



Komuso Tokugawa

Live musician, blues and ambient creator - exclusive interview



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the of **BLUES** Komuso Tokugawa

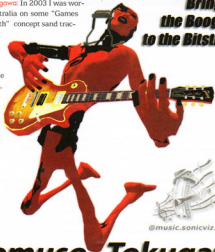
The interview with Komuso Tokugawa - live musician, who creates blues and ambient performances in Second Life, made by Mallory Beresford.

Mallory Beresford: You created your account in 2005, which makes your avatar one of the older second life residents. Could you tell us about your beginnings and how your second life has evolved during this time.

Komuso Tokugawa: In 2003 I was working in Australia on some "Games for Health" concept sand tracking the emerging area of social MMO's and came across SL,

before it was launched in beta. Initially they did not accept non-US sign-ups for the beta so I moved onto some other projects, and then in March 2005 I signed up.

**Bringing
the Boogie
to the Bitstream!**



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Komuso Tokugawa

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The first year I focused on exploring this new medium. I was also doing some collaborative health/relaxation research integrating biofeedback and neuro feedback interfaces with SL to drive avatar animations, audio visual instruments etc. As an avid RL photographer and short video maker, I also traveled the grid in these early days taking a lot of virtual photographs and posting them to slpics.com. I also developed an interactive SL music instrument, a Japanese Bamboo flute called a shakubachi, which got some nice feedback, though not a big seller;-)

Then in early 2006 I started playing live music in SL...

M.B.: Did you first come to SL to use it as a tool to promote your music or were you already using it when the idea occurred to you?

K.T.: In Nov 2005 I moved back to Japan and I quickly started a little three piece RL blues band with some of my old Japanese musician friends from the last time I lived here. I started experimenting using SL for RL song practice around Feb 2006, and then started doing gigs soon after. After a few months I decided to concentrate on this emerging area of virtual performance as a learning experience, and dropped the RL gigging. I do



KOMUSO TOKUGAWA (IN THE CENTER) AT PANGLANG SCHOOL, BHOTE KOSI REGION IN NEPAL

the odd jam now and again with friends in RL at some clubs. The SL live music experience has been a tremendous learning curve on a lot of levels, allowing me to connect globally with all sorts of interesting people.

M.B.: Could you please tell us more about the private beta test that went for a light and sound show in your home land - Artopolis? It seems to be very interesting.

K.T.: Sure! Synaesth Asia is a real time jam between myself in Japan and Mo-Shang Zhao in Taiwan, using the open source distributed music jamming software called ninjam. It's a style we have called Ambient Trance Blues as it blends elements of my blues, ambient, and electronic a background with Mo-Shang's Chinese Chill. We rehearsed by ourselves outside SL for a couple of weeks before launching a series of live beta test gigs in SL to test audience reaction. To make the experience more immersive

and interactive for the audience I developed a "Generative Visual System" called SLD, which is a visual instrument that was modified from a long time SL research project that connects bio and neuro feedback interfaces to Avatars and Audio visual instruments for real time control. Generative art, by the way, is a well established research field, just google "generative" and you will pick up the trail. The match of our real time chill music jam with constantly evolving visuals that the audience can fly around in leads to a very powerful online experience. My blog at <http://www.sonicviz.com/wordpress> has more details and links to stories and videos of this project in the entry titled "SynaesthAsia". I'm currently working on the next version of this. Stay Tuned!

M.B.: I just have to ask you about your House Rent Boogie Tour. I know you wander through the grid and play in the private places. That must be a fabulous

experience.

K.T.: I've done two SL House Rent Boogie tours now. I did the first one back in February 2007 and it was a lot of fun, though also a lot of work to organize. The second one I did in Nov 2007. It's an old tradition from the 1920's and 30's were blues musicians in the Mississippi delta played at house parties, barrelhouses, warehouses, and JukeJoints for guarantees, tips, and food/drink - essentially I'm carrying that tradition into the metaverse. I really like that combination of tradition and innovation, respecting the history of a form of music that has deep roots but extending it into new directions.

M.B.: I know you play both blues and ambient. Let's talk about blues now. How it is presented in SL and which way it goes?

K.T.: I've primarily been playing electric boogie blues in SL. It's very much a gro-

ove based boogie woogie style overlaid with grungy slide guitar and harmonica, interspersed with singing. I do play some clean sweet stuff too now and again though.) Due to the impracticality of organizing a real life rhythm section (bass and drums) to play online at a moments notice, and the fact I really like jamming out to groove based boogie, I put my Masters degree in music technology to good use and developed a unique Artificial Intelligence based rhythm backing section - fed by my custom programmed groove musical seeds. I call them Beato-san and Basso-san, my little robot partners in time, and I have two little robot avatars flying around me in SL to represent them. I can't stand playing to mp3 based backing tracks as it feels like playing on railroad tracks, and Beato-san and Basso-san free me up to jam out in my unique style. This is actually a really interesting area of music technology to keep an eye on, and I'm about to implement similar backing for some of my ambient relaxation projects. My Avatar has been designed specifically as a blues borg character to add some visual dynamics to the SL show, and I also use a custom animation over rider to drive the avatars animations. This aspect of virtual live performance will also be evolving a lot over the next few years. Another key aspect of my performance is the sound quality. This is a result of extensive work on my signal path and the hardware and software effects

I use to deliver the best possible sound quality to my audience given the current bandwidth and codec constraints of streaming audio to a virtual world. I'm constantly tweaking all of the above, always looking for ways to improve and provide a great experience for the audience. That includes composing, writing and learning new songs as well, and some of these can take a while before they come together. That's why I also call my audience my "Musical crash test dummies!" If they give me the thumbs down on an early experiment then I usually try and rework it completely. If they give me the thumb up, I'll keep playing it. Nothing like a real time focus group to hone yours skills!

M.B.: Do you co-operate with someone in your SL projects?

K.T.: I have a number of music projects in SL, both solo and collaborations. My core SL Blues show is a solo act, backed by my AI rhythm section. Then there is Synaesth Asia, the real time audiovisual collaboration with MoShang Zhao in Taiwan. Just recently I debuted another ninjam based real time collaboration with fellow SL musician, piano player Hathead Rickenbacker from Toronto in Canada. This one is very blues based, and we are just running some live tests in SL now after having spent some time rehearsing. We just released a new SL machinima of this called "Bitstream Boogie live at the Juke Joint", which you can find on YouTube or my blog. I have some other collaborations in the works as well.

M.B.: Lets get back to ambient. Which of in-world artists attracted you attention?

K.T.: There's a few in this category. Cypress Rosewood, Junivers Stockholm, Aldomanuto, Dizzy Banjo are a few of the great ambient/experimentalartist-working this genre in SL.

M.B.: Which clubs in SL do you consider as nice/worth visiting?

K.T.: So many, and growing all the time!

M.B.: What are you doing in your free time in SL, if you have some at all?

K.T.: Working on new projects mainly, coding or designing/building sets and prototyping new ideas. When I get the time I always try and hit a few clubs to check out the live music scene too see old and new acts and scout for potential collaborators -which is how I found MoShang and Hathead. I track a few blogs that are early warning on cool new builds in SL, like the Not Possible in Real Lifegroup, so try and check the recommendations out. Finally I balance all that with the ole "pull up the map and click randomly" trick to just see what is out there...you never know what you may come across or who you may meet that way!

M.B.: Do you make your public personality? Or at least some of your audience? Do you meet with them and talk? Share with us where its possible to catch you in-world.

K.T.: Yes, some of them. This is actually a dilemma for an indie artist, as it is phy-

sically impossible to scale one-to-one personal interactions with everyone in a growing fan base, even if that is "only" a few hundred++. I try and talk to everyone that approaches me though, within the time constraints I have. I do recognize the regulars at my shows, and always try and say hi over the bitstream between songs. If I'm not at my home base [see my profile picks for the tp] I could be anywhere!

M.B.: At the end I'd like to ask you about your further plans? I guess they include SL.

K.T.: I think SL and associated virtual worlds offer another step towards proving John Naisbitt's High Tech/High Touch theory that in a world of technology, people long for personal, human contact. I'm very passionate about the ability of virtual live music and entertainment to act as a form of social glue to create powerful online experiences that transcend the boundaries of distance and culture to enable this "High Tech, High Touch". This means being innovative with the technology to create new experiences in addition to virtual copies of entertainment forms we know and love. To enable that I'm working on some early stage projects involving music/entertainment. SL is a great platform, but 2008 will be seeing a lot more competition in this area as well as wider integration with the 2Dinternet ...and, as always, working on my own personal music projects so I can continue to "Bring the Boogie to the Bitstream"-I also have a soon to be released one hour ambient relaxation release of ambient water sounds and music recorded in the Bhote Kosi region in Nepal, as soon as we finalize the details for sending some of the revenues from sales back to the region where I recorded the sounds - see the photo!

You can keep up to date on all my music projects at <http://music.sonicviz.com/> and my main site <http://sonicviz.com> ■

by Mallory Beresford