

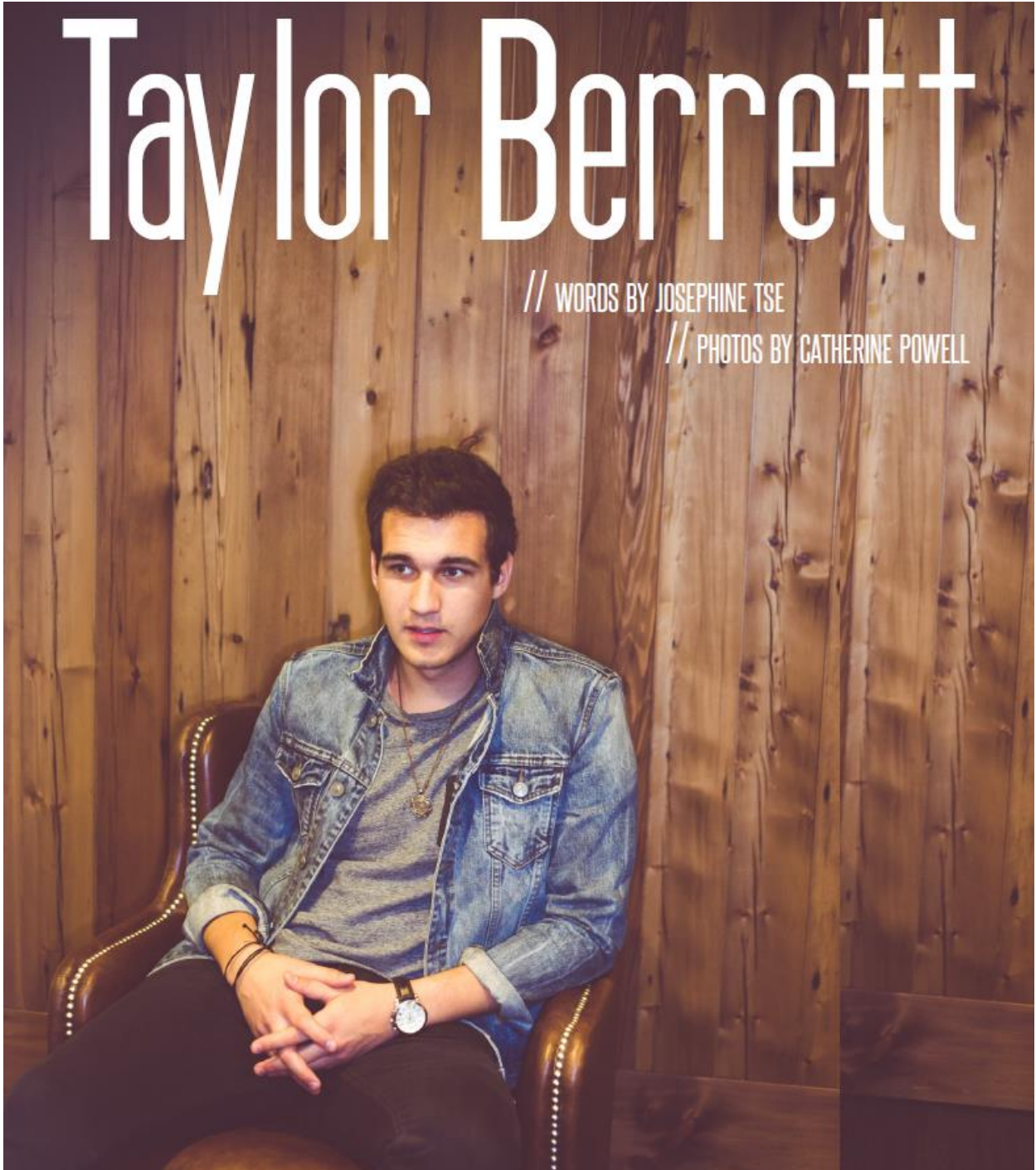
NKD MAGAZINE

March 2015

Taylor Berrett

// WORDS BY JOSEPHINE TSE

// PHOTOS BY CATHERINE POWELL



AT 22, TAYLOR BERRETT IS ABOUT to release his debut album, *Great Falls*. Currently in the middle of a residency at New York City's infamous Rockwood Music Hall, this busy, rising star is ready to give up his free time for his dream.

Born in Salt Lake City, Utah but raised in the suburbs of Northern Virginia, Taylor grew up with four siblings — three older, one younger. They lived in an area with a bustling city life to the east and the mountains and rivers to the west. His parents were not professional musicians, but there was always music playing in the house — particularly jazz and classical music.

As a child, Taylor loved to read books and always wanted to write. In elementary school, Taylor's passion for music really began to shine. He started taking piano classes with his aunt when he was 11 years old and took up guitar classes at school. He started a joke band with his friends called Bob and the Pears, and they performed songs in their cafeteria at lunch.

In middle school, he was at it again with another band called White Elephant. However, they broke up because Taylor "wrote a serious song without the other members' permission." That is when Taylor realized that songwriting was in fact, another form of writing, and it could be a career. "It is an extension beyond spoken word, just with harmonies and melodies," he explains. "So that was why I stopped doing a lot of other stuff and started writing a lot of songs seriously. I also slowly learned to record and do multi-track."

Participating in a local battle of the bands competition helped Taylor start mapping out his connections. Just a teenager in high school, he met his manager through one competition, which helped expand his network in the music industry. With the guid-

ance of his manager, Taylor recorded his first demo with SRP Productions, who he still works with to this day. He signed with Warner Brothers/Warner Chappell and has since released an EP called *Anchor Chasing* in 2012 and embarked on many tours around the country with other artists such as Alex Clare, Bobby Bazini and Lily Kershaw.

For Taylor, the key to getting better at songwriting is to study it. "I had to get comfortable with finding things I disliked with the music I liked, and finding things I liked with the music I disliked," he comments. "I think it is important to be critical of your own self. I listen to my own music a lot just so I can go back and say, 'This is bad,' or 'This may have worked.'"

"There is no part more interesting to me than getting better at [songwriting]," he adds. "I mean, of course I hope it happens because if it does, it shows improvement. To look at a song I wrote a year ago and being able to pick at things that I now realize are terrible is the thing that excites me the most."

At the end of the day, Taylor simply believes that if one wants to be a great musician, they must observe other great musicians to learn from their stories and experiences.

Taylor's passion and hard work has really paid off, as *Great Falls* will be hitting shelves later this month. Taylor says that he is "not trying to do more than what anyone's asking for," so his goal was just to pick 11 great songs to be on *Great Falls*. "There is sort of a running theme of incompleteness, but it was not a deliberate theme," he says. "There are several songs that deal with the balance between hope and despair, hope and frustration, progress versus the lack of progress- opposites like that."

He recorded the album in the United Kingdom with Jake Gosling, who has worked with Ed Sheeran,

One Direction and Christina Perri. Still, Taylor was left alone most of the time. "I am not one of those big pop, mainstream guys," Taylor says. "I had the time I needed to finish it. The most pressure to finish it probably came from my parents because they wanted to hear it. Being away from everything was nice, too."

The songs on the album were written both by himself and co-written with others such as Jake and his songwriting partner Chris Leonard in the United Kingdom and Julian Benita in California.

Fortunately, Taylor only had positive things to say about working with co-writers. He admitted that prior to writing *Great Falls*, he did not do a lot of co-writing because he has a hard time with it. But he says co-writing taught him when to speak up, stop or listen. He says that everyone in the room ultimately strives for the greatest good. "Writing with Jake was amazing. He did not have an element of ego," Taylor recalls. "He was just excited about songs and wanted to make the best songs yet"

For the rest of the year, Taylor will be nonstop touring, so people can hear his new songs live. He hopes that his upcoming album will be give out good, positive vibes. Maybe it can make a small difference for someone.

"I think it is a far stretch to say that musicians change people's lives," he says. "My dad used to tell me that Stevie Wonder was his musical idol when he was a kid, and sometimes, it was Stevie Wonder that got him through a day.

"I believe they can change people's days. And that's why I think songwriting is so amazing," Taylor adds. "Your voice and words have a chance of becoming a part of a stranger's life and really altering their mood. I find that appealing and interesting, and that is ultimately a place where I want to be." ❧