

Prologue

Who Am I?

Tough question, jeez. I suppose I am Robert Hamilton Tubb. You may have never heard of me. That's normal. You haven't heard of most people.

I have been a musician for 25 years, a software engineer for 8 years, a researcher for 4 years. A writer for 1 year. In other words you are about to consume the fruits of the pursuit I am *least* adept at. Good luck with that.

My musical history resembles any other perfectly normal musical freak's. I started by playing guitar in a rock band formed at my secondary school where I grew up in Selsey, Sussex UK. I then moved to London in the early 90s, where I just about caught the first (and arguably best) wave of Techno parties, which were very probably the single biggest cultural influence on my life. I then started making electronic music, because I guess I just have that personality type where I can't see something amazing being made without wanting to make it myself. I've lived in London for eighteen years or so, which was enough time such that in my mind my home town is, and may always be, London. I spent 5 years at Queen Mary University where I studied a masters DSP for music, and did a PhD doing research into synthesiser interfaces and creativity. For the last 5 years I've been developing software instruments and effects for Ableton in Berlin.

I have released four albums as a solo musician Cursor Miner. I've performed my music "all over the world" as they say... though I'm not sure what density of gigs per square mile you actually need to be able to say that, and I've only ever done one single gig on a waterborne vessel, clearly leaving at least two thirds of the Earth's surface entirely un-gigged upon. So maybe I can only say I have performed gigs "over" the world, but not "all over".

But my musical efforts are not the sum total of my cultural ambitions. I've also been an avid reader for my entire life, and I have endeavoured to learn as much as I can about my world whilst carrying on with the above activities. And not just learn - make sense of. I flatter myself that I know enough to actually write something, and have made enough sense of things that I have something useful to impart, I could be wrong.

In fact, one of the things I've learned and wish to strongly impress upon you in these pages is that almost all of us are almost always wrong about almost everything. But with the massive caveat that we are also getting less wrong over time. I know it doesn't seem like it, but we are.

I find these brute factual biographies tedious and limiting. So let's get the hell on with it, and maybe you can infer more illuminating snatches of autobiographical detail as we go.

The Album. Book. Thingy. What is this again?

My last album, *Requires Attention*, came out almost ten years ago. So you could say that this album took ten years to make. Except it obviously didn't, because in general I make lots of tracks and I make them quickly. So I was not "making an album" during this time. I was just making tracks. So this album is two thirds built from tracks that were made over ten years, plucked from a random assortment of makings. However, over the last year or so I have been making tracks *especially* for the album to give it more coherency as a whole. So many of the tracks you might have heard before, played live or up on Soundcloud, but some are new, and all have been improved by better mixing and finishing touches.

The reason I've not released an album in a decade is several-fold. The first reason is that I've been busy. "Being busy" is the absolute number one excuse isn't it? In fact, on our deathbeds, when ruing the fact that we accomplished almost nothing at all, we may console ourselves with the fact that we were "busy". Historically, the world's number one excuse used to be "God told me to do it", but in 1951 it got pipped to the top spot in the Pepsi Excuse Charts by "being busy". There's simply no come-back to this, is there? Short of following someone around 24 hours a day and keeping a timesheet of their every activity. So back the hell off, I was busy.

But really, doing a PhD and getting a "proper" job took most of my brain energy, and brain energy is an even more scarce and precious resource than time. There was no way I could have maintained my musical efforts to the level they were at previously, when I had the spectacular fortune to be able to do music full time for six years. Imagine that, eh? Seems incredible. It was, actually.

The second, and more difficult reason is the fact that I couldn't really see the point. I release a record. So what? Does anyone need it? Not really. There's at least fifty other records you could have.

A few people will buy it, but not enough to justify the effort or the materials that would go into making it. If I don't have much energy to spend on music making, I'd far rather spend that energy on the fun part, making it, than the tedious part, releasing it, or the really painful part, wondering if anyone will like it.

The third reason was that albums, to me, are things of the past. There is simply no need to make a physical thing with an hour of music on it any more. This is the reason I'm writing this stuff - to make something that isn't just an album. What is it, if it's not an album? It's a comprehensive look at my creative efforts over the last ten years, and an attempt to dump my thoughts out into the world, musical and otherwise. It is also an attempt to fix the stupidity of the world. I really didn't want it to be that last thing, but I couldn't help myself. It's not quite a Gesamtkunstwerk, but I'm working my way up to that.

The fourth and final reason is that, frankly, the last decade was not worth gracing with one of my albums. It's been the sorriest arsewipe of a decade in living history. I'm ashamed to have been a part of it. My music is just too good and too pure for the shitshow that was the Trollin' Teens, and the only thing that I feel is fit to sum up this pitiful decade is a massive fucking rant. So far, the new one isn't looking much better, but there's still 90% of it left so here's hopin'.

So that's why this is not an album... but why writing? Why not comedy? Why not needlework? Why not ringtones? Why not generative mud wrestling?

This Is Why I Write

At many times in this book I will just launch into lists. Lists are one of the plagues of contemporary times. In fact I have 10 reasons to hate lists, number 6 will SHOCK you. Nevertheless making lists is a lot easier than writing, so just lie back and acquiesce to your new Powerpoint overlord. The reasons are as follows...

Reason 1: Writing is better, for me, than talking

Music is an incredible way to communicate, isn't it? I mean just think about it for a while. Someone makes some completely abstract vibrations in the air, and then we feel

happy, or melancholy, or start jumping up and down and waving our arms in time with the vibrations. I mean, what the actual Christ?

I consider music far superior to talking. It goes deeper than words, because it touches directly the emotional and physical parts of people. Music is (or should be) an Art form, with a capital A, and therefore places some demands on Originality, with a capital O, and I find Originality important in *all* things.

Contrary to what most people seem to think, originality is not just a “nice to have”, it is essential. Communicating something everyone already knows is not communication, it’s just social grooming. The fact that a new piece of music has to say *something new* has a mitigating effect on the tendency we all have to talk in repetitive platitudes that completely lose their meaning over time. “Proper” music is original, contains new ideas, adds something to our range of experience and moves us forward as sentient beings. This is why music taste is often the best way to find out who someone *really is*.

Talking doesn’t do that. Talk is mostly just the same shit over and over.

When you talk to someone, there are quite restrictive rules on what you can and can't say. Even in the most relaxed social settings there are acceptable utterances and there are unacceptable utterances. Most people slip into these rules effortlessly and don't even notice them. I do not, however. It is a constant struggle to select “appropriate” thoughts that I can say to other people. I often find it difficult to find something to say, difficult to make myself heard, and even harder to make myself understood. With music, I can just let it all hang out as loudly as I like and it doesn't matter. In the alternative universe of music you can say and do the most outrageous things and it’s fine. Indeed, it’s sometimes even encouraged. When one is performing on stage, on a good night, you simply have a direct visceral route into people’s soul and can bypass their social brains somewhat.

To me, music means *freedom*, more than anything else.

Music is so important to me because it provides a way to socialise that doesn't involve talking. A person that is shy and awkward when in conversation can transform into the life and soul of the party when it's time to dance, play an instrument or sing. It's not that they're fundamentally shy, it isn't that they don't like to party, it isn't that they don't want to communicate and open up, it might just be that they aren't natural talkers. It is simply not their chosen medium. Some people talk-to-think and others think-to-talk, and I'm firmly in the latter camp. I have always felt that I could express

my true self way better in music than in socially situated conversation. I feel my brain just doesn't work fast enough to express my thoughts "live" in words, and isn't good enough at simulating other people's brains to adapt to them. I'll go into this challenge in more depth in the track Outsider.

However writing is *definitely* distinct from talking. I have found writing to be far more expressive. Somehow, writing feels more like making music than talking does.

Writing is slow and editable enough for me to get my thoughts in order before they get to you. And as a bonus, it is also slow and editable enough that I can even improve my own thoughts as I write! I can actually become a better thinker in the process. I like having undo, I like having rewind, and I like having delete.

The creative discipline of writing has so many stark contrasts with the process of making music, but also some interesting similarities. It has been an intriguing experience to switch from one to the other.

Writing is also structured. Thought (and talk) is not. Of course, unstructured improvisation is terrific fun. One of my favourite pastimes is daydreaming. Just letting my thoughts wander around wherever they want. If I were the CCO of a hip noughties creative company in Hoxton I would call it Brainjamming™, but I'm not, so please just forget you ever heard that word.

Sometimes Brainjamming™ daydreaming can be bad (referred to by psychologists as "ruminating"). Ruminating can be highly emotionally driven, in that the thoughts you have are simply an endless inner rant: knee jerk emotional reactions fueling repetitive, negative thoughts. Hence mindfulness meditation's emphasis on *reducing* mind-wandering. But sometimes daydreaming can be awesome: my mind feels like it's on fire and I can imagine whatever I want, free from judgement. I *love* a good stream of consciousness. I have terrible insomnia as a result... because I daydream during the night. Nightdaydreaming, if you will.

The problem with daydreaming is that it tends to be extremely unstructured, hours can go by and you have failed to have a single original or useful thought. The worst thing of all is that when you die, all those thoughts will be lost, like tears in the rain. Conversely, if you write them down, they will accumulate, like frost in the freezer. So I thought I'd publish some of my best freezer frost for you to suck down like a slurpee. *Choke Hazard*: there may be some very ancient petit pois in there.

I think the most important thing I discovered during my PhD was the value of writing to sort out my thoughts. During my doctorate many of my biggest moments of progress came as a result of insights gained via writing. The great thing about writing is that it *forces* some structure on your train of thought. If you organise a piece of writing such that it doesn't repeat anything, and builds a coherent narrative understandable by another person, then very often you find that you have created a brand new thought, or arrived at some insight that you wouldn't have done just daydreaming about the same thing. It is almost like algebra, in that just by manipulating some symbols you have arrived at a new truth derived from other truths. In contrast with daydreaming there's nothing really stopping you from thinking the same stupid thought, over and over, stuck in a rut. Daydreaming is repetitive. If I stood up and walked somewhere right now I'd literally just be mentally repeating this exact sentence over and over like a weird mundane mantra. Negative repetitive negative repetitive nititive repegative.

Writing is a great way to get out of that. So if you feel you are stuck "ruminating" over something and making no progress, I would *highly* recommend writing about it - it will change the way you think, it will move you forward, it will give you multiple new perspectives.

There is, of course, the old objection that writing about music is like "dancing about architecture". I'm naturally extremely wary of the tyranny of talk when it comes to something as mysterious and visceral as music. Indeed, for a long time I thought that it was best not to talk about music at all. Something like having a taboo against uttering the name of God, or the belief that a photograph will steal your soul¹... it was a suspicion that talking about music would "kill" it and rob it of its magical essence. I still have a lingering suspicion that when something is not talked about, and not reduced to concrete concepts and words, it acquires a kind of magical fluidity. It is as if music exists within a higher dimensional space, and words are a flattened low-dimensional version of that (see One-Dimensional Man later). I even had this theory that this ability for symbolic information to collapse musical magic was due to quantum effects, but that's another story, and an intellectually embarrassing one.

I even had this weird personal taboo against getting track IDs from DJs, not just because I know how irritating it is to get asked what you're playing when you're busy trying to play it², but also because I had often the experience that listening to that

¹ I'm still not completely convinced that photographs *don't* steal your soul. It would explain a lot.

² The only thing more annoying than this is requests. Later I will provide you DJs with a useful Track Request Form to print out and give to the audience member to fill out in this eventuality.

track again was hugely underwhelming. It was almost as though as soon as I knew the labels and words and the people involved the magic would disappear. The track, once it had been pinned down and isolated from its context in a live mix, lost something essential. The less I knew, the more I enjoyed. I made explicit efforts *not* to attempt to know too much about club music, as I did not want to break that magical seamless journey from the start of the night to the end by linking it all up with mundane things such as names, genres, labels and real, ordinary, flawed, mortal humans. The mystery, fluidity and facelessness was a crucial aspect of the experience. In those early days (circa 1993) I knew almost no one else who was into techno, and it was scarcely ever written about in the press, and I believe this really enhanced its power and its mystique.

In a similar way I wouldn't ever really try to talk about what I put into my own music, for fear that verbalising it would destroy or trivialise something important, something that was best left for people to unearth for themselves. Other people's interpretation of a piece of music can be very personal, and to tell them what they should be thinking when they listen would ruin that. Someone out there, I'd like to think, may have a really rich experience of my music, even richer than mine. Explaining in detail all the mundane crap that's in my head might actually just ruin it for them. So if you really like my music, stop reading now. If you think it sucks balls, then by all means plough on, because, hey, the only way is up, and it sounds like you could do with an education.

Reason 2: Writing Reveals Detail

I now think that I was largely mistaken to be afraid of putting music into words. The fear of talking about music might even have been some kind of cover up for my own laziness and lack of conceptual depth. Perhaps I was just afraid of being revealed as a fraud, and hence I deliberately obfuscated and mystified things? Maybe all art is obfuscation and mystification? Maybe the musical dream is itself the fraud? Maybe it's a Kumpo? We'll get back to what a Kumpo is later.

Not to worry, though. It turns out the exact opposite happens. Things get deeper and more detailed the more you look at them, and the same is true for investigating musical concepts using language, if done carefully and mindfully. Writing is not just "talk". Writing offers opportunities to carefully dissect your own thoughts and feelings and produce original perspectives. One thing that you immediately learn when you try to write about the ineffable is that the vague nebulous blob in your head that you are trying to express does not just pop and disappear - it slowly reveals more and more complexity and intrigue as you investigate it, like zooming into a fractal. As I discuss

later, investigating a mystery does not kill the mystery, it enhances it: One thing that good science communicators should do is refute the pernicious idea that probing the mysterious robs it of its wonder. The "unweaved rainbow" is not less beautiful for our understanding of optics and electromagnetic waves, instead it acquires *more* majesty (that last bit is to be re-read in Brian Cox's Mancunian accent).

Of course, it is bloody difficult to get writing right. Its easy to fuck it up and spout vacuous pretentious and cliched crap about "expression", "vibe", "connection" and "soul", just because you're heard those words before and they sound good. It is easy to get so carried away with your own splendiferous prose that the words take over and you lose any connection with the real phenomena you were trying to describe. Putting things into words is a delicate process, as words have their own rules and their own proclivities, and can take over and boss you around if you let them. I can't tell you how many micro-aggressions from words I've had to put up with in the process of writing this. In fact, I had to cancel "in fact", and "obviously" for their obviously toxic behaviour, and had to give a verbal warning to "rhythm" for its pathological spelling.

By writing, I want to uncover the assumptions I've always made about how music should be made, and what it is for. The feeling that inspires it. These assumptions we make subconsciously almost, and it's not until you *really try and describe them* that you realise you had them at all. The fact that something *is* so hard to describe, that it is so hard to translate musical thought into linguistic thought, is the very thing that makes the task worth doing. If something is hard to put into words, then you would hope that if you do succeed in avoiding empty phrases (or even finding out what those empty phrases really mean) then those words might be genuinely new and enlightening. For example, I'd like to try and go into what I think "vibe" really is. What is going on in your head when something has a "vibe"? How do you make something with "vibe"? Given something unvibey, how can you vibenate it? As far as I know no one has ever even tried to explain this, and no, "just sample some Jazz" is *not* the correct answer.

Mental states can be extremely slippery and nebulous - to the extent that we might not really think they are real at all. If you can somehow give voice to them and describe them, then you have made them more real and solid somehow, and I think this is really important if they are under existential threat. And I do believe that

artistic experience is under threat, I think we in the 21st century are in danger of losing something important, and that too we will get into later³.

Music seems such an unnecessary thing to try to do, that I really wanted to find out why I do it. I sometimes struggle to justify to myself why I have poured so much effort into something for so little tangible reward. I want to describe how it makes me feel, and what I'm trying to achieve. Music is more than just showing off, more than just noodling around with fancy gizmos, more than just hedonism, more than just passing trends, more than just tribalism, more than just mood-setting background decoration. I want to try and find out what that "more" is and set it down before I forget. Because I am forgetting, because I'm getting old, the clock is ticking, and I feel that I'm losing some kind of connection with the way I felt about music when I was young. I'm way less involved that I used to be, for a bunch of reasons. Maybe I feel the need for a "parting shot" whilst I still have any creative juice left in me.

Reason 3: Writing Provides A Narrative

Quality writing is one of the myriad things that has been sucked out of music in the 21st century.

When I first got into music, the first encounter with a new album was through magazine reviews, and therefore writing was often the means by which music made its way to my ears. Music spread throughout culture via radio, but also by piggybacking on writing. But that was then, this is now.

You could now think that writing about or describing music is unnecessary. We have Spotify and YouTube and can hear anything we like without having to read about it first. Music does not need to be described when it can all be heard, right? So not only are you dancing about architecture, you're also doing an old fashioned dance about demolished architecture.

Why do I need to write anything, when you can just listen to this stuff and make up your own mind?

Being obsolete, writing about music has become a shadow of its former self.

Journalism now seems to be little more than recycled press releases. When my second

³ Every non-fiction book nowadays needs a "threat" or a "why everything's going wrong" in order to engage people's attention. The "crisis in inspiration" will be mine. Ideally, I'd re-frame the whole thing to play that aspect up, but I'm not selling anything and I can't be arsed.

album came out I was a bit shocked when my label and I offhandedly came up with a press release attempting to describe my music ("Syd Barrett with a broken beatbox" for the first album I think) and this started turning up in every piece of text everywhere, including so called "reviews". Clearly people were too lazy to actually listen to the music, use their minds a bit, and come up with their own description. Only one single writer critiqued the description, stating that the Syd comparison was misleading in that the music didn't really come close to recalling the fractured beauty of a song like "Opel". This was absolutely spot on, and a rare piece of actual information rather than just an echo of my own warped self-image.

In the end I got so sick of doing my own press and writing my own biography that I just made them as goofy as possible, doing vaguely Pythonesque parodies of daytime TV adverts. Which worked well enough for the more "novelty song" side of my work but cheapens the more serious stuff. Ideally the record label would have enough understanding of the artists that they could be the one to produce a more objective description of the music, but clearly they're still biased, really shouldn't it be the job of independent "music writers"? Shouldn't someone, somewhere have something resembling an informed unbiased opinion? Anyone? Hello, hello, hello...

Music should be a dialog between performer, audience and wider culture, but now it's more like an unconnected horde of musicians radiating their own self-image into the void. It doesn't get better for famous musicians either, as their image is largely determined by their marketing, not by their audience.

The digitisation of information has probably hit journalism hardest of all, as text is now super cheap, so it probably isn't the fault of journalists, any more than the terrible state of modern popular music is the fault of musicians. Ultimately it was the fault of naive techno-optimists (like I used to be) who assumed that making everything free would make it better. We'll get back to that sorry tale in "Information Addict".

One of the most valuable things that goes missing when journalists go AWOL is a larger sense of the narrative arc of culture. It's ironic that the more people in the liberal arts blather on about "narrative" the less there seems to be one. The state of music now is that everything is out there, every style and sub-sub-genre you could wish for, all these scenes running along, sustaining themselves, largely independent of one another, and largely unnoticed by the mainstream, and possessing no coherent

mythology or unifying history. The sense that everything ties into a culture that was "what it is like to be in the 2010s" was absent⁴.

What I wonder about is whether the lack of coherent forward momentum and the lack of decent writing are related. Maybe we have to actually write and publish our ideas about music to really start a conversation we can learn from and build on? Without someone to describe the zeitgeist, is there a zeitgeist at all? Don't we have to deliberately construct and disseminate our own Zeitgeist as part of our art? Maybe we need writers creating a story around what we do, even if it is romanticised and inaccurate? Is it actually the romanticisation that's missing? Is the fact we're all trying to run away from trends a trend that is prematurely aborting all our trends? Are we all just too darn cynical and objective, and what we really need to be doing is constructing a crazy dream? Have we somehow lost our ability to dream crazily? Or, maybe this atomisation is fine - is a diverse bunch of disconnected scenes better than a universal hegemonic narrative?

Whether this fracturing of the narrative is good or bad, one thing is that it has become very hard to engage with anything new, because there is no one to hold your hand through those difficult initial stages where you don't understand something. The first time I heard electronic dance music I thought it sucked. It sounded lifeless and, quite frankly, utterly trivial⁵. But people persisted, I heard about amazing parties happening, people kept playing me stuff, I tried *actually going* to a club night, dancing for ten hours and then Bing! The rave-bulb illuminated, and I got it. I got it like a motherfucker.

If there's no one to describe what's good about a new and different sounding piece of music, you can often be left floundering and give up on it. Without some cultural context, music is just sound. You don't always need some deeper understanding to enjoy listening, but it really does help. I do enjoy reading about geeky details of the making of music. I strangely *enjoy* listening to some puffed up talking head pontificating about their rose-tinted, unsubstantiated, cultural analysis of some musician's random outpourings. Watching a documentary about the recording of an album will immediately make me want to go and listen to that album, listening to it with fresh ears and with my new level of understanding. It frustrates me that many

⁴ I can listen to a pop song from the 60's I've never heard before and can guess the year to within 1 or 2 years. With contemporary music I'd be struggling to do that within a decade or more. Though I admit I may just be out of touch. Frankly, I definitely *am* out of touch, but am trying to justify that fact.

⁵ Not strictly true of course, I think I remember being really into Pump Up The Volume when I was 14, and of course the hip hop we were into at that age was electronically produced, and I loved Kraftwerk's The Model when I was 7... oh and War of the Worlds... etc. etc. I have always loved electronic music.

musicians whose music I would love to understand more simply never communicated what was in their heads, or never had a journalist of any worth attempt to document their work. So in that spirit I attempted to document this album...

Given that I cannot really expect journalists to create a narrative around my music, given that I never get interviews in magazines, given that magazines barely exist anymore, and given that I don't spend a lot of time talking about my music to other people in person, the only thing that remains is to write. Sad, isn't it.

Reason 4: Writing As A Promotional Tool

Like any self respecting humble British underground musician, I spent most of my career considering self promotion to be the pus of Satan's arseboils, and have studiously avoided it. Like any self respecting humble British underground musician, I was almost completely wrong. If you make good music, then it is your duty to promote yourself. I mean, isn't it? Do you think what you make is worth listening to or not? If it is, then promote it, if not, stop making it.

It is your duty to communicate to the outside world what you are doing, and why it is good. How else will they find out? I spent most of my life considering myself "above" marketing. But frankly this was because I was snobbish, lazy and negligent. There is some virtue in being obscure, but it is surely outweighed by the virtue of inspiring larger numbers of people.

The primary danger you sense here, what you really fear, is not that marketing will ruin your music, it is being thought of as an asshole. This is the biggest fear that self-effacing nice people have, and clearly it holds them back in many situations. What you are actually doing when avoiding doing "nasty" things like self promotion is placing your own *social* standing above your *artistic* standing. Which is fine, but don't then whinge about how the world is ignoring you, because it was your own lifestyle preferences and moral priorities that gave rise to that situation. And don't claim that you're not being egotistical, because trying to appear "a nice person" is quite often a strategy to protect your own ego from the worst thing that could ever happen to it, which is shame.

There are indeed skills you can acquire that enable you to promote yourself without coming across as a cock, but they are actually tricky, subtle skills, and if you lack those skills then you'll fuck it up. The more time you spend running away from self-promotion the less of those skills you will acquire, and the worse you will screw it

up when you eventually try. Spoiler: I lack those skills, so I will fuck it up spectacularly right here in front of your eyes. It's gonna be fun.

So this an honest disclaimer, this writing is also an attempt to promote my own music, but in a more deep and considered way than just sending out spam, making promo videos, name-dropping or remix blagging.

To be honest, time and time again I have worried about what I'm writing here, worried about what people will think. I'm worried that you will read my self-indulgent waffle about my own crappy ideas, and see me as an arrogant self-aggrandising pretentious wanker. Well, if that happens you can always just stop reading I guess. Tell me to my face that it was shit. I don't mind⁶, I'm old enough and over the hill enough not to care⁷. To me the risk of appearing a conceited tosspot is less than the risk of having dedicated thirty years of my life to making stuff that no one gives a shit about.

Worse still, even if I faithfully describe my innermost creative machinations, we might find that what I put into my music is just so much cliched amateurish bollocks. I might, in the course of these articles, reveal myself to be a musical charlatan and a paltry pseud of the first order, destroying once and for all the meagre reputation I have spent twenty hard years scratching together from the dust and detritus of our ruined, decadent culture. The risk is there. But let's face it, if that's the case we might as well find out sooner rather than later.

Whilst the revelation that one sucks as an artist would be terribly painful, possibly even more painful than finding out that one sucks as a human being, it's also hugely important if one cares about *truth*. I mean, the reality of the situation does actually matter. Quite a lot. Doesn't it? If my thought processes on an average day are bollocks, I want to know about it, and I think you should know about it too, because you probably have some of the same bollocks in your head as me. Through this vexatious ordeal we might even discover ways to have better thoughts and make better music. That might be the best outcome of all.

So yes, in these articles it will appear that I'm totally up my own arse. I will say pretentious elitist things, I will describe to you how brilliant my creations are in insufferably tedious detail, I will be incomprehensibly abstract, I will tell tales of my achievements that not even a fourteen year old living in Bognor in the 1980's would be impressed by. I will puff my music up way beyond its puffability. That's part of the

⁶ I do mind.

⁷ I do care.

game I'm playing here, getting past my own humility in the name of something more fundamental. And if I am revealed as an unfunny and unfamous combination of Alan Partridge and David Brent in the process, then so be it. And that's even before we get on to Mike's contributions... Lordy.

I don't feel I've been a very good advocate for myself, or my scene, or my beliefs over the years. This is something I am slightly ashamed of. I'm hoping this will be the moment where I stand up and say my piece. Or at least practise saying my piece. Maybe this is going to be the bit in the cheesy eighties Hollywood movie where the shy kid who got kicked around for the first half of the film suddenly realises their superpower, kicks the bully in the balls, and launches into their grand speech. Or more likely it turns out *I'm* the bully, and I finally get kicked in the balls myself. Anyway, it's definitely going to be *that* bit.

This doesn't mean I'm not terrified of "letting this stuff out" though. It is one thing to say something dodgy and put a dampener on a night at the pub. It's another to write something down and have it accidentally go viral and end up the centre of a global twitter storm. Internet hate-fests are no joke, they do actually ruin lives. I'm one hundred percent certain that I would not be able to cope. The only people who can cope well with that kind of thing are sociopaths, which uncoincidentally is why they currently run the world (of which more later in Winston Churchill). I'm hoping that my near total obscurity will protect me from such a nightmare scenario, but you never know... It can even happen to completely normal people who just happen accidentally to press on social media's raw nerve, and Foom! It blows up, and a gushing torrent of vitriolic human bile becomes the defining moment of their lives. Their 15 minutes of fame were spent being torn limb from misrepresented limb, a helpless scapegoat for a digitally disembodied frenzied mob of reptilian furies. From what I hear it's no joke. And this stuff *will* hit a raw nerve, because it's impossible to write about music, creativity and culture without hitting on some stuff that will be deeply sensitive. As a small taster, we will somehow get into: mental health, elitism, political correctness, death, climate change, the second world war, gender differences, capitalism, social media, disability, overpopulation, inequality, pornography, religion, space exploration, AI... it's all interlinked, so be prepared.

This half-baked shit I write here will never go away. In ten years, someone could unearth this stuff, deem it unacceptable, and then I'd possibly lose my job, my friends, my self confidence, my sanity. Even writing this now makes me want to go over everything again and censor it. Or even give up entirely and just keep it safe on my

hard drive. How much easier that would be... Which is a worrying place for our public sphere to be, isn't it?

What I'm hoping is that this is such a long and impenetrable mass of text that no one who spends their time hurling misinformed abuse on Twitter will ever have the attention span to read it. If you've made it this far without checking your phone, congratulations, you are already one of the chosen ones! You have already read exactly 153 times the character limit on Twitter, and we haven't even started yet. Welcome to the inner circle, initiate!

Reason 5: Hearing Loss, Mental Health

Another reason that I'd like to start writing is that I'm losing my hearing. Yeah, shit one. Music... kinda needs hearing, right? That's what I heard.

This is partly just bad genetic luck (my hearing tests were poor when I was a kid), but mostly just my own stupid fucking fault for not looking after my ears properly. These days, a day in the studio will give me incredibly annoying tinnitus for about a week afterwards, and I worry that it's destroying my hearing further, so I have to keep it to a minimum. It also means that I'm extremely wary of doing too many gigs. I've been doing two or three per year and that feels about right⁸. For a week after the gig I will have problems hearing what people are saying. I now have to wear hearing aids, and ageing being what it is, it's not going to get any better... barring some medical miracle involving bluetooth enabled stem cells from naked mole-rat embryos.

However I still have a strong inner desire to make weird things, to explore some kind of artform, to splurge the contents of my brain on to some kind of persistent medium that complete strangers can pick up and boggle at. I will find a way to express myself regardless! And these pieces of writing are an experiment in a different realm - one that doesn't require ears. If only I could find one that doesn't require computers I would be a happy man indeed...

So there's my aural health, and there's also my mental health. "They" often recommend that people with mental health issues journal about their mental states for therapeutic reasons. Though I'm not sure we crazies should trust "them", "they" being controlled by triangle aliens, who come from an alternate timeline where the dinosaurs never went extinct and evolved into evil multiverse-hopping psychiatrists.

⁸ How funny these pre-corona sentences appear now!

But anyway mental health journaling is a thing now. So maybe I'll try that. I'm pretty stable in general, but I've had my, yuh, "peculiar episodes" lets say, and I thought it might be good to write about this to be honest with myself and you, and possibly help others who felt similarly. You, dear reader, being another human being (I assume the triangles are too busy to read this), have surely also experienced bizarre and difficult states of mind. So have I, so let's take a look. It is increasingly acknowledged that the music industry is quite a terrible environment for people's mental health - so let's take a look at that too.

When I talk about mental health, I try not to take the usual tone. This is the tone of some kind of limp AA support session where people are very candid and honest and understanding, tolerant, detached, down to earth... and fake. This would not do my particular brain any justice. This careful respectful tone is not what my music does, so this isn't going to be what my writing does. I wanted to stay faithful to my crazy self, to all our crazy selves. And that means *not* treating it as an illness, or the defining aspect of my identity, or a golden ticket issued by Willy Woke-a to join the hallowed ranks of The Oppressed, or something I can't do anything about. Treating it, as Greta terms it, as a superpower. In the song The Chairman I'll go into the upsides and downsides of this superpower.

Reason 6: Teaching

I'm quite interested in teaching. Having a parent who was a teacher makes you never want to become a teacher in a million years, Jesus no! Yet of course I have an immense respect for people who can do it. I've learned a few bits and bobs over the years and thought it might be helpful to set those bits and bobs down.

What's not happening here is the "production masterclass from someone who's successful" thing. I haven't been particularly successful for a start, and I'm not coming at this from any position of authority. There's not much here about the technical details about what equipment I have used or what I set my compressor to or any gear-nerd stuff like that - I find that 99% of talk about electronic music is on this techy side of things and its a bit fucking dull. Really. There's a million Youtube videos that will tell you how to use your DAW or how to make wobble bass, or comparing 28 different brands of XLR cable, so I won't bother with that crap. Indeed in I Fuck Like A Robot we'll finally stick a dagger into our inane obsession with GEAR once and for all⁹.

⁹ Of course not. I bloody love gear. You know that right?

Tech is just a means to an end, and what I'm more interested in is this "end" - why are we doing this? What makes a good track? What are we trying to say with this shit? Why does dancing in a club make me feel ecstatic? Why is this pointless frittering of time we call music so bloody awesome?

Similarly, this is not a "friendly accessible guide to getting started with..." it's more of a "Spiky awkward guide to transcending the everyday inanity of...". I imagine a few people will find it offensive. So I'm not holding out to be hired to do any workshops. I guess I should say now the viewpoints expressed in this book are definitely not those of my erstwhile employer. Boy, are they not, but that's fine with me and I hope it's fine with them.

I think education is another thing that the lack of good writing deprives us of - a way for the less experienced to learn something really *fundamental* from the experienced. If no one ever writes their deepest experiences down then we might lose ideas completely, or end up making the same mistakes over and over again. So here preserved for posterity are some of my greatest, dumbest mistakes, hopefully someone can learn something from them.

Why should you listen to me? Why shouldn't you listen to a musician who has actually, like, sold some albums or been on TV or something?

Actually, advice from famous people isn't terribly worthwhile, I mean, all that happened to them was that they A: did things right and B: got lucky. They have no useful information to impart. For every success there are a thousand failures, and a great deal of the information about the *difference* between failure and success will be encoded in the failures¹⁰. What's probably more useful for those starting out is what NOT to do, and this is something that people who've fucked things up are well placed to provide. So, I've done enough good stuff for long enough to know what I'm talking about, but I've fucked enough stuff up to not be a meaningless outlier - I'm not so successful that selection bias renders everything I say meaningless.

If you are an aspiring musician, given the 999/1000 chance you won't be successful, maybe the most important skill to learn first is, in fact, dealing with what others consider as "failure": being able to cope with being 100% committed to working on something that no one else values, pouring heart and soul into a superbly crafted masterpiece and then being faced with dunderheaded indifference. Dealing with the

¹⁰See Nassim Taleb's [Fooled by Randomness](#)

psychological cost of these things is significant, especially for solo musicians. And for those of you who do still believe in The Myth of Success (AKA the American Dream), I will have something to say about that too.

In addition I feel I have something to say here that is different from other "full time" musicians. I have studied the cognitive science of creativity for my PhD, so I know something about both how it works "from the inside" and also something about the science of creativity observed "from the outside". I'm hoping that a combination of my experiences and my research, the subjective and objective, will offer you, dear reader, something unique and valuable.

Teaching is one of the hardest things in the world, because it's really difficult to put your brain in someone else's shoes. I mean it's even hard to put your brain in your *own* shoes, right? There's two shoes, for a start, so you have to kind of squish in the lobes like... anyway, someone who doesn't have your experience will not have the context you do, so almost every sentence you utter will assume that the reader knows everything you do. In particular when it comes to music, much of your knowledge is implicit and very much *subconscious*. It can be impossible to transmit that from one conscious mind to another. So here I have taken the basic approach that I can, more or less, remember what I didn't know when I was eighteen years old, and I can give my younger self advice without fear of being too patronising, too preachy or too assuming too much background knowledge. This also has the side benefit of me being able to lay into my eighteen year old self as a thinly veiled excuse to berate snowflakey millennials and the lamer Gen-Z "kids of today".

Now, you probably know way more than I did at eighteen, so I'll try to keep things brief. One thing my eighteen year old self believed very firmly was that taking advice from other people was a waste of time, and I still think that's a good artistic starting point.

Reason 7: Politics, The Future of Everything e.t.c.

And my final reason to write is POLITICS. Oh god, no. But yes. I feel it is necessary. Everything appears to be fucking up, and I feel the need to vent, to rant, to spew, to do something, to fix shit, even if that is just try and write a few fucked up articles no one will ever read. To be honest, music right now maybe isn't the most important thing. Ensuring the future of our biosphere and sustaining a rational, enlightened, liberal, civilization are now the most important thing. My eighteen year old self would say that music is *absolutely the best* way of doing this, but now I'm really not so sure. That

attitude reeks of cop out. It stinks of “I like doing this thing, therefore this thing is the solution to all our problems”. Maybe that attitude *is* the problem.

I want to dig into some of these assumptions, should we really be making yet more acid bangers, or should we be protesting on the streets or getting involved in local politics? Should we care more? Should we care *less* but *think* more? Should we think less and *act* more? Or is our feeling that everything is fucking up actually an illusion caused by being us being constantly jacked in and jacked up on hysterical clickbait? I don't know and I want to try and find out.

Rather than post nano-rants on Facebook or Twitter, I have focussed my thoughts in a longer form here. Because, obviously, posting shit on social media is part of the problem, rather than part of the solution.

In order to do this, I felt the need to create a pen name. This is to clearly demarcate the stuff that I think I think, from the stuff I think I don't think, but have none the less thought. So I often introduce a special guest, Mike Stahlmann, who himself goes under the pen-name Mike Trollfield. I warn you now that you will probably not like some of what you hear from Mike. This is one hundred percent deliberate (on his part, not mine). I struggled with a few demons, and in many places I've tried to argue for what I have always considered The Enemy™. I've tried to do it in a mature and compassionate way, but some of it does not tow the party line, I'm sorry. There are three reasons that it has come to that, number two will shock you:

- 1: If something is being done wrong or stupidly, or someone says something I don't agree with, I usually just stay quiet, being an agreeable, conflict avoiding person. If doing this thing wrong will fuck up everything I love about living on our planet, then I get angry and I feel the need to speak up, but I don't. So here it is in writing.

I often disagree with what's being said in social situations, but I don't want to bum everyone out by saying something unpleasant. A middle-class Englishman's idea of hell is "causing a frightful scene", so I will do almost any cowardly, weasel-like thing to avoid it. I don't trust my conversational abilities enough not to say something really genuinely stupid and offensive so I've tried to say it all here, carefully and thoughtfully, in writing. So naturally, the most controversial of my thoughts have ended up here. I have surely failed to be careful and thoughtful in places, and I'm bound to be absolutely bone-headedly wrong very often, but I'm willing to continue the debate if so. But I'm *not* willing to continue the debate in the comments section. So there will be no comments section, there will be no share button, I will not argue with

you on Twitter, none of that inane corrosive bullshit. If you want to discuss any of this stuff with me that's great - send me a carefully thought out email, or better still let's go to the pub and discuss things like reasonable human beings. Or let's have a fight in a river.

2: Critiquing the "enemies", as in Neoliberalism, the Alt-Right or the Far-Right, is quite easy. We've been doing it for our entire lives and it doesn't seem to be having any effect, or rather it *is* having an effect but that effect is "shit-show". I could critique the Right in a single paragraph. Or even two words: "Stupid" and "Cunts". My work is done here. On the other hand, given where we are now, I think it's safe to say that whatever we on "The Left" have been doing for the past twenty years, we should probably just stop. Really. It's failed. It's over. We need a rethink. This is my attempt at a rethink.

In the process I have attempted to go over to the other side of the fence and take the view from there. I believe this "steel-manning" is necessary to rebuild a sane public dialogue. The standard narrative on the Left is that we are somehow losing because of a rejuvenated right. This is only part of the picture, the other part is that we are repeatedly, idiotically smacking ourselves over the head with a massive ideological saucepan, and the right are merely capitalising on our self harm.

3: Most of the people reading this I assume will be either friends of mine, or part of a similar scene. You're in my echo chamber, and you're all people in the same cultural ballpark. You know who you are, you're liberal music types, you already know exactly what's wrong with right wing politics. But we might need a few wake up calls about our own.

I'll spend a significant number words criticising what I believe is the lazy consensus amongst my own "tribe", but that doesn't mean I've red-pilled¹¹ over to the dark side or anything. You'll find plenty of pie-in-the-sky Utopio-Marxist pipedreams to keep you happy enough as we go along. It is important to bear in mind that everything I argue *against* here is stuff that I have at some point genuinely believed myself. So if I do sound insulting it is literally just one half of my brain (spoiler: the classical rationalist liberal half) insulting the other half (spoiler: the woke cultural-relativist liberal half).

So you might hate it, and if you do I sincerely apologise. But if you are determined to find anything disagreeable unthinkable, then you have already irrevocably closed

¹¹ I have purple-pilled though. I'll explain what all this means later.

your mind, i.e. *you* are the bigot¹². Learning is about encountering new perspectives, alternative viewpoints, surprising arguments that defy intuition... If you aren't up for that you'd better stop reading. We shall go into detail about the information dynamics of echo chambers, and how you should respond, in the songs "It's A Win For The Stupid" and "Information Addict". But suffice it to say what culture warriors have forgotten is that culture shouldn't be a war, and in particular, it's not a war between good and evil people. There are no defectors or traitors, there is no territory, there is no final victory, there are no uniforms or flags, there is only a marketplace, or rather a teeming ecosystem of ideas. Some of those ideas are great and some are terrible. It's time to call out those ideas in our tribe that are terrible, as they weaken us horribly, and leave an open goal for the real opponents of an open society.

As much as it might occasionally seem the opposite here, I don't really have opinions. I have thoughts, and some of those thoughts seem more persuasive to me than others. I believe that opinions are where thought processes go to die. Many thoughts I have are such utter bollocks that it would be humiliating to ever reveal them, they pop up saying "hey look at me, I'm *true!*" and within an instant I discern that they are complete toss. I believe that your brain, and everyone else's brains, are exactly the same as mine in this regard, and yet for some reason we feel we must present a perfectly edited version of our thoughts to everyone else, and pretend that our current opinions are the final ultimate word, and will be right and good for ever and ever. Amen. This isn't anything like how human cognition actually operates, and it isn't how we move the discussion forward either. So maybe it's time to let that nonsensical facade fall away.

The aim of all this should be to have *better* thoughts, to constantly improve, not to settle on some final conclusion and defend it to the death. Hopefully I will mostly manage to write in a style that remains more of a show-not-tell fashion. I know I'll fail. In fact, I deliberately created Mike in order to give myself an excuse to fail. But I've tried every trick in the book. Well, I've tried every trick in *this* book, that's for sure.

To be honest it was a constant effort to prevent this all turning into a massive rant about Brexit, so I've restricted that to a single song (It's a Win for the Stupid) and actually I've mentioned the B-word astoundingly seldom, because obviously Brexit is a symptom of something deeper, and it would be best to start attacking that root cause, rather than spending the rest of our lives in a constant state of Brexistential despair. Also, obviously most of this was written before the current pandemic took hold, so

¹² Check the dictionary - are you misusing that word to apply only to the baddies, and hence conforming exactly to that very definition?

you'll find I mention the C-word very little too. But then, we're all either sick of it, or sick from it, by now so hopefully that'll come as a relief.

I've also tried to *restrict* the amount of text written in an insulting tone. I don't think insults have any positive effect at all in an information based culture, they evolved to be effective in a face-to-face culture... On the other hand... insults are temptingly succulent and wickedly fun to write, and it is almost impossible to make things funny enough to avoid being insufferably dull without insulting someone. So I have thrown some shade here and there, but this is restricted to a few choice locations and should be obviously jocular and less sober than when I am writing more considered prose. Hopefully you know when not to take it too seriously. Like a coward, I have outsourced most of the dirty business of insulting people to Mike, in order to make this distinction clearer¹³.

Ironically, in trying to write about musical creativity, I have not actually been particularly creative. I've kept the language far more straight-laced than I would ever keep my music. I've tried to be direct, honest and no frills rather than innovative and exciting. This disappoints me somewhat, as I would love trying to write more imaginatively, but maybe that can come later. As with any creative endeavour, you have to master the basics first.

Reason 8: I Actually Enjoy It

This has been super fun. I had always heard that writing was miserable, difficult and required self discipline and routine and shit. Turns out it's fun, inspiring and addictive. I had a blast¹⁴!

What is the “Inspiracy Theory”?

Mike Trollfield explains:

The rules of writing or presenting stuff say that you need a summary of the entire thesis of the book right up front, preferably on the cover. Fuck that. I'm sorry. You're just gonna have to work through this on your own. If you want to find out what I'm talking about, then you're just going to have to get through the whole lot. I'm not going to make it easy for you (and hard for me) by explaining it all in a single sentence. I'm

¹³ Though in traditional Cursor Miner fashion, these convenient demarcations between various pseudonyms, personalities and ideologies will get increasingly ambiguous, confusing and challenging as the album proceeds.

¹⁴ Foolish words: you've not finished it yet!

fucking sick of this culture that says everything has to be bite sized, snappy, digestible, summarisable, shareable, memeable. Go stick it.

That's not to say that books are allowed to be a mess of incoherent ramblings. The Inspiracy Theory is ingeniously encoded into each one of the words here. Your job is to decode it. Is that so hard?

So, Here We Go!

Thanks Mike. I can hear the appetites whetting from here.

So for each track there will be some or all of the following:

1 Some details about the development of musical ideas that went into the track - a document of the creative process if you like.

2 The meaning behind the lyrics, a deeper dig into the concepts and issues brought up by the lyrics.

3 Some musical/artistic advice, based on my creative experiences and research. This will be less about tech (least important, easy to talk about, simplest to find on the internet) and more about the creative journey of the artistic soul (the most important thing, the most difficult to talk about, largely absent from the internet).

4 A more freeform tangential essay or rant loosely related to the ideas in the track. Once I started, I couldn't stop, so these tended to make up the bulk of the content.

5 A bunch of shocking and offensive dog whistling from Mike. Mike will tend to make up the bulk of the content if you let him, so I didn't. Or did I?

I hope you will find all this gunk interesting. Maybe there's one or two new thoughts in there which might make you think differently about something. Maybe you'll recognise a slice of your own world in some of my intimate admissions, or maybe you'll just be horrified. Maybe you'll unfriend me, maybe you'll fall asleep, maybe you'll become perfectly enlightened and at one with the infinite void, maybe this will precipitate some neuronal glitch and erase your memory of me entirely, maybe you'll feel empowered to write your own book that will be far better than this, maybe you'll look never at arachnids the same way again, maybe you'll just be sad, confused and

lost, maybe you'll even chuckle to yourself a couple of times, maybe you'll even *actually listen* to the accompanying music. Wouldn't that be a turn up for the books¹⁵. Good luck!

¹⁵ Or a turn up for the album-books, or whatever the hell this is.