

{UK}{44}



Rewind!

Drum & Bass, originally a London phenomenon, burst onto the club scene in the early '90s. For a while the style was everywhere. Then all of a sudden the sound went quiet **text graham brown-martin** *photography fabio mergulhao*

Sidestepper

DRUM & BASS, ORIGINALLY A LONDON phenomenon, burst onto the club scene in the early '90s. For a while the style was everywhere—in clubs, on television, on nearly every pirate radio station, even as the soundtrack for a dozen TV commercials—invading the senses. Then all of a sudden the sound went quiet: back underground planning its next assault. When drum & bass resurfaced it was bigger, badder and bolder, with a global twist.

I must confess: I'm a drum & bass-head. When I walked into a dark and impossibly crowded club in the early '90s and heard drum & bass for the first time, it was an epiphany—a revelation; the discovery of the UK's own urban music form.

There is a constant debate about what constitutes UK urban music. With its interaction with multiple cultures and inevitable integration, "urban" seems to be as much an aspiration as actual city dwelling. I suppose in a media-saturated culture "Urban" comes pre-packaged in Styrofoam containers sanitized for your protection and ribbed for her pleasure.

So what of drum & bass? How does this culture define itself? There are recurring themes: drum & bass, in its original South and East London form, is infused with deep bass forms and percussive references to ragga and dancehall integrated within a sampling and technology culture. Drum & bass has never been pre-occupied with the notion of race; it is a transcultural movement.

DRUM & BASS: THE PAST 10 YEARS

Drum & bass emerged out of the fusion between the UK dance scene and the South London blues party aficionados. It quickly migrated to Bristol, where the scene cultivated its own dialect, perhaps most notably in the style of artists such as Roni Size, Jumpin' Jack Frost and popsters, Kosheen.

As quickly as it emerged, at least from a mass media perspective, it retreated underground. The poster boy for drum & bass, Goldie, went on to seek alternative employment. With a part on

a Bond film, a "tuff guy" role on a UK soap, and the star of an advertising campaign endorsing crap clothing from high street chain, Burton, it can't be bad (or much worse).

But the merest mention of a resurgence of interest in drum & bass to V Recordings boss, Bryan Gee, brings forth an almost convincing denial that drum & bass has been doing nothing but continuing to expand. Bryan Gee is one of the godfathers of drum & bass, a passionate man with straightforward objectives.

Whilst conscious of his UK perspective, Gee has been impressed by the output of Brazil and South America, where DJs and producers such as Marky, XRS, Suv and Patife have been imprinting their own sonic experience into the mix. Gee initially gave Sao Paulo-based DJ Marky an early shift at the Movement night at Bar Rhumba, where his turntable antics and soulful drops had the audience demanding a peak time shift.

So a new chapter in the drum & bass story emerges as practitioners appear from every part of the world. The Germans are doing it, the Japanese, the Americans banged it from New York to San Francisco, but the Brazilians and the Colombians are spanking it, drawing off the warm vibes of bossa nova, salsa and high-life.

I asked DJ Marky about the new album he is currently working on with XRS. "We've been working hard on new material and developing new sounds and flavours. We're also inviting some great vocalists onto the project, such as Vikter Duplaix, and working on a live show to promote the album when we release it later this year," Marky explains.

Asked whether he felt any pressure to incorporate sounds from his native Brazil, he tells me, "No, not really... You know I'm 100 percent Brazilian and so is XRS but our focus is not only to be inspired by our local music. I guess we get asked this question because we sampled Jorge Benjor on LK, but in the very same way I might

look towards US soul or rare groove for inspiration at other points. We only use Brazilian music because it fits, not just because it's Brazilian—that would be too transparent."

SIDESTEPPER

I was fortunate to meet up with Richard Blair, fortunate in that I caught him on one of his infrequent stopovers in the UK, his birth place, but not his spiritual home. His home lies in Bogotá, Colombia, and he is about to wed Carolina Lizarazo, a well-known Colombian television actress. Their marriage has a kind of Norman Cook and Zoe Ball *gravitas* in the homeland; the prospect of the Colombian equivalent of *Hello* magazine dealing the photo exclusives is daunting to Blair. He is the driving force of the project known as Sidestepper. If you haven't sampled the delights of Sidestepper's EP, "Logozo", then you really haven't experienced ecstasy. It's an intoxicating infusion of drum & bass sensibilities with a booty swaying salsa.

Sidestepper is dropping a new album about the time you're reading this. I've listened to the album and the word is: don't expect a hardcore drum & bass tip. The album is, however, gorgeous and certainly deserves to be part of your record collection. It's called "3 AM (In the Beats we Trust)" and it's on the Palm Pictures label. The album reflects an almost zen-like dissection of the roots of urban music; it is reflective not only of the Colombian experience the indelible effect that the African diaspora has had on musical expression.

Talking to Blair, it's clear how his experience of a new culture has affected his embrace of cultural integration. He gained access to Colombian culture as a consequence of working at Peter Gabriel's Real World studio's alongside fellow knob twiddlers Eno and Lanois. As producer and studio wizard, Blair had the chance to work with Colombian artist Toto La Momposina's La Candela Viva. Drawing on the music and dance of the Colombian Caribbean, her work is informed and inspired by a rich cultural mix >



Bryan Gee



DJ Patife



DJ Marky

