

Watch That Dub-Step

It's loud, it's brash, it's an Indian twist to a popular sound pioneered in the UK – say hello to desi dub-step By **Bobby Friction**



BOBBY BE GOOD
Friction likes his music loud and wicked

LET ME TELL YOU WHAT TURNING YOUR amp up to eleven sounds like. It has nothing to do with heavy metal. Nothing to do with axe-wielding guitar heroes or indeed, nothing to do with the Led Zepps or Black Sabbaths of this world. In fact it has nothing to do with Rock at all! “Heresy!” I hear you cry, “stone the unbeliever!” What eleven on an amp sounds like is an electronic bassline so loud and gloriously evil that ancient civilisations topple all over again, and tectonic plates start smooching. Welcome my friends to desi dub-step – earplugs optional.

Dub-step, the sound, originated in the UK as an evolution of drum n bass, garage and grime. Its slow off-tempo rhythms, insane sampling and over-the-top bass lines have over the last three years established themselves firmly within the armament of the UK music scene. Protagonists proudly see it as another rung in a ladder populated by all those scenes the UK's been so adept at kicking off – including punk, indie and techno. And like those scenes it has a unique musical language and technology. Let's just say dub step nights are LOUD. Not big club loud, outdoor trance gig loud or even full-on festival loud. We're talking sound-systems so loud they shake your internal organs through sub frequencies that can kill small mammals.

What's interesting however is the way musicians of desi origin, have connected it inextricably with their sound. A lot of the better known dub-step from producers like Digital Mystikz, Plastician and Darqwan has included Middle Eastern percussion as well as sub-continental melodies from the beginning. But what we have now is a generation of Hindi cinema sampling, Carnatic instrument loving, desi bedroom producers with a junkie mentality towards the Bass. The paradigm has shifted with the non-desis using Indian drums and melodies without knowing their origin and the desi producers just seeing themselves as musicians without a country. It's the globalisation of audio and intellect in its purest form.

The trailblazer for all of this has to be Sukh Knight – a skinny Brit-Punjabi from East London whose gunshot driven odes to every Hindi gangster ever born are already classics of the genre. When I first heard Sukh I was putting my BBC Radio show together and clearly remember feeling like a teenager again. A teenager in the sense that a big smile appeared on my face, I stopped intellectualising about the music, and I was overtaken



Friction's 5ive

Engine Earz & DJ Luxy
'Kaliyuga' (*Catch 22 Music*)
Catch 22 has spent the last five years making a name for himself within the urban music sphere of the UK. Desi sounds have always been part of his palette with small touches here and there, as opposed to broad brush strokes. Now though, under his alternative identity Engine Earz, the bass-breaking hip hop of yesterday has been replaced by a love for classical Indian music layered over a bed of glitched up grime and dub-step. The sheer drama in this single is enough to send you screaming back to mummy, and Engine Earz has only just

started his journey into classical Indian music. The Indo-dance mafia better watch out!
www.thecatch.co.uk

Prithpal feat Abi
'Vakra Tunda' (*Buzz-Erk*)
This collaboration between two very different talents might not have worked. Prithpal is a conscientious producer of bhangra-inspired dance music while Abi is a rising R&B talent with her vocal chords stuck firmly on the pop side of the equation. What she's been hiding though is a childhood spent playing the veena – which she does brilliantly – and learning Sanskrit. On 'Vakra Tunda' Prithpal has made a tune of intense emotion that's like a soundtrack to an Olympics opening ceremony set in Nagpur circa 2069. Really!
www.myspace.com/prithpalmusic

Panjabi MC
Indian Timing
(*PMC Records*)
The original Bhangra bad-boy

is back with a new album called *Indian Timing* and true to form he's unleashed a monster of a CD. Car sound systems built for the hip hop generation will have trouble keeping up with the b-lines and subsonic rhythms on this album. Individuals sick and tired of a diet of bhangra-lite served up by a lazy Bollywood need to reconnect with the raw intensity showcased on this record. Highlights include the A-Team sampling 'Punjabi Soldiers' and dub reggae dhol clash 'Jagga'. His ear is still right on point when it comes to a killer hook and his rapping has increased in terms of delivery and content. Buy the album and annoy whole neighbourhoods by turning all volumes knobs to maximum.
www.pmcrecords.com

Thievery Corporation
'Mandala (Pathaan's Outernational Mix)' (*ESL*)
The polemical nature of the

Corp's last album *Radio Retaliation* didn't affect their magic touch with mood and melody. It was a rare thing – a political album that didn't sound too angry or jagged. When it came to the instrumental arrangements on the album, that submission to the power of music became even more pronounced, none more so than the sitar workout 'Mandala.' A few months later, the remixes are finally coming out of the woodwork with DJ Pathaan's string laden Outernational Mix high on my radar. The dubbed out bass has been replaced by a floor shaking kick and snare, while the sitar is complemented by what sounds like 3 orchestras' worth of violins. Euphoric and epic, straight up.
www.thieverycorporation.com

Janaka Seleкта
Pushing Air (*White Label*)
The Dhamaal Soundsystem spent most of the early Noughties spreading the desi

electronica vibe around California like a virus. Cool like Talvin, talented like Karsh and as clubbed out as the Nasha boys, they represented the continuing growth of the Underground vibe within the diaspora. Then they split forever with Dhruva Ganesan forming Sub Swara alongside Dave Sharma in NY, and Maneesh the Twister going his own way. That leaves us with Janaka, who in the three years since parting has worked tirelessly on his debut solo album. And what a debut! Sri Lankan, North Indian and Carnatic soundscapes clash hard against spliffed out Jamaican dancehall, while dirty dub-step throbs like a heartbeat through the entire LP. Some of the tracks are liable to bring tears of joy as this album takes the Buddha Bar vibes of the Nineties, and pushes them through San Francisco's maverick heavy back streets circa 2009.
www.janakaseleкта.net

with the urge to just jump up and down screaming, whilst smashing the room to pieces. All of that happened because a badly cut up *Sholay* sample was looped for three minutes over some of the most evil sounding electronic bass notes ever. I live for those moments, don't you? Since then, he's been building a reputation as a name to watch out for in dub-step, with an especially dark edge to his beats, and he's been signed to the Tru Tigers label while working alongside Asian Underground stalwarts GES-E and Osmani Soundz, who will be releasing the first compilation that tips its hat towards the genre, *Nasha Volume 3*, in spring this year.

Both the Nasha artists grew out of the remnants of Talvin Singh's career and club night in the late Nineties. They, above anybody else, have kept Anokha's original club-centric desi vibe burning. Over the last eight years, they have continued to make key drum n bass tracks, and have been responsible for surreal moments like when listening to AR Rehman with the shit sampled out of him over thunderous snares and kicks on BBC Radio 1's Fabio & Grooverider show. While the original Asian Undergrounders have stopped releasing records like Talvin, or become part of the neo-classical musical establishment like Nitin Sawhney, this lot have been slowly but surely beaver away in their Brick Lane HQ like sweatshop workers and slaves to the bass. Their love of desi DnB has morphed, like many of their peers, into a love of desi dub-step and *Nasha Volume 3*



FEARSOME FOURSOME
Nuphlo, Sukh Knight, GES-E and Osmani Soundz (Clockwise from left), the new lords of noise, are bringing about a revolution in desi dub-step in the UK

will be a seminal moment, as well a celebration of this movement's story.

The last integer in this equation is renaissance man Nuphlo. His palette is as wide as his brain is skewed and after watching his career for the best part of ten years I'm convinced he leans towards the box marked 'genius'... or autistic if you're trying to get an answer out of him in an interview! Many years before he stepped into dub he sent me

one of his art school projects, which consisted of shots of his very elderly grandmother in the heart of rural Punjab throwing African-American gang signs and poses at the camera. It was a brazen and glorious piece of Brit-Asian art which was picked up a couple of years afterwards by a younger generation of Internet users, who turned it into an online viral phenomenon with Punjabi Brits, Yanks and Canadians all getting their *Bibi-Jis* to do the same thing and posting the results up on message boards! His music, like his art, is fiercely individual, sonically challenging and completely in love with its Indian origins. A typical Nuphlo track sounds like an ancient Punjabi poem sung to the sound of the Death Star's dark heart beating with an army of robots singing melancholy qawwalis...and then the beats kick in.

What unites all these artists is a love of basslines that can kill species at fifty yards, and with the current audio/PA technology that's available I wouldn't be surprised if we soon see this music used as a sonic weapon! I have also noticed that dub-step is slowly creeping into the spaces around the stranglehold trance and house have over India's electronic scene and, after visiting a trance night in the country last year that was artistically and aurally ten years behind some of the nights in the UK, that can only be a good thing.

Bobby Friction is a DJ and TV broadcaster with desi music shows on BBC Radio 1, and BBC Asian Network in the UK.