

# Goldie

## Striking it Rich

**UK jungle producer Goldie is currently at the forefront of 'drum 'n' bass' music worldwide. A product of the old school, rescued in his late teens from a "directionless" life of petty crime when the first wave of American hip-hop culture reached British shores, Goldie's journey from anonymous criminal to present day jungle superstar has been a long and winding one.**

Born in Wolverhampton in 1965, the son of a rarely seen Jamaican father and English mother, Goldie grew up in a succession of foster homes, spending his school days painting and drawing, before getting involved in minor crime sprees, car theft and the like. His turning point came when a friend who shared the same interest in art showed him footage of New York breakdancers, the Rock Steady Crew.

"It was like nothing nobody had ever seen, that style of dancing, and the graffiti on the walls behind them. I was completely knocked over by it all, and it was the first time in my life I felt here was something I could be good at. I always liked graffiti, I was very artistic at school, so I immediately got into that."

For the following few years, Goldie embraced every aspect of the US hip-hop scene, devoting all his energy to perfecting the latest dance moves, and 'bombing' the drab environs of the Midlands housing estate that had become his permanent home. A successful audition with the B-Boys, Wolverhampton's premier breakdancers, led to a meeting in 1986 with a New York artist called Brim, who was touring the UK with pioneering rappers Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force. Brim and Bambaataa were filming *Bombin'*, a documentary about graffiti art for a major British TV channel, and invited Goldie to New York to 'bomb' in the South Bronx.

"That was wicked! These were people who had turned me on to graffiti, and there I was, standing beside them in the New York underground, painting a train. Wicked!"

He arrived back in Wolverhampton a hero, a graffiti guru, and began hosting workshops as a way of introducing a new generation to the hip-hop lifestyle. He returned to the States in the late 80s, just as acid house was hitting in the UK. But without the comradeship of his home town crew, Goldie returned to the wrong side of the law, getting into some serious drug trafficking in Miami. After one too many "life and death" situations, he moved back to the UK in 1992, based himself in London, and embraced the emerging rave culture, a by-product of the acid house days.

"When I got back from Miami, I started going to these nights, these parties they called *Rage*. The DJs there would be mixing up hardcore with breakbeat tracks, and it would really freak me out. It was like seeing graffiti for the first time, I just wanted to be a part of it."

Goldie drops the names Fabio and Grooverider (two DJs he calls "the embodiment of jungle") when asked his inspiration for moving into the realm of making music, and says he became obsessed with having the duo play a record of his creation at *Rage*.

Seemingly at will and with ease, Goldie became a producer. Under the name Metalheads, he released 'Terminator', a track that has since been described as liter-

ally changing the face of UK dance music overnight — the beginning of jungle.

Like all truly underground subcultures, jungle remained a product of its environment, growing and mutating in the clubs of its birth. The eventual discovery of jungle by the mainstream British media was treated as yet another exploitable passing phase, a hip fad used to sell issues until the next 'craze' arrived on the doorstep. This was the second time Goldie had experienced the fickle nature of the press, and it has become a pet hate.

"Jungle began and it happened, then the media decided to cover it, and then when the media went away, it was perceived to be out of fashion. It's like saying surfing is out of fashion just because the media's not covering it. It's like saying skateboarding's dead. The same thing happened with breakdancing. The fashionable angle is what every Westernised thing comes through, but by the time the media get something, they don't get it in 'A stage', do they? They always get it in 'D stage'. The media start off discovering the social background of something, and then they take it to pieces, and they want to run it into the ground. But for those who are into it, it has already grown out of being a fashion and has become a lifestyle. Because jungle is not really that mature, the masses have been mis-conceived by the media as to what it really is. It's a very complex thing."

This year Goldie is bringing jungle to the mainstream on his own terms, with the release of his debut album *Timeless*, a project begun two years ago with his studio collaborator Rob Playford, of the label Moving Shadow. *Timeless* clocks in at just under two hours, and this challenging mix of 80s jazz and soul (courtesy of vocalist Dianne Charlamagne), matched with drum loops travelling at a frightening rate of BPM, openly defies the boundaries of its genre. By its very nature, jungle is music of the programmed and planned variety (spontaneity doesn't enter into it). But *Timeless* emits such a loose and spirited feel, it shows why Goldie stands alone amongst his peers.

"I'm an artist, I work differently. This album was consciously started years ago, and bit by bit I started putting it together. It's not the individual tracks that make it an album, it's the way it's put together. *Timeless* was a fast developing thing in my head. I knew what it was going to be before it was finished. I know what I'm making before I even make it, then I execute it and get it out of the way. It may not be understood right now, but I'm finished with it, I have other things to do."

Goldie has just completed a European tour supporting Björk, and is spending a fortnight on the promotional trail outside of the UK, while construction work is winding up on the new house and recording studio he's building on the outskirts of London ("I'm not getting any fucking younger you know."). A little over a year ago he set up a label, also called Metalheads, and his plans are to spend the next 12 months developing the roster and bringing the new school to the fore.

"The label is just really really important to let me see what's going on, and hear what the boys are coming up with. I think with the underground, if you're learning so much from it, it's high time people stopped thinking about making the fucking dollar bill, and start trying to put something back in. You can't take things out unless you're going to put it back in. It's enjoyable to give people the opportunity to do what I do. Also, for me, the most important thing is to find music I can listen to as well. It's very hard to get an anaesthetic with this music, when you're making music all the time."

JOHN RUSSELL