

# On letting your work belong to the world

Musician Cornelia Murr discusses struggling with confidence, managing the business side of a creative career, and learning to let go of fear

September 29, 2025 -

As told to Emma Bowers, 2847 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Beginnings](#), [Income](#), [Multi-tasking](#), [Business](#).

## **Tell me about your earliest creative memory?**

When I was really young, maybe two or three, I drew constantly in a quite imaginative, cool way that I can't tap into at all anymore. I would draw these worlds-creatures and angels and men and women having sex-all kinds of no barriers kids stuff. They're quite good, I feel proud of them when I look back at them. That's my first memory of just being completely consumed in the river of some creative pull without inhibition. I think maybe my whole life is trying to get back to that. Like a lot of artists I think.

I first got into writing my own little songs and thinking heavily about music probably around 11 or 12. Not in a serious way, but I did write down lyrics and I was really into pop music. My mother plays a lot of different instruments, and my brother does as well. They jammed a lot together, literally, and I always felt a little self-conscious around that because I felt like I couldn't jam. I'm getting more into it now, but I felt like I wasn't as free or just simply as fluid on any instrument. I still feel that way. There's a lot of music in my family, but it wasn't an automatic thing...like "oh, you're going to play music."

## **Was there a moment where you felt that switch?**

There were a few moments when I would feel it. For instance, I met a wonderful woman who became a mentor when I was a freshman in high school. She taught a songwriting workshop and we totally hit it off. She's really gifted at songwriting herself, but also at just bringing the song out of someone and just really giving someone a lot of positive reinforcement. She really believed in me, and that was a big boost. I spent a summer actually living with her and making a demo, recording with some other musicians when I was 14. Getting that validation made a big impact, otherwise I was very private about it. Over the years to come, I receded back into my shell and I definitely struggled with just confidence in myself. It's part of what we do in life, I accept that I'm not a singer that would ever be on American Idol, I don't have anything knock-your-socks-off about me. I just have my ways of doing things and that's all.

When I do have songs come to me, I think, all right...this is what I've got. It's still a process to just accept the tools and strengths that I have to offer.

It probably wasn't until I made my first record that it all started to click professionally. I didn't know that record would come out when I was making it, and then the fact that it did and people started to come around me wanting to work with me was a complete shock. But it made me feel like, okay, now I have a responsibility to nurture this because it's becoming a career. It's been a slow process of building it, but that was a huge turning point when suddenly I had other people around me who were like, "We believe in you enough to maybe want to make

money off of you." I was like, "What?"

**That's a huge shift, especially in a world where you're told that being a musician doesn't make money and that for the most part, you shouldn't take it seriously.**

I'm not saying I made bank or anything, but it was a shift because I think I was hiding a lot in my younger years. I worked as a nanny for many years, I worked in a dress shop. I was afraid to show myself to the world. I worked a lot of jobs just because I had to. I had no upward mobility, and often my work had nothing to do with my personality. So that first record was the first time where any income came from my own expression, and that was just shocking and a seismic shift in my relationship to work. The fact that my songs were becoming my work was so validating.

**I was introduced to your music around the time you released that record, Lake Tear In The Clouds, which has so much omnichord on it. Your newest record, Run to Center, really expands on that sound but moves away from it in some ways, too. How did the omnichord arrive in your music practice, and how would you say you cultivated your sound?**

The omnichord was such a revelation to me when I found it, and it was quite a number of years before I made *Lake Tear* that I got one. I remember seeing it online and I felt like it was the love of my life or something. I remember making a very, very early Instagram post in 2012 or so, captioned with something like "mail order bride."

I always played a little guitar and I played a little keys, but with the omnichord I was just drawn to it. It's made for really anyone to play, and there's just something about the visual. It looks a bit like a toy, and you can see all the chords at your disposal on one plane. Once you hit the button, everything you do with your right hand is safe. You're not going to hit a wrong note.

For writing it became such a helpful tool because I could see visual relationships between chords in a way that I couldn't on other instruments. You also might be more inclined to choose a different chord than you would on another instrument because it's easier to play, and because you're just looking at the chords as buttons and they're all there. You can just try things!

It's such a strange electronic but celestial sound. It's a little old-fashioned at this point, and it's limited in many ways, especially in a live capacity. I've had a few different ones at this point and they all have a little bit of a buzz to them.

It wasn't a conscious choice not to use an omnichord on my most recent record, I think I just haven't been using it as much. I do have one out right now because I'm in writing mode, and whenever I'm writing a song on another instrument, I'll test it out there too. It's still a part of my process, but not as much so as it used to be.

**Tell me a bit more about your process now?**

I don't have a clear cut way of doing it. Right now I'm trying to let things surprise me. And when they do, I'm trying not to play it over and over and over again, to the point where I'm too used to it before I've decided if I like it or not.

I often feel like I'm beating songs into being. I'm rough with them, and I often give up on them. 99 percent of what I write will never come out because I decided it's no good, but I'm trying to be a little looser with it right now. I'm interested in making various types of music, maybe even an electronic record at some point, or maybe a country-ish thing wants to happen.

On a technical level, switching between instruments has always been a helpful thing for me. I don't feel like I'm equipped to really give anyone tips on songwriting because it's such a mysterious art form, but switching to the omnichord is one thing that helps me wrap my head around a chord progression sometimes.

**I'm curious if there's a skill or experience, not directly related to music, that has informed your musicianship either in terms of the practical business side or the creative side?**

There's a side of me that is very organized that was very alive in me when I was a student. Not just in college, but before, I was always quite obsessive about doing well in school. I think some of the skills that I acquired back in the day being a student come in handy when it comes to keeping organized.

There's a lot of work that goes into making music that goes way beyond the creative side and at this stage, I feel like I need to stay on top of it in order for things to work. I have two managers and some people around me that help me with things, but sometimes that almost makes more work with all the communication needed.

There's just so many decisions to make. It's extra right now because I just put a record out and I'm about to go on tour. There's a lot to organize when it comes to figuring out a tour, finding players, scheduling people, figuring out budgets and merch designs and album artwork for the thing that's not even remotely close to coming out, but you got to plan for six months later.

It's also a lot of travel. I'm bouncing around all the time. I have traveled and moved a lot in my life, and so there's a part of me that's used to the jostle of travel and the change of scenery. And so I guess that comes in handy too.

**Thinking about the label, artist and management connections-it really requires such a varied skillset and collaboration to release music and keep a project afloat.**

There's a lot to do, and so much skill required to do it well. I think about analyzing a mix, the skills that it takes to even know what to change in a mix. There are so many things that actually demand a totally different skill set. There's video editing...I could go on and on, but all these things that are so disparate from each other.

I feel like the more that I am involved and know how to do the various things, the happier I am with how things turn out-and I'm empowered in the whole product. So I want to be involved in everything. But it can be so much at times.

I don't think that most people who aren't in the music industry get it. If only my parents could see the number of emails every day on these just minute things. I just don't think they have a clue. Which is totally fine. But I think it's funny, there's a little bit of a stigma-the idea of the slacker musician. Like, "Oh yeah, man, I'm just playing tunes."

**As if you just go into a studio, record a record, hand it off to the label and you're done.**

It couldn't be further from the truth I think. Especially in this day and age where making money can be so hard, it's such a climb to just start to make anything.

**Being an indie musician is being your own small business, and I think people are wildly unprepared for that when they sign their first deal.**

I was, definitely. I struggled with feeding it in the way it really needed to be fed, all the different aspects. But you're absolutely right, it's entrepreneurship. I don't know if it's worth including but after we get off the phone I'm having a Zoom with one of my managers to finally set up an LLC, which I've been meaning to do for a really long time. I'm really ready to get organized in that way.

**It's funny that you say, "I don't know if it's worth including," because I do think it's valuable! I think a lot of folks who are just starting out and who get a big opportunity can get burned with 1099s and independent contractor work. It can get really complicated really quickly.**

Especially when it's all 1099 stuff—it's easy for it to pile up, and then you don't save. That's what's happened to me over and over. It's complicated because it's such a strange job. Having to figure out your business expenses and stuff. You're traveling, it involves players, it involves venues. There's so many ways for you to lose track of stuff. It's not like, okay, I go into the office every day and I work 40 hours a week and that's that.

**Are there any artists whose career trajectory you admire?**

I am a big fan of Cate Le Bon. I think she's such an incredible musician and now she's a pretty high functioning producer. I've loved watching that take off for her. She's producing bands I wouldn't even expect her to like The National and St. Vincent and big acts. She's just got such an idiosyncratic, cool, creative way of doing her own thing, and clearly has the skills to be a producer and people just want that special Cate Le Bon thing.

There aren't a lot of female producers, and I like seeing someone who does their own thing and can do both. I think I would be interested in producing people down the line or just I would like to grow my skillset in that realm a bit more.

Another person who comes to mind is Caroline Polachek. She's had such an interesting career trajectory. I saw her around town way back in the day when she was still in Chairlift, and she was friends with people I knew, and she had her side project Ramona Lisa. She puts on such a great show and has such a cool visual world, and I think she even did an ambient record around the same time. Now she's this full-fledged pop star, and while I'm not necessarily going for that, I really respect the arc. She's really morphed a few times over. Being able to change and reconstruct your identities takes a lot of power.

**I read in another interview that you'd tell your younger self that "music is meant for other people to hear, so don't be a hoarder." Could you talk a little bit more about that, how you came to that realization, and how you worked through those blocks?**

I still hold onto things pretty tightly, I barely let anything out. I have to remind myself to just let the thing be free. Don't throw it out until you've seen it through.

I was very private and shy about my songs for a long time. To this day I think it all could have easily not happened—that a friend got me to play a song, or that I met Jim James. I don't even remember how I came around to playing him anything, but it really might not have happened because I wasn't comfortable sharing.

I just played a round of record release shows in New York and then LA, and they were honestly just such heartwarming experiences. The crowd was incredible every single night, and they were all sold out. There was a lot of excitement and sweetness in the room, and it's just so moving for me when someone lets me know that my music matters to them. And to think that I could have just never finished or released something. It makes me think, "damn, it's not for me."

I think in general, when you're making art, it comes from you, and because it couldn't come from anyone else and it feels so personal. But it's a helpful thing to remember that it's actually not for me in the end. It's for everybody else. Whether they like it or not, take it or leave it. And you've got to be humble about that. They might not like it. And then you just move on. But the fear of people not liking it can keep you from ever giving it. And that's just stingy.

**That vulnerability becomes generosity for the listener...**

You are putting yourself out there in a big way, and it can be terrifying. It is a little bit of a self-sacrifice too, saying "here I am." You can't be too attached to the outcome. I think there was a time when I was younger and I had it really backwards in my head that if I showed someone something, if I played a song to people and anybody didn't like it, that it was somehow robbing them of their time. Like, how dare I ask anyone to pay attention?

And now it's just if someone doesn't like it, their life just moves on, it doesn't matter. But if they do like it, in some cases, like the way music is for me, it becomes something valuable to them or something helpful to them in a rough time. It can be so supportive, music, emotionally and otherwise. If there's a chance you might be offering that, offer it up.

**Cornelia Murr recommends:**

Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*

Chimayo, NM and the spice, Chimayo

*Sister Smile* by Lightman & Lightman

*The White Lotus*

The Telepathy Tapes

Name

Cornelia Murr

Vocation

musician

□