

BY AMY KAUFMAN

HALSEY BURGUND IS THE HOTTEST MAN ALIVE.

No, seriously, he is. Just listen to “The Truth Is Out,” the fifth track off of the musician’s latest innovative CD, *Words and Voices*, where the testimonial about his looks is looped over a funky, and oddly addictive beat.

With long, unkempt hair which frames his sound bone structure, it is true that Burgund certainly is good looking. Yet it’s not his charming smile which has attracted a slew of budding interest from the local music community recently, but rather his innovative genre of music. Halsey is the creator of a new style of music which integrates the spoken word with instrumental accompaniment. His music explores the intonation of varying voices, with accompaniment from simple musical tones, such as drums, playing backup.

The idea struck almost 2 years ago when Burgund’s parents were visiting.

“I had an idea to record them each reciting the same poem that I had written,” he begins, “just for fun. As I listened to the recordings, all of a sudden I was completely amazed...how could two people, whose voices I was most familiar with in the world, interpret and read the same words in such unique and different ways?”

The idea incited what Burgund now refers to in the liner notes of his latest release as his “obsession;” a fixation with the human voice.

Halsey, a 31-year-old resident of Bedford, Massachusetts, has always been a little bit off the beaten path. On a hazy July day in his home, he is barefoot, dressed in a Vermont music festival tee and cargo shorts which seem to have been stitched by an eco-friendly corporation. A graduate of Yale University with a degree in Geo-Physics, Burgund only a month ago quit his financially secure job with a corporate hi-tech firm to focus solely on his music career.

“I’ve definitely been happier since I left,” he admits, “financial security isn’t worth not being happy with what you’re doing.” As he speaks, Burgund’s CD rests upon an adjacent table – the craftsmanship of which, he says, is his own. He was once a furniture maker, Halsey tells, but quit because he didn’t want to make more than one of any piece.

After wood, Halsey drifted toward an old passion: music. Although he’d played in cover bands at Yale, Burgund’s interest in sound only truly emerged recently. Topics vary from file sharing, to George Bush, and even to the musician’s disdain for personality tests. On one track, he has co-workers recite the results of a test he was requested to take at his most recent job – “Halsey is a nice person,” they read, “um, he’s able to...reach and stimulate others? They make you sound like a lap dog!”

“We all have a voice,” he muses, stroking cat Ophelia and slowly coercing her off of his handmade table. “We can’t necessarily sing, right? But we all use our voices all day, every day to communicate with people, to get some kind of abstract or physical, concrete point across.” As he speaks, Burgund fumbles with various artifacts on his table: a guitar pick, an embroidered cup holder, the pages of his latest read, Kembrew McLeod’s *Freedom of Expression*.

“We talk about everything. We have philosophical discussions, or we say, you know, ‘give me a sandwich, please,’” he laughs. “It’s all the voice and it’s all language and it’s all around us all the time. I think the notion of taking these kinds of sounds that are around us and turning them into something that is musical is exciting. The voice is a very visceral connection, because we all have one.”

Halsey lives alone in a large, multi-room house surrounded by elm and pine, and an overgrown lawn. Although the home is clearly oversized for the musician, it somehow seems to fit him perfectly. His backyard is sheltered by conservation land and holds a

beaten hammock where he often finds inspiration. “I’m influenced as much by that bird that just squawked as I am by Nine Inch Nails,” he says, looking through a window.

“I write a lot of my music while I’m biking, actually,” Burgund divulges, pointing to a mountain bike which rests upon the grass. “Road biking is very methodical. You’re pushing your physical self to the limits and you get in this meditative situation where a melody repeats itself in your head.”

Inspiration also strikes in Halsey’s studio. Overcrowded with a full drum set, loads of computer software and variously sized microphones, Burgund says he often spends hours at his computer, figuring out how to combine the human voice with more traditional music. “I try not to be too loud on my drum set,” he chuckles, “after all, I don’t want to be on the Bedford Police Watch list!”

“My songs are about community,” he says. “I like to create a community of people within a song – there may be 20 people’s voices in a song, who have never even met each other. All of a sudden, they’re coming together in a certain way for a certain point.”

Aside from his individual solo CD, another Burgund passion is his other project, a concept which has deemed “Bring Your Own Voice.”

“This is it,” he proclaims proudly, gesturing to a plywood box reminiscent of a refrigerator. Emblazoned in black spray paint, BRING YOUR OWN VOICE is sprawled across the front door of the booth which Burgund crafted himself. He brings the box to events where he sets it up and invites strangers to share their voice inside, as he records and later uses the individual voices to create music. The BYOV booth is a seasoned traveler – in its short existence, its been placed at the center of Harvard Square, art galleries and museums in New York, and even at Burgund’s 10-year reunion at Yale.

“I give people a sheet with a list of questions which they read and answer. The questions are about everything – anything from ‘how do you feel about the weather today?’ to ‘do you like your job?’ I’ve found that people start to answer the questions in pretty interesting ways. You can really tell that they’re actually starting to think about things they’ve never thought about before.”

After their experience inside the BYOV box, Halsey invites participants to sign the plywood. The sides are strewn with a plethora of messages and signatures: “HALSEY ROCKS THE WORDS!” one reads. There’s something scribbled in Spanish. A drawing of

a tree. And then a picture in dark, purple sharpie in of...uh...is that a microphone, or something slightly less...musically related?

“Hey, who am I to censor anybody?” Burgund laughs.

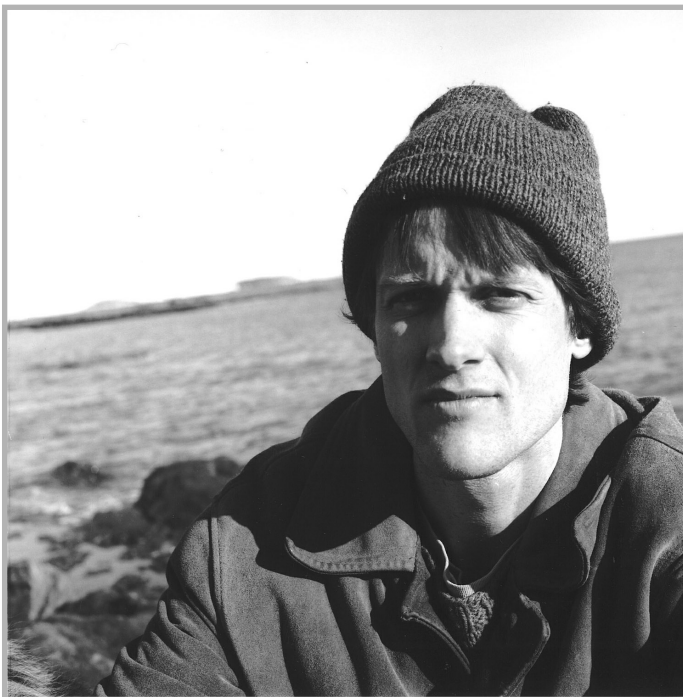
Halsey doesn’t have particularly big dreams. He never wants to fall out of love. Simply: he just wants to be able to continue learning about and sharing music with people across the globe. (His website, by the way, had the most downloads from Japan last month.)

In his dining room, a large, iridescent white board hangs upon a wall. Upon it, goals and messages are written in red marker. “MAKE MONEY.” It begins. Even larger: “SPREAD THE WORD.”

“It’s not going to be an easy road,” he sighs momentarily, before lightening up. “But I feel that if I didn’t give it a shot, I’d always wonder if I could have done it. If you really put everything into something and then you fail, it hurts deeply. But it’s a good hurt, because at least you gave it your all. That’s a very significant thing to be proud of.”

Halsey will be participating in the Harvard Square Oktoberfest with the Bring Your Own Voice booth on October 2nd. Learn more about the Festival at: <http://harvard-square.com/oktoberfest/index.htm>

Learn more about Halsey at www.aevidence.com OR www.bringyourownvoice.com



ROCKIN' THE WORDS:

THE SOUNDS OF MUSICIAN HALSEY BURGUND