

NEW RELEASES

TEXT: SHAWN REYNALDO

SIMIAN MOBILE DISCO //// ATTACK DECAY SUSTAIN RELEASE



Since the dawn of the new millennium, rockers have been just plain desperate to lay claim to the dance floor. It started with electroclash and dance-punk, but now so-called nu-rave (dance music can always be counted on for some stupid names) is taking over hipster dance floors and indie kids are embracing a bastardized version of rave culture. Nevermind that half the music is not all that danceable and people want no part of that

PLUR love-your-neighbor bullshit; day-glo print hoodies, strap-on fairy wings and oversized sunglasses are cool. Whatever.

In the midst of all this nonsense are groups like Simian Mobile Disco. The UK duo of James Ford and James Shaw formed in 2005 after the dissolution of their previous band, the competent but largely un-danceable Simian. Releasing singles on influential labels like Kitsune, SMD has quickly picked up steam. Oddly enough, one of their old Simian cuts, "Never Be Alone," caught fire after being remixed by French outfit Justice and reborn as nu-rave anthem "We Are Your Friends." Along with some hi-profile remix work for groups like Muse, Air, The Rapture, The Go! Team and others, SMD has also been behind the boards producing albums for Klaxons and Arctic Monkeys.

Attack Decay Sustain Release is the first Simian Mobile Disco album. Fans will recognize previous singles like "Hustler," "Tits & Acid" and "It's the Beat" alongside a bevy of new tracks. The duo is not bashful about their love for high-octane, synth-driven dance music. "Tits & Acid" and "It's the Beat" are both blistering slices of electro, the latter featuring an impressive B-girl turn from guest vocalist Ninja of the Go! Team. With its vocoder and electro breakbeat, "I Got This Down" is Afrika Bambaataa for the blog-house generation.

Simian Mobile Disco never forget to include a healthy dose of fun, as "Hotdog" pairs uptempo electro with lyrics pilfered from a schoolyard double-dutch contest. "Hustler" extols the joys of stealing records over an infectiously crunchy bassline. The boys stop to catch their breath on mid-tempo song "I Believe," a swirly number that also happens to be the best pop moment on the record. Album closer "Scott" takes things down a notch further, foregoing a dance beat for an impressive display of synth arpeggios suitable for the chillout room. (Do nu-raves have a chillout room?)

The idea of 2007 going down in history as the year of nu-rave is moderately embarrassing for everyone involved. Luckily for Simian Mobile Disco, if they continue making records like *Attack Decay Sustain Release*, their music will be around long after hipsters decide that nu-rave is "totally over."

EL HIJO DE LA CUMBIA //// FREESTYLE DE RITMOS



With local tastemakers in Buenos Aires bringing the latest wave of cumbia rhythms back to fashionable dance floors, it is unusual that so little attention has been paid to artists hailing from spots where cumbia never went out of style.

Enter El Hijo de la Cumbia, a bedroom producer who lays his head in the suburb of San Martín. While kids in his neighborhood attend weekend bailantas with bland traditional cumbias and

local hip-hoperos get down to cumbia villera, El Hijo de la Cumbia has quietly been pushing the genre in a bold new direction. Virtually unknown in Buenos Aires, this producer (who also goes by the moniker Chimango Selektah) has been making inroads with Mexican cumbieros who discovered his unique beats online. After scratching out a living by making other artists sound good, El Hijo de la Cumbia is now releasing an album of his own.

What distinguishes El Hijo de la Cumbia from other fledgling cumbia acts is the sheer quality of his production. Where other artists rely on simplistic loops and dirty lyrics, his work is textured and almost entirely instrumental. Even complex songs sound and feel organic. Although his music is sample based and digitally produced, El Hijo de la Cumbia clearly prefers the sounds of actual people playing actual instruments. Drawing heavily from vintage Mexican and Colombian cumbia sounds, the music is anchored by a wide array of drums and percussive elements. Many tracks also sport a distinctly psychedelic flair; "La Mara Tomaza" and "Cumbia de Los Barrios" would make as much sense as part of a 1960s movie score as they do on the dance floor. The aptly-named "La Cumbia Es un Tango," already pushing boundaries as a tango/cumbia hybrid, ups the ante by incorporating an eerie Spaghetti Western whistle.

Although El Hijo de la Cumbia's sound clearly pays homage to classic cumbia and psychedelic days gone by, the music remains distinctly modern. Vocal samples are sliced and diced into everything from ghostly whispers to staccato crescendos. Halfway through "Tú, Tú, Quien Eres," the lazy cumbia beat morphs into a breakneck drum n' bass track. Hip-hop scratching packs club banger and album standout "Soy El Control" while other cuts feature elements of dancehall and other Afro-Latin beats.

El Hijo de la Cumbia is not making music for the local bailanta, and that's a good thing.

TEXT: DANIEL DICKENS

EL POLACO //// AGRADECIENDO A DIOS



You've never heard of "El Polaco" but your daughter has. For the record, he is the hottest cumbia romantica vocalist in Argentina. His latest album, "Agradeciendo a Dios," just went platinum by surpassing 35,000 albums sold, an incredible accomplishment considering his fan base of teenage girls, the sheer quantity of pirated copies available in Once and the fact that in two minutes you could find the whole thing online for free (if so inclined).

So yes, 19-year old El Polaco is a rising star. And he wants to talk about something important to every teen. He wants to talk about love. There is love gone wrong in tracks like "El Delirio de Perderte/Primer Amor." Love going right so far: "Amor Adolescente." Love in bloom: "Enganchados." And love in the process of fading: "¿Porque Te Fuiste?" You get the point. His skilled backup band is armed with keyboards, keytars, shakers and a throbbing cumbia tropical beat. Each and every weekend this tight crew heads out to play as many as six or seven shows a night.

El Polaco, AKA Ezequiel Cwirkaluk, with his dyed-blond locks, job-interview-sabotaging neck tattoos and earnest lyrics, screams Eminem to many. Some members of his marketing team even seem to invite this comparison, but a much better one would be with a talented, gentleman entertainer in the mold of Usher.

Although his music is all but ignored by most tastemakers, it is utterly worshipped by hundreds of thousands of young Argentines. And his dialogue with fans is by no means limited to talking about love. He speaks directly to a reality that many of them have grown up with in tracks like "Mamá", where he pays tribute to his departed mother and vulnerably wonders how his life would be different if she were still around. He connects with his fans by presenting himself as their peer and, in doing so, confirms the cultural capital possessed by the cumbia tropical/villera movement. It is popular music in at least two senses of the word. But I'll leave the rest of that story to Washington Cucurto.

Watch "Pasión Popular" or "Tropicalísimo" on Saturday and pay attention to the teens singing along with every single word that El Polaco sings. And then check out his latest album, *Agradeciendo a Dios*, at any record store.

BEASTIE BOYS //// THE MIX UP



Even longtime Beastie Boys fans are lying if they say they saw this one coming. Their new record, *The Mix Up*, is 100% instrumental and does not contain a single sample or scratch. Yep, that's right. But it's also fine, because this record is a pleasure to the ears and an absolutely genius misdirection move by a trio of legendary trailblazers.

It has been three years since the boys from Brooklyn, Michael "Mike D" Diamond, Adam "MCA" Yauch and Adam "Ad-Rock" Horowitz, released *To The 5 Boroughs*. That one had its moments and was fairly well received, but mostly out of respect for the host. This one, however, feels like a return to the source as the boys gather strength for their next big voyage.

In fact, they are already working with different vocalists on versions of the same tracks from *The Mix Up* for a follow-up record. They are doing what James Brown would call the "tighten up"; they are getting their business in order before heading out in search of prey.

Partially conceived during sessions with frequent collaborator Money Mark and regular Beasties guest percussionist Alfredo Ortiz, the sound is something along the lines of organ-heavy lounge funk. The Beasties have done instrumental records before and in fact, the sound is 100% Grand Royal, their old label and fallen cultural institution. But there are some new twists; take a track like "Suco de Tangerina." No one would flinch if told this was Medeski, Martin and Wood just going off a bit. This is the Beasties, folks, not your local jam band after some killer hydro.

"Freaky Hijiki" sounds like The Roots messing around in the studio after listening to Mogwai for an afternoon. It has hand clapping, whistling and drumstick clicking interspersed for effect. Mike D is no ?uestlove but he certainly proves that he still has some serious chops on the drums. "The Gala Event" is the first single off the record and would be perfect for the chase scene of a Beastie-themed James Bond flick. "Off the Grid" would be the best thing RJD2 ever made, while "The Cousin of Death" belongs on a U.N.K.L.E. album. So there you have the fifth reference to another musician in this review. Aren't THEY supposed to be referencing the Beasties, not the other way around? Nope, not so if you ask Mike D. Their preparation was to "listen to music together, things that we're inspired by, everything from post-punk to afrobeat to hip hop to whatever. We're almost as much music fans as we are a band that makes music." This is going somewhere good, people.