



R&B artist Max Stark has been making music for more than a decade.

PHOTO/JERI CHADWELL

Clear cut

Max Stark

Max Stark's 2018 album *Moxie* speaks a bit to the young R&B artist's personality—thoughtful and private.

"I go ghost," Stark sings in the opening lines of the first track, "hit the one, go up the coast, go to places no one knows, because I feel like I'm a ghost."

A few months ago, Stark moved with his friend and manager, Brandon Miller, from Reno to Los Angeles to further his music career.

"I'm not the crazy, like, guy who goes out to party, so it's cool to have a guy like him, who can keep his head on straight and also network and do what he's supposed to do," Stark said. "I'm more of a reserved guy. So it's cool to be in the studio, and he picks up a lot of the other stuff. I don't want to go out until 2 in the morning. That's not me."

Stark, who's 25 years old, has been making music for more than a decade and has released two albums, as well as a handful of singles. His R&B style is somewhat classic—smooth, with strong bass—but with elements of indie rock and new wave.

"I love everything from Hall and Oates to Ginuwine," he said. "I listen to some hair bands, even."

Stark credits his diverse musical taste in large part to his father, with whom he lived in the Bay Area as a child. Staying true to his roots is important to him and one of the reasons he decided to use his real name as an artist.

"I didn't want to shy away from it," he said. "I didn't want to hide behind a stage name. My name is actually Maxwell Payne Stark."

On his neck, Stark wears a necklace bearing another name: Xeant.

"This is my girlfriend's name," Stark said. "It's a strange name. It's said like, 'Action.' She's from the Philippines."

Stark wears the necklace all the time, but his relationship is another aspect of his life he keeps mostly private.

"It's not like the world can't know about it," he said. "I want them to—but I don't like to post a lot of stuff. It's just an 'our business' kind of thing. I feel like a lot of people let other people into their relationships."

Stark is also ready for the world to know about his upcoming project—a third album, though he's not willing to speak too in depth on it yet.

"I mean, I'm not going to say the name of the project yet, but it's ocean-themed, for sure—and it's got a really nice summer time vibe, this one," Stark said. "We're not close on this one. I'm taking my time. ... I don't want to rush."

He expects the new album will be released early in 2020 but plans to start releasing some singles and videos as early as this summer. And Reno audiences can expect to see Stark for a few local show dates this summer, too.

"We're working on a couple of shows," Stark said. "I don't want to name the places for sure, but there will be two dates we'll have in the summer when we'll be out here. ... Reno has always been good to me. That's one thing I've always appreciated. It's always showed me so much love. And I feel like, anywhere, you get what you put in, you know? You work hard. People see it, but in Reno, like, there's something about the people." □

Follow Max Stark on Instagram or Facebook to see the new video for his song "Right Now."

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