

On going towards the unknown



Musician YATTA (aka ricky sallay zoker) discusses not playing shows after an album release, following their curiosity, and seeking slow and supportive environments to see the work through.

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As told to Janet Frishberg, 1593 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Focus](#), [Family](#), [Production](#), [Adversity](#).

Last time we talked, you shared that you were making something that you felt was potentially cringe, but you were okay with it. It was an important part of your process to embrace the cringe. I'm curious how that turned out for you with this album.

It has been an exercise in self-trust and clarifying my POV. I think there's safety in doing what you've done before. That can feel comfortable and predictable and easily understood, even if it looks like dissent. So I think I'm still in whatever portal it is that I said yes to, and it's ever evolving.

That makes sense. It's an alchemical process when you step into a creative project, and you're still inside the release part of it, where you get to experience it in front of other people and experience their reactions to it. That's a huge part of the whole thing, I imagine especially for music.

Definitely. I opted out of playing shows directly after the release of the album. I was listening to what felt right to me. I've always imagined playing this music in environments that are intentional, slower, and supportive. So I waited for those opportunities to come through. I just played my release show at Pioneer Works, where I recorded the bulk of the album. I had the best time. Pioneer Works has meant so much to me. I recorded my second album there as well as a part of the [Clocktower Radio residency](#). I feel cared for there. My pace is matched.

There's something very oppositional to hustle culture about not playing shows directly after an album's release.

I mean, it doesn't even feel like a choice to me. If I could, I would love to be able to do the hustle thing. But I've done it in the past and it was a path of destruction. So I'm trying to allow for slowness and sustainability, which in the immediate can feel a lot less sexy, but I want to be sexy for a long time.

I'm still figuring it out. I feel very green somehow. [The last time I spoke to The Creative Independent](#), I had just opened for [Beverly Glenn-Copeland](#) at MoMA PS1. And then Covid hit and I burrowed. Now I'm reemerging after having been in touch with my nervous system. And the nervous system is so bossy if you're trying to listen to it.

Right, once you're in a relationship with it.

I know. I want to rebel sometimes, but I just can't stomach it anymore.

I'm proud of the work, and of this album. I feel like I saw it through, and now it's about discovering ways of feeding it. I want it to blossom into the many interdisciplinary expressions that are in my mind. And that takes

time, it takes intention and commitment.

One thing I've been thinking about for myself in regards to slowness and delays that feel out of my own control, and that I can't overpower internally, is that whatever I'm going through during those times is preparing me to be the person to hold the work.

100%. I think of that a lot. It's just time for you to be chiseled into the figure that can hold what's coming.

In one of my favorite songs on the album, "Put Your Faith in God," it sounds like you're talking to yourself, about how you used to listen to dance music and now you're just crying into this microphone. You're encouraging yourself to try something new, saying, "I mean, it's not like whatever you're doing now is working." I'm curious about that track and that idea, and whether you knew that you wanted to make an album with some joyous or danceable songs.

Yeah, that came from talking. And I've been calling the post-album tour my Yap Tour.

I love that.

I didn't go on tour, but I've definitely talked my ass off. I wanted music that felt like it had levity and reached towards ease. I guess all of this is a process of allowing. It's funny: when you set out to find peace, if you don't have practice in that, you approach it in a non-peaceful way. For so long I was trying to work to find this peace, but then you realize that it's just allowing.

I was really struck by that idea of trying the other thing when something is not working. Because I feel this impulse to stay with what feels safe, even if it's not working.

Definitely. There's the option of following curiosity into the unknown, or there's the option of doubling down on what you've done before and creating safety that way. And maybe it's that different seasons call for different approaches or different people are oriented in different ways, and we need all of it.

When we talked last, one thing that was happening in your process was making something that would feel accessible to your family in a way that some of your music hasn't in the past. I'm curious how that turned out.

It worked. Check.

How's it feel?

It feels fantastic. I think there's a romanticization of rebelling into who you are. But there's actually a fulfillment in coming home... The most avant-garde thing would actually be to bring it back and seek resonance with your roots, I guess.

Are there any artists that are particularly inspiring you right now?

Honestly, I'm really excited by journalists and music writers who are doing their own thing. I think we need new contextualization that's not owned in order to create a more supportive future.

In terms of artists, I've stopped looking at output as much as I have personal infrastructure. American Artist has a show at Pioneer Works called Shaper of God. And oh my goodness, it was amazing. It was inspired by Octavia Butler, and I think it was an example of really prophetic work because the show started right when the devastating fires started in Altadena, and they're from Altadena. Octavia was making prophetic work, and then they're making work that aligns with that. That's when you're really just following your guidance, whatever you conceptualize guidance to be. That really inspires me, when I see that kind of alignment.

Tell me a little bit more about what "personal infrastructure" means to you.

I guess it's following your interests to their furthest degree, in whatever way they want to be expressed. And then allowing that to resonate with people, and having that be a way to create creative and intellectual community. I'm really psychedelic this morning.

I love it.

I guess it's materializing collective consciousness. Putting things out there that resonate with people, and then they get in contact with the material or with you. That's the dream. And I think that deep roots happen when someone is making from a place of curiosity.

It strikes me as very precious, and a tricky thing to hold onto, to make from a place of curiosity and not feel as much pressure around output.

I guess it's a hard thing to do. It's very meditative, and I don't always do it. I'm just trying to understand how to balance. If you're committing to being an artist and want it to contribute to your livelihood, you have to have output. So as dreamy as it is to think that way, it's also like, what's the moment that you shift? What's for you? What's for the world?

The last time we talked, you mentioned that you were working on making the most shameful part of yourself a room. It was about making space for more earnestness, which is how you experience yourself to truly be. I'm curious if the album feels like that room.

Well, earnestness is definitely present. I see it affecting every part of my life. So yes, it did that. And now, ideally, any sort of effort to make space in myself is leading towards a way of serving people. So hopefully that allows other people to access that, if that's what would help. So long as I can stop myself from hiding.

YATTA recommends:

"Los Thuthanaka" by Chuquimamani-Condori and Joshua Chuquimia Crampton. I see angels crashing into each other, laughing, and then jumping timelines. It sounds like what would play during a breaking news segment from God.

Making up your own syllabi. Right now, I'm taking a class I made up called "poetic ethnomusicology." I'm re-reading Hanif Abdurraqib and listening to his podcast, Object of Sound. Next, I think it's Uproot by Jace Clayton. That book changed my life. It's the reason why I chose to go to Bard's MFA.

Nameless Sound and Houston's deep listening community. It's intergenerational, welcoming, and so supportive. That space—and PTP in NYC—have held me down for so long. There's a confidence that comes with being surrounded by artists who lead with curiosity, play, and improvisation.

The Pomodoro Method. Like many artists, I have a slippery relationship with time. I'm constantly seeking structure. Pomodoro helps. Also, weirdly, I find it funny and grounding to say things like Q2, Q3, and EOD to myself.

Blade Study. I go to a short story book club there. It's led by my friend Drew Zeiba. I love being around writers. If I can manage to be quiet and listen, I learn a lot.

Name

YATTA

Vocation

musician

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