# HEADZ ZINE

AUTUMN 2021

## BRISTOL HEADZ

**CAPTURING HIP HOP HISTORIES:**

WILLIE WEE, KELZ,
DJ LYNX, FLYNN, TUROE,
KANT CONTROL, KRISSY KRISS,
DJ MILO, SIR BEANS OBE,
AWKWARD.

BRISTOL HEADZ

SPECIAL EDITION

First published 2021


Cover Art by Conrico Steez

This publication is non-profit making, and available free online. More on this project and others at the DIGitAL HEADZ ArchiVe which can be visited at: rhythmobscura.com



Published by Squagle House, United Kingdom

Printed in Great Britain

**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 and regional-rural. Examining the experiences of practitioners, artists, and the wider community in the UK and beyond, the project is concerned with the personal histories, memories, and archives of artefacts, recordings, photographs, and music ephemera. The project produces publications, exhibitions, recordings, performances, reading rooms, seminars and 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.

**Hip Hop's Fifth Element: Knowledge, Pedagogy and Artist-Scholar Collaboration** (Arts and Humanities Research Council and Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) PIs: Justin Williams and Sina Nitzsche. This project is an interdisciplinary study of hip hop's 'fifth element': knowledge, supported by a collaboration between the AHRC and the German Research Foundation (DFG). Its overall aims are to consolidate issues around power structures of knowledge and education by creating a comprehensive theory of the fifth element, to develop the research agenda of European hip hop studies, and to promote a collaborative and participatory approach to art and education.

## Acknowledgements

Peace, love, respect and a massive thank you to all the co-authors that contributed to this knowledge production. Big thanks to Conrico Steez for the cover artwork. Special thanks to Dr Justin A. Williams for his further support for this issue. Further thanks to Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for their support in funding the production of this issue – part of the AHRC-DFG project 'Hip Hop's Fifth Element: Knowledge, Pedagogy, and Artist-Scholar Collaboration (Ref. AH/V002988/1, PI: Justin A. Williams).

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## Contents

WILD BUNCH

WILD BUNCH
ALLSTAR
TOKYO
NIGHT
CLUBBING

PHOTO BY
MACHIDA(M.I.T)

FEATURING
3-D "The Cool Breeze"
Graffiti Outlaw Supreme
DJ Nellee
MC Willi Wee
Master of Ceremonys
DJ Milo
Papa Gee "The Soul Daddy"

PRESTIGE
25 APRIL FRI
[HIPHOP NIGHT]
OPEN 17:00
START 20:00 23:00
03-589-4125
03-584-0021
CHARGE ASK

club D
1 MAY THU
OPEN 19:00
START 23:00
03-423-1471
CHARGE ASK

TSUBAKI BALL
9 MAY FRI
OPEN 17:00
START 21:00 23:30
03-478-0087
CHARGE ASK

CLEO PALAZZI 2
29 MAY THU
OPEN 20:00
START 22:00
03-403-4554
CHARGE ASK

TSUBAKI HOUSE
31 MAY SAT
OPEN 17:00
START 21:00
03-354-3236~7
CHARGE ASK

WILD BUNCHに関する
お問い合せは各CLUBまたは
NITES 03-354-8981迄。

# editorial

James McNally

As a musical city, **Bristol** has been mythologized more than most. And, though it's rarely framed this way now, its prominence is, at least partly, if not mostly, a legacy of the city's early hip hop scene. We are, of course, talking about the '**Bristol** sound.' A taken for granted term in the lexicon of 1990s **British** pop, the '**Bristol** sound' has become somewhat interchangeable with 'trip hop,' and may be similarly contentious. As a genre tag, it is epitomized for many by the mid-90s output of **Massive Attack**, **Tricky** and **Portishead**. For more archaeological connoisseurs of the history of records, this is fleshed out by production units like **Fresh 4**, **Smith & Mighty**, and, perhaps most crucially, **The Wild Bunch** – all of whose discographies offer a vital, deeply entangled pre-history to the **Bristol** sound's mid-90s moment. But before these records, **Bristol** was – and it still is – one of the great European hip hop cities: home to one of the most vital hip hop party scenes of the 1980s, which in the 1990s yielded a large quantity of influential popular music rooted in hip hop – from the **Bristol** sound acts to **Roni Size** and the **Full Cycle** family – and a vital stream of hip hop that flew well below the mainstream's radar. This special issue of HEADZ-zINe preserves some of the lesser-told stories of that formative party scene, and of the underground hip hop activity that came in its wake.

In this much, we offer a slightly different perspective on a scene that has produced acres of criticism. That criticism has rarely emphasized the hip hop-ness of either the early **Bristol** sound, or the party scene that preceded it. Instead, this **Bristolian** constellation, rightly seen as a byword for multicultural British hybridity, has been viewed principally through the prism of its fluid approach to genre boundaries. **Bristol**'s most famous '90s names are seen as both ambiguous and multiple: as not reggae, not soul, not hip hop, not post-punk, not funk, but somehow and variously all of the above. And this, most often, is seen as something peculiar to **Bristol**'s culture, and not related to the hip hop

perspectives that spawned it.

Veteran UK rap journalist **Malu Halasa** identified this mythic openness as early as 1989, writing about **Fresh 4's** now classic statement of the pre-**Bristol** sound **Bristol** sound, **'Wishing On A Star'** – more of which later in our old school **Bristol** roundtable. The fact that **Soul Underground**, the magazine **Halasa** was writing in, had already dedicated two special reports to **Bristol**'s thriving post-hip hop music scene since 1988 should probably tell you something about the perceived novelty of its music. **Halasa**, hearing this latest exciting hip hop-based experiment from the city, suggested it 'fit in with my theory about **Bristol**, [as] a place where, musically, anything can happen.' 'In street music,' she explained, 'the emphasis is on raw, and the 'dirtiest' sound isn't coming out of fashion conscious London, but a small town 115 miles away. Since **The Wild Bunch** and **Smith & Mighty**, **Bristol** DJs, producers and singers have been forging a distinctive blend of unlikely elements.' This, in short, is the **Bristol** sound myth – a word I use not to describe a falsehood, but the stories that we, as a culture, tell about ourselves.


'Wishing on a Star', Fresh 4 (Children of The Ghetto), featuring Lizz.E., 10 Records, 1989.
Photograph: courtesy of Adam de Paor-Evans.

It is these unlikely elements that are seen to define the sonic essence of **Bristolness**, but now arguably resemble the likeliest of bedfellows. The fact that we are now used to blurred post-hip hop **Black Atlantic** sounds is thanks in part to the legacies of these **Bristol** crews' 1980s sonic adventurism. But it is also due to the entwined experimentation of hip hop generation Londoners like **Soul II Soul** and **The Sindecut**, and of almost every permutation of British bass music since. **Bristol**'s hip hop innovations were, in this much, never hermetic. Those lucky enough to have heard the tapes documenting the parties thrown by collectives like **The Wild Bunch**, **FBI** and **UD4** will no doubt recognize a vivid sense of scene-ness – one where real joy, and the intimacy of a tight city-wide network, are almost baked into the tape. But the idea of this being a **Bristol** scene, or a **Bristol** sound at once seems curiously too inward-looking. Our wonderfully expansive conversations in this issue with **The Wild Bunch's DJ Milo** and fellow mid-80s hip hop scenester **Krissy Kriss** (who started out with **Z-Rock** and would continue to shape **Bristol** hip hop into the 90s with his group **3 PM**), shine new light on this place and time, and in unprecedented detail.

That scene was as expansive as it was intimate. Focused on **St Pauls** – **Bristol**'s traditional centre of Black public life – but roving outwards to London, New York and Tokyo, and inspired by music from across the black diaspora and beyond, the **Bristol** of the '**Bristol** sound' was a planetary interface as much as it was a petri dish for local experimentation. Its hip hop was not simply one of virtual influences. It was of real-world face-to-face connections; of generational Black legacies and diasporic links; of experiences sought out in other cities, countries and continents. The popular stereotype has it that **Bristol** is a horizontal city, so laid back that things happen to it. But the truth is that its 1980s hip hop protagonists were notably entrepreneurial. They cleared out abandoned warehouses to make party venues. They travelled between cities and even nations in search of exclusive sounds and clothes. They forged productive alliances with crews outside their city at home and abroad. And when they found legal avenues to broadcast their music predictably closed, they helped create a

network of the UK's best pirate radio stations (shout out to inter-city travelling tapes of **FTP**, **Bad Radio** and **Emergency Radio**).

Most pleasingly for us listeners – real talk: I can still summon the joy of being 16 and making a tape that travelled by bassline from **3 PM** to **Carlton** to **Smith & Mighty** to **Blacksmith's** remix of **Massive Attack's 'Daydreaming'** – they took the initiative to produce aesthetically fresh music whose impact has sometimes reverberated internationally and across the generations. And this influence has often been in ways that are barely acknowledged. See, for instance, **DJ Milo** and **Nellee Hooper's** little-credited roles in the genesis of hip hop soul, which crops up in our conversation with **Milo** (a figure as close as any, I'd argue, to an undercover godparent of modern UK Black music).


Wild Bunch dub plate.
Photograph: courtesy of Milo Johnson.

In all of this, **Bristol**'s 1980s multicultural hip hop innovators – many of whom were the children of first generation **Caribbean** migrants – exceeded the narrow roles prescribed for them by a postcolonial, class-ridden British society. In a decade when **Margaret Thatcher** seemed to declare war both on the legitimacy of multicultural Britishness and on the institutions of the working class, I would argue this was particularly meaningful. Our interview with **Krissy Kriss** is fascinating, in this respect. It explores hip hop in relation to his experience of second generation Black **Bristolian** identity – one where the resurgence of organized racism in the late 1970s coincided with his coming of age in an almost totally white environment in the years before hip hop's seismic arrival. **Kriss'** generosity in sharing these memories, and the intensity of feeling he conveys for the hip hop community he and his peers built together, marks a welcome intervention in the history of a music scene all too often seen as curiously raceless.

Hopefully these two contributions, and our **Bristol** roundtable – which originally appeared in more compressed form in **Hip Hop Connection** in 2007, and features **Wild Bunch's Willie Wee, 3 PM**, **Flynn** from **Fresh 4, KC** from **Transcript Carriers,** and second-wave **Bristol** graffiti mainstay **Turoe** – will subtly recalibrate the **Bristol** sound myth, and enlighten us to the hip hop path that continued to run alongside it. (Special thanks here to **HHC's Andy Cowan** for recognizing way back then the importance of documenting this history. Apart from anything, it resulted in one of the more heart-warming interviews I've had the pleasure to conduct, as these micro-generations of **Bristol** hip hoppers spontaneously presented each other with their metaphorical flowers). Not least, we hope the parts of this special issue of HEADZ-zINe dealing with the 1980s will promote the idea that the party scene that yielded what we now know as the **Bristol** sound was not at all separate from **Bristol**'s hip hop scene. They were one and the same. We follow leads here laid out in **Bristol** hip hop's 1990 neighbourhood national anthem, **'St. P'** by **3 PM**. That record paints a far more vivid picture of the **Bristol** hip hop party scene and its soon-to-be-famous personnel than we ever could, so we

recommend you seek it out as the first stop in your soundtrack to this issue.

Just as importantly, however, **'St. P'** – recorded on the eve of **Massive Attack** becoming ***Massive Attack*,** while the **Bristol** sound was still a cult presence in specialist magazines like **Soul Underground, Hip Hop Connection** and **Echoes** – marks a de facto bridge between the earlier hip hop scene covered in the first half of this issue, and the second generation covered in the next. Figures like **Sir Beans OBE**, **Turoe** and **Awkward** – all of whom provide great interviews – grew up in the shadow of this mythical beast of 1980s UK party culture. Some were just old enough to catch its tail end at the close of the '80s. Others, simply were beguiled by the graffiti hand styles of the flyers pasted to walls in their neighbourhoods, and the crackly broadcasts of late-80s pirate deejays like **Bunjy** and **Lynx**. As that first scene began to morph into one of the most touted sources of popular music in the '90s, however, they were part of a second wave of **Bristol** hip hop sprouting in the undergrowth.

In a moment when the rave scene was booming, the audiences for hip hop had all but collapsed. It would have been easy, in this context, for **Bristol** hip hop activity to be relegated to bedsits, people's garages and bedrooms – and for a moment it apparently was. But, as our roundtable documents, it was veteran party emcee **Krissy Kriss**, by then of **3 PM**, who, returning from the **Bboy Championships** in Amsterdam, had the idea to create the **British Hip Hop Ghetto Movement**. This was the night that would, in effect, catalyse this second wave's sense of scene and connect it to underground hip hop across the country.

Despite this latter scene's evident vitality, it is a compelling paradox that as veterans of the first wave of **Bristol** hip hop climbed the album charts, this new wave laboured in inverse obscurity. For the most part, **Bristol**'s hip hop acts hustled cassettes hand-to-hand for much of the '90s. There were, of course, exceptions – **3 PM's** (1994) single **'Better Late Than Never'** and the private press 12's issued by the **Transcript Carriers** in 1992 and '93. But vinyl is hip hop culture's

format of record. The fact that it is so easy to list the wax issued by this scene before the tail end of the decade, speaks to the chronic underinvestment British hip hop faced in the 1990s and beyond. By the end of the decade, maybe this began to shift. Hombré Recordings and its sublabels gave a platform to acts like **Numskullz**, **One Cut, Sir Beans OBE** and **Aspects. Acid Jazz**, meanwhile, released **Parlour Talk's Padlocked Tonic**. But the fact that a group like **3 PM** – every bit the equal of a **London Posse** – were able to issue just two singles in a decade, while recording enough excellent music to fill a small handful of albums (see the 2018 compilation **The First Stroke**), remains disheartening. It is tempting to conclude that **Bristol** hip hop, despite its massive impact, never really got its props.

But I want to conclude by asking whether maybe we should think about that differently.

Maybe, given the inherent messiness of culture, we should take a wider view of what constitutes hip hop, and a correspondingly narrow one of the iconic early records of the **Bristol** sound. Can we not, in fact, read its hybridity as being of hip hop – a genre synthesized from the fragments of other genres? **Tricky** – who has a handful of walk-ons in this **Bristol** special, but who we did not approach for conversation, due to the fact that his story is widely available elsewhere – was cast for a moment in the mid-90s as British pop's magpie-in-chief, its high priest of liminality. He was seen as the **Bristol** sound's archetypical idiosyncratist – a blurrer of all kinds of boundaries, not just musical. To this end, **Tricky's** solo debut **'Nothing's Clear'** (1991) bolted together elements as seemingly unlikely (thanks **Ms. Halasa**) as **Gabriel Yared's** score for **Betty Blue** and **The Specials' 'Man At C&A.'** Not long after, he became an alluring figure for the British rock press, who typically read him as a **Bristolian** maverick: the hybrid offspring of **David Bowie, Jerry Dammers, Little Richard** and **Hank Shocklee.** And who wouldn't want to write about that?

But what was often missed in the race to categorize **Tricky** under the contentious flag of convenience 'trip hop' – one that located

him by definition outside the bounds of the movement that nurtured him – was the inherent hip hopness of his early music. Take, for instance, his 1994 remix of the aptly titled **'Boundaries'** by **Lena Conquest**. That recording revels in its collision of noise and melody, in its very 'out'-ness: a rhythmic sense of operating from a fraction behind the beat, on what **Sun Ra** might describe as the other side of rhythm; bass driven into a red blur of indistinct notes; its self-consciously surreal layering in of the diegetic sounds of warfare; and the deliberate artificiality its production takes in reversed samples. Forget 'trip hop.' The best sample-based hip hop was always self-consciously weird, and this might just as easily be a **Bomb Squad** remix of **Lena Conquest.**

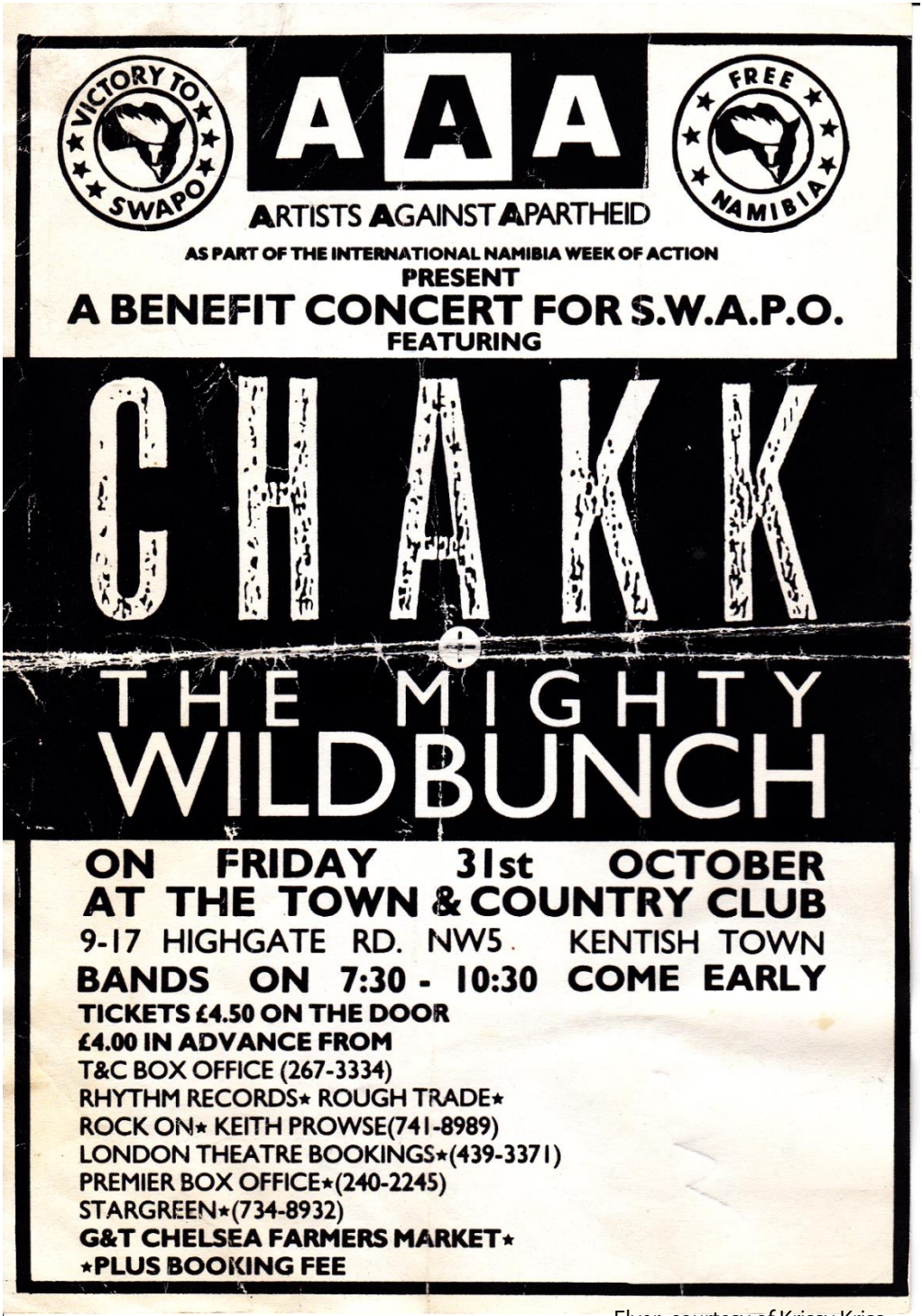

'Aftermath', Tricky, Nyeeve Records, 1993.
Photograph: courtesy of Adam de Paor-Evans.

In this much, there is nothing in **'Boundaries'** to distinguish this emerging icon of 'trip hop' from an established hip hop beat aesthetic. And neither is there in much of his early output. Hear, for instance, the white labels **Tricky** used to announce himself as a solo act prior to 1995's **Maxinquaye** – the **Dobie** rub of **'Ponderosa'** (1994) and the hiss-filled **'Aftermath'** (1993). The pitched-down sense of breakbeats thumping in suspended animation, the deliberately sibilance-filled mix, and thick, hazy textures of samples rendered as if through a double-layer of tracing paper, have clear sibling sounds in underground hip hop's then-emerging glacial turn: **Finsta Bundy's** (1995) **'Who I Be (Part Two)',** for instance, or **Da Beat Terrorists'** (1995) **'If You See What I See.'**

So maybe we should listen to **Tricky,** this veteran of both **The Wild Bunch** and **Fresh 4,** who told me in 2008:

> I'm a Bboy. I don't care what anybody says about my music, I'm a Bboy. That was my life... Every day I woke up and it was not just being into rap. It was the lifestyle. I lived the lifestyle... I was loyal to it – 100%... I still consider myself a Bboy, really. I just got my own slant on it.

And maybe, following on from that, we should ask why we don't speak about a record like **Massive Attack's 'Five Man Army'** in the same breath as UK hip hop classics such as **London Posse's 'Jump Around'**? After all, listening to it, we hear one of the most iconic hip hop breaks of all-time: **Al Green's 'I'm Glad You're Mine.'** Its crisp rimshots, already somehow sympathetic to reggae, are mashed up against the dubbed-out bassline from **Dillinger** et al's **'Five Man Army'** – a diasporic blend that's entirely at home in UK hip hop. We hear one of 1980s' hip hop's most lyrical British emcees, **3D**, with a slew of pop cultural references that speak to the British urban experience. And with him, a trio of **Wild Bunch** veterans – **Daddy G**, **Willie Wee** and **Tricky** – perform lyrics with origins on **Bristol** party cassettes dating back as far back as 1987. Shouldn't we, perhaps, think of this as one of the most popular UK hip hop records of the early 90s?




Flyer: courtesy of Krissy Kriss.

ROUNDTABLE

## WILLIE WEE – KELZ – DJ LYNX – FLYNN
## TUROE – KANT CONTROL – KRISSY KRISS

**...chaired by James McNally**

**Willie Wee (The Wild Bunch):** My first experience of hip hop in Bristol was 'Broken glass, everywhere / People pissin' on the street, like they just don't care'. I think that was one of the first rap tunes I ever heard of. That blew my socks clean out of this millennium, [then things like] **Jonzun Crew**, **Run-D.M.C.** When I first heard that rap tune, I'll tell you what – that was it. I was elevated to a different level. My head just kind of exploded, because it was, like, I was into funk, I was always into music... but that was a major changing point, a major chapter that, like, you know, you open the big book, and it's like 'Oh my god! Oh my god!' For x-amount of time I lived, breathed, slept, shit, farted rap. I couldn't think nothin' else. If it didn't rhyme, was not on time, it wasn't food. You know, it just didn't work. I know it changed the way I thought about a lot of things, different concepts. It's like the change in the music – I used to listen to things like **Roy Ayers**, **Idris Mohammed**, **Brass Construction**, **Mass Production**, **Undisputed Truth** – and all of a sudden it's different. It's a different transformation. A completely different style. It was a complete change of dimension, a new form of music and out of that came rap, and it was like all the different styles, the clothes, the vibe. The whole shit that went with it. It wasn't just music.

Did you have a group of friends who were into the same thing?

**Willie Wee:** I'll tell you what, my best friend was **Milo McKenzie Johnson** – that's **Miles** [**DJ Milo**] – that's my first homeboy! Oh my god! We used to sit and listen to **John Peel**, listen to mad stuff, crazy music like **John Cooper Clark**. He was the first white guy who did rhyming lyrical stuff: 'I married a monster from outer space.' **John Peel**, he played some off the cuff music. Very off the cuff. It didn't necessarily have to be dance orientated – I remember some stuff like this tune, the **Charlie Daniels Band**, it goes:

*The Devil came to Georgia, because I was looking for a soul to steal*

*'cause he was mighty fine, because he was way behind, he was willing to make a deal*

*And you play pretty good fiddle, my boy, but give the devil his due*

*I bet a fiddle of gold against your soul, 'cause I think I'm better than you.*

At the time I was into rap and I thought 'Oh my god! Country and western!' Do you know what I'm sayin'? It ain't just about the music, it's about the lyrics. The lyric holds down the beat, because as time progressed people were coming off on real basic, basic tracks. Lyrically, it goes to show that you can come from any dimension and background and you can throw down some bad lyrics! You can have the most basic beat, like two sounds, and it sounds funky, even down to where you throw it down acapella style. Without even a riddim, it still sounds groovy. Reverse it backwards, and it tastes nice! Tastes nice!

How did **The Wild Bunch** evolve?

**Willie Wee:** It originated with **Grantley Marshall** [**Daddy G**, later of **Massive Attack**], myself... **Grantley** and I, we used to be on a roots

tip. We used to play reggae music and stuff like that. And I kinda bought funk into **G**, because **G** was more a rootsman. I brought in more jazz funk and that funky thing. **Miles** was just into music generally, from your old school **James Brown** up through. We all used to flex together. Our first party was a place called **Green Rooms**. Then it slowly evolved to **3D** joining – but that was a period after, because at that point when we were playing music, rap wasn't really a solid foundation of music yet. That was in the pipeline. It was in transit, but it wasn't fully established. Then **3D** came in and little super-dooper **Hooper** – our **Nellee**. We was just friends, with a similar attitude towards music, and having a good time and entertaining. It rolled and rolled until it drawed a formation as two rappers – **3D** and myself. Then **Mushroom**, the apprentice, kind of rolled in and **Tricky**, and we formed a little group. It was, like, 'We're **The Wild Bunch**', due to the cowboys and shit. That was the basic formation.

What kind of places would you be playing?

**Willie Wee: Green Rooms**, we used to do little private parties. When we first started playing we did a big illegal jam in the **Redhouse** [an abandoned warehouse on **Portland Square** in **St Pauls**, in November 1984]. At the time it was a big chapter for us, because it was the first time we got it together as young guys to organize something – an illegal jam. And it kicked off, really. It was organized, but not organized: organized chaos. By that I mean, it was organized in the sense that we got everyone in the same place at the same time, but disorganized in the sense that the PA system was a bit up and down – all that kind of ruffneck street style. It wasn't really ironed out and pressed, you know.

Was that the jam with **Fearless Four**?


The Wild Bunch at The Crypt, St. Barnabas, with Great Peso and Soul II Soul, 1986. Flyer by Nick Walker, courtesy of Chris Burton. See Chris Burton and Gary Thompson's 2009 book **Art and Sound of the Bristol Underground** (Tangent) for more classic Bristol party flyers and interviews.

**Willie Wee:** Nah, nah – before that. That was when we were a little bit more organized again, because as time revolved we got a little bit organized. We took a lot of inspiration from the Americans, to be honest with you, but as a crew. That kind of thing evolved as a crew, rather than as a group of mates. I remember we got all our T-shirts printed up with **The Wild Bunch** on it. We started going and buying all our records in London and preparing ourselves for a specific party. We started cutting tunes, doing dubplates, rehearsing some sort of formation – so it was like '**Nellee**'s gonna come on at this point and cut up some tunes and we're gonna throw down some lyrics on the mic, then it's gonna go into some funk, then **G**'ll play the soul music – that kind of vibe.

Was it immediately quite big locally?

**Willie Wee:** Nah, it kinda grew... I'd say it kinda grew like a forest blaze: the more it progressed the more vibes we got from people, the more we had a bit more confidence, and the more we were in a situation where we could do a few more things. We had a few more connections, could get records... and, you know, the intervention of twin turntables! Because we used to play at first on one deck.

Were there other people at the time putting on hip hop jams?

**Willie Wee:** When we first got involved we were a bit of a spearhead, but at the same time other groups and formations, other crews and clans, were forming. It was cool, because we were a brotherhood really. At times there was a competition, because you're alpha males, you know what I'm sayin' – it's the rap thing. But there was a feedback to it. You'd go to other people's jams and you'd hear a tune and go 'Yeah! That was bad!' And you'd hear other people rap and there was a male competitive edge – there was a point when it was a bit negative, because we were young guys, and

you're not always positive with your attitude. But I think we was positive in general, and it pushed us forward instead of backwards. We were individuals, but part of a [pauses]... call it a **Bristol** scene, a **West Country** scene; whatever you want to call it. We were all from the same womb.

In those early days were you rapping with a **Bristolian** accent or were you putting on an **American** one?

**Willie Wee:** I'll give it to you straight, we never really had an identity at that time. Even things like our names, because I, personally, was so influenced by the American music and culture. There was a good period of time where I suppose we tried to be something that we wasn't: an Americanised package. But as time progressed people started finding themselves, started finding their own culture, finding what they are, and it slowly sort of petered out to 'I come from **Bristol**, I've got a **Bristolian** accent to a certain level. I'm **English**, I'm not **American**' – as much as I wanted to be. But you kind of find yourself. It started to come out in your lyrical content and in how you dropped your lyrics.

I know **The Wild Bunch** did a warehouse party with **Newtrament** in **London**, were you at that one?

**Willie Wee:** Yeah, because I knew **Newtrament**. One thing that we did in **London** was we did a big rap convention in **Meanwhile Gardens**, 11,000 people [**Willie** is probably referring to the **GLC**'s **Tim Westwood**-fronted Break Dance Festival at **Jubilee Gardens** on the **Southbank** in September 1984. **The Wild Bunch** featured on a bill alongside **Imperial Mixers**, **Cosmic Jam**, **Family Quest**, **Dizzie Heights**, **London All Star Breakers** and others]. We were invited up because we entered a rap competition and we came second. Because we were from outside of **London** – and in this competition

us and **Rock City** were the only two crews that was from outside **London** – and we came second out of the whole thing, **Westwood** treated us like we were his little babies from out of town, his little Exocet missile. It was like, 'Check it out! These guys don't come from **London**, but they can rap!' We were invited up to a couple of jams up in **London**. It was a good experience – a bit embarrassing at times, because you're from out of town, you don't come from **London**. It's hard to break down the walls sometimes, because it's a **London** thing. You know what **London**'s like: it's the capital of **England**, and at that time they didn't seem to have a lot of respect for anyone who wasn't from **London**. It was a good learning curve though.

Did you notice a difference between what you were doing and what London crews were doing?

**Willie Wee:** Not really, apart from we give enough of them bloody noses. We beat enough of them up, man. We beat them up on a microphone tip – truss me! That's not me blowing my own trumpet – I wish I could. But it just proved a point: It's not where you're from, it's where you're at. You didn't have to be from **London** to be able to rock a house. You didn't have to be **Family Quest**, or **Dizzie Heights**, or one of them guys. Because enough of the **London** guys were shit. They were just riding on the fact that they're from London. It was good though, because we met a lot of people through that period. Like I said, we met **Westwood** – and whatever you say or think, that's a plus! Because he's introduced a lot of good music to this country, which possibly a lot of people wouldn't have heard otherwise. He introduced a lot of people, gave them the stage to be on, to be heard.

What was going to **Japan** like?

**Willie Wee:** It was weird – good fun. But at the same time it was going into a battle blind – it worked out, but it didn't work out. Because we didn't know what we were doing at the time. We were just young guys who had the opportunity to go abroad, playing music, and we took it. There was some high points, but there was some low points [note: during the 1986 trip, **3D** became ill and returned to the **UK**. The subsequent fall out is sometimes attributed as the beginning of the end for **The Wild Bunch**]. But, yeah, it was really enjoyable. It was a good experience because we met different people and it was an opportunity to hear different sounds – even down to the actual tools to make music. In **Japan** we saw some crazy equipment which you just didn't have the opportunity to see or hear in **England**, or use [in **Tokyo**, **The Wild Bunch** contributed to a recording with Japanese new wave band **TM Network**. **Nellee Hooper** is credited with playing 'percussions on **Emulator II**' – a piece of equipment then with an $8,000 price tag for the entry level model]. But it was a good experience, man. We all had a good time out there... in general. You can only generalize.

[To the other people around the table] what was the impact of **The Wild Bunch** on **Bristol**?

**Kelz (3 PM):** Me personally, I would say – not riding anybody's dick. I would say that for me that was the blueprint of **Bristol** hip hop. I'm on about from then to now. Like wine is fermented in a cellar, you leave it a few years for the flavour to flood out – do you know what I mean? I think that the whole **Wild Bunch** thing has been a blueprint.

**DJ Lynx (3 PM):** It's ground-breaking, really. I'd never seen anything like it – or heard it. So, for me, it was completely new to see it for myself – like, in front of my eyes and stuff.

Where would you see them play?

**DJ Lynx:** Carnival – **St. Paul's Carnival.** I didn't go to **The Dug Out,** I was a little bit too young. But I went to the **Granary** and **St Barnabas School**, as well – which is now the **Malcolm X Centre**. I seen them jam a few times.

**Flynn (Fresh 4):** It was a place to go out and meet like-minded people. They were putting on warehouse parties and that, and everyone was caught up in the enthusiasm for that. For the first year of hearing those guys we were just stuck in the bedroom, trying to get our act together, just going down and watching these guys.

**Turoe:** For me it wasn't their music, it was the graffiti. The first thing I saw was the **3D** piece at **Clifton**. But [**Bristol** gallery] the **Arnolfini** done a film on them – a fifteen minute film – and before that they did an exhibition in the **Arnolfini** in 1985. I was too young to go; I wasn't even allowed to go to town. But I saw all the pictures, and the **Arnolfini** did a series of postcards – all **3D**'s pieces. Obviously, I was into **Subway Art** and that – I was just copying out of **Subway Art** every week. But when I realised somebody from **Bristol** did it [i.e. pieces in the book's 1987 follow-up **Spraycan Art**], literally we rode around on our bikes with cameras and took pictures of every piece of graffiti we could ever find. We'd pedal miles! From my side of town to where this is was a ridiculous amount of miles. I was just this little scraggly kid on my bike, riding around **St Pauls** with my little camera going 'Fucking hell! Look at that!' – getting really excited, taking pictures, going back and drawing them. That was the impact it had on me.

**Kelz:** They had the whole hip hop scene on lockdown: the deejay element, the graffiti element, the emcee element. The whole

shebang. I remember one [**St Pauls**] festival they played they were doing the piece '**The Longest Day'** on **Campbell Street**, and that's like – it was a first [for me]. It was seeing hip hop for the first time. And **Wild Bunch** tapes! Oh my god! If you had a **Wild Bunch** tape, it was gold dust, man. I think the impact they left was phenomenal.

**Kant Control (Transcript Carriers):** They was definitely the first thing to influence a lot of people. I remember going up **Revolver Records** [where **Daddy G** worked] and thinking 'That guy looks like **The Wild Bunch'.** And it was **Grant.** I'm like, 'Wow, I'm a white guy and I like hip hop, yeah. Can you educate me?' He plays me **'Fresh, Wild, Fly and Bold'** by **Cold Crush Brothers,** and I'm like 'That's hip hop! That's hip hop, Man! Scrap **Break Machine.** I'm out of that now!' They were the first guys on the scene, no doubt.

**Willie Wee:** You know what's funny, you guys? Listening to you talk, how you felt is exactly the same as what I felt. We were looking at **LL Cool J** and **Jimmy Spicer** – '**I Need A Beat**,' and all these tracks – and it was exactly what you were feeling. For us, it was the same buzz!

**Turoe:** It was just a couple of years apart, that was the thing.

**Willie Wee:** We didn't really feel like we was in front of no-one, we was just like 'Oh my god! Look at this! Have you heard this beat?' And it just filtered down and filtered through the ranks.

**Kelz:** I think the most important thing is, **Bristol**'s got its own scene, and it's just as old as London!

**Turoe:** It was hand-in-hand. The graff thing was hand-in-hand with **Chrome Angelz** and that.

**Willie Wee:** It's got good strong foundations. It was cookin' from time. **Wild Bunch**, in some ways, may've been at the forefront, but it wasn't exclusive to **Wild Bunch**, there was other crews.

[Everybody starts remembering crew names: **UD4**, **FBI**, **City Rockas**, **2Bad**, **Z-Rock**, etc]

[To **Flynn**] How did you start doing warehouse parties as **Fresh 4**?

**Flynn:** It was me and my brother, **Krust**. We had another mate, **Judge** and then **Suv** joined. We borrowed some of my brother's equipment and just got used to hanging out in bedrooms at different people's houses, mixing records together and then we took it outside to a youth club – **Ewell House** – in **Knowle West**. We just moved it around from place to place and ended up in a squat, squatting places in **South Bristol** and taking it outside like that, basically.

That was in **South Bristol**. **Knowle West** is in **South Bristol**, so basically what we decided to do was do something in **South Bristol** to bring people across the bridge into **Knowle West**, **Totterdown**, **Bedminster** and the south of **Bristol**. Because that was where we were from, we knew where all the warehouses and that were, so we would just squat different places and do different venues in **Bedminster** or **Totterdown**. Then we ended up in the squat that we used in the **Fresh 4** ['**Wishing on a Star**'] video in **St Luke's Road**. It's not there anymore, but there was a big self-help community down there – a big self-help housing community where people were squatting. There were loads of people from all around

**Bristol**, all over the country going there. So we squatted down there and got involved with the parties.

What kind of year was this?

**Flynn:** Probably about '88 – something like that.

**Turoe: Bunjy** was a well-known hip hop deejay in **Bristol** at the time. And being as I was hanging around with a kiddie from **Knowle West** as well, we used to go to **Bunjy**'s and he used to do me tapes. He was in a crew called the **Fresh 4** – which obviously turned into, well, they had a hit record. He was a part of it before they were even known, and they were just a hip hop crew and they used to do warehouse parties. So we used to go to the warehouse parties. **Kaos** used to do graffiti backdrops, and we used to go out bombing from the parties. I swear at one point I saw **Tricky** rapping at the parties, because **Bunjy** knew him. We went to this party and there was this kiddie rapping with a really strong **Bristolian** accent, like. And it was obviously **Tricky**. So that spurred me on a bit.

**Flynn:** We had our own emcees. At that time I was an emcee, **Tricky** was an emcee – he'd emcee for us. We were all together, but he moved on and went with **The Wild Bunch**, and then moved on and went with **Massive Attack**.

Was **Tricky** a straight hip hop rapper at that time?

**Flynn:** Well, yeah, we both did. And we all went to the same school as well. We were all from the same part of town, and he moved to **Totterdown**, and he was squatting in a house with us lot as well. We was just all part of that crew at the time.

What role did **Smith & Mighty** play in the scene?

**Willie Wee:** Strong... Strong.

**Flynn:** They were the mentors for the next part – for the actual making of tunes. **The Wild Bunch** was like the deejaying aspect and the whole emceeing aspect, **Smith & Mighty** was the studio aspect: 'This is how you make your stuff – your actual mix and stuff. You wanted your crew to be as good, if not better than **The Wild Bunch**. That was the standard setting for a crew. You had to get a couple of deejays who were good at cutting and scratching and that. Your emcees had to be up to the level of **3D** or **Willie Wee** – or just try and get up to that level, basically. After you'd gone as far as you can with that, it was obvious to try and make music. And the only people who were making music that I knew of were **Smith & Mighty**, but they were very open-minded and accessible and they wanted people to come into their studio and make music. They were for **Bristol** making music. That was opposed to **The Wild Bunch**, who weren't really into sharing ideas and secrets, and the tricks of the trade, they were like 'We're doing it, and that's it.' If you wanted to know how something was done, you'd just go down and watch them and then go home and try and work out what they were doing. Whereas **Smith & Mighty**, they were saying 'Come to the studio, if you've got any ideas at all, come down and show us your ideas and if we can help out we'll help out.' They had their **Three Stripe Records**, so it was a very good opportunity to take it to that next stage.

Weren't they your first entrée into recording, **Kelz**?

**Kelz:** With cuts by my man **Lynx**, of course... The whole **Smith & Mighty** thing came about for me because I used to emcee at **Peter D**'s house, 'cause I used to go about with his younger brother **Roger**

– **R-E-D**, bless him, man. **Peter D** [later a prominent D&B producer alongside **Rob Smith** as **More Rockers** and **Jaz Klash**] was making beats at that time, and he was always into gadgets. He was a bit of an inspector gadget. And he asked me whether I wanted to cut a tune, I thought 'Bullshit! … but I'm a come anyway.' I was young at the time, about sixteen, seventeen, and he took me to this place in **St Pauls**. We went upstairs and it was this long-haired white dude. He introduced me, said 'This is **Rob** [**Smith**], and that Rasta brother in the corner, he's **Ray** [**Mighty**]'. I was a little bit paro, to be quite honest. I kind of semi-shat myself: 'What's going on? I haven't done anything!'

But they had a little studio and that's the first time I got introduced to a recording studio and samplers. Them times it was reel-to-reel – the **Atari** hadn't even dropped. It was around '86 and they was still using the **Roland** and the **Fostex** and the **Yamaha**. But they played me some tunes they'd done, and it was like nothing I'd ever heard before. What I liked about it was it was funky. I jammed with them that day and got high as a kite, literally. I had to crash in the next room. When I came round I freestyled and **Ray** came up to me and said 'write three sixteens – I want a song. I want a chorus and verses'. That was my introduction to song-writing, because I'd always rapped, but I'd never written my raps and actually constructed three separate verses but all based on the same theme.

[Note: Both **Kelz** and his future **3 PM** partner **Krissy Kriss** made their individual debuts on **Smith & Mighty's** 1988 debut single **'Anyone'** – respectively with **'I Am The Poet'** and **'This Is The Time'**, both repurposing the **'Anyone'** instrumental. Their debut as a group, including **DJ Lynx**, was **'Anyone (Rap Version)'** on the **Beatmaster Records** issue of **'Anyone'** later the same year. At that point, they were still being credited as individuals, not yet as **3 PM**.]

From there, man, I done a few things with them. I done a track called **'I Am The Poet'**. That's one of the first tracks I laid down with them. I actually went home and wrote my bollocks off. After that I started hanging out there more, and I got the buzz of it. I got the gist of it. This is when **'Rock The Bells'** was a big tune, and it was my dream to make a rap song. Anyway, they said 'I'm looking for a deejay,' and it was like 'Hmmm... there's another yout from around my way runnin' it for the tapes' – 'cause **Wild Bunch** was up there, so everyone was trying to cut their own hip hop tapes. And that was **Lynx**, so I thought 'Yeah, hook up with this brother, man.' He used to get the [**New York**] **Kiss FM** tapes! He wasn't getting **The Wild Bunch**, he was getting tapes from **States**, man! Cut out the middle man.

**Lynx: Red Alert, Jazzy Joyce.**

**Kelz:** He was playing them in the youth centre and I was like 'I've got to hook up with this man.' And **Rob** was like 'Well, bring him round then.' So I went round **Lynx's** house and brought him round. What was that tune? [Hums bassline to **Smith & Mighty** ft. **Carlton** and **MC Kelz 'Travelling'**]

**Lynx: 'Travelling'.**

**Kelz: 'Travelling'**! He tore it up – and those cuts are actually on the record. That was the first time he'd been around there.

**Lynx:** Yeah, I was cutting up **'Strawberry Letter 23'.**

**Kelz: Rob** was, like, 'Stay there! Do what you're doing!'

**Lynx:** There was no structure. I just turned up with a few records. The deck was on the top of a **Peavey** amp. I was kneeling down to cut, so I was on my knees and I was cuttin' there [mimes cutting hunched up] and they were just there on the keyboards and **Ray** was looking at the window smoking a spliff. It was just so... relaxed. It was like you weren't really doing it – like you were just going round a mate's house, just messing about.

**Kelz:** You didn't think nothing would come of it really. The way it was set up – the layout – you just thought 'This is a fuck about thing, I'm just gonna do my thing.' And then two-twos [**Rob Smith**] came back with vinyl! I'm like 'What? You recorded that shit?'

**Lynx:** When the records appear you're like 'Shit is serious.' It was like 'Fuck, we've got a record.'

**Flynn,** how did recording with **Smith & Mighty** come about for you?

**Flynn:** The first time I met them they were helping out with the sound system at a squat party at **St. Luke's Road**. They provided the system – the **Three Stripe** system. So they helped us set up an illegal party, it got busted, and we moved to this squat from **Redcliffe**, and we began to chat and got a bit more friendly. Then, maybe a couple of months later, they were on a local news programme saying that if there's anyone who had ideas about making music, to go and check them at their studio. I saw that on the TV and thought 'Yeah, that's an opportunity to get some music together.' They had a large studio downstairs and a secondary studio upstairs – and initially it took us about a year to get the tracks together. At that time, they were doing a lot of work with other artists: **3 PM**, **Carlton**, myself, and **Massive Attack** – early **Massive Attack** [1989's **'Any Love'**]. So the whole process took about a year to get together.

Was **'Wishing On A Star'** the first tune that you actually made?


**Flynn:** Yeah.

It must've been a shock that your first tune was a hit [**Fresh 4's 'Wishing On A Star'**, featuring **Lizz E**, reached number 10 in the UK Top 40 in October 1989].

Flynn: Crazy. Really crazy. Unbelievably crazy. It took a year. It was the same time we was at the squat party doing those things, and one day I was in the kitchen at **Flora's** mixing records. I found that [**James Brown**] **'Funky Drummer'** mixed really well with [**Bobby Byrd**] 'Hot Pants,' then I found another record [**Faze-O 'Riding High'**] that mixed really well with those and it was like 'Okay, I reckon these three records work.' I had an idea of using some song that was a classic, so everybody knows it – **Flora** had an old **Rose Royce** record, and my mum used to play a similar set of records, so I was like 'I know this record: **'Wishing On A Star'**!' **Rob** and **Ray** really liked it, and as that whole process went along they put out their first single [**'Anyone'**] and they were onto their second single [**'Walk On'**], so they had a lot of interest in the industry. I think some guy, he took [**'Wishing'**] to **London** and there was just a real big buzz about it. I wasn't going to say no to putting this tune out, so we went with the highest bidder, and that was **Virgin**, and it just took off. It was just unexpected... But I just had a strong idea about using breaks as opposed to drum machines at the time.

That's the most obvious way it differs from **Smith & Mighty's** own sound.

**Flynn:** From our point of view, what we'd always been about was discovering the breakbeats – always scratching two copies of **Ultimate Breaks & Beats**. So at that time we had loads of doubles of records and we were used to looping records in that capacity instead of using a drum machine to get a constant beat. It was that whole quick-mixing, **Wild Style** type of thing. From a DJ point of view, mixing records was what we were about. So at the time I was really happy. I got some scratches on a record. I knew exactly what I wanted. I got a tune together. I got it produced by the people I wanted to produce it and it just took off. It was the absolute thing I could possibly do to finalise being a part of that whole **Bristol** thing; that whole mood: that dark warehousey, smoke-filled thoughts [vibe]. The late-night mish-mash of different genres and sounds and vibes.

[To **Kelz**] did you know [partner in **3 PM** with **Kelz** and **DJ Lynx**] **Krissy Kriss** before you started working with **Smith & Mighty**?

**Kelz:** No, the irony is, I didn't really know **Lynx** neither. I just saw him at the youth centre.

**Lynx:** We didn't really know each other.

Kelz: The 3 PM thing stood for three man posse move – that's what 3 PM stood for because we was from three different crews.

**Krissy Kriss** (**Z-Rock, 3 PM**, and prolific emcee on **Bristol's** mid-1980s party scene): I used to step with my man there [points to

**Willie Wee**], when we were down with **Wild Bunch**, then **Rob Smith** find he [points to **Kelz**], find he [points to **Lynx**], find me, and then we done a track together [**'Anyone (Rap Version)'**] – and that's the story of how we linked basically. But how did we get the name **3 PM**, **Kelz**? Sitting outside your yard, **Badminton Road**, and it was 3 AM, remember? And here's me: **'3 PM'** – Three – Pee – Em! Three man posse move. Fuckin' hell!

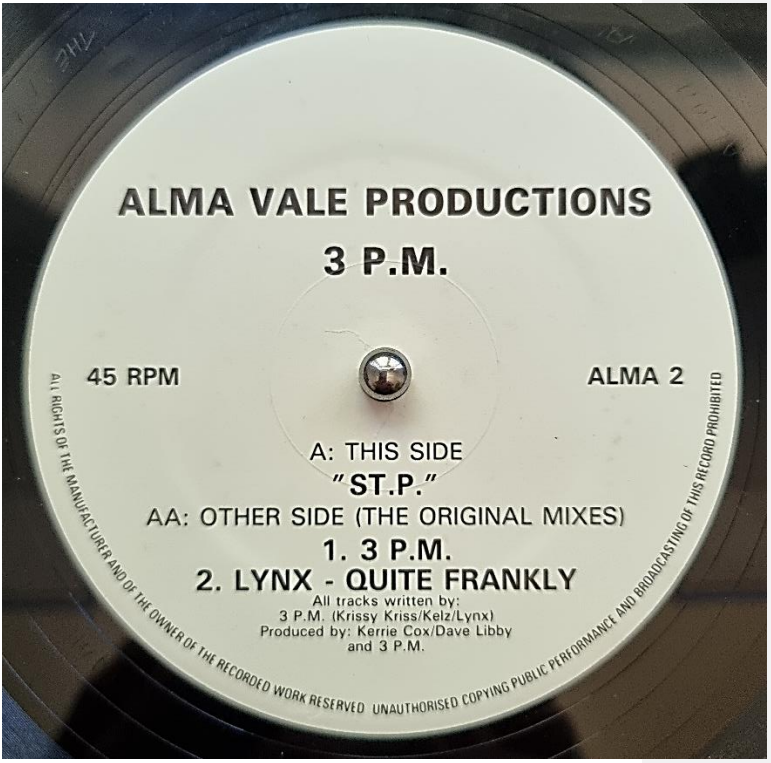
**Kelz:** While we were still working with **Smith & Mighty**, we just got more into that code of just being independent.

3 PM, circa 1990. Photograph: courtesy of Krissy Kriss.

**Lynx:** Being more individual.

[Note: **3 PM's** 1990 debut proper, **'St. P'**, a classic of **Bristol** rap, is a tribute to the **Bristol** warehouse party scene of the late 1980s. They

followed this with a sporadic recorded output and as a group remained figureheads of **Bristol's** live hip hop scene well into the mid-90s.]




'St. P.', 3 PM, Alma Vale Productions, 1990.
Photograph: courtesy of Adam de Paor-Evans.

**3 PM** were quite forward in using **Bristol** accents on their records. Was the issue of accents a big thing for **Bristol** generally?

**Kelz:** When we was doing our thing, there wasn't really **British** rap.

**Willie Wee:** You found yourself an identity.

**Krissy Kriss:** But, can I just add to that, [to **Willie**] you never used to rap with an **American** accent.

**Willie Wee:** I did initially, 'cause I called myself **Jazzy C.**

**Krissy Kriss:** Did you? I was **Mello-Zee.**

**Lynx:** My first deejay name was **Whizz Kid!** And then I was like 'Nah! I'm **Lynx**'.

**Willie Wee:** But everything was **American** then – it was all about **Def Jam**!

**Krissy Kriss:** When we went to **London** to see **Hijack** – that was like 'Rah! This is how we be too! We can do it' Fuckin' hell, these **London** boys are droppin' science on us. **Demon Boyz** – fuckin' A!

**Turoe:** We went to **Soul II Soul** shop in **London** to buy paint and somebody was doublin' up **'Recognition'** – when it first came out – and we walked in the shop and all they did – we were in there for about three hours – and they was doublin' up every track on the **'Recognition'** album. And I was like 'I've got to know what this is'. And that was way before I even knew what things were anyway. Things like that, it just sticks in your memory. That was the first time I'd heard a proper **British** accent on a record.

**Kelz: 'Vibes'** [by **Demon Boyz**] and **'Money Mad'** [by **London Posse**] – those two tracks introduced me to UK rapping. When **London Posse** were around that was the transitional time. To be honest, the **Gangster Chronicle** album converted me: 'I'm never rapping with an **American** accent, ever again!' ... It's important, though, there's emcees who were doing the **Bristolian** thing way before now. **Aspects** [a relatively recent crew at the time this interview took place in 2007] came out with it, but they've got a bit of everyone's flow – and it's not a diss to them, they're still a good group.

**Krissy Kriss:** But **Aspects** come with Bristol from the off – no stateside.

**Kelz:** Hear me out! Every emcee gets inspired, but when I listen to their flow, because I've been around a lot of **Bristol** emcees I can hear their inspirations in their flow. Every emcee is a natural detective, and if you're a good detective you can tell if a man's teefin' the next man's flow, or chipping a bit off a next man's style. It's not a diss, but there's other emcees that was doing that thing before they was, who you can tell they got inspiration from.

**Krissy Kriss:** They approached it as a group, as an angle – like 'hear dis, we from **St. George Road, Kingswood** – rah'. And you're like, 'these white boy a rap?!'

**Kelz:** That's what we used to think. We used to think, 'The white man can spit, you know, blood?!' But at the end of the day they're keeping their bumpkin thing, so respect.

**Kant Control: Kelz** is right, because each year, as things progress, everyone's influences have progressed as things have gone along.

**Kelz:** There's cats in the background that was doing that whole country element on a next level [from early on]. You can tell my man's blatantly listened to **Turoe**, obviously listened to **Transcript Carriers.** There's people who kicked that country thing way before, and didn't get props for it at the time.

**Krissy Kriss** [quoting **Kelz** on **3 PM's** 1994 **'Better Late Than Never'**]: 'Some would say cider, we would say [broad **Westcountry** accent] coider'.


Flyer image: courtesy of Krissy Kriss.

Hip hop in the **UK** more generally seemed to make its great retreat in the early '90s, was that the case in **Bristol** too?

**Kelz:** 1990, the rave scene blew the fuck up! 1990 was an important year, because 1990 the rave scene just went bananas so a lot of people crossed over in that phase.

**Turoe:** Just one year before [everything was happening], and then the next year it was flat.

**Flynn** [who by the mid-1990s was a key player in drum 'n' bass as part of the **Full Cycle** crew]: After we got signed, house music started coming out. What it is, is we embrace music that we find interesting, and with a lot of energy and a lot of direction and freshness. It's not that we ditched hip hop, as such, but **Bristol's** like a forward-thinking place, and we're into now. So if there's something really fresh and new, we had to go to it. And it was the same thing with **Rob** and **Ray**, we just felt that house music and the rave scene was so important. We didn't even question it. It was like 'Let's go to these parties and check out these sounds.' It just seemed the way to go. It was just a big mishmash of sounds and it reflected who we were at the time.

**Turoe:** It was stagnant as far as hip hop was concerned. There was the '89 thing, then in '90 rave came in and a lot of people went off to that, and then after that to the drum 'n' bass thing. After 1990 everybody just stayed about and did what they did.

Was it a case of people just going around to their mates' house to do it, and there wouldn't be any nights to go to?

**Turoe:** That was exactly it. There might be one or two, if we did it, but basically it literally died on its feet and everybody went 'Eeuurggh.' That was it.

How did hip hop nights start happening again?

**Turoe: Kriss** went to **Amsterdam** and saw a night over there, and he knew it had gone quiet in **Bristol.** Being at the forefront, and still emceeing, he thought 'I'm gonna get everybody together and put a night on.'

**Krissy Kriss:** That's **British Hip Hop Ghetto Movement.**

**Kelz:** That was after **Amsterdam**, the Bboy convention in **Amsterdam.** Their hip hop scene, right, blood, was the whole culture.

**Turoe:** That was '94, '95. Everybody was involved. **Shade** would design the flyers and he'd print up T-shirts and hoodies and give them out. One way or another, we'd be all involved promoting it, just for us to go there. It wasn't massive. But **Kriss** got everybody down from other parts of the country. You'd see **Blak Twang** [for the] first time there, **Killa Instinct**, **First Down** – **Son Of Noise**, I think, maybe even played there. He knew all these people anyway, so it was really good for us. We'd just go and it would be like a **British** hip hop youth club. All the writers would go, all the breakers would come down. We were really into **British** hip hop then. We used to have an open mic, get pissed up and just battle everybody. That's what it was like.

**Kelz** [Points at **Krissy Kriss**]: That was the brains behind the operation, I'm telling you.

**Krissy Kriss: British Hip Hop Ghetto Movement?** That's all-a-we.

A version of this article originally appeared in Hip Hop Connection, September 2007.


Original artwork by SHADE, typo & digital treatment by SYNDICATE.

Flyer image: courtesy of Krissy Kriss.

IN-CONVERSATION

# DJ MILO

**...with James McNally**

I grew up in **Montpelier**, which is like **St Pauls** – **St Pauls / Montpelier**.

Can you describe it for me?

When I moved there, actually, it was quite a mixture of working class **Irish** and a growing **West Indian** community there, and then it predominantly became **West Indian** over time.

Did you grow up in a musical household?

There was music played. Music was a big part – my stepfather had a lot of soul, he was into that mainly, but his father brought over quite a lot of blue beat and ska records from **Jamaica**, so there was a lot of that that I used to play. I'm talking about when I was seven years old. My mother, she liked her music as well. She was more into a lot of folk and rock stuff, like **The Kinks**, **The Beatles**, **Carole King** and **Joan Baez**.

So there was quite a mix of sounds going on whilst you were growing up.

Yeah, correct.

Did music feel important to you at that age?

I don't know if it was any more important to me than anybody else, but I think my taste was a little different maybe – because I lived in a predominantly **Jamaican** community and all my friends were **Jamaican**, pretty much. The difference for me was, I went to school in an upper-middle class area in **Clifton** for my first school, and after that I went to **Cotham** [Grammar School], which was the natural step over from that. So, even though I was living in **St Pauls** and **Montpelier** – where most of my friends were going to, say, **St George, Monks Park** or **Bishopston** school, which were basically all working class with a lot of **Jamaican** kids in there – I had a different experience. I had friends in school and I'd go to their houses, listen to what they were listening to. So my ear was a little more broader, I guess.

What kind of things was that bringing in to your musical repertoire as a teenager?

As a teenager, it would be getting introduced to things like **Wizzard**, **Deep Purple** and **Pink Floyd**, **Led Zeppelin**, things like that – even though I didn't buy that type of music until much later due to lack of money. Then later on I had a good friend who I used to play football with, who lived in **Redland**. His name was **Duncan Murison**. He had a really good collection of the punk stuff that was starting to come out. So there was that too, and his older sister was into things like **Roxy Music** and **The Beach Boys**, things like that.

Was punk something you were deep into, or was it just another part of the mix, as it were?

Because I didn't have any money – I was mingling with kids that had money, but I didn't have money – I just really enjoyed what they were listening to. I couldn't really immerse myself into it financially, but what I did do was pick up bits and pieces. So I gradually had an eclectic collection of music, even though it was quite small at that time. But I think most of where I was gravitating towards at that stage was planted in me from the early stage – from my mother and from my stepfather, in those years. Maybe if all I heard was blue beat and reggae in my house from the age of six to ten, then my ear wouldn't have been so open. But because my initial foundation was quite broad, taking in this other stuff that my friends were listening to at school was quite easy for me. I could find familiarities – not in melodies, but in certain textures that you subconsciously grow towards.

You mean textures in music that are beyond genre? Like, you might be really into bass pressure, and you hear something similar in, I don't know, a **Billy Cobham** tune and one by **Lee Perry**. It's got a low end that you're attracted to.

Of course, yeah. But also there was the attitude in how the music was delivered say for example punk and reggae in their approach mentally. They didn't care if the mainstream got what they were doing.

What was it that you were attracted to in punk?

I think attitude had a lot to do with it, and because it was a DIY thing so to speak. It seemed like before that you were looking at glam rockers or whatever, and they had shiny suits and elaborate costumes and wild guitars. But you were under the understanding that the rock guys could actually play their instruments really well. You'd think 'wow, that's a world away.' But when you seen kids in

things that you saw being sold in **Oxfam** shops, and stuff like that, and that only had the very basics of playing an instrument mastered, everything was a lot closer to what you maybe were able to do yourself. It wasn't a stratosphere away. If you had a creative leaning and you had a dream to be a musician as a young working class kid – to be on stage, and just playing music – punk basically looked like that was within reach.

W-B Jam, Milo, G, and Tricky.
Photograph: courtesy of Milo Johnson.

Were there many other Black punks in **Bristol**?

Not that I could remember. Later on I remember a couple of guys that used to go... [*pauses*] You see, I never really called myself a punk. I just liked the music and I liked some items of the clothing,

but I didn't immerse myself in it. I didn't call myself a punk. I wasn't going around pogoing at gigs, but I did like some of the music. It really, really resonated with me.

Which particular groups appealed to you?

I think Wire was one – they really stuck to me throughout my life. Johnny Moped had a few tunes that I really loved, the **Buzzcocks**, **The Lurkers**, **Spizz**, **The Damned**. **Manicured Noise** are almost on the cusp of post-punk, but I really loved those guys. So it was stuff like that, and those were all things that **Dunc** played to me pretty much.

You told me before that you met **Nellee** [**Hooper**] at a post-punk gig. What about the other members of **The Wild Bunch**?

I met **Nellee** at the **Bauhaus** and **Magazine** gig at **Trinity Church** in **Bristol**. And I met [**Daddy**] **G** at the clothing store that I used to hang out in, **Paradise Garage** – I met **3D** in the same place, actually. **Claude** [**Willie Wee**] I met in school, because he went to the same school as me – **Cotham Grammar**. **Tricky** I knew before everybody, actually. I knew **Tricky** when he was about seven. When I was about fifteen, I used to go out with his cousin. At that point in time I was living in a place called **Hartcliffe**, which was a working class white area, and she was living over that way. **Tricky** used to come over from this home in a place called **Knowle West**, which was like the roughest part of **Bristol**.

What was the early genesis of **The Wild Bunch**? From what you said before, it didn't sound like it was all happening at once.

I'd met **G**, and I think I may have introduced him to **Nellee**. **G** used to have a house in **City Road** in **Bristol**, which is in the **St Pauls** area, and at weekends we used to go down to his house. **G** had a big collection of reggae – massive collection of reggae actually. I had what I had, which was a lot of funk and some punk, and some **Public Image** [**Limited**], and things like that, and **Nellee** had a lot of records as well. So we were buying records every weekend with our dole money and going down to **G's** house and just playing tunes as we were chatting about our week. It wasn't like a deejay set or anything like that. It was just friends and acquaintances hanging out on a weekend and socializing. It grew from being seven or eight people, and just got busier and busier as the weeks passed. At some point **G** said 'Why don't we just rent out the back of this pub I saw in town? It's just getting a bit crowded here.' So we rented out this place. They had a really basic set up for playing music, and we played there. It was a really organic thing – it wasn't like we wanted to be deejays, at least it didn't start that way for me.


Nellee at Nellee's crib, Clifton, Bristol, 1983.
Photograph: by Julian Monaghan, courtesy of Milo Johnson.

Was that the **Green Rooms**?

Well, I thought it was the **Green Rooms** initially. We did play in the **Green Rooms**, but that was probably later on. I forgot what this place was called – it was a pub... I'm not sure if you're familiar with **Bristol**?

I've spent a fair amount of time there.

Do you know the big square there, like off the centre? Well there's a square with grass and trees in there, a cobbled road with pubs down there. It was around the **Queens Square** area – a very small place, but it was good. People weren't dancing or anything. It was just an extension from sitting on somebody's couch in the front room, with people just standing around. People would maybe dance every now and then spontaneously, but it wasn't really about that. It was about having more space and playing music a bit louder.

What was the mix of music?

It was everything that I had mentioned – it was reggae, it was post-punk stuff like **A Certain Ratio**, **Gang of Four**, maybe some **Killing Joke** and things like that; some **Parliament**, **Fatback Band** or **Brass Construction** and other funk records that I'd collected, a bit of disco, and maybe a really small amount of the earliest hip hop that we'd got together at that point, because it was just coming through.

Was there any attempt at mixing or anything?

No. No. No. There wasn't any of that. [Pauses] I'm just thinking about something now, because I think we did this really random party up on the **Downs** [i.e. **Clifton Downs**] one night. We just grabbed a generator from somewhere, got somebody's hi-fi and one turntable, and just played this music on the **Downs** one weekend. It was crazy. We had about a hundred and fifty people up there by the end and the cops closed it down. We tried it again in the day time a few weeks later, in a little cove by the bridge due to people asking us when the next one was going to be. But the cops closed us down even earlier because of complaints by the residents I guess.

So, it was like your own free festival with one turntable?

Yeah, exactly. **Nellee** lived up there at that time, so it was easy to transport what records we had. I would say that had to be either '83 or '84. I'm leaning more towards '83, but it's a bit of a blur a lot of this. Everything was so condensed; I have trouble trying to fit everything in time-wise. It was really a rapid thing going on, even though I didn't know it at the time.

Would it just be an 'everyone's friends and everyone's friends' friends' thing?

Exactly. **G** had a lot of friends from the **Clifton** area, and **Nellee** had a lot of friends from that area – he's actually from **Barton Hill** originally, but he'd been hanging out with some people in that area, gig-wise. I don't know how he hooked up with them, but he'd been in [punk-funk group] **Pigbag** for a part of time, so he had that going on with that network of people. So basically it was friends of friends of friends from that core area. Then you'd get a few guys from the **St Pauls** area that we knew. It was predominantly that [**Clifton** scene], but with a sprinkling of people from other areas of **Bristol**.

So quite a Bohemian core in a way?

Yeah, I would say so, pretty much – if you want to call it that.

Was there a specific spark for the transition to hip hop?

It was just that more and more records were coming through. **G** was working in a record store called **Revolver Records**, so he was getting a lot of stuff, and I was working in **Kensington Market** in **London**. I was working for **Paradise Garage**, when they opened a stall there. I was commuting every day from **Bristol**. And a friend of mine, she gave me some tapes that her friend had got from **New York**, which were **Afrika Islam** tapes. Then we had things, like, [**Bristol** post-punk musician] **Mark Stewart**, who was a big help part in our movement forward. He was gigging and going to **New York**, and bringing some tapes back and sharing them with us. But me and **Nellee** had actually gone to the **Wild Style** premier in **London** – he blagged us in there. That really set us off big time on the culture of the hip hop thing.

Was seeing that what gave you the frame of 'this is how you do it'?

Oh yeah, for sure. No question about it. It blew our minds, like everybody else at that time.

What did it make you feel?

For me, it was coming from the same place as punk – that DIY thing, pretty much doing things for yourself, and making a vibe of your own from very little.

Did it consume everything quite quickly – as in, 'this is now my perspective on being a deejay'?

Well, it really did become a bigger part of our identity as a growing unit of deejays. Because it was predominantly what I explained before [in terms of the mix of styles] initially. It would go from having ten records one week, and then within three months we probably had 150 imported hip hop records. Beyond that, it just kept growing and growing. But we still kept a lot of the soul stuff, the disco stuff. The new wave faded out a little bit – even though I kept a lot of those records and was playing them for myself, and making tapes and stuff, when it came to playing out it was more the hip hop and the disco and funk.

In terms of your perspective on how you put a set together, did hip hop deejaying become your prism? Like, when you listen to a **Grandmaster Flash** tape, for instance, he uses these techniques as a means to weave songs from different genres together.

That's an interesting question... Personally speaking, I like things in certain places, so I didn't really mix things together that way. A lot of the earlier hip hop stuff was on disco beats – say, **Younger Generation** [**'We Rap More Mellow'**] on the [**Oneness of**] **Juju** thing [**'Every Way But Loose'**]. So you may get it there, I may run one into the other. But ordinarily if I played that song I wouldn't then play an R&B song [afterwards]. I may play a **James Brown** thing, something like that. But we all kind of had our different sets. **Nellee** was more in the old funk and the rare groove type thing, breaks, and hip hop. And **G** played a lot of the R&B – 80s R&B – and a little bit of disco and hip hop. I played pretty much everything.

You said that you didn't consider yourself a punk. Did you consider yourself hip hop?

Not really. The same thing applies with the punk thing. I had a lot of clothes from that era. I think I was more heavily involved with that hip hop scene than I was with anything else. But I love all music, so it's very difficult for me to say 'I'm that' – because I think people back then were quite closed minded. You couldn't be one and be the other. It just goes against my nature to be so rigid in that. But I did like a lot of the clothes. In terms of what I looked like... I think what was good about, or what was different about us, was that we did fuse a lot of styles together, even in how you dress.

Can you describe how you did that with clothes?

OK. I might have a pair of really good sneakers from somewhere, but, for example, me and **Nellee** might wear ripped jeans – extremely ripped jeans. Or I'd still wear a motorcycle jacket, or a [**Kensington Market** rockabilly revival outfitter] **Johnson's** t-shirt, and infuse it with something that was hip hop, like street buckles and gold teeth that I got from **Times Square**, baseball hats, and things like that. It was just a mish-mash of things.

If you look at the timeline of what you were doing in terms of the hip hop influence, the **Wild Style** premier in **London** was around September 1983. By late summer 1984, **Tim Westwood's** already writing about you in his **Blues & Soul** column and you're taking part in that **GLC** jam at **Jubilee Gardens**. That's really fast.

The **Jubilee Gardens** jam, is that the big outdoor thing? That was one of the darkest moments in our career right there – the reason being, we had a tonne of good records that nobody had, and they got nicked. All our best hip hop records got nicked there. We got up there, we had the records in a flight case, and we went to the security place and said 'are the records gonna be safe here?' There was like a barrier where nobody could come in. And they said 'Yeah,

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the records are gonna be safe.' But, if you remember, there was a bit of a riot there, and things went mental. We'd been gone for like ten, fifteen minutes, and all hell broke loose. We ran back there and our records, we couldn't find them. I'll tell you what, I have never seen the crew as solemn as that. It was rough.

What kind of records would you have lost?

It was quite a heavy collection of the **Enjoy** stuff, which not a lot of people had. Because **G** worked in **Revolver**, he was getting stuff imported that wouldn't ordinarily get imported. There was no real market for it at that time – just a few little young kids really. So we had a lot of that music, and a lot of good breaks. It really hurt because we dug around for our things quite a lot. We were devastated, we were absolutely devastated. That ride back from **London** to **Bristol** was in total silence from what I remember. Nobody really said a word, 'cause that's your identity there. That was our foundation. So when we were coming up to **London**, for us coming from **Bristol**, we really had to represent in a way that we weren't gonna get laughed at as some country bumpkins...

There's definitely a territorial strand in London hip hop of that era. Was that a real worry for you generally, that they'd be looking at you as outsiders and bumpkins?

Not really. I think what maybe helped us was that we were always around people who liked us who were already on a higher level exposure wise – like **Mark** [**Stewart**] of the **Pop Group**, because he was really behind us. He was the one who organised for us to battle in the **Language Lab** [at the **Titanic** in **Berkeley Square**]. I can't remember what year that was, but that was maybe our first **London** gig. I think we had **Newtrament** on our side, they had **Dizzie Heights** and somebody else [**Sir Jules** aka **Danny John Jules**]. But it

was good seeing a crew in **London** who was going in the same direction as us. They were into it as heavy as we were from what I could tell, but from what I heard later there guys from the band **Funkopolitan** heading that opposing crew. I believe they had connections to NY and getting records and tapes. That was the first time we met **Newtra**, and we were friends after that. We invited him down to Bristol a bunch of times, and we did a big thing that got busted at an underpass in London near **Ladbroke Grove**, I think.

Is that the party where there's video footage online? I think it was a bus garage.

That sounds about right. It was kind of round, the place, but there was a couple of rooms. There was a few **London** crews in there and us. I forgot what they were called, but I'll tell you what they did that kinda blew our heads off: they were in the small room, and all of a sudden we could hear this **Wild Style** music in there – the one that they were all rapping over [in the film]. And we thought, 'How the fuck did they get that?' What they'd done is they taped it off of the video apparently, and did an acetate off it. So it was a little snippet. It wasn't the whole song, it was just a parts of the song they could salvage from video tapes that didn't have vocals on. But it was good enough for somebody to rap over.

That's interesting, because when you talk to **London** contemporaries of yours, they almost always bring up the fact that you had the **Wild Style** breakbeats.

Yes, we did. **Nellee** went to **New York**. We did a thing with **Peso** from the **Fearless Four**, and he became a good friend of ours. **Nellee** had gone to **New York** to visit him, and he managed to get a half inch of the reel of the soundtrack [i.e. the instrumentals used

for the party scenes] from somebody, and we pressed up eight tracks off of it and made twenty copies. That right there, that was the holy grail of all breaks from the day the movie was released.

That wasn't available in any form until about 1990, apart from the copies that the deejays in the film had.


The Wild Style instrumentals pressed up by The Wild Bunch.
Photograph: courtesy of Milo Johnson.

In no form at all, right. **Nellee** was always quite liberal with the facts. He used to drive us nuts sometimes as a crew, because it was like 'Oh, we're gonna do this gig here,' and it wouldn't happen. So when he came back from **New York** and we were at **G's** house, and he walks in from his **New York** trip and said 'Guess what – I've got the **Wild Style** breaks on a half inch,' I just said 'fuck off – there's no fucking way!' Do you know what I mean? 'I have, we're gonna press it up tomorrow.' When we got that pressed up, I'll tell you what, man – my heart just pounded! That was heavy. That was really, really heavy. And we kept it to ourselves, basically. I gave two copies to **Cash Money** when I was in **Japan**, because he was my favourite deejay, but I don't think we gave it to anybody else.

What was the response when you first played it?

[Laughs] We first played that in a place in **London**. Most the **London** crews that we knew were there – all the deejays like **Cutmaster Swift** and **Pogo**, and all that lot. It's me and **Nellee** doing a gig, because we'd moved to **London** at that point. I put the record on and they just stormed the turntables. 'Let me play that!' 'Let me get on that!' 'Let me have a go!' 'Fuckin' hell! Where did you get that?' It was bedlam. Absolute bedlam, because everybody knew that track right there. Everybody loved it and everybody wanted it. And we just said 'yeah, get on there.'

It was a really good time, I wish it was recorded. That would've been later on, though. In that earlier period, we played **The Wag Club** competition with **Westwood** [billed 'the London Rap Championship Trophy' on January 20th 1985]. I always say that he dicked us out of winning that competition. They based it on how loud the cheer was for whatever crew had just performed, and ours was louder by far. But everybody represented themselves really well, so I can laugh at it now.

**The Dug Out** has become this mythic place in the development of the so-called **Bristol Sound**. How important was it from your perspective?

**The Dug Out**, from a social stand point it was very, very important – there was no place like it. It was quite a rough place in terms of its appearance. It wasn't very clean. It had a really sticky carpet when you walked down the stairs into it. But the beauty of it was the collection of people that went there, because they were from all walks of life – predominantly from the **Clifton**, **Redland**, **Cotham** area, punks and post-punk bands, but the **BRI** [**Bristol Royal Infirmary**] was just down the road, so you had nurses and some doctors coming in, then you had a few people from **St Pauls** who would come up, and people from the working class areas of **Bristol** – the white working class areas. And it was just a really, really good club that had an upstairs video room where you could just chill out and watch music videos, and a good eclectic array of deejays – from funk to rock. It was just a fantastic place. But in terms of us, they asked us to play in there on a Thursday, and I guess it helped us to hone our skills by playing more regular. They didn't pay us anything really, but it got us buy a few records and test out records and routines.

How long were you doing it for?

I don't know if it was a year or two years, but it was quite a while.

Was it simultaneous to all the warehouse parties and so on?

Exactly. [**The Dug Out**] was the staple that give us a little bit of money to buy records each week, and then we did the things on the side after that. Briefly we had three residencies going on at the

same time. One was a weekday thing that was good on the first night, but just waned – that was in **London** on a Tuesday I think, which is a really bad day to have a residency anywhere. Then we had **The Dug Out** on the Thursday. So we had Tuesday, Thursday, and then we played at **Tropics** [in **Bristol**] on a Friday.

How did you decide to start throwing warehouse parties?

Well, this is where my memory is going to fail me. Let's say, for example, the **Redhouse** – I don't know if that was the first large space party we did, but it was definitely the first warehouse party in **Bristol**, I'm sure. I went down to **G's** camp one day, and **G** said 'Hey Jack, I've found this place to do a party down on **Portland Square** [in **St Pauls**],' and he took me round there. It was an absolute mess, but I saw the potential in terms of size and shape. It was an abandoned warehouse, basically – not a massive one, but quite a big space. I said, 'Flipping hell, **G**, that's gonna take a lot of cleaning to do.' And I say , 'how are you gonna get this together?' He was like, 'We can do this. We can get a lot of guys round and clean it up,' and so we did. **G** was the one who was quite progressive in pushing that. We really wanted to make a little bit of money as well. We weren't trying to be millionaires or anything, but we wanted to get more records, and the only way to do that was to do bigger gigs. So that was it. He knew somebody who had a PA system and we rented that.

How many people would there have been at that jam?

We did that with **Newtrament**, I think, **Redhouse**, and it was absolutely rammed. I would say there had to be at least 800 people in there. I hate to say it, but there's a picture where there was no room on the floor, and you could see people just hanging off the speakers – I mean, it was a big fucking system. Whatever that place

filled, it was over capacity. I remember the cops came. It was about 12 o'clock, something like that. I'll never forget it. I ran from the turntables and seen where the entrance was, where **Claude's** brother was doing the door. And I saw this cop come up – he was the top cop type of thing, because he had that sergeant thing going on. He came in, he just got inside the doorway and he seen how many people were in there. He just shook his head and just pointed back down the stairs to get out. He must have thought 'fuck it. Let's get out of here.' So they just left us to it. But those cops basically went to every hire company within a 50-mile radius and said 'if you rent to **The Wild Bunch**, we're gonna confiscate your equipment.' And so it was very difficult after that [to get a PA], except for from this one hippie guy who had a really heavy system. We used to give him a load of weed plus the fee [to use his system for] the **St Pauls** carnival.

That reminds me of a lyric that **3D** has in **'Tearin Down The Avenue'** where he talks about throwing parties on the frontline that don't get bust.

That's right! I remember that lyric, yeah.

**Krissy Kriss** said **St Pauls** was important, because the area's reputation, and the circumstances around the 1980 riot, meant the police were reticent about busting parties there.

That was exactly what it was. We'd played carnival, either '83 or '84, for the first time on **Campbell Street**. We set up at 10 o'clock in the morning by **G's** house – because he lived on the corner there, so we had the power from his house for the system. And we never left there until 6am the next morning. That was all because that place was rammed the whole time, and the cops just wouldn't mess with anybody at that point in that area at the time.

So it's one of those things where a place's reputation can be useful.

Right. For me, that place, **St Pauls**, was never a bad place. Obviously, there would be some crime or whatever, but I'm from there – none of the other guys are from there originally – so I felt at home, and it was always good. It was that community of **St Pauls** that enabled us to grow how we grew. It was absolutely key to our growth, because we could express ourselves.

Do you think you were reinventing a tradition that had been in **St Pauls** for previous generations in the form of places like the **Bamboo Club** and all the different shebeens?

Without a question of a doubt. That's the foundation right there. It was just the fact that I had a quite eclectic taste in music. So we're playing basically reggae style sound system, but we're playing funk, hip hop, a bit of disco and then later house. It was all coming through the same vehicle that our elders of **St. Paul's** like **Trojan** sound system and **Ajax Blues** used to deliver the music we were into.

Thinking of what those parties actually sound like, there's a great **Wild Bunch** party tape with blends of **Dennis Edwards' 'Don't Look Any Further'** and **LL Cool J's 'I Need A Beat'**, **Chic's '(Funny) Bone'** and **Dimples D**. Is it you doing both of those blends?

Yes. The blends – that was my thing.

How did you develop that?

Initially, I think what subconsciously fuelled me was when reggae records used to do a toasting version of a song on a twelve inch – like **Dennis Brown** and **Nigger Kojak** on **'Ain't That Loving You'** – that type of aesthetic. I really like that. I really liked that you had this reggae music which is totally a **Jamaican** thing and has a heavy texture to it, and then somebody's singing a mellow song on top of it. I loved that idea. And that's also really what was behind me doing [**The Wild Bunch** tune] **'The Look of Love'**, which was a hip hop version of an R&B song, or a pop classic.

So it's a similar clash of textures when you hear **Dennis Edwards** singing over a really heavy **Def Jam** beat?

**'I Need A Beat'**. Yeah. I did a bunch of blends. A lot of them I didn't play out, but I had loads of them. I really enjoyed doing that.

Were you hearing anyone else doing them at the time?

I think I heard a **Mastermind** tape – a really good **Mastermind** tape – where they used two hip hop records. They used [**Special Request**] **'Salsa Smurf'** and [**Run-D.M.C.**] **'Sucker MCs'**, I believe. So it wasn't the same thing. It wasn't the aesthetic of the fusion of two completely different styles that would never match normally.

There's an audible cheer on the tape when the crowd hear the bassline from **Dennis Edwards** come in. You can almost feel the ecstasy just from the recording.

Yeah. But that could be down to them knowing the **Dennis Edwards** song, because that record was a classic in our area at that time. It could've been down to that – or it could've just been down to the familiarity with the bassline coming in. 'Yeah this is coming'. But, yeah, I changed it up a little bit with the **'I Need A Beat'** in there.

How did you come to do **'The Look Of Love'**?

**Nellee** said we should move to **London**. We were both on the dole at the time, doing what we were doing, but not making any money to speak of. I just thought 'fuck it, why not?' So we moved to **London**, and his intention was to get a record deal. That's the one thing about **Nellee** – without him, nothing else really would have happened. **G** was the one that put us together as a crew. He basically headhunted people as a unit – that was me, **Nellee** and himself. So he made that foundation. But **Nellee**, he was the drive, getting us into the **Def Jam** party when they did the first **Def Jam** party in **London**. He would blag us into a load of shit, like the **Wild Style** party. And he was the drive in terms of pushing us forward. So he made a couple of connections and we got this deal with **Island**, **4th & Broadway**.

I think we were the first UK hip hop act signed to a major company. And it was really tough because basically what the crew wanted to do was to make heavy hip hop tunes – which we did – and my idea was to do this **'Look of Love'** track, which would use a hip hop beat, but using a singer on there. That didn't go down too well initially with the crew, but they did relent to the idea in the end once they heard the rough idea. I was really happy with it, and the actual 12' was pretty well received within the hip hop community. But, with Island, it was kind of new ground for them, and they didn't know how to promote it. They wanted to turn me into a singer – and I wasn't having that. So it just fell through in the end. We pressed two records.

The first one [**'Tearin Down The Avenue'** b/w **'The Look of Love'**], was that promo only?

I think so. There was one with the picture sleeve, with all of us on the cover. That's **'Friends and Countrymen'**, which got us to do the mix for **Eric B & Rakim** [**'Move The Crowd'**]. But before that we made two electro dubplates. They were raw, but when we played them in **Bristol** they went down really well. One was called **'Fuckin Me Up'.**


'Tearin Down the Avenue', The Wild Bunch, 4th & Broadway, 1987.
Photograph: courtesy of James McNally.

That had little snippets of **The Last Poets** in there and me trying to rap. They're here in the studio somewhere, so at some point we'll probably get those put out in some format. But they were good. I was really happy with those electro tunes, if I ignore my ridiculous and cringeworthy attempt at rapping – that was about 1983 we made those.

**'The Look of Love'** rightly gets credit for its legacy in the music that later came out of **Bristol**. But I'd argue it's also quite an important moment in the development of hip hop-soul more generally.

Around '87 or maybe even '88, I was doing a residency at a club in **Japan**, and I was staying there for quite a lengthy amount of time. We had to do this big event, and I said 'well, let me get an emcee to play with,' and I asked **3D** to come over to emcee for me. **Nellee** had already done the demo for **Soul II Soul** and **Delge** [**3D**] had a copy that he brought to **Japan**, right. Now, originally, with **'The Look of Love'**, I wanted to use a break we used to cut up at our gigs routinely. It was such a funky break and one of those like **'Outside Love'** by **Brethren** – my favourite breakbeat of all time – where to me you didn't really need a bassline because the kicks filled up the space. That was **Graham Central Station**, **'The Jam'** – which is the **'Pickin' Boogers'** beat. But **Island** didn't want to use a sample because of legal things, if my memory serves me right, and we had to re-program the break using an **808** booming kick that was the **Def Jam** staple sound at the time. That's what was used on the track. Now, after that **Nellee** is producing with **Soul II Soul** and they are using [**'The Jam'**] for **'Keep On Moving'** and for **'Back to Life'** – the same break. That was the sequence of events. So when I heard the demo, I said to **D**, 'It's fuckin' wicked, man, but that's the **'Look of Love'** beat there. Listen to it!'

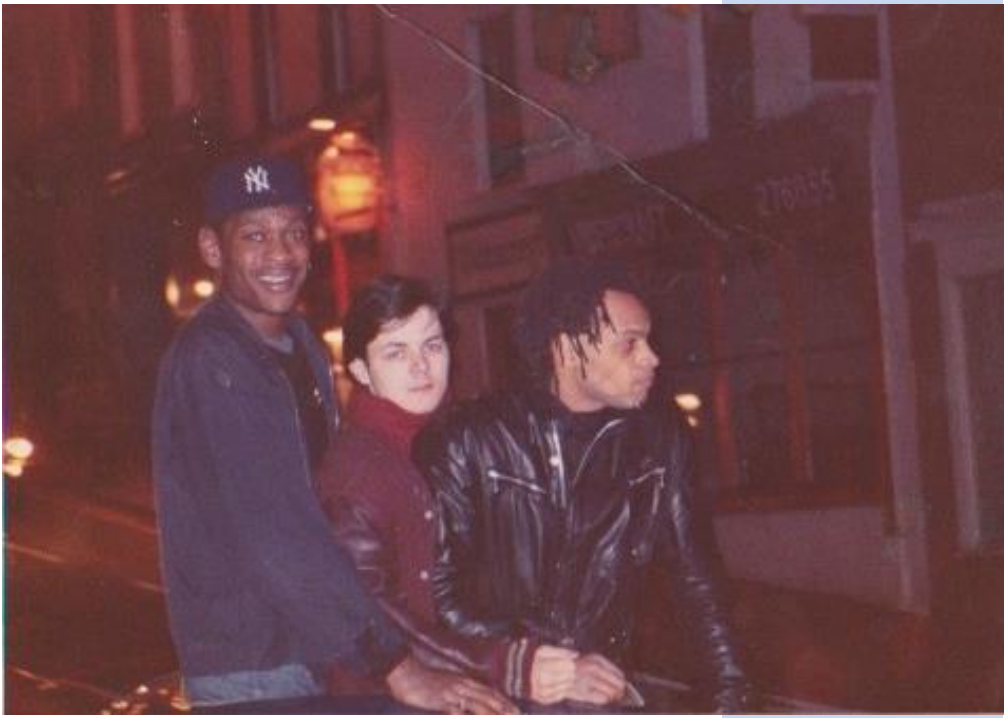
So all that passed, and then about three years ago, I'm in **Bali** at a party with a friend. My friend had a friend who worked at **Elektra** [in the 1990s], **Dante Ross** who is at this party, and he came over

and said 'Hey man, my friend explained to me your background.' And he said '**Soul II Soul** was what inspired **Mary J Blige**' – and, of course, **Mary J Blige** was what started off the hip hop soul thing. I believe he was hip hop A&R at **Elektra** and somehow had a connection to how that went down [note: **Ross'** acts **Grand Puba**, **Busta Rhymes** and **CL Smooth** were all prominent early collaborators with **Blige**]. To cut a long story short, through that beat, **Soul II Soul** sparked the hip hop/R&B explosion. It really blew my mind when **Dante** told me that because I had never put it together, even though at that time I was in the middle of that scene buying records and clothing for a store in **Japan**.

Chica, Tosh and Milo, Milo's Crib, 1987.
Photograph: courtesy of Milo Johnson.

I had moved to **New York** in '89, and soon after **Soul II Soul** was everywhere – absolutely huge. They were booming out of every car that summer regardless of demographic, but more importantly, as

a person growing up in the UK and knowing those guys personally, they were highly respected in the Black community. But I didn't put it together with everything that happened with **Mary J Blige**. It's something that went over my head completely, but it's an amazing lesson how linked things can be.



Gee, Nellee, and Milo (Kosta's VW).
Photograph: courtesy of Milo Johnson.

The connections people don't usually get to hear about are kind of fascinating – in a similar way there are the links that both you and **Soul II Soul** had in **Japan**. For instance, you've got **Gota** [**Yashiki** of **Tokyo** proto-hip hop act **Melon**] going to work with **Nellee** and **Soul II Soul**, and at the same time **Kan** [**Takagi** of **Major Force**] told me **Major Force** were sampling from tapes that they got from **Soul**

**II Soul**. There were so many interconnected events that created these new possibilities.

That's right. And **Gota**, you can't downplay his input in the **Soul II Soul** thing actually happening. From what I was told by someone who witnessed the creative side of that project, he pieced it together – because I don't think any of those guys knew how to work equipment at the time. Obviously they were feeding him the ideas, as we all did at some point in our growth as producers, but only **Gota** knew how to work all that stuff. Without him, who knows what would have happened? And, for me, [**Masayuki**] **Kudo** [of **Melon** and **Major Force**], he's the one who actually taught me how to produce for myself. He set me off in terms of getting programmes and equipment that he thought would be the easiest way to go about making beats, as I informed him that I really do not have the mentality to sit reading a manual for hours [laughs].

I don't think people in the UK realise how advanced that network of people in **Tokyo** actually were. When **Melon** started doing their turntable-based stuff in 1987, when you listen to the promos they put out then, I'd argue they're up there with the best **New York** production of that moment.

Without a question – especially the early **Major Force** stuff. That was really fucking good. When I first went to **Japan** in '83 or '84, the **Wild Style** tour had already been to **Japan** and it hadn't reached the **UK** yet. Plus in the record stores over there, they had absolutely untold shit. We'd go to **Groove Records** [in **London**], and **Groove** would have, maybe four or five **Enjoy** records. But in **Japan**, this shop **Winners** had the entire catalogue of every hip hop record label. It was open 24 hours a day. I went there at 2 o'clock in the morning, and it was just rammed with records. The first thing that I looked for – which at that time was the holy grail for me; a tune that **Newtrament** had, **'Smurf Across the Surf'** by **The Micronawts** –

they had like ten copies and I think I bought them all. I called **Nellee** up straight away, and I said '**Nellee**, you ain't gonna believe this. They got **'Smurf Across the Surf'** in here in **Japan**, and they've got every **Enjoy** record that was ever put out.' They had every **Sugar Hill** record, and a load of other smaller hip hop labels. It just blew my head off.

How did going to **Japan** come about in the first place?

I was at the camp, where we kept all our records at that point – **G's** camp. I think I was practising, and **Neneh Cherry** called looking for me, and she said 'Do you fancy coming to **Japan** next week?' **Japan** was the other side of the world! I knew absolutely nothing about it at all. The following Tuesday I was in **Japan**.


G and Nellee, Narita Airport, Tokyo, 1985.
Photograph: courtesy of Milo Johnson.

Who did you meet on that first trip?

It was fashion week – that's what it was for – and so they have a load of parties in the evening after the fashion shows. One of the first nights, I went to this party in **Akasaka**. The first thing I hear is **Spoonie Gee** getting played. I looked to where the deejays were, and there was this posse of guys. They had this long black hair, and they had some **Vivienne Westwood** hats, leather **Adidas** tracksuits, shelltoes. I was like, 'fuckin' hell, this is absolutely nuts. They look absolutely killer, these guys.' And I just rushed up there in a frenzy like a little kid totally over excited and almost knocked the turntables over. The guy I met first was **Hirsoshi** [**Fujiwara**], and we remained friends ever since. Meeting **Kudo** and **Toshi** [**Toshio Nakanishi** aka **Tycoon To$h**], **Chica** [**Nakanishi**] and **Kan** [**Takagi**] was just natural thing after that due to their links with each other.

Was that a big influence on you personally?

They probably were the biggest influence, because you have to understand, as far as I was concerned at that time, you didn't know what you were gonna be doing [in life]. I loved music, I loved playing music. But you go there, and you see this, and you see these other people in their world who are loving it the same way, and it just opened your horizons. It's not that I wanted to live there, or anything like that, it's just that it gives you a different scope and helped me break out of the bubble I existed in in **Bristol** or the **UK** – feeling, like most people at the time, that the **UK** was the second home to hip hop, when in fact **Japan** were ahead of us in so many ways. In hindsight, I believe what really had the biggest impact on me in regards to **Japan** is the way they go about things: attention to detail, honour, integrity, the hunger to learn, and not pigeonholing oneself as being a punk or a Bboy.

What led to the records you did with **Major Force**?

When I went there the first time, I did an event for a guy called **Moichi Kuwahara**. So when I went back with Nellee, I went to see **Moichi** and I told him I wanted to try and get a tour together for our crew in **Japan**. He was really supportive and had a lot of really good connections – he seemed like a bit of a 'main man' in introducing current things happening in **New York** and **London** to **Japan**. So we got a tour together, and we kept in touch. At some point, **Moichi** had this idea to do a video magazine called **Club King**, and because me and **Nellee** were living in **London** at the time, we collected loads of material. We filmed club life, fashion and music that was happening in **London**, and sent it back to **Moichi** to present it as **TV Video Magazine**. He was like the godfather of that scene – of introducing new fashion things to the **Japanese** public, so he knew all the guys.

**Toshi** would've been in like the next tier down, because he's a little bit younger. **Toshi** and [his then wife] **Chica**, they already were going to **New York** linking with **Warhol** and **Basquiat** and that scene. When they were punks [in the group **Plastics**], basically, they were going there and picking up a lot of the new stuff that was coming out in the hip hop scene. That was probably four years before it touched down in the UK, I would say. So they were really ahead of the street thing that was going on in **New York** and in **London**. That's really where I got my introduction to the **Major Force** lot, even though I'd known **Hiroshi** previously in '85, I think. So the **Major Force** thing developed afterwards. It was **Toshi**, **Hiroshi**, **Kan**, **Kudo** and **Dubmaster X**, and then a few other people would join as artists later – **Scha Dara Parr**, **The Orchids** and **ECD** and **Chappie** and a few other people. My involvement really developed from my connection with **Hiroshi**. He said he wanted me to be a part of it for this record [**'Thumpin'/'Return Of The Original Artform'**]. **The Artform** being our kind of homage to the **Double Dee & Steinski** records that were significant at the time, but we put a more of a disco edge to it.

Did you do tunes that didn't come out?

I think everything I did was put out – it was the **'Original Artform'**, a few remixes for **Takagi Kan** and a track maybe on his album. Plus, when I was over there I was putting together my stuff for myself. **Kudo** was showing me how to use the equipment, and I made my own tracks. So I had a reel – 2-inch reel – that I brought back to the UK.

Was that the early house stuff you were doing [as **Nature Boy**]?

No, it was hip hop.

Were you rapping as well?

Yeah. And you've got to understand, this was for myself. I didn't know what I was gonna do with it. I just made some music for myself that I wanted to do, and I had beats and wrote some lyrics. Rough ideas. It was on a 2-inch reel and I brought it back and dropped it off at my sister's where my belongings were at that time. I don't know what happened to it.

You rapped on **'Friends and Countrymen'** as well, didn't you?

Yes, I did, and I rapped on that not very well. I rapped on that electro dub plate we did in '83 too – now that is cringe-worthy for me to listen to today lyrically. But I guess I was just doing what guys in the US was doing in terms of themes. I can laugh at it somewhat now. It was only **G**, **Nellee** and myself in the crew at that time, but I was

glad when **Delge** took over the lyric duties about a year or so later, I'll tell you that.

Did you ever rap live with **The Wild Bunch**, or was that something you only did in the studio?


'Friends and Countrymen', The Wild Bunch, 4th & Broadway, 1988. Photograph: courtesy of Adam de Paor-Evans.

We did a couple of little routines at some parties that we did. From a personal standpoint, it's horrible, to be honest with you. I hate the sound of my voice anyway, but listening to some of this stuff – it's very, very hard for me to listen to. But it is what it is. I will say the demo material I did in **Japan** on that reel was not that bad. I found

a cassette tape of it last month by chance going through hundreds of old tapes. Pretty sobering also, because it was pretty political.

Do you feel the same discomfort listening to yourself DJ back in the day?

Sometimes. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not so good, and sometimes it's terrible [laughs]. But the one thing I take from it is I always enjoy the records that I was playing. Those records I was playing then, I'd play today.

One thing I haven't asked you is how the connection with **Soul II Soul** initially came about?

Somebody asked us to play a gig in north **London** – I think it was in **Seven Sisters**. Really fucking rough area, big party. That's where we first met **Soul II Soul** and we became friends.

Did you play with **Soul II Soul** at **The Africa Centre**?

Me and **Nellee** played down there once, I believe. It was absolutely horrendous. It was the worst gig. I said to **Jazzie**, 'I really want to redeem myself for that gig' – what it was is the acoustics in there and the fact that there was no monitors, so there was a delay. I couldn't beat-match in there. **Nellee** pulled it off okay I think, because he wasn't doing what I was doing technically, and he was much sharper about that type of stuff anyway. It just threw me right off. Selection was great, but ruined by the inability to find the groove.

Because everything's bouncing around?

Yes, exactly. It was horrific, basically. I played with them a couple of times in **London**, at carnival though and that was really good. That was a top crew right there for me. They had what we wanted in terms of sound system at that time.

Was there a difference between what you played in **London** and what you played in **Bristol**?

Not for the most part. I think maybe we played a little bit more hip hop, especially if the time was condensed. Sometimes things had to be sacrificed in a set. But it was mainly hip hop and R&B. We probably didn't play much disco [in **London**], but **3D** would be rapping live – and for me he was the best lyricist in the UK at that time. There was a lot of guys that had swag and flair, and really good delivery like **Noise**, **Mell 'O'** and the **London Posse** guys. I ranked them – and I always liked the dude that was with **Newtrament** a lot, **Fresh Ski**. He had a wicked voice. But **Delge's** lyrical content was second to no-one I had heard at that time, he just needed a little confidence in **London**.

Would you say there were **London** crews playing in the same style you did?

I think the closest maybe was **Soul II Soul** – because they were playing hip hop, they were playing R&B, but they had a really incredible collection of rare groove shit that they were playing. It was just phenomenal, so they leaned heavier that way. And **Newtrament**, he was playing hip hop. He had the best hip hop collection in the UK as far as I knew. He had all the stuff that [**Afrika**]

**Islam** was playing on the tapes. I think he said he his dad was **American**, and he'd send him whatever he needed.

Were you all putting each other up on tunes, or was it quite secretive?

Maybe the odd tune. We wouldn't hide anything, but there's kind of a respect – people had their identity and their tunes that are theirs, and you don't jump on somebody else's tune. If they're rocking that tune first and it's a house-rocker, to you that's their tune.

On **Wild Bunch** tapes from '86, you can start to hear house music coming through – what did that bring to the equation?

Well, for me it was like an extension of disco. It was obviously a newer sound. It had a different texture because it was using drum machines, and some of it was really quite dark as well – especially some of the stuff on **Trax**. But that was the same thing again – it was DIY. House music was DIY. You're making disco on your own stuff – on an **808** or a **909** in your crib – and it sounds fucking wicked.

Could you tell it was going somewhere, and that you wanted to pursue it?

For me, when we got our first tune you think it's a one off– it was maybe **'Funkin with the Drums'** by **Farley** [**Funkin Keith**] around 1985, something like that – it just had that **African** feel to it, but it was electronic as well, and it was raw. You can hear that hissin' and stuff. It was just like 'yeah, man!' But it was when you hear the next tune, that's when you're like 'Yeah, this shit is heavy.' And it was obvious it wasn't a fad.

# KRISSY KRISS

**...with James McNally**

What was growing up like?

As a Black kid growing up in **Southmead**, them days, you know? It's a weird one. I mean, now, being a grown man, through my eyes there's two stages in my life of growing up in **Southmead.** First was **Fonthill Road**, in the old estate, which is where we lived initially with me as a young kid, pre-primary school, up 'til the end of primary school. At weekends and in the summer it would be bottle of squash, jam sandwiches, off to the fields, scrumping, jumping streams, picking berries, stuff like that, and you'd be out all day 'til supper. After school we'd mainly stay in the street playing 'kerbs' or 'Please Mr Crocodile', 'cause only a couple of people owned cars so it was kinda safe, plus everybody knew everybody. Secondly, between the summer of leaving primary school and going to secondary school, we moved to the new estate, to a bigger house just below Twenty Acres. There, my spare time evolved to going to the local youth clubs – **Brentry Lodge** and **Southmead Y.C.** – but on lazy days me and the man dem could easily walk from my house to **Rookie's** in **Brentry** to where the mall is now on **Cribbs**

**Causeway.** Pure open fields which lead to **Little Stoke** and **Patchway**.

It sounds almost semi-rural.

Well, it was rural, really. It was a little rank of shops on **Southmead Road**, and that was it. We're talking candles because of the power cuts. You had two pence for the phone box – no one had a phone! Black and white **Rediffusion TV** – you'd have a little machine, like those bubble-gum things where you turn it and the coin drops, you'd have one of those boxes on the side of the TV. You'd put fifty pence in and then you could watch TV and an alphabet dial on the window sill to change the channel. But at primary school there was a mixture of kids there, and my friends there [were] white and black. The real change was going into secondary school. So I'm eleven, my mum says 'Right, you're going to **St Mary Redcliffe**.' My mum's a devout **Christian**, we were all brought up in the church, I was in the choir, so my mum wanted to send me to that church school. I wasn't really happy about that at the time, because I wanted to go to **Henbury** with my brother **Michael.** That's when I started to see the [racial] differences. That school then was about 1,000 [pupils], and there was probably twelve Black kiddies in the whole school, maybe a few more. There was about four in my year, and then respectively over the five years, 20 max – max! – out of a thousand.

What was that ratio like compared to your primary school?

I wouldn't be surprised if it was about the same. But I think when you're little, what was more apparent was the have and the have-not, you know.

So it was at secondary school that you became aware of race?

More so, yeah. As twelve, 13, going to the **Southmead Youth Club**, it was definitely very blatant then. The race or racism was coming strong. We'd have a game of football; it would be Blacks against whites. And it was just known... we knew he didn't like us, and we didn't like him, and we keep away from him... But racism, the N word and all that sort of thing, that flew, and we'd have our own dubs back as well, and a lot of people who dealt that shit couldn't really handle when it was sent back to them. There would be fights and stuff, and it got pretty brutal at some times. But at the same time, within the gaff, if I recall, when other areas came down – and that used to happen a lot as well – the same guys you're fightin' with earlier would be on your side when it was time to defend your own shit...

What kind of year would this be?

'77, '78.

In a historical sense, that was square on the resurgence of the National Front and organised racism. Was there evidence of that –

Yeah! You had skinheads, all that sort of stuff. The KKK, I remember that being brought up a few times. But I got chased many a time – white vans, tinted windows, stuff like that. I knew not to walk back certain ways. Always [walk] in couples, or your crew. You knew what road not to go down, what pub not to go near. You soon learned. Your spider senses attuned a lot earlier in life. You saw looks, you saw things and you just knew. You'd go into a disco, and you're checking a girl from a different area: [girl's voice] 'oh let's go to the school disco'. [You'd say] 'the guys over there won't like it.' She'll be, 'oh it'll be alright'. But you know it ain't gonna be alright. It's time to get outta there. 'Cause, a group of guys, strength in

numbers, all it takes is a kick in the head – I mean, we've seen it: you're dead.

So was that **Bristol**-wide, that atmosphere?

Obviously, I can't talk for everywhere. I could say it wouldn't be happening down in [Bristol's historic centre of Black life] **St Pauls**, because you'd get beat down, simple as that. **Easton** too, **Totterdown** – you had mans up there you couldn't ramp with... you had mans in **Southmead** you couldn't ramp with. But [late at night] if a white guy wanted to trouble you, you either had to run, or, don't get me wrong, if you had the same amount of people we'd give it back. But more often than not, it would be grown men outside the pub giving you that distasteful look, ready to call you 'black bastard' and give chase. It happened several times with me coming home from school in my school uniform!

How old were you when you started to travel around to other parts of **Bristol**?

Early teens. My brother **George** – he's four years older than me. **George** was into his music, and I just followed that – his music was wicked. He introduced me to funk and jazz and soul, going to all-dayers and stuff like that. It would be clubs like **Arnos Court** – though I didn't get to go! – **Reeves,** and **Freeze, Romeo and Juliet's** – that's probably at 15, 16 tryin' to be 18. Also **Locarno,** and **Tiffany's,** which had 16+ nights. Then eventually at 15, I got into **The Dug Out**. But I even think that that was living hip hop. Hip hop is a way of life, and a concept, and then a vibe and a feeling, and a knowing, I believe. The days of jazz funk, for me, that scene was a form of hip hop. It was just amazing. Guys were getting there early to practice their dance moves in the mirror. Then by ten, eleven, twelve, it starts filling up and you're ready. You had to be able to drop some

moves. You had burn-offs, just the same way you had breakdancin', but [it was] jazz dancing with the footwork – more footwork.

Then, after a few years of doing that, you're meeting other people from other areas, and other bonds are made, and through that you're invited to somewhere else. We'd end up going to house parties in **Clifton** and **St Pauls, St Werburghs**, or **Totterdown.** But it all started from going to – for me, anyway – from meeting people in the likes of **Tiffany's** or **Prince's Court** or **Cinderella's.** [That early experience] was at clubs in town, so this is a lot different to what soon evolved into the likes of [mid-late-1980s spots] the **Moon Club, Mozart's** and **Tropics** – which were just off-centre places to go, not mainstream clubs. You'd have your token amount of Black music in these other [city centre] clubs. You had Black bouncers being told to only let a certain amount of Black people in. It was fuckin' outrageous. [Bouncer] 'Sorry guys, top of the road for you, not tonight, got enough of you in there now. Try next week' – that sort of nonsense. It's interesting to see some of them now, when you're grown and they're all old. Just blow on you now, and you fall down. But you'd have none of that [in those later underground clubs in **St Pauls** and **Stokes Croft**]. It took years for it to come to fruition, and for white people to come and realise that there wasn't half the trouble – a third, or a tenth of the trouble – that the media made it out to be if you go into **St Pauls.**

What was your experience of **St Pauls** before that club scene?

Initially it was always family-related things. You'd go down there for, I don't know, a christening or whatever, as a family. But as a young man, again, [I'd go there] following in **George's** shadow. We'd all hang out down in town, down by the bandstand on **Castle Green**, again on the dancing thing – always music based – and when you see some of the other guys who lived in **St Pauls** [**Jamaican** accent]: 'whe you a-go, country bwoy! Go back ah country!' – meaning **Southmead.** But it's just dubs, taking the piss. And

somebody who didn't talk patois – or the Brit-side patois, or even a hint of it – they might get ribbed a bit more. But **St Pauls** represented, you know, black high road to me. But it was six miles – it was a bus ride away, it was far. You wouldn't walk there just to pass by. You had to go there for a reason.

Krissy Kriss, Bristol, 2019.
Photograph: courtesy of James McNally.

Did it almost seem like a mecca type of place?

[Thinks] I dunno. It was different. Night-time you had to know where you are, where you're going, and where you don't go. So, it was quite imposing as well. It's dark, and lots of unknowns – so I don't think 'mecca' is the right word for me. I'd go there with my man dem, but I didn't know the streets [at that point]. I wasn't that familiar with it – 'cause when I'd go there with the family, and you're the youngest, I'm going to the house, and that's where we'd stay.

At what point do you become aware of this thing called hip hop which was starting to happen?

There's two: one occasion was in the **Locarno**, and a guy called **Tookie** came back from the **States**, and he done some poppin'. It probably weren't even that good, but it was like 'Whaaat!?' That was seeing it physically. I knew what hip hop music was, or some of it. The other was coming back from **Southmead** youth club, and [**New Edition's** 1983 single] **'Candy Girl'** was on the charts – which was pop hip hop really. But I think seeing that on the TV was what made me think 'I can do that, I'm gonna do that.'

Did it catch you immediately?

Yeah, yeah, totally. It was immediate.

What was the feeling it gave you?

The feeling was... um, I've never had to describe it before... It was right. The feeling was right. It was mine, it was ours – and that 'ours' stems from the Blackness, initially. 'Look at what these Black people are doing!' After years of being seen like Black people ain't coming with nothing, ain't really good for fuck all, do you know what I

mean? Whether they're **American** or not, those miles were gone. They're there on that TV, like **The Osmonds**, like **The Nolan Sisters**, being the big stars, acclaimed – and they're my colour? Doing that music which moves me? Fuckin' right. Wicked. Don't get me wrong, the **Stevie Wonders, Gladys Knights,** they were always there before when I was little, but this was for me. I could associate with them. Immediate.

Why do you think hip hop did that, but reggae didn't?

Because I lived in **Southmead** and not in **St Pauls.**

So, was there a split in that sense?

I can only speak for my side, really. I mean, I don't dislike reggae, there was reggae in the house, but **St Pauls** was a small community, so you're hearing it everywhere. It simply is that. [If I'd grown up in **St Pauls**] I would've been hearing it everywhere I went in the streets – **St Nicholas Road**, **Grosvenor Road**, **The Inkerman**, it's all reggae influenced. There wasn't any reggae influence [in **Southmead**]. **Southmead** is a couple of churches, a row of shops, a couple of schools, and that's it. But in **St Pauls** there might've been 30, 40 per cent of the population were Black – that's thousands more people, or a thousand more people, than the twenty [Black] people who lived in **Southmead** by us.

So did hip hop catch all your friends who you'd been into the soul thing with at the same time?

Yeah. Yeah.

So it kind of morphed into a crew?

Yeah. It was funny because each chose their own discipline. A couple of them went in the deejay way, I went emcee-wise, a couple went in dancing-wise. You just organically went that way.

What was your crew called?

Initially, it was **Crazy 17**, because we were all 17 at the time. Then we went on to become **Z-Rock**, which morphed into **KC Rock**, and then not long after that I began emceeing with **The Wild Bunch** for a bit. After that I did stuff with **Smith & Mighty**, and then [from 1989] I was in **3 PM**.

When you started rhyming in '83, was there already a scene around it?

No, not really. We were the first to do a gig in **Southmead**. We hired the **Southmead** youth club, it was free entry, and we had people come from all over the place to it. There were jams going on around the city, but not many.

Was that the first time you'd been on a microphone in public?

In public-public, yeah. But that was '84.

Can you describe it to me?

What we would've been playing, would've been a mirror image – based on what records we could obtain – of what we saw **Wild Bunch** were doing, you know. But adding our own flex, our own influences. So **Z-Rock**, we all deejayed, but I emceed. **Wallace**, who's **Double Z**, he emceed. **Claudio** was **Triple Z**, I was **Mellow Z**, and **Michael**, my brother, was called **Dr Rookstein M.D.** So it still had that American flex with the names, because that was our influence.

Zee, not Zed.

Yeah, Zee. Them days, you know, we were living hip hop, but it was brand new, therefore I didn't know we was living hip hop. But when I think of it, we was coming from the jam structures, where men and women, boys and girls, came together and danced. It wasn't a hip hop jam [in the competitive sense], it was a funky hip hop night. So it would have been tracks from, say, **Just-Ice** and **Schoolly D** to **Roxanne Shante**, to **Chaka Khan**, then going into the soul sort of vibes – [**Fatback Band**] **'I Found Lovin", Cherelle, D-Train, Odyssey,** and stuff like that. A mixture, but the soul-hip hop mixture. So on that particular night, I'd've been emceeing, you know, and I was **Mellow Z.**

At the point of your first jam, were you aware of **The Wild Bunch**?

Going to their jams? Yeah, seeing **Milo** and **Nellee** deejaying – '83, '84, they were booming. They were stylish – I think that they used to get all their clothes from [fashionable Bristol boutique] **Paradise Garage:** ripped jeans and rockabilly boots with studs, the punk-but-not-punk thing mixed with hip hop – just different. They'd be playing jams music [i.e. early '80s boogie] into a hip hop thing... It was a mish-mash. But it was men and women, because hip hop [later] went to where it was just blokes to a degree. But really, the

reason why **Wild Bunch** stuck out more, I think, was because at that time you still had the likes of **Prince's Court,** the **Moon Club,** or other situated clubs. When **The Wild Bunch** did it, it was a house party or a disused building, not in a club. They pioneered that in this city – and then eventually we did stuff, following them up to London when they hooked up with **Jazzie** [**B** of **Soul II Soul**] and the Funki Dreds and stuff.

Was it inspiring to have young Black men like **Grant** and **Milo** doing something at such a high level, so fresh and new?

It was, but you've gotta remember, them days there was no money in it. It wasn't 'Oh god I want to be like them, because of the amount of money'. It was just for the love. What drove me is, one of the skills **Milo** had on the decks was the funky drop [he put] on it, but also it was where did you get that track from? It killed me. So I'd be hunting for that track. So, the inspiration was twofold, threefold, fourfold. It wasn't inspired to be like them, it was more like 'I'm a do some of that,' while also recognising, hats off and respect to them for what they're doing. So later, when they're asking me to come and rap with them, come and do a couple of bits-and-bobs? Of course I will!

Do you remember the first party you did with them?

I can remember parties, but don't know which one would've been first. I remember [in London] we done **Town and Country** [Club], **Artists Against Apartheid**; we done **The Wag Club**; we done this underground one in this disused bus garage that everyone came from everywhere to and got raided by the police. I remember I met up with **Jazzie** through them and the **Funki Dreds** up in **Camden**, staying by **Milo's** and **Nellee's**, and driving up to **London** frequently with **Sarah Dunn** and **Mushroom** in the black **Beetle**. I remember **Artists Against Apartheid**, 'cause we drove up, me and **Sarah** and

**Nick Walker** and **Mushroom**. I gave **Sarah** my **Kodak Instamatic**, and she took some photos, because that was my first big thing. Me and **Delge** [**3D**] decided what we're gonna wear – and we wore **Hawaiian** shorts, our goose jackets and **Kangols**. I had my **Puma States** and he had his **Nike Penetrators**, and **Sarah** got some shots. But it's a mixture [of memories], it's too long ago.

What was it like going to **London** in what was in some senses quite a territorial hip hop scene?

Because of how tight it felt with the crew, I didn't feel inferior or threatened by anything – I don't mean threatened as in a physical way. I didn't feel intimidated. I was just gonna do a thing. The importance was the enjoyment of it, the vibe of it. I felt **Milo**, **Willie Wee,** all the [**Wild**] **Bunch**, were cool. And I felt cool too, you know what I mean. I was minor league, I was young bwoy.

Did you feel that you had to work twice as hard to impress **London** crowds though? Were people kind of looking at you as if you were from the countryside?

I genuinely don't know. I don't remember thinking 'Oh my god, this is going to be rubbish' or 'What are they gonna think?' I don't remember that feeling. Because, you can appreciate, the guys arranged this night based on their contacts and what they'd done, so I was a part of that anyway. If other people thought that of me and my style, I didn't get to hear that because I was part of **Wild Bunch** that's come to rock a jam – you know, alongside **Jazzie** and the **Funki Dreds**, or alongside **Newtrament**.

Was the bus garage party you're talking about in **Paddington** with **Newtrament**? There's a video of it getting raided by the police.

That was madness! I think that was the first time I realised the differences in this city to a major city. When the police were cordoning stuff off, nuff other people ran. But maybe because we had to get on the coach to get back, we didn't run. We had a little argument with the police and one of the policeman said, 'You guys ain't from here, where you from?' 'We're from **Bristol**!' They weren't used to the reaction we were giving. It was defiance. It wasn't that we were gonna pick up rock and bottle, we were just ignorant to how raw the police could be [in **London**]. We didn't really have an idea about how they could just pull you, throw you in the cell all night, and you'll get a beating.

How would it have been different in **Bristol**?

The dynamic would be different because you downscale it. Then, if the equivalent was in **St Pauls**... because that's the only area where it would have been, because nightclubs wouldn't have been playing the sort of music **Wild Bunch** was playing – you had to go to a jam or a house party to have that raw music. If you're in the gaff and the police come, you're secure. You feel safer because your house is just over there. You know the get-out routes. There's safety in numbers – and it ain't in the police's best interests to make a ruckus. So sometimes when the police come, the best way to do it is to contain. They know where they are [in **St Pauls**]. They leave the scene, whatever.

Were the jams with **Wild Bunch** in **Bristol** different to the ones you were doing in **London**?

Yeah. Because the majority of the people coming to the jams in **Bristol**, you knew – or a high percentage, so therefore you had that and the comfortability of it. But it was interesting to see people reacting similarly, or in the same way to what you're doing in

another city. But then, as a young Black man, you would see another young Black man who is a hard-knock or a top-notch, and you fall into place. Or you lock into your spider senses when you feel that one guy ain't checkin' for you. You just stay with the crew, do what you've got to do and then get back to the house. But that's because it's a bigger arena – there's more possibilities and parameters to take on board.

It sounds like the **Bristol** scene was pretty intimate.

If you think about how small **Bristol** is in comparison with other major cities – and it is the biggest city in the **South West of England** – it's still got the mentality of a village. But back then it was probably 450,000 people, just under half a million. And you divide and divide down again, you know – **Totterdown** was **Totterdown, Southmead** was **Southmead, St Pauls** was **St Pauls, Redland** was **Redland.** There's ten, 20, 50 people from each one, all different ages, who all like that particular one thing that made a particular club at the time successful. And then [you'd have] a few more people came along who just wanted that vibe or whatever. It was a hundred-odd people [who went] religiously.

Were most parties in **St Pauls**?

Majority, yeah. One of the best ones outside of the regime of **The Wild Bunch** would've been **Hampton Lane** – an **FBI** party at **Phil** [**Jones**]'s mum's house, fucking blinding. **Willie Wee** and **Grant** [**Marshall**] came to that one, and **FBI** had the funk: two brothers, **Paul** and **Mark Cleaves**. I think **Phil**'s mum went on holiday or whatever and we had the whole house: three story house in **Redland**, massive garden! So, yeah, you had the occasional ones that ventured out of the gaff.

3 PM.
Image: courtesy of Krissy Kriss.

So why did it become centred on **St Pauls**?

Well, because it was most unlikely for any trouble to come police-wise, or any other sort of thing. Because the neighbours would've been more used to house parties and whatever. You couldn't just rock up in **Henleaze** – it would be locked down straight away. Not only because it was considered a 'Black thing', but because of the noise. I mean, living and growing up in **Southmead, St. Paul's** was the place everyone exodused to, to go to experience that thing. That was the known place. It might've originated from that being the only place in the city where, before our time, you'd have [blues dances and underground clubs like] **Ajax's, Dingy's, Bamboo** –

places that were renowned for after hours. So I don't think there was anything mystical or whatever.

But after that you had the **Tropic**, you had the **Moon Club**, and you had **Mozart's**, which was a bit after **Moon Club** – but these are all wine bars/nightclubs, which just started to play this kind of music. It was [all around] **Stokes Croft** or **Lower Cheltenham Road** [both immediately adjacent to **St. Paul's**] before **The Bearpit** roundabout. But no one from town – I won't say white people, or townies – they would have no reason to go to any of these places that was just up the road. So the majority of the places were 70% Black and 30% white, or a mixture of colours or whatever. But that's where you went, because that's the only place that offered what you were looking for.

So were most of the parties being thrown at venues that were being hired, or warehouse venues...

Both, both. The established places were the **Tropics**, and the **Moon Club**, and later the **Thekla** – they were owned by **Denzel** and **Bentley**. **Mozart's**, I can't remember who owned that. But it was the whole area – even down to **Slicks** the burger place [on **Stokes Croft**], everyone headed there afterwards. That was that stretch. That's where you saw ruckuses. That's where you saw mans drunk. That was our strip in Grease. That was ours. Everyone went there, man, and that's where all roads ended. What's interesting, though, is we loved that [**St Pauls**] was reported to be rough and nasty, and don't go down there. Those who went knew it wasn't, but it kept others at bay to a degree: idiots, or nonces, or people who wanted trouble. In a way, [it's] the fear factor of **St Pauls**, do you know what I mean? I've had it growing up: '**Krissy**, you're alright, but the rest of those coons down in **St Pauls**, I don't like them' – oblivious to what they're really saying to me.

The party everyone always talks about is the **Redhouse.**

With **Newtrament**. That was **St. Paul's**, that was a wicked night. Crazy night. There's a picture in **Beezer's** book [**Wild Dayz**, 2009], actually, with me and **Mushroom** [later of **Massive Attack**] there watching. In that picture there **Mushroom's** got a **Z-Rock** t-shirt on. That was when **Mushroom** got affiliated to **Z-Rock**, and I made him a T-Shirt. That's testament to how everything was all crossing over. It's hard to remember exactly [the details of the party], but it was amazing. I didn't do anything that night. I didn't get on the mic I don't think, but [we were] still crew enough to be right there by the decks.

How did your connection with **Mushroom** happen?

**Mushroom** came on board through **Michael.** They worked in **Michael's Restaurant** together on **Hotwells Road**, and he came back one time with **Rookie**, 'cause we'd also hook up at **Rookie's** house to practice. It all started from that.

I read an interview where **Mushroom** said you went to **New York** together.

Yeah, we did – '84 that was. By that time, I'd met his mum **Sue** and **Dave** his dad, and we were kin. So we arranged, rang my uncle, went over there, spent six weeks there having an amazing time. We met all my family – it was the first time I'd met everyone, so he experienced all that with me. We came back with goose jackets and **Cazals** and **Kangols** and shell tops and **Puma States**, you know what I mean? It was blinding. We saw some scary shit, we saw some beautiful things. We witnessed hip hop. We saw my cousin who lived in the projects – some scary fucking things.

Where were you staying?

In **New Jersey**, I even worked for a couple of weeks in the peach farms to get a bit more money – that's what paid for my goose jacket. **Mushroom** was adored by my aunt and by my cousins, so he was looked after. We just had an amazing time. We were 18.

Did that change anything when you came back?

For us? Yeah, fucking hell! I've got stories of when we turned up in **Special K's** [café and hip hop hangout] orchestrated. We both went in with our gooses and **Cazals**. We looked like people that were on TV. We looked like **Wild Style** the film. We had buckles and all that – what!? We were the first to come back with that flex in **Bristol**, in our circle.

So you were basically the dons.

We were boys, man...

Did you have a creative interaction with **3D** in those days?

Yeah, me and **Delge**... His parents used to own **The Beehive** [pub] in **Wellington Hill**. We'd hook up on whatever day, work for the day, get fed. Then we'd hang out in the bowling alley and write lyrics.

I think you're the only two emcees ever to have both used the word **Subbuteo** in a rhyme.

Yeah, man – kickin' like **Subbuteo**. I can still remember our first rap, which we were gonna make a track with. It was called **'Down in Black and White'**. That didn't come to pass, but it's like a pass-the-rap, so he'd start with:

[**Delge**] *I make your head turn and I will confirm*
*That me and **Krissy Kriss** are on equal terms*
*I like to paint, when I ain't just writin' with a marker*
*Singing,*

[**Krissy**] *His skin's lighter*
[**Delge**] *Word, his skin's darker*

Then I was:

*One Black, one white, we never mess up*
*The soft suckers I will break, and in black I mean bruk*
*Brukking them up, when I rocking inna nuff company*
*Every time I chat, me say me smoke my sensie.*

[Note: **The Wild Bunch's** 1988 single **'Friends and Countrymen'** has a similar set-up, with **DJ Milo** and **3D** performing an anti-racism rap]

I remember [at one point when we used to write] **Delge** saying 'You've still got that **American** twang bro, you need to sound a bit more **British**'. And, I was like, 'That's me, that's how I'm doin' it!'

On the tune you did with **Smith & Mighty** [**'This Is The Time'** on their 1988 single **'Anyone'**], I don't really hear an **American** twang though. I hear you fully formed – quite remarkable given the time.

Yeah. Dunno.

Were you consciously trying to sound **Bristolian**?

No. The closest I can get to that is what other reference do I have? I didn't know of any **British** rappers big enough to me to hear a tape or a track. But I didn't feel **American**. What they were talking about, I had no way of talking about that. My life wasn't like that, and it was so new I didn't realise I could turn that into talking about what it was like living in **Southmead**, or whatever. At the same time, I hadn't experienced being shot, or ruffed up because I was Black. I'd been called names and whatever, but it was different to [that history where] you wasn't allowed to drink from the same cup or sit on the same bus. I didn't experience that sort of thing. So maybe that's why there was so much passion coming out of what they said, which was then transferred into making us listen. The music, something triggered me, made me wanna do it – more so than reggae, more so than funk and soul.


Flyer: courtesy of Krissy Kriss.

3 PM.
Photograph: courtesy of Krissy Kriss.

IN-CONVERSATION

# SIR BEANS OBE

**...with James McNally**

What was it like growing up in **Bedminster** when you were a kid?

It was very working class, a lot different to how it is now. You've got a council block right behind the house, so there's loads of grass and fields. There used to be loads of kids that lived on our street and in the flats, so when we grew up it was just mental – kids everywhere, loads of us just being a general nuisance, playing knock-out ginger in the flats... Football and getting up to mischief. You know, the usual stuff that kids do.

Were there lots of kids in your immediate environment who were latching onto hip hop at the same time as you?

Not really. There was one of my oldest friends, it was just me and him really. There were twins at my school too, **Ollie** and **Dylan Barrett**, and they were breakers. I used to break with them in the school hall, on our dinner break. But, me and my friend, we'd listen to the radio as much as possible, record stuff, swap tapes, buy records, swap records with each other.

We were just totally obsessed with it. Between us we built up a collection of music.

It's interesting you say it didn't pick up more. As an outsider you think of **Bristol** as an amazing hip hop city with all this stuff going on from the mid-80s. Did you have any awareness that that was going on?

We were just nippers. We were like eleven, twelve years old. What I knew was what my friends or my sister listened to – she was into boogie and stuff and went through a robotics phase [*laughs*] – or when people would bring **Electro** tapes into school and I was lucky to get a copy of an **Electro** tape from one of the 'cooler' kids and they would get dubbed and passed around. Obviously, we couldn't go to clubs because we were just kids, so I wasn't too aware of what was going on really. It was more listening to what was going on via these tapes and from pirate radio. I also remember when I was really young, we would go into town and we'd see this guy body-popping, in **Broadmead**. It blew my tiny mind. He was dressed as an orchestra conductor, wearing a silver mask and ginger wig! That left an impression on me.

Were you looking at the graffiti and stuff or was that off the beaten track for you?

There was a lot of graffiti around, because I grew up not far from **Dean Lane** skatepark. As a kid I used to go out on my BMX and there was graffiti down there – Writers like **Bandito, TPA Cru** and **Inkie** and maybe **Ego** were the first to paint at the bottom of the park, if I remember correctly. I was there the first time the **Salvation Army Wall** got bombed and there was footage on the local news. I wish I could see that again because I was in it. I used to notice flyers for some of the earlier **Fresh 4** jams. There were always posters,

because I think some of them lived in **South Bristol**. There was all these graff-designed **Fresh 4** posters, **Def Con** posters, things like that. We would try to peel them off the wall, with no luck. But it wasn't until maybe the last few years of senior school that we were really really latching onto hip hop.

So when you were 15, 16 kind of age?

Yeah. We'd get our pocket money, go into town, get the latest **Electro** tape. Or my friend would save up his pocket money, buy a record and we'd swap. You know, we'd write down lists of records, it was like we'd hear a name of a record, or we'd buy **Record Mirror** or **NME** and look in it just to see the names of hip hop records, and write it down, just in case we ever saw it anywhere. Sometimes we'd pick up something that was good, sometimes we'd just waste our pocket money on something that was trash. It was just fun finding out everything. It was just the excitement even of having a record and taking it home and playing it for the first time and being like 'Wow – we've got another record!' Then you've got to save up for another one.

That really early stage of record collecting is great. There's a real mystique when you're looking at music magazines and you see a review of a record. You get excited just from the title.

Yeah. My friend **Marcel**, he used to religiously buy **Record Mirror,** and because it was pre-internet, and pre- when you could really see people on TV, he always wanted to put a face to a name or a voice. And when you get a picture of someone being interviewed in a magazine – there were obviously people like **Scott La Rock** and **Captain Rock**, some of the big names like **KRS-One**, **Cold Crush Brothers** – he'd cut out the picture and stick it up on his wall. It was

like a shrine just of different people, and he'd go 'I've got a picture of **Captain Rock**! I know what **Captain Rock** looks like!' It's like 'Wow! It's amazing! I can't believe it!' It's funny when you think about it, but I kinda miss being excited about everything all the time. Everything was just really exciting.

Sir Beans OBE and Kelz.
Photograph: courtesy of Sir Beans OBE.

There was a real boom of **Bristol** pirate radio in the late-1980s. What were you listening to?

A lot of the stuff we used to tape was **FTP**, **Bad Radio**, **Emergency FM** – those were the main ones. We used to just wait by the radio and record stuff and it wasn't until years later that some of those records I picked up – I'd see them and go 'Oh my god! It's that record! It's that record I taped off **FTP**!' It still happens. But the deejays would be people like **MD Junior, Reds, Riskee, DJ Lynx,** there was a guy called **Tristan B** as well – he was late '80s, [*but on*] the local radio station thing, a legal station, but he would focus a lot on underground music. I remember once in the '90s, we sneaked in on one of his shows and he let us come in. **LL Cool J** was there being interviewed. We've still got the photos – me and my two friends, **Richie** and **James**. We met **LL Cool J** – it was amazing, complete fluke.

When did you start deejaying?

I bought a **Citronic** turntable in '88. I couldn't really scratch on it, but I used to try and scratch. You touch them and they just slow right down to a halt. You have to wait for a few seconds before they pick up speed again. Then in '89 when I left school, I saved religiously until I could afford two turntables, which I still have. But my main inspirations locally were **DJ Lynx** and **Bunjy** and I really got into it to do the beat juggling – we wouldn't have called it beat juggling back then, it was doubling up records. I did think about going into the **DMCs** and stuff, but I could only take it to a certain point, and then I got so obsessed with scratching and I just couldn't stop scratching – I couldn't do anything else. I'd spend ages just scratching records and messing about and trying to do pause tapes and just being a bedroom DJ. I was learning what I was seeing on TV. But it wasn't until a few years later when I joined **Transcript Carriers** – that was when I went from being okay to being... I just jumped levels.

You were definitely very good by then.

I was just like, it was my mission. I'd come home from work and I'd be there from 5 o'clock, maybe eat some food, and then just scratch until I go to bed. That was it, I just had to learn new stuff. I was quite a shy kid, but inside I wanted – you want to be the best, obviously. But I just wanted to show other people up. You know, whatever that guy's doing, I wanna do that, and do it better. And I was just really quietly confident in myself. But definitely being in **Transcripts** was a *thing* for me. I remember, I had to prove myself. **KC**, one of the emcees, lived by me, and I started to talk to him, and I heard that their deejay had left, and I was 'right, that's my way in.' He said, 'You're gonna have to go up to **Deed's** house – **Paul's** house – and just...' I can't remember the correct phrasing, but I had to go up and show him how good I am on the decks. So we had to travel the other side of **Bristol,** to **Kingswood,** go to **Paul's** and just start scratching in front of him. And he said 'Right, you're in.' I was like, 'Shit, I'd better start practising.' It was a huge inspiration. I owe pretty much everything I do now to that opportunity.

So you were basically a bedroom deejay until then?

More-or-less. I deejayed I think in '91 with a guy called **Richie D** at **St Pauls Carnival** – so **St Pauls Carnival** was my first gig. That was scary [laughs], because it was like 'Right, you're in **St Pauls** – this is the place where it all started in **Bristol**, so you've got to prove yourself.' And when I'm deejaying, my mate's emceeing on stage, you've got the hype dancers behind him, and I'm cutting up in the background. And **Bunjy** – who at the time's one of my idols – he's sitting behind me, and his brother **Kevvy Kev**, who's a deejay, he's just behind watching. So it's like 'Right – don't fuck this up.'

That's kind of nuts for a first gig.

It's pressure, definitely. Pressure.

Were you in **Transcript Carriers** from the first 12' 'All Fear Is Bondage'?

I wish I was. No, I joined them just after that 12' because that was when their deejay left.

Were you aware of that single already?

Transcript Carriers.
Photograph: courtesy of Sir Beans OBE.

I saw the flyers around the [city] centre that were being plastered up, and then I heard the record and it just blew my mind. Because at the time, you didn't really [have many local groups]. I mean, in the early days you had **Wild Bunch**, but other than that [it was just] **3 PM**, who were amazing back then. But these guys, you know, it was just unusual, because back then you didn't see many white kids that were doing stuff, and especially putting out records. I remember I went to the **Freestyle** jam up in **Kingswood** in '92 and I didn't know what these guys looked like, but I loved the record, and they came on – these guys who just looked a bit like skateboarders in basketball vests, lumberjack shirts and stuff, and they just fucking tore it. It was amazing. I was like a little fanboy at the front just losing my mind. You know, we've got **3 PM** there! We've got **Lynx**! We've got **Bunjy**! We've got **Wild Bunch**! We've got **Transcript Carriers**! I was just an excited little kid.

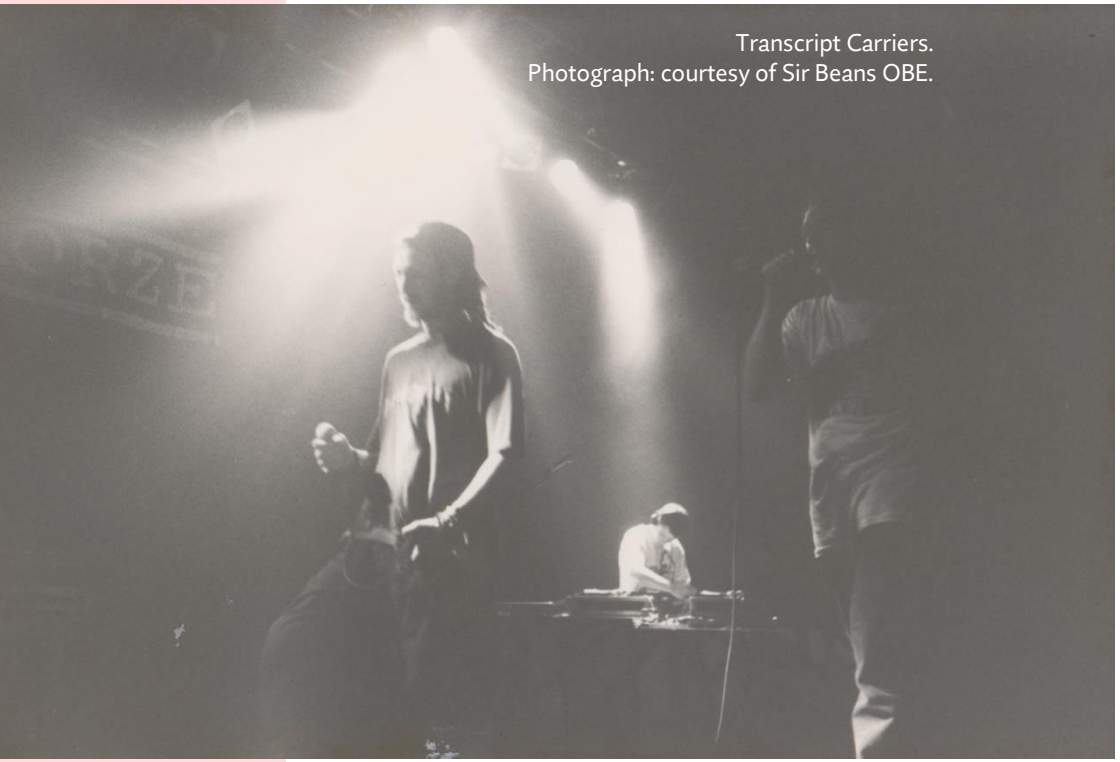
That single feels quite psychedelic. It's quite an unusual sound for its time, even before you take into account that they're obviously rapping in broad **Bristol** accents.

Definitely – odd in a really good way. It was like, with hip hop you get periods of time, like in the late-80s it was **James Brown** [samples], in the early '90s you have your jazz samples and stuff like that. But this like had a disco break, and then it had a **Hendrix** sample on it, and the whole pace of it was different. And, like you say, these guys sounded very **Bristolian**, and it was like 'this is fucking insane'.

So, given that, when you went over and did your kind of show and prove, that must've been quite exciting.

Yes, it was. Because there were a few other people over there that I met as well for the first time. There was **Cheo**, the writer. There

were quite a few writers over that way, who I met through **Transcripts**. I was a bit of a loner, so when I got to that point I started meeting people who were into music, and now I was actually being like an active part of it. So just being in a group was exciting enough, but then there was another thing where people were like 'who's this new kid?' and you've gotta prove yourself, and then people like what you're doing. It was just a really big thing. But it pushed me to really go past and raise myself another level, and just put everything I can into it. If I'm gonna be a part of it, I really want to make it special.



Transcript Carriers.
Photograph: courtesy of Sir Beans OBE.

How quickly did you start recording?

We did the **Haemorrhoid** [sic] **Fry-up** [EP]. That's probably, rough guess, about five or six months later that we recorded that. I remember coming up to the studio after work, no idea what I had to scratch, or what I had to do. The decks and the mixer were on the floor, so I was on my knees on the floor with the decks, cutting the record, having turned up with no idea what I was gonna do. I can't imagine doing that now.

In the early-ish **Transcript Carriers** days were you involved with the beats?

Not much. I think, on the first tape [**Ripping Gurners**] I contributed some samples and stuff, but I never really produced. It wasn't until just before the **Parlour Talk** stuff really that I started producing – so about the mid-90s. I always had a taste for it but it was just having the money to buy the stuff. I'd always use **Paul's** sampler, messing about doing loop tapes. But we got the advance for the [**Parlour Talk**] **Padlocked Tonic** LP, so that was when I went out and bought an **Akai S2000** sampler with the money. It just went from there really.

How did **Parlour Talk** happen?

The **Parlour Talk** thing came about just from **Transcript's** splitting up. **Matt** [**KC**] and **Jeff** [**Rebom**], I think they'd just really fallen out of love with it and wanted to go their own way and do their own thing. So me and **Paul**, we wanted to carry on and the name just came about because the **Transcript Carriers** production name was **Parlour Talk Productions**, so we just said 'call ourselves **Parlour Talk**'. We did the **635** tape, a demo that we just shipped around locally and sold locally. But the hook-up with **Acid Jazz** [who released the album] was through a friend of ours, **Tim**, who was **DJ TP.** He was from **Bath**, but he lived in **Hoxton**, which was near the

**Acid Jazz** offices, and he literally just went to the offices and dropped the tape in and maybe vaguely said 'Listen to these guys, blah-blah-blah.' Next thing you know, **Acid Jazz** were interested in putting out an album and we were just... It still puzzles me to this day, because you think of all that jazz funk stuff around that time – **Brand New Heavies** and all these groups – that were on that label.


Parlour Talk.
Photograph: courtesy of Sir Beans OBE.

It seems like a curve ball, doesn't it?

Yeah. It was strange. I don't think we fit in. All credit to **Ed, Eddie Piller,** he had a lot of faith in it – but I don't think the label really

knew what to do with us, gig-wise and how to push us. We were just some kids from **Bristol**, not a trendy **London** band into jazz funk. We were just these bumpkin kids from **Bristol** that make hip hop out of **Paul's** dad's garage. The album was delayed and I think it came out before we even knew anything about it. It was one of our friends, **Neil,** told us it was out in the shops. So it was like 'OK, this is how it's going. This is a bit strange.' I thought we'd at least know when it came out.

So there was no drum-roll.

Well, not from that point. But we did do a launch for it in the **Blue Note** club in **London**. That didn't go too well, really. There was just too many problems. There was aggro. I think there was a couple of punch-ups happening. One of our lot started on a few of the label's guys. Then there was something wrong with the PA, or the mic was cutting out, and we were just basically jinxed with problems. I remember **Paul** grabbing a glass and just throwing it against the wall in the club, and somebody kicking off at him for throwing a pint glass. Some girl came up and started giving me shit because of it. The whole show pretty much grinded to a halt. It was a mess. We just had some really weird gigs though. There was one – I wasn't there, I was away – but they got a gig at a rave. A **Parlour Talk** gig at a rave? That was unusual. Another at a students' union in **Manchester** where the fire alarm went off in the middle of the show and we had to finish early. Anyway they never mentioned another album. It's a bit of a blur, that whole period.

You mentioned recording in a garage – is that where you did the album?

Yeah. It was like your standard garage, but with an extension built onto it, as a little studio. He had two monitors and a little **Roland**

workstation type of thing – one of those. A couple of compressors, a sampler. It's a really basic set up, but some good times in there. We had a lot of fun making stuff. A lot of experimentation went on, definitely, just trying stuff out. But it was very basic, and the picture on the album cover, that was the door for the garage. That big padlock, that was the door for the garage. I'd just travel up to **Paul's** all the time, record, stay over, next day mess about, try and make some tunes, do some cuts.


Beans at work.
Photograph: courtesy of Sir Beans OBE.

It seemed like there were a lot of overlapping crews in your orbit – you've got **Transcript Carriers, Parlour Talk, Undivided Attention, Sound of Fury**. Are they all different configurations of the same group of people?

**Parlour Talk** was originally just me and **Paul** – I think that's part of the reason I left, because it used to be me and **Paul**, but it ended up being a lot more people, which was basically [the umbrella crew] **Undivided Attention**. So **Parlour Talk** really was just me and **Paul. Sound of Fury** was **Majesta** and **Frikshun**, and then you had **Spye, Finestyler** – that's **Nick** – so that was **Undivided Attention**. But whenever we did **Parlour Talk** shows it was all of us. So it was all of us under the umbrella of **Parlour Talk,** which was really **Undivided Attention**... if that makes sense!

It sounds potentially quite chaotic?

It was, yeah. I didn't really feel that I fit into **Undivided Attention** later on as it went along. It was never personal, it was just musical differences. So I left and did my tape [**Tape Feast**]. It was a kick up the backside to produce more, rather than just deejay. Even though I did produce some **Parlour Talk** things, it was like 'Now you're a producer as well. Get on with it.'

Were there producers in **Bristol** that fuelled your sense of competitiveness to improve?

My favourite producers locally, man, I loved the early **Numskullz** stuff – **Rola**, but also **Rumage**. I don't think **Rumage** gets enough props as a producer. He's really good at making mellow hip hop. Then you've got **Rola** – a lot of his stuff was quite dark. And then you've got **Awkward** – **Awkward** is more on the next thing. He can

be a bit glitchy, very electronic, but he's got that very old school sensibility. You get this really mad disjointed tune, and then you'll get this classic stab in there or sample or something. I've just done a lot of cuts for his latest project, **The Cloaks**, and that's exactly like that. It's very futuristic but it's got bits of classic in it. Like he's made this tune with '**Funky Drummer'** in it – you can just hear it's **'Funky Drummer'** but you've really got to concentrate to hear it. It's that sort of thing. But **Awkward's** brother **Phono**, his stuff's amazing too. He samples quite a lot of prog rock and weird **Italian** stuff and soundtrack stuff. But he's amazing. They both are.

What equipment were you using on **Tape Feast**?

I was just using the **S2000**, a **Tascam 424**, a **Mackie** 8-Track mixing desk and an **ART** effects unit. So it was very bare-bones studio equipment. I recorded it all in the spare room at my mum's house, so I'd get everyone round. It was the perfect time to do it because at that point you had **Junior Disprol** in **Bristol**, you had **Aspects**, I had **Sound of Fury** on there, I've got **Deed** and **Spye** on there. Then there was **Awkward, Kelz** as well, **Turoe**, and **Numskullz**. There were just so many people here at the right time, and I was just like 'I want to get everyone on one thing.' Because nobody was really collaborating that much, but it was just one of those things [that was like] 'I really want to do this.'

That period was quite a fertile time in **Bristol** hip hop.

It was.

What was the focus for that scene?

**Hombré** was definitely a melting pot, because you had so many people on that label. And the people that weren't on that label were affiliated with people that were on the label. **Awkward** would do stuff for **One Cut**, and **One Cut** were on there. **Numskullz**. You had **Retna** who was on that label, then you had **Binary Brothers**, which was another group. I did my own thing, but I also did stuff as deejay for **Binary Brothers**. **Hombré** was just bringing everyone that was around onto that one label.

Were there open mics and stuff going on?

Yeah, there was loads. **Thekla** nights were always open mics, every time.

With **Tape Feast** you've already got a distinctive sound going on.

Kelz and Sir Beans OBE.
Photograph: courtesy of Sir Beans OBE.

Well, when I started, when we were almost done with the **Parlour Talk** album – that was about '97 – around that time I went to do a music course for two years, and I really think that might have done something to make me think a certain way about production. Obviously being around musicians for two years, with the assignments you had to do, you had to be musical. So you had to fit in with what's going on, and I think it definitely pushed me to be a bit more musical... but not *too* musical, do you know what I mean? Because you don't want to be too musical, because I think it loses its edge a little bit. You want it to be a little noisy. So that period, around '97 to '99, that was definitely the time when I really stepped it up.

Were there particular things you were looking for in what you were sampling?

I've always liked my jazz stuff, there was like jazz samples and bits, but it was anything interesting really.

I'd say there's almost a weird **Italian** soundtrack thing to some of the production you've done. Some quite dark sounds coming through in a way that's almost a bit psychedelic.

Yeah – I do like my darkness. I don't know what it says about me personally, but I do like that kind of sound. If I hear it for the first time and it makes me screw my face and go 'that's fucking strange! That's really weird', but I like it. Those are my favourite sort of samples. I like a loop of a **Rhodes** organ or a sax, I love that as much as the next man, but if there's something that's really just odd, if I've got a drum break going already and it works under that, then that's good enough.

Kelz and Sir Beans OBE.
Photograph: courtesy of Sir Beans OBE.

# TUROE

**...with Adam de Paor-Evans**

So we started off talking about what we didn't want to discuss, those conventional interview questions that can be purely based on facts, but that we wanted to dig deep into how it felt to discover music, and then hip hop.

That's what I found interesting in your book, it was it was like reading my beginnings, even down to stacking the seven inches on the old record player. I've still got my mum's seven inches in an old box. We grew up in different places, but it was still quite similar.

That's significant I think. So at that point of listening to your mum's records, were you in the city of **Bristol** itself of somewhere on the outskirts?

My mum grew up and was born in **Knowle West**, and my dad was born in **Bedminster**. I grew up in **Windmill Hill**, which is in between **Victoria Park** and **Bedminster**. So, my first house where I grew up was in **Quantock Road** in **Windmill Hill**. I was born in '72, and I went to **Redcliffe School** which was just down through the park. It was a really multicultural school, so I had a load of different friends from different backgrounds, I remember going there and that opened my eyes a bit, without

even realising, you know. Everyone would bring all different foods to school for their lunch, you'd find out about food from other countries, but didn't really think anything of it, it's how it was. We'd go to the park, ride our bikes, make scooters – you know like go-carts – we used to call them 'dandies' – I think that's an old school term. I had some good friends then. There was a big pub at the top of the park where we used to kick a ball against the wall, and I remember that as I used to stare at the wall thinking 'that would be good to paint'. But I never did it, it's been painted now. We moved from there then to **Parson Street** which is in **Bedminster Down**. We used to paint **Parson Street Station** later on. I went to **Parson Street School**, a typical '80s comprehensive, literally ten minutes' walk from everywhere else, but it felt like we were moving countries – from my junior school to another junior school – it was literally 15 minutes away – but felt farther. It was that typical growing up in the '80s, a lot of it is a bit of a blur.

I remember doing stuff like that too – the go-cart thing – can you remember when music first did something for you, was it around then?

I think I was about 10 or 11, my mum used to listen to country and western, and my dad would listen to **Queen** and **Meat Loaf**, and I picked up on a couple of things I heard, I got into storytelling songs. There was a song called **'Boy Named Sue'** by **Johnny Cash**, and the story goes he used to take his son to bars and people would take the piss out of him because he called his son Sue. It just struck a chord that one, and sad songs that had stories attached to them. I would be listening to **Showaddywaddy**, and into the early '80s **Shakin' Stevens**, I'd get up at parties and do the **Shakin' Stevens** dance and stuff...I can't believe I'm saying this, you're ruining my hardcore hip hop image – haha! **Boney M**... so these were all records I picked up that my mum had in the late '70s and early '80s. She had her name on them, at family parties she'd take them, no sleeves, just all stacked up.

**The Osmonds** – for some strange reason **'Crazy Horses'** – and **'Long Haired Lover From Liverpool'**. Weird song! Then I started getting into **Adam and The Ants, Madness,** and **The Jam**. One of the first records I bought was **'Beat Surrender'**, I remember going down the record shop and buying singles, much like yourself. So that was my early listening to music. My sister's older than me, she had a lot of older friends and I would pick up on what they're listening to, and everyone used to just tape the charts, and I was hearing stuff like **Wham!** and **George Michael** and that because she'd be playing it all the time. We were just all into pop music.

Then I started buying whatever – **Freeez's 'I.O.U.', Hits of '83**, and **Herbie Hancock – 'Rockit'** was on it [Vol. 2], although I didn't know it at the time. I got into robotics, I don't know how, but I used to try to do the robot at family parties, I heard **'Rockit'** when I flipped the record over, but I didn't realise it at the time – not until I saw the video when I put two and two together. My first introduction to hip hop then, was in secondary school, or the boys' club. It wasn't really hip hop though, we got into poppin', before we really knew anything about breakin'. We were dancing to '**Axel F'** and things like that before we really knew what hip hop or electro was. Then I'd tape electro songs from my mate, just bits really, around '83 and '84. I'd be down the skateboard park on my BMX, this must have been late '83-'84, my mate was going out with this girl who was playing **'White Lines'** on repeat, I'd hear it, and there was a couple of pieces of early graffiti down there.

I was into drawing, I'd sit alone and draw stuff, listening to records – just like I do now – but I was drawing birds, eagles, and stuff, copying them out of books. I just loved the detail, from an early age I alienated myself and draw, that's what I did. I still had mates, but something clicked and I liked drawing. My mum and dad were both working, my sister had her own mates, you know what mean? So I'd just sit and draw and listen to music. I'm pretty sure my connection with pictures and words started early at school in English lessons. Apart from art this was my only other lesson I enjoyed at school. As I said, stories grabbed my attention so we had to read a book about two wayward

child hood friends, rough and ready street kids – I can't remember the book title – but from the description of the kids we had to draw portraits of what we thought they looked like – '**Fagso'** a big probably plump smoker always had a fag in his gob and his mate – I can't remember his name; but skinny dirty kid. I remember I got a good mark as my teacher said I nailed the sketches in my book. Another one was **War of The Worlds**. We had to sit and listen to the record without seeing any artwork or the cover, and again draw or paint what we thought the scene was. I remember my version was almost picture perfect of the LP cover, which was a bit weird as I'd never seen it before. Again, the teacher was impressed, subconsciously this is how I connect music with visuals and listening as I draw I reckon.

Turoe.
Photograph: courtesy of Turoe.

I'd seen some early **3D** graffiti in town, I don't know how, maybe I got my mum to take me to **Virgin Records**, and there was a piece of graffiti, and round the back, then the lane where they used to breakdance and there were a couple of early pieces there – the **'Wild Bunch'** piece and **'Rockit'** – I'd seen it – because I remember standing outside looking at it. Then I remember seeing **Subway Art**, it was just out but not mainstream. I thought 'what's this?' and my mate who showed me the book, his brother had drawings all over his room, all colours and lightning bolts and stuff, and I was thinking 'wow what's that!' I remembered it, went home and drew it from memory, and showed it to my mate and he gave it to his brother who said: 'Yeah that's good but you got to do your own thing', and I thought 'what does he mean?', then you realise you got to literally get a name for yourself, and not copy. So I got hold of a copy of **Subway Art** from the library, and there was a kid in school who had an art folder – the only person in school at that time – a couple years older he was – and I stole his art folder. I traced his art and drawings, that's when I met **Spice aka Riskee** in school, he was a younger kiddie who was into graff as well. This was before painting – we used to battle just with drawing – passing them backwards and forwards, and this girl I knew would be like 'his is better', or 'yours is better'. I've told the story a few times, but this is a bit deeper.

Yeah, this is great. So how did you perceive the relationship between the music, what you were seeing, and what you were drawing? Did you have an awareness that it was interlinked, that it was a bigger thing?

I must have somehow – I remember **'Buffalo Gals'** and the **Rock Steady** (Crew) covers and stuff, but even before that – I don't really know – I mean the **Subway Art** and **Electros** seemed to go together as I'd seen them at my mates' house, I think really it was the timing. I'm hearing **'White Lines'** on repeat in the skate park, I didn't know what graffiti was, but I'm seeing it on the wall. It must have been a

subconscious connection, and it naturally fitted together. Of course I saw **Style Wars** when it was on telly, and the **London** [**Rock Around The Clock**] lot painting but I think before that, if I'm drawing and listening to music, it was just me, I'm doing this. It wasn't something that clicked for me, I was just doing it.

That's really interesting that for you there was already an emerging relationship between music and visual art before hip hop came along.

Yeah I used to draw **Madness** logos and that as most people did, but I was always really into drawing from isolating myself and sitting down doing it. That's what I was into and it just happened. It was pretty organic, just two people locally. Obviously the older kid was into it with more history and knew more, but I didn't know until I saw the **3D** and **Wild Bunch** stuff. Just snippets. But I still remember it like yesterday.

That's a great detailed account of some of your early memories. When did you start making connections with other people who were like-minded, or when did you begin to realise this was going to be a much bigger part of your life?

So **Riskee** – the kid I battled at school – we would battle and there was one other friend – **Dean** – who was into it – he'd copy bits of **Subway Art,** and so would I, we found a connection. Then I met **Kaz** who was another local kid from **Knowle West**, and we used to battle **Knowle West** crews, when I was hanging around with a kid called **Marcus** who got some **WBLS** tapes from his aunty in **New York** which was around '87. One day this kid was walking around with long hair, top off; it was this kid **Vince**, saying 'yeah I got tapes', he had stuff from **Westwood**, and this and that, he showed me some drawings – stuff like we were doing – copying out of **Subway Art**, and we started tagging in **Knowle West** and formed a crew. So **Spice** has got this

mate **Dave**, who was tagging as well, me and **Kaz** are tagging, and a couple of other people from school, and we end up falling out weekly at this point, saying who's better than who, they're tagging mainly around **Bedminster Down** and we're tagging around our area which ain't too far away – crossing each other out – literally tagging everywhere, hanging out.


Turo and SP.27 tags, Windmill Hill platform, 1989.
Photograph: courtesy of Jason Clint.

Around this time we'd already been riding around on our bikes searching for graff. **Dean's** stepdad used to frequent certain parts of **St Pauls** and so **Dean** already had photos of the graff there, and he said he'd show us, so we'd get on our bikes, and ride from one end of the city to the other, taking photos and we'd found **Special K's** [the café], in the days of course before **Barton Hill**, and we'd gone in and seen mainly **3D** pieces and a couple of **Crime Incorporated, Bandito** and **Inkie** pieces and stuff. We'd go literally miles searching out abandoned buildings looking for graff. We didn't really care. That's how we knew **Bristol** had its own graffiti scene and how I knew it was bigger than just what was in **Subway Art.** That was the link really to us getting bigger. Then into the late '80s we formed **BD Crew**. But through the early-mid '80s, **3D** was the most prolific.

So how did you arrive at your name **'Turoe'**?


Dangerous Turo, AT8, 1988.
Photograph: courtesy of Turoe.

How I got my name was we saw some graff that I thought said **Turo,** and **Spice** thought it said **Tuco**, and we were arguing over who was going to have the **Turo** tag, and I just wrote **Turo** in the middle of the piece – not knowing any better – I have got a photo of it, it's an early


Turo's bedroom, Bedminster Down, 1994.
Photograph: courtesy of Turoe.

**Inkie** piece, and I wrote that on there in a marker. **Spice** was like 'well, I'm having **Riskee**', and I'm like 'that's rubbish!' haha. So, that's how it came about. Then we started doing pieces – me and **Kaz** did a couple – but we'd still be in touch. We knew **Bunjy** as he lived down the road, he deejayed for **Fresh Four,** and so we went down to **Knowle West** and **Bunjy's** doubling up **Ultimate Breaks & Beats** in his bedroom for hours on end; he's got loads of records. So I'm sat there watching him – he had about eight speakers on a huge bit of ply which he's made, and he's got his decks, and he's the best thing I ever saw. I asked him to do me some tapes, then I saw he had some graffiti in his back garden – a couple of pieces here and there – and I saw some flyers with **Chaos** on before I even knew who **Chaos** was – **Chaos** and **Shab** – then **Bunjy** says to me 'Do you know **Jerry**?' and I said no, he's like '**Chaos** is a writer – they do a piece of graffiti and then tell me where it is, and I go and see it.'

So one day, **Chaos** comes around to **Bunjy's**, and we're talking about pink paint – and that was the colour you just couldn't get. I was dying to find out – where can you get pink paint? After a while, I find out it's somewhere down by **Temple Meads**, so we go down there and find some tags in a pink, and there's some in lilac, on this pillar, and we find this shop, go up the stairs and there's tags up the stairs, we get to the top and there's a place that says **'Euro Graphics'**, and we're like: 'This is it! This is the place!' But it's shut. They're only open on weekdays. So, we come back and we end up buying one tin between three of us and rob the rest. This became a regular thing; we'd go in and clean the place out. Loads of us. We're still taking pictures of graffiti, but we're also writing next to the pieces now because we've got our names – so we're hunting for graff, looking for all the spots, and tagging along the way, down all the lanes, wherever on the way. Then me and **Vince** – **Kaz** – we decide we're going to do our own pieces so we get a load of **Buntlac** and paint in one of the lanes.

Our first piece was a **KT** piece, straight letters stolen out of **Subway Art.** We painted the **Mode 2** wizard in his bedroom and then I stole another character which was holding up pens, he saw the **Electro Rock** piece, and stuff out of **Street Scene** magazine, bits and pieces

he'd seen and we nicked and kind of changed into our pieces. **Spice** was doing a similar thing – letters here and there – and that's what happened, we copied what we saw without really knowing what we were doing. Do you know what I mean? You see a big piece and thing 'how did they do it?', you see these big pieces and do your little toy tags next to it until you learn. Then one day, **Spice** rings me up and says, 'I know how to do thin lines', literally we're using **CarPlan**, and thinking how do you get it thin? Our tags are all fat and crap. He said, 'come up, I'll show you!' So I went round, and he's literally scraping the can down the wall really fast, but every time he did a line he'd scrape the concrete off the wall and mark the wall. So I tried that, down the lanes, trying to do thin tags and scratching the wall, some are still there to this day. That was it. Nobody else showed us or told us how to paint, we went from there. We got better and better, and used to go out and just do stuff.

Turo's bedroom, Bedminster Down, 1994.
Photograph: courtesy of Turoe.

Then **Barton Hill** came into play, I think **Spice** and **Dean** discovered it first on their bikes when they were out looking for spots, then they

took me up there. **John** [**Nation**] had already invited them in, and they'd gone in and taken photos – it was pretty intimidating – **Barton Hill** was pretty rough in those days as everyone would know if they read certain books. I said it before, I went up there and it was closed, so these drawings I did and little characters, I wrote a note and posted them through the letterbox. Years later, Inkie said to me: 'Yeah I saw them, you bit all those characters, you copied them from such and such', I said, 'I didn't know any better!' I finally did go up there a few times and met a few of the locals, I met everyone, and I painted up there a few times, this was '88, '89, then certain things started happening in **Bristol** like the skatepark, I painted there in '89, all documented a million times.

S.W.R. South West Riters, Eagle House, 1988.
Photograph: courtesy of Turoe.

Mad, I love that detail about those early days before you were really painting pieces.

Yeah, we just used to stand about for hours, you would never fathom you'd be that good -yeah practice makes perfect – but not for

everybody. It's not easy. Although it looks easy, and now we have all these tailormade things to make it easier like slower paint, different nozzles or whatever, it makes you sound like an old fart but we had **CarPlan** and **Dupli-Color**; **Shady** described **CarPlan** as 'piss in a tin', and **Dupli-Color** was piss with a little bit of flour mixed in the tin! We might have got some **Buntlac** and a bit of **Smoothrite** to do the outline, but that's all we had. It was learning to do what you could with what you had. Then you had people making things to make pens thicker or whatever. It was just about destroying shit. Bus tagging, everywhere you went you would write your name.

I remember coming up to **Bristol** with **Rola** in late '88 and I've never seen so much saturation by tags. The buses were just drenched in ink.

I felt like that when I went to **London**, you got to pay homage to that, go and see that stuff, but also a few went to **Birmingham**, and got taught how to open up the back window of the buses, and you'd pull the emergency cord and the bus would stop, you'd open the window, hop out and drop down out the bus. The little yellow buses had a button on the back that you could push and it would stop for like five seconds, so we used to run up behind them, push the button, it would stop, you'd tag it and then the bus would be off. What we saw and learnt in **London** and other places we'd bring into what we were doing, meet up with everyone at night and just go out destroying shit. We'd still do pieces our side of town and they'd do pieces their side of town, then we would literally all get together and go bombing. It just snowballed, massively.

Until **Operation Anderson.**

And there it is. When **Operation Anderson** happened, what were your thoughts, did you think this is time to give up writing?

I'll go back a little bit. So I was working on the YTS. I left school and I was dossing on this Youth Training Scheme which was a graphic design place with literally one computer and one photocopier, so all I used to do was draw and photocopy stuff. **Beans** was there too; I hadn't met him before. **Kelz** was there, and a few people who was into hip hop and stuff. And **SP's** there, and I knew him from the club. So I left this YTS and got a placement with this bloke making signs near **Lawrence Hill** train station, so every spare minute I had I'm over the club to see **John** or whoever was up there. So, one day, I get a phone call in the shack where we were making the signs. We're out fitting a sign somewhere, and when we get back, I pick up this message to ring home urgently, and I'm wondering what's going on. So I called my mum, and she tells me to come straight home, don't go to the club or anything, just come home, and she couldn't tell me why. So I was like 'this sounds dodgy', this is at the height of the graff scene.

So I went home, I think my dad had been called home from work – I can't really remember – and he said, 'go upstairs', so I went upstairs, bear in mind my bedroom was covered in pictures of graffiti, photos, records, paint, pens, I had writing on the walls...and it was bare. Everything was gone. The whole bedroom had been stripped. I was like 'Fuck! What's going on?' and my mum said, 'the police have been.' I said, 'what do you mean?' Then the penny dropped. Shit. She said, 'They were going to kick the door in but **Margaret** next door said three police vans turned up, four cars...and they were literally going to kick the door in it was all for your stuff.' They obviously knew what I was doing, as I couldn't hide it, I had a free reign anyway, I could easily stay out late painting.

My dad blamed **John Nation** and **Barton Hill** straight away. He said, 'don't go up the club again.' I didn't know really what to do, and my dad said I had to get a solicitor, I didn't really understand what was going on, so we all went to the same solicitor, which was through legal aid, as we couldn't all pay for a solicitor. We realised then that they [the police] were trying to do us all under one conspiracy charge, and they were trying to do **John** as conspirator. They said he [**John**] knew that everyone painting up the club was out spraying illegal graffiti, but

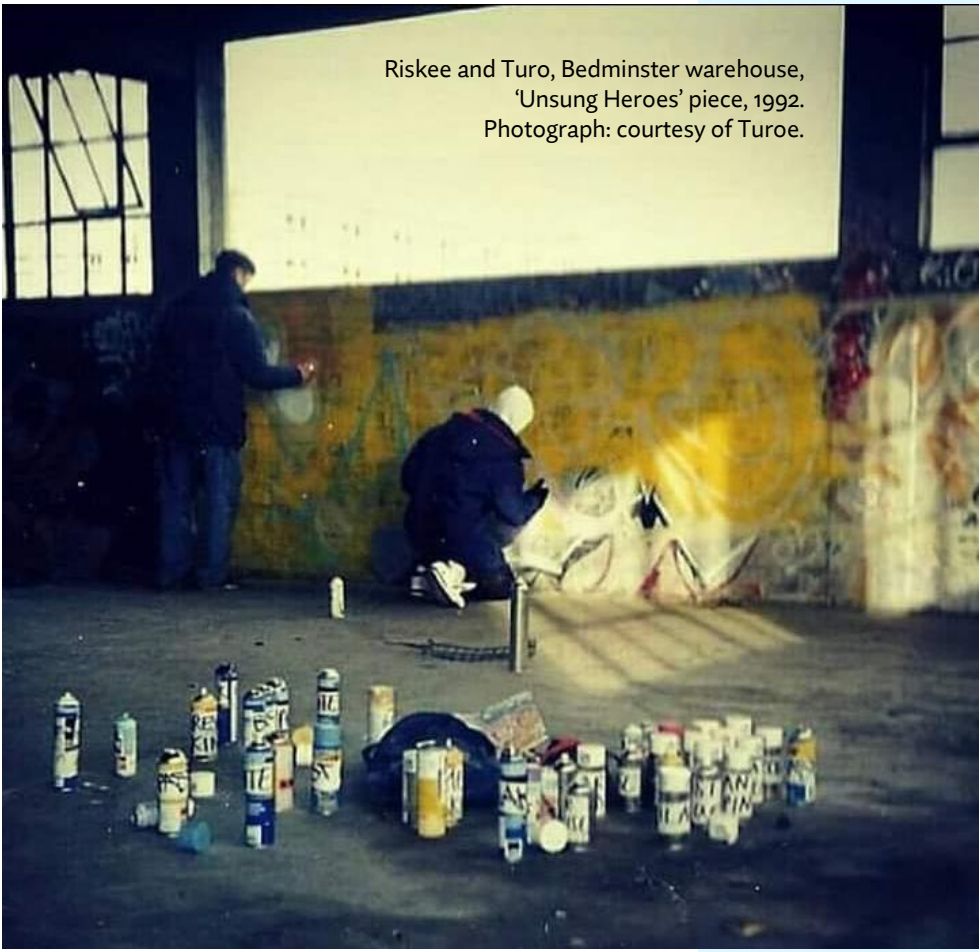
when we were painting up the club we were allowed to. So they were trying to say **John** incited us to commit all these offences, which was obviously rubbish. We were doing it anyway.

So we ended up going to magistrates court about six or eight times, it went on and on. The police latched onto certain names and people that hadn't done much, and the reason they caught us was they caught this kiddie up by **Barton Hill** who had been tagging – they arrested him and took him and found his diary and it had our phone numbers in. It literally said: 'Turoe' and my house phone number. No address, but the number. He'd also met people from outside **Bristol**: **Remer,** people from **Swindon**, and so on, and they (the police) then thought this is bigger. That's then how **Swindon** and that got busted. We got community service, some people got big fines, some got small fines, some people got away with this, some got away with that, it was just a trial run to see what was what.

At the time, I got an £800 fine. They waited until my 17th birthday to tell me I can be charged as an adult, then we went to crown court. They were saying I could go to prison for it, this was 1989, and the penny dropped then and I thought 'shit, this is serious.' My mum and dad were alright, I mean I could have been out doing a lot worse things then, like, in my eyes I didn't think of it as a massive crime, even though I'm sat in the police cell, being interviewed...I don't know...it was made a lot easier because I was there with all my mates. So, it made it easier as we all talked about it – even though you're told not to – you weren't going through it on your own. It wasn't a big joke, but then some people have got no fear. You see **SP** in the dock with his hat on sideways, and laughing and joking, you know, that's just his character, things like that made it easier.

If I knew what I know now, I'd have done more! I literally would have done more damage because that's what you're supposed to do, do you know what I mean? Not nowadays, I mean going back to your first question, I stopped for about six months maybe, I was back up the club, a few people were stopped in their tracks, and a few that were just tagging stopped, but they didn't feel the same way we felt about it. A lot of people got addicted to drugs later on. It was just one of

those – we were doing it – it was fun – then that's gone, they didn't have that anymore. But I was always going to do it. Then '92 comes around and we're finding warehouses in **Bedminster** and we're back. I was painting when I was on bail, at a warehouse party. The party got raided and I was hiding in the crowd and that, and for some reason... I wasn't going to stop. I've been doing three pieces a week. It's only in the past six months because of my health problems I've slowed down – **Bristol's** practically all legal now anyway.



Riskee and Turo, Bedminster warehouse, 'Unsung Heroes' piece, 1992. Photograph: courtesy of Turoe.

So now I'm doing more because it's my release. Work all day, got a couple of kids, I'm still drawing and producing more stuff now that I've ever done. It's what I do. I was that kid who was always going to take it and still do it, I've got an addictive personality, I'm still buying tapes, the collections are still building. You know and I know that anyone of our age, still doing it, it just escalates and becomes whatever it becomes. I don't really know why. In a different circumstance in a different place, I would have gone to prison for graff. It's a bit of a weird thing to say, but I know people that have lost lives, marriages, and family over doing this. I won't be running around doing trains, but I understand how people do that and risk going to prison. I couldn't even tell you why it means so much. It sounds weird as a 50-year-old maybe but only people into it that read this will get it, they'll understand.


Above: Turoe double blackbook page, 'Back to the Old Skool', 2020.
Opposite page: Turoe still in action, 2021.
Photographs: courtesy of Turoe.

IN-CONVERSATION

# AWKWARD

**...with Adam de Paor-Evans**

So we started off talking about a couple of the old jams where we first met – but take me way back – where did you grow up?

I grew up in **Knowle**, in **Bristol**, and then you have **Knowle West** divided by the **Wells Road** and I went to school with a lot of kids from **Hartcliffe, Knowle West,** and **Whitchurch.** I wasn't born here – I was born in **Stockton-on-Tees** – in **County Durham.** My mum's from **Newcastle** originally, then we moved here when I was about three months old. So, I've lived in **Bristol** pretty much all my life.

What can you remember about **Knowle** when you were a kid?

From now looking back, it was a very white area. It's near **Whitchurch,** which was a very **Christian** area, and I've got weird memories of lots of churches everywhere. It was a quiet upbringing, not so many kids into alternative culture, not that I was aware of at that time anyway. If you go over to **North Bristol** and it's totally different, there's more going on, more a mixture of culture.

So it was more a traditional **Westcountry** vibe?

It's hard to put into words really, it was just quiet culturally but rough in parts in **Knowle West** and **Hartcliffe** where my school friends lived.

So what was the first music you got into?

It was stuff that my parents would have been playing, the first group I remember thinking I really liked was **The Police**, and my dad had an album from **Bill Nelson's** group **Be-Bop Deluxe** – a '70s prog rock band – and on the cover were like new-wave type industrial robots, so I was into that, but it was **The Police** that I got obsessed with as a kid.

What was it about those bands – or specifically **The Police** – that attracted you to them?

As a kid you think it's about the pop songs, but I really liked the album tracks, some were fairly weird, what they were saying in the lyrics, and they had layers of jazz, rock, punk, and reggae in there. Some people would take the piss out of them but there are some really great musical moments. It's the album tracks in between the pop songs. That's me not listening to them for years and years and thinking back to **The Police** again, and saying 'yes that's what I liked them'.

That's interesting, how you revisit that.

Yeah, there's also the break that **45 King** used on **Chill Rob G's 'Let the Words Flow'** by **The Police – 'Voices Inside My Head' –** on that album there's a couple of weird excursions, they're trying different things, there's a bit of funk in there. There's also a dark edge to some

of the stuff too. There was a lot of **Led Zeppelin** being played in the house too; Yes as well, there was always that kind of prog rock being played, edging on the experimental stuff that my dad was into.

Live at Lakota, Bristol, 2011.
Photograph: courtesy of Awkward.

That's a really clear introduction to your music background, so when did you first realise there was something else – hip hop?

I guess I could pinpoint it to being aware of '**White Lines'**, but it didn't click – in 1983 I must have been seven. But when I was really aware of it was **'The Show'** by **Doug E. Fresh**. I knew it was hip hop, but I don't know why or how, I can't pinpoint it, I think I got it bought for me at Christmas, and I remember playing the B-side **'La-Di-Da-Di',** and I got obsessed with that. That was the first time I thought 'I like what this

is'. Then from there, it was the gradual exploration. A friend of mine at school had a couple of the **Electros** from his older brother, and I taped them, **Electro 4, 5, 6**...you know, fourth generation copies. So knowing about **'The Show'**, then having those tapes, and sort of forming an idea that this is what this music is, and asking 'what are these sounds?' not seeing scratching or turntables, or seeing anyone rap; then in the same year, seeing the graffiti piece outside **Virgin Records**, I don't know how it was all connected, but as a nine-year-old, somehow I did.

Then there was the exhibition at **The Arnolfini** in 1985. My mum worked there, and I went to the opening of the exhibition – so I knew at the end of it – **Wild Bunch,** Bboys breaking, graff on the walls... **Wild Bunch** playing, I got to know who they were, and after that one event I'm like 'pow pow pow' what is this, you know? In the record shop at **The Arnolfini** they had the soundtrack to **Wild Style**, and I'd go in there all the time and look at the cover, it was in there because the exhibition was on, and I wanted it so much. In the end, my mum got it for me, it was like £6.99 at the time, but that album, I'd just listen to it back to back constantly, and I didn't see the film until about six years later. But just looking at the cover, you know, the photos, the amphitheatre, just looking at these photos again and again and again and questioning what I'm seeing. Again, and **The Arnolfini** there was **David Toop's Rap Attack** book, so I've heard **Wild Style**, I've seen the graffiti exhibition, and then, you know, I'd go and look at that book all the time.

Those amazing black and white photos in that book; so relevant.

Yes, and I remember always looking at it, that book, front to back. And the record list at the back – **'Hundred Lightning Swords of Death'** it was called! That list of tunes – I'm looking at that list thinking 'what are these tunes?' So those three things were the main inspiration for me, and of course reading **Rap Attack** front to back as a ten-year-old, trying to understand what I'm reading about, trying to understand the

foundations to jump off. Trying to figure out who **Wild Bunch** were... there was a video being shown at **The Arnolfini** exhibition, so every Saturday my dad would drop me off there, and I'd watch this **Wild Bunch** video while my mum was working. So this video was them rapping over **Hollis Crew**, and it's just **Tricky** and **Willie Wee** rapping over that, I'd just sit there watching it, over and over again. There was an **FBI Crew** video as well, there was footage of people breakin' in **Bristol** city centre, and **'Girls Love The Way He Spins'** [**Grandmaster Flash**] which was another track on there, so you know, I'm seeing Bboying, breakin', graff, rap, scratching, it's all there together.

Wow, that's an amazing education, to have all those elements presented to you in that way. I know you were only ten, but do you think that you were able to contextualise that, like, this is people in **New York**, this is people in **Bristol**... that kind of thing? Were you piecing things together that way as well, or was the geography not on your radar at that point?

Well, you could tell it was **American** – reading **Rap Attack** placed the context there – remember that book had a lot of history pre-rap, **David Toop** connects it right back, and then seeing **Wild Bunch** and people breakin' in **Bristol**, I'm like, 'OK, it's here as well'. I wasn't old enough to go to clubs obviously, but it was all going on. This culture felt like an unexplored area of life. I didn't really have a concept of how long it had been going on, but I was able quite early on to contextualise its origin. The other important book of course was **Subway Art**, and having that, and being lucky enough to have access to that book at that age at that time. Also, I got to see **Style Wars**, as that was being shown in the gallery of **The Arnolfini**, so I was really lucky in a sense to have that spark my interest and be able to check all of this out. I don't know what happened to it, but I had a programme from the exhibition, and I got it signed by **3D**, **Pride**, and some others... but what happened to that I don't know.

It might turn up one day! That's really incredible. At what point did you try some of this out for yourself?

Well, I was rapping along to **'La-Di-Da-Di'** and stuff, and I remember really, really being into **'Fast Life'** by **Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde** which is still one of my favourite tracks, you know that 'huh-huhs!' and all those amazing dynamics, I'd rap those lyrics.

And **Dave Ogrin's** really fat sound! You're one of those people that can do everything, you know. You rap, you beatbox, you make beats, you Bboy, you DJ, you do graff, you do cover art, your skill base is amazing in its breadth, and I'm really interested in which followed which. You said you started rapping along to things, was it the rap that came first then?

I'd say that and doing outlines. Seeing the graff at the exhibition, and seeing **Pride, 3D** and **Nick Walker** painting before the exhibition opened together in front of me... I was really lucky to see, that really attracted me and so I started doing these outlines. I really saw no separation between them, and I thought 'I'll try this now, I'll try that now'. I think it's less common now for people to try different areas of hip hop. My good friend **Gee** [**Stepchild**] could do a decent outline, he had a good hand style, amazing emcee, obviously a good Bboy...it was just a thing, you do it all, you didn't have to just concentrate on one thing.

Yes, **Gee** said something similar when I spoke to him about **Provincial Headz**, you'd just practice all the elements, it was what you did.

Yeah. I can't remember when it was, I must have been about twelve, I had a **Realistic** mixer with the switches, transforming, and the record

Dean Lane graffiti, Bristol, 2021.
Photograph: courtesy of Awkward.

player – I was using bits of paper as slipmats – you know, just trying to scratch. My parents and grandparents clubbed together to buy me that mixer. I guess because my mum saw hip hop culture at **The Arnolfini** she could see what it as I was trying to do, she met people

involved, you know, I'm lucky to have parents that were artistic and primed in that way.

Bboy action in the street, 2003.
Photograph: courtesy of Awkward.

Yeah, you didn't get the 'what are you doing that rubbish for' like a lot of us did.

Yeah, she could see it for what it was. She would have talked to **3D** or whoever and seen what their process was, and that fact that I was into it was encouraged, and I didn't stop trying all the different parts

of it. I didn't start to write lyrics until about 1990, I used to just freestyle everything. I didn't start performing out to people until about 1991 or 1992, the beats came a bit later. I was doing beat tapes and pause-button mixes back then.

So were you doing a lot of that early experimentation yourself, or had you linked up with anybody by this point?

I didn't link up with anyone until I was going to clubs. I was just bouncing off things I was seeing, or anything else I could find. By that point I would have had copies of all the **Street Sounds Electros**, and whatever else I could get my hands on, and I'd detect what was mixed into what, how tunes went from one into another, and figure it out, then try something out myself. I'd cue up a tape, play it off the tape while the record's playing, tape it off, you know, blending and stuff. Trying to recreate what I was hearing. I listened again and again and again to **Jazzy Jeff** and **Cash Money** or **DJ Supreme** and I taught myself how to chirp using the side of the record, as I was just using cheap belt-drive turntables, so yeah. It wasn't until about '91, '92 when I started figuring out that clubs were playing this or that.

There were pirate radio stations that were important, like **Bad Radio**, **Emergency Radio, FTP** and all that kind of stuff, so I'd listen to them in like '87, '88 and they're like, 'such and such a night is going on here', and I'd hear the crew shout outs, names of clubs, and that gave me that knowledge of who and where. One night, I just turned up at the **Def Con** nights in **St Pauls** on my own. By that point I could rap, so that was really the first time I met other people properly that were doing it. I was about 17, and went up and asked if I could rap. They're like 'What you wanna rap?' I'm this skinny white kid, and I'm like 'let me get on the mic', and I was like 'yada-yada-yada-yada' and I think **Kelz** and people like that were there, and they're like: 'How old are you?' And that was how I got known. At the same time, I answered this ad in a venue for this band who were looking for a rapper, they were called **TOO DEE DEEP** At the same time I was going to clubs, I'd

be listening to **3 PM** and then meet them in clubs, and they'd be like 'How did you learn to do this?' That's when I called myself **Vinyl Matt**, which was my first emcee/DJ name. Every time I went somewhere, I'd get on the mic, and that's how I got to know other headz, because in the area I grew up in nobody else was into it. I hated school, didn't really have many friends I could relate to so getting into this world, rapping, being in a band, going to clubs and meeting others was something I could get into. Things then jumped off that.

That's an incredible story, because you have this world which you created which is about you practising and understanding all the elements of hip hop, then bringing that outside and connecting up with people in a public space.

I was a really shy child as well. I'd just draw at home; if I could get out of sports at school I would, I was really asthmatic as a child and spent a lot of time in my head and drawing, and my parents were really surprised when they saw me perform, as such an introverted child, and there I was on the mic. At school I was bullied a bit, I was one of the weird kids, artistic, but I would just be myself around a load of people that had no idea. At school everyone has an opinion of you and if you're quiet, you're weird. So then I met people in hip hop, when I had these skills, it just opened up my confidence. Also at that time I'm learning so much, I met around that time **Krissy Kriss** who was always really supportive. I used to turn up to **St Nicholas House** in **St Pauls** on my own, getting to know him, and going in his shop, I'd go in for hours and chat about stuff and records. I knew I had to learn from people like **Krissy Kriss**, I had to meet people doing it and be respectful of the culture and where it comes from. The whole thing constantly going on in my head was you have to show and prove. A constant quest of learning, and building, and showing, and proving. I'd hope that **Kelz** would say my rapping was good, you know. In my mindset, it was a quest.

Awkward on the mic with Probe Mantis and El Eye, 1997.
Photograph: courtesy of Luke Palmer/Acerone.

There are these people that you hold in high regard, that you've been aware of for years, then they become aware of you, and you kind of start to be seen in that way, it's a really good feeling, right? To become a part of that broader cultural movement.

Yeah, you know I didn't have a crew, I was singular-minded in a sense, I knew hip hop was this show and prove thing, take someone out, a battle thing, hunt down where people are playing and be like 'you're wack!'.

So was battling important for you, did you do a lot of battling?

That came a bit later, around '96, I didn't want it to take me the wrong way too, even though I was quite intense rapping, you know, I would get on where there were rappers that had been around a bit longer in **Bristol.** The battling came out more so when I hooked up with people like **El Eye** [**Aspects**], because then we were like-minded, around '96, '97 they'd just come to **Bristol** to college, and there was this added confidence of 'we're good'. We'd go and find people we thought were shit, and take them out. That developed naturally, and for fun. Again, it's the show and prove thing. People are like 'oh you're a hater', but we know it's not that. It's part of the culture, you know, you can battle someone to death then be like 'cool! Nice one!' Clapp! (makes a slapping hand sound). When you battled it wasn't because you hated them!

It's a way to bring it criticality really, isn't it? Critical feedback through taking someone out!

Yeah. The culture now is so homogenized, participation is the thing, which is cool, but you need to strive for excellence. I don't think maybe I was fully aware that's what I was doing, but anything in life, art and innovation comes from this. And in hip hop, you can give some of this back, you know.

So when did the name Awkward arrive, and what was that about?

So the first band I was in around '93 to '95, was a band called **TOO DEE DEEP** which was a jazz funk band, with a singer and I would rap on certain tunes, then I met a couple of people and formed a band called **Freestyle** which was what I really wanted to do, which was again, a live band, but the jazz funk dudes were quite pedestrian in their playing style, but these guys were into rock, but also **Cypress Hill** and **Public Enemy**, so I joined with them and became a DJ and emcee in that band. Then when it got to '96, and I met **El Eye** and **Probe Mantis** [**Aspects**], and I used to also hook up with **One Cut** weekly and go and rap with them down **The Watershed** and an emcee called **D Rock** and **MC Redz**.

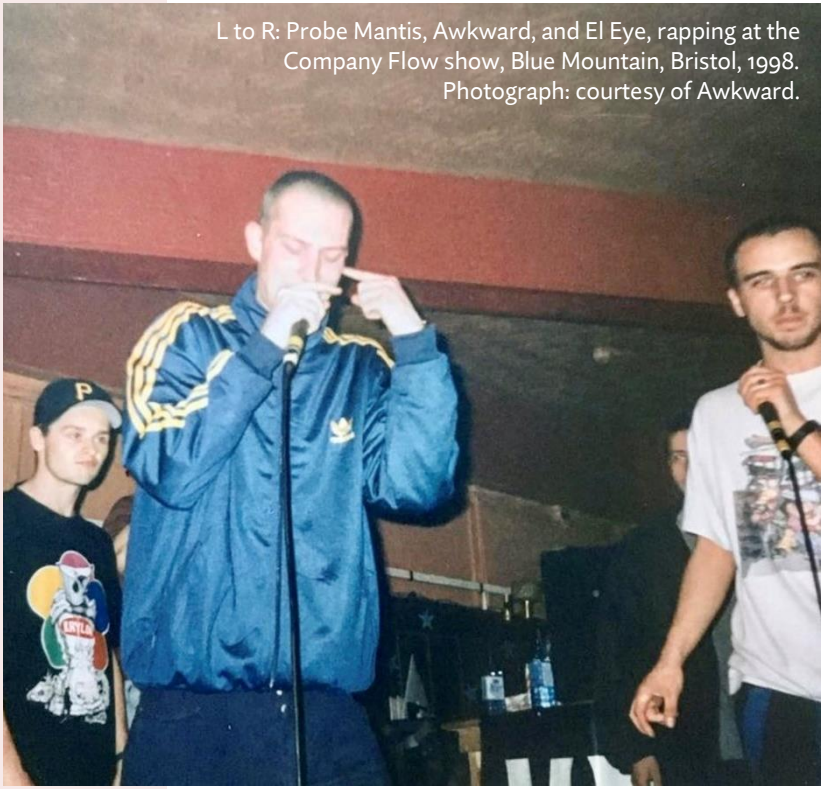
I was still known in **Bristol** as **Vinyl Matt**, I thought the name was a bit corny, and I liked the word 'Awkward' and how it was written, also at that point I was definitely starting to veer off into more weird territory. I was being influenced by hip hop still, but it was stuff like **Freestyle Fellowship**, **Hieroglyphics, Blackalicious,** that type of thing, which to me, having **Wild Bunch** at the back, art music and creativity at the front – I'm looking at hip hop people and thinking 'what are YOU going to do then? Are you going to do what everyone else is doing?' and that's quite a common thing to validate your position in UK hip hop. We all know who the innovators are but there are a thousand groups that are popular because they sound like the innovators. They're getting it wrong; you're not meant to sound like anyone else. **Task Force** don't sound like anyone else, but now we've got a thousand Task Forces.

So I was following weirder paths, my style was quite weird, quite awkward. Then I was ready to release my first solo tape which was away from the band side of things as I was making songs on my own. At that point I'd met **Jamie Hombré** who signed **Aspects**, and he heard recordings of me rapping over some beats, and he was going to sign me up, then I introduced him to the **Aspects** guys, and he went with them. So I was like, 'fuck that then', and I carried on doing my thing. So the first tape I did was by **Awkward**, it was me doing everything. The band was about to be signed to **Melancholic**, which was **Massive Attacks'** label, and our manager was just a shady dude


Awkward [far right] with Freestyle, 1996.
Photograph: courtesy of Awkward.

and he basically wanted the rapper in the group **Phelom**, who was the younger brother of **Hollis** from **Marxman**, and he and the bass player started going off making plans with our manager, next thing they'd come out and they'd got their album released. **Mario C** of **Beastie Boys** fame mixed and engineered and mastered it, and we were left... **Massive Attack** paid for us to record a proper demo over a week. We'd turn up to the studio and these two other members just weren't there. It was a weird thing. I thought 'fuck this', I was still with the guitarist – **Dave** – who at the same time was learning how to scratch, and he became an amazing scratch DJ **Dee Swift**. I'd got my first PC and I just carried on being experimental around '97 – which I didn't think was experimental – I just thought this is what you have to

do. I'd record them at **Dave's** house, and that's how I got into being **Awkward.** That was really the genesis of **Vertebrae** along with **Stepchild** [**Gee**] and my younger brother **Fono Veins**. **Gee,** who was like my mentor was older than me – he's first generation UK hip hop – he was playing me crazy VHS archive Bboy videos, you know, whatever hip hop he took off the TV, we hung out a lot, so **Vertebrae** formed with **Fono Veins, Marshy, Stepchild, Dee Swift** and **Snuf One** so that's how I became **Awkward** doing all that kinds of stuff.



L to R: Probe Mantis, Awkward, and El Eye, rapping at the Company Flow show, Blue Mountain, Bristol, 1998. Photograph: courtesy of Awkward.

I always had a feeling that it linked to style and your approach. Without a doubt, you're for sure one of the most exploratory artists in the UK, and I've always respected that, it's really important that you

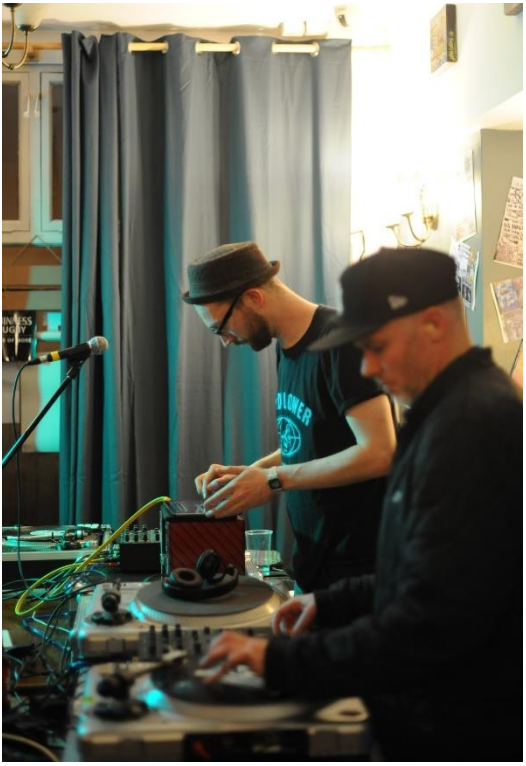
were doing that stuff. How has your experience shaped you as a person do you think, and how has it impacted your life now?


Awkward art work, 2020. Photograph: courtesy of Awkward.

Well I was a shy person, and having that outlet to be myself and explore from early on being accepted into something – and I had no idea that would happen – has shaped my confidence as a person. Having those opportunities in the culture has definitely impacted me. If I try to imagine what kind of person I would be now if I hadn't done all that stuff, I'd maybe still be shy and very private, so that's impacted me a lot. It's funny – I guess we all go through this as being hip hop devotees – we have a big passion and it can affect your

relationships. I've been in relationships with women where they've either understood what I was doing or they want to see a stop to it. The amount of time, energy, and effort that you put into it when you are pursuing it properly is just – it's such a part of life. I've been lucky enough to be in relationships with women who understood it, and been encouraging with it.

As an overview, it's definitely made me more confident in life, and in my interpersonal relationships with people, and getting to know people. But again, it's had adverse effects, and those personal relationships will fall by the wayside because this is part of me, you know? Because we've all been doing this so long, it's hard to separate out, but now as I get older, I'm 45 now, and there's been a lot of times where I've been like 'why am I doing this', you know? But then, I look at the people I've worked with and who I'm working with now you know, I worked with **Kool Keith** and if you'd told me in 1989 I would be doing that, I'd have had no idea.



We've just finished the third **Cloaks** album with **Awol One** and **Gel Roc** -it's just come back from mastering – and we've got **Aceyalone** on there; it's allowed me to work with people I'd never have imagined I would. The network of people is great, you know, and we've got **Beans** doing the cuts on the tune with **Aceyalone**, so you draw friends into that clique as well. Even if it's one of my drawings that

becomes a piece of cover art, it gets me closer to something. I'm not a writer, I'd never describe myself as a graff writer – I know what it takes – you have to be there inside and outside 100%, you have to live it every day. But the culture has allowed me to fulfil dreams. It's all positive. It's allowed me to express myself as a human being with ideas. When I look back to what I've learnt from gaining a deep understanding of the culture, it plants the seeds; it sets you up for the future.


Above: Promo shot, 2020.
Opposite page: Playing live with Sir Beans OBE, Rope-A-Dope, The Rope Walk, Bristol, 2019.
Photographs: courtesy of Awkward.

# postscript

Adam de Paor-Evans

It was the autumn of 1989, and a murky yet gusty day, peppered with orange and musty yellow hues was throwing a tantrum outside the window. I was sat watching the telly, when the music video to **'Wishing On A Star'** by **Fresh 4** began to play. As an eighteen-year-old, I had been captivated by hip hop for six years already, but here was something which somehow felt different. Within the first two bars I immediately recognised the **'Funky Drummer'** break, but as **Lizz E.** launched into the opening line the familiar words from **Rose Royce's** 1978 classic oozed effortlessly over the rhythm. Then, unexpectedly, the beat drops out after only four bars, and the vocal 'star...' floats majestically over **Faze-O's** 1977 jazz funk dreamscape **'Riding High'**, a song which I'd fallen in love with only a few months previously thanks to **EPMD's 'Please Listen To My Demo'** (**Unfinished Business**, 1989).

For a little over three-and-a-half minutes I was consumed by the most sublime atmospheric sound as the organics of the music and singing were pierced by sharp cuts, scratches and a single verse of rap. Visually, I occupied a soundsystem party, delivered in a combination of reverse chronology and flashback, as I witnessed the crew setting up their decks, mixing, scratching, and watching with fulfilment as toddlers, teens, parents, and families partied in the street. Intercut with urban skateboarding scenes, the rapper walking '...over a bridge calm as troubled water / Doing what I want to and not what you order...' – and – what was that **Wild Pitch** record being cut up at the end?

I had undergone a kind of baptism. For me, this record introduced me to a region and a community that was underpinned by years of local diasporic music culture, and a sound that was unconditionally hip hop originality. As I write this postscript, having just spent a day listening to **Bristol** hip hop spanning four decades and reflecting on the personal histories offered in this issue, I would propose that **Bristol** hip hop behaves as a kind of socio-spatial, material, contextual and intertextual palimpsest: that is to say

that Bristol hip hop's evolutionary uniqueness remains rooted in an organic sound, and a support mechanism between its members which intersects generations. As such, its processes and productions build layer upon layer, its artists insitu working intuitively, innovatively, and thoughtfully, continually adding to the original manuscript of Bristolian hip hop.


'Anyone...', Smith & Mighty, Three Stripe Records, 1988. Featuring Krissy Kris ('This Is The Time') and Kelz ('I Am The Poet'). Photograph: courtesy of Adam de Paor-Evans.

# Conrico Steez


**Conrico Steez** is an illustrator/muralist based out of Bristol, UK.

Knowing from a young age that he wanted to pursue a career in the arts, his work specialises in blending elements of pop culture and street art into the oft psychedelic flourishes and motifs scattered throughout his body of work. After completing a degree in Illustration, he is now working as a professional muralist/sign writer/illustrator in the South-West of England.


Above: 'Heterotopia', collaboration with Acerone. Bishopston, Gloucester Road, Bristol, July 2021.

Top, opposite: 'Tom takes a trip down the rabbit hole', Read and Weep crew jam. Cumberland Basin, July 2021.

Bottom, opposite: 'Cloud explosions'. Devon Road, Easton, March 2021.

Overleaf: 'An ode to Hokusai'. Riverside Park (next to the M32), Bristol, 2018.

Growing up in the halcyon days of the 1990s-2000s, he draws his inspiration from an amalgamation of source materials he has absorbed throughout life. Influenced by the heyday of cheap video games on the PS1/PS2 and cartoons/anime on late night Toonami brought Eastern animation to his young eyes, whilst golden era hip hop banged out in the background of life. His illustration leads him on a path of its own as his artwork fluidly develops itself as it moves from concept to final product. By utilising the fluidity of his creative energies, he brings forth the imagery you see before you today.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'Where's that W'ascly W'abbit', (alongside Soap). M32 skatepark, March 2021.

An ode to Hokusai:

I've always been enamoured by ukiyo-e (pictures of the floating world), movement from the Eastern world, ever since I was a young child discovering what artwork I enjoyed. I was immediately drawn to the flat colours and ethereal sensibilities in Hokusai's work. I decided I would replicate one of his sketches from his 'Mangaka' series of books for this mural. Sadly it lasted less then a day as it was painted

in the only shady section of this wall in the height of summer, so was taken out the next day by another artist. It's one of my favourite pieces that I've done as well, but that's the game at times.

Where's that W'ascly W'abbit:

Growing up consuming cartoons, Looney Tunes was one of my favourites and especially the hijinx of Elmer Fudd and Bugs Bunny, and reflecting on it as an adult brings new ideas to the fore. I decided to imagine what it would be like if Bugs Bunny never existed and was just a projection of Elmer's consciousness that he'd forever chase in pursuit of discovering himself and his inner rebel, manifested by an illusory rabbit who always got the better of him, no matter what.

Heterotopia:

I messaged Acer about linking up for another paint and we ummed and ahhed about what to produce for the piece, he had a spot already in mind which was a long abandoned building with some hoardings in front. I had never known anything to exist in this spot as for most of my teenage and adult life it was an empty, boarded-up lot (last occupied in 2005). As we began to talk about it I said I'd be keen to do some floating island/castle type imagery and he settled with the word 'Heterotopia' (I had no idea what this was, a quick wiki search informed me), and it was the perfect word to illustrate this location as it's been a place that has changed hands many times over both our life times from being a post office, bookies to a craft store in its last iteration. It is soon to become a Wetherspoons, which is in stark contrast to the ethos of the area as being a strip for independent businesses celebrated nationally (Gloucester Road). My floating island imagery would represent the ever changing facets of what this piece of land has been within our life times and his word brought succinctity and sense to the imagery; what looks like utopia could in fact be many amazing things which is soon to become a lifeless, corporate excuse to fill the building with something that is largely unwanted by the local community.

Cloud explosions:

This was an experiment for me in using less hard black lines within my work and focus on using colours to outline each other, it was a fun experiment I got to produce on a friends house. Initially this was the background artwork for a digital illustration that I liked so much I thought I'd replicate in a mural.

Tom takes a trip down the rabbit hole:

Again going back to my childhood obsession with cartoon and psychology I thought I'd create an homage to Tom & Jerry. A show I watched with religious fascination as a youth, reflecting back on the hijinks that Jerry would pull over Tom. Interestingly these days you never see kids tv characters smoking or drinking (not a bad choice in my eyes), but as a child growing up I was constantly exposed to the idea of smoking as something only adults could do and a lot of pranks that Tom would suffer at the hands of Jerry in his pursuits and exploits trying to capture him would often result in an exploded cigar or him getting inebriated in some manner whilst Jerry got away. Now as an adult reflecting back on what was deemed acceptable to animate for kids of the time (smoking was not widely regarded as being bad in the 50's/early 60's so can be seen everywhere in early animations) to growing up throughout my teens and adult life to see it largely banned and shunned from being done around small children (again quite a good idea for public health). I thought it would be fascinating to introduce the idea of hallucinogenic's in to the milieu and play with the idea of Tom being tricked by Jerry with an psychedelic laced cigar. I also quite enjoy playing with fluo/transparent colours when I paint and this was a perfect excuse to combine this experimentation and an interesting concept.

Words by Conrico Steez


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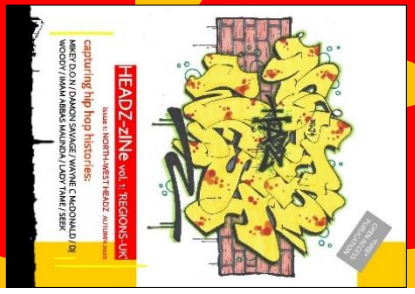
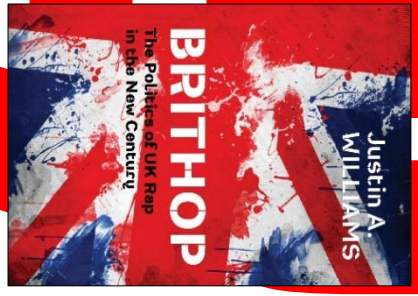



*HEADZ-zINe 'REGIONS-UK' NORTH-WEST HEADZ: Vol. 1, Issue 1.*
Squagle House, United Kingdom.
ISBN 978-1-5272-6848-7

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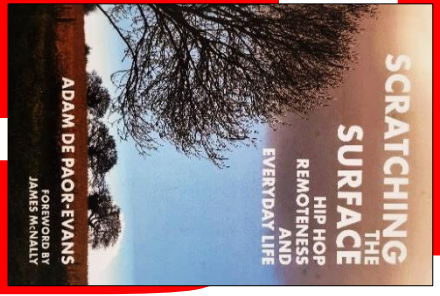


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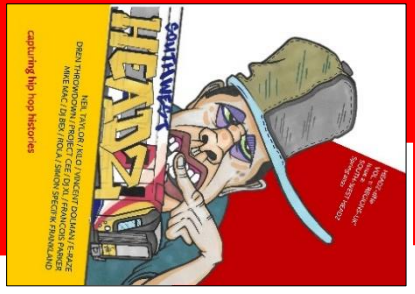
ISBN 978-1-5272--6658-2




*HEADZ-zINe 'REGIONS-UK' SOUTH-WEST HEADZ: Vol. 1, Issue 2.*
Squagle House, United Kingdom.
ISBN 978-1-5272-9509-4



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