Spark #1.19 - Making Keraunograph, part One

- Henry Warwick
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Greetings gentle readers and members of the SPARK fanclub.

I sincerely apologise for having abandoned you for so long, but I can assure you it was not a voluntary disappearance. As some few of you know, I left Apple computer in October 2000, to join a nearby start up and extract a truly horrible commute from my life. The start up went belly up in April, leaving me unemployed and collecting the miserly miserable pittance that the state of California calls "unemployment insurance". The amount I collected was so pathetic it didn't even cover my end of the mortgage, and I began spending down my savings. One day, while upending the sofa for pocket change, I got a call from a friend who put me in contact with another friend, and I am now wearily employed as a Temp, working at Napster. Weary? Because of my long stretch of involuntary idleness, over the past several months I've been working overtime like a man possessed by Breakit, the god of QA, so I might catch up on the ever demanding bills that have collected like chewing gum on the souls of my financial shoes.

After a solid month or so of slaving away, and continually working massive amounts of overtime, events are on a somewhat more solid and even keel at work, and I actually have cleared a weekend free from any demands at Napster. I feel like an old dish rag, but this time permits me to get back to the things and people I love most- my family, my music, my readers, and SPARK.

After talking with Darwin (lead commander, potentate, and grand poobah of creativesynth) and some other friends, I've decided that the next several SPARKs are going to be of a decidedly practical and autobiographic nature. Granted, my memoirs of a mis-spent youth and a turbulent music career are decidedly autobiographic, but in this case, this will be a good deal more timely, and practical.

"Practical?" I hear you snort- "Henry is going to talk about something PRACTICAL? Has he completely lost his mind?" I'm here to tell you today (to tell you today to tell you today to tell you today*) how I made my CD, "Keraunograph."

The response to my CD, "Keraunograph" has been strong. Reviews are coming in, and all of them are positive. Everyone seems captivated by the music, but reactions have been extra-ordinary to the packaging, especially the copper leaf work. Below is an image of the CD.
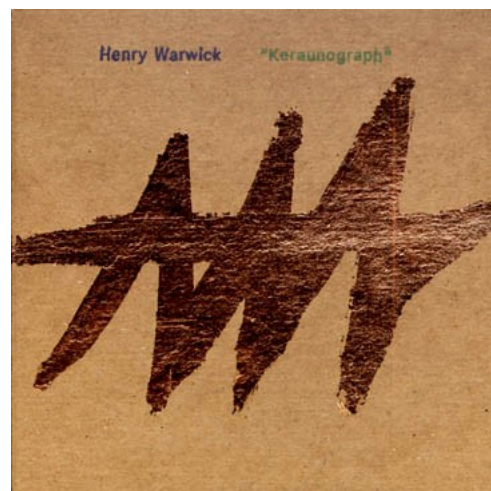
Of course, I urge to you get a copy for yourself BEFORE THEY'RE ALL GONE. Go to http://www.kether.com/music/ , or email me, for details on how to acquire one.

The process by which Keraunograph came into existence was long and complex. It started in the late 1980s, when my friend, the illustrious poet, Paul Grant, wrote a poem titled "Keraunograph". I asked him what a keraunograph was, and he explained that it's an image left by lightning. They are usually found in wood, but there are reports of rare glass keraunographs, where the image of curtains or a surprised face behind a window are weakly etched into the glass itself. Usually keraunographs are stark spidery abstractions, charred tendrils of wood where the electricity found its ground. The idea of a natural electric image from a lightning bolt was appealing to me, and I filed it in the great sloppy attic of my memory for future reference.

After moving to San Francisco, California in 1991, I began planning for a CD release. At the time, it was far out of my reach- to get even a thousand CDs printed was extremely expensive, and having spent most of my savings in acquiring skills for a day job, I hadn't the capital to put into such a venture. Then 1999 rolled around, and I acquired a Digidesign Audiomedia III card and a Yamaha CD burner. Suddenly, I had a recording and mastering facility. The Audiomedia card was, in hindsight, a big mistake, but the CDR-W has been and continues to be an invaluable device.

My problem with the Audiomedia card is its cantankerousness and inability to "get along" with other cards and software. If I worked in ProTools, and could afford the extortionate prices charged for TDM plug-ins, I'd probably be happier. But, I don't much care for the ProTools user interface, and TDM strikes me the same way any expensive proprietary format does- as a royal pain in the arse. The Audiomedia III card will soon be replaced. That will likely be the subject of another SPARK...

The Yamaha CD burner was a good find. It's a 4x CDRW burner, meaning it will burn a CD in 1/4th the time it takes to normally play it, and will burn regular CDs as well as Read/Write CDs. I picked it up a few years ago on a close-out sale from MacWarehouse. It has a SCSI interface, so I needed to get a SCSI card for my Mac G3 Yosemite, as Apple had recently (and correctly) determined that SCSI was an antiquated and often unreliable method of connecting devices. The sale on this particular burner was such that I was able to get it and a SCSI card for $40 less than a USB burner! The machine has worked admirably ever since. A very sound investment.

Even with the crankiness and limitations of the Audiomedia card, I was now able to record, edit, arrange, master, and print my own CD. Things had changed a lot since 1991!

I quickly assembled 11 works for release - some of them quite old, from the early 1990s, but the rest of recent composition. I knew I had a great title: "Keraunograph". But then I had to look at the harsh and disturbing realities of the business of music publishing and distribution, and all that is entailed in that. This, and the next several SPARKs, will detail how Keraunograph came to be.

For those of you who don't know me personally, like 99.99999% of the people reading this, I am also a professional visual artist. My paintings, drawings, and objects are regularly on exhibit, and can be

found in private collections around the world. These works, like my music, are simple bordering on stark, yet lush, texture driven, and evocative. I have digital sketches of them at my website.

As a visual artist, the Very Object that is the CD and its associated packaging is also of importance. This left me in a quandary - if I had a few thousand CDs printed up, there's no way I could make all the CD covers, or at least, make them to my satisfaction. So, I set about finding out how to have them printed. Having designed many CD covers in the past (often for Silent Records and its subsidiaries, Flask and Furnace Records), I knew what was involved, and I didn't exactly relish the prospect of doing that kind of work for myself- I knew how to do that, and it seemed very disconnected and alienated. Also, if I had a few thousand printed, where would I put them? Very quickly, I realized I didn't have the room...

Then I looked at my record collection, and came across an old LP by one of my favourite groups of all time, :zoviet*france: They would regularly make amazing covers for their records and CDs- felt, roofing shingles, wood, nothing was outside their bounds.

I'm not about to make a CD cover from roofing tiles, but it SPARKed an idea where I figured I could combine many of my skills and interests into one coherent object.

Next week - **Synthesis**.