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Interview: Derek Piotr



Derek Piotr, photo by Christiana Rifaat

[Derek Piotr](#) is a fine example of someone working and thriving in the creative life and community he's built for and around himself. Born in Poland, but currently based in West Redding, Connecticut, Derek Piotr has been releasing meticulous and singular electronic compositions for [several years](#). His work is critically acclaimed and well received in the U.S. and overseas. He regularly performs and has a strong online creative presence, yet somehow remains under the radar in his (perhaps too insulated) home state. His fifth full-length is called [Bahar](#) and was released May 5th on London label Bit-Phalanx.

The album was recorded with four woodwind players, returning Piotr to his formal, classical education, yet continues his explorations in voice and beatwork. I spoke with Derek via email and asked him a bit about *Bahar* among other topics.

Bahar means “spring”, but can also be translated from Maltese to mean “sea.” How does the title relate to the music on the record?

Bahar is an homage to a lot of things in my life, one of them my experience with woodwinds when I was younger. Woodwinds always had the sonic characteristic of new spring growth to me, the burbling sensation you get from many small plants emerging from the earth at once. I chose the word from Persian because there is some Turkish influence on this record sonically. I always seek a title with more than one meaning, all of my album titles can be translated or interpreted more than one way, so the Maltese suggestion of a large moving body of water (sea), doesn't hurt at all.

Why did you decide to work with woodwinds on this record?

I had taken clarinet when I was quite young and I have always really enjoyed the sonic characteristics of woodwinds, much more than brass or strings – winds are my favourite family of instruments. Also I felt it was time to work in a more structured way and see where that limitation took me – not only through scoring but from a technically sonic standpoint woodwinds are quite limited in a studio setting and hard to get “crazy” with when it comes to layering, chopping and editing. The arrangements on this album are pretty conservative actually.

What role does improvisation play in your music?

Generally I have a very specific goal in mind and use any means to that end, so to loosen the mould of what I'm trying to say, improvising with files is a wonderful process, and often brings you closer and more beautifully to your intention than if you had simply tried to connect all the dots A-Z to draw out what you saw in your mind. I am a firm believer in the strong psychic subconscious processes supplementing or even controlling creative output, often our subconscious mind knows better than our waking one what we want and what needs to happen. It's about trusting yourself.

What role does your voice play on this record?

For my last record, [Tempatempat](#), I treated the voice in a pretty ethereal/fragmented sense, there were a lot of vocal takes interwoven on top of each other and throughout the music, and autotune played a prominent role in some of the lead vocals on that record. For Bahar, I decided on straightforward vocal lines with very little manipulation, and, for the first time in my career, used some delay on a few vocal tracks (generally my vocals are completely dry). I also incorporated autotune into some of the backing vocals, but generally the tracks are single takes with no overdubs, which is not generally how I work.

How does living in Connecticut inform your music, if at all? Experimental music is experiencing a Renaissance in this state. Do you feel connected to “the scene?”

No, most of my musical nurturing comes either from the EU or from New York. Also quite a lot of internet collaboration, for instance I have a strong digital connection to London. I have been very fortunate to collaborate with a few musicians from Connecticut but it is generally a rare experience for me. I do however feel a tremendous surge of support from the flora and fauna here – I am currently located in a deeply wooded area and nature is endlessly inspiring and ultimately quite essential to my process and inspiration.

[Bahar is available now digitally and on CD.](#)