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Max Jury started playing gigs when he was just 14. He’s had a deep love for music – no matter the genre – but performing has always been his dream. The 21-year-old was born in West Des Moines, and when he graduated in 2010 from Valley High School, he headed straight for the Berklee College of Music to study songwriting and vocal performance.

Jury spent a year at the Boston school, and after an attempt to pursue music full time, he ended up at Iowa State University taking classes with no particular major and just “bumming around.” But Jury just wasn’t satisfied; he returned to Berklee College, and soon scored a spot with an international management company.

Jury is currently stationed in Des Moines after his tour of the Midwest, which included a stop at Iowa State with Amanda Gibbons and Stacy Harden. He also worked alongside countless well-known alternative and independent rock musicians – even opening for singer-songwriter Lana Del Ray.

Revival Magazine had the chance to talk to Jury about his experiences, his influences and his passion for all things music.
R: Do you have an instrument of choice?

MJ: I've always played piano; it's the first instrument that I learned. I've always liked listening to jazz and blues and country piano players. You know, people like Thelonious Monk and Phil Evans. I'm a sucker for stories, and I like storyteller songs. The themes of country music hit home with me. It's what I listened to growing up; it's what my father played.

R: What kind of music do you play?

MJ: I write my own music. I have been since I was 13 or so. I play my own music, and it has a bit of a Americana and country flavor to it. Music rooted in America kind of thing.

R: Who are your musical influences?

MJ: Wow. Gram Parsons, Neil Young, The Band, The Beatles… I like a lot of soul music like Al Green or Curtis Mayfield, Marvin Gaye. It kind of runs all across the board.

R: What's the format of your band – is it just you all the time?

MJ: It's just me, kind of for the time being, but we have a rotating cast of people who play. My friend who I roomed with at Berklee plays bass usually, and my friend Amanda sings sometimes. My friend Scott, who actually plays on recordings, plays drums when he can. He plays drums for the Envy Corps, but he also plays for me occasionally.

R: What was it like opening up for Lana?

MJ: I work with a booking agent, Tom Windish, and he has a pretty solid roster of artists. His agency is established in Chicago, and he recently picked up Lorde, around the same time we kind of started working with him. He's got a lot of weight and he was able to fit us on the bill with Lana. It was a really cool experience. It was [the group's] first show together in the formation playing this set of songs. There were probably 2,000 people there; people were really responsive to it. Lana Del Ray is a total sweetheart and is very easy to talk to. It was a fuckin' crazy first gig to play with this band, playin' these songs.
R: Any particular memories?

MJ: That was fun because the crowd was really active and would yell things. I have a song called “She Gave Back the Ring,” and someone was yelling, “I would never give back the ring!” (Laughs).

R: Do you have a favorite song of your own to perform?

MJ: Oh, boy. “Day Drunk” is really fun to perform because it’s a little less serious, and we can jump around a little. “Something in the Air” lets me mess around on the piano a lot, so I like that one, too.

R: Could you describe a typical gig – what happens before and after?

MJ: We played with a band called Wild Bell in Madison, Wisconsin, so we rented a van for a couple days. We usually have to get there kind of early to unload and sound check and stuff. We might get there at like 4 or 5, unload and grab dinner, and socialize with the other bands. We’re usually opening for bands. A lot of the bands we played with are super talented, and it was cool to hang out with them and meet them, and learn the ropes. We’ve gotten to learn how to tour from some pretty cool bands and socialize with them, and maybe play with them again sometime.

R: Did you have a favorite band to perform with?

MJ: Wild Bell was really cool; it’s this chick-singer with this soulful voice. We also played with a band called “The Dig” out of New York, and their bass player used to room with a friend of mine from Des Moines.

R: Do you have a favorite song or music group?

MJ: I think my favorite song of all time is the song called “Hot Burrito #1 (I’m Your Toy)” by the Flying Burrito Brothers. I just think it’s the prettiest song ever. I just like so much music; I’m all over the place. But a band I’ve been listening to is Goldfrapp. It’s a chick singer, kind of down-tempo, and a little electronic.
R: What do you do when you’re not performing?

MJ: It’s tough because my life for the last 6 months has been touring and writing, but I’m a big movie-goer. I’m really into watching movies and keeping up with that kind of stuff. I like to go see music; I’m always trying to go see a band and just surrounding myself in music. My life has been super consumed by music, so I haven’t been doing much else recently. I like to go up to Ames and party (Laughs). I keep up with people, in various ways.

R: What does your family think about all this?

MJ: They’re excited about it. They haven’t always been- it’s kind of tough for any parent to be like, ‘this isn’t the easiest path to go down.’ But since things have been picking up, they’ve been trying to come see me. They’re all for it. It’s cool; I’m lucky.

R: What are your goals?

MJ: My end goal is to hopefully do this long enough to be able to sustain a career out of it. Earlier this year I signed a publishing deal, so that has helped me sort of be able to live and play music full time. We have some stuff being released here in the next couple of months. My goal is to play music. (Laughs).

R: What’s happening right now with your music? Anything we should look out for?

MJ: I have a song coming out called the “Day Drunk” in a compilation released from Rough Trade Records on Dec. 16, and we’re gonna eventually release a 7-inch single and an EP in the next couple months. We’re gonna be performing in South by Southwest, so until then, I’m organizing and writing my full-length album.

R: Any closing thoughts for would-be musicians reading Revival?

MJ: My advice would be, you know, go for it. If you wanna write a song, just write what you wanna hear and don’t worry about how it’s going to fit in. Just write what you love and what you wanna hear. I think that’s what people are looking for. Go for it, you know. It’s fun, and if you work hard at it, it’s totally possible. You might not be Bruce Springsteen, but nobody is.
Thank you to the artists at Vanity & Glamour for dedicating their time and creativity to Revival Magazine.