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NOV 16, 2015 | BY JACK TREGONING | THE SCENE

DREAMSTATE AND TRANCE IN THE POST-EDM WORLD

How the #trancefamily holds its own.

Paul Oakenfold knows the value of a soundbite. “I’ve always seen EDM as slowed-down trance,” he says in his laconic cockney accent. “It’s got the same big riffs and big emotional moments.”

The perennial superstar DJ is weeks away from his set at the first-ever Dreamstate, an all-trance festival in Los Angeles, November 27-28. As he’ll readily tell you, Oakenfold isn’t the nostalgic type. He’s seen it all in America—from the rise and fall of electronica to the explosion of EDM—but right now is something new.

“We should stop hating on EDM and get on with what we’re doing,” he says. “The pie’s big enough for everyone. There’s room for house, techno, and trance festivals.”

Over ten days last summer, Insomniac teased out the cast of Dreamstate LA, building to the final reveal of headliners Oakenfold and Paul van Dyk. (One fan breathlessly predicted on the event’s Facebook page: “This event may change the fabric of dance music in the US—holy shit.”) Once the lineup was complete, all tickets disappeared in just a few hours. While hundreds of left out fans lamented the cruelty of the universe on Facebook, others recognized it as a milestone for trance in America.



The artwork that helped sell Dreamstate.

With all due respect to Oakey and PvD, Dreamstate’s swift sell-out wasn’t all about its talent. The event taps right into the heart of the #trancefamily, a global community with one very unambiguous shared passion. That fellow feeling exists on dancefloors

under the lasers, but it's also amplified by social media.

Insomniac, the promoter best-known for Electric Daisy Carnival, has chosen relatively close-quarters for its first LA edition: the Damas Building at NOS Events Center in San Bernardino, which will welcome 11,000 people over two days. There was also something immediately arresting about the Dreamstate marketing, with its intricate sci-fi flyer artwork of a future city above the clouds. Similar to how EDC is promoted as a fan-driven experience rather than an artist one, Dreamstate conjured a self-contained world for true believers.

Faith in a shared scene is the cornerstone of Insomniac CEO Pasquale Rotella's promotion philosophy. The LA native was converted by his first rave in 1989 and catching that feeling has been his obsession ever since. Unlike many of his competitors, Rotella is something of his own brand, regularly reminding 175,000 Facebook followers of his raver bona fides. (A recent [#FBF post](#) shows him looking very much the part of an old school raver at a "5:30am parking lot after-party sometime in 1994.")

"Trance music has always been incorporated into our festivals," he says from his home in LA, a respite from the heat of Las Vegas where he and his family split their time. "Regardless of [a sound] being big or not at the time, I try to include it. I've had D&B and hardcore at my shows; you can have a little of everything."

In concept, Dreamstate distills that single-minded adrenaline you can find at EDC's trance-leaning Circuit Grounds stage. "It's great to have a concentrated energy for a certain sound," Rotella says. "Trance is such a vocal, passionate crowd. They'll stay at the trance stage all night. It's unique in that way."



Circuit Grounds at EDC photo by Marc van der Aa for Insomniac.

The early outlaw rave scene in LA required fans to do more than click to buy a ticket. On the day of the event you would call a phone number on the flyer and follow instructions to find the the map points until you heard the thud of bass.

Born and raised in LA, DJ Kristina Sky was only 14 when a friend turned her on to raving. "My mom was a hippie and was very loose about the rules, as long as I didn't fuck up," she recalls. "The scene was super underground—very different from how it is now. People were dressing up, there were map points; it was an adventure."

The early part of the 2000s saw the scene hit hard as Congress considered the Reducing Americans' Vulnerability to Ecstasy (R.A.V.E.) Act. Under the law, promoters and venue owners could face fines and even prison time if their patrons were found using drugs. It was a hostile time for throwing parties. When a revised bill, now called the Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation Act, passed in 2003, promoters were already cutting their losses.

It took a few tentative years for the scene to find its feet again. As Sky recalls it,

trance got a legitimate foothold in LA with the arrival of Club Heaven at The Hollywood Arena. This was a dedicated weekly trance party right on Santa Monica Boulevard—no map points required. Sky soon joined the Heaven team. “We started bringing over all these European trance DJs—so many of them for their first time in the US or first time on the west coast,” she says. “It wasn’t getting huge numbers, but a steady 500 to 1000 people every Friday, which was kind of mind-blowing at the time. For DJs that most people hadn’t heard of either.”

Heaven’s policy was to book then-ascendant stars like Cosmic Gate, Gareth Emery, and Above & Beyond—or as much of Above & Beyond as budget allowed. “It was only Tony McGuinness, because there’s no way anyone could afford to fly all three,” Sky recalls. “We paid around \$1000.” As the sheen came off the superclub boom in Europe and the UK, trance DJs were eager to try their luck stateside—even if it meant sleeping on the promoter’s floor. “DJs weren’t demanding shit back then,” Sky says. “They were just grateful to come to a new territory they were excited about.”

Meanwhile, the Spundae crew was booking more established names like Ferry Corsten, Tall Paul, and Gabriel & Dresden, while powerhouse promoter Giant secured the likes of Armin van Buuren and Tiësto for its Giant Maximus New Year’s Eve parties downtown. (Armin’s [documentary of his visit](#) is a real 2006 throwback, complete with split-screen effects and shots of DJs flipping through CD wallets.)

By 2010, EDM was an accepted acronym and DJs were big business. Once Las Vegas casinos entered the game, offering \$1000 and an air mattress felt like ancient history. “Things didn’t get truly outrageous until Vegas happened,” Sky says. “That was the real turning point for DJ fees in the United States.”



Photo by Marc van der Aa.

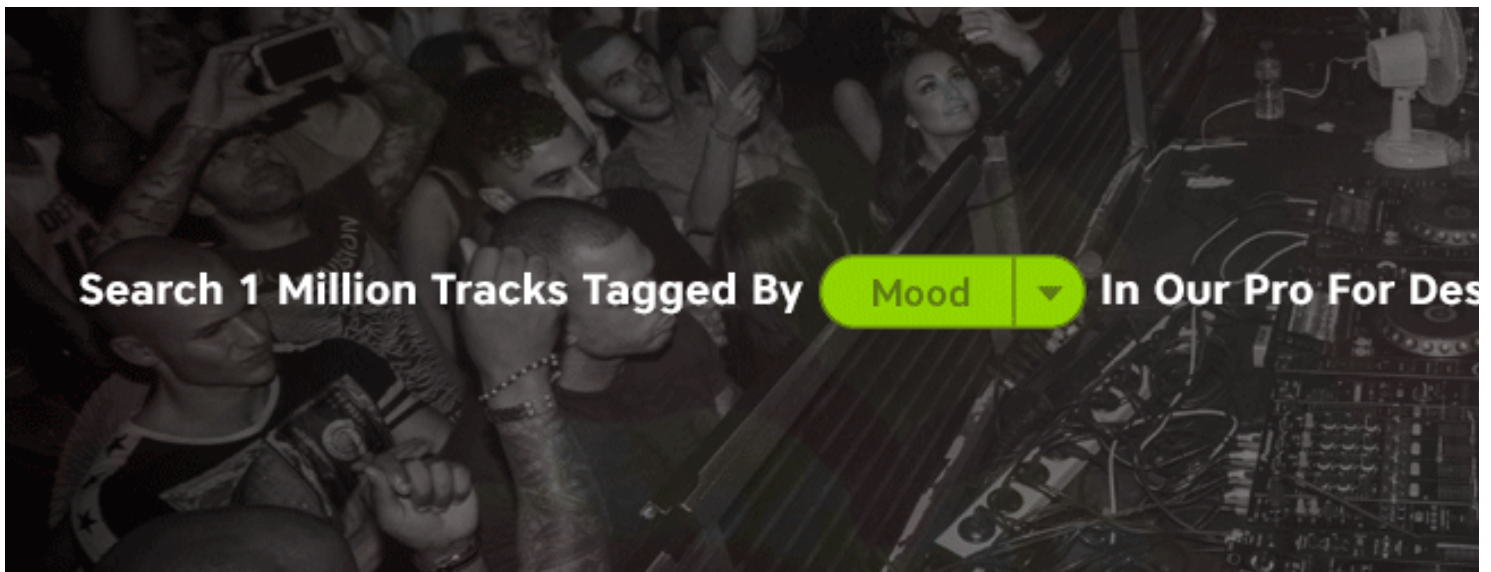
LA now has Dreamstate, but trance hasn't always been an easy sell. Several of the scene's former stars have slunk away to find mainstage glory, including Tiësto, whose search for sunrise morphed into a search for the EDM embrace. In interviews, he has been straight-up with his reasons. "I think some of the old trance guys still have their following, but it doesn't feel like anybody *really* cares," he told [DJ Mag](#) in 2014. Pasquale Rotella saw the trend too. "There was a time when DJs were distancing themselves from the trance sound," he says.

Now is not that time. North America is good to visiting trance DJs—including the genre's grittiest proponents. "Probably 75-percent of my gigs are here in the US," Irish expat Simon Patterson says from his adopted hometown of Miami. "The big cities like LA, New York, and Toronto are always going to be at the forefront, but there are places in the middle of America that are equally good." At Dreamstate, Paul Oakenfold is committed to a Full On Fluoro psytrance set, promising to accelerate classic trance records to 142-BPM. Even Gareth Emery, usually wary of genre tags, told a fan on Instagram he's no longer "bored and uninspired with the trance getting made."

However, the future success of dedicated trance events like Dreamstate will be determined not by the DJs but the devotees who buy the tickets. The #trancefamily is fiercely loyal, but it's also acutely sensitive to bullshit. The community demand a complete experience, from the sound and production to the running order of acts. Cut corners and the trust is lost.

While DJs stray and events come and go, the commitment of the fans is absolute. "The industry said that trance was dead for a long time," Rotella says, "but the hardcore fans were always front and center at the shows."

Jack Tregoning is Editorial Director at Beatport in New York. He is [on Twitter](#). Main article photo by Greg Rothstein.



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