



B(if)tek (l-r): Kate Crawford and Nicole Skeltys

B(if)tek Geek Grrls

That's a funky Porta-DAT," says Kate Crawford, the more jovially proper half of dance outfit B(if)tek. I have to admit that the dictaphone is actually all-analogue when the more knockabout half of B(if)tek Nicole Skeltys picks up the machine and explains the attraction. "This is how small we want to get our rig down to," she says.

"Well that's what's happening to technology," says Crawford. "It's Moore's Law. Every 18 months processing is halved in time, and halved in cost."

Forget about 1970s scientific theory, though. B(if)tek is more excited about the possibilities presented by the evening's *Beyond 2000*-style human interest news outro piece, in which a paralysed stroke victim has been offered control of a computer via diodes set directly into the human brain. Based in different states — Skeltys in Melbourne, Crawford in Sydney — the pair already employ the technology when they compose via e-mail, sending each other audio documents which slowly became realised

musical works through a process of Internet ping pong. Impressive? Crawford wants to go far further. She's keen to get a direct interface between computer and her organic grey matter happening ASAP.

"I'm ready for a chip," she nods.

"It would be so nice," Skeltys agrees. "We could think tracks instead of programming them. In your mind you can hear the ideal track."

"What I really want to do is clone myself," adds Crawford, "so my clone can do all my samples, while I sit around playing with my analogue stuff."

The digital technology angle to B(if)tek is further accented and assisted by Crawford's day job (she works as an information technology journalist by day, editing the national magazine *Internet AU*), and by Skeltys' background in advanced electronics.

But new single from B(if)tek, "Bedrock" is being released by new Festival records dance arm F1 as a showcase for the long standing Clan Analogue collective/label as much as it is for B(if)tek itself (fortunately, the interest it has generated for the duo has warranted further releases). And B(if)tek, while using digital technology for the practicalities of their form, are likewise pronounced analogue devotees.

The pair met in 1995 at an illegal forest rave outside Canberra (in a pine plantation rather than National Park — "We felt a bit guilty having them in the native forests because people are so trashy," says Crawford). From there a meeting of musical minds led to e-mail correspondence, and the first B(if)tek songs. They hooked up with original geek girl, Rosie Cross, the trio co-funding B(if)tek's first independent album release *Subvocal Theme Park* in 1996. One of the first albums to be sold online in Australia, *Subvocal Theme Park* solidified B(if)tek's view of the Net as "a useful thing."

"We're just technology types," Crawford explains. "We like our tek."

"And gadgets," Skeltys concludes.

Talk of plans for a virtual performance where a video screen shows the pair creating the music at home, even as it plays as a soundtrack — turns to a discussion of a Melbourne virtual artist who only performs online.

"We'd like to do it," says Crawford. "We don't actually broadcast over the Net, but we've composed tracks. But we don't see it as being an effective performance delivery method for at least five years until we have broad band or cable. If we had cable and we had really good RealAudio [audio-enabling software], you could pull it off. For the moment all it's good for is for us to send files on to each other on the Net."

In a rock-dominated, male-dominated industry, B(if)tek is already an anomaly. But they see the real challenge in the cultural cringe that dominates the trend-chasing edges of Australian dance.

"It's really derivative," says Skeltys, "always following what's happened overseas... I reckon there's about a five year time lag between Australia and the UK."

And as for the young player, is it hard for them to get on an edge in this field? Is it very competitive?

"Not really at all," says Crawford encouragingly. "There's hardly anyone tapping into this stuff."