

Does it feel right to you?

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Does it feel right to you? This inability to conform?

What happens when exclusion isn't from the outside but rather from within your own shell?

Are those judges, those performers, meaning to exclude you?

Or are you isolating yourself?

What happens when you no longer can grab ahold of what keeps you still, what's centered your teetering sense of gravity? Are those lessons even fruitful? Is this, what you're doing right now, even right?

Was it even there to begin with? This "thing" that anchors you.

What even is it?

Try to convince me. Try to convince yourself. Try to convince the judge. Can you even see what that is? How can you see what it is?

Should you see what it is?

Or is it okay? Do I need to see anything? Do they need to see anything? Do I need to force box, a label, a genre? Is it okay to restrict myself to this ideal, this chaos of momentum, of my vengeful brain, of all the inescapable choices?

Can that be right?

This was often the dialogue that ran through my head whenever I tried to understand my role in music. As a child, I often juggled multiple instruments, interpretations, lessons, mentors, styles, competitions, and inspirations. All work led to an undeniable whirlwind that I consistently hastened to minimize and mold with my small hands.

I consistently struggled with my musical identity, trying to fit myself into categories that seemed appealing to the judges, my family, and, most of all, me.

When college years rolled around, I no longer felt restricted to the tempo of band practices and the private music lessons of my middle and high school years. I found myself clattering into my freshman dorm with all of my instruments, music production equipment, and the heavy, heavy weight of questioning who I was in music.

Yet, over time, life took over. I couldn't help but be swallowed by the overbearing weight of everything else, so rigid and demanding in their nature.

My creativity began to wane and my confidence to strive in music drifted from my sight.

My once-singing flute faded into the background, tumbling around within my room while my hands laid tired and unbothered.

And as I stared longingly without drive at its rusted metallic keys, I questioned:

Was it the fatigue or the creative loss that bothered me? That stopped me?

Was it my own doing to have unwound from my once prized identity?

There were many moments like these, these lost moments of panging musical regret.

What could have happened if I picked up the long-forgotten instrument and chose to cultivate my aging wishes? After the initial drawl of freshman year, I started to find my place in music again. I sat in the seat of the front row, watching as I chose to continue the path I once wove but, this time, without a hand to hold. I started to live with myself rather than with my past demands and expectations. Over time, I found that it's been confusing yet clarifying to liberate my moments of musical paralysis. Swaying between the antithesis of musical entropy and at times, critically analyzing my own habits and desires:

What if I don't know why I continue to sit down in front of a piano every night, longing for its comforting liveliness under my hands?

What if it becomes a fusion, a new category, the "unheard", the slight cock of the head, and the tilt back of the shoulder?

What if I am not jazz and not quite classical, a singer but not quite the songwriter? A producer but not quite the mixer, a performer but not quite the competitor?

At least I am no longer marching to a metronome to sit.

At least I don't hear the voices of music labels and managers tugging at my ears, begging for my attention.

At least, this time, I choose to listen to me.

Embracing this spontaneity within my musical realm for the past few years has certainly been chaotic and nonconforming, and at times surprisingly painful.

Yet now I am able to sing like the notes are my next breath. I can sense the piano underneath me as my cheering companion.

My flute no longer tumbles around in my room, occasionally waltzing in as a guest in my musical visits to retirement homes.

My overall sense of creative being feels so intertwined, so anchored, so individualized--

How could this not feel right to me?