

On finding inspiration in other people



Musician Georgia Ellery (Jockstrap) discusses feeling inspired by other artists' creativity, pushing oneself further in collaboration, and dreaming up perfect places to write.

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As told to Max Freedman, 2277 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Beginnings](#), [Collaboration](#), [Inspiration](#), [Process](#).

You're a member of both Jockstrap and Black Country, New Road, which musically seem like vastly different projects. To what extent does participating in both projects allow you to explore different sides of your creative interests, similar sides, or both?

Working with one person [in Jockstrap] is very different to working with six people [in Black Country, New Road]. You're flexing a different muscle, because you have to be a lot more open in a larger group. I like that difference. It's good for a musician to experience being able to put all your ideas, emotions, and things that inspire you into something and have that outlet. But also, working with people and dealing with other people's emotions, songs, and personal things or ideas that are different to yours is a really good skill to get going in a band setting.

What from that openness and collaboration with six people in Black Country, New Road do you bring to working with just Taylor Skye in Jockstrap?

The process is a bit different, because if we've got an idea in Black Country, New Road, we'll vote and see how many people like it. We can't do that in Jockstrap, because it's just two of us. If we both like someone's idea, great, we go with it. But if we don't like it, there's not much you can do about it except come up with new ideas. Something that [Taylor and I] do as part of our practice is searching for the thing that we both agree on or going further. We have to push ourselves further.

When you're working on an idea and you choose to not continue with it any further, how do you come to that choice? How do you become okay with deciding, "After all this work we've put into this idea, we're going to abandon it"?

That's just the way it goes, I think. There's always something else. There's another idea, or there's a development of that idea. Because there's infinite possibilities, you have to try and not be too precious, which is obviously very difficult. But we trust each other, so I trust that whatever we do is going to be as good, or better, or the right way, and maybe that's just the way the creative process works. You are always going to get there in the end.

You and Taylor met in music school. How did getting a formal artistic education shape your creativity and how you work with other people?

The main thing that came from going to music school was meeting all the people that also went. I don't think anything would've happened musically if I hadn't met those people and met Taylor. The real thing it offers is just getting you all together in close proximity.

There were other things too. I studied something I had really no idea about, so I felt like I got stuck into that. After two years, it didn't interest me anymore, but it had given me some good songwriting tools. The main thing is just being exposed to different people from all over the world, different parts of the country that I wouldn't have met otherwise.

If you hadn't met Taylor, if you hadn't met the Black Country, New Road folks, do you think you'd still be writing music and sharing it with the world?

It's hard to say, but I don't think so. I wasn't writing songs until I met Taylor. The whole experience of going to London and listening to people writing songs, but it's electronic music, and it's ticking all the right boxes, that was the first time I heard it, at Guildhall, and that's what inspired me to write songs. God knows what I'd be doing if I hadn't met them, honestly. I mean, I come from Cornwall, which is the southwest tip of the U.K. Nothing was going on there. It's kind of strange that I fell into songwriting in a way, because lots of people do it from a very young age.

Often, when I hear your voice, you're singing in your falsetto, which is interesting to hear from somebody who is, I guess, newer to songwriting. How did you wind up deciding that you'd spend a lot of time in your falsetto? It seems pretty technically demanding.

I haven't had any singing training, so I just sing how I can. I've just accepted that that's the voice I have, and it just so happens that it's quite high. I can't belt or anything like that. Maybe it was because of what I listened to, and I was sort of copying or something. But it is quite difficult to sing. I find singing live difficult.

To what extent are touring and live shows part of your routine? I'm curious because of everything you're talking about with it being tough to sing live, but also, I've mostly heard your music in the COVID era where touring has had its challenges.

Last year, Taylor and I toured quite a bit with Jockstrap, and we did a bunch of American tours. I really like it. I'm yet to see whether it plays into the songwriting process, because I haven't written since all the touring. But it definitely was a great way to develop how I performed on stage. When Taylor and I started, I was rooted behind a microphone and wasn't moving much. Now, that's totally changed, and I'm quite active on stage, and I can get involved with the audience. It took a lot of gigs to get there.

It sounds like a bit of a case of "practice makes perfect" for being on stage.

Yeah. And confidence. You just have to slowly build it up. After a little bit of experience, I was like, "Okay, maybe I can write some songs that are kind of quite showy," or not necessarily—I don't think anything's all that theatrical, but something like "Greatest Hits." There's not many lyrics. It's quite sparse, but there's a lot of space. It's not so intricate. It's performative.

Do you write on tour at all? And if not, what kind of spaces do you prefer to write in?

I don't write on tour. I feel like I'm in a tour haze when I'm on tour. There's not really much space for anything. I like to write when I have lots of time at home. I'd love to go away somewhere in the countryside and write. I've never done that before. Somewhere quiet where I don't have any commitments, and preferably my phone is not on.

How easy or difficult is it to make that time, find that space where you don't have any commitments and you can detach?

It's very difficult. I haven't found any of it yet.

What you're saying is that, even though you just described your ideal songwriting space, the spaces you've been writing in, to date, have been close to ideal but not quite right. Am I understanding that correctly?

Yeah.

That sounds like a challenge. How do you deal with it?

I don't really know. I haven't figured [it] out yet. I like being in two bands, but obviously, it's quite time-consuming.

Beyond music, you're also an actor. What from acting have you brought to music and vice versa?

I was in one film. I wouldn't call myself an actor. But if something came along and someone wanted me to act in it, I would love to say yes. I don't think it has informed the music. It's just so lovely to get involved in any sort of artistic project.

The film that I was in [Bait] was, for what it was, incredibly DIY, and it was all filmed on film, and Mark Jenkin, the director, processed the film himself, so it was all internal. He did everything himself. It was really nice to see a filmmaker do that, because in the projects I've been involved in musically, it's been a bit of that as well, where you produce it within.

For instance, Jockstrap, we write the songs, I write the strings, we get the strings together, Taylor mixes it, a masterer does it, but [nearly] everything is done internally, and we do all the visual stuff as well. So it's nice to see. I'm appreciative of that.

Were there other reasons you were drawn to acting in Bait?

I was asked to be in it. I didn't audition or anything like that. It seemed like a really fun project, and I have a love for the arts in general.

If you think it's going to be fun and you have a love for the arts, you might as well try something new, right?

Yeah.

To what extent has that interest in trying something new played out in your work with Jockstrap or Black Country, New Road?

Both of them were very new things for me. When I started with them, I didn't listen to any post-punk music. When Black Country, New Road first started out, that was more the vibe of the band. I was just hungry and wanting to get involved.

When I moved to London, my world opened up, and I was absorbing new references. Everything was new very quickly. I was very hungry for it. I tried to do as much as I could and learn and listen to as much new music as I could. What I'd listened to was very limited compared to these other people I was meeting. I was just taking all the experiences I could. And same with [Jockstrap]. I'd never met a producer before I went to Guildhall, and I never, ever thought I'd be working with one. And then to think I could make the music that I loved listening to was like, of course I'm going to do that.

The main thread I'm hearing from you over the course of this conversation is that one of your biggest reasons for getting as musically involved as you are is other people. Have your reasons for writing songs or being involved in music changed over time?

The reason for writing songs at the beginning—I found a way to write songs, and that was to write about things I was trying to deal with, or internal conflicts and stuff like that. [In your] early twenties, there's a lot of material for that, or there was for me. And then, as those years went on, there was a bit less of that, and I had to draw from other things. It was all relatively personal things anyway. I'm sure that will change. I won't be able to summon that for myself all the time. It's about learning how to write about other things as well.

I do really love playing with people, and that is one of the main reasons why I do music. There's songwriting, and then there's playing music. I grew up playing music. Music is such an important thing for me to do. The core reason why I write songs is just because I love music. It's probably healthy to write songs about things you're dealing with as well. It's an emotional outlet. And great if you can get playing with people as well who are also into that.

In both Jockstrap and Black Country, New Road, how exactly during the writing process do you know a song is done?

Because we're making music at a computer in Jockstrap, it's more difficult to know. But both of them, you're working up until the time you're in the studio or in mixing where it's going to be cut off. For Jockstrap, because Taylor mixes it, we've got creative control right until the last moment. Taylor's normally the person to say, "It's finished. Can we please stop?" Because I could just go and go and go.

It's kind of similar for Black Country, New Road. We will just go and go and go until we feel like it's as good as we can get it. No one has the mentality of, like, "It's just chill. It will be what it will be. It's a vibe." Everyone I've worked with is like, 110 percent trying every possible solution until it feels as good as you can get it.

Are there any creative habits or writing tics of your own that you lean into or have to work against in both bands?

I'm not sure if there's anything right now. But when I want to write a song, I will sit down and be like... I was reading an [interview \[with\] Johnny Marr on The Creative Independent](#). He said, I'm paraphrasing, but it was like: "It's not helpful to just sit down and say, 'I'm going to write Stairway to Heaven,' or, 'I'm going to write Bohemian Rhapsody,'" which is exactly what I try and do. I'm like, "Write. I'm going to write the fucking best song ever" and sit down, and that's where I set my bar for myself. I'm sure that's got to change someday, because some people say it's not very healthy. But for me, that's how I grind myself into gear, and I won't stop until I really think I've done something good.

Georgia Ellery recommends novels she recently read and loved:

[The Summer Book](#) by Tove Jansson

[Swing Time](#) by Zadie Smith

[My Year Of Rest and Relaxation](#) by Ottessa Moshfegh

[Perfume](#) by Patrick Suskind

[A Book of Common Prayer](#) by Joan Didion

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