

MR. IN THE HOUSE

A state of the house scene in Denmark and Global

Opinion by our Music Editor, electronic-musician and former DJ Morten Vammen

Interview with leading Danish DJ and house-musician Morten Breum

THE JAPANESE DRUM MACHINE THAT FINALLY MADE THE WHITE MAN DANCE

WORDS MORTEN VAMMEN

What is the skeleton that connects the multitude of up-tempo dance subgenres, known as house? Four heavy stomping bass drums pr. bar, beating in 118-148 beats pr minute - the lowest common denominator in music.

Part 1 :Flashbacks

Back in the ugly 80's, when AIDS and complete nuclear destruction cast an evil shadow on a financially unstable world, a minor miracle happened. In the Land of the Rising Sun, visionary engineers from Korg, Roland and Yamaha made the hi-tech tools – previously solely owned by pretentious rock dinosaurs like Peter Gabriel and Jean Michelle Jarre - available for any hard working nerd or dancers bedroom. Now, clone the access to machines with a generation raised on post-punk and Moroders prototypical evergreen mantr groove "I Feel Love", a strong influence from Kraftwerk and an urging need for a rebirth of disco.

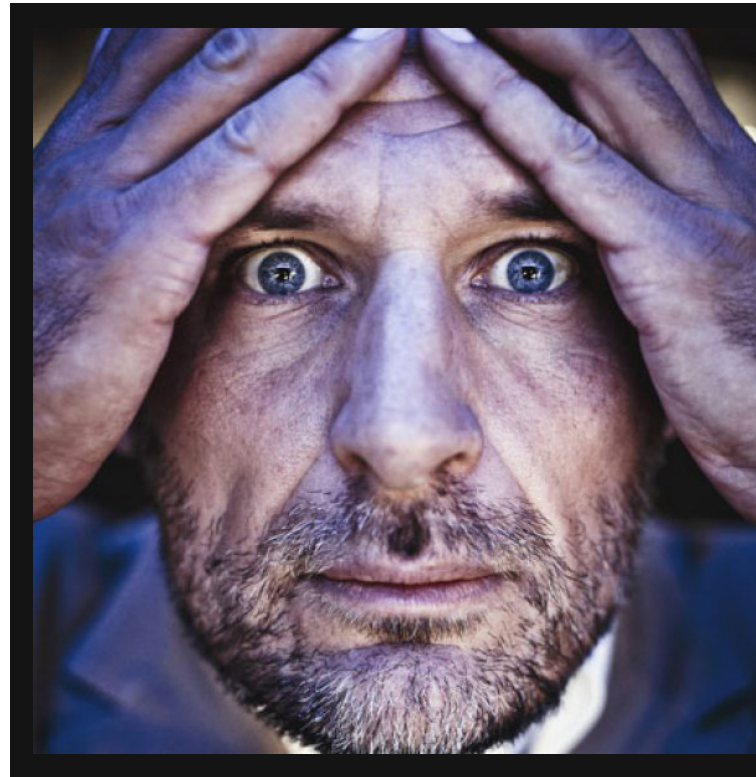
And POW! – House music was born.

Born to change any preconceptions of club music - and music in general - and spearheading a musical revolution that made even punk a tiny bump on the highway.

There was a longing for disco, a genre of pure joy, like soul without the lost love and race-issues. A pure motorically motivating muzak for sheer enjoyment. And as the reality of the 80's sucked big time, there was a need for a new beginning, a musical utopia and a forecast of the technological revolution to come, with less gloom than the dystopian industrial scene.

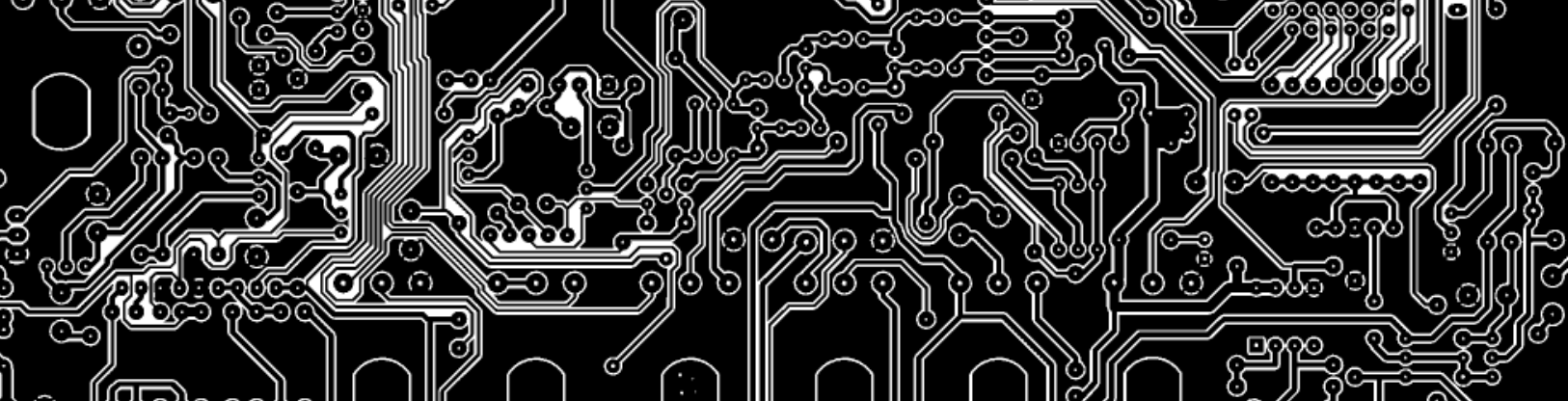
House is post-production retro disco, where echoes and ghosts of the working musicians are reassembled in the digital domain to work out dancers.

At first, the primitive 4-track cassette experiments from Chicago sounded crude. Like low budget templates for future music



longing for its disco past. But when a gang of sci-fi fanatics in the deserted motor city of Detroit cued in to the more serious gloom strategies of European post industrial EBM (electronic body music) and twisted house into soundtracks for the future, the European producers in spe took note.

This was back in the days, when a DJ was a nerdy hobbyist fighting for rare import 12" vinyl, only occasionally leaving his room to hand out flyers and getting his five minutes of fame on the dope decks. Synths and beat boxes were generally considered bad taste, and not "real music" to most people, who didn't care for the DJ's taste and sync skills. They just wanted to hear the pop/rock hits from the radio or the funky pastel of the dockside clad Montmartre scene.



Part 2 : Alone on the floor

As a DJ/producer always looking for the perfect beat in the mid 80's, I snobbishly shrug off house as poppy, gay, drug disco, fitness music, until my friends had a party with acid house DJ's in 86'. Complete with strobes and pure MDMA.

Suddenly the dark coolness and speed/coke/alcohol-menu combined with black leather and nylon gear and Front 242, Blue Monday and The Cramps seemed irrelevant. No more pogo or mating dance steps. Just dancing for hours with the whole room AND alone, to a never-ending Roland 808/909 beat.

There was no media, no uniform, no set of rules, and the records were few and rare. You just danced for days with strippers, hippies, druggies, and stylists – often just fueled from the power of the bass. A fresh feeling, and a new liberating post-post punk way to interact socially beyond the general norms.

I was immensely inspired. So I made the first acid CD in Denmark: AUM/Morph - the title a typical indication of the “fuck pop, we are fighting an information war on our own terms” ideas of the time, referring to the mantra of all sound and the quicksilver morph effects of the Terminator films. Several occult 12” singles on secret German imprints followed, along

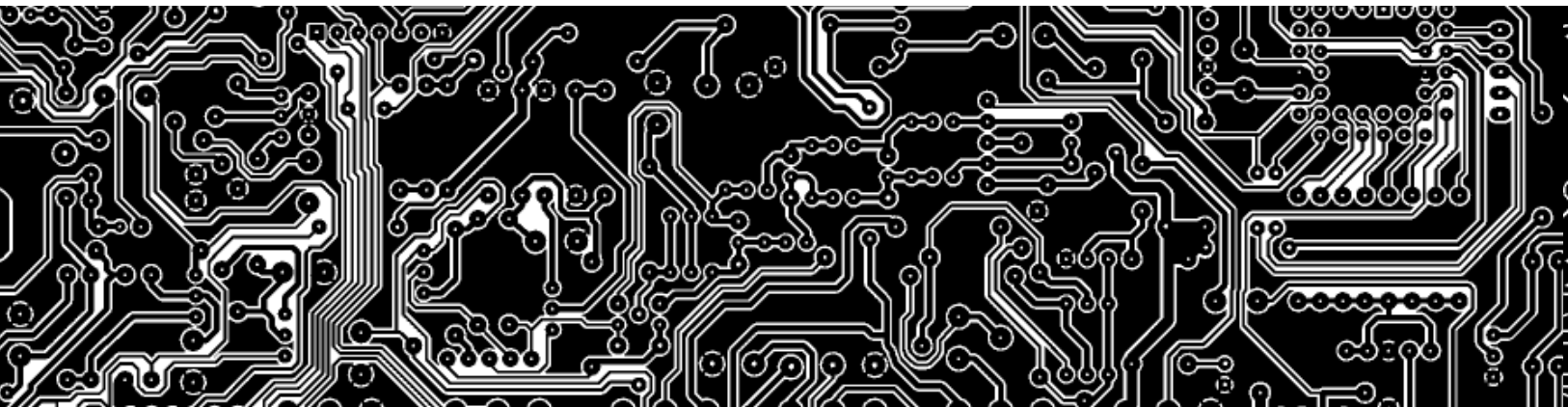
with a more breakbeat-orientated sequel CD: AAA: “Connoisseurs cornucopia”. Note the hermetic names and no photo style of the time “let the music speak for itself, fuck packaging and the star system”. The records made minds travel, and send me on a tour of the US and through studios and endless collaborations, eventually ending up making sounds for Lars Von Trier's series “The Kingdom” - and Stimorol ads.

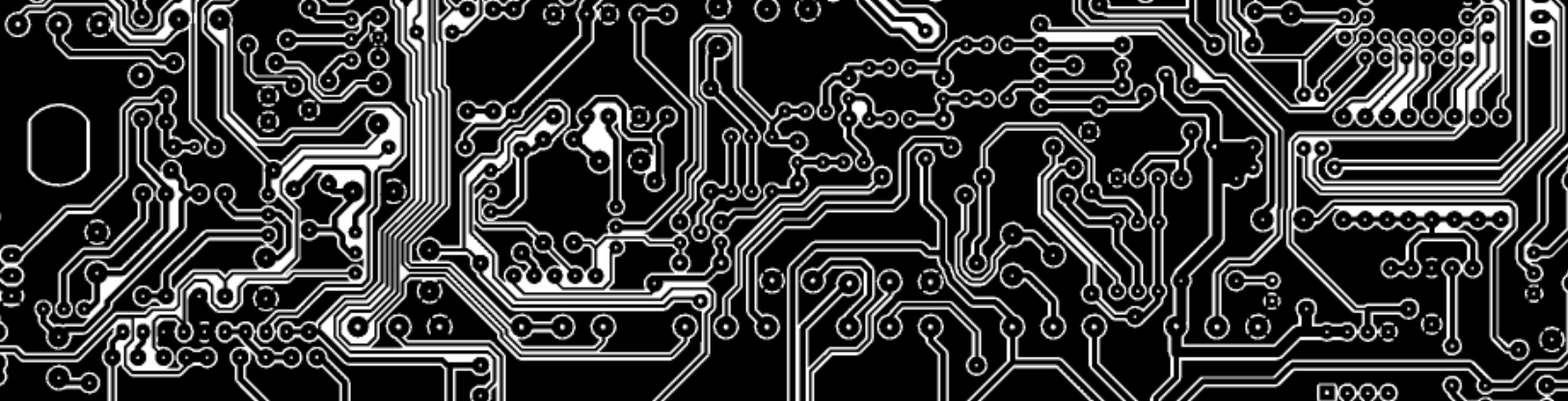
A DIY house-success.

Part 3 : Innocence lost

The innocent scene was soon exploited by pushers, media, entrepreneurs, stale radio personalities and ego-driven idiot DJ's, and split into a neo hippie Goa fraction – the forefathers of trance, and a more minimal camp inspired by the Detroit/Berlin axis. Later on, a funkier UK inspired Jungle scene evolved in the squatted city of Christiania – all three subscenes existing outside the mainstream clubs and charts.

Then, around 1996 Eurodance arrived as the new pop, making 909 beats mainstream. The old rave crowd - as any hipster crowd - needed to stick out, so they picked more avant-garde IDM sounds, or threw themselves at more mature, musical house a la NYC deep house, complete with afro percus-





sion, pianos and soulful divas – as if disco never died. The up-tempo big brother of hip-hop became a global virus, and electronic music was now the new club fodder, and Prince, E.W.F. and post grunge MTV styles died in the clubs. House was now used to sell everything to the younger hipster segments.

Part 4 : Hitting the studio

Suddenly, making music was a matter of punching some drums on a grid and sync/discipline some samples from your record collection on top and master the whole shebang with a clubshaking bassline. A world apart from the tedious rehearsal, live and studio rituals of "real" music - and you could do it ALONE.

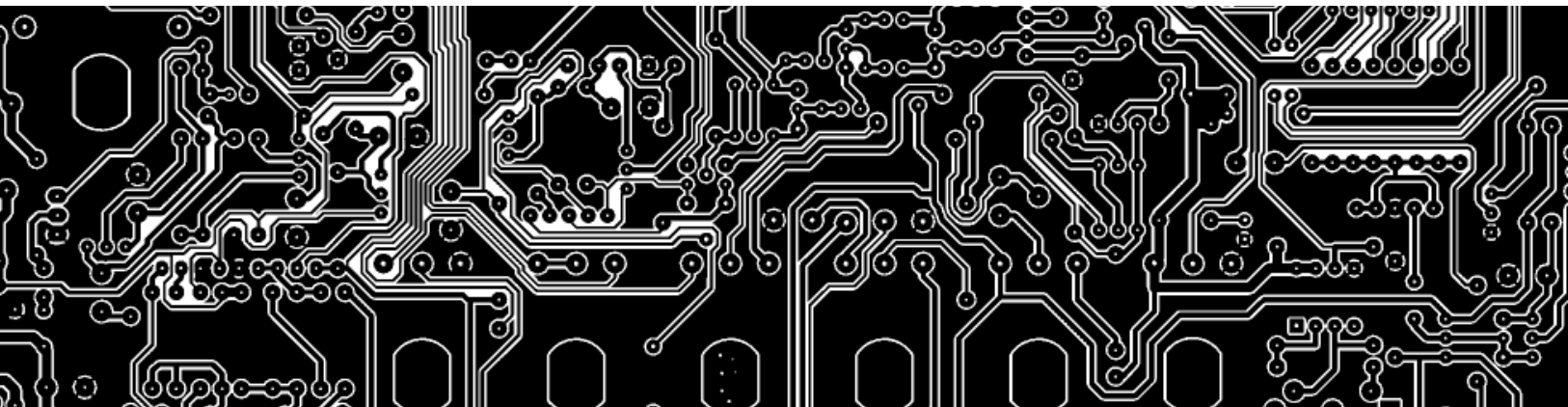
The Danes are not funky people, and as production before the laptop revolution required a lot of gear and a lot of time to figure it out, most producers made Eurodance, ambient, EBM or tech house. All a bit cold and blue, like most Scandinavian music. Danish tech house only bloomed after the rise of the Internet. The biggest contribution to the house cannon is probably the Nord company, responsible for some excellent analog-like synths, and especially the Propellerheads Reason software, which emulates all the expensive studio hardware of yesterday even on a modest laptop.

Part 5 : Voodoo house

House music - as sample based postproduction music - has a weird evolution. On one hand it's a complete underground niche music for drug dens, on the other hand it's the new pop/rock, filling stadiums. Every time house seems dead, passé and overexposed, after Swedish House Mafia or David Guetta has brainwashed us via the airwaves with another gimmick tune, a bedroom producer finds a new old record to sample and a new evil bass tactic. Everything from Balearic clichés over tribal drums to Balkan has been tamed by the sequencers and made into modern druggy march music.

Right now the new generations play around with black downtempo styles inspired by reggae, dubstep, boogie and hip-hop rejecting "big brothers music" i.e. tech house - its subcultural context gone, its sign value empty, reduced to juice bar music made by visionless attention hungry DJs desperate for bookings. But the downtempo trend will just build up the next up-tempo house backlash, like ebb and tide. Google the house blogs or beatport for further research into future beats. All combinations are possibly tried already.

And as DJ and studio technology merge on the laptop why not make your own? Music production and DJ'ing will likely end up as a kind of "Guitar Hero" game as you read this anyway.





INTERVIEW / MORTEN BREUM

WORDS LASSE W. LADEFOGED
PHOTOGRAPHY MORTEN RYGAARD

Morten Breum (29) is one of a handful of Danish DJ's riding the wave of the worldwide success of their genre. This summer, the biggest mainstream Danish music festival in the city Skanderborg, had DJ's headlining the biggest stage every night of the 5-day festival, sealing house music's status as mainstream and popular as hell.

Ten years ago, DJ's where obscure nerds and house music was for hipster druggies. What happened?

The entire electronic stage has seen an incredible development. And now you have DJ's headlining festivals all over the world. I think people have an urge to forget their troubles and just throw their hands up.

Not that you can't do that to rock, but it seems obvious to do it to house. And when house fades a bit in a while, which it will, rock music will still be there.

What is the future for your genre?

Well, music in general can hardly get more electronic than right now. So I think there will be a general backlash, and the organic sound will come back strong. Some might say that the electronic genre is at its peak right now.

But I don't think so. I think it is about to get really rough. A lot of trance and techno will be mixed in. The tech house culture lurks under the surface right now, and it can get really big worldwide. Look out for Maceo Plex internationally and DJ Henri Matisse in Denmark.

Describe your own music?

Progressive and melodic house.

What defines a good house concert?

Lots of hands in the air. And it is important for me to challenge my audience, and not just play stuff they've heard before. After one of my sets, people should be craving to find out what I have been playing. That is what I can contribute with as a DJ. That I expand their horizon and teach them something about music.

What's is the difference between Europe and the US, in what you do?

The mentality is different. In Europe, youwwhat you do. In the US, it is more ok to be yourself and just enjoy when things are going well. Production-wise, I have made several changes in my music, to ready it for the American market.

It has become more melodic and listener-friendly for the broad audience. The commercial house actually had its breakthrough in Denmark before the US. On the commercial scene, the US was stuck in the hip hop culture for many years. And it partly still is.

Morten Breum was born in Aarhus, Denmark. He currently lives in Los Angeles, USA, and has recently teamed up with remarkable names like actor Juliette Lewis (Cape Fear, Natural Born Killers) and several big names from the US house scene, for upcoming tracks.

