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As told to Sue Park, 2544 words.

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On prioritizing what brings you joy

Podcast host Yasi Salek (Bandsplain) discusses focusing on the positive, not being afraid to put yourself out there, and the power of fandom. I was just listening to the Television episode of Bandsplain and found out that Tom Verlaine is a Sagittarius. How did you get into astrology?

I was a preteen and I got into witchcraft, as girls do. When you're like, "that's right, I'm going to do this. Let me take myself to the local witch store"—every town has one. And you buy a little book called the Silver Broomstick or whatever and get into it. Since then, I was always interested in the esoteric. I like it too because it's for girls.

Speaking of your childhood, I remember you spoke about first loving "Give It Away" by the Red Hot Chili Peppers when you were nine, and becoming obsessed with the Replacements not long after; how did you get into music so young?

I can't remember a time when I wasn't super into music, even pre-"Give It Away." I always remember being so into Madonna because of my mom. It was the music, but it was also everything else. The first artist that I was exposed to had the whole package: the persona, the presentation, interesting things to say. Since then, I was just so captivated. It's so multidimensional, and the artists I'm always drawn to are still like that.

You have an archivist spirit and have said that an obsessive mindset requires intention; do you ever feel drained by the sheer amount of the history and cultural context out there?

I actually find it so energizing, and in a way it's like talking to people. If you have a really vulnerable, heart-to-heart conversation with anyone, you're probably going to feel an empathy and a connection with them. I feel that way about every artist that I deep dive into because even if I go into it being a little sus, that it's probably not my cup of tea—I might not come out the other side listening to the music, but I have a newfound appreciation for the artist. You can't look deep into someone's whole creative process and everything they've done and not be really touched and blown away by the work they've put in. Does that make sense?

Definitely. I wish I had more of that attitude. I find myself becoming exhausted by the expectation of having to know everything—

Going wrong, babe. You don't have to "should" anything. You just do what you like, just follow what interests you.

It sucks because I think the feeling that you should already know about things makes people stay away from them. And that's sad, because then you don't get to experience it instead of just being like, "Oh, I don't know. Let me see what this is about."

I guess it's a self-imposed obligation when I write anything: this pressure of having to be constantly right about things, especially the more I learn about them. How do you manage feeling like you have to cater to an audience?

I don't care—it's been a journey. I've been making this show for two and a half years now. At first, I was really preoccupied with wanting to get it right, for sure; I want to honor the artist. But over time I was just like, this is my experience of the artist, this is my lens. I'm not Wikipedia, I'm not a dictionary. I'm just a person with my own opinions interpreting something. And if you don't like it, bitch, you're not legally obligated to listen. When people complain, it's super funny to me. I'm like, "Nobody put a gun to your head. There are many other podcasts."

I don't want to talk about criticism as an art form, but I don't consider what I do criticism at all. So when people online are like, "This sucks, this album sucks," it's like, okay, don't listen to it then. You have one wild and precious life and whatever amount of energy in a day; you want to focus it on hating some record? Who cares? It doesn't make any sense to me.

That's a great way of looking at it-criticism was actually my entryway into writing. It's been hard and weird, acknowledging how negativity tends to really thrive and go viral. I've honestly felt super jaded about it: as if liking something publicly is essentially yelling into a void. How do you move towards wanting to continually share that passion for the things that interest you?

I don't think about it that way. I feel like I'm most drawn to people expressing love for something, or fandom for something. At its core, that's what the show is about. It's about fandom, and fandom is really beautiful and pure. I know the negativity gets more traction, but that's because people are literally so ill and their dopamine receptors are so fucked up that they need to engage in whatever makes them feel alive. I wish them the best, but I think you can't help but be moved by pure fandom. That's just how I feel; I'm super uninterested in negativity online. I'll just be like, okay, whatever. Godspeed to you and your take.

That's actually what drew me into the podcast-it was just such a nice vibe. It's how I feel when my friends and I sit around listening to an album just being like, this rocks. Was the original ethos creating this kind of communal feeling?

There's so many iconic artists that people have maybe heard of, but are overwhelmed by the thought of getting into them: college dorm room, Led Zeppelin shit where you're like, "Yeah, I know 'Stairway to Heaven,' but I'm not doing all that." So it was to create an easy entry point for anyone interested. And especially because of what you were saying about putting forth this idea that we should already know everything, I think people are too embarrassed or shy to even try and learn. So it was like, "Oh, well, you can just listen to this podcast." That was the original ethos, and then I just got too deep into it and fell into a fucking well. Then it just became like, I need to know everything and I need to tell you all about it.

I really appreciate that. I think that in beginning to investigate something, really doing research and adopting a more contextual mindset, it's hard to untangle genuine curiosity from expectations of, "I should know this." How do you maintain that drive towards purely doing the work for what it means to you?

I mean, I have the best job in the whole world. I get to be a professional teenager. It's something that I'm naturally predisposed to, and I get to spend my days reading about artists and thinking about their music. What a fucking cool job. Sometimes it's hard and it feels like work: like, "Oh, cool, there's 20 books about this band. How am I going to finish?" But even that's part of it. I like the challenge.

On that note, I really admire that you do all your research yourself. Because no one else can learn it for you, in terms of how you yourself put those pieces together.

You nailed it. People always assume I have someone else do the research for me. My producers help find some of the articles and prep like that, but I have to read everything. And I still end up having to look for more because again, it's my perspective and my lens. I can't have someone else read the article and pull out what they think is important, because that's what they think is important.

I love connecting the dots that emerge as this magic eye in the end where I'm like, "Oh, this is the thing." And it's always reflective of something I'm personally going through, because you see what you project. But I can't see it if I don't go through everything myself.

I feel like that also puts what we discussed earlier into perspective: the good in doing the work. How did you get involved with music writing in the first place?

Well, we used to be a proper country and have the alt weekly, where I interned in college and wrote about music. After that, I interned at *XLR8R*, which doesn't exist in print anymore. Then I wrote for *Vapors*, which was a graffiti and skateboarding magazine, then moved to New York and wrote for *Complex* and *Misbehave*, which also doesn't exist anymore-great magazine. None of these magazines exist anymore. Then, it just wasn't a job; it got narrower and narrower.

When I first wanted to do it, I was thinking of something else that stopped existing. I wanted to do 90's-style, *SPIN* magazine or British press-style journalism, like *NME* or *Melody Maker*. Music journalism stopped being like that by the time I was writing. I didn't find it fun anymore; they didn't let you put your personality into it anymore. You know what I mean?

For sure. I also grew up admiring a very specific sort of pop culture-related writing, and while I'll always have a lot of love for that sort of media, I also have anxieties about the way it's going right now. It feels harder to write for writing's sake. Do you maintain a practice for remaining positive in or beyond your writing? Sorry, I'm clearly very neurotic.

I'm the chilliest person. You don't have to be nervous for me, I'm just a podcast clown.

That's a great question. I think it's really important to have a practice; you have to try. I do morning pages every morning. I go on really long walks and I concentrate on things that bring me joy. That will

always create more joy. And that's what makes me sad about the fixation around negativity; I don't think people realize it just breeds more and more. Again, you have one life and you're going to create within it what you focus on.

In my opinion, that's what life is about. We're here to experience joy and love things, even if it's just going outside to look at a tree and being like, "fuck, that's cool." You know what I mean? I know it sounds hippie or whatever, woo-woo. But who cares? I make it a priority to experience joy and to love things.

Even calling yourself a podcast clown-it's like that "jester's privilege" meme. I wish there was more acceptance of writing like a silly, goofy girl. The music scene can feel like a boys' club at times, where it's hard to be taken seriously unless I present my thoughts very seriously.

Listen, babe, no one has to accept it but you.

I often like to say that "the feminism has left my body," but lately it's reentered. Even though this was not my intention, I like the idea that women can listen to the show and feel a little less talked-at and a little more talked-to. The name of the show is obviously a play on "mansplaining"-we all know, even though I think the audience of the show is still largely men. Which is fine. Happy to do it, happy to serve. They suffer through the vocal fry and the astrology; perhaps that's part of what they like about it. I have no idea.

But I love when college-age girls message me that they're into it. It's so cool, because it happened to me. I've talked about this a lot, but I take every opportunity to because I'm so grateful. When I was 11 or 12, I got this book by Gina Arnold, a music critic, and I think a professor now. It's called *Route 666: On the Road to Nirvana*. I was obsessed with Nirvana. That was my favorite band when I was 11 years old. So I bought the book.

It wasn't criticism; she wrote about music in a way that was totally personal. She told her own stories about fandom, and I learned about so many bands. You brought up the Replacements earlier-I learned about them from that book. I was 11, so I just took my allowance and bought whatever tapes or CDs she mentioned. She's why I do what I do; I never knew I could talk about music through a personal lens as a woman. It was just really eye-opening. If I can do that for anyone else, that would be huge.

That really beautifully knocks down the feeling that my writing has to be straight-laced; I really struggle with that. The way you speak about writing makes me a lot more hopeful.

Yeah, if you can ask yourself, "Well, how do I want it to be?" And then see how you can do it that way-I know that's a little easier said than done, but eventually it will become a thing. You can make it a thing.

I mean, really, the magic of life is in the mundane: what you do, your work, your daily activities. But there's magic there. So if you can see and find the magic in the mundane, then you get to have a really beautiful life, no matter what your circumstances are.

True. I did see the T-shirt in your shop that says "Never for money, always for love."

Love, yeah. It's actually a lyric from a Wire song, and also a Talking Heads song. The Talking Heads song is "This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody)." The Wire song, I can't remember. Hold on-see, now I'm going to be the one that doesn't get things right. "Practice Makes Perfect."

I feel people are going to be like, "Wow, this woman is extremely woo-woo." And I'll be like, "Yes, I am. And what?"

Yasi Salek Recommends:

Mushrooms. I microdose often to research because it helps me focus and make better connections. And I also do larger doses of mushrooms, not quite as frequently, because I think it brings you closer to the divine. I think it's healing.

Long walks. This can be in conjunction with the mushrooms or just separate. When you're in your own head, if you can just be outside and direct your attention around yourself instead of inside, it's impossible to not feel better.

Route 666: On the Road to Nirvana by Gina Arnold. Highly recommend that book if you can get your hands on it.

The band crushed. They're one of the more meaningful new artists for me; I think they're just super talented, literally amazing, and they make music that feels spiritual. Again, you can pair this with your mushrooms and your walk-a trifecta.

Morning pages. Let me add a caveat: morning pages *outside*. Do it first thing and take your little notebook outside, get the sun in your eyes, get the beauty of it. There's just something really powerful about physical writing and really letting yourself not give a fuck. Write it down and never look at it again. It doesn't count, no one's going to judge it; it's just for you to root through your mind and let some stuff out.

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