

HOT DIGGITY

This is what you gain when you lose that competitive streak.
Or so says Chet Faker.

WORDS Elle Glass PHOTOGRAPHY Zachary Handley



There has to be a certain narcissism to whatever it is you do. That drive, that push, has to come from somewhere deep inside you. You do something because you like it, end of story. The minute you start worrying if others like it, whether it's 'good enough', is the very same minute you lose control. Or, at least, this is what Chet Faker – the 23-year-old Melbourne musician legally known as Nick Murphy – tells us. He became a near-overnight sensation when he covered Blackstreet's *No Diggity* – a song he had no real affinity for, but that he has now become almost solely known for. That's all people want to ask him about these days. That and his beard.

"It's just a beard," he shrugs. Just like *No Diggity* is just a song, and not his at that. Murphy's own music is slow, triumphantly so. Like an establishing shot that just doesn't end, it's smooth, dope; his tracks are the kind you leave on, let ride and then run through again. For Murphy, this music thing is nothing new. Sure, it might be more polished these days but it's always been "a medicinal sort of thing". He started mid-teens, somewhere around that 15 mark where "everyone develops the realisation that life isn't fair" and made good on all the inner turmoil that comes part and parcel with that. While he admits it was initially "just for fun", it's now "a necessary outlet to get things out of (his) head". "I'm not very good at figuring things out in my head but when I externalise them, (they) make more sense to me."

While he's never had a lesson, "which I thought was really cool for a while", he's had no real trouble filling his days only with music. It's what he does: he "gets edgy" when not recording or writing, pulls his songs together from voice memos recorded in half-sleep in the early hours, and is prepared to bunk on wooden floors on tour (even though "it's hard to sing and pour your heart out because you're pretty jaded when you've had no sleep"). He admits – almost a little too freely – "that things have gone so swimmingly in the last year". "It almost seems like too easy. It scares me more than it surprises me."

"My biggest fear is not being happy with what I'm doing." He pauses, digresses, eventually comes back his statement. "My biggest fear a year ago was that I'd do something wrong and just be that guy who covered *No Diggity* forever."

"It was a cover for starters, I felt like I had no ownership to that song. Listening (to it) on the radio was kind of cool, but I almost

had a bit of distaste for it." His face goes dark. "I had some real negative approaches to that whole thing. I think because for so long I'd been preparing myself for things to go wrong that when something went right I didn't really know how to look at it. Except for analytically, to try and tear it apart."

Does he still feel that way? "No," he says. And then, "sometimes". So, which is it? He takes a deep breath. "When things are going wrong, intellectualising can be really good for you because you can work out how to look at it in a positive light. But when things are going well, you usually can't intellectualise it because there's no reason when things go well – they just go well. So, the thing for me has been to teach myself to switch off and not ask 'why is this happening?' or 'what does it mean?' because you're pulling yourself out of the moment so you're actually not enjoying what's going on."

That divorce is so easy to find. The complete immersion in the moment, in what you love, not so much, he admits. Perspective, he says, has a lot to do with it.

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Not caring what anyone thinks. Murphy's younger ("and maybe wiser") brother offered perspective on the whole *No Diggity* issue. "He was like, 'nothing has actually changed – a bunch of people decided they like your music and that's great but from where I am, nothing's changed'. I don't know any of these people, they don't interact with my everyday life, I still make music the way I make music you know."

He falls to some words from Ta-Ku – a Perth artist – for comfort, guidance, whatever you want to call it. "I'm not going to be able to say what he said word for word but it was something along the lines of music not being a competition, it's an expression. And that really stuck in my head. He didn't even say it to me specifically, he just tweeted I think."

"What I want is to be able to make music for the rest of my life, which I'll do regardless of whether I'm successful or not, but I would like to be able to support that. My biggest fear is getting lost in that goal and not enjoying my life. Because they're almost contradictory – one is to be content and the other is to be in the music industry ... It's a bit of a beast."

That fear, Ta-Ku's words helped him realise, came from fear of failing; of not being as good as, or measuring up to, someone else. He starts then on what we think is a tangent, telling us about a YouTube clip of backstage at USA for Africa: "(There was) Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie, Bruce Springsteen, fucking Diana Ross, Bette Midler, Bob Dylan, everyone – Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, Chrissie Jones – literally some of the biggest names in music of all time in one room ... all just hanging around. Harry Belafonte was there too – and someone started singing that song *Dao* – and they all just started singing and they kept singing and they were having so much fun and no one cared what anyone thought – harmonising, just killing this song."

And then he hits the point: "That made me think, that should have been a room of some of the biggest egos in the world who are trying to beat everyone else around but none of them really cared. They were totally cool." They put music first, just did what they do.

"That kind of clicked with me."

"I think the artists that last the longest are not the ones who are trying to beat everyone else, they are the ones doing the best that they can do for themselves and not worrying about what others are doing." Also:

"Being supportive of others; it snowballs into bigger and better things."

Holding your cards close to your chest, he says, does you no favours. "You're only going to come up with a certain number of things; you can't sit in a room on your own for the rest of your life and come up with everything that's amazing so you're better off just going, well, hey, here's what I've come up with and sharing it with an artist that you respect. It's easier. It's less of a strain on your existence."

This is all very well and good to be inspired by Geldolf and Co, but still he finds himself slipping back in.

"Absolutely. People, human beings, have this mass generalisation, this belief, that you only learn a lesson once." The truth is you forget lessons as quickly as you learn them, but it's your values, your habits, that allow you to "keep relearning the same lessons".

"It's not easy," he says. "I don't think I'm doing it yet, it's more of a concept that I strive for. That's the idea, that if I'm constantly striving for it and never telling myself that I'm there, I'll always be progressing in the right direction." 🐾