

LOVE SAVES THE DAY

DAVID MANCUSO AND THE LOFT

BY TIM LAWRENCE

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Like a soup or a bicycle or Wikipedia, the Loft is an amalgamation of parts that are weak in isolation, but joyful, revelatory and powerful when joined together. The first ingredient is the desire of a group of friends to want to get together and have some fun. The second element is the discovery of a room that has good acoustics and is comfortable for dancing, which means it should have rectangular dimensions, a reasonably high ceiling, a nice wooden floor and the possibility of privacy. The next building block is the sound system, which is most effective when it is simple, clean and warm, and when it isn't pushed more than a fraction above 100 decibels (so that people's ears don't become tired or even damaged). After that, the room should be decorated, with balloons and a mirror ball offering a cheap and timeless solution, and because the party might last a long time, and because some friends might be hungry, a healthy spread of food and drink should also be prepared. Finally and this really is the last thing to get right, and can only follow once everything else is in place the friends will need someone to bring along some dance records. After that, it's party time.

All of these parts were assembled at 647 Broadway, in the abandoned NoHo district of New York City, when David Mancuso hosted a Valentine's Day party in his loft in February 1970. That party, which soon became known as the Loft, wasn't so much a moment of inception or the point from which all subsequent events can be traced as a moment of rebirth in which a number of practices and experiences, some of which can be traced back across the decades, came together in a new form. The children's home where David was taken straight after he was born suggested that families like the Loft family later on could be extended yet intimate, unified yet different, and precarious yet strong. Sister Alicia, who took care of David and put on a party (with balloons and food and records) whenever she got a chance, suggested the Loft from another time and space. The psychedelic guru Timothy Leary, who invited David to his house parties and popularised a philos-

ophy around the psychedelic experience that would inform the way records were selected at the Loft, was another echo that resonated at the Broadway Loft. Co-existing with Leary, the civil rights, the gay liberation, feminist and the anti-war movements of the 1960s were manifest in the egalitarian, rainbow coalition, come-as-you-are ethos of the Loft. And the Harlem rent parties of the 1920s, in which economically underprivileged African American tenants put on shindigs in order to help raise some money (through "donations" made at the door) to pay the rent, established a template for putting on a private party that didn't require a liquor or cabaret license and could accordingly run all night because they lay beyond the control of New York's licensing authorities. These streams headed in a multiplicity of directions, and in February 1970 they met at 647 Broadway.

The February party didn't have a name, but the homemade invitations did carry the line "Love Saves the Day". A short three years after the release of "Lucy In the Sky with Diamonds", the coded promise of acid-inspired things to come was easy to unpick for those in the know, yet "Love Saves the Day" exchanged the Beatles gobbledygook with a commitment to universal love. The invitations also reproduced an image of Salvador Dali's "The Persistence of Memory", which now looks like another cryptogram, but didn't resemble one at the time because David hadn't yet had his latent childhood memories of Sister Alicia jogged into Technicolor revelation. Of course the image of Dali's melting clocks was simply random: David was offering his guests the chance to escape the violence and oppression of reality, and the idea of entering into a different dimension of time, in which everyone could leave behind their socialised selves and dance until dawn, was intended. "Once you walked into the Loft you were cut off from the outside world," says David. "You got into a timeless, mindless state. There was actually a clock in the back room but it only had one hand. It was made out of wood and after a short while it stopped working."

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When David's guests left the Valentine's Day party they let him know that they wanted him to put on another one soon, and within a matter of months the shindigs had become a weekly affair. Inasmuch as anyone knew about them and few did because David didn't advertise his parties, because they were private parties they acquired a reputation for being ultra hip, in part because 647 Broadway was situated in the ex-manufacturing district of downtown New York where nobody but a handful of artists and bohemians had thought about living. The artists (and David) moved in because the district's old warehouses offered a spectacular space in which to live as well as put on parties, and the inconvenience of having to have one's kitchen, bedroom and bathroom hidden from view (in order to avoid the punitive eyes of the city's building inspectors) turned out to be a nice way to free up space in

order to do things that weren't related to cooking, sleeping and washing. Outside, the frisson of transgression was heightened by the fact that there was no street lighting to illuminate the cobbled streets, and because David didn't serve alcohol, he was able to keep his parties going until midday (and sometimes later), long after the city's bars and discotheques had closed for the night. "Because I lived in a loft building, people started to say that they were going to the Loft," remembers David. "It's a given name and is sacred."

From the beginning, David looked constantly for ways to improve his sound system because he was convinced that this would result in a more musical and intense party experience. He began to invest in audiophile technology and asked befriended sound engineers to help him build gear, including tweeter arrays and bass reinforcements, which



David would tweak during the course of the party, sending shivers down the spines of the partygoers at 647 Broadway. Yet by the time they come to dominate the 1970s discotheque scene, David had concluded that such add-ons were unnecessary with an audiophile set-up and got into really esoteric equipment, adding Mark Levinson amplifiers and handcrafted Koetsu cartridges to his Klipschorn speakers. "I had the tweeters installed to put highs into records that were too muddy but they turned into a monster," explains David. "It was done out of ignorance. I wasn't aware of Class-A sound, where the sound is more open and everything comes out."

Like the space, the legal set-up and the food, the sound system was a technology that was introduced in order to assist the party, and as David relentlessly fine-tuned his set-up, the dancing became more free flowing and intense.

"You could be on the dance floor and the most beautiful woman that you had ever seen in your life would come and dance right on top of you," says Frankie Knuckles, a regular at the Loft. "Then the minute you turned around a man that looked just as good would do the same thing. Or you would be sandwiched between the two of them, or between two women, or between two men, and you would feel completely comfortable." Facilitating a sonic trail that was generated by everyone in the room, David would pick out long, twisting tracks such as Eddie Kendricks "Girl, You Need A Change of Mind" and War "City, Country, City"; gutsy, political songs like the Equals "Black Skinned Blue Eyed Boys" and Willie Hutch "Brother's Gonna Work It Out"; uplifting, joyful anthems such as Dorothy Morrison "Rain" and MSFB "Love Is the Message"; and earthy, funky recordings like James Brown "Give It Up or Turnit a Loose"

and Manu Dibango "Soul Makossa". Positive, emotional and transcendental, these and other songs touched the soul and helped forge a community.

The influence of the Loft spread far and wide. At the end of 1972 a Broadway regular set up a similarly structured party for an exclusive white gay clientele called the Tenth Floor, which in turn inspired the establishment of Flamingo, the most influential white gay venue of the 1970s. Objecting to the elitist nature of Flamingo's so-called "A-list" dancers, another Loft regular founded 12 West, which was intended to create a more laidback party environment for white gay men. As all of this was unfolding, another Loft regular, Nicky Siano, set up his own Loft-style venue called the Gallery where he mimicked David's invitation system, hired his sound engineer, and also borrowed a fair chunk of the Loft's guests when the Broadway party closed for the summer of 1973. The SoHo Place (set up by Richard Long and Mike Stone) and Reade Street (established by Michael Brody) also drew heavily on David's template. When both of those parties were forced to close, Michael Brody decided to open the Paradise Garage and positioned the party as an "expanded version of the Loft", and invited Richard Long, considered by some to be New York's premier sound engineer, to build the sound system. Meanwhile, yet another Loft regular moved to Chicago and opened a Loft style venue called the Warehouse. Having grown up on the dance floor of the Loft, where they bonded, Larry Levan and Frankie Knuckles went on to become the legendary DJs at the Garage and the Warehouse, where they forged the outlines of what would later be called garage and house music. Other spinners such as Tony Humphries, François Kevorkian and David Morales would look back on the Loft as one of the most inspirational parties they ever experienced. The Loft, in other words, was an incubator.

Like any party host, David has had to face some unexpected hitches during his thirty-seven year journey. In June 1974 he moved into 99 Prince Street after he was pres-

sured into leaving his Broadway home, and ten years later he bought a promising building in Alphabet City, only to see the neighbourhood slide into a virtual civil war. By the time he was forced to leave a room he was subletting on Avenue B towards the end of the 1990s, things were beginning to look quite grim for the Loft. But before he was forced to leave Avenue B, David received invitations to travel first to Japan and then to London. Initially reluctant to put on a party outside his home, David ended up accepting both offers, and although he experienced some hitches, he ended up returning to both Japan and London in order to team up with other friends. As he went about putting on these parties, David stuck to the principles that have driven him from day one: be faithful to your friends, find a good space for a party, seek out the best sound equipment available, and smile when people welcome you as a guest. In the process, David drew on the life shaping experience of his orphan childhood to realise a profound philosophical lesson: homes can be built wherever you put down roots and make friends. Returning again and again to Japan and London, David realised his own universal vision, which was previously constricted to New York, but has now captured the imagination of partygoers across the globe.

Shortly after making his first trips to Japan and London, David also hit upon a hall in the East Village that has become the new home of the Loft, and although the parties are now held on holidays rather than a weekly basis, David is convinced the dance floor is as vibrant and energetic as ever. The fact David doesn't live in the space is a little inconvenient in that he has to set up his sound system each time he plays, but even though he doesn't sleep in the hall, he's also more comfortable in his current space than any of his previous homes. "It's in the heart of the East Village, which was where I always used to hang out," he says. "I might have lived on Broadway, but for the other five or six days I was in the East Village. This is where I've been hanging out in the area since 1963. My roots are there. My

life is connected to the area." Forging new roots and connections, grandparents have started to dance with their grandchildren on the floor of the New York Loft.

Thanks to David's longevity and belated recognition as a seminal figure in the history of New York dance, it has become easy for partygoers to assume that the Loft has come to resemble a nostalgia trip for the halcyon days of the 1970s and early 1980s. Since February 1970, however, David has always played a mixture of old and new music, and he continues to mix it up in a similar way to this day. New faces in Japan and London might arrive expecting a trip down disco alley, but that's not what they get, because the party isn't a fossil-like impression of what it used to be. Throughout, David has remained committed to selecting records that encourage the party to grow as a musical radical yet never musically negative community. This sonic tapestry can sometimes sound strange to dancers who have become accustomed to a political and musical climate, in which communities are dismantled in favour of materialistic individualism and capitalist-nationalist wars, but the countercultural message is persuasive. "After a while the positive vibe and universal attitude of the music was too much for me, but this moment of hesitation and insecurity only lasted for a few minutes," commented a dancer after the March party. "Then all the barriers broke and I reached the other side. Like a child, I stopped caring about what other people might think and reached my essence, through dancing."

Confronted by the tendency of dancers to worship at his DJing feet, even though he has never thought of himself as being a DJ and is resolute in his belief that this kind of attention detracts from the party, David positions his turntables as close to the entrance as possible so that dancers see the floor and not the booth as they enter the room. In a similar move, he also arranges his speakers so they will draw dancers away from the booth and towards the centre of the floor. Yet in London (much more so than in New York) dancers tend to face David, even though the

effect is the equivalent of sitting with one's back to the orchestra at a concert. And at the end of these parties dancers applaud him as if he's some kind of saviour, when in fact he's a guy who helps put on parties and tries to read the mood of the floor as the "sonic trail" unfolds.

Reinforced by popular culture, which encourages crowds to seek out iconic, authoritative, supernatural leaders, the adulation makes David feel deeply uncomfortable. "I'm a background person," he says.

Even if utopias can't be built without a struggle, and can never be complete, the mood at all of these parties is thrilling to behold. The floors outside New York might benefit from believing more in themselves, yet much of their applause is directed towards the music, as well as the surprisingly rare joy of being able to dance among friends. That feeling has come about because, after years of dancing together, people now recognise each other to the extent that they are entirely comfortable about welcoming in new faces. "It's unbelievable," said a female dancer who came to her first London party with her two daughters in December. "The people here they make eye contact!" Eye contact might not be very fashionable, but then the Loft isn't about fashion. Rather, it's about putting on a party with friends. And because it doesn't follow trends, it's been able to outlast every other party in the ephemeral (yet eternally hopeful) world of dance.

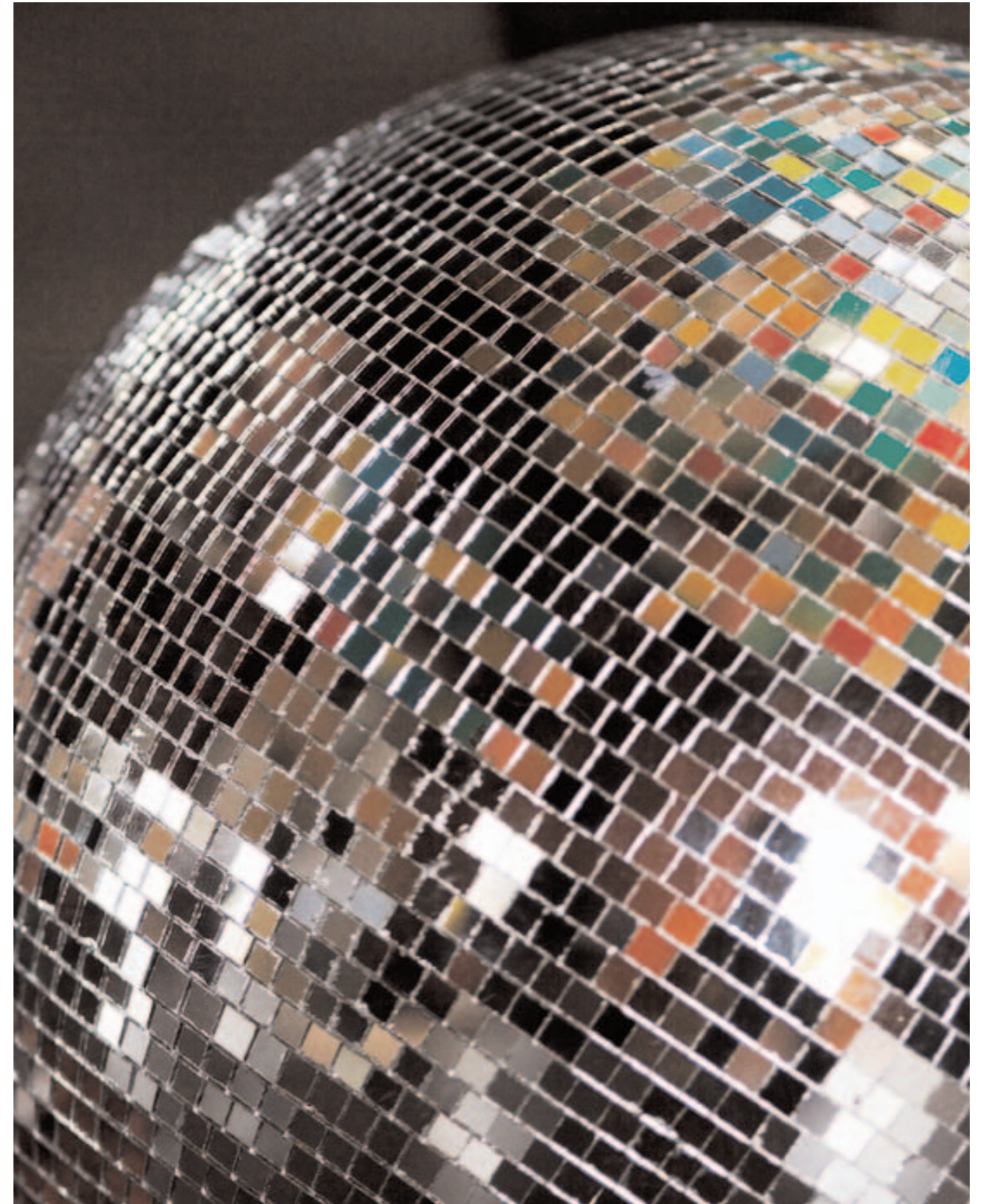
TIM LAWRENCE IS THE AUTHOR OF LOVE SAVES THE DAY: A HISTORY OF AMERICAN DANCE MUSIC CULTURE (1970-79) AND IS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF LUCKY CLOUD SOUND SYSTEM, WHICH HAS BEEN PUTTING ON PARTIES WITH DAVID MANCUSO IN LONDON SINCE JUNE 2003.

THE LOFT (NEW YORK CITY): WWW.THELOFTNYC.COM

LUCKY CLOUD SOUND SYSTEM (LONDON): WWW.LOFTPARTY.ORG

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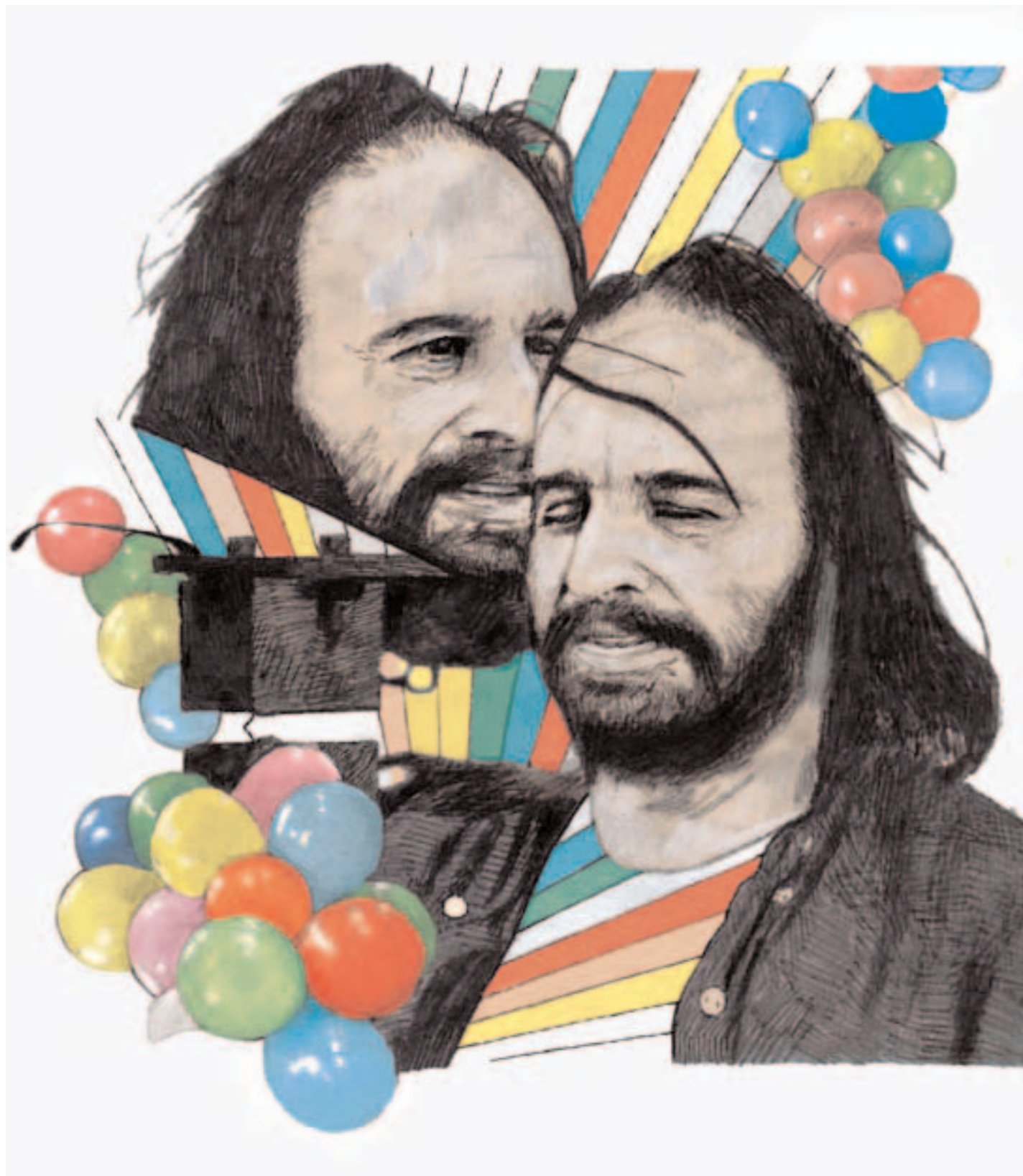
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INTERVIEW

MANCUSO

BY TIM LAWRENCE



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HELLO, DAVID. WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO BEGIN?

Ommmmmm.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO START THERE?

It's the spiritual word for all sound. It's a chant. Om says it all.

WHERE ARE YOU WITH YOUR OM AT THE MOMENT?

Home, as in H-OM-e. "O" and "m" are the two central letters of home. Om is very powerful.

Jeremy (a founding member of Lucky Cloud Sound System, which puts on parties with David in London four times a year) sent me this link to the sound of the big bang and it sounds like Om. Buddhists chant Om for a very long time and when they're together and in harmony the vibration creates the sound of a bell. It's enlightenment.

DO YOU HOPE TO CREATE A VERSION OF OM IN YOUR PARTIES?

It needs to be more of a human-acoustic touch. You can't do it electronically. But the vibration is there. Parties can become very psychic. But the bell doesn't ring if one person out of the group becomes more dominant than the other.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ABOUT SOUND, SPIRITUALITY AND THE PARTY?

When Buddhists chant Om the idea is to get to a spiritual level, and one way of doing that is by chanting. We don't get together in London four times a year and chant, and enlightenment isn't the kind of thing that you could achieve during an eight-hour party. But Om isn't one or two people, a man or a woman, an adult or a child. Om is the spiritual word for all sound. All of life is a vibration, your heartbeat is a vibration, the womb the w-OM-b is a vibration. Does sound have anything to do with the party? Of course it does. Music is a very spiritual thing.

DID YOU CHANT IN THE PAST?

I've been in groups, absolutely, in the 1960s and 1970s. It's been a while since I sat down physically with a group of people with that goal in mind. The thing is to do it in a group. You've got to create a collective vibration. I think that once you experience it, it affects you for the rest of your life.

COULD YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR IDEA OF HOME?

Maybe it goes back to Sister Alicia and her party room. Sister Alicia is my earth mother. She took care of me until I was six years old. I went to see her recently and during the visit I used the word "orphanage". She said it wasn't an orphanage; it was Saint Joseph's home. She corrected

010 me and said it was a home for children. I went in there when I was two days old. In those days kids went in right from the hospital.

DO YOU REMEMBER MUCH ABOUT THE HOME?

I only have very vague memories. The visual memories I have are playing outdoors, sliding down the slide and of kids playing together. Memories came back when Eddy, my friend from the home, showed me pictures.

WHEN DID YOU SEE THIS PICTURES FOR THE FIRST TIME?

When I was forty-five years old. Eddy wasn't told he was in a home, either. At some point the home was torn down and the building was replaced with an apartment complex. Eddy got married and moved into this apartment complex without knowing that it used to be the home. At that point he was sat down and told, "Look, this is what happened when you were a child." He got so freaked out he moved out immediately. But he wanted to find out about his earlier years in the home, so he looked up the records and through a long process tracked down Sister Alicia. He asked her, "Were you the one who used to change my diapers?" and she said, "Yes." Donald Byrd I'm having a realization right now "I've Longed and Searched for My Mother". It's a beautiful, beautiful record, released on Blue Note. That record goes back to the late fifties, early sixties. When I heard it, it grabbed me right away. It's very angelic. I always felt connected to that record and now I'm realizing why.

WHY?

It's a beautiful song and Sister Alicia was really a mother to me, even though I don't remember a nun taking care of me. There are a lot of things I don't remember. But under hypnosis or a memory pill, maybe the memories could be drawn out, because they're all in my brain. When I see a picture of her I start connecting dots. I'm very close to this woman.

HOW DID YOU GET IN TOUCH WITH EDDY?

Eddy said to Sister Alicia, "What's the name of the friend I used to play with?" She had all these pictures and she showed him one and said, "That's David." Eddy started to look for me in every state and it took him five or six years to find me. It turned out that in the same city where the home was in Utica Eddy worked in a big grocery store that his family owned. One day a clerk yelled out, "Mr Mancuso, your order is ready!" He went up to the person and said, "Do you have a nephew or a son?" He said, "I have a nephew." My uncle told me that Eddy wanted to get in touch and meet up. I was flabbergasted, totally shocked. It's something that goes back to my earliest years it's heavy stuff and it took me six months to pick up the phone. It was like opening

011 up the doors, like finding a brother you didn't know you had. Anyhow, it just so happened that Eddy used to come to New York City a couple of times a year, so on one of his visits we spoke on the phone and he came to visit me. This was 1984, just as I was moving into Third Street. I explained to him what I did in the Loft that I put on parties and he looked at the room and said, "You've got to see these photos!" He brought out all of these pictures that Sister Alicia had saved, and as we looked through the pictures we came across one of a party room that had a record player, records and balloons. It was a mirror reflection of my room in the Loft. We both freaked out in a very nice way.

WHEN DID YOU GET IN TOUCH WITH SISTER ALICIA?

I called her between Christmas and New Year's. As soon as I heard her voice it was as though I recognized it. She has a very beautiful voice. It's flowing and deep, like singing. I said, "Hello Sister Alicia" I was ready to shit my pants! I said, "It's David Mancuso." She said, "Hi, David." I said, "Do you remember me?" She said, "I remember you like it was yesterday." I told her I was very happy that I could reach her in other words, that she was alive and said that I had a place upstate near to where she was and that I'd like to visit her. I saw her a couple of months later. I don't know how to explain it to you. It was incredibly thrilling.

DID YOU STAY IN TOUCH?

I called at least once every two months. Then a few years ago Eddy and I went to visit her and at the end of the visit she asked us if we wanted to go to the chapel. We didn't have to pray it was an interfaith organisation and when we got there she said, "Let me show you something." There was a big glass bowl and if you rubbed a stick around the edge it created an effect that was almost Om-like. The glass was so big you could feel the vibration right through your body. I said to myself, "This must have been what we were doing as kids." She was bringing us to this musical instrument and showing us how to play this vibration. That blew me away.

I also went to visit Sister Alicia a few weeks ago with a journalist called Matt and we asked her about the records that were in the photo of the party room. We said, 'Do you remember the names of the records? Was there any James Brown?' She said they were children's records, things that children could dance to. Matt asked her, "How did you get these records?" She said, "I went out and bought them." That's heavy. It wasn't that someone donated them. She created this atmosphere; she created that room. The idea of having balloons; that was her concept. She treated us as though we were in her home having a birthday party.

The more I sit with her, the more memories return. Her voice is very h-OM-ish. This room was the basic blueprint as far as the vibration goes. The room was obviously put together for children's parties. It was a happy place. Sister Alicia would find any excuse to have a party. Even if

012 kids had birthdays on the same day, she still made sure they had individual parties. When I saw the pictures of the room for the first time I realized that although I didn't remember it directly, the feeling I have always had with me comes from this place.

IS THE LOFT LIKE A HOME?

It's a home away from home. For some people it actually was their home, though. There were people I let stay there. I'd take them in for six months or a year. At one point I had eleven people living in the Loft. I always said to the people who were staying with me, "If you bring up the word 'rent' I'll push you out that day." In other words, you cannot give me any rent.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE PARTIES ARE CHILDLIKE?

Of course. You're regaining what you lost in your childhood or sometimes what you never got in your childhood. The party is a childlike experience. You can have your cake and eat it, too. The Loft has never been a business. I've reached out a bit during the last few years and now visit London and Japan, but I'm among friends there. London and Japan are not very far off in that they're places for communities to start and grow, to develop and expand. It's like a chant it's like Om. The vibration that's happening can be very healing. When someone is with their children, the children bring things out of them that they can respond to in a way that they can't normally do. They can be goofy, do this and that, play games. It keeps us young in love and spirit.

HOW DID YOU GET FROM THE CHILDREN'S HOME TO THE LOFT? WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU AFTER YOU LEFT THE HOME?

I was in Utica and at the age of fifteen I went on the other side of the tracks. That was where the minorities and poor people lived. Utica is a very segregated and prejudiced city, but the hospitality across the tracks was incredible. I was already more or less on my own and most of my friends were living in projects. After school we would go to each other's houses on different days and we would listen to music. We were very young and they were little after school parties. There was a place around the corner that was called Birdland and in the afternoons this trio of musicians would be there one huge blonde guy who played the organ and two black musicians. The door would be open and we would go in and dance our arses off. And they could play! Oh my God, could they play? Anyhow, we were a very mixed group gay, straight, white, Spanish so we would listen to music and dance in each other's living rooms. We would tear up the rug. That had a tremendous influence on me. That's when I was introduced to James Brown, the Shirelles, a lot of artists. I learned how to dance, I learned about other cultures, and I learned about making friends. Everybody treated each other with respect. We did this on a regular basis. By the time I was eighteen I left Utica.

013 **WHERE WERE YOU LIVING?**

At fifteen-and-a-half I was with my uncle for six months. I got out of there at sixteen. My parole officer let me get my own room, so I went into in a rooming house. I quit school and I started shining shoes and dishwashing.

FROM THERE YOU WENT TO NEW YORK CITY?

I had a really close friend and he said, "Let's go to New York City!" We went on Labour Day weekend for three days and stayed at the YMCA on Thirty-fourth Street. This was 1962. We met two people who said, "If you ever want to come here..." and they invited me and my friend to their house in the Bronx. I had turned eighteen years old and in thirty-three days I was back. The weekend I returned to New York the Russians were half way to Cuba and I calculated that if it all went off it'd be on the Tuesday. I was in New York City by the Thursday so I had the weekend. If shit was going to happen, at least I was where I wanted to be. I stayed with my friends for about six weeks and they taught me how to "mop" how to get food from a grocery store when you have no money. I got a job very quickly and started and going to house parties. I was always comfortable in these environments. There would be music and people, and the pattern was always unique. That's where I was happiest and it became my reference point. It was all I had and it was a lot to be thankful for. My life up to that point was like these stages, these bardos the home, the houses, the house parties. And then I started going to private social clubs, especially one place that was called the Territorial, which was on One-hundred-and-twenty-fifth Street.

TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE TERRITORIAL.

It was run by two lesbians and each one of us was an outcaste. You had to come with a card or a guest, and if you came as a guest you had to pay two dollars to get a temporary membership card, because that way they didn't have to open to the public. I went as someone's guest and the first night I went there I met Larry Patterson [who became a close friend and, many years later, one of the principal DJs at Zanzibar in New Jersey]. I also saw someone there I'd met the day before in Prospect Park. I said to myself, "Wow!" Larry was with friends and said, "Come to my table!" There was a jukebox and we danced our arses off. We played songs that we liked and then someone else dropped some change in there and we'd dance to songs they liked. We were playing for each other, socialising in a very private, personal manner, and that's where we were happiest. So there was that familiarity again; something that said there's some reason why I'm doing what I'm doing. It was like a steppingstone. It was almost destiny. So the reason why I do what I do is to regain feelings from my childhood. I stay away from the business side of things because that's when I start losing interest. The Loft was never about me it's about us. When you go some place and people are looking for the DJ that's a very uncomfortable situation for me.

I'm not there for that. Other people can play that role and it's good because I can give them space. It's not that I'm anti-DJ; it's just that I'm not here for fame and fortune. And when something turns into that I start to lose interest because I'd rather be in a private, more intimate setting.

WHAT IS THE CONCEPTUAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LOFT AND A CLUB?

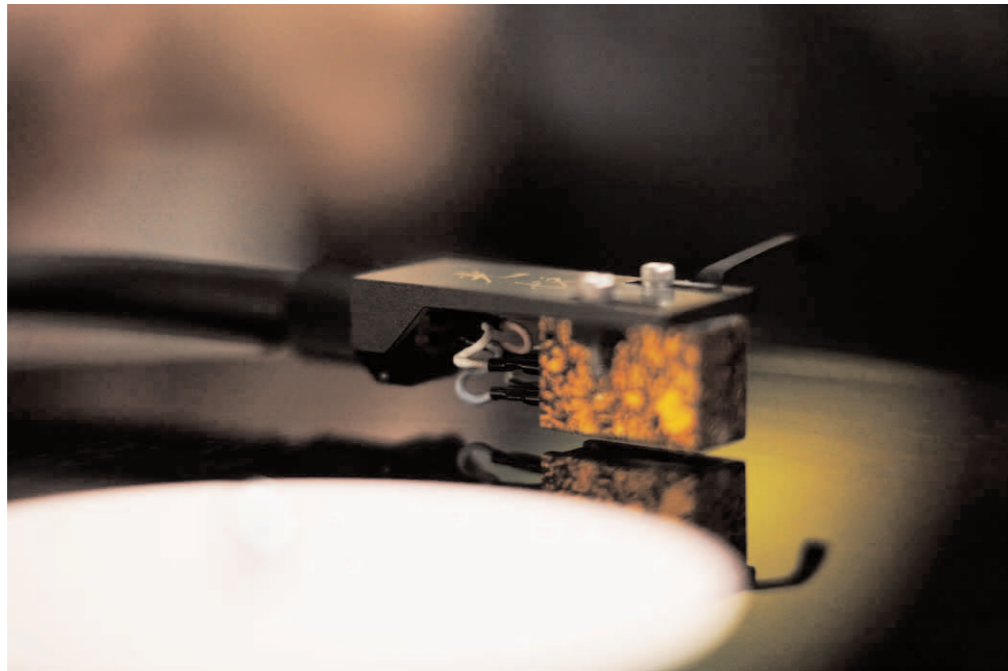
Clubs are set up for the purpose of making money. This is not what the Loft is about. The Loft is about putting on a party and making friends. That doesn't mean you can't put on a party and make friends in a club, but these places are structured to make a profit, and that's a whole different head. Without a doubt, that has a bearing on how things happen and how far things can go. For me the Loft is all about social progress. With my own parties you can bring your own alcohol and your children can come along. If I couldn't find a location where these things could happen I'd be at the end of my road.

In New York State, any person who walks into a liquor store or a bar that has a liquor license has to be served by law. The laws vary from situation to situation, but in general you have to be open to the public as long as they are orderly. Now that takes a whole different head and I don't have the head for that. I'd rather grow grapes on a farm and make wine. I'm not trying to create divisions here it's just the way I was raised. I guess maybe a lot of us were insecure but we found a way to make each other secure. What I'm doing has to do with something very personal and it shouldn't be compared to a club. It doesn't mean that one thing is better than the other. They're just different, and to me there's no doubt that the Loft is more intimate.

THERE'S NOT MUCH ROOM FOR INTIMACY IN CLUBS. WHY IS INTIMACY IMPORTANT TO YOU?

For me the core is about social progress. How much social progress can there be when you're in a situation that is repressive? You won't get much social progress in a nightclub. In New York City they've changed the law for eighteen to twenty-one-year-olds. Where can this age group go to dance? In my zone you can be any age, a drinker or non-drinker, a smoker or a non-smoker. And that's where I like to be. Social progress is extremely important to me, and it's also extremely important to me to avoid economic violence. In the last three thousand years we've made very little progress as a human race, so if there's a little bit out there that's happening then this is very important. To me the parties represent a way of making social progress because I'm not limited by a lot of laws. Safety laws always apply, but I haven't got a liquor license because when you've got a liquor license you go into another category. More laws come into play and the stakes are much higher as far as making money goes. At least here in London we've got them to keep the bar upstairs closed. It was a good and acceptable compromise. But if the bar had been in the same room it would have been a problem for me as it changes the whole mentality of the set and setting





HOW ARE BARS AND CLUBS ECONOMICALLY VIOLENT?

Having to pay five dollars for water, never mind ten dollars for a drink, can be very unaffordable. When you weigh what you can get for a contribution to come to a Loft party, it's good value. There's food, you can bring your own alcohol, and you don't have to pay to check in your coat. It's all-inclusive. You could easily have spent one hundred and fifty dollars if you went out somewhere else. It's a community support kind of thing. But once you get a liquor license there are so many regulations and your overheads get raised so high all sorts of costs follow. Not having a liquor license allows me to keep costs at a minimum and make the parties affordable for everyone, and that's very important to me.

HOW ELSE DOES SOCIAL PROGRESS GET EXPRESSED AT THE LOFT?

As long as you act like a human being you can do what you want. That's the deal. We don't have any fights. We don't have the usual problems a lot of places have. That tells you something. People can be trusted. People who drink alcohol at Loft parties do it by bringing their own with them, which makes it affordable to drink and relax. To see alcohol being consumed and not have problems is social progress.

HOW DO YOU WORK OUT WHO CAN COME INTO THE PARTIES?

That's up to the signing-up sponsors list. I don't rule, the majority rules. Two thirds of the population are the guests of people who are on the mailing list, and if someone on the mailing list sponsors you, you can also go on the mailing list unless we're over capacity, in which case you gave to go on the waiting list. Some people go back twenty years and can reappear, so we have this grandfather clause. The people who go back twenty years really have a preference over someone who is new. They have seniority and you have to give them that respect because they helped build this castle and have been friends for a long time. So whoever gets sponsored can be on the mailing list unless we're full, and I think it's wonderful that I don't have to be in a situation where I'm in control.

There are three signs if the parties are going well. First, if people want the parties to continue they will support them with a contribution. We don't advertise or promote. The income comes if people want to contribute and be there with their friends. So that's an indication. Second, if fights started to break out I would seriously wonder if I'm doing something to contribute to this violence. The final factor is if the door ever became a place where people had to be searched, or if metal detectors were set up, as they were at the Paradise Garage. I don't want to have to be part of that. If I have to do any of those things then it's not like I'm going over to my friend's house after school. Yes, there's a business side to the Loft, but it's orderly and simple. If for some reason the Loft ended or reached its conclusion I still would always have a lot to be thankful

018 for. I have been doing this for thirty-seven years. And I always know that no matter what happens there's going to be at least one more party. I have a backup where I could throw a party real quick and call it a day if necessary.

FOR LONGEST TIME YOU PUT ON PARTIES IN THE PLACE WHERE YOU WERE LIVING, BUT YOU'RE NOT ABLE TO DO THIS ANYMORE BECAUSE YOUR CURRENT APARTMENT IS TOO SMALL. HAS THIS CHANGED THINGS FOR YOU?

Where I put on my parties in New York is just as big as most of my other spaces. The only difference is where I sleep. Other than the fact that you don't see a bed, you wouldn't know the difference from every place I've been. Every time I look at a space and I'm not just talking about my own parties in New York here the first thing that goes through my mind is: where do the speakers go? Then I ask, "Would I want to sleep here tonight?" If I get those two feelings, I know it's where I want to be. It has to be about the sound and being comfortable enough to sleep there that first night.

FRIENDS WOULD DROP BY WHEN THE LOFT WAS ON BROADWAY, PRINCE STREET, THIRD STREET AND YOU'RE YOUR OTHER HOMES, SO THAT'S A LITTLE DIFFERENT, TOO, RIGHT?

I'm not there seven days a week, but we all meet up and we do our thing. That's been going on for years. And in my new place I can do what I've always done. The firemen of New York City also give their private parties there. I love the fact that you walk upstairs to get to the dance floor because you don't expect to walk upstairs and be in this huge room. Broadway was like that. And the fact that it's in the East Village is wonderful to me. If anything I could sit here and say that of all the places I've been at, including Broadway, this is the place I would have love to have slept in. But I'm willing to sacrifice that if the alternative is to not have parties. And if I didn't put on parties I wouldn't get any sleep!

SO YOU PREFER YOUR CURRENT SPACE IN THE EAST VILLAGE TO PRINCE STREET?

I prefer it to all my spaces because it's right where I grew up psychedelically and musically, and I met some of my oldest friends people I'm still friendly with to this day in the East Village. I loved the space in SoHo but not the neighbourhood, or at least not the way it developed, because it became too expensive. The local artist residents finally accepted us because they had to, but the SoHo artists were interested in real estate, not art. They would get together and buy a building on the cheap, and some of these people also came from real estate families, so they knew where the neighbourhood was going and they developed a plan.

IT'S GOOD TO HEAR YOU'RE IN THE EAST VILLAGE AND HAPPY. BUT YOU'RE ALSO MOVING OUTSIDE YOUR OWN LOFT PARTIES AND TRAVELLING AROUND THE WORLD. HOW COME?

I lost my building and home on Third Street due to an unpredictable lawyer. That tragedy turned

019 into possibilities. I probably wouldn't be sitting here in London if that hadn't happened. I said the same thing to my friend Satoru in Japan. I said, "I wouldn't have made a lot of the new friends and had a lot of experiences if I hadn't lost that space." I've been invited to travel and I've found myself being able to help when it's needed. I've made a few mistakes because sometimes I didn't know the person I was dealing with. But apart from two or three situations that I didn't want to go back to, I've stayed with the same groups that I've worked with since the beginning. I get a lot of offers and I always say, "I have to see the space. Can I see the drawings?" It's a lot of work and you were already familiar with a lot of the things I was looking for. So I've had to reach out and be careful not to bite off more than I can chew. The only two possibilities I've added to what I've got are Montreal and LA. They're in the infancy states.

SO WHAT HAVE YOU GOT?

Other than my own Loft parties, my main thing is obviously London and Japan, with Italy more and more an upcoming situation that has a lot of potential via a group of friends I made there five years ago friends that I believe in. The sound and vibe are very familiar to me. There are some cultural differences, no doubt, but the coming together and the community and the vision are very similar. The parties don't take me away from what drives me.

HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT GETTING THINGS GOING IN JAPAN AND LONDON?

I was offered Japan for a long time and I decided to finally take the chance. I saw an opportunity to go there to raise enough money to buy the space where I was living on Avenue B. In the end the person I was subletting from on Avenue B wasn't giving the landlord the money and the person I went to Japan with didn't have both oars in the water, so I realised I was not going to be able to buy the space. But during the Japan trip I met another individual, Satoru and we understood each other. I've been going to Japan for ten years now. It's a good, solid, wonderful relationship.

HOW DO THINGS WORK IN JAPAN?

They work very well. The community has developed. It's like going to see my cousins. The parties are always in the same locations and they have all the basic principles. It's all done with balloons, Klipschorns, Koetstus, food, the whole thing. It's very much an ongoing situation and it's gotten very deep. If Japan hadn't been part of my journey it'd be a tremendous loss.

AND YOU'VE BEEN USING KOETSU CARTRIDGES, WHICH ARE JAPANESE, FOR MANY YEARS.

I heard that Papa Koetsu as I call him was ninety-eight years old and I said, "Gee, I'd really like to meet him!" Within two days they arranged it and we went to visit him at his home. I asked

020 him what kind of music he liked and he said, "Gospel and classical." I thought it was interesting: gospel was the voices and the classical was the dynamic, ambient instrumental arrangement. To get a kettledrum to sound like a kettledrum that's serious shit. He seemed to have done his homework regarding me and had known about me for a while. It was an amazing visit.

HOW DO THE JAPANESE PARTIES COMPARE TO THE NEW YORK PARTIES?

Community builds hope, just like here in London. Even though there's a bar in the place in Japan, there's also food and balloons, and it's a very different situation than they have in the rest of the year. We bring in the sound system, just like you guys do, so it's a whole big effort. Why am I here in London? It goes back to meeting you and the book, and Colleen being here and living here, and the fact that I was here as a kid was also important.

WHEN DID YOU USED TO COME OVER TO LONDON?

1964, 1965. I was dealing in antiques.

THE LONDON PARTIES ARE PUT ON BY LUCKY CLOUD SOUND SYSTEM. HOW ARE THEY WORKING OUT?

I'm very proud to say that London has really got it together. From where you had to start and get to, there were so many challenges. You've all got it together and are doing it, just like in Japan. The parties are also something that can stand on their own. I don't want to go into the "I won't always be here" thing, but if I'm not here tomorrow, we now know what to do and what not to do.

TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR OWN PLACE IN THE PARTY?

I'm just part of the vibration. I'm very uncomfortable when I'm put on a pedestal. Sometimes in this particular business it comes down to the DJ, who sometimes does some kind of performance and wants to be on the stage. That's not me. I don't want attention I want to feel a sense of camaraderie and I'm doing things on so many levels that, whether it's the sound or whatever, I don't want to be pigeonholed as a DJ. I don't want to be categorised or become anything. I just want to be. There's a technical role to play and I understand the responsibilities, but for me it's very minimal. There are so many things that make this worthwhile and make it what it is. And there's a lot of potential. It can go really high.

IS IT PROBLEMATIC TO FOCUS ON THE DJ RATHER THAN THE DANCE FLOOR?

Definitely. For me to play the role of the DJ limits my whole horizon. I don't know how the fuck to put this into words. Presenting pre-recordings is the last of all the many things I do and that I prefer. What got me there is a passion to be with people and music. When the focus is on being a DJ you become isolated or at least this is the case for me. I would think this would be the

021 same for anyone else who just wants to shed their ego and melt together with other people and float downstream on this journey called life.

CAN THE FOCUS ON THE DJ TAKE AWAY FROM THE ENERGY OF THE PARTY?

If people treat me with this DJ head thing it's like I want to face the music, too, man! Let me have some space! I'm not afraid of facing the music! If somebody says to me, "You really play music well," I say, "I can't even play a piano!" I say, "Let's thank the musicians who give us these gifts." That's where I'm going. Being a DJ requires doing a lot more than what I do as far as at the turntables go. That might be the best way of putting it.

COULD YOU EXPAND ON THIS?

I don't do anything except clean the records, put the record on and try to stay tuned to the room. I try to keep my technical side in place and be in a state of what I call grace that is, to be worthy of having the opportunity to do what I'm doing, which is to share with other people a moment of musical joy. If I was going to come in as a DJ I'd be mixing, I'd have a pitch control, and that's a whole other game. That's not me. One day after eleven years I decided I wasn't going to mix any more and that decision also had to do with the quality of the sound. I can mix but if I mix I need a mixer and if I have a mixer I'm interfering with the quality of the sound, so I decided the sound had to have the least electronics as possible in order to not interfere with the sound. I had to get rid of the mixer in order for that to happen and I did this with respect to the artists, musicians and recording engineers.

SO THE QUALITY OF THE SOUND IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PARTY.

Would you go to a restaurant where the food is the best or the half-best? Because we don't have the advantage of the band being there, we want to get to that experience as closely as possible. You can't change the pitch control. *The Nutcracker* would you change the pitch on that? But if you were in a different setting you'd be expected to do that, and that's part of that kind of circus. It's a different story. If you do that, hopefully you do it well. But to me it's not musically pure.

DOES GOOD SOUND PRODUCE A DIFFERENT TYPE OF PARTY?

Is half-good food good for your body? Of course good sound helps produce a good party, although the music itself has to have life healing energy. A lot of records don't have that. Why is *Dark Side of the Moon* such a fabulous piece? It starts out with a heartbeat. People just stop and listen. It speaks for itself. The heartbeat takes us back to the w-OM-b. The w-OM-b is the mother of all ro-OM acoustics.