

FILLING THE BLACK VOID

Berliner Konrad Black uses meteor explosions as inspiration for cultivated minimal techno that is out of this world



ON FEBRUARY 15, 2013, the Chelyabinsk meteor exploded over Russia. Thanks to ubiquitous mobile cameras, the streak, the boom and the wreckage were all recorded and replayed around the world, over and over. Konrad Black – DJ, producer, sound designer, composer – saw it and was inspired to release his first original EP since 2005's 'Draconia' on Vancouver record label Wagon Repair, which he cofounded in 2004 with Mathew Jonson. Since 2004, Wagon Repair has been the halfway house to sophisticated, funky minimal techno by wayward residents The Mole, Hrdvsion and Cobblestone Jazz.

Released in September on DeWalt's Meander label after a low-key hangout, Konrad's new EP 'Scorched Earth' draws inspiration from the meteor, but more importantly, from "the blinding light that follows," according to Konrad. From his early work with Swayzak in the late '90s and early '00s, through his Headgear projects with Jeremy "Circlesquare" Shaw, his measured output on Wagon Repair and recent collaborations with Martin Buttrich, Black has always (befitting his name), plied a dark, paranormal vibe. On 'Scorched Earth', the shadow groove picks up the tempo a bit, sliding some brilliant breakbeats into the mix.

We rang him up in Berlin to find out more about this EP, teaming up with

Buttrich again, scoring a Russian gay-bashing film, his drum & bass days, and turning a rejected remix into a comeback.

How did you get involved with 'Pyotr495', the movie about Russian gay bashing?

"The writer/director Blake Mawson and I were already friends, and he got a hold of me through Jeremy Shaw. He had a certain aesthetic in mind."

What was it and why you specifically? "I'm the Dark Master, [laughs]. I've worked on other projects with him and Jeremy before, so he knows that I know what he's going for – the old days of horror films, an eerie John Carpenteresque vibe. I write that kind of stuff just sitting around anyway. He needed something for Dazed and Confused magazine ASAP, and I was going on tour. I actually had some stuff that I could work with. So, on the plane, I scored the scene on my laptop. It was nice to have this pressure of the deadline. I like being in the world of needing it now."

How's your side gig with Martin Buttrich going?

"With Martin Buttrich we're nearing the final stage. We have about eight or 10 songs that are 90% done. Once he's done setting up his label, we're dedicating this winter to finishing this project in his new studio in Barcelona."

How did this EP happen?

"This came out as a result of one track – 'Sycho Te Alyn'. I was meant to do a remix for someone big. They didn't approve my first version. Then I wrote another version and went deeper, much to their chagrin. To me, it was the best thing I've written in a long time. And they turned it down. Not only did they turn it down, they, the label, only listened to it on their laptop speakers. So, I just yanked out their vocals, and I had my own track."

How did this end up on Meander and not Wagon Repair – which you cofounded?

"I was at Dewalt's house and I wanted to hear it on nice speakers. He's like 'What is this? I would love to put it out. And I said, 'I think I have another track that can go with it.' It was something I had just done for myself. I came from hip-hop first, then drum & bass, and I was missing that feeling. I was listening to my old Metalheadz and Photek. So I wrote this faster, breakbeat thing. And I played it for Meander and they loved it."

How are you feeling about drum & bass these days?

"I had a friend of mine come over recently, Mark who had a project called Quadra. We just went off on the drum & bass we were into in the '90s. It's still the most powerful for us. This is when people used predominantly real gear

and samplers. My first piece of gear was my E-mu sampler that I got in 1998 and it died recently and I freaked out. I hadn't used it much. I thought, 'Oh my God! I can't use it ever.' So I went on eBay, and I got one that came with 120 gigs of every sound library from back then. It would have cost like \$8000. The guy drove it down right before Christmas to Birmingham from Leeds."

What's going on with Wagon Repair?

"It's kind of on hiatus. Mat [Jonson]'s always busy, it's hard to get us all in the same place and the same time. This thing with Meander happened so unexpectedly, I wanted to just let that be. It's not for lack of wanting, we just need to get our shit together. Mat, in particular, is really busy. He's going to Japan for six months to work for Roland. He wanted to go out and learn Japanese and live there for a while and they said, 'We'd love for you to work for us.' He's going to be like a kid in a big candy store."

What's your fascination with this meteor about?

"It shows how in one moment we could be wiped out. I became obsessed with tracking down all this footage and doing more research on it. And I started thinking of this being my first release in a while, a clean slate. From scorched earth comes new growth." **JORGE HERNANDEZ**