

2Lanes Treatment

Dretraxx

October 10, 2022

A powerful and long-developing talent, 2Lanes was kind enough to take time from his busy international schedule to sit down with me to discuss his production techniques, gear chasing, and influences. We grabbed food from Market 168's cafeteria in Madison Heights. After carefully scanning his options, he decided upon the three dish meal: shrimp with cucumber, Szechuan eggplant, and beef with green pepper. He cleansed his palate between judicious bites with an aloe pomegranate soft drink.

Dretraxx: One of my first impressions of meeting you almost a decade ago was that you are an individual that buys, trades, and sells a lot of gear. You're constantly in a cycle of obtaining gear, using it furiously, and moving on. Tell me about this process.

2Lanes: That's a very accurate analysis of me. If anything, I get that motivation from my dad who is really into guitars. He was always buying, selling, and trading guitars throughout my life. When I was younger, I would accompany him to guitar shows, guitar repair people, guitar dealers, and music stores. My first music equipment was used equipment so I'm

always in the mode of looking out for what is available within the city's used markets. Once I got more into MIDI-based music and learned about sequencers and weird rack sound modules, I began to focus on gear like the Elektron Octatrack. I became fascinated with the Octatrack as a production brain as it can sequence and sample. What initially drew me to it wasn't the sampling though, it was the sequencing. I had played with a friend's Octatrack and once I had my own, I quickly learned the intuitive flow of arranging sequences and MIDI from the Octatrack to external synths. That led me to my fascination with sequencing anything: from an old, classic synth to an obscure 90's cheap sound module. Being able to take the contemporary approach of sequencing MIDI on the Octatrack and integrate it with older synths sparked my love for the hunt of used gear.

Another big benefit to MIDI music is that most MIDI-capable synths have MIDI CC (continuous controls) for various parameters. So not only can you sequence the notes, you can set up automations of sound-shaping CC parameters as well. These CC numbers are different for each synth and are detailed within the piece of gear's manual. For instance, you could figure out what CC number is associated with a synth's filter cutoff or its ADSR's decay. These are crucial to manipulate to keep the movement of a track flowing and progressing. Utilizing Elektron's signature parameter lock automation technique allowed me to get more out of sequencing these synths. Plus once you get the Elektron workflow down it can be such a fast machine to work with.

What gear is grailed to you? Has anything upended the way you make music? Have you ever sought after a piece of gear that you thought would impact your music creation flow to only leave you disappointed?



Definitely the Roland RE-501 Chorus Echo was a big piece of gear that I've always chased after. I finally was able to get one through a series of gear sales and trades. It looks beautiful and sounds amazing. I've always idealized it because of dub and dub music production. The Yamaha TX81z was another piece of gear I've always lusted after too. It's a rackmount FM synth that has a very distinct tonal quality to it compared to other Yamaha FM synths. Controlling the TX81z, normally a very tedious synth to program, with things like Ableton or the Octatrack and help you dial in chaos to push the device to its intended limit. I love the synth's sound and tonal qualities and how it sits with my drums.

Another big one for me was my Waldorf Microwave XT, the orange rackmount one. I got it off Craigslist through a trade for an Elektron Analog Four MK1, which I did not like. I got it after obtaining my Elektron Octatrack, which was my introduction to the Elektron workflow. Something about the Analog Four didn't click with me so I traded for the Microwave.

I also had an Elektron Machinedrum, which I ended up trading for a Vermona DRM1, which I absolutely love. I didn't love the Machinedrum sounds despite its grailed status among the techno community. The Vermona is such an immediate and simple machine and can produce such a wide range of percussion sounds. You can make it sound like a Roland TR-606 or sometimes it can even sound like a real drum set.

You also have a specific MIDI controller for the TX81z, correct?

Yes, I recently picked up a Stereoping TX81z midi controller. It opens up the parameter CC editing of the TX81z. So instead of using the limited buttons and arrows on the synth

itself, the Stereoping controller lets you edit various parameters of the synth to change the tone and voice of a patch in real time. Of all the controllers from Stereoping, the TX81z version is the only one where the changes of the knob settings are not instantaneous—there is a slight delay to the adjustment of the patch's parameter modulation which gives the TX81z a very interesting sound as it morphs and changes per your input on the Stereoping controller.

More recently, you obtained a Korg WAVEDRUM.

Oh yeah, I got it because I love hand drums. I grew up playing the drums. I was frustrated with the intricacies of recording analog drums so I purchased the WAVEDRUM to alleviate those issues with drum recording. The WAVEDRUM looks like a flat hand drum and acts as a synthetic drum. It's really responsive and made really well. It's expressive to play, too. I do a ton of research on YouTube and see what people are doing with that gear. I always search for something like, "WAVE DRUM dub techno" to see how that piece of gear performs a specific style of music. There are a lot of shitty gear videos, though. It's not what you have, it's what you do with it. Shitty music is made with a lot of gear and no gear.

After a quick break to grab our ordered food from the cafeteria counter, we quickly realize that the green pepper in the beef dish is actually bitter melon, a flavor profile avoided in most western dishes. For the remainder of the dinner, Joey nimbly sorts through the dish to pick out the more familiar and desired pieces of beef.

Tell me about a piece of gear you thought you couldn't live without, and once possessed, you hated it.



The Quasimidi Rave-O-lution 309 groovebox. I watched a video and it sounded so good but once I got it, it was a nightmare to program. Also, the Behringer 303 clone, the TD-3. The sequencer of the original Roland TB-303 is super arduous and it was copied directly to the TD-3. I can sequence MIDI from the Octatrack so much quicker and easier than the TD-3. Also, a Roland SP, the new one. I sold it also because I didn't click with the workflow. I used to have an original one very early on when I lived in New York. I was never good with its live looping capabilities.

What was the first piece of gear that got you started in your dance music career?

When I was living in New York, I couldn't have a drum set in my apartment so my friends turned me on to the Akai MPC 2000XL. I bought one on eBay and it immediately broke in shipping. The guy I bought it from let me send it back, thankfully. I ended up purchasing one from a friend. Learning how to sample on that MPC was informative until I moved onto the Octatrack. I also had one of the older Korg Electribes in New York, the red face one with the tubes in it. That turned me onto step sequencing and groove box workflow which eventually led me to the Octatrack. When anyone asks me, "2Lanes, I want to start making beats, what gear should I get?" I specifically recommend an Akai MPC. New ones, old ones. It doesn't really matter. If they don't want to spring for a piece of outboard gear, I recommend getting comfortable in Ableton.

Joey scans the room and excuses himself to grab a bottle of Chinese black vinegar from a neighboring table. We chuckle at the fact that we are seated facing a wall of hundreds of vinegars to choose from and only have access to the restaurant supply-sourced ketchup bottles full of vinegar.

For me, intuitiveness and workflow are the most important aspects of making music. Many devices can sound great but are ultimately defeated by their poor implementation of workflow.

When you're sitting down to record new music, what is your process? How do you start?

It's a mixed bag on my approaches. Obviously growing up as a drummer I'm inclined to start with the drums. But sometimes you'll want to start with a chord and shape it carefully to the point of perfection. Regardless, I always have one aspect of a track in mind: drum beat, a groove pattern, bassline, a chord stab, or a sample.

Nowadays, I start everything in Ableton. I used to only use it like a tape recorder, recording everything in one take maybe into a couple of tracks, but at first it was solely live-take stereo tracks. As I made more and more music, I multi-tracked everything so I could have greater control over each piece of a track I was creating. It's interesting to listen back to your old music to see where you came from and, more importantly, to see what you wouldn't do again. Learning from your mistakes is a huge step in the ultimate direction of your musical progression. My biggest piece of advice to those making dance music is to trust the process of recording. Learn as much as you can, ask everything, talk to everyone. Learn about the sound you aspire to make and figure out the steps to getting it tracked down. Whether that's how to modulate rhythmic chord stabs, adding the right amount of groove and swing on UK garage drums, or what makes a good break chop. It takes time, but it develops you as an artist and human. Learning to love that process is crucial. The personal growth from accelerating your musical and production knowledge is a super power. Taking what is in your head and putting it out into the world is personally transformative.



What’s your ritual for making music? What steps do you always take regardless of what you’re producing?

When I feel the inkling to make music, I immediately try to sit down and make music. I find forcing myself to make music doesn’t always produce great results. When I have the itch to make music, I make sure to immediately hit my studio. Some of the best music I have made was made in 15 minutes after not making music for three weeks. It’s all about catching that feeling to produce.

I am always fascinated with mixing and mastering, the fine art of working with frequencies to bring out the best in your track, but sometimes you want to test stuff out that you just made. My friend Amal of Black Rave Culture out of DC turned me on to the Ableton mastering preset, Dance Aggressive. When I make something that I want to quickly bounce to a wav for DJing, I run it through that preset.

These days I am getting more and more “Ableton-pilled”. I get all my sounds from external instruments and synths, but Ableton’s internal presets and effects are better than a number of very pricey external units. Shout out to Jonah Baseball for influencing me and introducing me to Ableton’s equalizer utility, EQ8. This EQ is better than most \$250 EQ VSTs. Ableton’s Drum Buss, shout out to AceMo for this recommendation, is crucial for me. People will spend \$5,000 for a boutique piece of gear that does what Drum Buss does but worse. Ableton 11 has made everything better, and even easier to use. It’s all about getting the sound you want quickly with ease of use and not hindering the process. I no longer want to sit and EQ something for hours, I want immediacy to keep the flow going and produce finished stuff.

Shout out to Salar Ansari, he turned me on to Plugin Alliance. Their mix and mastering bundle has shaped my sound and has so many options, including plugin emulations of some of the best outboard gear around. He and a couple of other big producers have said that when you’re working with drum machines and synths, you don’t really need too much crazy

outboard gear. I did an A/B test of a processing chain from Plugin Alliance with some outboard processing gear that I owned, and the plugins were always better and ultimately easier to work with. I do have one compressor, by a small brand called Bugbrand from the UK. It colors the sound very well, and can give a nice warm feeling to the sounds you put through it. I just really need a new computer and then I’ll be set.

You talk a lot about “dub” and “dub style”. What does it mean to you and how do you apply it to techno?

“Dub style” references the process within reggae and dub reggae in which a mix was given to a studio engineer, like King Tubby and Lee “Scratch” Perry, and they would remix reggae songs within the particular dub sound style. This would mean their remixes would involve them taking the various tracks of a reggae song and creating a new mixdown that involved a focus on the drums, the bass, and sending various elements to big delay and reverb washes. Lots of depth and movement.

In college, I got the Trojan Dub compilation CD at Wazoo Records in Ann Arbor. This CD was especially instrumental for the rearrangement of my musical brain. Getting that CD helped me understand that dub reggae was one of the first major instances of remixing. Learning about how they made it and how the dub studio engineers were using studio gear like the musicians were using their literal instruments was huge for me. It made the engineer the fifth member of the band. The band would record a song, go out for a smoke break, Lee “Scratch” Perry would rewind the tape, do another bounce, rework the effect sends, and play the mixer as an instrument. The importance of the mixer in dub music was extremely influential and how these artists were using it like an instrument was extremely transformative. This has spawned my own love and appreciation for mixers and rewiring my studio. During lockdown, I found my meditative sanctuary in rewiring my studio and arranging things perfectly.



I offer Joey the last piece of eggplant, which he gracefully maneuvers from the styrofoam container to his bowl of rice. The bitter melon rests in a lonesome pile, surrounded by runoff puddles of black vinegar.

Recently, you're becoming a more dedicated live performer as opposed to a DJ. Tell me about your setup and approach.

I was always inspired by these Terekke live sets that he had on SoundCloud and when you look at photos from those live sets, it was just an Octatrack, a bass synth, a rackmount drum machine, and a delay pedal. No mixer at all. In fact, I emailed him and he was so kind as to respond back to me to answer some questions. I sent him screenshots I took of his live performances on YouTube to have him explain how he wired his liveset around the Octatrack. He was able to shed so much light on his set up.

Lately, my live sets have been a bass synthesizer, a drum machine, and the Octatrack all plugged into a four channel Pioneer DJM DJ mixer. What's great about the DJ mixer is that it is designed to be played and messed with. It is a lot more intuitive to use than a studio mixer for live PA purposes.

All the samples I use live are not necessarily pre-planned. A lot of how I play live involves improvisation of these drums, chords, basses, and samples. The drum sequences and basslines are preset but everything else is improvisationally fed into the mix as I perform. I go through a few rhythms that I make and I bring in samples as I choose. I usually piece together some sort of story line in my head of what goes with what so I'm constantly improving my live sets as I play them out.

Tell me about your introduction into electronic music.

Definitely older UK music. UK music in general is really influential to me. Genres like UK funky, older dubstep, 2-step UK garage. In fact, one of my bigger entries into electronic music was due to artists like James Blake and Mount Kimbie. I would read about them online which would then direct me to artists and labels like Peverelist and Hessle Audio. That was quite informative and exciting to me; seeing this world of music outside of what I understood. Before this, I was mostly into band music. The way electronic music worked compared to rock, particularly its release process, stood out to me. It was more casual, independent, and the output was different. I'm largely self-taught with recording so being able to read about these artists I admired and how they independently made their music was impactful.

Understanding the utilitarian aspects of a dance music track and how it is created for a DJ mix has made me a better producer. Keep in mind, a track you made the other day to be played out on a CDJ may be mixed into or from a track on vinyl that was released in 1982. Understanding that continuum of the DJ mix is crucial. Around 2013 I was listening to DJ mixes from people like Fade to Mind, Nguzunguzu, Total Freedom, and Bokbok. These artists helped me with my understanding of "the mix". I was living in New York, going to raves at the time, studying DJ blends, hearing new contemporary sounds, it was all very inspiring to me and formed my initial understanding of this music. Once I moved back to Detroit, I fell back into the lineage of Midwestern techno and house music.

The early New York club and house scene greatly impacts the music I make. The triplet drum fills used a lot by producers like Armand Van Helden and Towa Tei inspire me. Towa Tei, one of the producers of Dee-Lite, has a few heavier dance remixes that sculpted my style. He has to be one of my biggest inspirations. My sister's friend gave me a mix CD in 2010 that had the Towa Tei track, Technova, on it. It blew my mind. Receiving this mix CD motivated me to Goo-



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gle the track and ultimately discover Discogs. Finding that site was like uncovering another layer of the iceberg that is dance music. At the time, I thought I knew everything about music and what I was listening to was getting stale. Before discovering Discogs and getting that mix CD, music was getting pastiche and too self-referential for me. That Towa Tei record opened my eyes to house and techno. These tracks I was seeking were not going to appear on Hype Machine or similar blogs. I was going to have to dig and ask around.

Once I moved to New York, I was reading about and listening to artists like Zomby and DJ Rashad. In fact, DJ Rashad was playing a show right down the street from me immediately after Hurricane Sandy. Five to ten people were at this show and it was DJ Manny and DJ Rashad back to back all night and it was my first big exposure to footwork and generally speaking it was an extremely inspirational DJ set for me. Over the next two years, I saw DJ Rashad perform maybe 12 times. The music, the culture surrounding it, and the dancing to the music was very interesting. Their ability to make flips of pop songs and big rap songs at the time and turn them into footwork rearranged everything I knew about sampling and making music. His album Double Cup is huge for me. Each track on the album is perfectly functional for a DJ mix but also it's dynamic for personal listening. RIP DJ Rashad.

You're a big coffee guy. Tell me about your espresso machine.

I'm not too nerdy with it, I don't own a grinder or anything, but I do own a 1978 La Pavoni Europiccola espresso machine. My grandfather gave it to my parents for their wedding and they never used it. Before the pandemic, my friends and I would meet at the coffee shop to talk over espresso. When the pandemic hit, we couldn't do that and I remembered that my parents had this machine in their basement. Much like the gear I like, this machine is old. Growing up in Metro Detroit, you're surrounded by old cars and flea market culture. Older vintage stuff is constantly available to you living in Detroit and it grows your appreciation of how well old things were made. Since my dad was into vintage guitars,

he taught me that things used to be made with a different level of care and quality. This espresso machine is almost 45 years old and works perfectly and looks beautiful.

What's your advice to people who want to begin making music, DJing, or integrating within a music community?

Stick with your friends. Stick with like-minded people and build with them. Find a venue or a bar that will let you do what you want on the cheap and start from there. All it is is doing stuff with friends. That's probably the most beautiful aspect of all of this music stuff. When my friends and I started our Formula event series, it was because we were not really getting booked in the city and we were not hearing the music that we wanted to hear. So we stepped up and began throwing our own events to ensure our vision was being heard and seen.

What's your favorite bitrate?

Miss me with that bullshit.

What's your favorite file format for audio?

Wav. Everyone just wants wav or MP3. Don't ever send me a FLAC.

Who is an up-and-coming DJ, producer, performer that people should be looking out for?

I like Sabetye's selections. Rawatt is a sick DJ and a close friend. Jakob, Fusegrade, has an amazing taste in music. O'Shay, aka Huey Mnemonic, is making a ton of great music. Jnn Aprl, aka DJ Pia. Kamau is another great artist that I admire. I also really enjoy 1morning out of Los Angeles.

Who are Detroit DJs that never deserve another gig?

Kiss my ass.

runner