

BARON ZEN AT THE MANTLE R-E-M-I-X-E-S





The Story of the Baron

The rise of Sweet Steve and the San Jose
post punk / no wave / industrial / experimental /
electro clash / goth hop movement.





I first met Steve back in 1979 when I was in 4th grade. I had just moved to San Jose California and was literally in the moving truck with my parents and he came up and said "Hi. My name is Stevie. Wanna be my friend?" Even as a kid I thought that was weird, but that's why I got along with him so well. My house had a fish pond which had these water spiders in it and I remember catching some with him within a few days of moving in.



San Jose, 1989
Sweet Steve cold lampin' in the studio.

About a year later, we got heavily into baseball (he liked the Giants and I liked the Pirates) and soul/funk music. We'd spend our money equally on baseball cards and records. With the records, we bought everything funky that came out. We'd never both buy the same record because if we each bought different ones, we'd have twice as many songs in the end. Cameo, One Way, Aurra, Tom Tom Club, Fatback, Kurtis Blow, Slave. We'd buy mostly 45s back then, but had no interest in full length albums because (1) we couldn't afford them and (2) there was too much filler. On special occasions, we'd buy a 12" single of a particular song if we REALLY liked it. After "Planet Rock" came out, we realized that a lot of the raw sounding electro and rap stuff never came out on 45 or a full length album. We started collecting these "space jams." Robot voices were the thing: Grandmaster Flash, "Scorpio";

Garret's Crew, "Nasty Rock"; Fearless Four, "F-4000"; Man Parrish, "Man Made." There was a lot of cool west coast electro that we went crazy for as well. If it had a "freak" in the title, ("Dial a Freak",



Top: PBW & The Baron, Graduation 1992.
Bottom: Sweet Steve and Lisa = Forever

"Freak-A-Zoid", "I Need a Freak") we bought it.

By '86, electro had died out and we really stopped liking the soul and funk that they were playing on the radio. Hip Hop was so much better by then. We got really into "hardcore" like Schooly D, Just Ice, MC Shan, BDP, Rakim, Ultramagnetic, etc. At the same time, we were checking out all the different sub-genres of alternative music. Ministry, Joy Division, PIL, The Smiths, Dead Kennedys, The Specials. This music was competing for our attention and our wallets. We were supposed to see The Cure in '85, but couldn't swing the tickets in the end. We liked Red Hot Chili Peppers because they were the only white boys in existence who could actually convince George Clinton to produce their album. Speaking of white boys, we were Beastie Boy fanatics. ("Cookie Puss" - "Party's Getting Rough") We saw them open

for Run DMC before they ever had an album out and I got expelled from school because I wore a Beastie Boys T-shirt that said "Get Off My Dick" on the back. It was hard to find out about reggae in San Jose back then, but we sought it out and grabbed Prince Jammy, Yellowman, Eek-A-Mouse, and a few others. I didn't really like the cliché Bob Marley songs we'd hear over and over though. There were no magazines for us to reference, definitely no internet for us to search and we were too young to get into clubs. Record



The Man, The Myth, The Baron, & Steve.

stores and word of mouth were the only outlets we found out about the kind of music we were into.

By about 1989, we gave up on new wave and all other "rock based" music, and focused completely on hip hop. At that time, you could listen to full length hip hop albums and not get nearly as much filler tracks as you would today. I guess that's why it's considered the golden age. Yo MTV Raps was out and I was making beats full time for Charizma. Steve and I were in



The hi-top fade and extra-hold gel. Leave my curl alone.

love with The Flavor Unit. What's so strange about Baron Zen is that when Steve recorded that album, he was a straight up hip hop head, and that album is everything but hip hop. I mean, "When I Hear Music" and "Burn Rubber" were originally soul/dance songs, but Steve did them in a rock style. If Diddy invented the remix, Stevie invented the mash-up. Most of the album consisted of originals recorded on a four-track cassette in his bedroom while he still lived with his parents. By that time, he and I were also in a band called Peanut Butter Wolf that included my 12-year-old brother Jonny on lead vocals and Jeff Jank on nearly all the instruments. Jeff Jank also had a band called Electra that I played in. Jeff was really creative musically and I think he inspired Steve with the Baron Zen, and me with the hip hop beats, but nothing was ever said. Steve and I were always amazed with Jeff though.



The infamous 4-track recordings.



I was really excited to put out Baron Zen last year – more than 15 years after it was recorded. I was listening to the tapes for the hell of it one day and realized I had a great record right under my nose all these years. To me, it was a breath of fresh air from all the imitation '80s bands out there right now that all sound the same. The recording technique is raw, just like the records



Baron Zen - At the Mall
The hypnotic overlap continues...

we were always buying, but the songwriting is in-your-face as well. I remember playing "Night In Jail" to Koushik and thought the song was too crazy for him so I changed it and Koushik asked me to play it again cuz he wanted to see how the story ended. "Gotta Get Ridda Rick" is a good story as well. When I decided I was going to release the album, I gave Jeff a drawing I wanted to use

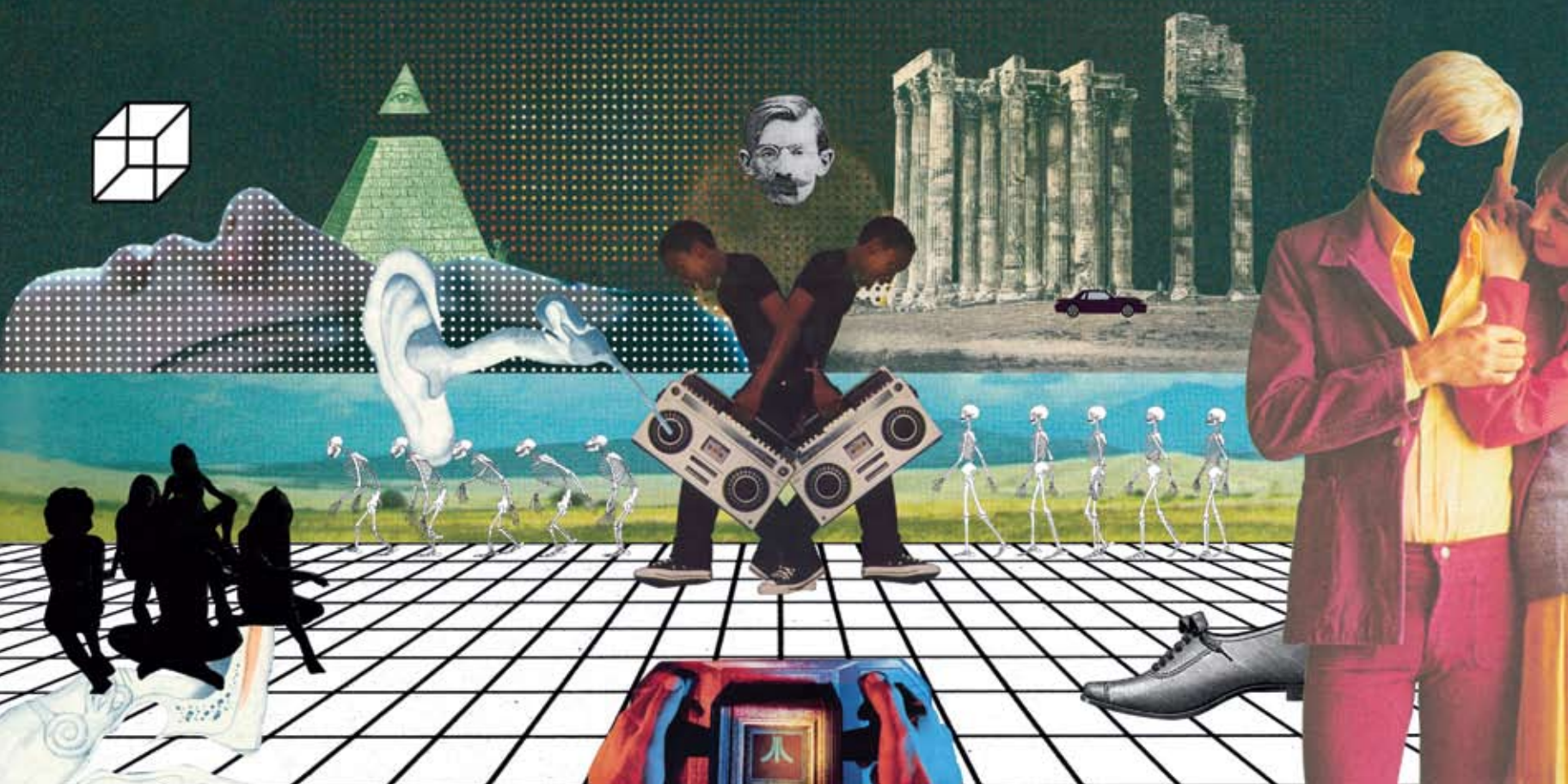
and he scribbled the song titles with a knife, cut himself, rubbed some blood on it and we put it out.

I got a call from a promoter interested in BZ opening for Daniel Johnston, and Other Music showed us love, but in the end, the album flew right over most people's heads, just like the Gary Wilson record I put out the year before. Scott Sterling, editor of Urb by day and Hollywood DJ by night, played a song at a hipster party and some hipsters danced, but that was about as close to "making it" as we got. Partially that was my own fault cuz we didn't do much to promote it beforehand. Steve was cool with it all though. It was never really his idea to release it on Stones Throw in the first place, even though he's been a loyal supporter of all our hip hop releases. Underground hip hop is mainly all he's listened to since recording the album.

Since the Baron Zen release wasn't getting the buzz I felt it deserved, I decided to release a vinyl-only remix EP with a few guys I knew who liked the record. I got Steve to go back and dust off his four-track tapes and the more I listened to it, the more I wanted to do a full album of stuff. I sent CDs out to a lot of my DJ/producer friends and the strangest thing about it was that almost everyone turned in an electro sounding song including hip hop DJ's and producers that I didn't even know made electro. Actually, my remix for "Turned Around" was also electro and didn't even know I could make an electro track.

— P.B. Wolf, 2007





BARON ZEN THEME

Danny Breaks

Danny made this song a couple years ago called "The Jellyfish" that I played out a lot in my DJ sets. He hit me up randomly on myspace and I thought he'd be perfect for this song. Steve had never heard of him nor had he heard of Steve, but this turned out to be Steve's favorite remix on the album and Steve's only request when I put this album together was that this song go first on the album.

GOTTA GET RIDDA RICK

James Pants

James is that rare guy who has a lot of records and is a great producer. (It's usually one or the other.) He did this all live and this is Steve's second favorite remix of the bunch. They remind me a lot of each other. Both married, quiet. '80s electro boogie soul/funk lovers.

NIGHT IN JAIL

M-80

This one was commissioned by Steve. It's done by the PE teacher at Steve's school (Steve teaches literature). His first time on wax. One of my favorites of the album.

WHEN I HEAR MUSIC

J.Rocc

I chose J for this one. He knows all that '80s freestyle and he put more time into this than I thought he would. I love the breakdown at the end.

AT THE MALL

PBW

I did this one. I have to give Kelly credit for helping me with the five million different delays we used on the vocals. That was over the top.

MONEY

Arabian Prince

I'm really glad Brother Arab is down

to earth. He was a hero of Steve's and mine back in the '80s. He made this one nice and funky for us. Even added the Yarborough & Peebles style munchkin voices.

SHOES

Madlib

I paid Madlib for this remix with a pair of vibes. I came across a used set as a steal of a deal. I love doing things by barter when I can. Keeps it interesting. Madlib made the beat and I laid the vocal on top.

BURN RUBBER

dam-funk

Dam is an up-and-coming DJ/producer who has lots of heat. He turned in this remix to me and I thought it was great how he slowed it down and made it into a new soul sounding thing. Only problem was Steve's vocal didn't fit it. This song was straight up outta Sweet Steve's

range. He had a hard time staying on key, which is why it's just an interlude on the original BZ album. I asked Dam to run Steve through a vocoder and it worked out well.

FUCKIN' BORED

Romes

People don't know about DJ Romes. He's been makin' beats for a minute and has gotten much better over the past year. He also surprised me with the electro remix. I think a lot of these guys agreed to do this project cuz it was such a stretch for them and they enjoyed the challenge. Romes told me, "I'm not even tripping if you don't use my remix. I had fun doing it." Of course we used it Romes. Good job.

ELECTRONIC

Tekblazer

This was one that shoulda been on the original album, but slipped through the cracks. I never heard

it 'til a few months ago, but I LOVE music like this. This is the only song on the album that Steve had nothing to do with. It was all Craig (a friend of ours whom Steve and I met by working with him at McDonalds). Craig does stuff under the name Tekblazer these days. His claim to fame is being one of the first guys on the West Coast with a dubstep night (in his hometown of San Jose.)

WALKING ON SUNSHINE

Jonny Manak

Yes, Jonny Manak is my younger brother. I thought he'd be the best man for this one cuz he rocks out and can play every instrument. He was the lead singer of the band Peanut Butter Wolf (where I got my name) back when he was 9 or 10. Also in the group were Steve, myself, and Jeff (who is the face of Stones Throw these days).

TURNED AROUND

PBW

This one was originally conceived by Koushik and I. We were in my car and listening to the album, trying to choose a track to remix and this was Ko's favorite. Koushik helped me with all the computer stuff cuz I don't know how to do that. We borrowed a Juno 106 from Liger and drank a few wine coolers to get into the '80s zone. The rest is a blur.

NO MORE

Tekblazer & Selector Dub U

This is definitely the darkest track on the album. I think it's awesome that Craig is getting up there in age (just like Steve and I), yet he's still so progressive. He was the one who showed us industrial/experimental music like Skinny Puppy and Cabaret Voltaire back in the day.

WALKED IN LINE

Blu Jemz

When I released the album, Blu Jemz was one of the guys telling me how he liked it so I told him to do a remix. I'd never even heard one of his remixes, but that didn't matter to me. I just wanted people on the project who understood and were enthusiastic about the music. He said, "sure, I'll do it, but I want an uptempo track. 150 BPMs is my shit right now." I told him I had the perfect song for him. The original is really death rock, but Steve's version had a swing to it.

WALKED IN LINE

M-80

This is something M-80 just gave us even though we didn't ask him for it. I'd already hired Blu Jemz for that track, but Steve and I agreed that we had to sneak it in somehow. It sounds like "My Posse's On Broadway".

Produced by:
Sweet Steve

Executive Producer:
Peanut Butter Wolf

Mastered by:
Kelly Hibbert for Elysian
Masters, L.A.

Design by:
Hypnotic Overlap (we-sign.info)
Stephen Serrato & Kristian Henson

All songs but two were originally produced by Sweet Steve. The other two were produced by Steve & Tekblazer.

*All vocals by Sweet Steve except:
"Baron Zen Theme" - Brother Grimmer
"At The Mall" - Steve & Tekblazer
"When I Hear Music" - Steve & John C.
"Electronic" - Tekblazer*

We can't reveal John's last name because his wife would kill him if she found out he was associated with this music.

Artist: **Baron Zen**
Title: **At The Mall Remixes**
Format: **2LP/2CD**
Release Date: **September 18, 2007**

"genre bending" - CMJeezy
"pushing the envelope" - P-fork
"forward thinking" - Wires
"absolutely brillian" - KCRad
"the holy grail of San Jose post
punk/no wave/industrial/experimental
electro clash/goth hop" - Herb