

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

Slam are a band who need no introduction. With a name inspired by a legendary **Phuture** track the DJ/production duo of **Stuart McMillan** and **Orde Meikle** have, over the years, been responsible for some of the most vital techno and house to find its way to these ears. Their DJ sets in clubs such as Glasgow institutions *Sub Club* and *The Arches* have become the stuff of legend, while tracks like *Positive Education*, *Stepback*, *Azure* and *Vapour* are the highlight of any night spent on the dance floor. BY **JOHN BITTLES**



They are also one of the few electronic bands to master the long-player format. Their debut album *Headstates* for instance, came out back in 1996 and is a sublime piece of electronic funk which has ably withstood any test that time could throw its way.

I first came across the duo back in 1991 with their debut 12" *Eterna*. The song's emotive keys, rising beats and kick ass percussion made it an instant hit for anyone tired of the the high BPM monotony of rave and hardcore. Released as a split 12" together with *I.B.O.* by **Rejuvenation**, the record launched the newly formed *Soma Quality Recordings* label in some style. Even from the beginning **Slam's** music incorporated elements of house, electro, ambient, dub, techno and more. Never ones to sit still, the duo have consistently pushed the boundaries of what great electronic music can do.

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Their new album, *Athenæum 101* is a compelling case in point. Out now on their own *Soma Records* imprint, the band's newest long-player is a record full of subdued mood pieces, rich sonic textures and moments of aural wonder. As anyone who has heard their contributions to the *Soma Coma* compilations or their respected *Monopod* mix series will be aware, **Slam** have no need to bow to the demands of the dance floor. For any doubters out there one listen to the lush electronica of *Athenæum 101* will be all the proof you need. Over its sixty minute run time the album moves from spectral ambiance to hazy house, bass-drenched dub, and slow-burn techno to give us a body of work which really does demand your attention from beginning to end. With none of the individual tracks given names, and many overlapping and merging together to form one long, luxurious whole, *Athenæum 101* is the ultimate headphone listen, revealing new details and textures after each and every play.

With the album receiving much love from both myself and my usually overly fussy cat, I decided to find out

more about the creation of this dark, mesmeric LP. In the following interview **Slam** discuss *Athenæum 101*, the perils of recording at 101BPM, their label *Soma Records*, how DJing inspires them, and lots more.

So, get yourself good and comfy, and let us begin...

For anyone who has been living in a hole these last few years, can you tell us a bit about who you are and what you do?

We are techno DJs and producers, mainly recording for our label *Soma Records*. We run the weekly podcast *Slam Radio*, promote our own parties and generally play around the globe at weekends.

Your new album *Athenæum 101* came out on the 30th of November. Why do we all need it in our lives?

Well, you wouldn't die without it! But if you like to hear an interesting unusual take on the way an electronic album is crafted and sounds then this album is for you.

Is there a concept or unifying theme behind the record?

In a way, yes. First and foremost we wanted to create the album that we wanted to listen to, without the constraints of being tied to thinking about what would be necessary for the dance floor. The concept for the album is loosely based around the 101BPM tempo, and trying to create a journey with different moods and atmospheres around it. We've taken a different path away from writing it as individual tracks and approached it almost like a continuous movie score with different scenes.

For me the album almost sounds as if it was all recorded in one take. Can you talk us through the creative process for *Athenæum 101*?

Yes, it was important for us to try to break the mould of writing individual tracks and then deciding on which order they should go at a later date. The way we approached this particular album was that we started with one piece of music which would then, in turn, inspire what followed thereafter. A bit like a DJ choosing the next track in a set. Although there are no tracks as such in the traditional sense on the album, there is subtle variance which we hope leads to different moods throughout. Doing it this way led to many problems and we had to have lots of different projects with say about 20 minutes a piece and we had to find a way of making sure that all that information within each project didn't overload the program. And that the beginning and end of each project was audibly coherent with the beginning and last for us to piece them together. This led to many frustrating saving and crashing issues which is probably why people avoid doing it this way.

The album reminds me a little of your *Monopod* series of mixes with its elements of ambience, slow techno, electronica and dub. What made you decide to slow the pace for this LP?

Yeah totally! Well spotted. The experimental side of techno is definitely a less functional continual love of ours. But there were no real influences for this other than what the machines were throwing out at the time of recording, but keeping it chilled and dubbed out was definitely a prerequisite. I like the idea of taking elements of say Jamaican dub and working them in with techno. Dub was indulgent studio music and has been a big influence in the past for sure. But it's always nice to try and fuse different elements from different genres together.

The album is released on your own *Soma Records* imprint which has put out records by the likes of **Daft Punk, Silicone Soul, The Black Dog, Deepchord and more. What made you set up your own record label back in 1991?**

When we were kids there was a culture of post-punk independent labels prevalent. *Factory, Fast Product, Rough Trade, Postcard*. When it came to making our own music it felt like starting an independent label was a

natural choice.

If you had to sum up the ethos of the label with one release which would it be and why?

I don't think its possible to do with one release. Maybe this album as we're always striving to try and bring something new to the table.

What have been the key releases for the label so far?

Ah, too many to mention, *Eterna/I.B.O.*, *Positive Education*, *Dark Manoeuvres*, *Diabla*, *Bang the Box Remixes*. Yeah too many to mention.

The label has a fantastic reputation for discovering new talent. What can we expect from Soma in 2019?

Some new artist EPs from **Magna Pia** and **ROHTS**. New **SLV**, a new **Slam** EP called *Transport*. A new **Setaoc Mass** EP, and also an EP from **Cleric**.

I still remember hearing Eterna for the first time back in the early 90s. It contained so many ideas that at first I thought the DJ was playing 3 different records. What was it that made you decide to create and release your own music all those years ago?

It just felt like the natural progression from DJing to want to try and make the music you were playing and hearing at the time.

And what is it that keeps you inspired to create music today?

Our DJ sets keep us inspired. We usually make at least one or two new ideas a week to test out in our sets over the weekend. We define them later once we've played and tested them.



Your sets at clubs such as The Arches and Sub Club have become legendary. What is the secret to winning over a dance floor?

Reading the crowd and not being afraid to read the mood of the room. We play back to back on 6 decks so we have no idea what the other one is going to do or play next. This keeps us on our toes and allows us to approach every situation differently.

What five tracks are working for you in the club right now?

Wrong Assessment - *Morfosi*

Slam - *Transport*

SNTS - *Violence and Force*

Raffaele Attanasio - *Gundam*

Nitzer Ebb - *Join In the Chant (Slam Bootleg Re Edit)*

Do you have any final words for our readers?

Thanks for taking the time to read the article. Our album is out on the 30th of November, haha.

Athenæum 101 is available now from the [Soma](#) website, and all good record and download stores. Give your ears an early Christmas present by treating yourself to a copy today.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)