



Music for First Contact

By Post Coal Prom Queen

Tracklist

1. I See No Gods Up Here
2. Wheeling Through The Void
3. See Red Peace
4. Free Radio Phobos
5. Daylight on Deimos
6. Cosmic Tongues
7. From Glasgow to Mars
8. Sapere Aude

Cast

Post Coal Prom Queen (PCPQ) are Lily Higham and Gordon Johnstone

Soprano vocals on tracks 1-3,5-8 - Stephanie Lamprea

Violin on tracks 1,2,4,5,7 - Laura Wilkie

Saxophone on tracks 1,2,4,5,7,8 - Calum Cummins

Piano on tracks 1,5 - Baichuan Hui

Synth bass on track 2 and guitar on track 7 - Phil McBride

Produced and mixed by PCPQ and Phil McBride at The Sonic Lodge recording studio in Edinburgh. Mastered by Louis Lemoine-Soubeyrat.

Information

Music for First Contact tells the story of humanity's first contact with extraterrestrial intelligence. 1000 years in the future a space station orbiting Mars - manned by descendants of Scottish explorers - detects a signal that is clearly intelligent. The question then becomes, do they reply or do they stay silent?

The narrative of the album is an exploration of the dark forest theory, popularised by Cixin Liu's Three Body Problem novel. It's theorised that all life seeks to preserve itself and, upon discovering a different life form, no species can guarantee that it will not be annihilated by this new species. Therefore, the safest option for any life form is to stay quiet to avoid detection, and if it detects others, destroy them before it itself is destroyed.

The tracks explore the dark forest theory, propaganda, fear and hope all through the lens of Scottish identity. The album also satirises the current political climate and the use of heavy-handed propaganda by both sides of the political spectrum to push flawed agendas - although it is important to note that we land firmly on the 'yes' side of the spectrum, whether it is Scottish independence or first contact.

Each song is an extrapolation of one of four arias written by PCPQ for voice and piano. Music for First Contact debuted as an interactive referendum at the 2022 Hidden Door Festival in Edinburgh to a sold out audience. The audience were asked to vote on whether or not to make first contact with the extraterrestrial intelligence. The audience voted 92% in favour of making first contact.

Track by Track

I See No Gods Up Here

Lyrics:

Memory of Earth
Film show me long ago
Millennia recorded for a TV show
I bathe in pixels of crashing waves
On shores we never saw
But in electric dreams

Memory of Earth
Film show me long ago
Millennia recorded for a TV show
I gaze in wonder
At landscapes tamed while cells run wild

Memory of Earth
Film show the starting gun
Hush audience, my favourite part is playing now
Pools of slime reach for minds
In celestial places we drew on rock faces

Narrative

'I See No Gods Up Here' sets the scene of the album. The only contact the people of the space station have with Earth is through old movies and TV shows - they've watched the evolution of a world and society they've never known, essentially making Earth as alien as the beings they're about to be contacted by.

Wheeling Through The Void

Lyrics:

Cosmic tongues, infinite lungs
The fish from the water, it walked up when ordered
Apes with our stones we made into phones and spoke

This frequency, we hear it we widen our eyes
This frequency, we hear it we widen our minds

Voices from the deep
Which timeline do we go on down?
We navigate orbits of mind

Cosmic tongues, infinite lungs
The fish from the water, it walked up when ordered
Apes with our stones we made into phones and spoke
This frequency, we hear it we widen our minds

Narrative

'Wheeling Through the Void' is the moment that humanity receives the signal. It is inspired by ideas of advanced extraterrestrial intelligences influencing the progression of human civilisation, such as in '2001: A Space Odyssey', and is a reflection on the evolution of communication - from our earliest ancestors up to the moment where we may send the most important message we'll ever write.

Free Radio Phobos

Lyrics:

Suddenly, suddenly we find ourselves in spotlight
Illuminate, illuminated in the dark forest
Rabbit in the headlights
Of monstrous machines
Like submarines
But made of teeth

Really, I find it kind of funny
The systems that we live in
Are alien to me anyway

Suddenly, suddenly we find ourselves in spotlight
Rabbit in the headlights
Of monstrous machines
Like submarines
With smiling teeth

Really, I find it kind of funny
The systems that we live in
Are alien to me

Narrative

'Free Radio Phobos' is the argument against responding to the signal. The protagonist feels like a rabbit in the headlights - exposed and terrified.

They're trying to imagine what is sending the signal, perhaps some unfathomable horror, and why anyone would ever want to respond to it. This track explores the dark forest theory (see above) as a reasoning for choosing to ignore the communication. 'Free Radio Phobos' uses deliberately absurd metaphors to satirise the fear mongering negative political campaigns have employed in the UK in recent years.

Daylight on Deimos

Lyrics:

Daylight on Deimos

Voice of hope

Narrative

'Daylight on Deimos' is the counterpoint to Free Radio Phobos. Its beautiful, utopian melodies and harmonies serve to portray an optimistic vision of what the future may hold - a new dawn for humanity in a post-signal world. The lyrics are deliberately vague to mirror the optimistic, and often unjustified, vision put forward by positive political campaigning. It's a promise of improvement with no mention of how that will be achieved.

From Glasgow to Mars

Lyrics:

Now the choice is ours
One step to the stars
My world is yours
Glasgow to Mars
Favouring the brave

Oh, my world is yours
Glasgow to Mars
Favouring the brave
One step to the stars

Oh, my world is yours
Glasgow to Mars
Favouring the brave

Narrative

'From Glasgow to Mars' is the triumphant celebration upon humanity deciding to respond to the signal and make first contact with an extra-terrestrial intelligence. It's reflective of the Yes campaign's approach of equating Scottish independence with bravery, and, therefore, Unionism and conservatism with cowardice.

Sapere Aude

Lyrics:

Sapere aude
Awake from this slumber
Growing pains we shake off
Wisdom flows in our blood

Sapere aude
Awake from this slumber
Growing pains we shake off
Wisdom flows in our blood

Slumber!
Slumber!
Slumber!
Slumber!

Narrative

'Sapere Aude' can be seen as a celebration of Man's ascension or a warning against our arrogance. The phrase translates from Latin as "dare to know" and was often used during the Scottish enlightenment - a time when humanity thought it was conquering all of its problems and reaching the pinnacle of social progress. We use the phrase here as a parallel to this hubris - humanity is setting forth on a path it little understands armed only with its optimism and over-inflated self confidence.