
“I used to be the kid that no one cared about. **That’s why you have to keep screaming ’til they hear you out”**

Forget the lyrics to his song *Written in the Stars*, Tinie Tempah’s success wasn’t destiny. Patrick Okogwu reveals how he dragged himself out of his tough council estate and built a business that’s turning the music industry on its head

Words by
ADAM THORN

Photography by
GARY HOULDER

Styling by
HOLLY MACNAGHTEN

Coat by Dior, £2,300 dior.com. Jumper by Valentino, £660 valentino.com. Watch by Rolex rolex.com



Jacket by Berluti, £3,500 berluti.com.
Jumper by Alexander McQueen, £545
mrporter.com. Jeans by BLK DNМ,
£130 blkdnm.com. Trainers by Harrys
of London, £375 harrysoflondon.com

Tinie Tempah stretches to pick up a mug of tea while perched on the end of his swivel chair in a recording studio in South London. It's his second this hour – the first cup, still half full and on the side, has turned lukewarm – but he was desperate for a fresh one before our interview begins. You'd think he'd have other things on his mind: it's August 8th and he's on deadline to deliver his third album, *Youth*, to Parlophone by the 17th. No matter, he leisurely leans forward, takes a big slurp, before slouching back into his seat.

'On a scale of one to ten of how much I love a brew I'm easily a nine,' he says, placing the mug next to the decks and within reach. 'I couldn't live without it and on a typical working day I'll get through six or seven. What I've learned is that the trick to a perfect cuppa is matching the brand to the type of water. I stumbled across Yorkshire Tea and I really liked that, but I found out that it's because we've got hardwater in London and that brand goes great with that.'

Tinie's dressed down today – he's wearing old jeans with a white T-shirt and a gold chain – and he spent most of the moments before we were introduced milling about the studio, checking his iPhone and talking to his team who have flitted in and out of the room. He may be one of British music's most successful artists right now, but this isn't the kind of swaggering bravado of his contemporaries.

More to the point, this isn't really the kind of lavish recording space used by top-tier pop stars, either. That's because, unlike most pop stars, he actually owns this place outright, purchasing it shortly after getting successful. It's pretty unglamorous – there's plastic kebab boxes, a bottle of Febreze, bean bags and a PlayStation in the room – and the front door is tucked behind a side path in 'Unit 1, Block A' of

an unassuming residential close in Greenwich. When the cash first started flowing in, he figured that, rather than blow £60k to make an album in an iconic venue, he might as well just buy the equipment and studio outright himself, so he would have a space close by to pop to as and when he felt most creative. It also means he can treat the place like home.

'Some people only like a bit of milk in their tea but I prefer loads,' he adds. 'I like it light, then with two sugars. Brown sugar, mind. Oh! And it's gotta be pipping hot.'

He points at the old mug across the table.

'Now that one is half full, yes, but it's just not warm enough.'

This studio – and it's chilled, tea-friendly atmosphere – is where he's recorded almost all of his hits, and plotted his whole career. That includes most of his seven number one singles (the most of any rapper in British history), his previous two albums (which have spent 54 weeks combined in the top 40) as well as this new record. So far, Tinie's lists of achievements and awards sparked from those songs are almost unmatched in British pop for a current artist: he's won two Brits, four Mobos and an Ivor Novello (the prestigious songwriting award won by music grandees such as Sir Paul

McCartney, Elton John and David Bowie); toured with music royalty Rihanna and Usher; appeared alongside Naomi Campbell in a *Vogue* photoshoot; and performed at London 2012's closing ceremony. He's even high-fived Prince William at the Brits (YouTube it – the look on the duke's face is priceless) and visited Number 10 in his role as an ambassador for London Collections: Men.

Yet buying this studio was part of an even grander plan. Why just have your own space, he thought, when you can be your own record label, too? Surely, the smart thing is to cut out the person in charge – who can often see artists as disposable products fulfilling a current market need – to control your own destiny? This small, two-floor building then is the engine room of his business, Disturbing London, where he signs and develops his own artists, works on his clothing label and even designs the album covers. Parlophone essentially have a distribution and PR deal. Almost every other aspect of his career is self controlled by him and his team, which has grown to 30 people.

'Do you remember at school when the teacher would have a cup of tea despite pupils not being allowed to drink in lessons?' he says, standing up and mimicking a tutor enjoying a cuppa while standing at the front of the class.

'I was jealous that I couldn't do that, too. I thought, "You're living the life while we're just sat here learning."

And, right then, I realised Tinie's spent his whole life deciding he wants to call the shots.

The first thing Patrick Chukwuemeka Okogwu Jr decided had to go was the name. He was only 14 but even then he realised that, if he was ever going to make it as a big-time rapper, that 11-syllable mouthful wouldn't cut it. He'd spent a while trying to come up with the perfect alias, but his eureka moment came when he was sat in a theatre class at St Paul's Roman Catholic Secondary School in Abbey Wood, South East London. He looked up the word 'anger' in a thesaurus he had on his desk and decided 'temper' had more of a ring to it. Then, thinking that was just a little bit too negative, he added 'tiny'. After a little creative license, 'Tinie Tempah' was born by the time the bell rang.

School was where his music career started really, and his first audiences were his mates. Come playtime, he would trot out to the playground and perform in front of them. Unlike the other would-be pop stars performing at lunch, his sessions were meticulously well planned – he would rap to lyrics printed out from his computer and, when he was done, carefully place them back in a ringbound folder that he nicked from his mum.

‘I was gutsy back then,’ he says today. ‘And it didn’t matter if I lost the lyrics at school because I knew they were safe on the computer.’

While he was building up a collection of songs he did well academically, too. His ten GCSEs got him to St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College in Clapham where his A-levels – media studies, religious studies and psychology – secured him a place at every university he applied to. Yet rather than take his reward, he took another gutsy decision, and decided to delay enrolling to work on his music.

‘I thought, let’s see what happens.’

Over to Tinie for what happened next:

‘In the summer holidays a few people would take an interest and I would go from collective to collective. I remember one was called V Click and another Sick Combination and another Aftershock. I would go to studios,

pay £20, make a demo, lose the CD then go back and make another one.

‘But then some of my mates started to get home set-ups, well, the slightly more middle class ones. You know, some kid’s parents got him a studio to compensate for the fact they were never there. And he’d be like, “Yeah man come round and make a record”. And because that made him a cool guy, he’d let you do it.

‘When I was at college there was a satellite DIY channel called Channel U and it was what I call a leveller. They would say, “If you give us £30 and your song is good enough, we’ll play it.” It’s where kids from challenged backgrounds got their break. So I put my song *Wifey* on there and it went top of their chart for ten weeks.’

We’ll pause here because he probably downplays this accomplishment a little. Firstly, *Wifey* was far ahead of its time, ditching the kind of brutal song lyrics delivered by American rappers of the time and replacing it with the kind of sweet, very British, slice-of-life observations that would propel Arctic Monkeys to superstardom. Secondly, the reason he was able to afford to make a music video at all was because he financed the thing through part-time work selling double glazing. Encouraged by that success he put his songs on YouTube – then not the behemoth of a site it is now –

and started touring, travelling up and down the country in his friend’s Peugeot 206. He stood out further still by staying behind for hours after every show, signing autographs and having photos taken with his fans.

‘I come from a huge family and it turned out my cousin, Dumí Oburota, was a music manager who had seen my songs and heard about me,’ he explains. ‘He called me again and again but I ignored him as I thought I was a little further ahead in the business than he was. Then one night I went to Odeon and some big guy runs out to talk to me and it was him. He had his own house and car and so I was super impressed. He became my manager, bought me a phone and helped me set up my own label, now called Disturbing London.’

Dumí was cut from the same cloth as his ‘cousin’: he had tried to forge his own career as a rapper but realised his voice wasn’t strong enough. Undeterred, he decided he could make a living from management, and so found out all he could about the profession from books and the internet. When he eventually signed Tinie, he invested his student loan in his career – he was studying a degree in sports science at the University of Greenwich at the time – and made more money by buying old cars, doing them up and selling them on at a profit. And

what Tinie may not have realised back then is that Dumí was using a bit of creative license of his own. The pair weren’t even cousins at all: their families were simply from the same village in Nigeria, where it is custom to refer to children of friends as cousins.

‘We then produced a mixtape called *Hood Economics* and ended up pressing 10,000 copies,’ Tinie continues. ‘We were ambitious, and just off the fact we made so many CDs, the distributors helped us get some record label interest. We’d go in and have talks and meetings but nothing really happened, but it led to me being able to perform on stage at Wireless Festival, further down the bill.’

Rather than just turn up, Tinie and Dumí made their own luck one final time: the rapper



I was gutsy back then. And it didn’t matter if I lost the lyrics at school because I knew they were safe on my computer



had been keeping a blog called Milk and Two Sugars – you can guess why – as well as his YouTube account. They decided to use them as a marketing tool, and wrote a post encouraging Tinie’s fans to turn up. The field was packed when he performed but, crucially, emptied out almost immediately after his set ended.

‘The record companies were there and they were like, “Who the hell is that kid?” And it was those chats that led to my first record deal.

‘But that moment was really a culmination of four years of trying.’

In fact, it wasn’t just one deal at all. After word spread, *six* different labels had serious discussions about signing him up but he turned them all down – finally signing a deal with EMI on October 7th, 2009. Why did he choose them? Because they were the ones prepared to travel down to his studio.

Of course, his rise was due to his initiative, but he also took advantage of the internet and satellite TV, too – outlets that simply didn’t exist 30 years ago. When I put it to him that the music business is often perceived as a huge old boys’ club, he counters that it’s actually more open and democratic than it’s ever been.

‘Because of the internet it is anyone’s game. There’s a rapper in America with one eye called Fetty Wap who has a song called *My Way*,

but if it wasn’t for the internet do you think somebody would sign a rapper with one eye? No! Now you can cut out the middle man who is holding you back. Once you’ve got a million people watching you, no one can deny that there is demand for the product. Any smart, savvy business will sign them.’

I ask him how it all worked before the internet revolution, how someone like him would have got his break?

‘I call John because he works for a big label. I say, “Hey, can my son be an intern?” Then, “Can you listen to his demo?”

‘You’d be surprised how many artists there are who come across like me, but their dad is a billionaire. They’ve got tattoos and piercings, but their family has a yacht in Monaco.’

‘My mum doesn’t know John from the record label. Now I can get passed these people, put my songs online and get so big that John from the record label can’t ignore me.’

It’s 5pm on Saturday 20th August and DJ Charlesy – real name Mitch Charles – has just finished performing his afternoon set at V Festival in Hylands Park, Chelmsford. Since its inception in 1996, the event has grown to become one of the country’s biggest



Coat £1,395; jumper £325, both by Burberry burberry.com



Jacket by Canali, £950 canali.com.
Shirt by Dior, £400 dior.com.

music weekends. Around 90,000 people have tickets today, and he's sharing the bill with a Glastonbury-beating lineup of stars including Justin Bieber, Rihanna, David Guetta, Jake Bugg and James Morrison. That he's even here at all is quite the story: just seven years ago he worked at his local school, mentoring troubled kids and teaching them music while simultaneously touring the country perfecting his DJ skills. But, incredibly, this is actually one of two times he'll be on stage today. In three hours' time, after our interview, he will return to DJ on one of the main stages, performing in front of a crowd of 30,000 alongside Tinie Tempah – his friend, bandmate and, also, boss.

Mitch was a relative unknown when they met, with his biggest gigs being at local club nights or universities, being paid a relative pittance. One day, though, his cousin managed to get him a spot on a tour with N-Dubz, the short-lived Camden hip hop band, as a support act. Tinie Tempah performed, too, and, when his personal DJ didn't turn up, he got DJ Charlesy to fill in. They've been working together ever since and, when Tinie created his label, DJ Charlesy was one of his first signings.

'He met me, believed in what I was doing and just gave me a chance,' Charlesy says. 'He's the guy who is all about giving people opportunities. Look at his second album, it's full of tracks he's recorded with new artists.'

He's right, too. On 2013's *Discovery*, A-list collaborators such as Emilee Sandé, Dizzee Rascal and Paloma Faith share the bill with lesser-known artists such as Ella Eyre, John Martin and J. Warner. For Charlesy though, Tinie's impact has gone far beyond just being his on-stage DJ. As well as accompanying his boss on an arena tour and working Wireless Festival, he's been placed in charge of Disturbing Ibiza, Tinie's set of parties on the Balearic island, and he's used that exposure to snag himself a show on one of Capital Radio's sister stations.

'He's always mentoring me and he'll tell me if I'm doing something right or wrong and there's not many people you can have that relationship with – one where you are just completely honest. The artists he's signed are like one big family.'

Currently, Disturbing London has ten acts

on its books and a number of success stories among them. For example, All About She, a trio of garage producers, scored a top 20 hit and have gone on to collaborate with Calvin Harris, while 22-year-old singer songwriter Sasha Keable has recorded with Katy B.

'The music industry is as brutal as everyone imagines it to be, but to be successful you have to be humble and that's what Tinie has instilled in me,' adds Charlesy. 'I don't know anyone who has a bad word to say about him.'

From Tinie's point of view, hiring his own artists is a clever plan as well as a kind one: not only does it allow him to give something back to the industry and nurture new groups, but it also protects him, too. It means that artists can't simply use his fame to get a leg-up before leaving him high and dry.

It's a point I put to Tinie when we met a couple of weeks back. Careful not to name names, he presented me instead with an analogy based on his experiences.

'I would do a song with a new singer, let's say it's a young girl,' he said. 'Her label would be excited for her and she would have signed for millions of pounds. I'm watching this artist and I'm envious of her situation because, hey, I didn't get signed for millions. Then a label would come to me and go, "Tinie, we want to put you on her first song." So I jump on her first song. It goes to Number 1. Everybody is happy. Then, six months on, you call up her management and ask if they want to do another song. Except now they are umming and ahing because she's moved on and she's trying to crack America. After this happened two or three times I thought, "Fuck that". I was giving them my light, helping to break them, but now they don't want anything to do with you. So I thought, from now on, I'm going to sign my own artists so this doesn't happen again.'

'It happens with producers, too. You give them a hit and then, later on, you ask for a beat in return. But then they're busy.'

'Here's another example. I'll be recording with a producer, he'll change bits, and three weeks later I finish cutting a song. Except then it's been sent to another manager and they've decided to give that song to someone else.'

'Even in terms of principle that's not how you run a business. Everyone is willing to step

over people, so rather than throw myself in that ruthless business, I have a different ethos.'

'The system is designed not to benefit the artist, only the label. Labels see the artist as a product – as a commodity. Just another on the conveyor belt. There have been many before you and there will be many after. You've got to be smart in that window you get to make sure you don't fall off.'

'Artists are not surviving because they are not in control of their own destiny. They end up relying on their management too much. But the person who picks your songs can take all the credit when things go well but then send the blame to the artist when it's not going too great. That's how you fuck yourself.'

Yet despite his success, he's one of only a handful of British acts to actually decide to take full control of his destiny. In America it's common place: Jay Z's business empire includes clothing lines and homes as well as his own record label; Eminem's Shady Records has released 14 albums from its nine acts, with seven of them going platinum; while Dr Dre is the founder of a whole conglomerate of companies, most famously Beats Electronics, which was sold to Apple in a deal worth a staggering \$3 billion (he boasted in a video that he is now 'the first billionaire in hip hop').

It seems a no-brainer, so why, I ask Tinie, aren't more UK acts following his example?

'They don't exactly encourage you to do it,' he says. 'But then, why would they?'

'I want more people to do what I'm doing.'

In June 1997, Tony Blair made his first major speech as prime minister on the notorious Aylesbury Estate in Walworth, South East

Record labels don't exactly encourage you to set up your own company. But why would they? I want more people to do this

London. It may only have been a 20 minute drive from Downing Street, but his choice of location was significant: set over 285,000 square metres and housing more than 7,500 residents, Aylesbury is not only one of the biggest council estates in Europe but one of the poorest and most crime-riddled, too, with stabbings and murders an annual occurrence. It's here that Blair, still riding the wave of goodwill from his landslide victory, set out his manifesto to build a new Britain, one empowering those living in the worst conditions.

'For the past 18 years I think the poorest people in this country have been forgotten about by government,' he told the waiting press pack. 'They've been told they were not needed and they've been ignored, too, except for the purposes of being blamed. I don't want there to be any forgotten people in the Britain we want to build.'

Tinie was eight when Blair made that speech, and lived in Aylesbury at the time. His family rented one of the 470 flats in the enormous Wendover House, and had a spot on one of its top floors.

Of course, nothing much changed, and a quick Google search today brings up an almost infinite list of horror stories. In one particularly nasty episode in 2013, for instance, two men were stabbed to death four months apart, but were found slumped dead against the very same bleak, concrete wall. Its reputation is so bad that it's become the location of choice for TV and filmmakers wishing to portray the very worst of Britain. It was the backdrop, for instance, for Michael Caine's *Harry Brown*, a gritty thriller about an elderly man stabbed to death by a gang; the main filming location for *The Bill* and, most recently, was chosen by Channel 4 for one of their pre-programme idents (if you remember, it was the one where the camera pans around a litter-strewn, narrow alley to reveal a giant 'four').

Tinie cites that estate as his very first memory of London – 'I remember grey, high-rise blocks for as far as I could see,' he once said in an interview – but while many former residents have been at pains to talk up the estate and downplay the headlines, he has always been very candid in describing the realities of living there. 'I remember growing

up and seeing narrow walkways that are sort of prone to conflict,' he told BBC News. 'You can only walk past the same person so many times without someone saying "Who are you?" or "What's all this about?" There were very grubby lifts where people would urinate. Those high-rises, when you wake up in the morning, they don't inspire you. They don't make you feel the need to want to get out of there.'

Nonetheless, his family – who moved to Britain in their Twenties from Nigeria – did manage to get out of there, and traded up to a semi-detached in Plumstead. It was no accident, though – and the pair worked multiple jobs while retraining and getting qualifications. His father, Patrick, originally set up a local barbers but retrained to be a social worker while his mum, Rosemaryan, worked her way up to becoming an NHS administrator.

'My mum and dad were doing two different jobs and also educating themselves while they were working,' Tinie says today. 'They started off doing menial work for menial money but they wanted the best for their kids. It taught me that nothing was an obstacle, and nothing I have been through compares to what they had to do.'

'But when you're a kid you don't see the difference. Your friend might live in a four-storey house with a balcony, and I might live in a flat; but that's just my house and that's just his house. It's only when you get older that you think, "Hmmm, that's a nice house and mine doesn't look so nice."

Tinie's parents were also keen to use the experience of living there to teach him a few life lessons, too. Case in point: he often tells the story of his late-night trips to Smithfield, the UK's largest wholesale meat market. Realising that the freshest produce was delivered long before the punters arrived in the morning, his mum would wake her son up at 4am, drag him out of bed and take him along as a chaperone.

'I used to think "Why me!"' he says now. 'I was really upset. It was cold there and full of dead animals and blood.'

It was one of many little adventures mum would take him on, treating him like her 'little husband' and making him the second man of the house, hoping it would help him gain confidence and feel independent.

My mum and dad were doing two jobs. It taught me that nothing I have been through compares to what they had to do

'I remember being 13 years old and she took me to a garage to buy a car. And the guy there is talking through the buttons on the dashboard, and explaining what they do, and she was like, "I don't know about any of this so just talk to my son."

'I'm grateful today because I can see now that it was a grounding and helped me to have a good relationship with my mum.'

That said, he also feels that tough backgrounds breed an endless cycle of poverty.

'When you're from a working-class background, your parents just want you to get a job that's gonna make money. Even now, as a 27 year old, I have made money, but what that means is that, when I have a kid, I can be like, "Mate if you want to just spin around in a circle go for it. Do what you want."

'I was restricted, but, as a result of fighting against that, I'm going to support you to do whatever you want to do. And that is more of a middle class outlook on the world. Whereas when you're working class, your parents are sending you to school not so that you can say, "I want to be a rapper" but so that you can earn £30k a year, £40k a year or £60k so you can get a mortgage and they would have done their jobs as parents.'

It's 2pm on Monday 22nd August and half the *Gentleman's Journal* editorial team are eating Ginsters sandwiches and chocolate muffins in a swanky location house in Highgate, a leafy suburb in North London, waiting for our cover star, Tinie Tempah, to arrive. From the outside, this bungalow looks much like the others on the unassuming Sixties-built cul-de-sac, but the inside has been transformed by its

The huge rise of Tinie Tempah

From left to right: invited to Number 10 as an ambassador of London Collections: Men; performing onstage with DJ Charlesy; with Dumi, sharing a joke with Lewis Hamilton at Oliver Spencer's SS16 party; sharing a high five with Prince William at the Brits in 2014 (the pair had met a few times previously); Tony Blair making his speech on the Aylesbury Estate, where Tinie grew up; screengrabs from Tinie's first music video for Wifey, which he funded through a double-glazing job



owner, Jemima Sanders, to give it a distinctly *Grand Designs* feel – a Brazilian slate-floored courtyard surrounded by sliding glass doors dominates the middle of the house, while the walls are covered in black American walnut panels and the floor covered in chocolate brown Panga-Panga flooring. Tinie's running late, so Jemima, who lives here with her family as well as renting it out for shoots, pops out to meet her daughter.

In fact, I'm probably underselling that delay a little – Tinie's actually running four *days* late. Our shoot was meant to take place last Thursday, but he decided to push back that 17th August album deadline by a day in order to add some finishing touches to *Youth*. (When you're the boss, of course, you make the rules.) To be fair, it couldn't have come at a worse time – this weekend he performed at V Festival at its two locations and had to dart back from Weston Park, Staffordshire, on Sunday to make it back for our shoot.

He finally arrives a smidgen before 3pm – well, he is a rap star, after all – with an entourage of seven, including his image consultant, PR and barber, among others. He bowls in, personally introduces himself to every one of our crew, shakes their hand, and darts into the bedroom's en-suite to get his hair done, as his team get everything ready for him (those Gingster sandwiches were, sadly, replaced by take-away sushi that the PR had delivered especially). His gang may be doing everything on his behalf to make him feel at home, but when one of our team pops in to ask if he needs anything, he's only got one request.

'A cup of tea would be great, thanks,' he says. 'Milk, two sugars.'

I take charge, and pop into the kitchen to rustle around for some brown sugar, and make



His style is streetwear and British tailoring. His favourite item is his denim shirt but he got his first tailored suit aged eight



sure the tea is as piping hot as I can make it.

Tinie loves fashion, and, if anything, he's as famous for his sense of style as his music. Now an ambassador for London Collections: Men, his geeky (and *allegedly* non-prescription) glasses have become something of a trademark (Ray-ban or Cutler and Gross are his regular brands though we've given him Garrett Leight and Thom Browne today), while he makes a point of attending as many fashion shows as he can. Much like everything else, it was a very conscious decision: he started dressing dapper as a teen when he was touring, as a way of making himself stand out from the dozens of scruffy rappers vying for attention.

Fast forward an hour (he takes getting his hair done very seriously, we were warned) and he's sat at the dining room table preparing for the first shot – the all-important cover shot. As our photographer, Gary, clicks away, he seems a little nervous at first – there's about 12 people staring at him – but soon relaxes. It's 25°C outside, too, and we've unhelpfully styled him in an unsummer friendly Dior overcoat and Valentino roll neck. No matter, as the first round of photos finish up, he hops over to the MacBook to see how they look.

His style is best described as idiosyncratic: a mix of streetwear and British tailoring. His favourite item is his denim shirt; he got his first tailored suit for his holy communion aged eight; yet he always names his style icon as Kanye West. When he arrives today, for example, he's wearing the same outfit as he wore when we met two weeks ago, but this time he's also sporting an Audemars Piquet watch.

It was, therefore, a particularly daunting task for us to find the right looks for him. It's not just that he's careful about how he dresses, but he's even dipped his hand into designing himself: in 2012 he unveiled his own collection, in collaboration with streetwear label MH1, which was sold at Selfridges. Do a little more digging around and you'll even see that his obsession goes quite a lot further – his current two-bed London pad was bought off the estate of a certain Mr Alexander McQueen. He has repeatedly called McQueen an idol of his – both working class Londoners, both succeeded in traditionally middle-class professions – but he wasn't afraid to make changes (he had the basement redesigned with exposed brick walls

and added a popcorn machine, projector and table tennis table to entertain his friends).

As we whiz through the different looks, he soon gets into his stride, and it helps that most of his gang disperse to check their phones. He transfers from the dining room to the bedroom, then onto the balcony and finally finishing up in the courtyard, wearing labels such as Burberry, Canali, Acne Studios and Matthew Miller.

As we're wrapping up, Jemima pops back. We all say our goodbyes but, before we leave, Tinie goes up to say hello and shake her hand.

'I just wanted to say thanks so much for having me.'

Survive The Difficult Second Album as an artist and you're granted something quite rare in the music industry: the chance to do whatever the hell you want. Sure, he's been calling the shots from the start, but nonetheless, album three offers him the opportunity to be more creative than he's ever been before.

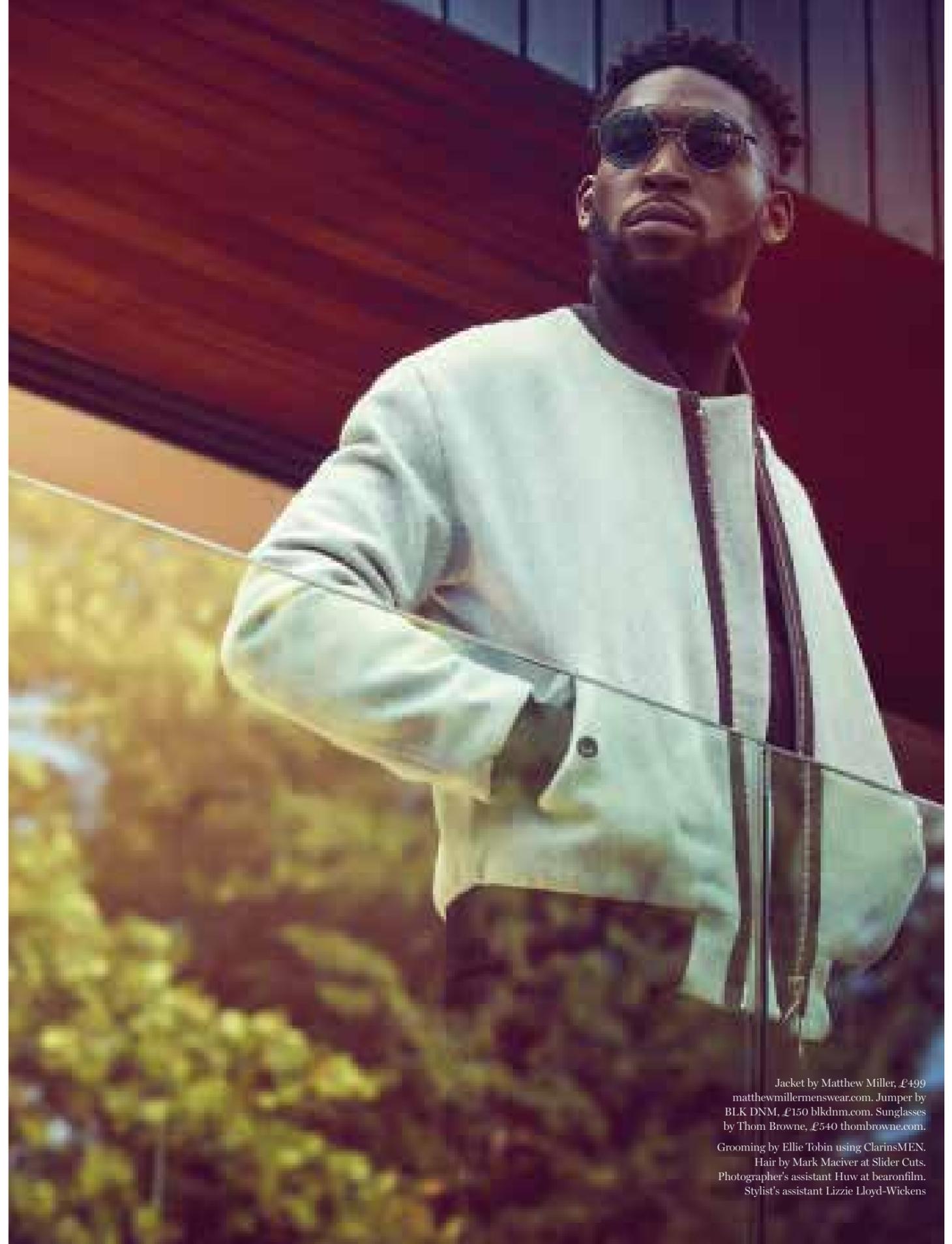
'This is my opportunity to be different,' he says. 'Now I have realised that it just doesn't matter how many copies I sell or if I have the most followers, either way I will get the people who will interview me and the people who won't. I just want to release it, for it to be a seminal body of work, and be able to tour it around the world for the fans.'

It's called *Youth* for obvious reasons, but he cites it as being a tribute to not only his modest background, but his love of the UK's capital, too. Rather than see that tough Aylesbury estate as a source of bitterness, it was also the making of his family, too. Because his flat was so high up, and London so densely populated, it meant he could spot the nicer houses from his window. When he kept asking his parents why they didn't live in the better buildings, they redoubled their efforts to move out.

'*Youth* is a love letter to London,' he says. 'A thank you for raising me, so I got to know the people I have and experience the things I have. You are in a country where anything can happen and that's amazing. This is no-holds barred and music should be free like that.'

'I know if it wasn't for London, I wouldn't have become Tinie Tempah.' ■

Youth is currently scheduled for release on 16 September. Visit tinietempah.com for more



Jacket by Matthew Miller, £499 matthewmillermenswear.com. Jumper by BLK DNM, £150 blkdnm.com. Sunglasses by Thom Browne, £540 thombrowne.com. Grooming by Ellie Tobin using ClarinsMEN. Hair by Mark Maciver at Slider Cuts. Photographer's assistant Huw at bearonfilm. Stylist's assistant Lizzie Lloyd-Wickens