

Vocalizing Grief: Dr. Jones heals while experimenting with Hawthorn



Kate Jones, recording as Dr. Jones; photo credit: Ryan Lopes and Leiyana Simone

While working as a nanny in Los Angeles, Kate Jones joined a drop-in chorus. She had sung in school choirs while growing up in Rhode Island and Vermont, but her newfound community traded hymns for harmonies of “No Hate, No Fear,” and choral covers of Bauhaus and OutKast. Founded to resist the fatigue of recurring protests, the group replaced rally shouts with shared song. Jones was unable to attend the political demonstrations but found similar sentiments performing at other local events, including at UCLA’s Hammer Museum of contemporary art.

Adept with a vocal range that extended from choir to a cappella and from folk to pop, Jones wrote her own music on a keyboard, guitar and ukulele in her East Hollywood apartment, but couldn’t remember screaming since childhood. At 9, Jones lost her mother to breast cancer. More than a decade later, three months after Jones graduated from Providence College, her father passed away from esophageal cancer. Silent sorrows knotted into frustration and shame.

“I had this sort of spiritual, but also very childlike, view of death,” said Jones. “I was always really comfortable talking about my parents and my loss and my grief in a really matter-of-fact way, but extremely uncomfortable in actually being able to allow myself to feel it or express it.”

Under the name of Dr. Jones — believing in the healing quality of music in general, and the voice in particular — in 2017 Jones released *Thundercloud Plum*. The six-song EP vacillates from the robust Q Division-engineered “Gold & In Style” to a banjo- and synth-laden rendition of “Gloria in Excelsis Deo” to raw cuts recorded by mobile phone. Since returning to Providence in 2019, Jones has collaborated with Laila Aukee on *Hawthorn*, a full-length in progress named after the herb traditionally used for cardiovascular support. With echoes of Markéta Irglová and the XX, Jones’s latest single “What is

Happening” surfaces her struggles with relearning to cry.

“It felt like this revelation that I was almost embarrassed by,” said Jones, “that I had made such a big deal out of these things I felt like I couldn’t do that are supposed to be natural and seem so easy to so many people.”

In her previous bands the Sugar Honey Iced Tea, Dr. Jones & the Shiners, Hott Boyz, and the Tequikees, Jones’s vocals stretched across musical landscapes, from bluegrass to psychedelic to classic R&B. With a poppier yet grounded touch to her first two singles from *Hawthorn*, Dr. Jones draws from the breakthroughs she found in therapy, herbalism, collective chorus and dance aerobics — “fiercely non-competitive,” she said — to give form to feelings.

“Songwriting and singing has always been a way for me to unload and work through some of my own pain and grief,” said Jones. “Perhaps mine can also have its little place in the larger spectrum of that musical body, that allows for healing to take place.”

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/vTjivpUnuUI>

Dr. Jones, Host, and Grace Ward play The Columbus Theatre, 270 Broadway, Providence on Tue, March 1. Doors at 7pm. Show at 8pm. All ages. \$10. Proof of full COVID-19 vaccination required.