



FLASHY BUT CLASSY

Jettison gets intimate with Mayer Hawthorne and asks about his favorite kind of Girl Scout cookie || by James H. Ewert Jr.

Mayer Hawthorne definitely sounds like an optical illusion; he's a square-peg in a round hole. Yet, upon closer inspection, he's clearly just a hip circle with a square blazer and a pair of fresh argyle socks to match. In fact, he told me he was wearing an argyle sweater when I called, and I figured it was most likely teamed with a slick pair of slacks and black, thick-framed spectacles. His style is one part Rivers Cumo, three parts Rat Pack, and a pinch of Wu-Tang for flavor and zest.

Hawthorne didn't plan on leading music through a soul revival. In fact, he didn't even plan on being Mayer Hawthorne, he he wanted to be DJ Haircut. Both Mayer Hawthorne and DJ Haircut are nicknames Andrew Mayer Cohen earned as a kid growing up in Ann Arbor, Michigan—one gained in his local barbershop

and the other a product of the childhood porn-name game that combines someone's middle name with the name of the street they grew up on.

Luckily for soul and Motown fans wishing they were born half a century ago, Cohen is sticking to Mayer Hawthorne—for now at least, because after hearing Cohen tell his story you get the feeling he still has a few face cards stashed up his nicely pressed sleeve.

Things have been moving fast for Mayer Hawthorne since releasing *Strange Arrangement* in 2008 on Stones Throw Records. Whether he's jamming with Snoop Dog or dressing up really fancy for Ford Modeling photo shoots, pretty much everyone has been trying to get a piece of the sweet-sounding soul singer—so much so, Cohen said it's been getting harder to find time

for himself. It was more than fitting for him to be in a Philadelphia record store searching for some buried 45-inch treasures, when *Jettison* called Mayer Hawthorne to talk about what's happening in Detroit, gettin' phone calls from Snoop Dog and his fondness for girl scouts. Oh, and ladies, he did mention he was single.

"It's getting harder and harder for sure," Cohen said about making music and balancing his ever-growing list of projects and collaborations. "It's more and more difficult that's why I cherish my times when I get to dig in the record stores like this. It's kind of the only time I get to myself to just kind of do my own thing. I try to get back and see my family in Michigan as much as possible. That's where I can get a little peace and quiet."

Most of Mayer Hawthorne's story is pretty well known and documented, but here's the rundown for the unfamiliar: In the early part of the decade Cohen was earning his stripes on Detroit's hip hop circuit, spinning and scratching as DJ Haircut, until Stones Throw Records founder Peanut Butter Wolf got a hold of a couple demos Cohen had been working on under the name Mayer Hawthorne. Wolf, like almost everyone who first hears Mayer Hawthorne, couldn't believe that what he was listening to was not only completely original work, but entirely written, composed, and recorded by a 29-year-old white kid from Ann Arbor.

After meeting a few times, Wolf signed Mayer Hawthorne to Stones Throw, and in November of 2008, the label released *Strange Arrangement* on a red heart-shaped record—the title, a fitting description given the circumstances that led to it being made.

"I'm sick of being asked the same questions, but I'm not sick of answering questions," Cohen said about the constant

barrage of press that's been coming his way. "You grew up in Detroit; how does that influence your music?" I get 'em all."

It can be tough to interview musicians while they're on the road. Publicists often set up several-hour long blocks of interviews and the artists punch through them one-by-one, usually getting asked the same questions dozens of times. It's the interviewer's job to break through that monotony and sometimes take the musician off guard, but that's assuming there is a guard to begin with—and in Mayer's case there wasn't so much as a facade.

I was Mayer's first interview of the day and his attitude was business-like. His voice was low and deep— a stark contrast to the soulful falsetto he sings in. His cadence was punctuated with 'you know's,' in a nod to his Detroit roots. He sounded a little tired, and quite frankly, I would be too had I been through the whirlwind of the past two years.

"I still make all my music in my bedroom at home and I do it pretty much the same way that I always have. I think that's why it's been working," Cohen said. "I live in Los Angeles now, yeah that's different. I'm in West LA. I love it. It's motivating. I wake up and it's 80 degrees and sunny and warm and it just makes you want to get out and get something."



Getting it, he has. It seems like every week a new musician is discovering Mayer Hawthorne and remixing his songs, just like he had done himself years before as DJ Haircut. He's covered songs from diverse artists like Electric Light Orchestra, to Biz Markie and Tony Bennett, and he's had his songs reworked by people like Ghostface Killa, Mark Ronson, and Snoop Dog.

"Yeah I get a lot of people chopping my stuff up," Cohen said. "I guess I shouldn't be surprised, but I have been kind of surprised that the majority of the people approaching me for collaborations and what not are hip hop artists. It's a lot of cats like Ghostface and Snoop Dog, and I was just talking to Chuck from the Cool Kids the other day and I had no idea he was even paying attention, but he told me my album was one of his favorites."

And do these people just call him up out of the blue?

"That is actually generally how it happens," Cohen said. "When I got the call from Snoop, I was eating breakfast in LA and my manager says 'hey, hold on one second you gotta talk to somebody and it's Snoop Dog.' It's always a surreal experience."

Even though Mayer gave me nearly 20-minutes of his time, I didn't get to many of my questions. I never found out who the last person he said "I love you," to was, what he thinks about hippies, or why everyone doesn't love Electric Light Orchestra as much as he and I do. But before he had to take another call, I had the chance to pose a few queries in rapid succession. Here goes:

JETTISON: What's going on in Detroit?

Mayer Hawthorne: You don't want to know.

JETTISON: Ice cream or cookies?

MH: Cookies for sure, I'm a cookie connoisseur. I've never been a huge ice cream guy, I'm not anti-ice cream, but can't go wrong with cookies.

JETTISON: You like Girl Scout cookies?

MH: I do, I'm especially fond of girl scouts.

JETTISON: Which kind?

MH: I'm equal opportunity when it comes to that. I don't think there are any bad ones, peanut butter patties are off the hook. I'm allergic to chocolate though, which is something everybody is always aghast by, but I guess it keeps me in shape.

JETTISON: Monocle or pocket watch?

MH: I got to go with pocket watch; I think a monocle is a little stuffy.

JETTISON: Argyle or plaid?

MH: Argyle, that's an easy one.

JETTISON: Four Tops or the The Temptations?

MH: Oh, you can't make me pick between those.

JETTISON: Tribe Called Quest or Wu-Tang?

MH: That's impossible, they're not even comparable. I'll go with Tribe strictly because I just saw Q-Tip, he came through my show in New York and said what's up.

JETTISON: Turkey or Chicken?

MH: Man, the food ones, those are the hardest for me because I'm a huge food guy. Depends on what you want to do afterwards.

JETTISON: Alright say you're going to play a basketball game afterwards.

MH: Then chicken for sure.

JETTISON: Handshake or hug?

MH: I'm a gentlemen and all my hip hop friends are always comin' in for the dap, and I'm trying to convert them all to handshake.

JETTISON: Describe your style in five words or less?

MH: Flashy but classy

JETTISON: Van Halen with, or without David Lee Roth?

MH: Oh, with of course, Diamond Dave, come on, dude's incredible.

JETTISON: Do you have your shit together?

MH: [hesitates] Yeah, I'm gonna say yeah, only because if I didn't I'd be worried about me.

JETTISON: Guilty pleasure music?

MH: I have a lot of guilty pleasure music, but to me I don't feel guilty about it. One of my favorite albums of all time is Janet Jackson's *Rhythm Nation* and a lot of people consider that guilty pleasure, but I don't feel guilty about that it's great music.

MH: Oh, I got another call coming in. I got to let you go.

