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It's all called techno or dance music now, 'cause it's all electronic music created with technological equipment. Maybe that should be the only name, "dance music", because everybody has a different vision of what techno is now. **KEVIN SAUNDERSON**

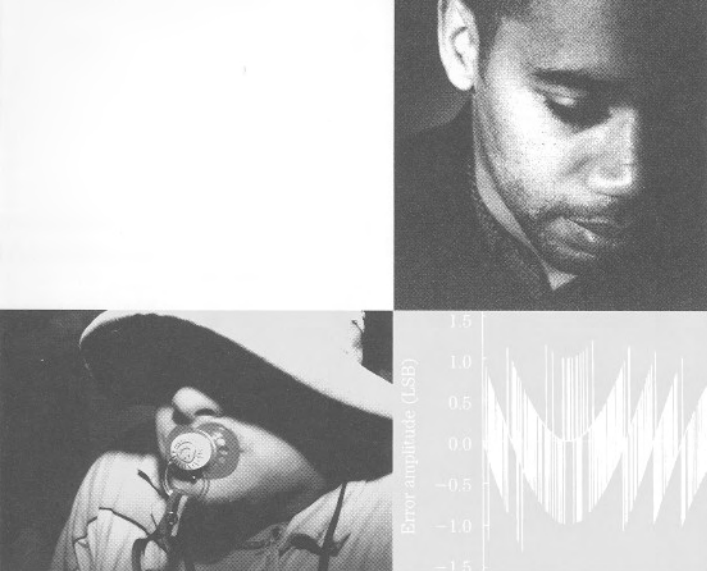
Detroit's an industrial city. It's a wasteland of ideas. Detroit is the type of place where you can only dream of what the rest of the world is like. **DERRICK MAY**

Techno is totally futuristic . . . and for kids it's brilliant 'cause all you're thinking is sci-fi, space, future, what's this, excellent, computers, wicked, music made on electronic gear, I can do that. **SEAN BOOTH (AUTECHRE)**

TECHNO

DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

BY MIKE RUBIN



Discography:

MODEL 500	<i>Classics</i>	R&S
MODEL 500	<i>Deep Space</i>	R&S
CYBOTRON	<i>Clear</i>	Fantasy
DERRICK MAY	<i>Innovator</i>	Transmat/Never
KEVIN SAUNDERSON	<i>Faces & Phases</i>	Planet E
E-DANCER	<i>Heavenly</i>	Planet E
PAPERCLIP PEOPLE	<i>The Secret Tapes of Dr. Eich</i>	Planet E
69	<i>The Sound of Music</i>	R&S
PSYCHE/BFC	<i>Elements 1989-1990</i>	Planet E
VARIOUS ARTISTS	<i>Intergalactic Beats</i>	Planet E
PLASTIKMAN	<i>Consumed</i>	M_nus/Novamute
UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE	<i>Revolution Through Change</i>	Network
UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE	<i>Interstellar Fugitives</i>	Submerge
MOODYMANN	<i>Silent Introduction</i>	Planet E
THEO PARRISH	<i>First Floor</i>	Sound Signature/Peace Frog
DREXCIYA	<i>The Journey Home</i>	Warp
DREXCIYA	<i>The Quest</i>	Submerge
VARIOUS ARTISTS	<i>From Beyond</i>	Interdimensional Transmissions
VARIOUS ARTISTS	<i>Techno Bass: The Mission</i>	Direct Beat
VARIOUS ARTISTS	<i>Detroit: Beyond the Third Wave</i>	Astralwerks
DJ ASSAULT	<i>Belle Isle Tech</i>	Assault Rifle/Electrofunk

CARL CRAIG

Long before the Prodigy ever learned to count to 303, Detroit-area teenager Juan Atkins and his high school buddies Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson were wired-up wunderkinds, mixing up the elements of techno in their bedroom labs and setting the periodic table for groups like the Chemical Brothers. Back in the mid-eighties, the so-called "Belleville Three" (named after the small town outside Detroit they hailed from) took the post-disco house music that had been nurtured in Chicago and refined it, upping the electronic content and adding a forward-thinking, defiantly cosmic worldview cobbled together from the writings of *Future Shock* author Alvin Toffler and Atkins' own ruminations.

In the city where the assembly line became a staple of modern life, techno's Henry Ford and his accomplices welded Motor City funk, European avant-garde composition, and Japanese gadgetry together to form a whole new chassis, but found their invention unappreciated in the American marketplace. Like jazz musicians from Ben Webster to Dexter Gordon in the postwar years, Atkins, May, Saunderson, and the ensuing generation of Detroit musicians they inspired – including the so-called "second wave" of producers like Carl Craig, Stacey Pullen, and



Kenny Larkin – went to Europe in the late 1980s to seek their fame and fortune. Thanks to a variety of factors – including a more enlightened European attitude toward dance music culture and a smaller, densely populated landmass that allowed for faster dissemination of data – they found it. By the early nineties, the English music press, like-minded musicians in Berlin, and ecstatic crowds from Amsterdam to Zurich had all embraced the Detroit pioneers as dancefloor deities.

Derrick May once described techno's man-machine fusion as "George Clinton and Kraftwerk caught in an elevator with only a sequencer to keep them company," but at some point during techno's global proliferation – maybe while Ralf and Florian were pushing the buttons for all the floors – Dr. Funkenstein got off the lift and left the building. While the homogenized byproduct of their



creation now provides the soundtrack for countless cola and car commercials, the Detroiters have been all but ignored here in the States, receiving virtually no publicity and even less airplay.

More disturbing to the Motor City posse is that techno has been portrayed as a “white” music. As techno’s digitized signals crisscrossed Planet Rock, most of the producers and consumers who tuned in were white, and the identity of the music’s funky forefathers often got lost in the transmission. Meanwhile, black audiences and musicians ceased to see techno as their own art form, leaving the electronic pioneers of Detroit not only feeling spurned by indifferent white-owned record companies, but estranged from their own community as well.

The tug-of-war for spin control at the heart of techno merely mirrors the tortured record of race rela-

tions of the city it hails from. Detroit is still recoiling from the repercussions of July 23, 1967, when a police raid on a black after-hours drinking spot touched off six days of violence, the worst U.S. civil disorder of the twentieth century until L.A. in 1992. “White flight” to the suburbs was already well under way, but the riot put some serious horsepower behind the city’s abandonment. In the first twenty years after the riot, Detroit lost one-third of its population; a city built for two million people has today dwindled to half that. In one generation, Detroit went from 70% white to almost 80% black. The area’s de facto balkanization led the local NAACP chapter president to declare in 1987 that “Detroit is the most racially polarized city in the nation.”

Though blacks rose to political power with the election of Mayor Coleman Young in 1973, whites continued



to control the economic clout. Those that fled took the money and ran, building not just their homes but their factories, businesses, and stores in suburbia, too. Some suburbanites have gone years without once actually venturing into the city that gives their metropolitan area its name. Not that there's much reason to go: Detroit in the seventies and eighties was devastated by a decline in the auto industry, skyrocketing unemployment, and cuts in urban assistance programs. Between 1967 and 1982, Detroit lost about 45% of all jobs in the city, and by 1987, more than half of the city's manufacturing, retail, and wholesale base had disappeared. Ironically, it was automation, computerization, robotics, and technological advances in manufacturing that fueled the city's precipitous loss of blue-collar jobs – the same developments that would pave the way for techno.

The fancy term for this process is "deindustrialization," but sometimes the oldies are best: "ghost town." Far from the chaotic lawlessness that the national media has envisioned in Detroit, the prevailing feeling is actually an eerie emptiness. Prewar skyscrapers in the heart of downtown stand forlorn and abandoned. Streets dotted with ramshackle shanties amidst untended grass and scrub look more like backcountry roads in the Mississippi Delta than arteries in an urban core.

Detroit's post-apocalyptic mystique is crucial to the mythology of Detroit techno. It's from this blighted backdrop that techno comes forth, like the city motto, "*Resurget Cineribus*" – "It will rise from the ashes." The contradictions in imagining a future while both the past and present sit in shambles all around you are rich indeed, as are those of having a high-tech movement hail



from a burnt-out urban shell or a sophisticated art music flourishing amidst such a stubbornly close-minded, culturally intolerant, blue-collar town like Detroit.

Techno's roots in Detroit date back to an FM DJ named Charles Johnson – better known by his on-air alter ego, the Electrifying Mojo. From 1977 to 1982 on WGPR, followed by three years at WJLB, Mojo practiced a philosophy he calls “counterclockwiseology”: ignoring the strict formatting that afflicted the local airwaves. A typical evening's session of Mojo's “Midnight Funk Association” (which each night featured an audio simulation of the landing of Mojo's own interstellar craft, “the Mothership”) might include Parliament's “Flash Light,” the J. Geils Band's “Flamethrower,” the B-52s' “Mesopotamia,” Visage's “Frequency 7,” Yellow Magic Orchestra's “Firecracker,” and anything and everything

PLASTIKMAN (RICHIE HAWTIN)

by Prince and the Time. Most importantly, the DJ had fished Kraftwerk's *Autobahn* out of the discard bin at a previous station, where it had been used as backing music to cut commercials over, and soon after acquired a copy of *Trans-Europe Express*. “It was the most hypnotic, funkier, electronic fusion energy I'd ever heard,” Mojo gushes. “I couldn't imagine what the mindset was of a band who could be that funky on purpose.”

When Kraftwerk's *Computer World* came out in 1981, Mojo played virtually the entire album every night, making a lasting effect on impressionable young listeners like Atkins. Growing up in northwest Detroit, Atkins had known he'd be a musician from age six or seven. When Atkins was in high school, his family almost moved to California, but instead ended up in Belleville, a fishing town of roughly 3000 about thirty miles southwest of

RYUICHI SAKAMOTO



Detroit. Belleville in the early eighties was perhaps the only place more unlikely than Detroit for a high-tech movement to begin: a rhubarb (a rural town taking on the trappings of a suburb thanks to metropolitan sprawl) only eight blocks long at the time, where a general store/bait and tackle shop was the town's biggest business. Because there were so few black families in Belleville, Atkins struck up friendships with two pals of his younger brother Aaron: Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson. Atkins turned his pals on to Mojo's radio show, and the trio began doing pause-button mixes and trading tapes while Atkins, May, and May's friend Eddie "Flashin'" Fowlkes began spinning and mixing at parties under the name Deep Space Sound.

At Washtenaw Community College after graduation, Atkins met Rick Davis, a Vietnam vet twelve years his

senior whose own noodling with synthesizers was more advanced than Atkins embryonic experiments. The duo soon formed Cybotron, Davis rechristening himself "3070" (his dog tag number, according to legend), and in 1981, they released the heavily Ultravox-influenced "Alleys of Your Mind" as a seven-inch single on their own Deep Space Records. Although they weren't the first local crew to put out their own electronic record – that title goes to "Sharevari" by A Number of Names – Atkins and Davis were blessed with plenty of airplay on Mojo's show, and "Alleys," and its 1982 follow-up, "Cosmic Cars," sold ten to fifteen thousand copies in Detroit alone. A contract with Berkeley, California-based Fantasy Records for *Enter* soon followed, and while the album was as much spaced-out new-wave funk-rock as it was ur-techno, a remix of the instrumental "Clear" became a top-twenty hit nationally

on *Billboard's* black singles chart. However, when Davis decided the follow-up single would be "Techno City" (despite its title, the song is heavily guitar-based), Atkins decided to strike out on his own.

Frustrated by his less-than-fantastic first taste of the record business, and fed up with his demos getting rejected by other labels, Atkins decided to press a twelve-inch record himself with the goal of simply attracting a larger label's attention. In 1985, he started Metroplex, taking the name from Cybotron's "techno-speak" glossary of Toffleresque terms. Atkins chose the name Model 500 for the project as a way of "repudiating ethnic designations" and cloaking his persona behind a machine-like veil; May, Saunderson, and many others would later follow suit. It would be this elimination of any telltale emblems of African American identity that would eventually come back to haunt the Detroiters in their search for a black audience.

For his debut release as Model 500, Atkins unleashed "No UFO's," his attempt at working out George Clinton and Mojo's Mothership issues. Eight years before the *X-Files*, Atkins sang of now-familiar themes of extraterrestrial encounters and official conspiracy, but with an urban twist: "They say 'There is no hope'/They say 'No UFOs'/Why is no head held high?/Maybe you'll see them fly." "The government always tries to cover up the fact that there could be other life in the galaxy," explains Atkins. "To me, the system is bent on keeping people in despair, hopeless, not wanting to achieve anything, so if you keep your head up high maybe you'll start realizing things that you never thought possible, and seeing a UFO is probably the ultimate impossibility."

Beneath the sci-fi scenario was an implicit subtext of self-empowerment, both in the lyrics and in the fact that Atkins was taking the modes of record production into his own hands. Like a black version of punk rock,

techno musicians around Detroit suddenly started their own labels – most notably, Saunderson's KMS and May's Transmat – and began releasing their own records, a case of brothers doing it for themselves. The aesthetic of anonymity that would become techno's trademark arose initially due to "straight economics," explains Atkins: blank record sleeves were a financial necessity because "we didn't have enough money to print full-color jackets and stuff. We were so used to doing it that way that we never even thought about it after that." Besides the blank packaging, the musicians camouflaged themselves behind a dizzying variety of alter egos, particularly Saunderson, who holds the unofficial record for aliases. Since releasing "Triangle of Love" as Kreem in 1986, he's recorded as Reese, Reese and Santonio, Reese Project, Keynotes, Tronik House, Inner City, Inter City, and E Dancer. The multiple monikers were "to help Detroit seem bigger," reveals Saunderson, to make it appear "that there was more going on."

The Detroiters' creative fires were fueled by some good-natured competition with Chicago's house DJs. May had moved to Chicago for a few months after high school to soak up the vibe of house DJs Ron Hardy and Frankie Knuckles; now May and Atkins traveled to the Windy City, hoping to have their new records played by Knuckles. It was May – desperately needing rent money – who sold the 909 drum machine to Knuckles that allowed the Chicagoans to become a record producing force in their own right. The Detroiters' initial records were also heavily indebted to the progress made in Chi-town - "If Chicago had not done what they did," says May, "we would not have had anywhere to take our music" – but where Chicago's sound was heavily reliant on disco, the Motor City remained steeped in funk, albeit accelerated to heretofore unexplored beats per minute.

But Detroit didn't really distinguish itself as distinct

from house until the name "techno" itself was first popularized with the 1988 British compilation *Techno: The New Dance Sound of Detroit* on Virgin's 10 Records subsidiary. The huge success of that compilation helped propel the term that Atkins lifted from the chapter "The Techno Rebels" in Toffler's *Third Wave* into the English vernacular. Following the compilation, the poppier, house/techno blend of "Good Life" and "Big Fun" by Inner City (Saunderson and female vocalist Paris Grey) became enormous hits across Europe and the locus of Detroit techno began to shift across the pond.

Crowds of thousands of ecstatic carousers greeted the Detroiters when they went to England in 1988 and 1989, and the continent soon became Motown's home away from home. Back in Detroit, May had become the house DJ and for eventual co-owner of the Music Institute, the most legendary local venue since the Grande Ballroom played launching pad in the late sixties to the MC5 and the Stooges gettin' Iggy wit' it. The after-hours downtown club was open for a year and a half, from May 1988 to late 1989, drawing a predominantly black clientele. Crowds of six to seven hundred people packed the Institute each weekend despite no liquor license, pulled in simply by the attraction of get-down-to-basics dancing from midnight till six or eight in the morning.

But the Institute closed in 1989, a victim of the Detroiters' success abroad. "We all got too preoccupied with our own lives," says May. "The world started calling and we started answering." In the kitchen of May's stylish pad above the offices of his record label Transmat, four clocks tell the time in London, Tokyo, New York, and Detroit, a constant reminder of where his bread is buttered. During the height of Detroit's foreign success, May moved from Detroit for stints in Amsterdam, Paris, and London, but each time he's returned to the place he calls "an ugly beautiful city." "There's not too much more to

do here," says May, "except either be very creative or be very negative."

The English press often refers to May as "the Miles Davis of techno," but the My Bloody Valentine or Guns N' Roses of techno might be a more appropriate description of his musical disappearing act. Recording under the pseudonyms X-Ray, Mayday, and Rythim is Rythim (May's accidental misspelling, which he ultimately kept because "my rhythm *is* my rhythm"), May raised Detroit techno to its most majestic, elegant heights and transformed the music into epic, complicated compositions. From 1986 to 1992, May rapidly turned out some of the best singles that Detroit ever produced – "Nude Photo," "Strings of Life," "It Is What It Is" – then abruptly stopped making music in favor of travelling the world performing DJ gigs, enjoying wine (just a little), women (a lot), and song (just not his own).

But while May may be a superstar in techno circles, in Detroit he's almost invisible. "Nobody knows who Derrick May is in the black community like they knew who Derrick May was back in 1990 and 1991," says May's good friend Carl Craig. "Derrick is like Sam Malone, a serious legend, but more people who are involved in this whole electronic music rave thing know who Derrick is, and all those people are white kids."

"We may have left here too soon," admits May. While the Detroiters were building bridges in Europe, they were allowing the foundation of their home to crumble. No one was left minding the store in Motown, and the momentum that had built up over the four years since Atkins launched Metroplex began to dissipate in 1989. "Once the guys got the notoriety and acceptance in Europe," says Stacey Pullen, "they couldn't be found in Detroit at all. So it just left us, like, 'Where are we going to go next?'"

The answer was Canada. Windsor, Ontario, may be



the only place from which Detroit looks like a bustling metropolis. From a vantage point across the Detroit River, all the Motor City's racial and social problems disappear, and only the recent gleaming real-estate developments on the riverfront are visible. "This is one of the best locations to get that overall picture of Detroit," says Richie Hawtin, a.k.a. Plastikman, as he sits on a couch in the living room of his home in a former firehouse nicknamed The Building. "It gives me an interesting perspective. My music from the beginning is definitely based in Detroit techno, basically influenced by people like Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson, but it hasn't progressed or come out in the traditional Detroit techno way. It's partly due to my background, but also partly my location."

Since he launched Plus 8 (a reference to the fastest pitch adjustment on a turntable) with partner John

Acquaviva in 1990, Hawtin has become the most controversial character in the evolution of Detroit techno, so much so that there are plenty of people who feel that he shouldn't be considered part of Detroit techno at all – whether it's that his home base is across the river in Windsor, or that, as James S. of the electro group Drexciya once commented to an interviewer, he's of the "Caucasian persuasion."

Hawtin earned his white devil status by almost single-handedly bringing rave culture to Detroit. Since 1992, he's thrown what are widely acknowledged to be the city's best parties in some of Detroit's worst neighborhoods, taking advantage of Detroit's surplus of vacant warehouse and factory space to stage huge, conceptual affairs, like the one that helped give him his Plastikman persona, where he completely covered a building in black plastic.

When Detroit's techno movement had disappeared across the ocean, Hawtin reenergized the Detroit scene with a new infusion of creativity. Releasing records as States of Mind, Cybersonik (with Acquaviva and Dan Bell), Fuse, and finally Plastikman, Hawtin built an intense following in Detroit as well as across the Midwest, and in the

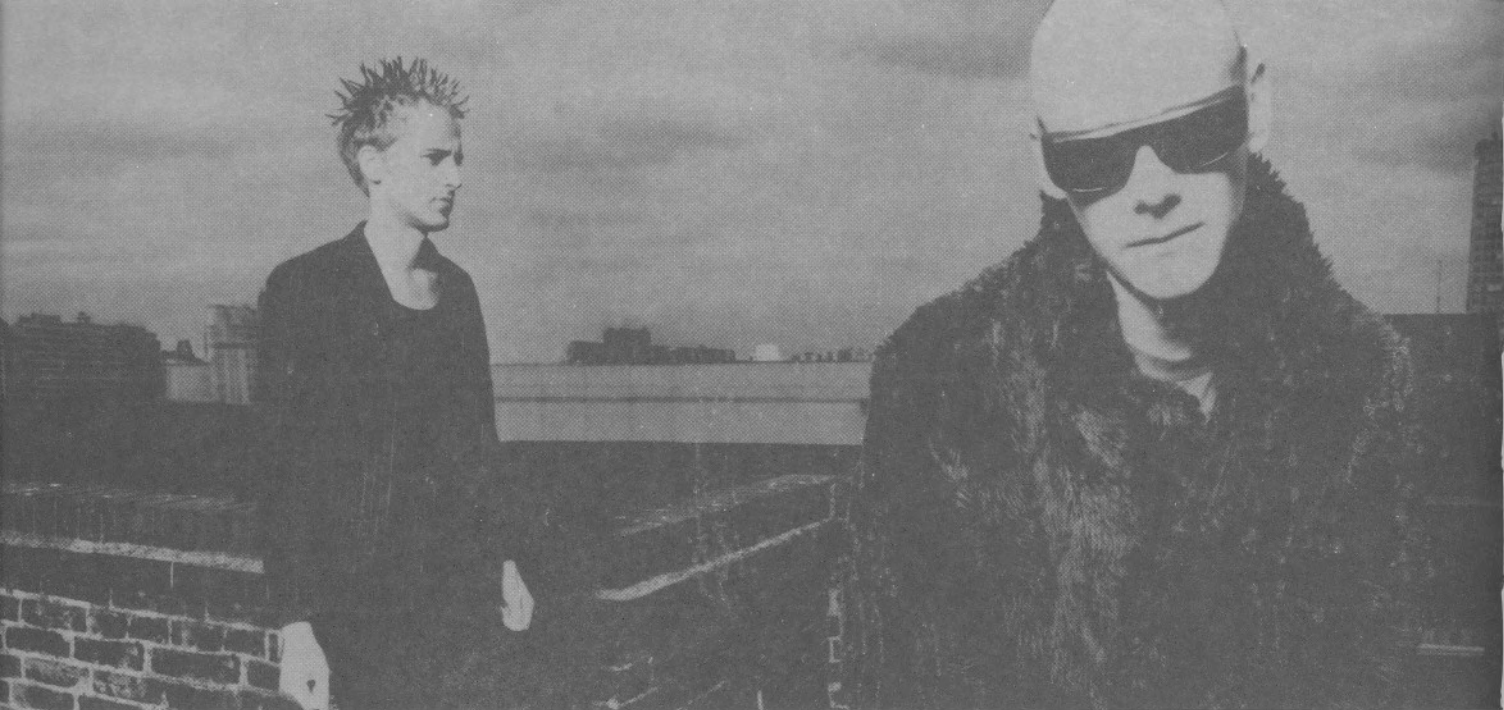


process totally reshaped the racial makeup of the local techno audience. After Hawtin stepped in to fill the vacuum created by the originators' European vacation, scores of young Caucasian fans followed him into the inner city in a startling reversal of white flight.

While Hawtin was shifting the constituency of Detroit techno to the vanilla suburbs, Mad Mike Banks and his Underground Resistance label tried to steal the course of the scene's original black identity. Banks is the conscience of Detroit techno, a combination of Chuck D and Ian MacKaye running a fiercely do-it-yourself operation where keeping it real means keeping it independent. Forming the group Underground Resistance with Jeff Mills (and later Robert Hood) in 1991, Banks brought a new aggression to Detroit techno, with UR song titles like "Riot," "The Punisher," "Elimination," "Predator," and

"Sonic Destroyer," and the motto "Hard Music from a Hard City." The stylistic approach of UR's tracks has ranged from pummeling hardcore to jazz-inflected melodicism, but the ideological content has never wavered, delivering puritanical anti-major label broadsides on songs like "Message to the Majors" and "The Theory," where a voice repeatedly chants "Remain underground!" In an era when most black pop stars boast far and wide about living large and getting paid mad money, Banks' anticommmercial *modus operandi* is a radical concept.

A formative influence on Alec Empire (of Berlin's Digital Hardcore label), Banks manages to pull off the difficult task of imbuing his instrumental tracks with a political subtext. One single, for example, is inscribed, "Message to all murderers in the Detroit Police Force –



We'll see you in hell!" and is dedicated to Malice Green, a black motorist beaten to death in 1992 by two white Detroit cops. As part of his self-reliant approach, Banks also helps run the distribution and mail-order companies Submerge and Somewhere In Detroit, "the world's most exclusive record store," which is open by appointment only – you can't get much more underground than that. Banks is the inspirational force behind Detroit's unique strain of black nationalist techno, which ranges from Drexciya – the mysterious collective who propose a scenario in which pregnant African women thrown overboard during the Middle Passage might not have drowned but instead gave birth to a race of water-breathing Afronauts who, any day now, are coming back up to the surface to deliver whitey a beatdown – to the crypto-fascist themes of Dopplereffekt, whose Gerald

Donald even posed for the matrix photo of the "Racial Hygiene and Selective Breeding" EP wearing a brown-shirt uniform and SS bars (which ended up being magic-markered out on the actual record).

The twenty-nine-year-old honcho behind Planet E, arguably Detroit's most innovative and important label these days, Carl Craig is the bridge between the original era of the Belleville Three and the various "waves" that followed, developing from the "boy genius" of techno, who made his first recording in 1989 under the tutelage of Derrick May, into the most consistently inventive Detroit artist of the last decade. Since launching the company in 1991, Craig hasn't just concentrated on the work of him and his friends, but also new local talent like the enigmatic Moody Mann, who had issued a stream of house-inflected twelve-inches on his own KDJ label



before Planet E released his outstanding debut album *Silent Introduction*, as well as non-Detroiters like Berlin's Quadrant and Britain's Mark Bell (who provided the beats on Björk's *Homogenic*). Recently, Craig has taken the next step and begun releasing full-length albums on compact disc, both of which had been heretofore untapped formats among Detroit labels. He's also initiated the practice of compiling retrospectives of out-of-print material, including the *Faces and Phases* collection of Kevin Saunderson's essential late-eighties underground singles and Craig's own early work as Psyche and BFC.

It's often said among electronic circles that there's a maximum of ten people with innovative ideas in techno at any one time, with everyone else who's making records simply ripping them off. If so, Craig is a constant among that talented ten, consistently heading

off into new directions that alternately delight and confound techno's tastemakers. His Paperclip People and 69 projects, for example, are some of the most irresistibly funky grooves to come from Detroit since George Clinton received his discharge from Uncle Jam's Army, while the two albums recorded under Craig's own name are more mellow, almost ambient affairs. Just to further derail the trainspotters, his Innerzone Orchestra album, *Programmed*, makes the oft-suggested jazz/techno analogy explicit – it has far more in common with a Herbie Hancock record than a 4/4 beatdown.

Craig is as close as techno comes to having a prodigy. He started listening to Mojo in first grade, and though he was a fan of Prince, Led Zeppelin, and the Smiths in high school, it was just after graduation that he discovered the scene developing at the Music Institute. "It blew my mind," remembers Craig, leaning back on a couch at Planet E's headquarters in a downtown high-rise office building. "The Music Institute was my coming out of my shell, freedom kind of thing. I finally found where I wanted to be, what I wanted to do, who I wanted to become. It was like for gay people, coming out of the closet. It was finding my musical identity, my lifestyle."

But young black audiences today aren't having experiences like Craig's electronic epiphany. Craig traces techno's divorce from its original black following to the point it began to veer from the street-oriented grooves of Italian disco and early hip-hop and began to get more spiritual and soundscapey. "Rap stayed street, rap stayed urban, it stayed within the community," observes Craig. "Techno went somewhere else." While hip-hop became the (purportedly) *verité* narrative chronicling the inequities of America's inner cities, techno's sci-fi soundscapes became the soundtrack to a cerebral ticket out, not so much escapist as transcendent; it wasn't a report of what was going on around them, but rather an open-

ended prophecy of what might yet be. "Techno is no words, no lyrical content," Craig continues. "We were like, 'Here it is, like it or not, let your body move to it, it's African rhythms mixed with European melodies, let's see what you can do with it,' and they were like, 'Fuck you.' So we went to Europe."

While many of his colleagues are still focusing their energies on the continent, Craig is taking active steps to make sure techno becomes the soundtrack to all tomorrow's parties. Toward that end, Craig has hatched a plan to invest a few thousand dollars in distributing free techno tapes to kids, hoping to get them hooked early enough so they grow up thinking that techno is normal. "Nobody knows our music because they can't hear it," says Craig. "Radio is not playing it. We need to take the initiative and promote ourselves in formats that people can actually listen to." Craig pauses to look out the window at the city below. "It just comes down to what we can do to make it happen," he says. "This is our hometown, and for us to be alienated like this isn't right."

But is it too late for techno to reclaim the streets?

Booty music is the newest "new dance sound of Detroit," as well as the oldest – it's been around in one form or another since the early eighties. It's sometimes called "Detroit bass," "ghetto bass," "techno bass," or "ghetto tech," or often just lumped in as "electro," from which it's derived. The terms are more or less interchangeable – sort of. "Electro is the meeting point between techno and hip-hop and funk," says Brendan M. Gillen, who runs the Ann Arbor, Michigan-based experimental electro label Interdimensional Transmissions. "It has inherently science fiction elements because you're using machines to talk for you rather than instruments, and it comes from a time when the future seemed so bizarre and exciting."

Booty, on the other hand, is electro's illegitimate

love child, with most of its practitioners obsessed with recapturing the early eighties sound of Cybotron and Model 500. Harder and faster than the similarly salty bass music of Miami or Atlanta, booty takes the Detroit tradition of speeding up the music to the extreme, with high-velocity beats, call-and-response chants, and potty-mouthed lyrics in obnoxious high-pitched voices that put the "scat" back into "scatological" – like Alvin and the Chipmunks if they hung with the Long Beach Crips. Booty is street level, working class, and incredibly reactionary in its homophobia and misogyny, with all the coochie-popping and bitch-slapping anyone could possibly hope for (or stand); call it "cum and bass."

Regardless of its exact handle, booty/bass/electro has won not only the hearts and minds but the asses of Detroit's black community. Techno has never been considered ghetto music, but now it's lost the battle for the streets to not just hip-hop but its own perverted cousin. Booty is the soundtrack of choice booming out of car speakers on weekend nights at Belle Isle, Detroit's popular island park, and cars cruising down Jefferson Avenue with trunks full of woofers. Booty/bass is getting the local radio airplay that techno could never achieve, especially on weekend mix shows on WJLB and WCHB that are broadcast live from clubs. Local sales are booming, with entrepreneurs selling records out of the back of their cars and testing their records at strip clubs to see if the tracks have shake appeal.

Booty's reigning titan is DJ Assault, a.k.a. Craig Adams, whose *Belle Isle Tech* CD carries the front-cover message, "Warning: This product has no social [sic] redeeming value whatsoever." Inside, there's enough unbridled testosterone to give C. Delores Tucker a field day, with such tunes as "Asses Jiglin" (sic), "Drop Dem Panties," "Bitch I Aint Yo Man," "Big Booty Hoes and Sluts Too," and three versions of "Ass N Titties." Unlike

techno, where the subject matter is inscrutable and open to interpretation, booty's topical preoccupations are easy to divine: in the words of the chorus to "Ass N Titties," "ass/titties/ass n titties/ass ass titties titties/ass n titties." With one tawdry tale after another about the world's oldest business, the only thing remotely "futuristic" or "sci-fi" about it is the sonic similarity to Luke Skyywalker (a.k.a. Luther Campbell).

Like just about every black musical genre before it, white musicians have now moved into the neighborhood. Assault's main challenger for bass supremacy is DJ Godfather (Brian Jeffries), whose "Player Haters In Dis House" and "Pump" have become local standards. Brian Gillespie, who describes himself as "a white kid with a black soul," runs two electro labels (Twilight 76 and Throw) and a bass imprint (Databass) and is trying to challenge Assault's Electrofunk and Assault Rifle record companies for the title of the Berry Gordy of booty.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there's considerable disdain from techno's artistic forces towards the booty men. Even Atkins, to whom booty claims paternity by dint of his Cybotron and Model 500 pedigree, is skeptical. "It's too silly," he says. "All that hoopin' and hollerin' and whoopin' 'It's your birthday!' - it's too corny."

It may be that booty is corny (as well as horny), but it certainly resonates in Detroit in a way that techno hasn't since its earliest days. "Detroit techno for the most part doesn't really exist here," says Lawrence Burden, co-owner of the electro/techno bass label Direct Beat, "and it really hasn't for quite some time." Booty's bottom-line-driven hustlers have been willing to make the compromises that Detroit's proud techno artists refuse to consider. Crass as they are, booty's sex-obsessed lyrics make the tunes more accessible than techno's purely instrumental song structures, which lack a human voice to relate to. White kids were drawn to gangsta rap by

exaggerated stereotypes of what black behavior was supposed to be, and booty samples that formula; where techno rejected racial stereotypes, booty plays into them.

But the issue of Detroit techno's low U.S. profile is bigger than just the Motor City and booty. Like soccer, Detroit techno has yet to fire the passions of most Americans. In their quest for domestic acceptance, the Detroiters have been stymied by a variety of factors outside of their control, including racism, conservatism in radio programming, the immensity of the U.S. marketplace, lack of record company support, and commercial and critical indifference to their brand of instrumental music – if not instrumental music in general – all compounded by the city's isolation from the industry, especially after Motown Records left for Los Angeles in 1972.

Some culpability can also be laid square at the feet of the creators themselves for issuing limited-edition singles under a sometimes staggering number of aliases on poorly distributed, vinyl-only independent labels, most with blank sleeves that carried little or no information except on the matrix label (and even that space was oftentimes left blank to create the much-sought-after "white label" release). It's an approach almost hell-bent on obscurity. "People in Detroit say, 'Oh, we didn't get the dues that we deserve and we didn't get this and that,'" observes Hawtin. "And then there are people like ostriches, they stick their heads in the ground, they want to be so underground that you've got to feel sorry for them. If you go out and work for it, you have to make some concessions to get what you believe in to a bigger stage. Some people don't understand that." Ten years after their singles first lit the fires of a youth culture revolution, the question about Detroit techno still remains: do Motown's electronic pioneers want to be art music snobs or urban dancefloor guerillas? The forefathers of techno still don't see why they can't have it both ways.

With Detroit techno, Derrick May, Kevin Saunderson, Juan Atkins – they were looked up to as the successors of Kraftwerk, the guys who took techno to the dancefloor. **STACEY**

PULLEN Some of my best stuff has come from mistakes. You'd be surprised with what

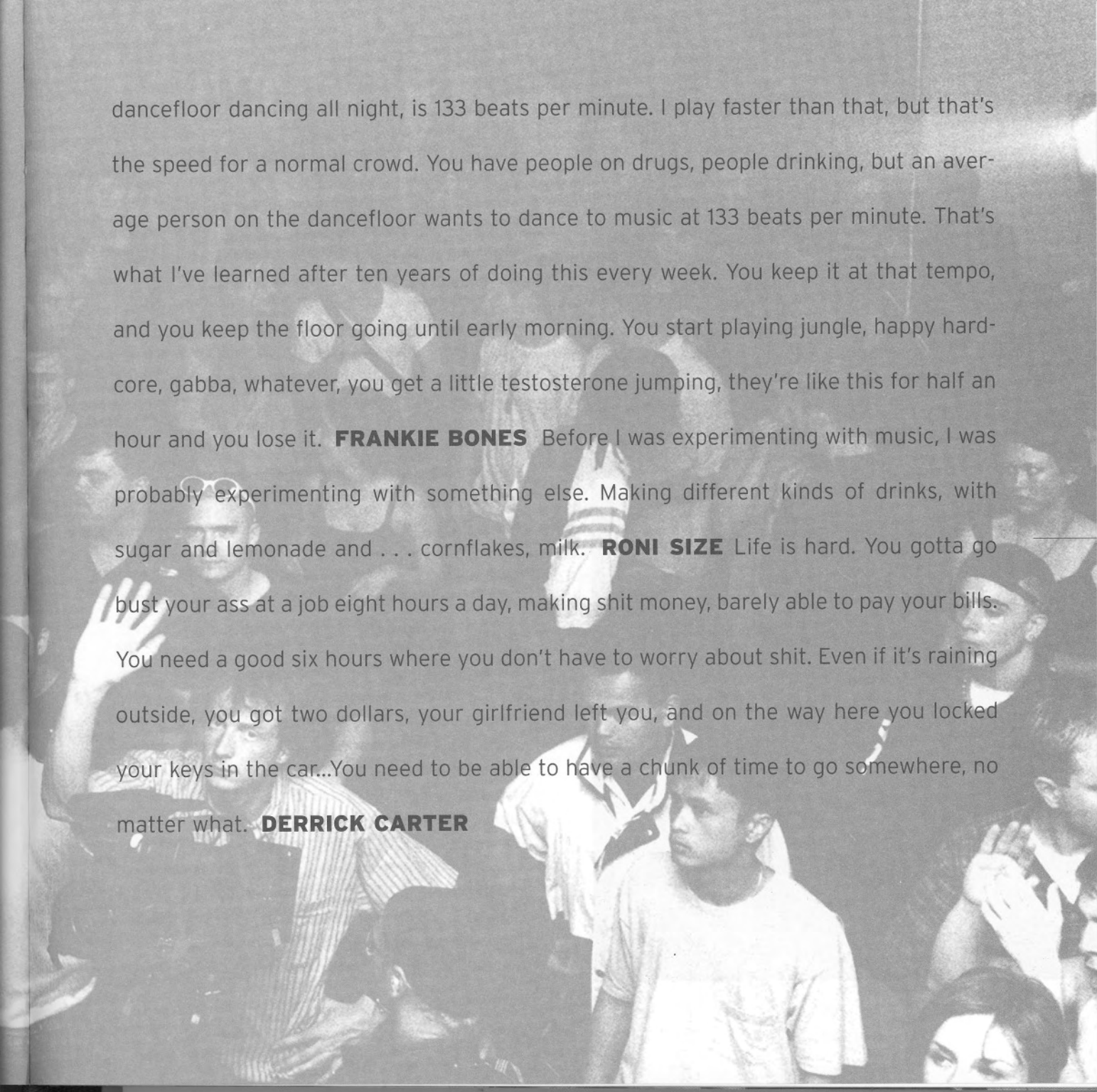
I come up with. **JUAN ATKINS** Robot music . . . I don't know, that's just what it seemed like. It just seemed like robot music. Not just dead robots. Really kind of alive.

SQUAREPUSHER We do not represent the future. We represent the eternal now.

FUTURE SOUND OF LONDON I see boundaries between musical styles as being very arbitrary: It all goes onto a CD and it all comes out of the speakers. **MOBY** What

grabbed me when I first heard Kraftwerk and Derrick May was the futuristic qualities of this music. Every time you heard a special record, not only did it have a special feeling and a special sound, it was unlike any feeling you'd had before, it was unlike anything you'd heard before. **RICHIE HAWTIN a.k.a PLASTIKMAN** We're not going to arrive

at a brand-new sound or a note or anything. It has to be a combination of elements that create another, two together create a third, and all these different things go into creating something new: The only way, I think, to arrive at something a little different is by combining things now. **BILL LASWELL** The actual beat for a dancefloor, to keep a



dancefloor dancing all night, is 133 beats per minute. I play faster than that, but that's the speed for a normal crowd. You have people on drugs, people drinking, but an average person on the dancefloor wants to dance to music at 133 beats per minute. That's what I've learned after ten years of doing this every week. You keep it at that tempo, and you keep the floor going until early morning. You start playing jungle, happy hardcore, gabba, whatever, you get a little testosterone jumping, they're like this for half an hour and you lose it. **FRANKIE BONES** Before I was experimenting with music, I was probably experimenting with something else. Making different kinds of drinks, with sugar and lemonade and . . . cornflakes, milk. **RONI SIZE** Life is hard. You gotta go bust your ass at a job eight hours a day, making shit money, barely able to pay your bills. You need a good six hours where you don't have to worry about shit. Even if it's raining outside, you got two dollars, your girlfriend left you, and on the way here you locked your keys in the car...You need to be able to have a chunk of time to go somewhere, no matter what. **DERRICK CARTER**



INTERVIEW:
Derrick May

Detroit's an industrial city. It's a wasteland of ideas. Detroit is the type of place where you can only dream of what the rest of the world is like. You find yourself trying to get out of there, wanting to put yourself in a position where whatever you think about, whatever you feel, you believe that it's going to help you get out of that city. I don't mean that in a negative way; Detroit is a cool town for some people, but in many ways you come up with this perception of the world by not having anything. By not having the same opportunities as some people have in other places. And that tends to put you in a position where your imagination begins to play a really strong role in everything you do. That is one reason why so many artists have come from Detroit or places like Detroit. Cities or places that don't have so much tend to create opportunities. People tend to use their imaginations to compensate. People tend to dream of what others have or dream of what it's like to be in other places. That's when the imagination gets hungry and when opportunities come around; you more or less push yourself to the next level. Not to have is to want. To have is to not want. Black science fiction and Alvin Toffler's, *The Third Wave*, have very much happened already. *The Third Wave* is here. The technological revolution is here. We're speaking now with a video camera that is not a video camera. It's a digital camera. I'm speaking to you, in the future, right now. We are here. The technological revolution, which is a phase after the industrial revolution, has already happened. Once again, we're in the future. Every second, we're in the future. The music [techno] started off being made by young black men from Detroit. It branched off to Europe and became bigger. Over there, it was mainly white kids doing it. When it came back to America, it was mainly white kids doing it. The music doesn't have the same feel, nor does it have the soul or love that it had when it first started. People

know what's good. In their hearts, people can feel what's right. The individual is far more intelligent than the masses. The right people will find the music, cherish it, and help it move to the next level, the so-called "futuristic level." "Strings of Life" was a mistake. A friend of mine came over to my home to make a ballad. He had put down a basic piano riff, and maybe one year went by between the time he did this five-minute piano sequence and the time that I listened to it. I was looking for something else on my sequencer, going through all my disks, and I found this little piece of music. It didn't mean anything to me at the time because it was, like I said, a five-minute-long ballad. But the tempo that I had had on the sequencer at the time, compared to the tempo that he recorded it in, freaked me out. I did a digital edit on it. I chopped it down and did a basic loop. I didn't sample anything, but I looped the main part of the piano, and I created a song around it. One guy said to me, "Man, how is it possible that that song is a song without a bassline?" I never thought about it having a bassline. It never dawned on me that it didn't have a bassline. Not once. I didn't think about it. The DX 100 was not the machine of Detroit. It was my machine. What happened was, a few guys in Detroit decided to use it. It never was the machine of Detroit, because I wouldn't let anybody know what I was using. I was really secretive about all that. I was very secretive with all of my gear for a long time. Because I knew that in this business, once you release a record, it's public domain. Once people know what you do and how you do it, they try to do it like you. The music business is a vicious business. It's all about other people making money. It's nice to be an artist, but it's also very much a money-making business. I'm in it to make money too. I love to be an artist. I love to create, but I also enjoy making money. Most of hip-hop is made by black artists. Most black artists are not imitating, they're reliving their most gratifying moments, the most interesting times of their life. That's why they sample and loop these classic old tracks from years and years ago – and also, they're funky loops. I think more than anything, that's what they get the loops from. I think to put anything more into that is really being far-fetched. I think about modern music today – for instance, techno music from Detroit – I don't think it was a mimic of anything. Motown was Motown. Detroit techno was Detroit techno. Chicago house is Chicago house. It is inspired subconsciously by something. Everything is subconsciously inspired by something. Nothing just...comes from nothing. Everything comes from something.



INTERVIEW: Mixmaster Morris

I'm not interested in categorization. See, I thought we had a revolution. But you know, the revolution seems to be well and truly lost. You sometimes wonder whether it's worth fighting for that revolution anymore, seeing as how its initial aims have been so perverted. I guess I have the same sort of feeling that the Bolsheviks would have had – by the time they got to Stalin they're thinking, "Do I support this anymore?" By which time you're in the gulag, it's too late. The techno revolution was very necessary, but it certainly allows the music industry to do a lot of scummy things. The music that's played in the clubs in London at the moment, I don't think I've ever heard music so bad. Really, I think it's the lowest standard. Even the worst disco, before the whole empire collapsed. I just don't see how it could continue. I mean, it will continue because millions, untold millions will be spent on hyping that music till kingdom come. But I can't see how anyone can put up with it. I went last Saturday to about six or seven London clubs and I was in tears by the end of it because I didn't hear any music that wasn't disgusting. Nowadays you can go to a party in England and hear twelve major label A&R men play all their new releases and call themselves underground DJs. People are having to fight harder to create an alternative. I've always been part of an alternative culture. I don't expect to like what every sixteen year old in the country likes. I didn't when I was sixteen and I don't now, when I'm thirty-five. I like the people who go the extra mile to find something more individual with more integrity than what you get in the charts. When you're a kid, you're brainwashed because all you ever hear is chart music, especially on daytime radio. It's only when I was like a teenager that I started to realize that there were albums and people making songs longer than three minutes. A vast wealth of music from all around the world, none of which ever gets heard on the radio. I have twenty or thirty thousand records in the house and none of it is chart music. It's all obscure and brilliant music from around the world. I make no apologies for that. It's not my fault it's obscure. But it's all music that maybe takes more than one listen. It's music that's

worth persevering with. It actually gives you something back in the end, instead of just a cheesy feeling of having been ripped off. It's like the difference between organic food and junk food. I think that the majors are turning the club scene into a junk food franchise, like "Kentucky Fried Beats" or something. Greasy, tasteless, disposable food that doesn't even satisfy your hunger and gives you cancer in the long term. Everything is up for grabs. PMT: Pre-Millennial Tension. The end of the millennium is a good time to reassess what's happened in the century and to save the careers of people that have been forgotten for the last twenty or thirty years. I think now is the time to do it because people look with a longer lens. This time of the century, people look with a long lens at the whole century and try and put it in perspective. I think a lot of rewriting of music's history is going to be done before this century is over, because most of the greats never figure on the commercial rosters. I mean, if you compare techno to jazz, say, Miles Davis never had a hit record. Ornette Coleman never had a hit record. Thelonious Monk never had a hit record. But Kenny G. has sold twenty million albums. That doesn't make him the best, it just makes him the blandest. I think the same is true with techno. None of the greats of techno ever figured on the pop charts because they don't work for the major labels. That doesn't mean we can write them out of the history books any more than you can write Miles Davis out of the history of jazz. It seems that every form of music that's of black origin suffers – each one suffers even more than the previous ones because people don't get any respect for what they've done. And to me that's really disgusting. ●