

# On having a life outside of your creative world



Musician, writer and filmmaker Rachel Brown discusses how important it is to balance a life outside of artmaking, what it means to work with the right kind of collaborators and how seeking perfection can hold you back

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As told to Sammy Maine, 2247 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Writing](#), [Film](#), [Collaboration](#), [Process](#), [Education](#), [Income](#).

## **Can you tell me how you developed your writing voice?**

I feel like I'm still developing it. Since I was a kid, I've wanted to be a writer, mainly a screenwriter. Writing lyrics for some reason has always been a lot easier because it feels like I'm journaling. That's absolute freedom whereas with screenwriting, I just get so caught up in trying to make sure that the story works before I even start and then I get too insecure about putting so much energy into something that I'm not sure what to do with. I'm still finding my voice. I have a specific way of speaking in general and I don't really know where that came from. My dad has a unique vocabulary as in he makes up words and he has a good time with sentence structure. Probably to an outside perspective, I have more of a clear voice than in my own perspective. I'm often seeing other people do things that I like and then I take that and try to use it without obviously plagiarizing.

## **It's still yours if you take something and make it your own.**

For sure, I think it just comes down to insecurities. I read poetry out loud for the first time a few days ago. I don't necessarily consider lyric writing poetry because it's so specific to the music behind it but I was so nervous. I was more nervous to do that than I've ever been to perform music or do standup. I don't consider myself a poet at all. Even though I sometimes think my journaling can be kind of poetic. With the two poems I read out, I really didn't know how people would respond to them but people were really nice to me about it. I was taken aback by that.

## **Do you consider yourself a poet now?**

I have a hard time considering myself anything. You can call yourself something, but if you're not perceived in that way, then who knows what the actual truth is. It's two opposites. I didn't think that those were poems. If I went to readings or if I owned any poetry books or was in any way involved with poetry, then maybe someday I would consider myself a poet. But I guess it's easier to say that I'm a writer.

## **Can you expand on what you meant about the perception of others vs what you call yourself?**

It's not that you're *not* it. Let's talk about the internet poet. She probably considers herself a poet and in a way, she is writing poetry, but I don't think what she's doing is actually poetic. I don't consider myself a musician; I play music, I play in bands and I make music, but for me personally, I would have to master the craft

to definitively say I am this thing.

**Labels are so tricky to navigate too because you do so much. You play music, you're a writer, you're a director, you're a visual artist. Do you approach each project differently depending on what you're making?**

Totally. My solo project [Thanks For Coming] and Water From Your Eyes are completely different. When I make solo music, I find that it's like a compulsion. It's something that I do that I'm not necessarily trying to do, whereas I find that I have to be much more intentional with other things. The poetry I wrote did feel instinctual in some way, but it was more similar to music, in that it didn't feel compulsory. I had to be more intentional with the words 'cause there's nothing behind it. It's not about it sounding catchy. When I make music, I'm trying to communicate my feelings in a vague sense. With poetry, I'm trying to communicate a specific idea and return to it. With my own music, one sentence doesn't really have to relate to the other. With Water From Your Eyes, it's a collaboration and when I'm writing the lyrics, there's often a melody, so I'm trying to have some sense of mood but trying to communicate that with a certain amount of syllables. When I'm doing my own writing, I also don't check in with anybody but with Water From Your Eyes I do.

**You made a music video for Model/Actriz and for Water From Your Eyes earlier this year. How do you collaborate and what do you think makes a good collaborator?**

Directing is interesting because the greater process is so much longer than anything else I do. There are so many moving parts and so many logistical aspects to figure out along with the creative. With my music and writing, I don't have to figure out how it's gonna get done but with directing, especially like making music videos for other people, I like for people to have a sense of what they want: any kind of imagery or feeling. It's a lot harder if it's really exact. I like to work within a framework but not be faced with any rigidity. So much of a music video happens in the editing process for me, so I like to have an idea of the general visuals and where they would go but not have to stick to anything. Water From Your Eyes is the only musical collaboration I do. My creative role is so specific. I used to do a lot of logistical stuff, but then that made me feel crazy so I stopped. A lot of it is coming up with social media or visual ideas for the creative direction for the album.

To work with other people I have to trust them. I have to know that I can communicate with them on a fundamental level. I need to know that we get along and that it would be easy to ask them to do something. The times that I tried to direct in school, I had such a hard time asking people to do things or spend their time and energy on something for me. As I'm getting older, it's been a lot easier for me to believe that what I'm making is worthwhile. I've worked in every department on set so for the most part, I know how the different departments work and what people need so I'm really conscious of trying to make sure that everybody has what they need which not all directors do. I always have my eye on the clock and I'm constantly just trying to make things easier for everybody else because I know how hard everything is and if I want my vision to come to life, everybody needs the right circumstances. Honestly, I need to work with people that I can laugh with.

**If you take yourself too seriously, I don't think your art's gonna be good.**

Anytime I'm on set and we're running out of time, we don't need it that bad; I can make something with what we have. It's not gonna change the world. If it's making all of us miserable and forcing us to do stuff that's physically impossible, then I don't care.

**How do you approach editing?**

I approach film and music the complete opposite. With music, I don't edit myself at all. I won't work on a song for more than a week because I will forget it. I will just not remember how to play it. I rarely change anything about a song, but sometimes I'll make things shorter if I'm rerecording it. With Water From Your Eyes, I don't really edit. I'll give Nate [Amos] some notes sometimes, but for the most part, he's making all the production decisions. I just trust him so much. He is a producer and I don't know anything about that. I still don't know what compression does or what compression means.

**Your ear is still so important because people listening to music also maybe don't know what compression is.**

I can tell when something's off but for the most part, I know when Water From Your Eyes is done when Nate says it's done.

**What about when it comes to the music videos you direct?**

When I watch videos, I notice a lot of little things. They almost never feel done, but at a certain point, there's just a deadline. I send my videos to a lot of people and then if the band has no notes, then I feel pretty good about it. I don't think anything has to be perfect. I'm not a perfectionist. As long as there's nothing that takes me out completely during the first watch and it feels like it's flowing smoothly, then I'm fine with it.

**Do you think going to school for art has been helpful to you as an artist today?**

I think it was helpful for me because I'm very much a school person. I love school actually. I took a bunch of social, political and cultural classes that have helped me as a person in ways that have been really helpful for me as an artist and as a human being. I also had no idea how films were made and I don't really watch YouTube. If I'd known that anything you wanted to learn is just on YouTube, maybe I wouldn't have gone but I like being in the environment of school and having a built in network of people who are doing the same thing. If you're an independent person already making things, to spend your time in school might seem less fulfilling and helpful.

I wouldn't have gone to NYU if I hadn't gotten a scholarship. It's changed my life. I'd be living a completely different life if I had student loans. It's worth it to go somewhere that will give you access to resources and people that otherwise you wouldn't have access to but going to university is a really difficult decision. Don't do it just because everyone tells you that it's something you have to do.

**You mentioned journaling earlier but is there anything else that you do to try to nurture your artistic mind?**

I'm really undisciplined in so many places. I don't journal as much as I would like to; I'd like to write every day and that's something that I keep saying I'm going to start tomorrow. I think that it's really important to have a life outside of your creative world and it's important to have experiences that have absolutely nothing to do with making something. Just like walking around and watching other people live and hearing about other people's lives and just being aware of the world is good. I think it's good to not think about your art. I think it's important to just have fun with your friends, hang out with your family and not put so much pressure or all of your energy into something because ultimately if you only think about art, then your art is going to be about art. And that's not right actually. Sometimes it can be awesome, but sometimes it's so meta and pretentious that it's not related to anybody outside of a niche group of people who also do the same thing.

**You need experiences to make art that other people will relate to. If your art is only relating to your own narrow view then I don't think it's going to be successful in reaching anyone other than the artist themselves.**

Yeah. I also like to scroll on Tumblr anytime I'm directing anything or thinking about visuals. I like seeing what other people are doing but also not putting myself up against it. It's really important not to view art as a competition. When you make stuff you're always going to be critical, so there's no point in seeing other people's art and not just feeling inspired to be better at whatever you're doing.

**What propels you to keep making art?**

Art is one of the few things that we have left in society that's in its purest and best form when it comes to connection and empathy. All art is telling a story, whether it's abstract or literal. It's expressing the human condition in a way that's meant for somebody else to take in. So much of our world is so dependent on perspectives. I remember how important it is that art is changing in people's minds and influences how people view themselves, others and the world and how they interact with it. We've lost so many different ways of connecting. Everyone's on their phone, people have chatGPT relationships and there's so many things in the world that are alienating people from engaging with anything really besides whatever little bubble they want to build

around themselves. It's not even about making art. It's about being a proponent of sharing either your voice or lifting up other people's voices and helping us all feel more connected and to care more about each other. Art could be used to create a better world and to create better or more interesting thoughts and ideas.

**Rachel Brown recommends:**

**Film:** [Brighter Summer Day](#) (1991) Director: Edward Yang

**Bopping Around:** Fitting as many plans into a single day as possible

**TV Show:** [Miss Night and Day](#) (2024)

**Website:** [www.oldhousedreams.com](http://www.oldhousedreams.com)

**Young Adult Book:** [Jellicoe Road](#) (2006) Author: Melina Marchetta

Name

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Vocation

musician, writer, filmmaker

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