

## FRESH AIR

by TITE BARBUZZA

More than ten years bubbling beneath the surface, a distinctive form of leisure has arrived, and dance music, the most popular and easiest to assimilate mutation of electronic music is its soundtrack. The stage where it happily celebrates its existence is the club and the DJ the craftsman who provides the magic, the basic and animal pleasures; vibrating your body with deep bass rhythms and crisp sounds in perfect synchronisation, infinite combinations, and eternal loops: Happiness Through Electronic Music.

The flyer is the ticket and roadmap to this synthetic paradise, in New York or Berlin, Madrid or Barcelona, and is a part of any end-of-century urban landscape. It chronicles, through its sharp and apparently frivolous glance, the evolution of pop music from rock to dance.

The functions of the flyer range from announcing the performance of a DJ to the opening of a new club, from the presentation of an urban-wear collection, to the relocation of some late-night groove scene from basement to terrace. The new club circuit generation communicates with all the senses, and the flyer is one of their most important mediums. Since the mid-fifties, the Pop Art movement, with help from the mass media and advertising, has taken its pulse from the street. Popular art has dethroned the art of the elite and its fetishes: unique, antique and expensive works of art. Pop art is the culture of the masses and its images and sounds, home appliances and idols are its cult objects. Andy Warhol's huge scale representations of movie and music superstars, of soap boxes and soup tins, show us that everything can be glorified and revered. Ordinary day-to-day life can be art, both yours and mine. Great works are no longer one-of-a-kind, they can be mass-produced and copied.

Not only did Warhol turn himself into the king of pop, he turned everything that he reproduced into a pop icon. In his enormous silk-screen prints, he "immortalizes" everyone from Jesus and the apostles to Elvis Presley. Elvis himself, the King of Pop Music, symbolises the beginning of a long flirtation between image and music. With Elvis, rock'n roll got its birth certificate, and a new market was spawned: the teenage market, a virgin and multimillion dollar industry revolving around fashions, styles and clever marketing strategies.

In the late 60's the Woodstock Festival brought together 300.000 people from across the whole of the USA. They were the hippies. While listening to their favourite groups, they protested against the Vietnam war, smoked marijuana, took LSD, and slopped about naked in the mud. In the photos you can see many flowers. It is the Summer of Love and the Sgt. Pepper Lonely Heart's Club Band. San Francisco is the capital of acid rock and the Haight & Ashbury district its epicentre. There, in small shops attended by their young owners you can pick a colourful postcard-sized copies of psychedelic hand printed silk-screen posters. These reproduced the mental images of a good trip, and advertised concerts. They were the first flyers.

Staying Alive during the second half of the 70's: Saturday Night Fever and John Travolta became the media heritage of the decade. Funky Latin flavour via la boite, the discotheque,

where what mattered more than anything, was to dance... and be seen. Platforms, very tight clothing in vivid colours and afro hair-styles are the visible stamps of the era. In the British Isles, punk anarchy burst onto the scene along with its anti-idols: the Sex Pistols. Their live gigs were energetic neo-dada happenings, although the punks themselves preferred the street to the stage. There they would poke around the street markets and stumble upon the world of second-hand 40's and 50's clothing, unused army gear, old magazines and cheap musical instruments. By using collage they copied and mixed without scruples, violating all the copyright laws. The punks found in Xerox, the black and white photocopier, their best ally and took advantage of its simplicity and cheap cost to promote activities and as a form of expression. Their watchword. Rather than the well-publicised No-future, was the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) philosophy. Make your music, your collages, your wardrobe, ... and your life.

With the 80's already in progress, several million twenty-somethings watched 24 hours of video-clips courtesy of MTV. New wave, reggae, soul, punk, post-punk, neo-psychedelia, rap, hip hop, gangsta rap. The styles did not succeed one another so much as entwine and reproduce. Between clips, a lot of commercials. Rock had already become a mega-industry and travelled in a private jet. Hyper-concerts in super stadiums of mega-stars a la Jagger meant that you had to buy tickets well in advance. If not, forget it, they sold like rising shares on the stock exchange. If you managed to get in, you would have to stay in the stalls and watch your star from afar on a giant screen. In Los Angeles, around Sunset Strip and Hollywood Boulevard, paper maché heavy metal types move between hairdressers offering wavy hair extensions and beauty salons with expertise on the rock image. What matters, more than anything was to triumph, to be a rock star, to breathe fire and to have lots of money. And image could help you a great deal. It had too much to do with it.

The second half of the 80's brought house music and its variants from Detroit, Chicago and New York: a response to the imminent decay of this decade of disposable income, of Nine and a Half Weeks, and cocaine. Hatched in warehouses, with a black, gay and happy inclination, the house scene meant that once again, the most important thing was to dance, to feel good, and achieve harmony by means of a big collective catharsis. By now, we weren't watching stars copulating with their guitars on stage. We were dancing non-stop for hours and hours to hypnotic sounds and repetitive rhythms.

Scorned by the conservative US, acid house crossed the Atlantic to the UK. There, outside the law that prohibits public activities at early hours, parties were held in unused industrial spaces. The promotion of these illegal encounters, later baptised as raves, had to be discreet, underground and almost personalised. Pirate radio stations were used, word of mouth rediscovered, and there returned both the 60's flyer with its psychedelic imagery and the cheap punk photocopy. Only this time, instead of felt tip pens, scissors, and glue, new technologies enter onto the scene. That's how the supersonic history of the 90's flyer began.

Bits, Bytes, Megabytes, Disks and Drives... It is not until the mid-nineties that we fully enter the ultra-fast whirlwind of the last Great Revolution of the Century: the digital revolution. New mediums and new aesthetics, a language, with brand-new tools, that we are only beginning to

understand. For now, importance is placed on extracting new meaning from existing images, rather than creating something from nothing. By cutting, pasting, superimposing and manipulating, we have re-examined the icons of the last 40 years including those timidly explored in psychedelia. In this way, cultures such as the Indian, African and Japanese are observed with curiosity in some flyers, It is as if the images and sounds of the whole planet were put through the blender, converting them into concentrated capsules of popular world culture. Concealed within a small piece of paper of 10 x 20 centimetres, the little flyer is the quintessence of 90 s neo-pop.

By appropriating and discovering new combinations from the uninhibited shifting context of bits of information pirated from our huge database, designers create new forms where everything seems familiar to us. The designer then becomes a visual editor who turns anonymous human environments into personal and recognizable ones. The designer invites us, with a nostalgic and subjective, yet complete remix, to take one last look before saying goodbye to the past once and for all, so that we may travel lighter towards the future.

In real time, fashions and forms overlap, constantly changing, becoming obsolete and making way for new trends. The revivals are coming to an end now that we've re-read all the aesthetic and musical movements of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is nothing left for us to re-visit. Fashion and advertising are dressing up the 80's and the press echoes the irreversible reconciliation between techno and rock. We have done a complete turn around and the long romance between image and music has transformed itself into a passionate but stale relationship, in top form to breed something new.

Meanwhile, the small flyer, ironic witness to the last gasping breath of the century, casually and happily looks for those which will be the styles of the coming century. You wouldn't believe it, but these funny little pieces of paper have a lot to tell.

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