

FATBOY SLIM

When Norman Cook was working on the second Fat Boy Slim album, he called it “Viva The Undercheiver”. Then he realised he wasn’t an under acheiver anymore, so he decided on “Let’s Hear It For The Little Guy”. But he wasn’t a little guy either, so he ended up with “You’ve Come A Long Way, Baby”. In the months since it was released he’s come a whole lot further.

Modesty and unexpected success have always gone hand in hand for Norman Cook. In the middle of the Eighties he became the bassist for Hull indie band the Housemartins as a favour. It turned into his first taste of pop stardom (number one with “Caravan Of Love”), but his heart, much to his bandmates’ disapproval, lay in dance music. When the Housemartins split, he formed Beats International and had another Number One (“Dub Be Good To Me”) in 1990 but they fell apart too. Two difficult years later, he had his first taste of clubbing and, high on hope, tried again. Freakpower, his acid funk band, scored a top ten with the Levi’s-championed “Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out” while away from the pressures of touring and chart-watching he reinvented himself again and again. As Pizzaman, Mighty Dub Kats and Fried Funk Food he covered everything from cheesy house to blunted trip hop, but one thing remained constant: it had to be fun.

When Fatboy Slim’s debut single “Santa Cruz”, kick started the Skint label in 1995, Norman just wouldn’t admit that he was the man behind it. After all, Fatboy Slim was just a laugh. Freakpower was his day job. Or so he thought. The second Freakpower album was inspired but it was also ignored, so Norman gave up trying to be a pop star and retreated to his studio again. Meanwhile in London, clubs like the Heavenly Social and Big Kahuna Burger were having similar ideas about combining the best bits from house, hip hop, rock and soul into a party-rocking hybrid. As Norman discovered when he drove to London to investigate, one of the anthems they were playing was “Santa Cruz”.

As more Fatboy Slim records followed - “Everyobody Loves a 303”, “Punk To Funk” and the debut album, “Better Living Through Chemistry” -Norman, his flat mate Gareth Hansome and Skint boss Damian Harris decided to give Brighton’s like-minded party crowd a more permanent venue than Norman’s house (popularly known as the House Of Love). They called it the Big Beat Boutique and as resident, Norman played records linked only by their capacity to put a big stupid grin on your face.

By the end of 1997, Norman was the undisputed king of big beat, remixing everyone from Jean-Jacques Perrey to Stretch & Vern, making it to Number 33 in the charts with his samabatastic remix of “everybody Loves a 303” and having the time of his life. But he wasn’t a pop star. Not, that is, until he remixed Wildchild’s “Renegade Master” (a tribute to the late Roger McKenzie) and Cornershop’s “Brimful Of Asha” (he wanted to DJ with it, but had to make a dancefloor-friendly version). He didn’t charge a penny for it either, but they put his name on the map nonetheless. Wildchild hit the top of the chart and

Cornershop (who didn't even make the top 40 with the original version) went to Number One as well. Norman's midas touch obviously hadn't deserted him.

You could call "The Rockefella Skank" surf-hop. You could, like Norman, call it "Hawaii 5-0 on acid". Or you could just call it the anthem of the year. Like so many classic pop records, it never made it to Number One on its release last June, but its deliriously infectious refrain - "Right about now, the funk soul brother" - indelibly etched itself onto the brains of everyone who heard it. Since then, Des Lynam has recited it on Radio 1, Ross has played it on Friends and USA Today has decreed it single of the year. Triumphant DJing expeditions to Glastonbury, America and Ibiza followed in the summer, and it was in Ibiza that he met, and soon fell in love with Radio 1 DJ Zoe Ball. Their wedding or, as Gareth Hantsome puts it, "a big party with a wedding attached", took place this summer. His mix album "On The Floor At The Boutique" was a resounding success. When "Gangster Tripping", the second single, went to Number 2 in September, its sales outstripped even "The Rockefeller Skank"!

The album, meanwhile, became a phenomenon. After weeks in the Top Ten it finally made it to Number One in the week of the Brits, fending off golden boy Robbie, and has now sold 3 million copies worldwide, 1 million in the UK alone. So far this year, Norman has won a Brit award for best dance act and further gongs from, amongst others, Q, NME, GQ and Muzik. He's also played in New Zealand and Australia (where an impressed Courtney Love was switched on to dance music by his set) and sold out a headline DJ gig at Brixton Academy. "Praise You", the single released in January went straight to Number One (and boasting a fabulous video from the legendary Spike Jonze) and "Right Here, Right Now" followed it into the Top Ten in April, bolstered by its appearance in an Adidas ad. So let's get this straight. Norman is living in a beautiful beach front house and married to Zoe Ball. He's the biggest dance artist in the world and he's a pop star all over again. Norman was right "Viva The Underachiever" would have looked a bit daft.

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