

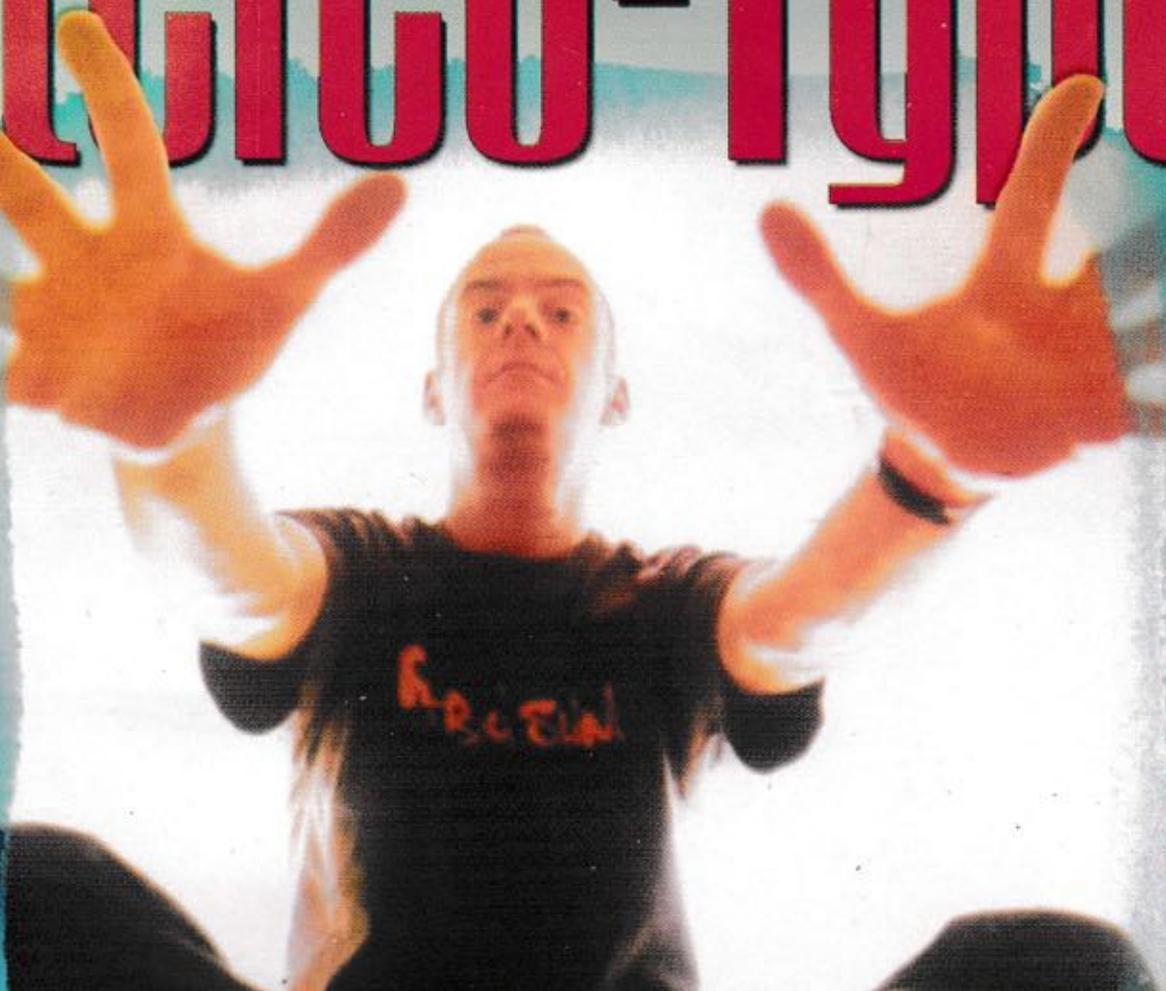
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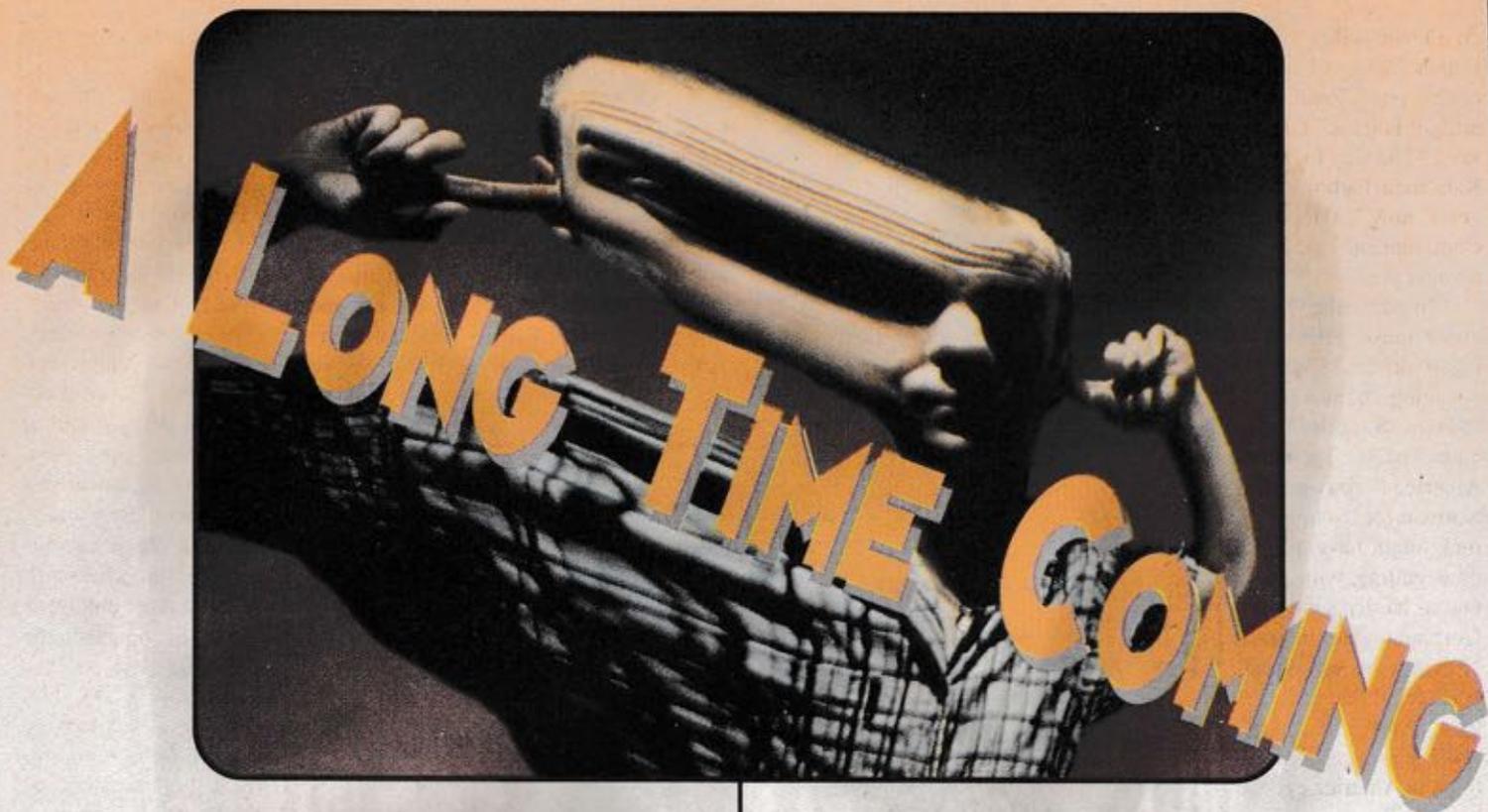


FATBOY SLIM

THE RETURN OF THE FUNK SOUL BROTHER

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**NORMAN COOK, electronica's populist, kicks back
and enjoys worldwide stardom as *FATBOY SLIM*.**

by Justin Hampton

Norman Cook—AKA Fatboy Slim—will do whatever it takes to get your booty out on the floor, whether it's by sampling a rock tune everyone knows or by tweaking his 303s to the point of absurdity. Most amazingly, he actually gets away with it, breaking down the steely resolve of Americans against dance music and becoming an international star in the process. "[I like to] make [the music] more accessible to people, rather than being cooler-than-thou and moody and whatever," Norman declares from a hotel in Boston where he will later take it to the stage with a DJ set to be simulcast by radio station WBCN. "I like to communicate with people and make things accessible so that they get into it."

It's been a long time in coming. When Norman inaugurated the run of now-revered Big Beat label Skint with his first single, "Santa Cruz," people like the Chemical Brothers' Tom Rowlands and Ed Simons were mightily impressed, but those outside the clubs were only so aware of music Norman

was recording under the name Fatboy Slim or other aliases like the Mighty Dub Katz, Freakpower and Pizzaman. Even the compilation of classic tracks that was Fatboy's first album, *Better Living Through Chemistry* [Astralwerks] only won over a few of the uninitiated. Cornershop later requested Mr. Cook to remix "Brimful of Asha," and the result climbed the British Top 10. He followed this up with a mind-blowing remix of Wildchild's "Renegade Master," and this remix, as well as the summer release of the surf groover "The Rockafeller Skank," showed the rest of the world that Cook was onto something good. "Recording *You've Come a Long Way, Baby*, I was thinking, 'I've finally worked out a way of how to do this after thirteen years of false starts.' I think I've kind of worked out how to do it so that it's popular and I'm enjoying it all the time," he says.

But just as he's achieved his success, Norman relates that this will be the last we hear from Fatboy Slim for a while. "You must

be careful not to end up with a bit of a formula," Norman insists. "That's probably the reason why I don't want to do more Fatboy stuff yet, because I've got to think of a new gag. I've done the first album gag and I've done the second album gag, and I've got to think of kind of slant, or else it will end up being a little bit of a formula." Long acknowledging the massive influence the Chemical Brothers have had on his music, he says, laughing, "I'll wait to see what Tom and Ed's new album is like and then I'll copy them. I can't have another album until I hear what Tom and Ed's next one sounds like!"

Of course, when the Chemical Brothers are giving you acetates of theirs to test-drive during your DJ sets, as Tom Rowlands did publicly at Skint's monthly club night at London's The End, you're perfectly within your rights to consider yourself a peer, rather than a slavish imitator. Besides, Norman never calculates when he records any new music. "I don't really plan on what I'm doing. When I do some stuff, I don't go, 'Right, I'm going to

do a Fatboy Slim album now.' I go do some stuff and listen to what it sounds like and I'll say, 'OK, that stuff's definitely Mighty Dub Katz, or that one's Freakpower.' I kind of do it first and then decide what artist it is later." Giving an idea of what his next project might be, he says, "The way I see it, it will probably come more like the Mighty Dub Katz then Fatboy, because I've been doing this solidly for like, two years now." (Hope he doesn't change his mind soon, as Sm:)e Communications has announced a Mighty Dub Katz album for release by next year).

In particular, Norman is currently rekindling his love affair with house music after a summer-long residency in Ibiza, a famed island resort off the Spanish coast frequented by a clubber clientele, and watching Thomas Bangalter (Daft Punk) side project Stardust hit it with "Music Sounds Better with You." Those in America drawn to Norman for his bows to rock might have a hard time getting with this, but it hardly concerns Norman. He insists, "I'm not on any great crusade to change the way America thinks about [dance music]. I think in America everybody still wants to be lead guitarist, whereas in England, everybody wants to be the DJ. And I'm not saying that one's right and one's wrong. I'd hate it if everybody in America wanted to be a DJ. But I just like coming in and dipping my toe. I have good friends over here and I like traveling around and I like the atmosphere."

Still, after touring with the Housemartins as well as Freakpower, Cook is happy to jettison the rock band for the DJ life. After all, it's hard to argue with low overhead. "It's a lot less stressful, because it's just you and you don't have to have a close relationship with the rest of the band," explains Norman. "If I want to take three months off, I just take three months off. If it's a band, then the rest of the band has to take three months off. And they might say, 'Well, we don't want to take three months.' See you have to account for so many other people, plus if you're not getting on with them, it's really stressful. And when you're traveling, somebody's always lost their passport and everything goes wrong. Plus, when you're on tour, you have to drive long distances with the gear and have soundchecks all day. It's really quite hard work, rather than you just fly into town with a kit, go out, play the show, there's no carrying stuff about. It's just infinitely more manageable, just

one person and a box of records rather than having fifteen people on tour. Just feeding fifteen people is really stressful."

No less stressful, though, than the pressures of the stardom Norman has received. He's as big as they get in Britain, and his romance with BBC Radio One's Zoe Baird has added a potentially gossipy facet to his fame that will certainly be exploited by Fleet Street tabloids in the near future. America—with its infatuation for what's "overdone, overblown and two sizes too big," in the words of Richie Hawtin—meanwhile has found in Fatboy an artist close to its heart and art. But Cook had to go to Singapore and Japan to realize how mammoth he'd grown. Recalls Norman in an almost awed tone "I went to Japan and didn't realize that I had two Number Ones there, and it was absolute, like girls waiting at hotels, things like that. We played three

nights in Tokyo, and it was just the best. Really, the crowd was going absolutely crazy and chanting and shouting. At the end of it, after the third gig, I was sitting in the hotel the next day and looking out over Tokyo, and Kim, my PA, put on the *Blade Runner* soundtrack and we switched the lights off looking at Tokyo in the dusk and listening to that, and going, 'How good does it get?' I'm thinking I've got this fantasy girlfriend and this fantasy life. And I think that probably that is about as good as it gets. I feel that I've been to the mountain top this year. All this sort of rounding off of the year and getting all the awards and everything, it is time for me to take a step back and not try and push it any further."

Now in his mid-thirties, Norman has learned through his

experience that the Fatter they are, the harder they fall. So as he retires to his newly relocated home in Brighton, affectionately named the House of Love, he does so with a sense of self-preservation. For the clubs and nightlife may not always have him, but the music always will. "I would probably get on with producing, and when I'm really old, what I think I'll probably do is do a radio show like John Peel where it doesn't matter how fat and bald you've gotten. You're still involved in music and doing the things you love," Norman imagines. "I think I would do less performing, but I still want to be making music."

Then Norman laughs as he ends with, "I don't know how to do anything else, frankly!" ■

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—FATBOY SLIM

