

## River's Edge (07/2010)

### Interview by V-12

V-12: 7 years have passed since your last C64 music collection called Dromaeomania #1 was released. What was the main reason for your quite long inactivity?

Actually, I left the C64 scene fall 1999, after releasing "Deinonychus #7". Latter is my pretty famous series of digi music collections. However, I kept composing tunes without samples until 2003. Only a few, though.. All tunes I did between 1999 and 2003 are included in "Dromaeomania #1". Aren't many, eh? The main reason for my inactivity? Um, there're two reasons: as most of you will know I'm not only a C64 composer, but also a musician in the "real world". My music project is called "Taxim", too. In 1999, I signed with Art Voice Media, a sublabel of Sony Music that doesn't exist anymore. As you can imagine, I was pretty excited about being signed (it was my first recording contract ever) and I decided to leave the C64 scene in order to focus on my "real" music only. Anyway, I had to terminate the contract with AVM in 2000 for health reasons, so Taxim couldn't become big. After taking a long break from music, I had two more recording contracts, but these labels sucked ass. As you can see, I wasn't exactly a lucky person back then.. Someone hug me, please? ;)

V-12: You mean Telegrammetry Recordings? Why they sucked ass? :) Did they promote your music badly or what was it that disappointed you?

Yes, Telegrammetry (also known as Abacus Florida) promoted and distributed my 2006 album "Ecclesiophobia" in the US and they did a good job on it. However, I strongly believe they cheat their artists; at least their foreign ones. I haven't seen a cent in this four years, even though "Ecclesiophobia" was selling good (I checked it's sales rank at several online shops every now and then).

V-12: What about your earlier works? You are considered as a founder of the C64 remix scene. Could you tell me about your SynthieTrax series (e.g. when did you start doing remixes and what inspired you)?

Well, I'm a great fan of C64 music, as you would expect; especially of game soundtracks released before 1989. (Beyond the Forbidden Forest, Aztec Challenge, Warhawk. Delta, GhettoBlaster, The Big Deal, The Last Ninja I + II, almost all tunes by Ben Daglish etc. When I bought my very first synth late 1996, I certainly wanted to know how my favourite C64 tunes would sound when played by some "real" instruments. My first synth conversions (I wouldn't call them "remixes" as the label "C64 remix" didn't exist at that time) were "Cyberworld" by Jeff (used in the demo "Dawnfall" by Oxyron), the theme music of "The Last Ninja III" and "The Mansion" ("The Last Ninja II"). It was just for fun, but after a former contact was very excited about these conversions, I decided to make more. After making another three conversions, I named the whole thing "SynthieTrax 64" and sent tapes to all my contacts. Believe me, most of them freaked out, haha. Remember, way back in 1997 something like "SynthieTrax 64" was really special. Besides me, only Chris Hülsbeck and Chris Abbott published synth versions of C64 soundtracks, if I'm right. Anyway, the sceners wanted more synth conversions of C64 tunes, so I continued with the ST 64 series. I didn't spend much time on ST 64 1 + 2, to be honest.. Most tracks were finished within 2 or 3 hours. ;) In 1999 I decided to put some more effort in my conversions. Also, I wanted to release them on CD. I guess it took me about two weeks to finish ST 64 3 and I was working on it every day (yes, I had a girlfriend at that time.. it was hell ;)). ST 64 3 was very successful, but I stopped producing such conversions for the same reasons I left the C64 scene. Ok, I re-remixed "Cyberworld" and "Warhawk" in 2003 (released on "SynthieTrax 64: Alpha/Omega", which is sort of a "Best Of ST" CD), but that's it. I don't think I'll ever release a "C64 remix" again, because nowadays thousands remix their asses off. Seriously, no one would need a CD called "ST 64 4" anymore.

V-12: I'm not gonna even ask you why... But I would like to notice, that C64 remixes were not your only synth works at that time. It is worth mentioning your first self-released album with non C64 remixes, entitled "The 25th Year" (done in 1998, no?) and including more interesting tracks, such as "Brightness... Inside", "Worlds of Water" or "Dead but lucky". It wasn't actually the album Art Voice signed you for, was it?

Thanks, but "The 25th Year" was album no. 2. ;) The very first Taxim album is entitled "My World" (how creative..), but only very few people have it. It was released in 1997, by the way. Like ST 64 3, "The 25th Year" was released in 1999. It wasn't the album

Art Voice signed me for, however, they used some tracks from it (the tracks you've mentioned, for instance). The Taxim record Art Voice published included the best tracks of the above-mentioned albums, so it was a pretty early "Best Of" and another one ("Ecclesiophobia") should follow, as you probably know. ;)

V-12: Actually "Ecclesiophobia" is a quite interesting release, because it contains some old and new tracks (even the main theme of "Dawnfall" is included), all is kept in a mixture of electro, EBM and even industrial-like music. But currently you are describing your work as "Electro Fun-Punk". What does it mean exactly?

As for "Ecclesiophobia", Abacus wanted that mixture of old and new tracks. I don't know why. And yes, my 2003 re-remix of Jeff's "Cyberworld" is included. Originally it wasn't supposed to be on this record, but in the end I had no choice. The deadline was coming closer and closer and I couldn't finish a new track called "Hangar Vier", so I was in urgent need of a track that would fit the record. Actually, you can't say I'd currently describe my work as Electro Fun-Punk, as I definitely broke with my former style(s). Many things have changed.. I finally started to sing and Taxim became a band, consisting of 2 women (keyboards and guitars) and me. I'm still the one who's writing all songs, though. Well, electro punk isn't a common genre, but it exists. It's pretty hard to describe what it sounds like, since each electro punk band seems to have an own definition of it. I would say old Sigue Sigue Sputnik is the most popular example for electro punk (in the 80s, it was called electro cyber punk). In my case, the music is not as crazy as Sigue Sigue Sputnik's, but the lyrics are. And they're not just crazy, but also funny, so I added the word "fun" to electro punk.. simple as that. ;) Some people say there're also elements of the "Neue Deutsche Welle" (this includes old stuff by Nena, Peter Schilling and Trio, for instance) in my latest songs and maybe they're right.

V-12: There is a funny story about electro punk music, because some people were using this term to describe The Prodigy's music back in the 90s, which was wrong, of course (that term was actually invented in 1999). When creating new tracks are you inspired by someone else or does everything come directly from your mind? And also tell me how it feels to be finally a real band, instead of a one man project?

Haha, I guess that was because of singer Keith's hair. The Prodigy didn't invent break/big beat, but they made it popular.. very popular. Many solo artists and bands claim to be not influenced by anyone, but seriously: there's no one (!) who isn't influenced by someone. I remember either Paul McCartney or John Lennon saying that the Beatles wouldn't have existed without Elvis Presley. Well, and Elvis was heavily influenced by Bill Haley etc. I would say that I usually write songs without being directly influenced by another artist, however, there were many influences in the past. Sometimes you don't even know someone influenced you. I'll tell you my influences of which I know: the most important influence was thrash metal music of the 80s (especially Sodom and Sepultura). Also, I was influenced by Paul Norman (C64 composer / "Forbidden Forest") and Matt Gray (C64 composer / "The Last Ninja II") in the beginning. Further influences would be Stephen Root, Modest Mussorgsky, Sting, Frederic Motte, Rob Zombie, Rondo Veneziano, Klaus Doldinger, Sigue Sigue Sputnik, Die Ärzte, early 90s techno, early Prodigy (haha, yes!) and some others. Well, even though I always liked to work alone, I must admit that having a band is even more fun. I mean, I now have two female vocalists (I plan on using their vocals more often in future), who are also damn good keyboard and guitar players. Plus they're fun persons, so we have a great atmosphere in this band.

V-12: Your latest album entitled "Einer für sich" was released some days ago (on the 16th of July) and it provides a completely new sound. As you've mentioned before, you broke with your former styles and also finally became a singer. But actually this is not the first time you acted as a vocalist (e.g. you already did in the song "Timeout"), right? How much time did you spend in writing and arranging your new songs and are you completely satisfied with the result?

That's right, there's a couple of old Taxim songs that contain vocals, but it's always just recitative singing and more or less aggressive and partially distorted whispering. Now I really SING and that makes a big difference. ;) Anyway, I didn't decide to start singing overnight; I actually started singing seven years ago. So why didn't I release tracks with "real" singing earlier? It was because I wasn't satisfied with my vocals. Only when I recorded the opener of the new album, "Erlöser" (2009), I thought: yes, sounds good.. let's make more vocal tracks. Also, I got some positive feedback on my voice, which reinforced my decision. Producing a vocal track is much more work than an instrumental, because you often have to mix sounds different and you need to make a lot of test recordings in order to avoid distortion. Including mixing and mastering, we were working on a song for up to two weeks. All in all, it took us 11 months to finish "Einer für sich". Btw, I composed almost all songs while taking a bath. Not kidding.

That's why the front cover shows me in my bathtub. ;) I'm extremely satisfied with the result! Almost all songs have pretty kickass melodies and I personally think it's the best Taxim album so far. In every way. I'm actually satisfied with everything this time, because I collaborate with a pretty good German label, European Music Group. Besides promoting Taxim online, they'll get us on the print media and even on TV. Only throughout Germany, though, because all our song lyrics are in German. Btw, I said that I don't think I'll ever release a "C64 remix" again, but I recently did, haha! I forgot about "Keine Musik (C64)", which is a synth version of one of my latest C64 tunes. Busted! However, it's a remix of my own material, so it's ok. ;)

V-12: Besides "Keine Musik (C64)", which actually is one of 2 instrumental tracks on "Einer für sich", there is also an interesting song entitled "Bläck Mätel". Sounds like a parody which actually is on the same level with Excrementory Grindfuckers. ;)

Speaking of "Keine Musik (C64)", there's still one thing I want to let you know: it means "not music" and I named it like that because of a silly statement I read in someone's MySpace profile several years ago: "Music without vocals is not music!" After reading that I decided to call one of my future instrumental tracks "not music" .. and there it is! Now you'll most probably know, why the second instrumental track on "Einer für sich" is called "Keine Musik II (Och Nö!)". "Och Nö" is like "Naaayy, not again!!" .. ;) Right, "Bläck Mätel" is a black metal parody! I personally hate black metal and after my girlfriend woke me up one day by playing that stuff loud as fuck, I simply had to do this song. ;) The lyrics are less friendly, as you can imagine and as for the vocals, that's actually me. No tricks and no essential effects. I was surprised that Alex can sound like Mark "Barney" Greenway's (Napalm Death) little brother. There's another parody on this album, btw: "Ugh!". It's about the German Medieval metal and neofolk scene.

V-12: You made it very well, so maybe you should make more black metal music in near future? ;) Anyway, are you planning any small tour in order to promote your latest album? Is there any chance to see you performing live in Poland? ;)

Hahaha.. Who knows, maybe I'll let that black metal band return someday. A lot of people like "Bläck Mätel". It's even European Music Group's CEO's favourite track of this album. So far, a tour isn't planned, but we're prepared to play live and maybe we'll play a couple of shows in Germany, depending on EMG's promotional activities. I don't think we'd make it to Poland, though, because Taxim, as it is right now, still is a completely unknown band. If enough people outside Germany will like our new album, there's a slight chance we come to foreign countries in order to promote our next album.

V-12: Okay, let's make one step back into the past. You've joined the C64 scene in the beginning of the 90s, right? Your first nickname was BLA and your first group was your own, "Deinonychus Software". Why exactly BLA? What does it mean? ;)

Nope, I first got in touch with the C64 scene in 1997. That means, I already got in touch with it in 1986 or so, but I wasn't an active scener until 1997. I wouldn't call "Deinonychus Software" a group.. It was just a label I created to release music collections on. BLA wasn't my first handle, but I first got noticed with it. The story behind BLA is simple: during the 80s, some classmate usually called me "Bloody Alex", because it was known that I mainly listened to thrash metal music, which was still a bit satanic back then. I found it funny afterwards, so I decided to use the handle BLA, obviously short for Bloody Alex.

V-12: So finally you joined the scene in 1997... Why didn't you join it earlier?

It was pretty hard to get accepted in the early C64 scene, so I didn't even try to contact people before the mid-90s. I really didn't think about people could like my tunes. Might sound strange, but that's what I thought.

V-12: In September 1995 you released your first digi music collection called "Deinonychus #1". It contains 5 tracks: "To live on speed", "Act of aggression", "Kampfstern Galactica", "Blaues Geschwader (K.G. Version 2)" and "BLA meets ACID (Humanoid)". Let me guess: they were not exactly your very first C64 tunes, since there are some compositions you released in 1992... When exactly did you start to make music with C64 and why did you decide to combine SID sounds with digi samples? And one more question: since you are composing on 8580, do you have any sample-booster installed for playing your samples loudly?

Wasn't it in September 1994? I think so.. and you're right, those tunes weren't my first ones. I think I finished my very first C64

tune somewhere in 1988 and therefore, I'm musician for about 22 years now. Wow.. ;) Well, my first music tool was "Rockmonitor VI" and I was pretty excited about it, because it allows you to also use samples in your tunes. Needless to say a "digi tune" sounded much better in my ears than a "normal" one. At that time, I couldn't buy myself a synth and my Dad didn't buy me one, because I was bad at school (coughs), so the C64 was my only instrument. Ok, I also played the guitar and some bass, but I didn't want to become a singer-songwriter or something. ;) If I had a synth back then, I probably wouldn't have released C64 music collections and I most probably wouldn't have spent so much time in creating C64 music. Anyway, now I'm glad that I haven't had a synth, because I learned a lot from creating C64 music and I still benefit from it. No, I've never installed a sample booster. I first worked with a 6581, so there was no problem. Later, when I got a C64 C in 1991, I had to find a solution how I'd get the samples loud on this machine. I actually found one by experimenting around; a software solution. It doesn't work with all SID's, but I only wanted to get them loud on my C64 C anyway. ;)

V-12: I can assure you it was in September 1995, otherwise there's a typo in the intro's scroll text. :) You also ought to know that we in Poland are installing sample boosters in order to listen to your digi tunes! Tell me, why have you called your digi series "Deinonychus"? Are you a fan of dinosaurs or something like that?

If you say the intro scroller says 1995, I believe you. ;) Interesting.. I don't know much about sample boosters; maybe I'll change that. Yes, I've been a "fan" of dinosaurs since my childhood. I remember I was drawing pictures of dinosaurs yet at the age of five. I was a great fan of Tyrannosaurus Rex, but he wasn't too popular back in the late 70s and early 80s, so I often had to explain to others what's a T-Rex. I still admire him ( ; ) , but in the early 90s, I heard about an even more interesting group of carnivores, the Dromaeosaurids. I'm sure you heard of Velociraptor; he's probably the most popular example of a dromaeosaur. Anyway, don't believe what you know from "Jurassic Park"! ;) Velociraptor actually was way smaller than in this movie and he also looked a bit different. They created a mixture between Dromaeosaurus and Deinonychus and called it Velociraptor. The actual Velociraptor wasn't impressive enough. Well, now you also know where "Dromaeomania" comes from. I stick with my dinosaurs.

V-12: Why did you change your handle to Taxim? Didn't you feel satisfied about BLA that much or did you maybe think you would need to have a new, better handle when actually joining the C64 scene?

Many people told me I should change my handle, because you could make jokes of "BLA", like blablalblah. ;) However, it didn't bother me. I changed it, because "Bloody Alex" sounded silly to someone who didn't know the story behind it and I was really tired of telling it over and over again.

V-12: You did a couple of tunes entitled "Taxim (or BLA) meets...". Does that mean you really met The Prodigy, Robert Miles, U2, Hülsbeck and others who inspired you creating these tunes?

No, haha! I actually met Honey of Welle:Erdball, for instance, but our work doesn't belong to that series. "Taxim meets.." stands for my personal interpretation of a song by another artist. It also stands for improved versions of C64 tunes, like the Paul Norman ones.

V-12: You're also a creator of some digi versions of famous C64 tracks (e.g. "Comic Bakery", "Aztec Challenge", "Forbidden Forest"). In one of your "Deinonychus" collections you said that Paul Norman would have been the best C64 composer ever, if I'm right. You confirmed that by the amazing "Forbidden Forest Cave Mix". But actually you did a lot of hard trance tracks on C64, so one could think you were more inspired by modern music than by good old Norman?

Norman is my favourite C64 composer, but I wouldn't go that far anymore, saying he was the best C64 composer. He was an exceptional musician for sure, but I believe guys like Hubbard and Deglish were even better. Nevermind, Norman influenced me after all. ;) Right, I did a lot of hard trance and techno tracks on C64, but that was because techno style makes the C64 sound most impressive and that's exactly what the first Taxim era was about: sound. Btw, if you listen to a tune like "Act of Aggression" carefully, you'll notice that I combined music in the veins of Paul Norman with elements of modern music. Not forgetting a touch of Taxim. ;) You see, it wasn't all about self-actualisation.. The actual Taxim sound at that time can be found in tunes like "Die Scheppersynthese" (former "To live on speed"), "Well done", "BLA is back", "Argon" and such. Mostly dark, fast and ear killing

stuff! ;) I'm afraid none of these tunes made it into the HVSC. With "Pain remains", the second Taxim era began fall 1999. This era is more about music and originality, as you'll especially notice once you've listened to some of my latest C64 tunes.

V-12: Which are your favorite tracks on C64 composed by you?

I especially like the tunes I composed last year; they're simply the best. Old(er) tunes I still like include "Living Black", "Depression", "Psychosis" (did I release it? I don't know anymore), all my digi versions of Paul Norman tunes, "Saegezahn", "Lotusbluete" (an unreleased tune I made in 1990), "Vengeance of Nature" (Version 1, unreleased), "Taxim meets U2", "Nowhere Girl", "Utopia Title", "Weird Dreams", "Well done" and "Tekknodome". Right, less "hits" on my personal hit list. ;) Some of these tunes even suck, actually, but they have that certain something.

V-12: You were also a swapper. How many contacts did you have and do you remember any interesting stories in your swapping career?

Career? ;) I had up to 50 contacts, I think. Most of the time I had about 30. That was just insane, if you think about the fact, that I was releasing music collections and other stuff regularly. Also, I was always working on some Taxim album and my SynthieTrax series. All my contacts got a personal note, though, and I often wrote fucking long notes. I've always been a workaholic.. Unfortunately, there's no interesting story to tell, but maybe something interesting about me: I've always disliked competition and the so called "elite". ;) You know, those "I am better than you" individuals. Therefore, all my contacts were pretty "normal" users/sceners. Certain people would('ve) call(ed) some of them even "lamers". ;) Personally, I've always liked lamers, haha.

V-12: Stepping back to the later 90s, your digi collections really were popular to Polish swappers. We all were excited about amazing tracks like "Klanghammer", "Tekknodome", "Hypnodome" and the really kickin' track "Pain Remains". I even heard that latter was played in a Polish discotheque! Did you ever think your C64 music would become that successful?

By no means! I'm glad so many people liked my work. Thanks to all my Polish friends for spreading it! I personally think the key to success is not wanting it. In the beginning, I only made music for myself and I was really happy with that. Way too many musicians think about having success before they even create their first song.. Anyway, when Floyd/Willow convinced me to enter the Symmek music compo '98, I seriously thought hardly anyone would vote for my tune and I made the first place in the end. Well, and I haven't changed much since then. When I started working on "Einer für sich" last year, I thought this album couldn't become successful at all (no shit). Once again I didn't care and once again I got nothing but positive feedback and a recording contract. So how could I think different about the key to success? ;)

V-12: Back then you left the scene after being active for only a few years. How come you joined so many groups within that short time?

This is going to be a very short one: remember the workaholic thing. ;)

V-12: So if you are/were a workaholic, is there any chance you'll be releasing new C64 music collections someday?

I still am a workaholic and yes, there definitely will be new music collections in near future. I made two (C64) game soundtracks between 2008 and now, which will be also released in a collection. If I wanted to, I could release that collection tomorrow, but unfortunately I'm not allowed to as the games using these soundtracks aren't released yet. Both games are sort of point and click adventures by German game developers Out Of Order. As far as I know, there won't be English versions of them, so releasing a collection makes sense. Also, I plan on making "Dromaeomania #2" and "Deinonychus #8".

V-12: What do you think about the current C64 scene? What changed within the last 10 years in your opinion?

It's just great that there's still a C64 scene in 2010. Sure, I wish it was as active as in the mid-80s, but hey.. it's still there. In my opinion not too much has changed over the past 10 years. I mean, the scene already was on the internet 10 years ago, quite unlike

15 years ago. Maybe you should've asked about the last 15 years. ;) Nowadays, there're less releases, but still a lot (just take a look at CSDb). Many people still develop even new games and new hardware. As for the snail mail scene, it already became smaller in the late 90s and almost died in the early 00's. However, just almost. All in all, I think we all can be more than satisfied with nowadays C64 scene.

V-12: A totally different question: how do you feel about music piracy?

It's a very difficult topic. I think an artist or a band that released a good album deserves consideration / support. You have to pay for an egg at the supermarket as well. People seem to have forgotten that music is a product just like the stuff they buy quite naturally. On the other hand, there's so much music nowadays that it's easy to forget about this. How many band requests do you get on MySpace daily? 20, 30? Anyway, you guys shouldn't forget that making professional music is pretty expensive. If you believe professionals earn much money, you're wrong. Only guys like Michael Jackson (R.I.P.), U2, Madonna and other megastars still make money. Here in Germany only three or four bands can live on music, the other ones have to go to work before their concerts. As for me, the production of "Einer für sich" costed me about €500 and currently one of my synths needs repairs I can't afford.. That's the reality. Anyway, music piracy shouldn't be punished harder than theft. Especially in Germany they overdo it, like music pirates would be the worst criminals. Also, people who actually can't buy a release in their country should be less punished or not be punished at all if they're poor. Everyone needs music, that's for sure.

V-12: Okay, last words to your fans, friends etc. :)

Am I going to be shot? ;) First off, I assume some of my former contacts will read this, so I'd like to greet them. I hope you guys are doing well. To all my friends and fans: thanks for your support! Some of you really did a lot for me and I appreciate that! Talk to you in another music collection soon. C64 rules - keep the spirit alive.

V-12: Thank you for this interesting conversation and I wish you good luck with your latest album "Einer für sich"!

Thanks and also thanks for the interest.