

Episode 211: Backstage Conversations At Live. Life. Love. With Jon Bellion, lovelytheband, Chelsea Cutler, And More

Please note: This transcript has been lightly edited to remove filler words or sounds

JON BELLION: Everything is a season and there is light at the end of whatever tunnel it is. I know that sounds super blanket and cliché but there is light at the end of every season, to stick through it and to weather the storm. And secondly, I would say that getting help is not weakness. That's actually, like, very brave and very strong.

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LINDSAY KOLSCH: You're listening to the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. Each episode we'll be talking about the things that can often feel hard to talk about, like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. We'll be sharing stories and exploring big themes like hope, healing, and recovery.

LINDSAY: For the past few years, the amazing team at 107.5 The River has hosted a benefit concert in Nashville called Live. Life. Love. The event started with the goal to create meaningful conversations about mental health and suicide prevention in their community and also to help raise funds for To Write Love on Her Arms. The event returned this year in a big and surprising way. The line-up included incredible performers like Grammy-nominated artist Lizzo, Jon Bellion, Louis Tomlinson, lovelytheband, and Chelsea Cutler. They were also joined by some of Nashville's up-and-coming artists like Leah Sykes, Bailey Bryan, and Scott Gardner.

The evening was truly incredible with over 7,500 people attending a sold-out show in Nashville. We spent the evening backstage talking with artists and people who helped create this special night. On this episode you're going to hear some of our conversations with Robin Fomusa from iHeart station 107.5 The River, Scott Gardner, the members of lovelytheband, Chelsea Cutler, and Jon Bellion. We hope these conversations are going to bring you hope and remind you that no matter what you're facing, you're never alone.

[music playing]

LINDSAY (narration): It's pretty fair to say that the Live. Life. Love. benefit concert would simply not exist if wasn't for Robin Fomusa, the Promotions Director for 107.5 The River. We got to have a great conversation with Robin.

LINDSAY: Robin share with us a little bit how this event got started because it really stemmed from a dream you had.

ROBIN: Yeah. So in 2007, I lost a friend to suicide. We were juniors in high school, 16, very hard time in general. And then after she passed away music became every, even before then it

was everything, but afterwards it was my only coping. So I was, I wanted to do a benefit show and I was like I don't really know what I'm doing because I'm 16 so I started—

LINDSAY: It's hard to know what you're doing at that age.

ROBIN: I started like messaging people on Myspace, asking them to play, and no one replied because obviously I had no details, no nothing. But then flash forward after college, I started working for iHeartRadio. And one day my boss just asked me and a few other people, if we could do one thing in our time with iHeart, what would it be? And I said I wanted to do a show for mental health and suicide prevention. And he was like, "All right, well, let's keep that in mind. If anything ever works out." And I was like OK. And then like a year or so later, there was unfortunately, an incident here in Nashville, there was an officer that was trying to save the life of somebody attempting, and in the process, he ended up drowning. And so it really sparked conversation in the community about mental health and the need to talk about it and that you can't just keep those things inside. And so at the time, my boss was out in LA for some music conferences, and he was like, "This is the time to do it."

ROBIN: So he started talking to artists and all the artists that year donated their time they all came out for it. It took, from start to finish, like idea to the show, it was like three or four weeks so it was very fast.

LINDSAY: That's incredibly fast.

ROBIN: Yeah, it was a lot. But yeah, now we're on year three and we moved to a bigger venue and—

LINDSAY: Just slightly bigger.

ROBIN: Just slightly. And we sold it out this morning. So, it's huge.

LINDSAY: Oh wow. Congratulations! That's amazing. I mean, did you ever expect it would become this—

ROBIN: No.

LINDSAY: Giant evening, evening featuring artists that have been nominated for Album of the Year?

ROBIN: No, definitely not.

LINDSAY: There's a line around the block for Louis Tomlinson. This is not a small event.

ROBIN: No. And I was a big One Direction fan so the fact that Louis Tomlinson is here is, like, huge for me. No, I definitely did not think... I never thought the show would happen at all to begin with. And then, you know, when we started talking about the, like, throwing around the idea, I was like, "OK, it's just gonna be like small local acts. We're just going to do like a little thing." And then it just kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger. And I don't really know where else it can go from here, but I'm excited to see it.

LINDSAY (narration): For Robin, music has always played a huge role in her life. At TWLOHA we often talk about how music can be a safe space—a place to say or feel things that might be difficult to express in other ways. Robin shared what music helped her get through 2019 and what has continued to help support her own mental health journey. We also got to talk a little bit about what her hope was for that night and for the people in that room.

ROBIN: So, prior to my friend's death, I had struggled a lot with my own depression and thoughts of suicide. So I, from the time I was nine years old, I was in therapy, and then up until college, I was in it pretty consistently. After college, kind of off and on as I feel like I'm needing, I'm needing a little extra, like, nudge to get through something. Therapy has been so amazing because you don't—you need somebody to look at it from a different perspective because you're looking at it from this is the worst thing that could possibly happen and somebody else can twist it in a way that it's like, "No, things are going to get better."

LINDSAY: What songs have helped you move through 2019?

ROBIN: Yes, so The Maine is my favorite band right now, has been for a very long time. They have, their whole most recent album is all about like mental health and that you're OK. And if you're not OK right now you're going to be eventually. They've just done so much for like so many people. They really have like a tight knit community of fans. But yeah, their music is always kind of what I go to when I'm having a hard time and I always go to them.

ROBIN: So yesterday I was on the way home from the studio actually getting ready for the show. And "Memories" by Maroon 5 came on. And that one really, like, I don't know, it just made me remember like that there's so many good things like even if you feel like there's so many bad things going on in your life. There's a lot more good stuff that's happening in that song because that song kind of, like, made me remember all of those things.

LINDSAY: Yeah. What's been important for you in your mental health journey. Like how do you care for yourself?

ROBIN: Music for sure. I love live concerts. They, I cry at live concerts, like, every time I go I, there's some moment during the show that I'm just like, this is just so beautiful. Everybody's so happy. We're all together.

ROBIN: My hope is to share y'all's message with everyone, as many people as we possibly can reach, whether they're here tonight, or they're just seeing things on social media, or hearing it from the artists later on. We just want them to know that even though it feels like you're alone, you're not. There's so many other people out there that are feeling the exact same way that you are. And that it does get better even though it really doesn't seem like it's going to, it does. So that's my hope.

LINDSAY (narration): When we spoke to some of the artists, we found that like Robin, many of them had a personal stake in the cause. Here's Scott Gardner talking about losing his mother to suicide.

SCOTT: Well, actually, this event is really an important thing for me because I actually lost my mom to suicide and I have her name tattooed on my arm.

LINDSAY: Oh, man. That's awesome.

SCOTT: I'm also a songwriter and composer. So all my music, I write I'm trying to uplift and make people feel good.

LINDSAY: Yeah.

SCOTT: I just think the world needs that right now. So I definitely feel like music is an important thing, especially for something like this, because I've had really dark times and I know my mom had dark times, and I know that one thing we bonded over was with music.

SCOTT: A message that I would want to say to anybody out there who's listening who's maybe contemplating suicide or thinking about suicide. Just think, I would hope that you would think about the people that really love you and care about you and don't want you to leave them behind.

LINDSAY (narration): We also had the chance to talk with lovelytheband. If you know lovelytheband, you probably have heard their song "Broken," a song that really makes space to have a conversation about mental health, what it's like to struggle, but also to know that it's OK to feel the way that you're feeling. Their music comes from a very personal place. Mitchy, their lead singer, shared about his own experience with depression. The first voice you're going to hear is Mitchy's. And then you'll also hear from Sam, the band's drummer. They both wanted to remind people that it's important to talk about what you're going through with your friends and family.

MITCHY: I think it's important that it's just a little bit more of an open conversation because like, you know, I didn't know it was a thing until my mid 20s because it just wasn't a conversation. It wasn't, it wasn't a thing that was talked about, it wasn't even a thing that, like, could be a possibility.

MITCHY: I don't know. I just think it's important to have a dialogue because it doesn't make you, you know, there's this whole conversation there. There's the whole concept of, like, having a mental illness or having mental troubles just makes you a weak person. And that's just definitely not the case. I think it's the exact opposite. You know, having those struggles makes you a fighter, you know, because you're, you're in a battle with your brain every day. A lot of times it's hard.

SAM: We talk about often on stage about how everyone deals with some kind of something. There's no perfect person, there's, there's no perfect day, there's, you may have perfect days, right? But there's no perfect life. Everyone has something, they carry something with them, something happens to them and then they don't know how to process it and talking to a professional or friends or family members is one of the most important things you can do. I had two close family members commit suicide growing up. And so if they had just, one of them I didn't know it was my dad's dad before I was born. But if he had just taught, it was what you just said, Mitchy, they throw pills at you and just be like here, be better. See this therapist once a week and that's it. And it's like, it doesn't always work. Some people need around the clock attention and they need to ask for it and they need to reach out for it. And I feel like if, if my grandpa had done it, he would be here but we just had no idea anything was going on. So talking about it, including loved ones, is one of the most important things you can do I think.

LINDSAY (narration): When I talked with Chelsea Cutler, I had the familiar experience we get when we talk to people behind the TWLOHA booth. She shared an all-too-common experience that when she was struggling with depression and anxiety she felt like she didn't have words to describe her experience. It wasn't until college that she felt she had the language to describe and name what she was feeling.

LINDSAY: I feel like you've been pretty open talking about mental health and just as it relates to your music and your own story. Why is it so important for you to do that?

CHELSEA: I think because I didn't really even know that I was struggling until I was in an intro psych class in college, and we were going through the symptoms of depressive episodes and, and anxiety and etc. And I remember like getting out of that class and I called my parents and I was like, "Whoa, I thought all this was normal." I think there's not a lot of accessibility and there's not a ton of like readily available resources kind of telling us like, like we go to the doctor every couple months, right?

CHELSEA: Like, we don't check in with therapists and learn about mental health the way that we learned about our physical health. So I didn't even really know I was struggling. And it's been such a huge component of my identity and of my experience of the past... I guess it's been four years since that phone call. So for me, like, it's so important to raise visibility about it.

[music playing]

LINDSAY: Hey, podcast family, this is Lindsay Kolsch. We're coming up on the end of 2019 and as we look back over the year, we're simply amazed at how this movement has grown and reached new people.

Your support throughout the year means so much to TWLOHA. We want to thank you for listening and sharing this podcast. If you've purchased TWLOHA merch or participated in the campaigns this year, if you've shared our FIND HELP Tool or represented this message in your place of work—thank you.

Our goal is to always bring you this podcast and the stories we share on our blog and through social media with the support and generosity of our community.

And if you're thinking about making a year-end gift, we hope you'll support TWLOHA. We currently have a goal to raise \$150,000 by the end of the year. These funds help us continue to reach new communities, expand our FIND HELP program, and work to challenge the lie that says we can't talk about mental health. We recently launched a new high school program and are continuing to invest in college students. We're really excited about what 2020 will hold.

So if you want to help us continue that work, you can make a gift to TWLOHA by visiting TWLOHA.com/donate. That's t w l o h a .com/donate. It's fast and easy and every dollar will help.

And when you make a gift of \$10 or more, you'll receive a digital copy of our new 2020 calendar designs. We also have some other great gifts like TWLOHA mugs and TWLOHA calendars.

We're so excited to see what 2020 is going to bring. We truly believe that better days are ahead, and we want you to be there with us.

[music playing]

LINDSAY (narration): The conversations we had backstage with artists was a powerful reminder that when we take time to talk about mental health, we can start to see how similar our experiences are with the people we find standing shoulder to shoulder. Whether that's at a concert or maybe in a grocery line or behind a booth at a festival. When that happens, our stories start to collide, we really start to believe that maybe we're not alone. And that message was really important for Jon Bellion. We got to connect with him about how he learned about To Write Love on Her Arms and why the evening was so important to him.

LINDSAY: What made you decide to be part of this event?

JON: Just what you guys do. I'm familiar with it with like the company as a whole.

LINDSAY: Do you remember how you learned about To Write Love on Her Arms?

JON: Something through Dashboard actually. I'm not positive as to what it was when I was younger. But he, Chris did something that was, to a certain degree.

LINDSAY: Yeah. HEAVY & LIGHT.

JON: And he was super influential in even my songwriting and, like, that type of stuff. So yeah, I would say through that I've always been aware of what was going on. And it's funny enough and not even to sound like holier than thou, I just I don't do radio shows. It's just not for me. But once I found out what it was for and what you guys were doing and that was you guys I was like "No I'll definitely do some something like that for y'all."

LINDSAY: Aw, man. Wow.

LINDSAY (narration): And as each artist took the stage that night, in their own way they encouraged people in the audience to know it's okay to struggle, it's okay to ask for help, and that their lives mattered. Jon was no different. We asked him what he might say if he had a chance to talk to someone who was struggling in the audience.

JON: Everything is a season and there is light at the end of whatever tunnel it is. I know that sounds super blanket and cliché but there is light at the end of every season. To stick through it and to weather the storm. And secondly, I would say that getting help is not weakness. That's actually, like, very brave and very strong. And whether the world tells you that is or not. I'm pretty confident that that's very brave of you if you were to ever reach out and say "I need help, I feel weak, and I need help with the situation I'm in because I'm not doing so hot."

LINDSAY (narration): Chelsea also wanted people to know that it's okay to speak up.

CHELSEA: I tried to keep it a secret for so long and just between my parents and me. And that was so ineffective because at the end of the day, my, the greater your support system is, the more successful you're going to be.

CHELSEA: I think the most important thing that I've learned in the past few months is that your illness isn't you. And the thoughts that it tells you to be true aren't true and the feelings that it kind of convinces you are the perpetual states of life aren't, you know, what life is really about. I don't know it's really important to kind of separate.

LINDSAY (narration): We believe that mental health and healing is a journey. And sometimes that journey is not a straight path. We had the chance to ask a few artists how they take care of themselves. Some of them mentioned going to the gym or live concerts. Others talked about counseling and eating well. Here's what Chelsea shared with us.

CHELSEA: First and foremost, eating well, like I'll make sure I get a green juice like in the mornings. Making sure I'm, I'm sleeping well, because obviously, physical wellness is such a catalyst for mental wellness. And then like my, the most important thing I do is like, I'll make a to-do list for each day, and if I can, like get just like one or two things done at least then I feel like I had a productive day. And then like you start building your self-esteem back up and start building kind of your motivation back up. So like literally if you're having a crappy day just to-do list it. Do like one thing, and you'll be surprised at like how great you feel.

LINDSAY (narration): And here's what Jon had to say.

JON: What's helped my mental health a lot in the past year I would say is learning to say no to people. I thought that that was, you have to say yes to everybody and that's what makes you a positive person and that's what makes you likable and you realize you can't be everything to everybody. So I think saying no to 98% of the things brought my way has brought a ton of balance into my life for my family and people around me. And it's just it's been good. It's been nice.

LINDSAY (narration): Jon also talked about the importance of unplugging from technology once in a while.

JON: I think just turning everything off helps me a lot. Just being away from my phone, away from social media, away from the TV, away from all those things. Just give yourself a second to breathe so it's not information overload. Sometimes I get just overload anxiety because there's just so much information that I'm getting, that's getting shot my way. And I'm taking it in every day between emails and texts. Also trying to work on music at the same time, and it becomes a lot. So I think just no matter what the repercussions are, no matter how many missed calls, it's nice to just say I'm not going to answer any of this today or something like that. So that's probably the something I do.

LINDSAY (narration): And as we wrap up our conversations from the night, we thought it would be fitting to leave you with these words from Robin from the iHeartRadio team. No matter how you find yourself today or where you find yourself in your story, this is our shared hope for you.

ROBIN: There are so many brighter days ahead that make the fight to get there worth it. Like, it's gonna be a fight. It's not gonna be easy. But once you get through it, it's the most amazing feeling to be, like, "I beat that. Like, I got all those demons out of my head, even if it was just temporarily." Like, you did that. And that has really kind of been like, I don't know, that's kind of what I try to think about. I'm like, "Yeah, I've dealt with a lot of things. But I've also beat a lot of things."

[music playing]

LINDSAY: We want to thank Robin Fomusa and the incredible team at 107.5 The River Nashville, and all the artists that performed at the Live.Life.Love benefit concert in Nashville. A huge thanks to Jon Bellion, lovelytheband, Chelsea Cutler, and Scott Gardner for making space to have these conversations backstage with us. We're truly grateful.

LINDSAY: We hope each episode is a reminder that your story is important, you matter, and you're not alone. We understand that so many of you listening might be struggling or know someone who is struggling with the issues that we've been talking about. We believe that help exists. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources on our website: twloha.com. That's twloha.com. Click the FIND HELP at the top of the page. Or, if you need to talk to someone right now, you can always text our friends at Crisis Text Line. You simply text the word TWLOHA—that's T W L O H A—to 741741. And you'll be connected to a crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

LINDSAY: And if you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, we really hope you'll subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. And, if you can do us a favor, we'd really love for you to write us a review. It'll help more people find this podcast and the mission of TWLOHA. If you have any feedback or questions, please send us an email to podcast@twloha.com.

LINDSAY: A big thank you to our friends at Copeland for the original music on this episode. The To Write Love on Her Arms podcast is produced by Mark Codgen, with editorial support by Claire Biggs and Rebecca Ebert. Music assistance was provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor. I'm Lindsay Kolsch. Thank you so much for listening.

LINDSAY: To Write Love on Her Arms is a non-profit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. TWLOHA exists to encourage, inform, inspire, and also to invest directly into treatment and recovery. You can find more information about To Write Love on Her Arms at twloha.com.