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## Going Underground With Saeed Younan

July 9th, 2013



Let me start off by saying, we live in strange times. Over the last few years we have witnessed the passing of some of the world's musical greats. Just earlier this year we saw the death of Ray Manzarek, who was a jazz and rock musician and the founding member of the legendary band The Doors. We were also sadly left behind by female icons Etta James, Donna Summer, and [Whitney Houston](#) in 2012. It's always something of wonder and intrigue when such history writers finally join that great party in the sky. When it comes to the electronic music world, it's no different. We have suffered the recent passings of Star 69 founder and remixer Peter Rauhofer, Canada's own Jay Hamilton from the Maritimes, and the voice behind Daft Punk's #1 hit One More Time, the late Anthony Moore, better known as Romanthony.

Besides the obvious sadness that comes from the loss of life and the loss of these careers, I can't help but feel something else that stands out with its own feelings of mystery and unknown territory; and that my friends, is that in a very literal sense, times are a changing. We live in a time where the Swedish House Mafia was made up of three guys, a time where thousands pack stadiums wearing glowing mouse ears, and a time where putting your hands in the air like Jesus while DJing has become a house hold action. Like I said before, very strange times.

This article and interview is not about whether these things are right or wrong. I believe the answer is obvious to any hardcore house head and is ultimately each person's opinion, but rather it's about the roots of where all these strange things have stemmed from. What I'm referring to is the straight elements that are, and always have been, the foundation to all the sub genres and commercial electronic trends of today, and that is the four to the 1 sounds of good old house and techno music.

Over the years there have been artists like Juan Atkins, Jeff Mills, and Richie Hawtin, who all have given something to the historical growth of techno music. At the house end of things we have had guys like V Lawrence, Jesse Saunders, and Frankie Knuckles; all originators and creators of house music and the scene that went with it. There have always been hard working artists in the wings that have made history over time with their productions, both in, and out of the studio. These artists did not realize how important their actions were at the time, but they did it out of passion and personal need to push the movement forward and give back to a scene that had taken over their lives in the fullest sense. To see these artists today is to see the main headliner at an event or festival, and due to such commercial growth of EDM in recent times, it's a mystery to a lot of newcomers exactly who these artists are and why they are where they are today.



While artists like Skrillex and deadmau5 are being marketed to the young masses, there are still the men and women who strive to keep underground music and its community very much alive. This brings me to the focus of this article and interview. When thinking of this group of people who remain out of the commercial lime light,

one name stands out amongst the rest. His name is [Saeed Younan](#).

Originally born in Iraq, Saeed has called Washington D.C. home from an early age. Washington has become known as residence to a whole slew of electronic music artists who have dominated the electronic music world for some time. It's no surprise that Saeed has been right at home in this city of successful music entrepreneurs. Growing up with the influence of different types of Middle Eastern percussive music and European sounds, this set the tone for things to come for the man behind the tribal drums. Saeed Younan has become one of the leaders in the house and techno world over the last twenty years. His history is made up of events that clearly show an extreme work ethic and dedication to the music he has become known for all over the world.

Starting his DJ career in 1990, Saeed set himself apart from the normal run of DJs playing straight genre interpretations. He has developed a style that cannot easily be matched. He has taken the elements of techno and house music and turned them into a carnival of ethnic drums, grooves, and dance floor emotions that are simply unforgettable. With a huge smile behind the decks, this man knows exactly how to push the buttons of his fans who pack dance floors to see him in every city that he performs in. Not so much a DJ set, but more of an experience of music and feelings that pluck all the right chords. His DJing has been recognized time and time again on a global scale.



For an artist with this sort of relentless flow, it's no surprise that he would eventually find his way into the production studio. He produced his first major house track in 1995 on Gossip Records, which is a sub label of the infamous Strictly Rhythm label. This could not have been more of a solid foundation for the events that followed. By 1998, Saeed created a label called Addictive Records which was formed with the intent to showcase the sounds he was producing. Progressive house music was starting to take on tribal elements and this is where it all began for the style he is known for today. He formed an early partnership with DJ/Producer Palash Ahmed and the two released productions that were heard on labels like John Digweed's Bedrock, Yoshitoshi Records, and they even did a remix of Relax by [Frankie Goes To Hollywood](#) on Star 69. This pushed the duo to the forefront of the house scene and by the year 2000 they released a remix for Celeda titled The Underground, which hit #1 on the Billboard dance charts and still remains as one of the great house anthems of our time. Over the next four years they released two CD compilations and had great success with their productions and global touring. It was in 2004 that the two decided to close that chapter of their careers and



pursue solo ventures.



This brings us to the birth of Younan Music. The record label was formed by Saeed in 2004 and is a strictly all digital label. The decision to make the label all digital came during a time when vinyl records were making their way out and the digital age was starting to inevitably take over the way things were done in the DJ booth. Younan Music is one of the leading underground labels in the world. The releases that have come out of this outfit are nothing short of extreme, tribal, drum pounding bombs. Any DJ that is into tech-house or techno music has surely come across Younan Music at one time or another. It has become a staple for tribal infused beats with an edge that a lot of labels only dream of obtaining. Its releases have reached the Beatport top ten time and time again and this is due to a wide range of world class artists that have joined the label to showcase their work in true Younan form. You can find releases from artists like Stacey Pullen, Carlo Lio, Pleasurekraft, Hollen, Matt McLarrie, Rainer Weichhold, Wally Lopez, Mastiksoul, and the list goes on and on. Along with the artists Saeed has invited to join Younan Music, Saeed he has done countless releases on the label that have gained recognition from the industry as a whole. The Pioneer audio campaign for the release of the [CDJ2000](#) used Yeah Ha, which was a release from Saeed in 2009. He has also released music on top notch labels like Toolroom, Viva Music, Stealth, and Great Stuff amongst many others. It's safe to say that Younan Music is a force to be reckoned with and there is no sign of the label easing off the gas any time soon.

With the ten year anniversary of Younan Music upon us, there is lots in the works for the label and for Saeed himself. Plans are in the works for tours in Asia, New Zealand, and Australia. Also, Saeed will be doing collaborations with DJ PP, Sebastian Ledher, and Ant Brooks. Younan Music will also be releasing tracks from Filthy Rich, Matt McLarrie, and Paco Maroto on a package that is due to come out July 22nd to celebrate the 100th Younan Music release. The label itself is also going through some changes at the moment with things like a minor facelift and format change. We were able to contact label manager Matt McLarrie regarding these changes and he was kind enough to shed some light on the new things to come, *"Younan Music is clearly known to many as a tribal house label and this is definitely what we're all about here, but it's also important for us that we don't get pigeonholed as only a tribal house label. We love all sorts of house and techno and will now be exploring these avenues in more depth in the future. We're also looking to change the look of the labels branding in order to keep things fresh and moving forward in a progressive manner"*. It's safe to say that after ten successful years, Younan Music is still here, and is here to stay. We had the chance to get to the bottom of things with the man behind it all and he was gracious enough to answer our questions. This is what he had to tell us...

**Let's get right into it. What I would like to know, and I'm sure anyone who is familiar with yourself and Younan Music would like to know, is how did you become the leading front man for real and authentic tribal house music? When did you find your love for tribal drums and rhythms and where and how did this begin for you?**

*SY: I was born in Iraq and lived there for the first 10 years of my life. I grew up listening to Arabic music, which played throughout the house, day and night. Middle-Eastern music is generally very percussive, so I guess that's how I got my start. I used to sit in my room for hours when I was a kid, tuning our AM [radio antenna](#) to find stations that would air world beat music or music from European countries. I'd always had a tape in the deck ready to record anything that sounded interesting.*

**I'd like to ask you about the birth of Younan Music. When did the label begin, why did you decide to go all digital, and what's the history behind what has become one of the most sought after record labels in today's underground house music culture?**

*SY: I launched Younan Music in 2004 right after we closed down Addictive Records (our all-vinyl Label) which ran from 1997-2003. This was right around the time when digital mp3 downloads and online music stores started popping up and dominating the market, while local vinyl shops struggled and most shutdown. I had no choice but to move forward with the times and not get left behind. I wanted to start something fresh and new with the digital age. And that's when I decided to launch an all-digital label. Using my last name for the label name, so people could identify with the sound this label was going to bring.*

**Many of us know the history of Chicago, Detroit, and New York and the historical musical events that have come out of these areas to form the underground music scene in the United States. Tell us a little bit about the history of Washington D.C and what kind of things have happened there over the years? Also, what other artists have come out of Washington?**

*SY: I've been a Washington D.C native since I moved from Iraq in 1982. The scene here has gone through it all. Underground illegal warehouse parties in the early 90s, to small underground house clubs that are open till 7am or later. The rave scene was, and still is, huge in this area. We also have a very large Euro scene here. I'd say the bottle service scene dominates D.C right now. But you can feel something new is about to happen. A change is coming. The Underground movement is making its rounds once again, with clubs like U Street Music Hall (no bottle service & just dance policy) making a big comeback in the city. Really exciting times right now, and I'm*

*happy to see that change coming...slowly but surely. We've had some great talent coming out of the D.C area. Some that broke out and made it big are guys like Deepdish (Dubfire & Sharam), Thievery Corp, Thunderball, See-I, and many more.*

**In my opinion, the remix of The Hum Melody by Robbie Rivera that you released with Palash back in the day is timeless and just an example of your studio strength from the beginning. Other mind blowers include Misery on King Street Sounds and the Relax remix for Frankie Goes To Hollywood on Star 69, all done under Saeed and Palash. Tell us about how you two came to be in the early years, and what eventually transpired to make you go your separate ways after 2004, considering your success as a duo?**

*SY: Palash and I were both D.C DJs playing at all the local clubs and bars. We knew about each other because there weren't that many DJs in D.C back in the early 90's. All the DJs kind of knew each other because we all shopped at the same local record store. Palash and I ended up going to the same college. I started organizing events on the weekends while attending school, asked Palash to play a few of my events, and that is how relationship grew. After we finished college we kept in contact and decided to launch a label called Addii Records, focusing on a signature tribal-progressive sound that not many labels or artists were producing at time. So really, the label was created so that we could release our own music without the hassle of dealing other labels that didn't get our sound. Our first few releases got the attention of Danny Tenaglia, John Digw Sasha, Carl Cox and many others, and quickly gave us recognition with help from our local D.C buddies Deepdish. Palash and I had an amazing run from 1998-2004. We got to play all over the world, including some of the biggest festivals around the globe. In 2004 we both decided to go on a solo journey and explore our own artistic talent. This was right around the time when vinyl sales were plummeting and it was hard to keep our vinyl label afloat. So, we closed our label office and made the changes to go on our solo routes...And this is where I am now.*

**Being an American DJ and being recognized with four nominations as America's best DJ and landing in the top 50 each time in DJ Times Magazine, how has this translated itself when touring and DJing in Europe for the techno heads and house fanatics from that side of the world? Did they understand your interpretation upfront? What countries in Europe do you have the most fun in while visiting and gigging?**

*SY: "Best DJ competitions" can be a double-edged sword. It's great if you are nominated for what you truly deserve or have contributed to the scene. It's not cool when you have a team of people and lots of money backing you up to drive votes for nomination. Sadly to say, this is how most of these competitions are driven these days. But I can't complain, these nominations and wins have helped my DJ Career, landing me gigs in places that I probably wouldn't have played if I wasn't nominated. Some of the places I've enjoyed overseas are Morocco, Amsterdam, Bulgaria is one of my favorites, and of course Ibiza.*



**Your DJ sets and productions have clearly been genre defying and have set themselves far apart from the normal run of house and techno music. What has been your formula and outlook for this, both in and out of the studio? What fuels your musical brand and what can you share about your studio approach to making beats?**

*SY: I tend to push myself very hard, trying to stand out from the norm. I focus on creating something special and unique with every DJ performance. I rarely play a track as it is. I'm constantly looping, editing, and sampling elements on top of tracks, creating something new with every transition, using all 4 decks. My studio approach is similar, I guess. I tend to bring back thoughts from my DJ sets to my studio, and try to program beats based on the ideas I had created with my live sets.*

**Younan Music is now ten years old and home to artists like Stacey Pullen, Wally Lopez, Carlo Lio, Pleasurekraft, Uner, Matt McLarrie, and Loko amongst many other world class performers. Can you tell us about any new artists that will be joining the roster in the near future and what we can expect from Younan in the next year? What's your musical vision for the future of the label, and is it all you hoped to be after its first decade?**

*SY: This is exciting times for the label and I couldn't be happier with what we've accomplished. I couldn't have done it all without the trusted help of my new label manger, Matt Mclarrie. Next year we will be celebrating Younan Music's 10 year anniversary and we are giving the label a major makeover. Updating the logo, creating new cover art for all the releases starting in 2014, a new website, and launching label based parties with our artists around the globe. We got some up and coming artists like DJ Fronter, Sebastian Ledher, Ivan Pica, Redondo, Fabio Neural, and Will Montone signed on for future releases, and we also have established producers like DJ PP, Filthy Rich, and Mendo signing productions with the label.*

**Tell us about your connection to Canada. When was your debut here and what are your favorite cities to play in? What are the general differences you might find between Canada and the States?**

*SY: I have to admit, Canada is definitely one of my favorite countries to play. I've been coming here since the late 90's. Nine times out of ten the party I play has been on-point. I love the energy and passion the Canadians have for this music; they give so much love to the DJ. And I'm not just talking about me, I see the genuine love they give to all guest DJs that come through. I really admire that. You don't get to see that very often in other countries.*

**How did the Younan Music label party go this year in Miami? How do you feel about WMC over the last few years? What's your opinion when hearing people say it has gone commercial and not what it used to be?**

*SY: This year, we decided to do a free rooftop party. I was honored to have my good friends Pirupa, Filthy Rich, DJ PP, Patrick M, Will Monotone, and others play an amazing sunset session. The party was slammed! People couldn't believe this free party with such talented artists. My whole goal of doing it this way was to bring things back to ground-level, how WMC was years ago. It was all about DJs showcasing their talent to fans, promoters and party-goers, while networking and having fun at the same time. That's how the WMC was for me years ago. But like everything else, as things become more popular, they lose that special feel. Of course WMC is much more commercial now, but there are still plenty of good parties to attend where you get to hear your favorite DJs without dishing out crazy amounts of money. Like our party for example.*

**Some may know that you're quite the outdoorsman. Do these activities help you balance your touring and studio schedule? What's your favorite outdoor activity?**

*SY: Ha ha ha... Yes I am! It's all about balance. This business can take a toll on your body and health if can't keep a good balance. I actually enjoy the outdoors very much; it clears my mind and really helps me become a better person, productively and spiritually. I do a lot of snowboarding during the winter months and I bike and hike during the warmer months. I don't know why this happens, but many great label and musical ideas have come to me while I'm on the bike trails. So I guess I'll keep riding.*

A big thanks goes out to Saeed and his label manager, Matt McLarrie, for taking the time to chat!

[Jonathan David Paech](#) / [jdpeach@ihmmusic.com](mailto:jdpeach@ihmmusic.com)

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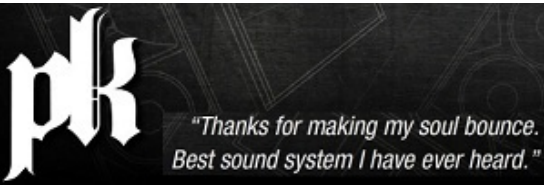
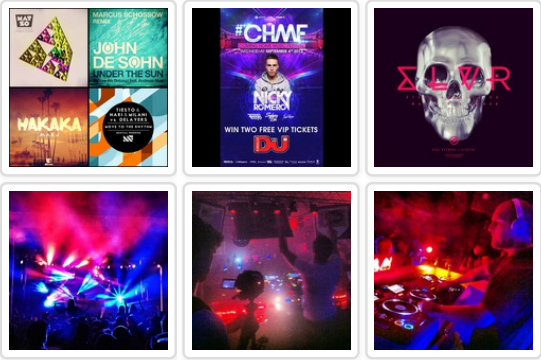
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