

EZEKIEL HONIG

SOUNDS TO LIVE IN

UNDERGROUND
SOUNDS

Many recording artists would cringe if anyone ever applied the term background music to their art. Avant-garde composer Ezekiel Honig, however, finds satisfaction in knowing his music—thoughtful, atmospheric affairs that combine electronic and acoustic elements with field recordings—accompanies its listeners even through some of life's most mundane moments. "Electro-acoustic music is not pop music," says Honig. "It is kind of open and undefined. I like the idea that a person can get something out of it by living with it. It's really big if someone tells me, 'I like to read and listen to it. I can fall asleep to it.'"

Years ago, Honig may have had a different opinion. As a teenager he discovered electronic music by attending raves and underground parties in his hometown of New York City, and by his early 20s he had already become a fixture as a DJ and promoter in the city's dynamic drum & bass scene—a far cry from anything that could remotely be considered relaxing.

Honig began dabbling in production to create music for his DJ sets, and unexpectedly found his true love in the minutiae of reinventing sounds and putting them together in new ways. The more immersed Honig became in production, the more his compositions strayed away from traditional dance music. "I think I was naturally inclined towards 'deeper' stuff," he says. "I was sort of on a continuum, moving away from the DJ roots."

Honig founded minimal techno label Microcosm Records and Anticipate Recordings in 2004 and 2003, respectively. His fourth album, *Scattered Practices* (released on Microcosm in 2006), which

firmly cemented his departure from his earlier sounds, and soon after its release he turned much of his focus to *Anticipate*. He developed a roster of like-minded artists (including experimental composer Mark Templeton and Tokyo/New York sound sculptress Sawako) that also explored the possibilities of ambient, electroacoustic and electronic music styles and multimedia art. His dedication to sonic craftsmanship showed in his own music as well; his fifth album, the delicate, dreamlike *Surfaces of a Broken Marching Band* (*Anticipate*, 2008) was released to critical acclaim.

Honig's latest album, *Folding Us In On Itself* (Type Records), is a quiet, peaceful offering that explores time, space and distance. These themes seem incongruent with the fact that many of its sounds were recorded on the streets of New York City, a place typically characterized as having the opposite of these attributes. Perhaps it takes a native New Yorker to find tranquility where others find chaos. "Ultimately if I wasn't living here, what I would miss the most is the energy on the streets, and part of that is listening," says Honig. "It's easy to be overwhelmed by a loud city, but you can allow it to exist around you. The crowdedness can create a solitary space, and you can find your own way. As crowded and as loud as it is, you can make your own rhythm. No one cares what you are doing. There are so many people and things going on. It isn't easy, but you can create space where there is no space." *Folding Us In On Itself* speaks to this very notion. Honig explains, "The title of the album is about revisiting a space that exists and turning it into a new version of itself. The memory of some-

thing is as real as the real experience of it is."

This concept even enters into Honig's field recording process, making the wheres and whys of his recording locations appear as much a part of his art as his music. The album's title track, for example, consists of recordings from three different neighborhoods in NYC. "I recorded in each spot on three separate days, and then I layered the recordings from the same space three different times, over another space that has been layered enough three times, and so on. It is a folding of time and space. I did the recordings not knowing what I'm going to do with them. Later I decided to use them specifically for one song. Once I had that, the rest came naturally."

On "Distance Breakfast Highway," the last track on the album, Honig applies this same technique using a more stripped down approach. During a visit to Italy, he hit the record button one morning while he and his friends were enjoying a morning meal in the town square. "Every sound you hear is what I heard that morning. There is a guitar sound that I wrote a couple of notes... recorded off of [friend and Anticipate Recordings Artist] Nicola Ratti's guitar," says Honig.

While Honig's current record may be rooted in the idea of memory, as a songwriter he is focused on the future. "I would like to keep building and keep moving along the continuum," he says. "I hope to keep developing and try to let everything around me affect me, and be aware of how it is affecting me—even the way the sounds I recorded a week ago are affecting me and try to figure out what they can turn into."

Words: Jamie Ludwig | Photo: Toni Skotcher