

**“WHERE THE MIX IS PERFECT”:
VOICES FROM THE POST-MOTOWN SOUNDSCAPE**

by

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University of Pittsburgh, 2011

In recent years, the city of Detroit’s economic struggles, including its cultural expressions, have become focal points for discussing the health of the American dream. However, this discussion has rarely strayed from the use of hackneyed factory metaphors, worn-out success-and-failure stories, and an ever-narrowing cast of characters. The result is that the common sense understanding of Detroit’s musical and cultural legacy tends to end in 1972 with the departure of Motown Records from the city to Los Angeles, if not even earlier in the aftermath of the riot / uprising of 1967. In “‘Where The Mix Is Perfect’: Voices From The Post-Motown Soundscape,” I provide an oral history of Detroit’s post-Motown aural history and in the process make available a new urban imaginary for judging the city’s wellbeing. To do this I utilize archival research and interviews in order to recover the life stories of a group of Detroiters in their struggle to change and be changed by Detroit’s soundscape during the post-Motown era. A diachronic study, my dissertation starts by revisiting Detroit’s role in the modern soundscape from musicians, dancers, promoters, and critics who experienced the city’s numerous ballrooms and clubs, listened to its charismatic radio DJs, and produced its studio-driven sound. However, as my dissertation proceeds, I pay special attention to the emergence of a new soundscape in the 1970s with a new set of heroes—club DJs—and an audience that both reflected and resisted the

racial, sexual, and class hierarchies of the period. Detroiters experienced the impact of this subterranean population in the ensuing years as the genres of disco, hip hop, house, and techno emerged and the city's residents mixed together as they had rarely done before or since.

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PREFACE

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I have listed those interviews that I have used in this dissertation in the bibliography. I am resisting thanking everyone I have interviewed here though because this project has just begun and there were many interviewee stories I was not able to use at this time. I am looking forward to extending my conversations and revisiting all of my interviews for a future book. Regardless, I have to thank all of my interviewees. Without them this project does not exist.

I would like to thank my editors at the *Metro Times*, Larry Gabriel, W. Kim Heron, Melissa Giannini, and Brian Smith, who gave me the room to explore the post-Motown soundscape. In this regard, I would like to especially thank Chris Handyside for giving me my break as a music journalist in 1999 and calling with Eminem tickets in 2010. As a writer, I am also indebted to a number of Detroiters who have mentored me, including Hobey Echlin, Casey Coston, Khary Turner, Bill Brown, and Kristin Palm. Writer and DJ Walter Wasacz spent a great many hours during the last decade helping me articulate a coherent view of the sonic place that we both love. He continues to support and inspire me.

On a personal level, I would like to thank my family, including my mother, Mary, father, Anthony, and my brother, Alex, as well as my surviving Grandparents, Anthony and Helmi, for their constant love and intellectual support throughout my life. I would like to thank George and Gail Ryder for their support throughout my Michigan years as well as for (re) turning me on to the Electrifying Mojo in the early 1990s. Lastly, I would like to thank Clariza for help with editing as well as support during the final months, weeks, and days of this dissertation process.

All of these debts I have incurred cannot be repaid.

Los amo todos.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

“When the world won’t give you what you need you have to make it on your own.”

—Voice-over during trailer for *8 Mile* (2002).¹

Sporting a gray sweatshirt and stocking cap, a lone, white, male figure gets on a mostly vacant city bus. He puts the headphones he has been wearing around his neck onto his ears. He turns on a small, black digital music player and unfolds two small sheets of paper—one white, the other yellow—filled with a seemingly haphazard arrangement of words, phrases, and scribbles. He uncaps a black pen as he hears a beat begin in his headphones. He is ready to work. The journey to his destination has already begun. It is desolate winter’s day in a deeply damaged urban landscape. As the city passes by, the young man brainstorms lyrics on the sheets of paper but he also looks out the bus window onto the street. He sees liquor stores and abandoned buildings, gun-range notices and empty lots, colorful painted dots and gray dirty snow.

In the opening of *8 Mile*, Rabbit, played by Marshall “Eminem” Mathers, takes a bus ride from his Mother’s trailer park just north of 8 Mile Road, the northern border of Detroit, into the city while brainstorming what will eventually become “Lose Yourself,” the dramatic theme song

¹ See the *8 Mile* trailer via Zimbio: <<http://www.zimbio.com/watch/zCbaMEIEeYD/8+Mile/8+Mile>> (accessed 1 February 2011). *8 Mile*, directed by Curtis Hanson (Universal City, Calif.: Universal Studios, 2002).

for the film which won an Oscar in 2003.² Within the world of the film, Rabbit goes from the “white-trash” world of Detroit’s borderland to the inner city. The crossing of borders—the journey through the streets of metropolitan Detroit—in the scene is an allegory of Rabbit’s own personal journey throughout the film. As he crosses area codes (from the “810” to the “313”), Rabbit crosses racial, musical, and class borders. In the process, spurred by his own inner demons, Rabbit channels his talents as a rapper to narrate his own mission to provide for his family, himself, and his own desires.³ At the same time the film’s stylistic choices—the spectacle of decay, the monotony of the factory, the darkness of the club—were consonant with other widely circulated representations of Detroit, whether from other Hollywood films,⁴ literary critics⁵, or “Ruin Porn.”⁶ In a later scene, when Rabbit spontaneously raps his way into a verbal confrontation in the parking lot of the stamping plant where he works—the highly creative, impromptu battle taking place amidst the bleakness of Detroit’s urban, former industrial core—it is not difficult to imagine why one of the key slogans in *8 Mile*’s trailer—“If the streets had a voice / this is the story they would tell”—resonated with audiences.⁷

² See the bus ride sequence via Zimbio:

<http://www.zimbio.com/watch/C_3y8Q0WcDX/8+Mile+Scene+Bus+Ride/8+Mile> (accessed 1 February 2011).

³ Another voice over from the trailer: “A young rapper, struggling with every aspect of his life, wants to make the most of what could be his final opportunity but his problems around gives him doubts.”

⁴ Terry Lawson, “Lights Camera Motown,” in *The Detroit Almanac: 300 Years of Life in the Motor City*, ed. Peter Gavrilovich and Bill McGraw (Detroit: Detroit Free Press, 2000), 356-60.

⁵ Jerry Herron, *AfterCulture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993). See also David M. Sheridan, *Narrative and Counter-Narrative in Detroit* (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 2001).

⁶ Thomas Morton, “Something, Something, Something, Detroit: Lazy Journalists Love Pictures of Abandoned Stuff,” *Vice Magazine*, August 2009. <<http://www.viceland.com/int/v16n8/htdocs/something-something-something-detroit-994.php?page=1>> (Accessed December 8, 2010). For a coffee-table version of this, see Andrew Moore, *Detroit Disassembled* (Akron, Ohio: Diamini/Akron Art Museum, 2010).

⁷ Rabbits—and even Rabbittes—have pursued their desires within the backdrop the modern city numerous times. It is a stock filmic and literary convention. At one point in *The Commitments* North Dublin-raised band-manager Jimmy Rabbitt argues that “soul music” as the sound of “sex in a factory.” In *8 Mile*, Rabbit has sex in a factory. It is only one of many direct references to the 1991 film. See *The Commitments*, directed by Alan Parker (Los Angeles: Beacon Communications, 1991). For a discussion of John Updike’s Rabbit and his relevance for discussions of space and race, see Amy Maria Kenyon, *Dreaming Suburbia: Detroit and the Production of Postwar Space and Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 110-116.

8 Mile's success was critical to Eminem's acceptance in mainstream circles and made him one of the biggest entertainment stars in the world. The film cemented his brand, providing a serious, street-level emphasis, to his other times comedic, cartoon-like moniker "Slim Shady."⁸ Eminem's artistic and marketing plan—despite very public bouts with drug abuse, the death of close friends like DeShaun "Proof" Holton, and tabloid goings-on with his on-again, off-again wife, as well as his birth mother—continues to be successful. In early September 2010, after releasing his newest album *Recovery* to wide acclaim during the summer Eminem headlined two major concerts with fellow hip hop artist Jay-Z in downtown Detroit. The concert tour only featured two cities, Detroit and New York.⁹ A "mini-documentary" has recently surfaced that features the concerts and an interview with Eminem about the meaning of the Detroit concerts to his career. In the video, Eminem explicitly states that his own "recovery" parallels Detroit's own "recovery."¹⁰ Eminem's *8 Mile* story continues....

However, Eric King Watts, among others, argues that critics ought to proceed with caution when grappling with Rabbit's story and, by extension, Eminem's career. In his essay on *8 Mile*, Watts argues that through stylistic and narrative choices the movie re-establishes dominant racial understandings of the "American Dream" by creating a character who overcomes his own working-class "wounded whiteness" (the film casts Rabbit as a chronic underdog), vanquishes "black villainy" (his battles are with the all-black Free World crew), and in the process reaffirms the unfortunate neo-conservative argument that the only "real" black rapper is one who is poverty-stricken (his nemesis is outed as a student of a private school,

⁸ Anthony Bozza, *Whatever You Say I Am: The Life and Times of Eminem* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2003), 260-61.

⁹ Brian McCollum, "Guess Who's Back? A Reborn Eminem: Since '05 Concert, His Personal and Professional Lives on Rebound," *Detroit Free Press*, 2 September 2010, 4A.

¹⁰ See "Eminem – Recovery of Detroit [Mini-Documentary]," via Youtube: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rt9tdq0WgKk>> (accessed 11 March 2011).

Cranbrook, located north of 16 Mile Road).¹¹ Watts continues that this has significant economic repercussions for global capital since hip hop's branding depends on the belief that it authentically emanates from the ghetto.¹² This analysis seems credible, explaining, in part, why worldwide audiences might have cheered on Rabbit's deeply problematic underdog story as if watching a film from Sly Stallone's *Rocky* franchise; the gray sweatshirt seems to be a dead give away. However, non-Detroiters raised on white working-class clichés were not the only ones who enjoyed the movie. So, apparently, did Detroiters. In 2002, former Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's press-secretary Jamaine Dickens, sensing a similarity between the film's theme and Detroit's own troubled story, even said, "In the beginning of *8 Mile*... Eminem enters a rap contest and is booed off the stage. The city of Detroit has been booed for a long time."¹³ Even in Detroit, Rabbit's story seems to suck the air out of the room.

¹¹ Eric King Watts, "Border Patrolling and 'Passing' in Eminem's *8 Mile*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 3 (August 2005), 193 and 203-204. See also Mickey Hess, "Hip-Hop Realness and the White Performer," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 5 (December 2005): 372-89 and Mickey Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?: The Past, Present, and Future of America's Most Wanted Music* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2007), especially chapter five and six, "White Rappers," and "Hip Hop, Whiteness, and Parody." It should be noted that on 2003, Eminem became embroiled in a dispute about using racial slurs on a cassette tape from his early career, a situation brought forward by Raymond "Benzino" Scott, then of the rap magazine *The Source*. The complicated back-and-forth between *The Source* and Eminem has been succinctly summarized by S. Craig Watkins in his book *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 85-88. For a nonmusical take on the issue of whiteness in Detroit, see John Hartigan, Jr., *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹² Watts, "Border Patrolling," 203. See also Dan Charnas, *The Big Payback: The History of the Business of Hip-Hop* (New York: Penguin / New American Library, 2010). Eminem's signing story is told on 519-22. I will tell a different version of this story later in this dissertation.

¹³ Quoted from Nara Schoenberg, "Motown Won't Be Mowed Down by Eminem Movie," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 November 2002. <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2002-11-18/features/0211180170_1_detroit-metro-convention-eminem-movie-film-industry> (accessed 5 March 2011).

1.1 RABBIT REDUCE: KEEP DETROIT BEAUTIFUL OR HIT ERASE BUTTON?

My dissertation refuses the false choice between, on the one hand, celebrations of Detroit-based neo-liberal heroes, à la Rabbit, and, on the other, neo-conservative indictments of Detroit as *the* site of the failure of American liberalism.¹⁴ Instead, my goal is to offer up a more authentic recovery project, one that offers up a wide range of complicated—even contradictory—stories and voices in order to broaden discussion about exactly what is meant when we debate Detroit’s apparent success or failure. Musical expression has been a long-standing pivot point for these debates about Detroit. Though the Detroit area has a wide-range of cultural expressions for which it is associated—including literature, art, architecture, and, critically, industrial production—music has been the dominant site for articulating exactly how “Detroit” does or does not harmonize with the American Dream.¹⁵

The stakes in these discussions are high. On the one hand are influential pundits like Richard Florida who have discussed Detroit’s music “scene” in order to persuade state and city governments to invest in “cool cities” projects.¹⁶ In a section called “Authenticity” in his best-selling 2004 book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Florida used Detroit, among a handful of other towns including Austin, Texas, and San Francisco, California, to describe the importance of an

¹⁴ My dissertation is not the first music-focussed dissertation to acknowledge *8 Mile*’s troubling representational influence for studying post-Motown music. However, my dissertation is the first to integrate the history of Detroit hip hop *and* “electronic music” in response to such lingering narratives. See Carla Vecchiola, “Detroit’s Rhythmic Resistance: Electronic Music and Community Pride” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2006): 32-36.

¹⁵ For a visual not aural interpretation of Detroit’s importance to modernity, see Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁶ Michigan has had a “cool cities” Web site, influenced heavily by Florida’s ideas, and encouraged by former Governor Jennifer Granholm, since the mid-point of the last decade. See “Cool Cities—Michigan’s Cool Cities and Neighborhood Homepage” <<http://www.coolcities.com/main.html>>. (accessed 12 March 2011).

“audio identity” to urban centers attempting to compete globally at the cutting edge of technology.

Technology and the music scene go together because together they reflect a place that is open to new ideas, new people and creativity. And it is for this reason that frequently I like to tell city leaders that finding ways to help support a local music scene can be just as important as investing in high-tech business and far more effective than building a downtown mall.¹⁷

On the other hand are voices who utilize music to frame political agendas against government influence, cool or otherwise. For example, in a July 2007 *Washington Post* article, Julia Vitullo-Martin utilized Motown music and Detroit’s 1967 “riots” as the center for an origin story explaining Detroit’s contemporary struggles with industry, rampant crime, and shrinking population.¹⁸ In the article Vitullo-Martin interviewed Martha Reeves, at the time a member of the Detroit City Council and former Motown singer with the Vandellas, who argued that “Dancing in the Street” from 1964, the song she is arguably most famous for, was not meant to be revolutionary, as Black Panther H. Rap Brown had insinuated at the time. “Marvin Gaye wrote that song to quench riots, not to incite them. He didn’t mean to instill anything but love.” The article finished with a rhetorical question from the author: “Forty years later, Detroit has still not recovered from the riots or what historian Peter Benjaminson (the biographer of ex-Supreme

¹⁷ Florida admits to getting the idea of a city’s “audio identity” from one of his own students. See Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2004): 228-229.

¹⁸ Deciding why the riots began, who started them, who or what was to blame for them, and if they were even riots at all and not, for example, signs of rebellion, uprising, etc., became a matter of debate simultaneously with their start on Sunday morning, July 23, 1967. For an overview of events and nomenclature, see *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968); Hubert G. Locke, *The Detroit Riot of 1967* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969); Robert Conot, *American Odyssey: A Unique History of America Told Through the Life of a Great City* (New York: William Morrow, 1974), 523-525, and Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989). For a more recent, local overview of the “uprising” / “rebellion” and its causes, see Lee Paul, “Uprising! Rare Testimonies and Reports on the ’67 Detroit Rebellion,” *Michigan Citizen*, July 22-28th, 2007. Tamar Jacoby presents the semantic debate in Manichean terms in her book, *Someone Else’s House: America’s Unfinished Struggle for Integration* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 238-39. For a more nuanced description of the potential groups contending over the meaning of the riots, see Melissa Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). In this dissertation, following Thompson, I refer to the riots as a rebellion except where quoting individual interviewees.

Florence Ballard) calls the spiritual blow of Motown's defection. Where has the love gone?"¹⁹ By finishing in this way Vitullo-Martin, a member of the conservative think tank The Manhattan Institute,²⁰ argues against the historical work by Suzanne Smith that held that "Dancing in the Street" was indeed a rallying cry.²¹ Vitullo-Martin also willfully ignores Thomas Sugrue who has argued that the seeds of Detroit's post-1967 struggle were set in the 1940s and 1950s. The riots, in other words, though important, are *not* the primary cause of Detroit's contemporary problems.²² This reactionary, bewildered, sense of nostalgia called upon by Vitullo-Martin, especially given the dire condition of the city, is chilling. In the process, she reduces forty years of lived cultural history after Motown to an allegory of cultural destruction.

Both of these urban imaginings reduce what Detroit was, is, and can be. Florida's understanding of music as a means to urban brand identity has arguably been more successful in

¹⁹ Julia Vitullo-Martin, "The Day the Music Died," *Washington Post*, July 20, 2007. Vitullo-Martin echoes fellow Manhattan Institute senior fellow Jacoby's utilization of Detroit as a case study for the failure of "social engineering" in the U.S. See Jacoby, *Someone Else's House*.

²⁰ "The mission of the manhattan institute is to develop and disseminate new ideas that foster greater economic choice and individual responsibility." See the Manhattan Institute Web site: <<http://www.manhattan-institute.org/>> (accessed 25 february 2011). For an analysis of the Institute's role in establishing a neo-liberal urban policy hegemony, see Jamie Peck, "Liberating the City: Between New York and New Orleans," *Urban Geography* 27, no. 8 (November-December 2006): 681-716.

²¹ Suzanne Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). Vitullo-Martin mentions Smith's book but drops off the Dancing in the Street portion of the title, writes her last name as "Street" and completely avoids Smith's political arguments. Joann Watson, former executive director for the Detroit branch of the NAACP, confirms Smith's interpretation of the revolutionary feel of Motown music: "I was born in Detroit and am a product of this community. Went to Central High School in the '60s [in the neighborhood in which the rebellion began] and became immersed in the growing civil rights movement. Mosque Number 1 where Malcolm X was doing his work was right across the street from the high school. I was greatly influenced by Martin Luther King. I was influenced by the Motown sound. Much of the music was a real anthem for many of us." Quoted in Robert H. Mast, ed., *Detroit Lives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 88. For a more nuanced historical take on the limits of revolutionary language and "aural blackness" see Michael Hansen, "Suppose James Brown Read Fanon: the Black Arts Movement, Cultural Nationalism and the Failure of Popular Musical Praxis," *Popular Music* 27, no. 3 (2008): 341-65, esp. 349.

²² Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). Thompson, Smith, and Sugrue, as well as a handful of others, are part of a generation of historians raised in Detroit who have attempted to revise many of the common-sense assumptions about Detroit's contemporary "urban crisis." See W. Kim Heron, "The Kiss, the Wall, and other Tales," *Metro Times*, 15 May 2002. <<http://www2.metrotimes.com/editorial/story.asp?id=3273>> (accessed 1 March 2011). I am deeply indebted to their collective work and, in the case of Smith, mentoring. Smith wrote a piece on the blues deejay and record story owner "The Famous Coachman" for a zine I self-published in 2000 called *se-mi*.

the hands of major corporations than state legislatures when it comes to establishing authenticity, especially when that branding recycles the same disturbing issues as Watts warned us against in *8 Mile*. For example, a recent Chrysler commercial featuring Eminem during the 2010 Superbowl finds the rapper entering Detroit's downtown Fox Theatre while his "Lose Yourself" plays in the background. The theatre marquee says simply, "Keep Detroit Beautiful." Inside, Eminem, in front of an all-black gospel choir, turns and points into the camera: "This is the Motor City and this is what we do."²³ At the same time, Vitullo-Martin's kind of official musical storytelling, given its glib avoidance of persuasive critical thought based in local vernaculars, demands a new intervention into the field of public memory.²⁴ A new urban imaginary for Detroit is long overdue.

1.2 SOUND, SCENE, SOUNDSCAPE

In "'Where The Mix Is Perfect': Voices From The Post-Motown Soundscape," I engage the focal point of this discussion on Detroit's past and therefore its present: the supposed "death" of the "Motown Sound" and the meaning of that death for Detroit. Through archival research and oral-history interviews, I recover the life stories of a group of Detroiters in their struggle to change and be changed by Detroit's soundscape in the aftermath of the Detroit Rebellion of 1967 and the departure of Motown Records to Los Angeles in 1972. One of the easiest ways to articulate

²³ See "Chrysler Eminem Super Bowl Commercial – Imported From Detroit" via Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKL254Y_jtc> (accessed 12 March 2011).

²⁴ On the tension between official and vernacular culture within the sphere of public memory, see John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1992). Bodnar's concept of public memory is opposed to that of "collective memory." See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Detroit's audio identity is to talk about its sound—specifically, the Motown Sound. However, attempting to get a hold of the Motown Sound, let alone the Post-Motown sound, is a difficult task. As already mentioned, Suzanne Smith has done much to historicize Detroit's "urban mythscape" linking Motown, the record label, to the city itself.²⁵ Attempting to create a new, Post-Motown Sound in this dissertation would reify further Detroit's identity crisis. Therefore in this paper, I use Motown Records to refer to the company. However, in my title I recognize the power of this heritage in the continuing use of Motown long after the record label left the city. One option I use in this dissertation is the term scene. Productive academic work has been done on music scenes and, when applicable, I draw on that term in my dissertation as a way of talking about musical practices throughout Detroit and their connection to global networks of production and distribution, as well as local understandings of tradition.²⁶ For instance, I refer to Detroit's 1970s "jazz scene" in my second chapter and in multiple chapters to Detroit's "dance scene." However, in my title, I am indebted to Emily Thompson's re-coining of the term soundscape as originally described by R. Murray Schafer.²⁷ She describes a soundscape as "an auditory or aural landscape." She argues:

Like a landscape, a soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment; it is both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of that world.... A soundscape, like a landscape, ultimately has more to do with civilization

²⁵ See Smith, *Dancing in the Street*. I am using "urban mythscape" as developed by Bennett who acknowledges the contradictory and creative character of understanding local sounds in an Internet age. See Andy Bennett, "Music, Media and urban mythscapes: a study of the 'Canterbury Sound,'" *Media, Culture and Society* 24 (2002): 87-100.

²⁶ Will Straw, "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," *Cultural Studies* 5(3) (1991): 368-388. Ken Spring, "Behind the Rave: Structure and Agency in a Rave Scene," in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, edited by Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004): 48-63. Also: Kristin Schilt, "'Riot Grrrl Is...': Contestation over Meaning in a Music Scene," in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, edited by Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004): 115-130.

²⁷ On the concept of soundscape, see R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, Vt.: Destiny Books, 1993.): 324.

than with nature, and as such, it is constantly under construction and always undergoing change.²⁸

In her book, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, Thompson uses this cultural definition of soundscape to track the emergence of modern acoustics and understand how public expectations of sound shifted in the United States over the course of the 20th century. She argues that during this time period audiences began expecting spaces where sound would be heard authentically and consistently, without reverberation or distraction. However, Thompson argues that this modern set of expectations gave way in the 1970s to a desire for a variety of resonant spaces. If Thompson is correct and the modern soundscape was focused on providing an “aural anchor” in the midst of tremendous technological and societal change, then it follows that the contemporary soundscape is a potentially dizzying, highly sonorous place.²⁹

In my dissertation, this cultural approach to soundscape—which echoes Han Robert Jauss’ audience-centered understanding of the existence of a “horizon of expectations” for readers of literary works—helps me recover voices that speak to a very different Detroit than that imagined by Florida or Vitullo-Martin.³⁰ Again the idea here is not to focus, on the one hand, on one voice or, on the other hand, shoehorn a selection of musical stories into an allegory of failure.³¹ Instead, by drawing heavily from oral histories, I offer a plurality of voices³² more

²⁸ Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 1-2. Thompson acknowledges Corbin as originating the idea of the soundscape as a landscape. See Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom (1994; New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), ix. I am indebted to Dr. Kathleen Newman at Carnegie Mellon University for introducing Corbin’s essay to me in a class called “Sound Theory” in the fall of 2006. See Alain Corbin, “The Auditory Markers of the Village,” *The Auditory Culture Reader*, eds. Michael Bull and Les Back (New York: Berg, 2003), 117-125.

²⁹ Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 321.

³⁰ Han Robert Jauss, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” trans. Elizabeth Benzinger, *New Literary History* 1, no. 2 (Autumn 1970): 12.

³¹ Describing what he considers the end of the “classic band” era in Detroit rock ‘n’ roll, Carson takes his own narrative advice from MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer. “The Grande [Ballroom], which has been the scene of their ‘greatest triumph,’ had now become of what Wayne Kramer calls a ‘pathetic last attempt,’ for which the band was paid five hundred dollars [in 1972]. ‘I guess you could look at the MC5 at that point as an allegory for what was

polyphonically true to what Ralph Ellison has described as the “chromatic scale of American social hierarchy.”³³ These voices, I hope to show, provide a range of stories just as compelling and unlikely, if not more so, than Rabbit’s emergence as a future star at the end of *8 Mile*. This is consonant with former metro-Detroiter, scholar, and ex-DJ, Alice Echols’s interpretive historical work on disco. In her book *Hot Stuff*, Echols leans on Ellison to critique scholars who “make a ‘rigid correlation’ between color, class, and musical taste” and therefore “fail to take into account the complexities of lived experience.”³⁴ The approach then here is to supplement Rabbit’s hackneyed journey with a mix of voices and life stories. By doing this, I make possible a new urban imaginary based in the preservation of Detroit’s rich contemporary musical history, a history that is quickly vanishing.³⁵

happening in Detroit,’ says Kramer. ‘It went from being a boomtown to guns, heroin, and murder. An urban nightmare.’” David A. Carson, *Grit Noise and Revolution: The Birth of Detroit Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006): 274.

³² On utilizing a “plurality of voices” in oral history see Selma Leydesdorff, *Gender and the Categories of Experienced History*, *Gender & History*, 11, no. 3 (November 1999): 601. Portelli describes the construction of his book as “a multivoiced narrative.” Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 17.

³³ “These individuals seem to have been sensitized by some obscure force that issues undetected from the chromatic scale of American social hierarchy: a force that throws off strange, ultrasonic ultrasemi-semitones that create within those attuned to its vibrations a mysterious enrichment of personality. In this, heredity doubtless plays an important role, but whatever that role may be, it would appear that culturally and environmentally such individuals are products of errant but sympathetic vibrations set up by the tension between America’s social mobility, its universal education, and its relative freedom of cultural information. Characterized by a much broader “random accessibility” than class and economic restrictions would appear to allow, this cultural formation includes many of the finest products of the arts and intellect—products that are so abundantly available in the form of books, graphics, recordings, and pictorial reproductions as to escape sustained attempts at critical evaluation. Just how these characteristics operate in concert involves the mysterious interaction between environment and personality, instinct and culture. But the frequency and wide dispersal of individuals who reveal the effects of this mysterious configuration of forces endows each American audience, whether or musician, poet, or plastic artist, with a special mystery of its own.” Ralph Ellison, “The Little Man at Chehaw Station,” in *The Collected Essays* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 497-98. Recently, Alice Echols has argued for the relevance of Ellison’s radical, democratic communicative understanding of American culture; see her *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), xxii. The phenomenological roots of this ideas are from Edmund Husserl.

³⁴ Echols, *Hot Stuff*, xxii. She is drawing from Ellison’s review of Leroi Jones’s (now Amiri Baraka) book, *Blues People* (New York: W. Morrow, 1963) in Ellison’s book of collected essays *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 252.

³⁵ See Dan Austin (with photography by Sean Doerr), *Lost Detroit: Stories Behind the Motor City’s Majestic Ruins* (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2010). Also: <<http://www.lostdetroit.com/>>. (accessed 25 February 2011).

1.3 MIXING OUT THE FACTORY

There is an intense amount of testimony to the forces that were working against places like Detroit in the era that I am interested in. In *Origins of the Urban Crisis* and, more recently, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, Sugrue utilizes historical and sociological work to indict governments, judges, and the broader American public in neglecting the goals of the Civil Rights movement and abandoning cities like Detroit whose residents played such a critical role in those struggles.³⁶ At the same time, media scholars like Ben Badikian and music historians like Nelson George, have argued that the era that I am writing about has been one of corporate conglomeration and media monopolization; therefore it is averse to democratic communication and, for George, the expression of soul.³⁷ Even successful tales recounted of Detroit's fertile post-Motown sonic world have taken on a clichéd singsong quality: each article that surfaces seems to recount the same myths and legends—many told by the same, small set of informants—as if readers' imaginations can only handle certain, dominant representations of Detroit.³⁸ During the build up to this project I too have been a purveyor of such myths due largely to the founding metaphors I initially chose. For instance, in order to handle the cultural breadth of Detroit's post-Motown

³⁶ Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008). See also Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Douglas S. Massey, *Categorically Unequal: The American Stratification System* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007.)

³⁷ Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1989).

³⁸ For a recent example with respect to "Detroit techno," see Andy Thomas, "Electronic Enigma: The Myths and Messages of Detroit Techno," *Wax Poetics* (2011): 74-86. The article focuses, as many articles and books on Detroit techno do, on the "Belleville Three"—Derrick May, Juan Atkins, and Kevin Saunderson—and in the process rehashes many of the same stories and ideas that were already in play in the British press when techno first surfaced in Europe. The seminal text describing the emergence of what has been dubbed "Detroit techno" is Dan Sicko, *Techno Rebels: The Renegades of Electronic Funk* (New York: Billboard Books, 1999). For an overview of the American and European changes in dance music over this same period, see Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998). For just one example of the global impact of this music culture, see Toshiya Ueno, "Unlearning to Rave: Techno-Party as the Contact Zone in Trans-local Formations," in *The Post-Subcultures Reader*, ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (New York: Berg, 2003): 101-118.

musical scene when I first began this project—initially titled “‘Start Dancing!’: Communicative Spark and Sustainability in Post-Motown Detroit”—I utilized a “Motor City” metaphor. I thought I was in good company as other authors, like George, had used the same metaphors to describe periods like 1960s Motown.³⁹ So I talked about “creative engines,” “musical dynamos,” and referenced “Detroit’s rusting urban body.” However, after conducting my research, I realize that this metaphor was deeply inadequate in explaining Detroit’s post-Motown, post-Rebellion, post-Riots, postmodern, experience. As Lars Bjorn and Jim Gallert have argued with respect to the Motown Sound:

The Motown Sound would not have been possible without the creativity, skills, and experiences of the jazz and R & B musicians mentioned [in *Before Motown*]. Once they had done their job the Gordy production system took over to make hit records. It is often tempting to liken this to an assembly-line process, since it took place in Detroit, but this is too facile an analogy. While cars are produced in a process minutely planned by industrial engineers, the creation of new musical sounds requires a more interactive process. Gordy realized this and did not interfere with his musicians. As [Motown percussionist] Jack Brokensha put it, ‘We saw Gordy once in a while, he was a smart cookie; he knew to stay away most of the time.’ Gordy’s genius came into play after the tracks were laid down, as [pianist] Teddy Harris recalled: ‘Once he found the sound he wanted, nothing went out of there unless it passed Berry’s ear.’⁴⁰

I am interested in the state of this “more interactive process” after Gordy’s departure. Bjorn and Gallert accomplish their study for the “Before Motown” period through oral histories of musicians and audience members, musical descriptions of audio recordings, and rich archival work with newspapers, photographs, posters, flyers, and other ephemera. “When the Mix Was Perfect,” in part, is an attempt to follow their model for the period “After Motown.”

³⁹ Nelson George, *Where Did Our Love Go?: The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁴⁰ Lars Bjorn with Jim Gallert, *Before Motown: A History of Jazz in Detroit, 1920-1960* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 2001), 203-204.

1.4 FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR TO THE DANCE FLOOR

I have found a more appropriate language for this project by foregrounding a key group of figures considered secondary for Bjorn and Gallert: DJs. Because of Bjorn and Gallert's primary focus on jazz as a musical genre their bias is to the musicians who made it—and to much lesser extent the club promoters and audiences who witnessed it performed—and far less concerned with describing the impact of modern communication technologies upon Detroit's soundscape. Taking Ellison's point about the proliferation of cultural artifacts seriously, such as recordings, I would argue that the long-term impact of the radio DJ, and later the club DJ (from here on I will only modify the term DJ when referring to radio DJs), are far from secondary in importance to Detroit's musical creativity. The DJ has at times been a controversial figure who has cut across twentieth century music making.⁴¹ The DJ was a figure made possible first by the rise of radio and second by the emergence of pre-recorded performances for playback. Beginning as early as the 1920s, musicians across the United States felt the impact of automation on their craft and audience, and therefore their professional livelihood.⁴² Radio DJs were incredibly popular and absolutely essential to the success of Detroit musical artists since World War II.⁴³ Though automation gained significant momentum in the 1970s with the rise of disco and, later, hip hop, it continually exerted economic and creative pressure on musicians to maintain their jobs and, at

⁴¹ Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000). B. D. Herman, "Scratching Out Authorship: Representations of the Electronic Music DJ at the Turn of the 21st Century," *Popular Communication* 4, no. 1(2006): 21-38; Kai Fikentscher, "There's Not a Problem I Can't Fix, 'Cause I Can Do It in the Mix,'" On the Performative Technology of 12-Inch Vinyl," in *Music and Technoculture*, eds. René T. A. Lysloff and Jr. Leslie C. Gay (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 290-315.

⁴² Robin D. G. Kelley, "Without a Song: New York Musicians Strike out against Technology," in Howard Zinn, Dana Frank, and Robin D.G. Kelley, *Three Strikes: Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls, and the Fighting Spirit of Labor's Last Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 119-55.

⁴³ David Carson, *Rockin' Down the Dial: The Detroit Sound of Radio From Jack the Bellboy to the Big 8* (Troy, Mich.: Momentum Books, Ltd., 2000). See also Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Random House, 1999).

the same time, control the definition of what it meant to be a musician as the century wore on. However, this labor threat also signaled the emergence of a new performative approach to modernity's soundscape: the remix aesthetic.

Here, I return to Thompson. In a recent work on the struggle over film playback practices in the 1920s, Thompson has discussed film projectionists who manipulated audio playback with equipment that looks very much like contemporary DJ record players. In the process, Thompson explicitly engages the post-1970s "remix aesthetic" and hip hop DJing to describe this aborted moment in the history of the soundscape.

Non-sync turntables could have allowed a new kind of sonic artistry to develop in 1929; they could have enabled a new musical creativity to be expressed through the personal selection and juxtaposition of recorded sounds. But within an industry and musical culture where standardization was the goal, the creative potential of this technology would not be fulfilled at this time. The musical possibilities of two turntables would remain latent for decades, awaiting a culture less captivated by top-down directives, an audience less enamored of master narratives.⁴⁴

Near the end of the essay, Thompson states that the audience she is imagining is that which emerged with hip hop culture in the 1970s, a cultural movement that, for Thompson, was able to take advantage of the possibility that "history itself is ultimately a remix, a reworking of old ideas into new contexts, a constantly changing juxtaposition of old and new."⁴⁵ In "'Where The Mix Is Perfect': Voices from the Post-Motown Soundscape," I follow Thompson's line of thought and use the shifting musical language of the post-modern soundscape, heavily influenced as it is by DJs and the "remix aesthetic": blend, mix, remix, and sync. On one level, these are

⁴⁴ Emily Thompson, "Remix Redux: In the Silent Film Era, the Roots of the DJ," *Cabinet*, no. 35 (Fall 2009): 23-28.

⁴⁵ Thompson, "Remix Redux," 28. Lev Manovich uses the phrase in his "Generation Flash," in *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*, ed. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Thomas Kennan (New York: Routledge, 2006), 209-18. For a more recent appraisal of the future of the "Remix Aesthetic" see Lev Manovich, "What Comes After Remix?" (Winter 2007). Available on "lev manovich: articles" <<http://manovich.net/articles/>> (accessed 31 January 2011). See also Pallabi Chakravorty, "Moved to Dance: Remix, Rasa, and a New India," *Visual Anthropology* 22, no. 2/3 (Mar.-June 2009): 211-28; John Shiga, "Copy-and-Persist: The Logic of Mash-Up Culture," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 24, no. 2 (2007): 93; A special issue of *Fibreculture Journal*, Issue 15 (2009) deals with remix: <<http://fifteen.fibreculturejournal.org/>> (accessed 12 march 2011).

words that the performers and the audience members that I have interviewed explicitly use to describe the music they make and the music they enjoy: Greg Collier talks about the difference between hearing “Clydesdales” in clubs and the actual blending of records; Jeff Mills talks about creating mixes and remixes on the air and in clubs; and Colin Zyskowski talks about how recent software technologies allow loops to be synced by the computer.⁴⁶ However, on another level, these terms refocus attention away from a reductive understanding of the relationship between economics and music towards an ethic of listening to the mix—and importantly listening to those caught up in that mix.

Because of this theoretical and metaphorical shift, I have become a better listener of Detroit DJs, like Mills who was known in the 1980s in Detroit as “The Wizard.” He is a crucial character in this dissertation, having been performing at the cutting edge of the remix aesthetic since the 1970s. Mills has been manipulating music with his eyes, ears, and hands in clubs, cabarets, and on the radio, as part of a much larger regional communicative network that included other dancers in clubs, and even TV shows.⁴⁷ However, the continuous mix of music in clubs in the 1970s brought together performer and audience—DJ and dancer—into sync in a way that they had not been before. The impact on Detroit-area residents was remarkable.

⁴⁶ Greg Collier, interview by author, 29 May 2008; Jeff Mills, interview by author, 20 September 2010; Colin Zyskowski, interview by author, 23 February 2011.

⁴⁷ For an overview of Detroit television, see Gordon Castelnero, *TV Land Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006). See also Christopher P. Lehman’s *A Critical History of Soul Train on Television* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2008).

1.5 MIXING EDM AND HIP HOP

American Studies scholars have completed important research on the emergence of hip hop and Detroit techno which are important to my dissertation here. Tricia Rose's book *Black Noise* was one of the first books to come to terms with hip hop's emergence from New York City. In the book, Rose argues that hip hop culture, graffiti, rapping, DJing, and break-dancing, were a systematic reaction and resistance to radical, violent shifts in urbanization.⁴⁸ Rose's advisor, American Studies professor George Lipsitz, has recently argued similarly for the resistance inherent in popular music in general and Detroit techno in particular. He argues that Detroit techno artists responded to the logic of computer-generated automation of the 1970s by using computers to become producers instead of mere consumers.⁴⁹ For Lipsitz, Detroit techno "marks a particular rupture in the history of industrial society, it grows out of what we might call the progressive history of percussive time—the history of 'putting the drums up front' in U.S. popular music."⁵⁰ In *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, Jeff Chang explains that a combination of deindustrialization and racially inflected governmentality—what he calls both the politics of abandonment and containment—have created the essential conditions to understanding cities like Los Angeles and New York City, especially since the neo-conservative Presidential victory of Richard Nixon in 1968.⁵¹ Furthermore, Chang has argued that these conditions created *the* context for the emergence of hip hop culture, providing the landscape for graffiti, the

⁴⁸ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 39. "Let us imagine these hip hop principles as a blueprint for social resistance and affirmation: create sustaining narratives, accumulate them, layer embellish, and transform them. However, be also prepared for rupture, find pleasure in it, in fact, *plan on* social rupture. When these ruptures occur, use them in creative ways that will prepare you for a future in which survival will demand a sudden shift in ground tactics."

⁴⁹ George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 238-262.

⁵⁰ Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark*, 253.

⁵¹ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005).

justification for the mock-fighting rituals of break dancing, the party out-of-bounds atmosphere where DJs honed their craft, and the set of conditions necessary to establish a language for rap music. In a recent lecture, Chang optimistically argued that this hip hop generation played a significant role in enlisting minority voters and electing Barack Obama, making him the first “hip hop President.”⁵²

I am interested in many of these issues in this dissertation. However, I am most interested in the soundscape and not strictly speaking any one musical genre. Instead I am interested in the tremendous impact of DJing and the ways that audiences, many of whom enjoy many different genres of music, have experienced that impact. Histories that explicitly mix Electronic Dance Music (EDM) and hip hop have been rare. In this post-Motown story, however, it is required. Because of the widespread influence of DJ culture on Detroit’s soundscape, Detroit hip hop, especially its lyrical component, was far less important than the danceability of its beats. It is not for nothing that the rap segment on Detroit’s TV show “The Scene” was called “Rap-A-Dance.” (I discuss this in Chapter 4.) When Detroit hip hop did emerge lyrically in the late 1980s and early 1990s, cresting in Detroit’s late-1990s golden age with MCs like Eminem, it had taken deliberate steps to distance itself from Detroit’s dance floor, including a homophobic and sexist lyrical address and, in the case of Eminem for instance, a working-class sheen.⁵³ This dynamic between the emergence of DJ and the late emergence of the MC in Detroit—as well as the struggle of both to achieve respect from the city itself—has not been told.

⁵² Jeff Chang, lecture (February 10, 2009), Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

⁵³ Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—and Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

1.6 DEFINING THE INTERZONE AND QUEERING THE ARCHIVE

I have not interviewed every performer and audience member since Motown departed. Instead, I have attempted to focus on voices and life stories that have either been understudied or not studied at all, with a theoretical eye to what Kevin J. Mumford calls the “interzone.” For Mumford, the interzone is a reference to “interracial vice districts” that emerged in the early part of the twentieth century in places like New York and Chicago.⁵⁴ These districts provided spaces, albeit at the margins of society, where a mix of races, classes, and sexualities, could interact. In my dissertation, I am interested in an interzone within the soundscape where a number of participants—DJs, rappers, dancers—have resisted and reshaped Detroit’s dominant audio identity. Authors in cultural studies and subcultural studies have attempted to understand this kind of interzone since the 1970s.⁵⁵ I am especially indebted to ethnomusicological work that has carried subcultural concerns with youth and gendered identity, into the realm of “underground” electronic dance music (or EDM) in the U.S. In this vein, Kai Fikentscher and Tim Lawrence’s work on dance culture in New York City has been especially influential in determining the kinds

⁵⁴ Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), xi.

⁵⁵ In his 1979 article, “In Defense of Disco,” Richard Dyer argued that disco, then understood by his peers in England’s New Left as just another over-commodified, reactionary trend in music, was worthy of study. For Dyer the highly affective, erotic experience of listening to disco recordings, as well as the polymorphous, embodied queer spaces that inspired them, provided a rich nexus for the then emergent field of cultural studies to theorize the continuum between political complicity (audiences dismissed as consumers) and subversion (audiences imagined as potential revolutionaries) under capitalist modes of exchange. See Richard Dyer, “In Defense of Disco,” *Gay Left*, no. 8 (Summer 1979): 20-23. Dick Hebdige’s analogous study of English punk subculture that came out that same year, has set the tone for the study of club culture ever since. Though this work has since been critiqued and expanded over the years, its central focus to take seriously what contemporary English disco scholar Tim Lawrence calls the “politics of pleasure” is still a critical component of cultural studies. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture the Meaning of Style* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1979). For a communication studies account of contemporary dance culture see Brian Ott and Bill Herman, “Mixed Messages: Resistance and Reappropriation in Rave Culture,” *Western Journal of Communication* 67 (2003): 249–270. For a re-elaboration of Dyer’s 1979 intervention, see Tim Lawrence, “In Defense of Disco (Again).” For a highly reflective approach to studying emergent queer youth style, see Susan Driver, ed, *Queer Youth Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008). For a subcultural account of dance culture see Sara Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan, 1996).

of voices and stories I needed to be listening to and the questions—in terms of culture and economics—that I needed to be asking of my interviewees.⁵⁶ This has been especially important regarding sexuality. Tim Retzliff has begun to draw together a rich archive of queer history in Michigan, including information on clubs frequented by queer audiences.⁵⁷ Bjorn and Gallert admit, for instance, that other kinds of performance heavily influenced by issues of sexuality and gender, including cross-dressing, burlesque, and vaudeville, were important to the jazz scene up to the 1960s.⁵⁸ This queer story, though not nearly as well documented, is arguably a continuous one from the late nineteenth century till the present day. In this way, much of my dissertation is part of a larger move to “queer the archive.” Here I am indebted to a recent pre-conference that I participated entitled “Bridging Queer Histories and Queer Futures: A Day of Cruising Archives” for the National Communication Conference, this last November in San Francisco, CA.⁵⁹ During this conference, I joined a group of graduate students, trained in communication, rhetoric, and cultural studies, in discussing projects that attempted to recover and reconstitute historical queer lives and scenes. This importance of this approach was confirmed recently when one of my own interviewees, Marke Bieschke, a 1980s Detroit club kid who is now a writer for the *San*

⁵⁶ See Kai Fikentscher, *"You Better Work!": Underground Dance Music in New York City* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000); Mark J. Butler, *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁵⁷ For an overview of archival materials available on Michigan gay life, see Tim Retzliff, “From Storage Box to Computer Screen: Disclosing Artifacts of Queer History in Michigan,” *GLQ* 7, no. 1 (2001): 153-181. I expand on this history in Chapter 2.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, a short reference of saxophonist Yusef Lateef opening up for “female impersonators,” in Bjorn and Gallert, *Before Motown*, 141. While in Pittsburgh, I was able to see an exhibition of photographs by black photographer Teenie Harris at the Warhol Museum that contained many images of transgendered folk in the nightclub scene in the Hill District. See L.A. Johnson, “Out on the Town: Teenie Harris Exhibit Captures a Rare Glimpse of Gay Life,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 26 July 2007. <<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/07207/804427-42.stm>> (accessed 12 March 2011).

⁵⁹ Charles E. Morris III & K.J. Rawson, “Queer Archives/Archival Queers,” paper distributed for the conference. See also Charles E. Morris III, “Archival Queer,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 9.1 (2006): 145-151; Charles E. Morris III, “The Archival Turn in Rhetorical Studies; Or, The Archive's Rhetorical (Re)turn,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 9.1 (2006): 113-115. See also: Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004). Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

San Francisco Bay Guardian, wrote a review of the exhibit “Our Vast Queer Past” at the new GLBT History Museum in that city. In the final sentence of his largely positive review, he says that, “‘Our Vast Queer Past,’ and the GLBT History Museum are giving queers a sense that we live history in our daily lives, and presents us with a fascinating IRL Wikipedia of our once subversive activities.”⁶⁰ Though my dissertation cannot possibly take the place of an entire museum—an “in real life” Wikipedia—dedicated to the queering of Detroit’s soundscape, I hope it will give a sense that we “live history in our daily lives.”

1.7 ORAL HISTORY

In the middle-1980s, the owners of Todd’s, a gay bar on Detroit’s northeast side, began advertising that their bar was “Where the mix is perfect!!!” Channeling their slogan in my title, I argue that these club owners, encouraged by their clientele’s relationship to the club’s cutting-edge DJs, were not only referring to the DJ’s “mix”—and perhaps the mix of the drinks—but also were advocating for a world that ought to have been. The methodological problem here is how to satisfactorily wrestle with human agency within this shifting soundscape. Communication scholars focused on urban settings, like Detroit, have turned to oral history. Fields such as urban communication foreground the necessity of local, empirical work that takes as its starting point the storytelling practices of people within their own neighborhoods.⁶¹ However, this presents another, methodological problem which is also, necessarily, political. Traditionally, the purpose

⁶⁰ marke, “Mighty Real,” *San Francisco Bay Guardian Online* <<http://www.sfbg.com/2011/03/08/mighty-real>> (accessed 11 March 2011).

⁶¹ Matthew D. Matsaganis, “Neighborhood Effects and the Invisible Motor of Community Change,” in *The Urban Communication Reader*, eds. Burd et al. 84-85. See also Francesca Polletta, *Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

of listening to voices left out of traditional histories in order to empower those voices and propel progressive politics. However, what happens when interviewees do not say what you want them to? Detroit is an incredibly contradictory and ambivalent place and the voices included in this dissertation are no different. There are stories of acceptance, progressive politics, and deep subjective insight. There are also stories of both musical and personal intolerance, confusion, and defeatism. On a larger scale, Detroit audiences, despite their support for major artists like Eminem, have only intermittently supported some of their most trailblazing artists, from The Stooges to the top electronic producers of techno, like Juan Atkins. In other words, Detroit, like any other place, is not filled only with oppositional, progressive voices. However, this is not a problem to be avoided. Oral history, at its best, does not shy away from the potentially reactionary and conflicted stories of those whom it studies. In *The Order Has Been Carried Out*, Alessandro Portelli critically refuses to project a structure onto the varying stories by his narrators who remember and misremember a mass execution by Nazi soldiers during their occupation of Italy in World War II. The goal instead is for the reader to get a “fuller sense of the rhythm of the narratives.”⁶²

I believe that oral history, used in this way, can provide complexity and freshness to current state of Detroit discourse that is full of stale metaphors and overwrought allegories. Indeed, I am not alone in thinking that oral history can help in this area. In 1994, two books, the first *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes* by Elaine Latzman Moon,⁶³ the second, *Detroit Lives* by

⁶² Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 18.

⁶³ Elaine Latzman Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918-1967* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994). A similar book appeared around the same time in Flint, a former industrial town about an hour north of Detroit. See Rhonda Sanders, *Bronze Pillars: An Oral History of African-Americans in Flint* (The Flint Journal and Alfred P. Sloan Museum, 1995).

Robert Mast,⁶⁴ provided two sets of voices that, if pieced together, provide a varied view of the twentieth century from 1918 to the then-present day. I draw on both books, as well as former Michigan-based *Creem* magazine editor Susan Whittall's oral histories of women performers from Motown, in my first chapter, where I attempt to synthesize Detroit's before/after Motown period. In the last decade, Anders Svanoe has used oral histories to tell stories left out of Bjorn and Gallert's *Before Motown*;⁶⁵ Ben Tausig has used them to expand questions of race and sexuality in the study of Detroit techno;⁶⁶ Carla Vecchiola has used them to understand the sense of community built with the electronic dance scene;⁶⁷ Jason Schmitt has utilized oral history in his dissertation to tell the ongoing success of certain aspects of Detroit rock 'n' roll despite Detroit's socio-economic struggles;⁶⁸ Gavin Mueller has used interviews to better understand the rise of Detroit's "Ghettotech" scene in the 1990s;⁶⁹ Marlon Bailey has used them to draw out the culture of Detroit's rich drag scene;⁷⁰ Tony Rettman has used them to tell the stories of Detroit's 1980s hardcore rock scene;⁷¹ and Denise Dalphond⁷² is currently finishing her own ethnomusicological account of Detroit electronic music relying heavily on oral histories. All of this work has been critical to formulating research and writing strategies for my own dissertation.

⁶⁴ Robert H. Mast, ed., *Detroit Lives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

⁶⁵ Anders Svanoe, "Bluesville: The Journey of Sonny Red," *Annual Review of Jazz Studies*, no. 13 (2003): 49-194.

⁶⁶ Ben Tausig, "Detroit Techno: Race, Agency, and Electronic Music in Post-Industrial Detroit" (Masters Thesis, University of Michigan, 2003).

⁶⁷ Carla Vecchiola, "Detroit's Rhythmic Resistance: Electronic Music and Community Pride" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2006).

⁶⁸ Jason M. Schmitt, "Like the Last 30 Years Never Happened: Understanding Detroit Rock Music Through Oral History" (Ph.D. diss., Bowling Green State University, 2008).

⁶⁹ Gavin Mueller, "Looking For the Perfect Beat: Rerouting A Hip-Hop Genealogy Through Electronic Dance Music," 2006.

⁷⁰ Marlon Murtha Bailey, "The Labor of Diaspora: Ballroom Culture and the Making of a Black Queer Community" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2005).

⁷¹ Tony Rettman, *Why Be Something You're Not: Detroit Hardcore 1979-1985* (Huntington Beach, Calif.: Revelation Records Publishing, 2010).

⁷² Denise Dalphond, "Detroit Electronic Music: Eclecticism and Diversity in Performance, Production, and Identity" (Ph.D. diss., University of Indiana at Bloomington, forthcoming).

Since 2000, I have interviewed eighty people and recorded approximately eighty hours of audio and video either in person, over the phone, or via Skype.⁷³ At first these interviews developed out of my practice as a freelance music journalist for alternative weekly paper *Metro Times* in Detroit covering the city's rock, electronic, and hip hop music. Much of this work is based on my own notes of these interviews later verified via email, phone, or Skype with the interviewee. During this period, my questions focused on whatever particular topic I was investigating at that time. This began to change though with the publication of a piece I wrote on Ken Collier called, "The Search for Heaven," which was published in 2004 for the *Metro Times*' "A Century of Sound Series."⁷⁴ (The article eventually became the basis of my first graduate school conference presentation for the National Communication Association in the fall of 2006 and is the central inspiration behind my third chapter in this dissertation). The series only generated a handful of stories for the paper but it had a profound influence on me. By 2004, Collier had been cited by many as a major influence on the emergence of Detroit techno—however little existed beyond a short tribute in Dan Sicko's *Techno Rebels*, one of the first book-long examinations of Detroit's electronic music history since the early 1980s.⁷⁵ During the writing of that story I realized the precarious nature of Detroit's contemporary musical history and the importance of recovering and archiving it. Many DJs and audience members, had moved away, had gone missing, or had died, including Collier himself. The impact of AIDs, as well as lack of adequate healthcare, on the predominantly gay black scene that I was examining was

⁷³ Oral history has been excluded from IRB oversight under an agreement with our department and the Pitt Board in 2004. The IRB exclusion has been granted because of the open-ended nature of the questions that will be asked which produce an unquantifiable archive that must be qualitatively examined.

⁷⁴ See Carleton S. Gholz, "The Search for Heaven," *Metro Times*, 14 July 2004. <<http://www2.metrotimes.com/editorial/story.asp?id=6502>> (accessed 12 March 2011). For a description the larger project, see Brian Smith and Nate Cavalieri, "A Century of Sound," *Metro Times*, 25 May 2004. <<http://www2.metrotimes.com/editorial/story.asp?id=6272>> (accessed 12 March 2011).

⁷⁵ Dan Sicko, *Techno Rebels*, 31.

profound. I could initially only locate a handful of DJs who could trace their careers to the 1970s and within a year of my article on Collier two of my interviewees, Enola Porter and Trina Brooks, had died. They were both under sixty years old. In 2005, in response to this, I along with Doc Matthews (a participant during the city's late 90s rave scene and, later, an interviewee for this dissertation) pursued the archivists at the E. Azalia Hackley Collection at the Detroit Public Library in order to create the Detroit Electronic Music Archive (DEMA).⁷⁶ Simultaneously, I applied to graduate school with the idea of pursuing a project on Detroit's contemporary soundscape. After taking a methodology class on oral history methods with Dr. Zboray in the spring of 2007 entitled "Voices of Remembrance," I began a more methodical approach to my archiving practice with an eye towards my prospectus and eventual dissertation. Since then, I have established a pattern of recording my interviews and seeking out narrators specifically for their relationship to my developing sense of Detroit's musical history. Though I have not transcribed every interview fully, I have taken notes for all interviews so that I could go back later and pick out key quotes for later transcription.⁷⁷ Whenever it was required by the "Interview Gift Form"—the legal document granting me the right to use the words of my interviewees—I provided quotes and transcriptions to my interviewees before using them here.⁷⁸

In 2010, I was able to return to Detroit with the help of a fellowship from the Cultural Studies Program at the University of Pittsburgh. This fellowship has allowed me to follow up many interviews and pursue dozens of new ones. Over the years I have settled on a series of

⁷⁶ See the Hackley Web site: <<http://www.thehackley.org/>> (accessed 25 February 2011). I am not alone in this archival turn however. Over the last five years there has been an emphasis on archiving the continuing efforts of African American electronic musicians and DJs. See Denise Dalphond, *Techno Music and Audio Visual Archives: The Conference as a Solution to Filling the Documentation Gap* (M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 2007).

⁷⁷ I have used Valerie Raleigh Yow to think through the process of building questions, gathering interviews, and editing transcripts. See her *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists* (Lanham, Md. and Oxford: AltaMira Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ For help with interview gift forms I have looked to John A. Neuenschwander, *Oral History and the Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

open-ended questions for my interviewees. I normally start with asking them generally about their family background before asking them about standout memories from different periods in their life (childhood and adolescence, early adulthood, adulthood). As they proceed through their lives, I supplement these memories, with questions about musical appreciation (Were their parents or siblings musically inclined? Was there music in the house, either through stereo systems, radios, or musical instruments?), and musical involvement (When did they begin to think of themselves as part of the musical life of the city?). I have also, more and more, tended to ask questions about the city itself, their perceptions of it, and where they think it is going.

Throughout this last decade, my identity—I am ethnically western European, identify as male and straight, and am youthful in appearance (as I approach my mid-thirties I am still regularly carded in bars)—seems to have both helped and hindered me. The idea that a white man like myself might be interested in the story of a predominantly black gay scene, for instance, has taken some interviewees literally years to get used to. To say that I stuck out, for instance, at an after-hours lesbian dance party or an all-black gay bar in the middle of the afternoon is a severe understatement.⁷⁹ However, reflecting on my research, one of the biggest obstacles to high quality interviews was the fact that people knew I had been and—from time to time—continued to be a (music) journalist. Being a music journalist with a wide knowledge of music did help in gaining access to some interviewees and helped me navigate musical jargon and references. However, there is little respect for journalists, musical or otherwise, and little knowledge of oral historians and what they do. As one interviewee reminded me only a few months ago, “journalists are assassins.” There was deep skepticism among some prospective interviewees about how interviews might be used or how they might be represented. Some of

⁷⁹ For issues regarding gender and oral history, I have drawn on the work in Susan H. Armitage, ed., *Women's Oral History: The Frontier's Reader* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

these interviewees never came around and did not agree to be interviewed. Others took years of interactions to build up any kind of rapport. But though it is deeply difficult to judge, I feel that trust was not the biggest problem. In many cases, interviewees assumed that all I wanted to talk about in our interviews was their involvement in the scene and were taken-aback that I would want to know, for instance, about their lives growing up in Detroit. My sense is that these Detroiters were not used to being interviewed by an oral historian and, perhaps more importantly, had not been asked by anyone, historian or otherwise, about their lives at any significant length at all. I made this disturbing conclusion in this last year and it has given me even more reason to complete my project.

1.8 NATURALISTIC INQUIRY

In 2002, I formed a DJ partnership with Walter Wasacz, then a reporter for the *Hamtramck Citizen*, now an editor for the online news magazine *Model D.*, called Paris '68. Paris '68, like our chosen DJ names (he called himself nscene while I called myself nosoul), in true Situationist fashion, reflected an attempt to disturb scene boredom as well as critique too-easy assumptions about what kind of music could be mixed together. For a little over six years, we played semi-regularly in coffee shops (we held a resident for a time at a place called Urban Break), ethnic restaurants (our first gig was at an Indian place called Gandhi), and, every so often, clubs like Motor and the Shelter, mixing together rock and dance music from all quarters, especially music from Detroit. At our peak as a collective, we started "The Subterraneans" at the *Metro Times*, a bi-weekly column that Wasacz continues to write. The column focused on the city's dance and electronic music and provided a place for short interviews, party reviews, and

listings for upcoming events. In a moment I will never forget, City Council member Sheila Cockrel quoted from one of our columns in order to support the then controversial move to allow the planners of Detroit Electronic Music Festival (DEMF) to sell tickets in order to raise revenue to pay for the event. We had supported it. The group eventually broke up but Wasacz and I have kept close tabs on one another. He still DJs in a group called nospectacle and this winter became an interviewee for this dissertation.

I tell this story, as well as admit to my involvement with the Detroit Public Library, in order to make clear that I am not an objective bystander in this dissertation. I do not draw directly from my DJing in Paris '68 in this dissertation. However, I do make a number of participatory observations from my time in the scene. I am hesitant to call my work a “performative ethnography” as Bailey does in his work on Detroit’s ballroom culture because my narrators are very much the center of each chapter and not my own performance as a DJ.⁸⁰ Instead, drawing on the Lincoln and Guba, I consider my work here as a part of a qualitative, “naturalist inquiry,” an investigation based in human capacities, principally listening. As Lincoln and Guba explain

When we assert that qualitative methods come more easily to hand when the instrument is a human being, we mean that the human-as-instrument is inclined toward methods that are extensions of normal human activities: looking, listening, speaking, reading, and the like. We believe that the human will tend, therefore, toward interviewing, observing, mining available documents and records, taking account of nonverbal cues, and interpreting inadvertent unobtrusive measures.⁸¹

In “Where The Mix Is Perfect,” I follow a group of narrators through a series of critical and telling moments, asking as I go, how have they imagined and invented Detroit’s mixing, post-Motown soundscape? I punctuate and enrich my oral history interviews with descriptions of a

⁸⁰ Bailey, “The Labor of Diaspora,” 58.

⁸¹ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1985), 199.

wide-ranging archive of audio recordings, videos, DVDs, personal papers, newspapers, photographs, posters, flyers, and other micro-media.⁸² I have gathered much of this material as an area resident, scene participant, journalist, graduate student, and now archivist. Additionally, I have gathered material while a research fellow at the Bentley Historical Collection at the University of Michigan in 2009 and 2010. My goal, once again, is to weave together a series of scenes from my interviewees' life stories with a corresponding and varied compliment of primary sources.

However, I think it's important to point out, as Bailey does, that I have had and continue to play multiple roles in the shaping of Detroit's soundscape. This includes attempting to organize DJs into the American Federation of Musicians Local #5—Detroit's longtime musician union—which I discuss below in my project overview and in my dissertation's final chapter.

1.9 PROJECT OVERVIEW

In my first chapter, "Improvise: Inventing a Renaissance Scene, 1967-1976," I describe both Detroit's pre and immediate post-rebellion soundscape in order to understand better the transition of the late 1960s. Detroit was not the only place in the world grappling with the failures of the left in the late 1960s. In Paris, Chicago, and Mexico, amongst other places, rebellions of workers and youth failed to bring about immediate political change. Large forces—including but not limited to imperial wars Southeast Asia, a significant right-wing backlash in public opinion, and intense police repression—were at work. However, unlike many global cities, Detroit was

⁸² For discussions of flyers as examples of micro-media used in rave culture, for instance, see Thornton, Chapter 4, and David Muggleton, *Inside Subculture* (Oxford, England: Berg, 2000), Chapter 7.

eventually successful in building a post-rebellion coalition, even amidst the global counter-revolution. Here I draw on writer, professor, and former-Detroiter Herb Boyd's observation that groups after the failed rebellion were "improvising" like the jazz musicians that he and others looked to for both musical and political inspiration.⁸³ These improvisations point of departure was that what was required in Detroit was a "Renaissance," a rebirth in which government, business, local community groups, and cultural leaders would come together to build a "New Detroit." This is perhaps the longest running idea in Detroit civic discourse—the city's slogan is "Speramus Meliora Resurget Cineribus" ("We Hope For Better Things; It Shall Rise from the Ashes"). Unlike the rest of my dissertation, this chapter leans heavily on already-existing work on Detroit's musical legacy, especially the previous oral history work mentioned above. The idea here is not to reinvent the wheel but instead to remix an extensive archive of journalism and scholarship on Detroit. Though numerous voices are included, I focus most heavily on two narrators: jazz musician Wendell Harrison and poet and radio DJ John Sinclair. I have interviewed Harrison a number of times since 2009 and Sinclair has been documented—and has documented himself—extensively. I wrap Harrison's story within the story of Tribe Records of which he was co-creator, a black-owned and operated record label committed musically and politically to addressing the city's black community and its jazz scene. From 1972 to 1976, this record label also produced a magazine that was distributed throughout the Midwest. To fill out Sinclair's story I draw from materials that include the papers of Frank and Petty Bach who were very active, along with John Sinclair, in promoting jazz, blues, rock, and new wave music after

⁸³ "With the exception of a small number of experiments in some aleatory music after 1960 ["music in which deliberate use is made of chance or indeterminacy"], improvised music is not produced without some kind of preconception or point of departure. There is always a model that determines the scope within which a musician acts. In the case of jazz, the model may be a series of harmonies that determine pitches to be selected for a melody; or a melody that is subjected to variation; or a set of motifs from which selection is made." Don Michael Randel, editor, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 4th ed (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003): 32 and 406.

the rebellion. Little published work has been done on this generation of these promoters, poets, and jazz musicians who theorized the possibilities for performance and politics in a post-Motown world.

My argument in this chapter is that in the process of building a scene Detroit cultural leaders failed to listen carefully enough to the soundscape. In other words, despite this scene's pretensions to speak for the entire Detroit region (and drawing from local, state, and federal arts funding in the process), it was unprepared and, at times, resistant to how emergent groups would redefine both sound and politics in the years to come.

In my second chapter, "Blend: The Soundscape and the Club DJ, 1975-1981," I introduce new scholarship, including original oral history work, to describe the emergence of one of these new, potentially transgressive groups: the primarily black and gay underground community organized around the "disco concept" beginning in the 1970s.⁸⁴ Here my narrators include DJs like Greg Collier, John Collins, and Stacey Hale, as well as party promoter and entrepreneur Zana Smith, and dancer/audience member Trina Brooks. I blend these stories together with descriptions of mix-tapes, party flyers, and advertisements from local queer publications such as the *Detroit Gay Liberator* and *Metra Magazine*. Though other writers in other cities have acknowledged the importance of underground dance culture, it has been virtually ignored in

⁸⁴ This story has already been told from the point of view of different regions and is crucial to the history of cultural studies and its understanding of the "politics of pleasure." See Richard Dyer, "In Defense of Disco," *Gay Left*, no. 8 (Summer 1979): 20-23. For a New York-based view of the rise of disco, see Kai Fikentscher, "*You Better Work!*": *Underground Dance Music in New York City* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press via the University Press of New England, 2000); Vince Aletti, *The Disco Files 1973-1978: New York's Underground, Week by Week* (New York: DJHistory.com/Pryamid Press, 2009); Tim Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003). For a re-elaboration of Dyer's 1979 intervention, see Tim Lawrence, "In Defense of Disco (Again)." For a highly reflective approach to studying emergent queer youth style, see Susan Driver, ed., *Queer Youth Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

studies of Detroit.⁸⁵ Bringing these voices into my dissertation while discussing the clubs they performed, worked, and danced in, as well as the record stores and record pools that provided them music and a modicum of respect, I fill a significant gap in the history of 20th century music in the United States.

In the third chapter, “Mix: Counterclockwiseology, 1979-1989,” I trace the mass communication phase of this new scene on radio, television, and in the clubs—and the audiences that listened, watched, and danced—in order to gauge new sounds that were remixing Detroit’s earlier soundscape. In the process, I introduce a dynamic I follow through the rest of the dissertation between Detroit’s DJ culture and hip hop.⁸⁶ In the early sections of this chapter, I rely heavily on two narrators, Charles “The Electrifying Mojo” Johnson and Jeff “The Wizard” Mills. Mojo and The Wizard were quintessential to bringing early hip-hop records and DJ styles budding in New York to a mass audience in Detroit. In the second half of the chapter, I rely on narrators like Khary Turner, James “The Blackman” Harris, and, later, Maurice Malone, who were inspired and challenged by these DJs to take part in the early moments of Detroit hip hop. I bring these voices together by highlighting how Detroit’s nightlife hummed even as AIDs, drugs, and gun violence brutally confronted city residents. Clubs like Todd’s, which I talk about at length in this chapter, have, to my knowledge, rarely been mentioned outside the scene except on a handful of Web sites and Facebook pages dedicated to them. This chapter is perhaps the most

⁸⁵ “Where Chicago house tended to feature disco-style diva vocals, Detroit tracks were almost always instrumentals. The final difference was that Detroit techno, while arty and upwardly mobile, was a straight black scene. Chicago house was a gay black scene.” Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998), 23.

⁸⁶ Much of my work on hip hop in this dissertation builds off of my own chapter on Detroit hip hop, entitled “‘Welcome to tha D.’: Making and Remaking Hip Hop Culture in Post-Motown Detroit.” In *Represent Where I’m From: The Greenwood Guide to American Regional Hip Hop*, ed. Mickey Hess (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2009), 393-428. For a more traditional, coastal view of the history of hip hop which also takes into consideration the movement of Caribbean immigrants as crucial to the proliferation of DJing, see Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005).

important in showing how mixed and imaginative Detroit's soundscape had become in the 1980s and therefore is crucial to my counter-memory that there was no love after Motown.

In the fourth chapter, "Remix: Journey Through the Hardcore, 1989-1998," I add to the mix a new set of voices, raised by DJs like Mojo and Mills, and inspired by national and global changes in the soundscape to build their own utopias within downtown Detroit. Here narrators like club-kid and rave promoters like Marke Bieschke and Adriel Thornton, share space with hip hop entrepreneurs like Maurice Malone. The latter was mentored directly by Zana Smith who continued to influence Detroit nightlife long after the demise of the disco era. The archive for this section will be recordings, desktop computer flyers for the rave scene, and photographs provided by my interviewees. Detroit's local rave history is shared extensively on social media networks like Facebook but it has not been written about extensively. Likewise, the "golden age" of Detroit hip hop has only been told in book and film form via Eminem's selective memory. By telling the story of, for instance, the Three Floors of Fun parties at Saint Andrew's Hall, where multiple musical genres—including hip hop and techno—served multiple audiences all under one roof, I recapture the interconnectedness of Detroit's contemporary soundscape.

In my final body chapter, "Sync: 'The Place Is Here / The Time Is Now, 1999-2011,'" I follow a series of voices, some introduced in earlier chapters, others new, from the soundscape in an attempt to gauge the recent health of Detroit's soundscape. Do DJs still mix records and minds? Do audiences still think with their feet? Can rappers still hail an audience beyond Detroit's neighborhood ciphers? Here, writer and DJ Walter Wasacz, music producer and Web designer Doc Matthews, and longtime club DJ Mike Huckaby, amongst others chime in with their understanding of what has been lost and what has been gained in an age of media

convergence.⁸⁷ My interviewees in this chapter have widely differing views of where Detroit music is now and what its challenges and possibilities are. In this chapter, I wonder openly if Detroit has the potential to shape the global soundscape again—or if Detroit’s history can no longer be remixed. I also share my experience of being inducted into the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), Local 5 as a DJ, the first such musician that I am aware of to join the union in its history. Over thirty-five years after the blending of records began shaping the sonic expectations of Detroit, the AFM and its members are potentially interested in inviting representatives from Detroit’s post-Motown world into its order. As the AFM begins its own archiving project, I take my final pages to openly wonder what kind of story the union will tell—or be able to tell—and what that might mean for how Detroiters listen to their own histories.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

⁸⁸ “Member Help Needed In Extensive Local 5 Archiving Project,” *Keynote* 73, no. 4 (2010): 15.

2.0 IMPROVISE: INVENTING A RENAISSANCE SCENE, 1967-1976

In a box at the Bentley Library at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor there is a series of manila file cards labeled “Police Riot Photos.”⁸⁹ On each card there are two black and white photos, one on each side, taken by the Detroit Police Department in the days after the Detroit rebellion began early in the morning of July 23, 1967. They are mostly photos from the street of building fires and damage, most no more than one photo per location. However, there are a group of shots—nine together—that feature the empty interior of a second floor set of rooms at 9125 12th Street upstairs from the Economy Printing Company. In one, a case of Stroh’s Beer, Detroit’s long-time local brew, stands open on the floor of a kitchen chaotically strewn with debris. The rooms are devoid of people. These are photos of the “Blind Pig,” a purportedly illegal, after-hours establishment that was raided early the morning of July 23, 1967, eventually resulting in the nation’s worst domestic disturbance since the Civil War. Evidently the police in the days after the rebellion had come back to the scene of the initial conflagration to authenticate the facts and, presumably, legitimate their actions. Though there is no corresponding police report available with the photos the fact that there is a photo of the case of beer, the apparent evidence for the bust—the potential purchase of which would have justified the vice squad’s

⁸⁹ Folder “Precinct 10-2,” Detroit Police Department photograph collection, Bentley Historical Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich.. From the collection’s description: “Photographs taken by the Detroit Police Department following the 1967 Detroit riot; views of burned-out and vandalized businesses and offices, including interior and exterior views of drinking club where disturbance began.” See <http://mirlyn-classic.lib.umich.edu/F/?func=direct&doc_number=002747368&local_base=BENT_PUB>. (accessed December 8, 2010.)

entry into the building—signals the standard story. The pictures taken by the Detroit Police Department (DPD) in 1967 eerily resonate with more recent photos taken of Detroit that have peaked recently with a glut of what has been called “Ruin Porn.”⁹⁰ These kinds of photos, which emphasize the trope of empty, burnt-out, buildings, filled with decay and decayed things/commodities, in other words are painfully not new. Being awash in these images today it is difficult to not assume that they began with silent, vacant photos like these. Photos like this contain few if any people and, normally, contain even less accompanying text than what the DPD provided to their photos over forty years ago. Though these photos can be disarmingly beautiful—a fact not lost on a number of photographers who have made coffee table books out of them—they do not come free of ideological meaning. In 2010, Detroit disaster photos point to the inevitability of city’s’ demise, its collective sins pouring out of its failed modern husks. And here, amidst these initial post-riot photos, it is very easy to be coaxed into accepting an allegory of urban decay that began one night, many years ago in red-light district bar at the margins of the American Dream.

⁹⁰ Thomas Morton, “Something, Something, Something, Detroit: Lazy Journalists Love Pictures of Abandoned Stuff,” *Vice Magazine*, August 2009. <<http://www.viceland.com/int/v16n8/htdocs/something-something-something-detroit-994.php?page=1>> (Accessed December 8, 2010). For a coffee-table version of this, see Andrew Moore, *Detroit Disassembled* (Akron, Ohio: Diamini/Akron Art Museum, 2010).



Figure 2-1. The “blind pig” July 1967.

However, this melancholy tale is not the only conclusion that can be drawn. As some articles and books remember the tale, there was a party that night for a soldier returning from Vietnam. A smaller number of sources remember that the “blind pig” had a name: the Urban Community and Civic League.⁹¹ Though rarely discussed in the years since the rebellion, the

⁹¹ Deciding why the riots began, who started them, who or what was to blame for them, and if they were even riots at all and not, for example, signs of rebellion, uprising, etc., became a matter of debate simultaneously with their start on Sunday morning, July 23, 1967. For an overview of events and nomenclature, see *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968); Hubert G. Locke, *The Detroit Riot of 1967* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969); Robert Conot, *American Odyssey: A Unique History of America Told Through the Life of a Great City* (New York: William Morrow, 1974), 523-525, and Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989). For a more recent, local overview of the “uprising” / “rebellion” and its causes, see Lee Paul, “Uprising! Rare Testimonies and Reports on the ’67 Detroit Rebellion,” *Michigan Citizen*, July 22-28th, 2007. Tamar Jacoby presents the semantic debate in Manichean terms in her book, *Someone Else’s House: America’s Unfinished Struggle for Integration* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 238-39. For a more nuanced description of the potential groups contending over the meaning of the riots, see Melissa Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). In this dissertation, following Thompson, I refer to the riots as a rebellion except where quoting individual interviewees.

Detroit Free Press did acknowledge the owner of the “club” shortly after the rebellion itself.⁹² In the article, the paper’s staff writer William Serrin names William “Bill” Scott, Jr. as the individual responsible for throwing the party, organizing the League (which, according to the article, was known as the “Democratic Club” to “folks in the neighborhood”), and helping to establish its goals beyond gambling, dancing, and drinking. The *Free Press* article, though not archived online, is available in a folder in one of the four boxes of riots materials in the Burton Collection in the *Detroit Public Library*. However, the more difficult find is William Scott’s son’s eyewitness description of the bust and the emergence and environment within the club itself. In it, Scott III describes the emergence of the bar as a space for electioneering that fizzled out between elections, leaving the jubilation of the bar, invigorated by the craps—a dice game—being thrown in a back room and the jukebox playing, according to Scott III, “Mr. James Brown” in the main space, the participants, “dancing, laughing, having a natty-gritty-funky good time.”⁹³ In his autobiography and account of the rebellion, Scott III, at the time working in a factory, not as doorman for the League a role he had held previously, describes the role of the club.

People were frustrated, they were tired, tired of police, tired of fighting and killings. It just got to their heads. It was just too much. So they danced. In the club. There’s a community feeling, that’s no shit; if a lot of the community is depressed, it spreads, nobody has to tell it to you, you know, just how much can you take, you’ve got to get away from it some way. So they danced. And now I was going to the club too. It would be one time I could go up there now without having to work all night. I would enjoy myself.⁹⁴

In the corner of one of the DPD’s pictures is a hint of the world that the younger Scott, then just twenty years old, remembered. In a photo of the League shot down the staircase of the building, there are two, white, circle placards with writing on them laying on the ground. On placard

⁹² William Serrin, “Detroit’s Time of Trouble: It Began with a Raid Here,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 6, 1967, 13A.

⁹³ William Walter Scott, *Hurt, Baby, Hurt* (New Ghetto Press: Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1970), 106-107.

⁹⁴ William Walter Scott, *Hurt, Baby, Hurt* (New Ghetto Press: Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1970), 105.

reads: “Teen Dance Night Every Sunday from 8:00 to 2:00.” On the other, “Hall to rent: Call Mr. Scott.”



Figure 2-2. Detail from photo of Urban Community and Civic League July 1967.

My concern with these photos and the obscurity of William Scott’s text is not to wax nostalgic about a lost-time never to return. Instead, in this chapter I want to follow the voices of Detroit’s musical community before and after the rebellion to see exactly what kinds of improvisation was forced to take place. Despite Detroit’s well-documented urban decline, Detroit’s musical audiences—and the musicians, DJs, record producers, entertainers, promoters, engineers, writers, and hangers-on among them—have found each other, as they came together to create, perform, and educate through music. The musical evidence of this is readily apparent to fans of techno, house, hip-hop, and other genres of music that have emerged over the last forty years, genres in which Detroiters continue to play a significant role. However, exactly what elements from Detroit’s pre-rebellion musical atmosphere remained in the post-rebellion scene is obscure. In this chapter then my plan is to help explain how and why, for instance, audiences at the League, instead of merely glad-handing, got together to dance.

In my first chapter, “Improvise: Inventing a Renaissance Scene, 1967-1976,” I describe both Detroit’s pre and immediate post-rebellion soundscape in order to understand better the transition of the late 1960s. Detroit was not the only place in the world grappling with the failures of the left in the late 1960s. In Paris, Chicago, and Mexico, amongst other places, rebellions of workers and youth failed to bring about immediate political change. Large forces—including but not limited to imperial wars Southeast Asia, a significant right-wing backlash in public opinion, and intense police repression—were at work. However, unlike many global cities, Detroit was eventually successful in building a post-rebellion coalition, even amidst the global counter-revolution. Here I draw on writer, professor, and former-Detroiter Herb Boyd’s observation that groups after the failed rebellion were “improvising”⁹⁵ like the jazz musicians that he and others looked to for both musical and political inspiration. These improvisations point of departure was that what was required in Detroit was a “Renaissance,” a rebirth in which government, business, local community groups, and cultural leaders would come together to build a “New Detroit.” This is perhaps the longest running idea in Detroit civic discourse—the city’s slogan is “Speramus Meliora Resurget Cineribus” (“We Hope For Better Things; It Shall Rise from the Ashes”). Unlike the rest of my dissertation, this chapter leans heavily on already-existing work on Detroit’s musical legacy, especially the previous oral history work mentioned above. The idea here is not to reinvent the wheel but instead to remix an extensive archive of journalism and scholarship on Detroit. Though numerous voices are included, I focus most heavily on two narrators: jazz musician Wendell Harrison and poet and radio DJ John Sinclair. I

⁹⁵ “With the exception of a small number of experiments in some aleatory music after 1960 [“music in which deliberate use is made of chance or indeterminacy”], improvised music is not produced without some kind of preconception or point of departure. There is always a model that determines the scope within which a musician acts. In the case of jazz, the model may be a series of harmonies that determine pitches to be selected for a melody; or a melody that is subjected to variation; or a set of motifs from which selection is made.” Don Michael Randel, editor, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 4th ed (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003): 32 and 406.

have interviewed Harrison a number of times since 2009 and Sinclair has been documented—and has documented himself—extensively. I wrap Harrison’s story within the story of Tribe Records of which he was co-creator, a black-owned and operated record label committed musically and politically to addressing the city’s black community and its jazz scene. From 1972 to 1976, this record label also produced a magazine that was distributed throughout the Midwest. To fill out Sinclair’s story I draw from materials that include the papers of Frank and Petty Bach who were very active, along with John Sinclair, in promoting jazz, blues, rock, and new wave music after the rebellion. Little published work has been done on this generation of these promoters, poets, and jazz musicians who theorized the possibilities for performance and politics in Detroit after the rebellion.

2.1 BEFORE MOTOWN

Like a Marcus Belgrave [trumpet] solo or the vocal shadings of Miche Braden, Detroit’s jazz scene is complex, everchanging, and full of sweet surprise. In its seventy years some years of existence, jazz in Detroit has pushed beyond the restrictive confines of Black Bottom to virtually engulf the city. It was once a music limited in space and sound, now it is possible to whistle along with Hastings Street Experience and end up on Orange Lake Drive.⁹⁶

— Herb Boyd, 1984

In late 1980, in an attempt “to assess how blacks have fared and how blacks and whites are getting on in Detroit today,” the *Detroit Free Press* published a series of stories on the black

⁹⁶ Herb Boyd, “Black Bottom and Beyond,” in *Detroit Jazz Who’s Who*, ed. Herb Boyd and Leni Sinclair (Detroit: Jazz Research Institute, 1984), 86.

experience in Detroit. In one of them, Betty DeRamus wrote about her experience growing up in downtown Detroit.

It is early afternoon, but a dozen people already are sipping drinks in the 606 Horse Shoe Lounge, a gray brick building on St. Antoine near Madison that opened its doors back in 1936 and is the last structure left from the old Paradise Valley. Outside, there is nothing to suggest good cheer: Snow flakes pound the parking lot across the street and cloud the outlines of Hudson's warehouse. In the lounge, though, old men in gray hats are drinking beneath red and green signs celebrating the holidays to come. Someone drops a coin in the glowing red and blue jukebox, and Aretha Franklin begins booming 'Bridge Over Troubled Water.' The people drifting in are regulars who have come here for years: They greet each other with grins. 'Hi, Red,' someone yells to a light-complexioned old man. The soap opera playing on the television set catches the barmaid's ear, and she shouts an answer to one of the character's questions. In a large aquarium in the back room, a kissing gourami, looking like a large, pale goldfish, swims alone.⁹⁷

By the early 1980s, this melancholy image of a largely black entertainment world, Paradise Valley, slowly peeling away would have resonated for a generation of Detroiters—of many stripes—who had grown up in its wake or sensed, as DeRamus does here, its rich cultural influence.

Long before the rebellion, Detroiters participated in an incredibly rich, modern musical scene. Alice E. M. Cain Newman, a Detroit-area realtor and member of the NAACP, remembered dancing in her musician-father Jimmy Cain's stage shows for a "quarter a week" in the 1920s.⁹⁸ M. Kelly Fritz talked about dancing in cabarets in Detroit as a teen before later attending dances at places like the Royal Garden and the Graystone. In 1994, he was quoted as saying: "I guess you'd consider me a good dancer. I still dance, shake a mean foot, I guess."⁹⁹ Frances Quock remembers meeting Duke Ellington at the Graystone in the 1940s only to not go to a party that the Duke invited her to later that night. "My Mom said: 'Don't go with musicians.

⁹⁷ Betty DeRamus, "Innocence and Vice on Hastings Street," in *Blacks in Detroit: A Reprint of Articles from the Detroit Free Press*, ed. Scott McGehee and Susan Watson (Detroit Free Press, December 1980): 79.

⁹⁸ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 74.

⁹⁹ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 81.

They're bad.'"¹⁰⁰ Many remembered Detroit's "Paradise Valley," the central business district within the "Black Bottom"¹⁰¹ neighborhood where blacks were largely restricted to in the first half of the twentieth century. Richard L. King reminisced about his time as manager at one of the main clubs within the Valley, Club Three 666.

When we opened the Club Three 666 as a night club, we presented Doc Wheeler and the Sunset Royals, with Ralph Cooper as the emcee. In the late years, we added a chorus line with a choreographer by the name of Betty Taylor, who lived in Chicago.... We had a seating capacity of 750 people and had it elevated so that everyone was able to see over those seated in front of them. We had the best acoustics in the city, and it was known as the finest club in the country.¹⁰²

Kermit Bailer, a former member in WWII's Tuskegee Airmen, talked about how the music drifted "uptown" after the war to "Show Bars" like the Flame and Frolic.¹⁰³ And the fun was not just in the clubs either. Mary Cosey remembers dancing in the courts of the Brewster Projects, the same housing complex where Motown singer and former Supreme Diana Ross grew up. "When we used to have court dances, they'd have all the lights on, and people would be blasting music, and the police would be out there. They had a project policeman. We called him 'Shorty' Black. He would be out there and make sure everything was all right and everybody was okay."¹⁰⁴ Herb Boyd, a writer and professor, who grew up in those same projects in downtown Detroit, remembers how the physical spaces of the cities, including homes, provided musical opportunities.

Detroit was not unlike Chicago or Harlem where there was a concentration of Black people. But Detroit was unique in terms of the geographical patterns of how we lived—single-family homes, a basement, a back yard. These things figured into the relationship people have that other cities didn't have. Jazz was very important to me as a teenager.

¹⁰⁰ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 246.

¹⁰¹ Whether the neighborhood name refers to the soil underneath or the eventual make up of the neighborhood at the height of the Perry Bradford's song, "Black Bottom," in the 1920s is the subject of the article by Desiree Cooper, "Black Bottom Neighborhood Was Not Named for Soil," *Detroit Free Press*, 1 February 2007.

¹⁰² Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 164-165.

¹⁰³ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 179.

¹⁰⁴ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 272.

We'd meet in different basements and play instruments. We had a certain amount of privacy. We didn't have to go to a settlement. Our homes were points of congregation. That gave us a certain control and development that likely triggered the later development of Motown.¹⁰⁵

These voices give testimony to the synergy between a myriad of forces—racial segregation, urban development, and a new modern musical aesthetic, built around improvisation and disseminated through schools, churches, and neighborhood living spaces—that was creating a heady atmosphere for young, blacks in Detroit.

Of course, Detroit's twentieth century, especially for blacks, was not all late night dances and dress-to-impress bars. Detroit's long-term sociological realities were well understood and experienced. Musicians were not immune to these conditions. Thomas H. "Dr. Beans" Bowles, Sr., and Earl F. Van Dyke—both "Funk Brothers," members of the stable of musicians who came to define the Motown Sound—remember playing segregated dances.¹⁰⁶ Moon quotes Bowles as saying:

When we first started going out with [vocalist] Lloyd [Price]'s band, they would have a white dance and the black dance. The white ones would come in first, and the blacks would come in later, and we would play the longest part for them. Then they got to having black and white, and they'd have a string down the middle of the floor; and the white guy would stand there with the flashlight, don't let nobody cross that string. We got to swinging one night and the string broke, and it was over.¹⁰⁷

Van Dyke remembers being beaten for such "accidental" racial mixing on a tour to New Orleans in 1959.¹⁰⁸ However, despite severe, violent, even at times fatal racial prejudice, Detroit's black community was able to build businesses, produce wealth, and provide for a level of cultural attainment as strong as any in the United States during the same time. As Van Dyke remembers:

¹⁰⁵ Robert H. Mast, *Detroit Lives*, 78.

¹⁰⁶ See *Standing in the Shadows of Motown*, dir. Paul Justman, DVD (Santa Monica, California: Artisan Home Entertainment, 2003).

¹⁰⁷ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 242.

¹⁰⁸ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 243-244.

The ambiance of the '50s was the greatest thing in my life as far as music is concerned, because we had a brotherhood, we had respect. Didn't make much money. You never make a lot of money in this business unless you get to be that one person out of a million that goes to the top. You get a chance to build your confidence. You live a good life. You enjoy your life, and there's places for you to work. Now there's no place to work. There's no place for a young musician to even hone his wares so that he's competent.¹⁰⁹

Van Dyke's observations are consonant with other musicians' experience of the times and his parting comments on 1990s Detroit nightlife are important to reflect on. I will return to them in later in this dissertation.

However, not everyone's musical heroes were traditional musicians. William Hurt III grew up near 12th Street where the rebellion began. For a career he would eventually go into marketing and public relations. But when he was a boy his heroes were radio deejays.

Ernie Durham, who used to be the top deejay of WJLB, lived directly behind our house, on the corner of Boston and 12th. He used to give all kinds of parties, and we'd drill these little holes in the back of his wooden fence and peer through them. He would have bands, and everybody would be in tuxedos or dinner jackets. We could see some of the Motown entertainers—Smokey Robinson, the Miracles, the Temptations. He was such a personality at that time and was really responsible for getting Motown and putting it on the map. Just sit in the alley and peer through the holes and watch him party. We had to have some kind of enjoyment as kids. So we did that.¹¹⁰

Hurt was not alone. Many were inspired radio personalities like Ernie Durham. He is an off-cited character during this time period for Detroit residents. Be that as it may, he had started his Michigan career in Flint in the 1950s so someone did not have to be black, or even live in Durham's neighborhood, to hear or idolize him. Mass communication, arguably as much as place and race, was helping to define Detroit's sound. As David Carson recounts in *Grit Noise and Revolution*:

¹⁰⁹ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 241. Bjorn with Gallert describe the 1950s period in their chapter entitled, "The 1950s: The Golden Age of Jazz in Detroit," in *Before Motown: A History of Jazz in Detroit, 1920-1960* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 2001), 122-167.

¹¹⁰ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 370.

Growing up in the 1950s, [John] Sinclair became a big fan of blues and R & B while listening to the radio. “Man, I used to listen to “Frantic” Ernie Durham every night on WBBC from Flint,” he recalls. “He was my idol. He played Muddy Waters, Little Walter, Sonnyboy [Williamson], and Howlin’ Wolf, and he would rhyme everything he said, like Great Googa Mooga Shooga Wooga!” or “We’ve got the jive that’s truly alive.” I thought he was the greatest.” Such a fan was Sinclair that he had even billed himself “Frantic John” while playing records at a high school dance.”¹¹¹

As a teen Sinclair, who in the 1960s would become a significant leader of Detroit’s counterculture, was tuning into a wide Detroit musical network that was already in full swing during his childhood. This included records from national recording artists that were taking off in the post-WWII years. Herb Boyd leaned on his mother’s collection for his “education.”

My mother was a jazz fanatic. Nat King Cole was like a surrogate father, along with Bill Eckstine, Charlie Parker, and all of the beboppers. She was deeply into rhythm and blues. She had all the records and I wore them out. I got my musical education through her records and listening to her and her friends.¹¹²

Much of this pre-Motown era of recording and DJing has been relegated to nostalgia-driven picture books.¹¹³ Radio mixes from this era are almost nonexistent; much of the recorded output of non-Motown labels is still out-of-print or available via unlicensed recordings. However, there are photos that attest to Detroit’s skills as record producers and record performers. In one of these photos, most likely shot in the 1940s, Joe Von Battle, one of Detroit’s earliest record label and record store owners in Detroit, is smoking a cigarette with his hand on the lathe made to cut records at his Hastings Street Studio.¹¹⁴ In another shot, taken at

¹¹¹ Quoted from David Carson’s personal interview with John Sinclair in David A. Carson, *Grit Noise and Revolution*, 107. Little has been written on Durham who died in 1992. Carson gathers biographical information from Loraine Alterman, “Ernie Durham, First Record Hop Man,” in *Detroit Free Press*, 9 April 1967. See *Grit Noise*, 19. There is a longer treatment based on a 1958 recording of Durham from the radio in David Carson, *Rockin’ Down the Dial*, 53-56. The recording, from Flint in 1958, features the Durham rapping the “Great Googa Mooga Shooga Wooga,” as well as promoting his show as playing “recorded music.” Hear the recording via “Radio Free Amsterdam”: <<http://www.radiofreemsterdam.com/archive/vintage-radio-vault/frantic-ernie-durham/>> (accessed 1 March 2011).

¹¹² Robert H. Mast, *Detroit Lives*, 78.

¹¹³ The current exceptions are David Carson’s books that I have referred to.

¹¹⁴ Marilyn Bond and S. R. Boland, *Images of America: The Birth of the Detroit Sound, 1940-1964* (Chicago: Arcadia, 2002), 23.

approximately the same time, a headphone-wearing Jack Surrell is shown with hands on a piano built into the radio studio around him, record player to his right and microphone in front of him.¹¹⁵



Figure 2-3. Joe Von Battle.



Figure 2-4. Jack Surrell right.

Battle would record acts such as John Lee Hooker and C. L. Franklin, Aretha Franklin's famous preacher-father; Surrell would move from radio to TV in the 1950s hosting live jazz with other

¹¹⁵Bond and Boland, *Images of America*, 29.

local Detroit musicians, including guitarist Kenny Burrell.¹¹⁶ Detroit's DJs made similar gestures thirty years later, when they would integrate electronic instrumentation into the mixing of records and, after years of playing out, begin to cut acetate records of tracks just for themselves to use as "DJ tools" in their sets. The process continues today, a continuous story of music-making, that at times has run parallel with, at other times at odds with, prevailing conceptions of Detroit's sound. However, the modern story of Detroit music is severely lacking without it.

The history of social dance in Detroit has a long history and one that, in its modern guise, connects intimately with the coming of sound recording. Hasting Street, the central street of Paradise Valley, not only played a pivotal role in bringing in musical acts, inspiring and incubating local talent, and eventually providing a setting for the recording of early jazz and blues musicians, as well as preachers, in Detroit. It also provided a potential market for deejays and radio stations attempting to build off of the popularity of the new sounds. One such place in Paradise Valley was the Ebony Room, the dining room of the Gotham Hotel.

On Saturdays, Trudy Hanes of WCHB would broadcast her show out of the Ebony Room, advertising Parker House Sausage. Frantic Ernie Durham lived in the hotel. He was a notable disc jockey, along with "Rocking With Leroy," Motown's "Queen Martha Jean," "Jack the Bellboy," and Ed McKenzie.¹¹⁷

WCHB, whose call letters were an amalgam of the initials of Wendell Cox and Dr. Haley Bell, was the first black-owned radio station in the country, beginning in 1956, becoming a critical outlet for early Motown hits by Berry Gordy and serving as a check on white-owned stations that catered to the black community.¹¹⁸ These radio disc jockeys, armed with studio technology, new records, and assistants, were critical to establishing the early sonic limits of what was possible on

¹¹⁶ Lars Bjorn and Jim Gallert, *Before Motown*, 149.

¹¹⁷ Ernest H. Borden, *Images of America: Detroit's Paradise Valley* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia, 2003): 40.

¹¹⁸ See David Carson, *Rockin' Down the Dial: The Detroit Sound of Radio* (Troy, Mich.: Momentum Books, 2000.), 56-57.

the radio. Simultaneously with other large city markets throughout the country, Detroit's radio personalities pushed the boundaries of what an on-air disc jockey might be, providing a continuous, sonic smorgasbord to their audiences and sparking the imaginations of everyone who listened.

However, these disc jockeys, what Detroit radio historian David Carson refers to as "personality jocks," did not for the most part provide continuous music in clubs—and technologically could not have. Traditionally venues for dancing were predominantly dance halls throughout the first half of the twentieth century. However, jukeboxes began to provide music in lieu of musicians beginning in the 1940s. The machines also played popular records that were different from the challenging jazz being served up by artists like Miles Davis when he came to play in Detroit at places like the Bluebird Inn. This mass-produced music found a home at places like the United Civic League where adults who liked more recent R & B and soul music, as well as teens, danced near or around them. Other musical playback technologies linked up with the growing baby-boom population, including the emergence of transistor radios in the mid-1950s. When Motown came along, Berry Gordy self-consciously sound-tested new records for their sonic compatibility with cars.

Motown recording engineers set up car speakers in the studio so that they could simulate and perfect how a song would sound emanating from a car radio. Richard Street, a member of the Temptations and a former studio engineer, described the process this way: "We'd have small to medium to large speakers. You'd put in the small one and turn the dial, and if you couldn't understand the words or it wasn't clear enough, you'd write a little memo back downstairs, like 'Turn up the drums' or 'Too much bass' or 'Can't hear the vocals loud enough.'" Hitsville Studios continued to monitor new advances in audio components for cars throughout the 1960s and marketed their products accordingly. In July 1966 a newspaper article reported that Motown Records led the field "in the first reported tabulations of sales of automobile eight-track stereo tape cartridges."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Suzanne Smith, *Dancing in the Street*, 124.

Detroit musicians, label-owners, and audiences, were learning how to take things they already did well—perform, dance, listen, promote—and adapt them so that they could travel beyond Detroit to national and international audiences. In the process, Detroit’s soundscape was changing global, sonic expectations. Nevertheless, very concrete situations in Detroit were affecting the musical networks within the region. Though much would survive in the ensuing transition brought on by urban renewal, the civil rights movement, the rebellion, and the emergence of new technologies, music making in Detroit would never be the same.

2.2 THE TRANSITION

According to Suzanne Smith, Motown was able to take advantage of the talent coming from Detroit’s schools, streets, and homes, as well as to draw from the political and economic energy of the community. As the voices above have attested, a growing black community, locked out of both mainstream politics and culture, was able to assemble a rich mosaic of strategies to better their lives. It is within this very specific historical framework, fraught with the hopes, fears, and day-to-day realities of black Detroit, that Smith locates the music and politics of Motown. Her main argument is that Motown was far from being an apolitical, teen-happy, crossover label. Instead, Smith examines particular movements and moments in black Detroit’s struggle for freedom, such as Detroit’s 1963 “Great March to Freedom”—which featured an early version of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech—and how those moments connected to the record company. She details Motown’s parallel struggles to establish itself as a black-owned business, examining the name and inspiration behind Gordy Sr.’s Booker T. Washington Grocery Store as well as the recording career of the Rev. C.L. Franklin, singer Aretha Franklin’s

father. The grocery allows Smith to make connections between the Gordy family and the key tenets of black nationalism and self-determination, while the Reverend's story brings out Detroit's history of black struggle and sound recordings. Franklin's sermons were distributed by Chess Records out of Chicago, one of the renowned R&B labels. Thus, Franklin was one of the greatest preachers of his time and one of Detroit's first major recording stars. Later, Smith investigates Detroit politics and culture via Motown's Black Forum subsidiary, a label that produced such un-Hitsville recordings as *Poets of the Revolution*, *Guess Who's Coming Home?: Black Men Recorded Live in Vietnam*, and *Free Huey!* Poets Langston Hughes and Detroit's Margaret Danner's efforts to be recorded by Black Forum despite the parent label's on-again-off-again interest in the project are set within the growing violence and frustration in Detroit that peaked in the 1967 rebellion. Similarly, Smith compares events such as the creation of DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) by black workers at Dodge Main with the songwriting work slowdowns and stoppages of Hitsville's most efficient songwriting team, Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, creators of "Where Did Our Love Go?," "Reach Out I'll Be There," "Nowhere to Run," and many other songs. In both situations, Smith argues, black workers fought against working on a production line, whether it was in a factory in Hamtramck or a house on West Grand Boulevard. These comparisons culminate in Smith's discussions of why Motown artists Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, the Temptations, and others felt the need to comment more explicitly on their realities as black people, despite the teenage lyrics and themes generally encouraged by the label's front office. This late-'60s / early-'70s groundswell of message music is one of Motown's most significant cultural legacies, with Marvin Gaye's "Inner

City Blues,” Stevie Wonder’s “Living for the City,” and the Temptations’ “Ball of Confusion (That’s What the World Is Today)” leading Smith’s list.¹²⁰

Despite Motown’s grassroots politics and revolutionary music, the company’s emergence was not considered a good thing by everyone. From a jazz perspective, Donald Walden argues that Motown’s emergence cost Detroit jazz musicians their own audience.

Today the audience isn’t there. We lost one generation to the Motown explosion and another generation of jazz musicians to the drug culture of the ’60s and ’70s. Before the Motown era, rhythm and blues was primarily for unskilled musicians that didn’t have a lot of knowledge for the most part. It only generates a certain element of popular acceptance. The difference that the Motown era made was that the music was created by jazz musicians and was polished and made sophisticated enough that it was able to be marketed to a much wider audience. In effect we kind of shot ourselves in the foot. All of that music was created by jazz musicians.¹²¹

At the same time, Motown’s success did not necessarily raise all boats or generate concrete political power. Urban renewal projects drastically reshaped Detroit’s urban landscape and tore apart black Detroit’s economic power base. In the 1990s, Marsha Mickens remembered her father, Joe Von Battle, taking her to where his original record store and studio used to be.

My first memory of Hastings was that my father took me to a place near where his record shop had been. I was a little girl, about three or four. He walked me across the street from the place where we were standing over to this gigantic dirt pit that was in the ground. It looked like a canyon to me. He looked at me and said, “Ling Ting Tong,” which was my nickname, “This is where Hastings used to be.” All my life, as a little girl, I didn’t know what that was. I just had this memory of this pit. As I get older, I realized that it was the initial diggings for the I-75 freeway. What my father so graphically understood and expressed with that sentence was that a way of life had been totally destroyed by the Chrysler Freeway. The street of Hastings just no longer existed.¹²²

¹²⁰ See Suzanne Smith, *Dancing in the Street*. The DRUM story is retold in Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution*, Updated Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press Classics, 1998). For more on the politics of music at Motown, see Ben Edmonds, *What’s Going On?: Marvin Gaye and the Last Days of the Motown Sound* (Edinburgh: Mojo Books, 2001).

¹²¹ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 320.

¹²² Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 361. Former Governor George Romney, is quoted by Moon as saying: “What triggered the riot in my opinion, to a considerable extent, was that between urban renewal and expressways, poor black people were bulldozed out of their homes. They had no place to go in the suburbs because of suburban

In an epically tragic twist of urban planning and crisis, Mickens was present to see her father have to mourn the loss of a second store when it moved, as many businesses did after the destruction of Hastings Street, to 12th Street where the rebellion began.

At the tail end of the riot Daddy took my brother and me to look at the record shop. He just said, “Oh, Lord.” It was like being in a war zone. Glass was all over the street. The record shop was just torn apart. Stuff was everywhere. It wasn’t burnt down as he had feared, but had been totally looted. Tapes that he had for a generation were destroyed. It was like his whole life’s work had been destroyed. I remember that feeling of witnessing my father witness that, of seeing him powerless over the situation, of the chaos because firemen and guardsmen were still running around. After that my mother says that he reopened the shop for a time. He was able to somehow pull it together, but it never did flourish. He ended up losing it shortly after that.¹²³

Regrettably, the destruction of Battle’s record store was not the first act of musical destruction during the rebellion. According to William Scott the Detroit Police Department went out of their way to smash the jukebox at the Urban Community League.¹²⁴

In terms of musical infrastructure, record stores and clubs were destroyed in the rebellion. By the time of the riots, Motown Records already had an entrepreneurial presence on the West Coast that would expand in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Motown would leave five years later, one of many businesses that would eventually close or relocate. The push and pull combination threatened a powerful network for musical creativity. As the 1970s began it was unclear what if anything would take its place. A robust, musical scene, at times with very explicit political aims, had been developing in Detroit for most of the century. As we will see, the rebellion signaled a shift in that scene but not its end.

restrictions. They settled along 12th Street. The concentration of people on 12th Street was too great. So when that incident occurred, it was a spark that ignited the whole area.” Quoted in Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 389)

¹²³ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 320.

¹²⁴ William Walter Scott, *Hurt, Baby, Hurt*.

2.3 TRIBE

TRIBE being concerned with black awareness, zeroes in on documentation of facts that will serve as ammunition for successful growth in our communities.... Once again **Black Awareness**, also means good **MEDIA CONTROL**. As [“Detroit Black Journal” producer] Tony Brown put [sic] it; “those who have studied the mysterious forces of the video box (TV), says it can shape family life, set social norms and customs, instill a feeling of national identity, re-design the world and effect individual personality development. This issue gives us more facts and figures necessary for the liberation struggle for black people. MOVE ON IT!”¹²⁵

In a middle-class home in the New Center area of Detroit, a short walk from the former headquarters of General Motors and less than a mile from the original Motown Recording Studios, Wendell Harrison and his wife, pianist Pamela Wise continue their efforts in a musical odyssey that has lasted more than forty years.¹²⁶ Upstairs is an office space where Wise maintains Rebirth Inc., Harrison and Wise’s record label and non-profit educational outreach program. In the basement is a recording studio that has been the home for Harrison and Wise’s contemporary recording careers, including Harrison’s involvement with The Tribe, a small group of musicians, including Phillip Ranelin and Marcus Belgrave, who came together to record a number of landmark jazz albums and make a series of performances in Detroit during the 1970s. Wise and Harrison continue to balance professional careers as musicians, at times traveling internationally, with their roles as musical educators in Detroit. They are part of a generation of jazz musicians who have taken very seriously their role as shepherding jazz to future generations as an “American treasure,” so designated by the U.S. Government in 1987 and again in 2009.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ “Editorial,” *Tribe: The Only Magazine for Black Awareness*, v. 1 (3rd Quarter 1973): 8.

¹²⁶ Wendell Harrison, personal interview, 21 July 2009 and Pamela Wise, personal interview, 9 September 2009.

¹²⁷ See Representative John Conyers’ Web site, “Issues: Home: Jazz”:
<http://conyers.house.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Issues.Home&Issue_id=05f8dd95-19b9-b4b1-120c-7f652e56f56c> (accessed 7 March 2011).

However, Harrison's legacy is not solely musical. In a cupboard, in the small dining room adjacent to Harrison's modest kitchen, lie his personal archives which include back issues of a magazine, *Tribe*, that he began at the same time that the musical group of the same name was forming. The magazines are relatively rare with only a partial run archived at the Bentley Historical Collection at the University of Michigan. Even Harrison's own collection is not complete, with some copies utilized for clippings, and others worn and torn. However, what remains is a powerful representation of the struggle for musical and cultural "self-determination" during the 1970s a period that held tremendous possibility and danger for Detroiters.

Wendell Harrison was born in Detroit in 1942, raised both in the "New Center" house and in Detroit's near West Side. Like many Detroit musicians, Harrison was raised amid Detroit's dangerously segregated atmosphere, yet eventually came to live and go to school on Detroit's near West Side, a haven for middle-class blacks and a critical area for new jazz clubs in the post-WWII period. Harrison learned his instruments—first clarinet, later saxophone, in flute—beginning in Detroit public schools—specifically, Northwestern High School—with strong teachers and, critically, strong student musicians turned on by new, avant-garde sounds in jazz. This atmosphere led him to hone his craft and begin to play local gigs in small ensembles as a teen with older musicians like Barry Harris.

There were so many clubs that had jazz, especially on the weekends, from Thursday through Sunday; and they had Monday night jam sessions. Flame Show Bar on John R; Chitchat Lounge on 12th Street; Eagle Show Bar; Spot Bar; Kline's Show Bar; and several others between Grand Boulevard and Clairmount. Between these blocks was just like being on Broadway. Also we used to jam in Delray. I had to sneak into these places because I was too young. I had to go out there because I heard so much about these guys playing jazz. These guys were serious. The word was serious.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, 319.

The groups would play weddings, parties, and, eventually, club dates. After studying for one year at a local musical conservatory, Harrison joined a group of ex-Detroiters playing jazz in New York City in the early 1960s. He practiced yoga, studied astrology, and sat in on late-night jazz sessions at lofts in New York's East Village. The connections he made in this environment led to regular gigs for both jazz and R & B groups, including work with Horace Silver and free-jazz legend Sun Ra. Detroit's musical environment had prepared him well. New York, however, provided a finishing school of sorts, filling in parts of his education in terms of arranging, recording, and, both for good and for ill, socialization.

However, his New York years did not end well. Like many artists of the time, Harrison fell into heroin addiction resulting eventually in his own arrest in New York City and the separation from his then lover Juanita Naima Grubbs, saxophonist John Coltrane's first wife. After a stint in California to get clean from his addictions, he returned to Detroit in the early 1970s to marry and begin a new life. With newfound energies, Harrison threw himself into the political and cultural maelstrom at work in Detroit, bringing with him as well as newfound commitment to politics. In part this was due to his own father who had written an analysis of the 1943 Detroit Riots. The riots, which left 34 dead, twenty-five of them black were a troubling sign of racial stress and division at a time when unity against fascism was being stressed by the government and media. The struggle over equal access to housing at a time when Detroit's population was exploding pitted working-class populations against each other and showed the fragility of the supposed World War II American consensus. In the short pamphlet, Harrison's

Grandfather had argued that one of the main causes of the riots was the lack of activities and resources for youth who then, according to the elder Harrison, turned to crime.¹²⁹

Twenty-four years later, Detroit went through another “disturbance.” This time violence was not merely between races but instead between working-class and poor residents and their own neighborhoods. The National Guard was called in. 43 Detroit residents were killed. Millions of dollars of damage was done. For some the revolution was in process. No area of Detroit’s cultural life was unaffected. Contrary to common sense explanations, however, Detroit did not then become a cultural blank slate. Many musicians and, perhaps more importantly, audiences still made their home Detroit. Harrison along with Phillip Ranelin and Marcus Belgrave began practicing together and, eventually, hatched plans to play locally in far different circumstances than they had in their previous professional careers. This shift was partly out of necessity. Each part of the nexus for producing and performing music, from the musician’s union and recording studios to the clubs, were in some sort of transition. But it was also out of ideological self-interest. The Tribe members were tired of playing for others. According to Harrison, playing in Atlantic City in the early 1960s for artists such as Marvin Gaye and Lou Rawls was, “like flipping burgers at Burger King.” However, under Sun Ra’s tutelage, Harrison had seen the creative and economic possibility of self-determination.¹³⁰ By the time he helped form Tribe, then, he was ready to make a break away from traditional club arenas and traditional ways of producing records.

At the same time, other shifts were happening that made such a radical artistic and economic move possible. For one, the musicians union, a significant force in national music

¹²⁹ Walter R. Harrison, “The Detroit Race Riots: June, 1943.” The small pamphlet has no publishing info. Courtesy of Wendell Harrison.

¹³⁰ John F. Szwed, *Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (New York: De Capo Press, 1998), 112-113. Sun Ra was featured in *Tribe*, v. 3 (2nd Quarter 1975), 20-23.

making since the early days of the twentieth century, was also going through major changes that would impact Detroit's entertainment landscape. Years before the Taft-Hartley Act (1947) had significantly impacted the American Federation of Musicians' (AFM) ability to strike for higher wages in the major recording industries on the coasts. However, the big change came in the 1970s when band leaders won significant rulings that defined musicians as contractors not employees and, for all intents and purposes, threw the AFM out of clubs.¹³¹ Though the AFM in Detroit did not immediately change their behavior, the cat was out of the bag. No longer could clubs legally be subject to union "business agents" enforcing union will. At the same time, AFM's attempt at maintaining solidarity during this time, especially from black musicians, was severely impinged by racist practices within the union itself.¹³² The New Music Society in the late 1950s had been an attempt at bringing together musicians outside of the AFM to learn from one another, make recordings, and interact with a serious listening public.¹³³ Tribe was attempting to do a similar thing in the 1970s. However, this time they also had the ability to create recording studios in their basements because of new recording technologies out of Japan. Harrison had seen certain musicians—John Coltrane for instance—in New York with home studios. However, they were only for the most advanced and well-off musicians. The new technologies significantly democratized the recording process and, for the first time, cut out the recording studio as the only place to go for the professional musician who wanted to make records. For these musicians, artistic freedom was now possible in a way that it had not been even a few years before. Of course, in a unionized world these basement sessions should still have been subject to work dues—but they were not and clearly that was part of their appeal.

¹³¹ George Seltzer, *Music Matters: The Performer and the American Federation of Musicians* (Metuchen, N.J.; London: Scarecrow, 1989).

¹³² Gordon Stump, personal interview, 21 September 2010.

¹³³ Lars Bjorn and Jim Gallert, *Before Motown*, 118-119.

With the loss of revenue from clubs and the rise of home studios, the union arguably lost its most dynamic and creative musicians, as well as an entire new generation of musicians coming up who would see less and less union work.¹³⁴

Tribe's initial events were held at the Detroit Institute of Arts in downtown Detroit. Money was raised by selling advertising in a published program that came with the price of a ticket. Early performances built off the New Music Society model by utilizing spaces like the Detroit Institute of Arts instead of traditional jazz clubs or ballrooms. The audience danced and The Tribe was well received. *Tribe*, the magazine, emerged from the process of putting out the initial programs. Local businesses attempting to reach an upwardly mobile and a politically conscious black community through advertising provided The Tribe with an opportunity to maintain independence from the union, major record labels, and clubs. The first formal issue came out in November of 1972 and featured a photo of Harrison playing saxophone on the cover.

¹³⁴ This loss, as I will argue later in the dissertation, continues to hurt the AFM as these former union members did not mentor younger musicians to be a part of the union. By the 1990s, the AFM was, at best, an aging relic, and at worst, a catalyst for the retelling of frustrating stories that virtually guaranteed no young musician, outside of the orchestras, would join.

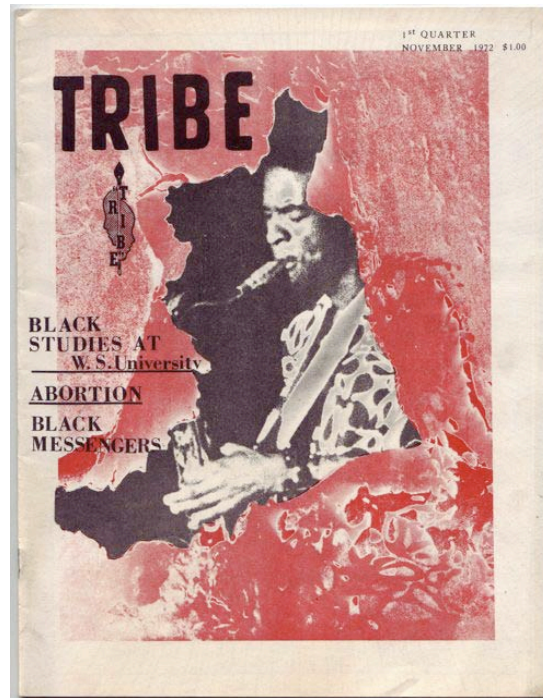


Figure 2-5. *Tribe* November 1972.

Tribe would last until 1977 and would publish approximately twenty issues. Though the magazine was begun in Detroit, it would eventually be distributed throughout the Midwest. Harrison's first wife, whom he married shortly after returning to Detroit, organized the magazine's visual look which stressed the politics of both the musicians and the young writers who wrote for the magazine. Articles on politics, music, fashion, and media were interlaced with images and articles promoting Tribe recordings and performances. Part of the visual ideology of *Tribe* was its "community" outlook which included explicit nods to the power of the Black Family as the center of the black community and, therefore, the black revolution.

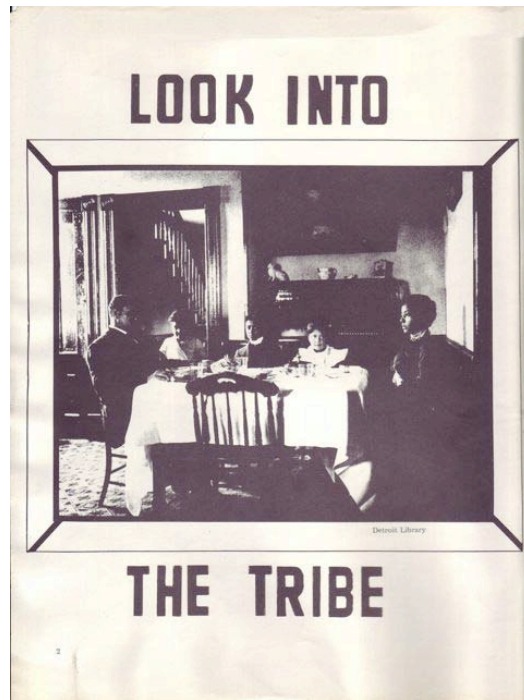


Figure 2-6. “Look Into the Tribe” 1973.

Musically and politically, *Tribe* writers and designers foregrounded the idea that the future of humanity in general and the “Afro American” community specifically was hanging in the balance. The specific editorial vision for the magazine, however, was not provided by Harrison. Instead, then Black Studies professor Herb Boyd maintained the magazine’s political outlook. Boyd used his classes and connections within Wayne State University to provide politically-minded black writers a chance to express their ideas. There were few political, economic, and social issues of the 1970s that did not directly affect Detroit residents, providing a rich backdrop for editorial interventions. Both the local and the global were regularly connected as the struggle over integration for instance was juxtaposed with American Imperial policies abroad. Frequently militant in its address, the magazine regularly conflated the long-term struggle of African Americans to achieve freedom in America—for instance fighting against slavery—with current events. In one article, a young writer compared the logic of slavery for

slaveholders in ante-bellum America with pro-abortion advocates in the 1970s.¹³⁵ There was no single understanding of what the position of the African American community should be on issues such as school desegregation. Should black parents push to have their children bussed across county lines in an attempt at getting “equal” education? Or was the mere idea that black students could not get an equal education without being surrounded by white students essentially racist?¹³⁶ *Tribe*, with its “black consciousness” and “black awareness agenda,” entertained multiple positions but gave prime space to those authors and political leaders who questioned mainstream Civil Rights strategies. The magazine also focused heavily on Detroit’s own black, urban revolution. Coleman Young, Detroit’s first black mayor, was elected during *Tribe*’s short history, and was featured in a number of interviews and features.¹³⁷

Perhaps most importantly though beyond the magazines explicit political ethos, was how *Tribe* provided local businesses and media with a way to reach black audiences. *Tribe*’s revolutionary ideologies, at least for a time, integrated well with the selling of mass commodities, from records to gas. Helped along by a growing sense by national companies that advertising in the *Tribe* was a great way to get to newly middle class blacks in Detroit, *Tribe* survived into the mid-1970s, at one time becoming regionally distributed as far as Pittsburgh. Committed to self-determination, community values, and nationalist racial politics, this movement paralleled national political and artistic trends while it also reacted to specific, local conditions. The *Tribe*, for a time, successfully navigated Detroit’s 1970s, staging performances, building their own audience, producing records, and publishing a regional magazine, a cultural

¹³⁵ *Tribe* (4th Quarter November 1972): 20. Former Penn. Senator Rick Santorum has recently made the same comparison. See “Rick Santorum and Al Sharpton Face Off Over Abortion, Race,” via FoxNews.com <<http://www.foxnews.com/on-air/hannity/transcript/rick-santorum-and-al-sharpton-face-over-abortion-race>> (accessed 12 March 2011).

¹³⁶ Jacqueline C. Brown, “Busing is a Reality!!: A Detroit Perspective,” *Tribe* (May-June 1976): 8-10.

¹³⁷ Jim Ingram, “Mayor Coleman A. Young’s First Year in Office: How Did It Go?,” *Tribe*, v. 3 (First Quarter 1975): 14-17.

tour de force that explicitly connected the issues of race and music within a Detroit context. Motown-era paradigms were changing significantly. Tribe emerged within the breach. However, Tribe would dissolve by the late 1970s and would only re-emerge at the end of this first decade of the twenty-first century in far different circumstances. The emergence and creative flowering of the Tribe in the 1970s provides an appropriate case study in the transition between the before and after of Detroit's Motown moment and provides evidence for Bjorn and Gallert's assertion that the era after the 1960s, in terms of jazz, could be described as a period of resilience, a period that would create a bridge between the "Golden Era" jazz era of the 1950s to an establishment phase aligned with major civic institutions, from City Hall to the halls of the U.S. Congress.¹³⁸

2.4 RENAISSANCE

When I first came to Detroit in 1964 I scoured the city for people who believed a Renaissance was possible. There weren't many of us then, and our voices were usually drowned out by the sound of police sirens cutting through the night air. When we were heard, people usually laughed at what we had to say about the possibilities for a future for the city we loved. But the cultural and political explosions of the late sixties shattered forever the reality of those times, and the last few years have been a slow but steady regrouping of many of the most creative young minds in town. The survivors of the civil rights movement, the Black Liberation struggle, the New Left confrontations, the jazz underground, the Motown studios, the myriad university scenes, the artists' lofts, the labor movement, the alternative press—all were beginning to come together in the New Detroit, heralding an urban renaissance which combined visionary political leadership with economic revitalization and an exciting cultural reawakening.¹³⁹

— John Sinclair

¹³⁸ Lars Bjorn and Jim Gallert, *Before Motown*, 206-207.

¹³⁹ John Sinclair, "I Just Want to Testify (Fall 1978)," in *It's All Good: A John Sinclair Reader* (London: Headpress, 2008), 58-59.

John Sinclair is a longtime character in Detroit's 1960s and beyond history. Raised outside of Flint, Sinclair came to Detroit in 1964 to attend graduate school at Wayne State University. However, the pump to Sinclair's activist life had been primed. As described above, Sinclair had been raised on "Frantic" Ernie Durham—he loved American jazz, R & B, early rock, and soul music. At Albion College, in farm country in the south central part of Michigan, he helped bring Malcolm X to speak on campus. When he got to Detroit he quickly found his way into the "beatnik" scene and started the Detroit Artist Workshop with some like-minded poets and musicians. They wrote a manifesto and were off. They published poems, taught free classes on jazz, collected dues, and smoked dope. However, Detroit was not nearly as enlightened as Sinclair wanted or needed it to be. He was arrested for marijuana possession in 1966 and returned from jail even more militant than when he left. Arriving home he saw the Motor City 5, or simply the "MC5." Sinclair and the band, headed by the politically charged lead vocalist Rob Tyner, were kindred spirits. Sinclair became their manager. They threw concerts at the now abandoned Grande Ballroom. "We were on acid," says Sinclair in the film *Twenty to Life*. "Unbridled optimism was the order of the day."¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Biographical information from *Twenty to Life: The Life and Times of John Sinclair*, dir. Steve Gebhardt, co-produced by John Sinclair (Big Chief Productions 2004). Also from John Sinclair, *It's All Good*.



Figure 2-7. The Grande Ballroom in 2011. Photo by Andrew Jukes.

However, police harassment did not end and the rebellion did nothing to make conditions immediately better. When a preventative curfew was instated after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Sinclair and a group of friends and followers left Detroit in 1968 for Ann Arbor. He did not return until 1974. Between 1968 and 1974, he formed the White Panther Party in support of the Black Panthers, got arrested again, was freed after a major concert by, among others, John Lennon in 1971, and attempted to get involved in local Ann Arbor politics, including a campaign for the legalization of marijuana. The film version of Sinclair's life more-or-less skips over the 1970s and 1980s, following Sinclair to New Orleans in the 1990s and then Amsterdam in the early '00s. However, Sinclair's middle period in Detroit was highly productive. In "I Just Wanna Testify," Sinclair recalls finding that Detroit had changed a great deal. The long-time, black, activist and state legislator Coleman Young had been elected Mayor in 1973 beating out white, performer police chief John Nichols. For Sinclair, Young—"My man!"—was singlehandedly

protecting Detroit from big business interests and right-wing government negligence. Describing the Ford-Nixon years, Sinclair said:

The general strategy seemed to be let the city finally collapse into bankruptcy, reorganize its assets under a regional system of government controlled by a white suburban majority, and lock the black residents of the central city forever into place as a squalid underclass majority. Then the whites could move back into town, tear down everything left standing, and rebuild the city in their own image, pushing the blacks and other politically disenfranchised residents of the central city out in the decaying ring of aging suburbs no longer suitable for white habitation.¹⁴¹

Young, raised in Detroit's "Black Bottom," swore to fight the government and Detroit's still deeply racist police force. That was something that Sinclair could get behind. He was not alone in his adoration of Young. As the 1970s continued and became the 1980s, a growing consensus among previously left-wing cultural elements consolidated around Young. When Young ran for his second term in 1977, this coalition, which included DJs and TV hosts, pulled for him (see fig. 2.8). He was re-elected by large margins. As the "RenCen" or "Renaissance Center," now the headquarters for General Motors, was completed, it looked like Detroit had not only politically turned a corner but also culturally.

Wendell Harrison, like a number of other musicians, continued their own careers and expanded their civic activities into the school system. Long-time activists and jazz fans like John Sinclair and Frank Bach utilized the growing sense of jazz as an American art form to push for Federal funding from the Jimmy Carter administration. Many musicians took advantage of Federal funds during this time period as well as money from the Big Three—then Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors—allowing local musicians to honor jazz from the recent past (Duke Ellington, for instance) while creating opportunities for a core group of still playing jazz musicians. At the same time, local radio station WJZZ, and to a lesser extent WDET, provided,

¹⁴¹ John Sinclair, "I Want to Testify," 47.

for a time, a local mass communication venue for Detroit jazz musicians. Jazz historian Jim Gallert, then a radio DJ for WDET, was part of this transitional moment, providing a space in the WDET studio for artists to perform. Most importantly, though, in terms of public appreciation for Detroit jazz makers, was the creation of the Detroit Montreux Jazz Festival, which provided an annual flagship event for the city's jazz musicians. Despite economic setbacks and numerous name changes, the festival continues each Labor Day.

However, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, Detroit's jazz community had not made much headway in combating the major contradictions at the heart of Detroit music making. Detroit had lost its white-collar musical workforce, beginning with the departure of Motown Records, and had not been able to replace it with anything that could compete with other cities like New York. At the same time, the ability for a young musician to make a living or hone their craft no longer existed in the same way that it had done even ten or fifteen years before. The Festival did not change that. Neither did it answer the "bodies" problem—audiences for local clubs with live musicians were a shadow of what they had been in the 1950s and 1960s. Though some key clubs still existed—Baker's Keyboard Lounge for instance on Livernois near 8 Mile has been open continuously since the 1930s—there was a sense that white club-goers were scared to come downtown.¹⁴² Detroiters were still partying, dancing, listening, and performing—they just were not participating musically within a traditional jazz framework. A new generation was bubbling up and creating its own music and its own spaces quite apart from the jazz generation's old haunts and values. Harrison and his generation, even in the 1970s, did not represent the cutting edge for Detroit's youth. Harrison and others were already in their '30s, were supporting political candidates, wearing suits, and looking much like those entering the

¹⁴² Frank Bach, "Music's Still Strong and the Nights Are Still Long at Detroit's Black-Owned Clubs: But the Riot of 1967 has Left a Visible Scar, and White Faces are Hard to Spot in the Crowd," *Detroit Free Press*, 6 February 1977.

city's power structure downtown. Perhaps, most importantly, Harrison and others had become teachers, not merely mentors. Jazz had passed from a mostly word-of-mouth, underground, community where skills and leadership were passed along person-to-person, to a Federally supported art form. Its musicians had begun to be awarded with Presidential honors and Governors awards.

Perhaps most disappointedly, Young went from left-wing dandy in the 1970s to more and more a reflection of the power structure he was supposed to be replacing.¹⁴³ Redevelopment plans got nasty, as Young's attempt to preserve jobs came at the expense of long-time Detroit neighborhoods.¹⁴⁴ Looking back twenty years later, Herb Boyd described the relationship between culture, politics, and music during that era.

From a cultural standpoint, I was trying to see what could be done from the university to effect change for community people, to have their humanity recognized and their music showcased. I hooked up with artists around the Jazz Research Institute at Wayne... and the Detroit Jazz Center. But it wasn't exclusively jazz. Later I hooked up with John and Lenny [sic] Sinclair, who were trying to bring culture and politics together with the Ann Arbor Sun, and the Detroit Sun. Charles Moore and I commuted for two years to Oberlin, where we taught jazz studies at the conservatory. We thought there was a division among politics, economics, and culture, and we were trying to bring them all together. Similarly, we thought that there should be no division between the academy and the community. We tried to knock the barriers down. All of a sudden you got all these jazz nuts hooked up with these political activists. Maybe the bridge would be Malcolm X to some degree and John Coltrane to another degree. Political and cultural change feed each other. But there was a lot of hit and miss. It's like jazz—we were improvising.¹⁴⁵

Growing up in and around Detroit, Harrison, Boyd, and Sinclair, as well as many others, had learned how to improvise, literally and figuratively, from the best. However, Detroit's deindustrialization, rising gang violence, and popular new music, like disco and hip hop—to name just a few things—kept them off balance and focused on survival. The audiences they

¹⁴³ For an overview of Young's career, see Wilbur C. Rich, *Coleman Young and Detroit Politics: From Social Activist to Power Broker* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

¹⁴⁴ Jeanie Wylie, *Poletown: Community Betrayed* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

¹⁴⁵ Robert H. Mast, *Detroit Lives*, 80.

knew were shrinking, not expanding. Somewhere in the struggle for the urban renaissance, a space had opened for a new mix, another musical generation, one that had grown up in Detroit, felt the promise and heartbreak of Detroit's Motown transition, and had begun to create its own world.

2.5 TRIBE REDUX

My goal in this chapter was to reintroduce the imaginative hot-house that existed in Detroit in the decades leading up to the urban rebellion of 1967 and in the decade or so after its aftermath. In the process, I have gathered together a number of voices together and retold the story of a transitional period that has been understudied and poorly understood. However, that period has not yet ended, proving once again that elements of Detroit's twentieth century soundscape continue to resonate. For instance, when Detroit electronic music producer, performer, record label-owner, and DJ Carl Craig headlined the main stage at the 2008 annual Movement electronic music festival, held on Memorial Day weekend, a festival he himself helped create in 2000, he was not alone. The globetrotting artist brought on stage with him fellow-Detroiter and jazz woodwind player Wendell Harrison. Beginning with his move to back to Detroit in 1970 from California, Harrison, a full generation older than Craig, had long played a central part in Detroit's jazz community, helping create Tribe Records, a jazz record label committed to political and cultural self-determination. Almost forty years later, scales from Harrison's saxophone swooped and swirled amongst the timbres of Craig's synthesizers and rhythms of his drum machines throughout Hart Plaza along the Detroit River. Thousands of fans, a mix-raced cacophony of mostly youthful metro-Detroiters and international tourists, cheered and danced

appreciatively to Craig and Harrison's heady musical offerings, honoring the historical and sonic continuities between the avant-garde jazz performed by Harrison and the electronic dance tradition embodied by Craig, two distinct visions of contemporary global music that nonetheless emerged, in Detroit's case, simultaneously in the years after the 1967 rebellion and the rise of a largely African American power block in the early 1970s. Both approaches to music drew heavily on the musical environments of the pre-Motown and Motown era, the rich communicative network of radio, TV, and newspapers, within the area, and the large, open-minded, middle- and working-class audiences hungry to participate in cutting-edge entertainment. Both relied on significant technological shifts in the performance and production of music. For the older jazz players the most important development was the possibility of affordable home studios that allowed for unfettered creativity outside the music studio industry. Though home-studios were eventually just as important for electronic music production, initially the technological shift was in the emergence of DJ mixing, a supple, powerful, technologically encouraged response to a collaborative need for continuous dance music. However, despite some differences, both musical approaches are indebted to a particular historical juncture whose fruition was at least in part satisfied by the Movement performance.



Figure 2-8. Wendell Harrison with Carl Craig, May 2008. Photo by author.

It makes sense then that two years later as Craig was completing production on a new Tribe record, the first in thirty years, the musical producer and tastemaker felt comfortable intuiting for a specialist, consumer audience how he had come to understand Tribe's music. "Detroit has been a town that always had very strong jazz roots. I think it permeated into my soul," says Craig. "It seems to me that I must have heard Tribe on WJZZ as a kid. I can't say for sure, but it feels that way to me."¹⁴⁶ Though he cannot guarantee the accuracy of his own memory in this article, Craig offers the possibility of a direct connection through the mass communication channel of a local radio station whose radio frequencies were able to affect his soul. It is a romantic, even classic, image. Craig, not even a teen, listening at home or perhaps in a car to strange and wonderful new sounds emanating from local radio, programmed by radio

¹⁴⁶ Todd Shanker, "Techno Pioneer Carl Craig Fosters Tribe's Enduring Legacy," *Wax Poetics*, no. 40 (March/April 2010): 70.

deejays in tune with their musical surroundings and skilled enough to reach through radio amplifiers into young souls.

However, this mixture of analog and electronic musicianship under the large umbrella of electronic dance music (or EDM), has not always been front in center in Detroit's post-Motown soundscape, and there was no guarantee that it ever would have been or will continue to be. Despite their similar chronological and technological genealogies, jazz and electronic music, first as disco, were not able to sustain any kind of successful collaboration until almost thirty years had passed. When it finally happened, it would be instigated by a younger generation, brought up within Detroit's fully developed electronic dance musical network as it developed from the 1970s. Born in the late 1960s, Carl Craig was in no position to witness first-hand either the initial formation of mixing or Harrison et al.'s trailblazing efforts in jazz. How Harrison and Craig were able to find each other at the dawn of the twenty-first century, and more fully develop a road not taken, is one of the stories left for this dissertation to tell.

3.0 BLEND: THE SOUNDSCAPE AND THE CLUB DJ, 1975-1981

I loved Motown. Motown was like was a part of us. If you were black—you were proud number one that all these black people were having a success in music and everybody's going crazy about. It was good music. So we were very, very proud. It was like we were a part of it, like we were experiencing what they were going through on the outside looking in. We felt like we even knew all of them—we really didn't of course. I mean Motown that was a very special time. We couldn't wait for a new release by the Supremes or the Temptations of the Spinners or whoever. Couldn't wait. We went to the Motown reviews. [*laughs — then, in a lower voice*] This is really deep. There was a show called “Swingin’ Time.” It was as dance show....¹⁴⁷

— John Collins

Only an hour before John Collins had been anxiously watching the clock on the wall of Copernicus Middle School in Hamtramck, Michigan. Scurrying out of school, he ran to catch the right bus from Hamtramck downtown and then transferred to a bus heading under the Detroit River to Windsor, Canada to the south. There he headed towards the CKLW TV studios on Oullette Avenue, Windsor's main street. When he arrived the stage manager was already checking in people from a line that had formed from those who had sent in and received tickets. Collins however had already done that a few weeks ago attending his first taping of the show “Swingin’ Time” with former deejay and TV host Robin Seymour. Collins and his cousin—they lived in the same neighborhood—had gone with him then. But the producers had liked him so much they had invited him back. Now when he came to the line he went to the front and was

¹⁴⁷ John Collins, interview by author, 9 March 2010.

quickly waved in. Now he was getting ready for the day's taping. Perhaps today he would be given a choice spot, as some of the other regulars were, near the camera during taping. However that did not matter nearly as much as being there to see and dance to who was performing. Would it be an artist from Motown Records? Maybe someone from a local rock band, perhaps even a national act? John Collins, a black teenager from Hamtramck, his father an autoworker and mother a homemaker, checked his hair, glanced around at some of the other kids, and waited for the signal to start dancing.¹⁴⁸

In the late 1960s, John Collins was one of scores of teens invited to dance on television on one of the Detroit areas most memorable music shows. "Swingin' Time" live performers read like a who's-who in local musical history.

I met all these entertainers—like I said Tina Turner, Aretha Franklin, Supremes, Temptations, Spinners, everybody, Marvelettes, everybody, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder—they all came on the show. Then we had a "Swingin' Time" review, like a Motown Review, where they had entertainers perform but they also had the "Swingin' Time" dancers perform so we performed, we danced on stage, it was a lot of fun. [...] I kind of forgot about that.

Seymour was already by then a local media legend, one of a handful of deejays who were significant in disseminating the sounds spilling out of local studios and teen dance clubs throughout the Detroit Metro area. For much of Detroit's youth who danced on the show, "Swingin' Time" was their fifteen minutes of fame. Collins remembers being a "mini-celebrity" by the time he moved to Detroit's West Side and transferred to Cass Tech High School. Wealthier kids who might not have talked to him for any reason otherwise, he noted to himself, seemed to find some way of inviting them to their parties, allowing him into upscale neighborhoods like Detroit's Sherwood Forest that he had never before been in before. However,

¹⁴⁸ Similar scenes can be seen in the John Waters written, *Hairspray*, directed by Adam Shankman (New Line Cinema, 2007).

some of the dancers, Collins remembers, went on, like him, to future careers in the entertainment industry.

However, Collins' later moves in the music industry were not directly due to his dancing on "Swingin' Time." Instead, he, like many young Detroiters during this time soaked in the incredible richness of Detroit and, after college, returned to Detroit not for the job as a doctor, a path that he had been groomed for at Cass Tech Detroit's premier magnet school and Wilberforce University in Ohio, one of the country's oldest historically black colleges. Instead, one night at his fraternity the band that had been hired to play failed to show. Collins—trained musically within his home and nearby church, cultivated by Detroit-Windsor TV and radio, and allowed to dance among present and future global stars on television as a teenager—stepped up and filled in. When John Collins began DJing, the idea of being a DJ who was not a radio personality, was new. Collins did not think of himself as a musician, let alone an artist, and had trouble explaining to his family why exactly he had decided on such a bizarre career path—if it could even be called that. However, by the late 1970s Collins was DJing four or more times a week and making over a hundred dollars a night playing for the local Dale Willis Organization, a stable of DJs ran by Willis who also provided sound systems to local clubs. Now, instead of dancing for the camera, Collins had himself become a performer, a mixer of music, directly encouraging the audience/dancers to let go, meet up with others, dance the dances of the day, and even perhaps invent new dances of their own. The result has been an ongoing thirty-plus year career as a professional DJ.

Collins was not the first or only person in Detroit to emerge from the 1970s as a professional DJ. However, born in 1951, he was born at the perfect time to appreciate fully the emergence of blending and mixing records during the rise of disco music in the United States.

Collins, along with an extended cohort of other DJs, became the faces of disco and then progressive dance music in Detroit, blending audiences and imaginations in the musical gap between the 1960s Motown sound and what came after. The national movement towards mixed music was far larger than Detroit. Non-Detroiters like Larry Levan, Tee Scott, Frankie Knuckles, and a myriad of DJs from places like the Bronx in New York City, were instrumental in spreading mixing across the United States.

Nevertheless, a whole generation of DJs catered initially to Detroit's gay, black underground. DJs like Greg and Ken Collier, Morris Mitchell, Renaldo White, Jimmy Lockhart, Duane Bradley, Elton Weathers, Melvin Hill, Stacey Hale, and the aforementioned John Collins. These DJs—with the help of a new generation of promoters and companies like True Disco, Zana Take Three, Cosmopolitan, One Way, the Real, and Luomo—pioneered a style of mixing and participated in a network of clubs and parties that would eventually expose them to a future generation of DJs, producers, promoters, entertainers, and dancers.¹⁴⁹ However, if audiences wanted to hear these DJs regularly from the 1970s into the 1990s, they largely did not and could not turn to their record collections or car stereos. Instead, they had to see them catering to a slowly expanding audience, in local gay clubs, from the Chess Mate to Heaven. The voices of that musical and cultural blending are the subject of this chapter.

¹⁴⁹ Many of the party promoters from this era, like the DJs, either have moved away, are out of the scene, or, regrettably, have deceased. Zana Smith, of "Zana Take Three," who is still alive and very active in today's Detroit scene has been critical in piecing together these histories. Zana Smith, personal interview, 15 February 2008.

3.1 GAYLY SPEAKING

By 1970, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), begun in New York City after the rioting at Stonewall, had made its way to Michigan and Detroit.¹⁵⁰ A gay, transvestite, sex-worker community in New York City had reached critical mass by the late 1960s, openly fighting police who harassed bar goers and the mafia who ran the establishments themselves. At the same time Mayor John V. Lindsey began cracking down on organized crime, both in the Mafia and within the police force itself. The era of organized crime and crooked cops running the public haunts of the gay community had finally crested. The Gay Liberation Front, explicitly left wing, took great encouragement by the seeming over-night shifts in gay consciousness. In Detroit, the GLF began a newspaper which would eventually last six years and produce scores of issues directly addressing the politics of sexuality in Michigan in general and Detroit at large. The first issue was a mimeographed, five-sheet paper, and stapled handout with the only imagery being a fist on the first page. However, by issue 2, May 22, 1970, the GLF had embraced a tabloid format with photos and drawn advertisements. Among articles on police harassment, the attitude of the Catholic Church on homosexuals, and the psychology of coming out, was a quarter page ad for the Iron Hinge. The advertisement featured, most prominently, the Iron Hinge design, which also at that time featured prominently across its main wall facing Woodward Avenue.¹⁵¹ The ad features a name of a DJ, Gary Shannon, and the phrase, “DJ seven nights a week.” It is one of the earliest references to DJs as a main feature of club life in Michigan and makes a strong argument for the idea that DJing was arising in the area simultaneous with similar endeavors in other cities

¹⁵⁰ I have gathered all material on the Gay Liberation Front in Detroit from a set of issues of the *Detroit Gay Liberator* archived at the Bentley Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich..

¹⁵¹ The Iron Hinge, or Ye Iron Hinge, and was considered a gay nightspot from 1970 to 1976 and was located on 7610 Woodward Avenue. See Tim Retzliff, “Historical Directory of Gay & Lesbian Bars in Metro Detroit,” self-published pamphlet, courtesy of author (2010). The entire block is now totally barren.

like New York. However, establishing this history is incredibly difficult. Many who were there are now gone.¹⁵² Therefore, I have had to rely on advertisements and other ephemera as well as pioneering work by other Detroit specialists to thread together the story of Detroit's early DJ community.¹⁵³

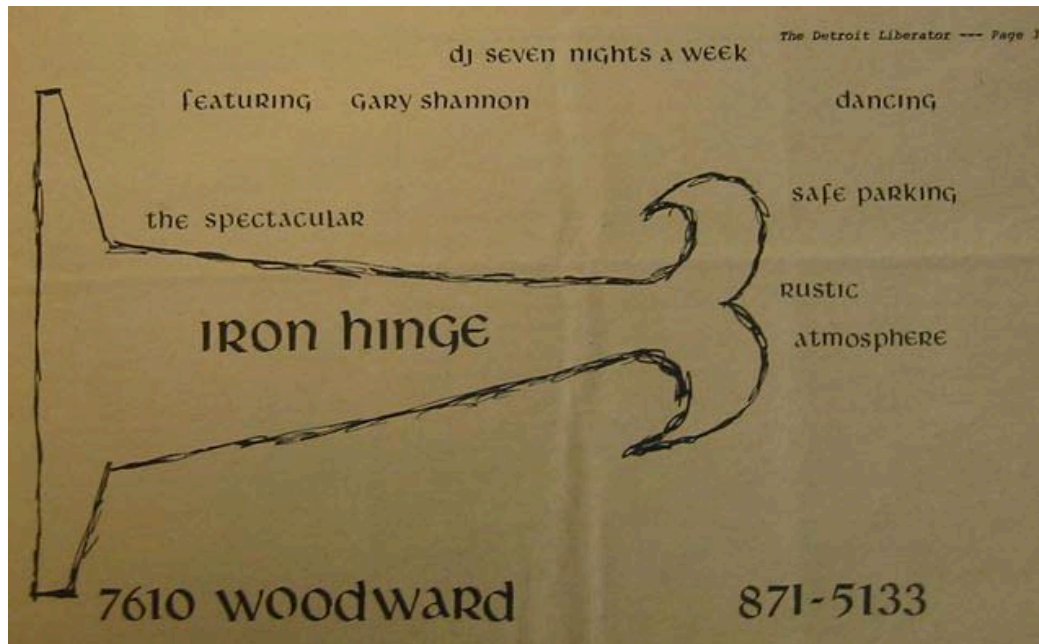


Figure 3-1. Advertisement for the Iron Hinge, *Detroit Gay Liberator* 1, no. 2 (Friday, 22 May 1970).

According to historian of Michigan queer life Tim Retzliff, Detroit's gay population has attempted to seek each other out publicly throughout the twentieth century. In bathrooms, movie houses, clubs, bars, and, Retzliff argues importantly, cars, the areas' gay community performed, cruised, and reached out to one another despite potentially fatal and explicit legal and police

¹⁵² During the writing of this this chapter, Dennis, a longtime bartender in the gay community who worked at the Iron Hinge passed away before I could interview him. At this writing I know of no one else involved with the club that I could make contact with.

¹⁵³ For an overview of archival materials available on Michigan gay life, see Tim Retzliff, "From Storage Box to Computer Screen: Disclosing Artifacts of Queer History in Michigan," *GLQ* 7, no. 1 (2001): 153-81.

harassment and social pressure. What's more, the history of these attempts does not necessarily narrate a progressive, linear history. For instance, according to Retzlöff, in the 1930s there seemed to be a loosening of restraint over gay life and even a national "sissy craze" that allowed, though clearly under heavy stereotype, particular kinds of gay performance and sociability.¹⁵⁴ However, a crackdown in the 1940s and 1950s made such public performances rarer and more dangerous.¹⁵⁵ The preeminent example of this underground, gay life within Michigan is the story of Ruth Ellis, a black female, who, when rediscovered by lesbians and feminists during the 1970s and 1980s, played a crucial role in bridging the gap that had seemed to occur between the postwar pushback and later gay liberation era. Ellis had thrown house parties during this period.¹⁵⁶

However, similar to other cities through the country, Detroit's gay community became much more public, both culturally and civically, after the 1960s. This renewed public presence by gay individuals. In the GLF Newspaper, the main issues involved vice squad police harassment and entrapment as well homophobia throughout the Detroit area.¹⁵⁷ But there were also aesthetic concerns, even in the socialist-leaning GLF paper. This included music and performance within the clubs themselves. In other words, what constituted a gay aesthetic or what was the value of gay entertainment was not altogether clear, as the 1960s became the 1970s. The Gay Liberation Front's radio arm cared about such cultural concerns as well. For a short period on public radio station WDET, a talk show called "Gayly Speaking" ran.

¹⁵⁴ See also George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basis Books, 1995).

¹⁵⁵ Retzlöff was good enough to share an overview of his dissertation research, still ongoing, during a LGBTQ History Month Lecture, 18 October 2010, given at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, Dearborn, Michigan. For a discussion of the 1950s pushback against queer life, especially gay, black, male sexuality, see Tim Retzlöff, "Seer or Queer?: Postwar Fascination with Detroit's Prophet Jones," *GLQ* 8, no. 3 (2002): 271-96.

¹⁵⁶ *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis at 100*, dir. Yvonne Welbon (Our Film Works, 1999).

¹⁵⁷ See for instance, "Vice Entrapment Never Ends," *Gay Liberator*, no. 25 (March 1973).



Figure 3-2. Full page advertisement for “Gayly Speaking” radio show from Detroit Gay Liberator, no. 33 (December 1973 - January 1974): 7.

One episode in 1974 focused on what constituted “gay music.”¹⁵⁸ A listening of the recording reveals that “Gayly Speaking” hosts Chris and Charlotte believed that what constituted gay music had much to do with the artist’s intended lyrical content. For instance, Lavender Jane and Steven Grossman were played because of their songs which explicitly evoked gay themes and issues. However, the show also featured songs where audience reception was critical to understanding the songs as gay-themed. The Supremes “The Happening” was played during the show. Chris’s explanation: “A couple of songs from The Supremes which you may not take as being gay but if you’re really listening to ‘The Happening’ and think about when and if you’re

¹⁵⁸ “Music Show” for “Gayly Speaking,” radio broadcast on reel-to-reel tape for 19 December 1974. Included in box of audiotapes as part of the Michigan Organization for Human Rights collection, Bentley Archives, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

coming out it surely is a *happening*.” However, the inclusion of David Bowie in the broadcast showed that style mattered as well. Whether or not Bowie sang explicitly or intelligibly about being gay, there was something important about Bowie’s flamboyant costumes, edgy, ambiguous sexual talk, and public performance. In Detroit, for instance, he was seen potentially going down on guitarist Mick Ronson on stage at the Masonic Temple Theater.¹⁵⁹

These creative arguments had much to do with the explicit message within the music—not the medium. The assumption for the “Gayly Speaking” hosts was that musicians with individual songs and known intentions would create gay themed music. However, by 1974 DJs playing all sorts of music in local gay clubs were greatly influencing not only what gay content might address or sound like but also making an argument that the medium itself—the structure of listening to continuous music among like-minded people—was in fact the real revolution. According to reports, reel-to-reel players were used in a local club, a practice that in New York had been used since the 1960s at gay havens like Fire Island to create continuous mixes.¹⁶⁰ DJ names like Gary Shannon and Jimmy Taylor are listed on a number of advertisements during this era. What they were playing and how they were playing it is very difficult to discern. Almost all of the DJs—all presumably white given the clientele in the clubs and heavily segregated nature of Detroit’s nightlife culture—are either now dead or incredibly difficult to locate. Unlike only a few years later, there was no popular press covering the clubs. However, this would change in

¹⁵⁹ John Morris, “Lady Stardust,” *Gay Liberator*, no. 22 (November 1972): 4. See Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

¹⁶⁰ “Friday October 30th found an assortment of witches and goblins and other such drags (plus a few of us n standard fare) freaking to the strobe and the music of Tony Russomanno; he did a fine job of editing tapes and his medeley [sic] of revolution matches the commercial world at its best.” See “Halloween Dance: GLFD Halloween Dance a Success,” *Gay Liberator* (December 1970): 8. Lary Sanders, a founder of Detroit’s Midwest Dance Association record pool was associated with DJing on New York’s Fire Island. See “Lary Sanders @ Disco-Disco.com” at <<http://www.disco-disco.com/djs/lary.shtml>> (accessed 2 March 2011). I was unable to reach Sanders during my research. It is possible that he—and perhaps others—provided an early connective link between the cutting-edge sound reproduction technologies in gay clubs in the New York area and what was going on in Detroit.

1972 with the publication of *Metra* and later *Cruise*. These “club rags” would be based around the exploding club network.¹⁶¹ These magazines would also feature writers—some named, others not—who would begin to write features on the DJs themselves, highlighting the kind of music being played, the audience that such music cultivated and what it all meant at the end of the night.

Racial segregation though was still a major reality, even with the more liberated era of the early 1970s. Violence against black men, though intense for anyone seen as gay, was especially intense. A series of murders in the early 1970s against purportedly gay black men underscores this fact.¹⁶² At the same time, gender segregation was serious as well. Anne Henke, following specifically lesbians and feminists during the 1970s, has noted the increased presence of lesbians and women in public, including places for music and dance. These places though were largely segregated from other, predominantly male, clubs and venues.¹⁶³ However, though a mixed race, mixed sexuality, mixed gender, mixed generation, audience for public entertainment was still rare in Detroit the legal, social, and sonic opportunity for a new kind of audience was now possible in way that it had never been before.

3.2 THE PARTY BOX

In all reality, a lot of that underground stuff happened in a lot of those gay clubs, because they, you know, they had to create they own scene so usually they was opening up old warehouses, old buildings, way back then just because they had no where else to go. So they changed those over into clubs. So that whole underground, other scene, had been going on a long time, way before, you know, raves and all that other stuff came along.

¹⁶¹ In the archives at the Bentley, magazines like *Metra* and others are referred to as “club rags.”

¹⁶² Ken Dudley, “Five Men Murdered in Detroit,” *Gay Liberator*, no. 31 (October 1973).

¹⁶³ Anne Henke, *Finding the Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

They was doing that stuff way back in the early '70s because they didn't have anywhere else to go party at.

— Trina Brooks¹⁶⁴

Studio 54 did not just happen in New York. Katrina Brooks—or simply Trina to her friends—saw Ken Collier play there in 1978 after graduating from Detroit's Cooley High School. Later a friend of Ken's and an early lover of the music, Brooks followed Ken to clubs throughout the city, both gay and straight. Whether it was rented cabarets in Highland Park, motorcycle halls on Grand River or after-hours at so many different addresses that they have been lost even to street maps, she saw her brand of progressive music move from underground to overground context and back again. Formerly a quality checker for General Motors working nights, when I talked to Brooks in 2004 she had been a dancer and audience member in the underground dance scene the majority of her life. Before I could interview her again she died. However, her descriptions of that era and her understanding of its emergence on the margins of Detroit nightlife are still poignant.

¹⁶⁴ Katrina Brooks, interview by author, 1 June 2004. Ms. Brooks, unfortunately, passed before I could interview her again for this dissertation. I found out via Facebook in January 2010. According to friends she had been gone about five years at that time.



Figure 3-3. Studio 54, Winter 2011.

Ken Collier was born in 1949 to a family that had arrived in Detroit years earlier in search of work. He attended local schools and, along with his Brother Greg, would often stroll over from his nearby home to Motown studios to hear who was playing and see the stars. By the time he graduated from high school, the young Collier had moved from music fan to a kind of music creator, blending records in his parents' basement. He moved out of the family house in his early 20s, after informing his parents of his sexual preferences, and began his professional career as a DJ. Greg Collier, Ken's younger brother, was born in 1954 and shared many similar influences and interests in music. However, his path did diverge from Ken's. Greg moved to Chicago in the 1970s, a choice that would eventually lead to his own DJ career. After years of DJing in Detroit's underground culture, Ken eventually appeared on disco station WLBS (102.7 FM) and at various straight cabarets, prep parties, and clubs. He would also dabble in record production, co-mixing a handful of tracks with Don Was and Duane Bradley as the "Wasmopolitan Mixing Squad," including Was (Not Was)'s "Tell Me That I'm Dreaming" and

“Out Come the Freaks” in the early 1980s.¹⁶⁵ Greg never made the transition into production but instead maintained long-term residencies at local gay clubs like Todd’s and Zippers.

Though he had high blood pressure—and is rumored to have taken a bullet in the 1990s—Ken was unaware of the diabetic condition that put him in a coma and eventually killed him in February 1996. His Brother, Greg, still lives and works in the city of Detroit but is retired from DJing. Their two careers encompass over forty years of musical history of which Collins and others share many experiences.¹⁶⁶ The Collier Brothers grew up on Detroit’s near West Side, almost equally distant from Motown Records and the United Community and Civil League. Singers Aretha Franklin and Levi Stubbs lived in their neighborhood, they went to school with the children of Motown stars while their mother’s cousin, Thelma, at one point was the first wife of Berry Gordy, making his children the Collier’s second cousins. They would visit the Gordy mansion in their youth. Their father worked for Ford for 42 years. Their mother started off in housekeeping at Detroit Memorial Hospital before going back to school and becoming a pharmacist assistant at Riverview Hospital. When Riverview closed she retired. There were records and radio in the house and their parents listened to the blues. WCHB and WJLB played the music that the Collier children wanted to hear. “Rockin’ Ernie Durham was the DJ of my times,” said Greg Collier. “That’s who we listened to on the radio all the time.”

Ken went to Central High School while Greg went to Henry Ford, which was at the time predominantly white. It was there that he was influenced by other sounds and genres—Jimi Hendrix, Traffic, Eric Clapton. “For me the Motown sound was good but then going out to Henry Ford you were going to get exposed to other kinds of music too. Henry Ford was what

¹⁶⁵ The mixes, which became hits in places like Larry Levan’s Paradise Garage in New York, were recently re-released by Ze Records in 2004.

¹⁶⁶ Specific information on Ken Collier’s early life was provided by Irene Collier, his mother, by phone interview in 2004 and his brother Greg Collier, a fellow DJ and a subject of this dissertation, on 29 May 2008.

really turned me onto Jimi Hendrix.” A self-described “music nerd,” who still has his letter jacket from band, Greg played trumpet and French horn in school and ended up receiving a music scholarship to Michigan State University. However, he wanted to get a real job like his father and so began a short stint in the factory. This, however, did not last long. After only a few days the younger Collier had no interest in continuing in his father’s line of work. Luckily for Collier, and unlike his father, he had other options and signed up for classes at Wayne Community College (WCC). Here his social and musical world expanded.

It was during this time that Greg Collier took significant trips to New York City and witnessed what was then the cutting edge of club music. He witnessed two turntables being used to make continuous music in a club.

First time, I heard anybody mix two records and make them start talking to me was in New York... That was probably Larry Levan. Then I heard another DJ in Chicago, I can't remember his name, but I heard them doing it and that fascinated me. That fascinated me, the fact of two records, the music just never stopping. Even though then the method of blending still wasn't really, it wasn't clear, it wasn't smooth, there was a whole lot of what I call “Clydesdales”—there was a whole bunch of bumping in the mix [chuckles] but the music still would never stop.

Greg moved to Chicago full time in the spring of 1976 after visiting in the winter of 1975. The move to Chicago was critical for him and eventually for Detroit. It was in Chicago that Collier began his career as a professional DJ and participated in the first moments of the explosion in Chicago of what would later become house music. His best friend was Frankie Knuckles. Knuckles, raised in New York, had come to Chicago on the recommendation of Larry Levan. Greg would come back to Detroit and visit from time-to-time and hang out with his brother and his friends. “I studied, well I didn’t study, I came up amongst some of the greatest, the great ones, the real legends, I mean Frankie Knuckles and I were best friends [laughs] all during that time so to a lot of peoples’ dismay when I came back from Detroit and me and my brother started doing things a lot of people did not know that I was already doing this.”

While Greg was in Chicago, Ken had continued his own entry into the music world, including creating regular events at The Chess Mate. From all accounts, regular, continuous mixing of prerecorded music began within Detroit's underground dance scene during the 1970s, a chiefly black and gay affair that gathered together in small venues like The Chess Mate largely by word-of-mouth. These small bars acted, especially at the beginning, much like speakeasies in the 1920s, with clubs requiring prospective patrons to knock on the door before gaining entry. Longtime DJ Stacey "Hotwaxx" Hale¹⁶⁷ remembers seeing Duane Bradley¹⁶⁸ in 1975 behind two turntables at the Chess Mate, a one-time beatnik coffeehouse in the 1960s and now a coin laundry on Livernois near Six Mile on Detroit's West Side. The Chess Mate had become an after-hours club where Bradley, Collier, and others played. She had sneaked into bars before—the Mardi Gras, the Twenty Grand, and the Argyle—but had never seen anyone mix records. "There was no mixing in straight clubs," Hale says. "The DJs that mixed were gay." Stacey Hale would eventually take those ideas from a club that her uncle opened—The Circus Lounge on Greenfield and Plymouth—to Club Xclusive near Eight Mile and Greenfield. There she would be discovered by Duncan Sounds, a system with about a dozen or so jocks, in the late 1970s and, according to Hale, introduce mixing to them.

¹⁶⁷ Stacey Hale, personal interview, 6 July 2004 and 3 December 2010.

¹⁶⁸ Duane Bradley died before the research for this dissertation began. According to Zarazua he died from "complications from asthma and pneumonia." See Daniel D. Zarazua, "Detroit's Duane Bradley Remembered," *City View* (21 October 1999). The article is archived at Zarazua's personal Web site: <<http://www.domingoyu.com/writings/journal-music/smooth-mixer/>> (accessed 12 March 2011).



Figure 3-4. Stacey Hale DJing as fellow DJ Elton Weathers looks on.



Figure 3-5. Stacey Hale DJing 2011.

According to Greg, he was the one who brought Chicago/New York style mixing back to Detroit and his more parochial-minded brother. It was this critical information—offhandedly presented by Greg—that upped the ante for disco DJs in Detroit. Aside for a short stint on WLBS, this music would be played in the underground not through radio or TV. Mix tapes, though critical in circulating the music in the 1980s, were not readily available in those early days, either. In that sense, what was happening was a word-of-mouth folkway, based on witness testimony, story-telling, a handful of record stores and record pools, plane-flights, and phone

calls between a handful of trusted friends and colleagues. Collier and Bradley, along with Morris Mitchell and Renaldo White, played the Chess Mate. They were not alone, however. There were other sound systems at the time, each with its own name and its own charismatic leader, its own sound “guy,” and promotional *modus operandi*. As the disco concept spread, so too did its infrastructure and popularity.

Metra was part of publicizing this new world and filled a media niche that needed filling in the late 1970s.¹⁶⁹ Gay life in the city was coming out. Clubs were opening and an exciting new musical context was happening right along side of it. Duane “In the Mix” Bradley was a columnist for *Metra* in those early days. His rare and few columns in those early issues are a crucial, early, personal account of the dance scene and how it was starting to see and hear itself. In one of *Metra*’s first issues, Bradley wrote:

Speaking of stepping out, Detroit is finally stepping into the light a little more. More Disco artists are coming to the various clubs in the area, showing that Detroit is being recognized as a viable market for disco music. Though our city is still in the early stages of change, we are beginning to wake up to what discoing and partying are all about. Cities everywhere (New York, Chicago, Philly, Wash. D.C., Miami, etc.) are already into it, but happily, we are coming around. With the opening of many new clubs in the area [see fig. 3.8], it looks like we’re on the right track.... So once again I say, come on Detroit, let’s step out and show the rest of the country that we can party, too. Some clubs have their good days during the week, but let’s make all of them hop every day. There’s not time like the present, so let’s make 1979 our year Detroit. The gay crowd made Disco 30, and we want to stay on top. WE’RE STEPPIN OUT.¹⁷⁰

Enola-Gaye Porter stepped out during this era as well.¹⁷¹ She eventually supplied DJs with the raw materials for their craft through the record pool that she administered, the Midwestern Dance Association (MDA) in the 1980s. But her story goes back further than that. Porter grew up on

¹⁶⁹ *Metra Magazine* is still being published. New issues can be downloaded as a pdf via: <http://www.metramagazine.com/> (accessed 22 February 2011).

¹⁷⁰ Duane Bradley, “Music: Editorial,” *Metra* (August 1979).

¹⁷¹ Enola-Gaye Porter, phone interview by author, 1 June 2004. By the time I spoke to Ms. Porter high blood pressure had left her blind. A few months after our interview she died. For a short obituary, see Michael Paoletta, “Beat Box,” *Billboard* 30 October 2004, 25.

Detroit's uppereast side in the 1960s and came of age musically in the 1970s and 1980s. Her mother, Dawn Porter, ran her own record pool as Enola was growing up, providing records and recommending DJs to local clubs and radio, starting as an assistant to DJs at the powerful CKLW before working with WLBS, Detroit's premier disco station in the early 1980s. She remembered the glitz and glamour of disco's 1970s golden era, as expensively produced, orchestrated, and energized R&B albums replaced live performances as the way to experience music. Clubs like the Palm River Club (now the Roostertail) were the epitome of this flamboyant scene, with male hair dressers, their female friends, models, and the rich and famous—basically everybody who did not have to work on Sunday or Monday—mingling and watching black, gay disco star Sylvester perform in 1978. “At the time it was all so new and so very exciting. But it got overexposed and cheesy.”

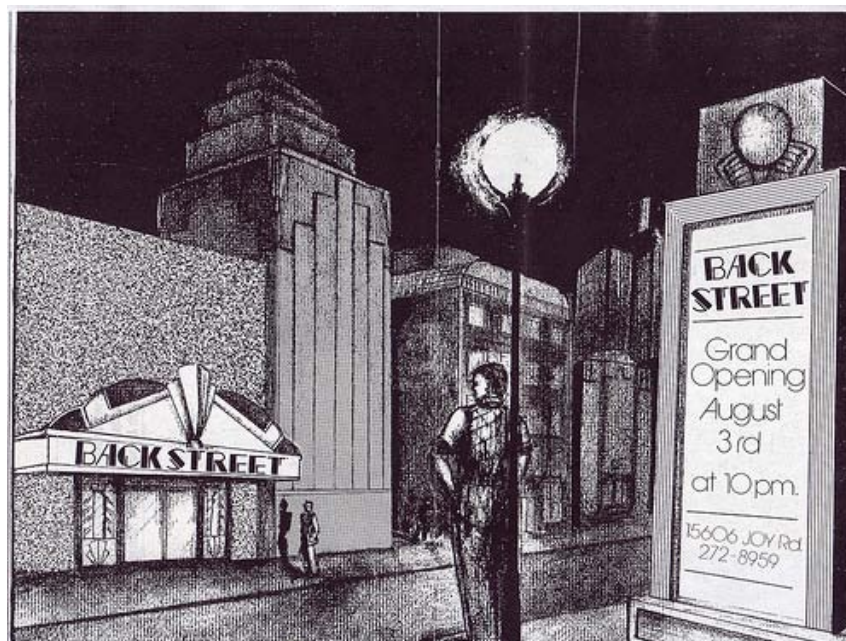


Figure 3-6. Back Street advertisement.

“Cheesiness” was not the only problem with disco. In the summer of 1976 “disco” was a problem for the AFM and Local #5. At least it was for Jim Lewis, then President of Local 5 of the American Federation of Musicians, and the musicians union for the Detroit area since the beginning of the twentieth century. Writing in the Detroit-based *Tribe* magazine, Lewis argued that threat of disco to working musicians in Detroit was mortal.

We find UAW and Carpenter Halls with non-union help, including musicians. We find politicians asking for our time and money, while sponsoring DISCO MUSIC. These people are insensitive to our problems and we need to let them know in no uncertain terms that we are aware of this lack of awareness. We are slipping back into the days when everyone was for himself and nobody got anything. We cannot afford to destroy the principles of a Musicians' Union or let others through greed and apathy do it. DISCO IS KILLING US!!! While we sit passively by, running our flatted fifths or getting weird sounds out of electronic instruments, we have to take pride and concern in our profession so that others will respect our profession. We have to belabor our leaders to put some pressure on politicians and to stop living in the past. We need effective programs and we need to participate. It is no longer good enough just to pay our dues.¹⁷²

Without a serious reexamination of basic union values—values that Lewis pointed had brought workers together in brotherhood for generations—musicians could be contemplating their own extinction. Though other genres of music had challenged jazz's longtime connection to dance-floors after World War II—including blues, jump blues, rhythm & blues, rock 'n' roll, and funk, to name only the most obvious genres—Lewis argues that it is discos that provided the most critical threat to jazz being banished from dance-halls and cabarets.

¹⁷² Jim Lewis, "DISCO IS KILLING US!!!" *Tribe* (May-June 1976): 22.



Figure 3-7. Jim Lewis, "DISCO IS KILLING US!!!" 1976.

Everyone did not hold his opinion in the jazz community though. The reception of disco was contradictory, with artists like Lyman Woodard and Tribe member Marcus Belgrave continuing to create music that blurred the lines between jazz and club, dance-oriented music. Belgrave even hosted a "Jazz/Disco" event at the AFM Union Hall itself sometime in the late 1970s. But Lewis's claims about disco link up strongly with other concerns about DJing as a non-musical, opportunistic, form of automation, that held strong resonance both inside the union and outside in the music community at large. A younger generation, just coming of age during the 1970s time, would be far less troubled by the gulf between being a musician and a DJ and the corresponding, incipient shift in community technologies into an information age. They would find themselves embracing the music just as the disco era seemed to be passing away.

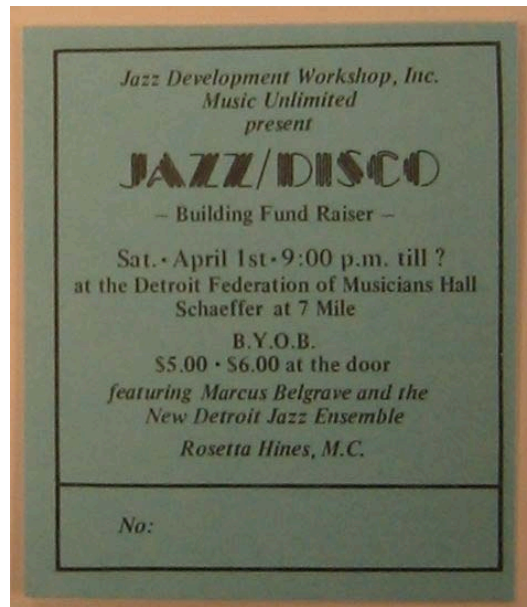


Figure 3-8. Jazz Development Workshop Flyer, 1 April, circa 1978.

3.3 D.R.E.A.D

I mean to me [pause] disco never died just the music and the upfrontness of it that's all that died. They just took it back underground..... And once they took it back underground it developed back into its true form. Once it was up front and it was commercialized and you got "Saturday Night Live" movies and thanks gods Friday and all of these commercialized things, well all the fun was being destroyed. They say rock killed it, rock didn't kill it, rock just kind a put it in its place and it went back underground where it belonged.

— Greg Collier¹⁷³

In 1979, WRIF, one of Detroit's rock 'n' roll stations, Anti-Disco fan club called Detroit Rockers Engages in the Abolition of Disco, or simply DREAD, enlisted their listeners to join, write in for membership cards, and not violate the rules. On the front, the card stated: "D.R.E.A.D" is Detroit's non-violent anti-disco league. Our aim is to eliminate disco from the face of the earth.

¹⁷³ Greg Collier, interview by author, 29 May 2008.

As a duly sworn member of D.R.E.A.D., I am committed to the conditions set forth on the reverse of this card.” And they were:

I will never wear platform shoes.
I will never wear zodiac jewelry.
I will never listen to disco records
and/or disco radio stations.
Silk dresses and three piece suits
are extremely suspect.
A violation of these conditions is punishable by...
“THE CHAIR.”

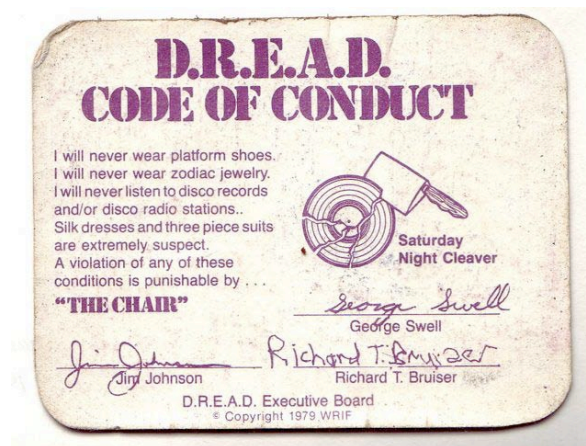


Figure 3-9. Detroit Rockers Engaged in the Abolition of Disco (DREAD) membership card.

Luckily, for Detroit’s dance scene, as we shall see later in this dissertation, many former members of this club violated both the spirit and letter of the fan club’s laws. However, in the early 1980s the attitude seemed prevalent and, potentially, insidious. Disco had died famously at a 1979 Tigers vs. White Sox baseball game at Comiskey Park in Chicago, as a local radio jock asked fans to bring disco records to blow up before the game. The resulting riot—and cancellation of the game—underscored the reactionary fervor of the times and set the stage for a new kind of scene. For a short time the disco clubs in Detroit at least kept creeping along. *Metro Times*, Detroit’s alternative weekly for over twenty years, even ran a disco listing in its early

years. But within a few years of the Comiskey debacle, disco, even as terminology died, and the corresponding clubs—JayBees, Piper’s Alley, Oscar’s—went off the radar. Without media attention, fewer white fans, and fewer places to play, black DJs and dancers loyal to the disco aesthetic pursued it “underground.”

One of these places was The Factory on Jefferson. Like many other such clubs amid Detroit’s dilapidated urban core, it is now an empty lot. However, club regular and house-music head Robert Troutman remembers when Collier DJed after-hours there, after hot-spot Studio 54, named after the more (in)famous New York City club but catering to a less-famous clientele, closed at 2 a.m.¹⁷⁴ Troutman is older now, a member of Detroit’s Chamber of Commerce, many of his DJ heroes, clubs, and memories for the most part behind him. “I’ve heard so much amazing music I could sit on this couch for the rest of my life,” he intimates at one point. But he is still youthful, springing up from the sofa to get gym bags full of old mix-tapes, lighting a quick cigarette when attempting to remember a certain DJ, and jumping from subject-to-subject. “Hey. Look at this.” From one of the bags, he pulls out a tape. The label says “Ken Collier 82-83-84.” He throws it on and the Collier that he has been talking about for the last hour springs from the tape deck. “Is it too loud?” The pounding of bass and drums, steady, clean, and crisp, sounds great in Troutman’s comfortable one-bedroom apartment, the sun glancing across the coffee table. “See, my people, we listen to the mix. We come from an era of mixing and blending records.” As he smokes, he listens intently to the syncopated hand claps, accented high-hats and four-on-the-floor tempos pounding out of the speaker behind him. “Hear that? See how he just mixed that record in? That was difficult.” The effect is subtle, even seamless.

¹⁷⁴ Robert Troutman, interview, 19 June 2004.

As great as the mix sounds, the importance of it lies in the openness of the music itself. What is on the tape is not disco, though disco's spirit pervades it. It is not house either; it is too early for that. The cut-up rhythm tracks that would eventually become known as "house" and wind their way along I-94 from Chicago did not exist yet. Instead, the music is what Troutman and others refer to as "progressive," a mix of disco flavor with new, thoroughly synthesized energy. Songs like the Italian-born Alexander Robotnick's "Problemes D'Amour," and Quest's "Mind Games," along with tracks from Europe and New York—all unavailable just a few years before and not necessarily meant to be mixed—are included in this early non-genre. The music is soulful and terribly funky despite—or perhaps because of—its mysterious, in-between origins.¹⁷⁵ The way the music is presented is telling.

3.4 NEW BREED

Norm Talley met Ken Collier when he was in grade school. He lived just a few blocks away from Collier's apartment on Greenfield on Detroit's west side on a street called Grove.¹⁷⁶ Al Smith, a sound engineer and friend, introduced Collier to him. Over the years, Talley would ride his bike over to Collier's and buy extra records that he was getting by being a reporter for *Billboard*. Like others from his generation, like Delano Smith, Al Ester, Mike Clark, and others, Talley was just a few years too young to have been a professional days in the early days of

¹⁷⁵ See Will Straw, "Music from the Wrong Place: On the Italianicity of Quebec Disco," *Criticism* 50, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 113-132.

¹⁷⁶ Norm Talley, interview by author, 17 March 2011.

disco.¹⁷⁷ A graduate of Cooley High School, Talley remembers when mixing was new and there was not as much music as today coming out every week. “You had to be more creative with the records, because everybody had the same ones.” He was young and the craft of mixing was less than a decade old. However, Collier’s mentoring and records encouraged Talley to join up with two older friends, Andre “The Maestro” Davis and Jeff Thurman to form the “Cosmic DJs,” a mobile DJ team that played parties in Detroit and then, as Davis and Thurman went college, in Lansing and Ann Arbor. However, Talley never went to college. Talley is now entering his thirtieth year as a DJ.

Talley was hooked. The lineage of who hooked whom into the new style of music and presentation remains unclear. Duane “In The Mix” Bradley, would eventually have his own radio mix show on WJLB, bringing some of that underground sound directly to afternoon mixes. The aforementioned John Collins, who now works for Submerge, a techno distribution company, heard DJed music in 1978 at a club on Lafayette and Orleans. He would eventually establish residencies at clubs like Cheeks and the Warehouse with the likes of Hale and eventually Jeff “The Wizard” Mills, a young upstart who would eventually be one of the most popular radio DJs in Detroit’s long-radio history, beginning in the mid-1980s, before becoming a globetrotting techno DJ up to the present day.

By the mid-’80s then the center of underground club music had shifted from the gay, black, “progressive” scene of the Chess Mate, Studio 54 and L’uomo, to the straight-black prep scene written about in Dan Sicko’s seminal 1999 book *Techno Rebels*. However, the early mixing era was also crossing over to other white DJs and audiences. A handful of whites had

¹⁷⁷ This group of DJs, some of whom have gone on to be music producers in their own right, like Talley, have not gotten nearly the attention in print as others approximately their age who became techno producers. A few articles though have emerged following them. See Dan Bean, “Detroit Beatdown: Motor City DJs and the Truth about Techno,” *Wax Poetics*, April / May 2006, 73.

been there from the very beginning. One of these fans of the new musical style was Butch Duncan.¹⁷⁸ Now living in Chicago, Duncan saw both Collier Brothers throughout their careers. Duncan himself would end up DJing early rave scene, being a regular DJ for Voom. According to DJ Scott Gordon, at the time a white teenager who had just begun DJing at teen clubs in the surrounding area, there were beginnings to be ways for DJs to get 12” singles and dance records more consistently.¹⁷⁹ For instance, Buy Rite Records began first as a mail order company, then as a brick-and-mortar record store. It would eventually become a critical spot for 12” records. Early DJs had gotten their records through their travels to New York and Chicago, had them mailed or given to them directly by record labels, other DJs, friends, or, later, when DJs became Billboard Reporters and were able to take advantage of those connections. However, for younger DJs unapprenticed into this communicative network, Buy Rite was one of the few points of purchase for the new music. The circulating of underground ideas and sounds was expanding.

However, not everyone was happy about it. Brooks remembered when Bookie’s Club 870 (or just Bookie’s), a longtime gay bar, burned down in 1991. The club, now an empty parking lot just east of Menjos, burned early one morning. Brooks lived in the area and went up to see the fire. Someone had called Ken and when he arrived Brook’s remembered him, “crying like a baby.” He had been doing a regular residency there for years, and had lost part of his record collection in the fire. Brook’s remembers residents coming out to the fire and smugly saying that the club needed to burn as Collier, Brooks, and others stood on in disbelief and sadness. The scene seems symptomatic of the city’s reaction to an underground culture that had to hide itself in heavily secretive, invite-only, places just to exist. Clubs would continue to rise in the midst of Detroit’s heavy decline, popping up in places that were being ignored. Two of these

¹⁷⁸ Butch Duncan, interview, 7 October 2010.

¹⁷⁹ Scott Gordon, interview by author, 7 March 2011.

clubs would surface off Seven Mile, the first named Todd's where DJ Charles English played on Thursdays and underground DJs like Duane Bradley and Greg Collier played on the weekends, the other Ken Collier's incarnation of Heaven. Both would exemplify the limits of Detroit's 1980s and early 1990s dance scene. Simply put, the two clubs stretched Detroit to the limit, exploring how loud, mixed, beautiful and ugly Detroit could be.

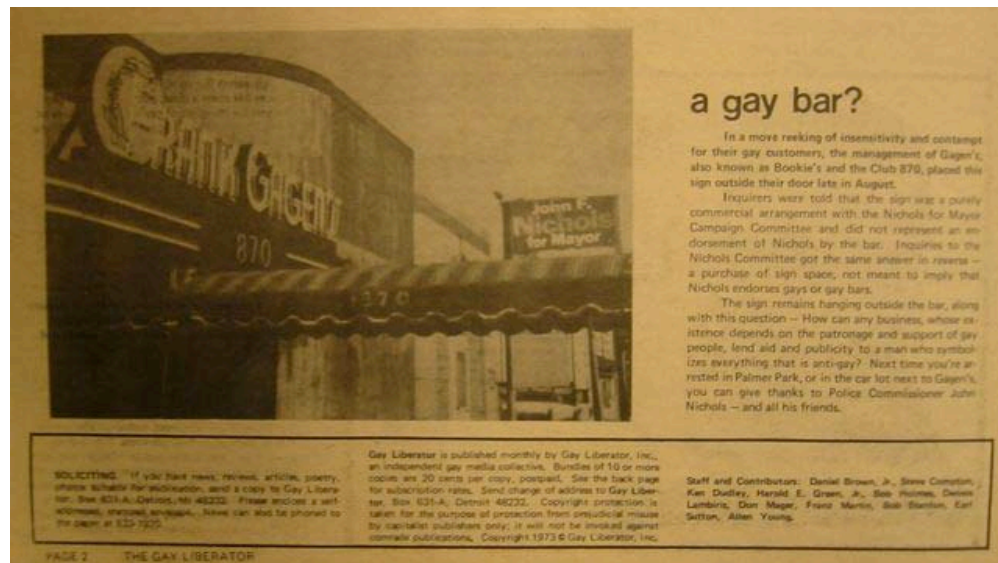


Figure 3-10. Frank Gegen's, also known as Bookie's.



Figure 3-11. Bookie's, now an empty lot, in the spring of 2005.

3.5 THE KICK DRUM

Luis Resto remembers the night that dance music finally made sense to him.¹⁸⁰ Born in 1961 in Michigan to Puerto-Rican-born parents, Resto grew up in Garden City, a small suburban town west of Detroit and, as he reminded me, “the home of the first K-Mart.” His parents had met in Ann Arbor while his father was training to be a surgeon at the University of Michigan. Raised in a Catholic family, in a middle-class neighborhood, Resto and his three brothers grew up, from Resto’s point of view, as normal as possible. Be that as it may, his family would return, from time to time, to Puerto Rico where he would hear his grandmother play piano—she had played in movie houses when she was younger—while his grandfather sang folk songs in Portuguese. He played violin and piano growing up and performed in youth orchestras and symphonies before

¹⁸⁰ Luis Resto, interview, 27 February 2011.

eventually going to Interlochen Fine Arts camp when he was a teen during the summers. Closer to home, he fell in with a neighborhood music teacher who would hold “musicales”—Resto described them as “neighborly get togethers”—in her home. There he would listen to and perform in small musical groups.

His eldest brothers, Resto explained, were Rolling Stones fans and “WRIF rockers,” referring to the rock station WRIF that had recently started up on the FM dial when he was still in grade school. However, his brother DD, the boy closest to Luis’s age, was slightly more adventurous, getting into “rock fusion.” Miles Davis’s jazz-fusion masterpiece *Bitches Brew*, released in 1970, featured Joe Zawinul on electric piano. Zawinul would later start the band Weather Report which would do much to popularize fusion as both an artistic and commercially viable medium. Resto dug the new sounds. Mario began a band in the basement of their parents’ house—they called it the “Basement Lounge”—where they could jam and, eventually, grow a neighborhood audience. At around the same time, when Luis could not go to the clubs, DD would record sets from local clubs, especially a group called Mickey Stein and the Pulsating Unit from a club called the Delta Lady on Woodward Avenue, and bring them back for Luis to hear and practice with.

In 1974, when Luis was only thirteen, DD suggested to Mickey Stein’s band that they come over to the Lounge and jam with him and his younger brother. “It was my first contact with reality.” Resto remembers the response he got when he asked one of the musicians what he should do as a young musician. “Learn standards” was the response. He took the advice seriously and began years of practice within “the jazz idiom,” learning to play “straight ahead.” However, Resto’s interest in fusion and the new sounds emanating from artists like Herbie Hancock and Jan Hammer were sonically challenging the concept of the “jazz idiom.” His father bid \$101 for

a Fender Rhodes keyboard recently liberated by the police—the local chief was a neighbor and told the Resto family about the opportunity. In the deal, Resto got an electro-voice microphone, a bass amp, and a phase shifter. Soon after, Resto got his first synthesizer, The Odyssey. However, he still took regular lessons with a piano player named Irwin Krinsky. Krinsky had gone to school with Don “Don Was” Fagenson. At eighteen, Resto was introduced to Don Was at the Sound Suite Studios in Detroit: “I was the kid with the synthesizer.” The connection landed a gig with Was (Not Was) for their first album.

Resto remembers that at the time he was a bit of a rebel and that Fagenson, about nine years his senior, was, on the one hand, very much into what Resto called the “unison line,” with everyone playing together. Resto, on the other hand, was falling asleep at night with his new electronic instruments. He wanted to harmonize and mess with the Motown formula. “I wasn’t really raised on Motown. I was into synthesis,” he told me. “I loved wacky sounds. I was into tweaking sounds.” He remembers calling Jim Cooper, the man who designed some of the analog synthesizers for pianist-turned-synthesizer player Herbie Hancock, and asking him how to make modifications. “It was kind of like plumbing. I was ripping into synths.” However, Resto remembers that Was told him that some day he would understand. Over thirty years later Resto agrees. “I’m better with collaboration. I can give you ideas forever but I need somebody to help me keep it simple.”

There was also something else happening at the time that Resto did not quite understand. After some time working with Was in the studio late night, a new face appeared: Duane Bradley. “He a really beautiful guy. He new what he liked and he would just express himself.” Resto also remembers Ken Collier’s name and is sure that Fagenson was in dialogue with him. But Resto definitely remembers Bradley being in the studio to provide a “filter” for the music so that it

could be played in clubs. Resto does not remember Bradley—or Collier for that matter—touching anything in the studio. That was not the point. Instead, Bradley was there to provide an ear. He knew what people in the clubs wanted and were interested in dancing to. The DJ was becoming a producer. It was at this time that Resto began to understand the significance of the kick drum. “I wanted to change the pattern but Was told me no, that the kick drum was not supposed to stop.” It did not make sense to him, coming as he was from the avant-garde sonic fringes of jazz and rock, until he met his future wife and she took him dancing. They went to Menjo’s with her and some of her friends in 1981 and he finally understood what Bradley, Collier, and Was were getting at. “It was so loud and I was like, ‘Oh my god, this is why you don’t want the kick to stop.’” It was a “thump to your chest.”

In this chapter, I have introduced new scholarship, including original oral history work, to describe the emergence Detroit’s primarily black and gay underground community organized around this same kick drum that Resto finally encountered at Menjo’s in 1981. Even for someone as musically astute as Resto, the continuous blend in a club atmosphere was a startling sonic moment. The soundscape had shifted—Bradley and Was had tried to explain it to him in the studio. But now he felt it. In the next chapter, I will show how this feeling spread across the metropolitan Detroit area. Detroit’s post-Motown sonic landscape had finally arrived. How the city as a whole would react to it—would they dance or would they fight the feeling?—is the story of the next chapter.

4.0 MIX: COUNTERCLOCKWISEOLOGY 1979-1989

I was in Ann Arbor standing on the corner of Stadium and University (1972). It's where Discount Records used to be. I had just started working at this Rock and Roll radio station, WAAM. I went to Discount Records to pick up some music. When I came out, for a moment in time, I was locked into the scenery. I was thinking about what the mission of radio should be. I saw all of these different cultures, ethnicities passing by me. I was just standing on the corner watching them. Old people, young people, black people, white people, Native Americans—people from the whole world. I was thinking about how radio stations fight for market share. They look at radio through this narrow prism. I thought about how we might look at things differently. I also thought about the multi-layers of peer pressure and how people are confined to their own little prisons by the people they hang around with and the people they want to please or people they don't wish to offend in any way. They say to the group, "What would you like for me to do? What would you like to listen to so I'll be pleasing in your sight? You like to go here?" This is where I like to go. You like this music? Okay, this is the music I like." That is them in the daytime, but at night, people don't have the pressure of their peers. They are forced to be themselves and to take on their own adventures.¹⁸¹

— The Electrifying Mojo

In 1980, just a year after Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" became a national hit, New Yorker Duane "Spyder D." Hughes co-wrote and performed the song "Big Apple Rappin'" for a new record label started by his mother, Doris Hughes while attending college in Michigan.¹⁸² The track, a ten-minutes-plus, funky, synthesizer-filled tourist brochure, mentions New York City landmarks, neighborhoods, DJs, and MCs, as well as the Big Apple's proclivities for crime

¹⁸¹ The Electrifying Mojo, interview by Vince Patricola for *DEQ: Detroit Electronic Quarterly—Old School Edition*, v. 3 Fall 2005): 45. Attempts to interview Mojo for this dissertation failed. I am grateful to Patricola for allowing me to quote extensively from his interview.

¹⁸² The record was re-released in 2006 as the title-track on a double-disc archival compilation by England's Soul Jazz Records.

and fun. Ironically, though, the track featured former Motown bass player Billy “Motley” Wilson, recent head of the Motown Alumni Association, and the label was named Newtroit. Eventually Spyder D. would hop from label to label throughout the 1980s, and Newtroit would release only one record.¹⁸³ This little-told story of “Big Apple Rappin’” illustrates a major negative factor working against early Detroit rap music: the lack of a nationally significant record industry presence, a deficit that began with Motown Records’ departure in 1972. Despite the high quality of the musicians still available in the former Motown, the evisceration of the indigenous hit-making infrastructure, so famous throughout the world in the 1960s, made something like Spyder D.’s career untenable in Detroit. Returning to New York City created the possibility of a major deal.

Hip hop itself did not start in Detroit. Moreover, Detroit was relatively slow in picking up on the genre of rap, as its favored musical interest. So, Detroit had a long period before it established its own, locally popular, rap scene. Despite ephemeral rap music singles and albums going back into the early and mid-1980s, rap did not dominate Detroit’s airwaves or clubs until the late 1990s, even though Detroit had a sizeable black market and major hip hop artists toured the region since the early 1980s. Instead, Detroit’s early appreciation of hip hop music focused on the electro sound of New York music labels such as Tommy Boy, which featured artists like Afrika Bambaataa & The Soulsonic Force. This electro music—based on reoccurring synthesizer vamps, pounding bass beats, short snare claps, and cymbal-like crashes provided by drum machines, like the Roland 808—had far more influence initially on Detroit ears than early rap. It would take years of dissemination and incubation before the Detroit area could offer its own

¹⁸³ See the *Newtroit Records* site, “About Newtroit” at < <http://newtroitrecords.com/about.html> > (accessed 6 March 2011).

version of rap music tied to an organic hip hop movement within its neighborhoods. When Detroit hip hop finally did reach a critical mass in the early 1990s, the impact would be felt around the world, with groundbreaking acts like Esham, Boss, Jay Dee, Slum Village, and Eminem.

Detroit's dearth of early popular rap artists did not stop the ascendance, through radio, of a new style of DJing influenced by hip hop. Detroit audiences' focus on the dance music sound emerging in early hip hop from New York, Los Angeles, and, later, Miami, was greatly stimulated by two major radio forces: The Electrifying Mojo and The Wizard. Charles "Electrifying Mojo" Johnson ruled Detroit's airwaves in the late 1970s and early 1980s on the radio station WJLB. Mojo, with his deep, spectral-sounding voice and studio effects, famously encouraged listeners to help him land the Mothership (a direct allusion to the fantasies of Detroit's famous funk band Parliament-Funkadelic) by shining flashlights out their bedroom windows and blinking the lights on their cars. While that was occurring, Mojo would play an all-embracing set list that could range from soul music to classic rock to early local electro within minutes. Only a few years after making the transition to the FM dial in 1979 Mojo had a competitor in Jeff "The Wizard" Mills. Hired in the mid-1980s by WJLB's FM competitor WDRQ, The Wizard went head-to-head with Mojo but not by talking. Instead, the then-teenage Mills brought a new hip hop style out of local clubs and cabarets to the studios of WDRQ and then later in the '80s at WJLB after Mojo had left. This fast-paced mixing style, in which Mills would mix individual records together for only seconds, as opposed to minutes, before throwing them aggressively onto the DJ-booth floor, quickly became legendary. Using multiple turntables, drum machines, 8-track effects, as well as other sound-recording equipment, Mills created a robust sonic collage that highlighted the slick, percussion heavy, technologically advanced

sounds of early hip hop music. Before radio stations had a format for hip hop music, mix-shows filled the vacuum, and Mills was the preeminent pioneer in Detroit.

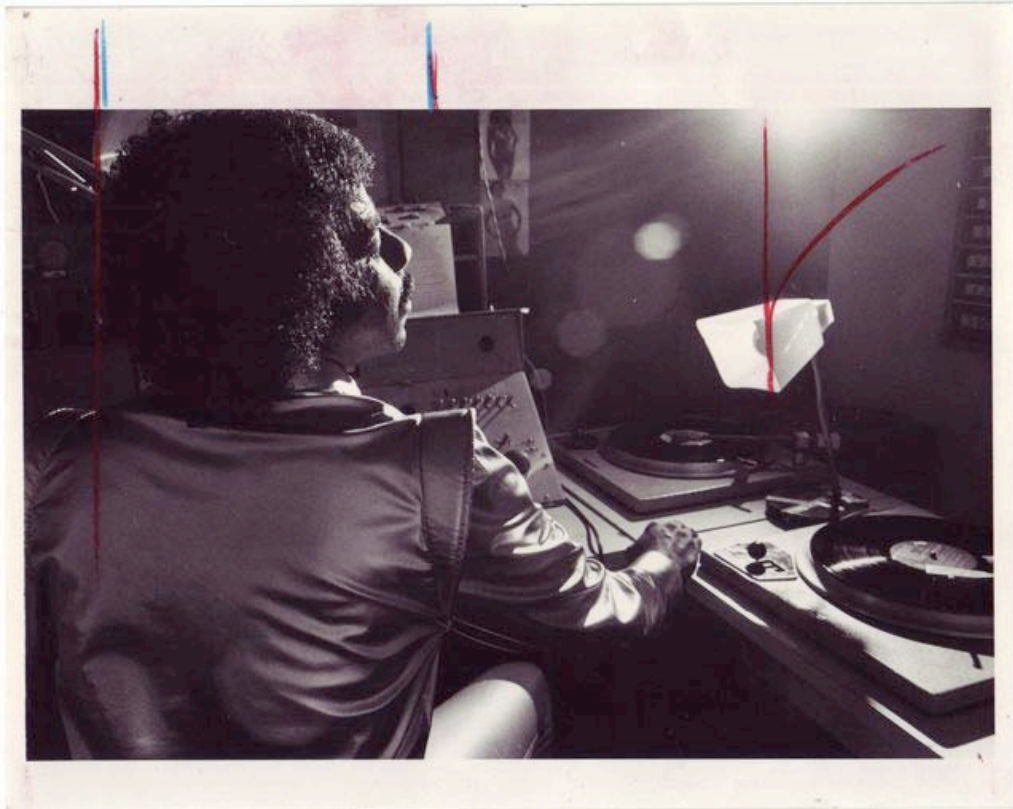


Figure 4-1. The Electrifying Mojo.

Mojo and The Wizard were quintessential to bringing early hip hop records and DJ styles budding in New York to a mass audience in Detroit. From music producer Jay Dee and his progeny's soulful sampling in their underground rap songs, to the local dance-floor friendly ghattotech DJs with their emphasis on scratching records speeding by at 150 beats per minute, to Dabrye's synthesizer-heavy laptop programming and its emphasis on distortion and off-kilter structures, many contemporary Detroit hip hop artists have drawn energy from the Mojo vs. Mills battles of the 1980s. The era eventually came to an end in the late 1980s and early 1990s as

the pressures of media conglomeration brought Detroit's unruly musical mixing in line with national rap and R&B formats dictated from the coasts. But through the circulation of radio mixes and folklore, Mojo and Wizard's nimble skills and encyclopedic knowledge of Motown, rock, funk, electro, and hip hop established the horizon for rhythmic creation in Detroit.

However, though this history is well known among music audiences and artists in Detroit, it still does not circulate well within the history of hip hop itself. This is ironic since if Detroit had not existed, hip hop's coastal representatives, both east and west, would have to have invented it. Musically Detroit has had tremendous influence on the sound of hip hop, including the 1960's soul sound of record labels like Motown, the 1970s funk provided by artists like George Clinton and his Parliament-Funkadelic, and the 1980s proto-techno acts like Juan Atkins' work in the groups Cybotron and later Model 500. Perhaps, most importantly Detroit's wider cultural legacy has greatly influenced hip hop since its early days, especially in its subject matter and through the wide dissemination of books by Detroit's pimp-turned-novelist Donald Goines. However, in the last two decades it has been the influence of Detroit as a spectacle of post-World War II industrial demise and social meltdown caused by joblessness, drugs, and structural racism that has set the tone for Detroit's inclusion into hip hop's larger narrative. This latter influence came out in the 1990s most spectacularly with Michael Copper's screenplay for the 1991 hip hop stylized film *New Jack City* which was largely based on famous 1980s Detroit crack dealers The Chambers Brothers and in the creation of the song "Ten Crack Commandments" by Notorious B.I.G which was invented based on another article about crack in Detroit written in *The Source* in 1994.¹⁸⁴ This chapter is about Detroit's mixed soundscape that emerged between the blended

¹⁸⁴ *Donnie's Story: The Life of Donald Goines*, dir. Kevin Williams (Maddmen, 2005). Barry Michael Cooper, "Motor City Break-down," *Village Voice* (December 1, 1987). William M. Adler, *Land of Opportunity* (New York: Plume, 1996).

sounds of the disco era and the eventual ascendance of Detroit as a remixed techno and hip hop capitol in the 1990s. It is also a response to the dominant coastal representations of 1980s Detroit that have largely dictated which Detroit stories and voices would be the most profitable.

4.1 THE EDUCATION OF A WIZARD

In 1984, *Metro Times* freelancer Bruce Britt, who is now a music journalist in Los Angeles, tried to capture young Jeff Mills at his residence at Cheeks, a now-defunct club on Eight Mile Road, after a moment of profound turbulence in the history of the DJ as a performer. The scratching of hip hop had outpaced the record-blending of the disco era.

[Mills] began this spectacle by blending two surging hip-hop tunes into one another. Having demonstrated this most basic of turntable techniques, Mills donned his headphones and cued up Yaz's "Situation." "OK," Mills said, forebodingly. "Here we go." Mouth slightly agape and head bobbing to the beat, Mills manipulated the record and mixing console simultaneously so that the phrase "move out" was transformed into "moo-moo-moo-moo move out." Later he blended parts of In Deep's "Tonight a DeeJay Saved My Life" with Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean." He then topped off this showy display by mixing a Berlitz language instruction record with the Deele's synth-funk smash, "Body Talk." Meanwhile, on the dance floor, the converted attested to Mills' disc-spinning abilities. "Is he good?," asked [a dancer], dabbing the perspiration from her forehead. "You see me sweatin', don't you?"¹⁸⁵

Though the spectacle seemed to appear fully formed, Jeff Mills, like his peers outside Detroit in Belleville—Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson—did not rise fully formed out of

¹⁸⁵ Bruce Britt, "Scratch 'n Dance: A DeeJay could save your life tonight," *Metro Times*, 5-11 September 1984, 1, 16.

downtown Detroit manhole covers. The constantly name-checked godfathers of techno shared many of the same experiences (simultaneously) with Mills, including DJing competitively in Detroit and on the radio, traveling internationally and creating their own labels. But neither May, Atkins nor Saunderson (born in '62, '63 and '64, respectively), or anyone for that matter, other than the Electrifying Mojo himself, had the kind of profound daily impact on Detroit's youth over as long a period as "the Wizard."¹⁸⁶



Figure 4-2. Jeff Mills featured in the Metro Times September 2004.

¹⁸⁶ Jeff Mills, interview with author. All material on the life and career of Jeff Mills, including quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from notes based on a handful of interviews that I conducted since 1999 with Mills. These facts, quotes, and other observations were confirmed and extended upon with the author in a personal interview conducted via Skype on 20 September 2010.

Years before, Mills, one of six children—his father, a civil engineer, and his mother, a housewife—had already begun listening to new sounds coming in virtually every day from New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. By his senior year in 1980, Mills had built a collection of dubbed mixtapes by everyone he could get his hands on: from Chicago, Farley “Jackmaster” Funk and Ralphie “the Razz” Rosario on WBMX; from New York, DJ Grandmaster Flash, DJ Red Alert, Grandmaster DST, Gail “Sky” King and, importantly, the Whiz Kid; from Los Angeles, DJ Yella and Dr. Dre. Meanwhile, Detroit stations like WLBS—the now-extinct urban sister station to New York’s famous WBLS—pumped out disco and R&B. For a short time from 1979 into the early 1980s, WLBS was programmed by DJs who frequented disco clubs and the largely underground after-hours parties where local DJs, like their New York and Chicago peers, were beginning to “blend” records with two turntables. Two of these local DJs, Ken Collier and Duane Bradley, would heavily influence Mills (the former mixing on WLBS and the latter working directly with Mills later in the ’80s at WJLB). Mills also began listening to years of WJLB-FM, a station that already had a long-standing DJ heritage on the AM band, and had signed Charles Johnson—known to Detroit radio listeners as the Electrifying Mojo—to the 10 p.m.-3 a.m. slot.

Mills did not just hear these sounds in his bedroom though. Thanks to a fake ID Mills was able to join future DJs like Tony Foster and Delano Smith when they saw Ken Collier and other DJs at the Downstairs Pub in Detroit. This older generation of DJs, along with promoters like Zana Smith and Luomo—made Detroit’s post-disco party scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s possible. “They were from a different era of partying,” Mills says. “The things I used to hear about that era were really incredible.” Though Mills didn’t know it at the time, Detroit DJs like Ken Collier and his brother Greg had already established, as discussed in the previous

chapter, out-of-town connections, including New York City-via-Chicago DJ Frankie Knuckles, and New York's Larry Levan, two legends of disco and house music. The DJs in this predominantly gay social network made a conscious effort to share new skills and ideas that they were trying out across the nation. "They were doing the same things, trading information and doing it very purposefully," Mills says. Mills and his contemporaries could hear the results and they acted accordingly. "We were going anyplace to hear this new type of music in Detroit—gay clubs, straight clubs, really underground places—to hear this progressive sound," Mills continues. "We were hooked."

If these human interactions provided a model, the advent of the 12-inch dance singles in the 1970s, the availability of DJ mixers and direct-drive turntables starting in the late 1970s, and Japanese-made drum machines in the 1980s gave young artists like Mills the means to move audiences at high school dances, converted disco clubs and, eventually, radio. Buy-Rite Records on Seven Mile Road provided Collier with records by such disco acts as First Choice and Mills with West Coast drum machine sounds from Egyptian Lover. Artists such as Afrika Bambaataa, Alexander Robotnik, and Kano were making records that already sounded great. But using multiple turntables, mixing on the fly and overlaying the pounding of drum machines, the DJs created altogether new performances that transcended any single recording. Mills made his entrance at exactly the right moment. Mills took these sounds into his parents' garage, perfecting his skills while emulating his heroes. He mixed it out against other mobile DJs at local parties and then he took his growing rep to clubs like Cheeks, UBQ, and the Warehouse in Detroit and the Nectarine Ballroom in Ann Arbor.

Soon his numerous residencies and one-night stands put him at the right place at the right time, as the execs of a struggling WDRQ—then a Top-40/urban station—heard salvation in

Mills' live mixes. Immediately, Mills was thrown on the air to compete with the popular Electrifying Mojo on WDRQ's urban opponent, WJLB. Though the two DJs respected one another and were on a first-name basis, their competitive spirit created a sonic backdrop for 1980s Detroit. At that time Mojo owned Detroit's airwaves, commanding an immense fan base as well as the keys to the new electronic music, from Kraftwerk and Zapp to such artists as Prince, who sought Mojo's advice on new tracks and called in for on-air interviews. Starting at 10 p.m. every night, Mills went in to the "battle with the opposite station. My job was to play anything and everything that was happening in order to take away from Charles [Mojo]." For the young Mills, that meant everything that he'd absorbed to that point—disco, house, techno, electro, Miami bass, R&B, rap and, in the later 1980s, industrial. Basically anything that would tweak the ears of the kids. In this pre-Clear Channel era, corporate radio was still tied into the local community. The new music—so popular in Detroit's neighborhoods—had forced radio stations to, at least initially, react to imported releases and street sounds, whether program directors understood them or not. MTV wasn't yet in every home; computers for downloading and iPods were 20 years away; and CD versions of the vinyl-only DJ releases that Mills and others were playing weren't available. Radio was king. "Back then, you had a city that was listening and, on the radio, you had a short time frame to have a big impact," Mills says. "You had to keep them listening and you had to keep it fresh. If I bought it that morning, I had to play it that night." Mills adds that he was constantly honing his DJ skills, learning to mix and scratch, not as a tool for showing off, he says, but as a tool to reach into people's heads, to get them to stop and actually listen. "That's really where I learned to use texture to keep things interesting, how to set them up, you know, the one-two punch."

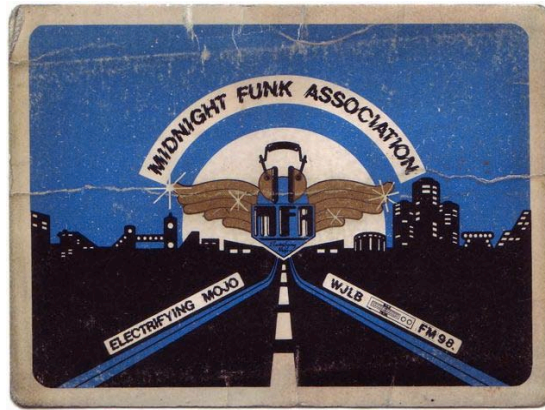


Figure 4-3. “Midnight Funk Association” I.D. Card.

Mills followed the radio ratings and says his show had, by the mid-1980s, begun to gain on Mojo. But WDRQ decided that they were not securing “the right demographic” by creating a sonic-paradise for Detroit’s predominantly black audience. Instead, they switched formats, attempting to break into a more suburban crowd and dumped everyone, including the Wizard, in 1985. But Mills was not unemployed for long. In 1986, James Alexander, then programming director for WJLB, brought Mills on board to join the late Duane “In the Mix” Bradley. The idea was to replace Mojo, who had not renewed his contract. Mojo subsequently left for WHYT. The competition continued. At WJLB, Mills had access to the station’s recording studios, its library of music and sound effects. The station built a special booth for Mills to include his mixer, up to three turntables and an assortment of drum machines, so that he could program music before the show and then mix it into the set live. Mills estimates that more than 85 percent of the shows were still done live. “Most of the time it was just easier to just come in and play, because to make one 30-minute show required eight to 10 hours of recording time.” What is funny is the Wizard never spoke on radio. He never had to. In the WDRQ-era, Mills’ show was syndicated to sister stations in Houston and St. Louis; at WJLB it was syndicated to Stevie Wonder’s station,

KJLH, in Los Angeles. The Wizard, though still a mortal to Mojo's godlike status, had made a name.

4.2 THE SCENE

Yeah of course [I watched "The Scene"]. Yeah who didn't? I think everyone did, looking to see what the people were listening to how they were getting on. I mean it was all connected, I mean we all knew each other. We were pushing music back and forth. They were listening to what I was doing [and] I was certainly watching what Nat [Morris, the host of "The Scene"] and all those guys were doing and we were pushing information back, back and forth, between them [the Electrifying] Mojo myself in certain clubs and record stores we were all very much communicating because we [. . .] I guess we sensed – we knew it was a very special time and we were all maybe a little bit... I think most of the guys were a little bit older so they knew the difference between what it was and what had happened when Mojo and I began to really get aggressive with the music. Everybody was connected and everybody made money, everything progressed, all the clubs were packed, DJs were working, people were drinking [laughs]. It was a very interesting time and you know record sales, record stores were selling records, a lot of records at that time and people were listening to the radio and just on and on and on... .

— Jeff Mills

The influence of young DJs like The Wizard especially for the future of hip hop in Detroit. For one, music at local parties and cabarets heavily favored electro artists and break-neck DJing. There were few would-be rappers and those that existed would have to appeal to local tastes in a place where the DJ was king. Early MCs, like Prince Vince and Merciless Amir, therefore, had to find their audience not in the party scene but on different media outlets and on the streets, neighborhoods, and basements of Detroit. However, as MC, poet, journalist, and teacher Khary Turner explains, there were opportunities. "Because Detroit does not represent the roots of hip hop culture, we did have our own culture and our own personality. We didn't deal with the same issues that New York dealt with so when hip hop began to take off in Detroit we had some

venues.”¹⁸⁷ One such place where rap music would be featured was on WGPR radio’s TV affiliate, one of the oldest black-owned TV stations in the country. “The Scene,” one of WGPR’s most popular shows from 1975-1987, was Detroit’s version of the nationally popular dance music show “Soul Train.” “The Scene” with its host Nat Morris, later to be re-christened as “The New Dance Show” in 1988 and hosted by R. J. Watkins, became a Detroit institution. Starting in the early 1980s, its theme song, “Flamethrower Rap,” written by Felix & Jarvis and produced by now famous rock producer and former Detroiter Don Was, highlighted the show’s openness to new music. In the 1980s the show also gave young Detroit rappers like Mark “Gallo” Legree and Woody Easter cameos, eventually inspiring a segment called “Rap-A-Dance” in which local rappers would battle. Though national acts that came through town could also be seen on the show, these “Rap-A-Dance” segments were the first televised images of locally based rap talent, providing a major inspiration.¹⁸⁸ WGPR’s radio station was also important in supporting early rap efforts with DJ Billy T’s “The Rap Blast” and “Billy T’s Basement Tapes,” starting in the mid-1980s and extending into the early 1990s.

¹⁸⁷ Khary Turner, personal interview, 27 December 2007.

¹⁸⁸ A brief history of “The Scene” was reported on local Detroit TV station UPN50 in 2006. See “Detroit Jit (The Scene)” <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fdzDKp4EO4>> (accessed 6 October 2010).

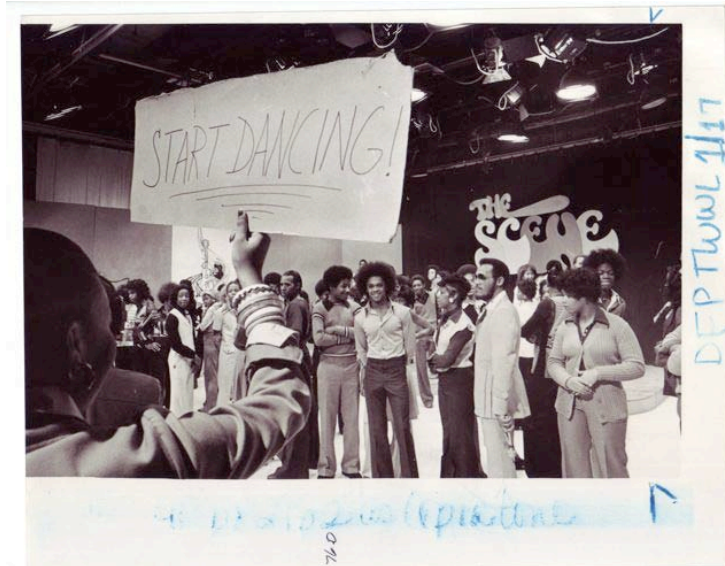


Figure 4-4. "The Scene" on WGPR.

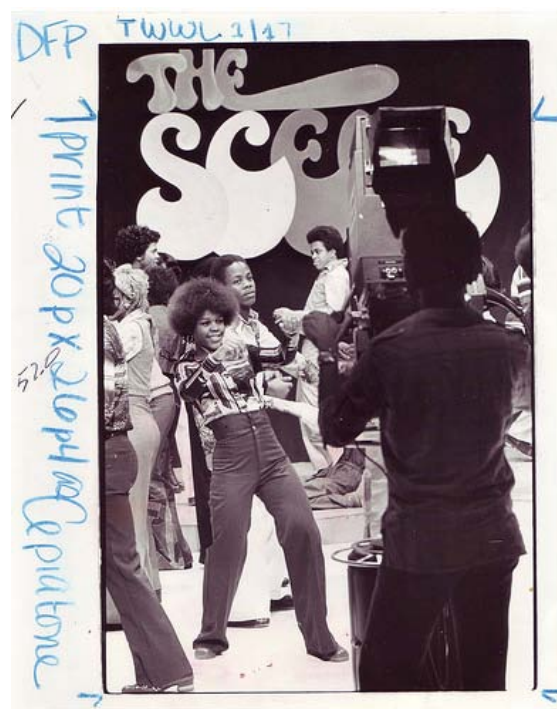


Figure 4-5. "The Scene" on WGPR.

However, New York rap did make it in Detroit as Turner's comments above testify to. He was not alone. James "The Blackman" Harris, who grew up middle-class on Detroit's east side, started to DJ as a young kid in the 1970s, utilizing reel-to-reel tape machines, eight-track players and belt-driven turntables.¹⁸⁹ Harris, a disco fan in the 1970s, remembers hearing rap for the first time on tracks like King Tim III's rapping over the Fatback Band on Spring Records in 1979 and "The Bumble Bee Rap" off of the disco label Salsoul Records in 1981. But, according to the Blackman, Detroit at that time was into the fast-paced, drum-machine driven electro sound from Los Angeles instead of the more disco-sounding early rap that he enjoyed from places like New York. However, that was about to change. The Blackman bounced around a couple of east side high schools before finishing at a vocational tech school in 1983 right around the time that New York rap act Run D.M.C. was about to break through Detroit's electro exterior partially with "Sucka MCs" and "It's like That." "Before that it [rap] was a novelty," Harris argues. "It was a big ass joke." Harris had learned how to DJ from disco where seamless mixing was the thing and had never been fascinated by The Wizard. "He went too fast—it really annoyed me." It was rap that gave Harris his break as a DJ for the Fresh 4 Crew, a young teen rap group made of twelve-year-old kids with connections to the promoter and a then-nineteen year old Harris. They played the Fresh Fest in 1984 at the Fox Theater. The Fresh Fest featured LL Cool J., Sparky D., Divine Sounds, Jeckyl and Hyde, Melle Mel, and MC Shan amongst others. The group got to tour the Midwest, playing major cities in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Ronald "Phat Kat / Ronnie Cash" Watts was in the crowd at Fresh Frest at a time when, according to Watts, gold chains in the crowd from the ascendant drug economy were bigger than

¹⁸⁹ Harris, James "The Blackman," personal interview, 27 Dec. 2008. Born in 1965, Harris resides in Donald Goines' and Henry Ford's Highland Park, owning with his wife, The Black Whole, an African culture shop on Woodward Avenue, where he is known to throw house parties in the basement.

the chains on the artists on stage.¹⁹⁰ Formerly an area of middle-class homes and neighborhoods, Watts grew up in the depleted era of Detroit's lower east side. Long abandoned by factories, the area became early territory for crack gangs like the Chambers Brothers in the mid-1980s when they would buy cheap houses and turn them into crack production facilities.¹⁹¹ Watts went to Southeastern High School in the late 1980s at a time when the line between street economics fueled by the drug trade and trying to build a creative life as a DJ or MC was a difficult to walk. It wasn't until he moved to the calmer near west side in 1991 that he was able to focus on a career in hip hop. At the time, rap "was just something you did." Only later did hip hop become embraced as larger way of life. For Phat Kat, the turning point was the Rhythm Kitchen at Stanley's with Maurice Malone selling jeans at a table while an open mic session developed. However, there were pre-Rhythm Kitchen hints that Detroit's rap culture was evolving into something else with groups like AWOL and Detroit's Most Wanted cultivating a street-educated panache and braggadocio. For Watts, these local inspirations interacted with national ones—rappers like Kurtis Blow, Big Daddy Kane, and Ice Cube—to inspire his lyrics. Sonically, for Watts and his early beat-maker, James "Jay Dee" Yancey, who he met at Stanley's in 1992, the main influence was from Detroit's 1980s radio mix, from Mojo's playing Kraftwerk alongside Michael Jackson and Prince to the bass-heavy music of Miami's 2 Live Crew and MC Shy D played by The Wizard. Techno, too, was a major influence in his music. "I grew up on techno. My music is bass heavy and hard driven. There are a few songs on my new album that you can dance to."

As Watts' story confirms, in this era, trusted local media was required. Turner agrees.

¹⁹⁰ Ronald Watts, interview by author, 1 November 2007.

¹⁹¹ For a history of the Chambers Brothers, see William M. Adler, *Land of Opportunity* (New York: Plume, 1996).

We had radio DJs who embraced hip hop and saw it as opportunities to break ground. Mojo embraced it. Marvelous Marv embraced it. Later on, Billy T. would embrace it. The Wizard embraced it, Jeff Mills. All on the radio. So we had little pockets where we could get exposed to the culture through legitimate media. So there was an automatic buy-in because it was being presented to us through media that we already believed in. We always watched “The Scene.” We copied the dances. We knew the dancers by name. “Miss Energy,” Lawanda [Grey]—we knew those people by name. They were hood celebrities. Marvelous Marv, what he said, for a long time in Detroit, what he said went. Mojo—Mojo broke Prince in the city. We weren’t listening to Prince until he started playing “Dirty Mind” and all that stuff. And then the Wizard popularized house and techno on the radio. He made the jits get into it as opposed to just the people you might catch at the local rave [sic]. And it caught on from there

A generation of rappers, raised as “The Scene” spectators and Billy T. listeners but conscious of Detroit’s fast-paced, bass-heavy tastes, finally began to materialize in the late 1980s. For example, Papa J. Smoove, who shared a record label with another local rap group, Rap Mafia, on Hittin’ Home Records, peppered his rhymes about lyrically battling with the devil in the midst of an electro beat on “Keep Dancin” (1990). Rapper J. to the D.’s “Sack Chaser” (1990) included a slow version and fast mix from his album *Living on the Edge* that was distributed by Atlanta’s independent Ichiban Records. The fast version barely allows enough time for the artist to level his disses against the “skeeze” who pursues him. These early rap artists came dance-ready with their hits and New York-styled deliveries.

Though the names that regularly surface in discussions of Detroit hip hop, from Awesome Dre to Eminem, are male, the scene has a noteworthy history of hip hop women. Local radio host Ms. Smiley’s rap career only amounted to a smattering of locally-produced releases but what a career it was. Lynette “Smiley” Michaels’s *The Smile Gets Wild* (Bryant Records 1989), which featured the local hit, “Smiley But Not Friendly,” was produced by label-mate Duncan Hines of the group Detroit’s Most Wanted at a time when that seminal group had only one single. The track was recorded for the Detroit-based label Bryant Records, headed by former studio musician Joel H. Bryant. With a co-production credit, remixes and radio play by The

Wizard, the song, a response to 2 Live Crew's "Get It Girl," with its staccato-delivery from Smiley ("I got a friendly face with an out-cold attitude.") over electronic drum rolls, is remembered as one of the first local rap singles to have gotten any notice. An earlier single had been even more explicit in its proto-rap-feminist take: "I Don't Have 2 Sack 2 Collect." Another female MC from that time, Kalimah "Nikki D./ Eboni and Her Business" Johnson, is still in the scene, as well. She put out an early single as Nikki D. for Urban Suburban called "Work that Sucka" that got enough buzz for Johnson to be the opening act for artists like Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions when they played in Detroit. But her career went south when a name dispute with another Nikki D. forced her to change her name. Then her album for World One Records, the same label that put out Kaos & Mystro's full-length album garnered little attention. She rejoined the scene in the late 1990s when poetry was bubbling up in Detroit coffee houses and has recently hosted an open mic night in downtown Detroit.¹⁹²

Just a few years later Smiley's sassiness would look like child's play. Lichelle "Boss" Laws is the only Detroit artist featured in Tricia Rose's seminal hip hop book, *Black Noise*. It was Boss's song "Recipe for a Hoe," which sampled and teased the Geto Boys' "You Gotta Let a Ho Be a Ho," that gave Rose pause because of the tune's lyrical "revenge fantasies" against misogynistic men.¹⁹³ The album, in a similar vein, sported images of women with shotguns on the cover; perhaps this was not Rose's idea of positive feminist rap. But for Detroiters there was more than just feminist politics at stake. Boss, along with her DJ, Irene "Dee" Moore, struggled but eventually signed with a major label, got three videos produced for their album, and worked with major artists, like Erick Sermon and MC Serch. She showed that someone from Detroit

¹⁹² Davison, Kahn. "New days bang: Onetime Detroit hip-hop star Nikki D is now an established poet and a sexual therapist. Who would've thought?" *Metro Times*, March 9, 2005.

¹⁹³ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, 174.

could make it—that Detroit had a hip hop community worth paying attention to. A product of Detroit Catholic Schools and community rap youth programs, Boss made her debut as “Lady the Boss” on the *Knowledge is Power* (1990) local rap compilation put out by Ton Def, a label run by R.J. Rice (former manager of Slum Village and now head of Barak Records) and Jewel Silas. But it was Boss’s move to New York and years in L.A. that precipitated being signed by Def Jam, a deal that brought Boss a number one rap single with “Deeper” (1993). Boss eventually asked to be dropped from Def Jam and moved to Texas where she was radio host in the late 1990s. Further professional and medical problems—she had to have a kidney transplant—stalled Boss’s career.¹⁹⁴ Laws resurfaced in 2007 as a rapper on a verse for “Detroit Stand Up,” a track and video set up by Esham to unite West Side and East Side rappers with artists like Big Herk, Al Nuke, and Proof, amongst others. Her flow, as well as her dark sunglasses in the video, was still intact.¹⁹⁵

4.3 THE JUMP OFF

When James Alexander left WJLB in 1990, the station’s new director changed the station’s format. Mills could either compromise or he could quit. He played his last night at WJLB on New Year’s Eve 1990. But internal radio struggles were not the only sign of change in those days. Near the end of Mills’ Wizard career, a number of crises began to roar in Detroit’s nightlife. Mills remembers the possibility of fights and shootings at Detroit hip-hop events as a

¹⁹⁴ Brian Smith, “Same as the old Boss,” *Metro Times*, June 16, 2004.

¹⁹⁵ The video is no longer available online.

fairly constant hazard of the gig. “Generally, things did ‘jump off’—you just hoped you weren’t in the path of the bullet or in the middle of the fight,” he says. By the late 1980s an uptick in Detroit violence spilled even more intensely onto the dance floor. A gang fight at Climax 2, a club on Chene near Jefferson, was enough for Mills to stop performing as the Wizard in Detroit. Concurrently, his successful three-night-a-week stand at the Nectarine Ballroom in Ann Arbor—where he’d been living—came to an end. The Sunday nights had become a problem for the local cops. “Wednesday nights was a fraternity night where I played everything from Bruce Springsteen to the Smiths. Friday nights it was house, techno and Top 40. Sunday night was the black night. Kids came in from all around including Ypsilanti. That was the night we got down.” It was also the night fans wouldn’t go home after the club closed, and large crowds would congregate on Liberty. The club was making lots of money, but city officials, Mills says, pressured the club to shut the night down.

Similarly, class politics was nothing new in the scene, beginning with notices on techno-party fliers in the early 1980s explicitly banning “jits”—the derogatory term given young working-class audiences who enjoyed the high-energy smashups that DJs like Mills unleashed. And that attitude didn’t die. As the ’80s came to a close, even the experimental dance nights at the hallowed Music Institute banned rap. MTV didn’t help things either. It split formats further, now with visual accompaniment, encouraging audiences to define themselves as consumers along racial, sexual, cultural and geographical lines. Local music historian Dan Sicko, after discussing the impact of DJs like Mills and Mojo at “inspiring, developing, and in many cases, breaking talent on the air,” tells of Detroit’s free-form coming to an end.

Shaking up radio programming on a local level sounds like an easy task, and it was relatively so in the days before *MTV*. Not only did *MTV* siphon off radio listeners, but

over time it helped reinforce the increasing segmentation and consolidation within the music industry.¹⁹⁶

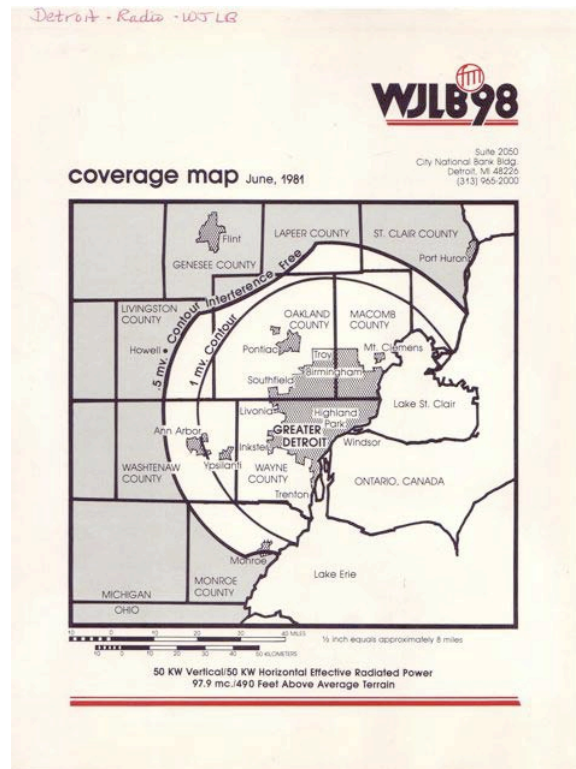


Figure 4-6. “WJLB 98: Coverage Map.”

Mills argues that when WDRQ went off the air the original competition for the youth audience began to die. WJLB became the king of the urban radio dial and eventually courted an older audience who had stopped buying 12” vinyl singles and began the move to album-oriented artists with whom they could identify. But this segmentation was not isolated to corporate ventures. Even the famed Music Institute on Broadway, an after-hours club that featured DJs and

¹⁹⁶ For a discussion of radio and Detroit identity, see Dan Sicko, “Bubble Metropolis: Expanding Detroit’s Identity Through Music,” *Shrinking Cities: Working Papers: Detroit* (Berlin 2003), 109.

producers like Derrick May, according to Mills, was part of the redefining and policing of the new boundaries, being known as a place where you only heard one type of music: techno.

The implications for DJs like Mills and Mojo, who had ignored those lines when building their sonic followings, were significant. After leaving WJLB, and a short stint at WHYT, Mojo would end up bouncing from station to station throughout the 1990s, never re-establishing the breadth of audience he once had. For Mills, the years of Front 242-meets-Rakim — the Wizard years — vanished as quickly as they had come. The stage was set for Jeff Mills' exit.

4.4 SPREADING THE NEWS

Richard Hawtin—jet-setting DJ, record label owner, producer of electronic dance music, composer of music for the opening ceremonies of 2006 Winter Olympic Games in Torino, Italy, utilizer of cutting-edge DJing technology, poster-child for online electronic music stores like Beatport, and an ambassador for the “Detroit techno” sound—is telling an origin story. In the interview, he explains his indoctrination into Detroit electronic music as a teenager from listening to mixes provided by his brother of DJs like Jeff Mills:

Jeff and those guys were playing a real mix. It was a perfect way for someone like me to get deeper into techno and house music because they played a mix of early hip-hop, and alternative, industrial... they were playing Yellow, they were playing Front 242, and Nitzer Ebb. All this stuff mixed together with Chicago acid house and Detroit techno. And maybe without that connection to industrial maybe I wouldn't have been brought in. That's what sucked me in first.¹⁹⁷

The mixes inspired him to be a DJ. He asked an owner of a small bar named Hoppers in

¹⁹⁷ *Richie Hawtin: Slices, The Electronic Music Magazine, Pioneers of Electronic Music, Vol. 1*, dir. Maren Sextro and Holger Wick. (2006).

Windsor, Canada, just north of his home town, and just across the Detroit River from Detroit itself, to allow him to DJ and, shortly after, to book his new-found hero.

The best thing about the Hoppers was I talked the management into giving me enough money to book Jeff Mills, so I became the promoter. We talked to Jeff and we talked to his manager and we actually brought him over to Hoppers to play, maybe to like one hundred or two hundred people. This was for me an amazing moment. I had never met Jeff—I had only heard these mixes for a year or something. And to see him playing in front of us, you know we were all in the booth just watching him and I don't know if he had any fun, I don't know if anyone was dancing but we were just watching and watching and he was playing so fast and throwing his records everywhere and he was playing all the records that I had listened to for the last year and he was like, [motioning like he is throwing records over his shoulders] “shoo, shoo, shoo.” And we were sitting in the back helping him sort his records and just copying all the records' names down and finally I was like, “Wow, that's what that is, that's what that is,” and then went to the record store the next day: “I need to buy these records.” It was unbelievable.

DJ Scott “Go Go” Gordon, the man who gave Hawtin his break at the Shelter in the late 1980s told a similar story. The young Gordon already a 16-year-old DJ at Spankys, a teen club in Waterford Township in the northwestern suburbs of Detroit, remembers booking Mills in 1981 long before the label “techno” even existed and paying him more money than he had ever heard a DJ make.

His brother was managing him at the time and they came in and looked around at the place. Later they came back with a blue print drawing of what they needed as far as layout of the DJ booth, the necessary height of the table for the record players – it needed to be taller so he would have better access to the records – and other requirements as far as sound.... His contract said that we could not record the performance in any way and we paid him \$100 an hour for four hours of work. He absolutely brought the house down.

For Gordon, seeing Mills spin was a career-inspiring event. He remembers clandestinely recording Mills' performance on two-track tape hidden underneath the turntables, which Gordon later studied intensely. “I learned one of my favorite scratches of my career listening to that tape, using a track by [early '80s Californian music producer] Egyptian Lover. Jeff Mills inspired me

to become the DJ I became. He was the single biggest influence on my career.”¹⁹⁸

Later in his career as a DJ, about the time Hawtin was booking Mills into a small bar in Ontario, Gordon would become a Billboard Reporter relaying the names of artists and the titles of records that were hot for him with his crowds in the Detroit area to the national industry magazine, sometimes traveling to New York City for music industry functions and conventions. He clearly remembers playing radio mixes from The Wizard to his New York peers. “They didn’t get it. They told me, ‘Why do you listen to this stuff? What is this?’” Neither simply West Coast nor East Coast inspired, Mills’ lightning-fast mixes of rap, industrial, bass, and electronic 12” and LP records, was largely inexplicable to Gordon’s east-coast peers. That initial resistance, however, didn’t stop Mills, a few years later in 1991, from conquering Manhattan’s Limelight club, or blowing minds in Germany, when he first performed on two turntables at the Tresor club in Berlin.

Mills was not alone. Detroit DJs Blake Baxter, Eddie Fowlkes, and others had played clubs like Tresor in those heady days as well. Brendan Gillen, member of the electro-techno outfit Ectomorph, puts Mills at the head of Detroit’s German invasion. A techno scholar and electronic music producer, Gillen attended Tresor that summer in 1991 to see the influence of Detroit techno in general, and Jeff Mills in particular. Over corn tortillas in southwest Detroit, Gillen shared his thoughts on Mills’ influence on global techno. “1990s techno music was Jeff Mills’ music. Everyone else was covering Jeff Mills. He is the theories and concepts of techno.”¹⁹⁹

Mills developed said theories and concepts during his Wizard era, competing with peers for gigs in Detroit clubs and jockeying with Mojo in the studios of WDRQ and WJLB.

¹⁹⁸ Scott Gordon, interview by author, 26 November 2006.

¹⁹⁹ Brendan Gillen, interview by author, 15 May 2007.

“Competition was really intense — playing normal records was not good enough,” Mills says. When he was competing with other young DJs early in his career—contemporaries that included Al Ester, Earl McKinney, Kevin Dysard, and Ray Berry—it meant trying to buy all the copies of a unique new record at Buy-Rite so no one else could play them. But on the radio the ante was raised. The high-profile radio gigs had afforded Mills opportunities to produce and guest-DJ on some hip-hop and R&B recordings. But it was Mills’ move toward industrial music while competing with Mojo in the late ’80s—encouraged as well by crowds at industrial nights at the Leidernacht (now known as the City Club)—that cemented Mills’ commitment to making music.

His first official releases were with the house-inspired industrial band Final Cut. Fortuitously, these early records were released overseas by the German Interfisch label, the same company that would eventually become Tresor and help Mills release music up to the present. But it was Mills’ co-founding and short (1989-1992) but influential tenure with Detroit’s Underground Resistance (UR)—a still-operating multilayered group of Detroit techno artists, including Mike Banks and Robert Hood—that set up the Millsian myth in Europe and beyond. Gillen traces the hardcore, chaotic, militant edge of the early Underground Resistance catalog directly to Detroit’s postindustrial condition at the end of the Cold War. “UR was the sound of the machine dying—the end of the assembly line,” he argues. In 1991, the Limelight in New York City made Mills an offer that was too good to refuse—three nights a week spinning at a club willing to do anything to crossover “European” techno in New York City. At that moment, Mills had no radio job and no Detroit residency — but he wouldn’t be forgotten in 1990s Detroit.

His turntables found their way into the hands of Brian Jeffries, now known as DJ Godfather, and cassette copies of the Wizard’s mixes became—as they had for Scott Gordon, Richie Hawtin and so many before—required educational tools. What had taken Mills hours to

create and, at times, speed-up, on four-track tape, funky and vulgar-minded DJs like DJ Assault (Craig Adams) and DJ Godfather, learned to do on two turntables in real-time performances, crossing-over “Ghetto-tech” or the “booty” sound in clubs, cabarets, and blistering DJ-mix CDs sold at area stores like Record Time in the 1990s. On the DVD “The Adventures of DJ Godfather,” Jeff Mills’ influence as “The Wizard” is acknowledged as helping to create “Ghetto-tech” or “booty” music. Dirty, funky, sexy and vulgar, ghetto electronic bass is now its own sound its own dance, jitting, an understudied cousin of contemporary urban dance, and its own origin story.²⁰⁰ In the DVD, DJ Nasty serves up Mills’ lesson as one of technique:

This music has been around before all of us even got into it. We were playing records on 45 [rotations per minute], people started this in the early 80s when Jeff Mills was mixing Prince with house stuff mixed with a whole bunch of stuff. So we came around in the early 1990s and said, “Wait a minute. Instead of playing these records on 45 we should make these records at 150 beats per minute where we don’t have to play them on 45.”²⁰¹

During the late 1990s it was the Detroit mass’s commitment to DJs and dance music exemplified in the ghettotech genre that made for true crossover musical excitement in the mid-1990s. A resurgence in the electro dance sound manipulated by a generation of DJs and producers raised on The Wizard but no longer forced to compete with him, ghettotech or booty music integrated cutting-edge electronic music—from drum and bass to local Detroit techno—with dirty, bass-heavy homemade 12” records. According to ghetto-tech scholar Gavin Mueller, producers like Craig “DJ Assault” Adams and Ade “Mr. De” Mainor created tracks like “Ass ‘n’ Titties” to be played and manipulated by a series of local new Wizards in local clubs and various radio stations across the FM dial. The only authenticity these booty-mixing soldiers—Wax-Tax-N-Dre, Don Q,

²⁰⁰ For an essay that comes within a hair of renaming “jitterbuggers” “jits” but then does not, see Katrina Hazzard-Donald, “Dancing in Hip Hop Culture,” *Droppin’ Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, ed. William Eric Perkins (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 230. See also Deanna Dunham, “Jit’ On... Detroit’s Legacy Dance Represents!” *Hardcore Detroit*, 2005. <<http://www.hardcoredetroit.biz/jit/jit.html>> (accessed 11 April 2011).

²⁰¹ *The Godfather Chronicles: The Ghetto Tech Sound of Detroit*, DVD, Dir. Amil Khan, 2004.

Fingers, Zap, and Gary Chandler just to name a few—were interested in was outdoing each other and propelling crowds to dance. The result was that weekend nights in the mid-1990s on Detroit radio—and at radio-sponsored club nights—were venues for a tongue-in-cheek, sex-crazed musical genre that spoke across 8 Mile. Local record labels sprouted up to provide product, with Adams’ and Mainor’s Assault Rifle/ Electrofunk label setting a high standard for low-down dirtiness. Two suburban labels also broke through with the sound. Brian Gillespie, Brian “DJ Godfather” Jeffries, and DJ Dick’s Twilight 76 took off by remixing Miami Bass records before producing their own, Detroit-style versions. Twilight 76 sold records like hot-cakes at local record stores. The short-lived, suburban Intuit-Solar also brought forth a DJ Assault LP, *Jefferson Ave.*, in 2001.

Few artists from this intensely Detroit-styled scene were able to crossover their local prowess into national success. There have been a few exceptions. “Ass ‘n’ Titties” for one has become such a global hit that it was mentioned by the lead character in Gary Shentgart’s best-selling novel *Absurdistan* (2006). Another sign is that a Japanese company produced one of the few documentaries about the scene, *The Godfather Chronicles*. There was also the momentary success of the Detroit Grand Pubah’s “Sandwiches,” an underground electro-booty pop hit (“You can be the bun I can be the burger girl we can make sandwiches”) that eventually garnered the quondam two-man group—Andy Toth and Paris the Black Fu—a date on England’s “Top of the Pops.” The record was locally produced by Brian Gillespie’s Throw label and distributed by Twilight 76 before being picked up by the New York based Jive Electro. Another ghettotech artist, area native David “Disco D.” Shayman, produced the song “Ski Mask Way” off of 50 Cent’s *The Massacre* (2005). Ann Arbor-raised Shayman, who died suddenly in 2007, coined the

term ghettotech, and was one of the few artists in the scene to crossover his rep as a booty DJ and producer into rap music production.²⁰²

In 2007, the same year Mills headlined the Movement Festival, Mills' own MacKenzie High School on Wyoming began its final year as a Detroit public school, at the time one of thirty-four schools to be closed as enrollment citywide continued to slide. It was here that Mills took drums; he was a sophomore playing in the senior-led jazz quartet ("stage band") that featured future jazz star Kenny Garrett on saxophone. The instructor was saxophonist Bill Wiggins who, like many instructors in Detroit's public schools, had professional playing experience. Wiggins had played with Marcus Belgrave and Aretha Franklin. Mills and his fellow students were well aware of their antecedents—it wasn't so long ago that students such as themselves had landed chart hits for Motown. "We knew there was a legacy to be in the stage band and in marching band or in the vocal group," Mills remembers. "All the Detroit school music departments were strong. We knew that in those days we were just a few steps away from people who were active in the Motown era or were studio musicians or active in the jazz scene." Though Mills would later take classes at Oakland University and eventually apply to Lawrence Tech in architecture, music clearly took over his career path. And if it had not been for MacKenzie High and its community, would The Wizard have ever gotten an education? I return to this question in my final chapter.

²⁰² Adam Matthews, "Death of Disco," *Village Voice*, August 1, 2007.

4.5 WHERE THE MIX IS PERFECT

Unlike his brother, Greg Collier did not like visitors in his booth. Where Ken was happy to have the booth open to visitors and more than happy to take a break while a younger DJ came up to spin, Greg was enjoyed being on his side of the glass booth, separated from the dancefloor, even from friends and well-wishers. However Derrick May was an exception. May would come to Todd's with his drum machine. They would play together. And the club where Derrick May brought his 808 drum machine to practice, Todd's, included an audience far more diverse than underground house heads.

Derrick May used to bring his drum machine down with him to Todd's. Derrick was the only DJ that I opened up the doors to—Derrick May and D. Wynn. Derrick May probably more than anyone else because Derrick used to bring his drum machine down and we used to hook his machine up to the system and Derrick and I would be—I would be mixing and then Derrick would come in and mix out, he would create stuff live during the set and then I would go right back into what he was doing and then go back into playing and he would never lose a beat and people would be like, “What was that?! What was that?!” [laughs]

In the 1980s, Detroit's underground had reached a fever pitch, peaking on the former bowling alley floors of the former Todd's Sway Lounge which opened in 1970. Early flyers advertised the club as a “Sway Lounge” but by the 1980s flyers claimed here that “the mix was perfect.” Greg Collier was considered an amazing blender of records—however, the description pertained as much to the clientele as to the music.

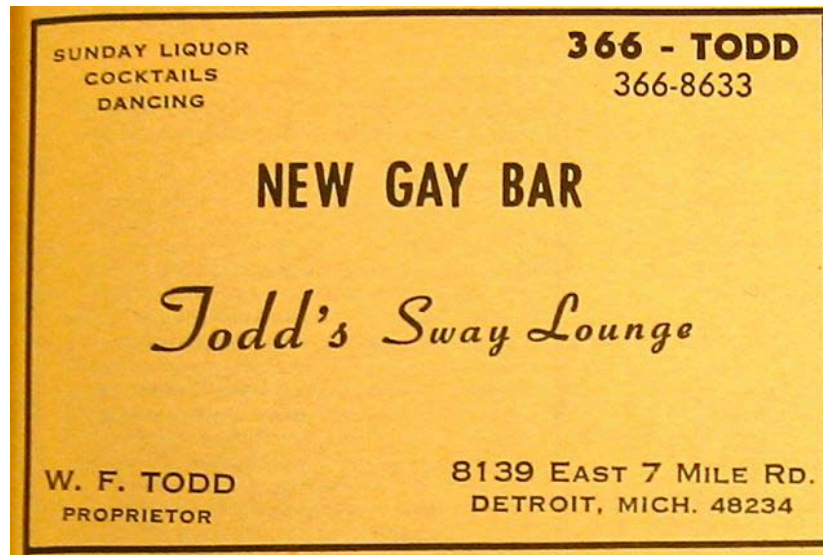


Figure 4-7. Advertisement for Todd's Sway Lounge, or simply Todd's.

Todd's is now a grocery store with a security guard on watch. But a little over twenty years ago Todd's was a place where an assortment of “new music” deviants frequented—hundreds per night during peak years—before “alternative” was a Madison Avenue word. The music that was being played was really a mixture of genres—retroactively called industrial, new wave, gothic, disco, and/or house. However, at the time it was simply “new music.” On alternative nights dancers could hear Charles English play everything from new wave to hardcore and everything in-between. On house nights, Duane Bradley and later Greg Collier would present a large-scale version of the developing after-hours dance-mix sound on the converted bowling-alley dancefloor. Though there were distinct differences between the two crowds—many surely never crossed over into each other's scenes—there were also boundary-crossers who understood the affective connection between the groups, one young, suburban and freakish and the other black, gay, and soulful. Whether it was “Every Day is Halloween” by Ministry on an alt-night or “Let No Man Put Asunder” by First Choice on a house night, Ken Collier dropping in to play a set or future techno star Derrick May bringing his Roland 808 drum

machine to play there in the late 1980s, Todd's was a heady mix of underground style and culture.

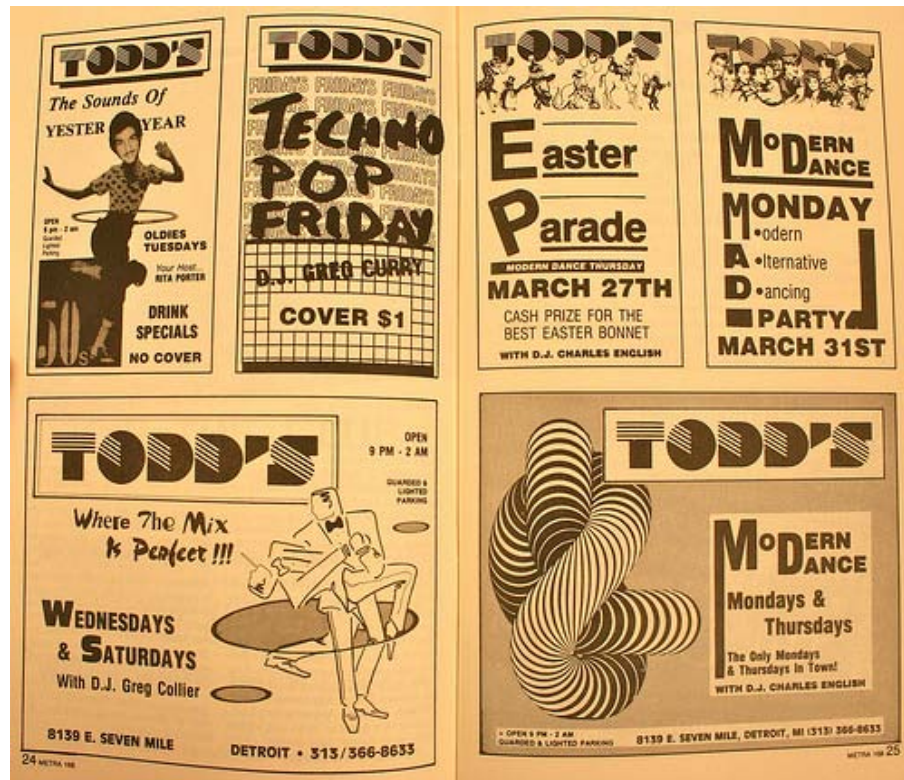


Figure 4-8. Two page advertisement for Todd's in Metra.

According to Benson Todd's pulled from every social class and every ethnicity. "All we required was to be into the music and to leave your attitude at the door."²⁰³ Benson grew up in Dearborn in the 1970s and graduated in the early 1980s, just in time to join Todd's as it emerged as a place for "New Wave" kids to enjoy themselves. Benson was sixteen when he showed up. At the time Sterling was booking the alternative nights. Benson would eventually run a clothing store inside of Todd's in the hallway near the DJ booth which featured, according to Benson,

²⁰³ Benson, personal interview, 23 June 2004.

“wacked out clothing and accessories.” At the club’s peak in the mid-1980s, according to Benson, 2000 people were packed into the club. “Quite a few who came were straight edge—most of the alternative scene were straight edge. We sold just as much soda as alcohol in the juice bar downstairs.” Tom Zito, who became a DJ at the club Industry in the 1990s, did lights. Of course, Todd’s was not the only bar at the time. DJ Chris Ewan, who later moved to Boston, spun records at Rich and Famous, and Asylum. The Shelter in the basement of Saint Andrews Hall was already an important site for DJing, especially during its teen night. The City Club, formerly named the Leidernacht, had featured DJs for years. Backstreet, which opened in 1979 at the height of disco, continued through this period, as well, while Menjo’s was a great place to dance on Thursdays and Sundays. Bookie’s had a club in the basement called the Alcove.

During the 1980s, the club was owned by Alfonzo La Rosa and his partner. They would both die in the early 1990s from AIDs. The list of those from that era who are gone is staggering. Benson remembers Alvin St. Jacques, a female impersonator, who frequented the club. The crowd began to thin out. Nobody could pull a crowd. Workers in the club attempted to buy the club but lost to a new owner who had owned rock bars in Detroit. According to Benson, “He did not like gay or alternative people.” Bob and Kenny ended up opening up Zippers on Davison near Van Dyke. For a time, Collier followed them there. The 1980s—its diversity and beauty—would lead to a scene in the 1990s that seemed to care little about sexuality, race, or gender. As we shall see in the next chapter, for a short-lived moment in the 1990s everyone, almost, hung out with everyone else. However, those utopian moments began in the 1980s at clubs like Todd’s. Despite the moment’s short-lived existence, its importance cannot be overstated. In a city divided in dire ways by race and class, Detroit’s handful of integrated moments—at Todd’s, Heaven, the Music Institute, Underground Nation, Three Floors of Fun at Saint Andrews, and

finally, during, the early years of the electronic music festival—are arguably the most important cultural moments in Detroit since the Motown era.

4.6 MIX: KAOS

Black folks have never been taught the value of our culture in any meaningful way. We have to be able to utilize the best aspects of our culture. Will it persist? Yes! Why? Because youth is being infused with remnants of it. This is most evident in rap music. If you look at progressive music, it went from jazz, with people like Coltrane, to Jamaica, with Bob Marley and reggae, to rap music. Rap is the most current progressive thing. The Present generation gap in the Black community is *really* manifest in the music. The nationalist sentiment is expressed in rap music. Young people said to hell with what the civil rights leaders say, we're going to follow and support Jesse Jackson. That's the nationalism in the youth. Here you have the nationalist culture, Afrocentrism, and a major aspect of the popular culture, the music, coming together. That was absent in the '60s.²⁰⁴

— Errol Henderson

Tiger Stadium was packed. Crowds gathered from all across the city. Historically, the Tiger franchise and the stadium it played out of had not been known as a park that specifically catered to black audiences even as the city became predominantly black. This is the Tigers of Ty Cobb, the “Georgia Peach,” one of the greatest players in the game but also a very public racist. However, black baseball teams had played there when the Tigers were out of town—teams like the Stars which featured Turkey Stearns. And since the 1960s, with the acquisition of Willie Horton, the Tigers had featured premier black players. If this had been a game day for instance, “Sweet” Lou Whitaker would have been fielding second base. However June 28, 1990 was not a

²⁰⁴ Robert H. Mast, ed., *Detroit Lives*, 97-98.

game day. Instead, Nelson Mandela, South African freedom fighter was making a Detroit appearance. Recently freed from jail, Mandela was on a world tour. The ceremony and speech lasted hours. The United Auto Workers made him a member of the union. Many spoke. But it was Mandela's speech which electrified the crowd as he described the importance of Motown artists like Marvin Gaye. Quoting Gaye's "What's Going On?," Mandela told the crowd, "Brother, brother, there are far too many of you dying."

One of the acts that opened up for Mandela that day was the local rap group Kaos and Mystro. Formed by two teenagers and mentored by an older generation of activists, school teachers, and studio musicians, Kaos and Mystro released one of the first full-length rap LPs to be produced in Detroit. By 1990, hip hop was beginning to emerge as a truly global cultural power. However, Detroit unlike its experience with many other musical genres, was behind the curve. Detroit rappers had, till then, been unable to break out of Detroit or make much headway with local audiences. Detroit artists had preferred to dance. However, Detroit's rap "Golden Age" was about to begin. Kaos & Mystro were central for other rappers to see and hear that it was possible to succeed. Jason "Mystro" (now "Maji") Wilson and Teferi (DonRico) "Kaos" Brent performed on one of the most sonically complex and politically daring albums in Detroit's early hip hop history, *Outcast Vol. 1* (World One Records 1989), channeling black nationalist politics through fast-paced beats as Kaos & Mystro.²⁰⁵ Their short career reveals a complicated relationship between the ascending hip hop culture and Detroit's pre-existing sonic and political mix.

²⁰⁵ Teferi (DonRico) "Kaos" Brent, interview, 14 February 2008.

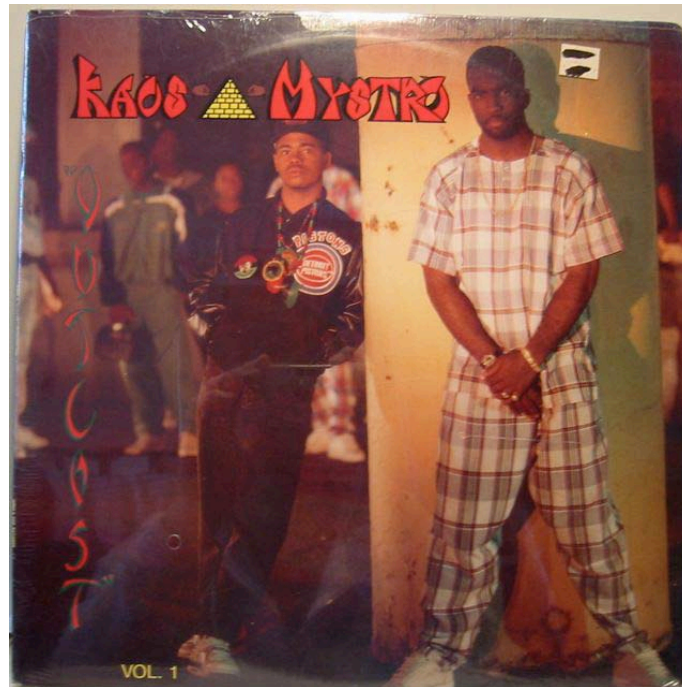


Figure 4-9. Cover of Kaos and Mystro's first album.

In an interview, Brent described his and the group's musical history. Brent moved around the city a lot as a kid, spending time on the West Side before finding his way to Highland Park, a city surrounded by Detroit, where he met up with Wilson. Despite having parents with solid blue-collar jobs behind him, Brent was not immune from hanging in Detroit's neighborhood gangs, both on Detroit's West Side and Highland Park. Fighting and getting in trouble were his modus operandi and it was enough of a problem that Brent was kicked out of a private school and forced to attend Highland Park High. It was not just gangs that were grabbing his interest. Brent was the of the generation that bought Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" when it first came out and attended the "Fresh Fest" with their early Def Jam lineups in the early 1980s. He rapped all night in his complex, the Gabrielle Houses, with local groups like the Food Stamp Boys and with people like Amery "Big Herk" Dennard in Wilson's basement.

Rap was not a career idea for Brent until some older Motown-era supporters stepped in. Here the influence of P-Funk and Motown on Detroit hip hop is critical to understanding Kaos and Mystro's early successes as well as the context of many early rap recordings in the city. According to Brent, the group was discovered by John Maxey, a relative of "Ivory" Joe Hunter (a pianist for the Motown house band in the 1960s called the Funk Brothers), and a band manager for R&B groups in the 1960s and '70s in his own right. Maxey was a special education teacher at the time at Brent's high school. Maxey's partners included Carl "Butch" Small. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Small had been a percussionist for the P-Funk affiliated Sweat Band and Parlet, as well as Robert Troutman's Zapp. According to Brent, Small could hear that ghetto-funk, an updated version of the P-Funk sound sampled for the rap generation, was becoming popular in the late 1980s and saw an opportunity to capitalize. "They were opportunists," Brent said. "They had the skills and the resources." Though Small would later work for Death Row Records, his rap production career began with the West side-based World One Records, a studio that came out of Proving Ground Records, a project he had set up with other P-Funksters but had only released one single in 1987. For World One, Small, along with his other partner Gene David, had already put out *Untouchable* (1988) by E. Z. B. and DJ Los (Small's son) when Maxey hooked Brent and Wilson up with the fledgling label.

Production and label management from an older generation was not the only influence in Kaos & Mystro's career. Another was Ms. Clamentine Barfield who at the time worked with SOSAD (Save Our Sons and Daughters) to help mothers in their grieving process when they had lost their children to violence in the city. Brent met Barfield when Brent's mother took him to one of SOSAD's meetings and Brent rapped a song about black history. Still another was Dr. Errol Henderson, who is now a political science professor. He had a rap group himself and was

part of getting Africana Studies started first at the University of Michigan and then at Wayne State University. His Afro-centric politics inspired Kaos & Mystro's lyrics and look. "He engaged and educated many of us politically in the early 1990s." Reverend Wendell Anthony of Fellowship Chapel Church was another major influence. The Reverend radically changed Brent's life. "We were all street babies until we heard Anthony preaching Jesus the way he did." The head of the local branch of the NAACP since 1993 and the pastor for long-time Detroit rapper Proof's funeral in 2006, Rev. Anthony mixed Civil Rights politics with hip hop in the process gaining respect in the youth community.

It was Rev. Anthony who set up Kaos & Mystro with an opening slot at Tiger Stadium to perform as an opening act for South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela in June of 1990 in front of 49,000 people. Brent remembers rocking the crowd and even giving shout-outs to Detroit's own political prisoners, including former Detroit Black Panther Ahmad Rahman, now a political science professor at University of Michigan-Dearborn. These influences, one from funk, another steeped in Afro-centrism, and another in the church, helped crystallize the Kaos & Mystro style. Brent calls it, "Christianity with a nationalist flavor." *Outcast Vol. 1*, the group's only full-length album, finds Kaos & Mystro, mixing samples of peers like Chuck D. of Public Enemy (who had family in Detroit at the time and knew Kaos & Mystro), and heroes like Malcolm X, with uptempo drum machine patterns. The cover features Brent in a Pistons basketball jacket and Wilson in a Kente-cloth outfit designed by the duo. "Mystro on the Flex," one of the key songs from the album, foregrounds Wilson's turntable skills and with the help of then high-quality videos the song became a local hit. But the focus of the music was on Brent's conscious delivery and up-from-the-streets revolutionary ideology.

Though Brent did end up at Maurice Malone's early Rhythm Kitchen shows at Stanley's Chinese Restaurant that would end up inspiring The Hip Hop Shop, his political orientation was different from the more secular approach to flow offered by the Rhythm Kitchen. (This story will be told in my next chapter.) His last rap project was The Foundation, a group that featured Brent as one of four MCs produced by Anthony "Ant-Live" Singleton, a rapper who at one point flirted with major-labels in the early 1990s. According to Brent, internal differences stopped the recordings from seeing the light of day. He completed his MBA while working as a supervisor at Chrysler which he eventually retired from. He currently works as a Community Reintegration Coordinator for Goodwill Industries, is President of the Fellowship Chapel Men's Ministry, and Minister of Education for the Isuthu Insitute Males Rites of Passage Program. Wilson, now known as J. "Maji" Wilson, has formed Yunion a "hip-hop ministry" with an extensive online article archive with advice, according to the Web site, for "the troubled youth of America."

4.7 HALL OF FAME

Like in radio. They say never play a song over three minutes. Never play two instrumentals back to back. Never play two fast songs together, break it off. I decided to unlearn everything I learned and to develop my own system of doing things called "counterclockwiseology." I'm going to go this way and see if I can get the same results. I took out my yellow pad and I drew a big circle on one of the pages. I called it the circle of conformity. I wrote in all the big name people on the radio at that time. I thought that to get into this circle, you have to be one of the good old boys. You've got to work your way in here. Once you get in, you're legendary because you are in there. But to stay in there, you've got play by the rules, to do what you're told, to follow the formula. There's nothing wrong with that really. Then I drew another circle called the circle of one and there was one person in it, ME. This circle (of conformity) is going clockwise - it is going to play by the rules. This circle (of one) is not. I'm going to get the circle in motion. People were saying it wouldn't work, to get this guy off the radio. This is weird stuff, but

they were so busy saying it wasn't going to work while it was working. People would ask why he's playing this weird stuff for, but the weird stuff was slowly gaining roots.²⁰⁶

In 1990, Collier was getting some over-ground success. According to an article in *Cruise*, Collier was inducted into the "Detroit Dance Music Hall of Fame" in a ceremony in which Al Ester also won as "Best Mobile DJ" and Greg Collier, Stacey Hale, and Melvin Hill were also nominated. Then former City Council President Erma Henderson handed Ken Collier a "Spirit of Detroit" award. Billy T., then of WGPR, and Kris McClendon from WJLB were hosts.

Ken has been spinning records in Detroit for sixteen years and was the first popular Black DJ in Detroit to mix records in the night club circuit. He has spun records at literally dozens of places including at the Chess Mate, Luomo's, The Steam Pit, Studio 54 and Bingo'. Currently he spins for afterhours at Heaven on Friday and Saturday nights and Monday nights at Bookie's Club 870. He has long had his fingers at the pulse of the Detroit dance scene, a fact Billboard Magazine recognized when they asked Ken to be a reporter for the publication's hot dance charts.²⁰⁷

Mixing—from Collier, his brother, and a number of others—had crossed over and changed Detroit's soundscape permanently. However, Collier and others would continue to be documented infrequently and then only in niche magazines. Mojo's conception of what Detroit could be continues to be a major impact on Detroit. However, it would take a newer generation, raised by him, The Wizard, and—again—by DJs like Collier to actually mix the city together.

However, the divisions between rap and dance music as they became "hip hop" and "house" in the late 1980s and the early 1990s—a separation that had much to do with nationalized radio play lists and, as we shall see in the next chapter, the perceptions of media capitals like New York who were interested in reinforcing and encouraging the class and sexuality boundaries that were already emergent in certain elements of the rap scene of which

²⁰⁶ The Electrifying Mojo, *DEQ* interview, 47, 48.

²⁰⁷ "An Award-Winning Night," *Cruise Magazine* (4 April 1990): 11.

Kaos & Mystro's Afro-centrism was just one example. The time period in which everyone could hear and see something on "The Scene" that they could enjoy was coming to an end.

5.0 REMIX: JOURNEY THROUGH THE HARDCORE, 1989-1998

Just coming up in the Detroit scene I didn't go to Heaven until I was probably like eighteen so that was later but just kind of hearing the DJs, like St. Andy and others DJs too, kind of introduced me to this whole club scene that was happening. I had heard about what was happening in New York and then I started reading *Details* magazine, which at that time was more a fan zine then the thing its become and, also *ID* magazine, that was happening at the time, which was a natural transition just because I had been so interested in it from the post-punk scene. And then it started writing about all these street fashions that were happening. I had been very into early hip hop when it happened and so I was really following with that and then it all kind of converged. I was going to these horrible gay clubs too which played awful music so I was always going to the record stores to see was there a kind of music that was like this gay dance music—which was really bad Madonna, remixed high-NRG at the time—that I could still enjoy. And also I think a lot of artists that I was following started putting more dance music. Like when Erasure first started—I was always a 12" collector of like Depeche Mode and Erasure and suddenly like these news sounds seemed to coming up, bubbling up to the surface. Which were more electro and dance. And also, Electrifying Mojo I listened to in high school, I listened to CBC, there was an all night broadcast [called "Brand New Waves" hosted at that time by Brent Bambury] so I listened to that. I was so alienated during my daily life in high school that I would just sit up and listen to the radio all night long which was when these people played and I would put my little tape recorder that you had to press record and play on top of my alarm clock radio because I couldn't afford a regular boombox [laughs] and I would make my own remixes of songs that I had recorded by using three tape recorders and that kind of thing....²⁰⁸

— Marke Bieschke

Amid Detroit's continuing de-industrial collapse, a cadre of teen and twenty-year olds, inspired by local, national and international shifts in the sounds of dance music and hip hop were converging to put on afternoon rap battles, night-time club events, and after-hour parties. Leaders

²⁰⁸ Marke Bieschke, interview by author, 27 March 2008.

in this younger generation were mentored by older scene members who had already been exploring the possibilities of Detroit's soundscape for well over a decade. These leaders, like Marke Bieschke—a 1980s club-kid, a 1990s party promoter, and now a journalist in San Francisco—were also mentored by the agents of change within the mass media network described in the last chapter, like the Electrifying Mojo. These leaders formed groups, with names like Underground Nation, Voom, Unity, and Poor Boy, to both establish brand identity—they did want people to come to their parties—but also to critique the increasing commodification of the music and styles that inspired them. At their best, these groups combined to create a youth-friendly, mixed-race, gay-and-straight, alternative to an older, more corporate, largely segregated club nightlife offered in the Detroit area at the time. Few of these groups survived the decade and a number of the leaders eventually left the Detroit area. New, more lucrative opportunities in other cities, as well as police harassment and scene fatigue in Detroit, among other forces and events, dissolved much of what had been formed. However, the long term influence of these groups is still being felt within Detroit's soundscape. Though a handful of these leaders—and their directly trained progeny—continue to be active in Detroit's musical life the major influence of this generation comes from the predominantly white and suburban audience that they encouraged to discover Detroit at a time in which Detroit had seemingly hit rock-bottom in terms of reputation. As an example, almost twenty years later some of Bieschke's most devoted followers, like members of the event company Paxahau, have become ambassadors for DJ culture in Detroit able to draw tens of thousands of people downtown every year for the former Detroit Electronic Music Festival, now called Movement.²⁰⁹ The festival is entering its eleventh year.

²⁰⁹ For some back story on Paxahau, see Walter Wasacz, "Pax Day," *Metro Times*, August 31, 2005. For a

The legacy of this moment however is not unambiguously positive. For one, despite the creative energy of the voices I present here, Detroiters still remained dependent on global media capitals like New York when they wanted to reach beyond the local scene. However these cities had their own idea of what Detroit was and the influence of that narrative, like Rabbit's narrative discussed in my introduction, continued to drown out Detroit's original take on the soundscape. In this chapter, I continue the story of Khary Turner—rapper, poet, journalist, teacher, and civic leader—who broke out of Detroit only to be reminded, in deeply ironic ways, how the city's reputation was as much a blessing as a curse. At the same time, I bring to a close Ken Collier's influential, yet stormy, relationship to Detroit by describing one of his last DJ residencies at a club called Heaven. Despite its name, Heaven was not paradise but instead a highly fraught sonic space, full of earth-quaking sonic and social pressure. Both Turner's story and Collier's admit to the continuing difficulty of local musical forces during the post-Motown era to master their own fates even at their most successful.

In "Remix: Journey Through the Hardcore, 1989-1998," I listen to these voices and their struggles to build their own soundscape utopias within Detroit. Other than oral histories, the archive for this section will be descriptions of recordings and flyers, as well as photographs provided by my interviewees. Detroit's local rave history is shared extensively on social media networks like Facebook.²¹⁰ However it has not been written about extensively in print and has been directly avoided by historians of the scene like Dan Sicko who believe that this era was

discussion of the techno festival itself see Rebekah Farrugia, "From Midnight to Broad Daylight: The Constructive Capabilities of Techno and the Detroit Electronic Music Festival," a paper delivered at the annual convention of the International Communication Association, San Diego, CA, 2003, 1-27.

²¹⁰ For instance, there is a Facebook group co-created by one of my interviewees, Adriel Thornton, called "D.R.U.N.K. (Detroit Rave-Underground-Nightlife Kulture)" (accessed 12 March 2011). When I last visited, the group had over 1400 members, featured 893 photos and flyers, eleven discussion topics, and over a years worth of wall posts.

dominated by drug use, a fact that he argues obscures his interest in techno music.²¹¹ Likewise, Detroit hip hop’s “golden age” has only been told in book and film form via Eminem’s selective memory. By telling the story of, for instance, the Three Floors of Fun parties at Saint Andrew’s Hall, where multiple musical genres—including hip hop and techno—served multiple audiences all under one roof, I recapture the interconnectedness of Detroit’s contemporary soundscape and continue to encourage a reevaluation of Detroit’s post-Motown era.

5.1 ONE NATION UNDER RAVE

On a cold, new years eve in downtown Detroit in 1992 a new kind of Detroit family came together. They gathered for a party, “Journey to the Hardcore,” featuring the cream of Detroit’s techno scene at the Majestic Theatre on Woodward Avenue downtown.

²¹¹ “Suffice it to say, it was easy to know what *not* to include in this edition. I specifically chose not to explore techno’s music’s relationship with the ‘rave’ concept and the drug ecstasy, and I stick by my decision. I still believe that it detracts far too greatly from the discussion of music.” Sicko, *Techno Rebels*, x.

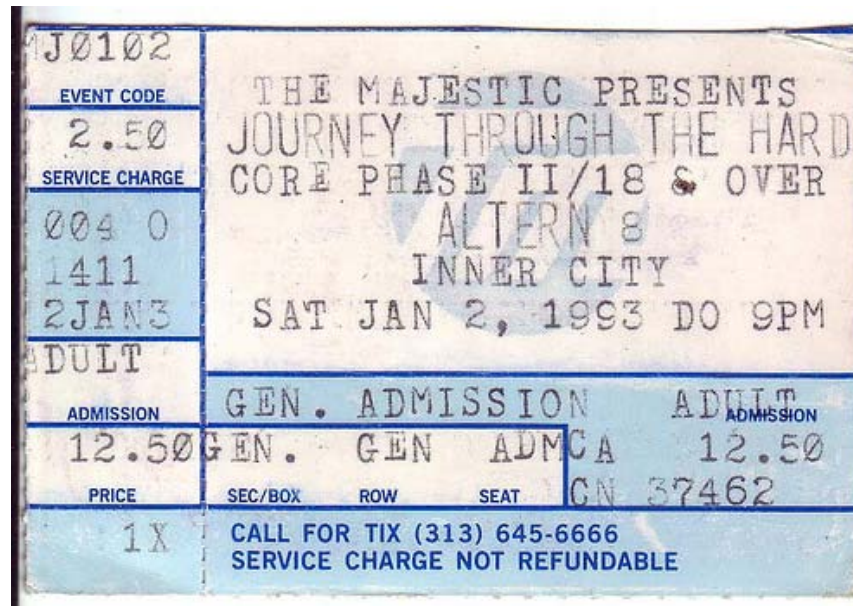


Figure 5-1. "Journey Through The Hardcore."

Inner City, the group that had broken the top ten in England, performed live. Jeff Mills, in the midst of becoming one of New York's best DJs, came home and DJed. Underground Resistance, spirited by Mike Banks who had formed the group with Jeff Mills, performed live as well. The crowd contained a wide spectrum within Detroit's scene. Young black men in sharp suits eyed the crowd, while white youth filtered into the rooms of the Majestic.²¹² Nancy Mitchell and Adriel Thornton who had both only recently begun throwing their own event after years of clubbing, remember helping out with the event.²¹³ Detroiters though were not the only participants that night. Performers like Todd Sines came from Columbus, Ohio where he was attending university.²¹⁴ Sarah Wilder, a native of Windsor, Canada remembers attending with friends from Toronto.²¹⁵

²¹² Observations about the crowd based on photographs provided by Nancy Mitchell.

²¹³ Nancy Mitchell, interview by author, 11 March 2004; Adriel Thornton, interview by author, 26 January 2011.

²¹⁴ Todd Sines, interview by author, 23 January 2011.

²¹⁵ Sarah Wilder Zakoor, interview by author, 26 February 2011.

The party was a seminal moment for Detroit's dance scene. Detroit techno artists had come home and found an audience. But this audience had not emerged out of nowhere. It had started years before. In the late '80s, Bileebob had started off his nights at the same Majestic Theatre where "Journey" was held. During that time producer and DJ Blake Baxter held court. At least as much as any other hometown DJ, Baxter was key to bringing new house and techno sounds—some of it made in Detroit—to Detroit. For a young John "Bileebob" Williams, Baxter's Majestic residence was an epiphany. Hearing tracks like "Situation" by Yaz and Depeche Mode's "Strangelove," as well as the pounding sounds of acid house and Detroit techno on a big sound system changed the way Williams and others like him thought about their soundscape. "Everything about Majestic was big," Williams says. "Raves had not hit the U.S. yet. This was the club. This was my Techno 101."²¹⁶ At that time, Baxter was part of a cadre of electronic musicians and producers making music in the back of Cliff Thomas' Buy Rite Records on 7 Mile Road. His DJ nights worked because they catered to a youth audience that had yet to be overburdened with consumable culture. This was a pre-Internet, pre-Amazon.com, and pre-iTunes era—if you wanted to experience new music you had to get involved. For Bileebob that meant turning an early love of music, including bands like Devo, into a small mobile sound system while still in grade school. Those interests, and the mix of people at University of Detroit High School on Detroit's west side, led to exploring clubs like the Majestic, the Shelter, and, for Bileebob, a "handful" of times at the Music Institute. By the early 1990s, Bileebob would be ready for Voom.

²¹⁶ John Williams, interview by author, 18 March 2005.



Figure 5-2. John “Bileebob” Williams 1993.

The beginnings of Voom start somewhere around the time Marke Bieschke began working with Steven Reaume at a club called Industry in Pontiac, a city to the north of Detroit, in 1991.²¹⁷ Their first event together was called “Safe Sex Tuesdays,” an idea that Reaume had put together. Bieschke had worked his way in as “door boy”—the person at the door who collects money. Born in 1970, Bieschke went to the same high school as the younger Alan Bogl, an all-boys Catholic school called De La Salle, in Warren just north of Detroit.²¹⁸ By middle school Bieschke was out; by early high school he was clubbing in downtown Detroit. Reaume was a fan of Ken Collier’s club, Heaven, where he would walk to after finishing his night at Salute (now

²¹⁷ Steven Reaume, interview by author, 15 March 2008.

²¹⁸ Alan Bogl, interview by author, 15 March 2008.

known as La Dolce Vita), an Italian restaurant in Detroit off of Woodward Avenue. Heaven, according to Reaume, was ninety percent black with numerous drag queens, and had a “magical, music energy.” Bogl was more interested in hardcore punk than dance music when he first began going to shows in Detroit. But as he told it, he had gone to a teen night at The Shelter once and been given a record by Kevin Saunderson and Santonio Echols (the former would eventually play Voom parties) called “Rock the Beat,” a record he would not play and understand until he attended an early, legal, corporate rave at the Majestic Theater in Detroit.

According to Bieschke, the name Voom played with Detroit’s automotive past while hinting at the pace that the promoters wanted to accelerate Detroit’s nightlife to. By 1992, the term underground as a description for the kinds of parties that Voom was interested in throwing had emerged. To Bieschke it connoted a group of people coming together who felt like outsiders. Bieschke, one of the main writers of the messages trafficked in the flyers, considered himself a Situationist, reading 1960s French writer Guy Debord’s critique of art, revolution, and capitalism in books like *Society of the Spectacle* during the emergence of Voom.²¹⁹ Bieschke also attended Michigan State University before dropping out to move to downtown Detroit in 1989 to get his M.A. in grammar at Wayne State, a choice that meant that he, “slept with a copy of [French literary theorist Jacques Derrida’s] *Of Grammatology* under my pillow.”²²⁰

Bieschke was dancing at The Shelter when he first heard DJ Scott Gordon mix two records together and on his prom night he was at the alternative dance club, Todd’s, a club in the northwestern neighborhoods of Detroit, where his car windows were smashed. Later he worked at the Juice Bar at the Music Institute, was a card-carrying Underground Nation (U.N.) member

²¹⁹ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1977).

²²⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

(I will return to this below) and regularly went to Ken Collier's club Heaven. He was also a radio fan, listening to Detroit radio DJs like the Electrifying Mojo and Canada's CBC 2 station which featured a late night avant-garde radio show hosted at the time by Brent Bambury. He bought records at Buy-Rite on Detroit's near west side, one of the early stores to traffic in underground dance records from Detroit and around the world. He read magazines like *Details*, *ID*, and *Paper*. In 1989, he traveled to England and attended raves as part of the "Summer of Love" that was occurring at the time, a scene that was heavily influenced by dance music coming from Detroit and Chicago. But it was no utopia for Bieschke—instead it was a warning. "It was like a giant frat party. It has a very football stadium rave sound. Very straight. We [Voom] did not want this to happen in Detroit. We felt like we needed to save it." He had also attended raves in California where he saw slick promoters profit while the scene offered "no real music."

Voom was not the only company throwing parties from 1992 to 1993 in Detroit. Adriel Thornton, a long-time promoter and founder of the Fresh Corporation, which still promotes events in and around Detroit, was active at the time throwing his first party in 1992 with techno producer, label owner and DJ, Dan Bell. Unity, the name for a small company started by Nancy Mitchell, now an actress and director in New York, was also doing events. Unity would eventually co-host a major legal rave at the Majestic Theater known as "Journey to the Hardcore" in October of 1992 with Voom, which featured the Grammy-winning Moby along with local Detroit DJs and producers.²²¹ These stories are intertwined and simultaneous. These different companies also were in competition and though there was a certain amount of respect, Bogl and Reaume told stories of a knife being pulled outside a gig when a rival promoter

²²¹ "Re: (313) Re: Moby in tha D," 313 list archive at Hyperreal <<http://www.mail-archive.com/313@hyperreal.org/msg96557.html>> (18 April 2008).

attempted to poach some of Voom's audience. These stories need to be corroborated but they at least hint to the possible stakes in the scene at the time among the different players.

Voom, however, through its flyers, crossover crowds, and successful progeny, the likes of which would eventually throw raves for thousands in abandoned car factories, seems to present a representative anecdote for a transitional period in which new, whiter, suburban audiences for underground electronic music and culture were crossing urban borders in Detroit.²²² Voom played its part as a midwife for this new scene at the same time that it offered an evolving critique to their audience, a critique that took shape through the process of producing its parties. The flyers, and the stories told about them, provide a way of thinking about that process.



Figure 5-3. "Life."

²²² Kevin Mumford, *Interzones* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 135-136.

5.2 “THIS IS OUR CREED”

Though flyers are still very much a part of the local scene in Detroit they are just one of many ways to get information about parties occurring in and around town.²²³ Semi-public internet message boards, like Detroit Luv listings and columns dedicated to the scene in the two major alternative press weeklies, *Real Detroit* and the *Metro Times*, as well as email send-out lists, and social networking sites like Myspace and Facebook, and, of course, word-of-mouth, all play a roll in advertising for parties.²²⁴ But in 1992, when Voom began, none of these Internet options yet existed in their present forms. Voom did use the alternative press, especially the *Metro Times* from time to time, to advertise its parties, but according to Bieschke, this was more of a playful gesture than a serious use of the alternative press.

Instead, at the time, Voom flyers were central figures in spreading Voom information and ideology. Many of the flyers listed the number for the Voom info-line (a landline phone with a digital voice mail recording), where further clarifying information could be listed, including ways to get to the party itself. Along with word-of-mouth, the flyer was a central component of the scene that Voom wished to create.²²⁵ The flyers from Detroit’s early 1990s techno scene are red, blue, green and yellow. They feature numbers, letters, spirals, and shapes. They are made out of paper, cardboard, string, and metal. Animals and objects are present as well: a vacuum

²²³ A the time of my original research for this chapter in 2008, a visit to Record Time in Roseville, just north of Detroit on the east side, found flyers for local parties and club nights displayed prominently just inside the front door to the store. Record Time, which opened in 1983, had been a significant gateway to the scene, including the years Voom was active. However, at this writing, three years later, the store is closed.

²²⁴ <<http://detroitluv.com>>. (accessed 10 March 2011).

²²⁵ A caveat to this discussion of flyers should be mentioned here. The flyers were not always interesting to everyone involved. Goudy himself claims that he never looked for flyers or remembers them with any specificity. In his interview he made it clear that he was just glad to see his name in print, spelled correctly. He did, however, ask for extras from promoters, whether Voom or other later promoters, to be able to give to people. To Goudy though the flyers served a purely utilitarian function.

cleaner, an anamorphic wolverine, and dolphins. They feature messages, some cryptic (“Put some scuba around tonight!”²²⁶), others seemingly more understandable (“Join us now on a journey of pure ecstasy, into the deepest heart of joy”). They mimic corporate brands (Standard Oil, Squirt) and play on the styles of mass commodities (bubble gum, laundry detergent). Their authors have names like Swan, MJF30-X10 and Eddie Munster (the latter a nod to character on the 1960s network program, *The Munsters*). Though some are relatively plain, with black text on white backgrounds, all feature some sort of design or image on them, and many look like slices of modern and postmodern art, whether the pop-art styles of Andy Warhol²²⁷ or the formalist lines, circles, and structural designs of Russian Constructivists.²²⁸



Figure 5-4. Voom flyers.

²²⁶ Voom, “Skylab 2,” flyer, circa 1993, for party in Detroit, photo courtesy of Doc of Focus Media (<http://focusmedia.org>).

²²⁷ Voom. “Skylab 3,” flyer, circa March 1993, for party in Detroit, photo courtesy of Doc of Focus Media (<http://focusmedia.org>).

²²⁸ Voom, “Calgary,” flyer, circa July 1993, for party in Detroit, photo courtesy of Doc of Focus Media (<http://focusmedia.org>).

Though certain figures and designs in flyers were designed by specific individuals—for instance the dolphin by Costello—based on the interviews, flyers were the product of multiple people working in tandem. Most of the flyers here were produced on desktop publishing software like Adobe Photoshop and Quark at the offices of Orbit magazine, a local alternative weekly magazine that was covering the local scene at the time. A woman who worked at the magazine and would let a member or members use an Apple computer to create designs before taking them over to Kinko's for printing on computer Zip discs. (The company is now known as Fed-Ex Kinko's.) At the time Kinko's allowed customers to choose their printing colors, which included blue, red and black ink, explaining, according to Bieschke, certain color decisions.²²⁹ Michael "Swan" Swan, Costello, Aaron Mertez, and Pam Shecter (now Shecter-Brown) of Arcadia a graphic design company, Reaume, and Bogl, and others, all had hands in the conception and design of these flyers. Many of the flyers could be said to have been practicing what the Situationists called "detournement," using common, everyday signs, and symbols and subverting their bland, everyday uses to create new, potentially revolutionary images and ideas.²³⁰ Though the Voom images are wonderful examples of this, the collective admitted that they had seen this kind of graphic sabotage used by others, especially within the budding rave fashion industry.

Voom's after-hours parties, save for a few, were illegal and held at non-corporate venues in downtown Detroit like the Bankle Building (owned by Propeller²³¹), and 1515 Broadway, a

²²⁹ See, for instance, Voom, "Calgary"

²³⁰ Situationist International, "detournement," definitions, 1959, online at Bureau of Public Secrets <<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/1.definitions.htm>> (18 April 2008).

²³¹ Propeller presents another interesting wrinkle in Detroit's late 1980s early 1990s downtown culture. Another group of young artists, many coming out of the Center for Creative Studies or CCS, a design college in Detroit, the group parlayed money earned for designing cars for the Big Three (Ford, GM, Chrysler) with art and furniture

café, art space, and black box theater space downtown. Sometimes though the flyers feature more corporate spaces, such as The Shelter, which is part of the St. Andrews Hall complex and, at the time, ran by Clutch Cargo's, the same production company that employed Reaume at Industry in Pontiac.²³² Some of the flyers show the splintering and multiplicity of Voom's identity. "Influx," thrown in December of 1992, was put on by a series of companies. Two were local, the Canadian/Detroit record label Plus 8 and a local skate shop that also featured rave brands, like the extra-wide style of JNCO jeans, called Corky's and the other national, a skate company named Split began in 1988 that also featured rave-friendly fashion. But the overall producer of the events was Brainfish, the name for events thrown by Bieschke and Bogl when Reaume was busy managing Industry in Pontiac.²³³ The flyer also featured the company Voom Garb (also known on some flyers as Voom Apparatus), a short-lived attempt by Voom to design its own clothes. Dat Duong, born in Vietnam but raised in the northern suburb of Sterling Heights, a member of the larger collective, utilizing his access his family business, designed a series of Voom coats.²³⁴ Bieschke remembers this time of Voom branding as one of experimentation and also confusion. "There were lots of slick players in California [in the rave scene]. Is this what we wanted to do? Compete with them?"

DJs for these invents were white and black, straight and gay, and male and female, and mixed many different kinds of dance music, from Chicago house music, and Detroit techno, to more European sets inspired by drum and bass. The sounds also mirrored the Voom members'

design. They also through parties and provided the Bankle for use by Voom as well as others. See Doron P. Levin, "Style Makers: Propeller, Art Furniture Designers," *New York Times*, December 9, 1990.

²³² See, for example, Voom, "Life," flyer, green paper version, circa August 1992.

²³³ Brainfish, "Influx," flyer.

²³⁴ Dot would go on to form Poor Boy another event company that threw major raves after Voom's demise. These raves utilized much bigger spaces, including the Packard Plant. For a short reference to this in a recent article, see Bill McGraw, "Is there new life for the old Packard Plant?," *Detroit Free Press*, April 18, 2008.

own taste. Bieschke described his tastes as “black house” and “intelligent techno.” D. Wynn, one of the resident DJs at the Music Institute acted as musical advisor to the collective, recommending DJs and acting as a liaison to them before and during the party itself. Reaume called D. Wynn “the Great Leveler” in his ability to creating a space where racial cooperation could occur amongst the predominantly white promoters and their black DJs. At first sound was provided by Carlos Oxholm, later a co-owner at Motor, a mid-1990s dance venue in Hamtramck, a city inside Detroit. According to Bogl though frustration with Oxholm’s sound systems came to a head after Bogl joined a “caravan of cars” and attended a jungle—a genre of electronic music—party in Toronto and “saw the light.” The Toronto scene at the time featured larger venues with far better sound systems, according to Bogl. The result was that Mike Fotias, who now works for Burst, a sound company that has done sound for years for the local music scene, got its start doing sound for Voom.²³⁵

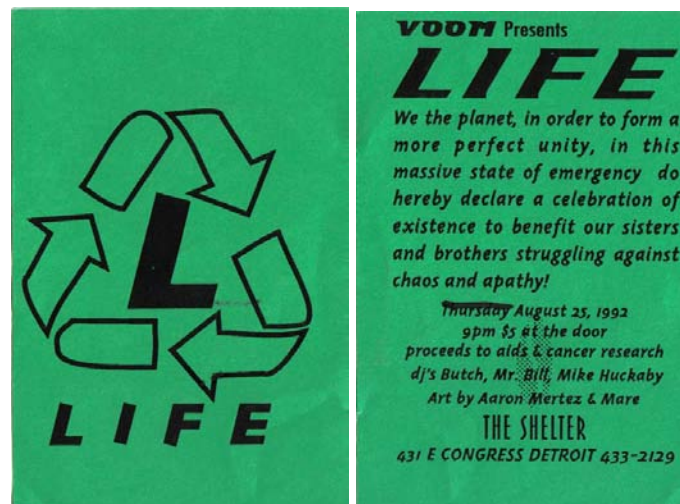


Figure 5-5. “Life” in green.

²³⁵ See Burst, company Web site <<http://www.burstllc.com/>> (12 March 2011).

The first party was called “klonk.” Held in the summer of 1992, with local public radio DJ and visual artist Alan Oldham headlining, there were multiple designs for the flyer. One included a “monopoly man” getting “klonked” on the head by a mallet. This flyer stated the time for the gig, a tag that explained that Alan Oldham was from “Fast Forward” (the name of his radio show at the time), as well as date, time and place. The only editorializing for the flyer is a simple “Peace + Love” at the bottom. The other two version of the flyer, designed by Michael “Swan” Swan and Arcadia, Pam Shecter graphic design company, with text by Marke “MJF30-X10” Bieschke, were more detailed and colorful. This flyer parodied, or detourned if you will, the Cheer detergent logo to create a “klonk” brand with two slogans, “Fresh New Formula!” and “Ecstasy • Joy • Freedom.” The other side of the flyer included a much longer description of what an attendee might expect at the party. “A slavepit for the crackerjack kids, raging bucktoothed into the morning, happy out of their heads, uniting, losing their races to creed #1 ECSTASY! JOY! FREEDOM! Party out your inner riot. Klonk the system. Get you [sic] first flying klonk.”²³⁶ The final flyer, took on the Standard Oil Company logo to announced “klonk.” “Join us now on a journey of pure ecstasy, into the deepest heart of joy. Exhilarate. You will be awestruck, fighting for your seventh heaven breath, blessed from your senses. To the rhythm of our world. “Come all you hardcores: Let us klonk together.”²³⁷

The design for the “Splat” party is very similar to the “Klonk” imagery, this time taking on the Squirt soda logo to issue its slogan, “Fresh disco taste.” The note on the back read, in part, “The kids from Klonk are delighted to serve you another tangy refreshing blend of fabulous fruit flavors and colors, with the power to satisfy your body’s inner thirst for funky fresh jive ecstasy.

²³⁶ Voom, “klonk,” flyer, Cheer-version, circa July 1992, for party in Detroit, photo courtesy of Doc of Focus Media (<http://focusmedia.org>).

²³⁷ Voom, “klonk,” flyer, Standard Oil-version, circa July 1992, for party in Detroit, photo courtesy of Doc of Focus Media (<http://focusmedia.org>).

Slurp down a cool one!” It also featured three bolded demands at the bottom: “NO CLUB POLITICS, NO GUEST LIST, NO OVERBLOWN EGOS.”²³⁸ The corporate references would continue throughout Voom’s cycle of parties, with slogans like “It’s underground, no static kling [sic]”²³⁹ and “More absorbent, less worry”²⁴⁰ featured on flyers the next spring and summer. “Life,” thrown just a month after “Klonk,” was a benefit for AIDS and cancer research, at a corporate venue downtown. A continuation of Reaume and Bieschke’s work at Industry, “Life” featured Butch Duncan a white, male, gay DJ who played at a gay bar called Timed Square at the time. “We the planet, in order to form a more perfect unity, in this massive state of emergency do hereby declare a celebration of existence to benefit our sisters and brothers struggling against chaos and apathy!”²⁴¹ The metal version of the flyer, cut by a local metal shop, featured no information about the event itself, but instead featured the same recycle design with “Life” written underneath it, and a different writing on the other side. “We are the citizens of a spirit inordinate, conjuncting, hurling our voices from the center of a violent globe, firing our will to extinguish discrimination, disease and despair. Joy, health, love for all: this is our creed, our revolution.”²⁴²

“Cindy’s Cat” was a turning point, for both flyer design and scene politics. Multiple flyers were produced for this series of parties Saturdays at the Bankle Building. One was a string necklace with Costello’s dolphin on one side and the party’s name and info line on the other.²⁴³ Another flyer was more straightforward: simply a paper flyer with a lineup on one side and party

²³⁸ Voom, “Splat,” flyer, circa 1992.

²³⁹ Voom, “Skylab 1,”

²⁴⁰ Voom, Skylab 3

²⁴¹ Voom, “Life,” flyer, green paper version.

²⁴² Voom, “Life,” metal flyer, circa August 1992, for party in Detroit, photo courtesy of Doc of Focus Media (<http://focusmedia.org>).

²⁴³ Voom, “Cindy’s Cat,” flyer, dolphin necklace, circa November 1992, for party in Detroit, photo courtesy of Doc of Focus Media (<http://focusmedia.org>).

information on the back.²⁴⁴ The third flyer was literally 3-D, with a small yellow envelope featuring the Voom logo in red with a phone number, with two notes inserted and a gum wrapper. An inside joke, Cindy was a friend of Marke who got an asthma attack after the feline slept on his face. The note featured a playful, rambling message that referenced the inside joke:

It's phuzzy! It's phat! It's where it's at! The Voom Coalition for the prevention of mental health flings the mostest incredibubble funkalicious hit 'n' split in your face. Again and again. Lick it. Flick it. Stick it. Your feline frenzy begins Saturday November 21, 92 at 2 AM in the basement of the Bankle Building. 2948 Woodward (2 blocks north of the State/Fox Crap). As always, Voom wishes you the uptmost peace, love, and grooviness. Call 313.4332129 immediately!²⁴⁵

Bieschke, Bogl, Reaume and Goudy, all gave their remembrances of these parties, especially the second and final Cindy's Cat. At this second party, the crowd was predominantly white while the DJ was a black, twenty-six-year old who loved to play what he called hard techno from local record labels like Underground Resistance and Fragile and European techno acts like the Advent. But what everyone remembers was what Goudy wore that night, not what he played. Goudy wore a blond wig and black t-shirt, which read in white-writing, simply, "nigger." The t-shirt, according to Goudy, was an idea that Goudy came up with his white friend in the scene at the time, Brian Gillespie, who also wore a similar t-shirt with the phrase, "honky" on it.

²⁴⁴ Voom, "Cindy's Cat," flyer, "Saturdaze" paper version, circa November 1992, for party in Detroit, photo courtesy of Doc of Focus Media (<http://focusmedia.org>).

²⁴⁵ Voom, "Cindy's Cat," flyer, spiral insert.



Figure 5-6. Contact sheet the t-shirt.

According to my interviewees, Mike Banks, a founding member of Underground Resistance, a musician on some of the records being played that night by Goudy, was not amused by Goudy's shirt and, along with a small group of friends, surrounded Goudy after his DJ set.²⁴⁶ Goudy does not remember what Banks said to him except that Banks was not happy and was making as if he was going to fight Goudy. Goudy himself remembers being scared stiff. He took off the wig and tried to explain the t-shirt which Goudy saw as a way to counteract racial

²⁴⁶ Mike Banks was asked to participate during the writing of this project but declined.

typecasting that he sensed in his own line as a retail clerk at a clothing store at a local suburban mall. The slogan for the t-shirt that Gillespie and Goudy attempted to expound was, “It’s just a word; don’t make it racial.” In Goudy’s words, it was meant as a “conversation piece.” “I wanted to beat people with it.” Goudy remembers quickly leaving the party without a fight and breaking down at home. It was a highly emotional moment that the promoters were also very aware of. The final Cindy’s Cat was cancelled and an eventual dialogue on the phone was had between Bieschke and Banks in the days after the incident. According to Bieschke, the incident had highlighted issues that perhaps Voom had ignored. “We were about challenging things,” said Bieschke. “We didn’t dress up Paris and we didn’t ask permission.” But after Cindy’s Cat things changed. “Maybe we need to ask permission. After that party we became much more conscious.”

Two parties show the impact of that change in consciousness. The first was a party eight months later, near the end of Voom’s run, at a large warehouse on Detroit’s southwest side. The party, entitled “Stop the Pigeon” for all of the pigeon droppings that had to be cleaned up in the building before being used for the party, required that Voom bring in another company called Merchants of Doom, that provided security. The flyer for “Stop the Pigeon” ironically did not feature a pigeon but instead a super-muscled wolverine character with his thumb up against a red star with yellow stylized rays coming from it. The party featured a better sound system than previous event and a major biracial lineup of DJs featuring the black Juan Atkins who wrote some of Detroit techno’s earliest tracks in the early 1980s as a member of Cybotron and the Canadian white Richard “Richie Rich” Hawtin. D. Wynn, a DJ that night, had taken his place as Voom’s musical advisor, cutting his set short diplomatically so a fourth DJ, who had shown up late and still wanted to play, could perform.

The second party that showed this new conscious approach would end up being Voom's last. George Baker who had owned the Music Institute, helped Voom put together the lineup together for a series of events called "Calgary" in July of 1993. The events would feature two of the Institute's former residents, Alton Miller and Derrick May. The blue, abstract flyer for the third event was of Bieschke's own design. It features the oblique but hopeful slogan, "In this way light becomes and travels toward."²⁴⁷ But the party would end before it began.

5.3 BUST

Yeah, you couldn't leave [...] they grabbed everyone. I mean I remember that the lights came on and it spreads really quick about what's going on and you know there's no reason why the lights should come on and I grabbed some people that we were with and tried to get out this door and we literally we walked into guns and in our face. Really literally, "Get back." [...] And then it was... you know—woah, this is crazy (referring to street)—it's all blocked. It was like taking control of the room, everyone facing the wall, hands up, you know a lot really serious gross mistreatment of people, a lot of inappropriate comments, a lot of, "What are you white kids doing down here?" I remember the senior officer after you know some time of like people checking IDs and all that going, saying, he said [laughs], "Does anyone here live in the city of Detroit?" or something and there was like next to no one that raised their hand at all and then it was just, "Why are all you white kids in our city? What the hell are you doing? You need to not be down here doing this," like we are fucking up their city by partying in this building....²⁴⁸

— Keith Kemp

Keith Kemp, a producer, DJ, and, in the early 1990s, another kid in the scene, and I hop in the car. It is a cool, early spring night in Detroit. I take the microphone and hang it over the rearview mirror. Kemp starts the car and idles. "Where to?" I ask him to where he went to his first "party." We have just spent the last two hours talking at a downtown restaurant on Woodward Avenue,

²⁴⁷ Voom, "Calgary," flyer, circa July 1993.

²⁴⁸ Keith Kemp, interview by author, 4 March 2007.

Detroit's main north-south artery. We begin driving north on Woodward until we reach Grand Boulevard in the "New Center" area of Detroit. Directly to our west is the former headquarters for General Motors and, less than a mile beyond, the houses where Motown Records began. To our east are the abandoned factories of Detroit's former industrial age. We start down the streets just south of the Boulevard, east of Woodward, filled with former factories and warehouses, most abandoned with small businesses and homes tucked between. We drive on the last stretch of Hastings Street, the historical street that was once, just south of us, the business center of Detroit's black community. It was destroyed when I-75 came through in the 1950s. What remain are a few blocks of warehouses and factories, one of which burned down to the ground the previous summer. Kemp pulls up alongside the empty lot that a year ago was an inferno and some years before that part of Detroit's industrial center. "This is it."

Keith Kemp was an audience member before he was a performer. In the mid-1990s, Kemp entered his twenties by joining a number of friends from his predominantly white, middle-class downriver hometown of Grosse Ile, and slipped through the rabbit hole of Detroit's mid-1990s party scene, a scene that in the mainstream press was simply described as "rave." There were significant stakes in the mass proliferation of the dance scene into Detroit's suburbs, of which Kemp is just one representative. First and foremost was the illegality of it all. The parties were unsanctioned events in abandoned buildings in downtown Detroit. But perhaps more important was the relationship between these young adventurers and Detroiters themselves, both residents and police. Detroit residents were not necessarily comfortable with the scene's presence in their neighborhoods and the police, once they decided that regulating parties was a priority, saw the young suburbanites as nuisances at best, trespassers at worst. Kemp, invited into

the scene by fellow suburbanites that had made their way downtown only a few years before was, through tickets, fines, and intimidation, invited to leave by Detroit's finest.

Kemp, for the most part, has not left. Except for a handful of years in San Francisco, Kemp, now approaching 40, lives just north of Detroit in Ferndale. After years of living, DJing clubs, producing records, and going to school in the Detroit itself, he is now a member of a global electronic dance music culture that in 1994 was just beginning to make itself felt throughout Southeastern Michigan. The scene was life transforming for Kemp, introducing him to new friends, sounds, images, ideas, and drugs. Approaching twenty years later he continues, despite personal setbacks, to participate in a musical culture in which he has become, now, a veteran member.

5.4 UNDERGROUND NATION

Raised in Detroit until high school where his family relocated to Oak Park, one of Detroit's northern neighbors, in the late 1970s, Maurice Malone would have to be in the running with artists like The Wizard and Electrifying Mojo for main character of the Detroit sound after Motown.²⁴⁹ Though he is known for his influence on Detroit hip hop as the founder of the Hip Hop Shop in the fall of 1993 his influence and history within the larger Detroit music community go back much further. Malone graduated Oak Park High School in 1982 when the music of Detroit's young black middle class was indebted more to Mojo's eclectic mix of electronic music than any rap group from New York. Malone started to DJ in high school with the now deceased

²⁴⁹ Maurice Malone, interview by author, 22 August 2007.

Daryl Matthews. It was with Matthews that he formed his high school party-promoting outfit Giavante. It was then that his crew circulated with the other West-side prep scene party promoters from other Detroit-area schools like Cass Tech, St. Mary's, and Southfield. This is the scene that Dan Sicko wrote about in his 1999 book *Techno Rebels*, a group of kids who distinguished themselves from the “jits”—the working class, street kids of Detroit's east side—by forming crews and throwing parties that catered to the Eurocentric visual and sonic tastes of Detroit's black middle class youth. The scene incubated artists like Derrick May (who Malone was sometimes confused with), Juan Atkins, and many others, creating a space for the birth of what would become Detroit techno.

After graduating high school Malone spent a semester in California to work on film before coming back to Detroit and throwing his first fashion show party at a banquet hall in Southfield on Telegraph road. Malone was a true Detroit renaissance man, designing hats, coats and jeans, DJing, promoting his own fashions shows, and even dabbling in performance, playing in a Depeche Mode inspired group called APORP (A Portrait of Radical People) in 1987. But it was Malone's Underground Nation or just U.N. parties starting in 1989 that would cement his importance to the scene. He had been inspired by clubs like Todd's on 7 Mile which had begun to cross over the scenes surrounding punk rock, industrial and, on certain nights, house music by DJs like Greg and Ken Collier, members of the largely gay underground DJ scene. U.N. would be a more intimate version of Detroit's club scene, where Collier devotees like Mike Huckaby and Terrance Parker, both now known for playing house but who historically grew up in the hey-day of the Wizard, could play and Malone could sell the hats and clothing that he was beginning to see as his main vocation. Before there was an overground “alternative” culture there were the party-people at 6404 Baltimore in Detroit's New Center area, where future musical artists like

Carl Craig and early Detroit rave party-promoters like Nancy Mitchell held yellow-neon colored U.N. membership cards in their pockets (see fig. 5.7).



Figure 5-7. Underground Nation membership card.

With full-length albums from Kaos & Mystro, E.Z. B. & DJ Los, Awesome Dre, J. to the D., Kid Rock, Esham, ICP, Smiley, A.W.O.L. and DMW in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is clear that stylistically and culturally Detroit hip hop was finding its way. Somehow, though, Detroit's first national success came north of 8 Mile—the long road that marks the city's northern boarder—when Flint-native Eric “MC” Breed's funk-heavy song “Ain't No Future in Your Frontin'” (1991) became a national hit. Flint's denizens had caught many of the same hip hop bugs as Detroit and, as represented in films like *Roger and Me* (1989) by Michael Moore, had many of the same post-industrial difficulties as Detroit, the larger city an hour to the south. “That's Life” off of Breed's 1991's album *MC Breed and DFC* shouted out Flint over all other geographies (“I ain't speaking on Compton, LA, Detroit, NYC/Man I'm talking about Flint.”). But Breed's stylistic focus on creating a hybrid Flint rap sound would die hard as he began to work with West Coast and Southern rappers in the 1990s. Breed's deepest commitment

musically was former Detroiter George Clinton whom Breed sampled throughout his career and worked with on the commercially successful *Funkafied* (1994). Breed brought the Midwest and, indirectly, Detroit to a national stage, performed and rapped with some of the biggest names in hip hop, and despite leaving the area for significant portions of his career, held down the funk in the region's sonic heritage. The 37-year-old rapper died in November of 2008 of kidney failure.²⁵⁰

If international consumption patterns were not enough, the white DJ turned MC Kid Rock, one of the first rappers from Detroit to sign a national record label deal, had his career derailed in the backlash over white rapper Vanilla Ice. The Dallas native had famously lied about his background, destroying his credibility, and putting a cloud over any white rapper's claims to hip hop authenticity. The result for Detroit's Kid Rock was the muting of his early major label success and the splitting up of his own local crew. He would only re-emerge in the late 1990s after revamping his sound and performing on MTV shows, linking his career with the rise of "rap-rock" groups like Limp Bizkit. For the rest of the scene, a well-documented collapse of national rap tours at the time made it difficult for even larger local groups to get any national coverage. Record label buy-outs and shutdowns inspired by corporate conglomeration and the tightening of the airwaves due to the rise of companies like Clear Channel, would virtually guarantee that "regional" hip hop artists would not surface successfully until the late 1990s.

If Detroit artists were going to succeed, they would have to define success on their own terms. There were multiple strategies. Some artists like Kid Rock and Boss picked up and left in order to pursue coastal opportunities. Others responded by gathering around Maurice Malone's early 1990s nomadic hip hop party, the Rhythm Kitchen, which finally settled at The Hip Hop

²⁵⁰ Jon Caramanica, "MC Breed, 37, Rapper With Midwest Roots, is Dead," *New York Times*, 26 November 2008.

Shop. This “Golden Age” community, which included a poetry scene, provided a place where local MCs could develop their skills with a small but dedicated audience inspired by the global explosion of hip hop culture.

The Hip Hop Shop was a permanent physical space on 15736 West 7 Mile Road started by Maurice Malone. From 1993-1997 the Shop was the center of Detroit’s underground hip hop community during its golden age. In an interview Malone discussed the shop, Detroit hip hop, and his relationship to it. Malone was a long-time member of Detroit’s post-Motown music scene since the early 1980s. He first started as a party promoter in high school within the nascent techno scene before discovering fashion design as a practical passion. In 1989 he started a members-only loft party called Underground Nation in downtown Detroit. An outgrowth of his fashion interests, the party featured techno and house music and inspired many in the early rave scene. But it was his early 1990s travels to New York and Brooklyn in order to push his line of jeans that changed his musical allegiances. There he connected with that city’s hip hop culture, with artists like A Tribe Called Quest’s Q-Tip and attending parties that looked and sounded like little he had seen in Detroit. The experience encouraged Malone to try to throw parties with rap performances back in Detroit. By the fall of 1991 Malone was back in Detroit in order to bring what he had seen in New York back with him. With a new partner, Tracey “Trac Bryd” Byrd, Malone started the Rhythm Kitchen. Though associated with Stanley’s Chinese Restaurant, the Rhythm Kitchen was more of a production company than a physical space that would throw open-mic parties and promote rap concerts, like Gang Starr and Leaders of the New School, at bigger venues in town. At the open mics, Malone would DJ, this time as DJ Soul Finger, with an MC performance in the middle. It was these performances, many at Stanley’s and later at The Hip Hop Shop, where the likes of Phat Kat met people like Jay Dee, Proof hosted battles with

Eminem, and local heroes Laswunzout featuring Loe Louis (then known as Lo-key) would bubble on the brink of success. Detroit's nascent hip hop scene, with Malone's forward thinking, had found a formula that was working.

The blueprint for the shop was the sale of Malone's jeans and other hip-hop-culture specific commodities with open mic battles on Saturday afternoons. B-Boy's danced in the shop, while on Saturday evenings from 5-7 PM rap battles raged overseen by long-time employee Proof. Shoppers came from everywhere since the shop was, according to Malone unique in the entire world in the early 1990s. It was wholly dedicated to hip hop culture, a place where visitors could hang out with MCs, buy hip hop fashion, and talk about hip hop culture, as well as battle your way to a Hip Hop Shop t-shirt (and bragging rights). To illustrate the point, Wu Tang Clan came by just to check the store and liked it so much they were willing to play a concert for free. Malone set up the show at the Music Institute space on Broadway downtown, a space that had been central to the height of the techno scene. The Shop had made it possible. Tags from all over the world filled the dressing room walls and everyone who was there who is still making music cites it as an influence.

With Maurice Malone long-gone from the Detroit scene, the best place to still dip into Detroit's blend of urban culture and style is at the place where Malone debuted his merchandise before The Hip Hop Shop ever existed: Spectacles. Located on 230 East Grand River in a downtown shopping area called Harmonie Park, Spectacles still features up-to-date street fashion and accessories from across the country and Detroit, as well as music, magazines, and books. In other words, it is the perfect place to buy an outfit for Saturday night as well as buy copies of Donald Goines' books. The store's owner and former business manager for Malone, Zana Smith, has been involved in small businesses in Detroit since the 1970s, eventually becoming a club

promoter who worked with proto-techno DJs after the fall of disco in the late 1970s. As a sign of her longstanding reputation in this area, the last time Jeff “The Wizard” Mills came “home” to play Detroit in 2008 it was at a show promoted by Smith. Smith was also critically involved in the Detroit’s nascent poetry scene in the early 1990s. Inspired by the New York poetry scene, local poets and emcees had begun to recite their poetry and verses when they came into Smith’s shop which led her to start a Tuesday night event at the recently opened Pour’ Me Café downtown in 1994. What started as an off-night experiment became the venue’s strongest night and another spark for the local scene.

After a falling out with the cafe, Smith moved the night to Carl and Cyrus Shaw’s Café Mahogany where it ran for approximately three years under her guidance. These years saw artists like Proof, Black Thought, Common, Jay Dee, Dwele, and many others hone and show off their emerging skills in a vibrant scene that complemented what was going on at venues like The Hip Hop Shop. After Smith left the night it continued, this time under the direction of Girard Ivory, DJ Carl “The Invisible Man,” and Fluent, until the venue closed shortly after getting a liquor license in the late 1990s. Dwele’s song, “Lady of Mahogany,” off of *Subject* (Virgin, 2003), pays tribute to the venue (“While she’s getting’ the soda, I’m gonna slide to the sofa and proceed to kick monopoly to lady of Mahogany.”) The poetry scene’s inspiration can be found in the more conscious moments of Mahogany-regulars Slum Village’s work as well. The musicians from Mahogany’s later years—a group that includes rapper and freelance writer Khary Turner—would go on to form The Black Bottom Collective. Smith, like she has since 1984, continues to throw parties and invite producers, DJs, poets, scene members, and even tourists to interact under the elevated ceiling of her store.

It is difficult to talk about post-Motown Detroit music, from techno and hip hop to garage rock, without talking about Saint Andrew's Hall. Though the Rhythm Kitchen shows and The Hip Hop Shop cemented an underground following—a movement of back-packing hip hop fans more concerned with local MC battles than national deals—it was Saint Andrews' "Three Floors of Fun," inspired by Maurice Malone in the mid-1990s, that crossed the scene over to a larger, whiter suburban audience that could expand their personal tastes by moving up and down the club's stairs. Malone's adventure with the venue started in the fall of 1993 when Amir Daiza's Ritual Promotion company allowed Malone to program events in the basement space of Saint Andrew's called The Shelter on Monday nights. The Shelter itself had already become an underground dance spot in the late 1980s and early 1990s, crossing alternative and industrial music with acid house, rap, and techno records with DJs like Scott "Go-Go" Gordon and later, Richie "Plastikman" Hawtin. But it was Malone's events, with rap performances at the peak of the party, which brought a solidly hip hop audience to the venue. The night was quickly a success. Within a year, though, Malone was told that security was afraid of his crowd and the night was discontinued—only to open a month later with other promoters. According to Malone, Daiza had taken the concept and cut out the middleman. Malone moved his parties nearby to a space on Broadway but soon came back to rent out all three floors of the venue for bigger parties—like Leaders of the New School—that were too big for the Shelter alone.

These "Three Floors of Fun" events took on a life of their own as Daiza saw their profitability. Moved to Saturday nights, "Three Floors of Fun" helped Detroit hip hop find its broader audience, where suburban kids youth could mix across races and sounds, and bob their heads to DJs like Hip Hop Shop regular Mike "House Shoes" Buchanan. Now a DJ in Los Angeles, Shoes is an evangelist for Detroit rap with his shows and Podcasts, and his sermons

began on 431 East Congress on the outskirts of Greektown in downtown Detroit. A Saint Andrew's resident for ten years starting in 1994, Buchanan was and is a savvy hip hop populist, demanding that his crowds sing along to tracks. At the same time, he would break-corporate 12" records in the faces of label representatives. The night sputtered out though shortly after the Eminem revolution. Now controlled and booked largely by Live Nation (formerly Clear Channel), Saint Andrew's is still a good place to see Detroit music, from rock to hip hop.

These venues would eventually produce many of the artists now considered to represent Detroit hip hop, from Slum Village to Eminem. But this underground scene, convinced of its own authenticity and largely shut out from larger corporate opportunities on national labels or even local radio, was largely invisible and impenetrable to outsiders. The result was that even at its creative height in the mid-1990s, Detroit's underground could not make either Eminem's *Infinite* (1996) or Slum Village's *Fantastic Vol. 1* (1997) hits outside its own environs. Instead, another even more unlikely "underground" scene in Detroit was getting their group a major label deal and four straight gold and platinum records. Spurned by the local rap underground and ignored initially by national labels, Insane Clown Posse (ICP) chose to focus their attention on growing a loyal fan-base with obsessive local promotion, interactive high-energy stage-shows, and numerous giveaways and collectibles revolving around their Esham-and-Geto-Boys-inspired "horrorcore" sound. The loosely defined genre featured sexualized tales of murder and mayhem, most of them screamed by vile-mouthed, angry young men, over methodical, dirge-like production. Many in the Detroit area loved it. The result was an audience that at least in numbers was the envy of every rap group in Detroit.

Malone closed The Hip Hop Shop and went back to New York City in 1997. Much to Malone's chagrin, a shop with the same name opened in 2005 under different management but

has since closed. Over the years, other venues, like the Wired Frog in Eastpointe, and even Proof's Fight Club nights held downtown near his Iron Fist offices, attempted to take over the open mic scene after the Shop's closing. A video of Eminem and Proof at The Hip Hop Shop now sits on Maurice Malone's "Hip Hop Shop by Maurice Malone" Web site a placeholder for Malone's plans for reopening The Hip Hop Shop as a world-wide franchise.²⁵¹

5.5 THE SOURCE

It was funny. I was in the hood but never of it. I was always [pause] around cats that were hardcore but that just wasn't me. That wasn't me. I was the cat who was about education. I could identify but I never wanted to pretend to understand what it was like to be that hood dude because to me that's just as much as a front [laughs]. I'm a studio gangsta if I do that. Because of that we [Open Mic] were more like—if Kaos and Mystro were more like a Public Enemy, we were a De La Soul. I think that's a good analogy for us..... They had an idea of what Detroit was like and it was all along the lines of the whole "Murder Capital" image and they didn't think they'd be able to market a group coming out of Detroit that did not reflect the national reputation. They said this informally. And it was funny because when I teach, I talk about how labels, record companies often sign artists and projected them onto the national consciousness in the manner and the imagery that they thought would be most marketable. At the time, Detroit was seen as this hardcore city. We were Young Boys Incorporated. We were, at the time, the home of crack cocaine which is why *The Source* asked me to write that story. And yeah, if I'm living in New York, or I'm a record exec, I understand the perspective. Everybody has a perspective of a different city. But it wasn't us so we just didn't bite the deal. [We] stayed in school.

— Khary Turner

At the end of the 1980s, Khary Turner left Detroit for Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. However the rap group that he was an MC in, Open Mic, continued to record during breaks and

²⁵¹ <<http://www.thehiphopshop.com/>> (accessed 12 March 2011).

on weekends. At school and when he traveled, Turner remembers that being from Detroit—whether he was an MC or not—gave him respect.

It was automatic respect that came with being from Detroit. It didn't matter who you were. The perception was that if you were from Detroit, you knew. If you were from Detroit—and to an extent it was true. You're not going to meet too many cats from Detroit who are not "sawed off" a little bit. [laughs] You know. So, yeah it worked.

However, Turner and his crew also had talent built from years of performing and recording. Despite working part-time they were able to corner some important rap gigs back in Detroit, opening for Todd "Too \$hort" Shaw from Oakland, California and, one time, at the Grand Quarter in Detroit's "New Center" area for Christopher "Notorious B.I.G." / "Biggie Smalls" Wallace from Brooklyn, New York whose album *Ready to Die* had just been released. Turner did not meet Biggie at the latter gig—he came in the back and left right after the show—but remembers it being a good show from both his group and Biggie himself.

At one point Open Mic were offered a 12" record deal. However, New York's Select Records, which Turner described as a "boutique" label at the time, were interested in the group "going gangsta."

We turned them down because they wanted us to go gangsta. This was after '86. NWA was taking off. Gangsta [rap] was becoming popular. It was out-selling east-coast forms of hip hop. At the time, most Detroit acts mimicked what was coming out of the east coast. And we turned the deal down. Because even then we had an identity and we weren't trying to be gangstas.

Turner was not done with New York City though. In 1994, after sending a set of clips from Xavier's student newspaper to *The Source*, then and still a major publication covering rap music, then editor Reginald Dennis gave him a call. Dennis pitched him the piece: find two drug dealers and two drug takers and tell their stories as part of a feature on the ten year anniversary of the emergence of crack cocaine in Detroit. The piece would be called "The House That Crack Built." It was an exciting opportunity for a young writer and "scholar of hip hop" just out of college. But

the sidebar his editors wanted him to also write, called “The Ten Crack Commandments,” troubled the socially conscious Turner.

I didn’t want to write the piece. At the time. And I told my editor that. I didn’t want to write the story because—I thought the “House that Crack Built” was constructive. I thought the “Ten Crack Commandments” was destructive. I had a very heavy conscience about it. [When he had a conversation with Dennis] I was nervous as hell because this was my first story. But as a journalist I had to stick by my own ethic and at least let them know that [...] writing a survival list for drug dealers without writing anything to say that we don’t condone it, we’re not trying to show you how to survive as a dealer seemed wrong to me.

He wrote the piece and got, in his words, his “props.”

The Saint Andrew’s cats were like, “Yo! You writing for *The Source* now? Damn!” It was like that. And it was cool. I really felt like I was—I felt like Detroit had a representative. Detroit hip hop had a real representative who understood, who now understood what it was like to be in front of the mic and how it was to look upon the cats who were on the mic and on the turntables. I felt good because the city had that representative in one person.”

However the story did not end there. Two weeks after Biggie’s death he got a call. Biggie, in a highly inventive moment that Turner still admires, had taken Turner’s side-bar and made it into a song. “I was like, ‘You’ve got to be fuckin’ kidding me.’ And at the time, I was still conflicted over the sidebar. So I’m like [...] this is not what I wanted to happen. [laughs] It felt like my worst nightmare come true. And then I heard the song, and it was a damn good record.” Turner waited for the album came out to hear the track—he had to make sure Biggie had really copied the piece before Turner approached Biggie’s record company and family. But he had.

What I later came to understand that—that’s the part of reporting that makes it very important for the writer to remove himself or herself from the story. That was my feeling. But as the journalist I have the responsibility to tell their story. And the truth is, like it or not, that’s part of their existence. So when these cats tell me that [flips through article] there survival tips are, ok, ‘Never let anyone know how much money you have,’ ‘never let anyone know what your next move will be,’ ‘trust no one,’ ‘never use what you sell,’ never give credit—[raps ala Biggie] a goddamn credit? debt it, think a crack-head paying you back? forget it,’ ‘never sell out of your own home,’ ‘keep family and business separate,’ ‘never pack your stash on your person,’ ‘if you’re not being arrested, never be seen communicating with police,’ ‘grave consignment—grave confinement, don’t give

consignment deals to crackheads.’ That’s their rules. [laughs] That’s their rules. You know? I had to tell that story.

Until now, however, no one has written about Turner’s story. Turner has turned down one interview on the subject from the magazine *Murder Dog* in the 1990s and in 2007 when I conducted my interview with him, he resisted me putting the story in the chapter. However, in 2011 his only concern is that I make clear that Turner did not sue Biggie’s family or the label. Instead he simply got a co-writing credit on one of hip hop’s contemporary classics.

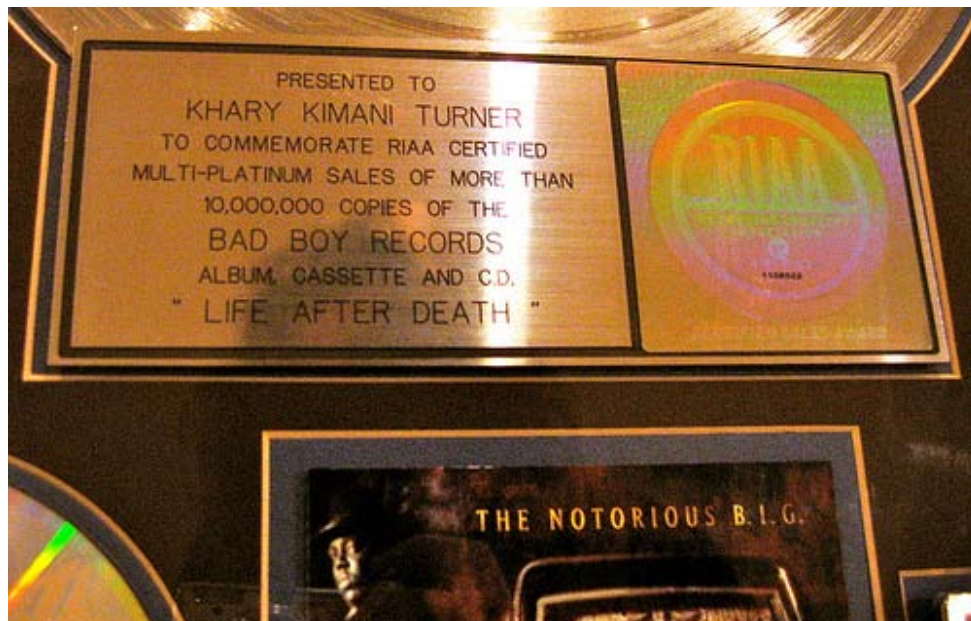


Figure 5-8. Platinum record commemorating Khary Turner’s co-writing credit on “The Ten Crack Commandments.”

Turner’s story is complicated and he knows it is. Detroit’s post-Motown reputation had been shaped throughout Turner’s life by many who were not from Detroit unlike the Motown Records era in which Detroiters themselves had played at least some major role in their own presentation and representation to the world. However, as those raised on Detroit’s post-Motown soundscape had matured they took their skills and ideas out of the city with the idea that they

would be able to shape that larger world. When they did however they came face-to-face with Detroit's most obvious stereotypes. However, Turner is not bitter about Biggie's appropriation of his song. On the contrary.

Biggie has a story and his story does involve some days as a drug dealer. That's not what made Biggie great as an artist. I think what made him great was that he often talked about how he crafted his stories. And he often said that, and I have read in interview, and heard an interview.... but I've heard Biggie say that he did not do everything that he rapped about. But he is around people who have told the stories. So if one of the people who he got a story from happened to be from Detroit, that's cool. You know I don't have a problem with that. I have a problem with MCs who say that they do it and they didn't. I have a much higher respect for the MC who says, "You know what? I picked up this story, it's the type of story that happens around my way, and I'm familiar with it, even if I wasn't hands-on involved in its execution. But I just fashioned it into a hell of a song." Well you know what I call you? A songwriter. That's what song writing is.

5.6 THE PRESSURE IN HEAVEN

The creativity and freedom of the crowd that Ken Collier saw at Todd's flowed directly into what he would do for almost eight years at Heaven for a predominantly black and gay crowd. As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, Collier transformed the white, gay club into an underground, post-Motown, dance Mecca. Heaven is a place where a McDonalds now stands but no one who was there can easily forget, a place where before Madonna's "Vogue" audiences could see drag queens sweating it out in vogue circles and dancers could hear "bitch tracks" like Lil' Louis's "Club Lonely" with its spoken introduction, "There is no guest list *tonight!*" These tracks, sassy and up-tempo, punctuated nights at Heaven and they presented a bigger-than-life stage for a younger dance generation.

Now an instrumentalist and producer, Maurice "Pirahnahead" Herd remembers being introduced to Collier by a six-foot drag queen. At the time he remembers being scared to death,

but he quickly sensed what Ken's smiling face and engaging music was supposed to mean. "He seemed to be saying to us, 'This is life. Come in and enjoy it with me.'"²⁵² Former radio and downtown club DJ Scott "Go-Go" Gordon recalls Collier's impact on the scene and was struck by his soulfulness. In the midst of a "cutting-edge" crowd, with a "wall-of-sound" music system, and after waiting in a long line outside at 3 a.m., Gordon remembers Collier's nights at Heaven as "the place to be." He says Collier would, "walk a tightrope between gay anthems and house without offending anybody and pleasing everybody." A place where, according to the well-versed DJ, British duo Pat & Mick's "Use it Up and Wear it Out" would mix with Chicago house producer Adonis' "No Way Back."

Heaven's sound system was remarkable and Collier worked it. The treble speakers jutted from the club's ceiling and the bass bins—the famous "Earthquakes"—were situated at floor level. The results, according to longtime Detroit DJ Norm Talley, were "ferocious," as Collier would tweak the highs, and drop the bass out completely before kicking them in at peak moments. But not everything was ideal at Heaven. A live recording from the era has Collier demanding, "Security to the dance floor! Security!" Though just a random moment from years of DJing at the club, it is clear from interviews that the line between "edgy" and "dangerous" was blurred at Heaven as the crowd—which peaked around 3 a.m.—mixed with the economically depressed area surrounding it. Parallel to all of this was the gradual disintegration of the underground scene itself. Some interviews remembers Collier playing "The Pressure" by the Sounds of Blackness when he heard that one of Heaven's tight-knit community had died. Going to funerals, sending flowers, and sharing a few words about dead friends became semi-regular

²⁵² Maurice "Pirahnahead" Herd, interview by author, 26 January 2011.

occurrences for Heaven regulars. AIDS, drugs and violence took their toll on both the club and Detroit in the 1990s.



Figure 5-9. Sandy Cicarelli and Keith Foster's AIDS quilt panel, 1996. Before they died, Cicarelli and Foster were owners of Times Square. The club is featured in Cicarelli's panel.

When Heaven closed to make way for a McDonald's, Collier moved to Times Square downtown and Off Broadway East off I-94. But the venues were not Heaven. "Things started to go down for him after Heaven closed," says Stacey Hale. Collier had obviously found a home at Heaven, a place where his was a marquee name, like Levan at the Garage or Knuckles at the Warehouse. Though he played a handful of tour dates in the United States and a few shows abroad near the end of his life, including one in Berlin, Collier rarely strayed far from home. The DJ was a Detroit native who stayed there his whole life. Collier's friends and devotees formed the now-defunct Ken Collier Memorial Fund (KCMF) in 1997, which threw parties to raise money

and awareness for diabetes, the disease that finally killed Collier.²⁵³ Collier's death left a hole in an already tattered scene. Though dance music was just taking off internationally, with techno DJs traveling the world and raves taking off in warehouses in Detroit, the progressive/house music and its DJs had fallen by the wayside. The new music was pitched up faster, had fewer vocals, and, for many, had lost the original soul that fans had originally sought. A mixed scene, which had come so far so quickly, resegregated. Collier's death seemed to close the door on a Detroit era. Clubs like Todd's and Heaven, as well as the older, mostly forgotten stops in Collier's DJ travels, stretched an economically stuttering and racially divided Detroit to the limit. Collier and the clubs he played explored how loud, beautiful, ugly, and racially and sexually mixed Detroit could be. Complex, contradictory, hazy, utopian, and even cautionary, the stories still echo around DJs like Ken Collier's name.

5.7 CONCLUSION: FAMILY FUNKTION

Jim and [Papa] Ron make-up only part of the Family; the rest are Brian Gillespie, Munk, Jerry the Cat.... The concept was simple: Jim and Ron, along with Brian, Munk, and Jerry, were individually doing the same thing they're doing now but decided to pool their efforts in order to bring their friends together. "We began talking about a family thing because it could draw everybody's group of friends," Ron explains. Like most families, each member brought different experiences (including DJ-ing and promoting) to a shared vision. "Detroit grew somewhat stale," Jim says. "People have been waiting for something like this for a long time. (Our parties attract) such a diversity of people: different age groups, white kids, black kids, straight kids, gay kids, hip-hop kids, techno kids. People loved it."²⁵⁴

²⁵³ According to Robert Troutman and Trina Brooks, the KCMF was eventually asked by Collier's family to cease its work and its parties.

²⁵⁴ Susan Salas, "Family Funktion," *The Left Bank Publication* 4 (1996): 66-67.

After the police interventions at “Calgary,” Voom dissolved into its component parts. Voom itself would try to start a diner called Sid’s in Pontiac. It would never open. Reaume would continue to put on events at Pyramid, another club in Pontiac. Bogl would continue to throw parties as Burnt Fabric in the coming years. Bieschke, burnt out, would eventually leave Detroit for San Francisco where he has stayed. He is now a writer at the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*.

Derrick May, who had become friends with Voom through it all, had pitched the idea of a large electronic music festival downtown. Bieschke and Bogl remember offering up Movement, jokingly, as a possible name for the festival, a name they always thought of referring to its scatological meaning. In the early twenty-first century the name would come back when Derrick May finally did take control of the Detroit Electronic Music Festival. It is still the name of the festival today.²⁵⁵ After years of different sponsorship deals, the Movement festival is finally establishing fiscal consistency, with Myspace and Red Bull, among others, as corporate sponsors. The fit between underground music, club culture and commercial culture is finally finding a consistent mix, significant to keep a festival for going for nine years. This shift in marketing and advertising to youth was being toyed with outfits like Voom in the early 1990s. Now it is a taken-for-granted part of the culture industry landscape.²⁵⁶

While these scenes were predominantly black, the culture, from B-Boying to beats, crossed over at places like Alvin’s, a club near Wayne State University, with its Family Funktion Wednesdays. Featuring DJs Ron “Papa Ron” Olson, Brian Gillespie, Alvin “Munk” Hill and Jim Stone, the night of diverse musical sounds, from Acid Jazz to hip hop, started off as a one-off record release party in the spring of 1995; by popular demand the night did not end until almost

²⁵⁵ Movement, myspace page <<http://www.myspace.com/detroitmusicfest>> (18 April 2008).

²⁵⁶ Timothy D. Taylor, “The Changing Shape of the Culture Industry; or, How Did Electronica Music Get into Television Commercials?,” *Television and New Media* 3 (2007): 235-238.

three years later.²⁵⁷ Family Funktion, unlike the Music Institute, mixed genres bringing a diverse group of music lovers—black, white, gay and straight—together. According to co-founder Stone, “Everyone was hungry for something new and different.”

In this chapter, I have just some of the story about how that “something new and different” happened and continued to happen in Detroit’s post-Motown soundscape. At its best, the promoters, DJs, performers, and clubs from this era catered to multiple audiences, many times under the same roof. The interconnectedness of Detroit’s contemporary soundscape is significant. In my final chapter though I will tell the story of how that interconnectedness has been challenged on a national, even global, scale.

²⁵⁷ Jim Stone, interview by author, 13 July 2008.

6.0 SYNC: THE PLACE IS HERE. THE TIME IS NOW, 1999-2011

In the strangest convergence of underground and mainstream since Chuck Manson met the Beach Boys, Eminem made his first Detroit appearance since releasing his now-platinum-selling *Slim Shady* LP at BTM Productions' "True Masters" rave Saturday night. The scene outside—as could be expected—was a madhouse, with a line 15 ravers wide still a block long just an hour before the Slim One's 1:45 a.m. appearance.... For his part, Eminem didn't disappoint, coming onstage in a "HONKY" T-shirt flanked by bodyguards as flashpot pyrotechnics—Detroit Rock City!!—went off on the opening beat of "Brain Damage." Even though the onstage entourage of rap scenesters basking in reflective glory threatened to overwhelm his performance at times, Eminem showed why his skills have carried him platinum. He and MC Proof freestyled over Redman's "Pick It Up," covered (!) Dr. Dre's "Nuthin' But a G Thang" before tightening up for "Role Model," "Just Don't Give a Fuck" and "Still Don't Give a Fuck." So tight were these that the closing "MTV Spring Break" anthem, "My Name Is," seemed strangely anticlimactic.²⁵⁸

—Hobey Echlin, *Metro Times*

According to photographer Doug Coombe it was like Beatlemania in the mid-1960s—or maybe Altamont Speedway and the Rolling Stones at the '60s end.²⁵⁹ The Hell's Angels were doing security at a Warehouse party on Detroit's east side, a space simply named after the corner it was located on: Mack and Bellevue. Coombe photographed for a half hour.

There was a small barricade in front of the stage. I was getting smashed by young women trying to touch Eminem. It's like I wasn't even there to them. I literally got boobs smashed in my face by the fans trying to touch Em. It sounds awesome—not really that awesome. After a half hour I was getting pinned between the barricade and the stage and realized I would be trampled if I didn't get the fuck out." So I got up on the stage between songs to exit stage left (no Rush reference intended) when someone in Em's

²⁵⁸ Hobey Echlin, "Pitch'd: Weird Scenes Inside the Gold Mine," *Metro Times* 7 April 1999.

²⁵⁹ Doug Coombe, personal correspondence, 7 March 2011.

posse inadvertently bumped me off the stage before I made the stairs. The stage was about 4 feet off the ground. I had my camera in one hand, my flash in the other. I protected them and smashed the shit out of my shin in the process. It was totally exhilarating, totally worth it. I felt like I had just been in a war zone.

Coombe, attempting to get a shot of the recently *Rolling Stone*-worthy Eminem, still has a scar on his leg to back up his version of events.



Figure 6-1. Proof and Eminem 1999.

In the late 1990s and 2000s, Detroit musicians conquered, yet again, the global soundscape. In hip hop circles, artists like Eminem were able to take advantage of shifts at the center of youth marketing to become global successes. The late 1990s saw the rise of what PBS correspondent Douglas Rushkoff in the 2001 documentary *Merchants of Cool* called the “mooks” and the “midriffs” as marketing terms in the wars over teenage dollars. The midriffs stereotype was provided by Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, while the “mooks” were modeled after characters on MTV’s “Jackass” and “Tom Green Show.” This moment fit well with three Detroit acts, all of which were represented in the Billboard Charts in the summer of

1999: Kid Rock, ICP and Eminem. The first two artists began to expand their audience in time to rise with artists like Limp Bizkit at the large, nationally televised Woodstock 1999 concerts. But it was Eminem's mushrooming popularity in 1999 that radically changed Detroit's music scene. Using his newly found commercial success, Eminem shepherded certain local artists onto an international arena while his mere presence in the media spotlight reflected attention onto Detroit's wider culture whether that attention was wanted or not.

While Eminem's major label success starting in 1999 eventually provided opportunities for his closest compatriots, like the members of D-12, it was Jay Dee's rise as a top producer and master of the 1990's sampling technology that moved another set of more independently minded artists to national and international exposure. Detroit-raised artists like Phat Kat, Guilty Simpson, Frank 'n' Dank, Waajeed, Black Milk, and others regularly cite Dilla, even after his death in 2006, as a source for beats and inspiration. A series of independent labels—though few Detroit-based—have released records by these rappers, including California's Look, Stones Throw, and Ubiquity. The result has been Detroit rap's continuing underground popularity around the country and world. In early 2006, Detroit hip hop writer, fan, and Renaissance Soul Blog writer, Kelly "K-Fresh" Frazier argued this very point stating in an article from *Real Detroit Weekly*, "Detroit hip-hop has got its foot in the door in all aspects of the game. We have major label, national independent, regional and local releases. Our artists have the ability to pack crowds locally, as well as sell out venues worldwide. Unfortunately, none of this is accomplished on a reasonably consistent basis, and our 'potential' is limitless."²⁶⁰

Beyond Hollywood films and still operating home studios, there has also been Detroit's developing as a major front in the struggle over hip hop politics. In *Hip Hop Matters*, author S.

²⁶⁰ Frazier, Kelly "K-Fresh" Frazier, "Breakin' Records," *Real Detroit Weekly*, January 4, 2006.

Craig Watkins described the campaign, election, and administration of then Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick in 2002—Detroit’s “hip hop Mayor”—as a case-study in the struggles over a post-Civil Rights agenda for those born in the age of hip hop.²⁶¹ Kilpatrick, in his thirties, made Detroit youth a center of administration goals with his “Mayor’s Time” initiative, a program designed to address and engage Detroit youth by providing activities to fill teens’ potentially unstructured time after school.²⁶² Watkins saw Kilpatrick as a harbinger of a new, global as well as national, hip hop politics rooted in youth and community activism. In a little over ten years, from the mid-1990s production of Jay Dee to the mid-2000s with the world-conquering success of Eminem and rise of figures like Kilpatrick, Detroit had changed both the sonic landscape of hip hop and, for some, its politics.

For years Detroit’s underground music scene had been fostered by clubs: legal and after-hours, straight and gay, black, white, and other. With the festival and the global success of artists like Eminem and the White Stripes, the lens of how the city and its citizens viewed its post-Motown legacy began, slowly to shift. Yes, Motown was still a major nostalgic player in the city’s understanding of itself. But business and civic leaders began to recognize the relationship between musical culture and any revitalized, regional, Detroit. To top it off, one of the largest success stories was the Detroit Electronic Music Festival (DEMF), now called Movement, gave local acts and audiences a chance to create a critical mass at least one time a year. Channeling an anonymous member of a focus group, Richard Florida used the festival as an example of the importance of “authenticity” in building high-tech, highly creative, urban cities.²⁶³ Detroit music, despite decades of struggle, was finally in sync. Eminem and Proof’s appearance at a rave in

²⁶¹ Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 187-192, 196-205.

²⁶² Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 197-199.

²⁶³ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 228-229.

1999 nodded to the convergence of scenes and, soon, the convergence of media. Music technologies emerged that changed the very basis of the remix aesthetic challenging ears and audiences. By the end of the decade, the festival, the fruition in many ways of decades of underground musical activism was still at the cutting edge of audio-visual experience.

The scene was in sync but there were struggles and not everything jelled. Eminem would insult techno on record and, with *8 Mile*, distance himself from the hybrid cultures—including rave—that had enabled his success. And the festival, though powerful, struggled for years to stay afloat. My interviewees from this era witnessed these moments where the music and the city seemed to click—and the moments when they were as out of sync as Greg Collier’s descriptions of bad record mixing as hearing “Clydesdales.”

Many metro-Detroiters were forever emboldened by this burst of energy and set their sights on finding a sonic attitude commensurate with their experiences and musical educations. I became a participant in this period, as well. Returning from college in Minnesota in 1999, I became a freelance music critic, regular audience member, and sometimes dancer, within the scene. My personal story and voice then collaborates with the voices and stories of musicians to provide a possibility for reflection about a time period when Detroit’s post-Motown scene finally got its opportunity to join the civic conversation. What we all did—and what we are doing—with that opportunity is the subject of this chapter.

6.1 REMAKE/REMODEL

There is an energy... it doesn’t go away to quickly. The flame—sometimes it gets really hot, the burners are really turned up to 7 or 8 or 10, and other times, it’s just a flicker, but the flame is always there. I think Detroit is that kind of place. And we don’t really

understand—we shouldn't understand it too much—we try to intellectualize it too much. There is just something about this place, the people and the place, that keep this going and music the expression that works best in terms of the environment or where we are, the region, it's psyche, it's work ethic, it's a producer-driven culture. We take product very seriously here. We have manufactured things, we've fabricated things, we will things into existence, we take things out of nothing and make something out of them. This is what we do here. And I think. We are... there is nothing about it—we don't cheat the product. We don't cheat what we do. We're not cheating.²⁶⁴

— Walter Wasacz

In May 1974, a group of young, male, recent high school graduates, from Hamtramck got into a scuffle with a similar group of “east side” boys over who had the right seats at a Roxy Music show at Ford Auditorium. In platform shoes and makeup, Walter Wasacz (pronounced Wawsak), already an athletic kid over 6-feet tall, was an imposing figure. He claims his group was no different. Wasacz remembers that the Grosse Pointe youths had to move to the row behind. Wasacz had grown up in Hamtramck, as John Collins had, in the 1950s and '60s. His parents worked hard for a middle class existence in a working class town whose main employer was the huge auto-plant on the south side of town—Dodge Main. In the 1960s, like many in his peer group he had heard the sounds of Motown played by young girls in his neighborhood on 45. However, he also heard the call from British groups like the Beatles and Rolling Stones. Talking about it over forty years later, Wasacz is now aware of the influence of Detroit music, especially its R & B and soul music, on those British bands that he eventually fell for, including Roxy Music and David Bowie in the 1970s. “It was the best thing that people like Bowie or Roxy Music could do for their careers was come to Detroit. It changed them.”

The Roxy Music show was a turning point for Wasacz. It was one of the first big shows he remembers going to that featured music of his generation far different from his parents and

²⁶⁴ Walter Wasacz, interview by author, 23 February 2011.

even other peers at the Catholic School he attended for high school. He began going to multiple shows a month. Two trips during to New York City—one in 1975, the other in 1976—allowed him to see the fledgling punk scene in that city. But it was a trip to London in 1977 as punk was spewing across Europe and back into the United States. When he returned to Wayne State where he was finishing his English degree, he wrote a piece for the student paper the *South End* called “Echoes of the Underbelly,” chronicling his time there. The piece launched what would, with fits and starts, become Wasacz’s long-time career as a journalist. With some mentoring from some older Detroiters—rocker David Keeps in Detroit and former-Detroit writer Cynthia Rose in London—Wasacz began writing professionally for London-based magazines like *Sounds* and the *NME*, then the New York Rocker before landing some pieces for *Creem* in 1979. However, today Wasacz’s career is not primarily focused on rock ‘n’ roll or even whatever remains of punk music. Instead, in the mid-1990s Wasacz was brought into Detroit techno and the rave scene. In spring 1995, *Details* magazine requested a piece on Richie Hawtin then touring as Plastikman, from Wasacz. At the time, Wasacz was making a major transition in his life. He had been living with a girlfriend outside of Detroit in rural Dexter and had been working with troubled teens for a number of years. He had moved away from the music scene. But now, at 39, he found himself in a car driving to a party just outside of Lansing with a twenty-four-year-old Richie Hawtin who seemed to already have lived one life—he told Wasacz that he was “chilling out”—and was in the midst of a techno scene that Wasacz had only heard glimpses of. And then Motor opened in Hamtramck and Wasacz, instead of being at the periphery of the dance scene, was in the heart of it.

6.2 MOTOR

I can say without the slightest hesitation that we worked our asses off to help support the Detroit techno community as a whole, and the international techno scene at large. We made some of our best friends during those short few years at Motor, and we had some of the best nights of our lives. Not every night was that good—how can it be when your club is open three nights a week, every single week. But when it really mattered. When the event was really special. We never let the community down.²⁶⁵

— Joshua Glazer

Joshua Glazer was at that Plastikman show at that same bingo hall just outside of Lansing in 1995. A student at Michigan State University more into independent rock music than rave at the time, Glazer would eventually become part of the team that managed and produced shows at Motor. In 2002, the Motor Lounge in Hamtramck, a city within Detroit's east side, closed after six years. At that time, Robert Gorell, a freelance writer for the *Metro Times* recently graduated from the University of Michigan, attempted to tell the story of the club's rise and fall.²⁶⁶ Only a year before, in the same paper, I had marked the club's fifth anniversary with an upbeat story in which the club's owner, Dan Sordyl, had been looking to expand his operations.²⁶⁷ The fine line between success and failure in Detroit's nightlife had shown itself again.

In 1996, Dan Sordyl, Motor's long-time day-to-day manager, joined up with former private-party promoter Steven Sowers and light-sound specialist Carlos Oxholm to form a new club. The eventual product, Motor, would utilize the threesome's combined knowledge of clubs

²⁶⁵ Joshua Glazer, correspondence with author, 18 March 2011. After our correspondence Glazer began Blogging about his experiences at Motor. There is some overlap in what he shared with me and what he has decided to share online. See <<http://jglazer.tumblr.com/>> (accessed 11 April 2011).

²⁶⁶ Robert Gorell, "Last Dance: Motor Grinds to Halt," *Metro Times*, 9 September 2002. <<http://www2.metrotimes.com/editorial/story.asp?id=3672>> (accessed 21 February 2011).

²⁶⁷ Carleton S. Gholz, "All Roads Lead to Motor: The Prime Techno Venue Turns Five and Can Rave About it," *Metro Times*, 8 August 2001. <<http://www2.metrotimes.com/editorial/story.asp?id=2171>>. (accessed 21 February 2011).

and promotions, from rock to raves, mainstream clubs to underground after-hours hangouts. Though the original idea according to Oxholm was “less is more”—perhaps a modest \$30,000 renovation—the final result was a \$250,000 investment turning the former Falcon Club space into the first major “it” club of the 1990s. The hip decor and swank club hype, continuing where Sowers’ Martini Bar in Royal Oak had left off, lured the people in on that first night. But so did Hamtramck. Two miles from Oakland County, in Detroit without being Detroit, and with an exit from I-75, Hamtramck made the urban-suburban blend possible. As Sordyl explained to me, “At the time we couldn’t have found a better place to be.”²⁶⁸

The initial honeymoon period of good cigars and brandy did not last, and what had started as the club’s musical signatures—cheesy dance music, swing bands, and Sinatra CDs—began to die off. It had become obvious that to survive past infancy, Motor would have to focus on some consistent substance that would coax people out of their homes. As a fix, Oxholm, the former light-sound manager at the Music Institute, persuaded Derrick May and, later, the rest of techno’s major players from Saunderson to Atkins, to begin changing Motor’s flavor. Soon after, early residents, including Mike Clark and Jennifer “Minx” Witcher and an essential two-year stint by DJ Bone, killed off Motor’s reputation as a swank velvety lounge. Instead, Motor became a Detroit-heavy dance-hungry place. Adriel Thornton’s “Family” Tuesdays and “Maximum Overload” 89X Fridays would now be Motor’s bread-and-butter, reaching further out into Detroit’s suburban reaches and steady underground.

Walter Wasacz, who wrote for *The Citizen*, Hamtramck’s weekly paper, during the period followed Motor’s morphing rise to the top of urban hip and was sensitive to the club’s cultural power and serendipitous presence. When I originally interviewed him at the beginning of

²⁶⁸ Dan Sordyl, interview with author, summer 2001.

the decade, he said: “Motor is an elite, historically significant club, that opened portals into the global dance universe for people who would not have otherwise got it. Detroit needed to be represented on the world stage with a venue that booked the best talent around, from Detroit and Europe, and Motor stepped up and delivered.” The failure of other venues, promoters and former employees to seriously cut into Motor’s dance centrality when it was open was a testament to its owners’ savvy pliability. But it was been two young self-starters that I spoke to in 2001—Josh Glazer and John Ozias, then twenty-somethings, who pushed and expanded those priorities. Ozias and Glazer began at Motor in the summer of 1998 with a two-weekend electronic musical theatre experiment entitled “Hamletmachine.” Ozias was brought on, and Glazer soon after, to use some of the leftover ideas from the play to change and challenge people’s expectations of the club. Taking their cues from art installations, theater, and rave culture, Ozias and Glazer attempted to give Motor a twist, from postmodern voyeurism to spandex over the bar. “Going that extra mile for a production isn’t going to necessarily put people in the door directly that night. But the residual memory of that event is going to leave people with a more positive feeling than if you just put another DJ in a room with a sound system and say, ‘give me your \$20,’” Ozias said. From left-field “Research and Development” nights, “Element” art shows in Motor’s former humidor, and “Departure” nights featuring Clark Warner and Liz Copeland, Ozias and Glazer sought to balance Motor’s cash-cow weekend DJs with art and style, building anticipation and excitement and keeping the audience—and themselves—interested.

But the scene that Motor created also threatened to be its downfall. Dwindling numbers brought things to a head. At the time, Sordyl argued, “People complain about a \$15 cover charge. But when Boy George costs \$10,000—not including flights and hotels or promotions—and out of 850 only 500 pay, then you figure out the math.” What Sordyl was touching on was the brave

new world that nationally known clubs such as Motor have found themselves in, where mid-'90s \$1000-\$5000 DJs are now twenty-first century \$20,000 DJs. Just as Sordyl and his staff were never able to break down the walls and make Motor bigger, neither could they talk down DJs from high fees when clubs in bigger markets can afford to raise door prices. At the time, Sordyl's response was a move downtown. In 2001, Sordyl claimed that leases were being negotiated and plumbing was being fixed. The new club would have featured three rooms, a restaurant and, according to Sordyl, a renewed commitment to pushing new acts. The passion with which Sordyl described the new club was testament to his belief that a new honeymoon period was exactly what the dance doctor has ordered. But the club never materialized and Motor, the club, now sits empty.

6.3 EMINEM

Proof and Eminem did not peak in 1999 at a rave. A number of biographies, like Bozza's *Whatever You Say I Am*, and documentaries, like *Eminem AKA*, have created a deluge of information about Eminem from the mid-1990s to his recent career "recovery" in 2010. On a national and global level, Eminem's emergence radically shaped millennial debates about hip hop, (racial) authenticity, and its influence on youth culture. Eminem's early life story—his troubled back-and-forth movements from Missouri to Detroit, his deadbeat father, the struggle between his mother and grandmother for influence in his life, the suicide death of his Uncle Ronnie—has been fairly well documented. His early career, which at first seems fairly typical for Detroit, has not. Hungry, Eminem took lessons from all that he could learn from. According to a lengthy article by writer Brian Smith, Eminem was encouraged and brought along by the same

extended Beast Crew that The Blackman had helped lead when Kid Rock had come into the picture.²⁶⁹ A few years later a young Eminem, attempting to make it in a predominantly black scene, needed coaching and connections. According to Smith, it came from people like Brian “Champtown” Harmon, a member of that same crew. But a dispute over Eminem’s girlfriend—that Champtown denies—led to the end of their friendship. The upshot though, according to early Eminem manager, Marc Kempf, was that it led to one of Eminem’s earliest collaborations with Proof, a two-song cassette by a group called Soul Intent. The tape, which featured “M&M” on vocals and early music collaborators DJ Butterfingers and his brother Manix, featured two songs. The first was a lighting-quick “Biterphobia,” while the second was a slower, more Eminem-like “Fuckin’ Backstabber.” The latter focused on Champtown’s supposed treachery and featured Proof rapping on the chorus.

Early arguments—“beefs” in the lingo of hip hop—and primitive cassette singles, though, were only part of Eminem’s maturation. It was the The Hip Hop Shop and Eminem’s relationship with Proof, made legendary by its fictionalization in *8 Mile*, that encouraged M&M to change his name to Eminem and release his first full-length record *Infinite* (1996). But the album failed to break and the young rapper, now a young father, sought out local manager and *Underground Soundz* magazine promoter Marc Kempf for help. Hustling by Marc Kempf,²⁷⁰ along with Eminem’s own maturing lyrical cleverness, finally led to national exposure in 1997 when Wendy Day, based on Kempf’s urging, invited Eminem to take part in the Rap Olympics in Los Angeles. Kempf had gotten Eminem’s demo tapes to Day and, eventually, to Interscope. The label, owned by Universal and run by Jimmy Iovine, had missed the chance at signing ICP before they inked contracts with Island Records. But Iovine was able to turn Dr. Dre on to

²⁶⁹ Brian Smith, Champ’s Town, *Metro Times*, 15 December 2004.

²⁷⁰ Marc Kempf, interview by author, 1 June 2008.

Eminem. Dre made the call to Eminem. That's when, according to Kempf, he stopped receiving calls from Eminem.

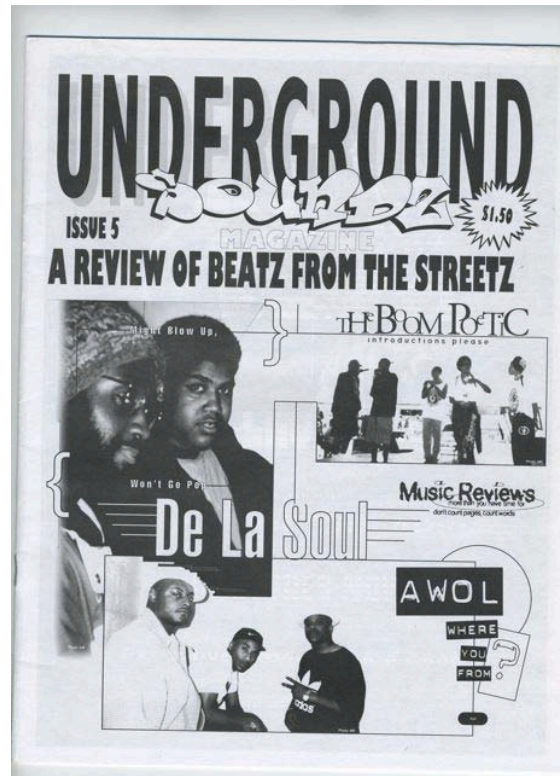


Figure 6-2. *Underground Soundz*

“My Name Is,” produced by ex-NWA rapper and producer Dr. Dre, and released on Interscope, made Eminem a star in a way that led to years of debates about Eminem and America’s zeitgeist. Is he too violently explicit in his lyrics? Does he hate homosexuals? Does he hate women? Is he a bad influence? Can a white guy really understand hip hop? The payoff of these debates has been substantial for a number of interested parties, from Eminem to his label Interscope, his mentor Dr. Dre, and MTV, the station which eventually championed him. I.C.P. had quickly dropped off—at least compared to the millions of records sold by Eminem—and Kid Rock has only been able to cross over his one-time DJ now country-rock rapper Matthew “Uncle

Kracker” Shafer in the ensuing years. Meanwhile, Eminem has been able to build his own career while also bringing up both new national artists like 50 Cent and local peers D12, Proof, and Obie Trice. Eminem’s *8 Mile* (2002) granted screen time to a handful of local MCs including Miz Korona, Strike (formerly of the local group Mountain Climbaz), and King Gordy. Other Detroit artists, like Royce Da 5’ 9” have also profited from their association with Eminem. Royce worked on the song “Bad Meets Evil” (1999) an early single featuring both artists put out by the original founder of hip hop magazine *The Source* Jonathan Schechter for his Game Recordings. Despite squabbles with Proof and Bizarre of D-12 (quashed before Proof’s death), Royce, born Ryan Montgomery, has released a number of LPs since Eminem’s ascendance.

According to the notice of his death in the *Detroit Free Press*, Deshaun “Proof” Holton was the “ambassador” of Detroit hip hop.²⁷¹ There were few in Detroit’s hip hop scene that he did not work with or befriend, from Jay Dee to Eminem. A long-time hip hop veteran, Proof’s death in 2006 from a bouncer’s gun in a nightclub on 8 Mile put a freeze on a solo career that had finally begun to take off in 2005 with his first full-length solo album. Proof made his local name in the scene as a regular at Maurice Malone’s Rhythm Kitchen and eventually as the master of ceremonies at The Shelter and The Hip Hop Shop. Though an off-again, on-again member of the local group 5ELA with Reginald “Mud” Moore and Bernard “Thyme” Russell (the group has continued since Proof’s exit from the group in 1999), Proof’s name will forever be tied to Eminem. Proof was a member of groups with Eminem beginning in 1995 and continued to record with the international star until the end of his life with D-12. On Eminem’s world tours and TV performances, Proof was Eminem’s not-so-straight man, hyping the crowd and providing a dynamic foil for Eminem’s circus-like psychiatric verses.

²⁷¹ Ben Schmitt and Kelly L. Carter, “D12 rapper Proof killed in shooting in afterhours nightclub.” *Detroit Free Press*, April 11, 2006.

When Maurice Malone started his own record label, Hostile Takeover Records, in 1999, he signed Proof. At that point he had been a recent freestyle champion as well as been recognized by *The Source* in its “unsigned hype” column. It would be Proof’s long-time compatriot Eminem’s success, though, that would bring national attention and commercial success for Proof. Proof, as part of D12 or Dirty Dozen, comprised of rappers Rufus “Bizarre” Johnson (also a member of the Outsidaz with Eminem), Ondre “Swift” Moore, Denaun “Kon Artis” Porter, and Von “Kuniva” Carlisle, made two records under Eminem’s management, *Devil’s Night* (2001) and *World* (2004) on Interscope/Aftermath. An earlier member, Karnail “Bugz” Pitts was killed before D12’s major label moves. But Proof’s first full-length solo efforts would not be on Eminem’s Shady record label but instead on Iron Fist, a label that Proof co-founded with longtime friend and manager of one of Proof’s earliest groups, 5ELA, black nationalist activist Khalid el-Hakim. The label released Proof’s mixtape, *I Miss the Hip-Hop Shop* (2004), and the sprawling, funny and funky album *Searching for Jerry Garcia* (2005). Earlier in 2002 on *Promatic* and then again on *8 Mile Chronicles* (2005), Proof joined up with Kevin “Dogmatic” Bailey, an MC and Sicknotes production member who had been originally known as K-Stone. Dogmatic had released material with Bryant Records, the same label as AWOL and DMW in the early 1990s. It was not the only collaboration that Proof was engaged with at the end of his life—he was working both on a release with horrorcore act Twiztid and a black nationalist concept album about land ownership on his Iron Fist label—but it signals the depth of his connections in Detroit’s scene and his importance in any understanding of how it emerged.

In April 2006, a club-bouncer Mario Etheridge shot Proof to death at an after-hours club on 8 Mile. Etheridge contended that he shot Proof in self-defense after Proof supposedly shot and

killed Keith Bender, Etheridge's cousin. Later, Mud, Proof's aforementioned band mate from 5ELA, accused Etheridge of killing both Proof and Bender. Etheridge was eventually convicted for carrying a concealed weapon but not charged with murder. A well written, emotionally charged, cover story for *the Metro Times* by Khary Turner, a friend of Proof's, shortly after the murders, asked a lot of hard questions about Proof and the scene that he knew so intimately. Attempting to reconcile the apparent cold-bloodedness of Proof's final moments with Proof's recent actions (he had quashed controversies with local rappers like Royce Da 5' 9") and words (he claimed that he wanted to be a better parent to his five children), Turner finished his piece saying, "Yes, I will remember Proof as the wonderful and conflicted person he was. But I will also ask why he couldn't exercise enough restraint to consider the moment. To consider tomorrow."²⁷²

6.4 THE LIMIT OF IMAGINATION

In an interview, conducted for the local Detroit alternative press paper *Metro Times* for an October 2010 performance by The Wizard, Mills acknowledged why he might be interested in performing a potentially older mix of records with turntables by showing concern for the state of dance music culture's musicians and audiences. When asked about the difference between the act of performing in a club versus executing a set for a radio show in the 1980s – in other words, whether actually seeing an audience mattered to his creative process as a DJ – Mills said:

It was little bit different back then because people used to dance more... so I could very easily imagine the type of dances from the "Schoolcraft" to all the kinds of things people

²⁷² Turner, Khary Kimani. "What do we have to prove?: Trying to make sense of the tragedy." *Metro Times*. April 19, 2006.

were doing back then and try to imagine how they would be reacting to it. But now it's a little bit more different. The people are kind of dancing less or it's not really structured type of dancing so [...] so I use other factors to kind of decide how the music should be shaped, what the tempo should be, the texture, what things should be heard as the main component and things like that but I am still a DJ [...] so in my mind I have a particular type of person wanting to hear a particular type of thing ... [I]t was easy to imagine how the people would react to those things because their dances were so influential it was really kind of directing the music in a certain way [...] It was easy to imagine when I was on the radio at night playing this stuff.

According to Mills, both nationally and globally audiences are no longer dancing or, perhaps more accurately, no longer dancing in the particular way they did in 1980s, as Mills began to hone his craft. In those days, dancers improvised using a complex yet recognizable set of gestures and dance moves – some with well-known local names, like the “Schoolcraft,” named after a Detroit West Side street – that Mills could and would recognize and react to during his sets and imagine later as he created music for radio and, eventually, his own recordings. He continues:

When people are dancing and you can clearly see that there is a certain type of art that's going behind what they're doing with their body to the music ... The DJ or the producer while watching it – you have to assume that the people are adjusting to it so well that they are beginning to relate to it [the music] physically and that you have to also assume that at some point they are going to feel so comfortable moving that they are going to modify what they are doing to modify their body to the music and that is what you're looking for if you're a DJ, if you are a producer, that's the stuff you're looking for, you're looking for the talkback from the music that you made or the music that you're playing and that gives you information of what to do next.²⁷³ When the people stop dancing you lose a large part of that communication. If they're just standing there and they're putting their hands in the air like they do now with hip-hop – and a lot of techno parties for one reason or another – the DJ can't see very clearly how the people are really reacting to it, if you can't see the legs move. It's that language that's been created for many, many, years that seems to be slowly dissolving away. Of course producers will begin to make music that will only get the hands up in the air and not necessarily make the people move because that's the information that he's getting. It's a two-way street and it's all connected. If I had to think whether the music was more interesting back then as opposed to now I would say “yes” and that's mainly because the people were dancing and there were

²⁷³ This description of EDM dance by Mills is consonant with work by ethnomusicologists. See Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, 2006: 72-5).

structured dance moves that the people did to it which let you know how the people were hearing it.

When DJs can't "read" their audiences – when the sounds they make do not conjure particular gestures of bodies in motion – then it is almost impossible, as Mills describes, to take them somewhere new. Why are these gestures disappearing? One problem, Mills argues, is when audiences consist primarily of young fans. Mills contends that multigenerational, racially and sexually diverse audiences tend to educate their dancers and even DJs into the rituals of the dance. However, this mentoring process has become rare in Mills' estimation. Another reason Mills cites for the lack of dancing is that digital DJ technology has removed the risk of making mistakes—and the potential to build up mixing skills to make mistakes creatively. DJs, no longer forced to touch records to keep them synced, have lost part of their own creative practice.²⁷⁴

When Mills performs for seated audiences, as he sometimes does when performing new soundtracks, a highly didactic audio-visual opportunity made possible by advances in digital technologies seems wholly appropriate. However, the demise of DJing as an analog process utilizing turntables and vinyl records is inextricably linked to the cessation of dancing as Mills has understood it through his career. DJ mixing with Technics 1200s, vinyl records and a mixer—as consciously taught and circulated by a core group of DJs across the US and Jamaica, eventually finding a global mass audience of dancers—has proven to be a minority movement, a minor practice that, though influential, according to one of its most profound practitioners, has failed to maintain the appeal of its central, vibrating, creative dynamic: the discourse of the dance.

²⁷⁴ Mills has attempted to address this situation through vinyl-only releases like "The Drummer" on his Purposemaker imprint in 2009 which he explained are designed to be manipulated by DJs – not played straight through without engagement. See <<http://www.axisrecords.com/>>. (accessed 12 March 2011).

6.5 HIGH-TECH KIDS

If you ask me, the whole ghetto was getting electrified. [Electrifying] Mojo was teaching deep ass shit, with the cosmic sound-scape to this shit.... The inner city was getting empowered with thoughts of technology, futurism; motherfuckers on computers and shit.²⁷⁵

— Mike Banks

In a more recent online interview, Banks clarifies his thinking by again linking the music and its creation with the inner city. Describing the many young musicians and DJs at Banks' label that Mills and Banks began more than fifteen years ago, Banks argues:

We need kids to be inspired. These guys all right here have passports. So when they talk to they nieces and they nephews and tell them about Japan and wherever the hell they've been that goes a hell of a lot farther than somebody patting themselves on the back and telling everybody they sold two thousands records.²⁷⁶

Pushing the story further, he talks about his own generations relationship to the music and the question of today's Detroit.

Cause ain't nobody reaching back and doing shit for us or our kids. So it's up to us to do, and make them hi-tech. The neighborhood Submerge in nobody got internet, nobody got cable, can't afford this shit, wi-fi and all that shit. They don't even know why they supposed to have it. Ain't nobody reaching out to them. Was no advertisements on 'JLB for no fucking [Detroit Electronic Music] festival or nothing. You know? So shit gotta change and I ain't waiting on nobody to change it so that's why we started an independent record label.... And if anybody else [like Kraftwerk did with Banks' and Mills' generation] can come in here and hi-tech this fucking inner city mindset—we got kids running around talking about icy grilles, 22s and \$300,000 of diamonds in their mouth. We need some hi-tech motherfuckers to come through. And until they do that, kiss my ass.

So who is educating the kids? Who is "hi-teching" them? The potential legacy of Mills' might be an answer; the Detroit Youth Foundation in downtown Detroit, where long-time Mills fan Alvin

²⁷⁵ *The Godfather Chronicles: The Ghetto Tech Sound of Detroit*, DVD, Dir. Amil Khan, 2004.

²⁷⁶ *Underground Resistance: Slices*, *The Electronic Music Magazine*, *Pioneers of Electronic Music*, 2006 <<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8050739842417235420&pr=goog-sl>>

Munk inspires young Detroiters to create electronic music at an after-school program for Detroit kids.²⁷⁷ Munk reports that the young students, many of them black and male, all want to produce hip-hop and that techno is wholly unknown to them. But since many of the public schools have cut music programs, urban radio no longer mixes genres in the free-form way it did in the 1980s or even 1990s, and a mixed youth rave culture has come to a grinding halt, Youthville, its cutting-edge electronic equipment, and its classically trained '80s club kid teacher might be the only chance for making a twenty-first century Mills possible.

At the Detroit Youth Foundation on Woodward Avenue in the New Center area, a lifelong Mills fan inspires young Detroiters to create electronic music at an after-school program. DJ, producer and academic Alvin “Munk” Hill used to gaze down onto Mills from the upper level of the Nectarine Ballroom in the 1980s, soaking up the DJ’s movements and sonic choices. Hill remembers: “Two turntables and a drum machine, tapping and turning on knobs, going through records at a pace where he needed to hand them off to his assistant, scratching and integrating the drum machine as if they were all part of one night-long song,” “It was mind opening and kept me on the dance floor when I could tear myself away from watching.”²⁷⁸

Now Hill believes that “injecting and expanding these ideas into the future” is essential for a young mind to grow. “I believe that it is important to give back and help children keep that same open mind,” he says. “It is a blessing as an artist to work with young children. For as you give to them, they give back to you, tenfold. I feel, on a selfish level, that it makes me even more creative in my own work.” Despite using similar computer technologies, Millsian techno is far from these students’ minds. During a recent tour of the DYF facilities, Hill reported that most want to produce beats for rap music. But in a city whose public schools have cut music

²⁷⁷ Youthville Detroit < <http://www.youthvilledetroit.org/> > (accessed 11 April 2011).

²⁷⁸ Alvin Hill, interview by author, 8 September 2009.

programs, urban radio no longer mixes genres in the free-form way it did in the 1980s (or even 1990s), and mixed-youth rave culture has come to a grinding halt. Youthville, with its cutting-edge electronic equipment and its classically trained '80s club-kid teacher, might be Detroit's best chance for keeping the question of a twenty-first-century Wizard open.

6.6 SYNK

On Friday night before the 2010 Movement Festival—the tenth anniversary of Detroit's electronic dance music festival in Hart Plaza—festival co-creator and “Creative Director,” Carl Craig, hosted an evening of films about, and inspired by, Detroit musicians. The event, “2010: A Detroit Odyssey,” featured the first showing of the festival documentary, *The Drive Home*, a French-made film, *Cycles of the Mental Machine*, that followed the voice and ideas of former radio DJ the Electrifying Mojo, and a video recording of a symphonic concert dedicated to the late Detroit-born hip hop producer J Dilla (born James Yancey) called *Timeless Suite for Ma Dukes*. These apparently realistic representations of Detroit music and culture were shown amidst the 1920s science fiction film *Metropolis*, originally directed by Fritz Lang, and, as we have seen, “remixed” by Jeff Mills.

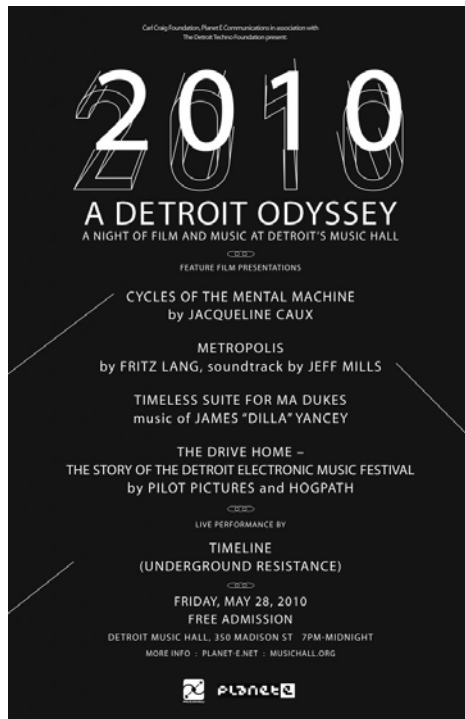


Figure 6-3. “2010: A Detroit Odyssey”.

Despite the free admission and the rare lineup of filmic texts, the Music Hall event was sparsely attended. However, anyone who stayed for the festival would have recognized that this night of films was not the only “screen”-based moment of the weekend. On the festival’s opening night, Richard Hawtin, performing as long-time moniker and live performance alter-ego Plastikman, brought a cutting-edge, hour-long performance to Hart Plaza’s main stage that featured him performing surrounded by a screen consisting of light-emitting diodes (LEDs), an updated version of “The Cube” developed for the 2008 “Contakt” tour by visual artist Ali Demeril for Hawtin and other artists from the Windsorite’s M-nus record label. This spectacular sonic performance was fully intertwined with its carefully crafted visual elements conducted on the screen. In fact, it was clear from the beginning of the performance, when a voice began

speaking and a line of light began fluctuating along with it, as in a spectrogram, that considerable care had been taken to make sure sound and light were in sync.²⁷⁹

The hour-long performance featured all the startling loud bass pulses and crisp, crackling drum patterns, as well as the obligatory ups-and-downs, and the now-you-hear-it, now-you-don't deliveries, that seem to be crucial to the execution of contemporary EDM performance. However, it was the visual cues that helped to explicitly center the audience's attention. Except for a handful of key moments where Hawtin's shadow was shown to the audience to be within the curtain of LEDs, the artist himself was not the apparent center of the performance. Instead eyes were on the screen. First, it was the sine wave reacting as both mouth and spectrogram to a deep voice familiar to Plastikman fans, a voice that I imagine is the superego of the artist himself—or perhaps better, the audience's collective superego—telling us what not to think or do. The voice has featured in many Hawtin performances over the years, and in his Plastikman full-length album, *Closer* (2003). The spoken word lyrics captured the migraine-slowness of a bad acid trip, telling the audience not to ask him but to “ask yourself.” Plastikman, through sound and image, seemed to channel The Wizard of Oz, annoyed at our presence yet at least sympathetic enough to deliver the sulfur and fake thunder that the audience demands / wants / expects.

The images generated by the thousands of LED dots on the screen flickered fiercely at times, simulating eclectic spinning patterns, while at others stayed static. Shapes, repeating, shifting, blinked with the music. Some of the visuals changed with the beginning of a new track and therefore seem pre-programmed, more like music videos than visual patterns created by the

²⁷⁹ For a technical description of Hawtin's performance, see Amanda Connon-Unda, “Plastikman Live transforms Detroit” <<http://www.musingsonspace.com/2010/08/04/plastikman-live-transforms-detroit/>> (accessed 4 August 2010).

sounds. Instead of an iTunes visualizer reacting to a set list, the effect seemed more didactic, meant to be a direct visual commentary on, for instance, the computer code script we are so familiar with from the *Matrix* films. In red and orange, black and white, and “computer” green, the images moved with the sound, manipulated by the triggers inside Hawtin’s cocoon-like enclosure via wireless networks and hundreds of carefully hidden cords. It is unclear what the best seat in the house is at a performance like this when the screen is circular and speakers are seemingly positioned everywhere within a cement bowl – though the sight-lines of audience members behind the stage were restricted by the scaffolding that surrounded Hawtin’s circular command center. At times the emitting visuals made the circular “Cube” appear like it was levitating just above the stage.



Figure 6-4. Plastikman live, opening night of the 2010 Movement Festival in Detroit.

The “screen” did not end with the scrim of on-stage LED projectors. Instead, the audience members themselves, many with iPhones, turned their own screens towards the stage –

and not merely to take pictures or video of the spectacle. Instead, through an iPhone application called “Synk,” the “users” were able to “participate in an experiment in audience-performer interaction aiming to blur the lines of perception and participation.” The description continues on the Plastikman website:

They [the audience] will connect to the PLASTIKMAN Wi-Fi network available at each show, and after being notified by a vibration triggered by certain moments in the performance, be able to contribute and interact by reorganizing word samples, viewing the venue from the Plastikman perspective, and seeing the real-time programming of the drum and percussive elements and effects. In between the performances, the application is in sleeper mode and functions as a Plastikman atmospheric location shifter. Using the iPhone’s built in microphone and accelerometer, users will be immersed in a Plastikman environment. For best results, use headphones.²⁸⁰

I did not have an iPhone during the performance so cannot comment from experience on the “Logikal,” “Kamera,” “Synkotik,” and “Konsole” options within the iPhone “Synk” application itself. However, drawing from the video clips offered in the “Watch” section of the Plastikman Live Web site, I can point out two things that seem important for performance and the remix aesthetic that I have been discussing. First, Hawtin as Plastikman has moved far beyond turntable-like controllers in order to manipulate sound and image and embraced touch-pad technologies like Grid to navigate both the macro (the overall shape and contour of sounds) and micro moments (specific notes, passages, rhythms) of the performance. I can already sense, in my attempt at describing this shift, the utilization of metaphors from architecture and sculpture—“shape and contour”—and therefore a potential break from the circular, repetitive, (re)mix metaphors. Second, the number of people (and the finances) required for such a performance continues to grow, even from the complete “club” experience that Hawtin has classically offered whenever he comes “home” to Detroit (Hawtin now lives full-time in Berlin), hearkening back to

²⁸⁰ All quotes from the “Synk iPhone Application” portion of the “Plastikman” website <<http://plastikman.com>> as accessed on 15 October 2010.

his earlier career DJing at elaborately staged parties in spaces as varied as warehouses to country fields. In this way, the club or rave experience seems to have dissolved into a larger concert experience, comparable to witnessing Pink Floyd's "The Wall."²⁸¹

However, it is from the audience perspective where Hawtin's rupture within the remix aesthetic can be understood acutely. From the Millsian perspective offered earlier, the audience is not dancing in any recognizable way—I saw no one doing the "Schoolcraft"—and, even if they had been, Hawtin as Plastikman could not have seen them within the stage-sized screen that enveloped him. Arguably, Hawtin had the audience's attention but the feedback between instrument and musician, sound and body, DJ and audience / dancer, was not the only, or primary, means of syncing with them. Whether it is by Tweeting the tracks he plays when he DJs to non-dancing audiences thousands of miles away or, at Movement, by providing a way for audiences to "Synk" with his performance both inside and outside of the club, Hawtin is holding himself open to what is new and possible in the convergence of various technologies of performance. In the process, he has kept himself at, or at least near, the cutting edge of what it means to "interact" with a crowd in the diffused, digital way that social networking and wireless technologies have made possible.

In 2001, John Acquaviva and Richie Hawtin, cofounders of the Plus 8 Record label and longtime creative collaborators, introduced Final Scratch, a combination software-hardware package then capable of allowing DJs to manipulate digital music files on their laptops via

²⁸¹ Roger Waters, quoted from "Roger Waters: The Wall Live: Official Site": "I recently came across this quote of mine from 22 years ago: 'What it comes down to for me is this: Will the technologies of communication in our culture, [sic] serve to enlighten us and help us to understand one another better, or will they deceive us and keep us apart?' I believe this is still a supremely relevant question". Quote from 11 April 2010 on <<http://www.roger-waters.com>> (accessed 20 October 2010).

analog turntables.²⁸² The technology made it possible for a DJ to leave their record collection at home when they toured but did not, according to Acquaviva, eliminate the joy of touch. Speaking to MTV Germany at the time, Acquaviva said: “I told you, you have to touch it. Once you touch it, it’s like falling in love.”²⁸³ However, in 2008, after the purchase of Final Scratch by Native Instruments and the increasing efficiencies of software and hardware, Hawtin, Acquaviva’s partner, disconnected his turntables completely.²⁸⁴ The result is a situation in which the computer has completely taken over what was once regarded as the key DJ talent—the hand-ear-eye gesture required to forge the mix. Now—eyes committed to the computer screen, ears tuned to the invariant loop, and hands ready to push, turn, twist and clap—the so-called DJ reorganizes his senses to intensify “the desire for the beat.”²⁸⁵ Hawtin’s response in 2008 was not melancholic though: “Allowing the computer to do one thing is only boring,” Hawtin said in a YouTube clip showcasing his setup at the time, “if you don’t use the time the computer saves you to do something else.” For Hawtin, that something else is the ability to focus on loops and effects. Hawtin continues to experiment with this “something else.”²⁸⁶

For now, Richie Hawtin will continue to be a “DJ”, albeit a digital one, if only because of the expense and systematized planning required for Plastikman performances. I have argued that a transitional moment has been reached where a set of musical practices and expectations with respect to dance music has been displaced—perhaps permanently—by a sonic environment that more persistently engages the possibilities of digital music-making and social networking. The

²⁸² See “10 Years of Digital DJing With Richie Hawtin” from *Urb* <<http://www.urb.com/2011/01/25/10-years-of-digital-djing-with-richie-hawtin/>>. (accessed 31 January 2011).

²⁸³ “John Acquaviva demonstrates FinalScratch @ MTV Germany” via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFyOJGVlbdo&feature=player_embedded#> (accessed 31 January 2011).

²⁸⁴ “John Acquaviva demonstrates FinalScratch @ MTV Germany” via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFyOJGVlbdo&feature=player_embedded#> (accessed 31 January 2011).

²⁸⁵ (Butler 2006: 92)

²⁸⁶ “Ean Goldne interview’s [sic] Richie Hawtin at Namm 2011 (Future of Digital Djing)” via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOksLpUj1kk&feature=player_embedded> (accessed 31 January 2011).

result, for DJs like Mills, is the impending death of an art form that worked, more or less continuously, since the 1960s. For others, interpreting Hawtin's performance and web presence, the shift is merely another example of change within an entertainment environment that emerged from technological innovation and complex, sometimes ambiguous, audience feedback. Mills, via VJing and film remixes, as well as online via his Facebook page, has shown that he can engage his audience similarly to Hawtin; though there is none as yet, I will not be surprised if Axis Records, Mills' label, rolls out an iPhone application. However, Mills clearly regrets the disappearance of dancers who, through their own agency, collaborated with him in the mix. In Hawtin's performance as Plastikman it seemed that technological progress might override such losses. Nonetheless, the crowd seemed to be enraptured.

At the end of the Plastikman Movement performance, however, Hawtin, the man not the scientist, came out from behind the screen for an encore, perhaps hinting nostalgically to an earlier remix moment. An analog drum machine on a stand was produced from below the stage and Hawtin began to "perform" his most famous early 1990s track, "Spastik." The gesture was anti-climatic and highly personal. As Dan Sicko discussed in *Techno Rebels*, Hawtin had been shocked at how certain European audiences had synched with the aggressiveness of his productions of the early 1990s, at times shouting anti-Semitic chants during DJ performances. Detroit producers, according to Hawtin, were "not making hard music just for the sake of it... We weren't slamming people over the head just for the sake of it."²⁸⁷ The gesture of coming out from the screen brings this perspective home. Hawtin, after pummeling his audience sonically and visually, still wants to sense their reaction directly—he does want what Mills calls "feedback." If this is true, then perhaps dance critics like Beverly May are correct, that indeed

²⁸⁷ Sicko, *Techno Rebels*, 89-90.

the ideal of EDM, as practiced by Hawtin, is not to sideline sonic-thinking through distraction but instead to produce the possibility for “unified concentration” and “collective focus.”²⁸⁸ However, Mills’ observations are still cogent. A particular form of creative, imaginative, dance called forth by a DJ immersed in the remix aesthetic has ended. This does not necessarily mean that dancing has ended or that music no longer propels humans to create new gestures or arm them with, as Kenneth Burke might have said if he had ever attended a disco, “equipment for living.”²⁸⁹ However, it does mean that a particular mode of aural/visual production – the province of the DJ—has become unhinged from its audience. What has emerged are performances where the sound projectionist is confronted not with a seated audience of film-goers, as in the 1920s, but with a sea of savvy digital producers, hands filled with interactive, audio-visual devices, their attention not focused on their feet but themselves.

6.7 CODA

We have a problem here in Detroit. The Detroit Symphony board of directors and management has a master plan. You know what that master plan is? They want to turn this into the Wal-Mart Orchestra. [Boos from the audience.] Let me ask you a question. Are you going to let that happen here in Detroit? [No!’s from the audience.] They have a master plan. They say there is a clash in culture in Detroit. That Detroiters really don’t know what world-class music is. You don’t know what world-class music is? [Yes!’s and cheers from the audience.] Remember something that happened about fifty years ago when the symphony strings and the jazz artists came together and they made some music? Remember what they called that? [A few voices in the audience: “Motown.”] Motown. Is that world-class music? [Yes!’s and clapping.] Is the Detroit Symphony world-class music? [“Yeah!"] They say that Detroiters can’t tell the difference. That’s

²⁸⁸ Beverly May, “Participatory Theatre: The Experiential Construct of House and Techno Music Events,” *Canadian Theatre Review*, no. 103 (Summer 2000): 9–13.

²⁸⁹ Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1973), 304.

what they say in the newspapers. They say being a top-ten orchestra is not that important. I want to tell you something folks. For all you media folks who might be here and music critics: they want you to say that you can't hear the difference. They want you to drink their Kool-Aid. Do not sip at their Kool-Aid. We all know the difference. We have a world-class orchestra and we're going to fight to keep it. [clapping]²⁹⁰

— Gordon Stump, President of the AFM, Local #5

As I returned to Detroit to finish my research and complete this dissertation, an event occurred that brought out many of the contradictions in the soundscape. In the fall of 2010, the musicians of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra went on strike after their management demanded heavy pay cuts and, critically, changes in work rules that would have made non-performance duties, like community outreach and education, for instance, requirements for full salary.²⁹¹ The musicians, all members of the American Federation of Musicians or AFM, Local #5 in Detroit, went on strike. It is within this context, that in early 2011 I joined the union.

²⁹⁰ "AFM Local 5 President Gordon Stump – Detroit Labor Day Rally," via Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upCF-L_YvmY> (12 March 2011).

²⁹¹ The details of this contract dispute are complicated and, as might be expected, the facts are not agreed upon. For the point of view of the organized musicians, see "Musicians of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra." <<http://www.detroitssymphonymusicians.org/>> (accessed 12 March 2011). Updates from management can be seen at "Detroit Symphony Orchestra." <<http://www.detroitssymphony.com/>> (accessed 12 March 2011).

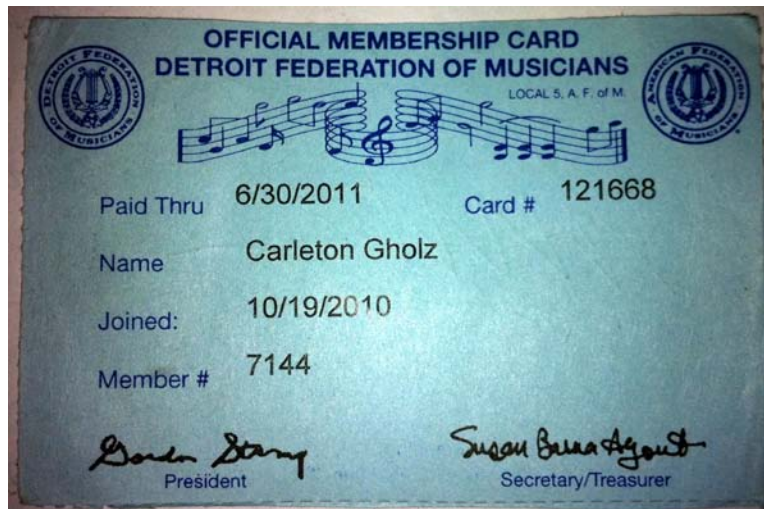


Figure 6-5. Author's AFM, Local 5 membership card.

Soon after the strike began, I had sat down with Gordon Stump, president of Local 5 for an oral history interview, not sure how it would exactly fit but sensing that it might.²⁹² At this time, 2011 will be his last as President before a new election. I met him at the Labor Day Parade just a few weeks before when he delivered an impassioned speech about the Detroit Symphony Orchestra players being on strike. Until the strike, I had for the most part ignored classical musicians in my dissertation, let alone unionized ones. When I had originally designed my research plan it just seemed to make sense. I did not know any DSO musician by name and was not aware of much overlap with the electronic music that I was studying. At the same time, I knew few unionized musicians and what I did know about the union, through word-of-mouth and a handful of magazine articles over the years, was antagonistic to the culture that I was archiving and analyzing.²⁹³ But with the strike I began to sense the connections. As a freelance writer for over a decade, I was conscious of the impact of the Detroit newspaper strike days of the mid-

²⁹² Gordon Stump, interview by author, 21 September 2010.

²⁹³ See for instance Jim Lewis, "DISCO IS KILLING US!!!" *Tribe* (May-June 1976): 22.

1990s. At the *Metro Times* I worked with and for ex-*Free Press* and *News* writers and had leaned on these former writers in my research.²⁹⁴ In other words, I knew at least in theory what this strike might mean to the musical community. I also began to think through, more seriously than I had before, the relationship between labor and music making, as well as labor and sound and automation. I intuited that perhaps I had not thought these connections through as much as I should have. The key example in my mind that made this work was the quote, from Dan Sicko's *Techno Rebels*, that Derrick May's "Strings of Life," contained a sample from the Detroit Symphony. I wanted to somehow think through how that electronic dance anthem, made as it was assumedly in May's home studio, related to the musicians playing in the cold, on the sidewalk in front of the old Paradise Theater, now Orchestra Hall, during Labor Day.

I got an appointment with President Stump. The AFM building, a 1960s white, three story office building with a recreation room-like basement, is located on the Southfield Freeway service drive just north of 8 Mile Road, in Southfield, Michigan. The AFM had had two other buildings. The last they had left in 1979 and was located at 7 Mile and Schaffer Road on Detroit's west side. That space, according to Stump, was significantly bigger, with a ballroom and bar. The first hall had been located on 2nd Avenue downtown. Stump, a trumpet player, had left New Jersey for Detroit at the time of the rebellion. We talked about his career as well as the recent history of the union until Stump said that the union had members that were DJs. I was stunned. I said he did not... or at least no one that I knew. He turned to his computer, and then called his secretary, attempting to look something up on his computer about DJs but could not

²⁹⁴ See "Voices From the Strike," at: <<http://detroitphotojournalism.com/strike/>>. One of my *Metro Times* editors, W. Kim Heron is featured. See <<http://detroitphotojournalism.com/strike/pages/heron.htm>>. (accessed 12 march 2011). Bill McGraw, a long-time *Free Press* writer and strike activist, has been a contact during the writing of this dissertation, helping me track down leads and advising me on Detroit history. See Peter Gavriolovich and Bill McGraw, *The Detroit Almanac* (Detroit: Detroit Free Press, 2006).

find any—but he was sure that they were there. So I asked the question: If I paid my dues and signed up, could I join the AFM as a DJ? Stump said, “Sure!” I told him, only half-jokingly that he should be careful with his answer because I would.

And I did. I asked for Membership materials to be sent to my home, filled them out, and sent in my first check for dues. I built up a Soundcloud site for my DJ persona, including a short biography.²⁹⁵ I filled out paperwork for the online referral system.²⁹⁶ And then I waited. My idea was that all the “musicians” that I knew—DJs across many spectra, MCs, beat-makers, EDM producers, even independent rock bands, and solo musicians—need health care. They all need life insurance. They all needed access to insurance for their instruments and equipment. And they all needed a higher profile when it came to organizing themselves. All of these things, I thought, the AFM, as out of touch as it was in my estimation, could and might provide. The recent death of Aaron Carl from cancer at only the age of 37 had brought this fact home.²⁹⁷ Many of the artists that I knew were in poor health and either had no health care or severely limited health care. They struggled to make ends meet and provide for their loved ones. When times were good, they made records and toured, enjoying a bit of the success that other DJs and producers from Detroit had achieved in the early 1990s. But in down times, they struggled to find gigs anywhere, even at home. One of my interviewees told me that he had begun to sell records in order to pay for his healthcare.

²⁹⁵ Soundcloud is a music sharing and streaming Web site. <<http://soundcloud.com/csgholz>>. (accessed 12 March 2011).

²⁹⁶ “Musicians for Hire,” via AFM Web site: <<http://www.detroitmusicians.net/Audio/MusiciansForHire.htm>>. There is one “Programming / DJ,” listed on the site, Nabil Ansara. He became a member of the Union after making beats for commercials a traditional way to be protected within the union. Industry work had always been a major place for employment for musicians who, as admitted by AFM historians, practically by definition, are normally part-time workers at best. See <<http://www.detroitmusicians.net/Audio/Ansara,%20Nabil.htm>>. (accessed 12 March 2011). See George Seltzer, *Music Matters*, 1989.

²⁹⁷ Walter Wascz, “Aaron-Carl, In Memoriam,” *Metro Times*, 6 October 2010. <<http://metrotimes.com/music/aaron-carl-in-memoriam-1.1044609>>.

DJs had attempted to come together in the 1970s with the rise of record pools. However, these organizations struggled. Musician unions fought DJs wherever they could. Disco, the emergent genre that gave the DJs a newfound power, was seen as a scourge by musicians (this despite bringing many musicians studio work according to Stump), and, eventually, by a vocal segment of the country. And, of course, the DJ community itself was stratified. Despite an initial collaborative matrix between DJs from Detroit, Chicago, and New York, the competitive urge between DJs took precedence. For those of Mills generation, the competition over getting records, and the lack of any real organizing opportunities within the music business that they floated under and amidst, the record pools had only limited influence. This was all on my mind the night I was sworn into the union, on Monday, January 10, 2011 amidst eighteen of my fellow “brothers.” (The Union musicians in attendance that night were all men. There were a handful of women assistants.) Just before I was inducted, one of these men introduced themselves to me and said, “Nice to meet you. What instrument do you play?” My reply: “I’m a DJ.” His response? Silence. He looked away. I gulped. I sensed this was going to be a long meeting.

President Gordon Stump had me repeat the Local 5 pledge and then promptly asked what size shirt I wore—he had an AFM t-shirt for me. For over an hour, a lions-share of the conversation was dedicated to the possible induction of DJs (and others from the post-Motown soundscape) into the union. I introduced myself and my motivations for joining the AFM. They had clapped for me when they were told that I was a new inductee (the only one at the meeting it should be said). However, I told those assembled that they might want to take those claps back. I was a DJ and was in the AFM to see if they were serious about having others like me join them. I explained my motivations, that the people I hoped to represent had common cause with AFM members. All needed support, financial and political. All created music. All faced a Detroit in

transition and industrial practices that were dangerous to all. I told them that my great-uncle had been a member of a territory band in Minnesota in the 1930s and eventually a member of the New Orleans AFM local. I told them that my mother was a retired public school teacher and long-time member of the Michigan Educational Association (MEA).

What happened next was heartening. Members who had joined in 1943 and were in their 80s argued that now was the time to bring these artists into the AFM. There was a debate about wedding DJs and whether or not they were what was being talked about. Yes, of course, DJs could join... but what *kind* of DJs? But even then musicians seemed open to the possibility that they could not really complain about someone who wanted to hear the original recording of a song they loved being played by a DJ, on the happiest day of their life. Stump, who had played in weddings, admitted to an uncomfortable truth as well. That because of union rules for breaks during performances, they were slow to provide the continuous musical energy demanded by wedding goers. Rock bands, according to Stump, has been good about that and DJs—they were perfect for that. If wedding goers were having fun, they wanted to keep going. During this discussion, I fielded questions from the group about DJs, including the argument for how creative they really were and what audiences they might be said to interact with. I argued that the initial disco DJs came out of a black and gay scene in Detroit and had created their own communicative network quite apart from what the AFM musicians seemed to represent. Guitarist Ron English sat in front of me. He stood up and told his fellow musicians about electronic artists that he had worked with. Many of the musicians that I saw nodded their heads.

After we broke for fruit salad, champagne, and some cold shrimp, English and I talked about his own history as a musician in Detroit.²⁹⁸ He had played for Motown Records, toured

²⁹⁸ Ron English, interview by author, 10 January 2011.

with the Four Tops amongst others, and eventually joined Lyman Woodard's funk and disco-inspired jazz band in the 1970s. Critically though, he, along with a small group of other jazz musicians had organized Strata. English told me that these musicians believed that post rebellion Detroit had created a situation where much had to be done. Musicians had to get together and play, yes, but they also had to rebuild, as well as create, a new audience. They had to work on various "strata."²⁹⁹ After taking to English and before leaving the meeting, I approached Stump and encouraged him to get in touch with me if he wanted to set up a meeting with the AFM and prospective inductees who I might know. He told me that he was busy with the DSO strike and that we would talk after that.

Writing about the recent union protests in Wisconsin, *Metro Times* columnist and editor Larry Gabriel has written:

In Detroit, while it may seem a very different situation, Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians, who have been on strike since Oct. 4, see their situation as connected to Wisconsin. "To put it succinctly, the DSO is trying to strip the musicians of their right to bargain," says Greg Bowens, a spokesman for the musicians. "It's not in a law like Wisconsin's but you've got to call a spade a spade." Indeed, DSO musicians have agreed to draconian wage cuts, but not to changes in work rules the DSO insists on. When the DSO canceled the remainder of this concert season, DSO Executive Vice President Paul Hogle was reported in the *Detroit News* to have said the DSO was considering hiring replacement musicians. The next day the paper back-pedaled, saying that the reporter had drawn "inaccurate conclusions" from an interview with Hogle. However, Bowens says that this past weekend the DSO executive committee of the Board of Directors indeed discussed hiring scabs. "People who were at the meeting told us," says Bowens. (As *MT* went to press, DSO musicians were announcing an offer to return to work without a contract.)³⁰⁰

As the article's editors noted, the DSO has agreed to return to work without a contract. If the AFM loses this battle it is unclear if it will survive. The symphony musicians are the lifeblood of

²⁹⁹ The archives of Strata are part of the Frank and Peggy Bach papers held at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

³⁰⁰ Larry Gabriel, "Stir It Up: Crushing the Unions," *Metro Times* (2-8 March 2011): 10. <<http://metrotimes.com/columns/crushing-the-unions-1.1112445>> (accessed 7 March 2011).

the AFM. By the time my year experiment as a DJ ends, I may be no closer to getting post-Motown musicians any closer to one of the few organizations that has ever been able to make headway for musicians in Detroit. Thirty-five years after the Collier Brothers began blending records in a converted coffee house called the Chess Mate I am struck by how little progress has been made. However, in my research I also remember Herb Boyd's essay, "Black Bottom and Beyond." In that 1984 essay, Boyd, concerned about the limited opportunities for musicians and music he adored, wrote: "If the prospect ends here on a somewhat blue note, it only signals what has been true in the past—that the beat and the mood is about to change, about to modulate to a more promising outlook."³⁰¹ I look forward to the next remix of history to prove Boyd correct.

³⁰¹ Herb Boyd, "Black Bottom and Beyond," in *Detroit Jazz: Who's Who*, 86.

7.0 CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have argued that the collective one-two punch of the 1967 rebellion and the departure of Motown Records did not destroy Detroit's creative musical heart. However, what emerged during this time was not easily understandable—or perhaps a better word would be audible—to Motown or pre-Motown ears. Though some from an older generation, like jazz saxophonist Wendell Harrison and funk percussionist Carl “Butch” Small, eventually did mentor and perform with younger artists, for many in Detroit and beyond the emergence of DJ culture was a complete sonic rupture with the past. The soundscape, as I have discussed it, had become a cacophonous space, punctuated by tremendous bass, sizzling treble, and repetition, as well as heat, humidity, and pressure. At the same time, it made possible a lyrical flow that grated sonically and ideologically against the nerves of those raised on the love poetry of earlier popular music. Though initially taken up by young, black, queer audiences, the successful listeners in this soundscape did utilize or, in the metaphor of Thompson, remix the past to shape their worlds and, in the process, created spaces for different kinds of collective structures, families even, to support themselves socially and even economically. As they grew older, many of these early adopters went on to mentor younger groups who created even more challenging sounds and drew in larger, and many cases whiter, straighter, audiences. However, without the white-collar musical workforce and power of the earlier Motown-era, this emergent scene had to generate much of its own sonic infrastructure—including sound systems, promotions, record stores,

record labels, and management—and remix Detroit’s dark, spectral, de-industrial, murderous image as it manifested itself in the minds of locals and non-locals alike to its own uses. I have argued that the results of all of this have been highly imaginative. The survival and ultimate success of the Movement Electronic Music Festival has provided a place to explore the contemporary limits of how much bass, treble, and sonic atmosphere Detroiters—or anyone for that matter—cannot only handle but understand and creatively respond to. If dancing at the limits of the soundscape is important to you, Detroit has rarely been such an exciting place. At the same time, the presence of Eminem in two 2011 Superbowl commercials, including one called “Imported from Detroit” for Chrysler, showed that post-Motown Detroit artists raised in the new soundscape could influence not only Detroit but the globe.³⁰² I believe that the voices that I have included in “Where The Mix Is Perfect” make both the recent festival and Eminem moments understandable as part of the same, sonorous whole, and in the process intervene in our memory of what Detroit and its music are.

³⁰² “Imported from Detroit,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKL254Y_jtc>. (accessed 12 March 2011).

APPENDIX A

ORAL HISTORY GIFT FORM

I, _____ (name of interviewee),
of _____ (home address), herein permanently
give, convey, and assign to **CARLETON S. GHOLZ** (4030 Walnut Hill, Troy, Michigan
48098, 313-505-7414), who is currently in possession of my interview (or oral memoir)
consisting of the recorded interview conducted on _____ (date) by **CARLETON
S. GHOLZ** and at _____ (place) and any transcripts made from them.

In so doing I understand that my interview (or oral memoir) will be made available to
researchers and may be quoted from, published, or broadcast in any medium that
CARLETON S. GHOLZ (individual) shall deem appropriate.

In making this gift I fully understand that I am conveying all legal title and literary
property rights which I have or may be deemed to have in my interview (or oral memoir)
as well as all my rights, title, and interest in any copyright which may be secured under
the laws now or later in force and in effect in the United States of America. My
conveyance of copyright encompasses the exclusive rights of: reproduction, distribution,
and preparation of derivative works, public performance, public display, as well as all
renewals and extensions.

Signature of Interviewee _____

Signature of Interviewer _____

Date _____

Restrictions (write out/or initial corresponding language on page two): _____

SPECIAL USE LIMITATIONS

- A. _____ **CARLETON S. GHOLZ** will NOT be permitted to quote form my oral history interview unless he has submitted the quotes to me and received my written approval.
- B. _____ **CARLETON S. GHOLZ** may NOT utilize my oral history interview unless all references from which my identity could be known are edited out and a pseudonym is assigned. After my death, all portions of my oral history interview which were held back, as well as my true identity, shall be made available.

FUTURE USE LIMITATIONS

- C. _____ No future researcher shall be allowed access to my oral history interview without my written permission.
- D. _____ No future researcher will be permitted to quote form my oral history interview unless he or she has submitted the quotes to me and received my written approval.
- E. _____ My oral history interview will remain closed to all future researchers until _____(date), or my death, whichever occurs first.
- F. _____ My oral history interview cannot be made available to future researchers unless all references from which my identity could be known are edited out and a

pseudonym is assigned. After my death, all portions of my oral history interview which were held back, as well as my true identity, shall be made available.

- G. _____ No portions of my oral history interview (audio and/or video) may be used in any future publication or broadcast without my written permission. This limitation includes all forms of communication presently known as well as those yet to be discovered.

PERSONAL UTILIZATION RIGHTS

- H. _____ **CARLETON S. GHOLZ** in turn agrees that _____
(name of interviewee) shall have a nonexclusive license to utilize his or her oral history interview. This license terminates upon the death of the interviewee.

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