

MEMORY LOCATION

Interviewed by The Silver Age, August 5th, 2024

Memory Location is the solo project of Thomas Cummings, a musician and audio engineer based in Philadelphia, PA. They are working on their first EP, *Early Autumn*, which will be released fall 2024. Follow @memory_location on Instagram for information about upcoming shows and future releases.

ALICIA LOPEZ: So then name, age, where you're based, and what instruments you play?

MEMORY LOCATION: Thomas. I'm 25. I live in West Philly. I started playing drums – I'm primarily a drummer. I've been doing that since I was, like, in fourth grade. But, for the purposes of Memory Location, I play drums, guitar, bass, voice... whatever. Laptop. The record button.

A.L.: Okay, so what genre would you say you play for Memory Location? What type of music do you play?

M.L.: These days it's leaning more, like, folk – I guess kind of singer-songwriter-y. But it started mostly as a “screwing around” recording project thing. Just trying to imitate sounds that I was hearing on records that I liked. And then it turned into more, like, locked-in songs. I focused more on, like, the words rather than the instrumentation.

COLE GABORIAULT: What records were you trying to imitate? What sort of influences do you have?

M.L.: This band, Lomelda, I love dearly. I think that's really, like, the very peak top of the list for me. Lomelda is this person named Hannah, and her and her brother record a bunch of stuff. And anything that they touch is automatically, like, saved, listened to, studied. They've recorded some stuff for some other artists, and everything that they touch, I'm like, “I need to do that.”

A.L.: Name origin – how'd you come up with Memory Location?

M.L.: I'm trying to remember... when I was in college, I got a four-track cassette recorder. And I'm trying to remember what the actual thing was called on it. Maybe like a... ah shit, damn it. It's like a cue mark or something for tape, so if you rewind it, it doesn't go all the way back to zero. It goes back to wherever you set. It wasn't called “memory location,” it was something-“location.” But there was something else on the tape machine that said, like, “memory” or something like that. I saw it, and I tried to find it again. You know when something catches your eye and you go back to read it and you have a hard time finding it? It was like that, but it

didn't exist. So I was like, "oh, Memory Location sounds cool, but it's not anything." And that four-track is, like, integral to my life and recording.

A.L.: How long have you been playing music?

M.L.: I've been playing drums since I was in fourth grade. I'm 25, so, like, a long, long time. But I haven't been writing my own music with words that I've taken seriously for very long. I've always kind of screwed around, and I've recorded stuff for friends, but I didn't take myself or my music seriously until 2021 or '22. Something like that.

A.L.: Are you self-taught or musically trained?

M.L.: Both. I was in band all throughout elementary school, middle school, high school.

A.L.: Drums?

M.L.: Yeah, percussion.

M.A.: Were you in the marching band?

M.L.: I was.

M.A.: Awesome. What'd you play in the marching band?

M.L.: My freshman year I played bass 1, and then sophomore, junior, senior year I played tenors, quads, whatever. So, like, practiced, did all of that, went to college for audio engineering technology. So, formal education both in percussion and then also audio. But these days, I don't have, like, a rigorous practice schedule for drums or percussion. I don't really know how to read anything that's a clef. I can read no-clef music just fine. And even still, like, I'm super out of practice for that. So don't put sheet music in front of me. And I'm really grateful for my audio engineering classes in college. But a lot of that I kind of had to, like, deconstruct after college and then realize what was worthwhile and what was like just learned to fit into a commercial successful studio or something like that. Not super applicable to home recording all the time.

M.A.: I've heard that's actually a common thing. I have a couple of friends who also studied audio engineering, and they have echoed similar sentiments that, like, they teach you all these rules, and you just have to just break all the rules after you get out of it.

M.L.: Yeah. It's so important to learn those rules because then you can apply them to anything that you want to make sound more commercial. But knowing how all that works is really useful in breaking those rules. You know how you can break them in the right ways or the wrong ways or whatever.

A.L.: Where were you at school?

M.L.: I went to Belmont University in Nashville.

M.A.: Did you like it there in Nashville?

M.L.: It was nice. I'm glad I'm not there anymore.

M.A.: Too much twang?

M.L.: Not even that. I don't mind twang at all. When I went there freshly out of high school, I was like, "I hate country music," and now I'm like, "country music is cool." Like, there's nothing wrong with it. But there is an ego problem in Nashville. It's quickly joining the ranks of New York and LA in terms of music cities. Like – it is "Music City" – but it feels so much more like a third city in terms of music, instead of this small country city or – I don't know. There's more of an ego to it now, which I don't really love.

A.L.: So how do you end up in Philly? Are you from Pennsylvania?

M.L.: No, I'm from Northern Virginia.

A.L.: Wait, where? I'm from Northern Virginia.

M.L.: Centerville. Yeah, grew up there, lived there up until college. But after Nashville – I lived in Nashville for a year after I graduated, and then I moved back in with my parents for like a year and a half. It was only supposed to be like four months. My friend and I had plans to move to New York. My friend is there now; I'm here. I realized that New York was really not for me. It was way too much going on. It's super cool, it's super fun, there's always so much to do, but in terms of where I want to live, I need something a little bit more cozy, a little bit, like – I don't know – somewhere in between. Philly has so much going on all the time, but it doesn't feel intimidating like New York does. And also there's – like, West Philly reminds me of the best parts of Nashville.

M.A.: Our next question is a bit of a hard shift. Do you have any pets?

M.L.: I do.

M.A.: What kind of pets do you have?

M.L.: I just got a cat. My first pet since I was like a kid. I had fish when I was a kid. But my cat's name is Bug. He's really cute. He's like a year old. All black, super weird. He doesn't fully know how to meow yet, so it just comes out as, like, a squeak sometimes. He's so sweet, though. He's definitely a lap cat. Like, if I'm sitting working on something, he'll hop onto my lap, fall asleep, or sit down next to me. He's a sweetie.

A.L.: What are your comforts? Like, what do you do when you're looking for sources of comfort?

M.L.: These days, it's just hang out with Bug. I like walks. I like to walk. Honestly, I feel like I haven't had time to sit with any sources of comfort recently other than Bug – thank God. I don't know. Just being cozy generally. So taking a nap, lying in bed. I keep the curtains open in my room all the time – I don't have any super close neighbors or anything. Just having the sun come into the room, and taking a nap in the evening as the sun's going down. The sun's super strong in my room. Nice, warm, cozy.

A.L.: Okay. So what does your music writing process look like?

M.L.: That's a great question. I don't know. It's kind of all over the place. These days, it kind of all comes to me all at once, which I'm really grateful for, but it's usually pretty few and far between. My best songs I feel like are written that way. But that's not something that I can sit down and be like, "this is going to happen right now." Usually if I sit down and try and write a song, it doesn't work out. But that being said, lyrics don't always come immediately. I'm definitely more drawn to chord progressions first. So I'll sit down with my guitar and just screw around and see what happens, and then sometimes I'll land on something and be like, "this is a really cool chord progression." And then sometimes words come immediately, and sometimes I just sit on the chord progression for a while, and then maybe sometimes words come, and sometimes words don't come. Then I find another chord progression. Etc. etc.

M.A.: When lyrics do arrive, how do you approach that process? This might as well tie into our next question. What sort of themes do you explore in your writing?

M.L.: I usually – like, most of my music is about myself in some capacity – something that I'm going through, something that I'm working through. Writing music is literally just a way for me to organize any sort of anxiety, or weird thoughts that I may have around myself, or things that I've noticed, or something like that. Organize them, process them, write them down, sing them, and then move past them. So in that sense, a lot of songs are from a moment in time. And now I'm, like, past it. I have a handful of songs that are kind of about nothing that I really love. That are just – one of them I did, it was a prompt for a songwriting thing. I don't really ever do anything like that, but I was a couple beers deep, and my roommate was like, "you should do this." I was like, "fuck it, okay." And I really like the song that came out of it. But usually it's stuff that's weighing on my mind.

C.G.: What are you currently working on?

M.L.: I have an EP that is coming out – fingers crossed – mid-September. Hoping for like Friday the 13th. It'd be cool, but we'll see. I need to mix it. And then master it.

M.A.: You're doing those yourself?

M.L.: I'm mixing myself. I'm gonna send it to a friend of mine to master. But everything is recorded. I feel good about it. Hopefully I can mix it quickly.

A.L.: Do you know what it's going to be called yet?

M.L.: *Early Autumn*.

A.L.: Can't wait too long on that one.

M.L.: Exactly, yeah. Kind of has to come out right then. But I've been sitting on these songs since I started writing, and I've got kind of a little bit of a back catalog of stuff that I want to put out that I like a little bit more than this EP that I'm putting out. But I feel like I can't put anything else out until I put that out into the world, and then I can move on to the newer and newer stuff.

A.L.: Nice. So I guess our final question is, why are you a musician? Why were you drawn to this?

M.L.: I kind of feel like I don't have a choice. I don't feel like there's anything that I've really gravitated towards outside of music in a super fulfilling way. Music is something that has been so present in my life for so much of it that I can't imagine myself doing anything else. At this point, I went to school for it, I have been playing it for so long – If I were to switch it up, I feel like it would be a disservice to everything that I've been doing.

M.A.: Is there anything that we should be asking you about that we haven't asked you about yet? Anything that we didn't cover?

M.L.: My roommate has a cat named Slime.

C.G.: Slime and Bug?

M.L.: Slime and Bug. They hate each other right now. Bug is, like, super new to the house, so we're slowly introducing the two of them, but we have yet to let both of them roam free in the house. Whenever Bug is out, he goes up to my roommate's door and, like, hisses.

M.A.: Their feud will be documented in the history books.