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Reggae with heart: Interview with Matty Woods – The Scavenger ...

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Reggae with heart: Interview with Matty Woods

When it comes to reggae with heart, Australian artist **Matty Woods** has it covered. His debut release *The Ras Gong Guerrilla* EP doesn't shy away from tackling political and sometimes controversial issues, and – in addition to being an expression of his innate creativity and musical talents – represents an extension of his personal activism. He spoke with **Elizabeth Usher**.

Matty, I've read that your passion for music started at age three– what was the inspiration at such a young age?

Press Kit

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I was subconsciously drawn to music and performance. It was as if I was just returning to my source. I somehow already knew it intrinsically.

You've described your music as “developed to the point of simplistic soul funk reggae grooves... progressed into more of a world music”. Do you find the expectation to have a ‘label’ for your style to be limiting or is it necessary to be able to let people know what it is that you do?

At its most simplistic level, it is just reggae music. But on the level of form, with which the wider world is more identified, they need more labels to attract the listener's ear or the reader's eye. So we try to elaborate a bit on its description and what makes it a bit more unique than 'it is plain old reggae music.'

With regards to developing your personal style, what if any formal study of music, performance or songwriting have you done?

The progression of my style has just been a life's journey. I could only be where I'm at with it having lived the life that I have. I learned music performance from watching Saturday morning Rage clips when I was preschool, namely Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley, Michael Jackson and Bono.

The only formal music training I had was 3 years of guitar lessons during high school and a few informal vocal coaching sessions at a friend's house. So there have been no academies or conservatoriums. I don't have any certificates or qualifications as a performer or musician.

Songwriting grew from a natural progression of poetry writing. Again, somehow at a spirit level I knew how to put the two together very naturally. So by age 12, I started to formally compose. This is otherwise known as a 'born entertainer.'

What is the meaning behind the title of your debut EP, *Ras Gong Guerrilla*?

The meaning is a tribute to my two years of work in the reggae field prior to this year's release. I got really riled up as a 21yearold by focusing in on the groundswell of community grassroots activism and green leftist ideologies of humanitarianism and conservation.

Documentaries such as [The Corporation](#), [Baraka](#), [I Know I'm Not Alone](#) and [The Fourth World War](#) really inspired me to do something in my own community which would be contributing to this movement of awakening consciousness. That rebel spirit of Bob Marley and his Rastafarian brethren really became the driving force behind wanting a music based outlet for these avenues of expression.

As I began to see the world more closely related I wanted a multi-cultural name. 'Ras' is

Ethiopian for 'head'. 'Gong' is a common word mostly associated with place names such as Wollongong, my home town, and its mountainous woodland terrain. 'Guerrilla' refers to embodying the cunning and cheekiness of spirited uprising and rebellion in youth through the arts.

That all came about through listening to a Ladysmith Black Mambazo interview which depicted the way in which Joseph Shabalala went through and chose the name for his group. (Who you are – Where you're from – Where you're going).

How did you plan and execute the process of recording, releasing and promoting it?

Big dreams, big ideals, lot of striving and lots of experimentation mixed with some solitude, some extended leave out into the central western desert and some more big ideas than some heartfelt realisations of one's own capacity, learning and accepting your own shortcomings and learning to appreciate true potential. Also, remaining in a position of novice and never becoming complacent as a seasoned expert.

Tell us about the experience of producing the video for your first single, 'Down in Australia'?

On so many levels I was ecstatic about producing the clip and the EPK video. Physically, I couldn't have exerted myself any further as the clip dragged out three days, and Keely (my lover and manager, soul compadré) and I performed the duties that an entire team would have undertaken. We were truly exhausted by the end of completion.

It's a seldom visited place to be completely elated with a project and totally exhausted by it at the same time. It is almost like a grinding marathon with the finishing line only a few more paces ahead.

As an independent artist, there's a pressure these days to be across several different online social networking platforms. How do you manage your online presence?

The online networks give today's independent artist an unprecedented amount of exposure to the world and its various arts communities. I love that side of the equation. The pressure that you refer to is that of the big steadfast shiny corporate competitive module of music and arts industries. That side of the equation I am not at all a fan of. Interactions can come off a bit one-way and a bit superficial.

Because of time constraints and the demand on the independent artist the use of a dashboard such as ArtistData help in a big way to making one post broadcast through several networks with one application. This is a massive time saver for people like us.

How do you include activism in your life?

I include activism in my life by keeping an ear to the ground through various online news articles and websites such as [Animals Australia](#) or the [Australian Climate Justice Program](#) or [Green Left](#) or [The Scavenger](#).

They all provide unique and independent grassroots level information which is great to be able to access at the click of a button just over an afternoon of cacao tea. I also include activism by going along to and contributing at community rallies such as [Climate Camp](#), various conferences and commemorative days such as [International Day of Peace](#), [International Day of Nonviolence Against Women](#) and [NAIDOC Week](#).

Those are the type of things that any individual can go along to and raise their hand and raise their voice and be an active member of their community. Being politically minded in this day and age is not about being so much an outspoken renegade but more so being a caring and spirited member of your community and the global community.

One of your songs is titled 'Reconciliation'. Given it's been ten years since the Bridge Walks for Reconciliation, what are your thoughts on the progress that's been made in the last decade, and where we stand currently?

The song 'Reconciliation' was inspired by an Aboriginal elder of the Dharawal/Yuin/Wiradjiri nations. Its emphasis is on the disconnect between how media driven campaigns with their prime time and their billboards and their use of language can be misconceived by a large contingent of mainstream society and therefore instil a false sense of accomplishment.

My song accentuates the dire need for all Australians, young and old, new or ancient, to take matters into their own hands rather than be swept up in a written form of peace making or a simple lip service reconciliation and embrace the Gandhian notion to be the change you wish to see in the world. No polished up careerist politician can provide that for you or your family.

It's a hands-on, heart to heart, life long journey. Not a 'weekend resort limited time only offer'.

Are you on [unfinisheddoz.com.au](#)? Do you think sites like that are valuable in the reconciliation process?

No, I'm not currently. But I am aware of it and many others which I would love to be connected with and contributing musically and spiritually. They are a really important player in the grand scheme of awareness building and outreach initiatives.

On stage at the [Sydney VeganExpo](#) in May this year, you displayed a great balance of relaxation, confidence and joy in performing but also a definite commitment to the

performance. Is this stage presence something you consciously work on as part of your preparation?

No, it comes from the subconscious. I have to be conscious to do it but it's like the keys to unlocking part of my automatic reflex action self. I'm actually very much like that around the house, perhaps even more so.

That's one good reason that we don't have a radio or TV in the house because I'm so entertaining to live with. I'm never bored. I'm always in touch with that energy source which keeps me in a state of vibrancy and keeps my inner child alive and exuberant, brings heaps of light and joy into all aspects of my life. It's a great therapy to have that kind of release.

I do consider it to be a real blessing to be able to contribute to an event such as the Vegan Expo with that type of energy and I realise that's something that a lot of other people wish they could do. So in a way when I perform, I perform for all of those people who could never speak in public or could never learn to sing or recite a poem to a live audience of people. I represent the voiceless and a subtle spiritual realm as well.

Can you describe your personal journey to veganism and tell us what was it like performing at a specifically vegan event?

My progression towards veganism was very natural and quite gradual. Say one year of consciousness building around the atrocities of flesh consumption and animal exploitation. Then one year of on-again-off-again vegetarian. One year of lenient vegetarianism. Then one year of fully dedicated vegetarianism by which the end of that year I'd come to realise I was 85% vegan without even noticing.

I felt that it was a very small way to go to actually then really being considered a vegan. So the final 15% of what was my diet and lifestyle was very simple for me to focus on improving. So in November 2008, I dedicated my life to the vegan culture. And the consciousness and experience has continued to flourish and grow in so many positive directions such as the fresh organic and raw aspect of being vegan.

Performing at a specifically vegan event was a bit like being a choir boy singing at a church mass. I felt as though I very much belonged in that scene without the imperative to explain my vibration to the converted.

Given your interests and activism cover a whole range of issues, what are your greatest concerns and are you optimistic about the future?

My greatest concern is that the choice to be happy, healthy and free will be severely diminished by an ego-centric mass media driven focus. Often referred to as affluenza, our

endless capacity to consume and devour unwittingly draws society into accumulating crushing debt and unconsciously living beyond our means.

Simplicity and balance is so accessible to everyone. It is essentially in our natural state to be fit and disease free but the severity of critical mass unconsciousness (that is, people with their heads stuck in their iPods, their iPhones and various other forms of uber modern technologies) means that people are becoming oversaturated with entertainment and information technology.

This ultimately drowns out the people's true nature and their spiritual connectedness. So people eventually don't know where their decision-making process begins and the multinational corporations end.

I have come to learn that the future doesn't really exist and that living in the present moment is the only place where optimism has any relevance. It is the same with peace or love. So my optimism in the future, is found in the now.



[The Ras Gong Guerrilla EP](#) is available directly from [Matty's website](#). You can follow Matty on Twitter [@mattywoodsmusic](#).

Elizabeth Usher has been vegan for a dozen years and tries to live in accordance with values that respect other animals – including people – and the earth. Despite rumours to the contrary, that still allows for some fun along the way. Elizabeth is also interested in producing music with a message. Her song 'Paradigm Shift', about issues surrounding factory farming, can be heard on her [Myspace site](#).

Elizabeth Usher - The Scavenger