

# MILLS

When Mills first moved to Los Angeles from his hometown of Bowling Green, Kentucky, he found himself going through the motions. Steeped in the rich history and sounds of nearby Nashville, the artist struggled with finding his voice in sessions. “The songs I was making were good, but I just couldn’t nail down the production,” he says. “They didn’t feel timeless, and they didn’t feel like me.”

But then he stumbled upon Laurel Canyon, L.A.’s countercultural hotspot for decades (the musical birthplace of West Coast icons like Joni Mitchell and Brian Wilson, and more recently acts like Father John Misty), and suddenly found inspiration in the legends and lore contained in its tapestries. “I was lost musically for a while and I didn’t know where I fell,” he says. “And then I heard Crosby, Stills and Nash and then I heard about Laurel Canyon and I literally watched and read everything about it that I could and just got super inspired. The songwriting is top-notch, and they were pairing that songwriting with beautiful musicality and also *pop* musicality that an untrained ear would gravitate towards.”

A self-taught singer who picked up the guitar after his brother persuaded him to skip out on asking for a snowboard in favor of the instrument, Mills started to write his own songs as a teenager in his bedroom. As a sophomore in high school, he borrowed his brother’s beat machine after his sibling offered to pay for lessons, noticing how deeply ensconced the teenager was becoming in creating music. He remembers assembling songs from loops and samples and posting them online early in the morning so his classmates could hear them before school. After spending a year at Middle Tennessee State University studying commercial songwriting, he moved to L.A. for a summer on the invitation of a manager he’d kept in touch with after emailing years earlier.

He ended up staying, living in his manager’s garage before uprooting to Laurel Canyon, where he is today. “People were moving to this place and were getting inspired by each other and making music for other human beings,” he says of his new home. “It wasn’t like, ‘I’m going to make the pop smash.’ It was just, ‘I’m going to make something that I feel and it’s going to make other people feel regardless if they want to feel or not.’ If you’re just chasing after a sound you’re not going to get anything, but if you’re chasing after a feeling then you’re going to attract so many people.”

Capturing a feeling is exactly what Mills’ dreamy, warm new EP, *Train of Thoughts*, does throughout its eight tight, punchy songs. They’re the type of songs that live with you long after they’re finished. Songs like “Light It” and “Hollow” paint in brushstrokes both bold and precise; here and now, Mills is making music for people who love music, and people who might not know just how much they love music until hearing his tunes. “A good song is a good song if you can play it on the guitar and it’s a good song,” he says. “I got inspired when I realized that I don’t want to make anything like what’s already out there.”

The *Train of Thoughts* EP achieves that lofty goal. Its peaks are high and often, juxtaposing sticky melodies with truly timeless songwriting touchstones like love, sadness, and hope. Early adopters (including Justin Bieber, who posted Mills’ music on his Instagram stories after a chance encounter in Benedict Canyon one afternoon) have called his songs heartfelt, noting how cleanly they showcase [“maturity and sophistication at a level that defies his age.”](#)

The messages in his music are timelier than ever; he knew making this body of work just how vital the words they contained would be for those who found them. "People need to feel a sense of community, that things are going to be alright again," he says. "There needs to be hope. People need to hear this and people need to come, because there's so much divide right now that it's upsetting to be living here. And for me, it was something I needed to take a stab at with these songs."

Mills says he doesn't often take the step back to look at his music through a critical lens; right now, he just operates from a place of making songs he knows he'd want to listen to as a fan. "I make music for people who really listen to music," he says. "They don't just put it on. I don't want to just make background music, I want people to feel the things that I have to say. My songs are made from feeling; they're not made from made-up stories. I really feel this all this myself first, so I hope you can too."