

MATTHEW CHECK - *THE BRIDGEFORD SESSIONS* (3/11/22)

An American roots musician whose career encompasses everything from Emmy-nominated bluegrass bands to critically-acclaimed solo albums, Matthew Check has never been afraid to mine his personal life — including the vices, victories, loves, and losses of a man who's spent much of his adulthood in a creative whirl — for musical inspiration. His latest release, *The Bridgeford Sessions*, shines a light not only on his autobiographical songwriting, but also his strength as a live performer. Recorded entirely live during a single afternoon, the EP finds Check in the driver's seat, navigating his folk-rock band through three songs about old flames, new relationships, and lingering memories.

Less than two weeks before recording *The Bridgeford Sessions* on a 1979 8-track tape machine in Bushwick, Check found himself at a friend's house in Rockaway Beach. He was heartbroken. Over the previous year in his adopted hometown of New York City, he'd met a woman named Lauren and fallen in love, only to break off the relationship while spending some time in the American Southwest. Upon his return to the city, he moved into Lauren's empty apartment, a place filled with reminders of the woman he'd left behind. "I really missed her right away," he explains. "I don't remember ever missing someone so much in my life, and knowing that I had lost her all because of my own doing."

While spending the July 4th weekend at Rockaway Beach, he wrote "Tattoo," "Okay With It," and "The Last Song" as a means of catharsis. All three tunes were inspired by Lauren. On "Tattoo," her memory is etched into his mind like body art, while "Okay With It" — a song that was partially prompted by the postcards that arrived at his temporary apartment every week, addressed to Lauren and sent by her new budding romantic interest — finds him attempting to make peace with the realization that his love has moved on. With "The Last Song," he even proclaims to be finished with music altogether. "That's because most of my music is about relationships that don't work out," he says, "and I only feel moved to write music when I'm in this emotional space. Frankly, I was tired of it."

Although rooted in painful introspection, *The Bridgeford Sessions* is still an upbeat and inspired piece of work. Drawing on his longtime affinity for artists like Bob Dylan and The Band, Check assembled a small band — including pianist [Brian Gelfand](#), drummer [Glenn Grossman](#) (Bob Dylan, Black Sheep, Bo Diddley), bassist, sound engineer and co-owner of Conveyor Studios [Jason Borisoff](#), and pedal steel player Justin Camerer — and recorded the songs quickly, before the spark of their initial creation had faded. The tracking sessions took place at Conveyor Studios in working-class Brooklyn, with Check leading his band on acoustic guitar and lead vocals. The result is an honest, heart-on-sleeve EP that's rooted not in studio wizardry or fancy production techniques, but in the timeless sounds of folk music and American roots-rock.

No stranger to delivering ace performances onstage, Matthew Check had balanced his ongoing string of solo albums (including 2020's *The Condesa Queen* and 2014's bluegrass/Jewish hybrid *The Bluegrass Kabbalat Shabbat Experience*) with a handful of collaborative projects. As half of the coed duo Joanie & Matt, he'd released two albums of Judaism-inspired folk music alongside the Grammy-winning artist Joanie Leeds. As an original member of the rap-influenced bluegrass act Gangstagrass, he played banjo on the Emmy-nominated song "Long Hard Times to Come," which doubled as the television theme for the hit show *Justified*. He's been a bandmate, sideman, and celebrated solo artist, making forays into children's music and other diverse genres without losing sight of his roots-rock foundation.

Arriving on the heels of *The Amazing Worth* and *The November Album* — two archival albums that were recorded during Check's first decade in New York City and released years later in 2021 — *The Bridgeford Sessions* showcases an artist who continues to evolve and electrify. It also marks a particular chapter in a

saga that continues to unfold, with Check and Bridgeford deciding to resume their relationship shortly after the record's creation. "We're still together and very much in love," he adds happily, excited to write the soundtrack for the next phrase of the couple's time together.

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