

## **Mat Kearney** *Nothing Left To Lose*

While on summer break during his junior year in college, Mat Kearney's friend Robert Marvin asked Mat if he wanted to help him move to Nashville. Kearney was looking for a change of scenery from college life at Chico State University, so he decided to go along for the ride. "I helped him pack up his trailer and we put a mattress on the back of his truck. We basically drove cross-country and slept in the back. When we pulled into Nashville we slept in a school parking lot for three days until we finally rented this apartment where the roof was caving in and mice crawling all over." And that's where Kearney and Marvin found the perfect setting to record the demos that would eventually land him a record deal.

"By the end of the summer, we had three or four songs and I realized this is what I wanted to do. It just clicked," he says. "So, I called home to my parents in Oregon and said, 'I'm not coming back,' and I never left Nashville." This journey east is referenced in the 27-year-old's major label debut *Nothing Left To Lose*. Specifically, the title track from the album deals with his move to Nashville and his decision to try his hand at a career in music. He explains, "There's this unfolding that's happening in the song, which is totally true to what I'm doing right now," he says. "I don't necessarily know the last chapter," he adds with a laugh.

Perhaps Kearney's restless spirit is hereditary. On his mom's side, his family is sixth generation Oregonians who traveled west on covered wagons and his dad's family were Irish immigrants who ran an illegal gambling ring and emigrated to the States during the Irish Potato Famine.

His parents met by chance at a harbor in Hawaii where his dad was working as a dockhand and his mom as a mermaid on a glass bottom boat. Two weeks after meeting the couple was engaged and six weeks later they were married. The pair relocated to Eugene, Oregon where Kearney and his two brothers were born.

The artistic vibe of his Eugene home fueled Mat's development as a painter, photographer and a writer of poems, screenplays and more. He explains, "In Eugene, there's the whole commitment to organic things and self-expression. What you're taught to value is different than anywhere else."

Music, however, was the one thing that Kearney came to on his own. He elaborates, "In high school I brought home this big console record player and before I could drive, I would have my mom drop me off at the local record store, called House of Records. I would dig through the records and bring home stuff I found—old Miles Davis, Billie Holiday and James Brown albums."

In high school, he also became interested in hip-hop. "I was into De La Soul, The Pharcyde and A Tribe Called Quest, that whole scene," he explains. "When I started writing, I picked up a guitar and started blending in my poetry with the music I was writing. There's something about the urgency of spoken word," he says, stressing the word urgency.

Another influence is his environment was his parents' spirituality. "My parents' faith was a big part of their lives and their story. I valued that," he says, "My music is committed to the idea of redemption."

When he was 18, Kearney headed to Chico State University in California where he studied English literature, particularly inspired by the work of Southern writers like Flannery O’Conner and William Faulkner. At the age of 21, he made his aforementioned trip to Nashville.

While record labels were starting to offer Kearney development deals early on, he wanted to wait until he had his new material at a higher level. “I knew my songs weren’t quite there yet, so instead, I worked every kind of odd job you can think of. I worked at a coffee shop, was a banquet server, worked as a youth mentor with kids. But I kept working on music,” he says. “I tried to devote time to write and to perform at the same time. I started by playing these songwriting nights and performing my songs around people like Nickel Creek and Duncan Sheik. Living in Nashville really stepped up my songwriting.”

It took about four years, but once Kearney felt he had his songs right, he completed his first album, *Bullet*, on a self-financed, shoestring budget. The album would go on to sell roughly 40,000 copies through an independent label in Nashville. The response to his songwriting was instantaneous and lead to a record deal with Aware/Columbia Records.

As he prepares to release his new record, Mat is touring the country and traveling a little more comfortably than a mattress on the back of a truck.

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