

Ta-ku



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From music maker and photo taker, to filmmaker and clothing designer. Is there anything Ta-ku can't do? We discover how the "29-going-on-48-year-old" started his multifaceted creative journey — and where he's headed next.

Regan Matthews is half asleep. It's a late January morning, 9 am to be precise, and the high-pitched trill of our FaceTime call has woken him up. He takes it in his stride, answering affably. "I could pretend I've been up," he laughs, "but I'm not gonna fake it." For all his successes, he's free from any hint of pretension, completely laidback and an easy, funny conversationalist. And to his credit, he's chatting to us leisurely in the midst of precious downtime away from work — we've caught him on holiday with family in Japan. Nothing, it would seem, is too much trouble.

Growing up in Perth on the southwestern tip of Western Australia, Matthews — who also goes by the moniker Ta-ku — discovered his calling a little later on in life. Although he was raised in a household where music was appreciated, he didn't have a conventional musical upbringing.

"I never knew how to play any instruments," he says in his cool, measured voice. "I didn't sing, and I wasn't in a choir. I was just this dumb kid really." With a little help from his cousin and peers, high school was where his deep love for hip-hop blossomed, and a couple of years after graduating, he started DJing. Naturally, learning to master the turntables leads to a meandering journey of musical discovery. And when the young Australian heard Slum Village's jazz-inflected 'Fall In Love', produced by a certain J Dilla, a light bulb went *PING*.

Over the years, the beatsmith has been both prolific and chameleonic. Working days as a corporate executive for a health insurance firm, he would go home and quell his thirst for music making in the night. He's dropped over 10 beat tapes and EPs — each reflecting his myriad influences at any given time, each displaying that signature, raw drummetry. Dusty, woozy hip-hop that paid tribute to Dilla and 9th Wonder; somnolent, poignant compositions in homage to Nujabes; intricate, synth-heavy electronics influenced by Flying Lotus and his Brainfeeder crew; incendiary trap that nodded to Hudson Mohawke's and Lunice's TNGHT project. "Oh dear," he laughs as we discuss his genre-hopping back catalogue.

"It's inevitable that you're gonna take different pieces of work and let them move you to create," he says. "Everything I've done has pretty much been appropriation — a respectful nod to people I look up to and to records that are my favourite." He pauses. "But, it's knowing how to create something that much more unique than the original idea that makes it your own. If you're doing the exact same thing, then you're straight up just a thief. Being original means being yourself — making sure your art represents you one hundred per cent."

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Now working on music full time, the Red Bull Music Academy graduate has distilled his sound into something much more personal, an apotheosis of every single track he's made. It's inimitable. His latest two EPs — *Songs To Break Up To* and *Songs To Make Up To* — reveal a more introverted Ta-ku, one that's become a producer juggling session musicians alongside his own beats. The records take love and its vast array of emotions as inspiration, all slowed down tempos and emotive melodies. "I've found the style of music that I'm most comfortable with, and that I really want to make," he muses. "When people think of Ta-ku, that's the kind of music I want them to think of."

Tokyo. Summer, 2014. Matthews is larking about on his iPhone, taking pictures. Repeat Pattern, a fellow beatmaker and photographer, looks on in exasperation and begs him to buy a camera. “I was like, ‘Nah, I don’t need to buy a camera; I’ve got my iPhone,’” he jokes. “Back then I didn’t know anything about photography. But I was really curious about what he was taking; he’s really great with abstract photography, making shapes and forms and people into photos you never thought you could take.” He returns to Australia and buys a camera.

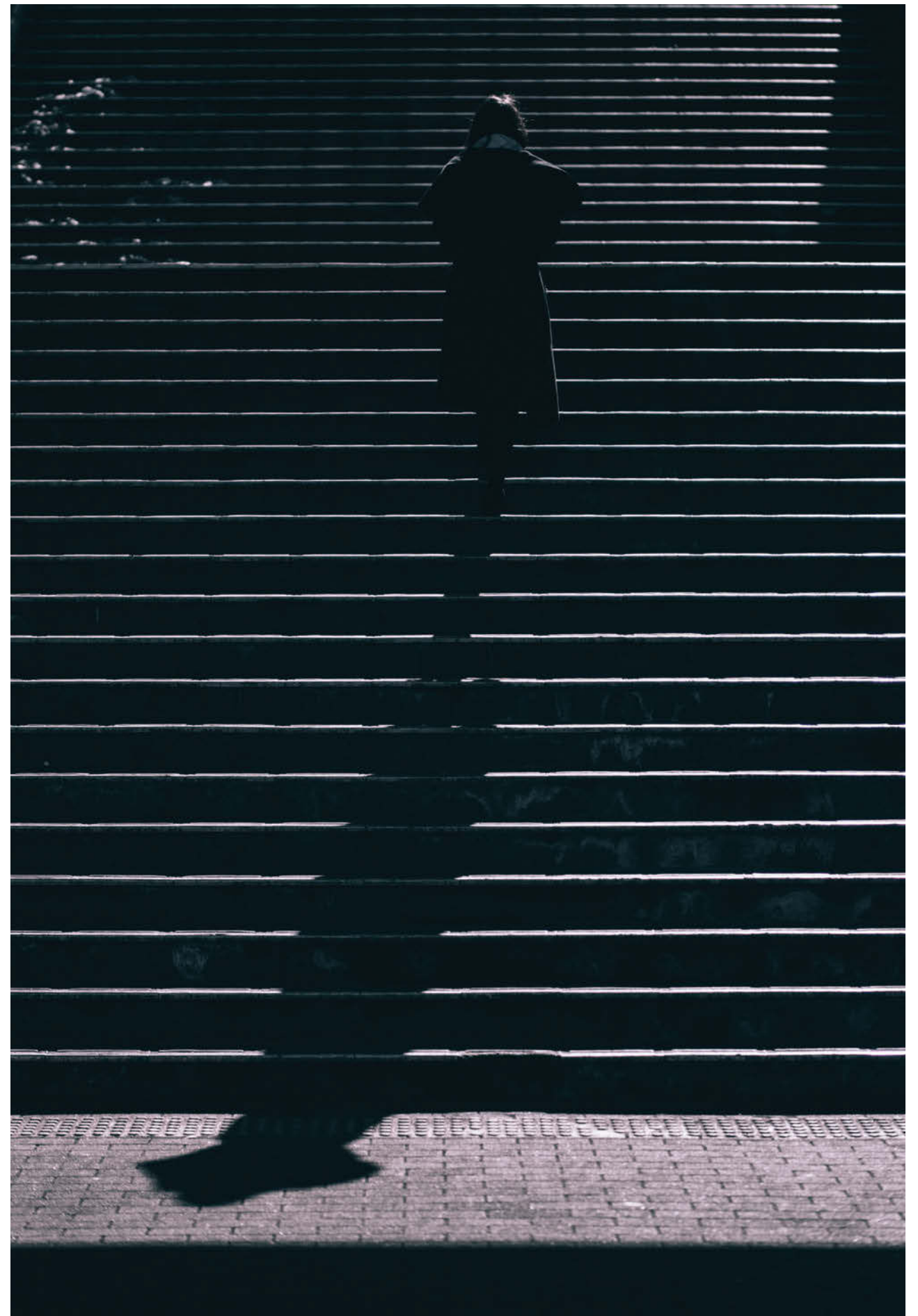
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In the one-and-a-half years since that camera purchase, Matthews has proven pretty handy behind the lens, exhibiting flair and — like with his music — a typically unique style. His pictures are freeze-framed dreams — surreal, abstract constructs that favour unusually composed portraits and street shots. “It’s insane man,” he enthuses. “It’s been full throttle, all I do, with what feels like music on the side. It’s something I take very seriously, as much as I take music seriously.

“Photography’s so personal, you just take photos of what you think is visually appealing,” he adds modestly. It’s gotten to the point where a large chunk of Ta-ku fans don’t even know he’s a musician — understandable given a burgeoning client roster that includes UNITED ARROWS imprint monkey time, I Love Ugly and, most recently, VSCO. Even so, he still sees himself as an enthusiast. “I have a lot to learn,” he says. “I feel like I need to work harder, work more, be more exposed and influenced by photography in general.”

Making inroads into film, he’s also worked as editor and director of photography on a couple of promos for monkey time and Asics, as well as stunning his legion of fans with arthouse-leaning Snapchat stories. His influences are clear: Spike Jonze, Sofia Coppola, Terrence Malick — auteurs renowned for capturing extraordinary beauty in the most ordinary of circumstances. “I’m a big fan of cinema,” enthuses the 29-year-old. “Shooting video is naturally the next step. Not only because I love cinema, but because I feel like it’s the best way to incorporate music as well, and that’s definitely where I’m heading with the new album. It’s not gonna be just a musical album, but a culmination of everything that I love to do. I’m still learning, but that’s something I really want to document, the learning process. Which is just as fascinating as the end product.”







And then there's Team Cozy. What started off as a joke page on Instagram to celebrate all things comfy ("I say I don't want to put out garbage and now we're talking about a page I made about the most comfortable shoes!"), has become a creative agency of photographers, directors and graphic designers — all bound by a proclivity for photography. It's now a clothing line, too, with its debut collection of performance-influenced sweats, hoods and outerwear dropping recently.

"It seems like a whole bunch of kids around the world love to take photos, and want to belong to a community they can identify with," says the photographer. "So we made an apparel line, opening operations in LA last year. A lot of our collection down the line will be more photography-based, for shooters. If you're living somewhere cold — or anywhere — these clothes will accommodate what a shooter needs."

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If this all feels like a trip, it's because, well, it is. How does one man manage to excel at so many different creative endeavours? You could say it all boils down to his philosophy of doing what you love, and taking your time doing it. Matthews' success is due to his idiosyncratic vision. And for him, this can be attributed, in part, to Perth. "There's a saying: 'Isolation incites creativity,'" he explains. "I agree with that, only because you're away from a lot of the hype and competition. The isolation gives you time to realise what kind of artist you want to be without any distractions. To get to work."

As to what he has planned for the coming year, there's Create+Explore, a platform that champions photographic and musical collaboration through video. "I'm looking to take it to the next level, creating visuals for more than just a two-minute song," he reveals. "It's not about making coin, just creating products that we're proud of and that will inspire other people. Most of all, I'm trying to find videographers that aren't signed to a production house. People that have been grinding away behind the scenes and need that little step up."

And of course, there's the thing that detonated his creative journey in the first place. Now signed to Future Classic, he's writing his debut album — although it's still early days. "I don't know what the direction of the album is, because I feel like I just want to take my time," he says. "With how quickly I was putting out music before — and how quickly music is coming out now in general — I'm really, really adamant about taking my time. Making something different." He laughs. "Don't worry, I'm not going into rock or folk or anything. Concept is everything, so I'm still working it out."

"Taking your time and letting things happen organically is the best thing you can possibly do," he adds thoughtfully. "You need to create something that *you're* happy with, that *you're* proud of. And that's a very unique place." Pause. "It's from your heart."