

## A Chat With : Motor City Drum Ensemble

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So how does it work? According to Danilo, the market may have changed, but the rules stay the same. "As long as you stay true to yourself, it will pay off. Sometimes it takes longer, sometimes quicker, but if you are honest with yourself, people will appreciate what you do. Everything is coming so quick for me, but in a way, all my other work has lead up to this, so I have been working 15 years to get where I am now.

"But looking at it from another view, there are so many promo MP3s I get, so much music coming out. So here's no common way to break an artist any more. The best thing to do is make vinyl, see if it sells, see if there's good feedback, and then see if it's working. And it depends on what kind of person you are too. If you are a total prick, naturally it won't work out!"

He may be only 24-year-old, but the Stuttgart-born Plessow speaks with a focus and an ambition that is surprising. After growing up playing the drums, he drifted into house after recognising sonic similarities between it and "his inspiration", jazz, soul and funk. "That is best inspiration for me – music where there is no discussion around whether you can make it in a real way or not: you use Fender bass, or Rhodes or whatever. For the album that is eventually coming, I want to buy a Rhodes and employ some guys to play with me – to take it in a more musical direction. I'm a trained drummer, but beside that I never had any training – I have a hard time finding out which chords fit. After 10 years, it's still a struggle for me. But I don't really care if people say to me, 'Hey you can't do this because it's not really musically fitting or whatever...'. For me, if it fits the mood, it works."

If you are a total prick, naturally things won't work out for you!

Similar to jazz, in a way? "Absolutely, absolutely. But the funny thing is, I've already tried to incorporate jazz musicians in what I do. And you think, these guys are players, so they will be really free in their approach – but they are often bound to these really strict classically trained structures, saying, 'Hey you can't do that' – and I say, 'Why not, it sounds good?' I also want to keep the raw, dancefloor vibe to what I do. So I want to avoid solos, people showing off what they can do. If you keep it minimal, it can work so much better."

His approach to making Motor City tracks also flips convention – he began making music with plug-ins, and then gradually switched to hardware. Why did you take the 'difficult route'?

"But for me it's the easy route. It's more fun, to find a riff on a keyboard or a rhythm on a drum machine, rather than using this plug-in, or this preset and the modulate it with a fucking mouse... With hardware, you know that turning this knob will always do this thing. I come from a software background, when I was younger I could not afford anything else, but I slowly built up my gear, and now I am comfortable with it."

I ask him about where he thinks he fits in with the contemporary house scene. "There's a lot of

music that sounds OK. It's like tool music. Last year, the Oslo/Cecille sound was hyped. And I kind of like the music, but it's tools – it will not stay on my shelf. My goal is to make music for DJs to play, but also that people will listen after 10 years and say, 'Hey, that's still cool'.

"I don't want to piss anyone off, but if you see a lot of these guys that are big at the moment, their top 10s are just house: maybe some classic house records, but only house. And I think, fuck man, there's so much more to music. So the way I approach it, there's no genre to music at all – every style of music has its point, its meaning. So each day in the studio, after three hours of making one thing, I have to listen to something else."

We talk about the difference between DJ tools – the tracks that you perhaps buy on MP3, or play off CD – and tracks, the ones that you want to own on vinyl and want to keep. There are more and more DJ tools available today of course, but perhaps that makes finding actual tracks all the sweeter. But what happens after the wheels come off the DJ tool house train?

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"Mmmm. It's something I am asking myself, and I really have no fucking clue. Now there are micro-genres, dubstep, which sounds to me like broken beat 2.0. But that's the way the pop industry works – let's jump on something new, give it a new name... so I'm not sure what's next, I think it's just micro-micro differences, nothing more."

Let's talk about the album. "The album? At the moment, it's just a theory!" But that's where all good ideas start, right? "I'd love to do a Motor City album, but this year I have done 15 remixes so far, so in the winter, it will be overkill. I have the fear about that, because I am worried that people will lose interest." How do you keep the balance between wanting exposure for MCDE and not overdoing it? How do you walk the line? "Umm... the remix opportunities came to me in a short space of time. I'm not sure what happened, but in March, there was no particular thing, maybe the Resident Advisor podcast and Raw Cuts 3 and 4 were still big. But suddenly, everyone was like, 'hey we need a remix, we need a remix'. So at the beginning I was like, 'hey cool'. So soon after I wanted to stop. But then the artists started getting bigger and bigger, so now it's Jazzanova... and you can't say no, so it's like fuck!... and then Steve Bug and DJ T... not really my kin of music, but it helps to build up things. And this is my job."

Walking the line. Knowing when to stop is sometimes as much of a skill as being able to make the music. It's clear Danilo is aware of this – his worry about a winter of discontent is telling – but it must be difficult to say no when the world starts beating a path to your door. He sees the album, and what follows on from that, as the escape valve. "I've been thinking about a live project for a while, but I don't want to be Ableton user no 20 million, four hundred thousand and something... How can I make it a nice live act? But at the same time, how does it work economically? Think about touring costs with a band. So I am not sure if want to be in the position where I tour with 10 people..."

Speaking of economics, you run two labels – Raw Cuts and Four Seasons - at the moment. How does that work for you? As in, does it work? Are they a loss leader to provide you with DJ gigs? "No, no, no. It's common sense that you need releases to get gigs. But it's not like that with me – it's not like, 'Oh, it's been four months, my gigs are decreasing, I need to release something.' With me, I need to do music; it's the most basic thing in my life. I never did anything else. And releasing records, I want to share what I do. And the funny thing is, 'Raw Cuts' works amazing well on vinyl, and not so much on MP3. I'm thinking of doing a track with a title that is a link to a Rapidshare file. Because what happens if your hard drive crashes and you lose all your MP3s. Or in 20 years time, CDs don't work because it's all zeros and ones. Vinyl is the only medium that is going to be there forever.