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John Moe: A note: there is a brief mention of suicidality in this episode.

I guess maybe your mind is like a car engine. You know it's a good idea to perform routine maintenance, get tune-ups. But still, you'll probably have some problems at some point. Probably need to go to the mechanic/therapist/psychiatrist once in a while. Hopefully you can get where you need to be going. If you're lucky, you get a check engine light first. If you're wise, you won't ignore that light. Still sometimes, no matter what you do, you might lose power in your engine/mind; might have a total failure, busted down on the side of the road, scared and scrambling. You might have a breakdown.

That's what happened to our guest this week. Call it a mental collapse, a nervous breakdown, a psychotic break. She was broken down, fell apart, and now she's back on the road—engine humming along—and listening to some great new songs that she wrote about it. It is *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Music: “No Happy Endings” from the album *The Resurrection Game* by Emma Swift.

I've come up for air after years underground

Still got the taste of dirt in my mouth

Delicate, delicate as a skeleton

Holding a jar of flowers

(Music fades out.)

John Moe: That's Emma Swift with “No Happy Endings” off her new album, *The Resurrection Game*. Emma is a singer-songwriter originally from Australia. She now lives in Nashville, Tennessee with her husband—the musician Robyn Hitchcock. She tours with him sometimes, but she's been getting a lot of attention, a lot of critical praise, a lot of audience—really—for the work that she does on her own.

In 2020, she released *Blonde on the Tracks*, an album of Bob Dylan covers, to widespread acclaim. The idea for that album came after a long period of depression where those Dylan songs and the idea of reinterpreting them from a female perspective really inspired her. For *The Resurrection Game*, Emma drew a lot of inspiration from what she terms a nervous breakdown or a psychotic break: a mental collapse in which she lost touch with reality and was hospitalized for several weeks.

I talked to her about that period, what it felt like from the inside when you really lose your mind, how she put it back together, and how she ended up making music about it.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Emma Swift, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Emma Swift: Thanks for having me.

John Moe: I've listened to the album, *The Resurrection Game*, a few times now. It's wonderful, and congratulations. The album is informed by a mental breakdown that you experienced. And of course, we'll get to that event. I wanna talk a lot about that. But first, what had been your experience with mental health, with mental illness, prior to that event?

Emma Swift: Prior to me having, you know, what I kind of call a nervous breakdown, I had had periodic bouts of depression here and there and also just heavy grief. You know, the first real element of my time in my life where I experienced profound sadness was after my father died when I was 21. And that heavy grief can feel like a depression. At least, it did for me as a particularly sensitive person. I was really struck by that event for about one to two years. And it took time to come back, to bounce back to what I would describe as my ideal, premium self.

So, that was when I was 21. And then around the time of the first Trump presidency—2016—I got whacked with a fairly hefty depression, which I now recognize as hormonal because of just some women's issues that were going on. Kind of an early onset hormonal thing, but none of the doctors that I went to really thought about it that way. I went to a couple of doctors who sent me on my merry way. And off I went to therapy and did some really good stuff. And then I kind of bounced back from that. But then—yeah, the record *The Resurrection Game* and the incident that that was born out of was a much more acute, hefty mental health crisis. I mean, it's not—I'm not just talking like:

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“I feel sad. I'm not getting very much done.” (*Chuckles.*) I'm talking—I got sectioned. I spent—I had a psychotic episode. I spent time in two different mental health facilities. Which was, altogether, something completely, utterly different and way more terrifying than I'd experienced before.

John Moe: When did this happen? How long ago was this?

Emma Swift: When did this happen? May of 2023.

John Moe: Okay. So, fairly recently. What was happening in your life leading up to that? What were your circumstances? What was going on?

Emma Swift: I was under a fair amount of stress, but I would say no more than the usual stress of a run-of-the-mill, independent musician trying to get by in the modern era.

(They chuckle.)

But I did get—I was stressed. And I was going through these hormonal changes, which I was navigating blind. I had no idea what was going on with my mind or my body. And then I got mugged. And the mugging, to me, is the place where my mind just exploded. All of the stuff that I was carrying around didn't really— Yeah, I just completely broke. It was the final straw.

John Moe: Was that in Nashville where you lived?

Emma Swift: No, no. That was in London. Yeah. Nashville, I've never had anything extreme happen to me, thankfully. But London, yeah. It's—you know, big city. *(Chuckles.)*

John Moe: Yeah. Would you like to talk about the circumstances and what happened with the mugging?

Emma Swift: I mean, not really. All I will say is that when I— Because of what that triggered— I mean, it can happen. You know? And I think that a lot of mental health care wants to put the onus back on the patient, but there are so often external forces beyond our control that it can really shake us up, you know? But whether that be assault or a car accident or, you know, losing someone we love or a bad trip. You know? Like, I mean, I'd also taken mushrooms the week before, but I hadn't had a bad experience. But the mushrooms were probably living around in my brain. And you know, like... Yeah. I mean, it's just really complicated. I think that it would be so much nicer if we could just do a brain scan or a blood test and go, “This is why you've had a psychotic episode.” But I don't— Unfortunately, it's not that simple.

John Moe: Yeah. No, trauma doesn't show up on an MRI. It's much more insidious.

Emma Swift: Right. And also, like—as you say, like trauma doesn't show up on an MRI. And 2023—by the time 2023 had rolled around, you know, all of us in the culture had been carrying around three to four years of extraordinary circumstances due to a pandemic.

John Moe: In the culture as a whole, you mean? Or in the music industry?

Emma Swift: Well, both. But I mean, particularly in the music industry. It was—I mean, I think everybody was knocked around, you know? No, I think— You know, in music, it had challenges, as I'm sure working in healthcare had really—*(chuckles)* real tense challenges or, you know, people with kids suddenly becoming stay-at-home teachers and— You know, like we all went through it, one way or another. And I think that— *(Sighs.)* And certainly for me, I had an urgency to move on from that experience and just get back to work. You know, partly just to keep myself employed. And I'm sure that wasn't great for my state of mind either.

John Moe: Sure. So, then the mugging happened, and you've got this background and these other things that are going on in your life. And what actually occurred? Like, how does—? I mean, I think we've all heard the term nervous breakdown or mental breakdown. What was the first thing that happened that you now regard as the beginning of the breakdown itself?

Emma Swift: The first thing that happened was that I could feel my mind slipping away from me.

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I started to feel acutely paranoid and scared and frightened. I felt like my devices had been hacked. I felt like I was being followed. And I'm a person who has never had any kind of mental break like that in my entire life. And I'm not a— I'm a fundamentally open and easygoing and trusting—you know, for better or worse—unparanoid person. So, that sort of paranoia kind of crept in.

And what was really scary was that I knew that I was losing my mind in the early stages of this. And I presented to hospital in London and said, “Something's not right with me. I'm not losing my— I'm not well. I'm losing my mind.” And they turned me away, because I wasn't sick enough. My psychosis was not yet acute enough. So, then I had about a week of getting progressively worse.

John Moe: Were you working in London at the time?

Emma Swift: Well, all the work that I do is remote. I'm a musician. So, I don't— You know, for better or worse, I'm my own employer.

John Moe: Yeah. But were you working on music at the time in London? Like, were you working with other, you know, studio musicians or recording or anything?

Emma Swift: Yeah. I mean, I work all the time. So, yeah. Yeah, yeah. It's a never-ending job, music. But yeah, I— So, that happened, and so I guess that was on the Monday or the Wednesday. I mean, all time is a bit of a blur. I don't know if you've ever had the misfortune to have a psychotic episode, but—

John Moe: I have not, but I'm really curious to what it is.

Emma Swift: Right. *(Laughs.)* It's, um... I've actually never taken acid or done anything like that, but— You know, the closest I've done is mushrooms. And that—even then, that's not— What I went through is like more what I imagine a very bad trip is like, but the very bad trip lasted two to three weeks.

John Moe: So, you get turned away from the hospital. What do you do next, and what happens next?

Emma Swift: I completely fall apart. I completely fell apart. And then I had to— With whatever remnants left of sanity I had, I felt compelled to go to Australia—which is where I'm from. And yeah, I got on a plane, promptly had a psychotic episode on the plane, was picked up at Melbourne Airport and taken immediately to a hospital.

John Moe: What happened on the plane? Like, what did you do?

Emma Swift: Well, I didn't really do anything, per se. Like, I didn't lash out. I mean, the thing—what happened with my brain breaking was that it was very much an inward thing, you know? But people knew that I wasn't well. And yeah, I had all of the things that are fairly run-of-the-mill psychosis, you know? Heaven and hell. And you know, I thought that I was going to be—you know, some kind of persecution thing. You know, super scary. Really, really terrifying stuff.

John Moe: So, it's still— The paranoia that “I'm being followed; I'm being tracked,” is that still at the heart of it? Or did other symptoms develop?

Emma Swift: No, it would shapeshift, you know. It really was an extraordinarily painful thing to go through. It's absolute torture. I wouldn't wish it upon anyone. I can't— Just the brutality of that kind of experience. There's a fantastic book that I read when I came out the other side by a wonderful British journalist and writer called Horatio Clare. And for anybody who wants to know what having a psychotic episode is like—and those delusions are like— Horatio writes absolutely beautifully about his experience. And I really recommend it. Yeah, he thought he was working for MI5. And he wound up driving his car into a river in the town where he lived in, and he had— He had started kind of cutting out chunks of wall in his house.

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And so, his experience of psychosis was much more physical than mine. But—

John Moe: Yours was just internal. Yours was the—your brain collapsing.

Emma Swift: Internal brain collapse. But also— You know, like there was a moment in London where I thought, you know, “The only way I can get out of this brain collapse is if I throw myself in front of a train.”

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Find out what happened next after the break. Here's the opening track to Emma Swift's album, *The Resurrection Game*. “Nothing and Forever”.

Music: “Nothing and Forever” from the album *The Resurrection Game* by Emma Swift.

Somewhere between nothing and forever

That's you and me

Nothing and forever

Because I'm, indeed

Nothing and forever

I want and I need

Nothing and forever

Love goes on and love goes on...

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with singer-songwriter Emma Swift. She was talking about being in the midst of a psychotic break, wondering if the only way to shut it down was to jump in front of a train.

Did that come close to happening?

Emma Swift: No, it didn't come close to happening for me. Because, fortunately, there was something in me—some kind of a preservation instinct. And I don't know... you know, I really feel lucky. I feel really lucky. But you know, like Virginia Wolf walking into the sea with her pockets full of stones. I can completely understand how that could happen now. Or Sylvia Plath putting her head in an oven. You know? Or you know, anytime I see someone on the street now carrying their stuff around, carrying their entire life around in plastic bags or—I completely... can see how that could happen to a person.

John Moe: So, this was all happening internally. Were you in touch with your husband? Did he know what was going on?

Emma Swift: Yeah. He knew what was going on, but he didn't know what to do about it.
(Laughs.)

John Moe: Sure. Yeah.

Emma Swift: He'd never had a wife experiencing psychosis before. And he also— At the time, his daughter was extremely unwell. That was another thing going on with our lives. His daughter had ovarian cancer. And so, frankly, he had other stuff to tend to. And that's the thing. You know, unfortunately with mental health, we can't choose the time of falling apart, either.

John Moe: Yeah. (*Chuckles humorlessly.*) It's not— You can't schedule that.

Emma Swift: You can't schedule it. It was absolutely brutal. And then I spent seven weeks in hospital.

John Moe: So, did you go straight from the airport to the hospital when you got to Australia?

(*Emma confirms.*)

Oh, wow.

Emma Swift: Straight airport—(*correcting herself*) to the hospital in an ambulance, and immediately sectioned and put on—

John Moe: What does sectioned mean? What do you mean by sectioned?

Emma Swift: Oh, I don't know what they call it in America. But in Australia, if you're sectioned, it means that you are forcibly put in the hospital, and you can't—

(*John affirms.*)

So, that's what that is.

John Moe: And what do they do for something like that? When you get in, like what does the treatment consist of?

Emma Swift: Well, the treatment consists of a fairly hefty dose of anti-psychotics to kind of bring your brain back to a baseline. But I will add—and this is something that I think, really, people are starting to talk about it in mental health circles, but it's still on the fringes of mental health circles—is that during the course of my treatment period, I saw probably five different psychiatrists. You know, the first round of hospital psychiatrists, and then I went to another private facility for three weeks, and then a psychiatrist outside of that.

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And then when I wasn't responding well to the medication—because I had very negative side effects to the medication—none of my doctors asked me about my menstrual cycle. None of them thought that my hormones could be having an impact on my brain health. When—

John Moe: Did you think that at the time, that that's what was happening?

Emma Swift: No, I didn't. I'd never heard of it.

John Moe: Didn't occur to you either? Yeah.

Emma Swift: It didn't occur to me. But actually, you know, once I was reading up about psychosis—postpartum psychosis is a fairly common thing. So, women who have babies go into hospital, and then—you know, three weeks later they've either got— You know, obviously not all, but some women get either severe postnatal depression, or they actually get psychosis. And sure enough, in the onset of middle age— And I'm only in early middle age, but you know, I'm still early 40s. If your hormones are particularly up and down, you can have a psychotic episode. You know, if you—

Yeah, I mean, Lady Gaga herself had a psychotic episode after she was assaulted when she was 19. And again, 19 is when you're very hormonally vulnerable. But I didn't— *(Sighs.)* Because I'd been—you know, essentially I'd lived a really lucky life. I'd never had anything like this happen to me. I didn't know anything about psychosis or what triggered it.

John Moe: Yeah. Just hadn't come up. Yeah.

Emma Swift: Until I was doing it. Until I was in it and responding to it. So, you know. And I will say it's really important that I had—that, yeah, this all went down in 2023. The general timeline is it went down in 2023; I got medicated; I had a very bad reaction to the medication that I was on, which triggered a whole bunch of other things. You know, anybody who will know that if you take an antidepressant that's not good for you or an antipsychotic that's not good for you, you can become like the black box warning on those drugs. Like— You know, like— So, there are things that work for everyone. If you're put on something that doesn't work for you, that can be really *(laughs)* terrifying.

John Moe: So, did it address the psychosis but lead to other problems?

Emma Swift: Yeah, absolutely. And I'm—

John Moe: Okay, so the psychosis got under control, but then you had other things?

Emma Swift: Yeah. Yeah. And then I had things like anhedonia. And anhedonia is like basically the—

John Moe: Joylessness. Yeah.

Emma Swift: Yeah. Joylessness. It's like feeling like you're living inside a cement brick. And it was the experience of anhedonia. That was when I read Horatio Clare's book, *Heavy Light* And he's since become a really wonderful mental health advocate in the UK and beyond. But during that anhedonia, that was when I started to think, “Oh my gosh, I think something else is going on here.” *(Chuckles.)* Yeah. So—

John Moe: So, what happened then? What did you do about that?

Emma Swift: I took myself off the drugs, which was really terrifying. Because the drugs have to be tapered off.

John Moe: Are you still in the hospital at this point?

Emma Swift: Oh gosh, no. No.

John Moe: Oh, okay.

Emma Swift: This is by the end of 2023.

John Moe: Okay. How long were you in the hospital?

Emma Swift: Seven weeks.

John Moe: Seven weeks, okay.

Emma Swift: Yeah. Yeah. Six to seven weeks I did all up. Yeah. I mean, just a profoundly life-changing, really difficult, pretty brutal experience.

John Moe: So, then you go off the— So, the psychosis is under control. You're then considered to be out of the breakdown phase, I would think. But then you're grappling with this anhedonia.

Emma Swift: Yeah, grappling with anhedonia and grappling with all kinds of— Like, I certainly wasn't myself. I wasn't fixed. I was pretty broken and being told, more or less, “Oh, you might be broken for the rest of your life.” You know. *(Chuckles.)*

John Moe: That's scary.

Emma Swift: You just might be a zombie lady now, shuffling around with your anhedonia and your terrifying side effects.

John Moe: Yeah. Choose psychosis or choose being dead inside. That's a horrible proposition.

Emma Swift: Yeah. Yeah! And I am—like I said, I kind of figured it out and then got myself on hormone treatment.

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Which has been amazing. And then up and up ever since! *(Laughs.)*

John Moe: Whose idea was that to finally look at the hormone issue as a culprit?

Emma Swift: A doctor in Sydney. A doctor.

John Moe: Okay. Yeah. Oh, that's wonderful.

Emma Swift: A very good doctor, who I'm really profoundly great grateful to. So, we got there in the end, but it just took about six doctors. *(Laughs.)* And so, you know, it's— You never think, “Oh gosh, I'm gonna have to shop around.” And unfortunately, it is just because we really don't know that much about the brain right now. And what works for some people does not work for others. Drugs tested on men are gonna have a different impact to drugs tested on women. *(Laughs.)* All that. There's definitely no one-size fits all approach.

John Moe: It's a lot of looking at what results have come out of different treatments, different medications, and then saying, “Well, maybe if that happened here, it'll happen again.” You know, which is not the deepest, most knowledgeable way to solve things with science. But it's all we can do most of the time with psychiatric meds.

Emma Swift: Yeah, because there's no— I mean, there's no blood test to say, “Okay. So, this is exactly what's wrong with you.” And even in a female experience of like something like perimenopause where you've got fluctuating hormones, those hormones are different at 9AM, and then at midday, and then at 5PM. So, depending on when someone takes your blood test, it could look like you've got more than enough progesterone. But if they took it at 3AM— *(Laughs.)* Maybe something else would be the case.

John Moe: And I want to talk about the music here in a moment. But also, what role did talk therapy play in this? You know, especially—I mean, with addressing the psychotic break you had, but also addressing some of the trauma that you had experienced. What role did that play?

Emma Swift: I'm a big proponent of talk therapy. I love talk therapy. I will probably be in therapy for the rest of my life. Because even when things are going great—and they definitely are great right now; I'm super healthy—but I still show up to therapy. Because I've still got a lot to— I've got a lot to process about what I experienced. And yeah. Like, I think that there is no... There's no way to tie a neat ribbon on it and say, “Well, this led to this, led to this, led to this, and that's why. And now the problem is solved!” But I do—talk therapy's been really great. And I've done a range of different talk therapy over the course of my life for different things. And it's been super helpful.

I've done Family Systems therapy, a bit of Jungian therapy. I'm also really addicted to therapy podcasts.

(They laugh.)

And I will say— You know, that too— Like, when I was really unwell, listening to mental health podcasts was actually extraordinarily helpful. Because I may have felt like I was in cement, but I could still take things in and listen to other people's experiences. And particularly anybody who comes out the other side of it and then talks about it, I just think that that is so important.

John Moe: Well, it's a big part of why we do what we do. Why I've been doing this for many, many years is that the experience of mental illness can be so isolating, can make you feel like surely nobody else is going through this. And sometimes just listening to other people's stories, realizing that there is a sort of below-the-surface interconnectedness that we have, can—you know, maybe not solve your problems, but at least make you feel like you're part of a team.

Emma Swift: Absolutely. And I think that things have come a long way, you know, in terms of just people being a little bit more open and a little bit more candid about what they go through. I mean, I grew up in a Catholic family, and that alone will keep you in therapy forever. *(Laughs.)*

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You know?

John Moe: Talk about a trauma response.

Emma Swift: Right. I got all of the guilt and none of the God.

(John chuckles.)

But I think that that experience— You know, that was very much about bottling up your feelings and feeling bad about your feelings. At least my experience of the church was. So, one of the— You know, one of the benefits of the age that we live in now is, yeah, I think people are more open to disclosing what they go through. And I'm really grateful to anybody who does that.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Just ahead, how does Emma take her experience—her harrowing, terrifying, recent experience—and make it into music? Here's “How to Be Small” off her new album, *The Resurrection Game*.

Music: “How to Be Small” from the album *The Resurrection Game* by Emma Swift.

I am so terribly lonely

How are things with you?

In the park by the cathedral

The sky turns from gray to blue

And I guess I am tired too

But what else could I do?

What else could I do?

(Music fades out.)

Promo:

Music: Bright, playful backing.

Alexis: Hi, I am Alexis. I am one of the cohosts of *Comfort Creatures*, and I'm here with River Ju, who has been a member since 2019. Thank you so much for being a listener and a supporter of our show.

River: Yeah. I can't believe it's been that long.

(They chuckle.)

Alexis: Yeah, right?! As the MaxFun member of the month, can I ask what sort of made you decide to be a member?

River: I used to work in a library, so I just used to listen to podcasts while I reshelfed all the books. It really help with, you know, doing—*(laughs)* reading at work. So, I just wanted to give back to what's been helping me. It feels good to be part of that.

Alexis: As the member of the month, you will be getting a \$25 gift card to the Maximum Fun Store, a member of the month bumper sticker. And you also—if you're ever in Los Angeles—you can get a parking spot at the MaxFun HQ just for you.

River: Yay! I'm actually going to LA in September, so I'll get to use the parking space!

Alexis: *(Gasps.)* Oh! Yes! Thank you so much, River, for doing this. This has been an absolute blast.

River: Yeah, of course. I've been so glad to be able to talk to you too, and I'm so excited to be a member of the month.

Alexis: Yay!

Speaker: Become a MaxFun member now at MaximumFun.org/join.

Promo:

Music: Bright, happy synth.

Jeremy Bent: Hey, everybody. I'm Jeremy.

Oskar Montoya: I'm Oskar.

Dimitry Pompée: I'm Dimitry. And we are the Eurovangelists.

Oskar: We're a weekly podcast spreading the word of the Eurovision song contest, the most important music competition. In. The. World.

Jeremy: Maybe you already heard Glenn Weldon of NPR's *Pop Culture Happy Hour* talk up our coverage of this year's contest. But what do we talk about in the off-season?

Dimitry: The rest of Eurovision, duh! There are nearly seven decades of pop music history to cover.

Oskar: Mm-hmm! We've got thousands of amazing songs, inspiring competitors, and so much drama to discuss. And let me tell you, the drama is juicy.

Dimitry: Plus, all the gorillas and bread-baking grandmas that make Eurovision so special!

Jeremy: Check out *Eurovangelists*, available everywhere you get podcasts, and you could be a Eurovangelist too!

Oskar: Ooh, I wanna be one!

Jeremy: You already are. It's that easy.

Oskar: Oh, okay. Cool.

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with singer-songwriter Emma Swift.

What led to the album? What led to the decision to take some of these experiences and write about them, record about them, put them out in the world as music?

Emma Swift: Because music is a—I think it's a transcendent and beautiful art form. And there's something that—I've always had this sad timbre in my voice, and I've always used music as a way to connect with my emotions—particularly my more difficult emotions—and kind of get them out. But I guess there's something quite beautiful about taking your pain and turning it into song. Whereas— You know, I also took a memoir writing course last year through Faber. It was an online memoir writing course, And I was trying to write about my breakdown. And I was just still so angry and so confused. And I think it was helpful for me to get those things on the page, but what I have to say about that experience is probably a little bit too close for comfort right now, in terms of time, for me to write about it in either essay form or book form.

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I'd like to do that some way down the line, but that's a ways away. But songs, however—songs have a delicacy and a tenderness, and it's also a space that I feel very comfortable expressing myself in. So, I felt like that was an important and helpful thing for me to do.

John Moe: It's almost like establishing some boundaries for yourself through songwriting, where—as you say—if you wrote in paragraphs and pages and chapters, you might have to fully explain everything, or you might feel like you have to fully explain everything. But with lyrics, you can be oblique, you can be metaphoric, you can be elusive. You can kind of tiptoe up to what you want to reveal and what you want to confront and take it at your own pace.

Emma Swift: That's exactly right. Yeah. You can do it at your own pace, and you can hint at things. And some of it's just absolutely heartbreaking. And you know, I— So, the first hospital that I went to in Australia—'cause Australia has a very good public health system—that was sort of two and a half weeks there. And then the second hospital that I went to, the third one—*(correcting herself)* the second one, rather—that was a private facility, you know, that cost a fortune. And I was there for three and a half weeks. But because it was a private facility, I was able to have a guitar. And I could sit and sing some of these feelings out, which was helpful. And I did. I went and recorded—not tracks that became part of the album, per se, but I did demo some things shortly after leaving the hospital. Because I was trying to get some of that experience out.

And not gonna lie, like some of those tracks that I demoed are still too vulnerable for me to share at this point in time.

John Moe: Do some of the songs that made it to the final album—are you writing those and recording those in order to give yourself strength? Are you drawing nourishment from your own songs?

Emma Swift: Of course. Yeah, I definitely draw nourishment from my own songs. I think that it's, um— It took me a really long time to even be able to write songs, you know? That's how buttoned up I was as a person.

John Moe: When did you start to write songs?

Emma Swift: My early 30s. It got to a point where I just had to, you know? *(Laughs.)* I felt like if I didn't do it, I was gonna explode. But getting the songs out about—you know, and talking about this experience of what I've had is so important to me. You know, and it's really—it's funny as well. Because, you know, we are multifaceted humans, you know. We contain multitudes. And so, I generally consider myself a fairly happy-go-lucky person, but I don't make happy-go-lucky music. *(Laughs.)* So, I don't even—I'm not starting an indie dance band or anything fun, just 'cause my vocal limitations mean that I can't do that. You know, I make—I love Sandy Denny and Marianne Faithful and that kind of stuff. So, that sort of puts a sonic limit on what I do.

And I'll say too, like I write poetry as well, but poetry feels too naked. I feel too naked. And maybe with a little bit more therapy and, you know, a little bit more time, I'll finally feel confident enough to share poems. But songs, to me, have that blessing and the gift of you can dress the lyrics up with melody and arrangement and instrumentation. You know? Jordan Lehning, the producer on this record, is a magnificent string arranger. And I really like that he was able to bring an appropriate sense of drama *(laughs)* that I wouldn't be able to do myself if it was just me recording the songs with a guitar.

John Moe: When you worked on the album, when you worked with your producer, when you worked with different musicians who helped out, did they need to know the full story of what had gone into this album? Did they need to know about your breakdown, about your trauma and all this?

Emma Swift: Um, well. I mean, part of the record was made before I had the breakdown and then it had to be put on pause.

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So, my producer definitely knew that something was up, 'cause we just stopped working, you know?

(John affirms with a chuckle.)

And then when I came back to it, he was pretty sensitive, you know, in that he knew that I'd been through the wringer, so to say. But he didn't necessarily feel the need to say to the cellist or the electric guitarist or the drummer, “Just be careful around Emma. She's a little bit cuckoo.” Like. *(Laughs.)* You know.

John Moe: She's been through some things.

Emma Swift: Fortunately, we live in more sensitive times. You know. So, yeah, that's how that went down.

John Moe: And I know that “The Resurrection Game” is the name of one of the songs on the album. Why did you go with that as the title of the album? Is it about your own resurrection?

Emma Swift: Yeah, totally! Because I absolutely felt like I had been through a rebirth. I've come back to... (*Chuckles.*) I mean, I don't love the idea that your pain and your sorrow or your trauma makes you more resilient. I don't think that's necessarily fair, and I think that's a bit of a cliché. But I've definitely come back a different person. I'm certainly happier to be alive. I don't—I've certainly seen some things. You know, I've seen the dark sides of my own brain. You know, we talk in therapy about the shadow self. But you know, like—(*laughs, struggling for words*) I really went to the inferno there for a while.

And so, *The Resurrection Game* is—yeah, it's about... It's about coming back to life after something else. I mean, the song, imagery-wise, is actually born out of an experiential therapy retreat that I had done some years ago, called The Hoffman Process. And I don't know if that's come up in your chats at all, but—

John Moe: No. What is that?

Emma Swift: It's basically a camp that you go to in Northern California. And I went to the camp. And you— It's about addressing your inherited patterns and things that, you know, you've got from your mom and your dad and your grandfather and other, you know, influential figures in your life; and working out if you have patterns that are from them or are a reaction to them. So, you know. Or just seeing the different ways that their issues are manifest in your life. So. And what you can do to turn that around.

And I actually went to that camp because— It was to kind of shake out some of my writer's block. Some of my issues. Basically, I was trying to beat the Catholicism out of my life with a plastic, yellow wiffle bat (*chuckling*) in Northern California. And it was fantastic. It was a real hippie thing to do. But I mean, the song came well after I had that experience. But some of the imagery in that song— It opens “In Calistoga, where the Redwoods grow, I've come to excavate your bones.” So, in a way, that conversation between me and my deceased father and trying to kind of reconcile myself to all of the wonderful things that he handed down to me—like a passion for nature, a love of music, a general enthusiasm—with also some of the fairly shaky things he handed down to me too. Like, sporadic bouts of depression (*laughs*), prone to flights of rage. You know, a sense of feeling, a little bit too sensitive to be in the world.

You know. And I was also, you know, in therapy speak—I'm the oldest of seven children, and in therapy speak that's what they call “the parentified child”. (*Laughs.*)

(*John affirms.*)

And I've had to work through a lot of that stuff. And *The Resurrection Game* is a little bit about that.

John Moe: Well, Emma, congratulations on the album. And even more than that, all the hard work that you've done and the learning that you've done. And thank you for sharing all this with the world in such a beautiful record.

[00:45:00]

Emma Swift: Thanks, John! I really appreciate you having me.

John Moe: Here's some of the title track from Emma Swift's album, *The Resurrection Game*.

Music: "The Resurrection Game" from the album *The Resurrection Game* by Emma Swift.

In Calistoga, where the Redwoods grow

I've come to, to excavate your bones

In the curve of the mountain, where the trees look the same

I'm getting close

To you again

And here comes the rain

Oh, here comes the rain...

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

John Moe: You know, Emma talked about how much mental health podcasts helped her when she was in rough shape, and I think they help a lot of people. I know they help me. And I think our show helps a lot of people. To keep doing the show, however, we need funding. That's the cold, hard reality of it. We get that funding from you, our listener. That's our business model: people pitching in 5 bucks a month, 10 bucks, 20 bucks a month, whatever works for you. It's easy to do, and it's really, really necessary. I want to keep helping people. I want to help people through tough times. And I know we're doing it, but we really do need your help. If you've already contributed, thank you a thousand times. If you haven't? Oh, it's so easy. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. Find a level that works for you. Select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars. Write rave reviews. That gets the show out into the world.

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We're on BlueSky at [@DepreshMode](https://DepreshMode). Our Instagram is [@DepreshPod](https://DepreshPod). Our newsletter is on Substack. Search up *Depresh Mode* or John Moe. Search it up. And I'm on BlueSky and Instagram at [@JohnMoe](https://JohnMoe). Join our Presbies group over there on Facebook. A lot of good conversation happening there: people talking about the show and the world and life and

mental health. And I'm there too. I'll see you over there. Just search up Presbies on Facebook. Our electric mail address is to DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. It was in the 90s here in St. Paul last week. In September! Sweater weather?! More like sweatier weather! I'll see myself out.

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 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

(Music fades out.)

Abigail: I'm Abigail, from Mountain View, California. And I want you to remember your feelings are valid.

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!