

The Julian Taylor Band

“In an era when music lovers seem to be required to like one thing, one style, one genre, we get the protean of the Julian Taylor Band – confident enough in their own abilities to delimit the genres and let the soulful beats resound from wider horizons.”

These words from acclaimed Toronto poet Robert Priest beautifully encapsulate the Julian Taylor Band’s new release *Desert Star*, a double magnum opus reflecting Toronto’s rich musical tapestry. Blending vintage soul, rock, roots, and a touch of hip-hop, the album is a re-birth of sorts for Julian Taylor, one of the country’s most gifted and multi-faceted singer-songwriters.

The Julian Taylor Band began as a blank canvas. They played anywhere and everywhere, as often as possible, knowing that a great band lives and dies by its live reputation. The R&B covers in their sets soon became the wellspring from which a new catalogue of original independent releases arose, landing on their debut *Tech Noir*, and setting the stage for the creative torrent unleashed on the sophomore *Desert Star*.

Taylor describes *Desert Star* himself as modern rhythm and blues: Deep grooves, powerful horns, and just the right amount of pop smarts. A relatively straightforward formula, yes, but Taylor ultimately envisioned the album as four distinct parts, stemming from sessions at various Toronto studios with producers Saam Hashemi, Bill Bell, Brian Moncarz, and David Engle.

“We’re really lucky that we’ve got a core fan base that’s been completely supportive since the beginning,” Taylor says. “There’s definitely been a musical evolution, even though the notion of R&B-meets-rock has always been a part of my sound. It’s just that I’ve learned so much more about songcraft in recent years, and collaborating with the guys in this band, as well as my co-writers and producers, has been a big part of that.”

“The idea to put out a double album really grew out of this huge amount of material we were working, about 70 songs,” Taylor says. “We whittled it down to 22 we felt stood on their own, and at the same time hung together as a cohesive, listening experience. Because we recorded the album over a long period of time in a lot of locations, it was a challenge to maintain a consistent vibe. But everyone was committed to serving the songs, and that’s always been my approach to making music.”

The first taste of *Desert Star* came early in 2016 with the release of the single “Just A Little Bit,” which received significant airplay in Canada, as well as in the U.S. and Germany. Follow-up singles “Heard Good Things” and “Set Me Free” were warmly embraced as well, with the latter spending eight weeks on CBC Radio 2’s Top 20 chart, where it peaked at number two. A couple more singles preceded the album’s release, the greasy funk jam “Fever” and “Get Loud,” which, although written in 2014, is in tune with today’s social climate with its refrain, “If a change is gonna come, we must get loud.”

It's a message Julian Taylor has been conveying, perhaps not so directly, ever since he emerged on the Canadian scene. With combined Caribbean and Indigenous Canadian heritage, his unique perspective is a refreshing take on the country's diverse musical landscape

Desert Star is named after a flower that grows in some of the planet's harshest terrain, and for Taylor it made perfect sense as a symbol for his music. Beauty can also be resilient, and if one flower can bloom in a desert, many more can as well. The Julian Taylor Band is planting those seeds now, one listener at a time.

Written by Jason Schneider