

Alt-Pop Upstart Morgxn Talks Toxic Masculinity, Authenticity & His New Music Video

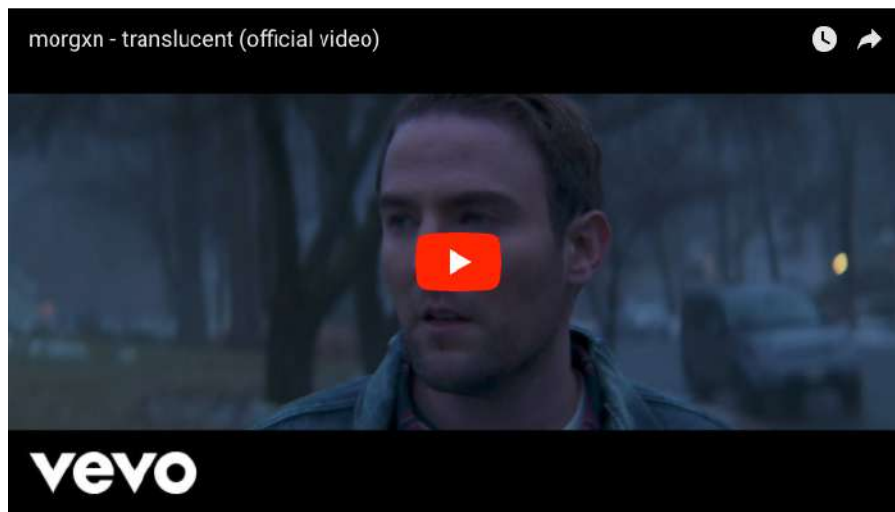


Alternative pop singer Morgxn is tired of dealing with the standards of masculinity that we set for ourselves. The Nashville-born artist has been told his whole life that he was “too feminine,” but today he embraces what makes him unique.

“I have always tried to define my voice for myself, but I have often been told that it doesn’t match what people are expecting it to be,” he says. “I wasn’t about to ascribe some sort of label to myself.”

Morgxn explores his relationship with masculinity in his new video for “Translucent,” premiering below. The video follows the artist from an audition to where he is told to be more masculine all the way to a stage show where he claims his own sense of identity.

Morgxn talked to *Billboard* about his new video, dealing with homophobia, being authentic and more.



One of the things I loved about the video was that it deals a lot with the idea of masculinity. How has being compared to other men and being told to be "more masculine" affected you as an artist?

I think that there is a standard of masculinity that has been set by somebody that's not who I subscribe to. I have always tried to define my voice for myself, but I have often been told that it doesn't match what people are expecting it to be. I think growing up when I was told that my speaking voice had a certain femininity to it, and that that was a negative thing ... I wasn't about to ascribe some sort of label to myself. I'm a kid in the world being told that who I am, whatever I am naturally as a person, might not mesh with other people.

It felt like singing was the thing that saved me from that. Where they tried to sort of push my speaking voice down, or push my attributes aside, it was always my singing that sort of set me free. In singing, I could find my voice. So I don't think that I let it affect me. Especially coming from theater where what you're doing is singing other people's stories and what they need from you is to be exactly what they need you to be. It was always sort of an imbalance for me, because what they needed me to be, and who I needed to be myself was different. That idea doesn't work. It doesn't work for me, it doesn't work for 2018.

The video also sees your character become a victim of a hate crime. Why was it important to you to highlight that moment in your video?

Because I get them everywhere I go. Most recently, I was going through border control — I was coming back from Canada into the US, and the guy at border control, he asked me "They let you have pink hair in Tennessee?" I had pink hair at the time. And I honestly didn't register it at the moment, because what he was actually saying was, like, "Wait, they would let you walk around like that in Tennessee?" And it's like, "F--k yeah, they would let me walk around in Tennessee because I walk around like that."

The other one was I was walking in the Women's March in New York, and this guy yelled out "faggot" at me. You think that you're in this, like, safe place where you're all walking together, and there's still hate being thrown in every direction! I think that music videos can sometimes feel like they're the glossy representation of what, some fantasy is supposed to be. And I'm really drawn to trying to depict something that's more real, and more like what we are actually going through, rather than some rich fantasy that isn't real for me and for a lot of people.

It strikes me how personal your music is. How important to you, in the creative process, is authenticity?

I was just listening to a podcast this morning called *Food for Thought*, which if you haven't listened to it, you absolutely must. They were talking about authenticity and being real and personas. There's a lot of mixed messaging around the word "authenticity." Two days after the song came out, I posted the voice memo where I basically sang the whole melody and lyrics in my car, driving one day. I had been sort of brewing on this idea of "I see right through you," and I wanted to show that because, for me, I think that authenticity means that you say what you mean and you mean what you say.

I think that is where music, for me, has saved me from myself the last few years. I've gone through a lot personally. I've lost a lot of family members who are close to me. I don't know any other way but to be honest with the music that I make, and the person that I am. I don't know any other way but to just say how I feel and to say what's on my mind.

Where do you draw inspiration from when you are going through the writing process?

When I'm like, in the middle of a strong creative moment, I try not to listen to a lot of other music, because it can feel like "That's what they're doing, this isn't what I'm doing." Especially in terms of modern music. I get a lot of inspiration, honestly, from reading books and from listening to podcasts — like what I was saying with this *Food for Thought* episode. A lot of my inspiration comes from conversations people are having, and podcasts seem to be the best way for me to find out about what kind of conversations we're having right now as a society. So that inspires me.

Another book that was really inspiring to me on this whole project was this book by Patti Smith called *Just Kids*, and it was about her navigating her time as an artist in New York City at a very crucial time in her life. I didn't really know how this was all going to take shape, and I really didn't know what form it was going to take shape in. I just knew that I wanted to make something, I didn't really know how, and her book kind of just inspired me.

In your name and in the name of your label (wxnderlost), you put the letter "x" in place of some vowels. Was that purely aesthetic, or is there a deeper meaning there?

I keep pretty accurate journals of my life. Like, I'm a guy who writes a lot of things down. So I went through a bunch of journals and actually found that on February 15, 2015, that was the first time that I wrote "morgxn" in my journal. What happened right around that is my grandfather went into the hospital for a pretty serious heart issue, and when I got a call from my mom, I thought it would be that something had happened with him, and it turned out that overnight, my uncle had an unexpected heart attack.

I don't know why "morgxn" with an "x" is what happened in my journal, but I think about it, and I think that there's been a large shift in my life over the last few years, for me personally and artistically. And I think that the "x" has always stood to represent evolution, and that I'm still evolving. When you release something, you don't know where it's going to go, but I've connected with a lot of people who use x's in their own life to represent something personally transitional for them. I can't speak for all people, but we as a society have started "Mr.," "Mrs.," "Mx.," and I think that's incredible. Same with "Latina, latino, latinx." In this video in particular, I sort of wanted to explore that for myself.. I wanted to explore what the "x" means.

Your album *vital* is coming out in May. What can we expect from the new album?

I think it's a pretty ambitious first record. It does not all stay in one place, and that would be completely untrue of me if it were all to be the same. I think if what you're expecting is "love you with the lights on," you're not going to get that. But if what you're expecting is for me to keep evolving, then you're going to get exactly what you need.