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SHOP. TALK.

DJ HEATHER At Chicago's Dusty Groove

By Christine Hsieh

Dusty Groove is the type of record store that can bring a DJ to tears. Not in that stereotypical cooler-than-thou record store way, with indie-rock- or goth-inclined hipsters scowling from behind large bins of aged white labels at anyone who dares to ask for the latest hit from the newest pop star on the block. This is the store to find that special record from childhood, the forgotten gems of soul and funk and the classics upon which modern music is based.

DJ Heather, one of Chicago's hardest-working house DJs (and a member of the respected Superjane collective, with DJ Colette, Dayhota and Lady D), remembers pawing her way through rows of records when the store occupied just one floor amid the hubbub of the Wicker Park neighborhood. Now relocated a few streets away, Dusty Groove occupies much more spacious environs, boasting three floors piled high with records for the picking.

"Dusty Groove really stands out for its selection of specialty hip-hop, jazz and funk," Heather remarks as she rifles quickly through the record racks. "If you're looking for a particular song—say there's a sample that you've heard about, and you really want the original piece of vinyl—nine times out of 10, they'll have it here." And indeed they do. James Brown, Soul Crusaders Orchestra and The Temptations are all present and accounted

for, but for a price: Bobby Byrd's "I'm Coming, I'm Coming"/"Hang It Up" 7-inch is tagged for \$34.99. Heather pulls a few classic hip-hop tunes out but, with a grimace and a shrug, returns them to the stacks. "If you're not going to be happy with the price, that's another thing," she says. "It's interesting to see what people think of records in terms of their worth. One person's doo-doo is another person's gold, so to speak."

Although her deep, funky house sets are garnering her more and more attention these days, Heather likes to keep things low-profile. No special attention, no chart hits, just solid music. While Heather's notoriety as a DJ continues to grow, it's refreshing to see that her attitude does not. The atmosphere at Dusty Groove doesn't really allow for that, anyway. The shop has an almost meditative ambience to it, and on this quiet Monday afternoon, DJ Heather browses inconspicuously with other shoppers—young, old, hip and square. For Heather, this vibe is more than welcome—she returned to town late the previous night after throwing down some Chi-town-style house in the main room at London's infamous Ministry of Sound superclub.

"This is the type of place you may come to—if you're able—maybe once a week or a couple of times a week just to see what's in stock, because the stock tends to turn over quite a bit," she says. "And they have compilations that you may not normally see and vinyl you know you can't find anywhere else but here. You might look online, or you might just come in here to look around, too. When I

was working at Gramophone [Chicago's famed record emporium], I found that I became a vinyl whore. I would spend my money on records but not really appreciate everything. I didn't listen to all aspects of a song. It's nice to go into a store like Dusty Groove and have the thrill of the search and find a gem. If it's an astounding piece, it's another step into learning more about music, another label or another artist. It's about opening more and more doors."

Traveling around the world for various gigs has its perks, as well. "People always give me new material on CDs, so I find myself playing a lot more CDs lately," she says. "That's kind of like my own record store!" Today, though, she's picking through Dusty Groove's more affordable selection of hip-hop and house tunes and coming away with some material that will work well both at home and at the next club she plays.

De La Soul Art Official Intelligence: Mosaic Thump (Instrumentals) (Tommy Boy)

I never got around to buying the instrumentals. I'm into beats before lyrics, so it's nice to have material to just play—especially if it's downtempo stuff, too. You can also throw your own a cappellas over it and make your own arrangements. There's more flexibility to it.

DJ Jazzy Jeff The Magnificent (BBE)

His productions have always been great—he's the guy behind Jill Scott's last album.

And this is his first feature full-length ever. I've heard great reviews from word-of-mouth. BBE is a really great label, as well. It's also two pieces of vinyl, and it's 15 bucks. I'm going to pick it up because I like his jazzy productions. I really like his approach to beats in terms of the chill aspect, and the arrangements are really quite nice. I thought I'd try it out. A lot of producers of his age or of his experience don't just rely on hip-hop, necessarily. It's all about the amalgamation of sounds. The best producers don't listen to just hip-hop all day long. It's soul, it's reggae, it's jazz—it's everything. The kids who make me happy in terms of production are the ones constantly being influenced by other sounds all the time.

Peven Everett "Testin' Me"/"One More Time" (ABB Soul)

Peven's a Chicago person—he used to do a Sunday gig at Madbar every once in a while, and he's worked with other artists like Roy Davis. I haven't seen this before—I just saw it on the shelf—but I really enjoy what he does. He's a great, talented multi-instrumentalist. I really admire what he can do: He plays trumpet, guitar and keyboards; he's a great vocalist; and he's just an all-around really good guy. I want to give him some support, and, hopefully, he's got a little Soundscan going so he can have a report of a sale! I'm hoping that this will do well for him. And, hey, it's \$5.99! So if it's good, great. If it's not that great, it's cool I still have it.

Mos Def "Universal Magnetic"/"If You Can Huh, You Can Hear" (Rawkus)

This is a reissue of an older single on the label. I bought it because I never got the original single. The beats and production are pretty solid, and I like Mos Def's lyrics and approach. He seems really relaxed, yet he has a very clear vision of what he wants to say, and he knows how to lay it all out there. Mos Def is more than just an MC; he does a lot of theater productions and is involved with poets and artists of that nature. It's kind of like he's diversifying a bit more than just classifying himself as a hip-hop artist. I bought two copies, so I can work the doubles—instrumental and a cappella—and I can do tricks and all that. It's also good to have two copies because, down the line, someone else may really want this record, so you can hook someone up or trade.

Pete Rock and Grand Agent "This Is What They Meant" (Groove Attack)

Pete Rock is one of my favorite hip-hop producers, hands down. With hip-hop, you've got to change it up really quickly. It's quick mixes, making sure people aren't bored and giving a combination of old and new and original material. With hip-hop, I find the only things that always get the crowd reaction are the old-school jams that people know, radio-friendly and radio material—the more familiar, the better in a club setting. And you want to get girls dancing, as well as the guys, because if the girls aren't dancing, the boys won't stay!

Tweet Southern Hummingbird (Elektra)

I bought the CD when it first came out, not based on the first single, "Oops (Oh My)," but based on another one. "Oops" is a big single about, um, self-pleasuring, so to speak, but the whole album is totally opposite of that single. It's a break-up album, which I love, because I broke up a while ago. So all those things that I'm thinking, she's saying. The songwriting is amazing—it's really sparse. I'd use this in a downtempo set. There are also a couple of tracks that you can put under a house beat—they'd fit perfectly. There are some bootleg versions of a couple of the songs. Overall, it's radio-friendly pop R&B, but it's done really well. It's a quality album.

Various Artists Soundbombing 3 (Rawkus)

This has been out for a little while, but I haven't picked it up yet. I like the label, and it's got lots of kids on it that I like. Q-Tip is on here, Kool G. Rap—it's just a good compilation. I really feel The Roots with Talib Kweli, The Beatnuts and "The Life" with Styles P. and Pharoahe Monch. I'd play it out or listen to it on my own. If you're into buying vinyl, it's a nice one-piece to buy, and you'll definitely find something solid on here.

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