

MOSS KENA

The debut single from British singer/songwriter **Moss Kena**, “**Square One**” unfolds in mesmerizing melody, stark and sleepy beats, and vocals that transcend all boundaries and expectation. With its subtle power and otherworldly tone, Kena’s singular voice captures countless dimensions of feeling in his soulful meditation on rebirth and loss.

“It’s a song about getting to a point in life where you have to reassess everything,” says Kena. “You have to decide whether to stay in the same place, or move on into completely uncharted waters—which is often the scariest thing in the world to do.”

The opening cut from Moss’s debut EP *FOUND YOU IN 06*, “Square One” has drawn praise from outlets like *The Times UK* (who hailed it as an “heir-to-Prince slow-burner”) and earned support from Zane Lowe (who premiered the track via his coveted *World Record* spot on *Beats 1*). *The New York Times* chief popular music critic Jon Pareles noted that the “verses that often suspend her high voice over just a beat and a bass line,” echoing a common bewilderment over the gender behind Kena’s shape-shifting vocals.

Recorded in London and L.A., *FOUND YOU IN 06* offers up a selection of similarly captivating tracks. In creating the EP, Kena worked with A-list producers like Pluss (Kendrick Lamar, Beyoncé, Drake, Future), T- Minus (Nicki Minaj, A\$AP Rocky, Bryson Tiller), and Donut (Jeremih, PnB Rock), shaping elements of R&B, hip-hop, soul, and pop into a sleekly arranged sound centered on Kena’s heavenly vocal presence.

In choosing a title for his debut, Kena gave a nod to the release year of Amy Winehouse’s iconic album *Back to Black*. “That record sparked my musical awakening,” says Kena, whose left forearm is tattooed with an image of Winehouse. “I think sometimes people don’t realize how much artists like her give to the world by talking about things that are so personal and dark. If you’re able to share yourself like that so that others don’t feel so alone, that’s a really beautiful thing.”

With his candid confessions of longing and lust and unrequited love, Kena instills a palpable generosity into his own songwriting throughout *FOUND YOU IN 06*. At the same time, his elegantly crafted lyrics are spun with a certain mystique, inviting interpretation of all kinds. “I’m not interested in writing lyrics that spell everything out for the listener,” says Kena. “For me it’s about trying to find the un-obvious angle.”

On the second single from *FOUND YOU IN 06*, Kena brings his nuanced songcraft to a high-drama, hip-hop-infused portrait of romantic frustration. Built on dense beats, “You Don’t Know” finds Kena’s delivery shifting from rapidfire flow to aching falsetto with impossible ease. With its throbbing tempo, “Games” confronts the endless confusion in a nebulous relationship, yet puts a carefree twist on that angst (“I was trying to make the melodrama not feel so sad,” notes Kena). Featuring a head-turning verse from Brooklyn rapper Leikeli47, the hazy and hypnotic

“Spend Some Time” reflects on lust at first sight. “I loved having Leikeli47 on it,” says Kena. “It’s this call-and-response thing where I’m hurling adoration at her, and then she comes in with the female point of view and just totally nails it.” And on “Problems,” Kena ends the EP with a more outward-looking track recalling classic soul in its urgent piano riffs and irrepressible spirit. “‘Problems’ is about how everyone has shit that they go through, so there’s no reason to hide it,” says Kena. “I think it’s cool that we live in a time where it’s more acceptable than ever to talk about our problems, and I hope that conversation gets more and more open.”

From track to track, *FOUND YOU IN 06* channels raw emotion with an intensity that has much to do with Kena’s deliberate vocal approach. “When you first step up to the mic to record a freshly written song, that’s often the best vocal you’re going to get,” he says. “A lot of the time we ended up just using the demo vocals, because it seemed pointless to try to recreate that feeling. I absolutely believe that emotion is something you can hear.”

Growing up on the outskirts of London, Kena found his passion for music at an early age, thanks largely to his parents (his dad was a DJ, his mom ran a string of record shops). “I definitely wasn’t raised on nursery rhymes,” says Kena, whose earliest music memories revolve around late-’80s/early-’90s dance music and house. While he devoted much of his childhood to musical theater (which included getting cast in a West End production of *Billy Elliot* on his first-ever audition), Kena dropped out of performing-arts school at age 15. “I just couldn’t ignore my connection to music anymore,” he says. “I left school without even telling my parents, but luckily they were really understanding about it. They just knew how committed I was.”

After gigging relentlessly in local coffee shops and shopping centers, Kena made his breakthrough with a ballad-like rendition of Kendrick Lamar’s “These Walls” in 2016. Along with winning the approval of Lamar himself, the track landed Kena on Complex’s “10 British R&B/Soul Artists To Watch In 2018” list. But even as the buzz around him intensified, Kena maintained a quiet mystery to his presence, leaving it to listeners to dream up their own image. “The element of discovery in music seems sort of lost today—we know so much about people so quickly,” says Kena. “I’d rather people start by getting to know the most important part of all this, which is my voice and the music itself.”

In bringing *FOUND YOU IN 06* to life, Kena immersed himself in refining the songwriting voice he first began honing at age 16. “Until then it hadn’t occurred to me that I could write, but within my first session I discovered it was this amazing outlet for me,” he says. “It can make you feel really insecure to think about opening up in that way—like, ‘Oh my god, will people laugh at this?’ But for some reason I was able to write emotively quite quickly. I kind of shocked myself.” Since that first attempt, Kena has evolved into a prolific writer who now views each new experience as a possible song in the making. “I usually feel most inspired first thing in the morning,” he says. “I tend to be in a more meditative state then—probably because I haven’t gotten all the stresses and dramas of the world into my head quite yet.”

With *FOUND YOU IN 06* marking his first experience in sharing his own songs, Kena ultimately aimed to embed a sense of hope into the EP—a purposeful optimism that, to hear him describe it, feels nothing short of visionary. “More than anything, I want people to hear this music and feel excited for the future. And not just for my journey—for their own journeys too,” says Kena. “My

hope is that people will feel some inspiration to go forward doing what they really want, and know that that's okay. I want them to feel like everything's okay, really.”