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As told to Max Freedman, 2253 words.

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Finding inspiration in solitude and community

Musician Taylor Vick (Boy Scouts) discusses the impact your surroundings have on your creative work, the benefits of collaboration, and how to know when a song is truly done.

Your recent music has a bunch of literary inspirations. I'm curious if you can tell me more about how literature drives your creativity.

It hasn't always. It's a newer development. But for as long as I've been writing songs, it's always been autobiographical, and it still is, in a lot of ways.

More recently, I [re]discovered my love for reading and got back into it through reading a lot of nonfiction, like self-help spiritual books that assisted in lifting me out of a dark place. Then I remembered and rediscovered my love for fiction. I think both are equally present in my songwriting process. But I don't know that I would have gotten to this point without the non-fiction stuff first. It's still kind of new.

When I start writing a song, it'll be about a personal thing, experience, thought, or feeling. And then, I had been playing with the idea of fictionalizing it a bit, or imagining what started off as an idea of my own from a personal experience, and letting the idea run like it happened to somebody else, and then shifting it a bit or creating a fictional experience. I think it becomes more enjoyable for me to listen to the song and then, eventually, [play] it live if there's a bit more distance from my own personal stuff.

What exactly about that distance makes it easier for you to play these songs live or just enjoy them?

As I've learned over the years, [when I'm] playing a song written six or seven months before over and over, [I'm] changing all the time. I feel like I'm a new person every month, and it doesn't feel as good to be singing a song that's really personal...feeling like I've changed from [when] I wrote the song [makes me not want to play it]. Having the distance, there's still that level of personal truth in it, but there's also this added fiction element that makes it more interesting and fun for me and less like, "Oh, I'm singing the song even though I don't feel this way anymore."

Are there other non-musical forms of fiction or art that inspire your creativity?

I don't know if it's art, but conversations with people that I have about creating, or really, it could be about anything at all, [inspire me]. It's more the experience of feeling connected that ends up inspiring me to be creative, and that can be achieved through conversations with friends, or even listening to podcasts of people that I admire and finding things that I can connect to. Just the experience of feeling seen and validated and connected.

That all makes me wonder, how does your creativity help you connect to and navigate the world?

In addition to sharing some creative idea with another person and feeling [a] connection in that way, [my creativity] provides me this opportunity to connect with myself. I find it important to always be open to the idea of growing and changing for the better, just on a personal level. I think when I feel more connected to myself and I'm becoming a better version of myself, I'm more able to show up for others in my life, and I'm more able to show up for [some sort of] community and try to embody that experience of connection.

You can be creative in so many different ways. I think we're creative all the time, even with choosing what we're going to cook for dinner. [My creativity] allows me to feel connected to myself and be present for a bit and pay attention to one thing for a certain amount of time, which can be really valuable and something it's becoming harder and harder to do because we're just bombarded with information all the time and distracted.

You've mentioned a lot of stuff about other people, and with your most recent album, *Wayfinder*, you've added more collaborators into the Boy Scouts fold. I'm curious what bringing in these other folks has taught you about your creativity.

For a long time, I really wanted to be the artist who does everything on her own and records and plays all the instruments on my own, and releasing that [notion] has been only beneficial. ... I connected with Stephen [Steinbrink] and realized that, working with somebody else that I really am aligned with musically and just in all the ways, we can create something so much bigger and better than anything I could have done on my own. It's such a beautiful experience to be creative with somebody else and exist in that space where, for a long time, it was always so personal and private for me and [then] being able to share [that] with someone else. It's allowed me to feel more confident in general. [It] makes me more excited about the music because there are other people involved, and I'm seeing other people become excited about it too and share their ideas.

You spoke pretty extensively about the pros of working with others just now. I'm curious whether you can talk about some cons you've found, too.

Being expected to collaborate with somebody else doesn't always allow it to go very well and have something come [out] of it that you're really proud of and excited about. And I guess that's not a con of collaborating, it's very situational. I can't really think of any cons that I've experienced...if I'm working with people that I'm comfortable with and trust and am able to say yes or no to an idea in front of, without feeling like I need to withhold that information if I disagree.

That makes me wonder how you choose your collaborators, how you know that somebody is someone you can trust, someone you can say no to.

The two people that I have collaborated with the most would be my brother and Stephen. And Travis, my brother, is the person I've been playing music with for the longest. Since we were kids, we've played together. There's already that trust built in, which I'm really grateful for.

I value both of their opinions so much and...I hope that they can sense that. I do tell them too, but I think because they know that I value both of their opinions and their creative ideas...it's just an energetic exchange where I feel like, "Oh, they know how much I think they're both absolutely the best." So I feel safe and comfortable saying I disagree with an idea if I do end up disagreeing with it. Having that kind of closeness makes it easy and comfortable. I think also, if it's a song I wrote [with] my lyrics and chord progressions [and] melodies, it gives me more confidence to say my thoughts.

I have to imagine that your brother and Stephen are people you've collaborated with in person, but if I recall correctly, with *Wayfinder*, some of the collaborations you did were entirely over email. I'm curious how having multiple communication channels as you collaborate shapes your creativity.

There's a bunch of stuff that was done just remotely. Stephen and I wrote the parts for the strings and sent them to our friends, and they recorded them, and so that was collaborative, but not in the way of just letting them do whatever they wanted. There was that structure there. Nick Levine [of Jodi] played pedal steel, and we didn't give them any kind of fixed structure or [direction]. We let them do whatever they wanted. But as far as all the other contributors and collaborators, it wasn't so much that they were being creative and sharing their ideas.

We were still the people behind this - Stephen, Travis, and I - coming up with the ideas or being like, "We should have Melina [Duterte of Jay Som] sing these harmonies, and we should have so and so do this, or Paul [Adam Benson of Ever Ending Kicks] do this." The parts were already written, but we sought out other people to contribute or lend their voices. The human voice is so unique to every individual person, so it was really exciting to have a song and be like, "Oh, it'd be so cool if Melina sang these harmonies, or it would be so cool if Paul sang these because of how his voice sounds like this." Having these friends that are all incredible musicians inspired us creatively in that we could ask them to lend their instrument.

You were just saying that the parts are already there when you bring these folks into the fold, but I do want to ask a little more about how working with other people affects your ability to sense when a song is done.

That's tricky. It's hard to ever really know that a song is done. You could say that a song is truly never done, but at a certain point, we get to this part where the recording sounds pretty good, we're pretty happy with it, and maybe we try to add other things, and we're like, "Oh no, this doesn't really add [anything], and it takes away from the song." I think once we get to that point, it feels like what we have is pretty great and we're happy with it.

I want to pivot topics somewhat and ask about your actual recording space. I know you went to Anacortes to record *Wayfinder*, so I'm curious, how does your actual recording space, the things in it, its proximity to where you live, things like that, affect what you create?

I think it totally does. [Wayfinder] was my first really big experience with that, or realization of that as a truth, because I hadn't recorded much in a variety of places before, and for this album, we did a week in Anacortes, and then we also did some time at our friend's studio in Oakland, and then a different studio.

I think the environment plays a huge role in the creation process. And everything [else] too, like the time of year that we were recording, the state of the world, and being up in Washington during the fall in this really beautiful studio [called The Unknown] that Phil Elverum from The Microphones had recorded in and [has] all this history. It felt really precious.

[Where we recorded was] an old church building and...we're all pretty sensitive to our environment, or I am, at least. And especially being up in Washington, those days felt so magical, and we were able to get so much done, and it just seemed like everything was flowing so effortlessly, and I do credit the environment at that studio...the idea of being away from home was new for me. I [had] never recorded anywhere besides my home, or home city, or wherever I'm living. Especially after having not left the house for so many months [during the early stages of the pandemic], being in an entirely new environment was super impactful. It felt really good.

Were there moments when the new location blocked your creativity from flowing? If that was the case, what did you do to get back on track?

I honestly don't know that it did. As an introverted person who likes a lot of alone time, even though I was staying with people I was recording with and [was] around people all the time, for some reason, it didn't affect me in the way that I thought maybe that would. It didn't block or hinder [my] creative energy or flow. Surprisingly, I hadn't really ever thought about that before. I don't know how that happened.

If you could design your own space away from home where you could regularly record your music, what would it have and what wouldn't it have?

It definitely would not have internet. I think it would have a wood fire stove and just be somewhere kind of cold and secluded and cozy. God, I hate that I like saying all these words, but it's true. I love feeling like I'm alone in the woods. I think that environment is really conducive to focusing, and being somewhere beautiful in nature and just being able to go on walks and not run into anyone would be really beneficial.

As far as things I wouldn't have: probably the internet. I think that might be it. That's the biggest thing I'd like to have time away from. When I first recorded an album with Stephen in our little shipping container [that] we had access to, there was no cell service, which is pretty cool, but I think I would need the cell service in case of emergency.

So you'd say avoiding the internet is more of a thing of eliminating distractions and procrastination than communication.

Definitely, yeah. Distraction and then just totally desecrating my attention span.

Taylor Vick Recommends:

Making your own granola

Taking an eight-plus day boat/camping trip on the river through the Grand Canyon—it's costly but more rewarding and spectacular than five vacations combined

"St. Martin de Porres" by Mary Lou Williams

Writing a letter to your future self - I use the website futureme.org. It's quite bizarre and special to receive a letter from a past version of yourself. Somehow always seems to show up in my inbox at the perfect time.

Snorkeling

Name

Taylor Vick

Vocation

Musician

Fact

Tonje Thilesen

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