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Gray Area Spotlight: Marc Spence




ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Marc Spence

UNITED
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Marc Spence is much more than a DJ. The Birmingham native is a man of many talents: DJ, producer, A&R specialist for Box Of Cats, and a teacher just to name a few. As a child, his dreams were to become a professional footballer. After an injury, Marc began promoting shows and never looked back.

“We stored our flyers in a record shop. I was much more into urban music back then. The guy I was working for introduced me to drum n’ bass and UK garage... I was going to hip-hop clubs and loved it. Funky house was really big at the time, I appreciated it but wasn’t into it... When I heard the music of Dave Taylor it changed my whole perspective of house music. I had never heard music like it before. I was converted overnight.” 

Although Marc Spence eventually found his way into the world of house music, his early introductions into the electronic scene were spurred by the ever-present sounds of UK garage. The golden era of UK garage took place from about 1996-2002. According to Marc, the lack of digital interfaces for music production made music production less accessible, and objectively more of a commitment. This, in turn, led to a more unified sound.

“You mostly had hardware, the commitment to the music and to the craft was so much higher. Nowadays there’s so many people doing stuff, it’s probably even harder to stand out but it’s easier to make whatever sound you want.”

Although Marc has now had a lengthy and successful career, he is perpetually wary of relying too heavily on one source of income. For Marc, relying on the next gig check or royalty payment causes art to suffer as the extra pressure leads to creation without inspiration. Early on in his career, Marc found himself living with a fellow DJ and Birmingham native, Chris Lorenzo. Chris Lorenzo brought Marc the idea of working at a DJ school, and it has been a passion for Marc ever since.



Quarantine EP
Low Steppa, Marc Spence



“If it wasn’t for the technology, I don’t think we’d be able to have a company as successful as it is... I teach anyone from an eight-year-old to a couple in their 60s who are banging out hard techno in our sessions... The visual aids in CDJ screens make the floor of learning so easy.”

Working at the DJ school gave Marc a fresh perspective on the industry that he is an integral part in. His relationship with Chris Lorenzo can not be understated as well. The two lived together for many years and helped bring one another to the next level professionally.

“I sometimes have trouble getting into the studio with other people. Chris used to be in the speed garage scene. I was on the house side of things. There was a crossover period about 8-9 years ago and my friend, Dr. Love, introduced the two of us. We met and had an immediate connection.”



In 2015, Marc saw the trajectory of his career take a major upswing. Following the release of the massive track, "Nasty," he soon joined the iconic label, Box Of Cats. It was the culmination of months of work. He admits it’s the longest he’s ever worked on a track, pushing the limits on the amount of time he would typically allot a production.

“I was living with Chris Lorenzo at the time... I had created the core of the track using a DNB sample. I remember snapping all the pieces together but when it came to the mix, there was so much class. It took me months to finish. I remember Chris walking up the stairs and saying I gotta give up the tune. For him, if he hasn't finished a track in 2-3 days, he moves on. I know he's usually right because you have to get music out there. You can't just work on one track for six months. But he drove me to finish it because I knew it was a special one.”



After the success of "Nasty," Marc received an invitation to become part of the Box Of Cats collective. With their first release in 2016, Box Of Cats quickly became a tastemaking label, helping some of the brightest names in house music break out. The invitation to become one of the leaders of the label was an immediate yes.

“I was a bit of a late comer. They had it all set up and I was talking to Wongo and he just invited me and told me about the project. It was a no brainer.”

What makes Box Of Cats so unique is the label's lack of discrimination in sound. They do not subscribe to any one style or genre. As Marc puts it, “it just has to bang.” While Marc has had his hands full with the label and his solo career, he has somehow also managed to find time for a side project.

His collaborative project called Ilgot n' Gane will see the release of an album soon. “We've been working on an an album for over ten years. The concept of the album is to represent Birmingham from the '90s. In order to be authentic, we're trying to use as much hardware as we can.”



While we eagerly await the passion project, Marc Spence will be coming stateside in early 2022.

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A SoundCloud player interface for the track "Im Gonna" by Marc Spence. The player features a play button icon, the artist name "Marc Spence", and the track title "Im Gonna". A waveform visualization of the audio is shown below the text. In the top right corner, there is a "SOUNDCLLOUD" logo and a "Share" button. The track duration "3:48" is displayed in the bottom right corner of the player area. Below the player, there is a "Cookie policy" link on the left and the number "97" on the right.

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A Spotify player interface for "Top tracks for Marc Spence". It features a large play button icon on the left, the text "Top tracks for Marc Spence" in the center, and a list of tracks on the right. Navigation icons for previous, play, and next are visible at the bottom.

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