

MARC HOULE Biography

As the Minus crew roll up in Frankfurt for another night of minimal pressure, Marc Houle cuts a rather unassuming figure. While the others are going through the hotel check-in process for the umpteenth time he stands alone, detached from the crowd, seemingly preoccupied by the recurring patterns of glass panelling that jar upwards into infinity from the giant reception area.

It's exactly this quiet, analytical approach to the x and y of time and space that forms the nucleus of his music. The warm analogue sounds from his beloved Korg Monopoly are encased in a cold logic that's all about clean edges and perfect angles. Listening to 2004's Restore double pack, it's fascinating to hear how he explores each new idea, unravelling it like some complex equation, entertaining variations and digressions before arriving at its natural conclusion. It gives his music a sense of symmetry and as the varying lengths of his work testify, he doesn't waste time saturating his music with unnecessary layers once the magic formula has been discovered.

Anyone who caught 2005's Minimize to Maximize tour would agree his music is equally impressive live, as it's this medium that allows the human element behind his machinist persona to really break through. Some artists are confined by technology and the sonic boundaries they set themselves, possibly because it was music that introduced them to computers. Marc's journey however, took him in the opposite direction allowing him both the freedom and control to lose himself and his appreciative audience in a labyrinth of sound - constantly improvising, always innovating - before triumphantly emerging intact.

Currently sharing his time between New York and Berlin depending on tour commitments, Marc grew up in Windsor just across the waters of Lake Erie from Detroit. He was and still is a first generation computer game addict. Hooked on his Commodore 64 and a host of early video games such as Arcon and Jump Man, he was mainlining Atari straight into his cerebral cortex from the tender age of ten. The theoretical side of his musical education arrived through piano and drum lessons, complimenting the bleeps, clonks and whirrs of the laser gun battles he fought on a daily basis. As a precursor to the minimal techno that would later envelop his life, it was the primitive square waves of the game soundtracks that really moulded his taste in music and as Casio hardware started evolving into real keyboards, Marc was on hand to exploit this new era of sound exploration.

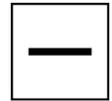
Needless to say, European electro-pioneers like Kraftwerk and Depeche Mode had a strong influence on him during these formative years and as his studio grew, Marc started developing his own particular brand of synth-pop by appropriating the old commodore game sounds into his productions. Things began to take shape in the early nineties when, still largely oblivious to the techno-revolution taking place in Detroit, he started heading over to warehouse parties like Sickness and Recovery. After soaking up

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the vibes under the expert guidance of Jeff Mills, Richie Hawtin, John Aquaviva et al, he would return home, applying these new found ideas to his sound which, in turn, began to evolve in a hyper, distorted 'Aphex Twin' direction. During one of these excursions he got talking to Hawtin, bombarding him with questions about a Kraftwerk gig the latter had been lucky enough to witness. This shared passion for all things electronic soon led to a DJ residency at Hawtin's 13 Below in 1997, hosting a New Wave/Atari night where clubbers could get off on vintage game consoles while Marc pumped out a mixture of Electro Boogie and New Wave, inducing 1983 style flashbacks.

Then one night Magda turned up as a guest DJ and to cut a long story short soon ended up lodging with Marc back in Windsor. Neither realised the significance of this arrangement at the time, they were too busy joking around and bouncing ideas off each other in Marc's studio, however this initial chemistry clearly set the wheels of their music careers in motion, paving the way for their current assault on the minimal techno scene.

Magda shakes her head in mock disbelief as she recalls how Marc wired speakers through the entire house so music was constantly playing in every room, how his studio was painted red with white clouds and how his obsession with Rembrandt's 'Man in a gold helmet' reached the point where the walls were adorned with every possible shape, size and variation of this singular image – in other words, it was her kind of pad. Soulmates, they started messing around with music although Magda was less than impressed with the giant synth riffs Marc often punctuated his productions with, forcing him to make two versions - one with, to satisfy his New Wave aspirations and one without that she could use in her DJ sets. These stripped down versions were of course bang on the money and started generating positive reactions and interest, not least from Mr Hawtin who was now beginning to hear the tantalizing results of this growing band of pranksters he had inadvertently brought together. Two became three in 2001 when Marc (Restore) and Magda (Stop) met Troy Pierce (Run) and the circle was complete, culminating in the 'minimal new wave' project Run Stop Restore and a 4 track EP on Minus in 2003.

Currently rubbing shoulders with an elite group of electronic producers on Richie Hawtin's latest DE9 instalment, he also remains faithful to the retro-sounds that first inspired him to start producing. Apart from his work for Minus, his insatiable output means he is involved with several other bands such as the new wave project La Folie and the cold wave outfits Raid on Moscow and 2VM.

So how does he actually define his sound, considering the broad spectrum from which he draws inspiration? Marc of course replies in equation form: Detroit + New Wave + Kraftwerk + Commodore ÷ Iron Maiden (!) before descending into a passionate debate with Troy about the qualities of Maiden's melodic structures. It's an unexpected turn to the conversation, delivered with typical deadpan humour. Nevertheless it goes a long way to prove that behind the elegant sonic structures Marc Houle creates – those robot grooves with their clean edges and perfect angles - there is still space for a little madness in his method.

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