

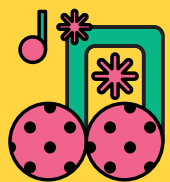


FIND

YOUR

SPARK

Fact: Inspo isn't something you stumble upon. (Especially now.) It's something you ignite for yourself. And the proof is these amazing music pros—singers, songwriters, and industry execs—who've pushed through the tough stuff to produce some of their best work ever. Guided by their intel, you, too, can unlock those soul-soaring creative vibes.



“PEOPLE CONNECT OVER PAIN.”

—BECKY G, LATIN-POP SINGER

When Latin-pop singer Becky G (a.k.a. Rebecca Gomez) shot the video for her song “My Man” at home, she never intended to make what she calls a legitimate music video. Instead, she says shots of herself and her boyfriend, pro soccer player Sebastian Lletget, playing Twister and cuddling in a backyard tepee, are “what I consider a blog of a day in the life of quarantine with Seb and Becky: the fun days...because there were some not-so-fun days as well.”

In 2019, Becky detailed her struggles with anxiety on Instagram. And although she says therapy changed her life and running is a great way to release energy (“I have so much of it”), quarantine has really put her coping mechanisms to the test. “To capture the little bit of light that I was experiencing in such darkness with my partner was so special to me,” she adds of the “My Man” video.

Sure, she cherishes the beautiful moments, but she’s not afraid to embrace the bleak ones too. “As an artist, this time has been inspiring in a very odd way because more people connect over pain than happiness.”

Writing—and not just music—has helped her process the wave of emotions. “If it comes out in song, awesome,” she says. “But if it comes out as a story that I might want to tell via film or TV [which she wants to venture into next], then I’m finding those creative outlets.”



THE POWER OF A PAUSE

How Brianna Agyemang, senior artist campaign manager at Platoon, and Jamila Thomas, senior director of marketing at Atlantic Records, knew it was time to shift gears.

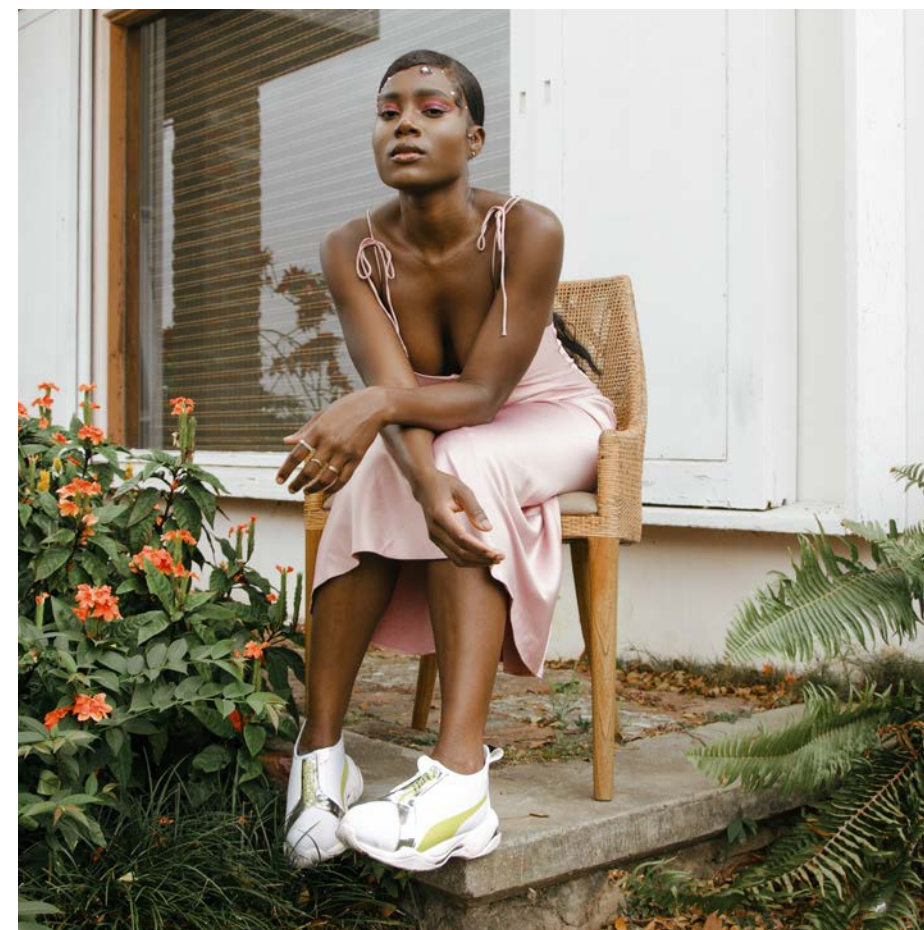


Call Time

For Atlantic Records exec Julie Greenwald, routine—and lots of steps—is key to brainstorming bangin’ campaigns for artists like Lizzo and Cardi B.

“I wake up at 6:50, walk the dog at 7:00, and exercise or do yoga by 8:00. Then it’s work. I’ll walk around my neighborhood while on the phone—I have a treadmill desk at the office, but I’m working from home now. The walks are such a tension reliever: I head to my local Starbucks every single afternoon at 3:00 for a soy cappuccino. Starbucks reopening was the greatest. The trip forces me outside, so I can [tackle] the next part of my day.” —Kiera Carter

EMILIO SÁNCHEZ (BECKY G); MATTHEW FURMAN (GREENWALD); FLO NGALA (THOMAS, AGYEMANG); DESTINEE CONDISON (SEVANA)



“I’M MY HIGHEST SELF WHEN I’M PRAYING AND MEDITATING.”

—SEVANA, REGGAE ARTIST

As a teen, Sevana performed around Kingston, Jamaica, while supporting herself and her family. In July, the now 28-year-old released her sophomore EP, *Be Somebody*, adorning playlists with tunes about love, longing, and empowerment. This is her advice to ignite drive in tough times:

CLOSE YOUR EYES

“I cannot put pressure on myself when I create music. There’s too much pressure everywhere else. If I’m writing a song and I’m having difficulty figuring out where to go next, it’s because I’m struggling with something else. So I prioritize introspection. I sit down and imagine myself in a serene space and wait for my breathing to get calm and steady. That’s really useful for me. I’m my highest self when I’m praying and meditating.”

DON’T STRESS

“If I’m anxious, and I can’t go to sleep, I’ll start dancing in the middle of the night. I’ll make up dance routines.”

PICK UP A PEN

“I write my feelings down a lot. Just freewriting. It’s something I’ve been practicing since I was a little girl, and I didn’t realize it would become such a saving grace. It helps you figure out why you’re feeling something, and then [everything] gets more honest, deeper.”



In response to the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and other Black folks by law enforcement, the execs sparked the initiative #TheShowMustBePaused, a take on “the show must go on,” to highlight the discrimination against Black people in music—

but stay-at-home orders meant they’ve had to dig deep for inspo and focus: “I’ve been trying to step away from social media to reset,” Agyemang says. “Clearing my mind really helps. I’ll be in the shower singing songs like, *Oh my*

god. I have an idea!” Thomas agrees: “I’ve been in the same living room for months, so I find ways to change my setting. I convince myself the kitchen is someplace different or take a walk and listen to a new EP. I can’t spark new ideas in one place. I need inspiration from things around me.”



It takes only 20 minutes to feel refreshed in between creative tasks. Take that walk!

Source: *The Accounting Review*

Alexis Krauss, Sleigh Bells Front Woman, Grabs Her Climbing Shoes When She Hits a Wall

"I moved from Brooklyn to the Hudson Valley [where there are *a lot* more nature and rock climbing opps] a few years back, and then Derek [Miller, Krauss's Sleigh Bells bandmate] also came here. So much of music-making happens in studios, indoors. It's just this very intense process of writing and listening, and spending time outside balances it out. Nature is transformative, and rock climbing is such a powerful outlet for me. When you're climbing, you're in this hyperaware, focused state, and the distractions and challenges of life melt away. I use the wall to work out band drama and family drama. I'm so grateful we have the outdoors with the restlessness of lockdown."



"WRITING IS A DISCIPLINE."

—KATE NASH, SINGER, SONGWRITER, AND ACTRESS

You may know her as Rhonda in *GLOW*, but Kate Nash, the musician, has had a loyal following ever since her song "Foundations" blew up in 2007, when she was just 19 years old. "When you're younger, you have a different experience with time," she says. "Writing was an escape when I was a teenager; it was all I wanted to do when I wasn't at my job at a fast-food restaurant." Music was life, no exaggeration: "I'd be like, 'I can't wait to go home and write,' or 'I'd be late to work because I'd be writing.'" Now? "It's a discipline. I need to make the effort—have my breakfast, my coffee, then go into the studio for five hours—otherwise, it's not going to happen; I feel like my days are seven minutes long." Not that the competing priors of adulthood are a bad thing: Nash is working on a musical with Broadway choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler ("a genius"); launching a digital platform, The Safety Chain, to teach guys sex ed ("no one's talking to men about abuse in the music industry"); recording a new album ("once we found out shows weren't coming back in 2020, I was like, *I need to make music*"); growing her own veg ("maybe I'll be a farmer next," she jokes); and of course, soaking in *GLOW*'s success: "I've been a solo artist for so long, steering the ship and choosing when to anchor. Being part of somebody else's bigger picture, a true member of a team, has given me so much confidence." —KC

CHRIS VULTAGGIO (KRAUSS); RUBY JANE (NASH); DELANEY ROYER (AVENUE BEAT)



LOOK TO YOUR IDOLS.

—SAM BACKOFF
"I get inspiration from those I admire. I was having a moment with the Taylor Swift album—it's legendary."

DON'T HAVE ANY EXPECTATIONS.

—SAVANA SANTOS
"Give yourself grace. It's such a weird time, and any emotion you're feeling is justified. We're all trying to navigate our way."



FOLLOW YOUR BLISS.

—SAMI BEARDEN
"I've been crafting things that are no pressure but still allow me to be creative: I've done some embroidery. I've made a couple of tote bags...."



COUNTRY-POP GROUP AVENUE BEAT

After releasing the TikTok video turned single "F2020," on which the trio sings, "Can we just get to 2021?/Please/Low-key f*ck 2020," millions of viewers instantly felt these ladies. "There's no better feeling than getting a message from a fan saying our song made their day better," says Santos. "Because it's not like we can go out and hug them after a show," adds Backoff. Above, their stay-focused tips.



BE YOUR BEST

The creative process can be subjective—Are you an early bird or a night owl? Deadline driven or a free spirit?—but there are still some practices that just work. The habits to embrace:

STEP 1: STOCK UP ON HEALTHY SNACKS

Your brain uses glucose to think, says David Strayer, PhD, a professor of cognition and neural science at the University of Utah. But a sugar crash never helped anyone. Keep some nutritious snacks (popcorn, edamame) on hand for fuel.

STEP 2: BLOCK OFF YOUR CAL

It's normal to feel zapped after a big to-do: Your mind needs to recover after a meeting or presentation before you can be creative again, Strayer says. Give yourself a break—eat lunch, go for a walk—before diving into the good stuff. You'll use your time wisely.

STEP 3: HIDE YOUR PHONE

Simply seeing your phone in the distance can be distracting, and you're not as good at multitasking as you might think. "We studied 8,000 people and found only 2.5 percent are actually good at switching tasks," Strayer says. Sorry...

STEP 4: SIT NEXT TO THE WINDOW

Strayer says the outdoors are a crucial part of letting the mind wander. "The brain gets overstimulated in a normal, hectic workday, but nature helps reduce stress." An afternoon walk is clutch, but a window view or desk plants can help too. —KC



Road trip! People scored better on creativity tests after spending 4 days in nature.

Source: PLOS ONE



“I need to feel like I’m living to spark something.”

—KELSEA BALLERINI, COUNTRY SINGER

“If I don’t have anything to write about, it means I need to live a little bit. If I’m like, ‘Oh, the tank’s empty,’ I call a friend: ‘Let’s go on a road trip.’ I need to feel like I’m living to spark something.

I’ve become obsessed with collaborating, but sometimes you get to the point where you depend on it. I’d start a song and not trust myself to finish it. The last few months, it’s been cool to go back to 12-year-old Kelsea with a guitar, trying to figure out how to say what I wanted to say, completely alone.

I’ve also been redoing the [self-titled] album I put out in March. I made it for touring, so I reworked it for people to listen to with a close group of friends or with a glass of wine by themselves—the climate that we’re in now. It sounds dramatic, but I had to grieve the loss of what I had planned in order to move forward. After, I was able to pick my head back up and think, *Okay, wait. You love this album. Don’t act like it didn’t happen. What can we do to reintroduce it?* It’s been a fun project.”

HANNAH LUX DAVIS (BALLERINI); BRANDON ALMENG0 (SAWEETIE); DANNY CLINCH (H.E.R.); J.J. GEIGER (SOO)

“I’M THE MOST INSPIRED BEFORE THE SUN SETS.”

—H.E.R., R&B SINGER

The guitar-toting, Grammy-winning singer-songwriter hailing from Vallejo, California, H.E.R., née Gabriella Wilson (her stage name is a backronym for Having Everything Revealed), writes romantic, love-lorn, and socially aware R&B. “I still learn different ways to get into that space, whether it’s with candles or dim lights, or at certain times of the day,” says the 23-year-old as she gears up to release a reggae-inspired EP and launch a guitar line. “My favorite time is right before the sun sets. The tone is very calm, and I feel the most inspired and ready.”



“DON’T STOP BECAUSE YOU’RE HOME.”

—PHILLIPA SOO, BROADWAY ACTRESS IN HAMILTON

“It’s going to be a while before theater jobs come back. The last thing people want to do is gather in a room with a bunch of strangers and watch a show for two hours. But I’m focused on a voice project... from my closet [a DIY sound studio]! I’ve been working on Netflix’s animated musical *Over the Moon* for years, as the voice of Chang’e, but I finished it in my house, surrounded by shoes and winter coats. It was a strange moment. But it also reminded me of making recordings in my room as a high schooler. Just bebopping on GarageBand with my friends. I was like, ‘Wow, it’s kind of like, full circle here.’ It’s this pure desire to create something—and the stuff you make as a kid in your bedroom isn’t that far from what you strive to do professionally. This thing that I’ve poured so much of my heart into taught me that true creativity starts within yourself, sometimes in your room or in your closet. And you don’t need to stop because you’re at home.”



“PULL YOUR LAYERS BACK.”

—SAWEETIE, RAPPER

The Bay Area native’s latest album, *Pretty Bitch Music*, is her most personal yet. “It’s easy to twerk that ass, but it’s another thing to look yourself in the mirror and pull your layers

back,” she says. “I’m trying to be more vulnerable. My purpose is to make women feel empowered to be self-motivated and unapologetically themselves.” Her creative blueprint:

NEVER SAY NEVER
“I had a stuttering problem growing up, so the fact that I’m a rapper is funny. I express myself better when I’m writing, rather than in conversation, but I still need to

express myself. I need to communicate properly. That’s why I majored in communications, because I wanted a challenge. It’s like, I plan to excel in the things that held me back as a kid.”

PAY ATTENTION
“I’m driving down the street, and I see a car of bad bitches, top down, playing music loud, and they all look good. I’m like, ‘I could write about something like that.’”

BE A VISIONARY
“I put a Porsche and getting signed to a label on my mood board. I pictured a bigger house. Within a year, all those things came true. There’s power in the mind.”

