

Artist Statement: Michael Sokolowski

It's a cliché for an artist to say that he or she is compelled by higher forces to do the work —that it's beyond a mere "calling;" art is a calling to which one *must* respond. While it's true that Art exerts a powerful hold on its practitioners, the artist still has to make the commitment to serve it.

I make the choice simply because I am most comfortable, day to day, in the world of sound creation. Music allows me to be the most authentic version of myself. Music is the means by which I can most fully and genuinely communicate. Through my work, I hope to engage others in a moment of wordless connection at worst, and transcendent joy at best.

My media are piano, synthesizer, electronic keyboards, violin, and music composition.

I start with simple structures—a simple melody or a simple harmonic relationship. From there I listen and develop ideas in response to the initial building blocks; every idea then becomes a building block for the next idea. I'm not very proactive in selecting materials—I have to let the idea come to me, and the idea usually comes with a sound or texture. Sometimes I'll change to a different sound; that sort of decision comes from the listening process. I get all my concepts and language from listening—listening to others, listening to myself, listening to the sounds of the world around me.

It's a process of discovery and an exercise of letting something happen. I'm not really creating anything; I'm merely setting the conditions for something beyond the music itself to happen. If I, any other musicians, and the audience are successful, something powerful will make an appearance.

After many years of piano-based writing and playing, I'm exploring analog synthesis in a much deeper way than ever before; I want to mix my own colors and sculpt my own rhythms in sound. I'm drawn to expand beyond piano's percussive nature and have more direct control over the shaping of sounds. Currently, I'm working with African drum master, Darrell Rose, on a project that blends instruments of the African continent with electronica. And later this year, I'll be using the synths on a duet record with Tim Reynolds—the long-overdue follow up to *Common Margins*.

The deep dive into electronics has helped clarify my understanding of the piano, as well. I'm working on a solo piano album of cover tunes—a wide range of songs to which I feel very close. I generally select covers if they seem like something I could almost have written myself. In order to do them, I have to be able to wear them well.

Finally, writing for the next—and fourth—Sokoband recording is underway. Houston Ross and I are bringing ideas into the studio to see what develops. It's been almost seven years since *Sokoband*, and we each have a wealth of experiences and thoughts to throw back into a musical partnership that goes back 27 years.