

On not hinging your identity on success



Musician Max Collins (Eve 6) on experiencing the mountaintops and valley depths of fame, learning how to have an identity apart from your work, and Twitter as a creative outlet.

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As told to Isabel Slone, 1818 words.

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I've noticed that you can be really self-deprecating about the music you've made with Eve 6. One time you literally tweeted, "my band is awful." How does being low-key embarrassed about your creative output impact your ability to make art?

In spite of how it may seem, I'm actually really proud of those records. I have pride mingled with embarrassment about the records that I wrote and recorded between the ages of 17 and 23. I didn't have a worldly guile. I was literally writing that first record in my bedroom at my parents house. Things like ambition weren't really crowding my mind. To make people understand what the feeling is like, imagine reading a diary entry that you wrote when you were 17 years old, only in this case it was published to the world and 2 million people paid for a copy of it. I think if I wasn't able to deride those songs there would be something wrong with that. I have a kind of objectivity about it. That might be a little abnormal for an artist, but I think it is actually pretty sane and healthy. In terms of where the band is now, it's a different band. I'm a different person. I've had a whole lot of experiences, positive and negative, since that first record came out. We're still calling ourselves Eve 6, and in a way we are, but in a way we're not the same version of the band.

If you feel like you're in a different band now, then why keep the name Eve 6?

In mid-2019, my guitarist Jon and I started talking about doing another Eve 6 record. Ever since we put out our last record in 2012 we basically functioned as a live business and did our creative stuff elsewhere. We both had our own little projects that no one heard. We just decided, like, why not just try doing a couple of sessions and see what happened? The new record is just me and Jon doing what we did before there were any other cooks in the kitchen, like a record producer and a label and people forging our sound who were a lot more experienced than we were. In that way, it really does feel like Eve 6 than most Eve 6 records do. People were always shocked when we listed our influences like Jawbreaker and Screeching Weasel because they really weren't super apparent when you listen to an Eve 6 record. So it's an opportunity to go back to our roots in punk rock and do it in our mid-40s without any apology.

I really liked what you said earlier about objectivity being abnormal for an artist. Can you expand on that?

The temptation is so strong to identify whole cloth with what your band does, or how it's perceived. I'm not immune to that either, but I think having your identity fused with your band—or other people's perception of your band—is probably not super healthy. I think I've come out of that not by any sort of virtue but because our story is so weird. Everything happened for us so young. We've experienced the mountaintops of fame and the depths of the valley below as a band and that forces some reasonableness into you. It puts it all into perspective.

So basically identifying with your own work is kind of a trap?

It's totally a trap. And I think the same goes for the people in the audience, as well. People can make the same cognitive mistake of making an artist into their personality. I was just tweeting about Kid Rock because people were giving me a hard time after I tweeted that if I could make one band on earth disappear it would be Foo Fighters. One guy replied it should be Kid Rock, and I totally disagree. After that I put on *Devil Without A Cause* while driving my daughter to school—that's right I allowed my daughter to listen to Kid Rock—and it's so goddamn good. Yes he's a dumbass, but in the case of rock 'n' roll it just happens to be that being a dumbass often serves the artist. If Kid Rock was this cerebral guy we wouldn't have "Bawitdaba." And I'm glad we have "Bawitdaba." I think that record is a masterpiece. To say that if an artist has bad politics then suddenly their music doesn't slap is so bug-brained. Look no further than Eve 6 for a band with fucking fantastic A+ unassailable politics and terrible music.

If identifying with your own work is a kind of trap, then how does one cultivate an identity outside of being an artist?

I think by getting outside of oneself. By being curious. By giving a shit about what goes on in the world around you. By having relationships in your life that you value with friends and family. I'm not trying to diminish the importance of art—I think it's the antidote to the gray, neoliberal state that we exist in, in a lot of ways. But the artist's job, I feel, is to have the impulse, and to create the thing. The thing is of the moment and once that's done, the responsibility of the artist ends. It doesn't matter how it's perceived—whether it's loved or hated or both—and if you're too wrapped up in that, by which I mean fusing your sense of self with something that is of the moment, you're kind of living anachronistically. Your identity shouldn't be dependent upon the success of the thing you're making. Whether you're making it for an audience of three or 3 million, it's the same thing.

We obviously have to talk about your Twitter account, which you've referred to as a "months long manic episode" and how it has spearheaded a renewed interest in your band. How important is posting to your creative process? Do you consider your Twitter presence an expression of your creativity or a distraction from it?

I think it can be both. I'm definitely addicted to it. I also feel like it definitely touches art at times. There are times when I just get sucked into the noise, or I'm after likes. Someone asked me recently if posting stuff informs my songwriting and no, definitely not. They're very much two different outlets of expression.

It's interesting you say it approaches art at times... It's almost like tweeting is good practice for creating art because it teaches you how to divorce yourself from how the outcome will be perceived.

There's some truth to that. Sometimes a tweet does come from a similar source as a lyric or something like that. I can't emphasize enough how different it is to get to the end, but at the end of the day, you are quite literally writing, right? It's not fucking prose but you are writing and writing is creative, even if it doesn't have punctuation and it's crap. I do think it can be art, and I think sometimes with me it is. I'd be lying if I said I didn't think so.

I remember you tweeted once that "the online to IRL pipeline is real." Is achieving popularity on social media important to cultivating an artistic practice?

In the case of my band, it has been a boon because it's opened us up to a completely different audience. It has allowed us to warp perceptions of our band in a way I think is fun. Taking a purely commercial view of it, it has helped us, there's no denying that. Streams have gone up, people are buying vinyl and t-shirts, and we're getting all sorts of offers for live stuff that we never would have gotten before. It's been helpful.

I will say that when you're young and you start a band, the brass ring is to make a record that people will buy and like and gets played on the radio. It doesn't seem attainable but you still work towards that goal anyways because you're an artist, you can't help it. Part of the reason why you do it is you do feel like if everyone hears the content of your mind, you'll be in some way understood. To be seen as you are and accepted for it. But of course that's not what happens. In a way you become less understood, because people have these perceptions of

you and they're fed images of you that you have little control over. I'm not playing a tiny violin about this, it's just the truth. Being able to speak my mind online and literally say whatever I think and express opinions, even unpopular ones, does make me feel more publicly understood than I ever did making a record.

It's been 12 years since your last record. Was that an intentional break or did it just sort of happen? How important are long breaks in creativity to your artistic process?

We were in a situation with personnel in the band where we did have creative differences. I think those kind of came to a head on during the recording of our fourth record, *Speak in Code*. Being in a band that always functioned fairly democratically, it made getting creative work done seem very like a very daunting prospect. At the same time, we needed to play shows to keep the lights on so those issues were all at play as to why we took such a long break. Part of what we're trying to do now is establish some trust with our fans that we're not going to put out this five song EP and then not release any music for another baker's dozen years. We have a whole lot of shit recorded and we want to prove to our fan base and ourselves that this band is in its own very strange second act and we're not stopping.

Do you have an all-time favourite tweet of yours?

I really like our pinned tweet, "pretty sure we're gonna be huge again." I did it totally tongue-in-cheek right as-or even before-all of this stuff was about to pop off. Obviously we're not huge again, we're not topping the Billboard charts or whatever. But in a way it's been this strange self-fulfilling prophecy. I'm never gonna change that tweet.

Max Collins Recommends:

Book: [*A Course in Miracles*](#) - spiritual psychology that simulates a psychedelic experience

Twitter account: [@autogynefiles](#) - she's really good at posting

Food: There's a little place called Yakis on Alameda and Main in Burbank and they have this thing called a bulldog which is a hot dog wrapped in american cheese and deep fried in an eggroll crust and it's really good.

Music: [*Sleaford Mods*](#)

Movie: [*The Game*](#) starring Michael Douglas

Name

Max Collins

Vocation

Musician (Eve 6)

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