



NEW JAZZ

LOOKING BACKWARDS TO MOVE FORWARD, THE POPULARITY OF JAZZANOVA'S LATEST ALBUM PROVES SENTIMENT HAS NEVER BEEN STRONGER IN THE MUSIC WORLD. BY PETER CHAMBERS.

Every time this scribe speaks to Jazzanova's Alex Barck, the Jazzanovanian is dog tired. Last time, it was because of his kids. The time before that, it was because he'd been playing all night at one of Sonar Kollektiv's label parties. "This time it's both," he replies. Some things never change. Others, on the other hand, have completely transformed. Jazzanova's *Of All The Things* offers 11 such examples. The album is a radical departure for the collective, whose previous effort *In Between* traced its futuristic lines between jazzy house and broken beat. That was 2002. In 2009, the group's new longplayer is as history-focated as the old one was future-focused. The "styles" category on discogs.com captures it nicely. *In Between* is labeled "house, acid jazz, future jazz", while *Of All The Things* is labeled "soul-jazz, soul, jazz-funk, funk, ballad, Latin jazz".

The only common denominator? Jazz. But where *In Between* needed every one of those hyphens to describe the amalgamation of styles and sounds, *Of All The Things* showcases each style in a form so faithfully it's like a having a fully-blown flashback: now a Motown record, now hip hop, now funk, now Latin jazz. At every moment, each song goes out of its way to sound totally authentic to the traditions of the style it's written in. In 2009, this is hardly a novel move: just listen to Amy Winehouse or Jamie Lidell. *Members Only* readers might remember an article printed here in which Lidell explained that, for him, electronic music sounded like the past, while soul sounded like the future. It's a sentiment that Barck agrees with. "Electronic music became retro again at some point. Electronic music people were always calling us retro people, but right now I can call them retro people," Barck laughs.

Barck points out that it's just a matter of how good your timing is, where you sit in the style cycle. He adds, "It's entirely possible that your timing is wrong and everyone will just say 'what's this?! Give us futuristic music!' But, actually, the response to the album so far has indicated that it's this kind of backwards-looking music that people are responding to at the moment."

Barck also concedes that the acceptance of artists like Winehouse and Lidell have certainly paved the way for soul music's elevation into the new now, but emphasizes that this was not calculated play für die zeitgeist. "I think what all this new soul music has done has tuned people into this frequency and this has certainly made people more responsive to the new album, but it's never been a big 'decision' about what we do in terms of style. It's all a matter of what we think we are able to do or say well. Not only that, but it's about giving something back, because we take a lot from the music. We really just wanted to give something back and to learn about what we've learned by collecting records for all these years... What we really intended was to put together a collection of songs which might be something that I would enjoy finding at a flea market."

Like other recent soul albums, *Of All These Things* has been painstakingly faithful to the styles it mines (and even mimes). "We spent a lot of time, a lot of time, investigating recording techniques. For example we looked at how the Motown sound came along and why it sounds the way it does and we learnt a lot from that. We deliberately set out to do something classic, in a classic way, using the classic techniques."

Following the classic techniques to the letter meant ditching a lot of contemporary recording technologies and going back. And certainly won't find any pager loops or Bobby Brown samples on the record, either. "We've used virtually no samples. Instead of using reverb plugins, we actually just used rooms," Barck explains, detailing how, if any reverb-like effect was needed, the group would record a voice, play it through a speaker in one corner of the office, mic up from the other corner, then hit record... straight to tape, naturally. "The thing about that is that not only does it not sound like any kind of reverb, our office is unique. And so for me personally, too, it has a connection. Like when I hear the clap on *I Can See*, I know it was recorded in the stairwell and I will always be able to remember that."

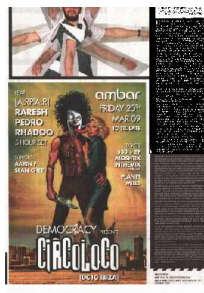
The shift toward a kind of eclectic classicism is something that Barck also sees happening to many people's tastes, including younger listeners. "If you look at what younger people have on their players, they have a little of everything and mostly a very 'classic' selection. Like, if they listen to hip hop, they will have some Tribe Called Quest, *still*, and people have the Red Hot Chili Peppers loaded on there, *still*."

Then there's the other end of the market, the vinyl mamas and papas. Last time I caught up with Barck, he was agonising about the decline in vinyl sales and the imminent death of lots of little labels. But the way it's shaping up, the vinyl market hasn't disappeared - it's just changed. Formerly, it was a market where DJs had to play vinyl in order to get the latest tracks. These days, the vinyl market is one where collectors seek out their favourites on vinyl to collect, keep and cherish. "The sense these days is that if you've got a *really* good EP you can sell it on vinyl, people will still buy it. There is a definite stable market out there for vinyl."

As a DJ, Alex also says that vinyl has retained its qualities, despite everything. "I still trust records more. I have records from the '50s that still play perfectly well. That gives the format a proven reliability, provided it's looked after well. I'm not sure about CDs and files, whether they'll still play in 50 years time. So vinyl is practical and from a collector's point of view it's much better. If you have a record, you know what you have."

Overall, the current situation is one in which vinyl has stabilised, digital is increasing dramatically, while CD sales continue to decline. In fact, Barck reckons, it's the CD that's going to go the way of pagers and Bobby Brown before old Poppy Scratchy bites the dust. "I think the CD will die before vinyl, definitely. Digital is going to be with us for a long time and oddly, it works well with vinyl. It is the CD, the intermediate form, that makes no sense." And with that, he was gone... back to the future.

WHO: JAZZANOVA
WHAT: OF ALL THE THINGS [VERVE/UNIVERSAL]
WHEN & WHERE: FRIDAY 6 MARCH, BECK'S MUSIC BOX, THE ESPLANADE, PERTH



Drum Media
05/03/2009
Page: 22
Section: Regional Changes - Perth
Region: National Circulation: 33339
Type: Magazines Lifestyle
Size: 335.00 sq.cms
Frequency: -T-----

