

Clubbing **2000**

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Clubbing 2000

ISDN linkups, interactive clubbing, futuristic venues, web casts... as the pace of technological change hots up, clubland's tech obsessed players tear along in its wake. What happens next? We sent ROB GREEN in search of a vision of millennial clubbing.

Everyone loves a good night out. Since the earliest pop music, youth culture has evolved through clubs, but no-one could have predicted the massive dance revolution that would dominate the 90s. For the first time, in the late 80s, dance music was served up by a DJ, accompanied by stimulants such as Ecstasy and Speed and garnished with freaky lasers and strobes. There was no booze in sight until the

government enforced a law that said 'raves' had to have licensed bars. It's likely that this is one of the catalysts that has wounded clubland in recent years. However, music, movement, and social gatherings are almost as important to our existence as food. They encompass freedom, which is why clubbing will surely continue in various guises as long as we see the sun rise.

The end of this millennium is almost upon us, and it will probably bring new ideas about technology and culture. What surprises could be in store? What technology is waiting for us? These questions will be answered in the not-so-distant future. Club culture could go in one of two directions: it may grow and commercialise further, or, and more likely, become more underground.

Either way, it is here to stay and will constantly change.

clubbing in the beginning?

"I think you first go clubbing to pull birds don't ya? Obviously you get absorbed by the music and the drugs, and the feeling of the whole thing."

What did clubbing do for you apart from killing brain cells?

"It gave me a career, it gave me a purpose. I used to throw parties because I wanted all my mates to have a wicked time ... and we did! I used to promote the Deja Vu nights and all sorts of club nights around London. It changes, it evolves, it's fashion, it's total youth culture. The fashion and the music that starts out in clubs is usually followed by everyone else a few years later.

"Youth culture has always been in clubs in one way or another, even in the days of the Beatles at the Cavern. Clubs are just places to congregate."

What will the future bring for clubland?

"In the future, people will probably have more leisure time on their hands, and there'll probably be more interactive clubbing going on. There will be link-ups from other clubs around the world and stuff like that. It can only get bigger and better, can't it? I think that the underground music will still come from the smaller clubs, though."

Will you be at the centre of the scene in the year 2000?

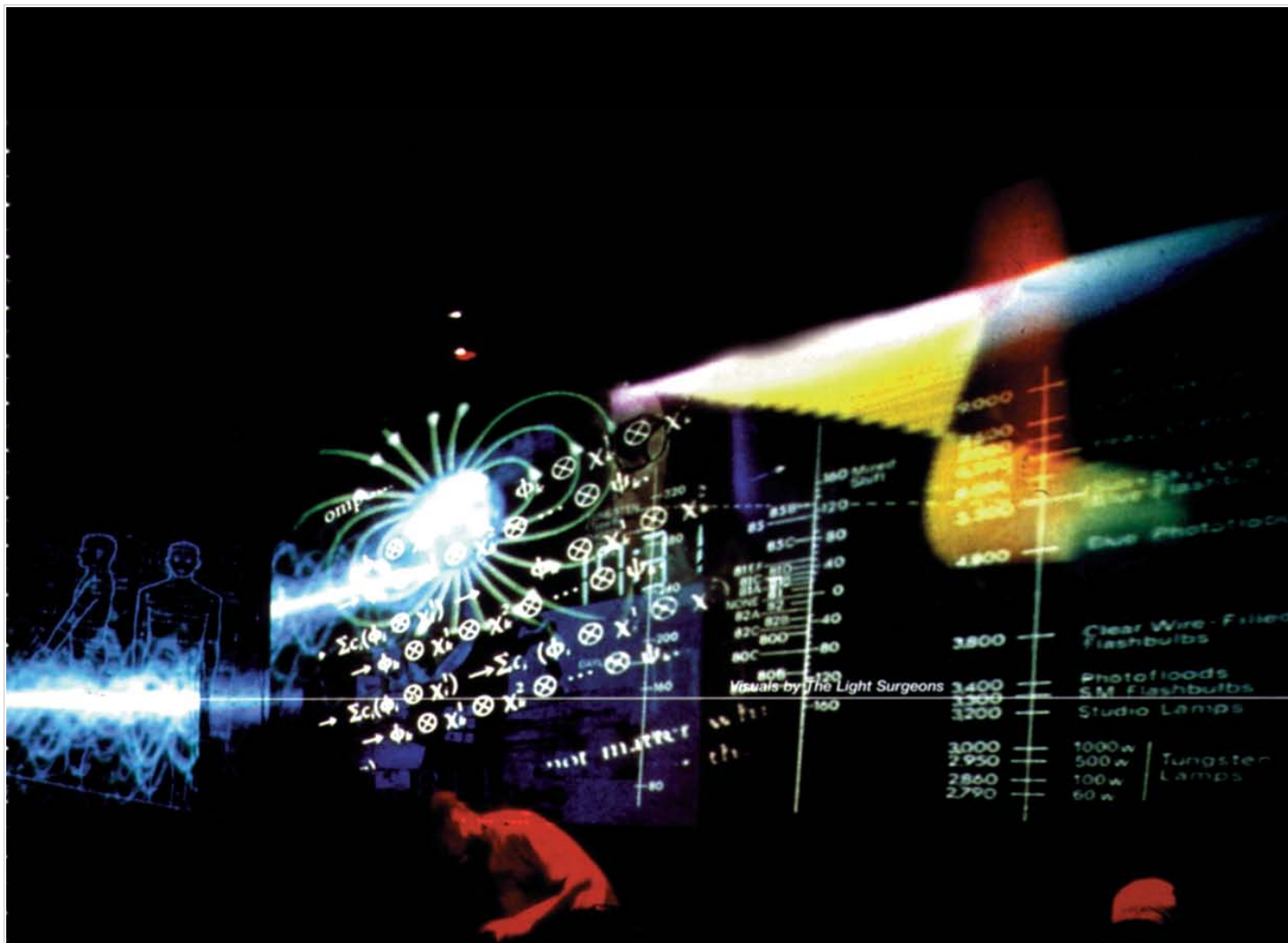
"Yeah, We always are! We're conducting it! We'll probably be doing

Veteran party animal, DJ, producer and one-time promoter **Barry Ashworth of the Dub**

Pistols has one or two ideas about clubland's origins and where it's likely to go.

What attracted you to

Barry Ashworth - the Dub Pistols



gigs from our bedrooms by then. As far as music goes, everything goes full circle. It all gets thrown into the pot and keeps moving around. Whatever was trendy ten years ago is likely to be trendy now. It's a ten year cycle."

Will the government ever succeed in getting rid of the club scene?

"Nah, there'll always be an underground scene in some form or another. You can never hold a good thing down!"

What sort of music can you see yourself making in the next millennium?

"Brazilian/Australian/Digeridoo/Spaghetti Western/hip-hop/gabba/house/techno!"

Few people are more likely to have ideas about millennium clubbing than futurist and audio/visual innovator, **Matt Black of Coldcut**. Last year, those 80s electronic provocateurs released *Let Us Play*, the first Coldcut album for years, and toured the US, Japan and Europe. They developed a new kind of light show for the tour which is a fascinating fusion of DJing and what they call the 'digital jockey'...

"This is about using new technology in the DJ aesthetic," explains Matt. "That was an audio/visual show that we did in conjunction with Hex. Since then, we've been developing the ideas that we used in that show for

some new dates this year, and also to use in the clubs that we're doing. We just re-vamped the Ninja club under the name Kungfusion (son of Stealth). Stealth was a brilliant club, but there comes a point when the hype starts to kill you, so we thought that rather than let that happen, we'd sink beneath the waves and pop up again unexpectedly. We've just had the first two Kungfusions and now we're moving to the 333 Club."

How do you picture the future of clubs?

"The idea of a disco club providing

thud-u-like and McDance for the E'd and lagered up consumers is not something I'm interested in. I'd be more interested in a stamp club, to be honest! For me, clubbing is not just about getting off your head and dancing to four-on-the-floor brain death. That's one type of club. For me, a club would have a living room, a chill-out space, a psychedelic electronic cinema, a video arcade, an internet cafe, a dance space and maybe a performance space. Events that fulfil quite a few of those criteria are surely the way forward."

Matt believes that as long as we're giving people more, expanding the club experience and offering performers and artists the opportunity to get involved, then that's a good thing, even if it is in the mainstream domain...

"As long as the trend is towards enriching experiences and more scope, that's good. Clubs that don't have strong visual images are not as well poised to attract attention as those that do. You've got more and more people setting up audio/visual experiments like Dynamic Syncopation who formed out of the Light Surgeons and some of their mates. There's Hextatic, there's Headspace, there's bunches of VJs and artists around. We're seeing a lot of these posse's coming together, and I think that will be a strong force in the future. To the extent that it's manifested in mainstream culture, I'm not that fussed, but undoubtedly, there will be a push for that to happen."

"It's only a matter of time before Panasonic suss out the fact that they have a market for video mixers potentially as great as DJ mixers. That could be part of an exciting wave of youth culture. They must have sold enough SL 1200's to realise what that could mean. I would also expect Sony to be more active in bringing the Playstation into the club environment. It's all very well having a



Matt Black - Coldcut

room devoted to Playstation games, but we're looking for a lot more than that. Those animated characters could be on the screen dancing with real people. There are many possibilities that are fairly obvious. Pure technology in itself is a bit of a dead end. It's exciting, but there's a lot more in the area of what I call 'spiritual technology' that is waiting to be discovered."

CCTV is Coldcut's latest technological club development, and it may well prove to be a glimpse of things to come:

"CCTV is Coldcut Television and that's a new project we've started to manifest and explore the audio/visual ideas we have. We had the first session at Kungfusion in the cinema room, and it all worked really well. I'm quite happy with the progress we're making. We're able to do a full audio/visual show combining elements of live performance, DJing and multimedia interaction from a fairly small ensemble of gear that's reasonably portable."

I wondered if Matt looked forward to, or feared a day when we could have a full-on club experience by simply putting on a headset at home.

"The present is catching up with the future William Gibson described in his classic new romantic trilogy about his vision of cyberspace. I don't think we're going to be able to jack it into our heads for full-on sensory stimulation for at least another thirty years, so it'll probably see us out, which is a pity. Our children will live for ever, which is quite a depressing thought! I think that there is a need for the meet - the real place. Until we can transform ourselves into pure energy, I think our bodies are a lot more important than many of us realise. Tech bods like me tend to get too much into their heads and their machines and not enough into their bodies. You've got to remember that all this technology we're developing is puny compared to the simplest stuff that nature has on offer. Undoubtedly, human kind is the most sophisticated technology we've come across yet."

Let me take you tripping back in time to 1992... I remember one of my friends talking me into driving to Mansfield for a new club night called Renaissance. 'Why the hell would I want to go to Mansfield?' I cried! I was then informed that it was Sasha's first residency since Shelly's in Stoke - that would have been a good enough reason for any self-respecting clubber.

So we drove there, and I remember walking through Venue 44's modest doors thinking 'is this it?' This, of course, was the chill-out lounge, and certainly not 'it'. Then we walked up some dingy stairs to what might have been the toilets, and as we opened

the doors at the top, our jaws dropped! Our eyes met the sight of a lavishly decorated hall filled with hundreds of well-dressed Renaissance clubbers losing it to the pumping, hypnotic beats of Sasha. The atmosphere was indescribable and it was an experience I shall always remember. I must have haunted that joint every other week for two years! Remembering my Renaissance schooling, I considered it appropriate to consult the Renaissance man himself - **Geoff**



Geoff Oakes

Oakes.
You helped develop a new wave of clubbing and music at Renaissance in Mansfield. Did you know what you were creating?

"My instincts as a clubber told me it was time for something fresh and new. The Hacienda and Shelly's had died and there were thousands of clubbers in the North looking for the next big thing. With Sasha, John Digweed and Ian Ossia, I knew we had our own sound and that was what gave the club its strength."

What are you doing to innovate clubbing today?

"We've been working on a project in Nottingham for the last two years and are in court for the alcohol licence in June. If we are successful, the new venue will have a massive impact on clubland. Everyone's a bit complacent. It's time new standards were set!"

Are you planning exciting visuals and production?

"Renaissance have become synonymous with lavish decor and production over the years. However, decor has now become a standard part of most club nights. We are currently working on a strong visual concept for the new club, due to open at the end of this year. Drapes, flowers and glittery logos have definitely had their day."

Where do you hope to be in the year 2000?

"Everywhere."

What kind of party will you throw on New Year's Eve 1999?

"One to match the occasion - expect the best!"

Are you already planning it?

"If I said yes, I'd be lying."

What sort of music and fashion can you imagine in Renaissance by the year 2000?

"People seem to think that there's going to be a magical transformation across the globe when the clock passes midnight on New Year's Eve 1999. Maybe we'll all be wearing silver space suits and partying on Mars. As for music, we'll be leading the way with the Nottingham venue."

Sasha began his DJing career on the rave circuit doing two-hour slots at

the end of the night to temper the hardcore sounds of Grooverider et al. He earned a good reputation for spinning uplifting house at these raves, and then moved on to reside at Shelly's. Those legendary nights set a standard in clubbing and Sasha went on to develop his sound in Renaissance, later to quit due to an disagreement. He has released several records to critical acclaim and remixed acts such as M-People and Madonna. He now has his own successful club night called Tyrant, which he takes to London venues such as The End. Of course, Sasha needs no introduction as he is now almost as famous as Barry Manilow. So what else is he up to?

"I'm still working on the same album I was working on four years ago, but I'm getting my shit together now. I'm trying to cut back on my DJing so I can



Sasha

concentrate on production.

"I've done a lot of slow stuff on the album, and there's loads of breakbeats in it. I'd love to do a film score. That's probably going to come after I've finished my album. I think film scores are getting more exciting, and a lot of Hollywood movies seem to be using British artists on their soundtracks, which is encouraging. Tyrant is my baby, and I'm trying to help Craig Richards and Lee Burridge get noticed. We do that once a month and at the moment I have a monthly residency at Cream, and Twilo in New York. We haven't found a permanent home for Tyrant yet, but it'll happen."

Is concentration on visual production important for Tyrant?

"The visual side of things is something we're limited on with Tyrant, because they're smaller clubs. We're going to be playing some bigger parties later this year, and we'll be able to concentrate on visuals more. Craig is really into the visual side of things. We're just trying to do something different."

What kind of music do you imagine us dancing to in the next century?

"That's a difficult question to answer. It's very hard to predict what will happen to music in the future, but I think there will be more breakbeats around. There are some great breakbeat DJs in the states who may break through. Some of them are still playing in their bedrooms, but they're great DJs."

"In terms of where clubbing's going to go, I think we may see the back of some of these big DJs who are letting the side down by playing cheesy, outdated records. A lot of DJ's play the same set for three months or more, and that is lazy. I think that kind of DJ will probably fade out. I think there will definitely be a new wave of DJs."

Has clubland become over-commercialised?

"The clubs that were cool and underground a few years ago, are now very mainstream places that house radio 1 DJs. Tyrant is kind of a backlash against that. I didn't want to pack Tyrant out with 2,000 people. I'd rather have 400 people who love what I do, than risk having the wrong people in the club who will spoil the night."

"I would definitely like to see the commercial element of clubbing disappear in the Year 2000. However, it has had a positive reaction financially. Jules and Tong are playing

major slots on Radio 1 and I think that has generated a lot of money for the dance industry, which can only be a good thing."

Do you believe that dance festivals will play a big role in the future of dance culture?

"Those festivals are wicked fun, they are really popular and I'm sure they'll continue, but I'm not totally comfortable playing at them."

Sometimes I mess up when I'm playing at events like Tribal Gathering. I never quite know how to do it, because I'm not used to doing those two hour slots any more. Sometimes I get it right, and sometimes I don't. To tell you the truth, I'm not 100% comfortable playing to a huge crowd. It's kind of weird, because I started out doing short slots at the end of big raves, but now I find it more difficult to put together a two-hour set in the UK than play a ten-hour set in New York. That short set that I started with, is now foreign to me. I'm not comfortable with playing banging records that have been in my box for a year, whereas a lot of other big DJ's seem quite happy with that. They all seem to have this button on their mixer which I don't know about that makes snare drum rolls!

Can you ever see yourself going to a gig with a laptop under your arm rather than a record box?

"Totally. Already, I can sit with my laptop on a plane and work on tracks that I have been doing in the studio. You can pretty much fit Pro-Tools in a box now, and I can set it up in a hotel room and work on sounds. Some of the software that's coming out on the Mac is wicked. 15 years of research has gone into some of these products, and now you can get them free on the net. Effects that would have been expensive to create ten years ago, can now be achieved with free software. A Fairlight (the first sampler) cost a quarter of a million pounds when it came out. The technology now pisses over that, and you can get it free on the net!"

"It may not be long before you can DJ in a club from a laptop. The whole physical side of DJing has problems anyway. You're throwing records on, and they sometimes get scratched and dropped on the floor."

Will ISDN be a big feature in the future with world-wide club link-ups?

"I've thought about playing via ISDN a few times. On the first Tyrant night at The End, I couldn't play because I got



offered the Madonna Mix in LA. I was going to play on camera in front of the Hollywood sign and send the signal to the club via ISDN. In the end, we bottled it because we didn't have enough time. If it had gone wrong, we would have looked like idiots. It could be cool if it was well organised. I like the idea of playing in two different clubs at the same time, but I love physically going to places like Hong Kong and Australia, and ISDN would take away some of the performance side of DJing. Future Sound Of London did it at an Essential festival last year, and I think the crowd were a bit bemused by it. I think it will open up certain avenues in the future though. ISDN is very cheap now, which is cool."

Do you think the government has

"I can't drive, so I don't know. I don't think I'll bother learning, because I live in London and I don't really need a car."

In as much as Sasha is at the cutting edge of the DJ scene, the **Light Surgeons** are state-of-the-art in theirs. The Light Surgeons are a collective of film makers who explore mixed media through multiple projections and surgeons Chris Allen, Andy Flywheel and Andy Firman are currently making waves in club and performance environments. Their clients have included artists from Ninja Tune, Mo' Wax, Wall Of Sound, Skint and Junior Boys Own, as well as organisations like The Blue Note, Essential Festivals, The Gallery and

student, I had to make short films and I was struggling to get them exhibited. I eventually gave up out of frustration. I also used to be a musician and the films that I made always mixed images and sound. Through going clubbing, I began to realise that there was a market for what I did on the club scene." Recently, the Light Surgeons have been moving their operations in a different direction and re-inventing themselves. Chris explained: "I've been taking a back seat in the last few months. I got involved with a project called Kentra at the Notre Dame off Leicester Square in April this year and Andy Weatherall exposed his new album there. The Halloween Society show short films at the Notre Dame every month and

will become the DJs of the future? "It sounds corny, but you may be right," answers an enthusiastic Andy. "The whole sound and visual thing marries. It's taking a while, but it's happening. There seem to be a lot of events that are integrating cinema - multimedia events. That's what we're interested in now. It gives the whole thing more focus and allows us to innovate."

"I wouldn't say we'd be DJs," argues Chris. "I think the whole DJ thing is going to mutate as this new technology becomes more accessible. When people realise what's possible, I think it will change our ideas of what a DJ is. The DJ scene has gone up its own arse in a way. It's just about who the name is, and the glamour of it all. It's not so

"The idea of a disco club providing thud-u-like and McDance for the E'd and laged up consumers is not something I'm interested in." (Matt Black - Coldcut)

plans for the future of dance clubs?

"There are people who have conspiracy theories that the government are controlling the drugs in clubs and making sure that they're crap and that kind of thing, but the government will never wipe it out. It's part of our culture now. Millions of people go to clubs every weekend. They seem to have a good go at the festivals with noise levels and stuff. Last year they were all over every festival, making sure that the sound was so bad that no-one could enjoy it. There are so many clubs, and so many people going out, that it would be impossible to stop. If the government banned clubbing, there would be riots all over the country. What would people do on a Saturday night?"

Will kids be swapping Sasha cards and John Digweed cards instead of football cards in the next decade?

"A lot of good things have happened to me in the last ten years, and it's hard to predict where I'll be in another ten. I think eventually, my DJ career will have to slow down out of physical necessity. I will reach a point where my career as a producer will get more serious. It's hard to balance two careers. It's not easy to DJ all weekend and then spend four or five days in the studio."

Do you think you will ever be travelling to gigs in a flying car in the next century?

many more. These three guys look set to change the face of clubbing as we know it. Here is the future according to Chris Allen and Andy Flywheel...

"We're exploring the relationship between sound and light," explains Chris. "If you play your own music over the television, you get some weird results. We experimented in the Gardening Club in the early 90's and we feel we've helped give clubbing a kind of face lift. We've still only started brushing the surface really. We're on the first rung of the ladder." "I'm a film maker," adds Andy. "As a

Kentra was kind of a post-Halloween Society mash-up which featured the Light Surgeons, Lazyeye and Eikon. They were all using our kit and we had 'film battles'.

"We did an ambitious show last November called Ocularis where we presented a cinema with 25 different projection sources - surround-vision. Inside that there were three stages where the Herbaliser was playing behind the screen. We were putting the band inside the film as it were. It was incredible."

Do you think people like yourselves

much about the music. Hopefully the future will bring us back to concentrating on the material - the music and visuals."

Whether you believe the next millennium will see us dancing to alien DJs in space clubs, or simply partying in a field, the bottom line is, dance music and clubs will continue to evolve. Somehow, I can't see us all dancing to a rock band or trancing to a chamber orchestra of a weekend, but then, stranger things have happened.

The Light Surgeons

The Light Surgeons