

On seizing the creative moment



Comedian and artist Jasmine Rogers discusses always having a project, pivoting to something new, and following your joy.

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As told to Brandon Stosuy, 3004 words.

Tags: [Comedy](#), [Process](#), [Success](#), [Multi-tasking](#), [Inspiration](#).

There's a [video](#) you posted where you talk about the constant pressure for creative people to post what they make online, and we're not necessarily people who went to social media school, but here we are. What's it like navigating this? The pressure is real. And, there are so many comedians on Instagram: How do distinguish yourself?

I've had a [YouTube channel](#) for about 10 years where I don't have a ton of followers, and I don't want to have a ton of followers. I'm very honest. Usually I'm crying. I would so much rather have a really small community of people who are willing to listen to me than have a large community of people who just want to walk by.

So many times I'm on shows with comedians who have a big following and I see their set and it's not a cohesive set. It's a compilation of everything that they've posted online. If I was an audience member and I paid money to be there, I'm not seeing a private piece of work. I don't feel like I'm in on a secret.

For me, there's no joke on the internet right now on my Instagram that I also perform on stage. If you want to see that and you want to experience the wonder of that, come to a show, come experience live art. It's really disappointing to me to see so many comedians with a big following... They get this Disney FastPass into bigger shows, into opening for bigger comedians, and I'd say 75% of the time it's well deserved. It's well deserved, they've put in the work, they're great comedians, and other times they're just on the internet using trigger words, but they're not an experienced comedian with a well-crafted set.

When it comes to posting things online, if I can be as vulnerable and as genuine as possible, I am going to attract those people. I don't want to attract people who don't have those same values. If I want to attract people that are also going to be honest and vulnerable with me, it is my responsibility to be honest and vulnerable. I also feel like I am somebody who is very willing to share nitty-gritty stuff on the internet.

Recently I spoke to an old friend who said she's not interested in getting bigger; she's interested in refining what she does. She was calling it "horizontal growth." Staying where you are, but finding a way to flourish in that space. Or, there's this [TCI interview with Justin Vernon](#), where he says, basically, "The goal is not always constant maximization, you don't always need to scale up." Essentially, "Not everybody needs to be Walmart."

We live in a time where folks are also often told they need to focus on one endeavor if they plan to grow it. Always this need to grow... I think it's interesting that, as a comedian, you have an [Instagram](#) and [website](#) for your visual art, too. You're very upfront about doing a lot of different things.

I have a poster in my room that I've made that says, "Never niche down." The internet wants you to niche down, but your brain and your body and your soul don't want you to. Something that I've noticed, you watch these big comedians on Netflix, after a few specials, their whole set becomes about them being a comedian. They start

chasing their own tail. It's so important to me that, no matter how big I get with comedy, I'm always pursuing something else. That way I have something to talk about. I have other experiences to talk about.

How much time do you spend working on your comedy versus working on your art?

It's always shifting. I'm always trying to follow my joy. I'm never trying to push through creative burnout. This last week I've been preparing for an art festival and all my brain is focusing is on that, and so I haven't been going to open mics, but then there could be a week where I'm feeling a little burnt out on art, and so then I'll shift all my energy towards comedy. I am not a writer. I do not write any of my jokes. They are all figured out on stage via just talking, and I record them, and then I figure out what I liked, what the audience responded to, and I basically just, over time, memorize that.

I don't write jokes. The only thing that I write are my raps. Obviously, I sit down and I produce the music for that, and that's a whole thing. But all my jokes and all my stories and all my silly skits and stuff, I do all that on stage. Every time you see a joke from me—and my parents can attest to this—there's a couple bits that I do that I've been doing for a few years, and every single time I do it, it's different, because it's not written down.

In terms of managing my time, I try not to put boundaries on it. I try not to put like, okay, 9:00 to 5:00 I work on art, and then 5:00 to 10:00, I work on comedy, because creativity can't follow a time schedule. An insurance office can, an accountant can, but my brain is a lava lamp. I try to just follow where I'm at in the moment and trust that that's where the best work will come from.

The writer Eileen Myles said this thing once: basically, creativity can strike at any time, you just have to be receptive to it when it hits. You know, keep your antenna up.

You said you don't deal with the creative block. Essentially, you pivot. If you're blocked somewhere, you pivot to one of your other outlets.

I'm always pivoting and I'm always doing what sounds good and what sounds exciting in the moment, and trusting that, with the other thing that doesn't sound exciting, it'll come back. But if I'm not feeling interested in painting, then why would I force myself to paint? If I've got a really good idea for a dance routine, then I'm going to focus on that. That's where your best work is going to come from. Something I'm always reminding myself, I've been a creative person since I was born, and that is not going to change. The outlet will change. It would be weird if the outlet didn't change, at least for me.

Some people, they are born a natural, they draw and they draw forever, but clearly that is not what's happening in my life. I do a gajillion different things, and so I'm always telling myself to just love what you love right now and love it as hard as possible because there will come a day when you'll love something else more. Don't try to constrain your love for something right now. Right now, I'm really into comedy and I'm really into painting my furniture and painting big paintings, but two years ago, I was really into photography. As long as you're doing what you love at every second, the bricks will lay themselves on the path. If you try to force a path or, "No, I'm a comedian, I have to do comedy," then you're making a shitty path. Follow what sounds good right now. I'm very aware that comedy is a really good performing outlet for me right now, but the second it's not fun, I'll move on. I'm not tied to it.

What do you consider a successful set versus one where maybe you think, "Oh, that didn't work"? Or, maybe it just wasn't what you hoped it would be...

That's a great question. An unsuccessful set for me is a set where maybe mentally I'm not super present or the audience is really distracting. I have a really hard time with doing shows at venues where people are eating and everyone's having conversations and I want to try to figure out what people are saying. Any show where I've got to rely on jokes that I've been doing for years and I've got to just let a script come out of my mouth, those are the worst sets.

Sets where I can be super present on stage, and I'm riffing a lot, I feel really silly, I have a lot of energy, or a set where I don't get through all my material, that is the best set, because that means that I was crafting in the moment, and that's where I think I'm the funniest.

I'm not a huge fan of standup comedy. It's rare for me to see a standup routine from somebody and I'm pissing my pants laughing, because it feels like comedians are trying to trick you. They're like, "Ha. I set you up and now you're laughing." But something I'm always trying to remember is the funniest person you know is not a standup comedian. The funniest person you know is your cousin or your friend or your coworker that makes you crouch over laughing at work or at a dinner or whatever. I'm always trying to recreate that feeling. That's how I want people to laugh.

Usually, people come up to me after a show and they're like, "I was in tears laughing," and I'm like, "Perfect." But in order to do that, you have to be really present. You have to create a connection with the audience where they feel like they're friends with you, so they have permission to laugh at you [as though] you guys are friends and you're in it together, and not on stage like, "Hi, I'm a comedian. I'm better than you, and here's a setup for this punchline, and here's a really smart punchline." I don't like this dynamic where I am bigger or better. I am just a girl. We're there to laugh together, I'm just doing most of the talking.

You were saying before, you don't try to push through creative blocks... But have you ever reached a dry period where you just don't do comedy and you don't make art?

I definitely go through that. And those times can be hard because making things is so...that's who I am. I grew up with parents who were architects. My parents are very creative people. My sibling is a musician in New York. It was very confusing to me to go over to my friend's houses, and I'd be like, "What are you working on?" And they'd be like, "What do you mean? I'm watching Disney Channel." I'm like, "No, but what project are you working on?" It was weird for me that other people weren't always creating.

I always had a project going on. At one point, I was really into sewing backpacks. Another point, I was really into drawing ice cream cones, and I grew up a violinist. Now, when I'm at a point where there's careers involved, it can get a little tricky when I need to take a break. The last few weeks, I've been so committed to comedy stuff and some of this art stuff that when, at the end of the day, it's time for me to take a break, I'm like, well, "This is usually when I would go make something."

It's like, what do I do? I can't go for another walk. What do people do? And my boyfriend was like, "Well, people usually watch TV or go to a friend's house or something," and I'm like, "But I need to be making something."

I'm trying to figure out how to battle those spells. Even if I'm on the couch and depressed and I don't know what to do, naturally, 30 minutes later, I've got a crayon in my hands. It's just there's an innate need to create, whether it's as big as a film or it's little as writing "hello" a whole bunch of times on a piece of paper.

Do you have a goal of where you'd want to be with your creative work in a few years, or are you just taking it as it comes?

I am taking it as it comes. Sometimes I have to look at myself in the mirror and go, "Jasmine, you're 23 years old, chill. Chill." I don't think it's crazy for me to say that I know myself pretty well, there is so much for me to discover, and again, as long as I'm doing what I love, the right path will make itself. People always say to me, they're like, with comedy, "I'll see you on Netflix." I'm like, "Well, but if that's not what's meant to happen, then I don't want to do that." I'd be lying if I said that I didn't maybe a little bit want to be on SNL, I think I would crush it on SNL, but that's the only thing I maybe daydream about.

Other things with comedy, I'd love to have a bigger, more curated show that combines a bit more mediums to it. I'd love to tour around and do theater shows with more visual elements, maybe more projections. I'd love for it to be more of a proper theater show, and I do think that's possible. I think, if I put the pedal to the metal, I could do that in the next six months.

It really saddens me when I hear people be like, "I want to do this thing, but I got to wait until I have more money. I need better equipment. I need this. I need that." Bullshit. If you're excited about a big thing now, do it now. Do it scared. It will never be the right time, so why not now? It will never be the right time. Creative excitement has a time limit. And if you miss that window, it's over, babe. You've moved on to the next idea. Take advantage of your excitement for something right now and do it however you can, and that way you'll be way more ready for the next thing.

I sell a print that says that, "It will never be the right time, so why not now?" My passion for it is huge. Or when people say, "Oh, I want to tour for comedy, but I need a gajillion followers. Oh, I need a bigger following. I need a manager." No. I was like, "I'm going on tour in Phoenix and Austin and I'm going to message as many people as I can, and I'm going to show up professionally, and I can tell people I'm a professional comedian and I'm just going to do it now, because this is what I want to do now." Take yourself seriously.

There was this TCI interview with Henry Rollins. He basically said, "You don't want to be the person who's left thinking, 'I never got to hike that mountain I wanted to hike,' or, 'I never got to write the novel I wanted to write,' because it wasn't the right time. The fact is, it's never the right time." I've never regretted starting a project. Or, going for a run in the rain, or whatever. It might not be the perfect thing, but you got to just get off the couch and do it, or it'll pass by and then you'll have a life of things that passed by..

If you don't do those bigger projects, then you might not discover the next thing.

When I was a senior in college, I made a feature length film about my experience with loneliness after COVID. I shot the whole thing myself, and it's been recognized by the National Alliance on Mental Illness as a resource for teens dealing with depression. My professors were really hesitant about me making it. They were like, "Jasmine, this is a big project. You have nine weeks. Are you sure you can do this? Do you have the right equipment?" And I was like, "I don't have the right equipment, but I've got a fucking dream. And I know that, in a year, I might not really be into this and I'm going to regret not making this project."

That film needed to be made and I needed to make it.vIt wasn't like, "Oh, well, I can't make a film because I don't have a crew," or, "I don't have the right camera," or, "I don't have the right lens." You know what I mean? The art will speak for itself.

I produced all the music for it. I wrote the songs for it. I produced music for it. It's like, "But I don't have a recording studio," "I don't have this, I don't have that." Okay, but you have your brain and you have a dream, use what's around you. It's something that I'm deeply passionate about.

Because I made my film, I really fell in love with composition and photography. After I made that film, my graduation present to myself was I finally bought a better camera. Because I did that big project, I found something else. Because I made my YouTube channel when I was 10 years old, that's how I found I loved making thumbnails, and I was like, "I want to be a graphic designer." And because I did dance in high school, and I was dance captain in high school, that's where I determined that I was funny and that that's how I got the attention of people, and then I discovered comedy. It's like, that's how growth happens.

Jasmine Rogers recommends:

Going to the trampoline park alone!!!!

Keeping a pack of crayons in your purse

Dancing on your daily walk

Lizzy McAlpine's "Older"

Doc Pop Poppi prebiotic soda

Name

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Vocation

comedian and artist

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