

ARTIST PROFILE

Yesteryear Sound

NICOLE SKELTY'S FIRST CAME TO NOTICE FOR THE accomplished underground-acid-ambient-trance techno work of Blifftek (Nicole plus Kate Crawford). The duo's Sub-Vocal Theme Park album showed a sophisticated grasp of electronic music's potential to celebrate technology and humanity simultaneously.

You might hear inspirations from Detroit, London or Germany, but their subversively enjoyable sound is entirely distinctive.

Nicole's other musical outlet is a solo affair, Artificial. Electro-Lollipop-Explosion, Artificial's debut album, continues Blifftek's musical interests. E-L-E is a deft mix of '70s funk, pop culture kitsch, funky acid, poised techno and unabashed techno. It is, perhaps, a record the Funky Squad might've made, if they hadn't been purely taking the piss (in fact, the album's cover features four fashionably unfashionable '70s-style dolls that might pass for extras from that TV show).

The irresistibly funky Authority Over The Fish would make a fine cop show theme, with its acidic funk take on a Oragnet-style sound. Check out the upfront swagger of Can Ya? and Curtis Mayfield-meets-Mouse On Mars grooves of No Taste in Music, and you'll understand.

Actually, given Nicole's impressive ability to weave media-friendly phrases, perhaps the twenty-word description of E-L-E that she gave to Melbourne mag, Ingress is more helpful: "A fanfare of trip-disco-funky-acid-electro-lounge; that's one word. Followed by low-fidelity album for the 'now' person who wants the sound of yesteryear only a bit more 'tomorrow'."

A similar intelligence and sensibility informs Pigeon Coup, a comic Nicole sketch. It's a humorous take of three birds exploring rave culture, blasphemy, politics, feminism and big Afro.

Dragonflight will provide an opportunity to test Sydney mag 3D World's observation that Nicole "was one of the most impressive live acts to let loose on a dancefloor in a long time... Artificial provided every tweak and bleep herself and kept the dancefloor screaming for more."

Nicole gives us the Artificial tale via e-mail... Did you begin the Artificial project with a definite sound, approach or objective?

Yes, there I was, newly arrived in Melbourne, alone in my smoky machine-den with only the seductive red twinkling of analogue LEDs for company... and I thought... I must cheer myself and the world up... what the world needs now, more than anything else, is more squishy funky-acid-trip-disco-electro-lounge... and of course, I felt duty-bound to release Elec-

tro-Lollipop-Explosion.

Do you set out to combine humour and unintentional enjoyment with serious musical invention, contemporary electronic sounds with kitsch references?

Thank you — absolutely.

Are you conscious of a subversive streak to your music — including stranger, weirder elements underneath bold melodies and beats?

People have compared my stuff to Dalt Punk, French disco house, and even Fat Boy Slim... but I'm not trying to sound like any particular 'contemporary' style. I think you have picked up on the fact that there is something deeply bent and surreal about the sensibility... and like my other project (with Kate Crawford, Blifftek) there is some eagerness in the deliberate idiosyncrasy of the sound. One reviewer compared me to Beck (!!) and said (somewhat incredulously) that my music had 'thin and creaky keyboard sounds, cheesy basslines and the most primitive of synth twiddles'. I was so chuffed with that description! Electro-Lollipop-Explosion incorporates a diversity of styles and sounds, and yet it's coherent enough to create its own style. Do you think that audiences are ready for that. Do you think that audiences are ready for that, in these days of increasingly fragmented subgenres?

That is surely the ultimate achievement that all artists aspire to... to create your own distinctive style. That's my holy grail. I think underground electronics followers in Australia are very open to lots of diversity and fresh approaches... the best Australian electronics, particularly from artists involved with Clan Analogue, is marked by that eclecticism and originality. However, above-ground techno is another story. In Australia, it is highly derivative of overseas styles. Blifftek, for example, is more popular in Europe than here. Artificial was picked up first by a New York label. If we wait five years, maybe our 'sound' will get exported back above-ground.

What is wrong with theory, anyway? There is nothing wrong with theory. Where would a modern girl be without theory, computers and platform runners?

There are tracks on Electro-Lollipop-Explosion that cry out to be used as TV show themes. Does the idea of a detective show called Authority Over The Fish appeal?

A friend of mine is currently painstakingly putting together a mind-bending computer graphics video for the Authority track which involves underwater cartoon fish gangsters. TV and movie soundtracks are a constant source of inspiration.

How different are your Stoner Classic tracks from the E-L-E material?

Stoner Classic 1 is a concept album (6 tras), first of a long series, and has a couple of tras from

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Would Suit The Funky Squad



Artificial: embracing funk

E-L-E and the rest are new. They are mostly very raw, deep analogue. Some, like, deeply tripped-out, a bit heavy... one track "Stomping Hermit Island" is about seven minutes long and features my 808 and 808 (I found synth oscillators plus a totally untracked cut-up self-monologue; it is certainly the most 'anti-OF' and most audaciously primitive of all the tras. The tras reminded me of a Moby, fat stomped against with an Afro bobbing along with its baggy pants half-way down its butt... that is where the visual image came from for Pigeon Coup).

We are not really trying to sell the Stoner series in Australia, it is too much more for too little gain, but if people want a copy of Vol 1, they can mail order by emailing me: wh3r3@artificial.net

How did you see these artists for Volume 2, the companion? The second volume has tras by Artificial, Clan Analogue, Dark Network. Most of the tras are by Dark Network, fellow Canberraers who have been a huge inspiration for me with their 'real melodic acid sound. This is my way of saying thank you to them, and to Kate Crawford who also writes with some of the members of Dark Network (the Queens) in Clome. It's a very, very weird, funky volume for the sun on lounge, and the artists will be even more spectacular than volume 1.

Stoner 2 is mastered and ready to go, since we finished CD distribution arrangements, I am already compiling Stoner 3, which has already aroused interest from some very special CD artists. It is going to be a surreal delight and a gift from MUSIC to the queer community.

What benefits do artists like yourself get from being included on compilations like Stonerlect or France Pacific Express?

Well, certainly not financial rewards, but the more copies you appear on, the higher your profile, and Artificial and Blifftek tras are getting a lot of copies now here and overseas.

The most important thing to make about projects like Stonerlect, though, are that they are offers by local underground labels and artists to support each other and to develop a market for our sounds. Collaborative and cooperative are essential for Australian underground electronic musicians and labels who are serious about fostering originality and opportunity in the face of overwhelming pressure by major and commercial radio stations to put out 'safe' techno for the Australian market.

What are some of your other projects at the moment?

My most recent release project was a tras by Little Nobody, of if records fame, on his recently released 'The First' album available through (Shack). I have also just had a couple of tras from E-L-E released on vinyl by Capricorn Music Works in New York (and also here on a cassette). Some work I had doing on a soundtrack for a feature game show 'mactuminary' has been undertaken by me and Kate with a heavy 1000-bpm tras being recorded on the 11th March coming out Feb next year, and Blifftek has been asked to do the soundtrack for a full-length movie.

It seems feature film I'm releasing stuff on comes all the time.

With the stars of your album's front cover be involved in your film shows?

Well the stars of your album's front cover be involved in your film shows? They work I play unless promoters can guarantee positive sales of CDs and champagne and miniature bottled beverage backstages. So parts it will not be me.

One album seems for another Artificial album?

Yes, I've had some recent releases: 'Stonerlect' in a single, together with extras by Paul Mack and some tras by me and Paul. It is doing very well (more than the adult dance electronic charts) for us weeks and we will be releasing a new album, probably through Festival, hopefully around March next year.

How has Clan Analogue evolved during your membership? What now does it play now?

Clan Analogue has gone from a bunch of bedroom messengers in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne in the early '70s putting out totally mad songs, to now being a sub-label of Festival. We are still heavily independent in our

esthetic and poetically conscious in our efforts to get non-commercially, liberally viewed and encourage youth to get involved (not always successfully, but we try). The collective will remain a breeding ground for new sounds and artists, while at the same time, each release is stronger, more assured and more popular. Have a listen to the just released Stoner 2 and I'll tell you why you should listen to it. You'll see what I mean.

Why did the Melbourne Underground Community start? What are its aims?

MUSIC as the use of Melbourne's most respected underground labels. Any of Trummet, Saigone and if records. They each wanted to release E-L-E, and I said why don't we just form a consortium, and release it collaboratively? That way we have more resources for manufacturing and marketing, and emotional support. They are a very exciting bunch of labels, and lovely people. I had been somewhat working with them on E-L-E and the Stoner Classic series.

What's the story with your Pigeon Coup music?

A new release of Pigeon Coup will appear with each volume of Stoner Classic. It is humorously Crumb-like in visual style. The narrative follows the exploits of the program, Funky Afro Pigeon, hulk-like there long and plain of attitude, Louie-like, underground electronic music (and remembrance to members of Clan Analogue party members) and later byrd, hand-drawn '70s images as they try and overthrow the state using skills in chess play and many weapons. It's a bit of a humorous chronicle of the entire underground, and it's a bit of a caricature of what ever it's supposed to be '70s street parties and feminism.' It's very funny, and very tripped out. We are thinking about re-releases.

Tom Hones

Artificial plays at Dragonflight on New Year's Eve.

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