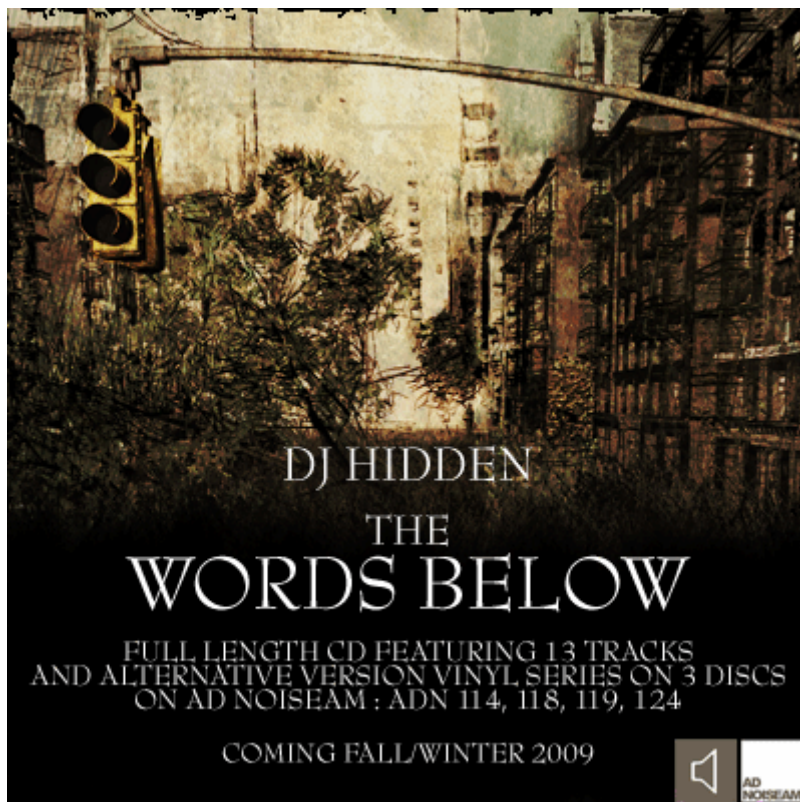




Interview DJ Hidden, Musicincontrol.nl, 07-10-2009

<http://www.musicincontrol.nl/index.php/2009/10/07/musicincontrol-interview-dj-hidden/#comments>

Diehard fans of the darker and harder styles do not need an introduction to DJ Hidden. As a part of The Outside Agency, he has been going at it with Eye-D ever since 1996 and from 2003 onwards they have been running the great Genosha Recordings label as sublabel of Cardiac. However, Noël Wessels solo career has really taken a big flight towards the better in the last couple of years. After the very well received debut album 'The Later After', there is a new CD coming this month called 'The Words Below'. Time for Musicincontrol to ask him some questions!



First off, tell us more about your album The Words Below, for instance where did you get the inspiration for the title and tracks?

While I had released a lot of 12 inches before The Later After, it was still quite a challenge to write an entire album. I was happy to see the release getting good reviews though. The tricky part when creating an album is that the tracks have to both work individually and simultaneously have to be part of a larger story. When I wrote The Words Below, I decided

to literally continue the tale I had initiated with The Later After. The first album tells of a protagonist's thoughts and doubts regarding his visions of a possible future. The second release is a submission: the main character accepts the madness and thereby enters the world of these visions. Its title "The Words Below" can be interpreted in various ways: the story of the subconscious, the story hidden in the music or quite literally: a story that was being told after entering a hole in the street's surface in a far future as seen on the artwork. In the end, it is up to the listener to decide whether he or she wants any sort of explanation; any sort of story below the surface.

When first listening to some samples of the album and judging by the things mentioned on the Ad Noiseam website, the tracks are a bit more dynamic than its predecessor. To what degree has your style changed or evolved?

In the two years it took to write The Words Below, I learned a great deal of new tricks with regards to production - so on a technical level, I do hope this release is a step ahead of its predecessor. In coherence with the story of this release, on a musical level, I have been aiming for a sound that feels "more secure", in order to bring certain feelings of both the "protagonist" and myself to the forefront. In the past, I used to aim for music that was closer to the work of others; nowadays I prefer to go my own way and create music that brings forth my vision of the various genres I work with. Some may say that my sound has always been different anyway - and they are probably right... but I do feel I have a better grasp on it.

Was it hard to live up to the expectations of the Later After? Do you even take such expectations into consideration?

My only starting point with this new album was the idea of continuing the "story" of its predecessor and making sure a lot of this would be drum & bass. Feedback, in the shape of reviews, forum posts, and simply verbal communication is definitely something I keep in mind - but over time I have discovered you can never please everyone. Ironically, the aforementioned response to songs can also be quite different from the one you get from people on a dancefloor. I have tried to create a balance which hopefully will be received well by as many as possible.

About the genre itself: drum & bass is rapidly gaining popularity. Is this more or less a logical result because the productions are growing in quality, or do you think it is due to the scene trying to (again) push itself away or revolt against the more mainstream approach of other styles which are very present these days?

I am not that involved with the popularity of a genre, to be honest. It is, so to speak, all around me so it had not really occurred to me. Production quality in general has improved a lot though: if you compare a new track to one made 10 years ago, you can clearly hear the difference. Both the percussion quality as other various elements you often hear in drum & bass songs have gone up a lot. This is directly related to the quality of the tools used to make music: nowadays a good computer, a sequencer program with a bunch of good vst plugins installed and a good set of monitor speakers can get you further than a studio crammed with hardware. The harder variants of drum & bass definitely have a tendency to rebel against the mainstream. During the last couple of years, a lot of producers have been inspired by the drum riffs you often hear in metal. Some producers, like myself, get classified as "breakcore" because of that.



Do you keep track of what your drum & bass colleagues in the genre do? Are you consciously trying a different approach than the others?

On a production level, there is always something new you can learn - and often, you do this by listening to tracks of others. What is particularly striking in, for example, the drum & bass scene is what happens when a certain producer introduces something "new" to his or her work. It usually generates a wave of productions based around the same concept. I do not believe that there are a lot of musicians who are completely oblivious to these kinds of trends.

Although some people know me solely for my harder stuff, I do not think that is the only thing at which I semi-consciously attempt to sound different from others. While my tracks on the one hand characterize themselves through hard percussion and dark sounds and atmospheres, I also try to add melody to enhance their story. It always makes me feel great when people tell me I should be writing music for films because it is my goal to write music that is as visual as possible.

If we look at your latest couple of releases (not taking into account the *Quadrilogy* EP) and see that *Eye-D* is actively producing solo as well, could we say that (both of) you are focusing more on solo projects rather than *The Outside Agency*, and if so: why?

Not really! Besides the *Quadrilogy* EP, we have released four records this year including the first on our new sublabel *Genosha One Seven Five*. The second and third releases have been scheduled and will hopefully both come out this year. We are also working hard on a new 12 inch for the "mother label" *Genosha Recordings* and we'd preferably like to release a new *Scenocide* CD this year. The "*Unconquerable Man*" remix just came out as well and we have got some guest appearances planned on *Smackdown Recordings*, *TNI* and a few to be announced labels.

We are essentially trying to keep a nice balance between writing hardcore and drum & bass

tracks. That way, we keep ourselves focused, are able to have a broader perspective and we are hopefully capable of making music that does not repeat itself unnecessarily or gets stuck using a particular template.

Genosha One Seven Five has started recently as well. You have mentioned multiple times that it will contain a mix of different styles (Drum & Core) and atmospheres. How different is this from your latest couple of releases such as Hells Basement?

Ever since the beginning of our careers, Frank (Eye-D) and myself have been involved with both drum & bass and hardcore. Back in 1996, we were already mixing the two genres during dj-sets. After the first downfall of dark hardcore, around 1999-2000, we primarily got involved with drum & bass and discovered that, besides noticing certain similarities on a technical level, there were also a lot of differences. Thanks to the first promo files, among other things, hardcore became more appealing to us again and we discovered that the various newly acquired techniques were very applicable to our interpretation of the genre. Concurrently, we noticed the drum & bass crowd becoming more open-minded which directly resulted in tracks such as The Resonators and eventually Times Like These. In the same year I wrote Times Like These, Frank, along with Fracture-4, wrote a track called Manhunt. The success of all three aforementioned tracks made us think more distinctly about a label specialized in pure cross-over material. Since we wanted to keep Genosha Recordings hardcore, we decided upon a sub label instead. At the same time, all sorts of labels asked us to do similar tracks for guest releases and after wrapping up those, we started with the sub label. Hell's Basement and Reality Collapse both were simply finished before we had solidified One Seven Five; they could've ended up on the first release just as well. Basically, the label is a logical step: especially since we have been involved with this particular cross-over for such a long time you could see us as two of a small group of founders of the genre. A label enables you to elaborately shape your vision of this genre.

Actually, we are not planning on sticking with a pure mix all the time on Genosha One Seven Five. Sometimes, the balance will tip in favor of one genre and next time, it will be the other. The only global factor will be the speed (BPM) and it will be our aim to deliver tracks with an emphasis on high quality production. It is not always as easy as it might seem to create a track that combines the best elements from both genres: when you are capable of distorting a 909 kick properly, this does not mean you can get along with breakbeats, hoovers and sub frequencies... and the other way around. Our big advantage, I believe, is that we've always done both - and while we (thankfully) still learn new stuff all the time, our production skills have gone up proportionally. The challenge now is to create records and tracks which sound new and unexpected and continue to evolve in terms of style.

One can say that the borders of musical genre's are fading away. Different elements are taken from different styles and put together and by the looks of it, it gets accepted more and more. Do you think this as a good development for the music industry?

I would never have wanted it any other way. In the early days of "house music" djs used to spin more combinations of genres in general - simply due to the lack of records available but also because it was more interesting to both the crowd and the performer. These days, people are not thinking outside of the box enough resulting in some people experiencing certain parties as "boring" due to lack of variation. I preferably create and spin music for people open to this merger.

How come your productions are focused solely on film score / IDM and drum & bass / hardcore? These styles are more or less in the same direction of Music. Don't you ever feel the need to do something completely different, and if so, what?

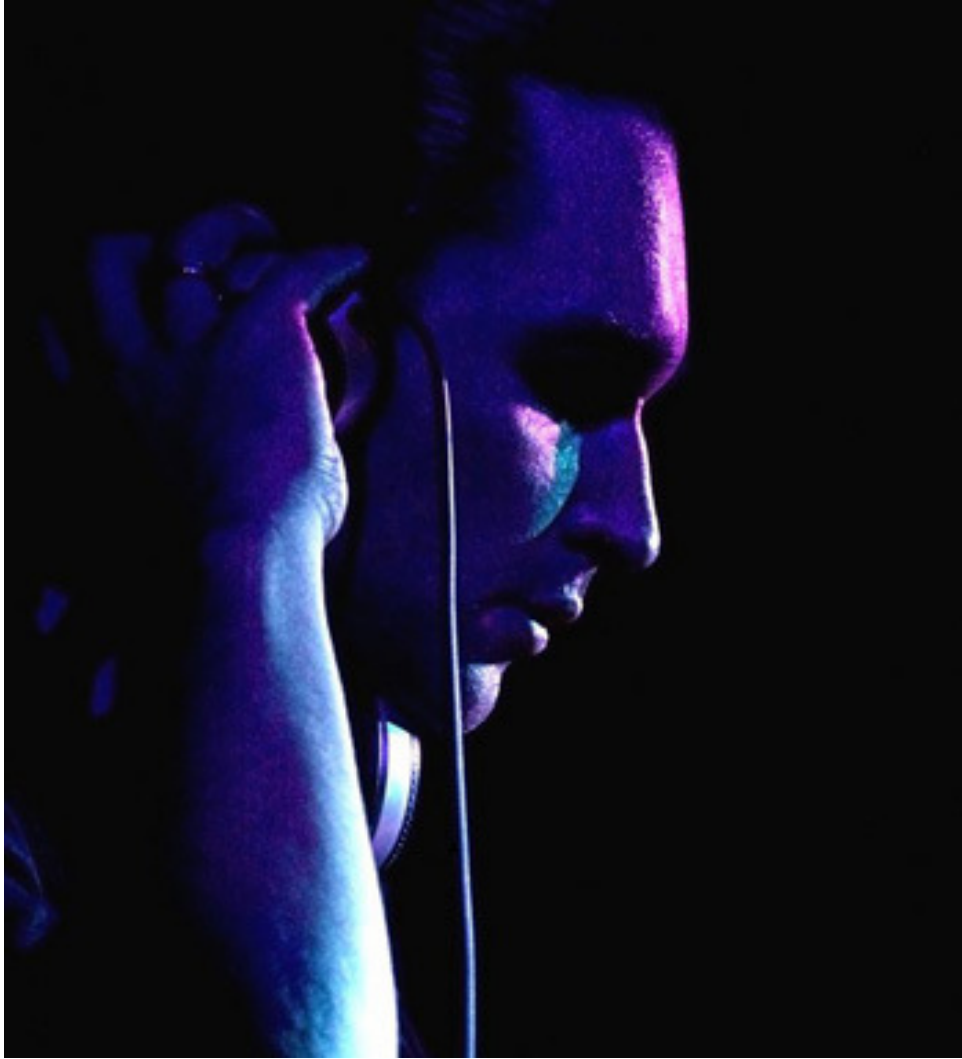
While film scores lean more towards the direction of classical music and, similar to IDM, their focal point is often their melody, both drum & bass and hardcore primarily center around percussion. With my music, I try to bring the various elements of the aforementioned genres together. On a production technical level though, they are all completely individually approachable musical directions. Intuitively, the genres are very different as well and I sometimes have the urge to go a certain way... but I definitely do not have any secret cravings to create r&b or country. What I would like to do in a possible future is to work with vocals and have one of my songs performed by purely using live instruments.

We haven't heard that much of your Semiomime alias. But here and there you mention that there is actually also a Semiomime album coming up. Elaborate!

During the writing process of The Words Below, I also started working on songs for an Ad Noiseam album as Semiomime. Part of this project is essentially all music that sounds too "liberal" to be filled into a particular space... and that is probably how this album will sound. How it exactly will turn out I do not know yet - most of the tracks are in still in an early stage. What I do know is that the music will contain a lot of mood changes and there will be an increased usage of alternative sounds, for example for percussion.

Next to your Music you also create visual arts. How does this combine? Can you visualize your own tracks in a piece of art, or does it work the other way around, with you getting inspiration from a sketch and try to form a new track?

Most of what I create nowadays is meant for a particular release. When making visual art, my music often is the catalyst but since the images in my head and surroundings are often a direct source of inspiration, I think the chicken is eating eggs in order to lay them. Besides imagery for my own productions, I do artwork for others as well. For instance, I made the current logo and 12 inch cover for No Room For Talent: Abusive Consequences (the one with two hands, chained to a wall) and I once did the (steampunkish) website of Position Chrome. Apart from that, I do everything Genosha and a lot of stuff for Killing Sheep.



Are there any artists which you really admire, either near your genre or a completely different one and if so, who and why?

I often admire artists because of their unique take and in some instances, their style is indissolubly connected with the technical skill behind it. I've always been collecting the work of Richard D. James, I like the fragileness of Radiohead, the apparent minimalism of Current Value, the nostalgia of The Boards of Canada, the compression techniques and "talking bass" noises by Noisia, the organicness of Amon Tobin, the subtext of The Eels, the landscapes by Future Sound Of London, the completeness of The Cinematic Orchestra... and so on. I preferably listen to as many different types of music and as a consequence it is seldomly quiet when I am at home.

Childish 'you have to choose either one' questions:

Drum & Bass or Hardcore?

If the former would be jump-up and the latter happy, I would choose neither one.

Produce or perform?

When I am in the studio, I am always wondering how something would sound on a dancefloor. When I am spinning, I always feel like making new things. So the both basically balance each other out - but if I really had to chose, my preference would lie with the most creative one.

Hardware or software?

My personal preference is software because I am able to work with it more conveniently. Just like choosing a particular method of sequencing, this is however entirely up to the individual and I can vividly imagine some people having a liking for hardware. On a qualitative level though, the differences are quite minimal.

What can we still expect from you in the (near) future? A DJ Hidden 'The Words Below' World Tour perhaps? ;-) Or a couple of your tracks as background for a movie?

Currently, there's no real album tour planned for The Words Below. I do however spin almost every weekend and at a drum & bass gig, chances are great you will hear several of the album's tracks. Apart from that, I never dismiss anything... so some day, you might hear my tracks in a movie or I might get the opportunity to write a score... you never know. ;)

For more information, check:

www.djhidden.com

www.myspace.com/djhidden



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