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## Harry 'Choo Choo' Romero - Interview

Mr. Choo Choo has steamed back into town this December with his offering in the Subliminal Essentials Series. Read the Defected syndicated interview....

By Spotlight December 22nd, 2009

*Harry Choo Choo Romero... It's that name, it instantly conjures up an image of a house music legend, and he is just that. A DJ and producer that has stayed at the cutting edge of dance music for 15 years, not to mention his masterpieces like 'Night @ the Black'. His sound is tough, edgy but always funky. He is known as one of the founding members of Subliminal Records with fellow producers and close friends; Erick Morillo and Jose Nunez. It's no surprise that he has been invited to mix the next instalment of Subliminal Essentials, and if HCCR says it's good, then you know it's going to be wicked!*



**Defected: Would it be fair to call you a veteran?**

**Harry 'Choo Choo' Romero:** Maybe I've been called one because people have been coming up to me and saying 'Oh my god I can't believe you made that record! It was out such a long time ago!' So I guess now you could call me a veteran! (laughs).

**Well it's fair to say that you've been around for a while making good records and building a name for yourself right?**

Well thank-you, yes my first record came out in 1995 on Strictly Rhythm, so next year I'm celebrating 15 years "in the biz", as they call it.

**That's a long time for anybody in a career!**

I guess so yeah, and considering I'm only 36 it's been a big chunk of my life!



**Do you honestly think that you're still on top in your own game and are you having to keep looking over your shoulder at all the new blood coming through?**

I'll be honest with you, my approach to music is the same now as it was in the mid-nineties and I don't really think in terms of whose on top, whose at the bottom and whose left or right. I do it because I love to make music, but having said that you also have to know what's going on out there so I do listen to a lot of different styles of dance music and all music.

I know whose coming up, I know whose doing what and I know whose on top of their game as far as specific genre's go, but my approach to music has always been taking a little bit of this and a bit of that and putting a twist on it and then putting it out.

**Do you listen to some of the new guys and the beats they're creating and think 'Hey that's pretty cool!'?**

Oh hell yeah! The cream always rises to the top and there's always a different generation of kids that are making dope beats like we were and still are making. I'm a beat guy. I always listen to the beats, and there's kids out there with their laptops just doing it right now which is really cool. If anything, going back to the original question, it actually inspires me and put's a light under my eyes and say's to me 'Yo get busy, these kids are doing it lets roll!'

**Is there anybody out there at the moment who you're really taking notice of?**

I really like Alex Celler (pictured) right now, I really like what he's doing. He's doing a lot of dirty/grimey massive and dope funky beats. Also there's Santos, I really like what Santos is doing too. For me, that reminds me of the vibe that we felt when we started making beats whereby there was a lot of different tones and a lot of different drums and it was really dance-floor beat music.

**Let's talk about the industry. How are you finding it at the moment?**

Well you know as well as I do that it's all over the place right now. I hate to sound like a veteran but I remember going into record stores and there was only a few record labels out there, but now you can't keep track of anything! Half of your working day is spent blogging and checking out blogging sites so you can see whose doing what and where, when & how and also finding out what the new bootlegs are. I would say that its 60-70% bootlegs right now. It's gone really 'Wild West' if you know what I mean.

### **How many records are you being sent each day on download?**

Oh my god, honestly, I would have to say between 50 & 75 downloads a day of links which lead into other links etc... It's hard to keep track. I think the way that promotion is done now has made it lose its thing because there's just so much.

### **We spoke to Kenny Dope (pictured left) and he said he remembers when he would just receive a box of records and he could then just pick out the ones he wanted. Would you agree that it's out of control?**

I agree, and going along with what Kenny said, it was more of a physical thing back then. Now it's just emails and links, and to be honest with you I'd just like to be able to drive to a record store, but the problem is record stores don't really exist around me anymore!

### **There's a lot to be said about the old style!**

Yeah, they were good times, but if you look at it in terms of the timeline it was short-lived. I was still getting vinyl promo's 3 years ago...

### **So are you not playing off a laptop at the moment?**

No not yet, but I'm thinking of doing the transition in the early part of next year. In January I want to start playing all of my music off a laptop. I still use CD's right now, but in January, laptop - here we come.

### **Let's talk inspirations. You're quite big on latin but are you Puerto-Rican?**

I'm actually 100% Columbian.

### **Is that where all your soul comes from?**

Yes part of it is that, but I was born in 1973 and growing up in the New York Tri-state area meant that we were listening to a lot of different music. We were listening to punk, disco, we were listening to everything so I feel very fortunate that I was growing up in a time when the music wasn't so segmented. You could put on the radio and hear everything.

We grew up on everything from Run DMC to Blondie to Afrikka Bombaata to Journey to Billy Squire to Metallica, you name it! It was cool man and a really fantastic time to grow up as far as music goes.

### **Let's talk about your special relationship with Jose Nunez and Erick Morillo. I would say that you consider those guys as brothers rather than colleagues, is that right?**

Absolutely, more like red-headed step brothers!

### **How would you describe Jose (right)? Tell me a little bit about him from your own perspective?**

Well Jose, on a musical level, is a perfectionist. Everything has to be perfectly right. And that shows when we collaborate together because it doesn't sound like I did it or he did it, it sounds like we did it.

I'm more of a seat-of-the pants producer, I really go on gut instinct and what I feel at that particular second and I don't necessarily question myself as much as he does, but when he and I collaborate there's a certain magic that I can't really describe. It's a mixture of his perfection and my gut instinct. It works out, and he really is an awesome person.

The good thing about having friends like that is that you can be in a creative space and be able to say 'Wo man that sounds Fucking horrible what are you doing!?' and that could be directed towards me, or Jose or Erick and it's all good because we really really talk to each other and we know that we're not being judgemental, it's just for the better of the project.

### **What's the dynamic with Erick like?**

If you put the three of us in a room it's just hilarious! We have a lot of fun, and don't ask me how, but we actually get stuff done. That's an interview in itself: 'How do the three of you get things done when you're in the studio together!' ha!

### **Let's talk about Subliminal. It must be an important label for you because you've been there since the start. Tell me how you feel about Subliminal as a label.**

The best way I can describe would be... (Rhetorically) Ok you remember when you lived at your mother's house right? And you remember when you moved away and then came back to that house and the feeling you had when you went back? Well Subliminal is kind of the same thing, its ground-zero in terms of music for myself & Jose and Erick as well. We took a leap of faith and we believed in each other and we believed in the talents that we had. We believed in Erick's drive and his position in the music business and we really leapt forward and we kind of put the blinders on and we just did our thing. We had a lot of fun doing it, and it will always be ground-zero when it comes to making music for me.

I had a couple of years before that, when I was doing stuff on Strictly and other record labels, but I really want to say that that's where (Subliminal) my career started in the music business.

### **Let's move onto your own record label – 'Bambossa'. What's happening with that at the moment?**

I'm just sticking to my model which is 'Yo have fun, make some dope beats, put them out and the people will either love them or hate them'. I am stepping the game up a little bit, I've just finished a record with Trailer M, whose Mariah Carey's lead-background vocalist, and we did a record called 'Is This Time Goodbye?' which will be coming out in February. I'm also doing a lot of tracks, which are more minimal, techno, acidy underground type of music. I've always been all over the place when it comes to genres and styles of music, like I said before I do it with my gut instinct and I like all kinds of music, especially dance music and I'm influenced by a lot of things.

Sometimes I don't know that I'm being influenced! Bambossa was set up as a label to put out all my different stuff which perhaps wouldn't sit right on Subliminal.

I'm using it as a point of departure, I'm trying to create a trademark for myself and a brand – something that can be exploited a bit more than just tracks.

I'm really gung-ho about it and I guess I'm putting all my eggs into one basket with Bambossa now that I've teamed up with Strictly Rhythm because they're doing all my manufacturing and distributing and it's great to have them as a partner.

**Let's talk about the latest mix you've done for Subliminal. What have you done with the mix and what are your feelings on it?**

With the mix, I really wanted to start it off with that track that I did called 'Jumped' – it's coming out on Subliminal. With every mix CD that I've done, I try to put myself on the dance-floor and I imagine that it's quite self-centred, but I try to put across the stuff that I'd like to hear when I go out to a club.

**So why did you call it 'Jumped'?**

I called it 'Jumped' because in America sometimes, in the hood, you get jumped (mugged), and a bunch of people come up and kick your ass, and I called it that because I took Todd Terry's 'Jump me' and by that I suppose I jumped him ha!

We do it all the time man, I do it to other people all the time, and they go 'Hey that remix is dope! Send me it without the kick-drum in it!' It's fun man. Back in the day you regarded beats like you regard your kids, but now we live in the age of pro-creation and you go with the flow.

**Tell us about 'Knight of the Black'.**

Yeah 'Knight of the Black' is a very special record for me and I always wanted to re-do it. We we're producing with Deborah Cooper & Erick and I thought that sounds I was using in that mix sounded dope and it reminded me of Knight of the Black, so I took the same kind of sound and did Knight of the black with it.



It's cool going back into time and doing these records, 10 years ago I wouldn't have been able to do it because you're so close to these records and you grew up with them. But now it's great to re-visit and get to re-know them again. It's also an honour that they asked me to do it.

**Are there any tracks you'd like to give us the heads-up on that you're doing at the moment?**

Well definitely the Traylor Rhymes track 'Is This Time Good-Bye' that's on Bambossa, the one coming out on Ovum called 'The Future' is definitely worth keeping an eye out for – it's a monster, you're going to see people like Karl Cox and Pete Tong playing it and it's going to be a massive record. Supposedly it's coming out this month, but I think it will come out in either December or January. Also another record on Bambossa that I did is called 'La Luz' which is latin for 'The Light', and that is a really kind of acid trip record with a lot of unexpected twists and turns. It's coming out in the first week in December.

**What about Tour dates? Are you going to be visiting the UK soon at some point and are there any other international dates you'd like to tell us about?**

The best thing to do is to go on my twitter or on my myspace and you can read-up on all the tour dates that I'll be doing.

**Finally Harry is there anything else you'd like to talk about? Anything at all.**

We have to get the healthcare system going in this country (U.S.A), we're fucked right now. We are so fucked, and I'm paying close to £700 a month in order for me, my wife and my kids to get healthcare, they've raised it by 20% like it's no big deal, no explanation or nothing! I mean if someone with no money breaks a leg or an arm they're fucked because they can't afford the healthcare! You guys have it much better in the U.K. There, I've got that off my chest!

Subliminal Essentials Harry Choo Choo Romero is out now.

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