

Aural History

Interview with deepchild

Interviewee: Rick Bull

Interviewer: Michelle O'Brien

Date: 1 March, 2011

Place: Sydney, Australia

Transcriber: Michelle O'Brien

Transcript

AUDIO EXCERPT: [Deepchild – FIRE](#)

MO: *Hello Rick Bull.*

RB: Hello.

MO: *You are an Australian-born music producer, artist and DJ who goes by the name of Deepchild. Can you tell me a little about your history as an artist growing up in Australia?*

RB: Well, I first got into electronic music, I suppose, as a teenager when I was studying for my final exams. It was... it was a really foreign music to me at the time that was sort of introduced by a traveling friend of the family who brought over a ton of electronic stuff from the U.K. And I think I was really drawn to it initially because it was a music that seemed so 'other' to my Australian cultural references so I just... and I loved the autonomy of being able to listen and and [sic] mess around with synthesizers at home. My dad was a piano player so we we [sic] had some old synths and bits and pieces, so throughout my teenage years I kind of noodled around on a four-track recorder blah blah blah [sic], but had never really had any experience with sort of an electronic music community or club culture.

When I left school I became involved with an electronic arts and media collective in Sydney called Clan Analogue. And I... we were all, again, just investigating what seemed to be a foreign sound very much from a sort of intellectual fetishist point of view. In other words we were all fascinated by the machines that made crazy sounds - instrumental music as opposed to rock music, or whatever. So it was as much a fascination with the technology of production as anything else.

I... I worked on public radio for about ten years and that was another way I encountered a lot of music again primarily from Europe and the USA. I never imagined that I'd be producing electronic music at the current level that I am and I certainly never imagined that I'd be involved with performing it. So it was a it was a [sic] very strange organic process. I eventually taught myself to DJ, just on a little bit of a whim 'cause it was another way to stay involved with electronic music, and really once that experiment began it fed into my own production, got me booked playing random shows here, and eventually catapulted me overseas.

MO: *OK, so you now live in Berlin. What brought you there and what is your history with the city?*

RB: Again, I.... my first encounters were, with Berlin, were kind of a strange organic happening. You know, I'd been accessing a lot of this music, before the Internet, from record stores, and then via the Internet, and realising that... Europe, but specifically Berlin and Germany, was producing a lot of the music that excited me the most. So I went there, pretty much on a whim, in... not until 2005... just on a little reconnaissance mission, to try to put some of the... actually to try to put some of the record stores, and names, and locations specific locations specific [sic] to certain sounds, together with the sounds that I had heard. It's a really, you know, it's a really localised sort of scene, and I was interested in exploring the community surrounding electronic music, as much as going out on 'club missions' or anything. Then I... I got booked... randomly... I got booked the next year somehow, and just because I'd basically sent out a whole heap of emails to different promoters... and and [sic] every year since then I I [sic] played. I'd be back for summer shows, firstly on my own sort of steam. It was just a... it was just a fascination and a love with the people and the sounds.

MO: *So what is so unique about Berlin's electronic music scene and its community?*

RB: I guess one of the things that excites me the most is that it's a... it's a community and a sound that is very vital to the cultural fabric of the place. I always have found that, in Australia for example, clubbing-culture is a little bit more on the fringes, it's a little bit more of a 'lifestyle' option, or something, you know it's a... where you go out to a club or a bar as much to 'pick up' or something as you do to listen to a [sic] music. And I found in Berlin, electronic music was really a 'roots-culture' in the same way that say Reggae might be in South Africa or something. Or... you know... it was a uniquely a uniquely [sic] German... Germanic sound.

I suppose because of the climate, the challenges of of [sic] gentrified living, there's a need for catharsis, particularly during the cold months, that electronic music provides. There's also a ton of spaces that are readily readily [sic] accessible, or that people have transformed into clubs. So to actually create spaces for the consumption of electronic art is a lot... a lot more easy than, maybe more expensive cities to live. It just felt like a life... a 'life-blood' in some ways. And constantly changing. You know it's also... Berlin's placement in the rest of Europe is very central: there's constant 'flow through', it's a really transient place. So it feels like a very vibrant, constantly

changing sort of scene.

MO: *In your opinion how has the history of the city, especially the divided Berlin, and the fall of the Wall, influenced this unique scene?*

RB: My feeling is particularly in the years leading up to the fall of the Wall, when when [sic] political and social tensions were kind-of at at [sic] boiling point on... in both the East and the West, there was really a culture of resistance that was being built-up and voiced through music, and I think that's a kind of... that's an archetypal 'happening' in lots of cultures that are oppressed. And that was both happening across the punk scenes, and with their this [sic] own kind of... almost subversive electronic 'voice'.

And then when the Wall came down, that that [sic] particular culture of of [sic] resistance spilled out into what what [sic] became a largely empty centre of Berlin, as as [sic] people - you know a lot of people from the East, particularly - just got out of there. So geographically there was, you know, there was a lot of space that squatters took over or, I guess there was just a lot of a lot of [sic] city-fringe space that was ripe for forming a new... a new artistic community, which naturally segued (very well) into, you know, illegal rave-parties and and [sic] stuff like this. Yeah, I mean a lot of the clubs that I'm playing are, or were, old abandoned spaces that have been reclaimed and they're still really a thriving kind of squatter and punk scene in some of the places that that [sic] are still occupied since the Wall came down.

MO: *You have performed at a number of high-profile clubs in Berlin such as Berghain, Panorama Bar and Tresor, three of the most famous techno clubs in Berlin and arguably in the world. Can you tell me a bit about these experiences?*

RB: Yeah, these clubs... I mean, these clubs are really my... the dearest ones to me in the world and and [sic] sometimes I still kind of pinch myself that I've had the opportunity to play at them. What really surprised me was getting booked at these places as as [sic] a relative outsider, which was different from my experiences in Australia. You know I I [sic] was... I was really moved by the fact that I've been continually asked back, say, to a place like *Berghain* judged on the merit of my music without so much of a profile compared to some German artists, and and [sic] this has consistently been my experience in in [sic] Berlin. The intention of places like *Berghain* being as much to introduce new sounds that people have never heard before, and to push their own musical boundaries and policy, as to put on well-known

acts.

You know, I've I've [sic] had a lot of musician/DJ friends that have done fantastic work in the U.K. and been booked with big shows but they might be associated with quite mainstream, or... you know... big name dance labels, and and [sic] they'll struggle very... they'll struggle very hard to get a gig... a booking in places like *Berghain* or *Panorama Bar*. I've just felt that what what [sic] has kept these places special is in... is in a kinda burning integrity and a protection of a particular way of thinking about music that that [sic] resists in adverted commas 'selling out' or at least seeks to be continually eclectic. Whether or not that translates into, you know, heaps of cash through the door or not, it's... they're risk-taking clubs. *Tresor* I guess has been the best-known one traditionally, it's... it's sort of taken a back seat to *Berghain* over the last ten years but still a fantastic place with such a history in Berlin. And I think places like *Berghain* and *Tresor*, people are drawn to because they feel, yeah, like hubs of the community... they feel like 'this is our place, this is our special club', yeah in in [sic] a kind of non-pretentious way but but [sic] in a way that is protective of what they mean to Berlin people.

MO: *And what about audiences at these clubs? I mean, obviously there's the phenomenon of Techno Tourism and some people say the Berlin techno scene is changing due to the 'Easyjet Set' crew that flies in every weekend from countries around Europe. How have you found the audiences in Berlin compared to other countries you've played in?*

RB: There's definitely a great deal of hype around the Berlin club scene that a lot of other Europeans and and [sic] people from the U.K. are are [sic] fascinated by. And you notice that, particularly in the summer months when people will come over from the U.K. and Spain and Italy for, like, rave holidays... but it does happen on a weekly basis as well. And there's there's [sic] certainly a kind of protective attitude as well, particularly with a club like the *Berghain* which seeks to resist that, and you notice that in the door policy which which [sic] compared [to] an Australian club is almost an inversion in a way. Like if you look too glammed up, or if you look too, you know, 'out to party', or too drunk or too stylish, they they [sic] won't let you in. So there are certainly a heap of judgments that occur on the door. *Berghain* in particular, the primary clientele seems to be gay German men, [laughs] so if you want to get in you'd save yourself well by looking like a gay German man [laughs]. *Tresor*... oh, *Berghain* also seems to attract, I guess, a more mature crowd, and I think that reflects the intention of the club to, you know, have people there who are really

invested in the music, that are serious about the music and less of the young, sort of, 'fly-in' crowd. I mean, it can be... it can be quite judgmental, I would say, but in a way that is different from other European clubs where it's basically, like, if you're a young woman you'll get in. *Tresor* similarly but less so, I mean it has it's.... [it] attracts a younger crowd and, yeah.

MO: *OK, so we've spoken a lot about nightclubs. Do you consider playing live as one of the most important aspects of your role as a music maker?*

RB: I find playing live a real double-edged sword, a really challenging thing and that's that's [sic] what keeps me doing it. When I first got into electronic music my my [sic] background had been playing a lot of improvised guitar music and and [sic] I've also, sort of, liked to think of myself as someone who's interested in investigating improvisation, and trying to do that in [the] electronic realm is very challenging and and [sic] frightening and prone to train-wrecks; but that's sort of the compulsion for me to keep doing it. And also, performing live really influences my... the productions that I do that will be released on record – it's it's [sic] a way of getting instant feedback. It's it's [sic] terrifying but it's amazing also how how [sic] rare it is within the electronic music genre. Yeah, I I [sic] love it when it's going well and when it's going... when when [sic] a show is less than good then I just have to let myself off the hook, but it's fundamental to my to my [sic] process as a musician.

MO: *And what about the lifestyle? I mean, obviously there's a lot of late nights involved, flying to cities and other countries for just a couple of days. Is that an aspect of the job that you love or that does sometimes, you know, exhaust you?*

RB: I... I quite enjoy the luxury of living in Berlin and being able to... to fly to other European countries really easily, within a couple of hours normally. It's... it's wonderful to play places like the U.S. but even, like, a seven or eight hour plane trip I find kind of fatiguing. You know, I guess... I guess there's certainly a special sort of energy that goes hand-in-hand with the clubbing that happens when you're out in a space and you should be asleep, and I and I [sic] think that's that's [sic] part of the crazy voodoo of club culture is [sic] your body changes the way your mind thinks when you're normally in bed [laughs]. And that's... I kind of enjoy that when when [sic] it works but I get really tired because, you know, I'm not a I'm not a [sic] party guy like the people I'm playing for – it's it's [sic]... it's my job. But at the same time the... the kind of bending of your... your regular patterns can sometimes feel very

cathartic for me; it's like flipping a reset switch. Yeah.

MO: *OK. When you're not touring and you're back in Berlin, can you tell me a little bit about your work in the studio?*

RB: Yeah, I try to keep a regular sort of daily studio practice up, which normally doesn't start until the early afternoon. I guess I've found it helpful to commit, whether or not I'm working on a particular project, to, you know, three or four hours a day at least of loop-making, listening to new sounds, listening to music, so that my artistic process becomes almost like a trade, or a regular... like a second-nature sort of discipline. It takes the pressure off, you know, tendencies to feel like when you're in the studio you have to produce something brilliant and it helps kinda keep me sane because, you know, work can come and go, hours can change and go. So a routine's really important to me and I try to build that into every day. I mean, having said that, the first few hours of every morning are really spent me [sic]... spent for me doing book-keeping and chasing up bookings and promotional stuff, so there's a good few hours everyday just in, sort of, house-keeping various projects going [sic].

MO: *OK, and do you find in Berlin compared to other cities there's more collaborative work with other producers in terms of in the studio, or do you find there's more support?*

RB: I would say, in general, because there are so many artists in Berlin, and it creates a culture where there's less general fetishisation [sic] of being an artist. In other words, for example, in somewhere like Sydney if you're a DJ or electronic producer it's sort of seen as a novelty, and that's reflected in in [sic] a different sort of community of support - like you're you're [sic] put of a pedestal or viewed with skepticism - and there's less of a general accessible culture of sharing of an artistic narrative or discussion. Whereas in Berlin most of my friends are artists and I guess it just feels like another job. So the culture in terms of collaboration and sharing ideas for me certainly seems a bit more relaxed and and [sic] more a part of the daily conversation you'd have with anyone you'd meet in a pub. It's it's [sic].... it feels like it's vital to the the [sic] cultural fabric of Berlin and, you know, you definitely don't feel like a stranger talking about art or synthesizers or.... It's it's [sic] a nice relaxed, ongoing conversation.

MO: *I'd like to ask you a little bit about your actual music production; how you make your music. Sampling is quite a controversial issue in electronic music production. How do you use sampling and re-appropriation of sounds in your own music writing?*

RB: I... am a big fan of sampling and my approach has always been sort of haphazard. I'm... the way I view.... the samples that I use are really primarily as tone colours rather than.... like, for example, it would be unusual for me to sample a whole, clearly identifiable motif or bassline or, you know, a phrase. It happens sometimes, but my approach has always been to listen to the music that I love and maybe zoom in on a single element because I like... I just like the tone or texture of it, and then to to [sic] kind of mess around with that. I have large banks of just totally random little snippets of sounds and I suppose they all have a particular resonance to me, whether it's a certain bassline sound or a, you know, a bit of noise on the end of a tape recording. Yeah, I love the idea of montage and pastiche, and artists for me like Matthew Herbert or Akufen or Jan Jelenik, all of these guys really mess around with the idea of contextualising tiny snippets of sound that had a particular cultural resonance and together told a deeper, more rich, sort of, story [sic]. And these... these are really my examples of influential producers interested in the relationships between particular sounds rather than necessarily just creating a sense of 'wholesale nostalgia' or 'cultural hijacking' or something like this.

MO: *So in terms of copyright of your own music, do you feel feel [sic] comfortable with people sampling your tracks and if so to what extent?*

RB: I... I would whole-heartedly encourage people to sample my music. I guess I would find it quite flattering. Again, I mean this just reflects the relationship that I have with musicians that I might sample whether or not they'd approve of it. I'm interested in this notion of of of [sic] ping-ponging and and [sic] swapping cultural references and I suppose I feel, particularly in the context of being a DJ, that that [sic] what I'm essentially doing is continuing to sample other people's music whether it's blending two records together or taking single sounds, you know. I feel like it's one big collaborative process, so, you know, I'm really happy for people to play my music and I'm really happy for people to sample it. I mean, I've often thought "where would I feel uncomfortable?" and it might be if, you know, half a Deepchild song rocked up on a Coca-Cola commercial without permission. So there's definitely grey areas [sic], but as a general rule I think it's I think it's [sampling] is a wonderful thing to do [sic].

MO: *What are your thoughts on illegal downloading of music and also the consumption of low-quality audio files forms such as MP3s?*

RB: I definitely love hi-fidelity recordings but I've never understood the fascination with either hi-fidelity or tape-only or vinyl-only as a sort of dogma. I'm more interested in what kinds of music the consumption of... the perpetual consumption of low-quality audio files might generate. For example, you know, there's a whole tracking scene based around software that came out in the 90s that allowed for for [sic] the first time people to make music with multiple channels. And and [sic] the thing that defined a lot of tracking music was that it was super low-fi, almost like video game music, but the restrictions of the form changed the sort of music that people made. And I'm sure that this is the case with people listening to lower quality music: it reflects the way that... it reflects the mastering aesthetic, the mixing aesthetic, once it becomes ubiquitous. Like, a major record label for example, you know, if they realise that a lot of the format that people are listening to their music in is MP3s, it will be mastered and mixed like this, and this in turn will probably spawn micro-genres that are responding to the way that people [are] listening to music. In my case, I think there's... you know, there's certainly something to be said negatively for the trade-off of lower-quality formats but I'm more excited in the kind of... the the [sic] freaky experiments that might be generated because it is the way that people listen to music. So yeah, my... that's the fidelity, kind of, question.

Downloading of illegal music? You know, like, it happens, and I feel like it's an issue that definitely affects record sales, or income maybe once generated from record sales or MP3 sales from artists. So my personal response has been to reframe myself as someone that makes money from performing, just because I don't have the... I don't have the energy, just selfishly, to get too up-in-arms about people taking my music. I have better things to be doing, and I also have the luxury of being able to perform. It's a real shock to some friends of mine who are traditional musicians and have no other income sources, but it's an issue that can no longer be addressed on a moral basis and this... this is where there's a paradigm shift, you know. You can't... if people go and take the music [sic], how much energy do you want to spend by telling them that that [sic] they're wrong, that they're stealing? It... for me the conversation needs to be changed, and in an ideal world I would say that all music should be free to download. You know, that's what that's what [sic] I'd want. I I [sic]... myself I only pay for music because I don't feel comfortable taking it, but the notion of music being free? It's not a bad one in itself. So we need to change the

conversation, I think. I don't think the wave of piracy can be stopped. And I don't think attaching a monetary value to recorded music is necessarily the best way of thinking about music either.

MO: *OK, so can you expand a little bit on your thoughts of distribution, consumption and the live experience in the future for your genre?*

RB: My... I mean, my genre is essentially dance-floor based electronic music which at the moment continues to have a really (I guess in terms of life-cycles of 'product', for want of a better word, whether it's an EP or a song), a very very short turn-over. So a track will be released, it will go to promo, it'll be up featured on a website for a week, then it will be off. You know... and it's and it's [sic] reflective of not only of the volume of home-producers which there are, and and [sic] certainly it's bedroom studios that fuel the dance music scene: like most of the music that I'm playing that is sold is produced in someone's bedroom and maybe mastered up somewhere else, but there's there's [sic] a glut of it. So it's rapidly consumed and it's also, you know, rapidly played (unless it's a spectacular track) because it's generally the DJ's imperative to keep fresh in the music that they're charting and they're playing.

Yeah, I suppose to surmise, I'm seeing a radical shift in culture where, for better or worse, you know, the... to have your music published and sound good is more accessible than ever, and younger musicians and producers can suddenly have a way to share their music with the rest of the world. I've heard, again, more traditional musicians up in arms cause they're like "that just means there's so much crap music out there", but I don't see it as a negative... I don't think there's any less 'good music' out there. Yeah, I... financially it means the... essentially the death of the record label as we know it, but I think that's been the case the case [sic] for a long time. And I like the sense of more DIY, collaborative, cottage industry music that that that this [sic] facilitates. I think it's essentially an empowering thing, I think for everyone to be able to have a go at making music, whether it's good or crap is... is fantastic, a really liberating thing.

MO: *OK Rick Bull, thank you for your time today.*

RB: Thank you, Michelle.

AUDIO EXCERPT: [Deepchild - STADTKIND](#)