

Alissa Faratro - Biography

I truly believe that everything that got me to where I am was written in the stars because, looking back, from my first xylophone lessons to being an engineer at Secret Genius studios, everything lined up so perfectly.

I was born in Montreal, Canada as the first child of second-generation immigrants from Italy. My parents weren't professional musicians and had no serious musical training, but it was very important to them that I learn an instrument. My school at the time offered Xylophone classes as an introduction to music and music theory for kindergarteners, so my parents got me enrolled. Within a few weeks, I begged them to let me take piano classes instead because, in the words of 6-year-old me, it was much easier to carry around Piano books than it was a xylophone so, the following year, I started learning piano. One thing I was apparently good at was Solfege; so much so that my teacher called my parents and convinced them to sign me up for voice lessons. It's crazy to think about now but I truly have my first grade piano teacher to thank for pretty much my entire music career to date. My whole family had known since before I even started talking that I liked to sing but they never recognized any sort of talent because they didn't know much about music at the time. My teacher made them pay attention. I am so thankful to all my music teachers for really encouraging me and advocating for me but I am also very thankful that my parents trusted them and agreed to support me.

At that point, there wasn't even an option to study voice at my elementary school so I signed up for lessons at the Vincent D'Indy conservatory and somehow made my elementary school integrate that into their program. You could say I pioneered the voice program there because I was the first student to study voice and the following year it was officially recognized as an electable instrument for students. To be honest, although music pretty much made up my whole identity growing up, it wasn't until 9th grade that I started taking music seriously.

That Christmas I was in a cafe in Florida when my mother's friend noticed that the man standing next to her was wearing a Montreux Jazz Fest t-shirt. They started talking and she found out that he worked at Berklee College of Music. That was the first time I heard about Berklee. Within a few months, I heard Gravity by John Mayer for the first time, did some digging, found out he went to Berklee, and so it all started to marinate in my head. The exact moment I decided I was going to pursue a career in music was when I was listening to "Born and Raised" by John Mayer as I was walking home from school one day and I just burst into tears when I heard the lines *"Then all at once it gets hard to take, It gets hard to fake what I won't be, 'Cause one of these days I'll be born and raised"*.

Those lines gave me such a sense of urgency and that was the beginning of my career. At that time, I really had no idea what I was getting into but I've always known I'd figure it out.

For my senior project in high school, I decided to go into the studio and record 3 songs so I went to the music section at the closest book store and picked out the NY Times Bestseller "This Is Your Brain on Music" by Daniel Levitin. I started reading it and was just blown away by the coincidences: the author went to Berklee and taught at McGill university, which is just

down the street from where I lived. So I shared the book with my mom and convinced her to read it. She turns the book to read the author's biography and she goes: "Alissa...Do you know who this is?? This is Dan..Our Neighbor. " Now mind you, I knew Dan but I knew him as Dan, not as Daniel Levitin and I never even made the connection.

So the following week Dan came over and we talked about the book. He told me so many crazy stories about working in the industry, songwriting, his appearance on the Big Bang Theory, and so much more but most importantly, he told me about Susan Rogers, his former student at McGill. Now if you know anything about Susan you know that she not only is a very respected engineer, but she also paved the way for female engineers in the industry. She engineered for Crosby, Stills and Nash, Prince, Barenaked Ladies, David Byrne, Tricky, and Tevin Campbell. I didn't even know being a sound engineer was possible back then but Susan really inspired at a time where I was really fed up with not being able to communicate what sound I was looking for to engineers I was working with. Every time I was in the studio, I asked questions and tried to learn as much as I could because not only can the engineer and producer's intuitions shape a song, they can also make it or break it and I wanted to be a part of that side of the creative process as well.

In 2015, I started classes at Berklee and declared Music Production & Engineering as my major. It was an intimidating process at first because I knew close to nothing about engineering compared to some others and there weren't many girls in the major but I really fell in love with it and went in headstrong. I am so thankful for everything I experienced and learned there and for all the opportunities I got. If I have to pick two highlights from my time at Berklee, the first would have to be the Atlanta Industry Trip I went on during which I met my mentor, Simone Torres. Simone is a Multi-Platinum, Grammy Nominated, engineer, vocal producer, and vocalist, but she is also the reason I grew so much as an engineer in the past year. From the moment we met, she has always been available to answer any of my questions and never stopped cheering me on. The second highlight would be how it all came full-circle when, during my last semester at Berklee, I was able to take my capstone project class with Susan Rogers herself.