

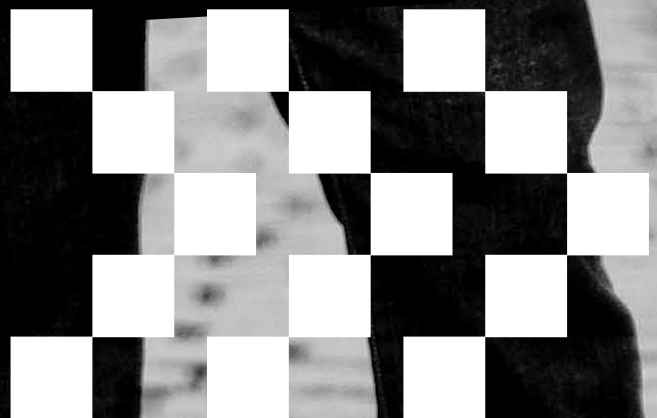
 JC ALVAREZ

JUSTIN UTLEY

KEEPS IT NOTHING BUT REAL

REFORMED MORMON RESISTS LABEL AS 'GAY ARTIST'

Singer and songwriter Justin Utley has always been accustomed to wearing his heart on his sleeve when it comes to his music, using authentic lyrics that reveal the realities of his growth as an openly gay artist. Born a Mormon and having survived reparative therapy, Utley emerged a scarred man. Now that he's made peace with his past, his songs are more brutally honest than ever. The title of his latest release, *Nothing This Real*, speaks volumes about his journey to self-acceptance.



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On *Nothing*, Uteley focuses on the music. The album benefits from its decisively high production value, setting it apart from its predecessor, the 2005 debut *Runaway*. "On *Runaway* I learned what to do," he says. "I was a little more reserved. I wasn't too sure how I wanted to approach the music industry as an openly gay man. I think I was in the process, but I wasn't as comfortable as I am today."

Born in Utah into a family of artists, Uteley has since childhood demonstrated a remarkable ease when it came to music, often able to pick up most melodies by ear. This natural affinity didn't necessarily transfer easily when it came to his attractions to members of the opposite sex. When the time finally came for Uteley to prepare for his missions as a Mormon, he became conflicted – and his music defocused for a time.

RECOVERING MORMON

In the Mormon faith there is no room for homosexuality. Through discipline, it teaches that gay thoughts can be exorcised like a demon – the subject of a hilarious number in the Broadway hit *The Book of Mormon* called "Turn It Off." Uteley readily admits to having seen the show – and loving it. "It's a pretty phenomenal show," he says. "I get asked all the time if I've seen it. Not many Mormons have."



After completing his two-year mission in Arizona, and still feeling conflicted and confused, Utley ran into conversion/reparative therapy, a common practice within the Mormon faith to help gay men conform to “normalcy.”

“Those were really tough times for me to get through,” Utley reflects, “to get to this point.” After enduring two years of therapy, Justin had endured enough. He accepted his homosexuality, came out and severed ties with the religion of his youth. He became an outspoken champion of LGBT rights and an activist against the Mormon Church’s tendencies towards reparative therapy. In the process, Justin Utley was finally no longer running away from himself.

Although Utley is no longer affiliated with the Mormon Church (or any other at this point), he believes in the need to feed the spiritual side of life. There is an intense amount of verbal acceptance on *Nothing This Real* that wasn’t very apparent on *Runaway*. The music on *Real* feels more polished, but that’s not to say it comes off like contrived, radio-friendly studio pop: “I could be as honest as I wanted to be on this album, musically and emotionally. I took what I wanted to change (about *Runaway*) and I applied it to this album, turning the volume way up.”

IN THE MOMENT

Now that he is in a romantic relationship, it’s not surprising that the theme of “love” wends its way throughout Utley’s new album. But for Utley, subtle shadings of love color *Nothing This Real*, be they passionate adoration or the ability to let go. “All the songs have an element of love in them,” he says. “As I was finishing the recording process my personal relationship took a deeper turn – in a good way.”

Even though the music is about his own personal journey, Utley hopes the listener will bring his or her own experiences to the music. For that reason, “I still try to be general with the lyrics,”



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he says. "I want people to relate to them on a broader scheme, but I'm feeling a little less reserved. I have a platform. I've had all of these experiences and felt I needed to have some continuity."

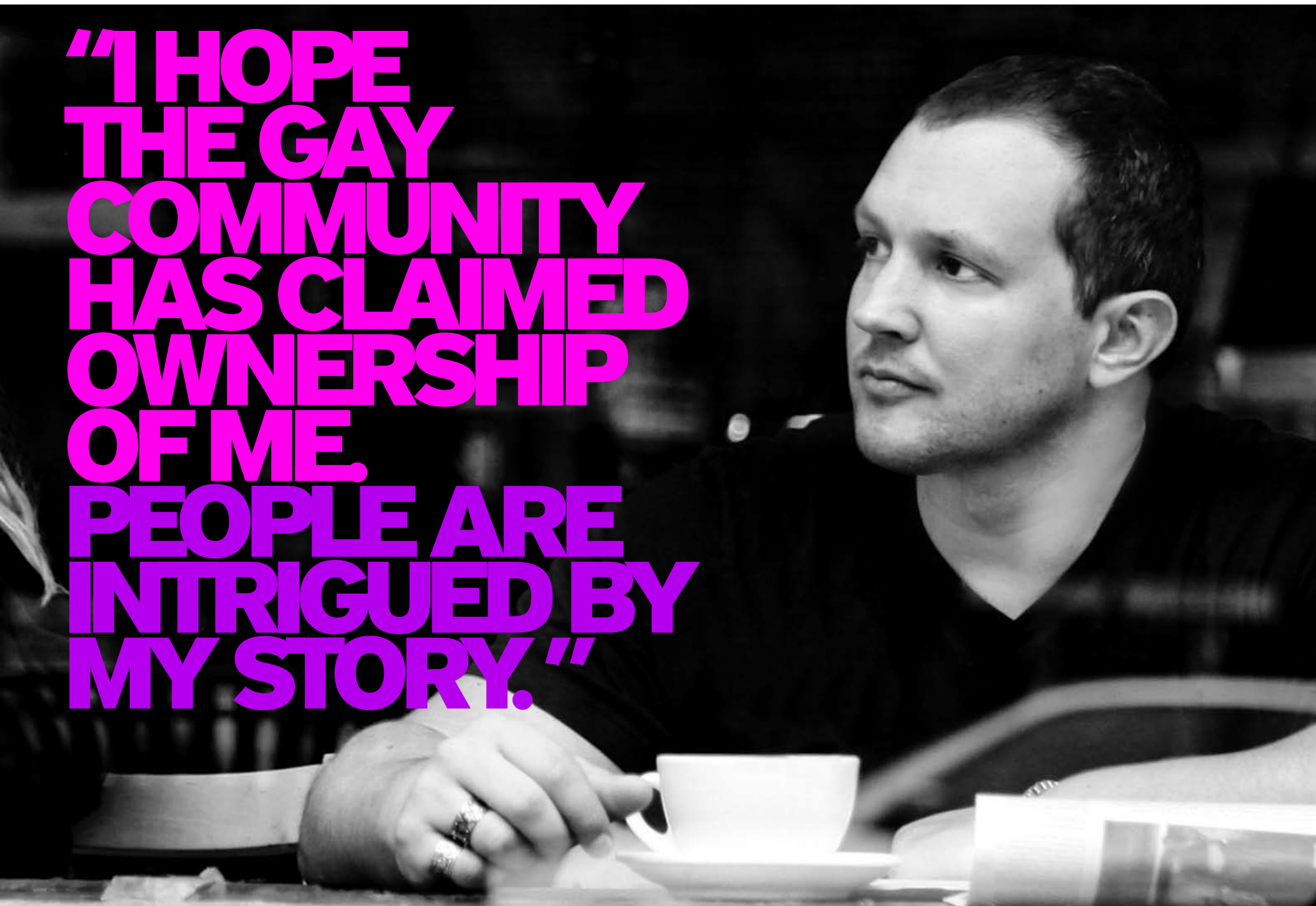
The one thing that Utley does fight is the musical niche of gay-defined artists. "I don't feel pigeon-holed as a gay artist," he says, although he adds, "I hope the gay community has claimed ownership of me. People are intrigued by my story. It separates me from just being a 'gay artist.'"

So far, there's no worry about that. He's charmed his way into the mainstream as

well. Utley is becoming an artist with a large female fan base – apparent at any of his live appearances. He, in turn, loves them back: "I have definitely connected with my female fan base. They tend to connect a little more. Women's emotions tend to run a lot deeper more intense than men, gay or straight. Well sort of. I can easily communicate my emotions, and I put them on display as my art."


But what's most important to Justin Utley isn't just that he continues to succeed as a music artist. It's that his journey connects with his audience. That connection is all the more important and strengthened by his relationship with his family – all

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the stronger now that he is honest with them and himself about his identity as a gay man. "My dad is often still taken aback by what I've accomplished," he notes. He's encouraged Utley to continue to tell his story, and perhaps write a book. "He's always made a point of telling me how proud he is of what I'm doing. And that means a lot."

Ultimately, Utley points out that his music underscores the reality that self-acceptance is the key to success both as an artist, and as a human being. "The first track on *Nothing This Real* sums it all up," he says. "I'm putting my foot into this new journey and hoping it's the right thing. I'm satisfied with the direction that I'm going in. It's an overwhelming feeling."

Justin Utley's *Nothing This Real* is available as a digital download through most online music stores including iTunes. For upcoming tour dates and appearances you can connect with Justin via his official website www.justinutley.com. 

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