

Interview with Howard
Question from Damian

Link:

<http://www.themusicofhoward.com>

Question:

In a medium sized nutshell tell us about your "musical/visual" background. You know, some obvious stuff like did you grow up in one, or like many of us did you pick it up along the way, describe the tools of your trade and how you came to master them, what was your first instrument, what influenced you to create say "electronic music of a programmatic nature" using computer technology. If you can follow that train of thought to describe how you come now to be working (predominantly) as a solo artist that would be interesting.

Answer:

My visual background started with **black and white photography**. I borrowed an old canon camera off a mate's dad with a 50mm 1.8 lens and just started shooting. I got a quick tutorial on focus, aperture, shutter speed, depth of field, the relationship between light and film and that was pretty much it. From that point on I pretty much just worked it out myself. I bought a Nikon FM2 and did it for a couple of years.

Looking back now on what and how I was shooting I should have stuck with it. I've got this incredible period of my life documented. **The crazy testosterone years**. Everything from my mates and me totally out of our minds on mushrooms to front and centre photos of Nirvana at the Big Day Out.

The Nirvana photos are quite a funny story. In those days color photocopiers had just come out and virtually no one had access to one unless you were working in some mega corporate environment. The press pass for the Big Day Out was just a lime green sticker with black writing on it. Very secure for its day. A friend managed to jobby a couple up at work and away we went. It was totally ridiculous, Kurt Cobain was like 3 feet away from me. If you've ever been up the front of the Hordern you know that there's a crowd barrier and we were just hangin there in comfort pickin off the coolest photos with all the time in the world. Twos very cool. I got this close up shot of Kurt's guitar and there's this big Courtney scratched into it. I remember showing my mates and we we're all just thinking it must be his wife, girlfriend or maybe he borrowed her guitar. It was a long time before anyone had ever heard of Courtney Love.

Music started in my first year out of school and was a bit more formal in nature. I wanted to go to University and discovered I could get into a music teaching degree if I had external equivalents to 6th grade AMEB in both practical studies

(playing) and theory. So off I went. I got a theory and classical guitar tutors and away I went. 4 hours practice on the guitar and two hours trying to get my head around theory every single day for 10 months. At the end of it I sat for the exams and passed. Only just but a pass is a pass.

So I got into uni, met some dudes, bought an electric guitar, and started a band doing indie pop guitar music. Did the whole indie guitar kid thing. Saw Pavement at the Lansdowne, Dinosaur Junior at the Lansdowne, Ride support Rat Cat at the Paddo RSL, Evan Dando get up on the bar at the Sando and sing 'shame about ray' with Smudge, faked press passes to the 1st Big Day Out, saw Nirvana etc.

It was all just plodding along nicely until my jaw nearly broke my big toe watching The Prodigy play at the BDO in WA. It was on the main stage and it was one of the most incredible things I'd ever seen. It was the ultimate lesson in the power of technology. They played straight after 'You Am I' and I loved 'You Am I' then but this was something totally different all together, another league. It was like Ministry coming on after Tiny Tim doing a ukulele unplugged set. When I got back to Sydney I bought a sampler, gave it to someone who new how to use it and formed a hybrid guitar, bass, sampler, keyboard, vocals band.

It was from that point I started getting into electronic music. That band imploded about the same time the old blue g3 apple computers came out and it was then that home computer music became affordable, accessible and more about the actual audio not so much the midi, which I never really got the hang of until last year. So I bought a computer, sat myself down and started to figure out how to make electronic music. I just set myself a dozen exercises and that turned out to be my first album. No midi, all audio and it just grew from there. I made the cultural pilgrimage from Cronulla to Surry Hills and got a space in Hibernian house. I was hanging out, in and around the Knot Gallery/Frequency Lab, which was an incredibly challenging yet encouraging atmosphere. I never really knew what I was doing or trying to do musically, other than entertain myself, until I bumped onto Brian Eno and then Aphex Twin. Not all but some of the stuff I heard was the final lesson in my musical education with regard to what the term 'recording artist' actually meant. Talk about attention to fuckin detail. Totally inspiring stuff. So with that lesson and that take on things I went off to try and carve my own little niche in the electronica genre.

My whole thing is about being creative. That's all I'm interested in. Trying to do stuff other people can't, trying to do stuff other people haven't thought of. At the end of the day when you have a budget of next to nothing you have to rely on your creativity as you just can't compete traditionally with people that have mega thousands and teams of people working for them. My tact is to hopefully draw the accidental listener deeper into what I do. I try and make everything I do multidimensional so most people can get something out of it. There's always something instant on the top and then hopefully the listener unravels a few more

layers and down the maelstrom they go. It's just a tricky proposition though as most people are all so busy and who wants to entertain the idea that to concentrate on and investigate something can be more rewarding than just turning off to something. What I do is not background music. To get the most out of it you have to focus. Just shutting your eyes is a start and there's more about my music in the 'about' section of my website if ya wanna look deeper.

It's similar with my **videos**. There's usually two standard viewer responses. The viewer either thinks it makes no sense or they repeat the viewing as they don't initially understand it but see enough connection to warrant a second run. When they take a second look they have a third and so on because there's always something new to understand from each viewing. It's a sit forward experience. They're there to puzzle you. To bamboozle, perplex, complicate, to disturb and dumbfound, to discombobulate. It's the stuff of the Internet generation. In fact if it weren't for the Internet then I probably never would have tried to design them that way. Distribution was the main reason but the Internet makes it possible for multiple viewings. Its this sort of access to your work that allows you to encode so deeply, as you know that if someone wants to they can pick it apart and follow you down the rabbit hole, then eventually it's possible they'll get into your headspace at the time of creation. What more could an artist want.