

Invisible Jukebox Carl Craig

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they are asked to identify and comment on – with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear. Tested by Philip Sherburne. Photography by Kai von Rabenau

Carl Craig may be known as one of Detroit Techno's second wave of producers, but probably no other Motor City artist has remained as relevant for as long, in quite as expansive a context. Born in Detroit in 1969, Craig was first exposed to Detroit Techno in the late 80s via a cousin who ran the lighting for Jeff Mills. After early collaborations with his first wave mentor Derrick May, Craig struck out on his own in the early 90s. Recording as 69, BFC, Psyche, Paperclip People, Tres Demented and under his own name – as well as a slew of other aliases and collaborations – he developed an instantly recognisable (and oft imitated, if rarely matched) style, at once lush and economical, bursting and streamlined.

While known principally as a Techno artist, Craig's musical journey hasn't stopped there. The 1992 track "Bug In The Bassbin", recorded by his Innerzone Orchestra, is widely credited as sparking a revolution in breakbeat based music, while his Detroit Experiment brought together artists from the city's jazz and hip-hop scenes; more recently Craig recorded with Phil Ranelin, Wendell Harrison and other

members of Detroit's fabled jazz label Tribe for an upcoming Techno-jazz fusion project. He also had a hand in Urban Tribe's *The Collapse Of Modern Culture*, a groundbreaking downtempo collaboration between Sherard Ingram, Kenny Dixon Jr and Anthony 'Shake' Shakir, and his one-off projects range from participating in Ricardo Villalobos's improvising laptop collective Narod Niki to performing on industrial designer Harry Bertoia's sound sculptures.

In the last few years, Craig has redoubled his presence with a stream of remixes fed through House and Techno clubs across the world. Many of these – for artists like Theo Parrish, Delia Gonzales & Gavin Russom and Rhythm & Sound – are collected on *Sessions*, a mixed double CD released by !K7 in January. His remix of Junior Boys' "Like A Child" was even nominated for a Grammy award. (It lost out to the Italian pop-dance producer Benny Benassi's remix of Public Enemy's "Bring The Noise".)

The Jukebox took place in !K7's Berlin offices on the eve of Craig's trip to LA for the Grammy awards ceremony.

Kikrokos "Life's A Jungle"

FROM *RON'S EDITS #1* (WHITE LABEL) 1978/2004

[Before the second bar ends] I don't know who made the original, I only know the edit. No, I do. I think I have a copy of the original, but this is a Ron Hardy edit. It's a serious disco tune but it only breaks down for a minute and a half or two minutes. It's really a cheesy disco record.

This is titled as Ron's Edits, but rumour has it that it's not actually legendary Chicago House DJ Ron Hardy, but a tribute to him.

It's possibly a guy from Amsterdam that did it. There's somebody that transcribed Ron Hardy edits and redid them. Every cut that he made, the guy recreated the cut, exactly how he did it. He took the vinyl, put it in the computer, and cut everything as Ron Hardy did it. So it's very possible that this is his thing, but – there's so many bootlegs flying around that you never know.

Did you ever see Ron Hardy play?

Yeah, I went to the Music Box [in Chicago] a couple of times. I mean, that whole experience was quite phenomenal, because when I was 13 or so, my sister had a boyfriend who was from Hammond, Indiana, which is right on the border with Illinois. And he had these tapes from WBMX. He let me borrow a couple of them, and it was the most amazing shit that I had ever heard in my life. When some friends of mine told me about Ron Hardy, it was like, 'OK, yeah, Chicago, I'll be able to check out WBMX.' I don't remember him as being very wild when he played. I got to meet him, and I think I met Frankie Knuckles at the same time. But the energy and the music and what he was doing – he was such a visionary. I think he had to have been a little crazy.

What was he using?

Turntables, and everybody had tape decks. The only way to play his edits, because he was known for his edits, was to play them from tape. I used to carry a tape deck with me when I first started playing. I was making these songs and as I was able to travel as a DJ more, I would just grab the tape deck and take it with me. If it wasn't for those tape decks, I wouldn't edit like I do now.

You learned to edit on tape? How painstaking was that?

It could be very easy, if you know what you're doing. The issue is how to keep track of what's where. Once you cut something out, if you want to use it later, you have to mark it. If you're doing something in a computer program and you cut a piece, you can save it to the clipboard. But you had to know where that fucking tape was, and we're talking 1200 feet. When you're cutting up shit that's at three minutes, and you want something that's at ten minutes, we're talking probably 700 feet of tape that's going past. That's some crazy shit. But I think that the greatest way to learn is to learn in an old way. I don't think that people who don't learn to master vinyl first can be really great mastering engineers, because you don't know the trials and tribulations that you have to go through in order to really master a record the way it should be.

**Junior Boys
"Last Exit" (Fennesz Remix)**

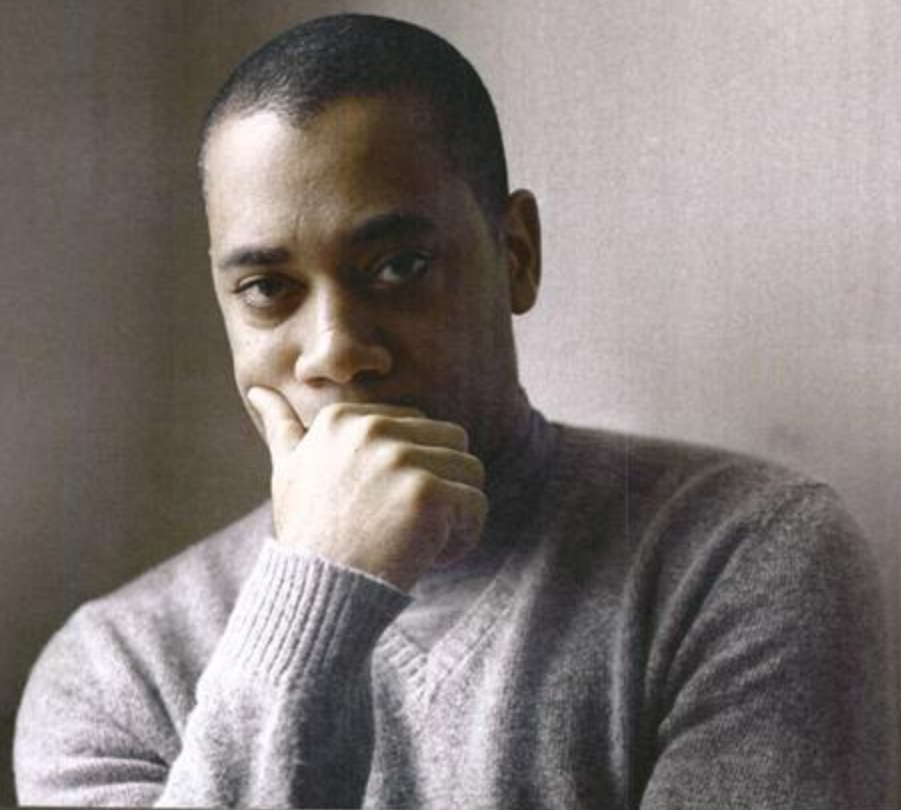
FROM *BIRTHDAY/LAST EXIT* (KIN) 2003

Is it a remix of The Junior Boys?

Yes, a Fennesz remix from the first EP. When I first heard your Junior Boys mix, the vocals and the music almost didn't seem to work together, as

though they were in different keys, but the more I listened, the more sense it started to make. What was your strategy?

To make a hot mix. That's the bottom line. What you heard that would be potentially out of tune were things I took directly from them, so the arpeggiator line is their line, and the sample that I play I think I sampled from something from them. It was all source material. When I work I just feel shit out. Sometimes when I'm feeling it out, it doesn't work and sometimes it does. Sometimes if it is out of tune it's kind of cool, and sometimes if it's perfectly in tune it sucks. My goal at the end of it was just to make a good production that wasn't typical – though it does have my voice, you can tell it's my style. I manipulated the vocals so that it's almost a Max Headroom technique, so that they repeat and do these little subtle things, not as drastic as putting his voice through some eight-bit thing. Inevitably, my focus at the end of it is to make a hot-ass mix. Doesn't matter, you know, that I'm reading Hunter S. Thompson at the time and I want to make something that sounds druggy, or I'm listening to Jean Michel Jarre and I want to make something like that, just, you know, it is what it is, and if it comes out not working then I throw it away and try something else. **You definitely have a signature style: epic, but restrained. Like the way you withhold the kick drum for ages in the Delia Gonzales/Gavin Russom mix.** I like finding that amount of drama that goes into the mix. It doesn't go necessarily into how I compose it; it goes into how I mix it. The process is more what comes in that final two-track stereo mix than in how I edit it together. With the Delia and Gavin thing, the drama is in the filter changes and the resonance changes. It goes like you're going up in a



rollercoaster, and then that big Moog sound impacts, like, *bam!* You're going down. When the strings hit, it's like, 'I didn't realise that strings were even going to come into this shit, I thought it was just going to be an Acid track!' You're kind of spoonfeeding it. But it's still enough energy that it's really taking the interest level higher and, potentially, I would hope that it would inspire goosebumps.

Harry Bertoia "#1025 Unfolding"

FROM UNFOLDING (PSF) 1993

[After ten seconds of indistinct whine] Bertoia.

You worked with his sculptures. What did you use? Any of them that they had in the local Detroit area. Cranbrook University had an exhibition of Bertoia sculptures and there are quite a lot in the Detroit area. We have, like, Ford executives, the Ford family, all these people that have a boatload of fucking cash. You would never believe that we have that kind of money in the Detroit area. But capitalism began in Detroit, as The Last Poets' Umar Bin Hassan told me. He's like, 'Capitalism started in Detroit! It started with Henry Ford!' So Cranbrook has kept a relationship over time with the families of anybody who donates money to the school, and they were able to bring in maybe about 50 sculptures. I don't know if you've ever seen a Bertoia sculpture. They come in various sizes. He has these tabletop ones that are in wood, and there are tines that come out, they're like rods. And on the top of the rods there's a thicker piece that goes around it, and they stand like a bell tree, and you just rub your hand across it and it makes this sound. Then he has these ones that are as tall as the ceiling that look the same or might be in a cluster of rods that just stand real tall. I had to play them with white gloves to make sure I didn't get any oils on them. With the ones that stand up straight, you just kind of twist them and they move in various directions and make these sounds. After I played, there were these old Detroit money people that were coming up, 'I'm so happy to see this happen, because the only time these get touched is when the maid is cleaning them.' It's that kind of thing, just there in the foyer, like *Gone With The Wind*. It was really quite funny and exciting and amazing. And then the Bertoia records are amazing. I was into the records before I played the sculptures.

Did you record your performance?

I did the day after. The idea was to take the recording and add some other shit onto it. But I have never gone back to it. I really need to.

Phil Ranelin "Vibes From The Tribe"

FROM VIBES FROM THE TRIBE (HEFTY) 2001, REC 1976

Outerzone. Outerzone Orchestra, Francisco Mora, right? Or not? Sounds just like something Francisco did. Sun Ra?

Detroit...

Is this [trumpeter] Marcus [Belgrave]?

Yes, with Phil Ranelin.

Oh, it's the beginning of "Vibes From The Tribe". God,

I'm so embarrassed. I should have known that one. [The beat kicks in] OK, if I would have heard this...

Were you aware of them while growing up?

I'm sure that I heard it on jazz radio when I was a kid, but I really didn't come to know their stuff until I was an adult. I didn't get acquainted for real with their stuff until the Soul Jazz compilations. I gotta give a lot of credit to those guys over there because they brought a lot of shit to light that a lot of people wouldn't know about. When we were doing *The Detroit Experiment*, I pulled out "Space Odyssey" and was like, 'We gotta do this, we've got Marcus here, we've gotta do this track.' It was one of the best tracks I've been involved with. I'd been bugging Marcus about doing a Tribe thing for a long time. I had asked him to come out with me to do a Paris live session we were doing at the Pompidou Centre. He said he couldn't do it because he had to play. He said, 'I'm sure Wendell [Harrison] will do it.' I'm not the hugest fan of the saxophone, or I wasn't until I met Wendell. I always thought that it was cheesy, that kind of 60s lounge music thing. People have this thing about the saxophone talking to them. Like, 'I hear the saxophone and I feel like someone is whispering my ear.' People get horny when they hear the sax. It's like, 'Oh, God.' Get that shit out of here! So I meet Wendell and he's really energetic - he's great, and we do these little rehearsals. Sounds good, he takes out his clarinet, he brings his flute. Wow, this is great. We do the set and it was amazing. It was unbelievable. And I said, 'Wendell, you know, I've been on Marcus for a little while because I want to do a Tribe project.' And he's like, 'Oh yeah? Let's do it.' I didn't realise that Marcus and Wendell [both] started the label. I had known Marcus for four years up to that time, and all those four years of me talking to Marcus, you know, within a couple of days, I had a Tribe project in the works.

How do you work with live instrumentalists? As bandleader? Arranger?

I sit back and listen to what they do, and I make suggestions, and sometimes I go and kind of conduct a little bit. There's some tracks that I conduct the dynamics in the room, in comparison to when I have it all on tape. They cut their teeth in the 70s, so their compositions can still have that flavour. Let's see how we can update it a little bit. On some pieces, like "Vibes From The Tribe", we did a new version and it was great. We did a version of "New Day" and it was like, 'Oh yeah, this is the shit.' It just fits right into the pocket. It's timeless. And on some other tune, it needs a little more love to be able to bring it into a position that I think that someone who's new to listening to jazz music will say, 'OK, what the fuck is that?'

Electrifying Mojo "Mothership Landing"

SOUND EFFECT FROM 107.5 WGRB
[DETROITRADIOFLASHBACKS.NET] 1982

[Craig Shrugls]

It's influential Detroit radio jock Electrifying Mojo's mothership landing.

Oh, really. Well, he was talking most of the time. Mojo used to be my lullaby. He was the guy reading the story to me when I was a kid, because I used to have a radio on next to my bed. I had to hear the beginning of Mojo, which was probably a late time for someone that's eight years old, ten years old. But I was like, 'I gotta hear Mojo.' He was playing the John Williams theme from *Star Wars* as an intro, then he'd go into maybe playing "Mothership Connection" or "Do You Feel Like We Do" - that Peter Frampton track was a big record for us in Detroit. When I first heard Kraftwerk was Mojo's show. "Pocket Calculator" was the first time, and I was like [whispering] 'What the fuck is this?' That was 81, so I would have to have been 12. Almost anything that became a real influence on me, I either heard it first from Mojo. With Kraftwerk, with "Din Daa Daa" by George Kranz, with Falco, all that European shit. "Planet Rock", all that electronic shit...

Cabaret Voltaire "Crackdown"

FROM LIVE AT THE HACIENDA 83/86 (CHERRY RED) 2002

Cabaret Voltaire. "The Crackdown", right? Yeah, Cabaret Voltaire was incredible. Actually "Sensoria" was the one that I really liked. That was a hot record in Detroit when I was about 17 or 18 years old. Then there was the soundtrack that they did called *Johnny Yesno*. That was a great one too. I had found out about Cabaret Voltaire when I was living in Detroit with "Sensoria", and then that one really stupid album that they had. You know, "*White car black house*", or some shit like that. It was like, 'What the fuck is this shit? This ain't no "Sensoria"!' But they were bad, they were bad as hell.

I had a similar reaction when I first saw Cabaret Voltaire on a music video show called *Night Flight* that my parents didn't know I was watching.

We didn't have *Night Flight*, we had *MV3*, which of course was MTV, but the free version. It came on, like, channel 50, those kind of stations. They would show European videos, but it was like four o'clock in the afternoon. At the time, the stuff that I was into was them, Severed Heads, a bit of Skinny Puppy, Revolting Cocks - I used to love The Revolting Cocks.

Was the industrial stuff a spillover from Chicago?

Yeah, definitely. Wax Trax was the king of all that stuff. They had the vision to license that Belgian shit, Luke van Acker and Front 242. When I started making tracks with Derrick, I wanted to make tracks for Wax Trax. I actually went down to Chicago and took a demo down there and stuff. I should have realised that they weren't into black music, by me walking in. They could have just stamped 'No' on my forehead. Everybody's got piercings in their face and shit, and wearing fucking thigh-high Doc Martens platforms. I'm walking in there like, 'Oh shit, this is cool, man. This is great.'

And someone at Wax Trax is kicking themselves right now for turning you down.

Ah, who cares. They do their thing, I do my thing.

Robert Hood "Side Effect"

FROM HOODMUSIC 3 (MUSIC MAN) 2007

Rob Hood?

Yeah.

I knew it was somebody from the UR camp. Jeff [Mills] and Rob and Mike [Banks] were doing a lot of that kind of sound. But there's so many phonies out here that it's hard to really tell sometimes.

Detroit invented minimal Techno, and now there's almost a split between Detroit sensibilities and the European strain. What is minimal Techno in 2008?

Honestly, if you want to look at what Rob Hood is doing minimally, which is really fantastic – but something like [Phuture's] "Acid Trax" was minimal, it's the same thing, you know. But then you can go back even further, I'm sure, and find something else. I think that minimal as we know now is probably Basic Channel, directly derivative of them. Which was of course influenced by Detroit. But for how I hear minimal records, everybody that's doing these cookie-cutter records, they sound like Basic Channel records.

Do you think Minus sounds like Basic Channel?

I think anything that's got that 'boom-chik-boom-chik' with some filter things on it is definitely a derivative of that, even if it's just a voice [warbles] like Minus does. That Marc Houle track...

"Why are the vocals pitched down so low..." You've heard that track, right?

No. It just says that throughout the whole song? Holy smokes. Was it a big record?

Yeah, for a minute.

Holy smokes! No, I haven't heard that one. Wow. But you know, even when Basic Channel started doing their thing it was a mix of what they did as Quadrant and what Jeff was doing with the arpeggiated basslines. But they just really changed the game. With Rob and what he does, he's got this movement that happens in his music that is quite phenomenal. A track that I like is "And Then We Made Our Escape", I think it's about a month old. It has this kind of thing that moves, you know. When he has this hi-hat come in and then he has this ride, it really pulls everything out, really opens everything up.

A Number Of Names "Sharevari"

FROM SHAREVARI/SKITSO (QUALITY) 1982

[After one handclap] "Sharevari".

That was fast. Did you go to the Charivari parties in Detroit in the 80s?

No, I was too young. I grew up right down the street from Paul Leslie, whose voice is on there, and Sterling, who was a part of the group as well. One thing that's really special about that song, to me, which I think is really important in making a record, is that you can hear the handclap and say, "That's fucking "Sharevari": That's what makes that track really timeless to me, is that it's got that characteristic that makes it "Sharevari". It's not just the music being played, but the sound that the record is. They didn't have that sound on anything else that they did afterwards, which is very little.



By the time you started clubbing, had that GQ style thing run itself out?

Yeah, the preps and all that had run itself out. But from what I understand, what was going on, "Sharevari" was influenced by Giorgio Moroder, you know, "The Chase" and "I Feel Love". Italian disco was really strong in Chicago and Detroit. **They called it 'progressive' at the time, right?** We called it 'progressive', yeah. So Alexander Robotnick and Klein & MBO, all that kind of stuff. It was huge in Detroit. I got a taste of it from radio mix shows and from listening to Jeff play. But even around that time, Jeff was still playing a little bit more, like, early rap stuff. But yeah, he was playing "Capricorn", which is a huge Detroit and Chicago record – loud-ass 808 drums, crazy shit.

Peter Inspirescu "Sakadat"

FROM SAKADAT/COLESTEROL (VINYLCLUB) 2007

Who is this, Ricardo [Villalobos]? Lucien [Luciano]? **No. Somebody from Romania, Petre Inspirescu.** Yeah, I've heard about Romania doing that style. **I'm curious about to what extent local scenes are still important or even possible...**

Local scenes are way important. I come from a local scene. Local scenes are only possible based on the clubs or the parties that people can throw. I think it's great that, like in Belgrade, they throw wonderful parties. It's amazing. It's nice to pioneer these new places, but we definitely need that kind of thing to happen at various cities in the US, because it's just

a bitch that everybody else in the world gets it and we're so far stuck up our own asses.

Why is that America still struggles to accept dance music, even in a city like New York?

We go by standards that are based on a country that's as large as Europe, and by people who don't know any better. Our standards are based on religion, and I think the standards over here have other origins. And our history is so young and we don't know any fucking better, and we let people living in the backwoods of the United States that are Bible bashers tell us what is right and what's not right. I think America should be divided [into autonomous regions]. It sucks that radio is determined by some fools in New York. It sucks that... all of it. You know, I'm not being unpatriotic, and I'm not saying anything that should lead up to misunderstanding my intentions. But I think that it just doesn't really give our culture an opportunity to grow. I would love to see Detroit be a pinnacle of the whole shit, I would love for Detroit to be a new city, you know, New Detroit, like in *Robocop*. To be like a new city with a new attitude, with new ideas, that can be the starting point and the go-to point for everything creative in the United States. But that shit ain't happening. So we just gotta spread the word however we can, and if it's a club for 100 people, that's great, we spread the word to 100 people. If it's a club for 1000 people, even better. □ To read Philip Sherburne's unedited transcript of the Carl Craig jukebox, go to www.thewire.co.uk