

It's interesting to ponder what drives the creative process of music and art. Where does it come from? How does it feel? At its root, emotions are being transferred into a piece of art, or musical notes, and somehow, somehow, they have the ability to affect us deeply. It's the ultimate form of communication, having your deepest emotions displayed; laying it all out there to be viewed and interpreted by all. This interaction connects people together, regardless of ethnicity, sex, language or disability. It doesn't matter who you are, just as long as your open and willing to witness and experience the special bond music provides.

Artists and musicians often describe a connection between escape and entering their zone as being a catalyst to their creativity. My partner, Conor, and I decided to ask three very creative people their views on this connection and how it affects their work.

I've known Ben Mandeberg, local musician and band mate, for over five years, beginning when I first met him in 7th grade. Ben and I, at the time, weren't that great of friends, just merely acquaintances, until one day I ventured over to his house to have a sleepover. We walked into his room and there was a purple Strat next to his bed. Since I play drums, I was intrigued and asked what he could play. "Jimi Hendrix," he said. I thought no way, but he picked up the guitar and started playing "Purple Haze," solo and all. I was amazed. We continued like that for a while, me quizzing him on what he could play, and him answering every question I had. That night was the first time I realized Ben had the gift of music.

Ben now, has been playing the guitar for over 8 years. He's 17 years old and has grown in everyway possible. At first sight, Ben looks like the typical musician, long curly hair down to his shoulders that has never been brushed, pale skin like he's never seen the

light of day, t-shirts with outrageous designs that hit you in the face, and a personality to back it all up. Conor sat down with Ben one night and quizzed him just as I did, about his interpretation of his place of escape and the zone. ¹“I feel like music is so based on interactions, you know, it’s you and your audience, and the whole point is that you’re also your own audience. Even if you’re by yourself at 12 o’ clock playing guitar in your room, you’re still trying to please yourself. The whole point is, it’s satisfaction and all it comes down to is satisfying, and I guess you could call that refreshing and I guess you could call that some form of escape,” said Ben. In the daily routines of life, it’s usually very frustrating and hard to feel fulfilled after being stressed with work and various problems. For Ben, whether there’s an audience or not, playing his guitar gives him a feeling of satisfaction he couldn’t achieve without playing.

Ben feels the zone is all about connecting with people. ¹“Well, it’s really just about human interaction when it comes down to it, you know, you can just connect with people on such a different level musically than you can, I think, with literature, or anything visual like film or photography or anything else really, just because it’s all so cognitive and it’s such a different, unspoken kind of interaction that you can have.” What we found with Ben is that both his place of escape and the zone are all about interactions, even if you’re just with yourself. To him, escaping and the zone are bonded together through emotional, unspoken feelings and connections within other people.

Eric Taggart, a local artist out of Los Altos Hills, was the next on our list. When first entering his house, you get a distinct feeling that this is the place where he eats, sleeps, and works. It’s definitely worn in. As you keep wondering around, you can notice

scribbling on the walls, parts of baby dolls, broken canvases, and broken guitars; just cluttered to the brim. You can just picture Eric walking around the house running on impulse, doing whatever he pleases. His house serves as his personal art studio.

²“I think of it as being kind of like meditation or psychotherapy or prayer in that it’s a place for me where you really get to really meet yourself. It’s kind of like a quiet place or a sanctuary where you can really kind of be alone with yourself and God. So, yeah, in that sense it’s a really unique experience and a powerful experience and you could say maybe a self-actualizing experience,” he says. Eric is talking about art. He feels at one with himself, and his art is just an expression of his emotions. Just creating art is Eric’s escape. Eric also connects other aspects of his life to his art. ²“So kind of my goal or a thing that art does for me now is the more I kind of explore myself as an artist the more I see that transfer into other areas, like I’ve become really interested in quantum physics and astrophysics, kind of weird stuff , and not so much the math side of it as much as the theory and to me it’s like there’s something incredibly artistic and creative about those things and working with all my different mediums I think kind of sheds light on all these other fields of study like science become more interesting to me and exciting to me and math becomes more interesting and literature , you know I can make more connections and I see some of those connections coming out in my artwork and I see my emerging interest in science and different things like that actually fuel my artwork so that you begin to see some of those themes so there’s kind of this cycle where my art informs all the other areas of my life and then as those areas become richer they inform my art.” Eric’s escape is about finding himself as a person and how to grow as an artist.

The zone for Eric is very similar to his escape. ²“You definitely lose your sense of time, you know, I’ll be down in the studio for six hours and think that it was like thirty minutes, I really will like lose my concept of time, just kind of letting yourself go into the process and materials you’re working with and letting your mind go wherever it wants to go and create.” According to the book, “Finding Flow,” many people experience the feeling as if time does not exist. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of the book, says that consciousness in “flow,” or the zone, has no room for distracting thoughts and irrelevant feelings because you are completely focused on whatever you are doing. Distracting thoughts and irrelevant feelings, meaning the concept of time. So Eric in the zone is so focused on his art, he escapes; he just drops everything and lets his emotions flow.

The next interviewee was Aldo Noboa. Aldo is an interesting man. The first thing you notice is his hair; it resembles a dying Mohawk, buzzed-like hair all around with a few strands of hair at the top of his head that somehow evaded the razor. Aldo also has the wise eyes of a thousand-year-old man, you can’t tell him anything because he already knows everything. When I first walked into the room, he had a presence much like my favorite rock star, just a feeling of awe washed over me.

³“I am a musician, I am a music teacher, I’m part of a national music program that is a business and my company title is Chief of Knowledge, which, I consult on all things pertaining to curriculum, culture within the schools, and musical details,” he calmly said. Aldo is the leader of the San Francisco branch of *The Paul Green School of Rock Music*; a national music program teaching kids how to play music. The book, “Finding Flow,” also talks about how the pursuit of an individual’s goals, shapes who they are destined to

be. I asked Aldo about this. He told me that he is a teacher because of his quest to explore his previously unanswered questions about music. So, I asked him how he escapes because his passion and love is so closely linked to his job. ³“It may sound corny, but, what’s crazy, and this can go in as part of the answer to the last question, there’s nothing to escape in this realm. You know what I mean, like, if I were cutting fish for a living, then my escape would be music or whatever, but I do music for a living, and there’s nothing to escape,” he answered.

Aldo’s theory on his zone is quite different, he finds a connection between his exploration of meditation and his idea of the zone. ³“Meditation is a broad word, but I’m referring to the actual practice of breathing and mediating, whether your focus is Zen or whatever, but its meditation, breathing, and learning how to control your energy. This zone that we speak of is the experience of being completely in the moment while being completely thought free. A lot of the practice of meditation is to relax yourself and constantly focus on your breathing, while trying not to entertain any thoughts, while trying to explore what’s considered nothingness, which is considered on human terms impossible because when you try to experience peace or quiet, all you notice is that nothing is still, and that’s a good spot, but I find that zone to be the musical equivalent when I’m in the throws of the best parts of playing music, I’m not doing anything I’m just playing, I’m completely in the moment, I’m not thinking, I’m not worrying, I’m not concerning myself with several hundred people in the crowd, I’m not even necessarily concerning myself with my musicians. I’m just there, we’re all just there and we’re making something in the moment, and to me that is the zone and its also where I’ve

channeled most of my meditational exploration, it's all now through music.” Aldo’s idea of escaping and the zone couldn’t be more different, but there is one similarity, his quest to explore his unanswered questions.

Our interview reflects our subject’s individual and unique interpretations of escape and entering the zone, while revealing many similarities. Ben, Eric, and Aldo, all describe their music and art as vehicles for transformation, their passion, curiosity, and commitment fuels this process into the zone; a suspended, spiritual place where their creativity feels only the moment and its emotional freedom.

With Ben, both his escape and zone are about personal connections, within himself, and with others. Eric sees his artwork much like a prism, reflecting and highlighting connections to his world and his many varied interests. Aldo, seems to have the most integrated view, that his escape and zone are at one with each other, a place he essentially resides full time.

So how do we best describe this opaque concept of musician and artist escaping into the zone? Words are inadequate. These personal journeys of discovery and expression are revealed by the work itself. Paint to canvas, notes or rhythms provide the best insight into this mystic process of escaping to the zone.

Bibliography

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Escaping to the Zone

A look from three different perspectives

By: Evan Arnold