
deq
DETROIT ELECTRONIC QUARTERLY
VOLUME 10
MARK FLASH
GARI ROMALIS
AL SCHACKMAN
REMOTE VIEWING PARTY
EXCLUSIVE: L'UOMO
WELL DONE GOODS
CYMATIC SOLES
WINTER EDITION

Letter from the publisher: DEQ #10

I hate to be negative in such a positive publication, but when the bubble goes pop! And the air comes out… we need to talk.

When was your personal bubble last broken? Was it a "friend" that stabbed you in the back? Was it a bad break up? Was it the death of a loved one? Whatever the situation, it hurts. You scatter to regroup from the unthinkable. The gut wrenching pain deepens grooves in your brain and brings you to your forever changed mental map. We can repair and reinflate the bubble, and it might look different, but ultimately it's our address.

It's easier than ever now to get consumed in our own lives. We can have so much of what we want, when we want and the way we want it. With distractions like the internet, smart phones, television, entertainment, technology and not to mention an unstable economy where people are working twice as hard to stay afloat, it's clear that in keeping our own lives together the world is falling apart.

The pop heard around the world came on Election Day when Donald Trump became President-elect and, for the record, I really hate the state of politics. I was DJing at the Aloft hotel downtown that Tuesday night. Watching it happen on multiple flat screens, I felt of the pain of my giving up on politicians, putting them all in the "Suck, Bought and Sold" category and closing the file. I felt the guilt of not paying closer attention to the news and the state of the world (although it was impossible to escape the slinging of mud in this campaign.)

I will never forget seeing all the red states on the map as Wolf Blitzer and numerous CNN strategists frantically barked as results came in. Moreover with the people's choice, I realized the severity of racism and the sad state of this country. Throw in the unavoidable PTSD from the election and it crushed me all at once. I felt sick.
As the bad news kept rolling in, the small crowd wanted some music for sanity purposes. It was a strange scene as I began with James Brown "Living in America" on this old school vinyl night. I thought it would lend a moment of levity, but instead I saw gaping mouths and sad faces. I found myself staring at the cover of the 12" record with Brown in a fancy suit and Apollo Creed (actor Carl Weathers) in his red, white and blue satin boxing outfit. "How does it feel when there's no destination too far?" Brown belted out. "And somewhere on the way you might find who you are!" I guess I never paid attention to the words until that moment.

I thought about my life's journey and about how much better of a person I am through friendships with people from other cultures. Putting this magazine together and playing nights with diverse people make me realize how truly lucky I am (and I'm sure you do as well.) Steven Reaume said so profoundly in his article, "When you risk everything to do what you love, it's worth every bit."

As I see it, we are fortunate to have this music, our friendships through it and all its healing powers. This magazine is doing a good thing for the community and the city. Even with that, I feel I have to do more. We have to do more. I am far from perfect. If we as people do not improve our interpersonal relationships immediately, both at home and with other cultures, we are in big trouble. There's a real danger in stereotyping and when that thought process reaches people that want to get accepted in a part of society, it's worse than cancer. That strong need to belong, combined with a closed minded view, is fuel to a raging fire.

To put out this fire, to repair the bubbles, to cure this, it's going to be one on one, hand to hand, mind to mind battle centered in volunteering time and energy. Face and mind time. It will take the patience of saints. It will take an army of good souls and it starts with yours.

Through healing on your journey, you might just find out more about who you are, like Soul Brother #1 James Brown said, "Eye to eye. Station to station."

Thank you again for reading, your patronage, your thoughts, your friendship. Thank you for paying attention. Make a difference now.

C O N T E N T

detroit electronic quarterly

GARI ROMALIS

Prince said it best “There’s joy in repetition.” Yes electronic music can tend to be somewhat repetitive, and yes there is joy in it, but what I am referring to here are the messages from producer, remixer, DJ Gari (with an i) Romalis. His Facebook posts are a hearty blend of well timed life advice, pictures of his 12” output and videos of inspirational tunes. There are posts like “procrastination is the thief of time” or “real ain’t what you got… it’s what you stand for” coming from a thick bearded fella with a consistent, Skype looking photo live from the wood paneled basement lab. He’s definitely hard core.

Upon telling a friend about my interview with Romalis, he said “you are interviewing him? He looks intimidating.” I said “Nah, I just think he’s focused.” I’m truly glad my assumption was correct. He’s a warm and friendly person with music production on the brain always.

“I have a weird creative process”, Romalis said. “I’ll put some music on while I’m doing something else around the house and then if I hear a few sweet bars or something that catches my ear, I’ll stop what I am doing to start chopping it up in the studio. It’s on from there until I make something new.” He prefers to sample music because, as he says, “I’m a DJ. I’m not going to lie and say I can play everything. I come from the choppy era... It’s from my hip hop roots.”

One may call Romalis Sir Chop-a-Lot as there’s a strong demand for his production and remixes, mainly from labels overseas. “I’ve got stacks upon stacks of tracks,” he said. Labels like Dockside (Paris), Hizou Deep Rooted Music (Barcelona), Warm Tapes Adjustment (Berlin) are a few that release his music. “That’s how I eat…The love for Detroit is strong overseas.”

As far as at home in Detroit, Romalis does not get the warm fuzzy feelings all the time. “A lot of people in Europe think we all hang out together and are all chummy, but that is not the case,” he said. He feels that the scene here is fragmented and it’s tough getting people to play and chart his records for some reason, much less ask him to play records. “We all (early Detroit DJs) came from the same platform and I just don’t get it. Maybe it’s just me.”

Romalis admits that with his steady workload, he does not go out much, but when he did, he supported and continues to love all the DJs and their different styles. He reminisced about the days of the original Charivari, Deep Space and Direct Drive social clubs and parties in the eighties when, according to him, the love was there. Now, to him, “it’s just different.” But as you guessed it, nothing stops his drive and progress in this music. It’s rooted deeply in the beginnings of the progressive music scene of Detroit. It’s back in the days of Mojo and Buy –Rite Music.

Speaking of Buy-Rite, Romalis remains close with owner Cliff Thomas and mentions him as a key factor in his growth as a DJ and producer. As “the money man”, he released and promoted Detroit’s electronic music in the early days and the store is still there at 7324 W. 7 Mile Road on Detroit’s West side (it’s now called Detroit Music Center.) “We all worked there, shopped there and lived the music,” he said. “It would have all been different without his involvement.”

Derrick May was as another essential influence on Romalis. When he first met May, Romalis described himself as a “wide-eyed, eighteen year old kid wanting to learn everything.” His time volunteering paid off. “I would have gone to Mars if they needed me to! People forget about people behind the scenes,” he said. By helping May get around town, he met a lot of influential people like artist Gary Arnett and record maker Mike Archer of Archer Record Pressing for example. He worked extensively on building the legendary Music Institute, bringing wood from Royal Oak in his car to build the DJ Booth. He sometimes played there as well.

One of his fondest memories of assisting May then was picking up David Gahan of Depeche Mode from the airport. “I was there when that photo was taken of them (May and Gahan) in Derrick’s loft. They were eating cookies and drinking tea… my demo tape was on the counter as a matter of fact.” He also fondly recalled being Kevin Saunderson’s studio when “Good Life” was made and has an original cassette from that session. “I would skip work, just to hang out and be there.”

May also taught him a lot about DJing mainly through the powers of observation.” I used to keep my head down and do my thing,” he said. “He (May) taught me that you have to watch. The crowd will tell you what they want to hear. You just have to look and be into it.”

In between DJing and learning music production, Romalis worked hard driving for a delivery company. There were long hours and essentially he was not taking good care of himself. One day in 2010 he suffered a serious stroke. “I couldn’t get out of bed. Anyone without a will to live would have died.” Romalis said. He had to teach himself how to walk again, and nearly everything else.

After a few years of rehabilitation, in 2012 he started making records. His close friend, the legendary DJ Norm Talley put him in touch with the French label Dockside and he was off to the races with the “Last Man Standing” EP. The track “Ain’t Right” starts with a 4-4 deep filtered groove and what sounds like a heart beat in a body. Swirling, winding deep, sort of muted beats underneath. The claps and kicks come in to lift you. The vocal says “This ain’t right”. It’s simple, long and deep. To hear it musically speaks to what he went through escaping the jaws of death and finding the will to keep living.

From that EP Romalis never looked back, putting out over forty records. There’s excitement building for his label featuring his own tracks called 1701, appropriately named after the year the city of Detroit was founded. He’s also working with fellow producer and DJ Tink Thomas , one of Romalis’ closest friends who was side by side with him since the early eighties, on a label called Forward Motion. Romalis calls it “Old school samplin’ while making the music our own.”

When it comes to making music, Romalis is proud to keep his production old school, keeping true to the “analog warmth, the source.” He says he’s stuck, but it’s a “good sort of stuck”, in hardware where he does most of his sequencing and editing in his workstation. “It just sounds the best to me,” he said. He records with whatever sounds right at the moment. “It could be Ableton, Audacity or even Garage Band. I’m simple. I’m all about what sounds good and what works at the time.”

And it’s all working for Romalis. Make records, play records, repeat… ah… the joy of repetition.

Interview by Vince Patricola // Photo by Walter Wasacz

REMOTE VIEWING PARTY

The production/DJ crew behind Remote Viewing Party and the shrouded in mystery imprint How to Kill Records first surfaced in the mid-00s as Detroit party promoters ProperlModulation. The collective quickly earned a reputation for good taste and fresh programming. The members welcomed Lawrence and Efdemin (Dial Records/ Hamburg), Sweden's Mikael Stavostrand (Force Inc./Mille Plateaux), David Moufang (aka Move D of Deep Space Network), Berlin ambient artist Klimek (Kompakt) and others to local dance floors.

PropIMod founders Aran Daniels and Mike Petrack are still promoting parties at TV Bar, were key programmers for last summer's inaugural Corktown Strut festival and play out as Remote Viewing Party for lucky after-party people who stumble unto their space-dubby DJ sets at the Russell Industrial Center and elsewhere.

But their passion project is How to Kill (HTK), a label made up of friends and collaborators that believe the Detroit underground remains the steady heartbeat of the global underground.

We caught up to Daniels and Petrack at TV Bar earlier this fall and kept talking to Petrack on Messenger and email to finish the interview.

DEQ: Ok, let's start at the top: how did you guys meet, when and where?

Petrack: Memory calisthenics notwithstanding, I think it was the first PropIMod party. Aran was a friend of my partner Chad's. I vaguely remember meeting him. Eventually I heard a mix that he did. I just remember thinking to myself "this guy gets it." That was during a certain point in Detroit techno's development when it was refreshing to hear someone use melody. Everyone had settled into this comfortable little pocket of sounds that were ubiquitous and therefore easy to play together. Aran's mix sounded like it intentionally avoided the filler, so when we got the chance to play together, things just kind of fell into place.

DEQ: You started out as promoters and evolved into producers. Describe that journey.

Petrack: Promoting is a strange game. There's a lot of politics involved. A lot of risk and relatively little reward. Essentially our goal was to get the good shit to Detroit before anyone else would take the risk. That was fun for a few years, and we got the chance to work with some consummate professionals. We never lost too much, never really made anything, but learned a whole lot. Eventually we decided that we'd rather take the risk on releasing music. If you only sell 50 copies at least 50 people have something that lasts forever. Parties are over at 2 or 4 a.m., and the attendees are off to the next bit of their lives.

When we got the chance to start stockpiling equipment, we really started looking for a place to call home. It's scary to commit, renting a space and buying the equipment to fill it. But ultimately you have to put some skin in the game, otherwise it's hard to focus and spend the time on writing and producing. We just kind of found ourselves at a crossroads, we could either go all in or let it fizzle. We'll find out if it was worth it, but at least we won't have any "what if" scenarios to contend with later on.

DEQ: How many people are affiliated with the How to Kill crew? List some of the artists, producers and technical support you have received.

Petrack: How to Kill is a collaboration between Shady P, The Friend, Aran Daniels and myself. Marshall Applewhite is also a huge part of the sound. We also released a track from Secrets (Matt Abbott). Other notables are the Broodlings and Stefan Ringer from Atlanta, as well as the Yung Azn Boyz. The Friend masters everything. The good folks at Archer do the pressing and we distribute through Crosstalk.

DEQ: How to Kill is a bold name for a label project - how did it come to you?

Petrack: Honestly… I found an image one night when I was reading about propaganda films from back in the day. I guess Disney did some pretty dark stuff back then. The image that became our logo was from a WWI era Mortimer Mouse cartoon. It just sort of lined up aesthetically with the music we were all writing at the time. The name and

Interview + Photo by Walter Wasacz

the ethos are a little tongue-in-cheek. Obviously, the music isn't about literal death, just the death of the status quo.

DEQ: Death to the status quo! That's great, put it on a t-shirt! How many records have you put out? What's next?

Petrack: We've contributed to a couple of F.A.M.E. tracks on HTK, Corndogs, and Greg Wilson's A&R Edits. There's been one Remote Viewing Party Release on HTK 004. We also have a forthcoming release on Josh Guerin's My Baby imprint. Really excited for that one, a TV Lounge label has been a long time coming.

DEQ: Tell us a little bit about Corktown Strut, the neighborhood festival you guys help program.

Petrack: Strut is a music and arts festival that takes place over Fourth of July weekend. It's produced by Forward Arts. Basically we program a handful of venues in Corktown with all kinds of music, collaborate with local restaurants to provide food, and drink. Last year was the first edition, we're already neck deep in planning for next year.

DEQ: Talk about other programming you do as DJs (clubs, after parties, etc.). Anything memorable? If there is a good story in there somewhere feel free to share.

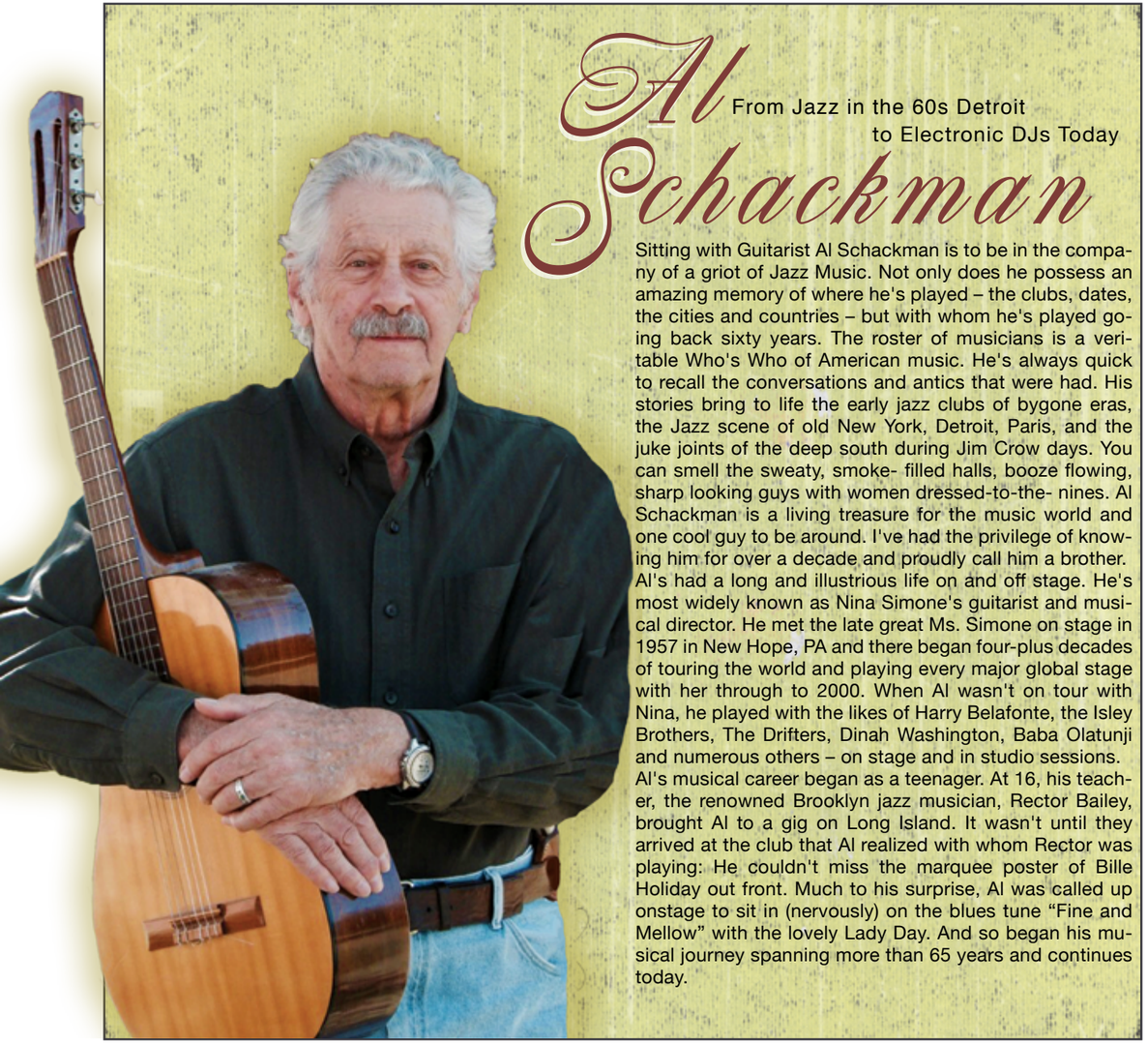
Petrack: We play all over the place, We've held a residency at TV for 7 or 8 years now. Lots of afterparty gigs, those are a lot of fun when the crowd is there. I also enjoy the fact that you never really know what you're gonna get after 2 a.m. Detroit's late night scene is kinda like a game of whack-a-mole, with the cops holding the mallet. A new spot pops up and runs for a while, then it gets shut down and the party moves somewhere else. As far as good stories go, they're all good stories, that's our job to make certain of as the DJs.

However, the last time we played at the Works some drunk chick punched Aran in the head, then later on in the set a dwarf jumped on stage and just danced on the DJ booth for the rest of the night.

DEQ: Finally, tell us what is it about Detroit that inspires you the most?

Petrack: The grit. The dirt. The difficulty of it all. But also the ingenuity it takes to flourish here. It's definitely changing, we're seeing a lot more development and new people with more money, starting to soak up some of the oxygen. Our studio is in Eastern Market, in the same building that I threw my first party when I was a senior in high school. So even when things are changing, I still get to take my cigarette breaks on the same fire escape and appreciate the fact that while the spaces that allow us to create are growing more scarce, we can still exist in this new ecosystem.

Honestly it's up to this generation of music people to keep Detroit on the map. The rest of the world is looking for us, we just have to make the product, whether it's art, music or cars, ultimately it's about the work.



Al Schackman

From Jazz in the 60s Detroit to Electronic DJs Today

Sitting with Guitarist Al Schackman is to be in the company of a griot of Jazz Music. Not only does he possess an amazing memory of where he's played – the clubs, dates, the cities and countries – but with whom he's played going back sixty years. The roster of musicians is a veritable Who's Who of American music. He's always quick to recall the conversations and antics that were had. His stories bring to life the early jazz clubs of bygone eras, the Jazz scene of old New York, Detroit, Paris, and the juke joints of the deep south during Jim Crow days. You can smell the sweaty, smoke- filled halls, booze flowing, sharp looking guys with women dressed-to-the- nines. Al Schackman is a living treasure for the music world and one cool guy to be around. I've had the privilege of knowing him for over a decade and proudly call him a brother.

Al's had a long and illustrious life on and off stage. He's most widely known as Nina Simone's guitarist and musical director. He met the late great Ms. Simone on stage in 1957 in New Hope, PA and there began four-plus decades of touring the world and playing every major global stage with her through to 2000. When Al wasn't on tour with Nina, he played with the likes of Harry Belafonte, the Isley Brothers, The Drifters, Dinah Washington, Baba Olatunji and numerous others – on stage and in studio sessions.

Al's musical career began as a teenager. At 16, his teacher, the renowned Brooklyn jazz musician, Rector Bailey, brought Al to a gig on Long Island. It wasn't until they arrived at the club that Al realized with whom Rector was playing: He couldn't miss the marquee poster of Bille Holiday out front. Much to his surprise, Al was called up onstage to sit in (nervously) on the blues tune “Fine and Mellow” with the lovely Lady Day. And so began his musical journey spanning more than 65 years and continues today.

Since Nina's passing in 2003, Al performs with the Nina Simone Tribute Band, continues to compose, collaborate, and perform his own work, lectures about his music experiences, and recently appeared in the documentary film, What Happened Miss Simone?

While relaxing on Martha's Vineyard this past summer, Al had the pleasure of meeting DEQ's Vincent Patricola from Detroit who was visiting the island. Al was impressed with the magazine's originality and after recounting stories of playing Detroit in the early sixties, agreed to share them with the DEQ readers.

BJS: What was your first experience in Detroit?

AS: “It was with Nina at the Flame up on John R around 1961-62. A rough neighborhood but popular showplace. The northern representation of the Chitlin Circuit in Detroit. Played there twice. It was significant because I witnessed my first murder there.

We were staying in the hotel across from the club and Bobby Hamilton, the drummer, and I were standing in front of the club and heard an argument. Then there were shots-powpowpow-and a guy went down. Bobby yells out, 'Feets don't fail me now!' and we ran to the hotel.... The vibe was rough but we spent most of the time in the hotel or the club rehearsing. It was well run, a great club to play, appreciative audiences. It was a Black audience, I would say they were in their late twenties and up.

I loved playing the Black clubs. To me, it felt more at home there than at White clubs. Like in NYC, I'd much rather play the Village Gate. Although New York was integrated, I'd much rather play there or the Village Vanguard or the Half Note or Cafe Bohemia than the Round Table, which was a real ritzy Eastside, Uptown club, predominantly White club. One time we played the Round Table – full of white business guys – and we started to play I Loves You Porgy. Nina paused, and we hear “...polaris missile submarine.” Nina looked out, got up, and that was the end of the gig!”

Al Schackman and Nina Simone in 1961 (youtube clip)

BJS: Did Nina like playing in those Detroit venues?

AS: “No. Nina was after concert halls. In fact there's one video of her at the Montreux Jazz Festival where she was very warm to the crowd and she said, 'I want you to know I won't be doing this anymore. I'm not going to be playing festivals and clubs from now on. I just want you to know that.' And she paused and said, 'But I hope you follow me.' Of course, she continued to play festivals and clubs. There was a part of it that she did like, but if the crowd was talking, and it was a Black crowd, she'd say, 'Be quiet now!' or 'Shut Up!' or 'I'm not going to play.' They'd shut right up!

Another time we were playing Cobo Hall, and Nancy Wilson was playing at the Flame. Nina and I went over to hang out with Nancy after her show. I wish I had a tape recorder of the two of them talking about the business and reflections....They both looked at each other, Nancy says to Nina, 'Shit, you know I hope we don't have to be doing these kind of gigs all our life.' And of course they both became big stars.”

Nina became deeply involved in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement. She and Al – along with Harry Belafonte, Dick Gregory, Tony Bennett, and Joan Baez and other notables...marched in Selma alongside Martin Luther King, Jr. in support of voting rights and in protest of Jim Crow. A makeshift stage was constructed with plywood laid over rows of empty coffins. Al and Nina performed her daring song for the times: the haunting and powerful condemnation of racism, “Mississippi Goddam.”

In March of 1965, Viola Liuzzo. the mother of five and a white civil rights activist from Michigan, joined a voting rights protest march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. She helped shuttle fellow activists to and from the airport. She was driving on an isolated stretch of highway with Black demonstrator Leroy Moton, when 39 year-old Viola was shot dead by members of the Ku Klux Klan. Not long after her murder, Harry Belafonte played a benefit concert for the United Auto workers and civil rights activ-

ists in Detroit.

AS: “I met up with Harry in the summer of '65 in Toronto – Nina wasn't working that much then – we went to Detroit and played a benefit concert at Joe Louis Arena, it was part of a big complex, the old Art Deco building, beautiful architecture. We raised money for Viola Liuzzo's family.”

BJS: What do you think about “electronic music?”

(Al had a lot to say on the subject, covering everything from music semantics to ethics. Interestingly, Al was part of the Avant Garde exploring electronic music in the late 1950's. The famed composer and music pioneer, John Cage, was among those experimenting on tape and wire recorders. The technology at the time was primitive at best – electronics were very limited and undeveloped.)

AS: We were all pushing the envelope back then. I experienced John Cage as an eccentric, interesting innovator. For example, my Free Forms Trio was on a program with Cage at Cooper Union in the Village. He came out on stage, sat down on a chair with a microphone turned toward the audience, and recorded all the sounds in the hall: coughing, chairs squeaking, mumbling... you name it. Then he got up, bowed, and walked off the stage. What he did with that recording, I do not know. He was an Avant Garde explorer like all of us at that time from the 50s to mid 60s.

I've composed electronic music myself, but I didn't take it from anywhere except the ether. I composed a piece called “Music In The Nine Rings.” (The 1972 release of Arica - Music In The Nine Rings is a new age classic). It was the nine centers of the body, each center being assigned a certain frequency – that's been explored by people before me, the Hindus and by someone called Gurdjieff in the early 1900s. What he did was figure out the frequencies of what the Hindus call the Chakras, or centers that vibrate. There's nine of them. I used the note of each frequency – each note being a center. The tone of the note would be like a bed. Each note has a characteristic and I'd attempt to represent that center in a musical form. It's an exercise to be able to sit and listen to each note which was about 3 minutes long. It would go up through all the centers (Chakras).. I did that mostly electronically and sometimes used a drum or claves. I hit it and it reverberated. These were real sounds. I'd use different sounds from synthesizers but I was creating it, not taking it from someone else. I don't agree with sampling music: If you can't create the music and play the instrument, then you're not a musician, you're a technician.

Al's more recent encounter with the genre in Berlin made him suspect of what had become of this art form. It made him question whether it was music at all.

AS: My take on 'electronic music' that I had heard in Berlin from massive speakers in what they call in French a Fabrique, I took offense to it. To me it had the dregs of fascism. I mean it wasn't fascist, but it was so Germanic strong that it stirred things in me that I didn't like. For me to hear this kind of music, and I'm saying music but this electronic sound, not music, called music – coming out of them kind of felt like this was in their fiber. And it was scary. It took place in this Fabrique, an old train station that hadn't been bombed during WWII. It was a station where they deported Jews, so it was kinda weird. But that's one isolated experience.

Music is a phenomenon that has to contain a human element, which is comprised of the brain, the heart, and the instinct center. Those three elements have to be there and attempts to call any electronic experience 'music' falls short for the most part. All music is frequency and that's how you can have digitized, synthesized music. You can take a certain frequency and make a piano note out of it. You can play it with a keyboard and you got the SOUND but music needs the HEART.

Music is what the Easterners call Kath: the solar plexus, the gut instinctual center. It's not enough to just play with frequencies on your keyboard or computer, or take a Miles Davis' song like 'Kinda Blue' and sample it, that's raping it, so I have a problem with that. Nina would say, 'that's not music, that's somebody that took my voice and made it something else. And if I ever catch the guy, I'll put a knife through him!'

Let's coin a new phrase: Techno-Jocks. Electronic TJs! I would have respect for that...for someone exploring that realm of electronic sound rather than calling it music. I have to hear more examples of what they're calling electronic music. I'm open to it if the electronic guys would not take exception to what I'm saying.

Please, we've taken too many years of our lives to learn how to play music. Don't take that music and get techno with it without calling it what it is. That's hijacking. I might not like it, but that's my problem. As long as you're respecting the divide.

an exclusive interview with L'uomo's

Mike Neil

by DJ Alton Miller

2017 is here and I am reflecting on not only 2016, but also how I have spent the last twenty-five years of my life. My story is very similar to most DJs who decided at a very young age to pursue their dreams and play records as if their life depended on it. Go to club. Hear sound system. Hear DJ become an infinite source of sonic bliss and spiritual pleasure for countless others. My mom was an avid clubber and would tell me stories of her nights out in club land here in Detroit. She would describe in detail the songs, the sound systems and the way the DJ moved the crowd. One of her favorites was "D" Train's "You're The One For Me". Ken Collier was a frequent name on all the flyers she would bring home. At age fifteen I went to L'uomo which was at the time the first and only underground club in Detroit. Mike Neil is synonymous with names like Robert Williams, The Assoon brothers, David Mancuso, Michael Brody and Steve Rubell. Mike Neil is part of the foundation that was built by others like him… visionaries, freaks and dreamers that became tastemakers. They created places where day to day existence could be abandoned and where people could be elevated, transformed, and become one with music and dance. His story is part of my story.

AM: Growing up on Detroit's northwest side during the late 1960's, what type of sounds were you and your parents listening to?
MN: At that time we were listening to a lot of James Brown and Aretha Franklin. They would have me dance like James Brown, you know, the splits, twists and all dance moves he would do.
AM: What were the prominent radio stations in Detroit and who was hot on the radio?
MN: WJLB, WCHB and the hot groups were the Isley Brothers and Earth, Wind & Fire.
AM: Were you going to record shops and buying records?
MN: Yeah we bought a lot of 45s and LPs. I remember the yellow disc that we would put in the middle of the 45s. The Floaters, Enchantment and a lot of local groups were formed with a Motown era ideology of how they performed and finding talent for their groups.
AM: Do you remember the names of the record shops you went to?
MN: Kendrick's, Detroit Audio and some shops on 7 mile.
AM: Where did you graduate from high school?
MN: I graduated from Cooley in '75
AM: Did you play sports or were you involved in the arts while you were in high school?
MN: Karate and basketball. We had this gang called the Red Hoods and would terrorize the neighborhood. We worked out doing the day and hung out with our girlfriends at night. I was All-City and All-State. We made it to the City Finals all the time and I remember busting through the tape as we ran on the court at Cobo Arena. They called it the Finals back then. We always made it to Cobo. We also went to a lot of basement twenty-five cent parties.
AM: What was it that led you to put on your first party? What led you to clubbing?
MN: We (Neil and his brother Kenny) were young entrepreneurs and into selling clothes. We had a clothing line called L'uomo. Our parents did not want us to open up a shop in a mall. They thought if we opened up in an office building we would have more patrons to sell our clothes to, so we opened up a shop at 6 mile and Meyers in 1978 because they worked there. I went to Western Michigan University and then to Michigan State when Magic Johnson was there. When Magic went to the Los Angeles Lakers in '78, I came home and opened up the shop. We had $45,000 in merchandise. We were vandalized and broken into.
AM: Did you finish school?
MN: I am finishing now at Central Michigan University. We had to come up with some money (back then) because we had to pay off the line of credit for the clothing. We threw a party at the Cotillion Club (at Puritan and Littlefield.) That was the first party and started an organization called L'uomo named after the boutique. We were popular. L'uomo means the man.
AM: Who was involved in the project with you?
MN: My brother, Peter Barksdale and a brother named Smiley. We were well to do and we dressed well. The party had so many people, the police came but they did not shut us down because we knew them. The party was amazing. We knew we were onto something.
AM: Do you remember who DJed that party?
MN: Ken Collier. We were buddies. He was the guru. Whenever we had something we had to have him.

AM: From that very first party eh?
MN: He was the glue. He would take me to the studio when he was mixing records for Was Not Was and I met Don Was. Ken was showing me where he wanted to go musically.
AM: What happened with your parties after the first one?
MN: We took the party to larger venues. Bonnie Brook. Sold out. Roostertail. Sold out. It was hot. Everything we did sold out. All of these DJs would flock to Ken like Delano Smith and Darryl Shannon. I would bring guys from New York and Chicago to play. They were the Kens of their cities.
AM: Ken was the resident DJ for L'uomo the party concept?
MN: Yep. We would go to New York City together and he exposed me to early club culture. I stayed at the Paradise Garage until 7am! The bass would move you if you stood still. The sound blew me back. The technology fascinated me. The lighting and the sound system. They used BGW amps. If it was not BGW amps, I did not want anything to do with them. The L'uomo parties were very successful and we were selling out large venues. Because of high demand we needed to have a weekly event. The Studio 54 space was owned by George Page and it was located downtown on Bagley.
AM: What else was going in city club wise at that time and where was Ken playing?
MN: Ken was playing at a place called the Chessmate on Livernois near McNichols. Melvin Hill was playing at the Famous Door on Griswold. He is a very good DJ! There were a lot of party promoters on the scene at this time. Charles Love, Love Seekers, Showbiz Kids. They use to have parties at different places. Everybody wanted to be a promoter.
AM: Do you think the radio stations reflected what was being played at the parties during this time? We are talking the height of disco right?
MN: No. I think what was being played at the clubs and the parties had great influence on what was being played on the radio. People were sick of the music that was being played on the radio and they wanted something different. DJs had special mixes of tunes that radio jocks did not have.
AM: Do you remember any of the record pools back then?
MN: There were lots of record pools. Atlantic, Warner Brothers, Angott. They would pay us to come to Southfield Road and 8 mile to listen to records for $65 an hour. We would give our opinions on records. We got records from all over.
AM: So it was a combination of the club owner or promoter and the DJ working together to set trends, make and break the next hit.
MN: Yep and I had the best, Ken Collier. I would pay Ken very well to be exclusive for me. $200 a night and back then that was a lot of money. He played every weekend from 9 -1.
AM: Were you doing events every weekend at this point?
MN: At this point we were doing Studio 54 every Thursday.
AM: Ok but wait. What happened to the clothes and fashion line?
MN: It became secondary. We were not going to miss this call. The parties were huge .We were the talk of the town.
AM: What was your crowd like in terms of age bracket? Was it alternative? Was it black, white, straight, gay?

MN: That was the key. We needed all types at the party. It had to be a zoo. If it was not a zoo it was not happening. It had to be like Noah's Ark. When we opened the doors at 9pm there was a line to get in.
AM: Was there anything happening at that time that would have been considered underground? Was there anybody using a cabaret license to stay open longer than 2am? Were there any afterhours spots?
MN: Yeah, but they did not cater to music and dancing. They were illegal gambling joints. I went to Adolph's, Bud Johnson's special invitation joint. I would go but would not stay. I would give people that I knew tips on where to go if they were looking for something else to do.
AM: How many partners did you have?
MN: My right and left hand was my brother and Peter Barksdale. They knew all the ins and outs and handled the money. We made $50,000 in one month. On a Thursday we were making $2,200 and his bar was making easy $5,000.
AM: He (owner George Page) was very happy.
MN: Yeah he was very happy. He wanted me to take Thursday and Sunday. As soon as you came off the freeway and bent the corner at Lafayette it was on full tilt boogie. We always had the spotlight outside the club. If we changed venues we would put on the flier just follow the spotlight. "Look in the sky and follow the light."
AM: Would you say you were more on the side of creating the aesthetic of the party?
MN: Yes I was totally into it. Being able to travel and see, at a very young age, places like the Paradise Garage, Studio 54, Grand Central Station, Limelight, Danceteria and hanging out with Madonna, the DJs, actors and all sorts of people was unreal. I was exposed to a lot very early…
AM: Let's go back to the first L'uomo. I never made it to the first one. What moved the party to Studio 54 from L'uomo's first location?
MN: The Cotillion Club was the first. There was a club across the street called Babes and they were after the spot that we were looking at. We had a toy store in the building next to it

and I put a club in there. This was just supposed to be a place for us to hang out. It was too small. It was like a motorcycle club. Morris Day and the Time would come there. Charivari. Snobs would come there. All the kids in high school were forming these clubs and coming to this spot to hang out. People from the suburbs were coming, both black and white, because of new wave. Everybody was punking out. People looked like they were coming from Mars. We were not wearing suits anymore. We wore cut off pants, cut off shirts, army pants…anything freakish and punked out at the time. People had Mohawks.

AM: So same party concept but different style?

MN: Yep, but too small. That's how we knew we were on to something. Ken was the man, the resident. Ken was hot. Everybody wanted to see him. I had to have security at the DJ booth because people wanted to be near him.

AM: Was it different? Were the DJs doing something different before this?

MN: There was a disco convention in NYC and twelve of us attended. We discovered that there were more DJs mixing keeping a steady beat. Dancers were not leaving the floor. The music was beginning to be more electronic. With Ken we did not have to give him any direction from the very beginning or even when we saw that DJs in other cities were becoming more skillful in their mixing. He was flawless. When we got into new wave and brought it to Detroit after hearing it in New York we had to give him direction. He was the catalyst. He had to make an adjustment with new wave. That sound took us to another level. The Cars, B52's, Devo and groups like that opened another door. Ken came with us to the convention in NYC. We were there a lot. Nightlife was at an all time high. We spent a lot time there at all the clubs.

AM: So you began running the club?

MN: Yep, officially every weekend. The guy across the street that owned Babes had police contacts and we did not have a license. He called them and they shut us down. They took me to jail for dancing. Who does that? No alcohol, just dancing. There was no place for his people to park. He was not happy. He saw all these kids looking like they were from Mars that were not going to his joint so he had to do something about it.

AM: How long were you in the first spot?

MN: A year maybe… at least six months. We had to make an adjustment.

AM: any guest DJs in the first spot?

MN: Yes. The guest DJs were Delano Smith and Darryl Shannon. Ken was getting a lot of offers to play out of town. He was traveling and we had a lot of DJs who wanted to play. They studied Ken and were getting good. They would make tapes. "Here is my tape. Give me a shot. I am good." Then we moved to 7 mile. We were mega hot on the eastside in a warehouse like the Paradise Garage in1981 and 1982! And I had video game arcade. We also played movies on a big screen like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

AM: How old were you then?

MN: I was 22 or 23. We were on TV…sports celebs… everybody wanted to know what was going on at L'uomo, this hot club. Whodini was there hanging out. It was hot.

AM: Would you say that L'uomo was Detroit's first true underground club?

MN: Without a doubt. We were open until 7am, but the kids could not stay out until 7 so we opened 8 -2 for the youth and from 2 -7 am for L'uomo late night which was for the gay community. It was off the hook. They would come thru the back door. We had thirty minutes to clean up, restock and get the club ready for the late night session. I would leave at 7am and there would still be a hundred people there.

AM: What was happening on Friday night?

MN: Same thing, same schedule. I had a cousin named Nicky Allen and he was gay. That was his baby. It was dancing at the finest level that you have ever seen in your life. The music was top notch. Ken was pulling double shifts. He would play from 8 until 7 in the morning Friday and Saturday. All the DJs that you know about now, they were there. If Ken let you play, and especially if he was not there, you had arrived. They (aspiring DJs) would try to pay me to play. They wanted to practice. They wanted to play at any time for any type of party. DJs wanted to play at L'uomo.

AM: Who was responsible for putting the sound system together?

MN: Myself, Ken and Nicky. Ken had the most input. He knew what he wanted. Russell Jewell at Audiolight had the boxes. He is a perfectionist. We tri-amped and fine tuned that system. That's how we got the rep for the best damn sounds in town. I spent a lot of money on sound. We were always tweaking the system, making it the best all the time.

AM: Tell me about the logo on the wall.

MN: We had this friend named Cindy. At the time I was into the artist Neko who was always in Playboy magazine. It was avant garde type stuff. Cindy could draw. We had the face of a lady that looked like she had turned into a party diva. That and the logo from Cindy we used on everything. She designed what we wore. What are you going to wear to L'uomo? Everything had to be mad because we were unique. You could not go to Saks or Hudson's. Man oh man. Ciao and City Slicker. They were Detroit owned stores. They started to emulate our style and carry things that we were wearing.

AM: What about Smitty and De Zanella?

MN: Smitty and I were partners at one time. De Zanella was the number one store in Detroit for that type of fashion. Smitty was on top of his game. Every time I would run into Smitty he was making moves. We ran in the same circles. We were both from Detroit and that made it special.

AM: Were there any guest DJs at L'uomo? Robert Troutman speaks about Frankie Knuckles playing there?

MN: It did not make a difference. If he said it was okay I would make it happen. I trusted him. If Ken said to have this guy play it was official. I did not question it. I would make it happen. It was done.

AM: What was the most memorable tune at the club for you? The song when you heard it, was the epitome of why you had done the things you did before and leading up to the club?

MN: We shared a lot of favorites. Ken had a special mix. He would look at me when he played it. He would run the beginning again, then come back into it with another version. Wow man. He made me like a lot of things that I probably would have not gotten into, but it was the way he played tunes that was great. Ken was an engineer. He was more than a DJ. He made records hot. That was my man.

AM: So you really gravitated towards new wave and the English invasion? The Clash, B52's and the English Beat?

MN: That sound was something so special and when Ken mixed it with dance music and his sound, for me it is what you call techno. It was very powerful. We tested a lot of early rap at the club. We were still going to the record pools. I would have discussions with them about this music because the English and new wave sound was slating to go out. I told the major record labels that you can't stop this music, referring to dance music and rap. Especially rap. Disco was dying. When Ken would play a little bit the club would erupt. They told me to take all the rap records. We would give these records to the DJs and the people that would come to the club. That time was constantly changing. I used to talk to Russell Simmons and people like him before they got the money. After Saturday Night Live and becoming this white thing, disco was gone. There were New Kids On The Block, but we still dictated what was happening in clubs in Detroit at that time.

AM: Let's talk about the climate and what was happening in Detroit at this time outside the club.

MN: Drugs. We stopped selling out at our events. It became another thing. People would come to the club and be like I am paying for twenty people. I did not want you in here. I would say it's $15 to get in. It did not matter. People were coming in with a different mindset. I had to increase security. I got dogs. I got Pinkerton security. I got Powerhouse Gym people. I needed everybody. This was 1982-83. This crack thing was becoming an epidemic and was spreading like wild fire. Clubbing became secondary. You were not going to be in the club long because you had to go get more drugs and if you came after getting high all you wanted to do was destroy. Rap music was making you angry and aggressive. You ain't thinking about having fun or a good time. That is what the big record labels were scared of when it came to rap. When I would speak to people like Russell Simmons they would talk to me about their visions and they knew how far this music would go. Ken hated to play rap.

AM: Who was Jimmy Jay? I remember him playing at L'uomo just as much as Ken did at one point. Who was he?

MN: Jimmy idolized Ken. Ken was his mentor. Jimmy played rap. He had very good skills. Ken would give him 15 minutes. He would watch him from 1:15 -1:30.

AM: That was it?

MN: Yes. Fifteen minutes and then he had to go. He had fifteen minutes of fame and he took off. It got to a point where I had to put him on. Everybody wanted to hear him. He was booked a lot and would come and do his set after his other commitments. He became just as hot as Ken.

AM: What was your most memorable event?

MN: It would have to have been the party at the Roostertail. That was the turning point. All the promoters were there and they had parties that night. My biggest competition had always been Charles Love. He thought he was God Almighty. When we threw a party, I always wanted to know when Charles was throwing a party. If he was at the Hilton we were at the Roostsertail. If he was at the Bonnie Brook, we

were at the Hilton. This went on until I won the award for best promoter in the city. When I accepted the award, I had the entire L'uomo crew come on stage. We were not in the club yet but after this we knew we would establish our own club. I got tired of making people a lot of money. My goal always was to open my own club. The team I had was first class and they helped me achieve my goal.

AM: What was your most memorable event at L'uomo?

MN: The New Dance Show and the Scene had parties at the club and we were on TV. Nat Morris was the host. A lady named Barbara Taylor was an on-air personality for WJLB. Those people were at the height of their careers. We joined together. The Scene was broadcasting their dance show from the club. Their ratings went up because people wanted to see what was happening at the club. We had crossed over into TV. Our people were watching the Scene, but we would have done better if we did not appear on TV. It took away from our mystique so to speak. It fell apart. Nat Morris stopped coming and R.J. Watkins had to fill in for him. So, the drug epidemic crack, rap and the hype of being on television really took us off our course. When it was simple and pure it was great but it became something else. TV diluted it. It was fake and it was just the cameras. It was not true.

AM: Were your brother and partner still involved?

MN: No they succumbed to drugs as well. It took longer to get to me but it did. I was left to my devices. I held on for as long as I could.

AM: So when did you get to the point where you said you had enough?

MN: I was the mayor of a city inside the city. I made a decision to take it to the next level and that was dope. With the contacts and connections that I had in New York and Los Angeles I knew needed to get a liquid license.

AM: Do you remember the final year or final party and how did Ken take it?

MN: No I don't remember. I don't remember when we shut down. Ken had a lot of options. We went got a liquid license we changed the name. We just let it die. Ken would come and do guest spots. There was no more L'uomo. We left the building. My concept was if everybody wants to get high lets sell liquor. We changed everything. A lot of the team did not make the transition. I was elated because I felt that I had graduated. I had just gotten married and my wife was the youngest black female ever to own a liquor license in the state of Michigan. I was dealing with the Liquor Commission. I was at another level. We're talking six figures.

AM: No sentimental anything about L'uomo?

MN:: No man I am older now. The taste had been taken out of my mouth. There was too much chaos. I went straight Anglo-Saxon. I was selling to skinheads and punk rockers. I was not selling Hennessey. I was selling Jack Daniels, Jim Beam and Absolut. This was at the Steam Pit and Asylum. It was great. Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Smitty and I opened up the Steam Pit. It was just a temporary move because we were getting investigated for our liquor license. We had to be cool. I was already looking at the old Vaudeville Theatre building around the corner. It had been a clothing store. I wanted my people, but they were not ready so I turned to Amir (Daiza) and Vince Bannon. I milked the Steam Pit for at least 6-8 months. It was very short lived. I was making a lot of noise. Smitty pulled out about a month after we opened. Smitty told me though. "I am doing this and you are doing that and it is not going to mix." That's when my soldiers showed up. Charivari and all the guys that I had nice connections with pulled some quick strings for me. I did not have to wait long for the license. We had to show how we made our money and it was legit enough for them so they pushed it through. Then I was downtown on Broadway. The kind of money that I needed to get it to where I wanted it Smitty and De Zanella had, but I had to go elsewhere. I had to grind again. It was terrifying. No lines of credit. The dope thing was cash and carry or credit card and swipe. I had to go against the grain. It consumed me.

AM: Were you doing everything by yourself at this point?

MN: My wife was my right hand. The license was in her name. Vince and Amir were my crew. They were bringing in fresh acts. It was like New York but in Detroit. I had a love hate relationship with the club for about a year and half. I wanted the money, so Dr. Ogenbasi entered the picture. He ended up opening Club Elan. I gave Vince and Amir one month's notice. I wanted to cash out because I was on drugs too. Plus the Doctor was fucking my wife. I used the drugs to pacify and numb me to whatever was going on. I could not save my face and ass at the same time. I told myself let me save my ass. I knew how to get the money. Dr. Ogenbasi offered $125,000 cash. They had to give me a briefcase because I wanted small bills. I always carried a briefcase. (Well known lawyer) Jeffrey Fieger's letters started coming to the club because of allegations of rape by some ladies. They were suing the club because of him and these charges. He had sixty percent of the club. I only had forty percent. I told him that's rape. They are going to put you under the jail. I told him to give me $75,000 and you can have it all. He made one call to Nigeria and he told me I could pick it up that Friday. It was the Monday before. I told him we had to talk. I had three letters here and I know he (Fieger) is serious. He gave me the money. (Shortly after) I was hanging with Vince and Amir in New York. Then I went to a different country and had a good time on the islands. We (Dr. Ogenbasi and Neil) were cool until I got my money. So on his first day my plan was to shut him down. He had extravagant flyers and so forth. I was in Acapulco and I called Big John, the guy who helped me obtain my licenses. I said to him "it is tonight." John said "I got it." All the people that came that night left right out. It had happened to me when William from Babes had me shut down. People were laughing and I got handcuffed, so I felt like Al Capone. The club never really got off the ground. He ended up committing suicide because of all the charges and the pressure got to him. I saw it coming.

AM: I remember because we were across the street at the Music Institute. We were his competition. We had a line down the street on weekends.

MN: Yeah I was done. I went through all of the money. I left rich and famous between 86-87. From that point on my life it went straight down hill very fast. I was using. I was not listening. People would tell me to go and get help. I did not listen. I was slowly committing suicide but it was on a daily basis. Nothing made sense to me. In 2006 I gave myself a birthday present. I went into treatment and I have been clean since. No cigarettes, alcohol, nothing. I am glad to be here. 7 years.

AM: I am very happy that you are here.

MN: I am in good health. God has kept me in his grace and mercy. Lots of people have asked me to do things. I get offers all the time. I refuse. The danger. If the drugs don't get you the lifestyle will. I got high with a lot of famous people. The fame and glory comes with a price. You've got to be well rooted in your faith. You've got to walk that walk and stay grounded. Get in and get out. You are dealing with the arts. You have to take something to get that artistic expression and get it off on a constant basis. That's where you falter. I told my parents that I was coming to do this interview with you. They told me I should not. I told them it is okay. My foundation is good. I am in a good place. I can go back to those days and tell the story. If I dreamed it I could do it, to seal a deal back then was to take a one on one. I started using just to come up with ideas. That was part of our creative process. We would put fliers together for parties yet to come. We were ahead of schedule all the time. This was me and my team. It was the medicine and the mood enhancer to create this movement. I lived it for sure sometimes. I used to think the crowd was moving to slow in the club and in my mind I was going to hit the floor and bring up the energy.

AM: The times dictated a lot of shit eh?

MN: Hello? That was an era. My idol was Steve Rubell from Studio 54. In my eyes what they were doing was ok. Shit, I had all the money. I had all the drugs I could ever want. I had all the women. I had a good time. The wildness started later. I still take pride in my appearance…how I dress. I get a lot of compliments about well I look from people that I have not seen in a very long time. I am looking at some of these guys who are younger than me. Alcohol use has really hit some of them hard. I stay away from it. I don't like the smell. That's a blessing. God's people take their health for granted. A lot of people are stuck there. I played a part in it, but they did not move on.

AM: Do you think that Charivari, out of all those high school groups, is the one you gravitate towards the most?

MN: Yeah Charivari. That's my baby. I like those guys. They

could do no wrong. I took them under my wing. I exposed to them to a lot of shit. They are good guys. They reminded me of myself. They came from good families. They are younger than me. I am happy for them.

AM: Yeah I am a bit younger than those guys but going to their parties at L'uomo was mind changing for me. What they were doing back then resonated with me. I thought they were real.

MN: My life, I am grateful for it. I put the p in party. I set it off. I stopped partying period. I thought it was forbidden on this side. I was told I was entitled on this side to have a good life. My reaction was, "Do you know who you are talking to? Do you know where I have been?" I was like a little kid because I thought in giving up that lifestyle, I could not have fun anymore. I was like "y'all told the wrong mutha-fuka that." Aw man I started having so much fun and it was clean. I was invited to speak. Then I got the call to speak at the World Convention of Narcotics. You're talking 80,000 ex-dope fiends and crack heads in Philly. This one was the largest. I ran into a lot of people in that I used to party with. It was great. We went to dinner and it was great to see these people. I got teary eyed because it was good to see that these people were not dead. To find out that they were over here doing this was great. I was elated.

AM: How do you feel about gentrification and what's happening in Detroit in regards to clubs and the music?

MN: Those guys (promoters) remind me of myself. They are into artists and after parties for concerts. It is not safe. People get shot and killed. It's more worrisome. When you get there you have to get loaded to have fun and ease the pressure. But then you are drunk and you can't communicate with people. It is not pure. It's a lot to have to worry about. It is not as safe as it use to be.

AM: You think gentrification is something to worry about in regards to African American people getting things done?

MN: Yes it is going to be private. Once you cross the (Grand) Boulevard there's going to be a lot of changes. Ilitch (Olympia Entertainment) and Gilbert (Quicken Loans) are buying all the buildings. If you are not on either one of those teams it is going to be very hard. When I came downtown nobody was down here. I knew it was coming. I signed my lease for ten years because I knew it was going to happen. I did not make it. It is all about timing. If you are too quick you still may miss an opportunity. If you are before your time you still may miss. You have to take the slow road so you will get accepted in whatever you do.

AM: Do you go out?

MN: No I don t go out. The (Charivari) picnic was the first time I had been out in a long time. When people saw me they lost their minds. If I go out it is something very special. When the past calls, I don't answer. There's nothing anyone can show me, not coming from where I have been.

AM: Give me your top five tunes of all time. Don't think about it.

MN: B52s "Rock Lobster", Black Coffee "Superman", Was Not Was "Tell Me That I'm Dreaming", Laid Back "White Horse", Gary Numan "Cars"

AM: Bruce Lee or Jet Li?
MN: Bruce Lee
AM: Buddy's Pizza or Domino's?
MN: Buddy's without a doubt!
AM: Lou's Deli or Mr. Fo Fo's?
MN: Lou's
AM: Baker's Keyboard Lounge or Bert's on Broadway?
MN: Baker's
AM: Armani or Calvin Klein?
MN: Armani
AM: Donny Hathaway or Stevie Wonder?
MN: Stevie
AM: Dramatics or the Temps?
MN: Temps
AM: Motown or The Sound of Philadelphia?
MN: Motown
AM: Soul Train or the Scene?
MN: Soul Train
AM: L'uomo or Warehouse Chicago?
MN: Warehouse
AM: L'uomo or Paradise Garage?
MN: Paradise Garage
AM: L'uomo or Music Institute?
MN: L'uomo (!!!! Laughter !!!!)

* Alton Miller is a world renowned music producer and DJ from Detroit. Look out for his forthcoming album on Sound Signature in late 2017.

FIT SOUND

Often outspoken ambassador of Detroit House Dance Gehrik Mohr (aka Poseidon) of CYMATIC SOLES, in conjunction with the Affiliated Community Building, put on a House dance cypher competition/workshop called “Hybrid Heroes” in downtown Detroit back on August 5. Whenever these events happen the aim is always to provide an organic environment for a street dance gathering to come to life in as natural of a way as possible. It’s cyphering with out of town friends to home town regulars, with all emphasis based around the music played as well quality projected.

CYMATIC SOLES: Facebook.com/detroithousedance

Most cities do a formal ‘battle’ format to bring their street dance culture together. Hybrid Heroes was an attempt to bring raw spontaneity back to a dance culture that no longer seems to pull crowds unless there’s a prize or purse. “I am very fortunate to attend a House (music) gig weekly in my home town,” Mohr said. “I’ve been lucky to have a small group of younger like minded individuals join me to dance as well. When I’m asked by outsiders or strangers when the next workshop will be, I tell them that there’s a free one every week! Hence my defensiveness when others claim this dance style as their lifestyle, but our small band of ‘heroes’ never see them out. And if they’re in the building, I watch them post up at the bar all night. Simply put, you’re NOT about this dance life if you don’t make the effort to lifestyle it in your schedule. Period!”
Last August Hybrid Heroes was joined by some of the world’s most renowned figures in the House Dance culture. Many realize the extended family they truly have as the Street Dance world becomes more accessible through internet and social media. Mohr (Poseidon) has met many on his adventures globally and he extends an open invitation to explore the deep roots here in Detroit.

Pioneer House Dancer and cultural icon Junious Lee Brickhouse said, “Detroit has always been a city that understands music and movement, so I was excited about being a guest. Now as an artist, I usually come to any city, outside home, with a mission. It was different with Detroit; EVERY corner of this city has a truth removed from the common understanding of outsiders. Feel me? This trip reinforced that for me. I think if a city can shine in its complexity and sometimes even its turmoil like Detroit does, it makes the soundtracks of their experiences that much better to dance to.”

Also joining this humble gathering was another of the dance cultures finest…Frankie Johnson! “My visit to Detroit was about trying to experience as much as I could in the short amount of time I was there.” Frankie added. “Detroit for me is the representation of House Dance and music culture and is a city that literally breathes and vibrates this everywhere you go. It is almost ‘aura-like’ and I could really feel it. In the mix of being able to visit places like the Motown Museum and Motorcitywine Bar, everything just felt so cool and authentic. It’s a beautiful city, filled with heritage. I was incredibly welcomed by so many amazing people.”

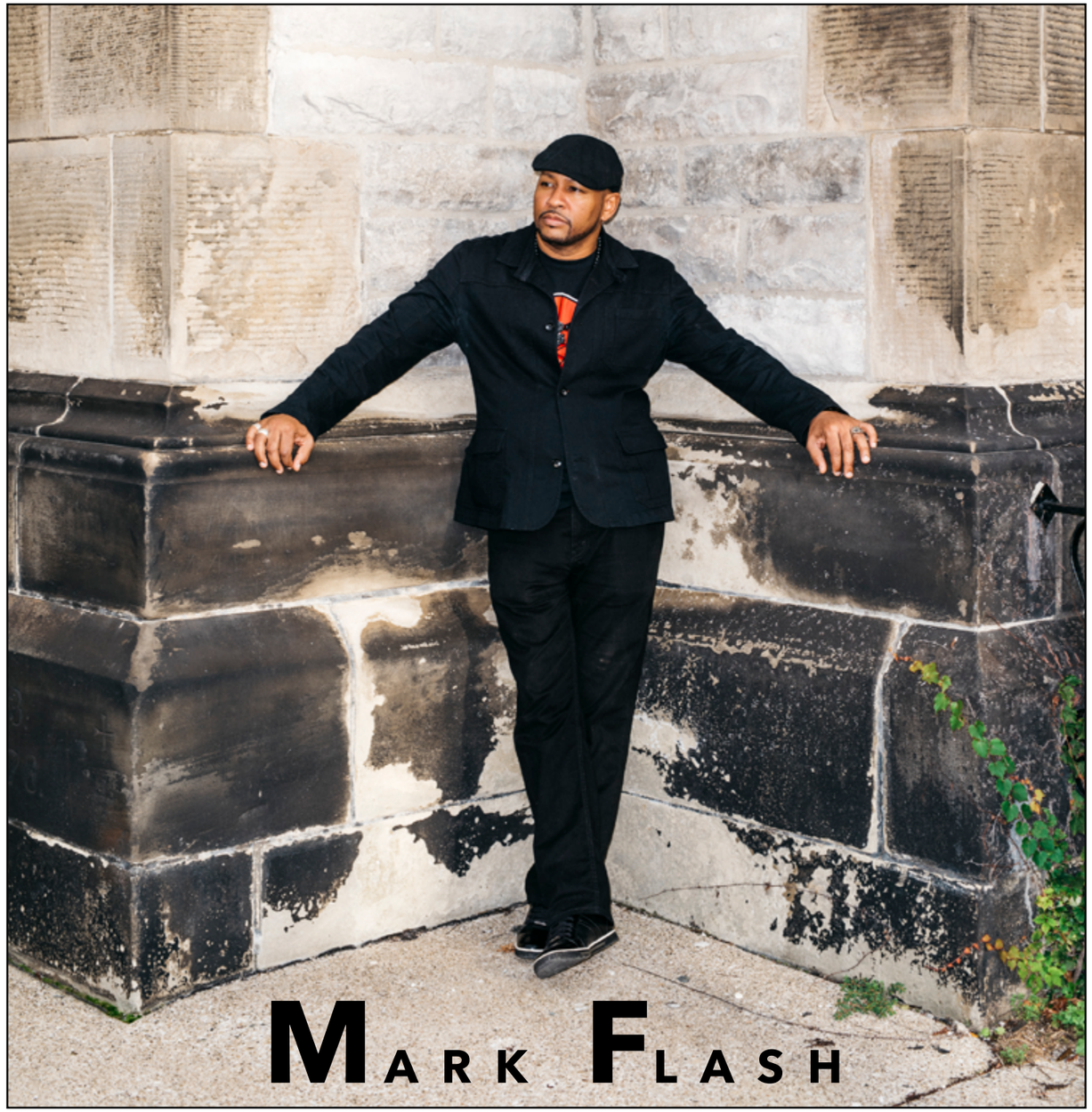
And lastly one of House Dance’s founders and strongest influences made his annual visit to the “D”. Shannon Mabra and Mohr have been long time friends since the 90s. “I was there not just for visiting Detroit, but for working and collaborating with artists. Also to establish and redevelop an active communicative platform with Cultivate Peeps, DJs, Dancers and Artists. Personally speaking it was an enjoyable time spent with dancers.”

CYMATIC SOLES began in 2010, formed from an idea spawned by Mohr himself. “It’s kind of like a business, but more like an identifiable collective for Detroit House Dance and underground culture, to protect and teach it properly. From those who danced in its past here in the D to now, This is my way of giving back!” Mohr said.

Some of the youth influenced by him began calling him “Poseidon” years ago. The name has stuck since. Outspoken and on a mission for truth in the D’s dance culture, Mohr has made it clear a number of times why his energy goes in the directions he supports today, “Studios and ‘practicing’ formally are baby-steps while experienced veterans hold youngster’s hands as they investigate a bigger world in raw, tribalistic culture. But unless you step out of that comfort zone…you never are a ‘Street Dancer’! You’re not going to find the essence of Street Dance culture in safe “…5, 6, 7, 8” dance structure. It lives in the moment of shared excitement wherever real underground music is facilitated. If you’re afraid of that spontaneity, or just reacting no matter what the track brings, then you’ll never truly get this dance style.”

To complement this gathering Todd Johnson, co-founder of Detroit’s Charivari Festival, asked CYMATIC SOLES to provide House Dance demonstration for the crowd. “There was such amazing dance talent from many places around the country cyphering during DJ sets at the festival. It was a cohesive injection of this specific movement to influence in a traditional manner. Seeing as street dance by history was always taught from proximity…not formality.”

Interview // Photo by Vince Patricola



Mark Flash

Detroit is quite well known worldwide for a certain strain of dance music that has been dubbed “high tech soul” by the likes of the innovator Derrick May. Rooted in the origins of techno music, which was part of a continuum with funk, jazz, and r&b long before the commonly heard banging four on the floor most people now think of, there is no greater force in high tech soul than the legendary Underground Resistance. Over the past two and a half decades, UR has taken in talented individuals from Detroit and beyond and schooled them in the ways of the underground music scene, in the process releasing classic after classic from artists who would go on to revolutionize techno many times over. Of the newest generation of artists under the UR banner to follow in those footsteps, Mark Flash is an integral part of this wave and a linchpin of the current sound of high tech soul.

Mark’s pathway to his current position is rooted in the heritage of Motown. Born to a multi-instrumentalist father who toured the country playing a variety of soul and funk based music, Detroit was meant to be his family’s destination so that his father could join Berry Gordy’s empire in some fashion. By the time they arrived, however, Motown was set to move its home base to Los Angeles. There were tough times for the family while his father was trying to hack it in the post-Motown Detroit music scene which led to Mark being sent to New York City to live with his aunt. This is where he was first introduced to early hip-hop and DJ culture. Being bitten by the DJ bug early at the age of 13 from hearing other people playing records in the Bushwick building he lived in, he used his knowledge of music styles to begin to blend the current hip-hop and disco music styles in a fluid way and throwing parties to entertain people. Discussing these origins, Flash says “The DJ upstairs was really cool. I didn’t know who he was, just spinning stuff. I’d watch him doing parties and I wanted to do that. I started throwing parties, and I made money doing that and I was like ‘Oh yeah that’s what I wanna do right there.’” That taste of the DJ life stuck with him, even after he left New York: “In New York I got into a lot of trouble, so my father sent for me and I came back to Detroit. When I got here I started going to school, still DJing and things like that. It was hard at the beginning but it worked out just fine.”

Reunited with his father, Mark continued to be exposed to music in ways that would come to define his future career. “We had a mixing board in our house and my father would teach me things. I didn’t take it seriously because I was doing it just to help him. Lo and behold, later on in my life it would come to help me produce music.” Upon demonstrating to his father what DJing was all about, his father urged him to add live instruments to help him stand out. Thinking that to be an old way of approaching things, he ignored the idea until one fortuitous day. “One day I’m DJing at home and I hear these congas in the background that I never heard in this song before. It was my father in the other room.” This revelation led to the purchase of a drum machine so that he could play live congas and drum machines along with records, and this was all the way back in the 80s. The full synthesis of all of these paths into original music didn’t occur until later when Mark met Mad Mike Banks and Underground Resistance.

Cornelius Harris from UR attended some shows that Flash played at in the late 80s and early 90s, and tried to approach him about coming through to Submerge to meet the guys and see their homebase. But it wasn’t until years later when Mark’s friend from his southwest Detroit neighborhood Rolando Rocha aka DJ Rolando took him along on a trip to pick something up from Submerge that he finally found his spiritual home. “I went down there and I went in the building, I saw all these studios and passports from going all over the world. Records all on the wall, I had no idea they were on this level. I think I went there around 11 or 12 o’clock in the morning, and I didn’t leave until 1 or 2 o’clock in the morning. I was there all day. That really got me serious. In my neighborhood, people don’t really go anywhere, they don’t do too much. Everyone has dreams but no one I knew was living them. These guys were living it. So I got more interested in what they were doing.” Going there allowed him to learn from some of the all time greats of Detroit techno like Aux 88 and Octave One, an invaluable experience. He began working uncredited on many of the productions that came out of the UR stables in various roles, all the while working on solo music at home.

Interview by Thomas Cox // Photo by Lyndon French

It was the high standards held by Mad Mike that forced Mark to keep at things until he got them right. After rejecting his first solo demos, Mike finally heard something in one of Mark's tracks that caught his ear. The advice he gave to Mark has resonated through everything he has done since: "He said 'This is what I was trying to tell you. The music you grew up with, the music you know, you need to take that and digitize it.' For some reason that made sense to me, it made total sense." Taking the sounds and rhythms he was familiar with and putting drum machines and synthesizers to them led to Mark's first release on UR, EP Brasilia, which drew on the Brazilian vibes he knew from his father's music. It took almost ten years to get it right, but he has no regrets about that. When pressed about what Underground Resistance means to him, Mark says: "Freedom. It's the freedom to express yourself through music without following what's hot."

At this time he was still working on his solo music at home, due to being married and having two daughters as well as a few day jobs. His hustles included carpentry, auto repair, and driving trucks, while cramming in as much work at Submerge as much as possible. This mentality served him well until the past few years where he has been able to live off of music alone, assisted by the fact that he is able to travel more since his daughters are grown up. Moving his studio into Submerge has affected his sound as well. "I was doing a lot of music at home. But I noticed that every time I would go there I'd get ideas I couldn't wait to get home to work on. Now I can bounce ideas off of people, utilize everyone there. Jon Dixon, De'Sean Jones, Ray 7, Mike Banks, they're all right in the rooms next to me. It's fantastic! It's like living with family."

Now that he can dedicate himself fully to music, he has many projects that are in various stages of development. Mark is currently part of three live bands, the mighty Timeline, D3 with De'Sean and Jon, and Depth Charge with Mad Mike. Playing live around the world as part of UR is a special blessing for him."I like the respect that the fans have. They have a lot of respect for music and art that comes from Detroit. I love my new friends and my new fans from around the world." He is also starting to DJ more, something he hopes will continue to increase in frequency. Making more music, however, is the top priority. His last EP included the track "Dark Symphony", which is still getting noticed five years after release. Around DEMF weekend this year, a new white label appeared at Submerge entitled Audiofluid EP. Full release is expected soon, but even more importantly the title is a teaser for his own Audiofluid label which will be starting shortly after the EP's release. This will provide him another avenue to release the very personal music that he has made his hallmark.

"When I started making techno it had a certain hunger in the track, and that soul comes out. I stay hungry. I gotta keep moving, like my old man says. Being from here, there is no copyright to soul, but Detroit has its own sound," says Mark. He has managed to perfectly tie together the Motown past with the techno future, and that has filled him with a sense of purpose that should keep him moving forward. "I feel like right now, I wake up in the morning and I'm actually doing what I'm supposed to be doing in life. I'm right where I'm supposed to be, and I wake up happy because of that."

Bethany Shorb
Well Done Goods

My eyes opened wide as I saw the huge backlit red and white EMERGENCY sign on the back wall. I had a Detroit Receiving Hospital flashback for a split second, but in reality I was a step inside artist Bethany Shorb's Well Done Goods store. The goat, deer and ram heads adorned in black neckties and printed scarves on another wall as well as the racks of skillfully designed shirts (and more ties) served as timely grounding elements.

There's a lot of irony in that scary sign as the store itself was emergency after emergency just to open the doors. They received the keys to the Atlas Building's Gratiot Avenue store front a month before the store's planned grand opening this past November. Keep in mind it was bricked up in cinder blocks since the 1980s and did not operate as retail space since the late 60s.

The renovation time provided many headaches. Not only did a massive portion (at least a ton) of the plaster ceiling crash to the ground ten days prior to the opening (as it was poorly held together by a few ancient pieces of wood), there were lots of nests and long dead animals that found their final resting place in rather challenging parts of the walls. With sledge hammers, gas masks, caffeine and can do attitudes Shorb along with her husband Kip Ewing and another handy man undid the bandage "repair jobs" of the past, gutted the place to bare bones and transformed it beautifully, right up to the hour before customers poured in.

The burning question is why would Shorb want a store front and retail headaches? She has a successful on-line business with her Cyberoptix Tie Lab, supplying "ties that don't suck" (and other crafty, hand printed items) to hip boutiques and museum stores around the world. Why be tied (no pun intended) to retail?

Convenience was a huge factor as she has been working in her studio space a few floors above and she has been a staple in that area for the last ten years. It's a short commute downstairs. There's also techno history to consider as the strip was part of "Techno Boulevard" (where founders Derrick May, Kevin Saunderson and Juan Atkins had their studios in the late 1980s.) Electronic music and culture is a clear passion and so much of her inspiration comes from it.

Not only that, the block is coming back strong. With growing love for Eastern Market almost all the store fronts on Gratiot Avenue, across from the heart of the Market, are open for business. Pioneers such as Inner State Gallery, Antietam (restaurant), Trinosophes (performance and art space, restaurant, coffee house), Peoples Records, Holice P. Wood's Detroit Life Gallery (space filled with incredible Detroit music photos, features live music and was Kevin Saunderson's KMS studio), and SMPLFD Clothing are there now with a few more stores moving in. Heck, Derrick May's Transmat studio is right on the corner (at Riopelle) and he often visits the store. It was the right time to give it a go.

"2016 was a year of doing things I thought I would never do," Shorb chuckled. "I never thought I would print t-shirts. I thought the world had enough t-shirts. I never thought I would open a store too but I guess I'm a big fat liar!"

Liar, in this case, maybe but fat definitely not. She's a spark plug, a thoughtful, hard working creative machine that rarely shuts down. "I don't sleep much and I don't just chill," she admitted. She has printed thousands of ties by herself in the lab. She's a lean rebel in a leather jacket and sported a "Why so serious?" t-shirt on the day of our interview. She's fast cars and motorcycles. She's welding steel and printing passion. She's punk and Detroit techno. She's funny and real to the core. She's brilliant and

Interview + Photo by Vince Patricola

unstoppable.

It's not only energy levels that got her to this successful point. It's the brain power behind everything in the shop. I remember playing a corporate party for an architectural firm and one of architects wore one of Shorb's sharp looking blueprint ties. I was really impressed with how he looked and I observed people pointing and complimenting his tie. I have a pair of her socks with a close up of a Roland 808 Drum Machine and they always get rave (no pun intended) reviews. Her items scream I'm passionate about what I do, I think forward while respecting the past, I have a sense of style, I have a sense of humor and I love Detroit.

Shorb manufactures about seventy percent of the store's wares on-site. The remainder showcases her expansion into carefully selected home goods, shirts, jewelry and other fun items.

Some of her biggest sellers have been lower price, impulse purchases like script plate necklaces that say almost anything but Detroit by itself. "I'm not going to carry things that just say Detroit. There are other people doing that. I don't want to step on toes," she said. However the necklaces, in their local nature and sassy, cursive ways, say Detroit better than just putting Detroit on them. For example, it's definitely a Detroit thing to say "Whatupdoe", which is slang for "what's up", when you see someone you know. If you say this to someone who doesn't get it (it happens) and you get puzzled stare back it becomes a conversation starter. But with one glance to the many that do know, they know you are down with Detroit. They are clever, educational and street all at the same time.

You'll find Hamtramck, Eastern Market, Cass Corridor, Up North and Motown necklaces that are more Detroit specific and there are also more universal fun ones that say boss bitch, tacos or cat lady. Some are music related and say acid, electro and Detroit techno.

In fact, the Well Done Goods store name came from the idea Shorb had to do a series of laser etched, stainless steel necklaces that are shaped like the temperature marker flags restaurants used to use on meat. "You can be raw or rare, medium or well. We have a vegan one just to be funny," she said.

Necklaces aside her fondness for electronic music is apparent throughout the store ranging from Techno Boulevard zip up hoodies to socks, ties and pillows that pay homage to the classic Roland 303, 808 and 909 drum machine, to pencil sets with genres of electronic music (ghettotech, industrial, acid, techno, house), to ties and shirts from neighbor Derrick May's Transmat label and hats from Carl Craig's Planet E label.

There's even a shelf rattling sound system that was installed by Detroit sound experts Audio Rescue Team. "We've been known to throw fun retail parties and we have to have good sound. I mean, how can we represent on Techno Boulevard and not have proper sound?" Both she and her husband Kip are DJs also.

Beyond her Well Done Goods store and tie designs, Shorb is an accomplished artist. She earned her BFA at Boston University then found her way to Detroit after being accepted to the Cranbrook Academy of Art where she earned her MFA in Sculpture. Her photography and graphic design works are constantly in demand worldwide. Her post 1999 art was heavily influenced by Detroit's underground music and art scene, when downtown was not so nice. Escaping Bloomfield Hills to head downtown to "the dirty city" was a regular occurrence then as her love of old architecture, blueprints, machines as well as underground parties in abandoned structures took hold and fueled her creativity. Between the décor and items on racks and shelves you can see her influences shine through with every glance.

As we finished our interview in Trinosophes she took a well earned, deep breath. She then finished her last sips of tea and said how very happy she is to have a store on the block. With everything firmly in place now she said she will have more time to create different print designs, find more things to stock the store with and make more art. Oh, and find the next mountain to climb. By gutting and renovating a vacant space completely to open a fascinating store in a month's time, expanding her internet business and completing her own artwork, she has shown she can do it all well. There's no obstacle too big. There's no unsolvable emergency here no matter what that sign says.

GRENADIER DETROIT

THE PARTY NEVER STOPS

DETROIT ELECTRONIC QUARTERLY

WINTER EDITION 2016/2017

Mark Flash – “Detroit Deluxe”
written and produced by Mark Flash

Remote Viewing Party – “Up Thing”
written and produced by Aran Daniels and Mike Petrack

Gari Romalis – “Get It Up” (Sentinal Building mix)
written and produced by Gari Romalis

ISSUE #10
LIMITED EDITION VINYL
www.detroiteq.com