

Joe Ely's Rack'em Records

Joe Ely's Music and writings

Steve Wozniak names Joe Ely A Pioneer in Music

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The liner notes on the new B484 music project is written by Steve Wozniak to Joe and all musicians. Please read this letter as follows:

“This story is very dear to my heart.

The personal computer was becoming a very disruptive tool empowering individuals to do things that they never before could do on their own. The worlds of financial forecasting and corporate communication had already started to change. Old products like typewriters could already see the end of the road. But in the early days, this was mostly confined to text based activities.

Moore’s Law says that you have more memory at the same cost every year, in your computers. When we started the industry, we didn’t really foresee the meaning of someday having enough memory to hold a song. But that was about to change, and musical creativity was going to enter the realm of small computers.

Right on my floor in the Apple building, an engineer named Charlie Kellner was working on a project of his own idea. The Apple][computer had only 1-bit of audio output, enough to get crude beeps into games. But Charlie built a board that could output musical notes as quality audio in stereo. Apple was not interested in this market but I sure was and came to respect Charlie as one of Apple’s most creative engineers ever. He didn’t just build things like other engineers did. He created new things that never before existed, at least not in personally affordable computers.

Charlie struck up a partnership to form the company Alpha Centauri. By now Charlie had found a musical keyboard with electrical outputs and connected it into the computer as an input device. Thankfully, the Apple][, of all the earliest personal computers, had a totally open input and output structure, allowing for and making easy such device connection.

Alpha Centauri marketed this device to aspiring musicians who wanted to think different. I was

not a keyboard musician but I bought one of these to demonstrate to friends. Alpha Centauri took their software far beyond what was originally expected. At first they memorized your playing on the musical keyboard. This was actually a hard thing, in these days prior to MIDI. Then they managed to display your music on a scale on the Apple][screen. You could choose many different instrument effects. The greatest achievement was to get this low-powered early computer to play back one track while it recorded a second track. I shiver a bit just remembering how incredible this was at the time. Nobody had ever imagined it.

The music studios had their money machines and didn't see the upcoming change in music production. What is common today was not the acceptable thing at the time. But Joe saw how much power this gave the individual musician to create new music with few resources. The world of music was to change forever and Joe was a pioneer. Joe really did Think Different in recording his first album with this new technology. He was an early adopter and leading generations to follow.

I once flew out, at my own expense, to visit the Austin Apple Club. I did this all the time because in my mind Apple, the company, had sprung from a computer club, the Homebrew Computer Club, where enthusiasts shared their interest in this new and different technology. It was there that I met Joe. I have never forgotten that important day in my life. I had never even met a popular musician before in my life.

I am thankful for everything that Joe and others like him have done to move our world forward. As I listen to this early recording by Joe, done in his home ('garage'), I am quite emotional about the significance of this effort. The music hits my music spot too. As we know, many great musicians record and produce directly on their personal computers these days.

— Woz''

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You're both heroes to me! Thank you Steve and Joe!

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