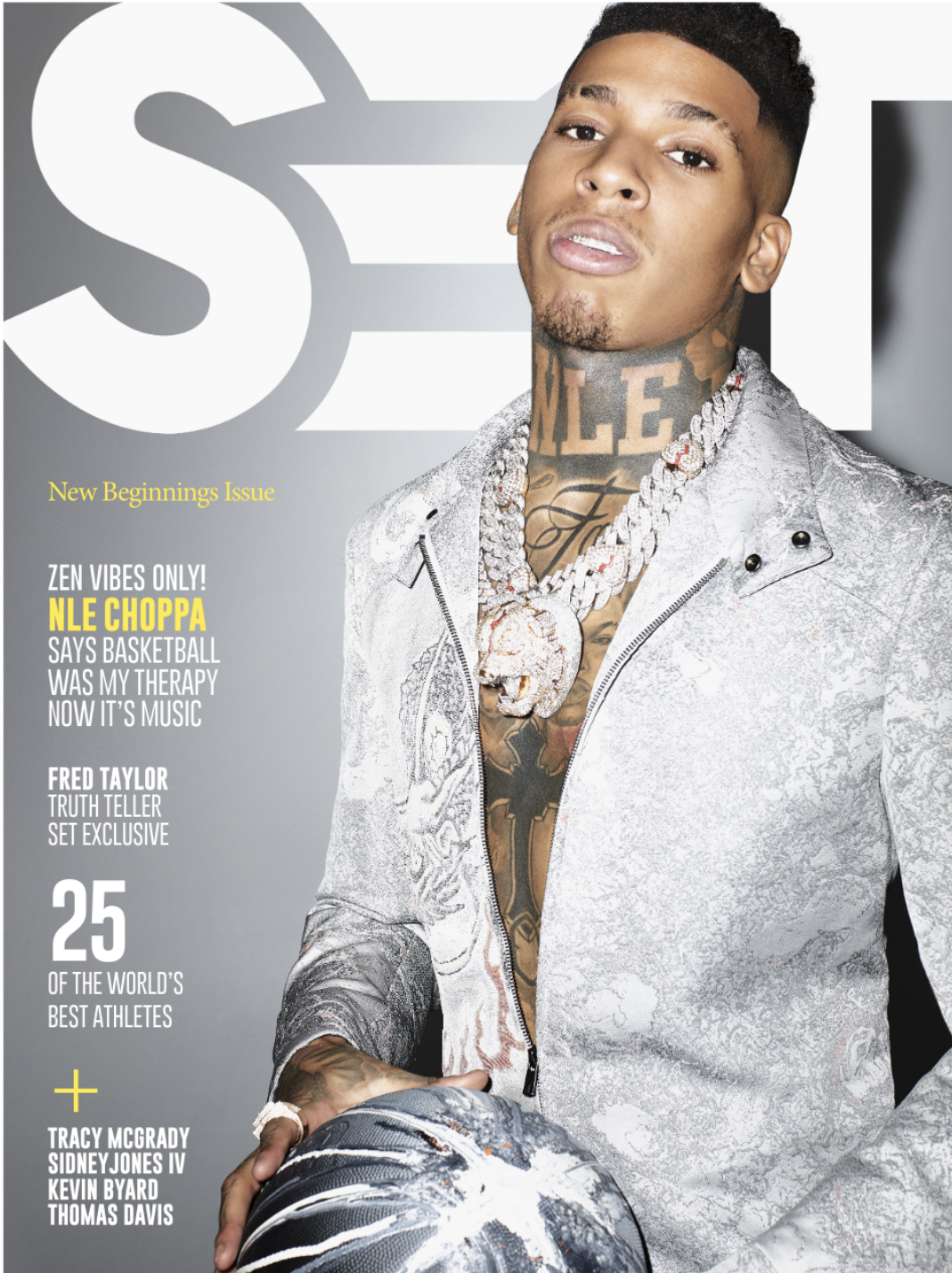




*“NLE Choppa exemplifies the prototypical hard-spitting young and hungry rapper, but simultaneously defies that very mold, emphasizing not just the pursuit of money, but the prosperity of mind.”*



New Beginnings Issue

ZEN VIBES ONLY!  
**NLE CHOPPA**  
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WAS MY THERAPY  
NOW IT'S MUSIC

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TRUTH TELLER  
SET EXCLUSIVE

**25**  
OF THE WORLD'S  
BEST ATHLETES

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\* ART COMMISSIONED BASKETBALL BY HENRY WILLIS BOIT

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**ON THE COVER:** Photograph and Styling by Sir Darryl Neal. Grooming by Uptown EL. NLE Choppa rocks: Red suit, Mashell Goodluck. Vest, Private Policy. Boots, CaesarWalks Footwear

**ON THIS PAGE:** Dragon Jacket, Hiromi Asai

# N A M A S T E

***NLE Choppa***  
The 'Gangsta'  
Rapper Who  
Wants You To  
Juice Cleanse  
With Him

Story by JAYLEN COAXUM  
Photography and Styling by SIR DARRYL NEAL  
Grooming by Uptown EL



Dragon Jacket,  
Hiromi Asai

#SPORTSANDENTERTAINMENTTODAY



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Since its early days, hip-hop culture has been subjected to ridicule and criticism from commentators across races and ethnicities. This is especially so when noisemakers “drop a verse” or two.

Rap music is to some an unapologetic blessing and to others a stereotype-fulfilling curse of the culture. Others see the genre as a medium for Black people to vent heartfelt thoughts in an unfiltered, unpolished and authentic way, no matter how vulgar or shocking it may be to some listeners. While another set think rap music, specifically since the introduction of “gangsta rap” in the mid- to late 1980s, is nothing more than a self-objectifying minstrel show of sorts, promoted and consumed by young Black people who now celebrate their own degrading depictions as if painted by Jim Crow racists.

In the now-famous, Kendrick Lamar-sampled words of journalist Geraldo Rivera, “Hip-hop has done more damage to young African Americans than racism in recent years.”

Those who relate to Rivera’s perspective don’t just look at provocative lyrics or revealing clothing choices either. They often point to the culture’s long association with violence, especially gun violence.

Violence has long been a widely-scrutinized feature of hip-hop culture and rap music, manifesting itself in everything from the lyrics, to sound effects that replicate automatic rifles, to actual real-life shooting deaths that, in a way, immortalize fallen rappers and sustain a clan-like, dog-eat-dog scene. This, on top of the culture’s reputation for perpetuating drug and alcohol use, among other things.

Given all of this, it is not difficult at all to figure out who is most scrutinized when these critiques are given. The protagonists of the culture themselves: rappers.

Rappers are male; rappers are female. Rappers are tall, short, dark-skinned, light-skinned, straight, LGBTQ, from the ‘hood, from the suburbs, singer-songwriters, advocates, fashion icons, talented athletes, college graduates, and so on. But, when most people think of rappers, the stereotype tends to fall under the umbrellas of hardened, uneducated, morally poor, and status-obsessed.

Enter Bryson Lashun Potts, nom de guerre NLE Choppa.

Upon first glance, most would probably assume the 19-year-old is just another wannabe rap star with some viral songs,

seeking to live out his opulently reckless rap fantasy. After all, he is a young Black father, who fashions designer clothing, comes from a rough neighborhood and chose rap as his profession. On paper, the ol’ reliable rags-to-riches rap saga.

But, NLE Choppa is a little more than just that.

“I’m liquid fasting ‘til the 21ST who with me. No food, No Sex, No Stressing. Only juices low in sugar, teas, and plenty of water.”

That’s a tweet from NLE this past December, not your resident self-care blogger or social media influencer.

While a rapidly-increasing share of celebrities and notable figures are becoming more outspoken about both physical and mental wellbeing, the topic remains a growing, yet still taboo discussion in Black male circles, especially in the gritty, street-cred driven, hyper-masculine world of rap music. For this reason, it may come as a surprise that NLE Choppa is an outspoken vegan and promoter of mental health, meditation and therapy.

When he’s not tweeting about releasing music, NLE keeps his followers motivated and uplifted, routinely posting affirmations and words of advice. Similarly, he strives to make his health journey publicly known, even challenging his Twitter fans to periodic fasting and giving health tips.

Speaking of which, turmeric is out and ginger is in! That is, according to a tweet by NLE.

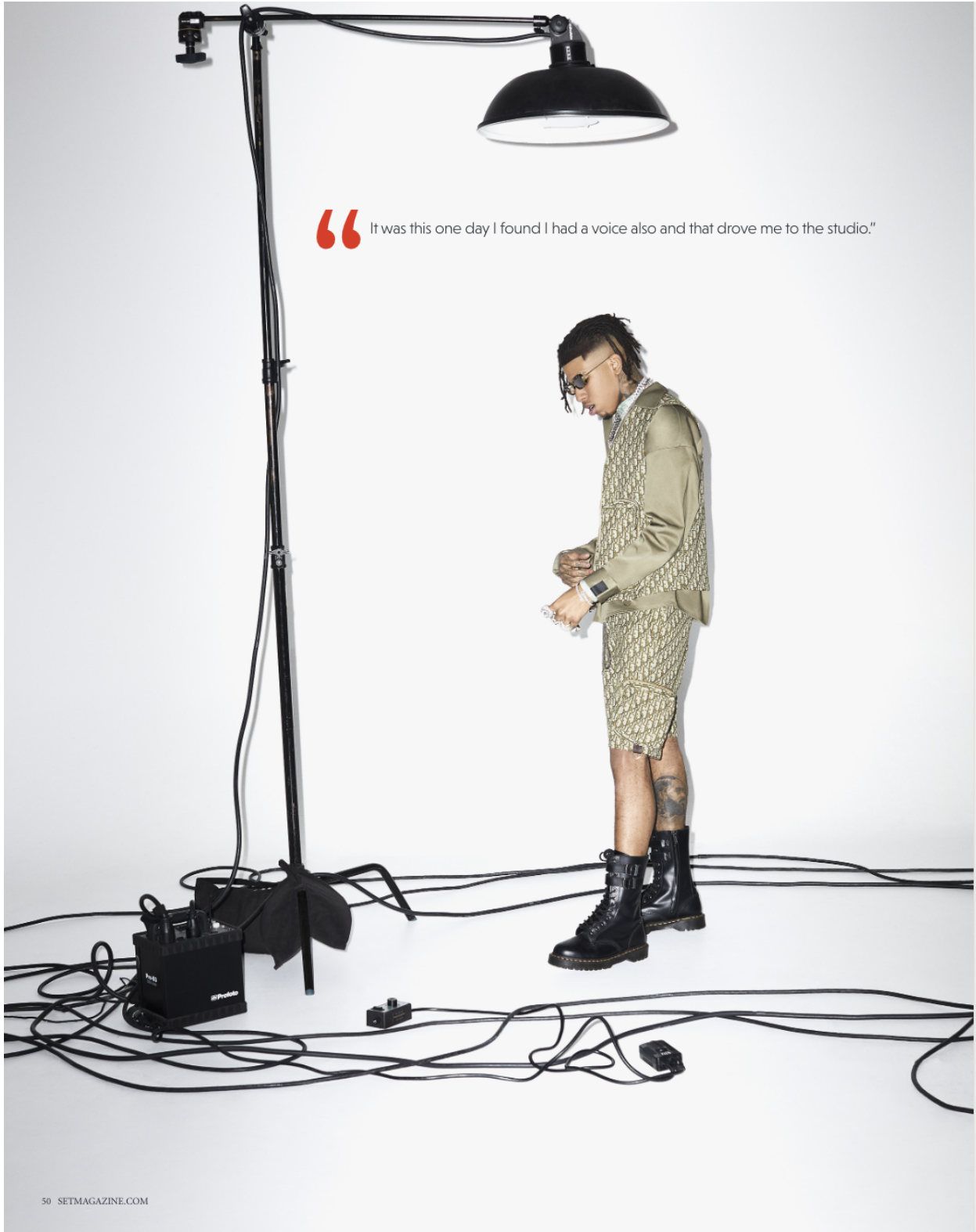
Going even further, he recently tweeted a supposed upcoming project that utilizes an herb that naturally provides the results of a Brazilian Butt Lift (BBL) and increases breast size, as opposed to the surgical procedure that is notoriously risky and can, in some cases, result in death. “Let’s naturally get the body you want. I am here to assist,” he wrote, accompanied by a single purple heart emoji.

This, coming from the same man who, in his 2019 single “Camelot” said, “I’m a hothead, I’ll crash any second / He speakin’ on who? Send his b\*tch \*ss to heaven / Extended clips, when we tote them MAC-11’s / My n\*ggas they be crippin’, they be screamin’ out them 7’s.”

Meditation and MAC-11’s? Low-sugar juicing cleanses and crippin’? Make it make sense! Where’s the balance?

Well, that’s what NLE says he’s all about. Balance.

Born in Memphis, Tennessee, a city with a long legacy of musical prowess in its own right, NLE Choppa realized his



“ It was this one day I found I had a voice also and that drove me to the studio.”





Shorts/jacket/  
vest, Custom Dior  
(Devon Milan), Shirt,  
M5 Shop, Mesh  
turtleneck, Daily  
Paper, Boots, Dr.  
Martens, Eyewear,  
Elisa Johnson

“

We're slaves to a lot of different things: to the things we eat, to the things in our household, to where we live, to what we listen to..”

future was in music at the young age of 15. Before this, he was, and remains, a talented basketball player.

“Basketball, it was like a getaway for me, something I could take my frustration out on,” he said in our interview. The “Shotta Flow” rapper played for Cordova High School in Memphis and Houston High School in the Memphis suburb of Germantown.

“It was also like I found the practicing part, the training part... just me, the ball, and the hoop, I felt that part of basketball was a type of therapy,” he adds.

Therapy and therapeutic means to finding inner peace are recurring themes in NLE Choppa's life. At that time, basketball was his driving force and, like so many other young Black men, his first therapeutic “true love.”

For many like NLE, basketball is a way to air out the frustrations of life as a young person, but particularly as a young person in a rough area. Oftentimes, in historically underserved communities, especially those that are mostly Black or Hispanic, basketball courts are the only free and easily-accessible athletic venues where young people can play or be engaged in athletic activities.

In truth, basketball courts do serve their intended purpose, but are also venues for kickball games, jump rope challenges between friends, or even birthday parties, cookouts, and more. Further, in communities like NLE's, the basketball court essentially acts as a sort of temple where legends are made, parents send their kids to run around and get tired or scrape their knees for the first time, and young people find a home outside of violence and substance abuse.

For NLE, basketball allowed him the moment to simply be “within myself with nobody around.”

But, like so many Black men of the past and present, NLE Choppa soon latched onto a new “love,” one that would take him to heights he had never been to before.

At 15-years-old, he made up his mind to make music his serious passion. Today, he continues to cultivate a career that rivals many of his musical counterparts, having collaborated with industry heavyweights such as Chief Keef, ASAP Ferg, 50 Cent, Meek Mill, and Lil Baby.

“It was this one day I found I had a voice also and that drove me to the studio,” he recalls while reemphasizing his mental health journey and how music has become an even

greater pace for his life.

“Rather than me just going day-to-day being quiet and taking my problems under my sleeve, I could go to the booth and let it out,” he says.

“I've never been the person to be vocal with my problems, or never be the person to talk to a therapist. When I'm in the booth, it [is] always therapeutic for me. Like I [am] somebody else, I [am] somebody with a voice.”

NLE Choppa's transparency about not just his physical health journey, but his mental health journey is noteworthy, especially in the rap community and in broader Black male spaces.

When asked what he would say to those within these communities who still view Black men who incorporate things

like veganism, mediation, being drug-free, and overall self-care into their lifestyles as questionable or even emasculated, NLE kept it real.

“It's not much you could say negative towards them, 'cuz at the end of the day, that's sometimes all people know,” pointing out that some of the stereotypes people carry reflect a sort of modern-day slavery of the mind.

“We're slaves to a lot of different things: to the things we eat, to the things in our household, to where we live, to what we listen to,” he adds.

“It's only very few...that get it [self-care and overall wellness], that come from that area [the 'hood]. And I feel like the very few that do get it, are not as vocal about it. So I feel like for that five percent or that one percent, it's very important to be vocal about it ... So, the people in the 'hood can be like 'Oh, this man doin' this, doin' that, it must be working for him.”

In setting his own example, NLE believes people are more inclined to take advice from someone who is doing something positive and taking control of their life as opposed to allowing life to take them over.

“Instead of just saying it, I'm actually being about it,” he emphasizes.

And so far, it's his openness about physical and mental health, his own personal journey, and how he translates this to his musical evolution that has earned him millions of fans, along with, of course, his designer outfits and heavyweight collaborations. He currently has 4.3 million followers on Instagram and 1.1 million followers on Twitter.

Yet, it is this synergy between personal wellbeing influencer and blossoming rap star that NLE Choppa finds most



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Custom suit, M5  
Shop. Vest, Daily  
Paper. X-Ray  
Gloves, Vanson.  
Eyewear, Elisa  
Johnson

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Jacket, Vanson.  
Vest, Private Policy.  
White leather pants,  
Mashell Goodluck

**Photo Assistant**  
Foster Caleb  
**Digital Tech**  
Jay Arora  
**Fashion Market Editor**  
Brendon Alexander  
**Production Assistants**  
Ivan Hernandez Jr. and  
Jayvis Mercado  
**Producer**  
Angelica Morris

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rewarding. After all, he is all about balance.

"I find balance, really, where I'm stationary. That's why I ain't really move out of Memphis," he notes, going on about how his hometown brings him peace and a chance to take care of himself and his body. He is also able to dedicate more time to meditating, a practice he is a big proponent of.

"When I go to L.A., that's where I go to record, doing music stuff, but when I go to my hotel or Airbnb, I make sure to do the same ritual as [if I were] at home."

For someone so dedicated to wellness rituals, juice cleanses, and meditation, one may ask, "Where does the 'gangsta' mentality fit? How can one be so hard and so gritty, yet retweet month-specific zodiac sign affirmations?"

This tweet summarizes that answer perfectly, with NLE saying "Same way Tupac made 'Hit Em Up' but could make a 'Dear Momma.' Same way you got an open palm and a back hand. BOTH CHOPPAS AUTHENTIC ALL THAT MATTERS."

Or in better context, the same way NLE made "Murda Talk" and "Bryson."

For the seven-time platinum rapper, a major life balance is between his professional and personal personas. But to him, there's not much of a difference, as both play onto each other. That being said, NLE Choppa is concerned with much more than just how he is perceived.

"Personally, I'm working towards the best health I can be in. Personally, I'm working towards the best of wealth I can pocket for my family. Personally, I'm working towards happiness and peace. I feel like those four things [are] the most important," he says.

NLE made an effort to point out, "Money for sure is the least [important thing], but wealth is a different type of topic from money."

He emphasized the fact that he wishes to establish a financial foundation for his family, noting that for him, "It is more than important to set up that type of wealth to have things to lean on when I'm gone. Because at the end of the day, I want to build an empire, more so than a legacy." NLE's family is comprised of a one-year-old daughter, Clover; he's to expecting a son, his mother and manager Angela Potts, his father, two brothers, and a sister.

In addition to pursuing a better life for himself and his family, NLE Choppa is very much attune to those in need and paying it forward.

This past July, for example, he hosted and participated in the "Ignite the Culture" PPV Celebrity Charity Basketball Game for the non-profit Above .500 Inc. in Miami. The organization is "designed to motivate entrepreneurs, students, and athletes" by hosting a variety of events that "encourage the youth to live positive lives, never give up and follow their dreams."

"Before I was rich, before I was famous, I was big on giving back, whatever I could do, whether it was my friends, whether it was people I didn't know, homeless people, or even St. Jude," he says, crediting his mother with instilling that sense of duty and selflessness in him from a young age.

"At the end of the day, what you give is what you gon' get back. I just feel like I'm real big on that and it's highly important. You in a position to give back once you're in a position like I'm in. So, it's important because if the tables were turned, I'd want somebody to give back to me."

It isn't everyday that we hear of rap artists, particularly younger ones, and their philanthropic efforts. This, of course, doesn't mean that rappers do not give, it is just not one of the more highlighted aspects of the profession, per the stereotypes and preconceived notions mentioned earlier.

Memphis's very own is adamant on continuing to give back in 2022, but money isn't the only thing NLE Choppa's offering in this new year.

Me vs. Me will be his second studio album, originally set to release in December, but now poised for early 2022. What should be expected from the highly-anticipated album?

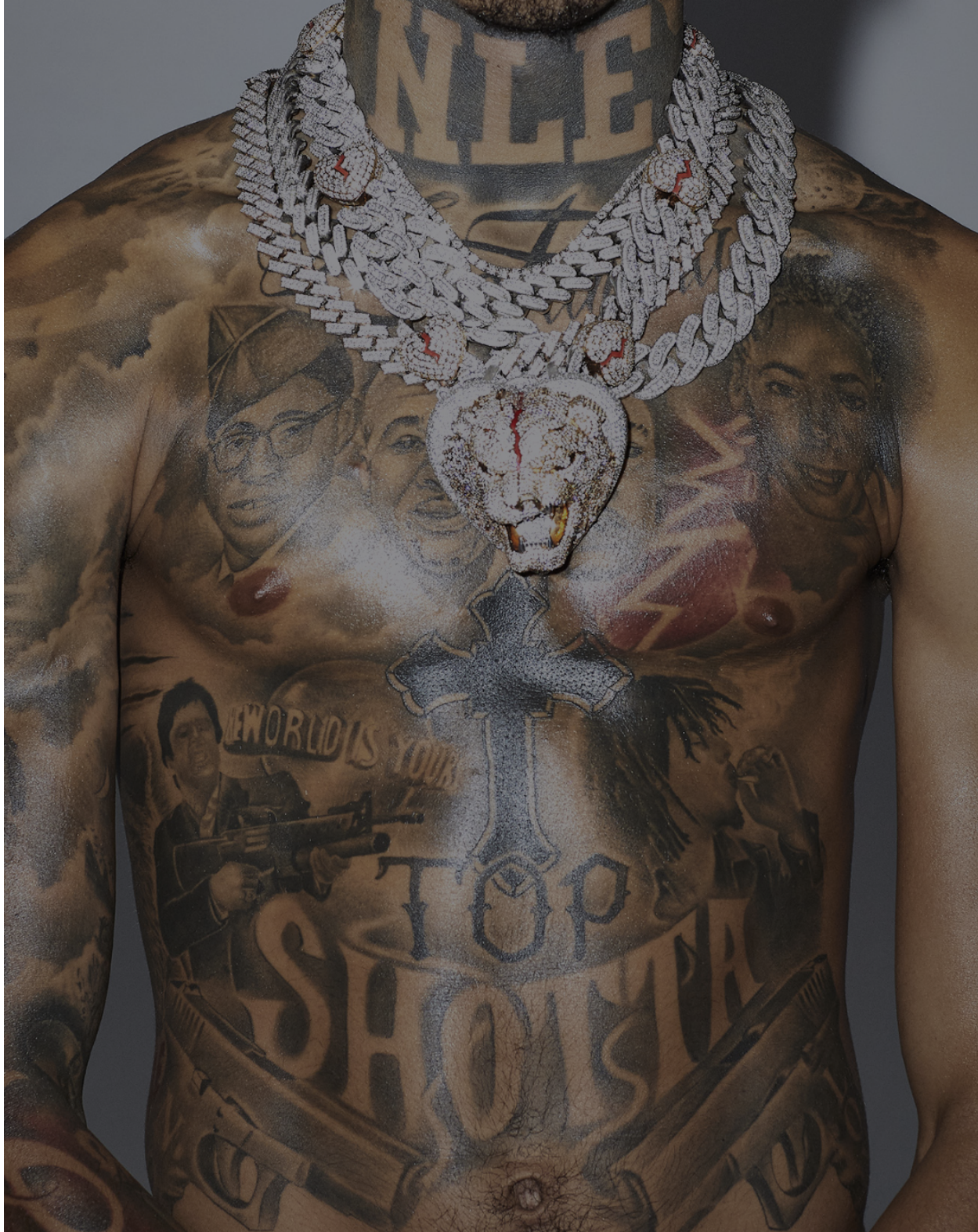
"[I'm] pretty much just going back to my old roots, something my fans are used to hearing. Something gritty. [The] type of rap I had before when I was first coming in. I felt like I owed it to my fans," he says.

His debut studio album, Top Shotta, was released in August 2020, delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests. His second major project, released in November of that year, was From Dark To Light. The mixtape, put simply, was much more introspective and positive than his first album. It was more reflective of his health journey and new perspectives on life, as opposed to the first album which was noticeably tougher. This upcoming album, Me vs. Me, is more or less a return to the style of the first album, but to NLE, an opportunity to demonstrate his evolved flow and a testament to his rise as a rapper. And what a rise it has been.

NLE Choppa exemplifies the prototypical hard-spitting young and hungry rapper, but simultaneously defies that very mold, emphasizing not just the pursuit of money, but the prosperity of mind. He finds success straddling the line between stereotype and norm-breaker, earning him a following that, at one point, even believed the Memphis rapper was quitting music to become a full-time herbalist. Of course, because he posted a tweet last July saying that.

From his chilling lyrics about street violence to his passion for the health of himself, his family, and those in need, NLE Choppa exemplifies the very thing he loves best: balance.

Despite several delayed releases, his second album, Me vs. Me, is set to drop on January 21st. As for that BBL-producing herb, we'll surely keep our eyes peeled. ●





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