

Bittles' Magazine | Interview

You know that sense of nervous anticipation you get as you put a new album on and you don't know what to expect? That shiver of suspense you experience as you put the CD in the stereo, place the record on the turntable, or press play on the file is a pretty beautiful thing indeed. Yet nine times out of ten you end up disappointed by what you hear. Be it landfill indie, or generic tech-house nonsense with the personality of a paving slab, the discovery of new music can be a fraught and terrifying adventure that makes even the most ardent of music lovers ponder the point of it all. By **JOHN BITTLES**



Photo: Stassymedia

Yet, it's those times when we put on a new record and discover something fresh and exciting that makes all the rubbish music that has previously let us down worthwhile. Noschool, the debut album by Ekkohaus is one of those records that made me sit up spellbound on first listen wondering why I hadn't played this wonderful music before. I admit that I had formerly been unaware of the work of Kostas Tassopoulos. But upon hearing Noschool, which is out now on Moon Harbour, for the first time I decided to rectify this by playing the album again, and again, and again.

Opening track A Drive is a gorgeous little groove with a delicious sax supplied by Robert Würz that recalls the glory days of F.Comm when the likes of St Germain, Shazz, and Nova Nova ruled the house music world. It signals Kostas' intent straight from the off, which is to present the listener with some luscious deep house that has that late night jazz vibe which can make you forget for an hour and a bit all the shit that is going on in your life.

Reparations, Rendezvous, and D58 keep the jazz influences coming while giving us house music with a real sense of musicianship and quality. Make no mistake this is sophisticated electronic music made for dancing just as much as for home appreciation. All thirteen tracks are stunning though and warrant the type of love and respect of which most albums can only dream.

Noschool has really hit a nerve and has resulted in me driving my loved one slightly bonkers by playing it repeatedly over the last month while continuously stressing how I didn't believe that people made house music this good anymore. That's why I determined to track down Mr Tassopoulos and stalk, torture or bribe him in order to get an interview. I am pleased to announce that he graciously accepted, (it was the pliers. It's always the pliers!).

Those who wish to listen to the album while perusing the article should head over to <http://www.moonharbour.com/live/index.php> where there are also some rather handy links so you can purchase it at your leisure.

Hi there and thanks for taking the time to answer these questions.

Thank you for the invitation.

First up, can you tell us a little bit about your album Noschool?

Well, I guess we are going to be getting deeper into it later so let me just say that „Noschool“ is my first full length Album feature. It is released on the 17th of May digitally (vinyl on the 8th of May) on Moon Harbour Recordings from the beautiful city of Leipzig. „Noschool“ was conceived, recorded, produced, mixed, and mastered in a time span of almost 3 years so it is not about the 'new trendy sound' or the 'edgy dance floor' feel. It is an album that follows the House tradition in terms of production, sound selection and carving, as well as sampling and arrangement. No hidden tricks or futuristic production techniques here, it is just house music. (laughs)

Opening track A Drive is only one minute in before I'm swooning in delight. It's deep, it's jazzy, it's excellent! Was this always going to be the album's first track?

You totally got a point there. A Drive felt like an opening track straight away. The whole album's initial spine, at the very first stage, was consisted with only 5 tracks, and this was one of them. In later process when deciding about the track order in the album, there was never another rival for the opening track. I didn't want to follow the »intro /outro« pattern in the album, so this song was perfectly balanced, very musical yet with a strong sense of rhythm, thus getting you into the house vibe and preparing you for some 4/4 action.

You've released quite a few singles and EPs before now. What made you decide to take the perilous step towards releasing a long-player?

My discography started with slow steps in 2005. It has been a few years now that I have been releasing 12 inch singles with a handful of labels that have trusted me along the way. I think it was only natural that I was getting to this point where a few ideas started to merge together and there was a necessity for a full length project. A few tracks were produced in 2010, and from there the idea of the album grew to an actual project. It was not like: »Now I will make an album«. It was more subconscious. Some samples that I am dealing with in Noschool are parts of my live sets for years. Anyhow, I believe that my music has not always been directly aimed for the dance floors so you could say that I mostly produce album material anyway. (laughs)

If Noschool isn't old school or new school what it is then?

Well, I just love to use 'negative' terms to provoke positive reactions. In the same way that Marketing 'sharks' have been using 'positive' words while expressing prohibition. Take for example the 'alcohol free' statement,

using the word „free“, a positive term, to clearly transmit a prohibition, NO ALCOHOL HERE, and so on. So, „NoSchool“ may come across as a negative message in the beginning, but it is not. It is a positive one. It is about deciding NOT to belong anywhere. Destroy your tag, your I.D., skip school.

It is a kind of playful take on the “Old / New School“ debate that goes like: Analogue vs. digital, Vinyl vs. mp3, good vs. bad, and so on, just as any ‘two-dimensional’ situation. I think I had enough with this debate and the demonization that comes with it. So, „Noschool“ stands for all that space between any two fundamentally opposite pupils.

If you had to choose one track to sum up the album which would you choose and why?

This would have to be „Reparations“ I guess. For its composition and smoothness, its easy going complexity and the little solo for which I am very proud of. Such sparks don’t come often or when they do, no one is recording. (laughs) I also like the subtle deep house vibe with the particular sample, that withholds a deeper meaning, just by a few words, yet, essential. They don’t teach you this sort of thing at school either. (laughs)

To my jaded ears the album is a beautifully warm and lush listen. Are there any production secrets or techniques that a budding producer might borrow or steal in order to replicate these sounds?

Oh my, what to say here. I have my way of doing things and it is not so special or unique, it is just my way. I started as self-taught and later gained academic knowledge in Music but I consider that I am still in the learning process. I guess that’s the thing with Multimedia Technologies and Electronic Music these days. There is so much development that one can keep on having new experiences again and again. As for my secrets, there aren’t many. Sample selection is vital for me, a sample you understand and embrace and fall in love with. Some Korg, Nord, Mfb, Jomox, Roland hardware keep me good company. I use my Mac as a sampler and arranger. Usually Logik rewired to Live, routed through an RME, to a Mackie desk and Monitors. The help of two friends in the mixing process was very important for the overall shaping of this sound. George Lemos from Greece, and Santos Resiak (Dante Costantini) from Argentina were my second pair of ears and hands in the mix down of most of the material. Without them, the album might have taken another 3 years to complete. (laughs)

Buzzin Fly is another highlight of the album for me. Is it an ode to the record label?

Buzzin Fly is a track of a club quality yet in a very soulful way. Ben Watt’s Buzzin Fly is a very soulful label with a club quality too. But this is the only connection I can make. It was literally a buzzing fly that annoyed my friend Rufus (Bosconi Soundsystem) and myself when we were laying the track down. We thought that this could make a direct reference to the label, and we didn’t mind it at all ...

I guess there is a lot to be said about tracks and track names, there should be a book written about this. (laughs)

What type of listener do you think would best enjoy Noschool?

Let me begin with saying that the target audience here is very wide. I would be very happy if a middle aged listener could enjoy this album as well as a young raver would ...

An album always gives to the producer the opportunity to get deeper or become more artistic (abstract, downtempo, experimental etc.). I guess I am using this sort of artistic »freedom« in order to present a fuller

composition, but instead of getting more specific and specialized, I choose to be more open, approachable and connecting, with this album. Because I think this is what people need more nowadays, to connect, come together, it's house music. The album is not very energetic so maybe a twenty-something audience would be more applicable but I am always happy to be proved wrong ...

Tracks like D 58 could go far in terms of varied audience in my opinion.

Some of the tracks on the album remind me of the mighty St. Germain. Do you think that is a fair comparison?

Oh, you do make me blush now. I think that I could not be qualified for this comparison. Due to respect and matters of originality and timing. Mr. Navarre has clearly been an influence for me, a master in this sound of blending jazz, house and soul. French class at its best... I am also excited with powerful deep voices and jazzy chords and the right pneumatic instruments. I have studied Vibraphone and Marimba when I was younger and there maybe lies a strong connection with this aesthetic and sound. However, the Ekkohaus project tends to be a bit more »tecky« or »loopy« at times, more computer based too. It is just another Noschool situation.

The album features a number of collaborations. How did they come about?

Yes, a few collaborations came about. Firstly with Robert Würz, with whom I have collaborated for a few years, playing his sax in a wonderful way indeed. Jon J-Lab played the bass and he is also a friend from even older times, when living in London. Lady Blacktronika is someone who I met lately and she has contributed some of the vocals in the album. She was actually visiting from the U.S. to play a show at Panoramabar in Berlin and we arranged a recording session through a common friend. It was an amazing session but only a snippet of her truly brilliant voice made it to the album.

Last but not least, Rufus is also a dear friend and it was a pure pleasure to spend time for the first time in the studio with him, and come up with Buzzin Fly. So, there is not really a name dropping of some sort, it is all based in relaxed arrangements between friendly people who enjoy making music. At this point I think I should mention the brilliant artworks from Zebiah, and design layout by Nikolaos Simeonidis. Without their artistic influence the visual outcome wouldn't be the same.

Will you be touring the album at all?

There's a few things planned I believe. I am happy that the album is coming out in the early summer time. I will have the chance to spread the word at Sonar Festival in Barcelona for example. There are some gigs arranged through the Moon Harbour agency and maybe also something is cooking for the other side of the Atlantic ... It is all very exciting as it is my first time to be doing this. I hope that the album and its impact can have a slow and steady roll in the market but this is hard with today's standards.

What's it like working with the guys at Moon Harbour?

I consider myself lucky to be working with such an efficient and responsible team. With their knowledge and experience they have helped in every part of the process for making this album. They have a few years in the record business and have been putting out some brilliant music for years so working with them has been a constant learning process. There are always different viewpoints and takes and especially in a project as complicated as an album is, you can easily end up with a lot of clashing ideas on the table. The balance is kept by a certain combination between »pathos«, »respect« and »business planning« ...

Finally, how do you think the album sits within today's music scene or scenes?

Today's music scene is vivid and open on one side, but very fast consuming and maybe also affected from the financial crisis on the other. So, as I don't do festival music, I don't aim for a global explosion of superstar proportions. (laughs) There are some jewels in the album and people are going to find them and appreciate them, different people, different moments, same music. An album is not something static or temporary, it will grow with time, depending of what people will make of it. And then there are the DJs who will bring different aspects into people's attention. I have also done some video projects in order to create some promo videos to accompany this album to its virtual Journey. A different way of artistic input and promotion than usual, maybe proved helpful in reaching out to people and using imagery to add to the original feeling of the music.

Photos: Stassymedia

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