



A look at ASMR from an audio VR expert

ASMR is an internet subculture which is the endorphin hit many of people did not know they needed. For those who have not yet come across the phenomenon, Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response is a feeling of tingles or chills when hearing specific sounds. This could be something tactile like hair touching or grooming, it could be visual stimuli – like eye gazing or observing slow hand movements. Most interesting to me are the audio triggers which often feature soft whispering voices, mouth sounds including chewing and blowing, and object related sounds like tapping, scratching, cutting and crinkling.

I head up Grand Central Recording Studio's VR division (GCVRS), where we have been experimenting and developing spatial sound capabilities for over eight years, so finding online groups obsessed with sound in such a practical way is incredibly interesting. I am well versed in their effectiveness because, not only have I been interested in binaural audio for 15+ years, I also has a wife who uses the online videos and audio clips on occasion to help her get to sleep.

Some of the most popular ASMR artists have millions of followers, with many role playing and using pitch to achieve the desired affect. They often have specific theme, such as kind, caring, empathic, attentive, focused, trustworthy, dedicated, or expert.

I have worked with several ASMR artists over the years and find the concept of binaural audio eliciting such extreme emotional responses fascinating. At our studios in Soho, we have previously invited ASMR artist Whispers Red in to combine her skills with our equipment. As most artists tend to do their recording in home studios, it was really interesting to see how her usual techniques were changed or enhanced by using our purpose made studios – notably the quietness we are able to achieve here at GCRS is tricky to achieve anywhere else.



Audio Media International, August 2018

However, for many, it can be a confusing concept – perhaps because for some people it simply does not work or perhaps they find the idea of someone whispering in their ear unsettling. It is, however, undeniably effective for others.

For the ASMR community, binaural sound and VR audio are an exciting prospect. Combining 360 films with spatial audio could be a way to enhance the experience in interesting and creative ways, and as software that can recreate binaural playback in a post production environment gets better and better, the opportunities to incorporate more sound design into these experiences becomes a very exciting prospect.

We are lucky to live in an age where we are able to learn about techniques like this so easily. Although explaining the concept to someone who has not yet encountered it can be tricky, I believe that learning more about this can only enhance the work I do.