

DOWNTOWN

Journal





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Los Angeles

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Milan

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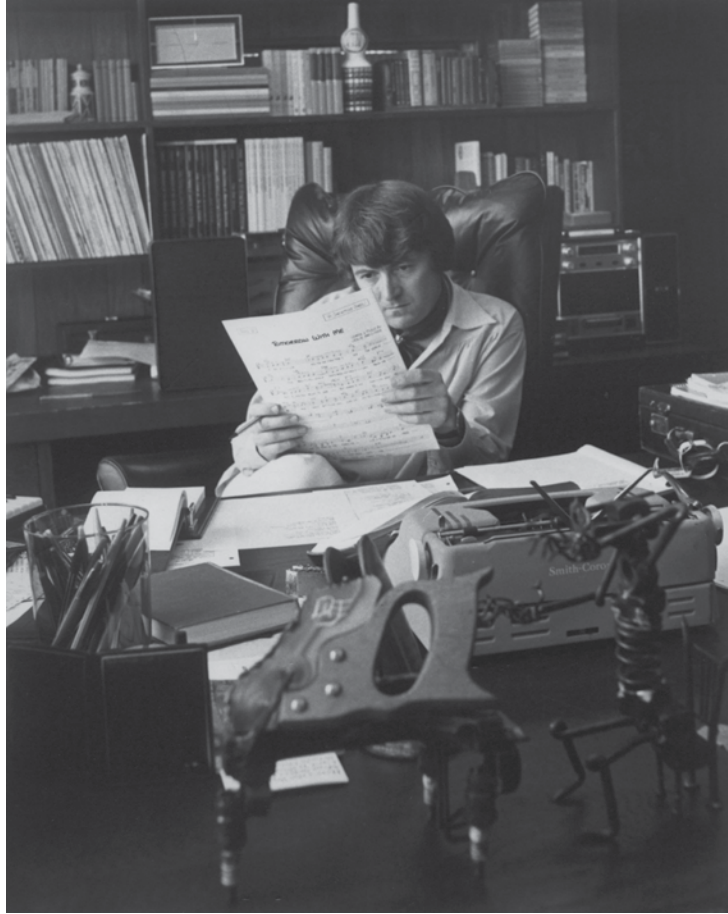
Seoul

Singapore

Sydney

Tokyo

Toronto





How's life?

I don't know about you, but it's been extraordinarily tough over here.

A pandemic. Climate change. Political unrest. Continued racial injustice. Not to mention the scores of local issues that can make it feel like we're being wrapped in a global quilt of negativity. It's taken a toll on our teams around the world, our clients, and our partners across the industry.

But six months in, I'm taking stock of the good. I look across Downtown and I am proud of our teams' commitment to our clients and the innovation they bring to the industry at-large. I look (and listen) to the output coming from the artists we serve and see boundless creativity. A silver lining, if you will.

Come to think of it, celebrating silver linings is actually the theme of this second edition of the Downtown Journal.

Here, we explore the resilience of New York City and the power of a good meal through East Village restaurateur Frank Prisinzano. We breakdown "Pure Imagination" with Leslie Briscusse, talk conches with Nubya Garcia and mind our Ps and Qs with our cover artist for this issue, Kano. Scene reports from Medellín, London, Paris, and Johannesburg — our latest Downtown outpost — help fill out weekend playlists and firm up future travel.

I hope these stories remind you that even in the toughest of times we can always find comfort in the little joys in life — be it music, nature or chicken parm.

One last note—with the pandemic now claiming more than 1,000,000 lives, I would be remiss not to mention the devastating loss of our dear friend John Prine. In his honor, I suggest listening to "When I Get To Heaven" while you sip on a cocktail...perhaps a vodka and ginger ale?

Until next time,

JUSTIN KALIFOWITZ, CEO

DOWNTOWN

Journal



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SOUND ON!



The song we started singing at the beginning of 2020 is very different from the tune in our heads now.

While our physical mobility may have been limited by world events, our abilities to find adventure, companionship, joy, and catharsis have all been greatly enhanced this year.

We can all thank music, and its magical, alchemical powers, for providing the transportation.

When the team at Downtown and I started assembling this issue, from the fun chats to the deep reads, a theme that came up again and again was connection.

When the artists featured here shared their creative visions, we quickly saw how the distance between an iconic songwriter and composer like Leslie Bricusse and a legendary emcee and actor like Kano wasn't so great after all.

So here you have it: a printed atlas of our universe, as always, held together by the artists, friends, collaborators, and wayshowers who help us connect — not only to one another, but to the parts of ourselves that can travel anywhere.

Deep, right?

Before you dive in, we have to shout out our amazing contributors for helping to connect our vibes and visions for this issue to the actual, factual thing you are holding in your hands right now.

We hope what you experience here takes you to some amazing places.

Groove is in the heart and the power is in print.

ELLIOT ARONOW
EDITORIAL & CREATIVE DIRECTOR,
DOWNTOWN JOURNAL



Snacks, ideas & obsessions from across our world

EDUCATION

Kaufman Music Center's Special Music School (SMS) is the only K-12 school in New York City that teaches music as a core subject.

In addition to helping students grow as musicians, while also completing a Regents-based academic curriculum, SMS teaches them skills like collaboration and composition to help them thrive in a 21st century creative economy.

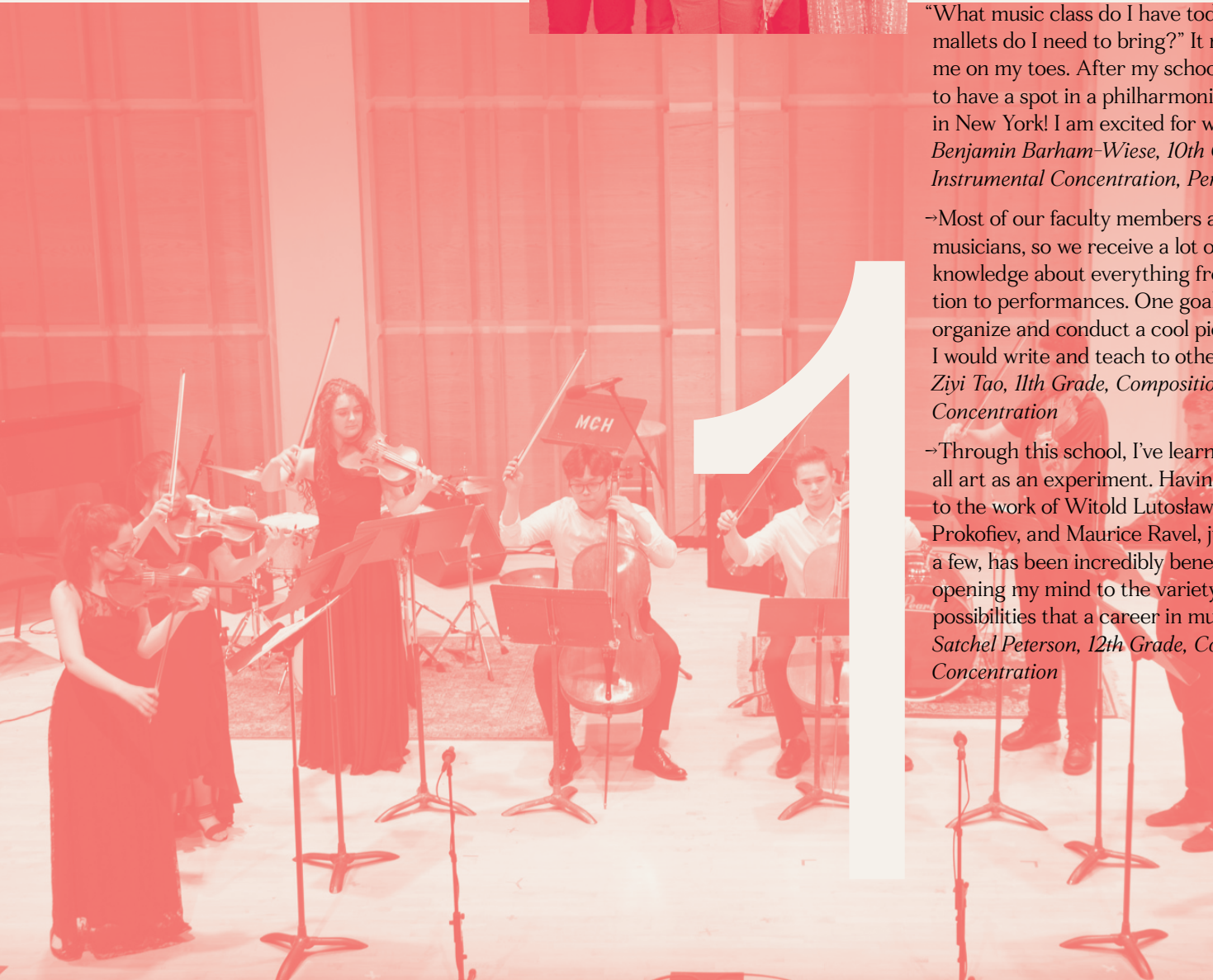
And now, let's hear directly from SMS students about their professional goals and visions for a more musical future.



→ As a percussionist, I wake up thinking, "What music class do I have today? What mallets do I need to bring?" It really keeps me on my toes. After my schooling, I want to have a spot in a philharmonic orchestra in New York! I am excited for what's ahead.
Benjamin Barham-Wiese, 10th Grade, Instrumental Concentration, Percussion

→ Most of our faculty members are working musicians, so we receive a lot of access and knowledge about everything from composition to performances. One goal I have is to organize and conduct a cool piece that I would write and teach to other students.
Ziyi Tao, 11th Grade, Composition Concentration

→ Through this school, I've learned to see all art as an experiment. Having exposure to the work of Witold Lutoslawski, Sergei Prokofiev, and Maurice Ravel, just to name a few, has been incredibly beneficial in opening my mind to the variety of creative possibilities that a career in music can offer.
Satchel Peterson, 12th Grade, Composition Concentration



PODCASTS

Podcasts were a major part of commuting, but even during the pandemic they continue to grow in popularity. Here are a few of our favorites.



→ I love *The Happiness Lab*. I appreciate the focus on staying mentally healthy and happy during an unprecedented global event. *Anna Held: Director of Product Development, CD Baby*



→ *Table Manners with Jessie Ware* features a candid, vivacious mother-daughter dynamic. Don't be deceived by the foodie angle, it's more about the conversations than the meals. *Louisa Smith: Experience Coordinator, Downtown Music Holdings*



→ Science has never been my forté, and so I love *Ologies with Alie Ward*. If you're into accumulating random facts about ants or aliens (or ever intend to participate in *Jeopardy!*), then you've found a good one. *Amy Nijenhuis: YouTube Coordinator, FUGA*

SOUND SYSTEMS

Dewayne Ector is our Global Head of Partner Relations & Income Tracking at Songtrust. Here are his recollections of a musical youth spent in Trinidad.

→ When there's no music around, Trinidadians don't feel right. That's the sort of environment that I grew up in — not only because my father is a third-generation musician — but because the country is obsessed with music and sound.

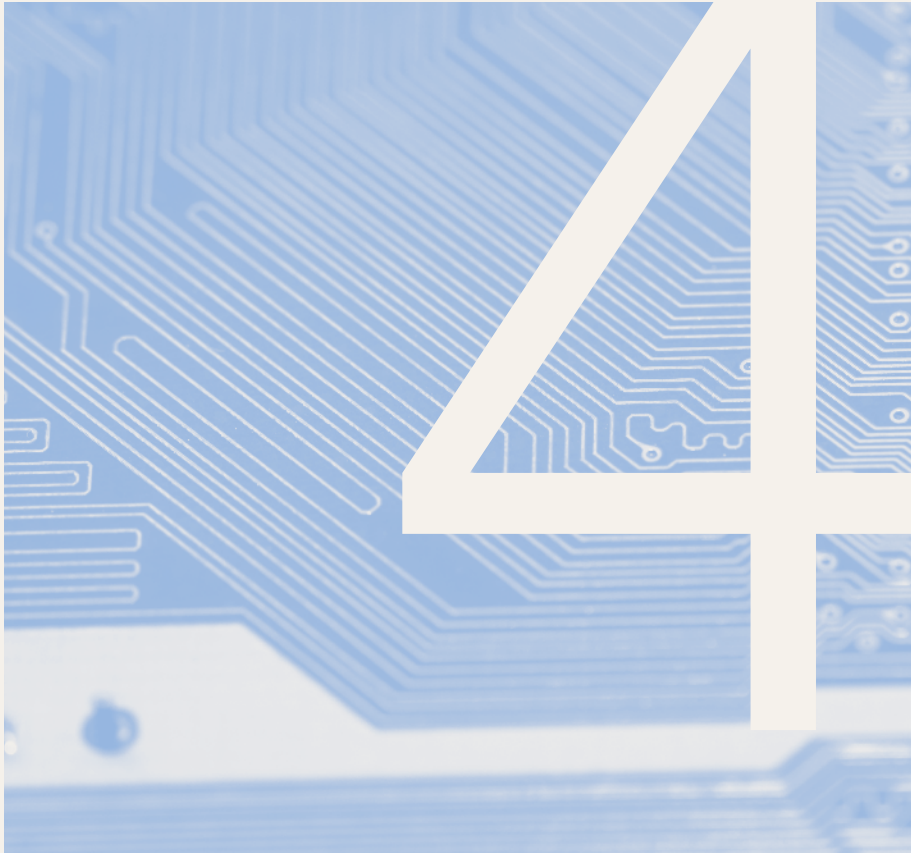
Trinidadians take a tremendous amount of pride in equipping their private cars, taxis, shuttles, and public transportation vehicles, with the most banging sound systems. Many of these homemade systems sound better and clearer than the ones you hear in professional clubs.

Every teenager growing up in Trinidad in the '90s wanted to be in the coolest and loudest bus, the one that had the most current reggae and dancehall songs blasting from the sound system with the heaviest bass. In some sense, that was part of the "social network" of the day, our '90s version of TikTok.



PHOTO BY DEWAYNE ECTOR

DOWNTOWN DISPATCHES



ROBOTICS

As part of Songtrust's continued commitment to helping creators monetize their work, the company has been developing cutting edge AI programs, or "bots," to assist with royalty collection. Here, Songtrust's Stephanie Grimes and Benjamin Muller tell us more about HANK, a bot developed by Robotic Automation Consulting.

→ Sorry to disappoint you, but HANK, our proprietary bot for helping Songtrust clients avoid common holdups in their royalty collections, doesn't have a shiny metallic shell. What HANK does have, however, is the ability to take a list of songs and search the databases at the Harry Fox Agency for any registration or licensing problems that would otherwise go unnoticed. HANK's superpowers allow us to be proactive in helping to expedite traditional publishing timelines at a scale that we could never achieve without a robotic aid. So long as HANK doesn't learn to write songs, we feel confident that our clients will appreciate its handiwork.

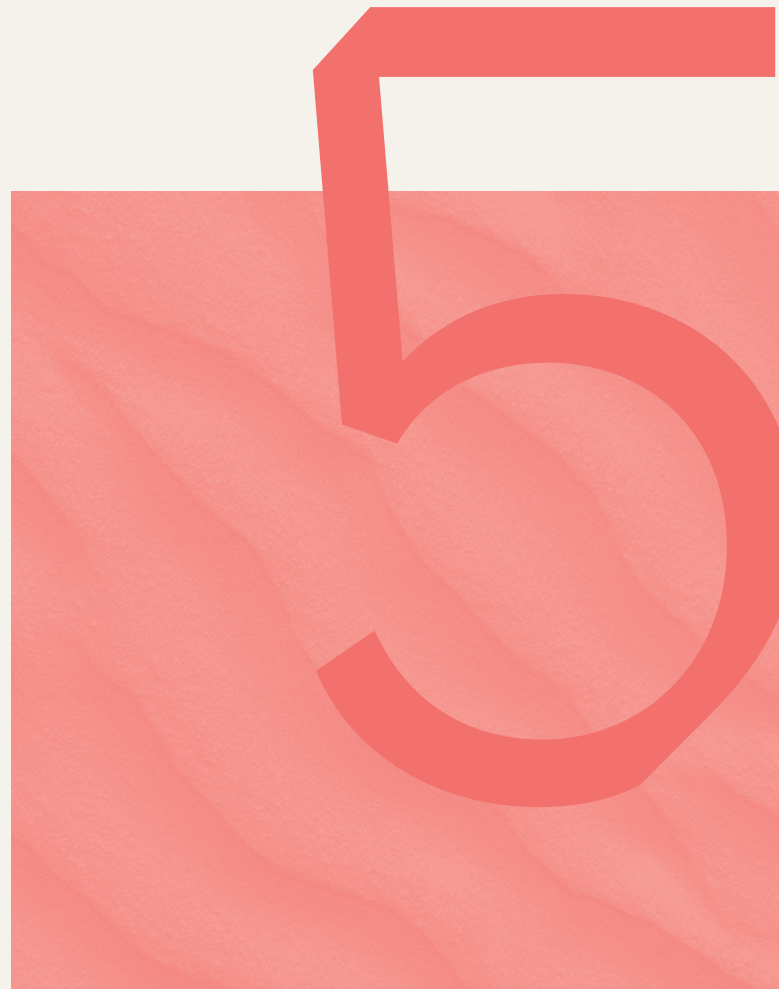
SELF-CARE

Our friend Rudy Chung works in Music Creative and Production at Netflix. Here are a few tips that have helped this veteran music supervisor ("The Last Dance," "Minari," "Silicon Valley") find some self-care in our overly wired world.

→ I'm no guru, but I can say that not being attached to my desk all day has been incredibly rejuvenating. I dedicate 30 minutes every day to turning off all notifications and going for a walk.

Because I am checking my smartphone less, I have more time to speak with my friends and see how they are doing. Pretending it is 1994 and hearing someone's actual voice has been a real lifeline for me.

Also, I stopped listening to music like it was my job, which it is, and started to become a fan again. Now, I savor albums that don't have anything to do with my work. Being able to love and appreciate songs and albums without needing to "do" something with them has been a game changer. Turns out, music really can be medicine.



the

KING

of



FILM

Stanley Nelson is a writer, director, and filmmaker best known for his documentary films on subjects that center and amplify the Black American experience.

The latest addition to his filmography is "Birth of the Cool," a career-spanning retrospective on Miles Davis.

Here, Mr. Nelson reflects on why Miles' life and work is still in the musical and sartorial zeitgeist, nearly thirty years after his passing.

Hint: it's because Miles was one bad mother!

→ One of the things that's so fascinating about Miles is that he was so much more than just a musician.

Miles was an icon, and his cool extended to everything in his world — the way he dressed, the way he looked, the cars that he drove — he always demanded excellence.

His experience as a Black man living in America during the second half of the 20th century is very unique in some ways, and totally ordinary in others. As a storyteller, that intrigued me.

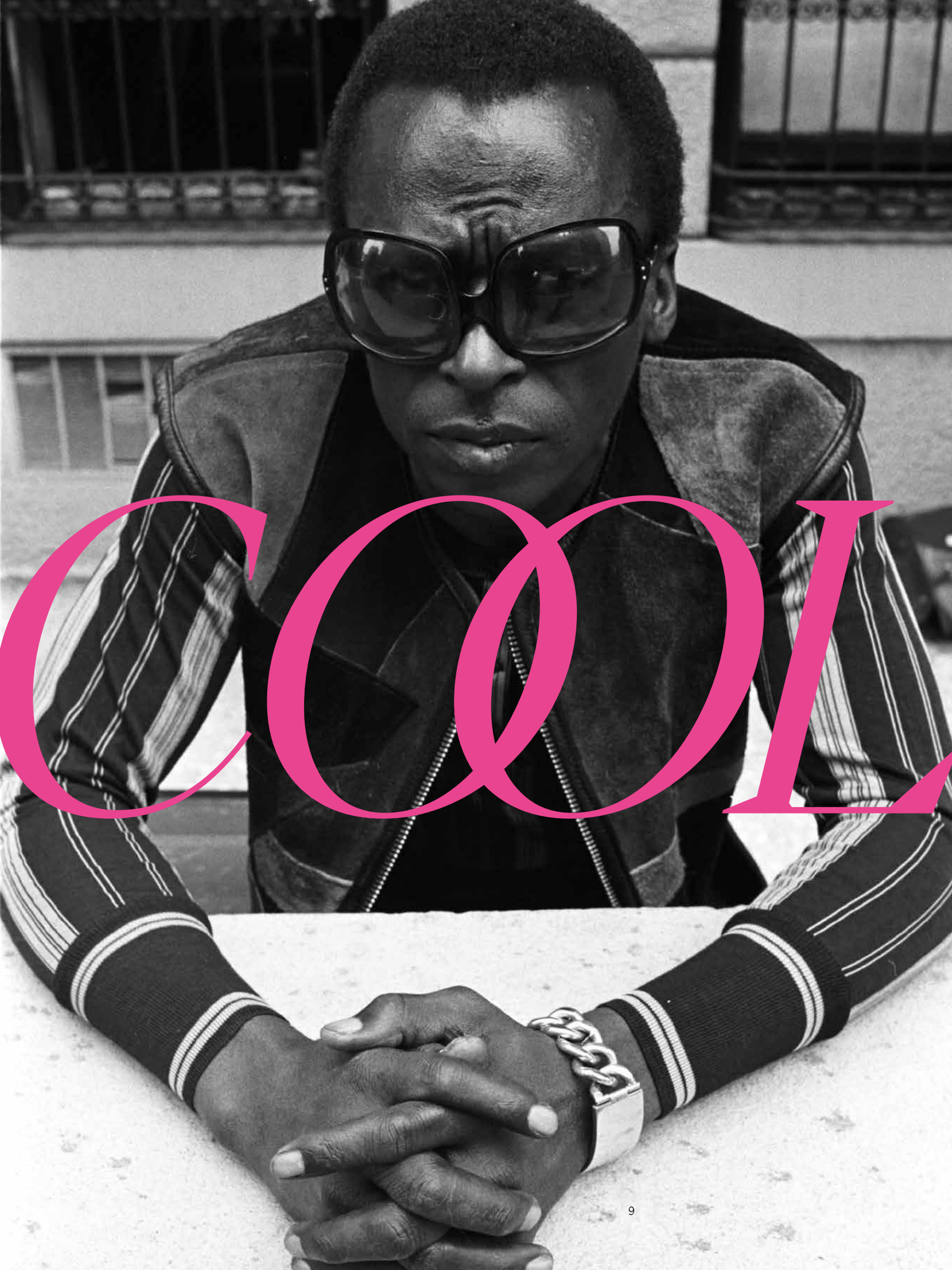
Miles never got comfortable. He never copied anybody's music, or anybody's lifestyle. He incorporated everything he learned before and abstracted it. He made things grow in new and wonderful ways. He never settled.

He never said, "Let's do a funk rock album." Instead, he gave us *Bitches Brew*. He didn't say, "Let's slow down bebop." He gave us *Birth of the Cool*.

To make those kinds of strides once would be amazing, but he changed the course of music and fashion at least four or five times in his career — and he did it without any compromises.

Everything he touched was at the highest level, always.

MILES DAVIS AT HOME, 1969. PHOTOGRAPHER: DON HUNSTEIN, SONY MUSIC ARCHIVES. COURTESY OF ABRAMORAMA/EAGLEROCK. AN ABRAMORAMA NORTH AMERICAN THEATRICAL RELEASE.

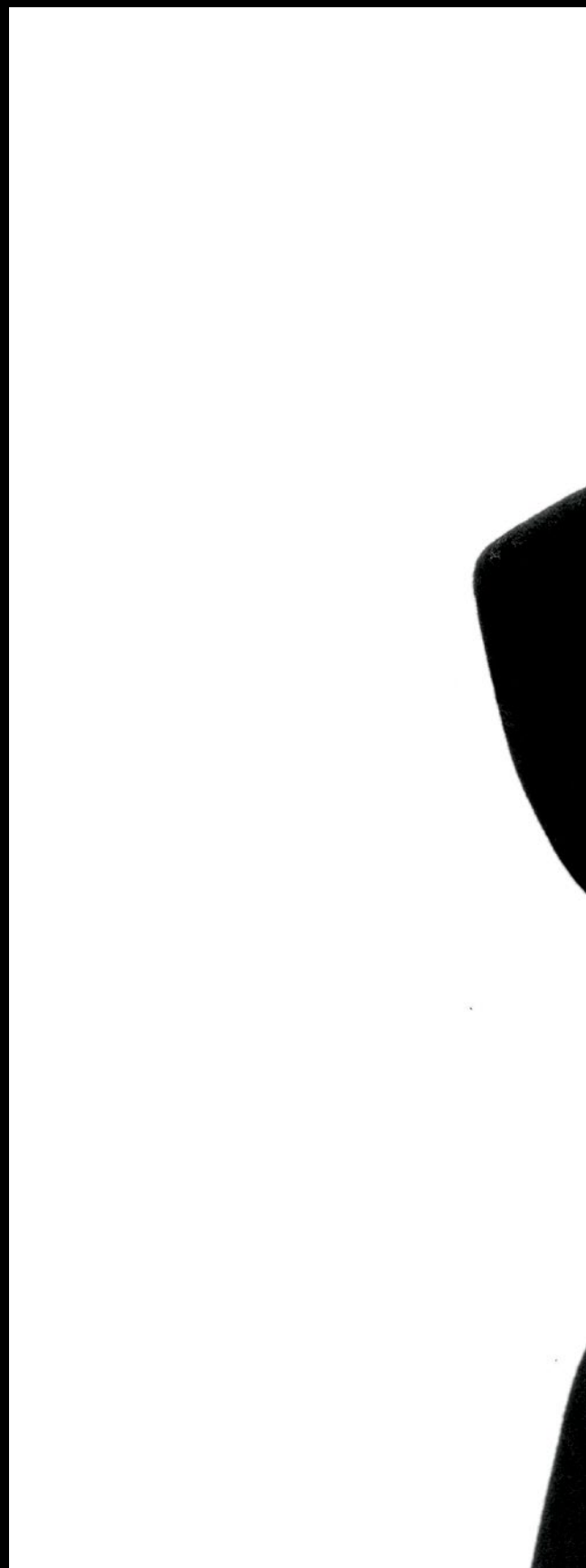


COOL

Yoko Ono

In addition to her outstanding contributions to the worlds of visual and multimedia art, avant-garde and popular music, and pop culture at large, Yoko Ono was also publicly credited with being a co-writer of the song "Imagine" in 2017. This is our tribute to her lifelong work as a creative, activist, and muse.

PHOTO BY ALBERT WATSON





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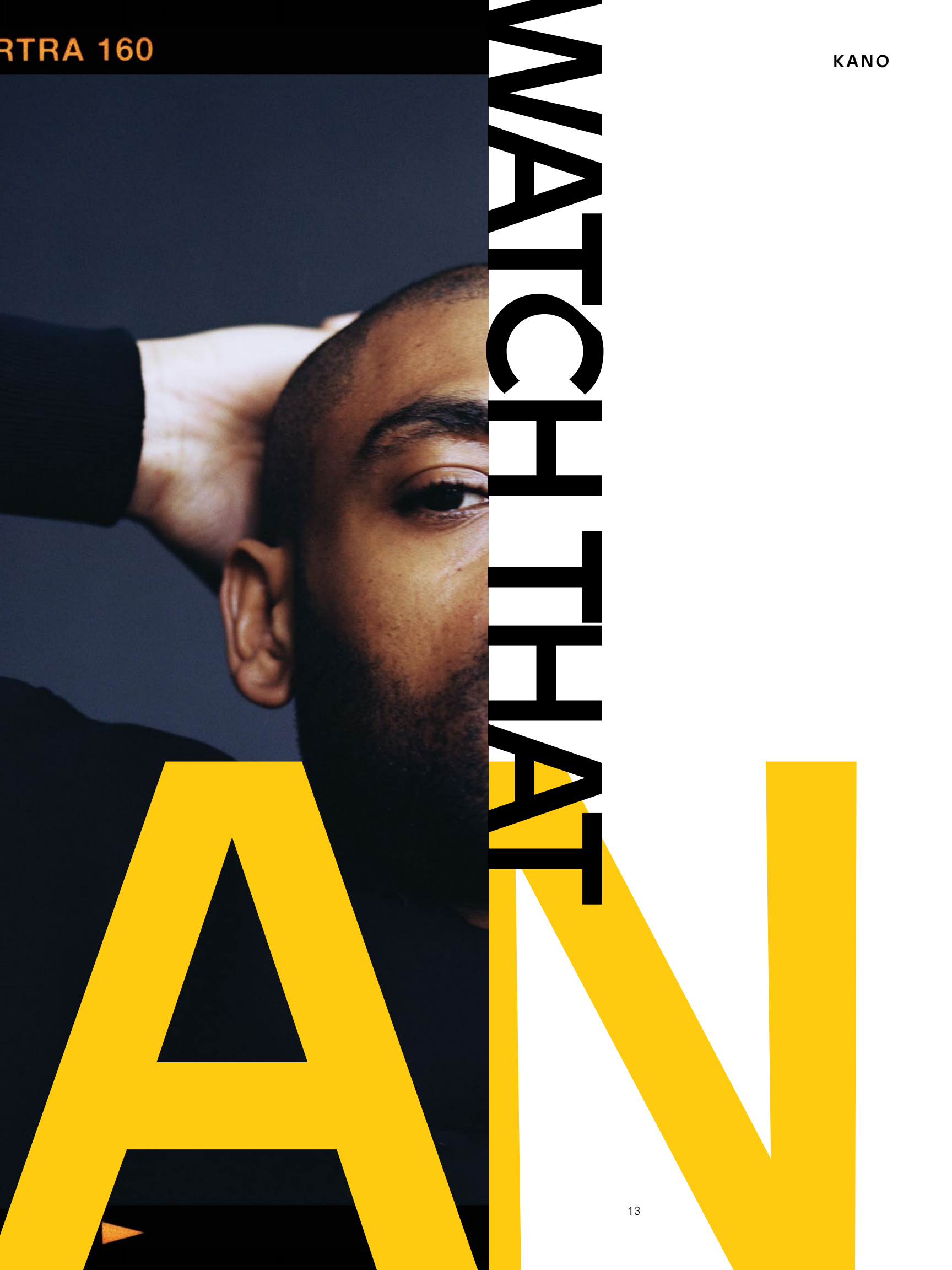
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KODAK POR



NM

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY OLIVIA ROSE
COURTESY OF KANO



WATCH THAT

A N

Armed with more charm than most, and a loyal fanbase that has followed him from stage to screen and back again, the London-born multihyphenate has created a lane for himself that few can touch.



Ever since he emerged as one of the breakout stars of the U.K. grime scene in the early '00s, Kano has been someone to watch.

In music, he's both a living legend and a forward-thinking songwriter and emcee, à la Nas. On screen, he's familiar to millions — thanks to his role playing Sully on the hit series *Top Boy*.

Our Editorial & Creative Director Elliot Aronow recently caught up with Kano during some much-deserved downtime to chat about everything from Gucci loafers and dancehall parties to self realization and tight fades.

Aronow: You're from East Ham. What are some of your earliest memories of the music that was coming out of the streets?

Kano: When I was really young, like 7 or 9, I really looked up to my uncles. They had big stacked sound systems. Seeing them partying and playing those deep, rattling basslines awakened something in me.

When I was a teenager, garage music was how my generation tapped into that spirit. We were too young for jungle, and drum and bass, but garage hit at the perfect time.

Let's talk clothes. What fits were you and your friends popping off back then?

The garage look was very clean, and that was attractive to all of us. Instead of the hip-hop tough vibe, garage was about Gucci loafers and Moschino belts. You would save up your money and put a lot of effort into going out.

Later on, as my friends and I started emceeing and taking ownership over our own music, we took stylistic elements of garage — but pushed it further. We started to mix the hip-hop fashion looks in. For us, that meant tracksuits, Avirex jackets, and Akademiks shirts.

I think British people always wore tracksuits better. I was born in Staten Island, New York in 1980, so I've really seen a lot of tracksuits in my day.

London is such a melting pot that we couldn't help but be informed by that Jamaican element. It crossed over to the way our music was styled and performed back then too. Everyone would get on the mic and spit over the same rhythm, which is way more dancehall than it is American hip-hop.

Because of the rebel energy, I think of grime as an analog of punk rock.

I definitely agree. And it was more noticeable in our early days. Nowadays, a lot of indie artists go on stage and do a show just like Jay-Z.

But back then, the way we performed at those early places like EQ Club and Sidewinder and all that, it was definitely a unique experience — with everyone battling on the mic and going back and forth all night. It was nothing like what anyone had seen before in hip-hop. The energy was crazy.

Even before your acting, you had a rep for being a crossover artist. Was it hard when you were first starting out to not fit in with any one genre?

WHEN MY EARLIEST TUNES LIKE “P’S & Q’S” CAME OUT, I REMEMBER THE GRIME GUYS WERE LIKE, “THAT’S NOT REALLY GRIME.”

And it obviously didn't really fit in hip-hop. But to me, that's perfect. That's where I want to be. I don't want to be boxed anywhere.

When you got into your acting hustle, was it a hindrance being a musician because people thought, “Oh, whatever — acting, that's not street?”

I think those days are gone. There's been a long history of musicians acting, whether it is LL and Will Smith from the classic era, or Donald Glover doing *Atlanta*.

So long as the work sits with your personality, it can't take away from your art. With *Top Boy*, the same people who are from the street and understand my music also understand that show.

I guess for someone like yourself, or Mos Def, you have to erase the identity that you've cultivated as a well-known musician. It's almost like you have to work twice as hard to inhabit a character.

I had to work really hard to not have viewers of *Top Boy* see Kano. They needed to see and feel Sully. I remember on my very first day on set, I had my barber give me an even tighter fade than usual. I thought if I looked different, I could escape being Kano.

But my director told me straight up that makeup and hair wouldn't help. My acting would be the only thing that could make Kano disappear.

Did you have people who you look up to as wayshowers — artists who have credibility, but also achieved some mainstream success?

I probably didn't look at it as in depth as that, but I just genuinely did gravitate towards people that were doing their thing and didn't seem compromised.

You never know what people are thinking when they are in the studio, but I always felt like Nas and D Double E and Bounty Killer were true and authentic. They didn't run away from success, but they definitely didn't chase it. What I took away from being fans of theirs is that they didn't repeat themselves by riding a certain sound for their entire career.

Now that I am well into my own career, I try to share a feeling in new ways, rather than repeat myself. Trends come and go, but it's always the feeling that people will come back to.



silence



PHOTO BY EDDIE SANDERSON, COURTESY OF LESLIE BRICUSSE

FIVE
QUESTIONS
WITH THE
LEGENDARY
LESLIE
BRICUSSE

Leslie Bricusse is a songwriter, lyricist, playwright, and composer of such legendary stature that to call him a titan in the entertainment industry would be an understatement.

With a body of work that spans six decades, including over 30 musicals that have been performed all over the world, you might think that Leslie has seen it all.

Yet despite his accolades, Leslie always has an appetite for more. His open, inquisitive approach to life should be an inspiration to us all.

Our Editorial & Creative Director Elliot Aronow recently connected with him via a phone call to his residence in the South of France to get some insights from the man himself on how creativity can spread light, in even the darkest of times. Enjoy!



PHOTO BY EVIE, COURTESY OF LESLIE BRICUSSE

Aronow: One of your most iconic songs is “Pure Imagination,” which is also the name of your very excellent autobiography. What does pure imagination mean to you? How does it translate to the everyday world?

Bricusse: It's freedom of thought, really. If you let your mind wander free, you can escape from your immediate surroundings. The key lines of the lyric are:

Anything you want to—
Do it!
Wanna change the world?
There's nothing to it!

In other words, keeping an open and curious mind about all things will lead you to a happier and more fruitful, better life.

Is there a common thread that links all of your creative projects together?

The lovely thing for the writer, especially in music, is that you are led into a different world every time you do a project.

I like to find a central character who is in search of a grand objective. Not only do they want to win, despite having tremendous odds against them, they want to achieve something that has never been done before!

In happier works, like *Scrooge*, they achieve their goals — and in less happy works, like *Jekyll & Hyde*, they do not.

The past few years have been very trying for humanity. What keeps you excited and optimistic for the future?

Looking at the world lately, not a helluva lot! But, I am an optimist by nature. I grew up in World War II, so I believe we have no choice other than to be optimistic. When that dark time was finally over, we all felt very liberated and we could let ourselves play once again.

That's why I have always written songs like “Once in a Lifetime,” “If I Ruled the World,” “This is the Moment,” “A Wonderful Day Like Today,” “Gonna Build a Mountain,” “Pure Imagination,” and “Feeling Good.” I want people to connect with the sheer pleasure of experiencing life.

If “you only live twice,” what would you want to do or experience in your second life?

I have been extremely lucky in my life. From modest beginnings, I was blessed with loving parents, a Cambridge education, the right choice of career, and the most beautiful and wonderful life partner in my divine wife, Evie. In the wise words of the immortal Ira Gershwin, whom I was privileged to know and exchange letters written in lyrics with, “Who could ask for anything more?” Second time around, I wouldn't risk changing anything!

As a resident of London, Los Angeles, and the South of France, you have access to some of the best food in the world. What are some of your favorite places to eat and why?

Everywhere Evie and I live, our major indulgence has always been restaurants. If I cared to think back about how much I have spent over the years keeping these sacred establishments in business, it would have to be enough to finance half a dozen major Broadway musicals!

In London, there's The River Café, which is owned and run by our beloved Ruth Rogers. Our oldest friends, actor Michael Caine and his beautiful wife Shakira, always join us to celebrate our first evening back in our hometown.

In Saint Paul de Vence, France, La Colombe d'Or is a place we have been visiting since 1968, when Evie and I had the joy of hosting Katharine Hepburn's birthday party and celebrating her second Oscar win for “Guess Who's Coming to Dinner.”

And in L.A., of course, we go to our old chum Wolfgang Puck's Spago. We have been eating and appreciating Wolf's food ever since he came to Ma Maison as a young chef in 1973, aged 24.

Pick a winner? They all are!

nihiya



the conch



Saxophonist, composer, and bandleader Nubya Garcia was signed through Downtown's London office this year.

Here, she reflects on a musical gift she received from friends while performing in Martinique.

I received this conch from two friends and musicians in Martinique last year.

We went to the mountains there to perform. The lineup for the event was Theon Cross, Simélin, Noss, and myself.

I mentioned how much I love the sound of the conch, and how I would love to find one. My friends/musicians said they knew someone who sometimes had them.

We all played, four of us each with the conches to the mountains overlooking the sea.

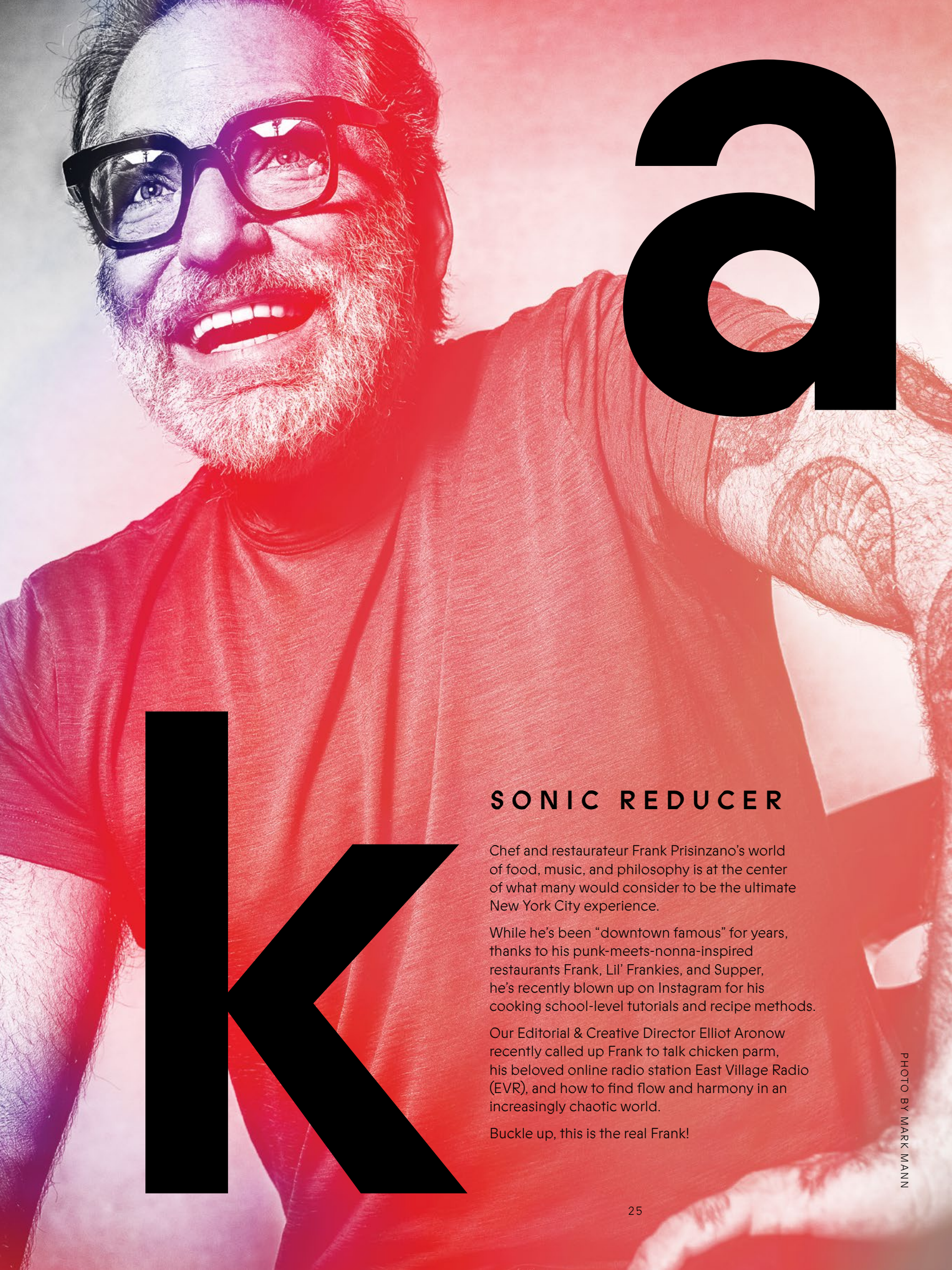
At the end, on our way down from the mountains, they gave one of them, this one, to me as a gift.

It brings back memories of that special time, and has deep meaning to me.

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SONIC REDUCER

Chef and restaurateur Frank Prisinzano's world of food, music, and philosophy is at the center of what many would consider to be the ultimate New York City experience.

While he's been "downtown famous" for years, thanks to his punk-meets-nonna-inspired restaurants Frank, Lil' Frankies, and Supper, he's recently blown up on Instagram for his cooking school-level tutorials and recipe methods.

Our Editorial & Creative Director Elliot Aronow recently called up Frank to talk chicken parm, his beloved online radio station East Village Radio (EVR), and how to find flow and harmony in an increasingly chaotic world.

Buckle up, this is the real Frank!

PHOTO BY MARK MANN



LIL' FRANKIES, 19 1ST AVE, EAST VILLAGE

Aronow: Since your Instagram cooking videos have blown up so much, I feel like a lot of your audience doesn't know about your contributions to New York City's music scenes. I think that you were an early pioneer in recognizing this kinetic relationship between food and music.

Prisinzano: Music and food have been the heaviest influences on my life. When I got my first job as a dishwasher in a pizzeria, all of my money went straight to the record store. I was really into Kiss, Led Zeppelin, ELO, Sabbath — all the classic Long Island guy stuff. By the time I was 16, I owned around 250 albums. The food paid for the music.

How did you get East Village Radio off the ground? Most pizzeria owners don't usually start online radio stations.

In the early 2000s, FM radio was being wiped out by Clear Channel. That, combined with a lot of clubs leaving the East Village, made me sad. I wanted to bring that spirit of independent DJs and underground artists to the internet. We were already a punk rock pizzeria, playing loud and strange music. Since that part of the business was doing so well, I wanted to give back to the neighborhood.

I am really excited for your perspective on this: what is your favorite dish from the East Coast Italian-American food canon?

Chicken parm. It's that guilty pleasure. What's really funny is that, all my life, I've been eating crappy chicken parms from random pizzerias on Long Island — and I still love them! Even when you get a bad one, you still finish it!

The chicken parm doesn't get much love from higher end joints. It's kind of the Billy Joel of sandwiches.

Totally! I avoided doing it in the restaurants for a long time, bro. When I worked in other restaurants, they acted like chicken parm was beneath them. But once we served them, they sold like crazy — and still do. The ego has no part in hospitality.

Do you have any advice for how people can get into their flow state and find happiness, both as a cook and as a human?

To start, you need to know what makes you happy. This is in no way a job for me, Elliot. Money doesn't make me happy, connection does. Teaching makes me happy. I can spread my legacy easily through Instagram. I'm giving away methods that chefs don't give away because they don't want people to be independent of them.

I love how you encourage people to mess up and start over. I don't know of any "celebrity" chefs who are so up front that it might take 20 or 30 tries to really get into the feel of a dish.

In order to be in your flow, you need to be inside of what you do and do it often. I learned this as a dishwasher. You keep repeating the signals going to your brain over and over and over again until all that information just becomes flow. It's the opposite of thought.

Like musicians, chefs can have an off night. What do you do when that happens?

At this stage, my customers are policing my food. They're telling me when something is off because they want the place to stay good, and

because they want to interact with me. Once they complain to me, we usually end up getting each other's emails.

If someone thinks we really screwed something up, we bring them back in to have it the right way — which creates more loyalty, more hospitality, and more friends and family.

I'm going to keep doing this until I'm dead. I'll have two million people at my funeral.



BEYOND



Now, more than ever, the power of journalism goes way beyond words. In this new ecosystem, context is king.

WORDS

To help get us up to speed on how things are shifting, our Editorial & Creative Director Elliot Aronow had a thorough phone chat with Ivie Ani — a writer, multimedia journalist, and on-air personality specializing in cultural studies, whose work has appeared in Teen Vogue, The New York Times, Okayplayer, and BBC Radio — and Timmhotep Aku, a writer, editor, and self-described culture worker who is the current Editor-at-Large of Afropunk.com and a contributor to NPR, Pitchfork, Genius, and Rolling Stone.

What follows is an edited version of our conversation, and a great educational primer for anyone interested in going deeper into the art of storytelling.

Aronow What role does pleasure play in your work? Or, to ask it a different way, what do you get back from writing and being a journalist?

Ani That's a good question. When I think about pleasure, I'm asking myself, "Do I enjoy something enough to put my time and effort into dissecting it?"

But my biggest source of pleasure is when people engage with the ideas I am putting forth, rather than just send me congratulatory praise because I got a byline.

Timm, how about you?

Aku As a cultural worker, I get pleasure from the conversation, and from people being able to catch things when they read a little deeper.

Popular media flattens Black people and Black art, and so part of my work is to bring context and perspective.

Context helps to humanize what you're talking about. As a storyteller, you want to be sure to take out things from the background and then center them in the foreground for the audience.

Ani You need to educate the reader and help show them that this is where this artist or genre is coming from. I also think that asking questions on social media, and then answering them within your own work, is key. The more you are a part of the conversation, the more you can add to it.

How do you find a way to write about what you want to write about in a contextualized way, while also knowing that you need to create something that people are gonna click on?

Aku To speak frankly, most editors only care about the hook. This artist is hot. That's the hook! This rapper got arrested. That's the hook!

I think the trick is to smuggle in some context and perspective when you craft your story. All you need to do is walk around Brooklyn on a sunny day to know whose record is big. The real story is: what informs this artist's sound?

Ani: I have found that very few of the gatekeepers are as concerned with context and nuance as I am. It's almost a Trojan Horse thing. The sensationalist angle, that's the horse — but inside the horse is an army of context, and real information and emotion, and hopefully humanizing agents.

IT'S AL-
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JAN
HORSE

What kind of skills do you need to be a good communicator in this field?

Aku You need to be a good listener, and you need to be a good marketer. If you can listen to the needs of your audience, even when they don't explicitly say what they want, and then serve them something of quality — that's going to pay off.

Ani You also need to try out different mediums and not get too hung up on being an "expert." I want to serve an audience, and sometimes my audience is not reading a magazine, but they are listening to podcasts or watching videos. I always make an effort to meet people where they are at.

If you were to burn down the media system tomorrow and start over as the benevolent content overlord of culture, what would you change?

Aku I think everybody needs to stop taking the status quo for granted. We need people who — because of their color, or sexual identity, or class position — are on the margins to be centered, so they can tell their own stories and provide their own context.

When we cut off the head of hierarchy, the conversation becomes a lot more interesting because it's not a top down thing any more.

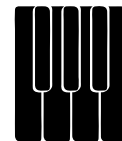
Ani Instantly, Timm, the word you pointed out from jump was hierarchy. That definitely needs to change.

As Angela Davis said, "diversity is not a synonym for justice." Bringing in new bodies and new sources of labor for an old, stable system is not justice.

The media and entertainment industries thrive off of optics, and that won't cut it any more.

I think the other major change that needs to happen is embracing mentorships and the passing of knowledge. I want to see someone who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to do this work be taught the skills necessary to be taken seriously.

Aku I just want to add that if you really want to be an ally, you need to cool with the redistribution of power and who gets to take up space and have a voice — no matter where you "sit on the ladder." You have to give that up in service of a greater good. Remember, journalism is a public service.



AMANDA BLACK

JOHANNESBURG

In addition to holding the prestigious role of music supervisor for the hit Netflix series *Blood & Water*, Mpumi Phillips heads up creative at Downtown's Sheer Music Africa in Johannesburg.

We recently caught up with her to get her insider take on the relationship between music and film, and the artists and movements that are making South Africa a global music hotspot right now.

On Her Role as Music Supervisor for *Blood & Water*

The music was an integral part of the show, so I was brought into the project before pre-production to start thinking about how it would set the stories within the series. Having the directors listening to music during the actual shooting process really helped to create strong connections between the visuals and music.

On Showcasing South African Talent

In our music scene, the voice of youth music is growing stronger. There's a lot of diversity in terms of South African house and hip-hop music, which made it really exciting when it came time to program music for the show.

I used a variety of up-and-coming artists like Red Robyn and Atlay, as well as established artists like Amanda Black, Sho Madjozi, and Black Motion,

in order to give a true reflection of South African youth's music landscape. I also worked very closely with a new label/management company who represents great local talent like Nasty C.

On South Africa's New Role in the Global Music Scene

The South African music scene is just as rich and diverse as all the other major markets. Major labels from all over the world are signing our artists. People are getting excited about all these new artists and genres.

It's not just about choirs and drums anymore. We have proven that our music can help creators and filmmakers tell universal stories.

LONDON

Mike Smith recently joined Downtown as our Global President of Downtown Music Publishing. We asked him and his team to give us the scoop on what's happening over in the U.K., right now. Here's what came back:



PHOTO BY DORIAN MALONGA

On the U.K.'s Current Musical Obsessions

Jazz is everywhere, right now, from left field innovators like Shabaka Hutchings to rappers like Loyle Carner. The emerging scene in South London, featuring our very own Nubya Garcia, has been capturing global attention — and with good reason. Generations of kids who grew up on hip-hop and R&B are looking to jazz for inspiration, and are finding new ways to make it their own.

Additionally, our dance scenes have been incorporating the sounds of West Africa to great effect, with artists like Rema, Fatoumata Diawara, Blick Bassy, and DJ Spinall really blowing up recently.

On Genre Blending

The U.K. has always been great at creating thrilling new genres. We are blessed to have a nationally owned public radio station that takes real risks

and goes way beyond the hit-driven format that dominates every other country. Artists get to hear things they normally wouldn't be exposed to, and that — combined with the fact that over 300 languages are spoken in our cities — makes for a very open-minded artistic community.

On Collaborations

Some of the most recent musical collaborations from our London office have been Jimmy Napes working with Teddy Swims, as well as Anthony Rossomondo having a great trip working with Celeste, Jake Bugg, RAYE, and Ella Henderson. Tion Wayne has also been very busy working with Rudimental, KSI, Stormzy and 6LACK, whilst Jaz Karis has been working with Justine Skye. Now more than ever, artists really want to connect and collaborate.

PARIS

Laura Bedikian is the Senior A&R Manager at Downtown's Paris office. We recently spoke to her about how she strikes that delicate balance between celebrating French music and expanding its sonic borders through collaborations and co-writing sessions.

On What Makes France a Leader in the Global Music Market

SACEM, our very own Performing Rights Organization, defines lyrics as 50% of a song, and so it is often the French language itself that is the backbone of these very unique melodies.

The other major factor is that when French artists try to copy U.S. hits, no one buys their music! What our market loves best is a real French identity, whether it is via sampling à la Daft Punk, the crooning of Serge, or more recent genres like Afrotrap — which comes directly from our African communities.

On the Rise of Collaboration

I think the rise of electronic music and rap has created a much more open musical scene. Every artist can now work with the top songwriters and beatmakers all over the world, thanks to social media.

We've seen producers for stars like DaBaby reach out to French rappers via DM and send them beats directly. The flow of musical information is so smooth. If things go well, those partnerships can last over many years.

Visions for the Future

I have always required that we have our own studio in Paris. We want local writers to have a safe and consistent place to work — and by making the space so creatively inviting, we have been able to "force" international writers and artists to come to Paris en route to other destinations like London or Amsterdam.

My goal is to prove that we can be an amazing hub of collaboration for international artists and writers in Europe.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL DECLERCK

I have witnessed with my own eyes that there are talents everywhere, if writers and producers are given a chance. And it is true that we all need a bit of chance.

France definitely has something more to offer than our wine, croissants, and Fashion Week!



MEDELLÍN

In addition to being an accomplished musician in his own right, Juan Peña heads up Business Development in Colombia, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic for CD Baby, a Downtown company. We recently caught up with him to get his super passionate insider's take on a few hot topics from his corner of the global music landscape.

On New Trends

One trend that has been very active is cumbia. What's funny is that our grandparents danced to cumbia, but because of all of these young musicians mixing traditional sounds with new arrangements, harmonies, and production techniques, it's really raw and fresh.

I am also really excited about this electronic scene from Colombia called guaracha. It's a descendent of tribal house that has crossed many social barriers and become popular with the new wave of ravers. It is starting to cross over into Europe and Asia too!

On Promoting Underground Artists

The lack of strong independent companies in our ecosystem makes it hard for acts to break through. Thankfully, digital distribution is changing this.

At CD Baby, we just started working with a label called Discos Pacifico. They are developing folkloric artists from very remote regions of Columbia. We are talking about musicians who need to travel six hours by car, and then another eight hours by boat, to reach professional recording studios. The music sounds like nothing else; it's almost as if the rainforest started making sounds.

Another great genre is vallenato, which comes from the North of the country. It's very stripped down, with only four instruments: an accordion, a small drum, a güiro-like instrument called a guacharaca, and the human voice. The rhythms are very complex. There's a lot of amazing lyrics too.

Visions for the Future

I think we are getting better at building solid independent music companies that present, promote, and monetize new talent. There's a lot of diversity and quality.

People are excited to see companies helping popular musicians, supporting local musicians, and ultimately helping their communities. It's a big opportunity!

Noah Becker is the President of AdRev, a Downtown-owned company that helps creators monetize their content. Here, the longtime shutterbug and music lover explores his passion for creating connections between sounds and images.

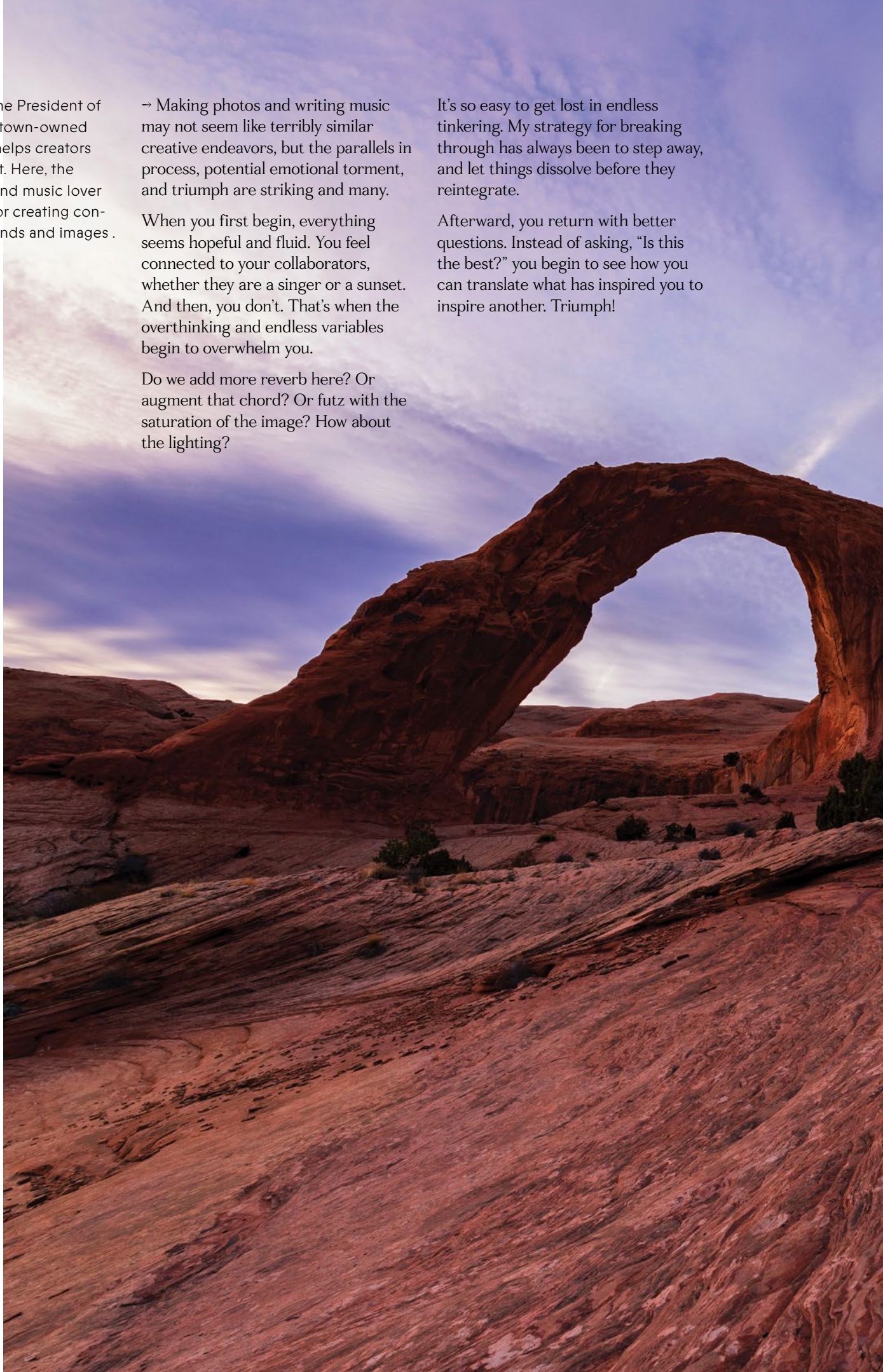
→ Making photos and writing music may not seem like terribly similar creative endeavors, but the parallels in process, potential emotional torment, and triumph are striking and many.

When you first begin, everything seems hopeful and fluid. You feel connected to your collaborators, whether they are a singer or a sunset. And then, you don't. That's when the overthinking and endless variables begin to overwhelm you.

Do we add more reverb here? Or augment that chord? Or futz with the saturation of the image? How about the lighting?

It's so easy to get lost in endless tinkering. My strategy for breaking through has always been to step away, and let things dissolve before they reintegrate.

Afterward, you return with better questions. Instead of asking, "Is this the best?" you begin to see how you can translate what has inspired you to inspire another. Triumph!







John Prine,
from the series *366 Musicians*,
Adam Villacin,
ink on bristol, 11" x 14", 2020

DOWNTOWN

**NO ONE WRITES SONGS
ABOUT THE BUS**

Betsy Plum is the Executive Director of the Riders Alliance, a grassroots advocacy organization of bus and subway riders dedicated to winning affordable, reliable, and world class public transit for all city dwellers.

To celebrate the role public transportation plays in the lives of musicians (not to mention Downtown staff members), we collaborated with Betsy to write a poem honoring a guitarist riding the bus on their way to a gig.

PHOTO BY MARC A HERMAN,
COURTESY OF NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT
AND THE NEW YORK TRANSIT MUSEUM

*Life as a working musician
Is all about numbers*

*\$2.75 for the B61
I-V-vi-IV progressions
4 pedals 3 cases
8PM doors 10PM show*

*My metrocard is a passport
East Harlem to Red Hook*

*Concrete to sea wall
The view from behind
The glass*

*Calms my nerves
As I dream of
My next stop*



