

Super Massive

<http://www.myspace.com/supermassivesounds>

Interview with Loop

Loop - *Your sound (instrumentation) and very tightly composed approach to songwriting suggests some very strong and especially Euro musical influences. It's the sort of music I'd expect to hear in a club in Berlin or France. Can you talk a bit about how your sound has evolved and make some specific references to your influences. I hear all sorts of things from Herbie Hancock, Frank Zappa to Nina Hagen to Souxsie Sioux and the Banshees, Blondie.*

Super Massive - It was fairly clear quite early on what sort of sound we were going for. Both Glenn and I were interested in exploring a real 50 / 50 mix of rock and dance.

There are probably a couple of hundred bands that make up the Super Massive sound – No one band we can pinpoint as a defining inspiration. We have a pretty wide field of influences – from Burt Bacharach to Kiss. We admire songwriters like Bacharach, and Bernie Taupin & Elton John. We love funk – both 70s stuff like Tower Of Power, Brass Construction and Stevie Wonder as well as 80s styled electro funk, from Power Station to Prince.

We've always been fans of British Rock and British Dance Rock sounds. The albums David Bowie recorded in the mid 70s, when he moved to Berlin, were a strong influence, with their weird guitar sounds and synths. Musicians took an experimental attitude back then that seemed to be lost a bit through the late 80s and early 90s. You mention Siouxsie Sioux & The Banshees – When we were writing we did do some listening to the later couple of Siouxsie Sioux albums, which were a bit more sophisticated in their instrumentation and production. We like their experimental drums and vocals, and the effort there to create an atmospheric soundscape.

We love atmospherics, and there are a lot of layers in the Super Massive sound. I was quite influenced by the trip hop era, which seemed to connect with me on a more physical, sensual level – bands like Massive Attack, for the deep, trance-inducing pulse of their rhythms, and Portishead too, as they managed to create whole mysterious worlds of beautiful but dark sounds. We have both listened to a lot of French Electro like Daft Punk and Air. Some of our lighter synth noises were probably born from those influences.

As well as that we've both always liked the showiness and flashiness of Glam Rock music. How it's so over-the-top, and the sense of fun of it all. Artists like Alice Cooper, T-Rex - even Adam & The Ants. The multi-layered drums in "All The Things I've Done" are possibly something Adam & The Ants might have done.

Loop - *Track 4, Ain't Easy is a favourite. I love the subtlety and dynamics of it and am a sucker for those tight funk driven beats. Can you tell me a bit about that track. Where it came from? Who did what? How it came together?*

Super Massive - Firstly, thanks for the kind words! We're stoked to hear you like it. Funnily enough, Ain't Easy started out as a bare-boned, electro track with no nuances or dynamics at all. Just a sketch of an idea.

Glenn wrote the music and gave it to me as an instrumental track on a CD with a bunch of other raw demo ideas. I think I was meant to be working on something else but it took my fancy at the time. I was living in Darlinghurst in an apartment above a major construction zone whilst the Cross City Tunnel and the revamped William St were being built, and all this hideous noise of urban advancement was invading my private space. I was delirious from lack of sleep as the jackhammers were going round the clock.

The initial sketch of Ain't Easy had this choppy, staccato verse music and a driving chorus that suited the feeling of frustration at the time. The seed of the theme of modern, urban life demanding all these things from you was activated by that experience.

I wrote the vocal melody and the lyrics of the first verse really quickly and finished it all off over the following couple of days at Glenn's house. (Where there was some peace!) It was tricky lyrically because structurally it's such a tight bunch of syllables it's almost like Haiku. It was lots of fun though, because there's so much poetic wordplay - assonance, alliteration and internal rhyme - going on. Most of the verse words are imperatives (eg "Stop!" "Go!"), so it seemed right to go for a rhythmic, staccato feel. I was thinking of Diana Ross and Prince - tight and funky. The third verse is a release from all that rigidity, and the vocal becomes more flowing as the lyrics pose an invitation to consider some alternatives to the rat-on-a-wheel life and permit yourself to take back control. The chorus music I thought was just so groovy and full of energy that it swept me away, and I felt it had a real swing to it, so the chorus melody and lyrics just leapt out of that.

I gave the track back to Glenn and he had a bit of a go at developing the music ideas but was so overcome by the quantised, synth nature of the original elements that he couldn't get into it and decided he hated it and shelved it for ages! He had a mental block on where to take it. I kept hassling him because I really liked it. Glenn thought it was all too nice and too slick and needed some harsh ugliness to make it sit and get your attention: To make it less pretty. He really wanted to work the dynamics too. When he finally got into it he started developing it madly and it just got funkier and funkier and funkier and more upbeat, to the point where I was starting to worry that the theme of the lyrics didn't fit anymore and would have to be thrown out.

We weren't even planning to record or release Ain't Easy. We happened to play a few songs we were working on at the time to our recording engineer Dax Liniere, and that was one of them. Dax just loved it from the get-go. He really connected with it and offered to record it for nothing. This was in the midst of recording the other three tracks.

The track was never even played by the band before we recorded it. We did the drum take in one take. John played the song for the first time ever in the recording studio. It was done on very short notice, totally unrehearsed. It was a bit daunting because the writing wasn't by any means finished. The arrangement hadn't been worked out and a few of the lyrics still needed refining. The vocals didn't get any preparation either because they were laid down impromptu at the end of a mixing day for one of the other tracks when we found we had some spare time we could use.

I think the extra funkiness came from everyone just letting loose in that semi-improvised context. John and Glenn are funk players in disguise, and it comes through when they are put on the spot.

I really love the guitar solo and the way that it tries so hard to keep up with the rhythm section, with the drums crashing and pounding away. The guitar starts to slip behind but keeps struggling to get back on top of the beat and comes through in time, with a flourish at the end. It perfectly expresses what the lyric is saying, like a mantra – “We gotta keep up the pace, We gotta keep up the pace, We gotta keep up the pace....”

Loop - *On the local front, what is the Sydney music scene like for a band such as yourselves? In terms of gigging, audiences, your fan base?*

Super Massive - It's been pretty good really, for our current situation - a band that hasn't released a record yet and had no airplay. In terms of gigging it's really competitive out there and you have to get behind your gigs 100% promotion wise, if you're ever going to get rebooked. Our audience response has been very positive, especially at the Hopetoun and Will & Toby gigs we have done in the past. Our fan base has been great and very supportive, particularly on those midweek winter gigs, so if you're reading this article and went to those shows, we absolutely thank you.

Our biggest supporter (I'm not keen on the word 'fan'), Alexi, who has come to all of our gigs is currently on holidays in Italy for a year, we want him returned immediately. We would love to see the Sydney/Australian scene really flourish for all bands by greater support from some of the bigger radio stations & my ultimate dream - get rid of those f#%king poker machines. There I said it.

Loop - *You have a very up to date and healthy looking MySpace. Can you tell me a bit about that. How it has worked for you? Who maintains it? What do you get out of it?*

Super Massive - We maintain the myspace ourselves, and personally write all the correspondence. We like to keep it bright and colourful, with our latest gig photos and update it fairly frequently. We don't have any other website, so it's the hub for all information Super Massive. A lot of people now use myspace as the first place to look up a band. Friends can find us. Bookers and other industry people like to use it too. It's faster than waiting for a demo to come in the mail.

We've followed a policy of not just collecting friends for the sake of it, so we don't go out wildly spamming people. We're trying to keep it a true gauge for ourselves of how we're going as a band. We've noticed that quite a few bands have a hundred thousand fans, but can't scrape together 50 people for a gig. We try to keep it to friends who are actually interested, and that works really well, because we've got a good vibe happening with our friends and a great culture established on the page.

Many times we've contacted people in different states to get advice from them – what's a worthwhile gig, where to go, where not to go – it's been really valuable for that. If we could improve three things about myspace it would be:

- 1.) for American rap / hip hop to stop hitting on us
- 2.) for the Macy's virus to be defeated
- 3.) to be able to organise friends into categories ie where they live, to be able to send targeted event invites etc more easily.

Loop - *Do you travel the country and if so where have you found your strongest audiences?*

Super Massive - We've been up to Byron Bay and had a couple of excellent shows up there. We're going back over summer. We've had a lot of demand through myspace from people in Melbourne and Brisbane wanting us to come play gigs there, so we're working on doing that with this EP. Hopefully, if a song gets to radio it will give us the chance to get out a bit further. We'd love to get over to Europe too one day.

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