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Disruptive Flights of Fancy in a Basement Nightclub

By JON CARAMANICA SEPT. 22, 2008

In London, Graeme Sinden D.J.'s for thousands; hosts a weekly radio show on Kiss 100, a major hip-hop and dance music station; and is known for his remixes of grime, R&B and, recently, Bjork.

These were facts that maybe one-third of the couple of hundred or so people at the basement nightclub Love on Saturday night, where he was D.J.ing, seemed to know or care about. Such is the conundrum facing the overseas dance music star in New York, where the lack of interest can be chilling. (Just ask Armand Van Helden, the longtime hometown nightclub kingpin who dropped in to listen for a spell.)

Sinden, who D.J.'s and produces under his last name, works in a genre sometimes called fidget-house, thanks to its glitchy, disruptive flights of fancy over punishing, throbbing 4/4 beats. Owing debts to the funk-influenced electro of the early 1980s and to early strains of Chicago house music, it's also absorbed tricks from more popular dance genres like progressive house and big beat: arena-scale arrangements, songs that swell and subside, a ruthless commitment to immediacy.

With the co-producer the Count, Sinden has released a string of singles over the last couple of years, two of which figured prominently in the first half of his set: "Beeper," a woozy gallop of a song that features sprightly rhymes from the Chicago rapper Kid Sister, and the shimmering "Hardcore Girls," featuring the young

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Over the course of two hours Sinden toddled back and forth between his own elastic productions and those of others, for a motley crowd: plaid-shirted hipsters, a crew of extravagantly outfitted Japanese hip-hoppers, a gaggle of nightclub tourists and at least one gentleman sporting a modified Oi! style.

Knowingly or not, Sinden took advantage of the small club's forceful sound system: when he would introduce new bass textures into the mix, the floor would vibrate, disruptively, at different frequencies.

The span of Sinden's set did reveal some limitations to the genre, though, namely its note of tourism. He played remixes of "Wait a Minute (Just a Touch)" by the British soul comer Estelle, "Kids" by the psychedelic pop band MGMT, "Hot Wuk" by the Jamaican dance-hall star Mr. Vegas and "Day 'n' Nite" by the Cleveland rapper Kid Cudi, and though each had particular strengths, they felt as if the original source material had mattered far less than what had been done to it.

Toward the end of the night, just past 3 a.m., Sinden played his remix of "Balle! Shava!" by the British bhangra group Tigerstyle, another forceful and homogenizing tune. As he adjusted his turquoise fitted baseball cap and wiped some sweat from his brow, a handful of faithful fans hovered by the D.J. booth, pumping their fists vigorously, celebrating the not-quite-conquering hero.

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