

Roy Woods is a shapeshifter. The Brampton, Ontario, native's music has never been just one thing, but as he's released more thrilling records, he's been able to fuse even more new sounds and styles to his lovelorn R&B. Since signing to Drake's OVO Sound in 2015, Woods has darted between brash rap tracks, ecstatic EDM, gleaming pop, and—in a nod to his Guyanese heritage and Toronto-area roots—low-key dancehall. "Toronto is so multicultural that it's a mind trip. My music is a representation of the city itself," Woods says. "I speak for not just one, but for all."

This penchant for bridge-building is the basis for Woods' new single "Touch You," a melodic charmer promising a summertime escape after a year of hunkering down. "*Fuck a COVID-19,*" he sings. "*Long as I get to see that body on the beach.*" The track teases Woods' latest left turn, a new era of R&B-driven songs that aim to deepen and expand the artist's introspective take on love. As the 25-year-old puts it, "I'm coming from a more mature and open place."

This fresh phase continues a period of growth that began with last May's *Dem Times*, a meditative EP about the unpredictable nature of life. But even as he's released more sensitive music, Woods has, of course, explored other sounds too, via his February guest feature on "Too Much" from Belgian DJs Dimitri Vegas & Like Mike, January 2020's rugged "Shot Again," and the 2019 club anthem "Bubbly," which has accumulated nearly 10 million streams.

In a way, Woods' more inward-looking music is an extension of the songs he's loved his whole life. He first discovered an urge to sing thanks to the towering classics he heard at home as a kid. In between middle school classes, Woods printed and studied lyrics from artists his mother played around the house, including Prince, Marvin Gaye, and Michael Jackson. The King of Pop's songs especially affected him, teaching Woods how to create whole worlds of euphoria and escapism. That passion for music only grew during Woods' teenage years. He played drums in his time at Turner Fenton High School and later learned music software like Pro Tools and Logic at St. Augustine Secondary School. He continued making music with friends, and that got noticed by the local Toronto scene, as well as OVO Sound's co-founder Oliver El-Khatib.

Since then, Woods has demonstrated his boundary-pushing take on R&B and his emotional, vivid songwriting with every release, beginning with his 2015 debut *Exis*, which peaked at #10 on *Billboard's* Top R&B Albums Chart. He's also extended his careful, focused approach to his Unlock The Underground collective, which consists of longtime friends and fellow creators like producer BATMANONTHEBEATZ, engineer RAYNY, and rapper Sha Hustle. "Since I was 16, my goal has always been to give back to Toronto as much as I can: Put on the kids, get them out of trouble, and build something for the city," Woods explains. "The way Toronto artists are able to show the world their talents is beautiful to see—and to be a part of as well."

Woods' own inventive, influential work has spread far beyond the borders of his city, of course—he now has over 1.8 billion streams across platforms and 1 million Instagram followers. This success is the result of being unafraid to push himself, a facet of his work that new music like "Touch You" continues. Every bar feels evocative and lucid, each new sound feels fresh and vibrant. His boundless experimentation is continued proof that for Woods, nothing is off limits.