

Brighton beats memoirs

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Located on the southern coast of England, the seaside city of Brighton attracted the partying Prince Regent in the early nineteenth century and has been hopping ever since. In the past fifteen years, the city has fostered a thriving dance music scene, particularly with regard to funky breakbeat and downtempo, launching labels such as Skint, Southern Fried, Tru Thoughts and Lumenessence, and producers such as Fatboy Slim and Quantic.

It was this environment that nurtured A. Skillz (Adam Mills) and Krafty Kuts (Martin Reeves), whose full-length "Tricka Technology" was released on London's beakbeat/funk-oriented Finger Lickin' label late last year.

The two met in Krafty Kuts' Brighton record store in 1999. Older by a decade, Krafty had extensive solo credits as a producer and DJ. Though newer on the scene, A. Skillz had already demonstrated substantial talent as a drummer in a live band and as a producer.

Not long afterward, they began working together, and in May 2003 released the 12-inch single for "Peaches." Featuring the vocals of L.A.-based rapper Droop Capone and singer Yolanda, the track was backed with the stunning, James Brown-sampling "Tricka Technology." The single for "Gimme the Breaks," featuring legendary rapper Kurtis Blow in a reinterpretation of his own 1979 classic "The Breaks," followed later that year. It included as B-sides a different version of "Tricka Technology" – this one featuring the vocals of Afrika Bambaataa's son TC Izlam – and the track "Ain't It Funky." The latter was reconceived on the album as "Roll Over

Baby" with vocalist Ashley Slater, best known for his work in Freakpower with Norman Cook (aka Fatboy Slim).

A significant contributor to the full-length was Lukasz "Dr. Luke" Gottwald, a New York-based producer who has collaborated with Liquid Todd and Ursula 1000, and plays guitar for the Saturday Night Live band. Gottwald co-wrote, arranged, or produced seven of the album's 16 tracks and played all guitars and bass.

The album begins with a short introduction and is punctuated by similar brief interludes between every few songs; the first full track is the album version of "Tricka Technology." Unlike the single version, it features the vocals of TC Izlam almost throughout. Lyrics are not the album's strong suit; vocals on this and other tracks are sometimes repetitive or uninspired. However, A. Skillz and Krafty Kuts have a talent for creating catchy hooks. Some of the album's standout tracks are the horn-driven "Ill Type Sound," featuring TC Izlam; the R&B-flavored "Give You That," featuring Obi and Real Elements; and "On Your Own," an album-concluding downtempo surprise featuring the breathy vocals of Cathy Burton. Overall, "Tricka Technology" aims to rock the party with funky beats, and in this goal it succeeds.

How would you describe your sound?

Much of it seems to have a party hip-hop feeling to it, but at the same time you're also considered to be breaks producers.

Krafty Kuts: This is a concept that I have always wanted to do from the first time I started making music, but never had the opportunity to do until now. Previously most of my work has been breaks, but when I hooked up with A. Skillz the time was right to make this funky hip-hop LP.

My sound is hard to define but it is taking influences from the music I love and grew up on, i.e., hip-hop, electro, funk, and disco, and putting them into a melting pot and bringing the funk back. I just love to see people dance, and that is what I feel my music does. I don't like to be pigeonholed with my music, but breaks is the music I have been making for the last seven years and it is only recently that it has been getting the credit it deserves. I love the way breakbeat is progressing and moving forward, and I am actually in the process of starting a breaks LP on my own imprint, Against The Grain.

A. Skillz: "Tricka Technology" as an album is definitely more hip-hop than breakbeat, but it's influenced by funk more than anything. We wanted to create a good positive vibe, which is what we think we have done. Finger Lickin' is traditionally a breakbeat label but funk is the common factor in all their releases.

Did you both grow up in Brighton? How did it affect you musically? What did you each listen to as kids, and what were the first records you ever bought? Martin, do you still run a record store in Brighton?

KK: We both grew up in a place just outside Brighton and I moved into Brighton over the last few years. Living here is very inspirational as it is a hive of activity musically with great club nights, record labels, and DJs. In fact, Brighton is a little London by the sea.

As a kid I listened to the Jam, 2-Tone (the Beat, Madness, the Specials) and then moved into early rap and electro. I was a huge fan of Kraftwerk, Kool and the Gang ('69-'76), James Brown, Blue Note Records – I just love funky music. The first record I got actually was given to me; it was an amazing funk