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As told to Isabel Slone, 1749 words.

Tags: Music, Success, Collaboration, Day jobs, Beginnings, Process.

On building self-confidence over time

Musician Jasmine Gluz-White on building an artistic identity, learning to live without recognition, and creating art on the precipice of falling apart.

I'm going to start off with a more sensitive question. You recently tweeted about your decade-long streak of not being nominated for a Polaris Prize. How important is recognition to being an artist?

I remember the first few years of No Joy, there was confusion over whether we met the criteria for selection because our record came out on an American label, or people thought I was American. There were always excuses as to why I didn't fit in a certain box and over time that box has just crumpled. Now, 10 years later, I just find it kind of funny. The concept of judging all of this art that's so vastly different is a little bit strange to me. I don't mind being separated from it. I'm not sure I totally buy into the notion that there's a winner or somebody that is the best. Music is so subjective and specific to the listener, it's hard to believe that one record could be better than everybody else's and therefore more deserving of recognition. But also, I don't really exist in a world where there's Grammy nominations and red carpets.

When did you first know that you were a songwriter?

I don't know that I would even call myself that. As a kid, I always had instruments and would always be making up my own stuff, which I guess is how I started writing songs. But 'singer-songwriter' is a category in itself that evokes a certain kind of music and a certain style of writing. If I went to a dinner party and said "I'm a singer-songwriter" people might expect me to sound like Joni Mitchell. It's been hard to figure out how to explain what I do to people who don't know me, because I am basically a singer-songwriter at the core of it, but that's not exactly the genre I work in so to speak.

When was the first moment you felt super connected with that ability to create?

It would have to be on the most recent record I put out. I really love collaborations and I think sometimes I would use them as an excuse to cover up the vulnerability that comes with being a songwriter. But on *Motherhood*, I made a very conscious decision to put myself out there, to spend time with the songs, to not mask the vocals with too much reverb, to focus on the lyrics a little bit more. It's only been

quite recently that I'm okay with discussing the songs as the songwriter and being comfortable with it.

Where does that newfound confidence come from?

It sounds cheesy but I gave myself time with the songs. There's a grind that comes with putting out a record. But I wrote the latest record over the span of five years, so I had a lot of time to sit with songs and come back to them. By the time I got into the studio, I had already built a relationship with the songs and had a better idea of where I wanted them to go and how they should sound. There was much more of a building process. I think that's what made me more comfortable, because I had time to accept it.

When you do start to write a song, where do you usually begin?

It's a gross comparison, but I think it's the same as when you have food poisoning and you need to run to the bathroom and puke. You just have something inside that physically needs to get out and once you eject it, you know you'll feel better. It comes in bursts. Another great thing about taking my time writing Motherhood is that I got to know my creative nausea. I would become aware of when it was time to start writing something and I would immediately know when I had something good. It taught me to take a break when something wasn't working and when I knew I was ready, I just started writing immediately.

So the muse just becomes too overwhelming to ignore. How much choice do you think people have in terms of whether they become an artist or not?

I don't think you have a choice. I think if you're an artist, you will be an artist no matter what. What you do have a choice about is what you do with your art, whether you have a home studio where you paint, or you're in a band that tours for eight months of the year, or you make sound collages with a few friends every once in a while. If you're an artist you can't change that, but commercializing it is something completely different. I've worked with a lot of people who are in a similar position to me, where we've been making music for a long time but the thought of not going on anymore is scarier than continuing on with varying degrees of success. It's probably the same thing with people who are into sports. If you love to play soccer, you should keep playing soccer whether it's competitively or just for fun with a small league. It's something that makes you happy and you have to do it because it's your passion.

Speaking of sports, I know you're a huge fan of the Montreal Canadiens [hockey team]. How does having passions that are totally outside the scope of art impact what you do?

Growing up in Montreal, there is something so supremely optimistic in this city about sports. Even when we lose, everyone stays really positive. It's something that brings people in our city together. Prior to Covid, attending games is one of the most exciting experiences you can have in Montreal. It's very unifying and there's an electric energy that's similar to when you see a really good live show.

As a day job, you work as a casting agent at a modeling agency. How does working day-to-day in a completely different industry affect your ability to create?

I would say the majority of things that influence me creatively are not music but other forms of art. Working in the fashion industry for the past 20 years has really influenced me to write a certain way. Sometimes I'll look at beautiful fabric and try to translate how I think that fabric would sound. Or I'll watch a photoshoot come together and observe the way it looks and think about creating a soundtrack to it. I'm not creative in that world at all. I come at it from the managerial side, but I'm able to observe it closely and if I had a different job, depending on what I did, I wouldn't be privy to these types of creative expressions.

In a previous interview you've said that songs take on a new life when you go on tour. Can you expand on what you mean by that?

The average tour I go on is at least a month long. After two weeks of shows you kind of get bored with your own material and start to experiment. When you play the same songs every day for 30+ days in the row, you need to do things to keep it exciting for you as well, not just the audience. That experimentation often leads songs to take on a new version of themselves. Maybe it's kind of deranged, but I like to think that all of my equipment might break at any minute. Like, 'What are you going to do if that pedal dies?'

My shows are usually kind of on edge, as if everything is about to explode. With that level of tension, I'm able to adjust and create new things. But not being able to tour this past year, I wasn't able to do any of that stuff.

How has not being able to go on tour impacted you creatively?

As somebody who toured a lot, I often learn things the hard way too. Sometimes you fuck up or you try something new and realize, 'That didn't work.' Also there was so much more pressure to be on social media for some reason? The prevailing wisdom was, 'You've gotta promote, you've gotta get a TikTok.' It's totally against my character to just post selfies all day. I will drive 12 hours across the Southern US to play one show for 40 minutes. That is easier to me than posting every day on social media platforms.

So you're not going to get a TikTok?

I opened one, but I don't know. It feels somewhat disingenuous, like I'm just getting a TikTok because I'm trying to get young people to listen to my music. I do like to look at those videos that are like, "This celebrity tipped me really bad." But for me personally, I'd just rather stick to what I know I'm best at, which is actually making music.

Jasamine White-Gluz Recommends:

Five Ways I use memories as a creative tool:

****Revisiting old mix CDs I made as a teenager: ****I love to listen back to these mixes and find what inspired me then. What is it that I learned from liking these songs, what are the common threads that I can trace in music I like now?

Keep an idea: I like to track or journal every creative idea I have even if I think it sucks at the time. I may hate it now but it might find its purpose later. As much as you can grow out of styles, you can also grow into them.

Using all the senses: When working on sounds, sometimes I will channel specific memories by evoking the other senses that were present at that time. What were the colors I saw? What did it smell like? What did things feel like when I physically touched them? What sounds do I hear when I smell, see and feel this?

Mixing both old and new tools: I like returning to more "primitive" tools I used when I started making music, like recording using my Tascam 4 track. Relearning how to use these machines reminds me of what it felt like using them the first time. Using my hands to physically shift knobs versus a click on a computer helps unlock different creative energies inside me.

Remembering: Nostalgia is never cheesy if it comes from a genuine place.

Name

Jasmine White-Gluz

Vocation

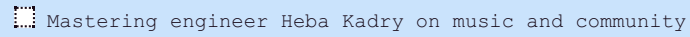
Musician

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