



DOME CITY

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As the sequel to Miles From Mars, Dome City is a dark sonic theatrical piece, loosely based on the idea of a domed utopia on terra-formed Mars, replete with the funky artsy futurist-liberals the Dada people (like the “Mods” from the 60s), readymade mechanical brides and a space-jazz bar called “The Plastic Alto”. The Dome is seen as a protective shell, hermetically sealed from corruption and moral decay, but ultimately is transformed into a world where utopian visions coexist with dystopian realities.

To explain *how* one does something is to explain *why* something is done. There are some artists that feel that the minutiae of how something is built is not necessary for one to fully appreciate a piece of art. Both approaches are valid.

One of my favorite sayings is “ambiguity is the most interesting thing in art”. However there are times when background information from artists informs the audience. We live in an age where we expect context, because it is ubiquitous and so easy to generate in mass quantities. In order to prove a position we provide facts and context to make the premise more salient. The same can be done in art, if it enhances the understanding of it.

What I Was Thinking

The more I work with video, the more I have seen the connection between film editing and music mixing. In film editing one tries to create a sense of space by placing various sounds in context with a visual action. Typically the sound editing comes at the end of the production, but in this case the sound editing suggests an action. I mixed the music in such a way that while one is listening to the music with an iPod in noisy urban areas, the music will blend in with the environment. I have intentionally includes things like sirens, Doppler effects, and electronic bleeps, all of which are part of the noise floor of a cityscape.

Process

Over the years I have employed various compositional devices and processes to build compositions. (This makes perfect sense given that one of my first career aspirations was to be an architect.) Seed ideas are crucial to make anything, and classical composers did it with cells, motifs and subfigurations. I do it with compositional strategies, “atmosphere generations” and putting my guitars and basses in altered tunings.

The composition strategies were designed while I was a composition student in the 80s. They are somewhat like tarot cards with 12 “suits.” (You can read more about the cards here). I random shuffle them and devise “recipes” which I use to write songs. “Unusable Signals” was written from a recipe. (See below)

The Tracks

[LaGrange Point](#)

The string tremulants give a sense of motion, with French Horn swells placed a minor second above, giving a sense of drama and foreboding. As film music, it could be used in a penultimate scene to a battle of some kind. Here, it gives one the sense of being in a large cavernous space.

[Imitation Man](#)

While not hanging too close to the Mission Impossible theme cliché, I wanted to compose something with some orchestral muscularity without being orchestral in the classical sense. The melodic and harmonic dissonances are part of its intentional architecture, suggesting visual metaphor: a flashing red warning light, steam rising from below, shadowy characters lurking around corners.

[The Large Glass](#)

(a/k/a The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even) this piece is based on an artwork with the same title by Dadaist Marcel Duchamp, done in 1913. Given that this entire album is an invented world, I thought that this is almost parallel to what the Dadaists (or at least DuChamp) were doing in the early 20th Century, i.e. redefining art by placing emphasis on the “fourth dimension” or the outside elements of art, not in the craft of art. Whereas Duchamp was working from the idea of an invented bride, I am working from the idea of the same invented robotic bride, imbued with machine intelligence—a new human being.

[The Dada People](#)

Started as a funky bass groove using the alternate tuning Eb-A-C-F#, this is also inspired by Duchamp. Dada profoundly addressed the philosophical projections or shadows that art casts on our sense of reality, done in a whimsical or farcical way.

[Unusable Signals](#)

Composed with the Strategy Cards using the following “recipe”:

Abstraction	Space
Arrangement	Fade Outro
Harmony	All Minor Chords
Key	A-flat major/F minor
Melody	Sour
Meter	3/4
Mood	Moody
Rhythm	Use a drum loop
Style	Mix 2 styles
Style	Experimental
Style	Film Music
Tempo Slow:	60-72
Topic	Scene From a Movie
Treatment	Indian Drone
Treatment	The sound of jazz played backwards and slowed down to half speed
Treatment	Allow use of two Treatment cards

Kuda Bux (the man with the x-ray eyes)

While having nothing to do with Dome City per se (neither a character nor inhabitant), the Kuda Bux character is an archetypal Martian denizen—having the ability to “see” without vision, hear without hearing and feeling without touch. He purports to be something supernatural and numinous, or just a very sophisticated and cunning robot. (In 2 parts, with Part II being composed first and Part I a slower arrangement of the same chord progression. The slower version sounds more like a Part I than a Part II and so they were sequenced that way.)

Frame 313

With all notions of nobility and visions of utopia comes the dark side. (Frame 313 is the frame in the Zapruder film where the bullet struck President Kennedy.)

Collidoscope

(Atmosphere Track)

Plastic Alto

The swing version of “Hot Blue Star” from “Miles From Mars”.

Get Go

(Atmosphere Track)

Lost in the Circuitry

(Atmosphere Track) The keyboard used here is in the Harry Partch 43-tone octave tuning.