


On getting out of your own way



Musician Trevor Powers (Youth Lagoon) discusses observing your past work and the power of being present with the moment.

November 20, 2023 -

As told to Jeffrey Silverstein, 2007 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Mental health](#), [Inspiration](#), [Adversity](#), [Process](#).

How are you today?

It was a long travel day. Nine hours in the van then another few hours tomorrow, but it was a good day. Every puzzle piece of the team fits together so well. Personality wise and everyone's aura, it all connects in a great way. Everything feels smooth. Even on days where there's a seven hour drive and a show, nothing feels like it's too much to handle.

A nice reminder that touring doesn't have to feel awful.

Totally. It's funny because it should be the baseline. The reason any of us get into music or any passion that we are eager to throw ourselves into is because of that inner child that never went away. It's the play and the fun. It's easy to get caught up in the bullshit and lose sight of what the beauty actually is—it's always right there, but it's easy to miss if you're not paying attention.

How has your relationship to Boise changed over the years?

It's changed so much. I've lived in Idaho my whole life. I was born in San Diego, but my family moved to Idaho when I was three. It's always been home. Like most people in high school, you can't wait to get out, to abandon it. I was no different. I went to Boise State for a couple years and started having ideas of where I was going to move. I was thinking of Seattle, had all these other cities in mind but then a lot of doors started opening with music.

With that came travel. The more I traveled and got out of what I was used to, meeting new people and feeling uncomfortable, the more my love for home grew. It's perspective. You can walk the same street 10 million times over and feel there's nothing new to see if your expectation is that you're not going to see anything new. The second you walk out your front door and have an appreciation for the present moment, that's when that street and everyone on it opens up and can speak to you.

What impact does working in such a familiar environment have?

The best thing I can liken it to would be a long-term relationship. My wife and I, for instance, we've been together for 17 years. When you're with someone that long you end up realizing that the good stuff gets better and better with every layer and the work you put in, you get that much back plus more.

It's easy for people to abandon ship, whether it be a person or a place or anything. There's absolutely nothing wrong with moving. If tomorrow I feel it's put on my heart to move somewhere else, that's what I need to do. The

more I have invested in what home and community is, the more it gives back. Writing this album, it was digging my nails into what I was used to and tearing back layers. Being patient with home and patient with what could be seen as mundane. Sitting with it until I can start seeing the beauty for what it really is.

Speaking of tearing back layers, what's your relationship like with your younger self? Can you hear or see yourself in older material?

Even if we were to have this call three years ago, it would be a dramatically different conversation. I have never had a good relationship with myself and self-love up until recently. It's such a new concept for me, and it's weird how life is like that, where it can be so much easier to love others and appreciate their goodness than with ourselves. I had this moment with a therapist a couple years back. It was eye opening because he had asked me to name some things I love about myself. Just that act of trying to name characteristics I see in myself as being worthy made me cry.

He asked me, "Why is this so hard?" I was like, "I don't know." I was just crying. I realized so much of my life up to that point had been this compartmentalization where there were previous versions of myself, and now there's the present version, and this is the kind of person I want to be in the future. Everything was so boxed in that it was suffocating and I wasn't able to have a relationship with or grasp on time.

All of that started colliding into this absolute oneness. Something clicked where I was able to start putting together all of these pieces that became self-love in a way that I had never known or understood before.

Can you describe what "killing off" Youth Lagoon felt like?

Youth Lagoon for a while got out of hand in terms of it was something I created, this creature that was mine. Then it turned into something I could no longer identify with. People were telling me what it was supposed to be, even though it's my thing, my brainchild and passion. Those other people, the industry or again 'the other', had never dictated my creative choices.

It felt like there was always this thing of, "Oh, what you're doing, it's not how I see it in my head." That's how people were treating it. It got to be really tiring to deal with that. When I used the phrase "kill it off," that is genuinely how it felt. When I cut myself off from this creature I had made and started going by my real name it felt like a big healthy fuck you because I was like, okay, now I can do whatever I want and you can't tell me what I should or shouldn't do. Looking back on it now, to make that decision for that reason feels so immature because it should never have come to some weird, silent psychological fuck you. It's such an unhealthy thing.

I needed that phase, that separation and change of identity in order to go off on even more extreme tangents in my brain to figure out who I am as a creator, what is my place in the world, what am I trying to say, and if I am saying anything. Having these huge questions I could swim around in this pool...see where the deep and shallow end is, make sense of it all. I needed that.

I was able to start developing a healthy relationship with the self, with time and the present moment. When I took versions of my past self and gathered up those pieces, that's when things started feeling exciting because I realized this is all something not guided by others, it's guided by the soul and that deep inner light. Taking the past, adding it to the present and having that be the future changed everything.

Did your definition of success begin to change as well?

It did. A lot of it was all the pressure I had been putting on myself. It was all numbers based. I would work on an album, write an album for X amount of months or years, record the album, then once the album was done the industry came in. It was all these analytics. Everything turned so messy.

It never infiltrated my actual creative process, but once the creative process was done and that was added to it, it always made it feel so...I don't know. It lost some of the magic of what the actual communication aspects of

music are supposed to be. It's supposed to talk to the soul, truly move the needle of the soul, not any financial dogshit. That's what it felt like it started turning into. Anytime that someone tells me the music moves them, that's all that I care about.

What informed your lyric writing process on *Heaven Is a Junkyard*?

My lyric process is sporadic because I have notebooks and notes on my phone where I'll have lyrics popping into my head. I write them down. I don't know what they mean in the moment, then sometimes it's not until months later I come back to them and it makes sense. The power of words in general has changed my approach to music dramatically. It wasn't that I didn't care about lyrics before, but they have secondary in ways up until this point.

It's weird. I feel like I'm this many years into making music and am just now starting to find my voice. A lot of that has come with that patience. Rather than just finishing it, I'm going to sit with it and see how it ends up speaking to me, take some walks, give it some time and space to be able to grow on its own, and then I'll come in and water it sometimes.

Falling in love with all kinds of filmmakers has been an endless well for me to turn to for inspiration. I'll watch certain movies and have this instant compulsion to work on music. There's this movie I've been obsessed with called *The Reflecting Skin*, one of those movies where every visual you could print and hang up in a museum. Every time I see that movie it speaks to me in different ways.

I'll watch something and then my brain is in hyperdrive and I can't keep up. Movies speak to me in a way that often music can't because I communicate through music. When I'm watching some of those images stick in my brain and don't leave. When I'm working on music next time, it's like I'm making imaginary scores for those situations, but then it becomes blurred with my own life. So you can't really tell where one thing begins and the other thing ends.

How do you know if an idea is worth revisiting?

It always depends. I try to never delete anything, never throw anything away. You just don't know when something is going to hit you in a new way. Ninety-five percent of the album was written over the span of one year's time. Some of them I've had on the cooker since 2018, 2019. It's all about that game of patience and holding onto something until it's absolutely right, but also knowing when to let it go.

It's such a common thing for people to get bored of their ideas just because an idea is old, that it means that it's not a good idea, which is madness. I view all ideas as being valid whether you wrote it fucking 20 years ago or whether you wrote it yesterday. Truth is truth. You just have to be able to separate who you were from that idea.

I love albums having some sort of cohesion. Specificity and a bullseye to what an album is as a whole, a vision. But also incorporating U-turns in an album where this track might be a little bit different, but it's intentional, an added spice to that emotion. I love that bullseye mentality. Sometimes that takes place over the course of years. Sometimes it can be a song written a week ago.

Are you still running?

I haven't been. I do it when I can. It's hard on the road and is such a habit based thing. Anything that makes you mindful, that's the ultimate fuel. Anything that pulls you into the present. It's such a fucking mind blowing thing that everything that you could ever learn or say, it's already there. It's already inside you. The difficult thing is moving yourself out of the way so information, creativity or communication can bubble to the surface. Anything that helps you get yourself out of your own way is everything.

Trevor Powers recommends:

Alice in the Cities (1974)

Blow Out (1981)

Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai (1999)

Withnail and I (1987)

Persepolis (2007)

Name

Trevor Powers

Vocation

musician (Youth Lagoon)

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Tyler T. Williams