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THE CRYSTAL METHOD

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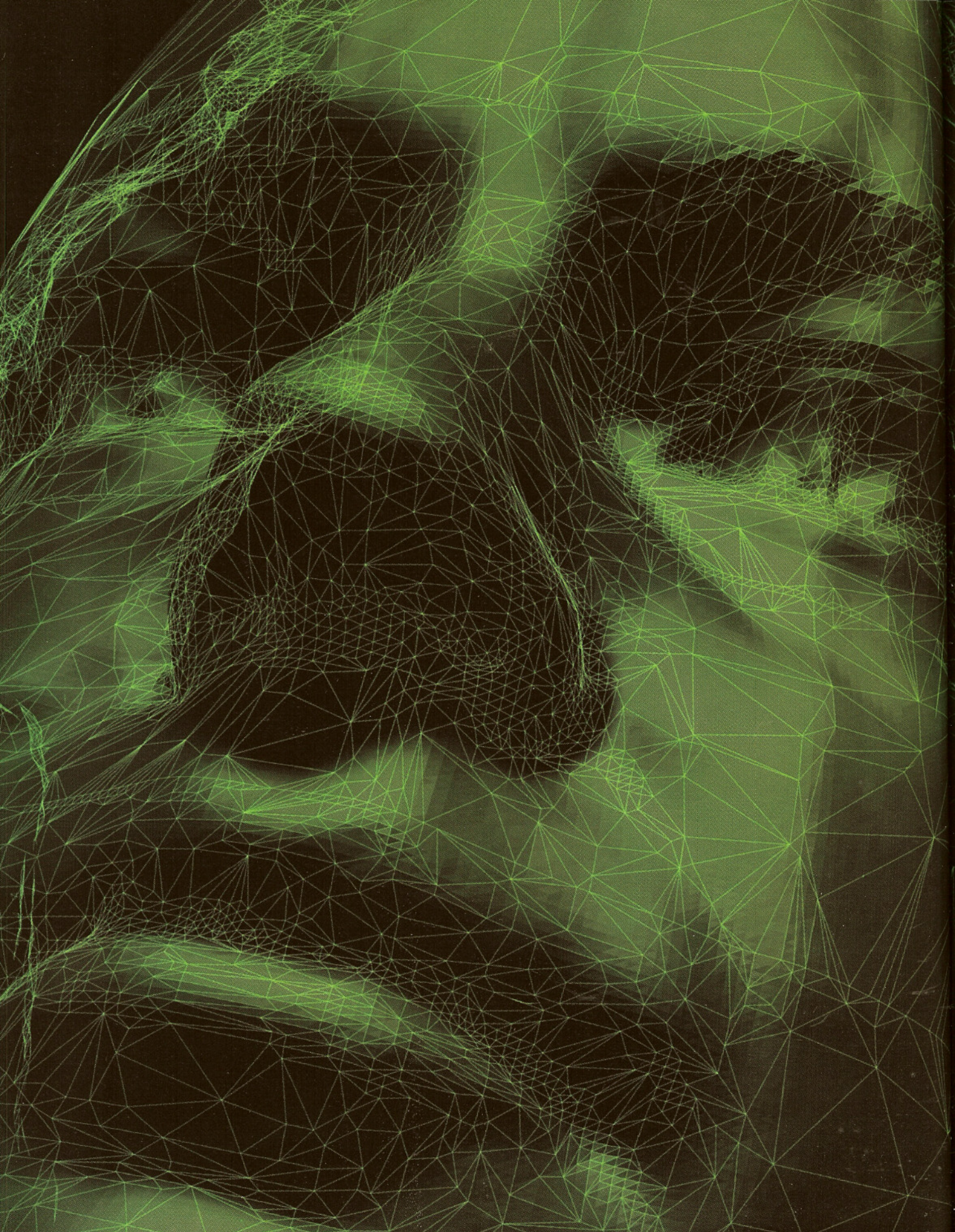
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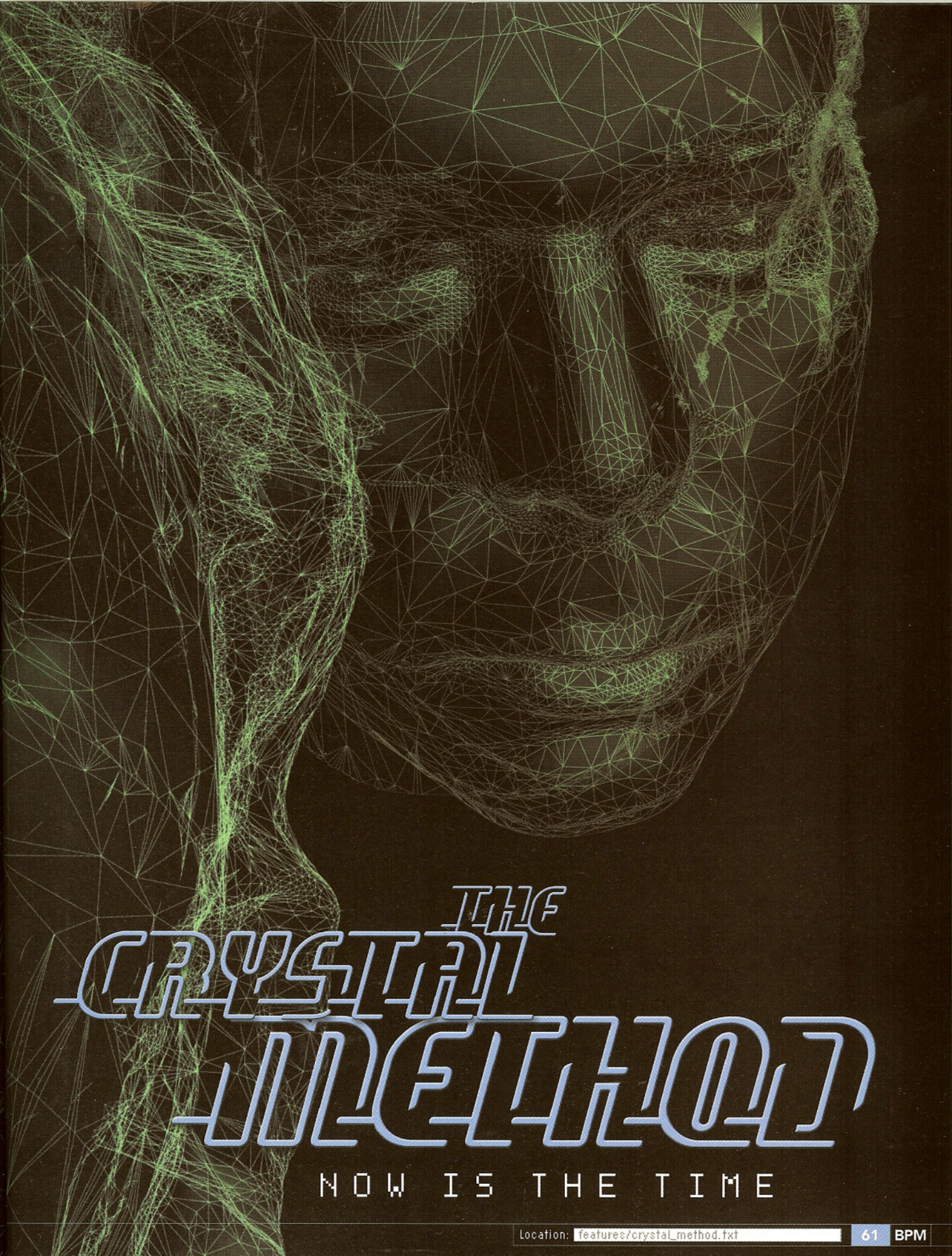
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THE CRYSTAL METHOD

NOW IS THE TIME

THE CRYSTAL METHOD

BY MARK PFEIFFER

ANOTHER WORLD... ANOTHER TIME...

Although 1992's 'Keep Hope Alive' was their first "official" single, The Crystal Method slapped the general public across the face using an open palm with 1997's LP Vegas. Its singles splashed across the medial spectrum from movies to video games in glorious gold-plated buckshot, and with it they tested into a frenzied wolfpack of a peer group spearheaded by the likes of Fluke, The Chemical Brothers and Daft Punk to name but a few.

Again, that was 1997. Their press release for 'Tweekend' proclaims that since then they have "not come up for air." At first I was dubious, and couldn't help but recall a similar release issued by The Stone Roses after five years of who knows what had lapsed between their first and what turned out to be their last album. Yet, after spending an afternoon with the Las Vegas born pair in their urban bunker studio it's obvious that these guys are perfectionists. **They control and create everything about their music, and approach it with a childlike zeal that borders on the pathological.** That's ok, true bad asses are allowed to be obsessive, just ask Oprah.

How does it compare to Vegas? If Vegas was a rocket sled Tweekend is a rocket tank with a wet bar. The mixing and mastering is definitely stepped up, and of course it's jacked through with sampled vocals which never detract, but always shoot the curl coup de'grace. Less space age chatter and more hip-hop fist de cuffs, but tomato tomatoe, you can still bust several mental nuts per song. The sound design is distinctive to The Crystal Method, and although the average BPM may be slightly lower, it's got more energy than a greased up Richard Simmons bombed out on pharmaceutical grade Speed.

'Tweekend' kicks off with the extremely confident 'PHD'. Echoes of 'Vegas' are pleasingly evident, and before long TCM has built a complex, staggering pillar of sound, which literally forced my head to bob out of fear. 'Name of the Game', the single slated for first release, features Tina Dixon bringing it on with some seriously tight shit-talking framed by a lightening smooth mix of guitar, scratch and backbeat which rolls and snaps like mercury on a hot tin roof. It was at this point I quickly found my favorite chair and, armed with my stack of unread Marvel comics, proceeded to spend an enjoyable Friday night at home.



ourselves and this is just our second album.

Scott Kirkland: The only thing we have to compete with is the success of our first album; we don't have to worry about the hype and the bullshit that was thrown on top of electronic music back then. It may have been the next big thing to the fan, who took it into their own world, but no one ever thought it was going to take over the airwaves.

BPM: I think it was Spin that ran an infamous article that said that very soon the only music out there would be electronica, in 1996.

SK: No one likes to be told what to listen to, and there was a lot of rebellion against that, but whatever.

BPM: You've been called the American equivalent of The Chemical Brothers. What do you think of their evolution? Do you think there is such a thing as big beats or break beats as a cohesive entity any longer?

KJ: I think people will continue to make music that doesn't have the typical house 1-2-3-4; the sound will change a little and they'll call it different things, but it will always have that organic, human quality to it. Right now there's a new wave of it coming from England, which is kind of being broken down and slapped with various labels.

SK: It's hard keeping up with the English press and their titles. I think the Chemical Brothers have veered off in another direction. They're kind of re-exploring the late '80s

FADE IN:

Setting:

A two-car garage turned home studio to Ken Jordan and Scott Kirkland. (Point of interest: Their front yard is host to a rusted out husk of a bomb shelter circa 1950.)

Noir voice over:

Driving north from Los Angeles, I had the same eerie feeling of displacement upon entering the San Fernando Valley as does any god-fearing resident of LA proper when the 405 begins its steep descent into that shadowy netherworld. It is a subtly sinister world of station wagons, stop signs (not lights), backyard BBQs, and white picket fences. In this suburban veldt the hills have eyes. The Bomb Shelter became more and more elusive the closer I got. In some terrible conspiracy against future generations, the "Valley" houses constructed in the 1950s were built by the same architect, who used the same cookie cutter blueprints with only slightly different shades of beige. In the end, my addled brain had more expected Mrs. Cleaver bearing freshly baked cookies, rather than their assistant armed with Red Bull, to answer the door. And yes, **their studio did indeed look like the bridge of a star-destroyer... if Darth Vader had kept an entire wall lined with old-school vinyl.**

BPM: How do you feel right now, this being your second album after a 4-year gap?

Ken Jordan: We feel great about it. On the first album our expectations were low. We just wanted to make a record. But that was during the electronic "revolution" hype era. It was the next big thing. Somehow we made it through, but it's good that we can release an album now without that whole thing surrounding it. We've established

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and techno, which is cool. On the other hand a lot of techno people like Sasha and Taylor are throwing breaks into their stuff. There are incredible bands like Hybrid and Beaver doing amazing stuff. The more the merrier; we're just waiting for the next category to manifest.

BPM: It begs the question: Where do you consider TCM to fall? (At this point we all throw our heads back and laugh vigorously.)

SK: Well, first we were trip-hop then we were break-beat then we were big beat.

BPM: Yeah, that's all relative to the media. I don't want to label you. Say ... let's just pretend you could "create" a genre right here and now with TCM as the massive awe-inspiring spearhead. Name it.

KJ: Thick and chunky.

SK: Yeah, just like salsa. It doesn't roll off the tongue like ghetto-tech or big beat, but it definitely describes this new album.

BPM: I think you fellas have, to an extent, mastered the art of vocal sampling. When the need arises, what do you look for?

SK: We did a Spanish-fly remix of "Dubblicious Grooves" where there's a Latino girl going off about her pimp. It took 2 or 3 people to figure out what the hell she was saying, but at the time it didn't matter. It was more

SIMPLY PUT, LISTENING TO GREAT MUSIC INSPIRES US TO CREATE, BUT NOT TO COPY.

about the rhythm of her voice. With "Busy Child," Rakim's "I Guess I Didn't Know," is full of attitude; it's the way he says it. We aren't trying to make any big statement. "Now is the Time," used a sample of Jessie Jackson was about as political as TCM gets, and it was appropriate for the post-riots LA. We have a large assortment of vinyl and obscure vocals that we use. The girl's voice in "Trip Like I Do" is actually pulled off an answering machine tape from way back when we were living in Vegas. This super-hot chic I was after called my house totally spanked out on something or other while I was out partying with my friends. Whatever it was it made her really, really sexual. The next day when I got home and had listened to 15 minutes of sultry come hither, I called her back and she was totally over it. That sample is just to torture myself.

BPM: Who's being sampled on "The Name of the Game?" Sounds like Smokey from the movie Friday.

SK: That's actually Tina Dixon. Big lady. She's like the female Red Fox (crusty stand-up comic) of her time. Real dirty.

KJ: All the scratching that's around those vocals is DJ Swamp working that same vinyl.

SK: A friend of ours, John Bryant, came in here with some

THE TIME

whacked-out vo-coder-meets harmonizer and screwed with some stuff we took from *The Wake-Up Show*, which was a syndicated hip-hop show that used to be on The BEAT. It still runs throughout the country, just not in LA. They would have this MC battle, where a bunch of up-and-comers would face off, so we got some stuff from that.

BPM: Sort of a ghetto Star Search.

SK: We haven't had great luck bringing people into the studio; more often than not we get it from vinyl or an alternative source.

BPM: I read once that you had commented that TCM is more influenced by Stevie Wonder than Aphex Twin. Interesting.

SK: We're influenced by Stevie Wonder, Led Zeppelin, New Order, The Chemical Brothers and Fat Boy Slim to name a few. We're moved not by what artists do technically, but the organic soul that they are able to create. Simply put, listening to great music inspires us to create, but not to copy. At the time that quote was thrown down, there were a lot of people wanting us to give praise to artists like Aphex Twin, and we're going to stick more to bands we listen to on a daily basis. It's not TCM vs. the core of electronica or anything; we just like to note the fact that many of our influences come from outside electronic music.

BPM: What are a couple of bands from the '70s and '80s that people will still be listening to in 20 years?

SK: One of my favorite artists is Bill Withers, the man behind "Ain't no Sunshine" and "Lean on me." Rare Earth is good; there's so much music that was created in the '60s, '70s and the '80s that the mainstream has never heard. You can go through old school funk records and lose your mind.

KJ: The '70s, well besides Stevie and Zeppelin, Sly and the Family Stones. The '80s were rough. Killing Joke, Book of Love, and early stuff by The Cult.

SK: New Order and Depeche Mode are my favorite '80s; they started introducing me to melody and building harmony. The first Ministry, the one that Jorgenson is dismissive of—*With Sympathy*—that was amazing. It's too bad. I know he's into roadkill and screaming through distortion pedals now.

BPM: And throwing feces at people. Moving forward ... how important is the listening environment for *Tweekend*? Do you need a \$200.00 set of headphones or a \$2,000 stereo to catch everything that's going on?

SK: Well through headphones it's a whole different world. I was amazed by it. Although we rarely use headphones in the studio, I listened to it while we were mastering it in New York and the left/right channel feel is really there. I asked the engineer to put in our first album and it was within five seconds, after I asked him if it was com-

ing in mono, that we knew we had made a much bigger, fucking wider record. On the other hand, right after we finished it completely we walked over to our friend's apartment and he had a cheap little boom box, with Xpanded Dynamic Range (we all laugh uproariously) and it played well. While we're putting stuff down, we're always routing it through different speaker set-ups, because, obviously, not everyone is going to have a monster system.

BPM: Who besides DJ Swamp was involved with *Tweekend*? I know Rage Against the Machine's Tom Morello co-produced and laid guitar onto a few tracks and afterwards you guys remixed "Renegades of Funk" for them ... because I have a copy (muha-haha).

SK: We were way behind on our album when we did "Renegades" for them, and we did it in a short period of time, but it's something that came out nice.

BPM: What kind of equipment did you guys use with *Tweekend*?

KJ: Nords have always been an important part. The Clavis Modulator and Lead 2. Roland Jupiter 6, Arp Odyssey, Korg ea-1, er-1 and MS-2000, Yamaha cs-80, Roland Juno 106 and on and on. We used the Access Virus to distort the hell outta the Wulitzer Piano on "Over the line."

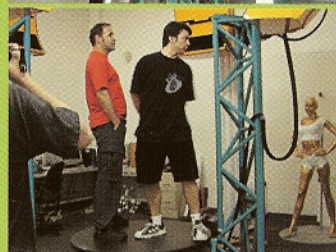
SK: We used to have loads more in the studio, but that led to claustrophobia, so we cleaned out a lot of the crap. Now every room is a mini-studio. Occasionally, we have an analog synth of the week we slide in here.

BPM: If an omnipotent being were to descend to the earth and commanded you to choose the manner in which humanity would meet its end, what would you say?

KJ: I like the asteroid thing. You know when it's going to hit, so you could have a big countdown, people panicking. When it actually hits it would be pretty amazing ... although that would mean you would die shortly after. You don't want to go with the slow ice age or the plague. Flame out.

BPM: You guys were involved with the John Reiss film *Better Living Through Circuitry* a couple of years ago. What was that like?

SK: That seems like a long time ago. Although



we took them very seriously, we didn't take ourselves seriously, so we were very laid back and spontaneous. When they came over to film the shots in the studio it was a very hot summer day. That was before we had air conditioning and the lamps they brought in had us sweating like pigs. They filmed us doing everyday things and before you knew it, it was over.

BPM: Is John Reiss related to your sometimes vocalist Trixy Reiss?

KJ: No.

BPM: You guys were great when I saw you in Denver a few years ago; however, I must admit that the image from that night, which is seared onto my brain to this day, is Trixy mounting the stage in a skin tight shimmering sequenced dress and doing live vocals for "Comin' Back." My lordy lord. I couldn't look my girlfriend in the face for a week. Not to be a meathead, but you should put more pictures of her up on your web site. For PR purposes of course... (Eyes glaze over)



continued >>

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SK: That was the only show she's performed. She was supposed to do a show in Vegas, but it got cut, so she did the Denver one instead. Lucky you.

BPM: Mommy mommy please don't hurt baby like you did on the potty!

SK: Huh?

KJ: What?

BPM: Where am I? (wipes drool from mouth). Speak of this to no one. I think Scott Weiland a la Stone Temple Pilots did vocals on a song. How was that?

KJ: Don't know. He was busy with STP stuff, so we sent a few things over to him to see what he liked, he laid down the vocals, sent it back and we redid the track around him. It worked out well, despite the fact we haven't been in the same room with him.

BPM: Ahh, the atomic age.

KJ: He works fast and got us a good track back; that's all I can say.

BPM: If without any effort you could instantaneously be a savant level genius on any one instrument, what would it be?

KJ: Clavinet. It's the instrument Stevie Wonder plays on "Superstition."

BPM: For me it's the spoons (more caddish laughter).

SK: The drums. Because when you can't play the drums everyone knows you CAN'T play the drums. You can sit down with a guitar, and as long as it's not plugged in you can act like you know what you're doing. Drums are so loud and obnoxious. If I could play like Jimmy Chamberlain from the Pumpkins that would make my year.

BPM: After the assured success of Tweekend, what's next for you guys? Another 4-year wait?

SK: A much faster turnover. We already have three or four tracks that we couldn't squeeze on *Tweekend*. We're going to be able to take our studio on the road with us and work on stuff outside The Bomb Shelter, which will be helpful. We can test a lot of stuff on audiences.

BPM: What DJs or producers would you guys like to work with in the future?

KJ: Hybrid, DJ Shadow, and Timo Maas just off the top of my head.

SK: We'd love to work with PJ Harvey or Shirley Manson. We do remixes, but tend to limit it to one or two a year. We aren't very plotting. We tend to stay in our own world, and if something we dig comes across our desk then so be it.

BPM: Aside from the stress of launching a new album, do you ever step back and say, "My god, making music for a living is pretty damn nice."

KJ: It's funny how little you do that, but it's true.

SK: Breaking into the industry is one thing. Staying a contender is another. We see so many artists that have just as much, if not more talent than us getting sliced off the bottom of their label's roster. We try never to take for granted what we have, but we work really hard to keep the momentum going which makes it more of a job. We try to pull back. The reality of how good it is hits me most on the road a lot—on your own tour bus.

BPM: What's your favorite city to play. If you had to choose one place, where night after night into infinity you had to perform, where would it be?

KJ: Our favorite city to play is the one we haven't played yet, on a Tuesday night, all-ages show. Screw the lights. Screw the laser show. It's great playing big cities, but when we go to a city where the kids haven't seen our show, it's always the best.

BPM: If you were to die tomorrow and God does exist, what would you like him

to say to you as you reach the pearly gates?

SK: I liked *Tweekend* better than Vegas

<< THE GEAR >>

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