

# Nozuka writes songs both intuitive and simple

The 19-year-old singer/songwriter chats about his mom, his inspirations, and how songwriting is just something he does

## musicpreview

### Justin Nozuka

With Nathan Wiley  
Monday, 22 October at 8pm  
Myer Horowitz Theatre

KATHLEEN BELL  
Arts & Entertainment Writer

It seems pretty intuitive for artists to acknowledge their mothers' love when it comes to finishing a project: moms often get mentioned in credits and thank-you speeches, and you can often find them stuck in between tour managers and production gurus on an album's liner notes. Justin Nozuka, however, is honouring his mother's support in a more traditional way: by naming his first-born after her. His debut release is also graced with her name: *Holly*.

"She's the one that brought me into this world and given me opportunities to do what I love," Nozuka explains. "This is my first baby into the world, you know? So it's a play on it."

Nozuka gives the impression that everything in his life, from choosing music as a career to the songwriting process, stems from a sense of intuition he's possessed since a very early age. The way Nozuka tells it, music just happened to him.

"When I was younger, I really loved to sing. Back in the day, I wanted to be

famous," Nozuka says with a laugh. "And then it sort of evolved, and I started getting into a certain type of music. I started exploring music on a deeper level and then exploring art, and then I just knew that this was it."

"My older brother introduced me to Michael Jackson, and that was actually a big thing," he continues. "But as far as the music that I found, I found it on my own."

What his music has so naturally evolved into is an acoustic singer/songwriter sound with a splash of soul, which is a nice position to find oneself in, given today's music scene—nestled in between Jack Johnson's mellow vibe and Amy Winehouse's smoky R&B revival.

For someone who's lucky enough to be diving head first into a career at the tender age of 19, Nozuka has left himself a lot of musical space in which to grow. He's happy to admit that he's only now getting a good grasp on his sound and that he expects that sound to continually change.

"This last album was just a compilation of songs I had written when I really had nothing to record," Nozuka says. "I thought, 'Okay, I'm going to perform them live.' So for this next album, it's a little more of a vision, and there's a little more passion behind it, as far as lyrical and musical content go."

Currently, Nozuka's lyrics are stirred not only by personal events, but also ventures into fictional storytelling. Songs such as "Down In a Cold Dirty Well," in which Nozuka



mentally positions himself in a cold, dirty well, play out like fictitious creative thought experiments.

"I try to put myself in different situations," he explains. "If I'm inspired by a story, I'll write a story and get into it."

But even given these fictitious

songs, Nozuka refuses to dodge personal or darker issues when the muse calls, unafraid of performing something personal. Having started writing songs when he was twelve, Nozuka has had plenty of time to develop and become comfortable with his own voice. When pushed

to consider the root of his songs or the deeper themes *Holly* sometimes tiptoes across, Nozuka firmly maintains the organic stance that he claims led him to the position he now finds himself in—intuitive and simple.

"I just write songs," he says.

## Paint-by-numbers history keeps *Elizabeth* from being golden

### theatre review

#### Elizabeth: The Golden Age

Now Playing  
Directed by Shekhar Kapur  
Starring Cate Blanchett, Geoffrey Rush, and Clive Owen

CAROLINE LAVOIE  
Arts & Entertainment Writer

The tale of Elizabeth I has been revisited numerous times by various actresses and directors, but Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, is anything but repetitive—it positively glitters on screen.

Cate Blanchett and Geoffrey Rush reprise the roles that garnered immense critical acclaim in 1998 for *Elizabeth* as Elizabeth and her advisor Sir Francis Walsingham. Clive Owen joins the cast as Walter Raleigh, a dashing privateer who has returned to court to woo his queen in hopes of having her finance his voyage and new settlement—aptly named Virginia, for his virgin queen.

Owen is all charm in the role, filling the screen with his intense, brooding stare and delivering lines about love and life that would sound clichéd if they weren't so passionately conveyed.

Thrown into the middle of Elizabeth's reign, Blanchett plays a queen weathered with distrust and dislike, having withstood decades of it. No longer does the court underestimate her for being of the fairer sex, and no longer does she underestimate herself. She is a queen comfortable ruling and playing the games of court.

To her, the high pressure of producing an heir and fielding suitors falls second to what's disrupting England's peace: the uprising of Catholics that again threaten her throne. Moreover, Philip of Spain (Jordi Mollà) and the Jesuits are plotting the assassination



of the Protestant English monarch to replace her with the imprisoned Catholic Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots.

Blanchett not only succeeds in displaying the haughty demeanour of the seasoned queen, she revitalizes the woman behind the gorgeous gowns and elaborate crimson wigs. She showcases a woman who struggles and doubts her choice of beheading her cousin and who is lovelorn for a man she can't have.

Blanchett is magnificently multi-faceted. In a second glance, she is the stately queen who commands an empire with dignity and charm, but glimpses of her alone in the evening reveal a queen who fears the demise of her people and the repercussions her choices have on the kingdom. The sequences are repetitive and predictable, yet Blanchett's black stare is haunting, and her androgynous appearance echoes the difference of who Elizabeth was privately and what façade she publicly offered to the court and her people.

The film thrives in resurrecting a time from the pages of history and capturing the scandals, the sex, the gore, and the deceit that were present. It has all the colour, but, unfortunately, none of the

deeper dimensions of the time.

*Elizabeth: The Golden Age* plays as a paint-by-numbers of history. The film contains vivid imagery with predictable, static subplots and figures. The villain is easily deciphered: Catholics, clothed in black, muttering threats, and killing all who stand in their way of doing God's will. There's no room left for the interpretation of good and evil.

Shekhar Kapur's eye for colourful, cinematic images sparkles in *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*. Brilliant gowns sashay around the majestic stone English castle and scenes of the Spanish Armada overwhelm the horizon as hundreds of vessels threaten to invade England. The English countryside and subjects are brilliantly captured and allow audiences to simply enjoy what is being seen.

Period dramas usually suffer in their inability to astonish or startle, and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* finds itself a victim of its category. It does, however, shine as a new piece where Queen Elizabeth is someone other than the stoic virgin queen. She gave up love, combated the strongest country in the world, and ruled with conviction. She gave herself for her people, her Golden Age. This film might not be gold, but it's at least a silver.

### CJSR CHARTS

FOR THE WEEK ENDING  
TUESDAY, 16 OCTOBER

1. THE SADIES  
*New Seasons*

2. BASIA BULAT  
*Oh, My Darling*

3. DIETZCHE V AND THE  
ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN  
*Macho 2003-2007*

4. THE MOST SERENE  
REPUBLIC  
*Populations*

5. WINTERSLEEP  
*Welcome to the Night Sky*

6. MAGIK MARKERS  
*Boss*

7. VARIOUS  
*Everybody Dance Now: Songs  
from Hamilton, Vol 2*

8. KRISTA LL MUIR  
*Leave A Light*

9. SANDRO PERRI  
*Tiny Mirrors*

10. SAN SERAC  
*Professional*