



Interview: Osamu Sato

The influential Japanese artist and designer/composer of video games like *LSD: Dream Emulator* gives his most in-depth interview yet

You won't find many Japanese game creators with subreddits dedicated to the microscopic details of their career, but such is the cult following that Osamu Sato has amassed. Sato is an eclectic artist who has used a number of different mediums to express himself, starting with photography and music before he turned to design. In the 1990s, he looked even further afield, to the CD-ROM and the opportunity to create experiences that had never before been seen in video games. His first game, released in 1994, was called *Eastern Mind: The Lost Souls of Tong-Nou*, and what came next was something quite unlike anything before or after: *LSD: Dream Emulator*.

LSD was released exclusively in Japan in 1998 for the PlayStation, but it is only over the past decade that people have been discovering the title in earnest. It's easily one of the most experimental titles in the history of video games, and Sato created not only the game itself, but also composed the forward-thinking soundtrack of leftfield electronic music and IDM. *LSD* contains more than 500 discrete musical patterns, and overall represents one of the most exhilarating soundtracks of the 32-bit era. Fans have always been hungry for information about Sato and his mysterious creations, and he spoke to Nick Dwyer as part of the second season of Diggin' in the Carts on Red Bull Radio, going more in-depth than ever before on his artistic inspirations and intentions



© B-Live 1983 @ Dee Bee's, Kyoto

You were born in Kyoto in 1960, and Japan in the 1960s was the beginning of this miracle economy. In the 1960s the Tokyo Olympics happened, there was the launch of the Shinkansen [bullet train], highways sprung up everywhere, there was mass development and from the outside, Japan, and especially Tokyo, looked like the something from the future. What was life like in Kyoto in the '60s and early '70s?

At the time I wasn't thinking about that kind of thing at all. In 1970 they had the Osaka Bankoku Hakuran-kai (Expo '70), so there wasn't really any sense that things were different in Kyoto than anywhere else [in Japan]. But there were lots of Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples and statues of Buddha around me, not to mention that my father and grandfather were both photographers. My grandfather specialized in shrines and temples. My father was involved in the fine art or arts scene in general, so most of his friends were artists, illustrators, sculptors, lots of people like that. Naturally they were often coming by our home, so, like, the everyday dishes we ate our meals with would actually be the work of an artist. We were just using them like normal and I didn't find anything out of the ordinary about it. Thinking back on it now, I realize it probably all was a bit different from the norm.

How do you think Kyoto shaped you growing up in ways that Tokyo wouldn't have?

The biggest influence it had on me would be we had a darkroom in our house and I had been given a camera when I was little, so I often took pictures. My father taught me my way around the darkroom and I did a few things in there, but it was nothing serious, just playing around, just being happy if I got a picture developed, that type of thing.

When I started thinking seriously about getting into art was the first time I actually learned properly about painting. My teacher was an old classmate of my father's, a guy doing dyeing for kimonos and such. So when I went there I became first interested in the colors and forms of Kyoto, kimono and so on, and started paying attention to those kinds of things. At the same time, I had a part-time job as a student working at NHK, the broadcasting station. I would often end up being a cameraman's assistant. Because of those shoots with NHK in Kyoto I got to go into those parts of temples you can't normally enter, that aren't normally accessible to the public. They often do seasonal stories there. I hadn't really given the temples and so on much attention before, but now I really started to see them [for the first time]. We all did interviews with the monks, so I was getting a taste of the traditional culture of Kyoto. For instance, geisha's bosses – I guess that sounds weird, but just like the head geisha – we'd interview people like that, and that helped me to understand that Kyoto is a really special place.

Something amazing happened in the region in 1970, which is Expo '70 and Okamoto Taro's Tower of the Sun building. Did you go to Expo '70, and if you did go, how inspiring was it for a young man?

I went to it ten times, the reason being that there was just this feeling that the expo was something that everyone in Japan had to see. Even though my home was in Kyoto and not Osaka, we had relatives coming from all over to stay with us and go see the expo, and I tagged along with these relatives each time they went. That's why I went ten times or so. Also, since my father was a photographer contracted with one of the newspapers he had a pass, so I would go along with him all the time. The expo really seemed futuristic to me even though I was just a kid. It still looks that way to me today. I guess there was the outer-space aspect of it. It was all about the future and space. Looking back on it I have to wonder why everyone lined up to get a look at that moon rock. There was something really American about that rock that got people interested.

The more I listened to electronic music, the more the sounds, the beeps and boops, took hold of my

mind.

I get the feeling that synthesizers and electronic music changed your life in a big way. Can you give us an idea of the music scene in Kansai in the '70s? How different was the music scene to Tokyo?

I was just a teen in the '70s, but based on what I've heard things weren't especially different from Tokyo here. In the plainest sense the first band I really dug was the Beatles, and from I just kind of transitioned into liking rock. Up until high school/college I was listening to the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, stuff like that. From there I started going back and listening to black music, too. I was buying a lot of records, and the record shops were like my go-to source for info back then. We didn't have any of the so-called major stores like Tower Records in those days. These were places run by individuals that dealt mostly in imported versions, not the Japanese releases by really famous artists.



Kraftwerk - The Man Machine

There were several of these import record shops in Kyoto, and it was by going to them that I first came across Kraftwerk's *Man-Machine*, with its Constructivism jacket on display. I was just like, "Woah, what is this?", completely blown away by

the red and black of it. I had never seen a cover that cool. I bought it without knowing a whit about the music, and that's how I came to know Kraftwerk. Around the same time YMO and other acts like that were starting to pick up steam in Japan. My taste in music changed completely. There was techno, and then later on the age of new wave. I was around 20 at the time, with my heart set on artistic pursuits, and I just knew that I wanted to do something like that, too.

What was incredible about being young and getting into electronic music, is the synthesizers everyone was using came from Japan. When you saw Korg, Roland, was there a sense of pride that this technology was created in Japan?

Well, for a long time people had said that Japanese music, like rock and stuff with vocals, didn't really carry over well in the US and UK. YMO is the first group that really seemed to break this preconception. That was their strategy. I was a kid, though, so I didn't know anything about all that. I'm sure they threw some money around in Japan, did some tours and then became a sort of reverse import, but all I saw was how awesome they seemed. And pretty much all the synthesizers back then were made in Japan, so... How should I put it? For instance, we had Sony here in Japan, so we had technology and video games like I mentioned before. All of those things were coming out of Japan, so back then I had this idea that if we focused on pumping that sort of thing out we might be able to get through to audiences overseas. Once I actually reached a place where I could make my own stuff – and I'm referring to my first work *Tong-Nou* here, on CD-ROM – I made the game with money from Sony here in Japan. Back then, I wanted to get the world to understand something, so being Asian and from Kyoto, I made *Tong-Nou* into this big mix of Asian ideologies and Asian thinking, Buddhist philosophy and so on. I went with that theme, made it into a game and imagery with the music also [being] ethnic – not necessarily Japanese, but with a bit of ethnic samples thrown in here and there. The Americans who saw it were really enthused, and so the game got okayed for release in the US.

You released your first album in 1983, *Objectless* and it came out on a Kyoto-based experimental label called Skating Pears. Tell us about your first album: When did you first start making music yourself, [going from] getting turned on to YMO to thinking, “You know what, I can do this myself”?

Back then I was doing a lot of silk-screening in school, prints with design, art and graphics. I loved music, but as a listener. I was really into groups like YMO and Kraftwerk. I thought it would be cool if I could do something like that, too, but synthesizers were super expensive, and I didn't have confidence in my ability to do

the kinds of things they were doing. All the same, the more I listened to electronic music, the more the electronic sounds, the beeps and boops, took hold of my mind. Kraftwerk and YMO only had one or two albums out at the time, so after I played them into the ground I found myself looking for something new. I would hit up the import record shops and buy up anything they had listed as electronic music or that was said to be electronic music. What I came across while doing this was musique concrète and other types of modern electronic music. The first time I heard it I was like, "If you call it music then it's music," but it's also not music in a sense. I was really blown away that there were people out there putting out whole records of that stuff. And there was that track "Come Out" by Steve Reich that plays a sample from the radio of someone saying "come out" over and over the entire time. I was just like, "OK, I guess it's fine to release stuff like this." I was into art, so you have musical notation, and there a bunch of modern music guys out there drawing these pictures, graphical notation, and calling them proper musical scores. All of this opened my eyes to that realm of music and helped me realize I could make music, too.



Steve Reich - Come Out

Tell us about Skating Pears. It was an experimental label. Was there a strong experimental music scene in Kyoto in the early 80s?

Around that time there was a bit of a different music scene in Kyoto than there was in Tokyo. There were a lot of art schools there, so a lot of people were exploring those avenues of expression, noise music and all that. Skating Pears was a way of putting out all that experiment stuff. [There was] Sato Kaoru, a friend of mine, sort of a mentor, who did this electronic funk band called EP-4. So this band from Kyoto became a pretty big sensation on the underground music scene, and they were one of the few (in Kyoto) that had industry connections in Tokyo. Nowadays that's not a big deal because anybody can link up with Tokyo, but there was a bit more distance in the old days, so having those connections meant EP-4 seemed pretty big league. It was all really cool. They also had a bunch of other folks around them making music that was decidedly not pop that they would release on cassette. So I tried submitting the stuff I made to them.

You mentioned noise before, and one thing I always wanted to know was, in Kansai especially, when you think of the history of noise you think of Hijokaidan, the Boredoms, EYE... There's a lot of noise music that has come from Kansai. What do you think it is about Kansai that has been a great breeding ground for noise music?

The truth is I've never been such a big fan of noise. My album *Objectless*, while ambient wasn't really a thing back then, it was what we called "kankyongaku" (environmental music) here in Japan. If we had the kind of computers we do now back then, I probably would have been able to make music that was more polished and closer to the Kraftwerk-like ideas I had, but the first thing I bought when I decided to make my foray into music was a secondhand Roland, a synth that only had one VCO, and then I also picked up a sequencer. That's all I was working with. I recorded everything on cassette, and with the music on tape I also wanted to edit the tape, but I didn't have an open reel. So I would open up the cassette and make loops and so on that way. Later on I did get a hold of a used open-reel tape recorder, two actually, and I would link them up like Brian Eno and Robert Fripp did. I put some distance between the two, with one recording and the other playing, everything playing twice. Then I'd have the feedback go into the one that was playing again and just have sounds transform more and more.



Osamu Sato - Blues Tube

I was making that sort of minimal music. It was kind of like the songs John Cage made with radios, or Steve Reich. When I played live at the art school or somewhere I would use a radio or tape player. Then I would take an MV, a big pipe like this and put the speaker here and then the mic here to create something called “howling,” a shrill sound, and I would have it go through tape recorder to make sounds. I did all kinds of experimental stuff like that. Noise all seemed a bit easy, and I had this image of how a beautiful sound is made in my head. So I compiled a bunch of those things I did, edited them and then released them as my album *Objectless*. As it happens, I had pretty much forgotten about the *Objectless* tape, but then this German guy who runs a label somehow had a copy of it and came to me saying he wants to re-release it. I don't have any of the original recordings anymore, so the first thing I asked was for him to send me the data, the digital version. It was all stuff I did when I was really young and I was a bit embarrassed to release it as-is, so I said that I would remix the original, and this will come out in December. And that's on VOD Records from Germany, Vinyl-On-Demand.

When did you start getting inspired by more 20th century avant-garde art like, for example, Surrealism, Dadaism, Bauhaus and Futurism?

The first thing was probably that cover for Kraftwerk's *Man-Machine* that I saw in the record store. I really wanted to know what it was, so I did some research and found out it was in this Russian Constructivism style. From there I stumbled onto related stuff like Bauhaus, De Stijl... All of these things suited my sensibilities, just really sat well with me, the style of their designs. In fact, I decided I wanted to do design as a profession. I was young, so I meant in the future. I just thought it would be cool if I could make stuff like that one day. So I would look at all the books and magazines, exhibitions of that stuff. I happen to like things more hard-edged, “techno” maybe, than those that are curvy or weaving. Once I was an adult I started

working in design, and began using Mac's when they came out around the time I was 30 or so. When I look back at my work, my designs, even from the days before I had a computer, all of them have a bit of a techno touch to them. Once the computers arrived that style became way easier to create, like twice as easy, and I could even use them to make music, so I started making sounds again, since had stopped a ways back.

After you were in Kyoto, at a certain point you went to the US to study. How old were you when you went to the US, whereabouts in the US were you and what kind of musical education did you get while you were there?

It was after I graduated high school and failed my first college entrance exam, when I was a "ronin" [masterless samurai], as they say. As for why I went [to the US], I had always wanted to go there someday. I wouldn't say I was quite trying to redefine myself, but there was a bit of that, and I thought English would probably be a necessity in the days to come. I was also considering the option of going to an American university if things there went well enough, but in the end I spent too much time just having fun, so that didn't come to pass. The thing that changed the most for me from going there wasn't about something influencing me so much as it was about me being on my own for the first time, living by myself for the first time. I spent a week traveling cross-country on a Greyhound bus, from east to west. I went to New York, then went back to California. We didn't have the internet back then, so I had to set all of this up on my own, buy the tickets and so on, and I talked to the other passengers on the bus, etc... It was more about autonomy for me. Americans are big on plain-speaking. If you can't say what you want you'll get cast by the wayside. So I think speaking with all those people from other countries while I was there turned out to be a good experience for me.

It was also my first time going to New York. This was still the '70s, so the city was still really wild and freewheeling. I was pretty freaked out, especially since it wasn't like I had a lot of money. Things were really dirty. I'd never seen a city that was so dirty. But overall I found it really stimulating. I went to see live music every day and only thought about eating at the very end. The first place I stayed is now actually a really nice hotel, the Washington Square Hotel in front of Washington Square, as it's called now. Back then it was the Earle Hotel. The buses went there, and it was kind of the place you'd sneak off to with a lover. The bottom floors weren't part of the hotel. I stayed there because I had heard from someone in Japan that had been to New York that there was a hotel there. It only cost \$11 or so.

The way we think of gods here in Japan is different than the way they do in America and elsewhere.

At a certain point in the '80s you finished your studies and moved to Tokyo for the first time, working in an advertising agency. What was it like to live in Tokyo as a young man working in the advertising world at the height of the Bubble Era?

I made a company when I was 29 in '89, right before the Bubble. I hired a few guys and set up a design firm, and then as it happened the Bubble came around. The budgets were ample, there was no shortage of work and I was doing really well for myself. I was always in meetings for design work. This was around when I first started thinking about becoming a creator and began making moves in that direction, but as I had become the head of a company I found myself tied up with management, sales, all the meetings. That became my main work, and I was making money hand over fist, but I found myself wondering what I was doing. I was making all of this stuff, but it was all advertising for other people's company, so none of it was for me.

Money wasn't an issue anymore, so the first thing I made when I decided to do a personal project was *Alphabetical Orgasm*, in which I designed an entire alphabet from A to Z, I created a series of images and then held a solo exhibition. Various parts of the media picked up on the project, and I did some more shows, so I found myself busy again, but the main thing for me was that I found my color. The biggest influence there goes back to the mixing of colors, the colors of Kyoto, that I learned while studying with the kimono designer that I spoke of before, as well as that techno feel, Constructivism and images are put together. All of that swirled together into *Alphabet* to produce something new and great in my mind. You can see it all on [my homepage](#).

In 1991 you had your first exhibition, *Alphabetical Orgasm*, and there was *Anonymous Animals*, the follow-up. I'd like to know something about the Japanese approach to creation. Historically, in the West, heroic characters are based on animals or creatures that exist within the known universe, but Japanese creators seem to have a knack for imagining and creating heroic characters that don't exist within the known universe. For example, the thousands of characters that exist within the *Pokemon* universe, or take Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*. I want to know if you think there's a link between the Japanese approach to character creation and the idea of "kami" in Shinto – this idea that animalistic spirits exist

everywhere. So as children, Japanese minds imagine thousands of characters existing in the world around them.

I think the way we think of gods here in Japan is different than the way they do in America and elsewhere. For example, in Christianity there is only one God. But in Japan or East Asian ideologies, there will be like a god, or “kami,” of toilets, for instance. There is a kami for everything. So you have all of these kami everywhere. If you can think of it, there’s a kami for it, so I think when we were kids and trying to visualize and embody these kami in our heads we end up with characters, and on the flip side this also comes in handy when we try to assign meaning to some character we just came up with from nothing. I can imagine that Christians might not think of things in quite the same way.

I built the whole world of *Eastern Mind* so it was full of these Eastern concepts... The game itself involved exploring these Eastern ways of thinking within someone’s head.

So in 1989 you started your own company, OSD, and at a certain point in the '90s you realized that a computer is a great way to create new art. What was that moment for you when you decided that the computer was what you would turn your attention to?

Back then the Mac 2 was around four million yen. Getting the printer, software and the Mac 2 would set you back four million yen. I was working a lot and did have a bit of money, but I certainly didn’t have four million saved up, I only had something like two million. This was before I had set up my company. I was thinking of buying a car, but then I saw how computers were changing the landscape of the music scene, like with techno and recording methods and so on. Music itself. There were just epoch-making changes in the nature of music since the first techno came out in the '80s. The Mac 2 was the first time that color could be used in design – only 256 colors, but still, it could be used for design. Then you Adobe Illustrator coming out around the same time. It could do curves and vectors. You could draw freely with it, so I had this premonition that huge changes were in store for design. It cost four million yen, though, so I used my two million as a down payment and then got a loan to cover the rest.

I found it to be super interesting. There wasn't much information to work with at the time, but still being pretty young I just spent all day every day playing around with it all and eventually reached a point where I could do a few things. That would lead into my Alphabet exhibition. It was also right around when the Bubble showed up, so it ended up paying for itself right away, and I eventually bought several computers and even got a nicer car than I was planning to get before.



Osamu Sato - Transmigration (Tong-Nou Ending Theme)

When did you start work on *Eastern Mind: The Lost Souls of Tong-Nou*? When did you first get the idea in your head, and what did you want to create and achieve?

The first thing in my mind was that if I were going to make something I wanted it to be sold in America and not just Japan. Being an Easterner, making something Eastern would be most natural. If I tried to make something based off of Christianity, Christians would probably be like, "What the hell is this?" So I brought in some Buddhism, like for instance, game over is when the main character dies, right? In my game the character is reborn as someone different and the game continues. So in fact, if they don't die the game can't progress, as in the Eastern concept of reincarnation. I built the whole world of the game so it was full of these Eastern concepts. It was a game, a CD-ROM game. Back then there was this image that games were made by nerds, but CD-ROMs had come out and in America there

were artists making things like *Myst*. I had this idea that maybe it would put me on the same level as a recording artist, so I decided I wanted to put something like that out in America, too. If my face weren't somewhere in the game then no one would know that I made it, so I put that green face, which is mine, in the game. The game itself involved exploring these Eastern ways of thinking within someone's head.

What were your feelings on the Japanese game industry at the time? Did you feel, because of the technology, that you could create an all-new experience of what a video game could be?

The truth is that I don't play video games at all. Of course I had seen people playing *Invader* games and so on at coffee shops back when they were all the rage, but I didn't see the point in spending 100 yen just to play it and get nothing back. But kids were spending tons of money on them. I wasn't interested though, and just watched from the sidelines. I never thought games were cool. They seemed really nerdy to me, so I never played them.

When I made *Eastern Mind*, I was doing so not so much in the context of a game as a piece of art on CD-ROM. I also had this goal of getting it released over in America. I released it from Sony Music, and just then there were this new machinery, technologies like the Sony PlayStation and Sega Saturn coming out that caught my eye. So then it was *LSD*, which I'm not sure if you've heard of or not, but isn't really a game either. It's got absolutely zero gameplay to it. I rejected this idea of games, so I focused more on making my own art. I wanted to use the PlayStation as the medium. This may be exaggerating a bit, but I wanted to make contemporary art or music. That's why I made what I did. And there was a company that was willing to put up for the money for me to do it, most likely because *Eastern Mind* had been released in America, because I had received some awards. I was able to "trick" someone into fronting the money.



Osamu Sato - Funky Solution

With *LSD*, you've always said that it's not a game. For you it's a "sakuhin," a piece of art. When you had the idea to create *LSD*, when you met with Asmik Ace, was it hard to pitch to them? "I've got an idea for game, but it's not a game!" Did the bosses at Asmik Ace understand? Or was it like, because it's not shooting, it's not racing, it's a dream game.

I wouldn't say it was difficult. The PlayStation came out, and there was just all sorts of stuff being released for it, so there was this company wanting to try something new that was okay [with my idea]. As for why I made *LSD*, there were plenty of traditional games, racing and so on, for the PlayStation and the Sega Saturn. I played a bit of this game where you drive a car, and I'd never played a game like that before, so I just sucked at it. I was slamming into things left and right. If you crash into things it's game over, so it was really boring for me since I was no good at it. So I wanted to make something that even people who sucked at games could play. This is the same line of thinking as what I mentioned earlier about moving on to the next world after you die. So if I crashed into the wall I would be launched into the next world – that's the *LSD* link. I wanted to make something where the player explores a world that keeps transforming like that.

I wasn't sure how to put it all together so it sounded plausible, since nothing like that actually happens in real life, but it does in dreams, right? Like, maybe I was just in Shibuya, but if I were in a dream I could suddenly be in New York, too. You can teleport all over the place, right? I wanted to do something like that. And then in order to fulfill the realities of the project I made a sort of dream diary to use as the raw materials and built the world from that, and there you have *LSD*. I put a bunch of hooks in *LSD*, gimmicks that I hoped would help even at least one person have fun or find interesting. Like, suddenly text from a dream diary will appear, or a movie of a UFO, imagery like something out of a dream suddenly playing, sudden game-overs. I tried to put in all sorts of things for players to sink their teeth into.

We weren't really an internet society yet at that point, so I was thinking it would be cool if it became something people talked about. I made all the music myself and then had seven remixers in England, Japan and so on make their versions of it. That became another hook, hoping they would find it interesting.

After you make it through the opening things begin to change randomly. As for the jacket, there was only one for the version that was sold, but inside there were seven different versions by different designers. So I made all these gimmicks and tricks to try and create a bit of buzz with people, but it didn't really work out that way. I guess it did create a little stir, but not much. I'm sure a lot of people just see it as some shit game, since it really isn't that interesting. But at some point people started digging into games that were only released in Japan and word got out about *LSD*. This reputation led to a lot of people contacting Sony. Normally only games that sell really well get into their Archives series, but so many people were asking them about *LSD* that they added it to Archives and released it again. So that helped it get out into the world again and create even more buzz. Now there's even some guy who has taken it upon himself to revamp *LSD* and make it run on the PC. All on his own, of course. Without anyone's permission. He shouldn't be doing it, but I sympathize with his efforts.



Osamu Sato - Long Tall Eyelash (μ-Ziq Mix)

So you've got guys like him, and then there are others taking images [from *LSD*] and putting them on hoodies and selling them. Or guys putting the soundtrack on cassette and making their own designs for it and selling them, tons of guys like that. And these guys will come and try to post the stuff made on my Facebook. Pretty crazy, huh? They aren't considering the copyrights or anything at all. But I

just think that it's interesting that *LSD* has become such a thing, and actually want people to keep it up. Probably the craziest thing for me was this British band alt-J that told me they wanted to make a video and jacket based off of *LSD*. This was all official, so they got permission and all that. but everything else is completely unofficial. Next year is the 20th anniversary of the release of *LSD*. I still have all the multi's of the soundtrack stored digitally, so I'm going to remix the whole thing and put it out next year. I'm going to pass it around to some other remixers, too, and then release it Japan and maybe some other places overseas.

So in 1998 it came out in Japan and it lived a life, but all of the sudden ten years later, 12 years later, it's becoming a sensation on the internet. Are you surprised by it?

In April I did an exhibition at [BEAMS] featuring all new work by me, graphic art. I also put out a CD around the same time, from Sony Music. The people who came to check out the show were way younger than I expected, in their teens and early 20s. So many of these people learned about me through *LSD* that it really surprised me. It really sank in how much of a cult following that game has. I'd ask how people learned about me and they'd say they found me online through *LSD*. I never really expected my CD to sell – I more just wanted to release it – but it suddenly shot up to like #4 on the Amazon Electronics chart. It reached #1 on the list of things people want. That really shocked me. It sold out on Amazon the day it was released. I never thought it would really sell at all, though, so I was floored.

The music is so incredible. There's about 500 different patterns, and some of the music is so forward-thinking. What was inspiring the music at the time? Were you inspired by UK labels like Warp? Also, where in Tokyo were you going for musical inspiration in the mid-'90s that inspired the soundtrack?

For *LSD* I think I was drawing on Warp and stuff like that, based on the time period. Same with the CD I released from Sony. At first I was concerned with linking tones and pitches. I had something ethnic in mind when I made [the soundtrack of *LSD*], and from around the '90s I started throwing in Japanese styles or pentatonic scales into the melodies, but at that time I had sort of come around to the idea that maybe I didn't really need to put so much Eastern elements into my music. For example, on the same label you have guys like Ken Ishii that have really gone out into the world, this new generation. YMO is kind of a special case – guys like Sakamoto-san are just naturally going to succeed because they are musicians in the truest sense. He can do orchestration and whatever else he tries. Ken Ishii is more like me. I don't have a proper music education, I can't read music, so it feels good to me that

they've been able to go out into the world, too. It felt like times had changed to where that could work, too. That's what was going through my mind at the time.



LSD: Dream Emulator [First 30 Minutes of Gameplay]

***LSD* is so experimental on so many levels: the concept, the game itself, the music. Did you believe at the time that *LSD* would usher in an era of a different kind of video game? Did you feel that maybe that didn't happen?**

That was something in my head as I made the game. As I mentioned earlier, I put various hooks in there that I hoped people would find interesting or inspiring, but that didn't happen right away. It took 20 years, maybe. A big thing also was that I was able to release the game with the name *LSD* without a single complaint from anyone. At the time I thought that having that name *LSD* would catch people's eye, like "Hey, what's this now?" *LSD* goes back to that LSD, the one that was popular in hippie culture in San Francisco and so on, like what we all said the Beatles used. I was kind of shouting out to the psychedelic movement in a game. The psychedelic movement and PC culture were also pretty intertwined on the West Coast in the US. I made *Eastern Mind* with this sort of audience in mind, too. *LSD* is focusing on Eastern elements, though. I had hoped to release *LSD* in the US, too, but that didn't happen.

So many people on the internet have written so much about *LSD*, but do you feel that there are still some Easter eggs, some things that you hid in *LSD* that people haven't found yet?

No, not really. I think everything has been found. I've forgotten almost everything I put in there. I don't really play the game myself.

By Nick Dwyer on November 14, 2017

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