

La Maison Du Funk

Techno duo Daft Punk liven up the French dance scene.



BY JUSTIN HAMPTON, PHOTO BY NICOLE CAMPON

For a couple of French guys who wear bondage masks and Afro wigs at their publicity shoots, Daft Punk's Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo are surprisingly down-to-earth. Considering that they created the definitive primer on modern dance music's roots in disco and pop with last year's *Homework* (Virgin), they're certainly entitled to have sizable egos.

Despite the international success of their singles, "Da Funk" and "Around the World," and kudos from the Chemical Brothers and critic Greil Marcus (he dubbed *Homework* "the broadcast of dreams"), Bangalter and Homem-Christo insist on maintaining their humility and creative autonomy. After all, Bangalter explains, they have a worldwide scene to represent.

"We haven't really been compromising with the establishment," he insists. "The French government right now has realized that the Parisian house [music] scene is important, and they want to export it and put money into it, and then just try to control it. We don't want to deal with that. We're just saying, 'We want to do it all our own way.' I think a lot of people respect us for that in this scene. We live in Paris, we DJ in clubs there and we do a lot of things that are completely out of scale with what's happening worldwide."

The scene that spawned Daft Punk can use all the help it can get. As ravers and clubgoers can tell you, media and authority figures who see dance clubs and events as fronts for drug activity are currently attempting to dismantle them altogether. Bangalter believes the attacks on club culture are biased and unfair.

"The drug problem is a fake problem," he contends, "because there have been drugs everywhere in any kind of music. In France, it was the excuse to stop this scene. But I think this scene is much more about music than drugs. It's just the music that people come for. It's important for people who make music to say this. There have been problems with these parties being stopped, whether you're in France or in Baltimore. It's a serious thing."

Bangalter is similarly outspoken when it comes to the role of drugs in music production. He reiter-

ates the distaste for Ecstasy he revealed to the British dance-music periodical *Mixmag*, and asserts that, notwithstanding, drugs are more of an obstacle than a tool in making music. "The drug issue is much more of a personal thing," he says. "I pretty much separate it from the music issue. Chemical drugs are not the best way for us to appreciate the music of the right quality and value. The problem with drugs is they make you lose a sense of judgment for the music. You can be at a party and whatever music is played, you will like it, and that's a problem if you're a musician and you're trying to make music."

For now, Daft Punk are currently holed up in Bangalter's home studio in Paris working on the follow-up to *Homework*. Tight-lipped as they are as to how it will sound, one can only expect an innovative and extremely drug-friendly, if not drug-inspired, vision of the perfect party music. Asked about their own ideal party and who would perform, Bangalter says the music would not be played by DJs, but by artists like Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles and Led Zeppelin.

"It would be more about seeing these things we would have liked to see live," he explains. "If you take music from the last forty years, it would be a month-long festival." *