On staying true to yourself



Musician Jordana Nye (Jordana) discusses finding your voice, the value of collaboration, and establishing a healthy approach to social media

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As told to Jess Focht, 1561 words.

Tags: Music, Collaboration, Process, Beginnings, Mental health.

I read on NPR that you started playing a number of different instruments at a young age. I'm assuming you must have been curious about trying new things and not just sticking to one thing. It seems like you also don't box yourself into one sound and one genre. Did you always want to make music with different sounds? Did you just want to try everything?

Kind of. With making music, it's fun to be able to just be like, "Oh, I'm going to go start a song on this instrument." And then, "I'm going to go add this on this instrument." And then, "Oh, I'm bored of this beat. I'm going to go start another one on this." I wanted that freedom.

When I was really young, I wanted to start with violin, so it was my main instrument. I was taking violin lessons and then wanted to be able to play chords as well, not just singular notes and pieces. From singing along in the car to my favorite songs, I decided I wanted to be able to actually play them and sing them in my own way.

Were you ever intimidated by learning new instruments?

It was a challenge—and it was fun. I decided I was going to try to learn a song and memorize the lyrics, chords, and sing it in a way that represents how I like to sing. Even still, I'll listen to my favorite artists and be like, "All right, I'm going to go online and find the chords and then play it." It's cool to be able to be like, "Oh my god, I'm playing the same thing that they are right now. I can do it." And do it my own way.

Your sound is very multi-layered and unique. I'm sure you draw inspiration from many different artists. Who inspires you specifically?

Oh my god, I'm back into a deep, almost teenage obsession that I had with watching live videos of the artist I'm obsessed with all the time. I'm obsessed with Andy Shauf right now. I don't know why I'm so late to the party. But that's masterful songwriting. It's so good. I want to be able to write like he does.

Are there any other artists that inspire your sound or maybe in the past year or so with your new album?

Grizzly Bear's always been a deep inspiration. I'm obsessed with them. I've been obsessed with them since I was 12. The Strokes are my favorite band. Were—I mean—but I still know all the music. I was really into Aldous Harding this year. And back when I was 14, it was the Arctic Monkeys, Strokes, Vampire Weekend, and more Tumblr music. My Tumblr username was The Strokes Arctic Weekend.

I love your EP, *Summer's Over*, with TV Girl. You've gone on tour with Remi Wolf and you've collaborated with a lot of other artists. How do you approach collaboration and how important is it in your collaboration process?

Well, I feel like you're never going to get anywhere without any other opinions or ideas. How are you going to find fresh inspiration and a boost in creative motivation without anybody else? Because that's like sitting alone or working with the same people. I feel like there's only so much you can do, which I've learned recently.

I've been sessioning with so many people recently and it's been crazy to see other people's processes. When I start sessioning with someone, I always have to hang out with them a little bit before and just talk about the music we've both been listening to recently. I start to think about where can we find a center ground that we can both get excited about.

How are you going to make music if you're not excited about it? Because it's not going to be as fun. And that's the whole reason why you're doing it—because you love to do it. If you find a working start to whatever you want to do or things that inspire you, then that's a perfect introduction to making something with both of your minds that's your own thing.

Have you always viewed collaboration that way?

No. It took so much time. I made my first album by myself because I had this big self-worth problem. If I didn't do it by myself, it wouldn't feel like it was mine. It takes a long time to get over.

But like I said earlier, how are you going to be inspired and how are you going to know when something doesn't sound right? It's worth it—even if you just have somebody to relate to and boost your motivation.

And I'm sure there's a natural progression that happens when you're first starting out, then you release more music and the opportunities to collaborate come along with that. There's a vulnerability element to it. You have to trust that person.

Yeah. Not everybody's going to click like that, but I have my people who I am really comfortable working with, but new people are really great, too.

How is it is being a working musician right now? A lot of musicians have to rely on social media in a way to get signed to a label. What's your relationship with digital spaces like social media, and what's it like specifically within your music career?

It's really great to be able to use a platform. When I first got a couple of messages from people who liked my music and wrote me long messages, I was like, "Oh that's so sweet." But then sometimes you're looking at it a little bit too personally. It's a blessing and a curse.

It's also not good mental health-wise when I'm having a personal crisis. I want to be personal on social media, but at the same time, I don't. And I feel like people pay attention a lot more when I don't post as much. So it's like you have to work up in waves. I still don't understand social media. I just post what I want to and hope that people respond to it.

Do you feel pressure from the industry telling you how to run your social media? And do you care?

I had pressure, believe it or not, following ratio-wise. That shit is so dumb. I was told by several people that I needed to start unfollowing people because it looks bad. I'm like, "Fuck you dude." I'm going to follow whoever I want to follow. I'm fans of people, too. I'm not going to act like I'm not a fan of people. It's what I want, too. It's a win-win. Who cares about the way it looks? If fans care about the way that looks, then they shouldn't be my fan.

I used to be like, "Oh I got to keep my ratio skinny because it looks really cool." But then I was like, no, how am I going to keep up with things I love? And it's so stupid, switching to a personal account. It's so dumb. My name is my career.

It goes back to how you really don’t limit yourself. And in a really cool way—an experimental way.

I used to care so much about that validation from other people. I would just think about it all day, actually just so obsessed with the feedback that I was getting from other people. And now I don’t care anymore. I think I finally started finding myself. There’d be too many comments and too many things to change. So I decided I’m just going to do my thing. And who would care that much? It really shows what kind of person you are. I guess I’m just too lazy to do anything. It might be a blessing to be lazy.

Do you have any other hobbies that are creative or is it mainly just music?

Oh, video games. I love video games. I’m a gamer girl. I’ve recently been into Lawn Mowing Simulator, and I don’t know why shit like that sparks my interest. I played my friend’s VR headset one time and it was a job simulator.

What kind of job did you work?

I was a gas station cashier. These animals just came in and they’d give you their order and then you have to go get their hotdog on the bun or something. Stuff like that. The lawn mowing simulator’s fun though.

Just mow the lawn to find your zen.

Yeah, you just mow lawns and then you get paid for it in British pounds and upgrade your lawnmower and it’s fun.

That’s nice. It sounds cathartic.

It is. It actually is. It’s like Minecraft.

Jordana Nye Recommends:

If you like great musical storytelling, structural folk, I recommend anything by Andy Shauf. I’m obsessed with him, personally.

Kettle brand Truffle & sea salt crinkle cut chips. They bang.

Speaking of banging, always pee after sex. Don’t care if you’re tired.

Clean your room before you go on a trip. You’ll feel a lot better coming home to a clean space.

I recommend playing *Minecraft*. It’s very relaxing and fun to be able to build whatever you want.

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