



By Ayla Tesler-Mabe

Paying Homage & Pushing Forward

While I was born and raised in Canada, I am fortunate to come from a family that has roots in cultures (and music!) from all over the world. My father was born in Chicago and spent most of his childhood in Argentina before moving to Canada. My mother was born in Chile, moved to Spain with her family at the age of five, and then eventually to Canada.

I grew up surrounded by music from so many different places yet have somehow always been drawn back to the guitar. While I love exploring any instrument I can get my hands on, the guitar has always been the instrument with which I've felt the most profound connection. Naturally it is a bridge that, for me, has created an almost intrinsic bond with the music of the past.

Now, the use of the word "almost" in that sentence was intentional and I'd love to expand on why.

In 2016, a video I posted to YouTube went viral. It was a guitar cover of Led Zeppelin's "Since I've Been Loving You," and since that day I've been the focus of hundreds of strangers' unsolicited advice on how I should spend my time making music. I was suddenly and fatefully tasked with the heavy burden of bringing back rock at the very tender age of 15. Don't get me wrong. I am beyond honoured to have this responsibility bestowed upon me and it is certainly a dream I would love to incorporate into my career; however, I don't think that faithfully recreating the rock and roll of the past will be what moves music forward, or honestly reflects the world we live in today.

Paying Homage

Soul. I sit here writing while listening to Alice Coltrane's early '70s masterpiece *Journey in Satchidananda*. The hypnotic drone of the tanpura, the almost ruthlessly suave character of the upright bass, and Coltrane's adventurous yet simultaneously ethereal harp provide the perfect backdrop to write about my feelings towards music on the most spiritual level. This music makes me feel all that I love about being alive.

Stevie Wonder, Jimi Hendrix, Joni Mitchell, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Santana, B.B. King, Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin, James Brown, The Beatles... This list leaves room only for those who are the best of the best, yet I could keep listing qualified names and it would stretch on for several pages. Please also notice that they are not all guitarists. The art that this incredible group of master creators brought into the world decades ago has left behind such a legacy that it still inspires and reaches the depths of a young soul in 2020.

For years, I misconstrued what this truly meant. In the tradition of your average self-professed, close-minded music aficionado, I was probably guilty of also perpetuating the obstinate narrative that all good music was dead, and that art would never progress unless we went back to the ways of the past. What good was a song if there wasn't a six-minute Jimmy Page-esque freak-out solo thrown into the middle?

Like a lot of new songwriters, I have spent the last few years trying to write the most authentic '60s garage rock or '70s soul track I could, and lately, I've started to realize that there is no way to move music forward by recreating the warm glow of nostalgia. What is being accomplished if the song itself is quite literally built from the ashes of a song we've all heard before? So, I've now arrived at the part of my journey where I know it's my responsibility to not simply imitate what these great artists did, but to take all that I've learned from my musical heroes and try to innovate new ideas that reflect the fact we are actually alive in the year 2020. And while I've certainly put in many thousands of hours, this has only illuminated for me firsthand just how much I don't know. The journey has only just begun!

Pushing Forward

My current philosophy lies in the notion that we shouldn't forget all that past masterpieces teach us about art and human nature. One of the most beautiful aspects of music as an art form is its transparency – even the most selfish masters share everything they know about their craft as a musician through their playing and performances. You could very easily spend a lifetime trying to accumulate the tremendous amount of knowledge of what has already been done, but it should invariably be done with the intention of using such a skillset to create music for other people to listen to. Music and all art are inescapably created by an artist for an audience.

I am beyond thrilled when people pick up on the fact that I have utilized a Stevie Wonder-inspired dominant 9 (Sus 4) V chord, or can hear the clear Eddie Hazel influence in a guitar solo I've laid down on a track, or appreciate the nod to *Pet Sounds* in a vibraphone part I played.

Nevertheless, I've realized that I want more than anything to write music that I know no one has ever heard before. It would be an honour to be in some way part of a new generation of minds making that happen, and I can't believe how lucky I am to have found accomplices in this task: my fantastically talented and forward-thinking Ludic bandmates.

Instead of dragging the music of 2020 back to the guitar-driven glory days of 1970s classic rock, why don't we bring the soul, groove, and spirituality of the past to our present and future – and with it, the electric guitar!