

# Warehouse Scene

By Timber Masterson

How many of you out there remember The Tasmanian Ballroom or the Underground Railroad at 225 King East? How about that killer space at 26A Oxford Street, or for that matter the building at Richmond and Spadina that housed the glory days of KOLA? Maybe you were there and didn't know, due to either your late night consumption of sordid treats and peculiar cocktails, or the fact there was no huge glittery neon sign on the door. I'm referring to the days of the dark and mysterious, off the grid, after hours warehouse party scene, where the distant sounds of sexy raw thumping echoes of underground house music awaited you. If you could find the place, you'd be treated to records by Fingers Inc., songs like Bang the Party, all mixed together by the likes of Dino & Terry, and of course, Mark Oliver. Often, the sounds melted together with a magical but bitter tasting capsule called ecstasy-if you chose to partake-provided by a friend of a friend, that made you racy and available, made you like everyone and helped the penetrating music hit you like an angel swimming into your lungs; people lost themselves. This was an outrageous and exciting time. In stark contrast to the harsh city lights outside, the Toronto Warehouse party offered freedom, compassion and unity. So, it's last call, everybody still revved up and out of nowhere you're handed a flyer, instructing you to venture off to a decorated downtown space to ingest thumping ethereal beats heightening whatever state you're in. Lets see there was 23 Hop, 4th and 5th and Boom Boom Mackai. There was The Party Center on Church, the Boston Garage and Polson Street-before it was turned into some sort of mini putt-putt, drive-in type deal. Gone are the raw high ceilings and candle-lit spaces these soulful dance parties once took place in. Today we've got Loft Spaces for the Rich. Slick Condo Palaces have taken over the few spaces left that were filled with character and possibility. "You felt special" says Danny Tenaglia, one of many New York DJs inspired by such parties. "You felt like you were an elite group, with people who were on the same level of understanding about music as you".

Aki Abe one of Toronto's DJs, now the owner of Cosmos Records on Queen Street West reminisces "many a Saturday afternoon was spent digging in the crates, vinyl imported from the basement studios of New York and Chicago, trying to get the last copy of that rare import or limited promo, or finding that classic lost gem after searching through 20 knackered boxes in an asbestos lined basement of a record shop, to bring out to the jam that night".

Party hosts and promoters often put newspapers on all the windows, which didn't always stop the fuzz from busting in, floating around with their flashlights. The men in blue usually split; then you were in for an unrestricted all-night affair with several more blissful hours of dancing in the dark.

Fast forward to 2000. Now the cut off point is 2:00 am, the music is faster, repetitive and electronic thus, taking away from the sensuality, the groove; the heart and soul of the experience. Ultimately everything changed, as these things do and the music found its way to the above ground. The downtown, creative artsy



types got older committed to real jobs and had families. Now in our late thirties or mid-forties we are having our own tiny humans called babies, and dare I say it, mortgages. Our bodies can no longer withstand such late night activities and the responsibilities of adulthood become our priorities. "It was experimental, we were pioneers, it all seemed perfect, those spaces and the era it occurred in, was perfect to play those experimental new tracks, but things like that don't last. To try and go back would be impossible," says Ted Clarke one of the originators. Aki continues, "I was spinning one night at that house on Richmond, Ted's place near where 23 Hop was, every corner of the room was jammed. Shams [a local DJ] showed up at 3 am and had a test press of a Frankie Knuckles track no one ever heard of. He told me to spin it, and I always listened to him. It was called the Whistle Song. I dropped it and the crowd went absolutely berserk. I played it at the top of the hour for the next 6 hours. It was tough to get people to go home when the sun came up!" When I walk around the city today, I can't help but run into the areas that played host to these gatherings; a church on Wellington, [now a hotel], the 5th floor of that building that still stands north of Spadina and Queen, stopping to look up, I remember an thrilled group pushing their way in from the side alley."

Juno winning house music producer, Rachid Wehbi recalls, "Those gorgeous rhythms with the piano in the back ground, the haunting strings. I wish there were clubs just dedicated to playing that old school house! Damn, I miss it big time. All I know is I've never danced like I did during those times."