

BERLIN UNDERGROUND

Funky Ass Minimal with Germany's Tom Clarke



100% 20

Thomas Haertel started to DJ in 1992 – a time when the German techno scene was far from what you would term flourishing. It was an era where the sound lacked its own identity – and where there were only a handful of labels and producers representin'. Thus, his name change to Tom Clarke was a product of the economic impossibilities that surrounded German techno in the early 1990s. "It's funny – most of the German DJs from my generation took on English names - Steve Bug, Ellen Alien or Sammy Dee." Regardless though, he is convinced that the name is irrelevant and the importance of personality and the quality of one's work, far more significant.

In time, Clarke would find much of his taste in music came from the influence of his older stepbrother – a rock DJ – and one with a considerable collection of records. He recalls spending hours looking at the pictures on the covers and being attracted to vinyl. "I was spending all my spare cash on a wide range of music and playing my record collection to friends. I used two tape recorders and a single turntable and fused hip hop, rock and disco.

Chicago and Detroit were defining influences in my life." Later, he would take on the world with his skills behind the turntables and in the studio. He would also work as Schach Matt and X-Men – projects involving various friends on his old imprint, Gold Plate. And since its demise over issues with direction, he established Highgrade Records and Laufwerk Music. The former is "still alive and growing day by day. For this label, I look for artists with fresh sounds and faces - good honest dance music without being too commercial." He is also known for his work as Klark Teknik and Magnetic Base. The latter is his most recent endeavor: "for this project I work with a friend who I have known for ever and he comes from the funk and hip hop scene, which means he has a totally different style of producing, adding a special touch to the productions and distinguishing them from my other stuff. The productions are more open for different styles."

In all, Tom likes to be recognised for putting his personal touch on production work and remixes. He has worked with all manner of greats including Alexander Kowalski – someone who hails from the same "village of Berlin as me – and somebody that I have known for quite a long

time." And like his compatriot, his music refuses to be categorised. His productions and DJ sets encompass anything from electro, house to techno. "It basically just depends on my mood. Even after hearing some good material out in a club at the weekend that influences me sometimes too." His artist album *King Tide* was hailed in music circles as a defining moment – "a dance album from a DJ for DJs" and he pledges "another album next year, although one with an emphasis on covering a larger spectrum of styles."

Today, alongside Tom Clarke, Berlin's sound aesthetic is reinvigorated once again. DJ Rush and Richie Hawtin have re-established themselves there – the sorts of paradigm shifts which give Tom the energy required to stay motivated; to stay ahead. And with assurances that his Australian performances will be filled with "deep minimal-funky-ass-shakin' goodness," Tom Clarke might be a name that you haven't heard before – but one you'll likely remember.

By Rezo Kezerashvili

Catch Tom Clarke this Sunday October 9 at Honkytonks