

## Mp3 Kevin Bartlett - Near-life Experience



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A brilliant sonic experience. Sci-Fi Soundscapes, Lush Symphonic Tone Poems and other worldly and cinematic electro- journeys make for the soundtrack to the movie in your head. NLE raises the bar for modern instrumental music. 10 MP3 Songs ELECTRONIC: Soundscapes, ROCK: Progressive Rock

Details: Near-Life Experience by Kevin Bartlett Backroads Music picks as one of the Top 5 albums That Matter Most for 2003 Musical Starstreams #6 of Top 20 releases for 2003 Echoes Staff Picks Near-Life Experience #18 of Top 25 for 2003 Over 70 minutes of the most cinematic electro/symphonic music you'll hear anywhere. Evoking the styles of Enigma, Mike Oldfield and Patrick O'Hearn, these Sci-Fi soundscapes, other - worldly , emotionally charged Tone Poems and Celtic Symphonica are the 21st Century Soundtrack for the movie in your head. Dust off your headphones and watch your mind.

Near-Life Experience by Robert Lovejoy rlovejoy@comcast Rating: 10 I have had the good fortune to have heard Kevin Bartlett's new and unusual album "Near Life Experience". The album is amazing on several counts. First and foremost, the music. Kevin's album is divided into ten songs but plays cohesively. The first thing I thought of upon first listening was the orchestral music of the Romantic period, albeit with a broader swath of timbres and tonal palettes than were available to composers of that era. On this album you hear evocations of woodwinds, didgeridoos, orchestral strings and rock bands. Add to the mix some astonishing ambiance, and you have a recording with quite possibly the most fascinating musical colors ever.. Beyond the tonal palette are the musical structures Kevin has crafted. You'll hear a smattering of atonal sounds, one or two stretches of straightforward tonic or root/fifth ostinato, some very cool rock progressions, and some extremely complex heavily composed music, all of it quite breathtaking. Throughout the album, there are stretches of voices. Whispering, echoing, announcing, incanting voices swathed in echo and reverb. It's a motif that ties the album into a cohesive

whole. There is also some fine singing now and then by a female singer who sounds classically trained. Most of the album, however, is instrumental, and it is startling to realize that Kevin is playing all (or at least most!) of them. As my wife listened with me, she noted that it must be incredible having that many things going on in your head. I've always been impressed by Mike Oldfield's solo works, but here we come to the tonal palette again - Oldfield's textures are as colored pencils to Bartlett's Oils. The first track of the album, "Gayatri", begins with soft, atmospheric tonalities. A haunting, soaring Celtic sounding melody is introduced, which soon breaks from its orchestral timbre as it is played by a wailing guitar. Deep rich bass tones abound on this album, and it is in this part of the track where yet another facet of this album is revealed - the recording sounds amazing! Either sampling technologies these days have gotten much better, or my ears are worse. The synth parts sounded to me very close to an orchestra. I recognized oboes and bassoons, flutes and violins clearly. The stereo soundstage is full and lush, and the album is draped in a diffusion of reverb that ebbs and flows along with the passion of the music. With Pro Logic II the surround mix was extremely satisfying. In short, the album sounds like a million dollars! I can't pick a favorite song yet, but if I had to, perhaps it's track six, "The Best Laid Mice". This track is gorgeous. You can hear subtle influences of Oldfield and Gabriel-era Genesis in parts of it, but the music is purely Kevin. It is, as are all of the tracks on this album, a tone poem, quite programmatic. You hear birds, sense action going on - it's amazing. (Non-musicologists can check out 'tone poem' at Google for results like [incompetech.com/music/poem.html](http://incompetech.com/music/poem.html) and [w3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/cmp/g\\_symphonic\\_poem.html](http://w3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/cmp/g_symphonic_poem.html)). Maybe my favorite is track four, "Sockdolager", with its progressive-rock Led Zeppelin meets Brian Eno feel. The subwoofer was going nuts; there are some great fundamentals on this track. Then again on track eight, "Lighting is Everything", there's a bass drum that moves my sofa! But as gorgeous and powerful as the sound of this album is, gorgeous and powerful can also refer to the music itself. The album ebbs and flows like a living organism, at times passionate and sweeping, at times still and quiet. Unexpected textures pop up at every turn, and in those quieter parts you can hear the voices. Track 3, "Miserere Mei" is also worth noting for its spirituality. It starts out almost as church music, then ebbs and flows into a triumphant operatic statement. There are some powerful drums going on as well, making for a heady mix, and then Kevin unleashes a rocking bass guitar. So maybe this is my favorite track. Clocking in at 76:46, there is a generous amount of music on this disc. None of it is filler. The engineering is stunning (note to self: must try listening with headphones!), the compositions are mature, the playing is

exemplary. One would think there was a team of engineers and a studio full of musicians involved in the making of this album, but it is primarily the work of one Kevin Bartlett. And it is an amazing, stunning achievement. I have often wondered what a composer from the Romantic era would do with today's technology, and I think this album goes a long ways toward answering that question. Don't get me wrong, the sensibilities are modern, but this is quite possibly the most unusual recording I've ever heard. Give your soul a treat, give your ears a treat, turn off your mind, relax and float downstream. It is not dying, but it is a near life experience. Bob Lovejoy Another Review Walking the Musical Labyrinth Kevin Bartlett's Symphonic Near Life Experience Majesty: Well, Herr Mozart, an excellent effort. You have shown us something quite new tonight. Of course, now and then it seemed to have-- how shall one say?-- too many notes. Mozart: I don't understand. There are just as many notes, Majesty, as I require, neither more nor less. Majesty: My dear, young man, don't take it too hard. Your work is ingenious. There are simply too many notes, that's all. Just cut a few and it will be perfect. Mozart: Which few did you have in mind, Majesty?-- from the film Amadeus Plainly, His Majesty was an artistic imbecile to complain that Mozart's symphonies were too lengthy or complex. Yet one might wonder what Mozart would have accomplished with today's technology. Probably what Hudson Valley composer Kevin Bartlett is doing, a man whose intricate, high-tech, orchestral compositions lay the stones in a spiraling path toward a true center of musical brilliance. Bartlett's journey through the industry maze has crowned him with every imaginable hat. Before his beginnings with electronic instrumentation in the early '70s, Bartlett spent the psychedelic era working special effects lighting for Janis Joplin, Led Zepplin, Jeff Beck, The Who, B.B. King, John Cage and The Moody Blues. He worked in music retail and stage management, composed for dance and theater, including Toni Morrison's "Dreaming Emmett," produced two rock operas, marketed other artist's work on his Aural Gratification label, composed for HBO, MTV, VH1, Comedy Channel, and Sesame Street, wrote 20 years worth of commercial music, and performed techno-dream excursions for live audiences. The culmination of all his efforts is the recently released Near Life Experience. Composed, performed, produced, and engineered by Bartlett, NLE is a 10-track journey through a panoramic, electronic soundscape in which myriad samples of live instruments and voices paint a vivid 73-minute canvas, most tracks pushing 10 minutes. Too lengthy or complex? Hardly. Guitar is the only non-synthetic instrument on NLE, though it would take a trained ear to distinguish Bartlett's woodwinds or strings from the real thing. He jokes that there are seven thousand instruments on this recording, but that's precisely

how it sounds. "If I do an eight or 10 minute piece, it's a drop in the bucket compared to a symphony," says Bartlett from his gizmo-packed Glenford studio. "These pieces are movements to me, with a beginning, transitional point and resolution. I take as much time as necessary to go through whatever particular life movement I'm trying to render." With a background in lighting, Bartlett's able to visualize passages in 3D, with layer after layer creating a palette of sound. "Every sound is a color," he explains. "With electronic music, you go way beyond the traditional orchestral colors available. The colors are infinite; I'm attracted to electronic music for that reason." Bartlett can define the color of an oboe, but some tones are beyond description. "There's some instrument there and I have no idea what it is. It's short wave radio, a banshee screaming, a 50-foot blue razor blade. I don't know what it is; it's a color, a texture. That's my bag, doing imagistic, romantic, classically and rock-based music, but not with traditional sounds." There's a consciousness to NLE that transcends conventional sensibilities. These emotive tones are Bartlett's children and they're laughing, sprinting, weeping, contemplating, having temper tantrums, and lying in the sun watching the clouds. Bartlett's labyrinthine, well-structured tone poems will appeal to fans of ambient and symphonic music, but his prime audience is the film industry, the cinematic nature of his compositions being perfectly suited for Kodak moments and rolling credits. Take notice: this one requires headphones to truly savor its tender and bombastic nuances. What is Near Life Experience? While discussing out-of-body, near death and alien abductions with a friend, Bartlett quipped that he was having a near life experience. "I'm using so many samples, synthetic instruments, and effects that it's not live, it's near live. On a deeper level, all of us have defenses and personas that we've developed to survive, and while that's a kind of truth, it's the truth of fear, not the truth of love." NLE's cover image reiterates this concept. "It's the universal symbol of man, but he's distorted because he's depicting our out-of-focus nature. Our initial life experience is predicated on personality and ego that isn't fully awake or aware." NLE opens with 10+ minute "Gayatri," morphing from an elegant dreamtime ambience into an inexplicably joyous illumination, a passionate heartburst with Celtic leanings. Mid-track, a female vocal speaks a line from Ralph Blum's Book of Runes: "You, who are the source of all power, whose rays illuminate the whole world, illuminate also my heart so that it, too, can do your work." "It's a prayer embodying the life force and the sun's energy," Bartlett explains. "It's about letting right action flow through you, passing on the light and empowerment of the sun." Expressed in four movements, the piece embraces the sense of spiritual awakening, the doubt of one's path, conviction, and finally acceptance.

"It's the path illumination takes and you have to start living it. But there's still a subtle layer of questioning which will keep you seeking and growing." "Tripping Over Torn," an homage to composer David Torn and his album *Tripping Over God*, engages slinky xylophonic keys, guitar looping and Torn's sampled voice. A joke between the two musicians, Torn had left a message on Bartlett's answering machine, saying "I'm not going to leave you a message because I'm afraid you're going to sample it and use it in something," followed by a diabolical laugh. So, naturally, Bartlett sampled it. "I thought, god, that's so artistically perfect!" laughs Bartlett. "I think David's a beacon of creativity; his guitar looping, sense of timbre and tonality has been a liberating force in my musicality. He should be proclaimed some sort of national monument." "Miserere Mei" is an unspeakably beautiful symphony, its title Latin for "have mercy on me." Heart-wrenching strings wed haunting Gregorian chant, bass guitar and percussion in a lush opera conveying the exquisite agony of supreme loneliness. Bartlett expounds. "The whole world for centuries has been looking heavenward and crying 'have mercy on me.' The pendulum is always swinging between light and dark. This orchestration is a resolve to that universal cry, moving the dark into a regal majesty of light and affirmation." The prog-rock of "Sockdolager" is an angst-and-release confessional employing heavy, chromatic guitar, keys cascading like raindrops and a disturbing assemblage of indecipherable female chatter. A light surfaces at song's end with Bartlett singing a sweetly falsetto "And I love you." "Sockdolager," a word made popular in the 1800s, means the defining, decisive event. "This is anxiety, fear run amok, sorting through all the conflicting data that flies at us as human beings and wrestling with finding clarity," he says. "It eventually resolves into a long breath of release. When you get to the love, anxiety disappears." Yet another cloud immediately passes with the steady rain and sparse piano of the deeply personal "Across My Heart." Energetic "The Best Laid Mice..." melds influences of Hans Zimmer, Steve Hackett, and Mike Oldfield with those of minor chord maestro Bartlett. The track continually unfolds, unleashing eastern influences, Turkish vocals, and soaring Ebow in a piece that Bartlett had to set free, letting it take on its own life. "The title is a word play on 'The Best Laid Plans of Mice and Men.' This piece showed me that our ends never know our beginnings, how things go awry and come out differently." "Outer Marker" has an Enigma-like, sultry-dance-of-the-Dark-Lord feel. Based on an aviation term meaning the furthest location point for an aircraft, it's really about extraterrestrials, filled with samples of police chiefs, farmers and skeptics discussing sightings, which Bartlett sampled from short wave radio. The track includes a joyous, celebratory Scandinavian vocal, gospel choir, soaring lead guitar, pipe

organ, bass pedals and other crazy elements. "It's saying isn't it just cool to be alive? It's the joy of discovery, the aliens in our hidden psyche, as well as on other planets. So, what's the outer marker to an interstellar spacecraft?" Bartlett's journey doesn't end there, as there's more fear, rapture and confusion to explore on NLE. "I'm just some guy trying to sort this stuff out," he says. "I put truth into every track and that's my criteria. Yes, there's some clever musical things going on, but emotionally I hit my target. That's the artistic success to me." Bartlett plans to replicate this material live using an orchestral/electro ensemble and is currently auditioning players; he'd like to include a theatrical multimedia component with lighting and video footage. His next musical project, which he's already written eight tracks for, will be more vocal oriented. "As I commit more to a True Life Experience, my music probably won't be as couched in production. I'll come out and say this is the way I feel, I'm naked, and it's okay. And it's okay if you are, too." Wanna spin this disc? Visit [cdbaby.com](http://cdbaby.com), [cdnow.com](http://cdnow.com), [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), [auralgratification.com](http://auralgratification.com), or email [auralg@earthlink.net](mailto:auralg@earthlink.net). A portion of proceeds benefits Tribe of Heart ([tribeofheart.org](http://tribeofheart.org)) an animal advocacy organization. Sharon Nichols Music Editor Chronogram

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