

WMXM INTERVIEW WITH RICH AUCOIN WITH DJ MICHELLE TKACHENKO WEAVER

FOLLOWING THE RELEASE OF SYNTHESIZER: SEASON 2

Pronounced: Rich OH-coin

Hometown: Halifax, Nova Scotia

Synthesizer was recorded at the The Vintage Synthesizer Museum in Los Angeles as well as the National Music Centre in Calgary which is home to one of the rarest collections of synthesizers In the world.

Recorded on some of the rarest synths: one of a kind Roger Luther Moog (which was recorded while on display in the museum), Moog prototype Lyra, and Novachord the first polyphonic synth from 1939 made by Hammond.

Aucoin played all 48 synths on the album for seasons 1 and 2

CLASH: "A bold talent, his grasp of sonics is interlinked with a desire to express something, to challenge both himself and those around him."

POP MATTERS: "This is an anthemic collection of head nodding and foot tapping electro-pop"

PASTE: "*A characteristically ambitious artist*"

AUSTIN CHRONICLE: "Part Daft Punk-inflected Dan Deacon, part DIY-driven Flaming Lips as filtered through Girl Talk"

Michelle Tkachenko Weaver: Alright, well, we can jump right into it! So, you have an album that came out very recently, *Synthesize*, which has been amazing. I've been a huge fan.

Rich Aucoin: Thanks!

MTW: And you've been making music for quite a long time, so I can start with the standard question: how did you first get into music? How did you start off before you ended up where you are now?

RA: Yeah, I have an older brother that took me on my first tour, so I was just studying philosophy at university, and at the end of that, he had me play vibraphone and drums and

synthesizer in his big nine-piece instrumental film score kind of band. And it was really fun being on the road and getting to meet everyone and play shows every night. So then I thought immediately after that I would make my own music, so I was making a record to sync up with "How The Grinch Stole Christmas" at the time.

MTW: That's awesome!

RA: And then I got on a bicycle and biked across the country and played my first tour on a bike.

MTW: That's crazy! In Canada?

RA: Yeah, so it was pretty fun, and then ten years later, I did it across America.

MTW: Wild! So this is already which number tour that you're doing already through North America?

RA: Number of tours, of like, my lifetime? Oh, I don't know, probably somewhere around a dozen.

MTW: Okay wow, do you like touring? Or do you like it better being in the process of making an album?

RA: Yeah, touring has been really fun. I'm just getting to the end of this phase of my life before I get back, I think I'll be more home-based. My goal is to work on film soundtracks and other recording stuff at home and not be on the road as much except for like a short, little go-away for a festival or a weekend or something, but the days of going on the road for like three months are coming to an end.

MTW: Fair, have you had a favorite show that you've played on a tour? Or something that stuck out the most?

RA: Yeah, so many; I've played everything from big major festivals playing to tens of thousands of people, or I played a house party in Amsterdam one time that we set up one of those bouncy castles in the house...

MTW: That's so cool!

RA: And so everyone in the show was jumping around on this, including myself. My gear was just off to the side of it, so it didn't fall over, but the whole show existed in a bouncy floor castle thing.

MTW: That's insane! This was in Amsterdam?

RA: Yeah.

MTW: Oh that's crazy.

RA: Yeah, we really made it, and I was shooting off so much confetti, too, during that show, that was a big cleanup after that show.

MTW: I can imagine, that's awesome... So, where does some of the inspiration for your music come from? I can tell that your shows are really crowd-involved; I hear a lot about your shows...

RA: The crowd thing happened because I made my first record alone, and I like to make a set of rules and invert them each record, so I'm always doing something different than the record before, so with the crowd stuff, it was just like "oh if I'm not doing a record solo, I should do it with some people" and then that number kept ballooning until I realized I wasn't gonna do it again in that manner, so I just kinda invited 500 people on the record, and then when I got to play it live, I realized I couldn't travel with a big choir of voices, so I had to teach the audience the part so they could be the choir that was on the record.

MTW: That's awesome! So, what is the story with *Synthesize* and this whole multi-part album, and the whole philosophy, especially with the whole vintage synthesizers thing, which is insane...

RA: Yeah, it's pretty much gonna have the most synthesizers of any record ever made. Just about to finish the third season when I get home from this tour. And yeah, it kinda started from when I was on tour in Canada we have a... there's keyboard museum, and I went to it and saw a lot of the synths that were on the record, and was like, "oh, I should come back here when I wanted to make a synth record and record all these synths". And then, fast forward ten years later, I finally did it. And that keyboard museum had closed down and reopened as The National

Music Centre, so in Canada, we've got kind of a pretty unique collection of synthesizers. That's kind of random for us in Canada to have one of the best synth museums in the world. I think the next biggest ones are Canada and over in Bern, I think is another huge one. And I think even America has a few smaller ones, like I recorded in the one in LA called the Vintage Synthesizer Museum, and there's one in Philadelphia as well, Tone Tweakers I think it's called, or New York City maybe as well. But yeah, anyway, it kinda got born out of that, and then my love of synth music and just wanting to get to play all these instruments. So yeah, we recorded over 140 synths on it already, and still have another 200 to go or so.

MTW: That's crazy! Are any of them particularly difficult to use? I produce some music, but the extent I know about [synth] production is limited. What is it like learning to use all these synths and learning the whole process?

RA: It's great, once you've learned the basics of each one, they transfer to the next one. I have been lucky to work with some good engineers that help get your head around the ones that have a million routings, but it's nice. I'm very lucky to get access to these synths 'cause they're, some of them are worth like half a million dollars each sort of thing, so they're pretty bonkers, so like, this record would just not be possible without [them], or I guess it would just be a different-sounding record. But the interesting thing is I did wait until... I do like writing at home a lot, and I did want to, I wanted to make the record at home before I went into the studios as well, so I think I was also waiting for the VST technology to catch up, and so like Arturia (I'm not sponsored by Arturia or anything), but they make so many nice emulators that I just think it's an interesting time to be making music right now because you have access to all these sounds that were only possible if you had access to these rare, unique synthesizers before. So, Arturia really made the playing field more democratic I guess, and being able to make music on things like the ARP 2600 and stuff like that would have cost tens of thousands of dollars, and there would only be like under a hundred in America sort of thing.

MTW: I mean, it's insane that gotten to work with all of this insane equipment and everything, how have you seen the music scene change, even throughout your life, even the fact that anyone can build their own music studio at home, and the way the landscape has changed, and even with AI, oh my gosh that's a whole other can of worms to open up, but how have you seen especially electronic music and synth music changing?

RA: Well, it's nice that every year more things get developed and become available, like when I started making music like Logic wasn't even out yet, like I was working on Pro Tools, and VSTs were way too taxing on your laptop, so you'd always just be working in audio files and so everything was a lot more scrappy and lo-fi. That was the only way to make it, or just be cutting up a lot of samples. So yeah, now it's interesting like, there's just so many more options now of what you can do and what you can do with a very limited inexpensive setup. So, it's nice to see all the music, I've noticed a lot of the music sounding really... the overall production of home-recorded music just keeps getting better each year, unless they are intentionally wanting it to sound scrappy, which is also another thing that is amazing to be able to know how to do.

MTW: Yeah, that definitely seems to be the trend in the underground scene, especially. Well, I'd love to hear about the music that you listen to that inspired this most recent album set and even about some of the specific songs, one of your favorites, something that you really wanted to show through to audiences...

RA: Yeah, I mean, let me go look at my *Synthesize* playlist. Stuff like Vangelis, Justice, Daft Punk, Air.

MTW: I actually have a Daft Punk album up here [on my wall]. Definitely shows through in the flavor and vibe of the album. Is this like something that, how do I say this...Has your style evolved to match these artists more? Was your music taste different when you first started making music?

RA: I think my taste is always, always in flux, but just what I'm aiming for changes constantly, and sometimes more like ebbs and flows of the things that are like the main focus. So, these

records, I'm definitely digging in a little harder to see how all of the songs that I love were made and take inspiration from all those. So yeah, but throughout there's lots of, you can hear little, you can hear the influence of Daft Punk throughout all my records, even the songs that aren't very electronic. But yeah, this record I basically went back to the first things I was listening to. If I was making a record for the self that was listening to those things at the time, what would I make? And that also partially was the reason why it was an instrumental album and not having any vocals.

MTW: Interesting. Is there a particular track on there that has a special meaning or one that you love playing live the most?

RA: Well, on Season 2, there's "Roger Luther," which is an interesting one for, it's on this old synth that was in the museum, and we had to go while the museum was open, and people were like walking by, and we were on the other side of the velvet rope with headphones on just making this big beast of an instrument work. That was cool. "Tech Noir" was kind of something you'd see from a "Blade Runner" soundtrack, or "Pure" is kind of the most Daft Punk-y song on the record. "Liminal" is really inspired by Brian Eno. "Prophet" is definitely more like that French, Justice-style track as well.

MTW: Cool! Do you keep in mind, as someone who does film scores as well, what you said about "Tech Noir", do you have that movie imagery in your head when you're making the songs?

RA: Yeah, yeah, for sure. The synth record isn't syncing up to anything, but all my other records sync up to movies. So, I usually have the movie on a side screen, and while I'm writing it, I'm looking over at the visuals for inspiration.

MTW: That's so cool! Was that always your music-making process?

RA: Yeah, I really like that; I don't know if you've ever seen Pink Floyd synced up to "The Wizard of Oz." But when I saw that, I was like, "Oh, that sounds good. I want to do that with everything".

MTW: Cool! What do you see... you mentioned you wanted to stick more with the film scoring side of things, but what do you see in the future for your new releases, if you have any specific ideas that you're aiming for, or for the [next] seasons of *Synthesize*?

RA: Yeah, so the next one is almost done, and the fourth one is pretty demo-ed out, so pretty much all that's left for Season 4 is I've got about around 100 to 200 people that expressed interest in playing on it. So I have to send all the parts out to everyone this summer, and that's kind of like the big next step. And yeah, and after that, hopefully, if I could figure out a way to figure out a way to be making music at home more and get some composing gigs, that's the next goal so I can segway into that world.

MTW: Awesome! Has there been a favorite person that you collaborated with? Or even someone that [you collaborated with] that made you feel like you really "made it" in the industry?

RA: Oh, definitely no person that made me feel like I "made it in the industry," but yeah, I don't know I've gotten to collaborate with so many people because of the nature of these projects; I've recorded with more people than most artists get to in their lifetime, 'cause as I said there's about 500 on the first record, probably about 70 people on the second record, the third record was another 70 people, and then I dropped it down to 20 people for the 4th record, and now this 5th record going back up to about 100 or 200. The second record also had a thing where I got audiences in the festivals I played that year to sing along to a part that I brought out my recording setup on the middle of the stage at these big summer festivals and got the audience to sing and then sampled that, and then that became a big choir of about 20,000 at the start of that record.

MTW: That's wild!!

RA: Yeah.

MTW: What is one piece of advice that if someone is pursuing music, maybe in a similar genre with these HUGE ideas, stuff that's unique and innovative, either that you received or that you would give someone aspiring to be in your shoes?

RA: Yeah, I think any of your wild ideas are possible. Just start writing them out in what the step-by-step thing of doing it is; with a lot of organizational things, having it all in Excel sheets and stuff is key, or I don't think I always wrote in Excel sheets; I have a lot of maps where I just have a piece of paper where I've written down everything and mapped things out. Mapping a lot of things out, I think, is the key so then your brain can relax and not be thinking about all the things you gotta keep in place, or also not thinking about all those one-end projects, but a series of steps, the age-old thing to keep in mind.

MTW: Fair. Has there been the biggest obstacle that you've run into with these wild ideas?

RA: I guess the common thread has always been, I'll be like, "Let's do this!" and then someone will be like, "That's not the way we do this," and then I'm like willing to take the chance and having the standard way and just totally ignoring the regular way to do it 'cause I think it would be more interesting to do it a different way and whether that was a good idea or not remains to be seen. But like I'll constantly just kinda do something a different way just to try and see it a new way than the way I saw it before. So that goes for everything, from the way that records are made to how they are released. I feel like a lot of the time in my lifetime, there's been times where someone was like, "You gotta wait two months between this and that thing," and I'm like, "No, let's do it this many times," and so I don't know, I think whether it works out or it doesn't work out its good to just stick to what you're excited about and not just do something because that's how people told you it has to be done.

MTW: Yeah, absolutely! And then you come up with these out-of-the-box things; never take no for an answer. That's amazing! Well, I guess I've hit my last question, but is there a message you would want your fans to know or something you'd want them to watch out for or know about you or your music?

RA: Yeah, I don't know. Just go out and enjoy live music and support local bands!

MTW: True that!

RA: Well, thanks so much! And you're in Chicago?

MTW: Yeah, I am, right now I'm a junior at the college, and we've been trying to up our interview game [at WMXM], and I've been a huge fan of the album and playing it on my [radio] show, so it's been super sick! Thank you so much!