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As told to Lauren Spear, 1723 words.

Tags: Music, Process, Identity, Beginnings, Collaboration, Time management.

On the time it takes to develop your process

Musician Maryam Said (poolblood) discusses learning to be alone with your thoughts, getting to know your collaborators, and the courage it takes to make creative work

I feel we must discuss this tweet.



I was like, "Oh, my god, one day I'm going to date the hottest rockstar" and then I realized I was stooping so low and was like "Why don't I just become the dude?" There are so many guys that I have been so infatuated with because they're musicians, and then at a certain point I thought, "Wait, just give me your guitar." It was like that meme where the guy is enlightened and all his chakras light up at the same time. When I decided to become the musician of my dreams, I felt like I was reframing and reclaiming my own image.

You just released your first full-length album. I noticed on the new album, mole, you redid a song called "sorry" that appears on your EP Yummy. Can you tell me how your relationship with that song changed over time?

When I did the first version, I was young and I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was going off of what was available and the musicians who were available at the time. When I got into the studio for the latest record, I was working with producer Louie Short and he said, "I want to remix this, something's missing—let's go back to the drawing board."

In the beginning, when you're singing a song, you're kind of adjusting your feet. As you're going, you start to really hang on tight then you're ready to coast, kind of like surfing. After a while, you eventually get to that point where you have to jump up and get on the wave. In the same way, I started figuring out how I would sing this melody and how I would do justice to the instrumentation. I wanted it to be weird and freak folk so Louie added his beautiful piano parts and my friend Eliza Niemi added her cello magic. After we added the flute, it just all came together.

Did it feel like a new song to you?

Oh, yeah, absolutely. I think that was so exciting about it. I was like, "Wow, this is the first time I second-guessed a melody and it turned out to be a great exercise." It just kind of made sense and came together and it felt really natural. I think it had more of an effect on me than when I wrote it all those

years ago. I think this time around when we redid it, it felt more grown up. I also had more time to process that song and what it was about.

Do you feel like your view of your old material ebbs and flows?

I think so. For the first EP, a lot of influences from my childhood poured into the music I was making. Now, I feel like I've had enough time to really know what I want to do with my music, how I want to put it out, and how I want to connect with people with it.

Is your audience in your head when you're performing or when you're putting music out?

When I'm performing, I'm generally opening for the main act so connecting to the audience can feel hard when people are more excited to see the headliner. That being said, it's really cool to reach different types of people and also engage with a variety of scenes and genres. When I'm playing, I'm looking for a connection that's honest and want a feeling of being seen through my music. When writing, I'll put my stuff out there, and then once someone listens to it, it's kind of not mine anymore. It belongs to the audience and they can do what they want with it.

What is one way in which you feel seen after you've released something or when you're performing?

I think it's about having the courage to do it in the first place. When I reaffirm myself, I'm like, "I'm doing this, and I'm actually saying how I feel and what I need."

So it's more being seen by yourself than being seen by others?

Yes, bringing it back to myself.

How do you write?

It's just me and the good ol' Martin sitting down, chilling. I got my three-drink rotation happening which is usually coffee, water, and a third fun option. Maybe kombucha or a matcha, you know what I mean? A treat, as you will. When I'm ruminating over something, that's when I'm like, "Okay, it's time to write it down and get into space." At one point, I tried to become mechanical. I wanted to sit down every day and write a song, but I was like, "This is kind of weird, and it feels really odd." So, then I was just going to go with the flow because that's when I feel the best. I think a lot of people think songwriting is sitting down and being like "I'm going to formulate this, and I'm going to write the lyrics about that," but being a musician is actually kinda chaotic because you never know when it will hit and you have to attend to that feeling. It's a beckoning, essentially.

While listening to the last track on Mole, "my little room," I was thinking about your writing process. In the song, you reference singing to the same four lonely walls. Would you say writing is a solitary process for you?

I think it was more of me being like, "I just need to sit." I used that sentence or that thought of singing to the walls in a way that I was writing more about trying to be with myself and not feeling like I need to be next to someone all the time. Sometimes I find it hard to be alone. I was trying to regulate or figure out how to sit with my thoughts and "be in discomfort" as all the holistic Instagram therapists say. So, I think that was mostly what that song is about. Also, I wanted to pay homage to my little room, that little space that I come home to every night. I love it so much and I can't leave. I look back at it when I am off to work and am like "love you." It's my little sanctuary.

Do you like to feel like you're in the driver's seat when writing?

Yeah, yeah, totally. I love to put out my little music. I like to be able to know which road I'm taking. If I need to park for a while, it feels good to be able to return.

What was it bringing these songs into the studio with Louie? Could you visualize what the end product was going to be like?

I feel like I came in with a bunch of the songs then, I was like, "Okay, here's the sitch. I'm going to dish. I want cello. I want horns. I want flute." I really just wanted to utilize everyone I knew who wrote or made music that I just really connected with and loved a lot. Eliza Niemi is one of my favorite musicians so having her on the song was just perfect. Then, Louie, I absolutely love and adore his work. I think his mixing and arrangements have always fascinated me. So, I was like, "This makes sense." Yeah, I think working in the stu' was fun. It was more in this little room of his where he had a bunch of gear that he tried every single day to tell me what everything was about. I was like, "I love that for you, I'll never be a gearhead, and you know what? That's fine. I think we should all subscribe to the bimbo-ification of music."

There were a couple of songs that took us a while when we first started working together. I was more interested in getting to know more about him and him as a musician. For me to feel comfortable working with someone I'm like, "I need to know who you are. I need to know why you make music." I need all that because it just makes the process easier. So, we spent a couple of days just talking about music and just talking about our childhoods and stuff, which was really nice. Then, when we got started, it felt really natural. It felt really just with the flow, and we got things done. I kind of knew how he worked, and I felt like he understood what I was saying. I think that's the best part. When you're working with someone

and you're like, "Okay, you get me musically," that's really sick.

I'd highly recommend it. I think it gets you closer to the music. Because, when you're making stuff, that is really personal, you're like, "Whoa, these are my babies. These are literally my puppies. So, who are you?" I think I wanted to know that he was going to handle all the stuff that I was writing about and the songs I was singing delicately. So, I was just really invested in understanding how he approaches music. I asked about his favorite bands growing up. I asked about moments he loved about his last record and his writing process. I guess I wanted to know where we stood together musically. Then, I was like, "Okay, I'm gathering information. I'm downloading it. I'm trying to figure out how I can word what I want for this record in a way that we talked about musically from the stuff that we love and the artists that we love."

Maryam Said Recommends:

Tacos but specifically this taco truck in North Philly called La Catrachita Food Truck, soo good.

Breasts and Eggs by Mieko Kawakami. Brilliant book that explores body image and family.

I can't stop listening to that Shirley Hurt record. Her beautiful voice and the melodies and production uuuuuugh so good.

I also love the new Highnoon single "Are You With Me". It's such a dream pop banger (:

Lastly, TMJ massages! Actively working on unclenching my Jaw :(

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Vocation

musician

Fact

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