

Nathalie Joachim: Cultivating a “perfectly imbalanced” creative life at the intersections of composition and performance

Jocelyn

Welcome to the Compose Like A Girl podcast! I'm your founder, host, and composer Jocelyn Hagen. My Compose Like a Girl initiative amplifies female-identifying and gender-expansive composers, helps conductors diversify their concerts, and works toward more equality in music programming and commissioning. I have been sitting down for conversations with some amazing composers, and I want to invite you into these deeper explorations of art and life. I hope you leave with some inspiration just as I did.

On today's episode, I'm sharing a recent conversation I had with Nathalie Joachim. I really loved our conversation about balance ~ which is something I get asked about a lot... What does balance look like as an artist? How do you manage to get all your writing done and still publish your music, or teach, or have a family. Her thoughts on the idea of balance, and imbalance, were very inspiring to me. They made me think differently about my own workflow and how I could possibly improve upon it to be even more productive, or less stressed. And it was also another great reminder that there is NO ONE RIGHT WAY TO BE AN ARTIST. You have to find your own flow.

Thanks for tuning in, and enjoy!

Hello Nathalie, how are you doing today?

Nathalie

I'm doing great. How are you?

Jocelyn

I'm doing fine. Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview.

Nathalie

Yeah, of course. Thanks for having me.

Jocelyn

So you describe yourself as a flutist, composer, vocalist, kind of a triple threat. Do these descriptions of who you are always go in that order? Do you feel equally split in three ways? How does that, how do you interpret that in a daily way?

Nathalie

No, they don't always go in that order. I guess, you know, it's a literal question, but it's also a sort of philosophical question. You know, I am a performer and a composer. I think for sure that each of those things is a very big piece of my sense of self and creativity, and they are modalities of

artistic expression for me. They don't define who I am and I don't know that I am ever really aiming to be the very best of any of them. I just think of each of those modalities as a sort of vehicle for creative expression. And sometimes one or another is more adept at expressing exactly what I need to be expressing in any given moment. So I work really diligently in my practice to be as fluid and fluent and to move between them fluidly and fluently as much as possible.

Jocelyn

Yeah, I think you do a remarkable job at that. When I listen to your music, I think it's so honest and genuine. Like I feel like I'm getting to know who you are through your music, which is really what we do, right, as artists and what we, what we hope for? I heard in another interview that you're an early riser, like 5 a.m., and that you can pose right away in the morning. Can you tell us a bit about that creative process?

Nathalie

Yeah, that is true. I was up at 5 a.m., I've been writing all day and up until now. I I don't know, I have my clearest moments in the morning. I also like to come into the world, you know, with the rest of life a little bit. Like I like that I come into the world with the sun and with the birds and that the world sort of comes to life around me, which offers me a really deep sense of clarity. And there's almost something spiritual about that, you know? There's a way of offering something of myself and something to myself before starting the day where you become sort of spread thin and offering many pieces of yourself to lots of other people. And then I also like that the music sort of stays with you for the day, you know? That feels good. It's not like you have a sense of longing for it at the same time as a sense of assuredness that you'll get to it again, that you've already gotten to it and that you'll get to it again. I am not at all a night owl. I think my brain becomes sort of more and more useless as the day goes on. And I think that's okay. I think I just sort of embraced that my brain really needs to rest at night, but that I wake up with a real sense of clarity and sort of precision. And yeah, so I have my most creative hours between like 5 and 8 a.m. And then I take a break and then at 9 I sort of start the day again like everybody else. [laughs] So it sort of gives me two days and one, which also feels uh great for somebody who's relentlessly productive. [laughs]

Jocelyn

Yeah, well it truly is a discipline to get up and to and to do that every day. And so much of, you know, what I was thinking about and asking you these questions is how all these things intersect in your day, because you know there's the teaching as well as the performance aspect. So it's like you wake up and you do this creative thing for you and your art form. And then how do the other things fold in? Obviously later in the day, yeah, and then when do you sleep? Like you said you're not a night owl, but how early do you go to bed?

Nathalie

[laughs] Oh, if I can help it, I'm I. I definitely keep granny hours. So if I can help it, I'm definitely in bed by 10 or so. But yeah, you know, I will say that though I am multifaceted, I'm a really terrible multitasker. And so I need to sort of just be consciously present in the activity that I'm

doing in that moment in time. Like when I switch gears, I really have to fully switch gears. And I don't like to feel like I'm being pulled in many directions at once. And so that is also a thing that I like to be really sort of like consciously present and find that I'm giving my best when I am not sort of perpetuating this idea that we should constantly be multitasking, right? And so as I move through the day, I just sort of allow myself to be really present in any given moment. And so to be there for my students, I really need to be just conscious and with them and aware of them and listening to them and talking to them and really able to hear them in a complete way. And so I try not to sort of like divide myself between the things or even to have some sense of, you know, where we live in a society that's like sort of constantly searching for quote unquote balance. And I think my sense of balance is really just being perpetually out of balance, right? Like to be wholly focused on one thing means that there are other things that just aren't getting your attention in that moment. And so I try to just embrace that as a state of being and it does make me, certainly makes me feel better while trying to do it all. But yeah, you know, at the same time I will say that I really am a strong believer that being a great performer and a composer does make me a better teacher in every way. And that being a great teacher and a great performer also makes me a better composer and that, you know, they they all kind of feed into each other in that way. And so, I really do think it's important for me to just be trying to be as adept in each of those moments and as present in each of those moments as I can because it all feeds back into the other sort of facets of my ways of living and being here. And so yeah, I think it feels good to sort of be perfectly imbalanced and know that none of it is ever, like to be present in one is not taking away from any other. In fact, they all sort of feed each other in a very deep way. And that for me, that kind of imbalanced balance is very sort of important to my sort of way of being, you know?

Jocelyn

I completely agree, completely. And I feel like so many people ask me, you know, how do you balance all the things? And it's like, well, it doesn't really. I think this idea that there is a stasis, a place where we get where we feel like, oh, I've got this all under control, that that really doesn't ever truly exist and that it's figuring out how to navigate that balancing act that is more true to what this what this career really is.

Nathalie

Yeah, for sure. And also just, you know, [laughs] I don't know, you know, it's like the way the world has been shaped is really sort of unnatural this idea that we should be juggling all these things all at one time. I think that, you know, there's so many wonderful things that I can say about all of the time that I spend very regularly in Haiti, but one thing that it reminds me, you know, my family is from a rural area there and most people are agricultural workers and so they also sort of live this life that where they come into the world with the sun and when the sun sets they're not working still. They're at home with their families and resting and enjoying one another and as the seasons change, their cycles change, and there's nothing sort of more grounding than bringing this sort of capitalist-fueled energy into that space and having everyone look at you very strangely. Like nobody works twenty four hours a day and nobody's always doing everything, right? They are really sort of like it's a very bizarre pattern for them and so it's also a

grounding reminder for me that like this idea that we should be doing all the time and not resting and constantly firing on all cylinders is pretty unnatural.

Jocelyn

Yeah, yeah, definitely. I and I feel I feel a kinship here because I'm from rural North Dakota, actually.

Nathalie

Oh, cool.

Jocelyn

Which is also a place where there's a lot of, you know, farming and agriculture and my grandfather was a cattle rancher. And yeah, there is tremendous discipline and a hard or driven work ethic that takes to do that kind of work, I think. And I feel like that it's maybe in your bones. This rising early and committing and also I would assume that you work definitely five days a week on your writing, but is it even more than that?

Nathalie

Yeah, I try not to do seven, but it gets me every once in a while. But I usually do write at least six days a week.

Jocelyn

Yeah, yeah.

Nathalie

There's something about the like I don't know, it's sort of you know, it's a little bit like people who are really attached to their like exercise regimen or something. It is a way for me to sort of get moving into the day, you know, so it actually feels good to do every day. It doesn't feel like a chore, right? It feels definitely like it's part of my own cycle, you know?

Jocelyn

Mm-hmm. Oh, definitely. And you know, looking at your list of works, you're quite prolific. A lot of your works are, you know, kind of longer and bigger pieces. I like thinking about this in terms of discipline because Stephen King wrote pretty famously that he tries to do 20 pages a day. Do you have a similar goal with every time you sit down in the morning to start writing?

Nathalie

Gosh [laughs]. I wish I could say that I was like, yes, I write two minutes of music every day. Um, no, I I don't. You know, I do this sort of productivity thing where when I leave the work I do have a sort of like short list of things I know I would like to aim for in the next writing session. Um, and sometimes I get to all of them and sometimes I don't and you know any composer will certainly tell you that every writing day looks different, you know, and so sometimes a really effective writing day is almost all listening, you know, like and not a ton of writing. And so I try not to and maybe that's different than creative writing. I don't know, I have no idea. But yeah, I try not to put

any sort of pressure on myself to be producing. Because I also find that in some way that that starts to feel like a restrictive limitation that like I become so obsessed with the goal instead of allowing myself to sort of just be excited by a sense of curiosity, you know, that like sometimes it might not look like you've done a lot, but if you have if you're searching for something or sort of mining for something or even like listening back to your own work or listening to other work, you know. I think that there is something about the curiosity that I allow to be the sort of driver and not the output. It becomes a really kind of pressurized situation when I'm like, "All right, I have a 15 minute piece to write, and if I don't get three minutes done a day, I'll never get done. It's just like, you know, it just doesn't, it doesn't work like that.

Jocelyn

No.

Nathalie

And there are times, you know, like my last album, *Fanm D'ayiti*, is a great example of that where the research and writing phase was really like a two-year process basically. And for like a year of that time there was like no music written at all. I was mostly just talking to people and listening. And that was really scary. Like I would I would say for sure like the vast majority of the writing for that project happened probably actually in like the last six months where there was a big burst of material all of a sudden. And so you know, I think if I had been putting those kinds of restrictions on myself, I would have been hindering myself from taking the time to invest in becoming a deep listener, which the project really required, you know?

Jocelyn

Oh, that's so beautiful. And I totally agree and have found the same in my own creative work that, you know, I have a big multimedia work that it was four years from the beginning of the um, you know, the germ of the idea until the premiere. And three years was that research and figuring out how this is actually gonna work and figuring out the libretto and how it was gonna be funded. And then, yeah, the writing part of it, like all those things kind of have to slide in place. Well, they don't have to, but it's often helpful. And then it's like, oh, okay, now I know what this is, I know what it needs to be, and I know what to say.

Nathalie

Yeah, exactly.

[Audio of "Vally VX" from Blue Dot Sessions]

Jocelyn

I'm going to interrupt this conversation for a quick announcement. Since the Compose Like A Girl initiative began in 2020, many people have asked how they can support the work we are doing. Specifically, the mentorship work that I have taken on. I'm happy to now tell you that we have finally set up an account through Buy Me a Coffee, where you can donate to the initiative. 100% of the proceeds go towards mentorship. Help me inspire and uplift the next generation of

female-identifying and gender-expansive composers. Head to buymeacoffee.com/composelikeagirl to support mentorship today. Thank you.

Jocelyn

I'm really curious since you do so much work with electronics, I want to know what your studio is like.

Nathalie

[laughs] It's a mess in here right now. I'm glad we're not on video, but I just turned in a piece this morning. So it's been it's gotten it's been in a little bit of mayhem here these past uh this past week or so.

Jocelyn

Well congratulations! It's a double bar line day!

Nathalie

Thank you.

Jocelyn

Those are great days.

Nathalie

It is, it is. Yeah, my studio is really sort of like I like to sort of cocoon up a little bit. So it's very sort of like cozy. It's the most colorful space in my home, I will say. My home has lots of like neutral tones otherwise. I'm always so shocked when I see people's bedrooms and they're painted like you know, like bright pink or yellow. And I'm like, I don't think I would, I don't think I would sleep. But by contrast, my studio is really colorful. Lots of plants and different patterns and colors and artwork hung and I think that this is just, it's very clear when you're in my home that this is the space where all the magic happens, so to speak.

Jocelyn

Yeah.

Nathalie

I try really hard not to pile up a ton of gear. I'm not a gear head. I think especially like working with electronics, more of my practice has been about limiting factors like learning either software or hardware really intimately over the course of many, many years. And by putting sort of like restrictive factors on it, I think that one of the telltale signs for sure in my teaching you always see like, you know, the student who is just writing an electronic piece for the first time and has just pressed like literally every possible button that they could press in the DAW. You know, like they're like, I have forty-seven synths and I have all the reverbs and I have all this and that and I really just feel like that is, that that's not the best look. You know, there's something that I really love about sort of, and I think about like my flute in that way, right? Like this one instrument that

I've been able to, like, over the course of many decades now, really continually eke out like more and more from it. And it does, you know, seemingly a finite number of things, but it's been decades of discovery, right? And so I try not to continually just like buy synths and like collect hardware or collect software. So I have a really sort of like very small and concise setup and I do work really hard to try to get the most out of it to really learn them as instruments. So it's a pretty minimal, it's a pretty minimal setup in here. But it does, I will say the one thing that it shows is that it does allow me to sort of like move between playing and recording and writing. Like that's the sort of maybe most efficient thing about my studio is that it allows me to sort of switch between the modes very easily and that makes my work flow and really great in terms of how I'm constantly sort of shifting and having to move between performer and composer even when I'm writing, you know, that to to think like a performer at times I think is really important in my writing practice that when I'm thinking like a composer, I'm not always considering the players and so being able to like put myself in each player's seat and move between those ways of thinking while I'm in the creative process is really important to me.

Jocelyn

Yeah, that's beautiful. And I was just gonna say it's a wonderful parallel to how you, I don't want to use the word define because you don't, it seems you don't like that word, when we were talking earlier, but just this fluent characteristic of who you are and what your art form is. I think that the studio then represents that and that's a beautiful thing. I'm also really happy that you brought up color and I'm not surprised that your studio is colorful because going on your website and seeing your headshots, it's also beautifully colorful. And I just really love that. You have some amazing pictures on there.

Nathalie

Thank you so much. A shout out to my friend Erin Patrice O'Brien who is kinda, she's like the only person that I ever want to take my photo. She's based in New York and she has been taking my pictures for gosh, almost 20 years coming up soon here. So she's amazing and she's always been able to really capture exactly, you know, I don't know, there's something about capturing not just the outside but the inside too, and she's been really great at that. So I can't say that I can take the credit for that. That's all Erin, I would say.

Jocelyn

Oh, but I mean the putting together of your outfits and the jewelry and like do you do that eye makeup yourself?

Nathalie

Uh not in those pro photos. I do like in my regular life, but of course the pro photos we usually splurge for a makeup artist, but, yeah, I think the styling, I've also been working with a stylist who owns this beautiful vintage shop in Brooklyn. It's called Malin Landaeus Vintage. It's in Williamsburg. And it's kind of just like, it's like great places to go if you're if you just want to play dress up. You know, like it's a really, she's got such a whimsical selection. She has beautiful, beautiful pieces that she's been collecting in her archive for many years and she brings out the fun in that for me. I think that, you know, fashion as creative expression or stylistic expression is

something that I like tapping into. Yeah, so I feel like I do like to play in that way and and Malin does make it very fun and easy to kind of go in and sort of put together the unthinkable and just play, you know, have a sense of play with style and that does come forth also in the pictures. So yeah, those two, Malin and Erin, have been sort of critical to almost every photo shoot I've ever done. And they're both just like just wonderful women and really love what they do and make it easy to sort of feel comfortable and like myself in working with them.

[audio of "Pop Vibration" by Blue Dot Sessions]

Jocelyn

Nathalie has written a number of different choral works, and one I especially enjoyed is "Blood Sister" from *She is Called: Dear Stranger*. Nathalie beautifully weaves the vocal lines and viola together in a powerful way. Let's listen now to "Blood Sister," sung by the Brooklyn Youth Chorus featuring the violist Yvonne Lam led by Artistic Director Dianne Berkun Menaker.

[audio of "Blood Sister"]

Jocelyn

Now let's return to my conversation with Nathalie.

Jocelyn

Do you travel a lot? Is that a big part of your routine?

Nathalie

Yeah, begrudgingly. Yeah, it is. I definitely, I don't know. I'm more of a homebody than people might think. And I find traveling to be more and more exhausting these days. It is a big part of what I do and who I am and you know, I'm pretty steadily on the road. I would say, you know, just before the pandemic, I kind of hit my threshold for what was maybe possible. I was on the road on average for like two hundred and thirty days a year and that was way too many.

Jocelyn

Oh, yeah, oh my gosh.

Nathalie

Yeah, that was way too many. I am doing much less than that now, which is great, but yeah, it's you know, it's a necessary evil. The performing I love and the audiences I love and I'm and I'm always so grateful to be able, I'm always like shocked that anybody even shows up, you know? Like it's just, like it's awe inspiring to me that people really like the music enough to show up in places where I don't know anyone or I have never been before. But yeah, it's not the performing part. If I could just beam in, you know, and like if if you could take away the traveling, it takes a lot of like out of your body, the time changes and everything.

Jocelyn

Oh yeah.

Nathalie

So I find it to be more and more exhausting the older I get. But you know, the payoff of the audiences and meeting new people and getting to sort of share in that kind of experience with people is of course very much worth it.

Jocelyn

Mm-hmm. So you're telling me what you need is a Las Vegas residency.

Nathalie

[Laughs] I don't know that I would say that that's what I need, I don't know.

Jocelyn

[Laughs] I am so in the same camp as you on this. I know it's important for me to travel. It's important to be seen. I think especially you too, you know, just that representation, like we need to be out in the world being seen doing what we do. But also, yes, as I'm getting older, it's like, oh this is harder and harder on my body. And I don't know about you, but I don't really write much when I'm away from home. Do you?

Nathalie

I do.

Jocelyn

Oh, you do?

Nathalie

I do. You know, I still get up and do it. It doesn't always feel good, but uh I do, do it. There, you know, I think I'm more attached to the practice of it, you know, and in such a or maybe even the habit of it that I definitely do it. But it's tougher, you know, it's tougher. It's harder to have clarity around it. You know, this piece that I just turned in, I was like struggling on it because I was traveling a lot these past handful of weeks and I was like, I don't know why I just can't cross the finish line on this piece. It really feels like I'm super close but I just, you know, I sort of am not, each day has not been as satisfying as I would have liked it to be. And all it took was just, you know, a few days at home for me to be like, oh, now I know exactly what needs to happen, which is great. But I will say that like traveling for premieres, like when you're when you're only traveling as composer, it's kind of nice, you know, like your work has long since been done.

Jocelyn

Yeah.

Nathalie

And you just get to sort of like revel in it. It doesn't have the same kind of exhaustion attached to it. So there's something very light about traveling as a composer that feels really different.

Jocelyn

Yeah.

Nathalie

I think when you're traveling for performance and having to pay attention to your body and making sure you're getting enough rest. You know, that is a different beast altogether.

Jocelyn

Yeah, so I guess this reminds me of our previous conversation just about, you know, the discipline of writing every day. And then I was curious, do you have a similar discipline for practicing? Like do you bring your flute with you everywhere and practice every day too?

Nathalie

Oh my gosh, no. [laughs] I probably should. But you know, it's a different, it's really different. I will say, you know, obviously I am very deeply conservatory trained. And so I have done all of the years of, you know, six or eight hours of practicing a day in a very rigorous and intense way. And I will say that at this point in my career, there's been so much unlearning that I have had to do in that regard. Like speaking of, you know, like a pressurized situation of like perfectionism, you know, like it has to be executed in exactly this way. And so to some extent I kind of feel like my flute and I have been in a tremendously long marriage and like many long marriages we have gone through very high moments and lower moments.

Jocelyn

Hm-mmm.

Nathalie

And we're continually sort of relearning one another, I should say, as we both kind of like grow into new faces of life. And so I would say this moment is a we're maybe just coming around the corner now. You know, I think that there's a sense of having to sort of like deprogram myself from thinking that I have to execute every single thing in this exact perfect way, which in many ways sort of like detracts from the joy of music making, right? And so there is something about my creative practice as a composer that is free of that and also my practice as a vocalist that is really free of that, that allows me to engage with those in a way that like maybe is just as rigorous but is free of the sort of shackles of conservatory-like mindset, I guess you could say. And so I have definitely spent the past handful of years coming into new relationship with my flute, like how to get us to cross over into this place that all of the rest of my creativity sits, right? Whereas like, you know, I often tell this story about my grandmother having been a really deeply influential person to me in my life and so much of our relationship was musical and so much of what she was instilling in me was this sense of authenticity that people see in my work, right? To share my own story honestly and authentically in a way that only I can, right? And so my voice is really centered in that space. She was, you know, my primary voice teacher, not in a formal way, but you know, in you know it is what was happening in in such a beautiful way. And also she was, for all intents and purposes, she was kind of my first composition teacher as well, you know, this idea of like encouraging the little composer in me too. And so I would say, you know,

like for me, *Fanm D'Ayiti* was a turning point of coming back into myself. That whole project was inspired by my grandmother's passing. And it returned me back to this space of saying, you know, I can just be and I can just be making. And that is actually the thing that's most valuable. And, you know, I have these very early memories of learning to compartmentalize that piece of myself when I started playing flute and when I started going to conservatory, which was, you know, when I was 10 years old, I started to go to Juilliard's pre-college programs. And so I learned that there was a value placed on what was happening in that building that was not afforded to what was happening to my grandmother. But I've also spent the greater part of the most recent chapter of my career getting back to exactly every single thing that my grandmother taught me. You know, like I think she kind of gave me all the tools that I really needed. So I don't practice the flute that rigorously anymore every day. And I hope that I do again someday. And I sort of like practice it rigorously in that way as I need to, you know, like as the rep comes up or as I need to, but I'm much more focused now on trying to come into a new relationship with it, right? Like I have changed and so my relationship with it has to change, which means that like it just can't be like getting the tuner and the metronome out and being perfect on it, right? I'm just like kind of allowing myself really intentionally to sort of be imperfect as a flutist for a little while here. And I think it's gonna be, that is the unlearning.

Jocelyn

That's really beautiful, and I think there are so many musicians who get trapped in that. And then it becomes a very toxic experience for them and it does take the joy out. And I love this idea that as artists we have to surrender a bit to who we are and what our true influences are and what's a part of our being at its core. And that releasing that to the world is actually a very brave thing to do, a hard thing to do. And you kind of have to shut off the voices of all these other people and all these other teachers and to get to that core of who you really are. And I've found that when I'm tapped into that in a big way, when I'm releasing music that is deeply meaningful and personal and that I have this connection to, that that is the music that also connects most to other people. Because they can relate to that honesty and that vulnerability in a way that, you know, you can hear something that's maybe beautifully executed and crafted really well, but it lacks that heart. And so it's like, I don't know how I how I feel about that. Or that was nice, but I'm not, I'm not in it with that piece of music.

Nathalie

Yeah, I mean I can tell you that for sure I get a much a much more emotional response to *ki moun ou ye*, my most recent album. than I ever did, in the hundreds and hundreds of contemporary classical performances as I gave as a flutist, right? And there's I think a really big reason for that because to some extent I don't know, you know, like the flute is an interesting thing for me because I think that there are people who do have . . . I have a love story with music. And I think that there are people who have love stories with the flute and their experience of playing the flute. And I think that the flute, I sort of just like fell into it as a thing that I am strangely good at for not a lot of good reason. You know, like I just sort of like happened to be good at playing the flute. And it is connected to the thing that I love, which is music, right? And so I do have a really deep love story with my connection to music. I think the flute is just . . . I became, you know, like to me, there is a way for me to also be very detached from it because I

understand the mechanics of it. Like I just can make that happen, you know, in a way that like doesn't require heart space. A voice is of course quite different and is just you know, that one of the core themes of my record is how deeply connected to our sense of being that our voices are, you know, and so my voice requires my heart space and my writing requires my heart space. And I am hoping that I get to the place where my flute also requires my heart space, which it does. It deserves that. You know, it deserves that heart space within me. I just, I wasn't brought into it in that way. And so, you know, I'm learning a new way about it.

Jocelyn

You mentioned *ki moun ou ye*, and I'd love to talk about that more. This is a wonderful album and it's the reason why I wanted to interview you. As prep for our conversation, I decided to listen to the whole thing again from top to bottom. Is that how you want people to listen to it?

Nathalie

I don't know that people listen to records like that, I still listen to records like that. I don't know that in the age of playlists and short attention spans, I don't know that that's the way that people do listen to it. I certainly sequenced it in that way and the songs are all really deeply connected. So I hope that people are listening to it as a collective. But my heart isn't broken by the fact that most people probably aren't listening to it that way, but I certainly crafted it in that way.

Jocelyn

Yeah, well I think the title track is definitely a standout track. But then I also really love the second song on there. Can you tell us a little bit about what the second song is about?

Nathalie

Oh, "Nan kò mwen". That's so funny. Yeah, it's so funny, you know, like you make a thing and you of course have the things that you really love and you're like, "this is for me, this is the track on the record, right?" And that for me almost never aligns with what is the track for other people.

Jocelyn

Uh huh, yeah!

Nathalie • 48:59

[Laughs]. And it's very funny because "Nan kò mwen," which is the second track, is that one. Like people bring it up all the time. And it's very strange because for me it's like the one track on the record that I'm like, eh, if I could you know, I might have left it off or I could have done a little something more with it and I've been changing it a lot in live performance. It was the last, if not the second to last song that I wrote on the project. And I did feel that, like, it makes an important statement and comes like in the sequence of the record, it does something like singular on the record, right? Like none of the other songs kind of handle that kind of messaging and material. It is also an outlier, you know, like it is it has a tremendous amount of text actually. [Laughs]

Jocelyn

Yeah, yeah.

Nathalie

But yeah, I don't know, what do you like about it? People like it. People like it. And it's always shocking to me.

Jocelyn

Yeah. Oh, see, I'm a sucker for groove.

Nathalie

Yeah.

Jocelyn

And I feel like that's what really happens in that second movement is I feel like, oh, I'm in this rhythmically in that like it spurs on my body to feel that music in my body rhythmically. I think that's what it is.

Nathalie

Well, it's fitting because "Nan kò mwen" means in my body. That is what the title translates to.

Jocelyn

Well then I think you did it very successfully then. You did exactly what what was supposed to happen.

Nathalie

Yeah, yeah. It's so interesting. The record deals so deeply with heartbreak in, you know, in many ways. And that song also deals with heartbreak, but is for sure the sort of angriest expression of it. And I think that there's something about parsing out who you are, you know, um, and your personal relationships Your relationship with yourself, your relationships with your family, your relationships with the people who have the biggest sort of influence on your making, you know, and there's bound to be some amount of hurt there, but it was important to me to sort of ask the question in the first track of *ki moun ou ye* and answer very immediately that this sort of, this anger that I find sitting in these corners and and pockets of my body that I know for sure that that's not who I am, you know? And so the song is sort of about letting that go. The chorus sort of just translates to, you know, "what I feel in my body, I don't want to feel anymore." And those things that I'm hiding in those corners of my body, I want to let them go, you know? And so there's something about finding the anger and just allowing myself to sort of like release it so that I can contend with the rest.

Jocelyn

Let's listen now to "Nan kò mwen," from Natalie's *ki moun ou ye*.

[Audio of "Nan kò mwen"]

Jocelyn

I think your music is so honest and you're willing to break open your heart and tell these stories and that you're not trying to be anyone else but yourself, which I think is also crucial in being a great artist. Thank you so much for taking the time to share all of that with me and with us today. You're definitely an inspiration.

Nathalie

Thanks so much.

Jocelyn

I'm always so grateful when these conversations lead to new ideas on how to both express my art and take in the art of other people. And this conversation was also a great reminder that my art is a reflection of who I am: my musical training, my family and upbringing, my schedule, my everyday life. And because of this, I am the only one who can make it. My art is authentic because it is the work of *my* mind, from *my* lived experiences. No one else is living this life, nor could they express my experiences through art better than I can. [whispered] (And neither can AI.) So, to flip that around, you are a unique and multi-faceted individual with something to say, in a way that no other person can say it. And don't be discouraged - it can take many years of contemplation and discovery to uncover it. It may not come naturally at first. You have to look for it. You have to find it. And then: what are you going to say? What beautiful reflection of the world through your eyes will you share?

Compose Like a Girl was produced by Justin Schell, Laura Krider, and me, Jocelyn Hagen, with special help from fellow composers Erika Malpass and Addie Struckman. The *Compose Like a Girl* theme music was composed and performed by cellist Cicely Parnas. Thank you all for helping me with this vision.

Thanks also to the Brooklyn Youth Chorus for their permission to use their recording on today's episode.

You can learn more about Nathalie Joachim and her music at nathaliejoachim.com and by following her on social media. I also want to share that since we had this conversation, Nathalie has also released another album with Flutronix, the Chicago Sinfonietta and Mei-Ann Chen called *Black Being*. Check out that recording as well.

Check out the links in our show notes, visit jocelynhagen.com/composelikeagirl, and follow us on Facebook and Instagram to listen to the music we talked about today, learn more about the Compose Like a Girl initiative, and check out past episodes. You can also find choral programming ideas by checking out the Compose Like a Girl choral series through Graphite Publishing.

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Until next time, trust your instincts. Be brave and unapologetic for your talents. Thanks for listening!