

History of Drum and Bass

Dance music now is like a bag of candy, once you split the bag open there are so many segments to choose from that you don't know where to start first. Whether you are into Jungle, Garage, Techno or Hardcore. It all has one thing in common and that is House music.

House music became big and blew up all over Chicago around 1985. DJ Frankie Knuckles was one of the early pioneers in this new form of music. While playing at a club called the warehouse he would experiment with soul and disco tunes by laying down a drum machine generated 4/4 beat on top of them. "The Chicago cats love this new sound" house music was not born. DJ Frankie was responsible for the all time classic "Tears" (FFRR Records 1989).

House music was still a small infant that needed to have a lot of love and special attention to help it grow. Now more and more DJ's and producers were taking the studios and starting their own interpretations of this new great sound.

There was an abundance of new tracks being played all over the Chicago clubs. The new sound of house then started to crawl it's way to other cities in America and in 1986 took it's way to other cities all over the US and started to take some baby steps across seas to the shores of the UK.

Pirate radio stations in Britain soon took up on this new sound and before long house music was being played in underground clubs in the UK. The first house tune to go commercial was Jackmaster Funks underground hit “Love Can’t Turn Around” which reached the national charts in September of 1986.

Commercial success continued for the Chicago artists and Steve Silk had the ultimate accolade of UK number one Cut “ Jack Your Body”. Some producers did not agree with this commercialization of the underground music and looked for a new sound to drive it back underground. The musical instrument that would provide that new sound was the Roland TB 303. The main person responsible for this new sound was DJ Pierre and the new sound he was putting out he called Acid.

No one knows where the term “Acid” comes from. It may take reference to one of the drugs taken at these events, but the preferred drug was Ecstasy. When Acid hit the UK a generation of kids looking for their own identity hit upon this music big time.

Around 1988 most of the big name DJ’s and producers who are still going strong today got into the scene. People such as A Guy Called Gerald who’s tune “Voodoo Ray’ still gets played out today were very influenced in the UK’s growing scene.

From 1989-1993 a fundamental change began to happen to the UK scene. It gradually became more and more segregated as people began listening to only one particular style. It was still possible to listen to all styles of house at one event, but each style was played in a separate arena or tent etc. Between 1989-1990 the style of house had changed to a more vocal version called "Garage" with tunes by Phase Two "Reachin".

Around this time party organizers became more aware of the money earning potential of this scene and if they could hold parties in abandoned warehouses or fields far from civilization then cutting the cost of venue hire then profits from these parties could be huge. Tickets for these events became very expensive and Shut Up And Dance Records release "20 Pounds To Get In" knocking the promoters for charging so much to get into a party.

During 1990-1992 the urban youth became alarmed listening to formula house music and garage music. Looking to take music into a new direction they began using double speed hip-hop breaks and samples from all types of sources including films, Soul and Reggae music and even Soap Opera's to produce a wholly British sound called breakbeat. Early record labels producing this style of music were Shut Up And Dance Records, Warp, and were produced by DJ Hype.

Gradually the sampling craze got out of hand with anyone and every ones grandmother being sampled if she said something funny. Big parties were now happening on a regular basis up and down the country with some having attendance's of over 20,000. After the bandwagon jumpers had abandoned the commercial sound in late 1992 the Rave scene went back to the underground scenes as breakbeat producers experimented more, there was a split in the music with breakbeat being split into hardcore and Jungle.

Pirate radio station flourished as more and more people discovered hardcore and Jungle, they wanted to listen to it all the time. Commercial radio would not recognize the significance of this demand and so the pirates of radio filled the hole. Some stations such as Kool FM and Pulse FM would attract 30.000 listeners on a weekend. In the broadcast the topics would be keeping listeners informed on the latest parties, records and happenings within the scene. By the 1993 there were over 40 pirate stations broadcasting to London and the South East alone, playing all types and styles of underground music.

In 1994 Jungle went national with chart hits from M-Beat featuring General Levy and SHY-FX featuring "Original Nuttah. The media loved the term Jungle. And soon you would here Jungle in the background of many things. There are many forms of Jungle some of the forms are:

Ambient Jungle- Drum and bass tracks with a atmospheric feel/mood/style to term. Some have long intros or ambient breaks. The most popular example would be Bukems “Horizons”.

Artcore/Intelligent- These were tracks that were initially written in a backlash against the big Ragga Jungle scene. The term was used most famously for the series of react compilations which included mixes by Kemistry (R.I.P) T Storm. This was and still is a favorite style of Good Looking Records.

Darkside- The exact opposite to the optimistic and catchy hardcore anthems. Darkside takes in samples from horror movies, deep. dark bass lines ad screams. Has undergone some serious developments but and ever-present style throughout Drum and Bass history.

Hardstep- A term born out of Grooveriders seminal 1995 LP “Hard Step” usually simple tracks with deep grinding bass lines and minimal of simple breaks.

Jump up- The style for the dance floor. Big, bad drums and strong bass lines often vocal samples so once you here some tracks you never forget them.

Ragga Jungle- The style of the originators. Many of the early jungle tunes took in Ragga influences. Ragga Jungle uses a lot of reggae samples and vocals. Ragga jungle uses a lot of Bob Marley samples.

Other producers were looking to take the music into a different direction and instead of using Ragga vocals to produces the Jump up atmosphere they would use, tough rumbling bass lines to get crowd reaction at events. When the DJ would drop the cut everyone would explode and flash their lighters and jump in the air and yell for the MC to request a rewind from the DJ.

By the mid 1995 the Ragga influence had all but disappeared and it was the bass lines that made a tune work. Major players were Alec Reece from Formation Records, Moving Shadow and Reinforced Records. By 1996 Jungle music had split into sub-genres of Jump up, Intelligent, Darkside and Hardstep, but with the umbrella name of Jungle Drum N' Bass.

Drum N' Bass is now one of the most innovative forms of dance music to be created, the music press have now fully embraced the scene and

artist such as Goldie, and LTJ Bukem have taken music to a more mature crowd with their Metalheadz Label.

The most popular style of Drum N' Bass still remains Jump up or Hardstep. But a return to the dark tunes of 1993 has been witnessed with this new style being labeled Techstep .Words cannot explain Drum N' Bass, to truly understand why so many people live for the break and the deep sub-bass culture you must hear the music and feel the bass hit you. When you can't stop dancing to the breakbeat you'll suddenly understand what drum and bass freaks and Junglist live for.