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Duo Imports Europe's Reigning Sound

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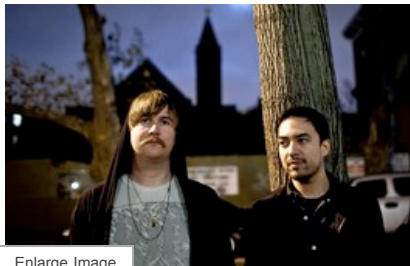
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By **ANDY BATTAGLIA**

A couple of weeks ago, on the stage at the downtown club (Le) Poisson Rouge, two heads bobbed in the darkness, one hidden in the hood of a sweatshirt, the other flashing an ingratiating grin. They wobbled over a bank of machines with switches and knobs, a pair of laptops poised in the middle for something other than administrative use. As images of what appeared to be the entrails of an eerie extraterrestrial creature beamed from projection screens, a crowd of 20-somethings swayed in and out of time, in search of a beat.



Enlarge Image

Bryan Derballa for The Wall Street Journal

Travis Stewart and Praveen Sharma of the Brooklyn-based dubstep act Sepalcure. The duo's self-titled debut album is out on Tuesday.

So went another club night for Sepalcure, a New York act on the rise in the ranks of the evolving electronic style known as dubstep, a rhythmically adventurous sound invested with alien textures and bellowing low-end throbs that signal its status as "bass music." The duo—Praveen Sharma, 30, and Travis Stewart, 29—started working together in Brooklyn two years ago, and are now beginning to fan out far and wide. This downtown performance marked their highest-profile New York show to date, though the most

significant swell of action has come overseas, where Sepalcure has reversed the normal course of musical migration and made waves in a style known to this point as being anything but American.

"To go to London and play a packed club with people pressed up against the DJ booth to see what we were doing gave us a lot of affirmation," Mr. Stewart said of a pivotal Sepalcure show at the end of last year. London, and more generally England, is the motherland of dubstep and all its variants, all of which are dynamically vibrant and rhythmically inclined. It is also home to Hotflush Recordings, one of the style's premier labels and, thanks to a chance event brokered by a few zealous friends of the group, the imprint behind Sepalcure's self-titled debut album, out Tuesday.

"It's electronic music and people can dance to it, but it's got a lot more to it as well—an esoteric quality that is not easy to pin down," said Paul Rose, head of Hotflush and, in his guise as Scuba, an eminent electronic-music artist in his own right. After he was sent a few early Sepalcure tracks, he immediately linked up with the duo in an online chat.



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"As soon as I heard them I was really keen to start putting stuff out," he said.

Like most local fans of dubstep, the two members of Sepalcure trace their education in the style to Dub War, a formative club night that began attracting international artists and DJs to the city in 2005. It was one of Dub War's founders, a promoter and fellow DJ named Dave Q, who sent the duo's early work to England for evaluation.

"I always wanted people from New York or America in general to have a place in the music I liked to play, and there was a real absence for a number of years," Mr. Q said. "Sepalcure clearly fit with the kind of stuff I was playing by U.K. producers, but it had an organic, warm, analog sound that was different from the clean, digital sounds I associated with the U.K. There was a looseness to it. I could picture Praveen and Travis in the studio just jamming."

And jam they did, both fast and slow. "At first I really liked the dub element in it," Mr. Stewart said of the sound he came to love at Dub War, whose adherents laced heavy club-minded beats with the introspective sonic-searching at work in traditional Jamaican dub reggae. "I've always loved the way that dub can jump back and forth between a double-time feel and a half-time feel, how it can make you, depending on your mood, bounce up and down or just lean back in your chair and relax."

Since then, the still-developing style of dubstep has expanded into shapes that have shattered, smoothed out and solidified into a certifiable sound of "now." All the byproducts of its evolution figure into the sound of Sepalcure, and central to all of them is a focus on the potent low-end properties of bass.

"I just read about how, in churches, they have speakers that put out low frequencies from organs to invoke spiritual feelings in people," Mr. Stewart said. "It's creating a physiological response even when you can't audibly hear. They use the same thing in riot control, when sound makes people feel sick to their stomachs. But at a certain controlled level, church people assume it is the fear of God. Looking at it from that standpoint, you can see how people lose their minds when they're at a show with a proper sound system and a bunch of people shaking their bodies all around."

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Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver is back in the hospital undergoing treatment related to an injury sustained while biking earlier this month, his spokesman said Monday.

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