

GEN F

Nate Tozer-Loft's harder sofa.

The Sheffield-born producer and multi instrumentalist speaks on the line between conventions and creativity, as an emerging collaborator in Leeds' experimental music scene.

By Rose Huhtala



The FADER's longstanding GEN F series profiles the emerging artists you need to know right now.

There were two sofas in the flat I shared during my first year at university. One backed onto a water-damaged window frame, pressed at an inconvenient angle to our television. Close enough that whatever anyone was watching sent a low, constant tremor through the crumb-lined cushions. The other however was dry, centred, and by all reasonable sofa standards the more comfortable option.

Nate always chose the former.

He was never an official resident, his accommodation sat on the outskirts of the immediate city, far enough that when nights ran past the late bus, crashing at ours made more sense than the alternative. Over the course of that year, he became something close to a permanent fixture. And yet every time, without apparent deliberation, his choice of sofa was unfavourable. I spent months assuming this was some unconscious habit. Then his alarm went off.

A personalised alarm, a pre-recorded voice bellowing expletives, intermittently intercepted by a piercing air horn. A self-designed system, vicious in its efficiency, built by someone who I was quickly realising, had decided that the path of the least resistance was not a path worth taking.

Nate Tozer-Loft is a twenty one year old producer and multi instrumentalist raised in Sheffield and currently based in Leeds. He has released, and has since quietly removed solo projects from Spotify such as his first EP 'EXPO'. But Nate's fingerprints are over dozens of local independent artists' discographies, through instrumentation, production and score work for short films. Due to his vast skill set, and his reluctance to admit to that fact, I find he is extremely interesting to talk to about music.

We meet in his home studio.

It is a room adorned with collectables from walks of life too dated to be from his own. Organised, it seems, around a principle of productive difficulty. A vintage keyboard from a market. A children's Casio from the 1980's currently awaiting something Nate called "circuit bending", a process that involves opening the casing and making temporary connections to find sounds the manufacturer never intended. If that proves unsuccessful, he is clear about the alternative "It's circuit bent or dead". Next to it sits a box he's just rediscovered, his dad's old MIDI unit from the nineties, left over from years of playing keys in a church worship group.

The influence of the Church runs further back than the equipment. Nate grew up in Sheffield playing congas in a Sunday morning worship band from the age of seven or eight. He demonstrates, slapping an imaginary rhythm on his thighs. As the children of Vicars, his parents enrolled Nate and his brother into music groups within the Church, where encouragement to try new things and be rewarded for doing so gave him a 'confidence from the get-go' he says. "Im privileged to have been in such a space."

For most of his childhood, the musical tastes of his mother were subconsciously adopted. "Until I was maybe 15, I didn't really listen to music," he says. "If I listened to music and thought Mum wouldn't like it, I didn't like it. My taste was just my mum's taste." She loves "beautiful things" he says. But in Nate's early teens it was the discovery that "not only can horrible things sound beautiful, but there's also a million other feelings you can get from music other than that."

“Theres that Dire Straits intro,” he says, referencing the arrival of the thumping toms after Sting’s iconic ‘I want my MTV’ intro for ‘Money for Nothing’ which he played before we began our interview. “I might get that same feeling from Chicago footwork”. He draws a similar sensory connection between Nick Drake and the Russian romantic composer Rachmaninoff. It is a way of listening that makes commercial categories feel redundant, which perhaps explains why commercial categories, or creating art to fit said categories has never much interested him.



After a few years of rough experimentation, he formed a band called ‘Flat Stanley’ with some friends just before sixth form. It was with this band that he had his first professional studio experience at Ross Orton’s studio in Attercliffe, Sheffield. Orton’s credits run from the Arctic Monkeys’ Brit Award winning AM to Working Men’s Club, and Yard Act to name a few. The session was run by Orton’s engineer Dave, who has worked there since the nineties and had built much the space with his hands. Now largely blind, he lives off of his disability benefits to support his life outside the studio meaning he can spend his days mostly where he wants to be - inside it.

Flat Stanley arrived, with two days to record three songs. By the time it was 7pm they had only just pressed record for the drum take. While Dave pottered around the kit, adjusting

and listening, the band ate and waited. When it came time to record, Nate recalls it sounding fit for a record without even touching the mix. A lesson itself in the importance of the set up rather than the post production that has stayed with him. Nate's affinity with 'fixing' and altering man made instruments or hardware derived from his days at this studio. In the final day of recording, Dave stopped everyone mid take, his ears attuned to something wrong in the bass amp. After a bit of dismantling and one replaced tube, the sound had been returned back to its original state with no one in the room understanding how he could've noticed.

These influences, the church, Dave, his ease around discomfort, all show up in a purposeful way in how he works now. His sessions are built on the feeling or 'flow' over a push for efficiency or the 'right' way of doing things. "The bare minimum" he says, "is that everyone has to be having fun. Because there's no other reason."

This is not always tidy in practice. Recording drums for *Oxford Comma*, a project with close collaborators, he insisted on compressing a snare until it was, in his own description, "flat, compressed, horrible" waving away his co-producer's offer to keep a clean parallel signal as a backup. Within the hour, having heard it back, he was quietly relieved the backup existed. He tells the story without embarrassment.

We close out our conversation with a few questions about how and what he's looking forward to about the next few years. He tells me about a feeling he's been chasing recently, of finishing a track and it resembling the imagined version he initially anticipated. He wants that feeling as much as possible, looking at studio internships as a way of chasing it more deliberately. The broader goal is having time, enough of it to keep making work with the people around him. "Whether that's because I'm making money by exploring," he says, "or making money that funds the exploring, I don't mind. I wanna make new sounds. And I wanna help other people get their sounds out."



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