

# INSPIRED OTTAWA

Part 1

SIX QUESTIONS FOR OTTAWA MUSICIANS



RANDOM TRANSMISSIONS #2

Random Transmissions is a sporadic digital publication for presenting random thoughts, research, and interviews created or facilitated by Cygnus Onyx Flame of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

*Random Transmissions #2* is dedicated to:

- The wonderful contributors to this issue.
- To my beloved bandmates in *Obsidian Will* [Liam “Soulless Ginger” Kennedy and Justin “Justinious” Dickie]
- Anyone who has managed to create a sound that made band members physically nauseous.
- Anyone who has played a gig at 1:30 AM because their earlier slot was bumped...several times.
- Anyone who has played live at a nudist colony plagued by persistent equipment failures.

LK/COF August 2020

## **In this issue.....**

<i>An Inspired and Inspiring City</i>	4
<b>Adriana Ciccone</b>	6
• Constellation 425	
• Forgotten in the Woods Again	
• Ottawa Experimental Music/Hexon Bogon	
<b>Pat Lemieux</b>	9
• Ash Primal	
• Clavius	
<b>Chris Trainor</b>	11
• C. Circo	
<i>Random Transmissions to Come</i>	15

## An Inspired and Inspiring City

I'm sure you, dear reader, have heard that Ottawa is a sleepy, boring government town. We don't stay up late and party like our older siblings Montreal and Toronto. We don't get the same mega shows that Montreal and Toronto get. Well, that's just fine. It's all a matter of perspective. I came to Ottawa, from Regina, in 1987. To a young(ish) prairie boy, Ottawa was a big metropolitan vortex. I can recall seeing local bands like *Furnaceface*, *Black Triangle*, *Skatterbrains*, *Resin Scraper*, and a ton of other acts that I was likely too drunk to remember seeing. Sure, fancy acts like *Malhavoc* or *King Apparatus* came in from Toronto and London but it was easy to find a show of great local talent any night of the week.

For whatever reason, I didn't start going regularly to shows again until Liam Kennedy and I started *Obsidian Will* in 2013. Because we were playing live shows, I was reintroduced to Ottawa musicians. Being part of *Obsidian Will* means that I've had the pleasure of sharing the stage with local bands and solo projects including:

- *Forgotten in the Woods Again*
- *Clavius*
- *Greylights*
- *Topon Das*
- *Black Oak Decline*
- *Noi Ya*
- *Intangerines*
- *Klapshmock*
- *Novusolis*
- *Transmit*
- *Day of Niagara*
- *Sheehan*
- *Wellington Sanipe*

There have been other great acts that, while sober enough to remember, I have forgotten due to questionable memory capacity. I've listed all these acts because of the diversity of style and execution of their music and their *creations*. *Obsidian Will* plays music that can range from a doom/dread-filled wall of cacophonous sound to soft creepy dark ambient soundscapes. Despite this difference of style within our own band, we have been able to share the stage with acts that can have a *very* different sound from us. Yet, even with this difference, it somehow *works*. I think that one of the strengths of the Ottawa experimental music scene has been its acceptance of and

respect for, the many different manifestations of what I refer to as the Flame of Creativity that burns throughout our city.

Aside from playing the shows that Liam books for *Obsidian Will* (thank you Liam!) and taking in the occasional show, I'm not actively involved in the music scene in Ottawa. I've often wished that I was able to talk to the musicians that we have shared the stage with but it's usually too loud or too late (for me) to talk. *Random Transmissions* is one way for me to engage with the creative musical/sound art forces in Ottawa. It is quiet here and I can go to bed before 10PM which makes me happy.

I approached a few musicians for this issue that I have worked with as *Cygnus Onyx Flame*, or shared a stage with in *Obsidian Will*. There are many more musicians I want to hear from so this is only Part 1 of an ongoing series of interviews. The six questions I asked the musicians, and will continue to ask, are the kind of questions I would have liked to have talked to them about after a show or while out for a drink. I will be sending these six questions to more Ottawa musicians but please do contact me if you would like to contribute your replies to a future issue of *Random Transmissions*. You can use the contact form on the *Random Transmissions* website. While *Random Transmissions* highlights my own interests, I hope that my interests will also be of some interest to others.

The six questions I asked were:

Question #1: How long have you been making/creating your music/sound art? Why did you start in the first place?

Question #2: How would you describe your music to a complete stranger who stops you on the street [being 2 metres away from you at all times of course]?

Question #3: How do you know when it's time for you to create something new or start a new project?

Question #4: How do you begin? What are your first steps? How do you know your project is finished?

Question #5: What would your perfect inspirational space for you to create your music look like? Take us through that space.

Question #6: Is there a project you are working on currently or one that you've recently released that you would like people to know about?

Enjoy the interviews! I know I enjoyed reading them and getting to know that artists a bit better. The interviews are presented in the order that I received them.

LK/COF

# Adriana Ciccone

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## *(Constellation 425) (Forgotten in the Woods Again) (OEM/Hexon Bogon)*

*Question #1: How long have you been making/creating your music/sound art? Why did you start in the first place?*

I want to say that I started when I was pretty young. I loved the piano and wanted so much to learn how to play it. In 82/83 I became friends with Cecilia and Alex who lived down the street from me. (Cecilia and I are still friends to this day.) They had a piano and Cecilia took lessons. I remember they had a small glass dome and encased in the glass was a rose. It sat on the piano. At least that's how I remember it. I remember looking at the glass-encased rose and I started to play a random tune on the piano. I often think that that was the first experience with experimenting and improvising with music. Skip ahead a few years and in my late teens my parents surprised me with a Yamaha keyboard, which included lessons at Domenic's Music, which was later taken over by St.John's Music, I believe. I didn't do much experimenting then and I don't know why. I think I really wanted to please my mom so I learned to play a lot of Italian songs, songs she liked. The instructor also threw in some Beatles and Elvis tunes and when Christmas rolled around the usual Xmas fare. For a while, I was stuck on playing covers. I didn't feel confident enough to write something original. I felt like I had to master something already written before I could be worthy of writing something original. Skip ahead a few more years and it wasn't until after I joined a full-fledged band that I realized I had encased myself with bullshit nurtured on by fear and low self-esteem. I chipped away at this encasement note by note. This was probably around 2012.

Why did I start making music? I just love love love music. I love everything about it. How it makes you feel. The different ways it can be composed. I love watching musicians play, I love watching how it makes them feel. I love how it makes me feel. I love how it can say so much with so little. I love how it can bring people together. I've always wanted to be a part of that.

*Question #2: How would you describe your music to a complete stranger who stops you on the street [being 2 metres away from you at all times of course]?*

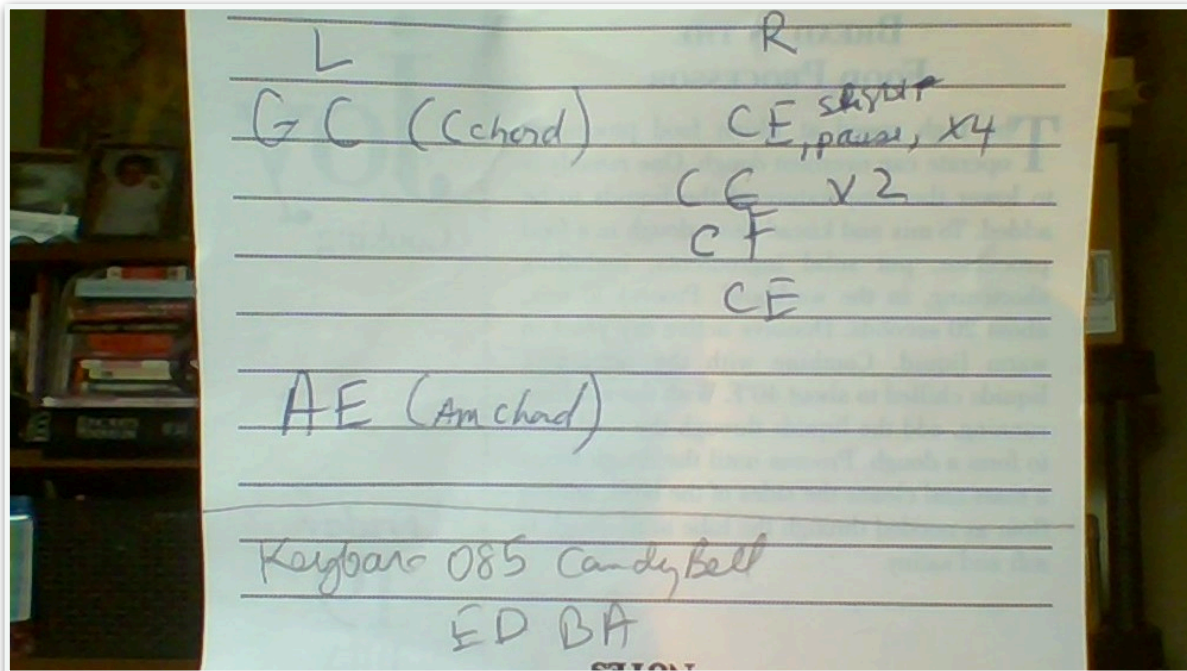
Ha, two metres away and wearing a mask! I often use the words instrumental or ambient in describing my music to strangers. It doesn't always work as they sometimes reply with, "Oh like elevator music? or meditative music?". I give them examples of other bands I might sound like (or wish I sounded like). That usually doesn't help though.

Question #3: How do you know when it's time for you to create something new or start a new project?

Goodness, that's a good and hard question. I don't think of the process as a start or stop. Just a continuous flow of ideas that hopefully might come together as an EP or album or just a single to share. In terms of projects with people, I know it's time to move on when it no longer makes me happy. Although I do try to make it work before calling it.

Question #4: How do you begin? What are your first steps? How do you know your project is finished?

I usually begin on my acoustic piano, when I'm waiting on my kids for something or other. I start playing notes and riffs usually appear. Sometimes they are cool and sometimes they are not. If they are cool I record the main riff using my phone and I write out the notes on a piece of paper. I'll add L to signify the left hand and R to signify the right hand. Then underneath each one add the notes I was playing and add information if I can. When I have time, I run to the basement where my keyboards and effects are and I start playing around with sounds. If I find something I like I will note it on the paper. Here's an example:



I have a Zoom recorder and I will use that to record what I'm doing. I sometimes feel frustrated with myself as I have not taken the time to learn how to use my gear to its full potential. Sometimes I let that distract me from the writing process and I lose the inspiration to continue. I love using loops but I frigging suck at it. I also try to figure

something out on the guitar if I can. Looping is great when writing, especially when you are on your own. I currently have three loopers, one of which is a Flashback x4 by TC Electronic. It's great as it was wicked delay and such. I've only used it with my guitar so far but I'm curious to know what it will do when used with keys but I digress!

I know when a project is finished when the song or songs feel complete. It's a feeling really.

*Question #5: What would your perfect inspirational space for you to create your music look like? Take us through that space.*

I wish I could have a studio outside. I keep dreaming about taking my instruments outside and playing. I think of that often. As long as the gear was safe from the elements, of course. Having a stage with cool rugs underfoot and patio lights to light the night sky when it gets dark. Can you imagine droning at night outside? I think it would be magical and intense.

*Question #6: Is there a project you are working on currently or one that you've recently released that you would like people to know about?*

I put together an EP for Drone Day this year. It's my first release on Bandcamp too. The Drone Day team did such an excellent job putting together this year's Drone Day. I definitely wanted to be a part of that. As for the band, since we can't get together we decided to re-record our first EP. When we put out our first EP Mike wasn't in the band. We thought it would be cool to re-release the EP with Mike playing drums. We wanted to put something out there that represents the band in its current state. Scott is no longer in the band so that's changed our sound too. I'm looking forward to this release. I'm not sure when it might come out. Mike is working on recording the drums parts now.

Here's the link to the *Constellation 425* [Drone Day EP](#)

Here's the link to *Forgotten in the Woods Again* [\(FITWA\) EP](#)

Thanks so much for asking me to be a part of your project Lloyd. It's pretty great.



## Pat Lemieux

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*(Ash Primal and Clavius)*

*Question #1: How long have you been making/creating your music/sound art? Why did you start in the first place?*

Music naturally came into my life at around 10 years old. I wanted to become a drummer so badly that I would make makeshift drums out of household items. Real acoustic drums would've been too loud for the town house I was living in, so I eventually got a guitar. I almost immediately began improvising and creating music once I learned the instrument.

I think the question "why" is a tough one to answer. Why did humans begin to make music in the first place? There's not one instance that struck me to create music. I was never surrounded by musicians; it was never forced upon me, but I believe in whatever circumstance I'm in, I'll always be creating music.

*Question #2: How would you describe your music to a complete stranger who stops you on the street [being 2 metres away from you at all times of course]?*

That is a real tough one, especially for my solo music. Sometimes it just feels I'm just pushing buttons, but at the same time, I'm always trying to express what sounds are moving around in my brain. I have a guitar, a small synth, and a bunch of pedals. With those, I try to fill the room up with warmth, other times, I try to fill the room with terror. All of this comes from my post rock, prog rock inspirations.

For my band *Clavius*, I usually describe post rock as highlighting emotions with rock instrumentation, but at a certain point I just write down bands they need to listen to. We try to replicate our post rock inspirations, while obviously trying to be authentic as possible. We love a great big wall of sound, with a sort of narrative leading up to it. That's why our songs are usually long.

*Question #3: How do you know when it's time for you to create something new or start a new project?*

Inspiration is something that can be inevitable, but stubborn. You can't count on it striking you, but it's amazing when it does, and you have to have the resources ready for you to record it. The worst feeling is when you have an idea, and it gets lost in your brain. What's really annoying is when you come up with a sweet idea, and when you try to apply it to the instrument, it doesn't sound like what you wanted it to. That's why it's good practice to...practice your instrument, but also to start with an idea you've already made with the instrument. From there, I try to come up with a general idea of

what I want this song to be; it's good to narrow it down, but not to set anything in stone. I usually come up with my greatest ideas away from my instrument, like on the bus, or going for a walk. Setting is super important to clearing your mind for ideas to flow. It's a beautiful thing when you can be there in front of your instrument. As I mentioned though, you can't rely on always being inspired in front of your instrument. You'll never get anything done on time. It's just a matter of being comfortable tackling it head on.

*Question #4: How do you begin? What are your first steps? How do you know your project is finished?*

I guess answered a bit of this in question 3. It's good to start with something concrete, and then letting your mind take you to different avenues of where you want this song to go. I usually come up with solid ideas with a looper pedal at the end of my chain, sometimes I have to take my phone out and record it. A looper with memory on it is a great tool for songwriting. You can write a riff, and then add whatever you want on top of it to hear how it will sound. Great for writing guitar compositions.

A great way to know that a song is finished, or at least on a right path, when you start embracing the song. If I catch myself dancing to something I created, I know I'm doing a good job. Finishing a song is a hard thing to do if you are stubborn like me, so I recommend getting other people's opinions, which makes being in a band really great. Especially when they are dedicated to the song and not afraid to say anything.

*Question #5: What would your perfect inspirational space for you to create your music look like? Take us through that space.*

I definitely work best when I'm alone and I have the start of the day to myself. I tend to look like a mad man talking to himself, pacing around the room, but that is what happens when I have so many ideas swimming through my head. You have to keep yourself letting go, all the while hanging on to the work that needs to be done. It can be hard to keep up with so many distractions that it's ideal to be away from them. When I have that strike of inspiration on the music I'm working on, it tends to keep going until I have 3 different versions of how I want that song to be in my head. This is all especially true when I'm making music for *Clavius*, which is a more serious project than my solo music. My solo music tends to be more physical activity than brain activity.

*Question #6: Is there a project you are working on currently or one that you've recently released that you would like people to know about?*

Well when the quarantining began, I started with my first solo project I've had in mind for awhile called *Ash Primal*. I had to quarantine away from my band so I had more of an excuse to finally execute something of my own. I always wanted to evoke calm and stress in one sitting, so my first instalment "Entropic" came out on May 31st.

# Chris Trainor

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*(C. Circo)*

*Question #1: How long have you been making/creating your music/sound art? Why did you start in the first place?*

This is an interesting question, only because it makes me think about when I should pinpoint the “beginning”. I have always been at odds with the conceptualization of when there is a definitive beginning to something, or when is it more of a general or fuzzy guidepost. If I was to take this question literally to mean when I started creating music/sound art in the sense of putting into the world recorded sound waves of some sort, it would be October 11th, 2018. I know the exact date, because I made an Instagram post on the day that I decided to dive in, so to speak. However, I didn’t release my first track on Soundcloud until April 2019. So I will leave it to the reader to decide how long it has been.

Now, for the rationale of why I started to create, it was a conscious decision to step away from constantly consuming. I had been a fan of electronica and techno since the late 1990s and early 2000s, and I had bought countless CDs, made my own mixtapes, downloaded, etc. So, I had listened and listened, and been a passive receiver (in one particular sense). In 2018, my wife had become more involved with stitching, sewing, and creating her own clothes. It made me really think critically about what I was doing. Sure, I was listening to music and it was great, but that can only bring you so far. You can like or dislike one artist over another, but there is no creative outlet. At the same time, I found a lot of my free time to involve playing video games, watching Netflix, reading Reddit, etc. All of these activities did not provide an outlet to my inner creativity. It was at this time, that Cygnus Onyx Flame and I started having more and more conversations about electronic music. This was the “straw that broke the camel’s back” (so to speak), and I realized that electronic music could be that outlet that I sought.

*Question #2: How would you describe your music to a complete stranger who stops you on the street [being 2 metres away from you at all times of course]?*

Ahh, I am interpreting this as the age-old elevator speech. Well I would say that what I end up doing most of the time is a sort of sonic exploration. I cannot describe myself as being tied to any one genre as I like to experiment and dabble in lots of different things from classical, downtempo, experimental, ambient, and even driving techno. What I create and put out into the world is driven by emotion and experience. If you listen to any of the tracks that I have published you will also be confronted with my progression (although I abhor the concept of progressiveness that alludes to a

constant 'onwards and upwards' concept of movement throughout ones life that negates setbacks and plateaus, etc.) and my becoming. For instance, if you listen to my first Soundcloud track 'Wistful Locus' you will notice repetitiveness of the composition when compared to later tracks, such as 'Supermassive Potential' where there is more "movement". However, I would say that none of it is polished and "perfect" in presentation. It is a summation of me experimenting and finding what resonates with me, and hopefully that resonates with others too (but, that isn't a necessity).

*Question #3: How do you know when it's time for you to create something new or start a new project?*

I would say that I am always in the creative mindset. I cannot tell you how many times I have completed a field recording of our washing machine creating an interesting resonance, or accidentally knocked a metal bowl and thought to myself, that is "cool" and then I have recorded it. I have days when I am just playing keys, and usually it will start with an electric piano or piano virtual synth (oh, did I mention that most of my creations are done using VSTs, and my DAW?). At these times, I may come up with chords, or compositions that I like and I will save them as a project file to return to later. Sometimes these transform into a full blown track, and other times they continue to linger on my hard drive until the day I turn my focus on them.

Apart from dabbling, I do like to set goals for myself and that usually is around a theme, or something that has inspired me. For instance, Cygnus Onyx Flame and I were talking about a question similar to this one day, we thought it would be interesting to collaborate on a project. What came from that was a white-boarding session where we talked about what we wanted to focus on to provide inspiration for our joint creation. We decided to look at elements, and eventually focused on clouds. Specifically, we were looking at the dichotomy of dark stormy clouds versus light fluffy clouds. The juxtaposition of the two, was an interesting one, and played on perception and the emotive response to those two concepts. We then took some time to let the ideas percolate, and eventually Cygnus Onyx Flame booked some studio time so we could hash it out together. That was a great experience because we entered the studio with some ideas, then mish-mashed them together in the studio, and recorded what we had come up with. I took those recordings and worked on them in my DAW, and the end result was 'Nimbus' which was my first collaborative effort. It was quite interesting going from creating everything solo to working with another person, but it was quite enjoyable to see other individual's creative approach.

*Question #4: How do you begin? What are your first steps? How do you know your project is finished?*

Again with the beginnings! If I interpret this as being in reference to when something tangible is being created, then I would have to say that that particular stage of creation for me begins when I set aside time to sit down at my computer and open up a new project in my DAW. From there, it depends on where my inspiration is coming from: is it dabbling, where it may or may not lead to completing a track? Is it driven by a project that I am working on where I have a more structured idea of the sounds I want to incorporate?

If I am starting a project that I have thought and contemplated about, then when I sit down to my computer I have already completed some 'leg work' and I will have gathered together either imagery, passages, etc. that I want and I start playing around with some of my go-to synths (Serum, LABS, Analog Lab, etc.) this allows me to audition some sounds and then I decide whether or not that resonates with what I am trying to do artistically. For instance, does the sound evoke images in my head of what I am trying to evoke. If we take 'Nimbus' as an example, are the sounds I am playing evoking a sense of calm, ethereal, and floating through the sky? If not, then I continue looking for those sounds that conjure up that imagery. So, this could be considered my compositional phase, and then I would move into arrangement (note: very rarely would I classify what I am doing as strictly one or the other, often it is more of an ad-hoc approach).

In arrangement, I am looking at what I am trying to convey. Is it repetitiveness? Intensity building? Tension? Are there components of ambiance? Is it the type of track that incorporates bass and drums, etc.? All of these elements would be much easier to 'nail down' if I was strictly adhering to a particular genre, but I have found myself to be a free spirit in the sense that I let my tastes, likes/dislikes, etc. guide me in a direction. For example, I hardly ever start a track and think "this will be a 140bpm techno track" and then stick to that no matter what. As I experiment with different elements, it may slip into techno-ish sounds, but there may be other elements in there that people would call downtempo, ambient, etc. I am not trying to make music to appease a particular audience as I think music has to be created for oneself, and then if someone else can find something that resonates with them, nice bonus, but it is not a necessity.

When do I know that I am completed? I find that I am done when I get to a point that I run out of things to tweak, add in, edit, etc. When I return to a track for two separate sessions and the 'creative juices' are not flowing, or I have that sense of being 'stuck', then I take that as an indicator that I am nearing completion. Now, I will say that completion in my mind is not a tangible thing to achieve, as I may return to a track months later and be inspiring to do something completely different with it. So, completion for me is a corporeal concept, and if I focused on minor tweaks and making things proverbially 'perfect', I am sure I would still be sitting at my computer working on 'Wistful Locus'. Self set deadlines are good, but also external deadlines are great. Posting on Instagram that you are working on a track or that you will have something out by such, and such a date I find is useful, because you have put it out there. Others now know, and may call you on it, if you don't do what you said you were going to do. Life sometimes gets in the way, but it is important to carve out the space to do the

things that make you happy, and for me creating electronic art (or music, whatever you want to call it) is one of those important things.

*Question #5: What would your perfect inspirational space for you to create your music look like? Take us through that space.*

That is a very interesting question! For me I do not really see it as a fixed space, and I do not conceptualize of it as a physical space per-say. To provide a little context on what I am referring, I will start by stating that I made a conscious decision to purchase a laptop for creating. This is because of space restraints within my living arrangements, but what was most important is the freedom to be able to move around and be mobile within my home and abroad. Also, I made a conscious decision to pour most of resources devoted to creation into virtual software. I had an AKAI MPK Mini Play when I first started (because I have a piano background and feel more at home with a piano roll), but I have since upgraded to an AKAI APC 25 so that it syncs with my DAW more seamlessly. That is it though. I don't have any hardware synths right now (although I am thinking about it... how can I not?). With everything bundled into my laptop, I can take my setup anywhere, and then if I need to do something live or what not, I can utilize my midi controller.

I find that I think less about a particular space or place, and more about having time set aside to devote to creating. Being enveloped in the process and glued to my screen. That is my inspirational space, somewhere between the connection of my brain and my computer. It is almost as if the rest of the world melts away when I am 'in the zone'. So overall, it is a liminal space between time and space (as hokey as that sounds) which I find to be the most inspirational for me.

*Question #6: Is there a project you are working on currently or one that you've recently released that you would like people to know about?*

I would have to say that most of my energy is currently being devoted to a two part EP project that I posted about on Instagram around December 2019/January 2020. The two EP's will be titled "Perspectives I" and "Perspectives II". The main idea behind having two EPs rather than one LP is that one EP will be characterized by lighter/ ambient works, and the other harsher/darker.

The concept comes from my obsession with perspective, and how individuals bring their own perspectives and lived experiences into play with whatever they interact with, or act on. This originally started with the 'Nimbus' project that I have mentioned earlier, but I wanted to tease that out further. What does it mean for a track to sound 'dark' or have a 'lighter' feel? Do some people find comfort in the darkness, while others fear the light? Stereotypically, we are almost trained to perceive certain things in dichotomous relationships. I wanted to explore that with two EPs where one

will embody what I perceive to be 'light' and the other 'dark'. What will be most interesting is what others' perceptions of the juxtaposition will be.

I have promised myself that these two EPs will be completed by December 2020 (at the latest), so as I write this here I am always reinforcing my deadlines and providing another external force to ensure that I stick to them.

Cygnus Onyx Flame, thank you for the opportunity to spew my consciousness on creating, art, and everything in-between. Keep creating!

## ***Random Transmissions to Come***

The next issue of *Random Transmissions* will be an outline of how I worked with the Dog Days and Sirius to create several solo and collaborative tracks. I also talk about the "Sublime Elixir of Musical Inspiration". Nothing strange going on there. Nope.

Until the next issue, thank you for reading and keep the Flame of Creativity burning within you and around you!