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Mike Relm: Spectacle

Publisher: **Radio Fried Recordings**

Who is **Mike Relm**, you say? If you follow the DJ scene, his name is probably one you already know. If you've seen *Blue Man Group* in the past few years, there's a chance you have also heard Relm's work, since he and at least one of the artists featured on **Spectacle** (Vocalist Adrian Hartley) were touring members of BMG's musical cast. The company Relm keeps includes solid acts like *Lyrics Born*, *Del tha Funkee Homosapien* and Mike Patton, of past *Faith No More* fame. Relm refers to **Spectacle** as "my first album" even though he's logged an impressive amount of time recording with other artists. The question of whether Relm on his own is capable of filling a marquee is answered within the first few tunes: He isn't, but that doesn't mean **Spectacle** isn't



an album aspiring DJs may want to check out. The beats and production work show a DJ's craft and an ear trained to build texture, drama, and credibility. It's admittedly a pieced-together album - to accommodate Relm's busy touring schedule - but the final product feels remarkably cohesive. The problem isn't that **Spectacle** fails to hold together as a creative unit, but that it just doesn't bring enough heat to mark Relm as a guy that other DJs are going to seek out and follow. This is in stark contrast to some of the great turntable work you'll find featured on Relm's Web site, so it's strange he played it safe for this record.

Within the 18 tracks on **Spectacle**, you'll find three that play theme-and-variation on a vocal riff from Hartley that Relm seems to like quite a bit. It's great the first time, but you'll be glad the third repetition is near the end of the album. Around this trifecta, you've got some tracks free of vocals that are probably the purest examples of Relm's craft. Pure because you can really hear what he's doing without the vocals, and also because it frees him from having to back up a lyrical line. Instead of letting it all hang out, Relm builds these tracks like back-up material, or demos for a prospective collaborator. Compared to tracks like "Bodyrock," "Everytime," or "Without Her," the Relm-only material sounds tranquilized. A "love it or hate it" element that "Without Her" and solo jaunts like "Tron" or "Vertiglo" also show is an abundance of '80s and '90s pop references. Beats, synths, and overall production betray a fondness for New Wave and similar material that younger listeners may find novel, but which brings up too many Jan Hammer memories for those of us that lived through those decades. The additional material on **Spectacle** is entirely built from short snatches of radio and conversations that fall into more "in-joke" territory than anything meaningful. When *Public Enemy* did it in '91 we were impressed, but then the whole millennium came and went along with a million copycat acts, and we lost our fascination with the radio-snippet sample trick somewhere along the way...

The bar for **Spectacle** is set for us where we've heard DJs like *Prefuse 73* and *Z-Trip* perform in recent years. Relm doesn't approach the raw power of either, and more importantly falls short in terms of creativity and a unique voice. The field is littered with DJs today, and there is a small army of kids at home fooling around with beats on their home computers. No kid at home is going to put themselves in the same league as *Prefuse 73* or *Z-Trip*, but **Spectacle** is something that most local-yokel DJs will feel is within their reach. At least the solo work, if not some of the collaborative material. **Spectacle** pushes no boundaries and does almost nothing in an original mode, other than finding good ways to weave pop sounds and heavier beats together. The biggest absence on the record is humor, although the radio-snippet interludes were probably intended to keep things nice and light. "Nice and light" is the operative phrase, and that's not a good thing if you're trying to stand in the company of DJs that manage to build beats with huge intensity, spinning wheels of steel that are literally unsafe at any speed. **Spectacle** is a notch higher than most home-brew beat fests you will find on the 'Net, but not by very much. Aspiring DJs should set their sights higher than this, or risk mediocrity.



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