

# BIO

Caleb Shomo first turned the pain of his struggle with mental health and self-image into music in 2013. **Beartooth** began as a living document, a diary, a journal of repressed rage and depression. Alone in his basement studio, screaming, singing, and playing all the instruments, he self-produced a batch of furious but melodic songs filled with reflection and confession. The Ohio native stared into the abyss, initially with no intention of returning to the heavy music world that burned him as a teen.

Bewildered, nearly destroyed, and determined to exorcise his demons once and for all, Caleb laid everything bare. A decade later, the different pieces of his body of work connect in title, sound, and spirit. As the frontman hits 30, Beartooth's fifth album, *The Surface*, completes this era in 2023. Even more importantly, it kicks off a new chapter filled with surprising optimism and just as much honesty. There's a sick, disgusting, aggressive disease below the surface. Caleb stands ready to bask in the light.

A singular theme above all others ran throughout Beartooth's first four albums, and it was, for lack of a better term, depression. "I was stuck in a cycle, not knowing how to get healthy," Caleb says reflectively. "Beartooth was this visceral, violent outlet where I could say whatever I wanted, no matter how dark, brutal, and abysmal. It was there for me to say it and let it out. What drew people to it was that I spoke so candidly. I never thought I'd write *this* record, an album where I'm starting to get better, figure out what this all means to me, and what I want to do with my life. It's terrifying."

*Rolling Stone* first heralded Beartooth as one of 10 Artists You Need to Know. "Caleb Shomo is one of his generation's most remarkable songwriters," *Kerrang!* observed. The rabid response to Caleb's music demonstrated just how many people related to his struggle for self-acceptance. It's a testament to the purity of intention manifested by the multi-instrumentalist from the start.

"*Sick and Disgusting* were made right before I turned 20. I'd quit my previous band and started dealing with serious mental health issues," Shomo remembers. "I'd been hurt and burned so much by my first run I didn't know if I could handle it anymore. I figured I'd become a producer and writer; this

would just be a side thing. That attitude is how Beartooth became what it did. Before I was signed, or knew this would be a real thing, I made that first record truly for myself. I carry that mentality into every album. When you look back at them, each is a story about what I went through at the time.”

Like Nine Inch Nails, Beartooth remains a one-person band in the studio. On the heels of the introductory *Sick* EP (2013), *Disgusting* (2014) produced Beartooth’s first Gold single, “In Between.” *Aggressive* (2016) and *Disease* (2018) expanded on the desperation and pain, each a step closer to a balance between the blood and tears of classic hard rock and the shimmer of modernity.

Over the years, Caleb recruited a formidable live line-up: bassist Oshie Bichar (since 2014), guitarists Zach Huston and Will Deely, and drummer Connor Denis. Steadily, without pretension, Beartooth perfected a sound and attitude sought by a generation of bands, equal parts solitary head-trip and celebratory exorcism. Their marriage of colossally catchy choruses and post-hardcore-soaked-in-sweaty-metal is without rival. Its effect is evident by their deeply engaged audience; tours with Slipknot, Bring Me The Horizon, and A Day To Remember; and that RIAA-certified Gold plaque.

As the band grew (grabbing trophies at genre events like the Golden Gods and Loudwire Awards), the raw nerve simply became more exposed, sounding wilder yet more accessible all at once. *Below* (2021) topped the Rock, Hard Music, and Alternative charts and found its way into Best Rock/Metal Albums of the Year lists assembled by *Revolver*, *Rock Sound*, *Kerrang!*, *Loudwire*, and *Knotfest*. As of 2023, the Beartooth catalog boasts more than 1 billion streams across all platforms.

*The Surface* is the start of a mental and physical redemption arc for Beartooth’s frontman. “I was on a warpath and incredibly self-destructive when *Below* came out,” he admits. “The record was gnarly, heavy, and the most negative collection of songs I ever wanted to make in my life. I never want to create something so gruesome and self-deprecating again. There’s not an ounce of hope within it.”

One of the obstacles Caleb recognized in his way was alcohol. He quit drinking in December 2021 and wrote “Riptide” a week later. Seasonal affective disorder was another thorn in his side. So, he relocated to LA and wrote “The Better Me,” “The Surface,” and “Sunshine!” in the Golden State.

“These were crucial songs that sparked my understanding of how powerful it can be to write about the *positive* things going on in my life,” he recalls of the spring 2022 sessions. “It’s a continuation of what I’ve always done, which is, to be honest about what’s going on. I knew there was more in me than what I’d already put into the world, that I could be stronger, and better in control of my life.”

The music still exorcises confusion and anger, most notably in “Look the Other Way” and “What’s Killing You,” which confront the first significant loss in the young musician’s life: the death of his grandfather. “I Was Alive” originated from the last conversation the two of them had. It’s a fitting summary of the entirety of *The Surface* and continues a tradition of powerful album closers.

“The most important thing about this record is the way it finishes. Beartooth fans know the last song on an album is usually very gnarly, distilling what the whole record means,” Caleb says. “I won’t listen to ‘Sick and Disgusting’ from the first album, nor play it live, because it’s just too hard to hear. It perfectly described the pain, confusion, hurt, and embarrassment I felt and how I wanted to hide away from everything and figure it out. It was me, a kid, screaming bloody murder in his basement.”

“King of Anything,” which closes *Aggressive*, is the sound of burnout. “We had this successful first album that part of me kind of hated,” he says. “I made this super personal thing that wasn’t intended for many people to hear, let alone connect with. I didn’t understand what happened. But records were selling, tours were coming, and the business was moving. As I came to terms with how this therapeutic emotional outlet now consumed my life, as a job, while still my passion, I was in denial.”

“Clever” finished off *Disease* with a desperate bit of self-realization. “I can throw all the money, studios, talent, and amazing people at this project, but at the end of the day, Beartooth will still be me

bluntly saying I have serious issues I'm not dealing with, and I'm just trying to survive. I'm trying, but it's still not working. This animal I've created is completely consuming me, and I cannot control it."

By the time Caleb hit the end of *Below*, he was so emotionally spent he couldn't even summon the words to sum it all up. "The Last Riff" was the culmination of everything he'd gone through, distilled into one instrumental sonic landscape intended to explain the pain he felt musically if not lyrically.

His last conversation with his late grandfather brought a newfound purpose to the whole endeavor.

"I would never have expected a song like 'I Was Alive' to be the one that closes out my twenties, the first chapter of this crazy thing I set out to do where every two years I make a solo record describing what I've been through, where I'm at, what I'm hungry for, and what I'm chasing," he marvels. "The four closers on the previous records were just pain. Now I'm exclaiming very openly, and honestly that I just want to live a life I'm proud of so that when I die, I'll know I did what I set out to do."

*The Surface* is genuinely a different animal than the Beartooth of before. The other records were about hanging on for dear life. *The Surface* is a declaration that Caleb is ready to go all the way.

"Going all the way for me is knowing that I gave 100 percent effort toward doing what I love. And what I love is playing rock music the best I can, singing and dancing, and having fun before I'm gone."

Beartooth began as both bomb and balm, an outright refusal to suffer in silence. The songs weaponize radio-ready bombast to deliver raw emotion mixed with noise-rock chaos. Other bands play the "devastating riffs and catchy hooks" game, but this music is the difference between life and death, and now, a sort of life after death while still here. The band *Forbes* confidently declared is "inching towards a tipping point of becoming the latest arena headliner" is now one step closer.