

Why I prefer Aphex Twin to any other musician I've listened to
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No other musical artist or ensemble do I hold in such esteem as Aphex Twin. The man who responds to the name: Richard D. James. I desist from calling him: *the best*, because such qualifications are contrary to the spirit of such geni. I dislike favouritism, and, even more, idolatry, so I will not place him above other musicians whose music I enjoy, or, at least, appreciate in varying degrees. I suppose I do not know what it is that their most ardent followers perceive in their sounds which eludes me. Although the consensus among many critics is that Aphex Twin is the greatest talent which electronic music has produced, why wouldn't there be a plethora of unknown artists whose music could also be regarded as matchless. Isn't music like any other art form? I have had sufficient exposure to unpublished poets whose word art has nothing to envy Byron, Poe, as well as the most highly acclaimed of contemporary bards.

I have had relatively wide exposure to music. This includes the African-derived American genres, including Jazz in its elevated and artistic modes (an exploration currently in progress), Caribbean, Latin, progressive rock and electronic acts besides Aphex. Add to this catalogue: 20th and previous century classical composition. I love all this music, but Aphex has not only endured, it is different. There is a peculiarity about what I denote as genius—it pertains to an independent realm; thus, it is incomparable; in its own category, it is neither better nor worse. Richard is a not a threat to any artist, because he does not belong to any scene, as he himself has indicated. Many artists build upon what has come before. They are validated by awards and considerable fan bases, but genius is perhaps extra-temporal, extrinsic to any discourse. The genius, like the child, needs no audience. He plays with his toys in the dirt of leftfield, mindless of praise, indifferent to congratulations.

People who create an intense kind of art that delves into inconceivable--to anyone else--territory—we might expect to be neurodivergent. There is some kind of brain wiring which is making the individual retreat into their isolated imagination to fashion the extraordinary sounds or images. I am speaking more generally about brains that are configured differently; with minds that often function self-referentially, by which the highly specialized mental processes begin and end with the self. Artists like Richard might have little interest in keeping up with world affairs or even discussing their own art. They spawn their own unique breed of logic and creativity. Something of a joker, in the visual art work which compliments his musical output, Richard plays with graphically modified versions of his triangular, pallid face and narrow eyes, with a smile that is subtly malefic. Elsewhere he distorts his face into expressions that are as sweet as they are menacing, in one case transposing one of these above the bodies of girls wearing old-fashioned dresses. The effect is unsettling, but the creative streak in me welcomes such subtle perversion, because like so many artists, my mind is more curious than filtering; it desires to meet what lies beyond its comfort zone.

Aphex Twin's music spans a spectrum from utterly atonal to the most subtle soundscapes. Some of the latter are more pristine than anything I've heard; alternately, they are alienating yet intimate. An example of the pristine would be the song *On*, which is unique in that its aesthetic is so removed from any other. The song evokes a barren white beach, and the tones are so clean as to represent a non-physical and spiritual realm beyond the reach of human suffering and concern, even as its ephemerality can be unsettling. There is nothing that is familiar about it in the context of musical genre, it is even rather novel in private association. I should say that my ethos is to get exposure to anything different, and absorb its value. The mind that is intent on uncovering its innate genius can have no taste, no scene, no OS, no dualism.

There are two qualifiers I would never apply to Aphex or anyone I admire. One is *transcendent*. This word surfaces to my mind when I search for ones to describe Aphex, but it fails to do justice to this artist. Transcendent implies superiority, and superiority is a vulgar designation that does not apply to an innocent spirit who is only interested in being creative, but not in being pedestaled. The genius, the child, the deity—exist for themselves and their circular, intelligent activity. Self-validation does not apply to them.

The other dreadful qualifier is *edgelord*, a term now used. The edgelord stand up comedians are pre-conceived, rather artless and predictable in their shock tactics. They are more annoying than impressive. Richard seems to have an eternally juvenescent spirit, but it is not stilted, overt or self-conscious; it is free from rhetoric, rather it is spontaneous. It is more like a talented girl who excels in drawing or math, which, along with almost every other facet of existence—is one more footnote to her life. This is because she knows everything is made up and dwindles in significance in light of the ghostly totality. Girls like this have a charming note of malaise or ennui to their self-expression, and perhaps a trenchant or caustic style of humour. This describes Richard as I have observed him. I am reminded of Mozart's depiction in the film *Amadeus*, as he makes crude jokes and has an impish personality; perhaps as a counterpoint to his lofty spirit and mind.

In the archetypal world, I like to think of Mozart as an imp, and Aphex as a minor deity. In reality, imp, druid, deity, angel--are all equal, they symbolize the celestial universe and supernature. Minor or major deity, Aphex's art seems to have resonances with an evil god as depicted in the aforesaid pictures, making a curious and unnerving contrast with the heightened kindness of his finest melodies. Thankfully, Richard is only mortal. He is a musically gifted man who speaks in the hushed and vulnerable tone of the shy and awkward boy. His sterling gift are the soundscapes or compositions that he has churned out since the mid-eighties. His humour has come across as faecal or worse, but it is not a case of the edgelord employing a social strategy, rather an enigmatic weirdo, amused not only by the harmonious and orderly, but also the inhuman. An artist who moves comfortably

across the margins of dualism, perhaps neither attempting to unite them, but leaving an iridescent snail trail highlighting, in one song: sublime peace, and in *Matchsticks* of *Selected Ambient Works vol. 2*: a dread-soaked night sky reminiscent of David Lynch's films. The combined traces of these two polarities, sometimes in the same song, are as unsettling as they are beautiful.

The indirect and subjective evocations of a cruel or menacing deity embedded in such music--have been unnerving to me, though what endures is the loftiness of Richard's harmonious compositions. These resonate in my mind with the effortlessness of mother nature and the grandest nobility. The repetitive (progression figures less in electronic music) song: *Hexagon*, contains a chime which is overtaken by a complimentary flood of equally melodious sound wafting upwards and all around. The chime along with the slightly erratic beat drive the track temporally. The secondary sound is ethereal, and ascends into the sky like an even flow draught, and like the inchoate energies of the world soul, organizing all below without traceable order. Perfection. It is no coincidence that the track's name is a geometric shape pertaining to the abstract realm of math.

If Aphex only delved in the dissonant, I would probably be less interested in him, though his penchant for dissonance is a testament to his authenticity. Reality is spectral, and artists are the conveyors of hidden and estranged spectra. There aren't too many artists who can evoke such an intensity of emotion as Aphex in me. What I will always remember of Aphex's music are his heightened melodies. A track like *Z twig*, a self-repeating sound that also resembles a chime, is eerie and pellucid, and feels, as if it were, concocted no less than within my mother's soul. The resonance of the melody approaches the sacredness of birth itself, as it also evokes the hallowed precinct of morning. Aphex song titles are often made-up words, sometimes evocative of chemical elements, or else curious names such as the above. Aphex is, with the partial exception of Moby, the only musician I am aware of who channels the nuclear bonds of my immediate family into poignant soundscapes; an almost otherworldly tenderness for sibling and parents. Moby does this with at least one track, Aphex with at least four. The song *Flim* has the imprint of my sister's essence in it. A little girl energy who has learned the verity of love better than so many sages and academics, and who comforts her older brother in his fear and sorrow. A heart that shines with its virginal energy in the tenebrous and immense universe.

If we are to speak of a divine creator or spirit imbuing a musician's profile and oeuvre, Aphex is the one that spans what a god would imply: the terrible and numinous, sometimes simultaneously. I do not believe that God is wicked, though, literally, it is in all. The conventionally and religiously-minded tend to shun this notion. The artist, on the other hand, can highlight alternate interpretations for our edification and amusement. The fashion in which an artist like Aphex juxtaposes extremes, as in the old-fashioned girls with sinister men's faces can be disturbing and, yet, I find it refreshing. To me, evading all that is alien and disconcerting but lurks in the hidden folds of the psyche, can be boring. I enjoy widening my spectrum of

exposure in the safety of art. I am not impressed by art that is categorical. The most enduring art compels us to suspend all belief. Art like this is only for the adventurous.

Aphex's energy, as conveyed by his art, hearkens back to my childhood and my mother's spirit. There is something there that is pagan, in a specific and personal sense which I will elaborate, and which I will begin by characterizing as earthy and libertine. Pure feminine energy is sprawling, as it is savage, embodying the principle of form-defying vitality, it is shaped and directed best by the sensitive intelligence of the masculine principle. No other artist channels these two principles for me like Aphex. A truly great artist is a portal to the sources of life and the origins of existence. Though my mother tends to be traditional in her mores, there is a scintilla of Nature's femininity in her which emanates as the Aphex aura, the way I perceive it. Once when I was quite young, we walked in the American suburbs with a couple of other children and an adolescent girl who had recently dyed her hair red. She was exhausted beyond measure, and we had even carried her for a while. The other girl walked with a tied bag full of water containing tadpoles we had caught in a lake. Though it was subjective, it seemed to me that we were ragamuffin heteroclitcs, especially as in this American suburbia no one walked, they only drove vehicles. Spiritual renegades. In this picture there were tonal palettes coloured outside of societal boxes; shades that were refreshing, innocent, spontaneous. All this was the antithesis of so much odious structure that would follow in years to come with the regimenting bane of modern life suppressing the original and vital. Whatever has a whiff of this spiritual world without borders is loved by me. The prominence of the code-based world has spurred me on to magnify the wild, unchained realm, and frame it in my own art. In the following paragraph I will elaborate on this concept, and how the maternal anecdote is implicit in the world of Aphex.

Revolt against structure is unsustainable and perhaps often unwise, but as a minimum it is agreeable to see it in snippets of art and self-expression where otherwise rhetoric, utilitarian rationale and agenda circumscribe the human spirit. A spirit that defies any kind of categorization. Aphex has a song called *Come to Daddy*; it is not one of my favourites, but the video is at least interesting. In it a group of children romp in an empty lot; by children I mean little girls wearing old fashioned dresses from the neck down, but with Richard's beard-stubbed, grinning face instead of what would otherwise correspond. They go about vandalizing. There is a grotesque and bleach-white ghoul that appears towards the end and which is associated with the children. The ghoul terrifies an old lady by howling at her at a close distance, at a piercing volume. The girl-Aphex hybrids represent to me an edgy innocence; not an obedient and conformist one. A raw, beautiful and unapologetic energy inside of us which we repress for fear of disapproval and for maintenance of social cohesion. The ghoulish creature (the daddy of the girl-hybrids) is a kind of supernatural source or daemon that is a befitting parent for those who perhaps do not feel they belong to the world of rules, norms and limits. A force that is unfiltered and rambunctious beyond any moral code or normative aesthetic. I applaud any artist who can take me into this

field, not primarily through the shock strategy but through abandonment of all formulaic conceptuality. Of course, the whole thing is rather tongue-in-cheek, it must be said.

In the subtlest cases of Aphex's music (not *Come to Daddy*) the intensity of the alien and intimate is undeniable, though perhaps less fetching than other art because it is so authentic and tender with no recourse to artistic thrust, plumage or ostentatious display. I cite *Come to Daddy* for the philosophical principle it illustrates, not for the musical value. The song itself does not interest me much. Aphex's true gems are more understated.

Many of us appreciate original spirits or genii who are connected to a muse of some type that is compelling and original. This often occurs through the erasure of the boundaries of dualism, refreshingly upsetting our expectations and ideas. The result are the streams of irrational enchantment that surge like a masterpiece or breeze. Genius in the root sense of the word literally means demon, and the primary meaning of demon is a spirit, and not necessarily a malevolent one. The age-old concepts of sorcery, demons and witchcraft were eventually Christianized and satanized by the Church. For example, the word *wicked* is etymologically attributed to wicca, as in the art of witches who practiced healing and magic.

We call some artists or scientists genii, probably because it is as if they are taking dictation from an entity in another realm. The greatest creations have an immaculacy about them, and are perhaps artless. Traditional art is the blending together of pigments, letters or notes in the artifice of enchantment. The images and sounds are pretty. The word *pretty* means beguiling, as an image that shows and displays itself deceptively like sunlight upon the water. Upon comparing Aphex's music to other forms of music, I observe that the other music is perhaps more characterized by the interplay of the notes and silent spaces. The unpredictability of the melodic and rhythmic shifts can bedazzle and defy explanation, even as their synthesis may enthrall or enlighten. I am talking about the best progressive rock or classical music such as Beethoven, but for me, Aphex is more on point. The music he has created was set down with the ink of light. I won't even use the word *arranged*, because that implies process, not the singular wand strike of an ineffable realm. A realm that is shy and separate, and is not *great*, for what is great compares to the specimens it presides over. A genius in the purest sense is akin to the unassuming and simple, yet unreal touch of mother nature. This touch is not in the ephemeral mathematics of her contours or the physics of her breezes; it dispenses with their complexities, and subscribes to a terser code. A code which reveals an unfrequented chamber deeper within the field of the universal source or singularity. The Aphex *chamber* is different from any other musical place I have known. You will not find any substance to claim in the soundscapes, nor any lasting shapes or textures. You will return empty-handed without recall, graced without trace. The finest art or spirituality for me is the least qualified and convoluted; it passes freely without bombast or assertion; it may leave us astounded, perhaps even transformed, though without residuum.

I surmise that Aphex is agnostic, and I like him this way. He either does not know or maybe care whether such a phenomenon as deity exists. I am reluctant for this reason to call him divine, for the same reason that if God exists, he would not show his face, because what true greatness is ever revealed, much less displayed in full manifestation? It desists from framing, pedestaling and pomp; it exists blended into the core of All that is, running inconspicuously and anonymously like a mountain brook in the shade. I am also reluctant to call Aphex's superb melodies sacred, because, paradoxically, what is truly sacred does not fit to such a label; what is sacred is understated and does not lend itself to parade. The most ethereal instances of the Holy Spirit shall remain sempiternal and beautiful secrets

Still, I feel I must laud, in my own way, one of the great artists of the age, perhaps of any age. A song like *Bucephalus Bouncing Ball* can hardly be called a melody in the traditional sense; it has a morphing abstract sound, but it is intense, emanating a light that is eerie as it is hallowed. The song begins with the clicking sounds of a machine calibrating, and a consistently bouncing ball. After the lapse of a minute and a half there is only a ball bouncing at a steadily slow rate, as the lit melody finally arrives. Emotively, the sound evokes a sanctum at the core of this existence with all its horror, dread and vileness. There is a wavering field of energy that is so personal at once, it is like my father transferred his serenity to me, from God or the Essence of life. Somehow, the Intelligence assures that all is alright, the core of everything is beauty, light, peace. Neither the constructive and destructive processes nor any formal pronouncement and, in fact, all that is verbal or scripted—can enter into this place. This poetic domain is also somewhat similarly evoked in the song *To Cure a Weakling Child*. With Aphex there is probably not only one meaning behind the title, and not necessarily a benign one. I detect there are layers of irony, but the song ennobles my spirit. There is the sample of a fractured and lucent child's voice chanting "my arms" "my hands," etc. The melody is rich and resembles a lullaby as the voice recurs throughout the track, interweaving with an unsettling breakbeat that resembles a chain pulling machine. The melody is as clement as a matinal rain shower in the sun-flooded countryside. It is as merciful as the look that a healthy and beautiful mother gives her newly born son as she cuddles him with no other pending concern but his well-being. His flourishing in the blessed universe which he shall unfold one corner at a time. What is this song but life at white heat seeking itself, as its melodious details arrange into a strange mathematical arrangement of tones. This is the most Mozartian strain in Aphex's oeuvre that I am aware of; I think the melody is as, if not more, celestial than *Piano Concerto in D minor*: one of Amadeus's peak moments. Because this is Aphex, the track has more powerful connotations than simply a sentimental song about a doting mother. This is its beauty, with the mechanistic beats and the partially disturbing sample, we are in a place that is non-dual, for only a deity or a great artist can combine the disturbing with the infinitely tender. Aphex's music takes me to the place inside Creator, as it were.

The mathematical structure traced by the inhuman beats of To Cure a Weakling Child is paralleled in one part of Bucephalus Bouncing Ball, as the ball bouncing during

the melodic interlude is at one point tinged resonantly by the melody. In this case there is a kind of harmonious orderliness that evokes the genius of every great and man-made edifice or master work in world history; echoes of the supreme construction of a Creator. Or, else, we might say a so-called Creator, to whom Aphex probably would have never attributed this or any other aural invocation. I just know the sonic experiment of Aphex Twin occurs there inside a place, neither good nor bad, neither special, nor renown. There is plenty of gorgeous music past and present, but to this day I don't know of any other musician who can take me as deeply into the ethereal core of genesis itself as Aphex Twin. To this day he is the only one that can move me to the verge of such tears.