

B(i)ft(k)

We like to think of our music as elegant electronica, acid beats for a whacky generation of girls with too much going on in their minds

Story/Interview by Sarah Smiles

The Beastie Boys dedicated tracks to them, Black Dog placed their last album on their top ten — it's a bird, it's a plane... who the hell are those two geek grrls up there in the sky?

→ So there I was, keeled over like a hunchback at the back of Canberra's "premiere" nightclub Heaven — waiting for divine intervention. Who knows what I was doing in Canberra. Who knows what I was doing in Heaven. All I knew at that point was I was facing DBDK. Death by Doner Kebab. The meatex offcuts that I had scoffed just minutes before felt like they were nesting in my stomach. Festering, fermenting and expanding rapidly into a mutant Gremlin terminator that felt ready to explode out my mouth at any second. Feeling a wave of contractions about to take over, I wedged my head deeper between my thighs and moaned softly like an injured Chewbacca fallen by the side of the road.

→ And then it happened. Putting the atom back into the sonic bomb — B(i)ft(k) entered the building. Ascending to the holy booth — two nerdy looking girls in nurses outfits, one with Buddy Holly glasses, the other with a fiery crop of red hair — like ET's with enlightened fingers outstretched, they performed a miracle on my stomach. Whipping the bounciest, funkiest, acid spank techno, bobbing over their little black boxes with smiles stretched wide, flipping the crowd into a near retarded frenzy, I soon forgot about all about the poisonous meat spluttering in my stomach. B(i)ft(k), French for steak — a pun on the robotic sound of the word, techno vs all things corporeal — had me making love to the speaker like I had never before. Dishing smiles out like frisbees and humping bass like a freak. As the 303 rippled over me in feverish shudders of joy it occurred to me I was having the best time I'd had in Canberra since back at the Questacon in '88 when I laid my hands on the plasma ball for the first time. And to who did I owe this delicious pleasure?

→ Originally from Canberra, Nicole Skeltys and Kate Crawford are the whiz bangs behind B(i)ft(k). Two self professed film buffs (the word B(i)ft(k) garnered from the Godard film *Une Femme et Une Femme*, the brackets

incising the "if" relating to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle) they met four years ago in the Capital Territory.

Kate describes the sound they create as "weird" — Nicole goes a little further: "Many people think B(i)ft(k) is the sound of one machine clapping... the UR-sound of electronica, around in the universe for maybe 3 billion years as general cosmic noise, and we just happened to come along and tune into it with Kate's System 100 and my grungy old sampler. I can see why people think that... but we like to think of our music as elegant electronica, acid beats for a whacky generation of girls with too much going on in their minds..."

→ Within a year of discovering each other, Kate and Nicole released their first album *Sub-Vocal Theme Park* in 1996, a dark, atmospheric, acidic excursion (financed by the cyberfeminist zine geekgirl), which was picked up by the German label Nephilim. This was followed by the success of 'Bedrock' — the pussy lash "breakbeat funk" single released by Festival last year and the "squidgy Japo-pop" of *Japanese Game Show*. Yet this is only the tip of an ever existing iceberg.

→ Between juggling their day jobs ("We work for NASA and are currently in training to be the FIRST ELECTRONIC DANCE ACT IN SPACE," quote Nicole), producing individual stuff under their alter egos Artificial (Nicole) and Clone (Kate), touring with the Beastie Boys ("nice chaps", who dedicated trax to them at each concert) — B(i)ft(k) have found the time to produce a second album.

→ I asked Kate to discuss *2020: An Electro Odyssey*, due to be released in 2000.

→ Describing it as "Japo-electro", similar in dark, atmospheric style to *Sub-Vocal Theme Park*, yet stripped back and "spacier", she divulged the Kubrickian concept behind the new album.

→ "The big visual influence for the new B(i)ft(k) sound is a particular scene in Kubrick's 2001 — on the space station. The clothes, the furniture, the architecture, all create vision of the future that is at

once retro and futuristic. We dig that visual aesthetic of retro-futurism, particularly what people in the 70's thought the future would look like — and in many ways it's a good metaphor for what we do musically. We use all these old 70's synths, drum machines and sound modules but make music that is very space-like and considered futuristic. Using a bunch of old and fabulous machines! I think Kubrick would have liked that irony..."

→ Futuristically, the album was conceived over two cities. With Nicole living in Melbourne and Kate in Sydney, their calendar is divided by weekends spent lugging their machines from Canberra to Melbourne to Sydney and back again playing gigs and recording. When it comes to playing live, would it be easier to just DJ? "I never really understood the pleasure in playing other peoples tunes," says Nicole, "but yes, carrying all that gear around can be a big pain in the butt. Perhaps when B(i)ft(k) Corp stocks skyrocket in value we will be able to press all our tunes onto vinyl, play records and then REALLY concentrate on getting those dance moves right."

→ To use a weary cliché, the sky is the limit for these two super heroes battling it out on the treadmills of creativity in the far off smoke dens of the galaxy. Thankfully I got in just before the red carpet rolled up and strangled them to ask them that much anticipated question — who would they thank if they won an Oscar? Being the excitable quirkball she is, Nicole grabbed the mike and took over from there:

→ "B(i)ft(k) are currently doing the whole soundtrack for an Australian feature film called *Bored Olives*, set in Brisbane about 20+ angst in the suburbs. Hopefully, this is the first step in the long-term direction for the band. We have always been film-buffs and would like to gracefully retire from clubland at some point in the future and swan around penthouses with martinis summoning up score ideas for pointy-headed films made here and overseas... so when we get the appropriate gold moulded statuettes for best soundtrack (or maybe best special effects!) we'll thank geekgrrls everywhere, Bob Moog and Giorgio Moroder for giving us the best years of their lives."