When asked to describe himself, Whitmer Thomas—comic, musician, skateboarder, infamous Blink182 stan—will tell you, “I’m always gonna be the one whose mom called him ‘the Golden One,’ right before she died.” This is where his debut HBO comedy special, *The Golden One*, finds Whitmer: age thirty, investigating this sense (curse?) of destiny-as-identity. It’s been thirteen years since he left Alabama for LA, becoming a linchpin for LA’s young, independent comedy scene with Power Violence, the monthly show he hosted with friends. But he became haunted by the question: had he already peaked, just like his mom, singer in a local band with big ambitions that never made it out of the Flora-Bama Lounge in Gulf Shores? Rather than shy away from all that messy self-mythology, Whitmer tapped the source of it all through writing this one-man show featuring his own original music. *Songs from The Golden One*, a companion album of songs from the special, features Whitmer’s darkwave bangers, synthesizing relatable-content: millennial anxieties, therapy-speak jokes, and the annals of his own childhood tragedies.

*Songs from The Golden One* feature ten cuts of borderline-John Maus cosplay with spasms of pop-punk absurdity. Thomas uses the gothy, nasal vocal drone as a tool of comic detachment to cover thr *funny-’cause-its-true* territory of awkward sex, crippling insecurity, the shame of ambition, and the long tail of abandonment traumas. Each song is a capsule of initial therapy breakthroughs: those realization-zingers where suddenly it all makes sense, how each fucked variable from *then* makes up the weird shit of *now*. When you see it all for what it is, it looks like some sick, clever joke from the universe, driving you desperate to revise the comedy so that if you have to be reality’s punchline, at least you can write the jokes.

Original tracks from the special include the shimmering, synthy euphoria of “Eat You Out,” a glorious admission to performance anxiety and the ol’ *magician’s cloak of cunnilingus* move. There’s “The Codependent Enabler,” a whole jungle gym of toxic relationship rationale where “I can only get it up if you are down,” and the sadboy sobriety anthem “Partied to Death,” about when you’re young in LA and you have to tell people that you’re not \*Cali sober for wellness\*, but because your mom actually died from addiction, so.

At first pass, Whitmer’s special and album make a relevant, hilarious articulation of one tragic childhood, of the messiness of masculinity, of the timeless qualms of being broke with a dream in Los Angeles, and the humiliation inherent in having “a dream” at all. But in flashes of unexpected weirdo wisdom, Whitmer weaves a deeper story of a person finding reconciliation and forgiveness alongside finding his own self and voice. He faces his darkness with darkwave, writing the story of his objectively insane youth through a Venn diagram of cool guy music, goofy dude jokes, and sensitive boy reflections that hit in a way that feels bigger than the sum of its parts. Whitmer will say that he made *The Golden One* out of desperation, but there’s something about the show feels a lot more, instead, like destiny.