

Q&amp;A



Jon Mannion

# THE GAME

## A chart-topping rapper takes on the concept of religion

"I JUST FEEL FREE," SAYS THE GAME. "I've got good friends, I'm eating right, working out, doing my music. That's how I feel." That's pretty good for the Compton, Calif., native, who was nearly shot to death when a drug deal went awry in 2001. Even after being signed by Dr. Dre in 2003, the artist born Jayceon Taylor feuded with 50 Cent, Jay-Z and Dre, leaving the rapper alone to make his way in the hip-hop world—which is exactly what he did, selling millions of records in the process. The Game's new concept album, *Jesus Piece*, features Kanye West, Lil Wayne, Rick Ross and Jamie Foxx.

### Why a concept album?

I had to scrap my initial album, *F.I.V.E.*, after Trey Songz came out with *Chapter V*. And the only song I really liked on it was "Jesus Piece" with Kanye [West]. It just set the tone for the entire album, and it became the album's title. But the song itself isn't conceptual—I brought up some heavy subjects, but I was just rappin'.

### What's the record's message?

The overall message is this: I've chosen a religion—to be closer to God, Jesus, Buddha,

Allah, whatever you call it. There's a higher power—and I'm grateful for it, I pray to it and I appreciate it. Just getting myself closer and better in my relationship with God. But that doesn't mean I want to stop smoking weed or kicking it with the homies.

### What's your writing process?

My writing process is pretty simple, man. I don't write, I just type it in my phone. You can ask any hip-hop artist you interview if I'm the fastest when it comes to writing verse, and they'll tell you, "Yeah." It only takes me like 10 minutes to write a verse, 30 minutes to write the whole song. People ask me if I have some ingenious writing scheme, but it's not that.

### Tell us about the song "Ali Bomaye."

I remember seeing Will Smith play Muhammad Ali in the movie, and thinking he did a great job. That's when I first heard the Ali Bomaye chant. When I was in the studio recording that track, I had the 2 Chainz verse and my verse, but I was looking for a hook. So I turned on HBO and *Ali* was on with the kids running in the streets saying, "Ali Bomaye," and I was like "OK, let's go."

### What are your thoughts on East Coast-West Coast hip-hop rivalry?

I'm a fan of all rap. I know I'm from California and this is the West Coast, but I hate when people section off hip-hop. That right there is what killed Biggie and Tupac—they made it an East Coast-West Coast thing. And they were just 24 and 25 when they died.

### What other artists influence you?

Amy Winehouse. I just love her, man. Her untimely demise was so tragic. I was really rooting for her to get it together. I hate to call it a wasted talent, but damn it, that's what it is.

### Who have you been listening to lately?

I've been listening to Ed Sheeran. He's new, he's young and I like his voice. For anything musical, it starts with the voice. You love Erykah Badu's voice, Stevie Wonder's voice, Busta Rhymes' voice. Ed Sheeran has a good voice. I recently tweeted something about *Jesus Piece* on Twitter and he retweeted it, then I sent him a message to let him know I've been listening to his music, too. He was like, "Man, I'm a huge fan." But I'm diggin' his music. And I'm not afraid to say so.

—Christopher Pilny

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