

Maine's Tucker Pillsbury (a.k.a. Role Model) on homesickness and heartbreak

By Arushi Jacob. Published October 8, 2024.

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Growing up in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, meant a lot to Tucker Pillsbury. The 27-year-old singer, better known by his stage name Role Model, has references to his home state scattered across his body through tattoos — and now in lyrics on his latest album, “Kansas Anymore,” which debuted in July.

“I wasn’t letting myself go home because I was so stuck on the album and what it was going to be for months,” said Pillsbury, who called it a “heartbreaking time.” “I was like, I don’t deserve to go home yet.”

Once half the album was written, Pillsbury started frequently flying between Maine and Los Angeles, where he worked and lived.

“The level of joy I feel in Maine, or even just on the East Coast, versus LA is just night and day,” said the singer. “It made me start questioning my entire life. Is this career worth it, just sticking it out in LA to find success or chase a dream?”

The singer first intended for his sophomore studio album to sound “full ‘80s,” but scrapped the concept after several months. A process, he admits, happened multiple times.

Leaning into the distance, Pillsbury started to listen to music that reminded him of home, referring to the likes of Kurt Vile and Duff Thompson as “comfort albums and artists.” He also cites [Kacey Musgraves](#)’s “Golden Hour,” which inspired him to experiment with his sound, injecting notes of folk and country into his music. (The album’s lead single, “Oh, Gemini,” was created with a frequent Musgraves collaborator, producer Ian Fitchuk.)

“I just wanted an album that would be like a comfort album for me,” said Pillsbury.

Watching fellow New Englander [Noah Kahan](#) “successfully champion New England” through his lyrics also influenced Pillsbury in deciding to embrace his roots. “I feel that in your early 20s, you run from where you’re from,” he explained. “And I think I reached a certain age where I want to embrace it.”

This effort manifests clearest in a three-minute track called “The Dinner.” The song references Pillsbury’s mounting frustration with his life on the West Coast, in lyrics such

as: “I’m the child of my mother, New England-born and raised/ Where the common sense is common as a nose job in LA.”

“I love where I’m from for a lot of reasons, but one of the biggest is just the normalcy of New England in general,” said Pillsbury. “Living in LA is a bubble, it feels like a simulation. I miss normalcy and normal-priced coffee, and people not getting dolled up at seven in the morning to go get a coffee.”

The last track, “Something, Somehow, Someday,” is a bittersweet song about hoping for a rekindled love. Pillsbury called one of the album’s most self-referential moments (“He’s an East Coast, jeans-rolled, no communication”) a “very Maine lyric.”

“There’s a jeans-rolled, granola archetype that is a very true stereotype,” said Pillsbury. “And I have been that boy and will probably always be that boy.”

Pillsbury returns to the New England area to open for Gracie Abrams at MGM Music Hall on Oct. 9. On March 16 he stops at the House of Blues on his “No Place Like Tour.”

“That’s always the show where my entire family and cousins and everyone comes,” said Pillsbury. “It’s one of my favorite stops because of that. It’s the closest thing to a hometown show for me.”

As he gears up for a long stretch on the road, New England should expect to see more of Pillsbury in the future. He hints at a local project in the works, though most details are still under wraps. “There’s a venue in my hometown that we’re working on,” he revealed. “Hopefully, it will happen next year, but I’ve been dying to play a hometown show in the summer.”

The next year has many career highlights in store for Pillsbury, but there’s a specific one he’s most excited for. The singer might also have a surprising accolade to add to his repertoire soon — Sexiest Man Alive. Nominated for the sexiest musician category in People Magazine’s Readers Choice Poll, Pillsbury joked, “It’s the best thing that ever happened to me. It’s more important than [the Grammys](#), than my parents’ birthdays. I think it’s going to be my peak.”

GRACIE ABRAMS: THE SECRET OF US TOUR

With Role Model

At MGM Music Hall at Fenway. Oct. 9 at 8 p.m.