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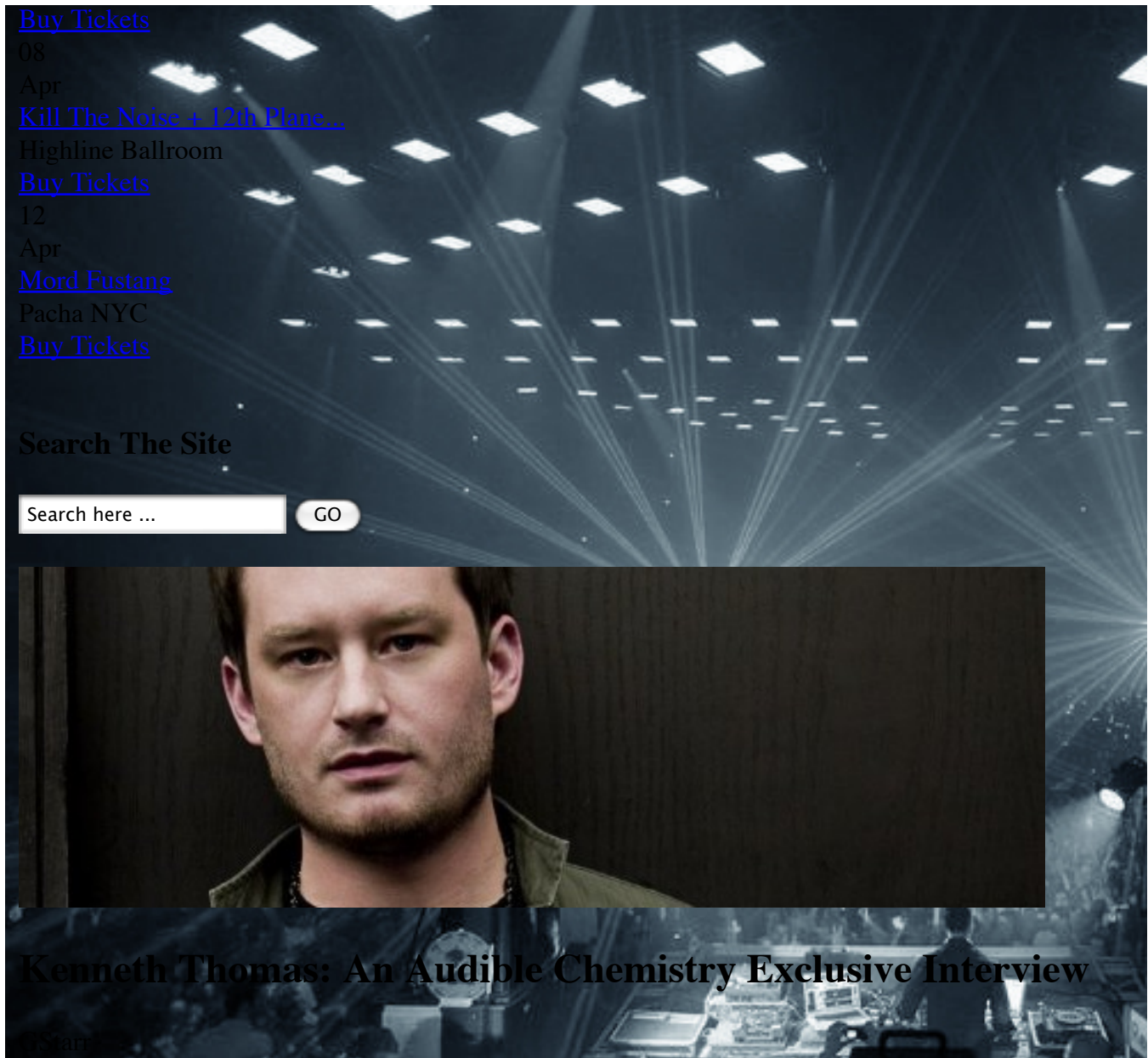
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Kenneth Thomas: An Audible Chemistry Exclusive Interview

April 4th, 2013

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While down in Miami a few weeks ago we had the pleasure of meeting up with several team members of Sleeping Giant Music. Not only are they some of the coolest people around, but they share that same passion for music as we do. One of the more recent signings to Sleeping Giant Music is DJ/producer Kenneth Thomas. We are very grateful that he was able to sit down and answer some questions for us. Check out his responses below in this exclusive interview.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO DJ'ING AND PRODUCING? WAS THERE A SPECIFIC

MOMENT WHEN YOU REALIZED IT WAS WHAT YOU WANTED TO DO?

"I kind of fell into DJing. I was at a sort of cross roads in my life 12 years ago and looking for some new outlets for my energy. Always being very passionate about music, and at the time really fallen in love with dance music; I thought it would be fun to make some dj mixes in my room for my friends. Before I knew it some friends who ran a club invited me to play the side room on Fridays. I was actually terrible! But the opportunity was really good and I just used that pressure to get me up to par as soon as possible. That opportunity grew to more opportunities and before I knew it I was touring the Midwest and east Canada, opening up for the top 10 DJs at the time. I became obsessed with learning everything there was to know about the art. I love feeling the energy in a room and being able to take people on an incredible journey through music. I'm not sure there was ever an exact moment where I knew this was what I wanted to do but I knew I never wanted to stop. To be able to keep pursuing this amazing career I knew I was going to have to start producing. A teenager in Detroit going by the name Elevation teamed up with Markus Schulz for the massive 'Clear Blue' back in 2004. Mike and I started collaborating on some tracks and over the next year I learned everything I could about production from Mike. By 2006 I had built my own studio and was off with my production career."

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EARLY CHALLENGES YOU FACED TRYING TO MAKE IT IN ELECTRONIC MUSIC?

"I would say branding was rather confusing for a lot of people in regards to my sound. Being that a lot of my music is trance-infused, but also has heavy elements of house and chunkier grooves, I was caught in a sort of middle ground between Trance and House. Unfortunately in the early 00s you didn't have as many cross-genre fans as you do now. Typically House heads didn't like any trance and vice versa. So I was trying to represent my true sound yet not alienate the fans which was very difficult at times. Today it's not as much of a problem, you have pitched back 128-130bpm chunky trance that is very dance floor friendly and you have epic house that can cause amazing moments at the massives!"



IN WHAT WAYS ARE YOU TRYING TO DIFFERENTIATE YOURSELF FROM OTHER PRODUCERS AND DJs? IS THERE A DISTINCTIVE SOUND THAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE IT?

“Expanding on the last question, I think it’s my ability to float between genres to create my own unique sound. I really dig deep to find those records that work for me. I think I often find unique ways to play a certain record. I like to think that I work outside the box with DJing. Looking specifically at what the distinctive elements that attract me to a record or inspire me in the studio is really beautiful, emotional leads. Coupled with great percussion and bass rhythms. There is so much music coming out every week, there is no reason to compromise and play a record that doesn’t meet 100% of what you are looking for. If a track has a great lead but the mixdown is dodgy, I don’t play it. If the song is great but the kick drum just doesn’t cut it in the clubs, I won’t play it. Actually those are what I call radio tracks, I save them for CDs or the podcast. I think my strict standards for the tracks I get behind and make time for is one element that really adds something special to the sets I play. I don’t play records, I invest in them.”

YOUR LATEST RELEASE, HIDING, FEATURING MOLLY BANCROFT HAS BEEN GENERATING A LOT OF BUZZ. IT WAS EVEN FEATURED ON BEATPORT’S TOP 10 MUST HEAR. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE SUCCESS YOU’VE HAD WITH THAT TRACK? WHAT WERE SOME OF YOUR IDEAS FOR CREATING IT AND HOW WAS IT WORKING WITH MOLLY?

“This is one of my favorite records I’ve done. It has such a moody, gritty emotional vibe, yet just storms in the peak. It’s a little bit of a slow builder too, but I’ve had some absolutely mind-blowing moments in the clubs when that drop finally hits. But actually since it walks that boundary between dark progressive and big room trance, I didn’t know if it was going to be received commercially, it’s definitely not the proto-typical Top 10 Trance record at all and I’m thrilled the guys at Beatport had open minds about it. Molly coming on board with the vocal was an absolute dream. Funny, my manager actually spent 3 months trying to reach her people and discuss getting her on the track with no avail. Eventually I got frustrated and just tweeted at her personally, crazy thing is, she lives only a few hours from me and we actually had the first vocal in hand within 72 hours. She’s an amazing person and one of my all-time dream collaborators. Look for us to be working together again soon!”



WE UNDERSTAND YOU’VE SPENT SOME TIME TOURING AROUND WITH THE LIKES OF CALVIN HARRIS, CHUCKIE AND TIESTO. THOSE GUYS ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN THE BUSINESS AND WE IMAGINE THAT THEY HAVE A LOT TO OFFER IN ADVICE, TECHNIQUE, ETC. WHAT’S IT LIKE TO WORK ALONGSIDE

THEM? HOW HAVE THEY HELPED YOU ELEVATE YOURSELF TO THE NEXT LEVEL?

“I have had a great opportunity to walk in some amazing roles. Touring for years with Oakenfold and being able to watch how he runs his business and music from the inside and out has given me so much. And then being on his Facelift Tour alongside Calvin, Chuckie and Nervo back when they were just breaking into the US market really let me see some shooting stars on the way up. I am definitely an observer, I like to keep my eyes open and absorb what I can from other people. Then look back and see how I can use what I’ve learned to help me on my own path.”

WHAT ARE SOME MUSICAL INFLUENCES OF YOURS? DO YOU TRY EMULATE THEM IN ANY WAY?

“Some of the albums that I connected to the deepest when I first fell in love with dance music still have a huge impact on my sound today. The massive anthem, creme-de-la-creme filled mix “Tranceport” taught me to aim high with the quality of leads and only invest in records that have a long shelf life, not just a 1 month life. Sasha’s Ibiza “Global Underground” and Dave Ralphs “Tranceport 2” from 2001 is where I got my inspiration to reach beyond the “genres.” I’m associated with. Look into Techno, Breaks, House and beyond to really develop an original sound. As I mentioned earlier, although it has alienated some fans because my sound cannot be pigeon holed, artistically it keeps me energized to always be working on different genres and pulling from all these elements to express my truest sound. Currently, I really love the chunky production from trance acts like Kyau & Albert, Tritonal and the guys on Enhanced. I am in awe of the chords and melodies from guys like Nigel Good, Dinka and JJoo. And I love the big drums and nasty twisted basslines from all the guys at Musical Freedom; sometimes you just want to bang out a room and these records get that job done!”

**THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC SCENE HERE IN THE US IS STILL VERY NEW. WHAT’S IT LIKE TO BE A PART OF THIS NEW WAVE OF MUSIC THAT’S TAKING OVER HERE IN THE STATES?**

“It’s actually kind of strange. I wouldn’t actually say it’s new, it’s just new to the above ground commercial market. Its weird cause this is a thriving industry that I’ve been part of for a decade, but now, the top acts aren’t just big in our industry making 100’s of thousands, they are international superstars rubbing elbows with big pop acts like Rihanna and Coldplay and making millions. It’s exciting, it’s a little weird and it can be a little scary seeing this huge explosion. A lot of people are actually really scared that it’s going to saturate and ruin real dance music, but I’m not worried. The

real sound will always be there, the underground will always be thriving and all these kids falling in love with pop-electronica will mature and dig a little deeper. This will only enlarge the core of the true sounds so why not enjoy our little time in the sun?"

DO YOU SEE ANY TRENDS IN THE MUSIC? WHAT DO YOU SEE HAPPENING LATER ON FOR THE MUSIC SCENE HERE IN 2013?

"On the commercial level, I think Dubstep will go a little more underground. Trap is the new huge EDM associated trend. I see a lot of the one hit wonders falling off and disappearing, I also think the quality of the commercial supported House and Trance singles will get much better. The fat will be trimmed a little and the quality of what hits commercially will get much better. On the more underground tip, I see the genres continuing to merge and blend."

YOU WERE DOWN IN MIAMI LAST WEEK FOR WMC. CAN YOU SHARE SOME THOUGHTS ON YOUR EXPERIENCE?

"Being as it was my 8th or 9th year at WMC, it was kind of more of the same. WMC for us has become so business minded, it's all about meetings and networking. This year we were really just in and out. I've done the week long partying over WMC week a number of times, now it's just hit and run for us!"

YOU JUST RECENTLY SIGNED ON WITH SLEEPING GIANT MUSIC. WHAT'S THAT BEEN LIKE AND HOW HAS IT HELPED YOU AND YOUR CAREER?

"The funny thing is Troy, my agent at Sleeping Giant has been helping me, consulting with me for years. He's a great friend and we have had a blast hanging out on the road over the past 5 years whenever we cross paths. So it's been really seamless coming on board. It's great when you can talk to your agent like a friend and have that rapport with them."

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR HIGHLIGHT FOR 2013 THIS FAR?

"All the momentum in the studio. I have never had a run of releases like we have had to kick off this year. We have had a constant presence in the Beatport Top 100 and we have had regular support from all the top acts lately. And then knowing what's in the pipes about to hit... some of the biggest labels I've ever worked with. This year is aiming to be the best one yet for us!"



DO YOU HAVE ANY BIG PLANS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THIS YEAR? ANY NEW

MUSIC OR COLLABORATIONS COMING OUT IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

“Nonstop studio and hopefully massive touring. I just got back from dates in India and Brazil to end last year and next week I’m heading back to China for some dates. Collaboration wise, I have a great crew of up and coming acts I’m working with. Mark Keyo from LA who just released his debut single on my own imprint IAMPHOENIX. Jake Shanahan who has been working with Hardwell at Revealed, the legend Darude, this great new Russian talent I found Pharazing and from Colombia, South America, Ray Violet. Vocal wise, I have stuff in the pipes with Drew Chambers, Tyler Sherrit, hopefully another track with Molly later this year and actually a local girl from my city of Detroit, Christina Chriss. So much going on, like I said, aiming to be a huge year!”

WHAT’S THE NEXT STEP FOR YOU AS A DJ/PRODUCER?

“Keep pushing forward, keep making music, keep touring and sharing this sound. Let’s see where this journey goes next!”

Well there you have it. It’s nice to see refreshing and honest answers, nothing commercialized. We’re looking forward to hearing a lot of the new music that Ken is currently working on in his studio. A big thanks to Sleeping Giant for getting us the interview and an even bigger one to Ken for taking the time to answer to answer our questions.

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