

On being part of a scene



Musician The Dare discusses competition as a motivator, taking time off to refresh his approach, and the right kind of provocation.

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As told to Yang Shi, 2205 words.

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

Who's The Dare and why the name?

The Dare is me. It's just a band name. I tried a lot of different ideas starting with "The." The Dare wasn't taken. I thought it sounded cool.

It is. It's catchy. What's the biggest dare you've ever actually taken in life?

I don't have a good response ready. I liked playing Truth or Dare growing up, but I don't have any specific dares that I remember doing. The Dare is more of a personal reminder to be daring and do things that are a bit uncomfortable or worth fighting for.

How would you define a provocateur in 2025?

Provocateur? It's hard to define now. Online, everyone's a bit provocative by default. The algorithm rewards content that grabs attention, often leaning into rage bait. In the arts, being a provocateur today can mean rejecting that speed and accessibility. It's about being more opaque, and less eager to explain or soothe confusion. Someone like Lana Del Rey comes to mind. She stirs discourse, shifts her image, and dates whoever she wants. She just keeps going and never feels the need to explain. That kind of slow-burn provocation feels more meaningful.

Yes, less shock and more mystery. Your lyrics explore sexuality, drugs, and the eclectic energy of '90s nightlife. What draws you to this kind of imagery and energy?

I like glamour. I've always wanted to live in a major city since I don't come from one. It used to feel foreign and exciting. I still view it through that lens, but it is also part of my life now. There's a constant collision between the fantasy of the city and the reality of living in it, especially when you're immersed in music, nightlife, and DJing. You're surrounded by people who live for partying, fashion, culture, and making art, so it feels natural to write about all of it.

I read that you grew up in suburban Seattle and played violin and guitar in grade school. You were also interested in English literature. How did this part of your lifestyle shape The Dare?

Growing up in the suburbs, just outside the city, I caught glimpses of nightlife and pop culture through magazines and blogs, scraps that only made me want to chase it all the more. Growing up playing music gave me the ability to do what I wanted with music later. Eventually, I saved up enough money to move to New York, and the rest is history.

Your latest album is called What's Wrong With New York. So, what is wrong with New York?

I don't know. I'm probably less of an authority on New York now than ever, since I travel so much. But at the time, a lot was going right with the city. And whenever something's really happening, it naturally stirs up a lot of attention and discourse. It felt like people were mad about any art being made in New York, which I actually thought was a good sign. There was this burst of creativity and this weird, exciting communication between different media and groups. It also felt like a reckoning with the internet. Like the internet was collectively going, "Fuck all these people." And in a way, I was both part of that and reacting to it. Plus, I just thought *What's Wrong With New York* was a funny title.

The way you described the collision of media, artists, fashion, and music felt like Warhol's Factory meets the nightlife energy of Studio 54.

Big time. I reread Edie Sedgwick's biography, which is a lot about The Factory. I've always been interested in being part of an art scene and a group of people who are diverse in their interests and tastes... I think it's something New York naturally fosters. The same kinds of people end up at the same bars and parties, but they come from totally different jobs and art forms. It just makes sense that they end up making things together. Or sometimes they don't. That's part of the fun of living there, at least for me.

I've always really loved New York as well. It's gritty yet romantic. Since we're discussing your influences, your hit singles bear a resemblance to those of LCD Soundsystem and The Strokes. Growing up, what kind of music did you listen to?

I listened to a lot of what was on the radio, before the internet. Then when the internet became a bigger part of my life, I got into early MySpace-blog house stuff. I didn't even know what it was at the time, or where it came from. I was just absorbing everything. Around high school, I became more of a music snob. I started intentionally listening to classic records or whatever music critics were recommending. I tried to take in as much as I could. That's when it shifted into a higher gear, where I started caring more seriously about music and making it.

Outside of music, where do your influences come from?

I'm influenced by different things. I'm just attracted to things that are loud and punchy and colorful, and often very minimal in their delivery. Writing-wise, I'm really into Henry Miller and Frederick Seidel. I'm also really into pop art and graphic design—Josef Albers and a lot of minimalist designers. They all have this fiery, colorful quality, but with very carefully crafted compositions. Same thing with fashion, although I tend to wear more black and white than color.

I can see that. Your first two music videos are very stylish. They remind me of Calvin Klein or Helmut Lang vibes. How intentional are you with this aesthetic?

The "Perfume" video is intentionally supposed to be a CK collage. I don't wear that much Calvin Klein at the moment. Everything I do is super intentional. If there's a reference in the videos, I probably put it there on purpose. I'm always trying to combine interesting signifiers or pieces of culture in new ways.

Do you still consider yourself a music snob, or have you become more accepting of a wider range of music and art?

I like all kinds of styles of music and art, but I am very, very critical. I'm always trying to figure out *how* good something is, and why it's good or why it's really bad—and if it's bad, what to do about it. Of course, it's totally subjective. But I'm a pretty harsh critic.

What's your creative process like when you write or compose a song? Do you see lyrics first or music first? Or do you see visuals first—as a concept, like you said?

Conceptually, it's usually lyrics first. Or it'll be like, "Let's write a song in this style." I'm inspired by

what I listen to a lot. Sometimes I'll hear a rhythm and think, "Oh, I haven't heard a song in this rhythm in a while," or, "I've never made a song with this rhythm. That would be interesting to try."

What have you been listening to on repeat?

The new Haim album.

Oh my god, I was just listening to the new Haim album today.

Do you like it?

I love the song *Relationships*. Towards the end, it feels like she's almost rapping. The flow is pretty genius for a pop song... What else have you been listening to?

The new album by Facta—he's a great producer. The new Bar Italia song "Cowbella." I was just revisiting some Animal Collective albums that I love, too. But yeah, that's it.

What do you do when you encounter creative or personal roadblocks?

I guess going for a walk is very helpful, or not listening to music for a while. My brain immediately jumps to fill the absence of music with something. Taking time off helps refresh my approach. If I've been working on a song for eight hours and then come back to it the next day, it all just feels simpler. It's just about taking breaks.

Did you always want to become a musician?

It wasn't even like I wanted to become one. I started playing music at such a young age that I just always thought of myself as a musician, whether professional or not. Around the time I was 18, I hadn't written any music. I had just been playing it. There was a moment of self-awareness where I thought, "Man, I need to write some songs." I knew I could do it, and I was pretty stuck-up about my music taste. There were people around me making music I thought was terrible. I was motivated by competition and by the feeling that I hadn't actually made anything yet. So I started writing songs seriously when I was 18.

Now that you're more established, do you feel the pressure to create or produce music even more?

It's not so much the pressure to make more; it's the pressure of knowing there's an audience now, people who'll listen and respond. That didn't exist before. But making music is still the most fun part of all this, and honestly, it's what I love most about the job. So I'm just glad I get to keep doing it.

If you weren't making music, what would you be doing?

I think I'd probably be teaching still. I was teaching after-school elementary, and that was quite fun. I enjoyed that. And probably DJing. I'd probably still be making music too. I just don't know about the whole career side of it.

Your work on "Guess" with Charli XCX and Billie Eilish on the *Brat* remix album was a major breakthrough. How did that collaboration come together, and what was the most rewarding part of working with two of pop's biggest names?

I met Charli a few years ago now, and we just started sending ideas back and forth and trying different things. Nothing was really clicking until she came to New York for the Met Gala a year ago. I was throwing my club night, Freakquencies, the same weekend. I was like, "I'm going to play one of those songs we worked on. Do you mind if I do a remix of it?" And she was like, "Sure." So I sped up the tempo and reworked the instrumental underneath the vocal she had recorded. When I sent it back in that remixed form—the early version of "Guess"—she was like, "Oh,

I love this so much. Play this." Maybe the next day she was like, "I'm interested in working on this some more and maybe putting it on the bonus track version of the album. Want to go to the studio?" So that same weekend, right after the Met Gala, we went into the studio, cut the final vocals, and did the final touches. The Billie thing happened totally to my surprise. Later, when Charli was putting together the remix album, she asked, "Would you be cool with Billie doing a feature on the song?" and I was like, "Of course." So then, back and forth, Billie, Finneas, Charli, and I constructed the remix version. It was very easy and fun to do. At the time, I was like, "I can't believe this is happening."

If you could collaborate with anyone, dead or alive, who would it be?

That's a good question. Philippe Zdar, who produced some of Phoenix's records—he's one of my favorite rock and pop producers. That would be incredible. I'd obviously love to meet Lou Reed. I don't know if I'd want to make music with him, but he's definitely one of my biggest heroes.

What's the best part of performing on stage for you?

The whole thing about performing is just blacking out and being in the moment for an hour—being so focused on the task at hand that you're not worried about anything else in your life. Everything else about performing sucks, like getting to the venue and waiting around. But actually doing it is wonderful.

I have a few flash questions based on the song titles of your last record. "I Can't Escape Myself": What's the part of yourself you never shake off, no matter how hard you try?

Probably like... anxiety.

"Perfume": If your album were a scent, what would it smell like?

Like alcohol and sweat and a fog machine. A crappy fog machine.

Have you been to Bossa Nova?

Of course. [laughs]

"Elevation": Is love the ultimate high, or is there something better?

It's not the highest you can go, but it's definitely the safest high.

"You're Invited": What's a festival after-party that you're dying to be invited to?

I've never been to Glastonbury, so I want to go to Glastonbury.

What's next for The Dare—sonically, emotionally? What's new?

Well, I'm putting out a bunch of music this year and next year. So I think your questions will be answered sooner than you think.

The Dare Starter Pack:

The Dare Starter Pack



The Velvet Underground and Rowan by Worldpeace DMT,



Bar 228 at Hotel Meurice



The Denver Airport



Mason Pearson comb



Anything double breasted

- The Velvet Underground & Rowan by Worldpeace DMT
- The Denver airport
- Mason Pearson comb
- Bar 228 at Hotel Meurice in Paris
- Anything double-breasted

Name

The Dare

Vocation

musician, producer

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