



**TIMELINE**

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## **Carl Craig**

Intergalactic Beats

By Dimitri Nasrallah

Carl Craig is generally known as the central figure in Detroit's second wave of techno, the leader of a talented slew of producers who began appearing in the late '80s and early '90s and who followed in the footsteps of Kevin Saunderson, Derrick May and Juan Atkins. Of this group, Craig was often recognised as being the most artful and the most willing to engage the rapidly growing shape of techno outside Detroit. An extremely prolific producer, he has released well over 200 singles, remixes, and albums across more than a dozen aliases. More than any other Detroit producer, Craig's enduring popularity has to do with his adventurous tastes, which over the years have incorporated European synth music, post-punk, jazz, funk, and R&B into the mix to create techno hybrids that still thrive today. He also unwittingly delivered the breaks foundations of drum & bass and propelled Detroit's legendary status as the home of electronic music through his controversial relationship with the Detroit Electronic Music Festival.

From the time Carl Craig emerged from under Derrick May's wing in the late '80s, he's led a pretty charmed career. "I was shy when I was coming up," he says from Planet E headquarters in Detroit, "and I might've had a thing about getting attention when I was younger, but over time I've found that it's sometimes better for me to play it low profile instead of trying to be the big bad wolf." He's had his fair share of ups and downs, not to mention high- and low-profile moments, but as we look back over nearly 40 years of life and 20 years of music, Craig is clearly enjoying yet another up. Some would say he's higher now than he's ever been.

### **1969 to 1989**

Carl Craig is born on May 22, 1969, in Detroit, a city still recovering from the 1967 race riots that left 43 dead and over 2,000 buildings burned down. Craig is the youngest child of a post office worker and a teacher. "My sister is the same age as Derrick [May], and my brother is three years older than her. My mom always complained that while she was trying to get me to listen to Alvin & the Chipmunks, my brother was always playing Led Zeppelin and Parliament/Funkadelic, which was 'too old for my tender young ears,'" he says. "But that was probably the best thing that could have happened to me, because it opened my mind to a lot of music. I was being spoon-fed good music at a young age." Craig attends Detroit's Cooley High

School, where he discovers the local funk of Motown and George Clinton, as well as the music of nearby Minneapolis upstart Prince. In high school, he grows interested in the new European music, including darker post-punk acts like the Cure, Bauhaus, Throbbing Gristle, Mark Stewart, and Art of Noise. Most notably, his interest in funk leads to the more austere ends of European dance music, where Craig discovers Italian progressive disco and Kraftwerk. He performs in several bands, playing guitar, but his interest in synthesizer music goes back to his '70s childhood. "The biggest influence for me, in terms of the first synthesizer music I heard, was 'Popcorn.' I have no idea who made it, but it was a song they used to play on television during the lottery here. It was a real gimmicky song, but it was a huge hit. They showed the lottery numbers between the 7 and 7:30 TV shows, and we'd sit there looking at the lottery balls, but I was mostly listening to the song."

In the mid-'80s, Chicago develops a thriving house scene, where DJs like Frankie Knuckles and clubs like the Warehouse take disco in more minimal and epic directions. Detroit radio DJs pick up the Chicago sound for Michigan airwaves, and soon people such as Kevin Saunderson, Juan Atkins, and Derrick May pull Chicago house into less emotional and more futuristic directions. The Detroit variation of Chicago house scene becomes known as techno.

"My first experience going out to those parties was with my cousin, Doug. He used to do lights there, and I would help him. He introduced me to Jeff Mills, so I would go to these parties and listen to Jeff play." By 1986, at the age of 17, Carl Craig develops an interest in synthesizers and Detroit techno through his cousin, Doug Craig, who has co-written a track called "Technicolor" with Juan Atkins (as Channel One). Curious, he explores techno further through a WJLB radio program where Derrick May DJs. He also begins experimenting with recording techniques. "All the guys here, we're all tremendously influenced by radio. So I would use a double-tape deck to tape stuff from the radio and then make these extended versions of the songs I liked, kind of like a basic remix." He soon takes an academic interest in the history of electronic, synthesizer, and tape music, studying the techniques and music of Wendy Carlos and San Francisco Tape Music Center acolytes like Morton Subotnick and accordion-experimenter Pauline Oliveros.

### **1989 to 1991**

"I was interested in meeting Derrick," Craig remembers, "because my cousin Doug had worked with Juan, but I didn't know that Juan and Derrick worked together, or that they were friends. I had no clue. If I did, I would've probably bugged my cousin to death." Craig begins recording his home productions, and soon gets a tape into the hands of Derrick May, whom he knows through mutual friends. May runs the Transmat label, and is impressed enough by Craig's demo for the track "Neurotic Behavior" to rework it with him. "Neurotic Behavior" eventually becomes the B-side for one of Craig's first release, "Crackdown," which comes out in 1989. "Crackdown," like Craig's first release "Elements," is credited to the alias Psyche and appears on Transmat.

"At 18, 19 years old, that was one of the first manly things I ever did, to pursue someone I felt I had a common interest and style with, to connect with him, work with him, and have him be my mentor." Craig spends much of the next two years assisting May with engineering. The pair collaborate on numerous occasions, most notably the "Strings of Life" single for May's Rhythim Is Rhythim project, a track that helps Detroit techno gain traction in UK clubs. Craig joins Rhythim Is Rhythim for two UK dates, opening for Kevin Saunderson's Inner City.

"I knew I wanted to go to Europe and meet Kraftwerk," he laughs. "It was all about 'Tour de France' for me. When it came up that I could go with Derrick, it was just the best thing in the world." The performances are in venues for 3,000-plus people, and Inner City is riding high on the success of several chart-topping singles. "I don't think I'd ever been to any event so big, minus the circus." During these two years, Craig also starts working independently as Psyche and BFC, as well as on remixes for early acid and house acts like A Guy Called Gerald and S'Express — the first of literally hundreds of remixes Craig will produce over the next two decades. He also starts up his own label, Retroactive, with long-time friend Damon Booker. The pair release work by Craig's aliases, as well as by A Guy Called Gerald's Inertia project, and

Underground Resistance.

### **1991**

With admirable cuts like “Crackdown” and hotly tipped associations like Rhythim is Rhythim under his belt, by 1991 Craig scores his first hit under his own name, with the Retroactive-issued “No More Words” twelve-inch. Craig is proving to be prolific and disciplined. At 22, he works days at a copy shop and then records in his parent’s basement most evenings. To manage his diverse tastes, Craig undertakes another moniker, Paperclip People. Paperclip People drops the “Oscillator” single on Retroactive. Before year’s end, Retroactive falls apart due to personal disputes between Craig and Booker, and Craig sets up his own label, Planet E. The first Planet E release is a Carl Craig twelve-inch under yet another alias, 69, an homage to the year he was born and home to a more experimental sound. 4 Jazz Funk Greats offers an ironic nod to his jazz and funk interests, while nodding in the direction of Throbbing Gristle’s 20 Jazz Funk Greats album from 1979.

### **1992 to 1993**

With no fewer than five aliases, Carl Craig is hitting his creative stride and the growing international dance community takes notice. In 1992, he adds to his growing cavalry of personalities two new names: Shop and Innerzone Orchestra, both of which appear on opposite sides of the same untitled Planet E single. While the Shop moniker will not continue, the Innerzone Orchestra moniker will become an important part of Craig’s persona. The B-side to this split single, “Bug In the Bass Bin,” steadily becomes Craig’s biggest success to date. “That song went through a lot of stages before it built an extreme cult following. It went through Amsterdam first, and then Belgium, and then it caught on here in Detroit, and then I found about what was going on with it in England, that was a couple of years after.” In England, the track unwittingly lays the foundation for the drum & bass explosion, as DJs quickly discover that they can access a whole other level of music by speeding up the track from 33 to 45 RPM. This amped-up variation of jazzy tech-breaks goes on to influence everyone from 4Hero to Goldie. By 1993, Craig is constantly working, with a consistent flow of tracks hitting clubs under the Psyche, BFC, and 69 aliases, as well as various one-offs like Piece and Shop. He has also become an in-demand remixer, tackling house and techno tracks from Chicago, Detroit, the UK, Belgium, Holland, and even up-and-coming German producers like Maurizio.

### **1994**

With a sizeable catalogue to his many names and a proven mastery across numerous styles, Carl Craig has become a figure synonymous with the second wave of Detroit techno, a producer whose tracks bridge the gap between the tectonic second-wave Detroit sound practiced by Kenny Larkin and the more politicized, hardcore variation produced by Underground Resistance, whose ranks feature Jeff Mills, “Mad” Mike Banks, and Robert Hood. Craig remains more chameleonic than his second-wave peers, however. He is able to blend easily into the international club circuit, a global web of countries and styles that have come to characterize the growing scope and variety of techno and house music.

Reprising the Paperclip People, he works with disco and funk influences to produce “Throw,” a ten-minute post-disco epic that sets the pace for the British progressive house sound and takes clubs by storm. Paperclip People will set the soulful template for Detroit’s third wave of producers, spearheaded by deep-house acts like Kenny Dixon Jr. (aka Moodymann) and Theo Parrish. On a roll, Carl Craig takes on his most high-profile remix offer to date, Tori Amos’s “God,” from the Under The Pink album. Tori Amos doesn’t connect with the remix. “She had a remix from [trance producer] BT, and I think that suited her commercial side a lot better. I think he did a few more remixes for her.”

### **1995**

As result of a remix for UK house duo Ultramarine, Carl Craig signs a deal to record his first full-length album for Mute sub-division, Blanco Y Negro, which handles the duo alongside such acts as the Jesus & Mary Chain, Everything But The Girl, and Dinosaur Jr. Landcruising, a conceptual electronic album that casts itself as a soundtrack to driving around Detroit, is similar in vein to Kraftwerk and Juan Atkin’s material as Model 500: artful, synthy, machine-

like. Though the album is a critical success, it fails to do well commercially as Blanco Y Negro does not know how to market a through-and-through techno album. As a result, it disappears from record shelves. Though the opportunity raises his profile further in the techno and house underground, Craig walks away from Blanco Y Negro disillusioned. From this point on, much of his music appears on Planet E.

"I learned a lot," Craig says of his brief experience with the majors. "My dream had always been to be on Warner or Sire Records. A lot of the music I was into came out on one of those two labels. Parliament/Funkadelic, B-52's, Talking Heads, Yazoo, those two labels had really progressive A&R guys at the time. I didn't know halfway shit about A&R people, I just knew the seal of approval. If it was on Warner or Sire in the early '80s then that shit was going to be hotter than a motherfucker. Blanco Y Negro had Geoff Travis then, which was really important for me because managed the Smiths and he was Rough Trade. So I was happy to be part of this history, but what disgruntled me was how the whole mechanism worked. It made me realize that they don't fuck about music. They give a fuck about stuff that's gonna sell like hotcakes. They're in the music sales business. It was a lesson that I'm glad I learned. But it fucked my head up for a little bit."

Soon after Landcruising, Craig collects his 69 singles from 1994 as a full-length compilation, *The Sound of Music*. Meanwhile, James Lavelle's fledgling Mo Wax imprint reissues "Bug In The Bassbin," and a new generation of producers is rediscovering what is now a time-tested breaks classic. Ever prolific, Craig returns to his Paperclip People alias once again and decides to turn the project into a live band of Detroit musicians. The live incarnation of Paperclip People features Planet E act Recloose, alongside members of the Sun Ra Arkestra and James Carter Quartet. Together they record the *Programmed* album that, like *Landcruising*, does well critically but not commercially.

## 1996

With the prevalence of the CD market in full swing, Craig begins reissuing many of his aliases into compilation discs. As audiences for "electronica" continue to grow, despite a more-miss-than-hit ratio of experimentation in the hands of major labels, new fans gain access to Craig's in-demand early rarities. Chief among these compilations is the Paperclip People set, *The Secret Tapes of Dr. Eich*, which collects all the singles and actually fares better than *Programmed* in foreshadowing the current tastes of dance music. The collection is propelled by new Paperclip single "The Floor," which has been licensed to British house juggernaut Ministry of Sound. By now, house and techno are steadily diverging into separate worlds of "big room" dance music with mainstream affiliations and the more underground sub-genres. Though the two areas develop their own labels and their own talent, Carl Craig manages to walk a fine line, thriving in both worlds. While a compilation of Craig's early Psyche/BFC material called *Elements 1989-90* proves his pioneer status in underground techno circles, Paperclip's "The Floor" helps solidify his standing in more mainstream dance arenas.

This dual existence is made more fluid by Craig's development as a DJ whose varied tastes can play both ways. Hot on the heels of all his compilations, the Studio !K7 label invites him to curate one of their new DJ Kicks sessions, for which he begins the practice of recording his own edits of tracks. His DJ mixes operate as hybrid album collections, with other people's tracks often working as the foundation, as opposed to merely the pieces, of a set. Craig's mixing abilities are average, however.

## 1997

At a career pinnacle, Carl Craig follows up *Landcruising* with the equally eccentric and deeply textured *More Songs About Food and Revolutionary Art* (Planet E). The album builds on the moody Detroit sound by pushing past the futurism of British counterparts at Warp Records, acts like Aphex Twin, Autechre, and Black Dog who have pushed techno's artfulness into the realm of highbrow pretension. Craig succeeds here because he can use the grittiness of techno's Detroit origins to bridge the bedroom isolation of British IDM and the increasingly social and emotive implications of club and rave-bound techno. The album is built on the foundation of several earlier singles and will constitute Craig's last effort at a proper album.

From hereon in, he relies on the DJ mix and compilation forum to preview new material or edits of his vinyl preoccupations.

### **1998 to 1999**

It's been a long and storied ten years for techno. Raves have invaded North America, electronica has been taken up and consequently dropped by major labels, and what began as one form of music in Detroit has fragmented into numerous scenes, sounds, and genres.

By decade's end, Carl Craig has ably eclipsed his first- and second-generation Detroit peers, many of whom have fallen victim to bad career management, financial miscalculations, or obsessions with anonymity that leave them only obscure. The man who once apprenticed under Derrick May is now considered techno royalty in international circles, having influenced the genre's trajectory from the UK to Belgium to Germany and back.

With much of his decade's work now reissued through Planet E or other compilations, Craig spends much of 1998 touring the band version of Innerzone Orchestra, in support of the new "4 My Peepz" single. Otherwise, he finishes off the decade on a high note, if not one that sees his furious pace of production slowing down, as his attentions steadily turn to bigger projects.

### **2000**

That project is a major public event. At the turn of the decade, in a move that will cement his reputation once and for all as Detroit's hometown hero, Carl Craig turns the spotlight away from his production skills and aims to put the whole of Detroit on the map by curating the first Detroit Electronic Music Festival (DEMF). The event is intended as an ambitious public service, a free three-day festival showcasing the city's contribution to modern music. Carl Craig acts as Artistic Director for the festival, which surprises everyone by drawing over one million attendees from around the world. DEMF is applauded as triumphant recognition of techno's importance in Detroit, and in retrospect is the biggest gathering of electronic music to ever take place in North America.

Carl Craig is recognized by fans and city officials as the community's central ambassador to the world of electronic music. The events inject some \$90 million into the local economy. On record, the compiling of Craig's back catalogue continues with Designer Music Vol. 1, a collection of his remixes that, by 2000, arrive showing their age. Musically, people are beginning to question if Craig still has the prowess to stay at the forefront of the music in the 21st century. A good ambassador does not always make the most adventurous producer.

### **2001**

The massive success of DEMF prompts the organizers to reprise the event in 2001, with Craig on board once again as the public figurehead and creative director of the festival. However, preparations for the event don't move as smoothly the second time around, and by spring rumours of major problems between Pop Culture Media (the festival's producer) and Carl Craig start to circulate. By early May, within a month of the festival itself, Pop Culture Media issues a press release stating that it has effectively terminated Craig's contract with the festival due to a failure to deliver contracts to the city's Recreation Department. A week later, Craig fires back with accusations that Pop Culture Media has failed to provide him with artist agreements in time for him to perform his duties.

Though the first year of DEMF is firmly about techno's prominence in Detroit, the advent of corporate visibility and the money to be made has complicated the second instalment. Ford Motor Company has signed on as a co-sponsor, and the demands for the festival's results are greater. For many people, the firing of Carl Craig is a blow to the festival's credibility. The city has put the techno producer on a pedestal one year only to publicly knock him off the next. As a result, many attendees wear homemade T-shirts that read "Carl was framed" and sport stickers claiming "I support Carl Craig."

DEMF 2001 claims to attract 1.7 million attendees, but those figures are later questioned for being too high. The following year, an "Artistic Board of Directors" replaces Craig, and though in subsequent years Pop Culture Media hands creative control over to key figures like Kevin

Saunderson and Derrick May, the festival begins to lose money as of 2003. By 2006, the one-million-plus attendance figures have dropped to 41,000. Musically, Craig has yet to adjust to the new decade as house and techno accelerate in rapid and unpredictable directions. He releases only one new single in 2001, "The Climax," and two mix albums, Abstract Funk Theory and Onsumothasheat, that don't invite the kind of adulation his releases once did.

### **2002 to 2004**

After his experience with DEMF, Carl Craig steps out of the public spotlight, opting to focus instead on his family and his label, and issuing only a handful of new singles and the occasional DJ compilation. In 2002, he drops the "It's A Wonderful Life"/ "As Time Goes By" twelve-inch, as well as The Workout, a DJ mix that sees him continuing the format to highlight alternate edits of his own tracks, unreleased material, and mixes of other people's work, though by this juncture the technique has been appropriated and pushed further by the likes of Richie Hawtin and others. Craig remains quiet, but wilfully so. Most notably in this period, The Workout debuts the latest addition to Craig's arsenal of aliases, Tres Demented, which signals his first move to blend into the generation of techno overtaking Europe. The Tres Demented tracks showcase a producer in leaner form working with more harrowing atmosphere. After stepping back from the mainstream flirtations that came with DEMF and his major-label episodes, Craig is pushing back firmly in the direction of the underground. But other aspects of his persona are still connected to Detroit and techno's past. He joins a large cast of Detroit musicians for a super-group known as the Detroit Experiment; they issue a single called "The Way We Make Music." In 2003, the Detroit Experiment releases their only album and spends much of the years touring, while Tres Demented officially drops the "Demented" twelve-inch. Otherwise, the only new work to emerge in 2004 is the "Just Another Day" single, under Craig's own name, as he continues to maintain a low profile in a techno scene that has shifted away from North America to Europe, and away from analog to digital composition.

### **2005**

By 2005, the techno scene that first started in Detroit has existed for over 20 years, and the overwhelmingly Euro-centric popularity of the genre is beginning to send many listeners and practitioners searching nostalgically among the techno pioneers increasingly associated with form's purest motivations. Whereas once Carl Craig looked to the European music for inspiration, now the new European music is starting to look back to Carl Craig for its foundation.

The revitalization of Carl Craig's career is kickstarted with an invitation to contribute to the fabled Fabric Mix series, a weathervane of notoriety among new electro-philés. Fabric 25 offers a timely reminder to a predominantly white-bred community driven by sterility and minimalism that techno can still swallow soulful underpinnings and vocal flourishes. The mix is greeted with critical reverence, and sets Craig on a trajectory back to the forefront of techno.

That year, Craig also reissues a vinyl-only ten-year anniversary version of Landcruising on Planet E, though the album is notably different because the original recordings are still mired in legal disputes. "It was an album that was really close to me, and there were some nice ideas in there still," he says, "and there was still a demand for it out there." The album comes with the title The Album Formerly Known As.... Techno fans in search of more Craig productions after the Fabric mix discover a low-profile remix of Theo Parrish's "Falling Up" on the Detroit Beatdown Remixes 1:2 twelve-inch, which is originally limited to 300 copies but soon becomes a DJ favourite as it becomes fashionable to mix in a little Carl Craig into club sets. Meanwhile, Planet E returns to fighting form by signing European newcomer Martin Buttrich's "Full Clip" single, making the label competitive in clubs once again.

### **2006**

A year can be a lifetime in techno, and absence of two or three years can mean you've been gone forever. By the time Carl Craig re-emerges in 2005, a whole new generation of technophiles defines the scene, and they remember Craig fondly as part and parcel with their roots. Onetime fans now own labels and produce music. Carl Craig is invited (along with another techno veteran, Baby Ford) to remix Delia Gonzalez & Gavin Russom's "Revelee" single

for the DFA. He also remixes Rhythm & Sound, Goldfrapp, Brazilian Girls, and X-Press 2, in a year that quickly turns Carl Craig into the remixer of choice for many acts. The “roots of techno” revival is in full swing when Rapster Records invites Craig to curate one half of The Kings of Techno two-disc set. Craig uses his disc to pay homage to the European influences that formed his take on techno, among them Yello, Nitzer Ebb, and the Art of Noise, all of whom no longer appear as stale and dated as they had at the turn of the decade. The other disc goes to French techno pioneer Laurent Garnier, who focuses on the Detroit influence and features, among his ten selections, two Craig tracks, “No More Words” (1991) and BFC’s “Galaxy” (1990).

### **2007 to 2008**

These last two years have been among the most successful of Carl Craig’s career. He is in the enviable position of being both a techno pioneer and a producer once again at the top of his creative game. His name has enough currency to keep scores of remix offers pouring in, his new tracks garner constant play from DJs, while crate-diggers continue to discover gem after gem in his immense back catalogue. In 2007, he produces two of his biggest remixes of this decade. The first is for LCD Soundsystem’s “Sound of Silver”; to return the favour James Murphy and company finish off their live sets with a marathon cover of Craig’s classic 1994 Paperclip People single, “Throw.” Craig also remixes Junior Boys’ “Like a Child,” an epic electro-leaning recast that trumps the original and earns him his very first Grammy nomination. In techno circles, meanwhile, Craig is invited to join current minimal royalty in Paris for a Narod Niki showcase at the Montreaux Jazz festival. The laptop-improv collective, which never plays with the same line-up twice, features for this occasion Ricardo Villalobos, Riche Hawtin, Luciano, and Basic Channel, among others.

This year, Carl Craig releases Sessions, a two-disc set that serves as a succinct collection of the tracks that made him the producer to watch. Like past collections, Sessions offers a timely peak into what the producer’s studio has concocted over the years. As Craig says, “I can make ten tracks a day, but that doesn’t mean they’re all going to come out this year. They could come out in two or three years. I do material, and it usually doesn’t come out for a little while. I pace things out until I find the right home for them.” Featuring over two hours of music, the two mixes showcase a home for Craig’s recent and classic tracks, sometimes in alternate of unreleased edits, from his current crop of remixes for Junior Boys and Theo Parrish to edits of Paperclip People, 69, and Tres Demented, all of which makes Sessions the perfect introduction for anyone just discovering this fascinating career.

### **ESSENTIAL CARL CRAIG**

Paperclip People *The Secret Tapes of Dr. Eich* (Planet E, 1996)

The essential Paperclip People primer, collecting all the major singles from this Craig alias that focuses on his interests in disco and funk. This is Carl Craig at his most fun, indulging in a form of organic house that still sounds every bit as energetic and urgent as it originally did. LCD Soundsystem have been covering “Throw,” this collection’s centerpiece, on their latest tour.

Carl Craig *More Songs About Food & Revolutionary Art* (SSR, 1997)

The second proper full-length, advancing on the conceptual foundations of 1995’s Landcruising while further establishing Craig as serious competition for Europe’s burgeoning “serious” techno practitioners. This is Craig at the height of his techno album ambitions in the ’90s. He has yet to record a follow-up.

Carl Craig Sessions (K7, 2008)

A two-disc set divided into two DJ sessions that highlight Craig’s long career, making this the most suitable introduction to Craig’s wide catalogue. Here, Craig showcases recent remix successes for Junior Boys, Rhythm & Sound, and Theo Parrish, while mixing in the still-relevant peaks from various aliases like Paperclip People, 69, and Tres Demented.