

## Wandering Locals e02: Austin Scheen & Lester Pogue

**Knuc:** [00:00:00] The Q-tip is a paper stick with a cotton swab at both ends and is perfect for arts and crafts, manicures, makeup, application cleaning, and more that language is direct from the Q-tip website. No, they are not a sponsor. They're a metaphor. I promise this connects. Did you catch the missing piece? I'll say it again.

Q-tips according to the very company that makes them. Are perfect for arts and crafts, manicures, makeup, applications, cleaning, and more. Where's the part about cleaning your ears? I did some Google site searching on Q-tip dot com and the only place where the company even mentions the word ear is on the products label.

And that is only in an all caps warning. Do not insert swab into ear canal.

Here's a weird, but totally true sentence: I promise we'll come back to Q-tips. Right now let's talk about successful projects. According to the prevailing wisdom of modern marketing, there are three elements. Every project must define in order to maximize the potential for success. The first is what it is.

The second is who it's for and the third and most important ... well, we'll come back to that in a second with Q-Tips. First, the "what it is" we covered in the last episode: we, the artists involved, are making a multidisciplinary arts cast, featuring creatives from all over Tacoma, trying to find our way to what it means to be a local.

It's the second, who it's for, that we haven't really covered. As I've been considering this, I'm trying to imagine you right now. Maybe you're still in bed, curtains drawn, maybe in your feelings and looking for something to lift you out or change the energy. Maybe you're in your car on your way to, or from work grateful to have a job, occasionally wondering if you're low-key risking your life and looking for some resonance, some connection with people who can understand. Or maybe you're in your kitchen, savoring a delicious homemade meal, feeling good about your life and this day. And you're looking for a bit of juicy inspiration. That's my "who it's for" so far.

And you may notice that as I imagine you, I'm not simply interested in your physical location or even your emotional state. I'm also trying to envision what you want from this show. And that brings us to the third element for any successful project, in addition to what it is and who it's for. There's also what's called the "job to be done".

This is the connective tissue at the intersection of maker and audience, and it will sometimes surprise us, like for example, with Q-tips. The Q-tip is made for people who apply makeup, or do arts and crafts, or need to clean between their pets toes. It is explicitly not made for people who need to clean their ear canal.

And yet that's the job most of us hire it to do. Yes, we makers make a thing. We make it for you. But that doesn't mean that the reasons for making it are guaranteed to be the same as the reasons for consuming it. So, as we hear from our featured artists today, I'm going to point to three big themes that are helping me develop my own understanding of who this show is for and what you might be hiring it to do.

If you see yourself reflected in one or more of these themes, I'm hoping this exploration will connect you a little more deeply to the journey we're embarking on together. And I would love for you to let me know in some way or another.

I will also say this upfront, if none of these themes land for you right now, that's okay. I'm not trying to force anything. Just please, whatever you do do not use us to clean your ear canal.

Welcome to Wandering Locals. Stick around to hear the range of emotions it's possible to express with techno, and to find out what Q-tips have to do with liberation. Our first featured artist today is Austin Scheen, who also happens to be the audio engineer-slash-masterer for this entire show. Look them up on SoundCloud and you'll see "just another white guy who loves techno."

Labeled as producer, musician, DJ, sound engineer. I first met them when they were running the open mic at Metronome Coffee back when we could meet in person, and there was a Metronome Coffee. Today, they're sharing a live set they recorded just for us. And it's an exploration into -- well, I better let Austin explain it.

**Austin:** [00:05:21] Uh, it's a tour through what all techno entails because it started off small, but it had a lot of potential from the very beginning, since the defining quality of techno was essentially, uh, something above one 20, but also that's not the limit. The thing is the kick drum. It's just like the tone and the feeling.

As long as you can get that across that's techno.

Okay. So

**Knice:** [00:05:49] let's get back me up here. You're telling me that the defining feature of techno is...

**Austin:** [00:05:55] Uh, a feeling and a kick drum.

**Knice:** [00:05:59] Don't you love it when a definition is that clear and simple? Here's Austin again:

**Austin:** [00:06:06] I mean, it's, it's really difficult because techno is such a wide breadth of things, but it's, it's rooted in a definite feeling, a feeling of like either togetherness, unity, uh, rebellion, together on an idea, that kind of thing.

It's a tour through all of the feelings that you can encapsulate, and a lot of like what I've heard techno can entail.

**Knice:** [00:06:30] Okay, that makes sense, so far. Techno can cover a lot of different ground, and they want to show us a variety, but why do it live?

**Austin:** [00:06:39] One of the reasons I do it live is I'm trying to recreate, uh, the original expression of when it was created, because it was created live without a computer when it first was created. And even to this day, some of the originators of it, I mean, we saw Richie Hawtin, he was doing all that live. That was an inspiration to me. And then I find the European guys that were doing it live and I found Ableton.

So just like being able to do it live gives me the opportunity to put a different feeling into every track. Like I have the track there, the general tones of the track, the track is usually an idea, but I get to play with how I give you that idea. Or I give you that feeling this time around as compared to last time.

Or sometimes I'm just like, I'm not feeling this one as much, so I go through it quicker or skip it or whatever.

**Knice:** [00:07:28] So techno is a feeling and a kick drum. And Austin likes to perform it live in order to stay connected to the feeling that they're experiencing in this moment, while they're sharing the music. Noticing a theme, yet?

**Austin:** [00:07:41] The feelings are always there, but it's like how we handle them. We've had all of this stuff to do, and these are ways to like express the feelings through the mirrors of the others and ways to. Share these feelings and community, and a lot of those opportunities are gone now. And so, yeah, there's a lot of space for us to have to sit alone with these feelings, usually with very few people, so kind of bounce those feelings off of.

So it feels like a void. There's nothing to express the feeling too. So, I don't know, for me lately, I've been kind of like trying to double down on the only opportunity I can see as a way of expressing my feelings to somebody. And that's through the internet and through things like Twitch and, uh, the artists I've been able to work with in Nigeria.

**Knice:** [00:08:46] Oh, right. You don't even know about Nigeria yet. But I want to stick with "the feeling" for just a second. Throughout our conversation, Austin talked a lot about trying to find community and express their feelings, using the internet, things like Twitch and discord and even this podcast. And that leads me to what I've identified as the first theme for who this show is for.

And it is the most complicated sounding one, so bear with me. This show is for people looking for ways to express a feeling, and, who are ready to feel along with another's expression. I think both sides of that are important. If we find a way to express our feeling and we don't have the benefit of reverberate of feedback, it can feel like we're screaming into a void. Who this show is really for are people that are ready to at least occasionally take that step to say: I feel you.

Okay. So we're about to get to Austin set, but first I want to zoom in on how the internet connected Austin with someone all the way on the other side of the planet.

Back when George Floyd was murdered over the summer, Austin was attending protests in Tacoma, recording samples, making techno music and looking for more to do.

**Austin:** [00:10:05] And I was like, I can do more. I have all these musical production skills. I want to work with somebody that's not just another white dude. And so I just made Facebook posts and like rap groups and techno groups. And I was just like, I'm looking for anybody to collaborate with -- I forget how I worded it exactly, but it was something like -- that's not a white dude. And then this, this young gentlemen by the name of Pauluwe way, contacted me from Nigeria. And I was like, they were very motivated. And so I was mostly surprised. And, uh, I dunno, I, I saw an opportunity for me to be able to grow as well, because I haven't worked with a lot of vocals in production.

So this has been a huge learning exercise. In so many ways: like learning how the economy of Nigeria isn't included in the world economy. And like Nigerian currency is such a hard thing to send and receive. And just all of the systems that are in place, how deep systemic racism even goes, like way down deep into the roots of Africa so that they can never unite themselves, and how SARS is going on over there. And they have their own police brutality that they're dealing with.

So yeah, Pauluwe has just been like a consistent, just a consistent person in my life. As far as like checking in with me every day, just saying hi, or sending me a new vocal or like his very, uh, stern feedback on whether or not a track sounds good.

He's he's got a good ear.

**Knico:** [00:11:43] Pauluwe, if you're listening: thank you for sharing your art and your energy with this human you met on the internet. I certainly wasn't able to keep them busy enough. And also, feel free to share your stern feedback on this track from Austin, stage name Alkemist -- a 15-minute live exploration into the breadth of techno.

[ Live Techno From Austin ]

**Lester:** [00:23:52] Check one, two, three, four, five, six, seven,

**Knico:** [00:26:57] That's the voice of Lester Pogue, a singer songwriter, living in Tacoma and a member of the groups Groove Colonie, as well as Maroons. He's been mic-checking and playing music his whole life. Even while wearing a feather.

**Lester:** [00:27:12] Until the ninth grade, I was, I was doing pretty good, you know, playing on a drum set.

And, um, when I went into high school in the ninth grade, in order to be in the jazz band, you had to do one year of marching band. So I had to play the snare drum in marching band when we did competitions. We had to wear these white, like floor-shine shoes with bell bottom purple pants. Purple, like, flared sleeves and a big purple hat with a white feather in it.

**Knico:** [00:27:55] So good! I can see it.

**Lester:** [00:28:01] In the Sacramento high school marching band, you know, that's where, you know, I stopped playing music. It was more enticing to wrestle at that point than it was to play the snare drum in a marching band, when I'd rather be playing the jazz band. And so then I just stopped. You know, did pretty good at wrestling through my high school years, and then went back into playing music just off the humbug when I was like 20, 21.

And I was, you know,

**Knico:** [00:28:36] When there was no longer a requirement that you wear a big feather in a purple hat in order to get into it!

**Lester:** [00:28:42] Yes. Or big white clown shoes, you know, and march around playing, you know, the music for the movie Superman.

**Knico:** [00:28:51] It's kind of wild to me that there's this like, that there's like this sort of, I don't know, like the, you wanted to play jazz drums. Like, why can't you just play jazz drums? Why is there this like gatekeeper? Like, no, you gotta go bang on this one snare drum, in a line, with a feather on your head. What, what is that?

**Lester:** [00:29:08] It's, uh, it's part of our, it's part of what I think what America does. It tries to, you know, quarter the talent, you know, just like being in art.

One of the things that got me out of doing like painting and drawing. I used to think I was a pretty good drawer. And then when I got into the high school arts club, I was doing everything wrong. Grading art, like giving the art a grade. You get it. You got a "C" on that. The f\*\*, a "C"?! The f\*\* you talking about, like, this is a masterpiece for me.

**Knico:** [00:29:50] Over the course of our conversation, Lester pointed out big challenges, huge cracks and blind spots in our systems and culture. Systems built on capitalist thought and white supremacy. And that's the second theme I'm identifying for this show's audience, the, the who it's for -- it's for folks who can see that our biggest systems are broken, and are looking for ways to make creative change at a local level.

Lester always brought the idea of creative change back to the role of art and expression. In this clip, the necessity of comedy:

**Lester:** [00:30:27] But that's how it is, man. And that's how, you know, we as Black people -- and I use the term tightly, cause we Black here in this country. I don't ... I'd rather be Ethiopian French Cherokee Choctaw on my father's side; and Spanish, Irish of British descent on my mother's side.

I'd want to have that conversation, but for now, I'm Black.

And in my native, you know, like learnings from my people, we make humor of serious things because it's how we live with it. You know, we have to laugh because it hurts so much to carry this load and the weight and the anger and the ... just the, you don't want to get, get back.

You know, we can't do it all the time.

Like the brother, Dick Gregory, man. Listen to some of his, his comedy man, listen, it's very brilliant. Comedians over time, have always been able to take, you know, cultural and social upheaval and just craziness, and they're able to break down that, that angry or that depressed side and put some endorphins in there that making, if I can laugh about it, maybe I can think about it a little bit differently.

**Knico:** [00:31:45] And if comedy is for thinking, Lester says music is for healing.

**Lester:** [00:31:50] Our music, it connects with our humanity and our humanity is what needs healing, because I believe healing our humanity. We get closer to our relationship with mother earth, you know, with the earth we're connected.

We stop and we go, ooh, there's an Eagle flying in the sky. Let me watch this Eagle for a little while.

You know, just that connection, you know, the slowing down. I mean, there's still people walking around butt naked, you know, chilling and loving every day, you know, not tripping on a damn thing.

Music is that language is that medicine is that healing that, you know, we all get. It's coming from the heartbeat that rhythm.

**Knico:** [00:32:43] Music connects with our humanity and our humanity is what needs healing. That quote is reverberating deeply with me. And just a few minutes later on our call, Lester demonstrated this connection directly: he started singing.

**Lester:** [00:33:00] I live over in Hilltop, so I walk downtown, come up, hit Fireman's park, and then I go up, w is McMenamins now, up to Wrights park and then back down Yakima. So all along that way, I do it regularly. So I see living situations in a city. You know, so seeing houses, folks laid up in doorways and parks, but Free Me is it's about that walk, it's about those experiences in the city.

And it's about, also, the systems that create that, you know, that the systems that are affecting that person sleeping in the park, that's one of the parts of the system that white supremacy and that, and that construct has created to, to, to shore up the white male land owner. You have to have people begging for that presence or, you know, like, under the thumb of that control. You know, that that's houseless folks, that's people struggling. That's people dealing with anxiety and depression and the mental health ... situations, should I say. So, the first verse of Free Me is, um, let me see if I can get it right now:

*(singing)* Sometimes we don't have the words for the pain, so we keep it inside.

Now letting go of the struggle and strain could be a matter of pride.

So, come on, tell me how do you show refrain from what some would say is insane.

People, please help me find the words to say

For me to relieve my brain.

Please free me. Come on, see me.

*(speaking)* And the second verse is like this:

*(singing)* Walk through the streets and see the pain and the strife

Laid up in alleyways, storefronts, and the park.

When darkness falls, they go away from our sight

Seeking respite from the chill of the night

I choose to speak about the issues at hand,

so we people come to understand

brothers and sisters check this truth for yourselves.

Walk through these streets and you will see what I mean,

Please free me.

(speaking) That's Free Me.

**Knico:** [00:35:55] I was recently told that as much as 40% of the building space in downtown Tacoma is vacant, even before COVID. Even if that's only half true, that's plenty of room for every person living in a tent that Lester walks by on his urban hike home. The fact that we can't find a creative way to make space for more people to live is an indication that something's broken right here in our own backyard.

Wait, there's more: before he brought out the last verse of Free Me, Lester dove into a breakdown of an important difference between "freedom" and "liberation".

**Lester:** [00:36:36] We're all kind of working towards a similar goal. You know, we all want the same thing. We want, you know, to be liberated from this bullshit-ass system.

You know what I'm saying? I'm talking about liberated, I'm not talking about free.

**Knico:** [00:36:52] I really appreciate the word choice, but please break it down.

**Lester:** [00:36:56] M\*\*f\*\*ers been talking about free. We got miles of free, you know, we're free to create. We're free to do a lot of things. But when you liberated, I mean, you don't need, you don't need to rely on somebody else for your freedom.

You know, when we're working towards liberation, we're you know -- freedom ain't even a thing. Cause you liberated, you know, you've let all that go. I want us to get there.

All these people that see these things, that recognize them, that have empathy, that, that can go up to a houseless person and say, man, I ain't got no money to share with you, man, but I can share some food or I'll share some thoughts with you. We could talk, you know, chop it up or whatever. You know, that that re our human relation.

You know, in the, in the last verse of the song Free Me, it's like this:

(singing) Humanity in need of more humanity. Love is in need of love.

These must increase for us to all live in peace.

See what I mean, and you will see.

Brutality leads to more brutality. Reality is reality.

Forgiveness leads to more forgiveness. Free thought will lead us to be free.

Please free me.

(speaking) That's the one.

**Knico:** [00:38:22] "Free thought will lead us to be free". That's it y'all. Pay attention to your own imagination. Stuck thinking leads to stuckness. It's important to keep our mental gears

greased to find another way forward. And that leads us to the third theme of who it's for which Lester summed up nicely by searching for a word:

**Lester:** [00:38:49] There's. I don't know if there's, I know there's probably an indigenous term for it, but I don't know if there's an English word for it, but it is:

we people who see the vision of, you know, connecting with our true spirit, collectively. You know, we have to be real in order to get there. And if we can't have conversations that go beyond just "how you doing" and "Merry Christmas", you know, we're not going to ever get anywhere in our humanity.

And you know, sometimes, we got to cry sometimes, we got to get mad. We got to tell a m\*\*f\*\*er to f\*\* off and then think about it, and then get together a couple of days later and be like, Hey man, you know, I had to let that out. And in our humanity, we have to accept that from each other. You know, cause we're sitting in the room together.

There's 7.8 billion people in this world, and we're in this room together. You know, that's one of the things that helps me when I get into these rooms with these, you know, highfalutin, sa-diddy, overly educated people. Like I'm in the same room as you man. Whether I speak with the Queen's English or straight from the streets, I'm in the same room with you.

And we're talking where we should be able to come up with some solutions about why, you know, our community is going through the shit that they're going through, and what can we do to either relieve it, fix it, change it, or even speak on it, you know?

Cause sometimes people just want to be heard, you know, Not even looking for, for any kind of like reward. Just hear, hear me, hear us, hear what the f\*\* we going through.

**Knic:** [00:40:40] This show is for people who "see the vision of connecting with our true collective spirit". We have to be real, and it's for people ready to listen. To hear, in Lester's words, "what the f\*\* others are going through".

**Lester:** [00:40:56] This is a positive thing. This is a straight, positive things because this creates upliftment.

When we recognize each other, we can uplift each other. You know, I recognize you're struggling over there, brother. I recognize you struggling over there, sister. You know, talk, you can talk with me and if we were to leave ourselves time to do these things, we, we will be able to get through COVID a lot better -- because this shit ain't going away with no damn vaccine.

**Knic:** [00:41:30] I've got nothing more to add. Let's hear one more song from Lester in his submission to this podcast.

**Lester:** [00:42:49] [ Lester plays drums, sings ]

(speaking) Yes, I.

**Knic:** [00:44:59] So what does a Q-tip have to do with liberation? Well, it's all in the job to be done. We didn't invent the system we live in. It was made for us, built by people trying to solve what they saw as problems in their own lives, however ignorantly.



Thing is, just like a Q-tip, we don't have to follow the instructions on the tin. Every time we interact with our systems and culture, we have an opportunity to do it differently. All we have to do is be clear about the "job to be done".

**Lester:** [00:45:38] You know, the revolution is here, you know, and there's all of this art is out there. Going on these marches and going to rallies, or listening to the news, or whatever -- you see, people have made artwork to display how they feel. Or they've written poems to tell us how they're responding to what's going on. Or people write songs, or whatever.

It's a great time to be that type of person right now, you know, because we don't have to hold back. There's so many extremes right now. Like we can do our best work in times of turmoil. I think that's always been evident in art.

**Knic:** [00:46:25] Thanks for listening to Wandering Locals. In our next episode, we'll talk with poet Michael Haeflinger about a murderous centenarian. And with Elle Grey, we'll discuss the mental health benefits of listening to podcasts. That's next on Wandering Locals. We end every episode with serendipity shout outs, looking for those little moments of unexpected connection.

This episode also has built in serendipity. After I finished editing this episode, I found out that these two artists had actually made a collaboration together already. We're going to present that now it's called Dubwise, featuring the art of Lester Pogue's group Maroons, remixed by Austin.

[ Dubwise plays ]

Stick around for serendipity shout outs. First, gratitude for the crew organizing by Zach White. Audio engineer, Austin Scheen. I'm your host Knic Pfost. As a project exploring present-day Tacoma, I believe it's important to gratefully acknowledge the First People of the land that we create this project on: the Puyallup tribe and the coastal Salish peoples -- you don't get any more local than that.

Also to our artists today, Austin Scheen, and Lester Pogue, and all of the Wanderers in the Wandering Locals collective. Shout out to our patrons, the Tacoma Arts Commission made these first several episodes possible.

And you could help make more episodes possible at [anchor.fm/wanderinglocals](https://anchor.fm/wanderinglocals). Hit the support button, or leave us a message with the little message button.

There's so many things, so many options. And finally, it's time for artists to artists shout outs. The first one is from Austin and it goes out to local artist Sam Bogle.

**Austin:** [00:54:50] Oh, Sam, I'm sure you're doing great. And I hope that you are finding joy in the ups and patience in the downs, because I'm sure you're going through too, as an artist.

And I miss working with your vocals. They're so clean and pretty.

**Knic:** [00:55:07] And Lester wraps us up, with a shout out to The Black Tones.

**Lester:** [00:55:11] I got to see The Black Tones a couple of weeks before COVID hit. I was on one of my urban hikes that day, and I came up to Spanish steps and I saw these Black musicians loading equipment into McMenamins.

And I thought, wow, you know, this is McMenamins, they got black folks playing there? And I had never heard of them. So I went to the show, and man. It was incredible, man. Eva, and her brother plays drums. And then their mom and sister got up and sang some songs with them. And it was just what I needed at that time, because there's that, you know, that part of black culture isn't really prominent here in Tacoma.

So for me to see a black band up there playing, it was super dope. So, yeah, The Black Tones.

[ music ]