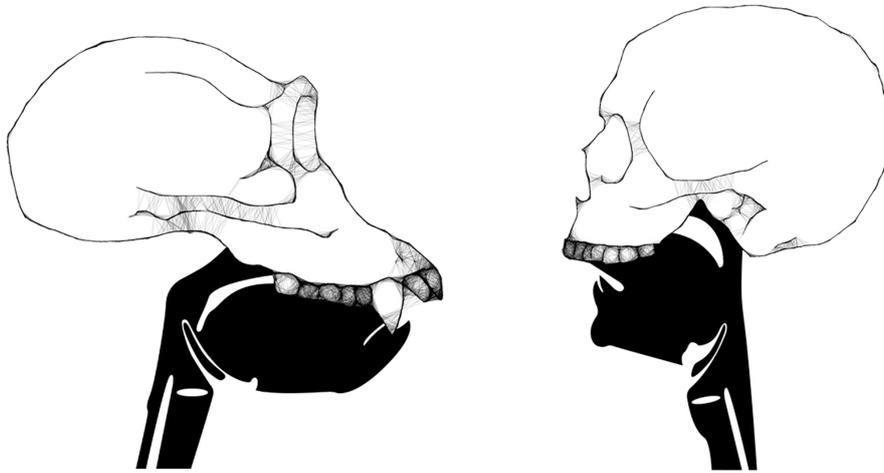


YAIZA VARONA



SECRET VOICE OF HUMANS Music from Secret Life of Humans

Music from Secret Life Of Humans, written and co-directed by David Byrne

What kind of animal are we?

We have no claws or fangs, we are not particularly fast or strong, our skin is soft and not much of an armour. So what then, did evolution equip us for? Communicating and effectively coordinating with others on a massive scale. And for this we needed a world class radio station.

The physical evidence for this is an incredibly evolved larynx and hearing focused on making the most out of the passing of information. A marvel that allows ideas to spread virally at unmatched speed, and which shapes our minds and everything around us causing an impact of planet altering proportions.

This concept album is a sonic study of what makes us human: the sounds of the human animal.

Inspired by research on fossil findings from prehistoric Atapuerca site, Spain, on how human language and hearing has evolved, it explains through sounds several aspects of what it means to be Homo Sapiens.

When you think you know the source of a particular sound, think twice; it might have been made by a human throat.

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1. ABOUT THIS SOUNDTRACK AND HUMAN LANGUAGE EVOLUTION

Throughout this journey, a choir of very diverse humans follows us informing of every action and sensation. It uses all the sounds a human body can make: voices of course, but also whistling, beat boxing, body percussion, clapping, breathing, heartbeats, throat singing; all and any sounds from the human animal...even if some sounds do not sound human at all. Any other instruments stand for all which is beyond our human experience (like Time).

Clicks, pops, and machine like effects appear in imagined futuristic languages to show how could we continue increasing the specialisation of our communications in time.

Inspired by research on fossil findings from the prehistoric site in Atapuerca on how human language and hearing evolved, here are some facts (and how they are used in the soundtrack):

Consonants are the domain of modern humans. They act as coders and diversifiers of the information passed, whereas vowels mostly sustain sounds longer in time (u cn stll ndrstdnch of ths wrth thm, rght?). So while apes use vowels easily, humans specialise in properly hearing and articulating consonants. Discerning them, in fact, is so challenging that even we humans struggle sometimes: that is why it is difficult to learn other languages and mistakes are often made in one's very own (in English, 'phank you' instead of 'thank you').

Communication (and the collaboration it enables) is key to the survival of humans, so much so that our larynx and hearing evolved to make the most out of this specialisation. We sacrificed a broad spectrum of hearing (our dog can hear someone coming before we do) for perceiving great detail in the middle frequencies where language resides. This way we can detect the differences between consonants and therefore benefit from transmitting richer information. Animals can't register these differences; to your cat, you sound like a fax machine. It knows there is some information being passed but cannot understand its intricacies.

We even sacrificed a safer throat (we choke much more easily than apes do) in order to have a larynx that prioritises having a middle section of the tongue capable of articulating sounds more precisely: that is how vital it is for the species that you understand *exactly* what another member of your tribe is telling you.

Earlier on in language, there were vowels; Aah Eeh Ooh are the easier vowels to articulate (you will find them scattered across all tracks), whereas Eh and Oh require more dexterity and happen later in evolution (so they rather appear in tracks later in Time, as do consonants or words).

More importantly, language is still evolving, following communication: think of emojis, the latest expressions in the internet you can't quite decipher or the 'pet' language you use with your close ones. We make up words and sounds all the time; so when we look at what a futuristic language might sound like, we use machine-like sounds and clicks and incorporate them in the speech.

After all, how we speak is how we think.

2. TRACKS

1. **Tiktaalik** (In The Beginning)
2. Vestigial Traits
3. A New Species
4. Mating Rituals
5. Spread The Word
6. Shared Imaginations
7. Unstoppable
8. A Lifetime is Not Enough
9. Afraid Of the Dark
10. Homini Lupus (Man Is A Wolf To Man)
11. Nuclear
12. Requiem
13. Light In The Dark
14. **Closely Interconnected**

3. ABOUT THE TRACKS

1. Tiktaalik (In The Beginning)

Named after the very first creature that could have emerged from the seas towards terrestrial life in the Devonian period.

This overture marks the opening of the album, introducing the human choir that will accompany us through it and how it dawns in an already old universe, governed by the relentless passing of Time (*Chronos* theme). It ends with a rewinding from modern sounds to the very first sounds human beings are thought to have made; the very first use of vowels and clicks from early languages that take us back in time from today to the appearance of our first ancestors on earth.

2. Vestigial Traits

The awakening of the first voices heard in the planet, emerging from brand new throats and regaling in what it's believed first speech attempts might have sounded like. Full of clicks and abundant in vowels and animal - like sounds, a collection new proficient larynxes and fine tuned ears explore protolanguages that slowly morph from primitive to more developed voicing. Simple, rudimental grunts and primary syllables give way to more complex sounds in the quest of new forms of expression.

Promising yet not fully developed, like the young voices it reveals, this track shows a sneak peak into themes used later on as well as the chance to hear the diverse voices of the 'choir' of invisible voices of mankind while they accompany us in our journey through self observation. It also prepares for a sense of wonderment to anticipate some of the content to come later on.

3. A new Species

A first approach to the paradoxical world of humans, governed by communication. An idea posed by a voice is shortly echoed, modified and passed on by other voices, creating interest and awakening curiosity while accompanying the frenetic activity of *Sapiens* (and preparing for the crazy world of man contradictions ahead) as they, and their ideas, multiply and grow exponentially. In general, full of contagious optimism about mankind and faith in its endeavours. The activity is sometimes interrupted by brief pauses on self reflection and the questions these new networks raise, when humans go where no animal has gone before.

More: rich in body percussion, starts with *Kairos* theme (mankind potential) and leads to the development of *Sapiens* theme (communication)

4. Mating Rituals (Want!)

A primal beat for our irrational, animal side and all the inexplicable urges it spurs us with. In a humorous and turbulent way, always about to explode but still barely keeping in sync, humans hurry without clear purpose (not unlike headless chicken). Contagious and showing the increase in speed and intensity, the excitement breaks into a sense of urgency as the compulsions, stimuli and desires reach their peak. Attention flies from one shiny thing to the next, and tiny bells stand for the tingles animal chemistry that lure one member of the species to another. *Stupid* theme comes in as well roughly around the moments of losing control, like an omen of what consequences can come from blindly pursuing immediate satisfaction without having the end goal on sight.

More: In the original play, based on a speedy date brewed online (also brewed in wine). Full of body percussion and beat boxing (including one dinosaur call for no apparent reason), the vocal percussion morphs into phone beeps and e-notifications and the other way around.

5. Spread The Word

Nothing would be possible for humans without the means to communicate and coordinate with each other. By oral tradition, written texts, morse or binary code, ideas spread virally and sometimes even become entities of their own, so quickly it escapes our control. This track covers the marvel of written communication; it starts with someone writing a letter (lines are passed from instruments to voices and viceversa) and ends with the addressee reading said message while having a cup of tea.

More: The sound design includes all and any means of communication: talking drums, ink writing, chalk scribbling, reading, typing, pigeons, the turning of pages, discarding of papers, morse and binary code. A light version of *Stupid* theme appears when messages disseminate dangerously unsupervised.

6. Shared Imaginations

Floating dispersedly, *Sapiens* theme (communication) evolves making single, unrelated voices converge from their individual potential toward a common goal, generating a formidable force when humans work together to reach an achievement.

What makes this possible is the shared imagination of humans, fueled by curiosity and implemented through an ever evolving language; however these imagined realities are no more than fictions that may shift through time and often crumble, revealing the fiction.

As the illusion of these shared myths is unveiled, the network of voices developing their own imaginary constructs morph from their more primitive sound into something more contemporary, synth or machine like, and they progressively fall apart and deconstruct while abandoning previous concepts in search of new languages that better serve the purposes of new realities.

More: Rather than effects in this track, there are mostly humans throats used in unusual ways. It shows a potential evolution of language, from vowels to consonants to superconsonants to sounding like fax machines and the technology we are currently surrounded by. Ample use of *Kairos* theme (human potential).

7. Unstoppable

Building on the previous track, the passing of time (*Chronos* theme) sees how a cluster of individual ideas inevitably give a distorted birth to others at an increasingly faster rate, until such a point is reached where there is no control nor stopping possible to this accelerated expansion (*Stupid* theme, inevitability).

This loss of direction out of not thinking, of allowing things going too far too fast and not having a more global view is highlighted at the end of the track, which recovers a ticking bomb feel before an open question, anticipating the dire consequences that are to come.

8. A Lifetime Is Not Enough

We can take a man to the moon but we can't control death, that sometimes interrupts the work of passion of a lifetime and others simply takes someone you love away, and with it your understanding of the world crumbles.

This is the personal tragedy of our human limitations. From the realisation that we are alone to the devastating effects of losing someone whose life ends before yours. This is the sadness of losing someone, the void it leaves behind and how it sucks all warmth away leaving only an intimate sense of being depleted of all energy and will.

More: A fight of high and low strings torn between remembering and forgetting in the messy process of grieving.

Sonically, human voices which sing familiar tunes fade away as an individual disappears and is substituted by strings, and no more voices are heard. There is only absence.

9. Afraid Of The Dark

We don't fear sabre tooth tigers anymore, but many things that still make us shake. Things we think we hear in the night.

A track rich in sound design to address all those irrational fears we still have in the dead of the night, when we are alone with our thoughts. Darkness understood as the oppressive anguish felt when things are out of our control, the ultimate vulnerability and disorientation experienced when our primitive animal fears still take over as we somehow see our self preservation threatened and light and comfort are nowhere to be found. The voices that echo in our heads reminding or anticipating anything and everything that might cause us harm.

More: It depicts an empty road, a car driving in the night. A driver alone with his / her thoughts, which soon turn into toxic patterns. Cruel laughter ridiculising and belittling us hide in the rain and thunderclaps, as behind every threat of the natural world there lies the toll that past voices of other humans has taken on us. The cave dripping effects, the wild animals (hissing, growls, etc) are all made by human throats.

10. Homini Lupus (Like A Wolf To Man)

From Latin Homo Hominis Lupus Est - Man is a wolf to man, meaning human beings act savagely or inhumanely to one another, failing to consider members of their own species as equals, let alone other living creatures. Time and again, greed and a disregard for anything else than self profit makes humans the most dangerous creature on earth.

Humans are ticking bombs, and our worst enemy. This is war.

Sound wise, the howling and summoning of troops and elements of war depict the process of dehumanising and how the brainless mob drags the individual's rationale, when everything is engulfed by the war machine. The tingling bells that in previous tracks stood for special connections between humans now transform into cold coins; humans descend to animals, an alligator growl morphs into an airplane gear. Finally, true naturalistic sounds appear and a bomb is dropped, leaving nothing but silence behind.

More: In Homini Lupus nothing much is what it sounds like. Across the track, only one howl comes from actual wolves and there are almost no sounds from real conflict or war. For example, there are only one gunshot and one real explosion; the sounds of people screaming come from yelling at the stock trade and market; some bombs and distant 'gunshots' are actually fireworks. Most importantly, it's not children crying; it's baboons.

11. Nuclear

A formless, cold horror.

After the disaster, the ear ringing opens a desolate soundscape that goes from unreal to really dark and desperate with moments of disbelief and disorientation, like the numbing sensation of those whose been struck by disaster. The only voices come from ghosts voices and ashes in an industrial desert dominated by electric buzz and radiation grit. The hour is growing late, the tick tack of the clock ages slow and heavy and changes its tone when announcing the end to come (somber *Stupid* theme).

More: some echoes of words can be understood: *lacrimosa mortis* (weeping, of death). The natural rainsticks heard in previous tracks are electric now, as it is now acid rain.

12. Requiem

A Requiem, a lament for all those who have dissappeared by the hands of humans. Should we learn the lesson, perhaps a chance to do better from now on too.

The first half of this track features exclusively human voices, as we humans have made ourselves alone.

The second half shifts towards what we are: essentially a contradiction, a brief call for beauty in the horror, as full of potential and hope as it is of relentless cruelty.

We are what we are, but we can perhaps improve if we don't forget so easily, if this last tragedy can be so deeply felt it becomes the spark for meaningful, ever lasting change.

When the clock / bomb feel of *Sapiens* theme reappears it is purposely extended ever so slightly, to provide for some space while recovering from the impact of what's have been experienced, a chance to mourn and absorb the depth of what's been lived so far. To make sure this is a turning point.

The track ends with an optimistic twist, slowly calling for the end of the journey.

13. Light in the Dark:

There is loss because there was love.

This track resumes the more personal sequence from *A Lifetime Is Not Enough*, finding a gentle hope of meeting again, of laughing again, of finding a connection and purpose once more. The joy of having fully lived outpowers the weight of all previous loss, and change and evolution can become tools for a brighter future once more if what we know from our past makes shift direction.

More: The voices emerge once more from the strings, as life comes back again to the most desolate of places. Like the comfort of finding an old picture, or recalling a familiar melody from the back of the mind and finding joy in it again. Clocks this time join the soundscape with a gentler acceptance, and more mellow 'tickles' of tiny bells find us again for a final toast and although some scars remain, hope and trust in what will come are strong.

14. Closely Interconnected

If we learnt from our mistakes, all we have gone through, what would be possible? Is a reconciliation between what we don't understand or control and ourselves achievable? If so, how would it respond to interdependence?

The human choir that has accompanied throughout the soundtrack finally merges with *Chronos* (Time) in a proposal that blends every single distinct aspect explored in previous tracks (as well as most of all previously used music ideas).

Providing closure for the album, this track connects back to *Tiktaalik* but incorporating a review of all the concepts seen so far, the different voices and how they can coexist together when the total is more than the sum of the parts.

At the very end, the last voices slowly disappear until only a single heartbeat remains.

More: This is a musical ecosystem that is supported by the marching army of *Homini Lupus*; the talking drums from *Spread The Word*, the clapping hands and main lines of *Tiktaalik*, the heartbeats of *Afraid of The Dark*, and numerous other fragments from other tracks. One part collapses without the all the others.



4. THEMES

The soundtrack interweaves four main themes or motives along the soundtrack.

Sapiens: Stands for communication and viral spread of information, humans as a collective (often a disjointed or coordinated cluster of individual voices forming a bigger set). The beginning of this theme sounds has a clock like quality to melt it with the concept of time too, and also recalls a ticking sound of a bomb, which Man can often be.

Chronos: It is the Time; inexorable, relentless, implacable. Shows the passing of fleeting moments throughout history, with an ever walking / moving quality to it. Universal, abstract, out of human reach.

Kairos: (from Ancient Greek) human conception of time, the opportune moments in which we have an impact. Stands for all the personal interactions of individuals throughout history as well as the positive aspects humans are capable of. More personal and tender, full of potential.

Stupid: Showcases the inherent stupidity of man, falling over and over in the same mistakes throughout its existence. Inevitable and sad feel about it, a depleted answer to the never ending cycle of remembering vs forgetting past lessons.

5. CREDITS

Body Percussion, Vocal Percussion: Emma King

Vocals: SiilHOUETTE, Michael Entwistle, Zoë Boyd, LaYo

Beatboxing and Vocal Effects: Fredy Beats

All tracks written, recorded, arranged, produced and mixed by Yaiza Varona

Body Percussion recorded at Soundtrack Creation

Mastered by John Elleson-Hartley

Artwork by Sharad Bansal

Concept and text by Yaiza Varona

6. THANKS:

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To my (extended and awesome) family.

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