

# On building it yourself first



Musician Candi Jenkins discusses wearing every hat, maintaining healthy relationships with fans, and her belief in discipline.

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As told to Brandon Stosuy, 2860 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Promotion](#), [Independence](#), [Process](#), [Success](#), [Focus](#), [Adversity](#).

**You're a musician, writing and singing your songs. You have collaborators, but so much of it comes down to you. How do you keep going every day? How do you motivate yourself to keep working on the project? Because if you decide, "Hey, I don't feel like doing anything for a few days," there's no Candi Jenkins music being made.**

That's a good question. I'm a workaholic, so that helps. But I think there are days—especially when I'm not out playing shows—that I don't know why I'm doing this. Because you're just at your computer, or you're doing admin things, or you're doing things that don't feel like they're actually part of this creative itch that I have. It's like you sit there and go, "Why?" And then someone will reach out and say that my music has meant something to them, or they're inspired by what I'm doing, or they're really connecting with a certain song. And honestly, I need that. I need those words of affirmation from people. Otherwise, I feel like a crazy person—because you are if you're working for yourself.

**Yeah, as much as we're compelled to make art, it's hard to create in a vacuum. When you launched the Kickstarter campaign, what was it like seeing tangible proof that a community of people believe in your project? I mean, so many folks jumped in to back it.**

It's been amazing. Honestly, I was absolutely blown away because the Kickstarter got entirely funded for our goal in 28 hours. That was not something I expected. I expected to be working up until the last minute of this 30-day window. It's over 300 backers at this point.

I have felt this calling to make this music, and I've felt this pull and this purpose into making it. I think you have to be a little crazy and delusional to go after it the way I'm going after it. Literally a week before we launched this Kickstarter I had the thought, "Maybe I am just crazy. Maybe this is not my purpose. Maybe I shouldn't be doing this." Because it just felt like nothing was clicking. Getting all those people to say, "No, we want this music. No, we want you to keep going. No, we believe in you"—it was really what I needed in the moment to keep going. And now I'm very excited. And ever since then, I think energetically something has opened up with that, because opportunities are coming in—new shows, new gigs. There's just this brand new energy that has poured in since starting this.

**That's awesome. The internet can create a false barometer, where people will "like" a post, but if you ask that same person to come to a show or do something larger, it's hard to get them to do it. It's easy to simply "like" something. Leaving your house and going to a show is harder. And for people to actually contribute hard-earned money—that's a big deal, I think.**

Yes. It means so much more. It means more than the dollar amount. It means they took the time... They're getting something back that they want. It's not just donating money to a cause. Although some people did do that, a lot of people just want the thing in return—and that's exciting because that's fulfilling. It's not just charity.

**The music industry is very weird right now. To be an independent artist in 2026, you have to wear a lot of different hats, and even so, it might not work. For people who maybe don't know what it is to be an independent artist right now, what are the different hats you have to wear every day to keep your project going?**

It's insane because the bigger it gets, and the more momentum it gets, the more I'm not doing music a lot of times. All of these different platforms end up taking up a lot more time than ever before. So it's like, I have a show, and I have to update Bandsintown and Patreon and Instagram and TikTok and Facebook and Bandcamp. There's all these different ways to reach people... And that is why, at a certain level, you do have to have help, because burnout is inevitable. That is where I was at right before this Kickstarter, at this burnout level of constantly having to do stuff online.

And then I'm also communicating with my booking agents, and getting shows, and getting the ticket counts and being told, "Oh, there's not enough tickets being sold, so we have to do some more marketing in this area." I'm basically wearing every hat. You can't, in 2026, just be the creative artist—not at the beginning at least. You have to build it and then people will come and help you. But nobody's going to jump in at the beginning.

**Yeah, for sure.**

It doesn't have anything to do with music. It has to do with the success of the project, which is very frustrating, because you're like, "I think the music is great." I know lots of artists whose music I think is so great and they don't have any help.

**How do you set aside time to actually make the music? Do you have a process set up that's pretty regimented or do you write when an idea strikes? When inspiration does strike, how do you make sure you have the space to work on it?**

Sometimes you don't have the space to work on something when it does. The voice memos are helpful for that. You have your little ideas in there. When I was 17, I read this book called *Coaching the Artist Within* and it teaches you how to be a disciplined artist. I'm really grateful to have read that book because it did frame how I think about art. There's a lot of artists out there that are not making art, and there is a degree of discipline that has to be involved in it. Because you don't always feel like it.

I take that to an extreme, I think, but it did make me a good writer. Not all year long, but there are large chunks of the year where every day I wake up and I'll write until about noon, because I'm creative when I wake up. That's a good structure for me. And that's from that book. That was just the pattern I got into. It's a little different now. It's a little more lax. I'll schedule co-writes with people, or I'll write in the afternoon, or I'll have a list of half-written songs and I'm like, "Okay, this week, I'm going to finish these three." But I'm a disciplined person and I'm a list person, and I think you have to be if you're going to be an artist doing it in a bigger way. You have to have some self-discipline about it.

**I always thought of it in the sense of working out. The person who goes to the gym once a month, nothing's going to happen. But if you keep a steady thing going, slowly you see results. Being creative, you have to chisel away every day.**

Exactly. I love that analogy because I work out, so that makes total sense to me... There's times in the last month where I haven't written nearly as much as I can. But it's always there. I think of it like a faucet, and if you turn it off for a long time, the faucet is going to sputter and struggle to get water out when you turn it on the first time. But once it's flowing, it's just flowing. And at any time I feel like I can just turn that knob and get things going again.

**Do you find that you get ideas when you're exercising? Or is that a time to remove yourself from the process?**

That is not a creative time for me at all, but it is a time where... I'm always looking. It's a good time for me to listen to music. I was thinking today, I was listening to *Brent Cobb* while I was doing box jumps in the gym today,

and I was like, "I bet I'm the only person in here listening to Brent Cobb digging holes while I box jump." Working out is my time when I can be like, "Oh, I want to listen to that. I want to check this thing out and I'll have an hour to do so." So for me, that time is more of research time.

**I know some artists try to shut out other music when they're writing. Do you worry about that or do you just listen and understand it's a part of the mix of ideas in your brain?**

I think there's been phases in my life where I was more easily influenced in a way that would've been more like imitating or copying something in a way that would be inappropriate—when I was younger, maybe. But at this point, I don't think it affects me that way.

**It takes a while to find your voice, but once you find it... There's that quote that Miles Davis had, where it's like, "It takes a while to sound like yourself." Once you you, you've found your own unique voice.**

Exactly, exactly. No matter what you're singing, it's going to be you. It's true. I mean, there are so many upcoming Americana acts that are very talented, but every time I hear a lot of these people, I'm like, "Oh, you're literally just copying something else." A lot of these people who are getting plays and getting some success haven't found their voice yet.

**For you, what makes a song successful? When do you know when a song is done and feel like, "I've written this thing, it's done, it's good, and I was successful in this creative endeavor"?**

You just know. I'm sure you get that answer when you ask that question, because when I'm writing something, you just know when it's finished. I feel—and you probably feel this too, with writing—when you are tapped into a thing, it just comes through. And it's not really you sitting there and editing and whatever. There's a little bit of editing involved, but most of it is just stream of consciousness. Once that download is complete, you just know that the download is complete.

That's how it feels to me anyways. It's a very spiritual kind of experience, because sometimes it happens very quickly, and an hour later, you have this whole song, and you're like, "Where the fuck did that come from?" Then sometimes, you'll write something a year ago, come back to it, and enough life has happened to finish that story. To me, that's also spiritual. It's like, what is time? It just starts to make you think all these crazy thoughts.

**You answered one of my questions, in a way, when you mentioned coming back to an idea. Do you think it's okay to abandon ideas or do you just save them for later? If something isn't working, do you try to save it?**

There are so many ideas that I have, that oftentimes, if it doesn't happen pretty quickly, it's not going to happen. There are, though, the rare occasions where there's a song that I started whenever, and find it again in my voice memos and I'm like, "Oh, that was actually really good." Me and [Oliver Craven](#)—who's my boyfriend, but he also plays fiddle and guitar for me, and he's [Sierra Ferrell](#)'s fiddle and guitar player too—he's an incredible writer and we've been writing something together. We started a song and that exact same thing happened. We started it, forgot about it, didn't think it was very good in the moment. And then I was going back through my voice memos and it's probably a song that's going to make my record. That's why it's important to record everything.

**You're saying you can write a couple songs a day, so you can write a lot of songs. How do these songs become a record, or how do you know which ones make it on?**

I don't totally have the answer to that. I do have a producer that I'm working with—[Andrija at The Bomb Shelter](#)—who's going to, hopefully, help me with that process. I think I have songs that are similar to each other and cover similar ground. So for me, it's making a diverse yet cohesive body of work. I might have three songs that are all bops, but they're all train beats at around the same BPM, and you're just like, "I don't need three train beats on the same album," or, "I don't need three waltzes on the same record."

It's really a feel thing I think. I believe that rhythm is probably one of the most important parts of songs and is the first thing people gravitate toward. You've heard the album where it's all the same tempo and all the same chord progression and all the same beat... I think, for me, I write everything from a really grassy, bluegrassy kind of thing, to a very slow ballad that's acoustic. I think it's just a matter of harnessing the diversity of what I am and putting that all on an album.

**What's your philosophy around consuming criticism of your work? Is it best to just not read the comments?**

Golly, I know, right? I feel like I shouldn't read the comments and I shouldn't reply. I am not above feelings though, and I have them. What I remind myself is that people project and people comment things out of their own insecurities and their own life experiences. They might be very ignorant to what reality is or what your reality is. But no, I sometimes defend myself when I probably should just let it go.

**You recently made a [video](#) about metrics and Spotify listeners versus people actually buying the album on Bandcamp. I think there's a general idea that people think artists are making more money than they're making. Artists have been more transparent about that in recent years, though.**

I think it is important. It is sometimes difficult for your ego, I think, to be transparent with fans. And so there's a balance there, of sharing and remaining professional and building something and keeping excitement without oversharing. But sometimes it is important for people to be real. So when I posted about Bandcamp, I posted that 36 people buying this music made me more money than the hundreds of thousands of streams that I've gotten since I started releasing it. And that's true: 36 people literally made me more money—a lot more money—than those hundreds of thousands of streams. For me, that was empowering, because I don't need hundreds of thousands of fans. I need a hundred. A hundred good ones. I think people were just blown away by that. I had a lot of people reach out saying that they didn't realize that, and they actually downloaded Bandcamp and they bought the album.

I think 20 years ago, most artists didn't really understand how all of these things like marketing worked, and we have to learn it all... All of these platforms and all of this stuff is this tree, and each one branch has a limb and a leaf. You're just building this tree, and then you're the roots and you're the base, and you're hoping that this tree becomes big and beautiful. But it takes all of these things working together.

**When you're not creating work, how do you continue to nourish your creativity? When you step away from making things, how do you keep yourself inspired to return to the work?**

I think experiencing other people's creativity is a big part of that. Luckily, I live in a city full of amazing music and a lot of inspiring songwriters and artists, and that's very helpful. Additionally, just completely turning off all these things that we're talking about: being online and marketing, all that stuff. I have to just actively decide, "Okay, I'm not thinking about that, I'm going to go outside, I'm going to throw the ball for my dog." I have days where I'm just a human in the world, not trying to move the needle on my career. The art is important and so is having life. Life is what we're doing here. There is no art, there is no music, without having some degree of personal life—having love, having experiences, having trips and adventures and friendships. Those things are very crucial to the tree.

Candi Jenkins recommends five songs she listened to today:

["Going Gone" by Josiah and The Bonnevilles](#)

["Algorithm & Blues" by Andrew Duhon](#)

["Horse Runnin'" by Bee Taylor](#)

["First Time Feeling" by Leah Blevins](#)

["Diggin' Holes" by Brent Cobb](#)

[Name](#)

Candi Jenkins

Vocation

musician

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