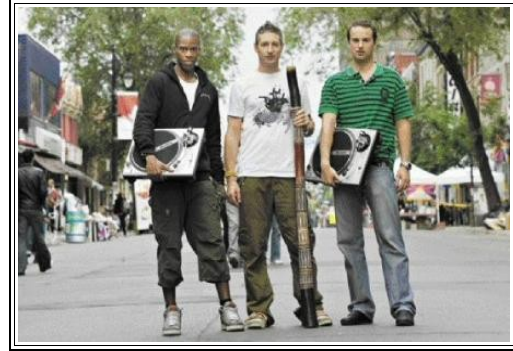


# The Gazette

Thinking globally, dancing locally

**Dubstep nights have brought the bass-heavy sounds of South London to Montreal, where the music has found an appreciative audience for all its emerging styles**



SCOTT W. GRAY, Special to the Gazette | Thursday, June 14, 2007

Everything is dark and clammy, your extremities are vibrating and there is a deep, constricting pressure across your chest. Maybe you're disoriented, sweating or unable to locate the source of the throbbing in your muscles.

These are either the first signs of cardiac arrest, or you are experiencing dubstep - a dark electronic music that has emerged in recent years out of England. Initially thought to be specific to the gritty south London neighbourhoods that spawned it, dubstep has expanded outward and taken root in Montreal, as well as in other international cities, picking up influences and audience momentum along the way.

There is some agreement on what constitutes dubstep. Based loosely on a combination of Jamaican dub, UK 2-step and electronic garage music, dubstep is usually mid-tempo, featuring reverb-heavy, syncopated percussion over an impossibly low sub-bass that is more of a physical force than an actual sound.

At a recent dubstep night during the Mutek electronic music festival, I experienced sub-bass frequencies so powerful they actually vibrated my glasses down my nose, and I watched beer cups shimmy off of speaker cabinets. High frequencies ping-pong and whirl around the listener, while deep shots drive the songs forward, echoing out with increasing intensity and heaviness.

Dubstep nights are popping up all over town. With DJ sets at Main Hall, Kop Shop, Academy or L'Escogriffe, the dubstep scene is vibrant and growing. Early in the night, events are populated by sparse crowds of die-hard dubstep fans, nodding along to the fractured tracks the DJ features.

As the night progresses, crowds from different scenes begin filing in - dancers, deep listeners and even just the curious - checking out music that draws influence from diverse record collections. Each dubstep night is subject to the quality of the sound system available, but in my experience, all share audiences with positive energy and enthusiasm for this sparse, unusual music.

Traditionally, electronic music thrives on tight definitions, subdividing various genres into micro-genres based on very specific criteria. Thus far, dubstep has eschewed such rigid parameters and adopted a more inclusive perspective, pulling in influences from a variety of different musical styles. This reaction against a formula to define dubstep has helped generate new producers, promoters and audiences globally, linked together by the internet.

Montreal dubstep promoters Nick and Matthew Burton (*aka*: Hosta and Komodo, respectively) are drawn to this inclusive aspect of dubstep, evidenced by the sets they play, and by Matthew's compositions that place didgeridoo and Arabian flute over the music.

"It's amazing what we've seen in the last couple of years," Nick says. "We've seen so much growth and diversity, and different flavours - there's the techno aspect, the hip-hop side, the half-step influence, the Middle Eastern influence. As far as I can tell, compared to other scenes, this is unique because in about a year this has all splintered off. To me, that's dubstep. It's just ... everything."

"And yet," his brother Matthew adds, "people are all still willing to call it dubstep. I think what's exciting about the dubstep scene is that we're at the beginning of it now. What's most exciting to me is that idea of anything goes. Ninety per cent of the people that come out to our nights don't know that this is dubstep. They just know they're enjoying it."

As local dubstep DJ nights or the recent dubstep-heavy events at the Mutek festival may evidence, the music has an all-encompassing breadth that attracts new fans across the musical spectrum. Montreal producer and promoter Smile Germeil (*aka* Intoccabile), has seen audiences enjoying the music even as producers are struggling with its boundaries.

"I think at the moment dubstep producers and listeners don't really know what dubstep is. It's like we're working, trying to define (it) by our output," he says. "I was kind of one of the first guys to talk about and promote dubstep in Montreal, because we felt like if we didn't do anything (it) would just die off. So that's why we took it upon ourselves to do everything - release material, throw jams, inform the public about these new, emerging styles. And it's exploding right now. It's crazy."

Dubstep DJ Philippe Aubin-Dionne (*aka*: Thehovsep) concurs. "I played this track last night and it just blew up. Everyone looked at me - just opened their eyes and went 'What's going on?' I am really thankful that I was able to discover this music, and put on nights. You know we recently had two dubstep nights in Montreal on the same night? It's amazing that something that's so central to this suburb of London would go on to have two nights at once on the other side of the ocean."

"Now, with the Internet," he says, "nothing can remain local."

The dubstep night Komodo Dubs is held the first Thursday of every month at Academy Club, 4445 St. Laurent Blvd. The next event is July 5.