

# **Making It: A Look into the Lives of Yonkers Musicians**

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Every musician that strives to become known in the music world started out with a dream, many dreams beginning from a young age. From that young age came singing lessons and being taught to play an instrument. For some, it was writing songs alone in notebooks in their bedrooms. Songs they never, ever thought would be heard by another person. Wherever the inspiration originated from, the fire and passion to make it to the big time was one that carried over with them into adulthood. While some of those adults put their aspirations on hold to deal with the real world, others made it their top priority, something that isn't always the easiest to handle. The majority of musicians in the world, about 91 percent, remain undiscovered by top record labels and producers ([digitalmusicnews.com](http://digitalmusicnews.com)), but that doesn't discourage those that pour their whole paychecks from a part-time job into their latest demo.

Just outside of New York City, a place where many go to follow their dreams, the city of Yonkers holds an unsuspecting music scene. Shows that get buzz through word of mouth and social media pack local bars and restaurants, such as Barney McNabbs and Yonkers Brewery. Whether it be that old friend from high school or a co-worker from a part-time job, everyone knows someone in Yonkers trying to make their mark. Three musical acts from the Westchester city, however, stand out above the rest. Looking to follow in the footsteps of Yonkers natives such as Steven Tyler and Mary J. Blige, creating and performing has transitioned from being just a part of their lives into who they are, and has been for quite some time. While they all have different years of experience, the goal remains the same – make it big.

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On a street corner in one of the many suburban areas in Yonkers, a full-fledged music studio is neatly hidden right around the corner of a seemingly average looking house. Clive Parchment, a 26-year-old hip-hop artist and producer that has grown up and lived in Yonkers his entire life, runs his independent label, HomeTown Heroes, right here. Parchment, who goes by the name Yung CJP on stage, is on a mission to show what he and other local artists are capable of. Parchment has been pursuing music for almost a decade, and what began as passing out homemade demos in high school has turned into co-owning this small recording studio, acquiring a team of other producers and creators to work with, and having other artists pay to use his studio and resources.

“I don’t really flaunt the extent of how deep I am in the business, because you’re not supposed to,” says Parchment “It’ll hurt you more than help you to let people know you have a cheat code.” Parchment goes on to express his disdain for up and comers excessively trying to show off to their followers on social media. “It’s just not necessary, I feel like a lot of artists are just trying to impress people.”

Parchment makes it very clear that he is far from the simple local artist struggling to turn into something big. “I’m very much a business person in this industry” says Parchment. “I feel like I came on a time in the industry, or in the world, where the Internet made music kind of like a whore house... any and everybody can make music.” Looking up at the trees with a contemplative expression on his face, he thinks back on how tired he was of simply going after small opportunities and decided to build something of his own, thus creating HomeTown Heroes. “This pretty much started out as just me and nine other people, making music on our laptops and trying to get people

to notice us. After a while I was just tired of being part of a crew of people and decided to make “HomeTown Heroes” a business.

He tries to make his fees for producing and using studio space affordable, being understanding of what it feels like to struggle. “I make this a resource available to anyone that wants to do it,” says Parchment. “People have different levels of talent, but everyone has a song in their heart.” At times,



<sup>1</sup>HomeTown Heroes Logo (via [hometownheroes914.com](http://hometownheroes914.com))

Parchment finds the demand to be overwhelming, with many in the area requesting the time to use his space at about \$200 a session. “There will be times where I just have to come out and say ‘there are too many of you and I’m only looking to take on the ones that are serious and can afford this.’”

As far as finding his passion for music goes, he credits his older brother, a DJ that passed away when he was nine-years-old. “My brother was like my father figure, so naturally I just wanted to do music from the jump,” says Parchment. “What at the time I wasn’t sure, but people showed me a lot of music and I’ve always had an ear for finding what was hot.” The only other artist officially under the HomeTown Heroes label aside from Parchment himself is Lyph (pronounced ‘life’) Rodriguez, a singer Parchment compares to Lauryn Hill in her sound and style. “She makes it look cool to be a ‘good girl’, which a lot of people don’t seem to be focused on these days.”

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Sporting pink hair tied into a ponytail and thin black rimmed glasses, Aria Noetzel's begins to explain her stage name of "Aria &". It has come to be a representation of whoever performs with her on any given day. "When I play with a band it's a fun thing that we do where we're 'Aria &...' something, we just make it up on the spot." At 25-years-old she is already branching out from her native Yonkers by moving to Brooklyn. Noetzel is a solo artist with a voice and sound reminiscent of Florence + The Machine, who happens to be one of her favorite artists.

Taking another sip of wine while we sat in the patio section of a New York City restaurant, she dives into why she became a solo artists, initially wanting nothing more than to be a member of a band or group. Embarking on this dream in high school, she eventually learned that becoming dependent on others when the lyrics were hers was not the path she was meant to take. "In two different situations where I was sort of relying on other people, it blew up in my face. They left and decided they didn't want to do it anymore," says Noetzel. "Then I ended up back at square one because when you're in a band you build and promote everything as a band. I decided I couldn't do that anymore, not if I was serious about it."

While having the peace of mind of being a self-sufficient performer is gratifying, she still loves to collaborate with other artists when she can. "I love harmonies and I love layers, so that's why I kind of left [the stage name] open ended," says Noetzel. "When I

play with a band it's a fun thing that we do where we're 'Ariah &...' something, we just make it up on the spot." She feels there is a sort of pressure, however, that comes with



2 The Cover of Ariah &'s self-titled EP (via Apple Music)

being a soloist. "Sometimes I'll be on a bill with all these other full bands and that's when I'll reach out to people to make that show."

During the summer of 2018, Noetzel decided to collaborate with a violinist friend to compete in a contest that is part of the Coffee Music Project, an organization that also holds events in

London and Los Angeles. "My friend Lena [Weinstein] is a brilliant composer, and we decided to do a set of just guitar and violin, and that's the tape we sent to this contest" says Notezel, "First place is \$1500 and a slot at their festival in Los Angeles, and a studio session record an original song."

Excited at the chance to get funds and a cost free studio session, regardless of the outcome of the contest she sees getting any experience she can, performing at any level, is an achievement in itself. "I normally play a specific kind of show, one in a basement venue where the artists are responsible for getting people there otherwise no one is going to hear you," she says. "This and the next few ones are very much a built in audience, which is weird but exciting for me."

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Maintenance originated out of Christian Costa's desire to take off in a different musical direction from his most previous band. "I was playing with For Lack of a Term for a while and it was fun and all, but I just wanted to do a different genre," says Costa, wanting to step away from a pop rock sound to a heavier one.

Singer and guitarist Costa, guitarist Crispin Tolosa, bassist Phil Gigante, and drummer Frank De Santis have all been part of other bands in the Yonkers scene before coming together early last year. "I knew Phil for a minute, so I just hit him up one day and said 'do you want to get in on this and play bass?'" Adding Gigante was the starting off point for the band, who soon found members De Santis and Tolosa to complete the lineup. "[This band] always felt like a project to me, and that's what was so unique about it," says Gigante. "It didn't feel like any other band where we just go around and say 'we're a band', it felt like this is something we're going to work on and craft which was cool. It's a different vibe."



3 The Cover of the Maladaptive Behavior EP (via Apple Music)

Sitting in their downtown Yonkers practice space, they look back on their first show, one that happened at the last minute at what Costa can only describe as a "dad bar"

named Burke's, and how it was very emotional for them. "Our original drummer was from Colombia and was going back home" says Costa. "We didn't want him to leave but he felt that was best for him, so we wanted to make this special and give him a taste of what it was like." They were then introduced to De Santis, a drummer that was widely known in the Yonkers music scene but hadn't played in any bands for a number of years. "I wasn't there from the beginning, but now I feel like the scene is like a tide, it has different dynamics at different times," says De Santis. "But every once in a while there's kind of a wave that will drag you in and, once you catch that wave it's an awesome thing to experience. That's how I feel we happened when it comes down to it." Gearing up to finish and release their first extended play, Costa has found actually writing the music and lyrics to be the easiest part. "Sometimes songwriting is a whole lot of nothing," says Costa. "Just catching a wave in an idea and just going with it."

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At NoHo sound, a music equipment and repairs shop that host the occasional music event, Noetzel prepares to perform a full set of songs as she is the only performer of the evening. Guitar in hand, she sits on a stool that is bathed in a spotlight from above, explaining that tonight's set will be completely solo and acoustic. "It's just me tonight, I thought I would have my bassist here but that didn't work out," she says jokingly as the intimate audience lets out a collective giggle. Noetzel carries a relaxed yet quirky stage presence, breaking up each song with jokes and otherwise funny observations. "They



asked me if I wanted an opening act tonight and I was like ‘fuck that, I’m the star!’” she says with a laugh. “But I was really just too lazy to reach out and decide on a person so here we are, so I’m just allowing myself to do my little chatter box routine between [songs] since I have no filter.” Some audience members laugh and nod in agreement.

“If you like music videos with pink-haired girls dancing around Central Park, then do I have a music video for you!” she says introducing the song the video was for, “Gold Bottle”. “[This song] is about drugs, but only prescribed drugs,” she says as the audience laughs. “It’s true! It’s about Prozac, but you guys know too much about me already.” The laughs cease when she begins an accapella harmony, her robust voice taking center stage.

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At Barney McNabbs, a Yonkers bar that usually houses an older crowd, clears out on nights when local bands get to take the stage and is replaced by 20-somethings there to support the bands and hang out. On the night of Maintenance’s release party for the extended play, “Maladaptive Behavior”, the small parking lot was packed with cars and people smoking cigarettes in between sets. On the inside, two bar tenders were kept busy with patrons holding out their money to order a Coors Light or Coke and rum.

As the closers of the show, the boys of Maintenance had everyone off of bar stools and surrounding the stage. “I wanna thank everyone coming out tonight, and all the

other bands,” says Costa. “Just a reminder y’all, please respect the space and keep each other safe. Don’t hurt anybody.” A guideline that is said at each of their shows, audience members open up a pretty big mosh pit during songs, kicking, punching and flipping to the breakdowns and Costa’s screamed vocals. As they performed their self-titled song, “Maintenance”, guys and a few girls began moshing, many that did not want to get stomped out clearing out of the way into corners. Everyone however came back together in unison as the band did their rendition of “Sweet Victory”, the song made famous on the show “Spongebob Squarepants” that had a disappointing cover at this year’s SuperBowl. As they begin to perform their last song, “Acceptance”, some audience members jump up on stage and scream the words along with the band, which they don’t seem to mind at all.

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Before taking another sip of a Pabst Blue Ribbon in a bar on 98<sup>th</sup> street, Aria Noetzel laments about not winning the Coffee Music Project. “I really liked all the other acts that played, but the ones that got further than us... I really wasn’t expecting. I’m not sure what they were exactly looking for anymore.” While the disappointment has set in, Noetzel feels the overall experience was what good came out of it. “We can always enter again next year and try to make it to that recording session in Los Angeles, but finally playing for bigger crowds and different crowds really made me feel good about getting myself out there”

Following the conclusion of the contest, Noetzel admits to falling into a bit of a slump as a performer. “It’d be easy to say ‘everything is great and I’m fine!’, but honestly I feel like I hit a rough patch after the holidays. I wasn’t playing any shows and it got kind of depressing. Then when I finally did play again it felt great, like ‘I have talent and I can do this’, but then the depression hits me again.” She feels she can’t help but compare herself to other artists that seem to be gathering more attention. “I see others getting noticed and I sit back and think ‘why not me? What am I not doing that I can’t get my feet off the ground?’ I love



*4 Ariah & performing at PIANOS in New York City on Feb. 19, 2019 (photo by Ashley Williams)*

doing what I do, but I have to wonder from time to time if I should keep trying.”

Despite the doubt that she can’t make it in the music industry, Noetzel has continued to record new material, hoping to release another extended play by the summer. “We’ve laid down some drums and vocals, but we’re still in the middle of it. I was getting a great rate from this woman that works at a studio but, she was dating my friend and they just had a really bad breakup. Fingers crossed that I still have that connection!” she laughs.

When it comes to writing music, she finds it easy to write about what she knows. “My favorite song that I’ve ever written is called ‘Light Snacks’. It’s basically about smashing the patriarchy. At the time, I feel like I felt pressure that girls feel to have a romantic narrative in their lives and to be in a relationship with someone when there’s so much other great shit we could be focusing on. One day I was just like that notion isn’t going to keep running my life.” One of the more somber sounding songs on her extended play, “Screaming Seasons”, finds her questioning why it’s so hard to let go of the past. “I wrote it when I was about 19 [years old], but it’s still so close to me. Time and life are always changing, and I feel like everyone will experience some nostalgia and just freak out, because everything is so different from what it used to be for them. It’s like, I’m grateful for the growth, but find it hard to believe that things will never be what they used to be. Life is just weird sometimes.”

One change she hopes to see is in her career, feeling that touring the country and bringing her music to more people would be “making it” for her. “If I could get out on an actual tour and support myself by just doing that, I’ll really feel like I’ve made it. I’ll be happy touring and travelling. Making a living doing music is all I could ever want.”

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Back in their practice spot in downtown Yonkers, Christian Costa, Frank De Santis and Phil Gigante reveal that they have turned into a three piece, guitarist Crispin Tolosa deciding to leave the band. “He’s dead to us!” jokes De Santis. “No but seriously, he just seemed to really not be interested in the band after a while, he just seemed like he wanted to do his own thing,” says Costa. All three of the guys agree that they saw this coming, too many red flags going up the past few months. “He was getting so distant,

not answering group chats and bailing on practices. There was one day where we set up a time to practice and, he ended up showing up way too early and got angry and left. Then when we tried to call him he just wasn't answering and that's when we knew, he's probably going to back out," De Santis says. "He finally calls me up after days of me trying to reach out," says Costa. "So I answer and he says he needs to talk, and he just said he was quitting the band. He didn't even bother talking to anyone else, and I know he is a shy guy so I'll blame it on that."



*5 Maintenance (L to R: Christian Costa, Frank De Santis, Phil Gigante) performing at Barney McNabbs in Yonkers on Mar. 31, 2019 (photo by Ashley Williams)*

While they have no problem performing as a three piece, the biggest issue with Tolosa's quitting was the financial aspect. "We went from splitting the cost of our practice spot and

our merch and everything four ways to splitting it three ways," says Costa. "At the end of the day, he's our friend and there aren't any real hard feelings," says De Santis. "On the other hand, we just know we have to be more careful with who we depend on, if we ever bring another member in." Gigante wants to keep the band a three piece for the time being, feeling it shows them being real in dealing with the change. "I feel like as a three

piece, we're capturing the moment in what this chemistry is right now, especially since we just released this EP and for this stage we can just present as we are," says Gigante. "Maybe by the time we release another EP, and have a new member, we can present a totally different dynamic."

With their first extended play, consisting of five songs, took close to a year to complete, another may be ways away. "We had a lot of scheduling issues and sometimes we could only record two or three hours at a time then, not get another chance for three or four weeks," says Costa. "Maybe next time around we can more prepared in how we work together and what we present to producers since we can know what to expect now. When it came to demos we were really unprepared and that slowed down everything. They also factor in the cost, which will also play a factor in when they can return to the studio. "It was about \$2000 for everything, between the mixing and getting it mastered, also advertising for the shows," says Gigante. "A lot of people think we make so much money from merch and selling tickets, and we do, but so much of it goes back into the band. None of us are out here buying steak dinners or living the life out of these shows."

Hoping to eventually "live the life" from making music, they all think the future of Maintenance is pretty bright. "I don't know how all this wouldn't pan out," says Costa. "I'm just enjoying myself right now and things are going so well, I can't see how it couldn't work out for us. The band not working out isn't an option." Gigante immediately shared the same notion, citing how much the buzz around the band has grown. "I feel like we've already seen tremendous results in what people say online and the turn out at shows," says Gigante. "We have so much hype around us right now and that's a little

success within itself. I don't see us stopping unless there's some freak accident where we literally can't pick up our instruments anymore." De Santis feels that staying positive is a huge key to them progressing as a band. "We're all pretty optimistic, and now being an even tighter group than when we started out, we're creating more shared visions of what our future will be," says De Santis. "We've made it this far and now we're in a position where we can take it to another level."

On what "making it" means to them, all three felt similarly in what it means for them not just as a band, but as individuals. "I just want to get to a place where I'm totally comfortable in the music I put out," says Costa. "I want to fully immerse myself in the things that I love without judgement, or having to second guess everything. You tend to put yourself down and, I just want to free myself from all that and continue to do what I love. That's when I'll feel like I've made it."

"I just want to be completely occupied with music, all different aspects of it," says Gigante. "Learning as much as I can about the industry so I can eventually produce or write for other artists. I want to become that go-to guy that everyone comes to when they want to lay something down. Basically, I just want to do music and not have interference with any 9 to 5 job that would prevent me from making music. If shit we're to go down where I want to get married or start a family, I want music to be my living so I don't have to step out of the scene to take care of what's happening in my life."

Staying on the idea of a future where music is an immediate income, De Santis feels there's a fine line when it comes to making that happen. "There are a lot of people in the middle of 'blowing up' in music and just getting by and not really moving up, and in that middle you're not a superstar so to speak," says De Santis. "There are still those fans

willing to throw down money to buy your songs or see you play and, if that increases I feel like we could make a decent living. I would love to make money and income from this but, I feel like making it would also be not having to sacrifice whatever other interests you have going on in order to do so. I want to have a balance where we can all lead our lives and not be limited by just the band but, also put out stuff we're proud of that will make people support us."

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Sitting in his living room in his home on one of the steepest hills in Yonkers, Clive Parchment says it feels almost like protection. "It's terrible to drive up here in the winter but, it's good for keeping the enemies away," Parchment laughs. Over the past few months, he's taken his label, HomeTown Heroes, and studio space to new heights. Wanting to offer more than a simple recording session, he is exploring other aspects of to become the go-to resource for artists in the area. "I feel like we're turning more into a multimedia company, we're trying to offer more services than just recording like video and advertising, but it's still in the start up [stage] in that sense." Making changes to revitalize the label's brand is Parchment's attempt to gather more artists willing to sign on with him.

What may seem attractive to potential musicians is Parchment's collaboration with a famous voice in the industry; he's begun a collaboration with Matthew Knowles, father of pop megastar Beyoncé Knowles, on a project titled "The Knowles Talent Search". Getting in Knowles sights through a mutual friend that has worked in his studio, the project helps up and comers reach new heights. "Basically, it's all about connecting with unknown



artists, helping them advance in their careers. [Knowles] has a website set up where an artist can put in all their information, music, and social media. It's kind of like an application, and myself and a team of marketers review those applications and reach out to the ones we think are phenomenal. Once we hear their stories and vibe more with them, their application gets sent to Mr. Knowles. We're trying to help them live on their own terms and live their lives making music, taking their passion and creativity and helping them to make a living out of it."



6 Clive "Yung CJP" Parchment performing at Sounds of Brazil in New York City on April 30, 2019 (photo by Ashley Williams)

On top of keeping in with his label and the Knowles collaboration, Parchment has become part of teaching a music and audio engineering course through an organization called the Music Production Institute of New York. "It's two thirds cheaper than any music schools in New York, and you're working in an actual facility with the software an actual studio would have. The course runs for about two months and, we train them for the music game and help find them career options."

Aside from the many occupations he's taken on, Parchment is preparing to step out from behind the scenes and perform for the first time in over a year; he's excited to feel the warmth of the spotlight once again.

“Performing, I live for that. The feeling is better than drugs, interacting with so many people at the same time. I’ve missed it, I love being able to do it all. Producing, performing and all, this is what I do and it’s my job, but doesn’t feel like a “job” for me at all. I’m going to keep taking on as many new things as I can, God willing I can handle it.”

When it comes to what “making it” means to him, Parchment would rather not use such a definitive term, feeling it puts a stop to creating and reaching more goals. “I don’t like that term, ‘making it’. I feel like I’ve made it already just living the life I want to live, and a lot of people won’t live the life they truly want to that will make them feel happy and feel whole. Of course I still have goals, I want a platinum plaque and a Grammy and to own a home in Los Angeles, but I won’t ever put a stop to myself by saying ‘I made it’. It’s like if I win a Grammy, yeah I’ve won, but what comes after that? I’m going to make it every day by just doing me every day.”

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Reaching a goal can sometimes seem like a game of heads or tails – making it to the end or failing on the way to the finish line. The future is never certain, and Clive Parchment, Aria Noetzel and the men of Maintenance are no exception to the unknown. While fame, fortune, and the satisfaction that comes from doing what they love is all at the fore front for them, they know all too well that everything could change tomorrow. What truly keeps them going is the slight possibility that they can continue down this path that makes all of their childhood dreams come true – a motivation that isn’t easily shaken.

## Interview Log

- **Clive “Yung CJP” Parchment – founder and CEO of HomeTown Heroes**
  - **Ariah Noetzel – lead singer of Ariah &**
  - **Christian Costa – lead singer and guitarist of Maintenance**
  - **Phil Gigante – bassist and backup vocalist of Maintenance**
    - **Frank De Santis – drummer of Maintenance**