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One Of A Kind

NEW YORK, March 26, 2006



Matisyahu, born Matthew Miller, converted to Orthodox Judaism after a chance meeting with a rabbi in a New York City park. (GETTY)

QUOTE

"I'm always just thinking, it's about, you know, trying to be a good person and trying to stay connected to God. Everything else is secondary."

Matisyahu

someone comes to a show because they think like, 'Oh, this is gonna be funny' or something they're gonna get there and they're gonna see that's not what this is about."

The sold out audiences lining up to see him are learning Matisyahu is no novelty act.

"I just thought that a white Jewish boy couldn't rap and then I listened to it. And then I thought, 'Wow, this is actually really good,'" one female concertgoer says.

His first major release "Live at Stubb's" made for just \$25,000, went gold, driven by the breakout hit, "King Without a Crown." And this month, his new album, "Youth," debuted on the charts at number 4, selling more than 100,000 copies in the first week.

Dermot Hussey is the reggae program director for XM Satellite radio

"Novelty is not a bad thing in pop music because it gets your attention. And it's for you, then, to take it from that perspective and move it beyond that," Hussey says.

26-year-old Matisyahu was born Matthew Miller, the son of social workers from White Plains, a New York suburb.

"I loved ice hockey. I used to play ice hockey. So, you know I wanted to be a hockey player," Matisyahu says. Matisyahu flowed toward music pretty naturally. He also dreamed of being a rock star.

"I started out with friends of mine in high school beat boxing. Everyone would sort of like be in a circle making up rhymes and raps, you know. That was like the creative outlet for my friends. And I became the sort of the guy that made the beats, like did the beats with my mouth," Matisyahu says.

As he grew older, though, he grew restless. Matisyahu dropped out of high school during his senior year, saying that on the first day of school, "I just didn't

(CBS) In the crowded Hasidic community of the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, Matisyahu Miller is just like any other Orthodox Jew.

But when he strides onto a concert stage he becomes rock 'n' roll's only Hasidic reggae singer -- what Rolling Stone called a "kosher man vibration" and one of the hottest musical acts in the country, CBS News correspondent Anthony Mason reports.

Despite the seemingly odd contrast between his faith and his music, Matisyahu is not bothered by those who call his act a gimmick.

"I never really thought of it. I mean I get asked the question all the time," Matisyahu says. "If

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want to be there."

Like many teenagers, Matisyahu says, "I was struggling.

"As a kid you're just born into a certain system, into a certain place. And you're just expected to go along with that, you know?" And like what if it doesn't work? What if you feel it's not right? What if you feel it's not true?" Matisyahu asks.

At 17, Matisyahu decided to escape.

"I left home with like \$10 in my pocket or something and I travelled for four or five months," he says.

He followed the band Phish all over the country and tried to find truth in music and drugs.

"They flipped," Matisyahu says of his parents. "I mean, my dad was pretty cool about it actually. He was much more laidback about it. And mom really -- she really had a breakdown."

Matisyahu's parents shipped him off to a wilderness camp to "straighten him out."

He ended up back in New York and enrolled in college. Then, by chance one day he met an Orthodox rabbi in a city park and made a leap of faith. Adopting his Hebrew name, Matthew became Matisyahu.

"I went through this whole transformation process," Matisyahu says. "I ended up moving out to Crown Heights, going to Yeshiva."

In embracing the Lubavitch sect of Orthodox Judaism, though Matisyahu did not abandon his music. With three fellow students he formed a band.

"When we started out, we were doing concerts for - for rabbis. We would show up at a schul and the rabbi would tell us to play 'hava Nagila' or the kids would be like, 'Can you play Bruce Springsteen?' or something. And, you know, so that's how it started. I mean it's been pretty crazy," Matisyahu says laughing.

He played about 250 concerts last year. Week by week the crowds got bigger, the halls got larger.

Matis, as friends call him, was recently married and now has a six-month-old son. And life on the road can be complicated if you're observant Jew, won't play on Friday nights or Saturday matinees because of the Jewish Sabbath.

And it can be problem trying to make sure the pre-concert prayers face Jerusalem.

His music is a cross-cultural blend: spiritual lyrics, hip hop undertones and a reggae rhythm.

"I got into Bob Marley, I got into reggae music. And that music just spoke to me and so it just became natural that when I started writing lyrics, and started singing them, they came out in that way," Matisyahu says.

Asked if he is a religious musician, he says, "I don't see myself, like - no, I wouldn't say like a Christian rock band or a Jewish rock band. I don't see it that way at all because music was such a strong part of my life even before religion was."

In a way, Matisyahu sees himself in his audience. The teenaged Matthew looking for inspiration in music, but sometimes channeling it in all the wrong places.

He wants to make music that is inspirational, but Matisyahu says, "saying that's not enough. At the end of the day that's not gonna do it. You know, you have to have some kind of plan. You have to some kind of structure or some kind of way to tap into this in a healthy way and strong way."

With all his success, Matisyahu does not view himself as a rock star.

"I'm always just thinking, it's about, you know, trying to be a good person and trying to stay connected to God," Matisyahu says, adding, "everything else is secondary."

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