

OC WEEKLY

Carmageddon 2011: A Soundtrack by Ken Elkinson

By Lilledeshan Bose Tue., Jul. 12 2011 at 7:12 AM

When Venice musician Ken Elkinson released the 6-CD box set of ambient music called Music For Commuting last January, we're pretty sure he didn't intend for it to keep SoCal residents in a state of zen for a 53-hour period of freeway construction.

While it wasn't intended just for commuting through traffic ("It is for commuting through all aspects of life," his site says), it was "composed specifically to help calm angry drivers."

But let him describe it for you: "From the dark and droning Monday/Tuesday double CD, to the upbeat 80's inspired synth anthems of Wednesday/Thursday, to the totally futuristic sounds of Friday/Beyond - there is literally something for everyone."

And this week, until July 18, the entire box set is available for free download on the website www.musicforcommuting.com, just in time for Carmageddon, when the 405 will be in construction for three days. Elkinson says, "This free download is my gift to help fellow Angelenos cope ...I decided to spread the love to the entire world."

OC Weekly: Why did you decide to write Music for Commuting?

Ken Elkinson: A few different reasons. First was that I have commuted in three of the worst traffic cities in America - Atlanta, NYC and now LA. It just kept getting worse - in terms of the insane things I see on the road every day. I see people reading books on their steering wheels - in fact I saw a bus driver for the MTA reading a newspaper while driving a bus. I am a super angry driver, and I needed something to calm me down on the roads. Second was the fact that I am primarily a piano player. I live in a small house in Venice, and I don't have room for a baby grand. I would write these complex pieces for piano on a digital piano,

go into a recording studio and record them on an amazing baby grand. I would then come home back to my crappy digital piano. I needed a break from that, so I decided to do stuff with synthesizers and keyboards in my home studio. Lastly, with my rage, I did not want to get into an incident that would hurt my wife or kids. My four-year-old twins started repeating my road rage rants word for word, which definitely led me to think I may have a problem.

What's the longest you've been stuck in a traffic jam?

One time in college, it took me 8 hours to drive what was normally about 1 hour 15 minutes.

What's the most extreme act you've committed in the name of road rage?

I have lost my voice from screaming so hard for three days one time. I have also had to use some A-Team-like driving skills to evade someone following me.

What's your musical background?

I am a classically trained pianist. I grew up doing the competitive classical piano circuit. It was totally my choice, my parents never even cared if I practiced, they used reverse psychology on me!

Why would you never move out of SoCal despite the traffic jams?

I am a sucker for good weather, I could not even handle the Atlanta winters. There is also the sushi and Mexican food, which can't be topped outside of SoCal in America. Lastly, there are the celeb sightings. While you can probably get an awesome house in Des Moines for \$150K, I bet you don't get to sit at the table next to Mel Brooks as I did last night.