

# ZAVIER

*Fetty Wap's First Album After Prison Is a Homecoming, A Reckoning, and a Reminder*

An In-Depth Report | April 2026

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## I. FROM PATERSON TO FEDERAL PRISON: THE STORY SO FAR

In 2015, Willie Maxwell II — born in Paterson, New Jersey, with a rare condition called ptosis that left him with sight in only one eye — became one of the most unlikely and irresistible stars in popular music. Releasing music under the name Fetty Wap, he dropped 'Trap Queen' into an already crowded rap landscape and watched it spend six weeks at number two on the Billboard Hot 100. He was a natural-born melodist: his nasal, pitch-bending sing-rap had the earworm pull of great pop and the emotional directness of classic soul. Singles cascaded out in rapid succession — '679,' 'My Way,' 'Again,' 'Jimmy Choo' — and his self-titled debut album, released in September 2015, became one of the defining records of that summer. 'Trap Queen' would go on to earn RIAA diamond certification, a rare feat.

Then, as tends to happen, life complicated things. The years after his commercial peak were marked by personal tragedy — the death of his brother Twyshon Mother, and in 2021, the death of his four-year-old daughter Lauren Maxwell. In 2022, he was sentenced in federal court after pleading guilty to conspiracy to distribute controlled substances, including cocaine, heroin, and fentanyl. He began serving his sentence at FCI Sandstone in Minnesota, and for the better part of three years, his name largely receded from the front pages of the music press.

He was released on January 8, 2026 — eleven months ahead of schedule, under the provisions of the First Step Act, a bipartisan criminal justice reform law. He walked out of Sandstone 85 pounds heavier than when he went in, with a GED he earned behind bars for his children's sake, and a perspective on his own identity that had quietly shifted. In a VIBE interview conducted one week after his release, he drew a distinction between his two names: 'People call me Fetty, but the people who know me call me Zavier.' The album that followed, delivered less than three months later, was built around that distinction.

*"People call me Fetty, but the people who know me call me  
Zavier." — Fetty Wap, VIBE Magazine, January 2026*

## II. THE ALBUM: SOUND, SCOPE, AND WHAT ZAVIER IS REALLY ABOUT

Zavier was released on March 27, 2026, via RGF Productions and 300 Entertainment. It contains 17 tracks — 18 on Apple Music, which carries a bonus cut — and runs just under an hour. Fetty reportedly completed it in thirteen days. That speed is audible, and it works both for and against the album in equal measure. The record has an immediacy and warmth that studio-polished, committee-built albums rarely possess; it also lacks the structural ambition you might hope for given the weight of the story surrounding it.

Sonically, Zavier is more expansive than anything Fetty has released before. The Apple Music album notes describe a project rich in his signature back-porch harmonization, but also peppered with pop-R&B, more traditional rapping, homages to personal heroes, late-1980s boogie, and even a subdued interpretation of big-band jazz. The standout example of that last category is 'White Roses,' a song Fetty wrote during six and a half months spent in solitary confinement. His sisters Divinity Maxwell-Butts and YMANIE sing background harmonies, lending the track a doo-wop intimacy that reviewer Tai Lawson at Shatter the Standards called the one song that 'justifies its length' on an otherwise breezy record. 'White Roses' functions as the album's emotional core: a love song, yes, but one inflected with solitary nights, concrete walls, and the kind of longing that accumulates across years.

The guest list is almost exclusively drawn from Fetty's home state of New Jersey: **Monty, Albee Al, Harrd Luck, Honey Bxby, Rob McCoy, and Oskama Esteban** all appear. Wiz Khalifa, Tink, Max B, and G Herbo round out the features. The Remy Boyz-heavy casting gives the album the feel, as one reviewer put it, of a neighbourhood reunion rather than a sequenced commercial product. 'Like a Taylor' — a homage to Wiz Khalifa, built on a lounge-singer aesthetic closer to Frank Sinatra's twilight recordings than anything in rap's current mainstream — is one of the project's most singular moments. The Apple Music editorial team compared it to what 'Frank Sinatra might have sung in his twilight years if he were Black, had one eye, and had bested the streets of Paterson, New Jersey.'

The majority of Zavier's 17 tracks concern romance in various shades: drunk devotion, shopping-spree affection, straight bedroom propositions. 'Right Back to You' opens the album with Fetty tipsy and sentimental; 'Say When' promises total devotion; 'Favorite Girl' and 'Fool for You' land closer to classic R&B balladry. The album also carries a harder underbelly. 'Never Tell' is the album's most direct reckoning with his legal ordeal — Fetty in the courtroom, prosecutors building their case, his admission that what he was moving scared him, and the declaration that he would rather die in prison than cooperate with the government. 'Eastside Mz' and 'Real Ones' venture into more conventional street territory, the latter featuring Albee Al and Harrd Luck naming dead friends from the block.

*"Zavier leans almost entirely on romance. It's slight and comfortable when it should be reckoning with the decade that almost swallowed him." — Shatter the Standards*

### III. RECEPTION, LEGACY, AND WHAT THE RETURN REALLY MEANS

The cultural reception of Zavier has been warmer than its commercial performance might suggest. The album debuted at number 169 on the Billboard 200, a modest showing that reflects how fractured and algorithm-dependent chart performance has become in the streaming era, as well as how much of Fetty's audience exists outside the demographic most likely to bulk-buy albums in a tracking week. The critical conversation around the project has been more generous.

Okayplayer, in a feature written by Aleia Woods, argued that Fetty's return 'feels bigger than a comeback' — positioning it in the context of a difficult year for many listeners seeking something emotionally reassuring. 'The idea of Fetty Wap being back home, outside and heading into another summer feels bigger than a comeback,' Woods wrote. 'It feels like a chance to tap back into something people have been missing.' The piece drew a direct line between Fetty's sound and the specific emotional register of millennial young adulthood in the mid-2010s: carefree, warm, and summer-specific in a way that few artists have managed to bottle.

The more critical assessments acknowledged the album's considerable craft while pressing on what it declines to do. Shatter the Standards noted that Zavier's thirteen-day completion time is 'about right for a record this breezy,' but observed that the album is 'slight and comfortable when it should be reckoning with the decade that almost swallowed him.' The reviewer pointed to the way the album circles romance obsessively while mostly sidestepping the full weight of what Fetty lived through: the deaths of his brother and daughter, the years of incarceration, the grief of a career interrupted at its peak. 'Never Tell' and 'White Roses' gesture toward that reckoning, but the album as a whole chooses ease over excavation.

*"Ten years after his run helped define a generation's summer, Fetty Wap returns with a more reflective, evolved sound and a chance to tap back into something people have been wanting to feel again."* — Okayplayer, April 2026

What strikes most about Zavier is the coherence of its intentions, even if those intentions are modest. This is not an album reaching for cultural dominance. It is an album by a man reintroducing himself on his own terms — using his alter ego's name, assembling his neighbourhood around him in the studio, and delivering the warm melodic trap-R&B he has always made without pretending that three years of federal incarceration need to be resolved in a tracklist. The distinction between Fetty and Zavier — the public performer and the private man — is the album's conceptual thread, even if it never fully pulls that thread taut.

Fetty Wap's first-era run, culminating with 'Trap Queen' earning diamond certification, established him as one of the most commercially potent and sonically distinctive artists of the 2010s. Zavier does not attempt to replicate that moment — and perhaps wisely so. Instead, it functions as a proof of life: evidence that the voice is intact, the melodic instinct undimmed, and that the man known to his closest circle as Zavier came out of FCI Sandstone not broken but reconstituted. Whether the album is the full artistic statement the moment warranted is a reasonable debate. That it exists at all, given what the last four years demanded of its maker, is itself worth something.

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## Sources

*Apple Music • Spotify • Okayplayer • Shatter the Standards • VIBE Magazine • Billboard • Wikipedia (Fetty Wap Discography) • ABC Audio / AOL • 2026 in Hip-Hop (Wikipedia)*