



The reformation, healing, and bravery of Jax Anderson

By **Murjani Rawls** - Nov 22, 2019

“I think kind of dawned on me that I have been holding on to the name Flint Eastwood because I felt like I needed to have a moniker behind my art. I rediscovered the reason why I started creating art in the first place. The reason why I continue making art is that I genuinely love doing it for myself.” Knowing you’re ‘why’ is a powerful tool. Rediscovering your why after a total reconfiguration of your center is just a big feat.

When I spoke to Jax Anderson, formerly known as Flint Eastwood over the phone in a recent tour stop in Chicago, I really got a sense of peace. It's the peace that you can only get when you overcome an onslaught of emotional shedding.

"I spent a couple of months, basically in isolation," said Anderson. "I spent that time just questioning why I believe things and why I do things and what I was doing out of obligation. I felt like in order to be my most authentic self, I needed to drop the moniker. I needed to drop the costume and present just me."

'Real Love' was an act of bravery. Anderson officially came out and questioned her religious upbringing. Her new EP, *Heal*, chronicled the ongoing process of learning who she is now. No strings and no mask. I spoke to Jax about her *Heal* 'EP,' the meaning behind some of the most impactful songs, and how she reclaimed her sense of self.

When I listen to the EP, I feel like I'm getting to know you all over again. The things that you have learned and the things you chose to leave behind. The first song you released from this project is 'Fear'. *The whole damn world is ruled by fear*. It can be a fearful world out there, but I feel like it's not only a rallying cry for other people, but for yourself, first and foremost.

I think with 'Fear' specifically, I was a little intimidated to release the song because I didn't want to come off as looking over a lot of groups of people's fear. There are a lot of minorities and marginalized people that do live in a lot of fear. I feel for those people heavy. It sucks to have to live your entire life for your own safety with a completely different lens than a lot of people. For a long time, I didn't want to release that song.

I just had to take a step back and think, "this is a song that I'm singing to myself." I personally had fallen into the trap of fear. It's important to have fear to stay safe, but I think a lot of the times we do things out of habit. We do things out of our own comfort zones that we don't realize is just letting fear win. With all of these songs, it was basically my way of just learning how to heal.

I had gotten to a point where I didn't even recognize myself anymore. It wasn't like I had picked up any major habits or anything. It was just all of the small things that built up. I wrote these songs as a way of helping me figure out and sift through my own thoughts. If they can help other people too, then awesome. Ultimately, I wrote this record to understand myself and learn how to heal on my own accord.

'Scared To Death' is my favorite song off of the EP. It's speaking to the notion that death is enviable. Perhaps, there isn't a heaven or hell below us. We should live life fearlessly and do like the things that we love to do. Without this preconceived notion that we can go to hell because we aren't perfect.

No, definitely! This past year for me has been just the constant state of unlearning. Feeling through unlearning. Some of the things that I needed to unlearn were things I was taught when I was young. I grew up in an extremely religious household that taught me a lot of things that I discovered just weren't true. You get to a certain point where you have to sit it out on your own and come up with your own conclusions.

Death was one of those things that were always looming. It had power over me because of what I was taught. I was taught if I didn't act a certain way on earth, that I would have eternal damnation and eternal torture. Being a queer person and hearing that all the time in a religious setting is terrifying. I had some time to unlearn and say, wait, all of us are going to die and it's going to be okay. Nothing is going to happen.

We have no control over it, but I'm not going to spend my entire life being unhappy on earth because of that. There was a lot of healing through that. Just accepting that I can come up with my own conclusion. I don't have to believe everything that I was taught. 'Scared To Death,' specifically was my page-turner song. I can come up with my own ideas and my own thoughts on things. Yes, I should be educated. Yes, I should definitely take other views in consideration. Ultimately, it's up to me to decide how I live my life.

With the title track, I felt like it could be a bookend to 'Chapter Three' from *This Is A Coping Mechanism*. You could be talking about a love where it ended in heartbreak, but this time, you're coming out the other side of it. You're shedding the skin of these bad emotions and you're ready for something new. The beauty is that it could be just newness in how you view yourself.

I think it even goes past the idea of love. I think it goes to the idea of just existing as a human being. For that song was just the question of being so sad, upset, and broken for so long. That was me admitting to myself that I was looking to other people to fix it for me for too long. That's up to me to fix myself. It's up to me to make those decisions. People can help, but I'm the one that ultimately makes that decision, right?

With 'Heal', it was me asking that question. I used to say, "someone tell me what I'm supposed to do. someone tell me how I'm supposed to fix this and how I'm supposed to do this." Tell me how supposed to think and what I'm supposed to feel. This sadness in me had been there forever. I went to therapy and have close friends. I think there are definitely definite tools that you can utilize.

Ultimately, I learned that it's up to me to heal. Up to me to make those moves. Sometimes, I don't have control over it and I have to be okay with it. Sometimes it takes a really long time to process and that's okay, too. I think a lot of times we're taught that healing and problems have to be finite. That it has to have a certain timeline, but that's just simply not true. I think everyone feels on their own time. I needed to write that song in order to admit to myself that I need to be my own savior. I got this shit. f I always tell other people they got the shit, but I got to start believing it for me, you know?

'Made' speaks to your childhood self sitting in the backseat. There's a certain euphoria about this song. The music also makes you feel like you're in a childhood memory. Back in the time where you created art and it just seemed fun. There are no expectations to taint that.

You pretty much nailed it right on the head. This last year, during my process of asking myself questions of like, "What do I want? What do I believe in? Where does my moral compass lie," I kept going back to periods of my life that I felt the most free. For me, I just kept going back to this memory of my friends and I. Were never these crazy partiers. Whenever I was a teenager, we would just like go into a car and like drive around and just sing at the top of our lungs to our favorite songs.

That was the happiest time to me because I felt the most freedom. I felt like I could express myself in any way that I wanted. Ultimately, that's what I want to be able to do an artist. I want to be able to express myself in any way. I got very clouded and distracted by a lot of things that were just very unnecessary. This song is asking myself questions. When did I forget the good in front of me? When did I forget to turn the other cheek? Basically, when did I get jaded? When did I become this person that I didn't want to become?

When did I let all of these expectations change me, because ultimately, I believe that there's good in the world? I believe that there's good in everyone. I think that everyone has the power

to change the world if given the right circumstances. Even just help change the people next to them. I think everybody has that that in them. I'm genuinely a pretty optimistic person. However, there was just this time in the last couple of years that I slowly let myself lose that side of me. 'Made' was trying to remember those times that I felt the most like myself and a memory of when I was a teenager.

Production-wise, my brother who goes by the name of SYBLYN made this beat and it just felt so nostalgic. It felt like the songs that I listened to when I was 19. I wrestled with this instrumental for a long time. I think it kind of intimidated me for a bit. I wrote about three or four songs with this specific instrumental and they weren't working until I was just really feeling nostalgic one day. I just went in on the mic and started singing. The main melody was originally a harmony, but my brother switched over to be the main melody. I really liked the way that it ended up.

With the video for 'Hard Times,' I felt it was very powerful. I viewed this song as not only releasing yourself from the chains of your previous life, but you speak to your friends not giving up as well.

For 'Hard Times,' there was a moment in time that I was writing a concept album called *Gays In Church*. I wrote that song during a week of writing with a bunch of queer artists and songwriters. I had just written a song with a trans artist that was talking about how they were mentoring. One of the people that they mentored ended up committing suicide. It was just one of those things that just broke my heart. That's something that queer kids still have to go through.

We were just still reeling off that and I thought about my own experience with coming out and how it was just a lot of really hard conversations. A lot of it was that I don't even want you to agree with me. I just want you to hear me. I just want you to listen. People won't even give you that.

The core of the song is just saying these times are going to be difficult. It's hard for a lot of young queer kids still. Although it's going to be difficult, don't lose your light. Don't lose that hope because life is still so worth living. It's still so beautiful and there are still so many things that you can do with it. It's about having those conversations when you are more open about who you are. Some people are privileged enough to not have to deal with family members that they are

hateful. Some people have to deal with it forever. It really just breaks my heart and I just wanted to write a song to the people that are really going through it.

With you experiencing this rebirth both musically and in your personal life, how have people close to you responded? I would hope that they would be very loving and accepting. You seem to be a lot happier and a lot more content.

Yeah, I mean, it's been great. All of it happened very naturally. Flint Eastwood had always been me. I'm the face of it. I'm the one that made all the decisions. It was my project. My brother produces my tracks, but he's very much not wanting to be out in the forefront. "I want to be behind the scenes. This is not my project. This is your project. I'm just like helping you with it." So, it was a very natural transition for me to just go by my name.

I feel like all of my listeners and all the people I've been following for a long time have always known me as Jax. When we talk online and after shows, they always refer to me as Jackson. It wasn't this kind of thing where I felt like I was losing myself. Or that there was a negative kickback too. Everybody was like, "yeah, that makes sense. you are yourself."

With going by Jax Anderson, I feel like I'm a lot freer. I have a lot more freedom to like explore other sides of my artistry. I also direct and I do music videos for other artists. I do all of my own videos. I also am a photographer. I feel a lot more freedom to talk about that side of my art as well as just only talking about being a musician.

For the EP release, instead of doing the show, I decided to do an art gallery. I love visual art just as much as audible art. It made a lot of sense for me to be able to visually put it all together as well as audibly. During my break, I really dove into a lot of photography as a means of healing as well. Using it as a means of understanding my own turmoil.

The listeners have been so supportive and kind. I seriously couldn't ask for a better set of community members. I always joke that like I hear these horror stories about musicians getting these like terrible messages. In the dm's that I get back, I see, "hey jack, hope you're having a great day! I hope you're writing music." They are always just so positive and so kind. I feel very honored and blessed to have the community around the project

Journalist, Self-published author of five books, podcast host of The War Report and The Final Cut, and photographer since 2014, Murjani "MJ" Rawls has been stretching his capabilities of his creativity and passions, Rawls has as a portfolio spanning through many mediums including music, television, movies, and more. Operating out of the New York area, Rawls has photographed over 200+ artists spanning many genres, written over 700 articles ranging displaying his passionate aspirations to keep evolving as his years in media continue.

