

the mover / pcp

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The Mover

A profile of Marc Acardipane

A profile of Marc Acardipane (a.k.a. The Mover, Mescalinum United and another twenty or so alter-egos), the shadowy figure behind Frankfurt's PCP, Dance Ecstasy 2001 and Cold Rush labels, pioneer of gabba, doyen of phuture hardcore, and guru of gloomcore. Originally published in The Wire, July 1998 by Simon Reynolds.

Queens, New York, a Saturday night in April: Lenny Dee, hardcore techno warlord and boss of Brooklyn's Industrial Strength label, is celebrating "30 years breathing, 15 years deejaying" at Club Voodoo in the sedate suburb of Bayside. For his birthday bash he's flown in a bunch of gabba allies from across the Atlantic--stormcore DJ Manu Le Malin, English hardtrance outfit Nebula 2 (whose '92-era breakbeat techno for Reinforced reputedly blew Goldie's mind at Rage), plus this mysterious figure from Germany called The Mover who's making his US debut.

Since 1990, using over twenty different pseudonyms, The Mover has released literally hundreds of tracks via the cluster of labels affiliated to Frankfurt-based PCP; tracks whose catalogue numbers are recited in awestruck tones by hardcore cognoscenti. But when the Mover takes over the decks a little after 1-AM, it seems like few of the teenravers on the dancefloor realise that the nondescript-looking fellow in the DJ booth is a living legend. They sho' 'nuff know his tunes, though, roaring their approval and moshing violently to the bonehead bounce of gabbanthems like Turbulence's "Six Millions Ways To Die", with its Sid Vicious "My Way" intro and murderous ragga sample.

The Mover also touches on the more "musical" side of the output of PCP and its sister-labels Dance Ecstasy 2001 and Cold Rush, a style people on the scene have dubbed "phuture techno". Renegade Legion's "Torsion" is midtempo and multitextured by gabba standards, its death-ray riffs strobing your flesh and subsuming the dancefloor in a phosphorescent frenzy. "Apocalypse Never", recorded by Mover and released under his Pilldriver alter-ego, is even more intense, seething around your limbs like a marauding miasma of sentient nerve gas. As with a lot of PCP/Mover music, the track's dark exultation is poised on the brink between the Dionysian and the frankly fascist--between mob and army, desiring machine and war-machine. Its ear-harassing synth-stabs and ungodly tintinnabulations get your goosepimples doing the goosstep.

An hour after The Mover vacates the DJ-booth, the "Deeday" rave comes to an abrupt end, with Bayside's fire marshals shutting down the party for being overcrowded (the official limit is 300, around 800 turned up). Lenny Dee throws a fit, but the kids disperse in good humor, despite the fact they've driven miles into the wilderness of New York's outer boroughs and paid \$15 for a bare three hours of entertainment. All buzzed up and nowhere to go, I'm disappointed too. But at least I can tell my grandchildren I once saw The Mover.

"We want to carve our initials into the body that is history. So that in 20 years people go 'Hardcore techno - that was PCP!', like punk was the Sex Pistols and rock was the Rolling Stones" ---The Mover, 1993

Despite the fact that he has created--especially in his more experimental-leaning identities Alien Christ, Pilldriver, Tilt! and Mescalinum United--a body of work as consummate as Jeff Mills's, the Mover is the forgotten man of techno. Yet once upon a time, PCP were briefly "hip". In 1992, Aphex Twin remixed Mescalinum United's classic "We Have Arrived"--a storm-trooper stampede with a blaring bass-riff which blueprinted gabba--for R&S. The Belgian label also released an EP of Mover breakbeat tracks called "Hellrazor" under the moniker Spiritual Combat. In May 1993, the PCP crew even played at Knowledge, the London "pure techno" club founded by Djs Colin Faver and Colin Dale and run on strict anti-breakbeat, anti-hardcore policies.

But this was at the tail-end of rave's golden era, a happier time when Djs as various as Richie Hawtin, Sven Vath, Lenny Dee and Grooverider could play on the same bill, and an individual DJ set might

encompass Belgian hardcore, acid-tweakin' proto-trance, breakbeat 'ardkore, even house. By 1993, the rave scene was stratifying, with some following the trance route, some going into jungle, and some abandoning the dancefloor altogether for ambient and experimental techno. Another option--at least in Northern Europe--was gabba.

The G-word is why PCP are never mentioned in "discerning" techno circles. The Mover's music languishes amidst gabba's moronic inferno of headbanger beats, kamikaze bpm's, and testosterone-drenched sadomasochismo. While PCP are heroes in Holland, the home of gabba, its ever-expanding family of sub-labels--Dance Ecstasy 2001, Cold Rush, Powerplant, Futureworld, White Breaks, Kotzaak, Super Special Corps, No Mercy, Pretty Asshole -- is an empire in internal exile as regards Germany. PCP's antagonistic attitude has won them few friends. Leathernecks's "At War"--a Mover production--was a giant and literal fuck-you to Low Spirit, the label/promoters who rule the Deutsch-rave mainstream and are responsible for Berlin's annual Love Parade. The Mover's determined anonymity (apart from a few fanzine interviews, he shuns the press, while PCP has stonewalled my own attempts to interview them for over a year) has also contributed to the label's low profile.

Yet there are signs that the Mover is sick of subterranean existence, hungry for respect. On his Marshall Masters track "I Like It Loud", his hitherto concealed real name--Marc Acardipane--is emblazoned on the front cover, alongside a photograph. He's just released a double-CD anthology, Marc Acardipane--Best of 1989-1997, whose cover also prominently features his German citizen's photo ID card. On the recording front, there's been a flurry of Mover activity, with his Pilldriver/Tilt! 12 inch "Apocalypse Never/Hell-E-Copter" on Cold Rush and the launch of an Acardipane-run experimental label called Adrenacrome. Maybe the Mover's days in the shadows are over. Maybe....

"Mover is dark because it's set in the phuture of mankind. I can't possibly justify seeing a happy end to this stupid human drama. Darkness is not mystical, it's your everyday reality"--The Mover, speaking to Alien Underground zine

In some ways, the label that PCP most resembles is Reinforced--albeit a Reinforced stranded in a perpetual 1993, a limbo of making worldshattering music that was barely heard, let alone respected, by people outside the hardcore rave ghetto. By late 1992, PCP--like Reinforced--were on a "journey from the light" that took them into the darkside of drug culture. The two labels share an interest in futurology and millennial doom; compare 4 Hero's Nostradamus-inspired 1993 track "Students of the Future" with Marc Acardipane's apocalyptic phuture-mythos of 2017. And like Reinforced, PCP track titles and cover imagery often evoke ideas of heroic quests or paramilitary resistance; 4 Hero's first single was "Combat Dancin", while R&S released a various artists PCP EP entitled "Warriors". Above all, Reinforced and PCP have a similarly ambivalent relationship with the hardcore rave scenes with which they're linked, jungle and gabba. Early on, both labels released hugely popular anthems; yet both rapidly became too "advanced" for their respective scenes. They were shot by both sides: too "musical" and experimental for the rave massive's drug-determined requirements or the crowdpleasing DJ's functionalist approach, yet --as far as the outside world was concerned--irretrievably tarred with hardcore's brush. As PCP artist Stickhead (aka Reign, aka Miro, aka ...) complained to Fallout zine, "The problem is the normal techno scene doesn't want PCP and with the extreme hardcore scene, PCP is too soft somehow". Although it regularly scores with gabba anthems, most of PCP's output is too atmospheric, too well-produced, and, at around 180 b.p.m, too slow for the gabba and terrorcore markets.

Another parallel between Reinforced and PCP is their ambivalent attitude to drug culture. 4 Hero are all straight edge, more or less; whatever their previous exploits may or may not have been, PCP assumed an anti-E stance in early 1993. On the back of the first Dance Ecstasy 2001 compilation, there's a tiny pictogram of a man dropping an MDMA tablet in a wastebasket, plus the legend "E...? Nee!". Talking to the NME in 1993, one of the PCP squad declared: "We've seen so many people get fucked up on E. We go to the clubs and the people are like zombies. Perhaps they started two years ago with half an E.... But in Frankfurt, now they go out and take five or eight Es and you see some people they never come down. Some people assumed that we take a lot of drugs because of the names we use, like PCP, Mescalinum United... but when we say 'E? No!' perhaps people see that you don't need E to make music, or to enjoy yourselves".

And yet PCP has continued to pander to the E-monster mentality. It's not just the band names (Pilldriver, Freez-E-Style, Trip Commando) and track titles ("E-LoCo", "XTC Express", "Hell-E-Copter"). Sonically, this is drug music, no two ways about it. In his populist gabba incarnations--Rave Creator, Leathernecks, Nasty Django, T-Bone Castro, Smash?, Turbulence---Marc Acardipane has come up with a thousand variations on the E-rush activating "mentasm" sound, as invented by Joey Beltram &

Mundo Muzique, and then turned into a demonic dirge-drone on Human Resource's "Dominador". He's caned a thousand shades of monstrous monotony out of the distorted four-to-the-floor kickdrum that is gabba's low-com-denom pulse. (And why shouldn't he exploit the reduced horizons of the Dutch market, when he helped sire gabba in the first place with "We Have Arrived"?).

Just as Reinforced's dark-core delirium of convulsive breakbeats and ectoplasmic textures plugged into the paranoid sensorium of the tripped-out raver in 1992-93, similarly PCP make Ecstasy music bent to the sinister. When MDMA is taken in large amounts over a long period of time, its lovey-dovey, empathy-inducing effects (associated with the neurochemical serotonin) wear off, leaving just the jittery, amphetamine-like buzz (caused by the neurotransmitter dopamine). Rave's hypergasmic euphoria mutates into a forcefield of "weird energy" (as DJ Hype titled an early track). Ecstasy's warm glow is replaced by an affectless intensity, a cold rush.

Cold Rush is the name of the PCP sister-label through which the Mover has released some of his most inspired music. Beginning in 1993, Acardipane and his comrades started making "music for huge space arenas", tracks whose cavernous reverb transforms even the most cramped club into a giant industrial hangar. At home, on headphones, you feel like you're inside a vast cathedral space carved out beneath the frozen methane crust of Pluto. Like dub and psychedelia, Cold Rush style "gloomcore" plugs into the history of sacred echo, from Gothic churches deliberately designed to swathe the listener in non-localisable mid-and-low frequency reverberance, all the way back to the prehistoric audio-technics of pagan rites conducted in caves and grottoes.



Cold Rush's ten releases to date are steeped in Numanoid melancholy, with piteous, lugubrious melodies that seem to wilt and waver in the air. Although the kickdrum is still pretty fast, around 170-180 bpm, the dirge-like droop of shimmery atmospherics makes gloomcore feel slower than it actually is. Rave Creator's "Astral Demons" and "Thru Eternal Fog" hinge around sickly synth-drones that evoke the hideously voluptuous descent of the Ecstasy comedown. Cypher's "Marchin' Into Madness" (from the gloriously titled EP "Doomed Bunkerloops") kicks off with the vocoderized query "is anybody out there?". The answer is "no", communicated not by silence but a nauseous vulvo-cosmic churn of sound; underneath, a trudging, parade-ground beat marches you into the center of this demonic mandala-swirl of void-matter. The mentasmic maelstrom sounds like "crank-bugs" (the amphetamine-freak delusion that insects are crawling under your flesh) which have burst the skin and swarmed into a locust-horde. "The Fog Track" by 8-AM (a pseudonym chosen in honour of those diehards still standing at the rave's bitter end) starts with the histrionic injunction "empty your minds" and fulfils its own command with a frigid inferno of wraith-vapor, simulating the sensory eclipse of the "head rush" (the white-out caused by taking one E too many).

Highlights of the Cold Rush series, all these tracks were produced by Marc Acardipane, and all bear the legend "created somewhere in the lost zones". (One exception is Cold Rush #7, "created in Pressure Zones -- so better take care, Doom Supporter!"). Mover and Reign/Renegade Legion have pursued a similar gloomcore direction on Dance Ecstasy 2001 (which more often puts out rave-friendly hardtrance similar to German labels like Noom). Tracks like Reign's "Light and Dark" and "Skeletons March" are all snaky slitherings and clammy, mucoid textures that cling to your skin-surface in a sort of abject inversion of MDMA's sensuous synaesthesia. Co-produced by Acardipane, Inferno Bros's "Slaves To The Rave" is a savagely sarcastic anthem of entrapment and zombiehood, which has nonetheless been embraced sans irony by the Dutch gabba scene.

"Well you know I'm a machine, I'm wired up... I'm roaming the earth and it's nice and doomy here. The sound of MOVER should speak for itself." -- Marc Acardipane, talking to Alien Underground

Not much is known about Acardipane. In the Alien Underground interview, he cites his formative influences as hip hop, acid and the darker side of Detroit--specifically, X-101 (an Underground Resistance alter-ego back when Mad Mike and Mills had more in common with Nordic hardcore than you might imagine) and Suburban Knight's 1990 classic "The Art of Stalking" (whose twitchy trepidation inspired the Mover trilogy "Frontal Sickness", "Frontal Sickness Part 2" and Final Sickness). Other, less renowned sources for Acardipane's doomier-than-thou sound-and-vision include Belgian proto-gabba outfits like 80 Aum and forgotten rave unit The Mackenzie.

As Kodwo Eshun points out in his book *More Brilliant Than The Sun*, techno's avoidance of tradpop iconography and its lack of lyrics mean that "peripheral" elements--alter-ego names, track titles, cover imagery, logos, slogans printed on the label or etched into the run-out vinyl--become crucial. PCP releases are as rich in esoterrorist clues and audio-visual triggers as Underground Resistance's ongoing self-mythology. PCP have some of the best artist names and song titles around: Terrorists's "Prayers of Our Clan," The Mover's "Comet's Swarm Rising" and "Nightflight (nonstop to kaos)", Reign's "The Zombie-Leader Is Approachin'" EP, Turbulence's "Bass Gladiators", Dr. Macabre's "Dimension of the Doomed", Alien Christ's "The Art of Shredding". The name Renegade Legion makes you think of Kurtz's battalion gone AWOL in the Vietnamese jungle, pursuing unorthodox methods to the mortification of the US military establishment. The Mover alter-ego Mescalimum United manages to simultaneously evoke psychedelic delirium and barmy armies of soccer-thug berserkers. On the visual tip, the logo for Dance Ecstasy 2001 is an ectoplasmic energy-shape that could be an alien lifeform which insinuates itself into your nervous system and gradually takes control, or the brain-virus incarnation of the "mentasm" sound itself.

"Imagine surveying earth after nuclear destruction and enjoying what you see, that's how it feels when you listen to it." Marc Acardipane, talking to Alien Underground

In his Mescalimum United guise, Acardipane has recorded some of his most experimental work. The Mescalimum trilogy of "Symphonies of Steel" EPs escalate from the Die Krupps/Neubauten clangour of "Part One" to the Merzbow-like gabba concrete cacophony of "Part 3". In between came "Jupiter Pulse", the B-Side of "Symphonies of Steel: The Second Level"--a foray into what Acardipane has called "sick ambient," a beat-less deathscape of noxious fumes and aftermath atmospherics. If most PCP music has a militaristic feel, a blitzkrieg surge towards wargasmic release, "Jupiter Pulse" is the sound of post-coital/post-catastrophic tristesse. Perhaps frustrated by the lack of recognition garnered by his detours into isolationist abstraction (which certainly bear comparison with, say, Porter Ricks or the superb new Plastikman album), Acardipane's new label Adrenacrome is devoted to experimental electronica. The metallic, glossily reflective sleeves break with gabba's traditional iconography of horror-movie grotesquerie and are more suggestive of a trendy minimalist techno imprint. Ironically, and despite the promising name ("adrenachrome" is a mythical adrenalin-based drug mentioned in *Fear and Loathing In Las Vegas* that reputedly feels like being plugged into a million-volt socket), Acardipane's first 8 track EP via the label is far less interesting than his gabba-affiliated output. Yearnings for credibility aside, Acardipane knows which side his bread is buttered. I doubt that he'll ever renounce the populist pull of the hardcore market. His latest Marshall Masters release "I Like It Loud" is a joyfully cretinized stomp of gabba volksmusik with a melody-riff that sounds like the Oompahs 's song in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. And in the sleeve notes to *Marc Acardipane--Best 1989-97*, he bigs up the Rotterdam massive with a matey "to all you dutch gabbers, nuff respect and stay hard-core for the year 2017."

Despite occasional stabs at electro-style jittery rhythm-programming (Mescalimum United's "Vs Evil") and breakbeat science (from 1992's *Spiritual Combat* EP to his jokey jungle-meets-classical novelty record released as Beethoven), Acardipane has mostly stuck with the monolithic four-to-the-floor kick drum. Gabba's "funklessness" may be the ultimate barrier to Acardipane's rehabilitation and recognition by the techno cognoscenti. Gabba's piledriver pummel is unrelenting and monotonous, but it doesn't have to be braindead. PCP's punisher-beats are cunningly inflected, alternating between saturated intensity and stripped-down severity. Above all, creativity comes into play with the timbral density of the kick itself: how thick, how wide, how voluptuously concussive each cranium-denting impact can be. When gabba fans groan the chant "need a bass!", they're not actually talking about bass in the conventional sense, but rather the trampoline-like boinggg of the smearily distorted

kickdrum. Mover and his PCP comrades have created symphonies in four-to-the-floor like Tilt!'s "Pitch-Hiker" and Miro's "Bass Drum Elevation", multi-tiered architectures constructed out of just kicks, claps and hi-hats, plus the halo of reverb and the gated crispness of attack. What this music offers is a different kind of rhythmic compulsion to funk's syncopated grooves: a white-line fervour of tunnel-vision fixation. Jonathan "Roadrunner" Richman and Neu! would understand.

Anyway, as a musical attribute, "funk" is just the tiniest bit over-rated, don't you think? Whenever a dance genre starts pining for a return to "da funk", it's a sure sign of encroaching debility. Detroit-pietist UK techno started to become irrelevant round about the time producers began prattling about "phunk", while drum & bass's current two-step-and-acridly-convoluted-bassline stagnation is accompanied by similar funkster rhetoric. You can hear the same kind of talk from 1998's most ludicrous micro-genre--"nu skool breaks" aka "subfunk"--which is basically "intelligent big beat", big beat with all the fun taken out of it.

All these scenes began as anti-cheese manoeuvres by hipsters hoping to alienate the rave audience. What I love about PCP and the Mover's work is that they're not scared to risk being corny: along with the exquisitely nuanced textures, there's always a big fat hook for the ravefloor massive. Jungle lost its common touch last year, its last gasp of cheesy-quaver-ness being Doc Scott's "Shadow Boxing", with its almost comically doomladen riff (a sort of cosmic scowl). Here's hoping that Marc Acardipane never loses his flair for the all-conquering, avant-lumpen cliché.

Founder of Hardcore-Techno

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