

# M E L O D I C E X A M I N A T I O N O F C O L O R A T I O N

by GAVIN ATKIN

As a photographer, I love shooting musicians. Being a visual person, musicians are artists with whom I cannot directly relate. I met with my friend Michael Ude, a talented musician, an hour or so before he was scheduled to go into makeup with Aubri Atkin for our photo shoot. I interviewed the singer/songwriter about how he got his start in music, what music means to him, and how color and art influence his creativity.

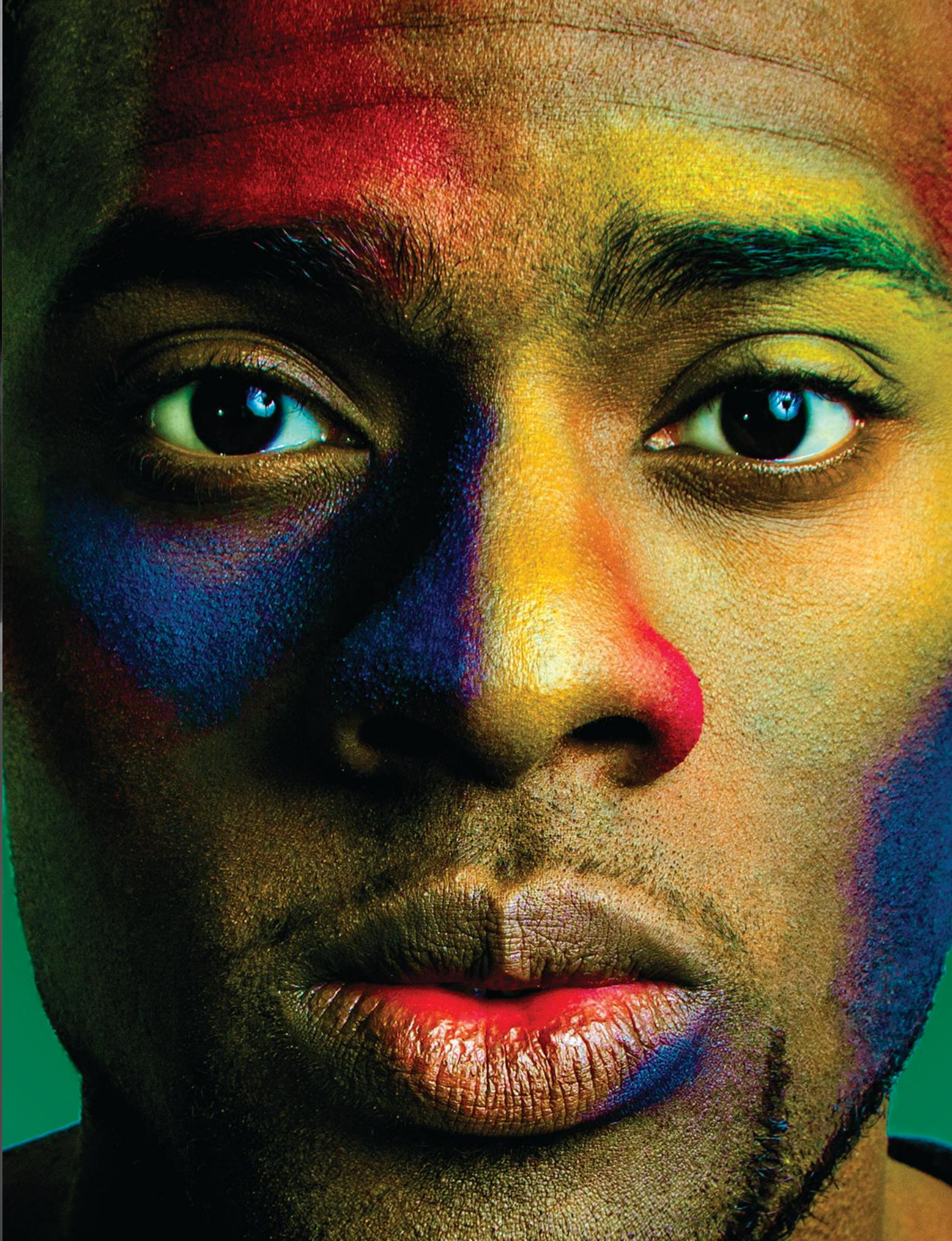
When asked about first memories of music, Michael replied, "I'll be honest with you; when I was six or seven, I was like a dead duck. I would try to sing, but it was the worst thing ever." He told me about his mom signing him up for choir at his school, and how he learned to open his throat while singing. He recalled his first experience falling in love with music when attending his aunt's Southern Baptist Church. There he witnessed the other attendees jumping up and down, the choir singing, and the joy in the air. "I don't know if you know much about Southern Baptist Churches, but" Michael paused, "they're vibrant."

"Lively!" I suggested, and Michael agreed. He remembered being particularly fond of the bass singers of the choir. "I saw these bass singers over to the left, and these guys were making the lowest sounds I've ever heard come from a human being before." He described most of his early singing as trying to mimic that sound. He was enthralled.

A main piece of Michael's connection with music is the guitar. He first started playing guitar six years ago at the age of eighteen when a close uncle of his passed away. "When he died, it was just such a heavy thing for me," Michael confided. His emotional struggle was clear as he told me, "I gotta get it out, or it just stays there." Michael's best friend had given him an acoustic guitar some time before the death of his uncle, and the friend had encouraged him to incorporate the instrument into his music. When his uncle passed, he said, he looked over at that guitar, and thought, "Man, if I could play this song the way that I'm feeling it in my head, I know I'll feel peace, I know I'll feel comfort." For Micheal, the first time

PHOTO: GAVIN ATKIN  
MODEL: MICHAEL UDE  
MAKEUP: AUBRI ATKIN











he played guitar was a spiritual experience. “I prayed to God to teach me how to play guitar, and then I played it like I had been playing it for years, and looking back, it was a basic song; entry level. But that was where it started for me, and it was a gift.”

The way Michael relates to music began to feel clearer to me – like a picture mid develop – and I was eager to know more. “At which moments do you connect to music?” I asked.

“Music bleeds through absolutely every aspect of my life.” He said deliberately. “If I’m upset with you, I’m going to write a song.” Michael described music as a way he can be more articulate, “I don’t always know the exact way that I feel, but the guitar will sing it for me. And then you will know exactly how I feel.” At least that is his goal. Michael went on to tell me the story of a time he wasn’t quite understood the way he intended. He had written a song when in the middle of a decaying romance; he was sad about the breakup, but knew it had to happen. Michael did not know yet that sometimes a person will hear a song without hearing the

**“ I DON’T  
ALWAYS KNOW  
THE EXACT  
WAY THAT I  
FEEL, BUT THE  
GUITAR WILL  
SING IT FOR  
ME. AND THEN  
YOU WILL  
KNOW EXACTLY  
HOW I FEEL.”**

lyrics, so when he sang the song to this girlfriend, he wasn’t prepared for her response. “I sing this song, and she’s crying through the whole thing. I’m thinking, ‘Oh man, she’s really feeling this.’” He finished the song and his anticipation built as he waited for her to respond. “That was the prettiest song I’ve ever heard!” She finally managed to say. Michael was completely baffled. “Okay... Did you hear though? Did you listen to what it said?” He wondered. We shared a laugh.

My own confusion and conflicting opinions on the subject of color prompted me to ask Michael, “What does color mean to you?”

Michael replied easily, “I relate a lot to colors.” He explained that he appreciates art in any form, whether it’s visual or auditory. He jokingly remarked, “I can’t draw a stick figure to save my life.” But regardless of his own two dimensional ability, visual art inspires Michael more than I had previously thought. “It does something to me,” he said thoughtfully. “Nine times out of ten I can go somewhere [and see] a picture, and I’ll go home and write a song about it.” Michael’s self-awareness about color is noteworthy. He said, “You could show me [a picture] without color and then show me the exact same picture with color, and I’m going to feel differently; I’m going to be inspired in a different way.”

I was pleasantly surprised by Michael’s relationship with color, but he had previously told me he had never had his makeup done before. “Uh-oh” I thought, as I tried to remember if I told him there would be a lot of makeup today. “We might be going outside of your comfort zone” I carefully informed him, but Michael laughed before assuring me, “The art is subject to the artist.” He paused, then added, “I could never tell a beautiful painter which brush to use; all I know is what I feel when I see it.” I was especially relieved when Michael said, “If I’m going to be the canvas, then I’m just excited to be a part of it.” Michael reminded me that he has seen my work before. “If you’re going to paint me up like a peacock,” he said, “it just better be good. People better feel something.”

Michael’s responses inspired me to ask one last impromptu question. “When you see this magazine come out, can I anticipate a song being written about it?” I asked.

“Yeah.” Micheal replied. “I don’t feel like that was a question, I feel like that was a threat.” We laughed yet again. **L**

