



Matisyahu

West Chester, Pennsylvania, USA

Instrument: Vocals, Beat-Box

Listening to: Go Nad Go's greatest hits

Few artists make an impact as complete as the one Matisyahu made with his Top 40 hit “King Without a Crown”: Here was a true original, the song announced-a Hasidic Jewish musician from New York City singing reggae songs about his religious devotion. Fans responded to this one-of-a-kind voice, too, driving Youth, Matisyahu’s Grammy-nominated 2006 studio disc, to the top spot on Billboard’s reggae albums chart. That album, as well as Matisyahu’s previous recording Live at Stubb’s, went Gold.

True originals, though, don’t stay put for long, and on his bold new album, Light, 29-year-old Matisyahu proves that there’s much more to his artistry than might initially meet the eye. “As my musical tastes have grown I have been re-discovering my sound and my voice,” he says.

Light is anything but safe. Produced by David Kahne (Paul McCartney, Sublime, the Strokes), the 14-track collection covers a dizzying amount of stylistic ground, from hard-edged dancehall (“Smash Lies”) and ska-inflected New Wave (“We Will Walk”) to laidback pop-rock (“So Hi So Lo”) and acoustic folk-soul (“I Will Be the Light”). While reggae is far from absent here-see the old-school toasting in “Motivate”-Light finds Matisyahu edging away from his comfort zone into more daring territory. “Being an artist is about being sensitive to how the world resonates inside you and then being able to express it,” he says. “This process is an ever-changing one.”

In 2008 Matisyahu decided to take the year away from touring and began creating the songs for Light. He went to Jerusalem for the high holidays and worked with his friend and teacher Ephraim Rosenstein to consolidate three years of learning Torah into 16 songs. While Matisyahu credits Kahne-“No producer had ever tapped into that with me,”

he says-with encouraging him to explore the dimensions of his voice, other collaborators helped him push his music in new directions as well. He came back to New York and rented a loft in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and got together with his favorite musicians and producers, people he's met over the last few years: he wrote with Ooah of Glitch Mob, singer-songwriter Trevor Hall and his long-time guitar player and close friend Aaron Dugan. Matisyahu took the songs to Kahne and began recording vocals. He went to Jamaica and worked with critically acclaimed young producer Stephen McGregor. Some friends of his, Adam Deitch and Eric Krasnow (the production team Fyre Dept), wrote a song with a Jamaican vocalist Jah Don, which is included on the album. Kahne got Fishbone to play on some songs and Matisyahu arranged for legendary Jamaican rhythm section Sly and Robbie on some others. Then just recently Matisyahu decided to cut two more tracks with producer Dave McCracken and the Smeezintons. One of those songs, "One Day," is meant to be an anthem of hope. The song a prayer for peace which Matisyahu hopes will be a source of inspiration for people struggling to open their hearts and stay positive.

Despite the lengthy and varied guest list, *Light* remains a work traceable only to Matisyahu's unique creative sensibility, an album that reflects more than two years' worth of religious study, particularly the story of the seven beggars by Reb Nachman. This is the driving spiritual force behind *Light*. The story is about two children who get lost in a dark forest after fleeing an invasion of their kingdom. Each night a different beggar, each of which suffers from a different ailment, approaches them with food and water. "I feel this theme, though written as a fairytale in the 1800's, is very relevant to many of the struggles that we face today," Matisyahu says. "From child soldiers to child sex slaves to everyday people trying to awaken their broken hearts."