A pep talk for doing it yourse



A pep talk from Ziemba's René Kladzyk for musicians planning to self release, and others who suffer from separation anxiety when releasing their creative work into the world

August 16, 2021 -

As told to René Kladzyk, 854 words.

Tags: Music, Inspiration, Independence.

(Note: You can listen to this pep talk being spoken by the author here.)

Releasing something on your own, doing it yourself as a musician, is hard in a lot of ways.

Some of the ways that it's hard are anticipated. We anticipate that it's going to be a lot of hours. We anticipate that we'll have to send out a bunch of emails, and we even anticipate that there will be rejection, and that not all parts of the process will go smoothly. The thing that many artists don't anticipate is the psychological experience of working on something for a really long time (and most of the time this something is very personal), reaching out to lots of people in the effort to share your precious thing with the world, and then once you actually share it with the world, watching, idly to some extent, what happens.

For many musicians this process is disappointing and painful.

I can't even tell you how many musicians I've talked to about the depression that sets in on a release day. I think that's natural—it makes sense that we would feel depressed when we unleash this baby we've been incubating for however long. It makes sense that we could get depressed when we have to let it go and relinquish control over it in order to give it autonomy—to let it stand up on its own legs in the world.

It's important that artists remind themselves what giving your creative output autonomy means.

It means that you will never know all the people your work will matter to. You'll never be able to measure it. You'll never be able to witness it. You'll maybe witness, if you're lucky, some traces of what it means to people. But in all likelihood, the vast majority of people who your work matters to won't ever reach out to you or show you what it means.

It also, once you put it out, will follow a path that you can't control.

Maybe music press will write about it, maybe they won't. Maybe press will write about it but nobody will listen anyways, or the timing will be bad in the digital news cycle, or the picture won't grab as many clicks or whatever. Maybe, for any number of reasons, it won't reach its broadest audience. Maybe after that happens, in 20 years, some person will rediscover this work of yours, and share it, and then it'll mean something to a whole swath of people. Maybe you'll be dead when that happens. You can't know.

It's not possible to trace the path of meaning that your work will follow. And that's part of what's exciting and amazing about it, even though that's also what makes it really hard to let go. We fool ourselves with this

illusion of control over our creative output. We have no control. I mean I could talk about our lack of control in the process of making it too, but that’s kind of beside the point for this pep talk.

The point, though, is that it’s okay to feel sad when you cast your baby off in a basket on a river out into the great wide world, where you can check on it but you can’t control its destination. It makes sense that it’s painful and hard. And it’s important for you to take care of you once you cast off the baby.

It’s also important to be measured about what you’re looking for. If you really want to spend a month emailing 30 strangers a day, trying to get them to write about, share, promote your work, then you should do that. If you decide that it’s not worth it to you, because it’s really draining psychologically to do that, to send out email after email, anticipating that you probably won’t get a response, or that even in the best case scenario, it could be shared or written about and then immediately forgotten—don’t do it!

The celebrity-oriented attention economy of social media tricks us into thinking that what we make only matters if a bazillion people listen to it or a bazillion people pay attention to it, and that’s not true. It just is not.

If I listen to a song, and it means something to me and moves me, that matters. If someone else has that sort of experience with my song, then it’s worth it to me to have written and shared it. 100,000 people don’t have to have that experience.

It’s ok for your work to not be for everyone. It’s great when you can find your people, and it’s very difficult to find your people. But also maybe the circle of who your people are is not actually the global domination circle. Maybe it’s just your community, and that’s okay, too.

Adjusting your expectations and thinking about what you really want, what would it take for you to be happy, for you to feel fulfilled and imbued with meaning from your work, that’s priority number one in terms of having an emotionally healthy approach to releasing music on your own.

Name
René Kladzyk

Vocation
Musician, writer

Adrian Kladzyk