Born and Raised

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A disastrous choice of words sent John Mayer underground for the past two years. In 2010, Mayer responded to Playboy and Rolling Stone Magazine interviews with vulgarity and racial slander. Following his controversial sexually aggressive statements, Mayer was diagnosed with granulomas, a serious throat condition that affects vocal cords. He retreated to Bozeman, Montana, to reflect and cope with this career-changing disease. During this time, Mayer said, “I remembered how to get happy.” The singer/songwriter has recently emerged from the shadows with his most cohesive and honest album to date, Born and Raised. The album marks yet another change in Mayer’s style. Traditionally categorized as rock, Born and Raised displays more folk elements.

Born and Raised is a very introspective record. In an interview with National Public Radio, Mayer explains, “I had nowhere else to go but get more real. I couldn’t get less genuine at a certain point. Part of this was a seven-year itch in a relationship with doing what I do for a living. Where you know what you do. You know what’s safe and that’s settled. I must have gotten bored or something I don’t know, I did anything I wanted to. That’s the problem. I saw anything I wanted to do as a road worth taking. As if I was this exception to every rule. Destructive or not.” In interviews, Mayer reflects the meditative and conversational ambiance of his record. For the first time he composed the album into a microphone. Mayer sat in the recording studio for hours singing to himself, occasionally using a white board to reposition lyrics. The album is improvisational. Not only is this technique inspirational, but it also allowed Mayer to sing about his immediate emotions, which is echoed so purely in the album.

The first single, “Shadow Days,” was released February 21, 2012. This track is a response to Mayer’s two-year break from the public eye. He sings, “Did you know you could be wrong and swear you’re right. Some people have been known to do it all their lives, but you find yourself alone just like you found yourself before. Hard times have helped me see. I’m a good man with a good heart. Had a tough time. Got a rough start. But I finally learned to let it go. Now I’m right here and I’m right now and I’m open knowing somehow that my shadow days are over.” These lyrics imitate what Mayer explained in his NPR interview. Mayer admits to letting his stardom get to his head. He is focused on putting those times behind him and opening up himself to a more positive future. This remorseful theme is strung through Mayer’s record.

Mayer’s second single, “Queen of California” was released August 13, 2012. This single rings of escape and hope. Mayer explains, “You don’t head out West with your headphones on unless you are searching for something. Just being able to have a hopeful vibe about something again. It’s actually about getting over stuff. That’s why it’s the first track on the album. It’s a very relieving breathe of fresh air.” The single is a cleansing of shame, sorrow, and pain. Again, yet another one of Mayer’s single reflects his emotions after his controversial interviews and throat complications. In a promotional interview with Ellen DeGeneres, Mayer said that, after his demise of character, his friends took him on a road trip West. He traveled to Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Deadwood, and then ended up in Bozeman. “Queen of California,” seems to be a story of Mayer’s own trip out West. Born and Raised makes Mayer more relatable and likeable than any other of his other albums.

Throughout the whole album, listeners come to understand what Mayer was thinking and dealing with during his past two years in hiding. Listeners get a glimpse simply by looking at
song titles such as, “The Age of Worry,” “Speak for Me” and “Whiskey, Whiskey, Whiskey.” “Speak for Me,” seem to be a direct response to his destructive interviews, referring to *Rolling Stone*. He sings, “Now the cover of a Rolling Stone ain’t the cover of a Rolling Stone…Show me something I can be and play a song that I can sing. Make me feel as I am free. Someone come speak for me.” Mayer realizes how destructive his own words can be. He pleads for freedom and a word far from criticism. He other song, “Whiskey, Whiskey, Whiskey,” echoes his lifestyle that lead to his downward spiral. Mayer sings, “That only deal I every signed, no devil drew a dotted line. The stage was set. The words were mine. I’m not complaining.” Through these lyrics, Mayer owns up to his flaws. He continues to sing, “Walking home with no one left. Speak softly underneath my breath. Whiskey, whiskey, whiskey, water, water, water, sleep. Dreamed somebody missed me, wake up, shake it off and repeat it, repeat after me.” Mayer again, is asking for sympathy.

Overall, Mayer deserves a second chance with fans and critics. His courage and ownership are inspiring. *Born and Raised* is one of his best albums yet due his honesty. Each song reads so genuine and pensive. The album is filled with remorse and hope. The combination reflects the reality of any human. We all make mistakes and Mayer, who made a lot of fans angry, has certainly made up for his negative comments with *Born and Raised*. 