

# BRM

GROUNDBREAKING MUSIC + CULTURE



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**AT HEART**  
**MARCO BENEVENTO**  
**HE IS LEGEND**  
**HAVE HEART**  
**UNI**



**Mayer  
Hawthorne**  
**THE SOUL MAN**



1

THE MARVELETTES  
"AS LONG AS I KNOW YOU"

2

BRENDA HOLLOWAY  
"TIL JOHNNY COMES"

3

THE FOUR TOPS  
"I'LL TURN TO STONE"

MAYER'S TOP 5

MOTOWN SONGS

4

THE SUPREMES  
"YOU KEEP ME HANGING ON"

5

MARTHA AND THE VANDELLAS  
"COME AND GET THESE MEMORIES"



# A

fter moving out to Los Angeles with his hometown friends and their hip-hop/soul group Now On, a unique musical force in their own right, Cohen met Stones Throw label head Peanut Butter Wolf through a mutual friend at the infamous weekly D-over party in Los Angeles. Peanut Butter Wolf, known for signing eccentric musical geniuses that hold heavy hip-hop cult status, at first did not believe that Cohen had written his own material. "I heard two songs and liked them, so I called Drew [Mayer]. Because he was a DJ...I thought maybe the songs were re-edits of old songs that he did," Peanut Butter Wolf says.

Upon Peanut Butter Wolf's first listening of Mayer Hawthorne, Cohen recalls, "He thought that it was some old, undiscovered soul stuff that I dug up on vinyl. Once he was convinced that I wrote and played and sang and recorded everything on the songs myself, he wanted to put it out right away. He sent me a contract the next week, I think."

According to Peanut Butter Wolf, "It was the first signing in the 13 year history of the label where I signed someone to an album deal after only hearing two songs. And even Madlib likes it. That should be what the sticker on the record says."

Mayer Hawthorne's music, sung by Cohen and backed by a band, is a brand of soul seemingly beamed in from a past era of dusty vinyl and crate digger's gems. Heavily influenced by the Motown and Stax records of yesteryear, Mayer Hawthorne has the uncanny ability to bring back a certain place and time in the annals of music history (Detroit in the '60s) and simultaneously hone in on America's newly renewed obsession with all things soul and vinyl (à la Amy Winehouse and Mark Ronson).

Seemingly out of nowhere, Hawthorne's first single ever, "Just Ain't Gonna Work Out," a gorgeous soul ballad released via Stones Throw at the end of 2008, caught the attention of *Rolling Stone* and NPR, and lit up the blogosphere with laudatory chatter.

Cleverly released on heart-shaped vinyl, the track borrows the classic kick-and-snare pattern from Allen Toussaint's "Get Out Of My Life, Woman," and lays it over silky doo-wop harmonies and jukebox break-up lyrics. The result is an outwardly simple song that holds within it complex chords and vocal arrangements that nod to the soul greats.

Cohen, an admitted vinyl junkie and meticulous music lover, grew up in a very musical family. He received his first Fisher Price record player from his parents as a child and, at a very young age, started to sit in with his Dad's band, take piano lessons and learn as many instruments as he could get his hands on. As a teenager, Cohen's hip-hop band dominated the local Ann Arbor scene, and his gigs as DJ Haircut were a hit at the University of Michigan. "[My parents] didn't want me to do music for a living," says Cohen. "They wanted me to go get my computer science degree at U of M and do something not so risky, but I always knew that I wanted to do music."

Feeling the draw of a big city and his desire to network with the musical elite, Cohen left his beloved Detroit and headed out to L.A. "There is just not enough industry in Detroit to support all of the music that is coming out of that area," Cohen admits. "It's a little different in L.A. We have a lot of labels and more support from the music community. It makes it easier to actually make a living off of music."

Although Mayer Hawthorne is one version of Andrew Cohen's identity, it is most certainly not all of him. In Los Angeles, Cohen quickly made a name for himself DJing high-profile gigs, doing graphic design with his company Colorblind Creative, co-founding A-Side Worldwide (a management and marketing company), and performing as a member of his hip-hop groups, Now On and Athletic Mic League.

"What's really unique...about Drew is how many hats he really wears, ie: singer, rapper, DJ, producer, writer, arranger, graphic designer and business owner, solo artist and in not one but two hip-hop groups," Jeff Klein, Cohen's co-manager, gushes. "Let's just say the man is a superhero and leave it at that."

With less and less money floating around the music industry, Cohen is part of the recent burst of DIY artist development where artists create the companies and tools to make their own careers a success, instead of bringing in outsiders. The DIY mentality has produced avenues for artists to create musical communities that foster musicians, publicists and event promoters building together, outside the model of the major labels.

At Cohen's management and marketing company, A-Side Worldwide, the artist roster is a Detroit-heavy lineup with some of the artists also working on the business side. The idea is that if any of the


artists start to gain attention, they can, in turn, help bring up other artists on the roster in a piggyback effect. Although the tactics for gaining fans and business opportunities may be heavily steeped in Cohen's work with A-Side, he desperately wants his actual music to stand alone.

"I wanted my debut album to be 100% me and I'm playing nearly every instrument on the album," Cohen says about *A Strange Arrangement*. "I recorded

it all myself. I wrote every song except for one. I arranged everything myself, produced it all myself and I'm really proud of it."

The experience of writing *A Strange Arrangement* was a process that came organically for Cohen. "Most of the songs for this Mayer Hawthorne project feel like they just got beamed out of the sky, and a lot of times I feel like I didn't even write them," Cohen says. "I'll be at the grocery store picking up frozen peas and a whole song will just pop into my head, melodies, words, and everything."

Cohen quotes the songwriting styles of Curtis Mayfield, the trio of Lamont Dozier, Brian Holland, and Eddie Holland Jr. and other soul legends as his learning ground. Smokey Robinson, "King of Motown," had an especially strong influence on Cohen's songwriting. "I would love to pick his brain for an hour. To me he is one of the greatest songwriters of all and I would love to just sit down with him and write a song, just to figure out how he writes. Amazing shit."

At a recent show, Cohen took the stage as Mayer Hawthorne for only the second time in his short career for a New York crowd. As fans sang along to every word, Cohen, who only a few months prior was completely unknown, relished in the newness of the moment with a giddy smile. Far from a joke, it's starting to look like things are just gonna work out for Cohen and Mayer Hawthorne. 

## I'LL BE AT THE GROCERY STORE PICKING UP FROZEN PEAS AND A WHOLE SONG WILL JUST POP INTO MY HEAD, MELODIES, WORDS, AND EVERYTHING.