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*This publication is under the faculty advisement of Emmie Whorton and Brad Wilson.

BRUINTUNES

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH
TOO FAR FORWARD



AND

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Mental Health in Entertainment: Cristi Williams

Written By Kiely Popowski
(Photo Provided by Shading the Limelight)



There is no question that the entertainment industry lacks mental health resources. Artists and entertainers have become more open about their struggles, but many still don't know how to be proactive. Stories of interventions and crises are too common, and-

-support remains too scarce. To combat this, Cristi Williams created Shading the Limelight (STL) in 2008 to challenge the industry's stigma around getting help. Cristi has over two decades of experience in the entertainment industry and holds a Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) license, among many accomplishments. She unexpectedly entered the industry through her daughter, Hayley Williams, and her band Paramore. The time on the road inspired Cristi to make a change. Bruintunes Magazine had the privilege of sitting down with Cristi to hear her insights on STL's mission to protect mental health.

STL has existed for just shy of 20 years and strives to equip entertainment industry professionals with the mental wellness skills needed to maintain a balanced, healthy life. They focus heavily on the preventive side of mental health, meaning their process gradually phases clients out. In our sit-down, Cristi explained it this way: she first meets weekly with artists, managers, tour managers, and other core team members. Once the team has checked in and growth has occurred, it shifts from weekly to biweekly to monthly. These three phases include collaborative sessions that provide in-depth feedback throughout the process. This unique support approach sets STL apart from other programs. Cristi's background as an educator at various levels helped her foster meaningful spaces. She specifically highlighted that she conducts her sessions interactively rather than through standard talk therapy. A safe, encouraging space for her clients is key to their growth.

The Pendulum of Fame is a tool artists can use to regulate themselves and is officially trademarked. The concept is simple: the pendulum constantly swings between two extremes, with shame and entitlement as common examples. What stood out was how Cristi explored the idea in depth.

She explained that it is used as a tool to communicate an individual's definition of spirit and higher power. It aids in decision-making about healing and successes in both career and personal life. The Pendulum helps balance emotional regulation and routines. The resources gained from it help weigh it down, since it will never stop swinging, as Cristi explained to us. The heavier it is, the more likely it is to become grounded in the middle. We got to talk more about some warning signs of being ungrounded, swinging too much to the extremes. Obviously, each artist experiences life differently, but the general red flags to watch for include isolation, withdrawal, moodiness, panic, etc. Cristi stated that leaning on inner circles, who will likely notice these signs first, will be crucial to pulling the artist out of the extremes.

Cristi also spoke to mental health myths, areas for improvement, and misunderstandings within the industry. The biggest myth Cristi pointed out was that artists over 30 don't need the same support as younger artists. People assume they can handle it on their own, but the opposite is true. The more success you have, the more complicated decisions become. Cristi emphasized how cancel culture's toxicity adds stress for artists. She also reiterated how important it is for companies to provide mental wellness resources to artists. This would encourage safe spaces within the workplace and combat the stigma attached to therapy. The big misunderstanding we touched on was surrounding privacy. Cristi noted that she has seen more boundaries being broken when people approach celebrities in public. More awareness is needed about the appropriate environments for this behavior. It was enlightening to learn how mental health professionals experience this industry.

STL is open to any entertainment industry professionals. No matter where you are in the industry, there is always room for support. If STL can offer your team anything, contact them through the form on their website: https://www.shadingthelimelight.com/.

Cristi Williams is also a professor in the Media and Entertainment Industries department, teaching both Social and Emotional Intelligence and Entertainment Wellness and Development. These classes challenge you to get to know yourself deeply, and as she says, what you put into the class is what you get out of it! Keep an eye out for any course openings or updates on STL.

Jae Stephens and the Key to AUDACITY

Written By Cash Bourgoyne

(Photograph by Rolling Stone Magazine)



Earlier this week, Bruintunes president Tucker Purvis and I had the privilege via °1824 and Universal Music Group of attending Jae Stephens' press conference for her newest LP AUDACITY, out September 25th. A fusion of dance, R&B and pop, the album generated a community long before its release.

Since being introduced to Stephens' work, I have thoroughly enjoyed the singles and was personally very excited to be at this conference. Many of the songs are playful ("Attaboy!") and use some clever wordplay, ("Sugar Trap") but even the most upbeat tracks have a sort of ethereal, almost melancholic quality to them. In my own experience, this is a hard balance to strike as a songwriter in any genre.

AUDACITY, Stephens tells us, is both a collection of songs and a figurative yet recognizable place, a city based-

-on the "courage to demand." Authenticity and self-actualization are critical to the record. Interestingly enough, however, the introspection of Stephens as an artist on the level that AUDACITY reaches does, in fact, precede the album. 2025's TOTAL SELLOUT was a key point in the canon that established Stephens as an artist whose image is as singular as it is beloved. Her press conference was full of fans praising the songs from that album.

I had the opportunity to ask Stephens about the emotional dynamics between the songs and how she maintained the balance between them while working on AUDACITY. Stephens told me that the answer lies partly in being open as an artist to writing about anything. With an open mind, she clarified, patterns started to emerge; she recalled a moment during the writing process when she thought-

-to herself, "there's a bit of a narrative here..."

It seems that another part of this same question can be answered by the fact that Stephens is both the main writer and performer as well as technically involved in the recording process, or, as she lovingly refers to herself, a "control freak". Jordyn Mayes from WAFFLE. Magazine asked Stephens about her thoughts on having creative control. Stephens feels that the key to enjoying the creative process is to "do it on your own terms" and to "force yourself to believe" in the artistic vision, regardless of the opinions of collaborators. The former is particularly important for her. She says that rushing projects creates a great deal of stress for her: "When things are rushed, they are chaotic..." This approach might be the sort of ethic you might hear from a long-standing, tenured artist, but it worked for Stephens even as she had only just begun to build her following. Since then, she has sold out several shows across North America, performed at Lollapalooza, and is set to embark on a European tour this fall.

Part of the immensely positive reception to songs like "Sugar Trap" and "Gymnastics" that I witnessed at the conference was generated by fans who recognized a certain timeless quality to the music. Indeed, even one listen to AUDACITY gives the listener the impression that Stephens is not interested in building a career based on chasing trends. At the other end of this idea, people from other-

-publications praised her work as avoiding the pitfall of reveling in the past. Wise listeners might determine that Stephens is a student of the greats -- Janet Jackson, Brandy, Beyonce, etc., but the sonic palette of this album has her signature all over it. Ashley M. Coleman of Phrasemaker asked about such reflections that people may have about her work in the coming years. For Stephens, she wants to avoid what she calls the "nostalgia fuel factory." There is a distinction between taking pride in one's inspirations and using them to inhibit one's growth.

It seemed like Stephens was, of course, happy to talk about her creative process. It was a delight to hear about it. But I would also suppose that there is a deep, unexplainable component to the way she works that the listener can only trace back to her own personal dedication. It is difficult to create a thematically coherent album that manages to span such a wide range of energies and emotions, but AUDACITY does such a trick. No part of the album will leave the listener bored.

AUDACITY is out September 25th on all platforms.

Band Showcase: Too Far Forward

Written By: Tucker Purvis

Photo Taken By: Ben Barkasi



Over the past year, the band Too Far Forward based out of Lipscomb University has been introducing their inspired take on pop-rock to fans through numerous concerts and festivals on their campus and throughout the greater Nashville area. With music that they categorize as "melodic-pop punk sleaze", they have worked to create an impressive genre defying sound that can be enjoyed by all despite the rivalry between our universities.

Bonding over bands like Tool and Reliant K, the four members of Too Far Forward started as friends passionate about music who later uncovered each other's musical merit through a series of jam sessions that led them to ultimately form a band.

After going by "Gas Leak" for a brief period, the group eventually settled on the name "Too Far Forward" after uttering the words while imparting advice as they performed skateboarding tricks across Belmont's campus. In going from fast friends to collaborators, Too Far Forward projects a free-spirited and playful attitude that firmly comes across in their music and performances.

The members explained that they "all have a different perspective on who [they] are", with each member influencing the group's sound through their distinct taste in music. With the lead singer and guitarist Abe Arthur influenced by the intricate and -interconnected guitar parts of My-Chemical Romance and the musicality of Dave Matthews Band, drummer Ezra Woods inspired by the intensity of Under Oath's percussion, lead guitarist Colin Moll influenced by the melodic nature of Americana and intensity of pop-punk, and bassist Kenzie Linsley inspired to model the driving basslines of frontman Lemmy from Motörhead, the group has developed a unique sound comparable to metalcore without the traditionally polished elements of overproduction prevalent in the genre. Despite their differing music preferences, the group shares a perspective that their music doesn't commit to the staples of the genres they take inspiration from, resulting in a catalogue where no two songs of theirs sound the same.

As friends, they incorporate their shared sense of humor in their writing and performances, often juxtaposing emotional memories with a lighthearted tone.

Too Far Forward enjoys performances where their chemistry as friends and collaborators are on full display, culminating in shows that are tight, coherent, and engaging for listeners. With heavy hits on the drum kit, shouted backup vocals, and catchy melodies, their performances are expressive and captivating to their audiences who often sing along to their tunes. Using the basketball saying, "leaving it all on the court", they start and end each show with a high level of intensity, performing-like each show is "the last thing [they] ever did". They firmly believe that what one person can uniquely do may be what many others uniquely need, and through performing, they find personal fulfilment in building connections with anyone that listens to their music.

Their songwriting process is highly collaborative, with them typically writing and consistently analyzing the core concept of each song in groups of two before presenting it to the entire band to refine its musical qualities and build their confidence in performing it as a group. The songs they write often describe events drawn from real people and experiences, morphing multiple people into single characters to better convey emotionally impactful events in the form of a story. They also often implement an element of satire in their work, especially within their song "New Year New Me" sung from the perspective of a character who flirts with the idea that a new year will change him for-better despite the mischievous acts he has committed. The quote "I resolve to stop stealing my neighbor's mail" embodies the tongue and cheek and ridiculous nature of the character's nefariousness.

Too Far Forward is currently working on recording their EP *This is a Threat*, and are planning shows from Halloween into the new year. You can listen to their live EP *Live and Really Rough* by checking out Too Far Forward's page on Bandcamp. To receive updates about upcoming shows and releases and to learn more about the band, follow Too Far Forward in Instagram at toofar4ward, and check out their YouTube of the same name!