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"Having a mobile studio is like the ultimate buzz for me. A lot of opportunities arise when you're travelling. And previously it was almost impossible to get good high-fidelity recordings on the road. Now it's great being able to be so free and flexible."



Jamie Lidell: Controlled Collisions

By Dustin Driver

On stage, Jamie Lidell possesses an almost nuclear energy. His fingers dart at the myriad buttons on his MIDI gear. His eyes bulge. He wails. He shouts. He looks — to all appearances — ready to explode. In person, however, he is shy, soft-voiced and just a little awkward.

In short, Lidell embodies a mix of contrasts — especially when it comes to his musical themes, ideals and inspirations. He counts among his influences the likes of Al Green, Sly Stone, George Clinton and Aphex Twin. He's a soul singer, beatboxer and experimental electronic music producer. He has worked with electro-chemist Cristian Vogel and toured with Björk and Beck.

Now, as a solo artist, Lidell has produced a back-to-basics soul album, "Multiply", and continues to explore the outer reaches of electronic music in live performances across the globe. In nearly all of his endeavours, he wields an impressive arsenal of outboard gear and a PowerBook G4 running Logic Pro and Pro Tools.

Nervous Habit

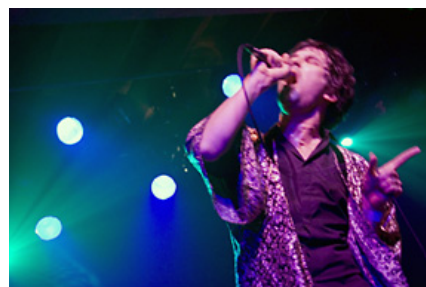
According to legend, Lidell first sang to keep the bogey monsters at bay. Afraid of the dark, the young Lidell sang into the night to triumph over his fears. The nervous habit honed his voice, transforming him into a sultry soul singer. As he matured and ventured outside of his home town of Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, Lidell became enthralled by electronic music. "The techno scene in England was amazing in about '95 and '96", he remembers. "It was a really pioneering time".

Lidell embraced the pioneering spirit of early technophiles. He began turning his natural musical talent into dance grooves using rudimentary electronic music-making gear. "I had Cubase on an Atari for years", he says. "Then I realised that I could run the program on my Mac as well. I basically fell in love with that computer and I stayed loyal to the

Lidell released his own album, "Muddlin' Gear", in 2000. Those albums shared a similar quirky electronic sound, heavily influenced by Lidell's obsession with MIDI and outboard gear. In 2005 that changed. Lidell's latest project, "Multiply", is a homage to a funkier era in music, a nod to greats like Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye and Bobby Caldwell.

Simple Multiplication

Super_Collider, as the name suggests, was a highly technical collaboration. Lidell and Vogel cobbled as many musical manipulators together as they could, producing a sound as intriguing as it was infectious. "It was a strange time in technology, a kind of a threshold between the days of MIDI and the days of digital audio", says Lidell. "On one of the Super_Collider songs we used the Mac's internal microphone to do the lead vocals. We pushed everything as far as we could. We'd have these explosions of ideas. We even used crazy generative software to come up with the lyrics. Our heads were very much into techno".



Lidell discarded many of Super_Collider's techno textures to make "Multiply". He put his voice, pure and unrestrained, centre stage. "I ended up trying to bring back some kind of simplicity to the music", he says. "I thought it was time for me to do something new, which actually, bizarrely enough, was to do

Live Setup

- PowerBook G4
- Digidesign Pro Tools
- Moog Minimooog
- Korg MS-20
- Yamaha SPX90
- Logic Pro
- Akai MPC1000
- Moogerfooger FX pedal
- Mackie 1604-VLZ
- Line 6 delay

Keep Writing

Lidell went from singing to himself to singing with Björk in a matter of years. His advice to other vocalists or songwriters striving for success? "Try to work out a way to record your song ideas wherever you are", he says. "If you think, 'That's a great idea', capture it and somehow record it harmonically. Songs are really precious things. I'm all about that now. In the past, I was all about sound. Now, I'm all about the unity of sound and song. Growing up, I wish I had the skill of just thinking about the melody and imagining the harmony. The quicker you get at that skill, the more flexibility, the more longevity you will achieve. Songwriters are the ones who make the money in this industry; they're the ones who inspire other artists. I'm a primitive songwriter and I wish I was better than I am. If I could turn back time, I'd focus on that".

More Info

- Jamie Lidell
- Warp Records

brand. It's designed for people who want to get stuff done and, back then, it was the only friendly way to use a computer".

His love for computers and music paid off in the mid-'90s. Lidell sent a demo to a studio in London and was almost immediately invited to record some tracks. "They thought, 'Maybe this kid's really good. We'll just chuck him into the deep end and see what he comes out with'", Lidell remembers. "I met other producers and party organisers in London — a community. Once I felt my skills were really valued by these people, I was really keen to contribute and see what we could do together".

Lidell stormed the London rave scene and eventually landed a gig with the Matthew Herbert Big Band project, which toured with Björk. Lidell sang with the impish vocalist at Madison Square Garden and the Hollywood Bowl. After the ride was over, he formed the techno-funk outfit Super_Collider with Cristian Vogel. The group released "Head On" in 1999 and "Raw Digits" in 2002.

something older. For me, doing something more traditional is actually more exciting and I learned a lot more than if I had made another electronic record".

To get that traditional sound, the vocalist travelled the world with his PowerBook, recording jam sessions with other musicians with Logic Pro and Pro Tools. He sought advice, guidance and inspiration from others, fusing their musical sensibilities with his own. "Having a mobile studio is like the ultimate buzz for me", he says. "A lot of opportunities arise when you're travelling. And previously it was almost impossible to get good high-fidelity recordings on the road. Now it's great being able to be so free and flexible".

Lidell used that flexibility to produce a raw, catchy album that is perhaps the most soulful of his career. "The album should be the sugar on your cornflakes in the morning", he says.

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Jamie Lidell: Controlled Collisions

Live Lunacy

To the uninitiated, a Lidell performance could be confused with the ravings of a lunatic. Surrounded by blinking electronic equipment, he sports flashy and nonsensical clothing and is regularly consumed by convulsions. He creates a symphony of instruments using his own voice — he records riffs, licks, moans, clicks and even kisses into samplers and his PowerBook. He fuses the samples together in a creative paroxysm that he unleashes to the crowd, demonstrating that the line that separates lunacy from genius is a thin one.



"It's a blank canvas", he says. "When I start a show, there's no sound at all. I have to create everything from scratch. I make the sounds, using my voice,

During his shows, the musician constantly creates, sometimes performing songs not found on any of his albums. No two performances are alike.

Lidell concerts are as visually arresting as they are sonically stunning. Director and effects specialist Pablo Fiasco summons dazzling visuals using live digital feeds, photographic stills, multi-coloured lights and stock footage from Lidell's videos. He manipulates these swirling creations during the shows, cutting in live footage from handheld DV cams and even a camera mounted to a large army-green helmet that encapsulates Lidell's head. Lidell performs in the midst of this chaos, fed by the creative energy.

Balancing Act

Lidell can't escape his chaotic creative energy. "I'm liable to make all kinds of music", he says. "I'm relatively unfocused. So I basically don't know how things will turn out. At the moment, I'm going through a cool process because I'm opening my mind completely".

Still, he wouldn't mind cranking out a few more soul records to appease his growing fan base. "Of course, with the success of 'Multiply', there's temptation to follow through and elaborate on that style", he says. "I really enjoy that idea, but we'll wait and see. I'm just gonna try and sketch as many songs as possible and I'll see what the dominant style is and I'll put it out".

That approach to making an album may seem haphazard to some, but Lidell lives for those creative moments when the music simply flows — without being guided by the forces of pop charts or record executives. "I don't particularly like the idea of marketing an album", he says. "Music is constantly coming to me. I like the idea of making music and just releasing it as it's made".

But even creative purists realise that their art can't exist in a vacuum. They need to consider their fans, those who appreciate music, those who understand.

Discography

You can find many of these albums on iTunes.

Solo

- "Multiply Additions", Warp Records 2006
- "Multiply", Warp Records 2005
- "When I Come Back Around", Warp Records 2005
- "Muddlin' Gear", Warp Records 2000
- "Freekin' the Frame", Mosquito 1997

With Super Collider

- "Raw Digits", Rise Robots Rise 2002
- "Head On", Loaded 1999

With Matthew Herbert Big Band

- "Goodbye Swingtime", Accidental 2003



mostly. The computer is just a good listener, a multitrack looping system. I make up to five recordings, which I can play back simultaneously. I control everything using MIDI interface — recording, muting, playing and deleting sounds. I roll with it as long as I think it's interesting, then I start a new song".

The result is a spasmodic synergy of soul vocals, beatboxed drum loops and synth choruses. Lidell famously abhors concerts that are little more than loud replays of album material.

"It does allow you to focus your ideas", says Lidell. "I ask: 'Is this communicating anything that anyone else would care about?' And if it is, that's a nice feeling — you can reach out and get to people with something that meant something to you. I know it sounds pretty cheesy, but it's true".

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