



UNDER THE INFLUENCE

THE US-BORN, ICELAND-DWELLING **JOHN GRANT** TAKES US ON A JOURNEY THROUGH A FEW OF THE INFLUENCES THAT HAVE SHAPED HIS IDIOSYNCRATIC WORLD VIEW

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ARCADE GAMES

“Going to the arcade in the mall was a big part of my youth and those places were always something of a sanctuary for me. I whiled away many hours in the early 1980s playing Atari games like ‘Centipede’, ‘Joust’, ‘Tempest’, which had an especially beautiful sawtooth sound effect with a slow attack and a quick decay.

“All the colours, geometric shapes and amazing sounds from those machines have been subconsciously processed over the years and have gradually seeped into my work. I’m a big fan of Chris & Cosey’s track ‘Arcade’, which sampled a lot of these games and I’ve always enjoyed trying to recreate these sounds on my own. When I build my songs I like to think that they’re like a video game in the advanced levels, in that there’s more going on and more sounds being added and layered.”

HORROR FILM SOUNDTRACKS

“Many of my favourite sounds originate from film scores and I have film scores to thank for my love of synths. I used to play sax, but I traded that in for my first synth, a Sequential Circuits Six-Trak, as soon as I could.

“‘Blade Runner’ was a big soundtrack for me, John Carpenter too. I remember buying the ‘Halloween III’ score on cassette when I went to California to play at the Rose Bowl for a school band trip. I love walking around listening to these quite intense synth scores in incongruous settings. There’s nothing better than marching around on a lovely sunny day with the sinister sound of Howard Shore’s ‘Suite From Seven’ rattling around your head. I love how music can transform the most mundane landscape into something fascinating.

“Many of my favourite songs have been emotional outbursts, but now I’ve got that out of my system I’m becoming more interested in exploring new avenues. I get more excited about film scores than any other releases these days, more recently ‘It Follows’, Mica Levi’s ‘Under the Skin’ and Cliff Martinez’s ‘The Neon Demon’ have all left a big impression on me. I’ve been thinking about making more instrumental, abstract music myself. My dream is to make a score for a really beautiful psychological thriller one day.”

INDUSTRIAL DECAY

“I’m fascinated by geometric shapes in architecture and I love taking pictures of decaying, weathered buildings. I’m really interested in the inner workings of buildings, all the pipes and wires and what’s underneath. I can be really annoying to walk anywhere with as I can’t resist the urge to stop, get up close to the surface and take little detailed shots of some old building chipping away. I’m a big fan of abstract expressionism, people like Jackson Pollock and Cy Twombly, so I enjoy finding patterns around me.

“There’s all sorts of unintended art happening all around you, but I particularly love fading industrial landscapes, faded paint,

cracks in the sidewalk, old corrugated iron, an unusual growth of beautiful moss. Anything like that draws my attention. There’s a lot of beautifully weathered industrial structures where I live in Iceland. The wind causes some interesting erosions. I’ve been here for five years and I’m constantly taking pictures of the same shit from multiple angles!”

FEMALE STRENGTH

“Ever since childhood, I’ve felt like an alien in a hostile landscape, like I couldn’t afford to be who I was. Being gay has meant I’ve thought a lot about masculinity and what it means to be a man. We’re fed these warped ideas about male strength, which often just boils down to fear and this has led to the absurd state of the world today. You can destroy pretty much anything with a single bullet, but where’s the strength in that?

“It’s also made me gravitate towards certain people who embody an ideal of compassionate strength, be they male or female, but especially strong women. They’re people who, along with having a certain measure of gentleness, compassion and kindness, also have an innate sense of self, which means they won’t put up with bullshit from others.

“There are so many strong women working in music who I respect: Liz Fraser, Sinéad O’Connor, Alison Goldfrapp, Annie Lennox, Kate Bush, Cate Le Bon, Cosey Fanni Tutti... the list is endless. My manager Fiona Glyn-Jones is another example. I think you can connect with all these amazing women without having to wade through all the macho bullshit that surrounds us.”

GOOFINESS IN MUSIC

“Over the course of my career I’ve gradually come out of my shell. On ‘Grey Ticks, Black Pressure’ you can hear me letting my guard down more. When I was working in restaurants for example, it used to take me at least six months before I could really be myself around people. I’m gradually learning how to shed the fear of being judged. This surfaces on songs like ‘Snug Slacks’, which on one level has a fairly serious message about sex addiction, objectifying people and not being able to experience intimacy, but on another level it’s quite a playful electro-funk track with snarky humour.

“I’ve always admired artists who aren’t afraid to have fun on their records. Bands like Devo and Yello spring to mind, both of whom have been a huge influence. Despite being accomplished musicians they’ve never been shy about goofing off on their records. It’s really important to tap into that ability to remain a child and be curious and excited about anything.”

The John Grant-curated ‘North Atlantic Flux’ festival runs from 28 April – 1 May as part of Hull 2017 City Of Culture. For line-up, venues and tickets visit hull2017.co.uk/johngrant