

'Expanding The Universe' (live) - Steve Vai - EXCLUSIVE :D

Steve Vai & Expanding The Universe

(Broadcast by Dutch radio station Radio 6, hosted by Co de Kloet) First of all, a massive thanks to all those at Radio 6 for making this piece available to the world. If you're reading this, I'll assume you're a Vai fan (and may have caught this broadcast as well!), and know how hotly anticipated this piece has been/is. The short version is, it's breathtakingly amazing. The long version / running commentary is below. The following was written in real-time while listening to the piece. It may or may not make sense, but it's as accurate as words could describe at the time! Obviously this review (actually, not so much a review as a blow-by-blow account - if you need any convincing as to how awesome this piece is, the fact that it's some 40-odd minutes long, and I stuck with it long enough to describe the entire piece, should say enough) isn't intended to infringe any copyrights, and is solely intended as a rough description of my first experience of this piece. When it does become commercially available, buy it, don't steal it. Stealing's bad, mmkay. And buy a copy for your brother/sister/mum/dad, especially if all they listen to is NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL [SHIT] MUSIC cds. But anyway, here's your very rough guide to 'Expanding The Universe'.

Moving from a beautiful guitar groove, pop-hook vocal melodies and lyrics straight into mind-bending orchestral fusion territory (the term 'fusion' used loosely, of course & this is Vai, not some wanker trying to outdo the next instrumentalist) complete with, of course an epic guitar solo, this piece is naturally epic in scale, with full orchestral backing. Complex rhythmic structures bely a somehow cute and catchy line before high-speed flurries meld with dense harmonies and unsettling rhythms, followed by almost 8-bit sounding improvisations (think the weird computer-game noises between pieces from the '96 G3 album), underpinned by immensely tense harmonies. Then we move into more cutesy melodies, gradually building in intensity...and metal riffs?! Yep, we're now in territory that puts the new prog-metal wave to shame. And, seconds later, now jazz. Yes, jazz. And a Vai solo on top. And Zappa-esque brass parts too. Followed by insane shredding and out-of-control (so to speak, this is Vai remember ;)) guitar widdling (reminiscent of Satriani's Cool No.9 break), silly sweeping...more proggy alternate picking (think Muse's between-song jams here), and a drum break that brings to mind Holst's piece 'Mars' from The Planets. Mixing with brass madness again. Now heavy string parts & really heavy & undulating and pulsing like waves. Danny Elfman-esque broodiness with more Vai soloing & plenty of whammy-bar antics and volume swells (think between G3 '96 songs again), with woodwind craziness underneath. Percussive crescendos, laughing guitar (See the end of 'Tender Surrender), more crescendos & the 'Yai Yai' sound (!) pushed to even further extremes than on 'Real Illusions'. Staccato hits and brass lines. More percussive staccatos (Holst again ;)), now mixed with bass guitar. Brass enters....dense and beautiful harmonies, more pretty soloing. Staccatos mixed with pitched percussion and fluttering harps, clean guitar in there somewhere, eerie sound effects and synths weaving in and out, now metrically modulating against more staccatos, a 'Day In The Life'-style mash of noise. Staccatos, more evenly spaced. A majestic melody makes a brief appearance before more Zappa-esque comedic and (equally) solemn brass. Incredibly complex staccatos follow. Now 4-to-the-floor drums underpin grooving bass, and everything dissolves into mush, pierced by high-speed and intense percussive peaks. Low-frequency rumbling and military snare drumming. Now lush strings hinting at the beginning of Spring (fuck it, if you've made it this far, you shouldn't think that's weird :P), soaring melodies give way to more unsettling and tense harmonic structures, pretty woodwinds and snappy percussion, harps, almost Disney-esque....and a violin melody, accompanied by sparse percussive textures. Brass and string melodies follow a pretty clean guitar part, now accompanied by strings before turning dark and haunting (with now-overdriven guitar leads). The God Eaters-style polyrhythms and by this time I'm running out of adjectives! Solo guitar now & you've heard Vai before, you know what he's up to ;) Rhythmic grooves and orchestral prettiness, now more Disney-esque melodies, loong notes, guitars interrupted by horns, more mushy and messy crescendos....and sixties spy-film esque piano and string/brass parts, woodwinds flying in and out, brain-meltingly complex stuff follows and stops. Short break, now harps and strings, pretty then ominous. Sixties film strings, now another smooth groove and sexy guitar improv. A great guitar hook here, and we move out into open ground with an amazing Vai melody...picking up speed with intense drums and bass, yet the guitar and strings are still laid back. No longer & crazy intensity and speed now, ridiculous tapping and another peak....and we're back to the smooth grooving guitar part we started with. Vocals return, impeccable as you'd expect, guitars fade, one last vocal line...and it's done. Absolutely amazing. If you made it this far, you'd better bloody listen to it! And thanks for reading as well :)

While you wait for this piece to become available commercially, check out Steve Vai's whole existing catalogue on [Spotify](#).

Leon

About the Author

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