

Interviewed by Crazy Mike

ESP has probably produced for most of Sydney's current hip hop acts. From Brethren, Trey, Mass MC and now, the Degenerates, ESP (who is also part of Etnik Tribe) is taking his crew, The Dominion, from behind the mixing desk and into the spotlight.

What are the reasons that led you to becoming a producer?

Well, I first got into DJing from high school - Balmain High. We had a radio show every lunch time, so I applied. [I] got a spot once a week and from there I got into DJing thanks to my Drama teacher, Mr Dooley. Soon after meeting new people in the Graf scene I was introduced to Avene. He had the full bit, a 4 track, drum machines, and soon after he bought a MPC60. I was amazed. Avene being a full technology freak bought a MPC3000 and then sold his MPC60 to me back in 93. The rest is now history.

Over the years, has hip hop production in Australia, and the elements surrounding production, changed?

The only thing that has changed is technology and with that you get the sound of Hip Hop to change as well. That's why you get a lot of producers using older equipment on purpose to keep that rough feeling. Digital sound's too clean for hip hop. So, it's harder to get that rough feeling in your mixdowns. The thing with hip hop is to make and sample something that has never been sampled before in a hip hop track. Peacefender (Khaled Sabsabi) is the only producer that I have met to do shit like that. He takes out a portable DAT player and samples things like toilets flushing, washing machines, background noises in take away shops, video players ejecting. You think of it and he's probably done it.

Who were the artists/musicians, both hip hop and non hip-hop, that largely influenced you both as a person and as a producer?

Well, Greek music definitely. My dad used to be in a Greek band. I used to watch them rehearse every weekend many years ago. On many occasions they'd have jams at home - like freestyling. I grew up listening to pop, Greek, hard rock, funk/soul like Midnight Star, 5 Star, S.O.S Band, Rick James and hip hop it was Run DMC, Grand Master Flash, Sugar Hill Gang, 2 live Crew, Ice T, Fat Boys etc.

Can you explain the reasons for starting up your own Dominion?

It came about a couple of years ago when I started to get into youth work and met Peacefender. I was already working with Et-nik Tribe and DJ Bonez at the time. It didn't happen until I became closer with Peacefender. He was working with Far Q which broke up to form the Exorcists. Peacefender got a grant to do a hip hop community based CD, he asked me to produce it along side with him. That's where I met Styre. I met Mass MC at his radio show on 88.9 before he was banned from Australian radio for life. From there I came up with the idea to start a crew called the Dominion - an Independent organisation to over come the flaws of the dependent organisations. I forwarded the idea to Peace Fender 3, and he was cool with idea, so from there the Dominion was born. Later on Bonez was asked to be involved in the development of the crew. Using all resources, Bonez, Peace Fender3 and myself makes the crew more powerful in the sense you've got 3 independent artists that can hold their own that are working together and networking through individual resources to meet the demand of raw hip hop. The Degenerates are the latest group to join the family. Hijak won the MC battle in December 98' when Pumpkinhead toured here.

How critical are you of your own work?

As time goes by, each track I produce, each track I record, the more critical I become of my work. If it sounds OK then that's not good enough for me. It has to be ON POINT. If you listen to

hip hop on a global level, they have a certain standard of quality of music and delivery of lyrics - not just in the US, Europe, Japan. So, if I ever compare my music it'll be on a global level.

Which producers, both Australian and overseas, do you admire, and for what reasons?

In Australia Peacefender,

1. The tracks that he's produced over the past 15 years of Australian hip hop are some of the most innovative production I've heard using breaks and weird sounds.
2. Peacefender's beats today burn anything I've worked on. He's taken the old break-beat days and progressed it to a modern day sound that you'll here anywhere in the world with his own twist to it. Krush, Vadim, and Shadow watch out.

Overseas, E-swift has an influence on my production as well simply because when you hear a track from E-swift it constantly progresses, it's not the same loop or sound through out a whole track, every 4-8 bars there will be a change, whether it's the drums or the melody. Also, Dr. Dre is another producer I look up to due to his ways of thinking and working. Reading an interview just before the Chronic was released he made a statement: "I'm going to own everything from my own label to my own film, publishing, etc." To this day Dre has achieved all that and more. The life of an entrepreneur.

My production would be a cross between East coast and West coast underground with a slight middle eastern feel.

Would you like to see your music, and the Dominion label, to become more accessible to the public?

Yes. That is the mission of the Dominion, to make it more accessible to the public and break down all stereotypical views the public has on hip hop and to rectify the problem the major labels have caused on the youth of Australia - Gangster Rap.

Where do you see production for Australian hip hop production heading in the future?

Hip Hop production will grow, Majors are all ready paying rock producers to produce hip hop and R&B. You'll see more hip hop instrumentalists releasing product and eventually the majors (labels) will pick up on the underground scene and get the hip hop producers and Dj's to work for them. Our job is not to get greedy and produce a new Cherry album or something bad like that. We should show some pride in our scene and our music.

What does the present and future hold for DJ E.S.P.?

Work on more hip hop and get the first generation of the Dominion out there. Get more involved with putting on events, as well as run more hip hop community programs for up-and-coming emcees, dj's, breakers and graff writers. And as soon as I fix all my equipment and upgrade it, I'll be working on an instrumental record.