



(new york state of mind)

## ILLBIENT NATION

CULTURAL ALCHEMY BREAKS BARRIERS IN THE BIG APPLE WITH THEIR SOUNDLAB PARTIES. BY JUSTIN HAMPTON

*Welcoming grooves for a cybernation/ the channels are open...in the presumed silence between beats/ the frequencies total ride/without stasis / Electro Empire Stateless/we read the message/before it exploded in our hand...the stuff information travels on/is what's being messed with/for real - excerpt from Cultural Alchemy flyers from October 10, 1995 to February 16, 1996.*

For everyone who visits New York City or lives there, an incredible diversity of culture exists within the city. East Village squatters awake to Islamic calls of prayer broadcast from storefront mosques. Out-of-town collegiates buy beer and junk food from Hispanic bodegas. Yet, for all this diversity, divisive politics and racial strife have prevented many of these people from coming together. This is reflected in Manhattan's rigidly segregated music and club scenes.

Thankfully, the artistic collective Cultural Alchemy, formed by Howard Goldkrand (aka Verb), Beth Coleman (aka Singe) and David Linton, is helping to break down the artistic and social barriers through their weekly underground performance series, Soundlab, held at Manhattan's Haus of Ouch. Since last September, Soundlab sessions have utilized the experimental possibilities of electronica to blur distinctions between musical genres, artistic mediums and all their respective audiences. In this space, installations of paintings have crossed with computer projections by Brooklyn multimedia artists Salon Cabal. Musicians such as Arto Lindsay, Marc Ribot, Elliot Sharp, Air Liquide and Soul Coughing have performed alongside or even accompanied DJs such as Spooky, Soulslinger, Gilman, Khan and others.

The genesis for Cultural Alchemy began last summer, when Coleman and Goldkrand took part in International Yoni: The Crush City Tour, which took them to Berlin and inspired them with a new vision for electronic culture in the States.

"I went to this place where you had buildings falling down, people living without money, the whole history of World War II staring right at you, and hanging out with kids and artists who had been living in the trencher on the East, and some on the West, and saying, 'Here's a free space, let's do it. Somebody I know's got a generator. There's somebody I know who's got a slide projector. Money is not the issue. We're gathering...'" Coleman relates. "There was incredible energy, and the joy of freedom happening, and I said, 'Why can't New York be more like that?'"

After returning to Manhattan, Coleman and Goldkrand linked up with Kitchen musical curator/ambient artist Ben Neill and hosted their first Soundlab sessions at Ben's monthly Tone events. There they met Haus of Ouch owner David Linton.

"I invited them to come over and see the space. When I saw the work they had been doing at Tone, I knew it was pretty close to perfect for this space, and that we could do what they were doing at Tone in a more realistic, week-to-week kind of way," says Linton.

Since its inception, Soundlab sessions have loosely operated on a different musical theme every week. Past nights have focused on trip hop, jungle, New York avant garde composition and ambience. A local

DJ, either established or upcoming, usually starts the show, leading into a live electronic PA. These performers linger for the "meltdown" jam occurring at the end of the night, which usually features the main act, a final DJ and any other musicians in the space who want to get involved.

Further demonstrating its versatility, Soundlab has staged special events that have broken the format, such as the December Soundclash between Spooky the Subliminal Kid and Alec Empire and the latter half of the Red Hot Organization's Offbeat event. In the future, Beth and Howard hope to "go nomadic" with the Soundlab concept more often, bringing it onto the Internet and to other parts of the world that do not regularly experience the music, as well as making tapes of Soundlab sessions available to the public. They plan to bring more diversity into the Soundlab format with upcoming nights based on Chinese opera, a performance of Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* proposed by Spooky and a voter drive.

Coleman and Goldkrand insist that with Soundlab they are not running a club, but helping to forge a community within an urban structure that can pose as its own social example to alleviate society's current ills.

"[Soundlab is] a space of nurturing," says Coleman. "People are hanging out, listening and relaxing in a way that the space is supposed to be in terms of free space."

"We're not looking for truth or God or any of that, but the fact that we're both able to share and communicate with each other is already a moment of treason...and the fact that we can do that on an abstract level—which we do anyway—but we're identifying with that abstract level," adds Goldkrand.

In addition to giving thanks to Byzar, David Linton, Soulslinger, Spooky and Olive, Cultural Alchemy hope to make contact with *URB* readers around the country and world interested in collaborating or communicating with them. Those interested can e-mail them at [bmc@echonyc.com](mailto:bmc@echonyc.com). (JH)



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