

VMAN

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<https://vman.com/article/rich-brian-new-ep-brightside/>



RICH BRIAN LOOKS ON THE “BRIGHTSIDE”

The artist sits down with VMAN to discuss his surprise EP, venture into acting and advice for young artists.

It's a lucky day for Rich Brian fans. Last night, the artist dropped a surprise project, complete with four heart-pounding, head-thumping tracks. Titled *Brightside*, Brian describes it as "an ambitious EP" because it wasn't engineered with choruses, hooks or other musical techniques that make songs infectiously catchy. Rather, Brian opted to work more informally, writing bars as if they were lines in his journal. This EP sees the artist lean into his emotions and, one could argue, offer up the most intimate version of himself we've seen so far. But don't worry – Brian's signature punchy rap verses are still very much present as well.

"I just wanted to talk on a song and treat it like a journal and mark how I was doing mentally at that specific point in time," Brian said recently, with characteristic chillness and charisma, ahead of the release of his new EP.

It all kicks off with "New Tooth," the first song Brian wrote as a sort of introduction to the EP. To date, the hard-hitting song has jacked up over 7.5 million streams across all platforms. But even before Brian completed the song, he thought "New Tooth" might be released as a surprise single. It was only after some time sitting with the song that he couldn't stop thinking about how it ended and how the next one might pick up. It was that initial curiosity that birthed the rest of the EP. Using the same circular ethos of listening to the end and creating the beginning, Brian produced the rest of the tracks in order ("Lagoon," "Getcho Mans" and "Sunny"). And the result is a uniquely innovative and beautiful experience one might only expect from a detail-oriented artist like Brian.

The release of "New Tooth" back in November also came with an accompanying music video, which is at once thrilling, heart-pounding, and at times, introspective. To our surprise "New Tooth" was directed, scripted, and edited by Brian. With guidance from 88rising's in-house creative director, Jason Año, the visual reimagines Brian as a S.W.A.T. officer turned business mogul. The inspiration for the video came from Brian's childhood in Indonesia and the nights spent watching police thrillers like *The Raid* and *The Departed*.

"Action movies used to be my biggest thing," Brian elaborated. "This was the first time in directing my own music videos, where I got the chance to do something as close to what I used to do when I was 11."

To complete this gripping, four-track EP, Brian tapped into the creative energies of his 88rising family. He shared that he was inspired by Warren Hue, who not only gave him the push to pursue more spontaneous bars but also gave him equipment recommendations to comfortably record at home. Brian even shares that the last song on the EP, "Sunny," was a product of this process.

"I feel like it fits with the song since it's such a personal one," Brian shared.



BRIGHTSIDE

**PARENTAL
ADVISORY
EXPLICIT CONTENT**

Brightside is a refreshing reminder that no matter the circumstances, there is always something positive you can take away. And while this may be a welcome note to many listeners, it's a message the artist tries to embody as well. The 22-year-old shared how some of his perspectives and priorities have evolved since his 2019 album, *The Sailor*.

"2019 was a really, really, exciting time for my career," he said. "And then when [The Sailor] came out, I remember wanting to be a lot more active in social media. Almost every day, I would wake up and I would think, 'What should I post it?' I feel like that burns you out really, really quickly."

Since then, he has been working on creating a healthier work-life balance and exploring other passions of his. This includes pursuing acting and even starring in the upcoming film, *Jamojaya*, directed by the critically-acclaimed Justin Chon (who you may know from *Blue Bayou* and *Ms. Purple*).

"If I want to make an album, I want to go full, 100 like that," Brian said. "And this EP is a product of me being free from that and the product of the past one or two years, just having fun making singles."

But that doesn't mean a new album isn't in the cards for the artist who's set to perform at Coachella later this year. "I do feel myself starting to get ready to get back into that mode of like, album mode, and getting in tune with creating a world again," he shared. And we can't wait to see what that entails. But for now, we can all revel in the artist's current creative process and the music produced. *Brightside* is out now.



Right before his EP dropped, VMAN sat down with Rich Brian. We talked about his recording process, what's changed since *The Sailor*, and acting for the first time. For more from Brian, read below.

VMAN: Congrats on the new EP! How does it feel to be able to finally release it into the world?

RB: One of my favorite things about this EP is that it happened pretty fast. The first song I made for it, which is actually song number one on the EP, "New Tooth." And I remember thinking like, I want to put this song out, but I don't want to just put the song about by itself. I want to do a three-song EP thing. Originally, it was going to be three songs, but it became four. But I made the second song by listening to "New Tooth" and how it ended and how the outro sounded. And then I was actually thinking if I were listening to someone else's album, how would I like the next song to come in. And that's how I got started for Lagoon, the second song. And then it kind of happened in order, which is rare for me because I usually make all the songs with a theme in mind for the album. And then the list comes after, but this happened, like 1234. But I'm really happy. It's exciting for me. I'm excited to see how people are gonna react because it's the first time after like, I've rapped like this. The past few years have been like, pretty experimental for me, finding my sound and exploring the melodies and all that kind of stuff. But this is like going back to the source. I will say like, it's an ambitious EP, just because a lot of the songs don't have any chorus or hooks or anything that's catchy. And I really wanted to drop it as a surprise, just because I've never really done that before. And I've always wanted to do that whenever I see other artists doing it.

VMAN: How did you produce this EP?

RB: Whenever I talk about this EP I always say it's kind of like me taking a mental note of how I'm doing right now mentally. Because, as everyone knows, the past two years have been like, pretty insane. And I've changed a lot as a person and as an artist then I've had a lot of changes in perspectives and priorities. So I think I kind of covered that in the songs. But part of why I wanted to keep this EP not crazy heavy-themed is just because I've been – when it comes to making an album, like a full-length album, I really want to make sure to do the whole treatment. Like what I did with *The Sailor*, we did a very long intensive process of being in the studio every day for multiple months and really sitting down and thinking about the creative and the meaning behind the album. And to me, it's like, if I want to make an album, I want to just go full 100 like that. And this EP is a product of me being free from that and the product of the past one or two years, just having fun making singles. But, I do feel myself starting to get ready to get back into that mode of like, album mode. And getting in tune with creating a world again, and getting back into that long intensive process. But this EP was me wanting to make something and just kind of having more freedom.

VMAN: What was the writing process like for this EP?

RB: Yeah, I would say whenever I make music, I try my hardest to not overthink about where the song is going to end up, and where it's going to come out. Because I think that gets me too much in my head. I start to overthink too much. So I usually try my best to see where the vibe just takes me. With songwriting, sometimes I could spend like, a day on a song and then sometimes I could spend like a week or two, just because I believe in ideas so much. And usually, when I work on a song for too long, it starts to get kind of stale, but then sometimes with songs like, "New Tooth" because that was the first song that I made on this EP, I was like, I haven't heard myself sound like that on a song for a while and it was really exciting for me. I spent like a week straight on just that one song, which is rare because I just wanted to be just such a perfectionist about it and make sure every word comes out right and all that stuff.



VMAN: Where did you record the songs for *Brightside*?

RB: Three of the songs I recorded it at the studio and the last one "Sunny" – I just did it after I got a new laptop. Warren from 88 has this setup where it's just like a MacBook, and this handheld mic and an audio interface. This is when he just got to LA and I saw his Instagram story and he was just in his hotel and he had that setup. And I'm like, 'That looks so nice. I don't want to have to go to the studio every time I do this.' I immediately asked him for the list of the things that he used in that picture and then I just got everything, the exact same. Since then I have been recording a lot at home. And the mic is definitely like a lower quality mic, but the convenience of it really helps with like how comfortable you sound on the record. It also makes me be able to explore, like how I sound and put random effects on my voice and stuff. Because when you're working in the studio with an engineer it's like you also don't want to sit all day and just like, tweak little things on your voice. So the last song, "Sunny," I did that at home, and I feel like it fits with the song since it's such a personal one.

VMAN: Who were some musical inspirations for this EP?

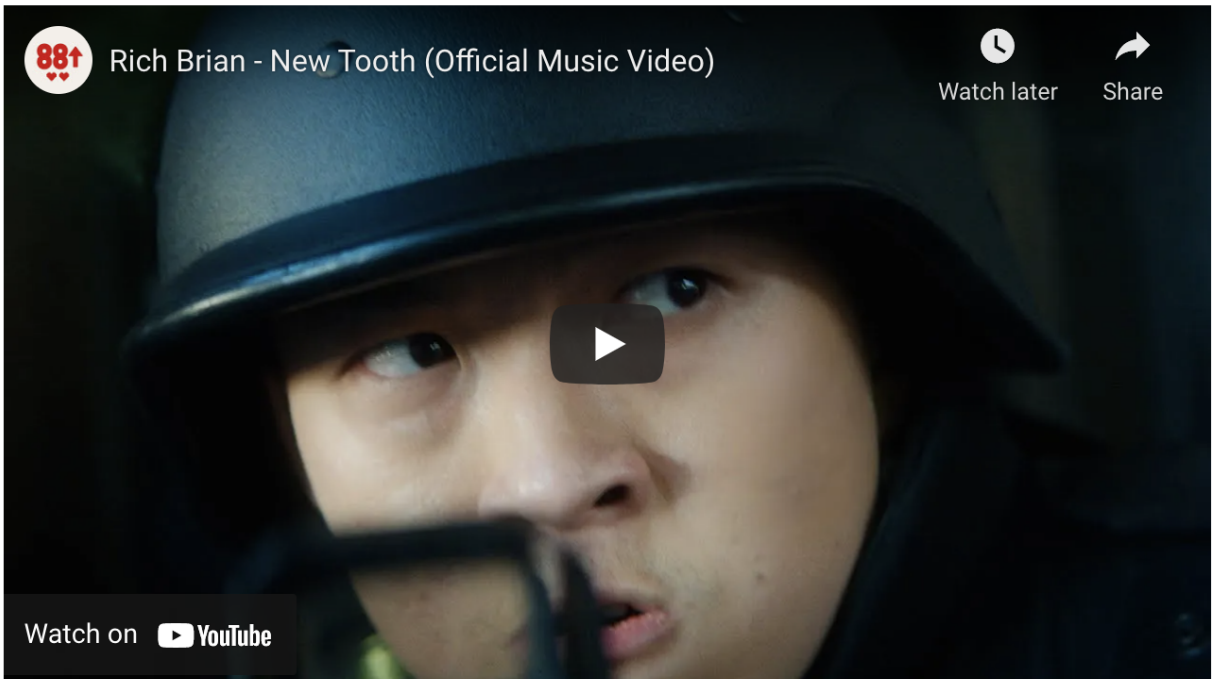
RB: I would say my biggest influence if I can name one has been Warren just because he freestyles really well and working with him has reminded me to not overthink too much. I'll be writing when I'm in the studio and then like, five minutes later, he has like this long paragraph already written down and I'm still stuck on the fourth line or something. Just because when I write, I want every bar to have some sort of deep meaning that'll make people stop and think. And that's cool, but Warren does this thing where he just says cool things on a song and it sounds cool as well. And that comes with him just being confident and not overthinking. That's been really, really inspiring to me.

VMAN: I also want to talk about "New Tooth" which was the first song to come out and the song you directed – When did you become interested in directing and acting?

RB: Before music, I used to make short films on my YouTube channel. I got into cinematography when I was 11, just watching a lot of YouTube videos and short films. From Freddie W or Corridor Digital, like a lot of people who do short videos with effects. And then once I started making music, it just suddenly became my job so it kind of took over everything else. But I still have that interest and passion with film. So every time I make a music video I try my best to be as involved as I can. And this music video for me was one of the ones where I got the chance to work with Jason. He's our in House Director in 88rising. And I've known him for as long as I've been signed to 88, but we've never worked together. So one day, we just got together and I told him, my general vision for "New Tooth," and then he was really excited.

VMAN: Where did the inspiration to be a SWAT officer acting revenge come from?

RB: The biggest inspiration that I took from was The Raid, which is an action movie from Indonesia. That was just like, a huge movie for me because I remember watching that when I was 11. And seeing the actors get cast for like, Fast and Furious, like a few years after, and seeing them in Hollywood being like, 'Oh my God. I've never seen any Indonesian person on the red carpet.' And I was super inspired. I wanted to visually pay homage to it. And I just felt like we needed character development or a story arc. So that's what we came up with. And I was also curious to see myself with a beard. I will say that another movie I was inspired by was The Departed. Action movies used to be my biggest thing and I think this was the first time in directing my own music videos, where I got the chance to do something as close to what I used to do when I was like, 11. Because back then my biggest thing was making short action skits.



VMAN: What are you trying to bring to the table with your music? What message do you hope to send?

RB: The message that I'm always hoping to send is making sure people know that it's possible to follow their dreams and it's possible if they have a passion just to go through with it. Because I remember when I was around 13 or 14, I wrote down a New Year's resolution that said that I'm going to go to the US when I'm 17. And when I wrote it, I just had this feeling that I really, really wanted to do it. But at the same time, I couldn't make sense of like how I would get here one day, but I wrote it down anyway. And I did end up going to the US when I was 17. I look back in my life and it's always pretty crazy to think about and I don't think I've ever fully processed the fact that I'm here doing what I do. So with my music what I always try to tell people is just go for it. But with music, it doesn't always have to be like so on the nose like I don't have to write a song where a whole 16 bars is talking about following your dreams or whatever. So I just try my hardest to just stay as myself as possible. With everything that I make I hope to always bring something new to the table and something fresh because that's what I always gravitate to with the things that I'm listening to.

VMAN: For aspiring musicians, especially of Southeast Asian and Asian descent, what advice would you give them?

RB: Along with the message of you can do anything, if you really want to. I think to be more narrow and specific with it. Now we live at a time where there's a lot more representation in the media with like, artists and movies, and all that kind of stuff. But just remember that you don't have to aim to be the next somebody. You can always create your own blueprint and be your own other thing. You can be the first someone to do something and I think that's really exciting. That's the mindset I had when I was like, 15, and 16 and I think that's really important.

VMAN: How has 88rising helped you develop your voice as an artist?

RB: Just the fact that I work with so many people on the team that have the same mission as me is feels really empowering. We're trying to do the same thing, which is to push the community forward and push the conversation forward. And working with Sean, he's not just a manager, he's not just a CEO. He gets really hands-on with everything and it's really great to have someone like that on my side. Because sometimes you need another person to remind you what to do because everyone has blind spots. And I think Sean is always there to remind me of my vision. It helps me be free with my art and be myself, I guess.

VMAN: How do you think you've evolved since your 2019 album *The Sailor*?