

SLCC Music 1010
Musician Biography

John Mayer

John Clayton Mayer was born on October 16, 1977 in Bridgeport, Connecticut. His mother's name was Margaret, an English teacher, and his father was Richard, a high school principal. John's musical career started while in high school. He played the clarinet with "minor success", as he put it. After watching Michael J. Fox's guitar performance as Marty McFly in *Back to the Future*, he became fascinated with the instrument. Subsequently, when Mayer was 13, his father rented one for him. Apparently one of his neighbors gave him a Stevie Ray Vaughan cassette, which contained the genre that Mayer would fall in love with; the blues.

John soon became consumed with playing the guitar and practiced constantly in order to get better. He practiced for two years, improving to an outstanding level of performance, when he started to begin his career as a performer. He started playing at blues bars and other venues while still in high school. In addition to performing alone, he was in a band called Villanova Junction with Tim Procaccini, Joe Belezny, and Rich Wolf.

A tragic event, getting stricken with a cardiac arrhythmia, sent Mayer to the hospital at seventeen. This event, Mayer said, "was the moment the songwriter in me was born." He was inspired and penned his first lyrics the night he got home. However, the defect left him suffering from crippling panic attacks, and even now he keeps Xanax, an anti-anxiety drug, with him by his side. This disease slowed down his music career for a while and he didn't expand very much during this time. He didn't even buy his first quality guitar until after he graduated high school in 1996. He bought a Stevie Ray Vaughan signature Stratocaster, a guitar that had inspired him to get into music in the first place.

Mayer's interest in music led him to enroll in the Berkley College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts when he was nineteen. After two semesters, he chose to cut his studies short, and at the urging of his college friend and Atlanta native, Clay Cook, the two moved to Atlanta, Georgia. Quickly making a name for their two-man band, LoFi Masters, they began their career in earnest there, frequenting the local coffee house and club circuit in venues like Eddie's Attic. Cook has said, however, that they began to experience musical differences due to Mayer's desire to take the duo in more of a pop direction. The two parted ways, and Mayer embarked on a solo career.

Mayer's career really got started when, with the help of local producer and engineer Glenn Mutullo, he got recorded his first EP, *Inside Wants Out*. The EP includes only eight songs, all with Mayer on lead vocals and guitars, with the exception of "Comfortable" in which Mayer only recorded the vocals. For the opening track, "Back To You", a full band was enlisted, including the EP's co-producer David "DeLa" LaBruyere on bass guitars. Mayer and LaBruyere then began to tour throughout Georgia and the surrounding states where they had major success in gaining an audience that wanted to listen to their music intensely.

His music continued to grow in popularity and in 2001 he released an internet-only album titled, *Room for Squares*. A year later when the record label changed, as part of the major label "debut", the album's artwork was updated, and the track "3x5" was added. The re-release also included reworked studio versions of the first four songs from his indie album, *Inside Wants Out*. By the end of 2002, *Room for Squares* had spawned several radio hits, including "No Such Thing," "Your Body Is a Wonderland," and ultimately, "Why Georgia." In 2003, Mayer won a Grammy for Best Male Pop Vocal Performance for "Your Body Is a Wonderland." In his acceptance speech he remarked, "This is very, very fast, and I promise to catch up." He also figuratively referred to himself as being sixteen, a remark that many mistook to mean that he was only sixteen years old at the time. What he really meant was that his musical talent was just beginning to blossom and that there would be plenty more coming from him in the future.

Heavier Things, Mayer's second album, was released in 2003 to generally favorable reviews. *Rolling Stone*, *Allmusic* and *Blender* all gave positive, although reserved, feedback. *PopMatters* said that it "doesn't have as many drawbacks as one might assume". The album was commercially successful, and while it did not sell as well as *Room for Squares*, it peaked at number one on the US *Billboard* 200 chart.

Around 2004, Mayer started to change his music direction into more of a pop feel, announcing that he was "closing up shop on acoustic sensitivity." In 2005, he began a string of collaborations with various blues artists, including Buddy Guy, B.B. King, Eric Clapton, as well as jazz artist John Scofield. Although Mayer has maintained a reputation for being a sensitive singer-songwriter, he has also gained distinction as an accomplished guitarist, influenced by the likes of the above artists, as well as Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Robert Cray, and Freddie King.

Mayer's hit album *Continuum* was released on September 12, 2006. Mayer suggested the album was intended to combine his signature pop music with the feel, sound, groove, and sensibilities of the blues. In that vein, two of the tracks from his trio release *Try!* the funky "Vultures" and the blues centerpiece "Gravity" also were included on *Continuum*. Mayer has said that "Gravity" is the most important song he's ever written. Included in that album was the hit "Waiting on the World to Change," which hit the public and exploded into popularity. The song was the third most downloaded song of the week on the iTunes Music Store, which is a big deal!

On November 17, 2009, Mayer's fourth studio album, *Battle Studies*, was released and debuted at number one on the U.S. *Billboard* 200 album chart. The album consists of 11 tracks with a total time of 45 minutes. The first single from the album, "Who Says", was released on September 24, 2009 in advance of album, and was followed on October 19 by the single "Heartbreak Warfare" and the single "Half of My Heart" released on June 21, 2010. Despite the album's commercial success, critics were mixed with their praise; while some reviews were glowing, calling it his "most adventurous", others called the album "safe" and noted that "Mayer the singer-songwriter and Mayer the man about town sometimes seem disconnected, like they don't even belong in the same body." Mayer admitted to *Rolling Stone* that he thought *Battle Studies* was not his best album. However, the fans still loved it and continued to support one of their favorite artists of all time.

Mayer's final album was released on May 18, 2012. It was called "*Born and Raised*" because John wanted to express how his life has grown and how his experience as a songwriter/performer has affected him. On this album, he plays with genres from R&B to blues to pop. "It is a set of organic cowboy songs dreamed up under a starry night sky" as John puts it. "*If I Ever Get Around to Living*" includes intricate arpeggios and gentle backup vocals that could've come from a soft rock AM station in the '70s while "*Whiskey, Whiskey, Whiskey*" and "*A Face to Call Home*" are melancholy and bring a depressed mood to the music. All of the songs in this album were all unique and quite different in their sound and mood.

John released a statement on September 16, 2011, that *Born and Raised* would be his last album for quite a long time due to a granuloma discovered in his throat. The granulomas were found next to the vocal cords and are treatable. Mayer described this as a "temporary setback" and that recording and mixing of *Born and Raised* was entirely finished except for a few remaining vocal tracks. He told, "I did a lot of therapy, like anti-acid reflux, and it didn't work, then I went on vocal rest. No alcohol. No spicy food. No talking. Most of September I wasn't talking at all. I'd have a Bluetooth keyboard, and someone would have an iPad to read what I type. I had to point to menus at restaurants. People look at me like I'm crazy." On October 20, 2011, Mayer updated his fans about the treatment of his throat granuloma, announcing that he "had surgery this afternoon to remove it and am now on complete vocal rest for a month or more", during which he plans to "travel the country, look, and listen." On March 9, 2012, Mayer announced on his blog that due to the return of a serious throat condition, he has been forced to cancel his tour and refrain from all singing indefinitely. Because the surgery he had in October 2011 did not work as expected, Mayer said he would have to undergo the surgery again. He hopes that his fans understand that he will miss singing and that he wishes he could continue to produce more songs that they would enjoy. He will be missed, but also his fans know that what John Mayer did during his lifetime was incredible and that he accomplished an outstanding amount in his music career. He definitely left his impact in the history of music.