On staying true to your own vision and never checking the streams

Producer and DJ Jubilee on knowing when a track is finally done, navigating the complicated landscape of bookings and management, and ultimately not letting the business of music take away all the joy in making things.

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As told to Ruth Saxelby, 2869 words.

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How do you know when a track you're making is done?

You don't. You don't ever think it's done. You listen to it for the rest of your life and think of what you could have done. Someone I know just tweeted, this producer Ernesto, "Man, that feeling when you're actually at peace with a track you made." I have to yell at some of my producer friends to just let it go. I'm guilty of doing it too, but one thing that I am good at is being like, "All right, fuck it. Stop. I'm turning it in because otherwise I could do this for another year." There are so many geniuses sitting on so much music right now because they're like this, when they could be working on new stuff.

What was your creative process with "Fulla Curve"? It's such an anthem.

I'm actually surprised when I play it, people really know it. I've been playing a lot of *Mario Kart* and I think that I was just thinking about Yoshi when I made that song, so it's called Yoshi [to me]. It was already a cute-sounding song with little noises in it. IQ came in and just made it a whole other song, because he's amazing. I had a couple other people write on that song, and they were all really good, but the second he started, I was like, "Oh, this is going to be it."

What have you learned from working with vocalists?

I'm not going to pretend that I have a lot of experience working with vocalists, because I don't. I don't do a lot of sessions with them, but [IQ] went right in and wrote it really fast. He picked up the key and everything immediately. I just had no idea what was going to come out of that song at all.

I feel like this album was way more trial and error. The last one I was like, "This is definitely it." This one was a lot more like, "What works? Is this me, is this not me?" I had vocals on "Daylight Ravings" that I loved, but it didn't work. It was too pop-y. It just wasn't a Jubilee song. It was good, but that song is such a busy song, structure-wise. It has so much going on in it, but also I just like it how it is [as an instrumental].

Is that kind of creative decision very clear-cut for you?

Yeah, “This is not it.” I wouldn’t play this, you know? Vocalists go to sessions all day, and rarely anything even comes out of it. I really loved two of the people that I worked with, and I would love in the future to do something with them that does work, or do something for them. I’ve also linked them with a lot of other producers.

I don’t like the whole songwriting process—you’re just doing sessions and doing sessions. If you want to write pop, then that’s sick. I have friends who are constantly in sessions, and that’s how it works, but for me, I don’t want to lose touch with this person. If I have a musical experience with somebody, I want to hold on to that. For me, [the songwriting session process] can be a bit impersonal, but when it *is* personal, it’s magic.

Me and Hoodcelebrityy, I’ll always love her. We were both in certain moments in our career where everything just came together for [“Wine Up”]. We did some shows, and she came to my release party. That’s my sis, straight up. We don’t talk a lot, but we have each other’s back.

What’s the most valuable thing that making two albums has taught you?

I kind of think I’m done with albums. I don’t know. The first one was so different than this and the music industry has changed so much. I liked [making *Call For Location*] a lot, but the business side of [putting an album out] took away from the fun. I do not fucking care about a Spotify list or some fashion magazine. You have to do those things, and people are like, “So, how’s the album? Are you checking the streams?” I’m like, “Why would I check the streams? I have zero control over who’s streaming this, so no, I’m not going to obsessively check the streams.” I have no idea actually how they are doing. I don’t know if that’s healthy. I probably should.

The good thing is I went to Asia [on tour] after my release. Those important three weeks while everyone’s refreshing everything, I just ignored it. I got a lot of good feedback from a lot of artists that I love, and that’s all I care about.

What is your studio process like?

Some people are studio rats, but I’m not. I get an idea, then I go. Last night I had an idea, so I went to Mixpak [studio]. I book blocks of time out, but if I’m not feeling it for the day, I’m not going to sit in there. I live in New York, I don’t have time for that shit. I also do a hundred other things. It’s not like I was working on this album for three years—I was, but it wasn’t 24/7 working on it for three years. It was very spread out.

When I go to the studio, three hours go by before anything actually gets done. I’m like, *Okay, I’m going to listen to this and watch this on YouTube.* Then I need snacks, now I need a soda. I can’t get a text that’s going to throw me off.

How do you get yourself into the right mindset?

It’s so hard. I think you just have to do it, and then you eventually get in a zone. I have pretty bad diagnosed ADD. The bad thing about ADD is you have ADD, but the good thing about ADD is once you focus on something, you have to peel me away. I have to find that zone, and sometimes you just don’t. I’m not going to sit there and force it. It sucks when you rent that studio hourly, though.

Working with other people helps because that pressure is gone and you’re just kind of fucking around and not even thinking about it. Burt Fox did my mixdowns and it was really good to bounce ideas off of him in the ending process. Even having Dre Skull in the studio to ask him for advice. Having a lot of producer friends that I can be like, “Hey, can you spend the day in here with me? Help me?” I think I tried to bring that back a little bit [with this album] because I’m at this point right now where I’m like, “Why did I start doing this?” Because business takes over your brain. I’m trying to go back old school, in a way. Because this is taking the fun out of everything.

What is it about the business side of putting an album out that's frustrating?

Having to have meetings. *When is this going to be done?* Yeah, you obviously have to get it done, but everybody around you is on a business perspective. Everybody only wants to do something if you have something to promote, and now everything moves so fast. This one magazine, four days after my album, was like, "Yeah, we only do something in the [first] day or two. Do you have anything new coming out?" I was like, I'm not even answering this email.

I think there's a lot of that, and it's taking away from the album itself. This time around, I just personally sent it to [people] even if I didn't know them. I DM-ed certain DJs. I was like, "Hi, I'm a fan and I just want to send this to you." Every single one of them [wrote back]. Martyn wrote back in 20 minutes and was like, "I like this song the best." I was like, "Whoa."

The London DJ and radio host Sian Anderson recently tweeted about how hard it is to find the right manager and agent. She said that "the reality is sometimes you are the best representation of yourself." What are your thoughts on that?

I mean, I really could use some help, but she's completely right. It took me a year to find management, and I treated it like dating. There were meetings and meetings, and I was like, "I'm not going to go to somebody until I really want to." After a year of searching, I found somebody that [ended up not giving me] what I was supposed to have, so I should have just been alone the whole time, doing it myself. At the end of the day, yeah, there were things that got done for sure. There was a day-to-day person that helped out a lot, but I could've just paid another person or done it myself.

You really need those people that really believe in you and want to be on your team; people who have the same vision. A lot of these managers and agents have these artists that automatically make them some money, so a lot of times what happens is when you're such a weird, niche thing, and they find out that you're some actual work and they can't just slap you on so-and-so EDM stage, they don't even want to fuck with you. "Oh wait, I have to do some strategizing. These [other] people, I don't have to do this with. I can just put them on EDC for $10,000 and make a quick thousand." I trusted [having management] for one year and, you know, when the time came to make the plans and do the things, it didn't work. I learned.

The good thing is my agents are sick [and are] looking towards the future of *Magic City*, which is my compilation that I think is going to be my next focus. The next one will be number five. I like producing, but I also want to start putting out other people. I'm getting older… how can we navigate? Bandcamp is really good right now, there's some really good things for dance music. Everything changes every six months. You have to be really creative on how you do things. I hate saying I'm trying to figure out the next move less than a month after my album came out, but of course I am. I'm a woman and I live in New York and I'm thinking about my future.

You DJ and tour a lot. How do you organize your music?

I have a system that a lot of people have, where I organize it by party. I have everything in my iTunes organized by genre, but as far as my USBs go, it's like "Mixpak Carnival Party" and then I'll just add to that when I download new stuff. Let's say my set's an hour, that's like 20 songs, I'll have 60. I'll have three per song as options. I also name things my own name, based on a lyric. Because sometimes when I'm deep in it, I can't remember the name of the song, even though I know exactly what I want to play.

You're in a unique position because there's not many DJs you see on big party lineups as well as underground raves. What have you learned from navigating those two worlds?

I was getting booked for a lot of New York party stuff and that was fun while it lasted, but guess what? I'm fucking over it. First of all, fashion stuff has gone full influencer anyway, so I don't really do those things anymore. I don't really want to do them, either. I was doing a lot of those and underground stuff. I was doing a lot of things that were focused on R&B and dancehall, but I feel like I'm really just trying to rave out right

now. I don’t want to do a lot of that [bigger] stuff, unless it’s a brand that understands the vision and is like, “Hey, we want this vibe.” Then I’m down, but at the end of the day, [brands] say they want that vibe but they really don’t. You know?

For a while I was doing that, and it’s great to have diverse options, but I think it’s really confusing for festivals that I really want to play. I think people think that I’m a dancehall DJ. Can you please listen to four compilations, two albums, and three EPs and figure this out? I get a lot of weird techno snobs that don’t really want to fuck with me when it comes to festivals and stuff like that. I keep posting all my old tracklists from 2009, just kind of like, “Have fun, guys.” I’ve definitely been pitched for some things and they’re like, “No. Not techno enough or not disco enough.” I’m kind of like, what does this mean? Do I not have the right friends? Are the right people not co-signing me? How does this work? At the end of the day, it still is a boy’s club, and the separation of techno and bass music is one of the most annoying things in the entire world.

What keeps you creatively inspired while you’re on tour?

The farther away you go, the more the people know about music. Also, when you go to a place like China, that blocks half the internet and they know your music, it’s so exciting. How do they even know? Anybody that knows me anywhere, it surprises me. When I was young I had a fascination with UK music and I did everything I could to find every single song, every single DJ, joined every message board. I’ve been there, I think it’s like that.

Whenever I leave the country, I always get booked with somebody that I can tell is a very thought-out opener. That doesn’t really happen here, where everybody just kind of slaps shit together. Even in China, every opener I had, I was like, “Fuck, give me all your music. Who are you?” Then the promoter was like, “We knew that you guys would be a good pair.”

Also, local music. With every cab driver, I’m always like, “Can you just put on your favorite station?” I like hearing local music, I like hearing the similarities. I was listening in Delhi to whatever the cab driver was listening to–it was some old man station–and it sounded like reggaeton. I think all of that helps me stay inspired, because as wonderful as New York is, it can definitely be the same party over and over and over again. It goes in and out of being great and dry. When it’s great, it’s great. When it’s dry, it’s like, “I’m not going out for a year.”

Jubilee Recommends:

Grime MC by JME
I had to have someone mail this album to me. I love JME. He only released this on CD and vinyl in local stores in London, which I hated and loved at the same time. People are buying it. It’s working. He is in the charts with only physical copies. He’s an icon.

Moonchild Sanelly
I found her via DJ Lag and then went in on the music digging. There is something about her voice, her look, her music, aesthetic, everything that is captivating to me. I hope we see more of her this year because she is a VIBE.

Untitled Goose Game on Nintendo Switch
Who doesn’t want to be an annoying goose just walking around terrorizing the neighborhood all day? Especially while our brains are on fire along with planet Earth. Honking and stealing some man’s hat while he’s in the garden is just soothing to me.

Mixed Feelings by Naomi Shimada
A book that began with intimate conversations between friends about social media mixed in with our everyday life. I am biased because a dear friend of mine wrote this book but I think these conversations are so important. Living online feels like end days and it’s nice to know that we aren’t alone.

LUCY
One of my favorite DJs right now. Her and her label, SZNS7N, have been inspiring to me this year. I have gotten to see her DJ a few times and she keeps raising the bar. She is part of a crew called 6 Figure Gang out of London

and every single member is fire.

AceMoMa

Hometown heroes out of NYC right now killing it with house and techno. New York has needed these guys for a really long time and now is their moment.

These eye masks from Japan

Run, don’t walk, to order them. They heat up and let off a lavender scent and I am completely obsessed with them. Sorry but I just HAD to bring this up.

Name

Jubilee

Vocation

Producer, DJ

Squid Stills