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## Unit 137 In conversation with Hylu & Latent Variables

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On 7th May 2021 we released the debut solo EP by Unit 137 sound system founder and label boss Hylu: **'Latent Variables Vol. 1'**. The EP came into being through a collaborative experiment between Hylu and the visual artist Latent Variables. The pair decided to write together, sending visuals and music back and forth, with the intention of creating short animations with sound. The resulting short animations became the

framework for Hylu to develop his EP. We caught up with Hylu and Latent Variables to find out more about their collaboration, artistic inspirations and more.

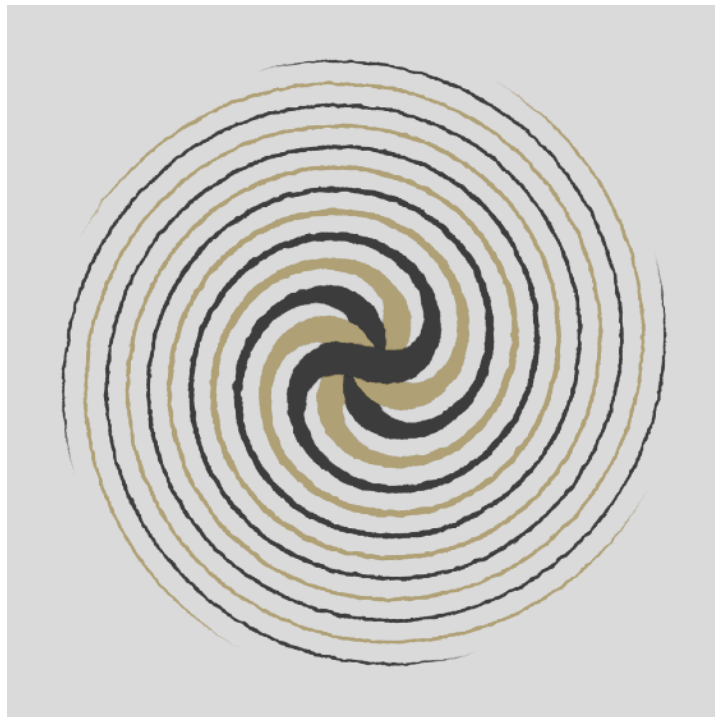
### Hylu

**The EP developed out of a series of audio visual collaborations between yourself and the artist Latent Variables. Can you tell me a bit about how that came about and what the process was like?**

James (Latent Variables) & I have worked together for over five years creating visuals for various 137 releases/events. We kept saying that we wanted to work collaboratively on a focused

creative project. So, I started the process by creating some loops - I think they were basic drum rhythms - we chose specific tempos that would link well with the frame rate (25fps) to make the videos one minute - this limitation gave us a creative boundary.

I sent the audio to James and he came up with video loops inspired by my audio - one of the main visual elements across the project is the Hylu logo, which is written in Amharic.



It was a very interesting process as I get lots of inspiration from visuals. When James linked the video with the music the works continued to develop naturally.

### **You've been making music for years but this is your debut EP. Was there a reason that now was the right time to put out your EP?**

I started out producing music by myself a long time ago - as I started meeting different musicians, producers and vocalists it felt like the right thing to do was to work with each other. Collaboration is amazing thing - you not only learn about other peoples processes, but you also learn a lot about how you work.

The problem for me was I collaborated so much that I felt I lost my identity. So, my injury and the various lockdowns gave me time to replenish and explore my own creative expression.

### **You are the founder of Unit 137 Sound System. Has being a Sound System operator affected the music you produce?**

Massively! Especially when focusing on bass - I do enjoy low frequencies. However, it is all about balance - high fidelity sound and dynamics are always the most important priorities, not loudness.

Being able to check mixes on the sound system has influenced the way I make music - if my music sounds good on the sound system I have confidence I am on the right path.

I am very particular about sound and what I define as quality. I suppose this is the engineer in me. This can create situations where I am too analytical and bordering on scientific about the music I create. This approach can be helpful when mixing. However, when composing I now strive to trust my ear in a different way - not to get lost in the rules of what should and shouldn't be done, but to focus on what sounds right to me in

terms of textures and feelings. Rules are made to be broken in the studio and creative freedom is paramount!

**The single, Zaf, has so many different musical influences. Can you tell me what you listen to and what inspires the music you make?**

Over the years I have listened to Jungle (mid 90s), all sorts of Drum & Bass, Dubstep (early 2000s), Reggae, Roots, Hip-Hop, Dub, Dancehall, Jazz - the list goes on. I only just recently connected with the various electronic scenes and am enjoying listening to all sorts of artists - it is really refreshing and all very new for me!

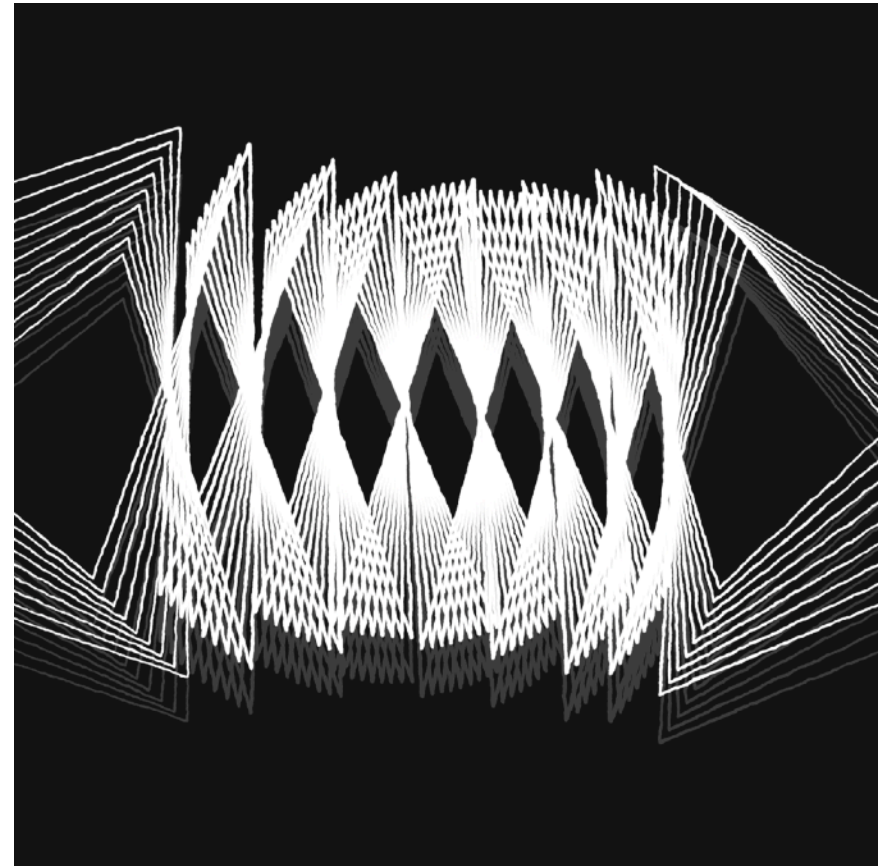
I believe that I get inspired sub-consciously by the music I listen to. My conscious inspiration is formed by story telling - when I compose I like to try and transmit a story sonically.

**C 5/6 really stands out both sonically and visually. Can you tell me a little bit about this track and what influenced it?**

I 'acquired' a prolapsed disc in my cervical spine at the end of 2018 - this injury was the main influence and the track developed from the start of 2019 until the end of 2020. I continue on my healing journey to this day - when listening to the track now, it reminds me of my difficulties at that time. I struggled to create and perform for over a year as I was unable to move my neck and I naturally like to move when working with music. So, physical pain was big part of the composition. The foundation of the visuals are my MRI scans, various letters I received - then James added his magic!

**Now that this EP is out what're you going to be working on next?**

I am currently working on a remix for the next Unit 137 release and a couple of other original tracks - trying not to take too much on at once, so I can focus on finishing projects. Also, James & I have been talking about how to approach Latent Variables Vol. 2.



## Latent Variables

**For the collaboration with Hylu you both sent material back and forth to develop the animations. Do you usually work with audio and how did you find this process?**

Audio tends to play a really important part in nearly all work for me. The back and forth thing was a completely new approach for both of us I guess. Projects can usually go through stages in development, but for this we both started with nothing and built it up from that. It was amazing to see the two sync up as Hylu added more detail to the soundscape. It's an approach I intend to keep trying now, as it produces such interesting results.

**Can you tell me a bit about how you developed the visuals for Zaf and Barrara?**

Hylu & I had some discussions & swapped ideas on optical illusions & zoetrope type things. Some playing with a lightning plug-in created some nice branch structures which could be nerve endings or trees. These were then converted to vectors to achieve the infinite zoom we see in Zaf. A 'stop motion animation' effect was achieved by making footage items play at 10 frames per second. Nearly everything has a jittery grungy paper effect too. Sometimes I just thought, 'Zig Zags today'.

**What was it like working with such personal material from Hylu on C 5/6?**

It felt a little like it was part of the recovery process for Hylu. At least it's what I was hoping for at the time. I was really happy to be part of it too.

**When you're not collaborating with Hylu what do you do?**

I spend my time, mostly feeling disappointed, that I wasn't Richard Burton.

[Listen/Stream/Buy Latent Variables Vol.1](#)

All photos by [Keifer N. Taylor](#)  
All artwork by [Latent Variables](#)

