

# On art as healing



Musician Kate Bollinger discusses art as healing, the importance of community, and preserving your relationship to art.

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As told to Sarah John, 1554 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Beginnings](#), [Process](#), [Inspiration](#), [Creative anxiety](#).

**I know your mom is a music therapist. I'm curious how that's affected your view on the role and responsibilities of being a musician?**

Growing up, my first introduction to music, in a lot of ways, was a therapeutic role. That definitely influenced the way that I see music. My mom has been doing music therapy groups at this residential community for adults with developmental disabilities up in the mountains of Virginia since before I was born, and started bringing me along with her from time to time when I was little. Getting to step into that community and witness music helping people in a really tangible way influenced the way I understood it. I would go with her sometimes and see how much music helped people, and triggered different memories and joy. It definitely shaped the way that I understood music.

**Do you feel now that when you're making music, those experiences impact how you write or what you craft? Is it something that made you want to become a musician?**

I think that it was more so a personal endeavor when I started making music. Both my older brothers played music and my mom wrote songs growing up. It was a way to process my life and things that I was feeling. It wasn't a conscious thing I was doing. It was just something that felt very natural and kind of just like writing in my journal. It was sort of the same thing as that, except at the end of it, you had something potentially beautiful that you were proud of, too. I mostly have a personal and solitary relationship to music, of being able to express my feelings and process my experiences. But it also feels like a way of connecting with people and spreading kindness, which maybe sounds silly but it's true.

**I'm curious how you preserve that personal element of art as a way to process, now that you make art professionally?**

For three or four years, I struggled with that and didn't really make music anymore for fun, which was sad. I think it stopped being a tool for me and it was like, "Oh, I should try to exercise this muscle," or whatever. But, in the last year or two, I've kind of gotten back to just doing it for fun—because I love music so much—which has been exciting and nice. I don't know how I keep it separate. I think I just write a lot of songs that I know I'm never going to put out and they're just for me.

**Do you think that starting to write songs that you had no intention of putting out was the switch to it becoming personal again?**

I moved two years ago and so many things in my life changed. I was feeling a lot more inspired again, and I don't know, I had stopped listening to my gut feeling for a while and then somehow got back to that. I started being able to write again. It was flowing out of me in a way that felt like there was no purpose other than just

because it felt right.

**So you said that you moved and you felt more inspired. Do you think it was the new surroundings and new people, or was it a specific thing?**

Yeah, I started meeting people. I visited LA for the first time because I had a friend out here in 2021, I think, and the very first night I was here, I met some people that I'm still good friends with now. It felt like my whole life exploded and opened up. My friend had a party and invited a bunch of his friends, and it was all musicians and artists. That wasn't my experience in Virginia. Not that there aren't artists. It was just crazy to be in a place where everyone around you is making something or working on a project. It was really inspiring. I started visiting a lot to record, make videos, and just for fun over the next year. Then I moved here and over that year, I started to make the most close friends of any city. So that's why moved, I guess. I started to have a community that I really loved here, and that's still really inspiring to me. I have some of the best friends I've ever had here.

I honestly am not very good at pushing through writer's block. I think it's important to just live sometimes, otherwise there's nothing to say.

**Yeah, that makes sense. And then, what else do you do when you feel discouraged about your art or your career? What other things inspire you?**

I try not to think too much about the big picture. I try just to get obsessed with one project, and that usually helps me. If I can find one thing that inspires me and get really obsessed with it and see it through to the end, usually that helps me, or involving my friends and making it feel more communal or something sometimes.

**You studied cinematography and poetry in college, right?**

Yeah, I didn't finish in the poetry program. I switched from poetry to cinematography, but yes.

**Ok, so you studied creative pursuits in college academically...I'm curious if studying those things gave you a different perspective on making art?**

Definitely. I mean, I think the main thing that I got from being in the cinematography program was just learning how to shoot film. That was why I studied cinematography is because I wanted to make music videos for my music.

**I'm curious if after you studied cinematography and learned about shooting film, did your music become more visual or did you start thinking of your music more in terms of the story behind it? That's a common one people say.**

I've always been pretty visual, I think. Whenever I write, whenever I record a song, usually I'll see, if I'm listening to the song, visuals that could go along with it. School helped give me the confidence that I could make what I was seeing in my head into something-like I could actually assemble the team, write the concept and the treatment, and figure it out.

**School helped you give structure to projects and show you how to execute it.**

Totally. Yeah. Every year there was this big group project called The Mondo. The whole class would get together and make this really weird short film with all of these super strange requirements. I feel like that was one thing that I got from school, is I learned how to collaborate with other artists, which was important.

**I think that's great, and actually, it leads me into my next question pretty perfectly. I know in the past you said it's important for you to think carefully about who you want to make music with and who you collaborate with. I was curious, what do you look for in a musical community or a creative community?**

When I first got to LA I think I was doing sessions just to kind of see what was out there. Some of them were really great, some of these blind sessions, but I ultimately decided from doing those that it takes a certain amount of comfort and friendship for me to feel like I can make something good with someone, I guess.

I mean, there's definitely an exception to that. I met Michael Collins from Drugdealer, and we wrote a song together the first day we met, and then the next day we wrote a song together. We were fast friends. But that doesn't usually happen. I feel like usually I need to be really comfortable with someone to be able to make something with them.

**When you say you need to be really comfortable with someone, is that just knowing them a long time or is that having had similar experiences? Can you expand on that a little bit?**

Yeah, I don't think it has to do with knowing them for a long time. So that's sometimes the case. I think just sort of an indescribable chemistry, I guess.

**Trust maybe?**

Or even, yeah...that makes it sound maybe more serious than what I mean even. I guess it is trust, or I feel like I have some friends and we just met and we just understood each other immediately and have a trust and a chemistry.

**Do you have any advice for young artists?**

Something that my mom always told me when I was growing up is to just not be afraid to write bad songs, to just write as much as you can and not judge yourself while you're doing it. I think that makes room for the good stuff. You have to let yourself get out the bad songs first.

**Kate Bollinger Recommends:**

*New York Stories* by Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Woody Allen (1989 anthology film)

Lucile's Creole Cafe in Boulder, CO. Restaurant in a house. Amazing vibe and we bought some of their hot sauce for the van.

Coloring in the van

Hooray for Tuesday by The Minders

Surface To Air Missive self-titled album

Name

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Vocation

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Leanna Kaiser