

A SPECIAL LONG READ FROM the **YYSCENE**

As he approaches 60, **TONA WALT OHAMA** is contemplating his legacy and opening up about his unconventional life and remarkable canon of electronic music. He has fans worldwide and yet concedes:

**'Nobody really knows me.'**

# Don't You Listen?

A PROFILE BY DAVID VEITCH

THEYYSCENE.COM



**T**ONA WALT OHAMA GREETES *THE YYSCENE* mid-day, mid-week, on a downtown street in Calgary. He's tidily dressed in dark slacks and a blue patterned dress shirt; streaks of grey in his black hair are the most visible reminder he's in his fourth decade of making music.



Alice Cooper's 1973 *Billion Dollar Babies* are the facing covers.

The apartment is a tight fit for two people (Mia, his wife of four years, lives in the apartment next to him) yet this is where Ohama has recorded all of his music since 2010, a decade that has proven to be the most productive and artistically restless of his career.

A few weeks prior, Ohama hosted an artist reception at Arts Commons to launch his latest project, a 15-speaker ambient music installation *A Moment Of Quiet Reflection In Downtown Calgary*, which runs at the multi-venue arts centre until Aug. 31.

"A woman came up to me and said, 'You know this guy Walt Ohama? He used to do this music in the '80s.' I said, 'Yeah, I know him.' Now that's not being recognized," Ohama says, laughing in a way you can't help but hear some hurt.

He has, after all, assembled a remarkable body of work (see Music is the Master on Pages 10-11) since the release his 1982 cassette-only debut, *Midnite News*. Never one to chase trends, Ohama simply follows his muse and that has led him over the years to create college radio synth-pop hits (*Julie is a TV Set*, *Where Do You Call Home?*), scores for movies and animated shorts, a stunning reinvention of a Jethro Tull prog-rock classic, collaborations with female singer-songwriters and a number of ambient works that have bathed Calgary's downtown core in sound.

An uncompromising singer, songwriter and producer driven by a singular vision, Ohama's achievements are truly his own. He has recorded in a series of homemade studios — one, famously, in the basement of his family's potato farm in Rainier, Alberta — and has remained an independent recording artist by choice. It's a decision that has puzzled some over the years, including the late

Despite having fans around the globe, the Canadian electronic music pioneer can wander his neighbourhood, and his city, in anonymity.

"I should warn you, I live fairly minimally," he says. "I can't even offer you a coffee. If you want one, you can get one at the shop over there."

Java declined, we enter a building and walk up a long flight of stairs to his one-room apartment, which doubles as his recording space. The dim, window-less room is mostly lit with red Christmas mini-lights strung along walls lined with books, DVDs and compact discs. Classic rock, prog rock and Prince are clearly favourites.

There's a vocal mic at the back of the room; to the left, two keyboards — including his first synthesizer, an ARP Axse bought in 1975 — sit on stands below Mandy Tsung's painting Cinder (used for the cover of Ohama's 2017 album, *Grrlz Monosynth Tower*). On the floor, there's a twin-bed mattress beside stacks of vinyl; Mott the Hoople's 1974 *The Hoople* and



**"A woman came up to me and said: You know this guy Walt Ohama? He used to do this music in the '80s"**



Tona Walt Ohama in downtown Calgary, June 28, 2018. Facing page, top, Ohama says a few words in front of family, friends and fans at the opening of his Arts Commons ambient installation, May 14, 2018.



# “He was quite something”

**Colin James and k.d. lang bassist Dennis Marcenko remembers ‘gentle soul’ Ohama when he was back in (all) black.**

I met Walt through Bruce (Toll, Marcenko’s roommate) in the early ’80s. I remember seeing Walt walk down the street; he was one of the first guys I saw with spiky black hair, all black clothes, black fingernail polish and eyeliner. I thought, “Wow, who’s this guy?” He was quite something. But he was such a gentle soul, too.

We lived close to the Plaza Theatre in Kensington and Walt would come over. Ulrike (Voll, artist and Marcenko’s girlfriend at the time) taught him how to pronounce (German industrial band) Einstürzende Neubauten. She had him repeat it over and over and they practised it until he got it right. He liked her art so much he used it on one of his albums. That’s her and I (on the cover of *Love Only Lasts Awhile*). That was taken from a photograph.

I always felt Walt was really cutting edge and I never really felt in the same league as him. So I was really quite impressed and honoured when he asked me to play on some of his stuff. I remember staying the weekend when we did *The Call*. I remember doing some pretty crazy things. I took a drum cymbal, laid it on the floor, then turned my bass on and just scraped the strings with it. To this day, I want to see rules broken. I want to see people push boundaries. That’s what Walt was really good at.

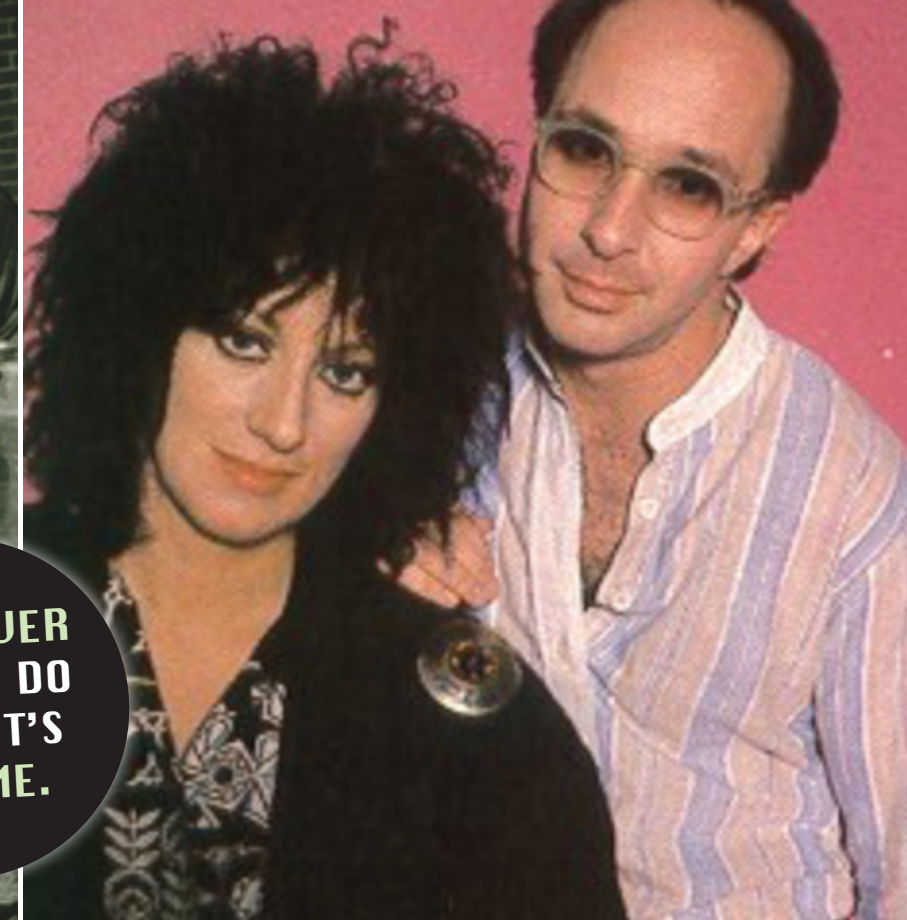
The one thing I remember about his parents is the communication they would have with him. They were very soft-spoken and very gentle. They saw that he had a vision. They saw he had a direction. I don’t think they understood what it was he was doing but there was a lot of love in the room.

We last chatted right after (Ohama released) *Thick as a Brick*. Next time I come to Calgary, I’d like to spend time with him in the studio again.

*As told to David Veitch*



Ray Walker, Ohama, Rhona Thomas, Dania and Dennis Marcenko at the Pumphouse Theatre. Right: 1985 CASBY hosts Paul Shaffer and Carole Pope.



Calgary *Herald* music writer James Muretich, who Ohama recalls approached him at the underground music club and arts space Ten Foot Henry’s with an offer he did refuse.

“James was so impressed with my show, he came up to me afterwards and he said: ‘I have contacts with record company people if you’re interested. Maybe you should send your things to them.’ And I said, ‘I’m not interested, James, thank you.’” Ohama laughs. “And that just drove him crazy.”

Muretich isn’t the only one who’s been left bemused by Ohama. Even to those who’ve known him for decades, Ohama remains an enigma.

“I don’t know if I ever did know Walt,” says bassist Dennis Marcenko, who recorded with Ohama in the mid-’80s. “I’m not sure how many of us actually did.”

Doug Wong, another longtime friend, goes one step further.

“I don’t know if Tona knows Tona,” he says.

“He would let you get glimpses into his personality,” adds Marcenko, “and then sometimes he would just smile and not say as much.

He was an observer. We definitely got along but he was all alone in his thoughts and in his ways of thinking. Whenever he’d tell me a story or share something with me, I always felt very lucky.”

And now it’s the *YYScene*’s turn to feel lucky. Ohama says he doesn’t usually allow people into what is, quite literally, a studio apartment — but invites us to look around and ask him anything.

“You know why I’m doing this? Now that I’m a little older, I feel it needs to be documented a little bit,” says Ohama, who turns 59 in January. “My music exists but nobody really knows me. Not really. When I did the Arts Commons thing, they don’t know who I am. I think I need to be known a little bit for what I’ve done over the past 30 years.”

With that, Ohama settles in for the first of two lengthy interviews with *The YYScene*; this fascinating, private recording artist, graphic designer, sound designer, computer programmer, streetsweeper and dishwasher opening up about his family, his recordings and the reasons he twice gave up on music — and almost gave up on life.

## SOMETIMES TRY TOO HARD: 1960–1986

**A**pril 24, 1985. The up-and-coming stars of Canadian music — Darkroom! Pukka Orchestra! Luba! — had gathered at the Toronto Convention Centre for the fifth annual fan-voted CASBY (formerly U-Know) Awards, launched by Toronto radio station CFNY to celebrate independent and ‘alternative’ artists.

The 1985 ceremony was the first to be broadcast nationally on CBC-TV and organizers pulled out all the stops. David Letterman musical director Paul Shaffer and Rough Trade singer Carole Pope were paired as unlikely (and hilariously incompatible) hosts, while the presenters and performers were also an eclectic mix: Eugene Levy, Martin Short and Dave Thomas of *SCTV*, Images in Vogue, Jane Siberry, The Spoons, Long John Baldry, Richard Butler of The Psychedelic Furs and The Band’s Richard Manuel, who would be dead within the year.

Also attending the music industry schmoozefest that night: Tona Ohama, who was nominated for best independent recording artist (losing to Ontario’s Direktive 17 in the televised category). He was sitting be-

hind rock legend Ronnie Hawkins in the audience. As the ceremony closed and everyone gathered onstage to sing charity single *Tears are not Enough*, Ohama recalls CFNY deejay Liz Janik trying to nudge the reclusive artist into the spotlight.

“Liz tried to drag me up onstage to join the group sing-along. I wouldn’t go,” Ohama says. “And I watched the other artists, like Gowan and the Parachute Club, who were like posing for the photographers and doing their thing like models and I’m thinking: ‘I’m never going to do that. It’s not me.’”

“It was a pose-fest,” confirms Marcenko, who attended as a member of k.d. lang’s band, “and that’s not who he was, although I remember him being gracious. Walt just didn’t buy into that whole scene. He

was most himself and most at home when he was with computers and his keyboard and composing.”

In retrospect, the 1985 CASBY ceremony was both the culmination of Ohama’s successes to date but also the beginning of an end.

The first phase of Ohama’s recording career was drawing to a close, much faster than anyone could have imagined.

**R**EMEMBER BEING four and singing Beatles songs,” says Ohama, born Jan. 16, 1960, a baby brother to three record-loving, teenaged sisters. They lived on a 2,000-acre potato farm and packing plant in Rainier, 35 km southwest of Brooks, population next to nothing. The family operation, established in 1942, supplied potatoes and Tona Goldentop potato chips to stores across Canada and into the U.S. By the mid-’60s, patriarch Tona Sr. was crowned the Potato King of the World by the industry; his lucrative business enabled the Ohama children to follow their passions that, in the early ’60s, included celebrating Beatlemania in real time.

“We had Beatles bubblegum cards





**“I’m 21 and I’m just angry. I’m angry I have to help my father.”**

was downstairs but the house was wired with speakers and the turntable was upstairs in the main living room. At those parties, my job was to

take requests downstairs and run upstairs to change the records.

**When did you start having your own records?**

Ten or 12. I was listening to so much music. Frank Zappa’s *Weasel Ripped My Flesh*, the whole Woodstock thing, Beatles, Rolling Stones.

**Did you want to play music?**

No, not at all.

**You didn’t have the impulse ...**

To play? I couldn’t play. I had no interest in playing. I wanted to listen to music. Any band that I really connected with, whether it was Elton John or Alice Cooper or Led Zeppelin, I was never gonna see them in concert, never gonna see them on TV, never gonna read about them. Not where I lived. Never ever. The only connection was that album. That album cover, that album, that’s all I knew about that artist. So that’s why the album is so important to me. I love listening to music but I had no desire to play it.

**You bought your first synthesizer from a small keyboard shop in Edmonton in 1975. Impulse buy?**

I walked in, it was plugged in, it just made this sound and I went holy.

I want that. And I bought it. I had about \$1,000 in the bank — which is a lot of money in 1975 — that had been sitting in my account growing all my life. And I spent the whole thing on this synthesizer. I wrote them a cheque and they shipped it to me on the bus.

**Did your parents approve?**

I couldn’t tell you. Japanese family. It’s hard to read.

**Did you have any musical training at this point?**

No training but my mom and dad had an organ in the house. So I decided to play it. It was one of those Yamaha things with the automatic rhythms. I played with that, so that was my training. In high school, I took piano lessons for four months and ... not interested (laughs).

**In 1976, you sold your ARP Axxe for an upgraded model, the ARP Odyssey. Did that signal you were getting more serious about music?**

I wanted to play rock music at that point. I’d take the synth over to house parties in Rainier, kids would come over, smoke weed and listen to me make these weird sounds. That’s all I could do with it. Then I joined a bar band (Merlin) and we started doing covers. We were playing in Calgary, Cochrane, Canmore, Maple Creek (Sask).

**What did you cover?**

Stuff like Yes, Genesis, Kansas. Not your normal top-40 pop music. When we were doing that, people were demanding that we play the Bee Gees. They wanted *Saturday Night Fever* and

we were playing *Afterglow* by Genesis and *Roundabout* by Yes.

**After graduating in 1981 with your Bachelor of Science in civil engineering from the University of Calgary, rather than pursuing a career in architecture, you tried to form another band.**

I wanted to make a band like Styx, or I wanted to do Rush with synthesizers. When (1985 Rush album) *Power Windows* came out, I thought that’s what I had wanted to do. I had my bass player, I had my drummer and we were a good trio. We were auditioning guitarists in Calgary every day; then, after months, he walked in the door and it clicked like that. It was amazing. I felt this is really special. We were going to be like something that Canada has never heard, maybe America.

**The excitement didn’t last long.**

No, that afternoon, my dad had drove up to Calgary and knocked on our door. He’s crying. I never saw my dad cry before in his life. He said, “Son, I need help on the farm. Can you come run the place for the summer and get us going?” His main manager quit to work for the competition and my dad had bought this automatic bag-tying machine that nobody could figure out. He was deserted basically. He needed someone to get that factory working and up and running by mid-July in order to ship potatoes for the summer.

**Was saying no an option?**

Not in my family. My drummer said, “I would have told him to fuck off.”

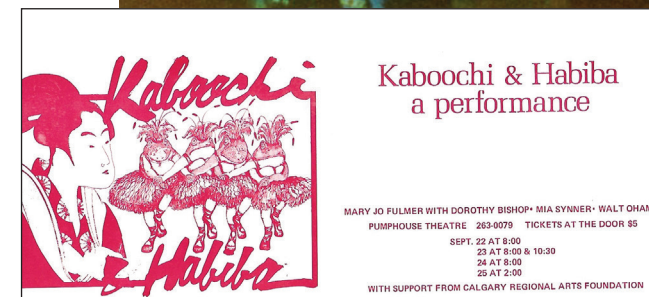
**How did you feel?**

I’m 21 and I’m just angry. I’m angry I have to help my father. I’m angry I have to help my family. I’m angry the band is not going to work. I’m just an angry, angry kid. My only thought was to get through this, do a year, get the factory running, hire somebody to replace me, and then put my band back together and go.

**F**ATE HAD other plans. That summer, his former bassist Bruce Toll visited Ohama on the farm and brought with him a stack of new electronic music releases, including *Metamatic*, the first solo album by former Ultravox



Clockwise from far left: Ohama brand potato chips from mid-’60s, Tona Sr. awarded for world-best potatoes, Ohama in Merlin, a Merlin poster, a flyer for the 1983 Pumphouse Theatre show where Ohama met future wife Mia.



frontman John Foxx.

“He played it,” Ohama says, “and I went: ‘That’s what I want to do. I’m not going to do the band thing. I’m going to do that!’”

Ohama spent the next several months juggling farm duties with building a studio in the family home.

“I moved into the basement and that was my bedroom,” he recalls. “(My dad) had no idea what I was doing. ‘As long as he’s running the business, we don’t care.’ That’s how it is. You don’t talk. It’s a Japanese family. You just start. I had to learn everything. Compressors. Equalizers. All self-taught. I needed a drum machine and that’s when things clicked. I got the drum machine and then I went, ‘OK, now I can do what John Foxx is doing.’”

The first complete song he recorded, *Dischordant Concensus* (sic), opens his debut cassette album, *Midnite News*. It was followed a year later by a second cassette album, *Ohama* (but nowadays he refers to it as the White Album). These two releases contain some of his best-loved songs, many of which he would re-record

(often in significantly different form) on future albums. Only 100 copies were made of the first cassette, 50 of the second, and Ohama erased the masters as soon as the tapes were manufactured.

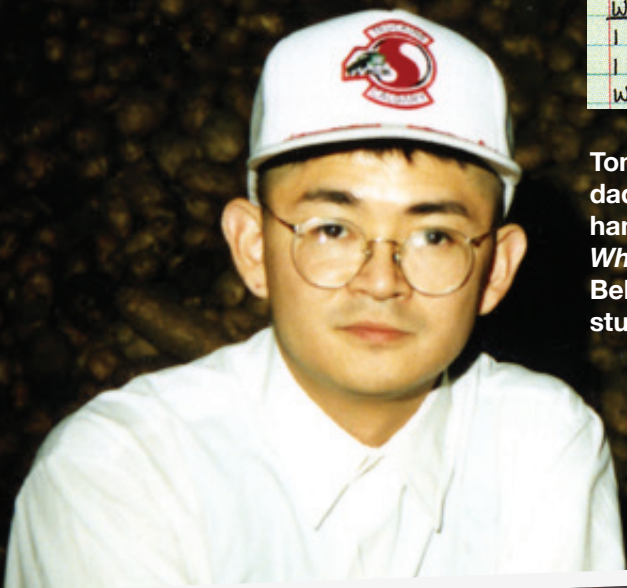
“I can remember the actual feeling of taking that master and running the bulk eraser over it and going, ‘That’s it. It’s done,’” he says. “I was young and I thought, if you make a limited edition print, you break the rock, you don’t make more prints. So that’s what I decided to do.”

There were no highfalutin artistic reasons behind his next decision to make the jump to vinyl. He did it to impress a girl — future wife Mia Blackwell — who he met at the Pumphouse Theatre in 1983.

“She was from Toronto; big into clubs,” says Ohama, who fell in love with the dancer instantly, even though she already had a boyfriend: Avery Tanner, a deejay at Toronto new wave nightspot Klub Domino.

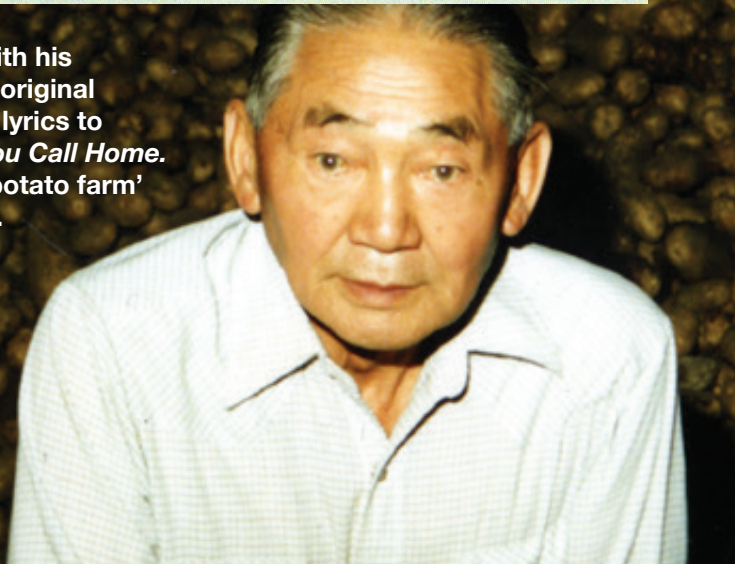
“I’m trying to impress her, showing her my tape,” he says. “She’s like: ‘If you don’t do vinyl, you’re not a real artist.’ And that was it. So then I did vinyl.”





WHERE DO YOU CALL HOME?  
I LIVE ON A POTATO FARM—WHERE DO YOU CALL HOME?  
I HATE CALIFORNIA BUT I LOVE NEW YORK (NICE PLACE TO VISIT)  
WHERE DO YOU CALL HOME?

Tona Walt with his dad. Above: original handwritten lyrics to *Where Do You Call Home*. Below, his 'potato farm' studio, 1983.



"My dad had no idea what I was doing. 'As long as he's running the business, we don't care.'"



done. You see stuff like that and you realize this guy is not like everybody else."

Within days, Ohama organized the pressing of his debut seven-inch single. He chose what he considered the best song from his second cassette, *Julie is a TV Set*, for the A-side, backed by another White Album track, *TV*.

Doug Wong, whose company facilitated the 1,000-unit pressing, remembers Ohama's instructions about the single's 'picture' sleeve.

"People would come in and print full-colour covers or they'd want pictures of themselves or something like that," Wong says.

"Tona came in and said, 'I want my name and that's it. The front cover is going to be blank.' I said, 'You don't want your picture on it?' 'Nope. Just my name.' I thought that was quite neat. It did make it stand out from the other things we had

A re-recorded version of *Julie is a TV Set* would appear, in arguably definitive form, on Ohama's first 12-inch release, the four-track *Midnite News* EP, released April 1984. Seven months later, Ohama released his first full-length LP, *I Fear What I Might Hear*, a creative and commercial triumph. He reworked five more tracks from his initial cassettes, added three new songs, and audaciously sequenced them into two side-long song cycles.

"I was really proud of it," says Ohama. "I knew I had an album that sounded really close to what I was aiming for the first time. *Where Do You Call Home* is the first song on Side B; *Of Whales* the first song on Side A. Those are meant to be radio songs and they were. They got played and they worked beautifully. I knew when I sent it out, there

was going to be an audience for it. I could just feel it."

He was right. *I Fear What I Might Hear* grabbed the attention of Liz Janik and her husband Peter Goodwin, who together hosted the CFNY independent music program *Streets of Ontario*. For the next two years, they would champion Ohama's music, playing his songs on their show, writing about him in their column for *Music Express* magazine and lobbying for the CASBY nomination. There was other media interest, including a segment on the nationally syndicated *New Music* TV program and exposure on *Brave New Waves* and *Night Lines*, two national CBC Radio programs that launched that same year.

"Ohama stood out on multiple levels," Janik remembers. "You had something that was very creative, you had something that was fresh, you had something that was original, you had an artist who was intriguing, to say the very least. When you look at some of his lyrics, he's

more about poetry in some ways."

Adds Goodwin: "When we got stuff from him, there was always a personal letter, there was tons of information, there was always something else that was quirky. He had always figured out a hook, a way of making his work and he himself stand out from the pack. Right from the get-go, he really impressed me with that."

The initial 1,000 copies were quickly sold, and two more pressings of 2,000 copies each were needed to keep up with demand.

"It took off, that album," Ohama says. "This is how brave I was. I went to New York City, I took a box of records, go into (famed New York City record store) Bleeker Bob's and Bleeker Bob (Plotnik) remembered me from April with the *Midnite News* EP. 'Oh, hey, it's the Eskimo guy from Canada!' He said, 'What do you got?' 'This is *I Fear What I Might Hear*.' He said, 'I'll take 10,' and he paid me, not on consignment. He said, 'Ah, they'll sell, don't worry. I can tell by just looking



at the cover.' So Bleeker Bob was selling my stuff in New York.

"The next day, I went to (trend-setting New York City nightclub) Danceteria at 4 in the afternoon and

walked in to see if my record could get played there. A deejay there put it on, listened to it and said, 'This is really good; totally not going to get played in this club. It's not the right type of music.' ... Still, pretty nervy for a kid to do that."

FOLLOWING THE CASBYs, his career ascendant, Ohama's next projects involved something he mostly avoided as a solo artist: collaboration. (Despite occasionally crediting outside musicians on his records, wonderfully named players such as Oot Myers and Eric D. Hoffaby don't exist.)

First, Ohama agreed to have Avery Tanner come to the potato farm and produce a dance single aimed at clubs like Danceteria. Tanner was looking to follow in the footsteps of Arthur Baker and apply his knowledge as a club deejay to record production.

STORY CONTINUES ON P. 12



"This could be a head or organ!"

Liz Janik (above) and Peter Goodwin, co-hosts of *Streets of Ontario* on CFNY in Toronto and Ohama boosters, recall gory details of their ooze problem ...

Janik: (Ohama) sent us a note that he was sending something to us. He shipped it off using Canada Post. Time goes by, I get a call from Canada Post, the local post office, saying: There's a package here and we'd like you to come and pick it up right away. We went over to the post office. "I'm here to pick up the package." And they said, "Oh, that package. Yes, you will have to go downstairs, out to the shipping area. It's oozing red liquid." I go pick up the box and, sure enough, it's oozing. And it's in a plastic bag because it was oozing over everything I guess. And I'm taking it home and saying to Peter: "What is it? Do we know it was from him?" I don't think we knew it was from him at the moment.

Goodwin: I think the label had been obscured...

Janik: ... by the oozing! We thought: "This could be a head or an organ or something. Oh my God." We opened it up so carefully at home and it was his beautiful potatoes that had frozen and gone mooky. He wanted to share a new breed of potato that they had developed on the farm. Shit, I never got the chance to taste them!

As told to David Veitch

Tona Walt Ohama interviewed by Daniel Richler for *New Music* and *MuchMusic*, 1985.





# Music is the master

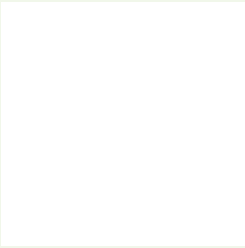
“My ideal fan,” Tona Walt Ohama says, “is still a loner who lives with their parents, hiding out in the bedroom, listening to an album and reading all the liner notes.” To help future generations of loners navigate his career, Ohama agrees to walk the YYScene through most of his back catalogue. Many titles are available for streaming or as digital downloads. CDBaby even sells select Ohama vinyl and CD titles for those kickin’ it old skool.



**Midnite News (Cassette, 1982)**  
Confident and accomplished first outing containing early versions of *My Time*, *Part in Peace*, *Midnite News* and *Of Whales*. It's a more dynamic recording than many synth-pop records of the time, which Ohama attributes to the lack of competing radio-wave interference on the farm. Only 100 copies made; today, Ohama owns just one, No. 27. On an album of future Ohama standards, deep cut *Mushin No Shin* still stands out for its driving 'sequencer' riff and its discordant piano solo, an '80s equivalent of the Mike Garson piano solo on *Aladdin Sane*.

**Ohama (a.k.a. White Album or Julie is a TV Set) (Cassette, 1983)**  
Only 50 copies made of a sophomore album that introduced a very select number of fans to songs he'd later revisit, including *The Drum*, *Sometimes*, *The Call*, *I Tie My Shoes*, *A Giant Starfish* and *Julie is a TV Set*. **Ohama:** "I don't think it's that strong because I was experimenting with different studio techniques and so on. It's almost like a demo tape. I didn't have a copy and I had erased the master. There was a fan in Sweden. He kept writing me: 'I want a copy of that album.' I said I don't have one.

It was one take that worked. I didn't have a sequencer. The drum machine had no ability to sync up to a synthesizer at that time. Those notes were played at half that speed then sped up." **Play this:** *Mushin No Shin*  
**Available:** Digital download, streaming



**Ohama (a.k.a. White Album or Julie is a TV Set) (Cassette, 1983)**  
Only 50 copies made of a sophomore album that introduced a very select number of fans to songs he'd later revisit, including *The Drum*, *Sometimes*, *The Call*, *I Tie My Shoes*, *A Giant Starfish* and *Julie is a TV Set*. **Ohama:** "I don't think it's that strong because I was experimenting with different studio techniques and so on. It's almost like a demo tape. I didn't have a copy and I had erased the master. There was a fan in Sweden. He kept writing me: 'I want a copy of that album.' I said I don't have one.

And he'd keep writing to me to say: 'You're not telling me the truth!' He offered me \$250 for a copy of the cassette. So when I went back to New York, my sister is there and she said: 'You give me everything you do. I don't throw it out. Maybe it's in the closet.' So she pulled out a shoebox and goes, 'Is this it?' I was so grateful someone had kept it. It was never played, so it's in pretty good condition. That's what's on the (career-spanning) box set. And then I took that original cassette and I gave it to the guy in Sweden as a gift." **Play this:** *The Drum*  
**Available:** Ohama box set



**Julie is a TV Set (7-inch single, 1983)**  
From the White Album cassette. A strong candidate for Ohama's signature song, co-written with friend Johannes Halbertsma. **Ohama:** "We were engineering students together. He wrote me a letter: 'A little pause before I start. I need a little time to think.

Like the end of a board sawn off. The dream was just disturbance.' That's how he started his letter. I thought that is going into this song! The rest was me. And I gave him a songwriting credit. He never joined SOCAN and he never got any royalties. Who's it about? A friend who's long gone. Her name was Judy and she used to watch TV a lot. I would say Judy is a TV set. I changed it to Julie so she wouldn't get angry. That's where it started. It wasn't meant to be a statement about technology. It's *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* or something like that. It is the first song where I programmed the drums. You hear how simple they are? I was learning the machine. That song probably took two to three hours to make. Total. It's a magic song." **Available:** *The Potato Farm Tapes* (Minimal Wave, 2012)



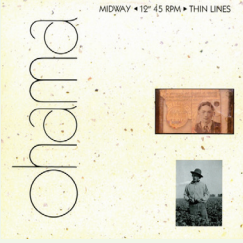
**Midnite News (12-inch EP, 1984)**  
Re-recorded versions of four White Album tracks. *Julie is a TV*

*Set* and *Midnite News* seemingly retooled for the dance floor; the thudding electro bass drum on the latter recalling the previous year's New Order smash *Blue Monday*. **Ohama:** "They had the same drum machine. That's why they sound similar. But (the EP) was not meant to be a club record; it was just meant to have lots of bass." **Play this:** *Midnite News*  
**Available:** Digital download, streaming



**I Fear What I Might Hear (LP, 1984)**  
Essential Ohama music; some would argue he's never bettered this. Although Ohama was widely viewed as part of the '80s synth-pop movement at the time, in retrospect there are '70s rock influences throughout: the prog-rock majesty of *Sometimes*' middle section, the bucolic soft rock of *Feelings* and, of course, the Pink Floydian integration of music

and sound effects. The use of barking dogs in *Midnite News II* is particularly hypnotic. **Ohama:** "It was a song cycle. I wanted it that way. I looked at it as Side A and Side B, not really as individual songs. It was one big track. I was really proud of that record. I knew, for the first time, I had an album that sounded really close to what I was aiming for. Everybody who does electronic music comes from Kraftwerk — that world. I'm a rock guy. I listen to Black Sabbath, Alice Cooper. That's where I come from." **Play this:** *Sometimes*  
**Available:** Digital download, streaming



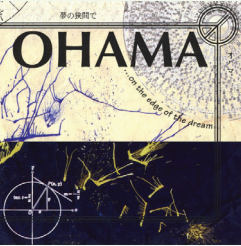
**Midway (12-inch single, 1986)**  
Sonically, this song and *Thin Lines*, on the flip, wouldn't sound out of place on a Depeche Mode album of the era. Ohama digs into his family's history and sets out to create a club single about Japanese internment and resettlement in Canada. **Ohama:** My dad was born in 1912. He's 30 years old, married with a daughter (Shoko) and they were in Steveston, near Vancouver. The police come to his door. They say you have 48 hours to move inland or we're going to move you. My dad quits his job (as a fisherman),

packs up his stuff and comes to Alberta within 48 hours in the middle of winter. The Japanese were not allowed to buy land so he made a gentleman's agreement with some people that he could farm their land and that's how he got my family to come to Rainier. My dad did all that. He was not interned. I thought maybe I should do something about Japanese heritage. The man who talks on (*Midway*); that's my brother-in-law Dick Motokado (who was interned). That man never said a word to me hardly in my entire life. Very gruff, silent guy. And so I said, 'I'd like you to talk about the internment and we'll put it on this music,' and he was into doing that. I had him do it in English and Japanese. I think (my parents) were quite proud that I did that record but they never said a word. And Dick, I think, he was really proud of it but he never said anything either." **Available:** Digital download, streaming



**Love Only Lasts Awhile (with Dania) (LP, 1986)**  
Ohama surrounds Dania's timeless European melodies with haunting synth arrangements on five outstanding tracks that comprise half of LOLA. Ohama remains

unhappy with Dania's efforts in the studio but, for others, her sometimes pitch-challenged vocals favourably recall Nico's blank, detached cool. If only they had a full album's worth of this stuff. Woulda, shoulda been a contender. **Ohama:** "I just felt it could have been done better." **Play this:** *Take Me Dancing*  
**Available:** Digital download, streaming

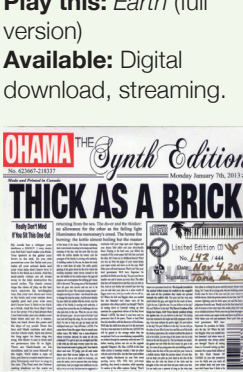
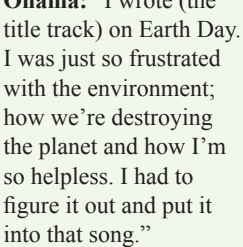


**On The Edge of the Dream (CD, 1994)**  
An adventurous hour-long album and soundtrack to his 1994 multimedia performances at the Calgary Planetarium. Ohama is clearly branching out; he says the tribal drumming on the opening cut was inspired by *Rhythm of the Heat* by Peter Gabriel. He started work on this album after being denied visitation with his newborn son and perhaps his subconscious is leaking into these sessions, with an ominous transitional piece using sounds effects of a crying baby and lyrics that occasionally sound like advice from a father to a child: "You can be whatever you believe/ You can be whatever that you dream." **Ohama:** "I realized, ok, (my son) is not going to be in my life. I'm going to work on music again. And that's how that came about. It's a very special album." **Play this:** *Discipline is Freedom*

**Available:** Digital download, streaming

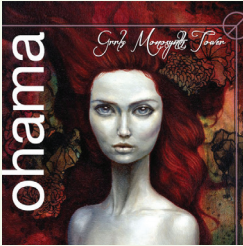


**Earth History Multiambient (CD, 2010)**  
An uneven re-entry into his recording career after a 16-year break. Frivolous near-instrumentals jostle with songs that probe the darkest corners of the human heart. The title track, a 16-minute eco anthem, is worth the price of admission alone; Ohama tapping into his love of free-flowing '70s rock as a one-man jam band ... with rap! A second disc cherry-picks highlights from his earlier releases. **Ohama:** "I wrote (the title track) on Earth Day. I was just so frustrated with the environment; how we're destroying the planet and how I'm so helpless. I had to figure it out and put it into that song." **Play this:** *Earth* (full version)  
**Available:** Digital download, streaming.



**Thick as a Brick: The Synth Edition (CD, 2012)**  
An artistic and technical triumph. Every detail of Jethro Tull's 1972 album is lovingly and painstakingly recreated on retro synths. **Ohama:** This is my masterwork. Every phrase and note was

laboured over, moving a synth note 20 or 40 milliseconds forward or back to make it sound more alive, more real ... until it felt 'in the pocket.' The album is so iconic that straying from the original just sounds like a mistake. My version of *Thick as a Brick* can be played simultaneously with the original and, tempo-wise, it will line up from start to finish pretty well. I admit I got obsessed with the project." **Play this:** 7:21 to 9:20 of the album-long title track  
**Available:** Digital download, streaming



**Grriz Monosynth Tower (CD, 2017)**  
Ohama takes existing, mainly acoustic recordings by female singer-songwriters and adds monophonic synthesizer to them. Inspired by two recent purchases: his first synth, a 1975 ARP Axxe, from a seller on eBay; and Cinder, a painting by Mandy Tsung, that appears on the album cover. Includes a second album featuring his Multiambient Tower Soundscape from the 2014 High Performance Rodeo. **Ohama:** "I personally love the synth sounds on this album but I didn't set out to exactly replicate vintage sounds. Still, if they don't exactly come from the '70s, they could have. I feel I've made an album that I could have recorded in 1975." **Play this:** *Beginning of Fall* (Dolly Sillito)  
**Available:** Digital download, CDBaby





Over several days in late 1985, Tanner, Ohama and Marcenko worked on *Midway*, a song that addressed Japanese internment and resettlement in Canada during the Second World War. It was the first and last time Ohama would allow an outside producer to shape his music.

**AT:** "I totally believed in (Ohama's) marketability. At that time, in the early '80s, all kinds of unusual music was breaking. There wasn't a formula at that time... Ohama played me the demo. I tried to make it more of a new wave dance song; a track that I would play."

**TO:** "(Tanner) had been looking for electronic acts to produce. He did Psyche's *Thundershowers* (in *Ivory Towers*). Then he wanted to produce a single for me. So I said yeah."

**AT:** "Not criticizing (Ohama) but he wasn't used to giving up a little bit of the control for collaboration sake. It was more frustrating for him than it was for me in terms of artistic issues."

**TO:** "(Tanner) was a little inexperienced, I felt. Dennis played bass on that and (Tanner) would come in, saying things like, 'Got to put compression on that.' I was listening to it; 'No, that doesn't need compression.' And Dennis is looking at me, saying, 'Just tell him you put the compression on. Just pretend.'"

**DM:** "I was trying to be a peacemaker. Maybe we were just humouring (Tanner). I knew that Walt was in



charge anyway."

**AT:** "The song pretty much came out the way I had intended. I played it (in the club) but I didn't really get other deejays playing it."

**TO:** "(Tanner) said things like, 'If you change this part here, and do it this way, it'll be more popular in the clubs and then you'll sell more records and you can do what you want.' And I just looked at him and said: 'You're in my studio. I'm doing what I want now. What are you talking about?' After that experience, I didn't want to work with producers anymore."

Ohama was back in the producer's chair for his next collaboration; this one with Calgary singer-songwriter Dania.

"She was complaining that it's so hard to make a record," recalls

Ohama. "I said: 'Let's just do one. You send me your songs, I'll do an arrangement, you come sing them, and the album will come out. That's how hard it is.' I just did it to show her, really."

Initially, Ohama thought they'd operate "like Dave Stewart and Annie Lennox (of Eurythmics). She's the voice and I am doing all the technical stuff; that seems to be a thing that works."

But, according to Ohama, this collaboration didn't work the way he had hoped and, to this day, he remains disappointed with their one album, 1986's *Love Only Lasts Awhile*. Of the nine tracks, five were breathtaking Dania originals, haunting and European (presaging Leonard Cohen's *I'm Your Man* by a couple years.).

Tellingly, of the four Ohama originals, two were previously released.

"We could have made it less cobbled together if we had taken the time," Ohama says. "Dania was so stubborn. I would say, as a producer, 'this line here, you could sing that better.' She would say, 'No, not doing it.' I would say, 'But this is a record; it will stand for all time.' And she would say, 'I'm doing one take and that's it.' I couldn't force her to sing."

"My part took hours and hours. Programming a thing like *Lonely Heart Dance*? That took a long, long time to do all those little things. Her part? The length of the song."

"I had to put it out to prove her wrong – that it's easy to put a record



"He said things like, 'If you change this part here, it'll be more popular, then you'll sell more records and you can do what you want.' And I just looked at him and said, 'You're in my studio. I'm doing what I want now.'"

out. Then it came out. I didn't even design the cover. I bought the art off of Ulrike (Voll), and then I sent it to the pressing plant and said: 'You guys design the cover. I'm tired.'"

After playing a session for The Funeral Factory's debut EP, *Living with Ghosts*, Ohama put a stop to

his recording career. There would be no turning back. In 1989, his potato farm studio flooded and he lost everything, including photos, master tapes and equipment. By this point, the farm was struggling financially. It closed in 1992, a half-century after Tona Sr. established it.

Today, Tanner fondly recalls his days spent on the farm, and draws parallels between the Rainier landscape and Ohama's music.

"On the one hand, it's very peaceful and very beautiful and calming," he says. "But on the other hand, it's sort of eerie. And surreal."

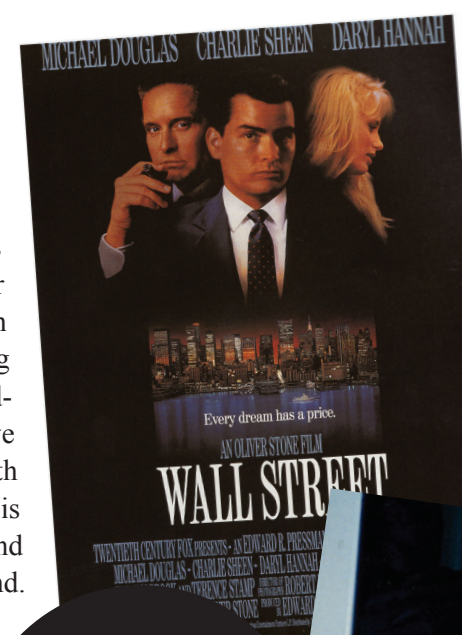
## FEEL THE EMPTINESS INSIDE AS YOU LEAVE ... UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN: 1987–2007

Ohama, forthcoming to this point, shuts down when questioned about how he spent the next few years. "It's stuff I don't want to talk about. I really don't." Yet, just as he sneaks jokey names in his album credits and hidden content on his CDs, Ohama can't help but drop clues about his activities during these mostly undocumented years.

In 1987, he saw the Oliver Stone movie *Wall Street*; protagonist Gordon Gekko and his "greed is good" philosophy found an unlikely disciple in Ohama.

"Everybody was like: let's make money, let's buy an island. It was all material stuff. I got into that for a while," he says. "I went through a period where I was flipping houses. In the beginning, it sounded like a great plan. I got to five houses, suited up and down with tenants in each one. I realized this is a lot of work, it's gonna kill me and I'll be doing something I can't stand. So I got out."

During this time, he also started hanging out with a woman named Rachel. "She had been a prostitute her whole life," he says. "You can piece together your own story however you want." Ohama wrote about their "strange friendship" in his 1994 song, *Rachel's Dream*; it ends with Ohama singing: "Let's set Rachel free/ Everyone just go away and let her be/ No one tell her how to live, not even me." Rachel was found dead in 1997, leaving behind three children. *Rachel's Dream* was played at her funeral. "She was so dangerous and



IT WAS ALL MATERIAL STUFF. I GOT INTO THAT.



chael was born in 1992. Ohama was there for the birth but says custody issues prevented him from seeing his son for almost seven years.

"When I was cut off from him, that's when I made that record," Ohama says of 1994's *On the Edge of the Dream* — his first CD release and the first full-length album under his own name in a decade.

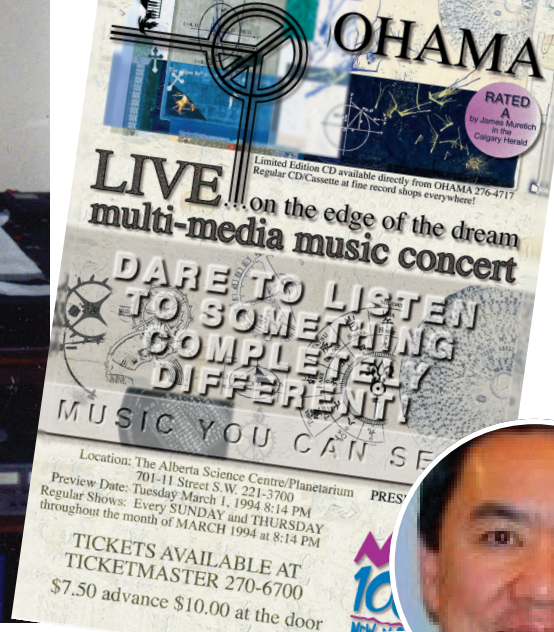
"I was inspired to do one more album. I worked on it for about a year,

pretty much full-time. I didn't expect it to be the fiasco it was."

Dedicated to Tona Michael, *On the Edge of the Dream* was recorded in Ohama's new studio in an inner-city Calgary neighbourhood, where he also developed an accompanying multimedia show.

**Facing page:** Tona Ohama with Dania, Avery Tanner and Dennis Marcenko. **Above:** Poster for *Wall Street* and Ohama during his Gordon Gekko phase, 1990.





**Clockwise from left: Tona Walt Ohama's son, Tona Michael; Ohama's mid-'90s studio; a poster for the Calgary Planetarium shows, Doug Wong, who helped make the Ohama box set happen.**

"That just killed me," Ohama says of his Planetarium shows. "One show, we had three people. It holds 350

people. Those shows were just heart-breaking, honestly." time, Ohama worked on Canadian TV series *Jake and the Kid*; did soundtrack work and sound design for nearly 30 animated films; acted as head audio engineer for a Sports Active Television video game; and helped assemble a CD-ROM on the Klondike gold rush by Canadian author and storyteller Pierre Berton.

Ohama also reached out to Doug Wong, who hired him at Canada Disc and Tape, which manufactured *On the Edge of the Dream*.

"He needed to make some money and we were happy to have him here," says Wong. "He made a lot of other people's projects better."

Ohama designed album covers, produced and mastered records, and later branched into DVD authoring.

"I was busy in music but I wasn't doing my own music anymore," Ohama says.

Yet he was content in his professional life — then, in 1998, his personal life also took an unexpected turn for the better.

He got a phone call: "It's time you meet your son."

**A**N ARRANGEMENT was made to meet at a tea shop in Inglewood. "My son walked in with his mom," Ohama says. "He's visibly trembling. He was so scared. I didn't know what to do, right? So I said something about Darth Vader and Luke, and he said, 'Oh, you're not going to cut my arm off?' We laughed a little bit and then we sat down and played a game of chess. We're getting to know each other. He pulls a thread in his sleeve and starts sucking on it as he's thinking of his move. I did exactly that when I was six. I couldn't believe the power of genetics. I was blown away. That's when I knew I'd cut my arm off for this kid. I'll do whatever it takes."

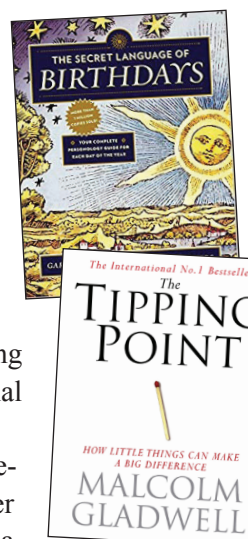
Over the next several years, Ohama bonded with his son. And just as Tona Michael's birth inspired Ohama to record again, his son motivated Ohama to reconnect with his back catalogue. In 2006, Ohama — with assistance from Wong — released a nine-CD, one-DVD box set containing his albums, videos, TV appearances, radio interviews, demos, live tracks and all kinds of oddities, ephemera and memorabilia, including pieces from disassembled studio equipment. It was a massive undertaking as, having destroyed or lost master tapes and original photo



graphs, Ohama sourced much of the box set's contents from others. Five hundred copies were manufactured, pre-selling for \$100 each. It sold out. "The sales of it went to fund a college education for Tona (Michael)," says Wong. "(Ohama) wanted to be able to supply something to him and this was his way of doing it."

However, the following year proved one of personal and professional upheaval.

Tired of putting his creative energy into other people's projects, Ohama handed Wong his resignation. There were no hard feelings. "With Tona," Wong says, "once he gets to a point where he's learned everything, I don't think he wants to stay, doing the same thing over and over again."



Soon after taking his son to the Saddledome to see Pink Floyd's Roger Waters perform *Dark Side of the Moon* — "the greatest night of our lives," Ohama says — he was again cut off from seeing his son, then 14.

"Because I was cut off from him, and because I wasn't making music, and everything (I created) was in a box — and my son was going to be fine — that's the year I decided I was going to kill myself," Ohama says. He began putting his affairs in order, including updating his will.

That summer, he started a project that would transform — and ultimately save — his life. Every day, for 12 hours a day, he'd pick up litter and sweep several blocks of 7 Ave. S.W. outside of the building where he lived. Ohama would befriend people living on

the streets and, if they provided him their month and date of birth, he'd jot their names in a book he carried in his backpack, *The Secret Language of Birthdays*, which assigns personality traits to birthdates. He also tried to build connections between the police officers, business people, drug users and the homeless individuals who shared this street.

"That may sound crazy," Ohama says but points out he was inspired by Malcolm Gladwell's first book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*.

"I read about the broken window theory," he says. "If you're in a neighbourhood and a window gets broken, and nobody fixes it

**"Because I was cut off from him, because I wasn't making music ... I decided to kill myself."**



“She dreamed my music was being played on church bells.”

right away, then another window is going to get broken. If you fix that window right away, and maintain your neighbourhood, it's going to keep the neighbourhood strong.

“So I said, OK, I'm going to start by cleaning up all of the litter on the street. I'm going to make sure everything looks nice. I'm going to change this neighbourhood. And I did it 12 hours a day for 90 days.”

He also wrote daily emails to friends, documenting his experiences as well as the stories he was told.

“They fill me up and rip me apart; the pain and secrets that have been shared,” Ohama wrote on Sept. 15, 2007. Later in the same email, he writes about what the street-cleaning project means to him personally: “This is one of my goals in life: to create intense memorable moments with special people.... I never have had — and can't imagine having (sadly) — a summer as memorable as this one. 2007, it will be tough to top but I will probably try.”

Looking back, Ohama is convinced sweeping the streets put him in a meditative state that “opened some sort of doorway.”

He reveals, one day during his street-sweeping project, he felt compelled to call Dania.

“We had barely spoken for 20 years,” Ohama says.

“When she answered the phone, she said I just had a dream about you. This is what Dania told me back then. ‘Something important is happening. Tona needs to write on the synth again. He will play again and people will be healed.’ Then she told me she dreamed my music was being played on church bells.”

He laughs incredulously.

“Then look what happened. You tell me what that was about.”



## THERE'S A PLACE WHERE WE BELONG: 2007-2018

**O**HAMA WAKES HIS MAC DESKTOP AND plays a video shot on 7 Ave. S.W. during his street-sweeping project. “So I meet this girl right here,” he says, pointing to a young woman playing an acoustic guitar. “That’s Solstice.”

Three decades Ohama’s junior, Solstice was a student at the Alberta College of Art + Design who was singing her original songs on the corner of Centre St. and 7 Ave. downtown, outside of the now-demolished Art Central building. In her repertoire was a song called *Dirty Paper* with its lyric: “I need a car to get to work to get some cash to pay for gas to get to work to trade my days for dirty paper.” Hearing that, Ohama was captivated. Something awoke inside him.

“Her lyrics were so good. That was probably the first time in 10

years that I said: ‘We got to record this,’” he says. “That pulled me out of the whole ‘that’s the end, I’m going to kill myself’ thing, working on her project.”

Ohama entered Rocky Mountain Recording Studio where he produced *This Moment Will Never Happen Again*, released in 2008. No synths here: Ohama captured the songs as he originally

heard them, with just Solstice and her acoustic guitar. (Today, she works as a schoolteacher; that debut remains her only album to date.)

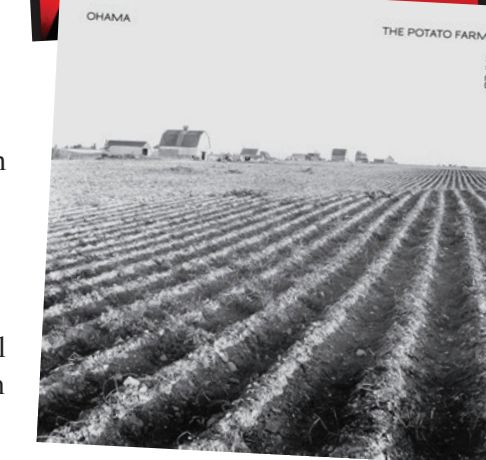
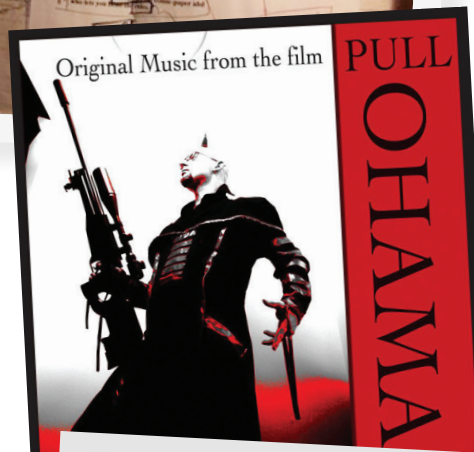
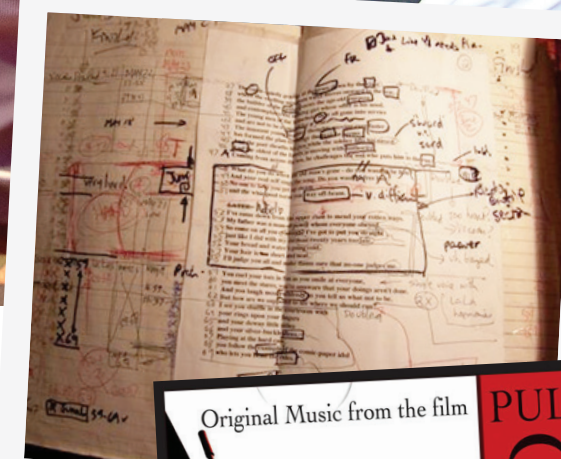
Newly inspired, Ohama took a job as a dishwasher at Teatro and

built his current studio where he recorded 2010’s *Earth History Multiambient*, his first album in 16 years.

“It was really tough,” he says of the recording sessions. “What was tough about it? How technology changed is number one. Two, I hadn’t been writing, so I had nothing to say.”

But then he did. The result is a diverse album that contains what he calls “joke things” (*OMG, Hey What*); deeply personal songs, such as *Isolated* (“If you listen to the lyrics, that was the point where I was ready to end it”) and an old-school, 16-minute eco anthem with a lengthy, jammy instrumental middle section and a rap by the son of Rachel, Ohama’s friend from the 1990s.

“He called me up and he said: ‘You wrote a song for my mother and it played at her funeral when I was 10 and I want to do music



**Top left: Tona Walt Ohama with son Tona Michael. Above: Reunited with Dania, 2006. Clockwise from left: Ohama’s *Thick as a Brick* notes, Pull soundtrack, the *Potato Farm Tapes* compilation, the Ohama-produced Solstice album.**

It’s perfect the way it is.”

The anything-goes nature of *Earth History Multiambient* revealed a new Ohama, untethered to his past or to people’s expectations of him. That spirit infuses everything he’s done during this fertile decade.

He followed *Earth History Multiambient* with a “synth edition” of the 1972 Jethro Tull prog classic, *Thick as a Brick*, which he deems “my true masterwork.” That was 2012; the same year he released his avant-garde soundtrack to the movie *Pull*.

In 2013, New York’s Minimal Wave label, which specializes in obscure 1980s synth music, introduced Ohama’s earliest material to a new audience with the release of the eight-track compilation, *The Potato Farm Tapes*. (Minimal Wave had included Ohama tracks on label compilations earlier in the decade.)

And, in 2015, when he found on eBay the first synth he bought — not just the same model, the same





“It doesn’t matter where you’re born, how small the town is. If you have this creative spirit in you, you can do good things. Do amazing things. I am glad he’s still here.”

ARP Axse — he snapped it up and then used it to layer monosynth goodness atop the music of several female singer-songwriters on last year’s *Grrlz Monosynth Tower* CD.

The album ends with Ohama and Mia singing the 1986 Peter Gabriel-Kate Bush duet *Don’t Give Up*; given Ohama’s earlier thoughts of suicide, hearing this version seems too intimate for strangers to hear.

But most notably, this decade is marked by Ohama’s entry into ambient soundscapes.

For his *Multiambient Tower Soundscape*, which played in the downtown core during the 2014 High Performance Rodeo, Ohama composed three elements and how people experienced the music hinged on where they were and where they moved.

The elements were *Core*, a mixture of common downtown sounds, from footsteps to birds and traffic; *Trees*, synthetic washes invoking wind blowing through the tree sculptures outside of Bankers Hall; and *Tower*, the soothing, two-note bell tones of the Calgary Tower Carillon — which, it should be noted, sounds like church bells.

Just like in Dania’s dream.



Tona Ohama — the “Artist.” “Maybe.” — poses with his sisters, from left, Shoko, Tonianne and Natsuko at the Arts Commons reception, May 14, 2018.

**T**HE *YYSCENE* DROPS BY TEATRO TO MEET Ohama for a second interview, this one over lunch. He’s now a bookkeeper for the Teatro Restaurant Group; the dishwashing gig proving too physically taxing after nine years. He isn’t the same 21-year-old Ohama who, 37 years ago, managed to juggle working on the family potato farm and launching a recording career.

“I heard that time waits for no man,” Ohama once sang in *My Time* — and at the Arts Common reception, he became emotional seeing family and friends who’ve crossed his path over his 58 years.

There was Mia, who Ohama started dating in 2007.

“For a couple of people who never wanted to get married, we’re both so happy to be married to each other,” he says.

There were his sisters: Shoko, Tonianne and Natsuko.

There was Tona Michael, now 25. His son chose the reception to tell fam-

ily he got engaged. “Such a night,” Ohama says.

And there were Bruce Toll, whose records sent Ohama’s life veering in a new direction; and

Doug Wong, filming Ohama’s emotionally charged comments at the reception.

But, of course, some important people could not attend.

Ohama’s mother died 20 years ago; his father a few years later.

In recent years, he has also dealt with



Mia and Tona Ohama.

the passing of close friends and contemporaries, including One Yellow Rabbit co-founder Michael Green and musician Richard McDowell, who helped open Ten Foot Henry’s. *A Moment Of Quiet Reflection In Downtown Calgary* is dedicated to both men.

“Their deaths affected me deeply, and contributed to my desire to document my work and complete my music catalogue before it is too late,” Ohama says. “Time is short for all of us. Their deaths were a shock and a wakeup call to me.”

So Ohama is now looking ahead. He and Mia are planning a move to the East Village. And he’s keeping under wraps details of a new vocal

album and a new ambient piece.

“There’s not a lot of money here and there never will be,” Ohama says. “What I want is enough to continue making records.”

And with many of his catalogue albums available as digital downloads and for streaming, one can’t help but wonder if new audiences will discover Ohama’s music years, maybe decades, down the road. Marcenko, for one, wouldn’t be surprised.

“Walt was just ahead of his time,” he says. “True pioneers, a lot of them don’t necessarily get the respect they deserve until years later. Then people go, ‘Oh, wow, we kind of dropped the ball on that one.’ ”

Peter Goodwin and Liz Janik are pleased to hear Ohama remains active on his terms.

“He didn’t need a record label to package him,” Goodwin says. “If he went to a major label ...”

“... they would have neutered him,” says Janik.

“He just oozed creativity,” Goodwin continues. “How could you ignore someone like that?”

“Tona,” adds Doug Wong, “is always going to be unique and surprising and very creative. He’s always looking at the next horizon.”

“What amazes me about him is the fact he has been able to accomplish all of these things from where he started out. It doesn’t matter where you’re born, how small the town is. If you have this creative spirit in you, you can do good things. Do amazing things.”

Wong pauses. Smiles.

“I’m glad he’s still here.” ■



Tona Walt Ohama’s first synth sits on a table during a listening party for his 2017 album, *Grrlz Monosynth Tower*.



“She dismissed me as a jock.”

**Hockey Hall of Fame sportswriter Eric Duhatschek remembers how Ohama records helped him score indie cred with his best friend’s girl.**

I had two of (Ohama’s) albums on vinyl. My best friend in Calgary is Doug Gossen, former morning man on CHFM. He dated, for a while, a woman named Kerrie Penney, who was on *The Movie Show* with Larry Day (below). When we first started to socialize, she dismissed me as a jock, which I found laughable but you deal with that attitude sometimes in the sportswriting gig. But I remember the turning point. I asked her, “Who do you listen to?” and she said, “No one you would know.” I said try me. She mentioned Ohama. I went to the basement and said: “Which album do you want to hear, first or second?” The thaw proceeded from there.

As told to David Veitch





You can be whatever you believe.

You can be whatever that you dream.

You can be.

You can be if discipline is freedom.

