

Canberra Times

Don't mince with Biftek

JANE CASTLES talks to a thoroughly modern female band, who are sick of fighting the gender stereotypes in the techno scene.

TWO MODERN young women, armed with the kind of complex machinery that would allow your average technophile into a technological utopia, are trying to create a new atmosphere in the techno scene. If Biftek had a mission statement it may well be this: A Canberra band made up of Nicole Skellys and Kate Crawford, Biftek are masters of "smooth, electronic" music that is "just what you need to get out of your car". It can be found somewhere within the techno scene, but Skellys and Crawford are aware that, as with all genres, techno does not contain the diversity and energy that inspired it in the first place.

Techno is a genre term which we take to encompass a huge variety of electronically based music. There are lots of functional mixtures which consist of layered and modulated, and layered even more. Crawford and Skellys are not just keeping up with the "beat" of techno. Skellys and Crawford are determined to transcend the arbitrary territories which cut up the musical landscape and plot a new topography.

One of our concerns with the band is in actually experimenting with an ambles class is very different to what we write, we are far more interested in incorporating, entirely different musical genres. Into what is considered techno. Into what sort of genre game is a game that we like to play with," Skellys said. Without wishing to be pigeon-holed into a "frustrating, girly band" basket, Skellys and Crawford are conscious of the fact that they are working within a male-dominated genre in a field that is determined to defeat without being overpowered. The duo are intent on beating creating material which undermines the boys at their own game and the old dichotomy which underpins modern music culture versus natural (ie technically and productively disempowered) woman.



Biftek's creations: determined to "transcend the arbitrary territories which cut up the musical landscape".

"From a very early age women are conditioned that machines, and any form of technology, are in a male realm. It is a negative reinforcement of the distinction between nature and culture, so women are like 'don't worry about it, the boys can take care of it'."

"I think we realised that there has been a barrier in the past, and in order for women to confront that barrier they need to see other women who are actually experimenting in this realm and doing it successfully. That's why we do take it seriously, to the degree that we want to do this very well and to

people often think what we are doing is quite crazy, but we think it's a bit of fun." Crawford said.

Keeping a sense of fun in what they do is important to Biftek. Although Skellys and Crawford are serious about doing the best they can do within the medium, they do not lose the earnestness of some of their peers.

"There is a certain playfulness to what we are doing. We are deadly serious about trying to meet and excel standards for the genre we are working in, but at the same time we are trying to build one of the traps - which a lot of boys in

particular fall into - which is taking themselves extremely seriously. If you listen to some of our tracks, they are quite playful. There are quite ironic samples that are going on in them as well," Skellys said.

Biftek belong to Clan Analogous, a unique Australian electronic arts collective. The collective aims to promote and develop innovation within electronic music and art and includes members such as DJs, DJs, writers and hackers. The members of Clan Analogous have a range of forums in which they display their work, anything from parties to the Internet, and have had a number of collective releases including a double CD, *Live*.

Skellys said Clan Analogous was a unique arts collective in that it was not concerned with the traditional distinctions between popular and fine and high art, attracting artists who experimented "on the boundaries".

"So, for example we have had installations at the Gash, in music with a high German, accompanied in also by a 'spatial X' but you can also get some of the most famous clubs around Sydney and see some of our stuff, but it's considered popular culture."

"There are people that do want that would be classified as electronic art, and there are people, like myself and Kate, that I guess work at the more sophisticated end of dance club music."

Naturally, *Subversive Theme Park* can be ordered by visiting <http://www.reelid.com.au/biftek/> or by contacting Skellys and Crawford at Landscaped Impact and Umm.

Theme Park will be launched with a special event, Acid Unravelling, at Ilfracombe. Other performers include J's, Basa Blich and Tod from Sydney, Jon Wick, and Canberra's Dark Network. Local video artists are also performing at the event.

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