



# LIFE & DEATH: THE MUSICAL HEALING OF NESSI GOMES

CONSCIOUS ARTIST FEATURE BY CHRIS ASSAAD

It takes a special kind of artist to capture the piercing truths, the raw intensity, and the immense beauty of our shared human experiences and to express them in a language that speaks to the heart of an audience. It takes an equally courageous human and soul adventurer to plumb the depths of the most ravishing human emotions and brave exploring the hidden corners of one's own consciousness to birth such profoundly moving art.





Enter Nessi Gomes.

Born on the tiny island of Guernsey to a Portuguese family, British singer-songwriter Nessi Gomes has forged a path less traveled into her artistry by relentlessly pursuing her own journey of self-discovery and channeling her most painful, revelatory and liberating experiences into her powerful musical creations. Nessi seamlessly fuses the traditional Fado folk music style of her ethnic roots, her more contemporary influences, and a weaving of her pure, sultry, emotive voice, along with the most intimate revelations, and a sprinkle of fairy dust, into one cohesive sound that is truly her own. All of this is clearly evidenced on her critically acclaimed release, *Diamonds & Demons* (2016), a timeless collection of songs both deeply haunting and healing.

I had the pleasure of diving deep with Nessi in a heart to heart chat that affirmed the origins of her rich artistry, and her consistent willingness to unabashedly open up and reveal all. I left the conversation feeling moved by her vulnerability, inspired by her journey to devote myself deeper to my own highest visions, and with a renewed hope in the wave of musical messengers that are showing up at this time, to unite us as we move through our moments of darkness into the light.

In this Conscious Artist Feature, we get an up close glimpse into the inner world Nessi has so fearlessly navigated and bared in her music, and the trials and tribulations that preceded her currently “mostly blissful” life. Nessi shares about her unexpected three-year long stay at the PachaMama community in Costa Rica at a crucial point on her path, where she had her first experiences sitting in plant medicine ceremony and where the direction she was to take in both life and music were revealed. Nessi generously grants us a peek into the creative dance of an artist committed to exploring ever-new territory, and avoiding the confines of classification or any potential complacency in her expression. She also offers her perspective on the healing powers of the voice, and sheds light on her work supporting others in accessing and furthering their own vocal liberation in her Voice Odyssey workshops. Last but not least, Nessi took the opportunity to honour and acknowledge her beloved life partner and collaborator in all things, Lino, who is soon to be the father of their first born child.







“ I remember the first day that I started to explore my voice and I started to sing, and it was like electricity in my body. ”

### From Troubled Beginnings

It would be easy to look at someone's greatest accomplishments and visions realized, and to overlook the ardor of the journey endured to bring them into fruition. Despite the seeming ease, effortlessness and confidence with which she inhabits her musical world, Nessi's foray into music, singing and songwriting began, not by choice, but by necessity. She opened up about her early struggles in adolescence with depression, a sense of not belonging and an eventual failed attempt to take her own life.

*“It's been a journey. Like I'm sure everybody goes through all these different challenges. For me, I've been doing music for a very long time. I started kind of exploring sound and music when I was about 14. I started writing poetry, actually. I was a pretty troubled kid. I was suffering lots of depression and isolation, and I think being Portuguese. I'm very proud of who I am, but when I was a kid, I had a lot of shame around who I was.*

*Growing up on such a small island, there was always this feeling that I always wanted to fit in, and I found it very hard because I had so much shame around being Portuguese, so I didn't want anything to do with it. So I didn't want to learn the language. I was just embarrassed. I didn't want to walk down the street with my parents because I so wanted to be like everyone else. I wanted to feel like I was accepted for who I was. I wanted to be English. I am English. I was born there, but in my early years, I just felt like I was in no man's land because I never felt fully English because I was fully aware of my Portuguese roots.*

*There was kind of a lot of racism back in the 80s. I think also because people didn't travel the way they do now. People are a lot more open minded and compassionate and have more empathy. They also get to experience how it is to be in another country and feel like a minority. So I feel like that changes a lot of people's perspectives, but in the 80s nobody really traveled that much, especially being on such a small island, it*

*was very narrow-minded. There was a lot of Portuguese there at the time, so there was a lot of discrimination and racism. I was very aware of it, and I just hated it. I felt so dirty. That's the only way I can explain it. I felt just that I wasn't worthy, and I'm sure everyone kind of experiences that in some way.*

*But for me, that's how I found music. When I started to get into music, like I said, I was pretty troubled. Very troubled. Suffering depression. Didn't know who I was. Being a teenager's really challenging without all these other complications. I think at the age of, like, 15, yeah, 15, I tried to take my own life. Thankfully, it didn't work out.”*

### The Healing Process & Finding Her True Sound

For Nessi, music and songwriting arrived as much needed allies in one of her darkest moments. She empathetically recounted how her exploration of the voice was truly a lifeline that helped to relieve her adolescent torment and guide her healing process.





“The moment I opened my mouth, I wasn’t a good singer. It wasn’t like I had velvet and gold pouring out. I wasn’t interested in that. I just remember how it made me feel. All of a sudden, I was able to communicate parts of my being that were just so buried and had been so silenced and so oppressed and it became like an addiction.”

“I feel what really contributed to my recovery was music because it was a bridge. When I started to write poetry, and it’s funny because I found these poems that I wrote when I was 14, and they’re super dark. Really. It’s kind of like your heart’s breaking to know that younger self of who you were. It was like a cry for help, but what happened was those poems became songs. I remember the first day that I started to explore my voice and I started to sing, and it was like electricity in my body.

It was like all of a sudden, because on some level as well, words are limited. The moment I opened my mouth, I wasn’t a good singer. It wasn’t like I had velvet and gold pouring out. I wasn’t interested in that. I just remember how it made me feel. All of a sudden, I was able to communicate parts of my being that were just so buried and had been so silenced and so oppressed and it became like an addiction. I just remember the first moment I started to sing, and then, every day I’d finish school, I would go and crawl into the music room, and I’d stay there for two

hours, just playing on a piano. And I can’t play piano, but I just used to kind of improvise and make sounds. I’d just be there. It was my way of escaping as well, but not in a kind of unhealthy way, but just creating a world where I felt safe, for myself, where I felt like I belonged, and slowly, slowly over the years and especially in those early times, I felt all these pieces coming slowly back to my spirit, feeling this reconnection to myself.

I feel through music and through singing, I’ve really learnt so much and I continue to learn so much about my Being and the way it’s given me confidence. For sure, I still have my insecurities and I still have my judgments. It’s not to say that now I’m spared from it. I’m not, but I know how to navigate these energies a little bit more than I used to.”

From those somewhat awkward first attempts, a new path opened up that brought a wide range of Nessi’s formative musical experiences, and that eventually led her to formally study music therapy, a significantly influential step on her path in which her connection to her own true

sound began to emerge.

“That was my starting point. When I started to kind of explore that and get into singing, it really had nothing to do with wanting to be a professional singer. It was like my medicine. This was my way to heal myself, and I wasn’t conscious of that. I didn’t know that’s what I was doing. I was just riding it. So that’s what then kind of led me into studying music therapy and voice therapy.

I sang. I joined bands, I was in a funk band for five years, which I loved. That was really fun. I was really getting to know myself through the voice, and I think it was only when I started to do music therapy, I started to tap into my own sound a little bit more. I got more into improvisation, and I was really starting to kind of peel back the layers and starting to figure out my own kind of vibration through the voice and sound. Whereas before I was still trying to be like somebody else and trying to impersonate, and I think that’s natural when you’re starting off.”



## **PachaMama, The Medicine & The Music**

Imagine drinking a naturally sourced elixir of some of Mother's Earth's most potent medicine, being cracked wide open and carried to the places in your Being where the most painful wounds, the most ancient rememberings and the most illuminating Truths wait to be released, rediscovered and reclaimed.

Then, consider the possibility of taking this journey, while being aided by the sounds of songs shamanic in their potency, crafted with an intimate knowledge of such depths and an understanding of what it requires of us to travel there. Indeed, such music would have to be sacred, powerful, born of experience, and channeled from a place far beyond the machinations of the human psyche.

Nessi shared about her life-changing time spent at PachaMama, the ecological, spiritual community in Costa Rica, her deeply transformative experiences with sacred plant medicine, and the profound shift that followed in her writing and music-making.

*"I guess I've always been a bit of a seeker, but not really in an obvious way. I guess because of my journey with what happened when I*

*was younger and also with the music. I always tried to find ways to nourish my spirit. So when I met this girl and she told me about PachaMama, I just felt, "Oh, this would be a really good place for me. I feel like I've done a lot on the road and I've been doing a lot of charity work, and I feel like I want to nourish myself and take care of myself a little bit." I was planning to only be there for like five weeks doing a work exchange program, and then in my very last week, I met Lino. He had lived there for twelve years. I had no intention of even meeting somebody. This is life. You think you're making plans for life, but life makes plans for you.*

*Those three years were so life-changing for me, to live in a community like that.*

*I was writing during that time. It was lots of transformation work, doing workshops, meditations, silence. It was very profound. This is where I first drank the tea. That was a huge turning point for me, actually, and a huge turning point in my music writing. Before I actually did my first ceremony, all my songs were mostly about boys. Which is beautiful, and*

*it has its place.*

*There's so many amazing love songs out there, but I think, yeah, my first ceremony, which I guess was nearly eight years ago. Wow. I don't know what it did, but it definitely shifted my creativity, my writing, my perspective in a very different direction. And I would say probably half the songs on the album were from inspiration from my journeys on the medicine. A lot of the insights that I received.*

*I really feel in ceremony in general, of course, the medicine is very powerful, but I think the music is also playing a huge part. Especially, ceremonies that I did where singing is involved, you're not just kind of receiving the music, you're also kind of very much part of the music.*

*They would last all night until the morning, and I think that combination with the medicine is very powerful because singing can also put you into an altered state, whether you're drinking or not. It has that ability. It's that powerful. It's been around for hundreds of years, the power of chants, Tibetan monks. I'm so grateful for that shift as well. It gave me so much. It just gave me a very different perspective to create from. I felt like I was feeling music in a different way as well."*







It is in such a context, that many have come to discover the magic of Nessi Gomes' music. Known to many of her faithful listeners as a medicine singer, her enchanting world of mystical messages and melodic imagery have graced many a sacred ceremony. And despite having had no immediate intention to serve that end, Nessi acknowledges that the plant medicine community's embrace of her music was a key piece in helping to spread her work.

*"I didn't see it coming at all. I literally used to record my little demos, my sketches on my iPhone, and I would just put these little sketches on SoundCloud. It was only from social media that the music started to move. People would write to me, and over the years, I'd slowly start getting invitations. 'Hey, do you want to come and play here? Do you want to come and play here?' That's how it started for me. I had no intention of, 'Right, I'm going to conquer the whole medicine world.' Ten years ago when I left my island to go traveling, my intention was to go away for a year and then come back, and then I'd settle down. If someone said to me, 'You're going to end up living at PachaMama,*

*in a community in Costa Rica for three years. You're going to be drinking ayahuasca for the first time. You're going to marry somebody from another country. You're going to be doing music as your profession.' There is no way I would have ever known. I would have not believed anybody. It's amazing.*

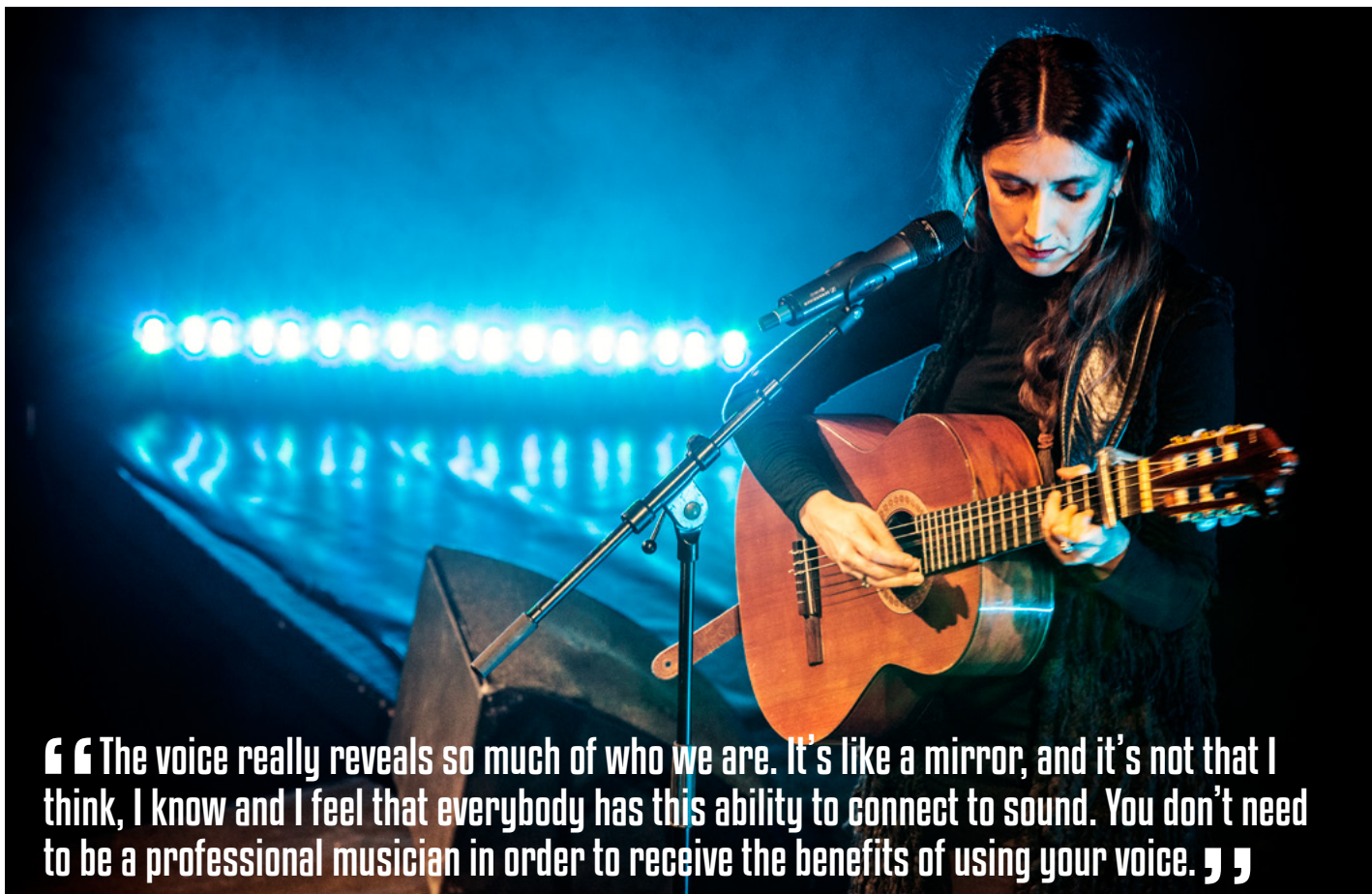
*I think for me, also what the tea gave me... because I grew up in a kind of Catholic upbringing, I had a lot of resistance to it, because I never really resonated with the church, and I didn't like the whole concept of faith and fear and guilt and all this stuff that kind of comes with that whole path. I feel like what the medicine gave me was a different church. All of a sudden I started to really believe again. My faith and my trust and just trusting life more. It really gave me so much, not just in music, and also giving me strength to take risks in my life, not just to settle and kind of really expand who I think I am."*

What's perhaps just as incredible, is the notion that the same portal-opening music has been enjoyed and experienced by just as many listeners, in more traditional settings and live venues.

This is where I first heard Nessi's soulful, sultry voice, reverberating through Toronto's Burdock room, a space so silent on this night that every whisper and wondering could be heard with crystal clarity, and equally received as the pure medicine that she has harvested for all to bask in. As her time at Pachamama came to a close, Nessi was very clearly guided to pursue music, and bring that to fruition, though it did not come without further bouts of struggle, self-doubt and great discomfort.

*"It was painful. It was so painful the first couple of years. I felt so paralyzed and fearful, and on one of the songs on the album, 'These Walls' is all about this whole experience of feeling completely paralyzed by this whole new change of way. It didn't come easy to me because I had to kind of break a lot of concepts of who I thought I was. It's easier now. Those voices can still raise their ugly head but I don't feel so afraid of them anymore because I recognize the energy.*

*At the time it was so new for me, and it just paralyzed me, and sometimes it just stifled my creativity because I just believed I couldn't do it. I'd ask myself*



“The voice really reveals so much of who we are. It’s like a mirror, and it’s not that I think, I know and I feel that everybody has this ability to connect to sound. You don’t need to be a professional musician in order to receive the benefits of using your voice.”

*“What am I doing? Why am I doing this? I need to get a real job. I’m a fraud.” Whatever those voices were.*

*I realized it doesn’t matter what you do in your life, you’re going to be faced with these challenges. It was an opportunity to grow. With every kind of growth, there’s growing pain. It’s painful because you’re having to kind of step out of your comfort zone.”*

Refusing to be put in any boxes, Nessi asserts that she isn’t just a medicine singer and that she doesn’t want to have to sit down and write a meaningful song every time. At the same time, she acknowledges that her music, born of her own healing is conducive to such an experience for the listener, while maintaining her claim of the space to be free in her expression, and the ways in which she delivers it.

*“It’s an onward journey. It’s never-ending. In a way, the music that I share. At least with the last album, it wasn’t necessarily something I planned. It’s just these songs, they do come from a healing space.*

*I don’t consider myself to be a performer as such. I also don’t want to put myself in a box. I feel very passionate about that because sometimes people think they understand me or they think that I’m a medicine singer, and I find that quite hard as well. I think there’s a part of myself that just sometimes wants to sing about nothing. So it’s something that, yeah, I don’t ever feel, I just feel the moment. I don’t want to feel this pressure, like now I have to write a song that has some kind of deep meaning. I find that a little taxing. I think there’s so much beauty out there in songs and that’s just where I’m at, at the moment.”*

### **Voice Odyssey & Holding Space For Others**

Having experienced her own radical transformation through vocal expression, the supportive element of sacred settings, along with a deep dive into the study of music as a healing modality, it followed naturally that Nessi would be poised to be a conduit to a similar initiation for others. It is in this spirit, that her Voice Odyssey workshops came to be

a central part of her work, alongside her music. These well-attended and highly intimate containers for the participants’ liberation through vocal exploration have been stewarded by Nessi and her partner, Lino, and have been offered in cities all around the world.

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*I think with the voice, it’s the most intimate thing we have, so it can be the most powerful in some ways as well, because it’s coming from us. For me, it’s like my compass. I know where I am when I’m singing. If I’m in my head, it’s amazing to see how much that affects the quality of my sound as well. But the workshops have been really powerful and really profound. Just watching people and witnessing people really step into their power is very courageous. It’s super scary for some people.*



But the work we do has nothing to do with teaching people how to sing. I'm not a teacher.

I'm not interested in that. For me it's creating a space where people can come together in community and really allow themselves to give voice to parts of themselves that maybe have been silenced or never been given the opportunity to really be expressed to its potential. Yeah, it's all kind of one, the music and the workshops, it's really connected somehow because they all link."

### **Birth, Death & New Life Beyond Diamonds & Demons**

In the same way that Nessi's body of work has been so closely and intimately linked to her personal evolution and life unfolding, Nessi shared the news of a soon to be arriving new member of her family that came, not surprisingly, as new life was beckoning to be birthed creatively as well. Confirming that her poetic lens is one through which she views all of life, Nessi also spoke about the necessary release of the old as a "death of sorts", requiring of her to make space for what's coming as she moves forward into the exploration of new sounds and new musical territory.

"Before I found out I was pregnant, I already had the intention not to do any shows next year because I've been touring for the last four years, and I've been playing the same kind of songs. I love them, and I feel like I've been on such a journey with them, but I also feel like I've kind of moved away from it as well. I still manage to bring that sincerity into the singing and to the songs, but I feel ready to explore a different part of myself. I find it's not that possible when I'm touring. It's not as glamorous as it sounds because you're in a tiny car and you're running around from one place to another. You're eating crap food, there's no routine. You don't have privacy. You stay in kind of cheap hotels. I wish I could be one of these people that create on the road, but I don't. For me when I create, I need to be very still, so when I'm touring, I don't feel like it nourishes my creativity. It's too hectic.



Also, because I'm playing the same songs, it keeps me in that frequency. I feel like, right now, I'm kind of in the death cycle. I think it's so important to go back to those places of being in the unknown and experiencing death through our creativity because of course it feels great to feel comfortable and to know what you're doing, but I feel like I'm at a point now where it's time to grow, it's time to move on, which is happening physically in my body. Also, I feel like it's time to do my creativity. I'm very slow at creating. I'm not fast at writing songs, maybe because I'm a bit of a perfectionist as well.

I bought myself an electric guitar. And I bought all the pedals and I'm so excited. I feel like it's time for something new. I don't want to get stuck in the same patterns, so I kind of want to just try different things, and next year I'm going to be exploring a bit more of something. I don't know what's going to come. I have no idea what's coming but I feel super excited just to play and just to make some new music."

After having shared so generously and sparing no detail in recounting her path to this moment, I asked Nessi if there was anything else she felt was essential to include. Without hesitation and with a sincerity true to the romanticism in her lyrics, Nessi took the opportunity to shine a light on her partner and greatest ally of all.

"I wanted just to mention also that a huge part of my journey, the reason it's been so successful in this way is the support from Lino. He's been amazing. I just feel like I really want to honor him as well. From day one, he's just believed in the whole story, and he's been driving it. We're just this team. We live together, we breathe together 24/7. Without him, I really don't feel like I would have been able to do any of this. I feel like I just wanted to say that."

more info:

[www.nessigomesmusic.com](http://www.nessigomesmusic.com)

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