

# COLLABORATION GENERATION

## *Interview* Sean Stillmaker

From the early indigenous tribes to the baby boomers, each generation has used music to identify their culture. Today, the Internet has disrupted that traditional classification tool as well as an immeasurable amount of other resources.

Rather than rebelling against digitalization, there are pioneering artists creating new amalgamations and discovering unique collaborative avenues that embrace this evolving eclectic cultural identity and taste.

On a sunny afternoon in Shoreditch, we caught up with London based artists Cedric Bardawil, Nick Hadfield and Linnie Zulu who are trailblazing a new convergence of music, art and culture. They last came together for their hit exhibition Jungle Fever.

Cedric, a DJ and founder of Something in the Attic, an alternative pop-up gallery exhibiting emerging talent in unconventional ways, Nick, a music producer, DJ and currently developing a record label and Linnie, a visual artist and illustrator with exotic regions serving as her inspiration, reflected on what it takes to navigate the deep waters of digitalization, art and music.

*For Generation Z, or those born post-Napster, it'll probably be difficult to imagine a world without music consumption platforms like YouTube, Spotify or Pandora. But for us in Generation Y or "Millennials" there was time we had to physically obtain music. What were your antiquated resourcing ways?*

Cedric

I was big into collecting cassettes as a kid. When we rode the school bus, we'd always be trading cassettes back and forth to see who had the pop songs and weird bits and bobs. Then when I was 15 and saw *Jackie Brown*, I had this amazing experience. Listening to all of those soul tracks; I was just blown away. That really sparked my interest to start searching out other music in all these different genres and begin collecting them.

*(Interestingly enough in the movie, the Robert Forster character goes to purchase a cassette when he was introduced to new soul music).*

Nick

My father was pretty passionate about music; so when I was a kid, he'd take me down to the local library and we'd check out CDs and tapes and go home and basically make pirate copies. Once though my sister got mugged and the police had to come around to interview her, and I remember my father being really paranoid that we'd get found out. The other part though was that I took piano lessons. So music has always been around and I never put it down.

Linnie

I miss those days! I used to love hanging out at record shops. For me, getting to know the artwork and look of

each album was so ingrained into my mind. It's a shame that the physical and visual part has been lost through digital downloads. It's all so instant, which loses out on a fundamental part of the experience.

*From the 60s through the 90s, music was predominant as a defining tool to one's identity. You could be labeled as a mod, hippie, punk, jock etc... and those stereotypical personality traits were associated with the music you listened to. What's happened to music as an identifying tool?*

Cedric

I think people are much more sophisticated now. They understand the links between music like disco, house and jazz and are willing to listen to anything that encompasses the different genres that interest them. I think today you're more defined by the places you go, the DJ you follow or the producer you like.

Linnie

There's so many genres blending, and there's generally so much choice that it's made the average person's music taste a lot more diverse. When I was younger I only socially identified people by their music taste, but actually it was interesting how it brought people together like some sort of tribe. Although it's harder now to identify peoples' styles to their music taste, that's fine as it makes more space for individuality and less space for pigeonholing.

Nick

I find the digital age a mess and much more overwhelming. It's way harder to consume music where you can form it into any sort of sense. But as a DJ it's great



Cedric (left) and Nick (right) spin on vinyl at Brilliant Corners in Dalston  
Photo by Lucas Seidenfaden



Lynn Zulu in her Shoreditch studio  
Photo by Cedric Bardawil

if people are more open minded with music. I like the challenge of trying to communicate with people who might only recognize very popular stuff. If you get someone like that to respond, dance and enjoy themselves with new music that's great. I find that way more of a challenge than trying to play the rarest records to a guy with a beard just nodding his head.

*When you last three came together for the Jungle Fever exhibition, it was a convergence between Lynn's visual art and Nick's constructed sound all under Cedric's direction. What do you think about this innovative intrinsic merger between art and music?*

**Cedric**  
We've been discussing for a while doing something more immersive and experiential. The movement of today is conceptual art and we're in a period of participatory art where you are part of the artistic experience. This kind of changes how you view art. From the beginning with Lynn's work, there are strong references and inspiration to African culture. So it was easy to decide on what the sound should be like.

**Lynn**  
I grew up in Scotland, but my mom was an artist who grew up in Tanzania. So she brought in a lot of those influences and especially into our home. From African spears, hippo teeth and crazy music, her influences were my beginning inspiration where I could use it as my own escape through my work. It was really great working together because Cedric and Nick really understood how music could complement the work. There were some themes I'd been harboring for a long time. Previously I was doing a lot of commission stuff. So it was really great being able to bring out these vibrant colors and patterns with this unique music enhancing the visuals.

**Nick**  
Her work is so vibrant and immediate. You can really respond to it with the music. While I developed the sound we had some help from Lynn's mother who gave us all these great tunes from Africa as inspiration. I also took some South American beats and natural rainforest sounds to create this atmospheric, calypso, hypnotic mood that would be an all around sensory experience. Our aim was to really create an intertwined and immersive experience with the art and music.

*Music has always had a strong relationship with moving images like movies, but there hasn't been a plethora of convergence between music and static visuals like art shown in galleries. Why do you think that is?*

**Lynn**  
I'm surprised it's not used more often. It really boosts everything in both aspects and makes the whole experience of going to a gallery or a show much more memorable. You're building all these attachments to memories with sounds; so it's much more stimulating. I understand the traditional exhibition in a plain setting so as to be more consumer-friendly and not deliver to just one type of persona, but in order to make it work cohesively, it also depends on the artwork.

**Cedric**  
I think there's a danger from detracting from the art. I think a lot of gallery owners and artists are afraid of that. But also when you're focusing on music and art, you'll find many galleries have their focus on the art rather than the sound and space — specifically on the acoustics. If your venue is not set up properly, the music will not be as complementary as it could be. But you're seeing that evolving. The new Tate Modern they're building has taken acoustics and visuals into consideration. We've gone past just seeing paintings on a wall.

**Nick**  
I think it's a misconception as music detracting from the artists' work. As long as you have collaboration with the artist beforehand, the music can be part of their work and add something to it. If you look at film, theater, fashion — music is used in all of those art forms, and I don't see why it shouldn't be used in visual arts.

*Your convergence was completely collaborative in the best possible ways. As you all continue your own artistic pursuits, what do you think about the seemingly increasing presence of collaboration?*

**Cedric**  
I think it's a generational thing. I think we're seeing more interdisciplinary artists. We've had this for centuries, artists who are poets and painters etc... But nowadays we're seeing a lot of young professionals who have day jobs who choose to pursue several other creative things. I think our generation is much more accepting of combining different disciplines and bringing mediums

together. Collaboration is the key word that's been happening for the last decade. From the ICA and NTS Radio to the Tate and Warp Records, we're seeing more collaboration. And because of this, I think we're producing a much more advanced consumer and visitor that understands and embraces these different elements.

Lynnie

I did my foundation degree, and I think all creative people have to experience it in some sort of way where you're just experimenting with all the different artistic ways of expressing yourself and finding which one works for you. I've always kind of known I'd do illustration, but I think it's definitely pushed myself into exploring different avenues like doing prints for fashion. Illustration has endless possibilities with its application; you can put illustrations on almost anything.

Nick

That's one of the things about our modern age — you have to do a bit of everything to make your money. It's a lot harder to be a pure artist — you can be; it's a lot harder, but it is possible. People today though are forced to diversify their skills more. The democratization of creativity and the ways to distribute these art forms has had a tremendous impact.

*How has the advancements in digital distribution affected your work?*

Nick

In order to stand out, you just have to do what you believe in. Rather than trying to be different, be true to yourself. Now, the record label I'm starting, Who, completely strips back persona from music. To begin there'll be a four track sampler, but you won't know who's on it. Then when the second one comes out, you'll know the DJs and producers, but you won't know which tracks they're on. White labels have done this before, but for us, it's a reaction to the age of too much information. With the ease of access you almost know so much about the

record before you even hear it. So it's nice to leave that information out and just leave the music in its raw form.

Cedric

Showing work online allows for a global audience; locally, it allows us to reach a wider audience of potential visitors. I think people still want to visit exhibitions and go to gigs. There's no intimacy in viewing work online or listening back to a recording. The idea of Something in the Attic exhibitions was always to create something experiential. For the last show we programmed over 60 hours of music to accompany the visual art — every visit was different, which doesn't translate online.

Lynnie

Digital distribution has really helped with the exposure of my work, and has led to many contacts from all over the world. The digital age is moving very fast and to be part of it you have to compete, be prolific and challenge new ideas. Tumblr is a good example of this, as you can see the huge influx of trends and fashions coming up before your eyes. There is so much out there that the imagery can become quite diluted. This is both daunting and motivating.

I think in terms of exhibitions I would like to think that digital distribution will not impact in a negative way, but will instead promote and hype shows. If people are genuinely interested in your work, they will enjoy experiencing it for real. If something exciting has been done in the curation-display and context, for example the Jungle Fever soundtrack, that makes it all the more attractive.

*Today, in order to reach a larger audience or even just market yourself, having a presence on social media is vital. What do you think about having to manage multiple digital platforms?*

Lynnie

When I was a teen I loved Myspace, but for the mere

social value, and for creating a space of self-expression. The media platforms I now use are all strongly dominated by my work and less of me as a personality. As I'm a very visual person, platforms like Tumblr and Instagram have been the most effective, as I like the work to do the talking. These platforms are good at keeping me up to speed, like a visual diary that I have to constantly update. I think it's also a very useful exercise as it keeps you evolving faster and provides an interesting progression of your work.

Nick

Myspace was very exciting and unprecedented in its connection of musicians with their fans. Discovering artists like Arctic Monkeys and Lily Allen through the same platform as connecting with people you knew was pretty cool. I'm extremely excited by the sharing, discovering and marketing ideas, art forms and causes through social media platforms. At the same time, I'm quite disheartened by the level of narcissism it encourages, myself included! I'm generally wary of creative people with very active Instagrams, Twitters and Facebooks, as it means they're not spending enough time on their actual work.

Cedric

Social media has come a long way in the last 10 years. It now has more purpose. One of the most important aspects is transparency, being able to see who else shares an interest and is planning to attend an event. The main platforms no longer compete: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter all have separate functions, yet can be linked, which makes them manageable.

*Technology has enabled 24/7 accessibility. What impact has this had on your personal well-being?*

Lynnie

I recently rediscovered airplane mode! I love a regular digital detox. It's a shame that it's mainly when I escape to the country that that actually happens. It makes me realize how much my brain is interrupted by notifications — emails, status updates, phone calls, etc... I guess it's part of

my character to be quite fidgety and trying to accomplish many things at once. So I love it when I have moments of pure concentrated time to complete a job. Working as a freelance illustrator can be challenging as the time is spent on creative work, which is very much intertwined with the business side of things.

Cedric

There was period earlier this year when I lost my iPhone. The next day I went and bought a Nokia 105, which is probably the most basic mobile phone on the market. It was liberating not to be constantly connected. I used an A to Z map to get around London, took my 35mm camera out almost daily and made a lot of calls and two line texts. I held back from getting a replacement phone for two months, at which point I missed the practicality of leaving home with just keys and a phone. Often now I'll start the first hour of the morning with my phone off — it allows me to think clearly about what needs to be achieved during the day.

Nick

There's definitely an issue of people misunderstanding superficial digital connection with real human connection. Not only the obvious examples of teenagers with no friends and being obsessed with Facebook, but also in much more subtle ways we can't comprehend yet. I personally value the idea of having a break and connecting back with reality and the present moment. Although over time the definition of reality will change (and probably has already) to include elements of a life online. Still for now I'd be happy to throw away my laptop and phone and just stare at some clouds for a while... Fluffy white clouds, not the clouds you can upload your shit to.

*This interview has been edited and condensed for publishing purposes.*