

music

Rhythmic
connectivity

Hyperdub, which turned 10 this year, is a record label that continues to turn the DNA of electronic music inside out, writes Andy Battaglia

DNA is a twisty, intertwined affair. Just take a look at a double helix. So imagine that, all coiled and contorted and bent, twisted even more. From a certain angle it might be ugly or strange; from another, it might make for an arrangement more beautiful than can fully be explained. Either way, it will be complex, complicated and interconnected.

The label started 10 years ago from roots in the information stream. Hyperdub was originally a website devoted to developments in UK dance music as it evolved from the early cataclysms of rave into jungle, drum 'n' bass, 2-step garage, grime, dubstep and so on. This, among people seriously devoted to the study of such things, is known as the "hardcore continuum".

Take the earliest rave music from the early 1990s, identified in its time as "hardcore", and from that follows an extraordinary tale of musical expansion and mutation. Rhythms shifted, tones and timbres changed, patterns arranged themselves only to be torn apart and reassembled.

All of it happened over the course of just a few years – and then it ended. Or at least that's what some observers have suggested of late, by way of fateful pronouncements about the seeming impossibility of truly big new musical movements now and increasing resistance to any meaningful cross-cultural sway.

Others, taking a big-picture view, disagree. Periods of consistency and stasis are just as significant as times of great rupture, they say; there is much to be learned from the old, earthy wisdom in the proverbial "calm before the storm".

As conversations of the sort have progressed, Hyperdub has worked to

proffer a state in which both diagnoses are true. The great flash of action has passed and yet it somehow also flashes on. There is reason to revel in the contradictions, and there are sounds to accompany them in their state of grace or disgrace, whichever might apply.

The Hyperdub tale begins with a Scottish man, Steve Goodman, who has come to be known under the mantle Kode9. At first, he was one of many smart and heady followers of electronic music, who started posting material to a Hyperdub website around the arrival of 2-step garage. The genre, minted with a bright, shiny and approachable sound in London around the turn of 2000, offered an intoxicating way into the hardcore continuum and all its refracted, but interrelated, storylines. And then, with the onset of so much brightness, came an interest in the opposite: dark, moody, melancholy music with a pent-up sense of dread and a pronounced dystopian streak.



101
Hyperdub
Various artists
Dh80

Somewhere in the intersecting circles of such extremes is the sound of Hyperdub as it now exists on a series of new 10th-anniversary releases. Each is a compilation with its own stated theme and each tells elements of a story still in the process of working itself out.

"I'm fascinated by rhythmic collectivity, whether it's pleasurable or not – just people moving together, differently, in time," Goodman said to *The Wire* magazine in 2009.

"I just think there's something very fundamental or basic that comes before any political affiliation, ideological affiliation, almost underneath social categories, a basic model of what a collective is... people coming together, joined by one thing, rhythm. The way I see it, rhythm is something that joins things."

It is a simple statement that is at once basic and profound. The notion that rhythm is an agent for connectivity or change requires a devotion to music that goes beyond idle creation and consumption. Indeed, it requires great faith in purpose, too. In the same interview, Goodman referred to the late German media theorist Friedrich Kittler (no raver, to be sure), and his suggestion that "our discos are preparing our youth for a retaliatory strike". Here we have club culture as an active zone for physical and metaphysical training, dancing as an ongoing exercise in getting fit for whatever the future might yet have in store.

Goodman mentions the same quotation in his book, *Sonic Warfare*. Focused on the subject of sound as a weapon throughout history, it is an academic tract that reads like an eccentric screed, shouting about whispered connections between World

this week's essential reading

{ 'A raised voice: how Nina Simone turned the movement into music,' by Claudia Roth Pierpont, *Newyorker.com*

} 'The feelings she displayed in the 1960s, pain, anger, a desire for revenge, made her seem at times emotionally disturbed and at others, the most honest black woman in America'



Steve Goodman, known as Kode9, first started posting electronic music material to the Hyperdub website. Courtesy Maximilian Montgomery / Hyperdub records



Ikonika. Courtesy Georg Gatas / Hyperdub records

War II army battalions and newfangled ultrasonic insect alarms.

It is also as good an introduction as any to the Hyperdub world, which remains open and inviting to both cerebral partisans and those who might not be compelled to think about sound as more than mere material for entertainment. To mark ten years of Hyperdub for all, the label is releasing a series of themed compilations, with three already released and another two yet to come.

The first special memento is a two-CD set, titled *Hyperdub 10.1*, which offers a mix of new tracks and highlights from the catalogue during the past five years. The focus goes to the label's "dance floor dimension", and the most suitable term for the occasion is "abstract".

DVA's *Mad Hatter* starts off the 32-track ride with a woozy, whip-crack spell of stretching and lurching, and from there it shifts to a steady, methodical, rhythmic building-block structure by the young Detroit techno acolyte Kyle Hall. By the arrival of Mala's *Expected*, zoned-out and entirely hypnotising by just the third track in, a question arises: how did this all get so weird and otherworldly so fast?

The whole Hyperdub world has a way of sounding somewhat conventional, at least within the realm

of experimental dance music, but then also radically stranger than just about anything else going.

The effect can be subtle and sly and, every so often, explosive, as it is in *Spaceape* by the gnomonic artist Burial. Burial is the biggest act in the Hyperdub world by far, and yet his haunted, hallowed minimal dubstep sounds very much in line with the rest, even when it's far apart.

"I definitely think Burial has had a big effect on aspects of popular music, but also being more open to stuff that's dark, melancholy and, most importantly, overtly emotional," Goodman told the website Pitchfork.

The emotional part of that goes to the theme of the second anniversary compilation, *Hyperdub 10.2*, which focuses on the label's liking for futuristic R&B. Beats still rumble, crack and creak but more prominent are slurred vocals and sound effects geared towards the heart and its many movable parts.

Burial himself figures in with the wistful *Shell of Light*. Other artists include Cooly G, DJ Rashad, Dean Blunt & Inga Copeland and Jessy Lanza. Ikonika, aka the London-born producer Sara Abdel-Hamid, takes a tack toward retro-futurism with *I Know (That You Are the 1)*, a pop tune

transmitted through blast-from-the-past keyboards and antic beats from times still ahead.

The third compilation in the series is *Hyperdub 10.3*, which focuses on ambient music from various releases in the past. This would ostensibly be the lightest entry, with weightless ambience the order for the occasion but its effects can be heavy and devastating. Kode9 & The Spaceape's *Hole in the Sky* is all sadness and dashed hopes but somehow life-affirmingly so, and Laurel Halo's *Melt* sounds like plaintive theme music to a despairing movie from a forgotten age. That it all works so well, and so resonantly in connection with the rest of the label's wares, upholds Hyperdub's contention that club music need not suit any one kind of manner or mood.

In the same retrospective interview with Pitchfork earlier this year, Goodman, in a rare bit of self-celebration, said, "I'd hope we've opened the landscape a bit and made it easier for certain connections between that may not have linked otherwise."

They did, and those connections are still busy finding new and enlightening ways to link up all the more.

Andy Battaglia is a regular contributor to *The Review*.

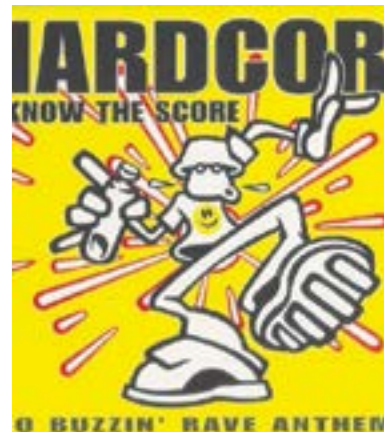
playlist

From the annals of the 'hardcore continuum', four influential titles to wrap your ears around

Various Artists

Hardcore: U Know the Score, November 2001

A solid two-CD survey of formative rave anthems by 4Hero, Omni Trio, 2 Bad Mice and more – the beginning of the "hardcore continuum". Either cheesy or a trip down memory lane depending on whether you've ever queued to get into a disused factory.



Various Artists

Platinum Breakz, July 1996

The hyperdub mastermind Kode9 got into electronic music via jungle and drum 'n' bass of the kind compiled on this survey of Metalheadz, the label founded by Goldie and Kemistry & Storm in 1994. The UK-based label is credited with bringing jungle and drum 'n' bass to the masses.

Various Artists

Sound of the Pirates, July 2000

The fertile early-'00s genre known as 2-step garage is the focus of this exhilarating DJ mix by Zed Bias, with classics by Azzido Da Bass, Artful Dodger, El-B, Wookie and more. It's the hugely successful music producer's first mix album and an attempt to toughen 2-step after mainstream success.



Burial

Untrue, November 2007

The keystone album of Hyperdub so far – a haunting masterpiece to turn to in times of want and need. Burial aka Will Bevan was tipped to win the 2008 Mercury Prize for best album. In a rare public statement this January, Burial promised new tunes to celebrate 10 years of Hyperdub.