

## Somewhere Between Sound, Noise, and Music

Q. What was the starting point of this project?

A. I've been making music for a long time, but the past few years I've been wanting to distance myself from existing forms of music, and to enjoy more the sounds made by things. Instruments today, having gone through modernization, are designed efficiently not just to produce the sounds themselves, but to express Western music clearly and precisely. Sounds that are more primitive than that – made originally from materials like wood, metal, or animal hide – have been increasingly more attractive to me.

Q. Where did the desire to distance yourself from music come from?

A. In 2000 or 2001, around the time I started collaborating with Carsten Nicolai's Alva Noto, the difference between the sound of a piano as an instrument, and actual sounds started to disappear for me. I began enjoying more and more the indeterminate, turbid qualities of noise. SN (Sound vs. Noise) are competing elements. But both Sound and Noise have become music to me, and the difference between the two has disappeared. Not only that, my desire has grown to return so-called Sound (like that which comes from a piano) to a more primitive Noise.

Q. Tell me about the title.

A. It's "async," where "a" is a negative. And "sync" means in alignment, the "sync" of synchronized. So it's "async," meaning, "not in sync."  
For example, because of its use of computers, YMO was the epitome of synchronization without the slightest deviation – but even back then I felt I would one day make "asynchronized" music.

Q. Before the release, you had posted a banner online that read, "SN/M."

A. In this album, there is the Sound, and there is the Noise – making it was about deciding how much of an M <Music> element should be added in. The banner was a way to ask listeners to imagine what kind of thing might be coming out, before the fact. It was also expressing my desire to have people use their imagination as they listened.

Q. You have been using ambient sounds since the "Art of Noise" days.

A. For a long time now, I've been collecting recordings of ambient sounds wherever I go. But partly because of my battle with cancer, I took the opportunity to toss out the old archives, and to re-record things around New York City again. Some are from around my house, some are from the woods Upstate. The sound of heaters, old buildings, coffee being poured, rain – I recorded all sorts of ambient sounds.

Then I remembered pieces of sound sculpture by the Baschet Brothers I saw when I was 18 at the 1970 Osaka Expo. It turns out that they had been restored at a University in Kyoto. So on a hot summer day, I went there to record

them. I played the sculptures, covered in sweat, for about three hours without lights and air conditioning.

Another piece of sound sculpture that I used in this album was made by an American man named Bertoia. While some of his pieces were located at a small museum in Pennsylvania, I found a few pieces of his exhibited in a small museum in Manhattan. These pieces only use vibrations of metal and resonated so beautifully.

Q. Did you use any materials from the past?

I did use pre-recorded materials. I did the soundtrack for the movie “The Sheltering Sky,” based on the novel by Paul Bowles, back in 1990. The track “Life, Life” was made by getting permission to use a recording of Bowles himself reading an excerpt from his novel. I had it translated into 10 languages, and asked all kinds of people to read it out loud. I even asked the director Bertolucci to do the reading in Italian.

Another exception is the sound of me playing the piano in an area struck by a tsunami in the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake. I’d gone to Miyagi prefecture to play a piano that had been immersed in seawater. The piano was falling apart, some keys made no sound, and it was completely out of tune. I felt that nature had tuned it. Nature had broken the musical scale forcefully made by humans, and returned it to its natural state.

Q. I hear there is a theme (to the album).

A. Once I reset the archives and sound sketches back to zero, I didn’t know how to take the first step. Through trial and error it occurred to me, what if I made a soundtrack to an image I was holding in my mind that was a bit like a Tarkovsky film – I’ve been hugely influenced by Tarkovsky, yet he only made seven films. And the scenes I like are scattered, here and there. That’s why I decided, I’ll make the soundtrack to an imaginary Tarkovsky film.

I also had some recordings of David Sylvian reading Tarkovsky. In 2011, after the earthquake, I was invited to perform at Japan Society in New York. So I asked David to pick and read some poems from ‘Life, Life’ and used some of these recordings in the live event. I returned to these materials while working on async.

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