

WINTER EDITION
VOL 12

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DETROIT

Lounge

FIT SIEGEL

MISTER JOSHOOA
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ABBE & TOTH
MACHO CITY
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Releases by Hiroshi Watanabe, Drummer B, K-Alexi Shelby*
this quarter



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CHRIS CAMPBELL

Watching Chris Campbell enter the WDET 101.9FM broadcast studio is a bit like seeing a ship's captain stepping onto the bridge for their shift. Dressed in a sharp light brown suit, matching tie, crisp purple shirt and a slightly tilted fedora, Campbell exudes confidence, just as an experienced sailor would. From 8-11pm on Sundays, Campbell hosts The Progressive Underground, a show specializing in neo soul, house, down tempo beats and what Campbell calls, "rare groove."

Ten minutes before show time, the studio is full of movement. New Soul Sunday hosted by Nick Austin, the program just before Campbell's, is wrapping up. The bump of a smooth beat is omnipresent in the background as lively chatter takes place between the two hosts and their associate producers.

As all this happens, Campbell opens his laptop, plugs in headphones and glances over the night's set list. In the brief moment between shows, Campbell sits down in front of the soundboard. Expertly moving his hands from one dial to the next, Campbell prepares to take WDET listeners on a three-hour journey into "the fourth dimension of sound."

Broadcasting from Midtown Detroit, WDET is the city's public radio station. Programs include the classic NPR shows Morning Edition, All Things Considered, On Point and Fresh Air. The station is heavily involved in the community and boasts a variety of original programming that highlight the social, political and economic complexities of Detroit.

On weekends, the station has several music shows. As opposed to run of the mill, corporate radio hits, WDET listeners are exposed to music created locally and from all over the world. The sheer range of music on WDET's airwaves is largely because of the passion each show's host has for sharing music. With that in mind, The Progressive Underground fits perfectly at WDET because Campbell is knowledgeable about the music he plays and loves putting people on to the freshest cuts.

Back in the studio, the vibe changes as the show gets underway. It's time for the music. On this particular Sunday, Jody Watley is set to call in and chat about her career. In anticipation of this, Campbell is playing a combination of well-known Watley tunes and her lesser-known deep house tracks.

During the interview, Campbell makes observations and asks questions effortlessly. With the way he moves around the studio, creates playlists and speaks with guests, it all seems easy. In reality, hosting a radio show requires extensive knowledge and years of practice.

"I've been doing this for about 20 years," Campbell says in between interview segments with Watley. "For me, my problem was being a perfectionist, you know? You just gotta let all of that go."

Campbell has written extensively about Neo Soul, publishing two books about the genre associated with Erykah Badu, D'Angelo, Jill Scott, The Roots, India.Arie, J Dilla and many others. It was through promoting his second book, The Essential Neo Soul 2.0, that Campbell got connected with WDET. Appearing on multiple shows to talk about the book, he was eventually asked to try hosting his own program.

"We just planned on doing it for the summer to see how it would go," he says. "There were no plans to go beyond that, but the response was so intense that it seemed worthwhile." Thus, The Progressive Underground was born. Over 200 episodes later, the show is an indispensable part of WDET's weekend programming.

As a Detroit native himself, Campbell understands the global significance of the city's music. "Detroit is really at the crux of everything we do," he says while explaining the structure of the show. "I basically craft the playlist with Detroit artists in mind. I incorporate a lot of international acts, but Detroit is the foundation (of the show)."

This is because "Detroit artists are trailblazers. In the States, a lot of the artists that I play are considered 'underground' or 'low key,' but you step over into Japan, Germany, England or Amsterdam, and they're like the Beatles," says Campbell while preparing the next segment.

"It's tragic how it's still that way after all these years, but Detroit artists power the world. People think of us as the automotive capital of the world, but really, we're a music Mecca."

Growing up in Detroit, Campbell was exposed to new music by frequenting record shops and listening to the radio. In the early 80s, radio stations in Detroit played many different



styles of music. “You would go on the airwaves and hear all types of genres played under one umbrella,” Campbell says. “Mojo played rock, hip hop, techno, R&B, soul, reggae and even a little classical. So you would get all of that under one umbrella.”

In the mid 80s, the nature of music radio changed. “Suddenly, everything had to be put in a box,” says Campbell sadly. “If you wanted to hear rock, you had to listen to the “rock” station. If you wanted to hear hip hop, you had to listen to the “urban” station. That’s when radio became homogenized. When I was coming up, you could hear all types of stuff.”

While Campbell plays neo soul, future jazz, chill wave and rare groove cuts, The Progressive Underground is known

for spinning house music. “The house thing stands out because nobody else tries to touch it on terrestrial radio,” says Campbell. Essentially, house doesn’t get a lot of play on mainstream airwaves because music executives haven’t figured out how to market it in the United States.

Despite the relative anonymity within the U.S., “Detroit has the highest concentration of techno and house artists who go overseas and sell out venues.

These (house) artists are making records in their basements that the world is dancing to,” explains Campbell. Musicians such as Jay Daniel, Kyle Hall, Amp Fiddler and Rick Wade have some of the most cutting edge tracks, yet within the U.S., they receive minimal coverage. These artists need to be heard, and Campbell is doing his part to make that happen.

As the show comes to an end for the night, Monday looms on the horizon. Yet, Campbell is at ease. It’s not quite time to worry about the week ahead. Instead, it’s time to enjoy the completion of another successful voyage into the fourth dimension of sound.

Despite hosting The Progressive Underground on WDET every Sunday, Campbell is still excited about the show. “The music keeps you excited,” he says. “Especially when you’re focusing on artists that are really about their game and about their hustle, you know? It’s all about the music.”

With Detroit music at the forefront, The Progressive Underground incorporates sounds from all over the world and across many different eras. From neo soul to acid jazz, house and down temp beats, Campbell’s set lists are always the definition of funk. With a vast knowledge of the music that has defined Detroit on the world stage, Chris Campbell consistently brings the freshest heat to the radio. Whenever Campbell sets sail, be sure to turn the dial to 101.9FM for a musical journey unlike any other.



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“All of our items are fifty percent off during our remodeling,” said Spectacles’ shop owner Zana Smith in her Detroit edged, silky tones. She was speaking to two people that had seemingly wandered in off the street while we were preparing for this interview and, of course, she gives all her customers immediate attention.

As it turned out this was a planned visit from two out of towners. With two of her very popular “Soul Detroit” design t-shirts and a fresh pair of women’s sunglasses in hand, this beautiful British couple raved (in perfect English) about the absolutely fantastic time they had in Detroit. They learned of the funky, fashionable goods available at the shop from their friends that live here and some timely smart phone research.

Spectacles, located on the ground floor of the Hemmeter Building in the Harmonie Park historic district, has been providing the mall hating, underground culture a cool place to shop for wearables, music, and rave tickets since 1984 in that location.

ZANA SMITH

When the couple left, I jokingly said to Smith “boy, this neighborhood has changed.” She looked back at me, pulled her glasses halfway down her nose and gleefully said, “you got that right!”

And we had a good chuckle.

But back two short years ago, it wasn’t so funny when the jaws of gentrification almost swallowed the store whole. The 50,000 square foot building, which many artists and Spectacles called home, was sold and its tenants had thirty days to vacate.

Needless to say there was tremendous uproar in the community and enough press to cause rapid, awkward backpedaling in the boardroom. Everyone left, except Smith. She not only convinced the giant to let her keep her store there, but remodel it for her and lower her rent from her previous landlord.

She’s the embodiment of Detroit resilience and courage. Always has been.

Going back to her youth, she spoke about the passion behind the store and music. She spoke of her affliction that she called “Berry Gordy Syndrome.” It bit with viper viciousness. “We want to make stars, become a star just like Motown.”

In her early teens, she knew people at WJLB and WCHB radio stations that would let her back stage for the Motown Reviews at the Fox Theatre and to a club called the Palladium on Grand River. “I was a tiny, petite, cute, young girl back then and they always let me in. Marvin Gaye, Smokey (Robinson) and so many super stars I would meet and see perform all the time.”

It was a given that Smith’s future would be in the entertainment field.

After returning from Ferris State College, her boyfriend at the time owned a record store (at Linwood near Davison.) She often went with him to some of the local music distributors (Simpson’s, Angott) to help pick out music.

Smith found an opportunity to have her own shop when she took possession of her brother’s store called Junior’s Jazz Room (Dexter & Richton) after a serious burglary in

1971. “I took the keys, got my record player that I had in my college dorm room and started selling vinyl and 8-track tapes.” The store windows had blinking lights and had neon signs. They sold glow in the dark zodiac posters, lights, and other Spencer’s type items that were all the rage back then. “It was Curtis Mayfield ‘Superfly’ times... stuff for basement parties.”

Smith knew how to bring people in. “Right when people got off the bus I knew which 45 record to put on to get them into the store. Once they got in, it was just a matter of changing the records to make them want that one and the next one... Music moves people into action. When someone hears a song that stirs their soul, they want it right then. They might buy other stuff too!”

With a solid understanding of the power of the media, Smith began advertising on WGPR and giving parties at the Linwood Theatre. She would often seek out the hottest live acts at that time like Norma Jean Bell, Ortheia Barnes, Millie Scott to develop relationships. Her charm and sense of style appealed to them as they became good customers at her store.

As competition grew rapidly among record stores through the late 1970s and early eighties, Smith decided to shift more towards clothing and accessories for one simple reason. Profit margins. “You make more money selling clothes. I was there when they had the \$3.99 record wars. There was tight competition and there was very little money to be made. If you sell a few pairs of jeans you might make enough to pay rent.”

With her fashion lines growing, in 1979, she utilized the next storefront over from her record shop and called it The Other Side.

A few years later, Smith relocated from the Dexter location to a new store on Seven Mile Rd as part of the Livernois Avenue of Fashion (between Seven and Eight Mile Roads). It had a music department but she started to get away from records. By 1984 Spectacles stocked very few records.

From 1980-82 she gave parties at the Downstairs Pub with legendary DJ Ken Collier, who inspired a whole new crop of superstar DJs each time he played. “That’s when I met (DJ) Derrick May and (promoter) Dale Willis. (DJs) Al Ester and Delano Smith were very young and didn’t have the notoriety

that they have now, but they were coming every Saturday to hear Ken. We all kind of grew up together. We used to have theme parties White parties, Red parties. All kinds of different parties. We would get ideas from W Magazine and we would do it like they did it but on a different level. I worked the door, sold Take 3 (Smith's promotion company) shirts and memberships. I also promoted the party."

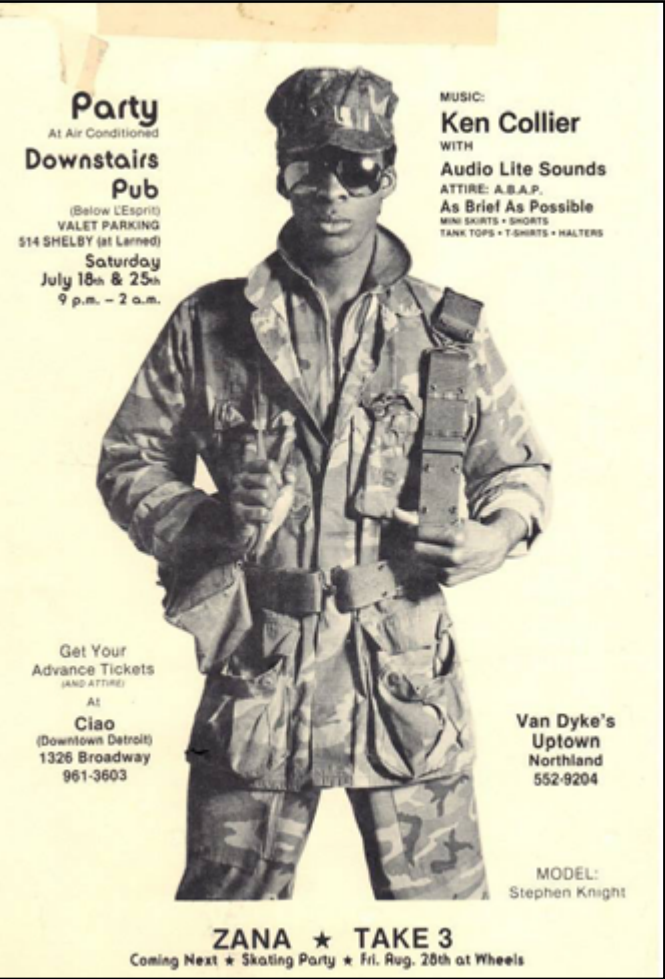
The Downstairs Pub parties were crucial to the cultural development of the underground scene here. While the crowds piled in, she was making more connections with people, watching trends, creating new customers and taking on rival promoters head on.

"There were lots of promoters back in the 80s", Smith recalled. "I was Zana Take 3, there was Charivari, the Real, Cosmopolitan and more. (DJ) Jeff Mills played for Dale Willis at La Note for the Real. They would give swank parties. Jeff was "the Wizard" on WJLB. He was aware of Zana Take 3, I think, because of Ken Collier's notoriety. The parties back then were about who had the hottest crowd or the most eclectic crowds."

Smith quickly forwarded in time to 2001, when Jeff Mills came into the store to shop. "I asked him why he doesn't play in Detroit anymore. He said, 'because nobody asks me.' Then I said, 'well I am asking you!'" A short time later, Jeff Mills played a mind blowing Wizard set for a huge Detroit crowd at Fifth Avenue. That was such a treat. Our good friend DJ Patrick Russell had an amazing opening set.

From the mid '80s to 2015, Smith promoted DJ nights and Poetry sets at Detroit hot spots such as Poure' Me Café, Hunter House, Coaches Corner, Club 246 and Café Mahogany, all of which fell victim to hard economic times.

Now it's Detroit 2017, and a boom is happening downtown. There are plenty of new, hot places to eat, drink and shop. Smith's formula of promoting a vinyl night in conjunction with her soon to be newly remodeled shop seems to still work its' magic. Her Tuesday night at Queens Bar just had its one year anniversary. DJ Steven Miller is the resident that night, but there have been many special guests including DJ Cent, DJ Dez, Raybone Jones, Seth Carter and more changing by the week.



Her strength, her hustle, her love for this culture is something we can all learn from.

When a call came in (not knowing who was on the other end) to schedule a meeting with Smith about keeping her retail space, she jokingly asked if she should bring a knife to the fight.

Her muscles and cunning were more than enough.



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JD: Full name, mother's maiden name, last four digits of your social security number:

MJ: My full name is Joshua B. Guerin, mother's maiden name is Wesley, and my social security number is 666-66-6666.

JD: How did you get into the music scene?

MJ: I suppose I got hooked by being exposed to the warehouse scene in Detroit. I caught the tail end of it in 1999 - 2000. If you ask an old timer they'd say it was all done by then but it was enough for me. I'd never experienced anything so insane in my life.

Skip ahead four years later and I got a bartending gig at Half Past 3, which is now TV Lounge. This is where I was exposed to real house music. Listening to DJs like Rick Wilhite, Bruce Bailey, Minx, Terrance Parker, Norm Talley, Delano Smith and Stacey Hale who all gigged there on the regular.

JD: DJ then composition or the other way around?

MJ: DJing I suppose came first. I've always had a drum machine or two lying around but didn't do much with them. DJing was my focus for a very long time. Over the years I've slowly collected gear until recently. Now it seems like I'm buying a new drum machine or synth every month. It's finally paying off! I've just released my 2nd EP on my own imprint, My Baby and have 3 and 4 on the way.

JD: Do you play actual instruments in a traditional sense or all electronic?

MJ: No traditional instruments.

JD: The creative process differs from soul to soul, but staying productive and original seems to be a tough

mistress for anyone in times such as these with so much outside stimulation. How do you keep focused and also keep from copying what other people are doing?

MJ: My creative process involves a lot of experimentation and not so much a project oriented state of mind. It's about finding the right work flow and not feeling like I have to finish something. If I'm in my studio just having fun the music tends to write itself. When something sounds good you just run with it.

JD: Being so steeped in TV Bar, what has been your be all and end all event?

MJ: There are so many incredible events we've hosted over the years it is hard to pick. But if I had to choose just one I'd say Ok Cool 4, 2016. The lineup was insane and the vibe was next to none. Seth Troxler, Craig Richards, The Black Madonna, Eddie C, Heartthrob, Mood II Swing and Rick Wade topped the bill. It was one of those parties you never wanted to end. Everyone recognized what was happening and went with it rather than standing around and taking selfies. Like a real fucking party ya know?

JD: What would be a dream lineup for you?

MJ: Todd Terje, Eddie C b2b Marcellus Pittman, The Black Madonna, Horror Inc, Moodymann, Jane Fitz, Dewalta & Shannon, Minx

JD: What would you call that party?

MJ: I'd call it "Don't Come" so I could enjoy it all to myself.

JD: Always taking dreams into consideration, who do you dream of working with?

MJ: Well I always wanted to produce a record with Eddie C (all time favorite) and recently that dream came true. We co-produced a cut out on My Baby 002 which will be in stores really soon.

JD: From your perspective, what is some Detroit only shit you see in our scene?

MJ: Dark answer is nitrous bars. Real answer: Detroit really feels like a big extended family. Some people say Reno is the biggest little city in the world but I beg to differ. I say it is Detroit. That can be a great thing and a not so great thing at times. However, being a part of the Detroit music scene has been my life's great pleasure. Sometimes I think to myself "Holy shit" I'm talking to Dan Bell or Delano Smith or Moodymann or Mike banks. It's insane!

JD: Speaking of Detroit, change is all around us. Do you fear the change?

MJ: I don't fear it, but I am concerned. Things are changing so quickly. I don't want things (events, venues) to get swept away because the newbies fear it. "Those crazy kids and their techno music" sort of thing. There is big money being spent all around us and you can bet your bottom dollar they will protect their investments.

JD: Who are some locals that keep you on your toes?

MJ: Marshall Applewhite, Remote Viewing Party, Loren, Rebecca Goldberg

JD: What is your favorite record store in the city?

MJ: Record Graveyard is amazing. There are so many hidden gems in there.

JD: If My Baby (label) was a restaurant, what would

be your signature dish?

MJ: Chocolate pie served in a diaper with a side of cigarettes.

JD: Your first release on My Baby with Rickers hits a lot of realms including sludge. What was it about sludge that drew you guys to bring some onto the release?

MJ: I like what it does on the dance floor. It has this hip hop / metal / techno feel that I dig. It really takes a party in a different direction.

JD: Outside of the dance realm, what kind of shit really hits ya where the good Lord split ya?

MJ: '70s to early '80s r&b, disco and funk. The precursors to house and techno.

JD: You're driving from Detroit to Chicago. Everyone you know is sleeping. What's the playlist for the ride?

MJ: Roni Size / Reprazent - New forms. That's a long ass, boring as F drive that I made many a time. You need a little extra zaz sometimes on that drive if you know what I mean.

JD: On the topic of playlists, death is inevitable and funerals could always use a better atmosphere. When you are haunting the proverbial chapel at your wake, name four songs that will ride you into the ether.

MJ: Chic "Flashback," Coati Mundi "No More Blues," Matthew Dear "Huggies Parade", Clutch "Tight Like That."

JD: Hood or cut?

MJ: Cut

JD: Boxers, briefs, bikini or commando?

MJ: Boxer briefs. I need to be free yet contained.

Look out for My Baby 002 in stores now! Remote Viewing Party, Rickers, Tammy Pickle (with Eddie C). 003 will be out soon featuring Rex Sepulveda and Acid Pimp Tom Newman. 004 is also coming out featuring Paxahau's Keith Kemp and Chuck Flask and Jaos.



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TRENT ABBE & ANDY TOTH



The analog versus digital, vinyl versus memory stick / CDJ debates have produced many heated arguments among music enthusiasts with regards to the tools of what makes a “real DJ” or a “real producer.” Is it laptops, memory sticks and CDJs or vinyl? Is it analog hardware or digital software? You know the drill by now.

With a humble confidence veteran DJs/producers Trent Abbe and Andy Toth put those heated arguments to rest by using all of the above in their productions and performances.

On stage Abbe focuses more on analog drum programming and outboard effects while Toth works more with Ableton and control surfaces. Both have years of experience DJing and stress the importance of incorporating vinyl into their sets. They both also have an unabashed, shared love for acid (house and techno that is.)

These two heads probably bought records at the same time and raved in the same warehouses back in the 90s, but didn’t know each other that well until they met in the recording studio. Toth, a studio ninja who currently professionally mixes and masters music at The Disc recording studio, is well known for helping local artists (in all genres) make their tracks sound their best.

As fate would have it (around 2012), some of Abbe’s close friends recommended Toth to master some of his (Abbe’s) old acid tracks that he had on DAT tapes. He made them back in the early ‘90s for the V-Max label which he co-founded with Heath Brunner. Toth really liked what he heard and they began comparing notes. They got along very well and have been working together ever since.

The track they submitted for this DEQ magazine vinyl compilation, called “Push It Up”, is an illustration of the creative synergy they possess. Abbe had an idea for a track that has the feeling of people at a hype show pushing up front to be closer to the music (the band or DJ.) They started to find push it up samples, chopping the phrase down to “up”, then just down to “uh” (losing part of the p.) They used it throughout this sludgy, acid laced, retro Chicago throw-back.

Their initial brainstorming is crucial. They take an idea, experiment until it has nothing to do with the original idea in a way yet it still makes sense to both of them, and then they

go for the groove. There are periods of adding and subtracting until they are down to the roots. “I think it’s a great way (to produce),” added Toth. “We throw everything in the kitchen sink and then drain it... it could end up being three or four tracks. This bass line works for that version without the vocal, but the vocal works cool without the bass line so we’ll come out with different versions.”

Preparation for their live and hybrid DJ sets begin in Abbe’s basement with all sorts of analog gear spread out on his pool table. How they use it depends on the gig.

For this year’s Dally in the Alley (popular Detroit music festival) performance, they played a lot of tracks from familiar artists, but put their touches on all of them (especially adding acid lines.) They tastefully used effects, analog drums, loops, along with playing some unreleased, custom edits. It worked like a charm as people danced the whole time. Toth made a 115 BPM remix of the Floaters classic “Float On” that was very well received.

If it’s more of a big club gig they will play along the style of who is playing on the bill, taking into close consideration the overall vibe. In this case, they may focus on analog gear and ditch the remixes. For the Movement festival, they practiced for months. Each gig is well rehearsed, but there is always some improvisation to keep it unique and interesting.

They are usually pleased with the crowd response when they play together. Abbe recalled a funny story early in his DJ career about playing a college party in East Lansing where house music was not so well liked. After the third request for the Digital Underground’s “Humpty Dance,” he shut down his equipment (around 12:30), drove all the way to Detroit to catch Jeff Mills’ set at a rave. “Now this is more my speed,” he said.

College radio played an important role for Abbe in being able to share and spread this new dance sound. He was a weekly guest at WCBN on Brendan Gillen’s Crush Collision show where he met and regularly played alongside Carlos Souffront and many other guests. Abbe also made regular appearances at WDBM performing live DJ mixes on the Mechanical Pulse show. He also made the occasional appearance on WXOU and WNUR.



Around 1994 Toth was playing drums in indie rock bands and looking for the next thing. He wanted to add synthe sizers to the band and try some new, weird things, but his mates were not very interested in change.

One late night feeling frustrated, he heard (then WDET, Detroit Public Radio host) Liz Copeland play some ambient tracks. It was a sound he was unfamiliar with, yet was excited about. He went to the store and picked up some ambient music compilations. Shortly after he went to his first rave called Deeper where legendary DJ D Wynn played. This was the moment when he found his new direction.

Toth fell in love “hard and fast.” He immediately immersed himself in the DJ world, but deep down he was intrigued with music production even more. As he was achieving his Audio Engineering degree (and after) getting a job at the studio, he would spend countless days and nights learning how all the equipment in the studio worked and often lost track of time.

As the word of mouth about Toth’s mastering skills spread, there were many “I love your records” interactions as he began working on the back end with the artists he has respected through the years. He did some work for electro producer/DJ Will Web and said to him “Oh my God, you were blowing my mind with your music back in 1995.”

Things changed for Toth when he started going into the studio with Paris the Black Fu (they eventually became the Detroit Grand Pubahs.) Toth saw him DJ many times and

perform as Heckle & Jeckle (with John “Bileebob” Williams.) They (Paris and Toth) started working together at D’Amato’s restaurant in Royal Oak. “I was bussing tables and he was cooking. I had a job in the studio with all access... We both liked whiskey and working on music. I was way more quiet and reserved and he was more fun and had wild ideas for tracks. I was immersed in technology so this worked well.”

In 2000, the Grand Pubahs put out the catchy song “Sandwiches” on Brian Gillespie’s Throw label. It hit the dance charts and the duo scored a record deal with Jive Records. “It (Sandwiches) was one of the first songs we finished... I just made a simple beat and he told me to turn the microphone on. I said ‘What you got?’ He said, ‘Don’t worry about it. Just turn the mic on.’ One take. Boom. That was Sandwiches. It was so much fun goofing around in the studio.”

The Pubahs album Funk All Y’all is a crazy ride. Beyond the lyric quirkiness, the true underground roots are firmly planted in the music. From electro to techno to hip-hop and more it is all there.

Abbe & Toth have a two track EP that came out in 2015 on LiftKit Records, a label run by Abbe. Both are big room floor fillers. “Levitation” and “Check the Jack” have Abbe’s signature Roland 808, 909 and 303 programming with obvious nods to the past. They also have Toth’s influence and warm studio touches, clean and nicely beefed up for a huge sound along with some cool effects that bring them up to the current day.

Abbe & Toth are a solid studio, performance and DJ combination. Abbe makes his presence felt with his live drum programming and DJing that calls on his vast knowledge, experience and diversity as he has been at it since the late 80s.

As I was about ready to turn my recorder off to conclude the interview, Toth said, “I love moments like these,” as we all sat in Abbe’s dimly lit, basement music studio. “This is where we shut the world out and we get to hang out, have a drink, relax, talk about weird ideas, play random records, not worry about being perfect or normal.” It’s the creative process at work. Lights down low. Minds and gear switched on.

There are no arguments, just go power!



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FIT Siegel has had a busy 2017. Those who know him might say, well, that's not news: he's always on the go and has been for the past 10 years, probably longer. That's just who he is, a driven entrepreneur and an ambitious artist. To call his company and the seemingly tireless person behind it "FIT" is a genius move and, whether it was intentional or a product of hidden, subliminal forces, a perfect branding stroke.

Indeed, FIT Siegel has carefully crafted a multi-layered career in music: as founder and owner of a label and distribution company, and as a techno and house producer and DJ that now has him gigging around the world virtually non-stop.

Much of that early work came behind the scenes, making important contacts in Detroit (Mike Banks, Kenny Dixon Jr., Omar S) and overseas (Serge at Clone in Rotterdam; Dimitri Hegemann at Berlin's Tresor), quietly building a recognizable brand with street cred stretching from Hamtramck, Michigan to Launceston, Tasmania, where he performed this summer. He also did a house party ("for about 250 people," he says) in Buenos Aires and played on top of a mountain in Chile.

The schedule didn't let up this fall. Siegel had shows in Munich, Berlin, London, Nottingham, Oslo, Paris and Istanbul on his calendar.

Trying to hook up with him face to face was difficult, though we managed to meet for a photo session in early May near his home in Hamtramck, swapped questions and answers on email the next few months, then finished with a late-night interview with frozen grapefruit and vodka drinks when he came home from Australia in mid-August.

While we talked and drank on his porch he spotted a praying mantis, apparently hunting a spider on the brick and cement ledge in front of us. "That's a big bug," Siegel said of the insect, which took an aggressive stance in front of his phone when he tried to get some pictures. "Wow, so cool. I've never seen that before."

After the insect disappeared into the darkness it seemed the perfect time to start an interview. So, FIT Siegel, from the beginning. What got you into music?

FS: "I always played instruments since I was really young.

I played saxophone, piano, guitar and bass. I can keep a beat on drums. I played bass in a band when I was in my early teens. When I was really little I had a tape recorder thing from radio shack with sound effects and microphone built in and I would experiment with that. I always listened to all types of music and worked at a record store in high school. The first time I started to DJ was when I was in college in Boston and had a freeform show in the middle of the night where I was able to play whatever I wanted."

Fast forward to after college, back in Detroit in the early- to mid-2000s. What was going on for you then?

FS: "When I came back to Detroit two years later I was struggling to find a decent job so I was doing a multitude of things - one was that I started a bike messenger company, another was working construction at a new club that was soon to open called Oslo. When Oslo opened (in April 2004), I worked in the bar and at the door, and later started to organize parties. Soon after I was doing parties at places like Detroit Contemporary and FI-Nite Gallery just for fun. I would DJ at the party as well. I would play first because I didn't want to pay anyone to do it. I was funding the parties with the money I made as a bike messenger, paying the artists. I booked a few tours to make it viable to fly them over here. I would design the flyer, hire the door guy, everything."

Where did the idea to start your own company come from?

FS: "As far as distribution goes - I wanted to stop bike messengering. I wanted a change. I saw a need for another company that could help with distribution of a lot of the independent labels that were popping up that I thought were making stuff that was interesting. I knew Mike Banks, and he had shared his experiences with me about the trials and tribulations of making records. Submerge was focusing on their house labels and the back catalogues of Transmat, KMS, and Metroplex, and Underground Resistance stuff.

But then there were all these other artists with labels around town: like Omar-S, Kenny Dixon Jr., Theo Parrish, you know, there's a million of them. I started contacting them, and other people found out. So that grew."

How did your out-of-town U.S. and overseas connections develop?

FS: “I had Serge from Clone Records play at one of my parties and he gave me some advice as well. His company Clone, became the first connect for European sales. If I had to go to Chicago or New York, I would bring a couple boxes of records over there and just go door to door, store to store, introduce myself, see if they wanted to buy records. I’d get their email and they’d become customers. I made the website. Places in the UK or Japan started hitting me up and then other stores. It was sort of a snowball effect with that.”

Where did you do your business? You’ve moved FIT Distribution around over the years.

FS: “I first ran the company out of my loft in Eastern Market, then it was on Michigan Avenue across from the train station. Then I was in the basement of Peoples records on Woodward, then a spot on E. Grand Blvd in a building that was under construction but had some raw space. Then two different places in Hamtramck, and now we are back on E. Grand Blvd.”

And the label?

FS: “In 2010, I started FIT Sound, which is something I needed to do because I wanted to have total creative control over the music and the artwork and the whole package. I tend to work closely with the artist on how the mix is going to sound, the edits, and art. I try not to change their shit, just give it a little direction.”

When did you start producing your own music?

FS: “Tonight was my first record that came out in 2012 on Omar-S’s label FXHE. I’d been making music for years before this, but this was the first to come out properly. Alex (Smith) helped me a lot on this one, helping me mix and engineer the sessions with L’Renee who sang on the track.

Like I said before I had loads of tracks but nothing like a finished product. I would always work a bit on this and that and never see anything through to the end. I would say that this experience gave me the confidence to take my own music more seriously and actually finish things. That was always the hardest thing for me, because you can always think it’s going to be better but in the end there comes a time when you have to just stop. Otherwise you are just going to overthink and ruin the damn thing.”



And getting gigs and touring as a DJ?

FS: “Traveling for gigs and stuff like that seemed like a natural progression. I had been traveling a bit here and there, but it definitely seems like there are more gigs after Carmine came out in 2015. I wouldn’t say I ‘blew up’ because I still had a good 10-plus years before that spending time in studios, record stores and listening to other DJs and just observing before ‘my’ time came.

I’m also playing quite underground events. This year I played what was pretty much a house party with at least 250 people in Buenos Aires and the week before that I was playing on top of this mountain two hours outside of Santiago, Chile. I also played a great loft party in Philadelphia. Generally, the weirder places and situations are, the better. The more dark and dirty the better. I feel at home in a shitty basement.”

The year, 2017, is almost over. Any other highlights to speak of? What’s next?

FS: “I did the Australia tour, also got to go to Tasmania this time, where I’ve never been to. I did some remixes on two UK labels: Mysticisms and Hotflush (Or:la’s Farewell 24 EP). There are also some collaboration 12s in the works with a few friends of mine.

On the label side of things we put a 12 by a duo called the Golden Mean, which is a really deep one on a kind of Chris and Cosey vibe, and following that will be another 12 by A Drummer In Detroit (aka Andres’ and DJ Dez). I also hope to release some more music from Stallone The Reducer on Est. 83 Records as well. Est. 83 is the label for the stranger stuff.”

At this point we went inside the house, where Siegel put on some tunes he plans to release on Est. 83, including new Stallone The Reducer demos. STR is Sam Consiglio, an ex-Detroiter now living in New York who was a member of Tamion 12 Inch, a three-piece electro-punk band on the Ersatz Audio label in the early ‘00s.

FS: “Weird, huh?”

The weirder the better, I say.

FS: “Yeah, I say that too.”

ASTRO
— coffee —



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“At this point now it’s become an institution,” says resident Jeffrey Sfire. America’s underground gay dance scene has been coming up in a big way over the last several years, and Macho City is an integral part of its success. Having celebrated its eighth anniversary featuring FIT Siegel, the recurring Detroit party has gone through a number of venue changes while meshing distinct tastes from some of the city’s best modern selectors.

At the center of the party’s history is Mike Trombley, who came up in the 90s at the Packard Plant and Zoot’s, where he met long-time Macho City resident Scott Zacharias around 1995. “Everyone met there and started bands,” Mike says of Zoot’s. He particularly cites Carlos Souffront’s Monday night, EXAT, as well as Adriel Thornton’s Family parties as breeding grounds for many lifelong friendships.

After five years in Los Angeles, Mike moved back to Detroit in 2004 and started the Disco/Secret parties at the Detroit Eagle, which happened on Sunday afternoon with Scott and Mike Kerns as fellow residents. It brought three devoted DJs together during a period that many describe as a vacuum for good music in the Detroit gay underground. “If you were into the leather scene that meant going to the Eagle and having to hear total crap on a bad sound system,” recalls Chuck Hampton, a frequent Macho City guest who is revered for his Gay Marvine disco edits. “In the 80s you had places like Menjo’s and Backstreet that played Hi-NRG and top 40 remixes. Then there was Todd’s, and the Nectarine Ballroom in Ann Arbor that played more alternative stuff.” The early 90s was a high point for gay nightlife in Detroit, all thanks to Heaven. “Ken Collier was absolutely killer at that club,” says Chuck. “You had house music in its proper element: a black gay after-hours club. Unfortunately it was closed down in the late 90s. The rave scene in the 90s was very gay-friendly, and that’s where the good music was, but the city started taking a hard line on unlicensed venues.”

Disco/Secret continued on until the Eagle closed in 2009. Meanwhile, Mike had moved to Philadelphia in 2005, where he and Ron Morelli - who was five years out from starting his career-defining record label L.I.E.S. - became fast friends. They started a party in Philly called Paradise, a tribute to the Paradise Garage, at “this amazing time capsule of a gay bar called Key West.” Both Scott Zacharias and Jeffrey Sfire were invited to play. With an old rotary mixer, mirrored dancefloor, and a suspended DJ booth, it looked like it hadn’t been updated since 1986. “I don’t even think I played records that night,” recalls Scott, “I think I just played with the lights!” The Thursday night event went strong for two years until the club closed in 2008.

It was at this time that Macho City came into fruition. “I’d gone to queer parties in LA that attracted a really diverse crowd,” says Mike. “It was an option for that segment of the community that was tired of hearing Britney, Madonna, and Rihanna. I wanted to create that option in Philadelphia as well.” The very first Macho City was in September 2008, which he also threw with Ron. “It just clicked,” he says. “It was successful right off the bat, and it was good to see such a diverse crowd in terms of age, gender, sexuality. It was a total melting pot.” The party happened once more in October before Mike prepared to move back to Detroit.

Taking three months to promote the first Macho City in De-

troit, the event happened in March 2009 at the legendary R&R Saloon on Michigan Avenue. “I was hoping to transfer that momentum.” With a stunning flyer from Philadelphia artist Jeffrey Bouchard, who continues to nail them all with little guidance, the first party featured Ron Morelli as its guest. It was packed. “To this day we have not had a bad turnout,” says Mike. “The party is just the right mix, and all we have to do is keep it going,” Scott commented. Jeffrey Sfire, who’s been an official resident since November 2014, says the party has “such a rotating audience, but they all bring the same vibe.” He adds, “It’s a place where people can let go of life stress. Compared to a straight party, there isn’t all that hetero energy. People feel comfortable to just relax a little and dance to good music, and I think that’s a big thing. Imagine a straight girl going to a party and seeing 10 shirtless gay dudes dancing together and making out -- you don’t see that in Detroit ever. We’re not San Francisco or New York. This is still the conservative midwest. To have a party like ours is still liberating and exciting for people.”

Macho City has survived a number of venue closings over its eight-year run. After a storied collaboration with Pittsburgh’s Honcho for Movement in 2014, the R&R briefly closed, reopened, and then officially shut its doors when Jeffrey was to play his inaugural set as a resident that same year. The party moved to Menjo’s, and was later held at Grenadier Club a few times as well as an after-hours spot called Doug’s Body Shop; a blind pig in a dangerous neighborhood named after a 90s gay bar in Ferndale. “The R&R set such a hard to reach bar for everything involved in our party,” says Jeffrey. It’s currently held at the new R&R - a side room at Menjo’s, now the oldest operating gay bar in Detroit, which features the former managers of the original R&R. “The older gay bars in Detroit have attracted very specific crowds. None of the young queer kids would really go to these bars. Macho City is attracting a lot of the Menjo’s crowd, and it’s much gayer than it used to be. Lots of shirtless dudes and straight hipsters,” Jeffrey continues. “The music is always fun, and there are all different kinds of people dancing together.”

“Some of the greatest moments ever has been when Chuck has been playing,” says Scott. “I’ve really seen the dancefloor levitate when he has been playing his own edits.” Chuck [Gay Marvine] adds that Detroit was ready for a good gay party. “There were other nights happening here and there, but those were at straight bars and you could tell that some of the staff at those clubs weren’t too comfort -



able with us queers." His sets are curated for this party with added effort. "I started doing edits specifically with Macho City in mind because the ages of the crowd varied so widely I knew I wanted to play tracks that would coax everyone onto the floor. If you can get people from different groups grooving on the dance floor, that's the glue that holds the night together. It makes a mixed crowd actually mix."

Jeffrey adds that their guests are often excited to play the gig, and that is a huge factor in their bookings. "It's about sound too. Are they fun? I wouldn't book someone that takes themselves too seriously." As a trio, the residents continue to keep the party going by staying true to its intentions. "It doesn't matter what you are: black, white, man, woman. We like to keep it foggy, dark, and loud," says Scott. "I see Macho City as a throwback, but also a celebration. We do play new records, but we like to keep this perspective where we can connect all of the dots at once." Mike adds, "Macho

City has been fully embraced by Detroit's mainstream techno culture. I'm just so happy that everyone seems to enjoy the party and supports it. That's really what it's all about. It's not just about sexuality, it's about talent and music that's compatible with where we're coming from."

The residents have been busier than ever since the anniversary. Scott Zacharias was signed by a notable agency, and has been knocking out a long list of European tour dates with Ron Morelli. Jeffrey Sfire and Ian Clark (of Perspectives and Le Car) teamed up to form Looky Looky - an italo-influenced project that was quickly signed by Dark Entries to release its debut EP. Mike Trombley is planning a Macho Edits label while manning his own record store, Stay Pressed, in Ferndale. And despite how much all three are in demand, Macho City is coming back strong in 2018 with some exciting lineup announcements.



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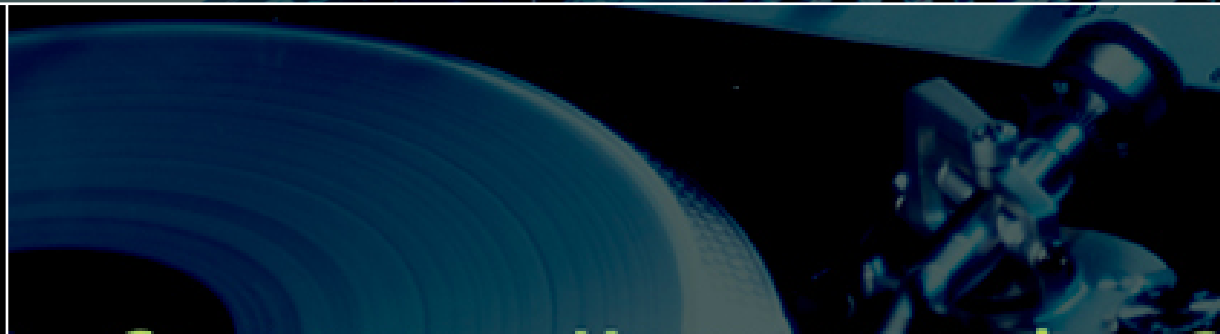
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