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Converging with Diversity: Piotr's New Release, "AGORA Regathered"



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LMA: We're talking about his new release, called "AGORA Regathered," which is about to be released...

Piotr: Almost done.

LMA: What was your process working with the collaborators? How did you go about, in general, making the album work with the collaborators? How did you choose them, and make that happen?

Piotr: Well, usually when I do remixes, I just ask someone who I like to do a remix, and whatever the remix is, I take it, and I'll put it out...But I think with this...I think I had some really specific people in mind for some specific songs. So I asked them, and they'd send me [the mixes]...If asked them to do a remix of "Overtaker," for instance, they'd send it to me. But if I thought that it was too long, or it wasn't quite right, or there was a part of what they'd sent me that I didn't like, or I wanted them to try a different song...because I thought...they might work better with a different song after hearing what I had in mind, I'd have them do it over. So there were a couple of do overs with this...I had about 40 or 45 remixes from a bunch of different people, and so I would try and kind of find remixes that didn't just sound like remixes, but remixes that sounded more like the core of the song brought forward and made more down to its essence.

LMA: Now, I overheard you speaking before about how you collaborated with an artist, but you had had a conversation where you had remixed some of his work, and then vice versa, and you kind of went back and forth. Who was that, and how did that happen?

Piotr: The "Behaviour State" Project with this Finnish producer who I'd actually heard about back when I was just sort of searching for electronic music, like 3 or 4 years ago just to kind of build my library and see what was out there, and I found his blog...he's a do-it-yourself, smaller artist but I really like what he has to say. So I emailed him, or I'd left a comment on his blog...and it took him like a year and a half to get back

to me, because I guess he never checked his blog...But he finally did, and it was right around the time that the AGORA record started to be put together...I had initially thought of AGORA as sort of like a meeting place for cultures, because there's some different cultures sampled, like different female vocalists from different countries, like Uganda and [Pakistan](#) and Turkey. So that was what I thought of AGORA at first, but then AGORA sort of turned into all these people that I admired converged with me and worked with me...like AGF is someone I've loved for like four years, now, and she finally worked with me for The "AGORA" Project...So I talked to this guy, Salakapakka Sound System. His name's Marco, and he lives in Finland...After finally responding to my initial comment years ago, he sent me some sounds that he was going to put into a track of his own. And I used them for my track, "Behaviour State," but he had also used them for his track. So then he did a remix of "Behaviour State" because he had some part in the song. Then I remixed his remix, and he remixed the remix of his remix, etcetera, etcetera. So we had about 7 remixes that we put together as just a release of its own. But then I wanted his touch again, so I asked for a remix, aside from all those remixes. So this is probably like his eighth remix of the song that he did for this particular project, this remix album.

LMA: Do you think that conversation of remixes, that 7th remix that you're talking about, prior to this separate one, will ever be released?

Piotr: Yeah. There were a few that we never put out because I think I did like two in a row at one point. We tried to do it I'd do one and he'd do one; him, me, back and forth, and back and forth. I thought it was kind of interesting getting a final mix from him, because we'd gone over this material with each other so many times. So it was just kind of interesting to hear...I don't know if it was totally possible for him to forget about the other 7 things we did, but I really liked the final thing he did.

LMA: There's a write-up, the remix album write-up that you had sent me about "AGORA Regathered." You had mentioned the original definition of the ancient agora, and this is what you said, 'By uniting people from various backgrounds into a single moment.' Now, how's that definition of agora sort of been tweaked, or changed, sort of added onto, regathered, in a sense, in this new album?

Piotr: Right. I think so. When I was looking for remixes, I didn't just ask my friends who...I respect their work, but I also asked people whose work I respect that I never thought I'd have a shot at working with, at least this early in the game 'cause this is only my first proper record out. But I got responses from a bunch of people...So it's sort of a mixed bag; it's people I respected for a long time that I'm maybe not-so-close with, but that have finally answered my emails. And then of course I have mixes from close friends, and then some larger-scale artists. So it's really very literally a collection of backgrounds into a single point.

LMA: Can you tell me more about that, and how you came to work with them, and more about that experience?

Piotr: Well, Belvin Blectum I'd known for a while because I had kind of a friendship- relationship with Matmos for a while, and I'd always liked her stuff. I'd talked to her a few times...emailed back and forth years ago...And then I was looking for people for this remix album, and I just kind of emailed everyone whose work I respect a lot, and she, of course, said, 'yes.' But a lot of them were kind of shots in the dark, like Scanner...I didn't think I'd have any chance.

(Musical interlude from "Remain" (Scanner 90 Mix))

Piotr: I've been very grateful to have all these people on board.

LMA: Scanner...you mentioned something about their claim to fame, or someone else who's affiliated with them, this big name, obviously. What are they famous for, or what was sort of their story?

(Answer accompanied by the fax machine sound)

Piotr: Well, Scanner...back in the nineties, he had a police radio scanner, or something that had like zero to ten-thousand kilohertz...that he could pick up cell phone conversations, police transmissions, and he could

pick up probably helicopter news broadcasts, or whatever he wanted... So it was sort of like he was stealing sounds, but he was putting them in his own work. So that's sort of how he got started, and then, I guess, Björk heard about him and put one of his noises from one of his EPs in one of her tracks, "Possibly Maybe," and it's that kind of noise that sounds like a fax machine. But, I guess, she didn't ask permission, or her record label didn't ask permission to use the sample, and she got into kind of a nasty legal battle with his label. And so that's sort of how people know his name, now, aside from his cult followers. I think that's kind of an interesting thing to have had happened to him.

LMA: First, the track order: How did you decide to have the 14 songs in that order?

Piotr: Well, I knew I wanted to start and end with "Focus," and I thought that was sort of the invert of what I had done with the album, where "Focus" is the very middle track; it's like the centerpiece. And I found this great girl who I really liked... The story with AGF is when I first put my stuff out on Last.fm, when I was just noodling around five years ago. Last.fm recommended all of these similar artists, and one of them was AGF, and I was really fascinated with her, and she's really influenced me. But then there's this girl in Canada, who's got like two listeners, and she just works out of her bedroom and cuts up her voice. And it's very similar to what AGF does, but its lofi. But I really like her approach. So I asked her to do a remix, and that was the opening remix. I think it's a really strong representation of my track. She just did something really fresh with it. And then the last track is this vocal only, it's just like one noise, and it's this Finnish producer, who I've liked for a while, and I found out about him on a blog... I thought it was really interesting 'cause he was gonna collaborate with someone else on the remix, and then the guy got too busy, so he just kind of finished up on his own. And he just did like one noise for the whole remix. And he just took Zach's voice, and put it through a filter. And it's really sparse, and I thought that was kind of brave to turn in a remix and have it be like an "unmix" almost. So I thought that was really cool, and it's the perfect ending. But then I just also kind of tried to establish just a basic flow, really, from track to track; I tried to have it transition nicely. And the "Invoice" mix that's gonna be in the record comes after a remix that Zach actually did of "Winter Consummation," and they both have kind of cut up voices. So that transitioned really well... I don't think I tried to be faithful to the original track order; I tried to just be faithful to what it sounded like next to each other, if it was effective.

LMA: What's your favorite track? Which one do you sort of feel is the one that hits close to home...?

Piotr: Actually, it might be Jhom's. But I think Blevin's remix of "From Whiteness" is really good 'cause it almost sounds like a sinking submarine, somehow.

LMA: I see that.

Piotr: And I really like her voice. So when I had her do the remix, she sent me kind of the initial stages of it, and I really liked what she did, but I said, 'Can you use your voice in this?' 'Cause I really like how she uses her voice, as this kind of reverbed element; it's not even really a voice at that point... It's like this siren call from the deep... So I got kind of specific in my requests with people. But her's turned out really well. I think those are the only female producers, as far as remixers go. I think everyone else was male, and I think that's kind of an interesting thing. 'Cause I feel like a lot of men are producers, and the women kind of do the performance aspect... So maybe the two female remixers. I don't think that was a premeditated choice at all, but I think that's interesting. I think more women should be trying things behind the mixing desk... But I think either the opening remix, or Belvin Bectum's remix of "From Whiteness" are my favorites.

LMA: I like those, but my favorite remix on this album is "Remain" by Scanner, the Scanner 90 remix. And I hear you said that it was 90 because he took 90 minutes to create this?

Piotr: Yeah. I was overjoyed that he said 'yes.' I was overjoyed, when I heard the mix. And then I was like in disbelief, when he told me 'I'm gonna call it the 90 mix 'cause it only really took me 90 minutes to do.' I think he's just been working with music for like twenty years or something, so maybe it's not such a surprise that he's so good, and can just sit down and do something so easily...

LMA: Do you feel as though that is going to become a separate single or EP?

Piotr: I'm planning on it 'cause I think Scanner and Steinbrüchel are both fairly big artists and kind of deserve to have their own platform in a way. And I think "Remain," as far as the original track goes, I just heard enough sonic variation to want to hand to these kind of sound artist guys. And since they are doing the same track, I'm kind of talking to a label, right now, and seeing if we could do a single... 'Cause I think that that should happen because they both do really good work...so I'll see what happens with that. I'd want to push it a little more.

LMA: Okay. Sounds like a good idea. Okay. Well, I'm just going to tell the feel I got from... There's three that I picked to talk a little bit more in depth. First off is the Scanner remix of "Remain"... The feeling I got was that it stayed very much true to the original "Remain," in the sense that they kept the key. It was definitely something that kept your vocals... it even added a little bit of what was in "Overtaker," with the Jacob's ladder noise, and I really liked that. And I also saw this sound. I call it the electronic maraca sound; did you feel that in there?

Piotr: Yeah... That kind of rattle-y, percussive thing. And he really just made it bigger sonically and time wise 'cause this is almost ten minute long remix version of my track.

LMA: "Remain" is actually a sort of a short song, the original one. How do feel about this remix compared to the original?

Piotr: I was really flattered... He really nailed it. And to have really captured the essence in such a short amount of time like he said he did... I just listened to that for days on end, and was just like, 'what is this?'

LMA: "Value System" was done by... Who was that done by?...

Piotr: Dendrite.

LMA: Dendrite. This is a new artist.

Piotr: ...I guess I'm a little biased because he's my boyfriend, but if I step back from it, I can see what's going on... I've known him for just under a year, but he's only really been working on sounds of his own for about three months. So this was like in the first month of him noodling around. I've had a lot of conversations with him about what should happen when you're recording and making electronic music and levels and... making sure everything's EQ-ed properly and not to have a bunch of bottom end cover everything and all those like nerdy things that you worry about when you kind of get into it. So he really did have a head start, I guess, but he really ran with it, and this is a really... It's a really varied experience, this whole remix album. And his is especially interesting 'cause it's... He's definitely got the newcomer's eyes to it, but I think I've tried to give him tips on what mistakes to avoid. 'Cause I've sure made a bunch of mistakes when I first started. So all I think you're left with is that newcomer's kind of vision into what music could be. I definitely heard his first version of this, and then gave him some pointers as to what technically could be changed, but I didn't say anything about the structure... I would tell him about the levels... So it's totally him, and it's totally beautiful.

LMA: Yeah, I really liked that one. It's probably one of my favorites. You said that he described it as something like 'Dorothy...'

Piotr: 'Dorothy on her way to Oz.'

LMA: Yes. Yes. Definitely. I saw that. I definitely saw like a hurricane kind of thing going on...

Piotr: Well, he spends a lot of time in nature, and not just hiking when it's sunny, but he spends a lot of time when it's snowing and in inclement weather, and he bikes when it's like fifty mile an hour winds, or something crazy, so I think that's definitely an influence on him.

LMA: To talk about the song just a little bit more...It had a crescendo: it went up to a crescendo, and then it went down, and it sort of faded out with the breathing it started off with in the beginning. Is that...a form that you think would be sort of [from] a newcomer? 'Cause it's very different, very distinguishable from the other songs; it stands out in its own way, in a good way.

Piotr: Yeah. I tried to polish up his edges, but I didn't tell him where his edges should stop. It's definitely different. It's a little bit freer.

LMA: Well, one of my favorites on the first album is "Flood Circuit;" I really really felt that one was one of the best, in my opinion. I wanted to see your opinion on how it was on this album compared to the first one. You said that it had a very "brittle" type of, in a good way, obviously, rhythm to it.

Piotr: Yeah. My friend in Boston did that, and he's really good at tiny noises. I don't know...it reminds me of Laurie Anderson for some reason, like it could be kind of like an old school drum pattern, throwback thing...He really took it to a different place, kind of like a blissful place, but almost like a melancholy bliss.

LMA: Yeah, I saw that. And there were some noises that you were talking about where it was definitely a little bit different with the indigenous...like you were in a jungle, or different realm, kind of world in the end.