

The Resistance - Episode 40

LIZ VICE TRANSCRIPT

Matt Conner: Welcome to another episode of The Resistance. My name is Matt Conner, and I'm your host.

Jay Kirkpatrick: And I am Jay Kirkpatrick, and I am the sound engineer/co-host sometimes.

Matt: I like it. I wish it was more times than sometimes.

Jay: I know. Well that's COVID for you. That's flying by the seat of our pants here. You do a good job by yourself, but my depression and my three kids keep me from really interacting with many people. No, I'm kidding.

Matt: Let me say this. The single worst outcome of COVID, for anyone anywhere, is our inability to co-host sometimes.

Jay: It's really hard. Because we try to get together and life has just got a hold of both of us, taking us both different ways.

Matt: More than anyone's personal fortunes or job changes or loneliness, any country's total despair, it's our despair here on this podcast. Anyway, let's move on with it.

So I was excited. Our guest today is Liz Vice, who is an incredible vocalist and songwriter. And I was excited to have her on this show just because I'm a fan of Liz. But Jay here, my esteemed co-host, is actually friends, has played with her, goes way back. Jay, I'd love to have you introduce what makes Liz so great, what makes this episode so great.

Jay: There's many things that make Liz Vice great. Her music is one of those things. But she's just an awesome – in the interview, the listeners will hear, she's just genuine. She's just grateful, gracious. So background. Some of you might know, I play with an artist named Josh Garrels who's a singer-songwriter. Way, way back in the day, maybe a decade ago, maybe a little less than a decade ago, Josh was in Portland, Oregon. He knew Liz Vice, and he knew also another guy named Eric Early. So he did a concert. I came out and played as well, because I play bass and other instruments, so I got to go out and be there. It was the first time I met Liz Vice. It was such an interesting blend.

So you had Josh Garrels up there kind of leading. You had Eric Early from Blitzen Trapper. IF you don't know who Eric Early is, he's the creator, the name, he is Blitzen Trapper. It's his group. And then you had Liz Vice, who at that point had not sung in a real concert. She had sung at church, she had done things like that, but she had never, if I remember correctly, it was the first time she had ever really been on stage at a concert concert, singing. Background, and I think she stepped out and did some verses to some of the songs.

As I see her now and hear these interviews now, I'm so blown away at how far she's come. I've done a tour. She was on tour with Josh Garrels once or twice. We were on tour with her. She is just so talented, so genuine, such an amazingly beautiful person all around. She's one of my favorite musicians and people.

Matt: If you've never heard Liz, now she's exploded in such a critically acclaimed way where she's been hailed by NPR, I think the New York Times. She's singing all over the place. As we talked to her in this conversation, she's going to Paris to record another album and do all of that. And yet, Jay, I know that

one of the things that has marked her story was a real early battle with some health problems that almost took her life, right?

Jay: Yeah. I remember her talking about this when I first met her. She goes more in-depth in the interview, but she dealt with a lot of health issues, to the point where they didn't think she would live. In the interview, she talks a lot about the resistance in light of that, and how she feels like she's in her bonus years. These years were never meant to even happen. It really struck me as she was talking about that, the amount of gratefulness, graciousness, maybe even awe, in the ability to, in everything you do, maybe finding the beauty, seeing the privilege of being able to do even the things that are hard and maybe other people would discount and not think is worth it. You kind of seize every moment as being much more significant when you're living your bonus years.

I thought, man, I think me and you even talk about how do we, we go through so much as Americans as people we have a hard time finding the beauty in some of the mundane and the just everyday, and it feels like with what she's went through, she's been able to kind of find that and many more things than me. Things that would trudge me down, she finds herself to be grateful and thankful for the resistance and that she even gets to feel it and go through it and push through it. I don't know. I'd love to have that mentality overall.

Matt: Yeah, I love it. It was a real pleasure to sit down with Liz for this episode and hear really a brave artist so willing to stare down the things that she wants to do and what tries to get in between them and just goes straight for it anyway. She's earned that right. What she makes on the other side is so beautiful and worth it. We know you're going to love this episode, and we're just so thrilled to have her on the episode. We hope you enjoy our conversation with Liz Vice.

Today I'm so excited to have someone I've actually been trying to track down here for a little bit. WE've tried to make this work. Liz Vice, you're so kind to take time out of your schedule today to make this happen. Thanks for joining.

Liz Vice: Thanks for the ask, and finding me. [laughs]

Matt: Finding you and seeking you. So Liz, there's obviously a lot I want to talk about in terms of your music and your own creative path, but I want to start where we begin every episode of The Resistance, and that's from our source material, *The War of Art*, by Steven Pressfield. You said you have but have not read the book, right? Like own it.

Liz: Yeah, I have it. I went to film school, and there are a lot of books that I have. I'm the kind of person that needs to have absolute stillness around me so I can focus on reading. Maybe I have ADHD. Maybe that's...I don't know.

Matt: We've got some self-discovery already happening in the opening seconds here. By the way, I just have a mountain of books that fit that category. "Oh yeah, I have that and haven't read it." Is that true for you?

Liz: Oh yeah. I have like screenwriting books. People like to send me book that they've written. Good friends. And I'm like, I don't know what it is, I'm not like a big reader. I used to feel embarrassed about that. But I'm not.

Matt: Now you just own it.

Liz: Yeah, I own it. I love movies. I love podcasts. I love reading articles and just being outside and observing people. But reading, I have to be in a certain mindset. And I will say, I don't really read fiction, but I've read the Harry Potter books in like 3 or 4 months, and I was blown away. And I read every page like I was eating a delicious dessert, and I've never felt that way about books in my life. And I read them 2 or 3 years ago. This wasn't when I was a kid. And I was just like, "What? How did she do this?" So all that to say is I have no real excuse of why I haven't read the book, but yeah. I have quite a few.

Matt: I'm glad at least Harry Potter broke through for you. I have a similar relationship. Like read them only as an adult and just surprised how much I loved reading the books myself, even though I'd seen the movies.

Liz: It was breathtaking. And my dreams were so vivid after I would read them. I was like, "The kids were right. The book is better."

Matt: Were you playing Quidditch in your dreams?

Liz: No. It would usually be running from something or being in that cave that Voldemort would bring the kids to try magic on them. I was like, "Whoa. This is so dark."

Matt: Well, back to Pressfield, the book that's not been read. It's my fault. I veered that off course. So Pressfield writes this. He says, "Most of us have two lives. The life we live, and the unlive life within us. And between the two stands the resistance." Liz, I just wonder how that quote strikes you. Does that feel true to you? What does resistance look like then, for you, if so?

Liz: Oh, yes. Honestly, my initial response is, the resistance is fear. And I did read that in the email that Nicole sent me. That quote. And I was like, oh that's my life right now. And it's crazy how the pandemic feels more like a motivation to live my life than before so. I feel like I was surviving. I was burning myself out on both ends of the candle. There was a lot of fear, a lot of fear of what people expected of me and a lot of fear of letting myself truly be vulnerable. As someone who is a full-time musician and has been for the past 8 years, who didn't start until I was 30 years old. I was going to say until she was 30 years old, but I'm talking about myself.

One of the first songs I ever wrote was called "Save Me." And it literally is about me getting out of my way as doors for music were opening. And they weren't opening in a way to where it was like Hollywood's approaching me, and they want me to sign to this label. It was more like, wait I'm singing in front of people now? But I went to film school, and I want to make movies and TV shows and be behind the camera. I don't want to be seen on stage. What do I have to offer? What is there new to say? Who cares about my story? And allowing myself to perform in a way that wasn't showboaty or trying to be an entertainer, but just honest.

And music has always felt so chaotic to me. Because every time I sit down to write a song, I don't know what's going to come out. And the whole time, I'm going, "You don't know what you're doing. You don't know how to do this. Why are you even a musician? There are people who can write ten songs in the time that it takes you to write one." So the resistance, to me, is the fear. Like the wall is closing in behind me, and I'm inching towards a cliff, but my toes are hanging on to that cliff, because I don't know what's at the bottom. And maybe I'll fly. Maybe I won't plummet to the bottom. And I've also realized that I am afraid for people to see me flying. I've been afraid to allow people to see me do well. And I don't know what that is.

Matt: What do you think that is? Like tangibly, what does that mean? To see you fly? To be successful? Is there a part of you that feels like you shouldn't be allowed to do that?

Liz: That, and also who am I? Like no. This can't happen for me. I don't know. I have no idea. But I've had people call me out and say, "You're afraid of succeeding." Maybe I'm afraid of the responsibility that comes with it. The fact that I've always had unhealthy boundaries with people in need. Or like I have this tendency to mend broken toys, and those toys could be people. But now that I've been in lockdown and haven't had people pull me in multiple directions, or put this obligation on myself, especially as someone who has been in the church since I was 15 years old.

I mean, I grew up Catholic, and that's a whole other thing. Natural guilt and shame always in my blood. But going to church on my own terms at 15, until recently working for a church, always hearing the sermon of "God doesn't care about your happiness. And so you're supposed to live this life of sacrifice. Don't live a life of material." I mean, there are other churches that are total opposite, like "God will bless you with material if you do this or that." But my thing was like, be poor. Starve yourself. Let someone borrow the things they need and want from you, and give give give give give give. You'll rest when you're dead. I've literally heard pastors say, "You'll rest when you're dead."

And so to have the tension on me and to be brought into spaces, there were years where I wouldn't, even to this day I don't really talk about my career and the exciting things that happen, because there's a guilt of I am taking someone else's dream who really wants this, who really planned this out. And I just stumbled upon it. And it is preparation meets opportunity, but also, I'm like it's Jesus and luck. I don't know how this happened, but I carry this shame that it happened. I mean it also has come with a lot of hardship and struggle and uncertainty. I don't know.

This year, I've been speaking to myself, saying, no one else is going to live this life for you, Liz. I've never been a 38 year old surviving a global pandemic where my income came from traveling around the world, and that has ceased, and living off my savings. And I've been able to live off my savings because I lived with poverty mentality for so long. The fear of buying things in case I need that \$70 70 years down the road. I can't buy these new rain shoes, even though the rain boots I have have holes in them, and my feet are wet. But what if I need that \$70 in two years, and then I'll regret buying these shoes? I don't know what that's called. That's why I'm in therapy.

But I know a lot of my resistance to being open to not having, I don't know, I feel like sometimes my body is created in a way to operate in certain ways, and then I resist that, because I'm like whoa whoa whoa, wait a minute. You're not a singer. What are you doing? That's what my mind's telling me. But my body's like, no. You can do this thing. You can sing that note. And my mind is saying, no you can't. You can't sing that note. And my body's like let me show you. And I do, and it comes out. And I'm like, where did that come from? What is this dichotomy that's within me, where my heart and my mind are separated? I had a stranger once tell me the space between your heart and your mind is where faith resides.

Matt: And that really resonated with you.

Liz: Yeah. Like reading that quote, I felt like, I've lived in resistance because I didn't believe that I could do this or that. I didn't believe that there was space for me. Yeah. I mean, and of course it comes from, I don't know. I'm a Black woman in American, where you don't see a lot of – a lot of the spaces I occupy are white spaces, and you kind of get tired of being the only one, or what's the motivation behind this? Am I just a Black face? Can I fully be myself or do I need to acclimate to a different environment so that I'm more palatable? There's so many things, and because of this pandemic, I've been able to lay

everything out on the table and say, “Wow, I’ve really been operating out of fear for a long time. Or I’ve really been operating out of giving so much of myself away that I don’t even know who I am or what I want.”

Matt: Do you feel like some of these discoveries have led to tangible decisions, then, on the other side of the pandemic?

Liz: Yeah. They have. Having healthier boundaries. And realizing there are certain people that I can no longer carry anymore. But that they don’t actually need me to carry them, right? That I am tired of talking about dreams, and now I’m going to make them happen. So I miss working in film. I love TV. I love British television. I love the way they tell stories, and how one season of a British TV show will be 6 or 7 episodes, because that’s all they needed to tell this particular story. So I’m going to take a screenwriting class in England.

Matt: Wow.

Liz: I’m putting my money where my mouth is. And I’m so afraid to spend this much money, because it’s not coming back into, I’m like how am I going to put this back into my bank? But I have everything that I need, and when I lived in New York, that was really scary, and I survived most of my worst nightmares. So what does it look like to invest in something that you want to do? So I’m going to take a screenwriting class in England. I have no idea what’s going to come of it. But maybe it doesn’t matter. Maybe miracles are partnerships, and I need to just move forward. Like take a step towards something that I want to do without knowing the whole story. I have no idea.

Matt: I love that statement, though, that maybe miracles are partnerships. I think there’s really something to that. How do you, you know this tension of feeling permission or lack of permission to step into the spaces that you’re at. I love the bravery shown that, you know what? I’m paying for and taking this class. I’m doing it. I’m doing it even if maybe I haven’t had some permission. No one’s asking you, “Liz we need a writer for this. Will you take this class in order to write for us?” Right? Did it take the pandemic? Was it getting older? Was it having previous success in stepping into spaces and realizing, hey you claim permission in a way. Or do you think it’s all that together?

Liz: I think I hate being, as I say I think, I hate being a hypocrite. I love to push people towards their dreams and goals and living a full life. I’m telling my mom, who’s talked about writing a book since I was a kid, I’m like, okay let’s not focus on sitting down to write a book. Can you just tell me the stories of how you met my dad? How you became, why you wanted to be a singer when you were younger? Tell me your childhood stories. When was the first time you had sex? Like I just want to know these things that most people don’t know about their parents. And so she’s been writing these stories and sending them to me.

And I talk about, man, I really want to write a British television show. I want to go to England. I want to tick off these countries on my bucket list. The things that I want to do contradict the times that I’m in. The world is shutting down. We’re wearing masks. You can’t go into certain places without a vaccination card. You have to be tested. Things are closed. But I feel more brave to do things now than I did when everything was open and I felt these obligations of going on tours that didn’t pay me well but not wanting to be forgotten, but then I was like, who am I doing this for? I’m miserable.

And then the whole thing about permission. I have friends that are like, I’m just waiting for permission. I’m like, from who? Who is giving you permission? I believe in a great creator. Do I understand God? No. And the older I get, the more I’m confused. But I have to believe that God says in the way that God says

it, what do you want? And I want to love people well. I want to love myself well. I want to have adventure. And I'm tired of being afraid.

Matt: Liz, was there a turning point? You've pointed to the pandemic, but that really leads to, that's 12 to 18 months. Was there a moment that you remember making some internal decision? Deciding on some change? Was there something that happened to you?

Liz: Oh yeah. I mean, as a very young teen, I was 15 when I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease that caused my kidneys to fail, and then heart failure, and then eventually I ended up on dialysis at 19 years old. I was malnourished. I was always in the hospital. I was on feeding tubes. Literally almost lost my life multiple times. And sometimes my biggest fear is death. And I'm like, I've already tasted death. I have danced with death, and I'm living the bonus years. What is there to fear? And so even though my personality is, I love security and my community, I like having money in the bank even if I never touch it.

I think about the parables of the rich young ruler, where he's like I'm going to tear down my barns and build a bigger barn so I won't have to worry about food for the next 5 years. And then the angel of death came to him and said, tonight your life is required of you. So I can do all these things to plan for a solid future, retirement, but there's no guarantee I'm going to make it there. And that's just my mindset. Because I've already almost died at 15 and 21. And so I'm 38 right now. It's too much fear for something that may never happen. I may never make it to the age of retirement. And I might. And hopefully I have money, or I'll have children that will take care of me, or my nieces and nephews will be rich and will push me around.

But it's like, where is that fear going to get me? What is staying inside going to do for me? I know people who have secure lives that are miserable. So what does it look like to say, I have tasted death in the face of the worst thing that could happen. Well maybe death isn't the worst thing that could happen. I have a vivid imagination. I could name some things that would be worth. But in this case it's like, what does carving \$3,000 out of your savings that you never touch going to do to you? Will you regret going to England? Will you regret taking this screenwriting class and exploring a different country? I don't think so. Will I regret sitting at home? Will I keep thinking about, man I should have took that class when I had time, when I had the space. I don't want that. That would hurt me more than actually trying. So yeah, I don't know. The fear of not doing it outweighs the fear of trying.

Matt: Yeah. Musically, I mean obviously this is not the conversation I thought we'd have, as a musician, to hear about a British television show. So it makes me curious there. DO you have ideas? Do you feel like, I have a story. I want to tell it. I just want to be able to know how to tell it the best? Or are you not there yet?

Liz: I do have an idea. And it sounds so, I probably never would have done anything like this 5 years ago or a year or two years ago, but I just had a very interesting transition from living in New York for four years to moving to LA. A lot of undoing, as far as things I believed, as one who considers herself a follower of the ways of Jesus. I don't desire to become a big famous person, because the sacrifice, even as someone on my level, just seems too extreme. Like I don't have the emotional energy to give of myself the way that it would take to become the 1% musician. And so what does it look like to be a working artist, doing what she loves to do, making whatever she wants with the people that she loves, while she is opening herself to dating, and living in LA with young, rich actresses who talk about how they're too fat all the time?

And I had a landlord who was very wealthy in New York City, who would call me and ask to sing for her, and asked if I would move to upstate New York on her property and live in a tent and pay her \$500 and

possibly be inspired to write songs for her screenplay about her white mom befriendng a Black man in the south, and when visiting her me and a group of my friends saved her life, because her femur snapped in half, and she eventually died 7 months later.

So I'm like, just in the 10 months of my life, that felt like something I would want to watch. Because it feels so unreal. I lived it. I lived it. I lived it. And I'm just like, even if I never put this on the networks, I don't care. I need to write this down. I need to write it down while it's fresh, while it still takes my breath away. I need to write this down while I still feel inspired and motivated and brave. Because I don't know what it will look like when the world opens back up. And I think I owe it to myself. I need to honor myself. I've put my body through so much, the least I could do is give it what it wants. And it's desiring to go to England to take a screenwriting class. So I'm going to go do that.

Matt: What do you do with your musical self? You've built a platform. You have an audience. You've cultivated, curated that. Do you feel like you're done? Do you feel like only select opportunities? Do you feel like you'll pick it up later on?

Liz: I have no idea. Okay, so I've been saying I'm done since I started. And now to the point to where my friends make jokes about it. They're like, "Oh yeah, Liz has been saying she's done with music since I started playing with her." And that's the resistance. That is the heart and mind constantly at war. My career is naturally unfolding, and my heart is like, I don't know what I'm doing. This is so hard. It is like abracadabra. The words that I speak, I'm creating, right? And I'm like, how did I write my second record? How did I do that? And then I'm writing more music. And other people are asking me to sing on their records, and I'm saying yes. And I'm like, why do I keep saying yes to these things? Because there is some sense of enjoyment.

And I will say that, again, the pandemic has been awful. And very eye-opening. And it's not just the coronavirus. It is the politics, the race conversation. It's been so much, and it's been such a huge blessing to me, because things stopped. I've got to say yes to things that have had to develop. Like the church I was part of in New York City, they needed to do online services to protect their congregation. That turned into these incredible music videos. I was doing duets with people that I had never met before, until this year. So for a year I was doing duets with people, and recording from home, so learning how to produce and engineer from home. I had to, in order to do these projects.

Moving to LA. Working with a producer, Tyler Chester. I had never worked with a producer where I felt like, Oh he trusts my artistic ideas. Okay. So I hear this thing. I think I'm going to write my own string parts. And he's like, yeah. Give it a shot. And I did. And I was like, Oh I know how to do this. And maybe that was the permission I needed, was to be around people who were like, "Yeah, you know what you're doing."

Yeah, so I don't know what I'm doing with music. And I used to feel so insecure about that. Because a lot of people don't really want to work with you unless, I remember a guy like 5 or 6 years ago saying, "Well I only want to work with musicians who want to tour and want to go somewhere with their music." He no longer tours. I don't know what he does with music. But I remember him telling me he didn't want to work with me because I wasn't doing what he thought I should have been doing.

And now I've traveled the world, singing on kids' records, the collectives I've sang with that I met through, like Josh Garrels introduced me to Isaac Wardell for the Porter's Gate. Isaac and his family picked up and moved to Belgium, so now I'm going to go record in Paris for 3 weeks.

So I'm just saying, it is a spiderweb of opportunities that I'm like, yeah. It was because this one friend. I sang with Mike Taylor from Hiss Golden Messenger because this pastor in North Carolina got hold of my record and when I went on tour I stayed at his place and developed a friendship with him. He passed my music to Bob Crawford of the Avett Brothers. He passed my music to his manager. I had management for a little while. And then they invited me to co-host on a podcast that was picked up by this place, and that relationship led to – it literally is a domino effect. And I'm like, I don't know where that train came from, but I just said yes to this one thing, and that led to this thing. And that fits more my personality.

I've recorded 4 songs for an EP. Four songs of protest music that I'm really proud of. Am I going to make another record after that? I have no idea. Because I said I would never make a second record, and four years later I did. And I keep singing on records. And the church that I was a part of in New York City, David Gungor brought his best friends to this place in Texas called Sonic Ranch, and he built this incredible house band of his friends, and we've made amazing music together. There were no egos. Everyone just loved on each other. People were vulnerable. People were crying. And it felt safe. And I just feel like a different person since working with him as a musician, being taken seriously without feeling like I have to prove myself worthy enough to be invited to the table.

Yeah. I don't know. I'm literally just going with the flow. And when doors open for me, I'm just as shocked as the other person. I just performed with Sara Watkins. I had never met her, but she was friends with the producer. And I said, "I've heard so many good things about you. I can't wait to meet in person." She's like, "Do you want to sing with me?" And then I performed with them at Largo. And people are like, "You sang at Largo? Do you know the history of that place?" And I'm like, "No. But I just said yes."

Matt: Was that for their Watkins Family Hour?

Liz: Mmhmm.

Matt: Yeah. I love what they do.

Liz: And it was amazing. And I'm like, I don't know how I got here.

Matt: Except just learning that it's not dependent on you.

Liz: No! No. If it was, it would never happen. Because my fear will cement me to the ground. Yeah. And then there are people who come through my life that are like cheerleaders. And I'm not like a words-of-affirmation person, but it's just like one conversation will inspire me to continue to be curious, which leads me to say yes or no. And when I say no, it's because I'm making space for what I really want. And that feels scary. But I've learned that you don't have to say yes to everything, and you don't have to say no to everything. And I'm just trying this out. So if you interview me later on in life, and I'm like, yeah that crashed and burned.

Matt: I don't believe I will anticipate that.

Liz: I mean, I don't know what the hell I'm doing. I'm just showing up. And I don't want to pretend that I know what I'm doing. But whatever I'm doing is fueling the next thing that's coming up, that I have no idea what it is.

Matt: Well, it's exciting. It's exciting to hear about. It's exciting to even hear about the domino effect and see where this cascading will take you. And certainly appreciate your openness to sharing even what's going on behind the scenes in your heart and mind.

Liz: Yeah, because I'm also a human doing all these things. Learning how to live and grieve and grow and pause and speak and move, all at the same time. It's crazy.

Episode Link: <https://www.listentotheresistance.com/liz-vice>

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