

REVIEWED: Propellerhead Reason 4 • Numark iDJ2 • Rayzoon Jamstix 2XL



Vol. 10, No. 1, JANUARY 2008

ELECTRONIC • URBAN | PRODUCTION • PERFORMANCE[®]

REMIX



Q-TIP
SECRETS OF A SOLDIER

**REMIX
TECHNOLOGY
AWARDS**

**28 FAVORITES
FROM 2007**

**GO FORWARD,
MOVE AHEAD**

27 SURE THINGS FOR 2008

REMIXMAG.COM



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DJ Muggs • The Lady Tigra • Boys Noize • DJ Rekha

Junior Sanchez

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www.timothysaccenti.com

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by **Mal Torrance**

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OUT WITH THE OLD

A month after 9/11 happened, I had the good fortune of going to China for a few weeks. It was a pivotal time, right before China became a member of the World Trade Organization. As the country opened up its doors to the outside world, you could actually see the economic change before your eyes.

My cousin's wife is from Guangzhou in southern China. It's a city of 11 million people, and one of the first "open" cities. While we were there, I saw dilapidated 20-story walk-ups patched up with found materials (sheets of tin, cardboard) standing directly next to state-of-the-art skyscrapers made from the most expensive-looking granite and glass. The economy was changing overnight. I've never seen such a massive shift happen right before my eyes.

On a less profound scale, that's what I noticed the last couple years with the music industry. But you had to look harder to see it. The dilapidated buildings were record-store chains (Tower, for example), major labels and radio stations, and they were closed down in favor of the ever-growing online world. Being an artist, it's hard to know which way to go these days. Do we try to align ourselves with labels? Do we go it alone and hire services (online distributors, publicists) to help us put out and promote our music? There are many opportunities, but which way leads us away from the dead ends and out of the maze?

It's not just us lesser-known artists. Even much-revered music veteran Q-Tip has been having a tough time making his way in a crumbling industry. But as you'll read in this month's cover story, he persevered. If you don't dust yourself off and try again, someone else will, right?

With our third annual "Go Forward, Move Ahead" feature, we want to help you navigate out of the mess and into the future. Obviously, we don't have all the answers, but *Remix* editors and writers put their hands on the tracks to see when the next trains were coming, and there was quite the rumbling. Check out the industry predictions from industry analyst and attorney, Bob Lefsetz, whose blogs have been making us gasp and cringe for months. Also, see which new artists and producers are making waves, what trends are on the rise, how the music industry is going green, what space-age gear is coming down the pipeline and who is renovating the way we market and promote our art.

But you can't just live for the future, right? You should also count the blessings of the present, too. So while we look ahead to 2008, it's also time to appreciate the greatest studio and stage advancements of the last year with our annual *Remix* Technology Awards. There's still plenty to be thankful for.... Then it's time to take a deep breath, recharge the batteries and forge ahead.

Kylee Swenson
Remix Editor

Editor

— Kylee Swenson, kswenson@remixmag.com

Technology Editor

— Markkus Rovito, mrovito@remixmag.com

Assistant Editor

— Lori Kennedy, lkennedy@remixmag.com

Group Managing Editor

— Sarah Benzuly, sarah.benzuly@penton.com

Group Editorial Assistant

— Tracy Katz, tkatz@emusician.com

Editorial Director

— Tom Kenny, tom.kenny@penton.com

Art Director

— Alex Butkus, abutkus@remixmag.com

Senior Art Director

— Dmitry Panich, dmitry.panich@penton.com

Art Director, Special Projects

— Tony Barmann, tony.barmann@penton.com

Vice President, Entertainment Technology Group

— Jonathan Chalon, jonathan.chalon@penton.com

Group Publisher

— Joanne Zola, jzola@remixmag.com

Associate Publisher

— Joe Perry, joe.perry@penton.com

Director of Audience and Business Development

— Dave Reik, dave.reik@penton.com

Online Audience Development Manager

— Tami Needham, tami.needham@penton.com

Southwestern Sales Manager

— Albert Margolis, albert.margolis@penton.com
(949) 582-2753

East Coast & European Sales Manager

— Jeff Donnenwerth, jeff.donnenwerth@penton.com
(770) 643-1425

Sales and Marketing Coordinator

— Clarina Raydmanov, clarina.raydmanov@penton.com

Marketing and Events Coordinator

— Jennifer Smith, jennifer.smith@penton.com

Classifieds/Marketplace Advertising Director

— Robin Boyce-Trubitt, robin.boyce@penton.com

Classifieds/Specialty Sales Associate

— Raul Sanchez, raul.sanchez@penton.com

Vice President — Production

— Lisa Parks, lisa.parks@penton.com

Senior Production Director

— Curtis Pordes, curtis.pordes@penton.com

Group Production Manager

— Melissa Langstaff, melissa.langstaff@penton.com

Advertising Production Coordinator

— Elizabeth Stoltz, elizabeth.gerke@penton.com

Classifieds Production Coordinator

— Jamie Coe, jamie.coe@penton.com

Office Manager

— Lara Duchnick, lara.duchnick@penton.com

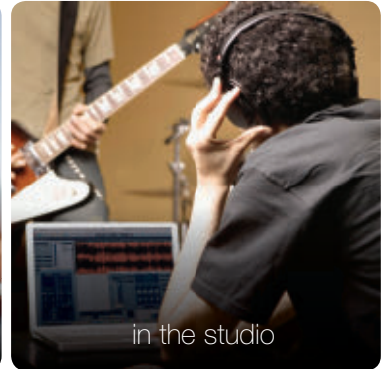
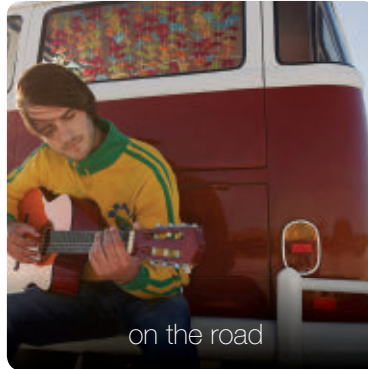
Administrative Assistant

— Natalie Stephens, natalie.stephens@penton.com

Founding Editor

— Steve Oppenheimer, steve.oppenheimer@penton.com

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Penton Media

Chief Executive Officer

— John French, john.french@penton.com

Chief Financial Officer

— Eric Lundberg, eric.lundberg@penton.com

Vice President, General Counsel

— Robert Feinberg, robert.feinberg@penton.com

Vice President — Audience Marketing

— Jerry Okabe, jerry.okabe@penton.com

ETS-LDI

Group Show Director

— Sharon Morabito, sharon.morabito@penton.com

Editorial, Advertising and Business Office

6400 Hollis St., Ste. 12, Emeryville, CA 94608, USA;
tel. (510) 653-3307

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

FAITH PLUS ONE

I have been producing hip-hop and making beats for a few years now (not professionally, though). It has been an obsessive hobby and quite frankly my passion in life. I'm sure *Remix* staff and readers know exactly what I mean.

It was a few months ago that I really started to get discouraged thinking about whether or not my hard work would ever bear any fruit (the financial kind, that is). I belong, as do thousands of other producers, to many online communities, forums and the like. I decided to call it quits with this one site I belong to, which allows me to sell my beats. I was a member for about two years and did not sell a single track. Putting all this time and energy into something that isn't paying off didn't seem logical anymore. About two weeks later, I got an e-mail from someone in an Australian hip-hop group that heard one of my beats on that site. They wanted to purchase the exclusive rights to it for a song that was going to be on their EP coming out next year. I was elated!

Having never sold a single piece of music before, I had to learn the business—and fast. I did a few Google searches to find out about royalties and contracts. Within two weeks, the contract was signed, and I received my very first advance payment. Needless to say, I rejoined the site that week. That one experience gave me a flicker of hope for my future—one that doesn't necessarily have to include a 9 to 5 job that I hate. I was finally validated as a producer. Someone on the other side of this world felt that my work mattered at a time that I didn't. I also realized another thing: Whether I get paid or not, I love making music. And that is something I couldn't quit if I tried.

Giancarlo (John Carlo) Ghedini
Dix Hills, N.Y.

For sending in this month's winning letter, **Giancarlo Ghedini** wins his own **Mackie Onyx Satellite FireWire** recording system (MSRP: \$499.99). If you send in the most inspired correspondence next month—or simply the letter we like best—you'll win the Mackie Onyx Satellite FireWire. All you have to do is send a letter to remixeditorial@remixmag.com. Please include your full mailing address.



LOVE IS...SHARING

We recently became *Remix* subscribers a couple of months back for the first time. We hadn't found anything like *Remix* before, which we came across on the Internet and immediately subscribed to.

We look forward to each edition of your magazine like little kids waiting for Santa. We just love all your articles and all the inspiring help you've given. We've got nothin' like it here in Oz. Thanks so much for keeping our dream alive. We were so stoked with your article on Sharon Jones & the Dap-Kings (November 2007), and we went straight out to get some of her music. She's a winner! Thanks to *Remix*, her music has enriched our lives and helped us believe in ourselves. We met each other over music and share the same passion for it, so each time your

Sharon Jones & the Dap-Kings



that a physical magazine could compete with the Internet, but that skepticism is no more. *Remix* offers guaranteed fresh articles on techniques, gear, artists and releases that are relevant to my life today. And although I am a guy that saves nothing (if I don't throw away one thing each year that I later deeply regret, I'm not throwing enough away), I have broken that rule for some great *Remix* articles, like the September 2004 article on perfecting vocals on a DAW ("Audio Idol"), or last year's "Boom Boom Room" (July 2006) article on building a studio in your home (the latter of which I foolishly failed to save but was able to find again with the recent help of Editor Kylee Swenson and remixmag.com).

So thanks for finding me when you did, *Remix*, and keep up the great articles.

Nat Jordan
Goshen, Ind.

ARE WE THERE YET?

I'm a huge fan of *Remix*! You guys totally flipped my school (SAE L.A.) into something else for *Remix* Hotel. That was awesome!

I read the "Editor's Note" (November 2007, "What Happens Next?") and completely understand how you feel. Every time I think my album is complete, I make a new track that I wanna put on it. Then I feel the track that's been on the playlist for a year is outdated. However, I'm coming to realize that the goal of an album is just to document a time in your life and move on! In a few years, the album will probably make sense to you.

Nathan M, aka ETHX
Producer, Metaphisik Records
Bay Area/Hollywood, Calif.

NEVER GONNA GIVE YOU UP

I've been a loyal reader for a while, and the last time I talked to you guys, I was a senior in the Recording Industry program at Middle Tennessee State University (class of 2005). Since graduating, I've had the opportunity to work in the industry from Virginia Beach, Va. to Hollywood, Calif. I have met many different artists, some of whom are living legends and inspire many of us to be either at the same level of creativity or even better. I just returned from an audition in Orlando, Fla. and have yet to hear the results. But one thing I have learned from my experience is to *never give up*. I am excited to be part of the community, as it will help me and others through times filled with many emotions, and it gives me peace of mind to express my experience. Music is my inspiration, and I enjoy sharing it with others, whether it's on turntables as a DJ or writing a song. Thank you guys so much for putting out this magazine!

Warren Young (aka Warren Peace)
Virginia Beach, Va.

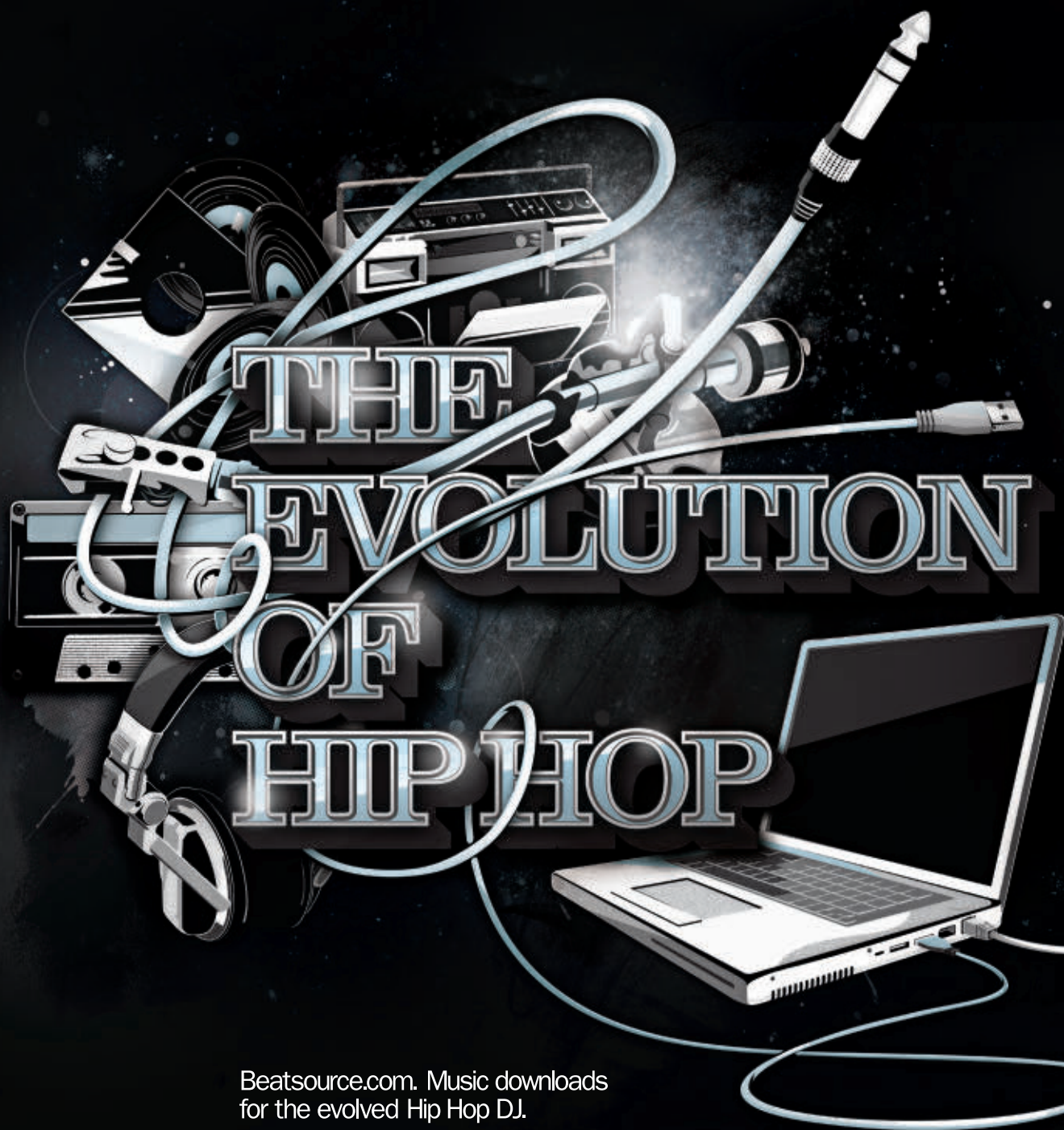
new issue arrives, we both pull up a chair to share the first read of *Remix*.

Damo and Mahera
Tyaak ("Oz"), Victoria
Australia

REMIX IS MAGIC

One day a few years ago, *Remix* showed up magically at my house without explanation, and I have yet to discover why fate chose to smile on me that day the way that it did. But I have learned in my 30 years on earth that when fate smiles upon you with undeserved riches, you accept.

And accept I have. Raised on recording by the information superhighway, I was at first skeptical



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TECHNIQUES



ALL HANDS ON DECKS

Pencils, check. Notepad, check. Needles, check. CDs, check. I was off to my first DJ class at Dubspot in New York, psyched for my quick chisel into becoming a cool and coveted superstar.

Within the first five minutes of class, I was made to bob my head to Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean," administer odd scratch noises on the decks and count sheep, I mean, beats out loud with fellow students. I obliged with much skepticism, unconvinced that these banal gestures would lead to my aspired DJ stardom. But my dubiety swiftly shifted when I attempted to jump ahead and put two tracks together. Beat matching is not as easy as it seems, and mixing two together on first try, well, that's a laugh. Masterfully doing so takes skill, practice and plenty of insider's tips: It's an education.

As sound unfolds in innovative directions and spacey synths and bleeps are as readily heard as a symphony orchestra, what constitutes musical academia is indeed shifting. Classical music institutions are now joined by the global emergence of DJ and production academies, including programs such as The DJ Mixing School in Melbourne, Sonica in Buenos Aires and the coveted Red Bull Music Academy.

Opened in January 2007, New York's Dubspot offers an impressive program. The students select from three core curriculums—DJing, Electronic Music Production and Visual and Video Production—each involving a rigorous hands-on program, complete with tutorials and lab time taught by influencers such as DJ Neil Armstrong, Nickodemus and Hani.

Notable is Dubspot's high female participation. "There are surprisingly a lot of women, almost half of our students," says the school's founder, Dan Giove. "Most are 22–35 year olds who really love music and want to learn how to create their own distinct sound."

The six-month Electronic Music Production course covers Pro Tools, Reason and Live basics; song structure and arrangements; signal processing; production skills with loops, beats and chords; MIDI; and getting to grips with the Minimoog Voyager. By the end of the course, students have produced their own demo and understand music-business topics such as publishing rights and self-marketing.

On the DJ side, Dubspot offers Tracks 1–4. Track 1 involves four sessions of hands-on-decks initiation like "dropping on the one," basic scratching and music theory; Track 2 emphasizes the workflow of the DJ and reveals Serato Scratch Live techniques such as Relative mode, cue points and crate creation; and 3 and 4 hone in on skills learned.

Meanwhile, the VJing classes cover the ins and outs of the industry's standard tools for visual mixing and teach students how to use video sources to mix on the beat with audio complements.

Dubspot's eight-station lab is armed with Technics SL-1210MK5 turntables, Pioneer CDJ-1000s, Rane TTM 56 DJ mixers and Apple iMac 2.33 GHz Core 2 Duos with Serato Scratch Live 6.0 and Ableton Live 6.0. Dubspot also scores prereleased gear such as recent acquisitions from Roland: the SP-555 Creative Sampler and V-Synth GT Advanced Elastic Synthesizer. Downstairs from the lab is the Dub Café, where you can grab a bite and talk about what you learned.

It's a full-on creative hub and hangout. "We are about building a community around electronic music," Giove says, "a place for professionals as well as hobbyists to find kindred spirits."—*Samina Virani*

DJ Neil Armstrong and a Dubspot student



Former Dubspot instructor John Brown





Kevin Drew

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Label: Arts & Crafts

Style: Indie-rock, indie-electronic, indie-pop

Established: Arts & Crafts was established in 2002 in Toronto, Ontario Canada by Jeffrey Remedios and Kevin Drew.

Artists: The American Analog Set, Apostle of Hustle, Broken Social Scene, Jason Collett, Constantines, The Dears, Kevin Drew, Feist, The Hidden Cameras, Los Campesinos!, Amy Millan, The Most Serene Republic, New Buffalo, Phoenix, Stars, The Stills, Valley of the Giants, Young Galaxy

Essential Listening: Broken Social Scene, *You Forgot It in People* (2003); Stars, *Set Yourself on Fire* (2004); Feist, *The Reminder* (2007)

A&R Philosophy: "It's quite rare that bands get signed by sending in a demo unsolicited," says Stephen McGrath, Artist & Media Relations. "That said, if you'd still like to send us some of your music, you may do so. While we listen to everything we're sent, we do not return any packages, nor do we offer feedback."

Upcoming: "We have upcoming releases from Jason Collett, The Stills and Constantines," McGrath says, "as well as many artist tour dates—including Stars, Young Galaxy and Feist, all touring through 2008—which can be seen at our Website, www.arts-crafts.ca/tourdates."

Contact: Arts & Crafts, 460 Richmond St. W, #402, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V 1Y1; raiseyourhand@arts-crafts.ca; www.arts-crafts.ca

DANCING WITH THE STARS

Remix Hotels are developing this chronic habit of hosting No. 1-selling artists and producers. Only they're not there to talk about their tricked-out cars, pimpin' pads or hot girlfriends. They're there to talk about how they make their music and how you can make yours better. Case in point: T-Pain graced Remix Hotel Los Angeles, which ran Nov. 8–10 at the SAE Institute of Technology on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood.

Mr. Pain conducted a Logic Master Class in the Apple VIP Room on Nov. 10. Apple also brought dance music mainstays DJ Rap and Josh Gabriel for Logic Master Classes.

At the always-packed Shocklee Innertainment panels, 9th Wonder, FreQ Nasty, Carmen Rizzo, Karriem Riggins and others spoke out on the importance of becoming a full-fledged producer rather than just a beatmaker. Meanwhile, other panels—featuring DJ Warrior, Aloe Blacc, MED and more—broke down the differences between mixtape and radio DJs, explained mix engineering, discussed music promotion and gave aspiring producers feedback on their demos.

Elsewhere, three of the World Famous Beat Junkies (DJ Babu, DJ Rhettmatic and J.Rocc) rocked the Rane room on Serato Scratch Live; DJ Revolution, Daddy Kev and others tore it up on M-Audio Torq DJing software; and Arabian Prince demoed the Korg Zero8 mixer. Potential stars of the future were also on hand as the iStandard Producer Battle crowned Alabama hustlers, Da Grindaz, champions of the first iStandard throwdown in L.A. and gave them a new Roland SH-201 synth.

Attendees soaked up plenty of other treats as well, such as wildly creative Ableton Live demonstrations; the new multitouch DAW control surface, JazzMutant Dexter; funky DJ sets in the GCI Technologies room; hands-on gear demos in the Yamaha, Roland and Celemony rooms; and glimpses of supertall comedian Sinbad taking it all in.—Markus Rovito



For audio and video highlights from Remix Hotel Los Angeles 2007, go to remixmag.com.



THE DOCTOR IS IN

Some peeps like to dis on Apple's GarageBand for not being "real" music-production software. We pity the fools! Just look at Justice's monster album, *†*, created in part using GB. And now that you've got your grubby hands on GarageBand '08, you may be wondering to yourself, "Self, how do I use these new, awesome features?" Digital Music Doctor's GB tutorial to the rescue.

Its easy-to-follow visuals and narration—available as a DVD or digital download (\$24.95; www.digitalmusicdoctor.com)—makes learning a breeze, and hey, the narrator sounds kinda hot.—Lori Kennedy



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Nothing will make you a social outcast faster than blasting a Sousa march or Bette Midler melody from your cell in public. So make yourself a good (or better) ringtone from ToneMine.com, a site that lets you mix, share and download ringtones using its provided library of genre sets, sounds and effects. It's free and pretty easy—just select a genre set, drag-and-drop audio into as many as seven tracks in the online mixer, arrange the sounds however you want, save it, and then download and share your masterpiece with your friends. You won't be embarrassed to answer the phone anymore.—Tracy Katz



9th Wonder





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what moves you

BASS IN YO' FACE

Decades on, L'Trimm's Lady Tigra makes a comeback with a boomin' *Boombox*

Since the '80s, Miami and factory car-audio systems went together about as well as Milli Vanilli doing an

episode of MTV's *Unplugged*. The 305 has always unearthed crops of local heroes who champion the area's bass-heavy aesthetic—tracks drowning in heart-pounding thumps that set off car alarms up and down the block. Out of that late-'80s subculture came the female duo L'Trimm, who were the predecessors to some of today's get-down girls like M.I.A. and French phenom Uffie. Now a generation later, one half of that duo, known to you mere mortals as the Lady Tigra, is back with her ode to club-inspired party-pop rap, *Please Mr. Boombox* (High Score, 2008).

"It kind of crept up on me; we never intended to have the songs be released," Tigra says of the

material that would later make up the contents of *Please Mr. Boombox*. "We were just making songs for kicks." What began as her and production partner and friend Jacob "Berko" Bercovici making music just for the love of the sounds is now the first project set for release on the newly formed High Score Records. The fun-filled party starter of an LP features collaborations with Linkin Park's Mr. Hahn, who remixes the song "Bass on the Bottom," and legendary lady rhymers MC Lyte on "They Stole My Radio." The disc also shows off a cohesive sound that is as original as it is hyped.

"We have a relationship that we understand," Tigra says of her and Bercovici's tag-team approach. "We get each other. I can say something like, 'Throw a little more James Brown in that,' and he'll know exactly what I mean." Having put it down together for years, the process of cooking up Tigra's first release in, well, a pretty long time had to involve just the right ingredients before it could be served up to hungry party people and booty shakers.

"We started off going through records for samples, but more and more I found myself playing a lot of keys, bass and guitars and using a bunch of old drum machines I had laying around," Berko says. "We ran everything through Neve 1073s and used a bunch of different microphones for her voice, like an RCA 44-BX and Neumann U 67 and U 87—all in Pro Tools, of course.

"The records we had access to were truly unique," Berko continues. "Tigra was interested in getting beyond what was expected of her stylistically and wanted to bring more of her personal tastes into her songs, which meant borrowing from a bunch of genres. My partner has one the biggest and rarest collections of Tahitian and Hawaiian vinyl in the world, and I found it to be a great opportunity to do something different."

It would be an understatement to say that the two have accomplished their mission. Sure to gain the eclectic MC a fresh stable of new fans who were no more than babies on her first go 'round, the record doesn't stray too far away from Tigra's Miami bass roots as to alienate old fans who are back for more. As Tigra tells it, the new stuff is just the next chapter of a never-ending story.

"Nobody could have told me 10 years ago that I'd be making an album again," she admits. "I'm not even sure what to expect from myself. I just don't know. But I can say that I don't see myself stopping anytime soon. I see this project as the evolution of L'Trimm. It's just me 20 years later. I hope that it'll inspire people to keep making music, especially girls. No other genre has married itself to every other genre of music like hip-hop has. With me doing hip-hop, I still use as much of my imagination as possible. I hope this record touches as many people as it can. Maybe it'll even warm up to some country fans. Who knows?"

"Nobody could have told me 10 years ago that I'd be making an album again. I'm not even sure what to expect from myself."
—The Lady Tigra



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DISCO DIPLOMAT

Germany's Boys Noize gives the French dance producers a run for their money

Alex Ridha's rendition of Depeche Mode's "Personal Jesus" is positively stunning. Masked in the Boys Noize moniker, the Berlin-based producer's grandiose, pitch-shifting stab at the electro-pop anthem eventually earned Ridha a bonus slot on *The Best of Depeche Mode, Vol. 1* (Mute, 2006). Ridha's "Personal Jesus" rework was aimed at DJ sets, but the drowsy vocal fluttering effects and the prominent heavy breathing are probably best enjoyed alone in a dark room. Isn't that where all the misunderstood youths first really appreciated "Personal Jesus" anyway?

"At first, I had to get through about 100 different tracks/parts Mute sent," says Ridha of his Depeche Mode remix process. "This takes an afternoon. Then I had to decide what to use and what to throw away, which was quite clear to me because I didn't want that 'Western' guitar of the original in my mix. I wanted to produce something more classic for them, like a 2006 version of 'Personal Jesus.'"

A couple of Ridha's tracks called "Oh!" and "Vergiftet" may have been composed even before his "Personal Jesus" rendition, but their place on his debut full-length *Oi Oi Oi* (Last Gang, 2007) is integral to the album's

sonically jarring structure. *Oi Oi Oi*'s rock-edged house and techno are grounded in hard drum stabs and crunchy, fuzzed-over analog keyboards (Clavia Nord Lead 2, Korg MS-20 and Roland Juno-106, mostly). It's been championed by Parisian duo Justice, whose praise might have something to do with the considerable similarities between *Oi Oi Oi* and their own work. The thick and fragmented synths on "Lava Lava" mirror those broken into pieces during Justice's "Phantom," but the difference is the variety of percussive hits in Ridha's track, all created with an Elektron Machinedrum SPS-1. While parallels will be drawn, a closer listen to *Oi Oi Oi* finds Ridha making his mark with occasional bare string section sounds ("Shine Shine") and a hip-hop influence registering in Rick Rubin-esque guitar chunks ("Wu-Tang [Battery Pt.2]").

"Of course, hip-hop was always a big part in my life," he says matter-of-factly. "Mainstream hip-hop is not my thing; I like the old stuff more than the new, but I think hip-hop's back in a good way. There are some exciting new artists like [recent Chocolate Industries signees] the Cool Kids."

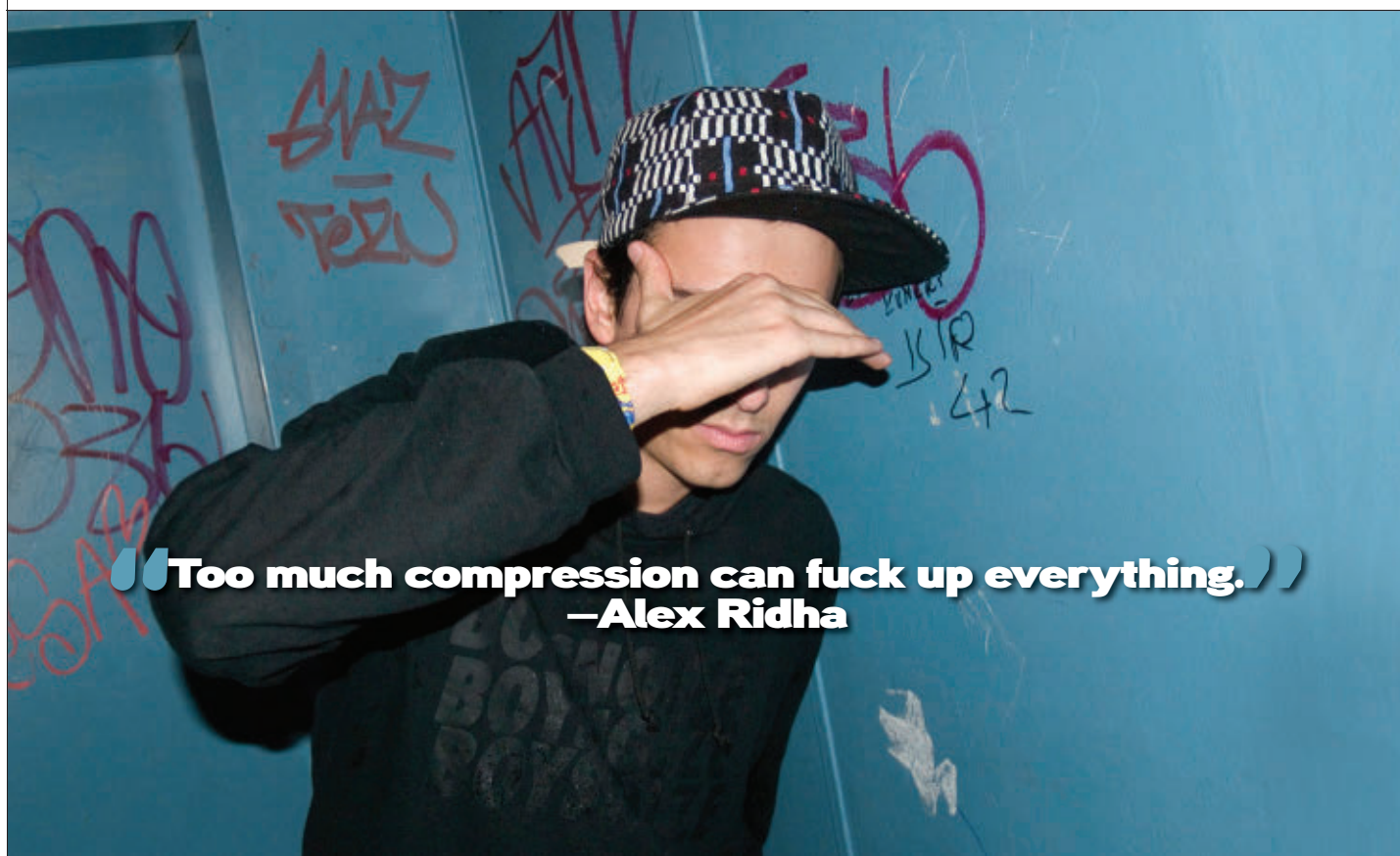
Oi Oi Oi's "Deny Selected" has an indecipherable hip-hop vocal sample that cuts in and out over choppy techno clacks. More glitch than Def Jam, Ridha's sneaky references to backspins and zippered-up windbreakers still make subtle appearances throughout.

"I must tell you that the beat from 'Deny Selected' is

made from the SNES game *Street Fighter*," Ridha confesses. "I sampled kicks and punches from the game and programmed the beat." Also arranged with his Roland TR-808, TR-909 and Elektron Machinedrum, Ridha was aiming at highly danceable beats when putting together *Oi Oi Oi*. The abrasive assortment rides an uneven electronic rhythm section, but it's supposed to get people to crowd the floor. "I thought it was good to put the tracks together as one piece on a CD, but to me it's not an album because there's not really a 'story' or anything; it's more a collection of Boys Noize singles that all bang in the club."

Crowd pleasers aside, some of Ridha's works beckon to be absorbed at home. The Depeche Mode remix is a headphone essential for the beat pulses, the two-note sirens that Ridha built with his Korg MS-20 and the original's signature breaths and grim synth riffs, now way up in the mix. Texturally intricate moments like those made it onto *Oi Oi Oi* as well and might go unnoticed in less-than-intimate listening sessions.

"When I listen some of the new French producers, I think they sometimes use way too much compression that hides bad production," Ridha says. "Compression can make the track very exciting. The elements can work together in a cool way, but too much compression can fuck up everything, losing the attack and the track's dynamic. In the end, it just sounds like a pot of mud, where everything isn't defined." 



Too much compression can fuck up everything.
—Alex Ridha

WILLIAM MINKE

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KORG

REBEL YELL

From Cypress Hill to film scores, DJ Muggs is still going his own way in the studio

"Hip-hop is dead" DJ Muggs says while eating almonds in his L.A. studio and preparing for his first motion-picture score. He's one of many producers to have staunchly expressed their retrospective love of the "good ol' days." With the game of Simon Says copycat tracks resounding throughout the airwaves, it's uncertain what the future holds for hip-hop, whose inception once countered popular culture with creativity and individuality.

From the late '80s until now, DJ Muggs has humbly played Solitaire as he watched his peers follow the leader. As grounded as his gritty drum patterns and crackling samples, he managed to swim while those around him sank. With its beginnings as a house-party rap group in '88, Cypress Hill became

the staple of eccentricity in the hip-hop community. While everyone was vibing to the smooth sounds of A Tribe Called Quest and the chopped samples of Gang Starr, Cypress Hill awakened a new flavor in hip-hop. DJ Muggs' hollow drums and uniquely piercing soul samples, combined with the infectious nuances of B Real and Sen Dog, earned the group a multiplatinum single, "Insane in the Brain," and a No. 1 album, *Black Sunday* (Sony, 1993).

"I come from a time when hip-hop producers were musically trained," Muggs says. "My music is awkward. I do what I feel. I was never interested in making the sound of the moment. Music needs people willing to be rebellious. Motherfuckers are using the same beats, same clothes. This culture, this music, was built off something opposite. Cypress Hill was that."

Muggs' ability to mesh chords, drums, genres and coasts made everyone stop, look and listen. Aside from his work with Cypress Hill, Muggs has provided

the backdrop for some of the industry's most revered producers/artists and has earned the moniker, "your favorite producer's favorite producer."

While some are making millions from looping samples accompanied by overused keyboard riffs, there is a chosen generation who still marvels in the art of production. Muggs—whose studio gear includes Steinberg Nuendo, an Akai MPC3000, Avalon Vt-737sp and Neve 1073 channel strips, Apogee converters, Waves Diamond bundle software, a Mackie d.2 mixer, Serato Scratch Live and Blue Sky Big Blue monitors—has successfully evolved from a DJ to a producer.

"I did a song with Dr. Dre called 'Puppet Master,'" he says. "The original is a song by Issac Hayes. I didn't want to pay for sample clearances, so I replayed it in my studio. I wanted the drums to be crispy, so I got some cleaner drums off one of these drum modules and I put some dirtier drums in. I had a keyboard player come in and replay the piano chords and the bass, and

I was never interested in making the sound of the moment. Music needs people willing to be rebellious.
—DJ Muggs



Mess with Cynic (far left), Sick Jacken and DJ Muggs, and you might just end up here permanently.

I had a guitarist come in. After vocals were laid down, I mixed in a few scratches, and we had a record."

Even for the most talented producer, production can be a tedious task. From chopping to EQing, the process can seem relentless. "Practice makes perfect" is the motto Muggs lives by. "I have times when I am superduper meticulous with samples," he says. "Then I have other times where I'm straightforward. I do different things to inspire me because if not, I get bored. [For example,] I don't try to finish beats. I get them started until they sound good, then move on to the next thing. Once the rhyme is laid, I go in and finish it."

Muggs is no doubt one of the hardest working producers in the game. "I have a lot going on. I put out a record with Sick Jacken—[DJ Muggs and Sick Jacken (featuring Cynic), *The Legend of the Mask and the Assassin* (Universal)]—which was cool because we weren't concerned about the industry. We have a loyal fan base around the world, so we made the kind of art we felt like making. We are trying to mimic Rolling Stones and Pink Floyd and not the new boy band of the week. I'm also working on the new Cypress Hill album; I am doing about a few songs, but I won't be touring with them. [On top of that,] I'm working on a new movie, called *Knight Watchman*, starring Keanu Reeves and Forest Whitaker. In other words, I'm still here."

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SHOP.TALK.

By Jason Newman

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DJ REKHA

At Music Trends in Levittown, N.Y.

Long Island, N.Y. may be home to legendary hip-hop groups like Public Enemy and EPMD, but while hip-hop was definitely on DJ Rekha's radar growing up in the L.I. suburb of Westbury, it was the numerous, disparate cultures in the area that had the greatest affect on her musical upbringing. "My town wasn't typical suburbia," Rekha (née Rekha Malhotra) says. "There were Haitians, Caribbeans, blacks, whites. There weren't a lot of South Asians, though. I think we were it. But those influences and being in that environment completely informed me musically." Her itinerant upbringing—the DJ moved from London to Queens at age 5 and over to Long Island at 10—is evident in her music, a mix of hip-hop, dancehall and reggae all under the umbrella of bhangra, the South Asian-influenced style of dance that she's helped bring stateside.

After more than a decade building up the bhangra scene in the U.S., most notably at her monthly Basement Bhangra parties in New York, this year sees the release of Rekha's debut album of the same name (Koch). With the album—a combination of originally produced and licensed tracks—Rekha hopes to re-create the sweat-

filled, dancefloor-friendly night on your home and car stereo. (In fact, many of the artists featured on the album have performed at the party at some point.) "The CD and my DJ sets are the same thing to me," she says. "I wanted it to be this thing where if people can't come to the party, they can still experience the night."

A major advantage to running a monthly party is the ability to road test material live before committing it to wax. While certain songs like Malkit Singh's 11-minute end-of-the-night chill-out record "Gur Nalon Ishq Mitha" were no-brainers ("I almost always play it," says Rekha), other tracks were tested continually to see what received the best reaction. And to please the veterans as well as the newbies, Rekha added four new tracks exclusive to the album.

To many Western heads, bhangra took some time to expand past the provincial clubs in the UK and U.S. In the early '00s, when Panjabi's "Beware of the Boys" remix with Jay-Z was on every radio station in America and artists such as Missy Elliott and Timbaland were incorporating elements of the genre into their music, it seemed like bhangra was going to stay on the radar for good. But while its popularity ebbed and flowed, Rekha is hoping this disc will bring the music a little more shine: "I get all these e-mails saying, 'This is great music. Where can I buy this?'

It's just me saying, 'Here it is. You don't have to hunt around and buy bad world music compilations.'"

For recording and sequencing of *Basement Bhangra*, Apple Logic was the tool of choice. "We recorded the album into Logic as a DJ mix because that's what [producer] Sunil [Sehgal] is most comfortable in. [But] I actually started learning on MOTU Digital Performer."

Although Rekha started DJing with Serato Scratch Live about a year ago ("It saves my back," she says), she's still down for the challenge of the vinyl hunt. "This is like a dictionary that's not alphabetized," says a smiling DJ Rekha upon entering the basement of Long Island's Music Trends. Looking around the room, it's quickly apparent that what's lacking in organization is remedied by sheer quantity. The randomness of the records makes this either a crate digger's wet dream or worst nightmare. "When I look in a store, if I see anything that says 'ethnic,' 'Indian,' 'global,' 'Arabic,' any kind of nonsense like that, I'll pounce on it. The thing that you're looking for when shopping in a place like this is triggers like labels, producers etc.," Rekha says. But, with precious time left before the doors are locked for the night, the DJ scrambles for those bangers. Don't worry. She's been DJing for a while. She's used to digging out classics quickly.



SHARON BROWN

"I Specialize in Love" (Profile)

I was drawn to the cover because it was Profile records. They had a dance imprint. Friday nights, I used to listen to the mix shows, and I remember this being a huge hit. This is the reissue from '94, so now there's a bunch of mixes on it. The trick is to see if the mixes are any good. I totally remember rocking out to this. This reminds me of all those old K-Tel records I have.

BOUNTY KILLER

"Cellular Phone" (V.I.P.)

I remember this one being a hit, but now that I listen to it again, it's still hot but not as good as when I first heard it. That's the whole thing about buying records, right? There's some connection because it's Bounty Killer, one of the top 10 reggae MCs of all time, so you think, "I'll take a chance." They're into quantity, so you don't know what you're getting. But this song was definitely a hit. If I were spinning an old-school dancehall set, I'd spin this.

DEBORAH

"Champion Lover" (Pow Wow)

I remember having this on a CD first. There's a version of this with a Shabba Ranks breakdown, but this version can go right into "Telephone Love." It's got a nice

dancehall-lovers' rock. This one was definitely part of my early reggae sets when I started DJing. It's just a great dance song. Timeless.

JC LODGE

"Telephone Love" (Pow Wow)

I actually heard this rhythm on a bhangra classic that I still play. Somewhere along the way, I heard this and was like, "Oh, what?!" Reggae rhythms are sort of "of the people." The thing about dancehall records is that they come out on 7-inch. To make [the tracks] DJ-friendly, people would re-press them as 12-inches so DJs would be more likely to play them. I find dancehall to be safe in a good way. Nobody doesn't like dancehall. It chills people out, and it's a really good groove. Sometimes you get booked for things, and people aren't there for the music. You'll play hip-hop to a certain crowd, and they'll get real angry. But reggae and dancehall seems to be good middle ground.

M|A|R|I|S

"Pump Up the Volume" (4th & Broadway)

This is one of the first 50 records I ever bought. I probably bought this at Mainline Records in Flushing [New York], which specialized more in house/dance music. I used to buy a lot more house records and play a lot more of it in my set. But over time, I phased it out. This was a song

that was a 12-inch, but it was at 45 [rpm], so you have to remember. This one stands the test of time; it's just one of those "build" songs. If we look at this today, it's kind of like someone just noodling with different samples. This is totally a "bathroom" song where you can just put this on in your set and take a quick break.

SWV

"Anything" (BMG)

I don't know what happened to them; they had some joints! They had this one song on the *Above the Rim* soundtrack, but it was never released as its own 12-inch. I remember going into the store and them telling me, "It's not out." I was like, "What do you mean, it's not out?! Are you kidding me?"

RONI SIZE

"Brown Paper Bag" (Talkin' Loud)

I remember [*New Forms*] came out in 1997 and is still the best drum 'n' bass album ever. This is the second track off it and really captures the Roni Size sound. I love how it's dub-driven and funky but not mechanical-sounding. 

Music Trends; 2947 Hempstead Turnpike, Levittown, NY, 11756; (516) 796-7755; info@music Trends.com; www.music Trends.com

Return of the Tribal Son

It's been a long road fraught with record label indecision and shelved solo joints, but Q-Tip insists that his new album, *The Renaissance*, is for real—in more ways than one

By Bill Murphy | Photos by Timothy Saccenti

"I want the music to be better,"

says a soft-spoken Q-Tip, his gaze fixed and serious as he discusses the inspiration behind his latest, and long-awaited, solo project—his first official release since *Amplified* (Arista, 1999). "I feel like the music that's going on today, especially in hip-hop, is almost circumstantial. It's all about business, rather than about some sort of emotional or spiritual quest. There's some that's good, but that falls in the category of an exception. We have to take care of the music. We can't just let it be circumstantial. It's a great and mighty thing, and it really is healthy because of all the great musicians who came before us—so we gotta remember that and hold to it."

As a prime mover behind one of hip-hop's most influential groups, Q-Tip certainly knows the territory. The funky, fun-loving and consciousness-raising seam that was opened up by A Tribe Called Quest—beginning with *People's Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm* (Jive, 1990), coalescing with *The Low End Theory* (Jive, 1991) and cresting with *Midnight Marauders* (Jive, 1993) and *Beats, Rhymes and Life* (Jive, 1996)—still exerts a profound influence today, despite the blind realities of a business that Tip himself has experienced firsthand. In his mind, it's time for a rebirth, with a bit of righteous indignation thrown in for good measure.

The Renaissance (Motown/Universal, 2008) is Q-Tip's aptly named follow-up to two solo albums that went famously unreleased (and widely bootlegged)—2001's *Kamaal the Abstract* and 2005's *Open*. Although at this writing, the album was still in the sequencing and mixing phase (with the possibility of even the title changing before its planned February release), and may or may not contain completely retooled versions of several songs that were meant for *Open*, all advance tastes point to this one being the breakthrough



Return of the Tribal Son

that Tip has promised since *Kamaal the Abstract* was so unceremoniously pulled back by the Arista label. The third time might indeed be the charm after all.

"I have my vision, and this record will communicate that," Q-Tip says. "Some of the music is from *Open*, but I've changed some things around because it got bootlegged, and a lot of people heard it. Some of those ideas were so good, I just didn't want to lose them all. So I'm trying to get it to a place where I'm good with it, to put closure to it, but I wanted to get some stuff from *Open* in there, too."

OPENING SALVO

If the first single, "Work It Out," released in mid-2007 on Tip's MySpace page, offered any initial indication, it was clear that *The Renaissance* was going to be propelled by the same energy and musicianship that had made *Open* such a stunner for those lucky enough to hear it. Guided by the chicken-picked guitar lines of avant-fusionist Kurt Rosenwinkel, the serpentine bass of Derek Hodge and the banging drums of Mark Colenburg (all of whom Tip calls out in the opening verse), the song is a blistering amalgam of samples, live performances, layered drums and reprocessed sounds.

"I've always been an advocate of live musicianship," Tip says. It's a stance he was forced to recalibrate in earnest after a fire in early 1998 destroyed his record collection, his beat libraries and very nearly his house in northern New Jersey, where he now maintains his home recording studio [see sidebar, "Live From the Living Room"]. "After that happened, I knew I had to

start from scratch and learn how to play. The fire may have taken away a lot of my tools, but it didn't take away my knack for creating what I was hearing, so I wanted to get that out the best way possible. That's why I wanted to get more into being a musician. It changed my perspective in a big way."

Tip taught himself on piano, drums and other instruments—abilities which, when added to his already well-honed talents on various drum machines, samplers and recording platforms, more than prepared him for a full-on collaboration with experienced players like Rosenwinkel. (Q-Tip co-produced Rosenwinkel's 2003 Verve release *Heartcore*.)

"I'd usually come up with a sketch on the [Akai] MPC3000," he explains. "Then I'd shoot that to the guys, and they'd take it and play with it, and I'd take what they'd do sometimes and chop it up, so it was always going through processing. It would morph and change to become whatever it was meant to become. In that way, jazz was a little bit of an inspiration, especially with the way Miles [Davis] was so organic in what he did with his band. He'd go for certain colors and certain vibes, like a painting. Making music is like that, with the palettes, the colors, the tones and the hues."

SONIC EVOLUTIONS

The Renaissance is rife with varying tonalities, in fact. Case in point: the throbbing, sci-fi-sounding atmospherics of "Fever" (which shimmers with the familiar ring of a Jay Dee co-production, now retooled into a band-driven mother ship) juxtaposed against the raw,



Josh David (left), Blair Wells and Q-Tip

Live From the Living Room

Recording engineer Blair Wells first hooked up with Q-Tip through ace producer Bob Power, who manned the console for A Tribe Called Quest, The Roots, D'Angelo and many more. "Q-Tip was looking for some help to upgrade his home studio," Wells recalls, "so Bob put us in touch for me to help him make that transition. We got to know each other through *Kamaal the Abstract*, and then I started engineering *Open*. At the time, he had just moved into a new house, so he was starting again from scratch and really wanted to build a bigger facility."

Initially, acoustics designer Fran Manzella was brought in to build a full-on basement studio with several different recording spaces and a large control room. A slab was poured and the basic infrastructure installed, but Q-Tip wanted to continue working, so

his living room became the main recording space while construction continued. "We spent a lot of time experimenting with where the best place was to put the drums," Wells says. "There's not much room to move around in the studio due to all the records Q-Tip has, and the layout in his house is pretty wacky, with certain areas having huge high ceilings. Once we had the drums put in the right place, it definitely didn't sound like a recording studio, but it had a really nice character to it."

Q-Tip liked the intimacy of the setup, especially when the full band was set up and the room completely miked. "We have some bleeding because you can't get that much separation," Tip says, "Everything was cool because we had DIs and regular room mics, so I could level it off. If I knew I needed some separation on the bass or the guitar or the keyboards, I'd use the DI signal. We used the mics to get the atmosphere of the room because of those big ceilings."



Q-Tip Kit

Computer, DAW, hardware

Apple Mac G5 dual 2.5 GHz computer
Digidesign Pro Tools|HD3 Accel, 192 I/Os
Prism Sound Dream AD-124 converters

Turntables, DJ software, DJ mixer

Pioneer CDJ-1000 CD turntables
Serato Scratch Live software
Technics SL-1200s turntables
Vestax PMC-06 ProA VCA DJ mixer

Synths, instruments

ARP Odyssey, Solina String Ensemble
Clavia ddrum4 SE system
Fender Rhodes Bass, Rhodes suitcase Mark I
Gibson ES-325 and Les Paul guitars (with
Line 6 Vetta guitar combo amp and Echo
Pro modeling effects processor)

Ludwig Vistalite drum kit

Moog Minimoog

Roland Fantom X-series workstation, Juno-106

Wurlitzer electric piano

Mics, preamps, EQ, compressors, effects

AKG C 451, D 12 and D 112 drum mics
Chandler Limited LTD-1 expanded 10-series
EQ/preamp, LTD-2 compressor, TG1
compressor, TG2 preamp
Coles 4038 ribbon mics
Empirical Labs EL-8 Distressors
Lawson L47 mic
Manley Reference Gold vocal mic
Sennheiser MD421 dynamic mics
Shure SM57 mics
Universal Audio 1176LN compressor/limiter

Studio monitors

Genelec 1031s
PMC AML1 active monitor system

dry and jazz-adelic studio jam "Life's Circus" (known in a previous *Open* incarnation as "Black Boy"). With recording engineer Blair Wells waiting in the wings on a Digidesign Pro Tools|HD3 system, Tip would often take whole sections of live jams and either layer them with sampled elements—kicks, snares and claps in particular—or reprocess them entirely.

"Really the one consistent piece has always been Pro Tools," Wells notes. "We have it set up so the [Chandler LTD-1] mic pres run direct into the Pro Tools rig, through the patch bay. We've got everything patchable so we can sample back out of Pro Tools or sample back in. We try to route everything in a flexible way so that we can really experiment with the tonality and the overall structure of the songs."

Q-Tip goes even further with aural textures than he did on *Open*, trying numerous methods to get to the sound he hears in his head. "The MPC3000 has been his main workhorse," Wells says, "but there was a period where he went back to the [E-mu] SP-1200

for obvious tonal reasons. He's tried the MPC4000 and the 1000, and some of the Roland boxes like the Fantom [X-series workstation] with the drum pads, to rework his samples."

For guitars, bass and keyboards (the latter usually played either by Q-Tip himself or prog-jazz upstart James Hurt), which were split between an amped-and-miked signal and direct to Pro Tools, most of the processing happened in Pro Tools with the aid of various effects plug-ins. "In general, we use our outboard gear to get the best quality signal into the machine," Wells continues, "and then a lot of the manipulation is happening in the digital realm. But we also did a good amount of re-amping. We use the Little Labs PCP Distro, which is basically a glorified re-amp box, but it also has routing capabilities where you can have a signal going through multiple amplifiers and independently adjust the levels."

Sometimes the sound manipulation happened right at the source, as it did for the distorted-sounding

Fender Rhodes that lends "Life's Circus" its principal character. "We took off the top of the Rhodes," Q-Tip says, "and I taped some wax paper over the tines and then miked that to get that pop in the sound. I think it worked much better at making that happen than any effects pedal or plug-in could have."

DRUMS ON TAP

Just as *Open* benefited enormously from the signature thwack-driven power of drummer Mark Colenburg, so too did the beats on *The Renaissance*—many of which were either reprocessed from the original sessions or based on recuts that Colenburg tracked using a Clavia ddrum SE-4 electronic drum kit. The kit has long been a favorite of Q-Tip's for its signature ability to compress drum sounds into a tube-warmed veil that maintains the snap of the original sample while creating a gritty, tape-baked sheen.

"I got hip to that just through searching," Tip explains. "I have the Roland V-Drums, but with the ddrum,

Return of the Tribal Son

the way the brain processes the sound is just dope. I sampled and chopped up a lot of the drums on the album and then routed them through that. There's compression when you load sounds into the brain, so it really keeps the integrity of the drum sounds nice and even. Then we triggered everything up—I use a Ludwig Vistalite acoustic kit with a Black Beauty snare—and we'd run it through the ddrum and put that back in the room, as well. We'd have a monitor in the room and then mic that, too."

Once Colenburg's original drum tracks—which were usually recorded with a pair of Coles 4038 ribbon mics and various combinations for the kick, snare and hi-hat—had been processed and loaded into the electronic

kit, a live pass of ddrums would often be blended in or used to entirely replace the original. "It was a headache to get the sounds into it," Wells recalls. "You had to use an old-style MIDI sample dump. But once they were in there, Mark would replay his original drum sounds to give us a take with no dynamics and just a solid groove all the way through. That allowed us to really integrate the drum kit itself between being a real kit and an electronic one. It was all Tip's idea originally, and Mark obviously had a lot of fun with it."

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

Along with the cutting-edge musicians who make up

his live band (which also includes Chris Sholar on guitar and DJ Scratch on turntables), Q-Tip tentatively plans to reprise appearances from two of the heavies who appeared on *Open*—namely, Outkast's Andre 3000 (who drops a guest vocal on "Sexy") and D'Angelo (who plays keys and sings background on "I Believe"). While there's a possibility that a revamped "Sexy" will end up instead on Andre's next album, "I Believe" is definitely going through a part-two configuration, due to its widespread visibility online when *Open* originally leaked.

"That originally came together with me and D'Angelo just vibing," Tip confers. "He came out to my house to do that, and we just found our way to that groove. I really want to finish another version of that because I feel the song is just too strong to leave off the album."

J Dilla, aka Jay Dee, in particular seems to have left a profound impression on the sonic direction of *The Renaissance*, and although he may or may not have some of his trademark hyper-syncopated beats on the finished version, he still shines through in spirit. "His whole thing was getting the right kit," Tip intones, his voice slightly hushed with admiration, "and having

“We have to take care of the music. We can’t just let it be circumstantial.”
—Q-Tip

the kits in tune to what was happening. That's what I picked up from him. We both used the MPC at the same time, too. He did everything on that, but on *Amplified*, we mixed to tape, and I think I might do that again on the next album. Tape can be a cumbersome thing, but it does have a certain frequency and warmth that just cannot be duplicated. I mean, Pro Tools and tape are both good—to the layman's ear, you can't really pick up the difference too much—but to us, you know, you can hear it."

As it turns out, if there's one track here that captures the essence of The Ummah—the production team founded by Q-Tip, Ali Shaheed Muhammad and J Dilla—it would have to be the stutter-funk lope of "Ofishal," which features Tip on turntable cuts and a crispy live rhythm track that recalls vintage Tribe from the *Beats, Rhymes and Life* days.

"I have a line in there about percussion being a weapon," Tip says and then rhymes, "I feel what the beat does/ People fuck with me 'cause /When this song ends /I become what the beat was." He pauses again to let the thought sink in. "It's just about trying to ascend and let people know where my head is at with the music. I take this very seriously, and this is officially what I do. I'm an artist, and just the wordplay of it all—I'm trying to fit into the beat. I really try to become that instrument with my voice. I really believe in the percussive sense, and in a real musical sense. My voice has a little bit of a musicality to it, so I try to approach it like that." 



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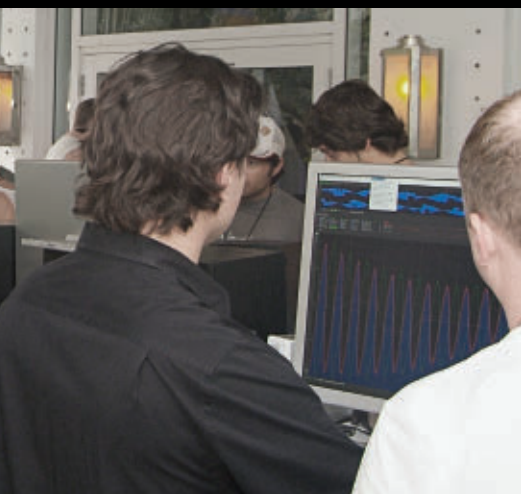




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GO FORWARD, MOVE AHEAD

Channeling the spirits of the future, *Remix* reveals the producers, MCs, DJs, artists, movements, companies, gear, sites, tours and industry changes that will rock the music world in 2008

Every year, *Remix* picks up its high-powered binoculars and looks out on the horizon to discover what's going to go down in the year ahead. This time, we bring you 27 of the most exciting developments in this crazy, Wild West of a music industry we're living in. From futuristic tracks and mouth-watering gear to bold new marketing schemes and industry trends, the focus of 2008 is sharpening, and it's quite the interesting view.

Ranting and raving music analyst Bob Lefsetz (you might know his blog, The Lefsetz Letter) brings a glimpse into the future of the music business. Meanwhile, female MCs storm the stage, artist-run studios take over, the music scene goes green, product merchandising gets crafty, parties roam the Earth, torches are passed on, gear gets extra touchy-feely and the digital age forges ahead. Hold on tight. It's going to be a bumpy, exciting ride.

PRODUCER ON THE RISE: ERIC LEE HUDSON

Even with a bevy of big-name producers at their disposal, proven hit-makers like Kanye West, 50 Cent, Usher, Mary J. Blige and Whitney Houston have turned to this virtually unknown producer for their high-stakes releases (such as West's awesomely futuristic and catchy track, "Flashing Lights"). From the looks of things, he won't be unknown for long.

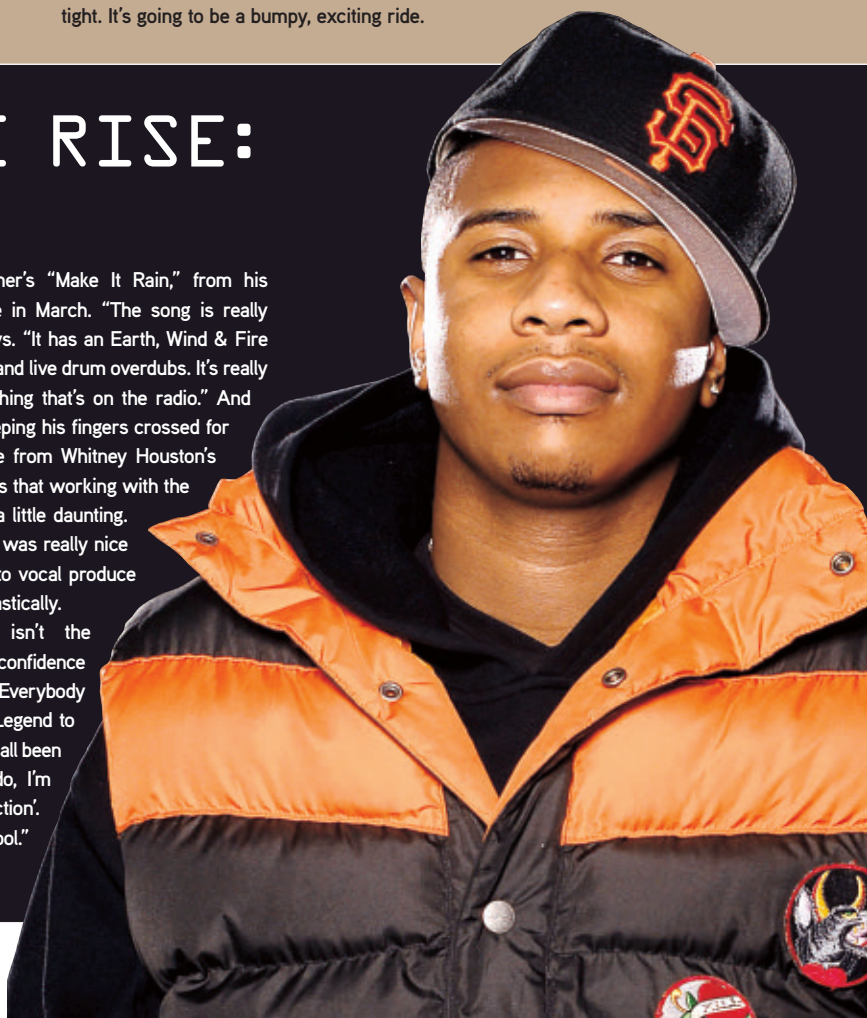
Eric Lee Hudson, the 20-year-old wunderkind from New Jersey, is working so often with so many big names these days, it's even making his head spin. The roster of artists that Hudson has produced is as diverse as music itself and, he says, he tries to embrace their individuality when he works with them. "I don't really have a signature sound," he notes. "I play four or five different instruments, so I can give you a live sound or I can give you that 808. I just try to get in there and vibe with the artist and whatever the artist is looking for. I just try to capture their style."

Of the songs he's produced lately, Hudson says there are some that he's especially excited about.

Among them is Usher's "Make It Rain," from his upcoming album due in March. "The song is really exciting," Hudson says. "It has an Earth, Wind & Fire feel; it has live horns and live drum overdubs. It's really different from everything that's on the radio." And Hudson says he's keeping his fingers crossed for a possible first single from Whitney Houston's new album. He admits that working with the R&B superstar was a little daunting. "It was hard, but she was really nice and she wanted me to vocal produce her," he says enthusiastically.

Houston clearly isn't the only one who has confidence in Hudson's work. "Everybody from Usher to John Legend to Whitney to Mary have all been like, 'Whatever you do, I'm following your direction. Everyone's been real cool.'"

—Rhonda Baraka



ONE SMALL STEP: A GREENER MUSIC SCENE

To say that musicians use a lot of consumable energy—music gear, CD packaging, gas for tour vans, etc.—is an understatement, so it makes sense that the music community is poised to make big environmental strides in 2008.

Many labels have already planned green changes for the New Year. WEA and EMI Canada are both aiming at recycled materials, Nashville's Circle Back Music is going carbon-free, and Sub Pop has committed to offsetting 100 percent of its energy use. Musicians are getting more involved, too, from using vintage guitars to choosing how their CDs are packaged.

Musicians unsure of how to best make sustainable contributions can hook up with companies like Reverb who provide "Greening" services for touring bands. "We arrange biodiesel for tour buses and trucks, and biodegradable products for buses and backstage," Reverb's Brian Allenby says. "And we'll educate fans by bringing our Eco-Villages to tour stops throughout 2008." The Fray, Stars, the Beastie Boys and Aimee Mann are among those using Reverb's services.

Festivals, media stores and nightclubs are even getting into the act. Chicago's Lollapalooza fest is set to bring back an expanded version of its popular Green Street area for 2008; California's Amoeba Music is implementing *The Big Green Box* for electronics recycling; and San Francisco's Green nightclub, Temple, has even bigger plans. "We recycle and compost 71 percent of our waste," owner Paul Hemming explains. "In 2008, we'll add vertical gardens and solar power and give away plantable trees. I'm also working with a physicist on our dancefloor, which will use piezoelectric crystals; when people dance, the crystals will be pressured, emitting a charge to a circuit, and that will power our LED lights." Hemming also plans to open a sustainable Temple nightclub in China. "It's not just nightclubs or bands that should do this," Hemming says, "I think humanity as a whole should do this."—*Kristi Kates*

NEW-FANGLED DELIVERY: FROM CDs to USBs

Are CDs as cool as they used to be? The recent actions of Radiohead, Trent Reznor and plenty of indie bands say, eh, not so much. A combo backlash of too-hard-to-crack record labels, environmental concerns, overpricing and the plethora of easily accessible music networking sites are causing musicians to turn to other methods of releasing their albums, among them digital downloads, pay-as-you-please, and, lately, releases on USB drives, which seems especially destined for the mainstream in 2008.

In 2007, The White Stripes dropped *Icky Thump* on supercool-looking flash-drive representations of Jack n' Meg in their London Pearly garments; Keane, The Fratellis, ultramodern grime-popsters Hadouken! and M.I.A. sent USB singles out on memory sticks; and even Matchbox 20 offered up its latest set in uncharacteristically edgy fashion—on a rubber USB bracelet. And those were only a sign of things to come.



PREDICTION: APPLE RULES THE WORLD

Apple stock will go up. With the introduction of ever-increasing iPod penetration, a slim laptop and resultant Mac sales, Apple will be akin to record labels in the '70s—a revered entity whose followers will give the company all their money. iTunes' share might go down, but Universal will never beat the company. Apple has won the war. Buy stock!—*Bob Lefsetz*

2008 looks like it's going to be a year of firsts in this department. The coming months will see albums being released on various forms of USB by the likes of the Rolling Stones (first album to be released on memory card in the UK), Mike Oldfield (first classical recording released on USB) and Finnish electro-rock band Desert Planet (first USB release in Finland). You get the idea.

So, what's the draw? Universal UK's Brian Rose is aiming USBs at the younger market, who are reportedly becoming apathetic about CDs, even "special-edition" ones, but the consensus in general is that people do still like to own a physical product, hence USBs potentially evolving where CDs have stagnated. Other appeals include the fact that USB drives leave room for the addition of plenty of videos and other multimedia components, allowing musicians to push the envelope regarding bonus content. As far as whether or not the CD will go the way of cassettes and 8-track tapes—only your wallet will tell.—*Kristi Kates*

GENRE ON THE MOVE: DANCEFLOOR HIP-HOP

It's no longer acceptable to stand around at the show nodding your head to the beat. These days, hip-hop is returning to the dancefloor. Once again, emphatic beats, gratuitous raps and unexpected influences abound as the new vanguard brings back the party.

This crop of DJs and MCs, led by the likes of Spank Rock, A-Trak and Diplo, focus their efforts on getting things moving. The dancefloor beats and provocative rhymes revive old tricks that never stopped working, and plenty of new sounds make their way into the mix to create a scene set to explode.

It was Spank Rock's Miami Bass-inspired YoYoYoYoYo that kicked the door open for this scene two years ago, and for its follow up, the Philly troublemakers headed up to New York and worked with regular contributors Amanda Blank and Santogold. With this crew, it's pretty much guaranteed that shenanigans will ensue.

Meanwhile, after gaining exposure as Kanye West's DJ, A-Trak built ties to the French party instigators from Ed Banger records, and his sound rides this nexus between hip-hop and dance music. The former DMC champion has a solo album in the works, and his Fool's Gold label is jumpstarting the careers of Kid Sister and the Cool Kids. That Chicago duo of Chuck Inglish and Mikey Rocks start a big year of their own with the January release of the *Bake Sale* EP. While they rarely bring things at a hip-house tempo, their throwback style is all about having a good time. Watch for their debut LP on Chocolate Industries before the year's out.

Finally, the manic DJ/producer known as Diplo continues to promote Baltimore Club beats and other sounds he discovers on his travels through his Mad Decent label and his Heap Decent charity.—Noah Levine

A-Trak



BEYOND THE MPC: LINNDRUM II

Dave Smith (founder of Sequential Circuits) and Roger Linn (creator of the MPC sampler) previewed the "BoomChik" drum machine last year. Now the design has taken on a smart new look and has been renamed LinnDrum II after the classic precursor to the MPC.

"I wanted to create a whole new performance instrument," says Linn, explaining that it's meant to be a drum machine, not an MPC-killer. "I wanted it to do anything from sensitive, very human drum parts to huge, powerful walls of electronic percussion, and do it intuitively without getting in your way."

The techno-savvy face-lift includes brightly backlit control buttons and Velocity- and pressure-sensitive pads—assignable to sounds, tunings, beats, pad mutes or sequence steps—making it poised for dark nightclub action. LinnDrum II lets you drop in and out of recording on different beats, play multiple beats simultaneously, switch in and out of song mode and more, all without stopping play.

A bright graphic LCD joins dedicated buttons for touch sensitivity, sound restart, real-time erase and pressure-sensitive note repeat. Programmable sliders and On/Off buttons control delay/reverb, filter, amp sim/compressor and resonator; a 16 MB internal flash memory stores sounds. "Expanding memory is accomplished merely by inserting a Compact Flash card," reports Linn.

Roger Linn Design (www.rogerlinndesign.com) will sell the sampling-only version, and Dave Smith Instruments (www.davesmithinstruments.com) will offer the LinnDrum II Analog, which adds four true-analog voices and Curtis filters, analog feedback resonator paths and 27 dual-function voicing knobs. An exact release date isn't yet available; prices are tentatively slated at \$1,000 (LinnDrum II) and \$1,500 (LinnDrum II Analog).

"Roger is the king of drum machines," says Smith. "This has been a great opportunity for us to put our heads together to design an exciting, flexible, easy-to-use drum box."—Jason Scott Alexander



RETURN TO VIDEO: WATCH YOUR BACK, MTV

Waaaay back in the dark ages, MTV—otherwise known as *Music Television*—actually played music videos. No, really, it's true. But with today's MTV being all about reality shows and dating debacles, where will we go in 2008 for actual vids from our favorite musicians? Ilovevideo, that's where.

Ilovevideo, at www.ilovevideo.com, offers pay-per-download high-quality music videos that are legally transferable, indefinitely, to as many media devices as you want (including Macs, PCs and handheld devices), making them the first DRM-free music video retail store. (Files are available in either WMV or M4V format.)

The site has already snagged agreements with Beggars Banquet, XL, Domino and Ministry of Sound, with more labels under negotiations for 2008. And these aren't Hey-That's-My-Friend-Ralph's-Band-on-YouTube type vids; they're top-notch clips from the likes of UNKLE, The Go! Team, Badly Drawn Boy, White Stripes, Fatboy Slim, the Pigeon Detectives and many more. Plus, ilovevideo's partnership with EMI Music will allow the site to make a plethora of videos from the EMI catalog available, including ones from the Chemical Brothers, John Lennon, Coldplay and Gorillaz.

You can check out videos in 30-second previews before you buy, with most videos starting at \$3.95, and you can pay for 'em by debit card, credit card, ilovevideo gift vouchers or text message (and yes, royalties are paid to the labels and artists involved). For 2008, the site plans to entice music lovers even more, with an ever-widening range of exclusive content, including director's cut videos, behind-the-scenes footage, artist interviews and live gigs. It's "music to your eyes," as the ilovevideo folks say. Between ilovevideo and iTunes' videos, we say...MTV who?—*Kristi Kates*

i
love
video

it's music to
your eyes

100% LEGAL
DRM FREE
MUSIC VIDEOS
TO OWN
AND
WATCH
AGAIN AND
AGAIN...

PREDICTION: PROMOTERS GET GREEDIER

Concert tickets will continue to go up in price, as greedy agents and promoters test the limits of what the market will bear. The acts will go along—after all, they're musicians; they don't know any better; their expertise is in music. However, those with lower prices will gain all the fan attention and bond most with their customers, ensuring longevity. For instruction, see Garth Brooks and the Dave Matthews Band.—*Bob Lefsetz*

Jean Grae



Kid Sister



Yo Majesty



LADIES FIRST: FEMALE MCs

With an underground superstar taking that next step, a pair of major-label players making their returns and a trio of hotly anticipated debut LPs, female MCs are set to make a major impact this year.

At the head of the line in both lyrical dexterity and sheer volume of scheduled releases is Jean Grae. Now on Talib Kweli's Blacksmith Records, the sharp-tongued Grae is bringing her hilariously cold-blooded rhymes to a trio of projects that promise to take her to a wider audience. In January it starts with the *Prom Night* LP, to be followed by the *Phoenix* mixtape project and the overdue release of *Jeanius*, her terrific studio excursion with 9th Wonder that was shelved for years after being leaked online.

Eve's *Here I Am*, which was also delayed, is finally expected to drop, and while the singles haven't quite caught fire, the major-label effort boasts production from Swizz Beatz, Pharrell, Scott Storch and Timbaland, so it's bound to have a few cuts. Even more intriguing is the next release from the consistently extraordinary Missy Elliott, who once again teams up with Timbo for her seventh album.

For new directions and uptempo beats, check out debuts from a trio of notorious party starters set to make themselves known this year. Chicago's effervescent Kid Sister scored a Kanye West guest spot on her "Pro Nails" remix, and now she's grabbed beats from Armani XXXchange, A-Trak and juke hero Gantman for her *Koko B. Ware* album dropping on Fool's Gold records. Also scoring studio time with XXXchange is Philly vixen and Spank Rock foil Amanda Blank, whose debut also includes work with Diplo. Finally, merciless Tampa electro-temptresses Yo Majesty bring plenty of excitement of their own. MCs Shunda K & Jwl. B signed onto the eclectic roster at Domino for their debut as well.—*Noah Levine*

HITCH A RIDE: THE THUMMER

One of the most original ideas in a long time is the Thummer, a unique handheld multi-input musical device. Not meant to be just another controller, the Thummer is part of what Thumtronics (www.thummer.com) designer Jim Plamondon calls "a focused effort to grow the market by increasing the success rate of music education." Essentially, it tries to help those new to music stay on the path longer by offering an instrument that is less daunting to master. The Thummer offers extensive expressiveness while being intrinsically intuitive and easy to learn. Each of its palm-size halves is operated by Touch-, Aftertouch- and Velocity-sensitive buttons that are organized into a repetitive geometric layout that makes melodic transposition simple and harmony easier to understand (see videos on the Thummer site). Small thumb-operated controllers on each wing offer muting/muffling, expression, portamento, modulation and pitch control on the fly without removing your fingers from the keys.

The eMotion Thummer adds an internal motion sensor for another layer of control—extreme expressive potential. Even on a good keyboard, you need one hand to play keys and another to turn knobs; on the Thummer, you can control notes and effects with a single hand, meaning you can easily play

two separate sounds—each with deep, expressive control—simultaneously. And DJ/VJ/performance potential is endless for assigning the buttons to MIDI controls. Once manufacturing

begins, expect retail prices around \$375 and \$575 (eMotion). Here's hoping Thumtronics finds a suitable investor soon, before we see Chinese-made knockoffs.—*Asher Fulero*

PREDICTION: MAJOR LABELS' PLAN B

Major labels will offer a lot of product for not so much money. The iTunes model won't die, but expect the majors to experiment with either licensed P2P and/or the bucket of tracks for one flat price model, à la eMusic. With CD sales tanking, major labels will be *forced* to try new ways of selling music.—*Bob Lefsetz*

ARTIST-RUN STUDIOS: NE-YO

Creating state-of-the-art studios has become the norm not only for producers but for artists, as well. How do these artist-run studios stack up against commercial labs? Singer/songwriter Ne-Yo, who opened his Carrington House Studio in Atlanta earlier this year, says he designed the studio to suit his personal needs. "I was very selfish when I was thinking about what I wanted the studio to be," he says. "It wasn't even a thought of renting the space out every now and then. I knew I was going to be spending a lot of time here, and I wanted it to be as comfortable as possible." Ne-Yo says he wanted a one-stop shop. "I needed a studio that is completely self-contained, where mixing, mastering, recording, everything could be done right there in that spot."

Carrington House has three floors that house the studio and business offices. The A Room is for recording, the B Room is for making beats and the Live Room is for rehearsing. The facility also has a kitchen—complete with a 24-hour chef—and a lounge. "You honestly wouldn't even know that it was a studio until you went upstairs and saw the equipment," says Ne-Yo. Speaking of equipment, Ne-Yo says he had only one preference when it came to the tools of his trade: "It's just gotta work," he says. "When I push the button, it needs to work." And engineer Jaymz Hardy-Martin III is there to make sure it does. From preamps to MIDI gear, Hardy-Martin has taken special care to outfit Carrington House with top-of-the-line recording equipment, including a Pro Tools HD3 system; Avalon, Universal Audio and Focusrite preamps; Neumann U 87 mics; and a Tascam DM-4800 console.

Ne-Yo says he hopes to expand the facility someday. "There's a studio in Miami called Circle House that I record at when I'm down there, and I love the whole setup of that place," he says. "It's kind of like a huge compound. We might wind up doing something like that in the next couple of years, but as of right now, Carrington House is fully functional, and it suits us just fine."—*Rhonda Baraka*

If Johnny Love (left) and Filip Turbotito have anything to say to each other, it can be said in an e-mail.



DEAFENING BUZZ: GUNS 'N' BOMBS

Given this country's fickle appreciation for dance sounds, it's fitting that America's best bet for dancefloor supremacy comes from a foreign-born duo (via Italy and Denmark) that has adopted L.A. as a home base. But Johnny Love, who teams up with Filip Turbotito to make rugged beats as Guns 'n' Bombs, thinks the timing is right for a breakthrough.

"America is getting a little better," Love says. "Maybe people are getting more open to dance music, and if they do, it'll be great."

Remix work for Chromeo, The Gossip and Klaxons, along with a lone release on

France's Kitsuné, have labels of all sizes calling about G'n'B's grinding club beats. But the duo is blocking out the buzz to focus on recording.

Working in a relatively simple digital studio based around Ableton Live, Steinberg Cubase and Propellerhead Reason, Love and Turbotito are aiming to take things beyond their buzz-saw beats to explore more melodic sounds. As for vocal co-conspirators, Love proudly asserts, "All the people we wanted to work with are already dead." But Turbotito freely rattles off an impressive list of possible collaborators, including Peaches, DJ Funk, his former group Junior Senior and legendary L.A. band Sparks.

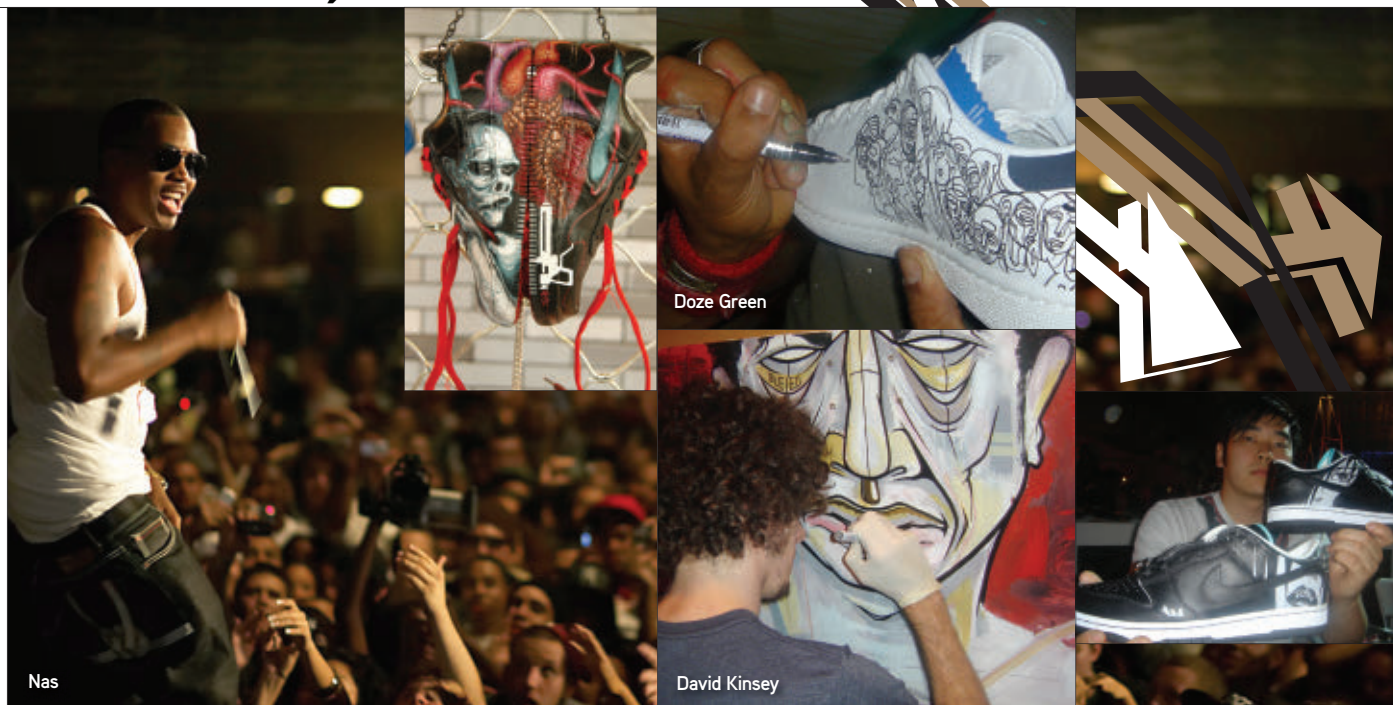
With plans to complete a full-length album by spring, G'n'B hopes to then hit the road with an analog-based live show, including "some crazy guitar pedals and effects," Turbotito says. Recorded or live, G'n'B will be bringing the combustible beats.—*Noah Levine*

FAIR TRADE: SSL PRO-CONVERT V5

In late 2007, Solid State Logic (SSL; www.solid-state-logic.com) acquired the Universal DAW Project Translator technology that Cui Bono Soft had been working on for seven years. Now released by SSL as Pro-Convert V5, this leveler of playing fields helps computer-based audio projects from disparate DAWs become easily sharable. No more bouncing files separately and rebuilding automation on a new DAW when you change studios midstream; simply use Pro-Convert to translate the session into a destination format, and off you go. Pro-Convert is compatible with Pro Tools,

Soundscape, Cubase, Nuendo, Vegas, Sonic Studio, SADIÉ, Final Cut Pro, Adobe Audition, OMF, AES31, Sequoia, Open TL and Tascam BU. Although some very popular platforms are absent (Logic, Digital Performer, Ableton, Traktion, Sonar), the idea of opening a PC Cubase session with Pro Tools on a Mac—complete with files, automation, fades and everything else—is almost too good to be true. Pro-Convert V5 represents a major upgrade from Cui Bono Soft's previous version, including up-to-date compatibility with the newest versions of each format.—*Asher Fulero*





FIELD TRIP: TRAVELING ART AND MUSIC

From art galleries to basketball courts, parties hitting the road this year are pushing the limits to educate and stimulate. And there's nothing like a good pair of shoes to get you there. With more than 1,500 vintage, limited-edition and rare runners, Sneaker Pimps have a kicks collection to covet. Showcasing hip-hop, skateboarding, basketball, fashion and photography, founder Peter Fahey started stacking shoes on display six years ago with local DJs spinning in his hometown, Sydney, Australia. Now the largest touring show of its kind, featuring heavyweight performers like Kanye West, Common, Nas and Public Enemy, as well as street artists like Tokidoki, Cartoon and Futura, it's a circus to run away with.

Meanwhile, New York's iStandard Producers are looking out for tomorrow's music. The creative mentoring and professional feedback workshops for burgeoning producers are going global with fully interactive online access to industry insiders. Now a monthly study-hard-play-hard session in New York and Philadelphia, with road stops in Chicago, L.A., Atlanta and Phoenix, music makers can get one-on-one attention they

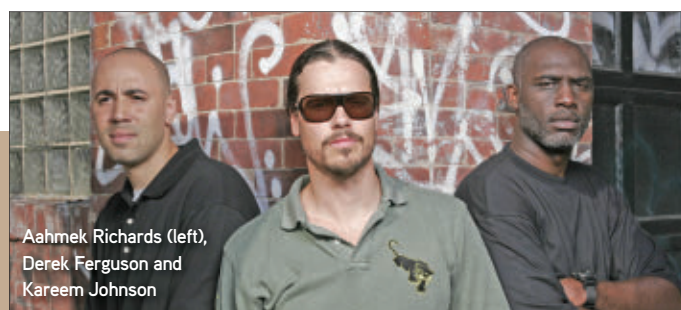
need to take their thing to the next level. Next up, after the WMC whirlwind settles, is iStandard's first-ever three-day "Beats on the Beach" in Miami this April.

Coming up in the roaming party/traveling competition realm, Montreal DJ Kid Koala's beats will resonate inside museums and galleries across Canada and the U.S. To promote his latest graphic novel (an untitled work in progress) composed entirely of photographs of Muppet-inspired 3-D miniatures on tiny intricate Dixieland movie-like sets, Kid Koala will be touring his jazz-infused scratch sets for book, music and two-step lovers alike. Also, stay tuned as Koala is planning a suburban roller-skating rink tour in the future. Hell yeah!

Also clocking in air miles from the Euro city, cutting-edge fest Mutek takes on Manhattan, Mexico City, Sao Paulo and Barcelona with more experimental music and art from Japan, Latin America, Spain and Germany. Now in its ninth year, Mutek remains compact and intimate while breaking acts like Chicago's Detalles and San Fran's Pigeon Funk. With its still-strong label, Mutek_Rec—delivering the long-awaited follow-up to Montreal artist Akufen's full-length *My Way* this year—and its minimitations only growing in size, the fest is a testament to the flourishing techno talent colonizing this side of the Atlantic.—*Elizabeth Mitkos*

NEW-MEDIA MOGULS: TRIGGERHAPPY

Seven years ago, Aahmek Richards predicted the proliferation of Internet-based media outlets. Today, as president of the two-year-old New York-based production company Triggerhappy, he and his partners are at the forefront of creating top-quality content for the digital age. "We are first and foremost a content production company," says Richards, who worked in new media divisions at Arista and Def Jam. "I realized six or seven years ago that all forms of media were ultimately going to be served on the Internet, and the Internet was going to become this new broadcast medium that was going to sooner rather than later overpower television and theaters." With that in mind, he and his partners, Derek Ferguson and Kareem Johnson, focused on creating



content specifically for the Internet that could also be used for other formats.

"What seems to be working well online is short-form content," he says. "People don't want to watch a 30-minute-long program." Richards' crew shoots videos with the Panasonic HDX; edits in Apple Final Cut Pro; and completes all sound design, mixing and mastering with an Pro Tools|HD system.

Currently, Triggerhappy provides content for Pepsi DJ Division (pepsidjdivision.com) and Flow TV, an on-demand cable channel featuring hip-hop interviews and videos.

So what is Richards' prediction for the next seven years? "Everything is just going to be a digital download," he contends. "All the traditional formats are going to go away."—*Rhonda Baraka*

THE MAGIC SCREEN: NBOR & DENNY JAEGER

With the chief designer of the breakthrough '80s workstation the Synclavier II at the helm, upstart company NBOR (No Boundaries or Rules; www.nbor.com) is looking to change audio mixing as we know it. Acclaimed composer for films and commercials, Denny Jaeger is the man who envisions a seamless fusion of the best of both the hardware and software worlds.

Still in the prototype stage, the system begins with the Universal Interface Panel, a hardware box with a display screen on top (that will likely be touch-sensitive) that can plug into any computer. Through laborious research that has spanned four countries and spawned more than 30 patents, NBOR designed custom-made,

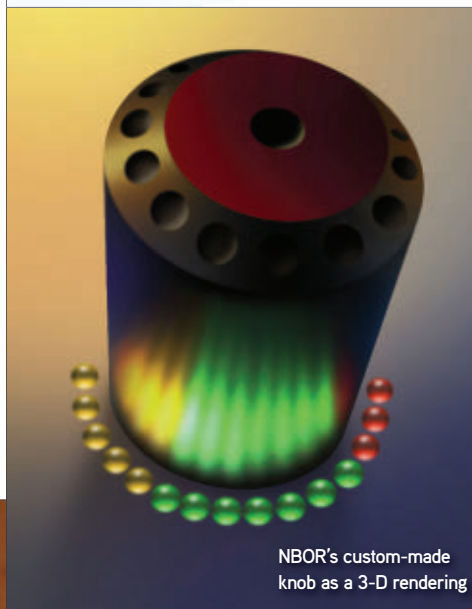
touch-sensitive faders that move across the top of the screen itself, using NBOR's Blackspace software. Made with many original parts designed from scratch, the faders have a maximum resolution of 6,000 points per inch and use unique magnetic coupling to make precise automated movements. The system also includes stand-alone knobs that can be placed anywhere on the screen (or on other surfaces as many as six knobs at a time) to control any software function with a response time of less than 1 ms. "There's nothing else on planet Earth that can do this," Jaeger says.

NBOR's new tactile and software environment strips limitations from users. Any object down to a single pixel can be customized and moved anywhere on screen. Sessions use a context messaging system, so multiple people can contribute to the same session seamlessly and remotely with negligible delay. Blackspace sits on top of an operating system, so it's not constrained by the menus, windows, etc. of a Mac or Windows OS. "Everyone should have tools that are as creative as they want them to be," Jaeger says. There's no news yet about a release of NBOR's products, but many developments should be popping up this year.—Markkus Rovito

This screen setting on the Universal Interface Panel prototype shows that mixing to picture while watching the picture is just one innovation of the NBOR system.



A detailed 3-D rendering of the NBOR fader



NBOR's custom-made knob as a 3-D rendering

STEVE EPSTEIN



PASSING THE TORCH: **ILLA J**

There's no escaping Illa J's musical pedigree, but rather than live in the shadows, the Detroit-born producer embraced it. Illa J, whose given name is John Yancey, is the younger brother of the late J Dilla. After Dilla's death in 2006, Illa focused on music full-time, dropping out of college in Michigan, moving to California and setting up a recording studio, determined to carry on the Yancey legacy. Using Dilla's Yamaha Motif XS, Moog Voyager and 32-channel Digidesign ProControl board, he set about the task of recording a full-length album.

"My brother was known for hip-hop, but he could make all types of music, and he was also a great MC," Illa J says. "I want to show that we're versatile, and this is a musical legacy to be dealt with." An accomplished bassist, Illa compiled his own tracks with other tracks from Battlecat (which he calls "feel-good funk"), Karriem Riggins, Notz, Focus and Dilla. "When I write to my brother's tracks, there's a certain connection to it," Illa says.

MCs Frank (from Dilla's group Frank n' Dank) and Guilty Simpson also appear on several tracks. "One thing I got from my brother is to keep it off time," he says. "That's what makes you bob your head, where the beat is actually pulling the bass line. I try to stay away from hi-hats unless I need them. What I do is put the bass line in the right pockets to make the whole beat move. It's the little things like that that keep it funky."

Illla is on his way to making his own name on the mic and behind the board. He proudly recalls a vocal recording session with Bishop Lamont, attended by Busta Rhymes. "Busta gave me a compliment; he said, 'I know you make the beats, but that was hot, son.'"—*Tamara Warren*



Illla J

PREDICTION: BANDS DITCH LABELS

More acts will follow Radiohead and go it alone, but most won't allow the consumer to set the price. The music might be free, sponsored by a corporation or news outlet, or sold via iTunes or other distribution entities. But what's most important is that more and more acts will be doing it themselves, not only capturing the lion's share of the revenue but free to follow their own muse. After all, who knows more about music, the people who make it or the businessmen who sell it?—*Bob Lefsetz*

WAVE 'EM LIKE YOU JUST DON'T CARE: **MULTITOUCH CONTROL**

Many technophiles have seen the YouTube videos demonstrating the amazing Multi-Touch Interaction Research of Jeff Han and associates (<http://cd.nyu.edu/~jhan/ftirtouch>). Even though the idea had been around for quite a while when they hit the Net in 2006, those videos really opened up the dialog about

the future of computer interaction and how we visualize our digital workspace. After different types of multitouch technology appeared in 2007, we think 2008 will be The Year of Multitouch. Significantly more interactive, intuitive and fun than the single-touch interfaces we're used to (think video poker or Wacom tablets), basic multitouch is already in action on Apple's hugely popular iPhone and iPod Touch. JazzMutant's killer DAW controllers Lemur and Dexter offer powerful and creative multitouch musical interaction, and the creative possibilities continue to inspire tech fans dreaming of the not-so-distant future when a cheap, dual multitouch-screen laptop helps them do everything from make art and music to software design.

But while rumors of all sorts of Apple multitouch MacBooks, Newtons and other devices abound, Microsoft has quietly started promoting its coffee-table-size multitouch home base for the "average" person (they will cost \$5,000 to \$10,000) called Surface (www.microsoft.com/surface), which, among other things, lets you simply set your wireless-enabled digital camera onto its touch-screen tabletop to automatically import and share your photos, with übercool-looking results. Several other groups have begun making their own versions, usually table-size and running custom-made software. With nearly every major designer out there salivating at the chance to incorporate this once-futuristic idea, the flowing computer-wall aesthetics that geeks used to ogle on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* can't be too far away from reality.—*Asher Fulero*

LAND OF THE RISING FUN: JAPANESE DJ GEAR

Just as it is with many of the latest and coolest consumer electronics, Japan hosts many music- and DJ-gear product launches well ahead of their release to the United States and the rest of the world. Several enticing new DJ products have already been announced in Japan and should see the light of day stateside in 2008. Vestax (www.vestax.jp) has the VCM-100, a compact USB MIDI controller aimed at DJ applications that follows up 2007's popular VCI-100. The small-format VCM-100 has the same professional build quality as the VCI-100, with two large channel level knobs in the tradition of club installation rackmounted mixers. Also from Vestax, the PMC-580 Pro is a 4-channel, 24-bit digital performance mixer with six effects per channel. It also has a USB connection, although it is not clear yet exactly what that is for.

Korg (www.korg.co.jp) has already introduced the Kaossilator portable phrase synthesizer in Japan. The handheld, battery-operated synth is the same size as Korg's 2007 Mini-KP Kaoss Pad and uses the same touch-sensitive pad to layer loops of arpeggiated synth sounds on top of each other. It's sure to be a live-performance favorite.

No doubt Japan will continue to get the jump on



new product releases all year, but lastly for now comes the Pioneer CDJ-400 (<http://pioneer.jp>), a professional DJ CD turntable that also plays MP3s from CD or from attached USB storage devices. What's more, virtually all of its controls send MIDI to control software such as Pioneer DJ's, Serato Scratch Live and others.—Markkus Rovito

FUTURE MARKETING: G-UNIT

Rubbing the crystal ball is customary at the New Year, so we asked Dre McKenzie, head of A&R at G-Unit Records, to gaze deeply and channel us the hell out of hip-hop's hard times. With overinflated recording budgets and advances for the urban artist long gone, McKenzie thinks opportunistic rappers should return to the early roots of rock and build careers onstage rather than through video. Get out and gig!

"Early rock artists were urban artists," says McKenzie. "People like Little Richard and Professor Longhair—who many rightfully argue was the real king of rock 'n' roll, influencing Elvis. Urban artists have to see the power of going to primary, secondary and tertiary markets and winning over fans through live performance."

Radio play has been a key indicator of potential album sales and fan bases, but not anymore. This past summer's top-spinning singles set records at radio but spawned dismal album sales and mediocre download numbers.

"With more and more radio stations being shut

down, the industry needs a real focused study on where people experience their music," says McKenzie. "Consumers do want 'experiences,' not just music. G-Unit tries to provide enough value in the purchase where the consumer feels they have to have it; it's something that reflects a part of them and encompasses a feeling they want to experience over and over."



With CD prices scattered and download prices duking it out with each other, "the revenue model for music sales has no standard, currently," says McKenzie. "This is a formative time. So much is changing, and when it will even out, I don't know."

As the face of urban music changes—embracing styles from reggae and rock to dance and country—demographic studies can't always keep up with its image.

"Kids in the streets of 'urban' America are dressing like rock stars with chains hanging from their not-so-baggy jeans," says McKenzie. "They're wearing brands like Diesel, Rock & Republic and fashion outside of 'traditional' hip-hop. In the next few years, I see real music companies with heavy emphasis on new media and strategic branding. I see brands like Macy's or General Mills establishing music departments. I see traditional labels creating music specifically to sell to brands, providing added value for their customers—for example, American Eagle giving free content along with a clothing purchase. I see more and more indie labels partnering with firms and independent financiers to fund projects, rather than pursuing major labels. This is all made possible by digi-distribution and the increasing ease with which artists can create, mix and master quality music."—Jason Scott Alexander

DJ Nu-Mark



F-F-FRESH INNOVATION: DJ MUSICIANS

"I feel like Serato and Final Scratch should be a reward for DJs who've carried equipment—for a DJ who's never done that, it's like dues to be paid," says DJ Dez, who has shared the stage with ?uestlove, Slum Village and Erykah Badu. Times have changed, but Final Scratch and Serato haven't killed the art of DJing.

Dez applies the spirit of a jazz musician to his sets. "I'm not the play-it-safe guy," he says. "I have clave in my blood. That is my metronome, beyond 4/4 simple measures. I'm always thinking when I go into my indigenous mode on some rumba shit." The master drummer incorporates turntable tricks into danceable scat sessions of rare funk records, hip-hop loops and house-music chords. "I can scratch on a house record, let the hip-hop overlap and go even more out there."

In another realm, DJ Nu-Mark has taken innovation to the playground. He collects kids' musical toys and rewires them for mixing capabilities. His latest creation is a DJ setup using Music Blocks, a product geared for 2-year-olds. "Basically, each block has different shapes on it," says the former Jurassic 5 DJ. "The circles are bass lines, the triangles are pianos, and they each play a bar of music. I'm beat juggling beats back and forth." Nu-Mark began experimenting with kalimba onstage with J5, which led to endless tricks. "I take a thick rubber band, and I wrap it around the part of the needle used to pick up the record. I take a guitar pick and I turn the bass up, and it sounds like an upright bass. The toys were the next logical progression."

And then there's DJ Enferno, who is bridging the gap between his weekly DJ gigs and live remix project. "The whole live project is an extension of the battling background," he says. He uses a Toshiba laptop running Ableton Live, a MacBook Pro running Serato Scratch Live and a Korg KP3 Kaoss Pad to remix songs in his sets. "For any one song, I start out with four different drum loops that I can trigger with my finger. Everything else will be empty, and I'll use one of the drum loops to mix out of the sound. I didn't have anybody to teach me, I cracked open a manual and went on discussion forums."—*Tamara Warren*

THIN IS IN: OLED TELEVISIONS

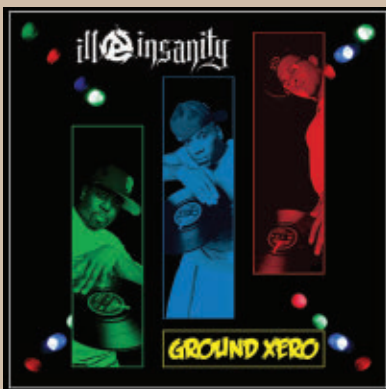
Most people would agree that plasma and LCD HDTVs already kick plenty of ass, but if something better came along, you'd dig it, right? Well, something better has come along. In late 2007, Sony introduced the XEL-1, the first OLED (organic light-emitting diodes) TV, an 11-inch beauty that is now selling in Japan for roughly \$1,740. The 1080p (full HD) screen is only 3 mm thick and is actually flexible. OLEDs are capable of the highest contrast ratios currently available and are also more energy efficient than plasma and LCD screens, which Sony is hoping to pass by on the road to making OLED the display technology of choice. The company already has a prototype of a 27-inch OLED TV. Toshiba has attempted to one-up Sony by announcing plans for a 30-inch OLED display in 2009. Dang, you know Propellerhead Reason would look fine on that!—*Markkus Rovito*



REJUVENATING TURNTABLISM: ILL INSANITY

In a packed room at Brooklyn's Galapagos last November, decorated DJs Rob Swift, Precision and Total Eclipse fired off group routines and separate, provocative solos on five Technics SL-1200MK2s under their new Ill Insanity moniker. Former X-ecutioners Swift and Eclipse reunited earlier in 2007 when they and Precision performed at Swift's *As the Tables Turn* DVD release party. The newly formed team brings vibrancy to a genre that 2007 DMC U.S. National Finals Champion DJ Precision says needs help. "As DJs and straight-up fans of turntablism, we want to keep it alive," Precision says. "Turnouts at battles just haven't been the same."

At Galapagos, Eclipse and Swift warmed up the crowd with missile-guided cuts over jazz breaks and chunky hip-



hop beats, including Gang Starr and Public Enemy instrumentals. Meanwhile, Precision whizzed through the night's first scratch solo, showcasing veteran control of a Rane TTM 57SL mixer, which Total Eclipse calls "the greatest on the market, allowing Serato users to trigger hot cues on the mixer board."

In addition to the group's decks, three Mac laptops run Serato Scratch Live at shows. "The experience of scratching on CD turntables never matched up to the feel of using an actual turntable, so we couldn't replicate a lot of the scratch sounds we were used to executing on turntables," Swift says. "With the invention of [Scratch Live], we power up our laptops and import any sound we choose straight into the software. With Rane's Control Records, we can still use the turntable to perform our scratches while maintaining the exact feel of scratching regular vinyl. This makes it possible for us to experiment more than we ever have."

Ill Insanity's bold turntable workouts will be packaged as *Ground Xero* (The Ablist Productions), the trio's debut LP, dropping next month.
—Dominic Umile



After renovating turntablism, DJ Precision (far left), Rob Swift and Total Eclipse discuss plans for *Extreme Makeover: Neighborhood Edition*.

GET IN THE GAME: MINIVIRTUAL INSTRUMENTS

It might come as a surprise to find out that, in addition to a slowly growing roster of legitimate software, there is a large contingent of underground home-brew

rebels creating music programs for the Nintendo DS and the Sony PSP. It's a given that the musical video-game niche is growing: *Guitar Hero* is being played by just about everyone, and Nintendo's *Wii Music* will be out in 2008, putting you in control of an entire band or orchestra. But the New Year is likely to find you using your portable game systems to do more than just play. With much of this software, sanctioned or not, you'll be able to jot down, demo and record new songs—and more.

Got a sudden song idea on the subway or plane? No problem. Nintendo's brand new *Jam Sessions* for

PREDICTION: OUT WITH MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Mainstream media will be proven to be out of touch. It's not important what the *New York Times* says; music lives on the Web, and people find out about and discuss music on the Web. It doesn't matter what the old kingpins say, rather what your *friends* say. And this friend network is ever expanding and built on trust. Will 2008 be the year of the Web filter, the one place where everybody goes to find out about new music online? Eventually, there will be a terrestrial radio/MTV/*Rolling Stone* of the Web. And it won't be any of the foregoing entities, rather a whole new site built and controlled by the Internet generation, with its ear to the ground and in bed with its viewers, as opposed to Madison Avenue.—Bob Lefsetz

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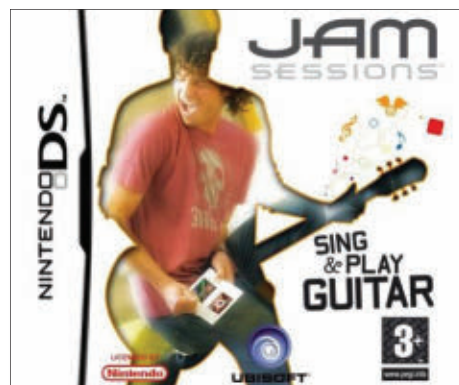
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the DS, with its touch-screen strum function, lets you take a "guitar" just about anywhere, while *Rhythm n' Notes* teaches chords, patterns and beats. In the home-brew department, you can download *DSscratch*, which allows you to digitally downsample, scratch and MIDI-transfer; *Piano Rigolo*, which places two octaves of piano on your DS touch-screen; or *NitroTracker*, a tiny composer/editor.

Meanwhile, over on the PSP tip, Rockstar games has teamed up with Timbaland for 2008's much-anticipated *Beaterator*, a powerful beatmaker/music mixer. Meanwhile, home-brews *PSPRhythm* and *PSPKick* are already out; Eidos' *Traxxpad* turns the PSP into a keyboard, drums and sequencer; and Ubisoft is prepping to release the tutorial tool *Guitar Hits*, complete with tuner and metronome.

Will other software designers hop on the—ahem—bandwagon for 2008 to give us more of these mini-virtual instruments for portable platforms? We can only hope.—Kristi Kates

Roland
www.RolandUS.com

"This sampler is incredible. It has lots of features for live performance, and it's so fun. This is the one that has the potential to expand the possibility of DJs."

-dj KENTARO
DMC World Champion

Handwritten signature of DJ Kentaro

BRING IT LIVE!

Meet the new SP-555: the unique and creative sampler that's packed with many of the best features from the industry-standard SP-404 – plus new performance features you'll want to bring on stage. You get killer realtime effects like Voice Transformer, Delay, and Super Filter, plus a cool Loop Capture function that lets you sample loops and play them back on the fly. The SP-555 also works as a USB audio interface for any DAW or DJ software application, so it'll fit right into your setup. Sample through its XLR mic or line inputs or through USB, jam with the effect processor live using the control knobs and instant-recall effect memory, and more. Tap into your creativity, and bring it live with the new '555.

To see dj KENTARO and the SP-555 in action, visit www.RolandUS.com/SP-555.





The Sixth Annual **REMIX** **TECHNOLOGY** **AWARDS**

**Pop bottles for the 28
hottest music production
and performance
products of 2007**

By Markkus Rovito

imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, so it's with the most heartfelt compliments that we have ended up imitating many of last year's picks for the 2008 Remix Technology Awards. It's said that success breeds more success, and that has been dead-on accurate for companies such as Apogee, Novation, Frontier Design Group, Allen & Heath, M-Audio, Native Instruments and JazzMutant, which are all taking home trophies in the same or similar categories as last year, many for products related to last year's winners. However, before you go crying "favoritism," most of this year's winners bring hungry new faces to the celebratory banquet. Among the youngbloods, *Remix*—always a champion of the little guy—honors the software companies Sonalksis, Modartt and XLN Audio, whose small employee headcounts don't stop them from doing big things for musicians and producers.

To crown the winners of the RTAs, which are 12 times more important than the Grammys (and 12¹² times more important than the Tonys), the *Remix* staff polls its writers and selected editors from sister publications *Electronic Musician* and *Mix*, who vote only on products they know firsthand, based on performance, innovation, results and overall value of the products. When the votes are in, we deliberate, argue a bit, make empty threats, get a little heated and say a few things we don't mean, make up and become even closer than before, and then we have our winners. Of course, every year the real winners are the DJs, musicians and producers who get to enjoy the power, convenience and flat-out fun of the ever-advancing technology.



DIGITAL DJ SYSTEM

Native Instruments Traktor Scratch

NI's first hardware-plus-software system for DJs who want to play computer audio files with control vinyl provides rock-solid performance, a well-designed audio interface and an easy upgrade path to the full Traktor software.



MIDI CONTROLLER

Novation ReMote 25SL Compact

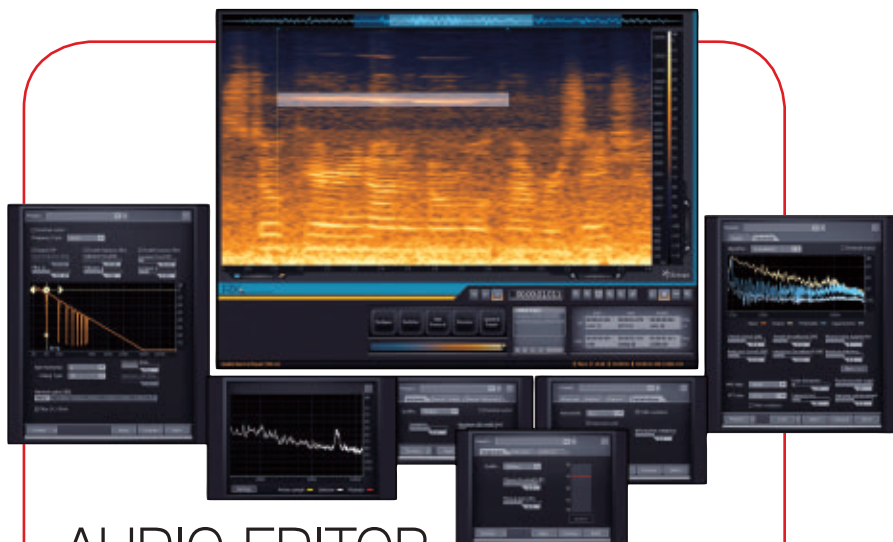
Son of last year's champ, the Novation ReMote SL, the ReMote 25SL Compact continues the family tradition of kicking butt as a MIDI controller. A chip off the old block, the Compact keeps portability in mind by streamlining the control and display surface, yet includes the full power of Novation's improved Automap Universal technology.

MOST INNOVATIVE HARDWARE

JazzMutant Dexter

Using the same technology as last year's open-ended standout, the Lemur, Dexter takes JazzMutant's impressive multitouch technology into the realm of dedicated DAW control over Cubase, Logic, Sonar and more.





AUDIO EDITOR

Izotope RX

Janitors at the 2007 AES convention swept jaws off the floor after the Izotope crew showed the stand-alone RX program removing a creaking door sound out of a recording. With its unique spectral analysis display, this audio restoration program is sure to amaze producers through 2008 and beyond.

MONITOR/ SPEAKER

Dynaudio Acoustics BM 12A

Anyone ready to step up in price range for a new set of monitors will find out that they get what they pay for with the BM 12As. Highly accurate and impeccably detailed sonic reproduction, with a wide, seamless soundstage and pinpoint imaging made these our favorite of the year.



MICROPHONE

Blue Woodpecker

With its first active ribbon mic, the Woodpecker, Blue chipped away at some of the traditional ribbon mic issues. It handles high sound-pressure levels, delivers a high output and can be used with nearly any preamp. All that, and the wonderful tone matches its lovely design.



HEADPHONES

Audio-Technica ATH-M50

With the ATH-M50's accuracy, comfort and attractive price, Audio-Technica really hit the sweet spot with these professional studio monitor headphones.





HARDWARE SYNTHESIZER

Moog Music Little Phatty Stage Edition

Following up the Little Phatty Tribute Edition of the previous year, Moog added street-smart rubberized side panels, auto calibration and improved software to this synth with an all-analog signal path and digital control. The Stage Edition is also a C-note cheaper. Phat.



MOST INNOVATIVE SOFTWARE

Modartt Pianoteq 2

While many piano sampling libraries are now running in the realm of 8 GB of hard-drive space, Modartt took on the task of modeling beautiful-sounding acoustic pianos in a virtual instrument that takes just a dozen or so megabytes on your system.

BEST HARDWARE VALUE

Blue Sky EXO 2.1

With audio quality that defies its size, convenience to small desktop studios and low price, the EXO 2.1 system is the least expensive entry to mixing music on a subwoofer system at pro-level audio fidelity.



AUDIO INTERFACE

Apogee Symphony Mobile

Like a key to a treasure chest, the Apogee Symphony Mobile ExpressCard is a tiny thing that unlocks a wealth of potential. It's the first interface to use the ExpressCard slot of Apple MacBook Pros, and it allows you to connect 32 channels of 24-bit/192 kHz audio into the computer using additional Apogee converters.



BEST SOFTWARE VALUE

Apple Logic Studio

Apple Logic Pro 7 cost \$999. So when Logic Pro 8 came out, Apple decided to throw Soundtrack Pro 2, the new MainStage program and tons of instruments, effects and sounds into this \$499 bundle. Any questions?



OUTBOARD

Universal Audio DCS Remote Preamp

The DCS Remote Preamp represents Universal Audio's new-concept Desktop Control System. It stashes two console-grade preamps into a base station and breaks out a remote box with flexible monitoring options, a headphone amp with listen-only EQ and reverb, a talkback mic and two VU meters.



DJ CONTROL SURFACE

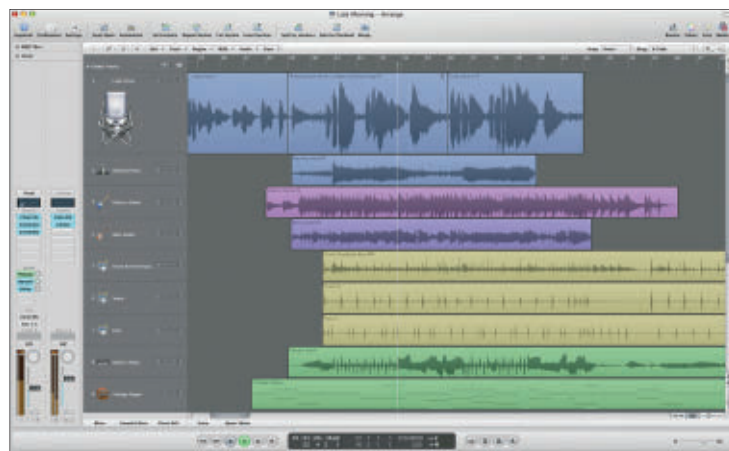
M-Audio Torq Xponent

For the new generation of turntable-free laptop DJs, M-Audio took setup worries down another peg with the plug-and-play Xponent audio interface/controller for Torq. The hardware controls nearly mirror the software UI, with plenty of extra room for MIDI control customization.

GUITAR-ORIENTED PRODUCT

Roger Linn Design AdrenaLinn III

The third version of this great-sounding amp simulator, tempo-synced effects box and—of course from Roger Linn—drum machine added many excellent new sounds and models, extra presets and more control potential. Owners of earlier versions can also upgrade with user-installable chips.



DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATION

Apple Logic Pro 8

Now with a fully "Apple-ized," user interface, Logic Pro 8 was the major update that Logic fans had long awaited. The single-window redesign adds new editing tools, amped-up multitrack and surround production and much more.

HYBRID HARDWARE/SOFTWARE PRODUCT

Muse Research Receptor with Complete Inside

Whether playing Native Instruments' 12-piece Complete 5 suite on a stable hardware module for live performance, or running the instruments as DAW plug-ins hosted on an outboard processor to save your CPU, this package presents extreme power and intelligent implementation at a fair price.



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FIELD/PORTABLE RECORDER

Korg MR-1

Taking advantage of pristine 1-bit/2.8 MHz recording, the handheld recorder with a 20 GB hard drive lets you record at the highest possible fidelity, which can be compressed to any digital format later.



DJ MIXER

Allen & Heath Xone:S2

A 4-channel club installation DJ mixer from the respected Xone line, the S2's USB interface can be used for playback or recording audio to and from a computer, or to connect the S2 to software to be used as an effects processor with its stellar analog filter and EQ.



SOFTWARE SYNTHESIZER

Native Instruments Absynth 4

With a new design, granular oscillator, wave-morphing mode and enhanced envelopes and modulation, Absynth 4 became the go-to synth for drinking up beautifully strange textures.

SAMPLING WORKSTATION

Roland MV-8800 Production Studio

Much more than a sampler, with its large color display, monitor output, mouse port, tactile onboard mixer, pads, extensive effects and CD burner, the MV-8800 is our favorite path toward "in-the-box" music production without a computer.



INSTRUMENT WORKSTATION

Propellerhead Reason 4

Although it's almost in a class of its own, Propellerhead keeps topping itself with Reason. The fourth edition blows out the sequencer capabilities and adds wicked new devices like the monster Thor synth, ReGroove Mixer and RPG-8 arpeggiator.



SOFTWARE DRUM INSTRUMENT

XLN Audio Addictive Drums

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SAMPLE COLLECTION

Sample Magic Electro-House

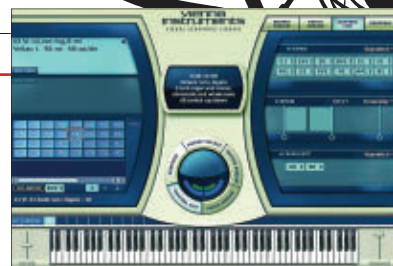
It's very rare that a sample collection that tries to encapsulate a trendy yet undeniably appealing subgenre such as this one does it so well, without being redundant or relying on clichés.



SAMPLE PLAYBACK INSTRUMENT

Vienna Symphonic Library Appassionata Strings

Just like with monitors or microphones, you may think the sampled string library you're using sounds pretty good, until you hear something much better. Appassionata Strings is that something better. Hearing is believing, or more likely disbelieving just how gorgeous it sounds.



EFFECT PLUG-IN

Sonalksis TBK3 Über Compressor

Last year, the electronic music producer community got hip to sidechaining for compression in a big way, and the sidechain is just one attraction to this analog-modeled compressor plug-in. With its simple, "big-knob" interface, TBK3 makes using compression as an effect easier and fun for those nutters who like to push their compressors hard.



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DAW CONTROLLER

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DIY BATTLE CUTS

Simulate the tricks of pro scratch records using DAW and digital DJ software

With the advent of “controllerism” and the meteoric rise of DJ software, some may assume that the art of turntablism is fading fast. Attendance at the large competitions continues to drop, and the 20-year-old art form appears to need a breath of fresh air. Ironically, it may just be digital technology that brings it. Software like Serato Scratch Live is making the bread and butter of turntablists—scratch records—more accessible to everyone and opening creative doors to exciting new ideas. For years, having your own scratch record to manipulate was a luxury afforded to a precious few. The technology and techniques that went into a DMC-winning performance were shrouded in secrecy as each performer tried to one-up the next. These days, you don’t have to drop \$100 on a dub plate or be a former DMC champion to make your scratch sentences and routines completely original. With digital vinyl technology, a decent DAW and some minor technical know-how, you can make your own personal scratch “record” in just a few hours. The pros don’t want you to read this; they want you to be out there buying their old scratch albums. Do yourself a favor: Save your money and invent your own way of performing.

ADVANCED RECORDINGS

There are no magic tricks up Q-Bert’s sleeve; a scratch record is just a record—a series of samples recorded linearly on a record. The trick is just in how the samples are placed on the record. The speed of the drum loops and the spacing of the samples can create very helpful characteristics that make a crazy scratch sequence easier to execute. You may have heard people throw around terms such as “skipless records” or “Y record.” Those are common techniques used for creatively spacing samples around a record, which you can recreate in your DAW.

SKIP LESS

Relative mode in digital vinyl control systems like Scratch Live brought about the only true skipless-record technology. Skipless scratch records most certainly skip, but when you accidentally or intentionally move the needle you won’t lose the beat. That is because the makers of the records have taken into account the time it takes the needle to travel in one full rotation around the groove. At 33 rpm, it takes the needle 1.8 seconds, and at 45 rpm, it takes 1.33 seconds to complete the circle. So if a loop pressed on the record is always 1.8 seconds long, then each part of the loop will always fall on the same part of the record. Moving the needle around will make a skipping sound, but the loop will always fall back in the groove. What is the point, you may ask—doesn’t Relative mode accomplish the same



DJ Shortee rocked her Serato Scratch skills for all the cut-happy cats at Remix Hotel Miami 2007.

COURTESY SERATO

thing? Yes, but it’s the creative application of this simple concept that has made many a turntablist’s show.

One common technique is to set up a series of loops that are all cut at the same bpm and loop several of them together. With this method, you can switch between drum loops just by moving the needle. Another technique is to loop a series of rising bass lines or tones so you can physically “play” the samples by moving the needle up or down the record. To accomplish that in your DAW, you just need to have a few figures handy. At 33 rpm, a few common bpm’s will always work, including 100, 133.33 and 166.66, which are 0.6, 0.45 and 0.36 seconds long, respectively. Because those lengths are all perfect divisions of the record groove length, they should provide a skipless groove. At 45 rpm, you have a few other options, including 90, 135 and 180 bpm, which are 0.66, 0.44 and 0.33 seconds long, respectively. Do you see the pattern? All of those bpm’s are perfect divisions of the length of one complete groove. If you create your scratch groove at 45 rpm, you can do a cool trick by alternating between 90 and 180 bpm loops, smoothly switching between hip-hop and drum ‘n’ bass rhythms just by lifting up the needle.

THREE-PART SHOW

The Y record was a concept that famed DMC champ Q-Bert introduced to the world in 2004. The idea is an expansion on the skipless groove concept, but instead of loops, samples are arranged in a specific pattern.

Most Y records are cut using three samples spaced evenly across the record. At 33 rpm, you just need to create a loop that is 1.8 seconds long. Place the first sample at 0, the second at 0.6 seconds and the third at 1.2 seconds. With that configuration, the samples will always be at the same place on the record, at approximately 12, 4 and 8 o’clock. Loop that series for a while and then change the samples. Repeat for the duration of the record length. That way, you have the best of both worlds: skipless scratch samples and the ability to quickly move to new samples by just moving the needle. Q-Bert’s record employed a simple system of sample management that you may also want to try. Each of the three samples is always a different type. For instance, the first sample could always be a vocal and the second a drum hit. By keeping your sample layout consistent, you will always find the drums, vocals and effects on specific parts of the record.

Many of these techniques can be easily duplicated and in some cases performed more accurately with creative uses of loops and cue-point triggers. That does not mean the easiest road is necessarily the most rewarding. Finding interesting ways of performing complicated techniques with simple tools like the turntable can help the audience understand what you are doing and create a more interesting performance. In the long run, that might lead to more gigs and an enjoyable DJ career. Remember, though, it’s not what you use, but how you use it. So don’t let your medium speak more loudly than your art. 

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ROCK THE VOX

Apply effects to vocals at the right time and place for that special touch

Each vocalist is unique in his or her own right, and each microphone imparts a particular color or transparency to that voice. Similarly, effects dress up vocal tracks in very specific ways. Take heed to these standard-fare effects for vocals and some suggestions for their usage.

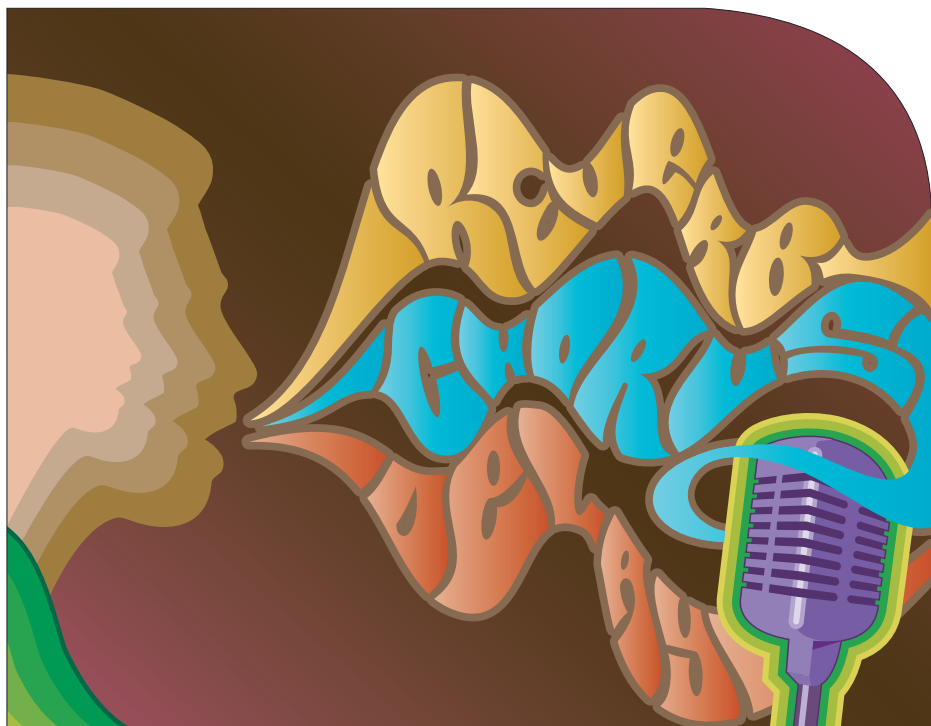
THE BIG SQUEEZE

Two frontline effects are compression and limiting. While they are not, strictly speaking, “effects,” they are so ubiquitous with vocal recording that I treat them as such. Ask many experienced mixing and mastering engineers, and one oft-heard complaint is, “too much compression!” Particularly in this plug-in-happy era of DAWs, I strongly recommend a less-is-more approach during the tracking (recording) phase. Compress more during mixing, where it is nondestructive and can be altered at any time. Sure, many experienced engineers may wish to impart the presence and punch of their vintage Universal Audio LA-2A (www.uaudio.com), Avalon AD2044 (www.avalondesign.com) or ELI Distressor (www.empiricallabs.com) on the way in, yet my mantra is still the drier you can keep your original tracks, the more each vocalist’s original tone comes through. And perhaps most importantly, you’ll leave more headroom for the later mixing and mastering phases. That said, the three outboard units listed above are both classic and modern favorites. On the plug-in side, I’m big on Apple Logic Studio’s built-in Multipressor (www.apple.com) and Waves Renaissance Compressor (www.waves.com).

SPACE IS THE PLACE

Arguably the first and most common thing artists and engineers do to spice-up vocals is to add reverb. Before you reach for that processor or plug-in, however, know that while in many cases it really polishes things, reverb is not a necessity for vocal tracks. Some vox are best left completely dry and very up front in the mix—though that generally requires a top-notch voice at the mic. If you’re keen to add a little reverb to a vocal track, the challenge is to apply just enough to sound a bit spacious and open, yet not pepper so much that the vocals become buried, washed out or ghostly.

Although there are no hard rules, I generally stick to applying the same reverb with identical settings when there are two or more vocal tracks to keep things cohesive. To separate them in the mix, I’ll use mild—or in rare cases, heavy—panning rather than varnishing them with distinctly different reverbs. On the more creative side, some groups such as Mazzy Star impart heavy reverb on vocals, which becomes part of their trademark sound. This may be the sound you’re looking for in a particular project. In such an instance, it’s important to think about the overall mix early on, as you will need to give the



vocals and other instruments plenty of sonic space to exist. I believe minimal music works best in that vein.

A few of my favorite reverbs include almost any Lexicon outboard unit (www.lexiconpro.com), TC Electronic Mega Reverb (part of the PowerCore hardware-software bundle) and TC Electronic VSS3 Stereo Source Reverb for Pro Tools TDM (www.tcelectronic.com). Logic Studio includes several good reverbs, but its Space Designer is the sweetest. Aside from delivering a natural sound and plenty of sculpting capabilities, the superb convolution reverb can simulate some of the world’s greatest spaces and can be used in stereo or surround.

Some engineers, such as rock hit producer Dave Fortman (Evanescence, Mudvayne), however, don’t care for reverb on vocals. An alternative is to apply delay to vocals. A single delay that sits snugly next to the main vocal (as opposed to a drawn-out, ping-pong type) with a lower volume in the mix substitutes for reverb nicely in many cases. Each performance is unique, so some experimentation is always the key. Also, to provide better mix control over the delay, using an aux send and returning the delay to a separate mixer channel is better than inserting the delay right on the main vocal track.

In using delay on vocals, you should be careful to listen for any combing (phasing) problems; if that arises, just flip the phase of the delay. Many delay units and plug-ins include such a feature, as do some consoles and audio editors such as BIAS Peak Pro (www.bias-inc.com). One of my all-time favorite tools is the TC Electronic D2 outboard rack unit.

QUICK FIX

The following scenario happens periodically with one of my regular clients. A guest vocalist flies into town for a recording session but has to leave the next day, and you need to use what you’ve recorded, even if the takes are, shall we say, less than perfect. Giving your vox a manual tune-up (literally) is sometimes essential. One of the choice tools I know for such a job is Celemony Melodyne (www.celemony.com). Simply stated, Melodyne automatically finds the separation of different notes in an audio file, and places it on a MIDI sequencer-type track, displaying each “split” exactly where it harmonically lives along a keyboard: C, C#, “C just-a-little-sharp” and so on. With a few clicks of the mouse, it detects the closest appropriate key and visually and sonically snaps each segment to the closest “correct” note, while allowing them to be manually moved as well. The results are spectacular. Melodyne is also a full-featured multitrack recorder, allowing you to work on entire projects in that fashion.

If you need a fix in real time, try out Antares’ Auto-Tune (www.antarestech.com), a plug-in that can work during or post-recording. Like Melodyne, Auto-Tune auto-detects and fixes pitch problems. Despite the seemingly essential nature of these tools, I advise against laziness. Don’t put an instance of Auto-Tune on every vocal *just because* it is slightly out of tune. If you can track the vocal again and get it right naturally, that is always the better path. Use pitch-correction tools like you would spices: sparingly, on sections of tracks rather than whole ones. Vocals tend to sound unnatural when you use pitch correction too liberally. 



In early 1986, three young rappers from Hollis, Queens came together to record a radical, stripped down collection of raw beats and street-smart rhymes. The album goes on to become a worldwide sensation, selling over 3 million copies and changing the sound of popular music forever.

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INSIDER TRAINING

Get insight into the music business from the perspective of a pro vocal coach

I had no intentions whatsoever of becoming a vocal coach/producer. Most of my life had been spent pursuing my own artist career, and that was what I believed my path to be. About 20 years ago, I was approached by a guy who ran a rock 'n' roll guitar school and asked if I could help one of his students who was struggling vocally. I thought I probably could, so I took on the task. At that time, nobody was really catering to the needs of rock or urban vocalists, so I became the go-to girl for that. And 20 years later, here we are!

You have worked with seasoned vocalists such as Usher, but even the pros need work. You call yourself a "personal trainer for today's greatest vocal athletes." How do you get them in shape?

It all depends on what they need. That's the real skill of being what I would consider a great personal trainer. All singers are *not* the same, and while certain basic principles might apply to everyone, the fine-tuning is what separates the great from the good. My job is to constantly evaluate and critique where artists are functioning, where they want to be functioning and how to get them there. I have to meet people where they are and be the bridge that gets them where they want to be.

For example, obviously Usher was already a good singer and a vocal artist with a thumbprint of his own. However, where most singers fall short is on technique. On the album *8701*, Usher performed many great riffs and runs, but if you break them down, not all of them were accurate—fast perhaps, but not correct. In helping him to understand some basic theory, he gained an understanding of the accurate notes that belonged in particular scale beds that accompanied the keys he was singing in. If you listen to the difference it made on his album *Confessions*, I think you'll get the idea.

After years of teaching 50 voice students a week, what have you learned is most important in developing a singer, as well as an artist's career?

Developing an artist is about making someone the best they can be at what they do. Singing is a physiological function really, and helping people to understand that is a huge part of helping them to learn how to have control of that function. The whole artist development and marketing thing is a totally different ball game, and it's about business. Most artists don't know anything about business, which is why so many of them are not successful in that sense. In the end, we all wanna say it's about the music and the art—which it really is—but if commerce weren't attached to it, not so many people would be clamoring to be part of it. Artists need to learn how to cover their assets and understand the business that makes successful careers have staying power.



Jan Smith (right) may look nice, but she and Atlanta production partner Huston Singletary can dish out the tough vocal love.

JONATHAN HARPER

When labels hire you to work with an artist, what are their goals? And what kinds of problems arise in the process?

Labels have finally gotten to the point where they realize that if the artist's voice goes down, the whole show stops. They're putting an awful lot of expectation and demand on those two little strips of fiber that sit in someone's neck. Enter the voice consultant. Labels have at least begun to understand that we are the folks who help their artists persevere under the demands of the lifestyle of being a touring artist. They basically expect me to be a miracle worker, which I am not, but I do deliver results and can do so under fire. You have to—it's the nature of the beast.

With your production partner, Huston Singletary, you develop talent and discover artists. What does an artist or band have to do to grab your attention?

I'm really more concerned with great art versus marketing. As a consumer, and a very critical one, I want to hear great singers, not the flavor of the week. I want to hear ridiculous songs that become the soundtrack of my life—for example, Dolly Parton's version of "I Will Always Love You" and "Purple Rain" by Prince—not the hook or beat of the month. I want to watch incredible entertainers onstage, not mediocre talent who got lucky and got a deal because of something that is totally not related to music. That's what gets my attention.

As a songwriter and "middle man" between a major label's need for a hit and an artist's desire to write

creatively from the heart, how do you bridge the gap and hopefully make both parties happy?

A good song is a good song. A hit song is defined by sales. Nobody sits down and writes what they know is a hit song. The public decides what a "hit" is. If it sells 2.5 million copies, it's a hit! If it tanks, it ain't a hit. That doesn't mean it's not a good or well-written song. I help my artists write good songs—well constructed, well thought out, musically and lyrically sound and relevant to that artist. The rest of it ain't up to me. Not every song—nor every artist—is destined for greatness.

What are some mistakes you've seen artists make that have negatively affected their progress and success?

They quit. Greatness doesn't stop. Do you think that Beethoven ever got sick of writing music? Probably, but he was obsessed and never quit. He couldn't. People call themselves artists, but they're really not. They're captivated by popular culture—what they see and want and think they deserve, but that's not being an artist. An artist is a person who works at their craft every day they live and breathe because they don't know another way to live. Why am I successful? I have done nothing but eat, breathe and sleep vocals my entire life. If that is what makes others seek me out for my advice and counsel, then so be it. But even if they didn't, and even when they didn't, I was still eating, breathing and sleeping vocals. And when they stop coming? I'll still be singing and raising the bar on what I did yesterday. There are all kinds of ways for me to make money, but I can't imagine living without music and singing. ●

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Includes stereo electret microphone, earbuds, headphone extension cable with lapel clip, power supply, USB cable (A to Mini B) and protective carrying case with mic pouch

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TECH SECTOR

NEW PRODUCTS

By Asher Fulero

M-AUDIO MICROTRACK II

PROFESSIONAL 2-CHANNEL MOBILE DIGITAL RECORDER

M-Audio helped launch a small downpour of professional handheld digital audio recorders into the market with the MicroTrack in 2006, and now it's the first company to follow up its first such product with a sequel. **MicroTrack II** (\$399.95; www.m-audio.com) is thankfully not just a tired rehashing of the original plot. It takes care of many complaints regarding the original version by adding an analog input limiter, an extended input gain range, 48V phantom power, faster file transfer rate over USB 2.0 and the ability to record files larger than 2 GB in size. You can also place markers while recording WAV files to make editing easier, and a new user-created folder structure helps organization. A new blue backlit display makes viewing easier, and you can dim the display to save power. Fortunately, the MicroTrack II's battery life has been extended. It now records for four to five hours on a single battery charge or three hours when using phantom power. Optional USB battery packs can extend MicroTrack II's operating life.

Like the original, the MicroTrack II records WAV as high as 24-bit/96 kHz or MP3 files through stereo balanced 1/4-inch TRS inputs or an 1/8-inch mic input. Also included are stereo RCA line outputs, a coaxial S/PDIF input and an 1/8-inch headphone jack.



SYNESTHESIA MANDALA 2.0

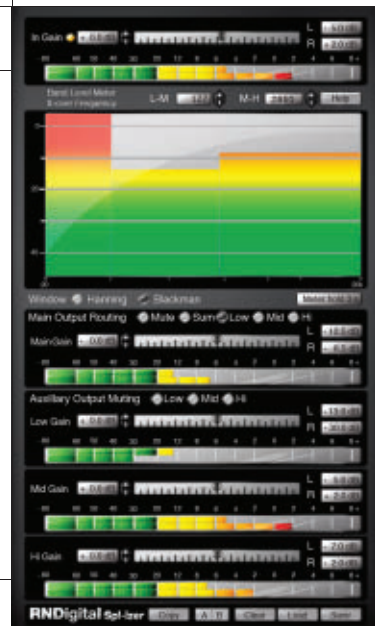
ELECTRONIC "SMART" DRUM AND SYNTHESIZER

Called by its maker "the smartest thing you'll ever hit with a stick," the new **Mandala 2.0** (\$349; www.mandaladrum.com) is a high-definition electronic drum pad and software combo that was created by Synesthesia in collaboration with Tool drummer Danny Carey. Compatible with most major software, including Ableton Live, Apple GarageBand, NI Reaktor and Battery via its USB connection, Mandala 2.0 features 128 concentric rings that can be divided into as many as seven zones, each with its own MIDI settings. The included software can synthesize sounds, as well as perform from sample libraries, and comes with more than 100 presets for quick usage (including the 3,000-sample model of the Black Beauty snare drum); the library is 4 GB in all. The programming possibilities are endless; one example had the drum triggering a single synth-bass note while the placement from center-to-rim controlled the filter frequency for great dynamic drum-synth control. Another had the elements of a jazz combo—upright bass, piano and drum kit—laid out across multiple zones. Creating custom configurations is easy, and hopefully this open design should help to inspire users to think up all sorts of creative ideas.

RNDIGITAL SPL-IZER

MULTIBAND ROUTING PLUG-IN

Most DAW users are by now familiar with the concept of multiband processing, commonly implemented as compressors that offer independent compression for three to five sections of the frequency spectrum. But RNDigital **SPL-izer** (\$129; www.rogernicholsdigital.com) helps you use multiband processing in other settings, too. Essentially a routable 3-band crossover, SPL-izer allows you to dial in two frequency split points on your track to create three output channels that appear inside your DAW as individual buses. Simply open one of these buses on an aux channel and apply whatever effects you like. There are an infinite number of possibilities for creative usage, including splitting vocals to apply effects to just the top frequencies or helping to "drive" the low end of an electric piano while leaving the high end shimmery. The list goes on. The plug-in comes in Audio Units, VST and RTAS formats for Mac and Windows and can also send an output on its own channel, switchable between Low Band, Mid Band, Hi Band, Sum or Mute. Each band has an adjustable gain and level meter, and you can choose between Hanning- or Blackman-style windows for different types of visual feedback. Start splitting your tracks and see where multiband processing can take you.





TC ELECTRONIC POWERCORE X8

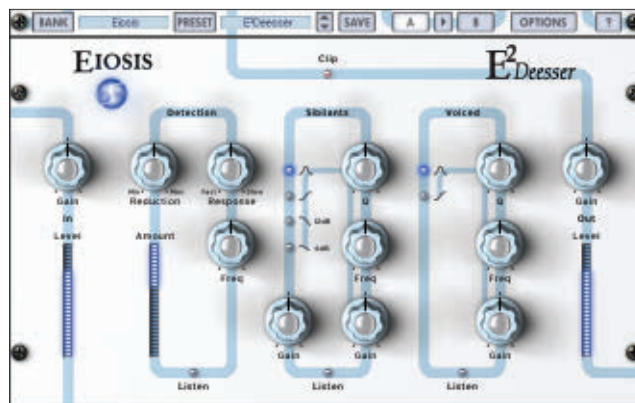
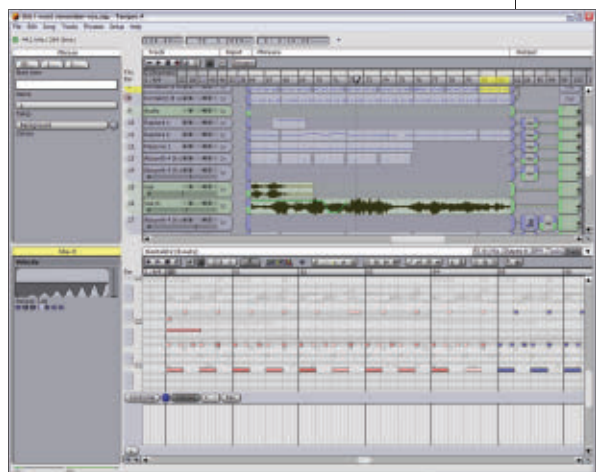
EXTERNAL FIREWIRE DSP SYSTEM

The TC Electronic **PowerCore X8** (\$1,745; www.tcelectronic.com) just makes a good thing better. With eight Motorola DSP chips and a floating-point PowerPC processor, the X8 has twice as much power as TC's original PowerCore and four times as much as its PowerCore Compact. Compatible with VST, Audio Units and RTAS formats, the 14 included plug-ins are each able to run with multiple instances while creating nearly zero hit to your computer's processing power. Packed into a single rackspace, the X8 connects via FireWire and operates using the new PowerCore 3.0 system software, which features an improved look and feel, as well as new enhancements such as meter zoom, easy parallel compression and the new TC SideChainer plug-in with hi- and low-cut filters. The new OS is available for existing PowerCore users as a free download from TC's Website, and while you're there you can use a \$500 voucher that comes with the X8 to purchase a few "optional" plug-ins from third parties such as Sonnox, TubeTech, Novation, Softube and more.

ANGRY RED PLANET TEMPER

MIDI SEQUENCER

Unlike most DAWs, the Angry Red Planet **Temper** (\$50 uncrippled, unexpiring trialware; www.angryredplanet.com) sequencer is designed to offer original tools that focus on MIDI and shapes, allowing more intuitive programming and experimental manipulation. Chock full of creative new ideas for MIDI-based sound design, Temper uses a modular and flexible environment with a clean interface that is ready to help you experiment. Interactive, real-time phrase manipulation allows you to take bits of recorded data and do amazing things with them using futuristic tools like the Velocirapture, which lets you create a line of Velocity-sculpted notes. The Rudiments tool allows "painting" of drum parts, and Crudiments can generate complex filter sweeps; these tools use Shapes, an interactive "curve designer," to actively shape the timing and Velocity of the MIDI notes as you adjust the angles of the curve. MIDI data-manipulation tools let you experiment further; four basic tools let you modify the start/end times, pitch and Velocity of the MIDI data, again using the Shape designer. The Flip tool can flip notes by time or pitch. Compatible with VST, Temper easily exports MIDI tracks via drag-and-drop for use with other applications, and saved Shapes can also be exported and imported for trading with other users.



EIOSIS E²DEESSER

CREATIVE DE-ESSING PLUG-IN

An unfortunately common problem with vocal tracks is sibilance—an overly boosted ringing at a particular frequency that often occurs when microphones are used in a very loud setting (such as onstage). That can usually be combated with a de-esser, which uses a compressor fed by a frequency-filtered sidechain. However, strong de-essing requires a lower threshold that can often leave the vocal track lacking in the high end after carving out its frequency band. Enter Eiosis **E²Deesser** (\$TBA; www.eiosis.com). By separating the detection process from the manipulation process, the E² lets you dial in the detection ratio while controlling the feel and sound of the sibilants, all while allowing the voiced parts (the rest of the spectrum) to be independently filtered. Add some sparkle back after de-essing, use it on slap bass to balance pulled and thumbed notes, or try it on a whole mix for some "sparkle-control." The sibilant and voiced elements of the track may be independently monitored, and the sibilants may actually be routed to a bus or aux send for further manipulation. This flexibility makes it a very creative tool, even for nonsibilance-related uses.

DIGIDESIGN MBOX2 MICRO

PORTABLE PRO TOOLS INTERFACE

No matter which DAW you use, Pro Tools is the closest thing to an industry standard, and you'll find it in every professional studio looking to interface with the outside world. But Pro Tools is also the only DAW not capable of running without some form of hardware connected. Thankfully, Digidesign has revealed the **Mbox 2 Micro** (\$279; www.digidesign.com), a flash-drive-size USB dongle that provides Pro Tools authorization and a 24-bit/48 kHz 1/8-inch headphone output for monitoring on the go. Featuring a rugged anodized aluminum exterior, the Mbox 2 Micro's only extraneous feature is the small volume wheel for adjusting headphone volume. Packaged with Pro Tools LE and an extensive plug-in bundle from Bomb Factory and DigiRack (as well as the Digidesign XPand sampler), the Micro is absolutely the most portable way to use Pro Tools, whether editing the previous night's show or creating new songs with virtual instruments and loops while on the go. Now all you need to work on complete Pro Tools sessions is a laptop, your headphones and an Mbox 2 Micro.



RC4 WIRELESS

RC4-MAGIC

WIRELESS DMX & DIMMING SYSTEM

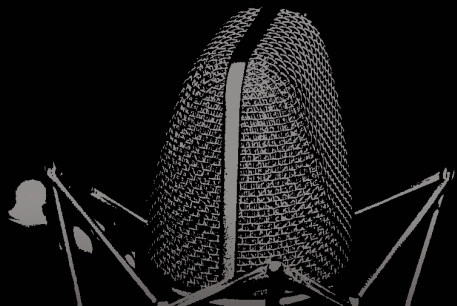
Just the word "wireless" is enough to light us up; nothing would be nicer than a studio or stage rig running in perfect harmony without a single cable to be seen. One more step toward that vision comes from RC4 Wireless line of **RC4-Magic Wireless DMX Dimming Box Toolkits** (\$899 and up; www.theatrewireless.com), collections of small devices that offer transmission and reception of DMX and dimming data across spaces of a maximum of 200 feet, eliminating messy DMX cabling and allowing secure and reliable visual control with less setup. Using Direct Sequence Spread Spectrum (DSSS) Digital Radio, the encrypted signal includes error-checking and correction codes and is not affected by minor interference. Each device has a unique ID number, and if the signal (or the power) is lost, the box will automatically search for its numerical match for auto-system-reset without having to reassign each box. That way, multiple RC4-Magic systems may be used in the same space without the fear of getting signals crossed. If there's a better way to use modern technology than to clear cables off messy stages, let us know. 



SOLID STATE LOGIC X-EQ

PLUG-IN FOR THE DUENDE SYSTEM

New plug-ins are always an exciting thing for owners of SSL's powerful outboard-DSP system, Duende. Recently, SSL unveiled **X-EQ** (£295 (approx. \$610; www.solid-state-logic.com), an ultra-transparent parametric 10-band equalizer flexible enough to cover general duties as well as more precise, surgical EQing. What makes it really powerful is that each of the 10 bands may be set to its own EQ type for dialing in just the right response from your curve. Overlaid against a detailed active FFT Signal Analyzer, the EQ curve may be manipulated by simply grabbing it and moving the curve points, by turning onscreen knobs, by scrolling the mouse wheel or by numerical data entry. Bands 1 and 10 are low- and high-cut filters, respectively, with five available topographies; bands 2 and 9 are shelving EQs with proportional Q; and bands 3 through 8 are Bell Filters with nine available EQ types and may each be switched between standard-series or parallel signal flow. A/B control lets you audition two presets quickly, and every parameter can receive DAW automation. Input and output meters offer stereo RMS metering with adjustable range. Duende users won't find a better sounding or more flexible EQ. Also, look for a release of the new X-Comp compressor for Duende soon.



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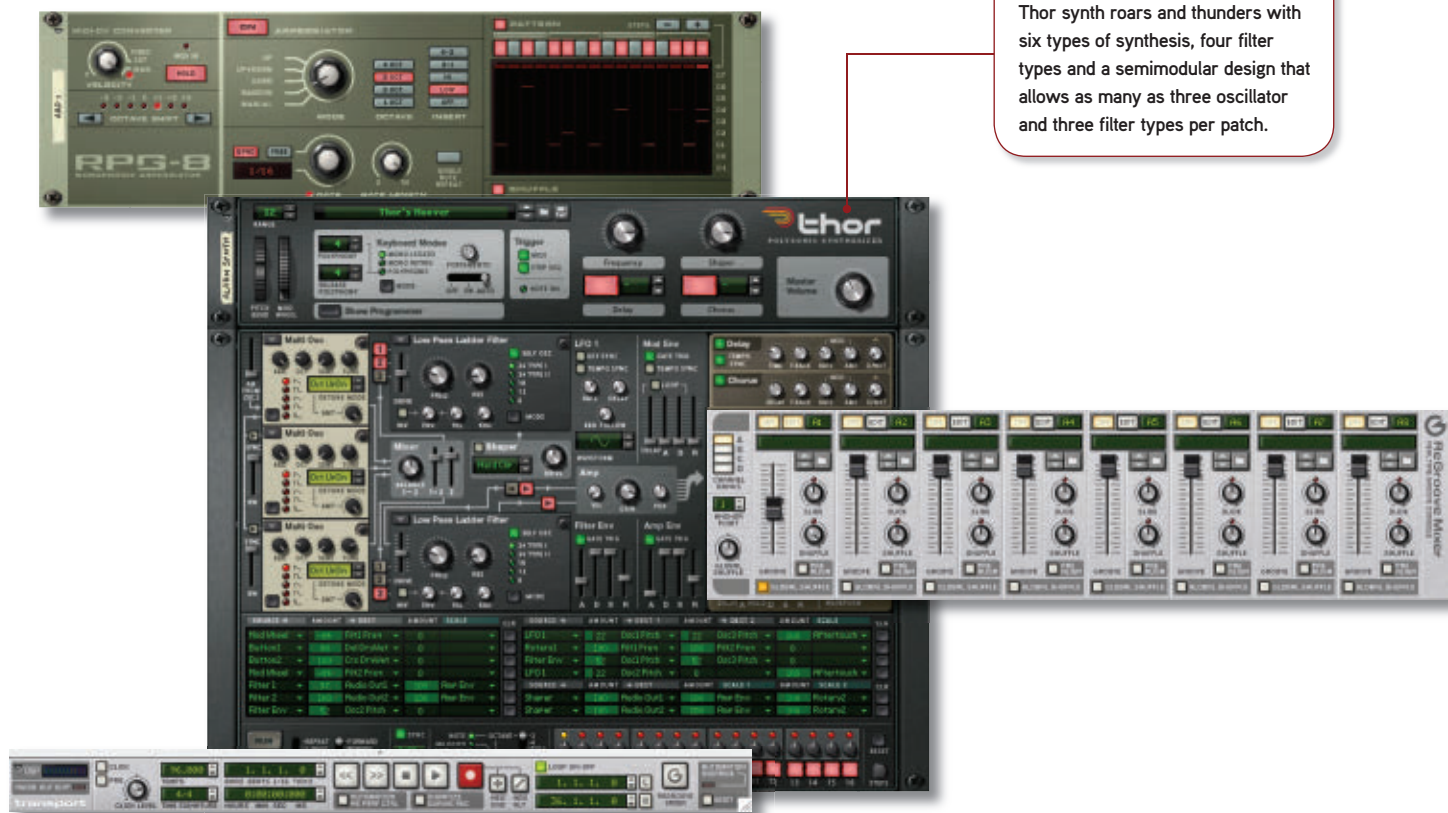
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PHOTO - VIDEO - PRO AUDIO



HAMMER TIME > Reason 4's new Thor synth roars and thunders with six types of synthesis, four filter types and a semimodular design that allows as many as three oscillator and three filter types per patch.

PROPELLERHEAD

REASON 4

THE EVER-GROWING RACK EXPANDS AGAIN

BY DOUG EISENGREIN

The Stockholm, Sweden masterminds have done it again. Although the release of Reason 3 was a biggie, and dedicated users have had to wait quite some time for the new version, Reason 4 is arguably the most important and feature-rich release since version 1.0. Propellerhead's Website boasts, "Your Reason rack just got bigger," and that's certainly true with the new additions of Thor Polysonic Synthesizer, RPG-8 Arpeggiator and ReGroove "groove management console." But it may well be the massively overhauled main sequencer that will prove to be the best-of-class new feature for seasoned Reason users.

I tested Reason 4 on a modest Apple 1.33 GHz iBook G4 with 512 MB of RAM and also on a more robust dual-2.0 GHz PowerMac G5 tower with 2 GB of RAM. I wanted to see how well the lesser of the two would perform on this historically efficient yet ever-flowering program. The install process is the simplest matter of dragging-and-dropping the program from the DVD to the Applications folder. Upon first launch, Reason installs the two classic ReFills—Factory Sound Bank and Orkester—and asks you to register online. No dongle is required—a plus in my book. I've been a Reason user since version 1.0, and as soon as I opened the program, it was obviously familiar, yet looked a little slicker. The transport has a more polished, professional appearance. The addition of a running time interface in hours, minutes, seconds and milliseconds has been needed in my opinion and is a very welcome addition, as are the New Dub and New Alt buttons.

PROPELLERHEAD SOFTWARE

REASON 4 > \$499

Pros: Stable and CPU-friendly. Running time displayed as H:M:S:M in Transport. Completely redesigned sequencer with multiple lanes per track. Great sounding, extremely flexible semimodular synth, Thor, added. New arpeggiator, RPG-8, easy to use and sports broad feature range. Unprecedented 32-channel groove mixer, ReGroove, added.

Cons: Arpeggiator doesn't automatically run with sequencer start.

Contact: www.propellerheads.se

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Mac: G4/1 GHz; 512 MB RAM (1 GB recommended); OS 10.4 or later; 2 GB hard disk space

PC: P4, AMD Athlon XP or better; 512 MB RAM (1 GB recommended); Windows XP/Vista; 2 GB hard-disk space

STEPPED-UP SEQUENCER

The obvious change in the sequencer is the addition of multiple “lanes” on tracks; each track now represents just one device in the rack. Rather than confusing, multiple tracks representing single devices clogging up the sequencer, Reason 4 now sports multiple lanes for different note takes, pattern changes, automation, etc. All lanes are grouped together neatly under one track, and just like the devices in the rack, each track and subsequent lane can be collapsed or expanded to manage screen space—laptop users especially will appreciate that. Note lanes can be edited, muted and deleted, and each has a miniature level meter, while the other lane types include similar, specific function controls. Linked to the record button on the transport are two new buttons: New Dub and New Alt. In Record mode, when the New Dub is pressed, all notes from the selected lane are instantly cleared, and a new overdub begins; when New Alt is pressed, a new lane is automatically created and selected while the previous is muted.

Each lane can be custom-named, and each note lane features a drop-down menu for choosing among different ReGroove Mixer channels. For veteran Reason users, this new layout may at first seem disorienting when opening songs created in older versions, but after spending just a few minutes with it, the new design makes logical sense and is a vast improvement. One caveat here is that when the New Alt button mutes previous note takes, the Mute button on the lane is not engaged unless Loop is enabled, and the song position locator is within the loop. Otherwise, you have to mute and un-mute the individual clips via the Edit menu (or hot key) in case there are clip outside the of the loop that shouldn't be muted by the New Alt command.

THE GOD OF THUNDER HAS ARRIVED

Reason 4 brings a big new synth around the block—Thor. It represents Reason's first foray into semimodular synthesis and looks somewhat like an old modular. Users have access to three simultaneous oscillators, each selectable from among six oscillator types: Analog, Wavetable, Phase Modulation, FM Pair, Multi-Oscillator and Noise. Those are mixed and then fed into one, two or three filter banks; for each bank, users get to choose from four filter types: Low-Pass Ladder, State Variable, Comb and Formant. An LFO with 18 selectable waveform types is onboard, along with an ADR modulation envelope and ADSR filter and amp envelopes. There is a global sample-and-hold ADSR envelope and a second LFO, and if all that weren't enough, there are adjustable Chorus and Delay effects.

A display for modular routing design sits below all the sonic-sculpting goodies, and below that sits a dedicated 16-step sequencer. In short, there are enough toys to play with here to keep even advanced synthesizer geeks engaged for quite some time.

Having personally owned at one time or another classic Sequential Circuits and Oberheim analog synth monsters, as well as cream-of-the-crop modern modular soft-synths from Native Instruments, Arturia and Cycling '74, I must say that the Propellerhead posse has designed a synth to turn heads. Just the presets, which include patches created by such luminaries as



LANE CHANGE > The much-improved Reason 4 sequencer includes new track “lanes,” which are separate segments inside of one track for different takes, pattern changes, automation and other information.

Richard Devine, Morgan Geist and Plaid, tell the story of a mighty synth that is capable of glossy FM leads, Arp-like sci-fi pads and strange squelches, fat Moog-inspired basses, Waldorf-like Wavetable patches and plenty of ground in between. While I don't love all of the presets (who ever does?), there are plenty to get users started, and they are arranged like all Reason presets in tidy category folders.

STEP UP (AND DOWN) TO THIS

The next big bang in Reason 4 comes from the RPG-8 Monophonic Arpeggiator. Like its cousin, the Matrix step sequencer, RPG-8 will connect itself automatically to the nearest appropriate sound module available, including pitch and mod wheel CV controls. The interface is straightforward and easy to familiarize with quickly. There are as many as 16 steps available, which can all turn on and off at the click of a button. Arpeggios can be assigned to play via key press or play continuously, they can cover a one- to four-octave range, and there is a ± 3 Octave Shift control. Altogether, all 88 keys of a piano are within range, and then some. Arpeggios can be assigned on-the-fly to play up, down, up + down, random or manually, and there is a huge range of tempo-synced and tempo-independent rates of play, from the standard 16th-note down to one-note-per-beat and on up to what sounds like a tight drum roll. Note lengths have a freely editable global adjustment, from very short staccato to a smooth “tie” legato. Like other modules in the rack such as ReDrum, RPG-8 includes Reason's well-designed Shuffle switch, which gives the pattern some loose swing; it can only be adjusted via the ReGroove Mixer's Global Shuffle knob.

Though I am admittedly not crazy well-versed in different arpeggiators, this one is thoughtfully designed and is capable of much more than just a batch of preset tempo-locked arpeggios. The one big issue with RPG-8 is that, even if you have set it to continuous looping without pressing keys, if the main sequencer is stopped and started again, it resets itself to “off,” and you have to key it back in. Another nice upgrade would be for Random mode to have a second option whereby a single generated pattern loops continuously; presently, the pattern gets regenerated with each loop. Adding an additional 16 steps for a total of 32 would also be welcome.

GROOVE SALAD

The final big addition to Reason 4 is the ReGroove Mixer Real-Time Groove Console. ReGroove is an interesting concept; it is a 32-channel (four banks of

eight) “groove handling mixer,” which can slap any of 32 editable grooves onto any of the sequencer tracks or individual lanes. It's essentially the “gradually adjustable” swing feature that Reason users have been craving, but it's also much more because you can apply one global groove to your song, or break it down by assigning different grooves to all of your different song parts. Propellerhead has provided a variety of groove presets that are called up track-by-track, include HipHop, Reggae, Vintage Soul-RnB, MPC-60 and even grooves that simulate classic vinyl recordings. Each preset represents a certain rhythmic feel; swing and varying note Velocities are applied.

Controls on ReGroove's face include channel faders that “fade-in” the groove amount, adjustable Slide and Shuffle pots on each channel, a Global Shuffle that can be assigned (or not) to each track and more. When you first apply a groove, it might sound rhythmically dissonant with the rest of the song, but with subtle shifts in the various controls, you can fit things together like pieces of a puzzle. This tool is not for mechanical, Kraftwerk-ian types, though; it can really push the feel of tracks into hard swing territory, and yet a deep level of fine-tuning is available, as well as “de-shuffling” tracks with heavy swing. I've seen a bumper sticker once or twice around San Francisco that reads, “Drum Machines Have No Soul.” I personally disagree with that statement, and I've long liked the feel of Reason's Shuffle. But in a nutshell, ReGroove is killer and should put the opinion on that sticker to rest.

RACK IT UP

The Swedes have done another excellent job with Reason 4. They have upped the ante of the sequencer and transport modules to compete with the big leagues; they also raised their own standard once again with Thor, turning out a semimodular synthesizer that is arguably worth most of the price of Reason 4 by itself. Propellerhead also implemented an easy-to-use yet feature-rich arpeggiator, RPG-8, which I am certain many seasoned users have been craving. Finally, ReGroove is nothing short of quantizing-on-steroids. And all of this has come to us without much additional CPU-draining baggage or a raised price tag. Yes, there are a few blips and desires on my radar, but with all these new goodies, I can't complain; I only applaud a job well done. 



Listen to exclusive audio clips made with Reason 4 at remixmag.com.

TRIPLE THREAT > The dual analog mixing channels allow you to blend audio sources from the iPod, CD players or even turntables.



DUELING PLATTERS > The jog wheels serve as both scroll wheel and scratch interfaces.

FULL COLOR > The iDJ2's vivid four-color display makes finding tracks simple and easy on the eye.

NUMARK iDJ2

IMPROVED IPOD DJ WORKSTATION IS READY TO DOCK AND LOAD

BY EAN GOLDEN

> This thing is *so cool*. There, I did it; I gushed at a prosumer iPod DJ gadget. Having been deeply involved in digital DJ technology for the past five years, sometimes things get so techy that we forget in the end it's all about music. The iDJ2 seems to step aside, give you just what you need to mix and let you enjoy playing music. Several times I completely forgot that I was writing a review and just really enjoyed mixing two tracks together. For a DJ that learned the ropes on vinyl more than a decade ago, that was very refreshing. If you want to cut, scratch, beat juggle and drop insane loops and effects, then the iDJ2 is not for you. However, if you just want to seamlessly blend together your digital music collection without needing a laptop, your search may be over.

At 6.5 pounds, the iDJ2 is light but not flimsy. The matte black finish and brushed silver trim give it a high-class look that promises to stand up to regular abuse. In terms of size, it's roughly the width of a 15-inch laptop but with an extra three inches tacked onto the length. That makes it too big to fit into your average DJ bag, but it would not be a stretch to assume it could be carried in a slightly oversize backpack. Overall, it's safe to say that it would not be too hard to carry the iDJ2 around to gigs, and it won't take up too much space in a DJ booth.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

The iDJ2 aims at being a very usable piece of gear and not just a cool concept embodied in physical form. To help achieve that aim, Numark provides all of the outputs and inputs you would need for many typical DJ scenarios. Let's say you're a mobile DJ; the balanced XLR outputs can run long lengths directly into a pair of speakers, and the built-in microphone input on the front means you won't need an extra mixer. With a Record output (stereo RCA) for posterity and two sets of line inputs (also both stereo RCA) for backup CD players (in case your iPod crashes), this powerful package could feasibly give you everything you need to rock any wedding from a single iPod.

If you're a club DJ and you simply want to incorporate MP3 files into an existing vinyl or CD collection without investing in a laptop, you have two easy options. First, you could run the RCA master output into the club's mixer and blend the iDJ2 into the mix like a third CD player, or you could even use the iDJ2 as the master mixer, running both

NUMARK

iDJ2 > \$599

Pros: Plays two songs from one iPod, with tempo adjustment and key lock. Fully integrated controller/mixer/iPod dock. Effective design. Two USB ports for reading flash drives, hard drives and other iPods. Video output. Direct Mode allows playing AAC tracks from the iTunes Music Store (with some limited functionality).

Cons: Poor scratching response.

Contact: www.numark.com

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REVIEW » iDJ2

turntables and CD players into the onboard 2-channel mixer. Although it doesn't have all the bells and whistles of many modern club mixers, all the basics are here, including 3-band EQ, gain, mic input, headphone cueing and a smooth crossfader with adjustable curve.

Even though Numark may not have built the iDJ2 with pro DJs like myself in mind, I can't help but think of all the great applications for the concept—for example, the casual DJ invitation. Many times friends will invite you down to a midweek party, a loft or even their home to spin a short guest set. You always want to accept the invite, but that means carting—at the very least—a laptop, or in my case 40 pounds of gear. Imagine being invited over to spin and having to bring only an iPod. That invitation is impossible to turn down.

SCRATCH AND LOCK

The good folks at Numark have tried to keep all of the basic DJ functions available, including scratching. The fact that scratching was even offered with an iPod at this price level was impressive, so I was not expecting a Q-Bert-like performance. Not surprisingly, the iDJ2 is not ready for ITF competition yet. Although backspins and basic wiki-wiki are possible, the jog wheels suffered from significant sticker slip and a pronounced ramp up that made cueing on time difficult.

Even though my expectations were equally low, Numark really surprised me with the key lock performance. For those that are not familiar with this feature, here it is in a nutshell. Most DJ programs, CD players and even some turntables offer the ability to change the speed of a song without affecting the pitch—you can radically speed up files and not get the chipmunk effect. Not to be outdone, the iDJ2 includes key lock on each deck, which can require a lot of processing power to sound good. I was pleasantly surprised that it sounds great even when pitched to extremes. The low end stayed strong when pushed into the range where poor key lock systems would start to break apart and show their flaws.

A LITTLE EXTRA

The iDJ2 comes with a 128 MB USB memory stick equipped with some bonus songs and a comprehensive manual. Sure, the flash drive may not be worth much, but it underscores two important points. One, rather than waste paper, Numark gives you the important information in a modern way. Two, you can use flash drives (or USB hard drives) in conjunction with your iDJ2 through two USB ports on the back panel. That's a great feature that has a very commonplace use. Let's say you're hosting an iPod mix night or you have a series of DJs playing after each other, all with iPods. How do you switch between DJs? Even the leader in digital DJing, Serato Scratch Live, can't offer an in-house solution to that problem. With the iDJ2, all you need to do is load a few "transition tracks" into the supplied USB stick and mix the next song directly off the flash drive. Then swap out the iPods, and the next DJ is on—no cable swapping or awkward silence required.

The iDJ2, like most digital DJ programs out there, offers the ability to analyze and display a rough view of what each song looks like sonically. That gives you the opportunity to visually scroll through a track and easily find crucial points in the song faster. Although the iDJ2

can perform the analysis itself, Numark also provides a software librarian so you can harness the power of your computer to plow through large collections. Once the program has analyzed each song, small information tags are attached to the files, so the iDJ2 can always pull it up when loaded.

COMPLAINTS DEPARTMENT

Yes, when mixing off an iPod, one can't get too nitpicky, but there are a few things to know before buying. Before playing a track, the iDJ2 loads it into internal memory for fast, accurate and reliable playback. In order to ensure instant load times, you must build profiles for all your tracks with the librarian software and then update it as you add new songs. That can take all day for loaded iPods. Otherwise, longer tracks can take up to 20 seconds to load.

On-the-fly looping is turning into a must-have for most digital DJs because more and more performers want to create extended edits of songs on the fly. Numark wisely includes the ability to loop sections on each iDJ2 deck, but it turned out to be difficult to use effectively. Technically, there is nothing wrong with the feature; the problem was more a case of reviewer error. Unfortunately, I think most users are also going to find it hard to drop loop in and out points perfectly every time. The iDJ2 advertises "seamless looping," but in my testing, I had to be very precise with the loop placement; it felt like playing Russian roulette with the timing of a mix.

MIXING IN MOTION

Did I mention this thing even plays video? Yes, don't let that iPod video go to waste; you can directly stream video out of the S-Video port on the back of the iDJ2. Before you get too excited and start conjuring up images of scratching and mixing music videos, there is a limit to what you can do with video and the iDJ2. For starters, only Deck A can play video—Deck B is disabled for it. Additionally, all of the DJ functions—including pitch bending, tempo adjustment and scratching—are disabled. Don't lose hope entirely, though. Numark chose to build the iDJ2 on the Linux platform and provided the source code on its Website. Theoretically, some really motivated coders might be able to come up with a way to get the iDJ2 to actually mix and blend videos in the future. Speaking of iPods, with no less than 16 versions out there, you may be wondering if yours will work with the iDJ2. To answer simply, if you own an iPod nano, Mini or 4th-generation or later standard iPod, you will be able to take full advantage of iDJ2. Other iPods support certain features, but you should check the complete compatibility list at Numark.com

Technology seems to move forward in baby steps—quickly, but still at one short interval at a time. Sometimes a product makes a bigger leap forward, combining several developments and redefining the way we look at technology. Just as the iPod did for music, the Numark iDJ2 may also mark a big jump forward for digital DJing. Not ironically, it's built around the storage device just about everyone has or has access to at this point, possibly solving the problem of a universal product. The jury is still out as to whether the public will accept this new concept in DJing, but the potential is there for the product to make a big impression. 



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SPARKLE MAGIC > It looks good, it sounds good, and despite the thin shaft connecting the capsule to the body, the Grand Pearl is built sturdily for road-worthiness.

VIOLET DESIGN

GRAND PEARL > \$749

Pros: Great sound. Versatile. Solid construction. Excellent value.

Cons: Somewhat narrow pickup range for live vocals.

Contact: www.violet-design.com

VIOLET DESIGN GRAND PEARL

MULTIPURPOSE CARDIOID CONDENSER MIC JEWELS UP PLAIN SOUNDS

BY MIKE HIRATZKA

Whether you're recording vocals or live instruments, the first—and often most critical—step of your signal path is a microphone. Selecting the right microphone for the job can make your vocals shine, your guitars jam and your drums rock, so knowing the strengths and weaknesses of each mic in your collection will help you make that choice. If you aren't in the financial position to afford numerous microphones, then it's imperative that you select one or two good all-purpose mics that will help get the job done without breaking the bank. With the introduction of the Grand Pearl, Violet Design offers a unidirectional cardioid condenser mic that is not only intended for studio applications such as vocal and instrument recording, but is also primarily marketed as a handheld unit for stage vocals. With that kind of versatility, it may just be the perfect mic for the budget-conscious recordist.

The Grand Pearl arrived in a polished wooden box that also contained a mic clip and windscreen that fits over the mic's head grille, which is intended for live vocal use. The microphone feels very solid, and its stylish design distinguishes it from most units on the market. The spherical diaphragm capsule is separated

from the body of the mic, and while it may look delicate, you can rest assured that the Grand Pearl is very well constructed and should handle the rigors of stage use (within reason, of course). The mic features large dual electrostatic gold sputtered diaphragms that provide fast transient response, minimal sound coloration and the ability to handle loud sound-pressure levels. The XLR connection is gold plated for optimum signal transfer, so be sure to use a high-quality cable when connecting the Grand Pearl to your rig. Remember, your recording will only be as good as the weakest link in your signal path.

PURPLE PEOPLE EATER

Because the Grand Pearl is specifically targeted toward stage and studio vocalists, it made sense to first try out the mic on vocals. Unfortunately, I wasn't doing any live performances around this time, but I happened to be doing some sessions with Kristy Thirsk, who sings with Delerium. It was a great opportunity to hear how the Grand Pearl performed on a professional vocalist. Kristy has a huge range, and it is often a struggle to capture her subtle, intimate

performances and at the same time be prepared for her powerful full voice without having those dynamic pushes overload the mic or the recording. The Grand Pearl performed nicely in that respect, with the soft passages retaining all of her breathy nuances and having a sweet sibilant quality that wasn't harsh or over-pronounced. And the really loud moments came through without breaking up or overdriving too hard. She is really good at varying her proximity to the mic depending on how loud she is singing, which helps to maintain a good recording level no matter how dynamic the vocal performance.

Because the mic is unidirectional with a cardioid polar pattern, it offers excellent off-axis rejection to eliminate unwanted room noise and ambience, but it also requires that you aim it directly at your sound source. I tried using the Grand Pearl as a handheld, and when I was singing, I noticed that if I moved the mic where the diaphragm was no longer pointed at my mouth, the signal dropped drastically in strength. To maintain the most vibrant, detailed recordings, it was crucial to keep the mic close to my lips, usually with the windscreen pressed right up on my lower lip. (That's a

good reference point for most uses, but of course, you want to pull back from the mic when singing loudly.) Many vocalists like to cup the grille of the microphone with their hand while they sing—which I definitely don't recommend as it muffles the sound—but that is kind of awkward because of the Grand Pearl's unique design. I suggest you coach any vocalists using this mic to steer clear of such a technique; your mic and your recording will benefit.

THE COLOR OF MUSIC

Next, I tried an acoustic guitar, which I recorded in a couple of different positions. First, I aimed the Grand Pearl directly at the guitar's sound hole, just forward from where my hand strums, which is generally how I prefer to record the Guild 6-string I use at my studio. The sound was nice and rich, with the pick strums cutting through well without overwhelming the depth of the lower register. Delicately picked notes sounded clear, and the overall definition was excellent. The Grand Pearl's manual recommends placing the mic facing the guitar's neck, where it joins to the body, about 4 to 5 inches away, so I gave that a try. The technique yielded a much brighter, punchier tone that had significantly less bass but was still very warm and even throughout the lower notes. I liked both results, so you'll probably want to experiment to find the ideal placement that best suits your instrument, song and playing style.

After hearing how good the Grand Pearl was on vocals and acoustic guitar, it was time to test it on one of my favorite instruments, electric guitar. I started out with a semihollowbody guitar on a clean setting and was immediately impressed with the warm, smooth tone and accuracy of the recording. This mic would be great for jazzy guitars! The sound of the mic only got better when I added some overdrive, and it handled a fairly strong signal with ease. The louder and more distorted the signal was going through the mic, the more smooth and creamy the sonic results became, which is pretty ideal for me. The overdriven sound was really punchy, and layering a couple of takes produced excellent results that really cut through the mix. I also tried out a few different effects on guitars, and I was very pleased by how vibrant and rich the sound of the chorus and phaser were and how detailed the taps were on an analog delay. Because of the limitations of my home studio, I usually do only close-miking with the mic pointed at an angle toward the center of the speaker cone. However, the manual recommends trying different mic placements, so I also tried running through all of the same settings and effects with the Grand Pearl a couple of feet away from the amp. The overall effect was that the guitar sounded a little less immediate, although there wasn't a lot of added ambience from the room. The tones were generally similar, but there was a bit less midrange and bass in the second set of recordings, and I must admit that I liked the overall results a bit better with the mic further away from the amp. Again, try experimenting with moving the Grand Pearl around on your own, and you may surprise yourself with the results.

I don't do a lot of drum recording at my home studio, so my percussion tests for this review were limited to handclaps and a shaker. The claps sounded dynamic

and realistic, which is sometimes hard to achieve. They often sound just like some indistinct percussive pops rather than an actual handclap, so it was impressive to hear the detail of palms hitting together and the subtle differences of each unique clap. The shaker also sounded great—very crisp and accurate with excellent imaging as the shaker moved back and forth in front of the mic. I'm looking forward to experimenting with the Grand Pearl on congas and bongos the next time they're in the studio.

PEARLS OF WISDOM

Whether you're looking for a great microphone that offers a lot of versatility, or you just want to add a

really solid mic to your collection, I definitely recommend checking out the Violet Design Grand Pearl. I really like the detail and transparency it offers, while adding nice warmth to just about everything I run through it. It is impressive to get such polished, accurate results from a microphone at this price point, so you may even consider getting a matched pair (available by special order) to try out on stereo recordings. As nice as this mic sounded on acoustic guitar, I would expect a stereo recording to be even more outstanding. The Grand Pearl is a microphone that you can use in a wide variety of applications and trust that the sound will rock no matter how and where you decide to use it. 

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Enhance One's Processor control varies the unit's results from punched up and aggressive to a softer sheen.



ELECTRIX ENHANCE ONE, COMP ONE, KING X

THREE RACK TOOLS FROM THE OLD SCHOOL

BY JASON SCOTT ALEXANDER

It's hard to believe that Electrix began life nearly a decade ago, providing cutting-edge performance-based effects units for DJs and musicians, many of who fondly remember those colorful and inviting front panels of the now-classic Warp Factory, Filter Factory, Repeater and Mo-FX. However, three short years and several industry awards into its run, its then-parent company pulled the plug on Electrix. Fast-forward five more years, and a new owner is re-juicing Electrix with updated versions of best-selling products and new models, including three 1U rackmount units aimed at studio and live sound reinforcement markets. But with plug-ins finding their way into even modest live setups today, will these old-school hardware contenders stand a fighting chance?

BOOST

Psychoacoustic processing can be good fun, or it can mean cheesy, QSound-like pseudo-surround and 3-D effects. Thankfully, the latter isn't the case with Enhance One, a simple yet flexible variation of the classic multiband fidelity enhancement and dynamic boost effect, along the lines of the Aphex Aural Exciter.

Conventional enhancers often worked well on pop music, using dynamic frequency correction to enrich the highs and adding musically related synthesized harmonics underneath. When applied to classical material or solo acoustic instruments, however, they tended to sound overly aggressive and unnatural. Based on program-dependent phase shifting, the goal of Electrix's new approach is to enhance the detail, clarity and imaging of a signal, regardless of what frequency dynamics are involved.

In a live setting, Enhance One sits between your mixer's main output and your system amps or active speakers. In the studio, you'll probably want to insert it on your master fader chain so you can both monitor and record its output as you mix down. Stereo XLR I/O is provided, and there's a dedicated XLR Mono Bass output to feed a subwoofer. Sadly, none of these units come with digital interfacing. Front-panel controls are duplicated for left and right channels, with a bypass button and In/Out indicator LED. I'm pleased to say that all three units use removable, grounded power cords, switchable 115/230V power and an easy-access fuse compartment on the back; but only Enhance One and King X feature an illuminated power switch on the front panel.

Leading the signal path are two Mix controls, which separately determine the amount of low- and high-frequency material that feeds into the actual enhancement circuitry. Their ranges are from zero to maximum, and they do not

ELECTRIX

ENHANCE ONE, COMP ONE, KING X > \$229; \$349; \$229

Pros: Clear, simple functionality. Good audio quality. Affordable for any budget.

Cons: No digital connectivity. Only XLR jacks on Enhance One and King X. Suspect knob and button quality. Terrible manuals.

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REVIEW » ENHANCE ONE, COMP ONE, KING X

alter the original signal in any way. A special Shift switch determines the cut-off frequency, or “peak,” around which the Low Mix control is centered. If the switch is set low, frequency energy primarily concentrated around 50 Hz is sent; if it’s set high, only fundamental energy down to 100 Hz is sent. It’s important to understand that you’re not actually boosting anything at this point.

Next is the Tune control, which is essentially an adjustable highpass filter with a range of 1 to 8 kHz. As its name implies, you use it to fine-tune the overall frequency spectrum of the High Mix path being routed to the processor. Lower tuning achieves more mid pickup and presence, while tuning higher produces an airier sound. By using the Shift and Tune controls in tandem, you can really get inside a sound and sculpt out exactly what the processor should focus on quite effectively.

The Processor control really lets Enhance One adapt to virtually any program material. Deceptively simple, when turned fully clockwise to the Pop position, it’s capable of punching up bass and treble dramatically and lending an aggressive edge to otherwise flat mixes. Turned completely counterclockwise to the Classic position, however, the result becomes increasingly softer with an unobtrusive transparency and increased richness that’s perfectly suited for piano, acoustic guitars, vocals and small percussion.

Finally, two knobs control the crossover frequency (100 to 250 Hz) and level of the dedicated mono bass output, along with a phase invert switch and bass output clip status indicator.

Enhance One is amazingly clean and sounds impressive for its price. Depending on the program material, some parameter changes can be subtle, leading you to wonder if you’re hearing any changes at all. As with most enhancers and exciters, though, a little goes a long way, and overcooking a mix is a recipe for disaster—not to mention a great way to toast your bass drivers.

While I enjoyed Enhance One as an insert on isolated instrument or vocal tracks, I got the most mileage using it across final mixes. With the ability to coax unbelievably tight sub-bass material out of rap and dance mixes I’d previously thought were ‘slammin’; it dramatically increased low frequency density and gently tucked it under without increasing peaks on my master meter or disrupting the mix balance. Enhance One can definitely make small speakers sound huge—not that I’m suggesting it should replace a good subwoofer. But it can certainly be used effectively as a perceptive tool on limited-frequency playback systems without fear of skewing a mix so it won’t translate well on other systems. As for the top end, mixes opened up and vocals and instruments came out with more fidelity and clarity. However, I didn’t notice the same degree of separation and widening as from another leading brand. Enhance One’s strength is in restoring natural brightness and detail and increasing presence without the need for significant EQ, and it works equally well on solo or full program material. It had the effect of sweetening the “pocket” space around each element of the mix, increasing depth and dimension pleasantly and musically.

SQUEEZE

Comp One is your typical 2-channel compressor and expander/gate setup with peak limiting but with a few interesting differences. Capable of stereo or dual-mono operation via a Link switch, each channel features an eight-segment 30 dB gain reduction meter and bypass control but unfortunately no metering for makeup gain. The Threshold control has a range of -40 to +20 dBu and features three status indicators: a green LED lights when the signal reaches threshold, while a red LED shows when a signal is above threshold. Located in between, a yellow indicator lights when the signal is within auto-compression range. Pressing the nearby Soft switch turns on a soft-knee auto-compression characteristic.

Attack and Release controls show no numeric values on the front panel; only a range from “fast” to “slow.” That is due to the fact that the compressor design is based on a program-dependent timing algorithm that automatically scales based on dynamics detected. A very fast attack setting acts like a peak limiter, while a slower setting acts like an RMS or averaging detecting compressor/limiter. An Auto switch overrides both attack and release controls, aimed at achieving a more classic “leveling amplifier” sound.

In practice, the hard-comp dynamics detection was accurate, with attack and release times following very naturally from one extreme to another. The softer auto-compression sounded extremely smooth and natural, without many of the usual artifacts; instead of the onset of compression being sudden at the threshold point, the

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ratio increases over a gradual input level range until it reaches the ratio set on the front panel.

There are typically two schools of thought on expander/gate units: those who like lots of envelope and depth control and those who prefer single-knob quickness. Comp One strides down the middle with simple Threshold (+15 dBu to $-\infty$ /off) and Ratio (1:1 to 4:1). They work well together in taming "chatter" and false triggering, though not quite as smoothly or effectively as I've seen on single-control units such as the Drawmer DL241, which features specialized circuitry that continually adapts expansion ratio, hold, attack and release times to the dynamics of the incoming signal.

Comp One's rear panel includes XLR and 1/4-inch balanced/unbalanced inputs and outputs with -10 dBV/+4 dBu operating-level switches. Each channel also supplies a 1/4-inch TRS sidechain insert jack. In hindsight, some low-cut and de-ess sidechain filters would have been a nice touch.

SEPARATE

King X is a stereo 2-way or mono 3-way active crossover. Using ultrahigh-quality state-variable 24 dB/octave Linkwitz-Riley filter design for greater driver protection, it features zero phase error and absolutely flat summed amplitude response at all crossover frequencies. In stereo mode, the crossover frequency can be set between 80 to 900 Hz, but a x10 switch shifts that to 0.8 to 9 kHz in 3-way mode. A brilliant choice was made in using high-quality 41-detent potentiometers to

handle crossover points. Such scrutiny ensures zero frequency drift and a precise and repeatable system setup. I love that latching mute switches are provided on each band to aid setting up and troubleshooting.

Input gain can be adjusted ± 12 dB to match the crossover sensitivity to any console, and there's a clipping indicator for each crossover. Depressing the Mono bass switch sums the low frequency (LF) outputs from the left and right channels—useful for feeding studio subwoofers or bass bins of club PA systems. Each band has ± 6 dB of gain control, and there's an LF Delay control for a maximum of 2 ms of phase/time alignment of bass program. Finally, the CD EQ switch applies a compensating Constant Directivity horn equalizer curve to the upper band in either mode.

Connections around back are XLR-only and provide dual input, low out and high out in 2-way mode. These same jacks internally reconfigure to provide only a single mono input plus low, mid and high outs in 3-way mode. Polarity switches are provided for each output, and automatic servo-function allows the unit to work with unbalanced source loads.

DSP TIMES THREE

Unfortunately, the booklet-style owner's manuals are pretty crappy, with poor English smacking of an abominable auto-translation program and frequent technical errors. The King X came out of the box with one of its tiny push buttons jammed inward; I gently pried it out with an X-Acto knife, but it never ended up sliding smoothly.

The knobs have highly variant feel. I removed a cap to discover that their insides are made from soft plastic that gives just enough to make them prone to over-twisting on the shaft, even under normal force. Finally, although I love seeing professional-grade locking-XLR jacks on live sound equipment, the lack of 1/4-inch jacks is a patching pain for your average home studio equipped predominantly with TR and TRS patch cords.

Enhance One's performance in a rehearsal hall with club speakers suggests that it will extend both ends of the frequency spectrum nicely, filling dead spots due to speaker and/or room deficiencies without sounding hyped in the high end. The LF density and improved sustain truly brought out the best in club mixes without sounding oversaturated or changing any dynamics of the bass sound in the way that multiband compression would. On live instrument amplification, everything I threw at it came out sounding larger than life and punchy enough to cut through a noisy room. It brought out amazing detail and presence on a simple bi-miked upright piano and made acoustic guitar articulations sparkle with gorgeous-sounding highs and overtones. Bass guitar enjoyed extended lows without sounding boomy and perceived dynamic boost without imparting distortion at the cabinet.

Comp One and King X both sounded great feeding my Mackie HR-series 2.1 system. Dollar for dollar, with street prices hovering around \$100 to \$180 per unit, I can't think of a better hardware value than having all three of these units in your gig rack. 

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SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

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RAYZOOM JAMSTIX 2XL

THE REVOLUTIONARY ROBOT DRUMMER

BY BENJAMIN MCFARLANE

Despite the cruel, heartless taunts from bandmates, a drummer's knowledge takes a long time to accumulate. Even if you are a skilled keyboardist, producing an authentic-sounding MIDI drum track is tedious. To avoid that tedium, shortcuts have been invented; programs such as Steinberg Groove Agent 3 or Cakewalk Sonar's Session Drummer are just two among a growing host of software drummer replacements.

Then there's Jamstix 2XL—unique among drummer plug-ins mainly because it jams. It "listens" to audio and MIDI and then improvises a real-time accompaniment and scores the accompaniment in a built-in MIDI sequencer. But it also goes much deeper than that.

WE HOPE YOU LIKE JAMMIN' TOO

Jamstix "jams" with both audio and MIDI signals. I tested Jamstix using Ableton Live 5 and an M-Audio Axiom 49 controller. I recorded a samba riff on an acoustic guitar to try out the Jam With Audio function. To get Jamstix to jam, you must use the AudioM8 plug-in: a VU meter that tells Jamstix the volume of the track that it's accompanying. To jam in real-time with Jamstix, low latency is a must.

I was surprised at Jamstix's instantaneous response to a drop in the audio level. Here's how it works: AudioM8's signal modulates a Power setting in Jamstix. Power allows you to control how powerfully Jamstix plays. Power refers to style decisions as well as note Velocity.

For example, Jamstix will cross-stick and choose a more minimalist pattern when the audio drops.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Jamstix Brain section provides several style-altering functions. The first thing I noticed while auditioning Jamstix 2XL's vast library of styles and drummers was that it applied concepts such as substitution, where a drummer will play, say, a kick on an off 16th note in one bar and then substitute it for the snare in the next bar. That and many other subtle tricks could have come straight from my old lesson manuals and syncopation books.

I was even more impressed that you can adjust those results. Like Groove Agent, Jamstix allows you to set groove and fill complexities, but there's much more. By tweaking its Brain, you can tell Jamstix what to do with its hi-hat foot during fills; what kind of cross-sticking habits it should have; whether to emphasize toms, hats, ride or percussion; whether to apply ghost notes; and how often to fill with triplets or "more cowbell!" It is a drummer with an intelligent style that you can alter with sliders, knobs and switches—not your typical session hack.

Jamstix creator Ralph Zeuner explained that the Brain is a culmination of studying many real drummer styles. Every slider effects a change in drumming habits, and all those changes are well within the realm of authentic style.

Session Drummer and Groove Agent draw on

prerecorded MIDI files to produce region- and era-specific style patterns. Jamstix commands more than 50 regional styles but also lets you select 10 drummer models, which replicate—with a startling verisimilitude—the habits of well-known drummers. Rayzoom won't acknowledge the models' namesakes (such as "Carter" and "Aaron"), but "Animal" is, in fact, a model of the drumming Muppet. And it's a damn good one.

THE FUTURE OF ROCK

Jamstix's improvisation alone is pretty impressive, but that integrates seamlessly with what is otherwise a very well-rounded drum module. Its jamming proficiency makes all of its other strengths—authentic kit sounds, stylistic variations and drummer models—much more realistic and intelligent. Jamstix can also save you a lot of time, like when you use a MIDI controller instead of just a mouse. And if the Jamstix stock kit and XL packs aren't enough, you can route Jamstix to other drum modules to use their sounds.

Rayzoom is planning a percussion refill and rule-based improvising bassist for the near future. I wonder how far the rule-based automatic-musician concept could go. If we can use software to convert a Miles Davis or Oliver Jones performance into MIDI, then could there be virtual versions of those performers in the future? Zeuner thinks there are limits, and that a genius performer requires a human mind. Time will tell. 

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By Jason Scott Alexander

SONY CREATIVE SOFTWARE POCKET DIVA

WORD UP TO LIP SERVICE

Sony calls Pocket Diva a collection of "world-class vocal samples," perhaps intentionally leaving out any genre-based references. The entire disc appears to feature only one vocalist, but her range is superlative with a great personality. The single-voice melodic loops folder introduces her quite nicely through a series of nine subfolders that range from operatic-pop, Top 40/R&B and Latin to much more ethereal, Delerium-esque Kristy Thirsk—or Sarah McLachlan-type material—signature octave jumps and all. Conveniently offered both dry and with mild doses of reverb, Pocket Diva has a clean and pure tone that's highly personable and quite intimate. She's thankfully not one of those overbearing or boomy singers when belting out phrases in the power registers and not at all nasal or cutesy on the lighter pop material. Lyrics are also wisely kept to minimum complexity, but they're more mature and inspiring than your basic "ooh baby's."

A folder of 34 pop-opera phrases offers a distinctive Eastern/ethnic twist, while the scat folder contains dozens of sophisticated "Brazilian cabaret-pop" (think The Bird and The Bee) and contemporary indie folk-tinged phrases (think Feist). But the sound-design folder stole the show. With more than 160

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At a glance: Pristine female vocals suitable for pop, hip-hop/R&B, dance, soundtrack work and more. 569 MB of Acidized WAV.

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melodic phrases, spherical vocal-scapes, stretched loops and spoken phrases, its heavily processed sound should easily find a niche in explorative trance and soundtracks. Among the expertly applied effects are crystallized delays, formant shifting, spectral gating, granular resynthesis, phase echoes, random time shuffling, pitch blending, etc. Coming from the gatekeepers of ACID technology, the sample-accurate metadata has been meticulously applied and made rekeying the vocals sound natural with no choppy artifacts.

AUDIO BOMB/BEST SERVICE BLAZIN RNB & HIP HOP COLLECTION VOL. 2

COP THIS AND CALL IT FLATTERY

Many of today's so-called Top 40 hip-hop/R&B libraries sound fairly generic to me, which gives Blazin plenty of opportunity to break from the pack. Inspired by some of the greatest producers in the biz, this library contains more than 6 GB of construction kits—30 brand new, and 30 from the first volume in the series. You get your typical reversed synths, pizzicato strings, plinko-pianos, wide-layered claps, dual-kick/boom patterns, Timbaland-esque detuned euro synths, and peculiar percussion and effects, but nothing that stands out as inventive or totally inspiring. You get lots of bouncy and energetic Swizz Beatz and Rodney "Darkchild" Jerkins-type stuff, as well as weirder Neptunes-style spacey sound effects, Middle Eastern melodies, tuned exotic percussion, metal drums and more. There are also several kits featuring loops with big piano, orchestral and brass hits, acoustic and electric guitar phrases, and more, but they all appear to be using patches pulled from popular workstations rather than having that organic live-tracked vibe.

AUDIO BOMB/BEST SERVICE
(DIST. BY EAST WEST/SOUNDS ONLINE)
BLAZIN RNB & HIP HOP COLLECTION
VOL. 2 > \$99.95

At a glance: More than 6 GB and 60 construction kits, including the previously released first volume in the series. Acidized WAV and REX.
Contact: www.soundsonline.com

Stylistically, the mixture's good—from radio-friendly, upbeat and ballad material to more hypnotic and darker cuts with menacing synth chords, gothic organs and the like. There are a few club bangers, but they're kept fairly downtempo, with no Beyoncé/DC "Lose My Breath" or Rihanna "S.O.S."-type arrangement to be found. This library tries to copy already overworked "trademark" production styles but brings little new to the table. However, if copying established styles is your jumping-off point for developing your own, check it out. 



URS M SERIES EQ BUNDLE

FROM STUDIO A ON WEST GRAND BOULEVARD

Berry Gordy Jr. formed Motown Records in the late '50s with an independent spirit that could be heard on all its singles. Countless hits were recorded in a cramped, two-story house located in north-central Detroit, outfitted with mostly homemade gear designed by Motown engineers. By 1965, Motown had pioneered 8-track recording (years ahead of George Martin and The Beatles) and constructed the world's first 7-band passive equalizers, used exclusively on Motown recordings—until now.

The URS M Series MotorCity Equalizer recreates the legendary peaking band, proportional-Q design with variable I/O gain and phase inverse. Operation couldn't be simpler: Each frequency band (50 Hz, 130 Hz, 320 Hz, 800 Hz, 2 kHz, 5 kHz and 12.5 kHz) has only a boost/cut control capable of ± 8 dB in 1 dB steps. I love the ultrasmooth response of the proportional curves circuitry, which sounded authentic and inviting on everything I threw at it. Adding a decibel or two of multiband gain to vocals gently lifts

their presence over a wide-enough spectrum to cover the singer's range naturally and without sounding contoured. Conversely, deep trims on a bass guitar track will scoop out a tighter Q, notching plenty of room for competing kicks or toms. The bundle also has a recreation of the even rarer Motown film EQ; originally only 6-band in its hardware form (80 Hz, 200 Hz, 500 Hz, 1.25 kHz, 3.2 kHz and 8 kHz), URS M Series Vintage Cinema Equalizer adds a seventh center at 16 kHz. When both plugs are used in series, their frequency centers overlap conveniently for a total of 14 bands. Typical of passive EQs, M Series stays true to the source and won't color your sound, though its unique curves impart a casually elegant Motown vibe.

URS

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GOLDFRAPP

Seventh Tree (Mute)
British siren taps into emotional side

It appears the glitter and glam bug has been exorcised. Not that the dancefloor possession was bad for the duo; it did thrust Alison Goldfrapp and composer Will Gregory into instant icon status. But on *Seventh Tree*, it's time to get to know the artists within. The result is a side of Goldfrapp that is so beautiful, it makes you wonder, where has she been hiding?

Not that her fans didn't already have visions of her sensuality, but here she can be heard as a deep, emotional woman. Beyond the disco ball, beyond the flamboyance of glitzy electronic, the British singer reveals a serious side. From the opening folkish lullaby of "Clowns," *Seventh Tree* immediately captivates you with crystalline vocals that lock themselves in your heart. Floating above acoustic guitar pluckings and orchestral strings, the tone is set for a particularly emotive ride. Goldfrapp then unleashes her inner Lennon, constructing soaring vocal harmonies and background *ahhs* reminiscent of the bespectacled legend, especially on "Happiness." *Seventh Tree* is, daring as it is to say, an electronic version of the *Magical Mystery Tour*.

For those looking for more of the same lighthearted club tracks, it seems Goldfrapp has left those on the dancefloor.—*Jason Jurgens*

★★★★★



4 BONJOUR'S PARTIES

Pigments Drift Down to the Brook (Mush)
Japanese septet's epic dreamscapes

The debut album from Tokyo seven-piece 4 Bonjour's Parties takes listeners on a journey through a world of expansive, dreamy pop. With a sound somewhere between Stereolab and Sufjan Stevens, 4 Bonjour's Parties makes good use of everything from horns and synths to flute and accordion, as well as male and female vocals, to create tracks that start off mellow, groove toward the middle, then build to epic, sparkling cacophonies. When at their best, like on "Satellite" and "Amalthea," 4 Bonjour's Parties' music has a big sound with a sense of wonder to it.—*Dustin Glick*

★★★★☆



AIR TRAFFIC

Fractured Life (Astralwerks)
Fresh yet familiar

You can tell this one's going to be different right when the jungle drums of "No More Running Away" roll incongruously yet perfectly into the rhythmic piano and ethereal vocals of Chris Wall. It's immediately engaging, as is the rest of the album—the contemplative "I Can't Understand," the retro-wave "Get in Line," the heartsick "Empty Space" and the perfect pop strata of "Shooting Star." The strangely wonderful thing is that these songs sound completely distinctive, yet somehow feel like songs you already know—a dichotomy you'll stop trying to figure out because you'll be too busy listening.—*Kristi Kates*

★★★★★



BEACH HOUSE

Devotion (Car Park)
It's shoegazing season

Although Beach House is from Baltimore, these songs conjure up visions of an autumnal Atlantic City, when the quaint boardwalk is still and the pace slow and even more nostalgic. "Heart of Chambers" offers up spare rhythms and a fainting-away chorus, while Alex Scally's slide guitar adds pinpoint focus to the tinny organ of "All the Years," the perfect song for a Sandra Dee whose beach days may not have been so sunny. Elsewhere, singer Victoria Legrand channels Petula Clark through the '60s melody of "D.A.R.L.I.N.G." and skims along the top of "Gila," with its echoey, Nico-like refrain.—*Kristi Kates*

★★★★☆

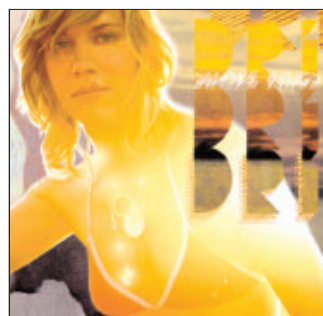


BONDE DO ROLÊ

Marina Gasolina (Domino)
Friends, remixes keep party going

Anyone that can make the sound of a croaking frog danceable ("Contaminada") has either run out of ideas or is so far ahead of the game that nothing is unusable. With the current Bonde do Role craze sweeping clubs, *Remix*'s money is on the latter. An ability to craft the grimmest bass-heavy beats drenched in the sweat of baile funk has club goers, as well as Diplo (who signed them), going dumb. Bonde do Role will do anything to get you on the dancefloor; if that means tapping into amphibians, so be it. And if that doesn't work, remixes from the likes of Peaches, CSS and Ladytron will do the trick.—*Jason Jurgens*

★★★★☆



DRI

Smoke Rings (Range Life)
Sleeping one off

Alongside Kansas beatmakers Nezbeat and more, Adrienne Verhoeven ("Dri") serves soulful electronic pop on *Smoke Rings*, her slumped-in-the-easy-chair solo LP. Known for her work in The Anniversary, multi-instrumentalist Dri's "girl group" fervor goes over magnificently on "Inspiration." Tender sentiments hit home over coos and SayMyName's crackly doo-wop piano samples, or glitchy pulses on opener "Two Are One," but not so much on the teen soap-esque "Don't Wait." *Smoke Rings'* charm filters out of its hangover haze, when the cigarettes ingested last night are the least of your problems.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★☆☆



FAIRMONT

Coloured in Memory (Border Community)
Tuneful techno-pop

Deftly produced, melodic and casually complicated, Jake Fairley invites some indie-pop over to mix this one up with the techno approach for which he's best known. "Mobula," "All Good Things" and "Flight of the Albatross" stay rooted in Fairley's customary sound, but other tracks go out on a limb. "Pomegranate" is all laziness, hidden insects and mood swings; "I Need Medicine" leans on an ever-morphing drone; and "Darling Waltz" ballroom-dances with androids. All are especially impressive in headphones, where Fairley shows off the art of the über-pan.—*Kristi Kates*

★★★★☆



INFAMOUS MOBB

Reality Rap (Sure Shot)
Queensbridge customs

While Mobb Deep made its sound somewhat more accessible upon getting down with G-Unit, the group's Queensbridge affiliates Infamous Mobb upholds the gritty, "go hard or go home" stance on its third LP, *Reality Rap*. MCs Ty Nitty, Gambino and Godfather Pt. 3 don't claim to be the best lyricists, but as the title implies, they're more concerned with capturing the rawness of QB strife life than getting complex. And they hit their mark on cuts like the suspenseful "Itz a Gift." But it's also the knocking beats of the Alchemist, Erick Sermon and others that make this album a hot commodity.—*Max Herman*
★★★★☆



KAMERA

Resurrection (Nettwerk)
Swedish pop takes a crack at the '80s

Getting lost in a label shuffle and losing band members may have left Kamera pondering the future; it may have also been the best thing to happen to the group. It's going to take more than a corporate uppercut to keep this band from embracing their inner '80s fetishes. The Swedish quartet proudly waves the Duran Duran/Erasure flag. You can just picture vocalist Joakim Hjelm biting his bottom lip, as eyeliner streams down his face, particularly on the ballad "Loves Surrounds Us." On *Resurrection*, emotions run high, romance abounds, and the pop is palpable. Hmm, sounds like the '80s.—*Jason Jurgens*
★★★★☆

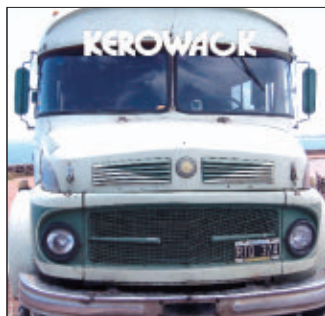
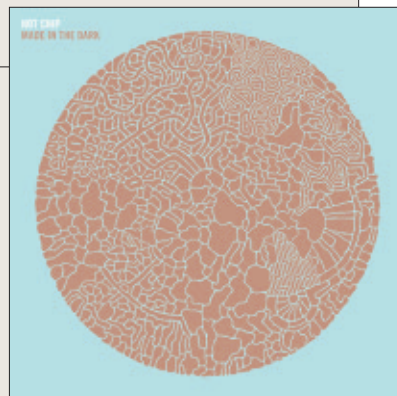
HOT CHIP

Made in the Dark (Astralwerks)
Improvisational dancefloor rock

It makes sense that Hot Chip's newest electro-pop album is called *Made in the Dark*. For starters, Hot Chip appeals to the nocturnal creature—a hipster junkie who fiends for dim-lit afterhour parties. And, as reported on Billboard.com, the Brits took a more improvised route to their widely acclaimed sound, resulting in a more experimental, rock sound.

Don't worry; this isn't experimental rock. You will, however, notice a bigger, grittier rock sound and live-band appeal on *Made in the Dark* by way of distorted guitars and soft piano. That doesn't mean they have slowed down. You still get the infectious dance beats and uniquely soulful Hot Chip sound. This time the juxtaposition between high-energy songs such as "Shake a Fist," featuring a Todd Rundgren sample, and mellower introspective tracks like "We're Looking for a Lot of Love," is more pronounced. One minute you're grinding a stripper's pole and the next you're journaling about being homesick.

Perhaps that's what makes Hot Chip so special; they create intelligent dance music that has enough substance to feel like rock.—*Jason Jurgens*
★★★★☆



KEROWACK

The First EP (Thunder Finger)
Kerowack us harder, dude

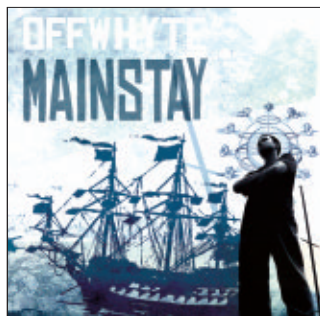
Crunchy dancefloor beats are trimmed in more-than-adequate fuzz on Kerowack's *The First EP*, but the producer duo also traverses slow-cooking electro grooves and house on its break-out six songer. Basement Jaxx-er Milly Blue offers the pseudo-MC/nonsensical disjointed vocal bit to "Fuck Guitars," but it works, thanks to the bare thwacks and rubbery keyboard bass behind her. Standout opener "Dirtgrabber" is fairly deceiving in its grit and prominent pitch-tweaked blurts, as Kerowack doesn't grip again as hard as they do at the onset. That's why it's their *First*, though.—*Dominic Umile*
★★★★☆



TOM MIDDLETON

Lifetracks (Six Degrees)
Elegant electronic

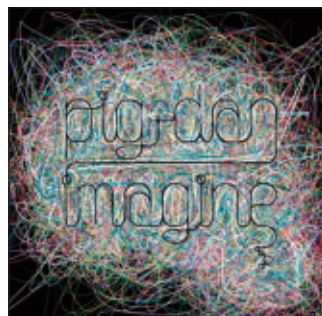
Middleton himself says "there's been no need to shout about *Lifetracks*"—and he couldn't be more right; this album quietly holds its own with pure strength and grace. Vocal-free and devoted to "pure emotion in sound" (another Middletonism), it's hard to define, with one foot in synth-pop, another in downtempo/ambient and several more dipping their toes into other electro genres. All in all, though, the expressive, delicately produced tracks will draw you in, with high-lights including the minor-toned opener "Prana," with its digitized guitars; "St. Ives Bay"; and the piano-laced standout "Moonbathing."—*Kristi Kates*
★★★★★



OFFWHYTE

Mainstay (Galapagos4)
Palatable smarts

Offwhyte is not the type of MC to crank out mixtapes on a whim—this L.A.-via-Chicago lyricist crafts his albums carefully, which partially explains why it has been five years since he dropped his last long player. With *Mainstay*, Offwhyte returns triumphant, spitting sharp, observant verses atop everything from thumping G-Funk ("GWARN!") to chill, lo-fi back-players ("Metropolitan People"). This MC's delivery doesn't vary as much as it could here, but in contrast to his dreary *Bow to the Sceptor* EP, he has discovered how to deliver serious subject matter without coming across sounding so solemn.—*Max Herman*
★★★★☆



PIG & DAN

Imagine (Cocoon)
By no means piggish

Although they're hardly new to DJing or to releasing their own work, *Imagine* is the debut full-length from Spain's Igor "Pig" Tchkotoua and Dan Duncan. Frenetically panned tech-house sonics meet blanketing trance synth sounds on *Imagine*, with minimal nudging against larger webs of delay and echo. Split bleeps and counter melodies peer eventually out of "Globetrotter"—a track peak mirroring those on Matzak's stylish *Life Beginnings*—and are suddenly hushed before emptying out onto the motor bass riffs of "Moth." Unlikely pairings like that are used to perfection on *Imagine*'s decorative spread.—*Dominic Umile*
★★★★☆



WYCLEF JEAN

Carnival Vol. II: Memoirs of an Immigrant (Columbia)

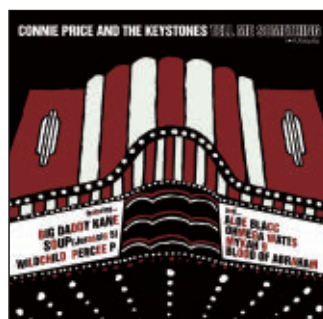
Building sonic bridges

As much as some folks dismiss Wyclef for scoring super-mainstream, chart-topping hits like "Hips Don't Lie," this MC/producer/guitarist has long strived to take hip-hop beyond formulaic methods. With *Carnival Vol. II*, Clef continues his quest of collaborating with artists from as many genres and cultures

as possible, creating an ambitious and global medley of grooves.

The best example of Clef's wide-reaching tendencies is heard on the bouncy, bhangra beat-inspired track "Hollywood Meets Bollywood (Immigration)." Here, Clef combines the strings of a full orchestra with an old Egyptian sample and the cautionary raps of Chamillionaire, resulting in a cross-continental sure shot. Conversely, getting aid from hip-hop's most sought-after guest stars Akon and Lil' Wayne on the single "Sweetest Girl (Dollar Bill)" was hardly risky. Yet the reggae-pop vibe and underlying message on this song are effortlessly engrossing. Of course, Clef can't score hits on every try, as the political, rock-tinged "Riot" with Serj Tankian and his dedication to the late Tejano singer, "Selena," just sound awkward. To Wyclef's credit, though, not once do his attempts come off as insincere.—*Max Herman*

★★★★☆



CONNIE PRICE AND THE KEYSTONES

Tell Me Something (Ubiquity)

Dust off the Farfisa

Dan Ubick and Todd M. Simon are the sole operators behind Connie Price and the Keystones, but everything points to the contrary. The classy funk/soul hodgepodge on *Tell Me Something* paints a stage full of suited brass and keys players, with guest MCs (Big Daddy Kane and Percee P among them) bridging a long history of hip-hop and soul 45s. Ohmega Watts out-brags any Roc-A-Fella alumni over woodwinds and infectious guitar riffs on "Master at Work," and Percee draws lines between Bush's war crimes and Native American genocide on "Thundersounds." Imagine that.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★★☆



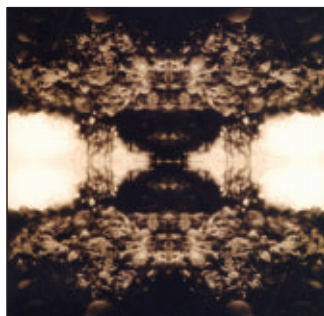
SUBSTANTIAL

Sacrifice (QN5)

The seesaw effect

Maryland rhymers Substantial's monotone flow isn't likely to immediately pull listeners in, but his new album *Sacrifice* reveals an artist who often has much to say and a pretty good taste in beats to boot. To be sure, the melodic boom-bap and uplifting raps of "Wake Up Call" and the swagger and Madlib-esque soul of "That Damn Good" inspire repeat listens. These standouts, produced by Algorhythm, no doubt show what this mild-mannered MC is capable of. Although elsewhere, tracks like the aimless "Spaticus" never really take off, making *Sacrifice* only partially exciting.—*Max Herman*

★★★☆☆



TEARGAS & PLATEGLASS

Black Triage (Waxploitation)

Situation critical

Three years after vanishing from sight and earshot—save a set of five unannounced Eastern European shows in 2004—the intriguingly abstruse T&P have returned with a collection of weighty compositions that rest darkly beneath the murk and mire. Although the careful instrumentations, especially on such tracks as "Plague Burial," are at times bleakly tuneful, the overall feel is one of pause and heaviness; these are essentially soundscapes—some with narrative—that encapsulate the aftermath of destruction. It's not a cheerful album by a long shot; but it is an affecting and thoughtful one.—*Kristi Kates*

★★★★☆



JIMMY VAN M

Balance 10.1 (EQ)

Pleasantly unbalanced

Stephan Bodzin's "Kerosene" B-side sparkles for seven minutes in a mass of glassy plinks and surges called "Cucuma," and it positively beams from Jimmy Van M's *Balance 10.1*. Florida native Jimmy Van M follows up his much-lauded *Balance 10* mix with a collection that spills over with driving but bleary techno, particularly in the Field's remix of James Figurine's "55566688833," and a couple stuttering, disorienting entries from Russia's Moonbeam. Planet Funk's dance rock ("Static") comes off generic and disruptive, but Jimmy's picks are otherwise blatantly atmospheric and boozefest friendly.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★★☆



T.H. WHITE

The Private Spotlight (Sky Council)

Got potential?

No one can argue that T.H. White (producer, songwriter, arranger, programmer, musician) isn't multitalented. Unfortunately, however, this set arrives with a bit of a dull thud, lacking the real oomph that is expected from someone this skilled. Opening with the jazzy, shiftily "Private People," the first impression is that of a sad singles' disco; that impression doesn't change much as the album moves on to "The Lost Bridges," with its '80s Pat Benatar-style synth. "Can I?" and "Separations" pep things up with White's unprocessed, chill guitar work, but overall, it seems that he could do so much better.—*Kristi Kates*

★★★☆☆



XIU XIU

Women as Lovers (Kill Rock Stars)

Weirder and better as time goes by

You mustn't casually listen to *Women as Lovers*. You must first be prepared. You must clear your thoughts because the imaginative experimental sounds and lyrics from this band are too much to digest on a full stomach. Jamie Stewart, the brainchild behind the Oakland band—widely known to be much smarter than you are—once again proves that chaos and discomfort are a breeding ground for beautiful and truthful folk music, like that on "F.T.W." A lot of experimental artists make noise just to make noise, but Xiu Xiu makes music with noise that is simply amazing and cutting edge.—*Jason Jurgens*

★★★★☆



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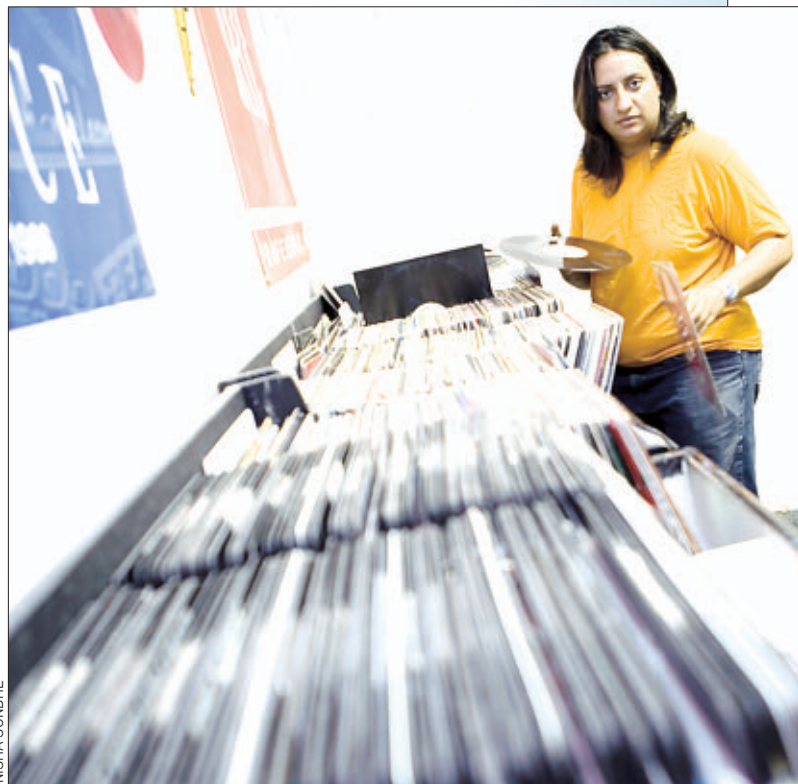
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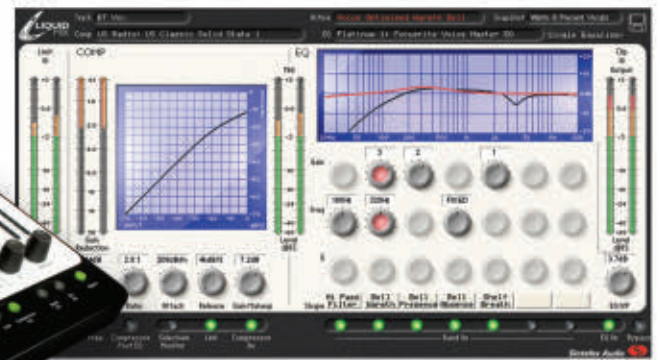
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HALF BAKED

Newbie jocks get nuked on MP3 blogs and software, but their skills are undercooked

Have you ever introduced your sister to a buddy and then ended up regretting it for years to come? That's how I feel sometimes about DJing. It's beginning to feel like 1998 again when everyone owned a pair of decks and was convinced they were definitely a better DJ than Paul Oakenfold. The club scene is officially in the midst of a nu-dance, nu-rave revival that is looking more and more like the '90s every day. With another Clinton running for the hot seat, all we need is a reunion tour of Technotronic, and then it's all Giribauds and fat pants from there. And that's not even the scary part.

What's worrisome is what has happened to the quality of DJs. The situation has gotten bad enough that a new term has risen from the flame wars frequently scorching the Serato Scratch Live forums. "Microwave DJ" is a term applied to anyone who has not "paid their dues," but because they own a laptop and thousands of MP3s, they are now qualified to play in a club. This, of course, threatens the old-school cats who spent 10 years and thousands of dollars honing their craft—as well it should. The game is changing fast, and DJing as we know it is appropriately morphing into the Internet age. The trouble is not with the technology itself but with new DJs taking technology shortcuts and failing to learn the crucial aspects of the craft.

A STAR IS BORN

Let me give you one shining example of this common pitfall. About four years ago, an acquaintance started DJing with popular DJ software that performs the arduous task of beat matching for you, albeit not always so well. This particular individual was genuinely proud of the fact that after only six months, he was being booked to play clubs all over Brazil. During one of my first tours there, he opened for me at a major nightclub, and the resulting sonic mess was sadly predictable. Even though the software was able to match up the songs 60 percent of the time, he was not able to tell that everything else was completely off. Technology had fast-tracked the learning curve, and his ears did not get the chance to become properly trained.

Mix timing is not the only casualty when a newcomer opts out of DJ basic training. During the years that it takes most people to learn, hone and subsequently improve their craft, normally their tastes grow and get more critically focused. That applies to all arts, including the simple task of playing music in a club. Without that crucial time it takes to train the ears musically and rhythmically, a DJ is really not ready to hold the reins of a proper dancefloor.

INST-O-MATIC MUSIC

You really can't place all the blame on the DJ—it's a bad combination of several wrong ingredients that turned sour when placed in the sun for hours. Consider this formula: [blogosphere + easy digital technology

access + amateur-DJs-turned-professional overnight] x [bad taste] = bad music. When the Hype Machine (www.hypem.com) and other music blog aggregators showed up, it was basically the Second Coming for DJs. Seemingly endless supplies of unreleased, one-of-a-kind remixes stretched out for days, promising fresh new music as long as the Internet bill was paid. This was in the "early days" (one year ago in modern technology time), so the smaller music blogs had not yet become the major tastemakers that they are today. Submissions were fewer, and the bloggers seemed to try to outdo each other with the hottest cuts they could dig up. Then it caught on like wildfire and everyone with a few MP3s and Ableton Live started pumping out carbon-copy remixes based on the latest submicro-genre fad. Conveniently, these fads implode after a month, but with each death a more horrendous one seems to grow from its still-warm ashes. [Nonexistent music training + zero filter] x [unlimited distribution] = endless supply of bad micro-genres.

FOR BEST RESULTS

Now before anyone gets too insulted, let me reiterate that blogosphere and the new world of DJing are wonderful things. We are in an exciting time when digital DJ technology, broader access to music and the proliferation of music blogs has resulted in a second honeymoon for music lovers everywhere—no complaints there. It just seems a little more restraint on the part of the DJ and bloggers everywhere might improve the uncharted terrain of this new musical frontier. Just because you can post or play anything does not mean you should. The final layer of quality control, nightclub bookers, also seems to be losing to the laws of the free market. From a promoter standpoint, it's quite simple: Why should I pay you all that money when this guy over here will play for next to nothing? The common excuse: Sure, his mixes might be a bit messy 80 percent of the time, but the crowd is piss drunk. Who really notices anyway?

When you blend all the conditions together, it's no surprise that the established veterans are up in arms about Microwave DJs taking their hard-earned gigs. It's enough to almost throw in the towel and start a jam band. Maybe that's why it's such a breath of fresh air hanging out in Berlin, where the status quo is pure minimal predominantly played on 12-inch vinyl by a seasoned DJ crop. Yes, it almost sounds like this could be the incredibly tired "nothing sounds like vinyl, man" debate. Well, it's not: Digital technology rules. I personally switched over five years ago without a single regret. Blogs and MP3s have revived a dying music industry, and it's great that so many people have access to DJ technology. Unfortunately, I just kind of wish I hadn't introduced it to my little sister because next week I am going to have to open for her epic rave-rap-electro-rock-ghetto-tech-favella-crunk set. 



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