

On being vulnerable as an artist



Musician Becca Harvey (girlpuppy) discusses healing through the creative process, collaborating with artists and listeners, and combating the pressure and comparison of the music industry.

March 16, 2023 -

As told to Erica Tello, 2548 words.

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

What do you feel like you embody as a performer when you're on stage?

I am probably the most outgoing version of myself. I'm extroverted, but I'm not super energetic or outgoing. I think on stage I am very much me, but I'm just a little bit dancier.

How would you define your voice as an artist?

I use singing and songwriting as a diary. I think I would just define my voice as vulnerable and honest.

When I listen to *When I'm Alone* and read the lyrics I think about how vulnerable and brave you are to be able to share those stories. Why did you decide to title your debut album as *When I'm Alone*?

I wrote a lot of these songs in moments when I was alone. I reference watching movies and feeling too much of a certain way about myself when I have that time alone. I thought it was great to name it *When I'm Alone*, because I feel like all the lyrics and everything I wrote is just all the stuff that I think about when I'm by myself.

How did it feel releasing that body of work into the world?

It was nerve wracking, but it was just so exciting because it's the work that I'm most proud of so far. More than anything, I was just so excited to have other people hear it just because I am so proud of it. It's everything I've wanted to say.

I know you also worked with a few different collaborators like Marshall Vore and Sam Acchione on the album. In your process, do you collaborate a lot in writing and just developing as an artist?

Yeah, I do. I don't play any instruments, so it's impossible for me to make music completely by myself. I always have to collaborate for writing purposes on guitar, piano, or whatever. For the album, especially, I wrote almost all of the lyrics. I tend to write lyrics completely by myself, and I don't really collaborate when it comes to that aspect. I'm not opposed to it, but I seem to write a lot faster when I'm making myself only do it under pressure. I worked with Sam Acchione and John Michael Young who wrote all of the guitar parts on that album.

How has it been collaborating? What does that process look like usually?

When we were making the album, it would usually start with a melody idea I had. I'd be humming something, and then I would show it to either Sam or John Michael. They would either interpret it or just play out the exact

melody that I was humming, and we would build from there. With the song, "Destroyer," for example, that initially da-dum da-dum da-dum. Sam had been playing that part all day at the studio. We were making a couple of the songs in Philly, and he had been just strumming that all day. I just came up with lyrics from there, and we came up with a melody together until it stuck.

It's interesting to hear about the process. Do you enjoy doing that and collaborating with other artists to get the final track?

I do. I really enjoy it especially when it's with the right person and it comes so easily and it's so comfortable. It's the best feeling in the world. Especially working with Sam, we work so well in everything we do together. I'm just so proud of both of us, and I really can't imagine making the album without him. With some of those songs, it's so embarrassing to sing or tell someone these lyrics. Especially, with some of the songs, I would have to just sing a melody that I can only hum and I can't play along to. It can be so embarrassing and silly, but having someone that makes you feel comfortable makes it so great.

What would you say is the most vulnerable song on *When I'm Alone*, and what does it mean to you?

I would say probably "Permanent State." When I wrote that song, I had been feeling very insecure. Honestly, I was insecure a lot of the time just leading up to making the album. With my debut album, I wanted to make something perfect and something no one's ever heard before. I felt pressure that it had to be completely perfect because it's my first time really showing anyone a full piece of art. I wrote "Permanent State" just about that pressure of wanting everyone to like me and not understanding if they don't. In the bridge, I specifically say, "I hate writing songs," and how it's so hard to write about things.

There's a recurring theme in the album of hating myself or not understanding when I do a certain thing or not really understanding myself in the way that I'd like to. Even resurfacing old memories that I haven't thought about forever. The song, "Revenant," is about an abusive relationship I was in in high school. I wrote about it for cathartic reasons, but also it's hard. It's still hard.

With "Permanent State," I was trying to say that it's difficult to write songs about such awful things in a way that is pretty, unique, and clever. I feel the pressure to do that. All the pressure that I put on myself, by the way. It's not coming from anyone else.

I don't think about that especially when artists are revealing really vulnerable details, stories, or things that have happened to them through their songs. They do sound so beautiful and clever. I didn't realize how hard it would be to take in that memory, relive it in some way, and then also make it sound like something someone wants to hear and listen to.

Exactly. So many people are so good at it. I think that's why I put so much pressure on myself because I was like, "Let me sing about this terrible situation I was in. Let me make it sound so amazing that everyone wants to listen to it all the time."

How does it feel releasing the songs into the world? When you did finish the album and you were revealing some vulnerable stories, how do you feel when other people have access to that, too?

I think I almost disassociate from the situation as soon as it's written down. The songs from the EP and album are still fresh to me, honestly. They'll be written a year ago in February. I haven't performed them that much. With the EP, I went on tour right after it came out. I was singing those songs every night to the point that it didn't even feel like I was singing about myself anymore. Sometimes when I make the song, I almost feel like it didn't even happen to me. I can't really tell if that's a good thing or not. I guess when I've completely detached myself from it. It still feels good though to put them out. If anyone can relate in any way, or even if you can't relate. For the same reason, I love listening to Taylor Swift. Sometimes, she's super specific in a way that I'm like, "Okay, I haven't been to Paris. I don't know what she's talking about." But I put myself in the same feeling that she is feeling. It's nice to maybe think that someone's listening to my music and feeling the same way.

When you say you disassociate from it after you write a song, I bet it probably feels like a therapeutic way to release it into the world or even just for yourself. What would you say is your relationship to vulnerability?

I think I embrace vulnerability fully. At first, I struggled with being vulnerable, but I have a good support system around me. I'm a Pisces, so it's almost natural to just be completely vulnerable. Every now and then, I'll go through a period where my guard is up and I'm not talking to anybody or even writing my feelings. Up until all through last summer, I wasn't writing anything down about how I was feeling. I just kept it all inside of me, which didn't help. I always find that I feel better when I'm being vulnerable. I don't think that my music would be the same at all if I wasn't as vulnerable.

Knowing you're a Taylor Swift fan and that she emphasizes her eras in music, which era would you say you are in musically right now?

I'm trying to be in my healing era. I just got out of a pretty long relationship almost a year ago. I've changed so much, even since then. It's actually crazy. I didn't know that a person could change so much. I've just been trying to write about that. Also, I hate that my next music will probably be breakup music again, but here we are.

A healing era is a great era to be in. Who or what would you say is inspiring you lately?

Honestly, I've been listening to a lot of older music that I used to a lot when I was in middle school. It's been inspiring me. I got back on the Beatles, a lot of Harry Nilsson and George Harrison always. I've been listening to Crosby, Stills, and Nash. It's always music that gets me. When I'm listening to too much of the same music over and over and over again, I don't have any ideas for new music. Whenever I listen to music that I haven't listened to in a long time or new music that I have never heard before, I find myself way more inspired to create.

Do you feel like listening to music helps you create music yourself also?

Absolutely. I think it's the same thing as putting pressure on myself. When I listen to a really, really good song, I'm like, "Oh my god. I have to write a really good song now." I'm putting the pressure on myself. If they did it, you have to do it.

How do you stay inspired and curious?

I get a lot of inspiration through my friends. My best friend, Tom, who plays bass in my band, is always sending me new music that he's been writing or new music that he's found. It really does help when he does that. Especially as of recently, I'll be trying to write music to put over the music that he sends me. That way, it seems like Tom writes a new song every day. I feel almost like I'm also writing a new song every day when he sends me something and I try to put lyrics or a melody over it. He really helps me stay working every day.

In the music industry, do you deal with comparison to other artists or other music? How do you manage that?

It does get tough. I try to stay away from listening to music that could be considered too similar to mine. I'm just afraid of copying or afraid of making myself feel bad that I don't sound a certain way. I remember when I first started putting out music, the three women I was compared to were Phoebe Bridgers, Soccer Mommy, and Olivia Rodrigo for some reason, which I think it was just because she was really blowing up at the time that I released my EP. I do struggle with that just because I feel like no matter what, I'll never be able to fight being compared to anyone in music.

Yeah. It's so frustrating too, because it seems like it happens mostly to women.

Yeah, it does happen a lot. In fact, it happens all the time. And, you're right, it's mostly with women.

How would you say you describe success in your life and then also in your musical career?

In my personal life, I define success as being the least stressed out I can be because I tend to stress pretty easily. Whenever I'm at a place where I feel stable in a job, in my friendships and in my relationship, that's when I know that I've succeeded.

In my musical career, I feel success whenever I finish a song. I felt really successful when I finished my first album. I try not to think about streaming numbers and all of that as a point of success. It doesn't necessarily reflect success to me. If I took that as the main source of success, I think I would go crazy because numbers change all the time. On tour, I always feel successful if I play a really good show or if people are nice to me afterwards. In my musical career I measure success, but I guess I celebrate more of the smaller achievements.

While you're touring, how do you make sure you protect your mental health and prevent burning out?

I've only been on tour twice, but I was so lucky both times that I was surrounded by just incredible people. Being on the tour with [Matt Maltese](#) and seeing him every single day increased my mental health because he's so funny and we are so similar. I think if I was ever feeling a certain way, I had him.

Calling my friends helps. I remember one day I was having a very bad day, and it was the first time I'd ever cried on tour. I fully just broke down sobbing. I called Sam and I instantly felt better. I think just keeping in touch with people that I know will make me feel better, and trying not to overwork myself. When I'm on tour, I only focus on being on tour. I don't try to write. When I was on tour in March, we were getting mixes of the album, and I was trying to focus on the tour.

How do you hope your vulnerability as a songwriter helps your listeners?

I hope that it just inspires people to be vulnerable themselves. When I was on tour, sometimes I'd get messages from people saying that they were inspired to start writing songs themselves and poetry. I think that's just the greatest thing that I could possibly hear, because it is so important to be in touch with your emotions in whatever outlet that you can. Whether it be writing poems, writing songs, or just journaling. I hope that my music inspires people to just write how they're feeling, sing about it, or whatever makes them feel better.

What's the best piece of wisdom that you've received?

The best piece of wisdom I can give is to be nice to everyone you meet, genuinely. It will help you get so much farther in anything. If you're kind to people, it will help you more than anything else you could do.

Becca Harvey Recommends:

[Search Party](#)

[All The Same All Ok](#) by chloe mk

[Girl In A Band](#) by Kim Gordon

[The Whale](#)

The Cobra Kai burger at Jack Brown's

[Name](#)

Becca Harvey

[Vocation](#)

musician, records as girlpuppy

□

Sophia Matinazad

