

Raul Midón Embraces Jazz on 'Badass and Blind' Album, Premieres 'Gotta Gotta Give' Lyric Video

3/27/2017 by [Elias Leight](#)



Blair Allen

Raul Midón

In 1991, [Raul Midón](#), then a recent graduate of University of Miami's jazz program, was summoned to a vocal session in Miami. "I was called by people who I went to school with," he remembered. "There was a guy that they were working with who they didn't like, so I got asked to sub, and that was all it took. It was 1991, and it was for [Carlos Mata](#), a soap opera star of some sort."

Since then, Midón, a singer and prodigiously talented guitarist who also happens to be blind, has assembled one of the more remarkable resumes in popular music. You can hear his voice on records from modern pop superstars ([Shakira](#), [Enrique Iglesias](#), [Christina Aguilera](#)) and classic crooners ([Johnny Mathis](#)). He has laid down guide tracks for the opera singer Pavarotti and contributed to house music from the

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esteemed New York producer [Louie Vega](#). He's worked on the most commercial edge of the music industry, helping make Coca-Cola commercials, and created a series of idiosyncratic solo albums that draw from acoustic funk, soft jazz, yacht rock, '70s soul, and a long tradition of singer/songwriters unafraid to groove.

Last week Midón sat with a double espresso in the lobby of a hotel in midtown Manhattan and discussed his new album, *Badass and Blind*. He was dressed in light blue jeans mottled with white, a brown hooded sweater, a tan, fraying blazer with white pinstripes, and Aviator sunglasses. The fingernails on his right hand remained uncut; that's his picking hand. His mild voice was sometimes overwhelmed by the wild cackles of three young children playing in a nearby photo booth.



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Raul Midon Returns With 'Don't Hesitate'

After breaking into the music business in 1991, Midón spent roughly a decade doing session work -- including a stint touring as a backing vocalist for Shakira, his first ever road jaunt -- that helped him realize that he was interested in fronting his own project. He started playing songwriter showcases in Miami sponsored by Warner/Chappell and landed a solo record deal in 2002. With the signing came \$75,000, and that served to fund a move to New York City, where Midón worked with Vega, among others.

Brimming with adept coffeehouse soul, his 2005 debut *State of Mind* proved hospitable for guests as far apart as [Stevie Wonder](#) and [Jason Mraz](#). Midón has made gentle adjustments to this trajectory on subsequent albums, including more of a full rock band approach on 2010's *Synthesis* and a live record in 2012.

His latest album may be a larger detour: he describes *Badass and Blind* as "the deep jazz" entry in his catalog. Several songs feature musicians he played with on the 2016 Monterey Jazz Festival tour, including [Nicholas Payton](#) on trumpet and Gregory Hutchinson on drums, who help Midón explore linear modal composition, where instrumentalists improvise around a mode or scale instead of a set group of chords. "[Linear modal composition] has a different sonic quality and feeling to it," he explained. "There's quite a few jazz pieces with it, but not songs. That's what I wanted to do -- compose things using that language but have them be songs."

There's also a different streak of experimentalism in the album, one borrowed from electronic music, that pops up in "Gotta Gotta Give." "When I'm not doing music myself, I want to listen to the weirdest most far-out stuff I can," Midón said. "There's this channel on internet radio called SomaFM, and there's a particular station that has the least amount of listeners called Earwaves that plays [Steve Reich](#), Stockhausen, tape-loop stuff.

"'Gotta Gotta Give' has a little bit of that," he continued, referring to the zany electronic noises that zing through the back of the track. "It's got a bit of a quirky, avant garde thing to it." French composer Jean Phillippe Rykiel -- also blind --

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contributes a solo played on a keyboard breath controller. The lyric video for the song is premiering exclusively on *Billboard* above.

Midón balances the overtly musicianly quests on *Badass and Blind* with songs like "You & I," the sort of reassuring, creamy soul that comes to him so easily. "That one is all about what I think of as pop: writing a song with a hook, having it being accessible," Midón said. "There's nothing linear modal about 'You & I.'"

Then he backtracked: "Actually, that isn't totally true. Two chords are linear modal, now that I think about it."



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After Midón finished the album and came up with the title *Badass and Blind*, he realized he didn't have a title track. He decided to write one, and the result is an amusing run-down of his many talents delivered over a slick guitar groove. Two-thirds of the way through the song, he suddenly breaks into a rap. The influence of hip-hop is rarely felt in Midón's catalog, and that's the point. "Rap with fancy chords is not too common," he said. "It's part of the whole, 'I'm badass' thing. I'm gonna rap, play a guitar solo, sing -- do it all."