

# INSPIRED OTTAWA

Part 3

SIX QUESTIONS FOR OTTAWA MUSICIANS



RANDOM TRANSMISSIONS #5

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* #5 is dedicated to:

- The wonderful contributors in this issue.
- Musicians and sound artists who consider “perfection” a dirty, dirty word....but not in a good way.
- Anyone who has found themselves in an awkward emotional relationship with their favourite plague mask that makes their other masks jealous.
- Synthesizers that have built-in effects so we don't have to keep buying 'effing guitar pedals....though let's be serious...we'll still buy pedals.  
#reverb4ever

**\*NOTICE\***

On the off chance that it isn't obvious, my rants in *Inspired Ottawa* do not apply to the contributors nor do the contributors necessarily agree with my rants. In fact, they don't see my rants until the issue comes out and I start the rants before I receive any replies to the Six Questions...and no, there was no incident that required me to write this...just heading off the potential problem now! :)

LK/COF December 202

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# When “Perfection” Kills Authenticity

“Yeah man, it took 24 takes to get the sound just perfect.” Bullshit. Just....no.

Let me back up. I wanted to rant a bit about the importance of authenticity in artistic creation and how “perfection” can kill authenticity.

I like to look at the roots of words for my rants. I’ve **emphasized** some key parts:

*perfect (adj.)*

*early 15c. classical correction of Middle English parfit "flawless, ideal" (c. 1300), also "complete, full, finished, lacking in no way" (late 14c.), from Old French parfit "finished, completed, ready" (11c.), from Latin perfectus "completed, excellent, accomplished, exquisite," past participle of perficere "accomplish, finish, complete," from per "completely" (see per) + combining form of facere "to make, to do" (from PIE root \*dhe- "to set, put").*

<https://www.etymonline.com/word/perfect>

And:

*authentic (adj.)*

*mid-14c., autentik, "authoritative, duly authorized" (a sense now obsolete), from Old French autentique "authentic; canonical" (13c., Modern French authentique) and directly from Medieval Latin authenticus, from Greek authentikos "**original, genuine, principal,**" from authentes "**one acting on one's own authority,**" from autos "**self**" (see auto-) + hentes "**doer, being,**" from PIE root \*sene- (2) "to accomplish, achieve." Sense of "real, entitled to acceptance as factual" is first recorded mid-14c.*

<https://www.etymonline.com/word/authentic>

It drives me bonkers when I hear accomplished musicians say they haven’t released or shared a track or an EP/album because they want it to be *perfect*. Waiting for “perfection” simply reflects, to me, a fear of criticism and external ridicule...or it comes from a deep seated sense of self-importance. Of course, I don’t have a refined background in music theory or composition and there is zero chance my own creations will “make it big” (though thanks to Adriana for playing my tracks on Hexon Bogon on CKCU!) So I’m not laden down by a heavy need to please fans or industry folks. I get that some people have to “play the game” and that’s fine. I’m not addressing them.

To me, a track or project is about being *authentic*. It is about reflecting who you are as authentically as possible throughout the entire process of: inspiration, planning, creation, iteration, and dissemination. Perfection is a dangerous and grotesque concept and I feel that it has caused undue suffering, of varying degrees, for some great creative forces in our city and beyond. I just want to be that expletive spouting

voice in the back of their heads saying... "No, that sound isn't perfect. It will never *be* perfect. It's ok for things not to be perfect. It is authentically you though so fucking release the goddamn EP already!"

!!

**\*Weirdo-Activity Warning\***

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A parting gift for those who need help to banish thoughts of perfection-here is a little activity to conduct before starting a project:

Light a candle and stare into the flame.

Say: "I am not perfect therefore my creations will never be perfect and that's ok. As this flame burns, I burn away my need for perfection."

Sit for a minute or two. Blow out the candle or keep it with you as you are creating.

Repeat as needed.

Red wine/gin are optional additions for this activity. I can't speak to effectivity other substances. Let me know how they work. :)

A parting thought: You become what you create. Create authentic and vast art.

/rant

As always, this issue of *Inspired Ottawa* consists of six questions asked to various musicians. If you would like to participate in *Inspired Ottawa* or know someone who might like to engage the Six Questions, send them my way!

[cygnusonyxflame@gmail.com](mailto:cygnusonyxflame@gmail.com)

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

# Greg Erickson

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*(Greg Erickson)*

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

It was a gradual process of dipping my toes into music, probably over the span of about 15 years. I started playing music as something to do with my friend who played guitar and had an old electronic piano. Since he played guitar, I got the keys, and I've been hooked ever since. I don't know what I consider to be my music - if it's the noodling I do on the guitar for myself, then yeah like 14-15 years, if it's the thing tied to my latest published solo material of ambient synth things then maybe more 4-5 years.

*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]?*

"Hmm.. umm... I dunno... like weird noises and stuff... maybe like soundtrack music?"

That's my elevator pitch. To be honest I probably would never bother telling a random stranger who stops me on the street anything about my music, I would be very surprised if they were at all interested in it. If it was a person I knew and cared about though... then I'd probably tell them I like making music that can tickle my brain or rumble my guts. I think I crave a physical, visceral, as much as emotional, reaction from music.

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

I think it's a combination of boredom at current self directed projects or a deadline where one exists. I am a terrible procrastinator with a garbage work ethic for my own projects, but if I know someone is relying on me, I am far more motivated and will put the time in.

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

The projects I've completed begin with an idea centered around a theme that I want to explore, and get their scope defined either up front or along the way. Like for Giant Lizard, I wanted to tell a story with a few parts, so it was telling that story. I work better with defined limitations, either on equipment, theme, time, etc. Also, my experience

has been that talking about a work in progress is the surest way to kill it - I get the same feelings from talking about it that I seek from completing it and lose the drive to continue.

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

You've driven maybe an hour out of town to get to a place in the woods that has all the boring gear you need for the fun gear you brought to work together properly. That said, you get to put it all together however you want, because nothing is plugged in yet. The room itself has high ceilings and lots of space, with cozy rugs and good chairs. There's big windows, loud amplifiers, plenty of power outlets, no one else is around unless they're helping you with a track. Most importantly, you have a good idea with a comfortable deadline.

*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?*

My stuff is on bandcamp here (<https://gwerickson.bandcamp.com/>) but I want to get into streaming on twitch or a similar platform. Hopefully you'll find me there at some point in the future. The thing I miss most with COVID is performing live so maybe this will be what's possible now.

## **Annie Socoria**

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*(Annie Socoria) (Bandcamp)*

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

I've been focusing on experimental audiovisual art since 2016 but I've been making music and playing with sound for as long as I can remember.

When I was very young I had a Magnus chord organ. I distinctly remember holding down certain pairs of keys and liking the sounds they made. At the time I had no idea that what I had discovered were perfect 4ths and 5ths. It would be decades before I realized that I had essentially stumbled upon drone music. I also liked the outcome of mashing several of the chord buttons at the same time. The result was a cacophony of traffic jam car horns.

Growing up, I was immersed in a wide variety of sounds and musical genres via the record collections of family and friends, from television and movies, radio, and video games. My older brother also played electric guitar. So much of the music of the 70's and 80's was steeped in interesting and unusual electronic sounds. I think the first time I learned about synthesis and electronic music production was from watching the music episodes of TV Ontario's computer education shows "Bits & Bytes" & "The Academy" in 1983. One presenter demonstrated a Fairlight CMI. He appeared to create a song out of thin air on a computer. It was like magic. This definitely sparked an early interest in the use of computers and synthesizers for music making.

Any formal music education I had was limited to the basics of western theory that were taught in the regular school curriculum. I played the recorder in grade school and clarinet in junior high school music class. I enjoyed playing with pianos, organs, and other keyboards whenever the opportunities arose. Despite this interest in keyboards, I had no desire to take any extracurricular music lessons of any kind. I didn't enjoy music instruction in school (and I didn't enjoy school in general to be honest).

In the late 80's I got a Casio SK-1 sampling keyboard for Christmas. Around this time I began to casually play music with friends. By the early 90's I wanted a "real" synthesizer with full sized keys and I used some savings to buy a Korg Poly 800 (almost entirely because of the helicopter and jet sound effect presets). My brother was also in the process of moving across the country and had left a guitar and bass at the family home. While he wasn't using them, I started to play around with them. Using books and videos I borrowed from the library, I managed to learn more about music theory and how to play guitar and keyboards. My technique probably suffered from not having a teacher to correct my "mistakes" but I definitely preferred the freedom to explore the instruments and learn at my own pace.



I continued to collect more instruments and gear and experiment with sound as time went by. I would scour thrift stores and garage sales for deals. My high school & college education in electronics enabled me to troubleshoot and repair things I would find at the curb on garbage day or sold “as-is” at local stores. I would jam with friends and make recordings on an old 2 track reel-to-reel and later with a 4 track Portastudio and an Atari ST & Cubase. Throughout the 2000s and into the 2010s I was playing in a couple of local bands with some friends. We would occasionally perform live. Generally open mics, fundraisers, weddings, etc. In late 2012, some friends from out of town asked if I would like to contribute some Hammond organ tracks to a new project they were working on. I was playing organ/keys with this collective until it fell apart in early 2016.

*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]?*

After my last band broke up, I felt the need to take a break from some of the conventional methods I had been using to make music for the previous decade or so. I was finding that “traditional” instruments and approaches were no longer satisfying or enjoyable. I had recently discovered no-input mixing, matrix mixer/pedal feedback, and an amazing and deceptively small and powerful modular synthesizer program called SunVox. Combining these new-to-me methods with some of the more avant-garde and experimental techniques I had dabbled with in the past (field recordings/musique concrete/circuit bending & hacking/diy electronics/video feedback) I turned a page in my life and began to create the work that I do now.

To describe what I now produce to a stranger concisely and without using vague genre titles tends to be difficult and generally somewhat inaccurate. I would have to say first and foremost that it is experimental. The process is a journey of exploration, discovery, curation, and composition. The resulting sounds can range from what some would consider noise to relaxing, lush, slowly evolving sonic atmospheres. By this point I assume the stranger has become bored and has started to walk away so I shout “experimental electronic ambient generative synth drone and noise!”

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

Usually it just happens when it does. At the best of times I've discovered that I cannot force art to happen. Attempting to do so often ends in frustration and unsatisfactory results. Much like my switch from traditional instruments to a more experimental approach, a rest or change can be what is required to allow the creativity and inspiration to flow again. Like many people, I've found that since the start of the pandemic, it has been more difficult to begin anything creative at all. The last three pieces I've produced have all been prompted by requests for contributions to collaborative works. I'm very thankful to have been asked to be involved in all of these

projects. Having a deadline has definitely been a persistent motivator to produce work, but I do not usually work this way.

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

Much of my work begins by exploring what sounds a particular item or instrument or piece of gear or technique is capable of making. Frequently this involves using things in ways that they were not intended to be used. I like to discover sounds that I've never heard before using unconventional and quite frankly, frugal methods. I will not discount or reject any item or instrument or piece of gear based on its reputation, perceived value, or method of sound creation (analog/digital, acoustic/electric). Everything can be useful for something, it's just a matter of discovering what that is. It is often through this exploration and experimentation that the foundation of a piece will begin to form. As for knowing when something is finished, I tend to stand by the following adages:

“Half of art is knowing when to stop”

“Art is never finished, only abandoned”

“Perfect is the enemy of good”

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

This may be a somewhat boring and pragmatic answer but my perfect inspirational space is one that is comfortable and efficient to work in. I'm a big proponent of Adam Savage's philosophy of “first order retrievability”. This states, in the context of a workshop, that any tool you will use should be immediately accessible from the place from which you work. I find that the music making process itself is a positive feedback loop of inspiration and creation. The space itself is not necessarily at the forefront of my mind from an inspirational standpoint. When creating music I'm ideally focused on the interaction between myself, the tool, and the resulting sounds. The simplest things can interrupt this focus and be detrimental to the creative flow (e.g. not having the correct cable within reach, having to dig through a drawer to find an adapter, setting up a piece of gear that was not at the ready, adjusting a mic or a level on a piece of recording equipment.) In a traditional studio setting, many of these types of things are handled by an audio engineer and often taken for granted. As a solo producer these things can at best, be a waste of time, and at worst, be the difference between trying something new and not trying it at all.

*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?*

With the colder weather approaching I intend to head back to my basement workbench to continue my experiments with old microchips and hacked Christmas voice recorder ornaments. Here is the link to my YouTube page which includes examples of these items in use as well as the rest of my audiovisual work:

<http://video.anniesocoria.com>

I also encourage everyone to check out the wonderful Ottawa Experimental Music Compilation which I was privileged and delighted to be a part of. All proceeds from the sale of this compilation will be distributed to three great local charities.

<https://ottawaexperimentalmusic.bandcamp.com>

Thanks!

# ISØBEL

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*(ISØBEL) (Bandcamp)*

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

I've played various instruments throughout my childhood. Some piano, guitar, trombone. I rocked the tuba in the school band. But I'd always wanted to perform my own music.

In 2018, I met a coworker who was a singer and musician, and played synth. He would lend me his synthesizers and pretty much got me started in music production. Last fall, in 2019, I started making short synth covers that I would post on Instagram. But still, what I really wanted to do was write my own music.

Finally, in January 2020, the stars aligned; I saw that a small electronic/experimental music festival was being held in Ottawa, (the Not Normal festival, put on by Possible Worlds) in March. That same day I found someone selling the Roland SP-404; a piece of gear I'd been looking for that would allow me to perform live. So I thought, screw it, if I'm not going to do this now, I never will. So I signed up, having no music written, and no idea how to perform it live. The next three months I wrote songs like crazy. Unfortunately the festival was cancelled about two weeks beforehand because of COVID, but I'm still so happy I signed up. It was one of the best decisions I've ever made.

As for why, dancing and being on a stage feels natural to me, and I am fascinated by performers who can captivate an audience, who transfer their energy to others. So performing has always been the driving force for me.

*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]?*

Angry electropop. With synths.

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

When I can't get an idea out of my head. When it's been sitting in the back of my mind for a few days or weeks, and I have this feeling of excitement about starting it.

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

For me it begins when I get the idea for a melody, or drum beat, or whatever, and I'll usually hum it and record it on my phone.

When I get to my DAW, I'll hum out and record the different tracks/elements, and then start recording them with the real instruments (synths, drum machines, guitar).

Typically, I set down a basic drum track first, to get the beat, then I'll tweak it later to make it more interesting.

After the initial idea, it takes me more time to flesh out the rest of the song... an intro, bridge, verses... I have to listen to my song and sit with it. I'll walk away and wait until the next idea for a part or element to come. I won't force it if it's not coming. Which is maybe not a great tactic, as it comes very slowly sometimes! When I do get an idea that pops into my head, I try not to second-guess it and just go with it.

Finding the right lyrics is one of the most interesting but also tedious parts of songwriting to me - it's a combination of trying out words/sentences that feel good to sing over a melody, while also trying to stick to the tone/message I'm trying to get across. It can take a lot of time, but it's really rewarding when the lyrics come together in a way with which I'm happy. Sometimes I'll just play the song and blurt out whatever words come out - those are often the ones that stick!

I know I'm happy with a project when I can listen to it multiple times and there's nothing left that I want to change; I don't hear anything that makes me cringe, and I can actually enjoy it! If I can listen to it with someone else and don't feel the need to say "Oh, that part still needs some tweaking", that's a good sign.

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

That's an interesting question. Having only worked in second bedrooms, this is something I haven't thought about much. My ideal space would be about what it allows me to do - I'd want to be able to jump up and down without bothering anyone. I'd want to be able to take 200 takes of the same word, without anyone hearing me. I like spaces that are big and uncluttered. I also find I get into the vibe if it's dark. Somewhere a little gritty, with natural light. And I love a good view. The second floor of an abandoned warehouse sounds about right. Maybe overlooking the Ottawa river and the city, (and that is somehow perfectly treated for recording, and heated). Anyone know a spot?

*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?*

Yes, I released a track titled "Time Bomb" mid-October. I'm pretty proud of this one, for a couple of reasons:

First, it was a long time in the making. The track was "born" out of another one I started in the in the winter of 2019. I kept trying to flesh it out and finish it, but I wasn't feeling it, and would move on to other tracks. I finally came back to focus on it in July 2020, and was about to scrap it again, when I came across a preset on my Novation Bass Station II which gave it a whole new vibe. I made one little change to the percussions, and rewrote the entire song with new lyrics.

And second, the message in the track is something I had wanted to write about for a while. It has a specific meaning to me, but I won't get into that, because I like leaving the interpretation up to the listener. In general, what I hope the song does is inspire people to break any destructive/unhelpful tendencies or habits in their life, and re-focus that time and energy towards things that are meaningful to them.

It can be streamed on Spotify here: ["Time Bomb" by ISØBEL](#)

# sheehan

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*(sheehan)*

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

My brother, cousins and I started a “band” one summer with a double neck toy guitar. There’s a picture, I think we even wrote a song, maybe...I was probably 5 or 6. When I was around 10 or 11 the same brother (Kyle, who I play in three bands with currently [The Tenenbaums, Duck Toys & Cowboy Chords]) wanted a guitar for Christmas and so I did too. He suggested I get a bass and so I got one. Kyle influenced a lot of decisions I made as a kid. He liked Brett Heart, so I like Owen Heart. He liked Batman, so I liked Robin. I think it’s safe to say he is a good 50% of what got me into making art. Our older brother, J, was also a very active drummer in high school and that definitely got us into music and wanting to be “cool” like him. He had long, bright red hair.

My mom and dad also have always been music nerds in some sense. Their record collection was massive and they always had music playing.

As I grew up, all the kids I really enjoyed hanging out with played or at least enjoyed music. I spent most of high school jamming with friends at school and after.

The first band I was in that I’d consider “real” was a punk band when I was in grade 8 called The Klondikes. Two of my brother Kyle’s friends asked me to join and I bought a white hollow body Epiphone. Mike & Alex continued to influence me artistically from that point. Alex drums in The Tenenbaums with Kyle and I.

This spring we lost Mike in a tragic accident and honestly it made me feel like I might never enjoy music again. He was always the person I looked to for approval when writing songs. Everything I ever released publicly I’d secretly be waiting for Mike’s message. His respect for my art made it worth it. He’ll never be replaced but I’ve found myself pushing myself to make him proud even though he can’t tell me if he is or not.

Short story long, my friends and family are the reason I make art and actually do anything. I rely heavily on them and am so lucky to have the people I do holding me up.

*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]?*

I play a lot of different styles with different projects but here’s some quick descriptions of my projects:

1. sheehan: solo ambient folk looping. Sloppy beats and slow burns.

2. The Tenenbaums: sporadic noisy gravel punk
3. Duck Toys: me and my brother looping guitars, drum machines and samples with way too many effects. All improv all the time.
4. Cowboy Chords: simple sad folk songs with a back up band far more musically talented than the song writer ever could dream of being

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

Usually happens when I least expect it, as cliché as that is. I often find myself writing lyrics when I don't have time to be doing it. I have a lot of notes in my phone that I pick away at. When I go to record I almost never sing or play how I had intended to. I could honestly say I have never truly, in my opinion, finished a song...

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

Most of my songs, even the really strange, out there, ambient songs began on an acoustic guitar. Which is funny cause I don't even own an acoustic that I'd consider playable...

My dad's classical guitar is forever my favourite and the guitar I learned my first song on (Free Falling, taught to me by my brother J in our kitchen). My sister, Katrina, who I live with also has a classical I play a lot. I love classical guitars for messing around cause they're easy to play and quiet. I also play this random Washburn "traveller" that my dad bought cause he thought it was interesting. It's super quiet and compact but has a full size neck.

I don't think I've ever written lyrics before instrumentation. Maybe once, but that just doesn't work for me. (I actually did this in between two sessions of answering these questions ... haha)

Usually a project is finished because of a deadline I set for myself or through a project such as Demo Fest 2020 which I'm participating in currently. In the past I decided to release an EP every month for a year and that really forced me to finish stuff. Otherwise, like I said above, I rarely "finish" any projects. I like to keep songs open and keep adjusting them and usually find myself changing lyrics over the years after songs are released.

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



Lots of natural light would be nice. I've moved around a lot and have a fairly mobile set up but would love to have a space sometime soon where things can stay set up for when inspiration strikes. Usually my space is a mess as a result of it being temporary. Maybe that's an excuse for not being organized?

I have an unreasonable number of pedals that I like to swap around and usually have a set up of about 5-10 for a project. It's funny for me to listen back to old recordings and think that I haven't used a piece of gear that's featured prominently since that recording was released. I want to slowly add more synths to this collection and a good selection of synths would definitely be a dream come true. I'd ideally like them all set up and not have to rearrange a room to make music.

My ideal space would fit friends to jam with too cause I flip flop between playing alone and with others super frequently so I'd like to accommodate both.

I am a professional gardener and so plants. Specifically ones that flower (ie. African violets even though everyone says they remind them of their grandma).

Specifically not my bedroom. I've spent many years in shared accommodation making music in my bedroom and I don't like it anymore. At one point I did.

Again, short story long, a well lit room with a good synth set up, a working computer (mine is janky as hell), some nice healthy plants and some of my friends art hanging would be perfect. Maybe a couch? Probably a couch. Ideally I'd like this space to be a permanent room in my home!

*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?*

My submission for Demo Fest 2020! It's a super cool initiative out of Montreal that is raising money for charity and getting folks inspired during a time when live music seems a distant memory. It's called "I'm lucky just to have you (songs I wrote in november)" and is sort of a follow up to my RPM submission from years ago! It's dedicated to my friends and family, they're important if that isn't clear yet...

My submission is a solo project that I'd call ambient, loopy emo. It's largely based around a Korg Volca Beats and an EQD Aqueduct I acquired during the pandemic. I love drum machines (shout out to Fire Antlers, a local favourite of mine who is a drum machine enthusiast and got me thinking more about them!) I also love vibrato and the EQD pedal has this really cool random vibrato mode I've been overusing on guitar and synth. After this release I'll probably make myself sick of it...that happens to me a lot.

Winter generally becomes my musical season as I'm busy with work in the spring, summer and fall. So I guess just keep an eye on my bandcamp

([sheehan.bandcamp.com](http://sheehan.bandcamp.com)) and my Instagram ([@sheeshjrdn](https://www.instagram.com/sheeshjrdn)) for releases and potentially live streams?

Thanks for reading !!!

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

The next issue of *Random Transmissions* will be whatever the hell it ends up being!

I'm also thinking of how to include collective band replies to the Six Questions, so if your band wants to give it a go let me know! [cygnusonyxflame@gmail.com](mailto:cygnusonyxflame@gmail.com)

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