



It's a familiar story: fledgling singer does soul-sucking day job in order to fund their real passion during the nocturnal hours. Except Mattiel Brown, Atlanta's rising star, is a rare exception to this time-honoured tradition: a fulfilled creative by day *and* night, albeit in different contexts. "It's like I have two full-time jobs: designer *and* musician," she says, humbly hip to her good fortune.

During office hours, Brown works as an ad designer and illustrator at MailChimp, a position she's enjoyed for four years. "I work with a great video production team, in a great studio. Luckily, they're a company that encourage side gigs." Out of office hours, Brown swaps the design studio for the stage, a softly-spoken, chilled-out design nerd turned rock & roll belter, performing bold, vintage soul as Mattiel (pronounced 'maa-TEEL').

Brown grew up on a five-acre farm in rural Brooks, Georgia, the only child of a Detroit native. "My mom bought the farm in the early '90s. She had – still has – horses, so I learned to ride western-style when I was 6, 7 years-old," (a skill Brown nods to in her cover art).

As an adolescent, Brown delighted in the '60s folk and pop of her mother's limited vinyl collection: Donovan, Peter Paul and Mary, and Joan Baez. As an adult, relocated in neighbouring Atlanta, she'd sing along to the radio on the long drives to work: Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Andre 3000, Dylan, Marc Bolan, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and Jack White.

When Brown first began jamming with InCrowd, the Atlanta-based song-writing and production team behind her dynamite eponymous debut, she had no real designs on making a whole album and no gameplan beyond the fun of "creating something out of nothing." She said, "That process is always pretty astounding to me, and doing it with other people is even better." But her producers, Randy Michael and Jonah Swilley, knew a good thing when they heard it: Brown and InCrowd had chemistry.

InCrowd's founders, both skilled multi-instrumentalists, met in 2014, as session musicians touring with soul man Curtis Harding. Michael – an experienced player who'd co-written with Harding and racked up impressive session spots with the likes of Bruno Mars, and The Next Day-era Bowie – played guitar, while Swilley (producer, writer and performer since age 9 and younger brother of Black Lips bassist Jared) played drums. On the road, they bonded over a mutual love of vintage R&R and '90s rap. "We discovered we both loved The Beatles as much as Jay-Z, Dylan as much as the Arctic Monkeys," remembers Swilley. Back in Atlanta, once the Harding tour had wrapped, the pair formed a band, Black Linen, writing reverb-washed guitar music inspired by Tarantino soundtracks, by way of '60s Cambodian psych.

Mattiel's sound might borrow from the past, but their art direction – Brown's inspiring handiwork, of course – is decidedly forward-thinking, all colour block aesthetics (à la the White Stripes) and artful, design-savvy music videos. "I don't wanna hit people over the head with like, bell bottoms and long hair and a Jimmy Hendrix outfit," Brown laughs. "People have seen all that before."

Mattiel is a "fresh mesh of retro and contemporary," says Swilley, the latter thanks in large part to Brown's vision, voice and on-stage energy. "She's very exciting to watch. She doesn't rehearse it or try to emulate anyone; she's just doing own her thing. And she's not fazed by the crowds [as evidenced during their shows to date: a recent, three-date support slot for Portugal The Man]. It's kind of incredible really, because in person she's pretty chilled and softly spoken, but when she gets on stage...in the last six months, she's really been killing it."

With a European festival circuit tour scheduled for this summer, Mattiel is no longer Atlanta's best kept secret. Look out, world.