After dropping out of college two years in to chase his musical dreams, Tor Miller found himself living them in real time. In early 2014, the Brooklyn native signed to independent label Glassnote Records, putting his professional career on track at 20 years old. Following his debut EP *Headlights* the next year, he released his first full-length, *American English*, in September 2016, putting him on an international tour that included stops at SXSW, Lollapalooza and multiple visits to Europe.

But when he returned to the States and the tour wrapped, it all came crashing down. “I didn't have an apartment and hardly had any money after touring so much and you realize that everything comes out of your pocket in the end,” recalls Miller, now 24. Despondent, he moved back in with his parents in New Jersey, disillusioned by where he had ended up. “I was stuck back in my hometown with no prospects of what to do next—no idea.”

Depressed and uninspired, he reconnected with his old childhood mentor, a local producer, who listened to sketches of new material, inspired by the bleak suburban life he thought he’d fled for good. The sessions, recorded in one take with five instruments in a room, yielded his sophomore album *Surviving the Suburbs*, a stark portrait of an artist whose life didn’t materialize as planned and how he coped with it.

Leaner and simpler than the lush, full-bodied arrangements of *American English*, *Surviving the Suburbs* is an honest self-reflection framed as a musical coming of age. It’s a step forward into vibrant territory where the vitality of a live backing band gives Miller more Americana flavor, as if, he explains, “Elton John made a Bruce Springsteen record.” On the electrified title track, he intones on the chorus that “we can’t get out of here,” reflecting on how, when he returned to live with his parents, he reconnected with his townie friends who had never left and drowned his sorrows with them in alcohol and pills. The remorse sets in on the wistful “Sunday Scaries,” a piano-driven promise to oneself that, after a weekend of binge-drinking and partying, he’ll never do it again, only to repeat the same cycle once Friday rolls around.

There’s a deeply visceral side, too, crystallizing in tales of the casual steps towards romance. “We Both Want To” coasts on the optimism of quietly harboring feelings for a love interest, trading casual glances with them from afar,while the wide-eyed “Friends With You” grapples with taking a chance and the tension that comes with sharing your romantic feelings with a friend in hopes they feel the same. “I wanted to do something that felt like it was alive and breathing,” explains Miller. “I think with the lyrics and music on this album, it was about wanting to have a human moment and encounter with the listener. In the end, it’s something I’m pretty proud of.”

It’s no surprise that *Surviving the Suburbs* has a more organic instrument-to-tape feel than its predecessor given his pedigree. Born and raised in Brooklyn, he moved to New Jersey with his mother when his parents briefly separated, and continued going to school in the city. During the long car rides, his mom introduced him to albums from John, David Bowie and Fleetwood Mac. Taking piano lessons from an early age, he began attending school in Jersey, keeping to himself until he broke his silence during an 8th grade talent show, wowing his classmates. In the years that followed, Miller set his sights on returning to the city, attending New York University’s prestigious Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music and supplementing his studies with gigs at mainstays like Rockwood Music Hall and The Bitter End.

Now, Miller is already seasoned in the music industry, having scraped the highs and lows and finally finding middle ground. “What I'm trying to accomplish with this music is to feel better,” he says. “I want to feel happy with where I am. These feelings and anxieties that we have, everyone is having. At this age in particular, where you feel very much in between and not satisfied with who you are and where you're at. But I think this record is trying to find that peace within yourself to move on and just feel stronger, whatever the case may be.”