

UNCHAINED MELODIES



BENDING THE BARS TRACK 9 & 10: “Four Walls” & “County Times”

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

- We will look at two songs from the album Bending the Bars
- First, we will explore the artists of the songs and the song lyrics
- Then, we will take a moment to understand the songs' meanings
- Finally, we will take a moment to pause and reflect on the songs

MEET THE ARTIST

OTW GHOST MAN

OTW Ghostman wrote his first song when he was in 6th grade, inspired by being surrounded by artists recording at his brother’s home studio. “I always tried to be better than anyone I ever heard,” he says, describing the commitment that drove him to write lyrics on every available scrap of paper, watch videos of rap battles in NYC, and host rap battles on the beach for his classmates in Broward County. One of 5 kids with a single mom, OTW Ghostman ended up being “raised by the streets” and used poetry and music to process his experiences. “If you don’t have music in your life,” he says, “you going to act out.”



THE SONG

FOUR WALLS

I’m so tired of these four walls, I’m so tired of these phone calls
I’m so tired of these hoes cuz Lord know that they’re so flow.....
I’m so tired of these niggas that I thought were my niggas
I’m so tired cuz I thought that I knew y’all.
Boy it’s crazy how the time’ll do ya
Everybody disappear that you thought that was close to you.
Man it’s crazy how the time’ll do ya
Boy it’s crazy how the time.

When emotions build up I be feeling sad
Till I go to thinking then that s*** just get me mad
I go to thinking 'bout the people that I thought I had
And all the b***** that I wish I never met they ass
So when you in the street duffling and you living fast
And that paper comin' no break straight gas
That's when everybody love you and they on your ass
Until the crackers sit you down and you're like "where they at?"
So when the nigga first calls she'd be all good
They be shooting you that money like you knew they should
And then the hoes be f***** with you like you knew they would
But when that bid gets long everybody bull
And when it's all said and done you wish you knew better
I read my bible just to make it through the rainy weather
I can't remember the last time I got a letter
My mama write cuz she say I'm her baby forever

I'm so tired of these four walls, I'm so tired of these phone calls
I'm so tired of these hoes cuz Lord know that they're so flow.....

I'm so tired of these niggas that I thought were my niggas
I'm so tired cuz I thought that I knew y'all.
Boy it's crazy how the time'll do ya
Everybody disappear that you thought that was close to you.
Man it's crazy how the time'll do ya
Boy it's crazy how the time.

Hardest thing is not knowing when you're going home
You gotta listen to the lies they shoot through the phone
They ain't thinkin' bout your life they are moving on
So you gotta just vibe homie, stay strong
A nigga ain't used to being told what to do
Especially when you're self made and you got the juice
I went from rockin' Jimmy Choos to being stuck in blue
I went from eating steak to s*** that tastes like dog food
We get told when to eat, sleep, and s***
You gotta hold on, stay strong, keep your grip
So if you're out there thuggin' pray you don't slip
Cuz on this end you're locked in on every shift
When you out there shiftin' and you on the grind
Last thing on your mind man is layin' down
Don't let 'em treat you like a fool, dress you like a clown
I swear I'm really sick and tired of this lockdown.

I'm so tired of these four walls, I'm so tired of these phone calls
I'm so tired of these hoes cuz Lord know that they're so flow.....
I'm so tired of these niggas that I thought were my niggas
I'm so tired cuz I thought that I knew y'all.

WHAT'S THE SONG ABOUT?

Recounting how incarceration slowly but inevitably separates people from their loved ones, FOUR WALLS aims to help people on the outside understand that honesty, vulnerability, and connection are vital for people who are incarcerated. Instead of being shielded from the bad news out in the world, which "makes me feel powerless," OTW Ghostman urges folks on the outside to stay connected and tell their loved ones inside the truth. For OTW Ghostman, it's vital that people outside stay connected to ensure that their loved ones know they aren't just "a computerized numbered file."

MEET THE ARTIST

ZQ

ZQ is a lyricist who started writing and performing music in his teens. “I definitely grew up too fast,” he says. “I seen too much, so I had a lot of questions.” Music became his way of processing his experiences. Committed to truth in music, ZQ found writing and singing to be crucial tools for his survival during his time in the county jail, especially when he was dealing with mental health challenges. “I hummed myself back to sanity,” he says. He values artists who tell their stories honestly, and who use the medium to make themselves and the world a better place. While he was incarcerated, ZQ devoted himself to enhancing his self-understanding. He describes that time as a period of intense introspection, where he explored his emotions through music. Haitian American, ZQ says that the island is an inextricable part of his identity and shapes his musical style. “I never forgot that I was born in Haiti. I would go there and vibe with my Haitian family, listen to Haitian music. That’s the music I like to make.”



THE SONG

COUNTY TIME

I'm tired of cold food cold showers lock down 23 hours
All a nigga eat is butter butter beans all days
Open the doors and let me out
Cuz I'm ZQ and I told you you baby mama she old news
If you funk outta bounds Ima fold you

All day in a room can't lie
S***'ll make a real nigga lose his mind
Feel like the walls closing in on me
And I'm stuck inside
Staring out a window thinking 'bout all the good times I had
I'm a young nigga with a bag
You play I'm running down lum lum toe tag
You niggas ain't built like me
I get money, money won't change me
A f*** nigga can't play under me
Never let p**** trip me off these streets
Z O M B I E ven sece 26 I'm a ZOE
Put em on one day chasing me
I ain't going back they gotta kill me

Cuz I'm tired of cold food cold showers lock down 23 hours
All a nigga eat is butter butter beans all days
Open the doors and let me out
Cuz I'm ZQ and I told you
your baby mama she old news
If you funk outta bounds Ima fold you

Do you know how it feels to wake up and gotta take a s*** with a nigga right next to you
BSO steady watching you, and harassing you man
S***got real when my bunkie took a bird bath just standing right next to me
I had to go under the sheet, s*** crazy dawg
My first bunkie name was Will
And my second bunkie name was Zutty
My and first bunkie we was cool
And my second bunkie wanna get married
Had a third bunkie he was fried
All he do was fart and tell me lies
Man I had to put bro on the door
Moral of the story

I'm tired of cold food cold showers lock down 23 hours
All a nigga eat is butter butter beans all days
Open the doors and let me out
Cuz I'm ZQ and I told you
you baby mama she old news
If you funk outta bounds Ima fold you

WHAT'S THE SONG ABOUT?

Written during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the county jail was on lock down 23 hours a day, COUNTY TIME emerged in response to a casual conversation ZQ had with his bunkie at the time. "I had a lot on my mind, and I keep writing," he says. While he was writing, he offered to share a cold meal with his bunkie, who turned it down. "He said he didn't want it because he was cold. So you know, I was making fun of him, saying, you know, 'yo, so you too good to eat cold food? And let me guess, you too good to take a cold shower either?' And that's really how the song came about." Writing to "express what was going on during that time in the county" and as "a way to vent," ZQ describes the process as therapeutic. "I was speaking what I was going through, how I was feeling," he says.

TAKE A MOMENT TO REFLECT

1. "Four Walls" talks about loneliness, trust, and the pain of time. What emotion do you feel most strongly when hearing it?
2. In "County Time," ZQ mixes humor with frustration. How do you use humor to talk about difficult things?

