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ANDY VAZ AND THE ART OF TECHNO SASHIMI

Written By: Robert Gorell | April 13, 2006

Early last summer, Andy Vaz showed up for a live gig at Oslo. Fortunately, he had the presence of mind to record the gig. It was a heady affair—glitch-heavy and cerebral one minute, booty shake-inducing the next. The crowd got into it, and the boozy, sweat-soaked basement environs of the sushi lounge made for an appropriately dark place to hear Vaz's blend of electric voodoo.

Listd. caught up with Vaz recently to discuss his newly released album, *Andy Vaz: Live in Detroit*, which captured the night's moody vibe manipulations. _____

Listd: I think the last "Live in Detroit"? record I saw was Bob Seger at Cobo Hall in 1979. How did the idea for your doing a 'live in Detroit' record originate?

Andy Vaz: That was simply because I really enjoyed playing that night, and the vibe and the place was just right. I ended up playing a long, extended set and I thought it was one of those deep nights that was worth capturing.

Listd: What was particularly special or interesting about the night you recorded at Oslo?

Andy Vaz: Oslo turned out to be the perfect environment for my music. It was the perfect place and the perfect crowd. Oslo just created the right vibe for my music—dark and intimate, ceiling right over your head, surround sound and all that. It seemed to be exactly built for what I had in mind for the music that night.

Listd: Do you see any parallels between Detroit and your hometown, Düsseldorf?

Andy Vaz: Not at all. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Düsseldorf is a small village. It's even in the name. "Dorf"? means village, a bit more than 400,000 people. It's an extraordinarily rich and boring city with nothing going on. It's basically a yuppie fashion capital and there are lots of corporations and business, which all have HQ's here. All the money kills a lot of the creativity and, as far as any subculture existing, there's not much going on at all. The only thing I could see that relates to Detroit would be the fact that Kraftwerk's from here and, obviously, they've been a massive influence for the birth of Detroit techno.

Listd: The cover art of the album has pictures of imploding abandoned buildings on the walls of a modern apartment. What about this makes you think of Detroit, or why did you find it appropriate for the record?

Andy Vaz: That's a good question. Showing the ruins of Detroit on the album cover has a lot to do with Düsseldorf. As I mentioned briefly, my hometown is pretty much the exact opposite: everything is new, modern, fancy, almost painfully rich and uninspiring. Everything shines. Being in a city like this has a few advantages, like a good infrastructure, The Rhein [River] and the comfortable size. However, it's lacking emotion and atmosphere. I always get sucked into things that are different to my everyday life. I have always been fascinated by the postindustrial flair of Detroit—with all the corresponding clichés—because it just feels like entering an opposite parallel dimension.

Listd: Your set isn't always dance-floor friendly. It's off-balance and weird one minute, then deeply funky the next. Do you ever feel out of place playing live in a club environment?

Andy Vaz: Yes, I do. I always try to play stuff I'm currently working on and I never make music to just fit in or please the crowd. My music's not always easy or accessible. I like taking risks when playing live—which is another reason why I came across the idea of doing this live in Detroit CD. I could experiment throughout the night—blend more abstract stuff with the deeper side of things in between—and people just felt it. That's not always the case. There are extraordinarily good shows or shows where people just wanna hear standardized techno all night, which I just don't feel like delivering, and then things can get twisted. I like to bring down the energy level by getting more free-jazzy, disharmonic and weird, then deep and linear and back. I think it's about keeping it interesting.

Listd: There are a lot of interesting atonal melodies on this record. How do you make all of these different sounds do what you want them to do in a live set?

Andy Vaz: I add layer over layer, shift tones, pitch melodies on top of each other and blend/fade them in and out to create this tension—like having tones clash. There are references to free jazz in my music. It's like deaf musicians in a jam session, playing on top of each other without hearing what the other plays, yet reflecting an intuitive idea of what goes on in their minds. Tones seem to be able to find their own language by doing so and it definitely makes the music more challenging—for both myself and for the audience. The result is a sound that's unexpected. I create tension. This also makes it more important to go back and forward to the more tonal and deeply textured stuff, in order to keep the balance and not to make it stressful.

Listd: What type of equipment do you use for a live show?

Andy Vaz: I use a PC laptop and a Midi keyboard with an additional Midi controller for each channel. I usually build up tracks with 16 channels per songs then I fade in and out.

Listd: What's your impression of audiences in Detroit versus other cities you've played in?

Andy Vaz: As I mentioned before, it was a fantastic crowd. I also saw lots of people (DJs, producers etc) there I had contact with before, but never met. On the same tour I played in New York, for example, and the show didn't go down at all. It was just one of these nights where people weren't interested in trying to get into the sound. In Detroit, it just seemed natural and it all made sense to everyone.

Listd: The album took a few listens to grow on me. It definitely takes patience. Do you find there to be as much of an audience as there once was for heady electronic music? Has the audience for material like yours grown or diminished over the past decade? In other words, do you think electronic music fans have the attention span that they used to?

Andy Vaz: I think it definitely picked up. Overall, people in Europe are pretty open-minded. Of course, you need to make sure you play in the right environment. This is not made for discotheques or rave parties, but for 300-400 people in small, off-road clubs and venues and/or for art festivals or concert-type events. With places like Japan, though, you can never go wrong. Playing in Japan is the perfect thing for me. People are so extremely open-minded and knowledgeable. Venues are always packed there, too. I found out over the years that almost every metropolitan city seems to have a smaller space and an audience for this kind of stuff compared to the traditional techno/house scene. There's always room for it and I think it's growing. Just recently, people in China and Taiwan showed interest in my work, so I am in touch with people there. It seems the market for this type of electronic music is still growing.

Listd: Name a few artists/peers that you're into right now. Who should people keep an eye out for?

Andy Vaz: Madlib, Portable, Murcof, Antiguo Automata Mexicano, Dave Miller...

Listd: When was the first time you played in Detroit? What was that like versus this most recent visit?

Andy Vaz: The first time, I played at the Audio-Lap at DEMF 2002. It was a tent on hart plaza, based around laptop music production with Apple and Native Instruments showing people how to produce music with software and computers. It was cool, but it didn't have that intimate club atmosphere and I was totally removed from any club-type environment.

Listd: What other projects do you have in the works? Are you in the studio most of the time lately, or touring?

Andy Vaz: I just finished my first solo artist album called Repetitive Moments Last Forever, which will be out in March 2006 as a 2x12" and CD. So, I've been both touring on the weekends and working on the album during the week over the past few months. Generally, I'm always playing on the weekends and trying to focus on the labels and studio production during the week. Now that the album has been finished, I'll be touring in Australia and New Zealand in January and will return mid-February to promote the album.

Listd: How do you feel live techno distinguishes itself from a DJ set? What do you enjoy about hearing live techno and/or playing it live?

Andy Vaz: think with laptop based musicproduction and the opportunity to play your own music live, atleast in europe a lot of more people seem to give up traditional djing in order to play there own music live. its almost a new standart of atleast having one laptop liveact in every regular club night these days and i think the trend will pick up even further until it will be normal to have laptop liveacts in clubs.

Listd: What is your approach to writing new tracks? Are you always experimenting with interesting sounds, or do you have an agenda, a point you're trying to get across, with a given track you're working on?

Andy Vaz: I usually experiment with sounds, let them clash and rub against each other, but on the new album, I had a more classical house thing in mind. It almost has old school rather than experimental sounds. It turned out to be quite down-tempo, chord-driven house music for a change. I felt after having started with more experimental stuff on the Soundvariation Series 12", it was time to do something more classical, more traditional. With house music being my first love, I felt it was time to make my first album a house thing.

Listd: Tell us a story about the worst gig you've ever played.

Andy Vaz: Hahaha... That was probably the one in New York, which was the day before I played Oslo. I got to Detroit in a pretty devastated mindset. I remember very clearly, the audience in New York was giving me a hard time. People were just starring at me when I started playing. And then without giving the music a chance to develop, they started talking over my set. Nobody danced and I was pretty lost out there. Nothing I tried to do would change the situation and I was just lost. I guess you could say I felt lonely that night.

Listd: What do you hope people will learn about you from listening to Andy Vaz: Live in Detroit?

Andy Vaz: I don't like to talk of music as something intellectual or it being a learning session. I'm not a teacher; I make music. I see music as something personal, something emotional, something I'd like to share with people. I like to put them into a certain mood and share my ideas with them. It's all about having a good time.

Listd: When will you be back in Detroit?

Andy Vaz: Nothing is planned yet, but I hope to play at Olso again.