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## 15 An interview with Keito by Axel

Axel, Wed 05 Mar 2008

# An interview with Keito of Alcatraz

by Axel of Brainstorm

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Keito is one of the musicians that has been around for a long time, hiding somewhere in the deep, dark alleys of the Demoscene. It took him quite some time to make the switch from lurking to participation. And as soon as he did, he won a music competition at Sundown in the UK and wrote the soundtrack to one of the better demos of 2007, Route 1066 by UKscene Allstars. ZINE met up with Keito to find out more about him as a person, his life, his work and his aspirations.

## Growing up

Keito grew up in Streatham in Southwest London, which he calls "a dump of a place". "It's right next to Brixton which is probably one of London's worst ghetto areas," he opens our conversation. "There's a lot of crime and violence here, but I still call it my home."

He has one older half brother whom he gets along with really well, and he had one sister that he never met. She died when she was just three years old. "Many have asked the reason for my name and for the first time now I will reveal why I have the scene name that I do," he explains. "My sister's name was Kate, and the Japanese version of that name is Keito. I chose that name so that every time I release music, I am honouring her and remembering her by doing so."

"My sister's name was Kate, and the Japanese version of that name is Keito."



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He has an excellent relationship with his mother. She has always, and still does support his musical interests. However, his father is a very strict person and has always wanted Keito to pursue other academic areas. "I won't go into a lot of detail here but these days we all get along," he sums up.

## Kindergarten and school

Keito's memory isn't so good these days. The reason for that is "far too much alcohol and drug abuse at parties in my youth," he says. "The most prominent early memories I have are probably from Sommerville School in my hometown," he continues. Lessons were fun, and we were encouraged to be creative, and I have fond memories of that school. Ah, life was so much easier in those days."

### Keito on the summit of Box Hill in Surrey

At school he was somewhat of a bad student. He had the ability to do well, but he was always too busy skipping school, playing football, and generally getting up to mischief. "I was good at Art, though, and loved drawing and painting," he adds. "I also played a lot of sports in the school teams for football, rugby, and tennis."

"My favourite lessons were definitely Art, P.E, and Religious Studies. For some reason I have always been fascinated with ancient history and thus religious studies."

## Discovering music

From the earliest days he can remember he was brought up on rock 'n' roll music from the '50s and '60s. His mother loves music and it was always playing, be it in the car, in the kitchen, or in the living room. As Keito grew older he naturally discovered rock and metal, and then electronic forms of dance music with the early '90s breakbeat scene in the UK blowing up.

## "I am a bit of a perfectionist"

"When I was about 14, I had a group of mates who I drank with and smoked 'stuff' with and we all used to gather 'round somewhere, grab a load of guitars and any other instruments and start jamming. I got the bug for playing guitar then."



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Apart from the recorder in school and some random sessions on the piano, his first real instrument that he could call his own was a battered old acoustic guitar that his friend gave him. That was followed by a cheap Fender Strat he got from the local music shop.

### Teenager Keito sipping some beer with friends

"Music lessons were horrible for me in school and I was never paid much attention to," he remembers. "It was a very old fashioned school with an old fashioned attitude. Basically, singing came first, and if you couldn't sing in tune, which I can't, then you were deemed not fit to pursue any musical interests. So I taught guitar to myself at home and jammed with my friends and steadily got better and better. I have had no real musical lessons, and as such my musical theory knowledge isn't that good. Later in the days of synths I taught myself some keyboard skills, learning scales, and began exploring other forms of music production."

Keito calls himself impetuous and sometimes impatient on the negative side, while he characterizes his strength to be generosity. "Maybe both a strength and weakness is that I am somewhat of a perfectionist which can lead to good things but also not so good things," he adds with a laugh.

Currently, Keito is writing music for a stock music library, but he takes freelance music jobs whenever they come along as well.

## The early days of scene activity

The first song is something special for every composer. Keito is no exception. "I can't remember the first thing I wrote on the guitar or a real instrument, but in a computer sense, I can remember the first module I ever completed on my Amiga 500 way back when. It was called Auralite and was about six minutes long and had an eastern flavour to it. I wrote it when I was about 15. I think I might still have it somewhere."

Even though Keito had already written tracks in his bedroom, he was still hesitant to approach any scene group or individuals with his music. "I have loved the scene from a very early age when I first got my Amiga 500," he remembers. "I watched demos religiously, swapped disks, and was eager to see more and more. Back then I didn't participate though. I am a bit of a perfectionist and if I was ever going to participate I wanted to be fairly good at my 'trade' first. So many years went by and life took its course, and I had kept and developed my interest in music. I was still watching demos, so I thought 'hey, why not get in touch with some UK people and have a chat?' So I posted a few songs on the UKscene forum at that time, maybe around 2004 or '05 I think, and I had a positive response."

Keito's first dip in the water of actually releasing anything was with Evil's wild "Ocean Drive". "It entered into Euskal 2006 which we made for Deviance, the track I had which Evil said suited it was very old and over compressed but it was a fun start and Evil is a great guy."



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"After many unused tracks and failed projects in Deviance I released an even older track for a demo by Division Zero at Main Party in 2006 entitled Kaleido. This was a one effect demo and I think the soundtrack helped a lot, but it was a pleasure to work with Nystep, another cool guy."

"In the same year I also attended my first demo party, which was inevitably the small UK party Sundown organized by rc55. I met some cool people there and ended up winning the Streamed Music compo with my track Dubstar."

## "Route 1066 was a pretty fast made demo in all aspects

2007 brought new goals and new opportunities. After a group switch to Alcatraz he found himself among a small team of great people, whom he can already call his friends. "I am really happy there, and our productions will surely follow soon," comments Keito.

Also in 2007, Keito became involved with the BitFellas team, where ALiEN was a supportive and helpful friend to him. "The rest of the team are all equally wonderful," he's quick to add. "I made some jingles for their radio station (BitJam) and also contributed to the superb BitJam Solaris Music Disk."

"At this point I must mention Darkus, who took a keen interest in me and my music and helped pave my way into the Demoscene proper. We also became friends, and he got me into Deviance Demo Division, where I met a lot of people which helped me a lot. He was also the man who introduced me to Alcatraz as they were forming, so again I have much to thank him for. But remember kids, Deviance is Death." And he laughs.

"So while all that was going on I was getting to know all the lovely folks on #ukscene, and they really are a top bunch of guys 'n' gals, after a few pub meets and a winning music entry at Sundown 06 the following work with Devistator and Smash took place, and now, well here I am."

## Cruising on Route 1066

And along came Route 1066, one of the biggest demos of 2007. "The first time I heard about the project was when Devistator approached me on IRC and said they, Smash and he, were thinking about making a demo for Sundown under the UKAS label," explains Keito. "He said they needed some music and that my style would fit really well. Of course I jumped at the opportunity and started to chat to the guys about style and direction. So I was involved fairly early on."



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## Keito

Keito was very eager to get started so he began to make a few small previews. There was some more discussion about the mood of the demo and some abstract elements were talked about which he thought could work well with some crazy jazzy parts in the music. He made a couple of more new previews and the guys liked parts of both previews. "Smash then suggested that I join some of these segments together to make one track. So I did, and it worked really well, and I then built the track from around that basis." The initial join point can still be heard in the tune straight after the short vocal sample "do you like jazz" when the new bass line comes in.

"The track was finished relatively quickly," says Keito. "At least the structure was done quite quickly which I imagine helped the guys to begin work fairly quickly with a view to time line and such. There was some small tweaking done later on before I handed over a final version but mostly it was done quite fast."

When watching Route 1066 one might think it's a highly polished, long planned demo with a proper schedule and development plan. One couldn't be more wrong. "To be honest, it was a pretty fast made demo in all aspects, probably something like 3 or 4 weeks, I would guess," elaborates Keito. "The whole approach was very relaxed and I felt able to be freely creative in the whole process without many boundaries or limitations. Sure, the final coding frenzy at the Sundown party place must have been stressful but in general I think we approached it with quite a free-flowing and almost laid-back attitude."

"Devistator did some amazing work with the graphics, he's a busy chap in our dvs, and he managed to get a lot done in a short time and to a high level of quality while still managing to ooze style and ultimately give substance to the demo."

"In retrospect, therefore, I feel privileged to have been able to work on this production and within this small but talented team. It was fun, enlightening, and a pleasure to see it all come together."

# "We approached Route 1066 with an almost laid-back attitude."

What is he most happy about regarding the demo? "I think the free flowing ability to express ideas and experiment and just go with the flow and try stuff out without the weight of expectation from anyone for anything helped it all. You can see a reflection of this attitude in the nfo for the demo, I think. As Smash says in the nfo "It's solely done for the sake of showing some design ideas," and I think we





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did that, and I am happy about the result." Keito only wished he could have spent more time mastering the track.

## Exploring the genres

Keito's songs are full of elements from various genres, ranging from funk to hip hop and from jazz to orchestral. "I guess I'm not a massive jazz fan, to be honest, but I do like to work with elements of these genres, as well as others, and see how I can mix it up. There is some great funk music out there which is always good at a party as well. I hear a lot of jazz/funk elements in more modern music from labels such as Ninja Tune, which I think inspires me to discover more and more jazz from original artists, and to listen to all the great funk music out there as well."

"All the time I am eager to broaden  
my musical horizon"

"I think I go through phases," explains Keito. "For a while now I've enjoyed writing some hip hop and trip hop with jazz and funk elements. When I started out with synths, I was often making more ambient tracks all the time, and then trance, and I have been through other genres in phases as well."

### Keito's studio

Thereby, Keito still strives for finding his limits. "All the time I am eager to learn new styles, techniques, and broaden my musical horizon. Music is just so beautiful in all its forms to me, even if, for example, I don't like Opera music as much as another genre, I am still fascinated by what makes it Opera, the structures and arrangements, etc. Music is bewitching and I am eager to try and learn as much as I can, sticking to one genre is ultimately quite boring for me. I think the Demoscene is quite narrow-minded in this sense and you only hear a certain amount of styles because, apparently, only certain music goes with demos. This I completely disagree with."

"I think the Demoscene is quite narrow-minded."



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"As a musician I think I am very creative, but as a technician I am not as competent, so I need to learn mastering to a higher level, but it's not a chore for me; more of a pleasure."

"I have no one direction that I want to go in," says Keito towards the end of our interview. "I would like to develop my technical ability more, so I can get as best a mix as possible. Creatively I am always eager to learn more, I have covered many styles already, from Latin and Salsa to UK Garage and Orchestral, most of which you haven't heard from me yet. And I have many unused tracks, some of which you will hear soon, I hope. I like to work in a free-flowing way and this works well for me, so rather than plan out a future direction for myself, I think I will just go with the flow."

Or in more clichéd poetic words: Keito goes wherever the music takes him. ZINE is looking forward to hearing from him again. Literally.