

Musician Interview Transcript

Maa Vue

[singing scales]

[vocal warm-ups]

Peb lub xyoo dhau mus lawm ntsiag twb to
(Three years has gone by in silence)

Lub siab mob los tsis pom koj rov los kho
(This heart aches not seeing you come back to mend it)

Wb sib tso sib ncaim mus dub muag txig
(We broke up and parted in coldness)

Taug nyias txoj kev, tsis tham, tsis tshuav dab tsi
(Taking our own paths, not speaking, there's nothing left)

- Maa Vue: Culture is definitely history... everything that is beautiful, everything that we cherish, that we want to keep going and keep having for future generations.

[singing]

As I started growing up, I noticed that parents of this generation, or even people my age that have kids now, they can't speak the Hmong language anymore. It's starting to disappear bit by bit.

My name is Maa Vue. I am a singer and songwriter. I sing primarily in my language, the Hmong language, because that is a part of my culture that I want to continue having for my children and their children in the future to come.

[singing]

The most impactful time that I ever had with music, that started this journey, was really high school show choir. There was this solo song called "Respect" by Aretha Franklin. But at that time, I was really shy, didn't want to sing. My voice was so quiet. Ah, but then I was like, "You know what, let me try. Let me just try this song." I belted it out. Everybody was just, like, shocked. They're like, "Wait a minute. "Maa had this voice this whole time and she never, like, used it until now?" So that's when I started getting more confidence in my voice, since then.

[singing]

My music that I create is very easy-listening, contemporary. When you think about China, Japan, like their music fusing with mine, Thailand, Laos, that style. And then you add that Americanness in it too, and then that's the sound that I'm trying to do.

It's all vocal. This is my instrument right here.

La

La, la, la

La, la, la, la

La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la

When it comes to my music compositions, it really depends on the mood that I'm feeling. So, if I'm sad, I will write a bomb sad song. When you're into your feels, you want that song that you can relate to. So how I do my process is that, I have to ask myself, "Am I touched by it?" "Do I feel like there's a connection?" "Am I crying to it?" "You know? And, "Does it make me feel like I want to change?"

So it starts from first, get the feelings right. And then, from there, I start trying to find music that is close enough to where I want it to go. So I'll look up like demos, or, like, instrumentals, listen to other sounds and see what they're doing with these sort of feelings to convey it. And then after that, I start building the melody and the whole composition comes together. Then I go to my producers and I say, "Hey, here's a rough draft of what I like," and, "How can we make something like this happen?" And we go from there.

My parents have never seen me perform. I think with their upbringing, being from Laos, going through with the Vietnam War and everything, my dad was a CIA soldier. All they've ever known was just hardship. And then coming to United States, more hardship.

And in our culture, or in several cultures, women and daughters, we are the ones that cook and watch the kids and do all that stuff. So they've brought me up to be that type of person. They knew that I was doing show choir after school. They say that, "You know, it's a waste of time." "You're not going to get anywhere with it." "It's a dead-end." And I have to live up to that expectation of being a good wife, right? Future wife, or a good daughter-in-law.

Other people did expect me to go to college and, you know, take music courses and things like that, but no, what happened was right after I graduated, I worked two, two full-time jobs. I started asking myself, "How come nobody's asking me what I want to be?" That's when I found music again.

[singing]

That is definitely the connection that brought me and my dad back, was the music, which is crazy because I've always been hiding the music from them. But there are certain things that we need to help our parents with in order for them to get their dreams out there, which is the funny thing about my dad. He plays musical instruments and he actually had cassette tapes of his xim xaus playing. I feel like that's when he's his most expressive. Being a male, I think in any culture, it's harder for you to express yourself.

And knowing that that was his form of communication, of expressing his sadness, happiness, or whatever he's going through, to me as a daughter, I'm just like, "Wow. Maybe this is how me and my dad, we can connect."

Music, it's a universal language. No matter if it's in Chinese, Japanese, or Thai, whatever language you're speaking in, getting in touch with that, then you can see how other cultures may do their sound, or how they relate to these situations. And it's important for us to have that connection because we're human at the end of the day.

[singing]