

# Living with bipolar disorder

**MATTHEW GOOD:** Album shows illness hasn't affected his creativity

BY TOM HARRISON  
STAFF REPORTER

When Matthew Good speaks at Bottom Line 2009: Workplace Mental Illness and the Family, Wednesday morning, it won't be as some pandering artist but as a person who has struggled with mental illness all his life.

"Basically, the focus of the conference is mental illness in the workplace," Good explains. "I wasn't diagnosed with this until I was 35. It's entirely relatable. Those core things you face are all the same."

Good has bipolar disorder type two, the symptoms of which are extreme, sudden mood swings from mania to depression, or manic depression. For the past three years, the musician has been treated through medication.

"When they asked me to speak about it, obviously it was something I felt compelled to do," Good continues.

**"I didn't go off the deep end, thank goodness. But I definitely noticed that something was wrong."**

— Matthew Good, on mental illness

"They" are the Canadian Mental Health Association. The CMHA presents its conference from 9am, Wednesday, at the Vancouver Convention And Exhibition Centre, where Good is one of two keynote speakers and is joined by five panelists.

Bipolar disorder can be a dubious blessing. Manic depressives are extraordinarily creative, driven as they are, and Good is nothing if not prolific. As well as recording four albums with his band and a steady succession of solo albums since 2002, he is a painter, blogger, political activist and an author. Conversely, depression is extremely difficult to be near, and to deal with.

"You can become very irritable," he notes. "I didn't go off the deep end, thank goodness. But I definitely noticed that something was wrong. Something was not correct."

To an outsider, Good probably was thought of as highly strung and his fits of impatience explained away as artistic temperament.

Good isn't ready to accept that rationale as an excuse.

"Bipolarity comes with a high suicide level," Good observes. "Artistic people are exorcizing demons."

"In my field, I can be written off as crazy."

Good's formidable workload and separation from his wife in 2006 overwhelmed him in 2007 when he suffered a nervous breakdown on a tour stop in Kingston. He was diagnosed as bipolar and subsequently was treated.

"I ended up accidentally overdosing on medication and going to the hospital," he explains. "It was a massive weight being lifted off my shoulders. It was one of the things that was very positive in my life."

Two months after his release, Good's recent experiences resulted in another solo album, the predictably personal but remarkably optimistic *Hospital Music*. As he notes, mental illness hasn't affected his will to create, and already Good is preparing to mix another album, *Vancouver*.

It has, however, sharpened his political vision. He now lives in the country but a year ago he was a resident of Vancouver's downtown eastside, the poorest community in Canada, but, Good notes, only a seven-minute drive from one of the richest.

"I'd walk out my door and see the hypocrisy," he says. "I realized that the only thing that separates me from the people I'd meet is that I can afford my medication."

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Matthew Good: 'Artistic people are exorcizing demons.'

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