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Always Making Noise, From DFA to the MTA

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By **ANDY BATTAGLIA**

Since dissolving his beloved New York dance-rock band LCD Soundsystem in 2011, James Murphy has returned to his roots as a producer, a cross-genre collaborator and a magnanimous scene-maker whose energy fans out into assorted cultural realms.



Enlarge Image
Ramsay de Give for The Wall Street Journal
DFA Records chief James Murphy at the Bowery Electric this week.

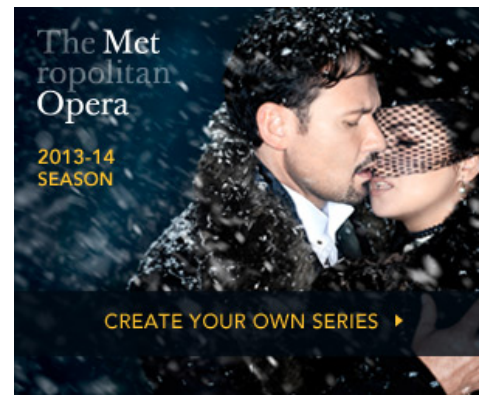
Recent musical credits include a song with Gorillaz and OutKast rapper Andre 3000 ("DoYaThing," from 2012), as well as ongoing production work on a new Arcade Fire album. Mr. Murphy has also maintained his status as a taste-making DJ—a guise he'll revisit on Saturday at a 12th birthday celebration for his record label, DFA, at the Grand Prospect Hall in Park Slope. The event, organized as part of the Red Bull Music Academy series, will feature live performances and DJ sets from some of the label's acts (including the Rapture, the Juan Maclean and Black Dice), all in an extravagant setting familiar to local TV watchers with a taste for campy commercials. As part of the same "Academy," Mr. Murphy will also participate in a conversation at NYU's Skirball Center for the Performing Arts on Monday.



Enlarge Image
Theo Wargo/WireImage/Getty Images
Mr. Murphy and LCD Soundsystem perform their farewell show at Madison Square Garden in April, 2011.

Always expanding his purview, he appeared in the 2012 indie film "The Comedy," signed on to direct a short film with Ron Howard as part of a promotional campaign for Canon, and cooked alongside chef [Daniel Boulud](#) at last weekend's Great GoogaMooga festival.

With all that on his mind, Mr. Murphy, a 43-year-old native of Princeton, spoke with




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The Wall Street Journal about life after LCD Soundsystem, building a new home studio in Williamsburg and the sonic possibilities of subways.

How do you describe your standing now—what goes on the James Murphy business card?

I describe myself as a musician. The rest just comes out of that. I directed a film, but if anyone thinks I got hired as a "director" they're out of their mind. I got hired as a musician to direct.

As a musician, what are you most interested in taking on now?

I'm interested in dancing back and forth between things. I'm building a new studio and a house. I'm trying to build a place where I can work for the next phase of my life, so I'm trying to do things that pay me well while there's this crazy moment when the world cares about DJs, which won't last. I oscillate between that and doing things that I would do for free, that I'm actually counting the days to do.

The DFA studios in the West Village are kind of legendary. What are your plans for a new studio?

I love my studio now, but it's also used by lots of people so sometimes I can't get into it. Right now I have a project to do but I can't get in because it's booked. I like that—being a public place that people from the label can use. That studio was built the way I used to work, with a lot of live bands. I don't do a lot of live bands now, so I'm building a room that's a lot simpler.

Do you have dream projects away from recording?

One thing I've been wanting to do is change all the sounds of the subway turnstiles, so that when you go through, instead of a slightly out-of-tune beep, it would sound like [makes angelic sound of serenity]. It would have a simple chip that would cost, like, a penny. You could tune them in a station to have a particular key, so rush hour at Grand Central could mathematically match the value of a piece by Brahms or something. Rush hour becomes very pleasant, sonically, rather than so incredibly unpleasant. Most cities sound much nicer. New York is quite brutalist, which I love about it, but I think a moment of social kindness would be really appreciated.

Have you made efforts to realize that idea?

I don't really know what to do. Do I call, like, "Dan MTA"? I've talked to a couple of arts-space people and tried to get to [Mayor] Bloomberg, but the MTA is different. I'm trying to find my way in through some avenue. I travel a lot and when I find things that are nice I want to bring them back. The Japanese subways sound incredible. They have a simple, inexpensive friendliness and kindness to them. Since [the MTA] is going to switch to a tap-and-ride system, when they're going to change the mechanisms anyway, it would cost nothing.

How has your studio work with Arcade Fire gone?

It's going great. It sounds super-amazing. I feel like it's really, really, really strong.

How would you describe your role with the band?

Depending on the songs, I've helped with arrangements or mixing sounds or trying to push ideas. There are lots of different meanings [for "producer"]. I'm certainly producing a lot more than some people who say they're producers, and a lot less than other people who say they're producers. The band is pretty self-producing in a lot of ways. For them I think "producer" is a tough role a lot of the time, but I'm like another person in the band since I'm a musician. They know I know what they're

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Real- York

Weather Journal: Haze Leads to Showers

At times on Wednesday, it felt like walking inside a water balloon left in the sun. A frontal system approaches on Thursday with enough energy to puncture the balloon, releasing rain showers across much of the region.

Small Footprints, Tall Towers: Skinny Condos Take Manhattan

Another day, another plan for a soaring, skinny Manhattan condo tower. Deals like those by developer Bruce Eichner to build a 800-foot condo tower on a lot just 50 feet wide have become all the rage in Manhattan these days.



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Getting Around Greater New York

dealing with. If they feel like they're being encroached upon, I'm very sensitive to that. We're different, but we both work with energy.

How do you relate to the recent dance-music boom in America?

I don't relate to it at all. I find it very unrelatable. It's got nothing to do musically with me. Electronic dance music—"EDM"—I'm puzzled. People always ask me what got me into electronic music, but I'm not that into electronic music—I'm mostly into drums. I like synthesizers, but they're just one of the things [I use]. Nobody ever asks me what got me into electric bass, which was a far more important part of [LCD Soundsystem's] sound.

What got you into electric bass?

Not being that good a guitar player and not being that good a drummer, and finding an instrument that does a little bit of both.

Haven't you participated in the rise of "EDM" to some degree?

I've done a couple of festivals that felt part of that new thing, but I don't make sense there. When I DJ, I like to bore people for 20 minutes to get them to stop staring at me—then we can get down to business of playing some music and having a good time. In the beginning of DFA, we did a lot of drugs and were kind of mayhem, but just at a scale of like 300 people. I thought there was something really funny about it, but it doesn't seem funny anymore. I sound more dour than I am. It's fine. It's just like eBooks or something—it has nothing to do with me. I'm not worried about them destroying dance music or making dance music popular. It's just something that's happening, like grunge. Set your watch and just wait a minute.

How did you arrive upon Grand Prospect Hall for your DFA label party?

Have you seen the ads? "Grand Propsect Hall, where all your dreams come true!" I've always wanted to go there, but I always thought it would be too expensive. At DFA we still operate as this little rinky-dink operation, but we sold out this thing—I guess we should do more parties.

How do you feel about the New York music scene circa now?

I have no idea what's going on. I listen to old music a lot and it's a little embarrassing because I should be more current. I'm sure there are venues I've never heard of hosting bands I've never heard of all over the place, and probably some good ones.

How about New York as a place to be?

I love it, but it's hard, sometimes too f—ing hard. For example, if you wanted to have a wine shop and you also wanted to sell, quite logically, cheese, it's illegal. There's no license you can get in which you could have a shop that sells wine and cheese. That seems insane. I like the idea of turning into somebody who could have a wine and cheese shop. Somebody could say, "That guy used to be in a band." I'd be like, "Yep." Sometimes New York is a little brutal. But that's part of what makes it work.

Write to Andy Battaglia at andy.battaglia@wsj.com

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