

Wicked techno outfit B(if)tek beat the bias

CYBER WARRIORS

By Tracey Grimson

THE ANALOGY THAT I like to run is that listening to one of our tracks is like a slow, warm, barbiturate rush," says Kate Crawford, of Canberra-based techno outfit B(if)tek. "People just go. 'Oh wow, this is great,' and they get sucked in. But then they'll come to a point where they suddenly start realising that this track has more to say and that it's somehow subverting what they're used to when it comes to dance music: that it has an ironic double-take on that whole genre and on their expectations.

In that way, there is a subversive ethic in B(if)tek, and there is definitely a feminist line there — probably an anarcho-feminist. But that's an implicit thing — we don't plaster all over our tracks or have feminist manifestos being read aloud or anything. It's far more subtle than that."

B(if)tek emerged with the support of Svány collective Clan Analogue which, like Crawford's outfit, twists preconceived notions of art out of shape to come up with highly progressive results. While the Clan's foundations are set in the production of electronic forms of music, the group also incorporates broader undertakings including performance events and visual art. And, as Crawford's B(if)tek partner Nicole Skelty explains, their outfit sits comfortably within the Clan's DIY, community-based approach.

"One of the things that's great about playing at Clan Analogue gigs," Skelty says, "is that inevitably someone's brought their computer animation sequences for the audiences to look at, which is a hell of a lot more interesting than a couple of people on stage riddling knobs."

The result of B(if)tek's knob-riddling, however, is a seamless and organic work of techno entitled *Sub-*

Vocal Theme Park. From danceable, upbeat numbers to more acid-oriented and trance tracks, the offering not only distorts ordinary notions of techno, but does so via the rich but raw sounds of analogue recording.

"Analogue gear is quite intuitive and you can work with it easily," Crawford says. "You just sit down and bond with the machines for a few days, and you can really start working with them from there. And it's a continuous process. We've been jamming with B(if)tek for a year and it's got to a point now where I think we're far more confident with all the machines we use."

But as the women go on to clarify, their technical education — at the outset at least — proved somewhat difficult.

"I got into [making techno] through male friends who were writing," Crawford says. "They were perfectly happy for me to sit and watch, but there was a distinction between watching and getting involved. When I met Nicole I finally had much more of a chance to sit down and really jam with instruments, whereas previously I think I was moonlighting."

The other major problem — apparent for both women and men in their field — is the prohibitive cost involved with the purchase of equipment. "A lot of people say there's a gender barrier there, and I think that's true, but there's a class barrier too," Crawford says. "It tends to be people who are middle class who can afford this gear, because it is really expensive. It's a rarity to find people who have very little money who are making their own machines or picking them up at strange garage sales."



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Both Crawford and Skelty encourage the continually developing networks through which fans and producers of underground techno can touch base, swap information and hone their specialities. In particular, the Internet is proving an increasingly viable means of communication and promotion for B(if)tek.

Skelty says there's a natural "intellectual and practical alliance" between techno and the Net: "People who are good at making their own machines are often going to be programmers and they can build web pages. It's all part of the same culture — the skills and the attitude

and the interests all blend quite well. "For underground techno, you're looking at a very small market," she says, "and it makes a lot of sense to use on-line distribution as one way of targeting your market precisely. It's something that's only just starting now, but I think that's the way it's going to go. And you can set up new alliances with people via the medium."

Sub-Vocal Theme Park is already pushing that barrow, through its association with on-line fanzine *geekgirl*, which distributes the B(if)tek disc. Co-sponsor of B(if)tek's recorded project and *geekgirl* founder Rosie Cross explains, "When I started *geekgirl*, it

was a reaction to sexism and misogyny on-line, but basically I like to platform other women who are working and playing in cyberspace. The epicentre of *geekgirl* is cyberfeminist, but around that you also have all these other broad-ranging views."

Cross cites her own interests as ranging from UFOs, conspiracy theory and cryptography to acid music and intelligent techno. *geekgirl* is the launch-pad for a diversity of views which are, whether closely or loosely, associated with her own. By presenting all manner of information and opinion, *geekgirl* exemplifies the true nature of the fanzine form.

Cross describes *geekgirl* as "feminism in a fun package". However, she says she likes the association with B(if)tek "because they make damn good music. Traditionally, girls are oppressed in the music industry, so you feel the need to rally and work together. But the focus isn't that B(if)tek are girls — it's just that they make wicked techno."