

The Spirit of Gravity 2001 to

Beyond the experimental: on experiential music

Since its inception in 2001, the Spirit of Gravity has based its activities on a considered, theoretical approach to music and performance, as encapsulated in the concept of Experiential music. Indeed, the formation of this concept, which was based on accident through a typographical error in marketing material, supports the methodology in practice.

Experiential music takes on the practices and values of the experimental and avant garde as the basic principles and techniques of a new aesthetic synthesis, combined with the dynamics of rock and electronic music to produce a total experience for the audience. The experimental techniques challenge while the dynamics stimulate.

A variety of experimental techniques are utilised, with a spirit of exploration and some anticipation of an unforeseen outcome, in the best tradition of avant garde practice. Form is examined in the modernist tradition, with an autonomous value placed in the outcome itself. This approach seeks to pursue an investigation of the structure and sound of music in the hope of the discovery of new forms and combinations.

This journey of discovery is manifested in the use of non-traditional instrumentation, non-musical sounds, random and chance combinations, improvisation and sound manipulation. This methodology builds on the discoveries of precursors from the Futurists to Cage to contemporary practitioners, but it is not a dry academic exercise leading to a solipsistic conclusion, with the logical outcome silence or a single unwavering tone reaching into infinity. Arguably, the post-modern paradigm applies, re-combining existing forms with an emphasis on performance.

Experiential music takes on all of these concepts as the basic building blocks of practice. Breaking and subverting existing forms, using chance and improvisation, pushing the boundaries and combining forms are common techniques used, but not as an end in themselves. Filtered through some of the more extreme dynamics available from rock and electronic music, linked with text / voices and visuals, both film and live generated visuals to create a total art form which focuses on the experience of the audience.

This concept is driven forward by an enthusiasm for new technology, but only with respect to the opportunities that this gives for the manipulation of audio signals, the use of non-musical sounds and the application of chance and spontaneous generation of sound through live performance. The same principles apply to the generation of live images, as a contribution to the total experience in itself, but also to avoid the sterile experience of laptop performance.

This is supported by the environment and atmosphere in which performances take place – this is intimate, inviting, involving and all-encompassing. The venue is small, the atmosphere friendly and accommodating, the performance breaks out from the stage and involves the spectator, and the visuals surround the audience in a way that supports and is generated from the music rather than providing a sensory adjunct.

Culturally, experiential music places itself firmly in opposition to the commercial motivations of most mainstream musical expressions, albeit while retaining a principle of entertainment. However, the impact of experiential music manifests itself by challenging the audience rather than comforting, with a view to subverting, rather than meeting, expectation. It also works on the spectator in a physical manner, through dynamics, noise and volume, producing direct effects within the brain and nervous system. There is never an option to receive without engagement, it will never be a backdrop to unthinking social interaction.

Socially, the structure of the Spirit of Gravity runs counter to cultural norms based on commercial value. Organised collectively, the Spirit of Gravity seeks no financial gain, allowing decisions to be made on the aesthetic principle only, no compromise is made to achieve profitability. The experience is paramount.

Tony Rimbaud: Brighton 2010/11