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Make room for Mayer

John Mayer talks about his new release, Room for Squares

By JOHN SALERNO
THE BATTALION

If you are trying to get where you are going, you sometimes have to leave the things and people you are comfortable with behind and move on to the next step, singer-songwriter John Mayer said.

Mayer has become familiar with this feeling in the past few years as his career began to take off rapidly, he said. The Fairfield, Conn., native first moved to Boston, Mass., where he attended the Berklee College of Music for a year before deciding that he preferred to play music rather than learn about it, he said.

"I should probably have never gone to Berklee, from most people's standpoint," he said. "I'm at the point now to where I can file it under, 'You did what you had to do,' but at the time, I don't think it was the best thing to do because I wasn't prepared to go to class. So I put all my stock in things that weren't class. I put all my stock in those times that class was built around."

so I didn't use it for what I should have used it for. But I guess it's debatable as to whether I was either a genius or really, really stupid," Mayer said.

After the decision to begin playing music, Mayer moved — this time to Atlanta, Ga. It was there that he found a more lively music scene and the opportunity to play his music for people who enjoyed listening to it.

Mayer later played at the South By Southwest music festival in Austin, Texas, and was approached by several music labels. He signed with Aware/Columbia Records and released his first major label record, *Room For Squares*.

"I think it's way ahead of schedule, and it's silly," Mayer said of his quick success. "I'm 24 years old and I should have gotten out of Berklee this spring if I were to have stayed for four years, and I would just be starting to make my first or second demo right now. It doesn't happen this fast for most people, and I feel like, to do a service for those people, that I can't just act like this is run of the mill, because it's not. So I have to do right by it."

With the release of the album and an intense touring schedule, Mayer has "done right."

"At live shows, I try to show people that things can go anywhere, even out of my own immediate control," Mayer said. "I think if I were completely in control of my faculties, that is to say if I knew how to get those great nights, it wouldn't be as fun. When people see things happening live that they know are happening at that moment, I think that

that's really, really fun for them to experience."

If given a choice, Mayer said he prefers studio work over live shows.

"In the studio, you can paint," he said. "With live shows, you only have one color at a time, but in the studio you have a whole box of crayons. That hurts some people to have that much access to that much color, but I don't think that it hurts me. I like the raw, creative part of being in the studio."

Before the studio work can take place, an even more raw process must occur for Mayer to create his songs.

"My love is playing the guitar and freestyling," Mayer said. "The freestyling is the pure jolt that keeps me in this. I can go home after a tour of six weeks and just freestyle and be so in love with it. So [the songwriting process] always starts with playing the guitar and imagining that this is my new song. It always starts out with a guitar part and a melody, everything but the lyrics. For the lyrics, [the emphasis] isn't about the meaning of the words but the sound of the words. I like the words to just grow out of the music."

Mayer's love of the guitar stems from his early exposure to a single Stevie Ray Vaughn cassette, he said. Mayer said he knew there was something in the music that he wanted to be a part of, but he realized that he could not imitate someone else.

"There was a lot of figuring out what my true instincts were and what my influences were," Mayer said. "You can assimilate your influences into your instincts, but if your influences are actually imposing and infringing on your instincts, then you're a hack."

Mayer decided that the influence of the great blues guitarists would remain only an influence. He moved away from their style of playing and has focused on melody, rhythm and the conciseness of his songs.

"For me to have taken all that music in and to have revered it so much, but then to deny myself the ability to say that this is the writer that I really am — I couldn't do it for that long," Mayer said. "It was just a matter of realizing what was my real voice as a writer. For me, it's about the expressiveness of the song."

VOLUME CONTROL



John Mayer
Room for Squares
Sony Music

can all find in it our own questions of how we ended up where we are.

The funky blues sound of "Neon" evokes the red-light atmosphere of less savory parts of town and the excitement of being involved with the nightlife. The electric edge of "City Love" appeals to Mayer's older guitar influences like Stevie Ray Vaughn, and in the track we see a man who has begun to re-evaluate life in a big city in the context of a new-found love.

And now that night has fallen on the album, it enters the cold and lonesome world of those who seek more than they have. The album ends with "St. Patrick's Day," a rich, dark and extremely mature track that makes perfect use of Mayer's moody voice, as a couple finds excuses to remain together, at least until the song's title.

With a combination of acoustic and electric blues rock, honest and touching lyrics, and an evocative voice that reaches chilling highs and lows within a matter of syllables, *Room For Squares* is one of the most impressive debuts. (Grade: A)

— John Salerno

John Mayer's *Room For Squares* opens with the upbeat "No Such Thing," but listeners still find seeds of doubt and uncertainty about life and love. These themes surface throughout the album, but they are not meant to bring the listener down. The title of the album suggests that these are problems people frequently face, and they can take comfort in hearing Mayer sing, "I just found out there's no such thing as the real world, just a lie you've got to rise above."

Mayer himself has commented on the "seasonality" of the songs on the album, that is, they are arranged so that as the album progresses, the day slowly turns from morning to night and from warmth to coldness.

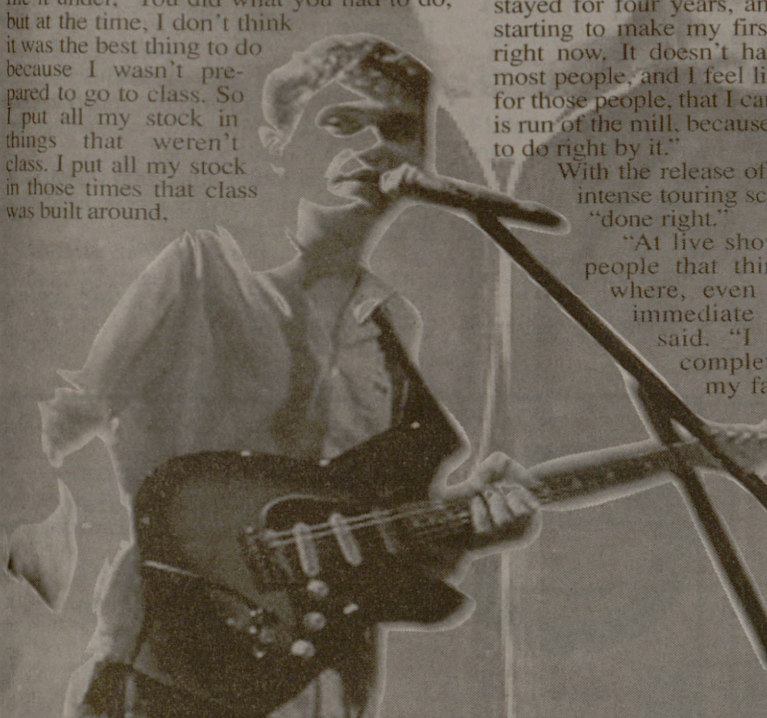
The songs take on new layers of maturity as the album progresses. "Why Georgia" is Mayer's personal question of how the course of his young life led him to Atlanta, Ga., but we

Ask Aggie

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— Courtney Bell



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