

The Making of “Sabre Rattle”



To my knowledge, there is no other audio recording quite like this in existence. I say “quite” because sound effects have been used in audio for close to a century; however, never in such a sequential combination of effects, live recordings, and other music that ultimately depicts the story of humankind’s relationship to the “universe”. It should be noted, that unlike the orchestral composition “The Planets, Op. 32”, this record is *not* a tribute to the universe or the planets, nor is it a tribute to humanity as a whole. It is quite simply an effort to make sense of the so-called “meaning” of human life through a particular interpretation. The project began in October 2015, and would end in April 2020, taking over 5 years of work and the ongoing collection of audio samples using a handheld recorder and a phone.



Over three-quarters of this record was constructed using an 8-track audio cassette tape and mixed manually in one singular take. In early 2019, as the tape machine began to malfunction, the work was moved to Mr. Small’s Northside Recording Studio in Pittsburgh, PA, where, along with longtime friend and engineer Nate Campisi, the final quarter of the record was constructed digitally. After the last pieces of audio were collected, we reconvened on 4/20/2020, (during the height of the Covid-19 crisis), to complete the project. Numerologically, this is somewhat symbolic for the 20/20/20 significance, in the Year of Judgement (as represented by Tarot Enigma 20: “Judgement”). The original goal of the recording was for it to run consecutively for 78 minutes and strangely enough, when we pushed the stop button at the end of the session, the completed work was exactly 78 minutes in length. Although there was a little more that I wish I could have done, this was an omen that the project was finally over.



Why 78? This is for two reasons: One, as a person who is a fan of music in physical form, a CD only holds 80 minutes of data. Second, and more importantly, a Tarot Pack contains 78 cards. The first 12 cards (The Magician to The Hanged Man) equal 78: 1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8+9+10+11+12=78. Card 13 equals “Death” (or Birth?). Thus, there are 13 total “tracks” on the completed recording. The entire piece is a long cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth.



I must admit here, that the basis for this work is not entirely of my own. The order of the tracks comes from the book “Numerology and Your Future” by author Dusty Bunker. I highly suggest picking up her books, as they will help you make further sense of this album. Additionally, some of the recordings are not entirely original. Every effort was given to select “royalty-free” audio, and while some may accuse me of stealing, this record is partly a TRIBUTE to the various types of music and cultures throughout the world. The dream was to actually travel to all of the various places you may hear on the record, but because I do not possess unlimited funding, this was simply not possible. When you hear music and sounds from faraway places—it is only a product of my wishful imagination. The record also began as a homage to my (now) ex-wife, Maria Lamas. For instance, the “Jupiter” Sequence was originally a recording of the Galician *gaitas*- an instrument that was a precursor to the Celtic bagpipe. This was recorded in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. The “Earth” Sequence is the sound of Andalusian gypsies (my ex father-in-law was from Málaga, Southern Spain). The *gaitas* were removed, but the gypsies remained, partially as an homage to figures like Django Reinhardt, to which I used to see a cover group called *Swing Gitán* at The Green Mill in Chicago (ironically, the guitarist Jason Miller played at my wedding). It’s not *exactly* Django, *per se*, but only the “essence” of the overall idea. Shortly after beginning work on the record and after only months of marriage, my wife divorced me (as you could imagine the shock of a newlywed coming home to a husband splicing sounds of Adolf Hitler and machine guns into the opening “Mars” sequence of the record played on repeat, glass of Absinthe in hand). Suffice to say, the Hitler audio is NOT a homage, and it took a great deal of convincing for Nate Campisi to work with me on the project for this reason.

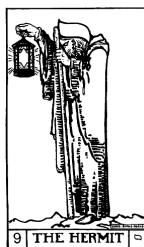


The work is not a series of random sound files thrown together. Some things pertain to myself as the creator, the center of my own little world, and then relate at times to the larger picture. The universe doesn’t have to be overly complicated. It can be found in everything, large and small. This is the true nature of “God”. But with God (the “Good” Energy), comes The Devil (the “Negative” Energy). Planets are also large and majestic, but infinitesimally small when compared the universe. People are even smaller, but it is people and their stories that provide meaning to the universe in the first place. As people, our physical lives are not infinite, and we are guided by a similar set of underlying principles. It is a series of steps that recycle, endlessly. This is what the album is. For instance, the opening sequence “Mars” is the “Big Bang” (so-to-say): a single gunshot, followed by a spark, followed by territorial expansion through violence. Even more violent is “Vulcan”, a planet believed to exist between The Sun and Mercury, discovered in 1840 by French Mathematician *Urbain Le Verrier*. The blast beats provided here by Pittsburgh performance group *Bear Skull* sum up Vulcan in one short track: similar to the short revolution that Vulcan takes around the sun (the tracks on the record are longer or shorter depending on the length of the ecliptic around the Sun). Thus, it was simple to choose a track called “Punished by The Light” that I had previously engineered for the group (recorded 2009, on a small tape machine, in Mr. Small’s long abandoned “Studio D”). What follows Vulcan is the creation and descension of consciousness and what was my attempt at using audio to assist in lowering your level of consciousness. It’s partly a self-help sequence (Uranus), and inspired by the work of José Silva, a parapsychologist who created the “Silva Mind Control Method”. The waves you hear are brain frequencies that once you learn to control, you can put yourself into trance-like states that promote fast learning, healing, and meditation. *What happens when you descend into the greatest depth of consciousness?* You reach 3 black men, chopping a log. The rain then begins to fall on the tin roof of their shack.

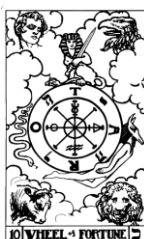




In Jupiter and Earth, the original *gaita* sequence was too short. After divorcing in March 2016, the Jupiter section was recreated in a small room at my parents' house, adding the rain, wind, hurricane, and the sounds of streams and wildlife (from wild to domesticated). This is the initial creation of life in the early world. The trumpets sound, thus heralding the larger coming of humankind. "Trumpets Under the Golden Dome" is a song played by the University of Notre Dame Marching Band, as an homage to *Notre Dame*- "Our Lady", the coming of the "Female" element to the recording (Mars being the Masculine). It is also partially a nod to Christianity and Celtic culture (Christian or not), and most world religions do appear at some point throughout the record. After the Celtic bagpipe sequence, there is also a nod to the Pink Floyd "Fearless" ending, comprised of the stadium chanting. Following the "lighter", happier coming of humanity in Jupiter (culminating in Earth with the Andalusian gypsy sequence), comes Pluto- the "darker" side of humanity. It is life in the shadows. You hear the sound of an El Train passing (I used to live next to an El Train in Chicago), and it ushers in the "seedier" aspects of humanity on the "other side of the tracks". Bars, drinking, nightlife, loud music, sexuality, police, gun violence, and a car/motorcycle chase sequence. The helicopter in this section was the *LifeFlight* chopper from Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh, which I also lived next to from 2009-2016 at the home sound studio where the recordings began. I hated the helicopter, but decided to add it in order to make my peace with it. The police breaking the door scene was created with an actual shotgun.



"Mercury" is the only music track that was entirely created by me playing every instrument. The initial traffic noises come from India and the reason India was chosen was not only for the fact that it has so much traffic and it is the "buzz" of modern humanity, but that my flute was made by Vyankatesh Asarkar- an Indian flute maker who died in 1965. The metallic nature of this track can be described as "mercurial" and this was the final track recorded at 1000 Cedar Avenue, following the divorce and the loss of the building. After moving back to my parents, the project was shelved for quite some time and therefore, the mellow nature of this song provided a peaceful ending to a major life transition. "Venus" on the other hand- is perhaps the laziest and most cliché track on the record. The original idea for this sequence was to audio record two people actually having sex. As I was creating the track as a placeholder, I fell asleep at the console watching porno, and the talking and moaning that are in the background were really clips of porn advertisements. Cliché as it seems, the sexual aspect of the adventure is as important to the story as the other pieces, and the track serves its purpose "as-is".



There was debate at this point as to whether Neptune and Moon should be switched, and as a purist, the decision was made to keep Dusty Bunker's original Numerological track order. As a faraway planet (and like Pluto), Neptune is much longer than the other tracks. The water sounds in this were recorded in an empty house during the middle of the night. The idea was to have the invisible person in the audio-story drown themselves in the bathtub, only to awake on the other side of the world in a Portuguese harbor town. Here again, is a homagé to my Galician ex-wife (we met in Madeira, Portugal), and represents a dream of actually *becoming Portuguese*. The music on the harbor speaker is a song called "Barco Negro" (Black Boat) by famous Portuguese Fado singer Amália Rodrigues. During the high note that echoes, the English translation of the lyric is:



*"Then I saw a cross stuck on a rock
And your black sailboat dancing under the light
I saw your hand waving goodbye among the ready loose sails
Old women of the beach tell me that you will not come back*

They are crazy... They are crazy..."



The viewer is then transported to outer space in a rocket (The Moon), and the other-worldly "Saturn" sequence begins (again long), which is circular in nature for the obvious reason being the Rings of Saturn. This is where the original tape machine broke down, and what you hear was an attempt to recreate what I had done from memory, at the recording studio. Some of the original parts of this track were lost, including screeching train wheels in the distant night. Track 44 "Atlas" the occult point, is a drone played by *Dreme*, a Pittsburgh trio, while the woman giving birth is layered on top. Like the sex scene, this was to be recorded at an actual hospital, and the woman I had to do it dropped out, similar to the lost ending of Alejandro Jodorowsky's *"The Holy Mountain"* where a woman was supposed to give birth on camera inside of a Mexican restaurant. I took this idea for "The Sun" which also borrows from the *Y Tu Mama Tambien* jukebox movie ending on the beach. The school scenes and man playing guitar on the beach in Acapulco, Mexico, were recorded by me in 2018-2019. I was working throughout 2018 as a schoolteacher, and I actually set up a real Kindergarten class to recite for me the ABC's and numbers. The original idea was to go through every grade level of school, but it proved too difficult and time consuming. The school assembly scene was also real and a man was there playing "When the Saints Go Marching In" on saxophone for the kids, although, because his performance was not that good, he was ultimately overdubbed by the gospel singers who were performing at a wedding. Therefore, you have the elements of youth, marriage, and ultimately, LOVE, which culminates the entire record and is the true purpose of life. The original ending would have been all Mariachi music, and this was cut down in favor of the live recording of the poor Mexican singer with the waves rolling out in the background.



Please enjoy, and may you cherish this work of art for years to come. I feel that I have accomplished everything now as a lover of audio recording, sound effects, and music, a passion that I have enjoyed since I was very young. This record is dedicated to my ex-wife Maria Lamas, who could never understand me.

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