Yearly releases are ruining rap music

By COOPER WOODWARD
Sports Editor

I was sitting in the middle of my high school business management class Nov. 22, 2024, killing time until the final bell rang. As I scrolled through the internet, I came across the YouTube page of American singer-songwriter Kendrick Lamar.

Lamar had caught my eye with his work long ago, but after his feature on record producer Metro Boomin's "Like That" ignited a feud with Canadian rapper Drake that spanned two months, 10 songs and nearly three billion listens, my attention was recaptured.

Whether people like to hear it or not, Lamar won the beef. His songs were full of substance, accurate disses and were genuinely catchy. Drake's were very clearly ghostwritten, with beats that were dull, slow and just bad.

On that November day in class, I clicked on Kendrick's page expecting to find the music video for "euphoria," a song that had been in my rotation since its release back in April. What I found instead was 12 videos with the "new" tag on them, the exact 12 tracks of his latest release "GNX."

"GNX" had come with no prior buildup, but had hype based on rumors that a project was in the works. It was Lamar's first project since his 2022 release "Mr. Morale and The Big Steppers," which caused the internet, myself included, to go bananas.



ILLUSTRATION BY LILIANA MIRABELLA

The first time I listened to the album from start to finish, I fell in love with it. So many of the tracks hooked me in ways few artists have been able to, with his attention to detail and thoroughness of the lyrics.

Singer-songwriter The Weeknd has also adopted this production pattern, and because of that, his quality has excelled.

His most recent project, "Hurry Up Tomorrow," came out in January 2025, three years after his 2022 release "Dawn FM." After listening to the 22-track album on its midnight release, I felt changed. "Wake Me Up" became a staple of my song rotation for months, while the transition between "Baptized in Fear" and "Open Hearts" was on repeat for even longer. To this day, it's one of my favorite projects released in the last decade.

That kind of dedication and quality in their craft doesn't come without taking time on a project to tie up every loose end. Creating lyrics, sitting with beats and tweaking them both after rounds of revisions and changes. It's a process that separates great artists from good ones.

On the other end of the spectrum, more and more artists have turned to almost yearly album releases, prioritizing volume over track quality. The most annoying example of them all has been Drake.

Since 2015, Drake has released a project every year, with the exception of 2024, releasing two albums in 2015, 2024 and three in 2026.

Out of the trio of albums released last May, I believe Drake went 4/44. That's 9% of the total tracklist that I saw myself going back to.

"What Did I Miss?" has an addictive first half that is my go-to song whenever it's time for me to lock in at the gym, because it was obvious he took time to perfect the lead single for the "ICEMAN" album. Although the lyrics of "Shabang" are silly, it became clear that the song wasn't meant to be perfect. Aside from that, I had a hard time wanting to go back to anything else from "ICEMAN," "HABIBTI" and "MAID OF HONOUR."

To top it all off, he released a deluxe version of one of those albums titled "HABIBTI (FOMO)" with an additional five songs. None of those five blow me out of the water the way songs from an artist like Drake should.

I've always considered myself a casual Drake fan. His hits are great, and he does them really well, but when you release three full-length albums at the same time with only four tracks that are worth going back to, a conversation needs to be had. In the nearly six years since Drake produced a quality project, the biggest takeaway from this sluggish run is that Drake needs to slow down. He needs time to pause, sit with projects and produce a product he actually believes in, instead of pushing out slop.

I love listening to albums on midnight releases and feeling like a different person afterwards. Nobody who has released multiple albums within a calendar year has done that for me, and if the pattern continues of musicians prioritizing pushing out project after project rather than taking the time to craft it, rap music will never be the same.

I hate PetSmart, and you should too

By VIVIAN GAGE
Associate Opinion Editor

Almost everyone I know, including myself, has stepped into a PetSmart without a worry in the world. Up until a few years ago, I loved visiting what I considered a mini zoo. I enjoyed watching the hamsters on their wheels, seeing all the different colorful fish swim around and visiting the reptile section to see what was new.

Knowing what I know now, though, I can never look at a PetSmart or any chain pet store the same way again, and neither should you.

PetSmart, and most other chain pet stores, are essentially tiny prisons that abuse and kill countless animals in the name of profit. Past employees have revealed accounts of animal abuse, and the chains continue to incorrectly advertise difficult pets as beginner pets or desk pets, leading to their inevitable untimely deaths.

The cruelty starts with the animal suppliers. Reports from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) detail horrific conditions inside Reptiles by Mack, a reptile mill in Xenia, Ohio, "that breeds and sells frogs, lizards, turtles, and other animals to pet stores across the country," including PetSmart.

PETA eyewitnesses documented that many animals were shipped to the facility overseas in horrific conditions, "crammed into plastic two-liter bottles, one-gallon milk jugs, mesh bags and wooden crates separated into tiny compartments like egg cartons."

Over the combined 15 weeks PETA eyewitnesses spent at the facility, they documented reptiles kept in filthy, crowded plastic tubs and deprived of heat, UV lamps, veterinary care, fresh food and water.

Hundreds of reptiles were reported to have sustained injuries due to the cramped and stressful conditions. Bearded dragons had broken limbs and tails, bite wounds and snouts rubbed raw down to the teeth. The lizards that escaped their confines were apparently caught in makeshift glue traps set by the staff, where many animals would die after being left alone for days. Animals that survive the facility are eventually shipped to PetSmart and other chain stores.

Reptiles aren't the only victims, either. Many of the rodents and other pets supplied to PetSmart and Petco used to come from dealers like Sun Pet Ltd., a company that buys small animals from breeding mills and sells them to pet stores.

According to World Animal Protection, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspectors uncovered countless examples of animal suffering at Sun Pet in just one inspection of the facility in 2024.

They observed excessively underweight hamsters, sick hamsters and a hamster with a mostly hairless face and reddened, crusty skin underneath. Other animals like bunnies and gerbils were found in similar conditions, suffering from illnesses or with rotten food in their tanks.

Cannibalism was documented in 22 hamster enclosures, with many hamsters being stored amongst other hamsters' corpses.

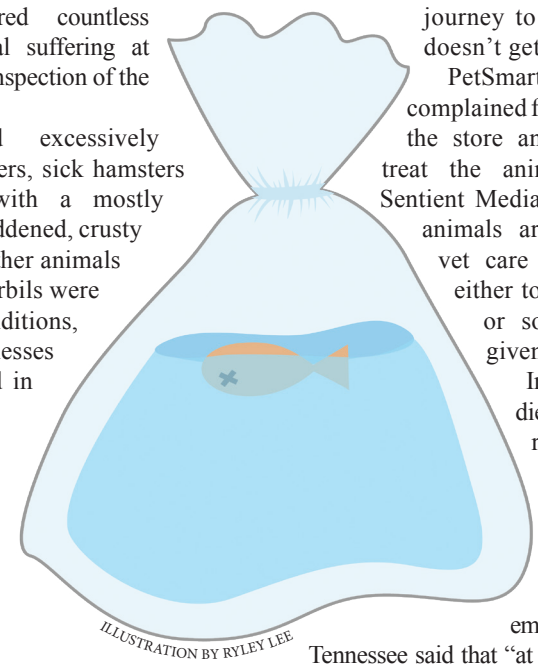

ILLUSTRATION BY RYLEY LEE

Like reptiles, rodents are shipped to pet stores in harrowing conditions, and many arrive dead. PetSmart allegedly no longer works with Sun Pet after the abuse allegations came to light, but one cruel supplier has just been replaced with another.

In May, the USDA suspended one of PetSmart's animal suppliers' licenses for violations of the Animal Welfare Act.

Apet Inc., a giant animal wholesaler, was accused of failing to provide adequate veterinary care to animals, failing to properly sanitize guinea pig and hamster enclosures, failing to ensure compatible animals are housed together and more.

Apet only received a 21-day suspension of its Animal Welfare Act license as a result of the neglect, and PetSmart still works with them.

It's impossible to tell exactly how many animals arrive at PetSmart dead because neither the federal government nor most states require pet stores to track or publicly report transit mortalities, unless they're selling "rarer" animals.

Once animals survive their journey to PetSmart, their fate doesn't get much better.

PetSmart employees have complained for years about the way the store and fellow employees treat the animals. According to Sentient Media, employees claimed animals are repeatedly denied vet care when they need it, either to avoid high vet costs or so managers may be given bonuses.

Inside the store, animals die or are mistreated repeatedly as a result of improperly trained staff and inappropriate living conditions.

A former employee at a PetSmart in Tennessee said that "at least 30 times she was asked by superiors to dispose of animal remains because the store's coolers were too full with the bodies of animals."

People have also reported finding live animals in PetSmart's dumpsters. In 2021, dumpster divers found live hamsters and a parakeet inside garbage cans at two different locations. In a TikTok that went viral in 2023, a woman found an entire box of live Beta Fish thrown away.

PetSmart and Petco also love to incorrectly advertise pets, underselling the amount of care and space each creature needs. They continue to sell fish tanks and enclosures that are simply too small, like those egregious, brightly colored plastic hamster houses in ridiculous shapes, which are really just prison cells meant to attract child buyers, not to ensure the hamsters are cared for.

This year, Petco started advertising "Desk Pets," little pets meant to sit on desks. The display makes these pets look easy to care for and almost treats them as decorations. The problem is that the pets they advertise, like pacman frogs and tarantulas, require intensive care and are quite delicate creatures. Pacman frogs specifically need a 10-20 gallon tank and can live up to 15 years.

The display oversimplifies the care the animals need and leads buyers to think that the tank they are sold in is a suitable size, when this is not the case. PetSmart and Petco, in general, encourage impulse buys for all types of pets, which puts complex creatures in the hands of inexperienced and underprepared pet owners.

It is important to mention that buying animals from PetSmart or Petco is not heroic. These animals are mass-produced just to be sold, and once one is bought, a new unlucky victim takes its place. By "saving" one animal, you are just encouraging the store to breed another. The only solution is to boycott the brands completely to cut off the demand for pets, buying from more ethical shops instead.

Animals are not toys. They are intense responsibilities that require lots of time and money to provide adequate care for, no matter the species.

If you really love animals, don't buy them from a chain pet store. Educate others to stop them from making the same mistake I made for years, because hamsters and geckos don't look nearly as cute in the aisles of PetSmart when you're aware of how they got there.