

# DUST

SIMON MAKIN chats to Martin Dust, Ian Orto, Aitcho and Rob Davies, the gents behind Sheffield's techno renaissance.

**What is DUST and how did it come about? IO:** "We weren't hearing the techno we wanted to hear in Sheffield. And we thought it was a bit scandalous really, since it is the spiritual home of British techno. People don't realise that ABC, Human League, Cab Voltaire actually influenced the early Detroit sound..."

**MD:** "I think Sheffield and Detroit are exactly same. Industrywise, they had all their eggs in one basket: Steel, manufacturing, cars. People went to work, they did a job. And what they wanted to do at weekend was go out and have a really good fucking time. Which is what DUST is about. I think everybody round this table's worked in a factory or a dull job, and that's what you live for. And there's nothing wrong with that. And that appeals to everybody. It makes perfect sense. That Friday night, on a pay night, is a night to go wild and forget about everything else, and pay consequences all weekend. And then go back and do it again - that's what you live for. And I guess the hub of it, really, is being creative, and enjoying that creativity outside of what's normally expected from a humdrum life, of going to work, coming home, sleeping, having your tea. It stands outside of that. If you were to sit down and analyse how it works, I think you'd miss the point. Because what's more important in DUST is the actual process of getting from A to B and then moving to C, and not thinking about how it actually works."

"I think from being at BED, we learnt very soon not to be interested in the numbers game. And booking a big name DJ's not the answer. It never has been. It's about building it up from grass roots. It's almost like being in a band, playing back of pub, getting the right people in, and they understand it and buy into it. One of the reasons we turned it into a social club is 'cause there is that aspect to it. There's losing yourself on dancefloor 't music and meeting similar minded people - and being able to talk to 'em, which is missing from a lot of clubs."

**You had some bizarre raffle prizes at the relaunch party. Tell us about the tray of meat. MD:** "It's all about a sense of humour, same as dress codes, a lot of people pick up on dress codes and think they're a joke, but if anybody did juggle in DUST, they would be fucking out, without a doubt. And tray of meat, and everything else, just comes from an era where, like my early childhood were spent in working men's clubs, and the butcher'd come in, and it were a big prize. I think it just resonates, and it's slightly amusing. And people obviously see what we've written and don't believe that we're gonna do it, but we always do what we say. We went in 3 fucking supermarkets looking for the best meat didn't we? What would look good? That's the detail we're considering."

**A:** "We stood debating between turkey kebabs and some chops..."

**Define techno for us? MD:** "People think it's 4 f' floor banging bass drum, when it's actually not. Which kinda puts people right off, people who actually wanna look at the whole spectrum, from Richie Hawtin, Underground Resistance, to all stuff that's going on in Europe, and all across

world - which is what we play."

**IO:** "It's more an attitude than anything. You can have techno which people probably see as house music. It can go from 80bpm, through to 200bpm, it's really broad..."

**MD:** "You could argue that Human League invented techno with Dance Like a Star in 1974. Whether that were a consequence of working with sequencers and computers, who knows, but it's such a techno track. I think it's moved on as well, because obviously when Juan Atkins and Derrick May and Kevin Sanderson where doing stuff, they were heavily influenced by Kraftwerk, and by Sci-Fi. And that period for us has gone now, 'cause there's a realisation, after 20 years of watching Tomorrow's World, and none of the stuff ever getting fucking made that it is even further away."

**IO:** "Techno is just electronic music - music made with machines. Good techno is music that you couldn't even imagine - until you hear it. And it's like, yeah, that's good techno. By definition you can't define it, coz if you hear something you've never heard before you can't say: 'that's drum n bass' or 'that's house' - it's techno. By default."

**DUST has diversified since starting out. MD:** "There's DUST club, which involves a different group of people. But equally important is Little Detroit [the website] and DUST Science [the label] because they all feed each other. DS is a label which plays across the spectrum of electro, back down to really hard techno. We don't want to limit ourselves to one category. Because a great record's a great record, no matter what category it fits in. Early Chicago, early Detroit, were so close together, I think you'd find it very difficult to separate Strings of Life from early house tracks, and say 'that's techno.'"

**A:** "It's about innovation, and there's that many people influenced by techno, that yer gonna see the fruits of that in other genres."

**MD:** "An aspect of making techno tunes for me is about making sounds you've never heard before, sounds that are truly reflective of soul of the city you live in. So the music we're making, we're actually sending to people in Detroit, and they understand it and they enjoy it, and we're getting really good feedback, 'cause for first time since the start of WARP, they understand what the soul of Sheffield is, reflected through music, and the fact we're not ripping them off."

**A:** "Because it's urban music at the end of the day, there's industrial influence. The amount of people who talk about urban music nowadays... Urban music's got nothing to do with shouting about how many bitches, an how much fuckin' money you've made, it's about reflecting the environment yer in."

**MD:** "And your desires within that environment..."

**Little Detroit was conceived to fill the void left by Overload online. Tell us about that. MD:** "Overload were a well respected and written, magazine to start with, covering the whole spectrum of electronic music and culture, and everybody that had an opinion, or put on a night, went on that forum."

**A:** "Everyone was there, promoters, punters, DJ's, musicians..."

**MD:** "...as well as guy in the street, who could say 'I just bought Strings of Life, what else should I be listening to?' And they wouldn't get slated, what they'd get would be 'have a listen to this, here's a couple of clubs to go to... then get back to me.'"

"When it shut down, we sat around, saying: D'you think we can do it? A lot of people on the internet thought 'they'll never fill that gap as quick.'"

**RHC:** "We never thought we'd get people signing up to it, did we?"

**MD:** "No. I mean, we had 200 in first 2 weeks. And it's just a reflec-

tion of people believing and buying into it, and trusting you. In that kind of environment, quite often, people hide behind masks and invented personalities, much same as you get in chatrooms. On Little Detroit people are who they are, and you have to accept 'em. Some of 'em are grumpy, some of 'em are really helpful."

**IO:** "It's not patronising. They don't talk down to people. They'll give each other hell, but at the end of the day, if someone knows less than them, it's fine."

**MD:** "And in 9 weeks we had 400 people, 3 million hits, 30,000 downloads. I've worked on a lot of commercial websites... big, big websites, and you look at them figures and you think - Jesus, that's incredible. But it's only a true reflection of the people that are involved and you get good feedback, 'what's that tune? Have you heard this? I think you'll like that. How d'you mix? D'you push records in or d'you use pitch control? Do you do it on the label? I do like this... Stuff you've never even thought of"

"Even some of the big producers in Detroit who are moving away from having lots of kit to working on computers have put stuff on there under other names. And people in bedrooms who've got no desire other than to make music for themselves and their own pleasure are giving them tips. Knowledge is there, and it's all about communication, and communication at right level. And it seems to work. And it makes it more international, more accessible and easy to get, for people that can't afford stuff."

**RHC:** "It makes it bigger than just the club in Sheffield. It makes it worldwide."

**IO:** "There is no other dance genre that has the same sort of community..."

**MD:** "It's very Northern. It's very welcoming. And that's why it's gone down well in Detroit. Simply 'cause it resonates with them. Interesting thing is there's not 1 or 2 strong personalities on there. There's probably about 200 people that are all at same level. Whereas, if you go on Gatecrasher, or God's Kitchen, there's a couple of people that reply to every link, an' wanna be personality, an' wanna be known, an' wanna be admin. Nobody's ever applied to be an admin on LD. Because it doesn't need one. And I think that's the difference. Nobody's there to impress, people are there to share, an' have a laugh, and talk about whole spectrum of way you live your life."

**IO:** "Just on the general discussion you see the broad spectrum of attitudes..."

**MD:** "From how fat Eric Cantona's got, to Richie Hawtin's haircut, to Dave Clarke looks like Marc Almond, why's he wearing makeup?"

**Finally: Why does Sheffield need DUST?**

**MD:** "All the electronic soul in Sheffield went fucking south to drink shandy, and it forgot what it were about."

**IO:** "Sheffield is such a fashion oriented city. Every bar is a chain bar and all the clubs are playing fashionable music. It's gotta be cool music. Techno has never been a cool music, really..."

**MD:** "Thankfully."

**A:** "That's where the need for it was. There's such a big gap between Warp and Sheffield being involved in early techno scene. It's just been too long of a wait which works for us and against us. There's a lot of kids come up who haven't heard it. People who are 18 now, who are going out, who haven't a clue about any of that..."



www.littledetroit.net has grown to over a million hits a week, and averages around 70,000 downloads a month. DUST celebrated their first birthday last month with the legendary Andy Weatherall (see review on p.18) You can read the full, unedited version of this on [www.sandmanmagazine.co.uk](http://www.sandmanmagazine.co.uk)