

natalie uhlenhake

2024-12-20 14:21:10

00:00:00

We welcome you aboard to Spectrum. I'm your host, Kevin Sandler. Happy to welcome Natalie Uhlenhake, who is back in town. She's from St. Henry originally. She's a musician. Natalie, thanks for coming. Good to see you. Thank you for having me. I'm so honored. Share with us, if you would, please, kind of the beginning. You grew up in St. Henry. I did. Yeah, I grew up in St. Henry, Ohio. I started playing guitar when I was about 12. Wrote my first song when I was 13. I did talent shows. I started doing the acoustic soloist thing when I was 15.

00:00:32

And so I eventually, you know, saved up my money and took the leap. I moved to Nashville in August of 2023. Let's, you know, talk about what got you into music to begin with. I mean, we all have favorite artists growing up. It's another thing, obviously, to get a guitar, right? You try to learn how to play it. So definitely, like any other girl my age, I am a huge Taylor Swift fan. Um, and, but, you know, growing up. My mom had a guitar, too. She always wanted to learn how to play, and so she would play for me and my younger brother, Hayden, when we were, you know, like four years old, and she'd sing us songs from The Muppets and The Wizard of Oz and John Denver songs, and, you know, I just thought it was the coolest thing to watch her play guitar and to sing along with those songs.

00:01:23

And so I had always kind of, like, tinkered around with hers and then actually started taking lessons a little later. I was going to say, when you first started to tinker, was it a little discouraging? Like, how do I form these chords? How do I do this? Yeah, yeah, it was difficult because I'm such a perfectionist that, like, if I wasn't hitting those chords quite right, I was so mad. And, like, just, like, if you've, if you, words. Sorry.

00:01:53

If you've ever played guitar or, you know, you play guitar, you know that bar chords are difficult. Which is hard. And like still I find little cheats to get out of doing it because I don't like it. And so like that was definitely discouraging. But my guitar teacher will tell you that like my first, he swears it was the first, I swear it was the second lesson. I was so upset and frustrated that I couldn't figure out how to do these chords and how to like switch between them. And he started playing One Bread One Body, which is a church song. And I sang the whole thing.

00:02:31

And that's when it clicked. And just from then on, it was easy to figure it out. It came easy to you, right? Yeah, for me anyway. Excellent. And then a quick progression to say that at 12, you got a guitar. At 13, you're writing songs already, you know? Yeah. Every week I would bring my guitar teacher a new song that I wanted to learn. And he would always say, Natalie, you can sing. I want to see you write something. I'm like, no, I can't write. I can't write. And then January, it would have been almost a year, just under, from when I started taking lessons.

00:03:08

January, when I was 13, that was, I wrote this song called Free Fallen that will never see the light of day again. But I brought it, and I didn't tell him I wrote it. I just played it. And he goes, this is a great song. Who sings this? Who wrote it? I said, I did. He stuck his pick in his mouth and gave me a high five. He was so happy for me. That's really neat. I know why you don't want it to see the light of day, because a lot of times when you progress, you might look back and say, what was I thinking?

00:03:39

But at least it was your start, right? Yeah. You know, everyone's got to start somewhere. That's for sure. So you talked about, you know, prior to moving to Nashville, what did you do around here to kind of get yourself familiar with, you know, performing and, you know, and all that? Yeah. So the first place I ever played was Evergreen Winery outside Coldwater. And after that. It was Gilbert Station, and just from there, it kind of snowballed. I started to get some name recognition, and I did that for like six years before I moved.

00:04:13

And you just, the words, I'm sorry. No, it's all right. I would think the first couple times you did it had to be pretty scary, right? Yeah, that was, it was terrifying. I would not talk in between any songs, and I would just like read from my book, stare at the book, stare at the floor. Nobody's going to pay attention to me. I am background music. And then, you know, now I'm playing on Broadway in Nashville, and it's like if all eyes aren't on me, I'm mad.

00:04:45

There you go. Well, again, you all have to start somewhere, right? Yeah. Not sure if it's for the worse or the better. What was that like the first time that you finally got comfortable and said, hey, look at me. I am here. Like you really started to enjoy this. Yes. Gosh. Um, I couldn't tell you exactly when, but I remember little moments where like people in the bar would start singing along to whatever song I was playing or people would get up and dance or, um, it's just like, it's validation really. It's just like what I'm doing is good. People enjoy it. And so that's a good feeling. It's fun.

00:05:21

All right. So if you would share with us what, um, you know, when you decided you

wanted to move to Nashville, what, what motivated you to do that? Obviously pretty radical move, right? Yeah. I think my biggest thing was like, if I don't do this now, you know, I was, I was 20 years old. I had no kids, no boyfriend, no like real steady job. And I was like, if I don't do this now, I'm going to regret it for the rest of my life. All right. Well, and that's a good thing because there is a window, right? They always say it's never too late, but I do think there's a window of what, when the best time is, you know, to do something.

00:05:57

I wouldn't change a single thing about me. journey so far. Let's hear about that. When, when you hit town, uh, you know, you gotta have a place to live. You gotta have a place to work. I mean, again, pretty scary here, right? Yeah, no, it was terrifying. Um, but my, me, my mom and my roommate all went down to Nashville, March of 2023. Um, and my roommates from St. Henry too, we have known each other since preschool. Um, and so we all went.

00:06:27

down together and we checked out some of the different apartment complexes and, um, just checked out the town, really got a feel for it. And we ended up moving to the West side of Nashville. Um, found an apartment there that we loved. And, um, when I, I, we both applied to dozens and dozens of jobs before we even got there and like heard back from none of them or they were like, yeah, no. Yeah. Don't, don't call us. We'll call you. Right.

00:07:00

Yeah, yeah. And so when I got there, at Tootsie's, every Saturday, they have like an open mic style audition in the back room. And so I went there and I was I think the second person on stage that day, but they invited me to what they call their Monday meeting, which is where you meet other performers and you like get to play for like the big dogs on that circuit.

00:07:30

Um, and that's how you start getting shifts on that circuit anyway. So that's how I got started. And, um, after that Monday meeting, I was like, okay, this is great, but I need a day job. Um, so I walked across the street to the boot store and I walked straight up to the first manager I could find. And I said, are you guys hiring? And they took me to the back and I walked out of there with a job offer. You know, that that's great because you were applying at all these places and when it comes down to it, all you had to do was walk in and get a little aggressive. Yeah, right. Yeah. But you know, that was I did that for about six months. And then it was, it was good. It was long hours and kind of crazy, but it was good. And I kind of fell out with the with with the Tootsie Circuit and kind of like took a break through the winter. And then I came back and I've been playing at Mellow Mushroom ever since, which is a pizza place. And it's down on Broadway. I've been playing there since February.

00:08:30

And I actually just got moved from my first, my first consistent shift that I had there was on Tuesday mornings. And then later, they added a band shift for me on Sunday mornings. And both of those as of the first of the year are getting moved to Saturday night, six to 10 and Sunday night, six to 10. So I'm getting some really cool shifts. I'm really excited about that. It sounds like we're talking to Natalie Ulin. Hey, if you're just, you know, tuning in, what you needed to do down there was obviously you get a place to live. live you get a steady job and now you got a good you know a base if you will where you can start.

00:09:04

to go out and try to try to get your your name out there or try to get the music out there yeah, and then so i've actually released two songs already um my first one sunday best came out in march i recorded it in march it came out in may my bad um and then my second one is called in the dark that came out in the end of october and i was actually just in the studio this previous monday and recorded number three that's gonna be coming out this spring these days just.

00:09:35

to kind of explain to people uh you know when you have a song recorded how do you get it out there we live in the electronic era right so when you do release it you know what platforms you try to get it on how do you make money these days on a song yeah um if you're not like one of the top people it's it's difficult um and we do live in the electronic age so i'm really not dependent on having a publishing deal or, record, deal to put my music out. I use a distributor. It's called DistroKid and it's all online. You.

00:10:06

pay a fee once a year to release as much music as you want. And then, you know, streaming numbers are really important. So, you know, Spotify, RadioSpins, Apple Music, Amazon Music, all that stuff is factored in. And basically my distributor DistroKid collects it for me and then pays me out for it. All right. What kind of exposure have you been able to get so far? Because that's got to be pretty exciting. Yeah. I'd say the biggest thing would be I got to play country concert this.

00:10:37

past year on the homegrown stage, which was a dream come true. Yeah. And how much time did you get to play? An hour. An hour. How neat was that? Did people understand the local connection? I'm sure you told them who you are. Yeah. A lot of people did. You know, my mom, my parents are both from the area and my mom works. A bank is so like. She knows a lot of people and, you know, they were both there. And so people go, oh, my God, I know I know those people there.

00:11:07

And wow, that girl looks a lot like Julie. Yeah. So and then probably 20 people from my graduating class in high school showed up and they were in the front row and they knew

every single word to the song I had released at that point. And it was so much fun to record a song. I'm sure some things don't change. You probably wrote the song at home. You record a demo, right? Like this is what the song is going to be. So what's the process of being in the studio? Like, do you know those musicians?

00:11:39

How does that work? Yeah, I'm sure it's different for everyone. I use Grady James with Studio 45B. And I think it's a little different because he plays just about everything. Like the the only two instruments that he'll hire people out for are fiddle and pedal steel. All right. Yeah. So. he does it all. And when you first come in, you do something called a scratch track, which is like a bass line. So it's just me and my guitar playing the song through. You get the tempo, you get the.

00:12:10

key, you get the feel, and then we go through it. If anything needs like a little longer break or something, we do the arrangement, configure all that out, and then you do the drums, the rhythm section, so the bass and the rhythm guitar. And then you do like the lead guitars and the motifs if you have any other instrument. This last song I recorded had a fiddle on it, so that was super cool. And then you do the vocals and the harmonies, and then you tune those and like run it through.

00:12:41

auto-tune. He has a really cool process for it. So that really keeps like the original sound there, just fixes the little jazz notes, as we call them. And then you mix and master and you're done. All right. How long was that process, like the first time you recorded a song? 10 hours. I think people need to understand that. It was a long day. It's not just you're recording a song. You are constructing a track, right? It's a construction project, basically. Yeah, that's a good way to put it. Yeah, people understand that you can have so many different tracks.

00:13:14

You can probably boost or change the sound anywhere. We need more echo here. We need more gain here. Turn this down. I mean, I can see 10 hours easily. Oh, for sure. Yeah. Outstanding. So, you know, for you, if you talk about what's next, you're just going to try to keep recording these songs, keep getting a name for yourself, right? That's the plan, yeah. So right now I need to just, I think, focus on the songwriting process and releasing some stuff.

00:13:45

I think what's next is I'm going to try pitching songs I've written to bigger artists and to publishers, try to get somebody bigger than me to sing one of my songs. I think that'd be really cool. Yeah, there's been a lot of people that obviously come, kind of got their start writing for others. Probably a great example. I don't know if you're familiar with who Eddie Rabbit was, but he wrote for Elvis. Got a couple songs out there that got him started, and then he went on and had a great career. So, yeah, it would help you to get

your name attached, right? Yeah, another probably more recent example would be Chris Stapleton.

00:14:18

He wrote for like 13 years before he ever released his own first song. He can do pretty good writing songs for other people, though, right? Oh, for sure, yeah. He gets some good money doing that. Yeah, and it's interesting, not every big artist writes. Some of them do, obviously, like Taylor, but others, they rely on others for the material. They have a wonderful voice, they can really play, but they're not necessarily songwriters. Exactly. All right. You know, for you also, when you write a song, what helps you decide this is the one I want to record? Do you get feedback from your producer,

00:14:48

and sometimes are they honest and say, try this instead? Yeah, yeah, for sure. But when I'm booking studio time, I already know which one I want to do. So I think the bigger factor... With the Nashville scene is writers rounds, which is basically an hour set at a time and you would probably have like four. And then you have anywhere from like two to four writers on stage at a time and they just play their original songs in a circle.

00:15:20

And that's a really great way to crowd test because everybody there knows they're there for original music and you can see what works, what doesn't. And you talk to people later and they're like, man, I really, really liked this song that you did. Or, man, I wasn't the biggest fan of this one. If you are open to criticism. Yeah, sometimes I'm sure that can go rough. Sometimes I'm sure you agree and then other times you're like, wait a minute, that song's my baby. I'm proud of that song. And also understand that they're not necessarily right either. Somebody else might hear it and say, that's a great song.

00:15:50

It's all subjective. Yeah, and I think we've all been there a time or two. We have our favorite songs and somebody says something negative. And we're like, hey, now, I don't know if we can still be friends. Hold on a second. Lose my number. Yeah. So maybe also to give people an idea, you know, you've talked about how hard you work to learn the instruments, to write songs. You uprooted yourself, moved to Nashville. Talk about, you know, like not only the time commitment, but as you said, you have a job, you have bills to pay, and you've got to save up. I'm sure studio time is not cheap at all.

00:16:21

Not at all. No. No, and also, you know, with that as well, have you been relatively satisfied with how the product comes out? A feeling of, you know, I wrote that. Listen to that. This is a professional recording. Yeah, it's a fun process, especially like if I look at old videos of like maybe the first time I recorded it after I wrote it, and I'm like, it went from this to this. That's so cool. Yeah, a lot of times some of the most beloved songs, when we hear the demo, we think, oh, my goodness, right?

00:16:53

I mean. You wouldn't think that could ever be a hit song, because it sounds not close to what it was. The acoustics might. not been good, they were in their living room or something, and it evolved into an epic masterpiece, right? Studio magic. There you have it. You've talked about how you're trying to write songs for other people. Maybe you could talk about how difficult it may be to get noticed. Obviously, you're not the first person to come to Nashville with a dream. Absolutely not. Putting it mildly, right? Yeah. I think you just have to know that you're bringing something new to the table, something.

00:17:25

exciting. And, you know, honestly, half of it, probably more than half of it, is knowing the right people. So just continuing to network and find the people with connections and build those relationships. I would think also that people would realize how far you came, that this is the commitment you have. You moved here. You know, you're working. And I mean, I'm sure people would respect that, too. You would think so. I mean, like everybody in that city did. So you're up against some tough competition. But I think...

00:17:56

Most people are good. And most people are willing to help the person behind the wheel. And, like, it's, Nashville has this air around it about, like, man, it's cutthroat. And it is. But, really, like, I've not met a person who wasn't willing to help somebody else. And we really are a community who looks out for each other. So, if you could share with us how people can follow you, how they can hear your music, how do they get connected to you, so to speak? Sure. You can find me on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, at NatalieUMusic, or just look up Natalie Yolenhake.

00:18:30

You'll find me. There's not many of us. Yeah. That's a good reason not to change your name. Yeah, right? You will stand out. That's for sure. That's actually a big reason why I kept it. I don't blame you. It's good thinking. And then, if you look, you know, Spotify, Amazon Music, Apple Music, you'll find me. I have two songs out as of now. That is Sunday Best. Best and In the Dark and Four Kids and a Picket Fence coming out this spring. Outstanding. We'll be listening for that. We'll be in touch. Natalie, thank you so much.

00:19:00

Thanks for dropping by. We appreciate it. Have a safe trip. Thank you. Thank you so much. If you missed any part of this program, we'll have it online at WCSMRadio.com.