

# High Contrast

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## LIVING THE HIGH LIFE : AN INTERVIEW WITH HIGH CONTRAST

Contrast is about setting off dissimilar objects or entities or setting things in opposition in order to show or emphasize differences. With a musical style that incorporates and fuses different, sometimes opposing, musical elements, Lincoln Barrett is contrast personified, High Contrast that is.

Before becoming Wales' dnb prodigy, High Contrast, born Lincoln Barrett, was into film. In fact, he had enough of an interest to earn a film degree from university. With film, as with photography, images are very important. But unlike photography, film also has accompanying sounds. For Barrett, it was these sounds (and the ability of sound itself to convey images) that was particularly interesting.

Barrett explains that from an early age he was interested in film and music that caught his ear were music on film soundtracks. "I had no interest in (electronic) music at all until I was like 16 or 17 really," he confesses. "I was just all interested in films and film music."

But through friends, Barrett was exposed to sample-based electronic music that piqued his interest around 1997. "The sampling that went into it just caught my attention: the idea of taking bits from old songs and reusing them and also taking samples from films," he says, explaining that one album in particular stood out for him. The album, "9 Deadly Venoms" (by Depth Charge), was on the breakbeat tip and full of film samples from westerns, Kung fu and horror movies.

Because Barrett knew all the films, he was drawn to the idea that a current music form was using all the sounds he had grown up with from cinema. "I kind of went from there and it's just grown into drum and bass," he adds.

For Barrett, DJing went hand in hand with composing and producing his own music around 1997. "I bought a music magazine and there was a demo of Cubase on the cover (on CD) and inside it said: 'With this demo you can make your own jungle tracks.' Even though I didn't really know what jungle was, I just started playing around with it and downloaded some sounds off the internet and some (other) things and went through my mother's Motown collection and sampled (it)," Barrett explains. "It was a totally new kind of concept for me. I just started messing around not really knowing what I was doing and I just went from there."

Barrett says his studio skills are self-taught, which has helped him to find his own path and develop his own sound. This unique sound is what makes High Contrast stand out from the pack in such a short time. "A lot of people bemoan that drum

and bass is very insular and there are just a certain few big DJs that run it (and don't let other people in)," he says. "But I think that really, it is just down to the product. The music will take you places if it is good, interesting music."

And Hospital Records was interested enough in Barrett's music to sign him to the label in 2000 and release his first single in 2001. It all started when London Elektriccity was booked to play at a Cardiff club night called Silent Running, where Barrett was a resident.

"Usually when he'd go to a gig (especially at that time), the resident DJs would be playing really hard, dark drum and bass and he was trying to do more musical kind of things. I was playing more along his lines so we just hit it off straight away," Barrett recalls. "I said to him, I produce as well and I've got some things on the go (and just at that time my production had gotten to an acceptable level). It was just good timing really because I gave him one CD and the second CD they signed me for an album."

Soon afterwards, he heard one of his own tunes being played out in a club for the first time. "I think the first time was at Fabio's night in London called Swerve," recalls Barrett. "It's kind of the seminal, liquid funk night. It kind of defined that sound. London Elektriccity was playing there, who runs Hospital, and he played the track that they first signed from me called Suddenly. It was something else to be there and standing at the bar with other producers like Carlito and Total Science and to have my tune played there."

High Contrast's first album "True Colours" was well received by critics and music fans alike and took many people by surprise. "Prior to the album coming out, I'd only had three singles out, and in dnb, producers release a ton of singles on a bunch of different labels," says Barrett. "It gave an enigmatic kind of quality to my name and it just seemed to work. It kind of hit people and made people take notice because I just came out of nowhere and had this product."

Barrett also explains the album was well received in more mainstream music circles. "With an album you tap into an audience outside of the drum and bass crowd as well. People outside of drum and bass - people who wouldn't normally listen to drum and bass - bought 'True Colours.'"

And it looks like Barrett will repeat his success with "High Society," his recently released second album. "Production-wise, it's better just because I've learned a lot since the first album," he says. "I think it's more interesting (because) there's more contrast on there. There are a lot of influences on there. Some tracks are hip hop fusions and there are some '80s sounding tracks, as well as more filtered, soulful, uplifting things I'm known for. I think there's a good mix on there."

This album is also different because Barrett approached it from the beginning as a unified project, whereas "True Colours" was more of a collection of the music he was feeling at the time it was put together. "The first album was freeform, I wasn't

working towards any real goal with it, whereas with this album, it was more of a concept from the start. I had a definite direction I wanted to go in," he says.

In fact, he started planning the second album almost as soon as his first album was released. "For this album, I came up with the name straight after 'True Colours.' (I was) kind of building what kind of vibe I wanted for it," he says adding that names are important for him. "I like coming up with names for tracks. I usually try to think of the name before I've made the track and try and just approach it in a conceptual way. I don't like how in drum and bass a lot of tracks have throw-away track titles or just like a line from the vocal is the name \ for the track. It's just kind of anonymous so I try to come up with names that make people think a little bit."

Barrett admits he is often astounded by the positive reception his music receives. "I never really think about the whole after-effect, I'm just in my home studio working on music and making things that I like personally. I never really think about the whole rest of the world and how they react to it."

But what he does think about is how to keep progressing and pushing his sound. "I'm always looking for the contrast in everything, hence the name," he says. "I just keep trying to push things really. I never try to settle on a sound. I may return to themes I've done in the past, but I always wait until I've got a new angle on it really. I'd rather hear a badly produced track that had a really good idea in it than a really well-produced track that was totally pedestrian."

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