

Speaker 1:

Welcome to the Eye on the Cure podcast, the podcast about winning the fight against retinal disease from the Foundation Fighting Blindness.

Ben Shaberman:

Welcome to the Eye on the Cure podcast. I'm your host, Ben Shaberman, with the Foundation Fighting Blindness. And joining me for this episode is Jason Taylor, who as a musician goes by the name Aether, which is spelled A-E-T-H-E-R, and he composes very cool, ambient and electronic attracts. Jason has RP, and that gives him that critical credential for being on the Eye on the Cure podcast. And Jason has composed and contributed music for a variety of popular video games, including Viewfinder, Mythwrecked: Ambrosia Island, Rocket League, and Kingdoms and Castles. And excitingly, he has a new EP out called, Moonstone, and I actually learned about him from recent feature articles in Forbes and LA Weekly. So Jason, welcome to Eye on The Cure. It's great to have you.

Jason Taylor:

Yeah, beautiful intro. Thank you so much. I'm happy to be here.

Ben Shaberman:

My pleasure to have you. So Jason, I grew up listening to electronic and ambient music a long time ago. Artists and groups like Tangerine Dream, Brian Eno, Harold Bud, very old school stuff. And I listened to radio shows like Music from the Hearts of Space and Echo. So I really enjoy the general ambient genre, and I was really excited to learn about you and hear some of your music. And before we get into the Q&A, I wanted to let our audience know that at the end of this episode we're going to play one of Jason's tracks. It's a beautiful ethereal and chill track called, Tender. So listeners, stick around for that. I'm looking forward to that song. So Jason, you're from Scotland, you're living outside of Montreal, but where are you right at the moment?

Jason Taylor:

Right now I'm back visiting my parents here in Fife in Scotland. Yes.

Ben Shaberman:

Okay. Okay, very cool. And what are you up what to, what keeps you busy these days?

Jason Taylor:

Well, right now here in Scotland, I'm doing quite a lot of eating, lots of yummy food. I think I have to do some guest talks on Thursday at my local college, the place I went to for sound engineering. I'm going back there to do some talks about making a career in the music industry. It's great to speak to all the students there, since I came from there around about eight years ago. So it's nice to be able to keep going back every year and just keeping them inspired and keeping the morale high in these tough times.

Ben Shaberman:

Certainly. I'm sure you'll be an inspiration. And what college was that can I ask?

Jason Taylor:

Yeah, it's just called Fife College, and it's here, funnily enough, and Fife. It's the one I attended for three years from 2012 to 2015.

Ben Shaberman:

Very cool. While I was introducing you, I characterized your music as electronica and ambient, but how would you categorize it?

Jason Taylor:

I think that's a fair categorization. I think it definitely evolved a lot over the years. It didn't evolve as much as it did expand. And what I mean by that is, I started off doing electronica music, very mellow music. And then I think, around about four or five years, then I started to explore a bit more of my comfort zone, which led me into exploring the soundtrack industry. And also, I composed a contemporary romantic EP, which was all just live piano, live streams and some live woodwind, which is very different from electronic. Well, electronic is all on the computer. This was all live recordings, so it was super fun. But yeah, I think overall, most of my music could definitely be categorized as either cello electronic or ambient music. So yeah, that's a good categorization.

Ben Shaberman:

Okay. And so, when you began listening to music, a lot of us listen to music when we get closer to adolescence or in adolescence. What did you listen to growing up? What were some of your favorites and some of your operations?

Jason Taylor:

Well, surprisingly, I used to listen to a lot of rap music. I still do. I love rap music. It's maybe what inspired me to create beats in the first place. I just love the groove and the flow. You can probably hear some similar elements in rap music. Well, with the exception of the rap, but the instrumentals of a rap song, you can maybe hear some influences of that in a lot of my cello stuff. I listened to that, I listened to a lot of dance songs, a lot of trans music as well. That was a big thing over here. My dad's big into rock music, so I was exposed to a lot of that. So I think yeah, just everything, which I think is a really good position to be in, getting exposure to all these different types of music.

Ben Shaberman:

Right. Right. Did you have particular artists or groups that were your favorites?

Jason Taylor:

The first album I ever bought was Gorillaz, their self tailed album called Gorillaz, which is a really good album. I had a bunch of M&M, I think R&B music. I think there was an artist called Ciara. I had her album, I can't remember the name of it, but it had blue cover art. That was one of the first ones I bought as well.

Ben Shaberman:

Very good. What actually inspired you to become a musician and start composing music?

Jason Taylor:

Good question. I think the biggest thing was probably going back to that college I was talking about. Prior to me visiting that college, my brother attended there six years before me, because he's six years older. And I remember he came home, and I was maybe 12 years old, he would've been 18. That makes sense. He showed me the little beat that he'd made, this little hip hop drumbeat with some little piano chords on the top. And I idolized my brother at this age, as young people do. And I was like, "Oh my God, my brother made this. This is crazy." And I think that was the initial spark. And then from there I was like, "I wonder what kind of stuff can I make?" And then, yeah, here we are now.

Ben Shaberman:

And did you start composing using a computer? Is that how you began?

Jason Taylor:

Yeah, for sure. I started using FL Studio back when it was in version eight, I think. It's now version 21, but it was back in version eight. Yeah, that was my gateway, and no keyboards, no nothing. It was just a laptop. And then using the little keyboard, I guess, that was on the screen, but there was no hardware keyboard. So musically, I have no musical background.

Ben Shaberman:

Yeah, I find that fascinating that you came up really through the technology rather than straight ahead music. That's-

Jason Taylor:

Definitely.

Ben Shaberman:

In talking to you before, you mentioned that you were diagnosed with RP. You were relatively young. And it sounds like you were diagnosed with RP and began getting interested in music about the same time. Can you talk about your diagnostic journey with RP when you knew you had something that wasn't quite right with your vision, and what it was like to figure out what it was?

Jason Taylor:

Yeah, I think it was around about the age of 9, 10, 11. I don't remember exactly which one, but around about that year is when I was diagnosed. It was evident to my parents prior. I used to always love drawing, because my mother, she's very artsy, which was always a blessing. I would always watch her painting and stuff. And then we had maybe Bob Ross on the TV, so I always wanted to get into that. But once I got told that information, that pivoted in a different direction, because in my head, which is strange for an 11-year-old, but in my head it didn't make sense to try something that I knew in the future I wouldn't be able to do, because that's how it was worded to me. You won't be able to see in the future. That was the way it was explained.

So I decided to... I mean, I've always loved music, so this just seemed like a perfect opportunity to dive into that. But yeah, that's the diagnostic as it originated. And then over the years it's obviously gradually gotten much worse. And then you see the big impact when you go to college or maybe even in high school, 17, 18 years old when all of your friends are starting to drive and then people go out to clubs and stuff, and you're left out of all that. But I just used that time to explore music production basically.

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Ben Shaberman:

Well, you've done it well.

Jason Taylor:

Thank you.

Ben Shaberman:

You've gotten a lot of success, and I definitely enjoy your tracks. I've listened to a lot in preparation for this interview. And I originally learned about you, thanks really to your new EP Moonstone. And I saw a nice article in Forbes Magazine, and that's not really the media you would expect a Scottish ambient electronica musician to get coverage from. Do you know how they found you?

Jason Taylor:

That's a good question. I think the record label that released Moonstone, their name is Monstercat, and they're really, really big. In terms of electronic music, they're pretty up there in the top. I imagine it's their connections. But I felt the same way, so I did ask Forbes interviewer when she interviewed me, what brought her to me, and she just seemed to find my story very, very interesting, both about the music itself and how I navigated the world as a visually impaired composer. It's not uncommon, but it's not common.

Ben Shaberman:

And do you think your vision loss influences how you compose music now?

Jason Taylor:

Yeah, for sure. I think definitely it does. One question I often get asked is, do you feel like your lack of vision helps enhance your hearing? And I'm not so sure about that, but I think with regards to the way I compose, for sure, because I obviously see the world very differently. Okay, here's a good example. If we both went out into a city at nighttime, and we just stared at this beautiful landscape, and then we both went home and you were asked to paint it and I was asked to paint it, even if we both had the same level of skill, we would paint very different things, because we're seeing very different things. And I think that's very similar to how I hear the world now too.

Ben Shaberman:

Sure. Well, I think you and I probably hear differently in addition to seeing differently, because-

Jason Taylor:

Yeah, definitely.

Ben Shaberman:

... you use your hearing maybe a little different than I do as somebody without vision loss.

Jason Taylor:

Yeah, I mean, I rely heavily on it. I'm very hyper aware of a lot of sounds that other people may not even notice is there.

Ben Shaberman:

Right. Right. Well, your music I think reflects that. There's a lot of nuance, and I would call it ornamentation in your music. So there are a lot of subtle variations that give it a lot of color and character. So I can see that, at least from what I think.

Jason Taylor:

Yeah, I mean, I greatly appreciate that. Thank you so much. Yeah, I mean, I try to spend a lot of time creating things that I've just interesting to me all the way throughout the song, because I just want to keep it interesting for the listener.

Ben Shaberman:

Right. Right. Well, you do. You do.

Jason Taylor:

Well, I appreciate that.

Ben Shaberman:

So you came up with the performance name or the stage name of Aether, again, A-E-T-H-E-R. How did you come about that name?

Jason Taylor:

When I started making music, I was in college and I was looking for a name. And at the time the music I was making was very ethereal, otherworldly, chill out stuff. And I wanted a name that reflected that from a brand perspective. And the word, aether, I don't remember how I came across it, but when I did come across it and I searched it up, it basically means the air breathed by the gods, or the air above the clouds in Greek mythology. That just seemed synonymous with my music, that otherworldly sound, otherworldly feeling. That's how that came about.

Ben Shaberman:

Right. Right. That's a great name and I think it's perfect for your sound. Excellent choice.

Jason Taylor:

Thank you.

Ben Shaberman:

So what are your next steps? You've composed a lot of music for video games, you have the EP, you're getting some media coverage. What are your plans moving forward?

Jason Taylor:

I have a few more albums that I've basically just finished wrapping up. One of them being a very meditative experience, just growing as a person. And the other one being exploring a lot of different synthesizers, using old analog synthesizers and running them through new, modern digital gear, and seeing the sense you can create with an ambient palate. But after that, I really want to work with an orchestra and acquire, whether it's for soundtrack work or for my own solo work, I just want to get

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bigger. I want to get more humans involved. Just to be able to sit down and just have an entire team of people playing something you wrote, that must be such a surreal experience. And that's where I'm aiming for right now.

Ben Shaberman:

Certainly. I think that would be very cool, so good luck moving forward with that.

Jason Taylor:

Yes. All in good time, sir. All in good time.

Ben Shaberman:

Right. Right. And so, people can follow you as you move forward, composing new stuff, recording new stuff. Where can they follow you? Is there a good website or a platform?

Jason Taylor:

Oh, yeah. I mean, I guess you could use [aetheraudio.co.uk](http://aetheraudio.co.uk), that's A-E-T-H-E-R-A-U-D-I-O.co.uk. And the handles on all platforms is @aetheraudio. That's for Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, SoundCloud, anywhere that you could exist. And I do exist, it will be on that name.

Ben Shaberman:

Very good. Again, A-E-T-H-E-R, Aether. Very cool.

Jason Taylor:

Yes.

Ben Shaberman:

So listeners, to close things out, we're going to play a track called, Tender. And Jason, before we move to that track, can you give us a little background on this piece?

Jason Taylor:

Yeah, this piece was written last year, and it's exploring the destruction that can be caused by selfishness, but in terms of actual production style, it was just an excuse for me to have a lot of fun with my new guitar pedals that I bought at the time. But yeah, that's Tender.

Ben Shaberman:

Okay. Well, it's a beautiful piece.

Jason Taylor:

Thank you. Thank you.

Ben Shaberman:

Nice work on that. And Jason, thanks for the interview. It's been a lot of fun. It's exciting to talk to you at this point in your career. You've had some impressive success, and I think you're going to go far. You've got a lot of great ideas and a beautiful sound, so congratulations thus far.

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Jason Taylor:

Thank you so much, I appreciate that a lot. And thanks for giving me the chance to come on here and share my stories. I really appreciate that. I hope it can help inspire, or at least just spark joy. That's the goal here.

Ben Shaberman:

Most definitely, it will. Thank you, Jason. And listeners, thanks again for joining Eye on the Cure. And if you can, sit back, relax, and enjoy this beautiful piece from Jason Taylor, aka Aether. Again, this track is called, Tender.

(Singing).