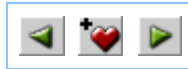


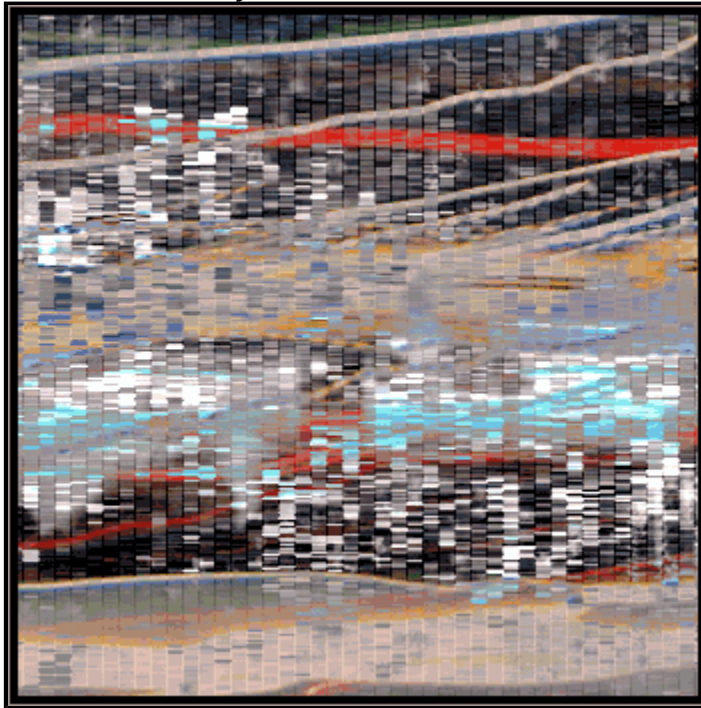


The Ambient Review ([@ ambient_review](#)) wrote,
@ 2006-03-22 09:33:00



Entry tags: [ambient reviews by gurdonark](#)

Past Andromeda by Peter Koniuto



The rise of the netlabels revolutionized ambient music. Some labels operate in much the same way that traditional labels did, except with a business plan based on internet-only marketing. Others utilize digital downloads in pursuit of sales. The term "netlabel" itself, however, has acquired a secondary meaning, in that a netlabel tends to release its material for free download. A good number of fine ambient labels arose which net-release wonderful material available for free download, including, to name but a couple, Webbed Hand and Darkwinter.com. The use of Creative Commons licenses, which can be structured to give a broad permission to copy the work on a non-commercial basis, places netlabels in the position of

seeking to make their impact through recognition rather than through financial remuneration.

The rise of this phenomenon is in part an inevitable outgrowth of the rapid improvement in home recording technology. The distance between what a consumer can do at home and a professional CD still exists, but the chasm is less gaping than in former days. In the field of ambient music, among others, the distance between fan and artist, never entirely remote, has narrowed, as listeners become participants. The ambient music listener base now includes listener participants, a participant audience who better understand the rigors and risks in each pole vault and high jump. The old religion of rock gods and worshipping fans melts in the face of a new egalitarian faith.

Some bewail this evolution of electronic music from a specialist's field to a mass consumption participation field. People worry that a plethora of material drowns out the quality. One sympathizes with the sentiment every time one hears a Casio-esque Moog emulation playing "ambient music" that would not be out of place in a very cheap hand-held video game a decade ago. My own view, though, differs from the "drowning out the quality" view. I believe

we are entering a new time in which traditional distribution mechanisms for music, particularly for "niche" genres, are going to disappear. The old construct in which a large (or small) record company signs the artist to a form of financing contract, with a small royalty incentive upon repayment of a disastrously structured loan, will fade. The price-per-unit of compact discs will eventually reduce, particularly as digital downloads make prices of two and three dollars each disc not only possible but economically advantageous for label and artist. I further believe that the more revolutionary concept of donationware music, in which the fan pays the label and artist on a voluntary basis, offers a viable distribution mechanism once people adopt the idea that music distribution can be handled in a new way, consistent with the new technology and Creative Commons ideas arising. I believe in this idea sufficiently strongly to have released my own work (certainly the work of a listener who creates rather than an "ambient artiste") on www.disfish.com, which uses an entirely donationware model for distribution.

The foundation of my faith is established by releases such as Peter Koniuto's *Past Andromeda* on Stasisfield.com. *Past Andromeda* is a fifty-nine minute piece which traffics in the intersection where atmospheric space ambient meets systems electro-acoustic music. Mr. Koniuto creates a central melodic drone theme, underlays it with deep and satisfying drones, and then intersperses the piece with samples ranging from piano sections to radio transmission waves. As with the best ambience of this type, the piece repeats its themes with slight variations, creating an effect that is sedate and yet never boring. The term "meditative" is arguably overused in ambient music reviews, but I find that this is ideal background music to soundtrack one's thoughts on an otherwise hectic drive. This is indeed an "ambient" music, because it does not intrude upon one's consciousness in the way that a Motown classic can do, but instead hovers on the edge of one's active attention.

Mr. Koniuto's device is to use the background spaces surrounding his melodic themes to introduce his many small thematic "found samples." In other works, this device proves annoying, as the samples some artists use tend to cloy through their obviousness or tend to have a joke-burdened quality not in keeping with the work. Mr. Koniuto commits neither sin, introducing instead effects and subtle themes that fit well with his main melodic drones. *Past Andromeda* has its antecedents in 1970s ambient music, from that heady time when the notion of sound as sound had been rediscovered with a tent revival enthusiasm. Yet the work never feels trite or tamed. Instead, this is a subtle, integrated listen—nothing less than the kind of mature, capable work that reminds us why we listen to ambient music.

So long as artists like Peter Koniuto make subtle ambient music for netlabels, this movement will thrive. My own hope, and belief, is that the day will soon arise when we spend our dollars in donations and small-per-unit-sale quantities. The end of the Recording Industry Association of America labels should not be attempted through civil disobedience, but through mass diversion of resources to places like netlabels and net artists. When the day comes that the ambient community has devoted its resources in this more targeted way, then ambient artists rather than corporate artist marketing departments will receive the economic benefit of the work that ambient artists do.

While we wait and work for this halcyon day, however, I commend to you Peter Koniuto's *Past Andromeda* as a subtle soundtrack for the conceptualization of this velvet revolution.

Available at [Stasisfield](http://Stasisfield.com).

Review by  [gurdonark](#).