

on AGORA Regathered: Lisa Ackerly interview questions 11/18/11

*1. What goes on in the mind of Derek Piotr when he composes? What do you notice happens to you when you find that inspiration to create? Is there a difference between when you compose versus when you write in terms of how you react, follow that spark of creativity?*

when I sit down to start work on an idea, the idea might have been born from a number of places. sometimes I sing phrases I've written, either poems or just scraps jotted down, and see how they sound. sometimes I get a bolt from the blue of a sonic idea that I get very specific in pinning down exactly in my head. sometimes I get files from people and I just work on those and see where they go, and sometimes I start with a general feeling and let it carry me...that often takes me very far from the starting point, if I go purely by 'feeling' versus if I start with a very specific sonic situation, like "a drum loop that sounds like this has to last for 12 measures and there's a tone that enters on the 8th measure..." that I can pin down pretty precisely. but something like "I want it to have a culture-less, yet eastern and sandy feel, with a moment of tension in the middle of something otherwise hypnotic"...well, that can go a lot of different ways.

I think there are always going to be sounds, textures and styles of music that I adore, and I'm not sure if I need to work inside those 'limits' so to speak when I make something new, or try and push myself to work with new combinations of sounds and styles. there's a lot to consider. one of the things I love about remixes is I can get a parallel form of the song from someone whose energy I really admire; I can "add" a new sonic world into my own body of work by trusting someone to respond to my material. a lot of times I get quite inspired by remixes of my own material. I select only people whose work I respect very highly when I approach remixes of my own work. I have also done remixes for other people, and I find that a great exercise. that's more of a "come what may" situation for me: I just respond to the material intuitively, with no specific outcome in mind. It's a lot of fun because there's no pressure to fit in next to a bunch of other songs on a record... it's a one-shot thing. I enjoy that aspect.

*2. I found AGORA to be very personal, an introspection relayed musically as you grew up? Is the theme(s) of the remix album somehow different from the original? If so, how are they unique from one another?*

AGORA for me was almost a self-made spell that became fulfilled. I envisioned it as a meeting point of a lot of cultures and ideas and eventually it became a meeting point of another kind: a lot of musicians I really respected have worked on this project with me. much of the initial material was produced in collaboration with AGF, and now I have remixes from people like Steinbrüchel, Scanner, Blevin Blectum, or Twenty Knives -- all larger-scale artists that I've adored for years. and then I have people like Jari Pitkänen, Salakapakka Sound System, jhom and HeeG...and even my boyfriend of under a year has started making electronic music of his own since watching me work, and he gave me a remix and it's really fantastic. I'm excited about his solo material. so this project as a whole has really united a lot of wonderful people in a cyberspace-type agora. it's been fascinating to understand that.

*3. I notice that you personify your songs, as if they have their own personality and identity. Is it far fetched to say that they are the agora of persons just as much as the people whom they have inspired and from where they they have been influenced?*

I think there's a story to every piece of music I end up putting on a record, so when I release my projects, I always write a song-by-song dissertation. kind of like the storybook of the record. I think the wonderful thing about music is that everyone is going to have their own interpretation, and it might be different one day to the next. it's not something you can write an essay on really – I think a lot of the feelings people get from written word or paintings might be a little academic, and music is sort of beyond that for me. like one day the song could make you nervous and the next hopeful and the next disgusted. so people remix their feelings when listening to any piece of music. I find that very interesting and powerful, so I try and honor the “lineage” of each song that ends up on an album of mine.

*4. Why did you choose these artists to collaborate with, and how did they come to remix the particular songs that have?*

I have always been into inviting others to remix my work and doing remixes myself, like I said above I think it's a very compartmentalized activity but it is simultaneously very freeing – you don't feel pinned down to carry the concept of an entire record. with this remix album I asked about 40 people to do remixes and narrowed it down to 14. I think remixes often get kind of a bad rap as a throwaway gimmick, but I wanted this project to be very rooted in collaboration, so I asked a bunch of musicians I really respect, and then patiently selected versions I thought were a genuine extension of the original songs. there were plenty of do-overs I requested while curating this...if I felt like there was a different story the mixer could pull out of the song, I'd explain that until they got it just right. It was really important that this collection was as essential as the album itself, and not just an add-on.

*5. How is sound art different from other types of music, when it comes to what the listener can get from the music? Why sound art?*

I think music is music is music. sound is sound is sound. sound art is kind of the bridge between the two : full of sound as sound, but something that can be stripped down to a musical core. if I wanted to do this album “unplugged”, with a little figuring and re-arranging I could. a lot of sound artists are deep into field records in their natural state or just pure harsh noise. none of that really interests me. I think I'm trying to be a musician but my love of sounds is distracting me from making pure music – there's always an infusion of layers of pure sound. I'd really like to do an acoustic version of my next record, it's definitely something I've considered.