

Places of Escape

By Conor Tiffin

Forward

Everyone needs a place to escape. A place where they can relax. A safe haven. And especially in a time when people are so completely overtaken by their careers, a space to step out of that environment is thoroughly needed by most people. There are many ways people do it - many perform some type of physical activity, some meditate, and others even use drugs or alcohol to escape. But in this book we chose to focus in on two forms of escape that aren't as typically looked at: art and music.

I had always known what it felt like for me to become entranced in music, and more recently, I've become more interested in trying to find escape through visual art, but I never knew what exactly other people got from it. I wanted to know why people chose to create art or play music over other things, and how they felt when they were in the middle of that. I wanted to know what purpose that activity had in their lives and more importantly, I wanted to understand the impact of their activity in their mind.

We began this documentary with the idea that these artists would be escaping out of everyday life to find comfort, but through talking with these different people, we realized that's a major generalization of artists and musicians, considering there are so many. What we did find, however, is that although these people are all participating in totally different activities for totally different reasons, the common factor there is the fact that these people are at some point, making that leap from their everyday lives to an escape through their form of expression. And through this realization, we decided we would find the similarities between all these different people's activities, and find what escape is, where it is, and how it is done for each of these people.

The people examined in this book allowed us to peer inside a very personal side of their lives, and they shared with us their thoughts on some of the most important parts of things that mean a lot to them. For that, we thank each of them for giving us that so that others can understand what escape is, and realize the strength and power these forms of expression can have on people. This book is dedicated to you.

Chapter One: Ben Mandeberg

I walked into Slim's expecting the same old show. A power chord here and there, some jumping up and down, and maybe even some moshing. That sweaty, moist 'guy' smell hung in the air, probably leftovers from the many metal and hardcore bands that had been playing previous to the time I got there. The crowd wore that familiar shade of black I'd become so familiar with after going to countless shows, but little did I know how truly different this show would be. As A Glass Gesture walked onstage I raced to the front, ready to take pictures of my first subject: Ben Mandeberg.

Ben is a seventeen year-old guitarist who's been playing for a solid eight years. More recently in his music history, he's been playing guitar and singing for the local band A Glass Gesture. It's easy to tell that he's a musician when you see him, in fact, it's hard to miss. With brown hair down to his shoulders, a pair of purple pants on and a

spontaneous personality, he's not someone you'd forget easily. He laid out his ideas nicely for me on what music really means to him, and what he gets out of it. And in doing this, gave me a piece of the bigger picture I was looking for: why the arts provide a way for a person to leave everyday consciousness - escape, if you will - and what's so appealing about that escape to the artist.

'It's really just about human interaction when it comes down to it. You can just connect with people on such a different level musically than you can, I think, with literature or anything visual'just because it's all so cognitive and it's such a different, unspoken kind of interaction that you can have.? To him, music is so much more than just a catchy chorus and plays on Myspace - it's a state of mind. The connections that he has and makes when playing music are indescribable, but they are still the reason music means so much to him. 'It's like trying to describe love or something. It's just there, and it's human nature. It's rhythm and people need rhythm in their lives. It's continuity, and they need something to fall back on, they need some kind of force to hold them down, and a lot of the time that can be music, just because music, I think, a lot of the time makes people's lives see more real to them, just in the sense that people relate to music and it's comforting, and people can see something in their own lives in the music, and it makes people aware of themselves.?

Music is Ben's place of escape. But that's not to say he's alone - other people escape too, many times just in completely different ways, and for completely different reasons. However, he's making that escape into another state of mind at some point, just like the others.

Chapter Two: Jamie Taggart

I rang the doorbell to a house with a great view. But the house didn't seem so special. It was old, crusty, and had a dirt driveway leading to the front door. And even though the house wasn't so pretty, the creations and ideas on escape that laid inside were amazing. Two young and married artists, Eric and Jamie Taggart, lived there. And after waiting for the usual thirty seconds for the door to open, I was let by Jamie, who teaches art at a local elementary school.

Jamie isn't the traditional artist: she has long blonde hair and wouldn't stick out in a crowd, But her views on how art allows people to escape are personal and unlike many others. She feels like art's escape is similar to therapy: that letting out all your inner emotions can relax you and aide you mentally. 'I think that art'can'be a form of therapy. Whether that be a way for them to express anger, or frustration, or joy.? Clearly, this feature of the escape is an important factor for her when creating art.

The fact that art is so enjoyable for students shows how natural it is to escape through creating art. Being an art teacher, Jamie sees kids creating every day, and she feels like it's clear why it's so enjoyable for them: because they are escaping their usual closed-minded thinking patterns that are so common in subjects like math and science. 'I would say what makes art unique from other subjects is just the freedom that's given in art to really explore and also to be unique.? It's more than just a quick break from multiplication , it's the only subject in which you are truly free, and yet structured too. This unique

combination gives kids exactly what they need, a break from the stresses in their day and in other words, an escape.

So where is Jamie's escape? It's the place that she goes when creating a piece of art that relaxes her. It's the therapeutic side of creating art. And even though that escape is totally different from that of other artists, it's still just as relevant for her.

Chapter Three: Eric Taggart

I walked into a room that I figured used to be a pool house. But what I saw inside that room was nothing that I had ever seen in any average pool house. There were doll body parts on the ground, separated and loose. There were scribbles on the walls, mounds of old canvases, and old, broken guitars. If you didn't know that Eric Taggart was an artist, you probably would find this room frightening, but the truth is that it's the opposite. This room is a studio. A lab where Eric Taggart reveals his inner emotions, thoughts, and feelings to himself, by channeling raw feeling into his artwork. For Eric, this place is a jungle gym - a playroom of sorts. This place is the very room in which Eric makes his escapes.

Eric's definition of what escaping through art does for him is quite simple, but through its simplicity is so incredibly important to his life. 'I think art is a way that I process a lot of my feelings and emotions. I work with what you might call troubled youth- kids with disabilities, mental health concerns - things like that, so it can be pretty intense work and I definitely see when I look at my artwork after it's done, I see that I've processed a lot of my emotions and my thoughts and feelings about those kids and their lives in my artwork, and so I think it's a way to kind of let out all that stress and tension and work through it.? A prime example of escape. Eric uses his artwork to channel that raw emotion that he has into something great. Not only does it relieve those feelings that he has inside of him, but it actually allows him to use those feelings to do something productive. For Eric, art blesses him with a truly needed escape.

The differences between artists and how they view and experience their escapes is an amazing aspect of the subject, and Eric's views are no exception. 'In a sense I feel like flow, for me, is like a form of prayer, and it's a way of being really in touch with what's going on inside of me and kind of really in touch with my surroundings and the materials that I'm working with.? Eric can capture his environment through the zone he reaches in his escapes, what he refers to as his 'flow?'. This statement goes along with those of other artists, a common theme between them being that they have a definable zone where they feel most productive and leave reality completely on some occasions. Eric also feels like his artwork 'takes on a life of it's own' on some occasions, another common factor between artists and musicians escaping into the zone. This sense of how art ceases to be consciously created definitely seems to go along with losing track of time, something Eric relates to greatly. 'You definitely lose your sense of time!' 'I'll be down in the studio for six hours and think that it was like thirty minutes, I will really like lose my concept of time??

Eric's place of escape is achievable most easily for him through art. In this place of escape, he experiences a serious loss of time and feels in touch with himself and the

materials and area around him. He uses this escape as a way to vent emotions and thoughts that otherwise, would be left to boil inside of him. But even though his escape may take place differently than other artists, and he may get to that place in a different way, all of those artists are still getting there, in the end.

Conclusion

'This place is a home, it's a landscape, and it's safe to stay in. But this place can't be driven to, and it doesn't have an address. You'll find this place somewhere inside your mind, and you'll know when you've been there. This is your place of escape.?

People are creative at heart, and one amazing part of creativity is the fact that no matter what sex, race, or age one might be, art and music are two creative places you can always go to relieve yourself of whatever problems you're having or whatever joy you're feeling - they're an opportunity to possess total freedom. Because of these reasons and many more, people have created art and music for all time, but understanding why people today are still doing it today lies in this very subject - places of escape.

Through examining different artists and musicians and how they escape individually, we were able to come up with a commonality between all of their escapes. Each person, although escaping in a different way, eventually makes a leap from everyday consciousness to an alternate form of consciousness. When there, they all experience different feelings, but the similarity between them is that in some way, that escape helps them cope with the normal side of life, and this is what keeps bringing them back to that escape consistently.

Citations Mandeberg, Ben Nathan. Personal interview. 18 Mar. 2007.

Taggart, Jamie. Personal interview. 21 Mar. 2007.

Taggart, Eric. Personal interview. 21 Mar. 2007.