

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

There are some songs which can make an entire generation of music lovers get misty-eyed. From the gorgeous synth swells and **Sara Nelson's** stunning vocals that help make **Massive Attack's** peerless *Unfinished Symphony* such a delight, to the soaring strings of *Bittersweet Symphony* by **The Verve**, these are songs which grip the listener by the lapels and drag them back to a better time in their life. Most bands/artists spend their entire careers attempting to create a track with the power to epitomise a specific time or place. Most of them fail! By **JOHN BITTLES**

One band who most definitely succeeded in this endeavour is UK act the **Stereo MC's**. Originally released on *Gee St.* back in 1992, the soul-infused hip hop anthem *Connected* touched a nerve in all that heard it and was the perfect blend of rap, acid house and funk. In the years that followed **Rob Birch** and co have brought us numerous great releases, including *Elevate My Mind* (actually came out before *Connected*), *Step It Up*, *Ground Level*, *Deep Down And Dirty* and *Paradise*. Their albums, including *Supernatural*, *Connected*, *Deep Down And Dirty*, *Double Bubble* and their excellent entry into the *DJ Kicks* series saw the band master the long-player format, being responsible for a series of LPs which were as funky as they were fun.



Having released music on labels such as *4th & Broadway*, *Island Records*, *Graffiti Recordings* and *!K7*, the band together with German act **Terranova** set up the *connected* label in 2015 with the aim of unleashing a wave of fresh beats upon the world. In the four short years that followed the imprint has given us killer records by **Re.You**, **Kalyma**, **Flashmob**, **David Mayer** and more. With a mission to educate as well as entertain, *connected* has gone from strength to strength to become a must buy for those in the know.

This month sees the label bring us the sunshine-infused eclecticism of the first edition of their *connectedbeats* series of LPs. With the album containing thirteen tracks showcasing the various shades of house music: soulful, deep, Balearic and more, we can only thank all those concerned for helping these aural gems see the light of day.

The album opens with the gorgeous melody-led groover *Negra Macha* by **K.E.E.N.E.**. Nicely atmospheric, the song successfully merges warm synths with crisp beats and a bittersweet air. From here we have the deliciously dreamy trance of *Molo* by **Yöurr**, the dark bassline led jam *Couldn't Live Without You* by **Oliver Osborne**, the slow-build melancholia of **Stereo MC's** own *Tender Unto You*, **West & Hill's** slice of deep

dancefloor romanticism *Tata*, and lots more.

With the album out on the 9th of August, the people behind the label took the time to sate my curiosity by answering some questions I sent their way. In the following interview we discuss their new compilation *connectedbeats Edition 1*, the new **Stereo MC's** track *Tender Unto You*, the label *connected*, the imprint's key release so far, and lots more.

So, head over to the label's [Bandcamp Page](#) to have a listen, and let us begin...

For those who have never had the pleasure of hearing your music before, can you tell us a bit about who you are and what you do?

We're the **Stereo MC's**, been making electronic based music since the mid-80s. We tour internationally as a live band and DJ. We've been involved with running labels since the beginning and we've released ourselves on other labels too (*Island Records, P.I.A.S, !K7* and *Graffiti*). We've also had collaborations released on *Keinemusik, Freerange, Kompakt, Skint* and some others. We have a history of remixing which we've got back into recently.

How would you introduce your label *connected* to someone discovering it for the first time?

Connected is a launching pad for underground electronic club music. Our style is based on originality and concept quality rather than commerciality. Our releases lean more towards spirit and energy, technology comes next. The label's musical orientation is somewhere between (and including) Afro House and Techno. We attempt to release music that uplifts, moves bodies and emotions and get a little moody, and steer clear of anything generic.

The 1st edition of your *connectedbeats* series is out on the 9th August. What is the idea behind the release?

We have a lot of quality music sent to us from artists all over the world, but there simply are not enough months in the year to give everyone their own release, so that is why we made this compilation - to give these tracks some airtime and also build our community further. The response has been really good, and I've had some genuine vibes come back from the promo. I think it's a really nice album.

The six tracks on the first sampler are nicely eclectic. How difficult was it to choose which songs to include?

The sampler was really to show the depth and spread of the LP, so it wasn't about picking favourites so much as identifying flavours - like a recipe - bolognese is basically minced beef, tomatoes and garlic but when you go deeper you find there's thyme, onions, red wine etc. We chose the tracks that would hopefully draw the listener into checking out the whole LP.

If you had to pick one track to sum up the record which would it be and why?

I can't do that :) What I can say is I like the spirit of the way certain artists came to us, for instance, **Stefano Ritteri** (who has his own imprint called *Viaggio Recordings*) introduced us to **Oliver Osborne** who then introduced us to his music from the other side of the world. It's a good feeling when people are kind and helpful and want to see others benefit with no gain for themselves. I appreciate that.

The record opens strongly with the lush melodic house of *Negra Macha* by Panamanian duo **K.E.E.N.E. What can you tell us about this song?**

When I first heard it, I was struck by its musical strength and vitality and thought it had to be a contender for

the LP. We've had a good relationship with Lloyd and Kevin since they first released with us and the **David Mayer** remix of *Lust* became a classic for our label.

Another personal fave is the deep techno groove of **Oliver Osborne's** *Couldn't Live Without You*. Oliver, like many of the artists featured is a new name to me. How important is the development of new talent to you?

It's one of the most exciting things about running a label, seeing artists grow and develop and move forward. We try to give as much freedom as possible as long as the basic label values are satisfied. It's like a big underground heating system in the shape of a tree where word of mouth, recommendations or just passing by could send you down a different stem, you germinate, pop up with leaves and grow flowers.

There are many demos to check, so many I go cross-eyed, and it's very hard to get back to everyone and we are often taking some time to reply, but there's much to do and we love making music too, which means shutting out the outside world sometimes.

Your own *Tender Unto You* is a beautiful slice of mid-tempo house. Can you talk us through the creative process behind this piece?

I have a very old upright piano my Mum gave to me, which my Gran gave her. My Gran used to play piano in the silent movie theatres in the 1920s and 30s. I recorded these chords on it some time ago and sequenced it with the sound of an African thumb piano I bought in Brixton market. We decided to take it to another level and put the same sequences through a synth going through a vocoder and kind of modulating it (is probably the technical term I think). I had some nice drum sounds I'd been using on another track and put a very simple beat to it which only comes towards the end. We liked the feeling of the music so bare and making a track which didn't obey the usual arrangement rules.

Is there any other new music from the **Stereo MC's** on the horizon?

Yes, we have some collaborations coming through and some rough sketches for new destinations.

What can fans expect?

A mixture of tradition experimentation and DIY, hopefully a beautiful collision full of frailties and strengths.

You started the connected imprint back in 2015. What made you decide to start up your own record label?

Like I said earlier, we've been involved in labels since we started. Our first release *Move* was on a label called *Gee St.* (home also to the **Jungle Brothers**, **P.M. Dawn**, **Queen Latifah**, **Ritchie Rich**) which we started with **Jon Baker** and **DJ Ritchie Rich** in 1987. In the 90s we had a label called *Natural Response* (**Spectre/Blackenized**) and a publishing label called *Spirit Songs* (**Finley Quaye/Jurassic 5**). More recently *Graffiti*.



The reason we started *connected* was because we wanted to go back to our spiritual roots which were in underground club music. We wanted to clear the decks, start fresh with a label with no expectations, restrictions or overseers telling us what we're allowed to do. We wanted total freedom to release anything, from the postman down the road to cutting edge producers and artists already establishing themselves and do it in the time frame we made ourselves.

I think working with **Terranova** in this early period was instrumental to the birth of the label.

[What have been the key releases for the label so far?](#)

Without minimizing the importance of each release

Re.You - *Nap Later*.

Florian Busse - *Wolves*.

Tigerskin & K.E.E.N.E. feat Eli - *Lust (David Mayer Remix)*.

Aaron - *L.D.O.E feat Valentine (Floyd Lavine's African Techno mix)*.

David Mayer feat Sooma - *Drained*.

Re.You - *Without You*.

David Mayer and Floyd Lavine - *Sondela*.

Nandu - *Another Jam*.

DJ Angelo - *Black Sheep*.

Nandu - *One Man's High Is Another Man's Anxiety (LP)*.

Sobek and Palm Food - *Glorious Miles*.

Skatman - *Moments LP*.

[What else can we expect from connected in 2019?](#)

Consistency, we have releases lined up, some newcomers, all bubbling.



Do you have any final words for our readers?

Thanks, you make it possible.

With the album available now from the label's [Bandcamp page](#) all lovers of quality music should treat themselves to a copy today.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)