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Split Personality

Wendel Patrick keeps us guessing on his second album, *Forthcoming*.

by Baynard Woods @baynardwoods



photo by Wendel Patrick

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Forthcoming

B More to BK (feat. Eagle Nebula)

Eutaw Street

Close

Ask Wendel Patrick what kind of music he makes, and he'll likely cock his eye and tell you to listen to the album. But he's not being coy: If he says his recent release *Forthcoming* is hip-hop, you'll get one impression, and if he tells you it's electronic music, you'll get another—conflicting—impression altogether. Electronic aptly describes the mode of production, and hip-hop is a pretty accurate tag for the album's rapped vocals, but neither label really conveys the sonic richness of Patrick's music. The lyrics seem spontaneous and the music alive (and only occasionally electronic—there are no samples). It is organic, intricate, and packed with the density (to put it in literary terms) of David Foster Wallace reincarnated as a sound engineer.

Really, Patrick won't tell you what kind of music he makes, because he doesn't want you to have preconceptions that keep you from actually *hearing* it. That's where the whole idea of Wendel Patrick came from—to separate the sonic experience from the expectations that come with it.

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See, "Wendel Patrick" is actually the alter-ego of Kevin Gift, a classically trained pianist, jazz improviser, and Loyola University Maryland music professor. A few years ago, Gift started messing around on the computer, making beats and occasionally rapping. "When I first started doing electronic music and hip-hop, people didn't even hear it because they were too busy trying to figure out why it didn't sound like the other stuff Kevin Gift had



photo by Wendel Patrick

done," he says.

Gift had a twin brother who died in infancy, and, as he got more serious about the other side of his music, he began to release it under the name of the brother he'd always felt but never known. "No one ever told me I had a twin, until I asked them. I just felt it," he says of the connection.

In person, he will often introduce himself as Wendel Patrick, and that's also what many of his friends—like WYPR's Aaron Henkin, with whom he recently collaborated on an ambitious hour-long radio documentary *OUT FROM THE BLOCKS*—will call him. The "two" artists have different websites and fan-bases, but it's getting more complicated to keep them separate.

"I'm working on an acoustic solo piano album that will be a sort of jazz/classical hybrid. It's Kevin Gift but it will also feature Wendel Patrick on a few tracks, so there will be this collaboration between us," he explains, laughing a bit at his double self.



photo by Wendel Patrick

Patrick calls himself a "musical loner," and though he created much of *Forthcoming* alone on his computer late at night, Patrick eventually reached out to a wide variety of emcees for vocals. Most notable among these is Ursula Rucker, the eminent spoken word and rap artist, who met Patrick when she came to town to play a gig. The guy who usually made her beats didn't show up. Patrick volunteered to do it, and that night, twenty minutes after he met her, he provided the music for her entire set.



photo by Ramona Lee

Patrick also works winningly with several other emcees—Topix, Eze Jackson, and Saleem—but he is not afraid to take the mic himself. There is a playful—almost accidental—quality to all of the vocals and you can feel Patrick working with and off of the other MCs. Sometimes, the vocals will be largely wordless as in the gorgeous "Trace" (featuring Ryn Tracy). At other times, the lyrics are eccentrically placed, refusing to follow prescribed patterns. It is as if Patrick wants the human voice to sound intimate and conversational in order to balance the extreme orchestration and control of the music.

Patrick finished the album some months ago, but he has waited to release it until he could figure out a way to translate the sound to a live performance. "I played all of the instruments on the album through a keyboard," Patrick says. "But I can't play them all at once, live, unless I want to just sit there and hit a button." So Patrick recruited Brian Brunzman on bass and Ethan Snyder on drums for the album release show at the Windup Space on December 8.

Though his family moved around a lot as a kid, Patrick feels particularly at home in Baltimore's music scene. In fact, much of the album is a love letter of sorts to Patrick's adopted city. A beautiful song called "Eutaw Street" begins with sounds Patrick recorded out on the street where he used to live. "When I wrote that beat, I knew I wanted it to go with sounds from Eutaw Street because that's how it feels." You could say that Patrick introduced his beats over the sounds of the street, but it would be equally accurate to say that the street injected its sounds and its spirit into Patrick's music.



photo by Ramona Lee

It used to bother Patrick that he didn't know how to label his music. Now it is a source of pride. The lack of an easy label keeps us listening to what is actually there instead of what we expect to hear.

Patrick will be performing at the Windup Space on Thursday, Dec. 8 at 8:30 p.m.

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