

On finding magic in the everyday



The DJs, label heads, and lovers share advice for maintaining routine in a pandemic, the importance of physical media, why chaos can be good or art, and how they made a club mix for isolated times.

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As told to Arielle Gordon, 2413 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Magic](#), [Collaboration](#), [Process](#), [Mental health](#), [Inspiration](#), [Production](#).

Could you go through what a typical day looks like for you both?

Eris Drew: We get up every morning at 8:00 in the morning, we workout, and then we do our office work for the day—all the annoying stuff of being an adult, like health, seeing doctors, and then just the work of being artists, whether I'm writing or we're working on an interview or whatever. That's our in front of the computer, have meetings time of the day and then—

Maya Bouldry-Morrison: We have lunch.

ED: We have lunch together almost always and then the rest of the day, if we're being good, is spent making music, whether it's mixing records or working on original productions or remixes. We're pretty religious about that.

MBM: Yes. I've been procrastinating a lot recently and I have too many deadlines coming up over the next couple weeks, so I have to hop to it.

ED: We cook a home cooked meal every night. That's part of our self care. Then maybe watch a movie. We take walks in nature a few times a week. That's a typical day.

Does that help you stay creative, to stay in a routine like that?

MBM: Making sure to eat three meals a day has been super important and that was something that helped me set right. Especially when we were touring because it was the one thing that brought my body back online. Extending that into the house has been really important.

ED: Before I started touring, I was working out all the time, I was taking really good care of myself. I was in a better physical state of harmony than I had ever been in my life because I had started hormones a few years prior, and they worked their magic in my body—not that it's magic—but it made me feel so much better. I hit tour with all this energy. But I found by the end, I was getting pretty worn down just from eating on the run all the time and weird sleep schedules.

MBM: I was on the road for four years straight. That's doing all nighters and staying up all the time and only sleeping four hours each weekend. When we came back home, it became important to have a set schedule.

ED: But the routine's really important for me also because I will retreat into music work and do nothing else. I

love it. If I'm just in my studio all day and there was a tube that delivered whatever I needed, I'd be fine, but I want to not not go to the doctor for two years. Maya's helped me have structure. I was always a night owl.

MBM: I'm a sleepy girl. I always go to sleep early.

ED: I just follow her routine and that's really helped me to stay okay during this.

You've spoken at length about your preference for mixing with vinyl. Do you think it lends something to the creativity process, whether you're more creative because you're more limited or that the tactile nature of vinyl is just a more creative medium when you're mixing?

MBM: I would never use a sweeping statement saying it's more creative in general to work with vinyl, but I think for us, that's a really strong point. When I had to use CDJs, I just played them in vinyl mode like a record; it was the only way I knew how to play them, because that's how I learned. I think the constraints are really important to us, especially when on tour. We can only have a specific bag of stuff and we have to keep recombining it and re-contextualizing it and putting different things together. I think it lets us learn the tracks more because we play them much more often, they get charged with more parties as we play them over and over again. We also just like the physical act of owning the artifact itself.

ED: I definitely think limitation is part of it. It's a bucking bronco ride playing vinyl because if you've got the CDJ, you can loop something. There are ways you can compensate if you need more time, but not with a record.

MBM: It's a race.

ED: If it's three minutes and 20 seconds long and you're playing it on plus two, you've got about three minutes to get in and out. That's really good for me because I'm an extremely deliberate person. If there's a core difference between Maya and I, I would say she is very off the cuff and I'm not off the cuff. Records make me be off the cuff. I have no choice. They're like a chaos machine for me, and chaos is good for any art. If you can control every aspect of the medium you're working in, that's going to be a really tough medium to work in.

Obviously we don't want to diminish what any other artist does, and a whole lot of our time is spent on synthesizers and other equipment that feels actually fairly non-tactile. But I do think humans have a preoccupation with matter, the *stuff*. If you read about alchemy, not only were they trying to change metals, they were trying to learn about themselves and what nature is. There's something weird about these records. There's some magic in interacting with these physical things. I can sound very woo-woo about it. There's dust from all the parties in the grooves and we're at a point now where we play so much older music... I hate the word old music. It's not old. 200,000 years of human history! "Why do you like music from the '90s?" Why wouldn't I?

Also, the records are important to us because we mark them up and we write on them, we put stickers on them, we put tape on them. Sometimes in the middle of the set, something happens and I want to remember it and I grab a Sharpie out of my bag and write it on the sleeve or write it in the center of the thing.

MBM: We play a lot of music by people who are gone.

ED: That's what I was going to say. Every time you hear us play that Wild Child record, that person died when they were young and their music has all these intentions and they have a child, so I believe when they were putting love and talking about their identity and putting all this in their music, they were creating a utopia for their child to be born into. What does that mean when we play that? It's a little different than the digital file because that's the sculpture of this music.

MBM: I think you're allowed to though.

ED: It's important.

You've mentioned magic and mysticism as a part of your process. I was wondering if you have any specific rituals that you perform to become creative or to engender positive energy.

ED: Yes, we do.

MBM: We play together often and we specifically do T4T Luv NRG parties. We have a ritual that we do before anyone comes, so we'll do it at sound check or we'll do it right before the doors open. We get three plates.

ED: It's for a trine.

MBM: We ask for people to bring us plates, we bring salt and we get lavender and we have a crystal that we'll swap out, depending on what we have with us or what's going on on tour. We'll place the plate behind each speaker on either side and then we'll write in salt our numbers. We'll put on my track "My Body Is Powerful."

ED: It's so funny. Some people who wrote about [Resonant Body] didn't get it. It's not an ambient song. There are resonances for spiritual connections. What we do is we take that pretty little thing that sounds like an ambient soundscape and we blast it at 105 DB and then those resonances feel like a church. It sounds like the resonances you hear from an organ. We fill the room with that. Clubs are a really compromised space, so we try to bring some good energy into it. We are compromised. We've just gotten off a plane. So, we always do this as a moment to just create space, to bring a different energy into the space and to synchronize our hearts.

MBM: It's for the party, but it's also for us. We don't make a show of it by setting it up when the party's starting and the opener's done.

ED: It's not like we read that in a book and then decided to go do it. We use words like magic and spirituality because those are the anthropological words for what I think we do, but it's pretty off the cuff.

MBM: Like true witches, we make all that shit up because it's the thing that feels right.

ED: If something's a sacred shape, it's because we say it is.

Your T4T home guides were fortuitously published in January back before people necessarily had to record at home and start thinking about creating a home space. It sounds like there's obviously challenges involved, but do you think that there is inherently a value to having a creative space at home?

ED: Wendy Carlos has said—I want to get it right, I might be missing a word, but—"a composer's role is primarily solitary." I think that all the techno and all the house, it almost all comes out of bedrooms. There's professional studios and things like that, but basically most of this music is generated through solitary practice.

MBM: Yes.

ED: The timing of the guide was interesting because it was us trying to emphasize that in a time when we thought it was de-emphasized. We really wanted to say, "So much of what you do in music is what you do at home, what you do alone, what you do with friends, what you do even when you're intoxicated sometimes, what you do to process your feelings." We brought all that into the guides, so it was interesting to then be in a situation where that becomes almost everything outside of some interactions mediated through electronic media.

MBM: When I was a kid and really got into electronic music, my friends and I started buying synthesizers when we were in high school. I would go listen to records and in my head, everyone had these huge, lavish studios and you needed special equipment and stuff like that. It's been really important to me to talk about how you don't need all the most expensive gear to have the best sounding music. I really hope it helps demystify some of the process to people that are interested in being creative in those ways but don't know where to begin or what they're even looking for. My "How To Set Up a Home Studio" guide is subtitled "The Journey of Mistakes" because it was 18

years of me buying something and it not working and trying to figure out what I needed to have a setup that was working properly.

I wanted to talk specifically about your fabric mix, which is excellent. It's so hard. I love it so much.

ED: I'm really proud of it. It was hard to do, too.

MBM: It was super hard to do.

ED: We licensed all the records back in March. We gave them a list of 40 or 50 songs. Then they had the legal team work for months trying to contact old artists, trying to find out who owns the rights to this music. We picked the list when we came home, thinking we're going to be home a couple weeks or two months. We got our clearance list and it was at a really dark time for us both.

MBM: Yes.

ED: And here's all these jammers, you know? We had to create something that felt real for the time with our really hot, hard, banging tour record. That was interesting, but I think good art came out of it.

MBM: I think so, too. It's hard to compress. When you have 70 minutes, you're like, "Okay, we've got to compress all this down into this smaller thing." And not have it be our "cool B-sides" mix. It's what you'd hear if you're going to see Eris Drew and Octo Octa play-

ED: -And you show up late. I'm glad it has that energy. I think people need that a little bit right now, too.

Was it difficult to get into the mindset of creating a mix in isolation and knowing that it would be consumed also in likely isolation by people in their homes?

ED: It was definitely something we talked about a ton, so it was on our minds.

MBM: I was somewhat nervous about how it would come out, but I was excited to do it because we had been doing some of our BBC shows and had been doing some mixes together at home and I just love mixing with you so much.

ED: Every time we've done it, it's been kind of hard but then at the end, we feel so good, like, "Okay, we accomplished this or we made something." Then our records, they double back on us. Honestly, I'm not totally ecstatic and happy all the time, obviously, but these records put me back in that place. When I listen to that mix, I do feel the energy of the actual parties and I do feel real nostalgia for raving. It's not our ultimate mix and I'm glad.

Eris Drew 5 Things:

The Original Walt Disney Film *Tron* (1982) (dvd)

Voyager Golden Record 40th Anniversary

Roshanak Kheshti "Switched-On Bach" (book 2020)

Why Did the K Foundation Burn a Million Quid (Interview: The Late Late Show 1995)

The grumbles, coos, and squawks of our pet Chinchilla, "Chee."

Octo Octa 5 Things:

Ghost in the Shell by Masamune Shirow (manga)

Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture by Arthur Evans (book)

Hilma af Klint (artist)

Neon Genesis Evangelion (anime series)

LTJ Bukem (producer / DJ)

Name

Eris Drew and Octo Octa

Vocation

DJs and T4T LUV NRG label heads

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