INTERVIEWS

Softness as Power with Elisabeth Klinck

By Brad Rose November 7, 2025

Elisabeth Klinck plays violin the way some people breathe: instinctively, necessarily, and with a kind of quiet devotion that predates language. On *My Hair Is Everywhere*, the debut from her trio with saxophonist Adia Vanheerentals and pianist Maya Dhondt, that devotion becomes something shared, a three-way conversation where silence carries as much weight as sound. The album seeps in slowly, like watching light change across a room. These three musicians choose restraint over display, intimacy over grandeur. Every detail emerges: breath moving through saxophone keys, the mechanical click of piano pedals, the faint scrape of bow against string. These aren't imperfections to be edited out but essential elements of the music itself, reminders that sound comes from bodies, from people choosing to be vulnerable

together. The result is music that lives in negative space, where what isn't played matters as much as what is.

My Hair is Everywhere is **OUT NOW** on **VIERNULVIER.**

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I'd love to start at the beginning. What are your earliest memories of sound or music? Was there a particular moment when you first felt something awaken in you?

I remember loving to lie under the grand piano while my sister — sixteen years older than me — was practicing. Surrounded by the sound — it felt like a small nest.

Unfortunately, I could only do it when my mom wasn't home, because she was terribly afraid the piano would fall on my head (which, thinking about it now, obviously is absurd).

How did you find your way to the violin? I'm curious about the path that led you there, whether it felt like a choice or something more inevitable.

This is an easy one; my father is a professional violinist, so the violin was always present in our house. Even now, when I stay at my parents' house, I wake up to the sound of him practicing.

Like many children, I simply wanted what my father had — and that was a violin.

What was the landscape of support like growing up? I ask because so many musicians have complicated relationships with early encouragement (or lack of it), and I'm interested in how that shaped your relationship with making music.

I grew up in an environment where music and discipline were ever-present. My father is a violinist with an incredibly strict practice routine, but he never forced me to do anything — he just made it clear that if you want to get better, you have to practice every day, like brushing your teeth. My mother, on the other hand, was the one who actually made me sit down to practice. She would sit next to me, follow the score, and sometimes even admit she didn't feel like it either — which gave those moments a kind of intimate, shared atmosphere. It never felt harsh, more like she was helping me build character, something I'm still very grateful for.

Still, there was always a sense of guilt when I didn't practice. As a child, practice came first — before parties or going out. I even took my violin to camp, where it mostly stayed unopened but somehow loomed over me. At one point, I'd even arrange my scores to make it look like I'd practiced when my dad got home.

Playing the violin requires a lot of perseverance and almost military discipline. Conservatory was tough — not just for me, but also for my ensemble members Maya and Adia. After that period, I had to relearn how to love the instrument and figure out what music meant to me without a teacher dictating how to play it. Between 18 and

23, I barely went out because I didn't want to "lose a day" — something I'm happy to say isn't true anymore.

Now, I try to make making music *easy* and *enjoyable*. I reject the idea that only hard, painful work produces something beautiful — that's such a destructive concept. I still love playing daily, but not for eight hours straight. I'd rather cook for my friends than spend the whole day in a practice room.

Looking back, studying violin taught me persistence, structure, listening, reflection — all things that help me understand the world. But after conservatory, I also had to *unlearn* a lot. If I'm going to dedicate so much of my life to music, it should be fulfilling and fun.

In the end, yes, it taught me to persevere and think deeply, but it also left me with a kind of "Christian guilt" — the feeling that you're never doing enough. That mindset is problematic, even capitalist in a way: *practice, practice, practice!* But really, you need to *live* — that's where beautiful music comes from. Constant practice in a little room isn't so inspiring. These days, I take it all a bit lighter.

When did improvisation first enter your life? Was there a moment when you realized music could exist beyond the page, or was that always part of how you understood sound?

Well, actually, improvisation first entered my life through ballet class. From around the age of five, I went to ballet. I always had trouble remembering the exercises and was easily distracted. My movements were too extravagant, and my teacher used to say, "Stop decorating those movements!" But I just liked them bigger and frivolous.

Once a year, we had a "free" class, where everyone had to prepare a dance to show in front of the class. I discovered that if I didn't prepare anything but simply chose a song and improvised, it was much more fun — plus my grades were better than ever. Of course, I never told anyone I was improvising, but I remember feeling extremely proud.

When I improvise now, I still aim for that same sense of freedom and joy. In the end, for me, playing music feels very similar to dancing — you listen, you react, you move.

The description of you offering "seeds of material: metaphors, sketches, sonic ideas" to the ensemble is great. I love that language. Can you walk me through what one of those seeds actually looks like? How does something begin before it becomes music?

For *My Hair Is Everywhere*, there were first musical sketches, then metaphors — and eventually, it all became the music on the album.

For me, creation begins by entering a state where thoughts are floating rather than controlling. When I dive into sound, I try to forget the *why* and *what* and simply follow the movement itself. I play until a certain sound or melody gives me a physical reaction — a vibration that makes my body want to continue. I search until something feels so captivating that I just want to repeat it. It's a bit like returning to a childlike

state, where only play exists. Once my body understands the sound, I record it on my phone.

Of course, I don't reach that state every day. But doing it daily takes away the pressure. Sometimes it's magical; sometimes it's not. Sometimes I can't stop thinking about lunch, or I get frustrated that everything sounds cheap — but that's part of the process.

I rarely start with a project in mind. I just collect these sketches — little sonic ideas. Later, during rehearsals, I dip into this library of fragments. Depending on how developed an idea is, we find ways to translate it with our instruments. But mostly, we explore together how the music wants to take shape.

That's when the most exciting things happen — the synergy between us becomes more important than the initial sketch. Only then does the music truly come into existence; it finds its form through us.

At some point, we have to catch the magic — and that's where metaphors appear. One that came up often during rehearsals was imagining Maya as a big, solid tree, and Adia and me as two squirrels running nervously up and down. At first, it sounded like a joke, but I said, "No, no — I mean it." Now we all know exactly what that means.

There's a beautiful tension in the album between what feels carefully constructed and what feels completely open. How do you navigate that in the moment of creating? Do you know when something is "finished," or is that even the right word?

Of course, we can feel when something is finished — it's intuitive. But since not all of our music is written down, we often have to "re-remember" it when we play live. In that process, new variations and ideas always sneak in. The pieces keep shifting, growing, finding new forms each time. They never really *end* — they just keep *becoming.*

For me, that feels very natural. Tomorrow I won't be the same person I am today; we're constantly changing and evolving. We like to think we're static, but we're really not — and the music reflects that.

You recorded in close proximity, capturing breath, pedal strikes, key clicks, all those so-called imperfections. That's a vulnerable choice. What made you want to preserve that level of intimacy rather than clean it up?

By "cleaned up," do you mean you think it sounds rough or dirty? *Haha.*

I actually love those sounds — the sound of touch. I love hearing Adia breathe through her saxophone; for me, that *is* perfection. The melody feels the way it feels *because* of those sounds — they belong to the same world. Hearing the people behind the instruments *is* the music.

It's funny how softness is still seen as something vulnerable or fragile, something to be avoided. But being soft can also be bold, even brutal. Softness, to me, is a fierce kind of power.

Silence functions almost as a fourth member of the ensemble on this album. How do you think about it? Is it something you compose, or does it emerge naturally from the way you three listen to each other?

I have to think about this quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: “Perfection is finally obtained not when there is no longer anything to add, but when there’s no longer anything to take away.” I guess that is what we are aiming for.

But apart from that, it emerges very naturally: it’s difficult to listen to others when you are constantly playing, isn’t that the same in a conversation?

The album title, ‘My Hair Is Everywhere,’ is wonderfully specific and strange. Where did that come from? What does it mean to you, and how does it connect to the music itself?

One day during rehearsal, my hair got stuck between my bow and the strings, and I ☼outed, “F*ck, my hair is everywhere!” That’s basically how it happened.

I love the banality of it. It's something playful and instantly recognizable — hair creeps everywhere, no matter what you do. I also love the sound of the phrase itself; it makes things feel lighter.

All three of you use voice alongside your instruments. That's not decoration, it feels essential to the fabric of these pieces. What does voice allow you to say or express that your violin can't?

The violin has this serious, almost royal aura — lots of centuries of crazy virtuosos make you forget it's basically just wood and a stick. I feel singing along helps to get the instrument off his *pied de stalle*. It reminds us the instrument is also just a voice guided by fingers.

And like I said before, the sound of the people playing matters as much as the music itself. Our voices are part of our sound — messy and playful. At first, we were stressed to sing live, but lately it became a game. Who can hit the highest note? Who dares to sing the softest?

We take it very seriously… by not taking it too seriously.

What surprised you most about working with Adia and Maya? Was there something that emerged in the trio that you hadn't anticipated?

In the beginning, it wasn't the plan to record an album at all. I didn't know Adia very well — I had just fallen in love with her sound and asked if she wanted to play with me. And although I already knew Maya, and we had played some classical sonatas together, we had never actually *created* music together.

The beautiful thing about making music is that you can't hide — you show your purest self. Through playing, you get to know each other in a very raw and honest way. Over time, we became close friends. Now every rehearsal begins with lots and lots of talking — about everything, really — before we even touch our instruments.

I think the biggest surprise was discovering how deeply compatible we are. They're both even greater than I imagined, and our different ways of seeing and approaching music fit together so naturally. They inspire me every single time we play.

French artist Annabelle Guetatra created the artwork. How did you find each other, and what about her visual language felt right for this music?

I discovered Annabelle's work way before we even had an album, but I immediately knew, if ever we made an album with Klinck Trio, her work had to be the cover.

It's difficult to explain what attracted me exactly; it's intuitive, but you could say, if you were to enter her universe through a dream and were floating around her puppets, our music would be the soundtrack.

And lastly, to close… What are some of your favorite sounds in the world?

We have this amazing word in Flemish: *Geroezemoes,* which describes the sound of lots of people talking unintelligibly, you hear it mostly in cafes or at a party, I love it… It's so reassuring, it makes me extremely calm.

The only thing is that it can make me so calm that I can fall asleep, which has made

me fall asleep in various random places.

Rain has a similar effect on me. In my apartment, the rain echoes so beautifully. I'm lucky that these days I'm often home, and it's raining a lot.

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