

\$1 A WEEK for **12 WEEKS** **SUBSCRIBE NOW**

TOP STORIES IN NEW YORK

4 of 12



Woolworth Building Gives Peeks at Lobby

5 of 12

E-Hails Lure Cabbies to Outer-Boros

6 of 12

Food Delivery Merger Stirs Concerns

Judge Strikes Down Prevailing-Wage Law

NY CULTURE | August 5, 2013, 8:13 p.m. ET

In 'Joke in the Hole,' Copeland Explores Basic Complex Ideas

Eric Copeland, part of the influential band Black Dice, lets the idiosyncrasies remain in his work as a solo artist

Article

Comments

[MORE IN NEW YORK-CULTURE »](#)

[Email](#)

[Print](#)

By ANDY BATTAGLIA

Outside his Bushwick apartment, the street was full of life, with kids playing around a fire hydrant and Puerto Rican flags flapping among artsy graffiti streaked on walls, but inside, the musician Eric Copeland sat at his kitchen table, listening to "Have Guitar Will Travel."



David Kasnic for The Wall Street Journal

'I feel like I dodged a bullet,' Mr. Copeland says of the relatively minimal gear he uses to make music.

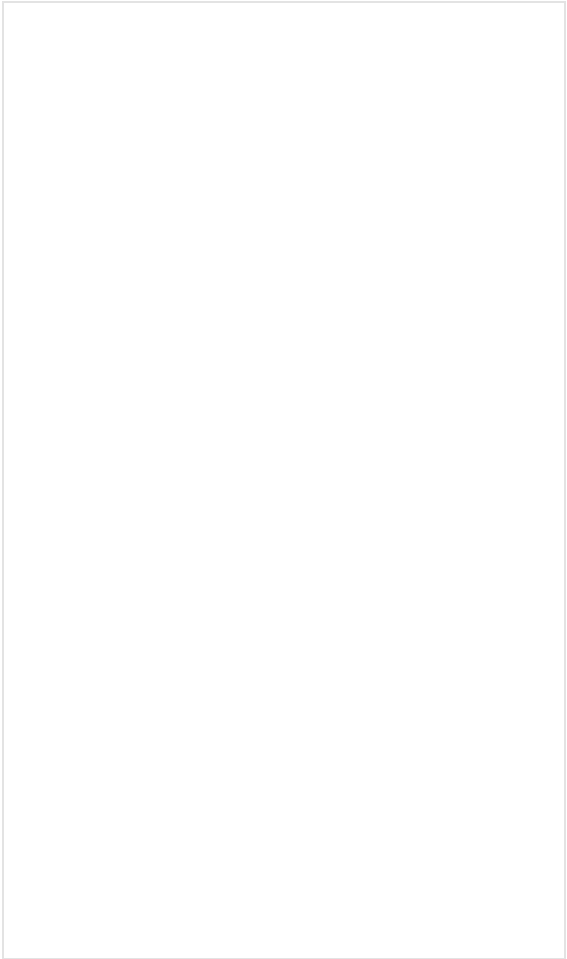
Mr. Copeland's homespun electronic music makes use of different technology than the Bo Diddley album did, but he hears creative echoes from the past.

"The options you want to make music don't require many tools, and they're pretty basic ideas," said Mr. Copeland, at home among his vinyl collection and pastiched collages arranged in frames. "If old blues musicians could figure out how to make those ideas work with one string and a pick, then you can do it with anything."

His new album, "Joke in the Hole," which releases Tuesday, traffics in electronic music that sounds both modern and primitive, like a futuristic soundtrack for rituals that could have taken place decades ago.

"There's a little bit of a war going on in every song, between sounds, tempos, ideas, things going against the grain," said Jonathan Galkin, co-founder of the New York-based DFA Records, which is behind Mr. Copeland's new album.

Mr. Copeland, 35 years old, is a solo artist as well as a guiding presence in the influential New York band Black Dice. With this group, he helped give rise around the turn of 2000 to a fertile underground movement with its roots in Brooklyn, devoted to experimental electronic sounds and delivered in the spirit of a carnival of strangeness.



THE NEW PORTFOLIO TOOL ON WSJ.COM:
THE ULTIMATE INVESTMENT TRACKER
AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FOR SUBSCRIBERS

[LEARN MORE](#)

provided by LukeAssets

Popular Now

[What's This?](#)

Opinion: Congress's ObamaCare

Unlike the skinny-tie bands active in the city at the time (see: Interpol, the Strokes, Yeah Yeah Yeahs), Black Dice and other groups such as Animal Collective took an exploratory approach to peculiar sounds outside the bounds of rock.

DFA also put out Black Dice's first album, setting its mysterious experimentation alongside revved-up dance bands such as the Rapture and LCD Soundsystem that also came to characterize New York's music scene.

"Brooklyn wasn't anything like it is now," Mr. Copeland, who grew up in Brunswick, Maine, said of that pre-boutique era. "There was a lot of neo-tribalism and bohemian ideas, like fire-breathers and absinthe and stuff like that."

Part of "Joke in the Hole's" sound owes to his skewed sense of composition, but it also draws on blueprints from dance music (cut-up and rearranged, collage-style) as well as the strategically strange samples that he takes from sources such as YouTube.

"I'm fascinated with every sound because I know it's there for a reason," said Daniel Lopatin, an admirer of Mr. Copeland's who makes electronic music of his own in Brooklyn under the name Oneohtrix Point Never. "He depicts a colorful and sad world filled with trash, like a high-functioning hoarder holding on to things that are otherwise unwanted."

Mr. Copeland himself attributes his habits to a more direct cause. "I'm broke," he said. When he's not working on his music, he tends bar at the Bushwick art and performance space Secret Project Robot, and he also works for the nearby small-press music distribution operation Fusetron.

But he also prefers making music with less-than-cutting-edge technological means. While most electronic musicians scramble to keep up with advances in software used to create and process sounds, Mr. Copeland remains faithful to the simplest of setups: a mixer, two pedals for digital delay, a cassette player and two hand-me-down keyboards.

"On the train, it's creepy: Every single person is looking down" at their tablets and cellphones, he said. "I didn't mean to wind up this way, but I feel like I dodged a bullet."

His disposition keeps him conversant with the heroes in his record collection, too. Musing on the earthy appeal of old rock and soul acts such as Diddley, Allen Toussaint and the Meters, Mr. Copeland gravitated toward the grit of recordings made with something other than cleanliness and ruthless professionalism in mind.

"Somebody had to figure things out to make it sound the way it did," he said.

"There are idiosyncrasies that people try to avoid now," Mr. Copeland added. "But it feels like you're hearing a take. It's someone's take, and they did the best they could."

A version of this article appeared August 5, 2013, on page A20 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: Complex Basic Ideas.

JOIN THE DISCUSSION
Be the first to comment

MORE IN
New York-Culture »

Email

Print

Order Reprints

THE NEW PORTFOLIO TOOL ON WSJ.COM:
THE ULTIMATE INVESTMENT TRACKER
AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FOR SUBSCRIBERS

[LEARN MORE](#)

provided by LikeAssets

1 Exemption



2 Bezos Buys Washington Post for \$250 Million



3 The \$4 Million Teacher



4 Boston Bombing Suspect Was Steeped in Conspiracies



5 Opinion: Best of the Web Today: True 'Lies'



[Show 5 More](#)

Available to WSJ.com Subscribers

Regrouped al Qaeda Poses Global Threat



Murky Data Blur China's Path Forward



State Farm Is There: As You Drive



Grand Jury Probes Firm That Cleared Snowden



\$1 A WEEK FOR 12 WEEKS

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Don't Miss

[?]

