HEADZ-zINe
VOL. 1: 'REGIONS-UK'
Issue 2:
SOUTH-WEST HEADZ
Spring 2021

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capturing hip hop histories

SOUTH-WEST HEADZ

Master Blast Roadshow poster by Raz (Kilo), 1986.
Photograph: Kilo.

First published 2021
2021 Adam de Paor-Evans

Cover graff by Remser

Remser started writing in 1997 after seeing dubs and pieces by Sceo, Fixer, Teach, and G-Sane at the M5 pillar spot in Exeter. His school bus used to loop around Sannerville Way and the pieces could be seen from the road as well as the train. A couple of years prior to this, Remser's mum randomly bought him a copy of Spraycan Art, and he knew straight away that it was something he wanted to be part of. In early 2000 he moved to London and hooked up with the DNK/CWR boys, they were way better than him and super-active but this experience pushed him to develop his style and learn about all aspects of graffiti writing. Respect and love to all of the South-West writers and hip hop headz, too many to mention but you know who you are! DNK CWR Waxnerds forever...

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Published by Squagle House, United Kingdom

Printed in Great Britain

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RHYTHM•obscura:
revealing hidden histories through ethnomusicology and cultural theory is a long-term research venture that explores the relationships of the non-obvious and regional-rural phenomena within music cultures. A significant focus of RHYTHM•obscura is the consumption and production of music cultures in the often neglected provincial cities, towns, and rural areas of the UK.

The HEADZ Project is a major component of RHYTHM•obscura critically exploring hip hop histories with a particular interest in the provincial, regional, and rural. Examining the shared experiences of practitioners, artists, and the wider hip hop community in the UK and beyond, the project is concerned with in the personal histories, memories, and archives of artefacts, recordings, photographs, and music ephemera. The project produces publications, exhibitions, recordings, performances, reading rooms, witness seminars, and public talks. Recent outputs include the monograph Provincial Headz: British Hip Hop and Critical Regionalism (Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2020), and the contextual novel Scratching the Surface: Hip Hop, Remoteness, and Everyday Life (Squagle House, 2020).

HEADZ-zINe is a periodical output of the HEADZ Project. Taking the approach of a fanzine with a critical edge, it challenges the convention of academic knowledge production and dissemination. HEADZ-zINe seeks to capture the personal, local, and communal histories of hip hop. HEADZ-zINe is foremost interested in the stories of its co-authors and through a series of in-depth discussions and complimentary analysis of the artefacts and archives of hip hop, HEADZ-zINe reveals a set of previously untold stories.

This publication is non-profit making, and also available free online.

More on these projects and others at the DIGitAL HEADZ ArchiVe which can be visited at: rhythmobscura.com

Acknowledgements

Peace, love, respect and a massive thank you to all the co-authors that contributed to this knowledge production. Big thanks to Remser for the cover artwork. Special thanks to The UCLan Research Centre for Migration, Diaspora and Exile (MiDEX) at University of Central Lancashire, University of Bristol, The British Academy, and Arts and Humanities Research Council for their support in funding the production of this issue. Thanks also to David Kerr, James McNally, Luke Palmer/Acerone, and Justin Williams for their help and further support for this issue.

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Shout Outs

DJ Bex: November 9th, 1968 to December 20th, 1997 – Lee 'Sane MC' Bloomfield – R.I.P. Bro, A True Talent, Never Forgotten. Shout for Posterity to the Camborne Breakers Crew 1984: Grant Hooper, Tim Weston, Andy Bassett, Martin Bowker, Martin Vallenoweth, Justin & Julian Rogers (St. Ives), Alan Gardner (St. Ives). Shout to Dave Clarke – Camborne's first proper graffiti artist. Shout to Duane Clarke – For the pieces on our Nike 'cheaters. Shout out to all the 80's party people: The Bluff, Hayle; The Barn Club, Penzance; The Bowgie, Crantock; The Berkeley Centre, Camborne' The Penventon Hotel, Redruth; The Twilight Zone, Redruth; Tall Trees, Newquay. Big Shout to the one and only Record man - John Read – Falmouth Records and Tapes – no scene in Cornwall without you Sir! Big shout to all the Bluff crew '88-'89 – Summer madness! Big Shout to the Falmouth Victor Drago's crew and the Exeter Lemon Grove coach crew – what messy

times! Respect to all those that tried, failed, tried again, failed, tried and succeeded and to all those still doing it and making us old timers proud – You know who you are!!!

Dren Throwdown: Tim aka Atomic Dog, Nicky & Jerry Toman, Caleb Hendy, Mark Pritchard, Dave Brinkworth, DJ Bex, Si Spex & The Creators, Mark B RIP, Blade, MCM, Calum Smallz Jackson, Shan Dookna, Francis Doyle, Chris DVS, DJ Sad Eagle, Britcore Rawmance, Mystro/MysDiggi, Freddy Fresh, Death Comet Crew, Cosmo D & Lady E, Donald D, Lord Jazz, Redvenom, Ice T & Rhyme Syndicate, Ageing B-Boys Unite, Chess Moves Cartel, George Fields, Harry, Yoshiaki Ishiyama & Delic Records, Saxon Scoundrels.

E-Raze: To all and everyone whomever I've had the pleasure of sharing the same space as, you have shaped and influenced me in ways beyond your imagination. Peace, love, unity.

Kilo: BIG shout out to all the crews I currently represent but first and foremost, my own crew Sinstars, who celebrate their 30th anniversary in 2021. I'd also like to say thanks to all my friends, family and loved ones who have supported me over the years.

Mike Mac: to the ones who showed me the way, Ribbz, Clint, DJ Mish, Paul, Kelz, Krissy Kriss, Lynx. Trz (told ya), DJ Kim, Kimfest crew. Rare~Grills – forever appreciate your work. Acer, Sean, Specifik, thanks for the music brothers. Mum, Sis, Kim, and Kane this is all for you. Keep it moving.

Neil Taylor: All past members of the Raw Pack Massive, South Side Alliance; Jeremy Beaver (Hip Hop Museum DC), DJ Dvious (Hip Hop Museum DC), Jay Quan (Hip Hop Museum DC), Geechie Dan (Hip Hop Museum DC), Christine L. Bowen (Hip Hop Museum DC); Toney Smith & Maureen Yancey (J Dilla Foundation), Grandmaster Caz, Chiefrocker Busy Bee, Charlie Ahearn, DJ Cash Money, Kamal Aziz, T La Shawn, Big Wiz, Rah Fyah, TruthMaze, Kimani Beard, Soul Reflect, Reies Romero; all the pioneers who laid the foundations for the culture, everyone who has supported my vision and art, everyone creating and investing in the real hip hop – rock on to the breaka dawn.

Project Cee: To the original IBP crew, South Side Alliance, and all the headz from those revolutionary days of hip hop in The Westcountry; to the creative practitioners, ordinary citizens, and everyday people fuelled by the funk; to Evil Ed, Mikey D.O.N, and the pioneers throughout the provinces too many to name; and finally to my co-authors in this issue, I appreciate you. Good lookin' out. Rest in Peace: Matthew Stiling, Jay Harrison, Rob 'Tree' G, Serena, Sarah, Sparky, Brian McConnell, and David 'Dog' Maddock – you are all forever with us.

Simon Specifik Frankland: Shout outs to my brother from another mutha Project Cee, Dr Krome SWK For Life, Kilo, Remer, Scarce, Mr Fiks, Rola Roc, Mesh147, Dooza, Crystal, Such, Rumage, and of course all the South Side Alliance. Also shouts to all my Bristol headz, B-Line Fam and Cold Krushers. 2021, let's get it done, 1.

Vincent Dolman: Shout outs to the fly girls in our crew, the Subway Soldiers, Marilyn Gorman, Kirsty House, Helen. All the South Side crew and Def Defiance. Big up Scarce, Rola Roc, Ad-M.C./Project Cee, Kilo, E-Raze, Spider, Mitch, and all the crew. Big up Bristol. Blade, Caveman. Girls from the refuge, Tara, Marcha, Jemma. Exeter crew, Levy and Steph, Jodie, Ritz, Humpty, Kyla.

DJ XL: Mike (Really Good Records), Simon & Mitch (Bigga), Kev (Cooperage), DJ Bloodshot (Flava), Paul Sullivan (Flava), MC Milestone (Cohorts), Rob C (Cohorts), B-Boy Parkz (Cohorts), Vegas (Gert Biggun), SFC (Gert Biggun), MC Manage, Civic Skate Crew, DJ Blueprint, DJ Phat Chex, DJ Plug, MC Crusader, Tom Oldham, Nub Sound, DJ Ribbz, DJ Hurry, DJ Apache, DJ-T, DJ Shakey, Skinny-D, MC/Beatbox Lacey, MC Illiterate, MC Exel, The Grinch.

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When we talk about hip hop culture and hip hop history, we rarely talk about 50-year-olds from the far-flung corners of the UK – predominantly corners constructed of white majority space – where hip hop culture would never have been thought to have existed in the 1980s. However, as hip hop culture exploded across the globe it infiltrated the remotest inhabited parts of the world.

This second issue in Volume 1 of HEADz-zINe focuses on pioneering hip hop practitioners and adopters from **Devon** and **Cornwall**. Much like the personal histories shared in issue 1 by those that grew up in the **North-West** of **England**, there are stories here of limited access to hip hop, and a shared sense of desire for fully absorbing the culture – or as much as could be absorbed – considering communication and societal practices of the era and the region's cultural context. The hunger for *knowing about* hip hop and *knowing* hip hop became paramount in the lives of some young **Westcountry** people, and in this issue, the personal histories of twelve hip hop practitioners and adopters growing up in the provincial cities of **Exeter** and **Plymouth**, the local towns of **Bradninch**, **Camborne**, and **Sidmouth**, and the villages of **Newton Poppleford** and **Buckland Monachorum** are presented.

This issue focuses on the formative and arguably most important decade for the evolution of provincial hip hop in **Devon** and **Cornwall**, 1983-1992. However, not all co-authors discuss this period, but rather have focused on specific periods of time within this developmental decade. The words of **Rola**, **Kilo**, **Francois Parker**, and **E-Raze** are framed between the first noticeable moments of hip hop's arrival in **Devon** during winter 1983 and the release of **Public Enemy**'s debut LP in February 1987, whilst **Specifik** just touches into '89; **Vincent Dolman**, **DJ XL**, **Mike Mac**, and **Neil Taylor** focus on the late-80s and the dawn of the new decade – **Neil** particularly linking

his Devonian hip hop experience to preparing him for life in the racially-fraught context of **Minneapolis** – and **Dren Throwdown**, **DJ Bex**, and **Project Cee** offer their discussions from wet, dull Sunday afternoons and record hunting in the early '80s to trying to land a record deal. Yet, all co-authors talk of their love of music before hip hop found them, and speak with passion about **Aswad**, **UB40**, **Madness**, **The Specials**, **Shinehead**, **Superman and Spiderman**, **Smiley Culture**, **Fat Larry's Band**, **Adam and The Ants**, and **The Temptations**, among others. Although too young to fully engage in the jazz funk scene (although **Kilo** and **Bex** touch on this), jazz funk was effectively the precursor to the electro scene and breakin' in the **South-West**. In **From Jazz Funk & Fusion to Acid Jazz** (2009: 28, 153), **Snowboy** acknowledges a range of nights in **Devon**'s vibrant scene and of particular note, **Sidmouth**'s jazz funk nights DJed by **Chris Dinnis** and **Andy Pinney** (the latter my DJ partner during the mid-90s). Not able to attend these club nights and gain exposure to Black music, there is something interesting about the other musics the region's hip hop pioneers were originally drawn to – drum-heavy and rhythm-driven, laden with lyrics deep in socio-political context and notions of identity – sieved from the soup of the pop world and requiring further attention.

Hip hop arrived, existed, lived, and thrived throughout the 1980s in **Devon** and **Cornwall**. Its arrival was both exhilarating and beguiling to its receivers, and in the first couple of years delivered through baggy assemblages of culture in the form of compilation albums, TV snippets, bite-sized pieces on night-time radio shows, scraps of magazine articles, and the occasional UK issue of a **Sugar Hill** or **Tommy Boy** release. A compressed and edited version of a culture with such a deeply-rooted sense of people, place, society, politics, and creativity had been hurriedly packaged-up for capital gain, and as a result hip hop initially arrived in **The Westcountry** via this cultural tamping (**Provincial Headz**, 2020: 77-8), most obvious in the myriad of breakdance compilation albums released in 1984, and it was the task of the hip hop adopter to unpack the threads of authenticity and to discard the commercial reconstructions and incongruous additions embedded within these reifications. By the

end of 1984, **Beat Street**, **Breakdance: The Movie**, **Style Wars**, **Wild Style**, and **Beat This! A Hip Hop History** had flickered through TV screens on rented, pirated, and taped video cassettes, and the pages of **Subway Art** were pored over endlessly as the insatiable quest of **The Westcountry** hip hop audience consumed every possible fragment of the culture.

The existence of hip hop became visible – albeit sporadic – on wooden bus shelters, retaining walls on ring roads, park benches, and playground equipment as the earliest writers practiced their tags in and on public space; in the form of windcheaters, trainers, and offcuts of linoleum as they converted the rough landscape into dancefloors for breakers and poppers. The life of hip hop grew as its **Westcountry** pioneers attempted to fill in the cultural gaps by comparing, contrasting, and cross-referencing the limited supply of hip hop records, media publications, video footage, poorly-curated commercial compilation albums, and the seminal **Street Sounds Electro** series, by close reading and almost forensic analysis of the visual, material, and sonic languages they were consuming. These analyses were then triangulated against their own cultural backdrops as they sought to transform their environment into a space for hip hop. Hip hop thrived as these analyses underpinned the development of creative practice, from the pioneering breakin' by crews like **Centre Force**, **Electro Shock**, **Master Blast**, and **Camborne Breakers Crew** to the formative sonic experimentations of **Rola** and **Specifik** and the beat diggin' escapades of **Dren Throwdown**, **DJ Bex**, **Francois Parker**, and **DJ XL** as they hunted for that perfect beat.

The idea of the crew as a hub for forming relationships with people, places and the very ethos of hip hop was paramount for the sustainability of the culture, as **E-Raze** discusses. **Kilo** also talks about this in terms of all the elements, and his notions of mentoring are clearly evident from his early days as a key member of **Master Blast**, whilst **Project Cee** and **Mike Mac** make reference to the wider cultural network as a support mechanism for one's own creative practice.

Raz (Kilo), Viki (Solar) and Jay Harrison (Cask) RIP, 1985.
Photograph: Kilo.

Soon after the four major and most obvious practice-based elements of hip hop had arrived in the small cities, towns, villages, hills, fields, and coastlines of **Devon** and **Cornwall**, so arrived a pursuit for the fifth element – knowledge. As these young practitioners watched films like **Style Wars**, **Wild Style**, and **Beat This!** and rewound, watched again, discussed, practiced, rewound and watched yet again, a cyclic form of blended learning evolved which was a fusion of critical reflection, peer feedback, primary observation, and the acquisition of information to process and form new knowledge.

Using the limited material available and their own interrogation techniques – individually and collectively – they developed an alternative education – musically, culturally, politically, and historically. Hip hop culture offered not only new knowledge about a culture geographically far removed from **Devon** and **Cornwall**, but a counter to the status quo – the lazy, predictable canon of education that many experienced as schoolchildren in **The Westcountry** at this time.

Hip hop taught them to challenge their own history and identity, and as **Rola**, **E-Raze**, and **Project Cee** suggest, it helped them clarify and relate to their primary listening experiences and narratives in the **2Tone** movement, which in turn fostered an understanding of hip hop culture. This was about more than purely rhythm.

The importance of national phenomena is also of significance. Without **John Peel**'s evening radio show on **BBC Radio 1**, there would have been zero exposure to hip hop on the airwaves – even when **Mike Allen**'s **TDK**-sponsored **National Fresh** show was launched in 1986, the regional stations in **Devon** and **Cornwall** were among the those nationwide that failed to broadcast it. **Tandy** – the high street audio and electronics retailer, and their own affordable brand **Realistic** – brought the possibility of cutting and scratching to reality, as young aspiring practitioners hooked up the **Realistic 4-Channel Stereo Microphone Mixer** to a belt-drive deck in efforts to emulate the work of their pioneering heroes **Grand Wizzard Theodore** and **Grandmaster Flash** that they had witnessed on video. **HMV**, **WHSmith**, and **Our Price** were also instrumental in delivering – despite in acutely small proportions – certain vinyl releases that were benchmarks for 1980s hip hop, perhaps the pinnacle of which remains **Z-3 MCs – 'Triple Threat'** which somehow landed in shops throughout **Devon** and most of the provinces (yet, it seems, did not reach **Cornwall**, as **Dren** indicates).

To avoid confusion, I should also mention that the terms **The Westcountry** and **South-West** are used both interchangeably and throughout this issue, but do not encapsulate the nine official geographic terrain of either. Rather here, they include **Cornwall** and

Devon, and allude only to parts of **Somerset** and **Bristol**. As I write this, a forthcoming special edition on **Bristol** is in preparation, and other **South-West** regions will be explored in future issues.

The first mixer for many provincial hip hop practitioners, the Realistic 32-1105, 1986. Photograph: Adam de Paor-Evans.

Almost 40 years on from its arrival in **Britain**, this issue presents twelve conversations with its co-authors to demonstrate hip hop's girth, reach and power. Furthermore, the narratives here also attest to hip hop's influence on how it has shaped the lives of this issue's co-authors, by equipping them with a creative and technological skillset, how to approach everyday life, or understanding their own personal histories and cultural identities – from **The Westcountry** to **London** to **Tanzania** to **India** to **Pakistan** – questioning forms of Englishness and Britishness.

Adam de Paor-Evans

KILO

...in conversation with Adam de Paor-Evans

What was life like on the brink of discovering hip hop and graffiti?

Before my family moved down to **Exeter** from **London**, which was summer of '83, I'd just got into jazz funk, but commercial jazz funk. I thought I was into proper jazz funk, but wasn't really. My mate was a bit of a casual-soul boy before I knew what that was, but some of these sounds I was into were already beginning to morph into electro, so when I came down to **Exeter** I was already getting into electro. In terms of graff, I didn't start writing until I came to **Exeter**. I went to **Priory** (school) and gravitated towards a certain group, and I remember doing a photography course, and I would go around the subways in **Exeter** taking shots and came across all the **Wiz** stuff. My cousin was involved in graff already in London, so I had an interest, but I wasn't actively writing. Then I was using different names just as I was starting to tag, **Nitro** was an early one, then there was **The Funk Master**, haha. You know, it was all happening at the same time, during that period of moving from **London** and just discovering electro and bits of graff in **Exeter** at that point.

So can you remember what the first piece of electro you heard was, and how did that happen?

It would have been through a friend of mine called **Chris Watkins** in **London**. I come from a fairly impoverished family, and I always wanted things but I could never afford them, and my mum could never afford them, but my mate **Chris** was like the playboy in our area. He wore **Tacchini** tops and waffle trousers, and I became

friends with him. He had an **Amstrad** twin-cassette and that blew me away, as I'd never seen anything like it. I remember being round his house with the lights off – just so we could watch these LEDs go up and down on his **Amstrad** and he was playing electro. I think it was **Electro 2**. **Electro 1** had sold out, and because we had already been checking out jazz funk, then he bought **Electro 2**. It would have been either **Two Sisters** or **Hashim**, you know, those tracks, then I got really into it and began seeking out the rest of the **Electros** in **Our Price**, **Putney**. Then my family moved to **Exeter**, and I brought that stuff with me. I was already doing pause-button tapes, you know, taping stuff off the radio, but only a few bits.

DevonAir Plus roadshow featuring Raz (Kilo) and MBC, 1985.
Photograph: Jay Tomkins.

Then when I moved to **Exeter**, the first thing I wanted to do was to continue this interest. Obviously, I didn't know anything about

Devon, but I went to **Exeter Carnival**, and I remember being in **High Street**, and **Louis** (**E-Raze**) – I didn't know him at the time – was sat up on some scaffolding wearing a pair of **Nike Air SC** – that funky brown and blue pair – so I clocked his footwear, then he clocked me, and we got chatting.

Before **Louis** though, in **Newtown**, **Exeter** – my little area – I quickly met some of the local kids. A couple of them were already getting into breakin', there was a kid called **Mark Cox** and we used to call him **The Back Spin Kid**. He lived opposite my house, and he had this unreal backspin. We used to break on a little square with a bench set back off the pavement in **Newtown**, we used to go breakin' there, and then in **Belmont Park**. There was another kid too – **Tony Harris** – and we had this little neighbourhood crew thing. Then we found out about some other kids that were breakin' at a youth club in **St. Leonards**, it was basically a table tennis club, and they'd move the tables back. I must have found out about them through school, but it turned out to be **Steve** and **Andy Butt**, and before we knew it we had this crew called **Electro Shock**. I was still going back to **London** once a month, and every time I went back I'd do pause-button recordings off the radio of **Mike Allen**'s shows and all that, and bring them back to **Devon**. I've still got most of those tapes now.

At that point, did you know there was a relationship between electro, breakin', and graff?

When I first heard electro, I would say no. But then there was things like **'The Message'** which were creeping in, and once those sorts of records – especially **World's Famous Supreme Team** – arrived I quickly realised there was a link. Also, I was fortunate to have my cousin who was already involved, so he tied up the loose ends for me. I remember being at his place in **Southfields** on one of my visits back to **London** and obviously, to me, he was the don as he was already into this scene and friends with **Basil Liverpool - Look Twice (Electro Rock)** who I thought was just a popper, but my cousin showed me

this video of **Basil** breakin', and that would have been the first time I'd ever seen proper, full-on breakin'. I remember him saying to me: "This is breakin'", and at the time I thought breakin' was scratchin'! I thought that's what you called scratching records. That's a funny little memory.

Haha, that's really interesting. It must have been a very different experience being in **South-West London** then suddenly being in **Devon**. What were the most noticeable differences?

MBC 25th reunion piece by Kilo (Raz), 2009. Photograph: Kilo.

My first vivid memory – before we actually moved – were family friends we knew that had already moved down. So we used to come down and visit, and one time we were coming down to look at the

house we were going to move into, and you've got to remember I came from a mixed-racial family background, you know, and I'm here in this area my mum was telling me was going to be my new home, and at the end of the road, on a low wall, were a group of NF-type skinheads just sat there. I just thought my world was fucked; you know. I'm moving to this city that's racist. There was definitely full-on racism there at the time, there was everywhere in the '80s in **England**, but fortunately I went to **Priory**, and I remember the joy I felt the first time I met **John Antat**, you know from one of the only Black families in the area, and I became friends with them. So, my first impression of **Exeter** was not a great one, but it did change which was good.

Raz (Kilo) throwing down at the Belmont Park jam, 1985. Photograph: Jay Tomkins.

Yeah, although there weren't many, thankfully there were some people in **Devon** from different ethnic backgrounds. So when you

started hanging out and breakin' with these local kids, was there a difference between their breakin' and what you'd seen previously? Did you introduce them to anything they might not have known about?

Unknowingly probably, yeah. But it's difficult to say if there were any differences in terms of what I'd come from as I hadn't really started, but it seemed very fractured. It wasn't a together thing, we didn't fully understand you could be involved in all sorts of hip hop elements, you'd just do one maybe and focus on that.

I think though through progression in the scene, you pick things up like being able to hold your own in other elements, it's a natural thing.

Yeah, I think that's a good point, you're right. You'd see what was going on around you as things developed and learn that way. See, the first time I remember seeing you, I was captivated by these matching **Master Blast** tracksuits. I remember where it was, remember at the arse-end of the cathedral, there was a lino there, you were there because it was raining, which is why you were all there as it was undercover and **Barclays** was still open so you couldn't go there yet. I remember clocking **Herbie**, **Louis**, **Spider**, and a kid doing headspins in the circle. I remember that really vividly.

As **Master Blast**, we had kids that would kind of tag on too, could have been a kid called **Weenie**. It wouldn't have been **Pete Thomas** – he was known for his turtles not headspins – **Spider** would know.

Pete Thomas, I remember his turtles at the **Cookie Crew** night, fucking hell I'd never seen anything like it apart from on **Beat Street**.

Exactly. He was unreal. But it wasn't just turtles, he had 'mills, lots of moves. We went to **Bristol** one night, I think it was the **Moon Club**, and we got into an impromptu battle. **Pete** smashed them, the only thing we beat them on was turtles, but he smashed it.

So how did **Master Blast** come about, were you one of the founders?

Basically, we set up **Electro Shock**, that was our little thing. We had the felt letters – we didn't have the same tops – but we ironed them onto whatever clothes we had, and then from that, one key person in terms of **Master Blast** was **Herbie**. He was a good organizer, he had the idea we all get the whole uniform, same gear, look the part, you know. We were watching things like **Electro Rock** and whatever else we could get our hands on, and **Sky TV** which had just come out then, I had **Sky TV** at home so we used to watch the **Newcleus** videos, things like that, and they would all have the same gear on, the Bboys. We realised we needed to make ourselves stand out; I was involved in that but have to credit **Herbie** as the main influence there.

So, **Master Blast** came out of our meeting up through whatever channels, and **Greg** and **Paul** and those guys. They were already doing their thing as **Future Shock**, at least I think that's what they were called, and **Centre Force** which was **Woody** and those guys. **Centre Force** were the best crew in **Exeter** hands down, they used **Barclays Bank** before we even used it. We used to go there to watch them. That was **Herbie**, **Maggot**, **Stu** (**Hi-Rize**), we all then met through one thing and another, and once we realised we were all on the same wavelength, we decided to break away and set up **Master Blast**, and some of the main guys from **Centre Force** got to the age where things like cars and bikes took over, and we were the next generation as it were.

So how long were **Master Blast** going?

I couldn't tell you exactly in terms of years, but it was a while. It must have been a good year or two. **Herbie** was obviously trying to cut his teeth as a DJ at the time, and we met up with **Andy Loman**, his parents used to run the Thursday club up **St. James**.

Yes, **Rola** and I came to that once or twice.

Yeah, through **Andy**, he had a video camera, and we used to film our training sessions. We then set up the **Master Blast** roadshow, which was basically through **DevonAir**, someone had coordinated between us and them, and as part of the radio roadshow we would go around performing with **Herbie** DJing and emceeing and the rest of us breakin', and we had a guy called **Simon** beatboxing, and also I had started to do graffiti, so we have the whole package.

St James Y.C. featuring DJ Lomax, E-Raze, Hi-Rize, Mags and Spider MBC, 1985. Photograph: Jay Tomkins.

Ah, there's a photo of a piece which reads 'PLUS', was that part of it?

Yeah, **DevonAir Plus** was the name of the roadshow, and so they wanted us to paint that. Other people were involved too, like **Jay Tomkins**, **Viki** and **Jay Harrison** (Rest in Peace), **Viki** was interested in graffiti so she was kind of involved.

Pete Thomas throwing down, Exeter High Street, circa 1985. Photograph: unknown.

So was this the beginnings of you writing?

Yeah, we all had tags, but me and **Stu** were the ones pushing forward with graff, and **Louis** was beginning to get into it. I was already involved a little, trying to be anyway. There were also times where my school mates and me would go to **Michael Vinnicombe**'s house in **Burnt House Lane** at lunchtime after getting chips from **Mr. Lee**'s chip shop, and we'd take it in turns to choose the videos, when it was mine and **Vinnie**'s turn, we'd clear everything out of the kitchen and practice backspins, even **Paul Murphy** the punk was trying it out for a laugh, then the next day, we'd have to watch videos of **Bauhaus** and **Big Country** and all that. Then we would go back to school in the afternoon. Things like that though, gave me an appreciation of things

outside hip hop, as you know, it's very easy to have hip hop tunnel vision.

Was there a conscious decision then to focus on graffiti?

I think graffiti for me was the thing as my mum was always interested in art, maybe there was a subconscious connection there, and conventional art didn't do it for me. I'd already started dabbling, but graff was something that came easier for me, breakin' too, but my crew carried me with that!

That's a deep story, and we've not even got to 1986!

It's funny though, there are so many things you forget, it's only through the conversation you recall how integral we all were to the scene and its development, we all had our roles that we played whether we were conscious of them or not. I thought I was going to be the kid from **London** that would go down to **Devon** and be the standout cool kid, and I quickly realised I wasn't. I may have had a head start on music and fashion a bit, but, when I saw there were people in **Devon** that were equally as passionate about it as me, it was a good feeling, you know. I like to think that's kept me grounded. That's how I perceive myself, anyway. Others might not perceive me that way. But you know when you look at some old schoolers and how they act, they can be demanding, demanding respect, whatever, that's not me, not at all.

But it's funny, you talk about **Herbie** being this organizer, but for me, you've always had this approach and been that sort of person, the one that brings people together.

Kilo (Raz) revisiting old haunts in Devon, 2014. Photograph: Kilo.

I think I learnt some of that from **Herbie**, some is in my character too – I'm a Virgo! **Herbie** showed me I can be like that. It's important to me to help keep things together and support things, through **South Side Alliance** to **Sinstars**, it means a lot to me to see how people like yourself, **Rola**, and different people have gone and created their own paths through hip hop, it's a good thing.

I feel that. Ever since that first jam in **The Arts Centre** in '88.

The Arts Centre, Exeter, 1988. Photograph: Kilo.

Yeah, like **Cram** from **Plymouth** mentions that jam in his **Sinstars** biography.

Amazing, you'll see **Neil Taylor** mentions it too, it was a monumental moment in **Devon** hip hop. The impact for a lot of people was incredible.

If that's the case, it's really nice to feel that you've had an impact on people's upbringing.

Kilo started writing graffiti in late 1983 after his family relocated from London to Exeter but didn't really get 'busy' until early '84. After moving back to London in 1991, he produced Visual Grafix, the UK's first (official) graffiti videozine, which was sold in numerous outlets both nationally and internationally. Since 1995, Kilo has been teaching classes and workshops in graffiti design, painting techniques, and production skills, both across the UK and overseas. In addition to educational work he has also produced commissioned work for clients such as AOL, ABN Amro, Guinness, Network Rail and CBBC. He has also painted numerous private commissions ranging from small canvasses to full-sized murals on interior and exterior walls including several vehicles. A few other projects he has been involved with worth a mention are co-founding AlFreshCo Paint and managing The Bridge hall of fame, both located in Cambridge.

https://www.facebook.com/GraffitiArtistKiloSinstars

Instagram: @keylowgram

Kilo SIN FBA TDS BMK SSB MW XMEN KAOS

FRANCOIS PARKER

...in conversation with Adam de Paor-Evans

Starting at the outset, what was life like for you just on the cusp of discovering hip hop?

I was always music mad, from as far back as I can remember. My first day starting school, my very first day, the teacher was amazed I knew certain songs already, I learnt these songs hearing my grandmother singing them. She was a record collector, but only on a small scale. She'd buy records from **Asda** and **Rumbelows** and wherever the latest **James Last** record was, but she was crazy about music, and so was I. In junior school I remember conducting a poll of what everybody's favourite band would be, I got everyone to fill in a slip of paper with their favourite band. Just before I knew what hip hop was, me and this girl **Denise** who used to live across the road, we used to sit in my room recording fake radio stations, pretending to do the announcements, then play a track. Every Christmas or birthday I'd get an album, you know, stuff like **Madness** and **Adam and The Ants**, but I'd love the compilation albums as well. Now I'm not fronting that I wanted them for the more obscure tracks – I wanted them for things like **Yazoo** and **Kids From Fame** – but they would have other bits on them. I got one in 1982 called **Raiders Of The Pop Charts** which had **Whodini**'s **'Magic's Wand'**. I didn't know what it was, but I certainly had an awareness that it was different than other things. So I wasn't into hip hop yet, but started to discover rap music or what we would come to know as breakdance music. So me and **Denise** would have been sat there playing **'Magic's Wand'**, then the other one was **Chart**

Attack also from 1982 which had **Fat Larry's Band – 'Zoom'** on it, I wanted that! It had **Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five**'s **'The Message'**, and I thought: "What's this?" Never heard anything like it. I can remember us actually pretending to **Denise**'s mum that we made it, and that we'd got her grandad to do the vocals on it, and we did the music with my **Casio** keyboard! I don't think her mum believed it for a minute, but it really shows how music was our world. That was '82. Apart from the music, you know, we were doing general kids' stuff, we were eleven, you know, going down the woods, climbing trees and stuff, but also there was this thing about being crazy about music. My first step into finding rap music and having no idea what it was. Am I right it remembering '82 was **'Buffalo Gals'**?

Yes, December '82.

Right. I can remember what room I was in where I heard it. I remember where the TV was, I was watching it on **Top of the Pops**, I had the black and white TV on a chair, and I was sat on the floor in front of it, and I remember **'Buffalo Gals'** coming on, and I was intrigued. I won't pretend I liked it, I was just intrigued, it was so different. I was challenged by it. It was a sensory overload coming through this black and white TV, it was a moment; so impactful. The first sight of the elements as they were packaged to us coming over here.

That's incredible. So what comes next?

So in 1983, I was at a birthday party. It was Thursday night, **Top of the Pops** was such a big thing culturally for us, and we stopped whatever was happening at the party, and **'(Hey You) The Rock Steady Crew'** came on, and I was like: "Wow!" For me it was more accessible than **'Buffalo Gals'**, I don't think **'Buffalo Gals'** was a pop track, but **Rock Steady Crew**'s was definitely a pop song, and I liked it. The

breakdancing – probably not the first time I saw breakin' – but it was incredible. Straight after **Top of the Pops**, we're all trying it – no idea what we were doing – but we were trying to breakdance. The second time was at a barbeque and my mate **Bob** did the caterpillar, he was also the first guy that I heard chop up the **'Amen break'**, and he was a quarterback for the local American Football team, you could give him something and he'd excel at it. I then copied that the next day at school – did the caterpillar – along with some shit bodypoppin', and that was the start of my breakdancing career.

Practising DJing in bedroom, 1989. Photograph: Francois Parker.

I lived on an estate called **Southway** on the edge of town, we didn't go in town much. So we were out on our estate, you know, doing kids' stuff. **Commodore 64**, **Spectrums**, the funfair was a big thing, you would hear cool tracks at the fair – they'd play **Shannon**'s **'Let The Music Play'**, arcade games, and all over that period breakin' and all these other mad things seemed to be there at once. The graff crept into this too, it wasn't suddenly there, but it crept in, then it became part of hip hop. We weren't calling it hip hop yet though.

That's a really nicely detailed account of the first year or so. Do you know why you were so taken by this? What was it about it?

The answer is I don't really know. Thinking about it now, I was so into music, but with other music there was no extension to it, when I was into **Madness** and stuff, I'd dress in the glasses and you might have a **Harrington** jacket and do the dance for a minute, but when we found **Break Machine** and **Rock Steady Crew**, I could see the cultural attachment to what they were doing. There were still massive gaps, but they were filled in mainly by the **Beat This! A Hip Hop History** programme. It was the first thing that had extensions attached to the music, something you could actively do. My group of friends, we weren't into football, and we just got together and did it. This documentary was monumental. I don't even know how we knew it was on.

Yeah I know, for some reason this one of the series was on at eight in the evening, maybe that's why more younger people had a chance of seeing it? Most of those **Arena** specials were on after nine or even ten, so that really could be a factor. I'd love to think the **BBC** scheduling team did that on purpose so more kids could watch it. I didn't watch it at the time of broadcast, but a mate recorded it, and I wonder if its time slot helped a lot of kids tape it too.

Ah right, maybe? I did watch it live, and a load of my friends did too, we wouldn't usually be **Arena** watchers! By that time we would have been hungry for more knowledge, and we were really getting a taste for it. But yeah, that documentary, I watched it with complete bewilderment. It carried such an impact. The whole thing, **Bambaataa** in the Bronx, cutting up **Bad Bascomb**'s **'Black Grass'** on turntables, I was thinking: "What the fuck is this!" What a moment. I wanted more. It was unbelievable, I could feel the futurism that **Soulsonic Force** were wearing. It reminded me of **Bronx Warriors** – we were aware of **Hollywood**'s version of **The Bronx**, but it felt like we were getting a more realistic version through this. **McLaren** talking about the volatile crowd, wow, it was crazy, what an impact. I remember the night after it was shown, the fair was at **Central Park**, and we walked all the way home from that – three miles – talking about it constantly.

Beat-making set-up, 2005. Photograph: Francois Parker.

I love your reflection of the acts of hip hop being a cultural extension, and your feeling that you were more involved in the music because of the activities that went with it.

Definitely, it did come to us as this four elements package. Hip hop gave us something to do. The music we were breakin' to were songs dubbed off the radio, but now and again, someone in the crew would get a compilation tape and it would have a breakdancer on the sleeve, these visuals helped connect the dots as well. The movies helped massively too. **Breakdance: The Movie** and **Beat Street**. We watched pirated copies that were floating around. We were also getting a lot of what we thought of as breakdance music from **Germany**, as my mate's brother was over there, and there were a lot of **US Air Force** there, so I guess that's why they made so many of these comps.

These little details are so important, these stories aren't discussed in depth enough, it's fascinating.

Yeah, I lived on the estate, there were about twenty of us into it, and we just made up what the culture was really about as we had no other support. We had nobody else to reference at all, just the guys on the estate and the things we'd recorded off the TV and radio, and these handful of compilations.

So what happened then?

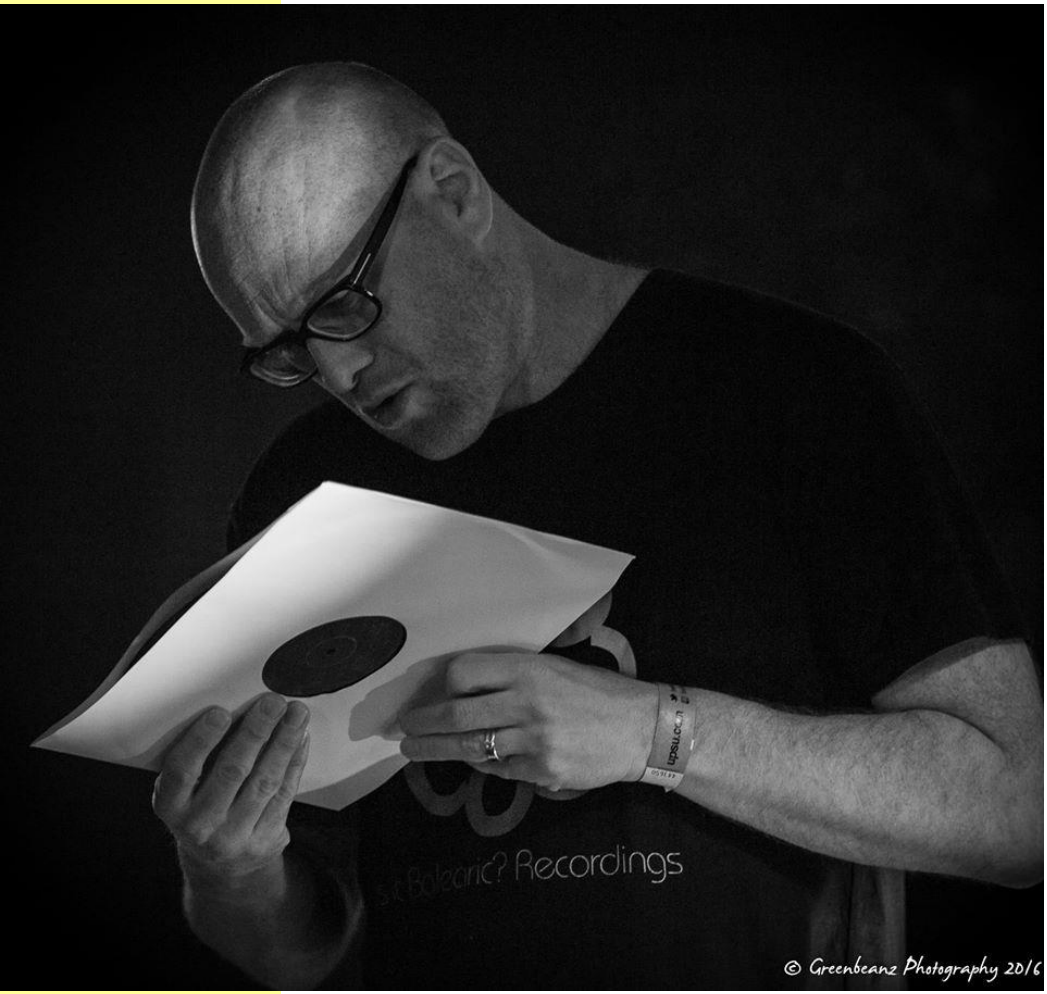
So, one day I was walking through town with my gran, and outside the toy shop, I saw something I could not believe. Two guys poppin' and lockin', dressed like they were in a breakdance movie. They looked absolutely incredible mate; it was a jaw-dropping moment. There they were dancing. I'd never seen anyone out of my group dancing. They were so good, a million times better than us. So

impactful. This guy **Dr. Doolittle** – **Dayo** – was incredible, just mind-blowing. The coolest-looking guy I'd ever seen in my life, he was probably only about sixteen, but it was very impactful. The first time I'd seen poppin' outside our little circle or TV. That was my first glimpse of real-life hip hop culture on the street. This guy went on to be a rapper and writer, classic graffiti writer. He used to do stuff with **Rust**, **Paw**, legendary local graffiti guys. Anyway, I went back to **Southway** – telling the guys about how cool these fellas were in town – and about a week or so later, I went to the **C&A** subway and that's where I saw a sea of breakdancers. I couldn't believe it. Boomboxes, lino, and windcheaters were just everywhere. Looking back though, getting a **Nike** windcheater was a big thing, not everyone could afford them, so kids were just breakin' in whatever sports gear they had; this was proper hip hop. Over the weeks and months that followed, we edged into that scene. It was a hostile scene – if you weren't in the clique – you weren't exactly welcomed, there was more than a hint of competitiveness, and me and my guys, we were from out on the estates, you know, people thought we were bumpkins, you know. Can I ask you, Adam, what was your breakin' scene, was that at a bank?

Yeah, so there was two I remember, there was one I was involved in in **Sidmouth**, a small one, there was an attempt at a crew, I was by far the youngest. There was about eight of us all in all, and I remember once going to **Exmouth** on the bus to have a battle with this crew from **Budleigh Salterton** – we didn't know what to expect – somehow we exchanged numbers with someone in their crew and we hooked it up, and we got beaten easily. It was a mad experience, I remember **'Clear'** by **Cybotron** pulsing out of the boombox as these lads were throwing down, and I thought: "Oh God, we're dead!" Then there was the main scene in **Exeter** – like you say at **Barclays Bank**, **Master Blast** were the major crew then, we were really on the periphery. I think I might have only danced once or twice, and mainly after the best Bboys had left or when the crowd was thinning out. I think because I was a year or two younger, it was more fear of rejection if they thought I was crap.

Yeah there was something about the age differences. I did edge my way in, I was really hoping to get accepted by these guys that were clearly better.

Indeed, for me it was acceptance from these guys in **Exeter** through rap and embracing hip hop which came a year or two later, probably around late ’86 early ’87 was when we first met them properly.



Francois Parker, 2016. Photograph: Greenbeanz Photography.

One day we got into town and thought we were going to win a battle with our best dancer, and at one certain move we did beat them, and they literally told us to fuck off. We thought being better would be our way in, but they told us to fuck off. So they were hostile when we were crap, and hostile when we were better! But because I loved it so much, I found a way in and became part of the scene. I used to travel around a bit with them then, up to **Exeter**. Getting to know who the crews were around was important, and back to the **Plymouth** crews, there was **Force Ten** – and they were a bit older – they were underage still, but at **The Academy** (nightclub) they were getting paid to dance there. There was **The Fresh Collection**, and **The Pop Jets**. They were the three prominent crews. I was never affiliated with any of them, but they were the ones that made up the scene in town. That was a scene that probably lasted about a year and a half, then when it started to fade out, it really broke my heart. You know, I was proper into it, and these guys who I considered were great dancers, one of them said: "Nah, we're into BMXing now." I couldn't believe it. Broke my heart, man.

I've thought about this a lot. Why do you think some of us stayed with it, and a majority just drifted off and forgot about it and went into other things?

Well I think we related to something that we just fell in love with. You know, I think we saw something that we truly loved, and the ones that saw it like a flash in the pan, they saw something that appealed too, but they were maybe into something fashionable, loved it because it was new. Also, a lot of people will just follow what their mates do, one of the crowd will be a tastemaker. Looking back to who was in our breakdance crew, when our best poppers left, some of the other guys just blindly followed them, whatever it was. But when I saw this lot saying that breakin' was out, I didn't even get the concept, it was never 'out' for me. That was an impactful moment for me for a different reason. Yes the breakin' faded, but the hip hop didn't, the

other elements got stronger, then we had the mid-90s breakin' revival too.

So was there much evidence of the other elements at that time?

Well, there was a bit of tagging and some bombing on our estate, and there was a lot of graffiti around the town centre. I tried rapping too, but I was crap, but the DJing and graffiti was strong. I can remember walking around in the snow with the boombox, living our version of hip hop. Nothing would stop us. That was well into '85 and discovering **John Peel**, and sporadically we'd get a tape somehow, sent down from someone somebody knew, but nobody seems to be able to remember who! When did you discover **John Peel**?

I remember the first track I recorded off **John Peel** that none of my friends had caught – it was **'The Big Beat'** by **The Organization** – it stuck in my mind because not only did I love that record, but nobody else I knew taped it, so it was my finest hour! I was listening to **John Peel** for a while before then though.

Those records **John Peel** played created a canon of tracks that has had a huge impact on people in all the provincial places around the UK – like you've said in **Provincial Headz**. If you didn't live in a big city and you weren't connected, you were never ever going to hear the kind of stuff he played – like **High Potent**'s **'H.P. Gets Busy'** – there's people in the rural areas all around the UK that know that song inside out. If **Peel** played four new tracks in a week, you were lucky. We all know those tracks if you speak to people our age around the UK, just in that window of a couple of years.

I love the way you mention about not being connected; you really had no chance if you weren't connected somehow – at least **John Peel** connected us – even though it was just enough for us to grab hold of.

Francois Parker, 2016. Photograph: Greenbeanz Photography.

Yeah, we'd get the odd UK-released **Run-D.M.C.** record, or the odd this or that, but that was about it. Through **John Peel** I found out about **Pretty Ricky & Boo Ski**'s **'It's Mine'**, that was the time I started getting the odd record and playing around on my gran's turntable. You know, the old thing with the spindle, weirdly she had two – one in each room – so I put them together and started playing around mixing that way, and I've still got records from then that are absolutely fucked as I didn't know what slipmats were. I thought scratching was when you slide the needle right across a record, I'm going back now to about '83 or early '84 or so, and I showed my cousin this scratching. I got my gran's records and I scraped the needle across the record, and he just looked at me like I was a right wanker.

Francois Parker, 2016. Photograph: Greenbeanz Photography.

The look on his face I will never forget. That was the first time probably I tried scratching. That was me becoming a DJ, I did nothing more one time than play the record when my mate rapped over it – this was in '86 – and we took it and played it to our music teacher who asked me: "Well, what did you do Leigh?" and I said, "I'm the DJ", and she goes, "yeah, but what did you do?" and I replied: "I played the record." That was very entry-level DJing, haha, but that was me, saying: "I'm a DJ", right up into this very day!

Francois Parker (Parkz) has promoted two seminal hip hop nights in Plymouth, Planet Rock between 1999-2000, and Sureshot, which ran between 2000-2003. Parker has also DJed and promoted at many other events over the years, as well as hip hop, Parker has a love of and has DJed house music, disco, and Balearic.

Parker has also made beats for various local MCs over the years from the Infamous P.N.S. in the 1990s to realising a single and album with The Cohorts in 2006.

In 2021 Parker is still music crazy, still knocking up the odd mix and edit, and still searching for that perfect beat.

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Mixcloud: www.mixcloud.com/francoisparker5

ROLA

...in conversation with Adam de Paor-Evans

So, let's start at the beginning. Tell me about that moment you first discovered hip hop.

I lived in **Exeter** before I moved to **Sidmouth**, and it was that summer, which I guess was summer 1984, I'd finished school and moved to **Sidmouth**, and that's the year it all blew up, but I didn't have any friends over that time as I didn't know anyone; I was in a new town. I'd seen **Break Machine** on **Top of the Pops**, that was the first thing I'd ever seen. It caught my attention – and I was like, "what's this?", then there was the **Herbie Hancock 'Rockit'** video, and that's all I ever saw. I never saw the **'Buffalo Gals'** video until recently – in fact, after I read your book – you were talking about it, and I brought it up on YouTube as I'd never seen that video. I have to say again, the first breakin' I ever saw was **Break Machine** on **Top of the Pops**, you know they play a song at the end when the credits are coming down, and there they were breakin'. I didn't know anything about it, what it was; I was travelling between **Exeter** and **Sidmouth** on the bus and I used to see a lot of tags – **Wiz** tags – and I was always curious in my mind thinking, "what is this?" and it wasn't until I started school in that September, when all the kids were breakdancing under the stairs. I'm sure you were there, and that's when it really knocked me, I was like: "Wow. This is it! This what I've been looking for." I was one of those kids, I wasn't into sports, nobody picked me to be on their team, I was missing something in my life. Just, it took me over, that was it. My first experience. Shortly after I met you (**Project Cee**), and **Supreme Shar**, and here we are today.

Wow, mad. That's really amazing, you had a different entry to many folks the same age who would say that the first moment they remember was **'Buffalo Gals'**. So tell me about how you knew this was something you'd been looking for, or did you know? Did you know at that point this was something that was going to be around a long time?

Rola Roc, Exeter High Street, 1989.
Photograph: E-Raze.

I guess I didn't know at that point it would be around all my life, no. It's such a strange thing, I think you'll find with most kids that were into hip hop at that time, were the kids with different personalities or weren't into sports. I always felt like a loner at school. All my mates were always in the year above or below, whatever school I was in I never connected with people in my year, I don't know why it just never worked out that way; I always felt like I wasn't part of things

and something was missing. Like some kids were into football, there was the whole BMX thing, but when I saw hip hop a feeling came over me and I thought: "This is what I wanna be." I was always into music as well, and to be able to be part of music and a whole culture was just what I was looking for.

So what about before hip hop, what kind of music were you into?

Before hip hop, I was into pop, every Thursday night I used to have my tape recorder with its in-built microphone in the speaker up to the TV, so I'd record all the music on **Top of the Pops** and listen to it for the whole week, then the next Thursday, tape over the tape with the fresh beats. I was into **2Tone**, **Madness**, I was well into **Frankie Goes To Hollywood** as well, then I realised it was because of **Trevor Horn**, and his production which was amazing. When I realised afterwards that was the same guy that produced the **Malcolm McLaren** stuff, it was really amazing.

Ah yeah, that's crazy, as only yesterday I was listening to **Welcome To The Pleasuredome**, and I don't think I've played that album in 30 years, and I'd never heard it through a decent pair of headphones, and you're right, the production is incredible. Tell me about how you connected up the elements of hip hop, how did you make the links between the **'Rockit'** video, breakin', and **Wiz**'s tags?

That was really from seeing kids' breakdancing, you could see on their schoolbags – they'd be tagged up – they'd have this writing on the bags, words that linked and connected up with hip hop. I don't remember seeing it really on TV until **Wild Style** came over. There were pieces around, people used to write 'hip hop' and 'scratch' and all these 'fresh' words, you know what I mean? It just seemed to all hang together. The first person I knew was **Ozzy**, and another kid who was breakin', and then it was **Sean Faulkner**, **Midge**; they were

all living in the same area as me, around **Higher Brook**. **Ozzy** and those others were a couple of years older than me, and I felt like a burden to them, and after a while they were drifting off into other things anyway, they weren't so into it as me. So, I was missing friends, then one day I bumped into **Shar**, and meeting him was a big thing as we got talking about music. He had all these records I'd never heard before, and he invited me to his house and we were listening to his music, and I really got into it deep from then. He had pretty much all the **Electros** up to **6**, and I'd only heard **1** and **3**, he had **Tommy Boy Greatest Beats**, **Grandmaster Flash** records I hadn't seen and some other compilations and 12"s I'd never heard before – and this was on vinyl – which was amazing to me as I was only buying cassettes then.

Rola at Khameleon Sounds, Bristol, 2021. Photograph: Rola.

That's an insightful detail, noticing kids' tags on their schoolbags with words associated with hip hop. How did your friendship with **Shar** develop?

Well, I started hanging out with **Shar**, I would be pestering him to hang out and listen to hip hop because he had these mad records. Our connection also came through BMXing as we would ride down to the park – he had a nice **Rickman Freestyler** with **Skyway** wheels, and we'd hang out at the park with other kids who had BMXs.

So where are we now – if we're talking about **Tommy Boy Greatest Beats**, we're around late 1985 – what happened then, late '85 to '86?

So many kids who breakdanced to start with, they moved on to buying cars, getting girlfriends, whatever, and it just whittled down to a few people, which was around the time I met you (**Project Cee**), and I wanted to find out more, but with fewer people into it, it was hard as it wasn't popular anymore. My dad lived in **Exeter**, so every second weekend I would go to **Exeter** on the bus, a kid called **Andrew Harris** (who was a breaker for a while) and **Shar**. See, the scene was still quite big there, hanging out around **Barclays Bank**, there were huge crowds there on Saturday afternoons, it was a buzz. Just being in that crowd and seeing all this breakin' happening in front of my eyes, for us, day trips to **Exeter**, was almost as exciting as going to **New York**. Just seeing it all, it was amazing.

So at what point did you think you wanted to try rap for yourself, how did that come about?

Rapping really started happening for me around late '85. The **Spar** shop in **Sidford** rented videos out, and that's when we first saw **Wild Style**. I'd never heard of it before, but with the graff on the front

cover, I saw it and thought, "yeah I've got to hire this!", and then **Shar** came up to my house as he didn't have a video recorder, we'd watch it and be like: "Woah -this is crazy!" I remember at the time we were laughing about how bad the acting was, but at the same time it was so genuine. We hired it out maybe five or six times, I'd get my tape recorder, push it up to the TV and record all the music. One of the first things I did, I wrote down one of the raps in **Wild Style**. I kept pausing the tape and rewinding it and I wrote out all the lyrics, and recorded my own version of it, and that would have been my first rap, must have been late '85.

Wow, that's mad for me, because the same year I did exactly the same with **Whistle**'s **'Just Buggin"** when they were on **Top of the Pops**. I was round a friend's house and we videotaped it, then he rewound and played bits at a time while I wrote all the lyrics out. It took us all evening, then the next day when I went around his house – mad excited to rap the lyrics – he wasn't interested, and I was well disappointed. When did you start making your own music?

Haha! From the days when I had a **ZX81** computer I had this little tape deck, and I also had a little boombox, and both had inbuilt microphones. So I could put a tape into one, and record me beatboxing, then put the tape back into the boombox and play me beatboxing, and start rapping the lyrics I'd written down from **Wild Style** on top of the beatbox. Then I'd layer it up with some rubbish scratching on my deck, then after a few attempts at this, I really wanted to get better equipment. On Saturdays when we went into **Exeter**, there was the **Tandy** shop that sold all the **Realistic** kit, we'd just go in there and I'd start dreaming about all this equipment, and I'd be like: "Man, I have to get myself a job and save up some money", you know, buy myself a mixer and a microphone. We didn't have much money as a family, but then that Christmas in '85 is when I really wanted a drum machine, so my dad bought me a second-hand **Boss DR-55** drum machine – I love the sound of that one – it's got a similar kick and snare to an **808** but of course different.

Ah yeah, the **Dr. Rhythm**. That was a great machine. I remember you couldn't play it live or in real time, you had to programme the beats in step-mode.

That's right, you couldn't programme the hi-hat either; you could only programme the kick, snare, and rimshot. Eventually I saved up the money for a 4-channel **Realistic** mixer and a microphone. I plugged the drum machine into one channel (as it was only mono), the mic into another, and then two stereo inputs for tape deck and record player, then from 'aux out' in to 'aux in' on my boombox.

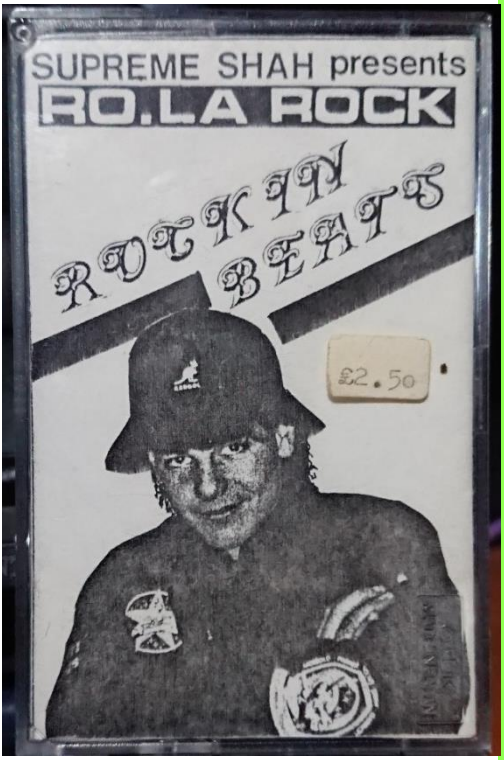
Then in '86 I bought a **Yamaha RX21**. Remember **Spin Offs**? Somehow I got on the mailing list, and every couple of months I would get a list in the post, and it was advertised in there.

When I turned sixteen I got my Post Office savings account that I couldn't touch until I was sixteen, and when that day came straight away I spent it all on my **RX21** drum machine, before I had even heard it! I had no idea what it would sound like.

Top: Yamaha RX21 detail. Bottom: Boss Dr. Rhythm DR-55 detail. Photographs: Adam de Paor-Evans.

Around then I remember I borrowed your **Yamaha** keyboard (**VSS-100**) because you could sample a couple of sounds and play them in

different key groups, and I took it home and that was the first time I chopped up a kick and a snare, and that was maybe Christmas ’86 or early ’87. We just didn’t know how these people were making these records, we had no idea, so we just tried to work it out ourselves, trying to find our way, find our way of doing it. We just had to imagine how to make a hip hop record.



Rockin Beats cassette cover, 1988. Photograph: Rola.

What was your perception of hip hop as a culture, what was your awareness of where it was coming from, and did you relate to it?

Yeah, it’s a strange one, I guess, not knowing its roots. I knew it was ‘American’, but it wasn’t until I saw **Wild Style** that I really saw where it was coming from. I just thought this is what it’s like – I wasn’t fully

aware maybe as it was just everywhere at the time with the breakin' if that makes sense. It wasn't really until **Public Enemy**'s first album came out in '87 that I realised it was predominantly a Black culture, in the early days it was just hip hop before it was something deeper. Being from **Devon**, you know, a very white place, in the early days, I didn't see the cultural side of it. If I'd have been growing up in **Bristol** or another large city I'd have seen hip hop in a completely different way.

So, did growing up through your formative years in hip hop have an impact on your life?

Those were the years I should have been thinking about my future and what I would grow up to be, but I couldn't think about anything other than hip hop. Most kids my age would be planning a future career but I was convinced my future was hip hop and nothing else mattered to me. Such a strange thing, but it influenced all the choices I made in life and ultimately led me to where I am now. I sometimes ask myself if it were a blessing or a curse, as I defo could have done much better for myself, but there's no way I would change a thing.

Rola began his journey in hip hop as a DJ/pause-button tape mixer in '84 under the name Discy Dee, becoming Rola Rock in '85 when he started emceeing, drum programming, and formed Ill Beat Productions (IBP) with Shar, Andy T, and Ad-M.C. (Project Cee). IBP were active until '89 producing cassettes and live gigs when he, Shar and Project Cee formed Def Defiance, releasing the Music Fusion EP and Hazardous LP. In '94 Rola moved to Bristol and formed Numskullz with Rumage and Jay le Surgeon, and over eight years toured various countries and released 12"s, EPs, and two LPs. Rola continued to be involved with occasional projects such as Khameleon Emcees, Konfectionists, The Journeymen, and Bastard Sunz, but more production-wise than emceeing. Since 2010, Rola has focused on studio engineering, working with a wide-range of emcees and producers throughout the hip hop community as a not-for-profit venture whilst still working full-time.

Instagram: @rolaroc

VINCENT DOLMAN

...in conversation with Adam de Paor-Evans

Can you tell me about your personal entry into hip hop?

I imagine it was around 1987, and it would have been something commercial, just before the **EPMD** era. We were learning a lot from the graffiti writers and emcees we were seeing around us; I remember going past the breakers breakin' on lino in **Newtown**, that was a bit earlier though. That was well before the **South Side Alliance**, but I remember them strongly. Then **Louis (E-Raze)** taught me and **Singhy** to dance, on a Wednesday night, that was quite early on too. We didn't have the experience of you older lot, we had energy though – **Singhy** was our main dancer, like one of the best dancers in **Exeter** – crazy legs! So we just used to throw **Singhy** into the circle, he was just freestyling it, crazy styles!

Haha, indeed! OK, so can you tell me about your personal context at that point?

Back in the day a lot of the sessions were at my house, I mean my mum was down with us, she'd let us smoke weed in the house, you know. **Singhy** ended up in a home because he cut his bobble off, because someone called him 'Paki' at school, so he just got out these

scissors and cut his bobble off, all that hair gone. And so his mum and dad who were quite religious, they kicked him out and he ended up in a home, so he basically ended up living at my house, my mum took him in. A lot of kids that had come from a rough home ended up hanging out there. We'd ourselves come from a women's refuge, you know, one minute I'm at school in **London**, then me and my brother get called out and the next minute I'm on a train to **Exeter**.

Caveman at Dance Raw 4, Lemon Grove, Exeter, 1991. Photograph courtesy of Vincent Dolman. Photographer unknown.

I'd never heard of **Exeter** before; you know what I mean? When she said we were moving to **Exeter**, I thought she said **Mexico**, and so we got well excited thinking we were going to **Mexico**! So, we ended up in **Higher Barracks** where a lot of broken families were placed, it was a real shithole. That was after being placed in a women's refuge for about two years. **Higher Barracks** was an ex-army base, and we were

put there until they found us a council house. Literally every flat at that place still had a door each end, from when the old sergeant majors used to walk through carrying out their inspections, you know? There were some rough families up there, you know. So that's how I ended up in **Exeter**, it's quite random, but I am glad we did end up there, it was a good place to grow up, near the countryside, the beach; it was good.

So the flat you and your mum lived in, was that the first place of your own you had in **Exeter**?

Yeah, it was, my mum's still there now actually, she's into grime too now, she's still with it!

Vincent's mum with Rob, Belmont Park Reggae Festival, Exeter, 2017. Photograph: Vincent Dolman.

I love to hear that! So what drew you to hip hop?

Well, you know there wasn't many Brown people in **Exeter**, the few of us used to stick together, and that's definitely one of the reasons, we saw it as a kind of safe house for us. With hip hop existing in this really white place, we knew that the guys we met that were deep into hip hop – a lot of them were white – weren't racist and knew what they were about and what hip hop was about, so we gelled with them and through the music. If I walked down the street in **Exeter** and I saw another Brown person, I'd say: "Alright mate?" even if I didn't know them, you know? They're going through the same shit you go through. At that time there was National Front, I remember seeing National Front marches in **Exeter**, and I was like: "What's that about?" and my mum would say: "They don't like Black or Brown people." I'd want to go and see them, I remember when I was about eleven seeing all these skinheads thinking "shit, this is scary" you know what I mean? I saw one of them throw a bottle which hit an old lady and split her face open, it was heavy shit. Horrible. It was crazy. Anyway, so yeah, me and **Singhy** were at the same school, that's where we first hooked up.

So what was it like first meeting **Singhy**?

I walked into the class, and suddenly it was like, "oh, another Brown kid", and I sat next to him in class. We weren't friends to start with, he wanted to fight me! We had lots of fights, you know, it was a combat thing, we would fight a lot but it developed into a deep friendship, he was from **Birmingham** and I was from **London**, there was something in that. We came as a pair then, nobody ever said: "Where's Vinny?" or: "Where's Singhy?" It was always "Vinny and Singhy", we were inseparable. We were hanging around with **Henchy** (**Henchman**) who was rapping, **Brocky**, **Ben**, **Evans**, **Muzzy**, **Anoush, Mitch**, and some others, kind of on the fringes of **South Side Alliance**. We were also growing weed, but it was crap, it was leaf, we didn't really know

what we were doing, haha. We used to go to the dub reggae nights too, remember when people used to come down like **Mad Professor**, and **Jah Shaka**, they were great, also what was that place off the **High Street**?

Vincent Dolman photographing The Inbetweeners, 2014.
Photograph: Carly Stephens.

Crown and Sceptre? Under the iron bridge?

That's it, I used to love it down there. Buying records was such exposure to hip hop too, I remember going to buy a record, then playing it constantly to learn every lyric, you know. It was an education too though! **Redman** – **'How To Roll A Blunt'** was great, as we didn't know! That record taught me how to roll a blunt! Then we'd just discover more stuff, trying to find it wherever. Someone would bring a tape from a **Westwood** show after a weekend trip to **London**,

then by the following weekend everyone in **Exeter** had a copy of it as it was passed 'round – spreading like wildfire!

That was mad, that really was our education system.

Yeah, listening to **Rakim**, it was poetry. We're learning poetry, you know what I mean?

Just taking it all in, learning about their lives in America, although it was much different there were things the same.

More of an education than school, in many ways.

Oh, one hundred percent. I didn't learn anything at school really, I remember this machine that was meant to tell you your perfect job, right. Remember them?

Haha, yeah – I got wig maker! Fucking wig maker!

Haha, what the fuck. Mine was fucking aerial erector. Seriously, I'm not listening to that. They actually told me: "Don't aim too high, aim low, and you might be happy." In drama or art, I was alright, but I just stopped going to school when I was about fourteen. I was getting in a lot of trouble, I started getting nicked a lot by that point too. I loved **Exeter** and the people I met, but the school was a waste of time. In these structures – I couldn't see a way to progress, you know. Job opportunities were limited. I was told I'd be in and out of prison all my life, so. My dyslexia was frustrating me too, I knew I was able, then I took the opportunity to go to **London** and start college. That was what I needed after being told I was stupid at school. I was put in a class called 'Extra Training Unit' at school, that wasn't me.

That's very revealing though, isn't it, about the system, to even call it 'Extra Training Unit', it's very conditioning.

It is. The system let people down, especially if you came from a troubled background or were Brown, or whatever, dealing with that shit and school, made me want to start doing something creative, and I want to get into teaching kids creativity too. Hip hop helped me in this too, I found hip hop, I found home.

Vincent Dolman, Clapham, 2017. Photograph: Lucy Hamilton.

I felt part of a community even though some parts of it were on the other side of the world, you felt part of it. Hip hop's influence is everywhere now, right, but in our day, the mainstream was rock, wasn't it? Rock everywhere, remember **DevonAir**? They used to say: "AND WE DON'T PLAY RAP!"

Yeah, I used that quote in my book, because; it's just fucking nuts, isn't it?

If you said that now you'd be called a racist!

And it was their sales pitch!

It was, wasn't it! I remember working on a building site, all the radios blasting that shit out, I was like: "Where am I living!?" We'd be wearing hip hop fashion too, and people would be staring at us in the street. I remember going down the **Wall of Fame** and taking photos of people posing in front of the graff with their trainers and baseball caps and whatever, and I look back on them and the composition is quite good, I remember putting people in the right positions and wanting to frame things well. I think that may be what sparked my interest in photography. I was only using a cheap throwaway thing, but I remember framing the space, saying: "you pose like this", that kind of thing.

I'm fascinated by the alternative structure of education that hip hop gave us, there are the obvious subject matters like Black culture and racism – an education we would never have received in **Devon** schools – so there's a lot of that – but there's also something about the more creative practices that we may not have been aware of at the time. That leads me to your current work, tell me about that.

After leaving **Exeter** – I needed to leave as I was getting busted a lot for selling weed – I was a 'known criminal', and I didn't know how I was supposed to do anything with my life with that label. So I moved back to **London**, I grew as a photographer, I started by assisting and then gradually started to get my own covers after about five years. My first cover was **Craig David**, then I started getting covers for all the people I loved and grew up with like **Ice T** and **Guru**, then **Eminem**.

The Holding Hands Project, Mumbai, 2013.
Photograph: Vincent Dolman.

As soon as I picked up a camera I knew that's what I wanted to do. **The Holding Hands Project** is something very personal for me. That's my passion at the moment, I was in **India** and I clocked it over several

Vincent Dolman, Hackney, 2018.
Photograph: Lorenzo Bella.

visits, that men hold hands. I didn't think much of it to start with. I took a picture of a guy holding hands with his son, then back in **London**, I saw the photo and thought there was something more to it. I jumped on a plane and was back out in **India** shooting this project for two weeks. That project was great. It was first in **i-D** magazine, then it got picked up a lot, it was a source of conversation, for people in **India** too, as it is such a normal cultural thing for them, and so unusual for western society. It happens in other countries too, **The Congo**, **Ethiopia** and **Vietnam** among others, I'm going to develop this into a bigger anthropological study. Western society is still trying to work this out, and in these countries men have been holding hands forever. **India** was a focus for me, as my heritage is **Indian**, I still don't know where from exactly, we don't really know if it's **Indian** or **Pakistani.**

That is truly an incredible project linking to your passions and heritage. So to bring it back to hip hop as a way to conclude, is there anything you'd like to add?

In our own crews and clans you belonged to a creative thing, we respected each other, and learnt from each other. I grew up a lot through that hip hop education, it was a perfect environment for me to learn, and to grow. The music helped me develop my identity, I could say: "This is me."

Vincent Dolman is a celebrity and fashion photographer based in London whose work is synonymous with today's popular culture. He has worked with many leading figures in music, TV and film, including Pharrell Williams, Due Lipa, Tinie Tempah, Ed Sheeran, Rihanna, Juliette Lewis, Alfred Enoch, One Direction, Eminem, Snoop Dogg, Cypress Hill, Little Mix, Jessie J, Labrinth, and Leona Lewis to name but a few. Dolman's work was exhibited as part of a group exhibition on Black British style at the V&A, London. His personal project, Holding Hands, was nominated for the Prix Pictet Prize 2019, nominated by Somerset House.

Instagram: @vincentdolman @theholdinghandsproject

Shop: https://metroonline.co.uk/2016

DJ BEX

...in conversation with Adam de Paor-Evans

So can you give me the background to your way in to hip hop and the **Cornwall** context?

I left school in summer of 1984 and was very drawn to a few lads that I knew that had started to breakdance at the local under 18s discos, and it all started from there. I was a completely wild character, I never held a job down for more than eleven, twelve months. The only job I ever held down for any length of time back then was with the **Ministry of Agriculture** when I left **Cornwall** the first time in 1986. When I look back on it, that was only about twelve months. When I look at everything, I wasn't communicating or networking. Mainly as I got myself into some severe shit at sixteen and I didn't know who to trust. Really, I would say I'm a consumer. When I was doing jungle stuff in the **Midlands** in the '90s, I prided myself on doing a brand new set every weekend. I realised very soon on that if I were trying to promote a track, I wouldn't be able to go and perform that track over and over and over again for six, twelve months, whatever it needs to get yourself recognised. I can see now looking back, there were a lot of opportunities to try to make a living, but then again, when you look at the demographics of those rural areas – 1984, '85, '86, '87 – in **Cornwall** there was 47% unemployment.

Records were expensive; unless you were on the DJ circuit, which for us as kids leaving school was either mobile jocks or working in clubs – we were in trainers and tracksuits – couldn't get into the clubs anyway. Such a low income, I was on YTS (Youth Training Scheme), earning £25.25 a week. Six records would have cost me that, especially the records we wanted. It was **John Peel**, listen to that. Pick out a few

of these mad tracks, that was it. It was just difficult. My dad got made redundant from **Holman's** which was main employer in the area when I was about fourteen, and he didn't work for two years. It was only when I was leaving school he got back into work. So, it was all about just making ends meet. I was a ruthless shoplifter, we had no money, and I needed **TDK SA90s** and batteries for my boombox, so that's what I did! I remember walking down to my grandmother's council house in **Camborne**, must be sometime late 1987 and a very young **Simon Gilbert** (**Si Spex**) came up to me, and went: "Are you **DJ Bex**?" and he was asking about this DJ competition which wasn't me but **Pete Jordan** who was trying to get it together, but the attitude from **DMC** was like: "Where? **Penzance**? Where the fuck is that? We're not going there." It never happened.

Twilight Zone flyer, 1990. Photograph: Dren Throwdown.

So, the first mixing competition was the **Twilight Zone** one in 1990 some three or four years later! **Richie Rich** was the compere, and we

were like, “surely he should be a judge, he’s the only guy in the building who knows what we’re doing!”

So when he got given the results, he just read them out as he saw fit, so **TC**’s brother was first, I was second, and **Paul Berryman** (**DJ Just Too Bad**) from **CDS** was third. Then a guy came running onto the stage and whispered to **Richie Rich** who had to reverse the order. So I stayed second, haha. So one of the organizers ends up coming first, that’s really smelly! The first prize was a £550 **GLI** mixer, a bloody good mixer for the time, so it was coveted, haha – and the guy that supplied the prize, won it. But you know, I was just chuffed to be able to get up there and do what we do. What came out of that, was that **TC** put **Benedict** (from **Ice Cream Promotions**) onto me. I was a bit itinerant, I had no telephone, rarely at mum and dad’s to take a call, but eventually he got hold of me and said: “This guy just wants a host DJ, doing the bits in between.” I thought I’m up for that, but ended up having to organize the coaches too to get people up to **Exeter**. We were very wild. We did four, and had four different coach companies, because each time we rang up to book one, they were all like: “Nope. Never taking that lot again!” Unsupervised youngsters.

Was there much in the way of graffiti going on?

We started doing graffiti in the summer of ’84, a family called **Clarke**, their dad played football with my dad and worked at **Camborne School of Mines** which had a training mine where all the apprentices from **Holman’s** would go and learn. There were three brothers, **David**, **Dale** and **Dwayne**, all three of them really talented in one way or another. We used to go out with **Dave** helping him fill-in. We did a massive one on the back of the **Tesco**’s, the one we used to hang out at the front of breakdancing, and that got in the national press. **The West Briton** (regional newspaper) did a big spread on it, it was a bit ‘vandals vandals vandals’, but they also did talk about it being a new art movement from **America**. That also of course, got the attention of the **British Transport Police** who were in touch with the police in

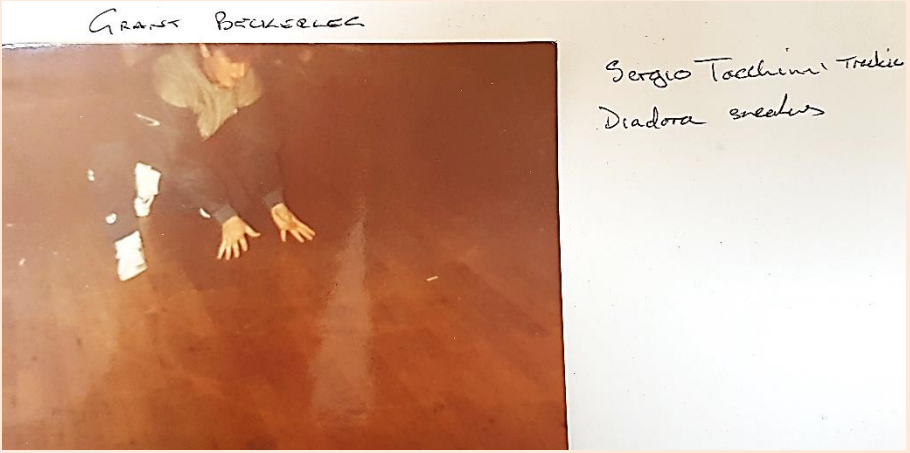
Exeter and **Plymouth**, and we were being lined up to get blamed for a lot of stuff we had nothing to do with. Unfortunately, right at the height of our breakdancing careers, I had to go and spend a few months in a social services lock-up in **Exeter**, and I missed some of what was going on.

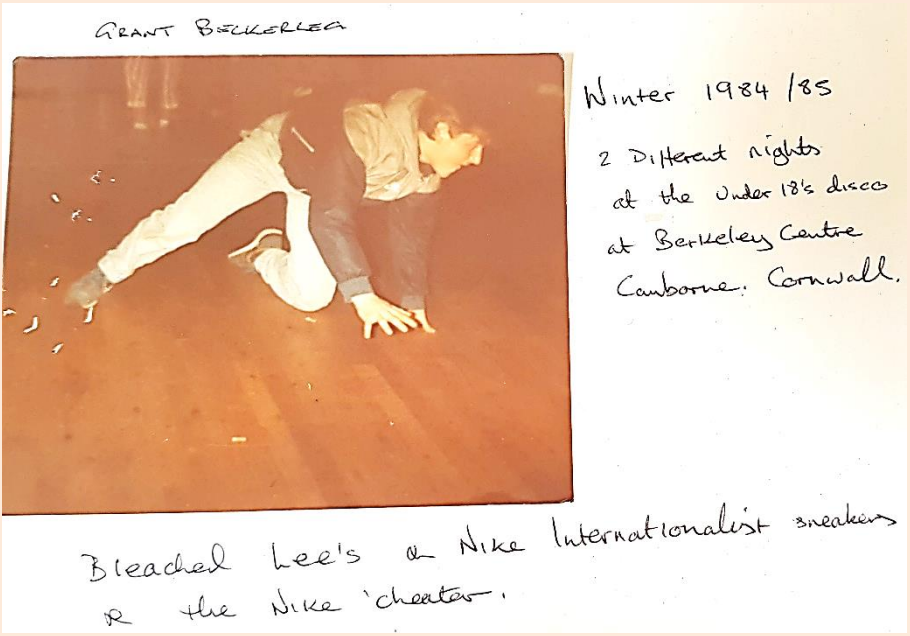
What other stories can you remember about your experience during the 1980s?

One of the best experiences was a breakdance battle in **Plymouth** with **TC**'s crew in early '85. About ten of us from **Camborne** with a few from **St. Ives** travelled up on the train on a Saturday morning. We all had taken inspiration from **Beat Street**, the movie was released that winter, and we got puffa-vests and ski goggles on over our **Nike** cheaters. We marched into the subway at **Drake Circus** with our boombox going where we encountered the **TCI** crew in their **Breakdance: The Movie** inspired get ups. We had a great time and snatched the win with a couple of young members of the **Camborne** crew pulling out windmills at the end. That was the start of contact with **TC** and some others.

The next few years were a bit of a struggle for me and in 1990, it became apparent to me that I'm living hand-to-mouth, and I'm playing more records' worth in a couple of hours here than you're paying me to do, and that was the problem. In **Cornwall**, they wanted to pay you forty quid to play nine until one in the morning – four hours – a whole night, you know. That's fine if you're buying seven-inch singles from the **Top 20**.

Also, there's the population density. We did at one point play with a biscuit-tin transmitter to try to get a little bit of a radio station going, but the reality is you're broadcasting half a mile in any direction – and that one-mile diameter – covers 300 people. In Bristol, it's half a million! And that's if you can get it somewhere high enough as well, and not surrounded by granite outcrops!





This page: DJ Bex breakin', complete with outfit description, '84-'85.
Photograph: Unknown.

Opposite page: Martin Vallenoweth and Tim Weston, '84-'85.
Photograph: Unknown.

Martin Vallenoweth starting backspin

Berkeley Centre
Winter 1984/85

TIM WESTON in handspin

BERKELEY CENTRE
Winter 1984/85

TIM WESTON in handspin

BERKELEY CENTRE
Winter 1984/85

It was just really tough, and there wasn't enough of us to build a momentum. You know, hats off to **Adrian** (**Dren Throwdown**) and **Simon**, they found their bit that they were really good at. **Adrian** blows me away, how he could hear the same thing over and over and tell when there was something different in it, I'd be like: "it sounds the same to me!" And **Simon**, he came down to **The Bluff** when he was about fourteen, and scratching on a belt-drive turntable sounding like something from the **DMC** finals! I don't even know where he saw it to learn from, or how he taught himself, because, yeah, we were collecting breakdancing videos, but to find something that taught you how to scratch was impossible.

I try to relay this to my sons, you may think you live in this little backwater, but you can do and be whatever you want to be, it just depends on if you want it to be commercial or not, you know, make a living out of it. Networking, schmoosing, will get you there, but if you just want to be the best at what you want to do, nobody can stop you doing that.

It was a real shame that there wasn't someone there to keep an eye on people, and it's a shame I wasn't in **Cornwall** to shepherd **Sane** over to **Adrian** and **Simon**, because he was just such a gifted rhymer and poet. When he first came down, summer of '88, I was DJing at **The Bluff**, and this guy just came up to the booth, and was like: "Ah you're playing hip hop! I'm an emcee!" and I was like: "Yeah OK...do you know how many times I hear that in the summer down here?" But he was, all off the top of the head, so good. I said to him, when we were sat smoking – 'cause we were all tokers – "When we're sitting down, you're talking about politics, racism, the police, you know, but when we get up and do it, you're so excited, you're chatting, but just chatting shit. Nobody knows it's shit, because it sounds great, but let's try and put something with a bit more body into it, and try to build up a portfolio of raps."

Then the epiphany he had, was at a night we did in **Camborne** at the **Berkeley** (now a Wetherspoons pub), they had the biggest lighting rig in the **South-West** – chrome and PVC classic '80s nightclub – for a load of tracksuited and trainered kids to come in and take over, it was quite a thing. Now, I remember **TC** brought a few down from **Plymouth**, and they had this big guy with dreads called **Robodread** – **MC Robodread** – and he was chatting away, then **TC** was like: "We've got some freestyle for you!" and every single one of **TC**'s crew knew the words. And I turned to **Lee** (**Sane**) – and I said: "You are a genuine freestyle rapper – I don't know what is going to come out of your mouth the next bar – go take the mic off him, boy!" And he did, he blew them all away. I moved away not long after that. And it was a shame I couldn't steer him in towards **Adrian** and **Simon**, you know, they could have worked with him very well.

I just couldn't live there without an income or I would have ended up in prison, simple as that. I had to get out of **Cornwall**. Then I get to a city, and you know – still no real jobs – **Thatcher** had ripped all that apart.

So there's something I'm really curious about, at the beginning when you talked about being a consumer, it was really hard to find those records, especially in the '80s down in the **South-West**, so how did you go about collecting music?

I was a bit of an '80s arcade kid, I used to spend my two pound pocket money on **Scramble** and **Defender**, and video rental shops came out around the same time, there was one shop that opened up in **Camborne**, a guy worked there called **Stuart Coville**. It was owned by a guy called **Andy Wilkinson** who was the main mobile DJ at the time, but at that point, I'm fifteen, and don't know anything about this, I'm just following on with these guys I spotted with **Patrick**

windcheaters on, and when I turned up with a **Nike** windcheater on, they were like: "Woah!"

Oh shit, those **Patrick** windcheaters were dope though, looking back!

There was a guy a couple of years older than us called **Grant Hooper**, and there was an under-18s disco on a Wednesday night at the **Berkeley Centre**, and this guy **Grant** started appearing in a black denim jacket, a green military round cap, and white gloves, and started doing robotics to the **Herbie Hancock** and **Michael Jackson** tracks. We were like: "Wow, see that? What's that all about?" He had a little bedsit, and he and two others started doing robotics and getting into breakdancing. He mixed with this guy that worked at the video shop, and what happened was Saturday afternoons we'd meet at the back of this video shop, and trapse down through town with our windcheaters on, everyone looking at these lads in their trainers with their boombox, then we'd all turn up at **Tesco** to break.

We got to know **Stuart** that way, and he was the resident DJ at **The Bluff** in **Hayle**, and that was seven nights a week in the summer as it was owned by the holiday site up the road. Then the younger people that weren't interested in the holiday camp entertainment could come down to a disco. It was a room built onto the side of a pub – flat roof – with a **Citronic** DJ setup built into it. **Stuart** used to shoot off to **Falmouth** on a Saturday afternoon, which was where he used to buy his records. So having been into **Woolworths** or **Our Price** thinking: "Where can I buy a copy of **Captain Rock**," or whatever, and not having any success, **Stuart** would come back from **Falmouth** with a big purple bag with **'Falmouth Records & Tapes'** on it, and that would be the latest records. But you know, it would still mainly be **The Cure**, **The Cult**, you know, the **Top 20**, but he would also have a little bit of funk and soul maybe.

There was a night they were doing in **Redruth** which was a Sunday, they used to call it a charity night as the law was you couldn't charge

to get in on a Sunday, so they'd charge 50p and donate it to charity. It was a hotspot for underage drinking and hooking up with young people from the cities that were down on holiday in the summer. That was run by another mobile jock, they were all run by mobile jocks then, they'd set up in the afternoon. It had a big parquet floor; great for breakdancers. It would get to about half-past ten, and he'd play **'Dr. Beat'**, and we knew the next track to come in after that would be **Time Zone** – **'The Wildstyle'**, we'd move through the crowd and break. They'd have got those records from **Falmouth Records & Tapes**. There was another guy who used to mix in mono, so one channel would come out the left speaker, and the other channel would come out of the right – I've got a tape somewhere still – remember **'E.T. Boogie'**?

Yes – incredible track! And please find that tape...

That's the first time I'd heard that. Belt-drive, mobile disco setup, again, records supplied by **Falmouth Records & Tapes**. So eventually, I went along with **Stuart**. The shop was run by a guy called **John Read** (there is a Facebook group in his honour run by his son), and whoever he was dealing with, his distributors, he got some great records in, and that did help create a bit of a scene. There was an older crowd, called **The Soul Patrol**, they'd wear their espadrilles and string vests doing the carpet shuffle, dancing to jazz funk, and then the electro that came through was really a progression, and those records came from there too. But definitely, **Falmouth Records & Tapes** supplying us was the one. I remember finding the **KRS-1** and **Scott la Rock** album **Criminal Minded** there, for years that was the main place for me. The biggest problem was what records to even ask for though, you know, there wasn't really anyone championing it. In **Cornwall**, it was really the **Tone Loc** and **Young MC** stuff that crept into the dance scene, just before acid house kicked off down here.

That sounds like a little vinyl oasis in many ways!

When I started taking over at **The Bluff** from **Stuart**, I'd be on the **Technics** before he was playing, as he'd go and play pool next door because nobody was in the club yet. Then the doorman would go and complain to him: "That **Bex** is in there doing all that eehhhh-uuhhh-eeehh rubbish again!" we're getting into late '86, early '87, and I was getting into the mixing. **Stuart** would come into from the bar, and mouth at me from across the room: "Is that you?" I'd stick my thumb in the air he'd mouth: "Brilliant mate." It was around then when I knew that I had a thing for this, I can do this. And that was it for me then.

Now 51 years old, Grant Beckerleg (DJ Bex, 1987-1995) is a married father of two teenagers from Camborne, Cornwall, living in or near Bristol since 1995. Drawn to breakin' in early '84 he became a member of the Camborne Breakers Crew, linking up with other breakers in St. Ives, Penzance, Falmouth and other areas. They danced as a crew regularly at local under 18s discos at Penventon Hotel Redruth and Berkeley Centre Camborne. He began mixing on Garrard belt-drive decks in 1985/86 at The Bluff on Hayle Towans – finger pressure stylee! He moved onto Technics 1210s in the summer of '87 after refurb at The Bluff. He moved to Southend in the winter of 1988 and did a couple of warm-up sessions for a rare groove DJ named Gilles Peterson at Waves club – under the McDonalds on Southend High Street!

He met MC Sane – Lee Bloomfield (R.I.P.) during the summer of '88 on his return to Cornwall, attempted to make a track and performed improvised sets, holding a guest slot at Bowgie, Crantock 89/90, and with improvised appearances at Victor Dragos in early 1990. He was placed second in the CDS Twilight Zone mixing competition, 1990, and was host DJ for Ice Cream Promotions' 'Dance Raws' at Exeter Student Union, Lemon Grove: 1990 – MC Duke, Demon Boyz, Blade, and Soul II Soul DJs. He first practiced performance on stage with Sane MC, and moved on to acid, rave, jungle, and techno scenes in late 1990/91. He held residences in jungle and techno in Leicester and around the midlands up to 1994, and the Dielectric Club from October 1993 to July 1994. He was a support DJ for the early Dreamscapes – the Proof of the Pudding! He retired from commercial DJing to study his degree in Computing for Real Time Systems from 1995.

DREN THROWDOWN

...in conversation with Adam de Paor-Evans

Starting at the outset, what was your way into hip hop?

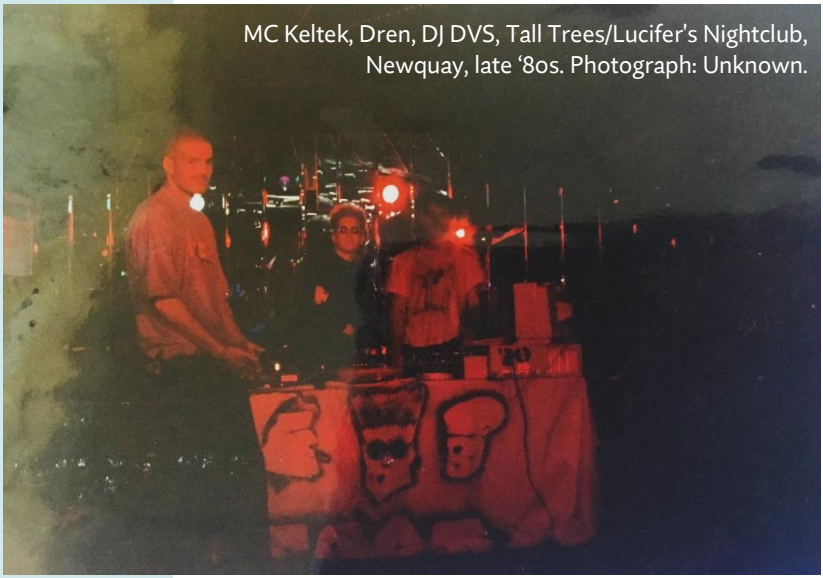
I left school in 1986, so I was in school when I got into it fully. I used to take my boombox into school and we used to have breakdance competitions in the classroom for example, and for a long time, I was in awe of **Bex**'s crew, and couldn't get near them, I saw them as rivals strangely, which was very weird back in the days, that in such a small community there were two crews.

That's something that's really curious, that even in our communities with such fewer people, there were more crews than perhaps people would have expected. Were you into music before you found hip hop?

I can remember when **'Rapper's Delight'** came out, and I was watching the TV with my parents, and they often reminded me that I was having a go because they weren't singing, they were just talking! So, obviously there was something that interested me even back then, and that really grabbed my attention, the fact that they weren't singing. **Time Zone**'s **'World Destruction'** was a record which was a massive slow burner for me, I bought that in **WHSmith** purely as it had **Afrika Bambaataa** on it. Then later on, **John Peel** was about the

only place I could hear stuff. So I would regularly stay up late with my cassette player listening to **John Peel**, which a lot of people did, I think. There was the main stuff like **Melle Mel** that you'd see on the telly, and things you'd hear but you wouldn't know, but the great thing about **John Peel** was that you'd hear all sorts of different things, and the tune that always sticks in my mind is **Z-3 MCs** – '**Triple Threat'**, do you remember that?

Ahhh, mate that's one of my favourite records!



MC Keltek, Dren, DJ DVS, Tall Trees/Lucifer's Nightclub, Newquay, late '80s. Photograph: Unknown.

Brilliant, well I heard that on **John Peel** and I was like: "What the fuck is this?" I was everywhere trying to get that track, and that I was in **Cornwall**, I was never going to get that track, you know. The best I could do was go into **WHSmith** and look at their import list and ask them to get things in for me, which occasionally they could, but it was real tough for us down here to get hold of any vinyl. Of course, there was the cost as well. I was doing a paper round for **WHSmith** and

getting £3.50 a week, and what I would do, after I got paid on Saturday morning I'd go straight to the record section and try to find something hip hop to buy. I remember buying **LL Cool J - Radio** on cassette, and walking past **Si Spex** in town, and telling him **LL Cool J** was going to be the next biggest thing, haha. Things like this in a little town like **Camborne** were quite mad because everyone was into **Status Quo** and stuff like that mate down here, you know?

It is mad isn't it.

We really stuck out like a sore thumb. I used to go to a youth club and take my boombox, and I would get the piss ripped out of me by all the locals. They'd say things like: "Oh your record's stopped, it keeps repeating!" you know, when they heard the drum machines and stutter sampling. Classic comments I'd get back then. At the time, I was thinking: "Fuck you, you haven't got a clue", I'd walk through **Camborne** town centre playing the **Electro** albums, and I think about it now, and it's cringeworthy, you know. We used to take a lino into town and do breakin', but we're about three years behind down here, whatever's happening anywhere else it would take three years to get down here. I remember doing some footwork and tripping over this old man that had just come out of **Tesco** and all the change fell out of his pocket, I felt really bad about that.

We'd seen **Wild Style** and stuff, and we all thought we needed to get into graffiti. So, me and three of my mates decided to do our local secondary school. We did a massive burner that said 'Break' – highly original I know – and got dobbed in my someone which was my first run in with the law. I had to go to the police station, mum and dad were fucking furious obviously, but; they then allowed me to spray paint my bedroom, the idea being that I wouldn't want to then go and do it outside. **Bex** and all continued to paint outside of course. So, all of these kinds of things were happening way before going to parties and stuff.

So let me come back to the **Z-3 MCs** record. I don't know how, but about five copies ended up in **Exeter HMV**, and it was the first import I ever remember buying, and they never stocked imports. My eyes were out on stalks mate when I saw this record. I was the same as you, I earnt £3.50 for a paper round and I'd do the same, straight in to town to the record shops. I was expecting to buy **'You Talk Too Much'** by **Run-D.M.C.** which was what I was going into town for, then I saw that. I must have missed it on **John Peel** that week, but when I saw that sleeve I was like: "I've got to have that record!" There must have been some mess-up with the **HMV** ordering as it was priced as a UK 12" too.

'Triple Threat', Z-3 MCs, Beauty and The Beat Records, 1985. Photograph: Adam de Paor-Evans.

Well, here's the thing mate, I didn't even get my copy in the UK. In 1991, Me, **Julian** and **Simon** (**Si Spex**) from **The Creators**, and **Chris**

DVS, went to **New York**, and I got mine there in a second hand shop. When I found it I was celebrating: "Yes! Here's that fucking record!" See, that's **Cornwall** for you mate. We would go on the train to **Plymouth** to go record shopping, so we'd get some stuff up there, then a shop opened in **Falmouth** – **Compact Records and Tapes** – and for **Falmouth** – that was weird – I went there and the **Boogie Down Productions** album was there (**Criminal Minded**), and straight away I bought it, got it home and it was the instrumental album, and I still haven't found that album with the lyrics on, but I kinda like it anyway. Because information was so hard to come by down here in **Cornwall**, I didn't know there was an instrumental pressing. That's just one example, it was so difficult to keep in touch with stuff. Do you remember **The Street Scene** magazine? It had a pull-out section in the middle.

Yeah, **Chuck Chill**'s Hip Hop Report.

That's the one, that was good for putting me onto tunes. In that magazine was where I first saw the cover of the UK release of **The Incredible Bongo Band**'s album, with the dinosaurs, which I never knew about. So really, it was **John Peel** and that magazine, which I used to have to order especially. I would root through the magazine and list things out I wanted to try to hunt down. That was way before getting the train up to London with **Simon**.

So how did you first meet **Si Spex**?

There was a do at the rugby club, a day event – must have been 1984 – and I really didn't want to go but I got dragged along to it. I have my boombox with me and spend the day walking around the ground blasting **Crucial Electro**, and **Simon** bobbed out the crowd and started talking to me. We never looked back, basically. The other one was how I met **DVS**. I'd just started work for an insurance company,

and they did an open day to support the Air Ambulance in **Perranporth**. Again, I didn't want to do it, but I agreed to DJ for it, and they were expecting me to play a load of chart music. In this tent, I was playing all hip hop, and they were furious. But in walked **DVS**, and it blew his mind, as there I was in **Cornwall**, in a shirt and tie, playing proper hip hop. These little things, down here in **Cornwall**, put me in touch with some great people.

MC Keltek, Dren, DJ DVS, Steven Dawe (dancer), Tall Trees/Lucifer's Nightclub, Newquay, late '80s. Photograph: Unknown.

So how did you get into making music?

Around the time of playing **Crucial Electro** on my cassette player, I started doing pause-button edit mixes, they were called **'Electro Eruption'**, and I did a series of nine, and just handed them out to people. Just me in my bedroom, with anything I could get my hands on, even snippets from **John Peel**. My mate **Jerry** would do all the covers. I mean, they were very basic mate, and some of them were

out of time, I was into the stuttering you know, edit mixing and stuff. Two of my mates that weren't even into hip hop – one of them was into **The Cure** – said: "Why don't we do a rap?" So I made a pause-button instrumental using a **Bboys** tune I think, and they rapped over the top of it. One of the guys rapping, is now the local vicar. I'm sitting here now holding the tape in my hand. Maybe I should digitise it? This is fourteen-year-old me trying to be a producer.

You should digitise it! These kinds of stories, and especially the recordings that have survived, they're historic documents, you know?

I'd love to think that my friend.

I think we were probably a year behind you in terms of trying these things out, we used to record our first efforts on C15 computer tapes from about late '86. We conceived the C15s like cassette singles, as you'd get seven-and-a-half minutes on each side, but of course the sound quality was not the best.

Bex went on to focus on DJing, and I went into production, and that really stems from that first cassette. As silly as it sounds, that sparked me to do something. I remember getting my first job on YTS, and I saved up for fucking ages to buy my first **Technics**. God knows how I did it, they were about two-hundred quid at the time.

But from that point, it was: "Fuck any other job this is what I want to do." Often I think, how can a boy from **Cornwall**, who never grew up around rap – my parents weren't into funk or jazz or anything like that – how can I hear something on **John Peel** – something that sounds so different to what I'm used to hearing – stir something so deep in me. How does that happen, you know? Hip hop was nothing like anything I was used to hearing. Was it that difference that made me take notice, especially the hard edge sound like on the **Z-3 MCs** track, it was tough. Maybe it was teenaged angst, I don't know. It's something I often think about.

It's a good question, and it's an important question. I agree with you, how did it happen? How did a collection of us from **The Westcountry** – actually the rest of the regional country too – and parts of regional-rural **Europe** – how did we all share that feeling? How does it happen when everyone around you is listening to **The Cult** or **Fields Of The Nephilim**?

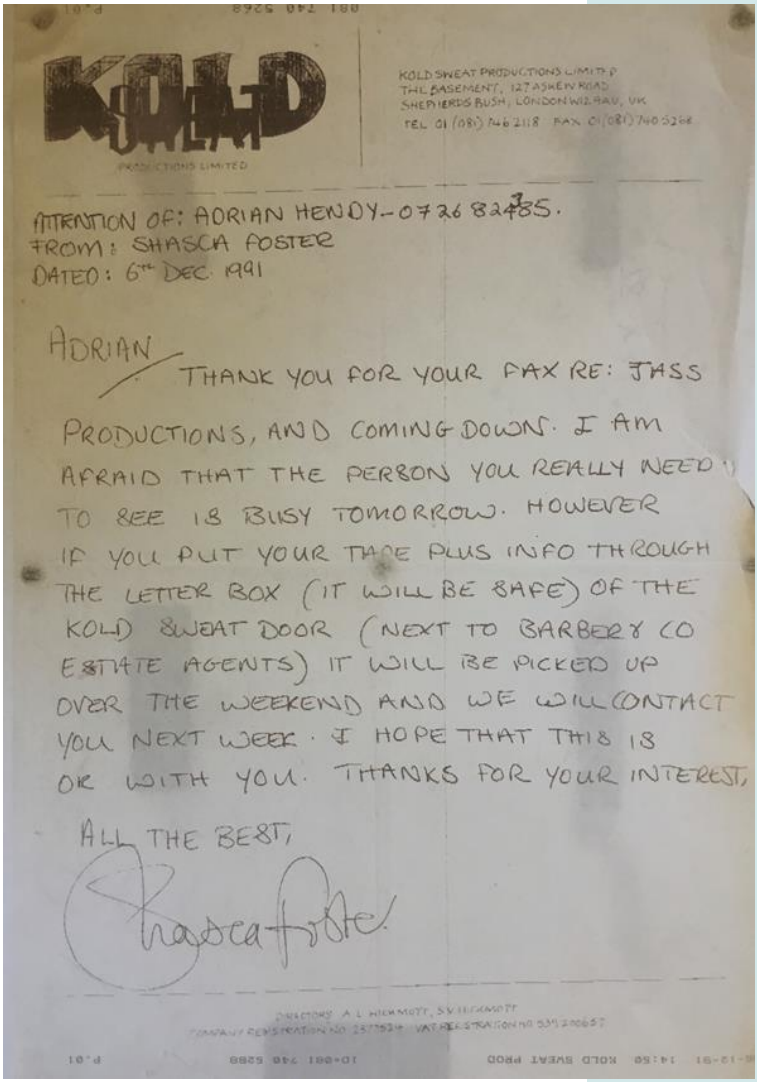
Maybe there's an energy encased in those recordings that gets transferred to people who are open to receiving them. Or are we just naturally tuned into that vibe somehow?

I think so, I mean, what's your view, is hip hop something that you naturally resonate with, or is it just teenage angst, or is it something else?

There's definitely a rebellious thing in there. I went to a Church of England school and had quite a straight upbringing really. But also, some of us are just that kind of character maybe. All I know is something deep within me wanted to know more. Now, whether I'm channelling that from a higher being or whether it is something that exists just inside me, I don't know. Energy can't be destroyed; it just gets transferred. I like that fact it was just me and a handful of guys in **Camborne**, you know, we were the oddballs in **Camborne** for sure, and I like that. I really like that. Nobody else had a clue, and they really didn't. It was very special, a very special time for hip hop. There was no boundaries.

I remember **Simon**'s very first diggin' experience, he found **The Soul Searchers**' **Salt Of The Earth** album without actually realising what he had come across, you know, with **'Ashley's Roachclip'** on, we were like: "Oh shit! That's from **Eric B and Rakim**", or it's from this, or it's from that, I mean, we didn't know how these tracks were made. Then we're like: "Oh, that's what they're doing, that's how they're making these records." Once I knew about beat diggin', my life was complete. They joy of finding breaks, for me, cemented the production thing.

We were using a **Commodore Omega**, must have been around ’88, to make our first beats. Later, we sent a demo to **Kold Sweat**. We didn’t get a deal obviously, we were **Cornish**. We tried our hardest to break through, but we were never going to, bearing in mind our location. No clubs would have us; it was house music or rock music. Later on, there was a club in **Hayle** called **The Bluff**, **Bex** and **Simon** got to play a bit of hip hop, and that’s really the only place where you could get away with playing just a bit of hip hop.



KOLD SWEAT PRODUCTIONS LIMITED
THE BASEMENT, 127 ASKEW ROAD
SHEPHERDS BUSH, LONDON W12 9AU, UK
TEL 01 (081) 746 2118 FAX 01 (081) 740 5266

ATTENTION OF: ADRIAN HENDY - 0726 82485.
FROM: SHASCA FOSTER
DATED: 6th DEC 1991

ADRIAN

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FAX RE: JASS PRODUCTIONS, AND COMING DOWN. I AM AFRAID THAT THE PERSON YOU REALLY NEED TO SEE IS BUSY TOMORROW. HOWEVER IF YOU PUT YOUR TAPE PLUS INFO THROUGH THE LETTER BOX (IT WILL BE SAFE) OF THE KOLD SWEAT DOOR (NEXT TO BARBERY CO ESTATE AGENTS) IT WILL BE PICKED UP OVER THE WEEKEND AND WE WILL CONTACT YOU NEXT WEEK. I HOPE THAT THIS IS OK WITH YOU. THANKS FOR YOUR INTEREST,

ALL THE BEST,

Shasca Foster

DIRECTORS: A L HICKMOTT, S V HICKMOTT
COMPANY REGISTRATION NO 2577929 VAT REGISTRATION NO 535 2006 57

Facsimile from Kold Sweat regarding demo submission, 1991.
Photograph: Dren Throwdown.

We played lots of house parties though. When we were playing at some places, it was mad, we only had one emcee, so we were doing four-deck routines with one emcee at these house parties where everyone was rocking out to **Status Quo**, but everyone would be looking at what we were doing – they were intrigued – as they'd never seen anything like it before.

DVS, Si Spex, and Dren, NYC, 1991. Photograph: Julian Harvey.

In a way, they were more interested than if it had been in a club, as we're all in this small front room, so everyone's right there in amongst it, and actually, those parties, they were good. We got treated well.

I didn't have much knowledge to be honest, I was really finding my way, I thought I knew what I was doing, but I didn't really. Do you remember the **Tascam Porta-05**? I managed to get one of those, and me and **Simon** would share it and do our own little mixes. They were a revelation.

So did you go on to make your own tracks on the 4-track?

Yes, so between **Si** and me we'd share the beat making process too, then I was making instrumental tracks which choruses and verse patterns with an emcee in mind, but we had no emcees then. I really wanted to do more, it was frustrating really, as who wanted to buy instrumental tracks then? Nobody I suppose.

'Bodder' (Scott Williams - beats/breaks/spoken word digger) and Dren, building site for new Morrisons supermarket, Newquay, date unknown. Photograph: Unknown.

So to compensate, I began making cut 'n paste mixes, because people wanted to hear those, and I went down that route, I was more known for cut 'n paste than 'proper' tracks or producing for rappers. Again, hearing **Double D & Steinski** for the first time on **John Peel**, that blew my mind. I was just thinking: "What are they doing with music?" It was so out there. My niche of hip hop has been cut 'n paste, and that's what I miss doing the most. I did a series – they are an hour long – not a DJ mix, people didn't realise – they're called **The Cornish Edit Agents**.

Cover artwork for The Cornish Edit Agent, Volume 2, 2000s.

Dren Throwdown,
Home Studio,
Camborne, 2021.
Photograph:
Dren Throwdown.

So to close, I'm reflecting back on our conversation, and it's incredible to imagine those nights in '85, where hundreds of schoolkids across the country are lying in bed with headphones on just waiting for **John Peel** to play a new hip hop record, a record which they'd all go a hunt for the following Saturday, it's really something.

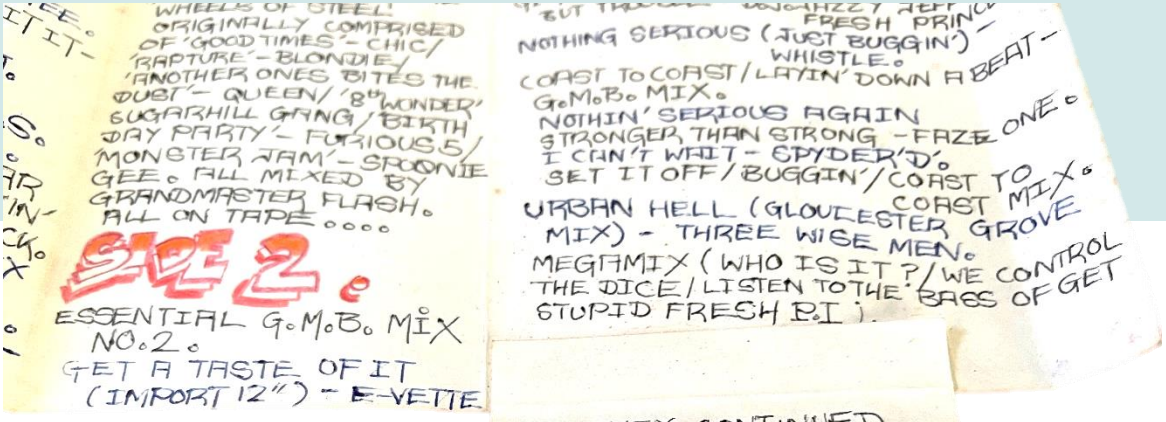
DJ DVS (Chris Richardson), Dren, and MC Keltek (Francis Doyle), St Austell, late '80s. Photograph: Mr Hugh Milne.

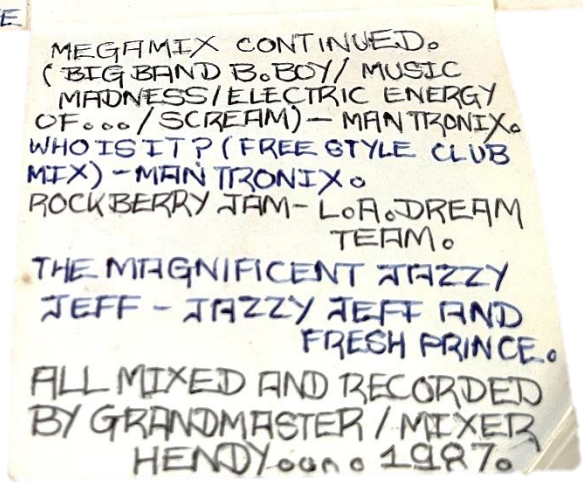
It's like an entity that was growing, spreading out its tentacles, taking over the country in a small way – infusing it in secret – so much so that the main people into hip hop in these small towns had no idea it was also going on elsewhere. That story at the beginning about me taking my boombox into the classroom, what you've got to understand is that I was a very shy kid, really shy. But when I was playing tunes, I wasn't shy anymore. Hip hop gave me confidence my friend, in '83, in school, pushing all the tables and chairs back in a fifteen-minute break just to breakdance for a moment.

Dren Throwdown was born in Redruth, Cornwall in 1969, and started listening to hip hop around 1983 before making his own beats for Cornish crew, JASS Productions, between 1986-1991. Dren ran Block Party Beats nights in Falmouth with brother Tim (Atomic Dog), and set up his 33Throwdown Label in addition to releasing mixes on Delic Records Japan. He has also worked on various projects featuring Death Comet Crew, Johnny Juice, Mark Pritchard, Craig G, Freddy Fresh, Donald D, Redvenom, Lord Jazz & Mystro and shared stages with Ice T and Newcleus as well as releasing his trademark hour long cut 'n paste mixes The Cornish Edit Agent volumes.

Mixcloud: https://www.mixcloud.com/DrenThrowdown/

Pause-button mix by Dren, then known as GMB, his first moniker. There are about ten different cassettes out there, all with hand drawn art from Jerry, 1987. Cassette J-card artwork: Jerry Toman. Photograph: Dren Throwdown.





E-RAZE

...in conversation with Adam de Paor-Evans

So just before we got into the conversation about hip hop, we were talking about some of the issues we are experiencing now in society, and we touched on ideas about support, comradery and confidence. Somehow, there was a confidence and a comradery built through the crew system, even back in the **Master Blast** days and before that in our very first crews, and I wonder where that comes from?

Well every human being on the planet has their own inbuilt moral code. And there's a sliding scale, everybody's scale is different. I'll get into a 'gang' epiphany I had when I was teaching in schools, but it goes back – in my opinion – to the size of your house, home space architecture, and England's lack of social space. Because as you get to eighteen – in our day – the social space is the public house. People come out of the work space, don't want to go home and take the work thing with them, or they need to get out of the home, maybe they're overwhelmed by young children's thought processes and meanderings, or their partner, or maybe you're on your own and need to get out and be social, so you go to the 'public house', and get to a point where you've unwound and are ready to be in your own 'house.'

But as young people, we didn't have that as an option, but us that were involved in that hip hop generation – we were out on the street finding our own space – with purpose. So we gravitated to the places with shiny floors as it empowered us to practise an artform that we were enamoured by, taken by. Obviously not everybody when they were first taken by it stuck with it. Was that because they were not physically able, like in breakdancing, or creatively able, or maybe not emotionally able to go with it within themselves to write poetry and

rhymes? But that space that we had out on the streets was our social space, and the people that gravitated to that social space weren't judgemental, we were very nurturing, we shared arts, not everybody got along, but the five pillars of hip hop allowed you to practice all the different ones, so you could jump from music, dancing, graffiti art, or just talking – being knowledgeable and learning – and so as a social club, hip hop practice covers all those bases.

In the 'public house', you can perch at the bar, but you still choose your table, your team, it's sometimes maybe hard to drop in and out of it and it never really provided us with the musical or visual simulation we craved, apart from the pool table, yet being broke kids it was rare to get a game unless it was made up of doing shots with just the cue ball. But our social spaces of hip hop were quite big, and you could hover around, and slowly be absorbed somehow into the group of unknown kids.

We didn't really care where people came from, it was about kids hanging out, and loving hip hop, and that's what I loved about it. People came and went, but the crew numbers stayed up as someone left, someone else would drift in. All without the aid of internet of course, no phone calls really either, there were not leaders and not much organization in terms of nobody saying: "We all have to be here at 8pm", but we would naturally meet up around the same time and places, it was quite magical really.

There's something about the threshold you get with physical social clubs, the ideas of the social club were very often within certain walled premises, or maybe at different venues, but they still happened inside walled buildings; the thresholds are not fluid. The fluidity of the physical boundaries are impactful on the fluidity of the emotional boundaries as well, there's this nucleus of people then these other people like electrons buzzing around the edge, that would sometimes fly in and become part of that core. There were also people on the fringes of the crews that became friendly, paired up, formed their own sub-crew or whatever, then eventually became

part of the core crew. Nobody sat down and wrote a manifesto; it was all very organic, right?

Exactly that. It comes from those five pillars. Putting on gigs, but you don't strive to be a leader and say, "I'm going to do everything," you ask: "Who can do this, who can do that?" Like when we used to go to **The Arts Centre** on Saturdays, not everyone had two turntables, someone brings something, I bring a bit of kit, someone else brings their mixer because it's less shit that yours, and you would take that make-do-and-mend approach. We couldn't afford to buy everything new, you borrowed, shared things, you know, made you own leads and cables, and when we realised **The Art Centre** was somewhere we could jam and not get moved on, writers brought boards they'd painted on, and do outlines in each other's blackbooks, it was all happening around the periphery. It wasn't a conversation, a moment in time, it happened organically from being in the same places and the same times a lot.

E-Raze working on the 'PLUS' piece for DevonAir Plus, 1985. Photograph: unknown.

So how did you meet people in the first place?

Well, I first met **Kilo** at **Exeter Carnival**, I was sat on some scaffolding, and I had on some **Nikes** and he was like: "That's a fresh pair of kicks", and he had on this fresh jacket that just had the style you know, and he looked good. At school you had very obvious mods, rockers, and new romantics – mainly girls – and the **2Tone** crowd, and maybe some kids into skateboards, because we were quite rural, that was kind of it. These kids grouped in very obvious small cliques, then we were like, you were a **Michael Jackson** fan or a **Prince** fan, **Prince** was a bit edgy and **Michael Jackson** was more about dancing. We were allowed in the 6th year common room and there was a shiny floor, so we used to break there. That would have been '84.

I remember meeting a guy at school called **Julian**. We were in the same year, and we would stay in at lunchtime and do art, then we realised we were both drawing graffiti. He lived in **Exeter** and I was living in **Bradninch**, and **Broadclyst School** was kind of between the two. I would cycle **Broadclyst** to **Bradninch**, then cycle on to my grandma's house in **Exeter**, like once a week. That turned into living at my grandma's house and cycling to school, which became living at my grandma's and cycling to **Herbie**'s house to play hip hop and avoid school. But **Julian** and I were writing at this little track side concrete work shed just at the back of his house pretty early on.

OK, so when you and **Kilo** first met, was **Master Blast** already formed?

I don't think so, no. I was to-ing and fro-ing from outside of **Exeter**. My hub was **Tiverton**, the closest market town from the village, we used to do **Aikido** in **Tiverton** and then we'd meet a few others there and we'd maybe just faff about doing some breakin', I kinda recall the teacher/sensei being in a cèilidh group, so when we played **'Buffalo Gals'** he showed us the connection to his folk thing....

Our parents used to take us all to these events in rural halls, with shiny floors although it wasn't always our thing (musically) you might hear some music and you'd go and see what was happening and get dragged into being involved. Admittedly, it's good at breaking down barriers, music and dancing in that folk style. My parents were always going to peace/anti-nuclear protests as well and had friends in companies like **The Foots Barn Theatre**, they'd do off the wall, free-roaming-stuff acts at **Glastonbury**, **Elephant Fayre**, and **Hood Fayre** and were very entertaining, it gave us kids the opportunity to go off and explore these festivals and break with these other kids we'd meet. There's that moment when other breakers realise you can breakdance, you do your moves, and they're accepting of your moves, then you copy or practice their moves, you know. Once our little rural crew were at **Elephant Fayre** and we saw a guy doing some poppin' while he was prepping part of his act, on a huge, red, London double decker bus. The whole side folded down to form a stage; we got chatting to him and then ended up as part of the act!

At home we didn't have a colour TV or a VCR, I got my breakdance exposure from what I saw around me, and maybe the odd '80s music video on the black and white TV once in a while. My stepfather was heavily into music, and it was a real listening experience, **Grand Funk Railroad**, **Grateful Dead**; loads of funk-rock, reggae – **Toots & The Maytals**, **The Skalites**, **Judge Dread** (we were chatting once much, much later about how I knew a **Bill Withers** tune called **'I Can't Write Left Handed'** and he pulled out a copy on vinyl and put it on his turntable). That musical influence was there from him very early on. One of the few times the TV came out was for **Top of the Pops**, we'd all sit down as a family and watch it, then discuss what we'd seen and heard. But the music, records, were always there.

Then as my confidence grew, on Saturdays, I guess I was twelve – I was allowed to mooch about in town myself, because I didn't want to just go shopping like my sisters did. So, I'd see people around – I'd see maybe some breakin' – I'd just hover, listen to the music, and I thought, "I'm feeling the vibe, I have a couple of moves", I'd moonwalk a bit, maybe a pop on the edge, someone else is doing the same, and it kind of started to happen. I remember **St. James Community**

Centre. They had a shiny floor, I remember people like **Ricky Kennedy** and a lot of guys even pre-**Centre Force**, pre **Master Blast** and **X-eler-8**, **Herbie**, **Keith**; there were these first generation guys – **Keith** used to do these one-handed donkey kicks which were pretty out there, not a lot of people could do. It's strange how they all came about, but we were the only ones that seemed to be able to get organized.

So **Master Blast** was a crew that came together post-**Centre Force**. I guess it was **Herbie**'s influence, I know when he got **Centre Force** going, they said they had sponsorship from **Puma**, I don't know if they did, I think they went out and bought all their **Puma** stuff and said they were sponsored all the same. There's that moment isn't there, were everyone is on the same path, and choosing to be individuals and choosing to dress individually, to then forming a crew, and for some reason feeling you have to dress the same, you know?

I know, it's an interesting observation. Isn't that something to do with an individual identity becoming part of a collective identity? In some ways, it's a visual metaphor for people on the periphery of a crew becoming part of the core, whereby the core is a critical mass rather than a group of individuals.

Yeah, definitely. It's interesting that a lot of us now are doing a civil service or community role, and I guess that stems from this collective experience and a sense of giving back to the community. Less career-driven maybe and more about supporting others.

That's really true, lots of us are involved in various forms of the arts and humanities too. I'm convinced it's something to do with how we absorbed a sense of community through hip hop culture. I don't know how aware we were of that at the time though.

It's funny, those communal moments might have happened around football, for instance, but other sports need more organization, and aren't so open. You can join in with a football game; make up the numbers if you hang around. There weren't really many places to skateboard in the villages either, but did this collective engagement with hip hop come from not wanting to play football, or not wanting to skate, but going anyway and hanging around on the edge watching, until you saw someone else on the fringes doing a handstand, or just a bit of very simple poppin'? Was it that kind of peripheral community to start with, someone then brings a tape player, then gradually something happens but on the edge of something else?

Now we're getting into detail.

There were a few people I know that were dead into football, like **Steve Craig** from my village. He was big into **Adam and The Ants** and skating, then overnight he got into **Grandmaster Flash** because **'The Message'** had come on the TV, and suddenly we're around his house breakin' and poppin', then the next day he's back into skating and playing guitar and stuff. But there were these moments where hip hop appeared then you take it or not.

I was lucky, I heard rap early via my stepdad through **The Last Poets** and **Lightnin' Rod**, they blew me away. Verbally, it takes you out of your current space, takes you on a journey, and because music for us was quite loud in the house, you'd get into it and try to understand it.

Then when **'The Message'** came along, I thought: "Fucking hell, there's the next representation of what **The Last Poets** were talking about", I was bang into that. That creativity. The first music I got into was ska and reggae too, so it was an easy transition when **'The Message'** came

out. It was all there already I guess; **Dillinger** was quite big in our house – wow – I'm reliving this.

So lyrics were important for you back then?

Very much so. As a kid something to sing along to, being in primary school singing **'Cocaine In My Brain'** and not knowing really what it was about, but just feeling the music and rhythm of words. The call and response of the vocals on that track. I remember being into reggae enough – and this is how DJing came about for me – we used to hustle at **Glastonbury** festival. Our parents would go there a week early and leave a week later, so it was dead at the beginning, then everything was slowly setting up, and that was like in '79 and '80. When you're there early, you get a lot of privileges, and when you're a cheeky little kid, you find ways to get backstage. You say things like: "Oh my dad works on sound" and the next thing you've got a pass. I'd just wander around and meet all these cool people, you see people as people, although they're performers, they're just people. My primary school books were books were full of autographs from **Ian Dury**, **John Cooper Clarke**, **UB40**, **Benjamin Zephaniah**, **Steel Pulse**, **Aswad**, **The Specials**, **The Beat**, **Madness** and so many more...

We used to peel onions and potatoes for the curry houses, and then we'd get free food. We'd carry water and stuff for the Caribbean stalls too, their sons would have soundsystems, so you'd listen to reggae all day. Then once I asked: "Can I put some records on?" and the guy replied, "You can put some records on, if you go and get your own records, you're not touching mine!"

So I went off to a stall about bought a load of 7"s. I was loving it, the vibrations, the sonics; it was so loud, and you never really got to listen to music that loud, it was a treat to hear it booming. Then there was mic techniques and echo chambers too. Which reminds me, My older sister had this 7" by **Bowie**, on the B-side was this track **'The Laughing Gnome'**, where he was messing around with his voice pitch, it was like this comedy record, but we realised if you played it at 16 or 33 he

E-Raze and Mr. Piper, circa 2018.
Photograph: E-Raze.

sounded normal, at home we had these old record players where you could stack up vinyl and you'd get the jukebox constant playing of discs one after another. From that I started taking stuff apart, so by the time I had arrived in **Exeter** it felt as though I knew where I was coming from musically. Early on though, it was all about ska and reggae. Dancing was a big part of it too back then, so was dressing stylishly as part of the **2Tone** movement.

It's amazing; you were ten when you were playing records on a soundsystem.

Yeah it's bizarre. Looking back now, we were so young and innocent, we could duck under the rope and just see and get into everything at **Glastonbury**. We'd go and help the sound guys, take our bikes and ride around the site, there was nobody around you'd just go and meet all these other kids that were running round with hippyish parents like ours. I remember a bit later helping one sound guy, and he did a sound check by playing **'Slave To The Rhythm'** by **Grace Jones**, and it fucking blew my mind, you know. I'm sat at the sweet spot, and you know. Super exciting, the hairs stand up on the back of your neck and you're not sure why. We were so fortunate to have a free run of the place, and go and find these experiences.

What's interesting about people like us in the **UK** and, in fact, anyone provincial and not involved in that '70s **New York** scene, is that we didn't know about original breaks of course – **'Bongo Rock'**, **'Give It Up or Turn It a Loose'**, **'The Mexican'**, and all those other crazy breaks – we found out about breakin' through electro, and it wasn't until a couple of years later we fully comprehended what was going on, you know?

Yes, so electro was first in terms of breakin'. There wasn't a stand out electro track for me, I don't know what point I joined the electro band

wagon. There were certainly massively influential things like **Electro 8** with **Aleem** – but that's a song, you know, it's an electro funk song (**'Confusion'**). It's not this experimental music. One of my all-time favourite records is **Tyrone Brunson**'s **'The Smurf'**, and he obviously came into electronic music through synthesizers as they were being born, but there was already this talent, and I was loving the electro-funk and jazz funk vibes too.

At what point did your cultural understanding of what hip hop was about arrive, did you recognise what it was doing early on, and where it was coming from?

Very much so. There's that moment in **'The Message'**, it's like the Foley artist in films. When **Melle Mel** raps: "Broken glass...", then 'smash!' You know? We can all relate to the sound of breaking glass as a kid, as we all kicked a milk bottle or threw a **Corona** bottle, as a kid it was liberating and edgy and dangerous to steal a milk bottle and smash it.

But then when he goes: "Broken glass everywhere / People pissing on the stairs you know they just don't care", I'm just like...fucking hell. That's really vivid; that's where you live.

I have no concept of that, we had an outside toilet, I could relate to the smell of piss outside, and we grew up in a shared farmhouse with another family, and it flashes back to that smell memory, but it really followed on from things like **'Nite Club'** by **The Specials**, this storytelling rawness. Raw imagery. We weren't just singling along to it; we knew what it was really about.

Looking back at that window ’82 to ’86, what long-term impact has hip hop had on your life?

On every level. Every level. The things that you need in life; confidence to stand upright and look people square in the face comes from battling people on the dancefloor, even dancing on a nightclub dancefloor on your own comes from the same thing. This performance element is huge. I always hark back to **Chuck D** saying: “I don’t rhyme for the sake of riddlin’” (**‘Don’t Believe The Hype’**, 1988), same as being a DJ, being confident enough to give back what you get and more. To experiment, and not to do things just for the sake of it. That also comes from the cypher mentality whether it be dance, DJing or emceeing. Being able to practise art too, there weren’t the rules in hip hop telling me it wasn’t correct, that non-conforming was a good thing. That early political side of hip hop was massive for me, it tied into the activist upbringing I had to challenge the mainstream, to challenge the zeitgeist. I remember at primary school I had a badge on my jumper that said: ‘we are the people your parents warned you against’.

Lord Louis (aka E-Raze) has DJed many musical styles globally; promoted hip hop nights in The Westcountry pushing UK and US acts, promoted funk, soul, Latin, and breaks club nights (**The Shakedown/Beats Workin'**) for many years, and continues to play, collect, edit, and generally meddle with music and art. He is a full-time tree surgeon and a part-time firefighter, and in his spare time, an international expedition leader for young people.

MIKE MAC

...in conversation with Adam de Paor-Evans

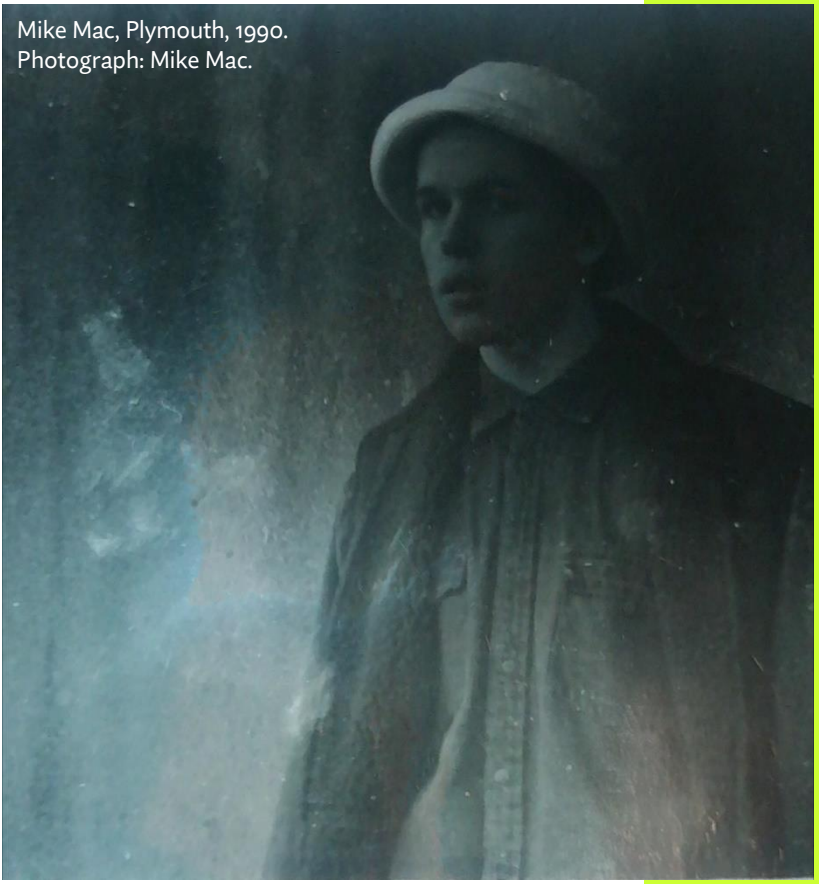
What was life like just as you began to discover hip hop?

I come from quite a musical family, my dad's a drummer, and my mum's family all play guitar or other instruments, in a way I'm the odd one out, but I loved music before hip hop. Anything with a beat, and I just generally gravitated towards funk. I played songs on my little **Sharp** system, and used to cut the channels out with screwed-up pieces of toilet paper crammed into the record tabs, and rap over beats. Pieces of toilet tissue were also used as slipmats. So I could scratch the vinyl by way of line switch and rerecord to tape, and I'd record rhymes over my recordings (before I got stuck into Cubase or Logic). To pin a particular song is not easy, but the obvious one would be **'Rapper's Delight'** and those kinds of commercial releases. To be honest, I was a little bit younger than a lot of the hip hop headz, but then my peers and my sister are slightly older and I would be dropped morsels of music from them back in the day. So it was all pretty much an evolution really. I just happened upon it rather than anything that impacted me as a thing.

What was your environment like growing up?

So my dad was from a village in **Devon** called **Buckland Monachorum**, and after moving around for a bit, we all relocated

back there and I was raised on a farm. The same village as **Seth Lakeman**'s from, we were mates back then. So, that's my home. The rave thing was big then – especially in **Plymouth** – **Ribbz** was doing his thing, and inspired a lot of youngsters in that way.



Mike Mac, Plymouth, 1990.
Photograph: Mike Mac.

So my sister's fella was just bombarding me with loads of tapes full of stuff. I went to a boarding school because I was naughty. It was a very difficult period of my life, but when I was there, I met a guy who had turntables. He was two years older than me, and I was let out one day,

and found me way to the arcades, and there I was playing **Double Dragon**, and I got a tap on the shoulder, and it was **DJ Mish** and he said: "Right, I want you to be my emcee", and from then I was working on rhymes all the time and listening to beats. He knew I was into writing rhymes; I'd always written poetry or rhymes. I'd go into all the record shops I could and get deep into listening to stuff too, and we gradually got really good, and people started booking us to play. We started doing parties and put on a night ourselves at a venue in **Plymouth** called **Charlies**, which didn't really ask anyone for ID, and they allowed young entrepreneurs like us to do shows. I was so young, it was crazy, but music was my thing. Initially, I thought I wanted to be a dancer, you know, and going to raves as a young person made me want to do that.

That's amazing, I remember getting into clubs with my fake passport back in the days when you actually wrote your own date of birth into your passport with a black pen, haha. I wasn't as young as you when I first rapped on stage though!

We put on a gig when I was fourteen, we were playing hip hop and I was on the mic emceeing, but we were also playing some early techno and other bits of dance music which I also gravitated towards. We went to **Warehouse** in **Plymouth** and did an audition for **Kenny**. We pestered all the clubs, promoters, and record shops, I think really until people caved in. We auditioned for the **Warehouse** I think about three times, so by this time I was fifteen, and I was auditioning for nightclubs, haha. We were trying so hard; I think they were just throwing us a bone. A couple of times we did manage to get some DJ slots though, and we obviously got known by the sound engineers and others who ran the club day to day, as they'd seen us come in during the daytime for auditions, so that's how we got to get into the clubs underage. All I needed to do was carry my DJ bag with me everywhere, and the bouncers just assumed I was DJing, so I'd get let in – underage and for free, literally every week, and getting on the

mic. We were a crew that played everything, we weren't formulated as a hip hop crew, it was just what it was. There was no music pigeonholing. But you know, I was more interested in hip hop, so I carried on writing rhymes and recording them over instrumentals, and I made a demo which was one side completely hip hop, and we got more popular in **Plymouth** then, which would be about '91 by now. I managed to get a backroom set at some of the big rave nights, there came a point then we were doing shows every night of the week almost, be it a party or a rave, or something.

Was it those backroom gigs where your closeness to hip hop was fostered?

MC Clint put me on emceeing in the warehouse and was also into hip hop. Ironically, my hip hop 'debut' if you like was when I stood in with **DJ Kim** for **Kelz**, **DJ Lynx**, and **Krissy Kris** who didn't turn up for show. Funnily enough **DJ Kim** also didn't show, and that was my opportunity to do my first hip hop show supporting **Blade**. It was totally unrehearsed of course – typical me! Haha. Just beats and rhymes. To be honest, that, for me, was such a moment of clarity in terms of what I wanted to do musically. I was really young still, and you know, **Blade** gave me an encore and afterwards he put his arm around me and said: "Do it for the love of it, don't get dragged into the money side of it." That just echoed through everything I'd done since, really. So credit to him for those moments.

That's a really clear overview of your background. So to revisit the hip hop side of things, what was it that drew you closer to hip hop, was it the fact you'd already been interested in lyrics and words?

I don't really know, I mean I was just into emceeing, it didn't matter to me, but at the same time, hip hop is something I fell in love with years before, and poetry was the thing really. I always would just put my poems to music. It sounds romantic.

It does sound romantic, but positively beguiling, I'm really interested in this idea of poetry coming before hip hop for you. Were you writing poetry before you were listening to hip hop?

Yeah I was definitely. I think as a kid, it doesn't matter where you are, I always remember listening to **John Peel**, I would always have a radio, music, lyrics, these are things that can inspire you, and living remotely, that can offer more of an incentive you feel like you're in a kind of niche. I'm from a little village, and everything is going on elsewhere. And for me, **Plymouth** was this massive, massive place, and then you gravitate to the parties there with all these different artists, and it was like a free fall format. You'd get there, work your way through, and realise that everyone is just cool and loving the music. It was a case of there being a party everywhere, anywhere, and after the party there was always another party.

Sonz of the Bassline crew, 1991.
Photograph: Hayden Vooght.

What about life outside Plymouth?

Well, then I went to art college, I met **Pfox**, **3PM**, **DJ Kim** and **DJ Diggz**. I was also there with **3rdEye** the graffiti artist, and that experience blew me away too. Looking to **Bristol**, coming from a small village, it was incredible, and then later on I met you guys in **Exeter**, that first time we played together was with **Task Force**.

Kimfest crew: Mista Pete, Kid Fury, Mike Mac, Skinz, Shonno & Oliver Love/Asian Hawk. Kimfest, 16th August 2019. Photograph: Kimfest crew.

Yeah. it's unreal when you think about it, those **Cut 'n Paste** nights in **Exeter**, I think about as relatively recent, but they were actually twenty years ago, and less than a decade from the end of the **South Side Alliance**, which in turn feels like so far into the past. Also, the early '90s and the turn of the millennium feel like completely different eras of hip hop.

I think in part we were pretty worn down by the beat-maker concept. I was very much into the idea of the cypher, I was into the positive aspects of building people up, of supporting one another, unification. I think that was a change for us all. Then we always put each other on

– if we could – and got back that vibe of supporting each other. It is quite depressing for artists trying to make it, so it's really important to get support from your peers. We had that support, and that was a refreshing thing. It added huge value to my experience for sure.

Jedi Mics (Mike Mac, Skinz), Stonegroove Social, Moles, Bath, 2004. Photograph: Bobafatt.

Mike Mac started emceeing for DJ Mish in 1990, calling themselves Sonz of the Bassline they performed at club, pub and house parties across Plymouth. The Sonz held a residency on Mondays and Thursdays at the Warehouse in '93. Mike's first live vocal slot was at the Warehouse supporting Blade, who offered an encore which fuelled Mike's rap passion. In the mid '90s Mike formed Jedi Mics with Skinz and DJ Loctite, releasing 3 12" EPs: Uppercut/Pretenders, Industry Show, and Nuts on Ice. Jedi Mics toured and performed alongside many UK legends including Rodney P, Phi-life Cypher, and Mystro, among others. Mike is the creator, producer, rapper of UBI Radio. Currently Mike produces, raps, and DJs and for various artists, most notably on the dance stage at Glastonbury Music Festival with Souljah Clique. He Released Kimfest EP last year, with 100% of royalties donated to the charity Mind, in memory of his best pal DJ Kim.

Buy the Kimfest EP here:

kimfestcollective.bandcamp.com/album/k-i-m-keep-it-moving-e-p

SIMON SPECIFIK FRANKLAND

...in conversation with Adam de Paor-Evans

Can you tell me about your context just on the brink of discovering hip hop?

I was into music, I was into fads, I would say. It seemed to me every six months, something new was coming on, it would be roller-skating, BMX, skateboarding, not in that particular order, but of course then breakin' came along. Breakin' was then associated with the music of hip hop that we now know, but before that music was just music for me. I was a big fan of **Adam and The Ants**, the first influence on me I'd say musically, as were groups like **Madness**, and other bits of general pop music. I was definitely into drum-influenced music, rhythmical music. It's the best way I can describe the music before hip hop, I was definitely led by drums. There was a quirkiness to the music I liked that wasn't maybe the norm.

There was also an image thing, and definitely a 'boy around town' type vibe, I got that from looking at **Madness** and **Adam and The Ants**. Especially **Adam Ant**, it was all very flamboyant, I was interested in the image. My next door neighbour was heavily into punk, and he used to play me lots of punk but to be honest it didn't float my boat. Again though, I liked the imagery, I had pictures pinned up on my bedroom wall – I don't know what my parents thought – a

ten-year-old with pictures of punks with ten fags stuffed in their mouths – but it was the intense imagery I liked. I was actually played **'Planet Rock'** by my neighbours' older brother, he fed us nuggets of information and when he got it the first time in '82, I was only nine or maybe ten, but I didn't have a clue what it was. It didn't chime with me at that point, I just thought it was weird. I'd never heard anything like it, that was that. I didn't twig until later on that I'd heard it before. This older brother would go off into **Bristol** and bring back the newest records, as I was living in **Nailsea** at the time.

Specifik, Sidmouth, 2007. Photograph: Simon Frankland.

The first thing that made sense to me was either **'Rockit'** or **Malcolm McLaren**'s **'Buffalo Gals'**. The reason I know this is I associate **'Rockit'** with **BMX Beat** – it was played in the background – and I immediately associated that track to movement and BMXing actually. It was nothing I put together with hip hop, but I placed it within this thing about movement. Then **'Buffalo Gals'** like many people, was the first thing I heard but through a school teacher who introduced it as part of the lesson, he wanted us to study what this record was, where the noises were coming from, and what was going on. He took a turntable out in class and we emulated the scratching. That was around the release of that record, it was amazing at the time, our music teacher was also really into **Bob Marley**, he had the album covers on the wall of the classroom.

Wow, sounds phenomenal, can you remember his name? He needs a credit in this publication!

All this stuff was going on around us, but he really encouraged it, like pause-button mixing, he'd ask us to make a mix, go out of the lesson, make the tape then come back in a play them to the rest of the class, he'd ask us to do the same with writing raps. This was a part of the curriculum which he'd designed, he was very open to new music. He was studying lots of things that were happening at that time and then he'd introduce them to the class. He as obviously in tune with what was going on, and had us kids a lot more engaged, it was amazing.

Indeed, that's quite incredible.

That also relates to my next door neighbour – **Michael Provis** – I credit him on my recent cut 'n paste record because we would make pause-button mixtapes with his records. We were trying to copy what we heard from people like **Chad Jackson** and other people that you'd hear on **John Peel** or wherever.

So what were you using, were you using cassette decks at that point?

Yeah, we were using cassette decks – he had a mixer too – not sure what the benefit was really apart from plugging in a turntable to it – it was more for an extra input I guess. I loved stuttering the intro to a track and repeating drum patterns, we were just exploring music.

So when would that have been, around 1985?

Yeah, I jumped from '83 to possibly into '85, because by that point we were fully all breakin' and doing the whole hip hop thing, and then in '86 was when breakin' as a fashion, as a thing, was out.

I remember the same feeling, what happened from your point of view? We had the mad breakin' explosion; everyone was going nuts for a year or so...then nothing.

Well it was a bit like everything else, for a lot of people that got caught up in breakin'; it was like a trend like BMXing, something else came along, and breakin' was out. That was about it. A lot of people in breakin' went on to do graff. It seemed like it anyway.

That's interesting because I wonder if the same may have happened with the other elements as well?

Yeah, well I think there was definitely a transition period from breakin' into other elements, breakin' didn't seem to exist much from that point onwards, I mean there were people still breakin', but not like it was in '84 and '85. There were still people into it, but it wasn't a thing.

Do you think that's anything to do with the path that the music itself took in its development?

Yeah I wouldn't disagree at all.

Concorde 2, Brighton, 2016.
Photograph: Dudley Jaynes.

I know we always seem to reference the **Electro** albums when we have these conversations but it is interesting when you look at the difference in sound, pace, and tempo from some of the earlier **Electros** through to the later ones which include much more heavier rap on them.

I remember going to the youth centre on a Thursday night when **Electro 6** came out, and I was playing **'Roxanne, Roxanne'**, and this kid said to me: "This is the turning point for me, I'm not into the slower rapping, I prefer the fast instrumental stuff." I think a lot of people started to split off into different directions. The **Electros** took people off into other things, I think that's quite unique to this country because of the way the **Street Sounds** series' put together a random selection of music. In **America**, that may never have happened, those records wouldn't have sat together on the same compilation album. **Morgan Khan** probably doesn't get enough credit for that.

Do you think that was intentional then? Sorry we've strayed off your personal story for a second, but I think it's worth discussing. Do you think that was intentional, designed, or was it due to limitation of availability in records **Street Sounds** could put together on their compilations?

I think it was a reflection across the section of what was being played in the cutting-edge clubs at the time. I mean if you talk to people about **The Roxy** and stuff, there was such a variety of music being played, it wasn't how some people imagine. I think that a lot of the other **Street Sounds** collections they were very geared to 80s soul vibe and just street style, dancefloor friendly would be the way I would describe it.

Your comment about **Electro 6** is mad, because how many people say **Electro 5** is the best **Electro**? So many people. And it's interesting to me now, in light of this discussion, that there was maybe an unexpected impact of **Electro 6** whereby its release possibly made **Electro 5** stronger to many people's ears, yet for me, I felt the same as you**, Electro 6** is heavy! It's actually quite a dark selection, amazing beats, and it took me a while to get my head around the whole stripped-down **'Roxanne'** vibe, but when I did, it was awe-inspiring.

I experienced something similar with **Run-D.M.C.**'s **'Sucker M.C.s'**, the whole tune, just drum beats and rap, I remember hearing it and thinking: "This is what it should sound like, this is the music I want to hear." And then a similar thing where I connected hip hop music with breakin' was when I first heard **'I Can't Stop.'** by **West Street Mob**.

So when did you first hear **'Sucker M.C.s'**, was it on their debut album or **Electro 4**?

L: Specifik, Bristol, 1988. R: Specifik, Newton Poppleford, 1987. Photographs: Simon Frankland.

I don't think it was on either, I think it was on TV, there was graff in the background, breakin' in the front, it was on evening TV. It looked

weird painting on stage, yeah, definitely remember, that was the point I thought, "Yeah." I don't think I caught onto the **Electros** until possibly volume five. I was late to them.

That's an interesting way into **'Sucker M.C.s'** being a pivotal moment for you, were you still breakin' at that point?

I didn't stop breakin'. When we moved down to **Devon** and I met you I was still breakin'. I distinctly remember asking people at school, and they told me **Steve Faulkner** and those others were doing it under the stairs, and I went down there a few times, but it had long gone by then. For me, it was still very much in the forefront of my mind.

So what did you think when you ended up in **Newton Poppleford**?

Well I knew we were going to move down; I've never been bothered about moving, I love meeting new people. We came down, and looked around the estate agents in **Exeter**, we were originally going to live in **Exmouth** or **Lympstone**, and I distinctly remember my eyes peeled looking for any clue of hip hop, and the first bit of evidence I saw – as you come into the art school on the ring road – along that road there was a tag on the wall that read: **'Sen'** or something, and also was written: **'Sly Crew'**, and I straight away thought that was a graffiti or hip hop crew, little did I know it was a football hooligan crew.

I was staying at my nan's for a couple of days while my parents were getting things sorted, and I was listening to **Crucial Electro 3** constantly then. So, I arrived in **Newton Pop** and set myself up in my bedroom playing music, going out and seeing if I could meet anyone, and of course it was only the village bays (boys), a couple of the local girls and my discussions of hip hop were like...well, they'd never even heard of anyone. Like, breakin' wasn't even on their radar at school,

same as the clothes I was wearing, I was looked at like some kind of weird alien, they were staring at me as I had on jumbo cords with splits in the bottom, and they were like: "What are you wearing?" It was interesting how there was an obvious – I'm going to call it – time delay from **Bristol** to **Devon** at that time. Back then there was a delay of things fashion-wise getting to these kinds of places. So, at school I started asking around if there was anyone into hip hop or graffiti, and I got pointed in the direction of this kid who showed me his book.

Did he have a blackbook then, or what?

No, it was like a folder, and on the front it had something written on it in a really toy style, and I shook my head thinking: "what's going on down here..." Then I met you, and we had a conversation that made me think: "OK, there is life here after all", then from that point pieces of the puzzle gradually started to come together, I began seeing a few things on walls, in **Exeter** mainly, there was of course **WWP** (**Wild West Posse**) as a graffiti crew that stood out to me straight away, we're getting into '88 now, there was **Lite** tags everywhere, and as far as **Sidmouth** was concerned, there was something painted on **Exeter Cross** bus stop shelter that had been buffed. So, there was remnants that somebody at some stage did something. All these things gave me hope! When did you paint the **Youth Centre**?

That was late 1987, because it was before I learned to drive, I was carrying cans of paint around on my scooter. It must have been, because we bit a **Chrome Anglez** character out of **Spraycan Art**, and that was published in '87.

It blew my mind, actually. So yeah, there were clear signs of hip hop around, and I just continued on my own path. Discovered some record shops, you know.

DJing at Backyard Boogaloo, Bournemouth, 2012.
Photograph: Shinobi Pictures.

So were you starting to experiment with your own music then?

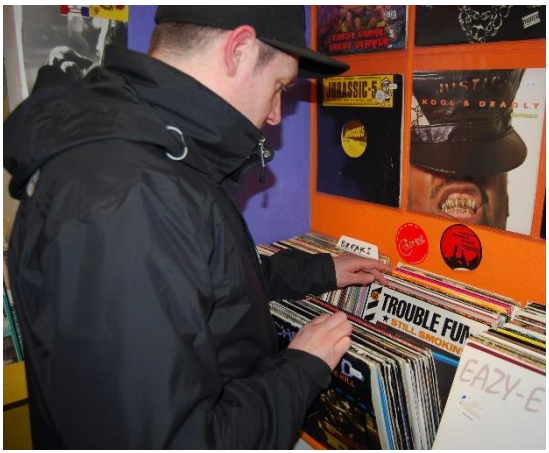
No, I was strictly making mixes then. I had an **Alba** turntable/double cassette, and it had buttons which were 'phono', 'tape', and so on, and I could hold the record, and cut it in and out with the phone/tape buttons. It's like I was practising scratching without a mixer, but I needed to find a way to put music on top of that, so I ended up with another stereo which I'd record onto while a backing track was playing, and using pause-button technology too. It was very difficult in a way as then my active life was very stifled in a way, there was no outlet really, so I became more a fan than a practitioner.

I suppose around early '89 I got my turntables from **Tandy** and a **Realistic** mixer, then I got deeper into scratching, and at that point the DJ thing really started. I mean if I look back on what you were doing at the time, you were already streets ahead, you were playing me breaks, making your own tracks, everything. You were decoding what was going on with this music way before I thought about any of that, way ahead of its time really. You have two really amazing things going on here: a serious lack of culture, yet at the same time the few people that are doing it are light years ahead of places that are known for doing it. Where the hell did you get your knowledge from, what was making you pick it all apart like that?

Yeah, it's mad, I don't know man, that's hell of a question. I've often thought of the dynamic before, and there was something about a mix of technical skill and an inquisitiveness into and deep love for the culture. You can't underestimate the power of having people around you, there were people in the **South Side** that were so supportive in different ways, it was inspirational. I'd never have picked the mic up at the **Cutmaster Swift** jam in **Torquay** in '89 if it hadn't been for **Ritchski**'s encouragement, for example.

Above: Snu Peas Records, 2016. Below: Red Rose Records, 2016
Photographs: Shane Clowery.

Also, I think there's something about needing to put the work in if you live remotely. I wonder if it was the same for you guys, the amount of time you need to focus on your craft when you are not surrounded by the culture is longer, and it's like you need to put more energy into it.



What impact of these formative years in hip hop had on your life?

Hip hop has given me everything, it's who I am and everything I do is with a hip hop mindset at the heart of it. It has given me direction, goals, friendships, an open mind, respect and an outlet to channel my creativity. As I answer this, I question myself and wonder if that approach to life would be the same in any other activity. My guess is it wouldn't, because hip hop wasn't pre-written, we were instrumental in its growth and everyone has played a part.

Summer 1983 was when Specifik first encountered and fell in love with hip hop culture. After the initial explosion of breakin', Specifik began to focus more on graffiti and DJing. After some initial success with making dance records in 1996/7 he linked with long term friend Project Cee and produced a number of notable records. Around 2004 Specifik went back to his roots and produced a series of cut 'n paste records before re-joining Project Cee in 2007 to provide production for The Projections' Project the Future album. In late 2008, Specifik joined forces with Doozer of Critically Ill and Crystal Carter to form The Bitterati who as a group are still making music in 2021. In 2012 Specifik played a major part in the success of new UK record label B-Line Recordings and also works as a solo producer and lead artist releasing a series of well-received singles and albums. In 2021 Specifik continues to pursue his passion for hip hop as a producer and DJ and presents The Cold Krush Radio show on traxfm.

https://www.facebook.com/SpecifikBLine/

Instagram: @simon.frankland

Sidmouth, 2004.
Photograph: Natasha Jones

DJ XL

...in conversation with Adam de Paor-Evans

So before we get into the details about your start in hip hop, we've started talking about the social framework surrounding beat diggin', and how that differs so much from the online collection of samples that are easily accessible and there for anyone to make beats.

Well when we started out in that, there was none of this. Everything we did was off our own back, going to the record shops, taking your portable with you and listening through; looking at the cover and trying to see anything familiar, names or clues that would help you, you'd link two and two together you know, and listening through at the same time. This is the knowledge that will be lost in future generations, you know, because they haven't had to go through this process. Clicking on Google, you're not retaining that information and there's no surrounding story to it, you know what I mean?

Sometimes I can pick a record out and be like: "OK, I was at this place, at this time...", and there's a feeling with it as well, a nostalgia almost. So many factors go into that experience. It's where you are at the time, the ambiance of the shop. What mood you're in at the time when you're listening to that piece of music; how the scene is at that time, all these factors. At the height of the hip hop scene when I was diggin', everyone was buzzed about it, we'd gather at the weekends, I'd go and meet **Parker** and a few others, and we'd get together, we'd bring what we found that week. You'd be like: "Oh I found the sample to **London Posse** – **'Gangster Chronicle'**", or **'Jump Around'**, and: "Oh I found that this week!" and everyone would be: "Wow!" and

that's the homework. That's the homework we put in, right? Within your own community you're educating each other.

Exactly! Then there's the records you didn't pick up – that you left in the shop, or the one's your diggin' partners find before you – they pull out the sleeve and it's like: "Yeahhhh look what I found!" All of those mad experiences.

All of that, you know. The one-upmanship, it's all part of that hip hop thing you know, who's got the biggest rep for diggin'.

I've always considered diggin' as an element, you know? It is a practice in its own right.

It is a craft, dude. You know, the way you put those samples together as well, you know, it is all so important. But it goes along with years of studying this way. Anyone can put a beat together, but to get that feel, how to express yourself in an innocent kind of way. I'm doing this because I love it, it's not superficial, I'm on no bandwagon, this is part of who I am. People come and go, and now looking back I can see that people were in it as it was fashionable. When I started I was about fourteen, you know, and people like you and me, we've done this because it's what we do! There's no pretence. I don't feel I need to dress hip hop all the time; I'm already fully immersed in it. I don't need that to confirm my identity. These are factors of coming up in a culture where it wasn't fashionable, you had to deal with fucking racism for being into hip hop, and I'm sure you guys had the same thing up there in **Exeter**.

Indeed we did, but as I know it was for you, hip hop reinforced what side we were on. So coming back to your early days of diggin', were

you into music before you found hip hop, or was hip hop your way into music?

I used to be into **Queen**, but my favourite was **The Temptations**, you know **'Psychedelic Shack'**? That was my favourite as a kid. I used to love that. I used to carry **The Temptations**' **Greatest Hits** tape in my pocket so that wherever I was, if someone had a tape deck, I could play it. **'Papa Was A Rolling Stone'**, man. That was the one for me. So I got into **Queen** through my mate's dad, 'Another One Bites The Dust', that was it. Then the other one was my dad's record collection, he had things like **Booker T and the M.G.s**, and he had this record called **Nero's Soul Party**.

Ah yeah. **Paul Nero**!

I listened through it all the time, and you know when the **Diamond D** album came out, it's got a break from that on it, so I was listening to all these things in hip hop, and thinking that I knew a lot of these samples already. I think the first break that I bought intentionally because I knew it, was the **Isaac Hayes ...To Be Continued** album, and I must have been fourteen, and I would have bought that in **Birkenhead**. That's where my aunty lived, and I used to visit my aunty, and I thought: "this must be a good place to buy music, you know, **The Beatles** are from just over the water, so I'm going to go and find some records." I don't know what got me into buying records because I started with tapes.

So, tapes was my first love, I had a massive collection of tapes. Those first ones I bought were **Beastie Boys**, **Run-D.M.C.**, you know, so '86 is where I really jump in. I met a guy at school in the same class. We were best mates, and he was really into hip hop, and he'd been shown hip hop from an older guy called **Matt T**. He had all this dope shit on vinyl, and that's what got me into vinyl. I saw all his vinyl and he was playing this stuff on his system; the speakers were phenomenal. I was just sat there thinking: "Yeah, I love this shit! This is me." At the time I was doing a paper round and cleaning people's driveways on the

weekend, and with that money I'd go down to places like **Lollipop Records**, **Rival Records**, **HMV**, **Virgin**, **Our Price**, you know, we had a lot of record shops at the time. **Rival Records** was the best one, because they used to get loads of independent shit and white labels in, and that's where you'd see **Ribbz** and **Hurry**, and **Apache**; these are all my DJ mentors actually. The people that took me under their wing and showed me how to mix. But then in '89 there was a big transition. I started mixing in '88, I had a job at **Plymouth Pavilions**, and with that money I bought some **1210s** and a little **Realistic** mixer with the VU dials on it!

Tandy's finest!

Yeah, **Tandy's** own brand! I went into town with the cash. I bought the turntables from **Jessops** – I remember the guy in there to this day – and his beard and glasses. Five-hundred quid, cash. Then I started practising, but the thing was I was already clubbing and on the club scene – as I looked older because of my height. There was one big jam at **The Academy** which I never managed to get to with **Overlord X** and **She Rockers**.

Yeah, I was at that one, that was an all-dayer, I think it started about two in the afternoon.

Yeah it was on a Sunday, but I couldn't get in, I think I was skint. I left home at fifteen, so I couldn't work fully, so I was sofa crashing. So the people I was hanging out with were the people I'd go clubbing with, so it was an easy transition to get into DJing. So during that time I was practising, getting better, and I got to a point where **Ribbz**, and **Hurry**, and **Apache**, were all saying: "Look, you should come and DJ with us, maybe we can give you a slot." But the thing is, because of this transition in '89. First we had the electro hip hop, then what I call the organic scene. The organic scene to me is where the sample-based

stuff comes in, the diggin' aspect versus the orchestration of musicians that make electro hip hop. So this transition where everything became disjointed, and this is where the rave scene came in. So sub-genres were created, you couldn't just call it one thing. But when that first started in '89, you'd play anything.

Because the rave scene was still at its birth, there was no template as to what signified you in a certain way, or what pigeonholed yourself. Same with hip hop, in the 80s there were so many groups with different sounds. So that transition in '89 it still wasn't homogenised, so a lot of the DJs were playing all types of stuff across genres. So I was immersed in that – I was playing rave, reggae, playing soul, I was playing jazz – anything funky that would get people going but what started to happen was people started to transcend towards the 4/4 house beat as it became all about the rave scene.

So of course, I went with that which is where I made a DJ profession for a few years. But I grew tired of it, it wasn't where my heart was, so I'm like: "I'm going to put my heart back into hip hop", which is where it started. So we started things like **Flava** in about '92 – the hip hop night – which we did pretty much every month. That started because we were all burnt out or had enough of the rave scene and it was time to chill, you know. The hip hop scene was more relaxed.

That's interesting, to talk about that period in those terms, that performances and music were more relaxed rather than running at full-pelt all the time.

This is the thing, every weekend everyone was on it, You'd be like: "How long can this go on for?" A few people died along the way, and as a long-term thing, it wasn't sustainable. Plus, I just didn't feel the same way about it. When I'd sit down and listen to that music, I didn't feel the same way as I did about the intricate rhymes, scratching, and

DJ XL studio selfie, 2020.

DJ XL and his good friend Clive Stevens (RIP), Hannah's (Seale Hayne), 2018. Photograph: Carl Munson.

at the time, you have to realise there was nothing hip hop going on in **Plymouth**. Everything was about electronic rave music. We had **Jelly Jazz** starting up around the same time, which **Pete Isaac** has made into a great success, whereas **Flava** was more for the passion.

My biggest gig was when I was eighteen at **Exmouth Pavilion**, the main act didn't turn up so I played for three hours and then I'm playing with **Ribbz**, **Hurry**, **Apache**, and **DJ-T**. There was also a guy called **Skinny-D** who was from London – like **Cazbee** who had come down from **London**, you know, the writer – So **Skinny-D** was older, and had been moved down to **Plymouth** as he was an ex-addict, and as he'd had that experience in his life, he could see that I was young and easily influenced and he invited me to do gigs with him. He couldn't mix, but he had tunes, dude. He'd been immersed in it, so he'd be handing me the tunes and I'd be mixing.

We'd get paid for DJing at the local youth club, and I was the same age as the kids we were DJing for in the club! So I'm sixteen, and met a load of those guys, we all became friends and they started DJing too. We were breeding these hot spots of DJing, you know. Some of them have gone on to be successful DJs. We still retain that identity, we have this shared experience, and these points we can go back to and reference. That's the beauty of that social interaction, that you share with people, right? That it's not all done behind a computer screen.

So we were doing **Oscars** and **Charlies** before **Flava**, and we broke a few big acts down here, like **Shortee Blitz**, **Big Ted**, **Ty**, they'd come down regularly and perform, there was a good rapport with the **Plymouth** crew, and people like **Mark B** would stay over and we'd go diggin', he taught me some shit on the equipment as I had the same setup as him and he was showing me how to do certain things which was great. Mark B. What a great loss, he was an incredible producer. But we'd just build things up, and I have to also give credit to the skaters too, they were all good breakers, you know the **Civic Skate Crew** used to come down a lot and break.

That was part of the success of the night, it's part of the culture. You'd have the circle, and there would be other breakin' that would just

happen through the night. Sometimes people from out of town would turn up too, we'd be handing out flyers in town during the day and people on holiday or whatever might come, then it would be like: "Wow, this is some new style!" Because getting back to the point I made earlier, people and places have their own style, and points of reference grow from those experiences. Back then, our only points of reference was from within our group, although there might have been some little snippet played on TV occasionally. This is the thing, even though there are these identity references that you can latch on to, to express yourself, after a while and by using those templates you actually start to create your own style, you know.

Yes, and then that grows within your group because you're all bouncing off each other, and that's how you develop that regional or local style through identity.

Exactly. The same as with emceeing, when a lot of emcees start out, they're just copying what they've heard, then it's like: "Alright meht, I'll get my fucking pasty, my style is fucking ghastly!" Haha!

Haha for sure! I get that!

We also got known for bringing turntablist down, so whenever there would be **DMC**s we'd bring down **Noize**, **Cutmaster Swift**, **The Enforcers** – that was incredible – all doing crazy shit on the turntables. I would like to have brought more Bboy crews down though. We brought a lot of people down that I'd heard on **279**. I would send blank cassette tapes to **279** in **Brixton**, he'd tape his shows to me then put them in the post to me, so I have a whole box of the best recordings you can get – of course he's recording them in the studio – which I've digitized. We were involved in **Plymouth Art College** (now **PCAD**) broadcasting across the city, which is unheard of, because back in the day – and I hated this – on **Plymouth Sound**

they had this jingle which said: "We don't play that rap! Doo-doo-dooo..." you know what I mean?

That's unreal because **Vincent** brought that up too and I wrote about it in **Provincial Headz** – so they did the same thing in **Plymouth** as **Exeter**? That's mad, what an impact that's had on us. Still! I'm like, what the hell was this?

That's something. That has sat with me all this time.

Me too, It's angered the fuck out of me for over thirty years.

That's gonna haunt me forever, man. I have to shout out **Parker**, he was doing a lot, and **Kit** with his breakin', then you get **The Cohorts**, that was my crew around 2000. I did a tour with **Barbican Theatre Company** for a month, DJing live to drama. There were a couple of fight scenes, and I was cutting **Bruce Lee** samples in sequence with the movement, which was quite innovative. I went on to do my degree in sound engineering, and made a video performance using sounds about **Plymouth**, there's a part in there I used where **Kenneth Williams** is talking about how the American 'rollll' comes from **Janners**! (vernacular for **Plymothians**). I was and am always trying to do different things, and not stick with the status quo. You have to push it forward so things don't become stagnant and fall into a formula.

I hear that. So to follow on from that and close out the discussion, what influence has those early days of hip hop and beat diggin' had on your life?

It's what my identity is. It's opened my mind to different cultures, and given me a different way to look at the world, and thinking of ways to do things that aren't recognised in the traditional and conventional sense. It makes you feel like you're part of something fresh. The other thing as well is that it gives you ways to express yourself that other music can't, especially in DJing.

XL jumped into the Plymouth DJ scene in '88 at the age of fifteen, after leaving home. During this period, his DJ mentors were DJ Apache, Skinny-D, Big Daddy Wayne, DJ Hurry, DJ Ribbz, Steve Poynter and Graham Chapman, whom he met whilst clubbing; or meeting outside Next – the central meeting point for the ravers, hip hop kids, dealers, and boosters. This was the spot where deals were done and plans were made for after parties at the weekends, due to the extraordinary amount of clubs who were in competition and offered such an eclectic choice, which made the club scene very exciting. DJing the rave circuit every weekend until '92, XL then started a hip hop night called Flava with DJ Bloodshot, DJ Pez and DJ Kooki which had a few revivals over the years, but ran monthly and consistently for eight years at Charlies, The Studio, The Cooperage, The Sound Factory, Fruit Bowl, The Blue Room and others. Many hip hop acts from around the globe performed at these events. In 2000, XL joined The Cohorts with Milestone, Herb-Boy & B-Boy Parkz. They collaborated with Gert Biggun (MC Vegas and SFC) on a few projects which toured the South-West. At the start of 2000, XL was involved in the theatre production 'Kicking & Screaming' at Barbican Theatre, Plymouth, where he performed 'Turntablism' in harmony with the sequences. XL is still involved in the Plymouth hip hop scene, organising events which promote the traditional aspects of hip hop and consistently providing an authentic grass roots hip hop experience to his audience.

Instagram: @ dj_xtra_large

NEIL TAYLOR

...in conversation with Adam de Paor-Evans

It would be good to start with an introduction to your context, maybe a touch before you discovered hip hop?

It was probably about '82 or '83, and I got into reggae first of all. I was into **UB40** first, then **Shinehead**, **Superman and Spiderman** – you know my obsession with tracking that album down again – **Smiley Culture**, there were a few artists that really helped get my mind ready as far as I see it for the crossover to hip hop. I heard bits and pieces, but then when I heard **'Bassline'** by **Mantronix** on the radio, that was it. That shit sounded like the future to me, there was nothing else that resonated with me like that. That was pretty much the same time as **Beastie Boys** and **Run-D.M.C.** were blowing up, that was my trifecta: it was **Licensed to Ill**, **Raising Hell**, and **Music Madness**, they were the first three hip hop albums I bought. That was my intro. Someone who was in my high school gave me these tapes: **Electro 9**, **Crucial Electro 3**, just a dub of those two. That again, was a fantastic snapshot of what was going on at the time.

There are many things interesting about that, your entry into hip hop via reggae, the artists you mentioned are not maybe traditional **Jamaican** artists, right, but artists with a definite position in **Britain**, and some of those other **British** reggae M.C.s like **Laurel & Hardy** and

Asher Senator and other **Saxon Soundsystem** DJs. Was there something about that, or was it just that was accessible to you living in **Devon**? Also, there's a big question about reggae – why reggae?

Neil Taylor, 2021.
Photograph: Anitra Budd.

It was definitely something about the style of music, but I reacted strongly to the themes I was hearing in it, and immediately it became obvious to me that as people knew I was listening to reggae – I was of course surrounded by white people – I was getting racist bullshit thrown at me, so just because I'm listening to a certain type of music you're going to start throwing racial insults around, thinking you're funny. So this is just the backdrop, school shit which was normal. So I'm like, OK, the themes that are being spoken about in this music, these are real things that are happening in the world to this group of people, which immediately raised my consciousness. I do credit **UB40** actually, and their track **'Burden of Shame'**, that was the first time it occurred to me: "Hold on, you can be against imperialism and militarism, and you don't have to be all patriotic and shit? Oh, OK, I'm down!" That switch in my mind, just realising that at a young age, that I could be more open to these themes being expressed, and as I got into hip hop **Public Enemy** came out a year later, that was it for me, and I know it completely changed my life.

It's interesting talking about **UB40** in that way, I have a similar feeling, for me it was **'One in Ten'** and **'Tyler'**, those two big tunes made a huge impression on me as an eleven-year old, on one hand simple lyrics but on the other carrying such an important message. I want to pick up on **Mantronix**. I love the way you said it sounded like it was from the future. Of all the things to focus on when you've been listening to reggae, why do you think you picked up on the **Mantronix** vibe?

Yeah, well my first exposure to hip hop was **Master Blast** who used to break outside **Boots** with their linoleum and boomboxes and matching tracksuits; I'd spend an hour just standing there watching them before I got into hip hop. I was fascinated with the look and what was going on, the activity, the dynamic, I didn't really connect with the music emotionally quite so much but it was just so other-place, so different. I was like: "Look at these people, look at them

making a spectacle, they are sharing their art with us in public." I was just fascinated by it. I also knew that I could not dance for shit! I tried breakin' didn't go well, I was terrible at sport too, always the last to get picked for football, ending up in goal and letting all the goals in. I hated rugby, anything like that, so I knew I didn't have the physical coordination to get into Bboying but I was always fascinated with that aspect of it.

I know you're a lover of **Music Madness**, so you've got **'Bassline'** off the first **Mantronix** album, then **Music Madness** comes along, and you've also got these very different sounds between the **Def Jam** stable and the **Sleeping Bag/Fresh** stable, so how did you make sense of that?

I was just trying to soak up everything I could, once I realised the record labels that were reliable, you know, "this is on **Def Jam**, I'm buying it", and "this is on **Sleeping Bag**, it's coming home with me." The thing I'm always trying to explain when I'm talking to younger kids these days who are into hip hop and didn't have the pre-commercial exposure to it, is that it was underground. It was constantly being written off as a fad, it was limited, crossover successes happened for a few artists, but it was never taken seriously and definitely didn't have the mainstream cultural impact it has now. Now, it is interwoven with every aspect of popular culture, so you had to seek it out. You were also looked down upon for being associated with hip hop. One of the things I appreciated about hip hop which drew me to it was that it was the outsider, the subculture, and the racial dynamics and that associated shit.

Do you think that was accentuated by living in **Devon** – like was it to do with the limitations of cultural exposure – that it wasn't ingrained in main culture?

I've thought about this a lot. With **Exeter** and the **South-West** just being a lot whiter than most of the rest of the country, and most of the hip hop practitioners and fans I knew down there were white, it was always going to be that way. I think it also helped form a tightknit and passionate underground. You had to seek it out and be down. You needed to be connected to know what was going on. Word of mouth, hand-advertised events, you know, flyers handed around people that were connected. That's how we knew about things happening. So I think that shaped the **Exeter** scene, just being so remote from the rest of the country, its lack of diversity, so the people that were into it were really into it.

So when you talk about the people that were really into it, this underground scene, how did you begin to connect in with these folks?

In high school I had one friend a year older than me, he introduced me to a bunch of stuff, I used to go shopping in town and he was working in **Gateway** (supermarket) in **St. Thomas** shopping precinct, and he'd be stacking shelves and I'd go and show him the tapes I'd bought that day; I remember showing him **Ice T – Rhyme Pays** and **Schoolly D – Saturday Night** that I'd picked up the same day. Just having someone you could share that with was essential. It wasn't until immediately leaving high school that I connected with **Barry**, I bought turntables as I'd saved up money that summer, he had a cheap pair of turntables, and we lived pretty close to each other, that was the start of having a tightknit crew of my own, but before that it was just through knowing people who knew people in the **South Side**, because you guys were always the leaders of what was going on, you had connections, you had equipment; I remember going to a really cool event in '88 at **The Arts Centre**, Saturday afternoon.

That was it! One until four, Saturday afternoon. It was amazing.

Yeah, that really stuck with me. I'd just come back from **America** for the first time, so I had a **New York Knicks** hat, that was the blue and orange one, a couple of T-shirts, I thought I looked pretty cool. That was my only hat!

Beat Street hat, 2021. Photograph: Neil Taylor.

Oh man, I'm really glad you mentioned that jam, for me that was a pivotal point as well, it was the very first time my name had been on a poster, and I was thrilled to see that. A major experience for a lot of

us. I'm glad you mentioned the turntables, as when you talked about buying cassettes, why and at what point did you switch over to vinyl?

The switch was when I bought **Grandmaster Flash**'s **On The Strength** on vinyl in '88. If I ever get a few hours of free time, I want to sit down and make a chart to document how I listened to music, x amount on radio, x amount on tape, x amount on vinyl, to chart the progression through the years. So in the mid-80s I had a small boombox and a **Walkman**, which is why I was constantly buying tapes. Then it just became vinyl. I was fascinated by the technical aspect of DJing, and there it is. Then there were other periods where I started buying CDs as I was listening mostly when I was driving, you know.

I like that, there's something about the equipment and the format and how it links to your everyday, that would be a really insightful study. So talking about your crew, how did it shape up?

It was **Barry** and **Damon**, then **Paul** and **Ben (Benny Bronx)** who were our dancers, **Henchman**, and **Steve Dewick**; there was the **Countess Weir** crew and **St. Thomas** crew that linked up. We were the young upstarts. My fondest memories were down the **Crown and Sceptre**, it was like our place. This is another thing I have to explain to kids these days, you can go to a hip hop night any day of the week in a decent-sized city, back in the days you had to really fight to get access in a club, to get a night going, and when you got it, you wanted to hold onto it.

So tell me about those **Crown and Sceptre** nights.

You had to wait in the upstairs bar for the basement to open, so we'd be drinking, people would be there bringing records that they wanted

to get played, you'd chat to whoever was DJing and hand records around, talking hip hop; that was our community and our hang out. Getting down into the basement, you knew there would be good music played, dancing, good vibes, and probably some staring across the room between rival crews. There would be hip hop, some new jack swing, just good music.

So between **PE**'s first album dropping and those **Crown and Sceptre** nights, were you experimenting with music making yourselves?

Damon and **Barry** were doing a little bit together, but we were limited by the cheap equipment really, it was pretty basic. More that **Barry** would mix two copies of beats and **Damon** would rap over. There was a small cassette with five tracks on it, I don't know if that still exists.

Oh man, I would love to hear that. Did you have a name then?

The crew name was **Raw Pack Massive** (**RPM**), **Special Delivery** was the music, but overall collectively we were **RPM**. There was a few tracks again, but they didn't really materialise. To be honest, they realised they were up against **Def Defiance** – **The Imperial Steamers** from the **South-West**!

Haha, that's mad, but a bit of a shame in many ways!

Actually, some of the first tapes I was getting from the guy that was feeding me **Electro** albums, I was getting **IBP** tapes, I distinctly remember **'Brown and Crispy'**, I had two or three tapes of them, I was obsessed with these homemade tape covers, standing there wearing **Kangols** on the front cover.

We made hundreds of them, some that never saw the light of day, all with these homemade photocopied covers. A lot of them didn't see the light of day because we were living in **Sidmouth**, and again, like you, got so much abuse for making hip hop, so we were making these tapes just for ourselves, for our own progression. To move the conversation slightly, I'm curious to know how you ended up relocating to **The States**.

So, I came to **Minneapolis** for the first time in 2005, I had a few friends here. After **Exeter**, I moved up to **Oxford**, and a friend had links in **Minneapolis**. We made the trip over and hooked up with a couple of other friends, and I ended up hooking up with this girl from **Minneapolis**, and she dumped me by text a week or so before I was meant to travel, so I stayed with **Carol** and **Anitra**, hooked up with **Carol** one night, hooked up with **Anitra** a couple of nights later – they were together as a couple already – so they've been together over twenty years – but – polyamorous, I didn't know what that meant at the time but I soon found out. So we've been together ever since. I just loved **Minneapolis**, I knew it had an established hip hop scene already, we lived less than a mile away from the **Rhymesayers** HQ, so I got connected with the hip hop scene through social justice activism. There was a police killing of a young Black man in 2013, the story stank to high heaven, and I got in touch with a group that were organizing a protest against it, and found out that they were founded on the praxis of hip hop.

That was my ushering into the hip hop scene here, through activism. I got involved in putting on educational hip hop events for the youth, got myself immersed in getting to know people.

So was it in **Minneapolis** where you launched your brand **True Headz Clothing**?

I made my first hat for myself in 2016, I was always down with fat laces, usually in a pair of **Puma Suede**. I wanted a hat with a fat lace in and couldn't find one being sold anywhere. **Anitra** showed me how to make one, and people were like: "Where the fuck did you get that hat?"

Wild Style hat, 2021. Photograph: Neil Taylor.

I never had that before, people stopping me and asking. I made three more, then ten, then it just kept on growing. I do a little bit of clothing, but it's more to make bundles to go with the hats. In the past year I've

got new equipment to do vinyl transfers of any graphics, I can get more creative. The biggest leap forward I had was in 2018 when I put on an event to celebrate the 45th anniversary of **Kool Herc**'s party, so I booked **Grandmaster Caz** to headline, he gave a presentation of the early history of hip hop as part of that. That was the first time I connected with **Caz**; he's got family here in **Minneapolis** too.

DJ Dvious, Grandmaster Caz, Neil Taylor, at the Hip Hop Museum, DC, 2019. Photograph: Jeremy Beaver.

He was saying in **New York**, nobody was doing anything for the 45th anniversary, it was all political, nobody could agree on who would get

the shine from it. So he was really impressed with what we were doing here. The following day, we had a panel discussion and community event, and he left with a strong appreciation of the dedication of the hip hop community here. Then when he saw one of my hats he connected with the concept immediately. He returned to **New York** with a bunch of my hats and was getting the same response I first did. The hats have connected me into another new world, I've been out to the hip hop museum in **D.C.**, and set up with other events and jams. I hooked up with **Jeremy Beaver** who founded the museum, and he's a big supporter of my brand. He invited me out to the hip hop museum events, which is how I ended up in a limousine with **Grandmaster Caz**, **Melle Mel**, **Wonder Mike**; yeah. That was nuts. If you'd told me when I was a teenager I'd be friends with **Grandmaster Caz** and he'd be calling me up to come and sell hats at his park jams, I'd be like: "fuck off."

I want to end on something about my transition from the **UK** to the **US**, having had my grounding in hip hop in the **UK**, and all the social justice themes that emerged, because you were talking earlier about **'Tyler'** and I wanted to come back to that. There have been racist police killings going on forever, and we would hear about a few of them through hip hop tracks. Hip hop was our news network in the **UK** when mainstream news wasn't going to give us any of that. But coming into the **US**, I had my eyes wide open to what I thought the racial realities were going to be. So, coming in with that mindset and identifying as hip hop being my culture – rather than coming in as a white person trying to assimilate with white America which was never my aim – and I was always very suspicious of white America with good justification. Because the longer I've been here the more my eyes have been opened to just how fucked up it is. Every, I mean every aspect of society here is imbued with racism. People that claim they're colour-blind, but you know the deal, they're just not wanting to see the reality. I came into the **US** with a very different perspective to white Americans because I'd already been deprogrammed so I could cut through everything and see that: "in this situation, this is

where the racism emerges", and "in this situation, I see why you're doing that", I think that really helped me to connect with the hip hop community here. Once I had got talking to people, they were like, "Oh, you're not one of those." I moved into the **US** looking up to Black people as role models and icons rather than looking down on them.

Neil Taylor is an old school hip hop head paying homage to the culture, style, music and ethos of hip hop with every hat he makes. With roots in hip hop culture going back over 30 years, he's a product of the early days of hip hop culture. Hip hop reached out and grabbed him when he was a 13-year-old kid growing up in Exeter, England, in the mid-1980s. A student of the old school, and hip hop history geek, he sought out everything he could get his hands on related to the foundations of the culture. Relocating to Minneapolis in 2006, he found himself in the midst of a thriving hip hop scene and threw himself into it and has been part of the annual Twin Cities Dilla Days celebrations since their inception in 2014 (Ma Dukes official!). By taking something widely available and ordinary, and accessorizing it in unexpected ways, hip hop culture's fashion pioneers were making their mark on the world. THC hats celebrate old school fat laces - and that spirit of unrestrained creativity - in a new way. The concept is simple: classic hats (mostly snapback baseball caps, but can do fitteds and Kangol bucket hats and more) with a hip hop edge are sourced and remixed. Laced up with high-quality fat laces, using a technique only True Headz know.

For more information, reach out:

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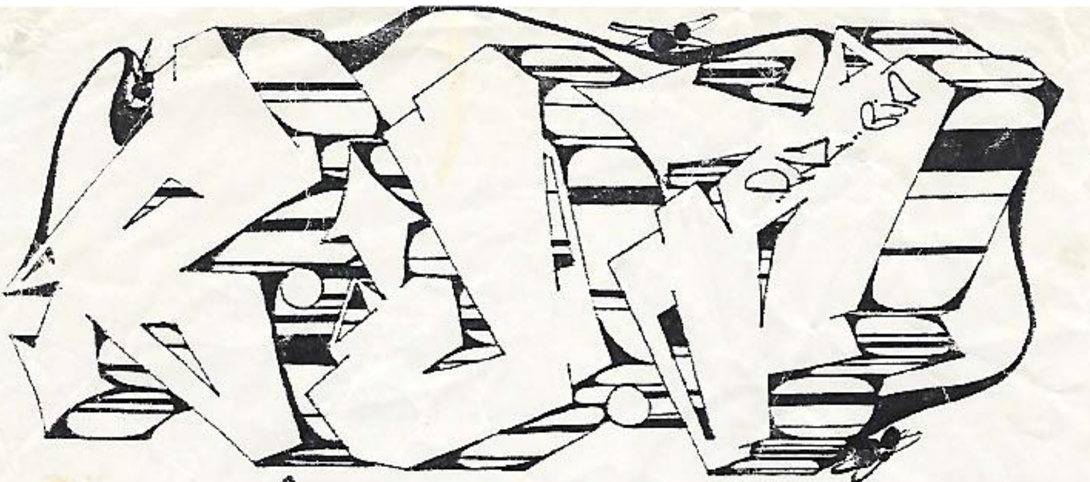

..PRODUCTIONS..

PRESENT:

..DA ILL BEAT POSSE..

FEATURING

*SUPREME SHAH * AD-M.C * DJ ROLA ROCK*

LIVE MIXING, RAPPING & CUTTING

GRAFFITI BY ..DAZ..RADE..E-RASE..NOIZE..

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GANDY ST. EXETER

DATE: 30TH APRIL '88

TIME: 1:00–4:00 PM

ADM. FREE

.....GUEST POSSES WELCOME

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-IF IT AINT HARDCORE · IT AINT WORTH A **FUNK**!-

PROJECT CEE

...in conversation with James McNally

Starting at the beginning, where were you living before you found hip hop?

We moved from **Exeter** to a place called **Langford** near **Cullompton** when I was nine and that was in 1980. It was really rural, really rural – a place that's four houses and one farm. But we only lived there for six months, and we lived there because my dad had gone bankrupt. That was back in the days when they took all your personal stuff as well if you went bankrupt, so we lost our house and we ended up in this very small bungalow in the middle of nowhere with nothing. We had no furniture, hardly any clothes – nothing. I remember the clothes we did have were just laid out on the floor in folded piles. Then my mum and dad split up, because there were some intense problems at home, then me and my mum moved to **Sidmouth**, which is a small town on the south coast of **East Devon**.

What was that like as an environment?

The space in **Langford** oscillated between being acutely intense and a complete release. In my early childhood we lived on one of the busiest streets in **Exeter**, so to suddenly live in a house where my bedroom window offered a view for miles over farmland was great.

But the remoteness did nothing but make the domestic abuse more concentrated. My father regularly drove home drunk late after work, I could see his car approach our house from about two miles away, and that generates some intense fear. **Sidmouth** though, was an enjoyable space to grow up as a teenager. But what's interesting about these kinds of places is that they have this kind of chocolate-box exterior, and actually behind the façade there are some real issues going on. There's several council estates which became quite important to me in terms of the places that I identified with, and places that I used to hang out in. There were two housing estates in particular – one in **Newton Poppleford**, where we lived for a short period of time, which is a really small village about three miles from **Sidmouth**, and one where we used to hang out, smoke and do poppers. That one was the sort of project built to sort out the housing crisis after WWII. It's still there and has problems with the structure of the building fabric. There was there was one school, so everybody knew each other – you know that typical trope of life in a small town.

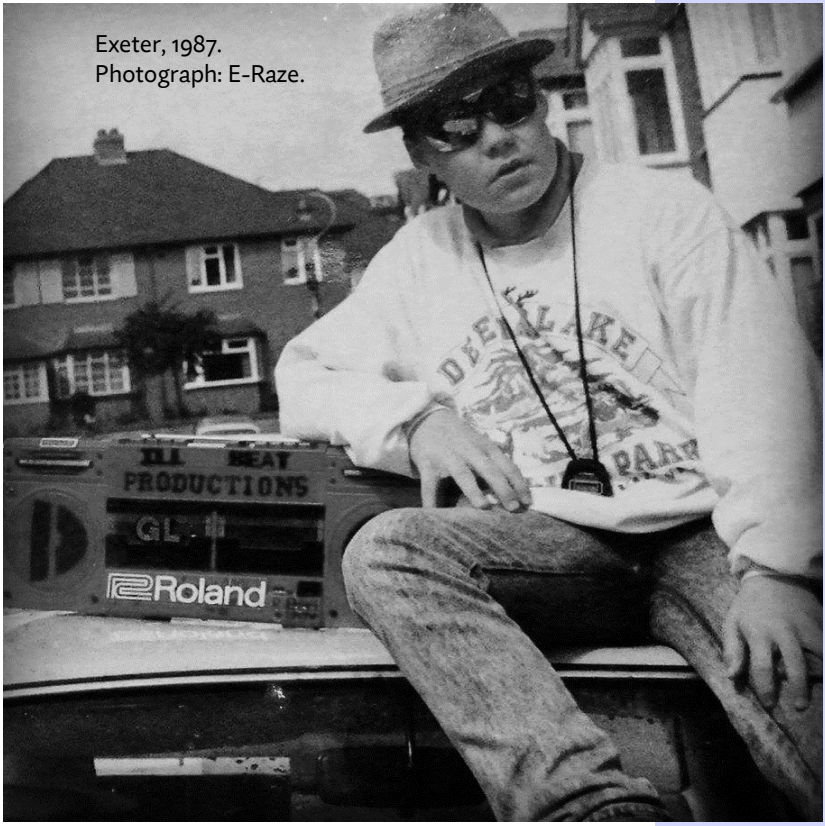
How big was the population?

It was only probably about 10,000 people, I would imagine. It didn't have a train station, it only had a bus route to **Exeter**, which back then took about an hour. Awareness of the rest of the country was only really through what you'd see on the TV, or hear on the radio, and that was really limited to popular culture, so any link to bigger cities was very piecemeal. I remember thinking that **London** was just like **Grange Hill**, the kids TV soap. I grew up as an only child, and I had a lot of time on my own. And I think that actually was a positive, because it gave me a lot of time to think and to reflect on things. I remember the first music I got into was **UB40**, **Madness** and **The Specials** when I was about eleven – I'm talking literally six or nine months before I heard **'Buffalo Gals'**. And I used to dream about being in **Madness**. I'd shut my eyes and pretend I was on stage with them. There's a compilation album called **Complete Madness**, with a

gatefold sleeve and there's all these little transcribed narratives where the band members talk a little bit about the songs and how they wrote them and what they mean. I remember with my flat-deck **Sanyo** tape recorder – I remember recording myself reading them as if I were interviewing them.

How did you first become aware of hip hop?

What happened is **'Buffalo Gals'** came along, and I then bought **Electro 1**, then after about nine months the **Newcleus** album, which came out in '84. So there are couple of records that had popped up in between that – things like **Ollie & Jerry – 'There's No Stopping Us'** and **Chaka Khan**'s **'I Feel For You'** – things that were slightly alluding to this world of hip hop.



Exeter, 1987.
Photograph: E-Raze.

And, of course, people were beginning to do breakdancing at school. But I remember feeling guilty for kind of stepping out of that **2Tone** world, and almost kind of leaving it behind, because I was so young. But actually you realise further down the line that all of these things are so integrated, and that music can't possibly be that binary, but at the time I did feel that sense of guilt.

Project Cee and Rola, Wall of Fame, Exeter, 1989. Photograph: Scarce.

For me there's something about how we were at that age – I know you know this as well James, but there were people at that time that were probably five years older than us, and they just kind of thought of breakdancing as really childish, and they very quickly moved on to things like that kind of late-mod music – things like **The Style Council** – because it was kind of more serious, that's how it was perceived. But I was like thirteen, and I think it was fortunate being that age, because there was no prejudice against this perception of breakdancing being a childish act, 'cause it was labelled as such. It was a fad; that's how it was considered, so I had no qualms about getting into it. You wanted to have that – that part of you that was doing something exciting – and that was exactly what breakin' did. The music really trickled down into **Devon**, so we generally got the most commercial side of things at the beginning.

And so I think there's no surprise that stuff like **'Itchiban Scratch'**, **'Bad Boys'** and **Doug E. Fresh**'s **'The Show'**, and records with the **Gadget** theme and cartoon-like sounds, were the kind of things that would float your boat, because you're thirteen or fourteen and that gives you a social context of sorts to work with, but then within those folds you begin to discover fragments of social realities, between those records you hear the narratives in songs like **'Stick Up Kid'** and **'Fast Life'**. Then you start to really get it.

What did hip hop make you feel when you were first exposed to it?

I think it was about carting me off to this other world. I really, really remember that my favourite sides of the **Electro** albums was side one of **Electro 1**, and side two of **Electro 4**. The reason being, that my only real opportunity of listening to music in a kind of a total hermetically sealed bubble would be on Sunday afternoons when my mum would go and visit my gran. I remember being at home on a wet Sunday, and I distinctly remember playing **Electro 1**, lying on my bed – I always

used to listen to music lying down. And that whole soundscape from when **'I'm the Packman'** fades up into **'Jam on Revenge'**, into **'Break Dance Electric Boogie'**, and then into **C-Bank**'s **'Get Wet'** – just this incredible soundscape that took me elsewhere, and I wasn't in that dreary Sunday afternoon context anymore. I was somewhere else. In my mind, I was occupying arcade games, I was flying through the air, I was in space. You just did this thing where you animate the sounds in your head. You invent this narrative. So it was very much rooted in this, I suppose, this science fiction narrative where anything's possible, but I was at the centre of it. And that is how it made me feel.

It's an imaginative flight.

Yeah, so what I just said in about ten-thousand words you said in about three. That's exactly it. Yeah, that's exactly what it was, and that's exactly how I felt. And in a way, I think that's almost how I measured music, because there are records that came along then that didn't do a lot for me and wouldn't take me into this world. I still think I respond to music in that way.

Is there a tension between that intensely personal experience and the other side, which is that hip hop is really a social thing?

I think when I recognised that I wasn't alone – and, again, I think this comes from being an only child, because there was a point when I thought I must be the only one feeling like this... What happened is very quickly, probably in less than a year, you've got 98% of people who were breakdancing at school, they've gone on to something else. And then there are 2% left that you realise are doing it because they feel the same as you. I got talking to **Rola** – he's a really incredible sound engineer and he mixes down so much hip hop for people in the **UK** now, a real unsung hero. I met him through school, I was on detention, on a playing field.

He was a year older than me, and he'd heard I was still into breakin', electro, and hip hop, and we'd started to talk about pause-button mixes, which I know from a lot of the research I've done people were doing across the country – it's quite phenomenal because there was never a TV show or a book. How did thousands of people do it at kind of the same time across the country? But I kind of blagged it a bit. I said: "Oh yeah, I do pause-button mixes" and I kind of didn't. And he said: "Oh, I'll come round, where do you live?" So I had to cobble together a pause-button mix very quickly. And that would have probably been around spring 1985.

Specifik and Project Cee, 2002. Photograph: Simon Frankland.

How did that situation play out?

It was interesting because, when I played the mix to him, I saw that he recognised all the songs, and I saw that he could tell where I'd chopped them up, and I could see that his enjoyment of listening to it, it was in part what I had done with it, with the very crude editing I'd done. But it was also very much to do with the fact that, for him, there was somebody else listening to the same music that he was. And we kind of became very close just through that moment – us and another guy that was into it – and that was affirmed even more by the amount of abuse that we got from our peers in the town. It was verbal, mainly name-calling. You know the thing: "Ah, you're still listening to that breakdancing crap." Or "What do you think you're doing? You look like a bunch of twats" because we'd got matching tracksuits. That was a red rag to a bull in terms of the piss-taking. Nobody, nobody wore matching tracksuits. Nobody even wore tracksuits unless you were going to football practice, let alone matching tracksuits – it was the sort of thing you'd be forced to wear if you were twins.

My lived cultural space was so far removed from what I was experiencing through hip hop – I felt alien in my own neighbourhood – yet that was a good feeling – so when I met **Rola** those feelings deepened. Hip hop had made us feel something strong – such a connection to this incredible music – and as I grew and absorbed more and learnt more about hip hop, these feelings turned into questions – questions about my present, but more importantly my past and my own sense of place, history and identity. This was also fuelled by the lessons I learnt from **Dick Fontaine**'s **Beat This!** in 1984 which blew me away. I began to challenge my heritage and discovered some things about my family history and its origins I had never known before.

So you're coming from a place where you're already feeling an otherness, and you're kind of amplifying that otherness. I think

sometimes people don't understand just how outside the accepted parameters of 'normal' hip hop was considered to be in the '80s.

Absolutely. I can tell you that between '83 and '89 the piss-taking was horrendous, real chauvinism at work. But at the same time as they were going: "oh you must be gay-boys, you're up in each-others' bedrooms all the time", we were rehearsing, we were practising, we were trying to make music. Then, the very first time I stepped on stage was in **Torquay** in 1989. It was at the **Cutmaster Swift** and **DJ Pogo** tour – the **DMC World DJ Touring Team** – and **Pogo** sort of said: "Any rappers in the audience? Any rappers?" I wasn't going to go up, I was kind of pushed into it by **Ritchski**, I did a rap and this other kid did a rap – and I was sure **Pogo** was trying to gee up a bit of a battle. They must've thought it was hilarious that there were these two kids from **Devon** that haven't got any experience in rapping –

Right, because we're talking someone here who hangs out with **MC Mell'O**.

Right, exactly. He's like: "go on, go on! He's just dissed you!" So I totally believed **Pogo**, and I went back in and I went for the jugular with this guy – I'd written this battle rap that I'd never used, and this was my time. What happened is, the next day I was working my Saturday job as a waiter in a café in **Sidmouth**, and the girl that I worked with – a really amazing singer called **Serena** (Rest in Peace) – said: "What did you do last night?" And I replied: "Oh I went to **Torquay**, and I ended up being on stage and I did this rap." And she was like: "Oh my god! That's amazing, wow! I'm really pleased for you. So what are you going to do next?" I wasn't expecting that as a response. I was expecting a bit of, maybe a bit of jibing, or a bit of not anything much. But it suddenly became a thing in **Sidmouth** that I was a guy that had rapped on stage in **Torquay**. And this story kind of whizzed around. **Serena** had given me the confidence to go up again.

Rare~Grills (Project Cee), Rope-A-Dope, The Rope Walk, Bristol, 2018.
Photograph: Paul Taylor.

So you've got your **Sidmouth** crew – how did you come to start interacting with people in towns outside **Sidmouth** in **Devon**?

This is something I've spoken about with **Kilo** and **Rola** a lot in recent years: the fact that back then you could tell that someone was into hip hop because of the trainers that they wore, or because of the headgear that they wore – there was still a little bit of nervousness about wearing headgear in the provincial UK, so it was mostly about the trainers. But I remember this very clearly. I was wearing a pair of **Fila** white tennis shoes and they had a blue trim to them, and I had fat blue laces in them that I had made myself – they weren't even proper fat lace material, it was ribbon that I'd bought from the indoor market. I also had on a **Run-D.M.C.** cap from **HMV** in **Exeter** – I was really nervous about wearing it. And I was walking through **Exeter**, and there was a group of kids that hung around **Barclays Bank**. It had been somewhere where people would congregate for breakin', because it had a foyer that had a polished marble floor, and when the bank was shut it became part of the semi-public space, so it lent itself to breakin' on Saturday afternoons.

Anyway, the breakin' thing had died down a lot by then, but one of the kids called us over. It was **Kilo** when he was called **Raz**, and he just instigated a conversation – he's that type of person, he's very much about making connections and meeting people. So we hung out with them for a bit, maybe an hour. We'd go into **Exeter** anyway on record shopping expeditions on Saturdays, but after that the aim was not just to buy records, it was to go record shopping and then maybe to hook up with these guys. It kind of snowballed from there and we ended up forming a crew with them a couple of years later.

So that was the **South Side Alliance**?



L to R: Battlestations, Plymouth, 2009, Rope-A-Dope, 2018, live stream, 2020.
Photographs: unknown, Paul Taylor, Adam de Paor-Evans.

Yeah. That didn't happen 'til 89 though, and before that our **Sidmouth** crew was called **IBP**, which we clearly ripped off from **BDP**, to the point where we called ourselves **Ill Beat Productions**. The **Exeter** guys we met were a graffiti crew called the **Black Jack Posse**, and then there was the **Wild West Posse**, which was another small group of writers from **Exeter**, though there were overlapping members in these crews. But we were kind of this loose collective and by '89 we decided to formalise our group as **South Side Alliance**. By that point there was huge hostility between **Plymouth**, **Exeter**, and **Torquay** because of football, and we kind of transcended that thing, so there was almost some further ostracization in a way, where the football lot would be kind of quite sceptical about our relationship with some of the **Plymouth** lads we knew through hip hop and graffiti as we were partying and hanging out with them in **Plymouth** and **Exeter** by that point too.

Within this group of people you were hanging out with, was that pretty much the nucleus of **Devon** hip hop – by which I mean people who were active in hip hop rather than just buying records?

I would say so.

How many of you were there?

I guess there was a group of around thirty of us at the most, but with our affiliates we were many more. I'd say the core practitioners totalled about fifteen or twenty – and they were writers, rappers, deejays and dancers, and also promoters – we almost saw that as a set of regional practices, it was our contribution to hip hop.

When would you say the most vital period was?

For me, late '88, say, early '89 to late '91.

So when you were 18, 19, 20...

Yeah. And again, graffiti plays a major role here. It was in the aftermath of **Operation Anderson**, which was a national graffiti bust focusing on **The Westcountry** and **Wales**. Some of our guys went down with that bust and got charged, and obviously still have criminal records. But from that moment, rebuilding after the bust, **South Side Alliance** became stronger, and there was a focus on events. The reason 1990 is quite a seminal year, is that's when our crew, **The Ill Brothers/IBP**, was reincarnated as **Def Defiance**, and we made **Music Fusion**, which is a six track EP on cassette.

At the same time, I was approached by a guy called **Ben Bonsu** who was studying at **Plymouth Uni**, but was from **London**. He put on a night in **Plymouth** which was quite successful, and he said that he wanted to put something on in **Exeter**, so we ended up being support for **MC Duke**. That was at the **Lemon Grove** at **Exeter Uni**. It was a really important night, because it was the first time we'd performed a substantial showcase of our stuff. But it was also important because there was quite a big audience – it was more than two-hundred people. But it was an incredible opportunity to meet new people and we brought more recruits into the fold. I think that we didn't realise that our reputation had preceded us, because lots of people were coming up to us afterwards saying: "Oh, it's really good to finally meet you", or: "So good to hear what you sound like. We'd heard that you guys were making stuff."

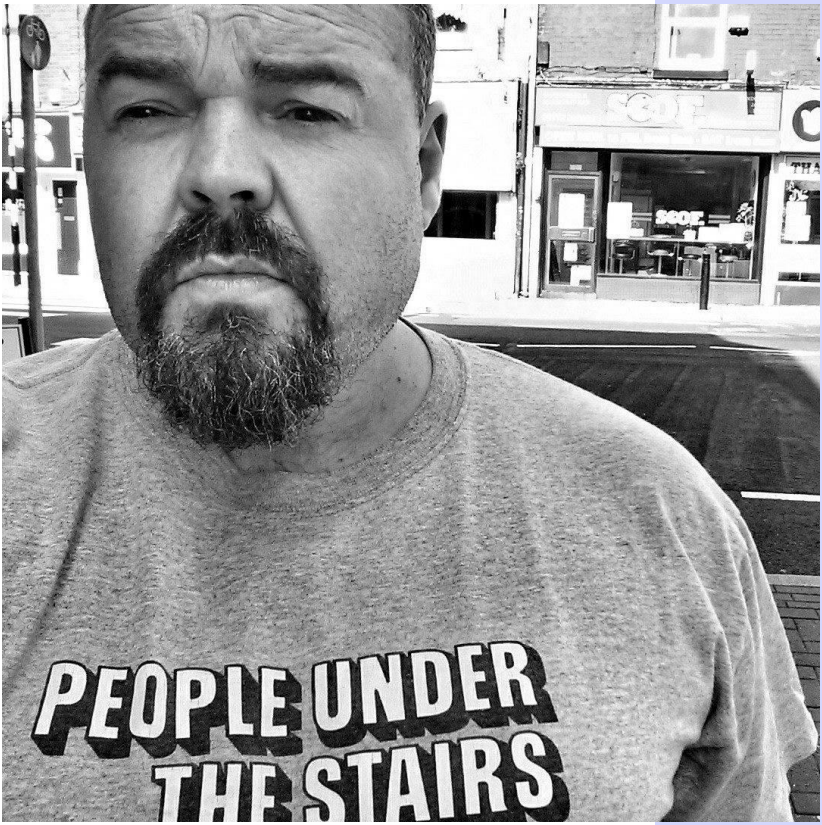
So was the reputation one of those friend-tells-a-friend-tells-a-friend-tells-a-friend things, and before you know it people in all these interconnected towns know of you?

Yeah, definitely, and I think there was also something about the friend-tells-a-friend-tells-a-friend thing, in that the friend also gives a tape, who dubs it off, who gives a tape, who dubs it off, who gives a tape. So although we only made thirty copies of **Music Fusion** they were taped-off and taped-off and taped-off and distributed, even to the point where – as I later found out – copies ended up in **Germany** and **Switzerland**. The friend-tells-a-friend-tells-a-friend approach is something that for me is crucial to personal and collective development – it's like the hip hop praxis version of snowball sampling in a sense, but I think operates more like a support mechanism, a two-way conduit of knowledge.

Since I've become a researcher myself, I can recognise that there were a range of very intuitive and critical methods we were working with back in the late '80s that are directly informing my work today.

They were methods, but now with a certain critical reflection, they've become methodologies. I would not be able to bring that thinking into my work without being absorbed in hip hop in the '80s. Neither might I have pursued some home truths about my own identity and heritage, and that's been significantly crucial to build who I am – from inside.

Poster promoting the now legendary DANCE RAW III, Lemon Grove, University of Exeter, 1990. Blade also rocked the house that night, despite not appearing on the bill. IBP Clan was a short-lived name for IBP/Def Defiance.



Friargate, Preston, 2014. Photograph: Adam de Paor-Evans.

After becoming obsessed with hip hop in '83, Project Cee started rapping in '85 as Ad-M.C. joining Ill Beat Productions the same year. Following many cassette-only releases as IBP, Project Cee became 1/3 of Def Defiance with Rola and Shar, releasing Music Fusion (1990) and Hazardous (1992) before relocating to London to attend university. In 1999, he hooked up with Specifik, and as a duo they produced several notable releases. In 2007 he conceived The Projections, releasing the Project The Future album, and has made cameo appearances on a range of records, particularly for B-Line Recordings. In 2014 he published his first academic work on hip hop, and has since been an active scholarly author publishing the books Provincial Headz (2020) and Scratching The Surface (2020) as Adam de Paor-Evans. He holds the post of Reader in Ethnomusicology at UCLan and produces contextual podcasts, live streams, and occasional gigs as Rare~Grills.

Social media, external roles, and web representation:

linktr.ee/rhythm_obscura

postscript

As I was reading the postscript in HEADZ-zINe 1.1, I was reflecting on its aims, its methods, and its approach to capturing hip hop history. This issue continues to test the conventions of scholarly knowledge production and dissemination whilst bringing to light personal journeys of hip hop practitioners and adopters from the hinterlands of Britain. The process of reflective co-authorship shared by all involved has enabled the production of a collection of individual narratives which represent the experiences of each co-author. Yet at the same time, the overlaps and similarities across many of these personal stories begins to shape a thick narrative which speaks to particular themes connected to cultural praxes, material culture, social and socioeconomic politics, location and distance, regional identity, and perhaps most significantly, a counter-learning environment and building of a new, practice-led knowledge base.

Drawing to a close, I anticipate with enormous enthusiasm the witness seminars, discussions, events, and publications of the forthcoming project: The Emergence, Representation, and Identity of Hip Hop Culture in the South-West and North-West of England. Funded by The British Academy, the project will bring together some of the co-authors from HEADZ-zINe 1.1 and 1.2 for the first time to dig deep into their individual, shared, and collective experiences of British hip hop in its formative years, with the aim to further enrich knowledge of hip hop in the British provinces and broaden the history of hip hop as a whole.

Adam de Paor-Evans

notes

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