

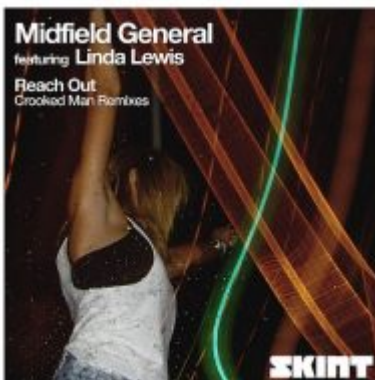
Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world

UK artist **Damian Harris** has had the type of career most could only dream of. Under the alias **Midfield General** he has released two superb albums (*Generalisation* and *General Disarray*) and had a string of hit singles (*Devil In Sports Casual*, *General Of The Midfield*, *Reach Out*, etc.) By **JOHN BITTLES**

His record label, *Skint Records*, which he set up in 1995, has been responsible for bringing the likes of **Fatboy Slim**, **Bentley Rhythm Ace**, **FC Kahuna** and **Lo Fidelity Allstars** to our ears. He has DJed around the world, while his contribution to the *On The Floor At The Boutiques* mix series is a wondrous snapshot of its time, yet still sounds fab today. Phew!

This summer **Midfield General's** evergreen classic *Reach Out* makes a very welcome return to our lives. Originally released back in 2000, the song features the vocals of soul legend **Linda Lewis**, and is a euphoric slice of vocal house. Gloriously uplifting, it is accompanied by a video which is one of the most heart-warming I have ever seen.

Now, in 2018 the song is lovingly revisited on a bumper package containing three eclectic and groove-laden remixes by *DFA* artist **Crooked Man**. As proven by his self-titled album from 2016, **Crooked Man**, aka **Richard Barratt** is a producer who knows his way around a funky-assed beat or two. His first remix is a swoon-inducing ten minute long piece of expansive house which simply commands your body to move. Joyful synths, luscious beats, and a vocal sample urging us to *Reach Out* are the simple ingredients used to create a dance floor number full of heart and soul. For his second version, the coolness factor is dialled up to ten, with some dirt-encrusted bass making it the perfect soundtrack to dancing in your shades. The final remix is a faultless amalgamation of the previous two, **Deep Dish** style beats and a slow building groove merging with spacey synths and soulful samples to craft a song which is impossible not to love.



With even my notoriously house music hating cat perking up when **Midfield General Feat. Linda Lewis' Reach Out (Crooked Man Remixes)** came on the decks, I couldn't resist the urge to find out more. In the resulting interview **Damian Harris** discusses recording the original song, working with **Linda Lewis**, those **Crooked Man** remixes, his label *Skint Records*, *Generalisation*, and lots more.

So, dig out those dancing shoes, and let us begin...

[For anyone out there who has had their head in a bucket these last few years, can you tell us a bit about who](#)

you are and what you do?

Hello my name is **Damian Harris**, I'm best known for starting *Skint Records* in Brighton way back in 1995. Our first release was by **Fatboy Slim** and we went on to release music by some of dance music's finest - **X-Press 2, Dave Clarke, Lo-Fidelity Allstars, Bentley Rhythm Ace, International Pony, Req One, Alter Ego, Tiga, Super Collider** and **Midfield General**, which was my nom de plume for DJing and production.

The excellent *Reach Out (Crooked Man Remixes)* came out on the 29th of June. Why do we all need this record in our lives?

Reach Out originally came out in 2000, it featured a sample from the awesome **Linda Lewis**, one of the UK's finest soul and folk artists. In 2001 she re-recorded the vocals for me. I've had those vocals in a drawer waiting for the right remixer to come along... and that person was **Crooked Man**.

The record features three versions of the classic track *Reach Out* remixed by DFA artist **Crooked Man**. How did they come about?

Crooked Man released my favourite album of 2016. I adored it, it sounded so fresh but dirty at the same time. I did some digging to try and find out who this mysterious **Crooked Man** was... and it turned out it was **Parrot** - we had both worked on a cartoon called *Zebra Face* a few years previously. I couldn't believe it!

What made you decide that **Crooked Man** was the right person to remix the song? And how did it feel to have your track reinterpreted in this way?

I loved what **Crooked Man** did with vocals - his tracks *Happiness* and *This Machine (Kills Me)* were the perfect mix of soulful vocals and hypnotic house grooves that build over a long time - just beautiful. So when I found out it was him I knew it was a sign and I had to ask if he would remix *Reach Out*. One month later three remixes arrived in my inbox. All different, all superb - I was so happy.

The new remixes feature vocals which were re-recorded by **Linda Lewis** in 2000, but which were never used until now. How do they differ from the original vocals?

The original **Linda Lewis** song *Reach for the Truth* was a slow soulful folk track and my version was a similar tempo. We had become friends when we first approached her to clear the sample - she played a set at my launch party - I was so honoured! We did a session in a studio to record some other vocal tracks and she very kindly re-sang the song at a house music tempo for me.

Listening back now, the original version hasn't aged at all. Can you talk us through the creative process behind the song?

When I first became a student I lived upstairs from a guy called Ed who had a great collection of soul and funk albums including *Lark* by **Linda Lewis**. We became great friends and the LP was the soundtrack for my first year at college. Three years later, when I finally got my hands on a sampler, *Reach for the Truth* was one of the first songs I sampled. It took 2 years before I made something worthy of the original song... but it was worth it.

What made you decide not to include the original in the release? *Generalisation*, the album that *Reach Out* is taken from, is almost 20 years old now. Is there a reissue in the pipeline?

The plan is to reissue *Reach Out* and *Generalisation* on its 20th anniversary which is 2020 - so that's why we held back on putting the original in the release.

I've been playing *Generalisation* a lot recently (partly in preparation for this interview and partly because it's great). What do you think has helped it stand the test of time?

Thank you - really glad you like it! It's a hard question for me to answer, but I think I've always tried to stay true to the music that inspires me, whether it's soul, hip-hop, techno or house. For me they are all timeless if they are done right - so maybe I did something right!

[Reach Out is out on Skint Records, a label you set up back in 1995. Is there a specific idea or ethos behind the music that the label releases?](#)

When I first started *Skint* I had two criteria for any release. It either had to be amazing or original - unlike any other record being released. Even in 1995 there were too many records being released so each one had to justify its existence. On the whole I think we managed to do that!

[The label is best known for giving us Big Beat, Bentley Rhythm Ace and Fatboy Slim among others. What has been the best thing about running a record label all this time?](#)

Music has always been a huge part of my life, running a record label has allowed me to work with my greatest passion. The label enjoyed some amazing success that has taken me around the world, got me into some incredible parties all while working with some of my best friends... I'm very lucky.

[And, the worst?](#)

As much as it's a creative industry it's also a business, and mixing the two can be hard. It can be very cut-throat - it's amazing when it goes well but not all the time. I've had to drop some of my best friends from the label and that's very difficult.

[What five Skint records should everyone hear at least once?](#)

Santa Cruz - **Fatboy Slim**:

Our first release and still one of my favourites. Dirty, funky but achingly beautiful too.

Vision Incision - **Lo Fidelity Allstars**:

The first track I heard by the band. A masterpiece.

Lesbia - **Lucky Jim**:

Not what people expect from *Skint* but a sublime song that still gets me today.

Razzmatazz - **Req One**:

Filthy hip hop from Brighton's finest graffiti artist. Love the video for this too.

Lazy - **X-Press 2 feat David Byrne**:

We were so excited to work with **David Byrne** and when it turned out to be this brilliant left field pop song I was ridiculously happy.

[Apart from Reach Out, what else can we expect from Skint in 2018?](#)

There is a new EP from **PBR Streetgang** dropping at the end of July. We will be releasing **Maya Jane Coles'** own *Warehouse* adaptation of album cut '*Keep Me Warm*' later this summer via the *Skint* collab with her *I/AM/ME* imprint. Then new music from **Better Lost than Stupid (Davide Squillace, Matthias Tanzmann, Martin Buttrich)** in August. Plus there are new signings on the horizon and a fresh new look for the label is imminent so keep your eyes peeled.

[Do you have any final words for our readers?](#)

Hope you enjoy the music and thanks for listening!

Reach Out (Crooked Man Remixes) by **Midfield General Feat. Linda Lewis** is available in all good record and download stores. Cheer up your cat by treating yourself to a copy now.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)