

chris gray

mechanics of me

a mind massage book

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from the heart

THANK YOU NOTES

have been removed from my music projects because I don't want to forget anyone . However, I'd like to make a special exception here in *mechanics of me*. Please accept a very warm thanks to *all* of the inspiring individuals in my life. And because of my imperfections, forgive me if your name does not appear below.

Dedication of this effort is due to God for putting up with all of our shortcomings. And despite them, I was blessed with a loving and understanding mother (R.I.P.) who is beyond praise, my father (R.I.P.) of whom I'm the spitting image, my big sister Linda and brothers Jeffery and Anthony for taking care of me; the Gray and Henry families; Tracy White for sharing house music and Aunt Emma Jean and her brother Hank (R.I.P.) for helping me move to Chicago. This is also devoted to Antwan J. Henry for taking me under his wing once I made the Windy City home and to Shante Bullock for being a comforter in some of my greatest moments of need.

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◇ **It's all downhill once you start**

TIME IS PRECIOUS,

so thank you for taking some of yours to read my story.

This project started as humbly a personal effort to capture the crispness of select events before fading from my memory. But after jotting a few random notes, I decided to better organize, then share the experiences as my first book. And instead of boring you to death by droning on about each hour of the day, I've decided to keep it short by concentrating on the powerful impact that house music has had on my life.

Judging from history, an author or screenwriter who's capable of telling a good story usually receives accolades. And while the primary motive here isn't to receive literary praise, my mission is to share specific segments of my life as succinctly as possible. But at the same time, I'd like to keep the overall presentation somewhat laid back and conversational. So please try to get beyond any grammatical errors, poor sentence structure and slang to focus on the essence of the journey.



And another thing... I'm forced to shamefully admit that I own a few good books that I've not finished yet. So regardless of how much or how little you choose to read here, I hope that you'll be enriched regardless.

Here's a question. Do you think it's possible that one's love of music could drastically change the direction of their life? Yes is the answer in my case and it happened because of my interest in house music. And if you're wondering what house music is and why it's had such a dramatic effect on me, I'll try to explain it during this book's journey. Now my intent isn't to explore and examine nearly three decades of house music history. But it should at least be said that it's a wonderful evolution of dance music—more specifically, an offspring of disco and funk.

It's been said that the term "house music" was coined to describe the unique music played at Chicago's legendary Warehouse club back in the late 1970's. Some club-goers would say, "Hey, let's go down to the Warehouse to hear some of that *house* music!" Does that make sense now?

The segment of society visiting the Warehouse and similar venues was mainly Black and gay, and wasn't always welcomed by mainstream nightclubs. So many of the gatherings took place wherever space could be found. This includes converted car washes, abandoned power plants facilities and of course, *warehouses*. They were happy to take

what was discarded and make it work for the sake of fellowship and love, through music.

Now let's fast forward 25 years to the summer of 2004. After many years of repelling dance music clubs, raves and the entire house and techno music culture, the City of Chicago finally acknowledged that which was born in its own



backyard. The city took a visible step by honoring Frankie Knuckles, one of house music's godfathers and former Warehouse deejay. *Frankie Knuckles Way* is

now the renamed section of Jefferson Street (at Jackson St.) in front of the first Warehouse location.

Friends of house music also lobbied Mayor Richard M. Daley who pronounced Wednesday, August 24, 2004 as Frankie Knuckles Day. And most recently the mayor declared August 10, 2005 as House Unity Day. Daley had been considered one of the worst enemies of dance music in Chicago and master of a deftly political city, so the dedications are marks of true progress.

But please understand that these accomplishments are about much more than playing music in a lovely old building or renaming a street. They salute the culture that blossomed from Chicago to all over the world, bringing many people together through a peaceful groove.

This is testament to the saying that each person has a unique purpose in life (as one of our favorite house songs reminds us, Mr. Fingers "A Path"). For those of you who are unfamiliar with the songs mentioned, hopefully the titles will at least provide a basic understanding.

◇ **And the keeper is Jack**

ALONG WITH A BASIC DESIRE to be a good person, succeed and have a positive impact on others, my love and pursuit of house music culture has kept me clear of journeying in unneeded directions.

Back in '77, the Warehouse was in its infancy and I was just a poor Mississippi kid eating generic cornflakes with water. Who figured that the club's watershed premiere would eventually change my life? I'm a music fanatic like my father was, but hadn't an inkling of an idea how important a simmering '70s Chicago club scene would become to me as an adult. But the bond makes perfect sense, considering my deep childhood affection for disco.

And the funny thing is, my dad told me years later that he drove 14 hours from Mississippi to Chicago for a police workshop around the same time the Warehouse opened. He also loved disco, so I wonder if his job put him the thick of house music's artistic pregnancy! Late 70's fantasies of chugging down *the real thing* (Coke) and chomping on a juicy, old-fashioned cheeseburger with crispy fries delights me. Who could ask for anything more down-to-earth and tasty ahead of Frankie's legendary Warehouse sets?

Sometimes it's just about the simple pleasures.

How I *long* for a time machine.

Barely 7 years old at the time, spending summer with my cousin Tracy proved to be my own brand of exploration. And while our mothers set about their own “windy city” getaway, we made the best of country life by getting into innocent devilry with our childhood friends. This included climbing our grandparents’ fruit trees. Our exaggerated wails from when our Grandmama spanked us for smoking amateur rolled-up brown paper bag cigarettes could have been nominated for an Academy Award.

We *knew* we were smarter than the old woman and that she’d never catch us. Right. But it was as if Mrs. Eagle Eyes had transforming powers and could see all over the house at once. It probably didn’t help that our undisguised anxiety to have her finish hot-combing Tracy’s hair was a tag team effort. We despised her rules and longed to be with our mothers in Chicago after a few days of “tyranny”. Life through the eyes of a child is hilarious at times. And the crazy truth is I came *this* close to moving to Chicago earlier, but my mom nixed that possibility.

Looking back with adult eyes, my mom made a wise choice because big city living wasn’t right for her kids... especially since we were accustomed to the innocence of the Mississippi Delta. But her decision seemed awful to me as a kid, because my cousins moved away and I didn’t. I felt a loss on many levels.

Despite my disappointment with being left down in the boon-docks, I still enjoyed backwoods simplicities like fetching Big Momma’s Diet Rite pops from the local Chinese grocery store. (Big Momma is a nickname for my mother’s grandmother). Remarkably, I can still feel the chill of those clear and curvy glass



CG's loving mom

bottles in my hands as I toted them home in the sweltering heat. Man, I really miss my Big Momma's smile. Oh by the way, we say *pop* down south instead of soda!

Maybe I'm quite silly in a sense because I still get a head rush from thinking about basic but essential events like two human beings joining together to create a new one. Of course other life forms accomplish this as well but the point is that most of us take the phenomenon for granted. But hey don't worry, this book won't turn into biology or genetics class. I've digressed a wee bit.

It was only mentioned to point out the sort of things that have whet my mind since an early age. And shoot, I'm still awestruck by the possibility that I could have been born as one of my brothers, my sister or even *you!*

I love my siblings dearly and respect their life paths but I feel incredibly fortunate to be *Chris*, the one who was introduced to the house music way of life. Some naysayers are quick to dismiss house music as merely a remnant of disco, but the "househeads" understand that it's about much more. We believe that house is as essential as blood and is naturally therapeutic. It's a great alternative medicine. House music helped me strengthen my connection with God, or whatever higher form of goodness you respect. Simply put, it makes me want to be a better person.

Am I being silly with my romanticizations? *Maybe*. But until otherwise, hopefully the feelings will nourish me as long as possible. Just like lovers do, I sometimes get frustrated and need take a breather from time to time. And like Jazz, it's amazing to feel the raw essence of life pulsating through it. Much of the kind of house music that affects me is played at the tempo of the human heartbeat.

But going back to an earlier line of thought, perhaps we pat ourselves on the back too much about how house music brings all kinds of people together. It's been argued that many other genres of music do the same.

House music attracted me partly because it easily brings out the joy of an inner child instead of fueling anger like much of hip hop does. It helps us smile when we feel like streaming endless tears from life's frustrations. And although the alleviation is similar to gospel music's, it's different because with house music, it's OK to openly explore a little lust and shun inhibitions at the same time.

Perhaps if I'd entered this world as one of my brothers or my sister, maybe I'd at least nod my head and feel house music's rhythm if nothing else. But if that was true, it'd be a shame to have lost my unique experiences.

But you know, I think I've *felt* the intensity present in house music long before I'd actually *heard* it. It's like the vibe of house has always been with me.

Have I just confused the spirit of house with God or goodness? Are they one in the same? Hmm. Maybe it's a bit over the top. And I don't deny being a nut at times. "Sometimes I *feeeel* a like nut... sometimes I *doooooon't*."

One thing's for sure about my familia though—there's absolutely no doubt in my mind that the fire in my soul was lit by the passion from both sides. I used to joke lovingly with my mom that maybe it should have been illegal for two tribes of mental patients to marry.



*Gray Family men at Chris' high school graduation in '88.
Front row, left to right: Demetrius, Johnny (Chapman)
Back row, left to right: Anthony, Grandad, Jeffery, Dad & Chris.*

◇ Tracy's mixtapes

BACK IN THE mid-80's, the synthesizer kind of soul heard in funk, pop and dance music left me in awe. The darker it sounded and the funkier the groove, the better I thought it was.

So I suss that deepness is also felt in other music styles. Before house, I got my fix from a wide range of choices including classical, new age, Sade, Cameo, Rebbie Jackson and the "Minneapolis sound" especially. Twin Cities masters of funk include Prince, Morris Day, The Time and particularly Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis of Flyte Tyme Productions. Jam and Lewis have upraised the sounds of S.O.S. Band, Alexander O'Neal, Cherrille, Thelma Houston, Janet Jackson, Nu Shooz, Cheryl Lynn, Human League and many others.

Fortunately there was a lot of dance music played back then that sounds as good as the four-to-the-floor sound we love today. In many instances the only noticeable differences were slightly altered drum patterns and a more consistent adherence to traditional song structure. At any rate, I was a teenager and ripe for trying new things in '86, but maybe not advanced enough for house music at first taste.

While my cousins lived it up in Chicago during the

height of the disco era, I fended off poisonous snakes and thirsty mosquitoes that mostly sought *my* blood down in the deep south. Or so it *seemed* that way.

It makes me wonder if living here in Chicago made it easier for Tracy to like early house songs that were causing such hysteria. (It's easy for me to phone and ask, but I yearn for a little dramatic flare at this point in the text. :)

After I moved into my uncle Hank's house in '92, my cousin Antwan boasted that Ron Hardy once lived across the street. I joke that it's no wonder that many of the songs I penned during my stay in that stuffy attic took on a lofty benevolence. But seriously, since I missed out on house music's early years all I can do now is imagine what it must've felt like through stories told.

It all started when my aunt Pauline moved back to Greenwood, Ms. from Chicago to settle back into my grandparents' home. Tracy took uncle Dennis' old room. Although it may not seem like it, this was a big deal in those days because traditionally the men in my grandparents' house slept in the back and the women kept up front.

So once Tracy moved back it was cool to catch up on our adventures and hang out while listening to her new stereo. (Yes, it had a built-in turntable and no, we didn't have tiny mp3 players back then!) It was refreshing to hear new music because I'd been limited to local radio stations that played mostly soft rock, country or soul.

It's sad but some radio stations in the deep south were weirdly segregated. The station I grew up next door to broadcast both AM and FM frequencies. Pop and rock targeted the largely White audience during the day, but when WSWG-AM signed off at dusk, soul-playing deejays catered to the mostly Black night-time audience. Talk about a musical Dr. Jekyll and Hyde!

The radio station's daily music switch felt as different as night and day too. Perhaps even more awkward than rid-

ing the predominately Black working class CTA (Chicago Transit Authority) red line train from 95th Street toward downtown. Once there, it seems similar to actors scrambling backstage between acts because many riders transfer to westbound trains and buses. Then a more diverse racial and cultural mix boards as the train continues northbound. Just the reverse happens as it travels southbound.

WSWG was a strange programming anomaly, but the radio station exposed two largely different groups of listeners to music that might not have been heard otherwise. After years of being star-struck as a child, I later worked as an announcer for WKXG (the renamed WSWG-AM portion) and broke rules by playing house music sometimes. My close friendship with Herman Anderson, a Chicago-reared music director allowed me to get away with it.

The music video format was a baby and TV programs like TBS' *Night Tracks* were gaining momentum. MTV was the cult leader but didn't exist to most of the rural south because cable television was limited and priced out of the reach of many. And by the way, this period was a decade before the web existed and online chat was a new drug.

So when Tracy played hotmixes from 89.3 FM WKKC (Kennedy-King College) and 102.7 FM WBMX, the music were pretty strange to me at first. I guess it was similar to my trying sushi and miso soup for the first time... it's definitely an acquired taste and can be a wonderful experience with patience and an open mind. I remember hearing JM Silk's "I Can't Turn Around" and wondering if the singer had a stuttering problem or if the tape was about to break. "I-can't I-can't I-can't I-can't-I-I-I-I-I- I-can't..."

Tracy's dual cassette deck permitted me to make a copies of the mixes to study this "stutter music" a bit more.

I asked "Why do all of these people stutter and say just a few words over and over again?". She laughed and then remarked that I didn't get it. It bothered me a little because

Tracy was my closest cousin, but now a stranger with her weirdo music.

So keep in mind that this was *before* cable and satellite TV brought our nation's divided pop culture together—so it stung a bit because she enjoyed something that we didn't have yet. Besides, I hadn't gotten over Chicago having the late 70's hit "Car Wash" almost two years before it was widely played down in Mississippi.

And living in the "Bible belt" gave me more than my fair share of church time as a child. But I was one of those kids who actually *enjoyed* being there, closely observing the minister for consistency and checked to see if his (or her) message seemed legitimate.

Unfortunately I've watched too many Black ministers act like buffoons in the pulpit instead of lead effectively. It's definitely a turn off. After spending a lot of time in different kinds of churches, some of my fondest memories are of a COGIC (Church of God in Christ) or "saved" church in the late 1970's.

Why did I mention it? Well because when we listened to Tracy's house tapes, it quickly became obvious that the music was heavily influenced by the Black church, sometimes bad singing and all. It was easy to tell this after hearing commanding piano and drum parts. The banging piano keys in "I Can't Turn Around" and "Gotta Have House" took me back to my church days, producing a bittersweet feeling at the pivotal age of 15.

After too many bad church experiences, those similarities caused discomfort and left a sour taste in my mouth at first. *(Insert a long story here about being disheartened by the blatant hypocrisy in churches, killing the spirit of a young child, blab blab blab.)*

But after listening a few more times and overcoming my religious discomfort, luckily I began to *get it*.

In some ways it felt like the artists were experiment-

ing with disco by blending the basic sound with all of the wonderful synthesizer flavors that were blossoming in pop music back then.

It came across as raw, imperfect and *wonderful!* (And for any music producers who are reading, this was long before MIDI so it certainly wasn't quantized perfection.) My increasing addiction to the music rivaled that of a crackhead's—stuttering and all! “House Mm-mmmuh-muh-muuuuusic!” But there was an agonizing problem with all of this—it wasn't easy to get my hands on more!

You see, there was very little house music being played in Mississippi. Perhaps radio stations and deejays felt southerners wouldn't like being told to jack their bodies. Farmlands aren't exactly urban landscapes you know.

And because of the limited number of records being made, there was no way that a small music label would send free records to *Mississippi*. Was it asking too much? Regardless, this was a serious problem because of my new house music addiction!

Since Tracy only had one or two tapes, I'm afraid that my cheap cassette copies didn't hold up very long because of excessive plays. I just *had* to find a way to get more. “You have more of these, right?”, I begged. The thing I love most about Tracy is that she's so light-hearted and lives in the moment. She was mostly content with whatever she had at the time and wasn't the obsessive fiend I'd become.

Lucky her. She lit a fire in my mind and soul for Chicago and its house music. Along with her big brother “Slick”, Tracy got to experience a wonderful journey because my aunt Pauline dared to travel outside of the southern Bermuda triangle.

Many people in the deep south are still hesitant to venture beyond their tiny hometowns, let alone uproot and move to a big city. But my encounters set into motion a two decade old craving!

◇ Blueprint of an emerging studio musician

EXPOSING UNBORN CHILDREN to music is common place, but what *kinds* of music do today's expecting parents offer? It'd be interesting to conduct a study of children who were exposed to disco, house or techno before they were born, then observe their personalities and musical preferences afterwards.

Not the Jackson 5

My family was too poor to afford expensive audio equipment, but I have no doubt that we've had music as our caretaker since birth. Dad was an avid jazz lover and trumpet player in high school. Before house music found me, I obsessed over jazz in addition to pop and funk music as a teen. Let's face it, John Coltrane played pangs of passion that have no doubt influenced many of our house innovators. And he's also inspired a plethora of house *appreciators* like me! So Viva La Jazz!

I don't know whether or not my dad's trumpet playing influenced my two brothers to join high school band, but they both played french horn together and stood out for that achievement. They were the brothers Gray on french horn. Jeff, before switching to football, also played trumpet while Anthony picked up the Baritone also. Eventually we formed a trifecta once I joined the french horn fraternity 8 years later. And to round out, my mom and sister

were both those pretty girl types seen in front of marching bands. My mother was a majorette and my sister twirled guns and flags in their high school years.

The french horn is a beautiful instrument, but the piano keyboard has always owned my heart. Have I mentioned how impoverished my family was living in the poorest state in the U.S. at the time? We couldn't afford piano lessons and my dad's stepmother was an instructor but never helped *me* despite the begging. It was truly madness.

Music videos and the synth life

Baldwin Piano Company operated a factory in my hometown for many years, so I'd walk 6 miles nearly every Saturday to play pianos and synthesizers in their downtown retail store. It's amazing that the poor storekeeper took so long to ban me, considering all the hours I'd banged on those Roland Jupiters and Junos! Maybe he was just as geeked about the new gadgets and was likely baffled to see a little Black kid so passionate about similar interests.

The early 80's were pregnant with innovation despite President Reagan's reign of terror. Apple Computer introduced the Macintosh and the music video took over the entertainment world. You can blame Bernie Worrell's Parliament/Funkadelic keyboard playing, Prince, Bobby Z, Monte Moir, Wendy and Lisa, Van Halen and Julian Lennon for turning me into a keyboard junkie. I tried to play their songs while camping out at the Baldwin store. If someone had paid a dollar for every time I fingered "1999" and "Jump", I could have enjoyed more of *the real thing* and juicy old-fashioned cheeseburgers! :p

And maybe perhaps people expected too much from Julian Lennon and Yoko Ono after John's murder. It's obvious that Julian isn't John but that's a *good* thing. What the hell is wrong with people? We're all unique and con-

tribute differently. I'm sick of people trying to clone others. Thank God Julian gave us "Too Late For Goodbyes". It was something about how he played the synth in the song's video that's had a lasting impact on me.

It's peculiar that most kids loathe music lessons, because I cried many times and yearned to learn piano. In ways it's probably best that I didn't get them early on because creativity is sometimes squashed when strict rules enforce a myopic compliance. Later I got my hands on various



CG's high school band uniform, '88

toy keyboards and learned a few tricks here and there.

Band (hey!), Band (hey!)

To advance, I aggressively pursued high school band because it was a free way to learn music. Our band director honored tradition and probably had his eyes on my potential since I was 5 years old. How's that? When I enrolled at Amanda Elzy Elementary I was four—then soon after conducted the kiddie orchestra for a school event.

Mr. Russell Baxter likely remembered that dark comedy and perhaps expected me to explore my musical infatuations once I was proper age to wear the white, adult-sized belt that wrapped around my tiny pants a bajillion times as a tot. Eighth grade came quickly and it was time to learn music through band class, since I couldn't afford private lessons and was terrified of the choir director.

None of the other kids *wanted* to play french horn so there wasn't much of a challenge. They chased cool instruments like trumpet, saxophone or *drums*. My choice of

french horn screwed the faces of not only the kids, but Mr. Baxter too. Since the french horn has the smallest mouth piece of all common brass instruments, not just anyone could play it. I mean, most of the kids had very plump lips that would get in the way of producing the correct buzz in its cone-shaped metal form.

After about a year of playing, I convinced Mr. Baxter to let me switch to mallet percussion. My buddy Carl took piano lessons, was next in line to be drum major and tinkered around on the school's marimba. So what does a poor kid do that can't afford piano lessons? If he's clever, he'd take up mallet percussion because the instruments have the same layout as a piano keyboard.

Tin hut, kick heel! (One, two, three!)

Most of the drumline guys wanted to beat the hell out of bass drums, snares or trios. There was no real lust to clap cymbals or play *gay* instruments. What's that? Yeah, they considered most auxiliary or melodic percussion too *gay* to touch. They acted as if certain instruments had *leprosy* or something. I found it amusing and embraced the dusty relics partly to tweak their minds.

But aside from my sadistic pleasures, I knew that mastering mallets would help me play synths better. Carl had taught me basic piano fingerings, but then I learned the circle of keys, major and minor scales, and especially *minor triads* which are almost always heard in my songs. I mean, can you *feel it* for real? Some believe that the ability to read music is a critically important skill for groups of people who wish to play together. Sheet music is somewhat like traffic signals and signs for drivers, but there are plenty of musicians who drive well without them.

So I later came to the conclusion that it was probably best that I didn't have formal piano lessons early on. Learn-

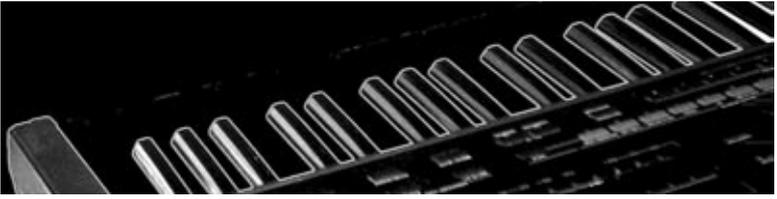
ing mallets taught me just enough to move to the next level of my own creative expression. Perhaps I would have been too busy bickering with the piano instructor to progress as well as I did with mallets. Mr. Baxter gave me a lot of autonomy partly because I transformed from a kid headed down the wrong track in 8th grade to one who returned to his dignified and determined roots in the 9th. And I've never looked back!

Sometimes I persuaded the drumline guys to jam a little house with me with their instruments, but it just didn't sound right with acoustic drums. Even though house music in 1987 came before the advanced sampling compositions of the late '90s, acoustic drums and instruments still didn't provide the same *feel* that synths and drum machines produced. However, a British brass band managed to successfully reinterpret a few acid house songs to my liking many years later. Maybe one day we'll hear symphonies jamming classic house anthems. Just maybe.

Down to electric avenue

Since acoustic instruments weren't satisfactory, I scraped money together from low paying summer jobs to buy a Yamaha PSS-130, Yamaha PSS-270 and Casio SK-5 keyboards. Since I couldn't afford those Roland Jupiter and Juno synths that cost well over \$3,000 back then, the cheaper ones would let me bang out house ideas that'd been rolling around in my head. Back then it was still quite rare to have a personal computer, so I had to score my musical ideas on paper. No one I knew had an extra \$5,000 laying around to buy one.

Some of you may have winced just then, but you can't miss something you've never truly had. It was '88 and I'm not even sure that purchasable musical arrangement software existed. Actually they did exist, but were very simple



products long before MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface). So all things considered, I didn't miss much scoring music by hand.

But I soon discovered that scoring sheet music was too slow and complex for what I needed. So I began to record individual song parts to audio cassette. "OK the bass line goes like this... (play) Now the chords progress like this... (play). The melody is this, but use a better sound later."

I still own those old tapes and a few of the ideas have been reworked and released on deep4life, as mentioned. They were reconstructed years later when I used professional instruments. "Sketching" early on was OK because as long as the essence of the concept was documented, I'd made tremendous progress. After I bought my cheap musical keyboards, I neglected to play bells and marimba. Were they just tricks from a one night stand? No, but I felt guilty about the diminished attention.

I'll jump ahead a bit here, just in case you don't make it to the next chapter. :) Months later, I enrolled at Mississippi State University and joined the Famous Maroon Band. After meeting new drumline acquaintances, I convinced one of them to program some of my sheet music into his Brother music sequencer (or was it a Roland?). I scored much of it blindly; so I was anxious to hear what the final version would sound like. He was just as giddy to program it as I was to hear its outcome.

Strangely, I still have that 1989 composition on cassette. Perhaps Lidell Townsell's "Under Control" on Trax Records was a heavy influence on me during that time.

◇ A visitor's gift

SINCE IT WAS incredibly difficult to grab hold of more house music mixtapes and even harder to buy vinyl records, I just decided to recreate the sounds by using my cheap piano keyboards. I was that hooked! By the way, this was long before the web and on-line shopping was a reality.

It's funny sometimes how you get involved with things. I'm not so sure that I'd be composing house music if it'd been a lot easier to acquire those mixes and records back then. Maybe forcing myself to make house music from scratch then inspired me to keep writing it for other reasons later.

I was a hobbyist composer and musician long before I got involved with house music, so the skills came in handy when purchasing the music wasn't an option. It was a great learning experience but also incredibly frustrating because there's only so much you can get out of cheap sounding instruments! Imagine trying to race the NASCAR in a dinky Ford Pinto. (It's an ugly little 70's U.S.-made car.)

You could definitely chalk one up to creativity though, because some of those songs were later re-recorded and released on deep4life.

Anyway, “Cabbage” introduced his cousin who was from Chicago and visiting Mississippi for the summer. (Cabbage is Decarius’ nickname and it affectionately refers to his cabbage-shaped head.) The visitor’s name escapes me but thankfully he brought new Farley Jackmaster Funk mixes along with him.

Cabbage knew that I was obsessed with finding more house music and felt that his cousin had something of interest. Of course I had no shame in sprinting over to their apartment to check it all out!

I still have those tape copies from ‘88 and vividly remember the initial excitement of hearing Farley playing songs like Willie Hutch’s “Brothers Gonna Work It Out”, Donna McGee’s “It Ain’t No Big Thing”, Mr. Fingers’ “Can You Feel It”, Fast Eddie’s “Can You Still Dance”, a bootleg mix of Jamie Principle’s “Cold World”. It was also a thrill to hear Bobby Q. Bobby mixing Rhythm Is Rhythm’s “Nude Photo” and Yello’s “Bostich”.

Maybe it should go without saying but most people in Mississippi are extremely poor compared to the rest of the nation. Isn’t that shameful considering how fertile the soil is? Driving through some parts of the state would make you wonder if you’re witnessing third world poverty within the U.S.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina too many U.S. citizens were blissfully ignorant of the magnitude of southern poverty. And I never did like the term third world, but that’s neither here nor there.

So anyway, we had a trashy dual cassette deck to make our copies. The thing was so raggedy that there were no doors to hold the tapes! Several times during our attempts, one side would stop all of a sudden. I guess it was just *tired*. It was frustrating because this defect caused tape dragging sounds in *my* copies. But you can bet that I was really happy to have anything at all.

Being quite paranoid and over protective, I used my cheap boom box to make backup copies with 33 cent Certron cassettes. That added insult to injury because the songs sound like they've been recorded in someone's basement with a hair dryer blowing. It certainly wasn't the audiophile's dream result but it was all to be had and I didn't dare take it for granted.

All things considered, I can't tell you how many times I've listened to those tapes over the years. Tracking down the vinyl records of the songs has been a bittersweet experience, but I must admit that the journey has taught me



more about patience and persistence.

Before the web and online shopping we had to do it the old-fashioned way—walk into a classic retail store that displayed records and tapes!

As a result, I learned the importance of properly cataloging song details and lists for the mixes. I don't understand why some deejays selfishly hide information about the songs they play. Please support artists and record labels through providing detailed song information because simply put, it's a huge way to educate listeners.

Back home in Mississippi just a few wealthy families held a tight grip on key businesses in our hometown, so I had to endure a lot of ignorance just to search out house music vinyl records at one local shop.

◇ Overcoming racism in the name of house

IN THE U.S. classical music first appeared on CDs in the late 1980's, then slowly other mainstream genres switched to the format. But it took much longer for underground music to progress beyond vinyl records and audio tapes.

So I went down to one hometown record store to see if they had any house vinyl after several shoppers told me that they may have spotted some. In fact my buddy Herman Anderson from WKXG AM was one of them.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the ugly and openly racist history of the southern U.S., I can tell you that it was still thick enough to cut with a knife in late '80s. But also there was a strange hope in the air as increasing cable television availability exposed many to other cultures and happenings in the world. Television showed that many had progressed beyond primitive hatred.

Interracial marriages were still taboo and it wasn't very common to see people of different races kissing in public. (These marriages were technically *illegal* according to the Mississippi State Constitution almost until the new millennium.) But fortunately the youth lead the charge and bucked many ignorant ways of the past. And I felt good about this progression... until I walked into that store.

I don't know how many of you have ever experienced a thick sort of discomfort after walking into a place of business, then having a wave of unfiltered hatred descend upon you, but I can tell you that it is one of the most degrading feelings ever. Such abuse caused me to retreat into my love and thirst for house music as a shelter to fight being defeated. I *had* to have house, despite their intolerably open and comfortably exhibited racism.

But I despised shopping there because I was treated like a thief and my being a teenager didn't make the situation any better. Who could enjoy shopping while feeling so unwelcome? No one should have to endure abuse. But my Grandmama taught me the proper way to deal with those situations long ago and that the store's disrespect simply wasn't acceptable.

Thoughts of the offending record store brings up bittersweet memories because I bought my first house music vinyl records there. They include Neal Howard's "To Be or Not To Be", The House Master Boyz and the Rude Boyz of House's "House Nation" and Pierre's Pfantasy Club's acid house music favorite "Fantasy Girl".

Nevertheless it was a very racist environment and the most disgusting part of all happened during the last time I visited the store. When answering my question about whether or not they'd be willing to order more house records, one of the lady cashiers made a derogatory remark about other Black deejays who shopped there as "some other *niggers* who also come in asking for it".

Needless to say I stopped going there completely after that incident. If you've ever seen me in person, you know that my skin is quite brown. However on that day it was possible to see the red rage brimming through.

But no matter how ignorant, they could not stop the house. And I've always tried to use negative energy as motivational fuel.

◇ I was there to learn,
but house stole my heart!

PERHAPS IT'S RARE but I attended Amanda Elzy from age 4 until graduating at age 17, because both primary and college preparatory programs are part of one school. Most students in the U.S. usually attend several schools over time, are 5 when they start and are 18 when they finish. However, I was born in mid-November and was only 4 once classes started September 1975, so the school nearly refused to admit me. Their rules only permitted kids age 5 and up to enroll.

But my family made sure that I was admitted and not held out because of a late birthday. Some of my fondest memories include attending pre-school with new friends, many of whom I'd later graduate high school with.

We developed some sort of bond but eventually grew annoyed with one another during the 13-year relationship. Each year I protected my sanity by separating further from the group and by keeping my true post-graduation plans shrouded in secrecy. How else could I avoid the "me too" types from trailing me?

Living in New Mexico seemed attractive because I craved to start anew in a place never visited. But as much as I wanted to get away, my family just couldn't afford tuition and expenses.

During my final year it became increasingly difficult to remain stealth, so I decided to discuss my contemplations with close friends. Sadly there were only a few worthy of experiencing college life with. Fortunately Nikita was able to enroll at Mississippi State University too, but Carl couldn't. Life felt so unfair because I had to say goodbye to a friend I'd seen nearly everyday for ten years. Thank God for house music being there through such a pivotal point in my young life.

And while I was one of many graduating seniors making the transition to university life, house music gained a much higher priority. Though I only had three or four mixtapes all together, I spent a lot of time trying to satisfy my intense cravings anytime I saw a piano or keyboard.

Carl was one of a few friends who was musically trained, but anytime I would play house, his attention span would eventually disappear. Somehow, jackin' house beats didn't quite mix with the Mississippi Delta landscape nor its pace of life. But the music definitely created a new blueprint for my mind. The summer of '88 jump-started a few new chapters at once and it was time for me to move on.

It was all new to me

Finally, I was on my way to Mississippi State University, eager to meet new people from all over the U.S. and world. It's a shame that Mississippi schools vehemently resisted integration and it's still an issue today.

But MSU's racial mosaic glowed in comparison to other formerly all-White state universities like Ole Miss, so I was compelled to enroll in its cutting edge broadcast-

ing curriculum. It was the best in the state.

Summer band camp was a golden opportunity to bond, but ended quickly as the rest of the student body trickled in for fall classes. Before camp I got a jump start on connecting with my future roommate assignment, since my friend Carl was no longer in the picture. We didn't have mixed gender residences at that time and I didn't think that having Nikita as a roommate would have been appropriate.

It was an awkward but challenging experience to track down a complete stranger in order to get acquainted before living together. Although he was very polite, my first assigned roommate Cedrick had already requested to be paired with his long-time high school friend Rick.

So it was back to the drawing board. And once I found out the replacement's name, I tried to extend myself again. This was the proper gesture in my mind and would illustrate my desire to have the best possible relationship.

Looking back, I guess it might have seemed queer to have a stranger aggressively introduce himself—especially since we were young Black males. You know, it never crossed my mind until this moment, but I now realize that the university had paired me with two Black roommates and the process didn't seem random. The selections stick out like a sore thumb because of the university's low percentage of non-athletic, African-American enrollment in the fall of '88.

But I was too distracted to notice, because it seemed as though many high school students were remorseful about leaving their familiar surroundings. Not me. I was thrilled about the changes and hungry to meet new people. In the end, I don't regret my decision to reach out and think that those friendships were stronger in the long run as a result.

After settling in, I could feel positive energy emanating from the diversity of our residences. I guess it was so apparent because my hometown was segregated. My rural

high school and neighborhood was predominately Black. The city high school was forced to integrate but still held separate proms for its Black and White students up until the 1990's. Nature doesn't divide us this way, so why can't the U.S. come to terms with its mental illness and embrace true change?

Yet because of primitive hatred, we still grapple with silly issues like skin color in modern times. But regardless, I was determined to jump right in and mingle with a wonderful assortment of people. Not long after, I settled down and reacquainted myself with the belief that despite cosmetic and cultural differences, we all have the same basic needs. The exposure had allowed me to expand my horizons a little more.

I was so nutty that I went through the student telephone listings just to find people who were from Chicago. The campus directory used to list home addresses and telephone numbers too. Since all of this was available, I tracked down people out of the blue just to talk about house music.

After living in Chicago for over 15 years, I now realize how bizarre it must have seemed to have a complete stranger phone and inquire about house music. But I didn't have big city sensibilities back then and wasn't inhibited about asking a stranger for help. That casual reality is one of the few things I miss about southern living.

After playing private detective for a while, solid leads surfaced and I eventually found Ray. Ruther Ray Johnson is one of the nicest guys I've ever met and was from Oak Park, a village near Chicago. Other kids at school may remember him driving his silver Mitsubishi as a Domino's pizza delivery guy, but the memories I have are more special than that.

Ray always flashed a genuine smile and was nice enough to record tapes from Chicago radio for me over the

Christmas break of '88. Despite the enthusiasm of being new at my university, the urge to search started to wear me thin. So I'm thankful because Ray said yes when he could have easily been out enjoying the city or doing something else other than baby-sitting cassette decks.

If the roles had been reversed, I don't know if I could have resisted Chicago night life to tape radio mixes for some guy back in Mississippi. Maybe it was Ray's pity.

It was a huge blessing because I'd begged other Chicago people to let me copy their mixes. But most were too distracted, downright stingy or mean-spirited to bother with a country boy like me. I never forgot that. What kind of mental illness causes a person to be selfish with a thing like music?

House was my drug

But Ray noticed my withdrawal and definitely delivered. I was so completely consumed in the quest to find more house music that I neglected our friendship. Were we distanced because he delivered the painful news that 102.7 FM WBMX had gone off the air? Ray, I hope you've never doubted my appreciation of your kindness.

So many fun alternatives distracted us from our studies. Everything was new. And regrettably some peers dropped out later because they'd partied, goofed and lost focus. My roommate was a fun-loving guy too, but I had to deliver an ultimatum at the end of the first semester.

1989 was just a few weeks away and I knew it was vital to move to a more mature and secluded residence hall. It was necessary to get away from juvenile distractions in Smith Hall in order to study better. So I made it clear to Andre that he'd need to find someone else if he chose not to move to Evans Hall with me in January.

The reality that I'd never get to hear WBMX live

put me in a deeper funk. With all of the negative changes happening, the house community sank into despair. It felt like our music and culture had died as hip hop asserted its dominance. Depression and worry convinced that I wouldn't make it to Chicago in time to experience any of the house life for myself.

So with all of that hanging over my head, the second school term was quite difficult to endure. Luckily we found a room in Evans Hall by January, but the only one that was available faced a brick wall. Talk about depressing and dark in all the wrong ways! My funky mood worsened and 1989 was off to a bad start as this country under "Bush41" bullied the globe for oil.

Hip house was on life support, Chicago radio stations sliced the throats of many house music shows, major record labels jettisoned house artists like leopards and general bickering and cannibalism in the house community ensued. It was a dismal time during Bush 41's reign of terror, as if eight years of Reagan wasn't torture enough.

Just as I wondered "what else could go wrong?", my trusty Magnavox boom box died. I could only afford to replace it with an ugly Emerson radio. It was a quirky upgrade. I'd played the Magnavox so much that the cassette decks died. This may sound cockeyed but it was hard to say goodbye to the silly thing, because it was my first.

Hip hop owned my roommate so we playfully dissed each other's musical tastes. But the cool thing is that we lived together for four years while our peers cycled through three or four roommates a year it seemed. Over time we met halfway on a number of issues, especially music. Our friends joked that we argued like an old married couple.

During that second semester it felt like too many people were obsessed with ridiculing my house music. The layout of our 4-story residence hall included four-room clusters, with two pairs of facing interior doors. So the guy across

from us blasted MC Hammer all the time and would harass me anytime he heard house playing. I could swear that bastard joyfully stalked me!

The naysayers weren't used to this music and would go out of their way just to put down anything different. "Why do you listen to that junk? Turn it off!" What unmitigated gall—they coming into *my room*, telling me what to listen to! It was utter madness but I swear I'm not exaggerating. It happened too often, like a recurring nightmare.

Were they some sort of house music lynch mob? Was it a government conspiracy? I never quite got over that experience and am still a bit defensive when telling strangers about my music. It's great to hear responses like "Oh yah, house music!" now that I live in Chicago but I'd love to forget all of those bad Mississippi experiences.

Gloria grew up listening to house in Chicago, but her family moved back to my Mississippi hometown in the mid-80's. But she went back to Chicago for a visit in '89 and luckily Santa sent back a few radio mixtapes with her. I was set with new WBMX, WGCI and WKKC mixes. Talk about feeling on top of the world!

My new ammunition probably drove my roommate crazy, but he may have also been happy that I had something different to listen to. I'm sure it was tiring to hear one or two tapes looping over and over. Gloria's cassettes were unique looking because their clear cases had tiny open reels inside instead of the usual design. But I guess only the audiophiles reading this would care.

My roommate Andre bonded with two guys in our residence hall from Brooklyn that semester. I was protective of my roommate because I didn't want him to drop out. It was especially concerning when he tried desperately to change his southern accent to that of a Brooklyn native. With hindsight, I guess there was no harm done. But I really didn't hit it off with the Brooklyn guys because I

didn't want to stroke their egos like other southerners who treated them like kings. Maybe it was the attention given and how handsome they were.

Maybe the locals were just being friendly and I was being sour and jealous. Who knows. At any rate, I found out that they were into hip house and house. It was interesting to hear a New York deejay's style of mixing house music. Back then, New Yorkers had the tendency to play the entire song instead of mixing out of it at the 2 minute mark like Chicago deejays when they "hotmix".

The overall feel of the mixes lacked a churchy piano and down home gospel feel. What I heard was a bit more sophisticated and the sound quality was definitely better than what I was accustomed to hearing. I think my tension with the Blatino guys melted away after I first heard Sterling Void's "It's Alright" in their mix. Sure it's a Chicago record but there was something special about hearing it mixed with east coast-flavored freestyle and hip house.

My roommate dug the hip hop overtones and even some of the house. The very thought of this sorta freaked me out. I wondered if he liked it just because of those guys or did he really like the blended musical styles? Perhaps I dwelled on it a bit too much. But I was in the drab confines of the Magnolia State with little else to do but ponder.

Sadly I don't recall many bright spots in '89. It was my last year of travelling with the university marching band to support our football team. And it was horrible watching the team get pummeled into submission week after week. The Bulldogs once had a Favre at quarterback, but the SEC is a tough conference and we needed much more than that to compete. MSU made a tough decision and segued from its head coach Rocky Felker to former Texas A&M coach Jackie Sherrill. But that's neither here nor there.

One of the reasons I brought up football was to make the point that change can be a good thing. In '89 the house

community worried that the music and culture was dying. Maybe other high profile changes like East and West Germany uniting or radio stations firing Chicago house deejays produced a cloud of uncertainty.

Or was it the proliferation of hip hop into mainstream culture? It was hard to get a sense of this while living in Mississippi because it was years before the masses discovered online. We felt isolated.

Anger introduced me to the internet

MSU gaffed in '88 by converting a men's residence into a computer sciences building despite a housing shortage caused by peak registration.

Already fuming over the disbanded university radio station, I vowed to camp out in the converted building regardless of its intended purpose. Broadcast majors had few computer science requirements then, so I hunkered down in the new computer labs.

This peaceful insurrection acquainted me with the Apple MacIntosh (Mac), UNIX, VI editor and the internet of course. I was like a private detective spying on geeks as they worked. They taught me a few valuable tricks after we became familiar with one another. Those basics helped me succeed in online publishing years later.

My enraged introduction to the internet opened many doors and offered new friends from all over the globe. Global real time chat was a new phenomenon and baffled us. We could have chatted by phone but calls were incredibly expensive in the late 80's. And besides, you weren't likely to dial up someone in Uzbekistan just for the fun of it either. But IRC (Internet Relay Chat) allowed you to type text to just one or hundreds of people at once, for free.

My objective was to protest the university's insensitivity towards its students, but the building eventually effected

an unexpected and colossal change in my life. This new virtual opportunity made it possible to sample the world from the comforts of home. It was an interesting alternative because we could barely afford a proper meal let alone pony up cash for any airline tickets.

Don't forget that this was the yucky year of '89—Bush 41 was in the White House, my room faced a brick wall, MC Hammer-lovin' guy across the hall annoyed, WBMX was gone and house music was on life support. So I guess you can say I was more than thrilled to discover online and disconnect from my immediate reality *en viva*. My friends couldn't figure out where I was spending so much of my time. They thought that I was hoarding a freak, because some of them were so obsessed with all things sex.

But the truth is that I preferred to spend time with people online who were in different places and into "differinthings". It was a new kind of therapy for me. And that's how I met Christian of West Germany who came online to discuss house music and would later describe what it was like after the wall fell between the two Germanys.

Our love of house allowed us to be as intimate as next door neighbors and this was long before it was common to have online friends. It was the late 80's. But don't think that my computer lab defiance went completely unchecked. You see the middle-aged lab monitors at my school, especially one in particular, were often bitter and itching to assert authority. They acted as if online chatting was black magic and would watch us like hawks to enforce the rules. But it made the rebellion sweeter and I was determined to get a taste of new media.

I loathed how they hovered over people's shoulders, spying to see what we were up to. Maybe a few times I retorted that my activities were directly related to a communications student's curriculum. One could argue that I was simply exploring new possibilities in my field.

We were in the stone age of online, long before mainstream society found out that chat is as addictive as other compulsive behaviors. It's one of the electronic opiates of our time.

Christian offered one of the best additions to my music collection when he sold a copy of a rare 15 CD set of historic Chicago house music. Keep in mind that this was before the web, Paypal, eBay and anything that you're ac-



customized to now. In fact he had to send the CD set from Germany to me with the trust that I'd pay him later through snail mail. This stranger from the other side of the world's blind trust really touched me. Why couldn't governments and Bush

41 learn from this instead of pissing people off for oil?

I vowed that he'd get paid and was so thankful for his global trust in an era in which most people couldn't comprehend such an action. Keep in mind that the world had just swallowed eight years of Reagan and was about a year into *his* version of Dan Quayle. It's a great example of house benevolence and I'm appreciative of the culture.

1989 came to an agonizing end, but better times were ahead. Phillip and I would soon discover a wicked, jazzy house sound just given birth on the east coast.

Above: Chris playing marimba in Mississippi State's Famous Maroon Marching Band, drumline member between 1988 and 1989. Sneakin' a few house notes in.

◇ We hunted for that jazzy, east coast house

NOW I MIGHT JUMP around in this section between the years '88 and '92, so please focus on the essence of what happened instead of order.

Well I don't quite remember how I first met Phil, but we both enrolled at MSU for the fall '88 semester. I think he lived on the second floor of Smith Hall, perhaps above our room. The building was X-shaped with a center lobby area, so it's likely that we watched TV together. I probably inquired where I could get mixtapes.

Phil and I hit it off quickly and discovered that we're both fans of Minneapolis soul, particularly the works of Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis of Flyte Tyme Productions.

Now it isn't house music but I've always appreciated the sophisticated melancholy in their songs—especially their S.O.S. Band, Alexander O'Neal, Cherelle and Thelma Houston productions. Phil staggered me because he liked the same qualities in house tracks. And it felt like the Minneapolis Sound was maturing right along as house music took evolutionary steps also.

Just a few months into our friendship we witnessed my favorite era of house music emerge. And it was one of the most definitive on the east coast.

1989 was soggy and distressing, so this was the right time to experience something refreshing and sanguine. This unruffled and deluxe house sound patronized jazz. Most traditional Chicago house songs worshipped the Baptist church, Detroit focused on the circuitry of a thing and this new east coast sound provided a much needed tranquil solution.

WBMX's death in '88 felt like the first domino falling. And the decline of hip-house and major labels' about face made matters worse. Mainstream's short acceptance period in the U.S. made me wonder if it was ever genuine.

But not only did this emerging style of jazzy house sparkle, it resuscitated the down and out some thought. This shedding of the skin thrilled us.

Pushing my way into a summer job in '89, I eventually landed a temporary slot in radio playing soul and funk after spinning gospel music at first. My hiring routed a racist deejay's two-year endeavor to destroy the Black-oriented sister station and to keep me out. This riveting job paid scanty, so I bagged free copies of assorted CDs and records to build a huge collection.

And though I happily shared the gains with many, Phil feasted the most. Laughter may be the best medicine but good music, food and wine with friends also competes for the crown.

We became summer school roommates for the next three years and tag-teamed on researching our favorite music styles with a passion.

MSU's residence hall decor paralleled a 60's state penitentiary, so lounging in the university's sparse Arbour Acres townhouses during summer school was luxurious in comparison. The Wayans family was writing comedy sitcom history with their TV show *In Living Color* while we busily hooked as many new house records as possible. Pop culture adored Lisa Stansfield while we entwined around

unknowns like Rhonda Clark. (Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis produced her *Between Friends* album.)

Lil Louis' debut album *From The Mind of Lil Louis* was a mandatory listen because we became fiends after hearing his anthem "French Kiss". This jazzy sound imbued Louis' LP, which was a striking departure from his raw sounding tracks like "Frequency".

We welcomed a new decade and host of new musical flavors in 1990, but the summer of '91 was watershed. Goose bumps popped as we watched Crystal Waters' "Gypsy Woman" on mainstream video shows. It wasn't common to see house music videos at this time, especially for non-commercial sounding releases. We really dug the Basement Boys sound, especially their work with Ultra Nate and Mass Order.

By this time, I was a computer lab junky and had met a hue of wonderful people on the net. DJ Doug Pithers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) was one of them. Doug was one of a few who heard my cry for house music and answered. It was his benevolence that exposed me to the contemporary sounds of Strictly Rhythm, Nervous, Nu Groove and Maxi Records.

Doug pulled the latest wax and mailed one of the most important mixtapes in my collection. At his urging, I concentrated on the songs instead of mixing technique. We were overwhelmed! The songs stoked my appreciation of *house music and jazz*.





This was the first true progression of deep house after Larry Heard's "Can You Feel It" and it hit us hard. Wayne Gardiner washed us thoroughly with gems released under his Classic Man and Logic aliases. Artists like Mood II Swing (Jon Ciafone and Lem Springsteen), Masters at Work (Louie Vega and Kenny Gonzales), Roger S. (Sanchez), Louie "Balo" Guzman, Victor Simonelli and Pal Joey pushed the proverbial envelope.

Since no one in our group had a turntable, Phil and I spent many hours in the university library transferring house records to cassette. Our faces broke apart with glee after hearing tracks like Ebony Soul's "I Can Hardly Wait" pulsating those cheap and tired stereo speakers caged in tiny music practice rooms.

If you're wondering how a couple of Mississippi types knew so much about house music back then, it's because we made good use of internet news groups and combed through each *Billboard* issue like a fine mystery novel as soon as it hit the library table.

I have no clue if the magazine is still highly-regarded, but back then it was imperative to read dance columnists Darryl Coleman's and Larry Flick's house tidbits. Like the *X-Files*' Fox Mulder, we stalked dusty microfiche (remember those?) to scan old columns dating back to the Brian Chin era in the mid-80's.

Above: Chris' Smith Hall photo, the year WBMX died, circa 1988

Left: Mississippi State campus near computer labs, circa 1990

◇ Taking time for the little people

THOSE *BILLBOARD* ARCHIVES were golden. With online record stores 7 years away, the dance columns helped us fine tune which records to buy. We used to purchase blindly from the snail-mailed Mail-o-Disc catalogs but with so many hot releases booming after 1989's death, 'twas hard to keep up using just catalog text listings. The *Billboard* reviews provided more details.

Once I'd persuaded a few record labels to buy into our pending university radio station, a salt-and-pepper haired postal worker took interest in my flooded mailbox and house music. And instead of acting suspiciously, he took special care in getting the goods to me. It's shameful that *the post office* provided positive contrast to naysayers who only harassed.

I needed all of the help I could get and Benji at DJ International Records retail store was easy to work with. He patiently played records over the phone when others laughed us off as uneducated hillbillies. I never forgot.

You may not believe this but it was fun to call Strictly Rhythm Records back when they had only a few releases. The young lady's name escapes me but she was always sweet and made me feel important whenever I called. The

same goes for the London office, which took time out to help me track down rare Logic releases. There's no telling how many annoying questions they had to field about their incredible catalog.

Their friendliness made it easy to become a fan of the label. This sort of allegiance isn't as common with major labels, but it's much easier to admire a small record label and its artists. "Mom and pops" operations are great for stimulating this industry as they are more personable.

I appreciate Martin "Boogeyman" Luna also. You see, right after WGCI dropped Ed "Get Down" Crosby of the Hotmix 5 in '90, Martin took over weekend housemix duties. And when the radio station receptionist shocked me with the news, it seems like the falling dominos accelerated after we lost WBMX. To my surprise, Martin took my message and called me back from his home. This genuine gesture didn't register immediately because I wasn't familiar with big city rudeness just yet.

Like Benji, Martin was patient and he also named unidentified classic acid house tracks from mixtapes I'd received. This high-profile Chicago radio deejay took time out for the little guy. In fact, Martin first told me what the Roland TB-303 bass line was. Because of his Midwestern Latino accent and my slowed down Mississippi dialect, I initially thought he said Roland *thrill* bass line. Hah! But anyway, what a thrilling sound it is right?

These random acts of kindness energized me to work harder building my record collection. Sometimes we'd find gold in the strangest places, like a dusty, highway pawn shop. Highway 82 runs through the heart of Starkville Mississippi, where MSU's main campus is located. That shop supplied my first copy of Mr. Fingers' "Can You Feel It", Rhythm Controll's "My House", Lidell Townsell's "Under Control", Mr. Lee's "I Can't Forget" and a few Jes Say releases for about 25 cents each.

◇ **Small town's David,**
major record label's Goliath

PERHAPS THE TOUGHEST challenge for small radio stations is snagging enough promotional music to run it. My efforts were exasperating because I had to identify the proper contacts at record labels first, *then* solicit dance music from the back of the line. And worse, the types that promoted dance music typically had miniscule budgets compared to their peers who promoted pop music. So dance representatives mostly targeted major markets like Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta and New York.

It was not only difficult to find out *who they were*, but getting them to take or return my calls was almost impossible! They probably didn't know where the 601 area code was, although any poised representative should. (601 was the phone code for the *entire state* of Mississippi while cities like Chicago and New York has several of their own.)

But thankfully there were a few exceptional people who sympathized with my plight. After about a year of networking (begging), our Atlantic Records representatives stepped up to the plate. They provided great service with hindsight. We scored gems like Three Generations featuring Chevelle "Set It Off", Doug Lazy's "Let It Roll",

“Can’t Get Enough” and his first LP, a few Steve “Silk” Hurley releases, Jamie Principle’s “Date With The Rain”, the updated of version of “Cold World”, and several of Cey-bil Jeffries releases.

But the best prize out of that lot was Bas Noir’s *Ab... Bas Noir!* LP, produced by Kerri Chandler and the Burrell Bros. Mary Ridley and Morie Bivins are underrated and it’s quite unfortunate because Bas Noir recorded one of the best house music albums of all time.

And that leads me to Lil Louis’ second album *Journey With The Lonely* on Epic Records. The WEA (Warner, Epic, Atlantic) group gifted some impressive Lil Louis and Ce Ce Penniston promos during that time. It was a coup for such a tiny, backwoods radio station in the middle of nowhere because Lil Louis’ second album was a stellar accomplishment. After the horror story that 1989 was, it felt like house music had truly jumped to another level. The early 90’s for house music was definitely a fascinating era.

The releases mentioned in this chapter ratified this new jazzy sound in such an immense way because of their appearances on major U.S. record labels. It was an incredible feat because the majors had seemingly given up on house music a few years earlier. Unproven artists usually take a back seat. Truth be told, art doesn’t need validation—but it’s always great to have quality music exposed to the large number of people possible.

Getting major label support for house music didn’t occur without hiccups. I worked closely with an MCA intern in Los Angeles during the time the Mr. Fingers’ *Introduction* LP debuted. So WKXG called me one sleepy afternoon and interrupted a deep nap. Since I lived next door, I covered for other deejays who couldn’t go on the air sometimes.

So I assumed that my nap was cut short to deejay because that’s usually when I’d hear from the radio station. My 20-year-old voice became heavier and less juvenile



sounding after sleep, so it worked out better for the adult-oriented listening audience. But to my surprise it was the MCA Records intern in Los Angeles calling to ask for my help. They needed a description for an upcoming release.

Nausea ensued because while it was great to have a busy major label type consult a small-town guy, it was also glum if someone had dumped this important task. My heart sank when he told me that Larry Heard was the artist. I don't think I've ever told Larry this story, as it's water under the bridge. But I never forgot the moment.

We worked fervently to craft a proper description for Larry's song "On A Corner Called Jazz". With hindsight, it was more challenging to describe that kind of downtown house than I'd anticipated. Was it jazz, house or *jouse*? Larry raised the bar again by receiving substantial airplay on smooth jazz radio stations all over the country.

Maybe it's not a big deal to many because most commercial radio stations are likely programmed by consultants on Californian beaches rather than a local who's in touch with the community. But nonetheless, it was thoughtful of that intern to seek advice on such a weighty undertaking.

This encounter began to make me wonder how attentive the major record labels were with artists. Later on after I'd recorded with several labels, I made it a priority to have an intimate relationship with each of the artists on deep4life. And you can bet it takes incredible concentration and patience to succeed. I'm not suggesting that I'm the best

at these kinds of relationships as there are many responsibilities to handle with little help. So one would think that a major record label would be abound with resources to ensure smoother relationships and transactions. But some artists suggest that the business aspect of the experience is a rude awakening.

History shows that too many artists grapple with ways to manage finances once they've signed with a major. Let it be known that a cash advance awarded by a record label is nothing more than a loan (unless stated otherwise). If the cash advance is given and the project doesn't make money after a specified amount of time, then artists actually owes the company until it does.

People in the know advise that an artist should deposit the cash advance into an interest bearing bank account, just in case a return is necessary at the end of the contract. At least money can be earned from interest during that period. But I'll leave the finance talk to those who are more qualified to speak on the subject.



Left: Chris plotting to take over WSWG, looking from the outside, circa 1986

Above: Mission accomplished, working the decks at WKXG, circa 1989-1992

◇ A Greyhound bus, \$20, used military bag

THANKS TO MY MOTHER'S SISTER, I drove her canary yellow 1977 Ford LTD to take my driver's license exam. Auto designs gripped me as a youth, but our family was always too poor to have anything glamorous. Was I obsessed because my family never owned a reliable nor attractive car? Maybe we had to realize how fortunate it was to come and go freely in anything we had.

But as a kid it was tough to deal with people criticizing our hoopties. (Hooptie is slang for a junky-looking car.) Growing up poorer than the dirt poor in Mississippi was a downer. We weren't at the bottom of the toilet, but we swirled there from time to time.

Since I was car crazy, it was a frustrating wait to reach legal driving age. And the crap car we had died shortly before then, so more torture was in store. I had high school friends who either had their own cars or access to their parents', but I was entirely too proud to ask for help. Later on, my college roommate was so protective of his cream-colored '79 Buick Regal (it was his deceased mother's) that I didn't have the heart to really ask him for help either. Then things became too distracting at university to dwell on anything else besides house music and academics.

So I finally took the driving exam four years later in '92, after I graduated MSU.

Oh by the way, I still have nightmares about high school or ones where I'm running across my college campus late for an exam. And these dreams have recurred more than a decade after graduating! I sometimes wake up in a sweat, trying to figure out if I've really finished high school or if I truly have my college degree.

What do these dreams represent? Some people suggest that there are doubts about something else in life. Was it possibly the uncertainty surrounding my move to self-employment from a regular job? (It's funny that I've not had these dreams since I took three years off.)

But I'm off topic once again. Sorry, I'm too easily distracted sometimes.

OK, back to the learning how to drive story. If you've never ridden in a 70's North American car before, just imagine a small boat on wheels and that's likely it.

A '77 Ford LTD is one of the longest cars I've ever seen and driven. Though learning how to parallel park in that land yacht was easier than I'd originally thought. Cruising around town and taking it out on the highway definitely boosted confidence once getting the hang of it.

About a month or so after graduating university, I could no longer withstand living in Mississippi. So I spent as much quality time with family as I could before making the inevitable move. August '92 marked my last days at MSU and I really didn't want to stay home and work in radio any longer. Chicago owned my mind and the soul knew that time commanded for us to *g-a*.

My backup plan included moving to two other places that would suffice temporarily just in case I couldn't immediately reach Chicago. Atlanta and Memphis headed the list for Cosmopolitan Living 101 alternates, or so I thought. They're both southern cities that aren't too far away from

Greenwood just in case I had to eject.

Efforts to live with my friend James in Memphis crumbled and I didn't know anyone in Atlanta. The inability to move to Atlanta hurt a lot because I pined to work with Mitch Faulkner at On Mic Productions, a leading national voiceover company. Mitch's booming voice *is* Black radio in America, identifying powerful stations like WGCI in Chicago, WJLB in Detroit and others. "One ooh seven fiveeeee, geeeeeeee ceee eyeeee!"

My aunt Jean saw my frustration and desperation. She helped me to focus and get back on track for Chicago. "You want to live in Chicago right?", she asked. "Then that's what we're going to do. Get you there."

She persuaded my uncle Hank to let me live with his family until I was established and found my own apartment. He agreed and the rest is history. Emma Jean helped me scrape up enough money to buy a one way Greyhound bus ticket to Chicago.

I packed my green, military duffle bag with a few essentials and left most of my music collection behind. The moments that lead up to the bus ride were definitely surreal. It's amazing that I didn't mutilate the ticket because lord knows I kept pulling it out with disbelief. "Maybe I need to be pinched... is this happening for real?"

When I boarded the bus and sat directly behind the driver, I won't likely forget how viciously that cantankerous fink scolded me because I moved his bag. It was a crushing feeling because prior to that moment, I felt good about myself for not sitting at the back of the bus. He dug into me and it hurt on many different levels. During a joyous moment, I couldn't let his rain turn me blue.

Doubt consumed my mind about whether I'd live long enough to truly make it to Chicago. TV news loves to trumpet sick statistics like "4 out of 3 young Black men in the U.S. are highly likely to die by touching red bananas"

or some similar foolishness. Those with a clue tried to ignore it, but it's still distressing to hear such negativity. Life's already tough enough.

Keeping abusive peers at bay consumed enough of my energy, so little tolerance could be had for foolish quotes by the media. *Thank God* for house music! "As the angels from above... fall down and spread their wings like doves. As we walk, hand in hand... sister, brother... we'll make it to the promised land!". Tears just came to my eyes as I typed those lyrics and heard Joe Smooth's anthem "Promised Land" playing in my mind.

I'm very fortunate to be 34 years old and flying to Dallas for business as I write this section of the book. (May 2005) I've overcome those horrible statistics about young Black men being unsuccessful. Take that naysayers!

There's no doubt that predestination led me to Chicago, despite never visiting before the late October '92 move. Coincidentally, my father passed away about ten years later around the same time of year.

The Greyhound bus' approach to Chicago the night I arrived here is still clear. My heart skipped a few beats in awe of a resplendent skyline!

We cruised into the CTA 95th street red line station, the first stop before heading to the loop terminal. (The red line is formerly the Chicago Transit Authority Howard - Dan Ryan line.) Now I was anxious to live city life but as I looked at the drab surroundings of the bus depot, I kept thinking "Is this it?!".

Tourists are warned to be alert while in large North American cities and look out for pickpockets and gangs. Determined to make it here is truth, but I'd be liar if fright was left out of the admission. Seeking composure, I focused on the top of Sears Tower and other high-rise buildings in the distance to keep from malfunctioning. Had anything occurred that night to make me so jumpy? I can't say that

it had.

But this was a strange, new place and people were behaving freakishly. Did they comport like thugs or derelicts? I can't say that they did. It turned out to be normal Chicago behavior, so I was simply a fish out of water. It was important to collect myself and calm my twitch.

After staring out of the bus windows for an eternity, I stepped off and looked for my uncle Hank. He hadn't arrived or was circling around the station. Private vehicles couldn't park at the depot. I stood outside in the element for a few minutes and felt another rush of adrenaline.

But I was *NOT. GOING. TO. FREAK. OUT!* Hank finally whipped into the depot at breakneck speed and told me to hop in. "This is your first time here right?", he said. "Yeah" I eeked disquietly, still marinating in the newness around me. And suddenly his church van darted out onto the Dan Ryan expressway for a quick tour of the loop. That NASCAR feeling returned because Hank drove with a *very heavy foot*.

There was little time to compose myself between sliding from one terrifying situation to the next. I think we passed housing projects near 55th and State Street before cutting north on Lake Shore Drive. I'd seen the projects on TV but having an up front seat that night was almost too much for this country boy! Thankfully, I don't recall hearing gunshots nor witnessing violence in their vicinity, during my 15 plus years here.

Oddly enough, the most violent encounter I've seen here took place right outside of my Chicago Avenue and Rush Street office in the mid 90's. A taxi driver and an Airborne Express package delivery guy argued as their vehicles approached our building. They parked in front of the J.J. Peppers food store as I enjoyed the virtually fresh air. Distracted with selecting the snacks I planned to buy, I thought that they'd exchange a few words and then end it.

It's the big city and people bicker all the time.

But the enraged taxi driver jumped out of his car with an aluminum bat and bonked the delivery guy over the head, causing blood to stream down his face. *Color me shocked!* I scurried inside the store with other customers to avoid taxi guy, just in case he was still in a *batty* mood. We peered out of the cluttered windows in disbelief.

Seconds later a few bystanders comforted the distraught delivery guy as taxi driver's car sped away. And this played out just steps from the historic Water Tower in a *posh* area of downtown—not the ghetto!

I don't know how the situation unfolded, but that moment definitely ranked as one of the most unnerving I've witnessed here. But it's a strange blessing because I'd been prepped to expect gunslingers on every corner and dope deals at the local church. OK that's exaggerated but the point is that living in Chicago has been somewhat safe and wonderful for me.



◇ Deep south + south side + west loop

= MIXES!

IF I HAD to lay claim to my first Chicago 'hood, it'd be the Chatham area on the south side. If you're unfamiliar, it's a community between 79th and 95th Streets east of the Dan Ryan Expressway. Chatham is upscale compared to where I grew up in Mississippi. The tangibility of public transit baffled me, but living in an assorted community of mercantile Black people was almost fantasy.

The surreal existence of Black-owned Seaway Bank injected me with a stronger determination to be successful in Chicago. A Black congressman's 30-year-old insurance agency operated just a few doors away. These progressions were foreign but yet healthy in adjusting the expanse of my personal goals.

Two weeks after arriving here I landed a job at that 87th Street insurance agency. I'd never worked for a Black-owned company before, let alone one that employed more than 30 people. My immediate goals were clear. I had to squirrel away cash to get my own apartment and buy a professional wardrobe. But for fun, recording radio house

mixes and clubbing topped the list!

West loop fun - China Club and Warehouse No. 2

Within twenty-four hours of arriving, I tracked down my buddy Eric at UIC's west loop campus (University of Illinois at Chicago). Who knew that I'd eventually spend more time in the university's computer labs than many registered students! Security guards never bothered to ask me for student identification. I'd become familiar.

Back then I mistook the UIC area for the west side and freaked out about going there alone. It was already bad enough that the CTA #8 Halsted Street Bus travelled through racist Bridgeport to get there. The west loop was home to the infamous "Jew Town" market, but it wasn't the popularly-feared *west side*. Jew Town, or the less derogatory reference Maxwell Street, was pretty run down and right next to the university. Street vendors sold anything from used tires to white gym socks that may have been stolen.

Here's the ritual. You'd haggle with vendors a while to lower prices before buying anything. Many people ate Maxwell Street polish sausages, but I never cared for them. For all I knew they were easily minced rats in a bun.

Eric helped record a few B96 radio techno mixes onto cheap Maxell cassettes and then we were off to the clubs. The now defunct west loop China Club was my first stop in the sanctuary of Chicago house venues. Mike "Hitman" Wilson twisted knobs and pressed buttons while on deck. It only took a few seconds to feel a wicked chill wiggle up and down my spine.

It was a pleasant virginity to lose, giving in to the wriggling house music in Chicago's sensuous nightlife! Who knows the name of the song, but one could wager that the way in which people worked their bodies on the dance floor was nearly involuntary.

Mississippi's housephobia had poisoned my spiritual blood for far too long. And it rang clear that my healing would take a while because I stumbled around unable to dance. China Club's sound system thumped pleurably as I tried to bury memories of a residence hall neighbor who bitterly complained about my music's volume and bass.

Since I hardly ever cranked my music, it irked me to hear him whine about faint bass vibrations felt through the wall. The situation was unfortunately marred with racism as I'd seen this pretty uptight White guy wear the most unpleasant face around people of color too often. One day while sitting in my room saturated with disgust, a White friend of *mine* came over and picked away at why I was steeped in a sullen mood.

My heart ached every time students derided Clark for *acting Black*. They simmered in angst because he longed to join a Black fraternity, but I knew it was only right to treat him as respectfully as he treated me. It was insupportable and deplorable to watch others abuse him for such an innocent desire. Like a pro, he easily cracked that I was perturbed about the next door guy's complaints.

"Hey it's that White MF next door again ain't it? Man forget him... he prolly grew up with a Fisher Price toy that scared him with too much bass. Haha!" It was crazy to hear a White kid say something like that in the racist south before hip hop crossed lines. Well it's not so shocking 14 years later since hip hop via Eminem types has claimed North American suburbs. But there was no way I could remain deflated after giggling at what Clark had said.

Anyway, I've mostly deprogrammed and overcame many of my housephobic jitters. Those first moments at China Club and *finally* making it to Chicago provided house life support. It was my victory because I'd lived long enough to experience the club life!

We were only there for a few songs before Eric steered

us to the Warehouse. Let me clarify that this wasn't the original location at Jefferson and Jackson Streets. It was Warehouse number two (or three) located on Randolph Street at Halsted.

The club resembled a stingy slice of wedding cake, slimmer than the original building. You could jam to Chicago-flavored deep disco on one floor or slightly more contemporary house on the other. Unlike the China Club, the Warehouse crowd was predominately Black but annoying because too many people rudely jarred each other on the dance floor.

Before mobile phones became all the rage, Eric found a pager in the men's rest room and gave it to me. I felt really bad about it because someone must have needed it, hence all of the unanswered pages I received the next day. It turned out to be bad karma later because I quickly lost it, found it, damaged it and eventually spent too much money on the pesky thing.

It was a painful lesson to respect karma! Wacky memories of me strutting around the streets of Chicago in dress slacks, shirt, tie and that transparent pager clipped to my belt makes me blush. But in my mind, *I had arrived!* I earned my own money, bought bricks of blank cassettes and recorded lots of house-related radio content. In many ways, I was *happy*. *Carl Bean happy.*

Chicago radio and Saturday morning haircuts

The electronics retail store Silo competed strongly in the Chicago market until the mid 90's. It was a Godsend to have the 87th Street and Dan Ryan location nearby. I schlepped a JVC dual cassette deck home on one of the CTA's "green limousines", as my buddy Walter called them. They were the legendary GMC "New Look" buses from the 60's. These rolling pollution traps resembled a giant

fishbowl in the front.

Now that I had an office j-o-b I had to take things to the next level; cheap boom box crap had to go. My pay barely topped minimum wage and was mainly saved for an apartment deposit, so I had to be frugal about spending. Just in case it isn't apparent, cassette decks were still expensive in '92. But I scored a sweet demonstration unit for about \$100. You may not think so, but this was a bargain back when cassettes were still the dominant consumer method of storing and playing music.

My obsessive purchase of Fuji cassettes allowed me to record scores of weekend radio mixes. Fond memories include frequenting Walgreen's drug store at 87th and Stony Island. And benefitting from tape manufacturer's price wars was icing on the cake. At one time Fuji gifted 10 or 12 cassettes for the regular price of a 4-pack. That was right up my alley because I needed to record a *lot*. At last count, I have over 150 tapes in my Chicago radio library.

One thing you should know about Chicago is that several scattered city colleges host different radio stations but share the same frequency of 89.3 FM. So this means that each station's signal can only be received across the street and maybe down the block a bit. I'm exaggerating, but that's what the signal strength *sounds* like sometimes.

Since their signal points in a direction away from my old neighborhood, I siphoned mixes from the pros on WKKC's Friday Night Audio and Soundwaves on Saturdays whenever they could be heard. Back then Romell Chilly C hosted FNA with deejays Lloyd Devastating Jackmaster, Barbie Jackmaster Bass, Ray Diller and Walter "Get Down" Brown. Lloyd and Barbie stood out for throwing down dark, basement feeling house from Strictly Rhythm, Nervous and Dance Mania.

They made it incredibly difficult to leave home and go clubbing because what they offered on the radio was too

deep to miss! Since I missed the early Chicago house music era and still mourned for WBMX FM's untimely death, my paranoia was heightened about the survival of other house-friendly radio stations. So I stayed at home a lot to record and archive just about everything possible.

Bobby Q. Bobby hosted a WKKC Sunday afternoon show that focused on house *education* rather than DJ mixing mechanics. He presented a variety of intriguing guests, which included an up and coming Glenn (Crocker) Underground and Clubhouse Records gang along with Cajmere and Braxton Homes.

One afternoon I called Bobby and offered a copy of one of his ancient '89 WKKC hotmixes. He's a very warm-natured person on air and in person. After eagerly accepting my gift offer, he asked me to come visit his show at the 69th and Wentworth Street studios. I took along my 15 CD History of the House Sound of Chicago box set and he played a few songs as he interviewed me. Bobby didn't know me from Adam but was hospitable about the whole affair.

And he was genuinely nice to me considering his accomplishments, and that nearly brought tears to my eyes. How *cool* was it have someone so deeply-established be nice to a stranger? It made me want to be a better person. I cherished my visit to WKKC and felt more complete after soaking up the ambience of where so many famous house mixes were performed. *Color me a fan forever.*

It felt like there was so much love on the south side, but maybe it was just my own joy radiating like the sun. One of my Saturday morning rituals included taking the #6 Jeffrey bus to 79th Street to get a haircut at McCoy Barber College (an institution in the local Black community). The \$10 price definitely shocked me, but was well worth the Black barber shop experience. If you've seen the movie *Barbershop*, it compliments my own experiences.

Saturday mornings at McCoy introduced me to V103

(WBMX's makeover) and Herb Kent, The Cool Gent. "Herbie Baby" played James Brown cuts and lots of "dusties". Dusties affectionately describe well-worn vinyl and is also Chicago slang for classic soul. Many of us didn't know the barbers personally, but it felt like one big family and was touching. It made waiting more than an hour a haircut almost tolerable.

When I moved to the north side, I decided to find another Black barber shop to keep my Saturday morning ritual in tact. If you looked up "Black barber shop" on Wiki or in some sort of cultural dictionary, a picture of Terrell's could easily appear beside the definition. And with these kinds of shops, you must *never* allow the owner to give your haircut because he's often the worst barber. Always pick the youngest in the shop because they likely know the latest styles and won't fall asleep mid-cut. People used to wait for hours to get the best chair at Terrelle's. I grew sick of my high top fade, shaved it bald for ten years then decided to grow locks.



◇ The disjointed nations of Chicago

THEY COULD TAKE one look and blurt out what part of the city a passerby lived in. We had very stressful jobs at the prominent south side insurance agency and needed pleasant distractions.

If a pedestrian walked into our office wearing a hot pink baseball cap, camouflage shirt, orange corduroy pants and a pair of blue beach sandals, my former coworkers would definitely classify the person as a north sider. They declared that no south sider would dare go out in public dressed in such a fashion. And that “pinky” probably loved trance music or something else foul too.

West siders were picked on a lot also. If say we spotted a young girl with filthy, skintight jeans, a puffy coat, gold teeth, unkept finger nails, badly-colored hair and a loud mouth—she was probably a west sider. And she probably loved listening to booty tracks and “rump shaker” music.

The Chatham folks on the south east side viewed themselves as more sophisticated and refined compared to those from the north and west sides. In the early 90’s, many Chatham women wore nice pants, tops, shoes and just enough make-up to compliment their natural features. This more conservative approach contrasted with the “hoochie” look.

And since my “stereo-type” writer is on full tilt, maybe we could surmise that these Chatham divas were more inclined to prefer the jazzier sounding Masters at Work versions of Dajae’s “Brighter Days” instead of the more sparse and dominantly-percussive versions. Of course much of what we joked about wasn’t serious or scientific, but was entertaining as too much insurance talk could make one go *Xerox* on a MF (much like mail carriers going “postal”).

Anyway, procuring my own apartment proved to be a greater challenge than I originally thought. It took me less time than most people I know, but it was a tightrope walk living with 9 or 10 people in one house for 8 months. It took forever, but I finally heaped together a deposit for a south side studio apartment at 67th and Jeffrey. It was quaint, close to 79th and Jeffrey and a block south of a huge lake-front park. This gem was just felt too good to be true!

And unfortunately it wasn’t meant to be. The insurance agency paid us every other Friday and since there wasn’t a direct deposit option, the local currency exchange or check cashing place was the next choice. With hindsight, I should have deposited the check into my Citi savings account but feared a long clearance time. So I cashed it and planned to deposit it into my account later. Thoughts of standing at the corner of 87th and Stoney Island one Saturday morning is still a chilling memory. It felt like forever waiting to get to Citi after I stepped off of the CTA bus.

A pack of kids played around me, but I was in a staring match with bank’s doors across the street. And I was too caught up with the fantasy of renting that place to notice that the deposit envelope had dropped. I felt flatter than a steam-rolled street once inside the bank’s lobby without my cash! Was I cursed? Why was this happening *to me*? How could I have been so careless? Rushing back out to the street corner proved fruitless. It was one of the most painful moments because I *really* needed solitude.

Little comforts such as bathroom time are an issue in a crowded house. Controlling one's environment is vital to nourishing artistic creativity. My living with 10 people felt like being packed into a telephone booth with a band because I'd been accustomed to plentiful personal space.

Depression set in so deeply that I mulled returning to Mississippi. So much was stacked against me with a hostile workplace and nutty homestead. My cousin realized how serious the issue was and convinced me not to leave. If it wasn't for Antwan's encouragement and the exciting rebirth of house music, my path would have deviated greatly.

It was a remorseful setback and perhaps a slight nervous breakdown, but I hit the reset button by combatively saving every penny over the 4 months that followed. Sometimes that meant going without a proper meal, cutting back on tape purchases and biting my tongue. You might think that the tape frugality was a bit silly, but the inability to record house mixes was a serious cutback. Back at MSU I learned how to survive on \$3 a day so those aggressive skills allowed me to get an apartment in summer of '93.

My not giving up proved rewarding because B96 radio was on fire. It's queer but I can still smell the sweetness of blooming trees as my walkman pumped those delicious weekend hotmixes. Spring weather comes late in Chicago and is short. But liberation was in the air and my move to the north side was ripe, despite south siders frothing at the mouth about the sissies and fags who would convert me. They were too blind to see that my bags *were already packed*.

B96's streetmixes became sweet nectar all of a sudden; unlike what the radio station had been playing and sounds heard in many of the clubs here. Friday nights at Red Dog were often an exception, but it wasn't that easy to find that good underground house music here like it must seem to some of you who don't live here. Grass is greener for sure. You had to seek out gutsy warriors who dared to play *other*

than tired Chicago disco favorites worn out by Ron Hardy wannabees every damn weekend. Year in and year out.



My old south side hood

◇ Summer of '93 and B96 amnesia

WHO CARES WHAT prompted B96 (96.3 FM WBBM) to drop off of the deep end. But their about face in weekend music programming was bizarre. It was a strange compliment to freestyle fusion and hip hop played for a predominately young White and Latino demographic. It was perplexing because they featured deep underground mixes from guest deejays. The move was bold, fresh and surely pissed off the Chicago house deejay mafia. New York and London guest mixers caused local deejays to revolt. The creative injection highlighted our lazy and stagnant local club music scene.

It was likely house music's best Chicago commercial radio endorsement in the early 90's and gave WKKC a run for its money. The hometown gang of Tommy Dennick, Julian Perez, Lil John Coleman, Ralphie Rosario and Harry The Blade B illustrated the success of playing *new* underground house from all over. (I'll grant that some of the mixes were a bit heavy on the east coast tracks. In fact some songs sounded like someone had fallen on top of a crusty organ and only noticed about 6 minutes later.)

Masters at Work's Little Louie Vega, T Harris of London, CJ Mackintosh, Doc Martin, Benji Candelario,

Murk Boys' Ralph Falcon, Junior Vasquez and Shep Pettibone took turns working the turntables as guest mixers.

Those names rang unfamiliar to most here, but B96 gave the Chicago community just what it needed... beats of fresh air and progression! Don't get me wrong. Classics are wonderful but how many times can you play them and pretend that it's the *first* time they've been heard? Closing our minds to anything new is truly an insult to art and to those who work hard to continually expose new music. Those efforts push us forward in this journey.

We mustn't rest on our laurels by using the past as a crutch. There hasn't been a widespread push to expose new music since the heyday of early 80's and 90's in Chicago. The Chicago scene has stagnated since the early days, until very recently. And though we've made small progress, a great deal of any stimulating experimentation has seeped back underground.

It was obvious that the masses were missing the music revolution happening before their eyes (and ears). Or was it because of the changes in *my* life that colored this period in house music more important? There's possibly a perspective issue at play, but I'm certainly not alone in feeling that the deep fusion happening then was really something hot.

It was an electronic mosaic of worldly flavors and styles swirling together in such an organic way. I realize that some artists try something different at one level or another, but how often does that come to the surface with any staying power? Moreover, how often does such strong currents change a ship's course? The early 90's period in house music is watershed.

In a way, most of the mixes I've created since 2000 pay homage to the early 90's era. But in doing so, they almost dangerously commit the same irksome sins of those stuck in the early 80's. Though one could argue that early 90's house music was never given its proper due because people

were too busy looking to the past. Our society is stuck in a perpetual cycle of looking backwards instead of enjoying what's right before them.

Here's hoping that history will prove me wrong, but to date the early 90's was the strongest effort in paying homage to the simple (and masterful) foundation of house music laid before it. And I'm not discrediting the tech house and glitch that surfaced in the late 90's, but those styles didn't really grip Chicago as tenaciously as early 90's underground did because of scene fragmentation and proliferation of hip hop.

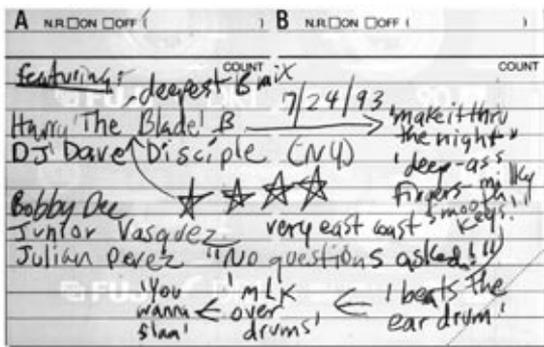
It makes me wonder who was at the helm of the B96's music programming change in '93. It's perplexing because U.S. commercial radio success is extremely difficult to garner in a crowded market. So what really happened at B96 that created an opportunity for progressive deejays to play on a pretty much status quo radio station?

The answers could turn into their own book, but the changes definitely made a huge impact on me and others. I'm not sure whether or not the scene would have been quite the same without them. I think that my first summer as a north side apartment owner wouldn't have been as jubilant sans that incredible music.

But it takes more than just a few exceptional deejays and clubs to move Chicago forward in the global house community. B96 was powerful enough to affect millions of people with its weekend mix shows. It definitely turned the Chicago house community onto its ear in '93.

The unorthodox move not only confirmed that house music was a survivor, but that it was still capable of being fed to mainstream America. And because VCR recorders and media were very expensive, it required staying home to baby-sit my cassette deck. Now it only takes a few clicks to download great mixes whenever you want, no matter where you are in the world nowadays.

It shows you how good we have it today, because I spent many weekends recording tape after tape back then. And it's no doubt that we were in a pivotal moment in Chicago house history.



◇ A nu era of Chicago house takes form

I MISSED THREE eras of Chicago house music (1977-1983, 1983-1987, 1988-1991) but was somewhat alleviated when I finally moved here in the fall of '92. The first eight months in Chatham was not only my introduction to city living, but more importantly the next era of Chicago house.

The Clubhouse Records crew and similar artists strongly put their signature on this period. They experimented with jazz and sample-laden dub house. Common artists were Lidell Townsell, Hula, K. Fingers, Braxton Holmes, Curtis Jones (Cajmere, Green Velvet), Dajae, Ron Trent and Chez Damier, Glenn Underground/Strictly Jaz Unit, Lil John Coleman, Paul Johnson, Robert Armani, Rick Lenoir and Black Ice.

It was definitely one of my life's accomplishments to listen to house music mixed live on Chicago radio. WKKC felt as though it lived and breathed, compared to the well worn tapes I'd relied upon prior to moving here. It was as if I could *feel* its human touch!

The south side to me was Jerusalem and the north side was Mecca when it came to Chicago house music. Do you remember the dismal statistics about young African

American men I mentioned a few chapters back? My successful move to Chicago was an important emotional victory. Deemed a success because I finally mixed in with this great city and its diverse, beautiful culture.

Since I've never owned a car, having proper aural sedatives to block out daily mental illness on public transit and in the streets is vital. The #87th Street, #30 South Chicago and #6 Jeffrey CTA bus routes have their own unique blend of colorful patrons, though not as theatrical as the #36 Broadway and #147 Outer Drive Express routes on the north side. Some of us think that the #36 is nothing more than a rolling asylum. It's maddening because I saw a frikkin raccoon walking down the same street!

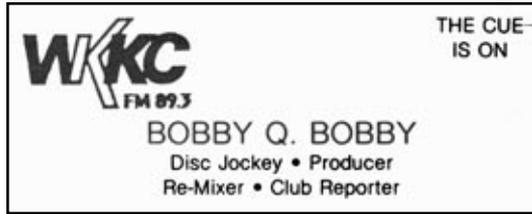
Visualizing the deepness

Early 90's jazz house mixed well with scenery along the #14 bus route along Jeffery Boulevard. Perhaps the visual transition from brick bungalow homes dotting 87th Street to vintage apartment buildings north of 79th Street brings R.E.'s song "Jouse" (Jazz and House) to mind.

Its grumbling bass line and plinky aristocratic piano parts compliment a not-so-affluent Black community south of the more upscale Hyde Park neighborhood. But still, it's a working class community proud of its accomplishments and comfortable in its fellowship. Jouse's flute solos embody lazy Sunday afternoon traffic on Lake Shore Drive with seagulls flying over Lake Michigan.

The energy felt when riding the #79th Street bus near the Nation of Islam's headquarters swells much like moments in Ron Trent's "Altered States", then relents into his more mellow "Love Affair" closer to the lake.

South Chicago Avenue's industrial presence puts me in the mood to hear Dance Mania flavored ghetto percussion and tracky Paul Johnson grooves. The northbound South



Chicago bus terminates at the 69th Street CTA red line station, just a few steps from WKKC's studios.

The nearby string of wholesale distributor buildings illustrates the mechanical house played on WKKC's Saturday morning program Soundwaves. Cajmere's "Percolator" typifies the bleak and downtrodden atmosphere of Jackson Park.

Although tracky-style dubs were right at home, the original mix of Dajae's "You Got Me Up" was a bit too fruity for Black neighborhoods on the south side. It's a better fit for liberal north side areas like Bucktown and Rogers Park. It makes me wonder if Cajmere thought about neighborhoods before, during or after the creative process.

But this brings up two early 90's house songs that wobbled the entire Chicago music landscape. It's hard to name many other local underground songs that have made this sort of impact ever since. Cajmere's "Percolator" drove the kids into a frenzy, and was played frequently on a large number of Chicago radio stations. It was the musical version of crack. I still find it difficult to process this city's massive reaction to that song! And the more sophisticated "Brighter Days" was an astounding follow up song.

But enough of this dizzy geographical pondering, as it may not mean much to those of you who are unfamiliar with Chicago's neighborhoods. In retrospect the importance of my experiencing house music on the south side created a solid foundation for what was to come.

◇ **The importance of Lil John Coleman:**

Loop Records, Red Dog, Large Records,
Mirage Entertainment, new friendships

WHEN I THINK about Lil John Coleman taking this perfect stranger under his wing as best he could, I count my blessings. A mission years in the making initiated once Greyhound issued my Chicago one-way bus ticket. The loss of WBMX along with several other house music-dedicated entities commanded me to hit the ground running upon arrival. But it was imperative to peruse any surviving dance friendly record stores before diving deeply into the local club life.

Loop Records

Loop Records operated several locations, but the former Michigan Avenue and Monroe Street store produced my fondest memories. (As of this writing the location hosts a novelty tee-shirt shop.)

Before the term stalking became popular, I regularly made the 1-hour commute from 87th Street after work to

spend as much time as I could flipping through records. Little of my paycheck remained after saving for professional attire and an apartment. So I couldn't buy much of anything notable except for Ron Trent's "Altered States" double-vinyl issue on Djax Records and Lil John's "Piña Colada" EP on 8th Bar. My objective to notate any deep records Loop's staff pushed became priority for later purchases. After a few visits, Lil John clearly displayed the best taste in underground house and he showed little ego compared to others. Store visits generally resembled relaxed listening sessions at a friend's house with him.

John noticed me after a while then we discussed the local scene once acquainted. He's the first house artist I've met that had a vinyl release sold in stores. We listened to "Pina Colada", which left me in awe from the music quality and standing in the presence of a guy who'd already accomplished one of my major goals.

8th Bar Records quickly morphed into Large Records, one of Lil John's brainchildren. In the beginning John had his fingerprints all over the label from its signature sound down to the upturned letter "A" in the early logo.

If video technology had been more affordable at the time, many of these moments could have been shared today. We had no idea of the era's significance and how they'd impact the masses. Larry Heard has no doubt influenced many of us, but my clubby sounding songs released earlier in my career exhibit shades of Lil John. He had an infectious approach to groove making.

To put my admiration of him into proper perspective, I need to talk about trust. Thieves stole Lil John's equipment from his parent's house just before I moved to Chicago. But after visiting Loop Records a few times, he broke his rule and welcomed me into his basement studio earlier than anticipated. I'm a country boy so I didn't realize the unusual comfort of a city dweller driving a stranger across town

either. Taking public transit home was automatic and an adventure that I didn't mind, but John offered rides with the same hospitality commonly found back in Mississippi. Unfortunately this is unusual in city life.

We threw around many ideas in his basement. In fact, we worked on an early version of Moonchildren's "Beyond Love" after I brought over a DAT tape of raw ideas. (Maybe I'll put it online one of these days.)

John recognized my potential but noticed the lack of a proper sound palette. Try to visualize music as a painting. Imagine a diverse bowl of fruit painted with only one color. Clearly there's a need for more. So I sampled from his Casio CZ-101 keyboard to borrow a popular Mr. Fingers bass sound along with other instruments to take my productions to the next level. He's perhaps the first music industry person to hear my raw music ideas. And trust is better than gold.

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Side note: In the music business, artists typically share their unreleased songs with record labels who then pay for the right to sell them as records, CDs, videos or downloads. But the artist's unreleased songs are compiled on what used to be called "demo tapes". That's short for a demonstration (of the artist's talents). And since the use of physical tapes has diminished, the slang "demo tape" has been shortened to just "demo". (As in "Pleeeeeeasssee listen to my demo!") I shared my first demo with Rob Kouchoukos in '95, where he handled Cajual Records' distribution.

It took me more than 2 years and an incredible amount of exhaling to let strangers listen to my unreleased music. After hearing about artists being ripped off, I had to protect myself. So I finally took Kevin Elliott's advice and solicited record labels that released similar material. I decided to

take my demo to Cajual Records on north North Branch street.

Nervous and timid, I mumbled something about leaving it for whomever handled artist submissions, but Rob offered to pop the cassette on the spot after I'd expressed doubt about if it was likeable or not. He expressed personal admiration but recommended that I let "the Europeans" hear my demo since most Chicago record labels were shy to release my style of deep music then. Thanks Rob! He later offered his own alternative by forming Guidance Recordings along with his mates Ivan Pavlovich and Sid Stary. The rest is definitely history.

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John's use of chunky bass lines and solemn keyboard parts in his music made me want to bow down and submit to the creator's obvious presence. More than a decade has passed since the release of Ulysses "I'm Leavin' You" on Large, so it may be hard for some of you to understand the magnitude of the song's importance when it was initially released. But some argue that early Masters at Work was influenced by John's signature bass lines and dark moods. (Check MAW's Mondo Grosso "Souffles H" mix.)

Regardless, Lil John is a pillar in Chicago house music and deejayed during the Mendel High School era long before many of these Johnny-come-lately superstars. He's a house elder and is one of the most diffident individuals I've ever met in this business. And if you've been around the scene long enough, you understand how exceptional it is.

Despite his affiliation with the who's who of early Chicago house, he sets one of the best examples by exhibiting house music's meekness. It's the proper way, especially when one gains success and receives blessings. Lil John hasn't received his proper dues but he's earned a great deal of respect from his peers.

Red Dog

Early on, it was essential to keep busy about town because of my temporary living arrangement. Then July '93 marked my exile to the north side. After years of yearning to live in Chicago it was mandatory to go clubbing every possible weekend. My home base was Red Dog at the triple intersection of North Avenue, Damen and Milwaukee.

The bar opened at 9 p.m. and I was one of the first to enter many times. And surplus youthful energy kept me there until 3 a.m. last call or so. In '93 it was my fortress of solitude away from a crazy household and I loved lounging on the swanky blue sofa under the 3rd story deejay booth.



Lil John in the booth at Red Dog in the early 90's

Back then deejays would sometimes play hazy tracks and their favorites before the crowds arrived. That sofa was the perfect support for my placid disposition.

But I was regrettably a wallflower, propped against exposed brick walls across from the main entrance when not circling like unpaid staff. Unfortunately trepidation never really allowed me to let go and dance, but I was good at

absorbing the spirit as my cousin Antwan joked.

I had an affinity for horizontally-striped tee-shirts, bell-bottomed jeans and comfy Doc Martin shoes—just in case I ever decided to get off the wall and dance! And though I didn't dance much, I spent priceless time in the deejay booth with Lil John.

I'm beholden for his mentorship but more importantly for treating this stranger like a kid brother. School was held in the booth with classes covering both music and life. My job was a looney bin so Red Dog was definitely a tranquil solution to that madness.

Everything except the cocky club manager helped me go to a lofty place and spirit when Lil John was on the decks at Red Dog. But time marches on and I'm also thankful for deephouse soldiers like Oscar McMillan, Hector Lopez, Darrell Woodson and that whole family of believers who continued the mission of liberation and expression through this wonderful music.

Large Records, Mirage Entertainment and bowling!

As Ulysses' song "I'm Leavin' You" gained popularity, I couldn't help but think back to Lil John's story about his son. The kid was quite amused to watch his dad flip the letter "A" in the first Large logo on its head during the design process. And childish joy befriended John, Peetie (Ulysses) and Jeff Craven as they studied the record's sales results in the back of Loop Records one day. I watched in the distance, starved for my own elation.

Long before the do-it-yourself era, it was customary for aspiring artists to wait and be pulled into the music business by an insider. Thinking back, I spent so much time with Lil John like an apprenticeship and I am thankful. But sometimes the apprentice has to know when it's time to go. Things intensified for and between John and Peetie.

After “Leavin’ You” began to make waves, there was demand for more of the same via remixes and new songs. Luckily John invited me to go to Alsip, IL with them to record “Time For Change” and some other songs.

My outspoken grandmom who pushed White supremacists during the civil rights era to integrate our local schools, later told me that sometimes it’s best to keep your mouth shut and listen. Because I was so hot-headed at the time I thought she was a hypocrite. But as adult I now understand the wisdom of her words. I tested her advice and absorbed as much information as I could by watching the early trial and error experiences of John with Large.

It was around this time that Large Records bosses Jeff Craven and Gregg Dickson leased a house and held an office warming party soon afterwards. John felt it was vital that I attend because there would be a number of local artists present, including the Mirage Entertainment gang. Thinking back, it was almost a room full of Chicago house music dignitaries from that era.

It was where I first met a persistent Jordan Fields and was blown over by the incredible productions of Black Ice (Sherman Rodgers and Darren Brandon). Mirage Entertainment was on fire, releasing hit after hit on their imprints Night Club Records (the Black Traxx series) and House -N- Effect Records.

Rick Lenoir and Larry Thompson are the masters behind the legendary releases “Can’t Stop The House”, “Work It To The Bone” and one of my personal favorites, a remix of New Deep Society’s “A Better Day”—all released on House Jam Records.

Kevin and Billy Jack

Speaking of New Deep Society, I chatted with Billy Jack Williams most of the night. After the office party,

the guys from Large and Mirage bonded through bowling. Since I didn't know how to bowl and was terribly shy, I slunk off into a corner. Everybody was in networking mode during the party, so it was a bit uncomfortable because I wasn't a mover nor a shaker.

But Billy Jack's friendliness made me feel welcome. I never forgot his kindness and today we have a strong friendship as a result.

Some time later at Red Dog, Lil John introduced me to Billy's production partner Kevin Elliott because we both used the Ensoniq ASR-10 sampling keyboard.

Anyone who owned the ASR-10 early on understands how challenging it was to have the keyboard play dance music properly. Now that I think about it, Billy Jack had an ASR-10 too. Two years later we met again through Kevin at a Grant Park festival after cycling.

During the summer of '95, I often worked on music with Kevin in my Kenmore Avenue studio apartment. Approaching burnout, sometimes we'd unwind by whipping out our bikes. It's funny but I remember the day we biked along Lake Michigan to meet Billy near Monroe Harbor.

I sat quietly as Billy Jack discussed "Call It Love", his collaboration with vocalist Jeanie Tracy. It had been licensed to a CD compilation and he'd brought along a copy. I had no idea back then that I'd remix that very song a year later for DC-10 Records. It was during this outing that Billy began to teach me about the mystical monster, music publishing.

◇ Hector Lopez, Mummy Bar and liberation

AS IF STRICTLY RHYTHM's new-found infatuation with watery Latin house music wasn't painful enough, Red Dog's management tinkered with the configuration of the club too much and added a 2nd level room in '94. The construction was done within the existing loft space. Many felt that the addition destroyed acoustics and Red Dog's appeal was further diminished by doubled admission price and an emerging thuggish clientele. Fed up with the arrogance of the staff, I ventured elsewhere.

There was a simple formula back then. Go buy a stack of records at Gramophone, then pick up a few party pluggers on the way out to keep up with the best soirees. Vinyl junkies could choose from several Chicago area record shops at any given time, but Gramophone Records on Clark Street has been a constant for over 30 years.

After Loop Records shut down, I went to Gramophone more often to both shop and people watch.

Gramophone employees have mostly been aspiring deejays and artists. Sometimes they spin records together at area clubs or work solo. Oscar McMillan, Hector Lopez and Darrell Woodson were my favorites during the 90's because they consistently played quality deep underground. Oscar is a master record selector and is the main reason why I partied at Shelter (Chicago) until it closed. The door staff was discourteous and abusive at times, but the trip felt worthwhile as the music was cranked inside. And he

was the only one who could make me appreciate both progressive and handbag house music. A little of Tori Amos' "Professional Widow" anyone?

Cairo and Mummy Bar eventually replaced Red Dog as my prime clubbing spot. Cairo was the upstairs venue and Mummy Bar was the basement area around the corner. (Cairo eventually became My Sister's House and the name changes continued.) Jamie Principle performed to a fickle Cairo crowd once but I really didn't frequent Mummy Bar much until Hector invited me during his residency.

By the way, it seems like I ran into Jamie everywhere on the streets when I lived on Kenmore near Bryn Mawr. I later found out that he lived in *my* apartment building. It was cool. Some Saturday mornings I'd wake up, look outside of my 2nd floor window and find him singing and working on his silver Ford compact. Or sometimes I'd see him walking down the street as I ran errands. I never would have imagined such possibilities while back in Mississippi while gazing at record labels or listening to mixes. In the 80's house pioneers seemed larger than life, so I didn't quite know how to process having one live in my apartment building let alone running into him in the laundry room. Sometimes the last thing an artist needs is to be brought out of their comfort zone, so I did my best to respect his privacy.

But let's get back to the Mummy Bar. You can bet that I tried to soak up as much deepness whenever and wherever I could. This, especially after missing legendary parties at the Bismarck Hotel, Medusa's or Music Plant that were revered so much. It became less stressful to come and go as I pleased after moving into my *own* apartment.

After stepping inside Mummy Bar and turning the corner, one would find small rooms along two sides shaped like caves. They were great for private chats or *whatever else*. A highly-elevated, antique, black leather stage coach

styled-bench sat perpendicular to the ground level deejay booth. The bar sat opposite the deejay booth with the dance floor centering the room.

Now the sound system was several *hundred* leagues below Kaboom! quality, but the gritty mid-90's affection that permeated the room could have been bottled affectionately as perfume. Kaboom! proffered the best Chicago club sound system outside of New York at one point. It's layout was reminiscent of a grand ballroom, minus the plush.

And to illustrate mixing styles, Oscar's would manifest itself as crimson red Victorian furniture while Hector's would be colored playfully with crayons—but a deluxe box of 100 or more inside. I cherish Hector's Mummy Bar sets because I never really knew what to expect. But it was automatic that I'd have my head and heart tweaked a bit each time. I first saw Curtis Jones (Cajmere, Green Velvet) during Hector's night just after the "Percolator" craze and Dajae's burgeoning.

While transfixed by the tiny stripes on his black and white French shirt, we were treated to some of the most screw loose underground I've ever heard in my life. It was definitely befitting an asylum, but in all the right ways! It was rather *singular*. Finally someone had pushed the envelope and more importantly broken away from that tired Chicago tradition of playing Ron Hardy's ancient top ten.

Now that's certainly no disrespect to Ron because he played forward looking music during his time. But it's pathetic to hear today's me-too deejays copying him years later in all the wrong ways. This was certainly not the case with Cajmere. At least not *that* night.

Mummy Bar painfully lacked a decent sound system. It fared slightly better than a cheap discount store stereo from '89, but *louder*. By good fortune, Oscar and Hector landed a regular gig at a discreet club near Rockwell and Diversey. It was certainly a top class venue for the ultra-

deep house music they played. It was Que Club, I think.

Although Que Club was rather short-lived, it was obvious that the owners made a heavy investment in the building with the unassuming exterior. It wasn't a common opportunity to soak up quality deep house played on a wicked sound system, dance on a brand new hardwood floor and lounge in a setting that's typically found in posh bars that played endless Debbie Gibson remixes. Excuse me. *Deborah.*



Party crowd waiting for more of that early 90's deepness

◇ Sangki Yuh: Freetown, Subwoofer Records
The London connection

IT WAS KEVIN who recommended that I study record labels to figure out which ones released music similar to my own. So I went to Gramophone Records and listened to new releases. Keep in mind that the web was primitive in '95 and wasn't the resource that it is today. Now you can easily click on a website and rapidly send or receive valuable information. But in the past real legwork was required to investigate the market. Funny how things have been flipped in such a short time.

After submitting my music to a few imprints, Sangki Yeo (Yuh) of Freetown/Subwoofer personally called me to rave about the demo. Since I was quite paranoid about being ripped off after hearing that Mr. Fingers' *Amnesia* LP had been bootlegged from a demo tape, I decided to booby-trap mine. My low-quality tapes had noises added, only offered about 2 minutes of any song and were distorted.

Skeptical still, I hesitated to send Sangki a better recording, but then agreed after Kevin vigorously urged me. (Thanks man!) It's amazing that my first release was set to come out on one of the hottest deep house record labels in the world. People could not believe that I'd been accepted

by Subwoofer. The appearance of my vinyl release in stores made their jaws drop even more.

There were no magic tricks nor voodoo. I just played my heart out through music and it touched Sangki, who by the way never usually listened to unsolicited demos. He arrived early one day before his staff had arrived, popped in my tape out of boredom and was thrilled. Lucky for me!

Sangki took a spring '96 vacation and stopped in Chicago between his Hawaii and New York stops. My first EP "Moonchildren" was a birthday present because it was released on the same day in November of '95. The follow-up release "Very Moody" debuted not long before Sangki arrived here. It was baffling to meet a small-framed Korean guy who sounded a like a Rastafarian on the phone! I easily detected that he was wealthy yet relaxed enough to blend.

Sangki introduced me to vocalist Kelli Rich that night. We all enjoyed an awkward but fun chat in his Drake Hotel room with a few other people.

It's the strangest thing because I can still taste the Earl Grey tea and Hawaiian candies that he insisted I sample. But let me stray for a second. What is it with British people *forcing* milk upon me when I have tea? After I declined several times to have milk in my Earl Grey, Sangki said no take it anyway. "Take it! *Take it all!*" Well he didn't quite say that but that's how dramatically it played out in my mind. This happened again during my first visit to London a year or so later. I dined with Alex in a quaint restaurant not far from her apartment and it was *déjà frikkin' ou!* Is it an insult to the frikkin' Queen to have plain tea just as one would have black coffee? Good lard give me what I want!

The "Chicago Tea Massacre" was a light-hearted affair, but I never imagined that my first meeting with Sangki Yeo would also be the last. He was killed in a car crash a few years later with John Robinson, a legendary New York house deejay. It was an honor to take him to Gramophone

Records and meet Oscar. Since they'd enjoyed a business relationship by phone for a while it was only logical that they meet in person.

But unfortunately one very famous Chicago house music pioneer (that will remain unnamed) walked into the store and confronted Sangki about either releasing or returning his demo. It was a vulgar affair. Afterwards the unnamed artist had the gall to ask Sangki for a free meal because he "was rich and treated people to dinner a lot". I nearly threw up from utter disgust. It was an embarrassment and highly negative way to treat a visitor in the birthplace of house music. It was unacceptable behavior because a house elder should have set a better example for others.

Seeking damage control, I did what I could to change the subject and asked Sangki if he wanted to visit other places. We headed to the Cajual/Prescription Records offices so that he could finally meet the guys in person.

It was my second time there and I couldn't wait to see the faces once we arrived together. It's funny how doors open wider when you're in the company of "V.I.P.s". And it hurts when you're treated this way in your own backyard.

Sangki had a fear of riding subways because he witnessed a London tube bombing, so we taxied to Cajual then met some of the guys who eventually formed Guidance Recordings. Rob Kouchoukos was alone when I'd visited a year earlier and Prescription Records had not yet moved in. During the follow-up visit I got to meet Ivan Pavlovich. (I was already acquainted with Sid Stary from an online music chat room years earlier.) Once we arrived, Sangki yelled into the intercom outside. The doors gleefully unlocked and smiling faces emerged to greet us.

It was obvious that they were in awe of this man so I sat back like a fly on the wall and studied the conversation with great interest. At some point Dajae walked by and was introduced. Someone then asked how I met Sangki

and before I could, he chimed that I was his new artist.

Maybe it's all in my mind but sometimes people give a "what are *you* doing here" look. So when Sangki stepped in and proudly presented me as a colleague it felt better than a cash advance. Did you hear that record label types and promoters? (And artists!) We should all remember that kind words and niceness usually goes a very long way.

Ivan handled distribution during this visit and was kind enough to give us many records that we struggled to carry away. As I typed that it felt as though I was taken back to sitting on the curb of N. North Branch and Division with Sangki, sorting out our records until a taxi arrived. It was eery to hear him correctly identify the driver as Nigerian. We took the records to his hotel, hit the lobby bar for drinks with Kevin and then drove to Chinatown.

I didn't drink liquor at the time so I was content with Coke. During the whole time with Sangki it seemed like he poked to see if I was real. He didn't seem accustomed to young Black men who didn't drink, smoke or take drugs. Though I *felt* like having them *all* after his mind games!

Kevin drove to Chinatown and once there things turned a bit loopy. Both of them were indecisive so it took a while to pick a restaurant. Once inside, I kept zoning out because Sangki started talking crap to shake Kevin down. Talk about a bizarre dinner.

Meanwhile, I thought that the food was a bit mundane. Vegetarian at the time, I freaked out from not knowing how the food was prepared. There wasn't much refuge for this plant-eating fiend. I didn't eat much of my chili earlier at Mity Nice Grill in Water Tower Place because it tasted like dishwashing liquid. Was it ginger? Sangki kept asking what was wrong during dinner. Maybe I was too nervous to eat. Or maybe I couldn't forget how awful some had behaved earlier that day. And a bowl of *Dawn* just wasn't in the cards for me.

Maybe his inquiries about my sexuality and matter-of-fact proclamation that he had gay artists on his imprint were in the back of my mind. Was it an invitation to sleep with him or was he just that blunt and nosy? What made him ask about *my* sexuality anyway? Was I setting off his private gaydar? Was it my music? Who knows. And eh, who cares because I was just beginning to get an inkling of who I was. At that age, I was too foggy to dwell because it felt like a private showing of Cirque de Soleil.

Anyway, it was strange to watch his methods of figuring a person out. It made me wonder if he'd acquired the skills by protecting his wealth, working in the music business or reacting to childhood events. He was and is still quite enigmatic to me, just as strange and mysterious as the beautiful music he dared to promote.



◇ **Billboard Dance Music Summit:**
My wallflower life came to an abrupt end

BILLBOARD's summer '96 summit was my first... music industry conference that is. San Francisco hosted for two consecutive years before Chicago's presentation of the 3-day event on July 17.

As it neared my heart pounded from thoughts of new possibilities unfolding. Fortune gifted us with the summit's seminars and parties from the comforts of home.

Hotels have progressed well over the years but there's something special about sleeping in your own bed.

Barely one month into a new job, I didn't have much vacation time accrued yet it wasn't an issue. It was great working where employees were treated as adults. Unlike prior jobs, only treats for hard work and commitment made us feel like children. And that's how it *should* be.

Music conferences feel more like vacations instead of business gatherings. We're big kids with toys on a playground. Sometimes you play with friends you've not seen in a long time or make new ones. This is possible because good music is a common bond.

The Nervous Records Party

Do you remember what you wore the first time you danced in a club and *really* let yourself go? (Alcohol or drug

influence doesn't count.) Well just like losing one's virginity, I remember my first time and what I was wearing. Nervous Records threw its Thursday night *Billboard* party at Shelter and the deejay line-up compelled me to skip work on Friday to make a 3-day weekend of it all.

That party held the promise of a classic Nervoulicious revival because CJ Mackintosh, Frankie Feliciano and Lil Louie Vega were on the bill. Since I mentioned Shelter's pig-headed door staff earlier I'll just tell you that I wasn't going to let them bushwhack a potential once-in-a-lifetime musical baptism. No *way!*

Avoiding faux long line drama and snagging a free, limited edition Nervous tee-shirt were priorities. And I had to arrive early and soak up the ambience before the crowd rushed in. It's great to feel the night's intensity build instead of coming during or after the climax.

My early 90's fashion cocaine was horizontally-striped tee-shirts. I'd happily wear my old powder blue and white pajama shirt today if it hadn't fallen apart after much use.

Jordan Fields joked that I was a big fan of "sleepy-tyme house" but I think it's OK if the music makes you wanna take a pillow to the dance floor. I laughed him off because if music brings calm to chaos, let's welcome it with open arms. Lord knows this world desperately needs it.

Once I got past Shelter's front door goons, I tried not to stampede for the free Nervous tee-shirts. I usually don't wig out over freebies but many of Nervous' early 90's artists had converted me into a huge fan. Wayne Gardiner's Classic Man and Sound Waves material highlight that era. Nervous released great Mood II Swing, Roger Sanchez and Masters at Work releases.

Shelter's decor was noticeably better than normal that evening. They placed lit candles and scattered miniature Nervous chocolates all over the bar. It was a nice touch and something we weren't accustomed to in Chicago. Well

maybe Ron Trent's Prescription parties were exceptions.

Don't expect traditional deep house events in Chicago to get packed until after midnight. Though bars and pubs that play mainstream music usually fill up during prime time. But I've never felt comfortable arriving late to house

events. Sometimes careful deejays who take risks early in the evening and play lovely, ambient songs wouldn't with a big crowd. I didn't care what time I had to get there, just as long as I could get some of *that!* The early bird *indeeeeee*.

And I usually circled Shelter's main room several times to find an aural "sweet spot". I perched on the hulking subwoofer by the deejay's booth after chilling out in the bleacher seats. Wallflowers tend to mark their territory aggressively so as to settle in for the long haul. It was vital to designate a nesting spot at each of my regular clubs because I rarely moved much. Thankfully the era of perching came to an end that night.

Shelter wasn't my regular club, but I'd been there a few times prior to the Nervous party with indifference. But the club definitely had more soul that night because the music was better than the usual progressive house flavor. It was more than a pleasure to hear meaty and soulful ambient house pulsating on that beefy sound system. And I blame

<p>Thursday, July 18th 1996 New York & London Underground THE NERVOUS PARTY featuring world famous D.J.'s Lil Louie Vega & Frankie Feliciano Direct from NYC along with British Heavyweight D.J. CJ MacIntosh Also spinning: Shelter resident D.J.'s John Curley & Mark Grant Live performances by Nervous Record Artist Byron Stingly (formerly of Ten City)</p>		 <p>Genuine Taste Genuine Nightlife</p>
<p>Friday July 19, 1996 The Chicago Music Showcase showcasing some of the Windy City's best D.J.'s D.J. Sneak • Derrick Carter Mark Farina • Diz Josh Werner & Scott Song D.J.'s G-Most & Jeff Starlight in the Paramount Room</p>		
<p>Saturday, July 20, 1996 The Twisted Party Don't miss the worldwide debut of Rob Destefano's (formerly Tribal America) New Underground Dynasty Twisted featuring Hometown D.J.'s Mark Picchiotti & Oscar MacMillan presenting the sound of the Lisbon Underground D.J. Vibe • Live PA's T.B.A.</p>		 <p>Present this invite for complimentary admission for you and a guest before midnight. \$5 there after. \$10 without</p>

this for my “coming out” on the dance floor that evening.

Actually Shelter had four large, black subwoofers that framed the dance floor in the main room. Since the music was unappealing on regular nights, I walked around all three rooms. But I was locked into a trance during the Nervous party. I don’t remember the order in which deejays spun that night, but I think CJ Mackintosh played first. My eyes watered as plush track after track had the calmness of God in them. I don’t know what kind of signal radiated but I blacked out, then noticed that more people had arrived and were in sync too.

A handsome, ponytailed guy with Native American features stood in my personal space for an eternity as I sat on the speaker in a trance. We never said a word but were strangely comfortable in each other’s presence the entire time. I’ve met a lot of wonderful people this way and was

about to say hello when a friend of mine popped over out of nowhere and stood next to me.

Booger.

Back then I was quite private about many things and didn’t show this friend any indication that it was perhaps the wrong time for a *third*



Shelter before demolition in the new millennium

wheel. And really, I was happy to see him mingling with industry people and out to witness such a historic event. But I noticed disappointment and discomfort on the ponytailed stranger’s face. I didn’t know what to do. If by chance you’re reading this Mr. Ponytail, I’m sorry! Unfortunately,

there were too many instances I care to remember that ended in peculiar disconnect. I should just say hello.

Kevin's a huge fan of east coast house and was visibly amped about the party. We marinated in its chunky, deep grooves. This event was a wonderful pep from the tired disco tracks many local deejays can't seem to let go of. We wanted difference. We needed inspiration. We received musical and spiritual salvation and it was finally happening in *our* backyard. *Billboard* gave us quite a love injection!

Our heads bobbed and we geeked out from the happenings. By then a few people were on the dance floor giving in to the beats. Someone walked by and said that Louie Vega couldn't make it because of airport drama. And a few minutes Roger S. climbed into the booth with his records.

Now the sight of this scared me a wee bit. Despite his soothing and milky releases on *Strictly and Nervous*, Roger's also known for playing very abrasive and acerbic house music at parties. We didn't want him to switch from the dark house that had been massaging our minds to some vomit house. Both of us were already wriggling in that "I won't really dance because I'm a DJ/producer" stupid sort of way. You know, that not-gonna-*FAG-OUT* brand of machismo. "I can't let other music people see me sweat." But the music made it *impossible* to hold back any longer!

But as suspected Roger began with construction site, hammer-the-nails flavored house music and people stopped dancing and gave him the stink eye. WHAP!-WHAP!-BWHAP!-CRAP! instead of the MMM-MMM-AAHH-MMM we got beforehand. It only took him playing 2 or 3 of these pipe cleaners to get that we didn't want his musical makeover. Roger eventually smoothed things out by adding a funky edge to the music. It made us hop instead of rubbing speakers with our tush.

Hector Lopez and Lil John Coleman leaned on the nearby railing and got into the groove. Kevin heard me say

“I don’t think I can hold back any longer” and he said “well let go then”. The dance floor was almost packed at this point so it was now or never. I *had* to work my body before too many people had clogged the floor!

As a kid I attended a sanctified church with my oldest brother and sometimes we’d get the holy ghost. Some of you might know what I mean. I’ll explain for those of you who have no clue.

In the movie *Blues Brothers*, there’s a famous scene with people in church dancing and doing flips. It’s a great natural high that sometimes defies gravity. At least it feels that way in the moment. And that’s what happened to me as I let myself go at the Nervous Records party. I danced so wildly it felt as though I’d finally lost my dance floor virginity!

My eyes closed for long periods of time and I sometimes ended up on the other side of the room when opened. It’s a great feeling when you’re able to put that much trust in a group of strangers. I’d never seen Lil John dance as much as he did that night. He didn’t flap about like me, but stuck to his signature bopping up and down. It was beautiful.

Was I on another planet? I lost track of Kevin and my shirt was drenched with sweat after a couple hours of this. It was a new experience and a bit scary. After coming out my trance Hector asked if I was OK. He was used to my reserved demeanor. No one had really seen me let go like that. I smiled at him and said everything was just fine! This wonderful night helped me make up for missing the early years of house. It also made up for the nights I spent taping radio shows instead of clubbing. It was another piece in my life coming into play.

Before we knew it the lights came on and they told us to get out. I couldn’t believe that several hours had elapsed but in that state of mind time passes quickly. I love watching people leave concerts, church or anything that positively stimulates the mind and soul by creating a natural high.

People smiled and talked about the great time they had as we left. We didn't want to go home or anywhere else.

In fact many of us congregated outside of the club for a long time. I sat on the curb with Ricky Bradshaw chatting about what had just happened. Since it's smart to absorb as much industry knowledge as possible, I must have asked Ricky a million questions about his blue-colored "Liquid Soul" vinyl record and what it was like to be Shawn Christopher's son. Why weren't things like this all the time in Chicago? The vibe was quite friendly and if only for one night it was great to have the industry ego peeled away.

Divas, Chicago crowds and Mad Bar party

Early July usually brings the first truly warm weather to Chicago. And since *Billboard's* summit commenced right after the 4th, the heat made getting around town a toasty chore. The Windy City hosts what seems like a bajillion festivals between May and October, but the granddaddy of them all is the Taste of Chicago. I only had a week or two to catch my breath before sampling a local tasting of international house music.

Sans any Alzheimer's episodes, Shay Jones and Danny Teneglia paint the only memories I have of the now defunct Stardust club on Halsted Street near Milwaukee Avenue. I believe Maxi Records hosted the party, but I remember feeling prickly as I walked in and saw so many New York music industry people mingling upstairs. The whole thing felt pretty surreal as the crowd appeared tranquilized at times. I could barely see Danny's head peek over the deejay's booth and it sounded as if the turntables had worn needles. That caused records to skip violently.

And if it hasn't been mentioned thus far, a Chicago audience can be mean as hell. A painful example of this was Loleatta Holloway's great performance at the House of

Blues. It received a lukewarm reception at best. Loleatta is elderly but took the stage after having major surgery, danced and sang her heart out, yet the crowd basically ignored her. It was such a disrespectful display and I felt like a stake had been driven through my heart. Our queen of contemporary dance music did not deserve this maltreatment, especially in her hometown.

So when I found out that my buddy Lars Behrenroth was going to spin at Mad Bar, I was a bit nervous for him because of what had happened to Loleatta. Since Red Dog was just across the street, I'd been too distracted to visit Mad Bar prior to this event. But fortunately it turned out to be a laid back gathering of industry people with a heavy New York presence.

The bulk of the crowd felt a bit stand offish or preoccupied, but it was a great opportunity to meet Tommy Musto, Jesse Saunders, Doug Smith of 95 North and Stonebridge. Despite my own jitters, Lars took control of the decks and sparked the crowd when he mixed in Mr. Fingers "Can You Feel It". Herman Santiago introduced himself as Tommy's engineer and happily explained the science of recording a good dance record. It was interesting to have a qualified engineer critique house music, because most of the ones I'd worked with only had ears for rock or pop music. And yes, they are different qualifications.

◇ **Winter Music Conference:**
A house music Mecca in '97

AS OF THIS writing, I've attended Winter Music Conference just once. For those who are not familiar, it's billed as an annual educational and networking conference for music industry professionals and artists. In reality it's a sunny Miami, FL vacation for many veterans. By spring '97 I'd released three EPs, remixed songs by other artists and was on the cusp of releasing my debut album *Deeper Level of Understanding*.

At the urging of friends and associates, I cranked my professional musical career up a notch by mingling at the premier dance music conference in the nation. *Billboard's* excitement and informal networking success inspired me to register for WMC, the premier event of its kind.

Taking it all in

Luckily people with WMC experience briefed me on what to expect. And once there I hung with Kevin, Darcy Kelley and Jordan Fields. Darcy was a Toronto-based radio deejay who shared a hotel room with Kevin and I. Other than by his radio show and music charts I didn't know much about Darcy, but I knew that Jordan would keep us laughing, Kevin would go into "super producer mode" and that was OK because the chase motivated me too.

It was imperative to meet as many house music produc-

ers as possible. Mastering song production was my aspiration, but I also wanted to know about the people behind the scenes. There wasn't a promise of meeting pioneers, but the possibility of crossing paths with someone like Larry Heard or Wayne Gardiner was thrilling. Maybe I would have fainted if so, but it was still a tantalizing thought.

We didn't see Larry or Wayne but Jordan introduced us to Carl Craig, Arthur Baker, Frankie Knuckles and Joey Negro (Dave Lee). Jordan has a great sense of humor and embraces the unknown or bizarre. Later I realized that he's a thrill seeker—he *pretended* to know these people and ate their reactions as the poor target tried to recognize someone they really didn't know. Before he confessed the game I just surmised that he had weird friendships!

Frankie Knuckles' distant stare was priceless, standing outside of a restaurant near Washington and 17th Street. Maybe the poor guy just wanted fresh air but had us invading his personal space instead. We soaked up the opportunity to meet one of house music's godfathers. Moments like those are rare and I try hard to respect a person's privacy, but it would have been rude to just walk off after being introduced. So I wrote this passage to express appreciation.

All is forgiven I hope but it was great to meet Joey Negro/Dave Lee and others this way. If it wasn't for Jordan's boldness, we would have missed Dave humming one of his famous bass lines in the back seat of a rental. Cute.

To watch emerging group Deep Dish spin at Maxi Record's beach party came as a sweet bonus. It was crazy because one moment Kevin and I were strolling down Collins Avenue back to our hotel, but then we were in the car with Jordan and Dave Lee the next. It was surreal and was like a bizarrely-urban Disney movie.

Miami's refreshing and very different compared to Chicago or the Mississippi boondocks. There's a multitude of Spanish-speaking people and South Beach feels like

another country. There was a sizeable Cuban presence and most of the general population was both physically and spiritually beautiful. What a treat.

Back then I was naive to think that people just saw me as a regular Black guy in America. But after so many South Beach residents spoke to me in Spanish it expanded my mind beyond the 'you're either Black or White' mentality of the deep south. At this point in my life I hadn't left U.S. soil yet, but Miami sure felt like it was across somebody's border. I navigated more comfortably on my trips to Brasil, Canada and France as a result.

It's not so alarming today when someone mistakes me for a particular ethnicity or nationality, but years ago



such a mismatch felt like a dark comedy. "Did she really think I was Latino or Spanish-speaking? I wonder why." It gave a whole new meaning to the phrase sometimes you can take the boy out of the country, but not the country out of the

boy.

And what's the point in traveling if you don't sample the culture and enjoy the locals? Fortunately Kevin felt the same way and urged me to try arroz con pollo (chicken with rice) at a food stand near 9th and Collins. We could have just walked right past it if we didn't know any better.

I don't think I've enjoyed rice and chicken quite the same way since, especially with the yummy Cuban Colas we slurped down afterwards. Mmm! Frio!

Not everything in Miami was appetizing. Although the rest of the meal at Wolfie's was okay, the strange bowl of limp pickle slices left on every table still plays like a horror movie in my mind. They were painfully out of place and did

little to alleviate the blistering heat outside as intended.

MAW, Giant Step Records party

Mingling with industry types and hungry novices overwhelmed me at times. Darcy finagled a few passes for Giant Step's party and advised us to hit the Delano Hotel early to avoid any headaches at checkpoint. Beating the crowds would head off experiencing drama at the door.

But Kevin and I really jumped the gun because only the grounds crew and sound engineers were there once we arrived that afternoon. Since the door staff hadn't arrived, we just strolled through the lobby directly to the patio area for a pre-party treat. After chatting with Jovonn outside and spotting Mousse T., we enjoyed watching Mike Delgado and Terry Hunter spin and Roy Ayers' band play live.

We ran into Lil John and he graciously introduced us to so many house music legends. It was great to witness artists and producers from Chicago, New York, Asia and Europe mesh well with one another. Most of them were well capable of attracting large audiences on their own. The most bewildering introduction had to be meeting Marshall Jefferson.

All during the conference I was extremely timid to greet people like this and had no idea what to expect of him. Who wouldn't be nervous to meet the guy who gave us so many timeless classics like "Gotta Have House", "Time Marches On", his Ten City and Kym Mazelle songs?

I think I grew faint as Lil John made the introduction, but Marshall's very down-to-earth nature allowed me to catch my breath. Considering the multitudes of people he's met, I didn't expect him to have any clue *nor care* who I was but he did. You see Marshall recorded an early Subwoofer Records release and had apparently received my records from Sangki as well.

Once we started talking about Subwoofer and Sangki, his eyes bugged out because it clicked who I was. "I thought you was one of them *cosmic* MFs from New York! You from Chicago!?" I couldn't help but chuckle as everything around me felt quite exaggerated. Before any of my pictures had appeared in the press it was sort of a dark comedy that many people thought that I was an Anglo guy from England. I guess the name Christopher Gray *is* a bit vanilla. But then again *so am I* at times. Go figure.

Since my music had been released by a British label, some assumed that I was pale and a teatotaler. Well at least the tea totaler part was right, because I didn't drink nor do drugs. But had Chicago become so discounted that we couldn't produce the quality of releases found on an import record label? The question disturbed me.

There were many WMC '97 high points, but this party was house music heaven on earth. I know it's best to keep your cool at social gatherings but I was a wee bit giddy after chatting with Marshall Jefferson, watching Mike Delgado and Terry Hunter spin, and seeing Louie Vega, Kenny Dope and David Morales mingling. And it was a *steal* to see Roy Ayers perform live. Thanks Darcy!

And the buffet offered the best tropical fruit I've ever tasted! It was a treat to be in the presence of great people without drama and egos. Everyone was super chill and this was icing on a very delicious cake. The MAW bar-b-cue catapulted me past cloud 9 and made it quite difficult to attend WMC afterwards. Kenny and Louie set the bar very high so I decided to marinate in the results for a while. Who could risk a less than stellar experience the following year? As if MAW songs and remixes weren't enough of a treat, thank you Louie and Kenny for a wonderful time.

Some of the other parties

If that wasn't enough Louie and Tony Humphries worked the crowd later at Liquid on Washington Street. Despite having a conference badge, many attendees were treated like 2nd class citizens too often. People buzzed that Liquid was partly-owned by Madonna, who enjoyed one of her 9 lives in South Beach. A scan of the dance floor showed that some had business on their minds, others were in awe and maybe a few were just coked up or drunk.

A broad smile crossed my face as I looked up from a trance and found Ron Trent dancing nearby. For some odd reason the purple print pants he wore that night still register in my mind. It was magic to go from listening to his song "Altered States" in 1990 on crusty cassette back in Mississippi to sharing dance floor space with its creator. I wanted to record for his label Prescription Records and had met with Ron and Chez Damier several times. The meetings felt like job interviews because both were very thorough in probing my dedication to this music. Was it a modern day peace pipe gathering or board meeting? I remember tranquilizing incense smolder and Chez's eyes blazed with passion as he talked about embracing the spirituality of soul music. And though I was in shock from just having met D'borah during her stint there, I knew it was critical to express my allegiance and desire to contribute. It never came together but I cherish the time spent there.

But where was I. Oh yah, partying at Liquid in Miami. Well Louie went for the jugular with an impressive house set, but his drum-n-bass selections at the end made for a peculiar transition to Tony Humphries' pounding Black Baptist Church house music selections that followed.

At another party down the street Michael Proctor's live performance rated as the best I've ever seen by a male house music artist. Don't get me wrong, the vinyl record-

ing is indeed excellent but after hearing him belt it out live, it's apparent that we were cheated a bit on the wax version. How common is that now? "Fall Down" nearly *knocked* us down because Mr. Proctor certainly didn't need a microphone. This guy's the real deal and his voice is a gift. My God that was wonderful!

It's unfortunate that mini video cameras weren't widely available or affordable then. If you were able to see footage of the hordes of people worshiping Danny Teneglia you'd probably smirk and wonder what the big deal was. Danny was red hot at the time and many had no shame in blatantly kissing his butt. With that being said, I have a degree of respect for him because without fail he kept a smile on his face and greeted people cordially. That's critically important, especially when you've become successful. Danny headlined a Sound Jet club party, which was isolated from the main South Beach strip.

The door staff was extraordinarily annoying and experienced frequent amnesia about whether to honor WMC badges for free entry or not. Even though admission to all conference related parties were supposed to be free with a badge, many clubs hesitated or abused attendees compared to cash paying customers.

But the most memorable Sound Jet gathering presented Frankie Knuckles and Kerri Chandler in the deejay booth together. Sound Jet was peculiar because the eerie, Romanesque back room had no ceiling with its own deejay, while the front section exhibited a typical warehouse atmosphere. Nervous about Kerri's anticipated turn on the tables I tried to intermix with the crowd for a while... but turned giddy once I spotted him for sure. The music was interesting and unfamiliar. As I nested by the booth, one of Kerri's test records wiggled from his crate onto the dark floor out of view.

Should I keep or return it? Temptation is a MF. I must

have stared at its typewritten info sheet and touched the vinyl for a good while, temporarily losing my usual ability to immediately do the right thing. After a few moments, I lifted the record into the air and motioned it towards Kerri. He politely raised a single finger, as if asking me to wait one second as he was about to segue into the next song.

Come to think of it maybe he initially thought that I was soliciting one of *my own* records before realizing that it was actually his own. It would have been golden to capture his facial expression after recognizing what I'd given him! But yes it felt good to do the right thing. The awkward situation ended as I turned around, walked back to my previous position of holding up the wall and nodded to the music without missing a beat.

Paul "Trouble" Anderson

My friends Kevin Elliott and Billy Jack Williams were pretty amped about garage house so the style slowly bagged me over time. Crispin Glover in London shared his Paul "Trouble" Anderson mixtapes with Kevin and it's intoxicating to hear a true blue radio personality with a house show in those days. Paul chatted over his mixes and reminded us often that we were listening to KISS FM, but unlike many competing shows it naturally worked.

Deeper Level of Understanding was out on Robert Barrett's Music Is... Records spring '97 and "Intelligent Emotions" was set for a late November release on Fragmented, so I flew to London during Thanksgiving for interviews and partying. Robert Barrett, his cousin Spider and I drove to Camden to watch Paul spin at The Loft (HQ's). Paul bounced the crowd off the walls like springs with his selections and it was *even better* than the mixtapes. I apologize to the Brits I frightened on the dance floor with my wild dancing but Paul's no joke! Mr. Trouble synced with the gods

that night and produced one of my best natural highs!

But wait. I'm getting ahead of myself here. Let's rewind back to the spring of that same year. Before WMC, I'd only heard Paul's recorded mixtapes, so perhaps you could imagine how amped I was about watching him deejay live for the first time. He doesn't try to impress like a DMC

champion when it comes to mix technique, but the man is a great music selector and master at making people feel good. But maybe it was an off night in Miami because things just didn't come together well for him. Before Trouble spun, Ricky Morrison made the crowd sop everything he pulled out of his record bag with a



biscuit. Ricky was the perfect appetizer. *Paul "Trouble" Anderson, Chris at The Loft in '97*

Just imagine the crowd's swollen anticipation as Paul made his way to the booth. He smacked us with his first record and everybody in that little club stared him down like twitching junkies near a drug dealer dangling the goods. It was our version of sanctified church and we were prepared to get "the spirit". But it never came. I won't pretend to know what happened but the vibe was just weirdly bad.

People we admire are afforded wide latitude and that night's crowd was truly patient with him. But Paul disappeared underneath the booth out of view for long periods

of time and baffled us. Was he was feeling ill? Was it the club's crappy turntable needles? The needle zipped across the record at one point and caused an awkward silence throughout the club for more than a minute.

After what seemed like an eternity, Paul popped his head back up in shock. That moment killed the night for many and it was disappointing that they would have the wrong impression of who Paul Trouble really was. From what I witnessed later that year his stellar Loft performance in London was the norm, but those who were at his WMC party would likely keep a sour taste without knowing the difference. What a shame because he's the man.

No liberty, no justice, no peace

Since everyday life is already difficult, I don't spend a lot of time listening to the acerbic flavor of house. And that's what Roger S. served at Nervous' WMC party. Every now and then it's OK to listen to hard beats with a little heavenly love and affection on top but I tune out once it starts to sound as harsh as acid reflux feels.

But don't get me wrong. I truly adore many of Roger's Strictly Rhythm and Nervous releases in the early 90's, but it's hard to swallow his overly aggressive releases afterwards. Me and Jordan stood out in front of Warsaw club where the Nervous party was held as the Strictly Jaz Unit guys cruised by in their black SUV. Jordan chatted with Boo Williams and Glenn (Crocker) Underground after I greeted and stood back out of the way.

This was perhaps the second time I'd seen Glenn in person but nonetheless it left an impression. We both attended a WMC licensing and publishing panel later and were equally insulted by the bad attitudes of stuffy legal types dismissively talking amongst themselves. They pretty much turned a blind eye to the attendees and looked down

on us though we'd paid their speaker fees. Even during the open mic portion some of them acted as if we'd barged into their hotel rooms! After this display, Glenn rallied Chicago artists to work harder to be independent.

Many artists felt looked down upon by a number of industry types but the glaring exceptions were Strictly Rhythm's Gladys Pizarro and Freetown's Sarah HB. Both ladies genuinely reached out during the panels they were on. I have great respect for that because they could have easily blown us off like the others.

Gladys and Sarah warmly welcomed everyone to bring up their demos after the sessions. Since I've dealt with both of these ladies to some degree I had no doubts about the genuine nature of their offers.

Strictly Rhythm had just finalized song selections for its compilation "Down, Deep and Dark" before my material had arrived, but Gladys' staff phoned me anyway to express their admiration and appreciation.

Keeping business and pleasure separate

It's been a strict practice of mine to keep business and private life separate, so I asked my ex-girlfriend to skip a few industry events at times. I was determined not to neglect her nor did I want to be distracted from artistic and business matters. Despite her true love for house music and urge to party she was sweet about the issue.

We recently discussed this subject and upon reexamination I feel awful for asking such favors. But our strong friendship and her conflicting work schedule then endorses her support 10 years later. But whenever we had the chance we explored Chicago and went dancing.

For many who work full-time jobs in addition to creating art, it's taxing to balance dual careers and one's private and social life. At the time, I was one year into a new pub-

lishing job, one year into my first serious relationship and two years into recording music professionally. It was also two years after sexually experimenting as an adult.

As you can see a lot of uncharted waters were explored in the life of this country boy, who was still somewhat new to big city living. The experiences made striving for proper balance all the more challenging.

Balance.

Since I got to hang out with the guys at WMC, I returned to South Beach with my girlfriend two months later. Her demanding retail industry job is akin to a surgeon on call, so it was very difficult to plan our vacations well in advance. But we slipped away to Miami during Memorial Day Weekend, despite the busy shopping holiday. I wanted to *show* her South Beach and the places I partied during the conference instead of just jabbering away about it.

We didn't expect South Beach to be flamboyant after WMC and the low-key atmosphere proved to be more romantic. Us gobbling greasy pizza slices on Washington Street and slurping News Café's exquisite fettuccine Alfredo on an Ocean Beach streetside patio was chill.

The tasty treats distracted us a bit from the blistering white sands roasting our feet. It was definitely hotter than it'd been in March. Sauntering through open air markets, slurping chocolate almond Haagen Dazs ice cream bars and swimming in the warm and salty Atlantic Ocean were simple riches missed when I was there "on business".

All of these experiences had much to do with my wallflower life coming to an abrupt end. My confidence rebounded after dumping a dead-end day job, diving into my first serious intimate relationship and commercially releasing my first songs. I'd finally gotten up off of the wall!

Who knows when it happened precisely but by the time

I hit puberty, my confidence to dance expressively in public had dwindled. And it was a terrible setback for a person who loves to dance. I was born in 1970 and I'm a disco baby. If someone present at my birth had told me that I was born dancing, I wouldn't likely doubt it.

Despite incredible urges I just didn't allow myself to truly dance in clubs when I first moved to Chicago. Sure I'd sneak a little in when no one was watching or if the club was virtually empty. But prior to the Nervous *Billboard* party in '96 there was no way I was going to let it all go in front of strangers. As long as it'd been held in, who knew how it'd finally come out and if any poor, innocent souls would be hurt in the process. No kidding.

If there's such a thing as being *dance pregnant*, my water broke and I went into labor during the Nervous Records party in Chicago. Well OK I really *gave birth* there, but for some reason it was awfully difficult to do the same at MAW's bar-b-cue, Louie's deejay set at Liquid or the Deep Dish beach party. I let it go a little at Liquid but quickly locked it back down minutes later. Maybe it was due to extraordinary industry pressure or something like that. Yah.

Well it's so very true that life's too short to deny ourselves simple pleasures like dancing freely. Laughter and dancing are close cousins but I for reasons unclear to me, I wasn't having my fair share of it.

◇ Dr. Heard, Ron Trent's pharmacy
and emotional distortion

IT'S EASY TO EMBRACE artists whose songs embody the kind of soul that Mr. Heard has contributed to deep house music's foundation and culture. So imagine how wiggy I was in the summer of '90 when Ron Trent's "Altered States" wheeled by on a Maxell cassette given to me by my friend Gloria.

It's not clear who mixed the tape but my tiny collection at the time welcomed it with wide arms. Soon after indentifying him, I collected as many Ron Trent releases as I could. (Many mixtapes have no artist or song listings.)

After moving to Chicago and meeting Ron a couple of years later, it was mandatory to catch him spinning at parties whenever I could. For a while he threw his own at Strawdog Theatre near Sheridan Road and Broadway. Clubbing at Red Dog and Mummy Bar consumed my first years in the city but it was time to frequent more eclectic offerings. There's no doubt about it, Ron's caravan is a beautiful and intriguing group of people who at least visibly embrace their roots and culture.

I couldn't care less about New Year's parties compared to most people but I had to make the effort to catch Ron's whenever I could. Candles and UV lamps illuminated

Strawdog Theatre on New Year's Eve in '97. It was mandatory to go hear Larry Heard deejay and watch vocalist Fonda Rae perform live.

At any rate, my ex and I were close enough to hear the door staff mention that someone had forgotten their record bag or that it had been misplaced.

But we would have been appreciative if Ron or Larry had shown up with just a pair of maracas and a flute. Well okay maybe not that extreme, but the point is that we cared more about presence over specific records.

Presence is what turned Shelter into a warm and fuzzy affair when Prescription Records hosted their parties. Ron and associates went the extra mile to grace the industrial looking venue with an Afrocentric feel. Beautiful tapestries hung from the ceiling as we danced to pitched down soul that saturated the room. Angora's new song "Enchantment" was being celebrated and live performances by Pevan Everett and Sundiata O.M. capped a beautiful night. Shelter's also the first time I saw Larry Heard in person. It was peculiar but gratifying to hear him play mellow and ambient music, then watch an appreciative older crowd soak it up. The setting was a pleasant contrast to the progressive house that was typically held in the same space.

Some of us fall in love with an artist's music and then expect them to play the same style when they deejay. It might seem logical but isn't required or automatic. The way an artist deejays records and writes music can have different outcomes.

But back to the NYE party at Strawdog. Well into Larry's set we began to wonder about Fonda Rae since it was well past 1 a.m. on New Year's and no live performances had occurred. The circulating gossip was that her flight had been delayed, she'd landed in Chicago but some other issue had to be resolved. We decided to leave as 3 a.m. approached because it had been a long evening. But

we found out later that she'd arrived very late and performed as promised. Chalk one up for impatience.

Besides performance drama, I had some of my own. Right before a separate Strawdog visit, I had an argument with my girlfriend at my apartment then left alone to enjoy the night. One monkey won't stop this show.

After walking around the loft a bit, I spotted the guy who'd given her candy for Valentine's Day earlier in the year. Immature and jealous, I phoned my apartment, woke her up and persuaded her to join me. My neurosis commanded me to find out if anything was going on between them and what better way to find out than by using the element of surprise. Or so I thought at the time.

So after some coercion she finally joined me. Cocked and ready, I pointed the guy out and watched her face. When she recognized him her eyes widened abnormally and the green monster inside made my pulse quicken. Completely crazed, I encouraged her to walk over and say hello against her wishes. She finally did, they chit-chatted for a bit and the little hairs on my head singed to a crisp!

A while later I took her into another room and sat on an empty stage. But the guy came over and asked her if they could have a talk. She returned a few minutes later after explaining to him that I was her boyfriend. But thinking with my heart and not so much the brain I was convinced that the damage had already been done. Surely treason of some sort had been committed and I would not have my emotions toyed with! No sir. Erm, no *maam*.

As of this writing, I owe her a tremendous apology for being very human and quite emotionally distorted during the last year of our relationship. We've decided to focus on our friendship since the breakup. It's definitely the required element of any healthy relationship.

◇ *Fish e' Luvconfushun*

*F**ish e' Luvconfushun* is an album named after two people I loved at the same time. Since the LP debuted 10 years ago (Spring '98), my first instinct just then was to write that it wasn't bona fide love. But I try to adhere to my rule of not rewriting the past or negating good times enjoyed with people I'm no longer on good terms with. I'm not the type to scissor someone from a photo out of anger.

So despite western society's difficulty to accept that an individual is capable of loving more than one person at the same time history shows us otherwise.

But do we confuse *love* with some sort of mentally ill affection? Love's meaning has been contemplated throughout time but are we really any closer to establishing a universal and clearly articulated definition today?

When I jotted this topic down in my notes long ago, my intention was to detail the events that happened between the three of us, leading to the album and its title. That task is no longer necessary and it would be detrimental to the relationships I presently share with them.

However, it pisses me off that tug-of-war is a recurring theme in my life in a variety of ways. Paranoia convinces me that people in my circle have tracking abilities and demand my attention concurrently for the fun of it. Here's an

example: if I'm in the mood to write music and am working in the flow already, a number of bizarre distractions pop up in symphony.

But whenever I have downtime and am itching to be social, no one can be found. Sometimes I want companionship but perhaps trip an alarm that scares people away because I usually feel invisible. But on the flip, there's been too many times when I'm in a relationship and solicitations pour in like spam mail. What gives? I don't get it.

It's crazy because so many of my songs deal with matters of the heart. If you were able to dial back before 1992 to ask me if I planned to write so many songs about love, I probably would have rolled my eyes in disgust.



Whether it's bonifide love or emotional distortion, know that I truly care.

◇ *Billboard* Phase 2:

Adeva, Ce Ce and the not-so-fat lady singing

DESPITE BUNGLED AFFAIRS of the heart, I was quite busy prepping the release of my second album *Fish & Luvconfushun* for spring '98. It received critical acclaim and I was on the fast track at my publishing job, but my personal life was rocky. The proverbial plate was full though it was definitely bittersweet. And it still tastes a bit strange today because I promised long before any music was released that I'd try not to let my personal and social life be a detriment to my art. And up until 2002 it was my strict *modus operandi*.

Because I don't believe in crossing certain ethical and artistic lines, I'd rather step away from a situation if it's something I might consider regrettable. It's with this thinking that I approached the next *Billboard* Dance Music Summit with a somewhat different pair of eyes so to speak.

Partying and freshman discovery was the '96 and '97 summits' flavors, but I was more uptight and anxious to plant the seeds for my own record label and long-term

independence in '98.

In a way I was robbed of the ability to truly enjoy the release of *Fish 3 Luvconfushun* as I had *Deeper Level of Understanding* for a number of reasons. As I mentioned in the last chapter, *F3L* was about the tug-of-war in my heart for two people. And if that wasn't enough, a painful divorce ensued between the company that owned Fragmented Records and the record label manager that I had been working with to present *F3L*.

I'm still quite fond of Fragmented's label manager Scott Braithwaite because like Music Is... Record's boss Robert Barrett (and later Brett Dancer at Track Mode), he's very patient and sincerely addressed my concerns. Scott helped me navigate some very unfamiliar and unfriendly waters during his label's transition, but the relationship with the parent company that formerly owned Fragmented was one of the most frustrating in my career.

Yes, I know that this chapter is supposed to be about the '98 *Billboard* summit, but it's important to clearly establish my mind state so you can understand how I had to filter everything at the summit's events.

It was imperative to build solid relationships that would allow me to divorce frustrating dependencies that existed while being signed to someone else's record label. Although I'd strongly contemplated launching my own record label from the beginning, it was terribly difficult to gain marketing leverage necessary to stand out above the hundreds of other releases. Keep in mind that this was long before the more friendly do-it-yourself record label era.

The downtown Marriott hotel on Michigan Avenue hosted summit meetings a few blocks south of my office, so I took time off to network when possible. Kevin and I hung out in the lobby soaking up the vibe of the room. I don't remember mingling at any business functions in previous years so it was bewildering to transition from my day-to-

day work in a zany newsroom to the pretense found at music business gatherings.

Looking back, I was perhaps numb from the Fragmented mess because one of the most influential house music divas stood right before me in Gramophone Records shop, yet the magnitude of that moment did not smack me



as it should have. As much as I used to daydream about house music artists back in Mississippi, I should have been in awe standing next to Adeva because I own several of her records and CDs. And if not for her musical accomplishments, perhaps for her towering over a shrimp like me!

I write these details to encourage you to savor every minute even when the going is tough because the moment will never come again. Have you ever studied a light bulb just before it's about to blow? The flickering wire inside visually describes how I felt while standing next to this queen of house due to the issues I was grappling with.

Nonetheless she exhibited class. When we saw each other in the Marriott's lobby later, she walked right up to me and said "Hey, I remember you from the record store.



Inside Gramophone Records in the late 90's

How are you?”. This, uttered to a complete stranger who wasn’t exactly in the best mood that sweaty summer day. Considering all of her accomplishments, Adeva didn’t have to exhibit this type of diplomacy. But

it’s the kind of humility I love and think that all should embrace. It *is the essence* of this music!

It makes me think back to Kim English’s Gramophone Records autograph session during one conference. The air conditioning took a vacation and turned the tiny store into a sweat box. But not only did Miss English show up, she maintained a very pleasant attitude despite working in what must have felt like a hot prison cell in the deep south.

By the time I arrived the store was nearly empty. But she remained alone at her table with marker in hand. Somehow the masses have been miseducated along the way to believe that a diva is sassy, brassy and inarticulate. Kim’s grace under pressure illustrated a diva’s true attitude and validates the raised bar in her music. She presented herself as a true queen and a lady!

My mind was able to calibrate after experiences like these so I could focus on conference goals. Hitting reset produced a better meeting with Brett Dancer of Track Mode Recordings. After a wonderful Mediterranean meal near North Avenue and Sheffield, we laid important

groundwork for future projects on his imprint.

But there's only so much work to do before it's time to play. It was the summit's showcase, but I didn't quite know what to expect from the event Clubland Unplugged held at Green Dolphin Street club located on Ashland/Armitage.

I ran into my Apple Mac-loving buddies Lars Behrenroth and Manny Napuri (Prince Quick Mix) before entering the main area to find Byron Stingily sauntering around the bar like a game show host. The whole setup was pretty surreal. Green Dolphin Street is a very classy venue that helped Clubland Unplugged seem downright swanky.

Besides Michael Proctor's live performance at Winter Music Conference in '97, CeCe Peniston belting out "Nobody Else", one of my all-time favorite comeback dance music artist performances. And if CeCe was the cake, the diva who preceded her was the icing, bringing down the house with clearly some of the best pipes in the business! (Her name escapes me. Was it Tim Gant's live band singer Roberta Thomas?)

Since I grew up in the deep south and have attended spiritual churches I'm no stranger to being moved by a talented singer. But it's not often that someone literally takes my breath away how this lady did. She was backed with one of the most talented bands I've ever seen perform but even if Tim Gant's musicians had stopped playing, she could have made us all gasp by her singing alone!

Considering the landslide of drama that crashed on top of me during that time, Clubland Unplugged was one of the rare opportunities to exhale.

Side note: Billboard held its dance music summit in Chicago three years in a row, so a few things may have been scrambled between them. Despite any chronological clashes, I've tried to present the events as vividly as possible.

◇ **My first trip to Generator**
felt like jumping the broom

AFTER YEARS OF FEAR of being seen near one of Chicago's most prominent Black gay house clubs, I finally got over the stupidity and ventured in. Maybe I did it partly as a way to create new positives when I was having negative relationship issues with my lover. And isn't it sad when you realize how much you've missed out on something because of silly fears?

Hopping up and down on that quaint little hardwood dance floor was a spiritual experience I never want to forget. Hours of dancing freely in a crowd that didn't require peer validation comforted me, unlike some other clubs. Those of you who go clubbing know what I mean? You know, dancing around the ones who feel the need to press their wide grins into your eyeballs as they dance... almost as if they're saying "Hey look at *me!*".

Oh no, the Generator crowd *got* it and we all moved as one in the music. Well except for the occasional idiots who aggressively walked through the dance floor with intent to share their misery. GRRR!

I've never been to a club where the security staff dances with the crowd. They wore their white Generator construction hats and overalls with pride. It's not that Generator was perfect, but small things like that underscored a type of house benevolence and fellowship. At least that's how it seems to us partygoers.

Generator's security mingled with us and we all had a good time. Unlike too many other clubs, Generator's door staff made its patrons feel *welcome* upon arrival! Although

we expect and deserve this, unfortunately it isn't the norm. People respond to being treated well and a jam packed venue without a superstar headliner is Generator's proof.

Many faces of those I danced with come to mind, but we were never properly introduced. Just like any family, we were dysfunctional at times. But we always worked things out on the dance floor.

Stories about the camaraderie of those who danced together at the Warehouse, Music Box, Power Plant, AKA's and other clubs are legendary, but this was definitely one of *my own* experiences.

The green line Lake and Halsted station was just a block south of Generator before the CTA relocated it several streets eastward to Clin-



ton. Sweet cocoa wafted through the night air from nearby Blommer Chocolates' factory as we went to work our bodies to sweet music in Fulton Markets.

There must have been a multitude of regulars shopping for fresh meat too because the first few times I went, it was a bit challenging to overcome the long, intense stares. But on the dance floor I could tell when one particular regular approved of the music because he would always squeal joyfully in his regular spot to the right of the stage.

We partied in the markets along with other nearby clubs like Stardust, Shelter and The Drink. It was peculiar how each bar had its own distinct following and vibe, and were just steps away from one another yet worlds apart.

My Generator experiences boasted of chocolate candy, cocoa people and good music. Now ain't that somethin'.

Note: Generator became Rive Gauche in '99, renamed New Generator in '05 and then Mannequin Nightclub in '07.

◇ Who needs the yellow brick road?

THE ONLY WAY I knew how to overcome the break-up with my girlfriend and going insane from an online infatuation was to release those frustrations through writing. *Emotional Distortion* is the third album and it debuted at the top of '99 as I moved ahead full throttle with my new record label deep4life.

Laying the foundation

While many were hyper about 1999 as a year of incredible transition, I felt it was pure, emotional anguish. My love life crashed and burned, office politics were out of control and I was fighting against artistic colonialism that exists between England and the U.S. This friction is especially irritating in electronic music between independent artists and record labels.

Since most of my songs had been released on British record labels, I didn't know if distributors would embrace or shun a U.S. label set to showcase my music. Since distributors can make or break a song by controlling where products are bought and sold, I took a huge gamble by launching deep4life before testing the waters.

I grew tired of other people making artistic and business decisions. Before learning the overwhelming responsibility of record label management, recording for others felt too much like living at home with bossy parents after living on your own. By launching the imprint, I'd assume control of the art and its exposure, leaving no one else to blame for

its success. The accompanying experiences would present a new type of creative independence.

My first Larry Heard remix project would be released in early '99, so I worked like hell in the fall of '98 to coincide *Emotional Distortion's* debut and deep4life's premiere as a trifecta. Distance Records' well-received "Give Me Heaven" remixes debuted as "Dance 2000: The Chicago Connection" with Anthony Nicholson remixes of "And So I Dance" on the flip side of the record.

Online intersects with deepness

At the same time, online chat heated up as new people from all over the globe joined our IRC (internet relay chat) channel #313 and #housemix. #313 is a chat room named after a Detroit telephone area code and pays homage to techno and its birthplace. I've navigated IRC since '90 and created #housemix with Vincent Hiu/Viper after other rooms urged us to leave with our house music babble.

As I mentioned earlier, online has given me the opportunity to network with a horde of delightful and talented people from a number of countries. It thrilled us to be online together after the Berlin Wall fell. Our West German peers blogged about a unified Germany and their new lives. It also stirred us because we realized that house music was there during a critical point in recent history.

By engaging online chat early on, I embraced a different type of feedback long before other artists and record label professionals discovered it. Buddies in Perth, Australia reported that deep4life was drawing a large following.

Online exposed different and emerging underground music communities as well as an abundance of new talent that used it to network and showcase their music. Big budget TV and radio stations began experimenting with music and video on the web in the mid '90s while smaller stations

and individuals got involved a few years later.

A surge of Australian chatters in the #313 room created a buzz about “Underground Solution”, a gripping RTR-FM radio program hosted by Ben Stinga in Perth. Chicago’s WBMX, WGCI and London’s KISS 100 FM were my familiar favorites but were recorded on tapes instead of being heard live. WKKC and B96 are the only surviving radio stations from my tape archives that broadcast live hotmixes when I moved to Chicago.

So it was thrilling to become a regular listener and contributor to live programming that supported underground music and culture. After watching the Aussies chat incessantly about Ben in the channel, I decided to get up early one Saturday morning to check out his show for myself. (Perth is 13 or 14 hours ahead of Chicago, which is in the central time zone.)

Besides Paul “Trouble” Anderson on KISS, Ben’s show was one of the most inspiring underground music radio programs I’ve ever heard. And he sustained with little support or confidence from many labels he showcased. Many in the U.S. have been blind to the global explosion of underground music outside of this country and such a lack of awareness is especially dangerous for artists and record labels who must find new ways to fellowship and survive.

Making the Perth pilgrimage

After I became a regular Underground Solution listener, a few Perth locals convinced Ben to come online and chat in #313. Just as hesitant to try new technology as old school artists and record labels were to embrace the internet, Ben finally gave in and joined us. I can say with great affection that the channel was never the same afterwards.

Since I was eager to connect with new artists from different places, Perth presented the perfect opportunity to

consider club deejaying. I was a radio jock in the late 80s, but am persnickety about working in clubs.

The club circuit is frustrating. Too often shady promoters mislead club audiences to expect music that won't be heard, screw deejays out of payment, pick clubs with poor sound equipment and offer poor transportation and indecent hotel arrangements considering the amount of time performers spend in airports when travelling.

But many deejays endure this rugged lifestyle just to take the crowd on a journey, enjoying themselves in the process. I love to travel but it's a crime that many deejays don't remain in places long enough to enjoy the people and local culture. That part of the lifestyle is utterly miserable.

But not all gigs or deejaying opportunities are lousy so I kept an eye out for those that seem promising. My first truly appealing club gig was the Perth offer.

It's imperative to work with trustworthy people, as it builds healthy relationships. After a few requests I agreed to deejay in Perth, but with a few strict conditions. Working with traditional promoters were not an option, the party venue had to be decent, the sound system had to be clean and powerful, the ticket price had to be affordable and the door staff had to be cordial.

These requirements should apply to most events but isn't the case always. And both customers and those who provide service should always show mutual respect. This is truly critical for dining out and nightlife. No one should be in a bad mood when they go eat or dance.

We put on quite a show in Perth and many talked about the experience months after it was over. My only regret is that the club reached capacity and unfortunately many people had to be turned away. I apologize for that. Next time we'll be more capacity conscious!

But for those of you who were there. Didn't we have a great time?! It was wonderful to throw a party where play-

ing so many deep records was not an issue. Deejays are frequently harassed by promoters when they're performing and music selection is commonly a sticky issue.

So I did my very best and brought the deepest music in my collection to pull tears of joy from anyone who could hear! Hopefully the memories will never completely fade.

There was an older gent who waited outside RTR until after my first interview was over and greeted us warmly before we had to race over to the party. He was carefree,



At Players Club in Perth, Western Australia in '99. L-R: V, Mark, Hau & CG

made a hat out of our promotional flyers and danced his butt off. People just laughed him off but it was special to me because here was an example of someone defying age to enjoy childhood freedoms. It takes a lot of effort to embrace such a mindset after so many hardships.

I'm thankful to all of you who came and danced with us. If you didn't know, the hotel staff came downstairs and asked me to turn the music down but I turned it up even louder. So that's probably why the sound system shut off briefly until Masters at Work's remix of Mondo Grosso's

“Souffles H” bass line kicked in. The crowd roared as if it was intentional. Don’t tell them it was just dumb luck. ;)

Things that matter most

Business and music industry events during my visit were fun, but the personal experiences were the real cherry. My keepers in Perth were warm and hospitable like those in the U.S. deep south. It’s special because there are many horror stories about neglected and disrespected artists who travel far and are abused.

I understood the risk of flying more than 27 hours to the ends of the earth in the name of house music, but something in my heart felt that it was destiny. It was important to keep my word, even after developing a vicious ear infection and head cold just days before the flight. The congestion wasn’t the worst part of the flight though. It was the group of chatty cheerleaders a few rows in front of me and squealing babies all over the plane that taxed my Zen.

Spending some Thanksgivings in London had been my M.O. before ‘99, but it was time to try *diffrintings*. Managing a record label, flying in a 777 jumbo jet and deejaying in front of an intimate crowd of over 1,000 people who loved down ‘n deep house music were thrilling new challenges. And it was an exciting era of change that set the tone for a new century—Y2K fears be damned!

Truth be told my mom had always admired Australia and its people. However she was terrified of flying; was no chance getting of her on a plane for a visit. But I guess that’s where I came in. It was wonderful.

Contrary to our displayed ignorance, geography is taught in U.S. schools. But since the country’s teaching methods are based on memorization instead of true retention, we forget it like yesterday’s news.

Crocodile Dundee is a joke, but Aborigine people in-

trigue me. And who knew that I'd get to visit Australia so soon? The guts of the continent is uninhabited, so that made traveling a bit tricky. My body barely endured the 6-hour Chicago to Los Angeles and 18-hour Los Angeles to Sydney flights. But anticipation helped me survive the 5-hour leg from Sydney to Perth.

The flights depleted me so I wasn't able to properly express enthusiasm and appreciation for the limousine provided by my comrades.

I didn't spot a kangaroo but chuckled at the "roo bars" on local vehicles. Now, Americans have front attachments on cars to buffer deer hits, but the massive presence of Aussie roo bars were something to behold. I was astonished that they hadn't tipped over a few cars.

It was Mark and Paulie's job to coordinate and publicize the gig. Even if they were professional promoters, I'd have to soak up the club's vibe and tweak its sound system before the party anyhow. Audiences deserve the effort.

But before we started working, I battled jet lag by meshing with Ben Stinga's wonderful group of Complex Records patrons and RTR-FM fans in his store.

It was also the first time that I met Hau in person, who's very special to me. (He's the one standing across from me on the Moonchildren "Rapid Eye Movement" jacket.) Hau's a founding Deep City crew deejay along with James Allen, Marc Allen and Ben M.

Before I flew over, Stinga mentioned Perth's disappointments with some of their past guests. Locals were particularly disturbed with arrogant and rude U.S. deejays who failed to engage the crowd. It was important to embrace my audience by playing the party with local deejays and mingling as much as I could. Besides, I *wanted* to be there. And I was determined to check out the local culture, just in case I wanted to stay awhile. I do this each trip.

If I never perform another gig, I cherish the good times

had down in Perth. Ben, Mark, Emma Love and the gang took great care of me. Vinny and I spent many hours contemplating life's intriguing layers while surviving on hotel mini bar snacks. Since I hadn't tasted scones before, Ben, his girlfriend (then wife) and Hau took me to a national park to have lunch and experience a breathtaking view.

Since late November storms aren't common there, they didn't believe when I sensed a big one approaching. It was easy to tell because of the way flies and other insects attacked us. Old people in Mississippi complain of incredible joint pain just before storms. And as I predicted, a magnificent



Left: Ben Stinga -Complex Records, RTR-FM

thunderstorm with bewitching lightning entertained us a few hours later.

As we sat on the lakefront during the last night of my visit, I felt an incredible heaviness. In just one week's time I'd fallen in love in several ways. It was refreshing to be in the thick of an emerging music scene with optimistic artists and music lovers working together to nurture it.

Visiting Perth helped me squash a year of emotional distortion that was my love life. For perhaps the first time I was excited to embrace the year 2000. I'd recharged!

To Perth... you will always be a special part of my memories and heart!

◇ **Top or bottom, you're a record label whore!**
So you'd better grab life by the cojones

SANGKI YUH

briefly appeared earlier in this book, so perhaps it's best to elaborate on our business relationship in this chapter. This discourse is appropriate because his management style affected how I've operated my imprint. Before deep4life was formed I used to consider Sangki the worst record label boss I'd ever had. He was pushy and rude, direct about what he wanted and didn't hesitate to assert his authority. Although I'm just as stubborn, I strained not to clash with him because I saw the bigger picture.

I've since come to terms with the fact that I really don't like people telling me what to do... well at least not in such a bossy dogmatic manner. And admittedly I'm probably a bit domineering about a few things myself. Maybe it's the scorpion inside that causes me to overheat, but it's likely that Sangki and I were both just passionate about our ideas. But *he* was the boss.

He didn't settle for table scraps

Sangki knew exactly what he wanted from artists. He craved a specific sound and worked feverishly to build a musical library of exemplary deep house music. Chaka Khan was perhaps his favorite musical artist. He certainly wasn't shy about approaching other established vocalists like Colonel Abrams to record for his label Freetown Records. Perhaps he was thrilled to match-make veteran art-

ists like Colonel with upcoming producers and remixers.

Freetown and Subwoofer Records catalogs boast a who's who list of house music such as Marshall Jefferson, Lee John of Imagination, Kerri Chandler, Roy Davis, Jr., Ron Trent, Fonda Rae, Mood II Swing and Masters at Work. The releases are stellar and I was to learn first hand *why* Sangki's records were consistent in quality.

Studying with the master

Sometimes he was sadistic, perhaps phoning me out of boredom just to toy. Now don't get me wrong, I was grateful as heck to record with a top-shelf operation. The affiliation not only knocked down doors from a marketing perspective, but it also put my work in front of an audience that is passionate about music that comes from the heart.

But again there were a number of bizarre phone calls. It's still difficult to process it all nearly 13 years later. Out of respect I won't go into details, but those were advanced phone conversations for a 24-year-old country boy.

The sticky part was tussling over artistic creativity. I had complete autonomy with my "Moonchildren EP", but Sangki surprised me and wielded a heavy hand with the follow-up "Very Moody". The recording quality of the first EP was lacking, but improved with others over time.

We spent hours bickering about the song "Twist of Lime". Sangki's zest for acid house made him hunt for a deep track with the long 303 sound to release on Subwoofer. I didn't have a Roland TB-303 instrument available and felt queer about mucking around with what I'd finished. The Ensoniq ASR-10 Sampling Keyboard was my entire studio at the time, so I had to find a compatible 303 sample. It was the height of the floppy disk era with electronic musical equipment, so fat chance of my finding such a complex sound small enough in file size to load into the ASR.

There were probably five or six alternate mixes of “Twist of Lime” written before producing the final version. I felt insulted and angry about his sharp commands and occasional slurs, but kept myself in check till the end. Maybe he wanted to back out of doing the second EP since we struck the deal just after the success of the first release a month or so earlier. Sangki also commissioned me to remix Karen Pollard’s “Old-fashioned Love” but more bickering over artistic differences signaled the beginning of the end.

To top it off Subwoofer was very slow to pay me, which put a stick in my friggin’ CRAW! A roulette of people answered the phone and coincidentally anyone with any power was either on holiday or out to lunch. My boil came to a roll after having other artists on the labels tell me that their payments had been swift. My body raised out of the seat in frustration and hulked over my PowerBook with furrowed brow as I typed this! (Okay, MacBook now.)

Hah, I’d better calm down (*hold music plays*)... OK.

Too many independent record labels drag their feet to deliver copies of the finished product to artists, if at all. If it wasn’t for the artist, there would *be* no product! Deep4life definitely isn’t perfect but I made pretty doggone sure that my artists received tests and final copies as quickly as I could send them. Some of them live in countries with *interesting* customs procedures, so postal delivery takes a back seat to who knows what else. But I’ve never forgotten the times I’ve pouted when bystanders knew what my release looked and sounded like before I did.

As record label managers we should *NEVER LET THAT HAPPEN!* And I realize I’m pointing four fingers back at myself as I point one towards peers.

Deep4life hasn’t a true budget and I’m quite blunt with artists about expectations before they decide to sign. But I try to let them know that I care about them as a person, appreciate them working with us and that we’ll present their

music with dignity. Some record labels will do anything for big orders, but the artist and music must not be pimped!

After Sangki's visit to Chicago, our relationship did in fact cool off. It was nearly impossible to get him on the phone much after that and when we connected, there was a terrible quantity of petulance in his voice. In fact, he dumped me like some tired lover and encouraged me to "see other people" basically. Distraught because Sangki was my first, I grew cloudy about being with others. But he gave good advice which helped me more than any cash paid for my music.



Today I'm more mature and I understand things on a much deeper level. May he rest in peace. I truly miss him.

Ladbroke Grove in '97. On my way to Freetown offices.

Gotta keep on movin' on

It wasn't difficult to gain interest from other record labels as Sangki had predicted. I've since worked with a number of wonderful managers who've had to endure my emotional baggage, but we met our goals anyway.

While still wrangling with the past discomfort of living with my extended family and enduring abusive jobs, the Sangki experience raised my defenses and heightened my paranoia. I'm sure it's given other managers migraines over the years. Kudos to all of you for having me anyway. Thanks Keith, Robert, Scott, Merrick and Brett! My new eyes appreciate your struggles and I respect you.

As I bickered with Sangki, the press was busy comparing me to Larry Heard. I'm not certain if it came from the Chicago association or what, but it's been disturbing and flattering at the same time. For the record, there's only one Larry Heard and I can assure you that I wasn't feeling as tranquil as his music at the time. He's blazed trails and is in our DNA. And when you boil it down, I'm just Chris the appreciator. Larry's improved the lives of millions by sharing his blueprint for compassion. We salute you for it!

Two British gents, Wamdue and rowdy punters

Robert Barrett of Music Is... Records helped me show any doubters that CG is not a one-trick pony. But he had to be convinced that it was the right time to present my first album *Deeper Level of Understanding*. We gambled big but were proud of what was accomplished at that time.

Scott Braithwaite picked up the ball and kept running as we prepared my second album *Fish e' Luvconfushun* on Fragmented Records. We both suffered a lot of anguish from upper management delirium but championed our cause in the end.



Scott and CG in London, circa '97

Robert and Scott are gentlemen and contrary to the norm, worked together to make sure that neither of their releases cannibalized the another. I flew to London in '97, '98 and '00 during the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday seasons to promote music and conduct interviews. Both have gone above and beyond to

make sure that our work was successful and that I enjoyed my stay.

Thanks for introducing me to Tandoori Grapes' excellent Indian cuisine Scott! And thanks for turning me on to Pizza Express' fried egg and spinach pizza, Wok Wok's spicy lo mein and Pret A Manger's chocolate croissants Robert! The little things count too.

I was fortunate to have dedicated people on my side and it became more evident as I witnessed a catastrophe unfold at Wamdue member Chris Clark's East London gig. Wamdue has always been one of my favorite deep house artists since Angel at Gramophone devirginized my ears with the song "In Love With You". So I jumped at the chance to meet one of the group's three Chrises and soaked up the opportunity to hear him play records at a club.

Sometimes I fantasized about being the fourth Chris of Wamdue. In a single night I wrote three songs while in that mindstate. "Ocean Floor" was part of the *Emotional Distortion* album, but "Coral Reef" and "Aquatica" were never released, though came close many times. But that's really neither here nor there for the purpose of this story.

Once inside, I met Chris and checked out the club's other rooms. We soon found out that there were no monitors in the DJ booth, the closest speaker was more than 12 feet from him and turned *away* from where we were, the equipment was faulty and he was left alone with several drugged out teens as he tried to spin records.

At one point a young girl invaded the booth, pressed her finger down and stopped the record playing once Chris was distracted. But without batting an eye, he kept his cool and kept playing his set. I knew for sure at that moment that the club circuit wasn't something I'd immediately pursue with any vigor.

Gay Paris on a rainy day

As much as I love chicken pastries from the Earl's Court bakery across from tube station, it was time to venture outside of England. So on my third trip, one night I scrambled to secure a day trip to Paris. It was destiny because the Eurostar representative procured a ticket that'd just been cancelled. I left early the next morning.

Trains have always fascinated me but my family was too poor to buy me a toy set as a kid. Fortunately there were several freight lines criss-crossing my hometown, so I had to let the real deal suffice. But this mode of transport also made the ceremonious crossing of the English Channel into France more special to this fanatic.

High speed trains have always zipped past during my London visits and their ferocity further diminishes the appeal of plain Jane commuter trains. After standing on the sidelines all those years, I'd finally get to see what all of the fuss was about.

Once aboard I sat next to a prim Indian woman headed to a radiology conference in Lisle, France. Miss thing was stiff enough to march with any army at first, but managed to stand down a bit and uttered a few words later. After finding out that I'd secured my ticket in less than 24 hours, she must have stared at me for 5 minutes straight. (I can still feel the burn against my left cheek.) My luck was made quite clear, because some riders had booked their seats at least 6 months in advance. Trying to break up the "*you friggin' American*" funk, I attempted to engage in a conversation about her profession. That didn't get very far.

But it moistens my eyes to reminisce about the tranquility and swiftness of our ride through the picturesque English countryside. Music business chores had always seemed to handcuff me to the heart of London during visits, but this was the first time that I was able to see the

beauty of rural English areas, despite the inability to roll around in the plush, green grass whizzing past my window. In retrospect it felt like the entire ride to Paris was only 15 minutes long, which of course isn't true unless the train was able to travel at warp speed.

Did I mention that I'd bought the Eurostar ticket but hadn't planned any activities for Paris? Well I could have called several people to hang out with, but decided to experience Paris through the eyes of a loner just in case I moved there one day. But just like chilly Chicago and London, Paris was dark and rainy in late November. It didn't bother me so much because it was the perfect backdrop to mourn the breakup with my ex-girlfriend. But I wouldn't dwell on it for long because Hau was going to visit me in Chicago soon after I returned.

African immigration rally, powder blue pajamas and whispery solicitation

Yes I'm well aware that Paris is a city for lovers, and lovers of life. It's for this reason that I didn't venture much beyond Gare du Nord terminal and avoided popular attractions like Eiffel Tower. But after exiting the train station and turning a few corners, I ran smack dab into an African immigration rally and parade. Encountering the heavy police presence underneath elevated train tracks should have made me more curious about what the heck was going on before I saw what must have been hundreds of people lobbying peacefully for compassion.

Now this was my first visit to a country that did not speak English as its primary language so I was lost. But it was done on purpose to test my survival skills. I hadn't remembered more than five French words from high school because our teacher was a fraud and couldn't speak nor teach the language effectively. So I switched to Spanish in

college. My first Spanish instructor was lost too. But eh.

At the rally, I took a leaflet from one of the protesters and walked along with the crowd not understanding what the heck they were chanting. But I found *comfort* in that inability. Their basic goal was clear to me, but sometimes it's a relief to rid your head of the messy details.

I detoured after a few minutes, then did some people watching before lunch. Robert urged me to carry his camera and look for restaurants with menus displayed in both French and English, but I didn't want any crutches.

It was a joy to stroll French streets and study vintage architecture and charming people. After walking in circles and getting drenched in chubby rain, I settled in at a quiet lunch spot. The waiter patiently served each course, despite my inability to converse with him. Studying the menu items lead to more indecision anyway, so I accepted the lunch special, tipped him and hit the streets again. The food wasn't enrapturing, but the experience of having a Parisian lunch gratified this country boy. And was I an unfading customer worthy of the waiter's memory?

On my way back to Gare du Nord, I stopped at a variety shop near the restaurant and bought several powder blue pajama bottoms and tops that I still cherish to this day. Despite our inability to converse fluidly, the shopkeeper deftly tended to my needs. After circling the neighborhood once more, I bought a few more items from the shop just in case. French locals displayed hospitality that quelled accusations of rudeness toward Americans I thought.

But my heart and mind were in transition and that rainy day in Paris was the perfect painting for my scattered disposition. I felt significant changes approaching as they'd always each year at that time. And then suddenly a young, French-speaking Black guy briefly interrupted my self-pitying. What the well-dressed gentleman asked for specifically was unclear, but it wasn't hard to figure out that it

was a request. Was he asking for directions? Money? *Sex*? Hey, this is Paris we're talking about here. Don't look at me like that for typing *sex*. You weren't there to behold his eccentric stare.

After a nervous attempt to utter in French that I only spoke English, he sighed "Ah, Anglais", looked disappointedly into the distance then walked away. I dodged a few cars while crossing the busy cobblestoned street in front of the train station. Once inside I gazed at the antique flickering train schedule signs and watched people come and go after buying a necktie with the last of my Francs. Since my experiences had been like living in a wonderful French movie most of the day, I should have known something was going to jar me back into a hellish reality sooner or later.

After meticulously finding a nearly-empty car once we were permitted to board the return train, I was tweaked about having a bit of solitude as we pushed out of the station. But just as it similarly happens during my flights, two noisy and intoxicated Americans with heavy southern drawls barged into the car and plunked down directly behind my seat whining about the difficulty of *finding a decent hamburger* in Europe.

If it hasn't been mentioned thus far, I find enjoyment in leaving U.S. soil to flee the irksome people and events that happen everyday. So you can probably imagine that I *was not* a happy camper because of this. Sometimes I wonder what horrible sins I've committed in this or past lifetimes that magnetizes big-mouthed idiots into my personal space, ushering in a fresh case of tinnitus.

The cowboys yapped incessantly for nearly 3 hours. The return Eurostar trip felt like a long, turbulent horse and buggy ride through a primitive Texan outpost in 1879. And it's inessential to say I was overjoyed to kiss the gun-slingers goodbye once we hit London.

◇ deep4life is my DNA

AFTER *Fish e3 Luvcnfushun* debuted on Fragmented and then Scott had re-established the label after leaving Kickin' Records, it rang clear that it was time to start my own. Chicago mourned the loss of both labels Cajual Records and Prescription. It was embarrassing as the city suffered a black eye by losing two labels committed to presenting deep and soulful music.

The *blueprint* imprints

At the same time I was determined to right some wrongs by launching a record label recommitted to music and the artist. There were many jaded artist horror stories and shrewd bosses accused of committing the musical equivalent of rape.

It was embarrassing to have people from all over the world ask about those encounters. I knew that it was time for someone to stand up and present a classier alternative. Guidance Recordings had already picked up this torch but they couldn't do it alone, nor should they have to. There were a few more imprints that operated on a classier level, but the more the merrier.

With particular regard to the loss of Prescription and Balance, I pondered who would be there for artists who produced similar music? And before they relaunched, who

would give new artists a chance? It was a simple answer—I had to present my own music and grant newcomers the same opportunities given to me.

It was 1998 and our responsibility to build upon what the pioneers had already started. I'm talking about Freetown/Subwoofer, Prescription/Balance, Gladys Pizarro at Strictly/Nervous, Nu Groove, Guidance, Vibe, Clubhouse, and Mirage/House-N-Effect just to name a few.

Who's face is it?

Since the mission of deep4life came about based on needs just mentioned, it was time to work on the look of the organism. Many skookum logo ideas bandied about, but my task required manifesting one that represents the humility in house music.

In my opinion too many imprints busily puff up their brands like self-centered athletes and that's an insult to artists, art and the essence of house culture. And they probably got erections from watching large American corporations mark anything that'd take a sticky surface.

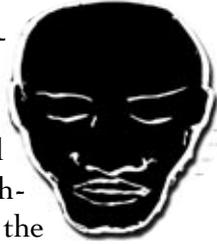
It was critical to find a visual that would pay homage to the aboriginal people of house music because our history has been distorted by a rogue press looking to increase circulation and exploit financial opportunities on the backs of la raza! Viva la raza.

Now how could I succeed at this task while educating and embracing those who respect the spirit of this great music? Our first release *Emotional Distortion* was released prior to the final logo design so I worked with Sire (Mark Neilsen) in Perth to get this accomplished before my November '99 gig in Perth.

I found a model's picture that clearly illustrated what worked, because my chicken scratch Photoshop mock-ups were laughable. Sometimes I wonder if Mark rolled around

on the floor howling at my pathetic sketches, because it took him long periods of time to respond in #313. Hmmmmm. *Hmmmmmmmmmm*.

Once I explained that we had to capture the look of the people who braved the bitter cold and congregated at the Warehouse, Power Plant, Sauer's, Mendell High School, AKA's, Music Plant and others, he went "ah ha!" and quickly finished the final logo.



If I had a dollar for every time someone's asked me if the deep4life logo was me, I'd be able to buy a nice box of super dark chocolates. :]

Mr. (or Ms.) deep4life's head had to bow to the omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent supreme creation. A record label should never be more important than the artists nor the art. It's simply a vessel, nothing more. It's always about the precious cargo!

Who's the boss?

I still find it hard to consider myself president, CEO or owner of deep4life. Those titles conjure up images of some fat slob sitting behind a boat of a desk with a huge nameplate and two of those ancient pencil/pen holders pointing back at him. The nameplate would read something like Bourgeess "Jason" Pennybacker or something equally ridiculous. It's just not how I feel about my role with the label.

Based on my experiences as an artist, I knew that the imprint needed a *director* (and baby-sitter) more than any position that sounded more powerful. I knew that there would likely be plentiful drama with artist relations, distributors and other vendors, so what better title to choose than the person who's responsible for holding it all together on the set of a movie or TV show?

Director it was.

I fretted about the whole endeavor but had to concentrate on doing the opposite of those things I hated about other label bosses. For the most part I've been able to adhere to this commitment, but we all screw up sometimes. It's just human imperfection. But I know the importance of saying "I'm sorry", "please" and "forgive me". The ability works wonders. We must try to answer emails and return calls as best we can. Every single beckon cannot be answered, but we must prioritize this responsibility even when delivering unpleasant news is part of protocol.

There's an intimate relationship with artists I work with—a lover, brother or child. Make them feel genuinely appreciated for allowing you into their inner circle. You must show them appreciation in the best ways. I'm not perfect but I've learned a lot of good and bad from my peers.

You ever hear someone say that they *never* want to be like their parents, but they end up taking on certain characteristics anyway? Well, sometimes the "Sangki" in me comes out... OK, lots of times. You see, I know what I'm looking for with regard to the sound deep4life has to present, but it hasn't been easy pulling it all together.

As both an artist and a director, my head spins around all the time fighting issues like some sort of schizo. On one hand, who am I to tell the artist how and what to create? But on the other it's *my* imprint so I won't just put out anything thrown my way. How in the world is balance possible with such conflicting thoughts and emotions?

Well I figured that the best thing to do was scare the poor soul during the first conversation and show that I'm demanding, demented, delirious and impatient. I'd push them hard to come up with impeccable results and say that they wouldn't like me at times, but I still loved them. We'd likely argue about a number of things but either they could accept my rules or perhaps work elsewhere.

I struggled to find the most compassionate way to communicate such rigid truth. Many record label bosses operate this way but they pour so much sugar on top in the beginning only to watch the relationship deteriorate to nothingness in the end because they misled too much. It was mandatory to be as straight up as I could with people in the beginning. I'm sure it's scared the beejesus out of them but I hope they appreciate the effort later as they deal with others in the business. If not, I tried to be good.

Art is forever the parent's child

I'm not dense nor misunderstand how the entertainment industry works, but if everything was peachy keen, there wouldn't be so many jaded artists in the world. A record label or agent shouldn't completely roll over for an artist, but arguably there are many small things that can be done to win their allegiance.

All I had to do was think about issues that irked me as an artist, then build upon the experiences. I detest anyone who intentionally tries to mislead me, especially when it comes to love, money or art. I've seen some ugly contracts before and have spent too much time adjusting situations that shouldn't have existed in the first place.

It was imperative to challenge myself by offering unconventional and honest contracts to further illustrate the commitment to artists who record with deep4life. In contrast to those 79 page constitutions with endless blocks of legal fine print, my goal was to offer the artist a 1-page handshake whenever I could. Simply put, that's what a contract should be.

It was my goal to educate each artist about legal language and what they were agreeing to. Many lawyers drool over having victims sign incomprehensible agreements because of their own ulterior motives. That is *NOT*

acceptable at deep4life!

In a way my imprint is sort of a boot camp for new or underexposed artists. My goal is to present quality art from unknowns so that they are prepared to deal with other record labels and manage new opportunities effectively. So many people have called me a lunatic for approaching the business this way. Why am *I* nuts? What's wrong with looking out for people? If what I'm doing gets me the stink eye, then something is rotten about the game. Besides, there are other ventures that would enrich me, because running an independent record label only keeps you 2 clicks from being in the poorhouse or nuthouse.

Anyway, my point is that the art belongs to the artist. The record label should embrace the opportunity to borrow the art and seek prosperity for *everyone* involved. But all too often the artist gets the shaft and it's unacceptable. I can tell you that deep4life has barely broken even or has lost money on each project, but sometimes you *have* to put your money where your mouth is—if you truly believe.

Internet opened many doors

Since most of my artists aren't local and live in countries many hours ahead of Chicago's time zone, it's a challenge to coordinate with them. This was especially tricky in the beginning because I held a regular job in publishing that also demanded a lot of time. So fortunately the internet began to flourish just as I prepared to launch.

As you may already know, it takes forever to send and receive snail mail but you can forget it if another country is involved. The development process moves very quickly with artists and most of the releases are fast-tracked, which means that they're "A-Z'd" within a few weeks. I don't particularly care for shelving releases for months on end. There's something sexy and exciting about meeting

short deadlines and winning victories with an artist. Often times it brings us closer together.

Prior to Apple releasing the first iPod in '01, I hesitated to embrace the whole mp3 movement because of the out of control piracy at the time. But as more and more new artists from Europe and other countries began to express interest in working with deep4life, the A&R process had to evolve to meet those needs. We had to rely upon the internet more than traditional means.

But back in '98, slow dial-up connections were status quo. So imagine having to download several large music files over an old-fashioned home telephone line then slowly burning them to CD. All of that had to be completed before rushing out the door to ride to work on the CTA (public transit) during Chicago's dreadful rush hour traffic.

Can you say it with me? I was late *a lot*. And unfortunately easy software like iTunes didn't exist to help speed things up. It was a challenge and stressful but I *loved* it!

It's great to reminisce about when I first started chatting with artists on IRC while listening to demos at the same time. The whole phenomenon usurped the typical A&R process at other imprints. If you mailed *them* a CD or tape to some large post office box, it likely fell over into a large reject bin, you never heard back from the label and they jumped on top of their desks *laughing* at you! OK, maybe they just chuckled a little.

Many times I've questioned my sanity for giving artists real time feedback as I evaluated their material. Sometimes you're just not in the right state of mind to properly critique. But as a hungry artist looking for love, the last thing you want to hear is "I'll get to it later" when they see you online. So I'm straight up with them. Things got a little heated with a few people who could not handle that. Dadgum brats! :)

Sometimes all-purpose flour just won't do

I had to think long and hard about how I'd operate the imprint, from a cost and vendor perspective. Since I'm not wealthy or anything, it's best to be penny-wise but not pound foolish. If I had to start a new business in some other industry, there's no way I'd be as liberal as I've been with deep4life.

What do I mean? Well, many imprints look for the cheapest alternatives when they manufacture releases. Please don't confuse low cost with bad quality. If you're able to get the lowest possible bid with quality, then it's a smart business decision to consider. But many of you own those jagged records with the labels half-slapped on as if they were assembled in the 11th hour of a fraternity beer bash. That is *NOT* acceptable at deep4life!

Either I could go with a broker who'd handle the entire manufacturing process or I could find the best vendor for every aspect of the undertaking to closely manage each relationship. Now keep in mind that I also worked a demanding, full-time publishing job and was moving up the proverbial ladder there.

With that being said, it was mandatory to produce quality releases that both the artists and music collectors would be proud of for many years to come. Look people, these releases are not cheap fast food! They aren't to be gobbled and pushed out later! This is *art* that's to be appreciated forever. At least that's my approach to the madness.

So I really don't have the energy or patience to talk about the headaches associated with the company I work with that makes sure each release has the best sound quality. I won't whine about the record plant having to work with the sound mastering guy/gal to receive fragile master discs in proper condition or there'd be big trouble all around. I'm too tired talk about the pre-printing company

that has to turn raw art or computer files into something else that will be used to make the *actual* record labels or jackets. Let's not get into the drama that happens when the company that prints the record labels or jackets does not receive what they need from the company that has to send them the right art format to get their job done.

And who has the sanity left to explain how touchy the plant that makes every single copy of the final record or CD gets if the printer or record jacket maker screws something up along the way, slowing down the entire manufacturing process. Did you know that record plants have to *bake* the paper record labels for a long time in special ovens before they are able to stamp them on *each record*? Now do you see how easy it is to just be a music lover?

Who can withstand more conversation about how we have to work with the record plant to make sure they work with different delivery services to get all of those records and CDs shipped to the right people, including the guy who has to sell them to each record store all over the country or world? And all of this has to be overseen by the record label boss (and her staff if she's fortunate enough to afford one, which many small record labels can not).

So. Do you *really* want to start your own record label after reading this? Hopefully the answer is yes because you can do itttttttttt!

Getting the bread to everyone who wants a slice

Some of you have complained to deep4life about not being able to buy our records in your local record store or reasonably over the internet. Please trust me when I say that we sympathize! But let me tell you a little about what goes into this process.

After all that drama I just told you about, working with the artist and then manufacturing the records or CDs, we

have to fight yet *another* battle of persuading the people responsible for selling the records to stores to accept them from us. It's not automatic, do you understand? Most records labels can't call up distributors or record stores and say "Hey, I have about 5,000 copies of the 'Smackalicious EP' sitting right here. What's your address and how soon can you send us the check?". No, no, no, no, *noooooo!*

Most record labels have to deal with the distribution mafia to get their products moved around. Don't take my use of the word mafia so literally, but sometimes they *feel* like it. Why? Because they have the ability to make or break a record. To be fair here, they have to survive too so they can't just order an unlimited amount of every record ever produced and still run a solid business. They have to be responsible just like us.

So this means that many of those lovely releases don't get picked up or a sliver of copies are ordered since there are 928,229,392,392 records put out *everyday!* (OK I made the number up, but it was to illustrate a point.)

Hopefully now you'll believe that not all of us sit in our basements scheming about making just 10 copies of a record just to piss *you* off. Come on! Most of us are not that sadistic! We'd *love* to have you buy our records, but there's only so much we can do as a record label!

The boom in digital music sales via the internet with iTunes as a model will help us make a lot of the current distribution headaches obsolete. But as a consumer, you have to open your mind to buying digital files in order to make it work. It's not perfect yet but at least it's a start.

What were you *thinking* about?

You'd think I'd be used to people looking at me as if I shopped for crack on an hourly basis by now. Huh? Many of you have asked what the heck I was thinking about with

some of my releases or others on deep4life. I think it's great that we're diverse and can get into *diffrintings*.

I purposely put 5 completely different tracks on my first release "Moonchildren EP" because I didn't want people to handcuff me to a particular sound like they had people before me. Nah, I don't like that some of you expect Larry Heard to write "Can You Feel It" over and over again, year after year. The song was probably how he felt in the mid '80s so just maybe he doesn't give a damn about how or what you feel *today*. How many of *you* look just like you did in '86, wear those same clothes, date the same person or live in the same house with the same exact furnishings, in the same exact place? Uh huh. That's what I figured. So back off of Larry and others who have never asked you to expect the same dadgum thing every time you see their records. Who told you to expect that? *Squirrel, please*.

So I wasn't content with just copying what everybody else was doing. I knew it was important to reach higher with the projects on deep4life. Sure, many of the concepts were risky as heck but how friggin' *BORING* it'd be to do the same old crap *over and over*. What is *wrong* with you people? Friggin' mental patients.

Anyway, I had to find creative ways to push new and unknown artists out there as smartly as possible. Thankfully many of you have received them well and I appreciate you for opening your minds, heart, wallets and purses to them. I know that they love you for it too.

I have a particular fondness for both compilations and the mini-LP series on deep4life. "Deeper Side of The Internet" was a concerted effort to share global deepness in a convenient package, while making the artists more accessible via online. Well as we all know, email addresses change almost as much as underwear, so hopefully you know how to use Google or SearchMe.com.

Since presenting a new artist's album is akin to pulling

the moon down out of the sky, I've tried to find a way to showcase their diverse talents at an affordable cost to both the record label and customer. It was a great challenge to help artists conceive these projects, record them and get the music crammed onto a single 12" vinyl slab at the cost of a regular EP.



Some of you loved it, some of you hated it, but we picked up different kinds of fans because we embraced other musical styles that are also deep. Again, Guidance Recordings has done a stellar job with this effort and we wanted to also support the diversity of deepness in the best way that *we* knew how.

Because our emphasis is on presenting new artists, it's not easy for me to say no to established artists I admire. There are so many other people that would work well on deep4life but they do not need a parent in the way an unreleased artist does. Somebody has to feed the children! Besides I never wanted to put out 789 EPs at the same time. This is OK with jazz because many of those artists can easily play the same song 789 *different and intriguing* ways, so 789 albums from them in a year is more of a treat.

But monotony is in house music's DNA and not many of us are talented enough to justify 789 EPs a month (though some of us *try*). But hey, that's just my opinion. Who am I to say? You're the music fan and have the final say with your ears and wallets. So I hope you've enjoyed what we've worked hard to offer on deep4life. Our hearts are in it.

And before this turns into a friggin' deep4life infomercial, may I digress?

More than towers were toppled on 9-11

Please understand that I have compassion for the families and friends that experienced tremendous loss on Sept-11-01 in the United States. I also have a global compassion for any living being in any country or galaxy that is in need or pain. That's just how I see things.

But anyway, 9-11 was a fatal blow to many besides the loss of human life on that dreaded day. In a less important but still significant way, that day took the legs from underneath an already anemic economy. It accelerated the loss of employment for many who've supported this music.

The proverbial poop hit the fan for so many record stores and others in the industry who labor to bring you this music. And finally it stabbed deep4life in the chest, so very close to the heart.

9-11 changed our civil, diplomatic, emotional, mental, social and financial realities.

So you've probably noticed that there hasn't been many releases from us after that date. It became impossible to operate in the old way previous to a recession, 9-11 and an assortment of Bush cowboy wars.

Personal changes in my life also necessitated the reallocation of funds. And I didn't write "Mental Patient" because it was just a cute title. It's very relevant to the state of affairs. (Didn't you notice the straight jacket?)

Who knows what the future brings, but for the moment we're in a wait and see position. In the meanwhile, we hope that you'll enjoy the assortment of our video projects.

Uh oh, the dadgum deep4life infomercial is playing again. I apologize!

But seriously, there's a lot of promise for the digital music revolution and hopefully we'll be able help artists connect with their fans a lot easier as it progresses.

◇ The importance of Oscar McMillan

Humility.

HE'S CERTAINLY ONE of the most underrated Chicago deejays in history and is one of the kindest people in the industry. Oscar manages the underground house department at Gramophone Records on Clark Street and is probably more recognized for that role. His humble demeanor is an inspiration because despite his connections and experience he manages to keep his feet on the ground. The introduction is necessary because all things considered, the man knows how to pick and program quality underground music.

Smart Bar's 2000 New Year's Eve party with Darrell Woodson and Oscar bested my other options. Darrell suggested the party during one of my Gramophone Records shopping trips a few days beforehand.

Based on my past unsettling Smart Bar experiences, I was hesitant to go. But this invite was a good way to socialize again after my breakup. I thought I'd get to meet Darrell's girlfriend Shani, who supported my music on her WNUR radio show, but we missed one another. It was bitterly cold that night. Once inside I ran into Ron Carroll and chatted for a few minutes. Ron's always been respectful and kind each time we've run into each other.

Smart Bar had remodeled a bit since I last visited. They

presented a classier look with fanciful iron decorations on a deejay booth made out of nicely varnished wood. The new look was certainly a few notches above the gritty and untreated pressed wood floor which used to bounce up and down with sawdust as we danced! Now that was okay but the finer things are a treat too. (They've remodelled again since, adopting a more Gothic restroom decor.)

But my goal was to jack it up (dance) on the dance floor with a Latin guy I'd bonded with through the unbelievable jams Oscar pummeled the crowd with. Ain't it queer how good music can help you establish a warm and platonic relationship with a stranger?

And that's house music for ya. It was one of those moments I hope to cherish and never forget.

I had no idea what Oscar's tracklisting was, but if I didn't know any better I could have sworn that he was pulling the songs down from the heavens! He always tries to work in new and obscure songs and give them a chance.

It's always a nourishing experience to absorb one of his sets. Believe that.

Mister McMillan is likely my favorite Chicago deejay besides Lil John and I'd follow him to just about any establishment he chooses to play in. That was definitely the case with the posh La Passage club just south of Oak on Rush Street.

If you're not familiar with Chicago's Gold Coast, I'll paint a picture... think extremely wealthy boutique shops like Burberry, Chanel and Prada. For those who know Oscar, it's obvious to see that La Passage is the antithesis of his demeanor. But he always manages to find ways to keep things in perspective and purposeful regardless



Oscar McMillan

of any wacky surroundings.

Only someone of his caliber could accept a position at a flavor-of-the-month spot like La Passage but somehow spin it into gold. Those familiar with Chicago house history know that mainstream society has a record of rejecting us as outcasts. Well this was fully the case until it became cool to enjoy house and techno in Pleasantville.

But back when the crowds were predominately Black and gay, it was a different story. Imagine a peacock of different personalities bonding for a common good.

And I abhor the types who associate themselves with this music but misbehave just like those who have historically denigrated house and its followers. It's intolerable and an insult to the music and culture.

Many househeads who are accustomed to dressing casually had to don a pair of slacks, fashionable shirt and shoes in order to get into La Passage before 9-11. Some were insulted by the dress code, but I decided to make the social challenge a fun one. I don't mind jumping a few hurdles to hear Oscar spin. It's that serious.

Once inside I found the club a bit more laid back than it seemed. There's really nothing wrong with a group of people dressing impeccably to have a good night out, *just as long as they are respectful*. And for the most part I enjoyed the company. Maybe it was the omnipresent benevolence in Oscar's mixes that brought out the better in us. Or something like that.

La Passage was another opportunity to hear the finest house ambrosia on a wicked club system, in my mind. Ever since Kaboom! closed, there have been few impressive sound systems upon which to hear deepness in Chicago. So I didn't take this offering for granted. I might have scared a few of the people on the dance floor with my exuberant dancing, but hey the music commands me... like Chayanne says! Besides I'm sure Oscar got a kick out of it.

◇ With the boys in the band...

I HAD TO take a break from operating deep4life and writing music. If the creative process turns into unpleasing factory work, one should take a timeout. Some of my favorite artists have experienced burnout and sometimes you're able to notice it. It's particularly easy for the madness of the entertainment business to take its toll on art and the soul. So I ejected before it turned messier. It was critical to recreate myself to survive.



A tabula rasa (clean slate) was needed to vanquish my disturbances. So strangely enough, I ended up bar hopping in Boystown

with friends of mine who knew little about my artistic endeavors and didn't bother to pry.

I was able to exhale. It took quite a while to get used to the openly gay culture on Halsted Street, as a typical night out was quite different from the house parties I'd attended. The music wasn't heavenly, but it was just what I needed to clear my head. It sounded more or less like Jane Fonda workout music, but hey I was game to lose a few pounds!

During our bar hops, I told my buddies that it would



probably shock my music business companions if they knew where I'd been hanging out. And more importantly they would freak out about the flavor of dance music I was being exposed to night after night. (We used to crinkle our noses to "Free to Be" anthems.)

What bothered me the most about Boystown was the adherence to some unwritten but widely-observed manual that dictates cruel and manipulative behavior towards others. In a strange way it was the antithesis of benevolence that's found on the dancefloor in the house community.

And the worst part about my Boystown experiences occurred on the dance floor. The dancing styles at many bars



revolved around showing off buff bodies or modeling the latest wears, but I hope that I taught them a thing or two about the art of dancing in my good pair of combat boots!

◇ I danced under the stars!

ONE SELF-AGREEMENT I

have about exercise is to avoid any physical activities that are deplored, unless absolutely necessary.

I writhe in disgust at the thought of laboring as a gym rat or gerbil on a treadmill, if there's no joy in the process. Don't get me wrong, I understand and respect the need to exercise, but most people won't make long-term exercise commitments unless they truly enjoy themselves.

My personal calorie burning favorites include dancing, biking, swimming or scenic walking with loud music pumping through my headphones.

To witness Frankie Knuckles' street dedication and soak up his 3-hour set in Grant Park afterwards motivated me to make the '05 Chicago SummerDance Festival a regular part of my agenda.

Since I'd left my publishing job just days before Detroit's electronic music festival on Memorial Day Weekend, I decided to kill a few birds by taking advantage of what my tax dollars had already paid for. It's great to relax in Grant Park, socialize with a different demographic, listen to different music and learn a few new dance moves too.

The festival lasts 11 weeks and focuses on a plethora of styles including dance music. Deejays play electronic music

on Wednesdays and other nights showcase live bands and include dance lessons. The 9-year-old city sponsored series is held downtown in the Spirit of Music Garden, which is treasured with an astounding outdoor dance floor.

The setting creates an attractive learning atmosphere, encouraging thousands to explore a variety of flavors like Plena, Salsa, Cumbia, Bachata, African, Cha Cha Cha, Merengue, Tango, Bhangra and other wonderful styles and traditional dances.

People from all walks of life venture out to partake in the fun. These nights are additionally appreciable because they unify strangers through music and take place in the heart of Chicago.

Unification is one of the things I love most about house music besides how it sounds and feels.

Since many of you are not Chicago residents, maybe you're unaware that historically the city has been embarrassed about and at times hostile towards house music, raves and the general dance culture. So for the city to offer its prized new Grant Park dance floor on the Magnificent Mile to the very people once oppressed, it was indeed a watershed event.

The City of Chicago tread cautiously with the '05 summer dance series and started with a strong police presence on the house/techno night. Fortunately their presence diminished by the last night and perhaps presenting them with a certificate of appreciation on behalf of house music has initiated new diplomacy for future events.



Ken Dunkin, Madeline Halthcock & Frankie Knuckles

But the most important transpirations were the renewing of a few old friendships, househeads from different eras working their bodies together with glee and witnessed the cultivation of a new wave of fanatics under the direction of invigorated house and techno pioneers.

This new beginning, christened with the Frankie Knuckles' street dedication and day, trumpets that our time has finally come in the Windy City.

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine the possibility of watching Keith Nunnally, Byron Stingily and other greats perform live in Grant Park. It's been wonderful to dance among the colorful people and costumes that have spiced up each weekly affair. Truly electric.



One of the best parts about these events that don't charge an admission price is dancing under the stars and watching little children enjoy the time of their lives. After many years of being cramped in hot smoky clubs, it was literally a breath of fresh air to enjoy ourselves while watching the summer moon come into full view.

I'm pleased to report that there are few negative things to say about the series—well besides limited toilets and a sponsor-happy emcee who didn't quite seem to understand what the music and culture is all about. An emcee shouldn't insult his audience by repeatedly coercing them to applaud for sponsors and by telling them that they've "not paid a red cent to attend". There hasn't been admission fees charged for the events, but plenty of taxes have been paid on the contrary to support the endeavors.

If the 2005 attendance levels were an indicator, Chicago will need to look into tripling the size of the dance floor and garden to accommodate the thousands who come.



Frankie Knuckles at Grant Park's Spirit of Music Garden after dedication in '04

Partial list of Wednesday night performers in '05:

Craig Alexander (July 6)
 Ron Carroll (July 13)
 Mike Dearborn (June 22)
 Farley Jackmaster Funk (August 24)
 Mark Grant (July 20)
 Andre Hatchet (August 3)
 Terry Hunter (August 24)
 Marshall Jefferson (August 10)
 Paul Johnson (June 15, rained out)
 Maurice Joshua (June 15, rained out)
 Rich Medina (August 17)
 Jeff Mills (June 22)
 Keith Nunnally of JM Silk (August 17)
 Jesse Saunders (August 3)
 Joe Smooth (August 3)
 Byron Stingily (August 17)
 Ron Trent (August 17)
 Glenn Underground (July 6)

Note: Old school politics cancelled the DJ series in 2007.

◇ Comfort food affection

THIS LIST IS PRETTY RANDOM and certainly not complete, so here it goes:

My momma's sweet potato pie (there's definitely a difference) - My mom may not have smothered us with kisses and spoiled us with material possessions, but she definitely expressed love through cooking and her determination to excel as a single parent. The yam represents strength as a root and exhibits benevolence in its sweetness.

Merlot - When I began drinking wine regularly after turning 30, I fell in love with Australian Shiraz (Syrah). But in recent years I've discovered the passion of a Chilean Merlot and particularly enjoy it with cuisine from Bhabi's Kitchen (local Indian/Pakistani food).

Donburi - I can be bribed with a bowl of Tempura Donburi and a sexy companion! (Tempura Donburi is Japanese deep fried shrimp over a bowl of rice.)

Green tea - My family has always enjoyed tons of

brewed iced tea since I can remember, but I was turned on to various forms of green tea after moving to Chicago and living among a huge and diverse Asian population. It was difficult to transition from drinking my favorite hot and sweetened Earl Grey to hot green tea sans sugar. It's been a pleasurable journey discovering green tea's many flavors and forms. Viva Pouchong and Jasmine!

Chocolate - Unfortunately most people never get to experience the real deal. I'm sorry, typical vending machine candy bars are *not* authentic chocolate and their manufacturers are stingy with the cheap crap peddled, too! Have you noticed that most of those bars are made out of the same ingredients now? There's not much of a variety anymore. You typically find a nougat cluster with peanuts, gobs of caramel and a thin spray of cheap, sugary, imposter chocolate on the outside. It may be an acquired taste for many, but try some Venezuelan cocoa that's at least 70% pure for the deephouse of chocolates. :)

Almonds - A very sexy nut that pairs well with great chocolate, vanilla ice cream or blanched on top of a custom made Foodlife salad!

Pot pie - I don't know what it is about a thin wrapping of baked dough around a stew of vegetables and chicken, but a well prepared one produces a most pleasurable mouth-gasm, especially on a bitterly cold Chicago day.

Fish - (especially Ahi Tuna, Tilapia) - My family has been avid fishermen for generations. While addicted to the bass, perch and bream species indigenous to my part of Mississippi, I've come to slobber over pan-seared Ahi Tuna, delicate Tilapia and Chilean Sea Bass tambien.

Croissants - are scrumptious with smoked turkey, cheese, mayo, romaine lettuce and beefsteak tomato... or just toasted with Nutella!

French Crullers - I've seen these for years, but have only indulged them in last few. I'm thankful that a drastic decrease in cane sugar intake has allowed me to appreciate the delicate joy of a well-made French Cruller.

Ostrich Wellington - After my initial vegetarian phase in the early 90's, I was challenged to find a plethora of birds and fish to consume, since I still don't eat red meat. Fortunately I was treated to scrumptious ostrich dishes at The Room and Speakeasy Supperclub here in Chicago. Ostrich Wellington tastes like a swanky version of a pot pie, sans the mess of vegetables.

Cabernet Sauvignon - Besides the Aussie red Ben Stinga coerced me to sip at Il Padrino in Perth in '99, the only cab I'd been exposed to early in my wine drinking days was limited to box wine type stuff that's a premium offering only in hourly motels. I am thankful to my buddy Mike for introducing me to serious cab. My journey began with a bottle of South African Beaumont Estate Cabernet. Imagine Mr. Fingers' song "Can You Feel It" or Intimacy featuring James Faith's "Want You 2 Want Me 2" in your mouth! Never thought it could be so good.

Joy's coconut chicken curry - Joy's is a Thai favorite in Boystown and serves up some of the best coconut chicken curry. Some joke that it's the MSG, but whatever it is pairs well with Australian Shiraz and makes you want to do fun biological things afterwards. :)

KFC - This is my and Donny's road trip sustenance for

some reason. KFC sold in the city is usually atrocious but is much less greasy and is actually quite tasty in backwater towns. Who can resist those flaky biscuits? And it's best washed down with ice cold Mountain Dew.

Chicken yi mein or lo mien - This is the first authentic Chinese dish I've ever had thanks Dr. Anita George! You're an addict if you have a list of different places you pick from because of the unique way each prepares their mein. A yi mein for every occasion I say!

Tequila - Many of us are probably accustomed to people bickering about worms at the bottom of tequila bottles, but the true ambrosia is *sipping* tequila, not the stuff done with shots. Thanks to Jesse Lopez, Jr. for hookin' a brotha up! Y amor por Rion Peoples y José Lau por El Tesoro y Patrón conmigo!

Southern fried spaghetti - Some people joke that my family has Asian blood because of our eyes, how much tea we drank and rice we ate. (We're part Native American.) Well if only they knew how we cooked spaghetti... I can't tell you the secret recipe, *but* instead of settling for regular ole al dente, we sorta stir-fry the noodles a bit after boiling.

Mexican hot cocoa - When plain hot cocoa just won't do and you want to *taste* your guapo...

Cashews - These are a strong contender for the deep-house of nuts.

Ridged potato chips - Maybe I inherited this obsession from my big sister, who used to eat the plain ones religiously while reading romance novels.

Lemon squares - Once a dessert chef learns how to master their art without relying upon cane sugar as a crutch, test their skills with this great treat.

Stir-fried veggies - These are great straight from the wok served over rice/noodles with a little soy or wasabi cream.

Sushi - I never really tried sushi until my Perth trip in '99. And emetophobia keeps me from eating sashimi as often as my taste buds would enjoy. But we can definitely discuss rolls. Especially the sweet potato rolls at New Tokyo or even the deep fried Miami rolls at House of Sushi.



Sakura mochi - is a deliciously soft, pink rice cake wrapped in a salted cherry leaf usually eaten on March 3, or Japanese

Girls Day. But I was introduced to this delicacy at Nagano in Chicago. I miss Nagano (and ponytail) immensely.

Green tea ice cream (very dark and rich, please) - Probably the best green tea ice cream I've ever had was served at a restaurant that wasn't highly regarded for its Japanese food. But Tomodachi, across from Nagano, had the darkest green tea ice cream and owner who played John Coltrane, which was a win-win for me until they closed for good.

French fries - Who in the world first thought of deep frying potatoes? They should be slapped *and* hugged at the same time because these little wedges of crack are hard to enjoy in moderation.

Speakeasy's Thai curry crème brûlée - The chef at Speak-easy Supper Club owned my wallet because of their deep cocoa, curry powder and perhaps cayenne truffles atop this titillating dessert.

Pizza - Don't believe that just because I live Chicago that I'm prone to gnaw on a chunk of bread with sauce on top called deep dish. The art of mastering a thin pizza is still much appreciated, thank you very much.

BBO chicken - It was great to be a spectator in the great BBQ battles that took place down south. But I have to give it to our former neighbor Joyce who started mixing honey in her sauce long before it was popular. Yum!

Cabbage - This is great boiled with diced red potato, olive oil and chicken bouillon, or steamed with carrots, yellow corn or even stir-fried.

Mustard and turnip greens with hot water cornbread and sweet iced tea - You may ask why all of them together. It's simply the Sunday afternoon treat that makes me homesick for Mississippi livin'. Well *some* things about Mississippi livin'.

Homemade biscuits, smothered potatoes (or turkey) in flour and onions - This is another favorite that makes me homesick. My mom could make biscuits so good, they'll make you want to dropkick somebody for more. And the smothered potatoes or turkey was created out of survival, but made running home after school worthwhile.

Grilled chicken breast sandwiches - I could swear there's a greasy spoon diner art form that explores the heights of creativity with this scrumptious sandwich. And don't forget to toast the dadgum buns!

Turkey bacon - Not all turkey bacon was created equal. Louis Rich brand is salty, but otherwise it rules the U.S. turkey bacon market. Butterball will do if in a pinch.

Chicken burritos - I don't remember eating these in Mississippi, but if I did they certainly paled in comparison to the superabundance of authentic Mexican offerings in Chicago. Just like the lo mein addict, one could eat a different style of burrito every day of the week in Chicago and be content. For healthy Mex, Mamacita's chicken burritos are yummy with Rancho Zabacho Red Zinfandel. What a great pairing!

Couscous, pilaf, Moroccan pastilla and mint tea - Andalous Moroccan Restaurant in Chicago is the proper introduction to authentic Moroccan delights. Ask for Hadj.

Haagen Dazs (especially their Coffee Toffee, Vanilla and Chocolate flavors) - They first got my attention with Macadamia Brittle, Swiss Almond and Rum Raisin flavors. Just about anything they offer is tasty, but since my cane sugar intake has been reduced, they taste too sweet now. That's why store brand chocolate ice cream is better sometimes.

Sauvignon Blanc - Thank New Zealand's Marlborough region for offering up wonderful whites.

Sauternes - This is a great dessert wine with shortbread, but a good Muscat will do too.

Tyskie beer - compliments pan-seared Ahi Tuna over stir-fried veggies with horseradish sauce, or simply college football on TV with plain potato chips.

Purple booters (as a cocktail, not a shot!) - I think we lost

the Roscoe's fireplace bartender that really knew how to make these well. It's said he opened Minibar nearby.

Banana pudding - Forget that crap with egg whites baked on top. Simply use Jello or some other banana pudding mixture generously over as many vanilla wafers as you can stuff into a big bowl. Go easy on the banana. Look, don't try to plunk an entire bunch of overripe bananas into the pudding like it's the city dump. It's not *their* fault that you didn't get to eat them because you were on vacation. That drives me batty, just like people who put 87 cans of cling peach hunks into their cobbler, only to find 89 of them left in the casserole dish afterwards because NOBODY WANTED THEM! Good lard. Get a *clue*.

Lychee martinis/ginger martinis - Too bad Monsoon closed. They made wicked martinis. And the foie gras made you want to *dropkick* someone!

Ramen - OK I know that many of us survived college learning how to make instant ramen 987 ways, but there's actually authentic ramen that is quite tasty too.



Crab cakes Whodathunk such an ugly animal could taste so delicious? After writing many entries in this section, I could go for about 13 or 14 of these right now with a frosted mug of Sam Adams ale and some fries.

Lobster - For some reason I have fond memories of company Christmas parties at Shaw's Crabhouse. We feasted

on a host of seafood specialties, but you should have been there to see people's eyes roll back into their heads after having the lobster.

Chocolate milkshakes - If you're gonna use fake chocolate, this is probably the best way to consume it, along with a toasted chicken breast sandwich with hand cut fries at a mom 'n pops diner.

Pocky - Chocolate dipped with crushed almond pocky rules. I haven't seen any yet but I'd love to try green tea and wasabi pocky. Little sticks of pleasure.

Garrett's cheese and caramel popcorn - There is always a snaking line for this hometown popcorn darling. If you walk down State Street near Jackson or State Street near Randolph, you're likely to get a whiff of the sinful treat.

Green tea wasabi peanuts - Are these edible cocaine pellets or what? They're so addictive. But watch out for that stealth peanut with 5 times the heat! There's no such thing as sinus blockage after a handful of G.T.W. peanuts.

Alonti's chicken tequila pasta - Alonti Deli's been making this dish for at least 10 years. We can't quite figure the sauce out, but it's quite sensual and erotic. It's best over farfalle (bowtie pasta) and served with a big slice of garlic toast and cold Lipton Brisk Iced Tea. I do hate when Alonti uses mostaccioli (tube pasta) though. I've written headquarters a few times pleading with them to stick to the bowtie! *exhale*

Tandoori, korma, naan, pakora, saag - I lived near Devon Avenue, probably one of the few places in the world where Pakistani and Indian people live together peacefully. And

when that comes together through food, restaurants like Bhabi's Kitchen are born. Don't forget to take a Chilean Merlot along!

Baklava - Andalous baklava has become my favorite. It doesn't taste like a 5 pound bag of sugar is in each slice like most other baklava, but is still pretty sweet for my tastes.

Dinosaur eggs (type of plum) - These are a great man-made invention. I can almost taste a hint of beefsteak tomato mixed in.

Chocolate milk - If you give most school children a choice, they'd obviously pick this winner. And if you can't have a chocolate shake with that toasted chicken breast sandwich with hand cut fries, this will do just fine!

Cheesecake - Traditional cheesecake could literally be used as currency, but it's amazing how it works well in ice cream too.

Fried calamari - It freaked me out when I found out what animal this came from. But since I'd been eating it happily for a while, what the hoo.

Blackened broccoli - It's OK to pan roast just the florets or the whole plant with olive oil and onion salt in a shallow pan on the stove top. I like to eat this with rotisserie chicken and sip a cold Pinot Grigio, Chenin Blanc or Vouvray.

Chicken gyros - There's a special reason why I loved these at the sandwich shop just east of State Street on Chicago Avenue. Wish I could say hello!

Chocolate cake - This is a classic favorite.

Homemade tea cakes - It's hard to find anyone that's able to cook these old-fashioned goodies the way my great aunt Pearline used to make many years ago. Rest her soul.

Wedding cake - There's nothing quite like a slice of tall, moist, white wedding cake.

Pancakes and waffles - We all love the traditional recipe batter but Homemade Cafe in Berkeley, California has something really special going with their wheat waffles.

Bubble tea - Boba, pearl tea, tapioca, bubble or whatever you prefer to call it. A Peach milk tea with lots of pearls is lovely and quite possibly sinful. Saint's Alp, Marcy?

Lotus seed and red bean mooncakes - Chiu Quon Chinese Bakery stole my heart with these tasty morsels. They're great with a huge mug of hot green tea.

Bowtie pasta with alfredo and freshly-ground black pepper - This is my favorite way to have farfalle pasta unless I run into a friendly bowl of Alonti's chicken tequila y el guapo.

Jelly Belly gourmet jelly beans - Regular jelly beans look (*and taste*) like chewy cough drops compared to these micro bits of joy. Too much cane sugar though. Hey, try honey!

Turkey hot dogs, turkey burgers - I had to get creative since I don't eat red meat and the some of the vegetarian options might as well be edible clay. Louis Rich takes the crown for turkey hot dogs and Green Giant makes very tasty Italian-seasoned turkey burgers. Trader Joe's does well with veggie products, though.

◇ **More than one way to skin a cat,
feel a good beat**

THIS MAY SOUND a bit obvious to some, but music composition is a very private and personal experience for me.

Since technology has made it easier and more affordable to install recording studios at home, I've committed to making the creative process a natural part of my day-to-day surroundings as possible.

One of the most common presumptions made about my earlier releases is that I used analog gear. I've always had a digital setup—from the beginning of the deephouse labs in '93 to being laptop-based as of this writing.

All of the releases before the "Intelligent Emotions" EP were created solely on the Ensoniq ASR-10 Sampling Keyboard. A number of people have asked me over the years what influenced me to use a swing jazz feel. Besides my love of jazz itself, I have to confess that the ASR-10's software that controls the song's tempo was horrible. It simply could not handle fast tempos and demanding house music arrangements. So to cover up the keyboard's shortcomings, I decided to use a more jazzy composition style. This is most evident in the songs released on Subwoofer and DC-10 Records.

Beginning with my first Fragmented Records release, I incorporated a Korg Trinity Plus, several Korg Trinity

Racks and an Alesis Nanobass. When I dismantled my MIDI studio in 2003 before moving to a different



house, I didn't reassemble it once the move was complete. I'd considered migrating to a soft synth environment for quite some time but finally switched to using Apple's GarageBand consistently in '04, after using a few others.

I've never been completely satisfied with the sound quality of my releases. In fact I loathe the final engineering result of "Moonchildren" on Subwoofer. After recording those tracks at home, I was encouraged by Kevin to take them into a studio to let a professional engineer pre-master them for "club levels".

You have to understand that the mass transition from analog to digital began in the early 90's for dance music and it was a confusing time. I learned a very important lesson after letting an engineer with an ear better-suited for rock music adjust my tracks – I trust my *own* ears!

I never went back to a studio for pre-mastering services and have found self-engineering to be a rich learning experience. The engineering quality of my follow up release "Very Moody" fared much better.

Not every release's sound quality is stellar, but fortunately many of my fans have concentrated on the compositional elements instead. Actually some of them think that the dirty, basement Chicago feel is intentional. It's not. It's just that I'm not the best engineer.

Some of CG's equipment used over the years:**|| Software**

GarageBand

Reason

Logic

Peak

Adaptec Jam

|| Computers

Aluminum Powerbook, G4 1.33 Ghz

Titanium Powerbook, G4 550

Mac Quadra 840AV

G4 Powermac 400/MT (G3 266MT originally)

|| Keyboards, instruments

Korg Trinity Plus workstation

Korg TR Rack (3)

Korg Electribe

Ensoniq ASR-10 Keyboard Sampler

Roland Pro-E Intelligent Arranger

Alesis Nanobass

Yamaha PSS-130

Yamaha PSS-270

Casio SK-5

|| Sound Processing/Recording

TC Electronic Finalizer Plus

Lucid Audio card
Lynx One digital soundcard (AES/EBU)
Aphex Model C Aural Exciter (Big Bottom)
Alesis Microverb 4
Mackie LM3204 line mixer
Allen & Heath MixWizard 16:2 DX
Tascam DA30MKII Dat recorder
Sony TCD-D7 DAT Walkman
Sony MDR-7506 professional headphones
Que 40x CDR
LaCie 2x/4x CDR

|| Microphones

Rode NT3
Sony ECM-737
Audio Technica DR 2700HE

|| Still/Video cameras

Panasonic DVX100A
JVC GR-D30U
Nikon N60 35mm
HP Photosmart 318
Sony DSC-S90
Sony DSC-W80
Apple iSight



◇ **These are my children**

DISCOGRAPHY:

-:: Chris Gray & The Moonchildren

“Night Navigation” (music video)

©2005 deep4life

Notes: written and produced by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

“Mental Patient” (EP)

©2002 deep4life recordings

Notes: written and produced by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions

-:: Glance

“Everyday”

©2001 stir15 recordings

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Larry Heard

“Praise”

©2001 Track Mode Recordings

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Moonchildren

“Ran Away” (alternate outtake)

Appears on the Millennium Records CD

“Cologne Summer”

©2001 Millennium Records

Notes: “Ran Away” written, produced and mixed by
Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Moonchildren

“Rapid Eye Movement” (miniLP)

©2001 deep4life recordings

Notes: written and produced by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions

Additional Production by Jalal Ouissal, Boku & Koibito

-:: Moonchildren

“No Other”

©2001 R2 Records

Appears on the R2 Records CD “Deep Burnt”

Notes: “No Other” written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray
for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

“Tried To Be Good” (miniLP)

©2001 deep4life recordings

Notes: written and produced by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray/Moonjaaz/Hiemmel

Various selections on “Deep South Experience”
(compilation)

©2000 deep4life recordings

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

“Drowned In You”

©2000 Track Mode Recordings/Music Is... Records

Appears on the Track Mode Recordings/Music Is...

Records compilation Abstract Fusion 2

Notes: “Drowned In You” written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Utterance

“Grant Me Utterance”

©2000 deep4life recordings

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Moonchildren

“Beyond Love”

©2000 deep4life recordings

Notes: written by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Moonchildren

“Ran Away” (original mix) CD

©2000 Turbo Records

“Stockholm Mix Sessions, Vol. 2 - Jesper Dählbeck”

Notes: “Ran Away” written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Boo Williams

“Mars”

©2000 Headphoniq

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

“Sweetness You Bring”

©2000 deep4life recordings

Notes: written, produced, mixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Moonchildren

“Moonchildren”

©2000 deep4life recordings

Notes: written, produced, mixed by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions

-:: Larry Heard

“Give Me Heaven” (deep4life mix)

©1999 Distance Records

Appears on the Distance CD “My House, Vol. 4”

Notes: “Give Me Heaven” remixed by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions

Written by Larry Heard.

-:: Larry Heard

“Give Me Heaven” (deep4life mix)

©1999 Distance Records

Appears on the Distance double CD compilation

“House Proud, Vol. 1”

Notes: “Give Me Heaven” remixed by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions.

Written by Larry Heard.

-:: Larry Heard

“Give Me Heaven” (medicinal purposes mix)

©1999 Distance Records

Appears on the Distance/Virgin Megastore CD sampler

Notes: “Give Me Heaven” remixed by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions.

Written by Larry Heard.

-:: Various Artists

“Deeper Side of the Wax” (EP)

©1999 deep4life recordings

Notes: “Affirmation” written and produced by Chris Gray

-:: Various Artists

“Deeper Side of the Internet” (CD)

©1999 deep4life recordings

Notes: “I Dreamed of You “ written by Chris Gray

-:: Billy Jack Williams

“Party Children 2000”

©1999 Bumpin City Records

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for

Mind Massage Productions

Written and produced by Billy Jack Williams

Vocals by Tad Robinson

-:: Chris Gray

“Nite Aire”

©1999 Track Mode Recordings/Music Is... Records

Appears on the compilation “Abstract Fusion 1”

Notes: “Nite Aire” written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray
for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

“Emotional Distortion” LP

©1999 deep4life/Track Mode Recordings

Notes: written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

“Emotional Distortion” (CD)

©1999 deep4life recordings

Notes: written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray

-:: Chris Gray

“Trippy Fingers” (EP)

©1999 Track Mode Recordings

Notes: written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray

-:: Larry Heard

“Give Me Heaven”

b/w Ron Trent/Anthony Nicholson remix of “And So I Dance”
from Dance 2000 part 2

©1999 Distance Records

Notes: Give Me Heaven remixed by Chris Gray for

Mind Massage Productions

Written by Larry Heard

-:: Chris Gray

“In The Dark”

©1998 Ki/oon Records/Sony Japan

Appears on “Wildman’s House” mix CD

Notes: written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray for

Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

“Deep Soldiers”

First Array (compilation)

©1998 Tektite Recordings

Notes: “Deep Soldiers” written, produced and mixed by

Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

Fish & Luvconfushun CD/LP

©1998 Kickin’/Fragmented Records

Notes: written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray for

Mind Massage Productions

-:: Various Artists

“Fragmented Records, Volume One” (CD)

©1998 Kickin’/Fragmented Records

Notes: “Blueprints for Your Mind” and “For Jazzmyn”

written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray for

Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

“Fragmented LP Sampler Part I”

©1998 Kickin’/Fragmented Records

Notes: “For Jazzmyn” written, produced and mixed by
Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

“Probe of the Outermental” (EP)

©1998 Kickin’/Fragmented Records

Notes: written, produced and mixed by
Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Nitelurkers

“Check The Levels”

©1997

Notes: written, produced and mixed by
Chris Gray and Paul Mac

-:: Chris Gray

“Intelligent Emotions” (EP)

©1997 Kickin’/Fragmented Records

Notes: written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

“Gamma”

©1997 Neuhouse Records

Appears on “Slightly Different” CD, mixed by Heiko M/S/O

Notes: written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions

-:: Billy Jack Williams

“ABC’s of Love”

©1997

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

Written and produced by Billy Jack Williams.
Vocals by Dana Stovall and Paul Stovall

-:: Chris Gray

“Tranquil Solutions” (EP)

©1997 Music Is...Records

Notes: written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions

-:: Vel Sylk

“Love’s Really Got Me”

©1997 Bumpin City Records

Notes: written and produced by Vel Sylk and Calvin Kool Aid
for Von Zoom Records

Remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Chris Gray

“Deeper Level of Understanding” (LP)

©1997 Music Is... Records

Notes: written, produced and mixed by Chris Gray for
Mind Massage Productions

-:: Greg Cash

“You and I”/“Can I Get A Witness?”

©1996 Bumpin City Records

Notes: written, produced and mixed by Greg Cash
Post-engineering and sweetening by Chris Gray

-:: DJ Pope

“Your Love”

©1996 POJI

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions
Written and produced by DJ Pope.
Vocals by Marty St. Michaels

-:: Greg Cash

“Greg Cash” (EP)

©1996 DC-10 Records

Notes: written, produced and mixed by Greg Cash

Post-engineering and sweetening by Chris Gray

-:: Chris Gray

“Party Flava” (EP)

©1996 DC-10 Records

Notes: written and produced by Chris Gray

-:: Chris Gray

“Very Moody”

©1996 Passion Music Ltd.

Appears on the compilation

“Deep House I: The Sound of the UK Underground”

Notes: written and produced by Chris Gray

-:: Chris Gray

“Very Moody” (EP)

©1996 Freetown/Subwoofer Records

Notes: written and produced by Chris Gray

-:: Karen Pollard

“Old Fashioned Love”

©1996 Freetown Records

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

-:: Billy Jack Williams featuring Jeanie Tracy

“Call It Love”

©1996 DC-10 Records

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

Written and produced by Billy Jack Williams.

Vocals by Jeanie Tracy

-:: Utterance

“Grant Me Utterance”

©1996 DC-10 Records

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

Written and produced by Billy Jack Williams

-:: Mindreaders

“Club -N- On The Weekend”

©1996 DC-10 Records

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

Written and produced by Kevin Elliott. Vocals by Malik Hart

-:: Mindreaders

“Love Music”

©1996 DC-10 Records

Notes: remixed by Chris Gray for Mind Massage Productions

Written by Billy Jack Williams, produced by Kevin Elliott.

Vocals by Malik Hart

-:: Chris Gray

“Moonchildren” (EP)

©1995 Subwoofer Records

Notes: written and produced
by Chris Gray

-:: Lil John Coleman

“Get N2 A Gruv”

©1995

Notes: remixed by
Chris Gray.

Written by

Lil John Coleman



◇ Home sweet home, house sweet jack

MAYBE I'M FOLLOWING the path of some of my predecessors by staying out of view! I had to face the fact that I'm not 21 anymore but it's definitely OK to jack my body in the comforts of home.

The club culture in Chicago isn't what the world perceives, but isn't as negative as some locals paint it. But as time goes on, I've become more selective about the outings I undertake.

We must never take anything for granted. But sometimes nothing beats putting on a record or a mix and lounging at home. I haven't given up on clubbing, but I cherry pick when and where I go.

So if you're in the prime of your club life, please cherish it! And if you love to dance, you're not required to go to a club to get your *juke* on, as we say. The first song that comes to mind as I write this is Logic's "Celebrate Life".

It's been my personal anthem at times. The meaning strikes deep within me as I owe it to God and house music for taking me down interesting paths in life!

Well, you've made it. Thank you for taking the time to read my book. I've done my best to share adventures as vividly and accurately as possible!