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# ARNAUD REBOTINI

## LOVE IN C MINOR

**Tired of the same-sounding laptop sound, the front man of Black Strobe plugs back his drum machines and keyboards to write the breathtaking “Music Components”. Let’s party!**

**W**hen we left off, he was the front man and singer of Black Strobe, boasting full frontal guitars on the 2007 “Build your own church”. This raging rock record took on a diabolical life of its own on stage. Arnaud Rebotini comes back with a surprising record, a huge slap in the face that marks a radical return to machines and to a pure and contemporary techno sound. As usual, this character takes us completely by surprise. It’s as if this essential yet discreet figure of the French electro scene liked to go against the tide. He honed his skill in the 90’s on the POF label, when techno was far from being mainstream, then became a salesman at the vinyl specialized

Paris store Rough Trade, when everyone was switching to CD – a gig which enabled him to guide a generation of Paris clubbers, DJ’s and musicians alike. In 1997, the “French Touch” takes off, but he plays it dark by creating Black Strobe alongside Ivan Smagghe. Later on, we spotted him strolling around with his eerie and elegant Zend Avesta project. And today, when music has become dematerialized and computer plug-ins have relegated most mythical keyboards to the dustbin, Mister Rebotini has decided to compose an album using only machines. The result is a breathtaking album, where the shadows of the pioneers from Detroit dance with their most revered followers. Arnaud Rebotini has hit a masterstroke.

### **Where did the idea of going back to analog come from?**

It goes back a little while. With Black Strobe, we were asking ourselves how to transition virtual synthesizers from our records to our concerts. I had been converted to that type of synthesizer for a long time, and all Black Strobe's remixes were done this way, but those virtual synthesizers did not satisfy me live. So step-by-step I brought back my TR-808, my SH-101, connected them together and decided to do a live techno concert, bringing me back to my first steps into this world. At the beginning, I did not want to make an album, but just present something live that would hold its own. Then Fred Gien from Citizen heard them, and asked me for an album.

### **The starting point of this album is therefore the live aspect?**

Yes. Black Strobe is a dance-rock band, with guitars, drums, etc. This album was born out of the will to do a real techno concert, without a laptop, just connecting the machines to one another. I wanted to stay in the world of electronic music but at the same time keeping this musician way of doing things. When I got in front of my machines, it felt so natural; I might as well have done it my whole life. The pleasure of encountering these sounds once again was a revelation. When you turn on a synthesizer, you are playing an instrument that's a part of the legacy of music. A laptop, on the other hand, is still the machine that you email from.

### **It seems as though people are getting tired of always hearing the same sounds coming out of their software...**

This is not the software's fault, but it's a problem that's inherent to the Dance Music genre in general: everyone copies everyone. In truth, today, the technology has grown in such a way that it's very simple to make music, especially electronic music, so the focus has become on taste and aesthetical choices. That's why you have these star

producers that can't do anything technically: it doesn't really matter in the end, it's their taste that makes a difference.

### **When working with machines, didn't you fear sounding old school invertedly?**

No. Virtual synthesizers are only the copies of those old school machines, so you might as well stick with the original.

### **Playing live with machines is a much more physical exercise, and a much riskier one than using a laptop live. What's in it for you? Excitement, gratification?**

It's gratifying in the sense that a lot of people come up to me and ask me "where's your laptop?" When you really dig electronic music, you realize how much these machines are real instruments with which you develop a true emotional bond. Of course, they have their downfall, for one it's a hassle to carry around... When I take the plane to play live, I need 3 tickets: one for me, one for a handler, and one for the machines!

### **Have you ever had a technical problem with those machines?**

Of course, but there's always a way out of it, unlike with a computer. I had a battery problem with my TR-909 and the memory went blank. So I had to rewrite everything in direct. That's the core concept of a live, though: you can play what you want, when you want. One day, in Montreal, I played two hours at an after party, just improvising. It was magical!

### **Contrary to Black Strobe, there are no vocals on Music Components?**

I didn't want vocals, even though I was pressured to add them. It didn't fit my concept of making club music that you could listen to at home, with nice harmonies. I thought a lot about Carl Craig's first album, *Landcruising*, which I often listen to. It's one of the great records of the history of electronic music.



*„Back in the days, a DJ used to collect records, now they collect hard drives!“*



*„At the end of the day, I went back to those basic things that have made people dance for the past 20 years and adapted them to this time and age.“*

**You can feel different influences on this album. Audion comes to mind...**

I'm really glad you brought this up, because I really like Audion. There is also an Afro Beat influence. I listened to a lot of soul and old house music: the first Cassius album, Motorbass... Nitzer Ebb and the whole electro-funk movement were important as well.

**Do you think the chords of Music Components evoke the more somber side of Black Strobe ?**

I don't know if it's the dark side of Black Strobe. I've always liked the electro-funk vibe of a track like Planet Rock. Listen to the harmonies on it, you'll see, it isn't exactly happy go-lucky. Computer World, by Kraftwerk, it doesn't really exactly push you to pop open a nice bottle of wine [laughs]! However, maybe you feel this tone because I made all those tracks in C minor. That might be Cerrone connecting with me unconsciously with his "Love in C Minor"... [Laughs]

**You're going back to machines, to the actual physical object, at a time**

**when music is dematerializing. What do you think about this new way of consuming music, Myspace, illegal downloading...**

The loss of the physical support anguished me profoundly... Back in the days, a DJ used to collect records, now they collect hard drives! I love going record shopping, going to a record store, or even filing the records I order online. There's a fetishist side to this. But all this is gone and you can't go against this: why pay when you can get it for free? The business has become more centered on concerts, with the kids having more money to spend on this since they're not buying records. Somewhere, this puts you in a position where you have to play live again, as it was before the record industry came along. The record industry is just a short time in the history of music. In a way it's good, music's true place is live.

**Let's talk about Ivan Smagghe: are you still not talking to each other?**

I have no news from him.

**Why did he leave Black Strobe?**

Ivan was in the studio until the end of the recording of the album. It's right before the release date that the shit hit the fan... He wanted to do interviews only by typing the answers, when he could find the time to do it. I didn't agree, I wanted to do face to face interviews. That's when it all started. There had always been tensions between us, and I myself was going through some pretty hard times personally... We've always had our disagreement, Ivan and I, and that's always been how we worked, in a constant state of tension that gave out a good result. All broke loose with the album. It's not easy to work with someone like him, who's considered a star. When I met people at parties, they would talk how great his last mix was, even though I had done it. It wasn't easy to go through this, or when I was reading online "what a genius, he even plays piano and guitar" when I knew full well he hadn't touched that particular track. For sure, that didn't help maintain the precarious balance.

**At the end, do you regret working with such strong personalities? At one time, the rumor went that Siskid was the one doing everything in Black Strobe.**

Sometimes I tell myself that I don't have the looks. If I need to be thin and do coke to be respected... Sorry, I drink a lot of red wine and I weight 250 pounds.

**Will you ever work with Ivan again?**

You know, we worked together for 10 years; I think we've had a good run...

**How was it being the singer and front man in Black Strobe?**

I loved it, but it wasn't easy, as it wasn't a natural role for me. People used to get on my back over stupid things as well, like my French accent when I sang in English. You'd think they've never heard Bjork [laughs]

**Would you do remixes for pop stars?**

I don't think I will have the opportunity. Well, I did remix David Guetta. That's someone I like a lot. In his last album,

honestly, there are some killer bass lines and great song writing. Give me David Guetta over many of those hyped up young producers.

**What turns you on in music right now?**

African music, soul in general, 80's funk, a band like the Bar-Kays. I am also a big fan of Carl Craig; I think he's evolved in a nice way.

**The reaction to your album has been great. People like Laurent Garnier and Chloe...**

That pleases me a lot, because those are people I respect. I think that's because on this album, I went back to the fundamentals of electronic music. At the end of the day, I went back to those basic things that have made people dance for the past 20 years and adapted them to this time and age.

**You are a mutiproject artist, with Black Strobe, Zend Avesta, and**

**Rebotini... Which musical direction can we expect from you next?**

I don't know. Black Strobe will come back pretty soon, with a single, and probably a new album, a more electronic record, with a gospel tone.

**Gospel? Will you be touring churches? Is this due to the 50's Elvis side of Arnaud Rebotini?**

More Jerry Lee Lewis than Elvis. I've always had a fascination for American rock from the 40's and 50's, be it black or white. I've always found this era to have common points with Dance. All in all, I've always been fascinated by the mixing of things that do not seem like a natural match. The next Black Strobe album will be less of a "black metal burn your own Church" kind of rock. I'm like everybody, I evolve. There are times when I want to burn churches and times when I want to go inside them. [Smiles]

**Damien Almira and Patrick Thevenin  
Photos: Bertrand Delous**

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