

Norfolk born and bred heir to the UK electronica throne Nathan Fake has kept fans of fuzzy-edged synths and pounding acidic techno beats alike guessing ever since his debut release at the tender age of 19. And now, having just reached his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday milestone, he is back with exuberant new album main event 'Steam Days', a breathtaking landmark on Nathan Fake's road to musical maturity which Nathan has rightly branded his "best work to date", oscillating effortlessly between both ends of the electronic spectrum to reprise both the soothing melodic indulgence and heavy dancefloor assault of his albums of yore. And although a career that has been characterised by such deftly-executed electronic versatility may to the outsider appear chameleonic, schizophrenic even, one thing has remained constant throughout his decade at the electronica coalface: a very real sense of the artist behind the machines, no matter which production hat Fake may currently be sporting.

It was during his upbringing in the rural English county of Norfolk that the first tell-tale signs of Nathan Fake's artistic idiosyncracies began to reveal themselves. When an early course of piano lessons threatened to stall at the abstract first hurdle of learning to read music, the young Nathan instead took on the much more daunting task of memorising by ear with the aim of recalling during practice sessions at home, with considerable – and surprising – levels of success. His induction into the electronic arts would come a little later care of his elder brother's Orbital tape cassettes, their unashamedly euphoric melody lines likewise effortlessly assimilated by Nathan, providing a welcome lead to play along to on his junior Casio keyboard (little did he know that years later he would end up supporting those same Orbital brothers on their 2012 comeback tour!). And to this day, Fake retains an ability to recall, deconstruct and replicate music that is damn near pitch-perfect, which has come to him via this altogether natural and entirely unstudied route.

This enviable raw, innate musical ability was given a cursory polish when Nathan left his sleepy Norfolk village of Necton at the age of 18 to commence an HND in Music Technology at Reading College of Art & Design, although Fake would end up dropping out before graduation when his musical career suddenly took off of its own accord – and in grand style. His debut 12" release - the Boards-of-Canada-do-techno of 'Outhouse' - came care of UK producer-cum-DJ James Holden's Border Community label in 2003 (the fledgling label's second ever release), making serious inroads on the dancefloors of Europe. Following hot on its heels came *that* inimitable (though far too many have tried!) James Holden remix of Fake's 'The Sky Was Pink', confounding all expectations to notch up 12" sales approaching 20,000 at a time when people were already queuing up to ring the death knell for vinyl. The Nathan Fake name thus found itself stamped all over a bonafide modern dancefloor classic, its soaring fake guitars reaching out into the realm of universal consciousness, somewhat inescapably cementing Fake's club reputation in the process.

But Nathan's brief spell at Reading College would not go entirely to waste: his course-based explorations of the influence of electronic music on rock and pop production would eventually lay the foundations of his 2006 debut album 'Drowning In A Sea Of Love', a melody-rich sweep of shoegazey rocktronica further in the vein of Fake's epic, psychedelic original version of 'The Sky Was Pink'. This endearing collection of warm and fuzzy juvenilia translated effortlessly into fully-fledged home-listening album material, making good on the promise shown by his early dancefloor incursions to see through the transformation into grown-up professional worldwide touring and recording artiste, thereby pulling off a feat that most of his then-peers could only dream of as his music broke out of the dance music ghetto to spin off into the record collections of album-buying music lovers the world over.

If his harder-edged 2009 stop-gap mini-album follow-up 'Hard Islands' then came as something of a dramatic departure to this new army of home-orientated listeners, the process by which it came about was for Nathan an entirely smooth and natural one. As his extended album tour gradually gave way to the never-ending stream of requests from the techno clubs where he first made his name, various 'Drowning In A Sea Of Love' era tracks were beefed up to complement his emerging new material. Evolving gradually in the context of his live performance before finally being pinned down to a fixed recorded form for their official release, these sweaty shirts-off 'Hard Islands' jams bear the influence of his experiences at dance music's front line, infusing them with an increasingly musically ambitious cerebral edge and a reactive response loop mechanism that leaves them even more optimised for maximum dancefloor impact than ever before.

“Playing live a lot has had a profound influence on the way I make music now,” Nathan explains. “It’s all quite improvised and I actually formulate a lot of my arrangements while I’m playing live. I use loops which I can put in depending on the mood, it’s all free form.” And the resultant Nathan Fake laptop live show is a much more intense, physical and visual experience than one has traditionally come to expect from the one man genre, wherein Fake fits and jerks his way through an unstoppable hour long assault with incredible focus, elbows flailing and body contorted to impossible angles as he throws the noises at his enraptured audience.

The almost autistic musical aptitude and incredible feats of memory of Nathan's childhood also continue to inform his modern-day studio productions, as he wrings his astounding results out of the limited palette of a PC and millennium-era Cubase 5 software thanks to his encyclopaedic knowledge of every little detail – bug, quirk, malfunction or bonafide built-in feature - that lurks inside his chosen tools. “My approach to making music, physically and mentally, has actually changed very little over the last ten years,” he maintains, somewhat surprisingly. “I like to keep the technical side of things as simple and familiar as possible.” For Nathan, this absolute and complete mastery of a limited set of tools is essential to ensure the rapid, visceral translation of instinctive ideas into jaw-dropping musical reality.

The method behind the madness may barely have altered, but as we fast forward to 2012's 'Steam Days' update of the Nathan Fake musical manifesto we find Nathan increasingly concerned with a new process he describes as “erosion of sound”, whereby an unpredictable organic layer of post-processing is added to the otherwise pristine and all-too-ubiquitous products of computer-bound digital soft-synths. “The last two records sound really clean to me now,” Fake explains. “This one has the perfect amount of grit in it, I think. I've put a lot of time into finding different ways to erode sounds, to make them sound wooden and earthy instead of plastic and metal.”

The unconventional low-tech hotch potch that makes up Mr Fake's idiosyncratic home studio thus combines the analogue richness of a rag tag collection of cheap drum machines with the infinite power and possibility of his trusty PC's digital audio editing capabilities, all of which is flattened and unified through the crucial final step of recording to one of his beloved vintage home cassette players. “The way a cassette works when it records stuff is pretty unique,” Nathan explains. “You can get plugins but you can never really get the same results unless you use real tape.”

The resultant 'Steam Days' album artefact is the considered response of an artist coming of age, drawing upon that self-same characteristic individualism to reach maturity in the full glare of that special kind of musical infamy that comes attached to an insidious club hit. A document of “everything that’s gone on in my head for the past two years”, the 'Hard Islands' techno tantrum of Nathan's mid-twenties has clearly now abated, giving way to a sophisticated organic blend of propulsive percussive body and warming pastoral bliss that effectively distills both sides of his fractured musical personalities into a delightfully varied transformative trip.

Long after his post-college move to the big, bad city of London, Nathan's rural upbringing in the Norfolk village of Necton continues to bring its influence to bear on his music, his pastoral roots weaving their way through harmonious washes of synths and folky refrains, and running deep into the mythology of his track titles. Farm fresh floorfiller 'Iceni Strings' is a nod to ancient Norfolk-dwelling Celtic tribe the Iceni, whilst local villages 'Bawsey' (outdoor swimming spot where the teenage Nathan once narrowly escaped drowning), 'Neketona' (the Anglo-Saxon name for his childhood village home) and 'Castle Rising' (surreally-named sleepy Norfolk hamlet) all represent personal landmarks in the Fake family folklore. Likewise the insistently anthemic 'Harnser' takes its name from his father's handyman company, itself named after the local Norfolk word for “heron”. “I've got a really strong connection with the place I grew up in,” Nathan declares. “Norfolk will always be my home, even though I don't have one there any more.”

“London is also my home, but I still don't feel like I totally belong here,” he continues, having adopted the British capital as centre of operations for his current campaign of touring and remixing (his string of illustrious credits includes none other than Radiohead, Domino's production young buck Jon Hopkins, Warp's PVT and Clark, and labels like Ninja Tune, DFA and Lone's Magic Wire). Though he often ventures beyond the walls of his home studio to embrace the full throb of the city's ever-shifting musical landscape, every now and then a wistful eye is cast back towards his long since sold family home in Norfolk, and Nathan somehow never quite manages to shake off that nostalgia for good times gone by encapsulated in his 'Steam Days' album title. But torn as he is between town and country, between dancefloor hedonism and home-listening introspection, the lone figure of Nathan Fake together with his third album opus 'Steam Days' serve as living proof that these seemingly polar opposite worlds don't have to be mutually exclusive.

*Gemma Sheppard*

## albums:

nathan fake : "steam days" border community

### "hard islands"

*"Short (six tracks), sweet and superb, the album combined big slaps of acid techno with dreamy electronica, resulting in a record that was simultaneously accessible yet fully belting, with a delightfully wonky tinge to the whole thing... One of the electronic albums of the year." - Clash*

### "drowning in a sea of love"

## singles:

nathan fake : "iceni strings" border community

"you are here"

"drowning in a sea of remixes"

"silent night"

"the sky was pink"

"outhouse"

"xmas rush"

pampa

"dinamo ep"

traum schallplatten

"watlington street ep"

saw recordings

## remixes:

neon jung :

"delirium tremens"

magic wire

radiohead :

"morning mr magpie"

ticker tape ltd

clark :

"growls garden"

warp

jon hopkins :

"wire"

domino

pvt :

"light up bright fires"

warp

piroth :

"dance closer"

oma gusti

grasscut :

"muppet"

ninja tune

starting teeth :

"venom"

creaked records

shocking pinks :

"dressed to please"

dfa

vincent oliver :

"clouds in the head"

lo recordings

annie :

"my best friend"

679 recordings

tiefschwarz :

"issst"

fine

steve lawler :

"out at night"

subversive

avus :

"real"

border community

perc :

"closer"

perc trax

dj remy :

"scrambled"

additive

jack addicts :

"stalker"

dirty blue