

Interview – Aaron Spectre

By M3 Event / June 6, 2012 / Artists, Interviews / Leave a comment

After a youth spent drumming for various Massachusetts hardcore bands, Aaron Spectre has gone on to become one of the world's most innovative DJs, mixing jungle, drum & bass, ambient and dubstep into his eclectic and unique style. Aaron also incorporates his hardcore roots into the ferocious, high-energy breakcore of his Drumcorps project, and has remixed bands like Converge, Animosity and Genghis Tron. M3 caught up with Aaron to talk about his musical background, creativity's ability to transcend copyright law and why tapes are the perfect accompaniment to a good shower...



https://m3event.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/aaron-spectre_drumcorps.jpg

First of all, could you tell us a bit about yourself, and what it is that you do?

Aaron Spectre – My name is Aaron, I make music under the name Drumcorps.

What inspired you to start making music? What is your own musical background?

I've always heard music in my head – it runs and I can't stop it. That is all well and good, but you know sometimes you want an outlet. So...

I was a band geek in school – I started out on drums and moved to bass guitar later – playing in the school's concert / jazz / marching bands. It was a pretty normal American small high school experience, and our music program was drastically underfunded. I'd be trying to keep the snares in time while dodging the water droplets falling from the leaky roof... but the teachers in our department were top notch – absolutely amazing, and I learned some extremely valuable music & life lessons early.

Outside of school, I was playing drums in a few local hardcore bands in the central Massachusetts area, just some friends looking for an outlet. We'd play DIY shows in gymnasiums, lights on, where we'd daisy-chain our hodgepodge of gear together and make a PA from old bass amps – and throw an all day bandfest from noon-8pm.

It was an exciting time in that scene, there was a new sound developing and there weren't any rules just yet. A lot of inspiration and talent was in the area and I was fortunate to be there. At the time we thought we were unfortunate, in fact the music was a direct reaction to the cultural climate, but in fact central MA was one of those hotbeds that pop up from time to time, uncontrollably, and it spawned many great staple bands of a subculture that would end up known the world over.

One day I discovered the MIDI software that came with my dad's new computer – and there you go. An opportunity to get that music out of my head and into the world!! AWESOME. Being a drummer, my first tune was a 10 minute drum solo called "If I Were An Octopus." ... and I think we see where this is going.

From that point on you couldn't keep me away from the computer – and my high school music teacher was gracious enough to let me spend my lunch periods in the MIDI lab – wolfing down a sandwich in 2 minutes and spending the remaining 18 clicking little 16th notes into notation software on the little monochrome Macintosh. This was before digital audio was within reach for everyone but high-end studios – so the computer was just used for sequencing the notes, and all the sound actually came from one or two synthesizers which were in the room.

At the end of the year I had finished two songs. It felt like such an accomplishment – wow – to compose an entire orchestra right there – to have variety and power and space and quiet all in a box. Amazing. Still at it...

What would be your preferred medium to listen to music (eg. Vinyl, CD, tape, MP3 etc.), and why?

For me, it's all about context. If I have a favorite album I want to truly spend time with – vinyl, hands down. I love the ritual of lighting up a few candles, putting on a record, and letting the time unfold. I love having the art and intent all there and taking care with it. The act of preparing the record player, dusting it off, making sure the needle goes down gently, it puts my mind into a "love and caregiver" state if you will, and it primes me to give the music the attention it deserves.

For checking out new tunes, I want digital streams. I want to get a flavor quickly, then have the option to put it on for a long time if I want to absorb. If I want to take it in permanently I seek out the vinyl.

Tape is fun, but for me only in a very specific context. Last year when I was living in Boston, I had an old tape boombox in my bathroom – which was a lovely thing. You put on a tape and take a shower. That focuses your attention like nothing else! A brilliant album with strong songs and good continuity really shines. One with weak tunes (or too many awesome nuances to be heard over the din of the running water) sits on the shelf. Press play and you're COMMITTED. You are surrendering your mind to this artist for the next 30 minutes, if you take epic showers like me... Stepping out into the void of freezing cold bathroom tiles to hit fast forward – getting water all over the place – not so fun. So I found myself reaching for those strong albums each time.

Do you feel the idea of an album, as a piece of art that people will listen to from start to finish, has been undermined or forgotten about in the digital age?

Yes and no. Face it – Not all artists are album artists – and not all listeners are album listeners! With digital, we all have the choice. If you want to make a 3 hour long masterpiece – go for it. A series of short

EPs or singles? Go forth my friend. Just make what is honest for you and sort out the details later. Music becomes a lot more organic this way, if you let it. Each artist can do what is truly appropriate for their essence – and the fans can seek that out.

Many people have claimed that there is no longer any money in record sales, and that touring is the most efficient way to earn an income as a band. How much truth do you think there is in this sentiment?

There is certainly truth in that – but the longer I'm around the more I realize that everyone's incoming money streams are different – and opaque. You never really know unless you're the one counting the cash box – and even then – so much is undocumented. The one constant is that the streams tend to align with the soul and integrity and general mind state that's in the culture of the tunes. If a subculture values handmade design, for example, selling intricately designed t-shirts and screenprints will follow – etc. I know about my streams, but I don't know enough about anyone else's to make that call, and I like to talk about music more.

Do you think the internet has rendered traditional concepts of copyright obsolete, or do you think they are still relevant?

The traditional methods are still relevant when you're dealing with something big. When it's underground, everything is trust and personal rapport.

Similarly, do you think copyright could be seen as a threat to the creativity of artists who make use of a lot of samples within their work?

Creativity happens. It's eternal, and it refuses to be stopped by any law from now until forever. That moment of inspiration that happens in the artist soul is beyond any worldly jurisdiction. Making money and copyright, that's a different story... but creativity, it's robust. Artists are always doing our thing. Give us a stick, and we'll make a beautiful picture in the dirt.

What is your take on the current SOPA/ACTA controversy?

Dangerous for freedom of expression, for sure. Orwellian. Do not like. Also, it just plain won't work, someone will find a way around it... and then you will have a two-caste information system of the people who rebel, and the people who go with the flow. A lot of people stick with the defaults, that's for sure. If you've ever visited a country where they have bandwidth caps on their internet traffic, you can viscerally feel that the country is culturally behind. Gives me chills. Please keep our information free, it's vital to our well-being as people on this planet. This will come back hidden in another bill. Be prepared.

What would you say are the main challenges facing an up-and-coming musician/band in today's cultural climate?

The biggest challenge, in my view, is this culture-wide emphasis on instantaneous criticism before we even give ourselves the chance to absorb a piece of art. When did we all become talent scouts? Armchair art critics? When YouTube and Facebook gave us this little box down there where we can fulfill our egos, that's when, and now we have 7 billion American Idol judges, all fueled up and ready to go.

Dialogue is great for sure, and I certainly appreciate the interaction – but the the challenge is that it can turn artists into self-censors. Being too self-aware, knowing too much about how things are “supposed to be” and not letting yourself be free when creating, is the death of art and the start of product. Having critical voices in your head before you've even started gets in the way of the magical artist moment – you could say the divine moment – when an artist gets outside themselves and creates something truly universal and beautiful. They didn't even make it, they just channel it. If you as a creator have critical voices in your head, you'll never get to that moment. Shut them off. Be free, explore, create. Whittle it

down LATER. Now, just do it. That said, there has always been criticism and dialogue – and there are ALWAYS artists out there who preserve their integrity no matter what. These people become the legends.

On a side note – sometimes as an artist in this new digital culture environment, you tend to feel like you're on the bottom level of the ecosystem. Your life, your blood, sweat, & tears become social media fuel, so different competing machines can feed on our likes and dislikes and keywords and speech patterns and gather their demographics, which they can sell onward, convert into capital, houses and skyscrapers.

But that's okay with me. I've always been more comfy under a tree than on the 35th floor. We're culture farmers, lovingly watering our little beetroots, and they are culture distributors who sell these beetroots in the market downtown. Fine with me, to each his own... And I've found that if you are honest and stay true to your roots, you attract wealth and health beyond compare, and you might even grow a 35-story oak tree all on your own. When you do, it'll be pure. I love this life, I love the travel, I love the freedom of expression and connection at our fingertips these days, and I've met some amazing people this way. Bring it.

Finally, what does the future hold for Aaron Spectre?

Right now I'm based in Geneva, Switzerland, working on a ferocious amount of new music, which will all come out over the next year. Thanks for the thoughtful questions and thanks for reading.

For more information about Aaron Spectre, you can [visit the official Drumcorps website \(http://drumcorpsmassive.com/\)](http://drumcorpsmassive.com/), and find him on [Facebook \(http://www.facebook.com/drumcorps\)](http://www.facebook.com/drumcorps) and [Twitter. \(https://twitter.com/#!/drumc0rps\)](https://twitter.com/#!/drumc0rps)

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About M3 Event

The music industry is rapidly changing. The internet has enabled widespread piracy, as well as a variety of new business and distribution models. We want to offer an engaged audience in and around the Euregion an opportunity to develop a coherent and detailed picture of the future of music distribution.

On the 31st of May 2012 a music conference in Maastricht, consisting of oppositional debates, creative workshops and lectures, will provoke opportunities for intellectual stimulation, debate, as well as networking. We hope to utilise the skills and ideas of some of most forward thinking minds and operators in the industry in order to highlight some promising new ideas and areas which can be improved upon.

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