

"Make good work that you want to watch and listen to every time" - Malinda Reese and Nick Pitera Talk Independent Music

When was the last time you watched a music video on the likes of MTV or MUCH? How about the last time you first heard a song by tuning into the radio? Doing such things seems a lifetime ago now that we have the likes of YouTube, Spotify and other platforms that allow us to access music with just the click of a mouse.

While some may be reminiscing about those days, it's hard not to be in awe of all that's changed. The music industry used to seem a daunting and near impossible thing to break into, but it's now not necessary for a musician to "break into Hollywood" in order to make a name for themselves. Through the likes of YouTube and TikTok, creators are able to upload original songs and covers, allowing them to make a name for themselves on their own terms.

We spoke with [Malinda Reese](#) and [Nick Pitera](#) to learn more about the process and what it's like to be an independent musician in the digital age.

"I first started posting back in 2007 when YouTube was still a very new platform," says Nick about his beginnings on the platform. "My first video was a contest entry and I had no expectation that anyone would actually watch it. As that video started to gain a bit of traction, I [posted a 'one man duet' with myself](#), covering 'A Whole New World' from Disney's *Aladdin* and singing both vocal parts. That video went viral and suddenly provided me with a musical outlet and platform. From there, I continued posting music videos and started navigating my way through the business!"

Many creators got their start after a video of theirs went viral. Back in the late 2000s/early 2010s, YouTube and online video was in its infancy, with the majority of those using the site uploading whatever tickled their fancy, and content was often filmed on low quality webcams. It was a time when the wider world couldn't predict the phenomenon the site would become, nor did anyone realize just how important a tool it would be for those wishing to pursue careers in the music industry.

"My goal as an artist was always to tell stories and I wanted to figure out a new way to do that," explains Malinda regarding why she decided to use YouTube to share her music. "For me, music and video are completely tied together. I see a song as an experience: the album art, the visuals, the video, the campaign around it [and] the story of how it was all made. I see all that as inherently part of the song, and YouTube in combination with other platforms allows me to create that experience."

One of the main reasons why these two have been able to continue to share their work online is due to the incredibly tight knit communities they've developed over the years. As any creator will tell you, having an audience of dedicated viewers who support your work is invaluable and can make what you're doing even more worthwhile.

“I wouldn’t be in this industry had an audience not jumped on what I was doing when my first video (that I made as a joke) went viral,” says Malinda. “Especially in my [Patreon community](#) and Discord, I feel like I have a team of people [who] want to support whatever I decide to do creatively, even if it’s a little different than last time.

“Having a following is a beautiful gift and I don’t think I’d have the confidence to fully jump into my work if I didn’t have that,” she continues. “That’s not the most comfortable statement to make, but it’s honest. People might think, ‘*Well, you should’ve been making videos just because you love it, not because you had a following.*’ And my response is, ‘I don’t know if I would have even thought to do it in the first place, and I’m so glad I did.’ They’ve definitely shaped my creative journey for the better.”

Nick’s sentiments mirror Malinda’s, with him citing his viewers for helping him realize it was possible to pursue his dreams. “I grew up assuming music wasn’t [going to] be in the cards for me and YouTube provided a path I never thought possible. I couldn’t be more grateful for those [who] have tuned in and continued to do so over the years!”

Having such a close and personal relationship with their followers has not only helped Malinda and Nick to build their confidence, it’s also allowed them to feel comfortable asking for input regarding their content. Nick shares that he often combs through the comments of his videos and takes video suggestions from those who support him on [Patreon](#), while Malinda frequently collaborates with her supporters, having created a whole series about the process.

“It’s really fun to collaborate and allow people to feel like they were part of something, whether it’s a lyric they contribute, actually playing an instrument or singing on a track,” she says. “Ignoring that as a musician seems like a wasted opportunity, so I lean into it as much as I can.”

This type of interaction with and inclusion of the audience in their work speaks to the freedom the two have, and it’s one that extends far beyond. There’s something to be said about having full creative control of your work, and it’s this freedom that appears to be the biggest difference for Nick when it comes to being an independent artist, as opposed to being signed to a label.

“I love knowing I have control of everything as an independent artist,” he shares. “There is a lot a label can bring to the table, especially from a financial and connection standpoint, but I do feel there are avenues to succeed on your own. It just takes a bit more initiative.”

Like the rest of creators, Malinda and Nick have to take the logistics of YouTube and its algorithm into account when uploading their content. While many let themselves get consumed by the numbers and the unspoken rules of when to upload and how long a video should be, Nick has learnt to not let the algorithm control what he shares with his audience.

“Since I’ve been around for quite a while now, I’ve seen the algorithm change many times. I’ve learnt to not let it consume me. There are times I attempt to navigate it, but, for the most part, I focus on creating content I’m happy with and excited to share.”

Malinda points out that YouTube has started to fall behind in several aspects that actually hurt those looking to build a name for themselves using the platform. She feels it “doesn’t have as symbiotic a relationship with music as it could have” and suggests the site may be “giving up on raw creativity that boosted” it in the first place. She references other platforms like TikTok, which she views as “beautifully integrated and highly collaborative” and as being the “best place” for musicians to be at the moment, given how freely it lets creators share their content and followers to directly interact with it.

Given all this, what’s some advice these two would give to those looking to upload their own music and content online?

“My advice, especially at the beginning, would be to not focus on the numbers,” says Nick. “It’s an extremely saturated market and if your only goal is attention, it can be a very hard road. Hunker down and focus on your craft. Trends change every day, but if you stay true to yourself, you’ll be much happier... Regardless of the view count.”

Malinda, while also promoting the importance of community, agrees with this sentiment.

“Don’t forget to ‘do the work’, as they say. Releasing music and making videos can come with a lot of analytics and gaming algorithms, but if you get too lost in that and let it derail your creative interests, your priorities aren’t straight. Make good work that you want to watch and listen to every time and those who like it too will come.”