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As told to Janet Frishberg, 2529 words.

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On not waiting around for inspiration

Producer, DJ, and FEMME HOUSE co-founder LP Giobbi discusses overcoming self-doubt and fear, dealing with gatekeepers, and how to keep going. **The first thing I'm curious about is how you've maintained the pace of your creative output the last couple years. What are the things that keep fueling you and that you keep putting in your system to refill the well?**

What fuels me is other music. Recently it was ODESZA, who just released a track, the first track on what's going to be their new album. It was one of those songs that made me actually depressed for two days. I couldn't write anything. I was like, "I'm never going to be this good." The thing about this song is it was like a journey, but it wasn't ever jolting. There were so many different sections that actually were so different from each other, but they still flowed together. And I was just like, "This is the music I wish I could make." For a few days I was depressed. Then I was like, "Okay, let this actually be something that you use as a tool to fuel you, to inspire you to keep working, because now you know that there's a level you want to get to."

I ended up in the studio in Montreal in between some shows on my tour and just spent four days trying to rip it. Trying to get as close as I could to making that song. And because I'm not as good, I couldn't rip it exactly, and what that meant was that something totally different and awesome came from it. So that's often my process. Through me trying to copy a structure, something totally new happens.

Also what keeps me going is something that's a little bit more depressing, and that's a drive that I'm not good enough. My output is something that I attach to my well-being or to my self worth.

That says you haven't done what you're supposed to do here yet?

Yeah, that says, "You have way more you need to do." I've tied my self-worth to my productivity in music in a way that's really unhealthy, but that also pushes me to keep doing it every day. If I don't get up and make music, the anxiety won't go away until I do it.

That sounds intense.

It's really intense! But it's also why I've made a lot of music.

What have you learned about collaboration over the last few years and how to successfully creatively collaborate?

This might shock you, but I'm not very flowy in the studio. [laughs] I wish I was one of those people, but how I work best in collaboration is having my own time to lay out my own thoughts. If I have a group of ideas or even some stems I've gotten, I need to sift through them, and grab what I like, and color-code them. Once I do that, I don't care if you blow up my thoughts. So I often come into a session with an idea, and then I'm okay with letting what happens happen.

I like that. How do you know when a track is done?

How I know a track is done is when I'm wanting to make another track. The most fun part of making a song is starting it. My mix engineers have to be like, "Patience, little grasshopper," because I'm done way before anybody else is done.

And knowing that about myself, that's why I don't mix my own records, because they would never be finished. So I have an awesome team who does the last 10% of production, because otherwise the records would probably sound pretty bad.

There are not enough female producers, only 2%. And there are a lot of women in the space right now who feel that because of that, we have to prove that we are doing everything, in order to get the cache we deserve, but guess what? Literally not a single one of the big guys is touching even a 16th of that on their own record.

And I really want to take that weight off of our shoulders. What are you best at? Go fucking do that. And you deserve to work with people who are even better than you at all the other stuff. We deserve to get the best team that we can. We're going to work with the best people. And that is empowering.

When you think about your creative career so far, what are the places that stand out to you as kind of inflection points?

The thing that changed it all for me was the first time I read an article that Grimes had written. I was in a studio, and I was with a band, waiting to record my synth line. We were sitting with male producers, which—we always were with male producers. And they were all wonderful humans actually, and spent a lot of time taking their time out of the studio to teach me sound design and mentor me. But it wasn't until I was reading an article about how Grimes produced her own records, and she was really dead-set on it, like, "I am the producer of my music. I'm not the artist, I'm the producer." I mean, she's both. But she made a big stink about that. And it was that moment for me.

I was raised by hippie parents who were like, "You can do anything. You can be anything." And that's already such a huge privilege, yet it still didn't occur to me that I could be a producer, because I didn't see myself in that role on a subconscious level. It was game-changing to be like, "Wait, why the fuck don't I see more female producers?" I didn't have a natural ability to produce. I didn't even really like using computers. It was feminism that kept me going.

And thank god, because now I'm obsessed with opening Ableton, making any sound I want. It's one of the most empowering things. It's so fun. And I never would've gotten there if it weren't for just sheer feminist desire, I guess, which is kind of wild. That's how I approached it.

I remember it was actually Pro Tools that I started with. I tried to put Pro Tools on my computer, and it crashed 15 times. I actually couldn't even get the DAW to open up. It just kept crashing and failing. My operating system wasn't good enough. But also, I wasn't saving the file in the right place. It was a two-week process, and I definitely was like, "I'm not good enough to do this."

And then I thought, you know how many people think that? I have to be able to. I know I can do this. Opening it for the first time and having it not crash, I was like, "I did it!" I hadn't even made any sounds or anything.

I love that.

I also remember being obsessed with the idea of, oh, I don't have a sound. When you're starting to produce, you can kind of do anything, but you can't really do everything. And I was talking to Tucker from SOFI TUKKER. He was like, "You're so obsessed with putting yourself in a box, but what you really care about and what actually led you to production is the female voice and trying to uplift the female voice. What if your genre is femme house?"

And that freed me to not be so obsessed with trying to figure out what my sound was. You figure it out by just doing it. Not intellectualizing it, but doing it.

Dance music is body music. It's not mind music. But I'd spent so many years studying jazz in college that I'd become so theorized in my mind. I had put music up here in my head and not down here. And so that was another freeing moment for me. "Yeah, I'll just call it femme house, and fuck it." Like, just keep making what you want to make.

Do you work with the idea of the muse or anything like that? If not, how does creative inspiration function for you?

I don't work with the idea of a muse necessarily, but *The Artist's Way* was a book that changed my musical journey. What it taught me was I don't believe in inspiration striking. I mean, for sure there have been times when I've been on runs or washing my hair, doing something monotonous, where an idea has come, but I actually think it's the act of sitting down and just doing the work every single day.

I think waiting for inspiration is shitty for all of us. I think sitting down and doing it is what makes it happen. I come from that place, not necessarily a muse or a higher power. I just think it's about doing the work, no matter how you're feeling.

One thing I've noticed about your career so far is that a lot of your success came in the last few years during this time when your industry was in this incredible turmoil and chaos, and there were so many creative constraints on artists. How do you make sense of that?

Oh my God, totally. I think about this all the time. My dad has this saying. He's been saying it to me and

my brother since we were kids, "You never know if it's a broken-leg-day or a get-out-of-the war day."

The tale is this young kid breaks his leg, and it's summertime. And he's like, "Damn it. I'm going to have a broken leg all summer now. What a bummer." But then there's a war, and everybody gets drafted by him because he has a broken leg. So actually, he got out of the war.

And that's totally how I view that time period. At first, the only thing I had going for myself was touring. That's how I was making the tiniest living. And so when that was canceled, I was like, "I don't stream well. I don't do syncs. What am I going to do?" I actually was looking at programs online to go back to college. Or I thought, maybe I'll be a doula. I was all over the place. I was terrified. It was so scary. I started streaming just because what else was I going to do?

And, I had written this song in November or December of 2019. I wrote more jazz piano chords in it. It was a little bit deeper, a little bit slower. I remember thinking, it's too beautiful; this isn't an LP. LP does dance floor bangers. And I kind of threw it in my fake trash can.

When the pandemic hit, I decided to study. This is so me—I went and listened to my top 10 favorite tracks on Defected Records. I was like, "Why did these tracks do well and none of mine have done well?"

They all had really awesome vocals on them. I realized, "Oh, a lot of my tracks don't have vocals. This seems so simple now."

So I pulled this song out of the trash can. Now that there wasn't really a dance floor, it felt weird to try to make a dance floor banger. I sent it to a singer in London, Little Boots, who I had a tiny weird connection with, whose voice I liked. The Queen of England had just given a speech there about, "Everybody stay home, and one day we'll meet again."

And, boom, she heard that. And I had just sent the record. The timing was such a way that that was in her head, and she wrote this top line. Then that record ended up connecting with people, because we were in a fucking pandemic. Talk about a get-out-of-the-war day. Then I started streaming at the same time and really building community, and now those people are my biggest fans on my first tour out.

You just never know. I was streaming, thinking, what am I doing with my life? And it turns out I was doing exactly what I should have been doing with my life. If only I could just get out of my own head and stop worrying about it as much and just trust.

You're in an industry where to have access to certain opportunities, you have to get through other people in positions of power, gatekeepers. I don't know if you're still hearing a lot of nos, but when you've been hearing no for a really long time, what do you recommend artists do?

It's not always about the actual quality of your work. It's a lot about the gatekeepers. And I think that's important to keep in mind for your own self-esteem and your own self worth, as frustrating as that is. It's not that your work sucks, which is a good thing. And that should give you belief and keep you going.

What happened to me was there was a huge gatekeeper, the most important person in electronic music at the time, at Spotify, who heard "Meet Again" and decided to playlist it. And that's what changed everything. I had 20 tracks that got all of the no's, that got less than 1,000 streams.

I get asked this question a lot. I wish I had a better answer. The unfortunate part is that there is no one blueprint, because there are 1,000 blueprints. That's frustrating, but also awesome. It can happen in so many different ways, so I would throw everything you can at the wall. The person who decides to not give up will eventually have it stick. That's what I think. And you're probably going to hear no a million times.

My partner was really good with this with me, helping me train my brain as a muscle as I would my body. I wrote at the top of my daily to-do sheet, "I will not take no for an answer. I will bulldoze the situation. I will not stop."

It is all about retraining your brain. Belief is the most powerful currency. And how do you believe in yourself? I'd be like, "Okay, well, what's my plan B?" I'd constantly be talking about my backup plan, and my partner would be like, "No, no. Write at the top of your sheet, 'There is no backup plan. I will not let the fear in. I'm going to do this.'"

It was just not letting myself have any other option, continuing to throw everything I had at the wall, and believing that one day, one thing would stick. I should have given up way, way before. Once the pandemic hit, what the fuck, why did I even think I could keep doing it? But because I did, it eventually stuck. And the thing that stuck was actually the thing that was probably most authentic to me.

LP Giobbi Recommends:

Track: Leon Vynehall - "Sugar Slip (The Lick)"

Book: The Artist's Way

Documentary: Long Strange Trip (about the Grateful Dead)

Synth: Moog Voyager

Parties: Elrow

Name

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Vocation

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Fact

Shervin Lainez

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