

On staying grounded in your creativity



Musician and comedian Eve Parker Finley discusses turning her attention to her creative path, the power of joy and laughter, and the importance of investing in community.

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As told to Adrian Inglis, 2511 words.

Tags: [Comedy](#), [Music](#), [Mental health](#), [Time management](#), [Process](#), [Collaboration](#).

A few years ago you made a big leap, leaving behind academia and a full-time career in favor of pursuing and prioritizing your creative work. What inspired that decision?

For a long time I was involved in a very DIY music scene in Montreal, and I had always been pursuing music as kind of a hobby: something I did on weekends and evenings. As the years went on, I went to McGill where I studied and worked in equity education stuff. My work life got busier and more intense, and then at the end of 2019 I had this real burnout where I was so overwhelmed by work and at the same time was full of this intense desire to pursue music and creative things. I really felt like "I have to turn my attention to my own creative practice, otherwise I'm going to die." That's really what it felt like.

So, at the end of January 2020, I got a clinically diagnosed burnout from my family doctor and took a bunch of time off work and then the pandemic happened, and I basically never went back to work and just started pursuing creative projects. Once I finally gave myself permission to do that lots of really exciting things happened, even though it felt like the scariest decision ever at the time.

I can imagine it would be very scary moving from a perceived stability or security into the unknown.

Totally. Honestly, having the monthly government subsidy during the first year of the pandemic was a huge reason why I was able to pursue creativity. And this is also why I'm such a proponent of universal basic income. I feel like there's so many artists that would be able to be [full-time] artists if they had the means to do it. Financial resources are super important, and I apply for grants all the time. If I don't have a grant sitting in my bank account, I'm applying for the next one. We're so lucky in Canada to have this system that has a lot of funding if you can access it. And a lot of people can't, which is so annoying.

You mentioned a diagnosed burnout, do you still ever find yourself on that edge?

That took a long time to learn because, after my burnout, I got so scared to be busy. Being busy felt like a trigger. Serendipitously, it was a time to not have anything to do, and the best healing for burnout is to try to learn how to do nothing, which I think is also really good for your creative brain. Now I'm much busier than I used to be, and I love being busy, but it's so important to me that everything that I do is something I want to do, that's the only way that I can manage it.

How do you find balance amongst all your creative projects?

I know that some people like to be able to focus on one thing or one creative pursuit, but I'm definitely someone who thrives when I can switch between a bunch of different things throughout the day. I'll be working on emails, because I work part-time for POP Montreal Music Festival, and then I'll switch and play piano for an hour, and then I'll write a song, and then I'll make a TikTok, and then I'll go back to my email. That cycle really helps me, and it's my ideal work environment..

Do you find yourself drawn to a certain form of self-expression depending on how you are feeling? How do you choose what form your creativity takes?

This is actually something I'm thinking about a lot right now. At the beginning of the pandemic, I downloaded TikTok, I watched what people were doing and I found this style of comedy so funny, the little mini sketch comedy. And then after watching it for a while, I was like, I want to do that. At first it was something that just made me so happy and I would laugh so much as I was doing it. It really helped boost my mood and explore feeling happy. Whereas I feel like for a long time, music has been a way that I can explore feeling sad or more complicated, deeper spiritual feelings. And those practices, [comedy and music], have been very separate for a while. But I have recently begun figuring out the ways that they can be threaded together and ways to explore tough emotions or difficult subjects through comedy, and also how to explore joy and funniness through music. And I feel like this is my next creative chapter, I think.

Eve, you are very funny. Could you talk about the presence and importance of humor and playfulness in your work?

I think laughing is so awesome. Oh my god I sound like a kindergarten teacher. There was a rise of a certain kind of comedy and comedy in general during 2020 and 2021. I think people were so scared and sad and depressed and really needed levity and to be able to laugh at home. I definitely needed that, I still do need it. I think people need it all the time. It's so powerful and exciting to help people laugh and find joy, and not just because it's a physical experience that feels good, I think that people laugh for a bunch of reasons.

One of the most interesting reasons to me is when people feel like their unique experience is being shown back to them. People laugh because they're like, "Oh, I know that person, or I know that thing, or, I've had that experience and I thought it was so niche to me, but I'm laughing because now, oh my god, there's all these other people who have experienced that." So it's a real recognition moment. I think that's very, very cool and a powerful thing that comedy does really well.

That is really cool, and points to the power of humor as a tool of connection right?

Yeah. And it's validation. And I think that's the special thing about the scene in Montreal. There's this really cute, cool, queer and feminist comedy scene with all these shows that happen, and people are making jokes about queer and trans experiences and a whole room of queer and trans people are laughing at it. And there's just something so powerful and unique about that experience. It's like, spiritual.

You are really active and well liked on social media, and you also do live performances. Do you have a preferred way of connecting with your audience?

I actually really like both. I think nothing can replace performing for a live audience and connecting with people in person because the energy you can get from people and the feedback and the surprise of how people react to stuff is not at all the same thing online. I also think there's something really special about connecting with people online, not only because you can reach people who are far away and from anywhere, but I think a lot of people find performing online, for lack of a better term, very scary because it's like, "Oh my god, who's going to see this?" People really cannibalize their own thought process and get so immersed in an anxiety spiral about it. Like, "Oh does this look stupid? Do I look cringe? Are people going to think I think too highly of myself when I post this?"

And I totally understand, those are all feelings I've had to work through, but I feel so free of all of those pressures now when I post something on the internet. I don't want to say that I'm perfect, but now when I post on

the internet, it feels like an ephemeral sandbox. What I find freeing about social media is actually that people look at what you post for a few seconds and then they swipe away and move on with their lives if they don't like it. It kind of means you can do whatever you want and who cares if someone doesn't enjoy it because you probably won't even know. And if they do like it, you'll get this really special message or comment from some stranger who just felt impacted by it. And I think that's so cool. Even though at the same time, these are big evil technologies, multi spyware, blah, blah.

If social media isn't a reliably sustainable means of self-promotion or connection, do you ever fantasize about what the future of connecting with audiences online looks like without having to rely on Instagram or TikTok?

I think social media is just an avenue for experimenting and sharing art and building an audience. I'm always trying to learn whatever the new tool of the day is. I taught myself how to navigate TikTok. Before that I taught myself how to navigate Instagram and whatever comes next I'm ready to teach myself how to do it. I don't feel married to any of those platforms because you can't rely on it. TikTok could disappear in a year so I stay focused on the creative things that I really enjoy, which are comedy, which is music, which is the intersection of those things. This CBC show that I've been working on, it's called Ten-Minute Topline. It's an interview game show with musician guests, and it's the perfect intersection of comedy and music for me. I'm so excited to explore future things like that which don't rely on my ability to reach people through a few specific social media pages.

In what ways does your creative community support you and your work?

In 2020 and 2021 I was doing everything by myself in my apartment and it felt like that could be such a lonely experience and can make you feel like you're spinning in your head. The last couple of years, it's been very important to me to build up and be enmeshed in an artistic community that's really supportive. I rent a studio with a bunch of other artists, and we all do different things and talk to each other all the time, helping each other with our projects. That has been so helpful. I have a friend, an amazing musician, [Thanya Iyer](#), and we call each other, semi jokingly, peer managers because neither of us have managers, but we meet all the time and spend hours with each other helping each other work through different aspects of our career that we need help with, setting goals and just feeling supported.

We also got together with a bunch of other musicians in the city and created this musician support group thing, which meets sometimes once a month. We sit around and we talk about what each other are doing and what questions people have. And there's lots of skill sharing and co-working time. All of those structures are incredibly important to make any of the work possible.

It sounds like you are a strong proponent of collaboration and mutual support.

We're so enmeshed in a western culture of the individual "it-girl" star that does it all on their own but really behind all of those stars has to be a big structure of support, whether it's financial or friends or community or industry or whatever. I think the idea of people doing things totally on their own is completely overblown at the moment and sets a false expectation for young artists, too. You don't have to do this alone. You can do it independently from industry structures, but you don't have to do it alone. So if you're feeling that feeling of wanting a community of support, and you don't feel like you have it, make it happen. And as soon as you put up the light, you send up a flare, people will come and join you.

What are some ways that you make space for your own care within a busy and sometimes inconsistent schedule?

The funny thing about being an artist is I feel like my hobbies and my job are so intertwined; whereas I used to unwind from work by playing music, now rehearsing is part of the job. So self-care is also intertwined with the work in a way because it makes me feel good to do it. But that being said, I really have to be very mindful about taking breaks and taking time off.

Being an independent contractor is tricky because if you're not careful, you can be ambiently working, always. I've tried a bunch of different methods and people just have to find the system that works for them. I used to

try and take weekends off but that never worked for me, both because so many creative things happen on the weekends, but also I like the flexibility. Instead I have learned to listen to my body and whenever I need to take a day or a morning or an evening off, I just do it. Remembering to take the time off is super important, but it doesn't have to be structured if that doesn't work for you. Social time is very important to me, too. I have this weekly dinner with friends and we've had dinner every Wednesday night for almost 10 years, and having a structure like that is so awesome and really helps keep myself accountable to taking time off.

Any parting words or wisdom that you'd like to share?

At the point that I am at in my career, I'm thinking a lot about how to take what I'm doing to a new level, and sometimes I get distracted from the point of all of this which is to be able to do the creative thing and have it fund my life and be sustainable and enjoyable. You can get distracted from that if you're trying to figure out "How can I make enough money to live or advance my career in x, y, z ways?" I had a realization the other month where I was like, "Oh my god, I haven't played my violin in a month because I've been so busy trying to meet with people and yet the whole point of building the career for me is to have the time to do the creative thing," so staying grounded in that is something I'm trying to do a lot more of. Even if I'm trying to build my career, I want to stay grounded in the creative part and connected to what brought me to these practices in the first place, because that's the fun part.

Eve Parker Finley Recommends:

rest

daydream

throw shit at the wall and see what feels right

collaborate (you don't need to do it all on your own)

share things with people. lots of people will like it, and some people will absolutely love it.

Name

Eve Parker Finley

Vocation

multi-instrumentalist and comedian

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Stacy Lee