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# MALCOLM MCRAE

In conversation with CARA DELEVINGNE

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Singer, Actor, and Model Malcolm McRae is a very intimate soul who lightly opens up about his deep inner world, full of delicate shades and some philosophical thoughts. Although at his young age — he's only 27 — he manages to express a strong maturity through his words, shyness, and incredibly delightful politeness. Model Cara Delevingne, a dear friend of him, has reached out to him for a funny and deep con-

versation, with laughs but also a lot of moments of thoughtful reflection about important themes, such as sexual assault, the role of women, together with interesting exchanges about their respective musical careers. As spontaneous as it can be, the two go through some memories of McRae, also telling about their experiences together, even revealing what they consider some of their weaknesses, for a one-of-a-kind dialogue for ODDA.





MALCOLM MCRAE. Well, thank you for doing this. I appreciate we can edit this down to whatever.

CARA DELEVINGNE. I'm always happy to speak to you no matter what. And if this is an excuse to meet you, then I'm always happy because I adore you. I saw a bit of a picture of the shoot [with ODDA.] How did you find it? How do you enjoy modeling? Is it weird? Tell me about it!

M.M. When it comes to a professional situation, I get so odd with it and I get tense. And I noticed in my face that I'm doing very "Zoolander" shit.

C.D. Sounds like someone I know.

M.M. What do you mean?

C.D. No, it's just funny. Especially when you're a musician or you're very much yourself as an artist when people try to take photos of you — people you don't know, don't trust — it's a professional thing.

M.M. But when you're taking photos, I feel alright. When friends are taking photos of Anya [Taylor-Joy, my wife] I can just like...

C.D. I've always said this to you from the beginning and I'm so grateful to hear your music. We met through Anya. But either way, your music to me, when I first heard it, I was so happy and blown away by the fact that music still exists, music that I loved and grew up with. It's just not because of the age I grew up. There's just something so pure and you get the feeling, the lyrics, and the music, and you hear the love and the passion in it. I found that with your music, so much! So, I understand when getting pictures taken. You're also just extremely modest. Do you know what I mean? In so many ways, obviously.

M.M. Well, I appreciate that. First I've had this whole thing where I've not been able to undertake certain things out of fear because I always want to be very good at what I do. And recently, especially having been with Anya, I do that less because I'm like, "What's the best situation in which to learn?" For instance, this was a cover, and that was a separate thing where I just got nervous.

C.D. But do you think you would have said no before? M.M. Yeah, maybe!

C.D. Because when I saw the pictures, the styling, I was like. "Yes!" I know what pictures I would take of you. And you very much in your clothes and your setting. I enjoy seeing you pulled out of extreme to the glam rock.

M.M. I like that too. I have a side of myself, my "performance personality" is more like a little more mixed. You know what I mean?

C.D. Can you talk a bit more about your influences and

the time and there wasn't really an influx of unique music. So, I found that through my mom, really. You always think of your parents as lame, but she was very cool! C.D. Who else? In terms of blues?

M.M. It wasn't necessarily blues that attracted me. Obviously, The Beatles. My brother introduced me to The Beatles, and that's a derivative of blues because it's Rock 'n' Roll, Chuck Berry, Elvis, too. But it wasn't necessarily rock music. I liked Ray Charles. I liked jazzy. I liked Billie Holiday and Chet Baker a lot — this album is called "Chet Baker Sings." And then I found Jeff Buckley, which I'm not sure how I feel about anymore. But these people that I would try to emulate either through singing only voice initially because I didn't play guitar until I was 17.

C.D. Really? So you started singing.

M.M. Yeah, most definitely.

C.D. What kind of stuff? Give me a picture of your little mouth! M.M. In Alabama, the only ways that you could get out of this sort of structure where I was raised as an affluent little town, you either were a businessperson, you were an attorney, you were a doctor, or whatever. So I found that I was drawn to this artistic community. But the only way to find that in Birmingham was through musical theater. There wasn't a film scene. And I wasn't really cool enough. I wasn't secure enough to listen to records and YouTube wasn't even there. So I couldn't search it out for myself. I was just unaware.

C.D. I have another question. What was the first play? M.M. So I did "Oliver" [Twist.] That was my first play.

C.D. Me too! Who were you?

M.M. I was Oliver. And then I did "The Music Man" and "The Wedding Singer." These moments were really formative for me because I was as big as it can get in Birmingham as a kid, and I was proud of myself because now this has all changed. But I didn't have stage fright. It was just something that I had an affinity for. And I really enjoyed doing it, but I didn't find that I loved the assortment of people. necessarily. I wasn't able to express myself like they were. They were very brilliant and loud.

C.D. Advantaged, just confident in that sense!

M.M. It wasn't just that. It was like, look at me. I was too insecure, so I was hiding in it. And I think then when I found music, that made sense, because I was like, "Oh, this is something introspective that I can do just for me, and I don't even have to share it with the advent...'

C.D. It's therapy, though. The one thing I would tell people is, "Start writing!"

#### "I THINK THEN WHEN I FOUND MUSIC, THAT MADE SENSE, BECAUSE I WAS LIKE. 'OH, THIS IS SOMETHING INTROSPECTIVE THAT I CAN DO JUST FOR ME, AND I DON'T EVEN HAVE TO SHARE IT WITH THE ADVENT...'" - MALCOLM MCRAE

where that kind of came from, growing up in Alabama? What were the things that you listened to? Like, that inspired you?

M.M. You're so professional at this. You're so good at this. C.D. Shut up.

M.M. You are! Definitely The Rolling Stones, The Beatles. So, I grew up in Alabama, and my parents both sang, but they didn't play instruments. My dad listened to stuff like "Madame Butterfly" [by Giacomo Puccini,] operas, and classical music. And my mom introduced me to Ray Charles, which was my first love. I remember because this was Alabama, so, what you would get were the pop hits of

M.M. For instance, you got into... What was the first thing? Obviously, you did modeling, but you've been doing music since you were 10.

C.D. The first time I was on stage, I was five years old. I had this whole solo, which, it's the same way I learn lines now, but I had this whole thing to sing and I didn't learn it until the night before. And I got on stage and I sang and even at five years old, I had a lot of stress. I had a lot of things in my head, a lot of stuff going on at home. It was the first time I had a breakaway from myself. It's why I was nervous. I was very insecure...

M.M. But wait, side question. Do you still get nervous?



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## "I DON'T GET NERVOUS IN TERMS OF PERFORMANCE. USUALLY, I GET NERVOUS WHEN I DO MUSIC, THOUGH, MY OWN MUSIC, I CAN PLAY OTHER PEOPLE, I JUST CAN'T WITH MYSELF. I FIND THAT VERY DIFFICULT." - CARA DELEVINGNE

C.D. Yeah, but I don't get nervous in terms of performance. Usually, I get nervous when I do music, though, my own music, I can play other people, I just can't with myself. I find that very difficult. But it was the first time I experienced escapism. Well, it's not really escapism, it's getting back to the stuff. But again, it was the only way I could have an outlet. But you play everything! You play piano, you play drums...

M.M. You probably played more than I do. Here's what I've realized: I wasn't very skilled. So, now I'm okay, there are moments when I practice guitar for eight hours a day and then I'll go sit on the piano and do two and a half hours of that. That's my entire day if I have a day off or something. Right? C.D. Yeah, it's so good. The other day I played guitar for like eight or 10 hours. I was in the field for that. And I've never done that in my entire life.

M.M. It's interesting you started with drums because I think that's probably the most important instrument. Yes, because it's everything when you're working on an arrangement, what I've noticed is you don't really have to play that well. It's just selecting the moments that you play. So, all these syncopated rhythms make up all the space in between. And obviously, with our recordings, it's so overproduced that we haven't quite figured out how to do that, but we're understanding it.

C.D. But that's the specialty in the things that you do well because when I hear you play them live, it's those moments of silence, but also the emotion in it and that space. That's what I think modern music misses, it is that moment. I mean, it's so hard to do.

M.M. Of course, but you do it too. You showed me a lot of music that's spacious. And I agree with you, that's what resonates. I think it's the same thing that we've been talking about a little, this insecurity thing, like hiding behind a wall or something.

C.D. But everyone hides, of course. That's the thing. Even the people that are the most on social media, they are hiding so much behind that. And I find that interesting.

M.M. But that's what evolution is, or that's what maturation is. "Oh fuck, I'm bare."

C.D. So going back though to when you were that age, when did you start writing? I want to know that. When did you start that? That's what I find so beautiful about what you do. Your songwriting is so amazing. Where does that come from?

M.M. I wrote three songs when I was 18. I had this little Alabama band back then when I was going to college. C.D. What is this band?

M.M. I honestly can't tell you. No, I can tell you. Our names were Brent, Malcolm, and Wade. So it's called the "BMW Project," right?

C.D. Oh, my gosh.

M.M. Obviously we didn't have any aspirations to do it as a career. But we were doing these songs. We didn't take the name seriously, but we took what we did seriously. That wasn't funny. Anyway, we only had three original songs, and I was doing this Jeff Buckley impersonation for all of them. I didn't know how to write lyrics. I was just doing bad poetry at the time. And then I went to architecture school, so I stopped writing with those guys. But I met a girl, and I moved out to LA. I was spending all my time listening to

music, and I said, "Well, I have to give this a try." I guess I was overconfident or ignorant about what it took because I got out there and I didn't even know how to write. So I would sit down and come up with maybe a verse and it was just horrid. And it took me two and a half years to finally get something good.

C.D. That's the thing about that. No matter how insecure you are, you have to have a moment of blind ambition or complete ignorant confidence to be ready to say, "I can do this." You have to have one moment.

M.M. Are you recording right now?

C.D. I've just been on holiday, but I will be. I want to do it in LA. I have so many songs. I've written a song with an arrangement I did ages ago of a chord progression. And my girlfriend [Leah Mason] also had one, which was weirdly similar to what we'd have because we were really young. I have so many, just piles of different lyrics and then different chord progressions or whatever.

M.M. So are you working with a producer or would you want to? And if so, who would you like?

C.D. No, I don't know, man. I always want to just keep playing. Fiona Apple is someone who I really want to continue working with. We have some songs we need to finish.

M.M. "Fetch the Bolt Cutters." [The fifth studio album by American singer-songwriter Fiona Apple in which you contribute backing vocals to the album's title track.]

C.D. "Fetch the Bolt Cutters," which I didn't know I was going to be on, or even my dog.

M.M. I can hear your voice in the background. It's on the title song.

C.D. She's someone who I like. Her and Alanis Morissette. I've really been having a whole reincarnation of just complete adoration and love recently. I am so obsessed. And the differences between them — because they were around at the same time, right? I looked them both up on the internet at the same time. There was nothing they ever did together. And I really want to ask both of them if they knew each other, but all they had was being compared to each other. But they're so fucking different.

M.M. They're wildly different. It was probably the comparison of Alanis as young as Fiona was.

C.D. She's actually a bit older. More mainstream and more popular in that sense. But Fiona is just so great and I've seen them both. They're just... To be honest, it's more like a punk edge quality to her.

M.M. I want to ask you a personal question if this is okay. And if not, just don't answer it. You don't have to obviously give specific details, but I feel like almost every woman in the entertainment industry has had some run with being "treated badly," and I want to know how you've decided to overcome that personally, not externally, but I know that it does damage to someones...

C.D. It does damage, man. It does! But also, everyone gets it to a certain extent. Women get it more because we're sexualized, and that becomes part of it if we don't do certain things then we won't get to certain places. Bullshit. It's complete bullshit. I started off modeling, and even at that point, I was so depressed. I saw a lot of bad shit happen. Nothing I personally did that I feel bad about, but I saw the way the girls got treated. I knew that wasn't my





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### "I GUESS I WAS OVERCONFIDENT OR IGNORANT ABOUT WHAT IT TOOK BECAUSE I GOT OUT THERE AND I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO WRITE. SO I WOULD SIT DOWN AND COME UP WITH MAYBE A VERSE AND IT WAS JUST HORRID. AND IT TOOK ME TWO AND A HALF YEARS TO FINALLY GET SOMETHING GOOD." - MALCOLM MCRAE

world. I knew that if I stayed in that industry, I would have died. I couldn't handle the way that people were treated. I also don't like the message of that. The most important thing that's where you get judged is by what you wear and the way you look. But also women only get paid more in two industries, and that's modeling and sex work. So, I was very lucky in that sense. But then I was like, "If I start acting, maybe that will change." Acting was the same thing though with Harvey Weinstein, with other projects I've done with men. It is people's fault. Of course, it's people's fault, but it's also the industry for the way that they get treated and the way that people are complicit in it. Music is also the same. M.M. In terms of being complicit, would you offer? Obviously, a solution would be, if you are an ethical person and you have some moral ground and you see something, how do you go about that, though?

C.D. I've dealt with sexual assault and stuff since I was a kid and it's one of those things where you freeze or fly. I froze. I completely shut down, I disassociated, and I didn't realize it was happening. So, anything that's happened to me I haven't dealt with until way later. There are things that have happened that I still need to talk about and process and go through. Because if the industry right now is meant to be changing, there are still people working within it who shouldn't be and there are still things where all this stuff is still happening. "Me Too," is an amazing thing, but these kinds of things are still going on and just happening in more hidden ways. We need to change it at the root. But if you see anything happening, it's the same as bullying. If you don't do anything about it, you're getting involved. And even not tell a teacher to make a scene, because making a scene is sometimes worse and a bully will take that and use it against someone else. But to just take the person aside, whoever it's happening to, and talk to them about it. Go to the "victim" — I hate using that word — but go to the person who's being in that place and try to be their friend, try to be there for them and see what they want to do.

M.M. Good

C.D. What do you feel like in terms of the industry and feelings? Because again, you're a very modest person. But I find it really crazy how there are so many people out there who I think are the most talented but still are not getting the recognition. Don't seem to get the same amount of attention or the push that other people get when they're willing to just sell themselves and do what the fucking industry requires them to be.

M.M. I think that's a talent in itself I can always respect. Once you create something, you realize that every aspect is difficult. And it's not easy to write off pop music or something. If you write indie music and say, "I don't want to do it really" it's that you probably don't have that skill set yet. You haven't written pop music.

C.D. You could still do pop music, but keep it. It just takes longer.

M.M. Yeah. And view it with intellect. I feel like for myself; the issue was probably the lyricism. If you're one of those people who can sell yourself and that's what you're very good at,

then you are a person who can forget that aspect of things. C.D. I think I'm really good at selling myself, but in music, I wouldn't be able to. Sure, that makes sense.

M.M. Okay. So in terms of selling yourself, I feel that music is a creative art. And so you start with absolutely nothing, and you put words to a feeling. You have a feeling and it's a concept, and then you put words to it. Acting or even modeling is an interpretive art.

C.D. Do you think modeling is an art?

M.M. I think anything can be! Like in Japan, the art of making tea, you know what I mean? Anything can literally be! It depends on how you go about doing it. Anyway, it's an interpretive art because you're given the words to say or the clothes to wear, and then you adapt and make...

C.D. You put your own.

M.M. Yes. Instead, that's a creative art. From a blank canvas to something.

C.D. What would you say is architecture under that blanket? How does that also play into your music?

M.M. It's creative. It's the same process. That's what I learned in school that taught me how to think critically. Someone said "Architecture is frozen music." And it makes sense. It's almost like a sound wave. You look at a steeple in Rome or something, and it's like this jagged sound wave. It's just this beautiful moment where you almost can walk into the memory of a place, and then because of the height of certain ceilings, it even has qualities of music in it. Natural revolution chords. Yeah, but architecture school is interesting because they require you to do things by hand initially. So, I loved that aspect of it. You would draft everything by hand. You would make your models by hand. And I found I was very good at that and I could do things because you had to think about it for a long time. So I'd be in the studio for 16 hours. But I knew what my design was, and I knew every measurement of everything in the design. And then at third year we started using computers and students would just do these arbitrary motions with the click of a computer or a small program and they wouldn't understand why they were doing it. There was no functionality to the form they were trying to make. And I think that's a little bit of maybe what we're talking about EDM.

C.D. Not EDM, but in terms of how it's just so easy.

M.M. Yeah, there are definitely arrangements that are easier to compose than others and I don't entirely know what they are, but you know it when you hear it. Because I feel like a listener is much more intelligent than you give them credit for. We talk about the "masses" too easily.

C.D. No, totally. Every listener has an exact equal right to listen and have their own opinion. I remember playing my song and people had the most conflicting ideas of what it was... But I don't know how to write music.

M.M. Okay, are you talking about structure or lyric to sound? C.D. Structure. Because I've got some rhythm. I'm talking about theory. How much of the technical side of music plays into it?

M.M. I used to write every day for three hours a day and now I've kind of slowed down and we're working on a live



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show and stuff. But I'll go back to that. I write best in the morning. Once you start writing that often you find that you do certain things, like you go from the one chord to the four chord. Pretty often your melody goes to the six or whatever. So I learned a lot of songs by the "Blue Nile" when my fingers didn't have the muscle memory so easily. C.D. I write separately. I write lyrics. I don't really use a lot of metaphors. I do sometimes, but I write very realistically. I just write very much and then a lot of those are not ever going to be songs with chords. I just realized recently I was playing something, and it's been something so awesome. Then I played the first ever Spanish song I learned on the nylon string, and I was like, "Oh, it's the same structure, just higher up and slightly different." But I think with drumming I get that a lot.

M.M. When you're not a drummer, you honestly do not know. It's the same thing with anybody who doesn't play music and they're just like...

C.D. Yeah, it sounds great in theory. I just don't really understand. My girlfriend was saying the other day, she's like, a pentatonic scale. Yeah, it's in my head.

M.M. I know pentatonic. I don't know much theory. I just started really focusing on playing lead guitar and I'm starting to understand a bit more.

C.D. In what way? What does that mean again?

M.M. Lead guitar is a solo guitar, so that's individual notes, usually, or bursts of melody, that's a counterpoint to the vocal or whatever. John Lennon didn't know what he was doing to a degree, but he could definitely play. He was a fantastic rhythm player. But he was writing "Strawberry Fields Forever" and he didn't know what the fuck he was doing. But he just had such good sensibilities.

C.D. I discovered so many different things that I wouldn't know a chord, but I sit at the piano and I just play a note that I really like. That's kind of all experimentation.

M.M. Yeah, perfect.

C.D. Can I ask, what are the things you write about most? Like, love, loss...

M.M. I think it's self-absorbed shit. I think it's autobiographical. So I'll take an actual event that happened to me and I'll write it literally into a lyric, and then I'll make it slightly more poetic. Then you obviously want it to rhyme, like inner rhyme, all these little tricks that you kind of learn along the way. I learned this cool word, "prosody," and it means that the melody follows the lyrics. So, if you sing, if you're saying "up" or "high," then your melody goes up, and if you say "low" or "down," then it goes down.

C.D. So, tell me about recording at Sound City.

M.M. It's a studio in Van Nuys, LA, and Kane [Ritchotte, my bandmate at more\*] and I worked there with Tony Berg, who's our mentor, basically. But anyway, we just did our first two EPs there, and it's like the most storied studio in LA. Nirvana recorded there, Red Hot Chili Peppers, all these artists. And while we were there Bob Dylan would go into and work on a record. I actually never fucking saw him. One time he had a bus. He had pulled up the bus to the side door and he walked from the bus and that was so cool. But, listen. Here's something about Paul McCartney that

I was talking about with Tony Berg, our producer. I don't remember if he turned me on to this. It doesn't sound like an original thought of mine. So, I'm going to say this was Tony. Tony said, "Name me three artists that have achieved that kind of iconic status and wrote a great album after the age of 35." So we were talking about Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan... Maybe everyone has, it's an odd thing. Anyway, what he was saying is that if you reach that level of success as a musician, I feel that people tend to not attempt it anymore after a certain age. There's a lack of ambition maybe, or something.

C.D. Is it there was a fire when you were younger? It's a fire when you're younger.

M.M. Totally! Well, I listen to this podcast. Do you guys know Sam Harris? I talked with you about him a little. He's a neuroscientist. He has a podcast called "Making Sense." He had a guest on his podcast. They were talking about finding happiness. And this guy talked about Raymond Cattel; he's a British psychologist. He basically had this idea of the two types of intelligence and how one of them is called "fluid intelligence." Your half-life is at 40. So, you've done all of your best work by age 40, right? On the other side, you have "crystallized intelligence" which is cumulative intelligence. So, you can do your best work, I think he said, until you're like 67.

C.D. Oh, I'm fucked. I think I only have one. Do you have both intelligence?

M.M. I think what he was saying was that in order to lead a happy life, you can have one, but you could develop skills that are more oriented towards crystallized intelligence, too. C.D. That's why later in my life I would want to do more. When it's like directing and writing and writing.

M.M. If you're writing, you should keep doing it! When are you going to do that? What are you working on?

C.D. Lots of things. Lots of ideas.

M.M. You can't really say.

C.D. I'm not at liberty to release these things. But anyway, I've always wanted to see you act because you're very smart. Now you're talking about fucking neuroscientist. But also, do you remember that Martha Graham poem?

M.M. No.

C.D. It's a Martha Graham poem, which I think you should read out now because it's "your" poem. This fucking poem it's my favorite poem of all time. I'm surprised I didn't make you read this the first time I met you. Because we also love to play games, right?

M.M. Yes, we love it.

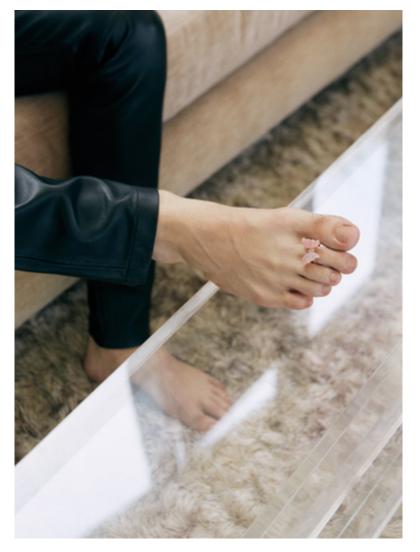
C.D. Okay. Read that poem.

M.M. Am I supposed to read this right now?

C.D. Yes!

M.M. Okay. Yeah, Can you read it, please?

C.D. Listen. "There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique, and if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium; and be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is, not how it compares with other expression. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and



directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep open and aware directly to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open. No artist is pleased. There is no satisfaction whatever at any time. There is only a queer, divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than the others.'

M.M. I love it.

C.D. And that was written by a ballerina, which I find so interesting. That kind of thing comes from an insecurity of not wanting to express certain things, that always makes me read it and go, no matter what I want to say. And getting it out is better than keeping it in. That's always what I kind of thought.

M.M. I have to read that again.

C.D. Yeah. I can't believe I never sent it to you. And I'm sorry. M.M. You just did. I feel like people go about this in various ways. Maybe that's what she's talking about? I feel that you're very good at this. I've never met someone with more innate confidence. Because you are capable. Does that make sense? But where did you learn?

C.D. I got nothing to lose because I nearly lost it all. M.M. I haven't figured out how to be a good winner because I get too, like, smug.

C.D. Yeah, you do.

M.M. I get fucking smug. Like, I'm pretty good at ping-pong and all. I don't know how to win because it doesn't happen

C.D. Oh, my God, you're so sweet. I just don't know how to win either, man.

M.M. I'm only good at a very select few things.

C.D. That's so not true. Again, you're saying this thing.

M.M. I'm okay at things. The way I measure things is like "top." Because when you go into the arts or something, and then you're 28 years old, you realize that there are levels to everything, right? And you go, "Oh, that person is the best." It's the "Dunning-Kruger effect" where you think you can do it all, and then you play a little of the game and you realize, "Oh, my God, I'm sorry."

C.D. But the problem with fame is that this career is a game you'll never win. The game is with yourself. That's the point. It's got nothing to do with everyone else on their fucking level. Everyone's great, everyone's good in different ways, but you're fucked if you compare yourself to anyone else. I mean, I do, I get it. I had a goal. I had to learn how to fucking juggle for my birthday by the time when I was 23. With balls. You know I'm good at balls. That sounded wrong, but you know I'm good at that stuff and I couldn't fucking learn it, and I still can't. But I'm still going to take these balls away from me and I'm still going to take these balls around and try to juggle them.

M.M. Well, I love you guys. I've held you for...

C.D. Love you so much.

M.M. I didn't realize it was so long.

C.D. I know.

M.M. Yeah. I appreciate you so much. Seriously.

C.D. I appreciate you too. So much. We're going to jam when I get to my house.

M.M. Yeah, tell me when you're back in town. Just text me.



Conversation edited by EMMELEIA DALIWAN Grooming LAUREN PALMER-SMITH @Home Agency using ORIBE and CHANEL Fashion Assistant ALEX HANSEN and JESSETTE Location THE GARCIA HOUSE Special Thanks to JOHN WILLIAM MCILWEE, MORGAN RUBENSTEIN @The Society Management and JAY at @Automatic Content