



# A MORE HUMAN PARTY MACHINE

**WHEN IT COMES TO HIS AUDIENCES, DAN DEACON DOESN'T WANT ANYBODY TO ACT COOLER THAN ANYBODY ELSE. DANIELLE MARSLAND UNCOVERS DEACON'S PLAN TO SMASH ALL SCENESTER PERCEPTIONS.**

**B**ringing people together is something that's never been much of a hassle for Baltimore-based electronic artist Dan Deacon. Be it making exciting collaborations with members of his Wham City collective, pulling in crowds drenched in enthusiasm at his solo shows or uniting listeners the world over with his incomparable electronic feats, where Deacon goes the people follow. Like a shining beacon, so is Dan Deacon. Well, not quite, corrects Deacon. "I think of myself more like a suggester of things. I like to see how far the audience is willing to go, and take them as far as they're comfortable. Hopefully, I help people shed their inhibitions."

Deacon practices what he preaches. Most performances find the musician sporting an unshaven face, sticky-taped spectacles and garishly coloured undersized T-shirts. His ample gut almost always making an appearance as well. As for a get-up somewhat reflective of Deacon's mantra on life: "Nothing to prove. No inhibition, no cowardice, no nervousness." That said, Deacon's live setup is enough to make anyone nervous, typically involving pedals, a sine wave generator, oscillator keyboards and vocoders, as well as Deacon's signature item: a makeshift light board with various bulbs and a green skull strobe light. "I lug it all around myself in a small suitcase," says Deacon, prompting comparisons to Mary Poppins' never-ending bag, to which Deacon laughs. "I've actually got the Mary Poppins reference a few times."

The latest version of Deacon's live act sees him play with a fifteen-piece ensemble, performing tracks off his latest album, *Bromst*. Most will remember *Bromst*'s predecessor, the breakthrough *Spiderman Of The Rings*, as a cacophony of electronic sound effects under nonsensical verbal gurglings about "goats and cats and pigs and bats/ with brooms and bats and wings and rats". However, unlike the entirely electronic *Spiderman Of The Rings*, *Bromst* utilises acoustic instrumentation and, says Deacon, contains "a varied range of densities, intensities, and textures." Deacon has been glad of the chance to ditch the Poppins bag and perform with the live ensemble. "I'm so happy to play music with people for a change, rather than machines," he exclaims.

Some of Deacon's early EPs suggest 'machines' are still his first love, particularly those on which he experimented with sine waves: *Green Cobra* and *Goose On The Loose*. D.I.Y. efforts made whilst Deacon was still a student at Purchase College's Conservatory Of Music in New York. When you consider that a sine wave's sound, in a less technical sense, approximates the sound a wet glass makes when you trace its rim with your finger, two albums' worth of the stuff is pretty impressive. Deacon



shares his fascination with this unusual method of music-making, "I was really enamoured by the rich texture of the sine wave, and how they sound different from wherever you stand in the room. Sine waves allow you to sort of suspend time, or interpret time differently. They're the perfect way to distort reality... I'd love to go back and make another record with sine waves."

Leaving New York to relocate to Baltimore at the end of his degree, Deacon formed Wham City in 2003 with his NY art college buddies. A performance collective whose early days revolved around a performance space in Baltimore ('Wham City'), the collective has now graduated into a touring concept. "Wham City has become less focused on the actual space, and more focused on the artists who comprise it," explains Deacon of the collective, which he describes as "loose, with no aesthetic uniformity." He continues, "The main thing Wham City is to me is a group of friends working within a common name to help bring attention to each others' work. There are also several group projects, such as the Wham City Box, Whartscape, and Jurassic Park, that really bring the group together".

Much of that which Wham City and Deacon himself propose as 'performance' entails a radical alteration of most people's

expectations of concert-going. Deacon's live shows aim to deconstruct the traditional relationship between performer and audience member through a recontextualisation of the show space. Deacon elaborates, "I try to focus my performance on the audience a lot more, rather than focusing it on myself, the performer. Most live show formats are like, 'watch band play', 'dance to band play'... the focus is always on the performer. I think it's more interesting to people if they can feel more attached to the performance, which I attempt to help them achieve through allowing them to become performers themselves."

In the past, this audience-focused approach has led to a number of interesting outcomes. One such moment Deacon finds particularly memorable: "I was doing a show in

this really hot warehouse in Detroit and I looked up and there were these three people crowd-surfing, in perfect time, and they all joined their hands and swivelled around and then one person stood up and pulled the other person up, and there was two people standing on top of the crowd, and then the third one sort of, dived, through the middle. It was almost choreographed, it was so awesome to watch."

Deacon looks forward to Perth audiences providing much the same amusements when he performs his solo act as part of the Closing Night celebrations at Perth Festival's Beck's Music Box, however is hoping he doesn't run into the same challenges he encountered playing support for Canadian songstress Feist at last year's festival. Admits Deacon, "My last show in Perth was most likely the most difficult show I played on my last Australian tour. I played after Feist, an adult contemporary act, to an audience that had been sitting for two hours. And I was billed as a DJ, something that I am not at all. It took the audience a little while to get warmed up, and into the idea of my show."

It's highly doubtful Deacon will run into this slow start again. This time he's being billed as a "one-man show" and is set to carry party proceedings late into the night. But just in case, we think it pertinent to steal a few tips off Deacon in regards to the suggestions our leader/suggestor will be making of us, come the event. Deacon replies that he's cool, so long as peeps get themselves into it. "I want a crowd that is willing to dance, move around and have fun. The best crowd is one that doesn't have people in it that think they are better or cooler than anyone else." Right, think we've got it: no crossing arms, moaning or moving to the back of the Box... "The best crowd comes to participate, and not to stand around and watch other people do it for them."

Deacon, we're dancing already.

**WHO:** DAN DEACON

**WHAT:** BROMST (MISTLETOE) Due March

**WHEN & WHERE:** SUNDAY 8 MARCH, BECK'S MUSIC BOX, THE ESPLANADE, PERTH

## THE DUMMIES' GUIDE TO DAN DEACON

**FROM:** Maryland, USA  
**Born:** 1981.

### BALTIMORE RULES

Deacon believes crowds in Baltimore are unlike any of the others in the US... "A lot of cities in America seem to think they have something to prove, or just have a weird vibe about them. I think too many people move to cities like New York, or San Francisco, to try and 'make it'. Some do, but most end up working a job they hate to pay for an apartment that's too small, and then with whatever time they have left they try to squeeze in some music or art. This creates an atmosphere ripe for bitterness, competition and resentment." In Baltimore, says Deacon, "People are excited to see each other succeed, or to see each other do well. It's just about having fun, or showing something you are proud of. It's just a generally positive place. Baltimore rules."

### "FUTURESHOCK" MUSIC

Dan Deacon has promulgated his own theory on modern music, which he calls the 'Future Shock' theory. "When I refer to 'Future Shock', I refer to the way technology has changed the creation and distribution of music, so much so that some people are totally lost on how to manage this new music, especially large record labels and recording studios. The technological climate also makes it possible for artists that would've been completely unknown or ignored by the media and major labels 15 years ago to now gain such a huge level of attention independently." Deacon cites Girl Talk and Tay Zonday as examples of Future Shock artists.

### WHAT THE MEDIA SAID:

"His show at the Music Box last year was an extraordinary mash between dancefloor madness and performance art in one of the most spectacular displays seen in Perth in 2008." - Harvey Rae

### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:

*Bromst* DAN DEACON (Mistletoe Records, TBR 2009)

*The Crystal Car* DAN DEACON (Carpark Records, 2007)

*Spiderman Of The Rings* DAN DEACON (Carpark/Mistletoe Records 2007)

*Ultimate Reality* DVD DAN DEACON & JIMMY JOE ROCHE (Carpark 2007)

*Acorn Master* DAN DEACON (Comfort Stand Records, 2006)

*Twacky Cats* DAN DEACON (Comfort Stand Records, 2004)