

With 'Christian,' All the World Is Allan Rayman's Stage

By **Murjani Rawls** - Apr 3, 2020



Photo Credit: Steph Verschuren

Since the last time I spoke to singer/songwriter [Allan Rayman](#) in the summer of 2019, he's been hard at work on his fourth album, *Christian*. Like his show on the iteration of that tour, his new music takes on a life of its own. These songs often play out like rolls of film in a projector as a score to his own feature film. With artists, it's been known that creativity in different mediums help one another. Rayman's musical and cinematic mind meet together to make a unique mix

all to himself. "I'm about six scenes in one right now," said Rayman. "Maybe about 15 minutes of screen time. It's crazy how long these things take, but I have a great idea for it. I've got many ideas for films mean stuff, Steph [Verschuren] and I."

The beauty of movies are that two people can see it and get two different interpretations from them. Some of the best movies provide just the right amount of exposition, but will have you compiling possibilities and theories. on the car ride home. In my second time speaking with him, I understand Rayman a little more. I also have more questions and that's the mystery that artists lose in the era of social media and accessibility. Rayman speaks through this music and his visuals. He uses it to his advantage as to where you can just focus on what he creates. The way it's supposed to be. The frequency in which you hear and interpret it is entirely up to you.

When we first spoke, we talked a little about *Pump Up The Volume* and *Christian* is influenced by it. The character of Mark hunter creates this alias named Harry-Hard On. That's his rebellious side much like I feel yours is. In the end, Mark Hunter really becomes the rebel. *Christian* has a very theatrical feel to it. I feel like this album is your version of what *Pump Up The Volume* would be. You're a very cinematic person, so what was your thought process in making the new album?

Harry Hard-On is the predecessor to *Christian*. With *Harry Hard-on*, it's essentially showing type confidence and fearlessness making those kinds of songs. An 80's rock kind of balance. Then it goes back to that Mark Hunter kind of thing. The angsty, vulnerable man behind the mask. *Christian* is just the more vulnerable side to *Harry Hard-on*. They almost go hand-in-hand.

After 'Papa,' there's 'Madhouse.' It's a welcome. It's requests your attention with the landline versus your cellphone. Where many mediums of art seemingly have to fight for undivided attention, *Christian* is composed in a way where you willingly want to provide it.

Yeah, I hope. That's what I kind of try to go for that with every project we make. I like bodies of work rather than a single. With 'Madhouse,' it does lay that out, but it also was talking about perspective. The deeper I get into the industry, (the following song after 'Madhouse) the more perspective I have. The more I get to see the more privileged behind closed doors. A lot of people don't truly talk about what it's like. You kind of just see the glitz and glamour of it all.

We also a little bit about your feelings about the music industry a year ago. The next song is a spoken word piece. There's the circus theme playing in the background. You say things such as "*We're not heroes and heroines. We're not here to save you.*"

It can be taken from two perspectives. I think from first listen, people will think I'm talking about the musicians and artists speaking to the fan. I actually wrote it where it could also be interpreted of the industry speaking to the artists, you know? The labels and the higher-ups talking to the artists. Just saying, "we're not here for you. You're here for us. We use you to better our situation" as well. It can be it's a double-sided

Yes, that's what I thought. When I heard the circus thing, I thought of PT Barnum, the ringleader. You can go all over with it. The animals and their relationship to the crowd and performers. There's a lot of room to let your mind run free with the concepts.

Artists are a very eclectic group of people, you know? We're all very different, but we're all part of the same circus. Honestly, with every song on this album, they can be interpreted differently. Whether it's from a female and male perspective. A lot of the time, I'll write a song from the perspective of the girl and sounds like it's a guy singing it. That's why there are some pretty aggressive lyrics in there, but it's actually coming from the side of a girl, you know what I mean? I leave that all up to the listener to get whatever they want out of it.

We take flack all the time because I'm very inspired by so much. Just all different aspects of film making. Seeing what [Quentin] Tarantino would do in terms of like referencing pop culture, I reference movies all the time. We did it as a promotional tool for the album. If you've ever seen the Howard Stern movie, *Private Parts*, we just did advertising, which was they did in that movie. We had a lady come out with a cardboard sign and say, "Alan Raymond album's coming out April 3." We some flack for it. Some people said, "this is disgusting. How could you do this?"

For me, it's just I love *Private Parts*, honestly. I just like to play with people's emotions and get them talking. I think at the end of the day, it's just art.

I saw that ad and I remember that movie. I took that as a satire on *Private Parts*.

That's exactly what it was. So when we talk a lot more of those kinds of things come out to that are all theoretical plays from different films and stuff a lot of Christian is trying to pose to the

different kind of movies I like growing up a lot of them having to do with Christians later obviously

With 'Stitch,' that was one of the first songs you worked on with Alex da Kid. How was the experience working with him on *Christian*?

You know what? Alex is a genius. He's a really, really smart man. Not just with music, just with a lot of things, I think over the next couple of years, he's gonna be recognized for a lot more than just music. That's kind of where the two of us meshed really well. It wasn't just about music. It was more about our ideas and perspectives. I think we just connected on that and then the music came from there.

We wanted to go back and do songs that I was inspired by. I was listening to a lot of Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* 'Stitch' is my take on a Chili Peppers song. As I said, everything I do is just my take what inspires me. While trying to make it as Allan Rayman as possible. With Alex, he messes with that. You got to take risks and I'm definitely a risk, you know? I'm not out here trying to make anyone's life easier. I don't really play along well with others. Not that I'm like a bad guy or anything like that. I just keep to myself a lot. The industry as it stands is all about mixing it up and working with other artists. I just don't do that. With Alex, I appreciate how we're working and we got a lot more to come.

I appreciate that. When I listen to an Allan Rayman song, it's within its own realm. You have built your own aesthetic throughout these EPs and albums. With all your visuals, you collaborate with Steph Verschuren. The video for 'Stitch' mirrors the album cover for *Christian*. You're in a white space while somebody is fiddling around on Instagram.

I don't want to give the magician's secrets away. I like the air of mystery that you instill within your music. I thought the combination of social media and you being almost dissected in a different way was pretty interesting. The accessibility of celebrities or artists through these social media mediums have grown. Thus, the boundaries have slipped as well.

Yeah, I don't give a lot of information. Like you said, I like to keep it just to the surface layer to get people thinking. Even with interviews, you'll think you're getting a lot and then at the end of it, you'll say, "I still don't really know too much about the guy." I know about what he's doing, but not who he is. That's always about protecting myself throughout all this. With that video specifically, when we went on tour, we didn't have a band. My guitarist left me kind of high and

dry and we were scrambling to try and put a band together. I was like, “you know what, forget the band. I’m gonna turn this thing into a play.” I’m going to have four sections of a show that represent each different projects I’ve put out.

The wings were just an added effect to the Harry Hard-On part because there’s a car crash scene and you come back to life as a reimagined version of yourself. You’re constantly evolving and that kind of turned into this metaphor about Icarus flying too close to the sun. As someone would become more and more successful in this industry, you wonder how dangerous that could be to their psyche and well being. With that video, we had a very small budget. That’s kind of where that came from, to be honest. “Oh, you’re not going to give us a bunch of money to make this, so we’ll just work with what we got here.”

We can make videos very cheap and get the message across. I think the idea of spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on music videos to me is insane. We’re musicians at the end of the day, you know? Sing a song. Go play a show. What are you doing? For me, the videos are so fun because I love film and I want to make movies. I’ve been writing scripts and trying my hand at screenplays during this quarantine. I love it, but we didn’t have the budget. We were just thinking really simple. How can we make something captivating for this album and push the narrative?

So yeah, I think you’ve kind of nailed it. on how accessible we think these celebrities are to Instagram. You don’t have to be. Yes, it’s right there, but you don’t have to respond. You don’t have to do anything. You don’t have to be trying to get social engagement. If I have more followers on Instagram, do I get a better slot at a festival even if I never played a show? Maybe I played two shows in my life and you’re going to give me a 5 p.m. main stage set time because I have a million followers on Instagram. If I actually, start thinking about that, it’s kind what drives my music. It doesn’t make any sense. I just don’t get it.

‘I Talk To My Cigarette’ and ‘Hello To Me’ are a beautiful sequence of tracks that follow each other. You said earlier, you can write from any perspective. Think about Tarantino. His films usually have a robust amount of dialogue and exposition. The *Kill Bill* movies switch from narration to regular speaking parts. ‘I Talk To My Cigarette’ very much feels like the precursor to ‘Hello To Me’ where the internal turn into the external action.

With songs, the concept and the vision is me. In terms of the production and the background, that's my boys. That's the production team. So, it's Alex, Moose, and Miles. Sometimes, it's Andrew Dawson. We have built a good relationship with these producers that we like to work with. You nailed it with that. Those two songs back-to-back in terms of narrative and dialogue. With 'I Talk To My Cigarette,' I'm truly talking to my cigarette. That's the scene of me sitting there pondering. "*Are you happy? You get way more done when you're angry.*" Just sitting therein in the room, smoking my cigarette, and thinking while this scene is playing out.

My last question is about 'Road Warrior.' You wrote that in an RV park in Oregon on tour. The song has a different feel to it than the other songs on the album. You recorded it at Abbey Road Studios and Electric Lady with Ben [Lovett] from Mumford and Sons. How did that experience play out for you creatively?

That song was a good lesson for me. It was 2017 and we were in an RV driving from Portland to San Francisco. We stopped in an RV park and wrote the song on acoustic guitar. A year later, we're at Abbey Road Studios and I'm passed out on the floor because we got off a long flight. I'm just dead and the guys are kind of producing it out a little bit. That's where I kind of got like a reality check. I need to stop and smell the roses every now and then. I've done a lot of really amazing, special things in life and I've taken a lot of it for granted. You get caught up chasing things and actually, that's a kind of cancer of the industry in a way.

It's like no matter how far you get, this never changes. it's never going to be good enough. There's always something better. There's always a bigger show. There's always a bigger check. There's a bigger accomplishment, you know? It's always attainable. It's right there. You just gotta keep going for it. No one's gonna let you just stop and take the time to enjoy what you're doing. That's not the business of this thing. We're getting older and more mature, I'm realizing to take in what we've already done and enjoy each moment Instead of trying to do better and more. That's going to come with keeping your head down and staying focused on what you're doing. Not just running after it and chasing it. If you do that, you're gonna miss everything. It all about the journey.

That song was gonna be scrapped, but Alex took a stab at it and brought it kind of back into the realm of what this album is. I love it. I think it's great. At this point, I'm just excited to get this thing out. I'm already well on my way another album and some EPs. We don't stop. We just keep moving.

Murjani Rawls

<http://murjanirawls.com>

Journalist, Self-published author of five books, podcast host of The War Report and The Deadscreen Podcast, and photographer since 2014, Murjani "MJ" Rawls has been stretching his capabilities of his creativity and passions, Rawls has as a portfolio spanning through many mediums including music, television, movies, and more. Operating out of the New York area, Rawls has photographed over 200+ artists spanning many genres, written over 700 articles ranging displaying his passionate aspirations to keep evolving as his years in media continue.

