

## THE RESISTANCE – EPISODE 1.4

### Lowland Hum interview – Episode Transcript

**Lauren Goans:** There's always this voice in me telling me that I'm an imposter or that I don't actually have anything to offer or that if I sit down and really try to write something, nothing will come.

[theme music]

**Matt:** Welcome to the Resistance: a podcast that features honest discussion with meaningful artists about the opposing forces we all face when moving toward our better selves. I'm your host, Matt Conner. When we're talking about music, a deep cut is a term used to describe a song buried on an album. The sort of track that only serious fans would know anything about. When we're talking about The Resistance, on the other hand, Lauren Goans is describing a deep cut of a different kind. It's an injury that hits at such a personal level that it forces you to doubt who you are. A cut so deep, it uproots your identity.

Together with her husband, Daniel, Lauren makes music as Lowland Hum, a folk duo from Charlottesville whose beautiful compositions settle into the same deep spaces we're already referencing. Lowland Hum's latest album, *Glyphonic*, is not only a sparse but satisfying listen. It's also filled with beautiful phrasing and pearls of wisdom that resonate with the listener long after the music is over.

What's amazing about the duo's ability to craft music of such substance goes back to the resistance's ability to cut so deep. Lauren says for her, the battle is about not feeling like an imposter. There are days, she says, that she feels like an outsider, a pretender, someone who doesn't belong. Her core identity should be informing her work, yet it's the resistance that sometimes takes over and cripples her ability to do the very thing which she was created to do.

What I love about this episode is that the Goans' struggle is one that we can all admit is familiar. We've all felt the voices of whether we really do belong in the spaces we inhabit. Or we want to inhabit. We've all heard the question, asked loudly and directly, "Who are you?" Fortunately, for the sake of the band and the music, Lowland Hum has learned, as a duo, how to rely on each other to weather those periods of confusion. And that's our subject for today with Lowland Hum.

[music]

**Matt:** Hello and welcome to The Resistance. We're in season one, and today I have the distinct privilege to Daniel and Lauren Goans. Together, they are Lowland Hum. Welcome, you guys. We appreciate you spending some time with us today.

**Lauren:** Thanks for having us. We're so glad to be here.

**Daniel:** Yeah, hey, Matt. It's wonderful to talk with you.

**Matt:** Your music seems ideally suited for the kinds of conversations that we've been enjoying throughout this first season so far. But to get us going, I'd actually like to start the way we've started every interview so far. For those of you who are new to the podcast with this particular episode, The Resistance is inspired by the work of Steven Pressfield, who is a playwright and author. And specifically he wrote a pretty easy-to-read book for creative types and artists called *The War of Art*.

Both Daniel and Lauren, I'd love your sort of impromptu response to this. I'm just going to read a couple sentences as he defines resistance, and I'd love your take on it. Pressfield writes this: "Most of us have two lives: the life we live, and the unlive life within us. And between the two stands resistance." I guess

I'd love to know now, as you're putting out your fourth album here pretty soon, and just this far into your career, your relationship with that idea of resistance, and what it looks like today.

**Daniel:** Something that I'm very familiar with and experience almost in a daily way is the distance between what I imagine and kind of dream of, even for a day, what ends up unfolding. And so part of what the quote reminds me of is this desire that I have to sink further into the present and find gratitude for what is without losing my connection to kind of the wonderful possible. And I don't always succeed at that, but for me, there's a lot of pain involved in kind of reaching out into unknown spaces and trying to create, acknowledging all the longing that we experience. And also to include the wonder that is present all around us. That's kind of where my mind went when you were reading the quote.

**Lauren:** I think for me, I'm pretty new to what we do as Lowland Hum. I mean, I'm 7 years in now, but I wasn't making music or writing songs before then. So there's always this voice in me that is telling me I'm an imposter, or telling me that I don't actually have anything to offer. Or that if I sit down and really try to write something, nothing will come. I think a lot of the time, a lot of our time is spent doing things that aren't writing and creating songs, because we're driving somewhere or we're doing emails, or Daniel's helping book something. It's a lot of administrative work and a lot of driving, mostly. We've been touring pretty heavily for the past 6 years, so lots of driving.

But I think during those times, I'm often thinking about, if when we have time, will I have the courage to try to create something? And I think this album that we're about to release was a really encouraging time for me, where I felt like yes, I'm doing the thing that I'm supposed to be doing. There are hiccups, and there are barriers and challenges, but I feel like just in the faithfulness of setting aside time to do them, good things were coming from that. And so that's kind of where my mind goes when hearing that excerpt.

**Matt:** You've mentioned the forthcoming album as maybe an answer to some of those things. Can you quantify that?

**Lauren:** I think on our first several albums, writing was really scary for me, because I think I've often battled the lie that I don't have anything of value to say. I don't know if that comes from being a woman raised in the culture that we live in that is definitely getting better about those messages, but I think the writing process was just a lot scarier in the past. This time, around both in the writing process and in the arranging and recording process, I felt like, oh yeah, this is my job, and I'm doing my job. That was kind of a big breakthrough for me, for it to not feel so riddled with doubt but instead just like, this is what I do. We've been doing this for seven years, and I'm doing it now. I don't know if that answers your question.

**Matt:** Yeah, it makes me curious about the role of community. You could be a solo artist or in a band, and you guys occupy this sort of rare territory of being a couple who's also a band. It makes me wonder about the role of like what Daniel provides, and maybe Daniel for you too, what Lauren provides. To the places where resistance is most prevalent for you, what it means to not be solo in that, but what community either provides for that, maybe in a negative way, too, or in a positive way.

**Daniel:** Yeah, I think for me, it's been totally invaluable to have Lauren kind of wade into, I mean our creative process is incredibly collaborative, even down to, when one of us starts to get momentum on a song or an idea, we actually kind of try to stop the momentum and then pass that partially formed idea to the other person so that the influencing comes from both of us right from the get go. I do think that Lauren appreciating my instincts has led to both her loving me as a person but also her appreciating my instincts musically and lyrically, has been really exciting.

I mean, I think it would be totally possible to really love someone but have very different creative instincts if you're both artists, and that not to really mess up your marriage, necessarily, but if you tried to

write a song together, you might adamantly disagree and both make valid points and be like, this is really frustrating. For us, for whatever reason, that is not our experience. We tend to admire each other's instincts and enjoy each other's instincts. I think because of that, I felt like there were less limitations on where I could go.

In fact, starting about two years ago, I started making up songs on the spot at our shows about any memory I have or anything that gets stirred up, and I don't think that would have been possible had Lauren not experiencing me doing that. Sometimes I can sing what I mean better than I can say it. So occasionally, when we've been on tour and I was in a weird place, I would be able to sing something to Lauren that would help her get closer to me in those weird moments. I'm kind of a weird guy. So I have felt like some of the parts of me that might have embarrassed me at other times in my life, in this context have been appreciated and enjoyed, and I think that's been healing, and allowed for more experimentation from my end.

**Lauren:** I think for me, I wouldn't be doing any of this if Daniel hadn't kind of recognized some potential in me and both invited me into what he was doing very humbly when I had no experience, and he'd been doing it for about 7 years or maybe 8 years before this, and also challenged me in a loving way to explore what gifts I might have that didn't know I had.

So really, I'd always loved singing, but I would never have sat out a recording project or a performance project. Daniel kind of just invited me to sing on some songs he was recording, just some harmonies, and then we started performing together, which was very scary to me. But all that would not have unfolded if he had not asked me and really encouraged me to push myself.

And then with songwriting, too, he just said, I think, based on the way you phrase things in conversation, you might be a songwriter. Would you be willing to try writing a song sometime? Which was also terrifying to me. Absolutely the role of Daniel in all of this, and of the community of our marriage, has played a huge role in pushing against the lies and ideas that I held before and still battle, that would keep me from exploring these things.

**Matt:** Daniel, I wanted to go back to something you said. These impromptu songs. Can you define those? Do you mean during sound check? Or do you mean during an actual –

**Daniel:** No, well now, like during the show. For instance, sometimes when we're singing a song, some memory from childhood will surface –

**Lauren:** Or sometimes something will happen in the room.

**Daniel:** Yeah, or sometimes something will happen in the room, too. The crowd will do something, or something just feels a certain way in the room, and I don't know. Something just stirs an idea in my mind, and what I try to do is I just kind of start with that idea, and it feels a little like just leaning forward and sort of running down the hill into the dark. And I just start singing whatever comes to me. Sometimes it can be very embarrassingly personal, or it just might be silly, or it might be something that's funny. Sometimes only funny to me. But anyway, it's just a kind of way –

**Lauren:** And sometimes it's very profound, I think. There are definitely the shows that happen where someone comes up afterward and says, "I'm so glad Daniel sang that thing about that thing, because it reminded me of this thing in my life." I don't know. It sometimes gets to a really serious place, but then yeah, sometimes they are really light-hearted and funny. And even those have a certain weightiness to them, because there's something magical about something unfolding in real time, and literally no one in

the room knows where it's going to go, and we're all experiencing it together, Daniel included, for the first time. It's a really beautiful thing. I'm really thankful for his extemporaneous songs.

**Matt:** I just want to understand this a little bit further. How often does this happen? Is this an every-show occurrence?

**Lauren:** Mostly, right?

**Daniel:** It has been happening almost every show now. It depends on – if nothing comes to me, I just don't do it. Because I kind of couldn't do it if nothing – I can tell a few times during a show, usually, that I could start a song right now. So I kind of look at Lauren, and then I just try to feel out if it's the right thing, and I think different audiences make those possible to larger degrees, or sometimes I think an audience could make it impossible. But maybe by doing that, my discomfort would generate another path it could take. That make sense? They really are just extemporaneous. Sometimes I'll try to play something I've never played and sing something I've never sung, like melody-wise. But a lot of times, it's not premeditated at all. Like not the music or the subject matter.

**Matt:** Wow. Do you have a moment in the setlist where you know to look at each other and go, this is the space that we've allowed that, if there is something extemporaneous, here's where you're going to do it?

**Daniel:** It's not like that. It's actually just like, whenever it comes, I just kind of briefly glance. Sometimes I don't even, sometimes in a song I'll just start doing it, and then Lauren just kind of steps back and waits, like uh. [Lauren laughs] We've had lots of conversations about it, between the two of us, and she's just kind of like, you need to follow your instincts there. Occasionally, she'll just kind of say, I don't think right now is a good idea, for different reasons.

An example is, we just played at the Philadelphia Museum of Art two weeks ago, and being in that space, we felt really honored and inspired, but it also took me back to when I was 9 years old and my grandparents took me to the British Museum. And my grandfather really loved that. My instinct was to ask our tour guide whether the Rosetta Stone was the genuine article, and those were the words I used. Or it might have been the Magna Carta, but anyway, that memory surfaced, so I just kind of sang to the audience about that memory. One of the rare times when I was a kid when I felt this kind of gravity of being in a museum but also wanting to make sure it was legit. But I was 9, so I didn't know the British Museum was legit, I just thought, I gotta ask.

For some reason, that meant the world to my granddaddy. He thought that was the best. So I sang that to the audience, and I don't know if they, in that context, I don't know if they understood that that was not a song of ours.

**Lauren:** Yeah, I think sometimes people don't realize that he's making something up. And they're kind of like, oh, that's kind of weird.

**Matt:** I was going to ask if you –

**Lauren:** But I think that if people are tuned in, they can usually tell. And sometimes twice in a show, Daniel will do it, so people kind of, by the second time around, at least, know this is unplanned. What is this? What's happening?

**Daniel:** But that's become somewhat of a fixture of our performances now, and I didn't even know that I could do that. And I don't think I would have without this collaboration happening.

**Matt:** This whole idea of the spontaneous song, I have a couple more questions. What's the most surprised that you've been out of an experience like that? Does anything come to mind when I ask that?

**Lauren:** [laughs] A couple things. Do you want to say, Daniel?

**Daniel:** Yeah. There's this one time. Two things come to mind. I'll tell the first one briefly. I'll tell them both briefly if I can. Basically the first thing that came to mind was we played this show in St. Louis, and Lauren and I'd had trouble getting along during the day on the way to this show. And I just sang what I thought I did wrong to the audience, which I didn't, it wasn't planned. I sang it, and then I turned really red and started sweating a lot, because I was like, whoa. That was crazy.

But the more I do that, the less inhibited. I don't mean like I'm so uninhibited, I just mean, there's not time between when the thought occurs and when it comes out of my mouth when I'm doing that. So it just came out. And so I was kind of embarrassed, and after the show, I was like, 'Lauren I'm sorry I did that.' Because it was a bigger show, because we were opening for somebody.

**Lauren:** I'm sure I had no objection.

**Daniel:** No, you were like, 'No it was fine.' And then a few men came up to me and said that that somehow had helped them be honest about how they had intimidated their wives or whatever it was about wherever they were in their relationship. And two men, like grown men that were probably maybe 50 or so, hugged me. So that was very unusual. I mean that doesn't normally happen, a stranger hugging me like that. But that experience was really interesting.

And then the other thing that comes to mind is more silly, but there was this show in Atlanta we did about a year ago, and I started doing this extemporaneous song, and I was sort of...sometimes it's like an imagination thing. I picture some experience that I've never had, and I start describing it and making it up like I'm making up a story or something. And basically, I just had set this scene that I was in the woods, and there were these different details about the woods, and then the crowd, right from the first note I played, started clapping along like really boisterously, which that has definitely never happened during one of these. Because I don't even know where it's going, so I'm like, I don't know if the energy of it would change, or whatever.

But they started clapping, and so then I set the scene, and then they started yelling out details. So then they're choosing, it's like we're writing this song together, and this was another scenario where we were opening. So the audience was much larger than one of our regular shows. And they just start yelling stuff out, so eventually, we had built this whole scene where there were bears playing on the wreck of a plane in the woods, and then the bears were not in competition but they all became friends. And then at the end of it, I yelled out, "it's a bear revolution," which really surprised me, and then the crowd cheered louder than probably any cheer we've ever had.

**Lauren:** They just went insane. It was so –

**Matt:** How do you not for Bear Revolution?

**Daniel:** And then the band that we were opening for had run up from the green room and were like, what are y'all doing up here? Is this a show? What song, what are you doing? And we were both kind of very shocked by that whole experience. I think also, it was such a delight, I didn't even feel like I was doing anything. I was just laughing. While I was singing it, I was just dying laughing, because it felt like it had very little to do with me at all. I just thought, something is happening, and I'm there somehow. So that's another one that stands out.

**Lauren:** Yeah. That's the main one that comes to my mind when thinking about something that was surprising, just how quickly everyone got on board, and how it just felt like this thing that we were all a part of, that none of us really, at the end of it, it felt like everyone in the room was kind of proud of themselves and of each other. There was no way for anyone to feel like they had full ownership over this thing that we all enjoyed. But everyone still played like a big part in it. It was really cool.

**Matt:** By the way, I think probably a number of people would buy a Bear Revolution t-shirt.

**Lauren:** They'd all be in Atlanta. No one else would get it.

**Daniel:** Or maybe listeners to the podcast would.

**Matt:** I'm in.

You know, the reason I'm so drawn to this particular topic, and why we ran down this rabbit trail, you know we're talking about resistance. And that sounds like the kind of place where resistance would stop something beautiful from happening. Like the fear of, gosh, not only is this thing not practiced, it's not even known. And to put yourself out there in such a way that I would assume to be vulnerable, challenging, unexpected, those are all things that keep us from stepping out. And yet you're talking about creating these beautiful moments of connection with people that at least in Atlanta, let's all cheer ourselves for this shared beautiful moment where we conquered any level of resistance that could have prevented that.

Do you think that kind of exercise, now that you're doing it on a semi-regular basis, does that help you with resistance overall, just to kind of give into, like hey, I'm used to kind of giving myself over to the vulnerable.

**Daniel:** I think I do feel freer in certain ways, for sure. And I think on this new record, actually the writing, actually one song that I wrote in this way, kind of in an extemporaneous way, ended up on the record because Lauren thought we should include it in the record. So we ended up including this song that I wrote after I hung out with a friend of mine, and then I just sang this thing, and Lauren happened to capture it on the phone, so we had it, and then I just re-sang it for the record.

So anyway, I think it has freed me up. I mean, the truth is, and I've said this before, but the truth is that most things that we think really aren't profound or necessarily even very interesting, and singing some of those things in front of people in a context where you're supposed to be, maybe not supposed to be, but it's somewhat expected that you be impressive or you do something amazing. People bought a ticket to this, or whatever. I think something about that has been freeing, and it's helped me to bring more of myself to the shows.

**Lauren:** If I can just jump in real quick, I think I've noticed in Daniel since he began doing this, that more of who he is is shown on stage, I think. And that doesn't mean, it is still very vulnerable every time he does it. I think people assume that if you're willing to do something like that, it's not scary to you, or you're not at risk of being hurt or embarrassed. But he definitely still is. It's very vulnerable every time. You've always been pretty comfortable on stage. Definitely more so than I have. But I do think that you bring -- something different is coming from you on the stage than before you were doing these songs.

**Daniel:** We tour very heavily, and I think the challenge to playing so many shows a year, one of the challenges is that it's hard to be present in each show, and it's hard not to just try to get through it sometimes when you're playing. We sometimes play 10 months of the year. We're trying to not do that as

much, because we don't think it's very healthy, but something about the extemporaneous songs has helped me realize that no, even though we played 4 other nights, or 5 other nights this week, this is a room of people that may never be together again. Our lives are crossing at this one unrepeatably point. It sometimes helps me realize what an honor it is, or what a special thing it is, ever, to perform for anyone. That's something else that I think it has led to.

**Matt:** I wanted to give a little bit of time, too, to the genesis of what you call the Support Quiet Music Movement. For those who haven't heard of that, can you define that?

**Lauren:** Yeah, I think for us, it was just an idea that came to me one night before I fell asleep. And somehow I magically remembered it when I woke up in the morning. But it's just the idea of encouraging people to support the quiet music that they love. It's born out of our own experience of it being very easy for quiet music to be covered up by bar noise or chatter. It in some ways literally does need a little more care for it to be heard, and a little more of a set aside space or attitude for it to not be drowned out by things.

But also just in the current cultural moment, and maybe all cultural moments, things that are loud and exciting, there tends to be more demand for that. So I guess the idea behind the campaign is just to encourage people to kind of go a little bit the extra mile in encouraging the artists whose quiet music they love, whether that's just encouraging them with an email, or buying tickets to their shows, or buying their music, or spreading the word about them to their friends, it's just the idea of gathering around the artists you love who make quiet music and helping their music be heard and helping facilitate spaces for their music to be heard so it's not drowned out.

**Daniel:** I think many of the emerging bands that are really, well, much of how music is spread, especially when it's kind of emerging artists, it's all based on hype. So depending on the kind of music you make, it's sort of like, the kind of stuff that we're thinking of is not necessarily just our music, but it's kind of like music that's kind of anti-hype. It's sort of like music that's going the opposite direction of that. And so our hope is that people would realize that there is a direction that most music that gets, that most bands that have certain opportunities, they have a lot of things in common. And bands that don't have those things sometimes need creative support that would be different than these more traditional....

We think about, like our agent often says to us, hey, the people at these certain festivals really like the songwriting and really like your live show, but they're not going to book you. And it has to do with what works with, what's the festival sound and stuff like that. And the fact that there is a festival sound that is even pretty rambunctious and sort of loud and high octane, even for folk festivals all around the country, it just signifies to us that maybe people aren't aware of the fact that the kind of music that we would identify as quiet music might need a different kind of attention or even different actions. We don't know yet.

We hope this is a gift to lots of bands. We kind of weren't even thinking about our band in particular. We just were thinking about lots of friends we have.

**Lauren:** Just how much good music there is out there that's not getting in front of as many people, because it's not as maybe marketable –

**Daniel:** Or theatrical.

**Lauren:** Yeah. But how important it is, I mean to us, of course we would be saying this. But I think quiet is very important. I think it's good for people to have space in their lives for emotions that aren't just a hundred percent wow! Or a hundred percent crazy!

**Daniel:** Or, it's Friday night, son!

**Lauren:** I think most people's experiences are not that way all the time, so I think it's good for our culture to have some music that's representative of other levels of hype or non-hype. I don't know if all of that made sense, but those are some ideas behind it, for sure.

**Matt:** Part of that is hoping that the listener, I mean I'm assuming on your part, I'm assuming that part of this is hoping that the listener isn't just a passive listener but is instead maybe challenging in some way, what are you listening to, how are you listening to it? Can you be a little bit more intentional in our consumer habits?

**Lauren:** Yeah. Totally.

**Daniel:** Totally.

**Matt:** I love it. I'd love to finish by, you said this wasn't even about our music. We wanted to help others. If you had a handful of artists or bands that you'd love to point in the direction of, who would that be?

**Daniel:** Absolutely. A few that come to my mind are Devon Sproule, she's a songwriter also based in Virginia. And she is just incredibly gifted and surprising and exciting to listen to. I also think of a band called Tiny Ruins. They have a new song called School of Design, and very surprising, really kind of hypnotic, that song. It's really great and really mysterious. Writing about unusual things. So those are two that come to my mind. Also, Diane Cluck is another really gifted songwriter that comes to my mind when I think of quiet music.

**Lauren:** Also, thinking, this person has a pretty devoted fan base at this point, but The Weather Station is an artist that I've loved for a couple years now who's writing songs about a broad range of subjects, and has an unconventionally beautiful voice. And doesn't seem to be writing songs in any particular form that would be considered standard, I guess. Her songs are just truly unique and surprising to me and definitely would be considered quiet music, I think. Those are just some things. Diane Cluck and Devon Sproule are both friends of ours whose music we just admire to no end and whose talent we admire so much, and we just always are wanting more and more people to get to hear their talent.

**Daniel:** I also think of another Virginia band called Nettles. That's our friend Guion who's the lead singer of that band. I've gotten to work with him on a few things, and there's a lot of intention and rigorous thought going into the way the songs are constructed. Thanks for asking that. No one's ever asked us that.

**Matt:** Let me just say it's been a real privilege to talk to both of you. Daniel and Lauren, thank you so much for joining us for this conversation and certainly just on your thoughtful music.

[music]

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Join us for our next episode with singer-songwriter **Denison Witmer**.