

# Psychedelic rocker, disco evangelist, gentleman adventurer, surf bum, raconteur. Enter the weird and wonderful world of the inimitable **Dj Harvey**

Interview Joe Muggs

**HARVEY BASSETT IS many things to many people, but one thing he's never been is predictable. He was an acid house-era free party hero with the Tonka Soundsystem, an early Ministry resident, an architect of the disco revival (especially via his Black Cock edits) - then took a few years off the international circuit after visa issues meant he was unable to leave his adopted home in the US. He made the most of it, though, forming Map Of Africa with Rub'n'Tug's Thomas Bullock, owning and running a club in Hawaii, then setting up the notorious Harvey's Sarcastic Disco parties in LA ("I can probably say," he tells us, "because I've been to a lot of others, that it was one of the best underground dance parties in the world for those ten years"). In the last three years, though, his international profile has been back on the rise, with his oddball techno project Locossolus picking up attention and steadily bigger shows. Now, as he puts it, "it's international Harvey month", with the release of an album by his psychedelic-surf-rock band Wildest Dreams, and some high-profile gigs. Mixmag caught up with him between a triumphant Sónar set and playing as part of James Lavelle's Meltdown at the Royal Festival Hall. As ever, our chat was anything but dull DJ self-promotion: Harvey's conversation is scurrilous, tangential, scholarly; that of a man as interested in life and music as he was when he started out as a teenage punk drummer over 30 years ago.**

**So you've got a bit of downtime in London between gigs. What have you been up to?**  
 Yesterday I walked to the South Bank, looked at the London Eye, looked at the old skate spot, walked over the

pedestrian bridge, hung out at [ancient Egyptian obelisk] Cleopatra's Needle - which I think is 6,000 years old - then I walked into one of the little parks and I learned that 200 years ago, the Thames was a hundred yards wider and went all the way to The Strand. Then I walked towards Charing Cross, wondering if Heaven was still there, one of the first real nightclubs I ever went to, and stood there sighing to myself at the fond memories of Bronski Beat, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, the smell of amyl nitrate... then I got a cab, saw a friend and listened to his soundsystem, walked to another friend's council flat and had tea and pastries, then went and had Turkish kebabs with two more friends and talked about hi-fi until about two in the morning... And that was it. A fantastic day, spent staring for as long as I wanted at the things other people wouldn't tolerate.

**Is Heaven where your DJing roots still lie? In eighties hi-NRG?**  
 Oh yeah. I'm all about hi-NRG! Dance music is all hi-NRG really. I remember once giving [seminal jazz and soul DJ] Patrick Forge a nudge - this is 20 years ago - and going, "who woulda thought it, mate, it's all hi-NRG now, and even you fucking jazzers are playing it, you wanker!"  
**Do you look back over your career when you revisit old haunts then?**  
 I don't really think about my career as such, because it hasn't peaked yet. The last 30 years have been me learning how to be a DJ - and now I finally am I can go out and give my skills to the people.  
**How have musical trends changed?**  
 I don't think about trends. It all goes

BANG-BANG-BANG-BLEEP-BLEEP-BLEEP to me. There's good ones and bad ones. Trends and genres help journalists like you help people who are reading about it instead of hearing it understand what you're talking about, like "this is a deeeeep house record". There's a cool trend for you!  
**Yeah deep house is back, back, back...**  
 It's so back it's over. If you're listening to deep house you're done for. I listen to shallow house these days. Lots of clanky pianos and high-pitched, sampled disco. That's where it's going, there's nothing else left to revive.



Flux Pavilion

**What are you hearing that does feel new?**

It's one record at a time, really. I like modern techno, though. There's always techno that's future-looking by its nature, and I still find that exciting. I can still relate to it. There's other music with other rhythmic structures, like... what do they call it... dubstep that I know very little about because it hasn't touched me yet, it hasn't stimulated me yet. I shared a ride recently with a guy whose second name was Pavilion...  
**Flux Pavilion?**  
 Yes. Which I thought was a very interesting name. And he had never listened to house music - and I thought, well, there's a thing. To be a star of a genre that comes from house - even if it is via rave and jungle and d'n'b and all that - to be a grandmaster of a genre like that, and only now to be "getting into" house, because his label boss was involved in house 20 years ago and is playing it to him and he's "getting into" it: I thought that was quite amazing. His trousers were quite amazing, too.

**Where is home now then? Still LA?**  
 I live in Venice Beach, LA, and I like it very much. It's been my home for nigh-on fifteen years, with a short sojourn in Hawaii in the middle. The sun shines, I'm by the sea, the food's good, the people are polite, I skate to the shops, I surf every day and have a nice time with my friends...

**And you have a rock band now...**  
 Well one of the first types of music that I was into was very classic great British blues-based rock 'n' roll. You take the blues and add LSD and you get this thing I'm so very into. I'm a drummer first, I've always jammed with friends, so I did this album, it was sitting around, then Smalltown Supersound - who are to my mind a real record label - picked it up. And because I made it a couple of years ago, it feels like it's not even any work for me! It's out there doing its thing - and while that's happening, I can keep DJing and do things like close Sónar By Day to 10,000 people with 'Relight My Fire' as the closing track, which was a fantastic thing and a great honour.

**And what's next?**  
 Depending on how 'Wildest Dreams' is received over the next couple of months I might put a little live show together, take that on the road. And there'll be a few singles and remixes of the last Locossolus singles, which is my techno-disco band; I'm going to take that in hand and launch my own label for it, and depending on how it's perceived and received, it might get a little bit of a live show, or I might mime to the CD like every other electronic act out there: with girls in bikinis shooting machine guns, a firework display, I'll arrive in a spaceship and a cloak amid mountains of LEDs and lots of modular synths that aren't plugged in. The more people will have off me the more I'll continue, until interest wanes - which hopefully it won't. As long as I can keep stoking the fire, then I shall do.  
**DJ Harvey plays Unknown Festival in Croatia on September 8-12**



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