

In the annals of film and television, certain musical themes manage to transcend the moving image. From the whistle that brings in Morricone's *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* theme to Tangerine Dream's "Love On A Real Train," memorable scores have the uncanny ability to sum up an epoch, an entire aesthetic. The prolific Texan musicians **Kyle Dixon & Michael Stein** have crafted a body of work that's synonymous with the fictional town of Hawkins, Indiana, the supernatural everytown at the center of the Netflix hit **Stranger Things**. But in just a few short years, their sound has expanded far beyond '80s Indiana, acting as the natural counterpart for VR-visions of the Universe (**Spheres**), the Chicago streets of Rashid Johnson's **Native Son** adaptation, Silicon Valley (**Valley Of The Boom**) and even the intimate gender transition of an 11-year girl in the British mini-series **Butterfly**. Exploring the full potential of racks of synthesizers and drum machines, Dixon and Stein write music for the present moment.

While Dixon & Stein came to prominence composing music for a series that has become a larger cultural touchstone, *Stranger Things*, imagery and setting have always been central to the duo's practice. In 2009, alongside Mark Donica and Adam Jones, they formed the epic live synthesizer band **S U R V I V E**. Leading up to the formation of the quartet, Dixon and Stein had already experimented with the idea of capturing space and time, recording in tunnels or perched up on top of water towers around Austin, Texas, hauling battery-powered modular setups and field recording equipment out to the sorts of places the *Stranger Things* kids might explore on their bicycles. This desire for tactility also informed S U R V I V E'S approach. As opposed to the laptop-based performances common in live electronic music at the time, the band took on the backbreaking task of arranging a studio's worth of synthesizers and amplifiers, achieving the ability to set up in a shed and fill the room with crushing sound as a self-contained unit.

Whether they knew it or not, with S U R V I V E, Dixon and Stein were laying the groundwork for their future as one of the premiere scoring teams of our time. Rather than speaking in musical terms, they'd describe their instrumental synth music with visual cues—a helicopter soaring over a waterfall, a high-speed chase down darkened Los Angeles alleys. This visual sense translated to their cult classic EPs and early studio albums, as well as their legendary live sets. They became the house band at a psychedelic desert festival near Joshua Tree, California. Audience members approached them afterwards to tell them they'd listened from the top of a rock formation off in the distance, waves of synthesizer hurtling across the expanse.

After The Duffer Brothers found the band and tapped Dixon and Stein for work on *Stranger Things*, the duo rolled their sleeves up, taking on a workload typically handled by multiple composers and assistants. Since 2016, they've produced nearly 200 tracks spanning three seasons of *Stranger Things*, scored *Native Sun*, *Butterfly*, *Spheres* and *Valley Of The Boom*, released a critically acclaimed album with S U R V I V E, toured the world and made the rapid transition from synthesizer-obsessed band dudes to Hollywood darlings. This unlikely coronation culminated with two 2017 **Grammy Award** nominations, an **ASCAP Award** nomination and an **Emmy Award Win** for Outstanding Original Main Title Theme Music.

But Dixon and Stein are just getting started. The *Stranger Things* kids have matured into emotionally-nuanced teenagers, and on their recent score for Season 3, they've turned in 41 tracks of their most dynamic, emotionally-resonant work to date. Their score for the National Geographic documentary on the beginnings of the Northern California tech explosion, *Valley Of The Boom*, includes melodic techno that channels the motorik optimism of Kraftwerk, while their *Butterfly* score transforms the lofty concepts of German cosmic music into timeless instrumental pop music. Stein and Dixon attend to warrens of hardware synthesizers in Los Angeles and Austin respectively, working assiduously to adapt screen visions to synthesizers. But the movies have been in their mind all along. Now we just get to watch them.