On staying true to yourself

Musician Ana Tijoux discusses aligning your work with your beliefs, the therapeutic aspects of writing, and collaboration as a conversation.

November 21, 2024 -

As told to Miriam Garcia, 1270 words.

Tags: Music, Identity, Success, Day jobs, Politics, Collaboration.

Your parents were from Chile and lived in exile in France since the start of Pinochet's dictatorship in 1973. You were born there in 1977, and in the '90s, you moved back to Chile with your family. It must have been quite a big change. How did that experience of returning as a teenager and this cultural clash influence you creatively?

I think that changed everything because having been born in a place that was not mine, and then coming back to my roots, helped me understand what it meant to be Chilean, South American, and Latin American. This experience is common among children of migrants, and I think it's becoming the new narrative of our world. We are all sons and daughters of immigration. Immigration is something very natural, happening for different reasons. But that experience changed my life, my perspective, my vision of the world, and my sensitivity. Many things changed after that.

By the time you were 20 years old, you had become a well-known female rapper in the hip-hop group Makiza. And one of the biggest songs was "La Rosa de los Vientos," which talks about displacement and immigration. Can you elaborate on the moment that song came out and how you feel about it almost 30 years after its release?

It's interesting because it's a song that can speak to many people who were not born in the same place as their parents, and sometimes that gives you this broader perspective. However, it can also be very painful because you feel like you come from nowhere, and you find yourself in this awkward position where you feel like an immigrant both in the country where you were born and in the country where you should have been born. I think this topic still resonates with many people today.

I read that after you left the band Makiza, you took a break from making music to take other jobs, like working as a nanny and a secretary. What made you make that decision when you were having success and recognition with the band?

Because I was not ready. To be recognized is something very beautiful, but it is something very hard as well. It's a responsibility. Also, I was too young and too immature to be under that kind of exposure and I think is very violent sometimes. Only a few people talk about that because everybody wants to be in that place and I wasn't ready. I was not ready at all.

I was reading some media coverage of your music and I saw all these heavy words about your work like" iconic," "influential," "legendary," and "established." Maybe 20 years ago, when you were in the band Makiza, you were in the process of becoming that established artist, but now you are that artist. What do you think has been the most drastic change or anything that has happened to you creatively during the past few years?

I think the most radical change has been inside me. In my daily life, I try to be more grateful to myself, not so hard on myself, and to embrace each moment, it's an exercise I try to practice. Sometimes I remind myself that

things are what they are, without being good or bad, and I just need to continue being as honest as I can be in the music industry.

Some artists prefer to be in the recording studio and others feel more comfortable performing. Do you have any preference or what creative energy brings one that the other doesn't?

My favorite part is before recording when we are creating, I think it's a magical moment, it's very intimate. I think that's the time that I enjoy the most.

Last year you published a memoir called *Sacar la Voz*. How was the process of writing a book different from writing lyrics?

I enjoyed writing a book because there is no scene, no applause, no crowd. It's great to enter that place where you can write in that silence. I encourage people to do it, just writing in general. It's therapeutic. And you understand a lot of stuff [about yourself] doing that exercise, too

Following up on that. Were there any revelations that appeared while you were writing your book?

I think the biggest revelation is that a lot of the writing was about things that I could never make into a song. So it was liberating for me. I wrote and I cried, which was very therapeutic. I think we are afraid of being vulnerable and crying and I think it's a very healthy exercise.

Your previous albums had lyrics about resistance and social critique. But with your new album *Vida*, it sounds more like a celebration and appreciation. For example with the song "Millonaria." Was the process of writing this album different from your previous work?

Totally. I wrote this album because of life itself, because too many people close to me passed away, and I needed to celebrate life. And since we all will pass away eventually, I needed to express more appreciation and gratitude for being alive.

I also heard that for you, this album is about being more like a happy rebel. Can you elaborate on what you mean by that?

I read this quote that resonated a lot with me: "If there's no dance, it's not my revolution." And I really feel that way. I think many activists, whether they're working on climate issues, neighborhood concerns, better education, or healthcare—these people often carry great joy. What I'm trying to say is that these people are full of vitality. Yes, there might be that typical image struggling, but there's actually a lot of happiness there. Maybe "happiness" isn't the best word, but there's definitely a lot of vitality and life in the stance of struggle.

***Vida* is your first album in ten years. What made you decide to record another album after such a big break?**

It was just a feeling. I called a friend. I said, "Okay, let's do an album, period. Let's do it." Just like that. Woke up. So I could lie and say, "Today the sun was beautiful." No, I woke up and said, "Today. Okay, I do it."

What were the conditions that allowed you to be like, "Okay, I'm ready?" Did anything happen or changed?

No, it was internal. I don't know. I don't know what was this necessity, but it just is.

Did you experience any external pressure during those 10 years to release music to stay relevant?

Of course, there was pressure and I think sometimes that pressure comes from people that work with you because they want the best for you. But I was not ready.

You have collaborated with so many people over the years, from Julieta Venegas to Morcheeba and Jorge Drexler. What are you usually looking for in your collaborators, and what makes a good collaboration for you?

A good collaboration is a very beautiful conversation. So it's magic, it's a connection. And sometimes that happens with artists that are very different from me. I don't like to follow a pattern of what I should do.

Ana Tijoux Recommends:

Song: Jennarie - "Never Been Small"

Album: Saint Levant - *Deira*

Book: *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* (written by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele)

TV Series: Boots Riley - *I'm A Virgo*

Movie: Win Wenders - *Perfect Days*

Name
Ana Tijoux

Vocation
singer, rapper, and songwriter