

# Music Review: Jidenna-The Chief



by Uther Blakwhel

A hip-hop album on a different plane is just one way to describe *The Chief* by emcee Jidenna. The record starts off with “A Bull’s Tale.” The song opens with a psychedelic water-like swoosh that rolls into a subtle and steady bass line that is accompanied by keys that are light yet precise. Jidenna’s Nigerian Uncle Palmwine tells him that he is as stubborn as a bull just like his father. Uncle Palmwine also issues a few Nigerian proverbs to his nephew while looking for more palm wine to drink. “The cow that is in a hurry to go to America will come back here as corned beef.” The song itself is about Jidenna going back to Nigeria to bury his father. His uncle warns Jidenna that all family is not family. “When you are in the Village, you are with your family. But your family may not be with you.” Once uncle Palmwine is done giving Jidenna advice the song changes mid-tempo shifts gears and becomes more tribal with a steady driving drumbeat and pulse. Jidenna rhymes about what he had to go through just to bury his father. “A Bull’s Tale” turns into an undercover mission with Jidenna as a darker version of Hamlet narrating his bittersweet youth while ending with a defiant battle cry that resonates with you.

“Chief Don’t Run” opens up with soft and serious melodic organs and strings that deliver a farewell to Jidenna’s father during the service. Once the intro fades an African chant bellows through a voice box with a blazing brass and woodwind section to follow. Jidenna starts to rhyme and take you back to his colorful childhood which includes living in the woods with his mother and being homeless with her while

being befriended by prostitutes. The trumpet, trombone, flugelhorn, and organ pick up the pace of the song and drive it home. "Chief Donâ€™t Run" quickly turns into a mantra, anthem, and autobiography at the same time. The song sounds and feels like an epic battle or fight scene that youâ€™ve been waiting all day to watch on the silver screen.

Jidenna cleverly delivers a nightclub hit waiting to be heard with "Trampoline." A song that celebrates a womanâ€™s sexuality and female empowerment at the same time.

"Trampoline" opens up with more psychedelic whirls and production that combines a Broadway-style horn arrangement with trap drums. Jidenna also unexpectedly questions the meaning of life and the nature of success towards the end of the song when he states,

*â€œNeed to be free more. What the fuck we got degrees for? If we ainâ€™t flying overseas more. If we ainâ€™t fucking on the seashore. If we ainâ€™t putting on the breeze more. Getting cheese more. Stripper tease more. Man I got a little but I need more. What we get green for? If we ainâ€™t tryna go and see more. Champagninâ€™ with the team more.â€*

In other words, why work so hard to accomplish things and then never celebrate your life with your friends and family? "Trampoline" is a great club track that actually goes deeper than expected.

The emcee lets us know that heâ€™s not stylistically-limited when he evokes the spirit of Nat King Cole on ~~"Bambi"~~ "Bambi" a song about a lost love. Is there anything more painful than watching the one you love marry someone else? Sonically, it's slight and subtle wedding bells mixed with cellos and violins with more trap drums and bass. The production is spectacular as it blends into a perfect twilight. When listening to

“Bambi” you forget that Jidenna is an emcee only because his sincere, charming but yet desperate crooning is so convincing.

The autobiography continues with “Long Live The Chief.” Jidenna easily asserts himself and puts other emcees on blast with Ohio Player (“Funky Worm”) style production and drums that drive in and out. He lets you know that you can fight over rings wanting to be a king but “Long Live The Chief.” The song also talks about how his mother taught him to make the most out of any small thing that you have.

*“Mama put a little money in the mattress. Taught me how to make a silver spoon out of plastic.”*

Jidenna lets you know that how you define your measure of success does not add up to his and he’s okay with it.

*“At best you can run a lil’ company. Nigga at worst, I can run the whole country.”*

The conversation with Uncle Palmwine flows throughout the record. His tales are serious and comical. The narrative is vivid and catchy. By the time the song is over you catch yourself chanting “Long Live The Chief.” Other tracks that stand out are: “2 Points,” “The Let Out,” “Little Bit More” and the creative and surprising “White N\*\*\*\*s.”

“The Let Out” starts off with ponderous and steady like keys that sound like melodic bells that give a prelude to the musical chase. Another layer of keyboards adds darker textures that drive the song into trap drums that lay in the background. The music has a stylish and cinematic driving at night vibe to it. The song is about Jidenna and his crew going to their favorite nightclub to get down and have fun. Everybody is dressed to impress and the night is always unpredictable because anything can happen from hooking up, getting robbed, or just hanging out with your crew. By the

time the song is over you find yourself wanting to go to “The Let Out.”

“Little Bit More” is about Jidenna meeting a woman who likes him but she is not sure if she should get with him. Jidenna thinks that if he can get her home she will become his lady. He lets her know that if she comes home with him that he will need the whole night and a “Little Bit More.” The song starts off with a slow and somber intro on keys that rolls into tribal drums with an AfroBeat Feel to the production. “Little Bit More” is lyrically a new spin “Come On Over To My Place” by Teddy Pendergrass and “I Wonder If I Take You Home” by Lisa Lisa And Cult Jam. The song makes you move.

Uncle Palmwine pops in throughout the whole record with funny and poignant words of wisdom for Jidenna.

On “White N\*\*\*\*s” Jidenna’s opening rhymes sound like he is giving a news broadcast as your favorite anchorman. Slow and subtle bass line that drives the song with moody and atmospheric keys. The song literally sounds like a hip-hop CNN news report with a laid back dark twist. The song is about what would happen if the tables turned and White America and Black America traded places within the social class structure that is North America. Black America becomes the majority and White America becomes the minority. The song is dark, humorous, empathetic and deeply revealing when reading between the lines.

“Bully of The Earth” is the last track on *The Chief*. The steady bass line with faint keys and trap drums drive the song. Jidenna writes an open letter to his departed father. He thought that his father was the “Bully Of The Earth” but now that his father is deceased he sees that he was just a man. Jidenna sings successfully through a vocal effect, “You’re not a man til the day your father dies. You’re not a woman til you make your momma cry.” He goes on to rhyme,

“Too many rebels just follow convention. I thought it was all about breakin’ tradition.” Jidenna fittingly opens *The Chief* burying his father and closes the record saying goodbye to him. *The Chief* lyrically comes full circle in that way.

Jidenna’s *The Chief* plays, sounds and feels like a hip-hop safari that blends, hip-hop with tribal African Rhythms mixed with Afrobeat, jazz, and a little Broadway-style showmanship. Jidenna’s versatility successfully shows from emcee to crooner and he does both quite well. *The Chief* is an ambitious record that delivers as a hip-hop journal/storybook in the day in the life of Jidenna. It also feels like a new hip-hop soundtrack to a movie you can’t wait to see.