

Dance Floor

Technics DMC DJ Championships London, April 7-8.

If the 4th annual World DJ Champs and convention were scaled down this year, nobody can blame the DJs, DMC or the general public. Whereas last year the event was a three day affair starting with the convention at the Hippodrome, the Eliminations the next night at Le Palais and the World Final at the huge Wembley Arena. This year was two days, the convention first at the Hippodrome, London's huge tacky tourist orientated club on Leicester Square, given severe street cred for

one night, followed by the elimination at Le Palais in Hammersmith the next afternoon, and the Finals that evening at the same venue. If you want to blame somebody, blame Saddam Hussein, because the same Gulf War that caused all the patriotic fervour Stateside also seemed to cause some sort of national paranoia of air travel amongst Americans. London itself was almost empty of American and Japanese tourists, and it seems that many American artists simply refused to travel. Public Enemy, 3rd Bass, Mantronix, Inner City and Digital Underground were the headliners in 1990. This year the whole show relied more on British, second level US acts and what seemed like an endless

stream of bad Euro disco acts. But shit, there were over 50 live performances (or semi-live in some cases) on the first night.

The highlights were, for me, Maxi Priest, the Ragga Twins, Loose Ends, Omar (a wonderful acappella), Lisa Stansfield's impromptu 'Around The World', an amazing rendition of 'Somebody Else's Guy' from Jocelyn Brown, who then duetted with a reformed Heatwave, but especially Alison Limmerick, whose rendition of 'Where Love Is', probably the biggest club and radio record in London this year, with DMC's Steve Anderson on keyboards, was awesome.

The low point of the evening seemed to be the Sony Music showcase at the end. Maybe it was because we'd sat through some 50 acts, but we were presented with about eight of the worst Euro-disco acts one after the other. We joined the general stream towards the bar.

The hosts the next afternoon, after a late start, seemed to suffer a few technical problems. Our own DJ Raw had problems with his right cartridge output which forced him to stop half way through to rectify it, obviously putting him off his pace. There were also problems with one of the four turntables which forced several competitors to have to redo part of their set. No-one could accuse the DMC management of not doing right by the competitors in this. Not only were they fair, they were seen to be fair. In the end Raw didn't get thru to the evening's finale, but he did get one of the best crowd responses of any of the non-qualifying DJs. We were proud.

By the time the final commenced the Palais was full to capacity (about 3,500, which makes our 720 look pretty respectable), and the whistle posse was in effect as DJ Tim Westwood, a UK hip-hop legend (although god knows why) warmed the crowd up. Eight were supposed to go through from the elimination (out of 26) but the standard was so high that in the end nine went on to compete with Germany's David Fischer, the reigning champion. What was surprising was the number of return champions from last year, ie Yoshi from Japan, Denmark's DJ Wgerlee, and the legendary Eliot Noss from Finland. The standard was definitely higher

than last year, but the directive from the DMC head office about the desire to get away from scratching and back to pure DJing seemed to be ignored by both the contestants and the judges, which may in a way be bad for the competition in the long term. Until DJ Dave's defending set, it seemed as if the Americans, with D-bert, a small, very reserved American born Philipino (wearing what looked like a tea cosy on top of his baseball cap!) from San Francisco, had taken the title, especially with his finale, where he scratched using the arm over a non-moving record. But DJ Dave came on like a superstar (apparently he's made several million dollars since winning last year) and did his thing. His thing was basically a sped up variation of last year's set but he finished by break dancing on top of the turntable while it was still playing. The final result was Japan first, USA second and DJ Dave third. Personally I can't help thinking that the UK's Reckless was rather hard done by. His set was everything that DMC had said they wanted beforehand, and he did some absolutely amazing things with two copies of Cameo's 'She's Strange'. Consensus seemed to be that he deserved a place ahead of Japan.

The other star of the evening was the Russian who, while not a competitor, did unbelievable things with two very ancient reel to reel tapes decks. You can't buy Technics turntables in Russia.

Records of the competition are, predictably, A1-Naayfish, 'It Takes Two' and 'Gonna Make You Sweat'.

I can't help feeling, and this seemed to be general opinion amongst the crowd and the organisers, that in its current format the competition has gone as far as it can go, and next year will see a major change. I think that maybe it's also fair to say that for a New Zealand DJ to make any sort of impact we're gonna have to tighten things up a bit, get more flamboyant, put on more of a show, because putting your head down and doing amazing things with two SLI 200's is no longer enough.

SIMON GRIGG

Massive 'Blue Lines' (UK Wild Bunch LP)

Two stops on from Soul II Soul (whose Nellie Hooper came from the same

Bristol posse as this band), this is a typically English amalgam of soul, jazz, reggae, hip-hop, and house that is totally engaging and kinda essential listening. Includes the singles 'Daydreaming' and recent club hit 'Unfinished Sympathy' plus a killer cover of William De Vaughan's 'Be Thankful For What You've Got'. A word of warning: get vinyl as the CD issue seems to suffer from a total lack of bottom end.

Run DMC 'Fates' (Beatnik mix) (UK Profile, 100 bpm)

Remixed by Chad Jackson, this is much superior to the US and initial UK pressings, with a groovy shuffling swing based in part on Big Daddy Kane's 'Ain't No Stopping'. Best single from these guys in years, probably since 'My Adidas'.

Crystal Waters - 'Gypsy Woman' (US Mercury 12", 118 bpm)

Real hot track produced by current hip producers the Basement Boys. The vocal on this garage track sounds like Marlene Dietrich gone soul, if you can figure that one out. Number one on dance charts all over the world.

Those Guys - 'Tonight' (US MCA 12", 120 bpm)

Another Basement Boys production, this is almost instrumental sounding New York garage, the only vocal being a repeated "gonna make love to you tonight". Surprisingly underground for a major label.

Wendell Williams - 'So Groovy' (UK DeConstruction 12", 110 bpm)

Produced, like his last one, by the godfather of hip-hop, Arthur Baker, this is a far funkier affair than 'Everybody' with a great chorus, amusing lyrics, and samples obvious and not so obvious. It might not be a classic but you can dance to it.

Vibes Alive - 'The Spoken Word' (UK Bassline 12", 104 bpm)

Basically a slowed down remake of the FM Band's 'Jazz It Up' with a harder, more hip-hop drum track, definitely one of the sounds of 1991. A big hit at the Box.

Groove and the Gang - 'In The Mood To Party' (Us United Sounds of America 12", 110 bpm)

Created by the CFM Band's Renauld Deschamps, this is sort of a New York version of the Vibes Alive track with more of a lazy Latin feel and a rhythm track mutated from 'Break For Love'. Should be big in the northern summer, which is about as temperate as our winter anyway.

Christopher Williams - 'I'm Dreaming' (US Giant 12", 106 bpm)

New Jack Swing is not exactly hip, especially after the bland low rent crap that American suburban FM has foisted upon the world over the last three years. Well, just when you least expect it somebody makes a good swingbeat record. From the New Jack City soundtrack, this track just sorta grooves along at a nice pace. Nothing special, just sort of addictive.

Underground Solution - 'Luv Dancin' (Remix) (US Strictly Rhythm 12", 124 bpm)

Strictly Rhythm is the hottest label on the planet at the moment, and, although this is not totally new, it's been given a second wind by the big bucks recently paid for it by Virgin. A subtle underground house track with an enormously catchy chorus from somebody called Jasmine. An essential Inner City track for '91.

De La Soul - 'Ring Ring Ring' (Italian Flying 12", 107 bpm)

The original US single of this was rather wooden and unexciting but the UK CJ Mackintosh Party Line remix is much better with far more of a roll to it, a hot sax intro and a sample from Fat Larry's Band.

Monks of Funk - 'Wonderful Thing' (UK White Label, 110 bpm)

Another CJ mix, strongest in its CJ's In The Park mix on the flip side. The best kind of pop rap, in other words it sounds nothing like Snap. Based around the old Kid Creole hit from about '83, this is going to be huge if there's any justice in the world. Expect a local release from Warners very soon.

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