

360

ALBUM BIO

UTOPIA

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360 is back from the brink. He hasn't exactly had 99 Problems but he's had his share. You might have read about some of them. You might have heard the 'rumours'. The thing is: now he has a new album *Utopia* – his third, the fabled 'difficult third album' of recording folklore, with a cast of stars on board – and in it he spells everything out. Letter by dastardly letter.



To recap. **360** is **Matt Colwell** of Melbourne. He is 27. This year he fulfilled a dream by supporting **Eminem** in a stadium tour. In 2011 he released his wondrous *Falling & Flying* album and it swiftly went double Platinum in this country; the following year it won two ARIA Awards including Breakthrough Artist – Release.

Sixty's whole world went ballistic at that point. He had been signed to an independent hiphop label – straight outta suburban Ringwood – at 16, taken under the not inconsiderable wings of local scene veterans **Brad Strut** and the **Lyrical Commission**. He made an album called *What You See Is What You Get* in 2008. But *Falling & Flying* was next level. The track *Boys Like You*, featuring **Gossling**, went to number eight on Triple J's Hottest 100, number three in the Australian singles charts with 4 x platinum sales.

Madness ensued. *"It went hysterical,"* he says. *"It got to the point of crazy shit. The hardest thing was getting mobbed."*

He did an instore at a major record store in Melbourne and a riot started because the place was full and fans were locked out. *"I went from someone who people would normally avoid to someone who made kids cry. They would literally cry and chase the car as if it was Madonna."*

He freaked out at the attention and the money and the hangers-on. Suddenly he had all these people who wanted a piece of him. A strange dilemma – the kid from the suburbs who discovers the redemptive power of hiphop at an early age and dreams of fame and fortune and then when he gets it, it hurts him. It pleased him greatly at first but then it pained him.

"When I was younger I looked up to party rock star dudes and I used to want to be a rock star in every form. Now that I have gone through that I know it's fun but it's also dark and lonely."

Before the **Eminem** shows January 2014, **Sixty** spoke publicly about how the shows would be his first sober. What had started for him as an alcohol problem ended as a serious drug problem and not just one drug but many. He's clean now and has turned into a gym junkie to keep his mind and body active. He brutally detoxed at the home of his manager. And while he doesn't want to glorify drug use he also doesn't want to hide from the truth.

"It was hard to shake drugs but I was heading downhill, I was so unhealthy and underweight. I went through times where I hated the fame and didn't leave the house and became a recluse. I want to stay clear-headed and focussed now. I don't want to be one of those dudes who preaches about the gym but it honestly has been the biggest thing to help me stay positive."

And so we have 'Utopia': The soundtrack to one of Australia's most popular young artists who found himself growing up in public and evolving with every turn of the page. It's a finely crafted, precise and passionate album from **360**, largely about the double edged sword of fame, the perils of flying too high, vulnerability and self-esteem and maturing in the limelight.

Featuring on it either front and centre or behind the scenes are **Styalz Fuego**, **Gossling**, **M-Phazes** and **S1** (who have worked with **Eminem**, **Sarah Jaffe** (who has sung with **Eminem**) and Los Angeles producers **Lifted X Ryan**; **Lifted** has produced tracks for **Kanye West**. **Daniel Johns** from **silverchair** is here, and **The Living End's Chris Cheney**. As is three time Grammy winner **Anthony Kilhoffer**, who mixed the album.

In terms of his voice – **Sixty** has matured too. *"I think this is way better than the last album. I wanted to come with a different flow. I didn't want the same timings. I studied old rappers and new rappers. I literally studied their timings."*

He mentions **Kendrick Lamar**, **Drake** and **Macklemore**.

"Lyrically I was fine, I always had lyrics, but my flows were samey. This time I wanted to switch it up and hone my skills. Look at Drake. His timing and his flows are so unique. But he is also very pop. If you understand the art of rap then you know Drake can rap with the best of them."

Sixty loves hip-hop. It is his lifeblood. But he also loves the wider world of music, particularly pop and dance music. He loves **The Beatles** for example, and **Macklemore**. The strong EDM and pop influences in his work have seen him accused of being all sorts of things.

"I worked hard for this," he says. "I was 14 and I was so obsessed with rapping I used to plug the headphones into the back of the computer and use the headphones as a microphone. When I was young being a rapper was not cool at all, I used to wear the baggiest clothes and hoodies to high school and dress like a gangsta and I used to cop so much for it. Now rap is a cool thing and that is awesome."

"But," he says, "there's a stigma with dance music and pop. People think pop means it is shit but I love good pop, I love Michael Jackson. He was my biggest idol when I was young."

With maturity also comes a heightened social conscience. **Sixty** says he used to rap with a certain homophobic tone but he doesn't anymore because he knows better. He's also not shy of handling difficult subjects such as suicide and mental illness. He has been personally touched – through family and friends – by these things and is now able to further our understanding of them through music.

That's why *Utopia* is a bold step forward. It is the soundtrack to one of Australia's most popular young artists growing up, in public.

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