In conversation with Rasharn Powell

Written By shift.

For London-based artist, Rasharn Powell, authentic and genuine expression is at the core of everything he creates. His current passion for multiple art forms emanates from his childhood, which he spent building make-shift furniture in his nan's backyard and being in the recording studio with his uncle. Understanding the importance of hard work from a young age, Rasharn proved his dedication as a musician with the release of his debut mixtape earlier this year, titled Dusk & Dawn. A blend of R&B, Soul, and Hip Hop, Rasharn breaks down which of his lyrics convey his most intimate experiences, and what it means to express profound emotion through music.

Original Shift's Tayler Prince-Fraser sits down with Rasharn to chat about his aesthetic, his music, and his perspective on life in general.

Tayler: The first thing I want to know is, when are the first chairs coming?

Rasharn: Bro, I haven't had an opportunity…well, that's a lie I probably have had a lot of opportunities to sit down and really design it, but I don't think I have had that spark yet. I know that I love chairs, I know that I want to design them and furniture in general; I want to have my own line. I think for me I'm not trying to chase the fact that I want to do that. I'm like when that will come to me, it will come and it will be right, at that moment.

Rasharn: Taking in all the influences from multiple different designers that I do love, like Hans Wegners, Marcel Breuer, and making sure that when it does come to that point, that I have a certain level of reference that I can then tap into. Ideally, within the next 5 years. It could be way sooner, which is probably why I said within. It needs to make sense within my brand, the trajectory of my career, and where it is that I see myself. But yeah, that's definitely something that's in the cards, I'm so glad that you started with that [laughs].

Tayler: Cause you used to make chairs in your nan's back garden?

Rasharn: Yeah, my nan's back garden. I used to take plywood and little bits of material that she would have lying around to get thrown out and I would just get the hammer and nail and put it all together. I would try and figure out how to make certain bits of tables or chairs and she probably thought I was a pain, just taking all her junk and trying to turn it into something. But I guess as a kid, you're just trying to figure it out and trying to be creative. That was my first inkling that I liked furniture, but I didn't have the means or the types of people around me at the time that would push that and push the idea that "yo, this is actually something. You can turn this interest into something very tangible, you just need that guidance to understand how to do it." My dad was a surveyor when I was younger and he used to say, "if you're going to do architecture then make sure you do a course in the trades." Because you can have all these designs, but if you don't understand how the plumbing system within those designs works then it's a redundant design because it doesn't work. You need to understand everything for you to then circle back and modify and apply the design in the way that you want it. And I've really taken that on board, even with something as simple as a chair. Creating the right chair, creating the chair that stands the test of time. It requires a certain level of knowledge that you can't get from just looking at chairs. You have to be able to understand different types of materials, what goes together, what the people want to feel.

Rasharn: What do I wanna feel when I sit in a chair? The majority of the time it's comfort. Unless it's something abstract, then I want to see a piece of art that's not necessarily functional but at the same time it's like "yo, that actually is just sick to look at". And there's definitely going to be chairs in my future crib that have that function. There's a function of sitting in them and a function of just looking at them, just the aura of that piece. But I think I want to get myself to a space where I can apply that and I feel like where I'm at right now, juggling all the things that I'm juggling, I can't apply myself in the way I want to create what it is that I know what I can create, do you get me?

Tayler: I get you. That's a very mature perspective to have. I have some similar things that I want to do in terms of making films on big photography trips and campaigns. I want to do British Guyana next year with my nan and my dad, cause my dad's never been and my nan hasn't been back in like 60 years. But I know that if I was to go tomorrow, those images wouldn't be as good cause I've not had as many experiences as possible. It's why I always leave shit to the last minute because I know each day I'm learning and getting better, so I want to have it done at its best. But it wasn't always like that. I don't know if you feel the same way but when I was younger, I was always like "now now now now", and I didn't realise that sometimes it's actually really good to wait for opportunities because when you get it, you're not letting go of it. You're fucking it up different. No one's going to doubt whether you should or shouldn't have had that opportunity, it's clear as day it was meant for you.

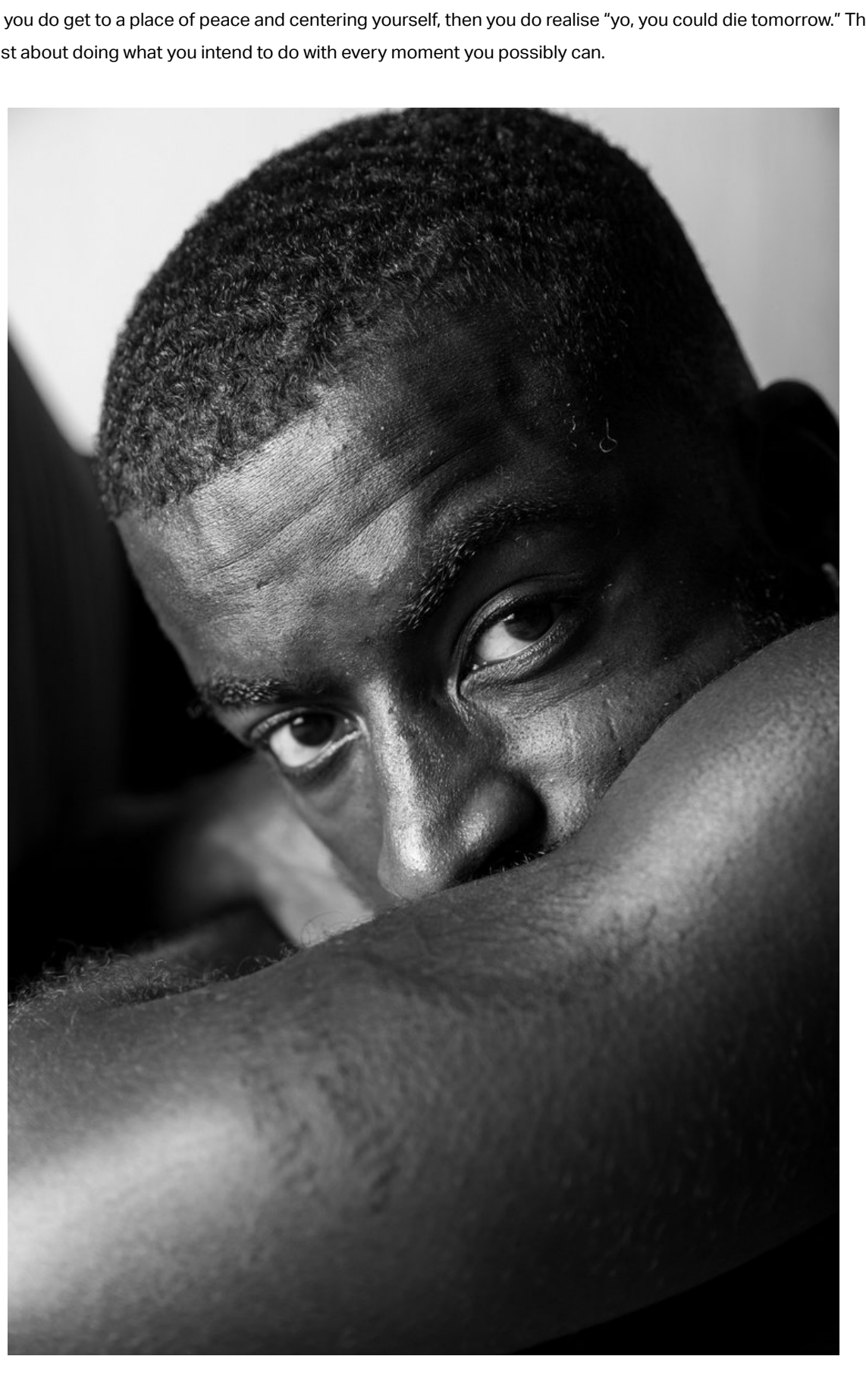
Rasharn: Nah, 100%. I think there's so much haste attached to youth. When I was growing up, of course, the internet — well when *we were* growing up – the internet wasn't this massive thing. We were introduced to it at the start of it and had the best of both worlds. Getting to understand what life was like without it and then understanding that life could become a lot easier with it, in terms of getting information that you want to get in the click of a finger. And I think that ended for me in terms of the haste or chasing an opportunity or chasing the "I want to do something right now" probably around the time that I wrote, "Warm in These Blue Jeans" which was like 2018. At that time, I was like "yo what do I want to do? What is it that I want to say? How do I look at everything that's happening around me and within me, and then translate that into something that other people could relate to in some space?" When I wrote that line of "Light speed light speed, we crave light speed from just 10, hit 21 and wanna be nothing again" — when I was young, I wanted to be old bro. I feel like a lot of people want to be old when they're young, and then when you're older you're like oh snap I've got all these responsibilities, I want to be young again [laughs], I want to be zero bro. I'm in this space now, being 26 just like you know what, life is happening regardless of me wanting it to happen. Instead of just existing, I'm going to choose to live and live my truth in whatever capacity I possibly can and when I'm done, hopefully that has an effect on everyone I've been able to touch over that time. But yeah, it's really interesting. That was a lot that happened within that answer away from what we were originally speaking about. [Laughs]

Tayler: Yeah from chairs to the meaning of life. But it's important, I was even thinking about it. I was thinking to myself, I wish I had more time on this planet. And I thought, I can't get more time but I can make better use of the time I have.

Rasharn: Mhm.

Tayler: If someone told me that I was the one person that was allowed more time to live than everyone else on this planet, what case could I make for it? I don't have a case to make for it right now cause I'm not making the most of each day. And it's difficult to make the most of each day when you constantly feel like you're fighting against the outside noise, pressures, and where you want to be and where you are. But I feel like until I can look myself dead in the eye and say, "you deserve more time on this planet" — which I don't think anyone will really ever be able to say — then you just have to make the most of what you've got.

Rasharn: Yeah 100%. And you know what's funny bro, you say that you want more time but to me I don't know if I want more time. I'm good with whatever time I end up having. For me, as long as I can say I've tried my hardest to get whatever it is that I've put my mind to — the people I've affected or the friends I have or the situations I've been in and tried to deal with in the best way that I possibly could, or the mistakes that I've made. At whatever point is my time to go, I'm like "cool". That obviously was how I was meant to imprint on the world, how I was meant to affect the people I've affected. It's like the release of DMT, you're just now flicking back through all the great things that have happened and then you're not here anymore. At that point, there's nothing that I could change and it's just realising that allows for me to live everyday like it is the last one. And I guess when you are stressed and when you are dealing with things mentally, it's hard to have that outlook but when you do get to a place of peace and centering yourself, then you do realise "yo, you could die tomorrow." That is the reality of the situation. We are all finite and it's just about doing what you intend to do with every moment you possibly can.



Tayler: And I think on that point, the beauty of what we both appreciate and love — art in some form — is that it's not finite. I would love to make something that one day people in hundreds of years are looking back at and trying to write 3,000 word essays about "what does he mean by doing this?" like I took the photo like that cause that's the photo I got. [Laughs] There's nothing about it, that's just the frame of the photo. I feel like there is something beautiful in striving to make things that people want to remember.

We already spoke a bit about your nan, tell me about your uncle.

Rasharn: He's an amazing man. So my uncle is a guy called Asher Senator, he was an MC with another guy within the reggae scene called Smiley Culture, who unfortunately passed away quite a while back now. But he was in-the-mix within Peckham, South London, Brixton Way — that area. He had his own youth club for people that were from underprivileged backgrounds or just from the streets to go to and make music. Or at least have a space to escape and be whatever it is that they wanted to be in that moment. He's still someone that is very respected, but I was very fortunate to have him. He's actually my uncle through my aunty, so it was meant to be in regards to how he affected my life. He recognized that I liked music, and I liked to sing. I was actively writing at that time, or trying to write at least. My mom took us down to Peckham where they lived and I'd heard about going to Code 7, which was his youth club. I think this was when I was about 9 years old when he took me there and it was the first time I got to see what a studio was like. It kind of brought things back to reality like "oh, wow. So to get to that stage, this is what I need to be doing." And I was just in awe, I wanted to learn and I just sat there and he would give me advice.

Obviously, my first song was not good. [Laughs] But, there was just intention. The intention to create was always there. And I feel as though that's why I never get worried about creating something again because my intention to create is always there. I know that this is what I love to do and I'm going to continuously create, whether that be for everyone, or for myself.

As time has gone on, I know there's more that I want to create outside of the space of just songs. But at least at that point, from my uncle taking me to the studio, I knew that was something I wanted to chase and go after. But yeah, amazing guy. He's given me so much advice. Even now, playing him some of the songs — I put it up on my Instagram, you've probably seen, when I played him "Demons."

Tayler: Yeah yeah.

Rasharn: I just said "bro, I want to play you a song." [Laughs] And then I played it, and it was just like, "wow!" You've seen me from not being able to make a song and then now, being in this position where I've got my first tape dropping and the music is actually good. It was really humbling, man. It's just amazing to have that experience with someone and have them still be around in where you are now, and see your journey, where they knew that you were destined to go in the first place.

Tayler: We were talking about how personal the experience of making music can be; how it can be a cathartic experience. Do you find that is the case with a lot of the music you write, and if so, what stage does it come at? Does it come when you're writing the lyrics or does it come when you listen to it back for the first time completely and you're like "fuck."

Rasharn: Yeah, I do. I think it's a mixture of both to be honest. It made me smile when you were saying that and then went on to say, "or do you hear it when you're listening back" because sometimes bro, I'm literally writing and things are just spewing out of me and then when I've listened back I'm like "oh wow, that actually is completely what I was going for at that point of time," but I couldn't even really fathom it because I was just trying to get whatever I had in me out. It's funny because whenever I've tried to write a song, it's not gone the way I want it to go, so I don't even try anymore. I'll write every day, whether that be one or two lines or when I'm in the studio I'll create a full piece. But being in the studio with my uncle until I was around 16, going in and having to be in the studio for two hours, I made sure that within those two hours I got the best out of it, because I didn't have money back then. My mom was financing it and helping me out, so now I'm able to bang out a song pretty quickly. I'm at least going to have a real-ass song that I can listen to and edit towards the end of the session. Sometimes within those experiences, because you're doing it so fast, you don't realise what you're actually doing or saying. I'm just sitting there sometimes thinking, "oh yeah, I want this to be as real as it is to me," which it always is, but I want to at least say certain things that really point towards what other people could relate to, or just cool lines, like little metaphors.

I love listening to rap and hearing the double entendres and triple entendres, the way that they utilise their voice, the intonations, the pockets that they choose, the different cadences that they end up sliding through throughout the song. I like to manipulate my voice and majority of the time I do that with my genuine voice; just trying to get a different sound coming out.

I remember some of my first songs, I was singing so much with my lyrics but in terms of my approach vocally, it was very monotone. And I remember vividly now speaking about it to you, I was like "am I ever going to be able to like… sing?" cause when I was singing other people's songs I was like "yo, I'm singing this stuff. Like I'm actually singing that." One of the first songs that I ever learned in my singing lessons was "Lately" by Stevie Wonder and that's a singing song, so I was like I know I can sing, but why is it when I'm approaching my songs, I can't apply that same pizzazz or whatever. I couldn't deliver with the amount of soul that I needed to with the songs that were about me, in the same way that I was with songs that weren't written about what I was going through. It is a massively cathartic experience for me. Even that song I played for you, by the time this comes out, it'll be out. It's called "Never Call Home". When I wrote that song, I had just gone through a break up. I remember I researched about how to get over a break up.

[Both laugh]

Tayler: What did it say?

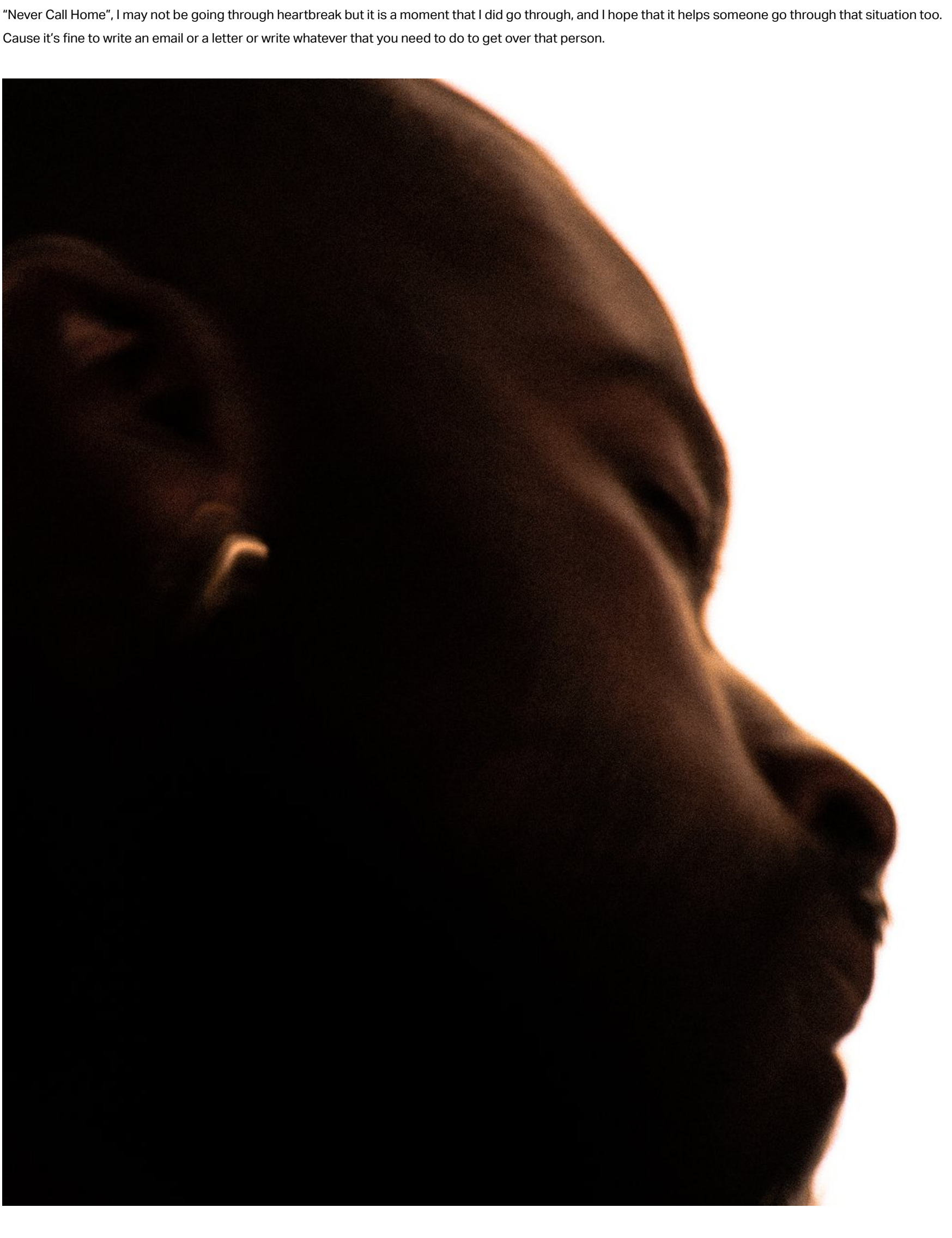
Rasharn: That was the first time that my heart was broken, genuinely. And I remember there was one piece of advice on probably Reddit, but it was like write an email to them and don't send it, but get it all out. So, I did do that, and that's why it says, "I wrote you an email, forever and always in the subject line, too pussy to send to you, I'm just hoping that our souls end up realigning".

Tayler: Ohhhh, cause I heard that and I was thinking… I don't know maybe you've run out of words.

Rasharn: No bro, that's a real moment. This song that has come out now, is probably like the most on the head that I've been.

Tayler: Have you ever written something and thought "nah this is too personal or too bait, I can't put this out."?

Rasharn: Yeah, and then I've quickly withdrawn that. I know that with "Blunder" I was really anxious to release that; it was really really personal to me. Even with "Never Call Home" I was like this is really personal, this is an actual experience. But then I was like, I'm calling for the people who listen to my music to be open and be who they want to be because that's exactly who you should be. For me, I have to stand by everything that I've written. It's not about being too personal at all. I want people to understand that the music I'm creating and the songs that I'm writing is a direct version of me. At whatever point in my life, at the time when you hear "Never Call Home", I may not be going through heartbreak but it is a moment that I did go through, and I hope that it helps someone go through that situation too. Cause it's fine to write an email or a letter or write whatever that you need to do to get over that person.



Tayler: Do you have a certain design philosophy that influences the way you approach music? Are you methodical and logical? Or do you do whatever comes to you?

Rasharn: I'm very carefree in the studio. But then in regards to how I release it and how it comes out, that's when I'm very methodical. It's all about the longevity of the situation, I want to be able to work with everyone that I've worked with for a very long time. It's like what you were saying to me about my merch shoot. We want to make sure that at whatever point, we're still doing our best. And it's about making sure that we continuously do that and apply ourselves regardless of how many eyes are on the situation. I know that when I do not apply myself fully to releasing something, I don't feel that satisfied resolution. From realising I don't feel that way, I just apply myself every single time I release something. I give my all because at that point I can then say, I really sat there for 75 minutes in that video completely still, just blinking my eyes because we wanted to get the shot right.

Tayler: [Laughs] I don't even doubt that that's what makes it funny. I can guarantee that happened.

Rasharn: [Laughs] That's what I'm saying. I know that you Tayler, are going to do everything in your power to create the best image you can possibly create. I know that as a fact. So, when I see something and I see it great, I'm like "yeah, that's Tayler". That's the level of dedication that I just want to make sure I consistently give. At whatever point, whether I see the fruits of my labour or not, I know that I at least gave my all every single time.

Tayler: Not a lot of people can say that. Especially not on a day-to-day basis. Some people have off days, but the intention is there. Even when you are doing things like taking breaks, the real ones are sitting there "I probably shouldn't be taking this break. What could I be doing?" It's a struggle, but it's worth it. One thing that drew me to you initially — and don't get too gassed.

Rasharn: [Laughs] I'll try not to.

Tayler: Is your personal style.

Rasharn: Oh, thank you very much.

Tayler: Cause when I saw you commented on a Shift post, I clicked on your page and I was like "oh, who's the stylist?" —no stylist credits. Clicked the next one, no stylist credits. I was like okay, this guy thinks he saucy. I was ready for the Balmain tracksuits, the Giuseppe Zanotti's, but nah.

Rasharn: [Laughs] Really?

Tayler: No no not at all, never that.

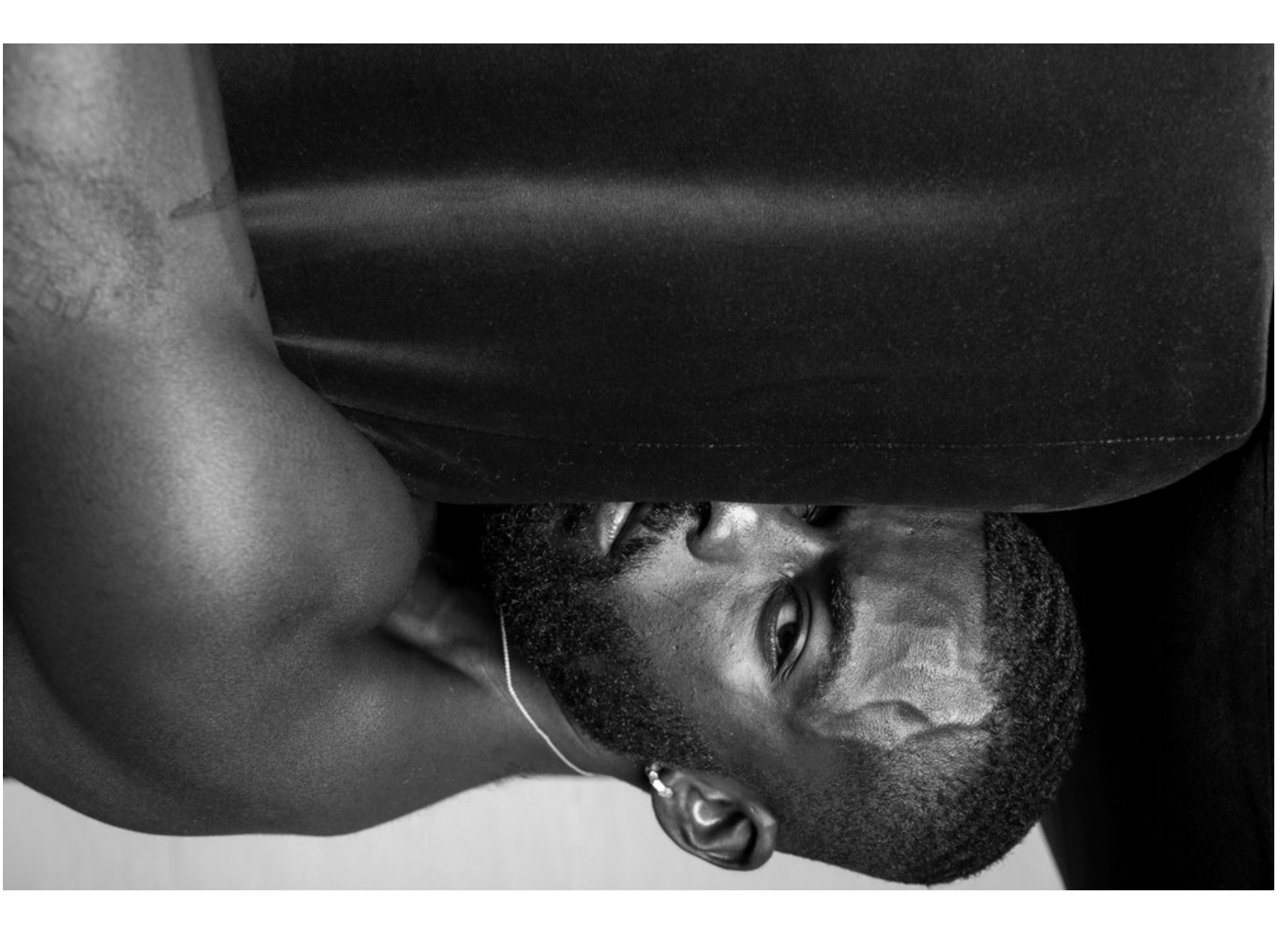
Rasharn: [Laughs] The new Balmain collection I actually really loved some of the pieces to be honest.

Tayler: I've not! But I doubt those are the pieces I'm talking about - I'm referring to the big double B's on the front. You make a lot of references to fashion and design in your music, especially in "Demons" where it's like "when I die bury me in Miyake, can't mess with no bitches in Versace". [Both laugh]

Tayler: How has your personal style evolved over time as you've grown as an artist?

Rasharn: I want to quickly make a note of that line. Growing up, Versace wasn't something that was really on my radar. You wouldn't catch me in Versace. But at the same time, I'm just a person that really likes subtle designs. I like form and silhouettes, and different things. I have a pair of Versace shorts that are amazing. I wear them and I love them. I think that comes from a humorous space because it's not something I lean towards. But I do appreciate what they've done.

It was my good friend that told me at one point when I was pretty reserved in what I wore, but I was interested in different designers and different types of clothing and silhouettes, that said to me "you know you can wear anything, you can pull off anything." I couldn't even tell you what my style is, I would just tell you that it's range because I wear everything, I genuinely will. Whether that be a tracksuit or avant-garde Rick or Yohji, or Ann Demeulemeester; different kinds of brands that are more anti-fashion that some people would be scared to lean into. But I'm like "yo, this is a part of myself that I really enjoy." Even from new collections of British designers that I love and are friends, Maximilian, Blerriot and like Bianca Saunders. Feel sexy. Feel comfortable. I'm about that. I'm about people really experiencing life in the way that they want to experience it.



Tayler: Movement seems to play a role in communicating the ideas and feelings that are a key part of your music. Is that something you had to learn, or something you feel and it comes out?

Rasharn: I'm not shy with the camera, I like being in front of the camera. I'm a performer. Anyone that I look up to, whether that be Prince or Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, Luther Vandross, they are performers. When they step in front of the camera, or when they step on stage, they're moving. They don't give a damn what anyone thinks of their movement. So to me, when I step in front of the camera, I'm just going to move. I just feel as though when you are able to move your body in certain ways that don't feel necessarily normal, it then allows people to see a different side of your personality through the picture. I started to lean way more into it after I had a conversation with one of the guys at Crowns and Owls just before we did the Blunder shoot, and they were like "You just move. You should lean into that." And I was kind of skeptical and they were like "You should have the confidence as the man that you are to know that just heightens the performance for anyone that's viewing." And as soon as they said that to me, I remember I was like "ok cool, I'm gonna lean into this."

Tayler: Now that Covid is lifted, you've got your first headline show coming up. What is the best live show experience you've had?

Rasharn: The best experience. [Pauses] That's really interesting. I opened up for JMSN at Village Underground, the end of 2019. I think it was August the 30th, 2019. I just gave my all to that performance. By the end of it, I think I was giving so much that I came off stage and my voice…I just had to rest it. There were people there that were my friends, or people that heard of me in some capacity. There were only two songs out at that time: "Warm in These Blue Jeans" and "Hiroshima", so there wasn't much out. But I got on that stage and I just said I'm gonna give all I can give and just sing my ass off. And I remember mid-way through the performance my mom finally turned up, and I saw her push through the security guard. Right by the stage. Filming me. and I was like wow. How lucky am I to feel so alive on stage in this way, and have my mum right there cheering me on? The person that put me through all the singing lessons that I ever got and all the different things that ended up making me into the artist that I am today. And that was one of my favourite moment's bro. I just felt like something else happened and I was just like, this is what I was born to do.

Tayler: I was going to say the next question I want to ask is, was there a specific moment where you were like "yeah, this is it", and you just told me what it was.

Rasharn: Yeah. [Laughs] It was, it was that. That's what I wanted to do.

Tayler: And I think that's just one thing you've got to be grateful for. Some people go through life and they don't ever have that moment. And if it takes you 26 years, 55 years, 92 years, then it takes you that long, man. But I think we're both very lucky to say we've found those things that make us feel alive — at least for now. It could be something else in 4-5 years and we're like "yo, what the fuck was I doing at that time with a camera? With a microphone? I really just love looking after animals."

Rasharn: And that's fine.

Tayler: Exactly. But nah man, I appreciate you taking the time to talk to us.

Rasharn: Yeah man, thank you.

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