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Passion for the 'Record'

Dance documentarist Jason Rem gets caught up in the music

~ By DENNIS ROMERO ~



Capturing it all: Jason Rem and crewmember in Miami

Dance-music documentaries have been a disappointing lot – either sponsor-driven, overly star-struck, or low-tech enough to make you wonder if your 12-year-old nephew made it on his mobile phone and posted it on YouTube. The DVD version of *Put the Needle on the Record*, recently released online and headed for stores in September, is a refreshingly slick, sober, and balanced look at electronic dance music.

community

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More than a dozen voter propositions have already qualified for the November ballot

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LEFT COAST

Cartoon By Ted Rall

TAKE MY PICTURE

Photographs by Gary Leonard

7 DAYS

Quick, Conscious Flicks

L.A.&E

Geek Love

For comedian Brian Posehn, dorkiness is a ticket to the top

Perhaps Needle gets it right because it was written and directed by a club-scene outsider with a small-screen pedigree, former ESPN producer Jason Rem. In 2002, he was looking for a topic for a first film when friend and soon-to-be Needle coproducer Shahin Amirpour suggested he check out the Winter Music Conference, the dance industry's annual retreat in Miami. More than a business-card-swapping soiree, the weeklong conference and related events comprise an adult spring break that draws the world's top DJs and electronic bands to perform at parties that happen 24/7 every March. South Beach's "dance music week" has grown to include massive concerts, super-club gigs, and sponsorship events. (Playboy, PlayStation, and Pioneer are but a few brands that have set up shop or sponsored happenings.) It's been estimated that as many as 30,000 industry insiders and outsiders come from around the world to rub shoulders with dance music's elite.

"I was inspired by the passion people had for the music," says Rem. He also spied a no-brainer opportunity to catch the world's dance-music brain trust in one place, during one week. The 2003 conference ended up serving as a common thread for Needle, which is essentially the story of how dance music became a massive subculture while still remaining under the radar of radio, magazines, and MTV.

"This goes back to my sports background," Rem says. "Going to the Super Bowl, it's easy to get interviews with all these football stars. The conference is the same way. There's a vast wealth of knowledge."

And so Needle gets house pioneer Jesse Saunders delineating house music's origins; drum 'n' bass star Dieselboy talking drum 'n' bass; radio DJs Jason Bentley and Liquid Todd illuminating the state of e-music on the air, and producers such as Dave Ralph discussing how technology constantly pushes the scene forward. Ralph celebrates the laptop-music revolution, saying a contemporary DJ can produce a track on her computer and end up playing it at a club the same night. Living legend François K, who's been spinning vinyl since the days of disco, counters that emotion, however, saying that technology is overshadowing musicality in the scene.

The film itself was a technological feat. Helicopters swoop down Miami's Ocean Drive as partygoers fill the side streets. Booties jiggle in high resolution. Hands are raised to house music. Needle gets a real aesthetic feel for the community, sexuality, and inspiration that drive people toward club culture.

"Those five days, we were doing 45 interviews," Rem says of filming in '03. "[DJ] Donald Glaude we chased the entire week. We had three Beta cameras going for 18 hours a day. We had a crew come on maybe about 11-to-3, then afternoon and early night parties, then an 11-to-5 crew."

Most of the subjects – interviewed at the beach, poolside, and parties – are introspective and open. (At one point, radio jock Todd describes how he learned to beat-match records on air, concluding, "I sucked.") Dance-music tourists explain what attracts them to the circus. And DJs give a universal thumbs-down to the legions of new kids who think mixing records is a cheap ticket to stardom. Dieselboy tells the tale of how he started getting gigs by calling the numbers on party flyers and offering his services free. Jesse Saunders says that, when he started, "I used to play in

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SUBCULTCHA**Wizards and Monsters****LIVE****Everybody's Not Gonna
Be Happy**

Letdowns aside, Ray Davies engages with Kinks classics and new tunes at the Wiltern

GROUNDSWELL**Passion for the 'Record'**

Dance documentarist Jason Rem gets caught up in the music

FILM**Matters of Life and Death**

French director François Ozon talks about 'Time to Leave'

'Lady' Be Bad

Another blow for the Shyamalan phenomenon

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STAGE**O, Those Midsummer
Nights**

A bumper crop of outdoor Shakespeare? Tell me more!

LISTINGS

~ SOUNDS ~

~ SUBMISSIONS ~

a closet for like 25 people the whole night."

Rem was moved by the dedication he witnessed. He's now an avid dance-music fan, even as the film did its job, opening doors for more documentaries and possibly even a feature under his company, Rem Entertainment. It's also doing a good deed for dance music, showing how it is with nary a glow stick, big head, or drug-face in sight.

"I've learned that this scene is about more than just kids going out and partying," he says. "I started playing the music, and I was like, 'Oh, I get it.'" ★

07-20-06