

MAGIC!

Primary Colours

In 2014, Toronto-bred, Los Angeles-based quartet MAGIC! scored the song of the summer with their debut single “Rude” — a buoyant reggae-pop tune that held the No. 1 spot on the *Billboard* Hot 100 for six weeks, charted in 41 countries, and sold more than 10 million singles, while its video nears a billion VEVO views. It was a juggernaut that launched their debut album, *Don't Kill the Magic*, into the Top 10 and introduced MAGIC!'s breezy sound — a catchy fusion of reggae, pop, and R&B — to the world. “When ‘Rude’ got big, my thought was, ‘What do we do with this?’” says the band’s lead vocalist and chief songwriter Nasri. “So we chased it. We used its success to get us around the world a few times and to turn those 350 million streams into a fan base.”

Indeed over the past two years MAGIC! has established itself as a bonafide sensation thanks to its undeniably catchy sound, superlative songwriting, and masterful musicianship. Now the band, which also features guitarist Mark Pelli, drummer Alex Tanas, and bassist Ben Spivak, has released a new single, the Caribbean-tinged “Lay You Down Easy” (featuring Sean Paul), which debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Reggae Digital Songs chart and racked up two million Spotify streams and one million VEVO views in its first two weeks. MAGIC! is also gearing up for the July release of its new album, *Primary Colours*, which finds the band further displaying its reggae influences and pop smarts. “The ultimate goal was to make an album that is groovy and fun,” Nasri says. “We are embracing ourselves now. We’ve actually found our identity and have really gotten to know each other as friends and fellow musicians. We had only known each other a short time when we made our debut album.”

Produced by Nasri and Adam Messinger (who as Grammy-winning production duo the Messengers, have scored hits for Justin Bieber, David Guetta, Shakira, Chris Brown, Pitbull, and Christina Aguilera), and with production assists from Pelli and Tanas, *Primary Colours* is the sound of a band that has come into its own. “Each of these guys is a phenomenal musician and they all stepped up in various capacities, whether it was writing, playing, or producing,” says Nasri. “Mark is extraordinary and plays everything to the highest degree. He has these amazing colors. Alex really grew as a producer and was stronger about sharing his opinion, and Ben is always open and very melodic, he played all over the record. My bandmates are always shocking me with what they can do musically. Everyone's contribution is always full-hearted.”

The creative bond that the band members have developed is palpable in the good-natured bounce of the music on *Primary Colours*, as are the rhythms the four have soaked up through their worldwide travels. Last year they toured as first support for Maroon 5 and performed headlining shows across the U.S., South America, Asia, and Europe. “We definitely had that spiritual connection to

the cultures we visited,” Nasri says. “We’re all natives of Canada, but we have different heritages. But when we get together, the guitar and the bass come out and we start to go with it. When we were in the studio making *Primary Colours*, the more rock-oriented songs started to give way to the groovier songs, and we thought, ‘This is us, We are this fusion band.’ It’s like home for me. I’ll make a song and if something doesn’t feel right, I’ll try a reggae melody or beat and it suddenly feels great. It’s like I took reggae on a couple of dates and it went really well and now we’re going steady.”

In the time between making *Don’t Kill the Magic* and *Primary Colours*, Nasri also gave himself a musical education, diving into records by reggae stars Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff, and Peter Tosh. He also immersed himself in The Beatles catalog and records by Paul Simon. “Growing up we had no money, so I only listened to the radio,” he explains. “It wasn’t until my ’20s that I started getting into Stevie Wonder and early Police. I didn’t know anything about The Beatles, just the hits. Now I know 70 of their songs. And I’ve realized, ‘Oh, I’m getting all of this from Paul McCartney.’ And I think being in this band with these super-talented guys — Mark and Ben are both jazz musicians — has given me more of an internal license to explore things. I feel like a kid in MAGIC!. It’s very pure.”

On *Primary Colours*, MAGIC! effortlessly spin out memorable melodies in a variety of styles, like the flirtatious “Lay You Down Easy,” the sultry ’50s-tinged “Red Dress,” the synth-pop tunes “No Sleep” and “Gloria” (the latter with its comical story of a hapless guy and his cheating girlfriend) while never straying too far from their signature reggae sound. Horns make an appearance on several songs, including “Have It All,” which the band wrote in The Philippines. “No Regrets” and “I Need You” are heartfelt ballads that show another dimension to Nasri’s songwriting. The closing track, the swaggy “The Way God Made Me,” features an urban reggae beat and finds Nasri channeling his inner Rastafarian in his vocals.

Then there’s the title track “Primary Colours,” which refers to Nasri’s need to start over not only in his personal life (which is where he draws lyrical inspiration from) but also when it came to making the record. “We were getting really complicated in the studio,” he says. “And I said, ‘Guys, we need to simplify. Our fans are going to be confused. Let’s start with a hook and then build on top of that.’ So we were able to strip everything back to its primary colors and then add layers of musicality. And I had to get in touch with myself and enjoy making pop music again. Luckily the guys can make simple ideas sound soulful and musical.”

Nasri’s goal for *Primary Colours* is also simple. “I want people to laugh and cry and dance,” he says. “I want people to have fun at our shows. And when it’s a serious song, they’ll get serious with us. But when it’s not, what are they doing? Are they just standing there watching us? Or are they with us? I want people to be with us. I want them to move their bodies and have fun.”

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