

DJ CAM - BIOGRAPHY

Lesson n°1 : To stand still is to die. This is what DJ Cam - whose groundbreaking skills are widely respected - implicitly claims in his work. Never close, nor far from, where you expect him, Cam manages to assimilate his influences without forgetting his hip-hop background, and has established his own style by messing around with musical tags. Up to now, he seemed to be driven by his ambition to fight against the media and public need to pigeonhole him. With the Loa Project, his latest and most accomplished album to date, DJ Cam seems at last to be at peace with himself and the rest of the world. In fact, the Loa Project is what he always did best, which is DJ Cam style.

Lesson n° 2 : A high quality and open-minded record collection is the best musical compost. Cam was raised in Paris, his father was a jazz fan and his mother keen on classical music, so he obviously used to listen to a lot of music at home. "Pop music was forbidden at home, it was Miles Davis or Mozart," recalls Cam. This highly demanding musical education guided him later on when he had to make up his own mind. As a pre-teen, he broke his moneybox to buy the best funk music around : George Clinton, Cameo, Prince, Earth Wind & Fire and Kool & The Gang. In the early 90's, Laurent Daumail got into tagging and his signature "Cam" (already!) was suddenly all over Paris' walls. With his posse "Les Erotic Warriors", a few high school students, he discovered hip-hop and threw himself into the rap music of those days. Eric B & Rakim, Public Enemy and above all Gang Starr, whose DJ Premier remains up to now his main influence, were the artists that introduced him to a scene that he will remain faithful to all his life, and to a sound - the sound of the New York underground - that he still considers as "the most beautiful music in the world". At the age of 15, Cam bought his first two decks and locked himself away for two hours every day to mix and scratch. It's great to make hip-hop music but what can you do when you can't find the right MC to work with? His frustration was short lived though. In 1993 Cam was struck by "Influx", Dj Shadow's seminal instrumental hip-hop track. "Thanks to him I understood that instrumental hip-hop had a future," says Cam, while rejecting vehemently, just like Shadow, the 'trip-hop' tag that he links to the Bristol scene.

His debut album Underground Vibes was released in 95 on his own label StreetJazz (renamed Inflamable for his second album release). Blending inspired abstract hip-hop with gorgeous jazz samples, this album revealed Cam's style in its embryonic form and above all his most famous track "Dieu reconnaitra les siens", by now a somewhat worn-out gem that was featured on a clutch of international compilations. While this record was immediately embraced by Massive Attack and DJ Krush, Cam had to wait a few months

before the explosion of the French scene to get noticed. Featured on two innovative compilations, "Source Lab" and "What's Up", he found himself rubbing shoulders with what came to be called the 'French Touch' - Air, Motorbass, la Funk Mob (Cassius), Mighty Bop (Bob Sinclar). Thanks to the release of a 12" single featuring La Funk Mob and Mighty Bop Cam established himself as a deep and mystical deck wizard.

Lesson n° 3 : Do not hesitate to try and experiment, you will always learn something out of it. His sophomore album Substances was released in 96. This transitional album

showed an artist trying to find his way and refusing to stay still. While sticking to his hip-hop roots, DJ Cam ventured through house, jungle and ambient and finally added some vocals

with the mournful laments of Indian diva Kakoli Sengupta. Cam is a melancholic guy but the fact that he could not play his records during his highly energetic live shows deeply bothered him. In 97, his mix for the prestigious DJ Kicks series - following such heavy weights as Carl Craig or Kruder & Dorfmeister - was a first attempt to bridge the gap between the two different sides of his music : the thrilling lightness of his compositions and the raw style of underground American and British rap represented here by some of its icons (Rasco, Channel Live, Ragga Twins).

Lesson n° 4 : You never know what to expect from DJ Cam. Indeed, the following year, Cam switched to something totally different and struck hard with "The Beat Assassinated", a hard-hitting smash where he invited a bunch of MCs from both sides of the Atlantic : Channel Live, the New York protegees of KRS One, KDD, the Toulouse rappers, ragga veteran Silvah Bullet and Otis, a British MC well-known on the parisian drum 'n' bass scene. DJ Cam had made his point : after such a rap explosion, not one record shop would dare to display him on the trip-hop or techno shelves. Still, it was not the last word from "the guy who knows how to make decks cry".

Lesson n° 5 : What's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh. With Loa Project DJ Cam comes back to his first love : instrumental hip-hop with jazz influences. DJ Cam seems to have synthesised everything he did up to now. With Cam exploring his latent mysticism further, the album hinges on "the positive aspects" of voodoo, which he studied for two years, because "pinned dolls and zombies only represent 3% of the voodoo cult which concentrates mainly on positive energy", underlines Cam. Under the sign of 'Loa Mété', a protective spirit, this record also is a fascinating travel book featuring mixed rhythms (steel bands, sound systems, percussion) and live instrumentation. "I went to Mauritius, the Réunion island and Canada where there is a large Haitian community, I met some interesting people there and recorded rhythms on DAT. Back in Paris, I mixed these samples with some real bass lines, keyboards and strings. I had never worked on so many tracks before". With its slow rhythmic build up, its crystal-clear piano and impressionist details - birds singing, a trumpet lament, psychedelic blips and a Stanley Clarke bass - the first single "Juliet", dedicated to his wife, is proof that Cam's style is now mature. Stylish, painful and magic. In this respect, "Voodoo Jazz" is also a real gem redolent of the grace of Alice Coltrane and a steaming ritual ceremony in Haiti. On the rest of the album, DJ Cam teases us, playing it hot ("You do something to me", an R&B track competing with the best of Timbaland) and cold (the frightening "Candyman"), pure hip-hop ("Mental Invasion") and free breakbeats (DJ Cam Sound System) while finally ending on "Angel Heart", a smooth and moving lullaby. Cam manages to touch the spiritual feelings of the listener. DJ Cam was a deck wizard and now is a voodoo sorcerer. The magus of good vibes.