

Muggs & Roz: The SELF LUV connection that set an “Eventual Party” in motion

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone and felt so connected that they're answering questions before you even ask them? Well, my interview with Roz Raskin (NOVA ONE), of the newly launched record label SELF LUV, and Muggs Fogarty, the first artist on said label- felt just like that- like a moment in time spent with old friends. These two Providence-based artists spoke to me in images, shared music-making secrets that made me long for car rides, tape players, and community; and explained how Muggs' EP “Eventual Party” came into the ether. We also talked about vocal harmonies... be still my alto heart.

Mayté: Tell me about you so that people that don't know you get to...

Muggs: Okay. Hey, strangers! I'm Muggs. I'm from Providence, Rhode Island. I'm a proud member resident of AS220, which is an incredible nonprofit art space in the city, and a member of Angels Collective, an arts collective space, where I practice bodywork, and [others] have arts offices and do tattoos... a queer space. I'm non-binary, they/theming it. I'm a poet. I have a long history in the poetry community, that's where I always begin any projects. Obviously, that [poetry] has flowed over into music has been wonderful. I've been in a couple of bands in town, but this most recent release is my first solo effort, with the incredible music and backup of my friend Shayboy, who's a local producer. We actually went to high school together and we're old friends. **Yeah, that's me; busy bee up to no good.**

Mayté: After I listened to “Eventual Party” I wrote down “poetic and ethereal.” Since it's your first solo effort, tell me about the journey that it was to make this EP. What did it look like?

Muggs: Yeah, it's a very, very COVID-specific project. Shayboy was posting incredible beats and instrumentals and just sort of reached out like, “Hey, buddy, I would love to truly just play around and have something to do, just kill some time.” I have been performing solo for a little while now using a vocal loop pedal. And so that's just like beatboxing, singing, everything's vocal, and live in the moment. So, I really wanted to work with a producer and focus on singing, vocal layering, songwriting. And not just be tight and hyper-focused on this pedal, to be more expansive. And so I loved what Shayboy was doing, using MPCs, MIDI plugins, some bass, just really interesting, kind of fun video game-soundtrack sounding textures... it's more elevated. I [thought], “Ooh, this is fun!” Like having a prompt [and taking] this instrumental, making a song with it. And we just started this nice, organic back and forth- totally online- and ended up just enjoying what came out of that process. So then taking it forward and working with a mixer, developing the sounds [even] more. There were also some cool moments to bring in spoken word, [and] a couple of songs have live looping with the pedal. It felt like an opportunity to bring in everything that I enjoy doing with a crew, a tight team, and [we] just made this really fun EP. I was listening to a lot of Robin, Kylie Minogue, Britney Spears and I was just getting in my pop bag. I really wanted a pop princess moment, the long wig (which you can see on the cover of this EP) and just getting into this fun energy that I don't always rock in my daily life.

It was a fun fantasy world to create, alone in my apartment- to escape a little bit from everything that was happening in 2020. [I'm] very grateful to Shayboy, and especially to our mixer, Zach Bloomstein.

[He] is just a doll who I had only met in person briefly one time. So it's funny... we all had to acclimate to zooms and connecting over to Gmail. It was such an interesting process, it was definitely unique to the time, and we made the best of it.

Mayté: It's kind of amazing how much you're able to do without being in the space with people physically. The connection still remains, as does the creation that happens through it... I'm so glad that we've had the tools to do it.

Muggs: I know it, well said. So going back to it you know, doing the car test- which is when something's being mixed and you're trying to make sure it sounds good on every different type of speaker. **I [was] driving around in my car and even though it's not super emotional confessional narrative music, I felt really emotional just because it's so of that time period. And all my stuff is sort of in there, like oh my god!**

Mayté: It's very personal.

Muggs: It's charged, yeah.

Mayté: I think you're the first person that I've ever spoken to that's talked about the car test. I've never heard that before!

Muggs: Maybe it's not a thing. It feels like a thing to me. Roz?

Roz: It is. It's a thing. Oh, it's 1,000%, there's always a car test baby, yes!

Muggs: And I know, Roz you're doing a proper release show for your album that came out over a year ago. I'm sorry if my timeline is off- it's elastic, **I don't know what time is anymore.** [It's] nonlinear AF. So, I hope someday we'll be able to do a proper show for this EP. But the car test was kind of my celebration, my moment to sit with those feelings and everything. Just rolling around the Prius, window opened, [thinking] well done kid, well done. **It won't just be that we'll get to have a show someday, but also my little party. My eventual party.**

Mayté: Mic drop right there. That was such perfection, what just happened.

Muggs: TM. Oh my god.

Mayté: Haha. So, are you then singing along with yourself? Or are you just listening?

Muggs: If anything, I'm attempting to do trickier harmonies that I probably left out of the mix because I wasn't confident enough, so I'm like "damn, I should have busted a little harmony on this part and I didn't."

Roz: You literally just read my mind, that is what you do. You know, that's what you do.

Muggs: I feel like a lot of singers especially would relate to that- sometimes you want to do kind of the impersonation of a song you're listening to, but a lot of times we're trying to harmonize- with varying success if you're me. That's also why we love the pedal, you just hit a button. Shout out to Roz for teaching me a lot about harmony.

Mayté: That just blew my choir singer's mind. Yay harmony! So either you or Roz, tell me how this EP

connected to the SELF LUV record label, how did that happen?

Roz: I'm a fan, you know. I've just been following Muggs' work for a long time. And we've known each other for many years, do you remember how we met? It was at high school.

Muggs: Yes! In the Smith Hill area there used to be a [place] called Holden Street Gallery, and they used to have some open mic nights. We went to different high schools with some mutual friends, and Roz performed and I think I probably read some poems. And I remember you had this like, really wild updo. And were just playing acoustic guitar. Your lyrics were just so beautiful, and you were so charming and sweet. And then once I met you, I started seeing you everywhere! **One of those things that happen in Providence as a small city. Someone will not be on your radar and then you meet them at a cafe, and then you see them in every store for the rest of your life... thankfully that happened with Rozi.** I left the city for a bit to go to school. When I came back, I started playing music a lot and transitioned from being an audience member to sharing stages and spaces more with Roz and their bands. And it was wonderful, amazing. Roz always has come through to see poets too- and is very beloved by the Providence poetry slam community.

R: Holden Street gallery! Good shit. Yeah, we've had a ton of mutual friends over the years, one of which is Lily Kendall, who I'm just gonna mention real quick because that's somebody—an artist—we love. I've known Lily since I was like four or five. And, Muggs- you went to school with her, that's how y'all met. Another thing too is that we do a little bit of singing together, we do backup for Ravi Shavi, doing some harmonizing. We've shared a lot of different spaces and then have just become friends over the years. It's pretty magical, all the ways that I feel like I know you and hearing you talk about who you are and what you make, your creativity. I'm in awe of you all the time, of all the amazing things that you make and create, and [of] your presence in the community. I feel so much solidarity with Muggs. I share a similar view of a lot of things that I really value, that I feel [are] really important for the general music community- [values that are] looking out for folks, and I appreciate that just so much.

Muggs: Also, just like our non-binary, bro, brotherhood.

Roz: Yes! Muggs is one of the first people I came out to.

Muggs: Oh my God, and I gave you a binder at Dusk! Remember that?

Roz: Yes! I mean, there's so many little things. I feel like watching your journey, as a person, just made so much space for me and for so many other people in the community to exist in a really real way. I value that so much... (Roz has made Muggs and I tear up at this point). I know, I know, I'm sorry- but it's true. Because Muggs has been very, out.

Muggs: And about.

Roz: Yes! Just in ways that I think maybe you don't even know, that people really [need]. **You allow so many of us to feel valid in a world that often makes us not feel that way. So that's real. That's real.** That is.

Mayté: That was beautiful. And I can tell we're all in this moment right now... taking it in.

Roz: Yeah! Well, and so, in terms of the music part, I had been thinking about starting a [record] label for years. And actually, I was going to start [one] right when I took off with NOVA ONE because I was in

contact with Community Records, my label. I said, "Hey, I want to start a label." And they said "you should." Then I sent them my EP and that started moving, so it was [put on hold]... Sometimes I'd just sit and think, who would I love to help bring their music out into the world? And Muggs has always been somebody who was at the top of that list. I feel like I mentioned that to you two years ago or something, in my kitchen. I said, "hey, if you ever want to put something out, I know I'm gonna love it. No pressure, but I think it would be fun to work together in that way. I don't really know what I'm doing, and if you felt like you wanted to participate in that with me, if we could just figure it out, learn together how to do it, that would be fun at some point." And then we connected during COVID; Muggs told me that they'd finished up the EP, and then it just started going from there.

Muggs: I remember that. Sitting on my cell phone and kind of sending you some of the mixes that were coming back, and just feeling really excited. Then that excitement being so amplified when you're like, "Hey, maybe we should return to that little label idea, bud." [I] just got really jazzed about it. The project itself just kind of started really organically. I didn't really go into it envisioning a final product, rollout or any of that stuff. Navigating that has been kind of interesting because most things you kind of go into—I'm learning—with a certain vision. But when this element came into it (of being released on this new label), it did start to take on a different life and become a lot more exciting, a bigger project that involved more people. So now it's like, ooh there's a music video, and a cool remix, and a beautiful tape (!), an actual thing I can hold in my hands: which, especially over the last two years where everything's virtual, has been incredibly meaningful. [To] have a real object I can hold and give to somebody and say, "look, we've made something." It's not just this ephemeral thing. It's nice to have something concrete. And so, the ability to collaborate with a label and actually make stuff has just been so cool.

Mayté: It's grounded differently when it's something tangible. I was curious, why the choice of cassette tapes?

Muggs: I love tapes. I mean, there's a financial element... records are really expensive to produce, it's very expensive for an EP, which is five songs, or at least mine has five songs, it's short. I wanted, like a small batch, a limited run of this really nice EP. It made sense to do something more cost-effective. It is a kind of project that is interested in Lo Fi sounds. I think the actual way tapes sound, benefits the aesthetic of the project.

Mayté: Roz do you want to say anything else about that choice? Is that something that you're going to do with other artists?

Roz: I can definitely picture doing vinyl at some point in the future, but I'm not sure if y'all have followed [what's happening]. It's just a mess right now, the whole vinyl situation, because it is backed up, sometimes six months to a year... Vinyl has exploded so much in the last 10 years. The boomer generation was like wait, vinyl's a thing? And everyone said "yeah, vinyl is a thing." Now Ariana Grande is selling out of vinyl. **It's that tangible piece, retro, and I'm holding the Rock-and-Roll-type of vibe.** The idea is that now it's cool to do this, all these larger label artists [who] have way more resources have now taken over a lot of the production. So, it backs up. Everything during COVID is backed up, everything is more expensive, for artists. It was so nice to be able to order these tapes, and then they came in like four or five weeks. It's just faster. The actual production of it is just a smaller thing. And so, I was thinking that cassettes would be great for a variety of reasons, one is that it is like a physical item that is so cute. I think tapes are just cute!

Mayté: The green tape is beautiful!

Roz: That was Muggs' idea! I think that it's also nice because each tape came with a download code. People can still download the music and obviously, it's on streaming services. But yeah, it just makes financially more sense for a tiny label, like something that I'm doing to start off... It was so exciting to get them in the mail. And they were looking so beautiful and I'm just so psyched and proud of it.

Mayté: Yes! I think it creates more accessibility, both in production options and in purchasing.

Roz: Something else about the tapes... it feels like in the same way that vinyl was cool, but now it's new. I don't even know what the word is, I don't know, y'all are wordsmiths- what do we say? It's like now [they're] back but they were never gone. I feel like Gen Z is really into... retro stuff, retro- meaning like the 90s. Tapes are cool for young folks, as is finding a tape player at a yard sale. Or buying an old car because that's all young folks have access to with inflation right now. You get a car and it has a cassette player in it.

Muggs: I think there is like a certain desire for a tactile experience, because so much of their experiences, even before COVID but especially after- have been really happening in digital space.

Roz: This is so real. Yes. I hadn't even thought about that!

Muggs: I've had that happen a couple of times... so I played one show, it was my first indoor show. There were some like youngish folks there hanging out, and obviously so sweet, into the set, curious about the pedal. [At the end] I said, "Hey, I got some tapes if anyone wants to take a look at this other project." And these two younger folks came up to me and they're like, "Oh, my God, I've been buying tapes. I love [them]. I still haven't gotten a tape player but I just love the way they look. I love the way they feel, even if I never listen to it. I just think they're cool." I [think] this is the way you would buy—I don't know—a weird piece of ceramics or something that has no utility, but it's visually beautiful to you. They respect it as an object, a novelty, [something] tactile. The beauty of it, the fact that it is green and it looks cool.

Mayté: Yeah, absolutely. It's valuable- as Roz said earlier, like holding a piece of rock and roll.

Roz: Yes! Also, coming back to the car test- Chaimés Parker (a Providence-based producer and musician) double checks his recordings through the car test! We have bonded over that a lot. There was this particular car (a Camry) that he had in high school that he listened to so much music on, and a big part of his new car buying process was trying to find similar speakers just to be listening to things in this way. That is the best way he's ever heard music. I drove a Hyundai for a long time and it had a system that really spoke to me too. And that's really how I feel connected to music. Driving around in that car and feeling independent, as a young person. It is a very real thing. And I think a lot of musicians do that.

Mayté: It makes so much sense! I'm in my childhood home right now and I have drawers full of tapes. My parents used to have tape briefcases filled to the max! I think there's a nostalgia- for those of us that grew up with that, and back to what we said about younger people, perhaps they enjoy going back to something that to them probably feels better, more pure.

Muggs: At the end of the day more fair; because it's so fun to see yourself up on streaming, but the reality is that they (Spotify, all of them) are really taking advantage of a lot of artists on there. Big time.

People are becoming more aware of that, and they want to support in a real way, through Bandcamp, through tapes. I had someone come up to me at that same show [and] be like, “Oh, I saw that it was up on Bandcamp, but I kind of wanted to wait till I could buy it from you in person, give you cash.” I thought, alright! People are realizing that this system of music, money and fairness is really stratified and messed up right now.

Mayté: Absolutely. It must have been so meaningful for that person to actually have the conversation with you, especially right now. There’s something beautiful about the tape itself, despite the access to digital versions of music. And the car test that I know about now, it’s also such a unique window into what musicians do, thank you for telling me about it!

Muggs: Is it like magicians though? Haha. Are you not supposed to talk about it? Did I mess up?

Roz: No, it’s special. It’s so meaningful.

Muggs: It’s church.

Roz: Yeah, it does feel so incredibly intimate. It’s like sitting outside of a friend’s house or driving to a beach at night. You know what I mean? Muggs, perhaps you identify with this in some way. I’m just thinking about this now, it’s funny to be from such a small state where you can get to so many places so easily. And at the same time, feeling the need to drive to certain [spots] instead of walking because the city is just big enough... You have to make that 10/5 minute drive or whatever, and throw on your stereo and then you’re rocking out!

Mayté: Yes! So, I want to come back to EP now. You’re clearly a poet, Muggs. I loved how the songs seemed to flow into each other, you reference the “eventual party” in the first and second songs I believe. Tell me more about your lyric choices.

Muggs: The majority of lyrics [for the EP] come out of two poems. They are actually pretty connected, which was such a fun project. When I would do songwriting with Lookers, or Ravi Shavi, it was usually this process of bringing in my notebooks of poetry writing, more narrative things, and kind of working with that and chipping that down into poppy song structures. They would always kind of come out pretty interesting because you’re starting that writing from a different place and intention, putting it through a process and getting a song out of that, I learned a lot. Shout out to Rafay Rashid, who’s a wonderful songwriter [who] worked with me to develop this... It kind of worked on [“Eventual Party”] in a similar way. In April 2020, right at the beginning of COVID, I did a writing workshop online, to just stay connected to folks. **Artistic practice, mine specifically, is so hindered by not having in-person access to community; not being able to go to the poetry slams, or get up with bands and do songwriting. It’s just tough, it remains [so], this project was tough in that way. It felt really isolating at times, [and] it was how I was connecting creatively with people.** In [writing] by myself, I was a lot more focused on vocal layers, specifically, and on how to work singing, lyrics, songwriting, without following a really strict pop song structure. There’s even moments of spoken word [in the EP]. In the second track called “Summer”, you just really get a huge chunk of that original poem that spawned a lot of the lyrics. It’s almost like an order; in “Eventual Party,” the first song is kind of the first chunk of that poem. And then “11th Hour” comes after that, which was sort of a tangential part of the writing. I didn’t make [the songs in] the order that they appear. “11th Hour” is from an older poem, and the rest were kind of from this writing class that I took.

Mayté: Got it. There’s something that I wrote down that I loved in one of your songs. You say it in

“Summer,” “the calendar is a raw mirror.”

Muggs: Yeah. It’s kind of a tongue twister. Raw mirror. That was just sort of speaking to the feeling of time just falling apart, and your hands becoming really elastic, really nonlinear. I have the hustle mindset often: that we can attribute to capitalism. And so, having that very intense forced pause, where you have to sit around and you end up thinking about your life- maybe in wonderful ways, maybe in more intense ways. **And kind of watching month after month after month, fly away and all you have is yourself. So it just felt like oh, I’m staring into time and it’s kind of staring back at me like, what are you doing? What have you done?** So that kind of intense thing, what does it say when that sort of process is happening? It’s summer now, I guess. Is that a time period? Is that a feeling? Is that where I am in my life? My age. Am I in summer?

Mayté: What a great way of thinking about that. Am I in summer? You as a human being. So, you mentioned “11th Hour,” those lyrics struck me too.

Muggs: It’s a banger. That’s my favorite song. Ah, when we kind of wrapped up I pushed away from my desk and went, “oh... this is hot!” I thought Shayboy was just so nasty on that. After having a lighter, poppier thing- to kind of go into this deeper bassier thing, and there’s coins clinking and I [messed] around with autotune, and sounded like a cold little robot. It just got so fun. We were getting really creative on that one. The way it sits right in the middle of the album and takes you a little more deeply into a kind of feeling before coming back up. It’s just sort of a nice deep anchor. And it was home for some intense feelings I was having after a friend of mine passed away. I was feeling like I had let him down. It’s kind of a nice way to not be overly revealing in our narrative in the lyrics, but still have this kind of darker sonic space.

Mayté: **I like what you said about it not being overly revealing. It’s just enough.**

Muggs: Yeah, Like, it makes you feel vibey. There’s something kind of off about it. But it’s still kind of a good jam. It was very cathartic to make... When I listen back to it, I don’t always think of my pain or my grief. I can actually just enjoy it as a song too because it’s hot stuff. I like that it plays a lot of roles.

Mayté: Definitely. It serves two purposes for you. And I’m sure more for other people, as they listen to it.

Muggs: Exactly. And that is the song we got to have a video made by my really brilliant friend and artist Jamie Rhode. We had some incredible conversations about vibes, aesthetics, some of my emotions and feelings, and what she ended up creating looked how it felt. It’s animation and... I just love it. The last cut scene is a cartoony human heart that has sad eyes, just sitting in a bathtub, and it has arteries and veins like a real human heart. That’s literally what’s in my chest. So that was amazing. And also, another awesome friend/collaborator, Caloric, did a remix of the song, which took it to a whole different, cool level: made it super dancy and bassy. And kind of chopped my voice around almost like [creating] some new lyrics. It’s been a really fun song to have all these friends and other folks hopping on with creative projects.

Mayté: Different iterations of the song, fulfilling different purposes for people.

Muggs: Totally, it’s had a bunch of lives now. I also do a version of it on my looper, which is entirely different. It just kind of keeps showing up and keeps living, which is really nice. [My friend’s passing] has been a big part of the process. If time is so funky and nonlinear, let’s talk about grief then- that shit

changes every day. It's good to have something that sort of reflects the dynamics of going through that kind of thing.

Mayté: Yes, grief does change... so before I let y'all go, where do we find you, your music?

Roz: Everything that is connected to Muggs on SELFLUV Records is on Bandcamp, and anywhere you listen to your streaming stuff, it's up there for you.

Muggs: Thank you for listening so deeply and thoughtfully. It feels really good to be heard and to be asked questions and to know that the things I wanted to land with folks are kind of landing. Sometimes when you release something the world's a little quiet or there's a lot of celebration, and then it's quiet. It's like well, what did you hear? What did you actually think about it? Sometimes there's a lack of engagement. And I'm really moved by how you've interviewed me today. Thank you so much.

Find Muggs Fogarty at:

Bandcamp: <https://muggsfogarty.bandcamp.com/album/eventual-party>

Youtube Video of 11th Hour: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=598Y8-Lcx0>

Instagram: [@muggsfogarty](https://www.instagram.com/muggsfogarty)

Find Roz Ranking and their new Record Label SELF LUV at:

Instagram: [@selfluvrecords](https://www.instagram.com/selfluvrecords)