

# On trusting your process



Musician, label owner, and producer Suzi Analogue on reclaiming autonomy, breaking down barriers, respecting your own story, and being a lone wolf.

December 22, 2020 -

As told to Harley Oliver Brown, 2564 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Culture](#), [Business](#), [Inspiration](#), [Focus](#), [Collaboration](#), [Creative anxiety](#), [Identity](#), [Independence](#).

**What does your day to day look like? What time do you wake up? When do you create art, and when do you answer emails? What kind of nourishment do you take while doing all of those things?**

I'm waking up usually at 8 a.m. EST. I'm working with so many people in different time zones, and in the States I'm the first one always up. If I have to promote something on my Instagram, I hit it up and share a new flyer. I eat a bowl of cereal, and I have a glass of water before I eat, because I have to jumpstart everything. I stretch. I'm working in a new artist residency at the Faena in Miami Beach, so I usually come here before 10 a.m. and I start to do my emails from there. I talk to who I need to talk to, schedule where I need to schedule, then around 1:00 or 2:00 p.m., I eat lunch. Every day I eat the same time except for dinner because everything starts to spiral from the morning, and it's like, "Oh wow, It's 9:00 and I'm still here at the space talking to somebody about some random releases in Africa." I usually go to bed by 2:00 a.m. and then I start again.

**It seems like you're always doing the most: doing, or creating, or planning to do those things. When do you find the time for self care, and what do you do for self care?**

I'm newly in this artist residency space and I told myself I'm going to come in every day from the morning into the evening like it's my job and create from here. My first week trying it out in full, I said, "I need a Thursday off." Since COVID has hit, I think everyone is redefining what they want their workloads to be. The five-day work week is a little toxic. It doesn't make sense to put everything you need to do in your life to Saturday or Sunday. Monday through Wednesday, I can hit it hard, then Thursday will be a recharge day, and then I'm going to come back and figure out any solutions on Friday, and then I'll chill again Saturday and Sunday. This is new for me because coming from a gig economy culture of me playing sets, it doesn't matter if there's one day I want to be off; if somebody has a booking for me, I'm on. This is one of the first times in recent history that I've had any autonomy over my schedule. I think we all have a Disney World complex. We just think we can enter the gates and everything is going to be great, but there is no Mickey Mouse that's going to wave the magic wand and say, "This can happen for us, we're allowed to do this." We have to figure out how to have our own agency.

**In your latest EP *SU CASA*, especially in "PPL PWR," the lyrics contain such pain, but also such resilience, and the music is so joyful. It's something that makes your music so powerful and especially relevant now and a source of strength for so many Black artists and womxn artists that are following in your footsteps.**

I've always had a sense of pain in my artistic practice because of having to be such a lone wolf, not having a lot of understanding in my identity as a Black woman and for my interest in music. Choosing to be autonomous and create a label, to find other people that might feel the same or feel like they don't have anybody to connect with, I always put in my messages but it wasn't hitting the same. I've been sharing discourse on some of these issues for a really consistent amount of time now. Even listening back to some of my earlier releases, I'm like,

"I was trying to tell them." I'm excited about the future of my songwriting, because now I feel like I don't have to question or wonder "Will I be understood?" I think that I can even ramp up sharing that truth and that pain and that rawness because people now understand better where it's coming from.

**Also, beforehand, there was an element of gaslighting, like, "Oh, it's not actually as bad as you say it is." When finally white people are starting to wake up and be like, "Oh yes, it is that bad. You were telling the truth the whole time."**

That's literally what is happening, and people are coming back to me from the past that didn't really support me like they could have. I never took it personally, I just saw the limitation in them understanding the levels of oppression, and I said, "I hope they get it one day. I'm going to move on and go this way" until they did, and people are like, "I'm so sorry. I did not understand." It's kind of heavy but I feel more hopeful than I ever did before.

**How do you feel receiving messages like those?**

It's bittersweet because I'm like, "Man, we were all duped." We were all believing in these systems of oppression, letting them really run our lives in a way that made us be ugly towards one another, made us not fully support people's ideas and not listen to them. People felt like they had the option to turn a blind eye to human oppression, and now we're realizing that is a costly thing to do, and artists always shine a light on that, and that we should be uplifting the artists who are shining lights on that, because who else is going to give truthful accounts of the seriousness of these actions and events that are happening in our society? I feel glad that these people are reaching that level of understanding, but I feel sad of the path that it comes from, and then on top of that, it's just heavy. I can be like, "Today I just want to watch Netflix" and then someone texts me like, "I am so sorry, I never understood..." It's so deep and it's happening so much to me that I just have to laugh. I told my friends I'm getting funnier. I'm going to turn into a standup comic, do a dark comedy act, because that's how I've had to approach this.

**I want to go back to you being a lone wolf. You've been charting your own path and yet you're also a part of so many networks, connected to so many different people through your label Never Normal. Looking at ZONEZ V.4, for example, you collaborated with Junglepussy and RP Boo, and you also brought on newer voices like Oyinda and Zen So Fly. How do you approach collaborations?**

I usually have an element of in-person interaction. I don't think there are too many people I haven't ever met that I've collaborated with. I am the type of person to go to the laundromat with people I collaborate with. Like, "Do you want to hang out?" It doesn't have to be super deep, I just try to have a level of real organic knowing each other built in so we can make something that we both feel is very special. I think that's what's missing with music, especially in this digital age, where we're like "We can send files," and I actually don't like that! I go really slow when that happens. I usually don't finish the projects when that happens. When I know that the person that I'm working with is excited, and I'm excited, it makes it so much better. A lot of people you hear on songs are people that I've met touring.

**Can you talk a little bit about how your creative process, your vision, and your worldview changed after having spent time in the places you've toured, and East Africa?**

I went to Uganda in 2015 as part of this project called Next Level. It's basically a peace initiative: artists from the States, specifically hip-hop-based artists, can engage with the youth cultures in other countries on their projects. We also push ideas of entrepreneurship and having agency in what you do, exchanging cultural ideas on the basis of "we all love hip-hop in this room." When I came home, I was like, "What could I play them that they would understand if I were to go there now?" That's what inspired me to start [the series] ZONEZ because I said I need to make something that is universal enough where I can play it anywhere, and have it represent me and my experience, my identity. It was an intentional thing to not include lyrics that were like verses, because I saw that as a barrier of understanding. I thought that we should just sing hooks together. How about we sing mantras together? How about we just love the beat, and instruments, let's start there. My time there helped me quickly understand how universal music is, but also what can cause us to not understand each

other in music. I feel like the future of music or a future sound, they always make it so avant-garde, and I try to take down some of those barriers, because I feel like it's restrictive.

**How are you cultivating, or maintaining your community digitally, now that it's uncertain when we'll be able to have live shows again?**

Now I chat with everybody in every time zone. That's also why I don't go to sleep until very late, because some people are just getting up in the morning. One part about my practice as an artist is staying attached with people and getting the true life accounts of what's going on in different places. Whether it's the current lockdown in Uganda where I'm talking to my friends, or my friends in Europe who are like, "We just got funding for all of these artists that are struggling," my music is now informed by the fact that I'm talking to people all over the world about how these things are being handled, and I'm home becoming outraged. I'm like, "Why, in this country are they taking care of it, in this country they're doing that and then here, they don't get it?" A lot of times, the news articles that pop up, I know that already because I talk to people in these places. It's kind of like a delay. There is some kind of dissonance that I'm experiencing, and I take it somewhat lightly.

**I remember you posted a *Guardian* article about how Africa was containing the virus so well, and Western media wasn't talking about it, because it disrupts the narrative of Africa being a backwater, and you were like, "This goes out to all the people who told me not to move to Africa."**

Totally! Every move that I've made as an artist has been to sustain myself, because as a Black woman, especially a Black American woman in this country, I am not supposed to thrive. The way the systems are set up it is to have a shorter life expectancy or have severe and chronic health issues from a young age. I moved to Miami from New York so I'd have a better quality of living. Within the last year, I had a pondering that I could figure out how to live globally and not be always in the United States, because I feel like that will actually take years off of my life. I always think worst-case scenario. I have maybe a bias because I've lost both of my parents, and I lost my mother before she turned 60. She never really had chronic health issues until the very end of her life, but I know the conditions and the stressful implications that this country places on Black women. I don't want to live in Europe because everybody does that. I've been to Africa and I believe in Africa, and I see the future every time I go there.

**Do you view social media as a tool and a resource, or do you see it more as a necessary evil to successfully self-advocating as an artist?**

A lot of what I and people a little older and a couple of years younger than I did in the last 15 years was show people how they could use the internet as a tool and a resource. When I originally—and how I still use—the internet is like the Dewey Decimal System. When we had events and there would be an event I'd want to go to but I don't know if it's still going on because I'm late, I'd go into a search, into quotation marks, put the event, and find out if anyone is tweeting about it, and be like, "It's been 30 minutes, I think it's still going" and show up. But if it's been an hour, I'm not going. That's how quantitatively I used the internet. I use the internet as a library, a personal diary, a store. I have a lot of peers that maybe didn't have the same relationship with the internet. I've been on chat rooms and forums since I was 15. That taught me how to read through the internet and disseminate what information was credible and what wasn't. If you don't have that kind of understanding of the internet you might feel like it's very distracting, but I do feel like the internet can't win over me. I'm the computer at the end of the day.

**What are one or two pieces of advice that you've received that you return to again and again?**

One piece of advice is to not rush. I actually hate getting that advice. I'm like, "I do need to rush because the time is now," but that's me speaking as an entrepreneur and being somewhat innovative. It's reassuring to know that you don't have to rush as long as you're staying true to your process; which brings me to another point, is quality over quantity in your creative process. It's not about me having 50 volumes of *ZONEZ*, it's a good-quality four volumes that brings me more joy than if I would've had 50, and not been able to effectively work with everyone I've worked with so far, or done some thoughtful art that involved my upbringing. A third would be to trust the process. When you're doing things in your own way, there really is no blueprint. There is no one you

can look to and say, "It's going to go exactly like this." Even if you do think it might go exactly like this or that, it might not go that way for you, because you're someone different. You have a different story. Having that trust within yourself can bring so much clarity and assurance in times when you may otherwise want to panic.

#### **Suzi Analogue Essentials:**

"JUMP ROPE"

"ONLY"

ZONECAST presented by Suzi Analogue: How to Thrive In Music as a Woman of Color

ZONEZ V.4 An Audio/Visual Moodboard

Suzi Analogue Boiler Room DJ Set New York City 2016

#### Name

Suzi Analogue

#### Vocation

Label owner, entrepreneur, producer, songwriter

□