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As told to Hurley Winkler, 3187 words.

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On dealing with creative jealousy

Musician Rick Colado (rickoLus) discusses cultivating an attention span for music, dealing with the concept of fame as a young parent, and collaborating in your hometown.

You've been making music for decades now. How would you describe your evolution as a musician?

I was more interested in creating things from the beginning, like drawing and building my own worlds within worlds. And when I got my hands on music, it was like, this is it. This is what I want. This feels the best. I think because of how visceral music is: it's so immediate. I was never too keen on school growing up. I think I just didn't have the attention span for it. And if it didn't interest me, I really didn't care. I'd rather spend hours trying to figure out how to play a guitar or going through the painstaking process of figuring something out myself than reading a book about it. The book would be more confusing to me.

It's interesting to me that you say you felt like you didn't have the attention span for something like school or reading, but you clearly had the attention span for learning how to play an instrument. What do you think was different about learning to play an instrument versus learning other things?

I think, luckily, I was pretty good at starting things. I'd have a burst of energy. It came easy. And it just felt really good. I feel like learning a musical instrument, you must have these eureka moments where it all clicks.

My first real love was Ritchie Valens. I watched that movie, La Bamba, and I wanted to play Ritchie Valens when I was five. I liked dancing, too. The next step was learning how to play an instrument, an actual instrument. My parents got me a guitar, but it hurt. And they tried to give me lessons and I just couldn't... the threshold, it was too difficult at the time. And the things they were trying to teach me, it didn't sound how the tape did. When I played a G chord, it didn't sound like "La Bamba." I didn't have that eureka moment.

It really wasn't until 13, getting an electric guitar and finding out about Nirvana, and they had these really simple songs that were easy to learn how to play. So immediately, I would be able to remember learning how to play "Come as You Are." I needed those moments. I found it. And then, you start to build up the dexterity and the strength, and then it doesn't hurt anymore. Then I wrote my first song: another eureka moment. Then I was like, "Oh, I want to play drums." I'd work towards getting a drum set, figuring out how to do the beat. This hand is doing this and my foot's doing this, and my hand's doing this. And then, after that you're like, "Well, what if we change?" You hear another beat, you want to try that. But you have to be able to see the bridge or the next rung on the ladder, you know what I mean? If you can't see it, then you're going to stop, or at least I would stop.

I would dive in and learn little bits all the way. It was like a rock climbing wall or something. Sometimes I'd take a song and pull myself up on a song rock, and then the next thing is like, "Oh, well, now, I'm going to pull myself up on this piano rock." And it was never about just going up one thing. For 20 plus years, it was always this zigzag all the way up, to where now, I just have this weird buffet of skills.

Musically, you're a jack of all trades. Do you prefer to make music on your own, or do you prefer it to be a more collaborative effort with several other musicians?

For a long time, I was more comfortable just doing everything myself because it would move faster. And it

was really exciting to figure out all the different parts. Just records in the shed by myself, playing the drums and the bass and the keys, and coming up with all the harmonies: that's a fun place to explore.

Working with people, it's like you have to find the right people. When you start bringing in somebody else, that's where this really magical thing starts happening because collaboration is ultimately the melding of tastes and ideas all together, and it really frees you up to go further, I think. So now, I'm really big on collaboration. I really would rather come up with an idea and see how it evolves when other people spin on it or add something to it or take something away.

But I do like that little area of inner... it's almost like meditation in yourself. You're writing, and you're the only one hearing it and you're the only one making any decisions. It's all inside.

What is it about another person that might make you feel pulled toward them to collaborate with them? Can you describe that initial pull toward them, how you know they're worthy of that collaboration?

It's a lot like falling in love. There's just something about them that, like, oh... it's scratching some itch that maybe you couldn't get to before. That's why, I think, young bands are so interesting. Because really, you're young, you fall in love so easily. You're just like, "Dude, you like music? Let's start a band." It's not very difficult to connect. And then with those things, it's really rare for them to fit and be intact for a long time. That's why it's crazy to think that the Stones are still a band, you know what I mean? They've been playing together since they were teenagers, which is insane to know somebody that long and then to be working with somebody for that long. It's a different type of relationship and a depth that you can't reproduce.

I think two things make a relationship powerful. Sometimes time is the thing and sometimes just the energy releases all at once. There'll be a big explosion, and the relationship may not last that long, but it's so intense that it creates something completely new. And it can also take a long time, and you'll see it slowly evolve into something, like a supernova or coal turning into a diamond.

The pull to a collaboration, I think, is based solely on circumstance and where you are and who you meet. If you're in a place that has a lot of different people that are creative and musicians and stuff, it can boost your creativity. That's what happens when a scene is happening. It's like there's a collective of people and they all are starting to mix and you see each other doing stuff, and that pulls everybody up. It builds because there is a collaboration going on between all these different artists and things.

Was ever a low point for you where you considered not making music anymore, and if so, what made you keep going?

There were plenty of low points. There were times when I thought, well, maybe I need to get a different job or work on something so I could make money and then do this as a hobby thing. But those were short-lived experiments. I never have thought of not making music. It was always something I was going to be doing and making, and creating, and writing. Once I got on the boat, I never got off the boat. That was it.

I fell in love with music really early. I remember just loving a song, like love this song. All I want to do is hear this song over and over, and over, and over, and over, and over. I always tell people that my first step into playing piano was when I went to go see *Jurassic Park* when I was nine or something, and I couldn't get the tune out of my head. That silly, triumphant song was just in my head, and I was like, "I want to hear it." I couldn't buy the soundtrack. So, I went to the piano and just found the notes so I could hear it. Just hearing it was like, "Oh, man, I got to hear it. I got to hear it more. I got to hear it more."

You've had this commitment to music, but at the same time, you became a parent at a very young age. You're married to the visual artist Sarah Colado, and today, the two of you have a young child again, 20 years after your firstborn. Do you have any words of guidance or solace to share with people who are in a similar boat: who have families and want to commit to their art at the same time but don't really know how to make that work with everything else?

I think it can be really scary whenever you put other people into the equation. Because now, you're not just responsible for yourself, and this could be a big deterrent for a lot of people. You think, "Oh, well, now, I need to settle down, or I need to go get a real job or something."

It might not look like what you think it was going to look like, but it'll be yours. Do you want to just do what other people are doing, or do you want to do what you do and make your way? There are no rules to this. I think that was another thing I liked a lot about art and getting into art and creating: there is no real rule. You could do whatever you want and make whatever you want, just like there are no rules to parenting or marriage. It's like a weird funky thing that you just figure out. And parenting is also a crazy, weird adventure where you don't know what path you have to take or what it's going to throw at you. Just like a music career, it doesn't even need to be a career, but you could still make it, and you could still do those things. It just requires prioritizing.

The biggest thing is learning how to prioritize and maybe kicking away some of that "me-time" and investing it in something. You don't need to spend two hours playing a video game, or you don't need to spend three hours watching a movie. Would you rather watch this movie, or would you rather be out with your kid, or working on your music? You prioritize, and then that's what you get. You don't need as much free time as you think. You do need some free time, of course, but the older I get, the more I'm investing

in people and things that I love.

What has your relationship with the idea of fame looked like? Has the concept of "making it" as a musician been a big driver for you?

I've never had a lot of fame to where I've really felt the trapping of it. When somebody knows your name, they have power over you, and when everybody knows your name, you're no longer yourself. I mean, you are yourself, but there's this other thing now that you've sacrificed to. You are now a vehicle for all these other people. Fame is becoming the sacrifice.

Now, what you're sacrificing yourself for, I think, is the big question. And a lot of people sacrifice themselves for a lot of selfish things. I just made this connection that's silly as hell, but it's like the ring of power in *The Lord of the Rings*: the way you come to this power is how it's going to treat you. You could take it in a noble way, taking this burden and trying and be as responsible with it as possible and trying and do what's right with it or try and helping people with it. If you take it out of vengeance or out of jealousy or something like that, or out of selfishness, then that's what it'll become. Are you just going to sit around and look at yourself, or are you going to try and lift it all up with feelings and thoughts and something transcendent?

What has your relationship been like with jealousy as an artist, when musicians you know surpass you in terms of milestones? I feel like every artist working has had that happen to them: we're all vying for a similar thing, and someone else's timing is guaranteed to be different from ours. They'll arrive there before we get to arrive. How do you process the feelings that might get stirred up when that happens?

I don't think anybody is immune to it, unless you're just some wizard and you're not really paying attention to what anybody else is doing. But I think when people around you start to achieve things that are bigger, going places you wanted to go, then yeah, you're going to be envious and jealous. I think that's natural. Eventually, you have to land on their path not being your path. This is your path, and it's different, and you can explain it. You can't explain why something gets picked. There's so much going into the fact that this band, which maybe has only been around for six months, all of a sudden is shot to the top. And you're like, "Whoa, I've been around for five years. What happened? Why did they get it and I didn't get it? Why did they get moved up? How did they get found?"

The jealousy and the envy is real, but I think if you really love what you're doing, you're going to work past it. There's always going to be somebody that's more successful than you. That's just how it is. There's always going to be somebody who you think has done better or has done more. And if you're going to sit around and worry about all that shit, then stop right now. This isn't for you. You should just find something else. But if you keep going, maybe you're going to do something that they think is the best thing ever. You just never know. So, don't stop. Take that jealousy and envy and put it over there and don't focus on that crap. It'll make you bitter. It'll make you real bitter.

I've heard stories about musicians that have played with these big bands and then go back to where they're really at. They've been up here for a while, and then they come back and say, "Well, I played with the Stones," or something like that. And they're acting like they're in the Rolling Stones, but they're not because Stones are up here. You're way down here, buddy. This is a different place, and be grateful that you had that opportunity, but be grateful that you're right here, because you know what? There's also somebody lower than you, too.

What advice do you have for fellow artists who live in cities similar to Jacksonville, FL, that aren't necessarily known for their artistic culture the way big cities are? How can people who live in these places build a creative network and make moves as an artist?

I spent a long time traveling around to all those big cities, playing in all these different types of shows far away from home. But now, I think you ought to build your scene before you start going to those other places. Build your own scene. Build with the blocks you already have. Make something happen where you are, and then that will start to grow. Then go a little bit out of town. Bring the thing you've build to that place. The slow build is the tactic.

Going on long tours all around is definitely a learning experience, and you could learn a lot to bring back. But strategically, it's a lot more difficult to build a following unless you can go back to those places on tour all the time. So, unless you're going to live on the road, always be playing everywhere, you just got to think of it strategically. Dispersing your army all over the place: is that going to be as effective as just conquering one thing at a time and growing your empire from there?

It's a little easier to maintain and build infrastructure close to home, and then your network becomes a more solid thing than driving all the way to New York to play a show. That can be a lot of fun, but it's expensive. And true, you might meet somebody and then you have a connection up there. But the connections I think that really help are the collaborative ones. And if you can find people in your area to collaborate with, then I would focus on those things because you grow a lot faster and a lot stronger when you have it on a daily or weekly basis.

Rick Colado recommends:

Making lists. Make as many lists as you need. It doesn't matter. Make lists constantly and check them off and throw the lists away. It'll help you stay focused.

Yoga. You got to stretch. You gotta start taking care of your body. I think flexibility is probably one of the most important things to keep your body intact. I just started working it into my routine every day, and it's been great.

Ancient civilization documentaries. I think it's super fascinating to learn about how civilization has come to where we are now. A lot of us take for granted all of the things that we have and we think have always been here. I didn't even think about there not being an alphabet, for example. If you have characters that you could use to build any words you want, that's a technological revolution right there.

The Beatles: Get Back. I'm just obsessed with this documentary, which feels very inside the bubble. That was at a time that people weren't so aware of themselves. That documentary could not be shot now because we're all too aware of ourselves and being watched. Whereas back in 1969, the camera was weird, and they're acting like it's not there. Back then, I feel like having a camera around was an abstract idea, whereas now, we're just all used to it.

Developing a practice regimen. For 20-something years, I was more into the punk rock way of doing things, where you just go in and figure it out on the fly. Whereas now, I've been into practicing and building a practice routine. There's a book by Benny Greb called Effective Practicing for Musicians, and I think it could be applied to anything. That's a book I would suggest for anybody trying to work on music or get better at anything. It's about working on these tiny things that eventually add up to you being this well-rounded player.

Name

Rick Colado

Vocation

musician

Fact

Amanda Rosenblatt

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