

Keith Richie

Ambient Highways



It's time to get on the road and take a trip. This trip won't end up at a friend's house or your grandmother's. For this journey knows no bounds. On his latest album **Ambient Highways**, multi-instrumentalist **Keith Richie** chronicles a space journey that takes place so distant, that the galaxy hasn't been named yet. The irony was not lost on me that when I received this music for review that I was reading one of the best Science Fiction stories of all time, *The Stars My Destination* by Alfred Bester. Take one main character, maroon him on a disabled ship far from anything, and cue the music. Richie's textural sound scores could be the foundation for any quality fiction that transports the reader and the listener, and there is no guarantee of a return.

The exciting journey begins with the tune **Neutrino**. Nothing sets in motion a journey like the engine of the mind, powered by neutrinos. Richie's opening track is animated, exhilarating, and builds the vivid scenario of an ordinary lift off, but then recounts a convergence with the star stream and the FTL passage that opens the doors that were closed to human kind for so long. Bon Voyage.

Xenogenesis asks a lot of questions. Before us is a phenomena so mysterious, so unknown that we doubt our own senses. Richie's soundscape suggest a metamorphism right before our eyes. What we thought of as a simple form has changed into a mind boggling birth of a strange, new form. Keith's swashes of electronic sounds are moderate and flowing, and suggests a vision of a changing scenario with an inexplicable central entity. Greetings.

Next comes the title tune, **Ambient Highways**. Off we go and into the star stream again with our destination indeterminate. Richie uses soft passages, sparkling elements, and inorganic chorus to transport us on this leg of the journey. There is no confusion, just uncertainty. But we came on this flight for a reason. The music is in its own way uplifting in a melodic sense. There is an unseen force driving us, pushing us to go on. This is a great piece powered by imagination and mindfulness.

Not all is what it seems. As on Earth, there be dangers in space. Keith's siren song, a piece called **Weeping Angels**, tugs at our heartstrings, but false flags don't waver in this airless region. The haunting seraphic chorus is heard just on the edge of consciousness and lures us in like some unseen hunters using quavering sounds as the bait. Slow, drifting tones ripple like bread cast upon the invisible waters. We are ensared.

One of my favorites on Ambient Highways is called **Faith's Song** (Ptilopteri's Waltz). This is a mesmerizing tune which could be rebranded as Dance of the Penguins. It has an olde world sway, but with a futuristic charm. What we think of as awkward, flightless avians, do very well

in the vacuums of space. They move around as if the universe is their personal ocean, swirling about in graceful movements. And in all of it a bit of fantasy.

In **Artic Shores** we witness the land that has been frozen for a million, million years. The coastline is unmoving on our visit to this place. Every inch of landscape is a transparent, frosty sculpture of a long forgotten time. Our eyes feast on the blues, the whites, and the shimmering silvers as their sun arrives. All of the beauty is heightened by the cold stillness.

Neptune's Awakening is the soundscape for a planet that is blue from our heaven's view. As we approach its boundary, we see familiar clouds, but their semblance ends there. The power of the winds that blow about the planet change its surface minute by minute. We never see the same face twice. Keith's powerful homage has its own driving force featuring darker elementals to acknowledge the mystery and supremacy of this far away world.

When we finally encounter Ultima Thule, we know we are "Beyond the Known World". **Ultima Thule**, at 8 minutes, is the longest cut on Ambient Highways and the most thought provoking. Richie creates a spatial state of shadowy, intangible atmospheres that are immersive. All around you are sounds that build, deflect, demolish, and return. Like the object itself, your orbit is certain, your future unknown. Really great straightforward cut that reminds me of electronic music made long ago and hardly heard these days without a lot of bells and whistles.

Keith Richie's dozen hyper-stratospheric tracks are a pleasure to listen to and experience. I am sure that Mr. Richie's equipment is state-of-the-art, but his methods are old school. This music was the perfect accompaniment to my reading, but the music can be enjoyed under any conditions. I suggest you get on board and immerse yourself in some excellent music. The stars await you. Highly listenable.

- R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews