

On creating something both honest and timeless



Musician Raveena discusses embracing your influences, escaping the endless scroll, and being true to your artistic and everyday self.

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As told to Mary Retta, 2445 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Process](#), [Mental health](#), [Collaboration](#), [Identity](#).

All of your albums have been quite different. It's felt almost like you've had a creative rebirth every time you've put out a new project. Could you talk a little bit about that evolution and whether it's felt good, or scary, or both?

I think that at the start of every album, I feel like there is a catalyst or a big villain origin story. I think that entering those kinds of portals shapes new worlds. I'm interested in the idea of portals and creating worlds around albums. So I think that's why they all feel like their own project, but I do feel like there's a lot of through lines in between all of them, which is really fun.

What would you say was the villain origin story for this project?

2022 was really rough for me. I got robbed of \$47,000 of music equipment. I was going through a lot on the music industry side. I had this realization like, whoa, America has a lot of catching up to do on how they ingest someone that is combining culture and paying homage to culture, especially a non-dominant culture like Indian culture. All of it made me really shift towards spirit and shift towards nature and shift towards community in a way that felt a lot deeper than I have any time else in my life.

You said you like to open up portals and worlds with each project. Has that looked the same for every project or how does that happen for you normally?

It's always been a communion with spirit, and I think that the way that spirit is accessed every time has been different. In *Lucid*, I think spirit was accessed through a lot of tears and through a lot of pain and through a lot of memory, like digging up of memory and sitting with it and crying with it. It was my most painful to make in many ways because it was so much about sexual assault and abuse. It was spirit in the way of intergenerational healing and getting at the root of examining what's happening in the body.

I think *Asha's Awakening* was spirit awakening through dance and through inner child and through imagination and through weaving connections through culture and through identity. And then, I think with *Where the Butterflies Go in the Rain*, it was spirit through channeling and through deep, deep meditation. I started doing Vipassana, which is where you're meditating six to 10 hours a day for days at a time. I was channeling in the woods. It was very much forest fairy, but light kind of channeling.

Could you elaborate on what particular spiritual practices you feel coincide with making art and making music for you?

I feel like it's all the same essence for me. Music is one of the most direct forms of reaching spirit. You're literally pulling the sound from the sky—that's crazy. It's not even something you can touch or feel, it's just insanity. And in the same way, meditation and channeling is pulling energy from this unknown source that is so expansive and so free and so much bigger than us, to be guided in our life and to understand ourselves and to understand the world better.

Everything I do is just built upon this deep ancestral tie to spirit. I come from a really spiritual family and a family of meditators, a family of alternative medicine healers and practitioners, and I think these things are passed down most of the time.

We talked a bit about how your albums have all felt a little different. Would you say that who and what you turned to for creative inspiration was different across the three records?

For sure. One of the first things we always do when we start a new record is just listen to so much music and create playlists that we can go back to and kind of shape a world in itself of all the people that we're inspired by.

For *Lucid*, it was pure honey, soul music: Curtis Mayfield, Minnie Riperton, Stevie Wonder, Asha Puthli. D'Angelo was a big one. Sade. It was this really milky kind of sound. Sly and the Family Stone. I feel like we were watching all of those '70s live performances, the sound of how the electric guitar was interacting.

The palette for *Asha's Awakening* was so much about all the collaboration of Black and South Asian artists over many different periods of time. I was kind of deep diving into what that looked like and when those collaborations started, because those are my two biggest influences. So it was looking at the '70s with Asha Puthli, Ravi Shankar and The Beatles and Alice Coltrane, Miles Davis, all of those kinds of jazz, classical Indian soul collaborations. And then the early two thousands with Timbaland, Jai Paul, M.I.A.. And then for this album, it was a lot of classic music, just great songwriters like Joni Mitchell, Fleetwood Mac, Bob Marley.

Thinking about the beginning stages of starting a record, when you're gathering all these influences, what does that look like? Are you printing out pictures, like you said you make playlists? What physically comes out of all of the research?

I make music with my best friends, and we love sending albums back and forth to each other. And I remember for this album, I would commit to listening to one whole album a week and really dissecting it, and understanding all the parts I loved about it, seeing how I felt about it as a whole body of work. I remember Marvin Gaye and the record with *What's Going On* was such a big influence for me on this album. And I was looking at like, oh, there's so many repeated motifs in what he's doing. How is he using instruments? What does the room sound like that he's recording in? What elements beyond just the instruments is he bringing in?

Could you walk me through what your day-to-day or week-to-week looks like when you're making a record?

It's super routine. I wake up really early, like 5:30 or 6:30, and for two, three hours I'll just be in a portal opening and meditate really deeply and do yoga, take a walk outside, do good things for the body—I do this whether I'm making an album or not. And then I practice instruments for an hour or two in different disciplines.

In my week, my day will either be a practicing day, where I'm studying instruments that day for hours after that initial practice, or I'm going to the studio, or it's a day of ingesting music or film. And it's just more of an inspo day or a writing day where it's just writing poetry. I love to be in a space of learning when making an album. I love to be discovering new things that I can do with an instrument, I love to be reading, I love to be taking a writing class, taking dance classes, almost like going back to school.

That's so interesting because I feel like a lot of artists that I've spoken to have very polarizing thoughts on routine and discipline. I've heard a lot of people say that a routine will make them feel kind of stuck or confined.

It's so easy to spiral and just get on the internet and be so sad. Everything I do is so that there is a plan set in place so that my body is feeling good, my vessel's feeling open, I'm feeling creative and inspired. Especially as an artist, you can have so much noise if you want to just go find hate about yourself or find a reason to be upset. So I think if you have too much time on your hands, it's not a good thing. I love discipline, but it's hard. And I definitely have days where I say, "Fuck it, I'll scroll."

Could you talk a bit about the process of making a music video? How do you collect images or decide on the color palette and everything?

It looks like a lot of mood boarding at first. I kind of create a visual world for the album way before. It's very much a defined world before [other people] come in. And then those collaborators bring their own kind of takes on what's happening visually and create their own narrative.

You said you already have the visual world ready. How do you make it?

I make it through a lot of mood boarding and a lot of even just switching up my home to the colors of that album, subtle things like that. I think that that's really important too. For this album, the world was very much like an Indian fairy because I haven't really seen that specific image reflected back at me. It was very eco-sensual, this album. Let's dream of nature, but make it surreal.

You mentioned a lot of your inspiration comes from the 1970s and the 2000s. I also watched an interview you did where you gave advice to artists who are coming up and you said something like, 'it's important to resist the allure of overnight fame and focus on your craft,' which I thought was really cool advice. I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about what draws you to music from that time period and what elements you think are in it that makes the music feel kind of timeless or able to be relevant beyond its current moment.

When I think of my favorite artists, to me, it seems like they're pretty disconnected from the persona of who they are in the public realm. And they're really, really in tune with that high, that sense of flow that you get when you just sit down on a piano and sing or you sit down with the guitar and sing, or just singing into the ether. I think that feeling is the heart of everything we do. It makes me want to cry. It's just a super consuming and beautiful feeling, and a feeling to live for and a feeling to fight for and a feeling to be brave for.

I think that because so much of the '70s was about—and this is not great, I think that there was a lot of bravado and misogyny in this—just being a perfect god at instruments. I also think that made them really revere music and really be devoted to it in this way that is really being diminished and harmed in the current environment, because so much of being a working musician now is about promotion and understanding promotion and marketing. And it's changed even since I started being a working artist six, seven ago, which is crazy. Do you see that shift too in that short timeline?

In the music industry?

Yeah.

Yeah. I mean, you would obviously know way better than me, but I do. I think the way I've seen it as a consumer of music and someone who writes about music is, I've seen songs get way shorter, and the way people write or make music videos sometimes, it's clear that the goal was for it to go viral online. Which I think connects to what you said in the interview about resisting that temptation of overnight fame because that doesn't necessarily equate with you growing as an artist, even if your platform is growing.

Yeah, exactly. I don't even try to judge an album's success in six months, in one year, or even five years. You really know what stands the test of time when you're much older and you know what feels good across generations, which I think should be the goal in music making. It should stand the test of time because it's the universal language. It's the language and it's artform that can transcend time. That's so powerful. So then why even try to

do anything less?

Absolutely. As a writer, it's something I think about a lot, too. I'm really trying to figure out how to make art that is timeless or that, like you said, is cross generational and can appeal to so many different types of people. It's really hard, and so few artists have figured it out.

This is why I keep going back to spirit. If you're channeling pure spirit and you make your human filter as diminished as possible, that's how art is going to stand the test of time because spirit is eternal.

I feel like your path to artistry was unconventional in a lot of ways. Did you ever feel like there was a safer path that you were tempted to take?

There was a safer path that I was encouraged to take. I think that coming from the kind of history that I do with people that have been so close to such raw and dehumanizing pain, it makes you a very free person. Do you know what I mean? You just know. You just know at the core, I know at the core, all I need is a little house, a little garden, and the people I love. So anything that happens beyond that is beautiful, but it's not something I need to cling to.

I think that easier paths were always encouraged. I was thinking about my early twenties and I was thinking how a lot of people were encouraging me to be a pop songwriter that was more in the background, or encouraging me to feature on electronic beats because that was really big in 2011, 2012. Or I'm thinking about how someone in my school time was like, "Are you ready to dance on top of a car naked because what else are you going to offer?"

When I was like, "No, I want to write about sexual assault," people told me, "That is crazy. You're going to be branded as an activist, a weirdo," which is so funny. There's been so many times where the safer path has been presented. But I don't know. I am not very attached to my public self, so I just don't really care.

Raveena Recommends:

[Solo In Rio 1959 by Luiz Bonfa](#)

[Sunoh album by Lucky Ali](#)

[Father Complex directed by Tyler Cole](#)

[Survival Takes a Wild Imagination by Fariha Roisin](#)

Meditating to [Mooji](#) for 30-45 minutes in headphones in a botanical garden, underneath an ancient tree

Name

Raveena

Vocation

musician

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