

On having a point of view



Musician Choker discusses learning to give himself grace, gaining conviction in his creative decisions, and admitting when there's something you don't know.

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As told to Jessica Kasiama, 2030 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Mental health](#), [First attempts](#), [Independence](#), [Success](#).

Between your last full-length project, Honeybloom, from 2018, and this forthcoming album, Heaven Ain't Sold, how has your creative process evolved?

I've gotten a lot more forgiving of myself when I'm making things. When I was making *Honeybloom*, and a lot of my past projects in general, I was probably harder on myself. It was difficult for me to make something and get to a place where I felt like I had executed what I was trying to execute. To be very transparent, a lot of the music that I was releasing around that time was just sort of getting something to a place where it felt bearable. Like, "Okay, I could somewhat listen to this, so now I can put it out into the world." But I'd say with this project, it was probably the first time that I was able to just make stuff that I really wanted to listen to.

I think the biggest part of the process that changed over the years was me gaining more conviction in my decisions. I had lost that for a period of time, and belief in my expression in general. I think that's what made it hard to share music for a while, because I didn't have those internal connection points that made me say, "This is something that I need to share with people because it feels like an accurate representation of how I'm feeling." Once I was able to regain that, I feel like how I created things took on a whole new shape because I was [doing it] from a place of belief again.

What do you think helped you regain that conviction?

It was kind of just brute force, I'm not going to lie. In my personal life, I was really not addressing my depression in a healthy way... When I started to do some of the base-level things like, "Let me actually try to get better sleep, let me try to go outside more, let me get out of the studio more, let me try to open up with my friends more," and not have music be the only place where I have this line of communication that gets me to the emotional milestones that I need as a person—when I started to pour more effort into my life outside of being an artist—those personal advancements fed into my [creativity].

How does being independent affect or shape the pace at which you work at and release music?

If I wasn't an independent artist, I definitely would've had some sort of music out [sooner] because of contractual obligations. Being able to decide what my timeline was, because I am independent—that's something that I was super grateful for. I was able to take the time that I needed to get to this point where I felt comfortable sharing pieces of myself that are very near and dear to me.

I was listening to an interview with the rapper Saba earlier, where he talked about how important relationships are for independent artists. It made me think of you because you seem to have built a few long-term creative relationships over time—for example, with graphic designer and visual artist Tyler Smith, or your longtime manager, Euni Jung. What do you think helps those collaborations last in an industry that's always shifting?

To be honest, what's made those collaborations last is that those are my real life friends. I like working with people who I know and who know me. A lot of what I do is very vulnerable and I'm mining deep parts of myself that can be difficult to package, so when I'm working with friends, it makes [the process] a little less scary.

Was there a specific moment or even a feeling when you realized that *Heaven Ain't Sold* was ready to be shared?

I think it was probably August 2025, right before I got into the last mixing stage. I was listening and thinking to myself, "There's nothing left to be done here." There are no stones left to be unturned because I tried to unturn every stone [*laughs*]. That was a scary feeling because then I was like, "I'm actually out of this cycle of tinkering now." And that cycle was a safe place for me, because when you allow yourself to keep editing something, you can have this vision of it being better in your head. So when I was like, "Okay, this isn't going to get any better than it already is; wherever it is now, that's where it is and I have to accept that," it went from being scary to positive.

Do you feel like your definition of success has changed over time?

Definitely. And I think it's somewhat returned to what it was when I first started releasing music, which is cool. It was more of an internal self-validation thing, where success wasn't really driven by outside noise or traditional metrics like chart success or award nominations. When I initially was making music and putting it out, I didn't care about any of that stuff. I was just like, "Yo, do I like this? And am I able to support myself by doing this?" Yes? Then cool, I'm successful.

I'd say maybe around the latter end of 2019, going into 2020, I started to gain some traction, doing shows and experiencing validation for the first time. To be honest, it's hard not to get a little drunk off that. People are propping you up and giving you a feeling that's hard to create for yourself. But I don't want to have to go outside to get answers that I know that I can get from myself. That's kind of where I'm at with it now.

Your writing feels very observant. How do you stay attentive to your point of view as your life becomes more public?

The big thing to me is just really buying into my own perspective and the need for that perspective. And when I say this, I sometimes worry about it coming across as selfish, but it's not about the world—it's that I need it. Without my view of things, then I'm totally lost. If I don't know how I feel about something, it's just confusion.

It's not only just from a creative standpoint. Whenever I'm in conversation with anyone, or I'm trying to communicate something, it's very important to me to have an idea of what I think about something—what I'm aware of, what I'm not aware of. And to be forthcoming when I'm like, "I didn't know that." I think it's important to be forthcoming with that because that's the only way people can continue to shape their awareness of themselves... Anything that I've picked up, anything that is within my perspective, I've gotten it from somewhere else. Any time that you have something that feels like a true, honest part of yourself, I think it's cool to clock that. And if you want to share it, cool. Or if it's just an internal thing that you're able to have for yourself—like, "Okay, I know I feel that way about it"—I think it's important to stand on those parts of yourself that feel like the roots.

Let's rewind a bit. Growing up, you played basketball and soccer, right? As someone who came from an athletic background, do you see a connection between physical training—like breath, stamina, or discipline—and the way you approach your voice and music today?

So much of sports, to me, is repetition, repetition, repetition. Training and then executing in that clutch moment when it actually counts, when all that work comes down to one moment. The way that I make music is born of that mindset of repetition and training. When I'm trying to pin down a song idea, I'll usually make a bunch of versions of it. And all of those lead up to the point where it feels like, "Okay, that's where I executed it. That's where I actually did what I was trying to do." But I wouldn't have got there without [the earlier versions] that led up to that moment.

In sports, when you are in a certain zone and flow, I think a lot of that comes from the breath-having this steadying force and balance within your body. It feels pretty much one-to-one the same when I'm doing something with my voice and it feels like I'm really locked in... When people think about making music, they don't necessarily think about how physical an act it is.

We're in these bodies. Everything we do is physical. Everything we do is some form of reaction to the present moment. So yeah, even down to playing piano and having the finger dexterity to remember what's going on, all of these things are physical acts that are born from repetition.

Your song "Proof" draws heavily from the genre new jack swing. How do you feel like your instincts as a producer have evolved with age and experience?

Before, when I was trying to really go for something, my way of doing that was throwing paint at a canvas and then figuring out what shape it made. Now I'm a lot more targeted when I'm trying to do something. With "Proof", before I made it, I decided I wanted to make a new jack swing song. Then I was like, "Okay, how can I bring something new to it? How can I make it a little more jagged and fit it within the world I've been building?"

When I wasn't as confident, a lot of the decisions were about obscuring parts of myself-like, "Yo, let me smear that to the point where you can't even tell what it is anymore." It might've been a clean synth where you could make out every note, and I'd drown it in reverb and distortion. That's cool, and I'm sure there'll be a period in my life where I return to that because things move in cycles, but right now I want the core of things to come through clearly. That also plays into the writing. On a song like "Proof," I feel like the lyrics are a lot more direct than I probably would've been in the past. Less metaphor and more of me just being like, "This is how I feel about this. This is how I feel about this person in our interactions. This is what I'm seeking." Just being very upfront about what I want.

What's a lesson from your creative journey that you've carried over into other parts of your life?

Giving myself grace, for sure. It's hard to give yourself what you more naturally give other people. I'm often talking to friends about things they want to work on, and they'll say, "I didn't react how I wanted to," or, "I slipped back into this habit." And I'm quick to give them understanding. But when it's me, when I don't react the way I wanted to or I fall into something I've been trying to nip in the bud, it's hard for me to give myself the grace I give the homies.

Through this process, I've started giving myself space to not be 100% all the time. To not feel like I have everything pinned down. Life has ebbs and flows. Sometimes it's like, "Man, I'm killing this." Other times it's, "What the hell is going on?" This album made me feel better about existing in the gray area of, "I'm trying to figure this out, but I'm not sure if I'm there yet." And being okay with that. Not being so harsh on myself. I know what I'm aiming for and I'm diligent about it but I'm not beating myself up as much, which is good. It's really good.

Musician Choker recommends:

Watch the Detroit Pistons play basketball

"For Lovers Only" by Maxwell

Babylon (1980)

Do that thing you've been meaning to do but keep putting off

Watch the Detroit Pistons play basketball

Name

Choker

Vocation

musician

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