

# A Review of Elaine Walker's new album **Drum n Space**

**Overview:** This is an extremely accessible microtonal album that achieves accessibility through superior compositional skill, production, and a fabulous ear for catchy melodies.

## **The Beginning**

The album is a concept album that combines science, space and xenharmonic music into an adventure of a universe that has in part become sentient and is on a quest to understand and replicate itself. The opening track should be used for a science museum or NASA exhibit as it beautifully explains the genesis of the universe from chaos and ultimately ourselves. Also, the opening track serves as an exposition that explains each how each of the following tracks fits into the whole. Musically the depth of musical facility with 17 edo (equal division of the octave) is very impressive as Elaine creates yet another emotional facet of the tuning that I had not heard before. Beautiful originality.

**Who Loves You? Me!** is conceptually a very odd song being an ode of affection for a space ship but it has grown on me, especially the very middle eastern, for me Egyptian, bridge. The form of the song is very complex mixing of sections in unexpected ways keeping the song fresh. From a harmonic standpoint this a Tour De Force making 10 edo incredibly palatable.

**Champagne** is a very sultry love song that is, again, incredibly hard to believe is in 10 edo despite the obvious part writing involved. (Voice and bass marking out a progression in constant counterpoint with counter melodies, vocal harmonies and chord flourishes). This song is not as catchy for me as the preceding two though from a technical standpoint the use of the harmonic language of 10 edo is stunning.

**Avatar** is another one of my favorite pieces on the album. It takes the form of an electronic anthem that is bold in timbre and harmonies. This piece includes modulations between 16 edo keys. Modulations are a relatively rare occurrence in the xenharmonic music I hear from our community so this really needs to be pointed out. The timbral emphasis helps to propel the music forward. Elaine also combines middle eastern themes with more familiar western stylistic pop singing which works really well by adding added contrast to the sections.

**Love Song** in Bohlen-Pierce scale is a lush and tender piece. The harmonies are reminiscent of sweetness of a series of major 7ths chords in 12 equal with the added dimension this tuning adds. The percussion is unusual and in a way Bjork-like and acts as an emotional counter point sounding like a beating heart. The piece is a very tender moment in the album.

**Space Battle** is an unleashing of Elaine's synthesizers! A very drum n bass electro piece that takes on 19 edo and makes it sound fairly exotic. The real show here is the emotion of aggression that the music conveys keeping with the theme of the piece.

**Love is The Catalyst** is another of my favorites on this album and again incredible facility with writing in 10 edo. In fact it is hard to believe this is 10 edo as the melodies and harmonies are so smooth and soothing in a very alien way. It is easy to believe I am sentient DNA listening to this! At 2:34 a beautiful harmonization (did I just say 10 edo is beautiful?) of an ascending progression occurs that is wonderful. The arpeggios throughout this piece are a great hook. Definitely radio ready in my opinion.

**Wormhole** in 19 edo is a driving almost 80's synth pop song with space borne arpeggios. This is one of the more programmatic pieces and works very well telling its story. The ring modulated vocals are a nice touch. There are some great synth timbres in this piece. One has to love the "Trust me I'm not, I'm Better!" as perhaps the best single one liner quote from the album. :-)

**Greater Good** in Bohlen-Pierce scale has a such a smooth and futuristic sound to it. I like the smooth harmonies against the driving active drums with the expansive vocal lines. This has a wonderful space electro vibe to it.

**Happiness** in 16 edo is an interesting coda to the album and for me has echos of some of the preceding pieces. Also to my ears this piece has the most angular harmonies on the album. The many synth stabs are very cool.

## Conclusion

Elaine Walker has masterfully composed an album's worth of stunning xenharmonic electro-pop music wrapped in a cool conceptually organizing story. I think several of the tracks are radio ready if given to the right radio station. This is because there is a balance between the new pitch material the alternate tunings provide and the melodic material that gives a new listener to xenharmonic music a place to hang their hat on. I think that is the genius of this work, it is different but in a very accessible way. This is not easy to achieve. I highly recommend Elaine Walker's album Drum 'N' Space.

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