

The Burlington Project Interview 14/07/2009

There has been some speculation surrounding your artist moniker Motor City Drum Ensemble. Stuttgart, your home town is often referred to as the 'motor city' of Germany, so please tell us where, in fact, the name heralds from?

Stuttgart is the home of Mercedes Benz and Porsche, so yes, as these are one of the biggest German car manufacturers, you can call Stuttgart Germany's motor city. And it's obviously a link to Detroit as well – a city with a musical history second to none, and I'm not only talking techno. Music from Detroit has been inspiring me for years.

The new mixes of 'DJ Sprinkles - Grand Central, Part I (Deep Into The Bowel Of House)' include a Detroit inspired 'Raw Mix' that we have come to expect of you and a 'Bassline Dub' which we might not. Can you tell us a little more about that and how it came about?

Detroit is not the only city/style I try to reflect in my music. Labels like NuGroove, Trax, Prescription/Balance, as well as Jazz, Soul and a fair bit of Disco etc have also played a major part in developing my musical taste. The Bassline Dub for Terre is inspired by early 90s New York House for example, as was my first 12" on Four Roses „Breath Control“. I like to keep things interesting and not stick to a certain trademark genre; I rather have some trademark elements/sounds and play with certain styles – I think one of the biggest mistakes you can do as an artist is to just stick to one certain style and not experiment.

**With your productions, there's an obvious emphasis on an analogue warm sound. How much of your productions take place 'in the box' (plugins) and how much importance do you place on hardware?
(what's a brief rundown of your studio set up)**

I'm using Cubase to arrange, record synths & samples, and do the mixdown in it as well. I'm using only a really small amount of plug-ins, and I stick to freeware for about 90%. Other than that, everything is hardware. I stopped using any software synths as for me it feels just easier and more comfortable to work with the real deal - Not to mention that it still sounds different as well, plus you'll make certain mistakes that'll eventually turn out to sound great after all. In my studio you'll find quite some old drum machines (hence the drum ensemble), Roland Trs mainly, but also more obscure stuff like a rare Vermona DRM from the 80s or an EMU Drumulator. Synthwise, the Yamaha DX7 is the main source for the typical MCDE chords, plus an Oberheim-Xa, Matrix 6 and Korg Poly61. On the mono side you have a Roland MC202 & Sh2000, a Yamaha Cs15, and I'm currently investing in some old Roland Modular System.

The Raw Cuts series have gained notoriety as embracing the past through the intricate use of samples while still pushing the envelope. Other Motor City Drum Ensemble productions are comparatively sample light, e.g. the 'Lonely One EP' on 2020 Vision. Rarely do producers master both skills with such aplomb but do you have any preference between the two methods?

The whole Raw Cuts idea was/is just fun. The concept is to only use samples (except drum machine sounds) and finish a track within two hours, no need for thinking about it too much, just keep it as pure & raw as possible. I like that people dig this approach, but I also love to get all geeky with my synths. All other MCDE productions, including the remixes, are a totally different approach, as I don't want to limit myself here. I'm trying to develop a certain vibe that is not bound to any genre, combining the sampling methods of raw cuts and the possibilities of my studio. The upcoming remixes will all be very different as in mood, style, whatever you name it. But it's still me using the same equipment and the same tricks of arranging and using my stuff, so I feel you can clearly hear who has done it, and that's a very important thing for me.

I read that you didn't start djing until you released your first record in 2001. How does your

time divide up between the studio and performing now, eight years on?

From 2001 on, i have constantly been playing – sometimes more, sometimes less. But it has never been this crazy! At the moment its really hard to find my own studio time, as i m also producing Rainer Trübys album, plus i have done a whole bunch of remixes. So i said to myself, before i start to lose quality, i ll not do any own stuff until i finished all the remix work – that ll be end of august i guess. Really enjoyed doing all those mixes! Luckily, i ve still some nice stuff left that i did before the madness started haha.

As well as several aliases (Hypster Wonkaz, Aphro Pzyko...), you're also half of 'Inverse Cinematics' with Joachim Tobias, a more leftfield, broken sound. Can we look forward to more from this partnership?

I hope i can find time for that, at the moment it looks like it will have to wait.

And how about the link up with Rainer Truby?

Rainer has been a good mate for some time before he came up with the idea of me doing his new material. Now we are very good friends and working with him is really nice. We already have some stuff finished and the first single is about to drop.

What would the perfect DJ/live act lineup look like for a Danilo Plessow soiree?

Hmm, i havent seen everybody i want to see, but a very nice lineup would be this: Harry, resident of SubClub for the warm up, followed by DJ Harvey, followed by Kenny Dope playing obscure Disco, and Theo Parrish taking it from there to techno madness in the end.

By maintaining an amount of retrospect in some of the music you make and play do you ever feel at venues that there is a pressure on you to gain the approval of the older 'heads', the chin strokers at the back making mental playlists?

Hmm, good question. I like to drop some gems mostly at the end of my set – could be anything, obscure techno, spiritual jazz, deep soul, disco or even some krautrock, canterburry or what the heck. This works only if i m the last dj on though. But for the main part of my set i keep my eyes rather at the dancefloor and try to work that out. I really hate people who are snobbish about music and i usually try to keep the focus more on quality entertaining than on educating. This doesnt mean i ll play beatport charts, but i have no problem with playing a classic like „big fun“ even though its been heard to death already. After that you can continue with some deep stuff.

On a similar note, with the term deep house becoming ever more encompassing have you ever had the experience of having to follow another DJ playing 'tech house' at 130bpm? How do you cope with poorly programmed nights and the misplaced preconceptions of some crowds?

This has so far not really been the case with MCDE, but i have experienced stuff like that from time to time for sure. In that case, I usually try to be as accesible as possible for the first hour, so i can show some of my deeper side in front of a crowd still later.

But as i use 80% vinyl, and you cant really plan nights like that, its not always working.

With your DJing schedule becoming increasingly diverse and high profile, what have been your best experiences and which countries/clubs have delivered the best atmosphere?

Dublin last sunday was a very nice fun little crowd. Other standout gigs were Goa in Madrid, Tape Club in Berlin, Zukunft in Zürich and the parties i threw together with my mate Moritz von Pein in Stuttgart.

What have you been listening to lately? Are there any new artists that have grabbed your attention?

There has been some nice stuff around, i dont follow it too much though.
Two artist that come to mind spontaneously would be Bodycode/Portable and Levon Vincent.

What can we look forward to in the near future on Four Roses, MCDE and from yourself on any projects that you are working on?

On Four Roses there will be an EP by Classic Flowers, followed by a split 12" with Mujaba and myself, plus we have a new secret signing that will hopefully turn some heads this winter.
MCDe will see the release of Raw Cuts5/6 before summer break, after that there will be another new signed artist and a remix by Trus Me.
The list of remixes to drop is big, yet i ve tried to keep the quality and i hope you all do enjoy them.
MCDE Remixes for Andre Lodemann, Art of Tones/dOP, DJ T, Jazzanova, Losoul, Steve Bug, Toby Tobias and Tom Trago are to come out soon.

Danilo Plessow, thank you!