

# Interview: Jason Mraz

The Grammy Award-winning singer/songwriter talks about avocado trees, generous spirits and the importance of using your talent.

By Eliza Leung

## You worked on the BP oil spill, volunteered to fight child slavery and championed sustainability. What is it like to live with your soul inside out?

It's scary! But that's the best part about it. When you put your life in those environments where disasters have occurred or human lives are on the line, it becomes much more dangerous in the physical sense. In the emotional sense, it's like "Wow I'm right here working alongside real-life Indiana Joneses and Al Gores". Wait it is Al Gore. Their strengths become mine to use.

When you understand the threat they face every day either in the environment or from the traffickers who are calling and threatening them daily, it makes it a lot easier to come back into my nice safe, soft, musical world and contribute to their project to keep them afloat through awareness.

## Did you always have dreams of setting up a Foundation to fight inequality, protect the environment and promote the arts?

It never occurred to me because I never thought I'd have success I've had. To me, success was just being able to make awesome music. I always thought it offered a sense of comfort and relatedness, maybe to help to heal a broken heart or help someone understand their place in the world.

Thanks to the enormous success that my manager and audiences around the world have helped me acquire, I quickly got to a place where I felt I had way too much. So the Foundation is what I can do now beyond music to comfort others.

## So your record-breaking song 'I'm Yours' freed you?

Yes. It's tremendous. Everything in my life is paid for. I'm good. Even my grandchildren are probably going to be good. I still can't get my head around it. Having learnt over the last decade what a powerful fundraising tool is, when I lent my voice or my time to a cause, we decided we'd take it a step further and start our own foundation. Even when I'm not working, this bank account is essentially growing and can only be used to help others which I think is totally far out. It seems like a magic trip.

## So personal growth has steered you towards helping others?

Absolutely. I've always surrounded myself with very generous souls. I only got where I am because others were philanthropists. They continually support me and give me a rich quality of life. Thankfully my rise was very slow, and I have great mentors who taught me how to live responsibly.

## What is your biggest motivator to live sustainably?

Buying a home. My backyard has 5 acres of avocado trees. They're about 30 years old now. And the trigger was ok, this is my piece of earth to care for, my responsibility, and no one else is going to come here and water these trees. No one's going to come here and turn off the lights. I'm responsible for everything I buy and bring into my home. I'm responsible for all the waste that's going to the curb every Monday morning for garbage collection. Almost overnight, I was a bit obsessive about it. I wanted to make sure my plastic, glass, cardboard, paper was divided up for recycling. My compost was separated. And I noticed almost instantly how very little waste I actually created when I lived this way.

I also started surfing same time. When you get out of the ocean you have new eyes. You feel different because you just did a pretty strenuous activity. And you also see differently. When you have to be careful walking on the beach to avoid cigarette butts and broken glass, it can break your heart. If I had kids, I'd be afraid to let them go to some of the beaches I've visited because of what's in the sand or how polluted the water is.

Green choices are really important. So thanks for this awesome hotel experience. It's extraordinary. I love it. I live in hotels. Every one I walk into has every light on. And here nothing was on, unless I wanted it to be. That gives me choice. Even when we're a guest somewhere, that's our home for the night. I've often encouraged people to consider their car, office, home as a place to care for. When I see the city skyline at night and entire buildings are lit up, I think about how many computers, escalators and microwaves are plugged in. All that goes back to why we need oil and have environmental disasters. It was a real breath of fresh air to come here and know recycling is offered and that the elevators are energy-efficient and dual purpose.

## What is the message behind your latest single 'I Won't Give Up'?

After the success I had with my last album, I spent two or three months resting on my laurels. I thought "Alright, I've done a lot, maybe as much as I'll ever be able to". So I kind of gave up. I started looking for new career options. I was starting the Foundation and travelling around the world, and enjoying those great opportunities.

I thought maybe I'll direct some of my money or attention elsewhere. But it didn't satisfy me, and in fact it broke my heart. I thought I was going to quit my music and go down the path of a family. To be honest, I wasn't exactly sure. But eventually I decided I would give that all up and return to music.

'I Won't Give Up' was one of the first songs I wrote. I didn't sit down and consciously say that's the song that's going to bail me out and bring me around. But thankfully music is my practice, yoga, meditation and my religion essentially. I sat down and prayed through my guitar, and the words I cried out were "I won't give up".

This song is really about the bridge. I don't want to be someone who walks away. I'm here to stay and make the difference I can make. It was deciding I'm going to continue to fight for what I believe in and make use of my talent. Music has given me the power to be who I am. The Foundation doesn't exist if my music doesn't exist. I don't exist if my music doesn't exist.

This is a life-changing piece for me. I get reborn nightly.

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