

A Conversation with Garrison Starr
by Frank Goodman (7/2006, Puremusic.com)

In the middle of SXSW 2006, I had stopped in to a club to see a set by Jules Shear. I noticed that Garrison Starr was the act before him so I went down early to catch that, too. I'd liked the songs I'd heard here and there, but had never seen her live.

I could tell by the way she stood that she weren't no folksinger. Although he was completely in darkness stage right, I noticed Brian Bequette on guitar with a big pedal board, a guy I knew very slightly from Nashville, but thought he was a bass player... The highly regarded Neilson Hubbard was on keyboards, I knew that he'd produced Garrison records in the past, and records for a couple of friends of mine. The drummer I didn't know, but you could tell when he checked his drums real quick that he hadn't been hired for his brush work.

There was some problem with the sound system or mixer, but they blasted right through that. You only get a short set and then you're done, so there's no time to get bogged down. From the top, Garrison's presence and her singing was so true, so urgent, and so naked that I couldn't take my eyes (or my lens) off her. The ensemble was picture perfect, but in a rock and roll way. The songs were beautifully written and sung, great melodies and arrangements. And the chick was throwing down, hard. They weren't happy with the sound, but they weren't gonna let it spoil the fun. That was the night I became a fan, which I'm sure I will always be.

Especially after we spent some time on the phone recently. Garrison is a very passionate and sincere person, outspoken and not full of pleasantries. So we got downtown in a hurry. She was not happy with her label that day, and pulled no punches about it. But she gave more time to things and to people she loves, and to whom she is grateful.

The Sound of You And Me is rightfully thought to be her most revealing and emotional record to date, glad we jumped aboard here. That said, let it be known that another well-loved album of the artist is *Songs From Take-off To Landing*, we're after that as well. But this new one has producer Neilson Hubbard teamed with pop maestro Brad Jones at the console, and together they came up with some boss sounds, and a vocal signature that anyone would envy. They started, after all, with one of the best vocalists in singer songwriter pop today.

Garrison Starr's music filled a hole I didn't know I had. She actually gave me something to fill that hole with. You gotta love a person who does that.

Puremusic: Where do I find you this morning?

Garrison Starr: I have a day off here in New Orleans.

PM: What's it looking like?

GS: Well, you know, it's pretty interesting. I haven't been down here since the hurricane. And I mean, in a way it feels the same, but in another way it's kind of surreal. When you drive around and see all the damage and destruction, it's really kind of fascinating, honestly. But a couple friends of mine are going to take me over to the Ninth Ward today and see what that's like. That should be pretty unbelievable.

PM: But there are parts of where you can drive around and it feels kind of like normal?

GS: Oh, yeah, totally. We played the House of Blues last night, in the French Quarter. I'm from Memphis, and there's a tension that exists in Memphis; it's kind of a cloud of tension that exists over that city which is really interesting. You can feel that in the French Quarter, definitely. But there are all sorts of people walking around still, and places of business are open. I mean, it definitely wasn't as packed as it has been. But you can tell that the city hasn't lost its heartbeat.

PM: Who were you playing with? Were you there by yourself?

GS: No. I'm doing some dates with Edwin McCain right now. I've been out with him for the last few days. And we are going to be out together for another few days, actually. We're going to do the rest of this run through Texas. So I think we're out with him for another five days. And then I go back to Nashville for two days, and then I do some headlining dates for about a week--up in the southeast. And then I take a couple weeks off in July. And then I think there are some more southeast dates.

PM: Are you solo, or do you have some version of the band with you?

GS: Well, on this run, actually, it's just me and a drummer. I can't really afford to take anybody else out, so I'm taking him out. And it's kind of cool because on a lot of the songs it's just electric and drums, and it's just a different way to play the songs. And it's fun for me because I get to rock out on electric. We just kind of go for it. I was worried in the beginning that you'd miss the bass, and you probably do, but we have a good time. And I think it definitely gets people's attention in some of these chatty crowds--like more than just me sitting up there with my acoustic guitar trying to fight that war. I get tired of that.

PM: Yeah, because even if somebody sings their ass off like you do, and you can sing loud as hell when you want to, getting over people's chatter is unbelievable sometimes.

GS: It's tough, yeah. And these opening gigs are pretty hard, because when people aren't there to see you, I mean, that's what you get. And Edwin has a fairly sizable college

audience as well. And there are a lot of college kids that come to these shows, and the college kids are going to drink and talk. They're not there to listen to music. And that's fine, but that's just the way it is for that group. But when it's not your show, it can be pretty tough. People can be pretty unforgiving--though his crowds have been very great. There has not been a show where people have been like rude or unappreciative or unaccepting. It hasn't been that way. Everybody has been really supportive and nice. It's been great. And his crew is awesome. Edwin is a great guy, and his band and crew are sweet. So it's a great environment to be in, which is a blessing, a total blessing.

PM: And they're digging you because you're an easy breakdown on guitar, and you probably use their drums.

GS: Right.

PM: Yeah, so they're digging that. And besides, electric guitar and drums is all the rage these days, anyway?

GS: Is it?

PM: Sure, the White Stripes and all the spin-off versions thereof.

GS: Yeah, well, for me it's just another way to get out there and be able to play my music. And it's funny, I ran into one of my really good friends, and he also was my very first manager, Mark Roberts, he works for the House of Blues in New Orleans now. And we were talking last night about the music business and how much it's changed. How the business has sucked a lot of the heart out of music and art. And it's trying so hard to kill it, to beat it to death. And it's hard not to be cynical about that. It's really hard to keep loving it and keep finding the drive to do it.

PM: Yeah.

GS: I was watching a great documentary out right now that Rosanna Arquette did. I don't know if you've seen it. It's called *All We Are Saying*. It's on Showtime.

PM: Really? Rosanna Arquette is doing these cool documentaries now. Did you see the one she did called *Searching For Debra Winger*?

GS: No.

PM: That was very interesting, about what happens to actresses when they get a little older, how disenfranchised and devalued they get.

GS: Wow.

PM: That was really interesting. So I'm into hearing what this one is about, *All We Are Saying*--what's that about?

GS: Well, she talks to everybody from Radiohead to Steven Tyler, from David Crosby to Joni Mitchell, to Sting, to Annie Lennox. She even interviews the Black Eyed Peas, and a couple of other really current younger artists as well, like Gwen Stefani. But most of the subjects are very credible artists who have really interesting things to say about the business. Especially like David Crosby, what he had to say about the business was unbelievable. And then Joni Mitchell... Rosanna Arquette is an actress who loves music. So she was so interested, she's passionate about talking to these artists. She interviewed Patti Smith and Chrissy Hynde, getting their viewpoints about the way the business is and how it's changed, it was unbelievable.

And what I was going to say was about this interview with Joni Mitchell. What Joni Mitchell said is very interesting, and I completely resonated with it because I feel that way right now in my life--in my career. Joni was saying, "I just got to this point where you turn in record after record that you're excited about, and you go through the motions. You follow through with your ideas and with your inspirations, and you put them on paper, and you go through the process of letting your thoughts and passions unfold and writing these songs and making this art, and you turn it in, just to have it rejected over and over and over again." She said, "I'll get inspired, and the muse is there, I'll have an idea, but I just don't have the energy to flesh it out anymore, at least not right now in my life, because I know where that's going to go, and it's not going to go to a good place."

PM: Wow, she'd rather go paint a painting, hell with it.

GS: Right. And that's the way I feel right now. It's really hard for me to get excited about music when I have a record label that is making it impossible for me to have records at my shows. Because I'm in debt to them, they put my account on hold to where I can't get CDs at my shows. So I can't even sell my record at my shows.

PM: Wow.

GS: And I hate to say that, because I know that I'm supposed to be this supportive cheerleader, like, "Ooh, everything is great."

PM: Yeah.

GS: And I guess what my point is, it's just more and more of a struggle for artists to be able to get exposed. It just makes me think about Ani DeFranco, and how she had the right idea from the very beginning. She worked her ass off and just sold her shit out of the trunk of her car. And now she's in control, though. She's made a lot of money doing that, and nobody else owns her shit.

PM: She's a visionary.

GS: I know. And that's the thing. When I was twenty-one, twenty-two, first of all, the business was way different than it is now. The business was different. And when I was

that age I knew a little about her because a couple friends had turned me onto her, but I didn't get it. I didn't have that business mind. I didn't know what any of that meant. But she knew. I just feel like she really had this drive and she's got this great business sense. And I mean, more than anything, she just wanted to do it her way.

PM: Right.

GS: And I just wish that I'd had the self-confidence at that age to want the same things, and also to have management and business people around me who could have encouraged me in that way. But we were all stuck in that model of "throw it against the wall and see if it sticks." And to have a lasting career, that model just does not work, not anymore.

PM: That model is so broke now.

GS: It is. I mean, just even in terms of being on a record label and having distribution, none of that stuff really matters that much anymore because of the internet. And also just because of how much money it actually costs to manufacture a CD. You can manufacture your own CDs and sell them at your own shows and make a lot more money than you make when you go through a record label. And let's face it, unless you're Gwen Stefani, your records aren't stocked in stores like that, anyway.

PM: Right.

GS: There might be two or three copies stocked in the store, and then once they sell out it takes a couple weeks to reorder, so people are going to go on to the next thing that they heard on the radio. I don't mean to sound like a bitter old hag. It's just interesting to me where I am in my life right now, and where I've come from, and how much I've experienced in this business. I've seen a lot of people come and go, and I've seen artists like me fall through the cracks. And it's frustrating. It's frustrating to kind of be caught in the middle of that sort of dichotomy about the business: how it used to be, how it's changed, and what it's morphing into now. Some of us are kind of in no man's land.

PM: And to have that feeling going on, and to have your account on hold, et cetera, when this last record you made is so good--

GS: Thank you.

PM: --that's a cryin shame.

GS: It is a cryin shame! And what I've decided is that I don't care. I'm going to talk about it now, because I think people ought to know the way it is. People ask me all the time, "Man, I looked for your record in the store, and I couldn't find it." Well, it's because my label is not supportive of this project, that's why you can't find the record in the stores. So if enough people get upset about it, if enough people feel like they want to hear my music and they're not hearing it, then maybe enough people will take it upon themselves to go

investigate, or write the label, or email the label. You know what I'm saying? I don't have anything invested to cover their ass. It's like, "Hey, you know, you're not going to support me, hell with you! I'm out here working as hard as I can."

And if I don't feel supported, then what do I have to gain by saying that everything is great, and everybody at Vanguard is so great and we're all great friends. They're just like every other record label, they want to make money. And it sucks, because I've talked to so many people that were making records in the '70s, and it was just a different time, man. People just loved music. People loved music. And don't get me wrong, there are some really good people at Vanguard. I think they're nice people, I do. And there are some good people there. But in the end, it's a record label. It's a record label and the bottom line is the dollars. It's the dollar sign.

PM: More and more I talk to really, really great and singular artists who just came out of a major into a smaller label and spun into "Damn it, I have to do it myself. I'm still with my manager. I spent X a month on radio promo, and I hired a publicist, and I got an angel investor, and I'm off and running, and hell with the rest of them."

GS: Exactly.

PM: The David Mead approach, for instance.

GS: The what approach?

PM: The David Mead, that's what he did. [see the interview with David in our previous issue]

GS: Absolutely. You know who else is doing that is Roger Clyne and the Peacemakers.

PM: Really?

GS: Yeah. They used to be that band The Refreshments?

PM: Yeah.

GS: They're doing it themselves. They're absolutely doing it themselves. You can do it. And that's the way the business is going.

PM: Usually when it's done best, there's somebody back there with X-amount of dough to make sure that--

GS: Exactly.

PM: --"Okay, we got a budget. We only got a budget for this year, or we got it for this year and next year, okay, great. Now let's put all these building blocks in place."

GS: Right.

PM: And for a person like you who has put out a whole mess of great albums already, and has a lot of people out there who think she's really great, there is such a person out there for you, as you know.

GS: Yeah, totally.

PM: So I challenge them to step the hell up.

GS: I do, too. And I appreciate you saying that. It's just tough because on tours like this, where you're opening, and you're getting \$250 a night, I mean, that's not much money when you're talking about gas and hotels and taking somebody out with you, and I mean, doing everything yourself, when you're not getting tour support, like me. It's hard to make that work. You don't make money, you just break even. And on this record, just because I've gotten so little financial support from Vanguard, I've gotten myself into a hole-- because I took the full band out for a month and a week around the release of the record. It's just tough.

And it takes a while. That's why I'm touring so much. I really want to build my base up like I never have. That's the missing piece in my career. I'm just really getting out there and beating the pavement, and building a base. Dave Matthews did that, those guys went out and toured their ass off and built up a sizable fan base and then got signed, and then just grew from there. That's a wonderful model. Talk about visionaries. I don't know if they knew what they were doing, but they did it in a really great, stable way. And that's the piece that's never happened for me. When I was on Geffen I was getting great radio airplay on *Superhero*, and if the label hadn't imploded, that might have been a really successful album.

PM: Right.

GS: But if I had been touring like crazy on that record and connecting the dots--because we had great opportunities with the radio thing. That was a great thing for me, and it really helped, and had I really gotten out there and connected the dots touring-wise, I'd be in a different place today. I would be making more money, and my touring schedule wouldn't be so crazy. But thankfully I have a booking agent who's doing a great job, and a manager who's doing a great job, yeah, they're keeping me business-busy so that I can, you know, get out of this hole and really get to a better place.

PM: Who books you?

GS: A girl named Laurel Deppen at Silverleaf Booking. She's great. She books Michelle Malone and the Moaners, and she books a band called Limbeck. She's awesome, and she's twenty-seven. She's on fire. She's got her own company, and she just does a great job. People like working with her. And so that's been great.

And I have a manager who thinks I'm an undervalued artist, and he really wants to see me get to a better place and have a lot more shows. His name is Matt Cornell. His partner is Dave Bartlett. They manage Mavis Staples, and they just took on Anders Osborne.

PM: Wow. Where are they out of?

GS: They're out of Boston. They have a company called 525 Worldwide. And they have a couple other smaller singer/songwriters out of Boston as well. They're just really passionate, proactive guys. It was a Godsend that they came along. They have a lot of ideas and that's what I needed. I needed a manager who would step up and help me build my company, which is something that I never knew how to do before.

PM: You know, I'd heard your records and always liked them, but until I saw you at SXSW recently, I didn't really realize how great you were.

GS: Oh, thanks.

PM: I've really got to see somebody play. And that goes back to building that fan base thing, because it's not every artist who actually can get on the road and deliver. But you are one of those people who can.

GS: Yeah. Well, I appreciate you saying that. I mean, it's been interesting for me, because I really--on this record I really--I sat down with the label and told them--I was just like, "For me, it's really important to present this record as a package, the way it is, and get out there." Because that's the thing I think has been missing for me, like in releasing records and then going and touring, it's like--and I'm sure that a lot of other artists make this argument as well, but when you release a record, and then you have to go out and tour just solo acoustic, if somebody comes and sees you for the first time, well, that's what they think you and your record sound like. They think that you're an artist that tours with your acoustic guitar. Which, in the grand scheme of things, if you're good, does that really matter? Probably not.

But for me as an artist who just made a record that sounds a certain way, I would love to be able to go out and present it the way that it sounds. And that's the one thing that I've never been able to do consistently on any record, is go out and tour behind the record with a band for six months or a year, or consistently go out and really show people what it is I'm doing.

PM: Yeah. I mean, you're not a folksinger, you're a rocker.

GS: Yeah. And a lot of people don't understand that because they've never gotten to see me play with a full band.

PM: Right.

GS: I'm able to do that in the southeast, close to home I'm able to do it, based out of Nashville, and do it that way. But I'm not able to do that in New York City. I'm not able to do that on the East Coast, where you really have to spend money to keep people out, and keep renting vans and all that stuff. I will get there, I know I will. But it's challenging. I'm just fortunate now that I have a manager--or two managers, but the main person I work with is Matt. I'm just lucky now that I have a manager who understands where I need to go, and understands how we need to get there. But it's just going to be a process of getting there.

PM: And the other model I'm seeing all the time now from a handful of good artists is the satellite band thing. It's like, well, I have these four people in New York, I got these three people in Seattle...

GS: Yeah.

PM: Richard Julian is doing that, and David Mead is doing that, and this person, that person. It's really hard as hell to plug it all in, but over the years you pick up a couple here, pick up a couple there. That's another good way to do it.

GS: You're right, if you can make that work, that's just another way to help out financially. And whereas I used not think so much about the finances of touring because I used to think, "Oh, well, whatever, what's \$200 in the whole grand scheme of things?" But now I think, "Ooh, \$200 is \$200."

PM: Yeah.

GS: Now I start to look for opportunities to really cut corners. For instance, we're staying with this friend of mine that I just met whose mom and dad came to see me play in Athens, Georgia. And her mom became a huge fan. And it was like, "You should meet my daughter who lives in Florida." So she and her husband drove down to the Tallahassee show from Athens. They also had to do some business there. But they drove down, and their daughter drove over. And we became friends, and now she came over to New Orleans, and happens to have a friend who owns this condo, like right down the street from the French Quarter and that's where we're staying for two days, which totally helps us, and we don't have to pay for hotels for two days in New Orleans or anywhere else.

That's another beautiful thing about meeting people over the years, and making friends and playing shows, because people want to help you out. They want to support you. And that's kind of something that fascinates me about the road, and people, and how the world works, and really, when you put it out there to the universe that you need help, and you put out there--not to get new-age-y on you, but to put it out there to the universe what you want, and what you feel that you deserve, and where you need help, you find that you get that help.

PM: Yeah.

GS: You find that somebody is looking out for you up there, and you get that help. And those little things not only give you the ability to continue--or they give me the ability to continue to go on, but they also encourage me. They also show me that hey, there are people out there who care. There are people out there who care about my music, who care about me. But also, there's a world that's going on out there. There's a life of people doing their thing, and reaching out to other people, and living and loving. And there's bigger stuff going on than just Vanguard putting my account on hold, or how many records I sold in Spokane, Washington last week. Or how many people showed up to the gig last night. It puts thing in perspective.

There's a bigger picture out there. There's a bigger world out there than just the music business, and people's egos and finances, and people wanting to be in control of everything. It helps me to enjoy the moment more, and go, "Man, this is pretty cool." You know?

PM: I mean, who would have thought that James Taylor would have come up with the thing that summed it all up, "the secret of life is enjoying the passage of time."

GS: Yeah.

PM: [laughs] It's just never been said any better than that.

GS: Yeah.

PM: It's amazing on this record what you and Neilson did by pulling [co-producer] Brad Jones into the mix and spreading the project out in many ways.

GS: Thank you. Yeah, we wanted to do that. Neilson and I really wanted to do that record on our own, but it just wasn't the right time yet. We had done some demos of the songs, and neither one of us felt like they really turned out good. And I think that kind of put us in a place where we didn't know what to do. We wanted to get a third person in who was going to be objective and be able to really sort of just come in with a completely different approach. And Brad was the perfect person to come in and do that. We'd talked about talking to Trina Shoemaker, and we discussed talking to a couple other people. But the Brad Jones thing just made so much sense because he didn't have anything going on at that moment. I don't know if he was looking for a project, but he wasn't working, and he was in Nashville. And I really wanted to make the record in Nashville. Neilson lives there, and now I'm there, too. So it all came together at the right time.

PM: And along with Brad comes a whole stable full of cool characters.

GS: Absolutely, yeah.

PM: Had you worked with Pat Sansone or Pat Buchanan before?

[Just doing a Puremusic search on either name will bring up different things each musician has done. Pat Sansone is currently with Wilco and Autumn Defense. Pat Buchanan is a Nashville session man who gigs with a band under his name--see our recent interview with Pat here.]

GS: Oh, yeah, Pat Sansone is one of the funniest most amazing dudes. Do you know that Pat was born without a sense of smell?

PM: What?

GS: Pat Sansone can't smell anything.

PM: [laughs] Oh, what a strange thing!

GS: He doesn't know what anything smells like.

PM: You could put dog shit under his nose and he wouldn't know it.

GS: He doesn't know what food tastes like. He doesn't know--

PM: And yet he's a master of texture, musically speaking. How bizarre.

GS: Well, they say when you lack a certain sense, your other senses get stronger.

PM: You get something else, yeah.

GS: Yeah. Maybe that's where he got--but also his mom is an opera singer.

PM: Wow.

GS: His mother is an opera singer, and so that's where he got his voice from, too. Have you ever heard him sing, by himself?

PM: I've never heard him sing, no.

GS: Oh, it's ridiculous. Pat had a band a long time ago in Oxford MS called Birdy. It's unbelievable. The record is called *On The Moon*. You might check iTunes, because now that he's in Wilco, I wonder if he has that stuff available on iTunes. [I was unsuccessful at iTunes and eBay, but if anybody gets lucky, we'd like to know about it.]

PM: A lot more people are not only going to be digging on you after this record, but they're going to be digging you emotionally after this record because you put so much into it emotionally, and there's so much Garrison Starr in there that you listen to it and you say, "Wow, I dig that person!" Not just "I like that music," but "I dig that person."

GS: Well, thank you so much. That means a lot to hear you say that. I mean, we've gotten a couple of reviews that have surprised me. Like in *Paste* and *Harp*, the record got really lukewarm reviews. And that's okay, because I can dig that not everybody is going to like everything. But it was just funny that both of the reviews were by guys. And they both said--I mean, they never said anything about my songwriting or me as an artist, that I'm not talented or can't write songs. It was more about the production, and like how it translated into this sort of sounding all over the place, unfocused record.

PM: *What?*

GS: I was really surprised. And again, I'm not upset about it. I'm able to look at that from a detached place and go, "Man, they missed it. They totally missed what we were trying to do." And it's just interesting to me--that is so opposite of anything that we were intending. And when I listen to the record, that's not what I hear at all. And the fans that I've talked to, they're so into the record, and that's not what they hear, either. So it's really funny, sometimes, how people interpret what you're doing.

PM: Yeah, because it's an awesome record, and a very emotional, musical record.

GS: Yeah.

PM: Lots of times reviewers can be too young, they can be too cerebral. They can be too cool for school and just out of school, and it's just like, well, it's easy to miss it, then.

GS: And it's also dudes. Like it's not always--the way they farm out these reviews, it's not always people's thing. Sometimes people get stuck with something that they're like, "Ahhk, another female singer/songwriter, Jesus, I hate that." And who knows? But it's interesting. It's funny, because I really thought that when we released that record that people were going to freak out about it. And I just thought that the process was going to go a lot differently. But that's the way life is. I mean, I love this record, I think it's great. And when I get to do interviews with cool people like you, it makes it all worthwhile, it really does. It just makes me want to fight harder--

PM: Yeah.

GS: --and really work harder. It just makes me want to keep going, and keep playing, and keep writing. And that's a good thing.

PM: There are a lot of great songs on the record. You must be happy with that.

GS: Yeah, I am. And I appreciate that. Me and Brad, Neilson, all three had input into what songs were going to be on the record, which I love. We all had equal say in that, and I think the record has benefited greatly from that, from the fact that everybody got their picks.

PM: So you put out eleven. How many were in the pile when you first went in and started looking at songs

GS: There were probably about seventeen songs we were picking from. And we narrowed them down to eleven.

PM: Yeah, because you get such a skinny budget that you better just pick the ones you're going to record.

GS: Exactly. Well, that was the other thing, too. We didn't want to come out with like half-done stuff.

PM: So what was the m.o. like in the studio between [co-producers] Neilson and Brad? I don't know Neilson, but they seem like different characters, energetically speaking. Including yourself, what were everybody's studio personalities like?

GS: Well, we did most of it at Alex the Great [Brad Jones' studio in Nashville]. And Brad pretty much took over.

PM: [laughs]

GS: I mean, Brad's got his way that he likes to do things. Part of that is--I mean, Neilson does, too, in his studio.

PM: Right.

GS: But their personalities are different in that Brad is just more of a control freak, I think.

PM: I hear that.

GS: I mean, Neilson is, too, but in a different way. But Brad is very OCD, and very--

PM: [laughs]

GS: --he's got his way he likes to do things. And if you step out of his way of how he likes to do things, he gets real uncomfortable and defensive about that. Like he likes to make his coffee, and he likes to do this. And "No, let's do this, let's not do it this way. Well, how about if we do it this way?" You'll make a suggestion, and Brad will be like, "Well, okay, but how about if we did it this way?" He's really funny. He's just set in his ways.

PM: Right.

GS: Especially, like I said, in his studio, he likes to do it a certain way. So that was interesting, because Neilson is funny, I think in some ways, Neilson struggled for his place as one of the producers on the record just because Brad is such a strong personality.

PM: He's a very strong person, right.

GS: And I think Neilson really struggled for his place a lot of times. But it was good for him. I think he learned a lot on that record. And he had to stand up for himself a couple times on things that he thought. It's easy to get pushed over by Brad because he's just so strong.

PM: And then he plays the hell out of the bass. But Neilson himself is a good instrumentalist.

GS: Yeah. But yeah, being with two producers who were so musical and so arrangement-oriented--but Neilson is more controlled in his arrangements, and Brad is more like a loose cannon.

PM: [laughs]

GS: You know what I mean? He's like a cricket, or something, you never know where he's going to go.

PM: [laughs]

GS: With Neilson you kind of--Neilson is very controlled. You kind of know where Neilson is going to go. And I don't mean that in a bad way, because Neilson comes up with amazing melodies. With Brad you never really know what you're going to get.

PM: Yeah, he can go right off the wall in a heartbeat.

GS: Yeah. And I think I can speak for Neilson in that both of us learned a lot from that, both of us learned a lot from being around Brad and really just being around his arrangement and melodic sensibilities. It was amazing.

PM: What kind of a girl were you growing up, and how are you different now?

GS: I think that the main way that I'm different now is just that I'm more open than I used to be.

PM: Ah.

GS: I mean, I think when I was a kid I was the way I am now. But then as I started learning about the world, I think, and growing up in the south in a very controlled like conservative Christian environment, I think it really sucked a lot of the life and passion

out of me, in a way. It made me close up a lot. It made me go inward a lot. I didn't talk about my feelings as much. I wrote songs instead.

PM: Yeah.

GS: I didn't talk about my passions as much, and I didn't expose my feelings as much because I knew they weren't going to be accepted. And that was hard for me as a kid, because I was an only child, and I needed to be accepted. I didn't feel like I was safe enough to not be accepted. So I went inward, and I wrote songs. And then as I grew up, after I got out of those adolescent awkward years, and some experiences that I had in my early twenties and stuff, I moved to L.A., and I spread my wings a lot, and I started learning about myself and growing into an adult. And I think I've really developed into more of an open, expressive person. I don't really care what people think about me like I did when I was younger.

And that was the focus of my life and my family's life because of where they came from, too. I mean, everybody is so concerned with what people think. I think people are just mainly scared of themselves. You know?

PM: Yeah, or just really scared. Are you a spiritual person?

GS: Yeah, absolutely.

PM: In any certain way, or--

GS: I mean, I grew up Christian, and I would probably still consider myself to be a Christian, although I struggle with a lot of aspects of Christianity.

PM: Yeah.

GS: I struggle with the black and white mentality of Christianity and just the scary, egomaniacal, judgmental, self-righteous side of religion, and Christianity, specifically. I struggle with that. So I do have a strong faith, and I do have a strong spiritual life, but it's still something that I'm figuring out. And it probably will be until I'm no longer living. But I feel really good about my relationship with God today. And I feel strong in that. And I don't feel like I have to have that figured out like I did when I was younger.

PM: I don't really think there's any figuring it out. I mean, you just keep trying. But you never get to the end of figuring it out.

GS: Right, right. Yeah.

PM: It's a scary question for any of us, but what do you see up ahead? Where do you think this thing is going?

GS: Man, I think that it's going to be something incredible. I really do. I think I'm building an incredible story here. But I don't know what's going to happen next. I mean, I do know that I'm starting to feel inspired again. I feel like I'm in a good place in my business life. This past year I'm really focusing my energies on getting my career to a stable place and coming to be the president of my corporation. I've been blessed to hook up with, like I said, a good team around me, with my manager and my booking agent. But I think that's leading to good places, more self-sufficient places.

And I think that I'm going to be making a bigger name for myself this year by headlining a lot of shows. Instead of always being a great support act, I think I'm going to be my own person now, and that's good. I'm excited for my next project. I really want Neilson and I to go in the studio and just make a record together. I want us to be able to go in and make a record together and just play everything, and just go hole up and co-write songs and do the arrangements ourselves. I really want to do that. That's something that I've never been able to do with him, just me and him.

PM: Wow. It's an amazing partnership you guys have.

GS: Yeah. He's unbelievable. He's one of the most amazing people I've ever met. He's my best friend in the whole world. He's probably the person that I trust most, more than anybody. I mean, Neilson always knows that I can trust him with anything, anytime, anywhere. And he knows me so well, and he believes in me so much. I mean, it's magic when we sing together and make music together. When we were making music together in college, it was the most beautiful music I'd ever heard. And it's still what I love about music, I think about playing music with Neilson, and that always makes me excited. It gives me butterflies in my stomach whenever I think about it.

That's what music is to me, butterflies, and passion. And that's the way I feel when I play music with him. And so I feel like that's what I want to do next. I really want it to just be about me and him, and I don't care like... I don't care. I don't care about Vanguard, I don't care about any label, I don't give a shit about anybody. I just want to go in and do something that makes me happy. Like *Songs From Take-off To Landing*.

Songs From Take-off To Landing, that's the way we did that record. I didn't have any money. I just had Chris Fuhrman, who believed in me, and who was like, "Hey, we can do it on this new system called Protools." That's the way that record got made. And that's everybody's favorite record, across the board. Fans always love that record. And that's because it's real. Because don't buy into this bullshit, this formula business about the record business. Nobody cares about it. Nobody buys into that stuff. Nobody does. If you don't make a record that's true to you, people aren't into it.

And that's the way it is, because people can sniff that bullshit out a mile away. And I just think there's something cool and there's something very significant about the way that record was made, and about the way people connected with that record. And that's what I want to do on this next project, and I want to do it with Neilson.

PM: Wow.

GS: Because I think it'll be beautiful, first of all, and it'll be the story that I want to tell. I mean, he's one of my oldest friends. He's the person that I've been making music with the longest in my life. It'd just be so awesome to me and him to have that freedom.

PM: That's amazing. Well, when you get back to town, I want to have coffee with you and Neilson.

GS: Oh, Frank, let's do that. I've got two weeks in July that I'm totally off, from like July 3rd through like the 14th or something. So let's definitely hook that up. You've made my day. Thank you so much for taking the time do this.

PM: And you mine. It's my pleasure. And I look forward to seeing you very soon.