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John Moe: A note to our listeners: this episode contains discussion of suicide and abuse.

I used to think that where you acquired a mental health issue from was basically a 50/50 proposition. Half the time it was because of traumatic events, likely in childhood, causing a nasty echo that kept resounding until—and unless—some good treatment got it under control. Then the other half of the time, I thought, it was just a spin of the wheel, and you landed on depression. You landed on an anxiety disorder. You landed on bipolar. It just happened. I don't think that way anymore. I don't think it's 50/50 anymore. I don't know what the math is. I don't think we can know.

But the past eight years I've been interviewing people about mental health have put me very much in the nurture column. Environmental conditions, traumatic events. And the thing about trauma is that those echoes can span generations. It's not just one lifetime. It can be many. And that's a lot to manage. So, of course you're—you know—fucked up. But it's not hopeless. You can unpack that. You can figure out how it's working on you, what you can do about it. You can watch subsequent generations, watch out for them and care for them. It's hard.

It's possible.

Sometimes you can even sing. Let's listen to a little music together.

It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Music: “Common Loon” from the album *13” Frank Beltrame Italian Stiletto with Bison Horn Grips* by Xiu Xiu.

What will you do if and when

I am someone else?

They are a freak, and cool

(Music fades out.)

John Moe: That's the band Xiu Xiu, with a song called “Common Loon” off their new album, *13” Frank Beltrame Italian Stiletto with Bison Horn Grips*. It's a long title for an album. The voice you heard was Jamie Stewart, lead singer and founder of Xiu Xiu—spelled X-I-U X-I-U. Jamie's our guest this week.

You won't hear a lot of Xiu Xiu songs played on acoustic guitars at coffee shop open mic nights. You're not going to hear it playing in the background in shopping malls. No, it's less down to earth than that; more up in the sky than that, I guess. Wikipedia lists Xiu Xiu as

experimental rock, art rock, noise pop, electronic, post punk, avant-pop, and art pop. Alright! They've put out 14 albums, won lots of critical acclaim, and a loyal following.

Jamie has had the band together with various lineups since 2002. Jamie Stewart, who uses they/them pronouns, says both their parents dealt with manic depression—which is sometimes called bipolar disorder today—and says that their parents abused Jamie and their siblings. And that the previous generation—Jamie's grandparents—were abusive as well.

Jamie's father, Michael Stewart—a musician himself—died by suicide in 2002. You might not have gone through everything Jamie and their family have. Or maybe you have gone through something like that. You might not have released 14 albums of experimental music. But I don't know, perhaps you have. But you've probably been through something, and you're probably trying to figure out how to manage it. Maybe this will help.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Jamie Stewart, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Jamie Stewart: Thank you for having me. I mentioned earlier, but I'd like to say in public: I'm a very big fan of the show. I'm very happy to be on. Thank you.

John Moe: Thank you so much. What's the album about? It's a broad question, but what's it about?

Jamie Stewart: I'll try to answer it clearly. This one—a couple of the songs are about very particular things. You know, the first song on it, “Arp Omni”, is a very specific love song. And the last song, “Piña, Coconut, and Cherry” is a loss of love song, and a loss of love through poor behavior—an excess of nefarious behavior. A lot of the rest of it is about interactions with sort of liminal spaces—

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—trying to navigate one's way through very negative aspects of spirituality. Trying not to become lost, but being very, very lost. And then in the midst of that unclear and unpleasant, you know, traversing through other aspects of dimensionality, basically celebrating being of a freak (*laughs*) or being—like, in the midst of all of that, along the way finding insane sexual deviants, and giving them a quadruple thumbs up.

John Moe: (*Chuckling.*) Okay. Well, let's get to know you a little bit. And being the show we are, I need to ask you about mental health. You've described your house growing up as a place where both parents experienced manic depression. What was life like for you in that house growing up?

Jamie Stewart: Well! It largely fucking sucked! (*Laughs.*) I will say, before I go too deep into the sucking parts, both of my parents were brutally abused as children and tried very hard to show my siblings and I love. And I think the reason my siblings and I are not psychopaths is because even though my parents had many, many, many cards stacked against

them—coming from where they came from and with their own biochemical imbalances—they did express love to us, even though the house I grew up in was very, very emotionally abusive, and also totally unpredictable and chaotic pretty much at all times. So, it was—I don't know—

John Moe: You say emotionally abusive, so was it not physically abusive?

Jamie Stewart: There was a certain amount of physical abuse. But I—you know, a lot of people who are victims of abuse make excuses for their abusers. (*Chuckles.*) Not in any degree to the brutality that both of my parents experienced. There are certainly things that happened to me that in a million, billion years I could not imagine my siblings—my siblings have children. I can't imagine my siblings doing the kinds of things physically that my parents did to me that they do to their own children. Partially, it was a different time. I mean, I grew up in, you know, the '70s and '80s. It was just a different time.

But also, you know, like I said—my parents were crazy. They did a lot better—they did significantly better by us than their parents did by them. And my siblings have since done significantly better by their own children. So, you know, I mean, I got punched in the face. I got kicked a lot. But you know, it wasn't like—it wasn't something that I feared daily. It was more of like a shock that would come out of nowhere, because—out of, you know, their unpredictable behavior. It wasn't like I expected to get punched in the face. Just suddenly that would happen, and I'd be like, “That was... a fucking negative surprise!” (*Chuckles.*)

You know, but my parents, that was something that they dreaded every day.

John Moe: They dreaded?

Jamie Stewart: Oh, just physical abuse every day, when they were children. Yeah.

John Moe: When they were young. Okay. Okay. So, what did that do to—you know, living in that place of these ups and downs and with this abuse of all sorts, what did that do to the way you lived your life, to your behavior? What was a day in the life like for you?

Jamie Stewart: It's been a long trip for me. Very, very, very fortunately—you know, through therapy and then just through a strength of character on my mom's part, I was able to—I guess, you know, about a decade and a half ago—just talk to her very directly about the things that she did to me when I was a kid. And to her credit, she took responsibility for all of them. And you know, a lot of people in that position, they'll deny it. You know, or they'll pretend it didn't happen, or say it was your fault, or something like that.

John Moe: Minimize it. Yeah.

Jamie Stewart: Yeah. Yeah. And because she just said, “That was awful, I'm sorry.” And then she tried to explain to me—not as an excuse, but explain to me what her childhood was like. And just, you know, just to sort of give a source for what happened. And because of that, she and I started our relationship over, essentially. And now we're very, very close. And

I would say we're friends. I mean, I genuinely enjoy my mom's company. Also, she's on the right medication now, and her life is totally different than when I was a child.

So, now through—it took me a very, very long time to get to that place. But when I was a kid? Just afraid all of the time, just constantly anxious, terrible sense of self. You know, but then—you know, like a lot of people who feel that way—

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—I started taking karate as a kid, and it gave me a little bit of confidence in the midst of that. But then I just went like really hard. (*Chuckling.*) Like, really hard. Became sort of outrageous—you know, kind of outrageously extroverted and obnoxious. I think to sort of supplement all these feelings of self-loathing as a kid. So, a lot of back and forth between feeling like I was a complete piece of shit, and then acting like a complete piece of shit.

I'm a lot better about it now, but just had, really—I'd probably say I was an alcoholic for a long time. Now I have a very healthy relationship with drugs. But my father was a junkie, so I never did drugs until I got my shit a little bit together. So, I don't have a problem with drugs, but alcohol is something I really struggle with. You know, I have severe depression and anxiety and can be—and have a very, very, very short fuse. And I think people throughout my life who have been close to me have been on the negative end of that short fuse. And you know, it's something that in therapy I'm really working on. You know, not as an excuse for my behavior in any way, but it's just the source of that incredibly short fuse.

I used to smash stuff and break shit all the time, which thankfully I don't do anymore. But yeah, I was a fucking handful for a long time. (*Giggles.*)

John Moe: Was music a way of trying to cope with everything that was going on in your life?

Jamie Stewart: Oh! Yeah, yeah. Like, I would—I'm not saying this to romanticize this or be self-aggrandizing, but I would be dead without music. I mean, I got—Xiu Xiu was when I really got serious. I always played in bands as a kid. But Xiu Xiu, when that started, is when I got very, very serious about music. And it is—I've described it this way for me a lot of times. It doesn't erase those problems for me. It's not cathartic, but it is a way to organize those feelings. It's a place to put them, categorize them as something, or compartmentalize them as something that has the potential to be constructive rather than destructive.

So, it places all those feelings sort of in an emotional compartment that is not negatively turned onto my own physical self.

John Moe: So, you know, as you grow up, and you make music, and you're in these bands, and you're—you know, Xiu Xiu forms—what's the role of your mental health in the music that you make? Is it—are you trying to understand it through the music? Or like you said, just sort of set it aside? Are you trying to treat it?

Jamie Stewart: It might not—maybe—I might have misdescribed this. It's not necessarily setting it aside. I think it's giving it—trying to give that negative mental health energy, which I cannot make go away—give it some— You know, you can't make energy; I mean, it's just physics, you can't make any—no energy vanishes. It's trying to turn that energy, transform that energy into something else.

I mean, one of the few positive things about being nuts is being hyperfocused. (*Chuckling.*) And you know, we've made a shitload of records, I think because I'm fucking crazy, and I don't want to do anything else. That's been one way that my mental health has surfaced is just by always making something.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More with Jamie Stewart from Xiu Xiu in a moment. Let's enjoy some more music. This is “Veneficium”.

Music: “Veneficium” from the album *13” Frank Beltrame Italian Stiletto with Bison Horn Grips* by Xiu Xiu—an upbeat, distorted synth track.

(*Music fades out.*)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're back talking with Jamie Stewart of Xiu Xiu.

Your father died by suicide in 2002. What did that do to how you saw the world?

Jamie Stewart: Fortunately and unfortunately, for about three or four years before he killed himself, he told me pretty regularly that he was planning on killing himself. And I say unfortunately, obviously, because that's something that I had to sit with for three or four years, just wondering when this was going to happen. But fortunately for me—which was different than it was for my siblings—is I knew it was happening. I was expecting it. So, when it happened, I was mostly just relieved. I was like, okay, I don't have to think about this anymore. You know, the shoe has dropped that has been weighing on me for years. It's done. I know this was going to happen, and now it happened. And now he is free.

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And he has taken on whatever form he has taken on.

But for them, they were shocked—completely shocked—and had a much different relation with it than I did.

John Moe: Where are you in the birth order?

Jamie Stewart: I'm the oldest.

John Moe: You're the oldest.

Jamie Stewart: Yeah, and my dad was also a musician and kind of helped me. He went—when I was a kid, he was pretty checked out. He just had a lot of addiction issues and massive mental health issues and became—you know, was a workaholic also, similarly to me, just I think to sort of subvert all of his demons. And just wasn't a—I mean, my parents were married, and we lived in the same house, but I hardly ever saw him when I was growing up.

But he—before I was in Xiu Xiu, I was in my early 20s. I think he could tell that I wanted to try to be a musician. And he went through a very brief period of really getting his shit together, essentially. Stopped using drugs, got out of the music business. Which I think was just—and got another good job. Like, he worked in the music gear business instead. I think just being around the music business, he just couldn't get away from drugs. And made it made a concerted effort to become a part of my life, and kind of helped me get going. And kind of, you know, taught me a bunch of engineering things—recording engineering things. And helped me get my first band started.

And then unfortunately he started using again. But there was this period where he was really himself, essentially, and—you know—not at the behest of insanity, and not at the behest of drugs. And then he got Xiu Xiu rolling, and then unfortunately he went back on the path.

John Moe: Well, I have to ask: if you knew that he was suicidal, and your siblings didn't know that, why didn't you tell them?

Jamie Stewart: It was just a time of complete craziness. I mean, I'm very close to my siblings, and I always was. But it never even occurred to me to tell them or to try to do something about it. I think I just didn't feel as if I could, or that I wanted to burden them with that information, or I thought maybe they knew also. Or—I mean, a lot of things about my relationship with my family—I mean, when you say it now, it makes a lot of sense. Like, (*chuckling*) I probably should have said something! But it didn't even cross my mind at the time.

I mean, things were—I mean, I was not living a very healthy life at the time. I don't know. I don't know why. I mean, other than that. I mean, it's odd, because my family—I mean, despite all of the bad things that happened, I think because my parents did their very best to show us some love, my family has always been very close. Not necessarily—now, in very positive ways. I mean, things are—everybody has a totally different life now; it's like a miracle almost. But at that time, it was just complete chaos for all five of us.

John Moe: How far back do you go with depression, yourself?

Jamie Stewart: When I think about it now, I mean, since I was a child—when I understand the symptoms. But I didn't really begin to understand it in myself until probably my mid-20s. It was getting very, very bad. And I began to have a clear conception of what the symptoms were, and just realized, oh, there I am; that's me. You know, all of these things—that's my existence.

But when I just—you know, when I think about how I felt as a child and how I felt as a teenager, it's all the same things. I just didn't know how to describe it.

John Moe: You mention a lot of drugs and alcohol. Is it too simplistic to say you were trying to deal with it? You were trying to self-medicate?

Jamie Stewart: Oh, not at all. I mean, that's exactly—I mean, now, fortunately for me, drugs are just kind of for fun. You know, I don't have a problem with drugs. You know, I'm able to do them or not do them. And I don't—you know, I don't do any hard drugs. I just do like hippie drugs, like mushrooms and acid and pot and stuff like that. But booze on and off is very, very definitely self-medicating. I haven't gotten drunk in three months, which is—for me—a very long time. I'm going to try and keep it up. I'm noticing I vastly prefer my physical and mental self off booze. But—oh, yeah. (*Laughing.*) All of the plainest, most boring, obvious relations to alcohol that depressed people have.

John Moe: Yeah. Well, you've been very candid about your mental health in interviews and in your songs, too. I want to ask about kind of writing about that kind of thing. Like, when is the right time to write about what's happening with one's mental health? Like, do you feel like you need to be completely on top of an issue in order to write about it? Or can you write about it when you're in the thick of it, and it's maybe not going so well?

Jamie Stewart: I can't really get any music done when I'm very depressed. I can get music done when I'm sad or I'm angry or distressed.

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But it's really difficult for me to do any writing. I can tour when I'm depressed. I mean, it sucks, and it's no fun. But I mean, I can, you know, functionally play a show. But any sort of creativity when I'm depressed is just—I don't have any feeling for it or any attachment to it, really. So, it's basically like when it's done, it's done. Or I'm trying to get through depression by working on music, even if I'm working on stuff that sucks. It's just sort of a way of functioning other than just lying in bed and staring at the wall.

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I'm always interested in hearing from professionally creative people about the utility of the work that they do in dealing with a complicated mind. Like, is it—? You know, are you trying to make sense of it? Are you trying to kind of decode what happened to you? Or are you just trying to describe it? Like, what are you trying—what's the role of your mental health in that music?

Jamie Stewart: I mean, it's been different at different times. There was—in I think maybe kind of the mid period of Xiu Xiu, I was beginning to understand the ramifications of certain very specific types of abuse that I went through. And I wrote some songs about that, specifically to try to understand it—to essentially put it into a narrative, and by putting it into a linear narrative, be able to admit to myself things that had happened. I think when the band started, my mind wasn't that clear. I think it was just the feeling all the time was, (*like an upset baby*) “EEEEEH!” And then I think just the “EEEEEH!” became part of the songs.

I think now as my life is a lot better, I'm less bonkers than I have ever been. And I have a clearer understanding of, okay, this is my brain malfunctioning right now. The world is not ending. This is gonna suck for, whatever, ten days. I will try not to be a total asshole to the people around me. This will pass eventually, you know. I just—I sort of understand it as more something that is happening to me rather than something that is— And it's not confusing anymore.

So, I think now, the role of dealing with cuckoo-ness and Xiu Xiu is more of just music as a way to get past it and just deal with other issues. It's more—music is more maybe palliative rather than necessarily illuminating. Whereas, before, music was really clarifying certain things for me. Now, depression is just occasionally in the way of music. And I'll—you know, and I'll just sort of shove through it. You know, but 15 years ago, it was very different.

John Moe: Well, it seems like you've got a really good grip on recognizing the distortions that go with mental illness. Like, to say, you know, “Okay. This is something that's happened to me,” like you said. And not “This is the way the world is.” Like, not “I'm seeing the truth that nobody else sees about, you know, all this evil.” You're saying, “Oh, okay. I'm getting fooled. Someone's trying to fool me here. I'm trying to get taken for a ride.”

Jamie Stewart: (*Chuckles*) It's just—it's not immediate. Like, I'll probably have like two days of feeling like there is no point in living and fuck humanity. You know, fuck God, and fuck nature, fuck everything. And then I'll go, “Oh, wait a minute. This is depression. This is not—my life is really functionally not any different than it was two days ago. This is just bad wiring.”

But you know, before I would feel that way for like five months. And you know, now I got—you know, (*stammering*) realizing the source of that feeling and kind of becoming moderately functional is a much shorter ride. I mean, clearly, there are things that happen in the world that are deeply upsetting to me and are deeply upsetting to everybody. But understanding the difference between being upset by something awful that has happened in the physical and actual world, and understanding difference between my brain chemistry imploding is I have a much—not a total handle on it, but a much better handle on than I used to. The negative markers exist for a much shorter period of time.

John Moe: How did you get to that better understanding? Was it therapy, or just self-reflection, or what?

Jamie Stewart: Some of it was therapy. Some of it is just, you know, I'm in my mid-40s. It's just, you know, I've been feeling this way for a long time. Some of it is, you know, talking to friends in a similar situation. Some of it is just making different life decisions.

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You know? And realizing, oh, this behavior radically exacerbates something that makes me want to fucking kill myself, and I'm tired of feeling this way. So, I'm not doing that anymore. And some of it's just luck. I've had some good things happen professionally that just made it easier to exist. And, you know, my life being—(*stammering*) my life being easier to exist in than it was before. I have fewer things making me—you know, leading to the types of

behavior that would lead to exacerbating depression that was going to happen one way or the other. Does that make sense? Sorry, I feel like I babbled a little.

John Moe: Yeah, no. I mean, what I read that to mean is like maybe you don't have the anxieties that you might have if your career wasn't going so well, like the sort of everyday, you know, little pushes that you get.

Jamie Stewart: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, not like we're like crazy fucking superstars, but there was a period— You know, I mean, I love music more than anything. And there was a period where it seemed like Xiu Xiu wasn't going to work out anymore. And I went through for a very, very long time an extraordinarily deep depression. It felt like, you know, I was somebody I loved was going to die. You know, or like getting divorced or something like that. And then really just by some stroke of luck, it seemed like things kind of turned around. They seem to have stabilized to a degree. But yes, how you described it was accurate.

John Moe: So, is the stability of your mental health depending on how many albums you sell and tickets you sell?

Jamie Stewart: *(Laughs.)* It's not so much that. It was more about can this gift be maintained? There was a while where it seemed like maybe it wasn't going to. And I think at this point—you know, if and when Xiu Xiu ends, I think I'll be able to deal with it a lot better than I could at that time. I had a long—through some therapy and through a lot of talking with my mom and my bandmate Angela, this came to a clear realization about just, you know, what being a musician means. And you know, I mean, this was a few years ago. And I hope it never ends, but if it does, my life is not over. Which is what I felt like it was going to be like for a long time.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Jamie mentions drugs there. Hippie drugs, they say. We left it in, because it's what they said. It's part of their story. But I should mention that pot is still illegal in many places. Mushrooms are illegal in most places. Acid, LSD, is illegal everywhere. Buying these things off the street means there are no controls or regulations on what you're getting. And also, these drugs can be extremely powerful. LSD and mushrooms can involve long-term adverse effects. Just wanted to put that out there.

Just ahead, drawing boundaries on your private life while being a public figure.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with Jamie Stewart of Xiu Xiu. Last year, their memoir, *Anything That Moves*, was published.

You've written a book about a lot of your sexual encounters. You've talked a lot about your mental health, and you write songs that feel very personal. Do you have parts of your life that

are off limits, that you want to just keep private, that you won't work into anything that you do, or that you won't talk about in public?

Jamie Stewart: Oh yeah, for sure. *(Laughs.)* Yeah, definitely. There are mostly good things. Mostly nice, positive interactions I have. I really just—I want to keep those to myself. Also, they're usually kind of boring. Like, they don't really make for *(laughs)* very compelling songs.

John Moe: They might not have the conflict and the drama in there? *(Inaudible)*.

Jamie Stewart: Yeah. Yeah. You know. I mean, I don't—you know. *(Laughs.)* I don't want to write some insipid fucking song about what a rad day I had.

(They laugh.)

John Moe: Do you consciously draw—like, do you sit down and say, “Okay, this is where I'm drawing the line,” And this is on this side, or that's on the other side? And you just kind of wing it?

Jamie Stewart: Nah, no, not really. Yeah. I just kind of wing it. I mean...

John Moe: Okay. What's it like—? You know, a lot of Xiu Xiu's lyrics can get pretty heavy. There's talk of—you know, there's things like suicide and death and intrusive thoughts. And it's very plain-spoken. What's it like going out on tour and singing that stuff every night? Do you have to have the full emotional experience of those words in order to present them?

Jamie Stewart: I think I just realized very recently, like within the last two months, that it has a much bigger toll on me than I understood that it did. Generally, when we're playing a show—and a lot of musicians have talked about this—it's going great if I walk on stage, and then I suddenly realize the show has ended.

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You know, like if it's just happening, if it's flowing along. Or I mean, this is a corny word—or a corny phrase—but people talk about the flow state. You know, if the flow state is happening, that's when it's the most real that. You know, the connection with the audience is the most generous—I mean, most genuine. The connection with my bandmates, connection with the music is the most genuine. And I am—you know, my conscious mind is not involved. It's just happening.

We won't play songs that there is not some immediate emotional relevance to the subject matter. I mean, you know, some of the songs are kind of impressionistic or psychedelic or kind of unconscious. And it's harder to determine whether or not there's an immediate connection. But the ones that are very, very literal and are about a clearly definable narrative subject, if I just don't feel that way anymore, we won't play those songs. Or if those feelings have not evolved into some different thing, where— You know, over time obviously your

feelings about certain historical events change. If there's still—if there's not some sort of very real or relevant evolved feeling about a particular song, we won't play those anymore.

Not to endlessly talk about my dad, but because he was a musician and because of his suicide, he's been a big figure in my life. And he's my dad. So. But there is a song on our second record called “Blacks”. Which we finished the record before my dad killed himself, but it came out after he killed himself. And the lyrics in “Blacks” are largely things that he said to me about wanting to kill himself. We played that for a few months after he died, and then I just didn't want to deal with it anymore. And so, you know, we didn't play it. And we haven't played it in 20 years.

But I was in—so, I was seeing a new therapist recently, and I realized I had never really dealt with my father at all in therapy. I think he was just this sort of sad figure in my mind that I tried not to think about. I prayed for his spirit every day. But I just didn't think about him. I didn't deal with the suicide. I didn't deal with how he was with me as a child. I dealt with a lot of other stuff in therapy, but not him as an individual. So, I figured, oh god, I better do this before I die. So, I started talking about my dad and was getting to a very different place, very different feelings about him, very different understandings about him.

And I thought, okay, it's a song that kids have requested that we play a lot, and we have never played it. And we're going on tour soon. And I thought, okay, I'm in a different place with my dad. Maybe it's time to explore this song again. And you know, but I haven't listened to the song in 20 years, and I was sitting in a little studio and trying to learn it again. And you know, saying the words for the first time in two decades. And again, not to sort of be self-aggrandizing with feeling bad, but had—I just—I started shaking. I started just—I was by myself, and I just started like screaming, essentially. Like, there was some physical ball inside of me about those lyrics and about that instance that had not been released. And it felt like a lot of other similarly fraught lyrical subject matter was included in that ball, and it had been just sitting inside of me for a long time. And I think singing these particular lyrics kind of broke the dam.

And it was very intense for about two or three minutes of just being physically totally out of control, and just sort of like shouting, and just—it was like being exorcized or something. And then I was alone, and I realized like I have to get a handle on this, because I don't know what—there's nobody here to talk me down at all. I have to—you know, I just started trying to like breathe really slowly. And it took about 10 minutes before I suddenly felt like in control of myself again and then just kind of walked outside and looked at some trees for a minute and went, “Wow, that was very fucking intense and weird! (*Chuckles.*) I didn't expect that to happen.”

All is to say—to go back to your question—that stuff is in there. It may be affecting me more negatively than I realize that it does.

John Moe: Well, it sounds like trauma. It sounds like—because trauma doesn't fade. It just waits. And then it (*inaudible*).

Jamie Stewart: I think that's very accurately stated.

John Moe: So, are you going to do that song on tour?

Jamie Stewart: Yeah, yeah. (*Laughs.*) I mean, (*stammering*) I feel like I can—I mean, we've been practicing it. And in rehearsal, that level of explosive negativity has not come back again. I think it's going to be fine. I think it's just—kind of like you said. The trauma ball was waiting. It left.

John Moe: Well, I mean, you certainly wouldn't want to go through that, you know, every night on stage.

Jamie Stewart: FUCK NO! (*Laughs.*)

John Moe: You don't want to be in Milwaukee and have that happen.

Jamie Stewart: No, I would not.

John Moe: But then—like, it makes me think of like an acting performance, like where they need—an actor needs to lend their emotional truth, their emotional life to imaginary circumstances, to a situation.

[00:35:00]

And it does require giving over of yourself to that extent. Do you have a similar obligation as a musician, as a songwriter, where—if you're going to really tell the truth of that song—you need to get inside of it to some degree?

Jamie Stewart: I mean, the music that has meant the most to me—you know, and the literature in the films that have meant the most to me—it is clear that the people or person who are making it took that risk. And because they took that risk, it resonated with me in a very genuine way. And you know, because we have been given the gift of being able to be in a band that's been around for a long time, I feel obligated and want to be a part of that continuum, to try to give in that way.

It's not like a burden, you know, that I feel! (*Dramatically.*) I have to torture myself in order to realize the continuum of art and music!

But you know, the art and music—I'm following the path that has been meaningful to me. The people who have done this before and made music that meant a lot to me, I realize that is a viable way to make music that has the potential to hopefully mean something to a certain type of person.

John Moe: How do you manage it with your fans? In that, you know, you write these deeply personal things, and they have an empathetic response, or they link it up to things that have happened in their own life. And you know, I know from the work that I've done that people are looking for chances to connect with you. Like, you know, you've shared something; they want to share something back with you. It's this very human response. I would imagine for

the work you do, that can get very intense or even overwhelming when you hear from fans about stuff.

Jamie Stewart: It can. But the people that seem to be interested in Xiu Xiu—although that very definitely happens—are genuinely kind and thoughtful and sweet and open minded and interesting and creative people. So, almost never does it occur in a way that is or feels over the line or disrespectful. And it's happened enough times that there are certain ways—you know, or certain I guess like tells that I realize, oh, okay this is going to go too far really fast. And then also, again—I mean, if somebody writes, and they need to talk about something? I mean, that person who's writing has basically made my childhood dream come true of being able to be a musician for a living. I mean, the least I can do is spend two minutes answering an email. It's really the least I can do.

And also, we're not famous enough that it happens so much that it takes over my life. You know? I mean, I get, you know, a couple messages a day, but it's not like I get hundreds or 1,000 messages a day or something like that.

John Moe: Well, does it work the other way? Like, is it a healing thing? Is it a strengthening thing? Like, knowing that people are making such a deep connection to the art that you've made? Does that help you?

Jamie Stewart: I tried not to really think about it. I mean, I feel very tremendously honored that somebody would be so open. But I don't think that it really does—it would do anybody a great service for me to get—you know, as somebody who is interested in our band, it would not do them a service in terms of our future records for me to get too wrapped up in that kind of thinking. I think it's really our job to make the best records that we can do, and to try to be as nice to people when we come across them, online or in person as we can be. And that's really what we try to focus on.

John Moe: Finally, as a veteran coverer of Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car", what are your thoughts on the Luke Combs cover of that?

Jamie Stewart: (*Laughs.*) I've been asked this many times, and I have made a point of not listening to it. Because it seems like whenever anybody asks, they're saying it as if it's completely putrid, and I don't want to listen to a totally putrid version of one of the best songs of all time.

(*They chuckle.*)

Is it really bad?

John Moe: I think it's lovely. I enjoyed it very much.

Jamie Stewart: Oh, okay. Oh, okay. I'll check it out then. Okay, (*chuckling*) people always kind of seem to be giggling when they ask a little bit, so I just assumed it was terrible. But if you say it's lovely, I'll check it out.

John Moe: Well, you know, it's—I didn't trust it when I first heard it start to play. Just because like what does this guy know about the things that Tracy knew?

(Jamie cackles.)

But then for me, it broke when he kept the line about being a checkout girl. And I'm like, oh, okay. He's—you know, he didn't make it a check out guy.

[00:40:00]

Jamie Stewart: Alright, good for him!

John Moe: Like, he inhabited it. And the duet from the Grammys was very nice as well, so.

Jamie Stewart: Did they sing it together?

John Moe: Yeah! Yeah.

Jamie Stewart: Oh! No shit? Wow, okay. Okay, she—

John Moe: Yeah, no, she hadn't been on stage in a long time. And—

Jamie Stewart: If she believes in it, then I'll check it out.

John Moe: Okay, alright. You check that out.

Jamie Stewart, I want to thank you so much for joining us. And congratulations on the album.

Jamie Stewart: Oh, it was such a pleasure. Thank you. I love your show, and I love how frank you are about the difficult subject. It was a real pleasure to talk to you. Thank you very much.

(Music fades in.)

John Moe: Xiu Xiu's new album is *13" Frank Beltrame Italian Stiletto with Bison Horn Grips*. It refers to a type of switchblade, and that album is out now.

Music: "Fast Car" as covered by Xiu Xiu on the album *A Promise*.

You got a fast car

But is it fast enough so we can fly away?

We gotta make a decision

Leave tonight or live and die this way

I remember we were driving

Driving in your car

The speed so fast, it felt like I was drunk

The city lights lay out before us

And your arms felt nice wrapped around my shoulder

And I, I had a feeling that I belonged

I, I had a feeling I could be someone

Be someone

Be someone

(Music fades out.)

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

John Moe: Our show exists because people donate to the show for it to exist, for it to go out and help people. If you are already one of the people who've donated, thank you so much. You're really making a difference in folks' lives. If you haven't yet donated, we really need to hear from you. It's super easy. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join, find a level that works for you, and then select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. It's so easy. Be sure to hit subscribe, give us five stars, give us rave reviews. All that helps get the show out in the world, also, where it can help yet more people.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the US and Canada by calling or texting 988.

Our Instagram and Twitter are both [@DepreshPod](https://www.instagram.com/DepreshPod). Our newsletter is available on Substack. Search *Depresh Mode* on Substack; you'll find it. I'm on Twitter and Instagram, [@JohnMoe](https://www.instagram.com/JohnMoe). Join our Preshies group on Facebook. A lot of great discussion happening over there. People talking to each other, supporting one another. It's a good place to hang out. Sometimes they even talk about the show! Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org if you want to drop us a line.

Hi, credits listeners. There used to be a soft drink called Pepsi Light. It was Pepsi, but with like lemon flavoring added to it. You can't get it anymore. That's not the biggest problem in the world, that you can't get it anymore, but it's on my list.

It's pretty far down on my list. I would not die on that hill. I might sprain an ankle on that hill.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, "Building Wings". *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

Music: "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller.

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!