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Jack of None Interview



Avant-Garde music group, Jack of None!

Where did you all grow up? We're siblings, and we were all born and raised in Manila, Philippines.

What inspired you all to get into music? Our parents are well-renowned artists in the Philippines. Music was always a big part of their day-to-day lives, and so it became a big part of ours as well. Growing up in our house, we would watch them paint in their studio while listening to whatever music interested them at the time – everything from Miles Davis to Steely Dan to Brian Eno.

When A.G. was 13 years old, he asked for an electric guitar for Christmas, which almost immediately led to him attempting to compose his own music in bands he formed with his classmates from school. At the age of 15, he formed a band called Faust! with 2 of our other siblings. That band was “discovered” by MTV Asia and quickly signed to a major label – becoming the youngest recording artists in the country at the time.

Unfortunately, the band's tenure with the label was short-lived. Disputes

over creative direction following the release of its debut album led to the band investing in an 8-track recorder and creating the “My Secret Identity” EPs, which have historical significance in the Philippines as the first recordings by commercially signed artists to be given away for free on the Internet.

Soon after, the band would dissolve as its members decided to pursue other interests and prepare for college. Creating music never stopped being a passion though, and a lot of the knowledge A.G. had acquired would be passed on to Maxine and Julian in the years that followed.

How did the group get together? Our love for music and the passion we have for its creation have always been our “common ground” as individuals with varying tastes and interests. They are things tightly woven into our fabric as siblings -- things that have always been near the core of our relationship with each other.

Jack of None was an experiment to see if we could continue to make music together despite living on opposite sides of the world by using online collaboration tools. It was also an experiment to see if we could leverage digital distribution platforms and other technologies that were disrupting the industry at the time in order to find an audience for our creations.

We’ve been figuring things out as we go. But so far, it’s been a very rewarding experience!

What is a songwriting session like for you? Jack of None’s creative process usually starts with a musical composition by A.G., which is used as the foundation for a new track. Not everything he works on is a good fit for the band, but he knows the beginnings of a Jack of None song when he hears it. Usually, it’s a piece of music that’s “the right kind of strange” or something he considers innovative in some way.

The recording is sent to Maxine and Julian, who react to what they hear and feel by recording their own parts on their computers. Ideas are bounced off each other in emails and live chats using tools like Slack and Google Drive.

Maxine’s art and poetry are known to be explorations of the darker aspects of the human condition, and this comes through in her lyrics and

vocal ideas as well – often adding a new dimension to the track, setting its theme and solidifying its overall personality.

Julian adds melodic flourishes with his guitar, which are often in stark contrast to A.G.'s purposely dissonant passages.

We iterate until we're happy, or we determine it just isn't working out, in which case we never hesitate to stash it and move on to something else.

What inspires you to create? As corny as it might sound, it often feels like we're just giving form to something inside that's dying to come to life. When we're not creating, that thing eats us up on the inside and we feel unhappy and unfulfilled. When we're laboring to give it form, it feels like we're fulfilling a higher purpose, regardless of whether it's appreciated by others or not.

What is your local music scene like? It very much feels like we exist in a "global" music scene today. But if you're wondering about the Philippine Music Scene, we think it's much more progressive than most people give it credit for... provided you know where to look (or listen?)

Before A.G.'s work took him to the United States, he and Maxine performed alongside his wife, Mica as a group called "Utakan". They joined their Father, Cesare Syjuco in touring the country – performing everywhere from city slums to schools to high-brow art venues in what would come to be known as "The Electric Underground Collective".

Anybody who was fortunate enough to experience these events will be able to attest to how mind blowing and transformative they could be. Artists from around the country would participate and present their own unique blends of avant-garde music (often performed with otherworldly musical instruments), poetry and performance art.

What are some of the struggles of being in a group, and also siblings?

We grew up together, so we know and understand each other more than most. That said, we still butt heads once in a while when we want to take things in different directions. Thankfully, things never escalate past grunts, cold shoulders and sighs of exasperation. We understand that collaborations require give-and-take, and it makes it easier to compromise when you're family and genuinely care about each other's feelings.

Before Covid19, did you perform live often? Unfortunately, more than 8000 miles of salt water kept that from happening. We do enjoy getting drunk and “jamming” when we’re all together though -- usually during the Christmas holidays.

Tell us about your latest project. "The Purpose of the Moon" is a collection of 7 very personal tracks that explore the 7 stages of grief -- from denial to acceptance. It's significant as our first collection of music since 2017's EP "The Tattle Tale Heart", which was awarded "Best EP - Eclectic" in the 16th Annual Independent Music Awards in New York City (March 2018).

All tracks were written and recorded during quarantine -- between the months of May and August 2020. Like all of our previous releases, the EP is the product of online collaboration from 2 separate locations -- Manila, Philippines and Chicago IL, USA.

The tracks were written during the process of grieving. They are presented to the listener in the order in which they were created, so it feels like they chronicle the grieving process in a very organic way. That's something we weren't conscious of during production, but something we're very proud of today.

What can we expect from you in the future? There's no telling what the future might hold, but if we have our way, we want to keep doing what we do. We hope that that leads to expanding our repertoire, building a stronger following and discovering new avenues to bring our creations to life.

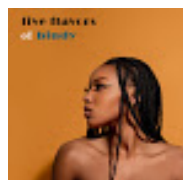
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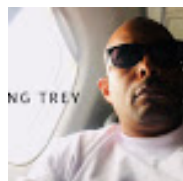
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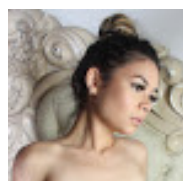
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