

A GUIDE TO GOOD MUSIC
AND MORE BY
INDIEFFERENTIAL



What's
new?

MEET THE MOST
INTERESTING ARTISTS
AND CREATORS

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INTRODUCING: MARA KATRIA

BY GEORGE
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Where can we find you right now and what are you up to?

I am pleased as punch to be up to my ears in putting the finishing touches on my debut album codenamed MODERN M which features my friends and heroes from the iconic new wave band Modern English. Their record AFTER THE SNOW including the hit "I Melt With You" helped define the 1980s and the music we've made together includes that epoch's inspiration and spans the ribbon of time with science fiction, history, and fantasy influences. What started before the pandemic as a five-song EP has expanded into a full-length LP; and the music is blowing my mind! I can't wait to share it all with the world. It'll come out first-half in 2023 (including eventual live performances starting on the US east coast). In the meantime, you can find me on YouTube, Instagram, et cetera, under the handle @marakatria or visit my official website.

Tell us a bit about your influences.

Certainly! My earliest influences came from my parents' backgrounds. My mother is entirely Finnish, and her collection of tapestries and tomes fostered an appreciation for those haunting Nordic soundscapes – as well as the bright tenacity of the Finn concept called 'Sisu'. On my dad's side, the magic of the Celtic ballads has enchanted me always. As I grew up, I became enamored with the music of Loreena McKennitt (who in present-day gave her seal of approval for my recent homage to her timeless song "The Dark Night Of The Soul"). Following that, the avant-pop and rock of previous decades entered my taste with Laurie Anderson, Peter Gabriel, U2, Annie Lennox, Ultravox, Patti Smith, and of course Modern English. On a related topic, the timing of Kate Bush's recent resurgence with the STRANGER THINGS series is fantastic for so many reasons. One that's personal to me is, while I wasn't familiar with her work growing up, when I released my premiere single "Midnight Mind" last year, the host of a regional terrestrial station DJ Don Bedell said in his review that "MM is a hit! It's haunting. It's mesmerizing. Ethereal. Atmospheric. A little Kate Bush. A little Annie Lennox. I'm looking forward to hearing more!" (It's worth emphasizing that this was before the ST airing.) So, throughout 2021, with this humbling comparison fresh in my mind, I did a deep dive into Kate Bush's repertoire. My socks were knocked off. Kate Bush is spectacular – as is well known by all who've spent time with her work – and in her, I found such a kindred spirit and approach to audio-visual construction and themes including theatricality, movement, and technology. It felt like coming home again. It's a joy to recognize that – though I didn't know her work before I wrote my single or the upcoming MODERN M album – those commonalities emerged independently!

How did you start?

It's cool that INDIEFFERENTIAL MAGAZINE isn't shy about mentioning their interest in video games, because, in a way, I got my start with recording music when I was working as project lead, AI programmer, and world builder for a quest expansion MOD for the videogame THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION called "Et in Arkay Ego." During my work with the outstanding EIA MOD team – which I absolutely loved – I directed the voiceover work and also scored the quest's music. This deepened my understanding of the requisite gear and software, and with that, I realized that innovating with and commanding technology was a major part of my passion for storytelling through music!

What do you think is the difference between the artists of the past and today?

Sometimes I like to ruminate about the artists of the long past and what it means to be in our 'current' age. I wonder if in 3022 we'll be reviewed in one chronologic category along with composers like Gustav Mahler who was around well into the twentieth century – which was so recent really. Will humans of the twenty-second century regard the subtleties of our 1980s music versus that of our 2020s? I can certainly hear the difference, hahaha! But I digress. Within the recognizable scope of the artists of our parents' childhoods compared with those of today, I would say there are two groups in both time periods. There are those who are "truly artists", inspired and committed to sharing emotion and meaning through music – and there are those who see an opportunity to "leverage resources". When vinyl and CDs were popular, those who wanted to leverage resources saw a rich vein to tap into for merchandising. The music was saleable. It was a flawed but somewhat golden era for the true artist because their art was something others could profit from. That encouraged the most zealous and talented artists to work even harder to be noticed by those who could help them share their work with larger audiences. I think as a result we saw a greater proportion of actual artists in the 'top 100' so to speak. Since the invention of digital file-sharing (E.g.: Limewire), the leverage of resources and profits has shifted. Behemoth media corporations work hand in hand with other giant streaming companies to make as much as possible on digital music. There's not nearly as much profit in listening to a stream as buying a record, so the emphasis has become on quantity over quality paired with a subscriber-like mentality. What have you done for me lately? Artists become supported – directly or algorithmically – based on how regularly they can stay topical via super-frequent singles releases and media appearances. Generally, those who are most willing to release music so quickly ... [cont. p2]



... and stage media stunts are probably aware that they're doing so as part of the production line – they become merchandisers more than artists (even if they started with good intentions). Deepening the relationship with merchandise, the would-be-musicians get almost none of the profit from streams, so they need to develop their 'brands' through low-quality makeup lines, subscription vlogs, how-to books, and other repeat consumables. Though there are a few sincere creators who still make it through the commercial gauntlet even today. And a wider contingent of real artists is still out there – represented by some amazing labels like Bella Union. We still can find musicians who are just as remarkable as yesteryear, but we need to look harder to uncover the avenues that support great work. I find when we do, those genuine musicians are just like they used to be: brave, brilliant, and full of hope and angst! Hahaha!

What is the highest point of your career so far? What unique thing happened to you?

One of the highest points in my career so far was related to a feature-length film I directed entitled PLEASE TALK WITH ME. The movie sought to recreate the authentic events now known as the C2D1 Haunting which happened at a Western New York (Geneseo) College in 1985. It was a months-long horror for the students who underwent it. The PTWM team and I dedicated years of our lives to faithfully telling the survivors' story. When the picture was completed in the mid-2010s, we first decided to premiere the film at festivals and paranormal conventions. I'll never forget attending the Wilson Horror Film Festival and seeing so many movies made by skillful people. The survivors J. Jeff Ungar and Chris Di Cesare were there as well as our producer William J. Edwards and our PA Michael Lewis. I didn't expect an awards ceremony after the final screenings. I was excited because our lead actor Kyle Shea was nominated for Best Male Lead. There we were sitting together in that impressive theater when they announced the winner for Best Director. I always knew that the care and quality our whole team put into PTWM was worth every award, but I never thought of "myself" winning something in particular. So, I was completely stunned when they announced my name. I managed not to trip as I mounted the stage and made my impromptu speech thanking WHFF, the survivors, and our cast and crew. And, I saw those previously mentioned gentlemen beaming for me – completely selfless. I have been lucky enough to receive some awards since then – which I treasure – but that moment is cast in amber in my heart, always.

What do you think will change in the future in terms of how we consume music?

The way we've consumed music has changed so much already, yet I'm comforted that some aspects remain the same. We see that music has developed into a largely free and saturated expectation. The tools for making music have become cheaper and cheaper, which is lovely, but also much more "automated". This allows individuals – who wouldn't otherwise be interested in the "work" of writing, recording, and performing music – to make quick facsimiles of pop songs aided by free autotune plugins, chord packs, and samples ready to drag and drop onto a grid. While in caring hands, this can produce compelling music, it also seems to have flooded social media and streaming services with countless new uploads daily. And, overwhelmingly, most consider what's released to be more like rough drafts than fully realized songs. A bar to entry that used to be very high is now nonexistent. Weeding through the seemingly infinite influx of new media is a daunting, almost impossible task that might encourage us to return to the taste-makers of the past to help us find the diamonds in the rough (which could include local and university radio hosts (some of my favorites are DJ Brian Silvis on CHANNEL 98.9 in New York and Sister Sylvie on the Pennsylvania college station THE LION.FM). Likewise, INDIEFFERENTIAL MAGAZINE is an awesome example of how to find the gems with a devotion for the artform. I would also wager that platforms like long-form television and feature films will have a multiplying impact on what becomes 'heard' or popular insofar as what's in the soundtracks. The imagery and story paired with the music will create lasting memories – which I think we'll crave to share with our peers in a world where we will likely each have our personalized, lonely online-echo-chambers. Furthermore, I think that authenticity and humanity will become the rarest commodities in art and music. Some audiences will grow tired of the cognitive dissonance caused by video filters and pitch-corrected voices. They might therefore gravitate towards honesty and vulnerability in artists' performances. That said, I'd be naive if I did not also predict that, at the same time, music and the concept of the 'popstar' will be ever more inexpensive to fabricate via algorithmic technology: hotter-than-reality and unaging simulacrum. We're just about there now really. The low risk and high reward will be irresistible to the largest labels and distributors, especially compared to what it used to cost to sign and promote a beating heart musician. As such, many young people will be equally, if not more, entranced by

the resulting hologram and 3D graphical performers they'll watch and interact with via social-meta and digitally-enhanced realities. That stuff is going to be pushed into our faces with the massive leftover advertising budget agencies will have thanks to the non-human simulations. This will drive down and perhaps erase digital download and streaming profits for 99% of flesh and blood musicians. Yet, for those who truly love the real thing, it'll increase the value of going to see music live and getting physical keepsakes like signed vinyl.

Do you remember any strange or funny incident that happened to you?

I've got lots! Since my work directing the paranormal documentary PLEASE TALK WITH ME, I've seen many fascinating occurrences. Yet, there's one perhaps perfect for INDIEFFERENTIAL MAGAZINE that happened a year before I started working on PTWM. I was on my way home from subbing at a school in Upstate New York the day before winter break. It had snowed earlier that week – turning the hills and fields of that rural area pearly white, but the roads were clear and the scene was serene as I was driving back. I was playing the US album by Peter Gabriel. I had the road to myself and both hands on the wheel. A perfect driving moment. It was at about the seventh song on the CD when my tires spun out. Black ice. The car twisted and lifted into the air. Time almost seemed to stand still. I could see my hair floating around my face as if I were in space. I could see the bright alabaster day whisper-quiet all around me. The change I'd put in the center console for tolls was now twinkling in midair. I said a prayer of thanks for my life – in case these were my last moments. Then, the car completed its twist as time sped up and I hit the trenched hill on the other side of the road. Nothingness. Nothingness. Peace. And, then from the silence, I could hear the clarion call of Peter Gabriel's song "Come Talk To Me" playing with the warmth and urgency of breath itself. Vision returned, and I saw the car dashboard and doors crushed all around me: Totalled. I tried to turn the key in the ignition amidst the strange tranquility of shock. No ignition. There was no electricity in the car. No lights. And "impossibly" . . . the song played on: "Please talk to me / Won't you please talk to me / We can unlock this misery / Come on, come talk to me." Eventually, other cars came along and stopped to help. Thankfully, I didn't need to go to the hospital, and an officer named Warden drove me home. Flash forward to the completion of my first single "Midnight Mind" years later – and the song is mastered at none other than Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios. [cont. p3]

Do you play video games? What is your favorite?

I do indeed, haha! I am delighted with narrative games with vast worlds. Some of my favorites of all time are BIOSHOCK (exploring dystopian and utopian concepts ala George Orwell and Ayn Rand); INDIGO PROPHECY (an immersive piece that looks at the paranormal and morality); THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE THIRD AGE (the most beautiful turn-based RPG I have ever played, set in my ideal fantasy world); and indubitably THE ELDER SCROLLS (TES) series.

Regarding TES, my top choice of all time would be MORROWIND; and I am currently to be found playing the online version (ESO) in the guild created by Real_Ghost_Boy called 'Et in Arcadia Ego' (inspired partly by a certain painting by Nicolas Poussin). Maybe I'll see you folks there!

Tell us about your latest or upcoming release.

My upcoming release is, of course, the album codenamed MODERN M that I wrote featuring the legendary band Modern English!!!! You can see lots of fun content related to that by searching the hashtag #musicfortimetravelers. And, my most recent original single is entitled "Midnight Mind" which has an accompanying music video I directed – which recently received Best Music Video at Imagine This Women's International Film Festival (Brooklyn) and Imaginarium Film Festival (Louisville). It has simultaneously been a dream come true to have it well received on college radio. It's free on YouTube, et cetera, and a really handsome box-set of the CD paired with the video plus lots of limited edition artwork was created. So, if you like to hold music in your hands, just send a message via any of my sites.

Listen to
MARIA KATRIA

