



To help you grow your creative practice, our website is available as an email.

Subscribe

August 15, 2024 -

As told to Hannah Harlacher, 2702 words.

Tags: Music, Time management, Inspiration, Process, Day jobs, Collaboration.

# On learning to trust your instincts

**Musician Georgia Harmer discusses the power of intuition, utilizing your community, and the reality of creating music as a business. What's one thing you look forward to, both on tour and when you're returning home from tour?**

I'm working on finishing my second album right now, so it's nice to be home and to get time to work on it. It's been a slow process because it's been amidst touring. That said, being a self-employed creative person, whose job is my art, when I'm at home, I can definitely struggle with self-direction, self-scheduling, and motivation—especially when I'm working on an album, which is just up to me. It only happens if I make it happen.

I find sometimes that toggling between states of being on the road, being very outward and outputting, and coming home and doing a totally different kind of output, can require some transition time.

When I'm on tour, I have a whole set of to-do lists every day that I have to get through. I have such a structure I make for myself as well as one that's handed to me [by a tour manager], so it's definitely a different kind of work. It feels almost less like I have to call the shots and more like I'm just doing a job. It's really relaxing in a way, a bit of a vacation.

**You're thinking about the album while you're on tour, at least for this latest tour?**

I try to put it away because there's nothing I can do when I'm on tour. Since I'm finishing the recording phase, I can't really even listen to the songs. I try to put it out of sight out of mind. I know there are people who can finish an album in a few weeks, but I need a lot of time with the songs and then away from the songs, and then with the songs again, to build a timeless relationship with them. I need to make sure that I'm going to like them for a long time.

**What is an ideal no plans day for you to recharge?**

I was reading some of the other Creative Independent interviews, the one with Anna Fusco who I'm such a huge fan of. She talks a lot about having time where there's no output and how art should be slow. I find that so validating, especially right now, because it has taken me so long to finish this album, and I feel such a pressure that I put on myself, too, as soon as I get home from tour, to be productive, whatever that means. If I'm recording, then I'm not writing, so I have to make sure I have time to write as well. But also just remembering that all of that is output.

A recharge day for me probably means just hanging out with some friends. I'm a very social person, so I make a lot of plans and sometimes that can also be draining, but probably just spending time in nature with my friends.

**What was it like growing up with and being surrounded by musicians?**

I feel lucky because I know a lot of people who want to do music for their life career don't have an example. For me, having so many examples, and being born into a musical community, the path was already something I could see. It wasn't something I had to carve out for myself or someone had to point out as an option.

Still, I think, societally we're not necessarily all encouraged to be artists because people don't make it seem like a viable option. But I had a lot helping me to see it as a viable option when I did decide

that's what I wanted to do. Having a creative family just means it's something they support, and also know what to warn you about. They're familiar with the challenges.

**Do you feel you had much choice in the journey that you've taken? Was there anything else that was pulling you, or music was always what you wanted to do?**

It was what I always wanted to do, but I had a roundabout way of getting to it. I almost ignored the instinct for a while because it felt too obvious, and too difficult honestly. I was definitely warned about the challenges and I feel like we're all kind of told that it doesn't usually work.

I went to university for a semester because I wanted to prove that I was smart enough to get in. I hated it so much. I just wanted to be writing songs. I dropped out after one semester. Then I got a job as a backup singer for a year... I think my background in singing and music just led me in these other directions, and showed me what other options there were. And I honestly hated that, too.

I think that at that point, after trying things that felt so wrong, it was like nothing was pulling me more than songwriting and making my own music.

**Can you remember if there was a defining moment where you were like, okay, I'm going to do this seriously?**

Well, it was my community. I was playing shows around Toronto, around my city, just little songwriting circles or organizing shows with my friends and doing things casually. I met a good friend of mine through this who ended up engineering and co-producing my first record. He was in the music community and was like, "Do you want to make an album? You want to record some songs?" And I thought, "Oh yeah, right." I honestly don't think I'd even considered it at that level.

Then, I'd started serendipitously playing music with two other friends and pulled together a small band, so that all aligned at the same time. It took other people's seeing like, "What's she doing? Just playing these songs, all the same songs at every show. Why don't we try to make something out of this?"

**Is there something you wish you knew when you were first starting to make art?**

Something that I'm still working on, that was handy when I first heard it and is handy now, is just to trust myself. Trust and intuition and desire are all things I've been thinking a lot about recently. I went to a few art schools growing up, and I feel like it was an interesting way to learn art. I'm really glad I did. But also combining art with academia starts you off in this productive, explaining-your-art phase a little bit early. I feel like something that I had as a kid, and something that I try to foster now, is trusting my instincts and not always having a reason for everything I make or want to make.

I think just listening to the world that wants to be built. I hear a lot of people talk about channeling songs or having songs sent to you from the ether and not being responsible for them, and I definitely feel that in a way. I feel like that's part of trusting what comes. You don't always know why you want your album to sound a certain way or why you want to have someone playing on it, but trusting those gut instincts has gotten me everywhere I've gone since starting music.

**Are there specific things you need in place to record the best way that's true to you, or what is your process for recording?**

I am used to recording with other people around, so I have a lot of brains to bounce things off of... I can definitely sometimes lean on that a little too hard and can be like, "Do we want that there?" "What do you think?" "What do you think?" Ultimately I'm producing the record and ultimately I know I'm going to make the final call, so I'm trying now with these stages of editing and making decisions to just make them and to trust what I hear. But yeah, I need a good balance of working with other people and working alone to not lose sight of my own judgment, but also to have other people there for different opinions.

**Is there always a magical moment where you know that the project is finished or how do you typically know when you're done with an album?**

I don't know. A good friend of mine is sending her album to mastering now and she's been reaching out to me being like, "Let me know if you need to talk about this because this is the really hard part." I've been very grateful for my community right now, but still, I don't know. I do think it will get to the point where I just start enjoying listening to the sessions and listening to the songs, and I'm not thinking about what it needs or what it doesn't. I do think I'm close with a lot of them.

**Are there methods that you use to get into a creative flow when you're writing or where do you draw inspiration from typically?**

I've been wondering that myself because it does feel totally random. It feels like if I stumble across a rare moment alone, sometimes something will strike me and I'll be feeling something and it will come out and I'll be able to write a song in half an hour. Then sometimes I'll sit with the guitar part for weeks and weeks and not have any lyrics that feel inspiring, and I feel like I'm never going to write a good song again. But every time I write a song, I feel like it's the last good song I'll ever write. I would love to have more of a math. I would love to have more of a way to get into the zone of writing. I also do feel like it's similar for most people, and it's always sort of like getting struck by lightning.

**Can you talk a bit about transitioning from being more of an independent artist to working with a label?**

**What's that been like for you?**

Well, it's honestly been great because it means that I now have sort of the beginnings of a small career, and I definitely wouldn't have that without working with a label. So as much as I know there are ups and downs to everything in the music industry, I do think I got lucky in having a group of people that believe in my music and want to put in time and energy to get it out there. Because again, I don't have really the organizational skills to get that kind of thing together. It took my friends telling me to make an album, and just people who were like, "Let's do this. Let's take this really seriously, because you're good enough to be taken seriously." I don't think I knew that or would've been able to believe in myself.

**What is one surprising thing that you've realized along your creative path?**

When this all started happening, when I released my first record and got that all together, I realized that it takes a village for sure, but at the same time it's up to me. If I don't execute ideas that I have, they won't happen. It's not necessarily hard work, but it's a lot of work.

I know that artists work hard, I'm not saying that being an artist isn't hard work. But for me, it's so natural to have this task of make a music video, build a visual world for your album, assemble a group of friends to make a record with. Those are things I've been wanting to do and I've been doing since I was eight years old. This is fun and games for me, but it's the actual making it happen and actual organizing, reaching out to that director, sending your music to this person, reaching out to them if you want to go on tour with them... That stuff doesn't just happen to you, you have to make it happen.

**What has your art, your music, and your career taught you about yourself?**

It's put me more in touch with myself in a lot of ways. Something I always said before I started doing this, taking this seriously, was that I just want to be able to keep doing it. People were always sort of being like, "What do you want? What do you see for yourself?" And I was like, "I just want to keep doing it. I love making music so much. It's like the center of my soul. I couldn't not do it."

If I can do it and make a living and have time to do it and do it with my friends and my community, then that means I can do it for the rest of my life, and that's all I've ever wanted. And, I think that is something that has just sort of remained very true.

**What is a small piece of advice you'd give maybe an emerging artist who's kind of unsure about persevering because they can't really get the momentum, or they're wanting to change paths? What would you say to them to keep them going?**

If they're struggling with getting going, I would just say, again, listen to yourself and make things that bring you joy and make you excited and feel good to you. And don't even think about sharing them. I worked in restaurants for years and I still will probably go back to working in a restaurant this summer. It's super useful to not have to think about how many streams something will get, or if a label wants to sign you before you even make the record. Do it for your inner child or for the joy of it or however you want to put that, and make something that feels very true and that you can really get behind because it makes you excited, it makes you happy, not because you think it's objectively good, and make something that's original. Try not to emulate anyone else's path or anyone else's sound because you think it will give you a better shot because it probably will give you a worse shot. And then, if you truly think that it's good, it's because it makes you feel good.

Georgia Harmer recommends:

Jess Williamson's album *Time Ain't Accidental*: I've never heard anything like this. Her voice is so unique, this production is so unique. I listened to it, I honestly didn't really know what to make of it, and then I became completely addicted. I've been listening to it for months on repeat. I just love it. It's very free and I love the lyrics and the writing so much, too.

Daughter by Claudia Dey: It had such an insane grasp on me as soon as I opened it and I didn't put it down. And Claudia is actually a close family friend of mine and I am just such a huge fan of her and her work and just the way she lives. So everything she makes I am inspired by.

Having a pump organ in your home: My best friend's grandparents' farm had a pump organ in it and I would go there once a year with her and I would just spend the whole time playing the pump organ. It's such a visceral vocal wind sound. And my aunt and uncle were getting rid of a miniature one recently, I took it and it's now sitting directly beside me in my bedroom.

XO Skeleton by La Force: I think La Force is one of the most original, exciting songwriters happening right now.

Desire, I Want To Turn Into You by Caroline Polachek: I remember listening to an interview with Caroline and she was talking about how this album is "YOLO" and how she looked to her gut instincts and didn't explain anything... I really tried to do that when making my album, in a totally different style, but I found it really inspiring.

Name

Georgia Harmer

Vocation

musician

Fact

---

Colin Medley

---

Related to Musician Georgia Harmer on learning to trust your instincts:

■ [Writer Claudia Dey on sustaining freedom in your creative process](#)

■ [Caroline Polachek on making work that's useful](#)

■ [In Conversation: Jess Williamson and Katie Crutchfield on being the captain of your own ship, comfortable collaborations, and figuring out what works for you along the way](#)

---

The Creative Independent is ad-free and published by [Kickstarter](#), PBC. See also: [Terms](#), [Privacy Policy](#).



↑