

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Brandi Carlile

**JVN** [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious, I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by Brandi Carlile, where I ask her: Did you know you know you'd grow up to be Brandi Carlile? Welcome to Getting Curious, this is Jonathan Van Ness. I normally don't cuss so soon, but I cannot stand how fucking excited I am for today's episode. This is so major. Welcome to Getting Curious Brandi Carlile, who is a six-time Grammy Award winner and a number one New York Times bestselling author. She is currently nominated for, count 'em, one, two, three, four, five, Grammys for her new album In These Silent Days. Chills up my triceps. Welcome Brandi Carlile, how are you?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:00:46] Oh my god, I'm so well. I love you more than I can say. You are an absolute gift to the world, and you have brought me so much joy and insight. This is a high honor. Thank you for letting me talk to you today.

**JVN** [00:01:01] Brandi, I can't have you say that to me at the very beginning. Like, normally, I just get tricep chills but that gave me, like, quad chills.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:01:06] I just needed to start with it, I just needed to tell you this.

**JVN** [00:01:08] That also made my stomach, like, full flutter. Also I just have to tell everybody, not to, like, be a hideous name dropper, but I just feel like we have to say, Brandi, will you just tell everyone who you were subtly FaceTiming with right before this? It's just kind of major, if you wouldn't mind telling us.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:01:23] I was having my morning FaceTime with Elton John and he was so excited that I was talking to you that he basically hung up on me and told me to get in there and do the interview and send you all of his love and admiration.

**JVN** [00:01:37] I need a fainting couch and I'm sitting down! You didn't say it like that first. Oh yeah. Why do I have in tears in my eyes and it's only, like, 20 seconds into this recording. Okay, first of all, welcome. Thank you so much for taking your time to talk to us. We're so excited. Like, everyone on my team is such a massive fan. Actually, I think, do you remember when, when I saw you at SNL that one time and then my assistant Julie got to take a picture with you and it was, like, really major for her?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:02:05] Yeah, I do remember.

**JVN** [00:02:06] It's, like, framed. It's in her family's living room. It's, like, a really major moment. Yeah. I mean, you're obviously just, like, a life-changing person. Everyone looks up to you so much, everyone's so obsessed with you. And also, In These Silent Days, not your fault that, like, you just keep on getting critically acclaimed, gorgeous, celebrated work every time you turn around. You were just performing on SNL. Can you tell us a little bit about In These Silent Days? I know you're working on it through the pandemic. Tell us about In These Silent Days.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:02:37] Well, not unlike you, I wrote a book. And it was amazing, the revelations that came from writing this book, the things that I had discovered about myself. You know, I always thought I remembered my life. I thought I could, you know, recall my memories in vivid detail. But to actually sit down and mine it, chronologically, it was amazing, because smells resurfaced and sounds and floral patterns on the couch and on the living room and in the car that we used to drive. Things, nuanced detail from my life kind of emerged and this picture started getting painted inside my mind and I, this book flew out of me, and I wrote my book, and I just remember, you know, the last day. Closing my computer at the desk and standing up, leaving the desk and going straight to the piano. And so, you know, I've made some albums, and I'm 40 years old, but this album is different because it came from me really understanding who I am, I think, in a way that I don't, I hadn't understood until now.

**JVN** [00:03:39] So Broken Horses is the name of your book, so Broken Horses, like, led you to this album. Kind of. Or, like, totally.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:03:47] Yeah, it's, it is absolutely, like, a continuum of, of the book. It's a-- it wouldn't be here without it, you know, which is really weird because I didn't think there were going to be any more firsts in the ways that I would write albums anymore.

**JVN** [00:04:00] If people have been living under a rock and they haven't been following, like, your career. I have this annoying habit of, like, breaking everything down, relating it to either, like, an Olympics or like a presidential administration. So your first album, Brandi Carlile (2005). This comes out in the Bush years. This is pre-Obama. This is right after Athens, Chellsie Memmel has just won her first individual all-around world title in the closest tie break with Nastia Liukin ever. Two thousand five, it's a different time. You also are very, like, just sidebar, a very consistent music maker, which, like, you better give us what we want. Love the new content, like, thank you for that. But 2005 to now: because you've had Brandi Carlile. The Story in 2007. Give Up The Ghost in 2009. Bear Creek, 2012. The Fire Watcher's Daughter, 2015. By The Way: I Forgive You, 2018. Snaps, damn near broke my phone listening to that one. And In These Silent Days, in 2021? Is In These Silent

Days, like, a departure? How have you, like, embraced, kind of, different styles in this album?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:05:12] Well, I think that if there is a departure in this album, it wouldn't be based in genre or instrumentation, I think it would just be based on vulnerability, because this may surprise you or appal you, Jonathan. But I've been adverse to drama most of my life. I've been a bit, I don't want to say rigid, but you know, I'm, I'm kind of a northern, stoic person, you know. I live in the foothills and I try to be and maintain a kind of level state of mind, you know, maybe it's because I was, I was raised with some chaos in my life. And when I wrote the book, it was, like, "All right, I'm done, I'm done shielding the world from the fact that actually I have a lot of drama." And so when I went into the studio on this record, I just let loose in the way that I sang, in the way that I played. There's no timing. There are no click tracks. It's almost all live vocal, bleeding into every instrument, and it's just really shameless in the way that I, you know, that I used my voice on this album. That makes it a departure for me. I get embarrassed listening to it, even, a little bit, but I know it was true and it was who I was in that moment.

**JVN** [00:06:30] OK, I'm obsessed with, like, I'm obsessed with all of that, answer. You wrote In These Silent Days in the pandemic, after this, after this book. So what was it like getting back into, like, touring, being back, like, on SNL cameras, like, I kind of, when I did my first performance after, like, two, not comparing my career because it's not, but, I, like, that when I feel like I did this show in the Kennedy Center, I was, like, "Am I going to remember how to do this in front of people?" and it was, like, kind of unnerving or were you just, like, "Get me back out there, Queen! I haven't been away from people this long in a hot minute."

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:07:10] I love that question so much. First of all, you should know, I just came from the Kennedy Center, and your, the picture of you is on the wall. And it's, it's just, it's just joy, like, you are just a joy bomb. And I loved, I loved, I loved seeing it in, in that space. I was really emotional when I first got on stage again, because I wasn't sure whether it was ever going to happen, I mean, it was, like, there was a time when I didn't know if it was going to go back to normal or what it was going to feel like. But I had to keep it together because you can't sing and cry. So I did. But I have been slowly having to regain some of my audacity back. I don't know if you've noticed this since the shut-ins. I mean, I watch your morning coffee dances and I see your audacity, like, on full display. And I didn't have the nerve to do coffee dances, but I've noticed that I could get back on stage with the band and kind of strut around with a microphone and fog machine and reverb and lights and, like, sequins and everything just fine. But that any time I was, like, called to pick up a guitar and sort of bare all and be alone, I was having these little crises of confidence. And so I actually just played a solo show last weekend because I just needed to fight or

flight it. I just needed to sink or swim. And it gave me a lot of my confidence and audacity back. And actually, I really feel like I'm just now ready to return to the stage as my full self.

**JVN** [00:08:42] So it took quite a bit of time for, like, a literal Brandi Carlile, who is literally you, yourself, it took you a little bit to feel like you found your, like, zhuzh, back. I mean, that's my words, not yours.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:08:56] Yeah, my zhuzh, my dynamics. You know, be able to look up from my hands on the piano and know that I'm going to hit the right chords. Just a real crisis of confidence. I've had it, I noticed it. You know, I do these jams with Joni Mitchell once a month at her house and it's a guitar pull. You know? We pass the songs around the room and in the song would come to me, and I would, I would pass it up, or I'd try to get somebody else to play it with me or anything to not be exposed doing it by myself, which is like, so counterintuitive to me because I've been a ham since I was, like, seven years old, you know?

**JVN** [00:09:28] And what was that, that was just from that was, like, your nervous system's response, like, to the shut-ins and just being isolated from people that then when you kind of got back in community, like, what was it, just, like, random?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:09:40] I think so. I think I just lost some social and dynamic musical chops and just needed to throw myself into the deep end to make sure I could still do it. Did you do anything like that for yourself when it goes, you know, you're such an outward and incredibly inspiring person? I mean, did you get a little shut in?

**JVN** [00:09:59] Yeah. Well, I mean, I will. I mean, well, I had my husband and I kind of I, my husband and I don't know. I think I. Look at you turning the tables on the podcast, asking me a question, get it. Yeah, no, I think as far as, like, my comedy bit goes, like, writing a new show and then, like, my stage manager, Julie, who's a really good friend of mine, was like, "Should you do, like, a littler club once or twice to like, do some like, do some of your new stuff?" And I was like, "No girl, I got it. I know I can do it." So that was kind of my version of just sink or swim in at the Kennedy Center. And I felt like I swam. But there was like, I mean, that whole day I was just like, "I am going to shit my pants. Like, maybe I should have done the smaller places."

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:10:54] Well, that place is intimidating! It's so big!

**JVN** [00:10:47] And it's, like, there's so many legends. Yeah, and big. Mm-hmm. But I landed all my tumbling passes. I do start my comedy routine with a gymnastics routine in a leotard on a bouncy tumble track. It's a little unique to my, I don't know that many other

comedians that do that to open their show, but that is what I did. But I nailed my passes and nailed my new comedy. But that's not the point.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:11:08] That is a brilliant way to warm up for a show, by the way. The best thing I've ever heard of, in my life.

**JVN** [00:11:11] It's good, right? Yeah, you, but this must be, like, I don't mean to talk about myself when I'm literally interviewing a legend. But think about this for crisis of confidence.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:11:18] I want you to.

**JVN** [00:11:20] Have you ever, like, what my life is? What? You don't understand this because you can sing like it. You just sing. You just, you're a singer girl. Not to quote Whoopi Goldberg in Sister Act II, but you are a singer. I can, like, try to open my mouth and make a pretty noise. And it doesn't happen. Like, I wish that I could. I wish that after I wrote Over the Top, like, I could write songs, but I don't have the instrument. I just don't. And we're not going to work on it right now. I know that's not what I'm asking for. I just, I have this disease where I can only sing the note that I hear and not well, which is just such a double whammy, you know, I can harmonize. Plus, I don't make amazing noises with my throat hole or my mouth hole or, like, it's just very, like, not the, the you just whatever. So for you and your because I don't even know if you could do this, and I think it could be, like, too mean to even ask because they fear and I hate people. I think my favorite thing because there's so if you had to do, like, a top three for, like, stand out, stand out, because this is, these are three, I have three questions in one and I just think I bit off too much they can choose. They can't even do two or three because it's really collaborations, concerts, and moments on tour, but that's, like, 18 things. What would be, like, your top three experiences in your career?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:12:43] I mean, I can narrow down. I can tell you a few. One of them happened this weekend. You know, I watched Joni Mitchell stand up out of a wheelchair and walk up the steps of the Library of Congress and, and get a medal put around her neck for contributing to American culture and art in a way that makes her more of an ambassador, even, than an artist. Because when the best of us is remembered, we'll remember it through the lens of people like Joni Mitchell, and even as a Canadian, she's contributed so much to our daily lives and also just to watch her recover from that aneurysm and get to where she's gotten to now. It was a really high honor and I was there as Joni's guest, and that's something that, like, when my life flashes before my eyes, like, I'll see that happen. The other one, I'm going to have to name check The Joke at the, at the Grammys. Because they knew it was a "changing my life" moment, and I knew I was old enough and centered enough in myself to experience it right then and not in

retrospect. I wasn't nervous in a way that I couldn't be there. And I just remember plugging in my guitar and feeling so ready, like, "Oh, this is my moment." I know, I knew it. I knew it was coming. I knew what it was. And so I'll never forget that. I remember it finishing, and I knew what had just happened and I was jumping up and down. Whenever I watch it, I'm, like, "Oh God, don't jump, Brandi."

**JVN** [00:14:18] You were too excited.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:14:19] Yeah, there's that one. And then, and then I have to say, I fell in love with Elton John in a fifth grade book report that I had done on Ryan White. And I had only ever listened to country music my whole life. I lived in a conservative house and went to school in a small town, and I checked that book out of the library at my school because Ryan White was so handsome and I wanted to carry around a book with a beautiful boy on it. And I read that book and I learned about HIV and AIDS and I learned about how politicized Ryan White was fighting to not become. He was being used by, trying to be used by the church and by so many other platforms to to turn the zeitgeist on gay men, basically. And when I got to the end of the, of the book, Ryan White had befriended this British rock star who then started the Elton John AIDS Foundation and sang at his funeral, sang a song called Skyline Pigeon. And I went to the King County Library, and I heard Elton John sing for the first time after discovering him in that book. And it changed my life, and made me play an instrument and made me write songs, and it sculpted my worldview. And so I met Elton John, just like you hoped I would, in the basement of a casino in Las Vegas. And that was again a major milestone in my trajectory as an artist. I would say those are my three, top three moments.

**JVN** [00:15:56] OK. And then if I was to go back and edit that and be, like, "Brandi, what were your top moments from your career?" And then you told me also about Dolly Parton because I'm just, like, really obsessed. Because I don't know if you know this about Getting Curious. We have been posting a picture of Dolly Parton or we went through this phase where we posted a picture of Dolly Parton every Sunday for, like, three years because, like, I would basically like, I would basically do anything to, like, just interview like Dolly Parton, like, Steel Magnolias, Nine to Five.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:16:25] You have to. Have you, have you asked?

**JVN** [00:16:27] Yeah, I've been. We asked her people. I asked the internet. I have gone to her house. I got a restraining order. I don't even know how we, I'm just kidding. I didn't actually do that. You know, no, I would do, I would do, I'd kiss a girl. I'd do anything, like, I would do whatever I had to do. You know, I'm saying, like, I hate mushrooms. I'd eat a mushroom. But I even know that she wouldn't even make me do that because she's Dolly

Parton. And I know it's just, like, it's just her people being, like, protective of her time because she's Dolly Parton. But the point is-

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:16:56] She would adore you.

**JVN** [00:16:57] Like, did you just, like? Because you mean you've met her, like, enough times to know who she would like?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:17:02] Well, exactly. I have met her now many times, and I would say that the big turning point in my relationship with Dolly Parton would be around Newport Folk Festival, which is a festival of moments. Some of the most historical moments in American music. Like, this is, this is the place where Bob Dylan plugged in. You know, this is the place where Johnny Cash introduced Kris Kristofferson to the world. This, this place changed the course of music culture, big-time. So, but they had never had an all-female headlining set. And they're known for these sets. And they gave me the unspeakable honor of curating it. And I thought about it. I went back, I researched Newport and I'm, like, "What's Newport never had? Newport's never had Dolly Parton."

**JVN** [00:17:45] Really?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:17:46] Yeah. So I started writing letters to Dolly, asking if she would come to Newport and shut it down. And I got a polite response, a few letters in, that said, "Please don't talk to us anymore about this until, until after Christmas." So, you know, Newport's in July. So Christmas ends and I write my, my fourth ish letter and I get this other reply that's like, "The answer's not no. But, you know, Dolly's got a lot going on and, you know." Anyway, one day in early spring, I get this voicemail. And "Hi, Brandy, it's Dolly, I'm going to be coming to your Newport Folk Festival that you've been writing me about, and I'm going to be singing Because I'm A Woman, Jolene, I'm going to be singing She's An Eagle, Nine To Five, and then I'll be singing I Will Always Love You as a duet with you. I'll be there if the creek don't rise." And that was it. It was, like, "Learn 'em, get 'em right." And she did. She came, I romantically sang, I Will Always Love You to Dolly Parton, like, to her face with an enormous crush I couldn't even hide and was transported out of body in that moment. One of the greatest experiences in my life or career. And she can sing, oh my lord, can she sing.

**JVN** [00:19:08] She just sings her ass off.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:19:10] Mm hmm. Mm hmm. And there's no effort.

**JVN** [00:19:23] Cause I saw her at the Hollywood Bowl and I cried. I was, like, not even in good seats, not even in good seats because, like, I was, like, twenty seven and, like, just to get there. But I cried the whole time, like I was beyond moved, like, just in her storytelling. Get away from me, you know Dolly Parton so well.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:19:30] Well, Jonathan, Jonathan. Before, before she sang with me, she prayed over me. Yeah, she comes onto the, onto the Newport grounds, right with a bag over her head. All you can see is her fingernails and her heels and-, because she was a surprise. So she gets into this trailer and she asked me how I'm feeling. And for some reason, I just said, "I'm terrified. I feel like I've bit off more than I can chew. I think the band knows the songs. I'm just, I'm nervous." And she goes, "OK, I understand what we have to do." And she just took my face in her hands and just prayed for me. And I've, I've actually, that's my lens of Dolly is through the lens of queer faith in the way that she has paved the way for, for us in that way.

**JVN** [00:20:22] It just struck me: you are someone who is clearly, like, a student of music. You couldn't, like, write what you write, and learn to play what you've played, in terms of learning piano, in terms of learning guitar, you've done, you're just such a musician's musician, and I can hear it when you talk about these legends and, like, Newport, how it's, like, such a major place. And sometimes I because this is, like, embarrassing me, but I'm, like, reverse sexist with music. Like, if you're not a lady I naturally don't want to, like, it's, like, this weird problem I have growing up as, like, a little gay boy on, like, a cornfield, like, I only like ladies' voices. I can't, or, like, although I, well, there are some non-binary and there are some cisgender male voices who as an adult I, like, but they're all gay. If they are, you know, like, Vincint [Cannady], like, I love.

But, but the point is, is that, like, by and large, like, I can tell when I should be excited about, like, a male music. Oh, Elton John, he's one! But again, but again, gay. Yeah. So, like, they have to, that's kind of, like, a prerequisite for, like, that gets me over the hump of, you know. I think it's just, I also wanted to be a diva. But the point is, you're a musician's musician. You are a studier of music. You're a celebrator of other musicians. I love that you hear other people on. But like, what about, like, what does it feel like to know that you changed the landscape of this whole music industry? Like, not a genre, like, the whole, you've made a welcome space for so many people that did not feel welcome and you have consistently done that. Like I said, you know, through so many administrations and times where, you know, our community was going through all sorts of stuff and you made, you changed the landscape. And when you were growing up being a lover of music and did you ever know that you were, like, literally going to turn out to be *the* Brandi Carlile?



**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:22:29] Yeah, I did. I did, and it feels amazing to know that I'm changing the landscape and that I'm one of those voices and one of those people doing it, and I know what you mean, like, I'm not reverse sexist or anything, but I am drawn intrinsically to, to queer voices. I hear them. I know them a mile away. I don't have to see the photo. I don't have to know the background. I know a queer person when I hear them, and it's because we're sparkly, we're sparkly. We bring so much to the world because it's, it's born of burden. And we transcend it, and our audacity precedes us. And those with ears to hear, we can, we can hear it. And I love, I love being that. I love being a queer voice and I love being a part of what we're doing for the world, it's challenging when everybody believes and doing it really fabulously.

**JVN** [00:23:21] Wow, what a beautiful, vulnerable journey. In Broken Horses, talking about growing up LGBTQIA+ in a rural place in a very religious setting, that's checking a lot of my boxes. I remember for me coming out, my mom left a book on my bedroom door that said, "Openly Gay, Openly Christian." And I remember she was just like, "I don't mind if you're gay. I just don't want you to burn in the fiery pits of hell." I'm surmising into last words, but that was the bottom line. You know, she didn't want. That was, like, you know, her biggest fear. Yeah. And for me, like, spirituality was, like, a really important part of who I thought I was as a kid and the thought of, like, being rejected by, like, the church or like the people at the church was like such a source of, like, pain and, you know, kind of sadness. And I think that for so many queer people, we have to, like, come to, like, a knowledge of who we are as it pertains to spirituality on like a slower term because it's, like, not laid out as clearly for us because we have to deal with something that so many other people don't have to deal with. And so what was that like for you, like, growing up in a rural, religious setting? And how did you reconnect with your faith and spirituality as an adult?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:24:40] Well, I don't want to gloss over that you mentioned hell, you know. Because I think that we have to we almost have to joke about this or talk about this openly to erase some of the dogma, some of that hell imagery and trauma that so many LGBTQIA+ kids are exposed to in their youth, usually before their parents even know they're queer. Or they may know innately and are in denial about it. But you know, we're really one of the only we'll call demographics that are promised hell from a young age. We're the first ones to find out that we're queer, and we associate that imagery with something innate in us. And there's real trauma to unravel there. And I think about it, I think about it a lot. Everything that that we do, whether it's country music or whether it's what you do on Queer Eye has a correlating culture. And just by living diametrically in the arts, having my feet on the ground, playing music, riding a four-wheeler, becoming a finish carpenter, being a country person, raising chickens, I'm changing the narrative of what rural America or what a rural person who's queer is allowed to do and the way that we're

allowed to live, which is one of the reasons I like *Queer Eye* so much. When I see you guys go in the spaces that, you know, queer people don't often go into and totally change someone's life and surroundings. It's profound, you know, it's reaching little kids who have that hell imagery in their mind and need it erased, but don't want to admit that it's keeping them up at night.

**JVN** [00:26:25] Mmm. It's interesting how when you said, you know, you don't want to gloss over the hell stuff and then, like, my making a joke about it, there are so many things that I do joke about that I don't even, like, it is just so deeply ingrained in me to joke about it because I can't even go back to some of the, because it just, like, hurts too bad. But I, I am just, I just love you so much I can't stand it. OK, but anyway. How is the, I guess, the experience of processing so much of that new visceral memories that you didn't have through shaking through *Broken Horses*, and doing that so publicly? Like, how was that for you? And, not to answer the question, but is that what kind of *In These Silent Days* was that your almost, like, your own way of, like, healing reliving that?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:27:15] Yeah. And it was also just my way of turning that time into something productive, you know, going, "This is what I did with these silent days. You know, what did you do?" "I wrote this. I came to this realization, I'm going to come out of this time really loud." And you know, that's why I did it. That's what I meant with the title. And then also working my shit out publicly is just what I do. You know, that's been, that's been my thing since I was a little girl. I've always wanted to be famous. I've always wanted to be on stage. I've always wanted to be heard. I don't make any apologies for the fact that I've always wanted to be famous. And I think it's because of my heroes, I think it's because of Elton, you know, Patsy Cline, Dolly Parton.

**JVN** [00:27:55] Do you ever feel, like, guilty?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:27:59] Yeah.

**JVN** [00:28:00] Like for, I do, too. Like, I always wanted it, and I never used to be ashamed of saying that I always wanted to be famous and, but now sometimes I feel really guilty.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:28:13] I think that there are so many different ways to be famous. One thing that you and I have in common about the thing that we've chosen to do with it is to turn really deep, vulnerable, life-changing situations that are, you know, unique to us outward to help other people with them, you know, with our whole hearts, our whole lives. And being famous doesn't necessarily mean being glamorous, being rich or, you know, having all the right clothes.

**JVN** [00:28:43] I think I thought it meant it would be easier. And it is not. Like, you do get to impulse buy cuter stuff. But it is, like, if I used to have a bad day, like, I fucked up, like, maybe a person or two's hair. Like, now it's, like... But now I actually thought of a songwriting thing. You know, like, in the movies, when you're not a musician, like, we are, it's like the label, isn't that like the network, you know? So what happens if you, like, go, and, you're like, "Oh my gosh, you guys are going to be obsessed with that?" And then, have you ever played something? And they were, like, "I don't get it." And then, if so, what do you do?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:29:18] I mean, this is nothing against any labels or infrastructure behind my career, but nobody's ever done backflips about my music when I turn it in because it's not very commercial. Nobody's going, like, "Oh yeah, we're going to cash in on this." I think working my albums in supporting me in terms of like the corporate powers that be has always been a labor of love. I think that they love the music because they love it and they know it might not be huge and that that has to be OK with me. It just has to be.

**JVN** [00:29:41] That's happened where they were, like, "Can you lose, like, track three, nine and 12?" And, you're, like, "No, fuckers, like, that's all of it!"

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:29:48] Every time, every time. Man, you know, the worst, the most poignant time that that ever happened was the song, my song The Story on the album, The Story.

**JVN** [00:29:56] We love The Story.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:29:57] Oh my god. I love it, too.

**JVN** [00:29:59] That's the one that I've always, like, that's a particular song where I really realize, like, how much I can't sing. I was actually just listening to it, like getting in the, like, in my mode for this interview. And it's just like. Yeah, I can't even, I'm not going to do it in front of you because, like, I'll die but it's, like, it's, like, I want to sing to it so bad.

[CROSSTALK] And then just, I do, I do. And then people, like, laugh at you, have around because they're like, That's like what it sounds like. And you're like. But I think, but in my head I sound like you or like another good singer.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:30:26] You do. If you accept yourself, singing feels like flying. It feels like a flying dream.

**JVN** [00:30:30] But just like but to other people, it feels like like some sort of like torture. [CROSSTALK] No, I mean, when we're not on my podcast stuff, I'll send you a DM of me

trying to sing. You'll be like, "Oh." Like, I know you're just like being like, it's, like, other people can by covering.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:30:47] I've heard a couple moments of you singing on Instagram where you break into song, you know, and you just can't help it. And I think it's beautiful.

**JVN** [00:30:55] Shut up. Could I? You know what I could ever do, though, I think, just sidebar, if you ever need a cameo and, like, like, if you ever had, like, a choir behind you or something, like, a random like choir, like if I could ever just lip sync in the choir, like, like, and people would be, like, "Is that JVN?" But they only mean because I'll be like the eighth row. Like, I'm really like hidden back there. I'm not even trying to usurp any attention. I just want to lip sync in a choir in or, like, because what's the, what is that, just the most recent gorgeous music video that I'm obsessed with, like, Courteney Cox directed?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:31:31] Right On Time.

**JVN** [00:31:32] Why couldn't I have been one of the people, like, walking? Like, I could have, like, even worn a wig, so people would have been like, "Is that JVN?" I'm, like, I just, I could have really camouflaged myself in like or dressed up as like a straight person or something and people wouldn't even have known.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:31:45] I mean they would have seen you, they would have known. You are such a pop culture baby just like me. Do you do heroes? Do you have, like, heroes?

**JVN** [00:31:56] Yeah, I have major heroes.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:31:58] Who is your hero?

**JVN** [00:32:00] Well, really funny, you should ask. Well, I have. I mean, obviously, Michelle Kwan is, like, leaps out. I think I mentioned her in my first book, like, two hundred and seventy five times. I was doing this work with my therapist the other day of, like, centering, like, your highest self and, like, you know, doing, like, a guided meditation, going through, like, a little place like you're. And it was, like, Dominique Dawes, like, that's who was waiting for me, like on one of the three stumps. Like, they're all like 90s and 2000s figure skaters and gymnasts are, like, really top for me, which is really embarrassing because I was actually doing an interview with Ashlee Marie Preston, who I love. She's a really good friend of mine, and they asked us, "Who are your queer icons?" And I was, like, "Rudy Galindo, 1994 world bronze medalist, 1984 US national champion. He was HIV positive, out, queer. Rudy Galindo." And then Ashlee Marie Preston was, like, "I'm going to more

say, like, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera." I was like, "Yes, of course, our heroes from Stonewall" but, like, Rudy Galindo is also a hero. That's what I meant to say. Yeah, that's what I meant to say, but I have. But I do have lots of heroes. I mean, but accidentally, when I think about it on the spot like that, they're all 90s gymnasts and 2000s gymnasts and figure skaters.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:33:18] Yeah, but that's why you're so special and so unique. It's like we it's so it's a needed perspective.

**JVN** [00:33:25] Like, there's other people too. Like, I mean, I've seen like a sense of what the, I think there's like so many different creatives and musicians and writers and, like, that. I mean, Margaret Cho is like one of my heroes who I like. She's kind of one of my own giants. Yeah, I can't believe that I've gotten to work with and see as much, and Michelle Kwan has also, like, I mean, we've become such good friends that like I, I only started acting normal around her, like, in the last six months, and we've been friends since 2018.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:33:54] I really get that.

**JVN** [00:33:56] Do you always lull hosts of podcasts or your interviewers into such, like, a nice little chitty chat trance that you end up asking them questions because it doesn't happen to me usually?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:34:06] I am utterly fascinated by you. OK? I am your creepy fan, and I, I watch everything you do, and I DM you, and I think about you way more than I care to admit.

**JVN** [00:34:17] I know that because we talk to each other, but I didn't! I wish that Julie, my assistant, she's not here to hear this, she'd shit her pants. We're obsessed with you, we can't stand it!

**JVN** [00:34:31] So but you do have, sometimes there have been things where the label, where they're, like, they don't understand the genius. But then later you just come back and you're, like, "I'll take my check, bye!"

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:34:39] I was saying, The Story, there's that moment where my voice cracks, when I say "all of these lines," it's like this big moment. The voice cracks and squeaks. It's like, it's a cool moment. It's like a Whitney moment of a break apart in the voice, right? But it's kind of also not beautiful. And, and the label wanted me to fix that and to edit that out. They were, like, "OK, well, if you're going to leave it on the album, then at least let us do a version for radio that your voice doesn't do that." And I mean,

even being, like, in my early 20s, I knew to kind of just, like, plant my flag there and go, "No, I'm a human being with a human voice, and it does that." And it was, like, something I'm really proud of when I look back on it. Yeah, it was definitely a label not excited about one of the moments I was excited about moments.

**JVN** [00:35:27] I can't believe that was the one because it's such a moment.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:35:30] I feel like that, too.

**JVN** [00:35:32] Have you ever had, like, I have had this one time where I accidentally called, I accidentally called Irish people British because I, I don't know if I can tell you the story, well, ok, so basically. Well, do I? It's my filter. So basically, I was doing this stand-up comedy show this one time, and I just was, like, "Oh, like, I just still haven't gotten over that, like, 25 beat Lemonade for Album of the Year. I just can't get over it, because, like, obviously I love Adele, but, like, I just...." And then, and then, and then I was, like, "Oh, I shouldn't say that, I'm in Britain," and then everyone started booing, they were, like "Boo, fuck you!" Because, and then they were, like, "You're in Ireland, you're in the Republic of Ireland." And I was, like, "ah!" I was also in a leotard, like, I was in the leotard after my gymnastics routine.

And then I had to, like, introduce the opener. And then I had to, like, go in the back, and I was, like, kind of pooping my pants and I, like, called my mom. And she was like, "You know, what, you have to, like, apologize, and then they're going to love you again?" And I was, like, "You're so right." And then I went out there. It was, like, "You guys, I'm sorry. Like, obviously, Beyonce should have won that. But, like, so cause, like, I just, geography escaped me." And then it was, like, fine. And it was like a great show. But if you ever had a moment on a show where you just, like, momentarily shit your pants and were, like, "Oops!" Or like, is that just it's, like, never have it? Or did you ever like earlier in your career? Did you ever find yourself at, like, the Tennessee State Fair? And it wasn't cool, and you were like, scare-scare? Not to call Tennessee that, but you know what I mean?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:37:03] I have never done that because I've, it's always been on the forefront of my mind. But I have had that moment where I felt the room turn on me and it was like, really, like, not a big deal. It was early on in my career. I was in Tucson, Arizona, and it was during Mardi Gras. I don't know why Tucson was celebrating Mardi Gras in that way, but somebody--the light's really bright in my face. I was in a club and it was called the Rialto, and it was like it was, it was a big show for me because they had a radio station. So there's, like, a thousand people there and somebody threw Mardi Gras beads at me and they hit me in the eye with my eyes open. I didn't see him come and tore my retina and then my eyebrows like, like mascara. But when it happened, I had this, like, schoolyard

bully response where I was like, yelled at the crowd. I was like, "I'm not your kindergarten teacher!" And it was like, I lost that room and I never got them back. The whole rest of the show. And I was dying inside for a straight hour and a half, and I wanted to apologize. I wanted to take it back. It was one dude, obviously that hit me in the eye with the beads, but I made this decision. I was, like, "For the rest of my career, I will never call an audience out because it's never worth it." So I never have. Have you ever felt the room turn on you when that happens, like, the room feels like you're in a nightmare?

**JVN** [00:38:18] Yeah, the Ireland time? That's the only time I ever got booed. Also, the room turned on me when I tried that. I've tried really hard to make this one joke work, and it was just, I thought, let's see if it works for you. Okay, okay. So it was, it was in my new set, and I was, like, "I'm HIV positive. This is my second pandemic." And at one time, they were killing it. Like, people, because it was, I was opening for Margaret Cho and people were laughing, just thought it was, like, the funniest thing they ever heard. Then I did the same joke at a college and there was all these, like, 18-year-old kids, like, probably, like, 18-year-old girls. And I did that joke and they were, like, "Oh my God!" I could literally just, like, feel the whole room go, like, Oh, and then I was like, Oh, is it too much? And I just felt, I just looked really uncomfortable the whole time, and I felt like I traumatized this like roomful of, like, teenagers. And I I don't know. I don't know why I really lost them so much as I lost myself.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:39:20] Oh yeah. And that's the thing is, maybe it is really us and we think it's losing the room, but it's like something changes. We flip something inside of us, maybe.

**JVN** [00:39:28] You lose the will to, like, be vulnerable because you, like, over, like, I at least, I over did that. I was like, "I don't know how to bring this back from the ledge." Generally speaking, this is kind of just like the music world. The way, how much more time do we have? Like six minutes, two minutes, three minutes, no minutes, three five minutes. How many times can we have left?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:39:48] I mean, I will talk to you all damn day.

**JVN** [00:39:50] No, because you're just being a nice person. I know you have like fucking places to go and people to see. OK, so three more minutes, rapidfire, OK, OK, I did that, so because your career has spanned a gorgeous time. What do you, what has changed since the beginning? If there's people who are passionate about music, specifically young people who are passionate about music. Actually, not even young people, why is it always about young people? If you're a person who is passionate about music specifically, like, a

queer person. What, do you have any advice for these people that want to get more into the music industry? Is there, is there a space for us? Is there room for more people?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:40:24] Yeah, I think, I say my advice to people if they want to get into music, if this really is where your heart's taking you, like, hold on to yourself, but find other people. Don't be alone. Play with people in a band. Form a community around yourself. Create support, chosen family. It's Queer Survival 101. But whether you're queer or not, find people. Find community. Form communities, form ideologies.

**JVN** [00:40:46] But just do that, like, on the side and maybe don't become, like, a group act because then they might be fucking nightmares and just jam with them on the side. Because, like, it's kind of fierce being, like, a solo act like Brandi Carlile, so you've gotta to like, wait. Maybe it's my own thing, like, you know, it's just whatever. Maybe that's my own thing, but whatever. So, OK, so there's that. And then what's next for you?

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:41:04] Yeah, I'm going to be touring the new album, and I have my women's festival, Girls Just Want A Weekend, where all women headlined the stages every stage and we sell it out every year and we hope to send the message back to us concert industry that we can throw down and sell tickets all by our own, by ourselves.

**JVN** [00:41:25] Or maybe you could just, like, tell the US concert industry to go fuck themselves, you don't even need them anymore. And it'll be like that tennis tour movie with Billie Jean King. And then you guys just launch your own like concert thing and you'll get your own stages and the next thing you know you guys will be your own promoters know I'll be like, fuckin kajillionares.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:41:43] Sarah knew. Sarah McLachlan knew. Lilith Fair was everything.

**JVN** [00:41:47] Was she your favorite when you were, like, a little tiny baby girl.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:41:50] I went to every Lilith Fair and that's JVN heaven, Lilith Fair is, by the way.

**JVN** [00:41:56] I was, I was doing all these corporate interpretive dances to Sarah McLaughlin just, Adia. You should've seen the heartbreak on my single axle, like, that was, like, at the apex of, like, Adia. And as hard as I, it's just, I'm obsessed with Sarah McLaughlin so bad.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:42:10] Did you know we're doing a show together?



**JVN** [00:42:12] What?!

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:42:13] We're playing The Gorge, in Washington state, where the Lilith Fair took place. When I was 17, 18, and 19, I went to all three of them on that same stage. I'm going to make her sing all those songs with me, Angel. I'm going to just walk out singing Adia, but also, "Hold on, hold on to yourself, and it's gonna hurt like hell." The whole thing. "Oh, hold on to yourself." Mirrorball, it's happening.

**JVN** [00:42:44] I was just looking behind me to see if anyone saw that, like, I was getting sung to by Brandi Carlile on Zoom, like, get away. Also Building a Mystery is another classic. And also random sidebar and then I'm gonna let you go. I swear to God. Also, the Sarah MacLaughlin song Winter Song that she sings on her, like, and it's just like, my high school cheer, or my high school dance team, the Q City Palmers. Every year, it's such a fire hazard, one of these years, it's going to get canceled. They turn down all the lights in the gym of my local high school. They pitch black the lights, no lights, then all the Palmers, they all have these two flashlights, and in their pants, like, the skirts. They have all these other colored flashlights and they do this, like, light show to Sarah McLaughlin Winter Song. They do, like, Santa Honey, a Christmas Tree. They're, like, coming down off the aisles, like, waving the lights, it is so major.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:43:35] Has this been filmed?

**JVN** [00:43:35] The YouTube video, it's on YouTube, but it, like, sucks on YouTube. It's like not as cool as real life, but if I can find, like, a cute video by the time can you show, I'm gonna DM you, like, a million videos. And maybe just show her, cause it's kind of fierce.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:43:44] Don't DM me, just come. Just come be my guest.

**JVN** [00:43:48] Literally Brandi Carlile on Getting Curious. Get out of my face, everyone. Get her, get the book, get her new gorgeous album, In These Silent Days, which is available now. We're going to include everything so people can follow you. But just thank you so much for coming on, Brandi. We love you so much and thank you for your time and all your advocacy and everything you do. We love you so much.

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:44:06] I love you. Thank you so much. That was really, really special.

**JVN** [00:44:10] Ahhhh!

**BRANDI CARLILE** [00:44:11] Byeeee!

**JVN** [00:44:15] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Brandi Carlile.

You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on.

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