

ESCAPE TO NATURE

The Man ‘Beyond the Veil’ of Seven Lions

EDM DJ Jeff Motalvo takes us to experience the grounding abilities of the woods and as he discusses his transformation into Seven Lions.

BY JENNEL ALIZA MANALO

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Seven Lions' Photoshoot for the formulation of his record label, Ophelia Records.

I've never walked through the woods without a tour guide before, but Jeff Motalvo strolls through Ring Hill Forest with the comfort akin to one. With a thermos mug graciously filled by Tazo's Organic Darjeeling (Motalvo tells me he drinks this religiously), we walk alongside his dog as he explains how these exact woods inspired his latest album, *Beyond the Veil*.

Beyond the Veil is Jeff Motalvo's debut album, his first full-length album after a decade of releasing music under his pseudonym, Seven Lions. This April, he will be touring in support of this album across the United States. *Beyond the Veil* comes as a celebration of those ten years of EP's, singles, and tours; the pandemic gave Motalvo the perfect space to create it. With no touring and an abundance of alone time, Motalvo basked in the opportunity to focus on a single project every single day.

Beyond the Veil is born from this focused solitude with most of his inspiration stemming from his daily movement through this forest. Each walk customarily consists of him, his dog, his Tazo, and his thoughts - I felt honored to join in on something so personal. Walking here, I feel immersed in a new dimension, a new space. This forest oozes relaxation and serenity, and I can easily see how this sense of peace drips out into the newest installation of the Seven Lions universe.



Seven Lions in Ring Hill Forest, Washington as a promotion shoot for the Beyond the Veil album.

I mention how calming walking through these woods is, and Motalvo laughs and says it's the very reason why he does it. I tell him that he seems to be the epitome of being 'collected', and he responds by explaining how it's a constant thing for him to keep working at.

"I remember just sitting in hotel rooms before the shows with such crippling anxiety, and I didn't even know what anxiety was at the time because I've never felt those feelings before," Motalvo explains. His burst to fame was rapid. After winning a competition held by Above & Beyond, one of the most influential EDM acts in the scene, everyone wanted to see him and everyone wanted to book him. This was quite a change of lifestyle for Motalvo, and the sudden need to refocus his life around creating and performing his music took a toll.

"Since my life is so chaotic, I'm one of those people that really rely on ritual and doing the same everyday if I can" he says. Existing in this space feels so effortless, it's easy to imagine how grounding being here habitually must be. I take a deep breath to enjoy the freshness of trees that soothe us. So attached to this land, Motalvo jokes that in five years, he would have a "long ass beard, living in the forest, eating meat just raw, brewing my own beer, eating mushrooms on the ground." It's an easy thing for me to picture.

Talking about his music career, Motalvo says, "To move from a reclusive computer guy to a public facing artist and trying to grapple with that was intense. I feel like I had to change a lot (as a person) just to keep up." Adapting to public performances was not the only change Motalvo had to do as Seven Lions, for he had to develop into Seven Lions as well.



Seven Lions during his set at Electric Daisy Carnival in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Many would say that Seven Lions is a stage name for Motalvo, but Motalvo says he sees Seven Lions more as a project. “Me as a person and Seven Lions in the beginning were not very linked, I’ve had to kind of become the character through the last 10 years which is very interesting. Being here and being in this space makes it very easy to keep that separated, but when it needs to come together it can,” he tells me. He notes that he is conscious of what he absorbs on social media, and especially stays away from anything EDM related. Keeping his world and the Seven Lions world distant helps remind Motalvo that he isn’t exactly Seven Lions - he *created* Seven Lions.

When he does work as Seven Lions, he goes all in. He is known to play with genres and what defines them, preferring to blend and merge and synthesize and fuse dubstep, house, trap, and whatever feels right to him for a certain piece. His song “Strangers,” featuring singer Tove Lo and EDM duo Myron and Shane 54 is a fresh, dreamy, lively, headbang-inducing fusion of trance, dubstep and house. I

struggle to clearly describe what kind of music Seven Lions creates, which goes to show how diverse of a creator he is.

His work is all-encompassing, rather than just music, and creates what many refer to as ‘The Seven Lions Universe.’ His universe is an immersive mythological universe focused on story-telling and the fan experience. Each music video, album cover, and lyric adheres to the same kind of mythos that started when he first released music under Seven Lions 10 years ago. His Chronicles tour stops are “mini-festivals” described as ““Lord of the Rings meets the Renaissance meets f*cking flash gordon” by Matt Rodriquez, Seven Lions’ Agent. Undoubtedly, Motalvo ensures that the music he makes is able to translate well in a big system for huge live events to enrich that fan-experience.

Motalvo stops walking to point at a tree his dog is especially fond of, and I take a second to notice the tattoos adorning both his arms. His arms depict mythical and mystical scenery, cohesive with the aesthetic of the Seven Lions Universe.



Seven Lions on a tour stop at The Aztec Theatre in San Antonio, Texas.

Speaking about the tree, Motalvo is suddenly reminded of axe-throwing. “Bus tours are like summer camp” Motalvo starts, then talks about how he took being in a new city everyday as the perfect opportunity to do something fun everyday. Each city was a new background to endless discoveries, and Motalvo aimed to at least make one of those discoveries each time. His activities ranged from ax-throwing, to go-kart racing, to skiing, to stopping at every tiki bar he and his team could find on the road, and I asked about how he balances that with such energetic performances that same night.

He looks almost perplexed as he says, “It's kind of a hard feeling to explain. Cause you're exhausted, you're tired, you're like, how am I gonna do this, but as soon as you get on the stage, it's like everything snaps into focus and everything becomes okay. It's everything built up - all the lack of sleep and annoyances - it just goes ‘poof.’ It's crazy.”

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