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ED BANGER DRUG LAWS AZARI & III ABOVE AND BEYOND

# ENCORE UNE FOIS

Bridging the gap between rock 'n' roll, fashion, art and banging electro, they changed the face of dance music forever. Back with a raft of stars, including the unstoppable Justice, Ed Banger Records is set to rule the world once again

Words Thomas H Green Photos So Me & Mendoza Illustrated type So Me

**T**HIS IS A big deal. *Mixmag* is in Justice's Paris basement studio listening to their work-in-progress new album, due to be released towards the end of the year. Your correspondent is only the fourth person outside the band and Ed Banger label manager Pedro Winter to hear this music. The air fizzes with tension and anticipation.

An enormous painting of Tutankhamun peers impassively down from the wall as I sit in a brown swivel chair amid analogue and digital kit. Justice are here too, looking nervous, avoiding my eyes. It can be terribly embarrassing when bands play you their new music. What if it's terrible? Where do you look? What do you say? I stare intently at something called a Vocet Discrete Class A Studio Controller.

The reason it's so important is that Justice were game-changers. They helped revitalise dance music when it was in its post-millennial doldrums, formed a vital portal to indie/rock and welcomed a new generation to the party. Their first album, '†', combined distorted electro bangers with pop süss and a shed-load of attitude. Their new one, it turns out, is more than its equal: complex yet funkier and more playful.

The 10 tracks *Mixmag* hears, with titles like 'Horsepower', 'Ohio', 'New Lance' and 'Audio Video Disco', don't have so much of '†'s raw bangin', yet maintain a powerful, club-centric vision that's still very Justice. They've assimilated a strong flavour of 70s rock in a way that's thoroughly entertaining.

Singers such as Ali Love, Vincent Vendetta of Midnight Juggernauts and Morgan Phalen of cult hard rock act Diamond Nights, as well as Justice themselves, front songs where the spirits of Queen and Iron Maiden collide dramatically with gigantic electro-bassline funk. Mad prog rock lyrics, baroque flourishes and even an apparent flute solo seamlessly gel with polished electro-punk, monster synth riffs replacing guitars. It's original, poppy, accessible, brave and fun. It's also hugely exciting.

In the eerie silence that follows the last track, I burble enthusiastically, "It's The Who for ravers!" Gaspard Augé – the heavily moustachioed half of Justice – smiles faintly. "The two albums we had in

mind when we were making this," he says, "were 'Who's Next' and Led Zeppelin's 'Houses Of The Holy'."

This is a surprising statement coming from the reigning kings of Gallic clubland cool (given that Daft Punk are making film soundtracks in LA). It's time for dinner. There's much to talk about.

**N**EARBY RESTAURANT the Hotel L'Amour boasts a unique selling point: a €20 book featuring all the waitresses in the nude. As a result, it's difficult to keep the imagination from wandering as they serve you. Justice are unfazed. This is a regular eating spot, and they sit picking at their starters.

Xavier de Rosnay, 28, wears a red leather jacket, jeans with a white belt, key chain and hi-top trainers. He is the smaller of the pair, good-looking with dark, intense eyes and a mouth that has a natural pout. Gaspard, 32, looks like a 70s rocker. He wears a tight, navy leather jacket, a Blue Oyster Cult T-shirt, turned-up jeans, a crucifix earring, thick glasses, cowboy boots, a gold gargoyle ring and a hefty 'JAZZ' belt buckle. Both speak reasonable English, although Xavier seems more confident.

Dressed as they would dress on stage, they have the quietly charismatic presence of stars. Their rise to success, however, was not immediate. Signed to Ed Banger in 2003, a couple of young graphic designers chancing their arm with music, their Simian remix 'Never Be Alone' was a sensation. The singles that followed, while big club successes (especially 'D.A.N.C.E.'), fitted the exploding



Gaspard, left, and Xavier, middle

ED BANGER

BUSY P



So Me: the design and photography genius behind this issue's cover story

**“The Beatles, Black Sabbath – they all had ways of blending traditional with modern music”**



indie-dance crossover rather than defining the band. The album moved things forward, but it was Justice's iconic live show, featuring stacks of Marshall speaker cabinets and a giant neon cross, that was the making of them. In the States, especially, their raucous riff-electro and rock star chic connected with a broad audience. They cemented their reputation in 2008 with the DVD documentary *A Cross The Universe*, a frenetic, stroboscopic window into their US tour, jammed with gigantic crowds, groupie sex, band logo tattoos and rock 'n' roll misbehaviour.

**T**HE WORLD HAS not heard much from them since. Xavier now spends much of his time in London, while Gaspard remains in the flat the pair share with Bertrand de Langeron, aka So Me, the designer who is a core part of their and Ed Banger's creative vision (and responsible for this month's *Mixmag* cover). Alongside Diplo and others, they worked on an as-yet unreleased project by French singer Mapie, and Gaspard wrote the soundtrack to Mr Oizo's recent feature film *Rubber*. Since the beginning of 2010 they've been working on their new album. The first taste is the epic single 'Civilisation', with an extraordinary video by long-term collaborators Surface 2 Air that comes on like the disaster flick *2012* via a prog rock album cover. In it a desert world tumbles into oblivion as Mount Rushmore, Rio's Christ the Redeemer statue and other global monuments crash to their destruction amid herds of fleeing bison. It all seems a far cry from hammering out electro at Paris's Rex Club. "The first album was the night and the city," says Xavier carefully, "This one is the day and the countryside."

"We were listening to a lot of late sixties and early seventies English rock," Gaspard adds. "I was trying to explain the record to a friend, talking about ELO, Queen, Black Sabbath and she said we'd been 'taking the best of the worst'. But we don't think of these bands as bad taste." There are some fairly *outré* moments, though, like 'Loose Canon', which opens with a kind of folksy jig... "We've always had a soft spot for medieval music," replies Gaspard – not a line anyone expected from Justice. "We don't want to launch into it too far and end up playing leprechaun festivals, but these bands we

love – The Beatles, Black Sabbath – they all had ways of blending traditional with modern music. You can hear it a lot in 'Planisphere', our twenty-minute song [created for Dior Homme's 2009 campaign], but on the album we've gone back even further in time."

Such wilfully off-beat behaviour is what makes Justice such an interesting proposition, and the environment of creative freedom makes Ed Banger a great home for them. They drop hints that a major label tried to poach them, but they see label boss Pedro 'Busy P' Winter and So Me as integral to what they do. Even at the dawn of their career Pedro understood the potential of 'Never Be Alone' (aka 'We Are Your Friends') when even its original writers, ex-Simian duo Simian Mobile Disco, didn't.

"They told us quite frankly they didn't like that song because it sounded to them like Midi-jazz," smiles Xavier, "They're right. Even for us it's a mystery why it became so popular. We used to play the original in clubs because we thought it was much better than ours." "It's funny because the only reason we kept just the chorus is because our sampler didn't have enough space to put the whole record in," adds Gaspard. "It ended up so catchy by chance."

As we walk from the studio to the restaurant Justice are approached by a girl, but she doesn't want an autograph, she simply wants to talk about her boyfriend's music. In Paris, at least, it seems they're not publicly hassled by their rising fame – though Gaspard says, "There's a [web] community of girls obsessed with us being gay. They make embarrassing pictures of us kissing and naked in the same bed."

The only real hassle they've had was a rumour, online and off, regarding a photograph of Gaspard on stage beside an apparently unplugged Midi pad controller.

A rumour arose that they didn't play live at all. "I was looking at the screen of the computer and the controller was unplugged, then five seconds later I plugged it back in," Gaspard explains. "We even found a photo where you can see me plugging it back in, but that was not the one people took any interest in. It fed the hate machine... but that started way before." "Pedro took the photos so we put a sequence of four or five pictures on our MySpace and called it Justice Unplugged, then Justice Plugged," says Xavier. "Even then people were looking at the middle picture saying, 'Oh, look, it's unplugged.' We were a bit annoyed, but you can't say anything about stuff like this."

**W**HEN JUSTICE FIRST appeared, electronic dance music was arguably at its lowest ebb in 15 years. It's now bigger than ever, but the duo are untouched by the foibles of public taste.

"We only ever hear new music in cabs going back from the studio," says Gaspard. "What we've been doing for a year and a half is so disconnected from the rest of the world."

"We don't have a TV, we don't have a precise idea of the music scene," Xavier continues, "We've not consciously gone somewhere different, because we had no idea what was happening. The driving idea on this record was the same as the first one: to make modern pop music."

In reality, *Mixmag*'s audience with Justice is just the beginning. The live show, when it appears – still just the two of them, but with all manner of new bells and whistles – will be where their return really blows up. Their extraordinary new album, meanwhile, has the potential to be a phenomenon. ▶▶



Justice's new video for 'Civilisation': epic

ROMAIN BOURVEN

# BREAKBOT

Disco funk wunderkind bringing "old-school black culture" to the new Ed Banger sound

**THIBAUT BERLAND** – aka Breakbot – lies fast asleep on a sofa in the Paris photographic studio where *Mixmag*'s cover shoot is taking place.

"He looks like Lenin in his tomb," comments Gaspard. He does, kind of, but his beard is fuller, he has more hair, he's wearing an Ed Banger T-shirt, grey-brown jeans, and big Ray Ban-style sunglasses. The whole ensemble looks less like the figurehead of the 1917 Russian Revolution than a very tired DJ, which is what he is.

The 29-year-old describes himself as the "the last kid in the Ed Banger family", having only been with them three years. He's working hard, though. It's Monday and he's had 16 hours sleep since Thursday, having played gigs every night around France and Italy. Next week he's going to New York to shoot the video for his new single, 'Fantasy', which, when he's roused from the sofa, he describes as taking place in an art class where one of the students falls in love with the model. It sounds a little like the video for Lionel Richie's 'Hello'.

"I've not seen that," he says, "but I'll check it out, because Lionel Richie is a big influence for me, when he was in The Commodores. I'm trying to bring old-school black culture to the Ed Banger camp."



Indeed, Breakbot majors in light, disco-seasoned freshness. His debut single 'Baby I'm Yours' wound the clock back stylistically to Modjo's 'Lady' and classic Roulé material, and remixes for Air, Aeroplane, Matthew Dear and, notably, his take on P'nau's 'Baby' are rife with funk, fun and ladies on the dancefloor.

"Ed Banger feels that every artist can have a different sound," he states. "My stuff is a bit cheesy – but I like cheese." His tentative English may be letting him down here. It's not cheesy at all, especially when taken in tandem with the stunning video for 'Baby I'm Yours', an elegant, constantly morphing, apparently hand-painted, psychedelic extravaganza.

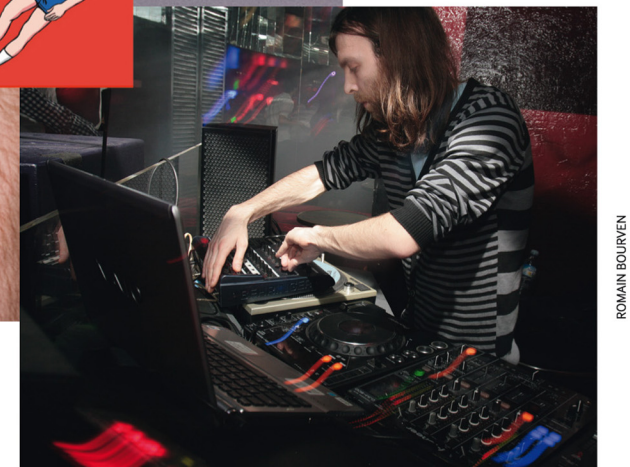
"My girlfriend Irena Dakeva made that, it took her three months," he explains. "She did every frame from watercolours, two thousand drawings, inspired by the 'Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds' sequence from [Beatles' cartoon] *Yellow Submarine*."

A Paris native who grew up "not going out that much – I was more into Ninja Tune and trip hop," Breakbot was "a friend of Justice before they were Justice" and an early Ed Banger fan. He had a successful career as an animator and CGI artist – he worked on the kids' film *Arthur And The Invisibles* – but also made music, kept in touch with Ed Banger, and kept hoping.

"I never thought it was relevant to become a Justice clone or a SebastiAn clone," he says, "because they were already doing their thing very well." In fact, if SebastiAn's album (see overleaf) closes the book on the Ed Banger sound 1.0, Breakbot's points to the future. ▶▶



**“My stuff is a bit cheesy – but I like cheese”**



ROMAIN BOURVEN

# BUSY P

# SEBASTIAN

DJ maverick, punk prankster and vampiric master of crunching, heavy-duty electro

**A SHEPARD SCALE** is a sonic sinewave tone experiment. Like Escher's famous optical illusion staircase, it appears to rise forever, but actually loops in circles. It's a head-frying sound. When SebastiAn headlined Koko recently he came on and dropped a Shepard Scale, then lay down on stage on his back and smoked a cigarette. Five minutes passed. The crowd thought it funny. Ten – they were restless. Twenty – they grew gradually furious. Thirty – fights were starting to break out. Then SebastiAn stood up, walked to the decks and dropped a beat. The place went ballistic.

SebastiAn is the contrary, dark horse of the Ed Banger stable. Lolling over a table in a Paris photographic studio, he looks the part. His skin is pale, his eyes red and he's clad entirely in black. His debut album 'Total' is equally uncompromising, ranging from steroid P-funk to all-out noisiness, and featuring guest appearances by MIA and Mayer Hawthorne of Stone's Throw Records. "It's what I did from 2005 to now," he says. "Twenty-two songs, some long, some small, like going to a restaurant for entrées."

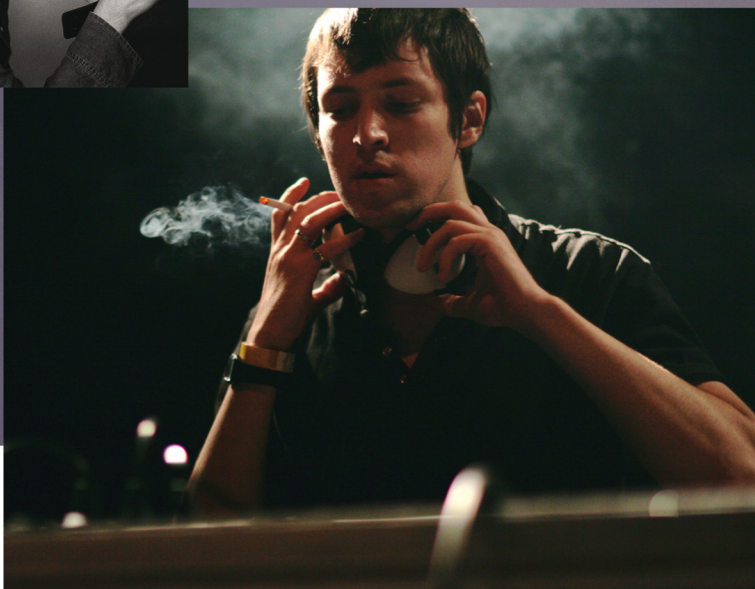
SebastiAn – the capital 'A' is simply to emphasise the fact that he doesn't have the usual French spelling with an 'e' – is credited with inventing the crunching, heavy-duty electro which became known as the 'Ed Banger sound'. 'Total', long promised, supposedly closes this chapter. The title track is possibly its apex, one minute 22 seconds of metallic cacophony – "Aesthetically it's a punk track," he says – while the video is a cut-up shock-a-thon of sex and violence.

Born of Serbian-French parentage in 1981, Sebastian Akchoté was raised in Paris and Belgrade by a single mother. Signed to Ed Banger in 2005, his profile shot up after a series of battering remixes for the likes of Daft Punk (their favourite ever remix of their own work), The Klaxons, Kelis and his pal Uffie, later collected on a compilation. He has also worked on film soundtracks for directors Mr Oizo and Romain Gavras, and is currently producing Kavinsky's album. Future plans include working with avant-noise maverick Jean-Louis Costes and some live shows for which he promises something very different...

In person he emanates straight-faced, deadpan amusement, a twinkle of humour, as if constantly holding back from commenting on the world's ridiculousness. "To me, everything is a joke but very serious," he admits, but adds, "There's no rapport between my life and what I do in front of a computer, it's perverse."

Some may find his album cover more perverse. On it the French photographer Jean-Baptiste Mondino portrays SebastiAn in a passionate clinch, kissing himself. "It is straight, a heterosexual kiss between two men," he reckons, "I'm quiet and never really show myself in general so when I do, I do it for real, I make two of me."

Two of him would probably be too much mischief, but just the one SebastiAn will certainly deliver some edgy surprises for the next phase of Ed Banger.



ROMAN BOURVEN



"I'm not a mastermind. I was just there at the right time"

Ed Banger kingpin, dancefloor dynamo and extremely busy man

**AND SO TO** the daddy – or "the bus driver on our school trip", as he would have it. There are not many people in the world like Pedro Winter, aka Busy P. A gangly, grinning figure with longish hair, a Tom of Finland T-shirt and multiple tattoos, he bursts with positivity, anecdotes and wild plans – only unlike most people's wild plans, Pedro Winter's might actually happen. After all, Ed Banger did – but he knows the label's now at a turning point.

"Today we could do stadium tours, all of us hammering the kids with noisy banging," he says, "but there are plenty of others doing that right now, people like Deadmau5. We've been doing it for five years and I don't want to arrive at a show and do what I did yesterday. Of course it would be good for my bank account, but I prefer to build a castle of sand, watch the sea smash it and then do another thing."

His office is a melee of art, kitsch and mementoes: Jay & Silent Bob figurines, Mo' Wax toys, Moomins, a canvas of Pedro as Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, a drawing by US graffiti artist Neck Face of a monster eating a bleeding Eiffel tower (which Pedro also has tattooed on his arm), Cassius yo-yos, presentation boxes of recent 7" set 'The Bee Sides', promotional Daft Punk figures for *Tron: Legacy* that the duo sent him. At 20, Winter managed them and oversaw their rise to global fame before amicably parting ways in 2008.

He has spent the weekend at the Cannes Film Festival and gleefully relates how he DJed on the beach, then hung out with Pharrell and Kanye at a 200-capacity event where the pair were performing for the likes of Leonardo DiCaprio, and finally DJed in a small club "playing Stephan Bodzin and dubstep".

"I like doing the splits between these two worlds," he enthuses.

After club promotion and Daft Punk management throughout the 90s, he set up Ed Banger in 2002, but it really took off three years later when the label became the trailblazer for the rock/dance crossover crowd. Pedro, Justice and SebastiAn, former hip hop producer DJ Mehdi, big-mouthed American rude-girl Uffie, DJ-producer Feadz, and film-making UK chart-topper Mr Oizo, all became the vanguard for wild party electro with rock'n'roll spirit.

"It wasn't a choice," laughs Pedro, "I'm not a mastermind saying, 'OK, we're going to conquer the world with a zest of rock attitude.' Everyone asks, 'What's the secret recipe?' but I just believe I was there at the right time."



Now Ed Banger has moved on, as admirably demonstrated on the recent, rich and varied 'Let The Children Techno' mix from Mehdi and Pedro, which featured Skream and Flying Lotus alongside the likes of Siriusmo and Zombie Nation. Pedro has put on Ed Banger parties in collaboration with Warp and Stone's Throw and these are the kind of company he now sees the label in.

"This year is going to be crucial," he says. As well as albums from Justice, SebastiAn and Breakbot, he has new ones from downtempo Ed Banger perennial Crazy Baldhead and UK producer Mickey Moonlight. "His album is a masterpiece," he says of the latter. "I'm scratching my head to find a way to release such a good album in a world where people aren't buying albums any more."

If anyone can find a way it will be Pedro, who actually lives up to that awful cliché of being high on life, avoiding both drink and drugs. "The perfect way of enjoying life is to be able to remember it the next day," he says. "I enjoy every minute of this music adventure – I sometimes feel like a sponge."

And with that, *Mixmag* is dismissed. It's accounting day in Ed Banger's office and after 24 hours as our gregarious host, Busy P is – yes – busy. There's a world to conquer, all over again. ☺

"When I do show myself I do it for real"

