

OLD AMBIENT WEBSITE BLOG 2019

Welcome to the Blog page of my PhD at Anglia Ruskin University. This is posted in support of my research so all your comments are welcome. I am currently studying a PhD in Music Technology, Sound Art and Composition.

My research focuses on the production of Ambient music in the studio and its performance whilst considering its authenticity to myself and its reception to other listeners. Posts will therefore, be on this topic and everything related to Ambient Music that is relevant to my research.

I'll also be posting links to music for you to listen of my own compositions for your comments please. I hope you enjoy your stay and like what you read and hear.

The Ambient Binary

Posted by nigel.sanders@blueyonder.co.uk on June 3, 2019 at 3:00 PM

I've reached a point where I believe Ambient Music has taken two distinct directions and perhaps rather than breaking them off into a multitude of sub genres you have as follows:

Route One - The onset of the Electronic Landscape / Minimalism and EDM Ambient. All three seem to have a progressive narrative of sweeping soundscapes using electronics and perhaps a piano and orchestra.

Route Two - Ambient and Rock music from 60s progressives to dark ambient metal and extreme forms of noise found in the 20th Century. More of a horror and darker landscape than perhaps route one.

Having established this fact it has made my research that much easier in have two distinct pathways of composition and performance. Experiment one following Route One with a blend of ambient chill out, classical leanings and modern film soundscapes aka nSanders Solo. Experiment Two being Black September Falls with the mix of dark ambient and hard rock/metal. Clarity at last.

Credit must go to the book 'The Ambient Century' for helping see and shape this synopsis of Ambient.

<http://www.ambientcentury.co.uk>

Metamodernism and Ambient Music

Posted by nigel.sanders@blueyonder.co.uk on April 1, 2019 at 6:50 PM

The topic of this blog post is that of Ambient Music as an expression of metamodernism. Metamodernism is a doctrine that follows on from the post modern and modernist condition of the 20th century. It is a statement of the poetics of the now. The website <http://www.metamodernism.org> is a good place to start if you are interested in writings and discussions of what this state of being or ontology is. As described by Luke Turner 2015 <http://www.metamodernism.com/2015/01/12/metamodernism-a-brief-introduction/>

'metamodernism considers that our era is characterised by an oscillation between aspects of both modernism and postmodernism. We see this manifest as a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism, a moderate fanaticism, oscillating between sincerity and irony, deconstruction and construction, apathy and affect, attempting to attain some sort of transcendent position, as if such a thing were within our grasp. The metamodern generation understands that we can be both ironic and sincere in the same moment; that one does not necessarily diminish the other.

The use of the prefix meta here derives from Plato's me-taxis, describing an oscillation and simultaneity between and beyond diametrically opposed poles. This usage was first proposed by Dutch cultural theorists Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in their 2010 essay, Notes on Metamodernism, spawning a research project and website of the same name, as well as numerous symposia and exhibitions, to which a diverse array of academics, writers and artists from across the globe have since added their voices.

As Vermeulen and van den Akker put it, metamodernism's oscillation should not be thought of as a balance; "rather, it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles. Each time the metamodern enthusiasm swings toward fanaticism, gravity pulls it back toward irony; the moment its irony sways toward apathy, gravity pulls it back toward enthusiasm."

As described here, this social condition is part of many aspects of 21 Century life including the musical arts and particularly ambient music. As a narrative soundscape that acts as a tint or mood to a situation, whilst we continue in our everyday activities, ambient swings between foreground, background, romanticism, post modern mash ups, pastiche, and modernist purism. That purism being a statement of minimal and robust tints, tone and shades of colour or in musical terms sound.

In the process of composition sound is blended from a wide range of sources but instead of the postmodern skepticism towards a historical narrative of detached meaning metamodernism resides somewhere between 'sincerity and irony, deconstruction and construction'. Therefore, although the music itself does portray meaning typical of the romantic era and modernist era for example, it shares a mood or an expression of perhaps a singular or minimal emotion. Thus expressing a narrative that shifts between poles like the liquid sound itself.

If you have further comment on this opening statement or wish to pursue this line of research then please do get in touch to discuss more or follow the links or add a comment.

Ambient Music Reception

Posted by nigel.sanders@blueyonder.co.uk on February 21, 2019 at 11:20 AM

How do audiences receive Ambient Music. The significance of which reflects on which aspects of Ambient Music creation and its design, for want of a better word. My own reception for Ambient music is purely self centred in that I listen on my own quietly or use it as background music whilst doing other things. A common outcome for probably all music at present in 2018.

Therefore, does Ambient Music have other methods of reception outside its original conception of background mood music with enough in it to focus on if needed.

A positive perspective of technology in Music composition

Posted by nigel.sanders@blueyonder.co.uk on February 21, 2019 at 11:20 AM

I thought I would post these thoughts on Music Technology in support of its usage and that in fact our reliance on technology has always been there, it is our perception of its authenticity both as composers and as recipients, that shape our views of such matters.

Interpretation of technology is subjective, however, any synthetic device (man made) is in my opinion technology. Therefore, a pencil and manuscript paper, a piano or other instrument to a PC Laptop are all one and the same. Put simply a tool to aid the creative process in realising the soundscapes that reside in our heads as phenomena. Without such technology we would therefore, never get to hear the outputs of such sound phenomena and share these sounds with other beings.

So with this perspective I believe that technology is not at stake here in our subjectivity towards its use in the creative process but our perspectives of what technology is used. So if we are to be critical of 21st century composition using current IT devices such as Logic Pro X on an IMac for example, then clarity is needed in positing such opinions and the perspective in which it is placed. In other words, looking back to the so called 'good old days' where 'real instruments' are used is a narrow perspective of a past technology and in so doing limits oneself of all the possibilities of what new and current technology has to offer the composer. In turn limiting the possible soundscapes that can be created. As I have heard many times and I agree, technology frees us from the limitation of past eras and allows us to express musical phenoms into the aural landscape. N. Sanders 21st November 2018

What Is Ambient?

Posted by nigel.sanders@blueyonder.co.uk on February 21, 2019 at 11:15 AM

What is Ambient Music? has been a subject for debate for several decades and I believe is not only a music meta genre but a cultural dynamic as well. For me ambient music represent a type of eastern philosophy in western culture where by we search for states of the mind, body and soul that are calm and free of stress. In our ever exponentially progressing way of life, time out of the wheel of 21st century living, is becoming more and more necessary.

Therefore, ambient music represent a zen like soundscape that aims to calm and sooth the mind, body and soul. Many composers including myself are looking to and have looked (John Cage comes to mind) to eastern culture for musical inspiration and music as a sense of meditation. In fact my own personal journey in to ambient music was through listening to space rock, psychedelic and ambient sounding rock bands such as Hawkwind, Steve Hillage, Pink Floyd and the whole underground experimental drug culture that existed in the early 80s where I lived in Essex. Even then I was trying to escape the expectation of modern life to find a dream like existence of peace and no noise.

Since those early days I have continued to search for a music and life style as free from stress as possible finding a place of calm. I not only compose music but I practice Tai Chi, Karate and a tiny bit of Wing Chun to find synergy within in me and then compose music that calms me and put me in a meditate place. This has not always been the case of my own composition but is now.

Is it working, slowly but surely I'm getting there. mmm This is the journey I guess.....

Anyway getting back to ambient music, although I didn't really stray to far, i hope, this meta genre (rather like classical, Jazz, rock and pop) has evolved in the spaces of contemporary western music and has continually existed and evolved not due to commercial restraints and demands but because humanity needs it.

Therefore, in conclusion of this slightly self righteous post I propose that any music that helps you find inner peace is in its self ambient and therefore, exists in mind of the recipient and not the musical text itself. Therefore, it is subjective as with much art and changes in opinion from one generation to the next...

What makes an Ambient Composition?

Posted by nigel.sanders@blueyonder.co.uk on November 15, 2018 at 4:55 PM

'It has on a reactive level all the components I am looking for. This would certainly be a focus for further discussion. What, why and how is this? This piece sums up all my performance elements I like to include in at least 2 tracks per album, namely piano, synths and strings. With the strong influences from minimalism and its affect on popular music - namely - Electronica and Progressive Rock.'

The above sentence was written regarding the reflective process of deciding if the overall sound of a said composition meets my understanding for the boundaries of ambient music. So how does this work? What do I subconsciously decide when listening back to a composition Ive created. I would propose the following thoughts:

Is this authentic to the remit of what I understand to be Ambient music. (see last blog).
Does it include the instruments or sound objects that fit with my own canon or soundscape. i.e the sounds that distinguish my originality.

Does it express the emotion or context of what i am trying to achieve or create artistically.
Does it meet the purpose for which it is intended. Ie. To be performed, played in an art installation, a chill out room, youtube video or MP3 etc.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?