

Young Dolph, rapper with string of hits, killed in hometown of Memphis



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November 17, 2021 | Updated November 17, 2021 at 9:48 p.m. EST



The artist Young Dolph — who rapped with a bold and swaggering style, racking up hundreds of millions of streams and a string of Billboard hits — was shot and killed in his hometown of Memphis on Wednesday, city authorities said.

Just before 12:30 local time, police responded to reports of gunfire at Makeda’s Homemade Butter Cookies, a store the 36-year-old rapper visited often on his trips home. Young Dolph, whose given name was Adolph Robert Thornton Jr., was pronounced dead at the scene. Investigators have not named suspects and Memphis Police Chief Cerelyn Davis said Wednesday evening that it was too early to determine the motivation behind the killing. She asked for calm while police work “to bring those responsible for today’s shooting, and others, to justice.”

“This shooting is another example of the senseless gun violence that we have seen far too often locally and nationwide,” Davis said at a news conference. “Too many families, too many mothers, too many fathers have suffered in our city and, quite frankly, I think we are all tired of it.”

The city’s mayor, Jim Strickland, [said](#) the episode is “another reminder of the pain that violent crime brings with it.”

Young Dolph earned a reputation as a proudly independent musician, eschewing offers from major record companies that could have made him millions, and instead starting his own label, Paper Route Empire, where he released all his albums. Even as he distanced himself from the music business establishment, he scored plenty of mainstream success: His last half dozen albums debuted in the top 25 of the Billboard chart and his most recent solo effort, “Rich Slave,” reached No. 4 on the Billboard 200.

He became a sought-after collaborator, working with other rappers including Megan Thee Stallion, Gucci Mane, Wiz Khalifa and Young Thug. And he was a mentor to his cousin and fellow rapper, Key Glock, who he teamed up with for the well-received “Dum and Dummer” albums. In “Case Closed,” an energetic standout track from the March sequel, the pair chronicle their rags-to-riches story: “Went from sleeping on the floor/Now my jewelry box froze.”

“This has always been my plan and my vision, to build a strong team and build artists like Glock,” Young Dolph [told Billboard](#) in an interview in March. “I like seeing new artists with no buzz, because I can give them game, and they’ll take that and run with it.”

Young Dolph was born in Chicago, but moved with his family to Memphis as a 2-year-old. His difficult upbringing, including a stint selling drugs, provided the basis for his music. In an interview with [Rolling Stone](#) in 2017, he discussed how he was raised by two parents battling drug addictions, the eventual topic of his song “In My System.”

“It’s really me describing where I come from, my background, and who made me and how I was made,” he said. “It’s my mama and daddy. I got the cocaine running through my system because, like, I was saying that because that’s what my mama and daddy was. That’s what they was on. That’s what they was into.”

Their addiction, he told [Vibe](#), damaged his relationship with them. But his grandmother Ida Mae, who raised him in South Memphis, “changed my whole attitude toward my mom and dad,” he told the outlet.

The change would not come too easily. As a teenager, Young Dolph craved “a lot of money,” finding two measures to satisfy his desire: first by cutting hair and then by dealing marijuana, he told [Vibe](#). But a love for music, a car wreck he survived, and the deaths of his grandmother and other family members would eventually inspire his new career.

“After that is when I started doing music,” he said. “Then my grandmother passed. After that some more of my folks passed with lung cancer. I just knew that I was losing a whole lot of time being in the streets. Time that I could’ve been kicking it with my folks. It’s other ways to get money, but the life we come from all we know is the streets.”

Even as a full-fledged rap star, violence trailed Young Dolph. After a 2017 shooting in Charlotte left his SUV riddled with bullet holes but did not injure him, Young Dolph released the album “Bulletproof,” whose track list reads like a rebuke to the gunmen. The opening song, “100 Shots,” taunts, “A hundred shots/How ... you miss a whole hundred shots?”

Just months later, after a scuffle outside a Hollywood hotel, Young Dolph was shot at again and seriously wounded. “I saw so much blood coming out,” he recounted in a 2018 [interview with the Guardian](#). His reaction was defiant, telling the outlet that he refused to let the shootings deter his music.

“I’ve been targeted since I was 17, 18, 19,” he said.

He filmed a music video for “Believe Me” that began with news footage of the incident and scenes inside the hospital where he recovered.

Up until his death, the Memphis-raised rapper was heavily involved in the city. He and his family started the Ida Mae Foundation, named after his grandmother, as a community organization focused on programming and philanthropy. Last year, he [donated](#) \$25,000 to his high school, the money going to new sports equipment. In May, he performed at halftime during an NBA playoff game between the Memphis Grizzlies and the Utah Jazz. And just last week, the rapper was [spotted at Makeda’s](#), buying cookies. Young Dolph had two children with his partner, Mia Jaye.

In the hours after his death became public, tributes poured in from the hip-hop world.

“R. I.P. to my friend Dolph this broke my heart,” [Gucci Mane tweeted](#).

Fellow rapper Lil Yachty reminisced about his relationship with him, [writing](#) that they “used to be next door neighbors. Smh. RIP DOLPH.”

Megan Thee Stallion took to social media to pay tribute to her former collaborator. “I am sooo sick rn I am in disbelief!” she [said](#) on Twitter. “Praying for his family and friends ! Rest In Peace to my friend a true legend dolph.” She [added](#) in an Instagram post: “Everybody that know me knows I play this man music EVERY DAY !”

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