

Allen Ravenstine Bio

By Robert Bowman

For those in the know, Allen Ravenstine has been one of the most creative synthesizer players of the past forty-plus years. Ravenstine started out in the mid-1970s experimenting in his Cleveland apartment with an analogue EML 200, eventually creating a piece in 1975 that became known as Terminal Drive. While he had no intention of releasing his compositions, word got out about the kind of sounds he was experimenting with which led to an invitation to join Pere Ubu for the recording of the group's first 45, "Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo."

While Ravenstine initially eschewed live performance, it wasn't long before he changed his mind, joining Pere Ubu full-time, bringing to the band's sound unpredictable textures, effects, bleeps, squalls, pulsating washes of sound—whatever he felt could enhance the soundscape of the band's performances and recordings. In the mid-1980s, with Pere Ubu on hiatus, Ravenstine crafted similar sonic coloration for Red Krayola and David Thomas' Wooden Birds, the latter of which eventually mutated into Pere Ubu Mk 5.

By the early 1990s, Ravenstine had grown sick of the road, band infighting and the music industry in general. Deciding a change was needed, he opted to forego music altogether, making his living as an airplane pilot. That might have been how things had remained had not director Robert Fantinatto wanted to interview Robert Wheeler, who was playing modular synthesizers with the current version of Pere Ubu, for his 2014 documentary I Dream of Wires. Wheeler, in turn, suggested that his interview be done in conjunction with Ravenstine.

The filming began with Wheeler demonstrating the EML 101. Inspired, Ravenstine started playing alongside Wheeler and over the next 48 hours they recorded two fascinating exercises in improvisatory modular synthesis, released on CD in 2013 as Farm Report and City Desk, via BlueJet Music. Energized by the reception that his work with Wheeler received, in 2015 Ravenstine released a limited edition of 1000 copies of a new recording he titled The Pharoah's Bee through ReR Megacorp. All of this activity motivated Smog Veil to locate a copy of the legendary 1975 recording of Terminal Drive, releasing the 15 minute piece in 2017, some 42 years after it was first recorded.

As long-time fans were looking to the past listening to Terminal Drive, Ravenstine was looking to the future, embarking on a new series of pieces that are now being released as Waiting for the Bomb. The basic tracks were cut in Ravenstine's New York City home using a Moog Theremini, a Doepfer Dark Energy Korg MS 20, a Rare Waves Grendel Grenadier drone synthesizer and a home computer. Ever seeking to expand his palette, Ravenstine then headed to Hamilton, Ontario's famed Grant Avenue Studios to add traditional instrumental sounds on top of his already created analogue synth soundscapes. Utilizing the prodigious skills of Bob Doidge on trumpet and bass, Joe Sorbara on drums and percussion and William Blakeney on piano, Ravenstine left the studio with 18 original tracks that sounded unlike anything he had ever attempted before.

The result is a huge step forward for Ravenstine in terms of both breadth and depth. Various tracks conjure up ambient soundtracks, jazzy miniatures, space age exploration, world music, the ghost of Harry Partch, and, on "Day Shift," the industrial dance floor. At just over 66 minutes, Waiting for the Bomb is a stunningly mature work that provides new and surprising sonic rewards with each and every listen.

Long live the analogue synthesizer!

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