

20 best: 2-step

Hot Chip's Joe Goddard presents his selection of the finest UK garage and 2-step joints ever made...

Words: Joe & Hot Chip & Goddard

I can't claim to be an expert on 2-step; most of the records I have chosen were hits and some were anthems, but I love this music and am still inspired by it. I used to listen again and again to a tinny mp3 of Wiley and Dizzee over one of Slimzee's special dubplates: every time I would get new ideas for rhythms or melodies and would be energised by the ferociousness of the MCing.

Producers like Jameson (before he added the 'i'), Sticky, MJ Cole, Zinc and Wookie released strings of solid records and each producer had an immediately recognizable style. Sticky's beats were simple and chunky, with big, sub-heavy basslines that seemed to be inspired by Jamaican music. Wookie's style was more syncopated and intricate, with layers of percussion and jazzy electric piano, his bass sounds were fluid and warped, and very heavy. Jameson and Zinc's tunes were unashamedly jump-up, simple grooves that grabbed hold of a crowd immediately. MJ Cole's sound was smooth and sophisticated, mellifluous and beautifully arranged. For me, Pay As U Go Cartel contained the best MCs; people like God's Gift, Maxwell D, Flow Dan, Wiley, and later on, Dizzee - as Pay As U Go morphed into Roll Deep. The group reminded me of Wu-Tang Clan in that each MC had a clearly defined character, each was aggressive and inventive, in eight or 16 bars you would get a string of crazy images and a different flavour from each man. Pay As U Go weren't interested in aping US MCs, something which UK hip-hop is sometimes guilty of.

When I first heard 2-step I didn't really understand the swing of it, it took me a while before I even began to enjoy it. At first it seemed alien to me; its smoothness, and the cocaine and champagne idea, was anathema to a person who had previously been obsessed with Ram Records and grunge bands like Pavement. Whilst I was at school nothing seemed more mundane to me than a 4/4 kick drum. But that syncopated 2-step sound started to slowly work its way into my head, and I felt like I had to know how the drums and rhythms were put together, how they worked. Once I was hooked, 2-step seemed to me to have the best bounce, the bumpiest, funkiest sound of anything I had ever heard…

01: PAY AS U GO CARTEL

'KNOW WE'

(WHITE, 2001)

This is PAUG's biggest record, a ruffneck dancehall-inspired anthem. The production is raw, as is the vocal sound and style. The whole record feels like it's about to burst out of the confines of the plastic it is pressed on.

Listen

02: MAXWELL D

'SERIOUS', JAMESON REMIX

(RELENTLESS, 2001)

This is one of Jameson's most aggressive productions - the bassline has a ragga feel to it, and the fairground feel of the breakdown is unexpected and entertaining. Maxwell D sounds totally great on this record as well, never really pausing for breath, always totally on time and inventive. Jameson seemed to knock out tunes like this with total ease, and every time they sounded unstoppable.

Listen

03: STICKY

‘TRIPLETS’

(HOT POINT, 2000)

When >>Forward first started at the Velvet Rooms on Charing Cross Road, I saw Youngsta play this record and it was immediately clear it was a future classic, purely because of its simplicity and its bounce. The vocal version, which arrived later, is good but kind of unnecessary - as soon as the bassline begins there is no need for anything else. This has been known to make break necks through excessive nodding.

Listen

04: WOOKIE

'SCRAPPY';

(MANCHU, 1999)

Like I said, there are a lot of anthems on this list, I'm usually drawn to populist stuff from all different genres. This came at the start of Wookie's reign, and was followed by 'Battle', 'Storm', his Soul 2 Soul version, 'Far East' and many others - all classics. The cut-up drums and Fender Rhodes on 'Scrappy' are quite brilliant. Totally unusual in its construction, with lots of jazzy snare rolls and bass drum programming, this reminds me of 'Bug In The Bassbin'.

Listen

05: TODD EDWARDS

‘SHUT THE DOOR’

(LOCKED ON, 2000)

You could pick maybe 15 amazing Todd Edwards productions, all of which are built around an insanely simple kick and hi-hat pattern, and all of which sound like the greatest fairground ride you have ever been on. When you combine his brilliant sampling of old soul vocals and his beautifully melodic vocoder melodies with the fact that most of the songs are about his love of God you get a very intriguing character indeed. You’ll be dancing madly to this infectious record and then realize that the lyric is: “For you he died on a cross.” If more evangelical Christians were like Todd the God, I might go to church more often.

Listen

06: HORSPower PRODUCTIONS

‘STICK AND MOVE’, REMIX

(BIG DADA, 2002)

The original is an excellent UK hip-hop tune, but Horsepower add an incessant and pretty weird bass noise and a cutting off-beat and let the MCs shine: “If a man dem a bling, stick and move, stick stick stick stick and move.” The lyrics highlight the tension in garage between the sweet and smooth sound of the early scene and the roughness of the scene that it developed into, namely grime.

More info

07: ROLL DEEP

'ROLL DEEP REGULAR'

(ROLL DEEP, 2003)

This was the first record I bought that had Dizze on it I think, and he kind of steals the show. Tim Goldsworthy once compared his voice to that of Norman Wisdom, and to me it is easily one of the best, most original voices in modern music. There is so much energy, aggression, dexterity, feeling, rhythm and power in it. When he clashed Asher D and rapped acapella with that kind of juggernaut style, slowly speeding up, constantly building up the pressure, you didn't really feel that a beat was necessary underneath.

Listen

08: MR OIZO

'LAST NIGHT A DJ KILLED MY DOG'

(F COMM, 2000)

This wouldn't have been played by many garage DJs, but in my eyes it's a classic 2-step record. I don't know if Mr Oizo would agree, but I hope so. The fragments of guitar, overdriven keys, glitch-y drums and percussion all work in such a bumpy, way, like a weird electronic James Brown record, and it still sounds fresh.

Listen

09: JAMESON

'URBAN HERO'

(LIFESTYLE, 2001)

This record is everything that a dance anthem should be – it’s immediately recognisable, infectious and commanding. Though it’s really the incessant string part that makes it. Jameson's records from this period sounded perfect in the club, they were engineered flawlessly.

Listen

10: FLOW DAN

‘BIG MIC MAN’

(WHITE, 2002)

Flow Dan is incredibly tall and used to lean back whilst MCing, his hood would cover his eyes and his arm would be outstretched. His low voice cuts through everything else in this record and sounds imposing and authoritative. The production sounds a lot like a ragga rhythm, simple and heavy sub-bass and snare rolls, all built perfectly around flow Dan's voice as he name-checks Shinobi and his beloved transit van.

More info

11: MARK 'RUFF' RYDER

'JOY'

(RELENTLESS, 2000)

In my opinion, this is the best use of Soft Cell's 'Tainted Love' bassline in a dance song. Like a classic rave/hardcore record in some ways, this has an MC section that sounds exactly like pirate radio in the summer of '99/2000. 2-step is summer music and this tune is probably best suited to driving around London in the sunshine. It is slightly cheesy, as a lot of 2-step was in a way, but you just have to get into the spirit of it and enjoy the rhythm.

Listen

12: SHOLA AMA

'IMAGINE'

(WEA, 1999)

This is one of the sweetest, catchiest helium-filled party monsters in the known universe. It is impossible to listen to it and not sing along and smile like an idiot.

Listen

13: DJ ZINC

'138 TREK'

(TRU PLAYAZ, 1999)

Maybe the most recognizable record on my list, but you can't fuck with it or fault it in any way. Every Zinc tune of this time was based on a simple formula - an insanely catchy bassline repeated for five minutes, changing the sound every 16 bars but keeping the same melody throughout: all sounded great, and caused mayhem on thousands of dancefloors. Perhaps my favourite night of clubbing ever was one of Zinc's 'Faster' nights at Fabric - he played his collaboration with MC Dynamite, '4 More', and absolutely killed it.

Listen

14: STICKY FEAT. MS DYNAMITE

'BOOO!'

(SOCIAL CIRCLES, 2001)

This was the first popular Ms Dynamite record, and an early hit for Sticky as well. A record very much influenced by ragga, both the beat and Ms Dynamite's verses.

Listen

15: JILL SCOTT

'GETTING IN THE WAY,' MJ COLE REMIX

(EPIC, 2000)

Jill Scott has a great voice, which obviously helps when remixing a record. Both of these are smooth and sophisticated garage rather than garage songs, I think the MJ Cole mix even contains a saxophone part! Mixing between these kind of champagne sipping records and the more rudeboy variety is a lot of fun.

Listen

16: GOD'S GIFT

'MIC TRIBUTE', JAMESON REMIX

(SOLID CITY, 2002)

This is such a great piece of MC'ing from God's Gift - he name-checks all of the other MCs on the garage scene of the time, and shouts out their catchphrases in their particular vocal styles. I consider it to be a historical document in a way; it takes you back to that time brilliantly and shows that there was a lot of lyrical ingenuity, a lot of individual style and character to the scene and its heroes.

17: MORE FIRE CREW

';

(GO BEAT, 2002)

Lethal B's first big hit, this record was a sign of things to come, a proto-grime tune with a punk energy and real aggression.

Listen

18: SO SOLID CREW

';21 SECONDS';

(RELENTLESS, 2001)

So Solid crew had a string of great singles, '21 Seconds' is a pretty crazy record and was a massive pop hit - moments like that (musical weirdness mixed with pop success, like 'Oops' by Tweet) are probably my favourite things about modern pop music and they don't happen often. The production on an old Hot Chip song called 'San Francisco' (from our self-released EP of the same name) was totally inspired by '21 seconds'.

Listen

19: EXEMEN

'STORM'

(MANCHU, 2001)

This is one of Wookie's craziest basslines, it catches you unawares and sounds totally fresh, still ahead of its time. I had a version of this with Wiley and God's Gift over it, from an old PAUG mix CD, the combination of Wookie's sick production and their voices was very powerful.

Listen

20: AZZIDO DA BASS

'DOOM'S NIGHT', TIMO MAAS REMIX

(CLUB TOOLS, 1999)

Norman Jay played this seven times in one day at the Notting Hill Carnival, and you heard it pretty much everywhere you went that year. It's an obvious choice but an interesting one because it wasn't produced initially for 2-step clubs, but became a massive anthem in them - which shows that the scene had a ferocious appetite for new sounds. If it worked, it got played.

Joe Goddard

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