

Jungle | Founding DJs Fabio

and Grooverider and new star

Sherelle talk to *Sam Davies*

about the music’s origins 30

years ago – and its resurgence

There are a few versions of the story behind how jungle music got its name. Some say it was Congo Natty, a Jamaican-British producer and vocalist previously known as Rebel MC, who picked up the term “junglist” from an old reggae tape. “Rebel got this chant – ‘all the junglists’ – from a yard-tape,” says MC Navigator in the rave history book *Energy Flash*. “When Rebel sampled that, the people cottoned on, and soon they started to call the music jungle.”

Others say it was a racial epithet, first used by disparaging commentators, then proudly reclaimed by the musicians themselves. I put these theories to DJs Fabio and Grooverider, two founding fathers of the jungle sound in the early 1990s.

“Yeah, you’re wrong,” says Fabio, real name Fitzroy Heslop. “When we were doing Rage [the pair’s club night], a guy that Groove grew up with called Danny was on the dance floor . . .”

“He used to have a bag of weed,” cuts in Grooverider, born Raymond Bingham. “And he called his weed ‘jungle’. He’d hold it up and shout ‘jungle!’, talking about his weed. And then people started shouting ‘jungle’ whenever we played.”

Rage was held at Heaven, a nightclub beneath the railway arches of Charing Cross in central London, and the term jungle came to be associated with the sound that Fabio and Grooverider created. It was composed of breakbeats – sections of soul, funk and hip-hop tracks containing nothing but drums – which they would isolate, speed up and loop *ad absurdum*. They played other genres too – techno, disco, dance hall, acid house and breakbeat hardcore, which had dominated UK raves since the late 1980s – but they made their name as two of the first purveyors of jungle.

“There might be other stories that people have,” adds Fabio. “But as far as me and Groove – and we were there at the root – that’s how it started, on the dance floors of Rage.”

Producers soon started making jungle records of their own. Many artists associated with hardcore – Tom & Jerry, Shut Up & Dance, Nookie, Andy C, Aphrodite and Slipmatt and others – started speeding up their breakbeats further and sampling old reggae tunes. They



From top: clubbers at Beat Freak at the Gass Club, London, September 2000; Sherelle, a DJ and producer with a residency on BBC’s Radio 1



removed all but the most minimal melodies from their tracks, content instead to let the rhythms do the work. For the drums, the so-called “Amen break”, sampled from the Winstons’ 1969 soul record “Amen, Brother”, was chopped up and reused hundreds of times. Meanwhile, endlessly warped variants of the Reese bass – a Hoover-ish rumble named after techno producer Kevin Saunderson, alias Reese – gave jungle its booming undercurrent.

Rage became one of the coolest nights in London and jungle spread quickly across the UK, spawning mainstream chart hits – Shy FX and UK Apachi’s “Original Nuttah” and M-Beat and General Levy’s “Incredible” to name two – and spreading diversity among the country’s previously tribal clubbers.

Jungle proved popular with people of all backgrounds and ethnicities: hip-hop heads, football hooligans, celebrities – even gangsters. “Everybody was attracted to jungle,” Grooverider says. “But any time women go out [dancing], you’re going to see gangsters following behind them at some point.”

“You got some heavy, heavy guys from Brixton, guys that me and Groove grew up with, we started seeing them in

jungle dances,” adds Fabio. “And you’ve got to remember, at the start of this they were very anti anything to do with dance music.”

By 1994, jungle’s open-door policy was becoming a problem and the police started shutting down jungle raves. “You were going to places and you literally had security looking after you, acting as bodyguards,” Fabio remembers. “It got rough, man, it got really rough.”

Meanwhile, jungle was morphing into drum and bass, a more moody and less dancefloor-oriented sound. Albums such as Goldie’s *Timeless* (1995) and LTJ Bukem’s *Logical Progression* (1996)

enjoyed crossover success before Roni Size & Reprazent won the 1997 Mercury Music Prize and went platinum in the UK with *New Forms*.

But another new form of dance music was emerging too: UK garage, a sped-up version of New York house and a sleek, pseudo-sophisticated alternative to jungle’s rough and tumble. Just as quickly as they had fallen in love with jungle, the UK’s clubbing masses took their cruelly short attention spans elsewhere, leaving the music to a diminishing crowd of breakbeat obsessives.

But jungle never died. In 1996, a three-year-old girl sat in her uncle’s car. The family were moving from a block of flats in Walthamstow, east London, to a nearby council house. Her uncle suggested a quick breather from the stress of relocation. Night had fallen and London was lit up like a video game. Music rumbled from the car radio, which was tuned to a local pirate station. It was jungle: Foul Play’s VIP remix

of Omni Trio’s “Renegade Snares”. “That’s my favourite tune of all time,” says Sherelle, now a DJ and producer in the UK’s newly resurgent jungle scene. “The intro’s sick, just the breaks on their own, the way it drops into this beautiful melodic, emotional tune. Then, when it drops again, it’s just like this bountiful rush of emotion.”

Hearing Omni Trio at an early age set Sherelle up for a life in the music. Today she has a residency on BBC Radio 1 and jungle is thriving once again. Sherelle and contemporaries such as Tim Reaper, Coco Bryce, Sully, Mantra and Nia Archives have brought it back to the forefront of ravers’ consciousness. Pop acts like PinkPantheress – a 21-year-old singer and producer from Bath – have gone viral on TikTok with music built on junglist breakbeats.

Festivals and clubs, dominated for years by house and techno, are booking jungle DJs again. “It’s always been here, but I think more people recognise it,” says Sherelle. “All we want is just for people to keep it here.”

She also brings up jungle’s trademark diversity, which is even more evident

‘It’s always been here, but now more people recognise it. All we want is just for people to keep it here’

Nineties rewind

THE LIFE OF A SONG

GIRLS JUST WANT TO HAVE FUN

Dig beneath the surface of many seemingly innocuous pop songs and there’s a story to be told. Such is the case with “Girls Just Want to Have Fun”, a hit for Cyndi Lauper in 1983. A track from the New York singer’s debut album *She’s So Unusual*, it was hailed as a feminist anthem; although there was nothing explicitly feminist about the song, it celebrated the idea that, contrary to what they had heard in songs for decades, women had no need of male approval, affirmation or even their company to have fun – they could do it by themselves.

Like her near-contemporary Madonna, Lauper tapped into, and in turn influenced, the thrift-store chic of the time, appearing in the song’s budget video in a brilliantly original fashion pastiche – flouncy prom dress, plastic sunglasses, bangles, fingerless gloves, wacky earrings. In the video, wearing this quirky ensemble, she comes home at dawn from a night out, joyfully dancing in the street, to be confronted by her mother at the kitchen table (played by her real mother) and her finger-wagging father (played by burly wrestling manager Lou Albano). Soon she’s on the phone again to her all-female multicultural friends.

And yet: “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” was written by a man. And in its original incarnation, celebrated a man’s life of casual sex (to the disapproval of his parents). It was recorded in 1979 by Robert Hazard, a US singer-songwriter with a predilection for the skinny new wave-ish attire. In his guitar-driven version, he comes across as a womaniser enjoying a string

of carefree liaisons with girls who “just want to have fun”. It was recorded as a demo but never released. Four years later producer Rick Chertoff was working with Lauper on her debut album and remembered the song. Tweaks were made to the lyrics, mostly switching the gender. Lauper’s version was synth-driven and had a more joyful spirit; released as the album’s lead single, it became her breakthrough hit, a singalong dancefloor classic, while the video got heavy rotation on MTV.

A string of cover versions followed, but they were mostly “novelty” takes: the cast of the UK school soap *Grange Hill*; Dame Edna Everage. In 1985 “Weird Al” Yankovich released “Girls Just Want to Have Lunch”, a strained parody which Yankovich himself effectively disowned, complaining that it had been made under duress;

perhaps his management was hoping to capitalise on “Eat It”, Yankovich’s version of Michael Jackson’s “Beat It”.

Lauper herself revisited the song. An extended Arthur Baker remix with chopped-up vocals and stuttery breaks came out in 1983 and also opened her 1989 EP *The Best Remixes*, released only in Japan. The track became a fixture in her live shows. During her tour of 1993-94 it began to mutate and evolve, acquiring a loping reggae groove. She re-recorded this as “Hey Now (Girls Just Want to Have Fun)”. The new version was also distinguished by its clever use of a breezy snippet from the US band Redbone’s 1974 hit “Come and Get Your Love”.

Released as a single from her 1994 hits album *Twelve Deadly Cyns... And Then Some*, it re-entered the charts and became a rare example of a singer having a hit with a cover version of their own earlier hit. Another video was made, featuring more joy, some actual men, and a fun take on the crowded-cabin scene from The Marx Brothers’ film *A Night at the Opera*. In 2005 a joyful ska-driven version featured on Lauper’s album of re-recordings of her hits, *The Body Acoustic*, accompanied by Japanese duo Puffy Amiymumi.

In 2007 singer-songwriter Greg Laswell gave it a moody makeover, transforming it into a stripped-down piano ballad. Miley Cyrus made a punky breakneck recording in 2008. Most strikingly of all, in 2015 the Portland, Oregon electronic band Chromatics came up with no fewer than seven meditations on the theme, among them: breathy, dreamy, silky vocals; as an instrumental with heavy percussion; uptempo; slow. It’s a powerful song that can withstand being pulled around like this.

And what of the man who wrote it? Hazard died in 2008 following surgery for pancreatic cancer. He was just 59, but the song had been good to him: he reckoned he had made \$1mn from “Girls Just Want to Have Fun”.

David Cheal

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Cyndi Lauper in 1984 — Getty Images

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