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*Grammy-winning artist Jason Mraz became  
a worldwide sensation without much fuss.  
Now he plans to save the world*



**right:** A dedicated farmer and gardener, Mraz shares his passion for growing food and plants by participating in community gardening projects around the country.



Jason Mraz lives a grounded life, not a flashy one. He surfs. He gardens and records on his five-and-a-half-acre avocado farm in California (he's a vegan). He makes films (he was an associate producer on *The Big Fix*, an award-winning documentary about the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico). He shoots: In 2008 Mraz published his personal photo travelogue from his world tour as a book titled *a thousand things*.

So it's no surprise that Mraz (pronounced Mer-az; it's Czech for "frost") wears all the success stemming from his music career without pretense. If he weren't doing what he does, Mraz says he would be doing something decidedly unglamorous: working as a professional landscaper.

But, of course, he's not. As an international pop star, Mraz cultivates growth on a grander scale, through songs that encourage us to look inward and get to the essence of feeling. The musician with the melodic Brazilian flavor and a penchant for fedora hats has scored with life-affirming, introspective tunes across five albums, including the hit single that's verging on immortality: the 38-year-old's infectious "I'm Yours" has been watched nearly 400 million times on YouTube.

The Virginia native, who counts as his influences Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, Queen, Ben Harper, and Alanis Morissette, made his name in the San Diego coffeehouse scene after stints at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York and Longwood University in Farmville, Va. The go-west road trip that made Mraz a fixture at Java Joe's in Ocean Beach during the early 2000s proved fortuitous, as the musician with the acoustic guitar, the elastic and honeyed tenor, and the playful performance style scored with his early albums *Waiting for My Rocket to Come* (2002) and *Mr. A-Z* (2005). Diamond, Platinum and multi-Platinum certifications in more than 20 countries followed, as well as that pair of Grammys in 2009 ("Make It Mine" earned him Best Male Pop Vocal Performance, while "Lucky"—with Colbie Caillat—scored a win for Best Pop Collaboration with Vocals).

Writing and performing has always been a way for Mraz to get to that pure place that everyone is trying to get to. Staying pure means that he can become impatient with the mechanics of the business. "Sometimes I struggle superficially with my management, or with my own career about how much time I spend traveling or promoting my music or myself when I'd rather be gardening or surfing or at home with my loved ones," he concedes. For Mraz, life is about living as spontaneously as possible, rather than crafting a calculated existence based on image. As he sings in "I'm Yours": "I guess what I am saying is there ain't no better

reason / To rid yourself of vanities and just go with the seasons."

"Music has always been a way for me to shut down the rest of the world, shut down the mental chatter, and really connect with one voice," he says. "I think I've just wanted others to have that same experience, where they would lose that mental chatter and just feel loved."

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*Whatever we put after 'I am,' we're going to become.*

Music has also become a way for him to do what he really wants, which is change the world in the spirit of his songs. "See, 'I am' are the two most powerful words on the planet," he says. "Whatever we put after 'I am,' we're going to become. I've tried to be really specific in my language as a writer, to start putting more affirming and heartfelt and thoughtful lyrics in the songs so that when you sing along, you're actually getting these tools of transformation. And maybe your attitude can shift a little bit or, at the very least, maybe your mood can change for three and a half minutes in the song."

The way Mraz sees it, people can have an impact by doing the simplest things. "People can help by just advancing equality—with their conversations, with supporting the movement for gender equality, with supporting same-sex marriage—just equality for all," he says. "It's just, in general, being nice."

And promoting niceness sometimes means taking a stand: To raise awareness about human trafficking, for example, Mraz became the first international artist to play an open-air concert in Myanmar when he headlined the Milestone Concert in December 2012 for 90,000 people. Earlier that year, Mraz also spent a week in Antarctica with a group of environmentalists, scientists, and researchers (led by Al Gore) on a mission to learn about the effects of climate change.

He says the biggest career highlight has been launching the Jason Mraz Foundation. Its mission is to inspire change in the human experience by advancing equality so all people are treated equally, promoting the arts so they are widely accessible, empowering through education so that it becomes a tool for driving social change, and preserving the environment for generations to come.

With typical self-effacement, he says his foundation "is there, but it's not the be-all, end-all. It's just something fun that I get to do with my money and my resources. But you can help me by advancing equality, supporting arts and education, and saving this goddamn planet." In other words, making our collective garden grow. ●

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