

Analogue Souls

Doy Petralba

Track 1 Intro: Emperor Control Remote in D major Rallentando

She's coming back they say, coming back in a way. I only wish she'd return for good. Maybe that's just wishful thinking but I'm talking about turntables and records, not my sister. In this age of 0's and 1's, everyone seems to be down with the fast and the crispy, down with crispy clear movies and music in kilobytes per second. The days of hand-written letters, snail-mail postage stamps and manual cameras are being forgotten. Buttons have taken over the world. Emperor Control Remote bids thee *click, click, click, and be on your way loyal subject*. I guess there's nothing wrong with all the ruckus about progress and speed, nothing wrong with moving forward and saving time.

Except I like wasting time. I like wasting time turning the pencil sharpener's lever before writing. I enjoy soaking envelope corners in warm water, waiting for stamps to inch away. After the last shot, I take pride in rewinding the rolling crank of my camera. These rituals and ceremonies, far from being ignored, are savored. Because when I do away with them, something profound is changed, perhaps nothing truly lost but everything significantly altered.

Track 2 A/V

If I ever have to choose between being deaf or being blind, I wouldn't think twice. The horror of being cut off from the buzz and the hush, the sighs and the moans—that is exile terrible and true.

But I should like to start and talk about my journeys in sound by invoking a memory of its complete and utter absence.

We were driving home from the hospital. I was sitting in the back of our sedan. I was three years old. I had just been roused from a deep, refreshing slumber. My eyes were bright and wide. I remember the vast, empty road lined with majestic acacia trees, leaves swaying slowly with the breeze. We rode past swathes of wild grass standing still against the horizon, immovable and blue. And everything, every little thing was bathed in the mellow light of morning. All of it seemed to exude a tinge of gold. The steering wheel. The dashboard. And my new born sister, wrapped in layers of white cotton blankets, nestled in our mother's bosom. I gazed at her head while she snoozed, still oblivious to our bond. I will never forget that soft cotton blanket cuddling her; never forget that renegade thread floating by her shoulder, shimmering in the wind as if it was made of pure light.

I try to recall that particular scene nowadays and I find it bereft of any sort of auditory component. A silent film. But the light, always the light, beaming streaks of gold in the landscape of memory—the serenity and radiance I never heard inside our little red sedan.

Track 3 Subs and Dubs

Then came the noise.

And crushes and coolness and *Aquanet* and puffy glam-rock hair and screaming at your sister and *Betamax* and puffy glam-rock hair and *Ninja Kids* and school fights and *Trapper-Keepers* and avoiding your parents and glam-rock hair and cassette tapes and . . . have I mentioned puffy glam-rock hair yet?

I grew up in the eighties when cassettes had reached their apex. During the holiday season, I'd listen to Christmas songs and transcribe the lyrics word for word so I could sing along. When I heard *The Twelve Days of*

Christmas for the first time, I almost died (years later, *American Pie* would have the same effect). Then I discovered the features of the multiplex. A system which allowed the music and vocal tracks to be separated. All I had to do was pan left, and only the music would be heard. When I panned right, the melody faded, leaving a solitary voice for me to decipher all the way up to the twelfth day.

But how was this happening? Wasn't music recorded in one go, all in one track?

Soon I discovered that the cassette tape was a smaller version of the reel-to-reel tape. An offspring that basically employed the same principle of capturing sound waves from a microphone and making it stick to the tape by using electro-magnetic technology. The tape could either have two monaural audio tracks or two stereo pairs (actually making it a four track tape). This feature allowed different tracks (music and voice in this case) to be recorded on separate channels (left and right speakers).

During my exploits in lo-fi, I chanced upon a wonderful device in my cousin's house: the four-track recorder. Unlike a standard cassette player, which erases the entire track when you press *record*, this device allows four independent tracks to be recorded separately. The tape-head on a standard player could only playback and erase in mono, while the four-track tape-head could access all the tracks in the tape. Now I could sing *The Twelve Days of Christmas* in baritone on track one, alto on track two, bass on three and tenor on four (talk about vanity).

But what better way to pay homage to the eighties than to reminisce about the mix tape. Ah the mix-tape! The true symbol of one's undying love, the quintessential love letter rendered in a language that is music. You didn't need to be so explicit about the mushy stuff. In fact, you didn't even have to say a word. The message could be camouflaged. The trick involved a careful selection of songs that shaped the over-all "theme" of the album. If the tape was for an anniversary, it would include songs about forever and ever and all that, songs like *Eternal Flame*. If the goal was to impress someone, as in the early stages of courtship, then the mix should include the songs du jour. This would create an image of a "cool" and sophisticated admirer (blehh).

Once, a friend asked me to cut a mix for his metal-head girlfriend who hated my guts. He wasn't into music, so I obliged and included every

song I knew that supposedly contained satanic psalms heard in reverse play. Within a month they broke up. The metal-head discovered god when she entered high-school and my friend turned out to be Satan, the Lord of Headbangers himself. It was an Enervon milestone moment for our insignificant trinity.

But it doesn't matter when you were born. Everybody goes through the age of subs and dubs. The age when minds are like blank tapes, extremely impressionistic and vulnerable to the noise and violence of fads and trends, cassettes continuously dubbed and overdubbed. Tastes are defined and redefined, always changing, and never really satisfied with the final cut. The phase that could only record and read a world in mono.

Track 4 Conversions in F sharp

Affrettando

1

```
CuteMouse v1.9.1 alpha 1 [FreeDOS]
Installed at PS/2 port
```

```
C:>dir
```

```
Volume in drive C is WAY_TOO_LOUD
Volume Serial Number is 627458262-GA0
Directory of C:>
```

FDOS	<DIR>	08-17-98	3:15p
AUTOEXEC	BAT 435	09-01-98	3:16p
BOOTSECT	BIN5 12	09-13-98	3:17p
COMMAND	COM 93,96	309-13-98	3:18p
CONFIG	SYS 801	09-26-98	3:18p
DIGITAL	EXE 56	03-15-99	3:18p
	6 file(s)	98,767 bytes	
	1 dir (s)	1,064,517,632 bytes free	

```
C:>fastopen c: digital.exe/x
```

```
C:> _
```

Digital Conversion (Audio)

```
I.   Analog-to-digital[1](ADC) and digital-to-  
      analog[2](DAC) converter  
      Device 1: initiate...  
      converting analog sound waves to discrete  
      binary digit sequence  
      Fidelity: 99.999%  
      Device 2: initiate...  
      converting binary codes to analog  
      sound waves  
      amplification level: maximum  
      Generation loss: 0%
```

0

Subject: Greeting from the land of the free!
From: Simon Saga <sagaworks@yahoo.com>
To: "Doybag" <sinigangcartel@yahoo.com>
Date: December 12, 2003

baldo maro the waldoferus! kamusta bai! maayo ka ba dong?
na unsa ka naman diha? haha. well, i'm finally here. sayang
wala ka nung despedida bai i'm sure you've heard of the
parents literally dragging me out of the room for the flight.
didn't pack a thing. hoped the plane would leave me. but
the parents packed my stuff, the whole room bai! schemers.
haha. weniweys, first christmas abroad. think i'll have me
one of those winter depression type-o-suicides. kill my folks
with guilt. haha. I'm living with an aunt somewhere in new
york. time to get a job, a pad, build character. haha. lots of
cousins here for support tho. faaaaaak! should've ditched
that nursing exam like you said.

first chance I get, i am outta here.

sagaworks

11011

II. Word Size

Converting analog sound wave/word size
as binary digits(bit)
Initiate...
Bit rate set to maximum
frequency response (achievable noise level)/
fidelity proportion: 1:1
Possible values: 16, 24 bit

00100

Subject: sup meyng

From: Simon Saga <sagaworks@yahoo.com>

To: "Doybag" <sinigangcartel@yahoo.com>

Date: April 20, 2004

sorry for the lag, been keeping myself busy, just moved back to ny after living in the west coast for a couple of months. plan on moving back there again. meeting all sorts of people. Gentle and mad. making weird connections and just finding more about myself and what i want. i'm apparently a veeery slow life learner. and it takes a while for stuff to sink in. this place is something else tho. every thing's so fast and everyone's so tekky. but that's progress for you, right? been catching up on books. lost track of movies. trying to learn flash programming. what's going on with you?

ss

101110

III. Sampling Rate.readme

Defined as sample rate per second of analog
sound wave/
Sample rate increase is directly proportional
to fidelity/
Possible values: 44.1,48,88.2,96,176.4,192
kHz/

010001

Subject: <none>

From: SS

To: "Waldo R. Petralba" <sinigangcartel@yahoo.com>

Date: February 3, 2005

doy,

had to cancel the PI vacation trip. landed this web designing gig in this frisco-based outfit. so far so good. if my schedule permits, will visit later next year. will get in touch then. thanks.

sent from my blackberry wireless handheld

Track 5 Conversions in C minor

Prestissimo

DOWNLOADS

ARTIST	ALBUM	SIZE	PROGRESS	SEEDS	PEERS	
Pinback	Summer in Abaddon	40 MB	>>>>	20%	43	14
Wes Montgomery	Talkin' Verve	43 MB	>>>>>>>	34%	76	12
I'm Not a Gun	We Think as Instruments	53 MB	>>>>>>>>	58%	323	81
Mew	Frengers	40 MB	>>>>	20%	43	14
Everything But The Girl	Acoustic Moods	48 MB	>>>>	20%	43	14
Miles Davis						
Air						
Thievery Corporation						
Hum						
Tool						
Fleetwood Mac	Catalina	43 MB	>>>>>>>	58%	323	81
Zero 7	Rumors	53 MB	>>>>	20%	43	14
Buffy Clyro	When It Falls	40 MB	>>>>>>>	34%	76	12
Theloniuos Monk	Infinity Land	43 MB	>>>>>>>>	58%	323	81
Lali Puna	Quartet w John Coltrane	53 MB	>>>>>>>>	58%	76	12
John Scofield	Faking the Books	43 MB	>>>>>>>>>>	89%	323	81
Call and Response	Groove Elation	53 MB	>>>>	20%	43	14
Medeski, Martin & Wood	Winds Take Shape	40 MB	>>>>>>>	34%	76	12
Jimmy Smith	Combustication	43 MB	>>>>>>>>>	58%	323	81
Self	Root Down Live!	53 MB	>>>>	20%	43	14
Radiohead with Sigur Ros	Subliminal Plastic Motives	53 MB	>>>>	20%	76	12
K's Choice	Corporation	43 MB	>>>>>>>	34%	323	81
	Cocoon Crash	53 MB	>>>>>>>>	58%	76	12

ALERT!
YOU ARE LOW ON DISK SPACE & MEMORY!
DELETE FILES IMMEDIATELY!

Track 6: Analogue Soul

Everything starts out as analog—light burning films, sound magnetized by mics, even words before we type. At some point, all of them wore an organic form. I never really thought about why the old stuff attracted me so much. Sometimes, I see them as relics of eras I can escape to. Most of the time, I'm simply awestruck by the inventors and pioneers who've influenced the course of our lives. These guys worked with nothing but curiosity, necessity, and pure analog imagination.

I was nine when I first saw my father's turntable, I was just about to finish the cassette phase but not quite in my CD stage yet. I was craving new tunes that day, but I had spent my allowance on *Bazooka* and *Sarsi*. Unable to rent a CD in *Soundtraxx* [Soundtraxx was the village hook-up in those days. Unlike the choices available at the local Betamax and VHS shops, their CD collection was sparse, but ten pesos got you a week's worth of hi-def listening pleasure], and having grown weary of my cassette collection, I rummaged around the house for a new fix.

The turntable was tucked away in the most forgettable spot in our garage. It was a sorry sight to behold. Scratches stained the once transparent dust cover; there were blotches of white mold on the round rubber platter; the tiny knobs and levers for adjusting pitch and speed creaked like rusty door hinges; the tone-arm slumped on its cradle, tired and vexed; the skin of the plinth had already faded, as if it had forgotten the elegant black of its former self.

It was a surprise to see the pea-sized bulb come to life, then. The bulb shed smoky tangerine on the mirror-like rivets which served as a guide for rotation speed. It was still alive! Yet the platter wasn't turning. I opened its shell at once, only to find the rubber gear belts broken by time. But that didn't daunt me. I needed my fix, and quick. I could already hear the theme song of *Macgyver* in the background. I ran to the bedroom and yanked the shoe strings right out of my brand new *Nikes*.

So instead of listening to music that afternoon, I ended up trying to fix my father's *Technics* turntable. Needless to say, the turntable never sang that day. Obviously, one needs more than a couple of shoe strings to fix something as sophisticated as the gramophone.

Years later, a friend asked me to accompany him to a shop that refurbishes turntables. I seized the opportunity, despite the fact that we had to negotiate traffic from Parañaque to Makati with immaculate patience.

Ka Rene's shop was a few blocks away from the newly reincarnated Cash and Carry. The shop was small, a bit bigger than a pair of king-sized beds. All sorts of speakers, amplifiers, and turntables crammed together. There were stickers on the door. Most of them were logos, brand names, but others were more telling. Stickers such as "tube-guru" or "tubaholic" caught my attention and I wondered about the real price to earn them. Inside, a fat, leather couch lay against the length of the shop, with both ends flanked by high-backed chairs. We sat on the brown couch at once, anxious and giddy to meet the proprietor. A horde of speakers and turntables scattered all about the prim blue carpet. The turntables looked like ceremonial altars, and the speakers, like giant chess rooks of different sizes, shapes, and colors. To our left was a glass facade, from floor to ceiling, its width spanning no more than three doors. A stiff aluminium rack showcased an array of tin boxes topped by a couple of glass bulbs to the pedestrians. To our right, two doors, a toilet and a storage room for tools and inventory. The walls were white and spare just like the fluorescent light beaming on top of our heads. We marveled at the novelties before us, but only because they appeared delicate and expensive. We were clueless about high-end stereo culture and its attendant jargon, so after only a few minutes, we found ourselves talking about the brown, cozy couch.

When he emerged from the storage room, I realized the room wasn't for storage at all. It was his repair station, much like the stalls of locksmiths and watchmakers found outside groceries and tricycle stations. We stood up and introduced ourselves. But before we could state our business, he broke the vibe and said, "*Maupo muna kayo.*" Then he returned to his workstation. He looked like he was in his fifties, but perhaps he was older. He wore white sleeveless sandos, blue puruntongs, and slippers. He had a square chin, broad lips, and kind eyes. And there was something in his voice that captivated me. It wasn't that he spoke in an animated or booming manner. His voice was placid, delivered in subdued tones. And he raised his eyebrows and tilted his head skyward when he ended his sentences.

He came back with a record in hand and knelt on the floor. He drew the record from its jacket with care. After gently placing the jacket by his side, he wiped the jet-black disc in slow, circular motions, eyes focused on

the empty street. He held the record by its edge with the tip of his thumbs and index fingers before carefully setting it in the spinning platter. After a meticulous status sweep of every knob and wire, he turned the amplifier on. That solitary click resonated across the entire room. He then turned to face us and offered some coffee. “*Instant lang ha.*” While waiting, my eyes focused on the globular vacuum tubes that were presently giving off an ember-like glow. This is where the magic happens, I mused. I placed my palms on top and felt the warmth emanating from it. When he returned with our java, the tubes were already bright and hot. Ka Rene perceived it was time for some jazz. He knelt beside the player again. As his index finger cupped the tone-arm’s handle, I asked him why he still preferred planting the needle on the record manually when surely he knew about the latest, automatic models. He was silent until we were well into the jazz, until he was satisfied with the levels and decibels. He took an unhurried sip from his cup before he spoke. “*Old school tayo eh.*”

The next time I saw Ka Rene, I had already decided to buy a new turntable. My father’s player was beyond repair, he said.

Now it is good to know that I’m proud of being what you call an “informed consumer,” unlikely to fall prey to the quirks of the impulse-buyer. Years ago, I asked my sister to shop with me for a new pair of jeans. She obliged with ecstatic halleluiahs, for I had been wearing the same old pair for almost a decade. We scrimmaged against the crowds of *Glorietta 2 & 4*, *Landmark*, *Greenhills*, *Shangri-la* and *Megamall*, all in one day. By the time I had found “the one,” the sides of my hips were red with blisters. But it was well worth it. I couldn’t have found it without my only sibling.

Anyway, when I arrived at Ka Rene’s shop for the second time, I had to wait for him to conclude his business with another patron. The client was giving the detailed specs of his custom-made amplifier. “*Tubero ka na nga, nag di-D-I-Y ka na eh,*” Ka Rene told him.

I had done some research on sound technology, but to this day, how they first captured and reproduced sound boggles me. How could they have even considered the project remotely possible? They say sound waves are captured as grooves on waxed cylinder. They say sound is reproduced by a stylus which ‘senses’ these grooves, frozen like pictures. During the turntable’s infancy, each musician performed in front of a cone-like cylin-

der while the turntable carved the vibrations of the air into a record. That was the closest they got to “mixing” every instrument in the ensemble. The technology developed with the invention of the microphone. They covered the record in a thin metal coat to serve as the master copy for all the other records that would be pressed. It was easier to comprehend the inner workings of digital recording. It made sense to me. But grooves? Grooves!? This wonderful invention was truly beyond me. For how could sound descend on something so tangible and remain there? How could something so transient, so ethereal be given form?

We were listening to a Neil Young concert one day. My friend commented that what the turntable really did was emboss the exact same air pressure configurations and acoustics that day in the 60’s. “That there record is air captured and seen with ears.”

Meanwhile, an important component of the research needed an equal amount of attention as well: fieldwork. Regarding equipment and gear, specialty magazines such as *Stereophile* and web-based audio communities such as *wiredstate.com* will serve as excellent starter-kits for the fledgling, but what I enjoyed most was talking with people I’d chance upon in audio shops. Some are self-proclaimed gear-heads who talk about the math and physics: “I really do prefer my tracking force-gauge calibrated in milliNewtons,” someone told me once. It took several days for me to realize he was talking about cartridges. Some prefer to leave the science out of the equation so they can listen to the music. One time, I asked an audiophile about speakers and optimum distance. He simply made me notice how we were able to talk comfortably and without strain even though the speakers were blasting in front of us.

On another occasion, I overheard a conversation about equalizer settings. When three frequencies are the only available choices, the high, mid and the low, there’s nothing to worry about. But more than that, say, ten or twenty frequencies, one would have to rouse a whole spectrum of the auditory armada to appreciate equalizers. A woman in the group declared that settings would depend on the type of music or instrument one wants to hear, an isolation of frequencies of sorts. Another remarked that the rule of thumb he always followed was the “reenactment” of a performance, an approximation of the real thing, like an orchestra performing right in front of you. That’s why audiophiles always ask the type of music you’re into, so they can tell you what sort of frequencies to look for.

Another man wanted to change the topic to speaker wires. I tried to hide the smirk on my face. I thought he'd be snubbed. *Your friends are talking about equalizers and the cosmos and you want to talk about speaker wires? Come on...* But his fellows just as quickly jumped on the issue—its metallic compositions, its compatibility with amperes and ohms. “You lose 1 db for every ten-feet of wire,” I heard someone say. Then I wondered: *why would anyone need more than ten feet of wire?*

It got weirder and weirder after that. Audiophiles will go on and on with words like room acoustics, physics, sound depth, soundstage and gravity for days. Yes gravity. Apparently, some audiophiles feel the need to suspend their turntables in zero gravity to get rid of the most minute vibration and noise.

Because records are extinct in the mainstream market, enthusiasts hunt for them in flea markets and swap meets. And because piracy has not turned its gaze on the market yet, the dig becomes sweeter. The price can range from ten pesos to any amount one's gullibility and/or sanity will permit. But patrons with stable mental constitutions will usually appraise a record based on the occurrence of scratches and the cover's mint, or lack thereof. Plastic covers are optional. Usually, people don't mind, especially when it comes to cheaper records. They believe the thin film shrinks over time and damages the sleeve. Cubao, Makati Cinema Square, Raon. These are the usual spots in Manila. But here's a thought: the unexpected gem of a record is waiting in a basement or attic of some uncle or aunt, a lolo or a lola. And in my experience, I find they are more than willing to share and pass these records on to the next generation. So perhaps, it is not so hard to understand sound reproduction after all.

Back in Ka Rene's shop, I was getting psyched by the minute. His client left after some time, and we were finally alone. After the pleasantries, he proceeded to give me a rundown of turntables according to my budget. Enthusiasts call it an audition. He billed it as a “wine-tasting experience of auditory proportions.” And he was going to be my connoisseur. He briefly complimented each candidate, then connected it to different sets of speakers, pre-amps, and amplifiers. With each prospect, he played the same record over and over—a reference record the listener is familiar with. “*Anong album ba ang kilala mo hanggang buto?*” asked Ka Rene. He then proceeded to inquire if I heard this or that, switching from one turntable

to another. He waited for my reaction after he asked if I could hear the drumsticks 'brush' against the rim of the snare drum. "*Rinig mo yung pahid?*"

With another model, he showed me how the tone-arm automatically raised itself and returned at rest when the record ended. First, the dead-air crackles took over. A subtle, hypnotic pulse throbbed in the undertones before the arm ascended, and then, silence. Finally, I asked, "What's the difference, really, between analog and digital?" I told him about Mawi, the first true-blooded audiophile I had the pleasure of meeting. During one of my visits to his house, he borrowed my iPod and played it through his system as an experiment. His eyes were vacant but his ears were listening for something I could not discern. "The digital hiss is an unwanted nuance," Mawi said. He told me, as if it were some grand secret, that his beef with digitals was really about the low frequencies. "CDs sound bright. Very bright. That's the problem right there." He told me about a term he called the *brown sound*. "Whatever happens, a voice from a telephone will always sound better than a voice from a mobile. That Edison, man! He got it right the first time. And you, my young apprentice, would be wise to junk your CD's and iPod altogether, sell the house immediately, and take the money to your nearest analog dealer." I looked at Ka Rene and waited for his reaction. He gave me an awkward smile. I did not dare press the issue.

I had all sorts of plans for my new turntable that day. I cancelled my engagements and locked myself in, hoping to play records until the next life. I'd already chosen the occasion's debut album: the original soundtrack to the movie *La Bamba*. The first track I'd play would be "*Oh Donna*," by Ritchie Valens. I cleaned the dusty record using a microfiber cloth soaked in a mixture of water and *Joy* dishwashing soap, placing it in the spinning platform first so I didn't have to hold it. As the cloth around my finger gathered dust from the vinyl, the player suddenly comatosed. It still had power, for the pea-sized bulb still shed its orange light. I inhaled deeply, called Ka Rene and informed him about the situation. I was lucky, he said. He was going to be home the whole day. I flew with a purpose. I braved the streets once more, inching my way through grid-locks as I scrolled through my iPod to keep me occupied. *Eighty gigs, eleven thousand three hundred and twenty six songs. Stick with a tune, man!*

I was taken aback when I entered Ka Rene's home-office—a *bo-dega*—where piles and piles of dead or dying equipment were stacked in high racks. The sun was absent and the lights were dim. There was a funk in the humid air which reminded me of school buses and old cars. The gray, cement floor was covered in dust which stuck to the hem of my jeans. His working table revealed various tools: a soldering gun here, a magnifying scope there. Copious amounts of little fuses and gears were hidden in small pigeon-hole drawers. As he proceeded to dislodge the screws of my player, I saw a neatly framed medical diploma hanging by the wall in front of his table.

I was surprised to find that the drive motor of my new player did not rely on wheels and belts, but on opposite polarities of a magnetic field which actually kept the motor afloat in zero-gravity. This technology produced a consistent and smoother spin which prevented the needle from skating out of the grooves. "*Bato-balani 'yan eh, walang kupas,*" he said without looking at me, "*di tulad nung sintas sa player mo.*" He opened a small drawer and handed the tarnished strings to me.

We soon got to talking about the recipient of the diploma, his daughter, who worked as a nurse abroad. While he brought my player back to life, I told him about my sister, a doctor, who was getting married and preparing to leave in a couple of months, also to work abroad. I confessed that sometimes, I secretly wished she would fail some exam or requirement so she wouldn't have any choice but to stay in the motherland. I shared my unease with an anecdote my father told her, with hopes of convincing her to reconsider. He likened her condition to a tribe that teaches its flock how to make fire, only to see the enlightened members of the fold defect to the neighbouring tribe and capitalize on their new-found knowledge. He kept silent as if he didn't hear a word, continuing with the repair. A split-second swivet crept after my words. I was afraid I had insulted him.

The rebirth of my player was in its final stages, and after the last screw was bolted, he suddenly spoke and told me about his kids in America. Their youngest daughter, who still lived with him and his wife, was graduating from college in a few months and had already announced her intentions of leaving. When I asked him how he had reacted, he said simply, and not without a smile, "not a word, *iho*, not a word."

Track 7 Saturn Return

“Kuya favor. Can you help me edit these personal statements for my applications? Think of it as your birthday gift to me.”

“I’m not an editor. I’m a writer.”

“*You* are a bum. And you fart too much.”

“29 eh? Nice. Saturn returns.”

“Huh?”

“The Saturn return? See, Saturn takes about 29 years or so to complete one orbit. So on your 29th year, Saturn will have returned to the exact same spot it occupied when you were born.”

“And?”

“They say it’s a time of great upheaval in one’s life—a right of passage of sorts. If you fail, the consequences will haunt you in full force by the time it returns again, when you’re 59 or 60. If you make the grade, then it becomes your path to wisdom in old age. You know Van Gogh decided to be a painter instead of a minister when he turned 30?”

“Yeah, then he chopped his ears off before killing himself.”

“That’s beside the point.”

“So, will you look at the statements? *Sigue na*, I’ll buy you all those records when I get there . . .”

“You know you lose 1db for every ten feet of wire?”

“Are you high or something?”

“Doctors earn a pretty decent living here.”

“My dear brother, you are a moron. It has never been about the money. The only thing your Saturn is asking me is when I should give that letter to Mama and Papa . . . you know the letter we always talked about? Maybe it’s time. I’m thinking I should give it before the wedding. What do you think?”

Track 8 Analogue Soul (Reprise)

I haven't seen Ka Rene since. And to this day, the difference between analog and digital, if the difference exists at all, eludes me. It's something very personal I guess—something we cannot impose on others. What is profound to one person may be trivial to the next. And the best thing we can hope for is an occasional email, a video chat or a picture posted on the internet to remind ourselves that in the silence of distance, there is no longing, only patience.

So when the day is done, I boil a pinch of tea and light some candles. I relieve my battered iPod from its duties and recharge it in a corner of my room. I flip through my LP's, waiting for a memory to take hold. A record slides out of its cover, tranquil and calm. The soft cotton cloth wipes the vinyl in trance-like motions. The running platter embraces the record, spinning, spinning. I steady my hands before I cradle the tone-arm and send it off. For a moment, I look at the cartridge as it undulates with the subtle curves of the record in graceful dips and jumps, the stylus barely kissing the grooves. I make the necessary speed adjustments, but only after I take a sip from the steaming cup. I sit down and close these eyes so my ears can see: a saxophone player's neck, veins bulging, the strings of a guitar, still shivering in sustain, a mad, sweat-drenched maestro, preparing for the climax, and the ivory keys of a piano, caressed by long and elegant fingers. When the light returns and the final note is fulfilled, I know the player will automatically lift her slender arm and place it by her side. But I stand up and catch it anyway. Tenderly, I bring it back home.

Analogue Souls

A Cosmic Verb Recording

Performed by the Dayharmonic Candle Orchestra

Conducted by Professor Cristina P. Hidalgo

All tracks written by Waldoferus except track 4 written by Waldoferus, Sagaworks and track 7 written by Waldoferus, Milkymilk.

Approximate running time: 5,500 words

Produced by Ka Rene & Waldoferus

Engineered & Mixed by Mawi

Mastered by Bundy the Baboy Dog

Recorded Aug 22-30, 2010 at Sinigang Cartel Studios, Manila, Philippines

Cover concept by The Pheytz

thanks: april, arlene, art, bambi, bigg, camille, carljoel, cathy, chester, elena, ham, jeena, jenny, jron, louella, max, myka, nat, pay, preach

Sagaworks appears courtesy of Leave Us Records

Milkymilk appears courtesy of Bato Balani Records

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Highly flammable.

No smoking within 100 meters.

Keep off the grass.