It never fails... you show up to some poorly attended show at a small club or art gallery billed as 'experimental' electronic music. You know that it is 'experimental' because the crudely-drawn-with-a-Sharpie® posters you saw all over the downtown core boldly told you so. Inevitably, when you arrive you see a guy with some manner of synthesizer and a phase shifter pedal and enough reverb to drown the cat. You show up, and there he is, pawing at the synthesizer's filter cutoff knob up and down like an uncooperative zipper on prom night. 50% of the time there is a drum machine set on "stun" playing in the background.   You look around. Is anyone else disappointed? It seems to me that there is SO much left unexplored with electronic music. The options available on modern electronic instruments are frankly staggering in many cases. So why are we all over the filter cutoff knob like a lamprey on a lake trout? To be 'experimental' ought not mean an audience of curious and uncertain yet rolling eyes watching a masturbatory performance worthy of a mid-80s Madonna video. Experimental electronic music should have a more objective goal.

Think of a science experiment. Worse, think of the science labs they made you write up in High School. Hypothesize, test, observe, and conclude. If I showed up in Mr. Chow's Grade 12 chemistry class and proposed to throw a bunch of stuff into a beaker to "see what happened" when I put it over a Bunsen burner, I don't think it'd go over too well. This is not experimentation; this is chaos - the kind of chaos that gives anarchy a bad name. Likewise, if I show up with a synth filter and echo unit waiting to tweak ad nauseum without direction, then the time to draw your conclusion is now. BORING!! The main reason this happens of course is that the filter cutoff is the single most bang-for-the-buck big-payoff knob you can grab and turn to change the sound. If I may paraphrase the legendary-for-writing-a-famous-book-on-synthesis-but-where-is-he-now author Devarahi, "synthesis is a Zen process". You need to know ahead of time exactly WHAT the effect any particular parameter change will have on the resulting sound you are shaping. Yet, at the same time, not know exactly where it will take you in terms of musical structure. For neophytes, it can be hard to hear in your head ahead of time the effect of those parameters that you have little familiarity with. There are so many of them after all! However, there are options. I propose that thinking small will render the best results. The interaction of 2 very small ideas will usually result in a multiplicatively larger, broader and more interesting result than 1 look-how-big-and-important-I-am idea.

For instance, most synthesizers these days have more than one LFO (Low Frequency Oscillator). If you have 2 LFOs, a simple yet interesting effect can be playing one off of another. Setting both LFOs to control the filter cutoff (instead of your now tired arm) in similar amounts, yet setting their rates at very slightly different amounts will result in a kind of 'rippling' effect - the result of creating a form of beat-frequency difference. This is the type of 'interesting' effect I am talking about - allow for the subtleties in the instrument to surface by letting the machine do the hard math! This is a bit like plotting graphs of mathematical functions, but in a far more aesthetically pleasing way than merely charting a visual X/Y graph. Ho hum. This - in my opinion - is what qualifies a sound as 'interesting' and worthy of lustful pursuit in that mad-scientist kind of way. A sound is interesting when it arouses an almost primal curiosity about its inner workings and relationships. Sound **can** be sexy!

You can make things easier by thinking of your synthesizer as a series of connected discrete components (Oscillators, Filters, LFOs, Envelopes etc) instead of one big machine. Try constructing a series of program patches that focus only on one small idea at a time each, like the example above with 2 LFOs. By examining the nature of the individual components and how they can relate to each other, you can generate an array of ideas for very small yet interesting sounds that you can then combine like colours on a palette. Go crazy and make a whole series or bank of such sounds. By generating a series of experimental sounds that are in some way related you can then construct larger experimental pieces of structured music that have an almost organic

cohesion to them.

It is one thing to create a sound that you think is 'neat'. It is another thing altogether to be able to understand objectively exactly **why** you think it is 'neat'. By stripping any sound down to its bare essentials and building it up as a coherent and obvious concept you will find it far more likely that others will find it pretty interesting as well. That is a good thing. That kind of creativity allows for dialogue between performer and audience - and communication is what this is all supposed to be about. 'Experimental music' has come to be seen by many as a contradiction in terms, and for good reason. You cannot communicate to others that which you cannot communicate to yourself.

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