*ROWAN DRAKE*

For 19-year-old artist Rowan Drake, songwriting has always provided a space for turning inward and transforming his most complex and painful feelings into unexpected beauty. Growing up in the small college town of Ithaca, New York, the singer/songwriter/producer first discovered the power of that outlet when, at age 15, a devastating accident ended his burgeoning career as a competitive snowboarder. After devoting nearly all his time in high school to honing his craft—and frequently skipping class to record songs in his school’s music room with childhood best friend Kii Kinsella —Drake dreamed up his own hypnotic form of alt-pop: moody, immersive, and fearlessly confessional.

Born into a music-obsessed family who raised him on artists like Van Morrison and Elton John, he first explored his innate musicality by taking piano lessons at age seven and later moved on to guitar. But from sixth grade until his freshman year of high school, snowboarding dominated his entire world. “I put my whole life into snowboarding, but at some point my body decided I couldn’t keep going,” says Drake, who moved to Colorado at age 14 to join a national team. “It showed me that life has a way of putting you on a different path than what you’d planned for, and you just have to trust the process.” Turning to songwriting for solace and escape, Drake soon began performing at bars and restaurants around town, and later self-released his debut single “Closure” while still in high school. Just a few months after graduating, he packed up his car and moved to Los Angeles on his own, newly tattooed with the date on which he plans to play Madison Square Garden for the first time (June 12, 2025). “I woke up one morning with that date in my head, and I got the tattoo as a way to hold myself accountable,” he reveals.

Once he’d settled in L.A., Drake threw himself into connecting with potential collaborators, quickly linking up with up-and-coming producers like Davin Kingston (John Legend, Joshua Bassett), who helped create the piano-laced and kaleidoscopic sound of “2 People.” As he built up his body of work, Drake experienced a major breakthrough with “Abandonment Issues”—a quietly spellbinding piece of storytelling, matching his graceful guitar strumming and airy yet potent vocal performance with sudden bursts of hard-hitting beats. “I heard that melody in my head, and the first few lines just came to me,” Drake recalls. “I was alone in L.A. and missing my girlfriend and my mom and all these people from home, and it turned into a song about the anxiety that comes with feeling distant so from the people you love.” Produced by his close friend Aaron Osbourne and co-written with Ben Levy (aka Author), “Abandonment Issues” soon caught the attention of Arthouse Music Publishing and Records CEO Kara DioGuardi, paving the way for his signing to Atlantic Records / Arthouse Records in spring 2022.

Now at work on his debut project, Drake often writes in deliberate solitude, embracing a stream-of-consciousness approach to the creative process. “I love to write in stairwells and parking garages and other weird spaces with cool acoustics,” he says. “It’ll be just me and my guitar, and I’ll start to sing and wait until I come across a hook or a line that sticks with me.” A lifelong nature lover, Drake also finds endless inspiration in more idyllic surroundings. “My dad founded a wilderness connection program, so my whole childhood was spent building fires with bow drills, running around in the woods with very little clothing on, and all the others things you do as a kid in a small town,” he says. “Nature has always been very important to me, so now I make sure to take at least a couple of days a week to get out of the city and calm my mind.”

As his following grows exponentially, Drake aims to use that platform as a way to unite others in his deep-rooted mission of protecting the natural world. “There’s so much that needs to be done to take better care of our planet, and I really believe that music can be a way to build community and create some kind of positive change,” he notes. And in the act of songwriting itself, Drake remains focused on preserving the more immediate impact of unfiltered expression. “It’s been amazing to see that once I create something and put it out there, it belongs to everyone else just as much as it belongs to me,” he says. “With every song I make, I’m just trying to get something off my chest, and then people can take that song and fit into their lives however they need to—hopefully it will help them to let go and cry if they need to cry, or smile if they just need to smile.”

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