**Behind the Prose Transcript**

**Episode 15: Songwriting 101 with Gandhi, a musician with a mission**

Length: [01:02:23]

Host: Keysha Whitaker (KW)

Guest: Nimesh Gandhi (NG)

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00:00 (KW): This week's episode of *Behind the Prose* is sponsored by Scrivener, a powerful content generation tool for writers that allows you to concentrate on composing and structuring long and difficult documents. For a free thirty-day trial and a twenty percent discount on the regular version of Scrivener enter the code PROSE at www.literatureandlatte.com. Do it before August 30th.

00:30 (Music)

00:40 (KW): Hello writer, welcome to episode 15 of *Behind the Prose* I promised you a continuation of Rachel Toor and I'm gonna make good on that promise, just not today. Today I've got a guest interview with Nimesh Gandhi. Gandhi's a singer-songwriter in Brooklyn and I fell in love with his style several years ago when I met him in New York, and I hope this interview will make you fall in love with his style as well. But before we get into *Behind the Prose* lyrics addition let's check in.

01:15 (Music)

01:20 (KW): So this is a rather somber check-in for me. I'm still at eleven and what's worse, I haven't been getting up at five or five-thirty and writing. You know why? Life. That's why. It's crazy season at my job. Do you have that time where there're a certain few weeks that take over your life. For me that's the end of the semester, and that's right now. So, that's why *Behind the Prose* has been late the last two weeks. If you've noticed on iTunes because you're subscribed and I know and I thank you and please tell your friends to subscribe too. But my writing's falling by the wayside and that isn't to say that I haven't been thinking about it. I have, and I think that's good. Amy Baker, one of my previous guests, said she thinks about her writing. She's always writing in her head, on her way to work, and observing things and actually that's how she got the idea for that amazing essay, "This Monstrous Heart," that ran in the *New Delta Review*. And it was her first try at nonfiction and she got into the *New Delta Review*, just from being observant and kind of thinking about what she wanted to say. So, I have been thinking. I'm gonna call this thought writing. I can't give you a word count, but that's what it is. I hope you're having some successes this week. I hope you've been able to get some writing done. You can still email me with your accomplishments, I'll shout you out, behindtheprose at Twitter info @behindtheprose. I appreciate subscribing on iTunes. Make sure you drop in there and give us a rating. Recommend the podcast to your friends if you have people who are aspiring writers because we have a lot of good resources within the last fourteen episodes, and we're gonna have great resources in the coming episodes as well, so. . . . Today's resource is how to be a songwriter. How did someone go from teaching themself how to play the guitar and write songs to now getting ready to drop an EP this summer playing around New York City with a band and performing collaboration shows with poets and photographers. I'm talking about Nimesh Gandhi. I met him several years ago and fell in love with his style. You're gonna get to meet him today and I hope you fall in love with him too. At the end of this show we'll go out to his title track from his upcoming EP, *Rebel On*, but here's Gandhi.

04:23 (KW): Gandhi is a Queens New York based musician named Nimesh Gandhi. He writes, produces, and performs songs of melancholy, angst, and hope. His songs beckon listeners on a journey to new worlds and alternate possibilities. I first met Gandhi several years ago when we were in New York. He's still in New York, I'm in Pennsylvania, and we met at improv at the Magnet Theater. And through connecting with him through that he invited me out to one of his shows in New York, and I was completely enamored with the sound and the lyrics. It was very thoughtful very soulful. And when I started *Behind the Prose* I thought of Gandhi to be the first song writer, performer, artist to come on to *Behind the Prose* and talk about his writing process in terms of penning lyrics and scores. So thank you, Gandhi, for joining me today.

05:33 (NG): You're very welcome, Keysha. Thank you, I really appreciate you having me on the show. I've seen the site and see who you're communicating with out there, and I feel great about being part of the mix. So thank you.

05:49 (KW): So, I usually start out asking people when did they realize they wanted to be a writer, and I'll ask you when did you realize you wanted to be a writer, in particular songs?

06:03 (KW): That is a good question. So, I, my foray into the arts came from a personal, journaling, and poetry writing that I was doing kind of in an incubator. I really wasn't initially sharing with anyone in my mid-twenties that I was doing this. And then eventually when my friends took an interest in what I was writing from a poetry standpoint I would, you know, I began to read to them, read at parties, and just became more confident in what I was writing as being both impactful to me and also to those that I was sharing it with. So, I guess that kind of where all of my creative process started, you know? And, you know, if anyone asked me now, you know, what medium do I feel most comfortable within it's actually writing creatively, you know? Particularly stream of consciousness kind of approach to writing. And so that's, you know, that's where I started and from there I began to dabble with playing the guitar and also found out I had some semblance of a voice that I could sing with, which I didn't know, you know, until well into my twenties. So I think the poetry coupled with the experimentation on the guitar and finding I had a voice and also being really inspired and riveted by the nineties rock grunge alternative music movement. I think all of those things kind of combusted or caused an explosion inside of me to really want to find my own unique writing style as a singer-song writer.

08:01 (KW): How did you transition from the poems, I mean the songs, I mean, well, a song is a poem, but like there's a craft of songwriting too. Did you study that?

08:17 (NG): That's a really good question actually. The transition was key, kind of opening a door opener to my finding my own writing style, and also what would eventually get me to a place that I was, sort of, teachable. But what I discovered in trying to move and transition my own poems to song is—I began to realize that it wasn't working, at all. And so I think, and what I mean by that is I thought going in to songwriting because I had the interest in doing it that I had written already, you know, X number of poems. And I looked at like five or ten of them, somewhere in that range, and I said, "I'd like to take these and convert them to songs, and I think that should be pretty straightforward to do." So I approached it just thinking, sort of conceptually, *This should work*. And I've learned some three chord kind of progressions and I'll now map over the poems in the songs, and it as through that co complete failure that I had to discover actually how to write songs. So I attempted to do it this way, it didn't work, and then I had to figure out how to write a song because it wasn't as easy as I thought it was gonna be, and it's from there that I developed my ability to utilize the guitar to write a song. And typically what will happen since that time and even to this day is that the music's going to come before the actual realization of the lyrics and the story that I'm telling. And if I had to look back at where I started it all I didn't start that way at all, so it's been quite a process, and actually that moment where I had that moment where I had that discovery was real key in my beginning a journey to become a songwriter.

10:20 (KW): So did you get songwriting books? Did you deconstruct other songs?

10:27 (NG): Yeah, really good question. So, I found around that time period listening to a lot of the structure of songs, Nirvana songs, Pearl Jam songs, a lot of early nineties grunge songs. And then, transitioning from there, I began to analyze the Beatles' songs. Peeling back, you know, how they structured their songs was a good foundation for me to understand how, you know, prolific songwriters, you know, created—and those guys had very structured approach, particularly in the early days, so for me as a novice to open up, you know, a song like "Yesterday" or "Norwegian Wood" or even the earlier stuff, "Hard Day's Night." You know, this began to give me some exposure to how these guys crafted the song and that was—reading a few books, songwriting books, and then continuing to experiment with my own style it kind of formed my own songwritership, until I met the first producer I worked with, which helped me elevate that to the next, you know, the next step.

11:52 (KW): You said that the music comes before the lyrics now in the process. When that first started—and you write your own music as well—can you talk a little bit about the inspiration for some of the, I guess, the score that you would write to.

12:13 (NG): Yeah, absolutely. And when I meant music comes before the lyrics the sound, from the very first day I picked up the guitar, the sound immediately—the connection, the give and play between the sound the guitar I would make off of the guitar would evoke a sound out of my mouth. And the interplay between the two gave the opportunity for creating lyrics out of my mouth, so that is probably the best I can describe it in terms of it's most rudimentary form. Sound coming out of the guitar evokes sound coming out of my mouth, which translates to opportunity to share my actual thoughts verbally, which become the lyrics. And I've never really veered too far away from that model, even, you know, fifteen years later I still, even if it's a collaboration—this latest work called *Rebel On*, a lot of the music, although, you know, I'm involved in the chord progression, a lot of the music is maturing through the work of my producer for the track Vin Scialla. And he knows because we've played together for years what my approach is, the kind of music that we've done before kind of led up quite nicely to what we're doing now with this track. But even for this track, many years later, it's a lot of the music that was created first that evoked the sound and the lines, the musical lines that I would find both for the verses and the choruses, and then going forward for the lyrics themselves. So, I've always been inspired by sound. I think it's one of the reasons I enjoyed a band like Nirvana, I mean, the sound is what drew me to what they were doing and it was often too hard to understand what he was talking about. You know, the lyrics were sort of secondary, but for me the sound is vital and then it just gives a sound bed to be able to say what I really want. And if I can map my ideas through song, through melody into the sound that's created by the guitar, the piano then that's a real winning situation for me. So, you know, that's the approach that I continue to go with, even now.

14:35 (KW): What is the writing process like for songwriting? Typically on the show we talk about drafting and revising and editing. Do you go through that type of, the stage, or those stages? And how?

14:55 (NG): Yeah, absolutely. I may sit alone for a little while just riffing on three chord progressions, and then shifting to maybe some ideas I think might fit for a bridge. Coming back to these simple chord progressions that are either gonna become a chorus or a verse. Sometimes there are minimal number of chords and notes that I'm going to use. Sometimes it's more complex, and I don't really know when I first sit down, well, you know, what's gonna come out of this piece? I rarely sit down with the notion that I'm gonna write a song about some specific political movement and here are all the players and I need certain lines to be fed. It's very rare that I'll approach something—more times than not it's just me messing around with various chord progressions and trying to begin to put them into a framework where these two chords and playing them back and forth could become a verse. This three chord progression would be nice for a chorus, you know? And then off in the back of my mind is an idea for a bridge. And so, pretty much when I sit down that's how I approach songwriting now. I'm—it's almost like I've got these different colors that I'm painting with, and I'm blending, you know, a red and a blue over here and in this section I'm blending maybe three colors: brown, orange, and green. And then in the back of my mind I'm gonna use black and I'm gonna use white at some point and that'll be a bridge. And so I lay a framework and then I begin to think about the things I've been thinking about and these sounds for the verse, for the chorus, they're evoking words and sounds to come out of my mouth. And I'm shaping lines, lyrical lines in this process. It's almost like improv. I'm going back and forth, back and forth, and it's a very, just, personal work that I'm doing in my own chamber here. You know, so that's where, that's kind of like the very root of how I'm drafting. And it's constant, you know, right, like coming up with chords may be throwing away the chord idea, chord idea I had for the verse. Bringing in something that I was playing with maybe six months ago and bringing that in because I think that would fit better. I'm constantly writing lyrics and scraping them. Writing new ones, trying to get longer lines to be more condensed and fit the length of time on the verse that I've created. So it's this kind of process until I have something that I want to take to a producer, who can help me then take it further, because he, because he or she is going to be able to really challenge me to use less words, not have the chorus and verse sound so similar, change the bridge. So, you know, I know that's a lot I just shared there but talking right out of what it is that actually happens.

18:29 (KW): That's interesting, the producer seems to be the parallel of the editor in the writing world. Where he'll say, "Oh, this is too short. This is too long," or, "We don't need this. Change this."

18:44 (NG): Yes. Yeah, I think when you have, I think when you have a good producer because I've always worked pretty much always worked with producers that are good songwriters— I've stumbled on that, but I now know that's something I want to continue with because if you have, if you're working with a producer that's a good songwriter, and they've written songs, you know, and then they know what you're in then they can also help guide you and give you the feedback that is very specific, that challenges you, and has you go back and work on it and come back with, you know, a fresher more direct song, you know? And so that's critical for me. I don't collaborate really with anyone else. I don't have another songwriter I work with. I'm not in a band. So the relationship, I'm glad you picked up on it, because the relationship between me and the producer, especially when it comes to the writing, it's paramount that, that time really be put in and that both people are invested in this writing process. Even though I'm doing the writing the producer is, like the editor, and just, you know, so valuable from so many different levels. The music, the vision for the album, the vision for the song, the actual lyrics of the song, the length of the song, you know, the thematic, the choice of words. I've just been very lucky. And the reason I can talk from this place is I've been so lucky to work with guys like William Moses who is a composer for the Reverend Billy Choir for Stop Shopping in America. He was my, he was essentially the producer of my first work. And he is a songwriter, he's a composer, and so just what I'm describing, Keysha, in terms of this process just like the great question you asked—analogy you made is that's what happened between him and me, you know? Like you said, the writer and the editor, the songwriter and the producer in my case.

20:56 (KW): That's really enlightening. I didn't realize the relationship was like that.

21:03 (NG): Yeah, yeah, and I think—go ahead, I'm sorry.

21:06 (KW): No, go ahead.

21:08 (NG): No, I think, yeah, it was a discovery for me because of all the bands I liked and all the books I read about McCartney and Lenin and other great songwriters it seemed typically the writer were challenging one another. And I think McCartney and Lenin are a phenomenal example of that. I mean, these are two of the most prolific songwriters in the twentieth century and they just got better and better because they challenged each other. And when you don't have that it's just paramount that you have someone in your circle as you're developing a body of work that's gonna be that, at times very frustrating person, to have involved in the process. Because it's not always what you want to hear, but it makes the work better ultimately if the two people can work it out, you know?

22:00 (KW): Going back to the writing of the music and the lyrics, you said that sometimes you'll sit there with a chord and you'll transition to another one, and you'll maybe pull something you had in your head. And in my mind I'm picturing you with the guitar, and are you, like, playing a chord and then stopping and then writing that chord down or writing whatever you've done down? And then going and doing something else, and the writing, you know? Or is this all sort of, like, in your head you keep it before you put it to paper?

22:31 (NG): Yeah, another great question. So, when you get right down to it I use a recorder. You know, these days with the laptop and recording device, or even if you're on the road you can use your iPhone. I'm recording what I'm doing and then listening back. You know, if I've got, if I have, you know, a G D verse progression going and then, you know, an A C G chorus progression going I may play those almost as though they're a song already, and begin riffing some vocals over that and recording it. And, initially, you know, as I'm doing verse, verse, chorus, verse, verse, chorus, and maybe even a bridge idea I record that, and then there's some, you can hear my voice beginning to sing something. And that's all recorded because I just did that right while I was in front of the computer as these ideas were coming to me. So I got it down, and I think that's critical. A lot of the songwriters I talk to, you know, in my circle of friends the most important thing is you get it down. You know, if you're not a theorist or someone like me who doesn't even read music it's just that much more important that you record it so you don't lose it. Because the next day you sit down and you try to go—at least for me by memory, because I don't read music I would be in trouble. You know, to just find it again 'cause that inspiring moment where you've been thinking about something and you're playing around a few chords and you get an idea for a verse and a chorus. I typically just find myself going forward and recording it right there, and that will never be the final song, but it could be a great foundation for starting a song. You know, and sometimes it's not. Sometimes it just goes into a folder on my desktop and it's something that sits there as new material and that I may pull from at a later date.

24:44 (KW): Do you have a daily writing time? Do you have to, you know, say, oh, you get up every morning and you work on your songs or. . . .

24:55 (NG): I try to play guitar every day. Guitar is not, if I had to look at all of the skills I have as an artist, I mean, guitar is way down low on the totem poll. I'm, I would say, I spend more of my time now playing because I find myself doing a lot of solo work. I do duos and I have full band shows. So lately, I would say in the last years I've just been spending a lot of time consistently playing guitar so I can just improve my skills. And then every year I would say there's about a four, five month pocket where I'm working a lot on songs. So I'm not only just playing guitar but I'm guiding into, you know, writing songs and that's a little bit of a different activity. I try to do that every day, and I need time to step away from it. But I do attempt to immerse myself during that period of time to finish work, and, you know, in this case coming into the summer it's a five or six song EP that will be coming out. So I've been, especially with this song "Rebel On," in a writing mode. You know, and so I would say probably where I'd like to be is where I'm writing every day all year around, but at this point it's more, kind of, at that part of the time frame where I'm gonna be putting work out that I'm accelerating and just working harder as a writer.

26:34 (KW): Let's get into a few of your songs. Can you tell us a little bit about "Color Yourself"?

26:41 (NG): Yeah, so "Color Yourself" is a song, one of the first songs I wrote, and it is—as a progression it kind of stems from a conversation I had with my mom at a very young age. And, you know, the idea behind the song, and it's a pretty, very simply structured song. Came out of that—what I shared earlier in terms of coming up with a verse, progression, a chorus and then an idea about a bridge. And the idea I had floating in my head at the time was one of the conversations I had with my mom where she's trying to get me to go outside and play and, you know, enjoy friends, and I'm, like, inside and, you know, questioning a lot of things and just not going out and experiencing life. And so, you know, the verses are what I would imagine me saying to her at this young age, and the choruses are her saying go out and enjoy. One of the lyrics is, "Color yourself in green again. Color yourself believe again." And this is her saying to me, "Go outside, it's green, the grass. Go enjoy. Learn about life that way. Stop asking me all these questions," you know? So that's where that song comes from and, you know, as the song progresses it's not about just me and my mom, the next sort of verse is about me and my girlfriend, and the third verse is about me and my wife. And so it kind of progresses in that way, and it starts to include not just me but it's about us and we. And so I think when I look back, yeah, I had the idea. It started with me and, you know, the earliest memories I have are me and my mom in our house. And it would start there, but then it would start to grow with me as I grew up, and hopefully other people could relate to it, you know? That really what it's about is going outside and all of us being together, that's what being here is about. You know, and so, I was kind of taking a stab at what life means to me through that song.

29:07 (KW): Let's take a listen to "Color Yourself" by Gandhi.

29:10 (NG): Great.

29:11 ("Color Yourself")

29:47 (NG): "Would anybody dare to just share? Tell me why, why are we here? Mother, I'd like to be right. Ought to think I ought to think just twice. Color yourself in green again. Color yourself, believe again. Come on, dear person. Come on, dream cousin. What about I want to sing why are we here? Just by the way that we fear? Lover, I'd like to be nice. Ought to think I ought to think just twice.

30:45 ("Color Yourself")

31:11 (NG): "Color yourself in green again. Color yourself, believe again. Come on, you can do it. Come on, step through it. What about I want to sing I'm just not sure? Could it be, would it be the war? Honey, I think it's for a good cause. Might've been for reasons too large. Color yourself in green again. Color yourself, believe again. . . ."

31:53 (KW): That's "Color Yourself". I think I liked that, you know, immediately when I heard the beat, and then it's just, you know, this kind of inspirational, you know, lift yourself up, color yourself again. And so, yeah, thank you for sharing that with us.

32:15 (NG): Course, yeah, thanks for playing it. Yeah, tonight's the—to have your questions, Keysha, and then be able to comment on it and see if what I'm talking about makes sense even for myself. Yeah, thank you.

32:36 (KW): And as you explain about the storyline that is behind the narrative in the lyrics in the song, and it's so a step away from, so if I were, if we were reading this in a memoir, or something, we would know it was the mom talking. But with the song you can kind of—we don't know as I was listening, but we can impart these identities or where we think these voices are coming from. Am I making sense right now?

33:15 (NG): Yeah.

33:16 (KW): Do you know what I mean?

33:17 (NG): Yeah, I think so. I—

33:18 (KW): When you explained it as your mom, like, "Oh yeah, I can see, I can hear that," you know? But I had made my own thing for it.

33:27 (NG): Yeah, yeah. Yeah, and even as I'm listening back, you know, in reference to what I shared with you and then when we listened to it, it became clearer to me from where I wrote that song. I mean," Why are we here?" you know, somewhere in the process of writing that song I imagine myself as a kid, the way I remember myself, being a little resistant to go out and take chances. And I would need some sort of pushing to go out and experience life rather than just endlessly asking questions about it. You know, "Why are we here?" and I guess I'm gonna go find that out if I listen to mom, and I go outside and enjoy, you know, enjoy it. That's where I'll start to discover it, and why, discover why we are here. So, yeah, the "Why are we here?" kind of forgotten about that whole piece of it, you know? I mean, this to me, when I began to answer your questions was more about, you know, what I was actually thinking about when I was trying to put this together. To me, it might be interesting to have this dialogue between my mom and I and turn that into a song. And I think as I began working on that, this idea of "Why are we here?" came about. And then I could also include that and, you know, have some kind of, you know, discovery for myself as I wrote that piece, and now as I listen back that's the most important thing I'm listening to.

35:01 (KW): And I feel like it echoes what might be a theme in some of your songs. And you have to help me fill in the rest of the lines for the song if I should fall behind. You have this, I guess it's part of the chorus where the, I want to say the narrator, you sing if I should fall behind wait for me or something. What is it?

35:30 (NG): Yeah, "If I should fall behind wait for me, I'll wait for you." It's actually, it's the first attempt of mine, especially with a man, to produce a cover song. That's an original Bruce Springsteen song called "If I Should Fall Behind."

35:52 (KW): Oh, it is!

35:53 (NG): Yeah, "Should I fall behind I'll wait for you, wait for me." Yeah, so he's, you know, talking about a poet. I mean, that song, I had a buddy of mine, Tom Patton, he's also a collaborator he had introduced me to Bruce Springsteen. He's a British guy, Tom, and so when we began we were doing a side-project and, you know, just sharing different writing styles, and began to collaborate a little bit. And he played this song for me, "Should I Fall Behind" and he said, "Have you listened to Bruce?" And I'm like, "No, not really. I've never been really that close to what he's doing." And so he, kind of the songbook, and said, "I think you would really like this song." So he played this song and I loved it. And then we began performing it live, and it just became a song I just took with me. And, you know, it ended up on the *Reverb Nation* page. We as a band did it at a gallery event for an engagement party, and the couple, the engagement couple, really wanted this song performed. They loved the way that we did it and they wanted it as part of the event. And that recording is from that event.

37:09 (KW): Let's talk a little bit about "Ming Ming."

37:13 (NG): Yes.

37:14 (KW): Now, for people who are listening you can go to the *Behind the Prose* page, you will have links to Gandhi's website. On his website he has this really great video that's sort of like a documentary, mini-documentary, about his work and his life in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. And at the end of the video you as a band are performing this song, "Ming Ming."

37:40 (NG): Yeah, yeah.

37:41 (KW): Let us take a listen to "Ming Ming" before you tell us about it.

37:45 (NG): Great.

37:48 ("Ming Ming")

38:21 (NG): "One morning in China. Chinese girl comes in mine. She gives me smokes of her vine. We're dancing, now she's mine. Ming Ming, I'm losing my mind. Ming Ming, you're losing time. Ming Ming, we're losing time. Ming Ming, we're crossing lines. We flying so high. In the trench living lies. Four falling from skies. A man, I made you cry. Ming Ming, I'm lost in your mind. Ming Ming, I'm turning—"

39:30 (KW): Now tell us a little bit about the inspiration for "Ming Ming."

39:34 (NG): Yeah, that's great. I love hearing it as we're about to talk again. It's funny, I was really listening, and just as a listener to the song. And what I was struck by is really I feel like the luckiest guy. I play with these super, super talented musicians, and with the guitar Cerulean was doing right there, and with the guitar, is almost making these wailing kind of crying sounds out of the guitar. And I'm like he, you he, and they all do really understand how, you know, wherever in this song or what I'm trying to accomplish for the whole piece. And you can hear it in that song. I mean, you know, what I remember as I'm listening back is it just that I'm hearing a guy, who's just way in over his head in a relationship and it's not working out. And if I had to encapsulate what the song "Ming Ming" is it's, you know, being in New York and having a relationship that I really want to have work out and it's just not happening, and I'm really, really, really torn about it all. And that's what comes out of that.

40:50 (KW): Yeah, the chorus, at least the first chorus, I think it changes through, right? The song. . . .

41:01 (KW): The lyrics—

41:02 (KW): Is that accurate? Yeah, lyrically.

41:05 (NG): Yeah, yeah. It's, yes, there's a progression in that. It's, if you follow the trail "Losing my mind. We're. . . ." Yeah, wow, in the line "I'm losing my mind. I've lost my mind." That, you know, that's one progression. There's a progression of her and I that's changing. So the relationship through the song in verse one, two, and three as well as the choruses, they're all going from—they're all kind of act one, act two, and act three of this relationship. And that's what I was attempting to do with both the verses and choruses. They would show you where we were in the beginning, show you what was going on in the middle, and the middle branches off to a bridge which talks more about me and what I'm going through, I'm running away from love, and then third verse and chorus are the ending. You know, we've crossed a line, this is it. We've crossed this line and that's the end. And then it's about me being sorry. You know, so, I kind rushed off there, I don't know if I answered your question, Keysha.

42:25 (KW): No, you did. But how did you come up with that structure?

42:30 (NG): The structure of kind an act one, two, and three and. . . ?

42:36 (KW): Yeah, as far as the progression through, and in particular the chorus, 'cause most of the time I think people just are used to the chorus being the same, you know?

42:45 (NG): Yes, yes. I'm really glad you picked up on that. It's interesting, I mean, I look at "Color Yourself" as kind of similar. I take some creative license, I think, because I don't want to—"Rebel On," you know, as we get to that is a little, it's a noticeable shift in my writing into more traditional courses. But I think what I was doing, especially early on, is I was taking more liberties and the people I was working at that time would honor, you know, would go with it. And "Ming Ming's" and example of that. I want to tell a story also through the chorus because, for me, I try to keep songs very simple and the structure simple. So you only have, you only really have so many opportunities to get out what you want to say, and you want to tell the story. And a lot of my songs are layered quite a bit. Now the layering here is just what you picked up on. There's, there are—I'm not saying, I'm not singing the chorus the same every time. I'm using that as an opportunity to tell you act one, act two, and act three. And I find myself instinctively doing a lot of that, because I'm gonna use every—I look at art, often times there's opportunities within it to, you know, really make a strong choice because you want to communicate something, and you want to do it in a unique way, and you want to get your point across. There's always a format, you know? You're gonna lose people's attention if you're doing something that doesn't have some rhythm that we can all lock into. Or they're gonna have some semblance of a structure. You're gonna lose people. So I don't want to lose people, but at the same time if I've created a structure, and this is a pretty structured song, "Ming Ming," I'm gonna take every opportunity to evolve the story in a way that I tell the story, even if means changing, you know, not making the chorus the same words every time.

44:50 (KW): That, hearing you say you don't want to lose people, you want to keep them engaged and that's a lot like I've heard a lot of the guests on this show say, you know, with the introductions or I'll ask editors, you know, what draws you in? And most of the time people will say, "Well, you know, they grab me with an intro, and it was engaging, and they just kept me interested." So it's very interesting to see the parallels play out on the lyrical side.

45:17 (NG): Yeah. Yeah, I mean, music is, it's a very rhythmic—music, you know, music is founded in the beat. And, you know, I had a guy tell me once, you know, you really, if you're gonna throw out a rhythm, you know, you got a chord progression going, you've got a certain beat going with the drum or the bass you want to give them a chance to breathe and lock in with you on that before you start disrupting all that or changing it or taking them off on some other journey. You really want to invite them in to get them to kind of move their body, move their head, move, you know? And music's a phenomenal, there's a phenomenal opportunity with music because you've got instruments that can do this, create this rhythm that can get people's bodies moving. And once you've got them kind of locked into this then you have their attention, and it's like what you do from there. But, you know, I try to maintain that, in a live performance, you know? I want to really be thoughtful about the chord progression and the way that I'm playing the guitar in the hopes to get their attention so then they'll want to listen to the song. So, yeah, it is interesting, you know? You know, I think that is a little bit of a format too? Because I think format also comes out of human nature, and, you know, we all will gravitate to something that is easy to connect with and that we can understand and relate to. So, you know, I guess I'm parlaying a little into live performance, but yeah the, you know, the rhythm is very important.

47:14 (KW): Gandhi, what is your songwriting superpower?

47:20 (NG): Superpower? So anything, what that means to me? Superpower?

47:30 (KW): Mm-hmm. What is your songwriting superpower?

47:37 (NG): Wow. Yeah, I think the superpower for me is really, you know, the belief that what I have to share is unique and important enough, and that I can stand behind it. I think that's, you know, really that's something you have to come back home with all the time is face yourself and what you're creating as an artist. I think, you know, whether it's improv or acting or writing a novel or writing a song, you know, the superpower is within. I believe that, you know, we're constantly as people excavating what we may have known about ourselves many, many years ago as kids or, you know, where that strength may have been covered up, or we've not allowed ourselves to grow that part of ourselves that is very unique and has just this infinite power. Because our creativity is in that. That internal power that we probably had when we were very young that either got away from us or maybe it's been continued to be matured. For me, I feel like I've discovered a lot, rediscovered a lot of my superpower at a later stage in life, you know? I certainly wasn't playing music in my teens or in my early twenties. It wasn't even a thought, I went to engineering school. So, my superpower, for me, is just honoring these discoveries I've had in my late twenties and thirties that have to do with my unique creative ability, and that I can write a song. You know, that to me is, there's power in that. And I think I have to keep going back to that, you know, that source. And continue believing in it, and also growing it. You know, improving the skills and really working at it. So, I think the superpower is within.

49:49 (KW): I think that is evident in "Rebel On," which is your latest release.

49:58 (NG): Yeah, yeah. Thanks.

50:01 (KW): It right off from the first verse the singer—and I guess I'm looking for the equivalent of narrator in the singer, right?

50:14 (NG): Yeah. Yup.

50:17 (KW) Starts off in a way that is very authoritative and really calling the listener to question things that they may have taken for granted or just assumed were true, right? It starts off, "They're telling you lies. Fairy tale in disguise."

50:40 (NG): Yeah.

50:45 (KW): Can you tell us a little bit about the impetus for "Rebel On"?

50:50 (NG): Absolutely, yeah. So when Occupy Wall Street happened down here in the, I think it was the summer of 2011, and, you know, that's kind of where my membrane sort of began connecting on, you know, these ideas that I also have my own opinions about. Not only what was happening there, you know, a lot of the misuse of money and power on Wall Street, you know? I have my own, I had my own thoughts about that then. I have my own thoughts about that now. And, even larger than that, I've had my own thoughts that have been inside of me that I want to share about growing up here in America. I'm first generation, so my parents came from India and, you know, I'm American, and so I've watched, you know, in my years here how our country is and grown and how it was in 2011 and how it is as recently as with a lot of what was happening with Gardner and Brown and the Ferguson shootings. And so, this song, I saw as an opportunity to comment on a lot of what was stirring up inside of me. And yeah, I think the song starts strong, and I'm proud of that because it does talk the lies. And I think it's a wake-up call for me also as a songwriter and hopefully a wake-up call for people who listen to it if they receive it that way, to challenge things and question authority and what, and, you know, where we are in the evolution of this county. You know, I'm not intending on turning this into something to evoke violence or completely make this country look dark. But I thought it would be an opportunity to comment on what I believe was not so great about this country and what's happening. Particularly over the last three, four years so, you know, "They're telling you lies," some of the words it's kind of like using some strong words and then throwing in some commentary around that to get people to paint their own impression or their own thoughts onto some of the spirit of what I'm evoking. I mean, I think one of my big influences is a guy named Beck, of course, Beck singer-songwriter, prolific singer-songwriter during the nineties and the 2000's. He's very influential on me, and I think one of the things he does in his style is he's a tremendous writer of melody and his songs just have this amazing visual imagery. He doesn't come direct with the lyrics so often. You don't necessarily know exactly what he's talking about, but he does a phenomenal job of giving you space to breathe within the song and form your own ideas, and throw your own thoughts into that. And that was the other thing I should mention going into the song "Rebel On" is both myself and the Producer Vin Scialla of Mission on Mars we decided we would approach the song this way. And it would have enough room within that I could make comment on things like Occupy Wall Street, on the Brown and Gardner situation here, and the violence of the cops towards those guys. And so, I took the best stab I could at, you know, pointing those things out and also sharing some of my attitude about that. Now, I don't, I'm not as direct as maybe I will be in the future but it was a step towards that.

54:53 (KW): And so "Rebel On" will be out, it's the single. When is the single coming out? Is it out now?

55:01 (NG): It's not. Well, we decided to release it as either a five or six song EP coming out this summer, in the late summer. So, it'll be released, it's an early fall release and it will be "Rebel On," "Ming Ming," "Color Yourself," and there'll likely be three other songs. And that'll all come out—Rebel On'll be the name of the album, or EP, and it'll be the title track, of course. And so, yeah, that's coming out later this year.

55:32 (KW): Gandhi, thank you for joining me today. I wish you the best of luck. You're welcome back here anytime. It was truly great talking to you and learning about your songwriting process.

55:44 (NG): A pleasure. Thank you so much, Keysha, I really enjoyed the conversation and the thought-provoking questions. It was great, great to hang with you here.

55:52 (KW): You're welcome. Oh, we forgot to mention the show that's coming up on the 2nd, wait—

55:58 (NG): Yeah, I just remembered that myself.

56:01 (KW): So you've got the LP, or the EP, coming out later this summer, possibly early Fall. Are you touring? Are you doing shows? What's going on right now?

56:12 (NG): That's, yeah, thank you, I, we begin this summer series of performances. It's gonna be this year local, tri-state area work, and the first performance will be at a place called 3B, at 136 Lawrence Street in Brooklyn, Friday May 1st at 7PM. This happens to be one of the most unique shows I've had. I'm performing a private concert reading, and when I say private it's open to the public and, you know, I'll give you the link for the tickets and all that. But it's, the writer, Abigail Leque, who writes a book called "The Darker Side of Lust" has found herself connecting to some of the work I've done, some of the songs, and so she came up with the idea of doing a night where she would read from her book and share her photography and we would, I would play the songs that connect with her thematic. There's a lot of eroticism and darkness and lust and in her work, in her writings. And so, we'll back her musically as she reads and then we'll parlay that into a set of my original songs, we'll go back to her readings, and then we'll be doing my original songs, and that'll be the night Friday May 1st 7 o'clock to 10 o'clock at 3B. It's actually a bed and breakfast, and in the living area they've actually turned it into a performance venue, and it's a pretty cool little hang-out. So, you know, I'll give you the information, Keysha, and I appreciate you asking about that. So that's the first show that kicks off the summer for me, and then there'll be all my performance dates on my website from there.

58:06 (KW): Mm, that sounds great.

58:08 (NG): Thank you, yeah, it'll be fun. It's, anytime you have the opportunity to work with a very stimulating artist and be part of that I get very excited about that, so. And I always love when it's not just music and it's involving other forms of art, so that, I'm trying to do even more of that this year.

58:31 (KW): I think that sounds like something that can really take off.

58:36 (NG): Yeah, yup. I'm hoping. Erotic readings and acoustic stylings is what we're labeling it, so for that to take off would be phenomenal.

58:47 (KW): I think you got a good shot. I'm gonna try and make it out there if I can drive the four or five hours.

58:58 (NG): That's true. That's true. Well, we'll have to take that on the road to Pennsylvania.

59:05 (KW): Yeah, well, thank you, Gandhi.

59:12 (NG): You're welcome.

59:14 (KW): Okay, and here's "Rebel On" by Gandhi.

59:18 ("Rebel On")

59:19 (NG): ". . . Rebel, rebel on. Hungry youth. The sky is the limit to our truth. Stay in mind, it comes in time. Whoa, rise above this lie. Whoa. Stay in mind, it comes in time. Whoa, rise above this lie. Whoa. Rebel, rebel on. Hungry youth. The sky is the limit to our truth. Rise above this lie. Stay in mind, it comes in time. The sky is the limit to our truth. Rise above this lie. Whoa. Hands up, hands up, but don't shoot."

1:00:57 (KW): That's Gandhi, "Rebel On," he is a musician with a mission, and I'm glad that I got to talk to him. I'm actually really hoping to try to get out to Brooklyn on Friday. And maybe I'll see you there. Go to behindtheprose.com for the show information, you can get your tickets, you get the location and all that good stuff. I want to thank Gandhi again for joining me on *Behind the Prose* this week. Next week I've got a special treat for you. I'm not gonna tell you, but I'll give you a hint. Two words: the Godfather. Mm-hmm, you know what that means? Mm, Google it. Mm, find out. In the meantime go back, catch up on all our previous fourteen episodes. Find it on the episode page on behindtheprose.com. Check me out on Twitter, behindtheprose. The music in this show today was brought to you by Gandhi and of course at the beginning we our artist Redvers West-Boyle. You can find him on SoundCloud, that's where I found him. In the meantime listen, learn, and write. Write songs too.

1:02:14 (Music)