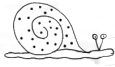




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October 26, 2020 -

As told to Danielle Chelosky, 2272 words.

Tags: Music, Focus, Collaboration, Multi-tasking, Time management, Production, Process.

On completing and releasing creative work in difficult times

Musician Domenic "Nicky" Palermo on overcoming deterrents and pressures, collaborating outside your comfort zone, and trying to keep an album rollout interesting during a pandemic.

How's your quarantine been going?

I'm working 10-hour days, overanalyzing every detail of the new record from music, obviously, to the art, the merchandise, ideas, videos... everything. We knew diving into this release date we were going to have to be a little bit savvy with presentation to make sure it gets the attention it deserves.

And, I honestly feel like the record's been 10 years in the making anyway, and the last mile's always the hardest mile. Having this quarantine has almost been—I don't want to say a blessing, in any sense, because people are dying—but having the full focus on dealing with how to properly present this has been something I wouldn't have had if things were normal.

Can you tell me more about these 10-hour days?

I'm non-stop on the phone, trying to massage this rollout into something meaningful, to give it as much meaning as the actual record. For instance, today I'm working on a pre-recorded livestream with Full Of Hell. We're bringing in a film team and a projectionist, and we're trying to reinvent the shitty, lame livestream stuff that's become such an eyesore.

It's a 45-person production. I managed to gain some cool sponsors to help out. We've created this nice little ecosystem of artists and filmmakers. But we're integrating a co-promotion, like a global co-promotion with promoters we've worked with over the past 10 years. We're trying to get everybody in our ecosystem working on something and feeling that there's a point to waking up and getting out of bed every day because it's really rough right now for everyone involved in our world. So I'm doing that.

And then, dealing with the art guys. We have Walter Pearce, who is the art director for this record for the art and the videos. And he brought on Jordan Hemingway, who's handling all the art as well as the videos. Both of them are just like super brilliant dudes and awesome to work with. They're both more fashion-related dudes. Jordan shot the past couple Gucci campaigns. He just did a perfume thing. The video he just dropped in between "Say Less" and "Bernie Sanders" was a Travis Scott/M.I.A. video.

Right now we're working on a poster rollout for L.A., New York, and the UK. We're putting together a wild set of imagery. It's cool to see the album stuff be handed off to people who are outside the music industry and it presents itself in a cool way.

It's been a long time coming to get to this point. We're always having hurdles dropped in front of us since day one, so I'm pretty well-versed in getting around it, but this is just a crazy scenario. That said, it's opening up more doors for me to work with people on the project and be more collaborative, and rattle my normal approach of wanting to be in control of everything at all points.

Do you find it to be rewarding to have to go through these 10-hour days and to collaborate with other people?

Absolutely. Working with Jordan and Walter, it's opened my mind as far as how things can be presented and how beneficial it is to widen your horizons. I've always tried to do that, but I really let a lot of things go and fault myself on things that I've just grown so accustomed to doing.

I felt like losing a little bit of the usual control was important for this record, and not just because of the quarantining making it difficult to do the normal things. But that did force me to be light on my feet. And, as I'm reaching out to these different people and working remotely with all these different people, it feels like I did the right thing.

You mentioned how this record feels like it's 10 years in the making, which is how long the band has been around for as of this year. I wanted to ask how you've been staying inspired throughout the past decade, and if you think you're improving as you're going along.

I'm not sure I've improved in any way. Everything to me always feels very lateral. There's growth, of course, but those are the kind of things that terrify me. Seeing things on a linear level like that, it's just really intimidating to me. I mean obviously there's been natural growth with this band over the past 10 years. Actually, I wouldn't even say growth. I'd just say that there's been a constant wobble and a constant movement. There's just been an energy that's been constantly at work here. And in some ways it went in positive directions, and in some ways it went in negative directions. And I think that's how life really is when you look at growth.

It's strange. I started doing this because I thought it was going to be some kind of answer, that there was going to be some kind of answer at the end of it and some kind of feeling of like a completion. When I left L.A. to move back to Philly in 2009, I had this epiphany that I was going to find some sort of meaning in going back and diving back into music and taking a dive into the unknown, doing something that I never really did before. And getting this LP done that, essentially, was going to help me get over that previous decade that I had all that trouble in, because I never really knew how to deal with it, I didn't know how to deal with what happened to me, what got me to the point where I was going to be in prison. I never dealt with what got me to that point. I never dealt with the time, the two years that I was away. I never dealt with the readjustment and how I came home. How do you readjust when you're ignoring what happened behind you? It doesn't work like that.

So in my naïve brain, for me it was like, "Okay, write some music," because that's always what my answer was in life when I didn't have one. I thought that *Guilty of Everything* was going to be that record. And it felt like it was for a little while, but as I moved through those years after it, it was quite evident that that wasn't the answer. I still hadn't confronted any of those things in my past. I thought bringing them to the light was all I had to do, just being honest and being like, "Okay, this is what happened and this is me and this is it." But that wasn't it. I was just walking down a hallway popping doors open and keeping it moving and not really stopping to take a look into what was in each of those rooms.

We moved through these years and these albums, and I just never got that completion. It just never felt like I did what I was trying to do until this record. Sitting, getting these mixes back and hearing stuff back and having like a moment with the music that you've spent so long dealing with, I felt like I came in a full 360 and I was almost like staring at the back of myself back in 2010.

This time I understood and felt that completion. It felt right finally after 10 years. In hindsight, it kind of makes sense. It was a naïve thought that this was all going to be able to be fixed in a couple years' time.

Did you know when you were making the record that this one would be different?

I mean there was a multitude of different things that were challenging stepping into this. One, the most major, was reopening this book and the lifestyle that comes with this. Revisiting all that stuff that I'm talking about, it wasn't ideal to start dragging myself into again. There's a lot of factors that come with that, from what I do to myself on tour, what I do to myself when I'm trying to write this stuff and when I'm trying to complete it. There's a lot of that.

We have lineup changes again, which we got really used to doing at this point. But Brandon [Setta]'s departure was a big deal. We've got accustomed to writing a lot of the stuff together at this point since *Guilty of Everything*. It was intimidating to put this whole thing back on my shoulders again. There's a lot of self-doubt, obviously. You're leaning into a record and things aren't the same, and you worry about what you can do as a musician.

I just kind of pushed through it a little bit and said, "Fuck it," to be honest. I made myself a set of guidelines. At one point I just decided that I was going to push through and just do it with those guidelines in hand. I built myself a nice foundation between the members that are in the band now, [publicists Duncan Will and Nick Dierl], booking, and management. I didn't have any toxicity in this thing. I had a lot of support. That really was a change for me. That was not how I've typically done

things in the past. It was always in hyper-speed and things were hectic. And everything was just insane always. It was like this band has always just been like a runaway train. Like who knows what the fuck is going to happen at every turn? We did that for 10 years. This was just different.

What were your guidelines?

The main guideline was that—whatever happened—I didn't want anyone to say that we made another Nothing record. I just didn't want to hear, "This is just the same exact thing." I love all the records that we've done. Actually, I never listen to any of that shit, but I respect what we've done in the past. My main thing was I wanted to let myself be a little bit looser about what we did. When we went from Tired of Tomorrow to Dance on the Blacktop, we didn't really even think about things too much. We figured out how to write a Nothing record really easy.

[For *Dance on the Blacktop*], we just went in there and we had [producer John] Agnello with us and we were feeling great about that. We were in a studio out in fucking Woodstock, Dreamland. We had a budget and everything was really lovely. It's just like a really ideal situation, except for the fact that I don't think we pushed ourselves enough to what we did and we just kind of made another record. It's a good record. It was great experience. I don't dismiss it at all, but I didn't want to do that again. I wanted to test the boundaries a little bit and just write music. I didn't want to alienate our sound at all. I definitely just didn't want that to be the case that people said we just wrote another Nothing record again.

Your last two records—*Tired of Tomorrow* and *Dance on the Blacktop*—were both well reviewed and received. Did you feel any pressure about following up both of those?

It wasn't really a pressure on what people were going to say about this record or what people are going to say about this record. The record's not even out yet and I feel great about it. Obviously, we've had some success with the first couple singles. We've outsold every other record for first week sales and stuff like that. So that initial thing was relieving for me because I feel like my job's done already. This record hasn't hit and everyone hasn't heard the whole thing, but I feel content with it. And like I said, I feel that completion.

There was absolutely an insane amount of pressure, but it wasn't really ever about anybody else. It was really about me and seeing if I was going to be able to get this thing done. Beyond my own problems, there was this tidal wave of other bullshit that you couldn't even make up if you wanted to. We were in the studio in the beginning of March and we're planning this thing in November of last year and December. We had no idea what was coming. There was just a constant influx of things that wanted to deter me from doing this at all. To me, that's always when I was able to do my most. I'm used to catapulting myself in bad situations. When things are going the right way, I'm more harmful to myself. It's when I'm in situations that are not ideal that I thrive. I mean the pressures were there. We just worked through them.

Domenic Palermo Recommends:

"Maybe for now I should try, each day, to be a little less than I usually am."

"Under all this dirt the floor is really very clean."

"Not a man of habits, though he wished to be"

"I am so used to it by now that when the traffic falls silent, I think a storm is coming."

"First they burned her - that was last month. Actually just two weeks ago. Now they're starving him. When he's dead, they'll burn him too. Oh, how jolly. All this burning of family members in the summertime."

Name

Domenic Palermo


Vocation


Musician

Fact

D. Randall Blythe

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