On how work your evolves with you

Musician Billianne discusses the pressure of the process, leaning on collaborators for insight, and the importance of exploring love in different forms.

October 14, 2025 -

As told to Lauren Spear, 2334 words.

Tags: Music, Collaboration, Inspiration, Process, Beginnings.

I’m catching you on a special day—you just released “Memories,” the final single before your debut album. How does this release differ from other releases?

One thing that’s started to feel different as I release more songs is that I have to actively find that release-night excitement. When I first started, it was automatically there, just the fact that a song was coming out felt huge. It’s so easy to forget how cool it actually is, that this piece of music I’ve worked on for a year and a half is finally out in the world. That’s something I’ve been reflecting on.

“Memories” was one of the songs that took us the longest to figure out. There were a lot of phone calls specifically about the intro of the song, because it’s pretty barren. It’s just a banjo and this vocal loop of my producer Duncan’s voice, with no real low end going on until the acoustic comes in. Because of that, the song itself stands apart from much of the record. It even has this switch-up halfway through, which isn’t something we do on the other tracks.

I totally resonate with that feeling of being too close to the intricacies of the production. It’s easy to forget what the song was originally. Do you feel that?

Yeah, I remember driving and listening to the album for the first time and thinking, “Okay, this actually sounds good.” I don’t always get that feeling. Sometimes I just catch myself overanalyzing everything, and it’s only once the songs are out in the world that I can finally feel happy with them.

Do your songs evolve over time? For example, if you listen back to “Memories” a year from now, do you think you’ll hear it differently than you do today?

I think so, yeah. Even lyrically, I notice the songs change over time. I’ve never fallen in love or been in a relationship, so when I sing something like “Crush” or the song “Enough,” I think about that a lot. “Enough” is a love song, but when we wrote it, it was really about me wanting to look in the mirror and say, “That’s enough.” It was about learning to like myself, which is its own kind of love. I know that once I’m in a relationship, the meaning will shift. I’ll probably start hearing it as being about another person. That’s how I know the songs evolve with me.

One of my favourite songs on this album is “Jessie’s Comet.” When I learned it was about your sister, I wept. Can you talk about the importance of exploring love in its different forms?

Well, like I was saying, I’ve never really been in a romantic situation with anyone, so the love I write about is

just the love I know. It’s not super intentional, it’s just my life. I have so many people that I love, and their stories come into my songs. Like “Future Emma”—that was a story my friend was telling me about her family and the really tough things she was going through. And because I love her so much and want her to be happy, I’m sure that song came out of that love. Sometimes the stuff people I care about are going through is really heavy, and I don’t think I would’ve had another outlet to process it or explore it. Showing her that song felt like a way of saying, “I see you, I understand.”

And “Jessie’s Comet” came when my sister moved out. Suddenly, she wasn’t just down the hall anymore, and I was like, ‘Wait, where is she? Where’s my sister?’ That’s where that one came from.

To me, this album feels so much about hope, about looking ahead and projecting into the future. The title *Modes of Transportation* really turned me into a detective. This morning I was listening to the songs and trying to catch all the moments where a mode of transportation shows up—like the trains and buses and everything. I’d love to hear what that theme means for you.

The title really came to me when I started flying for the first time. Once I began working in music, I was suddenly getting to travel to these really cool places. So in one sense it’s super literal—taking planes for the first time, hopping on trains to downtown Toronto, arriving at Union Station for my first writing sessions, and just feeling that sense of wonder. But it’s also about movement in a bigger way, trying to get from one place to another, both literally and figuratively.

The first song that really sparked the theme of the album was “Modes I.” It opens with, “New modes of transportation, moments of realization.” Later it says, “everything is changing except for you,” which in a way sums up the whole record. For me, so much feels like it’s shifting. I’m going out and experiencing new things, hearing these stories from friends, my sister’s moving out, but the one thing that doesn’t feel like it’s changing is my parents. In my mind, they’re still in the same place: at home with the dog in the backyard, probably sitting on the leather couch watching TV. That’s really where that line came from.

That can be looked at as a negative and a positive. It’s like everything is changing except for you, and I love that you’re there, steady and the same. But at the same time, I’m away changing so much, and they’re not. So every time I come home, it almost feels like they’re meeting a new version of me. That’s the metaphorical part: how do I get from who I was before I left to who I am when I come back?

That’s a beautiful way to put it. I want to know, what was the last song you heard that made you want to write a song?

Ooh, I love this question. It’s happening a lot these past couple of days, so there’s definitely a few. One is a song called “Fingers and Clothes” by Jake Minch. Do you know that one?

I don’t!

It’s about how things stick to your fingers and clothes. The opening verse starts as if he’s talking about a cigarette, but then it expands into all these other things, how people and moments cling to you, and everyone can tell just by the way you move through the world. That song made me want to write, and also to experiment with open tunings. Jake does that all the time, and I’m always inspired by it.

Then there’s the pop side of my brain, which I get inspired by too. Right now, I’m loving Audrey Hobert. Her sound feels like early 2000s music and just makes me want to have fun with music. So those are the two sides I’m drawn to, the folk side and the pop side.

Your song “Crush” sounds like the sonic version of having butterflies. When you’re writing a love song, what are you drawing from?

What helps is having collaborators like Nick Ferraro and Duncan Hood, who are in their thirties and have more

life experience to draw from, which is really valuable. I think a lot of my inspiration comes from movies and TV, watching relationships unfold there. I tend to get obsessed with shows, and while I've never intentionally channeled that into a song, I want to start leaning into it more. I get so invested in the characters and love triangles that I want to actually write about them.

"Crush" was directly inspired by a crush I had. I've had plenty of crushes in my life and sometimes it even concerns me, the depth of what I feel. I think, "This is scary. If I were the other person, I'd be afraid."

You have two versions of "Crush," and I'm curious about how production shapes the emotional tone of a song. There's the pop version, and then a lower, more intimate, stripped-down one. Can you talk about how production influenced these versions, and what it's like working with Nick and Duncan?

When we were tracking the pop version demo, I was at the vocal mic trying to sing in this really staccato way, and I kept thinking, "I don't do this." I remember Nick and Duncan encouraging me the whole time. At one point, I was literally lying on the ground saying, "It sounds so bad. I can't do it. I can't get it the way I hear it in my head." But eventually, we got there. The pop version was definitely a process. I always try to have fun when I'm recording vocals because I think that energy shows up in the song.

The other version came from us experimenting with a live arrangement. I performed it at Osheaga using a lot of tracks, and afterward we were like, "I don't know." The first time performing a song is always full of notes and ideas, but something just wasn't clicking. So we came up with a "lounge version," which ended up feeling much more emotional. The pedal steel plays a bigger role on that one, and it's just groovier and more sensual.

It's foxy!

Yeah, that's a good word.

So you performing the lounge version live?

Yeah, that's what we've done in the past, but for this upcoming tour, we're planning to rearrange everything. Duncan is helping me with a lot of the arrangements, and our goal is to make everything sound as close to the record as possible for the audience. As a music fan, that's always what I hope artists I love will do, so that's exactly what I'm aiming for.

Do you have a preference between recording versus singing live?

They can both get stressful if I spend too much time on them. In the vocal booth, if I'm locked in too long, I start to go a little crazy and get down on myself about every take. By the time you hit take 100, it's like, "What are we even doing?"

Touring can feel the same. If I'm out there too long, I start getting hard on myself as it goes on. But I still find both really fun. Recording is especially exciting in the early stages, like when you're tracking a demo. That's my favorite part because you're still coming up with melodies and it feels freer.

How do you feel about the way music is released right now? And if you could do it completely differently, what would that look like?

I always think about major artists like Beyoncé or Taylor Swift and how they can just drop an album. To me, that shows what artists really want to do, and that would be my dream too, to just release the whole thing at once. Like, "Here's the album, this is what I worked on." That way I don't have to pick which song might get playlisted or played on the radio. People could just listen to it as a whole.

I always think about the online side of it, like what comes with releasing four singles before an album. It ends up being a lot of posting, a lot of trying to get people's attention, and this buildup of fear as the release

gets closer. You start thinking, “Oh my God, no one is watching this video, so they must hate it.” That kind of pressure just comes with the process. It would be great not to have to do that, but that’s the reality right now.

I feel like there used to be a time when artists could just make an album and release it, and that was enough. Now it feels like the industry expects you to handle every part of it. It’s kind of like asking a carpenter not only to build a house but also to design it and sell it. Artists are expected to do everything, and their face and image are tied so closely to the music. You have a huge following, with so many people watching your videos and loving what you do. How does that feel for you?

I feel pretty used to showing my face and posting a lot now. It feels second nature, just part of my life. But I do remember the growing pains early on, and I’m sure there will be more. When I first started, people seemed to form an idea of me as this quiet, subdued person with a guitar, almost a no-makeup kind of image. And when I started posting selfies or mirror photos, I’d get comments telling me not to change. That really bothered me, because of course I was going to change. When people first found me, I was 19, and then I was moving into my twenties.

Another thing that still bothers me is the whole view count thing, trying not to tie my self-worth to numbers on a screen. That ties into the process of releasing so many singles before an album and going through this intense social media promotion. I go through that rollercoaster every time—there are highs and lows. I get lovely, sweet comments, and then sometimes nothing at all.

Totally. You’re like, “Hello??”

Like, “Oh, anyone there?”

What do you think is the perfect setting for someone to listen to your album?

I definitely want someone to listen to it front to back, wherever they end up being. I love the visual of someone at night in their car, parked, no one bothering them, putting it on. Maybe they’re closing their eyes, or going for a drive, experiencing it for the first time.

Billianne recommends:

Making seasonal playlists every year

Baking banana bread at least once in your life (and realizing how easy it can be)

Going to the movies alone

The Great–a tv show I love with my whole heart

Candle warmer lamps

Name
Billianne

Vocation
musician