



classifieds | food | the agenda | music | movies | arts | feature | news | naked city |

the music issue

26 | PHILADELPHIA CITY PAPER | OCTOBER 25, 2007

“W

hen you're 13 and your dad catches you listening to Donna Summer, he starts to worry a bit," says Julian Grefe, one of the primary producers/multi-instrumentalists behind Pink Skull. "I was pretty smitten by her, though, and in the end, he was more disturbed by the Smiths."

Challenged masculinity aside, Grefe's introduction to disco — by way of his mom, a former Atlantic City-based Playboy Bunny — was the beginning of a beautiful relationship with dance music as both a DJ and producer, from dropping downtempo tracks (his EDK alias) and drum 'n' bass dubplates in the late '90s, to riding the disco-punk party train in 2001 alongside Dave P at [Click.]. At the same time, Grefe was also getting his emo on with the Trans Megetti and assuming the programming position in S PRCSS, leaving little room to focus on one or the other.

"My place [in S PRCSS] was as the Eno of the group, the fruity dude playing with knobs all the time," explains Grefe. "The whole time I kept thinking, 'Why can't I just be a DJ and make a lot of money flying around the planet?' The more I played in bands and dealt with the ego trips that go along with them, the more I wanted to make electronic music."

To hammer this point home, Grefe finished the first fuck-a-vowel "Rvng Prsnts" mix for Dave P's emerging Rvng Intl. label in 2002. Recorded straight to a CD burner and printed in a small spray-painted run of 200 at Kinko's, the long-out-of-print disc closes with "I Feel Love" and opens with Roxy Music. The areas in between look like a pre-emptive guide to electroclash, from a DFA mix of Le Tigre to "House of Jealous Lovers," the Rapture smash that got all the cool kids dancing to cowbells and clanging chords. Which is funny, because his second Rvng mix — hand-selected with former Pink Skull member Ian Kelley, aka DJ Diabolic — arrived in 2004 right on the cusp of the mash-up craze. A staggering 46 tracks, it reads like a scatterbrained 2 Many DJs set list (Plump DJs and The Pixies, Butthole Surfers and the Chemical Brothers, Drive Like Jehu and Devo). No wonder the Belgium brothers asked the pair to open a 2 Many DJs show soon after.

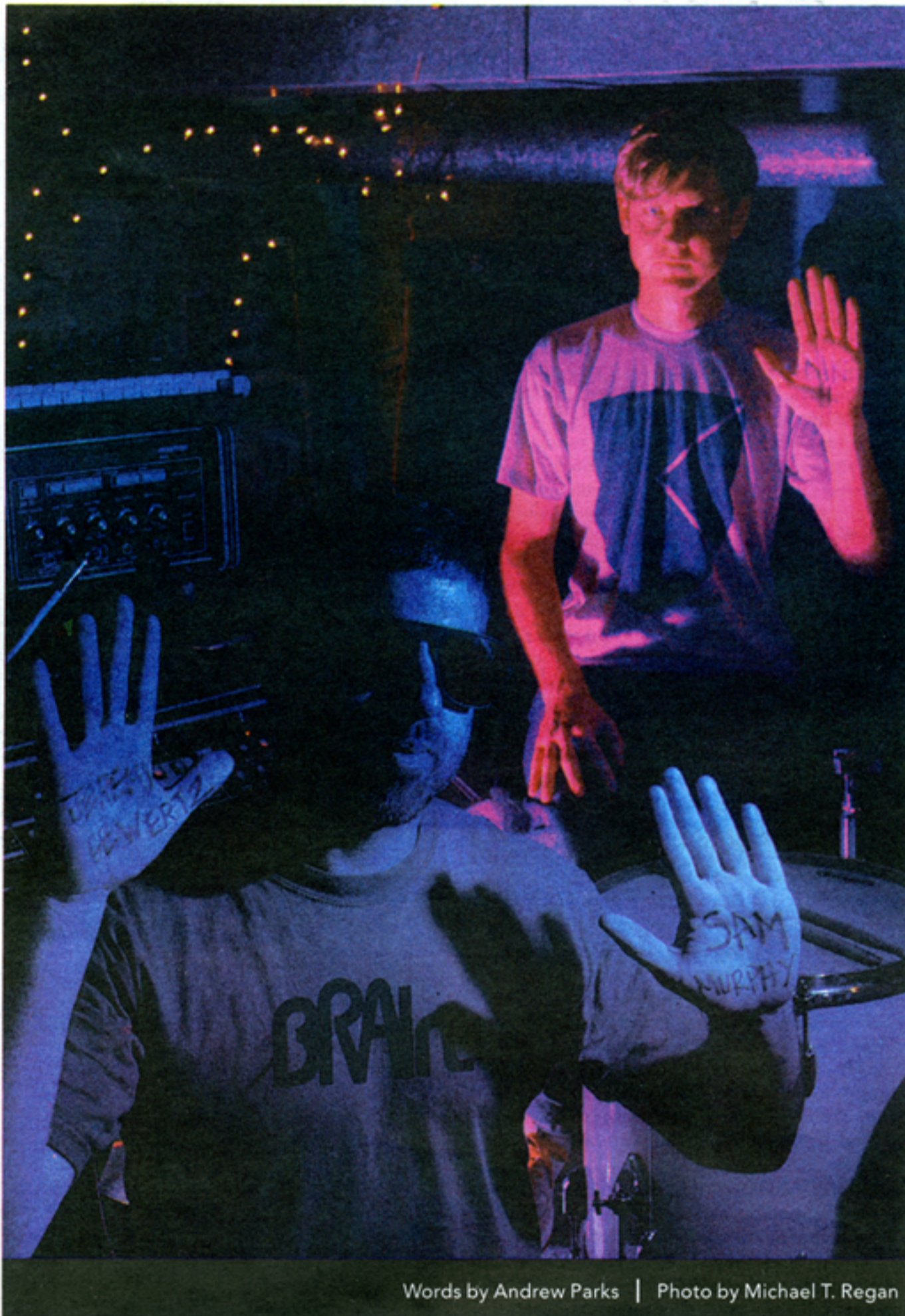
"Now when you go to a bar, everyone's playing an eclectic mix of everything at 130 beats-per-minute," says Grefe. Well, that or they're playing jackhammer electro and "nu-rave" nonsense by the likes of Justice and the entire Ed Banger label, a post-Daft Punk lot that's fun at first and incredibly monotonous over time. As Grefe puts it, "There's no push and pull or playing off the audience. I'm not saying I like mellow, sweet, lyrical blah-blah-blah, but some of the stuff coming out right now is unbelievably grating — to the point where it's tuneless. That doesn't make me want to dance; it just beats me over the head for an hour until I'm tired."

Enter Pink Skull's long-awaited LP debut, *Zeppelin 3* (Free News Projects), due out in early 2008 after a pair of promising 2006 EPs (*Unicorn Harpoon*, *Blast Yr Akk*) and the soon-to-be-released "Gonzo's Cointreau" 12-inch. Now a full live band featuring Grefe (keys/vocals/percussion) and longtime friend Justin Geller (drum programming/visuals/engineering) at its core — alongside Jeremy Gewertz (drums), Sam Murphy (guitar) and Mike Hammel (bass) — Pink Skull's gone against the grain and recorded a brave mix of drone



Hear Pink Skull on the CP Playa.

Pink Skull



Words by Andrew Parks | Photo by Michael T. Regan

tones ("Ssilt"), scrambled brain waves ("Fuck 'Dead or Canadian,' Let's Play Homeless Guy or Arthur Baker") and absolutely sick dance songs (the ambient, Orb-like techno of "Bubblelog Aftermath," the acid builds and IDM breaks of "Get In").

"We wanted to make something like [The Chemical Brothers'] *Dig Your Own Hole*," explains Grefe. "That's a dance record that happens to be dynamic and perfect — a real collection of tracks. There isn't a fucking thing wrong with it. Look, the older you get, the more you want out of your music. It's a little cheesy, sure, but going to raves since I was 18 taught me that DJing

[and dance music] is supposed to be about a journey — taking people somewhere, you know?"

(a_parks@citypaper.net)

- **Membership:** Julian Grefe, Justin Geller, Jeremy Gewertz, Sam Murphy, Mike Hammel
- **Circle:** Dave P, Steven Bloodbath, 2 Many DJs, S PRCSS, Plastic Little, Andrew Jeffrey Wright, Noah Lyon, Isaac Linn
- **Labels:** Rvng Intl., Free News Projects, ToneArm
- **Site:** www.pinkskull.com
- **Marquee:** Fri., Nov. 30, Fels Planetarium, Franklin Institute, 222 N. 20th St., 215-448-1200

■ DJS DANCING INTO THE NEXT DAYS OF DISCO