NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

label, Joe “Mojo” Martin, Kris Markle and Matt Agriculture with Joseph Compan — opened in Portland’s VNC’s <ST> collective works with gO!! studios and supported the Notes from the Underground events as well as a string of parties by John Hawkey that brought Kenny Glasgow, Algorithm and Adam Marshall. The energy was maintained by connections between Vancouver’s B-Side, TeamLounge, HQ Communications and <ST> with a West coast network of musical tribes, from the JoyScouts in Oregon to CloudFactory in SF. Dave Baptizem’s Together 604 Network also actively strove to bring together electronic genres in several experimental events, culminating in his successful introduction of Perlin records to Victoria at the now-defunct Neptune nightclub. Yet it was not until 1998 with the launch of technoWest.org as an extension of Toronto’s techno.ca that SF’s techno scene — Sutekh, Context Records, the infamous Static night — and Vancouver’s were brought together through an encounter with SF’s DJ Forrest Green. Then, bam — Y2K. Next thing you know, Vancouver has its own techno-heavy Boomtown records, Kris Palesch hooks up with UK electro-minimal househeads Squeak, Vernon and Tyler Stadius launch their tech-house night at the Lotus, a slew of tech-house labels sprung out of Vancouver, and Neon Black turns from jungle and the defunct HQ Communications collective to put out a wildly successful single under the moniker of “Headphase.”

From here, the rest is history. At the end of the ’90s, CTV’s Brady Cranfield — who had been creating experimental music as “LoveSucks” and Industry & Agriculture with Joseph Compan — launched the Open Circuits music festival. This opened channels with the Vancouver New Music Society by hosting Oval at The Western Front artist gallery. In 2001, the RePhnant conference collaborated with Open Circuits with a performance by Kim Carbone, leading to a series of events at the Video-In featuring some of the best of Canada and the West Coast’s techno scene. Tomas Jirku, Safety Scissors, Sutekh, Jetone and with the New Forms Festival, Mitchell Akiyama, Joshua Kit Clayton and Sue Costabile. Moreover, many of Vancouver’s local artists have gone on to fame and fortune. Ben Navele played Mutek 2002 in Montreal, and Lesol toured with Stars of the Lid through Europe. And did you know Tim Hawker, a.k.a. Jetone, is from Vancouver? Seattle continues to sprout labels and artists... and the region is fertile.

Dispenser

Open since January, DownLow is the brainchild of local DJ/Producers Jon Lee (www.titledrecords.com) and DJ Ryko (www.dryko.com). Along with Wesley Holmes, they’ve created an unpretentious, friendly environment that welcomes aficionados and novices alike.

At first, the size of DownLow’s catalog may not seem to impress, but the store’s prime focus. Yet, other categories include techno, breakbeat, hip hop, downtempo and a minute section of drum ‘n bass. Upon listening to a few records, though, it becomes obvious that the experience. Jon, Ryko and Wesley bring to the store bears its fruits with one of the finest record selections around. Indeed, each visit I’ve made has resulted in a drastic emptying of the wallet.

“Dispenser has made a musical gap in the city once Beats International closed.” Ryko states. “I come from the Bay Area, where there are a ton of quality dance shops. That was the main focus, to try to bring a little of that energy here for the people to absorb. The goal is to provide all with a selection of quality tracks along with some knowledgeable service.”

Ryko concedes that business has been “slow” so far. Nonetheless, he believes that with more support from the people like the DJs, dancers, ladies, clubbers and the kids, [DownLow] should be alright.

Find enough people with addictions as bad as my own (I hide my record purchases from my girlfriend now!) and — yeah! — DownLow Music should be doing just fine.

PS: You guys still have that stack of records on hold for me?

- Jeremy Niall