What’s in your bag, Matoma?

What’s in your bag? is a recurring feature where we ask people to tell us a bit more about their everyday gadgets by opening their bags and hearts to us. This week, we’re featuring tropical house and pop producer Matoma.

Norwegian artist Matoma, born Tom Lagergren, walks into *The Verge* offices with a bright, bouncy disposition that matches the music he crafts. Known for uplifting productions that blend together genres and dance across everything from hip-hop to funk to house, Lagergren’s not only seen commercial success with his original works, like recently released single “Sunday Morning,” but is often sought after to collaborate with heavy hitters such as Jennifer Lopez, Noah Cyrus, and Enrique Iglesias.

Growing up, Matoma had every intent of becoming a music teacher instead of a touring artist. He learned classical piano, moved to making music on his laptop, became a resident DJ at some venues in Norway, and then went to school to pursue a degree in music production. But once he started putting out remixes on SoundCloud, people flocked to his songs. Very quickly and unexpectedly, Lagergren had a fan base.

Now, Lagergren finds his days occupied by packed tour schedules and studio sessions with some of music’s biggest names. He’s currently in the middle of an international tour that wraps up at the end of March, and by now, the hectic tour schedule, which sometimes has him performing multiple shows a day, is second nature. We had Lagergren dump out his bag for us to get a peek at what’s necessary to maintain sanity when tour life is everyday life.

Have you been traveling a lot lately?

On this trip I'm away 12 days and I'm doing six shows, so it's not too much. When I did my tour last year I did 48 shows in 52 days. Some days we did two shows per day. Summer was also insane with festivals. I think we did 80 concerts over a few months.

Well, I'm glad we got you on a relaxing day. This must be like a spa for you! So the first thing I'm curious about is where the name Matoma came from?

The name Matoma actually came from my brother. My brother and I lived together when we were both in college. He was writing his masters in chemistry and I was getting my bachelor's degree in music production. We had this party after a Calvin Harris concert. All our friends came to the after party. We were drinking and having fun.

I had another name at the time and was starting to release remixes on SoundCloud. My brother came up to me and said, "Tom, your music is starting to sound really nice. But, I have to tell you this as your brother and out of love – your name is shit and you need to change it."

I got a little upset and it started an argument. One of my friends misunderstood the conversation and went between us like, "Guys, can't you take life easy like in *The Lion King*? Hakuna matata!" My brother gave me a hug but was a little drunk and said it wrong. He said "hakuna matoma." And I was like, oh snap, Matoma, that's sick. To make sure we wouldn't forget it we found a marker and wrote it on the living room table. The next day when we woke up hungover, we went downstairs and on the living room table it said Matoma. That table was a gift from my parents when we moved in. *[Laughs]*

I wanted to talk about the single you worked on with Enrique Iglesias. That was on your bucket list, right?

Oh, the process was amazing. We were working on this song for a year and a half. I was in the studio with him in December of

2016. We just had such an amazing and fun three days in the studio. Afterward, we didn't hear from him for a couple months. But then his camp and his team came back and they loved it. And his label, RCA, loved it. Then we tweaked the song to perfection. I was so lucky to have it as a single for myself, and to have him featured and collaborating on it. He wanted it for his album. For him it was a big decision and a big move to to give it to me as a single. He really trusted me in that process. And for that I'm grateful. He was such a kind person and included everybody in the room.

Let's start looking through this bag. It's amazing how nice and neat your cable organizer is. And here's a Sony camera.

Yeah I got it for a really cheap price from my photographer. He was buying a new camera, and I told him that I wanted to buy his old one. He's one of my best friends.

What do you like to shoot?

My girlfriend *[laughs]*, nature, the traveling process. I also have a drone. When I was in Ireland, I loved shooting the cliffs and fields.

What are these earbuds?

These are the Sony WF1000X. I use those to talk on the phone and to listen to music. For me, Sony are the best traveling headphones just because of the quality of the sound. I think they are way better than the Bose headphones and the noise cancelling is about the same. Maybe Bose is about five percent better with noise cancelling, but it's hard to hear the difference. But with the sound quality, the difference is easy to hear.

I use them when I work seriously. They also have Bluetooth so

you can talk on the phone with them. And, they are easier to use when you're walking around and don't want to have big headphones on. And then I have these other Sony headphones for when I produce.

How many different kinds of headphones do you think you've gone through?

Oh I think maybe 20 different ones. I'm very particular with sound.

Okay. So the earbuds you use when you're working and the over ear headphones are for when you're producing stuff. Is that just on the road or anywhere?

No, just for on the road. I have my studio headphones at home. They are a little more expensive and by a brand called Audeze. They're made of bamboo.

What phone do you have?

So this is the . I hate it. I've had an iPhone since the first one. They are just getting more and more terrible.

[embedded content]

When you're on the road and get inspired, how do you take down ideas?

I just keep it in my head. I've been very lucky, ever since I was a kid I've had photographic memory. So when I get melodies in my head they get stuck there.

I heard you collect sound bites though?

Yeah. When I was getting my bachelor's in music technology and production I always had a microphone with me. Everywhere I went, if I heard a sound that was interesting I'd record it. I also recorded my own drum, piano, saxophone, guitar, and percussion libraries. So I have, like, a library of almost two

terabytes of sounds I've recorded.

Are you playing all these instruments?

So when I was sampling instruments I was playing each and every note. I play the piano, so there I also recorded all scales and all sorts of different chords on a grand. All with different attacks and sustains. If I'm working on an airplane and I don't want to write out all these notes, I can just grab these chords. I also made my own plug-ins for each instrument.

I also have a lot of nature sounds. I have a library of rock sounds. Birds, claps, cars, ambient noise, so many different things.

Are these samples in the cloud or on a thumb drive?

I use a 5 terabyte LaCie drive.

Why did you record all this stuff?

Five or six years ago, it wasn't so easy to find samples online. So I did it all myself. But now there are sites, like Splice, where they have all the samples you would need and you can buy credits to download what you want. It's like Spotify, but for samples.

I studied classical music when I was a kid, until I was 16. I had a scholarship, but at a certain point it wasn't fun anymore to practice so much and to play other people's music. So I stopped. Then I started recording, producing, and composing my own music.

Okay and then we have…

Herman the travel companion. He's my little mascot. He's a monkey and he's always happy. So every time I'm sad when I

miss my girlfriend, I just take out Herman and I look at him and I start smiling and thinking about her.

Herman is the most well traveled little stuffed monkey that ever was.

Yeah, I think I've been in 80 countries with him.

And then I have my glasses. Usually I don't wear contact lenses. I wear glasses. But when I play shows and am on tour I wear contacts. Then I have another Tumi bag with cables. Eye shades for flying. Nose spray. Two pairs of sunglasses.

What are these cables for?

For my MIDI keyboard. The keyboard is too big, so that's in my suitcase. I also have a portable charger and a USB cable for my phone. I would have my laptop but I had to leave it at the hotel because I was uploading some stems. It's a MacBook Pro.

You also have a FitBit. What is your favorite thing about it?

I track steps, and it also gives me my messages. You can have a conversation with a person, get the message notification, and then look at the watch and read it fast. So I don't have to take out my phone. It also has cool functions, like it shows your heart rate, and it tells you if you've been sitting too much.

I have to say I love that you have an actual book.

Yeah I usually bring them every time I travel. I always try to read one book.

What is it about?

It's about a police officer that worked in the force for 30 years. He had a division where his team worked on fighting drug crime in Oslo. There was a big case on the news about him being corrupt. But basically it was set up by his own people

and they turned him in. All the cases he was working on were reclassified so he couldn’t talk about them in court. He got 21 years in jail and he’s in his 50s. He dedicated his whole life to the police force, and the case he got jailed for was a case he was working on, but he couldn’t talk about it, because it was one of the biggest drug cases in Norway.

[Looks at phone] Oh wow, we’re number two on iTunes in Finland. Already!

That’s amazing. Congratulations!

The reaction so far on “I Don’t Dance (Without You)” has been incredible. It’s just mind blowing. When I showed it to my mom she said, “This is by far your best song Tom, and not just because of Enrique.” *[laughs]*

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