

# On facing life through your art @

Touché Amore vocalist Jeremy Bolm on collaborating with a hands-on producer, releasing an album during a pandemic, and processing intense emotions through songwriting.

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As told to Danielle Chelosky, 2212 words.

Tags: Music, Writing, Success, Failure, Process, Independence, Creative anxiety, Promotion, Production, Collaboration.

## **How has your quarantine been?**

I've tried to make the best of it. That's not to say that I'm an optimist, but that's to say I'm just trying to spend my time with stuff that is at least creatively fulfilling. I've been between working on Touché stuff on and off, and then I put out that Soul Glo record [on my label Secret Voice]. It's getting a lot of praise and I'm excited about it. I'm about to release a poetry book for [Alexis Marshall] from Daughters and Dan [Darrah] from Mil-Spec, a split book between the two of them, which is exciting. So yeah, I've got stuff that's at least keeping me stressed. I'd rather be stressed about projects than stressed about the world as much. I try to occupy my headspace with projects instead of the obvious doom around us.

## **What was it like to go through a whole album rollout during a pandemic, and have you been finding ways to keep it interesting?**

If I'm going to look for the positive in it, I would say that it allowed us time to really surgically focus on how we wanted to do things. There was obviously some hurdles that were a little harder than usual, like me making music videos during the pandemic is obviously nightmarish. We only really had to do one that was live action with all of us. We put one out that's animated, and then the other one we did was friends sending in iPhone videos, so that was pretty COVID friendly. The album rollout was okay, it was nice to have everyone's focus on it. A lot of albums were pushed back, so because of that a lot of people we were working with had a lot more free time to really focus on us, which was cool. I think we just tried to make the most of it and did the best we could considering the circumstances.

## **Did you consider pushing yours back?**

For a brief moment, yeah, when things were way less clear. We were still in the studio when the first, initial, "Hey, things are bad," was happening. Between March and April there was still a lot of uncertainty, it just felt like a lot of grocery store panic when you couldn't find anything-like toilet paper. It felt very post-apocalyptic for those first couple of months, and telling everyone to stay home and whatever. We did the best we could under those circumstances, which was a lot of only two of us in the studio at the time, and just a lot of looking out for one another and making sure we're not going anywhere. All of us are such homebodies as it is.

When there was so much uncertainty we were having a discussion whether it was going to be smart or not, and then we started to really hear how many records were being pushed back. We looked at that as maybe we should just take advantage of the free space, like less competition. I think even the week our record came out there wasn't really any other "hardcore records" that came out. I could be wrong, but I know that in the weeks around us there was

supposed to have been a couple of bigger records that ended up being pushed. It allowed us some extra eyes on us, which I think was really helpful.

**Can you take me through the day-to-day that you went through in the studio?**

It was the longest we've ever spent on a record. Stage Four took three weeks, and at that point that was the longest we had never been in the studio. This was supposed to be five weeks, but because of COVID and the uncertainty it really did drag out for a couple months where [producer] Ross [Robinson] was just digging into it so much with mixing and things like that. He would call me in the middle of the night and be like, "Yo, I was working on this thing. You come by the studio and re-sing this line." He was finding any excuse to keep working on it, he didn't want to stop, which was sweet and also like, "Okay, Ross, we got to get this thing done."

Day-to-day, every day was honestly very different. In the first couple of weeks it was a lot of getting all the drums, so that was all of us working together—as in all six of us, the band plus Ross—on the songs one by one really, really intensely finding all the little things that we could do to explore all the parts or whatever. It was a very, very exhausting in a great way first two weeks, and then after that once Elliot [Babin, drummer] was done the guys would do all the guitars, and then I would maybe sing a song, and then they'd do some bass and then I would just sing a song randomly.

Ross really had a thing where he would say, "Jeremy, anytime that you want to sing, that you feel like you're ready to sing a song, then we will stop everything we're doing so we can get you to sing a song," which was a cool freedom. It made me feel like a little special kid, but for Ross he was just like, "We have to preserve your voice, and we don't want you to have to sing a ton of songs in a row so if you're just feeling like you're ready to do one, let's just do one." There was enough scratch tracks and enough there that I could make a song work, so that was kind of cool. The short answer is every day was very different, but there was never a dull moment. There was never a moment where we're all just sitting around looking at our phones, that was never a part of the process. It was just always pretty full-on for a few months.

**Was it rewarding to work with Ross who's notoriously intense?**

Absolutely. It was my favorite recording experience yet. As much as it was hyper-personal and could be a little uncomfortable at times, it was all for the greater good, and I understand that. Even my reservations and my nervousness about certain aspects or certain things that would be expected of me in the studio, I think the parts that if I was feeling negative about it in that moment it was just out of fear of opening up in front of everybody and really doing the work to create the best thing I possibly could.

All those moments that I had where I was fearful really helped me go deeper and deeper into what I needed to do to get the record done. Once I got through the hardest parts of getting used to it, once I was used to it, it was just freedom. It was very comfortable. I trust Ross, I trust what he's doing. He's not demanding those things for the gimmick of it, he's demanding those things because he genuinely believes in getting the realest thing he could possibly get and that's all he cares about.

**What were some of the hardest parts?**

It's even tough to say. Things that might not seem so hard in conversation were maybe some of the hardest. Just some of the acceptance. I'll write things and not really think too deeply on what I'm actually trying to say, but then it's in those moments when I'm reading the lyrics line by line to everybody in the band and to Ross. They're asking me questions and asking me follow-up questions, and discussing how that makes everybody else feel and all of that. It's with those conversations that I'm realizing what I'm actually trying to say a lot of the times, which was really interesting. It was the closest thing to therapy that I've ever experienced.

**Every time you go into making a record, do you have to mentally and emotionally prepare yourself to face all of these things?**

Yeah, it's my least favorite part about doing a record. It takes me so long to write. It takes me so, so long to

write and to get comfortable enough to say that I'm ready to record. I've had to express that to everybody else; band, label, everybody, before. Everybody gives me the space that I need, but when it's coming down to the wire and someone might say, "Hey, how's the lyrics going?" There's been a few times where I've kind of blown up a little bit saying like, I'm having to literally exist in the worst parts of myself for weeks trying to figure out what I want to say, and what I want to write. I don't like this feeling, but it's part of the process. I do dread when we decide to write a record, but I also know that it's always going to be fulfilling in the end.

**Do you think that there will ever be a way for you to somehow separate your personal life from your career or do you think that art inherently brings your whole life into it?**

I think that for me it's always going to be one in the same. I couldn't imagine trying to do anything else. Like writing fiction seems really difficult to me, I don't even know where to start something like that. It's always going to be one in the same, and it's just always going to be the way I'll operate, and I'm okay with it so far. I've been doing it long enough so it is what it is, and the people in my personal life are understanding of it and support me, so I'll probably just keep down this road.

**Can it be taxing to have people put you on a pedestal for sharing all of these vulnerable feelings, and then expecting things from you because of that?**

Yeah, definitely. There's a few songs on the record that I wrote about that, specifically the last three. Yeah, it's extremely taxing. No one goes into this thinking about how an audience is going to react to it, other than just the audience listening to it if you're lucky. None of us have ever written music or anything with the assumption that it's going to cause this kind of a reaction, we're just doing it because we like being in a band and I write because I feel a need to express these things. It's a double-edged sword though, as I've been saying a lot, it's where I'm very thankful that anyone listens and anyone connects, and I understand the motives of someone wanting to talk to the person who wrote it in a heavy conversation, I understand all those motives.

There's been plenty of artists in my life that I've admired and have helped me one way or another that I expressed to them when I've had an opportunity to meet them, that their music has helped and whatever, so I understand that the reaction, I just don't think that I was prepared for it in the way that came after specifically *Stage Four*. It's very, very taxing emotionally. I'm not mad at anyone for doing it, I get it, I understand the motivation, but at the same time it's extremely difficult to traverse because I never have the answers. Also, it triggers anything that I've dealt through over and over and over again. So, it's tough.

**With making records, how do you define success and how do you define failure?**

I feel like if you come from a band that's built on DIY punk, hardcore, whatever you want to call it, you keep your expectations low because the ceiling is extremely low. I think success for a lot of us is just being able to pay our bills. That's how I've always gauged success. If I'm able to survive financially and I'm able to be proud of the work that we've done, that's enough for me, and didn't compromise any of our integrity, which I don't think we would ever do in any circumstance.

I don't even know how we would do that to be honest, but we make the art that we want to make and we're able to pay bills off of it. That's success to me. Failure would be doing things that we're not comfortable with and regretting them later. We've had those moments in our career here and there where we've maybe done a thing, taking a chance on something and it feeling wrong, and then it actually being wrong where you're like, "Wow, that wasn't worth it." Those moments are when I feel failure.

**Jeremy Bolm Recommends:**

If you are able, go for a run every now and then to clear your head.

Listen to Leonard Cohen's later material, not just the early.

Never be anything short of kind to people in customer service

Challenge yourself with genres you're unfamiliar with, and don't be afraid of being a poser.

Support your artist friends, by all means necessary.

Name

Jeremy Bolm

Vocation

Musician

□

George Clarke