

June 26, 2017 - Natalie Mering, also known as Weyes Blood, is a singer-songwriter from California known for her dynamic vocal range and timeless songwriting. Her latest release on Mexican Summer, *Myths 002*, is a collaboration with Ariel Pink. Here she talks about the dangers of nostalgia, taking the time to find your real voice, making seemingly incompatible things work in your art, and why limitations can be useful.



As told to Gary Canino, 1640 words.

Tags: Music, Process, Collaboration, Inspiration.

Weyes Blood on the difficulty of making work that is distinctly your own

There's a form of architecture where two wildly different aesthetics are placed next to each other in order to emphasize their differences. I enjoy how the press images for Weyes Blood have a stark, science fiction feeling to them, while the music evokes a more naturalistic feel.

I'm a Futurist, but I'm also a nostalgic Futurist. Those are two kind of incompatible things, but I try to make the two work [together]. I'm interested in extremely modern things and extremely old things, and seeing the relationship between them. The sci-fi, or Futurism, mixes in with kind of the old world, folky, Medieval song realm; I love juxtapositions. I feel like my personality is juxtapositions.

In previous interviews you've mentioned how it took you time to find your true voice while singing. That reminded me of the Miles Davis quote: "The hardest thing for a musician to do is sound like yourself."

It's easy to put on a vocal affectation, and for years I tried different ways of singing, but was just peeling away at that to get to my true voice. I was also learning how to have an affectation that's my own, because singing without any affectation can end up sounding like K Records or "indie rock," which is okay, but even that is its own affectation. It gets on my nerves when somebody puts on some shit that's like not their real voice. It drives me crazy.

Do you feel like musicians or artists are less conceptual than they used to be?

The intelligence meter is getting weird. I can't quite put my finger on it because there are a million things that could cause these little differences. I think art is being intensely affected by attention span and the gratification culture perpetuated by social media. People are just looking for nostalgia and a good time.

Nobody's trying to transcend what's going on. They're just living it. I feel like a lot of musicians in the past made experimental music because they were angry or because they were trying to transcend or escape the norm. Now, I feel like people are just trying to get more normal. It's so chaotic that people actually crave stability, and they're nostalgic for how things used to be.

There seems to be this growing sentiment that "rock" music isn't progressing anymore.

There's nothing new under the sun. There's a nostalgia genre, and it's so integrated into our culture. I was really young when Kurt Cobain died, and I remember asking my Dad, "What's going to happen? He's dead. I think this is it." He said, "Oh no, there's always gonna be another way. There will be more good music." Then, it was the Spice Girls, Britney Spears, *NSYNC, Hanson, and all that shit happened. I was just like, "I think this is it. I think this is done."

And it's true. There have been waves of music, but they were way smaller and more marginalized. I feel like things just really changed in a way where the only outlet for creativity now is in Top 40s Hip-Hop. That's the only genre that's actually trying to make some fresh stuff. Everything else is just severely debilitated by capitalism and having to be perfectly pedestrian.

And social media was praised once upon a time for a musician...

Who sings the praises of social media?

Well, once upon a time, MySpace was celebrated as a way of leveling the playing fields for bands. "Anyone can be discovered." But at the same time, you're also competing against more noise than ever before.

We didn't know what we were all getting into with all this internet shit. I think the internet did have a Golden Age and I think MySpace was a part of it, when it was a bit more in people's hands. MySpace was like your little corner of the world to create a vibe. You didn't even have to have a release, you could just present a concept. I don't think anything like that exists on the internet now. There's something so disposable about Bandcamp and SoundCloud, which is sad, because it should be more musical. For some reason, MySpace got that weird combination right.

You've mentioned in the past that whenever you listen to an older album of yours, there are small things you want to change or embellish. How do you know when an album or work is finished?

For me, nothing's ever really done. I have to be cut off because I could record infinitely, so usually a record is done when it has to be, with some kind of created deadline. Or if somebody I'm working with says it's done, that helps, because I'm just so unhinged that I need limitation. You can make a really great record with limitations. Limitations help incubate a specific thing. If you got to do whatever you want for as long as you want, you might not have that kind of magic.

In other interviews you often discuss the importance of "honesty" in the music itself. Are there any "dishonest" musical elements that you try to avoid?

I don't like auto-tune, so I don't really use that. I have changed takes where you comp vocals together. Everybody does now that now, but I feel a little guilty when I fuck with the lead vocal. I want it to be really real. I also feel guilty using too many tropes, but I end up kind of thriving on them. I have a friend in a band called Mild High Club, and he came in to play guitar on a song. He played a lot of chorused out guitar stuff that a lot of people are doing right now, and it sounded great.

Then, I remember stepping back, and Chris Cohen and I, who helped produce it, were like, "You know what, that's what everybody's doing. Maybe we should try something completely different." And we just changed the song. The song was "Seven Words," and it turned out to be way more interesting when we didn't go with the safe route. Even though it sounded good, I think sometimes it's good to pay attention to what there's too much of out there, and balance it out.

Have you ever scored a film?

No, I'd love to. When I first started making music, for people that didn't get it, they'd be like, "Ah, it sounds like a horror film." I feel like there's always been a cinematic element to what I do. When I write a song, it usually has that kind of visual accompaniment that helps me write it. The two are intertwined in my mind. Though I did get to direct music videos for the first time with this record.

The barriers to entry always seem way more difficult for a director, with financing and timelines. Creating an album in comparison seems like way less work.

Yeah, but you can do great work with little material. People in the film world are biting off more than they can chew sometimes. You can make a \$2,000 film and have it be cool. I really love quotes by Stanley Kubrick and David Lynch about this. You end up having to be so technical that you have to simultaneously have your mind on every single detail, and then you also have to let go because things aren't going to work out, and shit's going to fall behind schedule, or you're going to run out of money.

It's like this precarious balance between being a total perfectionist and a total flake, all at the same time. There's a bit of that with music. I think the two are pretty relatable. Directors end up being a little bit more fascinating to me, because of the spirit and the dedication and the amount of passion. Musicians are a little more touch and go throughout history. There are passionate musicians, of course, but directors never really stop. They kind of hit their prime in their 50s and music is such a young thing. It's a little bit more fleeting.

There's also the Kubrick/Lynch connection. Lynch was heavily inspired by Kubrick, by when Kubrick was making The Shining, allegedly he called Eraserhead his favorite film, and had a private screening for the whole cast of The Shining to "get them in the mood."

I had no idea. I just got chills. Sorry, that is so cool. I go deep with Eraserhead. I'm so glad that they have that relationship. They both tap into the subconscious in different ways. It's like Stanley Kubrick taps into the subconscious in a sublime god-like way and Lynch taps into the subconscious in a personal dream subjective kind of way. It's like they're both doing similar things with different methods.

Your latest release, Myths 002 EP, was a collaboration with Ariel Pink. What was your process recording this?

Collaborating with Ariel is interesting because he's kind of a savant with harmony, and really intuitive. He can see all the little tiny details and how they'll fit into a bigger picture. When we were recording, he'd have some idea, and I'd be like, "Hm, that sounds kind of lame. How's that going to become a good thing?" Then it would grow and change over time and become this amazing [song]. I'm better at bigger, grander gestures. It was cool that we could compliment each other in that way.

Essential Weyes Blood:

Weyes Blood & Ariel Pink - "Tears on Fire"

Drugdealer - "Suddenly" feat. Weyes Blood

"Morning After" from Myths 002

Performance from KEXP

Name

Weyes Blood

Vocation

Songwriter

Fact

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