

# MATT SHAPIRO



"I approach making a record like I'm making a movie" says NYC-based artist Matt Shapiro, before adding: "My last album *Metaphysical* was very layered and wide-angle and made to sound kind of epic. With this new EP *FADE IN*, I made the conscious decision to go the other way. This one's more lo-fi, like a scrappy little indie playing at the drive-in on the dark side of town. And it has more bite." When asked to elaborate on that point, a smiling Shapiro replies, "Listen to the album."

The 6-song EP comes barreling out of the gate with "Rockaway Girl" and quickly introduces the distorted synth-organs that are one of the record's sonic hallmarks. It's an exuberant, lo-fi affair with organs grinding alongside pulsing bass and drums and Shapiro's reverb-drenched vocals floating overtop. Elsewhere, the mood is heavier. Especially on "Waters Edge" a synth-garage pop ballad about a mysteriously departed friend and "Johnny", a pounding, narrative-driven catharsis that features some of Shapiro's most dynamic and tripped-out vocals to date. The EP closes with "Geneviève" a nostalgic piece of classic song craft that sketches scenes from an adolescent friendship over hooky guitar riffs and a big sing-along chorus.

Shapiro recalls some of the life changes he's weathered, particularly the culture shock of moving from Montreal, where he was raised, to New York City. "I was this naïve kid from Canada confronted by this fast-paced, ultra-hip scene," he recalls. "There was a lot of confusion and angst and just figuring myself out. It was a struggle. I had these vague ideas about 'making it' but really had no idea what I was doing."

Not that this fish-out-of-water experience was completely new. "Growing up, I had no role models for the stuff I was really into, no reference point," he explains. "The adults were all doctors, lawyers, or businessmen and kids were expected to follow suit. I was kind of the black sheep." Succumbing to that pressure at first, Shapiro tamped down his creative urges and went to university thinking he'd become a lawyer. "It seemed like the sensible thing to do but deep down I knew I was on the wrong track. I would get into my car at night and drive around Montreal singing myself hoarse for hours on end. It was a side of me that nobody knew and yet it was the one thing that made me feel connected and alive."

Shapiro would nurture this secret well into his 20's and credits that period with helping him to develop his signature vocal sound. "I was lucky in that I got to make a lot of mistakes when no one was looking." It was around that time that Shapiro started sketching his first songs, singing into an old handheld tape

recorder. After moving to New York City for an internship, he got up enough nerve to start auditioning for local New York bands. “I’d find ads on Craigslist, coffee shop bulletin boards, or in the back of the Village Voice. I was nervous as hell but figured the only way to get over it was just to jump in with both feet. I met all kinds of crazy characters.” Eventually he found his way into one project, then another. Gigs around New York City followed. “There were some awkward moments for sure,” he admits. “But I was on the path.”

Shapiro eventually started taking voice lessons. “I was that guy singing scales in his bedroom every day,” he recalls. He also enrolled in acting classes to help with stage fright and further develop as a performer. “I consider my time in acting classes to be absolutely formative,” he explains. “A lot of musicians try to cultivate this too-cool-for-school presence onstage. I was interested in the opposite of that. I wanted to connect and being around actors really freed me.” In fact, it was while on a U.S. national tour as an actor that he bought his first guitar. “A few of the other guys played and would show me chords. We’d have late night jam sessions in these little motels off the highway. That was how I learned.”

Prior to *FADE IN*, Shapiro recorded three solo albums and engaged in several successful collaborations. *To The Moon*, Matt’s co-write with DJ-producer Tone Depth, garnered critical acclaim and was picked up by Dave Seaman’s Audiotherapy label in the UK and commissioned for several remixes. The track was championed by top DJ’s, including the legendary Tiesto, who featured it during his own set. In their five-star review of that track, DJ Magazine praised Shapiro’s “brilliant, nigh-on, angsty vocals.” In 2016, the duo would collaborate again on *Halls of White*, which was released worldwide by Noir Music (Denmark) and hailed as a “remarkable vocal tune.”

On the solo side, several Shapiro cuts have been placed in such TV shows as the Gemini Award-winning Canadian television show *15 Love*, *Charlie Jade* (a Canadian/ South African co-production), the Canadian reality series *Webdreams*, *The Young and The Restless*, and the CW’s reboot of *Melrose Place*.

The road to making *FADE IN* began in the summer of 2017 when Matt convened with his band in a Brooklyn rehearsal space to run through new material. It was a non-starter. “The magic just wasn’t there. I realized that it was time to reinvent.” His next call was to frequent collaborator Fraser McCulloch, producer (and member) of critically-acclaimed indie band Milagres whose resumé also includes helming albums for Chaos Chaos, Golden Suits, and Sunjacket amongst many others.

“I sent Fraser every demo I’d recorded all year.” The duo settled on 7 songs – 6 of which made the final EP- and scheduled a series of sessions starting in mid-September. One major constraint was McCulloch’s imminent move cross-country to California. “Time was of the essence, so I was meticulous in planning our sessions. We made this list of 6 guiding principles that we taped to the side of a studio monitor. We’d check it constantly as we were working to keep us on track.” He credits McCulloch with helping him to clarify his vision for the record- and for holding his feet to the fire. “Fraser is the ideal producer for me in that he’s both my biggest fan and toughest critic. It’s easy for me to fool myself into thinking something’s better or worse than it is. Having a sounding board -whose taste I totally trust – is absolutely crucial ”

When asked why he chose the title *FADE IN* Shapiro explains, “In many ways, the last record was about tying up loose ends. This one really feels like the start of something new.”