On growing with intention and integrity

Music curator and interviewer Margeaux Labat (marg.mp3) discusses eliminating distractions, establishing your voice over time, and staying present.

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As told to Jeffrey Silverstein, 2876 words.

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You've shared that music was a private interest for a long time. When and how did that change?

Music has always been private for me. It even feels like that now, which sounds a bit contradicting, since I have this crazy platform with thousands of followers. It still feels extremely private in my actual life. It always has. It was rooted in negative feelings a lot of the time, shame, or feeling like I couldn't connect with anyone. Isolation, because when I was a teenager in high school, my brother was showing me this stuff, but we weren't talking about it together in a way where we're sharing mutual excitement.

He was just like, "Yo, listen to this," and then he dipped out. With my friends and my peers, the music that we listened to together was not indie music. That was private for me, the stuff I felt the most moved by. It's always been a personal, one-on-one connection, me and the music that I'm listening to. It's never been shared. Even to this day, I don't talk to any of my closest friends about music, which is a big gap in my life. It's a gap that I fill through my online accounts.

I think it's healthy to have close friendships that aren't based entirely around common interests.

It's funny you say that because I'm so deeply wanting that in my life. As my profile grows as this music tastemaker, or whatever, people don't talk to me about music in person because they're intimidated. People don't want to put on music when I'm around because they're thinking a lot about it. I'm like, you guys, it's chill. You could put on Beyoncé. I don't care. I understand, but it's something that I'm so deeply wanting, just that personal connection. I want to go to a concert with a friend and just let loose.

Were you initially turning to the internet to find community?

I did turn to the internet to satisfy that need, to share my love of music and common interests, for participating in music with others. But I was not contributing at all to the conversation during my formative years. I was just consuming. I was just going on Reddit and forums. I was on 4chan, reading a bunch of message boards. That's how I best consumed information. I was obsessed with the indieheads Subreddit. I feel like I grew up on Reddit, learning about all of the bands that I loved. Even now I'm on Subreddits constantly, but I'm never commenting. Just reading constantly. That's something that is still a part of my daily life.

What other outlets were you paying attention to?

I was reading Pitchfork lists and interviews a bunch. I never really read album reviews. Fast-forwarding a couple years, when I started posting online, it was just text on my Instagram account, posting album covers and typing my thoughts in the caption. That's when I started watching different videos on YouTube. I was watching Anthony Fantano. I was studying him, how he talked. Whenever I would be reading Pitchfork, I would be studying, doing research. How does this writer say certain things in a way that resonates? How could I say it in a way that is more descriptive, that paints a different picture? I was doing research on how to talk about certain things in a way that sounds more eloquent and I guess, serious. Even today, people are like, "Do you consider yourself a music critic?" And I'm like, "Not really." I'm not really criticizing music. I'm just listening to a bunch of stuff. I keep my criticisms to myself and then I share what I think is good.

Criticism seems to have entered a less aggressive era. Do you notice the shift and has this given space for channels like yours to thrive?

I notice this shift for sure. Whether I like it or not, I'm a part of the shift. I have trouble comprehending and accepting my place in this space. I see myself as someone that's posting online and going about my business. Then again, this is my whole career. I've made a career out of this. I get to travel and go to festivals and interview artists. It's my job. I've created this for myself. I think it's good that it's moving this way. I just happen to be part of this new wave that's existing in this space where there's not a sharp polarization of this is either good or terrible.

There's more nuance to the discussion of how to talk about music, and how to understand what it sounds like and reads to you. Growing up under that, reading these Reddit message boards, being in the places that I was online privately, I was like, I don't want to be like this. Even looking at Anthony Fantano, no shade to him, I was like, I respect this, but I don't want to be like this. I don't like giving things ratings. If you're looking for someone to talk negatively about things, there's so many other places that you can go. I'm not one of those places.

Your videos feel far more accessible because of that.

Accessibility is the key. Growing up as a music fan, especially as an indie music fan, there were never other girls that looked like me also listening to this stuff. Which also largely contributes to why it's been so personal. I couldn't find any other Black girls that were making the music that I liked, that were listening to the music that I liked, that were talking about it online. When I started posting, I wasn't doing it with the conscious decision of, "I want to be the change that I want to see in the world." I desperately just wanted to express myself, and I took to the internet to do it and didn't think anything of it. I didn't plan for any of this, but I just so happened to establish this voice over time.

I wanted to make music that's esoteric and obscure be more accessible to other people like me. And in a way that isn't so daunting like, "Oh, do you want to learn about, I don't know, IDM? Let me tell you the stuff that I like or where I started when I was listening to jazz or whatever."

Have you always felt comfortable with interviews/being on camera?

I did a couple of long form interviews starting in 2022. In 2024 I did my first short form interview to post on Instagram and TikTok, which was with Kazu from Blonde Redhead. I was already friendly with publicists and music managers, because I'd been in New York for a couple years. I used to work at labels and was at Pitchfork at the time. When I posted my first interview with Kazu, people that worked for artists, managers and publicists were like, "Oh, let's get Margeaux to interview this artist." It was full on from the jump. I think my second or third interview was Kim Gordon. I look back to that time and I'm like, what the fuck was I doing? I don't even know. I was a baby interviewer and I was interviewing one of my idols.

I felt so lucky to be given these opportunities. At the beginning, for the first year, I was always asking a friend to come and film for me because I didn't have a tripod. I always have a set of questions that I send to artists beforehand and they pick which ones they want to answer. I never know what they're going to say and sometimes don't even know what questions they're going to pick, but we workshop that in real time. Whenever I

record, it’s like I’m reacting. I never know what they’re going to say, so it’s a genuine, impactful interaction. I just got better as I did more of them. Also, as I eliminated people that were there with me. Whenever I film now, it’s just me and the artist.

I like to keep it that way. When other people get thrown into the mix, I get distracted. I want to eliminate distractions. I’m trying to lock in and be present. An element of the interviewing process that I’ve had to accept is just the lack of control a lot of the time, being okay to roll with the punches and developing confidence in myself. My own interviews were happening in tandem with me working at Pitchfork and doing video shoots constantly. I got it down through doing both at the same time.

What gear are you using?

I’m not so savvy when it comes to gear. Simplicity, functionality, and portability are the main things that are important to me. I hate carrying more stuff than I have to. I have an iPhone that I use strictly for content. It only has videos on it. No apps, no data plan, no nothing. That preserves the quality of the camera. I have two bluetooth mics and, I guess, what’s equivalent to an interface, which I plug right into my phone using an adapter. It’s the RODE Wireless GO II. I use that to record my interviews. No lighting. Then I have a tripod. That’s pretty much it. When I’m traveling, I want to have a nimble setup. I like it to just be me. I do want to expand on what I’m doing. That’s what I’ve been working on lately. I’m going to have to involve more people but I’m crossing that bridge when I get there.

How do you navigate what brand collaborations to take on?

I say no all the time. For many reasons. I can say no because I’m feeling tired, overwhelmed, because I’m not into the music, because it doesn’t feel true to me. I read somewhere in recent years that no is a complete sentence. You don’t need to elaborate. That’s how I protect my peace, as cliché as it is. It’s how I protect and preserve my integrity as a creator.

Another influencer who I think is honestly prophetic in a comedic way, she once said that people in the online space, they can either make a quick bag and get a bunch of money or they can make a serious cultural impact. That’s always stuck with me, because I could’ve “sold out” a long time ago. I’m wanting to proceed with the utmost intention and integrity. The second I’m not feeling true to myself is the minute that I maybe just stop doing all of this. My integrity in what I post online and what is attached to me, my brand or whatever, that is so important to me. That’s why I don’t have a take on every single thing. People always ask me, “Oh, what’d you think about this album? It literally came out an hour ago.”

I understand that’s how people are primed now. Even if I did have something to say, I’m always wanting to sit and marinate with whatever I’m listening to. I preserve all of that by saying no. There are certain guidelines I have for myself when it comes to what I say yes to. Often, if it’s not an immediate strong yes, then it’s not happening. Looking back on things that I’ve said yes to when it’s not been an immediate yes, I’ve kind of regretted it, but everything’s a learning lesson.

How do you feel about the term “influencer”?

People ascribe these labels to me. Music critic, music journalist, content creator, music curator, music interviewer, music blogger, TikToker. I don’t care. When you think about what I’m doing, I’m influencing people’s music taste. I’m an influencer in the literal sense of the word, not in this conflated vapid thing that comes to mind when you think of modern day influencers. You can call it what it is. I don’t feel any negative connotation around that word.

I don’t say that when people are like, “What are you?” I’m just like, “I’m a music curator. I’m a music interviewer,” because that makes more sense to everyone. But at the end of the day, I’m a music fan that has made a career out of it.

Sometimes I answer with the thing that makes me money. Other times with what I care most about.

I feel that. It's going to vary if I'm talking to someone I'm meeting at the bar versus my aunt's friend. I do a lot of things, but it doesn't mean that I am those things. I don't attach my sense of self to the things that I do. I do radio, I post videos online, I interview artists and bands. I go to festivals and I do fashion stuff. It sounds corny, but I'm just this person that does these things and makes a living out of it. That's a long answer, but no one cares. They want a quick categorization to eliminate confusion, but that's how I see myself.

Do you still document your dreams?

I don't document my dreams as much as I used to. The state of my dreams have been changing and my mornings look different now. I was doing more dream journaling when I had a normal job. I just lay in bed for hours, and I'm reading, looking out the window thinking about crazy shit. Memory is always something that I'm thinking about when it comes to my personal relationship with music and the kind of stuff that I want to do more long-term. Music and memory are so linked.

As an interviewer, I love asking questions that directly channel music memory. That's when gems start to come out, in terms of how this musician came to be the person that they are through their music. I love learning about people's lives through music taste, because that's how I would want someone to learn about me, if they really wanted to know me. That's why I post online. That's why I do my NTS show in the way that I do and talk sometimes way too much. I'm offering people an opportunity to learn about me if they choose to pay attention. By talking about memory, sometimes the listener on the receiving end thinks about how it applies to them in the span of their own lives. Those are the most powerful interactions and takeaways. It dictates pretty much everything that I do, especially when it comes to music and art.

Margeaux Labat Recommends:

Reading for 20-30 minutes right after you wake up — People love to read before bed but I personally will fall asleep in less than 5 minutes when I do, which I guess is kind of the point, right? Like it's supposed to relax your brain and make you sleepy… but because this happens to me, I never get to really immerse myself in whatever I'm reading, so I'm now a morning reader and have been for a while. It's a great way to ease yourself into waking life, way better than immediately scrolling on your phone. I'm currently reading *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison !

Dogville (2003) — I watched this last week on a whim and am still thinking about it. I watched it in two sittings since it's 3 hours long, and in between viewings it really was all I could think about. I've been on a Lars von Trier kick since… trying not to think too much about what that might say about where I'm at right now, lol.

Robert Palmer - "Woke Up Laughing" — My favorite song right now. I first heard it foreverrrr ago and it never really stuck with me, but it has been hitting so hard for me lately. It's such a creative approach to a song, the singing style, the seemingly stream-of-consciousness lyrics, the African-influenced polyrhythms, and it's just super catchy. Which makes sense, like, he had some serious hits.

Steaming / icing your face — I'm always trying out new DIY things to add to my skincare regimen, and for the past 6 months or so I've been icing my face for 20-30 seconds in the morning. But I'm currently sick so I've switched to steaming, mainly for my sinuses, but it's been really nice for my skin, too. I just fill a large bowl with boiling water and lean over it under a towel for 10-15 minutes. Feels like a quick trip to the sauna. Think I'll only do it once a week, though, once I kick this sick spell.

Al-Aqsa Bakery & Restaurant — I literally just ate from this place for the first time and it was kinda mind-blowing. It's a Palestinian hole in the wall in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Seriously might've been the absolute best falafel and hummus I've ever had. Plus the guy gave me free samples while I waited for my food, how sweet. No frills, amazing food, affordable… my kinda spot.

Name
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Vocation
music curator and interviewer

Photo by Katie Philo