

# Scientist

DJ, PRODUCER, RECORD COMPANY EXEC—  
COULD IT BE THAT **DB** IS THE HARDEST  
WORKING MAN IN DRUM & BASS?

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Acid house. Hardcore. Ambient. Veteran New York-based British transplant DB has been in the trenches fighting the good fight in his own way for a large part of this movement's infancy. He'd seen it peak in England, and after moving to America in 1989, the North London native began offering his DJing skills to help it bubble up on this side of the pond.

Rave culture swept America in 1992, before taking a belly flop at the cash register after it was shanghaied by clueless major labels looking to make a quick buck (remember Altern 8?—didn't think so). Meanwhile DB co-founded the NASA night at the Shelter. At the spiritual home of the post-Paradise Garage deep house throng, he helped bring glowsticks and techno to the fore, and a completely new attitude. The intent of the party? To say a healthy "fuck you" to the fabulous clubbers of disco's yesteryear and to provide some Anglo-flavored raving for the underground club music connoisseur. Thoroughly anti-Studio 54 in ethos, this was a place where you stood in line, paid your money and went in, with no egotistical doormen and extravagant guest-list policies.

Nearly a decade later, DB has a host of credits under his belt. He has established himself as one of the most popular drum & bass DJs in the country. He has dabbled with producing. He co-owns the New York-based Breakbeat Science jungle shop (look for an LA-based clone opening this summer). And he is currently co-director of Warner Bros' two year-old dance imprint, F-111.

DB, it can surely be said, is one busy bloke. "People [at Warners] have no idea that I go out of town on the weekends and play to 2000 kids," he smiles, shaking his head in amazement. "They don't know that my weekend life is insane. The DJing helps out the A&R and one thing influences the other." But this kind of synergy hasn't been easily arrived at—the journey has been a tricky one.

While assembling compilations for Profile in the mid-'90s, DB helped to launch the Sm:)e imprint with Profile veteran Gary Pini. Best known for its colorful slabs of collectable ten-inch vinyl and picture discs (all of the singles from Steve Stoll's *Pacemaker* album were shaped as buzz saws), Sm:)e issued quality, but sadly overlooked, albums from Omni Trio to Air Liquide, as well as some slamming compilations and DJ mix CDs. The problem? "Profile had terrible distribution," DB moans. "They didn't have mad money to spend on marketing. If you're going to spend the money to sign a group, then I think you at least should give them a chance and that's by spending money on exposing them." But small-label economics meant this never happened.

But while Sm:)e might have lacked the muscle of a major label, heavy radio support and club play still enabled the label to sell a swift 150,000 copies of Mighty Dub Katz's Latin-disco cut-up "Magic Carpet Ride". They also had other impressive commercial successes, such as Frankie Bones' delicious "House Loop" and 4 Hero's post-hard-core classic, "Mr. Kirk's Nightmare". However, while singles did reasonably well,

America, DB concedes, is a tough market in which to break any non-rock music, so perhaps the masses just weren't ready for adventurous electronic full-lengths.

But that's all water under the bridge, he says. While at Sm:)e, he began a conversation with Andrew Goldstone (then of Astralwerks) about what their dream imprint would look and sound like. Through a happy series of coincidences, a once-in-a-lifetime run of luck, DB and Goldstone were offered the chance to make their dream a reality. As he describes it, it was an offer that they just couldn't refuse, and F-111 Records was born.

A small label, with only three staffers, F-111 is run like an indie to ensure longevity, with no exorbitant signings and caution being the watchword. DB and partner Goldstone desperately wanted to sign Basement Jaxx, for example, but when the asking price became exorbitant, they gracefully bowed out of the bidding war.

And of the records they have brought to fruition so far, DB's flawless *Shades Of Technology* mix CD has done admirably (the follow-up is due in May), and Faze Action's brilliant *Moving Cities* debut was a critical success, however DB states that both suffered from Warner's inexperience marketing and distributing to this (to American sensibilities) new and niche market.

DB can't afford to dwell on the past. "We have freedom [at F-111] and a period of time to prove ourselves," he explains, "but this will be the year. We've signed a bunch of records and now we've got to do it. This is the year that the pressure is on."



Accordingly the Faze Action record will get another push, Chicago house maestro Green Velvet will no doubt be making some noise—domestically for a change—with his upcoming album, and the lo-fi Control Freq will issue its pop-tinged electronic-influenced debut before 2000 is out.

DB has had to master the art of shrugging off the flack and running with the ball. He's happily leading a double life of working for a corporate monolith and continuing to DJ (although he only plays twice a month now per his new wife's wishes).

As he says, the one totally balances out the other, and keeps his musical sensibilities fresh and real. A guy who some stereotype as liking only drum & bass, DB states for the record that he listens to everything "from Air Liquide to Oasis." "It still amazes me that I'm in demand," he laughs. "I get a lot of requests for old school sets and I'm over it. It's just the same records. To me, the fun thing about DJing and loving music is discovering the next thing. Listening to retro anything isn't interesting. Playing an old school NASA set holds as much thrill for me as a pair of dirty socks. It's fun to watch the kids go crazy, but I'd rather play dubplates all night. Drum & bass is getting big in the States, not just with ravers, but with all types of people. Things take a long time in this country."

And faced with that fact, DB knows there's only one strategy to follow: "How do we plan our year? One day at a time."