

DJ

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BEST OF BRITISH
30-PAGE SPECIAL

DREAMS COME TRUE FOR OR:LA

INSIDE:

BLACK OWNERSHIP IN UK ELECTRONIC MUSIC / TURNTABLISTS THE BREXICUTIONERS: A CUT ABOVE THE REST
SAVING SAN FRANCISCO'S GAY DISCO HISTORY / THE BEAT GOES ON FOR JUNGLE PIONEER M-BEAT
GAME CHANGER: KINGS OF TOMORROW 'FINALLY' / ONES TO WATCH FOR 2021 & LOTS MORE

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ENERGY DRINK

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Best of British

It was disappointing to have to cancel our Best Of British awards show at London's Steel Yard venue in the middle of December, but with the Omicron strain of Covid spreading exponentially in the UK we had little choice. The run-up to Christmas saw Omicron decimating nightlife businesses, with a plethora of cancellations and no-shows, yet little sign of immediate financial support for struggling clubs, bars and restaurants.

Clearly, the UK government should step up and put in place support measures for the night-time economy similar to those granted by European countries such as Germany and Holland, who announced lockdowns or curfews over the festive period. There cannot be a repeat of the tardiness of support that characterised the first lockdown in March/April 2020, with UK nightlife businesses and jobs in jeopardy, sick pay inadequate, and self-employed people left out in the cold.

It was a disappointing end to the year, when the second half of 2021 — after everything opened up again — had been so positive. Still, our Best Of British awards were received well online, and in this issue we profile all of the winners from page 37 onwards. Orla (above), voted Best DJ, is our cover star, and her story is expertly told by Katherine Rodgers from page 38 onwards.

Elsewhere this issue, we've an important piece on Black ownership of UK electronic music organisations (page 16); a look at how promoters are navigating ongoing Covid-related difficulties (p26); a fascinating feature on preserving the history of San Francisco's gay scene during the disco era (p70); and a lot more besides. Hope you enjoy it. The uncertainty that's returned means that we must all look out for each other as much as possible. Again, DJ Mag wishes everyone in our scene a safe and — ultimately — prosperous new year.

Carl Loben
Editor



Living & Breathing Dance Music!

DJ Mag
Thrust Media Ltd.
PO Box 71897
London
N1P 1HH
Commercial: 07940 488 015
Editorial: 07940 488 008

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Editorial

Editor	Carl Loben	carl@djmag.com
Art Editor	Martin Brown	martin.brown@djmag.com
Deputy Editor	Ben Hindle	ben.hindle@djmag.com
Features Editor	Lauren Martin	lauren.martin@djmag.com
Tech Editor	Mick Wilson	mick.wilson@djmag.com
Fashion Editor	Amy Fielding	amy.fielding@djmag.com
Albums Editor	Lauren Martin	lauren.martin@djmag.com
Staff Writer	Ria Hylton	ria.hylton@djmag.com
DJ Mag North America Editor	Bruce Tantom	bruce@djmag.com

Digital

Digital Editor	Rob McCallum	rob.mccallum@djmag.com
Deputy Digital Editor	Eoin Murray	eoin.murray@djmag.com
Digital Tech Editor	Declan McGlynn	declan.mcglynn@djmag.com
Digital Staff Writer	Amy Fielding	amy.fielding@djmag.com
Head of Digital Media	Simon Kelly	simon@djmag.com
Live Broadcast Manager	Euan McGraw	euan.mcgraw@djmag.com
Video Production Manager	Jon Dommett	jon.dommett@djmag.com
Video Producer & Social Media Channel Manager	Liam Smith	liam.smith@djmag.com

Contributors

Ben Murphy, Helene Stokes, Katherine Rodgers, Claire Francis, Niamh O'Connor, Michael Lawson, Sophie McNulty, Dave Jenkins, Christine Ochefu, Oli Warwick, Will Pritchard, Theo Kotz, Oskar Jeff, Kamila Rymajdo, Katie Thomas, Shiba Melissa Mazaza, Dhruva Balram, Anna Wall, Rob Kazandjian, Harold Heath, Christian Eede, James Keith, Eileen Pegg, Martin Guttridge-Hewitt, Kristan J Caryl, Sophie Walker, Sam Davies, Joe Roberts, Jael, Charlotte Ina Sterland

Commercial

Commercial Director	Heath Holmes	heath@djmag.com
Sales Manager	Chris Blackhall	chris.blackhall@djmag.com
Head of Business Development	Iain McGoldrick	iain@djmag.com
Head of Brand Partnerships	Simon Kelly	simon@djmag.com
Production Manager	Becca Antoon	becca.antoon@djmag.com

Managerial

Publisher	James Robertson	
Managing Director	Martin Carvell	
Head of Communications	Rasa Sadauskaite	rasa@djmag.com

Events

Head of Business Development	Iain McGoldrick	iain@djmag.com
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Best Of British award winners revealed via social media

Our annual awards club event was cancelled after rapid spread of Omicron strain

DJ MAG'S Best Of British awards show was due to take place on Thursday 16th December, but as the Omicron strain of Covid spread exponentially around the UK the team took the difficult decision to cancel the event on Monday 13th. The rapidly escalating situation had led to a number of issues affecting staffing, performing artists and award winners. Instead, the DJ Mag team put together a digital ceremony, and the awards were revealed on the appointed day on DJ Mag's socials via a mixture of voice notes, videos, photos and assorted winners tiles.

The reveal began with the music categories, with wins for Joy Orbison (Best Album for 'still slipping vol.1'), Special Request (Best Compilation for his 'DJ-Kicks'), Ewan McVicar (Best Track for 'Tell Me Something Good') and Autechre, who picked up the Best Remix/Edit award for their rework of the late SOPHIE's 'BIPP' on Numbers. Overmono won Best Live Act, August 2021 DJ Mag cover star PAWSA picked up the award for Best Producer, Best MC/Vocalist went to Little Simz, and Ghetts' 'Conflict Of Interest' won the award for Best Rap Album/Mixtape.

Other winners included ENNY's 'Peng Black Girls' (Best Rap Track), Bradley Zero's Rhythm Section International (Best Label), Jaguar (Best Radio Show), Ben Sims (Underground Hero), Printworks (Best Large Club), Animal Crossing (Best Club Event), and We Out Here (Best Festival). The Young Urban Arts Foundation was awarded the Innovation & Excellence gong, and radio stalwart Mary Anne Hobbs received the Outstanding Contribution award.

The final award was given to Northern Irish DJ Or:la, who received the most votes in the Best DJ category. "Much love to anyone who voted in this, and to @DJmag for their continued support over the years," Or:la tweeted. Read profiles of all the winners from page 37 onwards.



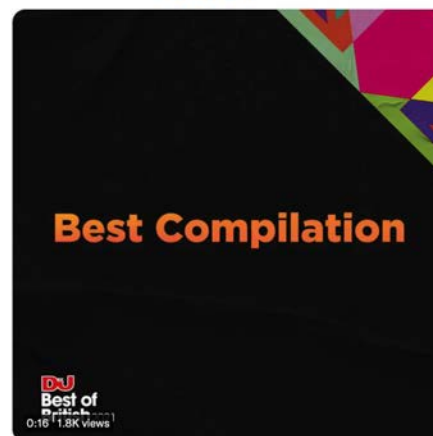
BEST RADIO SHOW!!!!!! THANK YOU @DJmag THIS MEANS THE WORLD 🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰
I wrote a speech for tonight... but looks like we'll have to wait to celebrate.
Thank u to my friends & family & to everyone who voted - this is all because of you.
I LOVE YOU ALL!!!!!! Xxxxxxxxxxxxx



Huge thx to all who voted - your support is eternally appreciated and big ups to @DJmag for the nomination. Pretty sure I've never won an award before, certainly not for anything music or DJ related, so it's a nice thing, especially after the past couple of years. Thx everyone!!X



DJ Mag @DJmag · 16 Dec
🏆 And the winner is... Special Request 🏆
@PaulWoolford aka Special Request's 'DJ-Kicks' on @K7records has won Best Compilation at DJ Mag's Best of British awards 2021. Congratulations!
Follow the results live here: dj-mag.com/3ylli7y



Paul Woolford @PaulWoolford
Replying to @DJmag and @K7records
!!!
Amazing

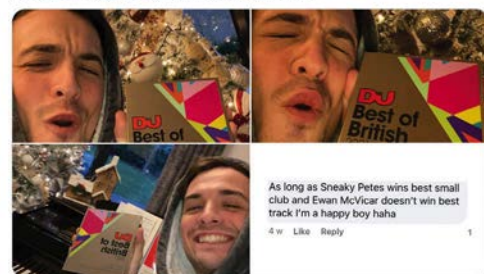
🌟🌟🌟 Thanks to @WillSaul @K7records everyone that voted, listened to DJ Kicks, supported this year & also huge respect to all the other nominees - all excellent projects - and finally all the @DJmag crew especially @HaroldHeathDJ and @CarlLoben 🌟🌟🌟



THIS MEANS SO MUCH!!!! been following @DJmag for over 10 years & never in ma wildest dreams did a think ad ever win an award from them, never mind be nominated & this time, it was all down to you legends 🥰🥰🥰🥰

thank you all so so much ❤️❤️❤️

have a very merry christmas fae me





Nightlife leaders call for financial support from UK government

A cancellation fund, a return to furlough and more being demanded to save businesses and jobs

NIGHT-TIME industry leaders have urged the government to shore up the sector following the introduction of new Covid regulations and the government's call for limited social contact.

#WeMakeEvents, launched by the Professional Lighting & Sound Association (PLASA), is calling for "an immediate package of measures", including the distribution of any money left over from the Culture Recovery Fund, holidays on loan repayments and a government "cancellation fund" for events. Trade body the Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) is calling for sector-specific grants, a freeze on VAT and the return of the furlough scheme in the first quarter of 2022.

In mid-December, England's chief medical officer Chris Whitty advised members of the public to scale back their plans in the lead up to Christmas, stating that they should not "mix with people you don't have to." Around the same time, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced new measures for entertainment venues, including nightclubs, to tackle the Omicron variant. This included the use of COVID-19 vaccination passes or an up-to-date negative lateral flow test for unseated indoor events with 500 people or more and unseated outdoor events with 4,000 people or more. The accumulative

result has been ticket no-shows, low turnouts and last-minute event cancellations.

According to Bristol night-time economy advisor Carly Heath, the sector is "facing a lockdown in all but name". Heath told DJ Mag that Bristol had already witnessed job losses and mass cancellations at sold-out events.

"Whilst we recognise the public health advice is given to protect us all, the impact is being felt across the sector without any safety net to stop businesses from hitting the wall," she said. "The sector needs additional financial support. It was needed before the announcements were made."

NTIA CEO Michael Kill is of a similar mind. "It is vital that the government — and in particular the chancellor — recognise the impact of the government's public health messaging and swiftly implement proportionate financial support to ensure businesses and jobs are protected during this extremely challenging period," he said in a statement to the press.

"The chancellor may be wary of stumping up the cash but this will be better for the economy in the long run than putting businesses at risk of failing. Night-time economy businesses are social hubs in the heart of communities across the UK — you simply cannot 'level up' the country if a swathe of them are lost to this pandemic." UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak has reportedly

been in touch with hospitality leaders and has "support measures in place to help the industry", including a quarter of a billion pounds ready for distribution via local authorities, but in the face of a pseudo-lockdown — where venues are allowed to remain open, but the public is advised to stay at home — many fear jobs and businesses will be lost before any cash reaches them.

As DJ Mag went to print, Johnson ruled out further Covid restrictions before Christmas, but said he must "reserve the possibility of taking further action". The Times had uncovered potential government plans to put in a two-week 'circuit breaker' just after Christmas to slow down the spread of Omicron, while other possibilities were thought to be a return to Step 2 from the Roadmap at the start of 2021. This would revert to outdoor table service only in bars, and the closure of indoor nightclubs. For Carly Heath, the current financial recovery measures have not gone far enough. "The night-time economy is a major contributor to the national economy and to introduce these measures without a plan for financial support during the industry's peak season will have a lasting impact on the sector for years to come," she said.

RIA HYLTON

DJ Stretch



Far Away In Time

New documentary celebrates 25 years of drum & bass label AKO Beatz

A new documentary celebrates 25 years of the much-loved drum & bass labels A-Ko Recordings and AKO Beatz.

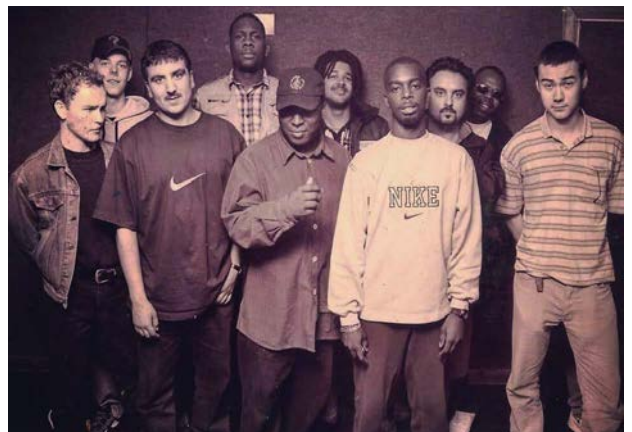
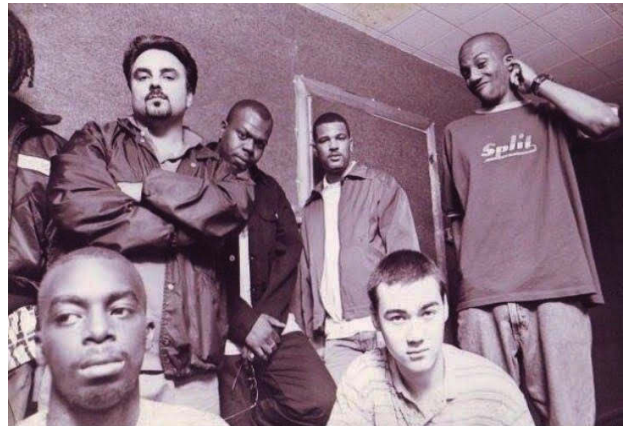
The short film, *AKO Beatz... 25 Years In The Jungle*, was released for free via the label's YouTube channel on Christmas Day, and features contributions from the likes of Goldie, Mantra, Double O, Decibella, Sheba Q, Sweetpea, King Britt, Djinn, Threshold, Blackeye and numerous other figures from its rosters, who reflect on its history and key releases. The documentary was edited by Esther Wanyama, who also DJs under the N.E.GIRL alias.

DJ Stretch launched A-Ko Recordings in 1996, with the help of the legendary label Reinforced Records, releasing a number of his own records through the remainder of the 1990s. Since then, it's spawned a number of offshoots, most notably AKO Beatz, which came to life in 2014 with a focus on pushing new and established artists working within the jungle and drum & bass scenes. Since 2014, AKO Beatz has released

records by Rupture's Double O and Mantra, Ricky Force, Goldie, and '90s jungle heads Tom & Jerry, along with many others across its main label and sub-labels.

"25 years to run the label is an achievement more than anything," DJ Stretch said of the milestone in a statement. "I'm super proud to see a new generation getting to hear the sound we believed in back in the day, and bring it into the future now. And it doesn't stop there. Every year I'm raising the bar higher!"

Music journalist Verity Raphael, who's overseen the project alongside DJ Stretch, added: "Making the real roots of jungle known to those who benefit from it remains as vital now as it ever did. I want to see more of the foundational labels getting shouted about, so as well as having a deep love for the AKO family and sound, I'm determined to help document this important history to educate the next generation of ravers!" You can find *AKO Beatz... 25 Years In The Jungle* on YouTube now.



Sophia Kearney & Steven Braines



HE.SHE.THEY launch social networking app

The collective have also launched a new podcast

THE team behind HE.SHE.THEY. have launched a new social networking app and podcast.

Created by co-founders Steven Braines and Sophia Kearney, the new platform aims to bring together the various strands of the collective's activities, while also offering a place to chat, make new friends and even date online.

In a statement, HE.SHE.THEY.'s Steven Braines said: "With diversity, inclusion and community at the heart of everything that HE.SHE.THEY. does, we wanted to disrupt the social media space as we have in the arts. We all know social media sites and dating apps can be toxic with anonymous trolls ready to spit hate, but we also know that these apps can bring many positives if you can lessen the negatives.

"Firstly, to be able to use the online hub and accompanying app, you have to have your profile validated by sending in a picture of yourself doing the same distinct randomised gesture as in the photo. This is checked by actual humans rather than relying on an algorithm.

"Our community has always been about platforming and celebrating weird and wonderful humans, so of course, we have a zero tolerance policy on homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, disablism, body-shaming and racism on the app. People can report hate speech — again to an actual human — and, depending on the nature of the violation, people will either be warned about their behaviour or banned from the app."

Users of the app will also soon be treated to big discounts and early releases on HE.SHE.THEY., covering gig tickets, clothing and full-length episodes of their new podcast series, which launched in early December.

The first podcast includes contributions from Eats Everything, club kid Max The Tribrid and more.

To sign up to the app, go here: **app.heshethey.me/register**

Office Playlist



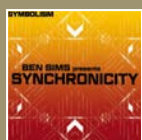
**Wheez-ie
'Horizons
(Remixes)'**
Evar Records



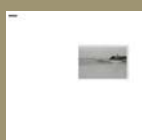
**A.Fruit
'Measures Of
Dispersion'**
YUKU



**Finn & India Jordan
'All About Love'**
Local Action



**Ben Sims
'Synchronicity'**
Symbolism



**Man Power
presents Bed
Wetter
'A Life In The Day'**
Me Me Me

Incoming

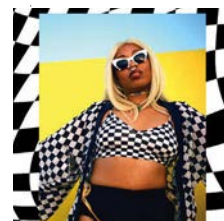


► Ninja Tune, Warp, !K7, Brownswood, XL, Anjunabeats, Ghostly and a number of other labels have signed up to

Music Climate Pact, a new initiative encouraging music organisations to pledge to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. Launched by AIM and the BPI in the wake of the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, the pledge contains commitments to take both collective and individual action to reduce greenhouse emissions, and to share information with music fans about the music industry's impact on the environment. **musicclimatepact.com**



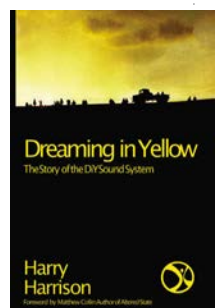
► The mysterious Burial drops a new EP this month on Hyperdub. It's being kept under wraps until digital release on January 6th, with physical to follow, but according to the press blurb, "Antidawn" reduces Burial's music to just the vapours. The record explores an interzone between dislocated, patchwork songwriting and eerie, open-world, game space ambience."



► Suzi Analogue, Turkana and Queens D. Light have collaborated on a new track for a forthcoming Never Normal & ANTI-MASS compilation.

'Make It Shake' is the second single to be unveiled from the 'Gukuba' comp, following the release of 'Desserts' by US producer Safiyahh and Uganda's Nsasi last November. 'Gukuba', out this month, aims to focus "on new approaches to dance, sound and rhythms between Africa and the global Black Diaspora", and also features tracks by Authentically Plastic, Nsasi, Tayhana and more.

► Dreaming In Yellow is the latest book from dance music publishing house Velocity Press, detailing the history of renowned free party collective DiY. Written by crew member Harry Harrison, the book traces DiY's origins in Nottingham and takes them through the infamous Castlemorton festival and finishes right up to date. Out March 2022.





Priori

From: Montréal, Canada

Three tracks: '4see', 'Ani Ma', 'Infinity'

For fans of: Peach, Flørist, Kasper Marott

"SHARING ideas with other people made me progress way faster," explains Priori of his collaborative process. The Montréal-based producer — real name: Francis Latreille — is part of seven projects on top of his solo one. Jump Source with Patrick Holland, ANF with Dust-e-1, Housemates and Ntel with Ex-Terrestrial (who actually was his housemate), M.S.L with his friend Edouard and, finally, New World Science with a bunch of Montréal crew, including Ex-T and RAMZi. Many of these projects have been platformed via the label NAFF Recordings that he also co-runs with Ex-Terrestrial; a label that could be considered a modern classic. As Priori, his 2019 album 'On A Nimbus' was up there with the finest extended works of that year, bursting with sensitive, textural sound design and smart composition. His tracks have become some of the most treasured of recent times. During lockdown, he dropped

'Infinity' on Bandcamp. A dose of triumphant trance-y techno, it was the perfect antidote to the then-dire situation we found ourselves in. Digitals were so popular online, they decided to press it to wax. Now he's back with his second album, 'Your Own Power'.

Francis got into all of this quite young, at around 15. "The very first pieces of proper dance music I listened to were from Daft Punk," he recalls.

"I started looking up the people from their song 'Teachers', and through that I heard Chicago and Detroit music. I got really curious about how that stuff was made." But things took a while to get going for a young Francis; he produced alone for six years before he found like-minded folks. "Making music was always a pretty lonely thing for me, I just did it in the basement at my parents' place," he says. "I didn't know anyone who was doing this. It was just me and the internet."

YouTube was in its infancy when he started wading into production.

"I would watch tutorial videos, but the only videos you could find for an MPC [sampler] were '90s hip-hop people making J Dilla beats," he remembers. "There weren't videos of people making my favourite stuff, so I progressed pretty slowly until I met other people."

It was Patrick Holland who gave Francis the

impetus to get serious about his productions, and he still shares a studio with him today. "Pat already had some music out when we met, and I was intrigued because I hadn't put anything out... I didn't think my stuff was good enough." They released their first record as Jump Source in 2016, and the process of bringing something physical into the world gave Francis some perspective. "I realised it was doable," he says. "I saw you can do this in your basement, it can come out on a record and some people like it."

Physicality is a word that crops up a lot in our conversation, whether it's in the methods Francis uses to produce, split between gear and his computer, or indeed the format in which his music is released.

"In the beginning, 80% of the music we were discovering was on vinyl. If you found something on YouTube, it was a shitty rip, so you would go out and try to find it in a store," he reminisces. Undeniably, there's also a physicality to the way his music moves us as listeners.

"What attracted me to a lot of electronic music was hearing sounds and textures that really popped at you or scratched your ear," he says. "When I get a new synth, I try to push it and make a sound that's super crazy and weird. I'm looking for that one sound that really catches your ears." **SOPHIE MCNULTY**

Seven Davis Jr

SINGER-SONGWRITER, DJ and producer Seven Davis Jr is hanging in San Francisco when we call him up. He's in Redwood City, to be precise, just outside San Fran in the mountainous region looking across the Bay Area. "I'm just chilling," he tells DJ Mag. "I finished the album here, I grew up between here and Houston, Texas."

Sev has been very open in the past about his difficult upbringing, which means he's still estranged from both sides of his family to this day. "Outside of music, I have had a hard life," he says. "I'm used to the hard knocks." He was into singing when he was a kid, but was sexually assaulted by a supposed mentor in the choir he sang in. He was wooed by major label execs when still in his teens, but cast aside by spiteful comments to his face. He learned how to produce himself and started ghostwriting, uncredited by choice, before he branched out on his own and released the 'Universes' album on Ninja Tune in the middle of the last decade. "The Ninja album wasn't a super-serious record, even though it had a concept behind it that was serious, as were some of the subjects — like on 'Fighters', where I was addressing, early on, police brutality, which has gotten worse since," he says.

Since then, he's worked with the likes of Honey Dijon and Detroit (now Dam) Swindle, and has just released his new 'I See The Future' album on his own Secret Angels label, finalised in the period when he was recovering from Covid. Stuffed full of squelchy, deconstructed funk jams and diffuse, soulful micro house, it's Sev's most complete body of work to date. "This record is a surprise to me," Sev says. "As an artist, you should be able to surprise yourself."

Because of your name, do you have a thing about the number 7?

"I was born on April 3rd, and $4 + 3 = 7$. It's really as simple as that. I love the number seven — there's so many synchronicities with it. It stuck, and became a nickname as a kid. And it's been good to me — people call me Sev, my close friends. It's a little weird hearing people call me Seven. Over the years, I've met people that have said, 'You're a grown man, I'm not gonna call you Seven' — whatever. It's been good to me. It's a heavy number to adapt, it carries a lot of weight to it. I'm just grateful that it fits."

It's seven years since your 'Universes' album on Ninja Tune — is that a coincidence?

"Not planned at all, it's a surprise, but things like that happen a lot in my life. I parted ways with Ninja after one album, and in retrospect there were things that both of us could've done differently. I will say that maybe 80% of the relationship was lovely, it was like a bad break-up with someone you're dating. Most of it's good, and then all of a sudden it goes left somewhere and you think you hate each other. Then, years later, you're like, 'You know what, we both could've done stuff better'. And



PHOTO: JAMIE ROSENBERG

we're in a good place now, I feel nothing bad towards them — they're like a baby momma who I co-parent with!"

There are definite tinges of Prince in your new album on tracks like 'Share Your Toys' and 'N'Joy', was he an influence when you were growing up?

"He was, and he is. In previous songs I've been like, 'Yeah, I wanna get a Prince vibe', and I actually didn't do that at all with this album. But then listening back, I'm like 'Oh shit' [Laughs]. You can hear it in this album."

Who else was an influence on you?

"Prince, Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, gospel music, but then also Jimi Hendrix and Portishead, D'Angelo... all over the place. Radiohead, Jamiroquai, those type of things."

You're a singer-songwriter and producer, but you've also DJ'd a bit in recent times, is that right?

"Yeah, I DJ for fun here and there. I play everything, but when I get booked it's usually for house. Soulful, deep house, but I can play everything, given the opportunity. I don't think people see me as a DJ, and that's fine because I'm more of a selector. "I learned how to DJ in Gilles Peterson's basement. He's a selector, but when he wants to DJ, he can give a DJ set. I feel like a lot of my early DJ sounds came from those early sessions in his basement and being around him. Then obviously my time with Kutmah,

he taught me more about DJing downtempo — he's more in the abstract Flying Lotus/Gaslamp Killer world. But what really helped me step my DJing game up was J Rocc, an associate of Peanut Butter Wolf. He's like a brother to me, he's taught me a lot."

Did you enjoy your time in London?

"I lived in Dalston for a year, Shoreditch for two years and then New Cross for a year-and-a-half. When I lived there I wasn't really myself, I wish that I was more myself during my time in London, I met a lot of people and I felt like they didn't really get a chance to meet me. I was this American person who'd never left the country, and I wasn't really prepared for the amount of attention and how fast things would happen with my career, to be honest. So my time in London was a whirlwind, I don't remember most of it — it's a blur. There was so much going on."

Do you remember the cold weather?

"I actually loved the weather. Yeah, really! It's always sunny in California and Texas, and it can seem like it's not reality sometimes."

Why have you called your own label Secret Angels?

"It's in regards to my rough upbringing and the things I survived. Things happened and I was able to pull through, which made me feel like I must have some secret angels looking out for me. 'How in the hell did I get through that?' So I just named it that. It's been sticking."

Bubblers

Six acts popping off this month

Pic: NEELAM KHAN VELA



Lady Neptune

Irresistible nu-rave energy, hyperpop hooks and experimental electronics form an unstoppable force in the hands of Lady Neptune, the gabber goblin queen alter-ego of Moema Meade. After several years of moonlighting as a bass player in DIY bands, the Glasgow-based singer-songwriter, producer and fashion student has adopted this creature-of-the-night persona as an outlet for her high-powered live performances. She delighted a packed audience at August's Jupiter Rising Festival in Edinburgh and can be frequently found electrifying clubs and basement venues across Scotland. Her 2020 EP 'New Gorbals Gabber' on Night School Records condensed this idiosyncratic take on peak-time dance music into six pulverising tracks full of arpeggiated synths, hardcore beats, vocal processing techniques and unapologetic trance riffs. In 2021 Meade appeared in collaboration with fellow Glasgow-based producer TAAHLIAH on the latter's "break-up tune" 'Tears', and she kicks off 2022 with the imminent release of a new EP titled 'NOZ'. **CLAIRE FRANCIS**

For fans of: SOPHIE, Arca, Gabber Eleganza

Pic: MINA ZLATOPER



Poisonfrog

Brooklyn's Jonny Abraham, aka Poisonfrog, is the latest artist to make his mark on New York's illustrious jungle/drum & bass history. His debut 'Head Over' EP on UK label Repertoire is a hypnotic excursion into intricate breakbeat science, moody atmospheres and heavy basslines, with a side order of head-twisting sampladelia. 'Smoker' mixes dub techno synths, rap and reggae vox snippets, and dusted ride cymbals, while immediate highlight 'R U Up For This?' slices up the Think break over a killer sub-bassline and a lush soul sample.

Poisonfrog got into DJing at college through a friend who grew up in the UK, and after listening to dubstep, Aphex Twin and Squarepusher, got heavily into jungle. In addition to labels like AKO Beatz, Droogs and Scientific Wax, he cites Paradox — in particular, his Amiga-based live set — as a huge inspiration.

Drawing samples from sci-fi, horror and anime movies, and citing authors Philip K Dick and William Gibson as inspirations, he's already working on fresh jungle material. "I'm aiming to continue releasing heavy, emotional jungle tunes with labels like Repertoire that exemplify what the jungle subculture is all about," he says.

BEN MURPHY

For fans of: Thugwidow, Sully, Dub-One



Lolsnake

Iraqi-American, Berlin-based DJ, producer and founder of the Weeirdos event series, record label and platform for local queer artists, Lolsnake is a regular and crucial part of the city's club circuit. Whether she's whipping out effervescent trance or thundering techno on HÖR Radio or DJing at Weeirdos parties, Lolsnake tells DJ Mag how she has evolved over the last two years, both personally and musically: "I feel like I'm living more true to myself. I feel very connected to the music scene in Berlin by playing more and hosting frequent events. I've taken more risks, throwing raves in unusual locations. I found that I have an audience in Athens, a city and scene I fell in love with." This month, Lolsnake will contribute a track to a soon-to-be-announced V/A, and later this year, her first EP will drop on Weeirdos. Plus, Lolsnake makes her London debut with the Technomate crew in February. **NIAMH O'CONNOR**

For fans of: Hadone, peachlyfe, Hyperaktivist



Deepneue

Deepneue is a multi-skilled artist whose talents go beyond the scope of dance music. The Portuguese producer, Pornceptual resident DJ, DARKROOMAFIA label boss and sound designer has built a presence in Berlin's techno scene, but there is more to him than initially meets the ear. Having composed soundtracks for two critically acclaimed alternative queer porn short films by Nicky Miller, and also the score for a dance performance titled 'What Will Come' for Tangente Danse in Montréal, Deepneue's talent across a wide range of music is why his profile continues to pop. Back in the world of techno, his next release will drop on the London-based Les Mirabilia label this year, and he has a track on a V/A on Ellen Allien's BPitch imprint. To get a sense of Deepneue's bouncy energy and ability to inject fun into techno, check out his Boiler Room in Sofia — a veritable vortex of vibes.

NIAMH O'CONNOR

For fans of: Randomer, Benjamin Damage, The Lady Machine

Lauren Duffus

Taking up music production as a means of working through grief during the first lockdown of 2020, Lauren Duffus' natural flair for emotional expression has quickly singled her out as a captivating addition to London's experimental electronic scene. Her debut EP 'Sulk', a beguiling record characterised by its intimacy and unique use of vocal samples, was released on the fledgling Body Motion imprint last February. She then fought off competition from thousands of other applicants to land a spot on the 2021 edition of NTS WIP, a year-long artist development programme run by the tastemaker station. With a steady stream of DJ sets at clubs like Venue MOT, Ormside Projects and Colour Factory also under her belt, Lauren has now set her sights on scoring films and documentaries — an artistic undertaking that seems well within her capabilities. **MICHAEL LAWSON**

For fans of: Loraine James, Mica Levi, aya



Eich

Norwich-born, London-based Eich is the mastermind behind More Cowbell, a record label, events brand and online community dedicated to the umbrella genre known as '130' — a title alluding to the bpm of this hard-to-categorise sound.

"Everyone has a different name for it, right? It's this weird, kind-of-in-between thing that I always struggle to describe," she explains tentatively. The '130' sound is perhaps better communicated through her DJ sets: a blend of bass-heavy, percussion-driven UK techno cuts, often armed with low-slung grooves and eschewing the parameters of 4/4. A new residency on Rinse FM — where a slew of artists from the wider More Cowbell community have been pencilled in for guest slots — and recent milestone gigs at fabric, Corsica Studios and The White Hotel are indicative of Eich's fast-rising status as a trusted scene tastemaker.

MICHAEL LAWSON

For fans of: Ila Brugal, Korzi, Monir



Yosh

From: London, UK

Three tracks: 'It's Over', 'My Fire', 'It's The Way'

For fans of: Sully, Instinct, Interplanetary Crimina

THE first thing to understand about Mark Ramsey, aka Yosh, is that he's a raver. A true raver. Even in the mid-'90s, when he was DJing on seminal pirate station Upfront FM, he considered himself a raver first and foremost. Stories about iconic parties spill out in conversation, as Ramsey details his musical education. Sure enough, when DJ Mag calls up one of the leading lights in modern-day UKG and breakbeat, he's feeling the burn from a Sunday session at Printworks. "I went down to show support for a mate who was playing," he explains. "It was really good. It's a massive club though — I prefer smaller spots."

Given he was engaging with the first strains of UK hardcore and jungle as a schoolkid, his unwavering enthusiasm for the dance is commendable. But you can tell Ramsey is a die-hard devotee when you listen to his Yosh productions. A dizzying rush of releases over the past 12 months all fizz with the best elements of rave culture, from diced-up breaks and warping low-end to crafty two-

step hooks. Of course, he's far from the only person mining this corner of electronic music, but there's a blend of finesse and authenticity which shines through in his deft tracks — and it all kicked off with a chance demo sent in the direction of omnipresent Leeds DJ Burnski.

"I made three house-y kind of tracks," Ramsey explains, "and one breakbeat tune. [Burnski] picked up on that breaks tune. I remember meeting him and he said, 'Mate, I think you're onto something. You've got your own sound'. That was all I needed."

That demo came after years spent exploring other genres, from tech-house and minimal to electro and broken beat. Ramsey's journey through music is long and winding, but the success of that one chance wildcard represented a lifetime's obsession coming to fruition. It mirrors a DJing breakthrough he had years before under the guidance of UKG originator Funky Smith, who mentored Ramsey in taking control of the decks and adding flair and technique to his game. "Funky Smith taught me to realise you control the decks, and not the other way around," he says.

Tutelage from UKG heavyweights and coveted pirate radio slots came after years fighting to express his love for the music — taping every underground show on Kiss FM, blowing his McDonald's pay cheque on every jungle and garage record he could cop at Bluebird Records in Bromley, making pause-button mixtapes, and battling with belt-drives before

he could get his hands on industry-standard turntables.

After the lifestyle years of jungle and garage though, Ramsey drifted for a time, dipping into the broken beat scene and hearing Hatcha prophesising the dubstep revolution, before being seduced by tech-house and minimal, which led to a six-year stint in Ibiza. "I moved to Ibiza in 2010," Ramsey explains, "but the sound I was making wasn't really doing much out there. When I DJed on Ibiza Global Radio, the guy running the station said, 'Why are you playing this mad music? It sounds terrible!' I was at a point where I just wasn't feeling it anymore, because it was formulaic."

For all the fun he had on the White Isle, since his critical breakbeat breakthrough, Ibiza feels like a distant memory. Releases have flown out since then — four for Burnski's Vivid, plus spots on Dr Banana, Holding Hands, Timeisnow and more. Part of the reason for this productivity is a lockdown breakthrough, which found Ramsey making up to five new tracks every week — a sure sign he had found his true sound.

"Jungle and garage consumed my life," Ramsey says, "so my music is a nod to where I was back then, sprinkled with everything I've learned over the years. An element of tech-house, an element of deep tech, an element of the Romanian sound. The music you've grown up with always comes through in your productions." **OLI WARWICK**

Selections invites DJs, producers and label heads to dig into their digital crates and share recent additions to their Bandcamp collections

Otik



OTIK occupies a unique space in the UK techno sphere. In a scene that so often flourishes in the depths, where dubstep pressure and the rhythmic influences of dancehall, jungle and grime converge into a heady club brew, the Bristol-born, London-based producer and DJ reaches for the light at the surface. His sound retains the bass-weight and dancefloor heft of his peers on labels like Keysound, Livity Sound and Wisdom Teeth, but bears an emotional resonance and blissed-out atmosphere that feels entirely his own. With a deep love for ambient music and a keen sense of melody and sound design, he's earned a reputation

for productions and DJ sets that hit hard, but aim straight for the heart.

Otik's recent EP, 'Soulo', on Martyn's 3024 imprint presents some of the finest examples of this sound to date. Across four tracks, swift, broken rhythms and rumbling sub-bass plumes underpin bright melodies and lush rave sonics. It's the prolific producer's heaviest club gear in some time, but somehow, simultaneously, his most tender. That balance of tenderness with rib-rattling energy is demonstrated in Otik's Selections, which stretches from ethereal ambient and atmospheric club music into precision-tooled breaks and big room dance tools. Dig in.

01. MLO 'Shadows of Life and Thought' *Music*

From Memory

"If you've listened to my radio shows you'll know that ambient music has a special place in my heart. This one ticks all the boxes for me: cinematic, ethereal and beautiful. I opened with this at my last gig and it really set the tone for the rest of the mix."

02. Atrice 'Intensified' *Ilian Tape*

"Another ambient piece I've connected with. I'm a huge fan of anything that Ilian Tape puts out and this whole EP is really solid and forward thinking."

03. Stones Taro 'Spend The Night' *Cheeky Music*

Group

"This one will be a staple in my sets for a while, I think. Classic junglist vibes with the perfect sample and breakdown. Stones Taro is an artist I'm keeping my eye on for sure."

041. Anastasia Kristensen 'Voice Within (Kettama Remix)' *Houndstooth*

"I was pretty late to discovering this. A dreamy UK techno/breaks version of Anastasia Kristensen's trippy original from Kettama, who honestly seems to never miss when it comes to big room dance tools."

05. Hodge & Simo Cell 'Ah Bon' *Livity Sound*

"Bass-heavy, dancehall-influenced music with a tribal and breaky twist from two legends in the game. Love the pads and vocal stabs in this too. Livity Sound does it again."

06. Surgeons Girl 'Sink or Dive' *Monstart*

"This one is taken from the latest Monstart compilation which includes a bunch of other great tracks, but this particular track grabbed me. Super atmospheric with beautiful melodies and sound design from one of my favourite producers at the moment."

07. Sully & Tim Reaper 'Windswept' *Future Retro*

"I'm a huge fan of both of these artists and I have been for years, so to see them both unite on this track was pretty exciting for me. It's the breakdown at three minutes for me — loving the eerie symphonies coupled with ridiculously detailed breaks."

08. Kessler 'Pipe Dream' *Shall Not Fade*

"I'm pretty much into everything that Kessler drops, but this one stood out for me recently. I love an ambient intro and a moody bassline, and this track ticks both boxes with ease."

09. Bakey 'The Look In Your Eyes' *Self-released*

"This track takes me back to 2012/13 and reminds me of that big room Swamp81 sound that did the rounds at the time. The breakdown is so perfect for mixes, and the pads and vocals are strong."

10. Ross From Friends 'XXX Olympiad' *Brainfeeder*

"This is my favourite track from Ross' new album, the melodies and switch-ups in this song are out of this world. I actually saw this live after I warmed up for him at Hope Works in Sheffield last year and it honestly blew me away, along with the rest of the live set. Beautiful music."

Black Ownership in Electronic Music



Black-owned music organisations, radio stations and record labels are helping to create vital platforms for Black producers and DJs who've been held back by systemic disadvantage. DJ Mag talks to Black Artist Database, Sable Radio, NTS and Touching Bass to find out more

Words: **CHRISTINE OCHEFU**

Though all genres of Black music have been subjected to exclusion, commodification and whitewashing, Black ownership in music varies. While rap and hip-hop are largely still fronted by Black artists,

and knowledge of the Black origins of genres like rock is gradually re-entering the cultural consciousness, Black electronic music seems to lag behind. From the Midwestern US roots of Chicago house and Detroit techno, to UK genres like garage, grime, drum & bass and jungle – the

latter perhaps even a wordplay on the racialised epithets thrown at its Black originators – electronic music would not exist without Black musicians. But creation doesn't necessarily translate to credit, or ownership. Along with improper marketing for Black artists and lower rates

for Black talent, profits are concentrated within top-selling labels and line-ups, and industry organisations are fronted by white representatives. It can be a struggle for Black-led organisations and artists to get a look-in. And once there is money to be made, ownership and compensation become more fraught, with the risk of exploitation. Now more than ever, electronic music needs more Black ownership.

"Black organisations are held back by systemic disadvantage," says Kay Ferdinand. He's one of the co-founders of the Black Artist Database, a community-based platform that began as Black Bandcamp in early 2021. "We're missing the connections, means and institutional memory to make massive strides into what has become a non-Black industry," Ferdinand says. "The challenge remains to get access to the resources, spaces and networks that are hidden and unreachable to the most marginalised."

During the "latest popular global wave of support for the lives and condition of Black people," as the Black Lives Matter movement grew, the Database rerouted the

electronic music scene's focus towards improving the material conditions for Black artists. "We were focused on building an organisation that could harness and continue the action being done for Black people in music, and at the same time create safe, interesting and quality spaces for our community," says Ferdinand. The project aims to be an open resource to find, hire and pay Black people directly, and to work autonomously from decades-old music industry structures. With over 3,500 profiles of DJs and producers, the Database is due to expand to other creative disciplines around music, featuring photographers, designers, writers and more.

"All of our decisions and efforts put Black people front and centre," continues Ferdinand. "All the voices we showcase with our content are Black and, even as a small organisation, we strive to compensate everyone who contributes. The intended beneficiaries for our partnerships with other music organisations are Black people. However we act and operate, we try to make the industry and scene a better place for Black people."

One of their most recent projects is their online shop, which is under development. Through this, fans can buy directly from Black artists via the Database. "We're aiming to surface the richness of creative talent from the global

"We're missing the connections, means and institutional memory to make massive strides into what has become a non-Black industry... the challenge remains to get access to the resources, spaces and networks that are hidden and unreachable to the most marginalised."

- KAY FERDINAND, BLACK ARTIST DATABASE

Black Artist Database



Pic: THOMAS MURRAY

Black diaspora, in pursuit of wage equity, transparency and stable employment for our communities.”

SABLE RADIO

One area of electronic music where Black-owned organisations are thriving is radio. As the Covid-19 pandemic pushed entertainment further online, radio became an ideal, open space for Black-owned broadcasters to grow. Sable is a Black-owned, youth-focused online radio station, production company and creative platform that’s involved in multidisciplinary projects in Leeds, UK. They also run a mentorship programme for young Black people looking to work in broadcasting and for cultural events, like Leeds’ West Indian Carnival.

A big part of this programme is resisting the expectation that entry-level work in the creative industries will be unpaid. This includes the traditional radio broadcasting model, where performers are rarely paid for their research and hosting. “For us, it’s about trying to get people to understand what we’re doing and why we do it,” says Sable’s creative producer and co-founder Baile Ali. “The business model for online radio is that you don’t pay people, so if we’re going to try and subvert that model... we have to be quite cut-throat about it.”

Looking to 2022, Sable will be working on a series of club nights. “With big arts or music institutions in Leeds, I feel like there are certain hoops you have to jump through which are very different to when you’re working [directly] with Black people,” Ali says. “Clubs that have been doing stuff for a long time kind of have a monopoly on spaces, so it’s quite hard to come up and say, ‘We want to do a club night which prioritises non-white people’, for example.” They’ll also be looking to expand Resound Projects, a programme that focuses on getting 18-to-25-year-old Black people from Leeds hired for local creative projects. “Mentorship has been really useful for us, to see the ways in which other people do things. I think there’s a lot of lateral mentorship that can be happening within our communities.”

For decades, Black-owned radio stations in the UK were excluded from structural necessities such as licensing, funding and recording spaces. From this, pirate radio stations boomed. With DIY stations, often set up in artists’ homes or abandoned city spaces, and focusing on emerging Black genres such as garage, jungle and grime, Black artists created a peer-

Baile Ali & Orla from Sable Radio



“The business model for online radio is that you don’t pay people, so if we’re going to try and subvert that model... we have to be quite cut-throat about it.” - BAILE ALI, SABLE RADIO

led arena to play, record and share music directly with listeners. Of course, operations weren’t without their pitfalls. As an illegal form of broadcasting, pirate radio stations have been subjected to police raids and even prosecutions. From this historic tension between pirate radio stations and the police, current Black-owned stations, even legal ones like Sable, face difficulties. “OFCOM, the DTI raids; they used to raid pirate radio stations and still do,” says Ali. “Peoples FM in Leeds have had their equipment taken, the last time being in 2019. These people have been pushing the culture without spotlights, without looking for institutional or mainstream recognition. They’ve just been doing this day in, day out; pushing people without a lot of support, and with a lot of repression.”

Though dance music fans in Leeds may be aware of Peoples FM, a reggae-focused station with a long history, there’s a lack of awareness

about how Black-owned pirate stations continue to be targeted; because of this, they tend to face operational challenges alone. By networking with older pirate stations like Peoples FM and Fresh FM, Sable have adapted their model and have felt encouraged to be largely self-sufficient. “[It’s about] recognising the barriers that exist,” says Ali. “When you go to funding outlets, like Arts Council England — a lot of it is just geared towards organisations that typically are going to be older. So they might say, ‘We need three years of accounts’. You’re not going to draw in that many Black-led organisations because of the very long history of discrimination against those organisations, of people being denied access to founding things or leading on projects. There’s definitely work that groups like Arts Council England can do to make a more welcoming environment for newer, Black-led organisations.”

NTS RADIO

For Femi Adeyemi, founder of NTS Radio, one of the reasons that Black ownership is lacking in electronic music is something of a catch-22: there's a lack of inspiration for young Black people, because there aren't more Black people in positions of influence to learn from.

"It's funny when another Black person finds out that it's a Black person that started NTS," Adeyemi says. "There's a lot of music or programming that we do on NTS that isn't very traditional; it's like, 'Oh wow, another Black person likes this?' It's more for the generation coming after. I think that I probably would have felt a lot more at ease starting off NTS when I did if I had seen more faces like myself in positions of power."

Adeyemi is a Londoner of Nigerian heritage. He started NTS out of both a love for music and a frustration with mainstream radio. "There wasn't any access for me, so I decided, 'I'm gonna figure this out myself,'" he remembers. (To this day, the slogan for NTS

Radio is: "Commercial Radio Sucks".) As a young kid from inner city London, he struggled to make connections to people in the industry.

"A lot of people like myself from similar backgrounds — similar colour to me, similar tastes — they just couldn't figure out how to get in there. Even when you did, the sort of shit you had to go through to cross over and get to the places you wanted meant that, by the time you got there, you're kind of jaded."

Since NTS started broadcasting in 2011, the station has expanded out of its original, makeshift studio in Dalston, east London; it's become a global music and cultural platform for underground music, and now has permanent studios in Los Angeles, Manchester and Shanghai. Adeyemi is passionate about the importance of championing the work of Black artists through the station. NTS has long-included Black artists and highlighted Black cultural contributions in its programming; shining a light on

pioneers in music rarely hosted on mainstream stations, such as Larry Heard, A.R. Kane and their Black Opera series, among others.

In June 2020, NTS compiled an online directory of resources in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, and went off-air for 24 hours, "in solidarity with everyone fighting racial injustice, stateside and beyond". In place of their regular programming, both of the station's main channels broadcasted "the names of those murdered through police brutality in recent years", focusing on the UK and US. Various hosts also ran their own, genre-specific broadcasts dedicated to Black music and protest.

"It should be natural to anyone who runs a company like NTS," Adeyemi says. "We make sure there's a fair, balanced approach to how we do things, but we've never been one of those companies that when there's a wave of popularity feel we have to speak up or do something. We've been doing those things anyway. Popular culture is Black culture; we would be doing a disservice if we weren't."

NTS' plans involve working with The Black Curriculum for 2022, Lavinya Stennett's project to include Black history within the UK national curriculum. They're also looking to continue programmes to support young people who see themselves as radio hosts, musicians or working behind the scenes, like Adeyemi once did. "I think a lot of responsibility does fall on us as owners and leaders," he says. "On a personal note, if a young Black person reaches out, I make a particular effort to look out for them."

"There's a lot of music or programming that we do on NTS that isn't very traditional; it's like, 'Oh wow, another Black person likes this?' It's more for the generation coming after. I think that I probably would have felt a lot more at ease starting off NTS when I did if I had seen more faces like myself in positions of power." - FEMI ADEYEMI, NTS RADIO

Femi Adeyemi, NTS Radio



Pic: OLLIE ADEGBOYE

TOUCHING BASS

Touching Bass is the brainchild of Errol Anderson and Alex Rita.

“More than anything, Touching Bass started as a response to not experiencing enough nights that felt like the kind of home I needed,” says Anderson. “Not only is that in reference to the eclecticism of music, but also the feel of community and warmth of the space.”

Based in South London, Touching Bass is a record label and a curatorial/creative studio. Anderson and Rita also host a club night, concert series and show on NTS Radio, all part of the Touching Bass universe.

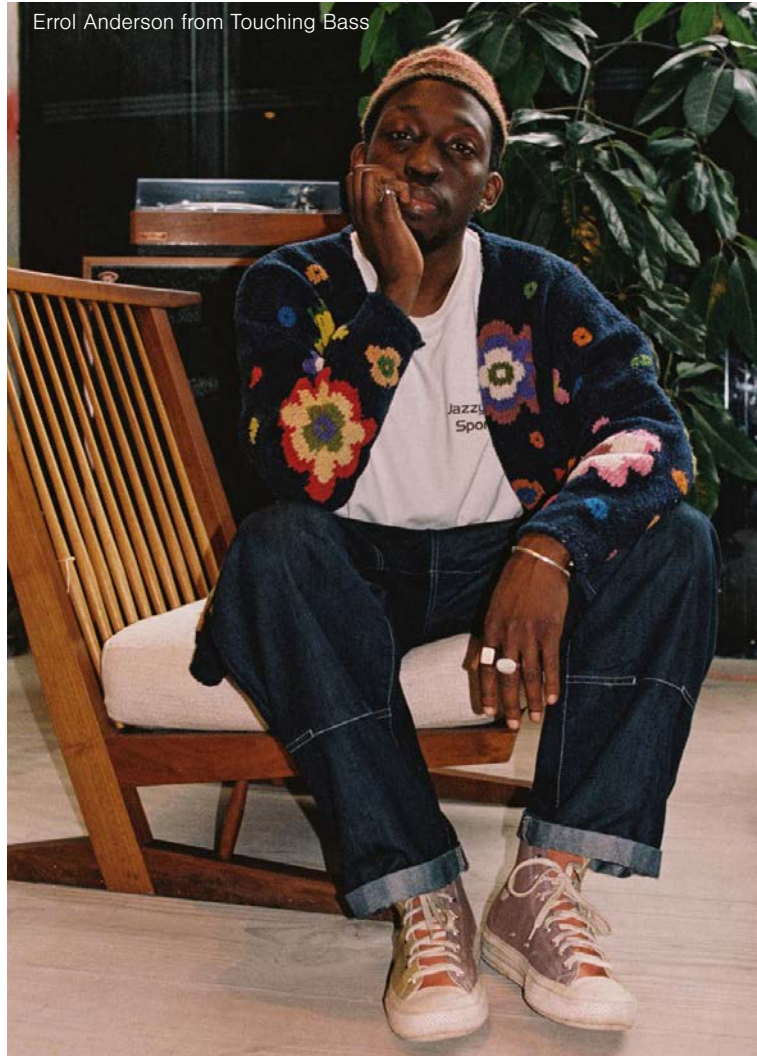
“We’ve always made a proactive effort to champion the work of Black artists and, more generally, those who are respectful of Black music,” Anderson says. “That goes from the label, to the artists we book for the club night and play on the radio show, which are as much about educating people about the wealth and breadth of Black music as soundtracking their dance moves, lunchtime and lounging.” Recent artists on the label include Londoners CKtrl and Demae, who released the ‘Robyn’ EP and ‘Life Works Out... Usually’ album respectively in 2020, and Danish jazzy hip-hop trio Athletic Progression, who released their ‘cloud high in dreams, but heavy in the air’ album in 2021.

In terms of the wider challenges that prevent Black-owned spaces and organisations from thriving in the country, Anderson talks about the issue of co-opting by larger institutions and the problem of “culture vulture business”.

“One of the things that I’ve started to notice is that whenever a Black-led entity’s popularity starts to grow beyond its grassroots foundation and becomes part of a more mainstream consciousness, their organisation is often acquired or sucked up by a larger one; too often run by Babylon.”

“It’s as if the idea of an independent Black-run space operating at a large scale is too much of a threat to the status quo of the industry as it stands. Instead of openly championing what we’re doing and leaving it at that, they try to siphon off ideas,” he continues. “Using what we’re doing as a blueprint is humbling and heartwarming when it’s honest, but I’ll never forget when an A&R from one of the big indies ran up to me at one of our dances and said – and I’m paraphrasing here – ‘I’ve been going through your SoundCloud likes and suggesting the unsigned artists as potential signees at our A&R meetings, so thanks’.”

Errol Anderson from Touching Bass



“Whenever a Black-led entity’s popularity starts to grow beyond its grassroots foundation and becomes part of a more mainstream consciousness, their organisation is often acquired or sucked up by a larger one; too often run by Babylon.”

- ERROL ANDERSON, TOUCHING BASS

From the beginning, Touching Bass has employed multiple strategies to stay afloat and lessen the need for larger brands to swoop in and take them over. They made use of local haunts for their events and club nights, such as bakeries and restaurants around the city. Selling self-funded merchandise has also allowed them to invest back into other work, such as the record label.

It’s their way of keeping things sustainable without having to compromise on ethics.

“Touching Bass’s mission remains the same; creating space for our growing community,” Anderson says. “Next year, we’re diving even deeper into that, and also releasing some more beautiful music on the label. As we grow, I want to ensure that I continue providing more opportunities for more young

people that understand those same principles.

“We are the creators and so often the originators of the culture we know and love,” he continues. “I’d like to think that having more people that look like me in powerful positions will mean more people [in the industry] with a level of empathy and understanding that can only truly be learned from being Black and brown. So hopefully that would mean less exploitation, for a start.”

In this, groups like Touching Bass, along with Black Artist Database, NTS Radio and Sable, can not just create Black culture and be credited for it, but own it. “The fact that a young Black and brown person from the ends will see themselves in the industry more frequently; the power of that is obvious, yet immeasurable.”



ANDREA OLIVA

T R A N S I T

INCL. REMIX BY

KEVIN SAUNDERSON

L I S T E N N O W O N



AND MANY MORE

AVIN Ear



Jungle pioneer M-Beat made some of the genre's biggest chart hits, but disappeared from the industry in 1996. Fired up again with lots of new music ready for release — after going through homelessness, not being paid, and being ignored by most genre historians — he's ready to tell his side of the story

Words: **DAVE JENKINS**



Some folk just exude music as if it's pouring out of their skin. Their eyes spark up when they chat about beats. They can't be stopped when they're in full

flow about the topic, or talk about a song without singing at least a bar of the lyrics. We all know these people. Chances are, you are one yourself. Sitting in a Hackney studio one Friday afternoon late 2021, DJ Mag is under no illusion that M-Beat certainly is one too.

"How the hell can anyone listen to music and not move around?" he shouts/laughs over a booming new fusion of drill, jungle and grime. He's enthusiastic to the point of fizzing over. Any track he discusses will almost inevitably involve him breaking into a little bar or two or a quick drum rhythm on the studio desk. When he plays a new beat, he pushes the studio chair to its limit, rocking back and forth with a wallowing grin on his face. Especially when he's playing his own new material. The beats themselves are so fresh, he's not quite ready for us to reveal what they are yet, but the man himself requires no introduction whatsoever.

Marlon M-Beat is one of jungle's earliest breakthrough artists, whose records were pivotal during the early hardcore/jungle crossover era between '91-'93. He was responsible for introducing the mainstream to the sound, with a string of the genre's first big crossover anthems, such as 'Sweet Love' and 'Incredible', a track featuring General Levy that's revered and sung along to with as much gusto in 2021 as there was when it was released in 1994. He's also the only jungle pioneer to have performed on Top Of The Pops (no less than four times), and was the only jungle artist to score three consecutive top 20 UK hits in the '90s. Besides Shy FX and his track 'Original Nuttah', no other producer has come close to presenting true jungle culture to the mass pop market.

Yet for all his influence, and his passion for music that runs ridiculously deep, Marlon hasn't released an official beat since 1996. Aged no older than 21, he left the scene homeless and penniless. "I never stopped listening to music, during all that time," admits Marlon, who first found work driving taxis,

before eventually settling into a successful career in IT as a consultant for major blue-chip brands like McLaren Formula 1 and Lloyds Bank. "Music is food for the soul. It's soothed me through the hardest times. I just never made any of it for years and, yeah, thinking

about it, I never listened to any jungle. Maybe it was some type of trauma?"

He laughs jokingly, but no one would blame him for turning his back on the sound he helped to bring to life. Within a year of his last appearance on Top Of The Pops, Marlon was skint and sleeping on a friend's couch. From legend-in-the-making to a story of legend, his role as pioneer remained intact, but his status in the game lapsed. To this day, he claims he's never been accounted to or paid any formal royalties for his ground-breaking hits. In fact, every M-Beat single or reissue since 1996's 'Morning Will Come' (with R&B star Junior Giscombe) has been released without Marlon's permission. And the person responsible for not paying him? His father — Renk Records co-founder Junior Hart.

BACK IN ACTION

Twenty-five years later, Marlon isn't just ready to return, he's positively amped. A dormant code running deep in his psyche has been triggered, and a whole wealth of ideas is spilling out at a rate of knots. Making up for lost time and rolling with a wingman who's rooted in jungle and well-versed in modern production, they're currently sitting on a bag of revolutionary tunes. Like M-Beat's most famous tracks of the past — all of which brought together his love for dancehall, soul, reggae and breakbeats — these new creations are all heavily powered by fusion as they smelt aspects of soul, grime, drill, R&B, pop, trap, jungle and drum & bass in an exciting and unique melting pot. The pair of them have big plans, with an innovative, striking new brand and a body of music that sounds fresh and doesn't kowtow to any current trends happening in music right now. Most importantly, there's not a whiff of nostalgia or heritage to what

they're doing.

"I don't want nostalgia, I want fusion! This music has always been about evolution!" Marlon says excitedly. "I see too many people running after the past. You're running backwards, bruv. Run forwards. A huge part of me just wants to give the past to my dad, put it in a box and leave it. It's done! It's over! But I know I need to tell my side of the story, just once and move on. I'm not going to tell it again."

Before releasing his first music in over 25 years, Marlon wants to set the record straight and close this chapter of his past. It's a chapter that's been told by other people so many times, but never by the producer himself. Even in a recent book that explores the history of jungle through the tales of various seminal releases, the chapter on 'Incredible' only includes insight from his father and the vocalist General Levy.

"I didn't vanish off the planet, I haven't been locked away somewhere or living on a desert island, I've always been available to comment if people could be bothered to find me," he laughs. "But I also have to say that I have no remorse, or regrets or any type of bitterness. I just want to put my story out there."

It's quite the story: on paper, Marlon was down as the co-founder of Renk Records, the label responsible for all the M-Beat hits. In reality, he explains how he never saw any accounts and was never paid any type of actual wage. He just lived at home and was given pocket money.

"I was just a kid," says Marlon, who first stepped into his father's studio at the age of 15 and made 'Incredible' when he was aged just 19.

"I had no clue about bills or costs or responsibilities. I was given enough money to fill the car up with petrol, and told I should be grateful for having a roof over my head and meals to eat. And for most of it, I was happy with that! I was left to do what I wanted to do, which was make music and be a studio lab rat. Making beats was literally the only thing I wanted to do, I was obsessed. All the other stuff around it? That wasn't for me." When he went to raves and saw friends like Weekend Rush DJs Red Ant and Devious D reload his early bangers like 'Booyaka', and saw the crowd erupting, he describes the adulation he was getting as "a

"MUSIC IS FOOD FOR THE SOUL. IT'S SOOTHED ME THROUGH THE HARDEST TIMES. I JUST NEVER MADE ANY OF IT FOR YEARS AND, YEAH, THINKING ABOUT IT, I NEVER LISTENED TO ANY JUNGLE. MAYBE IT WAS SOME TYPE OF TRAUMA?"

byproduct of making records". Even down to his appearances on Top Of The Pops, something he was never particularly comfortable with, fame wasn't part of the plan for Marlon. "None of it was," he shakes his head. "The fame, the money, the success. Making music was what I adored, nothing else."

'INCREDIBLE'

But as M-Beat became more and more of a household name, more things distracted him from the music. As the first ever jungle track to hit the UK charts, 'Incredible' became embroiled in controversy. General Levy was famously misrepresented in the magazine *The Face*, saying "I run jungle", consequently causing rumbles in the infamous 'Jungle Council', who blocked the MC from the scene for many years. While this didn't affect Marlon personally (his stripes as a producer were far too strong to be affected by any beef people had with Levy), his high profile did attract attention. "Friends at the club would be like, 'Boy, you gotta have some nice money in the bank now!'" he recalls. "I'd always evade the question. I didn't know what to say." Eventually tensions reached a peak and, after one particular confrontation with his father, he was promptly kicked out of the family home. Within months of collaborating with '90s pop-soul megastars Jamiroquai (on the hit 'Do You Know Where You're Coming From'), he was homeless, and his

career as a musician was put on ice. Yet despite all this, he holds no malice or anger, and is actually very quick to credit his father.

"You have to understand the ingredients of what your success is," avers Marlon. "With dad's good business acumen combined with my love for creating music, we were a powerhouse. I want this to be documented."

In fact, Marlon spends a great deal of the interview putting his father — who had been involved in soundsystems for years, released a few records under the name the Beat Inspectors, and had promoted a series of early acid house parties — in a positive light. He speaks fondly of his father's sense of futurism and love for technology, how he embraced the internet in its earliest dial-up forms, and even put on the first ever live jungle concert.

"All this needs documenting!"

Marlon raves. "He was an innovator. That concert, which I think was in Walthamstow Town Hall, was a really special moment. As far as I know, it was the first time jungle was performed by a live band. This was in 1994 just as 'Incredible' was starting to blow up. And that was all down to dad. There would be no M-Beat without him.

"Ironically, everything he taught me — how to be a man, how to be balanced, how to hold it down and not let things get to my head — held me through this," continues Marlon, who tells DJ

Mag how he's attempted to reach out to his father on several occasions to tie up copyright issues and legalities, but has not been responded to.

"But he's not done any of it himself. The way he's treating me now isn't the best. But the way he brought me up enabled me to get through this."

Not just get through it, but to come out thriving with a completely invigorated passion for beats that he thought would never return. Having spent the last two years working on his next moves, it's now almost time for him to reveal the next chapter. But only after putting this old one to rest once and for all.

"It's funny," he ponders. "When I was taxiing, I remember thinking, 'If I could just afford a day to myself, get some fish and chips and sit in front of the telly on a Saturday night, that would be great'. I got more than that in the end, but I still wasn't fulfilled. It was like, 'Hang on, where's that feeling?' It still wasn't there. So I set my targets higher and worked even harder, and it still wasn't there. Now I'm back making music, that feeling's returned."

And with that, he puts on another fresh beat, his eyes spark up and he instantly starts fizzing away again, dancing in his chair, drumming on the desk and rapping to the bars. He's back in his happy place, a place that, had things been different, he may never have left. Something tells us 2022 is going to be an exciting year for M-Beat.



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The UK's club promoters are not out of the woods yet

Putting on parties demands optimism even at the best of times. After an unimaginable 20 months, the limits of hope continue to be tested

Words: **WILL PRITCHARD**

Joshu Doherty has been putting on parties for nearly 15 years, but it's never been this difficult. "The last five months," he says, "have been harder than I can ever remember."

Doherty, better known as one half of Posthuman and the brain behind the I Love Acid clubbing brand, is not alone in feeling this. His experience is one shared with promoters of all stripes since Covid-19 restrictions began lifting in England, Scotland and Wales last summer (clubs in Ireland and Northern Ireland opened in autumn, though venues in the republic were forced to shut again in early December). Party throwers have faced a new set of challenges that social media highlight reels can only do so much to mask, stretching their inherent optimism to its limits as the new year dawns. "The biggest issue is no-shows on tickets," says Bugged Out! resident Lemmy Ashton. "Pre-Covid, about 15% of people who bought tickets wouldn't show up. Now it's ballooning massively." According to promoters, bookers and venue managers DJ Mag speaks with, average no-show figures now hover around 30 to 40%. For a sold-out 1,000-capacity venue, that's a difference of hundreds of people. In North London, The Cause saw no-shows climb as high as 75 to 80%, resulting in just a handful of people wandering the venue's labyrinthine expanses.

There are myriad reasons for these drop-outs. Some people don't want to risk catching the virus in a club before visiting family or heading off on holiday; others are forced to isolate after a housemate or close contact tests positive; rescheduled shows, meanwhile, have been crammed into smaller and smaller windows, making calendar clashes inevitable. Stuart



Joshu Doherty

"Because of everything that had happened, it seemed like a good chance to go back to supporting local scenes and local crews, but instead it kind of went completely in the other direction, and we went even deeper into this kind of headliner culture – just the same big names playing everywhere." - JOSHU DOHERTY

Glen and Eugene Wild, who will run The Cause until its closure at the end of 2021, suggest that lots of people book tickets so far in advance (a flurry of purchases followed the government's roadmap announcement in February 2021), that by the time the party comes around months later, plans and

desires have shifted. Very few punters are claiming refunds on their unwanted or unused tickets either. While intentions here may be pure – wanting to support promoters by letting them keep the cash – the knock-on is party planners and venues are unable to predict how



safety issues too, for ravers and club staff who rely on private hires to get home safely when public transport isn't an option.

In cities where university students make up the bulk of clubbers, attracting new audiences is also proving tough. The pandemic years have disrupted the cultural ebb and flow of clubland in these places. Typically, says Steffi Allatt, who's been running Manchester techno night Meat Free for close to 10 years, most students spend their first year partying in commercial clubs before dipping into a city's underground scenes, as they get to know their

many people they'll see through the door. Sold-out-but-empty dances don't just affect the vibe in the club, they can lump promoters with hefty unexpected fees, as they have to make up minimum bar spend shortfalls from their own pockets. Venues buy in drink stocks and arrange bar and door staff shifts according to expected attendance too. If half the crowd just doesn't materialise, then everyone's in the red.

All venues vary, but most weight bar takings against the hire fees they charge promoters. Use of a 1,000-capacity venue might be offered for free, provided at least £15,000 is spent by partygoers at the bar. Any shortfall on that bar take has to be made up in cash, by the promoter, in lieu of a room hire fee.

If the promoter in this example estimates each attendee will spend an average of £20 at the bar, then they can feel confident that they'll meet the minimum bar spend if they get at least 750 people through the door. Accounting for a drop-off of 15% in no-shows, the promoters will want to shift around 900 tickets to be confident they'll get enough people in and hit their minimum spend. If no-shows are much higher than 15%, then the promoters risk losing significant sums. It's close to impossible to predict.

"We have all these weird little formulas which we made up to

calculate no-shows," says Glen, laughing as he explains the pseudo-scientific methods he and Wild have come up with. Ultimately, he concedes, "you just get a gut feel for it". Hoping for the best is a familiar mode of operation for almost any promoter. But when the finest of already slim margins are being stripped to a sliver, planning for future parties gets harder. And it's not just no-shows making club promotions more precarious than usual.

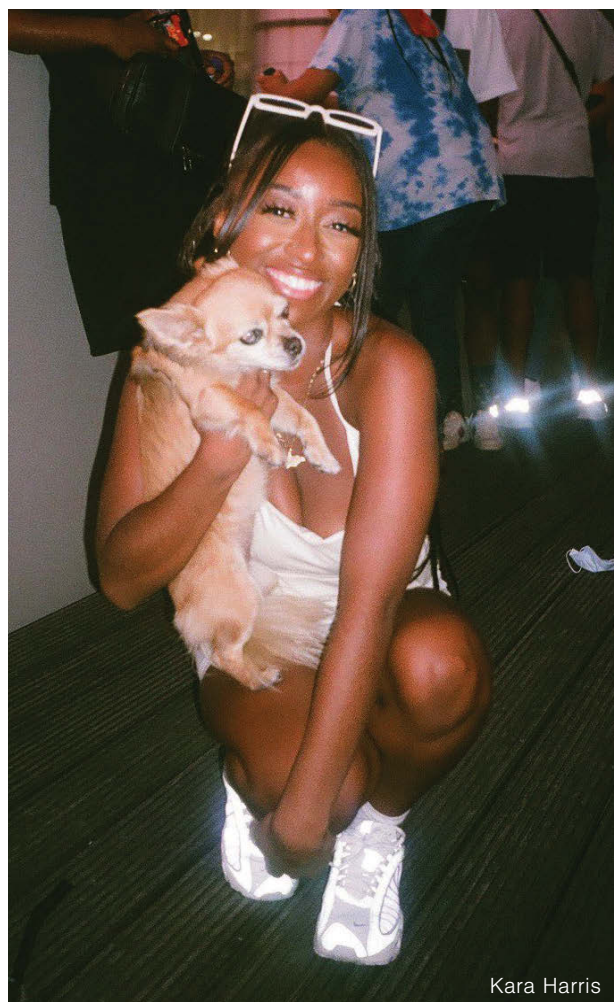
Disruption

According to the Licensed Private Hire Car Association, over half of licensed minicab drivers haven't returned to the road since the pandemic. Drivers for ride-hailing services like Uber and Bolt have departed too, after demand for rides dropped by as much as 90% during the pandemic. A lack of taxis doesn't just dent consumer confidence (the prospect of spending the wee hours waiting on a kerb won't fill many club-goers with excitement), it raises

new home better.

Lockdown orders and caution among many students have stunted this progression. Good news for the nation's sticky-floored WKD outlets, less so for more music-focused spaces. While Allatt believes Manchester, with its close-knit local clubbing community, has remained largely immune to this unusual fluctuation in student attendees, she's noticed nights in places like Sheffield, Leeds and Liverpool struggling.

"Security is one of the biggest ones [around Black-centric party Recess]. Venues want to hike up our hire fees to cover additional security because they think there's going to be trouble. But we've got case studies with other venues where there's never been a fight. There's never been any issues." - KARA HARRIS



Kara Harris



“For me, it’s brilliant to get paid for DJing – and, you know, you should get paid fairly – but if it’s done to the detriment of having a great party, and you’re missing out on that just because you don’t think the fee’s right, then you need to get your head checked.” - STEFFI ALLATT

Some issues are less novel. Black promoters have continued to face discrimination, despite the online overtures from venues in the capital and elsewhere following the murder of George Floyd and the rallying Black Lives Matter movement. “Old attitudes remain,” says Kara Harris, who worked with London-based party Recess over the course of 2021. The party attracts a young, predominantly Black crowd. “Security is one of the biggest ones. Venues want to hike up our hire fees to cover additional security because they think there’s going to be trouble. But we’ve got case studies with other venues where there’s never been a fight. There’s never been any issues.” Recess has been running for five years now, and is a well-established club brand with a dedicated crowd. Despite this, Harris says “some venues will still treat us differently,” and worries that other young Black people will be put off starting their own parties after encountering discriminatory attitudes.

Lack of decent club spaces is an eternal concern, and the dearth of venues has been especially felt in satellite towns.

“You need these places to feel like there’s life in your city,” says Jim

AL, a former free-party head who now runs nights with the Nexus crew in Chester, a city of around 80,000 inhabitants. Nexus has remained on a self-imposed hiatus since clubs reopened, due in large part to the lack of suitable venues in the city following Covid closures, disputes with previous premises, and a lingering caution from club managers. Jim AL says he’s seen at least four or five smaller crews in Chester forced to relocate to bigger nearby cities. “We might just go back to throwing parties in the woods again,” he says, with only half a laugh.

More broadly – and the subject of plenty of “told-you-so” grumbling among the more than dozen promoters DJ Mag speaks with – the pre-Covid status quo of who gets booked and for how much has largely endured.

“Because of everything that had happened, it seemed like a good chance to go back to supporting local scenes and local crews,” says Doherty, of I Love Acid. “But instead, it kind of went completely in the other direction, and we went even deeper into this kind of headliner culture – just the same big names playing everywhere.” Doherty and others worry about what happens when the name on

a flyer takes precedence over the vibe of the party. But there are signs that pre-Covid methods are no longer working as they once did, and that a return to more localised, community-oriented efforts could be the way forward.

“The promoters that still have this idea that you just book people who are on the hype trajectory to bring people in, these are the folk who are seriously struggling right now,” says one club booker working in Scotland, who says they’ve seen promoters plugging 3-for-2 deals and other, arguably desperate ploys to shift tickets for big-name bookings.

Community focus

Meanwhile, community-focused promoters, who emphasise local talents and making spaces “more inclusive for folk”, are seeing attendance grow.

One such promoter, over the border in Newcastle, is Geoff Kirkwood. Better known as Man Power, Kirkwood entered lockdown on the cusp of calling time on his decade-long career in music.

“I was close to throwing in the towel, to tell the truth,” he says, “because I felt that the clubbing scene in general had turned into something that I wasn’t necessarily subscribing to. It’s very corporate-influenced, mass entertainment rather than underground culture, which was never really the reason why I got into it.”

Kirkwood had moved back to the north-east of England, where he grew up, after spending a few years living in Berlin and Mexico. When a friend asked if he wanted to run a night at Newcastle club space World Headquarters, he accepted cautiously. “My conditions were that I didn’t want to do sporadic and monthly parties, what I actually wanted to do was a weekly party. And what I identified as being necessary, in general, wasn’t to create these parties where there’s

Man Power



“I was close to throwing in the towel, to tell the truth, because I felt that the clubbing scene in general had turned into something that I wasn’t necessarily subscribing to. It’s very corporate-influenced, mass entertainment rather than underground culture, which was never really the reason why I got into it.” - MAN POWER

panel discussions, Q&As and presentations. (During lockdown, these were hosted weekly online.) It’s a space to share best practice and common resources on everything from health and safety to cost-benefit ratios.

“The point of it really is to create conversations between scenes and sounds. It’s really easy for promoters to just live in their own bubble, because it’s such an absorbing thing sometimes,” says Sugden. “For up-and-coming promoters, those sorts of words of advice and resources are absolutely vital. We’re just trying to create a common space for that.” The Night Time Industries Association is involved in the LPS too, and aims to replicate the Society’s work in cities all over the UK, along with a recently-announced push to install Night Time Economy advisors in more places.

This kind of collective action and support could prove more vital than ever in the coming months, as club scenes emerge from another tough winter. The Omicron variant and the wave of new lockdowns it’s spurred across Europe have been a reminder that the uncertainty that’s dominated promoters’ lives since March 2020 isn’t going away any time soon. Most remain — for survival and sanity as much as anything else — optimistic, seeing 2022 as a chance for a clean break. Others, particularly those operating in smaller towns and cities, see the current situation stretching out over years rather than months.

Uncertainty is the only constant. So guts are being trusted again. “The underground does tend to always burst out again in some way or another,” says Doherty, his optimism daring to creep through. “I just don’t know when.”

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Us & Them

an arms race for who books the biggest, most recognised name,” he says. “Instead, it was to be about the community who actually went to the club every weekend.” The resulting night was a weekly party called *Us & Them*. There were no headliners, just “guests”. Names on flyers shared the same font size. Cameras were banned. It would be all walk-ups, no advance tickets. A membership service offered entry for a fiver each week — and if you were skint, you could drop the organisers a message and they’d sort you out. “They were just old ideas that people had forgotten,” says Kirkwood. Over the weeks, the crowd swelled steadily. Faces became familiar, and Kirkwood had his faith restored.

Nods to the old school and a localised spirit haven’t been unique

to Newcastle. In Manchester, Meat Free’s Steffi Allatt says she’s “much less likely to stand any shit from agents anymore” — and that parties have improved as a result. Petty gripes and diva behaviour, she says, are a distance away from the kind of solidarity that a sustainable, healthy return for clubbing requires. “For me, it’s brilliant to get paid for DJing — and, you know, you should get paid fairly — but if it’s done to the detriment of having a great party, and you’re missing out on that just because you don’t think the fee’s right, then you need to get your head checked.” The promoter working in Scotland says that in a toss up between buying pricey fizz for an out-of-towner’s rider or booking a couple more local DJs to play, it’s obvious where the real value lies.

“The industry could learn from being a little more community oriented,” agrees Harris. The continued success of *Recess*, which sold out a three-room Fabric takeover in November on the strength of its resident DJs, supports the validity of this position. “Even the people that buy tickets, they’re building something that, they probably don’t even really realise, is bigger than themselves.”

More formal organising efforts are taking shape along these lines in the capital. Freddie Sugden, who puts on nights in cities including London, Manchester and Bristol under the Loose Lips banner, has helped to establish the London Promoters Society, or LPS.

The group, which has a mailing list of around 700 members, hosts monthly meet-ups featuring

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A CUT ABOVE THE REST

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After a DMC winning performance, they open up about collaborating during our Covid times, bringing the artform to a wider audience — and that ridiculous name

Words: **DAVE JENKINS**

On a cold, curmudgeonly night late in October 2021, two anonymous hooded figures appear on screens across the globe. Dressed in black, faces pixelated, they keep their heads down and say nothing directly to the camera. Their actions, which occasionally involve dangerous martial arts weapons, are concentrated, precise and executed with killer instinct. The tension is high, and the only thing stopping this situation from being the Squid Game dystopia you accidentally ordered on Wish.com is that we're watching this on the DMC YouTube, and not the news. That, and the fact they have a pretty ridiculous name...

Meet the BREXecutioners: Everyone following the DMC Team World Championships knew they were competing, but no one knew who they actually were. Even the name had an air of tense intrigue; not only is it a direct reference to one of the most important and influential DJ battle troupes of all time (legendary NYC crew the X-Ecutioners), but anything with a 'Brex' prefix is steeped with too many pro-Leave connotations for comfort. Plus, at this surreal point in post-Brexit, mid-Covid, late-stage capitalist western life would anyone be that surprised if Farage and Johnson themselves tried to step up and corrupt one of the purest and most disciplined forms of DJ craft?

It would be another two weeks until the final round, where the BREXecutioners would reveal their true identity in their full six-minute routine video, but many card-carrying scratch nerds and deck heads had already worked it out by the time their three-minute elimination entry video was over. They didn't need a double decker bus to deduce that this dynamic duo was in fact DJ Angelo and JFB. Even at this stage of the competition, many were rooting for the duo. One block cap-happy commenter screamed "JUST GIVE THEM THE TROPHY ALREADY". Another stated, "You can't disguise class like this". Many others called the UK pairing a "dream team". Eventually, after the final full routine featured the duo mixing with their feet, scratching with nunchucks and tearing up modified versions of the

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles theme tune, the judges eventually called them winners.

BREX don't roll

"No one had done the anonymous thing before, and the name was quite controversial," grins Angelo. "We knew people would be like, 'Why are they biting the X-ecutioners?' Obviously there's the Brexit thing, too. We thought the Brits would find it cheeky but were also aware that some people would take it literally and hate us. But the anonymousness, and the name, made it fun, and the elimination video has been watched more than our six-minute final."

Their elimination video is one of the most watched performances in the whole of this year's DMC tournament full-stop, but the story of how Angelo and JFB came together against all odds is the real winner here. It's a story that entails some of life's most modern foibles and some of turntablism's oldest traits. It's a story of discipline, friendship and some of the most intense creative processes DJ Mag has heard of for quite some time. Most of all, it's a story of two DJs who are truly passionate about turntablism and have dedicated their careers to ensuring the artform is promoted in the highest and most accessible ways possible.

You see, tournaments like the world famous DMCs are just one of many battles that turntablists have to endure. On one side of turntablism is the constant struggle to be heard against mainstream standard club DJs who spend more time with their hands in the air or pressing the sync button than they do actually mixing. On the other side of the craft, you have chin-stroking super nerds who still decry any form of vinyl-less mixing as 'not real DJing', and another set of dedicated turntablist students who are bending techniques and pushing technology so much, and so hard, that they've lost the attention of the regular viewer's need for fun and entertainment.

"We're not scratch geeks for the sake of scratch geeks. We want to make this artform digestible and popular with

everyone,” says Angelo. “Over the years, the DMCs have become a victim of their own need for progression, and it’s alienated a lot of casual fans. In the late ‘90s, it would be packed like a hip-hop event. For everyone. But recently, it’s felt like it’s more for heads, DJs and nerds. No passing traffic, which is too insular. It’s a shame. Turntablism has to evolve and the DMCs have to encourage the highest-level skill possible. But the downside is that it’s become more niche. So we looked to bring back some of that old school fun so people could appreciate the show no matter how technical we were or how technical the audience are.”

Remain event

The BRExecutioners’ DMC World Team championship title winning routine video is well worth six minutes of anyone’s life. Firstly, it’s visually stimulating regardless of any technical skill the viewer has or doesn’t have; the way they weave between each other in a delicate choreography, use things like spinning nunchucks (utilising Serato’s game-changing Bluetooth Phase tool), and both swing their legs up in unison to modulate a single tone into the iconic riff from Fred Wesley & The JBs ‘Blow Your Head’ (which was famously sampled by both Public Enemy and DJ Zinc). But it’s the groove and momentum the pair create, and their musical reference points, that really provide the knock-out punches. It’s clear, in case you didn’t already know, JFB and Angelo could just as easily rock a party as they could smash the DMCs.

Yet it was a smash no one saw coming. One on hand, you have JFB, a veteran battle DJ who’s won the DMC

UK finalist crown on three occasions and come second and third in the World Championships just as many times. Having decided 2021 would be his last year in the tournament circuit, he set himself a task to win three World Championship titles. Just as DJ Mag went to press, JFB completed his hat-trick — he won the DMC World Final, to add to his and Angelo’s win that followed his first victory in the DMC World Beat Juggling Championship in June.

“Winning the Beat Juggling Championship was very satisfying,” explains JFB over Zoom from a hotel room in Antwerp. Currently working with the International Swimming League as the main entertainment between races and main musical conductor during the races, it’s a rare moment of downtime for the hardworking DJ.

“The standards were crazy high. I was nervous watching the final, because all the contestants were amazing. I was super happy to win that. Then there was the team entry, which I’d never done before, but I knew Angelo was the perfect DJ to do a routine with.”

EUR the one

JFB and Angelo had known and respected each other for years, but they’d never performed routines together and certainly never battled in competitive DJing together, because Angelo — although hugely renowned in the turntablist community — has famously never entered any contests before.

“At first I was like, ‘Bro, that’s not me,’” laughs Angelo. “I didn’t think I’d be at J’s level. My routines aren’t about the battle, they’re about entertaining and how it all sounds.



Not so massively technical. But then he explained how the Team Championship isn't a technical showcase, but about presentation and how you interact and perform. It's the whole package."

Angelo got on board with two substantial caveats.

"He was specifically adamant about us using every turntable, every mixer and every fader as much as possible," says JFB, real name Jean-Marc. "I think that massively helped the routine and gave us ideas and solutions on which way to go next."

"It had to be visually entertaining," chimes in Angelo.

"When you look back at legendary team routines, they were always very physical and entertaining. We watched a lot of videos by The Scratch Perverts, The Allies and C2C. They were huge inspirations to us in terms of theatrics and physicality. And fun, too. Another stipulation for me was that it had to be fun. Fun for us, and fun for the viewers."

But fun doesn't always come easily. The lengths these two DJs went to in order to create their routine, the stacked schedules they had to intensely limbo around and the mind-merging chemistry they had to undergo, is what really makes their win worthy.

Leaver It Out, Mate

First there was the multi-layered terrain of the Covid landscape: Angelo, who'd relocated to Berlin from the Midlands six years prior, took three flight attempts to link with Jean-Marc. Then, once finally linked, they had to forget the last 18 months of isolation and live in each other's pockets for two weeks, working from breakfast until past

midnight every day. "We had to drill it out," admits Angelo. "We had to get used to each other's processes, which took time. We're both solo artists and used to doing things our own way. J works very fast and thrashes ideas out on the decks, while I'll do a lot of thinking before I start and marinate on things for a while. So we had to find a groove."

Here's where things get a little mind-boggling. Putting together a routine is a little like doing a jigsaw, except you don't know what the picture is and you're also making the jigsaw pieces as you're putting it together. Both more than adept at making their own solo routines, merging their styles, minds and egos to make a team routine was a whole other level.

"This was one of the hardest things!" explains JFB. "I'm not good with dialect and talking, but Angelo is incredible. I don't want to blow his head but he's a genius, and there were times when I knew I needed to step back and let him lead. I'd let him go into a crazy scientist mode where he's writing things down and trying things out, and I'd just put my headphones on, practice something, and try and do something else."

"The thing about turntablism is that it's hard to articulate some ideas," adds Angelo. "We'd often misunderstand each other when describing different ideas, which could get very frustrating. It's such a difficult thing to do in a team. You need to put aside your egos and be inside each other's minds. It's incredibly difficult. At points I didn't think we'd make it."

Throw in the intensity of their individual schedules, and you



begin to understand just how close to the edge they were on this. Angelo had multiple deadlines to make tutorial videos for a whole host of major league brands. Jean-Marc, meanwhile, had to go to Naples to perform at the International Swimming League for six weeks. "We could have made the routine a lot better than it was," says JFB, who spent his time off in Naples writing and rehearsing his third DMC entry video in his hotel room. "We just didn't have the time."

After six weeks of doing their own individual things, JFB and Angelo were able to reunite for another two weeks at the end of the summer to complete, rehearse and film their team routine. Once again, they were undergoing intense hours together and coming from very different perspectives.

"Angelo came into his own again," JFB explains. "The way he thinks about, not just himself, but other DJs. He scrapes the barrel and gets the most out of the performance. He made it all make sense, while I have a tendency to rush on things. I'm into my technical stuff and fast stuff, but I knew working with him he'd have the patience and the right mindset to get the best out of what we wanted."

BREX Sells

The pair complement each other succinctly and joke about being yin and yang. Angelo is quick to praise JFB's spontaneity, flexibility and work ethic in return of any praise J fires at him, and the pair also big up fellow DMC world champ DJ Switch, who was hoping to be a proud BREXecutioner himself but wasn't able to commit the hours (and hours, and hours and hours) needed to put into such a routine. "Turntablism is one facet of DJing that you can't cheat, you can't rush, you can't shortcut," says Angelo. "You have to want to do it at this level, or you wouldn't put in the amount of hours."

This is what separates any other type of DJing to turntablism; the pure graft. While a significant number of touring club DJs don't even have decks at home, dedicated turntablists never stop practicing. All mixing styles have artistic merit, but the technical level of turntablist is undoubtedly black belt. Angelo makes parallels with kung-fu.

"It takes years to be a grand master," he states. "A lot

of people can watch it and think it looks easy, but it takes years to learn the movements and find a style that resembles you."

And while much of that is the hours and hours of endless dextrous practice, a considerable part of attaining and maintaining your style and discipline, once you're battle-ready, is the never-ending hustle. For Angelo and Jean-Marc, this is evident in many ways, as the pair continue to find new and different methods to promote and push turntablism outside of the niche culture.

Both DJs are flexible enough to work in the corporate sphere, for instance. Angelo creates content for mainstream brands like Algoriddim, Digital DJ Tips and Reloop, while JFB's work in the sports sector alone — from BMX to football to his recent role in the International Swimming League — is unparalleled.

"It's all about representing the artform in as many ways as possible," says Angelo, whose unique career has positioned him in the top branches of the turntablist tree without even having to get stuck into the competitive nitty-gritty of tournament DJing. In many ways, this level of hustle is just an extension of the turntablist culture and mindset. It's an idea that's reinforced by JFB when we wrap up our conversation with thoughts on Brexit and their ridiculous name.

"It's especially sad for EU artists coming to the UK, or any smaller band or act who doesn't have a big enough budget," says Jean-Marc. "That takes away a lot of opportunity, which, in turn, kills art. But we'll work out a way. Everyone who makes music loves it so much, we are always determined to find a way."

"Yeah, the show must go on," nods Angelo. "We're adaptable, we always have been, and the whole culture of turntablism is based on going against the grain. It's a bit punk rock in terms of how we use turntables and created an artform in itself and a whole new culture. No matter how things progress or develop, we'll always find a way."

With that, the duo don their hoods, pack up their nunchucks, re-pixelate their faces and go about their daily grinds in this surreal post-Brexit, mid-Covid, late-stage capitalist western thing we call life. The purest and most disciplined forms of DJ craft remain in safe hands for now.





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TERM:

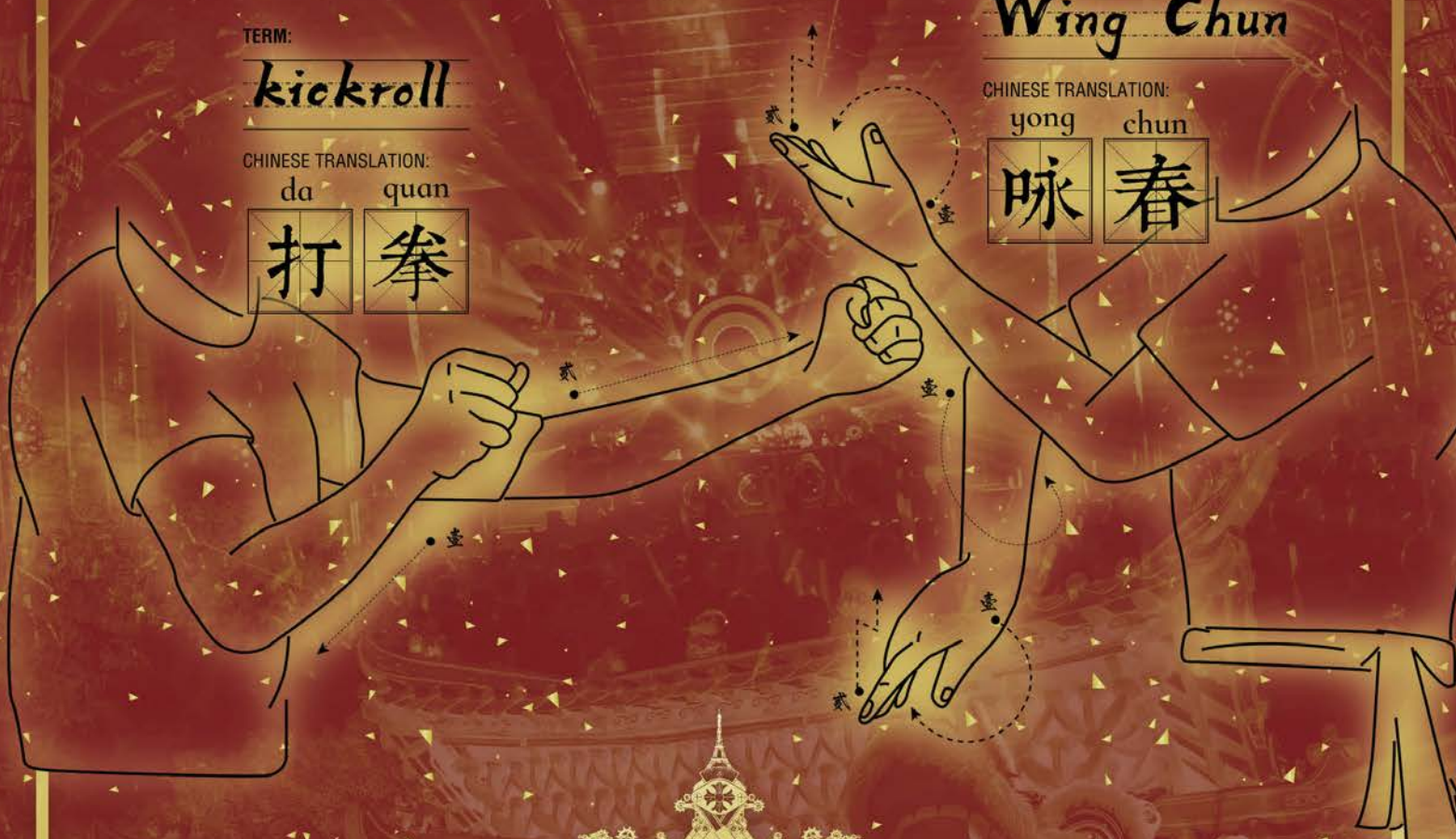
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CHINESE TRANSLATION:

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CLUB GALAME

GALAME KONGFU

CHINA TO THE WORLD



Best of British 2021

Best Of British is where DJ Mag shines a light on the wealth of homegrown talent on the doorstep of our UK HQ. How it works is that DJ Mag staff nominate five names for each category – Best Label, Best DJ and so on – and these are then put out to a public vote.

Our awards show this year was sadly cancelled in real life due to Covid issues, with all the results being revealed online. Over the next 30 pages of editorial, we profile all the winners in all the different categories. We can only hope that 2022 brings a more prosperous time not just for all of our Best Of British winners and nominees, but also for the whole scene at home and internationally.

Other Nominees

Batu
Bradley Zero
Equinox
Mala

Best DJ

Or:la

Living the dream

With an eclectic career spanning DJing, music production, label management and running raves in abandoned buildings, Derry's Or:la is part of a new generation of iconoclastic, multi-hyphenate creatives in dance music — and one of the big winners at this year's Best of British awards

Words: **KATHERINE RODGERS**

Pics: **VIVEK VADOLIYA**

Stylist: **LUCA WOWCZYNA**

Make Up Artist: **SHIORI KAWATO**

Hair Stylist: **CHRISTOPHER HUTTON**

Becoming a DJ came to Orlagh Dooley in a dream. No, really. During her first year of university, Dooley had an epiphany, in the form of “a dream where I could see myself DJing... and I'd never even thought of DJing before. It was so weird.” Dooley woke up, downloaded some free DJ software onto her ancient laptop, and got started as Or:la.

Perhaps we should all choose our careers through epiphany, because it seems to be working out pretty well for Or:la. For an artist still in her twenties, she's managed to do just about everything you can within dance music. She DJs and produces original music, runs record labels and has years under her belt hosting parties, even breaking into abandoned office blocks to do it — all while garnering support from a growing international audience, particularly across the UK and Europe.

In recent years, Or:la's hit the road with as much force as the pandemic has allowed. She's helmed the booth at UK festivals like Lost Village and Field Maneuvers, and in make-or-break clubs like Ibiza's Circoloco, Berlin's Berghain, Tbilisi's Bassiani, London's Printworks and Corsica Studios, and New York City's Nowadays. Though global, ever-changing restrictions on touring necessarily slowed her touring momentum over the last year or so, she still played major sets in 2021 that saw thousands lock into her groove, most notably at Belfast's AVA Festival.

And it seems like the wider industry is embracing Or:la's vibe. In 2020, she recorded an Essential Mix for Pete Tong's legendary BBC Radio 1 show, and starting this month, she'll be part of the







Orla wears:
Shin Hosokawa suit
from Hysteria Fashion
@hysteria.fashion
Vivienne Westwood
shirt from Lala Link
@lala._link

station's taste-making Radio 1 Dance Residency, sharing top billing with Goldie, Sama' Abdulhadi, Scratcha DVA, Folamour and LCY; spinning an eclectic mix of dance tracks during the station's primetime slot.

Imagination

At the 2021 edition of DJ Mag's Best of British awards, the public voted Or:la the UK's Best DJ from a shortlist of DJ Mag nominees. She now joins the ranks of other Best DJ winners, named alongside heavy hitters like Andy C, SHERELLE, Eats Everything and DJ EZ. Considering that Or:la won the Breakthrough DJ category at Best of British just five years ago, it's a testament to just how brightly her star is shining right now.

Or:la is thoughtful and particular. She speaks in a gentle Derry lilt, her steady gaze peering out from a shock of curly brown hair. Dooley has recently relocated to London, which she's enjoying — if it wasn't for the mysterious banging noise coming from the flat below, which has been disturbing her sleep. Somewhat unnervingly, during our conversation over tea and biscuits, we're informed by the landlady that the flat has been vacant for quite some time, leaving Or:la looking horror-struck. Perhaps fittingly for someone attuned to the spiritual, Or:la was born in Inch, a tiny island on the Irish border in County Donegal, on a wild, cinematic stretch of coastline known as the Wild Atlantic Way. Unsurprisingly for an island with a population of fewer than 500 people, she grew up surrounded by "wild birds, grassland, marshes and lakes", and her closest neighbours were a wildfowl sanctuary. Dooley credits her remote upbringing with activating her imagination at a young age.

"It really allowed me to be creative," she says. "I guess boredom is important in that sense? I feel sorry for today's teenagers who can't reach that place of utter boredom, because they're constantly being entertained by TikTok, or whatever — because a lot of creativity can come from that place." Starved of entertainment, she and her siblings turned to music to keep themselves occupied. Their first creations were heavily influenced by "country and western vibes" — an enduringly popular genre in rural Ireland — but her first musical love came in the form of the 1999 UK

garage hit 'Sweet Like Chocolate', by short-lived musical duo Shanks & Bigfoot. She recalls hearing it on the radio and riding her bike round and round her yard in excitement.

"I remember thinking that it sounded like nothing I'd ever heard before," Dooley says. "After that, I forgot about that song for a long time, and then the whole garage revival thing came back; it made me realise that I can really join the dots between that song and the type of music and sounds I enjoy at the moment. Like, it's always been there."

Age 13, Dooley moved from the idyllic Inch to the more urban Derry, to attend school. In Northern Ireland, schooling is still largely segregated along religious and cultural lines, with 93% of Northern Irish children attending faith-based schools. Moving to an area with more schools which align with your family background is a pretty common experience.

Dooley attended a Catholic convent school, which she loathed. As a young, then-closeted queer woman, she was frustrated by the Church's outspoken antagonism of the LGBTQ+ community, and as someone from a non-religious family, her school's religious bent left her feeling isolated. Coming into school on Monday mornings, she was drilled by her teachers on the contents of the sermon from the Sunday Mass; her friends would whisper the answers to her.

In later years, as Or:la, she would channel that rebellious spirit into programming her own queer-friendly club nights, an endeavour she describes, poignantly, as "an antidote to the shame and programming I developed while in the closet, and a way to release the power of that shame."

Raves

The move from country to city was Dooley's first exposure to electronic music and Derry's small but lively clubbing scene.

"I had a fake motorcycle ID that I used, and if that failed, me and my friends would find out what 18th birthday parties were happening in the local area — just through the grapevine at school — and we'd gatecrash them, just so we could have a dance and hear a DJ. Eventually, people would be like, 'who's that guy in the

corner?', and we'd have to make a pretty speedy exit."

Dooley made her solo exit from Derry in her late teens, to study for a degree in Media Production at Liverpool University. It was in Liverpool that Dooley had her DJ epiphany — and where she began *Meine Nacht*, her first club night, which she ran as Or:la alongside fellow DJ Breakwave. *Meine Nacht* was the epitome of a DIY night. "We didn't have a club venue, so we would just drive around looking for spaces we could use for the night," she remembers. "Like, we'd just go around finding abandoned buildings, or knocking on doors. And we did everything ourselves — from working the door to cleaning up afterwards." One night, Or:la held a 300-person rave in an empty art building ("I don't think the owners ever knew"), while another night found them teaming up with Felicity, an art gallery owner in her seventies who gamely let them use her space, and even worked the bar at the rave. "She's sadly no longer with us, but she was so sweet and welcoming," she remembers.

Not every party was a positive experience. One night, a group of men began throwing stones at a warehouse Or:la and her friends were in, forcing the crowd to flee through the lorry loading bay. She figured out a lot in those early years in Liverpool about what makes a good party.

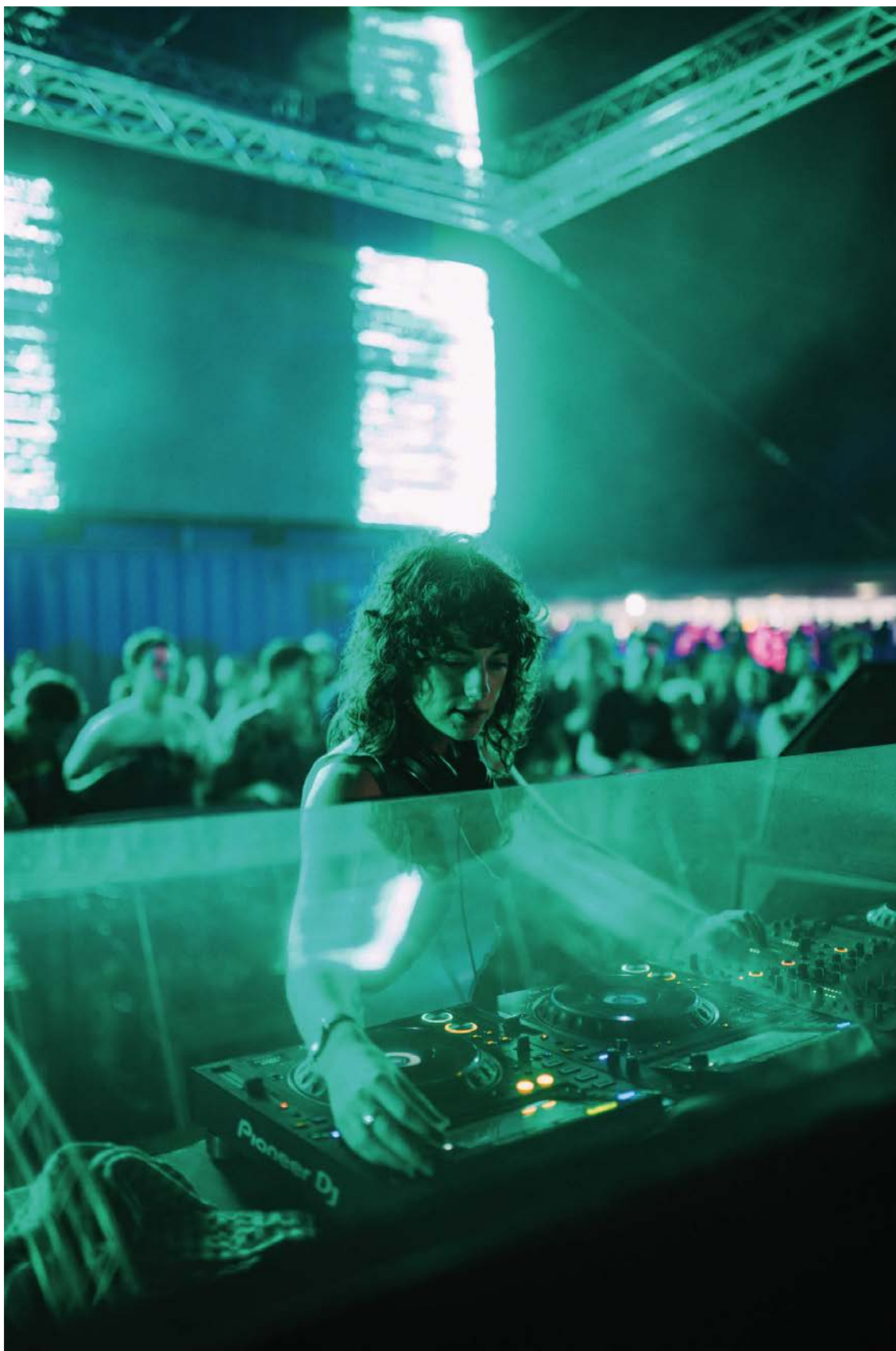
"It was an incredibly formative experience — we learned everything from setting up soundsystems, to cleaning and security. There's a lot of environmental factors that go into making a club night, and ultimately, we have a responsibility for everyone." Perhaps unsurprisingly, Or:la's passion for creating safe, welcoming club spaces came also in part from her own experiences as a solo, female touring DJ.

"When I first started touring, I had some bad experiences. I had men rattling the bars in front of me, trying to distract me. I had someone shout 'Suck me off' really loudly during a breakdown. I had men asking me to smile when I'm DJing — that one happened quite a lot."

One night, Or:la decided she'd have her revenge. "I told myself that if someone asked me to smile one more time, I'd turn the music off. Obviously, some guys started trying to distract me by telling me to smile — and I turned the music off and they nearly

"[Rural life] really allowed me to be creative.... I guess boredom is important in that sense? I feel sorry for today's teenagers who can't reach that place of utter boredom, because they're constantly being entertained by TikTok, or whatever — because a lot of creativity can come from that place."

Pic: LEWIS MCCLAY



shat themselves. Like, the look on their faces was priceless," she says, with a grin. These days, Or:la prefers to play "queer and inclusive venues", where people "mind their own business, and aren't up in your space staring at you, or trying to take photos".

She's naturally introverted, preferring to maintain a steely sense of concentration during her sets, rather than playing theatrically to the crowd. Her introversion is something which she accepts doesn't make being a DJ the most natural career choice. "With extroverts, blood flow in the

brain is directed more to interpreting sensory data, while in introverts, it's directed towards interpreting your internal landscape. So for extroverts, seeing people's faces during a DJ set would probably energise them, when it's kind of like the opposite for me." After university, she moved back to

Derry, and tried out a succession of jobs at bars, coffee shops, and one depressing stint in an HMRC call centre. “I hated them all. Especially the HMRC one,” she says. “I was in this big, grim, asbestos-riddled building outside Derry city centre, taking complaint calls all day.” After she quit HMRC, she tried selling tickets for a season in Ibiza. “It was an eye-opening experience, but I was really, really bad at my job,” she laughs. “I scraped by, but I ended up completely running out of money. I even contemplated stealing chips from the airport Burger King when we were on our way home.” Or:la swore she’d only return to Ibiza if she was booked to play — which she was, at DC10 in 2019, just a few years later. Like most terrible jobs, Or:la’s early career proved unpleasant but formative. “In the end, I was kind of glad it was all so awful, because I wouldn’t have pushed myself to try and make it in music.”

Independence

Back home in Derry, Dooley continued making music as Or:la. She received a fair bit of attention — a stripped-back remix of Beyoncé’s classic anthem to self-love, ‘Me, Myself & I’, caught the attention of producer Karma Kid, who urged her to distribute her music on download sites. In 2016, she struck gold — three original tracks she sent to Hotflush label owner Scuba were signed, and packaged as ‘UK Lonely’, her first EP as Or:la.

In many ways, ‘UK Lonely’ is a love letter to UK club music. Simultaneously sounding like the past and the present, it takes familiar elements from dance music and blends them in new and unfamiliar ways. ‘Limbosoup’ is grounded in UK funky, but brings in some unsettling sonic twists; there’s an off-kilter synth arpeggio, and a repeating sample of what sounds like a phone ringing underwater.

Around the time of the release of ‘UK Lonely’, Or:la started experimenting with becoming a label boss, launching vinyl-only imprint Deep Sea Frequency (alongside Breakwave), which released music from Carlton Doom, DJ Seinfeld and Or:la herself. Later on, she started Céad, which releases music from similarly hard-to-pin-down artists like Lewski and Blu Terra. There are playful quirks and tricks involved with Céad: one release’s artwork includes a hidden quote from a Greek philosopher, while others are designed with binary code — “on the off-chance one of our fans can read binary code!” — and various hidden messages.

The most recent release, Céad’s seventh, is a four-track compilation titled ‘MMXXI Inferno’: featuring artists FAFF, Mary Lake, Supreems and

Splash Pattern, with all proceeds from sales going towards Afghan Aid. On release in September 2021, DJ Mag described the compilation as striking “a perfect balance between toughness and trippiness; off-kilter electro and techno rhythms gallop and jolt, while sci-fi zaps, sub bass, and cyborg vocal chops sizzle and spark for maximum impact.”

Or:la ventured into running independent labels in a bid to maintain creative control over her

career — “I didn’t want to have to rely on other people to give me the opportunity to release my music” — and because she was inspired by a “paradigm shift” happening in the UK music scene. Around six years ago, the wavy sounds of lo-fi house took off in a big way, breaking a new generation of artists with a keen sense of humour, a high tolerance for imperfection and a great deal of respect for the old school. While Or:la’s sound is perhaps too iconoclastic to slot into this movement

“There are covert references to Irish history and mythology embedded in everything that I do. It’s really important to me to showcase Irish culture.”



wholesale, she was inspired by various elements of it. "It proved that dance music didn't have to be so rigid, or take itself so seriously," she says, "and it allowed me to have more confidence because I realised that you don't have to make totally clean mixes, or to be an expert at compression and EQ, to release music."

Her attention to detail within her labels and original music extends to her appreciation of mysticism, filling her work with arcane symbols and Celtic iconography.

"There are covert references to Irish history and mythology embedded in everything that I do. It's really important to me to showcase Irish culture." Or:la's t-shirts feature illustrations from books of Irish myths and legends, and she laces oddball sonic references through her productions.

On a recent, untitled track, made to soundtrack Irish fashion designer Robin Lynch's newest collection, Or:la samples a 1993 Irish news broadcast covering a piece of legislation banning "freely roaming horses" in Dublin — which sounds like something that should have been banned way before 1993.

Resistance through hedonism

After her time in Derry and Liverpool, Or:la moved to Berlin for two-and-a-half years. She didn't really connect with the party capital of Germany — she describes it as "a city of lost souls and unreality" — and has since settled nicely in Brixton, South London. She loves her adopted neighbourhood, and sees a connection to it and other places she's lived in; she describes herself as "being drawn to places which have a rich musical culture, as well as a history of conflict or upheaval. You can feel it manifest itself in the local crowds, and how people value coming together to enjoy music." Music as a source of healing and reconciliation is an idea which holds particular power within the Northern Irish music scene. In the years during and after the Northern Irish conflict, known as The Troubles, club nights played an important role in providing cross-cultural experiences for the Catholic and Protestant communities, and became an outlet for the life-affirming hedonism which often filters through post-conflict societies. This is an idea that's affected Or:la deeply. During our conversation, she quotes, from memory, a line from the 1995 Northern Irish documentary *Dancing On Narrow Ground*, which follows two groups of working-class ravers — one Catholic, one Protestant — as their worlds collide at Kelly's, a legendary nightclub on the North coast: "They danced like they never

"Irish crowds are just the best crowds, in terms of their energy and open-mindedness... the Irish scene is in an incredibly healthy place — and it's only going to get better."

Or:la wears

Jacket from Song For The Mute @songforthemute

Top from Paula Canovas Del Vas @paulacanvasdelvas

Jeans from Paula Canovas Del Vas @paulacanvasdelvas

danced before. They danced to drive away evil spirits, they danced to save their souls. They danced until the darkest hour before dawn."

This tradition of finding liberation and resistance through hedonism is something that Or:la seeks to continue with her own club night, La Potion. While the night is still in its infancy — when we spoke, she'd only just put on her first night in London, and was busy planning a follow-up —

she's keen to establish it as "a space where all kinds of people can just be themselves, and where they are free to resist societally imposed labels and identities."

This spirit of rebellion is present in the diverse range of artists Or:la showcases. Headliners have included queer Israeli DJ Roi Perez, super-eclectic Dutch selector Elena Colombi, and Canadian DJ and producer Peach, a rising star in the



UK club scene who tends towards bouncy, high-energy beats. While the artists all fall broadly within electronic genres, Or:la pairs their sets with a diverse mix of live performers, including drag queens and acrobatic dancers, in a messy, vibrant celebration of queer creativity. Or:la feels strongly that queer and non-binary people should “have the opportunity to see that they can be performers, and the people behind

parties, rather than just being part of the crowd”, and notes that even the event’s mystic-themed artwork was created by queer designers. This enthusiasm is perhaps informed by her experience growing up feeling like she was “the only gay in the village” in Derry, a city historically under-served by LGBTQ+ venues and events — indeed, she has plans to bring La Potion to Derry, in a bid to bump up the number of queer parties

in the city. It’s difficult not to be struck by the immense sense of pride and protectiveness Or:la has in her Irish identity, even though growing up there clearly wasn’t the easiest experience. Besides, the Irish scene has been kind to her. She shouts out several organisations, including Skin & Blister, a collective who platform female, trans and non-binary creatives in Dublin nightlife, and Celtronica, a

team of Derry-based electronic music promoters, who Or:la credits as being one of the first parties to ever book her, and keen supporters of her from the beginning of her career.

What Ireland's underground scene perhaps lacks in scale, it makes up for in vibrancy. Irish crowds are "just the best crowds, in terms of their energy and open-mindedness", she insists, and describes the electronic music scene as generally "in an incredibly healthy place — and it's only going to get better". Or:la saw something of a homecoming happen in the summer of 2021, despite severe lockdown-related nightlife restrictions, when she played a thrilling and punchy set at Belfast's AVA Festival.

For now, though, Or:la is happy in London — and is busy working on new music. Her debut album, her first solo release since 2016's 'UK Lonely', is slated to come out in summer 2022. Like many artists, the break provided by the pandemic gave Or:la the space she needed to solely focus on creativity, rather than squeezing it in around tour dates.

"I could never have made the record while I was touring. It allowed me to live in the moment, rather than constantly planning for the future, which would just feel like headlights in the fog. To be honest, I was close to burnout before then. But I know how privileged I am, that I can take anything positive away from the pandemic."

When discussing the inspiration behind her upcoming debut album, Or:la cites Remedios Varo. A female surrealist artist active in the 1950s and '60s, Varo's work merges art and science, drawing from spiritual concepts and practises like alchemy, mysticism and the occult, as well as scientific disciplines like chemistry, hydraulics and physics.

Inspired by Varo's multidisciplinary approach to creating art, Or:la spent lockdown going deep down the rabbit hole, delving into weird corners of the internet and endless Reddit threads, in a bid to research how music "could be used to create a loop between your external surroundings and your subconscious."

From all of this enthusiastic digging around, Or:la bought a mind machine — a clunky-looking headset which uses binaural beats and flickering lights to induce different brain states in wearers, first popularised in the '60s and '70s as a form of "digital drugs" (she describes it as "like doing mushrooms without doing mushrooms.")

Or:la has ambitions to use these mind machines in her future work, and is particularly charmed by the possibilities they hold in creating

new communal music experiences; of groups of music fans listening to the same music through mind machines, "wrapped up in their own little cocoons, while accessing an experience that's personal and communal" — it's an idea which holds obvious appeal for anyone who self-identifies as an introvert.

Dream life

Another source of inspiration came from dreams. Like many of us, Or:la's dreams were unusually vivid during the pandemic, and she began paying particular attention to them in a bid to explore "the dynamic between the conscious and unconscious worlds." Many of the tracks on her upcoming album are inspired by dreams Or:la has had — she describes one unsettling recurring dream "where I have chewing gum stuck in my mouth, and I'm pulling at it and pulling at it". During our conversation about dreaming, Or:la effortlessly tosses out references to concepts like Automatism (a style of art which uses free association — it's a Freudian thing) and the collective unconscious (the idea that all humans share a common ancestral memory — it's a Jungian thing).

The result of all of this deep thought is a sound which is notably more contemplative and complex than Or:la's early tracks. While 'UK Lonely' is an exhilarating ride through the history of UK dance, the new tracks take a step away from pumping, sweaty dancefloors — which makes sense, given that most of it was made during the depths of lockdown, when clubbing was an impossibility. While there is one new track in production which can be reasonably described as a banger — combining dubby drum beats, a jagged synth line, and a 'let me hear you scream!' vocal sample — many of Or:la's new tracks hold a different kind of appeal. One demo merges soothing washes of electronic sound with a thumping, juddering backdrop, in a cinematic soundscape that wouldn't sound out of place on a science fiction soundtrack; another combines jagged fragments of synth with a nervous, frenetic drum pattern.

While much of her original music pays homage to recognisable dance music genres by melding them together, it's harder to pick out obvious musical influences in this new work — it feels slippery, futuristic and in places, genuinely unpredictable. Perhaps the only thread which connects Or:la's new music to 'UK Lonely' are the dark, dub-influenced drum patterns; reappearing on several tracks, they anchor the disparate array of sounds.

Given her interest in technology, it's perhaps no surprise that Or:la is cautiously open to the metaverse, and the potential that new technologies hold to usher in new artforms and communal experiences. "I'm interested in how the metaverse could present more inclusive environments, in terms of clubbing. It could completely eradicate the need for physical safety."

Having said that, she's sceptical about the abilities of virtual reality technology at present, and won't be planning her own virtual club nights any time soon — she reckons we're "about 10 years" off metaverse club nights rivaling IRL ones, despite what Mark Zuckerberg says. She's also open to the potential web3 holds to "transform how artists make a living" — but again, she maintains a dose of scepticism, noting that "on the other hand, these technologies perpetuate ideas of individualism, and place high levels of importance on ownership, which obviously goes against the collective ethos of raves."

There's no denying that being an artist is an increasingly tricky business these days. Diminishing revenue streams, paltry streaming pay-outs and the increasing monopolisation (and mistreatment) levied through record label contracts means that plenty of artists are seeking out escape routes from the relentless grind of touring and running down recording contracts. Artists like Or:la present a genuine alternative to the status quo, carving out niches for herself by pursuing a wide range of creative interests, and retaining a sense of curiosity and openness. This loosely-connected smorgasbord of creative activity she's hit on over the past year is all coming together to form a new stage in her career; linking a series of projects and disciplines — musical, artistic, technological — under a set of unifying themes and associations.

In this new year, we'll be seeing and hearing much more of Or:la. On 6th January, she'll be kicking off her BBC Radio 1 Dance Residency, from midnight till 1am; around her Residency shows, she'll be planning more La Potion parties and working on her debut album and exhibition. "I'm not confined to one style," she says, "but it's important that it all connects and intersects. In such a binary world, it's important to embrace the grey areas."

"I could never have made the record while I was touring. [The pandemic] allowed me to live in the moment, rather than constantly planning for the future, which would just feel like headlights in the fog. To be honest, I was close to burnout before then. But I know how privileged I am, that I can take anything positive away from the pandemic."

Orla wears:
Vest from Mona Cordes
@mona_cordes_
Trousers from Jamie Backshall
@jamie_backshall

Other Nominees

aya
Ghosty
Overmono
Scratcha DVA

Best Producer

PAWSA

When Solid Grooves co-founder PAWSA — real name David Esekhiile — fronted DJ Mag's UK cover in August this year, he spoke extensively about production, and the importance of being true to your artistic self. "This is a way to show people I'm just here expressing myself," Esekhiile said about the music he'd released, "and maybe inspire some of them along the way." After falling in love with the minimal and micro sounds of house and techno after his first trip to Ibiza in the early 2010s, Esekhiile began producing, and made his debut on Leftwing & Kody's Lost Recordings in 2014. He's since been quietly acknowledged as an architect of the UK's current tech-house sound, with releases like 'Party', 2017's 'The Groovy Cat' and 'Crazy' racking up over 30 million streams between them.

When we speak with Esekhiile about winning his award, he's just returned from the first South American tour of his career, where he played at Cocoricò in Riccione for the first time. It's been a year for firsts for the artist elsewhere, too, with this summer seeing the debut of Solid Grooves' own festival: Grooves Island. Alongside his business partner, friend and DJ/producer Michael Bibi, the likes of Loco Dice, ANOTR, Lindsey Matthews and The Martinez Brothers played across a two-day takeover in East London, providing a welcome return for the capital's dedicated Groovers.

"It feels amazing to win the award for production," he says, reflecting on his output over the last 12 months. "It also makes me more determined to work harder on my skills and keep learning and improving." This year alone, PAWSA has released 15 EPs via Solid Grooves, its sub-label RAW, and his own PAWZ imprint. PAWZ is Esekhiile's place to release music, in his own words, away from expectations. He masterfully blends pared-back, minimal beats and wonky synths — largely with signature acapellas — delivering at least one club tool each month.

Despite scooping the award, Esekhiile says the highlight of 2021 was fronting the DJ Mag cover. "It was such an honour to be approached to tell my story," he says. It's the first time the London-born artist had really stepped into the spotlight, and he gave candid insight into the tech-house scene and his attitudes toward it, breaking down his thought processes as an artist and sharing his experience of navigating fans and labels alike. "No-one is an artist that everyone wants to hear, or paints a



PHOTO: RIVA HOLLINGS

picture that everyone wants to hang in their gallery," Esekhiile said back in August. "But you find the formula that works, and you just keep innovating."

After a string of sold-out, all-night-long shows this year, at venues like Leeds' Mint Warehouse and Village Underground in London, Esekhiile is looking forward to spending Christmas at home with his friends and family. It's short lived, however, with 2022 looking set to be just as hectic

as the past 12 months. "There's a lot of touring planned!" he tells DJ Mag. "I'll continue to release new music on both PAWZ and Solid Grooves, and we're also planning a big Ibiza season and have a packed release schedule for both labels. "I'd also like to say a big thank you to DJ Mag for their support this year, my team for their hard work behind the scenes, and everyone that has supported my music over the years." **AMY FIELDING**

Other Nominees

dBridge presents Black Electric

Loraine James

Nubya Garcia

Space Afrika

Best Live Act

Overmono

Pic: ROLLO JACKSON

After the last couple of years, it feels like a triumph to even be able to vote in this category at all, and we're sure you'll agree that with the return of clubs and live music, we were all winners here. With that in mind it feels fitting, inevitable even, that DJ Mag readers should anoint the Russell brothers the kings of the communal music experience.

An Overmono set is like mainlining serotonin. The duo's brand of direct, body-moving breaks and hands-to-the-sky build-ups was tailor-made for the triumphant return, and after more than a year when the communal experience of music felt like a distant memory, the immediacy of their sets meant theirs was a name on everybody's lips.

Their time away from clubs wasn't spent idly. In fact, Truss and Tessela's collective output has reached a hitherto unmatched rate since the beginning of the pandemic. As a result, they were perfectly poised to hit the ground running.

"At first it was really overwhelming," they tell DJ Mag, "being with so many people again. We'd get off stage literally shaking. We think it's just that rush of emotion that you

don't really get from anything else, but it's the best feeling to be back playing music." As a punter, the feeling was mutual. DJ Mag can remember being at Gala Festival in South London, one of the first of a delayed season, and standing among the crowd at a domed stage. The feeling of being almost-indoors and surrounded by people was still unnerving, but amid tracks everyone had been desperate to hear out, like the all-conquering 'So U Kno', the crowd's pent-up fears seemed to evaporate into a sea of outstretched arms and incredulous grins.

'So U Kno' wasn't the only Overmono track that seemed to pierce through the collective mindset of clubbers this year. The recent 'Diamond Cut' / 'Bb' single, a pair of sample-driven, UKG-indebted weapons, is another tour de force, while their remix of For Those I Love's 'I Have A Love', with its anthemic shades of The Streets' 'Weak Become Heroes' or even 'Born Slippy', was tailor-made for affirming tears on the dancefloor. The image of the pair playing the latter, backed with the words 'AND IT NEVER FADES' at London's Village Underground will live long in the memory of anyone in attendance.

Technically, their live shows reached a new zenith this year too. Where in the past they would tweak their process after every gig, they've now settled into a more consistent groove. The result of which allows for a greater sense of controlled chaos.

"It's important to make sure there's always stuff that can go wrong," they say. "You want it to feel like the wheels could fall off at any minute, but you manage to keep them on. If one of us is wrangling a drum machine that's trying to go out of time and we manage to keep it in and drop the kick at the right time, you can be sure we'll be buzzing." That energy is key to the unspoken communication between artist and audience at the heart of what makes live music so special.

Ultimately, at a time when the joy and catharsis that comes from sharing moments on a dancefloor were so keenly felt, Overmono managed to tap into the essence of what makes those moments happen. With a BBC Essential Mix in the bag and a mammoth show at York Hall Leisure Centre set to pop off once again in the new year, you can bet they will continue to send hands skyward and spread grins across dancefloors. **THEO KOTZ**

Other Nominees

PACH
Sheba Q
Tailor Jae
TSHA

Best Breakthrough DJ Yung Singh



"Completed the DJ Mag prophecy, didn't I?" Yung Singh cheekily says.

A year after being described as 'one to watch' by this publication, it felt inevitable the London-based artist would deservedly win Breakthrough DJ. There have been few artists whose rise has been as stratospheric as his: whether it was his set at Fabric, Dialled In, the viral Boiler Room clips or the educational Instagram posts, Yung Singh has built himself up as more than just a DJ; he's truly carving a path of his own.

Earlier this year, the seeds of success were planted. During the Daytimers 24/7 live stream in support of the farmer's protest in India, Yung Singh used his set to enlighten and inform viewers: he played footage from the protest alongside inspirational speeches and music relevant to the protest. It felt like a taste of what was to come.

On 5th August, Yung Singh curated a Boiler Room night with the energy ferocious, the excitement palpable: a wall of Sikh individuals mashed behind him, forcing constant reloads while Yung Singh, again, used the opportunity to educate audiences around the world on British South Asian culture, playing tracks which

spanned genres and generations. "I think Boiler Room was the right place at the right time," he says. "It was the first time our community was able to come together after lockdown finished, so that energy was special and had been bubbling for a while," he says. "What Boiler Room did was stick a camera in the middle of it and stream it to the largest dance music platform and capture those moments." The clips from that show went viral leading to his now iconic, history-making set at Dialled In festival, which felt like one of those truly special 'you had to be there' moments. "I wasn't very happy with my Boiler Room performance," he admits. "It was really messy and I wanted to prove, to myself, if no one else, that I was a good DJ. At Dialled In I brought to life so many ideas I had fermenting in my head for years, crossing across genres, bpm's and cultures in a way you don't really see that often."

A month later, the DJ and producer curated another night, this time at iconic London venue Fabric, involving members like DJ Ritu of the original Daytimers crew. "No one has ever seen Fabric like that," he says, "all because of a line-up I helped curate, which involved me bringing an Asian and UK underground legend back into the spotlight."

All the while, Yung Singh has had a full-

time career he's studying for, dabbling in side-projects while also executive producing a documentary showcasing the birth of the Punjabi garage movement. "What I like doing most is telling stories and platforming stuff I find interesting," he says. "The medium/format of how that manifests knows no bounds. The fact that it has been received so positively, so widely, means that we have begun to reclaim the narratives that have been imposed on us and fight back against us being written out of history."

Despite the year he's had, Yung Singh wants to share the spotlight: he wants to pass it around, especially to his boundary-breaking Daytimers crew. "Everyone else is now coming to terms with the fact that we represent a community, rather than being a collective of individuals," he says. "I'm really proud and feel privileged we hold such an important position in our communities and within dance music too. Making sure we live up to that responsibility is tough work but all so worth it." On this trajectory, Yung Singh is due to take over the world. Though he's hush about upcoming projects and plans for next year, if 2021 is anything to go by, it's bound to be special. **DHRUVA BALRAM**

Other Nominees

96 Back

A.G

ELKKA

Kessler

Breakthrough Producer
Samurai Breaks

Bombastic kick-drums, rippling breakbeats, sugar-rush rave samples and guttural wobbs — these are the ecstatic sounds of Samurai Breaks. As indebted to footwork as it is hardcore and bassline, his is a style best described by the name of his newly founded label Super Sonic Booty Bangers or, if you like, the title of his Hooversound debut, 'Turbo Rave Artillery'.

In the year when our long-awaited return to raving finally arrived, it's little wonder that Samurai Breaks' music resonated so much with the public as to earn him the Best Of British Breakthrough Producer trophy. But when we dial up the Leeds-based artist, he admits he almost thought it was an April Fools joke.

"I felt like I was slacking," he says of how he rates his 2021. From an outside perspective, it's quite the contrary; alongside the aforementioned release for SHERELLE and NAINA's label and opening EP of his SSBB imprint, he also dropped a five-track collab with Origin on Trax Haven and, most recently, scored his first vinyl release with a two-tracker for Racked Records. But, he says, there should have been even more — like the follow-up to his wildly exuberant 2020 album 'Acid Puma Racing Stripes' for Off Me Nut, along with several other EPs.

"I've always given music 110% because I believed I could do something with it and have a life from it, but then lockdown hit just as I felt like I was about to break through," he explains. "So, in my mind, 2020 was gonna be the year I was gonna break through, and then all that hit and I couldn't keep on giving it as much as I was 'cause I'd burnt myself out wanting to make it."

With no gigs and no furlough pay, Samurai Breaks — real name: Sam — had to find work elsewhere and wasn't able to focus on music as he once had. Thankfully, with the end of lockdown this year that focus has returned, as has his ability to test out tunes on proper rigs. "It's really been a boost for me coming out of lockdown to be so busy, and then to get this award has been the icing on the cake," he says. "I couldn't believe it."

Speaking about his hyperspeed, hybridised sound palette, Sam explains how years spent playing multi-genre events have helped him hone in on what makes a dancefloor tick. "I've spent a lot of time trying to work out how to kind of trick people into dancing to things they wouldn't normally dance to, like interesting bootlegs or referencing other types of music," he says. "Like you can reference grime sounds in a jungle tune or a footwork tune in a way that tickles people's ears. It's



about using clichés in a lot of ways — that take you back to a place or inspire an emotion in you, but then play with them in a way that people don't expect."

It's all about striking a balance between minimalism and maximalism, he continues — pairing a simple, catchy element like a recognisable vocal with cluster-bomb drum edits, or slamming a 4/4 kick down amid bonkers synth lines.

Having fun is a top priority, while maintaining a high standard of production. "I don't really take myself too seriously. I really care about what I do but I like having a party, I like being daft," he says, adding that it's a quality that he's found in abundance among the Off Me Nut crew. It's also one of the reasons Sam couldn't believe he'd won a Best Of British award. "My sound is so tongue in cheek and silly; it's not as sophisticated as what some people make," he says. "I feel my music is more like having a laugh. I've just been

doing my thing and it's nice to see that's been appreciated. I guess out of the back of lockdown that's what people want — people don't want serious stuff, they wanna have a laugh."

Moving forward, Super Sonic Booty Bangers is Sam's main focus; the second release comes from label partner D'TCH and there are forthcoming drops from ERAM, Lakeway and more. Sam hopes to foster a family vibe among label artists, and he and D'TCH have already begun taking the show on the road. On the production front, he's got another vinyl release coming in 2022 (this time with occasional collaborator Arcane), along with the promised second Off Me Nut album. Though the pandemic put it on hold, it's safe to say Samurai Breaks has well and truly broken through, and now the sky's the limit. **BEN HINDLE**

Other Nominees

Giggs
Pa Salieu
Shaybo
Tion Wayne

Best MC/Vocalist

Little Simz

Critical acclaim isn't something that Islington-born multi-hyphenate Little Simz is unfamiliar with. An extended run of excellent, forward-thinking mixtapes and EPs between 2010-15 built her reputation as a bewildering rap technician, able to stir narrative-driven verses into a melting pot of diverse Black sounds, from dubstep to jazz and neo-soul. Her conceptual debut album 'A Curious Tale Of Trials + Persons' boiled down those experimental sounds into something dark and defiant. Her third studio album 'Grey Area' landed in 2019, winning Best Album at the Ivor Novello Awards and earning a prestigious Mercury Prize nomination. She'd already earned big ups from A\$AP Rocky, J. Cole and Kendrick Lamar, and toured with icons Lauryn Hill and Nas. Rap heads this side of the Atlantic knew she was comfortably in the pound-for-pound reckoning for our best MC, but the project elevated her status amongst more casual listeners, confirming what many of us already knew.

With the arrival of 'Sometimes I Might Be Introvert', released in September, Simz put the pound-for-pound conversation to bed in glorious fashion and bloomed into a fully-fledged British icon in the process. The deeply personal 19-track project has that golden 'this will bang forever' feel that only the truly great albums made by great artists have. She told Nana Baah in Noisey's August cover story that while recording 'SIMBI' she listened only to the classics, from Biggie to Nina Simone: "I was studying why people connected with these artists — why is their music so timeless? I want to make a staple album. I want you listening in 10 years and you're like, 'Rah, remember when that came out and what that done?'"

Sonically, the album draws on everything from luxurious orchestral grandeur to crunching grime and swinging, vibrant Afrobeats. Thematically, it's as introspective and soul-baring as it gets. But at its core is Simz's peerless ability as an MC. She's like an alchemist, transmuting her delivery and the production into precious gold. She bends and shapes her flow from the blissed-out and mellow ('Two Worlds Apart', 'I See You') to charged up, scattergun ('Rollin Stone', 'Speed'). And she does this without ever losing her identity. Simz's tone, be it a whisper or a war cry, is distinctive and instantly recognisable; that's the sign of an MC at the peak of their powers.

When asked how good she thinks she is, she told David Smyth in the Evening Standard: "I think I'm amazing. Honestly,



respectfully, I think I'm very, very talented. I know I am. But I also wanted to pose the question: why is legacy important? I want to be a legend, but sometimes I don't know why." It's something Simz will

need to continue to interrogate, because at the age of 27 and after a standout year, she is most definitely a legend. **ROB KAZANDJIAN**

Other Nominees

ATO
DoRoad
ENNY
KAM-BU



Pic: JOSH CROLL

Breakthrough MC/Vocalist

Nova

Shaheeda Sinckler, known better by her astronomical alias Nova, religiously gets her nails done because they remind her of her similarly otherworldly achievements as an artist: “I’ve been looking at my nails, and they’re a symbol of me no longer having to work in a bar after winning these awards,” she says. Though the awards show sadly succumbed to Covid, her plan was to collect her award for Breakthrough MC/Vocalist for 2021 wearing a lilac two-piece from Bazaare Worldwide sourced from her friend’s Glasgow-based concept store, Lunch, and her nails would have had black tips. Because, now, she’s not wiping glasses and carrying plates: Nova is shifting Scotland’s hip-hop scene into a whole new gear. Every win for her is a win for her city.

Before winning the Scottish Album of the Year in 2020 with her debut record ‘Re-Up’, the 25-year-old rapper and vocalist was one of Glasgow’s best-kept secrets, clocking in only 300 monthly Spotify listeners. Her sound taps into Glasgow’s underground scene and its nocturnal pulse, wrapping the likes of grime, jungle, garage and d&b around her little finger. Her repertoire is strong, blending chameleon-like into the raves, club-nights and parties of her city, and as a self-made artist with organic instinct, her success is both natural and entirely her own.

The successor to ‘Re-Up’ was this year’s EP ‘WWND?’, a body of work executed with a whole new level of confidence. With her piano-infused trap hit ‘Get Bands’, which features heavyweight bass drops that aim straight for your gut, and the silky, Afrobeats-driven track ‘Grind’ primed to drop in the club, it’s her most accomplished work to date. No wonder, then, that Nova made winning the award of Breakthrough

MC/Vocalist seem like light work.

With her career escalating in momentum, does Nova feel like she is, in fact, breaking through? “I keep seeing these memes where it’s like, ‘Remember how you used to pray for what you have now?’ — it’s kind of like that,” she says. “I’ve earned a good lifestyle: I work on music pretty much every day, and I’ve got a home studio, but there’s still a long way to go.” For a start, she’d like to begin sharing her lengthy back-catalogue of tracks that could easily build into albums.

Nova has always had to fight for a seat at the table. “It has its challenges,” she says. “When I first started out, I was in Glasgow, trying to get beats and understand how to make music — it was really hard, but I pushed through a lot. Being a woman, if you’re successful, there are people out there who won’t like it, particularly in the rap scene.” She remembers a double-edged compliment that her music was “challenging”, and it still sticks in her throat. It shouldn’t be such a bitter pill to swallow, she feels, when her sound is so intrinsic to the inner-city experience. Now, more than ever, Nova feels emboldened to navigate uncharted territory in her music. With a dedicated recording space in her flat and the ability to perform once again, ideas and new material are coming to life at warp speed. As we speak, she’s about to drop a music video for a freestyle remix of ‘Commitment Issues’, rounding off 2021’s victory lap by collecting her award. And as for success? She’s already got it: “I just want to gain attention organically for the work that I put out there. I want people to be interested in who I am and what I’ve got to say. Success, to me, is being comfortable, making the music I love with the artist I admire, and to always be learning and growing.”

SOPHIE WALKER

Other Nominees

AKO Beatz
Hyperdub
Rekids
Scuffed Recordings

Best Label

Rhythm Section International

Now more than a decade old as a party, and seven deep as a label, it's hard to imagine the landscape of London music without Rhythm

Section International. The Peckham-based crew have been instrumental in breaking several of London's current crop of jazz-indebted luminaries like Al Dobson Jr. or Vels Trio, not to mention wigged-out house from the likes of Chaos In The CBD, Pinty or FYI Chris, while the dances themselves helped springboard the careers of Jayda G and Pender Street Steppers.

Though locally focused in its infancy, that 'International' has always adorned the label's name, and these days it sits a little more easily in Rhythm Section's makeup. This year the label has released artists from Ecuador, Minneapolis, Chile-via-Milan and Australia — and a fair few more from the UK — while label manager Emily Hill has relocated to Berlin.

This year has seen Hill take on an even more active A&R role along with label founder Bradley Zero, and the fact can't be overstressed given what a stellar year Rhythm Section International has had. Speaking to us via email, she shouts out the Nicola Cruz release, 'Subtropique' — a stepping, rhythmic EP drawing on deep house and EBM — as a personal highlight. The tracks were written with Rhythm Section in mind, and she explains how "the outpouring of support from our growing international community has been a blessing. It's allowed me to go full-time and to expand the team, which ultimately offers different musical perspectives across the board as well as different creative viewpoints."

This expanding musical palette has been a hallmark of a landmark year for the label, one in which the largely part-time team has released an impressive 11 projects. These range from the crackling, psychedelic beats of MMYKK, who wrote 'Science' amid the bubbling turmoil of his home city of Minneapolis after last year's world-changing events, to the sultry bedroom soul of Jerome Thomas' 'That Secret Sauce', as well as returns to the label from Prequel, 30/70 and Vels Trio.

Another standout is Cousin Kula's 'Double Dinners', an expansive take on jazz-flecked, psychedelic indie that has earned admirers in the likes of BADBADNOTGOOD. Bradley Zero first heard the group on radio and it speaks to the label's entrenched community spirit that Zero himself travelled to Bristol to help shoot videos for the group.

Community is a term often thrown around in music but it's a difficult trick to pull off. One way in which Rhythm Section stand out in this regard is their continued commitment to releasing sample packs at reasonable rates. This year both Z Lovecraft and Contours contributed a treasure trove of sounds that



serves to demystify production and dish out the tools for nascent artists to try their hands with.

Hill even credits the pandemic with "actually broadening our ability to connect with people on the opposite side of the world". With everyone so used to connecting digitally, it stands to reason that geographical boundaries start to blur.

Perhaps the most recognisable result of this has been the second iteration of Rhythm Section International's 'SHOUTS' series. This year's compilation stands as the closest thing to an encapsulation of the label's modus operandi to date, not to mention their refreshed love of dancefloor music.

Find among its tracks meditative spoken word

(James Massiah), stripped astral steppers (Lilizu, Dylan Bryne), textured rhythmic flexing (Nídia, Mafo), jazz to warm the soul (Retromigration & Cem Mo, cktrl) and weapons-grade, peak-time slammers (Yusha, Adam Pits). That's some range.

With trips to SXSW, new dances in Berlin and a programme of workshops and courses for emerging QIPOC artists all on the horizon for 2022, not to mention new music Hill promises everyone should get excited about, it feels as though Rhythm Section is settling into a new level of maturity for the future. For now, DJ Mag readers have deservedly banged the drum for a true British institution. **THEO KOTZ**

Other Nominees

10 PILLS MATE
Cheeky Music Group
DNO Records
Pressure Dome

Breakthrough Label

Future Retro London



Tim Reaper's star has been rising for over a decade. In junglist circles, he's moved past being the exciting new kid on the block to establish himself as a figurehead of the modern scene — his prolific output of unforgiving breakbeat choppage unmatched by any of his peers. But over the past couple of years, he's also broken out into the wider electronic music underground, helping to bring about the jungle takeover that's now in full effect. In 2020, Tim (real name: Ed) decided to take a more active role in propelling the jungle scene forward. In June last year, he was due to hold the first Future Retro club event — an official testing ground for artists pushing the sound to new heights. Of course, the pandemic put paid to that idea — temporarily, at least — so Tim pivoted to a plan that's now scored him a nice shiny Breakthrough Label gong for his mantelpiece.

Future Retro London, as it's now known, launched in July 2020 with a unique idea dubbed 'Meeting Of The Minds'; each release was a four-track EP on which Tim collaborated with four (or more) different artists. "I had an idea during the first lockdown about a collaborative release where I work with a lot of the producers in the jungle scene that I liked, but I couldn't really think of a label that I knew or worked

with closely enough that would give me as much creative control as I needed to make it happen the way I wanted it," he recalls. "Every tune on 'Meeting Of The Minds' was made with the series in mind, after the idea was conceived in lockdown. I wanted all the tunes to be as fresh as possible for their release, nothing that had been sat around unsigned for months or years." The results have been some of the most essential releases of the past 18 months. The eight volumes to date pack in rowdy jungle tekno stompage, hellfire Amens, gleaming cosmic rollers and more, with Reaper pulling in old skool icons like Harmony, modern day heroes such as Sully and Coco Bryce, and rising names like Eusebeia and DJ Sofa.

The label has recently branched out too, with the first non-series release 'FR001' and label collabs with Equinox's Scientific Wax and the experimental Circadian Rhythms imprint. All three feature multiple artists and/or remixes, continuing the collaborative spirit that's driven Future Retro since the start. "I like the varying processes of collaboration that take place with all the producers I work with, they all seem to differ in how they do it, in how much back and forth there is and so on. On top of that, I like the interesting end results that come from the compromises made between me and others involved,

and the synergy that comes out of such a project," explains Tim. "I also feel like Future Retro London has to be a brand that represents a wide amount of people involved in the jungle scene, because there's so much talent out there to be showcased. I'd find it impossible to represent everything I like about jungle with just a select amount of producers." A quick tally shows that Future Retro London now boasts a roster of 36 artists, including Tim himself — not bad for a label that's not even reached its second birthday.

So far, each release has arrived as a double — or most recently, triple — drop too, which Reaper explains is designed to help fans save on shipping costs. He carries on to reveal there are eight main label releases lined up already for 2022, along with the next two editions of 'Meeting Of The Minds' and more label collabs. "A lot is in the pipeline which I'm looking forward to and can't wait to share with everyone!"

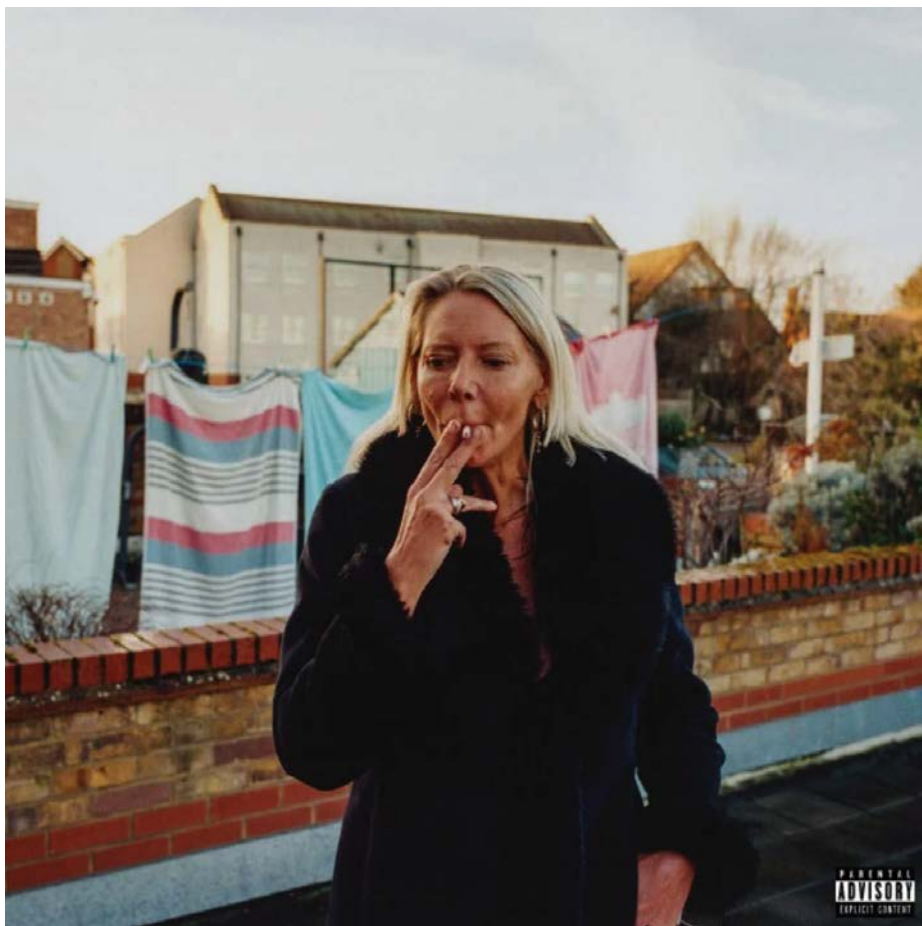
And what does he make of his Best Of British win? "It feels very surprising," he says. "I honestly never thought that I'd have an actual chance of winning it considering the other nominees and where jungle fits in the grand scheme of the music ecosystem, but I'm very grateful to all the people that voted to make it happen!" **BEN HINDLE**

Other Nominees

Dusky 'JOY' [17 Steps]
 Loraine James 'Reflection' [Hyperdub]
 Space Afrika 'Honest Labour' [Dais Records]
 The Bug 'Fire' [Ninja Tune]

Best Album

Joy Orbison 'still slipping vol. 1' [XL]



Released back in August, 'still slipping vol. 1' was a very welcome surprise — the long-form Joy Orbison collection we never knew we needed. With a back-catalogue boasting many classic tunes, from 'Hyph Mngo' to 'Sicko Cell' to 'Ellipsis', plus plenty of more experimental EPs, such as '81b' on Hinge Finger, the one thing Joy Orbison had never given us was an album.

Coming 12 years after his debut single, 'still slipping vol. 1' is musically wide ranging, from the trap/half-time beats of 'bernard?', to the deep vocal house of 'better', 'layer 6's aquatic drum & bass, and the smoked-out ambient rap of 'playground'. It feels like an amalgamation of all the sounds and styles he's into and, stitched together with voicemails and recordings of family members, it has an intimate touch. As such, Joy Orbison (real name: Peter O'Grady) bills it as a mixtape rather than an album.

"I'm not a massive fan of electronic albums, I'm not sure I could name more than five that I love, so I guess the idea of an album doesn't really excite me at the moment," says Joy Orbison. "The concept of 'still slipping' existed before a lot of the

music too, and I'm not sure it would have really made sense if I'd treated it like an album. In my head, a mixtape is a more personal and hopefully a less grandiose thing, too, which hopefully can put the listener in the right mindset when they're listening."

Joy O has used voice recordings in his work before, but during lockdown, he hit upon the idea of incorporating them into 'still slipping' as a way to give his music a more human element. "I'm really influenced by people, and I want my music to feel relatable," he says. "I feel like the voice does that, it locates it and lets you into my world, something I wasn't always that comfortable with at the start of my career. Lockdown obviously played a big part too; I was alone for pretty much all of that time, and this was more or less the only contact with my family. A mate said to me recently that the voice notes are basically the 'hooks' of the record — I liked that." Though it has a share of uptempo tracks, 'still slipping' caters less for the club and more for headphones, the home or car. Working across an expansive canvas, it allowed Joy O the freedom to further explore the styles he's only touched on

with previous EPs.

"I've always made quite a random mix of stuff, and squeezed them into EPs or crept things out under pseudonyms," he says. "A lot of the music on the record existed in some form before lockdown, but I guess I may have been drawn to the less obviously 'dancefloor' bits for this tape. The initial concept was a bit less rigid than a general dance 12, so it was always going to be quite varied, style-wise. I also had this realisation a few years back that I don't really have a body of work that can soundtrack a bus ride or car journey. Hopefully now I've dealt with that oversight."

He's thrilled to win the Best Album accolade, especially since the mixtape was such a personal expression. "It's a real honour and quite a shock," says Joy Orbison. "My manager said to me the other day, 'You seemed quite emotionally drained after the album came out', and in a (slightly pathetic) way, that was true. I really tried to put a lot of myself into this mixtape, so to see that it has connected in this way truly means a lot to me. Thank you." **BEN MURPHY**

Other Nominees

Another Chemical Love Story 'Do You Feel Like I Do?' [Self-released]

Anz 'You Could Be feat. George Riley' [Ninja Tune]

Jubei & dBridge 'Show Me' [Carbon Music]

Overmono 'So U Kno' [Poly Kicks]

Best Track

Ewan McVicar 'Tell Me Something Good'

[Ministry Of Sound/Trick]

In a post on social media, Ayrshire's Ewan McVicar had previously said that 'Tell Me Something Good' — the Chaka Khan-sampling, feel-good anthem released via Ministry of Sound and Patrick Topping's Trick — was just meant to be an edit to fill gaps in his set, or as he puts it, "Pick things up in the party". "I'm so appreciative of winning this award, what the tune has done for people — I have fans now!" he laughs down the phone. Although he's been DJing and running parties for almost a decade, 'TMSG' catapulted McVicar into the spotlight in a way he couldn't have imagined. In the first week in December it was in its fourth week in the UK's official Top 40 — peaking at no. 15 — and McVicar is still processing the success when we speak. "Being in the charts... it's just something that's happened, and I'm running with it," he says. "But there's no pressure on me to be in the charts again, because for me, it's just about making music that I love. Otherwise, what am I doing it for?"

Despite the overwhelming success of 'TMSG', you'd be hard pressed to find an artist as grounded and determined as McVicar. Although 'TMSG' has pulled in the most numbers, McVicar has released 19 tracks this year via Nervous Records, Trick, Shall Not Fade, Unknown To The Unknown, and KooKoo, and remixed tracks for Amen, Mura and Big Miz. His touring schedule is stacked, too, with weekends packed with back-to-back performances, but still McVicar remains upbeat, ever-smiling and positive, thriving in the chaos of clubs, parties and good times. As a selector, McVicar is crowd-focused. He picks up on the shifts in energy, carefully structuring sets that allow him to play his own selections and tracks he'd always imagined in the club, while remaining aligned with the dancefloor's energy. He recently played the first night of his residency at Glasgow's Sub Club, and for McVicar, it was when everything really came full circle. In his formative years, he would work the cash-desk until midnight, before doing "research" — watching the likes of George Fitzgerald, Optimo and Jasper James work the room, all while sober. "See, just learning off those folk is more valuable than anything I've ever done," he says, "and it paid off." "When I got in there for the gig... my god," he exclaims. "I was just pulling tunes out my arse, hugging everybody, playing records I'd always imagined playing in Subby. I hit the cue button with my elbow, and I'm gonna upload the mix, but fuck it we're human. I played 'Heather Park',



a tune of mine that's not out yet, and just burst out crying. It was unbelievable."

Looking to the future, keeping the balance and remaining grounded are key for McVicar. He's well aware of the two worlds he's currently straddled between. On one side, there's chart success, a slew of radio plays and high-profile interviews, and on the other, there's playing to a sweaty Sub Club, pumping out acid house and his own productions to festival crowds and dedicated dancefloors. "I've released two EPs and one single since 'TMSG'," McVicar says, "but people are still asking me

when my next music is out, because the commercial crossover is there.

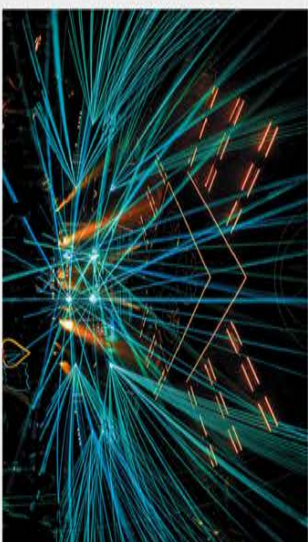
"I want folk to see what else I can do. I've got tracks that I think are better than 'TMSG' — it's always the tunes you don't expect to do well that blow up. It's so far removed from the underground scene and where I see myself, but I think because I can, and try to, connect with people, and I'm emotional and open, that people will stick with me. My fans are so supportive. "And see... as long as I keep making bangers... I don't really think anyone gives a fuck." **AMY FIELDING**

SPACE PLUS x GUANGZHOU

SPACE PLUS GUANGZHOU seamlessly integrates electronic music culture with industrial site-ampunk design, creating an immersive multidimensional entertainment location.

Covering a total area of over 5,000 square meters, boasting a ceiling height of 14 meters, and a total capacity of over 1,500 people, Space Plus Guangzhou is an aesthetic wander of industrial design. The entire space is filled with an entanglement of futuristic space technology and industrial steam-punk elements, seamlessly cooperating with the state-of-the-art Funktion One sound system to create a unique and immersive nightlife experience.

The crowd at Space Plus Guangzhou exists somewhere between fantasy and reality, interacting with hundreds of mesmerizing visual effects, breathtaking mechanical contraptions and dynamic scene changes, entrancing them in to a dreamlike state where imagination runs free, and anything is possible. As an integral part of the experience, each night is carefully curated by a group of talented artists, and so far, the club hosted various local and international acts, amplifying local electronic music scene and developing new talent.



INDUSTRIAL AESTHETIC OF THE MODERN ENTERTAINMENT ERA

Considered a perpetual work in progress, the team behind Space Plus Guangzhou continues to evolve, refine its ideas, improve the technology, and cooperate with world's leading audio-visual artists on its never-ending journey. This voyage through the multiverse of music has no final destination, and experience we gain along the way will shape the ideas of the future. The saga of entertainment has no final verse and its pages are not numbered. We will close our eyes and rearrange them, each time creating a dream you can be a part of.



Cultural, artistic, and spiritual
Immersive audio-visual experience
For your mind, your body, and your soul

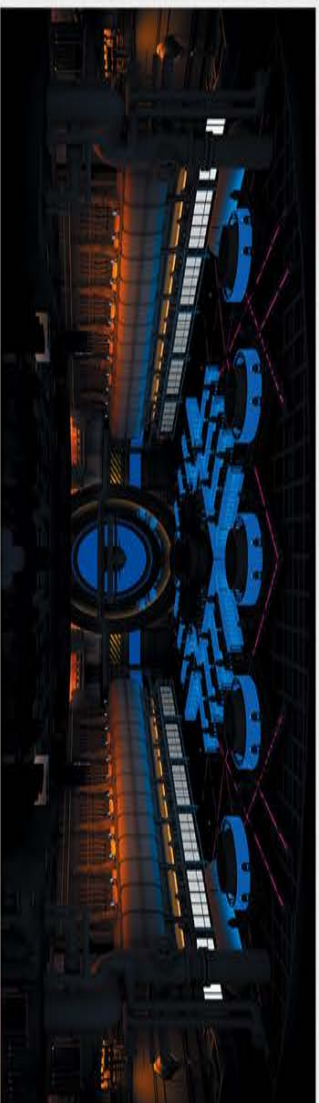
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SPACE PLUS GUANGZHOU
2021

TOP 100 CLUBS #22

As the world started to bulk under the pressure of the pandemic, live music industry took the brunt of the blow. There are many challenges to face while operating in an unpredictable environment, and SPACE PLUS GUANGZHOU managed to face them all without flinching. Relying on the ingenuity of the local electronic music landscape, and the creative support of its international partners it created a sustainable ecosystem which continued to thrive in the toughest of times. The unrelentless work of the team behind SPACE PLUS was rewarded with a historically high rank in the DJ Mag's top 100 club list, it polled at number 22 and set a new standard for the Chinese nightclub scene.



THE NEW BENCHMARK FOR CHINA'S ELECTRONIC MUSIC SCENE

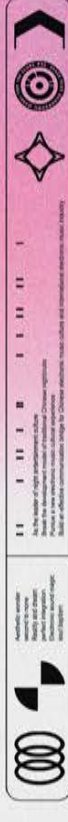
W W . S P A C E P L U S . C L U B



SPACE PLUS GUANGZHOU is located in a newly developed Global Business District. The surrounding area has a strong cultural background, and is designed to preserve the unique aspects of the local experience. The merger of local lifestyle with the modern outlook has successfully created a new landmark location in Guangzhou's thriving nightlife.



As traditional rules keep get broken, the pioneers of the industry keep changing the electronic music landscape forming trends that will shape the future of music. Their determination to innovate and excel produced groundbreaking cooperations with some of the leading names in audio-visual design. With a clear goal of enriching the culture and enhancing the prosperity of the region, SPACE PLUS GUANGZHOU is the epitome of entertainment spirit: MADE IN CHINA, shared with the world.



#22 → 2021

TOP 100 CLUBS



Other Nominees

Bree Runway 'ATM (feat. Missy Elliott)' [EMI]
 Knucks 'Los Pollos Hermanos' [NODAYSOFF CC LIMITED]
 Kwengface x PS Hitsquad 'Petrol Station' [Self-released]
 Meekz 'Respect The Come Up' [Neighbourhood Recordings]

Best Rap Track

ENNY 'Peng Black Girls (feat. Amia Brave)' [FAMM]



Speaking to DJ Mag over a shaky Zoom connection, ENNY, born Enitan Adepitan, is in the hair salon getting ready for the MOBOs, where she would take to the stage with rising R&B star Bellah singing Amia Brave's parts. Softly spoken, at the other end of the line the South Londoner is measured with her words, taking care to express each thought with precision. That's hardly surprising, of course: her first official single (an earlier video uploaded only to Instagram has since been lost to the mists of the internet) 'He's Not Into You' presented a quietly self-assured South Londoner with absolute poise. With 'Peng Black Girls', however, she flourished. The rhymer's instincts, sharpened from years writing poetry as a teen, were even more pronounced, effortlessly skipping between internal rhymes and rhyming couplets, switching up her flow at a moment's notice. Much of her lyrical dexterity comes from an early introduction to grime and garage. "I think the first project I really listened to when I was in primary school was Dizzee Rascal's 'Boy In Da Corner'," she explains. "My brother had that, and this was back when you could only listen to one CD at a time and I would listen to the whole thing!" That grimey influence, she adds,

is something we may hear even more of in the future. "Even now," she adds, "the cadence of how I rap is very grime-inspired and finding those pockets in rap. That's why it's so different, because it's a kind of grime flow cadence but mixed with hip-hop and soul beats. But yeah, the grime foundation's always there."

It's not just the playful wit and choppy flows of Channel U-era grime that coarse through her music — it's also the storytelling. One of the most important and defining elements of ENNY's music is the playground folklore absorbed while growing up in South London. It's something that also informed her essay accompanying the recently published Keisha The Sket, a legendary piece of London literature originally written on short-lived social media platform pic.zo and passed around via Bluetooth. In that essay she talks about the treasured school moments that can lose their significance with age if we're not careful. She talks about catching the later bus home to maximise her post-school chill time with her friends (but not so late that her mother catches her), about the importance of hair for Black women, and how identities are forged in the few places not policed by school uniform policies. It's

the same on the EP, too, gathering oral histories, preserving them and sharing them, but with the playful charm of school friends chatting.

The first lockdown hit in March 2020, a couple of months before 'He's Not Into You' dropped and many months before 'Peng Black Girls', so for most of her ascent she's only been able to reach fans virtually. But with 'Peng Black Girls', a much stronger connection was forged. She joked on Twitter that "If live shows have shown me anything... white men sing 'Peng Black Girls' from their core", but the truth is its message of taking pride in Black features — whatever your skin tone, body shape or hair type ("Permed tings, braids, got mini Afros") and regardless of white Western beauty standards — has had an impact for Black women that will last far beyond the usual viral lifespan. It's those very same Black women that ENNY hopes to inspire. "I just want to be doing the best I can and be the greatest representation of myself," she says. "I want to be someone that the younger version of myself can look at and see that they can do that. That's the most important thing for me, because a lot of times people can't be what they can't see." **JAMES KEITH**

Other Nominees

Abra Cadabra 'Product Of My Environment' [Self-released]

Blanco 'City Of God' [Polydor]

Bugzy Malone 'The Resurrection' [B Somebody]

Digga D 'Made In The Pyrex' [CGM Records]

Best Rap Album/Mixtape

Ghetts 'Conflict Of Interest' [Warner]

Lately, a discussion's been sweeping the timeline. Understandably, artists and labels have been growing increasingly frustrated with the short lifespan a release has once it's been put out into the world. The 24-hour news cycle mixed with the immediacy of streaming are largely to blame, but there are still albums that buck that trend — and Ghetts' 'Conflict Of Interest' is a prime example. Released back in February 2021, the album is still one of the most talked-about releases of the last 12 months and has been cleaning up at awards shows.

So what makes this album unique? Ghetts has always been set apart from the crowd, but with time that's become more and more of a priority. "I just wanted the next chapter to be very different," he says. "I wanted to say something that people might not be saying and use soundscapes that people are not using, to give it a real identity. I also wanted to be as truthful as I possibly could. I was just at a stage in my life where I was cool with showing vulnerability."

Did Ghetts expect it to connect so well with audiences? "Without sounding cocky... Yeah, I did. We put a lot of time into it. So I would have been hurt if it didn't connect, because I wasn't cutting any corners at all. Not one. From mixes to using live instruments to the subtle changes we made to 'Mozambique'. Normally, when a single's out for that long and you get the album, you just skip it. I didn't want people to do that, so I came up with a way that they wouldn't do that. Like I said, we didn't cut any corners."

Ghetts explains that he called the album 'Conflict Of Interest' because he considers himself a naturally conflicted person. Paradoxically, he actually sounds more at peace than ever before. "It's the first time I've actually gotten Ghetto, Ghetts and Justin to work in harmony," he explains. What's changed is he's better at dealing with it, or as he puts it, "understanding and not being ashamed of the past, but to embrace it and use it to better myself. That was one of the main ingredients."

'Conflict Of Interest' also feels like a passing of the torch. Newer MCs and rappers like Jaykae and Dave feature prominently, but the crux of the cross-generational meet-up comes on 'No Mercy' with Pa Salieu and BackRoad Gee, two artists who probably come closest of the new generation to being Ghetts' spiritual successors. Does that make him an elder statesman? "I don't feel like one," he laughs, "but maybe I am. To be honest, I get along better with the younger generation than I did — or



Pic: ADAMA JALLON

do — with my own generation, especially Pa and BackRoad. I really like their music, and I like them more as individuals. They deserve the world of success."

It's no fluke that 'Conflict Of Interest' has been so universally celebrated. Its continued success has stretched far beyond the usual lifespan of releases, but few could have predicted the impact of that moment. It was the apex of a crescendo that had been building for at least a year — arguably for a lot longer.

Since the orchestral drama of lead single 'Mozambique' first rang out, he released a string of high-profile collaborations with Skepta, Stormzy, BackRoad Gee and Pa Salieu, drove a tank through central London, and clinched No.2 in the album charts. But to play ringleader at The Roundhouse, with Kano, Giggs, Stormzy, Emeli Sandé, Jaykae, Shakka and more at his invitation... it was a moment that Justin Clarke has been owed for nearly 20 years.

JAMES KEITH

Best Compilation

Special Request 'DJ-Kicks' [!K7]

"I've wanted to contribute to 'DJ-Kicks' since 1996 and discussed it with Will Saul and !K7 for a good seven years before it transpired!"

Long-time producer and DJ soldier Paul Woolford is clearly enthused about winning this year's Best Compilation gong, especially with a project that means so much to him: "I LOVE Claude Young's instalment of 'DJ-Kicks', plus Carl Craig and Moodymann's mixes, they're all belters packed full of inspiration."

Ever since its mid-'90s inception, the 'DJ-Kicks' series has been the standard for other mixtapes to aspire to. And this year, Paul Woolford in his Special Request guise stepped up and delivered a superb mix that demonstrated his two-decades-plus experience behind the decks. "I wanted it to be something of a world in itself," says Woolford, "something that could stand up almost as an artist album on its own merits."

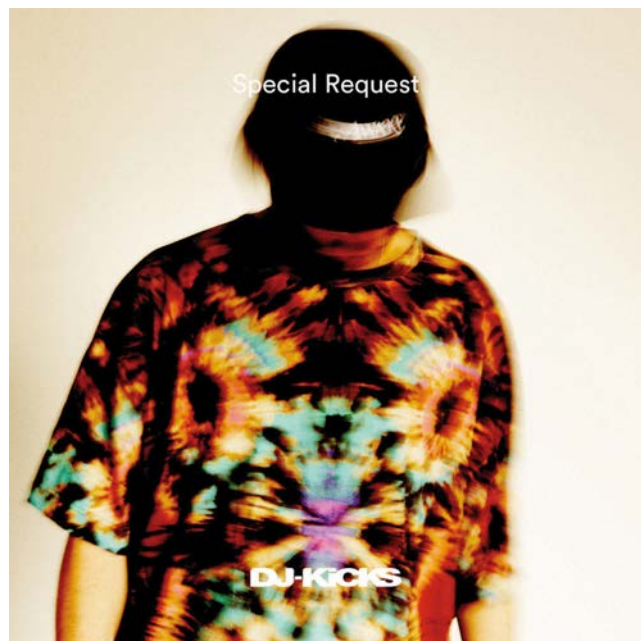
Woolford's 'DJ-Kicks' mix showcases a DJ confident in his craft, happily melding together the contemporary and the classic and deftly springing across genre boundaries as though they're not even there. Early Trax records like Virgo's 'Are You Hot Enough' from 1986 drop with ease next to contemporary space-house jams like Krystal Klear's 'Turn Valve' from 30

years later. Then before you know it, Woolford's smoothly fading in rave classic 'De-Orbit' by Speedy J before coming right back up to date with the sleek futurism of his own LS1 Housing Authority track 'Ultraviolet'.

It's a mix that's not afraid to take a breather, allowing for palette-cleansing ambient breaks and sometimes simply letting records build up, rather than slamming in peak-time banger after banger. Having said that, Woolford's mix is packed with plenty of high-energy dancefloor action and the final half-hour in particular absolutely smashes things up, finishing proceedings with some heads-down jungle and drum & bass.

The selection reflects an open approach to dance music, less restrained by the boundaries and limitations of genre, a trend that Woolford sees reflected in his audience when he DJs:

"Even in scenes where the focus would have been concentrated on sub-genre, the outside influences can become the most potent moments. It feels wide open." **HAROLD HEATH**



Other Nominees

V/A '1 Year Of Invicta' [Invicta Audio]
V/A 'BEAUTIFUL PRESENTS: BEAUTIFUL VOL. 1' [BEAUTIFUL]
V/A 'DT002' [Daytimers]
V/A 'Molten Mirrors - A Decade Of Livity Sound' [Livity Sound]

Krust 'Only God Can Tell (LCY Remix)' [Crosstown Rebels]
Lady Blackbird 'Collage (Calibre Remix)' [Foundation Music]
Rebound X 'Rhythm N Gash (PJ Bridger Refix)' [Self-released]
Two Face 'Again (Remix) feat. RV, ShaSimone & Gully' [Self-released]

Best Remix/Edit

SOPHIE 'BIPP (Autechre Mx)' [Numbers]

"No remixes... unless it's Autechre," was the "unequivocal response" that the team at Glasgow label

Numbers received from SOPHIE when the idea was first floated in 2015 of commissioning a collection of reworks of her 2013 masterpiece 'BIPP'. The label, having booked Autechre for a Numbers show in 2005, duly put the request out with a faint hope that they might take up the offer. "We passed over all of the stems and parts, including all the Sysex data for the track from the [Elektron] Monomachine and [Elektron] Machinedrum," Calum Morton, who co-founded Numbers and DJs as Spencer, tells DJ Mag over the phone, referencing the machines that gave SOPHIE's music its distinctive, elasticated pop sound and which SOPHIE was partially inspired to start using upon hearing a recording from that 2005 Numbers gig. Five years passed with no word, until an email dropped into the Numbers inbox, out of the blue, one day in 2020. "Sorry this is so late, hope it's still of some use," read Autechre's note, with the finished remix attached.

The duo's flip of 'BIPP' completely inverts the source material, pitching the helium-taut vocals down considerably and setting them against a



stripped-back, funk-laden instrumental that is equal parts Latin freestyle and UK street soul. It's certainly not what one might have expected from a duo whose music has grown increasingly cerebral and inscrutable with each new release. "It's company policy not to question Autechre," Morton jokes. SOPHIE tragically passed away just a couple of

weeks after the world got to hear Autechre's take on 'BIPP'. "It was all very much led by SOPHIE," Morton says of the project, "but we worked in a way that you understood the direction and you followed it. When someone's vision is so clear, it's fun to work with them on realising something. That's something you've got to treasure while it's there." **CHRISTIAN EEDE**

Other Nominees

Anu, NTS
Jamz Supernova, BBC Radio 6 Music
NAINA, Reprezent
Western Lore, SWU.FM

Best Radio Show

Jaguar, BBC Introducing on Radio 1 Dance

When Jaguar's show burst onto the airwaves in April 2020, it was a tipping point for the host, presenter and DJ's career. Working with the BBC for over six years and pursuing radio for even longer, this year she smashed targets and moved forward with a clear goal. She tells DJ Mag, "The ambition was to showcase the best dance tracks coming out of the UK. But it's also about playing artists who aren't always given that opportunity to play on mainstream radio, or in the wider world." Her dance music-focused BBC Introducing show launched during a pandemic, helping to "keep producers motivated". In 2021 the format continued to thrive, and uploads from electronic artists soared from the 200s to over 700 tracks a week. She also hosted a prestigious Maida Vale session with Shygirl — the first of its kind from BBC Introducing Dance.

Jaguar's thirst for cheerleading others has always been apparent. In 2017, she encouraged Prospa to send in their tracks, which resulted in gigs at

Creamfields, ADE and a career kickstart. "I knew them from Leeds, where I studied. We'd talk about our hopes and dreams and now, we've done it together," she tells DJ Mag. She's just as tenacious today, reeling off lists of names who she's loved supporting, including Amy Dabbs, Junior Simba, ELKKA, Meg Ward, Kiimi, Emily Nash and Rosie. "It's such a pleasure to do it, honestly." Although championing the length and breadth of Britain, Scottish producers have stood out to the broadcaster in 2021: "They're just killing it." Another of Jaguar's 'success stories' hails from the area, with Glasgow's TAAHLIAH being a regular on the show.

Beyond location, supporting minorities is key for Jaguar, who hopes it will "open doors for people who think they can't get there". Throughout the year she's produced episodes focusing on Black History Month, LGBT History Month and International Women's Month, alongside consistently diverse playlists. She'll never programme a 100% male show, she says with a smile. "That's just not going to happen". **EILEEN PEGG**

Other Nominees

Crossbreed
Origins
Gonzo's Two Room
Shoot Your Shot

Best Club Event

Animal Crossing

There are significant years, then there's 2021. Over the past 12 months, UK clubs have held on tight to a rollercoaster of uncertainties, doubt and anxiety hanging in the air long after reopening in July. All of which means the achievements of Manchester-based Animal Crossing are even more impressive. The nomadic collective is known for throwing parties in places where parties shouldn't be thrown, and have more than made the most of the meagre six-month window during which events have been possible. Sessions with John Dimas, The Ghost, Apollonia, You&Me, Evan Baggs and Enzo Siragusa have taken over locations from the suitably cryptic 'Somewhere New', to city centre rooftops and disused car showrooms, addresses shared once all tickets are sold.

But that barely scratches the surface. In a shorter-than-normal festival season, the promoters delivered Summer Of Love, a 10,000-capacity daytime throwdown featuring a who's who of minimal-leaning talent — from [a:rpia:r] to Truly Madly — christening an impressive warehouse site in gritty east Manchester. The after-party then moved action to The Loft, another side of their story: a brand new,



200-capacity venue and arts hub that Animal Crossing worked tirelessly to open, now a regular weekend haunt for those who want to stomp. "We feel humbled, motivated, and inspired to keep pioneering, dedicating ourselves, and providing an experience for people. I mean, it's quite ironic — we've won Best Club Event but have never thrown a party in a club before," says

Olli Ryder, a central figure in the Animal Crossing crew. "What makes us special is that unknown; no matter how many times you come, it will always be your first time. It's a really poetic narrative to have... Next year we're looking to add Best Small Festival and Club to this award."

MARTIN GUTTRIDGE-HEWITT

Other Nominees

Fabric, London
Invisible Wind Factory, Liverpool
Mint Warehouse, Leeds
Motion, Bristol

Best Large Club

Printworks, London

The 5,000-capacity former newspaper-printing factory has made a huge impact on UK clubbers, despite only just approaching its fifth birthday.

With a winning formula of industrial remnants, labyrinth-like navigation, and a breathtaking LED screen, the London club regularly hosts the biggest electronic brands, from Bugged Out! to FUSE and La Discothèque. In 2021, Printworks collaborated with United Visual Artists to push the limits of its ceiling-to-floor visual backdrop, commissioning bespoke artwork that connects the venue's heritage to the pulsating information age of today.

Dance music lovers flock to the space to see huge names — The Chemical Brothers, Carl Craig, Moodymann, Green Velvet, Andy C, Four Tet and Floating Points are just some of this year's headliners. However, a new concept, Redacted, kick-started the club's reopening in September 2021, which saw the venue ask dancers to put their trust in them, and keep the focus "firmly on the music for a pure celebration of club culture". Instead of artist announcements, three events across the weekend were promoted on their sound alone. Friday's 'Late Night Movement' featured adventurous producers, Saturday's 'To The Floor' was dripping with house, while 'Low End Theories' on Sunday



Pic: JAKE DAVIS

was a drum & bass dedication. Guests were reminded of the 'no photos on the dancefloor' policy throughout the reopening nights — a welcome scene, at a time when lockdown was replaced with real-life moments after so much time.

Next year's schedule, starting in spring, welcomes Helena Hauff, Charlotte de Witte, Flying Lotus, and Solomun among others. And before its Defected and Glitterbox New Year's extravaganza was Noisia's last ever London performance in December. **EILEEN PEGG**

Other Nominees

Hope Works, Sheffield
Sneaky Pete's, Edinburgh
Wire, Leeds
World Headquarters, Newcastle

Best Small Club

FOLD

Walking up the road to FOLD feels like a scene from a dystopian sci-fi movie. The DLR rumbles by, and huge skips heave with industrial material. A derelict pub is en route and adds to the forgotten feel that permeates this pocket of Canning Town. But further on, FOLD sits unassuming in the middle of the wasteland. It could be another warehouse, either in use or defunct. Inside, however, Lasha Jorjoliani, aka Voicedrone, has cultivated one of London's most essential electronic music and art spaces since 2018. "We are artist-led, this space is built for artists and our community, and we are continuously evolving and growing," co-founder Lasha tells DJ Mag. "Our aim is to build a new type of space, which supports a wide range of local emerging and international artists from electronic music to more experimental and immersive audio-visual arts, as well as champion interdisciplinary collaboration."

It helps that the surrounding area has remained virtually unchanged since launching. "We are working with Newham Council to grow and expand and provide more opportunities for the local community to get involved in what we do and aim to partner with local schools and art/music groups within Newham," says Lasha. "We are aiming to become a cultural hub within the



community and collaborate and work with the locals to inject our inclusive ethos and artistic direction into this area."

As well as hosting international talents and labels, like Cartulis, Ismus, Stay Up Forever, Hydraulic and Rupture, it's the club's queer Sunday daytime party UNFOLD and its residents

who have perhaps most contributed to the club's success; "UNFOLD is not just a party to us, it is political," says Lasha.

Reflecting on the win, Lasha adds: "We have put our blood, sweat and tears into keeping us alive and making FOLD what it is, and so having some recognition for our hard work is definitely appreciated." **NIAMH O'CONNOR**

Other Nominees

AVA Festival
Homobloc
Junction 2 Inner-City
Waterworks

Pic: JAMIE CRUMPTON



What was there not to love about We Out Here? The weather was lush, the location a sprawling never-never land, and the ratio of live acts to DJ sets perfectly balanced: festival-

goers could catch Mercury-nominated artists Moses Boyd and Nubya Garcia on the mainstage and then get lost in a heady mix courtesy of Anz, Fabio & Grooverider, or SHERELLE. But perhaps what gave WOH the edge in 2021, with

Glastonbury and Boomtown both cancelled, was the sheer range of activities on offer. Whether you wanted to lounge in the cinema tent, meditate at the yoga gazebo, have a roller disco, or swim in the lake, there was something for everyone.

"Winning this year has been amazing," WOH marketing manager Ellie White tells DJ Mag. "For the event, the music and the scene to be recognised among so many great previous winning festivals is a great feeling and after two years of challenges and uncertainty, it felt amazing that we were able to go ahead with the festival at all. To have had such great feedback and support makes it all worth it."

WOH takes its name from the 2018 Brownswood compilation, which showcased the new wave of artists in London's jazz scene. This was reflected in the line-up, which leaned heavily on UK talent owing to COVID and visa restrictions, but organisers hope to welcome more international artists and punters in the years to come, as well as growing relationships with the charities. "The festival featured some incredible experiences, but without the community and family feeling that the WOH crowd brings it wouldn't be the same," says White. "Can't wait to see all those faces again in 2022." Neither can we. **RIA HYLTON**

Other Nominees

Body Movements
Dialled In
GALA
Groove Island

Pic: JANDREW WHITTON



The Lincolnshire festival may only be a few years old, but it's quickly made its mark on the UK circuit. The words 'immersive' and 'experiential' feel almost obligatory to be included in the description of new festivals these days, but Lost Village's exquisite attention to detail means it lives up to the hype.

If you're new to the event, the idea is that many years ago, a remote village in a picturesque wood was abandoned forever. No one quite knows why, but left behind were log cabins, eerie gramophones and even full aeroplane cabins that mysteriously crashed in the grounds of the festival. Eerie goings on ensue, creating a mystical atmosphere amongst the rumbling

subwoofers. Imagine an M. Night Shyamalan film soundtrack by the finest house, techno and disco and set in an idyllic forest by a shimmering lake and you're halfway there.

Having won the award for Best Boutique festival back in 2017, Lost Village has claimed the crown again in 2021, after 2020's event was cancelled due to Covid. This year's was a roaring success with headliners Bonobo and Four Tet joined by Ben UFO, HAAi, Jayda G, Jamz Supernova, Honey Dijon and Kettama, to name a few. Highlights included plenty of surprise back-to-back sets like Theo Kottis b2b Ryan Elliot, who dropped an edit of 'I'm Horny' to thousands of dancers soaking in the sun, while CC:Disco's b2b with Bradley Zero resulted in the 'Murder Mix' of Dead Or Alive's classic 'You Spin Me Round (Like A Record)', to giddy glee. But the real star of the show is Lost Village's immaculate production — from actors wandering the forest to the 'abandoned' vintage cars, chapels and cabins, and the fireworks over the lake on the final night, Lost Village is truly immersive. Once you're in, it feels like another world, something many other festivals promise but very few can pull off. **DECLAN McGLYNN**

Best Festival We Out Here

Best Boutique Festival Lost Village

Other Nominees

Dave Beer
Elijah
Holly Lester
Lukas Wigflex

Underground Hero

Recognising the champions of grassroots UK music communities

Ben Sims



PHOTO: MARIE STAGGAT

BRITISH club veteran Ben Sims is as humble as you'd expect upon winning the Underground Hero award.

"It's a genuine surprise," he says. "I wasn't expecting to win at all, and just being nominated was a welcome boost after the past two difficult years, so I'm happy about it. Surprised but appreciative."

The Essex-born DJ, producer and label boss is synonymous with a groovy vein of UK techno and stays true to his sound without adapting to trends. During Ben's two-decade career, his imprints Hardgroove and Symbolism — the latter of which will release a two-part compilation later this month — both played a part in his upward trajectory, as well as Theory Recordings which ceased in 2014. Those in the techno world will know of the club-night and label Machine that he co-runs with Kirk Degiorgio, geared towards supporting emerging artists. Ben's Run It Red show on NTS Radio follows the same ethos, with each broadcast dedicated to new music supplied by producers from all over

the world.

Before Ben found his calling in techno, he played house and hip-hop records on a London-based pirate radio station during the late '80s. He went to hip-hop parties too and made a mental note of the DJs' skill on show. "They were my heroes," Ben recalls. "Still a lot of hype, ego and bravado, but they had to have the skills and selection to back it up. You couldn't be up there jumping about like a prick and not deliver the goods; you'd be booed off. So that's what I learned really early, and that's what's important to me — the musical knowledge, the skills, the art of mixing, rocking a crowd. I do my best to avoid the rest of it."

During his imitable career, Ben faced certain challenges. Navigating the grey area between work and play was one of them, and as someone who likes to party, clubs being the place of work proved a tricky environment. "The line between work and fun is often blurred, and I tend to be a bit all or nothing in general, so I had to learn how to police myself," he says. "It's not easy sometimes, and

I don't always get it right, but being more conscious of it has improved a lot of things professionally and personally."

Looking towards the next generation of artists, Ben shares noteworthy advice to those finding their feet, as the landscape for producing and promoting music has evolved since his first gig at a school disco, aged 10. "Be patient and take your time to master what you do. It's hard to stand out these days, even if you've been in the scene a while, so having your own identity counts for a lot. Don't follow fashion or trends for the sake of it, things go around in circles anyway," he says.

"Most importantly, do it because you love it — because you love the music or mixing records or making beats, treat it like a hobby and enjoy it. I've previously said this on Twitter, but it's totally possible to make a living from underground music. You probably won't become a millionaire or a 'commercial success', but then again, you won't have to sell your soul or deep throat Satan either." **NIAMH O'CONNOR**

Innovation & Excellence

Young Urban Arts Foundation (YUAF)



Kerry O'Brien AKA Lady MC



Young Urban Arts Foundation started in a box room in Deptford with Kerry O'Brien, aka Lady MC, and her mum doing DJ and MC workshops in youth centres. Almost 13 years later, the foundation has helped educate, empower and celebrate 19,000 disadvantaged young people and is Gold Accredited by London Youth, making it a recognised centre of excellence. All of this has happened in the wake of the global financial crash of 2008, Covid-19 pandemic and an 80% cut in funding for youth services over the last six years. If that doesn't make it worthy of DJ Mag's Innovation & Excellence gong in this year's Best of British Awards, nothing does. "It really means so much to us all," says Kerry. "We work so hard and usually get our awards seeing the development of our young people and artists, but to be recognised by the industry really means a lot."

The need for YUAF to innovate with its offerings has never been more important than during the last two years of the pandemic. "We decided to go harder," says Kerry, defiantly. "We adapted our programmes and used the creativity in the team to reach young people powerfully and get them in a better space mentally and emotionally."

Kerry had no professional experience when she started out, "just a lot of passion and drive to help young people". What she did have, though, was experience of childhood trauma which she escaped by getting into drum & bass and becoming an MC. "The craft of it helped me to release the challenges I faced growing up, instead of suppressing emotions," she says. "My colleagues were like my social workers, I had a community and felt more confident than what I was programmed as a child to believe about myself."

YUAF exists to now offer those opportunities to others. It engages young people in ways that traditional and formal educational settings do not because of the passionate people involved and by allowing young people to lead as much as possible. "Most of us have lived experience or a lot of experience working with young people, so we know how to communicate with them," says Kerry. "Importantly, if we say we are going to do something, it gets done. This builds trust, and trust is the bridge to progress."

Recently the foundation has created the YUAF Futures project to specifically help 16 to 19-year-olds from Black, Asian and minority ethnic and LGBTQIA communities, disabled teenagers, and those living in poverty. "These groups are

at a disadvantage when it comes to entry into the creative industries so we wanted to make a difference," says Kerry. "We provide spaces for them to explore their passions, upskill in those areas, gain work experience placements and meet aspiring role models in their chosen fields." Londoners may have seen YUAF's famous bus, which is a mobile multimedia studio that heads into estates and areas where there is little or nothing for young people to engage in. It offers a safe and exciting space that can inspire and build confidence through hands-on DJing and production experiences. "But it's 20 years old now," says Kerry. "We desperately need some help getting a new one on the road so TfL, give us a bus please!"

YUAF's YouTube channel is packed with music crafted by students, motivational tips from established artists, and films documenting the foundation's work. It is hugely inspiring. "Noticing the difference in how a young person speaks about themselves, seeing smiles we haven't seen before or listening to a recorded track that a girl said she could never do is a privilege and a blessing," says Kerry. "This has never been a job for us, this is a mission I will be forever grateful for." **KRISTAN J CARYL**

Outstanding Contribution

Mary Anne Hobbs

"I'm overjoyed and overwhelmed in equal parts," says radio stalwart Mary Anne Hobbs when we call her up about her Outstanding Contribution award. "I'm not the sort of individual who is ordinarily decorated, so I am truly humbled that you would think about me in this context. I was jumping up and down and screaming in a corner on my own when I first received your email — truly thrilled, and absolutely honoured."

This award is truly deserved. While others are content to sit on their laurels and retrain the same old paths, Mary Anne is constantly striving to bring new music to the masses. Her daily show on BBC Radio 6 Music, running from 10.30am to 1pm every weekday, is an artfully curated wonderland of eclecticism, where an old LFO hardcore track will be followed by indie-rockers Arcade Fire, slamming straight into SHERELLE's 'Jungle Teknah' before continuing with an Iggy Pop classic — to take just a random segment from one of her recent shows. She champions artists like Loraine James, Anz, Nils Frahm, Shygirl, Avalon Emerson, aya, Ezra Collective, and a wealth of other relative newcomers who also circulate DJ Mag's orbit, shrewdly positioned between the finest alternative rock classics or hip-hop and grime missives. On a Friday she'll host a DJ set by Paula Temple, LTJ Bukem or Thom Yorke; she'll shake speakers across the land by dropping a slamming 4/4 cut on Techno Tuesday; and continually blend the new and the vintage with celestial dexterity, turning thousands on to discerning new music every day.

"I want to completely reimagine what a daytime radio show can do and draw in music that is thrilling and highly significant culturally," Mary Anne tells DJ Mag in her lilting, captivating radio voice. "I've always felt that there should be a place for music from every genre, from every conceivable cultural enclave, on daytime radio. I know it feels very different, but that thrills me."

Much of daytime music radio is full of pop hits or inane chat, but it's Mary Anne's devout mission to push the conversation forward by showcasing a raft of deserving artists who merit exposure. "I wanted to kick down the white picket-fence that has always surrounded daytime radio, and just do something radically different with it," she says. "To create a borderless environment, where we can welcome every artist internationally who deserves

the light of a daytime platform." "When I used to listen to John Peel's show when I was a kid, I never expected to love every single track," she continues. "That wasn't the point of listening. Listening was to know what was out there, and to have an understanding of the whole spectrum, the whole rainforest of sound that was out there that Peel represented. I feel like the audience who really love the show, and also people who are new, understand that the exercise is not to love everything — but it's to know that it's there. As somebody who's a passionate lover of music, and that whole anthropological exploration, it's always been fascinating to me. It's the reason why you see every conceivable creature on an Attenborough documentary, when he's exploring a particular environment. He doesn't just show you the tigers, y'know?"

Growing up in a small village in Lancashire, Mary Anne used to illicitly listen to John Peel's Radio 1 show under the bedclothes at night in her teens. "He stood at the gateway to an alternate universe," she believes. Her alcoholic father would routinely smash any of the records she brought home, but never found her little transistor radio. As soon as she could she ran away to London, living on a bus with a rock band for a year before landing a job as a writer at Sounds music paper. She spent the first half of the '90s at NME, scoring a show at the fledgling Xfm radio station when it was granted a temporary broadcast license for London.

Radio, she felt, suited her better than music journalism. "I was never a happy critic, I've always been much more of a fan," she says. "On radio I was able to play music I was passionate about, without that necessary element of critique that I always struggled with as a music writer. Even now, all these years later, I like to devote the time I have on air to music I'm incredibly passionate about. And music journalism works in a very different way. [In the '90s] there was a feeling that savage, negative copy was more exciting to read than something positive, whereas radio — for the main part — is a much more positive medium. I'm not a cynic at heart, I don't really have that gene."

One day at Xfm she was told that the Mudhoney session for her latest show had to be bumped to make way for an interview with Trevor Dann, the new head of BBC Radio 1. She was incensed by this, and took him to task

about the state of Radio 1. "A tape of this little girl giving him a hard time circulated around Radio 1 and landed on [controller of Radio 1] Matthew Bannister's desk, and within about 10 minutes of hearing it he rang Trevor and said, 'Who is this girl? I think we need to get her [on the station]'. I literally couldn't believe it when I got the call, I thought he must have the wrong number!"

Mary Anne's Breezeblock show ran for 14 years on Radio 1, joining the dots between leftfield music genres, and one of the most important milestones was the immense Dubstep Warz show in 2006 — widely credited as helping dubstep break internationally. Mary Anne had got into dubstep after hearing an early Pinch tune with P Diddy, 'War Dub'. She found a number for Pinch and rang him up. "I said, 'What is this music? I can hear the constellation of influences but I've never heard anything quite like it'. He said, 'Well, this music is called dubstep, and if you really want to know about it you have to go to a Brixton club-night called DMZ and find a guy called Mala'. That's exactly what I did, and it changed my life completely." Seduced by dubstep's bass riddims, she became a regular at DMZ at Mass in Brixton and FWD>> at Plastic People in Shoreditch. "When I walked into those rooms for the first time I was a complete stranger, but within a very short space of time I became a part of that family," she says. "As a consequence, people trusted me with their music. Music that was only being cut to dubplate, that you couldn't buy — artists would give me a file of that to play on the radio."

After playing more and more dubstep on her show — a conversion she likens to Peel's seismic shift when he discovered punk — she initiated Dubstep Warz in January 2006. She brought Mala, Skream, Kode9, Vex'd, Hatcha, Loefah and Distance together in the Radio 1 studio to play sets, and the embryonic genre was immediately seeded around the globe. This led to her curating dubstep showcases at Barcelona's Sónar festival and putting together compilations for Planet Mu. "Even in the glory days, between 2005-8 or 9, every producer had a completely different interpretation of the [dubstep] sound," she says. "It was really only the 140bpm and the huge passion for sub-bass that was the great leveller. Beyond that, everybody's interpretation was so different, and what that short period in music history ceded was absolutely fascinating — and you still feel that

"I want to completely reimagine what a daytime radio show can do and draw in music that is thrilling and highly significant culturally. I've always felt that there should be a place for music from every genre, from every conceivable cultural enclave, on daytime radio. I know it feels very different, but that thrills me."



momentum now."

A few years after this crucial moment, she shifted over to 6 Music where she has been for the last decade — still playing a rich selection of new music to the world. She's continued to play out, and in 2019 curated a Queens Of The Electronic Underground stage at Manchester International Festival — featuring Holly Herndon, Jlin, Aisha Devi, Klara Lewis and Katie Gately. Then in the summer of 2021 she put together an All Queens line-up at All Points East with Maya Jane Coles, Octo Octa, Afrodeutsche, Jamz Supernova and Chloe Robinson joining her for sets. "Those girls really ripped it to shreds, as you would imagine," she remembers fondly.

The new music on Mary Anne's radio shows is often linked by a chilled, minimalist interlude track — a 'bed', in

radio lingo — made up of a snippet from R Seiliog's 'Mt Essa'. "I use it to bed speech in a really beautiful way," she says. "It creates a sense of momentum, but doesn't interfere with the narrative I want to create on the show."

She explains how she likes to distill information down in a radio link, based on the principles of her favourite artist — Peter Saville from Factory Records. "I don't know what people are doing when listening to the show, and I don't really want to tax them too hard, so I try to distill things down to a very minimal number of words that will hopefully resonate in the way that they need to," she says. "Then, with some records I'll give a bit of context and frame it, so you know what's coming next."

Every single one of her shows feels like a work of art, DJ Mag suggests. How long do they take to prepare? "I don't see it as a job, I see it as what I

do with my life," she outlines. "It's hard to give an exact timeframe because there are so many balls in the air all the time. Some projects take an enormous amount of development; even just a single piece of music you can sometimes be in conversation with an artist for months about it. And some things fall together very quickly." She explains how — apart from eating, sleeping and showering — she's working on her show constantly. "It's living this life, and I love it," she says. "I feel so fortunate and privileged to be in this position. I can't imagine another life — it's the life I always imagined. When I was 18 and ran away to London and lived on a bus in a car park for a year, if I could have had a glimpse at the life of the 57-year-old me, I'd have been elated." **CARL LOBEN**

SAVING SAN FRANCISCO DISCO

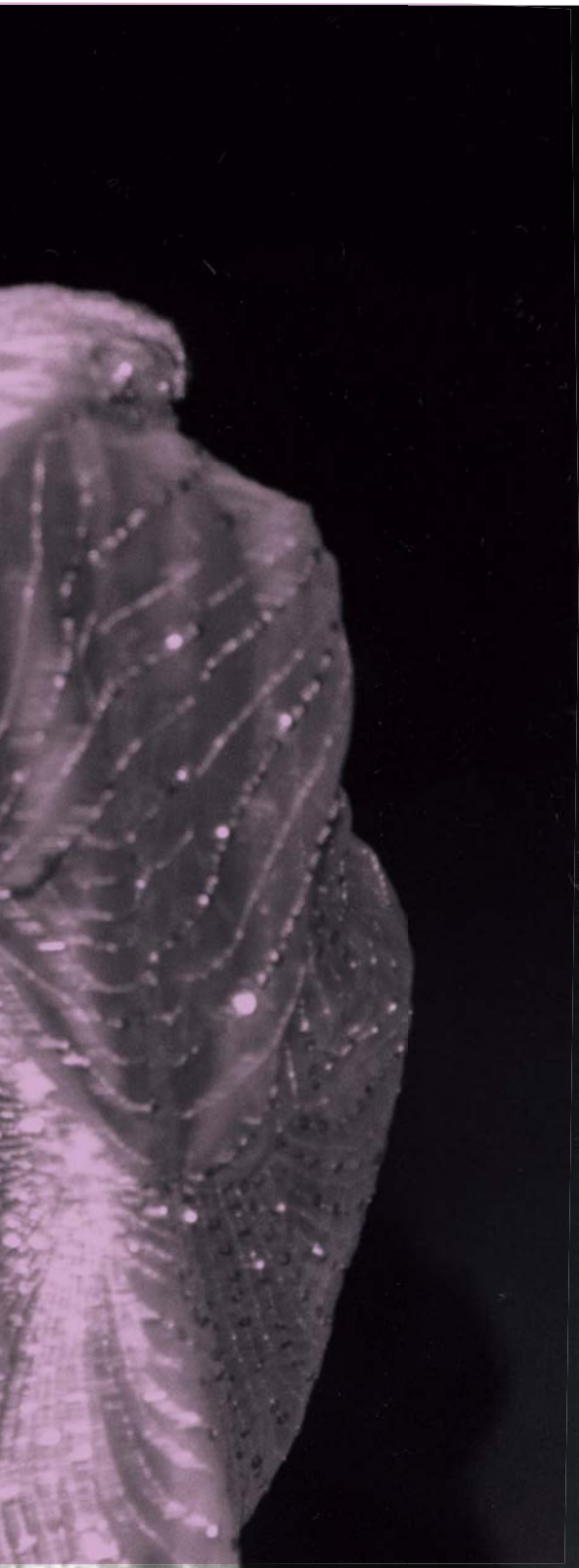
The flamboyant electronic sound of San Francisco's wild dancefloors soundtracked gay liberation and the early AIDS era. The city's nightlife community is working to preserve it

Words: **MARKE BIESCHKE**



Pic: **ROBERT PRUZAN**

Deep in the vaults of the San Francisco GLBT Historical Society and Museum Archives, a modest wooden crate glows with the importance of a sacred reliquary. It contains the personal effects of Sylvester, the Black, gender-defying performer who started out as a countercultural star in the early 1970s



and rose to become a global disco icon, before passing away from AIDS in 1988.

Items inside the crate, recently transferred from his estate into the archives' professional hands, include his gold records, industry awards, concert flyers, photographs and newspaper clippings. Also secured for future generations of disco pilgrims are his hair-pins, brooches, earrings, sequinned stage costumes and, touchingly, a mounted collection of exquisite satin gloves, which of course

the diva framed himself. Sylvester's effects are part of a growing disco collection at the archives. Dedicated preservationists have catalogued and stored LGBTQ community artefacts since 1985, when the Historical Society was formed to save the belongings of people killed by AIDS from the trash heap. Sylvester's musical story frames a wild, liberating, eventually tragic but ultimately inspiring period in gay history; one which unfolded on San Francisco's dancefloors, amid the ecstatic jangle of tambourines and the whoosh and clack of hand-painted fans. It changed the course of electronic dance music — then was wiped out by a deluge of death. Can the sounds and spirit of this essential scene be captured, before they fade away forever? Joining the archives in the effort is a new book documenting the history of San Francisco disco called *Menergy*, an online archive of DJ sets from the San Francisco Disco Preservation Society, a steady stream of previously unavailable music released by the Dark Entries label and a host of faithfully retro parties. To save San Francisco disco, it takes a village, people.

DO YOU WANNA FUNK?

In recent years, as DJs and dancers are more visibly celebrating the Black, queer roots of dance music, the outspoken, unabashedly gay Sylvester has risen to deity level — the falsetto-voiced Queen of Disco whose hits 'You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)', 'Dance (Disco Heat)', and 'Do You Wanna Funk?' have powered the LGBTQ community through triumph and heartbreak, and testified to the connection between disco's rapturous hedonism and the Black gospel music of Sylvester's youth.

To many other listeners, disco has become a shimmering algorithm of sleek production and instantly recognisable hooks — endlessly sampled, retouched, remixed and edited to cast a beam of golden warmth on any party, wedding or household chore. Shorthand for naughty dancefloor decadence pleasantly repackaged as nostalgia, disco has managed to shed much of its corny reputation. But it's still a sonic monolith, a brief streak of mirrorball joy before they put everyone in neckties or on the dole.

The actual story of disco, however, is more complex, beginning with the fascinating micro-diversity of its regional sounds and scenes. (Saturday Night Fever's ultra-straight, Brooklyn Italian-American pick-up joints and Montreal's quaintly experimental approach were just two variants.) That story also includes the way disco popularised inventions like mixing and beat-matching, technologically complex lighting

and spatial sound design, 12-inch records and remixes; arguably, disco popularised electronic music itself. Along with Sylvester, trailblazing producer Patrick Cowley, record company founders Marty Bleckman and Johnny "Disco" Hedges and a slew of gay DJs were architects of the high-energy San Francisco disco sound, a delirious permutation that stoked 24-hour debauchery in the city's dance palaces, bars, bathhouses and roiling street scene of the late '70s and early '80s. Despite the homophobic and racist US backlash of the infamous Disco Demolition Night of 1979 — which saw a pile of records from mostly Black artists detonated in Chicago's Comiskey Park as a white mob chanted "Disco sucks!" — the party in San Francisco never stopped. In fact, it only got more gay.

Menergy: San Francisco's Gay Disco Sound, published by Oxford University Press this February, is written by musicologist Louis Niebur. The book details the rise of disco in the city, starting with the influence of DJ Johnny "Disco" Hedges; first in 1973 at the Mind Shaft club, then later at the luxurious City Disco, which mixed in live performance for a cabaret-like atmosphere. It follows the sound's progression through larger dance clubs such as Oil Can Harry's, Alfie's, Dreamland, the EndUp, the Rendezvous, the cavernous I-Beam and Galleria Design Center, and after-hours climax Trocadero Transfer — with plenty of back alley, bedroom and behind-the-booth intrigue along the way.

Homegrown tracks like 'Menergy', 'Megatron Man', 'Cruisin' The Streets', 'Disco Kicks', 'Lucky Tonight', 'Sex Dance', 'Backstreet Romance', 'Shot In The Night', 'Right On Target', 'Homosexuality', and 'I Wanna Take You Home' stoked an almost never-ending party. Tens of thousands of men lived by the "four Ds": disco, drugs, dish and dick.

The book also traces how local classic rock label Fantasy slowly turned its attentions towards disco in the early '70s, growing into a leader of the sound and spawning gay-owned labels Moby Dick, Fusion and Megatone. We hear from classic DJs Lester Temple, Steve Fabus, Jon Randazzo, Bill Motley and essential Miami transplant Bobby Viteritti, and performers like early disco enthusiast Frank Loverde, Sylvester backup singers 'Two Tons O' Fun' Martha Wash and Izora Rhodes of 'It's Raining Men' fame, and the deliciously personable Lisa, whose 'Jump Shout' became an international club sensation.

Along the way, seminal moments in history unfold — the assassination of gay rights leader Harvey Milk and San Francisco Mayor George Moscone by

PICT: ROBERT PRUZAN



a disgruntled conservative politician; protests and early triumphs of the gay liberation movement that brought thousands into the streets; the shock of AIDS that decimated the community, along with the galvanising rise of AIDS activism. There's even a little civic infrastructure: what other city would open up a new subway station with a massive underground Metro Madness party, headlined by Sylvester himself in a flaming red sequinned jacket, and complete with dimly lit carriages for "intimate activities"?

GO WEST, YOUNG MEN

"Disco is so important to the gay movement because it was the first time we could dance together without being thrown in jail," Niebur said, pointing out one of the important effects of the 1969 Stonewall Uprising. That rebellion and riot against discriminatory police raids in New York City's Greenwich Village, centred around the Stonewall Inn bar, helped kickstart the contemporary gay rights movement.

It also gave a boost of energy to

ongoing legal battles, accompanied by queer community "sip-in" protests at hostile bars, which eventually ended bans on same-sex dancing around the US. "There were times back then where if you even swayed to the music, the bartender would yell at you because he didn't want to get busted."

Now that people could openly dance in bars, the music changed, welcoming upbeat sounds like dramatic, strings-drenched Philly soul and later Motown, Sly Stone's raw funk and the soul of Bill Withers and Barry White. Musty jukeboxes were replaced by humans spinning the latest seven-inch singles and deeper album cuts. Stonewall also led thousands of queer people out of the closet and into the streets, bars and dance clubs of major cities, creating a public gay culture for the first time. A new culture needs a new soundtrack, and disco developed alongside this massive coming out.

San Francisco, deep in the throes (and some of the hangover) of its hippie revolution, quickly became a

magnet for gay men eager to escape oppressive small-town environments and join in the dance — with extra helpings of sex. It was a lusty mass migration, abetted by countercultural permissiveness and cheap rents, as older San Franciscans moved out to the suburbs. The Castro, Polk Gulch and South of Market neighbourhoods glittered with bare chests and marquee lights. By the time disco superstars the Village People released their priapic anthems 'Go West' and 'San Francisco', the once-provincial burg was now the Emerald City on the Yellow Brick Road to gay Oz.

The movement came with a famous look — a macho, denim-clad, working-class aesthetic that gradually dropped its scruffy counterculture edginess for the sleek, moustachioed look of countless Freddie Mercurys. This was the "clone", which simultaneously appeared in New York and San Francisco, home of the "Castro clone". As historian Randy Schilt described it at the time, "The dress was decidedly butch, as if God had dropped these men naked and commanded them to wear only straight-legged Levi's, plaid Pendleton shirts, and leather coats over hooded sweatshirts."

As with all good cultural excavations, Menergy puts some of the utopian myths under the microscope. The clone look may have started as an empowering reaction against stereotypes of gay men as prancing, effete nellys. Yet it was also overwhelmingly conformist, marginalising alternative gender expressions. Sylvester revolted fabulously, declaring, "Fuck this. I must spend \$60,000 a year on clothes, and I'm not going to reduce myself to 501s."

The scene was also incredibly white and male — people who could more easily uproot their lives economically and socially — and Menergy highlights women and people of colour, like DJ Chrysler "Frieda Peoples" Sheldon, who was shut out of prominent positions and often asked for several forms of ID because he was Black. The endless partying, too, gets an unblinking eye: Niebur quotes one clone describing MDA, aka ecstasy. "We used to say it stood for 'Must Dance All-night'. And the next day it stood for 'Mustn't Do it Again.' Because you were totally wrecked."

HOT TALES ON THE 'FLOOR

Niebur, a professor at the University of Nevada in Reno, came to his subject through his work on film and television music. His first book detailed the history of the BBC Radiophonic

"Disco is so important to the gay movement, it was the first time we could dance together without being thrown in jail." - LOUIS NIEBUR

Workshop, which developed much early electronic music. He also adores the pop music of the late '80s, much of it spawned by the gay Hi-NRG scene of London clubs like Heaven, which echoed and furthered the San Francisco disco sound after it faded in the US.

"I'm mad that the UK gets all the credit for this music, but you can't deny the power of a good Ian Levine or Stock Aiken Waterman production," he says.

The through-line of all this was the invention of electronic dance music, which led him directly to Sylvester, Patrick Cowley and San Francisco disco. A night out at San Francisco's retro-disco Go Bang! party cemented his resolve to document how the music and culture developed side-by-side. "Queer history always has to be reconstructed from ephemera, because until recently nobody's really valued our history, or thought it was worth preserving," he says. "There's no Smithsonian Museum of Queer Culture. You have to search through the bar ads and event calendars in gay magazines, music reviews that are full of scene gossip, peoples' diaries, rare photos and obituaries, because so many stories were told about the DJs and musicians that were dying of AIDS. And then interviewing people from back then, which is a race against time. A couple of my subjects died while I was writing the book."

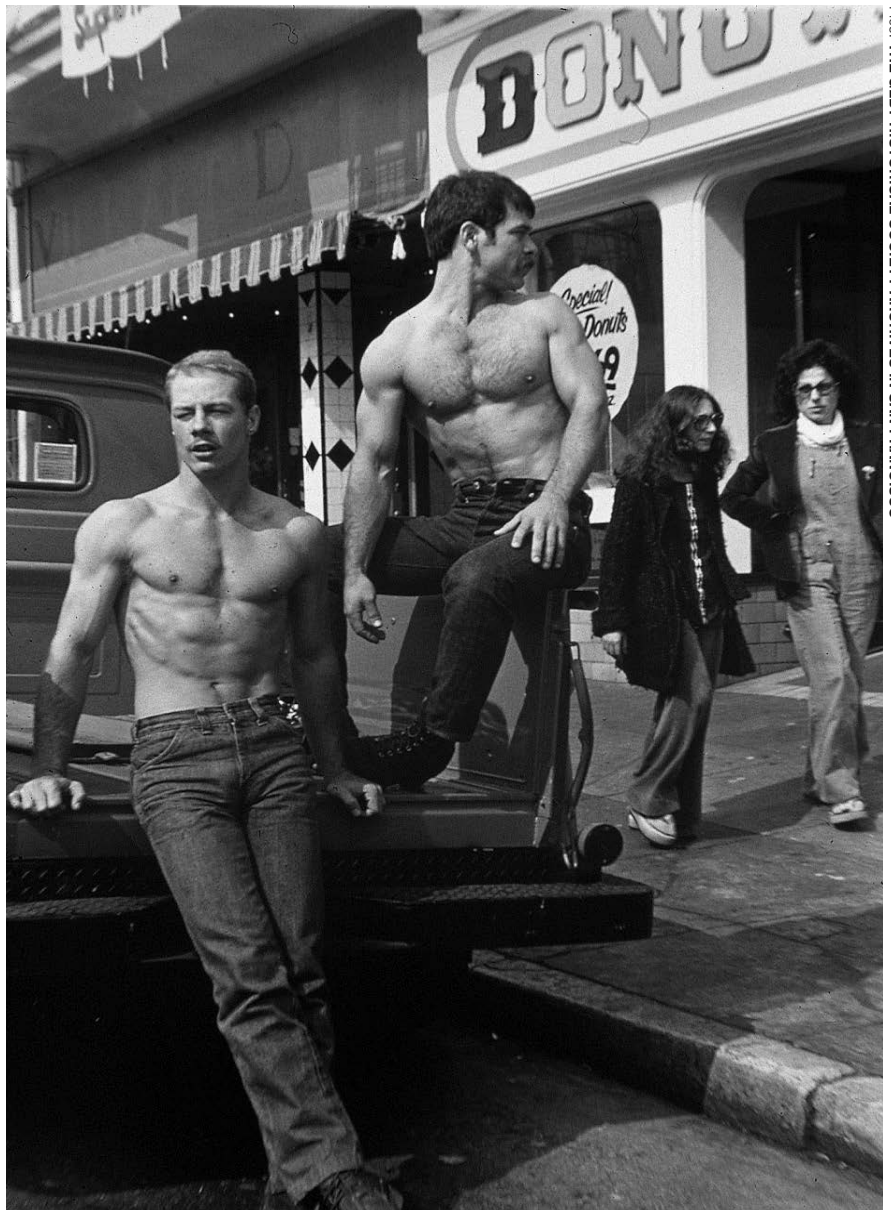
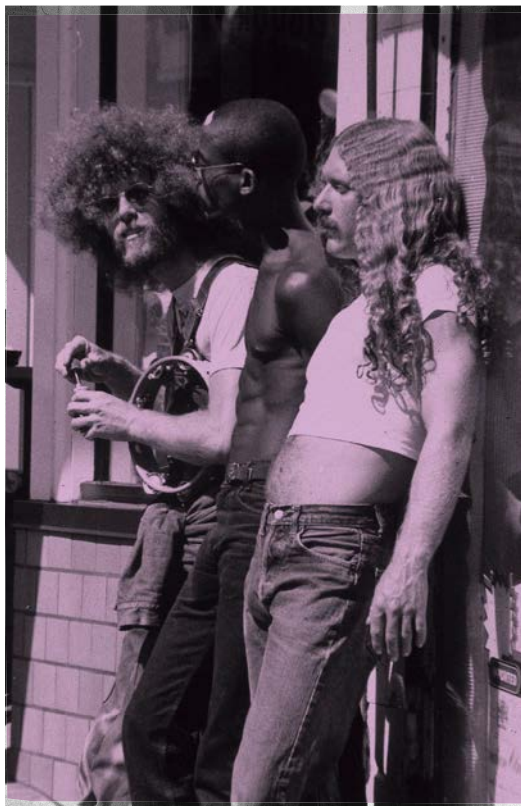
Niebur combed through decades of the Archives' recently digitised community newspapers (including a database of the Bay Area Reporter's more than 10,000 obituaries) for clues to the past.

"But the primary documents are the recordings. The sounds and the lyrics that people wanted to hear at that time, what they wanted to dance to, tell so much of the story. There's a lot of surprising evolution. Sometimes the music sounds like, 'Wow, they really had no money when they made this'; or listening to Patrick Cowley, as he progressed over the years. There are the big hits, porn soundtracks... you can really hear the story there."

Cowley, the precocious gear-head who started in the scene working the City Disco's dazzling 16,000-bulb lightboard, basically invented San Francisco disco's high-energy sound when he melded his love of gay sexual energy and countercultural ideals with emerging technology. He was among the first to enrol in San Francisco City College's groundbreaking Electronic Music Lab classes in the early '70s. Matching blazing ambition with technical confidence, in 1977 he took the then-audacious step of creating a 16-minute, futuristic remix of Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love' on

his bedroom equipment, submitting it unsolicited to her record company in 1977, which it eventually released. Cowley's music embraced the octave-hopping disco arpeggio descended from pioneering bass player Larry Graham and heard in hits like 'Disco Inferno', but pitched to a heart-racing gallop. When Sylvester heard what Cowley was doing, he immediately tapped him to edge his blues-y tracks with electronic sizzle, leading to some of the era's greatest hits. Despite his fierce productivity, Cowley was full of devilish humour. One of his biggest solo hits, 'Menergy' (published through his Masculine Music company) was created with friend Marty Bleckman when they were both high — its ludicrous title was meant to goof on a sometimes too self-serious scene.

While Cowley dominated the beginning of the sound, producer Barry Beam — a punk soul entranced by synthesisers (and a rare straight man on the scene) — took it to campy new heights in the mid-'80s, with giddy co-productions that had no use for coy double entendres, like



PHOTOS: THE GLBT HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES IN SAN FRANCISCO

Corruption's 'Show Me Yours' and 1983's 'Castro Boy' by Danny Boy and the Serious Party Gods, a lispy parody of novelty hit 'Valley Girl', with lyrics like: "It's not pretty being easy. Gag me with a cock. Faaaaaabolous!" Beam's bright silliness and spacey new wave sounds provided acid-tongued levity as dancers realised AIDS was closing in, and no help was coming from a government that would rather see them dead. Cowley himself was one of the first to die in 1982, at the age of 32, so early in the pandemic there was no official name for the disease. AIDS ramped up the music's urgency even as it began to empty floors. "It's important to remember that DJing as we know it was still something

pretty new at the time," Niebur said. Continuous mixing, beatmatching, extended mixes and the 12-inch dance single had been invented by DJs at New York's early '70s Greenwich Village bars and gay Fire Island resorts, and a circuit of gay DJs and dancers quickly formed to follow and spread the new techniques around the country. "San Francisco gay DJs were taking the art in all kinds of directions with this music. There was someone like Steve Fabus, who specialised in 'sleaze', the morning music of the bathhouse or the dancefloor when the sun came up, and which was more about slowing things down into a steamy, soulful groove. And then there's Bobby Viteritti, from the

Trocadero Transfer, with peak-time sets that were practically all electronic and all the same beat, almost like something you would hear in a techno club today." To listen to hundreds of sets like those, Niebur turned to an almost miraculous digital archive from lost dancefloors.

FEELING MIGHTY REELS

It's alarming to discover that the only thing standing between many of the precious DJ mixes from that era and the silent void of annihilation is a food dehydrator. That's one of the tools DJ Jim Hopkins uses to rescue old cassette tapes and reel-to-reels, recorded in classic disco DJ booths, from disintegration. As the founder of the San Francisco Disco Preservation Society, Hopkins has digitised and posted hundreds of reel-to-reel, cassette and VHS tape disco sets online, rescuing them from basements, garages and storage sheds around the US.

Hopkins started learning how to DJ in 1978 when he was 13 years old, after attending a disco in Roseland, California, and convincing his father to buy him two turntables and a mixer from the neighbourhood Radio Shack. Hopkins' father also gifted him his own father's reel-to-reel tape machine, launching a lifelong obsession. In the '80s, Hopkins was living in Sacramento and spinning at gay bars — until too many requests for Madonna drove him to the more underground house-friendly San Francisco.

In 2009, feeling nostalgic, he bought a reel-to-reel machine and went looking for blank tapes on Craigslist. There he found the daughter of DJ Michael Lee looking to digitise his collection — she had more than 60 of his recorded live sets, passed down when he died of AIDS in the '90s. Sensing a new line of business, Hopkins worked out an arrangement where he could keep the tapes after converting them and post the mixes; the first, a 1975 Lee set from Bones bar.

From this, the Disco Preservation Society was born: first as a Facebook page, where it took off like a flaming rocket, and then as a full-fledged website. Right away, promoter and Trocadero Transfer soundsystem designer Rod Roderick, whose wild private blowouts at his "mansion" and various warehouses had helped usher in the city's all-night mega-party scene, gifted him more than 480 tapes. "From there it just snowballed," he says with a laugh. "Tapes began to take over my apartment." Hopkins had to invent his own system of preservation, digitisation and remastering, a complex process involving a T-shirt soaked in alcohol, old RX7 audio rescue software, and, yes, several hours in a food dehydrator, to eliminate mould and remedy deteriorating effects like "sticky-shed syndrome". Other challenges include length (DJ sets were often six to nine hours), wildly varying track volumes and the sheer number of submissions from DJs, as they retire to Palm Springs or Florida and want to clean house. "Sometimes they just arrive in my postal box like mystery Christmas presents," he says, summoning images of white-bearded disco St. Nicks, downing piña coladas by a sparkling pool and sending off their legacies.

BACKWARDS GLANCES IN THE NIGHT

Another disco spelunker, Josh Cheon of San Francisco label Dark Entries Records, has climbed through attic crawl spaces and delved into damp basements to discover Patrick Crowley's prolific output — the unusually moody porn soundtracks, psychedelic electronic experiments and ravenously explicit sex diaries



DJ Steve Fabus



Pic: JOHN HEDGES

The Bay Area Disco association (with Two Tons Of Fun)

“There’s a real hunger for this music and for that time of celebration. Young and, well, more experienced dancers want that lush sound of music produced in a studio with full orchestras combined with the excitement of the electronics. It just feels human.” - STEVE FABUS

— much of which his label has released. His obsession with Cowley began when Johnny “Disco” Hedges announced that he was retiring to Palm Springs and was giving away all his records — an especially rich trove, as he had founded the Bay Area Disco DeeJay Association record-sharing pool.

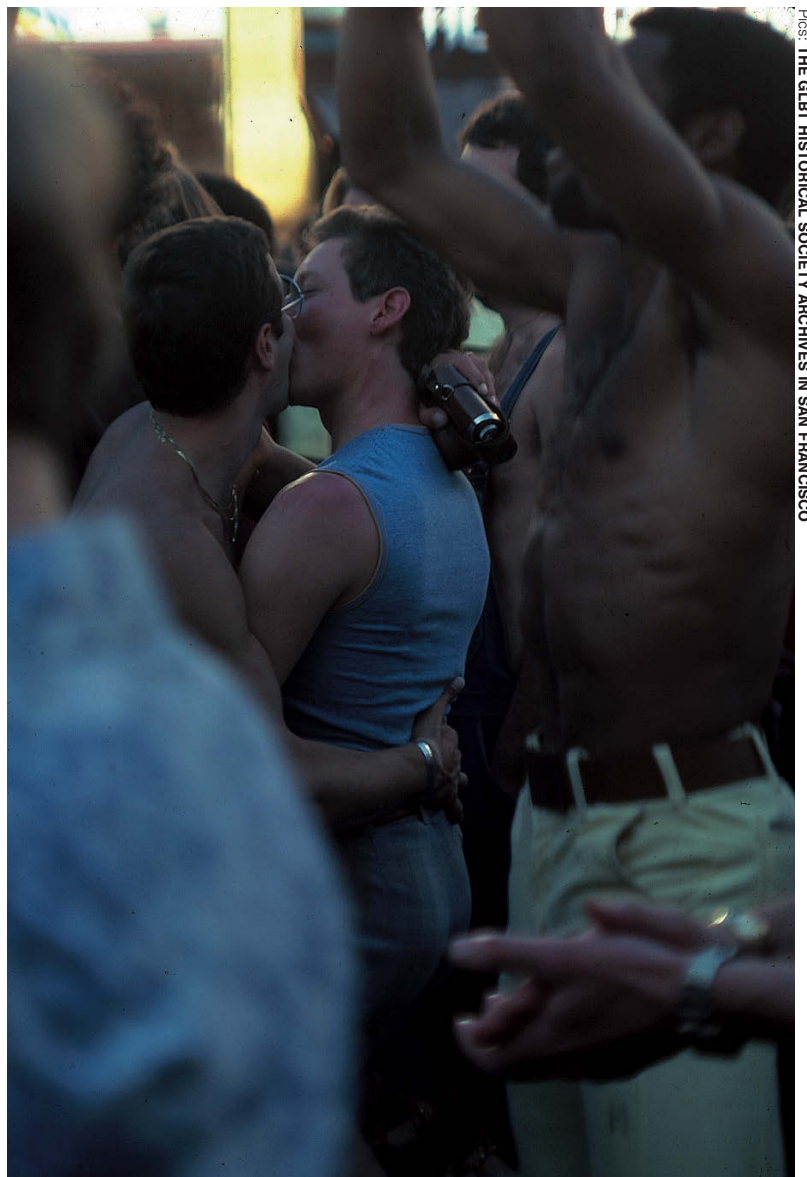
“There were two unmarked boxes of tapes in there that were a mystery,” Cheon tells us. “Even Johnny was like, ‘Don’t bother with those’. But they turned out to be these amazing unreleased recordings by Patrick. I knew the world needed to hear them, as part of our history.” Cheon, too, has been racing against time —

George Horn, the Fantasy Studios engineer who mastered thousands of records, including those of Patrick Cowley and Dark Entries, recently died of Covid-19.

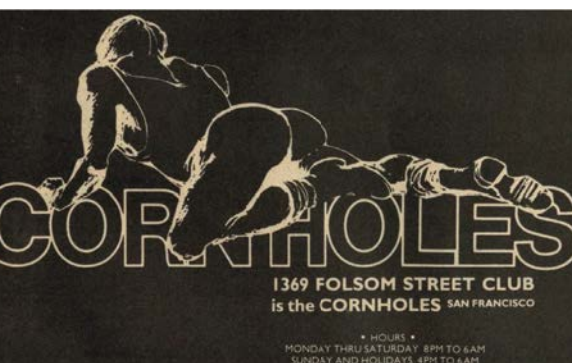
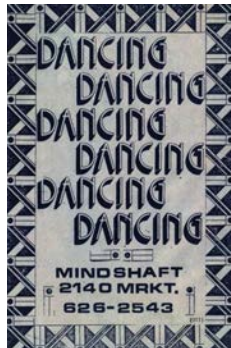
Energised by their new cache of Hedges’ records, Cheon and his then-crew Honey Soundsystem requisitioned a former bathhouse space and threw a retro-disco party called *Dancer From The Dance*, after a classic gay novel from the period. (Cheon’s set from the party contained all the records mentioned in the book.) The rapturous response set Cheon on a course to release Cowley’s material over the next decade, as Honey continued to throw

era-themed parties that summoned the past.

Honey was not the only party reactivating the menagerie. The Trocadero Transfer staff held annual Remember The Party events through the ’00s, while the monthly outdoor *Flagging In The Park* event celebrates the dancefloor art of flagging and fan-dancing, its participants whirling through the AIDS Memorial Grove like neon butterflies. The monthly *Go Bang!* party combines creator DJ Sergio Fedasz’s youthful love of the genre with veteran DJ Steve Fabus’ four decades of disco experience. It isn’t unusual to see walkers and canes raised towards the ceiling there.



PHOTOS: THE GLBT HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES IN SAN FRANCISCO



Outside of the city, parties like London's Horse Meat Disco, Pittsburgh's Honcho, Detroit's Macho and more joined the call this past decade, to rediscover a joyous gay aesthetic that was overshadowed by AIDS trauma. "There's a real hunger for this music and for that time of celebration," says Fabus. "Young and well, more experienced dancers want that lush sound of music produced in a studio with full orchestras combined with the excitement of the electronics. It just feels human."

The grand-daddy of all San Francisco disco revival parties is The Tubesteak Connection. Each week since 2004 (though currently paused due to the pandemic), DJ Bus Station John has meticulously decorated tiny, ancient dive bar Aunt Charlie's with handmade collages of vintage porn and party ads, promising "only music from 1975-1983" and recreating the man-to-man aura of yesteryear. For him and others, the revival is equally about honouring musical forebears — Bus Station John's records are mostly from collections of those who've passed on, their names and original notes inscribed on the labels and sleeves — and recapturing a lost immediacy, the physical human connection once ubiquitous before online hookups and cruising apps. "The fact is, a great many gay men still want to find tricks and lovers, friends and boyfriends, live in-the-flesh — the good old-fashioned way — in a space created specifically with that desire in mind," he says. "I'm not sure we or any other club will ever be quite as colourfully freaky as we used to be, since the demographics of San Francisco have changed so dramatically. What was once 'Gay Mecca' has become financially inhospitable to the new generations of

young queens. And, heartbreakingly, so many others have had to leave. The good news is there are still enough interesting people here to make for a lively party."

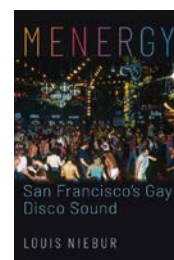
DANCING INTO THE STARS

When the San Francisco gay scene was at its peak, there were more than 100 bars, bathhouses, sex clubs, cabarets and discos — now, the city is down to about 20. As Niebur tracked the nightlife establishments and movements of San Francisco's disco players in the '70s, a kind of ghost map sprang up of a scene long-erased first by AIDS, then by gentrification and assimilation. "Being able to retrace everyone's movements really brought the non-stop energy back to life," he says. "It also brought home how much is gone."

Menergy tells of people bravely trying to keep the music alive when DJs, club owners, record executives and party promoters were struck down. Miraculously, the San Francisco scene did live on, as house music took over as the soundtrack of LGBTQ activism, and more trans people and people of colour joined the dancefloor. If there was a true "grand finale" to the San Francisco disco scene, it took place one night in 1988, as DJ Steve Fabus took to the decks at Dreamland, the classic disco which had reopened in a burst of glittering optimism that the scene would revive. "It was a wonderful night because all these people were coming out to hear this new house music, and I was playing to a packed floor at 10pm," Fabus recalled. "Suddenly the promoter Ron Baer came in the booth and said, 'Honey, Sylvester's here'; this was a big surprise, because we all knew he wasn't doing well. The last time we'd seen him was leading

the Gay Pride parade in a wheelchair, looking very stricken. But of course fabulous — it was Sylvester!

"The club had two levels, and the DJ booth was on the bottom, so they rolled him on top of the booth, directly over me," he remembers. "I turned on the mic and made the announcement, 'Everybody, Sylvester is here to say hello'. The response was like thunder. People just started clapping and stomping their feet so much the booth shook. I had to think fast. So I cued up all my Sylvester songs and made a medley. The club was going wild. "After about 45 minutes Ron said, 'Sylvester is going to leave'. I stopped the set. Sylvester spoke and said, simply, 'Thank you so much. Goodbye', and was wheeled away. People were sobbing, stamping, screaming. Everybody was crying, I was crying. It hit everybody that this was his goodbye. He has said goodbye. This went on for five minutes, six minutes, seven minutes; shouting, 'We love you'. Nothing more could go on after that. I got on the microphone and said, 'Good night, take care everyone, I love you'. And people just slowly left the club, until it was empty."



• **Louis Niebur's Menergy: San Francisco's Gay Disco Sound is published by Oxford University Press in January 2022**

• **The San Francisco Disco Preservation Society digital archive can be found through <https://sfdps.org>**



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Leon Vynehall live @ Heaven, London

Leon Vynehall's show at legendary central London club Heaven finds the innovative producer moving his sound on into artful and thrilling new realms

Words: **THEO KOTZ** Pics: **FABRICE BOURGELLE**

In a cavern beneath the Strand in central London, Heaven's brick archways are illuminated with flashes of red and white light, and Leon Vynehall is kneeling, angled away from an enraptured crowd. The opener to his 2021 album 'Rare, Forever', titled 'Ecce Ego', swells from the speakers. The track's mournful strings feel like reverberations from his last album and tour cycle, the ambient-and-modern classical triumph 'Nothing Is Still'; but gradually, they uncoil and break apart, revealing something more intimate beneath. Even the title, meaning 'Behold, I Am', suggests something essential.

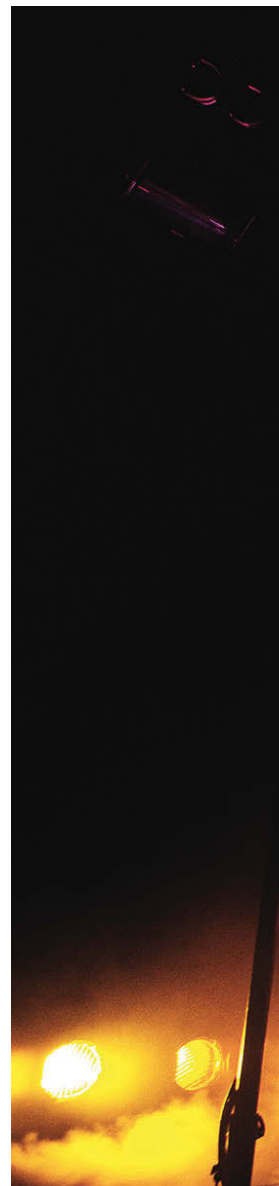
The setting elevates this feeling. Where Vynehall's 'Nothing Is Still' live shows saw him orchestrating among virtuosic players, here he remains kneeling throughout, surveying his compact modular setup encircled by strobing lamps. There's a little sway or a bob of the head, but only when the momentum dictates. It sometimes feels as though we're peeking over

his shoulder into a studio session. This is no coincidence. Vynehall is meticulous with his themes and imagery. 'Nothing Is Still' was an ambitious imagining of his grandparents' emigration to the US 50 years ago, complete with an accompanying novella and film. His earlier long-players also toyed with narrative, though a little more loosely: 'Music For The Uninvited' was an ode to dance music's queer catharsis and the comforts of his childhood, while 'Rojus' linked ornithology with club behaviour.

'Rare, Forever' can be understood as Vynehall's attempt to shed the need to conceptualise a record too much (on the track 'Dumbo', the sampled words 'do you know what I mean?' are a gentle joke at this tendency), and yet this becomes the narrative in itself. This time, he is exploring self-expression, and where the compulsion and inspiration to do so come from. It is a more slippery subject, harder to pin down.

'Rare, Forever' went through a few stages of development. At first, Vynehall wanted to focus on fluidity, to run with whatever ideas popped into his head and switch gears. Listening back to the resulting record, originally titled 'A Little More Liquid', left him cold ("I sounded like a confused man," he told DJ Mag earlier this year), and a night watching Kano live in London inspired him to be more definite. And yet what he found, it seems, was fluidity itself. 'Rare, Forever's' obscured concept revolves around something Vynehall calls "Velvet", a guiding force for creative efforts. He also calls it the "hidden orchestra", which brings to mind David Lynch's "ideas are like fish" theory. Headphone listening reveals an uncertainty on 'Rare, Forever': themes and motifs threaten to dart from view, and momentum suddenly shifts, intensifies or disappears.

Live, this impulse is amplified. 'Mothra' gathers pace into a gallop





on record, with a blooming tension and release. At Heaven, you can feel the audience swept up in the tide, and by the time its luscious synths wash through the room they are up for it. Hands reach for the red lasers overhead before the track crackles, glitches and pounds back into groove. It doesn't last long though. Throughout the show, these moments of abandon give way to something more meditative, and vice versa. It brings to mind another motif of the record, displayed on the cover: the ouroboros, or mythical snake eating its own tail. It's an ancient symbol that alludes to the universe's cycles of rebirth. On 'Rare, Forever', it's skewed slightly to the notion of a snake shedding its skin, and the artist's compulsion to do the same; constantly starting again. It's a curious quirk of the success of an album like 'Nothing Is Still', that it leaves the artist feeling unsure of where to go next. This feels most directly addressed on 'Snakeskin ∞ Has-Been', an energetic highlight of the show, like 'Mothra'. Propelled by a fizzing 2-step and sawtooth synth, it moves like a malfunctioning machine; a spluttering

old factory repurposed for newfangled wares and wheezing under the weight. It's the most functional banger of the night, and yet never quite settles into a thumping locomotion. Aptly titled, 'Snakeskin ∞ Has-Been' feels like it's on the cusp of a new form.

Unpredictability is one of the album's biggest strengths, and yet is perhaps one reason why the live performance sometimes stumbles and frustrates. For all the contention that this album is a return to the dancefloor for Vynehall, he doesn't commit to functionality. It's one of the reasons why he's a compelling artist, but there are moments where it feels like the restraints are off and something alchemical is happening between crowd and performer, only for a sudden shift to pull the rug out from under us.

This was primed, somewhat, by the support acts too. George Riley, hemmed in by the small stage she shares with Vynehall's gear, can't quite connect with the intimacy she does on record, and although Touching Bass honcho Errol gamely tries to build up the heat with some energetic house,

the brighter lights and dampened volume don't allow him much space to achieve more than a sweet background hum. It's not the only time we're left wondering how this show would have been different as part of a club night. It's a minor gripe, though. Vynehall has a way of making synths and samples feel incredibly immediate when played live. At Heaven, the music of 'Rare, Forever' sounds gorgeous. The metallic thwack and clatter of 'Dumbo' seems to come straight from the chest, and the beatless majesty of 'An Exhale' soars. There are tracks too which we can guess are offcuts from the album: one hypnotic wiggler, underpinned by the repeated words "a little more liquid", suggests the first iteration of the album could well have stood up on its own.

Towards the end of the show, we climb some steps to a balcony set further back in the long, tall room. From here, surveying the kneeling figure and the throng neatly carpeted with smoke and lights, the night is encapsulated in an image that will be memorable for a long time to come.

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Ones To Watch 2022

Over the following pages we profile five artists destined for big things in the year to come. From Jersey club to Afrotech, hardcore, house and beyond, these are the acts pushing tomorrow's sounds today. This year we've also teamed up with Radio 1 Dance to present a mix from each of our Ones To Watch every Saturday morning at 2-3am throughout January, plus all the mixes will be available afterwards on the BBC Sounds app.

Jersey club Queen UNIIQU3's 'Heartbeats' EP was one of 2021's best dance music releases. But while you might be most familiar with lead single 'Microdosing,' the fourth track on the record, 'Drown', featured another star of Jersey club: Ugandan-American producer SJAYY. With steamy vocals ("pussy so wet you'll drown in it"), rap horns and a killer trap beat, 'Drown' was an exciting and playful offering. "The dancefloor is a tangible asset again," SJAYY tells DJ Mag, "and now Jersey club is more global than ever."

Born in Plainfield, New Jersey, SJAYY is intensely creative, turning his hand to production, DJing, photography, fashion, and creative direction. In recent years he's been particularly prolific on the music front — there have been three SJAYY albums since 2019 ('A Big Jersey Club Album' in 2019, 'So Far So Good' in 2020, and 'Constant Dedication' in 2021) — and is fast gaining notoriety as one of the scene's most exhilarating artists. SJAYY has always been a tastemaker; at school, his friends relied on him for the best new Jersey club tunes, taking turns with his MP4 player each day on the bus. He recalls some of the first CDs he owned: Drake's 'So Far Gone', Kanye West's 'Graduation', Soulja Boy's 2007 debut, 'Souljaboytellem.com'. He was already interested in art and design back then too, he says: "I'd go through the albums back and forth, trying to redesign the CD covers with my sharpie."

At 13 years old, SJAYY got a place at Plainfield Academy for the Arts and Advanced Studies (PAAAS), where he studied stage acting. Around the same time, he started experimenting with production on a hand-me-down Compaq laptop his mum had found for him. Later in his teens, he and his friends would throw block parties, direct music videos and make tunes together. "My mother's side is the soul," SJAYY says of his upbringing. "My dad's side holds the music, the faith and love that I carry within me." When he was younger, on trips to Uganda to see his mother's family, he struggled with his identity; experiencing an entirely different way of living to his life in Plainfield. But those trips proved instrumental, he says. "I'd come back to my hometown with all these musical ideas because I wouldn't touch the internet [while I was there], I'd just listen."

SJAYY's music is most informed by Jersey club, hip-hop and drill, but there are myriad other influences in there too. Big kick-drums, staccato rhythms and chopped-up samples are often brightened by R&B-leaning melodies and vocals. There's a reason for this variety, he says — wanting to "give the people something new each time. I'm infusing

SJAYY

The hyper-kinetic pulse of Jersey club is taking over the world, and one of its most prolific young talents is New Jersey polymath, SJAYY, whose determination to introduce new sonic elements and maximize his own creativity knows no bounds



what I know with what I like."

Speaking of what he likes, SJAYY sees great potential in his friends and peers, naming artists like Dvsn, Jay Versace and Pink Siifu specifically. He'd "collaborate on a whole project" with Sam Gellaitry if he had the chance, and is keeping an interested eye on Vivid The Producer. "[She] gives me hope for good Jersey club music," he says. "These artists excite me and aren't afraid to break barriers in music."

Lockdown was a strange time for us all, but for SJAYY, it gave him time to, as he puts it, face himself. The time for reset has also allowed him to sustain a healthier lifestyle, as well as learning new instruments (he wants to include more acoustic elements on his records), and delving into dance, clothing design and 3-D skills. "Four walls made a Vincent van Gogh out of me," he says.

Looking forward — and it's clear SJAYY only looks forward — the sky's the limit. "I'm gearing up for [2022]," he says, "finding new limits to push." Most of all he wants to make people dance. "If nobody's grooving, is it really a party?" **KATIE THOMAS**

We first sighted Nicole Raymond, aka NikNak, at last year's We Out Here festival, rounding out the Eves' Drop Collective's takeover of The Sanctuary stage. As her funk-filled set came to an end, she loaded up Cameo classic 'Candy', slid out from behind the DJ booth and began to lead the crowd in the Electric Slide. It was the perfect segue into the festival's first full evening of events, but this was far from a typical NikNak set. In fact, there's very little typical about the artist. From her genre-defying mixes and leftfield collaborations to her ambient compositions and bespoke turntablism style, this Oram Award winner is in a proverbial league of her own.

A Londoner born and raised, NikNak left the capital in 2010, moving progressively north over the years. She's currently based in Leeds and, though there have been familial calls for her return, has no desire to move. "There are still a lot of things I want to explore, artistically and creatively, without the pressure of being in London," she tells DJ Mag. "There's a general expectation, once you hit a certain point, to move — and to London in particular — but you don't really have to. I haven't felt the need."

It was while making her first beat in her early teens that NikNak realised her love for experimentation and sound, or as she jokingly puts it "pressing buttons". She pursued this love throughout her studies, first on a three-year music course and later at university. In 2016, she decided to take things further and moved to Leeds for a masters in electronic and computer music. Her first social port-of-call, however, was a KRS-One show where she made friends, landing her a gig at Unity Festival some 20 days later. A billing alongside Cakes Da Killa soon followed.

Since moving to the northern city, NikNak has supported the likes of Princess Nokia, Children Of Zeus and Grandmaster Flash, and for two years hosted a weekly show on BBC Radio Leeds, interviewing hip-hop legend Talib Kweli, Benjamin Zephaniah, and the award-winning turntablist, DJ Yoda. She's also been fully embraced by the city's experimental music scene and is resident turntablist in both The Belgrave House Band and TC & The Groove Family. "I'm just out here doing weird things," she says, smiling wide. "I love how varied my career is."

In the years following her move to Leeds, NikNak was fielding a steady stream of work, but by 2019 she was



NIKNAK

A turntablist, producer and presenter, Leeds-based NikNak is just at home mixing funk and hip-hop as she is dubstep and d&b, putting together experimental ambient works or interviewing icons; she's on the rise and doing it her way

starting to sense the signs of a burnout. "When you're DJing, you're around a lot of people, especially when you're gunning it for gigs," she explains. "I was running around crazily. I think that contributed to my foggiess." She soon left for Turkey and while there, began taping the sounds around her. A few months later she was back home, chopping, delaying and reverbing the recordings at Leeds International Festival, the result of which was 'Bashi', her debut ambient improv album. 'Bashi X2', a live edit and remix album, came a year later.

The opportunities continue to flow today and NikNak is a born collaborator, but she's trying a more strategic approach, a stint in hospital having refocused her priorities. When asked, she offers an impressive list of upcoming projects, most of which she's not quite ready to share, but there is one thing she's keen to make clear. "You really don't have to be in London to have a successful career. If I get to a point where I feel like I've hit some kind of a ceiling, then I'll look at moving — but I've not felt that yet. Leeds continues to surprise me."

RIA HYLTON

PIG: SOPHIE JOUVENAR

Traversing an ever-growing scene that straddles both the underground and the mainstream, South Africa's Kasmario Thulani Ike Fankis goes by Kasango — as well as other monikers he's donned in his decade-spanning career as a studio engineer and ghost-producer. In the past couple of years, he's taken the first steps on a new production journey, beginning with the Jamie Fallon Smith-featuring 'One Night' in March 2020, and going on to take the once-sidelined sonics of Afrotech to heights that rival South Africa's pop staples with his multi-million streaming production 'Osama' featuring Zakes Bantwini. Becoming the No.1 track in the country on major radio stations and charts, 'Osama' went on to hold its place there for 12 consecutive weeks. Meanwhile, his solo production 'Closer' dominated in the underground, making its way into the hands of Kitty Amor, Pete Tong and Black Coffee, and setting a new standard for a genre that was for a long time considered too niche to convert new ears. Kasango himself has quickly become one of the most in-demand producers around, emerging from the doldrums of the pandemic with a newfound love for the unifying power of house music.

Born to a Liberian-American father and a South African mother, Kasango's early days were steeped in the sounds of hip-hop, R&B and soul. His father, who passed away when he was very young, played the guitar and spoke multiple languages, travelling

the world as a skydiver. Kasango exhibited similar thrill-seeking tendencies, chasing the highs he felt listening to mixes by pioneering Soweto house artist, DJ Kent. By the age of 16 he had managed to build his own record collection.

"Deep house was very big around 2004 to 2007, and compilations were 'the thing', so we'd import a lot of the house classics, Quentin Harris, etc," recalls Kasango. "But what [early South African house trio] Kentphonik did here at home was mixing pop vocals with house songs, which was rare at the time; I'd listen to songs and try to reverse-engineer them. DJ Kent is the reason why I decided to go into production. He stood out, he was different and he represented a new sound that I loved."

All DJ/producers know the best way to hone a sound is to road test it, which means playing out. One of the places Kasango has found most inspiration doing that is The Summit Grill & Sky Bar in Menlyn, Pretoria. Tucked between a hotel and a highway, the venue pierces the city's skyline, boasting a mixed crowd with one thing in common: a love for all varieties of house. From Thursday to Sunday, evenings there are filled with jazzy 'private school' amapiano, sweaty deep house classics, or festival-inspired varieties of techno that carry clubgoers off into the exposed night sky above. For Kasango, it's the space he feels most liberated in.

"It's one of the places I enjoy the most, because the crowd is there to enjoy everything, from deep to progressive to techno to Afro," he tells us. "The beautiful thing about being in South Africa is that we have a variety of sounds that people are accustomed to, and can tap into. At some point it was seen as an international sound, but even with the likes of 'Osama' you have scenes here at home that now enjoy Afrotech in a new way that feels less underground."

Due to the way the music industry and media in South Africa favour celebrity status and popular genres, such as pop and amapiano, Kasango never anticipated how well 'Osama' would do. When he was ready to release the final version of the track, his only thought was "This is a nice song... let's see what it does." But like his favourite club, the track revealed a widespread willingness to embrace his sound, striking a chord with audiences who were in desperate need of comfort during South Africa's year-long club closure.

"I never create music anticipating that it'll be a hit. I make music based on how I feel," he says. "I already know that the next song I plan to release will carry a different feeling to 'Osama'... I also know that it will capture people in the right way."

If his first few tracks are anything to go by, Kasango's potential, and that of the Afrotech sound, looks to be limitless in 2022. **SHIBA**

MELISSA MAZAZA

KASANGO

Landing smash hits in both the South African charts and the underground parties in 2021, Kasango is on a mission to connect people through house music



BLACK CADMIUM

Inspired by the sprawling history of Black music, Dutch duo Black Cadmium are ready to take 2022 by storm with their fresh take on the club-ready sounds of house, electro and breaks

Whether they're making brisk Detroit techno, UK breakbeat rollers or mystical electro, Black Cadmium's tracks are always on-point. In just a couple of years, the Rotterdam duo, composed of Joginda Macnack and Mike Richards, have become a hot underground name. They've released EPs on Naïve, Vault Wax, Ovum and Transient Nature, and tracks for United Identities and Sticky Tapes, all imbued with decades of club music evolution and a precision-tooled sense of what it takes to move a dancefloor. 'Sexy Acid', from 2020's 'Chemistry' EP, was a strobe-lit, 303 breakbeat burner, while 'Our Legacy' moved on tight drum machine beats and a squidgy electro bassline; most impressive of all was 2021's 'Gold', which had the feel of prime Infiniti or Underground Resistance in its kinetic techno-soul groove. "Everything we make gets released. If it doesn't, it's a waste of time," Macnack tells us over Zoom. "Sometimes big DJs say to us, 'I make so many tracks, but only one of them gets released', and I'm like, 'How?'"

As well as Detroit originals such as Carl Craig and Jeff Mills, and current trailblazers like Funkineven, Ben UFO and Carista, in a larger sense, it's the rich history of Black musical innovation that drives the duo.

"It's Black music, in the broadest spectrum that you can imagine, that's really what's inspired us," Macnack says. "If you look at the Detroit sound, or jungle, where those came from, they've got so much soul," Richards adds. "I think this music is supposed to bring everybody together, but let's also not forget where it came from. Credit where credit is due."

The duo met around 2000, introduced by mutual friends, and bonded over music. Both were big ravers and used to party in the Rotterdam club scene. Nowadays, Richards says, "the relationship we have is more than musical, it's a real brotherhood. We've seen each other's kids grow up, and we've been through the good times; we shared the bad times. I think that's also something you can hear in our sound — when we create music, it's

just who we are."

When they work on tracks now, whether in person or remotely, their different personalities help the composition process.

"The way we work, I think it's really special, because we complement each other's minds," Richards says. "The way he [Macnack] thinks is more directional with a bigger overview, and that's a quality I don't always pick up on." One of the duo's earliest releases, 2019's 'The Nasty', made with Kevin Ney, was released on DJ Pierre's Afro Deep label. They connected with Beyun when she worked there, and she's since released two Black Cadmium EPs on her own Vault Wax imprint.

"We just feel like Vault Wax is our home base," Richards says. "Joe and I and Beyun are really close friends. Now she lives in Rotterdam, she moved from the States over here, and we're part of each other's lives, so we just got to know each other on a deeper level."

Looking ahead to the new year, Black Cadmium have lots of new music coming, with a split EP on Naïve with Violet, an EP on Jensen Interceptor's International Chrome, and an appearance on a Nous'klaer compilation. "A lot is lined up, a lot of options, and things are going to happen in 2022," says Macnack. **BEN MURPHY**



PHOTO: BRENDAN PETERINK

MIXTRESS

With multiple London radio residencies and regular appearances at clubs and on live streams like Keep Hush, Mixtress translates her deep knowledge of high-speed dance music into adrenaline-pumping dancefloor moments, while striving to combat inequalities in the industry

New Delhi-born Mixtress — first name Rini — grew up in Amsterdam, before settling in London, aged 18, to study design engineering. A Joy Orbison all-dayer at Village Underground during Freshers Week got her excited for the city's club scene, but music had been her passion for years, starting with the records that were being played at home. "I had what I would consider 'a Bristolian dad's' music background," Mixtress explains over Zoom. "There was a lot of prog rock, there was a lot of trip-hop, Massive Attack and Morcheeba and Air," she says. Her signature high-energy DJing style, which favours 160bpm genres but takes in everything from jazz to drill, has its roots in her childhood, she explains. "I spent a lot of time digging and making playlists way before Spotify was even a thing."

Squat raves were where Mixtress discovered her passion for hardcore and jungle. "That was my first taste of UK rave," she recalls with a smile. Her first foray into DJing was within the spheres of techno and EBM, however, inspired by the kinds of events she was going to at the time. But the scene — which she describes as "cis, het, white" — around the time (2018), was one where she was continually getting disrespected as the only woman and the only person of colour. Eventually, the atmosphere compelled her to quit. "I realised the music I played harboured a very toxic environment, and the environment was just not good for my mental health," she explains.

Mixtress re-emerged a year and a half later, with a more carefree attitude to DJing, but at the same time, a clearer understanding of the kinds of genres she wanted to play. "Going back to it with a fresh set of eyes, where I had no expectations, no monetary expectations, was like, I just like music, and even if I'm playing in front of people, I never want to take myself that seriously," she says. This isn't to say that Mixtress is no longer passionate about the issues which made her quit DJing. She joined the Sisu crew, who work to showcase aspiring women and non-binary DJs and producers, precisely because she's committed to tackling the imbalances that still pervade the music industry. "I've always just been a huge fan of seeing real community efforts, to target and change those spaces that I think people of marginalised communities find intimidating and difficult and toxic sometimes," she says of her involvement in Sisu. Part of her role in 2022 will involve mentoring up-and-coming DJs, which Mixtress says is important for helping emerging acts with issues such as imposter syndrome, which she herself experienced. "If you are a person of colour, if you are queer, if you're not a straight, white guy, there is so much more to how you will feel in that space performing."



How people of different backgrounds feel at events is also on her mind when it comes to the make-up of audiences, and factors in her plans for the next phase of her career. She particularly wants to find a way for old-school fans of hardcore and jungle to co-exist happily with younger clubbers, who are just discovering these genres now. "Hardcore raves back then were inherently political, were done in protest, and they were extremely diverse for a dance crowd of the early '90s, where other genres were not, necessarily," she says. A move into promoting events, and fostering a welcoming atmosphere for people of all backgrounds and ages, is how she envisages replicating that mood. "I keep talking about the safe space that I would like to see at these events, but now I want to be able to create that myself." **KAMILA RYMAJDO**

Game Changer

Seminal cuts that altered dance music forever



Kings Of Tomorrow 'Finally'

Defected

A soulful house classic, Kings Of Tomorrow's 'Finally' appealed across the board thanks to its universal lyric and hopeful message. Kristian J Caryl talks to vocalist Julie McKnight, co-producer Jay Sealee, Defected's Simon Dunmore and Bushwacka about its evergreen appeal

Words: **KRISTIAN J CARYL**

"I was visiting my cousin Jay," remembers Julie McKnight of one special night in a New Jersey living room 20 years ago. "Sandy, the other half of Kings Of Tomorrow, was also there. We got pizza. Had some Heineken. They said they had a tune called 'Finally' they needed a vocal for, and I said 'Ah, OK'. I sang it, and what people hear is one of only two takes I ever did. That was it. I went off to play with Sandy's baby girl and they finished it off." Simple as that. No committee meetings. No major labels. No vastly expensive

studios. That one laidback get-together gave birth to one of the most enduring soulful house tracks of the century. In the 20 years since it peaked at No.24 on the UK singles chart and No.17 on the Billboard dance chart, 'Finally' has remained an evergreen favourite — a track that unites any crowd with its bittersweet messages, hypnotic drums and spiritual atmosphere. Sandy Rivera had actually started producing it a year before that living room meet-up, but had stalled when it came to getting the right vocalist. No one ever really knows why some

tracks go on to be as indelible as this one, but co-producer Jay 'Sinister' Sealee — who went solo in 2002, leaving Sandy to take care of Kings Of Tomorrow — has his own ideas.

"It was just a perfect pairing of lyrics and the tone of Julie's voice that intertwined for a magical result," he says. "The family connection to her was totally irrelevant in our selection. Her very specific styling, perfect pitch and timbre made her the sole consideration and obvious choice to deliver this very important song. No one else could have delivered it with

the same outcome, because Julie takes direction extremely well and, typically, is a 'one-taker'. 'Finally' is very straightforward by design and didn't incorporate many additional tracks for her to lay down with regard to harmonies."

UNIVERSAL

Importantly, 'Finally' is very much a song, and one, says Jay, that was "perhaps inspired" by the Aly Us hit 'Follow Me' on Strictly Rhythm. Sandy Rivera, meanwhile, has said in an interview before that CeCe Peniston's 1991 smash of the same name was the inspiration.

"It just came organically, outside of the fact that it was pre-determined that the bassline was going to drive the track as a feature, once laid," explains Jay. That bassline was crafted on a criminally under-appreciated Roland JV-2080 synth and, next to the vocal, is the track's standout feature, despite its simplicity.

'Finally' actually starts with two verses as opposed to the more standard one, which delays the gratification of the first chorus and the main melodic features of the tune until you're already well-and-truly locked into the rolling bass and Julie's spine-tingling voice. What she does is a masterclass in vocal work: she repeats words and phrases like 'You', 'I' and 'Time and time again', effortlessly shifting their pitch and tugging at the heartstrings in the process. When she opens up for the chorus and the heavenly chords ride up and down the scales, the rush of emotion and ripples of goose-pimples are unavoidable. Whether you're a house head or a techno warrior, it brings universal feelings that never grow old. The lyrics were written by Jay while on a flight home. They manage to be both profound and sensuous, singable but never derivative. He remembers that they came to him quickly and that he was "tearing up a bit as ideas hit the pad during the writing process. Maybe one too many bar drinks attributed to the emotion at the time," he laughs. The track was written about something personal to him "which I won't share further", and was inspired by the arrival of the new millennium.

"It was presented in a package to be delivered, related to, interpreted and consumed by the listener for whichever circumstance was personally applicable, whether that may have been personal self-reflection, relationships, love or new beginnings."

For many, the song can be happy or sad; a tale of love lost or newfound romance, depending on how you come at it. But for Jay, "it

is awesomely happy and the only sad emotion it evokes, if you could call it that, would be one of hope". And that's part of the reason it became an unofficial anthem for dancers in New York in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 9/11. "The song reflected the value of a new beginning, and I believe people latched on to that and looked to the song for peace in a very dark and chaotic moment in time."

SPARK OF MAGIC

These days, well-crafted house songs like 'Finally' are few and far between. Simon Dunmore has a theory as to why, after he re-released the tune on 12" via his Defected label a year after it first appeared, buried in the middle of Kings Of Tomorrow's 'It's In The Lifestyle' album on Paris label Distance in 2000.

"Artists don't get together in the studio like they used to," he says. "These days, most collaborations are done on the internet. I think that means there isn't the opportunity for a kind of curveball moment, a spark of magic, or for people to really bounce off each other in the way they can when they get together in the closed environment of a studio."

Simon had worked with Sandy at a previous label, AM:PM, so the two already had a relationship. To this day, they have a friendly dispute over whether Simon knocked 'Finally' back first before it went to Distance. Regardless of that, once he heard it in the club, and saw the

undeniable reactions it was getting each and every time, he was keen to license it for Defected.

"The tune was picked up by lots of the US DJs who were coming to London and playing," he says. "Word began to spread, the tune got played on lots of pirate radio stations, by Bobby and Steve on Kiss, and Danny Rampling on his specialist show on Radio 1. It was almost everywhere you turned back then, so we ended up making an offer to license it. It is a record that, to this day, still very much defines Defected. It's just a great song, very emotional house music. There is a lot of functional music these days, but tracks that really stand the test of time are much harder to find."

Simon remembers people balking at him for putting up such a big advance to secure the track for his own label, but it paid off. Defected reissued 'Finally' in October 2001, and the same year, Simon enlisted New York legend Danny Tenaglia to serve up two remixes of his own.

"You have to broaden out the appeal of a record. The original is very deep, the bassline is really hypnotic and the song carries it, but then — as it is now — DJs preferred records with a bit more energy. Danny had an amazing reputation, so his endorsing the record was one part of it, but for him to deliver a remix that was so up, with the huge and lush piano chords he added, it just took the track a bit more into peak-time territory."



Julie and Jay both tell us they were fans of the Danny Tenaglia remixes, and also the 'Love Story vs Finally' mash-up that proved just as successful by Layo & Bushwacka. It came about as a result of the tech-house duo's DJ sets: Bushwacka would play on three decks, and one night at Creamfields in Argentina, he dropped the acapella of 'Finally' over their own tune 'Love Story', as well as a simple techno loop. "I had never seen so many thousands of people go so crazy," he recalls. "The fusion brought tears to my eyes, and that is how it came about."

The pair actually had other vocalists in the studio re-singing the original. "The results were OK, but not magical enough for us," says Bushwacka, who admits that at the time, Layo didn't even want to release the mash-up version they did, which ended up cracking the UK top ten. "I saw Sandy once years later. I said that he did well out of us with his publishing royalties. He thanked me. That's the only discussion we have ever had about it but, for me, it has meant making lots of people very happy. It fills me with joy to think about how many beautiful memories there are of people dancing and singing along."

MEANING

The original 'Finally' got plenty of plays in Sandy Rivera's own house sets, even if Harry 'Choo Choo' Romero knocked it back when he first heard it at Sandy's house, claiming it was "too soulful". Jay remembers the track catching on when he heard it at the Winter Music Conference in Miami. "Tony Humphries dropped it multiple times in a set, and

the crowd reaction from spin one said it all," he says, adding that for him, "it was a big track from the moment I heard Julie deliver the first line in my headset."

"I still love it. I love all of mine," beams Julie, who now also works as a kindergarten teacher, but is speaking while in the UK touring with Sandy and happily performing 'Finally' at every show. "You know, that's why I've made sure I choose songs that mean something to me, rather than just singing on something people think will be a hit. No. With 'Finally', honestly, the meaning of the song changes at times, even when I have to perform it, depending on where I am in my life. It can be about God, or it can be a message to the house family that's there with me, it can be about someone who has passed away, or a wedding, or a new baby, and I think that's why it's so special."

The reason Julie has always been so vocally adept is because she has been singing and performing since she was 15. "I was raised singing in clubs at home, whether it was rock or punk or blues or jazz. I've always been a singer with a band, doing open mics and larger venues, and that was always my favourite thing to do. But if I am up there on stage, alone, I get my energy from my house family, feeding back into my performance."

Julie grew up in a musical household, and legendary early rock & roll architect Little Richard was a family friend and regular visitor. Julie says he, and other family friends, grounded her and always advised her to stay independent, which is why she

shunned major label offers that came in the wake of the success of 'Finally'. In fact, Julie was and is very choosy about who she works with.

"I have a small circle of people, mostly family, who I would sing for, and that was why I was comfortable enough to go in with Jay," she says. "I knew I would be treated fairly and given some freedom." Years later, Julie was asked to work with Axwell and David Guetta. She did, but still insisted she sang verse-chorus-verse-chorus rather than just a line that would be looped and heavily post-produced. "It's a different world, the songs come out very different, so I only did two," she says with a wry smile.

Neither of them bested 'Finally'. The "never-ending churn of music streaming", as Simon puts it, means the track is always available, and always getting played somewhere. In the past, tunes sold out, went out of print, got deleted. But these days anyone can listen to anything at any time. That, combined with the subtle spirituality and philosophy of the original, has helped it endure. "The thing about great music is that longevity is not necessarily about selling a huge amount of records really quickly and being in the charts," says Simon. "Other records we have put out on Defected have been more successful, but don't define us as well as that record."

Similar follow-up tunes by Julie and Jay, such as the gospel-tinged 'Home', are still brilliant house records, but never even got close to the status of 'Finally'. As Simon puts it, lightning never strikes twice. "It was just a magical moment where everything came together."





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Avision

Pic: DAVE COSTANTINI



AVISION has just released his debut album on Maceo Plex's Ellum Audio imprint, 'In My Mind', an impressive body of work stuffed full of melodic techno and maximal house tracks. It's certain to increase his stock internationally, adding to gigs in 2022 that have previously included the Brooklyn Mirage and Time Warp in New York and festivals like Elrow, BPM Festival, Electric Daisy Carnival and more.

Avision grew up in NYC, and has released on mainstay techno labels like Adam Beyer's Drumcode and Alan Fitzpatrick's We Are The Brave. His lockdown-recorded 'In My Mind' album was snapped up by Maceo, an action no doubt in part due to the plethora of playable big room bangers included within it. From voyaging Detroit-tinged opener 'Real Talk' through a deep-down 'Cut The Rope' with the magnificent Robert Owens on vox, the album is soon peaking with the metallic, burbling 'No Disco'. The title track with vocalist Xander will chime with those who dig a Depeche Mode-go-techno vibe, while other highlights include a cosmic 'Your Soul', the hi-octane prog of 'Where I Want To Be', and flowing, euphonious penultimate squelcher 'Lost Symmetry'.

"This album touches on a little bit of everything, and I wanted it to represent where I'm from," Avision says. "90% of the album was written during the time we couldn't be ourselves and do what we love, but I turned that frustration and disbelief into an album with emotion and meaning. I couldn't be happier with the final outcome, and I hope everyone enjoys it."

Michael Jackson 'Off The Wall'

"Produced by the legendary Quincy Jones, 'Off The Wall' has been one of those albums I can never get enough of. I don't think there was a better time for music. Released in 1979, Quincy and Michael teamed up with Rod Temperton from Heatwave to write most of the album. I think this trio is unmatched; what they were able to do in a studio is every musician/producer's dream. When I find myself needing inspiration, I go back to this album. I always listen to all of the little things they were able to fit in the mix, and to me it is the perfect album."

Chicago 'Street Player'

"There is no band that can pull off the musicianship and diversity that Chicago bring to the table. Growing up playing the drums, Chicago has been one of my favourite bands of all time. They were funk, rock, soul and disco all in one band. 'Street Player' was released in 1979, when disco was taking over the airwaves. My favourite part of this record is the break when the horn solo comes in, most famously used in 'The Bomb' by The Bucketheads (Kenny Dope). Chicago's funk has always inspired me from my younger years all the way up till now."

Stevie Wonder 'Another Star'

"The legendary Stevie Wonder has to be top five on my all-time artists list. 'Another Star' was written and produced by Stevie and released in 1976; another record that had the feel of disco. I love the writing in this tune (as it's brilliant), and the arrangement. I love when everything strips back into just the drums/piano and then builds back into the full arrangement. Simply amazing."

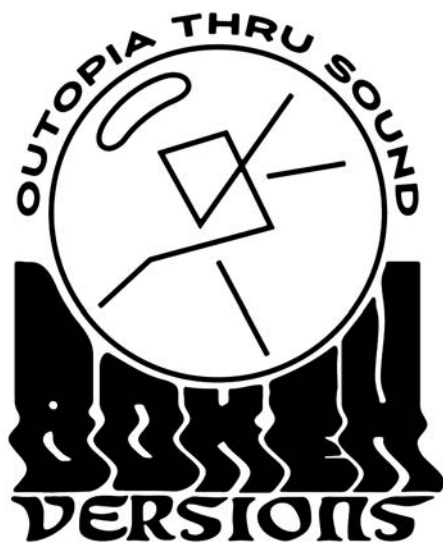
Audioslave 'Audioslave'

"Audioslave are one of my favourite rock bands of all time. Their debut album dropped when I was eight years old and I remember asking for it as a Christmas gift. I couldn't wait to listen to it, and when I did, I couldn't get enough. I just love how Chris Cornell's voice cuts through every record — so much emotion, so much power, just an overall phenomenally talented group. I think what I relate to most on this album is their way of writing melodies and hooks. Each track on the album has its own identity and they didn't skip a beat on the writing."

CeCe Peniston 'We Got A Love Thang'

"Call me corny or whatever, but if there's one track that reminds me of my childhood, it's this record. I was born in '93, and 'We Got A Love Thang' was released in '92; this was my first introduction to house music. My dad would be blasting this record over and over when I was a kid. This record was the start of me loving house music, and made me a 'house baby' — ha. I always have to remember where it all started, and records like this inspired it all."

Vital Label



Meshing dancehall, dub, techno and industrial, Bokeh Versions has carved out a unique niche in Bristol's underground. Valuing eccentricity and a spirit of collaboration, the label has found novel ways of releasing music to its loyal audience

Words: **OSKAR JEFF**

BRISTOL'S electronic music scene is an invigorating one, with labels, promoters, DJs and producers growing from the city's dub reggae roots. In recent years, label crews like Timedance and Livity Sound have, broadly, adapted dubstep and other sub-bass-focused genres into new styles of UK techno. Others have come at the city's heritage from a different angle.

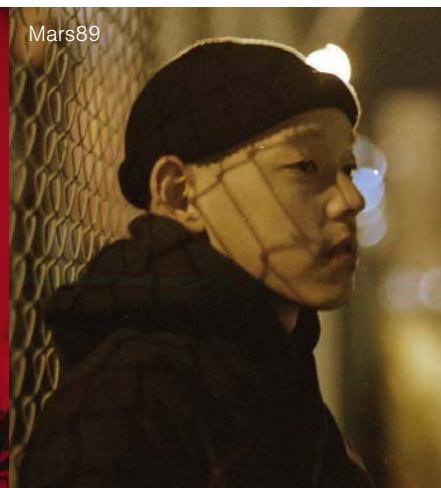
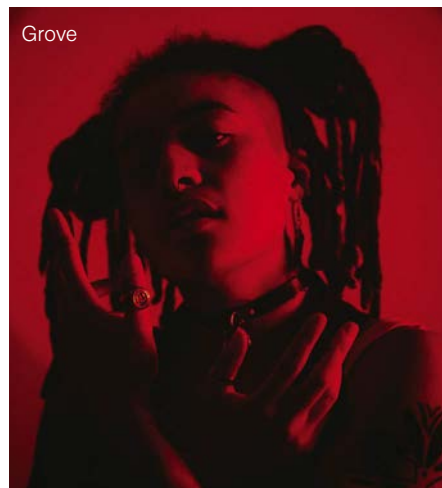
Over the last six years, Bokeh Versions has drawn from myriad influences connected to Bristol's DIY soundsystem culture, and an international roster of dancehall, reggae, industrial and noise artists, building its audience through recognisable formats like cassettes, vinyl, T-shirts and experimental merchandise like virtual reality and even homebrew perfume.

From the futurist dancehall of Duppy Gun and the dub collages of SEEKERSINTERNATIONAL, to the industrial battery of Bad Tracking and the 'unearthed' psychobilly recordings of the Leather Rats, Bokeh Versions is a gonzo forage of international oddities, and an ongoing experiment with how underground music can thrive in the digital age.

OUTERNATIONAL

The label's outernational reach has been part of its ethos since the beginning. The spark came from SEEKERSINTERNATIONAL, a Filipino-Canadian production crew whose spatial dubwise sonics on 2012's 'The Call From Below', on Digitalis Recordings, caught Miles Opland's ear.

"I just thought it was one of the best things I'd heard in forever," Opland says. Hearing the group felt like a return to the "soul, spirituality and heart" that, for him, had been missing from dub techno for a long time: "I really



connected with them for that reason."

Still early in their career, the crew were guarded about their identities, and the intrigue and excitement around them chimed with Opland's urge to start a label.

"I'd always been involved with music, and it felt like the next step in helping the music I love have a life it might not otherwise," he says. "I remember thinking, 'If SEEKERSINTERNATIONAL say no, then I won't do it'. I remember that feeling vividly."

Opland and the group connected online, and in 2015, the seven-inch single 'TrustInDigikal / IfUWantMe' was released on Bokeh Versions; a one-two punch of whacked-out dubwise exploration that kick-started the label. SEEKERSINTERNATIONAL's ethereal dub techno has mutated into an anarchic soundsystem collage, harking back to the crew's early days in the '90s turntablist scene. Their 2016 album 'LoversDedicationStation' is an ode to lovers rock that pushes dub to its outer limits, an avant-garde sample montage of speech, melody and bass that's as close to Madlib as it is to Mad Professor.

"We encourage our artists to do something different for every release, it's all about the weirdness," Opland says. "Not necessarily moving forwards, but pushing everything outwards."

SYMBIOTIC

Another repeat offender is Jay Glass Dubs, whose second release on the label was 2016's 'Glacial Dancehall' mixtape. A sludgy, DJ Screw-esque mix of dancehall cuts, it established two recurring themes for the label.

One is the use of cassette tapes as a means to release physical formats while not having to succumb to the arguably laborious and expensive process of vinyl manufacturing. The other is the mixtape as a guest-focused series. As part of 'Glacial Dancehall', whacked-out mixes from Time Cow, of Jamaica's Equiknoxx crew, and Low Jack, France's premier exporter of reconstructive dub experimentation, have tapped into the increasing prevalence of dancehall rhythms in underground Western club music; through the series, genre originators and loving outsiders have started working together for Bokeh Versions. A pivotal moment for Bokeh Versions came as Opland looked to the Duppy Gun collective and label, who have released some of the most radically off-kilter tracks in modern dancehall. The brainchild of Jamaica-based MC I Jahbar and LA-based musicians Sun Araw and M. Geddes Gengras, Duppy Gun's approach is the sweetest antidote to the tropical cosplay of Western pop iterations of dancehall, and a reminder of the sound's playfully warped eccentricity.

Duppy Gun saw a convoluted birth; initially funded by Stones Throw Records, it soon stagnated. Fortunately, a chance meeting between Opland and Sun Araw while the latter toured the UK led to Opland helping the crew reinvent the project on the label side.

"It had a life before I was on the scene, for sure," he explains. "I knew they were having some troubles and I just got chatting to Sun Araw, and we really got on. I could see it was quite a frustrating situation for them."

With Bokeh now handling label operations

“At this point, vinyl is almost like flogging a dead horse. We thought, ‘Let’s take the money we’d have spent on a record, and instead make a couple of videos, a perfume, and some T-shirts’. That seems more exciting.”

alongside the LA duo, and I Jahbar recording a stable of up-and-coming vocalists in Jamaica, the team began jointly distributing projects, the first being 2017’s I Jahbar-fronted ‘Miro Tape’. Since then, Duppy Gun and Bokeh Versions have had a symbiotic relationship, showcasing homegrown vocal talent such as G Sudden and Vybz Kartel protégé Sikka Rymes, while giving Bokeh Versions production regulars such as SEEKERSINTERNATIONAL and Jay Glass Dubs a new way to flex their production chops. “You grow through your collaborations, that’s why I really encourage people on the label to get together,” says Opland. “Just because you can do everything yourself doesn’t mean you should. It’s good to get out of those echo chambers. If we’ve just got someone who’s a bedroom producer, we’ll try and get a vocalist involved.”

ECCENTRICITIES

The project has blossomed in the past few years. On the 2019 cassette ‘I Jahbar & Friends - Inna Duppy SKRS Soundclash’, production is handled jointly by Duppy Gun and SEEKERSINTERNATIONAL, who, having previously relied on sampled vocals, are able to distill their outlandish sonics in a more functional setting, displaying an infectious synergy with the Duppy Gun vocalists that has continued to evolve. Looking forward, collaboration is at the heart of Bokeh Versions. The latest release, ‘SPICE’,

finds rising star Grove voicing cuts from YOKEL and Robin Stewart of Giant Swan. Six tracks of seductive, forward-facing dancehall and club, it follows up on the promise of their previous project ‘Queer + Black’, cutting a distinct figure in the Bristol scene. “When I first saw them perform, I thought they were fucking unreal, just one of the best I’d ever seen. Grove can do it all, to be honest. Absolute legend.” As vinyl pressing stalls due to endless major label reissues, supply chain problems, and Brexit causing postage and import taxes to skyrocket, Bokeh Versions have been reconsidering how to release music. “Brexit almost killed us. We’ve never chased money, but it’s not nice to lose a third of your customers, which the EU audience represented. A lot of these people have been with the label since the beginning, and now they’re just not buying stuff. And why would they? They might get some mystery tax added to their spend.” While a clear fix seems way off, the label has doubled down on its eccentricities; limited copies of the Grove release come as homemade fragrance brewed by the artist themselves, a new direction in sensory world-building around music. “At this point, vinyl is almost like flogging a dead horse. We thought, ‘Let’s take the money we’d have spent on a record, and instead make a couple of videos, a perfume, and some T-shirts’. That seems more exciting.”

This follows the label’s wildest step within alternative distribution: a 30 minute-long virtual reality headtrip, released as a companion piece to Mars89’s 2021 sound art release ‘New Dawn’. “I like the idea of a release as a world, the idea of music as transportation. You don’t get that with a five-second clip on Instagram.”

Currently viewable on either headset or browser, the site allows viewers to navigate a hellscape of abstract digital flora, an environment that pulsates and breathes with the soundtrack. A product of two years’ work, it remains a proud achievement for Mars89, though Opland admits that the initial response to the work proved difficult to gauge through the veneer of social media. Originally scheduled to appear as an installation piece before the pandemic reared its head, ‘New Dawn’ will be presented as a physical exhibit soon.

Gimme 5

Leslie Winer & Jay Glass Dubs ‘YMFEE’S’

“Leslie’s a legend who’s starting to get deserved recognition, and this was such a quantum leap for Jay Glass Dubs. Strung-out, beatnik, industrialised trip-hop that marks a moment in time for me; huge and painful.”



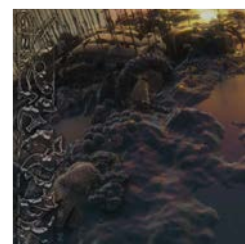
TNT Roots ‘Raw Dub Creator’

“The record I can’t believe we got to release. The most militant ‘90s steppas of all time. I even got an angry text from Aba Shanti-I afterwards. Legends don’t like it when you press their dubplate killers.”



Mars89 ‘New Dawn’

“Tokyo’s Mars89 realising his full sci-fi dreams with a soundtrack to the VR world created with a crackpot Mexican team of hackers and coders. Felt like breaking new ground, maybe it was too deep and dense for our Instagram/paid-PR world... and that’s the point.”



I Jahbar & Friends ‘Inna Duppy SKRS Soundclash’

“Duppy Gun has been a huge labour of love and vision from I Jahbar. This is his debut album proper, linking with the reason Bokeh started in the first place: SEEKERSINTERNATIONAL. Outer-orbit dancehall perfection.”



Grove ‘SPICE’

“To the future: Grove is instantly electrifying. A magnetic performer, producer, vocalist and person who can do anything. Five tracks of potent punk-club with a full Bristol crew, creating an amazing contextual world around the music with 16mm footage, DIY fragrances, airbrushed T-shirts and datamoshing.”



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Techno



01. **Age Of Love**
The Age Of Love Charlotte de Witte & Enrico Sangiuliano
Remix
Diki Records
02. **Oliver Schories**
Devon Oliver Huntemann Remix
Ritter Butzke Records
03. **James Hype**
Dancing Extended Mix
Musical Freedom
04. **Carbon, Lampe**
Driving Mad Original Mix
Alula Tunes
05. **Andrea Garcia, SAM WOLFE**
Prison Break Original Mix
1605
06. **Popof, Space 92**
Insomnia Original Mix
Form
07. **Timmo**
Mind's Eye Original Mix
Hypnstate
08. **UMEK**
Frequency Differ Original Mix
1605
09. **HI-LO**
Hypnos Original Mix
Drumcode
10. **Teenage Mutants**
Rebirth Original Mix
Filtth On Acid

Drum & Bass



01. **Bou, High Contrast**
Don't Need You Original Mix
Gossip
02. **GRAY**
Rubadub VIP
Born On Road
03. **Killer Hertz**
Stingray Original Mix
Killer Hertz
04. **Issey Cross, Wilkinson**
Used To This Extended Mix
Sleepless Music Limited
05. **Phibes**
Like Whoa Original Mix
Korsakov Music
06. **A.M.C**
Brazil Original Mix
Drum&BassArena
07. **DJ Limited, GRAY, Ragga Twins**
Blood DJ Limited Remix
Born On Road
08. **S.PY**
Nebula Original Mix
DARKMTTR Records
09. **Enei, Kasra, T Man**
Take A Dive Original Mix
Critical Music
10. **P Money, Whiney**
Buss The Red Original Mix
Hospital Records

Tech-House



01. **ACRAZE**
Do It To It Extended Mix
THRIVE MUSIC
02. **Joshwa, Lee Foss**
My Humps Original Mix
Repopulate Mars
03. **James Hype, Vintage Culture**
You Give Me A Feeling Original Mix
Insomniac Records
04. **Wade**
Passion Original Mix
Criterio Music
05. **Matt Sassari**
Give It To Me Full Vocal Mix - Extended
Cr2 Records
06. **Chris Lorenzo**
California Dreamin' (feat. High Jinx) Extended Mix
Black Book Records
07. **CID**
Duro Original Mix
Repopulate Mars
08. **Biscits**
Wait A Minute Extended Mix
SOLO TOKO
09. **Ben Kim**
Somebody To Love Extended Mix
REALM Records
10. **Byron Stingily, Martin Ikin**
Devotu Like That Original Mix
CLNE

Dance



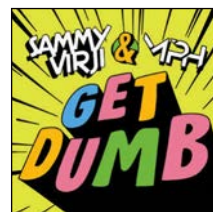
01. **Dua Lipa, Elton John**
Cold Heart Claptone Extended Mix
EMI
02. **The Human League**
Don't You Want Me Purple Disco Machine Extended Mix
Virgin Records Ltd
03. **Echoes (UK), John Summit**
Human (feat. Echoes) Extended
FFRR
04. **Soft Cell**
Tainted Love Jamie Jones 4Z Extended Mix
Positiva
05. **Ed Sheeran**
Shivers Jax Jones Extended Remix
Atlantic Records UK
06. **Dua Lipa, Elton John**
Cold Heart PNAU Extended Mix
EMI
07. **Farruko, Tiesto**
Pepas Tiesto Remix
Sony Music Latin
08. **Dom Dolla, Mansionair**
Strangers (with Mansionair) Extended Mix
Sweat It Out
09. **Ancalima, Tom Franke**
Better Off Alone Sean Finn Remix
ZYX
10. **Eyelar, Purple Disco Machine**
Dopamine feat. Eyelar John Summit Extended Remix
Sweat It Out

House



01. **Mark Broom, Riva Starr, Star B**
Fire Extended Mix
Snatch! Records
02. **Ewan McVicar**
Tell Me Something Good Original Mix
Trick
03. **Darius Syrossian, Mark Knight, Prospect Park**
Get This Feeling feat. Prospect Park Extended Mix
Armada Subjekt
04. **Bob Sinclar**
Save Our Soul Extended Rework 2021
Yellow Productions
05. **Darius Syrossian**
White Rabbit Moxy Extended Club Mix
Defected
06. **Jaded**
Welcome To The People Extended
Higher Ground (Mad Decent)
07. **Westend**
Perfect Extended Mix
D4 DANCE
08. **Mr Jay, Paul Bleasdale**
Piano Life Original Mix
Cleveland City
09. **Shermanology, Will Clarke**
Searching Original Mix
All We Have Is Now
10. **Junior Jack**
Stupidisco David Penn Extended Remix
Tinted Records

Garage



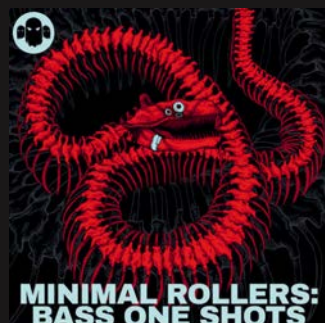
01. **MPH, Sammy Virji**
Get Dumb Original Mix
Sammy Virji
02. **Danny Dennett, Sando**
Really Tight Original Mix
Yosh Pit
03. **Smokey Bublbin' B**
Poison Original Mix
Smokey Bublbin' B
04. **Higgo**
Crush Extended Mix
SPINNIN RECORDS
05. **JGT**
Back To The Party Original Mix
Elektroshok Records
06. **Ozzie Guven**
Melody Original Mix
Seven Dials Records
07. **DJ Cosworth, Interplanetary Criminal**
Ruff Hyper Mix
Time Is Now Records
08. **DJ Cosworth, Interplanetary Criminal**
Trust Me Original Mix
Time Is Now Records
09. **Overmono**
Bby Original Mix
XL Recordings
10. **Sosa UK**
Your Love Extended
Ministry of Sound Recordings

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Staff Picks

This month's deadliest cuts, chosen by DJ Mag staff



Elliott
Transcendance
Ritual Poison

SINCE 2019, South London's Elliott has co-run Big Dyke Energy, a beloved underground queer club night they've described as being all about "being strong, being independent, knowing your worth, taking up space and not giving a fuck about what people think". It's an assertive attitude the DJ and producer has captured perfectly on their debut solo EP. Across four cuts, Elliott jumps from full-phat garage into alien 'ardcore and warped acid electro. Opener 'Tender' seeps its 2-step beat into a thick, smoky sub-bass soup; its floor-quaking heft is matched by deep melodic plumes, as fit for fist-pumping catharsis as they are for introspective dancefloor moments. 'Loose Tooth' fires from all cylinders, with classic rave breaks, gnarly keys and a swooping electro backbone blasting off for maximum effect. 'Metamorphic' mixes the murky rhythms and mystery of both Drexciya and Boards Of Canada into a perfect Room 2, 4am mind-melter. These cuts pair with a razor-sharp remix from Violet, rounding off a striking debut of formidable rave energy.



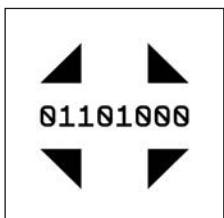
tape_hiss
Fever Dream
Echocentric

AFTER releases on Love Notes and Just Jack, Brooklyn producer tape_hiss lands on the Echocentric label with a hefty EP of deep house and electro. Lead cut 'La Tirimbina' is especially bewitching, harking back to the dreamy Italo house of labels like UMM: all moody bass, yearning piano and wafts of synth melody. 'Sky Garden' is in a similar zone, but breaks out the 808s for an electro excursion, while 'A Space That Sees' leans into Marshall Jefferson bass and illimitable, horizon-gazing pads. Vitamin D on wax.



DJ Void
RIDE05
Magic Carpet

AUSTRALIA'S DJ Void is next in line on the Lisbon-based label Magic Carpet. The EP kicks off with 'Bbbreakfast', a retro-sounding A1 where warm basslines and Italo-esque stabs are the order of the day, while the bouncy dancefloor-friendly rhythms continue on 'Aussie Vibration'. The rolling percussion and snare hits of 'Smordrumz' flow effortlessly with undulating melodies and floaty basslines, and then 'Break It Boi' reveals a classic Korg M1-style bassline and slamming 909-style drums alongside subtle 303-acid tweaks and '90s-style breaks.



Fasme & Maelstrom
Lotus 48
CPU

ON 'Lotus 48', rising name Fasme and seasoned electro pro Maelstrom combine forces and prove a formidable team over four tracks that mix club nous with mystic melodies. 'Ciliae' is especially good, with its descending arpeggio bass, zapping drums and glimmers of icy synth work, and 'Lotus 48' is appropriately the highlight of the lot, with its slamming beats, funk-up groove and spaciness. 'Moneres', too, deserves a mention: a huge-sounding production with crystalline keys and a deadly arp driving it forwards.



DJ IC
The Adrenaline EP
All Shades Of The Drum

LONDON-BASED DJ IC, an inaugural member of the collective My Vibe My Tribe, delivers a dance-ready new four-track EP. The title track infuses a methodical tech beat with surging synth lines, while 'Elevation' flows with the same energy, undulating melodies that work in perfect harmony with bassline stabs. 'Wrong Lane (Afro Tech Mix)' alongside G Boy SA is full of epic builds and tension, and 'Most Wanted' with Jim Mastershine and G Boy SA rounds off the EP with synthesized sounds that unfurl alongside pattering melodies.



Pugilist
Static
Banoffee Pies

MESHING jungle, dubstep, grime and techno into his own fresh hybrids, Melbourne's Pugilist has become a name to watch, and he impresses again with the 'Static' EP. 'Déjà Vu' is a jaw-dropping cut, mixing shuffling drums somewhere between garage and breakbeat with trippy techno chords, bringing to mind Martyn at his best. 'Future Retro' leans into the breakbeat flavour, adding reggae vox snippets and jazzy notes, 'Static' itself is digidub perfection, and 'Sky Blue' harks back to the trip-hop of Pork Recordings. Hugely impressive stuff.



D'TCH
SSBB002
Super Sonic Booty Bangers

AFTER releases on Sweetbox, Diffrent and Western Lore, Bristol's D'TCH brings a sweaty selection of rave fusions to new label Super Sonic Booty Bangers, combining fragments of multiple genres into pure party material. 'Blow My Mind' is a super-speedy mix of Amen breaks, 4/4 kicks, hardcore synths and pounding pianos, while 'Getting Down' cranks up classic house bass riffs beyond donk tempo. 'Manic Acid Sex Bunny' is not a place for subtlety, but will delight fans of 303s, Squarepusher and weird breakbeats.



TAAHLIAH
Angelica Extended
untitled (recs)

GLASGOW-BASED TAAHLIAH made a name for herself through DJing and is now gaining recognition for her productions. The experimental sounds on 'Angelica (Extended)' fuse plenty of different influences; the dreamy

vocals and slamming beats on 'Brave' remind us of the euphoria of turn-of-the-millennium trance, while tracks like 'Never Lose' take a fast-paced, hard-hitting journey into gabber and hardcore. 'FMX (4x4)' is a more jacking affair that wouldn't sound astray in an early hours techno set. There's something for everyone on this mini-album.



Battery & Flight
CM.005
Carbon Music

SEASONED drum & bass DJ Flight dons her producer hat, teaming up with Battery (formerly Craggz & Parallel Forces) on Jubei's Carbon Music imprint. On 'Overture', they conjure a bustling and polyrhythmic piece of

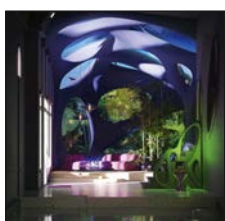
d&b, with a moody jazz sample and the classic 'Ironside' siren wail, before a weighty sub gatecrashes the party. On the flip, Battery take on a classic break with 'Funky Mule', shredding it over dub-wise chord clangs and felt-not-heard low-end. A slamming combination.



Finn & India Jordan
All About Love / Big B
Local Action

FORMER DJ Mag cover star India Jordan rounds off 2021 with another collaboration with Manchester's Finn, following their EP 'H.U.R.L.' on the same label back in 2019. 'All About Love' is an anthemic house track

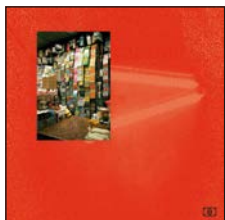
with a storming bassline and deep spacious chords; hold tight for the breakdown. 'Big B' speeds up the pace for a fiery breaks-laden dancefloor banger, with elements of classic '90s rave, bleep, and speed garage. LFO fans be at the ready.



mayo
Sad Violin Music
United Identities

AMSTERDAM producer mayo has a history of playing in bands, and she brings a scuzzy DIY energy to her debut EP. Over three tracks, she explores industrial electronics, techno, rave and EBM influences. 'Dystopian Dialect'

is a mid-tempo throb of 4/4 beats, ghostly touches of breakbeat and metallic scree, while 'Aura Phase' morphs between electro and breaks, illuminated by glowing synth bass. 'Human Engineering' you could imagine in an Elena Colombi set, with its crepuscular post-punk atmosphere.



Wheelman
STE003
Stereotone

THERE'S solid grooves aplenty on Glasgow-based Wheelman's latest release via his own imprint. Though now a label, Stereotone started off as a club night and this club-ready three-tracker is perfect for both warm-up

and peak-time sets. 'Tripped' is the mesmeric A-side with psychedelic vocals, while 'Memory' is all about the bassline and spaciousness, with warping sounds and woven dubby stabs throughout. 'Broke' is a breakbeat affair with off-kilter beats, energetic percussion and wonky melodies.



Eliza Rose
Plant Lovers
Rosebud Recordings

THE 'Plant Lovers' EP finds DJ, producer and Rosebud boss Eliza Rose teaming up with a host of friends for an eclectic selection of beats. Mkulu remixes 'Up Down', bringing

bittersweet jazzy piano and reversed drums to Rose's lush vocal. Peaky Beats offers a digidub version of 'Flowers' you could imagine in an Iration Steppas set, and Kylin Tyce and Introspekts bring skippy garage interpretations. But Angel D'Lite's mix of 'Flowers' is the pick: a jungle tekno juggernaut for the ages.



Yosh
The Warning
Time Is Now

SOME serious heat arrives on Time Is Now with this new five-tracker from London producer Yosh. 'How We Roll' kicks off the EP and doesn't mess around, warping basslines right from the start. '2 Times' is on a similar

flex with the addition of dubby vox and glimmering pads. 'It Goes' is a breaks-heavy roller, reminiscent of early liquid drum & bass. 'Shape The Future' is another heater for the clubs with squelchy bass, horn stabs and subtle whispers that reverberate into the ether, while 'Pigments' is all about the drop — guaranteed to get the crowd hype.



Dar Disku
Dar Disku 005
Dar Disku Records

BAHRAIN and UK-based label Dar Disku brings another rare gem to light, this time Sally's 'Zawgy El Azeez', a sublime piece of Egyptian pop with a decidedly Balearic flavour (licensed from Digitech Records). On Amr

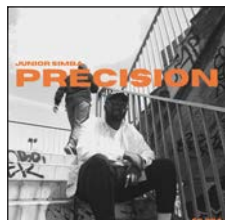
Mahmoud's mix, Sally's vocal hooks and lush synths power the lilting rhythm, but on the Dar Disku & Eternal Love edit, there's a propulsive slap bass disco groove for club play. On the flip, Dar Disku edit 'Yom Fil Kahera' into a faster, Arabian electro-disco rhythm, this time sans vocal.



Highrise
Distant Skies
Timehri

NEW London-based label Timehri follows its inaugural release by DJ Perception with three choice cuts from Highrise. The A1 is a dreamy, deep journey into UKG; stripped-back 2-step beats with jazzy stabs, while B1 is a tougher

cut with slamming kicks, sultry vocal cuts and off-kilter hats that keep it effortlessly rolling. B2 brings us back to the deepness, vox and stabs with some serious soul. If you're into Steve Gurley, El-B, Ramsey & Fen, and other iconic garage producers of the late '90s/early 2000s era, then 'Distant Skies' is for you.



Junior Simba
Precision
Simba Sounds

LEEDS-BASED DJ and producer Junior Simba's latest EP 'Precision' truly brings what he delivers as a DJ — an abundance of dancefloor energy. The title track is packed with groove, deep stabs rolling throughout until

the melodic breakdown provides unforgettable moments. 'Senna' takes things more pensive and deeper, with minor chords bringing plenty of emotion. 'Rain' travels on a similar tip, beautiful vox over soft pads and off-kilter beats. And 'Kingdom' featuring Vanessa Chisakula's spoken word performance rounds the EP off with thought-provoking lyrics.

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Making noise: The creative community of EAT DIS

Drawing on the DIY attitude and experimental spirit of the Midwest's dance music legacy, EAT DIS is a trans-centred community of club producers pushing at boundaries in every direction. Now in its fourth year, label creator DJ GIRL speaks to Theo Kotz about her vision

MIDWESTERN LABEL EAT DIS and its driving force DJ GIRL honour the roots of club music by encouraging boundless creativity and giving a voice to the marginalised.

As DJ GIRL explains, “the ethos is essentially: ‘get the bitches paid and let’s bang the box as hard as we can.’”

Shortened from ‘EAT DIS Pxxsy’, what began as a party at Detroit’s CityClub became a group chat when DJ GIRL had to relocate to Chicago. Some of the participants were making music and from that incubatory sharing of ideas the ‘Vibes Comp’ was collated and EAT DIS was born in 2018. This energy remains and is most apparent with the periodic ‘2HR’ compilations on EAT DIS. These releases are the result of regular production competitions, in which the crew each receive a sample pack and make a track in two hours using just those sounds. When that time is up, they share the results among the group and pick a favourite.

“We’re not competitive,” says DJ GIRL. “It’s more about blowing your friends’ minds than burning someone. It’s like a ritual for all of us, it’s why we are a thing.”

On these comps you’ll find undulating jungle-drone like Oaths’ ‘Angel of Death’, glitch tracks like Odae’s ‘Beams of Lighter Fluid’, burst-fire trance collages like Twofold’s ‘Recalibrated’, and countless other freaky permutations. The tracks are often fast and abrasive, though releases like Tony G’s ‘One More Time’ stray less far from the old club forms. For DJ GIRL, it’s a deliberate play for discomfort.

“One time someone said after a show ‘your music gives me an anxiety attack,’” she says. “Good. My life is very scary, I’ve almost died four times. [That] anxiety is something I want people [to] feel. We need to stop letting trans people fall by the [wayside]. I want you to understand the stress [and] the pain we go through.”

Demos are open to trans women only, with the guidance simply to “go crazy” and “do you”. Things have improved for trans visibility in the 10 years since DJ GIRL’s own transition, but as she explains, “Trans people are so othered in dance music. We need a space just for us.”

All of which feeds the agitated maelstrom of her music, a mishmash

of club styles, fashionable and otherwise: fuzzed-out, stepping house like ‘CUICA’ from ‘The DJ GIRL EP’ rubbing shoulders with the rumbling techno of ‘DETROIT BY MORNING’; or the aquatic stomp of ‘EATDISSOO’ alongside the datamoshed ghettech of ‘COINCIDENCE’ from her latest ‘FUKKUPPPP’ EP (itself the result of the ‘2HR’ sessions).

She cites DJ Rashad (“the greatest who ever lived”) and Disco D (“he ripped shit up and didn’t care one



bit”) as key influences, and contends that “we need to love Detroit and Chicago more than just going to Movement [Festival]”.

Holding dear the impulse to make and do without heed to pre-existing structures in the industry or in music itself, EAT DIS is one of the realest torchbearers to that legacy around.



10 essential EAT DIS tracks

DJ GIRL picks out the perfect primer into the frenetic world of EAT DIS, with words by Theo Kotz

01. Heavymetallids ‘@ The Club’

Hefty, bouncing low-end and ravey stabs enshrine this dancefloor call-to-arms.

02. Yakui ‘Radial Hardcore’

A glitchy robotic malfunction built from crushed drums and cascading sirens. It sounds like an anxiety dream played at double speed.

03. Fairway ‘Amiga Jawn’

A crunchy, gothic banger lifted from one of the label’s famous ‘2HR’ compilations. Raw, unfiltered club fuel.

04. Zwansound ‘Produkt’

Snatched vocal snippets and menacing gunshots hint at ghettech intentions, before a hard bounce and menacing rumble crash into view, moving into moody dark room territory.

05. Twofold ‘Timbales Track’

Skittish timbales and a shallow-tuned bassline dance around video game splutters and ravey synth slides. Thunderous.

06. Alptrack x Twofold ‘Hold Up’

Frenetic and uncomfortable, a collage of bangs, rattles and glacial bursts of light.

07. Rattznest ‘Murder is an Art (to Practice on Public Officials)’

Almost two tracks smashed together: a neurofunk freakout gives way to an almost meditative keyboard jam underpinned by a warm think break, before a big drop back into the former. One to blow minds on the dancefloor.

08. Tony G ‘Robotomy (DJ GIRL Remix)’

A nervous freak out and submerged, low-end gong bath at d&b speed from the label head.

09. Zvrre ‘Jetpack’

Relentless, pounding trance banger.

10. DJ GIRL ‘COINCIDENCE’

A rolling, Baltimore club-indebted track torn apart by DJ GIRL’s riotous drum programming.



10 shows you need to tune into

Head of programming Richard Akingbehin spotlights 10 essential Refuge Worldwide shows

01. Andrey Casablanca

"A natural radio personality if there ever was one. Prepare to laugh, cry and enjoy great tunes."

02. Sarah Mardini

"A special interview between human rights activist Sarah Mardini and Nicky Böhm at our studio, just days before Mardini was set to face trial for rescuing migrants at sea."

03. Steve Bicknell

"A UK techno legend playing everything but techno. Straight from his record shelves, all fire."

04. Loose Ends

"Mr Reliable Geoff Kemback's Loose Ends show is an always on-point selection of jazz, funk, soul and Afrobeat."

05. Vio PRG

"It's been a pleasure to watch Violeta grow from a radio newcomer to one of our favourite DJs and hosts on the station."

06. DJ Lag & Nico Adomako

"This night was one for the books. The bar and studio were on fire with the sounds of gqom pioneer DJ Lag and Einhundert boss man Nico Adomako."

07. Made Kuti

"It was a great honour to host Afrobeat royalty, Made Kuti, grandson to the great Fela, as part of the exceptional Partisan Records residency."

08. Annabel Ross & NIKS

"Two of the most important and brilliant people working behind the scenes in electronic music right now in conversation."

09. Nour

"Wonderful storytelling by the multi-talented Nour."

10. Wayne Snow

"A brilliant talent singing live in our bar space, Oona."



Refuge Worldwide: the radio station amplifying community activism

Claire Francis speaks to the minds behind the Berlin-based online radio station

IF there's a silver lining to the ongoing pandemic, it's that our desire to connect through music has caused a resurgence of independent radio stations across the globe, providing a vital source of unity amidst challenging times.

Launched in January 2021, Refuge Worldwide is a Berlin-based online radio station with community outreach at its core. The station grew out of Refuge, a fundraising platform working in solidarity with grassroots and non-profit organisations, with a mission to amplify both music and social issues, says founder George Patrick.

"Refuge began as a one-off event in 2015, raising money for refugee shelters that were popping up in Berlin as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis that was unfolding at the time," explains Patrick. "I was here working in the music scene and felt very privileged as a white male from the UK and decided to organise a fundraiser."

Refuge has expanded over the years into a series of fundraising parties and events, working with a broad range of social support groups. When the first lockdown hit and these in-person activities were no longer possible, the online platform was born.

The addition of 'Worldwide' to the name underscores the radio station's global scope, from partnering with clubs in Taiwan and non-profit initiatives in Jordan, to reporting on issues from all around the world via the station's Instagram stories.

Alongside a commitment to advocacy and fundraising, there is of course a vibrant and diverse music programme. Head of programming, Richard Akingbehin, is passionate about curating a schedule that celebrates established DJs as well as

platforming newcomers and people from marginalised communities.

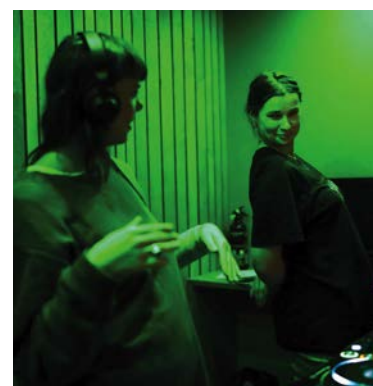
"We have big-name artists alongside people who have never DJ'd before," he says. "We have asked people who are well-known for playing house music to do hip-hop shows, for example, to make sure it was interesting for the artists and also for the listeners. The diversity of people is as important as the music itself. I'm interested in supporting people who haven't had these kinds of opportunities before and helping them to develop as artists."

The station now attracts listeners in over 90 countries, with around 150 residents, another 400 guests, and almost 1,500 shows broadcast in the last 10 months. There are also plans to develop a flagship breakfast show in 2022, as well as a return to live, in-person events.

In July, Refuge Worldwide also found a physical home at Oona Bar in Berlin's Neukölln neighbourhood. From here, the small and dedicated station team facilitates free weekly workshops, events, training programmes and classes in media, creative fields and mental health. It's a lively and welcoming place for people to get together and hang out, and uniquely, the music played live in the studio is simultaneously broadcast directly into the bar.

"We wanted to build something strong that people would feel attached to," says Patrick. "You need a community hub, and the core of Refuge has always been community outreach and solidarity with other groups."

The studio even takes its name from a six-year-old neighbour, Oona, who loves to visit the space. It's this kind of genuine connection to community that means whatever 2022 has in store, Refuge Worldwide will continue to find a way to bring people together.



Spice Rack: Cape Monze Records and the Pakistani underground

In his latest column on the South Asian underground, Dhruva Balram spotlights Pakistan's Cape Monze Records and its open-format approach

IN 2017, after the dissolution of Pakistan's foremost underground music label, Forever South Music, the country's underground musicians were left without a central nexus through which they could channel their creativity. Events like Lahore Music Meet and artists like Abdullah Siddiqui, Talal Qureshi and Natasha Noorani moved the country's music scene forward, yet there lacked a core label focusing on Pakistan's musicians. Cape Monze Records is now attempting to fill that void.

"I felt the need to start something that focuses on artists rather than huge profits," says producer and DJ, Daniel Arthur Panjwaneey, founder of Cape Monze Records. To date, the label has five releases, each oscillating between genres as it nimbly skips away from definitions, instead choosing to spotlight the vast breadth of talent Pakistan has to offer.

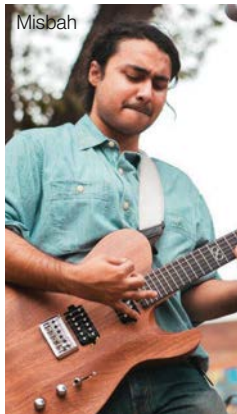
Each release has been distinctive in its approach. The label's first was 'Dou Tarbooze' by Tarbooze — "a collection of four songs corresponding to different times of the day". Opening with a lithe, melodic voice over chirping birds, the album exudes happiness through a folksy guitar; soft contours encompass this release. 'Bezaar Nahi', a single from artists Honeyjamn and Nadir Shahzad, is floating conscious hip-hop, a rarity to emerge from Pakistan, especially as it's fronted by a female MC. The production is pared-back, its simplicity allowing Honeyjamn's natural flow to be the primary focus.

Tollcrane's 'Fast Girls' sits apart from the rest of the label's catalogue, its frenetic, hi-speed techno an ode to the dancefloor. A producer and DJ from Karachi, Tollcrane was part of the Forever South Music label, so to hear his releases through a Pakistani label again is a blessing. It showcases his potential as a producer, which, nearly a decade into his career, still shows no signs of hitting a ceiling. 'Fast Girls' is hypnotic, chaotic and gorgeous in its synth-drenched melodies.

Nadir Shahzad is another artist whose name has been a delight to see reappear. With his band, Sikandar Ka Mandar, Shahzad was an integral part of Pakistan's indie music scene and his latest release on Cape Monze, 'Atomy Event', is a reminder of his talents.

But it's Misbah's four-track EP 'Woh Hai Kahaan' that has been the stand-out project on the label. Since last year's release on Chalo, audiences have inquired more about the enigmatic producer and he has been silent.

The anxieties of making and producing music took a toll on the artist, but he was also able to pour those feelings into this EP. Infectious, guitar-heavy rhythms underpin Misbah's sublime voice, pulling the listener into a state of tranquillity. Featuring Pakistani artists like Janoobi Khargosh, Fatima Khan, et lone and Zahra Paracha, Misbah's EP



selflessly shares the spotlight in its creativity. From the distinctive artwork for each release to the music itself, Cape Monze Records is setting a high standard for others to match. Most importantly, in ensuring an older generation don't fall through the cracks by releasing their new music, while also spotlighting new talent, Cape Monze Records has a bright future ahead.

10 Tracks compiled by Daniel Arthur Panjwaneey

The Cape Monze founder highlights 10 tunes you need to know

01. Tollcrane 'Over My Head (feat. Bad Local)' Cape Monze Records

"Raw, hearty, driving techno with groovy, manic basslines from Karachi's techno veteran."

02. Rudoh 'Djemo' Jugaar Records

"Mixing it up with his newfound love for electro just takes Rudoh to a whole other level."

03. TMPST 'Rapid Displacement' FuFu Records

"TMPST's switch to creating sinister techno in recent times has been hard enough to destroy dancefloors everywhere."

04. Malik x Shahmeer Raza Khan 'Empyrean VIP' Miracle Mangal

"Glitchy bass madness with hints of calm."

05. Towers x Jamal 'Seedhi Baat' Self-released

"A catchy R&B-meets-synthpop-esque track with an eye-catching music video/film."

06. Honeyjamn x Nadir Shahzad 'Bezaar Nahi' Cape Monze Records

"Young poet Honeyjamn armed with bars full of wit teams up with indie veteran Nadir Shahzad."

07. Misbah 'Beemari (feat. Janoobi Khargosh)' Cape Monze Records

"Dismantled riffs, warbling synths — enough to make you feel sick, enough to keep it on repeat."

08. Peach Fuzz x RFB x Shams Mansur 'SAR PHRA' Self-released

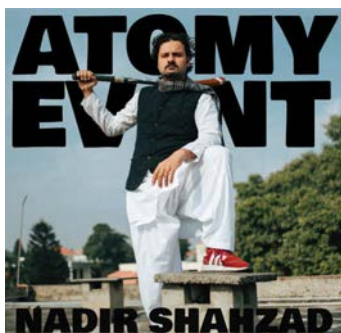
"Power combo of some of the most forward-thinking producers, songwriters and MCs from Karachi."

09. Shorbanoor 'Prelude to Murder' Self-released

"From the description of this video: 'art does not belong to those who attempt to measure it.'"

10. Tarbooze 'Seaview Avenue' Cape Monze Records

"Bits of psychedelic meet indie-pop."



Swak Catalog Chart

Primarily a vehicle for the music of Jumping Back Slash and Aryu Jassika, Swak Catalog occupies one of the stranger corners of the South African musical landscape, but the pair are big advocates of the music being made in Mzansi. Amid the explosion of interest in amapiano and the blossoming cross-pollination with gqom, kwaito, punk, house, jazz and more in SA, the label heads pick 10 of their favourite releases of recent years to dive into. The first five picks come from Aryu Jassika, the last five from Jumping Back Slash, with words by Theo Kotz

01. River Moon 'PSYCHOSOMATIC'

Self-released

Tough, abrasive and raw, River Moon comes screeching through like Cape Town's answer to LSDXOXO.

02. Jumping Back

Slash 'Assassins' *Swak Catalog*

Metal guitar shreds, obscured in neon, float along a jarring cacophony of bells and bangs. JBS at his disturbing best.

03. Odous 'gnash' *Self-released*

Stuttering techno with a satisfying, almost touchable texture. Crunchy and hard-hitting.

04. Ubuntu Brothers 'After Seven Quards (feat. Native Soul)' *Ubuntu Brothers Records*

A sparse amapiano bomb from two of the best young production duos in the game.

05. King Lee 'Detour'

Durban Gqom Music Concepts

Another spacious banger, like so much of the best SA music. Driven by a military rattle, bass stabs and a cascading synth.

06. Stiff Pap 'Tuff Time\$' *Cotch International*

A post-kwaito masterpiece that sounds like nothing else.

07. Aryu Jassika 'Miss Madam Flesh Eater (with Bujin)' *Swak Catalog*

Industrial amapiano backed by Bujin's unsettling intonations.

08. Malcolm Jiyane Tree-Oh

'Umdali' Mushroom Hour Half Hour

A modern gem of South African jazz, Jiyane's group reflect the strength of Soweto's jamming scene.

09. DJ Adjuster 'Ma Pantsula' *MMT*

Stripped-back, old-school SA house of the highest order, distilling the meeting of melancholia and pure joy so specific to the nation's style of dance music.

10. Nonku Phiri 'Sifó feat. Dion

Monti' Soundway Records

The Johannesburg-based artist Nonku Phiri lays rich R&B harmonies over a modern, stepping kwaito beat in this gorgeous ode to grief.

Swak Catalog: Re-imagining South African dance music

Drawing from all aspects of South Africa's rich electronic music scene and twisting them into new forms, Aryu Jassika and Jumping Back Slash's Swak Catalog label puts the focus on local artists breaking international expectations

WITH their label Swak Catalog, Aryu Jassika and Jumping Back Slash disassemble the club sounds of South Africa. The result is an arresting combination of emotive wrangling, wild experimentation, and body-moving club music.

The label began when the pair met up in Cape Town "and moaned about the state of everything," says Jassika (real name: Shaheen Jacobs), from the way the often UK-centric music press — or wider US and Europe-dominated music industry — reduce music from South Africa and the wider continent to a caricature, to the clout-chasing culture in SA's own club scene.

"Magazines can go into the smallest corner of the USA/EU to expose a sound, but Africa must jump through hoops just to get noticed," elaborates Jacobs. "Meantime, someone from Amsterdam can make amapiano-influenced stuff and not even acknowledge where they got this idea from and then just start touring."

Jumping Back Slash (Gareth Jones) is himself from England, and his latest album 'A Map of The Hills I Chose to Die On' contains its own fair share of amapiano influence, nowhere more so than on the metallic clatter of 'Wotuno' or the grime-flavoured 'Stupid Games Stupid Prizes'. The difference is that Jones not only acknowledges these roots but has long been entrenched in the scene of his adopted country, working with Mzansi legends like DJ Spoko and Spoek Mathambo.

These days he recognises how his place in SA music is changing. "I'm older," he says. "I am moving into my mentor stage and I'm

more concerned with trying to make it easier for others to get in the scene and get heard if I can."

A recent remix of the singer Amarafleur's 'A Reminder' points to a recent collaboration, while last year's 'Ariana's Collectivist Fantasies' compilation from Swak Catalog shone a light on a host of genre-bending peers from SA's weirdo music community. Mixing and mastering credits on Stiff Pap's lauded 'Tuff Time\$', a boiling cauldron of trap, kwaito, R&B and experimental electronics, is something Jones is particularly proud of.

His own music continues to evolve and toy with the various flavours of SA music to exorcise his emotions. 'Hills' draws on metal as much as amapiano, most prominently on the thrash of 'Gratitude Exercises' and the mind-blowing opener 'History of Knives', built around a clattering beat, choral chants, and an Allan Holdsworth-indebted guitar solo, played by Leo Stalles.

"Riotous noise and terror can achieve a lot on an emotional level," he says, and there's a lot being wrestled with on the record. Styled as "an album about loss and quixotic battles against giant enemies", it sometimes feels like an uncomfortably raw exercise in catharsis.

Ultimately neither JBS, Swak Catalog nor their wider peer group are neat representatives of a scene like amapiano or its forebears. What they do offer is a reminder of just how vast and gorgeous the possibilities are when SA music is involved.



Aryu Jassika



Album of the Month

Pic: ARIEL MARTINI



Huerco S

Plonk
Incienso
Maverick trap

YOU probably think of Huerco S as an ambient artist, reluctant poster child of the mid-2010s ambient resurgence. His 2016 album 'For Those Of You Who Have Never (And Also Those Who Have)' is as good an ambient record as you'll find; released in the same year as Trump's election win and Britain's Brexit vote, it was proclaimed by many to be a remedy to the political turmoil that surrounded it. But Brian Leeds, the man behind Huerco S, has since distanced himself from both the project and ambient music in general.

In truth, the association has never really been fair. Long before he was mentioned in the same breath as his namesake Mr Eno, Leeds was making all sorts of weird club music, most of which had beats and almost all of which was really fucking good. His first album 'Colonial Patterns', released on immensely underrated Newcastle label Opal Tapes, is a work of mesmeric electronica driven by an ear for sluggish rhythms. He also produced 'Elma (Ruff Rub)', possibly

the greatest outsider house track ever recorded.

After 'For Those Of You', Leeds all but ditched the Huerco S alias, uncomfortable with the attention and uninterested in being synonymous with ambient. He switched focus to his label West Mineral Ltd and released under new names, most notably Pendant, for the 2018 album 'Make Me Know You Sweet' and this year's 'To All Sides They Will Stretch Their Hands'. His Huerco S comeback album, 'Plonk', is almost anti-ambient, a work of strange, cascading beats inspired by trap, drill and the artist's childhood love of cars. 'Plonk I' to 'III' burble and babble for about 15 minutes. Strings are plucked. Brooding atmospheres wash back and forth. It's around 'Plonk IV' that you'll snap out of whatever you're doing and realise this is not a background album. A frenetic, haywire beat taps out on a metallic digital drum kit. The track races forth, spinning and stuttering until a murky, club-ready breakdown that's half dub techno and half weightless groove.

Then there's 'Plonk VI', the album's vertiginous peak. As it climbs skyward, building a tower of heavenly sound over nine-and-a-half minutes, the track recalls Actress's 'Ascending' or Donato Dozzy's 'Cleo', tunes made for those coming-up-for-air moments in a DJ set that make you feel like levitating above a dancefloor. In instrumentation, moments like this are a world away from anything on 'For Those Of You...', but in their hypnotic effect, they have a lot in common. Both a thudding trap beat and a languorous, narcotic serenade, 'Plonk VI' is an incredible piece of music and Leeds's best composition in years. Tracks include snippets of ambiguous dialogue, sampled in among the noise just like in Burial's most moving work. These vague hints of lyricism make the introduction of a rapper on 'Plonk IX' feel seamless. Over a bed of irregular beats, Washington DC emcee Sir EU mumbles a stream of rhymes and non-sequiturs like a man possessed by an unworldly spirit; as the track builds, his lyrics add to the feeling of a rising, suffocating tide.

With his closer 'Plonk X', Leeds finally does away with both beats and words, rolling out over 11 minutes that are inescapably ambient and affecting. Huerco S is back.

SAM DAVIES



Klahrk

Oscillate And Shimmer
SFX
Alien rave

Across its eight tracks, the London-based producer here cuts through shuddering sub-bass and billowing distortion with bright, swooping electronic zaps, acrobatic breakbeats and neon-hued spirals. Moments of foggy melodic mystique are interrupted by explosions of frantic rhythm, which collapse in a chorus of vocal yelps and arpy oddness. Four-to-the-floor stompers, these are not. Rather, they're like alien interpretations of a Fantazia rave: sci-fi meets 'ardcore meets next-gen club experimentalism. 'MF.MT', co-produced with Lighght, thunders forward on a syncopated beat, its Auto-Tuned refrain orbited by stretched vintage rave sonics and eerie, FX-drenched groans. 'Phantoms' with CITYTRONX and 'E-merge Sty' with Zoë Mc Pherson execute similarly hi-def eruptions, while remixes by Ehua and Ice_eyes round things off with volatile percussive flair. **EOIN MURRAY**



John Thayer

Supermundane
Moon Villain
Electronic bucolica

If you record an ambient album and call it 'Supermundane', you'd better make sure it's anything but. John Thayer — who you might know as part of Arp, on the Mexican Summer label — just about pulls it off with his sixth studio album, but it's not obvious at a glance. Listening to 'Supermundane' is like watching a livestream of a river flowing quietly through a forest; unless you're paying attention it's little more than artful decoration, an unobtrusive background to whatever else you might be doing. But the more attention you give it, the more transfixed you become. Every carefully struck mallet, every faint echo of birdsong, conjures a different image of the natural world, with tracks like 'Kamo' and 'Sota' bearing the clear influence of Ryuichi Sakamoto and Jon Hassell. 'Supermundane' is a vivid, HD rendering of pastoral beauty. **SAM DAVIES**



Biosphere

Shortwave Memories
Biophon
Evocative electronics

Despite having one of his tunes featured in a Levi's advert, Geir Jenssen has flown below the radar for much of his recording career. As Biosphere, the Norwegian artist has released on Apollo, Rune Grammofon and Touch, his albums spanning everything from intricate beats to Himalayan found sounds. 'Shortwave Memories' draws inspiration from post-punk studio pioneers such as Martin Hannett and Daniel Miller, using the kind of late '70s/early '80s synths they would have employed. In both its production and instrument choices, the record has the kind of dank, fogbound atmosphere associated with the period, mixed with the melodic IDM that has become Biosphere's calling card. The mystic 'Night Flight' has an expectant mood, with its dusty drum machines and looming synths, while 'Shortwave Memories' itself is all icy soundscapes. **BEN MURPHY**



Niagara

Magna Moralia
Disciples
Bubbling depths

Portuguese trio Niagara, associated with Lisbon's Principe label, have a prolific workrate — as shown by the amount of roughly-hewn, weird material self-released on their Ascension label. Warp sub-label Disciples has adopted them for their latest album, 'Magna Moralia'. With track titles as Roman numerals, it's a meditative affair that draws heavily on new age ambience. The twinkling synths and chimes of 'IV' bubble like the cascading water sounds that accompany them. This watery field-recording motif continues: in 'VII', where a warm, hazy layer of sound undulates, and the baleful, piano-led 'XII', which spins off into a strange loop, like you're vortexing down a plug-hole. It can't help but recall that most new age of inventions, the floatation tank. 'Magna Moralia' explores the mind's more distant realms. You just don't need to get actually wet. **JOE ROBERTS**



DJ Neptune

Greatness 2.0
Neptune Records
DJ magic

DJ albums are tricky. The best known spinners will assemble a cast of A-listers, calling in favours from all those artists whose albums they mixed, but the feeling often persists that collaborators are saving their best material for their own projects. Thankfully, Nigeria's DJ Neptune's second album is a party from start to finish. Diasporic rhythms rub up against drill basslines ('Cash') and amapiano drum rolls ('Hustle', 'Abeg', 'Recipe'), with guests like Rema, Yemi Alade, One Acen and loads of others all turning out and turning up. The irresistible 'Cupid' is the peak, a lovelorn serenade featuring Cheque and Blaqbonez that sounds like the sweeter side of Young Thug, with a chorus that WizKid would be proud of. Ending with song-of-2020 contender 'Nobody', featuring Joeboy and Mr Eazi, 'Greatness 2.0' shows that Nigerian music is in rude health. **SAM DAVIES**



LeRon Carson

Under The Conditions
Sound Signature
Raw late '80s house

Theo Parrish's Sound Signature shines a light on LeRon Carson, a sadly departed Midwestern producer whose legacy has been shrouded until now. These late-'80s recordings are filled with a raw, tape-hiss jack many have tried to emulate. There are classic drum machine and synth cuts — the jocular, grooving 'Determination Practice', the Martin Luther King-sampling '72nd & Ogelsby', the lush 'Sof n Thik'. But it's his more disco incursions that point to the later work of Parrish himself, as well as contemporaries like Moodymann. 'Baby Said To Me' loops the intro to Quando Quango's 'Love Tempo' before various disco samples load it up with dancefloor sass. 'Say It' is another stomper, as is the nostalgic 'Funtown Memories'. Sounding like long-lost, newly-unearthed Music Box classics (literally, such is the grit), their power is in the machines being pushed to their limits. **JOE ROBERTS**



Boy Harsher

The Runner (OST)
Nude Club/City Slang
Gothic '80s goodness

American duo Boy Harsher gathered a cult following with their last album, 'Careful', a record that mixed Jae Matthews' coolly delivered vocals with synth-heavy tracks produced by Augustus Muller, incorporating twisted electropop, darkwave and industrial. Not since the glory years of the Italians Do It Better label had there been such a distinctive take on alternative '80s sounds. 'The Runner' is excellent: the soundtrack to a horror film written and directed by the duo, it veers between atmospheric vignettes and striking songs. 'Machina', with guest vocalist Mariana Saldana, is pure Italo disco with a chorus that will take the roof off the right club. 'Autonomy', featuring Cooper B. Handy, is emotive synthpop that tugs at the heartstrings. But then there's 'The Ride Home', a brooding and sparse track that will send shivers down your spine. Gothic greatness. **BEN MURPHY**



Seven Davis Jr.

I See The Future
Secret Angels
House funk

There aren't many producers occupying Seven Davis Jr.'s place in the house scene. He grew up on Prince and George Clinton while also training as a jazz vocalist, and his musical output in nearly a decade-long career has sounded like the Parliament-Funkadelic catalogue remixed by Todd Edwards. His new album springs few surprises, largely comprising garage house tracks that sometimes veer into washy disco. 'Boys & Girls' sounds a bit like something from Calvin Harris's first album (and not in an especially good way). There's nothing as seductive as 2020's 'Poison' or Seven's recently reissued classic 'One', but the excellently titled 'New Life, Who Dis' is well worth a listen; a subtly alluring track that was originally ghost-produced for a mysterious celebrity — in atmosphere and moonlit groove, it's the closest thing on the album to vintage Seven. **SAM DAVIES**



Bed Wetter

A Life In The Day

Me Me Me

Ambient catharsis

Newcastle-based DJ, producer and label owner Geoff Kirkwood, aka Man Power, has stacked up an impressive dancefloor catalogue over the years, releasing on DFA, Optimo Trax and ESP Institute. His Bed Wetter project, though, reveals a more personal side. 'A Life In The Day' is Kirkwood's second album under the name, and was made in late 2020 while he was Artist In Residence at Sage, a venue and cultural centre in Gateshead. Reflecting the darkest days of lockdown, the record vacillates between hope and sadness, expressed mainly through bittersweet ambient. 'Calm (The Routine Safety Of Patterns)' has melancholy synths that echo like a church organ, while 'Patience (A Life In The Day)' possesses a wintry darkness. Then, on 'Optimism', the record emerges into the light, with its subtle kick-drum and rising chords. A moving document. **BEN MURPHY**



Jean-Louis Huhta

Wormhole Of Time

Organic Analogue

'90s Swedish techno gems

This album is a hanging thread. Pull it and you'll discover the incredible music and life of Jean-Louis Huhta, a drummer, producer, skateboarder and DJ born in 1960s Gothenburg to a Finnish mother and Trinidadian father. Huhta spent the '80s playing Kängpunk in bands like Cortex, Anti Cimex, The Stonefunkers, Fleshquartet and Lucky People Center. He moved to Stockholm, hanging out at Planet Rhythm with techno heads Adam Beyer, Jesper Dahlbäck and Cari Lekebusch. Complete with a 'zine on the artist's life, 'Wormhole Of Time' collects Huhta's own techno productions from the '90s. Shades of Lory D creep through dubwise acid tracks like 'Alt QuadPhunk'; 'Marja-Liisa' is a work of restrained beauty; 'The Art Of Peace' pulsates with rhythm. And this is just techno Huhta, only a fraction of his vast catalogue, but a tantalising introduction to a fascinating talent. **SAM DAVIES**



Jumping Back Slash

A Map Of The Hills I Chose To Die On

Swak Catalog

Intensely detailed

If Jumping Back Slash's second album really is 'A Map Of The Hills I Chose To Die On', its 20-minute running-time makes it a small but intensely detailed one. Released on the South African artist's own Swak Catalog, there's a sweeping, grand perspective throughout. The title track's cut up choir gives its moody bass and neo-Baroque melodies a kind of operatic feel, despite the obvious club underpinnings. 'The Day You Became An Idea' similarly swells orchestrally, before modern vocoder vocals join, while the slamming bass of 'History Of Knives' suddenly welcomes a Prince-style guitar solo. 'Gratitude Exercises' goes full metal, a heavily-distorted, murky mosher with throaty, screamed vocals. It might appear a strange blend. Delivered with a burning intensity, though, the album shines with its own impeccable internal logic. **JOE ROBERTS**



Aria Rostami

Bolbol

Shaytoon

Genre-blurring beats

In the last decade, Iranian-American Aria Rostami has produced an extensive discography of experimental electronic music, appearing on Dark Entries, Spring Theory and Jacktone. On this mini album for Sepehr's Shaytoon, he conjures hypnotic drones and off-world soundscapes. 'Endless' mixes evolving pads with a disquieting spoken word vocal, before skittering drum machines kick everything into gear. Its counterpart 'Depthless' is a more dubbed-out affair, with intricate hand percussion and ghostly flute lines. 'Bolbol' places chopped up breakbeats in a cavernous space of FX and distant melody, and 'Cheshm' is an ambient piece with spiralling arpeggios, before Sepehr turns in a dark garage rework of the title track, and Tehran's Sote offers a more abstract version. Rostami evades classification with this compelling electronic emission from the outer limits. **BEN MURPHY**



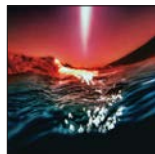
Nite Fleit

The Present

Atomic Alert

Electro expansions

London-based Australian Nite Fleit has become a key electro artist in the last few years, putting out rave-driven EPs on Steel City Dance Discs, International Chrome and Planet Euphorique (to name a few). Over the course of late November and throughout December, she released a track per day for free through her label Atomic Alert's Bandcamp, culminating in 'The Present'; showcasing not only her adept dancefloor production, but also a more melodic side. If 'Dizzy Edge' is a relentless pummelling of overdriven drum boxes and acid, then 'Fully Sunny' mixes techno kicks and raw arpeggio basslines with blissful synth lines, and 'Soft Sweet Air' is a bittersweet electro gem. It's the dark stuff that she excels at though: 'Metallic Muse' and 'Alienated Together' are built to be played in a Helena Hauff set at 5am to a strobe-lit club. **BEN MURPHY**



Bonobo

Fragments

Ninja Tune

Full of the feels

Bonobo's 'Fragments' arrives with a whopping three-page press release that can be summarised thus: Si Green becomes hugely successful, burns out, is wrong-footed by Covid-19 (like everyone else), loses his mojo, gets into modular synths, rediscovers dance music, combines this with live musicians, gets singers involved, new album is born. If this length is to convey added emotional weight, it's not like Bonobo was ever short of it. From the beatless 'Elysian', whose cinematic beauty is filled with intimated stories, to the shuffling, main room grandeur of 'Otomo', featuring Bulgarian choir 100 Kaba-Gaidi and co-production from O'Flynn, Green is still a master of neo-classical mood. Elsewhere, 'Rosewood' is a soulful dancefloor banger to rival Caribou or Four Tet, while 'Tides', featuring singer Jamila Woods, is just one of many radio-friendly guest turns. In summary: full of the feels. **JOE ROBERTS**



John Beltran

Aesthete

Further Electronix

Melodic mastery

Since the early '90s, Michigan electronic artist John Beltran has made 12 albums under his own name, countless classic EPs and singles, and sought-after gems under pseudonyms like Placid Angles. Turning his talents to techno, house, drum & bass and ambient music, melody is a unifying factor — so leading IDM imprint Further Electronix is an apt home for his 13th album, 'Aesthete'. 'The Sun Would Shine' is a gorgeous piece of emotive electro, its meandering melancholy riff a delicate counterpoint to the glitchy drum work, while 'I Play For You' is an emission of lush vocal samples, chattering rhythms and synths that recall Kraftwerk at their most utopian. But 'Lodge Highway' is the high-point, a spacious and dub-wise techno cut that conjures Manuel Göttsching's 'E2-E4' or Carl Craig at his finest. 'Aesthete' is another Beltran gem. **BEN MURPHY**



Alex Ho

Move Through It

Music From Memory

Warm, gossamer beats

LA's Alex Ho releases his debut album on Music From Memory, aided during its three-year gestation by friends including Baba Stiltz, Phil Cho, Damon Palermo and John Jones. Fans of his monthly Moony Habits NTS Radio show and associated party will recognise his trademark warmth: the album is defined by sunny synths and sax, and Ho's falsetto vocals sometimes add a hazy, gossamer presence. 'Miss Suzuki' sets the tone, diffuse and spacious, Ho's indistinct vocals floating in a twinkling haze of 'E2-E4' styled synths. 'Move Through It' is extremely chill wave, and 'College Crest Walk' adds off-beat percussion to create the vibe you could imagine DJ Harvey opening Pikes with. The compositions are enough to garner praise, but with a production quality that belies this being a debut release, it fits seamlessly into the Music From Memory catalogue. **JOE ROBERTS**



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Compilation of the Month



V/A

Ritmo Fantasia: Balearic Spanish Synth-Pop, Boogie And House (1982-1992)

Soundway Records

Perfectly curated Balearic beats

THROUGHOUT the '80s, the iconic Ibiza nightclub Ku (now Privilege) held a regular party known as Noche Española, in which trendy party goers would dance exclusively to records by Spanish artists; from Iberian pop ballads and boogie tunes, to wavey synth-pop dazzlers and sun-kissed early house. The music played at these parties, and throughout Ku's calendar, laid the groundwork for what dance music fans understand as Balearic music now, though the Spanish artists that helped pioneer it have often stood without their flowers in the history books of an ultimately international scene.

Enter Venezuela-born, Berlin-based DJ Trujillo. Over the past 10 years or so, he's spent countless hours digging through dusty crates in remote record stores, and meeting fellow diggers, to uncover as many lost gems from this era as he could. He's been on a mission to find a missing piece of the Balearic puzzle, and to shine a light on some of its Spanish spiritual originators. The result of Trujillo's work is now presented in this archival compilation for Soundway Records: taking in 21 tracks from between 1982 and 1992, and touching on everything from languid pop and sensual wave music, to velvety dancefloor anthems.

The arrival of 'Ritmo Fantasia' couldn't be more perfectly timed. As the winter settles in and a persistent chill pulls a blanket of gloom over everything, the warmth at the heart of this compilation is transportive. Listening to these tracks, you can almost feel the sun caress your skin, as a breeze carries irresistible beats and melodies right into your chest and feet. From the intimate, swaying pop of opener 'Puente De Esperanza' by Marengoto to the delay-drenched bass and soft melodic funk of Blaumarí's closer 'Memories', there's an inviting atmosphere here that is impossible to not fall into a luxurious, sensuous step with.

There's a duty of care required in archival releases like this, in ensuring the music is correctly represented and the songs within are given their due context. It's something Soundway Records has always done exceptionally well, and this compilation is no different. Few stones are left unturned as Trujillo touches on underground music from throughout Spain, from Madrid and Valencia to smaller coastal cities such as Marbella, Gijón and Cádiz.

Many, though not all, of these tunes are one-off hits by artists who faded into obscurity

in later years, who released on short-lived labels such as Cantos and Prismatic. The time taken to uncover these songs, and sequence them in a way that feels intuitive and affecting, is evident. That level of care extends to the compilation's artwork: a piece by the artist Yves Uro, whose posters for Ibiza clubs including Ku between 1977 and 1990 came to define the era's visual aesthetic.

There's so much to love in this release. Zas' 'I Love My Body' is a silky, sexy number built on muffled brass, effervescent keys and a swaying beat, all of which underpin a gorgeous, understated vocal. Scan Man's 'Arabia' is the sort of hook-laced hip-house cut that is so unabashedly silly you can't help but get swept up in it.

Tracks from Madrid Groove, Poly-C and Nsue are jaunty classic house cuts with a distinctly Mediterranean flair, while intoxicating wave jams from Jaume Escala and Mogambo place these songs in the wider context of European synth music from the era.

'Ritmo Fantasia' is a superb time capsule from a musical golden era: the dawn of one of the world's most enduring party scenes. Perfectly curated, the heat and hedonism oozes from this compilation, and the music's lasting influence echoes through its tracklist. In the depths of winter, this release is a sun-baked diamond of Balearic escapism.

EOIN MURRAY



Beverly Glenn-Copeland

Keyboard Fantasies Reimagined

Transgressive
Fairytale folk

It's the stuff of fairy tales. Beverly Glenn-Copeland spent the '70s and '80s making music for Sesame Street and chanting with his Buddhist friends while recording obscure folk songs. In 1986, he made 'Keyboard Fantasies' using a synth and a drum machine, pressed 200 copies and sold a handful. Nearly 30 years later, the album was reissued and Copeland gained a cult following, winning the hearts of listeners through his story and eerie electric lullabies.

Testament to his appeal are the names that contribute to this collection of remixes, reworks and covers, such as Bon Iver, Julia Holter, Arca and Blood Orange. Ana Roxane's 'Old (New) Melody' is a truly beautiful work of strings and voice, while Kelsey Lu's 10-minute-long 'Ever New' might be the best thing she's done since 2016's 'Dreams'. **SAM DAVIES**



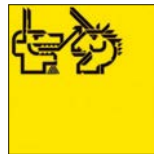
V/A

Reactions Vol. 2

Erbium Records

Wildly creative and varied

Operating between London and Birmingham, Erbium Records presents its second compilation. As is in vogue, it's a far-reaching affair, highlighting the fertile pastures of producers up and down the country. You'll find lovely, floaty Orb-esque electronica in Harry Oscillate's 'Red Shift', techy, bleepy breaks courtesy of Manami's 'Yellow Chlorophyll', and Mani Festo dropping his usual BPMs for edgy, industrial creeper 'Chuggr'. Other favourites include Debba's 'Recall', with IDM-ish skitters, gated vocals and a sad string landing somewhere in your solar plexus, and Mincy's massive 'The Forbidden Milkshake', where old school reversed jungle strings are used to devastating effect over new school 140bpm beats and breaks. There's plenty more, covering percussive club, acid jungle and off-key techno. A taste of some of the creativity emerging from our turbulent times. **JOE ROBERTS**



V/A

AM: Friends & Family Vol. 2

Accidental Meetings

Pure oddball ecstasy

Since 2018, Brighton's Accidental Meetings has championed young, emerging talent in the UK and beyond with its parties and podcast series, keeping an ear firmly on the ground for rumbling leftfield club music and nu-skool soundsystem pressure. When the pandemic brought its events to a halt, it refocused its energies on starting a label, which has flourished in the past 12 months. On its second compilation, with all profits going to mental health charity Mind, friends and affiliates of the label deliver 19 cuts of pure oddball ecstasy for the dancefloor, with next-gen talent front and centre. From dub techno to technoid dub, slippery acid electro to depth-charge dancehall and feverish drum workouts, there's a fizzy excitability throughout; the giddy sound of a community surfing the continuum, and pushing it in fresh, fun directions.

EOIN MURRAY



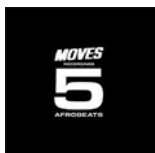
V/A

Family Affair Vol. 1

Razor-N-Tape

NYC delivers the goods

Brooklyn-based Razor-N-Tape provides a first compilation of its nearest and dearest. Hometown big hitters Eli Escobar and Lauren Flax combine dusty house with samples from the essential documentary What Happened, Miss Simone? on hip-wiggler 'A Feelin', while Dimitri From Paris and DJ Rocca combine for the sunny, synthy joy of 'Days Of A Better Paradise'. There are plenty of star turns from lesser-known acts. Jungle Fire's 'Atómico (Snake In Dub Version)' is brilliant, dubby Afrobeat, Lay-Far's 'Acid-Funk Bass Extended Tool' adds breakbeats and 303s to the mix, a la vintage Norman Cook or Bassbin Twins, and the echoing hand claps of Sentimental Animals' 'Love Vibration (JKriv Acid Dub)' are an enticing homage to Larry Levan. Straight out of the spiritual home of disco the first time around, New York delivers the goods again, half a century on. **JOE ROBERTS**



V/A

5 Years Of Culture

Moves Recordings

UK power

Over the past five years, no other British record label has been putting in work like Moves, breaking crucial artists and standing by them when controversy has brewed. For its fifth birthday, it is releasing two compilations — one afrobeats, one rap and drill — totalling 39 tracks, including previously unreleased material and undeniable classics. There's historic drill tunes like Skengdo x AM's 'Attempted' (which earned the duo a suspended prison sentence when they performed it live in 2018), dancefloor smashes like Afro B & Wizkid's 'Drogba' and Belly Squad's 'Long Time', and lesser-known gems like Oxlade & Reekado Banks' 'Craze'. Among the standouts is underrated up-and-comer SD Muni, whose flow on 'Letter To YP' is like DMX's 'Fuckin' Wit' D' set to an xxyyxx instrumental. In the UK and beyond, Moves is the future.

SAM DAVIES



V/A

SUCHI SELECTS

Boxout.fm

Dizzying fun from India

The first in a series of compilations from regulars on India's Boxout.fm, raising funds to support the station, SUCHI comes out of the blocks with purpose. The UK influence hangs heavy in the foregrounding of electro and breaks; opener 'Out Of Mind' by Monophonik & Trafficc combines both with sinister bass and warm, spacey pads. It rarely lets up after that. Prism's 'Babel' is sweet, stepping future-garage, Marbman's 'Unhindered Self' is wicked, bubbly breakbeat and FILM's 'Medium Rare' is a mad ride through walls of bass with a vocal you'll either love or hate. Indeed, it's only Siya's 'Have To Make My Bed', a slow, evolving piece of contemplative vocal electronica, that takes a breath before the action recommences. Quality across the board, it shines a seemingly well-deserved light on both SUCHI and Boxout.fm.

JOE ROBERTS



V/A

JBDUBZ VOL. 9

Juke Bounce Werk

Bangers, and lots of them

Juke Bounce Werk's annual 'JBDUBZ' compilations have become the festive season's essential addition for producers and DJs alike. Open submissions draw in a wealth of bleeding-edge talent, and after weeks of Twitter hype, the result is a dragon's hoard of footwork, jungle and other high-speed sonics. This year's comp boasts an insane 42 tracks, with highlights from Bored Lord (4/4 hardcore with lashes of 303), Arma (leisurely ragga jungle), Drumwarp (a hurricane of breakbeat choppage) and Sonido Berzerk (sparse, R&B-licked footwork). There's also Benny Salvador's bulging breakcore screamer, ultra-crunchy jackin' house from Dan Miles, Good Looking-esque halftime by Oceanited and a whole lot more than we can squeeze in here. The main dot-connector is quality, and an abundance of it. Dive in now and you might get through it by the time next year's one arrives. **BEN HINDLE**



Fela Kuti

Fela Boxset 5

Partisan Records

A rebel life

Co-curated by Fela Kuti's son Femi and Coldplay's Chris Martin, the fifth collection of albums by Afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti spans almost his entire career. From the rallying cry of 1971's 'Why Black Man Dey Suffer' — an early example of Kuti questioning power structures and the Afrobeat sound coalescing — to 1989's 'Overtake Don Overtake Overtake', where, despite two decades of aggression from successive governments in Nigeria, Fela still rails against oppression. Much of the music is well-known, apart from a forgotten four minutes restored to 'Original Sufferhead' that see Fela go hell for leather on keyboard. But beautiful photos of Fela, and the liner notes — in particular Femi's memories of growing up into Fela's band, and Afrobeat historian Chris May's album breakdowns, which give a real sense of Fela's strength and struggle — are fresh and inspiring. **BEN HINDLE**



Pics: SEAN HAGAN Models: NATALIE WINTER, DYLAN WATSON & ERNEST NIJIMU

Brand Focus: **DONOTSUBVERGE**

DJ Mag speaks with London-based brand DONOTSUBVERGE about creating a community, working towards sustainability, and fashion that's reflective of society

THE brainchild of three London school friends, clothing brand DONOTSUBVERGE was born from a desire to, in their own words, “create a fashion brand that is subliminally associated with music, particularly the underground scene, by bringing together a community with meaningful connections built on a culture of rule-breaking attitudes and behaviours”.

Still growing and expanding since its launch in 2019, DNS has affectionately coined its community “subvergers”, and remained true to its founding principles: “the playful idea that when you’re told not to do something — you want to do it even more”. The brand’s very first collection, DNS001: DO NOT WEAR, explored the concept of trivial “do not” signs that people see throughout our daily lives. “We’re becoming more aware of the deeper significance that DNS’ core values have in today’s society,” DNS tells DJ Mag. “There is a growing reluctance to go against the grain and challenge the expectations that modern society places on us. We want to encourage

our people to question norms and live with a new sense of authenticity — independent from external influences or perceptions.” All of DNS’ collections and capsules are inspired by society. The recent Liberty collection, curated post-lockdown, explored the fantasy of a utopian world after the pandemic.

While the brand’s latest collection, DNS004: OUT OF OFFICE*/SORRY I’M LATE, just launched, elsewhere, DNS is also focused on the strategy for future drops. “Pop-up and new collection launch events are going to form a big part of our future,” says DNS. “We don’t want to be another faceless brand, we want to bring our community together at events that reward our loyal supporters. “Imagine intimate afters vibes, where like-minded people can come together to build connections, have a good time and check out our latest collections.” Determined to put back into the society they draw their inspiration from, the team behind DNS are committed to sustainability as part

of their expansion. Working alongside eco-certified suppliers, and leveraging industry expertise in the UK, they work with printing and embroidery networks based in London, and work with sustainably sourced fabrics. “We’ve spent all of 2021 restructuring our supply chain to become more sustainable,” they explain, “while developing our silhouettes to bring the highest quality products to the market.”

Moving into 2022, DNS also has an ongoing partnership with the charity Youth Music, who are focused on giving access to making, learning and earning in music for all young people. The brand recently launched a t-shirt as part of its collaborative fundraising initiatives with the charity, celebrating the UK underground and the importance of its culture.

“And just to wrap this up: no, ‘subverge’ is not a word — but if you do try and Google it after this, you will conveniently land on our website.”

Style Spotlight: Lindsey Matthews

DJ, producer and Goddess of Mischief brand owner, Lindsey Matthews, drops in to talk about Virgil Abloh, coconut lattes, and taking fashion inspiration from Aaliyah's '90s looks

WITH a reputation for ramping up energy and putting a “dubby twist” on modern tech-house, Birmingham-based DJ/producer Lindsey Matthews is a regular fixture in DJ booths from London to Ibiza. From sharing line-ups with the likes of FUSE's Archie Hamilton, Loco Dice, ANOTR and Yousef, to helming the booth at Solid Grooves' debut London festival, Grooves Island, this summer, her ability to keep a dancefloor locked and bumping is present in her skill and selections. Also a producer, Matthews has released EPs via Sanity, East Project and No Rules Records, and ahead of her New Year's Eve 93° gig in East London alongside Latmun, Prok & Fitch and Wheats, Matthews dropped in to chat Virgil Abloh, statement pieces and fashion movements.

Tell us about this outfit!

Where did you buy each item and why do you love them?

Sunglasses “The sunglasses are my brand: Goddess of Mischief. I wanted people to understand what Lindsey was about, so I created it during lockdown. I have always been intrigued by the matrix and the feeling it generates. You want to be hidden, add mystery, and still feel on top form. This sunglasses collection is all about that, the bold orange paired with the striking rectangle shape will match any outfit.”

Nike Jacket “I spotted this online, and admire the boxy shape with the cropped undertone and the monochrome logo. I love inclusivity and power, which is an ethos I believe in. An example is the Ibtihaj Muhammed campaign, something amazing that I researched extensively. It shows the progression in women's rights and inclusion in race and religion. Nike is more than just a brand to me, it is a movement! I'm here for it.”

Trousers “Inspiration doesn't simply come from the high street, but from the small markets, shops, and places all around us. An individual doing demolition of a building pointed to the store while wearing these trousers. I spoke to the guy who gave me a backstory on how they'd been made overseas in a factory he owns. The fit was perfect. The colour was so bold. He spoke about the silhouette it would create on my body type. There was no way I could refuse! They were mine.”

Off-White Trainers “The trainers I've been eyeing for a long time are exactly what I've been looking for. The silver is so bright and combined with the orange and blue stitching, it adds so much to the outfit without even trying. Off-White is a brand that I admire a great deal. My favourite part of Virgil Abloh's journey was how he listened to the youth and incorporated them into every part of his project. I loved how he understood his market and how intelligent it was. Self-development and growth



require re-invention and communication; these are more than just trainers, and I'm reminded of that every time I wear them.”

What's your inspiration when you're putting outfits together?

“When putting my outfit on, the first thing I think about is my mood. Who am I going to be? Not necessarily a feeling. Sometimes I want to be a bum, always a luxurious one, but other days, I want to feel like I'm attending Paris Fashion Week. With me there is no in-between, my inspiration is my mood, my mind and what playlist I've got on. Of course, a coconut latte is always needed when making executive decisions and putting outfits together.”

Is there anyone over the years whose style you've really loved? Who is your fashion icon?

“The '90s is always an inspiration. Aaliyah is one of my favourites when it comes to her signature looks. Her tomboy characteristics were intact, but she also had sex appeal. She always possessed class and elegance — it's something I really admire about Baby Girl, may she rest in power forever.”

If you could own one garment that you currently don't, what would it be and why?

“The Monogram Accent from Louis Vuitton is such an iconic jacket. The box fit and attention to detail are incredible, I really love how it's so minimal yet so loud, it's almost like an illusion. It's on my bucket list — give me a month or two and it's mine.”

January Essentials



01. The Hundreds Campus Hoody £90.97 // Chimp Co Store **02.** Herringbone Pants in Pine £95.00 // Butter Goods **03.** Socks £18.00 // Bisous @ END **04.** Gramicci One Point T-Shirt £32.00 // Gramicci **05.** DJ Mag x Youth Music longsleeve £28.00 // keepushmerchservice.net **06.** Wallabee Cup White Nubuck £120.00 // Clarks



On Your Marks

Numark is fresh out the blocks with a selection of new DJ products

Numark starts the year where they left off with yet more new product releases. The latest is a new DJ headphone called the HF175. The new headphones adopt a lightweight styling with soft leather earpads and have been designed to provide 'ultimate comfort' for long mix sessions. The closed-ear HF175s are built around 40mm Neodymium magnet drivers and have a frequency response of 15Hz – 22kHz to provide high-quality sound for use in a variety of settings; DJing in a club environment, at home or in the studio. The new headphones also feature a stainless steel adjustable stitched leather headband with a manganese steel framework for maximum strength and longevity. They also provide long-lasting comfort. The closed-ear design offers a certain degree of sound isolation, which is essential for monitoring in a loud club environment. The headphone cups can be rotated 180 degrees for single-ear monitoring and for easy storage and packing. In terms of looks, they are quite bold with their black and red colourway and Numark's record spindle logo on the side of the cups. The HF175 are aimed at DJs from the beginner to the pro alike.

The second release announced at the back end of last year is in the form of a new controller — the Mixstream Pro. The Mixstream Pro is a standalone two-channel all-in-one DJ controller with a host of features aimed at the next generation of DJs. They include built-in WiFi, offering direct access for users to stream music direct from the hardware, Philips Hue smart lighting control, seamless integration of existing DJ libraries, Dropbox connectivity and built-in speakers.

With built-in WiFi, the Mixstream Pro can access streaming content virtually anywhere. Connecting quickly to Beatport LINK, Beatsource LINK, TIDAL, Soundcloud Go+, the Mixstream Pro gives DJs access to millions of songs, curated playlists, and DJ

curated charts. Users can also sync their entire music library or selected playlists to Dropbox, and access them seamlessly on the Mixstream Pro. Your tracks are also buffered into the internal memory of the unit as they are loaded, ensuring ultra-reliable and stable playback.

The new controller also features two USB inputs and one SD card slot for external media drives, giving DJs connection options when it comes to how they want to play their music on the unit. At the heart of the Mixstream Pro is the Engine DJ software, which offers plug-and-play usage from the unit without having to connect it to an additional laptop. DJs can simply attach a USB drive or SD card with their Engine DJ-analysed tracks and instantly get into the mix.

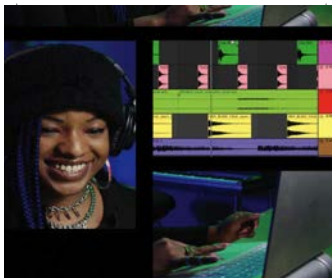
A unique and novel feature, which has to be an industry first, is the ability to control Philips Hue smart home lighting. The Mixstream Pro uses its built-in WiFi to connect wirelessly to Philips Hue lighting and users can use this function to create a beat-synchronised light show via the in-built seven-inch high-definition touchscreen. There is also the ability to create advanced lighting options using inMusic's SoundSwitch desktop software.

Another standout feature is the in-built speakers. Numark has expanded on their Partymix Live controller — which also featured built-in speakers — by installing an upgraded set of speakers, meaning that the controller can be used to power the party straight out of the box, perfect for a wide variety of uses. It makes the Mixstream Pro one of the most versatile controllers on the market.

Various
• numark.com



soundbytes



Spliced Together

Splice has teamed up with Uniqu3 to launch their new Skills series. The new series offers a ten-minute exposé into the world and production techniques of the artist. Follow Uniqu3 as she explains her production methods and then shows viewers how to incorporate them into their own productions.

• splice.com

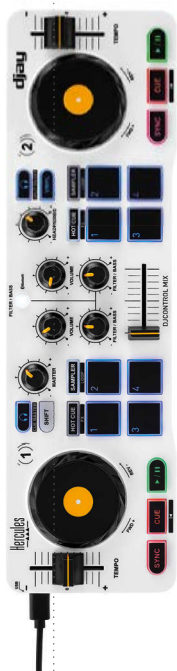


Switch Up

Pioneer DJ has released a new desktop monitoring system — the DM-50D. The new speakers feature a five-inch driver and incorporate key elements from the popular DM-40 unit, with additional components and features to create a more powerful and higher quality sound. The speakers can also be switched between DJ mode and production mode.

£199

• pioneerdj.com



Connect Me

Hercules has launched a new controller for use with Algoriddim's mobile app djay. The DJControl Mix, a new microcontroller built in partnership with Algoriddim, is powered by an external battery or USB power supply, and connects to the djay app using Bluetooth. It can be used on both iOS and Android platforms.

£89.99

• hercules.com

Synth News

ROLAND has announced two new hardware synths as part of their Boutique series — the JX-08 and the JD-08. Modelled on the JX-8P and the JD-800 respectively, the new boutiques are mini versions of two classic synths from Roland's back catalogue. The JX-8P was a late '80s classic that was known for its shimmering chords and raw bass arps. The original was a digital beast, meaning it was hard to program and didn't have many instant-access controls on top of the unit.

The new Boutique version addresses that with new controls on top as well as the familiar colour scheme of the original, with a new sequencer and built-in chorus and reverb.

The other Boutique — the JD-08 — is a model of a '90s classic that just got added to Roland's Cloud service. It was used heavily by trance and dance music artists throughout the '90s and was a throwback to analogue synths that feature controls for almost every feature. The new smaller Boutique



version features 64 presets and faders and sliders for most controls, with expanded polyphony and a new sequencer. Both units also have MIDI over USB-C.

£349 both units

• roland.com

Studio Essentials

DJ and producer August Artier delivers his Studio Essentials

Output/Bearfoot Frontier studio monitors

"These speakers have changed the way I listen to music. It's like hearing music for the first time and perceiving it with a totally new experience. Every frequency is perfectly detailed and sits in its place with no colouring to what you are hearing. When you close your eyes, you can literally hear where every musician is standing and from which direction sounds are coming towards you."

Pultec Passive EQ Pro Legacy

"This is an incredible EQ that I call the Take & Give Method. I use it for all low-ends like kicks, bass and other sounds that need the right attention for the mix to breathe. Pultec's Pro Legacy allows you to take out unwanted frequencies to the point of re-adding them via the boost and attenuation knobs. Combining this method with the peak gains, it allows you to find the right spot through a very natural feel of the vintage machine."

Apollo Twin soundcard

"This soundcard works in perfect harmony with all the UAD plugins. It is reliable and never lets me down. Even after hours of use it maintains its characteristics and works consistently, allowing me to finish all my production work to a professional standard."



Tube-Tech PE-1C EQ

"This EQ is great for high-end and any mid-range percussion that needs to be present without hurting the ears or coming through as too harsh. This vintage EQ allows you to naturally find the sweet spot, attenuating the highs by subtracting and adding via its original rotary knobs."

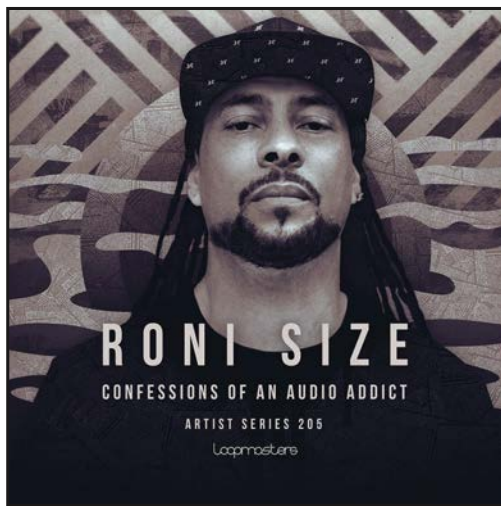
UAD Teletronix LA-2A Grey model

"The LA series combines three different ways of compression and

levelling. I love the smoothness of the LA-2A Grey when used on pads or longer type sounds. Its suave way of releasing allows space and brings a very nice vintage warmth to synths."

Oxide Tape recorder

"Used in the right way, the Oxide tape recorder will bring life and character to your productions. I love using it on acid lines or sharp sounding synth stabs to give them character and presence."



RONI SIZE needs no introduction as one of the UK dance music scene's biggest figures. His collaboration with Loopmasters has come together as a result of decades of self-proclaimed audio addiction, and the resulting sample collection is exactly what you'd expect from the drum & bass pioneer. Sounds in the pack have been sourced from old samplers right up to newer projects, giving an authentic reflection of the sound of Roni Size.

You'll hear a merge of classic '90s jungle sounds with modern dancefloor drum & bass elements in this collection. Breakbeats and deep sub lines directly connect to the heritage of Roni's music, while current, heavy-duty kicks and snares connect

Loopcloud

presents a collection of the finest sample packs for DJing and producing

Each month Loopcloud delve into their extensive sample library catalogue and present a package of the month

Roni Size 'Confessions of an Audio Addict'

you to a contemporary sound palette. Polished vocal samples, phat synths, guitars, pads, bells and more are great for filling your compositions with jazzy vibes and colour, and you can complete your arrangements using the included enveloping SFX samples.

This is a diverse collection that works well in most subgenres of d&b, so producers looking to gain inspiration from one of the scene's most established and successful creatives should look no further.

• **For a free 30-day trial of Loopcloud, visit loopcloud.com**

soundbytes



All White on the Night
Denon DJ has just released the PRIME 4 White Special Edition, a reskinned version of their popular PRIME 4 controller. The new White Special Edition features all the same features and functions as the original but now comes in this eye-catching snow-white colourway.
£1,899
• denondj.com



Case Study
Pioneer DJ has added a new protective case to their range of accessories. The new DJ controller bag is the perfect size for their XDJ-RX3. Made with an EVA Durashock moulded body, black ballistic polyester, black fleece lining and egg-foam lid, it's tough enough to protect the unit against bumps and scrapes, but lightweight for easy carrying.
£110
• pioneerdj.com



Taking Note
Bitwig is set to release Bitwig Studio 4.1. The new update brings even more features to this already feature-rich DAW. One of the main new additions is Note FX Devices that allow users to do some pretty tricked out things to the note information passing through the DAW. Producers can now apply a series of Note FX, offering new musical possibilities to their productions.
• bitwig.com

Can't live without

Principleasure Can't Live Without EMU SP-1200



"I made my last album almost entirely in the box due to not being able to get to my studio because of the pandemic. It's hard to say what was missed most, as initially, I felt like I was operating with half a brain. However, it easily became apparent what gear cannot be reliably replaced with software — and the one piece that will never be bettered is the EMU SP-1200.

"The raw tonal quality is unlike anything I've ever heard. It can take a regular drum sample and just instantly fatten it and make it sit perfectly in the mix. It will take a hi-hat pattern and just give it an imperfect human feel, it can take a groove and make it feel like there's a real drummer behind it and not a machine.

"When you set the faders to pitch down, it gets even grittier and punchier. It's a pain in the ass to program, of course, and you're limited to a floppy disk's worth of sample memory. For me, that usually means eight sounds max. There's something beautiful about that limitation. It forces you to commit to the palette in front of you and focus on ensuring the elements just work together sonically.

"I sent a friend some of my drum hits, and as I couldn't get over to my studio in person, they sampled a series of eight-bar grooves and that became the rhythm track on 'Aurora'. It was important not just to capture the raw sounds, but also the feel of the sequencer itself."

loopmasters.com

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NI Traktor S2 MK3/ S4 MK3

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Photo: @jordigomezphotography

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Fake news

Ethereal electronic musician Nathan Fake tells DJ Mag Tech about his current production processes and what music projects he's been working on lately

NATHAN FAKE is the master of his own sound, creating music that truly resonates with the listener and the dancefloor. His latest EP 'Blizzards Remixes', released on his own Cambria Instruments imprint, revisits his acclaimed 'Blizzards' release of 2020, flipping the record on its head and bringing a fresh reinterpretation to the much-admired original.

Tell us a little bit about your studio/recording space?

"I just work at home, in my living room! I live on my own so I can kind of do it anywhere, and the living room has the best acoustics. I'd love to have a proper studio somewhere more remote one day."

How do you have it all set up?

"Very basic — laptop and monitors set up on a table in the studio-slash-living room, then a big synth rack with a few of my synths on it. And a bunch of stuff on the floor." [Laughs]

How do you work? With a lot of hardware or are you happy to delve into the box and use software?

"I use a bit of both, these days it's mostly software but I'll always have a few bits of gear I'll never get rid of. Obviously, these days you can do so much with software, it's mad how advanced the technology is getting. But I'll always need to have synths and drum machines to play.

That's how I started off, and it's quite therapeutic using things like that. To be honest I like being comfortable with what I'm using. Using hardware has been the biggest change I guess — I actually started out using only hardware but then when I got into making proper tracks I was using software, and only software. Then around 2008-to-2009, I got interested in synths again."

What is the process you employ for sound design?

"As mentioned before, I use synths, hard and soft. I do quite like using samples too, mostly percussion, some loops. I always like to edit them quite a bit as well. I use Cool Edit — now Adobe Audition — to design a lot of my drum sounds. I like having a dedicated bit of software for editing sound, feels like I can concentrate on it more."

How do you approach the production process? What is your workflow?

"I'll usually start with a drum pattern, and then I'll end up writing a melody or chords over that. Or vice versa. Then a lot of the time I'll record myself jamming live with it for ages, then I'll edit that recording down afterwards."

"Mostly I'll record straight to hard disk but sometimes I do record straight to cassette. Most of the time I'll record an initial digital master in Ableton or Audition, then I can tape that up afterwards or whatever."

"When writing I suppose I always start with very familiar bits of equipment, so I don't have to think too much about the tech side of it. Conversely, when trying out a new synth or something, sometimes I will come up with new ideas from just trying out the synth."

Can you tell us about your favourite bits of kit, from synths to effects units that you like to use?

"Definitely my Roland SH-09, my Korg Prophecy, and my little Yamaha Reface CS that's so much fun, especially as it has built-in speakers so you can just pick up and play around — that can be a good way to come up with an idea impulsively."

Where do you get your influences from?

"All kinds of things. I went into that a bit before, i.e. playing instruments can be a really good way to come up with ideas. Also, any music I listen to can be inspiring, and music that my friends have made. Equally, just being alone with your own thoughts can be a good way to come up with things."

What is keeping you busy in terms of creative work?

"I've been busy working on new music, and I've also been working on a drum and percussion sample library for Loopmasters which I'm excited about — something a bit different for me."



Third Dimension

Pioneer DJ up the ante with their new XDJ-RX3 all in one unit

Pioneer DJ has always been on to a winner with their XDJ-RX. When it first hit the market, it was a convenient way for DJs to get the CDJ/DJM experience albeit in an affordable compact standalone unit, which freed the user from the laptop, unlike many of the other controllers that were on the marketplace at the time. The first unit sold bucketloads and was replaced by the XDJ-RX2, which was even more popular, incorporating more technologies from the CDJ/DJM Nexus range, bringing the playing experience even closer to what could be found on the industry-standard separates. The RX2 held court for the four years since its release, showing how popular this version has been, but now Pioneer DJ has updated the RX to version three and with it, added more technological advances from the CDJ-3000.

Notably, the massive 10.1-inch touch-screen that now adorns the top of the new unit, as well as the on-jog display, which is becoming a standard on Pioneer DJ's new product releases and all-new FX for even more detailed performances. One DJ who managed to get hands-on with the unit before it hit the light of day was

DJ Cueball, who happily jumped into the guest reviewer hot seat to walk and talk us through the new piece of hardware.

Hi Oliver, talk us through the new hardware — what is it, what does it do?

"The XDJ-RX3 is a two-channel performance controller set to replace its predecessor the XDJ-RX2. The unit offers a high resolution 10.1-inch touch-screen, RGB lit pads, a large array of onboard effects and just about every other bell and whistle you could hope for from a controller with this form factor.

"The unit houses two top-loading USB ports that allow for use of rekordbox-analysed tracks or it can be connected by another separate USB port to a laptop to unlock Performance Mode in the rekordbox software. Happily, I've been reliably informed that Serato support is coming to this unit and is expected to arrive in the first quarter of 2022.

"The jog wheels are capacitive and non-mechanical but do include tension adjust, meaning that — as in the same way to Pioneer CDJs — the feel and weight of the platter can be adjusted to taste. Other improvements include LCD screens inside

the jog wheels that display important track and player information.

"While the faders may not be of the coveted Magvel variety, they are buttery smooth and feel great, as do the rest of the knobs and controls — just what a DJ would expect from a Pioneer DJ controller at this price-point."

How do you use it?

"For me, this controller is perfect for travelling — and when I need to be portable. Having the ability to be untethered from a laptop but still have the benefit and use of a screen is great."

Can you tell us about some of the new features of the unit?

"Multiple features have been taken from the CDJ-3000 that I really like. The 3-Band Waveform feature is an excellent addition to the RX3 as it allows the user to see the volume levels of different frequency ranges for a more detailed visual representation of how tracks sound. The Touch Preview is also really cool, it lets DJs preview tracks in their headphones directly from the browse menu on the screen without the need to load the track to a channel."

What is your standout feature on the new controller?

"The new features that really stood out for me on the RX3 are those that make DJing



more efficient — namely, The Beat FX Bank and The Playlist Bank. The Beat FX Bank allows you to select your favourite Beat FX and have them displayed on the screen for easy selection and use. This saves a lot of time, and not having to adjust the physical controls on the mixer makes the whole process of using and switching FX smoother. The Playlist Bank lets you select your four favourite playlists and access them quickly without having to browse your entire collection. In a live setting when mixing quickly, this can be a real lifesaver.”

Was there much of a difference in terms of the learning curve coming from the previous controller to this one?

“The new interface does take a little bit of getting used to in terms of browsing menus and finding your way around but otherwise, everything felt quite intuitive.”

Lots of people always ask about how the RX controller stacks up to a CDJ/DJM rig. What are your thoughts on this?

“As Pioneer DJ has fitted a lot of features onto the RX3, some artists may find the unit a little bit cramped, especially if they are used to the amount of space a full CDJ/DJM rig gives. As I use the unit primarily as a portable setup, the smaller size is definitely more of a positive than a negative. Also, as I like to scratch, the

mechanical nature of CDJ jog wheels is hard to replace. While the tension adjust is a welcome addition, the feel of the platter took some getting used to.”

Down to the basics, what is the build quality and feel like?

“Overall, the build quality of the unit is very good. The screen is bright as are the RGB pads, the faders are super smooth and all the knobs and buttons have that familiar and satisfying heavy duty feel.”

In terms of styling, how does it look?

“I think the controller looks amazing. I love the large screen but for me, I think the LCD displays in the jog wheels are the best aesthetic feature of the RX3 — these definitely give a very professional look to the unit. The paint job has also been updated from the previous model with the mixer section of the controller now being more pronounced, which is nice.”

What do you like about the controller?

“Having so many features in a small portable unit is hands-down my favourite thing about this controller, almost unlimited creative options without the need for a laptop.”

Who is it aimed at?

“From an industry standpoint, I think this controller would be very fitting in small bars or clubs as a permanent rig — it would give any DJ all they’d need to

perform at a high level with few limitations, especially when Serato support arrives. As I mentioned earlier though, I think this model is aimed to be an all-in-one solution for artists and performers that need to be mobile. And it’s perfect for DJs who still want all the bells and whistles of a CDJ/DJM setup but can’t extend to the financial commitment this sort of rig demands.”

At a glance

PIONEER DJ XDJ-RX3

£1,699

• pioneerdj.com

BUILD QUALITY	8.0
EASE OF USE	9.0
FEATURES	10
VALUE FOR MONEY	8.0
SOUND QUALITY	8.0

Hype

- Huge high-resolution screen
- CDJ-3000 features
- Over 20 on-board FX
- On-jog LCD screens

Gripe

- Only one laptop connection
- Screen isn’t multi-touch

Verdict: 8.6/10

Words: **MICK WILSON**Pics: **EILON PAZ, DAN MEDHURST & IAIN MAKIE**

In the Studio **Colleen 'Cosmo' Murphy**

Getting technical in the philosophy of good sound

Colleen 'Cosmo' Murphy is a self-confessed audiophile. She prefers to be known as a music host rather than just a DJ, and has the technical know-how and skills to deliver music at its sonic best. Her attention to detail and the ethos of sound has helped her carve her way to being one of the finest players in the audiophile music community. Her Lucky Cloud and Classic Album Sundays events give an unrivalled musical listening experience to all those that attend. All this was gained from her time playing at The Loft in New York and being taken under the wing of the legendary host himself, David Mancuso. DJ Mag Tech caught up with Colleen at the Beat Hotel's recent Ibiza takeover to discuss her love for all things audiophile and her mission to deliver "good sound as a human right".

Tell us a bit about yourself?

"I have so many strings to my guitar. I basically have been a musical host, radio DJ and curator for most of my life. I started when I was really young at a high school radio station, worked in record shops and then did college radio in the '80s and started professional DJing in the '90s. I was mentored by my late friend David Mancuso. I started going to his Loft parties and he took me under his wing and taught me quite a lot. Now I am on Worldwide FM. I've been on there for five years since they started, I host a show called Balearic Breakfast every Tuesday morning and then my dance side is Cosmodelica. I also founded Classic Album Sundays, which is a platform for deep album listening on really high-end audiophile equipment so people can really hear the detail and hear their favourite albums in a different way. Maybe hear things that they haven't heard before and experience it fully uninterrupted, phones off, no talking, getting to know the stories behind the albums that have changed our lives."

How did David Mancuso's approach to sound help you within your own pursuit?

"My work with David started as me helping him as a friend, it wasn't really professional. I started learning from him in terms of his utmost respect for the musician and the recording and trying to honestly get the artists' original intention across sonically. His whole approach was about not interfering with the music's intent, the message and the sound, replaying the original event and trying to get as close as possible to what the artist did in the studio. Trying to get the feeling on the dancefloor of being in the middle of those musicians, using a sound system that doesn't have any extra added FX, using three-way horn speakers that don't take away or add but deliver a very honest reflection of the music to replicate the natural sound as truly and as honestly as possible.

"This is similar with the entire audio chain, starting with a really fine handmade moving coil cartridge made in Japan by Koestu. These cartridges, once they warm up, they sing. You can feel the music, they pick up subtleties and have a living spirit that other cartridges don't have. A lot of DJ cartridges are really heavy, weighed down — getting technical here — tracking at three-to-four grams so the stylus is sitting in the groove really hard, getting a lot of that bass signal. This means the audio doesn't sound exactly how the artist made the music. The Koestu moving coil cartridge has a lighter, more dynamic sound. David didn't use valve as it is really hard for transient sounds, he used a solid-state Mark Levinson classic preamp known amongst audiophiles: the ML1. Two phono inputs, no headphone jack with no way to mix on it. You click from phono one to phono two so you have to play the whole song. You're playing the entire song through a very pure signal path, there is no added EQ, nothing on the system at all, audio straight from the ML1 into a dividing

network and spread out to the speakers. The whole thing is a simple, honest sound path, no interference, just getting it from point A to the listener's ears — point B — as unobtrusively as possible."

In terms of the technical/equipment side, what is your setup?

"With the listening events, there are a variety of different turntables that we use. Always a really high-end audiophile turntable; it could be a Rega P9, for example. I've used a Continuum turntable that cost almost £100,000 — that was crazy! Always a moving coil cartridge pretty much, just a two-channel system. I've used different valve equipment from Audio Note UK, which is incredible, especially for jazz and classical and I have used solid-state stuff as well. The speakers can vary. I've used the Bowers & Wilkins 800 series, the Kef Blades, all really high-end loudspeakers.

"When I am DJing at The Loft or Lucky Cloud, that's a different kind of setup — more speaker stacks — but it is not set up with the speakers facing out from the DJ or music host but with them facing inwards towards you, so you're in the same sound space as everyone listening — you face the music. Again, you would have the main left, right so everything is in stereo, a centre





mono channel and at the side, you'd have as many columns as you need, maybe 15 feet apart. There would be a slight delay on those, as when you are moving away from the main left and right you want the sound to arrive at the same time. No EQ, no compression, a pretty straight signal path.

"When I DJ I have a very high technical spec and mainly it's all about the isolation of the turntables, as much as possible. I bring my own high-end hi-fi cartridges made by Audio Technica, which are beautiful. You can't scratch with them but they have a closer sound to a coil cartridge. They sparkle and have a bit more shimmer. They have a more dynamic range and they sing a bit better. It's important that the turntable is set up correctly and levelled out, and again, isolation is really a big thing to sort out any possible vibration issues. I have a high spec of mixer as well — I love rotary mixers, they are my favourites, but I am very adaptable and as a working DJ

I've used all kinds. Then I will listen to the room and at times taking out bass just because, again, when you have a lot of bass energy in a room it can be a bit much. I make sure I can do as much as I can without bringing my whole entire sound system, making the sonic expression the best it can be and what can be best for the dancers for the kind of music I am playing.

"Can I just finish off with something my dear friend David said: 'Good sound is a human right'. We're subjected to a lot of sonic pollution; great sound can help convey the life energy of music instead of sucking out all of the energy like a bad system can. It is about the people and their listening experience and that ultimately is what it is about."

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colleencosmomurphy.com





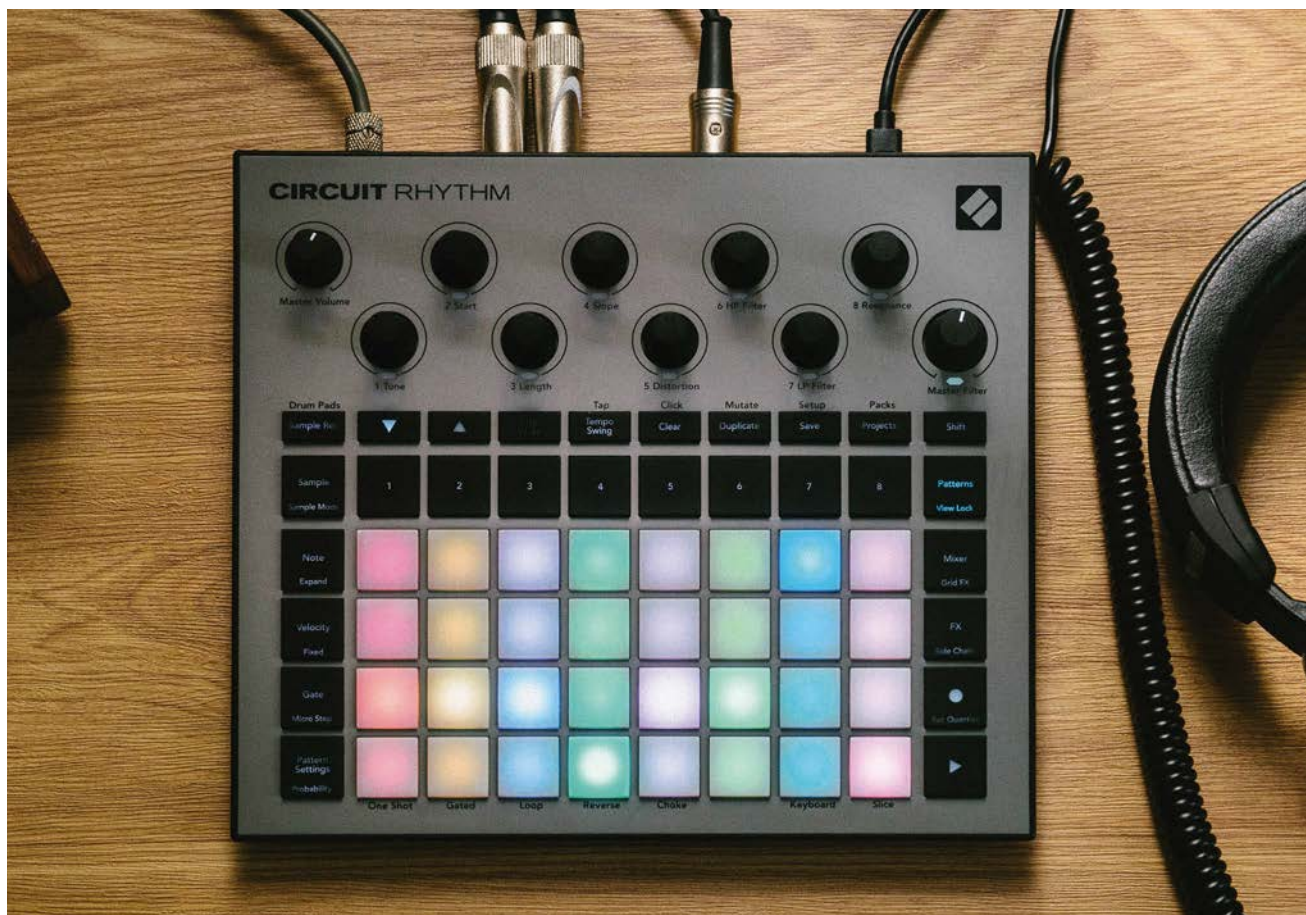
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And The Beat Goes On

Novation's Circuit Rhythm is more than just a groove machine

Novation's Circuit Rhythm is an interesting little box of beats, an all-in-one groovebox with the added extra of being able to capture samples directly into the hardware. The uber-compact device can be used standalone or connected to your DAW of choice. The take-anywhere use-anytime ethos means that you'll be creating beats where and whenever inspiration strikes.

The Circuit Rhythm follows the same form and styling as Novation's previous groovebox Circuit Tracks, however it comes with double the amount of programable tracks — eight — than its partner and a healthy amount of sample space too. We decided to give it the ultimate hands-on test and recruited multi-instrumentalist, DJ, artist and producer Jael, throwing him in at the deep end to give the Circuit Rhythm a proper workout.

Talk us through Novation's Circuit Rhythm and how you've been using it...

"This device is a groovebox that contains drum samples, sample FX, ADSR, syncing, and a recording interface. It lets you load in your own samples through Novation's companion software Components and you can also record them yourself directly onto the device. I've been using it in my DJ sets as a sampler. I love to play around with samples and acapellas, so this device is the perfect way to develop my DJ sets and bring them to a new level. I have never used any grooveboxes, so this is a great start for me to play around and discover the world of grooveboxes and what the Circuit Rhythm can do."

Was there quite a bit of a learning curve when jumping in on the Circuit Rhythm for the first time, or was it quite intuitive?

"I learned very quickly how to make a beat in the Circuit. The workflow is very pleasant when getting into hands-on mode and also just for playing around with samples. I would highly recommend the unit for beginners as well as anyone who is pretty adept with hardware. However, I think it is very challenging to just make a whole project on this groovebox. Saying that, personally, I love challenges when it comes to music. Circuit Rhythm lets you groove around freely but one thing that is a bit of a shame is that it doesn't let you play two or more samples at once."

What features stand out to you on the unit?

"My favourite feature is the sample loading, so that I can play around with my own samples at live performances. Also, I really love that there are some sample FX on board. I absolutely love how it looks — it makes you want to immediately start playing around with the performance pads. The response time of the pads is just perfect. The feel of the ADSR knobs is firm, which is super important. It's got a nice layout considering its compact size. The lights on the pads are very nice and I love how the unit is built."

"I also really like this unit because you can sync it to Novation's Circuit Tracks device, so you can play around and jam with more devices."

At a glance

NOVATION
CIRCUIT RHYTHM

£360

• novation.com

BUILD QUALITY	9.0
EASE OF USE	8.0
FEATURES	8.0
VALUE FOR MONEY	8.0
SOUND QUALITY	9.0

Hype

A great piece of kit aimed at creative producers and DJs that love to play around with grooveboxes.

Gripe

No onboard screen can make for a tricky time, and the option of playing two or more samples at once would be great.

Circuit Rhythm is more than the sum of its parts. Some users might find the lack of a screen a little bit frustrating but the simplicity of using the unit makes up for this inconvenience.

Verdict 8.4/10

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Tech Essentials

A New Year and a fresh look at some new tech options for the discerning techy



Sennheiser HD400 Pro

SENNHEISER has launched the HD400 Pro studio headphones, their latest headphone aimed at the creative music crowd. The HD400s are a perfect choice for producers and creators that rely on natural and precise sound reproduction to ensure that their mixes are delivered to the highest quality. The make up of the new headphones is ideal for long studio sessions, consisting of a lightweight open-back design equipped with soft velour earpads for additional comfort. The headphones come with both coiled and straight detachable cables, allowing them to adapt to different user preferences.

The HD400 Pros have quite a few technological tricks up their sleeve. In order to deliver an unbridled

sound, the headphone drivers sit at a slight angle, carefully recreating the optimum triangular listening position you would place yourself in when in a recording studio. The open-back design also aids in delivering a wide and spacious soundstage, neutral and transparent, which enables producers to work confidently, knowing that their final mix transfers accurately to listeners. In addition to this, the HD400 Pro features a wide frequency range of 6 to 38kHz to give music producers the full account of their mix. Although the human ear only hears between 20 to 20kHz, the HD400 Pro reproduces audio beyond the audible frequency range, giving the user the ability to perceive the nuanced harmonics and ambience in their music, while at the same time revealing a bold, articulate low-end.

£249

• sennheiser.com

LaCie Portable SSD Drive

SSD HARD DRIVES offer users faster performance speeds and have no moving parts, so are less likely to break. The new generation of drives offer large storage capacity yet can easily fit into a pocket and are ideal for the creative user. The LaCie Portable SSD delivers blazingly fast read and write speeds (up to 1,050 MB/s and write speeds up to 1,000 MB/s), essential for anyone doing heavy work with audio or video files. Being able to transfer these files across and to write them at fast speeds improves the capabilities of your computing machine — allowing for more intensive sessions. The LaCie drive can be sourced with various memory capacity from 500GB to 2TB, which considering the physical size of the drive offers a lot of storage space.

The new drive is compatible across Windows, Mac and iPads, and also comes with a custom app for on-demand and scheduled backups, a one-month Adobe Creative Cloud All Apps plan, a three-year limited warranty, and Rescue Data Recovery Services to help defend against data loss and retrieval costs. That means all your data stored on the drive is secured and retrievable against any potential issues that could happen with this device. There is also a handy file-mirroring software feature that allows for seamless file access and syncing across multiple devices. The small lightweight design hides the large storage capacity and makes for the perfect drive for anyone who is on the lookout for something ultra-portable.

£109 - £349

• lacie.com



Tech Producer

We reveal some handy tips and tricks to help you on the road to wicked productions

Words: **MICK WILSON**

Killer Sounds

How to create the freshest sounds on the dancefloor

DJ and producer John Graham, aka Quivver, talks us through his killer sound on his new album 'Revelate' on John Digweed's Bedrock Records

"IT'S been a few years since the last Quivver album and the Covid lockdown gave me the time I needed to focus on making 'Revelate'.

"I wanted it to be a 'proper' album, something people could listen to from start to finish at home, in the car or wherever, rather than a collection of club tracks thrown together.

"I'd been messing about with different ideas so there were a lot of unfinished tracks lying around. I had a conversation with John [Digweed] at Bedrock — around this time last year — and suggested putting an album together, and also that I wanted to do something in various tempos and genres. He was totally up for that, so I cracked on and started revisiting some of the ideas as well as starting some new ones.

"It was great having the freedom to experiment a bit and move away from just four to the floor stuff and the album started to come together quickly, with different tempos and styles going on, but still with a distinct vibe running through the whole thing.

"I started my musical career producing drum & bass — as Skanna — so this was also a great opportunity to return to my love of breakbeats, which I did with 'Shine' and 'Crystals'.

"In terms of the technology side of things, I still use Pro Tools as my DAW. For me, I like the way



it works. While I am creating electronic music I still adopt a song-driven workflow. I have a few go-to soft synths and plugins like Sonic Academy's Ana 2 and Kick 2, which I always use for my kick-drums. FXpansion Strobe for bass sounds, Omnisphere on everything in some way or another, Dune 2 soft synth, Output Movement to make the pads sound interesting, and Newfangledaudio's plugin bundle gets used on everything, especially for end of mixdowns and mastering.

"So far, I've had some amazing reactions so I think I need to start doing this more often than every 10 years."

plug-in corner

Welcome to Plug-in Corner, our monthly look into some of the best plug-ins around for creating electronic music

MANUFACTURER **Loopcloud**
PLUG-IN **DRUM**
FORMAT **VST, AU, Mac/Windows**
PRICE **£39.95**



Loopcloud

DRUM is the latest plug-in release from iconic sample titans Loopcloud. Using their expertise in the world of sampling, they have created a powerhouse drum machine that turns samples into full-on drum kits to inspire unique grooves and rhythms.

There are no half-measures when it comes to this innovative plug-in, with over 1,000 sounds and 30 kits to be harnessed, alongside your existing library of sounds. All the patterns that you create can be programmed and edited quickly with nudge, timing, and velocity controls available at every step, with adjustable parameters on all 16 pads.

The feature that truly encapsulates the creative ability of DRUM is the intelligent Kit Generator that can be used to create an immeasurable number of combinations. With its simple UI and intuitive design, creating a kit is as simple as setting an instrument per pad, hitting 'Generate kit', and watching as 16 pads are instantly filled with professional quality, inspiring sounds.

While getting lost in the endless possibilities at your disposal, the last thing you want is for your perfectly designed kit or your carefully crafted rhythms to be lost. Loopcloud has ensured you will never have to face such nightmares by focusing on the organisation and ease of navigation. You can simply export the audio or MIDI directly to your DAW and save it for future sessions. DRUM also remembers every kit in its history, allowing you to rework and revisit rhythms that have the potential for future productions.

It is no question that rhythm is a core driver when it comes to what makes music so special and with DRUM, you are fully equipped to turn your ideas into reality. DRUM is available at Plugin Boutique for Mac and PC in VST & AU formats.



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Producer Tips: Loz Goddard

"I don't know about anyone else, but I'm a bit bored of hearing perfectly quantised drum tracks and percussive loops. It makes sense to quantise your drum tracks of course, but a production tip from me is to not get too hung up on making sure every drum or percussive hit lands right on that Ableton grid.

"For me, a track sounds much more interesting if it retains elements of a 'live recording' that are often lost when producing exclusively behind a computer. To achieve this, I use two approaches.

"First, you can use Ableton's 'Groove Pool' by dragging any groove file from the 'Packs' folder onto a drum loop. Once that's loaded in, I tend to set all values to zero, and then play around with the velocity, random, timing and global amount. You can also use the groove pool method to add some weirdness to synth elements too, provided there's plenty of notes per bar.

"Option two is my preferred method and works for anyone who has each individual drum hit on a separate channel. I tend to get better results by manually adjusting a few drum hits of the bar, so they aren't all falling directly on the grid lines. A bit more tedious, but you will be able to better control exactly where you want that hi-hat or snare to land — not to mention you will be able to EQ each drum hit separately, leading to a better overall mix."

It's Logic, Jim

Apple release new version of Logic Pro with 360-degree Spatial mixing



WITH the launch of the new MacBook Pro M1 computers, Apple also upgraded their Logic Pro DAW to version 10.7. The new version brings with it Dolby Atmos surround sound mixing as well as a host of other mighty feature upgrades. Logic Pro is long-standing in music production circles, being considered one of the industry standards and offering electronic producers some pretty hefty tools to aid in the music production process. A Mac-only product, it is effectively the go-to DAW of choice for Mac users (we haven't forgotten about Ableton), built to run in tandem with Apple's own machines. With each new version, Apple brings some pretty significant updates to this DAW, which has been around since the '80s. It is amazing to see how it has developed and what it offers producers with the powerful tools that can now be employed as part of its makeup.

To get the most out of Logic Pro 10.7 you'd be looking at a fairly recent Mac running macOS 11 or later and around 6GB of space on your hard-drive for the core elements. However, if you're installing from scratch you're going to need about 80GB of space to load up every element of the software — it is a meaty install, that's for sure.

As mentioned earlier, the version 10.7 software is now optimised for the new M1 Pro and M1 Max processors found in Apple's latest 14-inch and 16-inch MacBook Pro laptops. It also supports up to 56 processor threads. This is a serious amount of computing power of which we'll be discussing in our MacBook Pro review coming up in the next few editions. Luckily, if you're using one of the older MacBook machines without the supersized processing hardware, users can set Logic Pro to only load plug-ins needed for project playback, meaning that the software won't be as much of a drain on your CPU.

Talking about processing power, with the new 10.7 Logic Pro users can now have up to a staggering 1,000 stereo audio tracks, 1,000 instrument tracks, and 1,000 auxiliary tracks, and use up to 12 sends per channel strip in one session. You'd be doing some pretty heavyweight stuff if you ever get near to using this much in your projects, but it shows the power and potential that lies in this DAW. We were pretty much blown away when Apple showed us the track count at the press briefing, in which they were running a full orchestral mix with spatial surround processing and a whole heap of plug-ins and soft synths. We've never

seen such an intense session like this run on a laptop before without falling down — very impressive.

So, the big feature update in 10.7 has to be the introduction of Spatial Audio mixing tools utilising Dolby Atmos. Apple has included, in the DAW, a set of mixing tools that users can use to create 3D spatial mixes, now offering producers the option of placing sounds anywhere in the 360 field. There are other additional plug-ins that also aid in the process of 3D mixing, with Apple updating some of its existing plugs to take advantage of this workflow. As part of this, Logic Pro's mixer section has been revamped to support metering and panning for speaker configurations up to 7.1.4.

Aside from the major updates, Logic Pro 10.7 also has a new, cleaner look with an updated GUI. Nothing too groundbreaking here but it does work to refresh the look of the DAW. Logic Pro users continue to benefit from the powerful suite of tools available for them with this updated and formidable piece of software.

£149
• [apple.com](https://www.apple.com/uk/logicpro/)

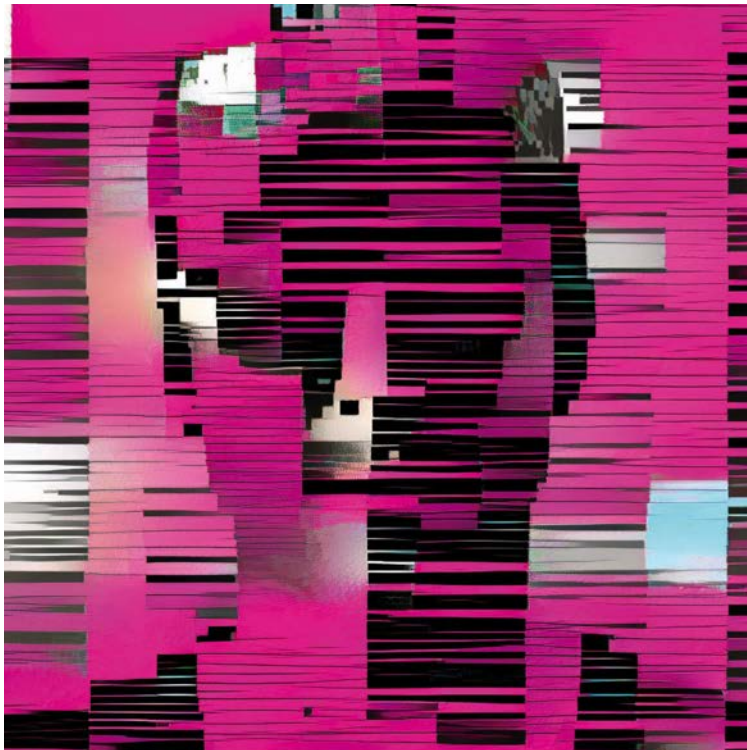
MC SQ'd

ARTURIA continues to grow their soft synth emulations with yet another take on a well-loved classic: Ensoniq's SQ-80. The SQ80V is a virtual recreation of this digital powerhouse (also loosely taking aspects from the ESQ-1) which was popular in the '80s — its sonic influence can be heard on many of the records that were produced from that time. Arturia's latest VST incorporates all the features of the original — including the three digital oscillators, analogue filter and amp — and in the usual Arturia standard, adds modern elements and features to make it a truly up to date version of the machine. The crunchy digital sound of the SQ-80 has been recreated using Arturia's extensive know-how in emulating the classic circuitry found in these beloved synths. Users even get the original soundbank, as well as a collection of new sounds.

£169
• [arturia.com](https://www.arturia.com/)



Lucky Seven : Agoria



"I really enjoyed the process of no boundaries, but at the same time trying to question what I really wanted to develop."

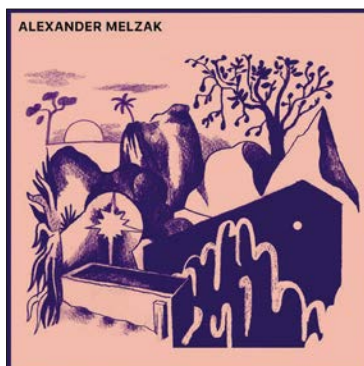
"Every time we do an album, it's an answer to the one before," legendary French artist, producer and DJ Agoria tells DJ Mag. 'dev' is the sequel to 'Drift' (an album that took six years to make), whereas his new release was made in a month or two last year during the pandemic. "I really enjoyed the process of no boundaries, but at the same time trying to question what I really wanted to develop," he adds.

It's an exciting, highly conceptual long-player full of philosophical ponderings that arrive from the deep perspectives and talks Agoria has with many physicians, philosophers and writers. However, the cover artwork, featuring a handsome goat, is the complete opposite.

"I think this image is totally irrelevant compared to the music," he laughs, and goes on to explain time spent with a goat keeper, and about his fascination with wildlife and nature.

Agoria has a passion for creativity. He recently set up HempFM, a 24/7 insight into the sounds of a field of hemp slowly growing; he also just released an AI player, "where the music is not static and where the track isn't the same every time you listen to it". His love of music on vinyl is a constant one, and to this end, DJ Mag asked him the Lucky Seven questions.

Words: **HELENE STOKES**



The track that reminds you of your childhood...

"So 'Oxygene' by Jean-Michel Jarre was one of the very first tunes for me, because when I was a kid, I was playing for the parties of my parents. My parents would say, 'Push this button when we tell you', that was my mission. I remember especially this song, and I just realised it was released in '76, which is the year of my birth. It's a track that I have listened to through my parents and my family so many times."

The first record that you ever bought?

"It was Inner City 'Good Life'. I remember I had to wash all the cars in my neighbourhood to get the precious money to buy this record. This song was a big hit in the country when I was 12 or 13 years old. It's not that I was digging in record stores at an early age, it was a hit on all the mainstream radio stations. I have to say that when Kevin Saunderson asked me to remix 'Big Fun', for me it was a present from God. So from that point on, I was in touch with Kevin, he invited me to play in Detroit at the Movement Festival, and yes, it was a very nice story for me to remix such a legendary artist."

What do you listen to that isn't dance music?

"I listen to every kind of music. But if I was to think of nowadays, let me tell you what I've been listening to today. It's The Caretaker, 'Everywhere At The End Of Time'. I just liked it and I didn't really question it or the process of it, but it's tracks that have been slowed down, very old tracks. I love the process and I think it's really fresh. It's really easy listening. My mum was an opera singer, so I listen to a lot of classical music too."

The track that's guaranteed to make you cry?

"There is one track, I lost a friend of mine recently who was 21 years old from a bad disease, he was a big fan of Mylene Farmer 'Sans Contrefaçon', so every time I listen to this, it makes me cry. That is the power of music — you don't always have to be impressed by the music itself, it's always attached to memories and surroundings that make it special, I think. It's also the case for bad music, it can make you laugh."

What's an album (or artist) that you're currently into?

"Yes there is one, it's a fantastic concept album by Alexander Melzak. It's absolutely incredible, it reminds me of the first works of a French composer named Sylvain Chauveau. It's a mind-blowing album, it might be my perfect album of the last year. When I'm listening to this, I have a feeling of discovering new fields, new territories and new planets."

The record in your collection that you most treasure?

"If I'm very sincere, and you might be scared by this, there is not one. As much as I'm a big digger, as much as I'm a big fan, the fact of owning it maybe one day is enough for me. It's enough for me to know that I did own it, but if I lose it, it's fine. It's like with books — you get a book, you read it, it's in you, but if you lose it, it's totally fine. But if you really forced me, I would tell you Jeff Mills 'Axis 9B', which I had been running after for maybe two or three years before I got it as a kid. Jeff Mills released the others in order, but then the ninth wasn't released for many months or years, and then one day it was."

Your all-time favourite track of all time?

"It's going to be silence. I recently watched a movie, Sound Of Metal, and it's this story of a drummer who loses his hearing. The music is actually what he can hear, so it's silence, but he is actually hearing a few things. I think the soundtrack is fantastic. It's by Nicholas Becker. But my answer would be silence, because we only speak about sound and music, but without silence, we would all go crazy."

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