

Terror Danjah

By Joe Muggs

PIRATE

"The music you first have sex to stays with you for life. And for me that's Jungle. Wherever I go, I always have that in the back of my head, some Roni Size or V Recordings-style tune, fast and furious!" Sitting in the sun outside a bar in Stratford, East London, Terror Danjah laughs genially at his adolescent memories. The day after this interview he has a DJ gig in Berlin, and is due to appear at the Glastonbury festival in a Hyperdub showcase. He is now in demand as a founder of Grime and inspiration for dubstep, but from his very first sexual explorations and DJ gigs to the "Mentasm" and "Amen" sounds in his new Planet Mu EP, *Power Grid*, that Junglist impulse has indeed always been with him.

A bashment fan from primary school age, Terror Danjah was 12 when Jungle began to emerge in 1992. He became hooked, and started DJing the following year as the sound found its footing. "I grew up in Forest Gate [in the London Borough of Newham], where I live now, but I had family in Birmingham, or I'd be in places like Tottenham," he says, "so people always thought I was from somewhere else."

Sociable, but something of an outsider, he felt at home among the constantly shifting and overlapping crews, cliques and radio stations of the Jungle scene: "In 1996, me and D Double landed a show on Future FM through a mate of mine, Tempo, who at the time had an MC called Footsie, so you can see the connection [D Double E and Footsie would later form Newham Generals]. Then there was Raw, which I think became Raw Mission FM, on Fresh FM's old dial, but we got taken to Rinse by DJ Rips who now runs drumandbassworldwide.co.uk, who happens to be [Roll Deep-affiliated Grime DJ] Karnage's uncle, but ran Rinse with Geeneus. I remember Karnage as a little kid sitting on the table in the kitchen where

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the broadcast was done, watching... it's mad how it comes around."

Danjah had no interest in Garage, but members of his original Reckless Kru, including Scratcha DVA, Hyper, Bruza and Lethal, eventually persuaded him to try making Garage beats. "It was stupid," he laughs again, "I made a million drum 'n' bass tunes, then the third Garage one I tried, even though I didn't like Garage, got signed to Solid City, along with Wiley's "Know We", Pay As You Go Cartel, So Solid." Realising that this was where the money was at, he went about creating a template that Garage DJs could play but also suited his tastes, throwing a love of funk inherited from his older brothers and sisters and the rolling rhythms of Jungle into a "half-stepping, hiphop-influenced, but hard-hitting" sound. This became bundled together with the very different Grime sounds that Jammer, Jon E Cash and Wiley were beginning to make. "A journalist name," says Danjah ruefully, "we were all [comically affronted voice] 'Nah, my music's not dirty!' but eventually you just go with it!"

The years 2002–04 were a golden era for the Grime producer: "It was 50/50 producer and MC then, and the tracks were for dancing as much as anything, before the MCs decided they had to be 'artists'," Danjah remembers. He visibly lights up when talking about dashing between pirate stations, passing on tunes, watching a DJ's phone "go crazy with 80, 100 missed calls" wanting to know what the track was the first time they played his still radical-sounding 2004 Grime-soul track "So Sure", in collaboration with Sadie Ama and Kano. His After Shock label was at the heart of Grime, with almost every major vocalist on the scene voicing his tracks. But, he admits,

"Everyone thought they were going to follow Dizzee's success but then someone would offer European distribution and we'd be – typical black man thing – 'Nah, he's trying to rob us'. There was too much chasing our own tails."

Winding up After Shock in 2007, Danjah was at a low point. "But then I started to remember that these dubstep guys had been playing my tunes since day one," he says, "and they'd made a success of the music they loved without compromising, but we hadn't noticed because we'd had our heads in the clouds!" He self-released the increasingly instrumental-led *Hard Drive* double CD and his free download track "Zumpi Hunter"; then meetings with long-time supporter Kode9, Planet Mu's Mike Paradinas ("a legend" says Danjah), and young Bristolian Joker, who encouraged him to return to DJing, changed everything. "Hyperdub, Planet Mu are the future," he enthuses. "Instead of doing what they think the industry wants, they do what they want and let people come to them."

"I tell young artists now, do it yourself," he continues. "You can have £500 a show, but get it for ten years – or you can go the industry route, the pop route, take the million pounds, but have someone else control your music and spend the million anyway because you have to live that lifestyle." With his own label Hard Drive ready to launch, protégés like Rude Kid and DOK making waves, and initiatives like the Butterz show on Rinse FM and Glasgow's Numbers label putting the emphasis back on Grime instrumentals, he is quietly confident that he is leading the way to "a new Grime producers' era – but this time we've got our eyes open." □ The *Power Grid* EP is out now on Planet Mu

