

Biography

Billy Mann is just getting started. Twenty years ago, he sat with his ear pressed against the radio, teaching himself the songs of Carole King, Gamble & Huff, Police, and Billy Joel. Now at 26, he finds himself on stage with Sting, writing with Carole King, charting as a writer/producer in his own right on a variety of formats, and releasing his selftitled debut to critical acclaim.

Beginning with piano at age five, Billy quickly added more instruments - including the guitar, bass and flute. By age twelve Mann was singing R&B classics on the streets of Philadelphia for a change. Describing his turbulent childhood as a "constant crash course" he found relief at the High School for Creative and Performing Arts (Boys II Men, Az Yet, The Roots, Christian McBride, among its alumni) as both a vocal music and creative writing major. Teenage Billy spent his school days writing lyrics, fronting local bands, strumming his guitar and singing in the gospel choir. His nights were spent getting kicked out of clubs and recording studios -- underage but determined to hear Philly sound at work.

"I remember trying to hide in an alcove at Sigma Sound while Patti Labelle was recording, being found, and tossed out." Mann has since returned to the legendary studio as a client.

At 20, after the common artist trauma of being misled by a shifty manager, an insecure Billy Mann was asked to sing at a Philadelphia Music Awards ceremony to honor famed songwriter Linda Creed ("The Greatest Love of All," among her many hits). At the performance, Grammy winning jazz legend Grover Washington Jr. was taken by Billy's voice and soon after became a source of encouragement for him.

"Grover gave me no choice but to be inspired to keep on with it, even when I ran out of confidence...which I did...a lot," Mann recalls. "It's through him that I realize that true success in music is the ability to keep continuing."

Curious about life outside of Philly, Billy traveled on to Boston, San Francisco, Miami, London, and New York, making stops along the way at "open mic" nights and street corners to hone his craft and earn his keep.

Finally, at 23, Billy followed a girl to New York and when the relationship took a downward spiral, Billy Mann took off. "*Killed By A Flower*" the single on the album, chronicles his aimless chase to New York for the perfect imperfect girl. The tale of "*Daisy*" is admittedly close to the real story. "The city was better than I planned. But it took a Daisy obsession, a couple more things that I don't have the pride to mention, to keep my good intentions from a jaded soul."

One afternoon while singing in a stairwell of a mid-town Manhattan building, Billy was approached by a long-haired man who heard his voice in the outside hallway and was compelled enough to find out who was singing. Reluctantly, Billy entertained the one-man audience member who turned out to be Ric Wake--multi-platinum hit producer (Celine Dion, Mariah Carey, Hall & Oates, Whitney Houston). "Next thing you know," Billy laughs, "I was sitting in a state of the art recording studio on Long Island with this famous producer going through my songbook to find which songs to put on my album! And not too long after that in the office of A&M Records. It was surreal."

This first album reveals the multi-faceted talents of Billy Mann. As a vocalist, his shocking three octave range soars song to song carrying poignant, inventive lyrics that intrigue and hooky melodies that stick like glue. As a multi-instrumentalist, Billy lends his hand playing guitar, piano, bass and even flute. The end result of his upbringing and talent is a goulash recipe of a stream of consciousness singer-songwriter with Philly soul roots and a credible musical understanding.

One track that most obviously reveals Billy's Philly soul roots is *"Ain't Gonna Keep Me Hangin' Around"* featuring a 16 piece string ensemble and a Hammond B3 organ. Reminiscent of the 70s hook laden Gamble & Huff style writing, the song reveals Billy's "better to feel good" rather than "look good" about a lover philosophy. On the musical flip side, Mann, accompanied only by his guitar, is unafraid to express his cynical take on one of his favorite songs *"(Tell Me) When God Will Speak."* "I've been flipping through channels and it all looks bleak. I will listen in alleys in Bethlehem, even Pakistan or L.A."

At such an early point in his career, some of the artists he's been involved with either on tour or in the studio make up quite an impressive list: Sting, Robert Plant, Jimmy Page, Carole King, Grover Washington Jr., The Mavericks, Chaka Khan, Diana King, Suzanne Vega, Boyzone, Phillis Hyman, Jann Arden, Keb' Mo', Josh Wink, and others.

Billy Mann is an artist whose creations capture the heart. Not only will his lyrics and melodies stay with you hours after the stereo stops playing, but they always reveal more depth and positive spirit with every listen. And though Billy playfully admits "there's a long journey ahead," one can't help but be awed by such an impressive beginning.

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