

Lera Lynn Conquers Imposter Syndrome By Going It Alone on Ambitious New Album

Nashville singer-songwriter says she fantasizes about quitting music — but she's fully invested on her daring LP 'On My Own'

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By **JOSEPH HUDAK** 



"I don't know if it's confidence in myself or maybe I'm just totally fucking nuts," Lera Lynn says of writing, recording, and producing her album 'On My Own.'

Alysse Gafkjen*

At least once a year, **Lera Lynn** considers **quitting music**. She says the social media obligations alone have been enough to send her packing. But it's when she encounters a fellow artist's particularly stellar album, song, or even video that the singer-songwriter asks herself a recurring question.

"Who am I fooling?" Lynn says. "*These* people are good. They should be the ones making music, not me. I think that's something everyone can relate to. There are a bunch of different reasons why one can be discouraged."

That Lynn, one of Americana's most coolly confident performers, can occasionally suffer from imposter syndrome should be reassuring to us all. She's earned acclaim for albums like 2016's indie-rock adventure *Resistor*, eclipsed guests Rodney Crowell and John Paul White on the collaborative 2018 LP *Plays Well With Others*, and exuded enough mysterious charisma to stand out in a bit role in the crowded second season of HBO's *True Detective*.

Still, she second-guesses, fantasizing about an escape hatch to leave it all behind. "Gosh, you know, I feel like a real asshole complaining about why I want to quit music to a music journalist," she laughs.

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But in 2020, she did the opposite, immersing herself in the most ambitious, daunting, and risky album of her career. *On My Own*, recorded before the pandemic and released in October, finds Lynn writing, producing, and playing every instrument on the project. It is the sound of someone having faith in their process.

“I don’t know if it’s confidence in myself,” Lynn says, “or maybe I’m just totally fucking nuts.”

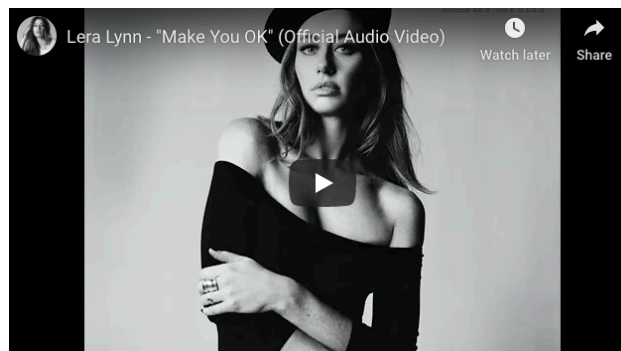
An element of searching underpins *On My Own*. Songs like “What I’m Looking For,” “Things Change,” and “Are You Listening?” point to a journey with an endpoint. Lynn and her partner, the musician Todd

Lombardo, had a son during the pandemic, and she had been taking stock of her future even before becoming a mother.

“I’ve dedicated my life to traveling around the world and performing and talking to strangers. It’s a beautiful, romantic, rich life. But what’s my life going to look like 15 years from now when I am not touring anymore, maybe? The reality is I’m getting older,” Lynn, 36, says. “I think that I was searching for what I want, and really wanting to take control of my own destiny. I didn’t want to wake up one day thinking that life had just happened to me.”

So she disciplined herself. While writing and recording what would become *On My Own*, she kept office hours, pausing every day for lunch and maybe some painting before resuming work. During one break, the stunning “Make You OK” manifested itself. Arguably the high point of the album, it is a devastating plea to an unidentified man whom she describes as both “harsh” and “severe.” (While she doesn’t explicitly say so in the lyrics, it’s about Lynn’s father, an alcoholic who died when she was in her twenties.)

At the end of her lunch break, she burst into tears.



“I wept. Which is not something that I do often when I’m writing songs. Sure, you have plenty of experiences that cause you to feel the full range of emotions, and those are often the things that inspire songs, but it’s rare that I’ve written a song and then just looked at it and cried,” she says. “I was so moved because I finally said something that I haven’t known I wanted to say for a really long time.”

“I didn’t get it then but I sure do now/and I’m terrified I’m becoming you somehow,” she sings in one brutal couplet.

“[It’s my] own recovery from not being able to help someone else recover,” Lynn says. “It’s how that relationship affected my relationship with myself.”

On My Own has been in the world nearly two months now, and the pandemic has prohibited Lynn from performing its songs live. A show she had booked at an outdoor venue in Nashville for November was scrapped, and she’s getting antsy. She’s painting again (she favors acrylics) and there’s talk of a YouTube series that’ll take fans into the studio. She also just released a four-song holiday EP that furthers the moody, melancholy vibe of *On My Own*. The centerpiece is the title track, the original composition “Love One Another,” written after the 2016 election, but Lynn dazzles with Joni Mitchell’s oft-covered “River” too. “I worried that that was low-hanging fruit,” she says.

Her focus though remains on her still evolving album. She recently enlisted Lombardo and a band to reimagine a few of the songs and has plans to begin rolling them out next year. Lynn found a new voice and sense of empowerment in her creative isolation, but she’s happy it’s over. Turns out, working alone can be a drag.

“It’s just really fun making music with people,” she says. “We all know that now even more.”