Music Spotlight on Maelstrom: "It's more about designing a small generative universe than finalizing an album."

Async Art, June 2022 - Lauren Mae

The smell of smoke in the morning, the dust raised by thousands of feet moving in unison and the sound of bass drums reverberating around a warehouse — that's where Maelstrom started making music. These post-industrial, decaying environments were the birthplace of Europe's illegal rave scene in the 90s. Two decades on, the music producer and performer reflects on the roots of his music and draws parallels with the music NFT scene today.

Maelstrom is back on Async to launch his genesis Music Blueprint collection "JANUS", a collaboration with graffiti artist Ipno. This will be one of the first generative music projects created on Async Canvas and will pave the way for a new mode of creating, listening, and experiencing music. The techno producer was part of the OG Async Music Classic lineup where he released programmable music NFT "Warehouse" in early 2021. He calls the Music Blueprints launch an "important new chapter in the history of music NFTs".

Janus, the central focus of the Blueprint, is a figure from Roman mythology — the Roman god of beginnings and endings. He symbolizes changes and transitions, past and future, one condition to another, and the journey from youth to adulthood. "It worked with our idea of producing one song with many faces. With each newly minted Edition, the song takes a new shape and gains a new face," Maelstrom told us.

There are potentially 75,000 combinations of "JANUS" that can be minted but with the Edition count capped at 250 — only this many versions of the track will actually exist. However, the possible outcomes feel "endless", says Maelstrom. "Producing a piece of music with Async Blueprints means that you have to make peace with not having full control — that's what's so exciting about making generative music." The creator must accept the chance element and allow the collectors to mint the music into existence via an algorithm.

Maelstrom has always seen music as a collective experience. He recalls parties in abandoned warehouses as "a collective practice with music at the center — a network of musicians, creators, activists, dancers, and outcasts all had an important role to play in making these parties happen." A similar thing is taking place today. With the interactive music NFT movement, it's working together that makes the music happen. Indeed, the musician produces the Music Blueprint, but the collector's interaction with it (i.e. minting it) brings the track into existence.

Interaction has always been integral to the music creation process. "Music is something that grows out of interactions between instruments, machines, presets, samples, patches, musicians, and the audience." The stem-based algorithm in Async Music Blueprints unlocks further potential for interaction because it hands the track over to the listener. Yet, it feels like only the beginning. "Web3 gives us the chance to expand the scope of these interactions and will allow the audience to describe many more parameters," believes Maelstrom.

The layering of the stem tracks and the addition of variations give musicians a new way to present their music to listeners and help fans to better understand the creative process. Async Music Blueprint lays out so many potential variations that could have happened, rather than a traditional static finished track. The way it works is through Stem Tracks (think of them as Layers) and Variants (States) - variations of these Layers.

"I decided the track would have six Layers and produced a variant for each of these Layers. Then, using this first variant as a template, started recording variations for each Layer by jamming on my hardware," said Maelstrom. "Next, I made sure each variant of a layer had the same qualities and started editing to make sure the variants could work together, although it's impossible to know with so many potential outcomes. It's been more about designing a small generative universe than finalizing an album."

The newness of the music NFT space with everyone exploring and experimenting makes Maelstrom think back to the early days of techno. He wanted to reflect this idea in his music. "We wanted to remain true to the DIY ethos of techno and early electronic music — using limited tools, trusting the process, and embracing accidents. I relied a lot on improvisation and used only analog sources. I wanted to keep it as intuitive as possible and not overcomplicate things with various music sources.

The album artwork, designed by Ipno, had to reflect the same DIY energy. "We didn't want our Blueprint to look too polished, we wanted the artwork to reflect the early days of internet art where tools were limited to Paint and Photoshop v1. To emulate this, we used the most basic functions of Photoshop, without correcting any of the mistakes or glitches," explains Maelstrom.

The idea of things being experimental and stripped back taps into the primitive state of NFT space as a whole. The "JANUS" Blueprint has come to represent the lightning-fast speed at which technology is advancing and how it allows and brings platforms like Async Music Blueprints into existence. "Works in this format will definitely change the way we listen to music and think about music," he says.

With the launch of NFTs, the face of music is changing. "Due to the decentralized nature of NFTs, you no longer have to fit into a platform or record label's specifics to "make it," explains Maelstrom. His advice to musicians? "Focus on what you have to say and then find a platform that corresponds to what you've created, not the other way around."

"JANUS" by Maelstrom & Ipno launches June 2nd @ 11AM PT. Presale opens June 2nd @ 9AM PT.

Mint an Edition of "JANUS" via Async.