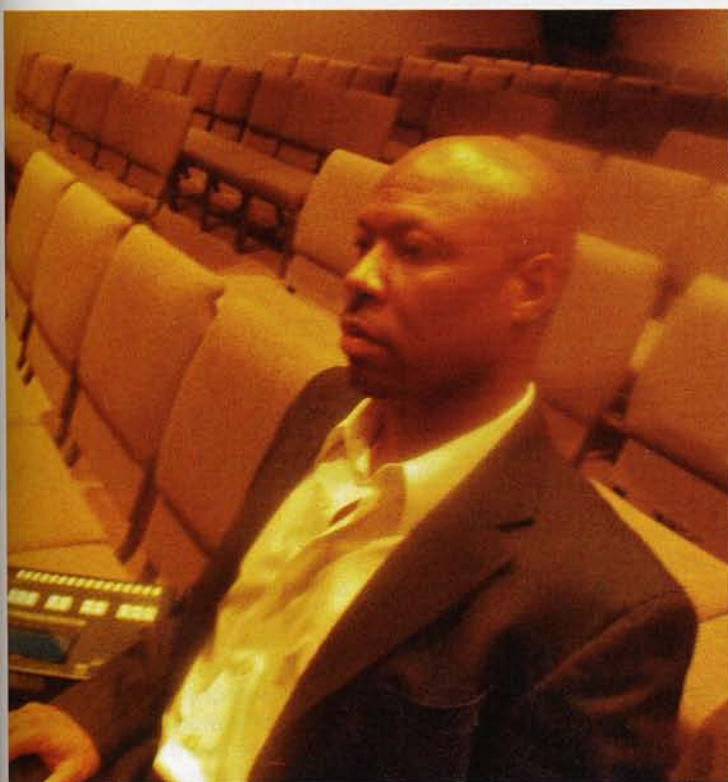


HEAD HEAVY?

THE BLACK DOG VS ROBERT HOOD



AS THE MINIMAL BUBBLE FINALLY BURSTS, DETROIT DON ROBERT HOOD RE-RELEASES HIS SEMINAL 1994 'MINIMAL NATION' ALBUM TO SHOW US HOW STRIPPED DOWN SOUL IS SUPPOSED TO BE DONE. WE INVITED CHIEF ELECTRONIC EXPERIMENTALISTS, AND SELF-CONFESSED FANS OF HOOD, THE BLACK DOG DOWN TO **idj** HQ TO INTERVIEW A TRUE MINIMAL MAESTRO. THIS IS HOW THEY ROLLED...

TBD: "Minimal Nation has really stood the test of time and become something of a seminal release, a line in the sand. How do you feel about that? And did you ever think it would be this successful when you created it?"

Rob: "From as far back as 1983, I knew minimalism was coming through to the forefront of arts, design and music. Even on a subconscious level I knew, and as an art student I could really feel it. I loved watching the development of automobile and technology design – you could see it coming."

'It's Like That' by Run DMC was the first real piece of music that proved this to me. It blew my mind! It was so stark and stripped down and the words they spoke were so different to all the party music going on at the time. There was no traditional intro or set structure with verse, chorus, verse, bridge, it felt like the earth shifted! I was still in high school at the time, then, later on with the birth of techno, everything fell into place. It was almost prophetic. Minimal Nation was a name before the album; I just made a comment to Jeff Mills that 'the minimal nation was rising'

because you had people like Robert Armani, myself, Dan Bell and a few others doing something other than that rave direction that US club culture was taking. He just said to me, 'that's it!' I was half way through the double EP so it all made sense."

TBD: Do you think the younger generations understand what you were trying to achieve with Minimal Nation?

Rob: "Very few do. Marc Houle certainly does. Mark Broom and Shinedoe do, too. They know when enough is enough. They know when to stop cluttering things up. There's a delicate balance to it. Minimal is harder to do than layered production. People think it's easy, and they jump on the bandwagon. It became trendy in '97/'98 and again recently. It was stupid, the popularity increased so much it stopped being fun. People were saying 'oh we're going to make intelligent techno.' What is intelligent techno? Come on! We're having fun here, surely?"

Club-based music can't be so serious, uptight and intellectual. It's a spiritual feeling you get when you achieve a minimal balance, when you get that balance you get





that Holy Ghost-style sensation and it's not because of some big build up, it's because the music is taking you to another place and you want to scream. I used to get that at the Music Institute listening to Kevin Saunderson and Derrick May. The way they put the music together just put you somewhere else, like church! I'm not saying you have to go back to those times to feel it again – music is all about evolution – but you have to build on what we had and make some progress."

TBD: Is less always better?

Rob: "Less isn't always better. I go by the rule of 'anything goes'. I made 'Nighttime World', and you've got some really layered stuff right there. It's musical and more produced than some of my other music. It doesn't have to be this certain tempo, this certain cymbal. Sometimes I'm in an aggressive mood and I make something a little harder. You know, music is heart and emotion and I really feel people aren't doing that anymore. Music has become a commodity, just a product. You don't feel happiness or sadness so much anymore..."

TBD: So do you think people have fallen out of love with music and just become consumers of it?

Rob: "Most people, yes. I listen to the radio stations over here and I realise most people are followers. Most people are just programmed to like what they're told to. They don't even question it! People don't even seem to communicate that way, I don't see anyone getting in touch with these stations and asking them to play something, or asking where they can

get something. They just hear the same song three times in one hour, so they think 'okay, I must like it'. Most people, that is. Not all of us. We're in a minority though, which is very, very sad."

TBD: Do you listen to other minimal composers at all – Stockhausen/Budd/Reich?

Rob: "Not really. I listen to Jean-Luc Ponty, RZA from Wu Tang, DJ High Teck, DJ Premiere and a lot of 70s stuff – stuff I grew up on. That's pretty much it. There are a handful of techno artists I admire as well, people like Pacou."

TBD: All your tracks have that "deep funk" in them, even some of the harder, more uncompromising tracks still have it coded into them. Funk-wise, who or what has been the biggest influence on you?

Rob: "James Brown! He's the Godfather, without him we wouldn't have all of this. George Clinton, Bootsy Collins, Cameo, The Isley Brothers, the production team at Motown, David Bowie, a little bit of Depeche Mode; they all contribute to my musical makeup. There are too many to mention!"

TBD: You're one of a few artists where we have everything you've ever released. Who's your most collected artist and why?

Rob: "Oh wow! I'd have to say Wu Tang and the Killer Bee's – I haven't got everything, but pretty much everything."

TBD: Do you ever feel trapped by your own past? We say this because The Black Dog has had

several different line-ups and released different styles of techno over 20 years, while certain sections of the techno community seem to want the same thing over and over again – to pigeon hole and trap you in one narrow mode. What do you feel about that?

Rob: "I've never, ever felt trapped. I made a conscious effort not to get trapped! After the success of 'Minimal Nation', I released 'Internal Empire' on Tresor which was a lot more experimental. Then 'Nighttime World' threw things again. I like to push things and expand; just when you think you know who Robert Hood is and what he's about, it'll be like bang! This is also what I'm about. It's all about keeping people on their toes and pushing my skills and abilities. I've never felt trapped, and hopefully I never will."

TBD: When we've talked to you about studio techniques before, you mentioned that you don't use a computer, just machines. Are you still using this method of working and why have you elected to not use a computer in your studio set-up?


Rob: "I just don't feel it. It's all machines and a hard disc recorder. I guess somewhere there's a computer, processing it all away. Why, everything's a computer, even a drum machine is a computer deep down. I just don't feel software, I love hardware. I don't want to have to wait to upload or download – if I want to make music, I want to pick up an instrument and make music. I'm a hands-on type of guy, I don't use a computer to do all the work. I think we lose a lot of soul making

music through computers. If you're a musician, you should play some keys and turn some knobs – I have to have that human touch."

TBD: What's happening with your record labels, and when can we expect to see new material from you? We've heard that M-Plant is starting back up, is this true?

Rob: "Yes, this is true. 'Minimal Nation' is the first to come out, and then in September we'll be setting things up properly. I'm interested in people like Shinedoe, and I've expressed an interest in working with Mark Broom, so who knows?"

TBD: There's often a big difference between your releases and DJ sets – we're thinking in particular about your Peacefrog releases and your live 909 workouts. Is this deliberate and do you think the title of "uncompromising" is a fair description of your DJ style? Or do you think there's more than one Robert Hood?



“JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU KNOW ROBERT HOOD AND WHAT HE’S ABOUT, IT’LL BE LIKE BANG!”

Rob: “There’s more to Robert Hood than people will ever know. Personally and musically, I’m not a single dimension. No one ever is. Hence the title ‘Internal Empire’; there’s a wealth of creativity and moods within us all. I don’t want to make out I’ve got some kinda split personality going on here, but everyone has many sides. We’re not just techno artists, there’s much more to all of us!

As for uncompromising, that depends if it means the set-up – two turntables and a mixer – or how I play. If it’s about how I play, it’s all about the groove, it always has been. If anything is going to sacrifice the groove, I won’t do it. In the way I deliver it, in the way I render it, if anything sacrifices the simplicity of the groove, I don’t want to know.

I used to grow up listening to DJs who were really fluid. Now Serato and Final Scratch have come along, which is all totally fine, but I’ve noticed those same DJs have lost some of their edge. It’s taking away

that sparkle from their efforts and I’m not enjoying them like I did 20 years ago. I’m very careful not to go that way. Nobody’s right or wrong – if that enhances your set then great – but I’ve noticed that certain DJs have been compromised. I can’t say who, though!”

TBD: **We know you are a spiritual man and you’ve always said that music from the heart is the real mission. Has that mission changed at all over the years and do you still strive to be an originator?**

Rob: “God is a god of vision. He has given each one of us a vision, and I try to stay spiritually in tune with the vision that has been imparted on me. I don’t think people realise where that vision has come from, but many of us still utilise, evolve and challenge it. It doesn’t matter if you don’t know where the source of the vision is coming from, as long as you’re pursuing it. I always try to let my vision manifest itself into reality.”

TBD: **Detroit has many myths but the one it doesn’t seem to be able to shake is that it’s a “rough hell-hole”. Do you feel that it will ever escape the prejudice of mass misinterpretation?**

Rob: “People are always going to be biased and opinionated about what Detroit is and what it’s all about. Many people who say these things have never lived in Detroit, let alone been there. It’s an amazing city with many, many strengths. Yeah it’s got some hard neighbourhoods, but it also has some really nice communities. You can’t let the ghetto affect the whole place’s reputation. It’s very narrow minded, and I think it’s a problem across the US; people always generalise about black people and their neighbourhoods in Detroit, Chicago, Brooklyn, everywhere man. It’s very sad to discount these places when you’ve got some incredibly gifted people coming from there. Detroit is a great, cosmopolitan city that has, at times, been very progressive.”

TBD: **Talk to us about Mike Banks. We often listen to his interviews to help us stay focused and humble, he’s been a big inspiration. What does he mean to you?**

Rob: “Mike is the mad rebel! He is the liberator of techno and he’s been a big brother to me over the years and a total inspiration. I’ve got nothing but love and respect for Mike Banks, always will. He is the Underground Resistance.”

TBD: **If you could pick a track that you wish you’d written and released, what would it be?**

Rob: “Oh man! This is tough. Too tough! I really can’t answer this one, there are so many records I wish I produced. No, that’s too hard. Next question please!”

TBD: **From ‘Internal Empire’ to ‘HoodMusic 3’, when you review your body of work, are you happy with the creative progression?**

Rob: “Yes I am very happy with the musical progression. I think at one point there was a time when I fell out of touch with my own vision and was standing on some ground that was unsteady, but now I’ve recaptured that vision and I feel stronger than ever.”

TBD: **We don’t believe in God, but when we meet on some other plane, Robert, who gets to say “I told you so...”**

Rob: “God!”

■ **Robert Hood’s ‘Minimal Nation’ is out now on M-Planet**
■ **The Black Dog’s ‘Further Vexations’ is out now on Soma**