BRISTOL'S NEW SCHOOL
YOUNG ECHO | LIVITY SOUND

A User's Guide To
CABARET VOLTAIRE

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Julia Holter on Linda Perhacs | Theo Parrish on Biggie Smalls
Devo de-evolved | Hijokaidan de-filed
Pooling their collective energies into records, radio broadcasts and club nights, Young Echo and Livity Sound are causing the tectonic plates of Bristol's bass culture to shift again. Rory Gibb tracks the new school of musicians, DJs and producers through the city's streets. Photography by Clare Shilland.
St Pauls Carnival, Bristol, July 2013. The early afternoon sun beats down onto the front court of the Malcolm X Centre on Ashley Road, where the Maasai Warrior sound system have set up two towering speaker stacks. They’re silent now, though background noise bleeds from all directions: excitable chatter, sizzling food and the clink of beer bottles blend into the low-end drone of hundreds of speakers set up around St Pauls, the area just north east of the city centre that’s home to much of Bristol’s Afro-Caribbean population. Someone flicks a switch and the Maasai system emits a colossal sub-bass groan, a palate cleanser, instantly obliterating the carnival hubbub and temporarily stunning everyone into stillness. The selector drops track after track, and at the epicentre between stacks the effect is like being electrocified: hair stands on end, stomach and legs turn to jelly, hearing and vision distort. Just around the corner on William Street, the Negus Melody sound system intensifies the volume and sub-weight even further; leaving several hours later, you feel bruised but exhilarated.

Returning towards the city centre you pass along Stokes Croft, a stretch of road dividing St Pauls from the more affluent area of Cotham. In recent years it has undergone regeneration, and is now lined with cafes decorated in earthy greens and creams. One particular venue is conspicuously absent: The Croft, formerly home to Pinch’s Dubloaded night, which for several years formed a social hub for Bristol’s dubstep community. With a full-size system installed for the occasion, once a month the venue’s small, dark backroom would transform into a high-pressure sub-bass resonance chamber. The Croft closed this year and now someone is redecorating the space, its formerly cherry red walls now painted in neutral tones. Bristol has long fostered strong connections between wider UK music trends and the sound system musics still rumbling from St Pauls 15 minutes’ walk away. Dubstep, which peaked midway through the last decade, was the most visible recent point of contact between the two. Since 2010 the scene has scattered as DJs and producers have shifted towards dance music styles, predominately House and Techno. Yet similar impulses run beneath this seemingly more varied surface. Two collectives in particular, Young Echo and Livity Sound, are producing music that sees them heading even further out on their personal voyages and shared trips into the echo chamber. Young Echo are a nine-strong group of Bristol locals in their early to mid-twenties who came of clubbing age during dubstep. Mostly self-taught musicians, their personal projects reflect this early influence, but cut across a number of styles. Seb Gainborough (Vessel) and Sam Kidel (El Kid) collide Techno traits with improvised Noise, while Joseph McGann (Kahn) and Sam Barrett (Neek) favour dubstep, Grime and reggae. Alongside vocalist/MC Alex Rendell, Amos Childs sculpts loopy hiphop miniatures as Jabu; he also produces dubstep as Zhou alongside Cris Edon, who also makes steppe tracks as Ishan Sound. A second MC, Jack Richardson (Manomans), has recently joined, as has composer Paul Zaba.

In late 2010, disillusioned with the Bristol club scene, they established Young Echo as a semi-regular online radio broadcast. The intention was to solidify the kinships they recognised within their work: to create a like-minded community in which to trade ideas, much like the gathering of producers around Dubloaded several years previously. The collective’s activities have since broadened to encompass live performances, studio work and a new album, Nexus; in the process they’ve formulated a distinct group aesthetic – cryptic, contemplative, sub-heavy, anchored in dub but unstruck in genre space. Livity Sound, the trio of Tom Ford (Pevereilist), Joe Covton (Kowton) and Craig Stennett (Asusu), use dub methods to shred the boundaries between Techno, Grime and Jungle. The group was born of similar impulses as Young Echo; Ford was an active participant in the dubstep community, as producer, DJ and Punch Drunk label head, but as it splintered he began feeling musically isolated from the scene he had helped define. Seeking a context for his music, whose disorienting, volatile rhythmic tics were idiosyncratic even among his peers, he connected
with Stennett and Cowton, whose brand of House is a stripped back, punishingly bassy perversion of early dubstep. Unlike Young Echo, however, the trio remain fully locked to the dancefloor. Since 2010
Lively Sound's label, an outlet for the trio's individual and collaborative efforts, has unleashed a series of potent, club-minded white label 12"s, each hand-stamped with an Aztec-style glyph. And in the live setting, with all three members manning hardware, their music tears from speaker stacks upon waves of invigorating, rough "n' tumble low-end, its pulsations shuddering through the body.

Continue along Stokes Croft and onto Jamaica Street, and soon you reach King's Square, a patch of green surrounded by flat-fronted buildings. Tucked on the far side is a small studio complex, whose low, arched ceilings until recently were home to Young Echo Radio. Early broadcasts had found them crammed into members' bedrooms, audibly nervous about speaking into the mic. "Cris had made a patch for Ableton that was just a sinewave, and he had a controller to trigger it with, so it was a poor man's club siren," chuckles Amos Childs. "Pretty raw." They later established a firmer base of operations here on King's Square, at Joseph McGann's studio, but that ramshackle feel hasn't been lost.

If anything, the show's breadth has become more startling as they've eased into radio presentation. They have hosted guests, local DJs, rock and drone groups and kindred spirits from elsewhere (Opal Tapes and Jamal Moss, among others). Shows have lengthened - one last year exceeded seven hours, more club night than radio broadcast - while transitions between styles crash in with jarring instability: US hip hop swelled by electronic noise, roots reggae going head to head with Techno. Recent shows have found the entire crew in fits of giggles on air, and surreal humour and group in-jokes are an endearing flipside to the intensity of their own productions.

In conversation members of Young Echo skirt the same line between irreverence and seriousness. One second they're focused and articulate, the next someone cracks a daft joke and everyone dissolves into laughter. "It's a mirror and a window," reflects Seb Gainsborough on the collective. "You see yourself in other people. You're spending so much time with others, listening to their music and being critical of it." Nexus points to the potential energy stored within Young Echo's group and individual pursuits; there's a sense that they contain a huge vault of fiercely exploratory music yet to be laid to tape. Compiling tracks from group members under a collective banner - individual producers aren't credited - it's an insular listener, shrouded in protective effects and immersive bass. Like their close-knit group dynamic, its hermetic nature hints at their vision for Young Echo. "We find solace in each other's music," says Childs. "It's easier if you've got a group around you, you just go inwards, rather than worrying about pleasing everyone outside."

Nexus reiterates that dub is at the root of Young Echo's group aesthetic. The album sounds bruised: roughly applied effects force sounds out of their allotted spaces, so melodies blush and saturate the mix like blood leaking from broken capillaries. Sub-bass permeates, propelling tracks forward or eroding cavernous spaces. "We're all into raw music," says Kidel. "None of us are into anything too clean or technically driven."

“I like raw music, whether it’s Grime or punk, I just love it when it sounds fucked,” corroborates Joseph McGann. We’re sitting on a bench on Brandon Hill, one of the highest points in Bristol city centre; further south the evening sun stains rows of terraced houses deep orange. “Bearable, but not so clean, and without everything done to perfection, I’m self-taught, and there’s younger guys that know lots more technically than me, but I’ve always tried to come at it from a punky angle. I’m always interested when younger people start producing and don’t know what the fuck they’re doing. There’s an energy to it, because they’re just messing around, seeing what sounds good. That seems really creative to me.”

The breadth of McGann’s output as Kahn is testament to that attitude. While most dubstep has lapsed into predictability, he attacks the style with an almost sensuality - last year’s “Bread” is a calling card, overdriving a gruff Rasta vocal until it ripples with distortion - but he also writes neon-striplit club tracks, Garage and electronic pop. He calls Young Echo a liberating force. “It’s a kind of freedom for us all, [but] especially me, because I consider myself the most commercial one, the most stuck in...” He pauses and checks himself. “Well, not stuck, [just] having more traditional structures and working in a more specific way.”

McGann and regular collaborator Sam Barrett, aka Neek, are the Young Echo members most directly locked into the world of club music. They became friends while DJing at Sureskank Convention, a night Barrett established in 2006 as a means of engaging with the emergent dubstep scene. Taking place at the now-closed Tube near Park Street, Sureskank tended to be raucous, with a younger crowd and liberal helpings of Grime. Resident DJs and producers were the focus. "It was its own little scene," recalls Barrett. "We were making tracks and playing each other’s tunes." Tom Ford’s Punch Drunk soon took notice, releasing 12"s by Sureskank’s Gemmy and Superisk and, in 2010, McGann in his Kahn persona. McGann and Barrett now play a similar role for another generation of Bristol producers. They recently started the vinyl-only Bandulu label for their own Go To Sleep dark old school Grime instrumentals. "We wanted to have our own new Grime tracks to mix with the older Grime we’re playing, stuff that’s fresh but fits in," says Barrett. "Our record collection’s inspired what we make.” Initial Bandulu 12"s dropped with enough force to trigger aftershock activity, and the label’s third release gathers darkened debut tracks from young Bristol Grime producers, which sound leagues from the colourful reboot of the genre currently experiencing elsewhere.

These Bristolian tectonic shifts are the latest expressions of a tendency underlying more than 30 years of the city’s music. In the 1980s, emergent punk and hiphop scenes connected with the St Pauls dub and reggae community, giving rise to sound system-rooted collectives such as The Wild Bunch (later Massive Attack) and Smith & Mighty. In the 90s the much discussed Bristol sound and names like Tricky and Portishead exploited the same crossover point, sinking hiphop and soul into paranoid low end. On the
dancefloor, Smith & Mighty’s proto-Junglistic hiphop/soul/reggae fusions proved immeasurably influential upon subsequent generations: the rolling drum ’n’ bass of Full Cycle, Krust and Die owed much to them, and Rob Smith later became an active participant in the dubstep community as RSD.

Dubstep catalysed another potent meeting of UK dance and sound system culture, and from 2005–09 the music emerging from Bristol was extraordinarily vibrant. Compared with Garage or Jungle, dubstep’s sparseness rhythms left space for producers to bring wider interests into play, creating a fertile but unstable state of equilibrium: ideas from dub reggae, Techno, Jungle, Grime, Noise and video game soundtracks, all in thrilling alignment at 140 bpm. The results were beautifully experimental, but rooted in the twin foundations of dancefloor motion and beatplate impact — high points included the snake-coiled coils of Peverelist’s “Roll Thru The Punches” and “Infinity Is Now”, Pinch’s rootsy Underwater Dancehall album, Headhunter’s Technofoxial Nomad and Appleblim’s Skull Disco tracks. The city’s relatively small size was an intensifying factor, with producers living close enough together to encourage collaboration and swift transmission of new ideas.

Rooted Records, situated near the railway arches at the base of Gloucester Road, epitomised that community feel. On almost every visit you would bump into various luminaries browsing for new DJ material or chatting with manager Tom Ford. Wall-mounted racks at the back boasted new 12”s by the very same people lottering beside you, many bearing the distinctive spiralling logo of Punch Drukk, the label Ford established as an outlet for exclusively Bristol based music — often by young producers he had met over Rooted’s counter.

But dubstep was pulling in too many directions, and its presence waned between 2009 and 2011. Rooted closed in 2010, though former staff member Chris Farrell subsequently established the Idle Hands shop on Stokes Croft, now a similar hub. Several key clubs have also closed, leaving fewer spaces as focal points, and sporadic nights have largely replaced regular events. So at dancefloor level, Bristol in 2013 isn’t openly crackling with the same energy as before. Far from killing off musical activity, however, this lack of a unifying style has driven it further towards communities. An entire community of artists sonically united by dubstep are now traveling along idiosyncratic personal trajectories, unhindered by restrictions of tempo, structure or even club functionary. Multiverse — established in 2004 by Pinch and Exotheory’s Willian Grench — still runs several labels, including dubstep institution Tectonic and Subtext, home to Epsipt and Rolly Porter’s Techno/Ambient demolitions. Punch Drukk’s operations have slowed slightly, in response to a surge in DIY label activity creating new channels for Bristol music: Idle Hands release 12”s, Kahn and Neek run Bandulu, and another small crew self-distribute Peng! Sound, Hotline and cassette label No Corner. Outside Young Echo and Livity Sound, several solo producers are making intriguing moves: Hodge’s subby House rollers and the deliciously weird dancehall/drum ’n’ bass fusions of Lukra stalk the dancefloor, while Ekopiez praxes decaying, reductionist electronic experiments.

Peng! Sound, a night founded in 2009 by Dan Davies, aka Osia, opened a new conduit between club and sound system communities, hosting reggae veterans like Dubkasm alongside Peverelist and Young Echo crew members. With many DJs/ producers raised on UK dance having encountered sound system music via dubstep-era nights such as Dubkasm and Pinch’s Subloaded/Teachings In Dub, there’s now palpable excitement around dub and reggae, and several people mention young friends who are building their own sound systems. Kahn and Neek founded Gorgon Sound several years ago, the name a nod to Horsepower Productions’ seminal proto-dubstep shuffleur, to explore their love of steppers reggae. Gorgon’s new EP on Peng! Sound’s label is a manifesto: four infectious, patiently unfurling dancefloor tracks whose blast-furnace bass hints towards Grime. As Ishan Sound, Young Echo’s Chris Ebodn treads similar territory; his debut 12” “Clash Of The Titans” is gorgeous, ghostly reggae, one of Bristol’s most striking recent records.

“I saw how much of a foundation Dubkasm put together over 20 years of knowing each other, and seeing them with such perseverance and longevity following a certain direction [was inspiring],” Ebodn enthuses. “It’s midnight and we’re slumped on a sofa in Dan Davies and Sam Barrett’s shared house, shortly before Ebodn and Amos Childs are due to DJ as Zhou on the other side of town. “We can talk about 2005 to 2008 [dubstep] in Bristol, but to see that there’s still a steppers scene that’s been going 30 years, and there’s still selectors playing the same cuts after such a period of time — it’s incredible to feel you can build something up like that. And seeing a selector play dubplate-only for three hours, and knowing that they might not have produced every one, but that every single one is still an exclusive cut,” he marvels.

“That’s my aim — more dubplates!”

An hour later the dubplates are out in full force in Exchange, a new venue on Old Market established by the Croft’s former owners. Ebodn is bathed in green light, dancing emphatically and placing 10” dubs onto the decks, while Childs coaxes bleep-bloop salvos from a dub siren. Attendance is sparse, though Osia and Sam Kidel bound energetically along nearby. The set consists mainly of Ishan dubs, each a variation on a core theme, with Casio dancehall beats, reedy panpipe motifs and vocal chants recurring and remoulding across an hour’s set.

Only one track from Zhou is aired: the muffled raindrop patter of “I Remain”. Zhou’s Punch Drukk 12”s contain some of the most radical Young Echo music yet: dubstep reduced to shifting atmospheric density and silvery melodies. Discussing Zhou, Ebodn and Childs affectionately mock one another, but the latter becomes serious when describing their shared ethos. “Cris and I have come to the same conclusions in a different way. Dance music at the moment seems to be a lot of flash in the pan things; springing up very quickly and being very exciting for a very short period of time. Cris has been drawn into steppers and reggae sound system stuff, which I’m also interested in, and I’ve been drawn towards the hip hop side of it, which is also an artform that’s been going for a really long time. It’s the same thing [Young Echo] are all into: slow growth and long lifespan, rather than trying to keep up with trends.”

“Go for the absolute bare bones. Anything else is cluttering your frequencies.”

Joe Coates
The beats Childs produces for Jabu, his collaborative project with vocalist/MC Alex Rendell, reflect that clarity of vision: exquisite, loop-based miniatures, built of material sampled from old records and cassettes ("anything I can find, basically"). "I wanted to bring a traditional hip-hop approach to something more abstract and personal," states Childs, citing RZA and J Dilla as inspirations. "I want it to be as authentic as possible – trying to pin down individual moments when I wrote them and what I was thinking about. I want it to be a sort of healing music for people to listen to, and keep it openended, let people apply what they want to it."

Rendell is soft-spoken and quietly funny; he and Childs bonded at school over a shared love of hip-hop, and have written music together since. "It was our own private ritual," he laughs. "We'd meet up, smoke hash, drink brandy and make music." Jabu's very intimate tracks feel like eavesdropping on private conversations. Childs's cloudy beats cocoon Rendell's lyrics, which construct cryptic narratives using potent visual imagery. "It's a lot of fun to rap over that stuff," says Rendell. "When Amos introduced me to these loops he'd constructed, there was so much space there. At one point he said, 'You need to be the drums, you're the rhythm – find the way it sticks for you and go there'."

Young Echo have just recruited a second MC: London based Jack Richardson, aka Manonmars, who attended school with Childs. He has yet to appear on studio material, but has appeared on Young Echo Radio – throughout radio recordings are minute-long passages of Richardson's alert, loping flow, with lyrics portraying more of an exaggerated character than Rendell's personal musings. Regular radio guest Paul Zaba has also recently joined. A classically trained musician and composer, he has played music with Kidel and Gainsborough for several years, and their collaborative work draws together contemporary classical composition and experimental electronics. With Richardson, Barrett and Zaba all recent recruits, Childs stresses that Young Echo's membership is fluid. "I like the idea of having more lyricists to balance out the group dynamic. Also, the idea of being able to make a hype, posse track, but then there'll be another thing from Sam Kidel that's 11 minutes of toneless noise. We want to be beguiling. It's nice to be a bit of a marketing nightmare."

Given Bristol's strong musical history, it could be tempting to overemphasize the city's influence upon Young Echo, and certainly they tear away from Bristol stereotypes in as many ways as they adhere to them. Yet there's still something manifestly Bristolian there: the radio show's roughshod collisions of sound system music, club tracks and hip-hop recalling tales of The Wild Bunch at the Dug Out club; the wobbling bass of Nexus; their shared love for dub processes. Young Echo's members offer mixed opinions about their engagement with that history. Kahn and Neek, who're most directly involved with the dance scene, are perhaps unsurprisingly the most positive. Gainsborough is more equivocal. "You can't help but be influenced by your environment. A while ago I would vehemently deny that I was influenced by Bristol, but I must be. It's not just because I'm working here; I'm now part of a collective that's historically relevant to Bristol's music scene, because it's got a history of disparate movements and collectives coming together and making changes."

Of all the Young Echo members, though, it's Gainsborough and Kidel whose solo studio ventures veer furthest from atmospheres and structures laid down by previous Bristol artists. Both started out broadly making dancefloor tracks, but have gradually moved away from computer software, using acoustic instrumentation, hardware and improvisation to crack open club music structures. More than half of Gainsborough's bedroom is occupied by his spacecraft cockpit of a studio: flatscreen computer monitors, keyboards, innumerable synthesizers, effects units and a Doepfer modular synth system. These machines are central to his composition and live performance. Gainsborough, aka Vessel, is the only Young Echo member trained in electronic music production. "He's like a mad scientist," laughs McGann. "I don't understand anything he's doing.
most of the time." Since university Gainsborough has shifted from "very consciously computer music" towards analogue sound sources and self-programmed Max/MSP patches. "Growing up as part of one of the first generations to have easy access to free music technology, you learn to make music just making computers. So, to flip that on its head – turn the computer off, just use your hands and your intuition, and record live with no overdubs – is so liberating. And they’re all idiosyncratic, they all have their own breaking points and distinct characteristics when you start fucking with them. That’s the point at which they become more liberating than digital tools."

Gainsborough sees Vessel as "body music – physical music to be played loud on sound systems but isn’t necessarily beholden to dance music production or structures or DJ use." Last year’s Order Of Noise album was Techno liquefied – treacle-thick bass and saturated melody barely clinging to the beat grid. It’s a striking listen, but he is already critical of it, admitting he feels strange listening back now. "I didn’t have any notion of craft or how I wanted it to sound, what I wanted it to say."

So he plays me some new music: recorded on the fly, its harsh rhythms sound hewn from hardwood and iron ore, but feel precarious, always on the verge of being demolished in a salvo of effects. You imagine him hunched over a mesh of cables and hardware, punching buttons, dripping with sweat. He later sends me tracks from other aliases: blown-out hiphop-leaning beats as REI ("straightforward rage music") and piledriving Techno as APE, inspired by "experiences of free parties in Bristol". It’s unrelentingly gritty, even as he calls it "a homage to silliness in electronic music". The way Gainsborough is starting to fold Techno in upon itself is reminiscent in process, if not form, to fellow Bristolians Emptyset, hinting at further structural distortions to come.

While Gainsborough’s Techno mutations retain links to the dancefloor, Sam Kidel – known thus far for his House tracks as El Kid, all Alka-Seltzer effervescent melodies, tape crackle and limber rhythms – is largely departing that realm. "I’ve decided what sort of listener experience I want to create, and it’s not something that can be achieved in a club," he reveals. "I'm much more interested in deep listening and states of immersion, which club music rarely provides. It’s nice to go back to square one and think: what is it I want to contribute, how do I want to make people feel?"

Kidel’s approach to music making seems more analytic and less overtly cathartic than Gainsborough’s. He’s as enthusiastic about the ideas underpinning his work as the finished music itself – when I ask how his current recordings sound, he opts to "describe how I imagine them visually". "I've got a sketchbook and I’m thinking through what I’m making sonically using sketches," he elaborates. "I’m building a sense of how sound and visuals are interrelated, and what exactly interests me about that relationship." Alongside Gainsborough, Zaba and artist/vocalist Lily Fannon, he has recently worked with art collective Arcanum on audio-visual installations, and has scored documentaries by his father, film maker Mark Kidel.

Kidel’s composition process is hands-on, melding recorded and synthetic sound sources: modular synth, prepared guitar and battered old effects pedals, reel-to-reel tape recorder and home-built instruments (the previous day, Gainsborough had described Kidel’s home-built splank as an "amazing spring reverb on a stick"). He describes a particular recent obsession: "I’m fucking in love with the sound of toy harmonicas at the moment." His current recording projects explore these fixations. The first is a brutally compelling half hour based around prepared guitar, where a continual high-pitched whine feels like jacking your nervous system into an overhead power cable and guitars clatter and scrape like trains on tracks; in places it’s reminiscent of the percussive thrum of Eli Keszler’s music for Pan, or some of the output of Keszler’s label Rel – Kidel cites Geoff Mullen’s Accidental Guitars as a key influence. The second piece is quieter: near imperceptible synth and toy harmonica drones, shriuded in urban environmental sound.

Young Echo’s members push these noisy tendencies further under the alias Killing Sound, an improvised hardware and instrument based project that began as the duo of Gainsborough and Childs. "I go round to Seb’s house, and we have some sort of complicated, weird meal," grins Childs, "and then we get sad together and write a nine minute Ambient tune."
Kidel has since been involved in studio sessions, with music recorded in real time and run through a live effects chain, while Rendell provided vocals for the trio during an improvised electronics set at the Croft last year, alongside electronic pioneer Mark Fell. Despite little pre-planning, “what’s emerged is something quite recognisable as a Killing Sound aesthetic,” notes Kidel.

Although there’s no tension within Young Echo socially – they’re close enough friends that they practically finish one another’s sentences, and Nexus presents an equally harmonious front – in Killing Sound you can hear them, in Gainsborough’s words, “grinding against each other.”

“Killing Sound is part of becoming firmer friends, and knowing how one another makes music,” he clarifies. “We can sit down together and have a relatively good idea of who’s going to do what. Developing those relationships is really fulfilling. And if it’s shit you can tell each other it’s shit.”

“Can we just mute everything?,” Kidel quips. “Can we mute you? It’s a classic funk solo!”

Their recorded material to date bristles with restrained aggression. Abrasive and freeform, it distils Nexus down to elemental gestures. Hacked guitars, sampled gunshots and sirens ring out in an echoing void, while Child’s haunting hip hop loops are bent by leering distortion and distant explosions over a gut wrenching sub-bass. The group plan to establish a sub-label to release material from Killing Sound’s sizeable archive, claiming their next album will be much more a collective affair.

In a city whose public transport links err on the patchy side, the train running from Severn Beach to Temple Meads station is a pleasurable exception. The front cover image for Appleblim’s Dubstep Allstars mix was taken on a bridge over this line. Released in 2008, it was crucial in introducing the wider world to the rolling, Technoïd Bristol dubstep sound, featuring early material from Pinch, Peverelist, Komanuzmak and Gatekeeper. Having jumped onto the clattering carriage at Montpelier station, gazing south as the train rumbles towards Stapleton Road you’re gifted with a view over St Paul’s, the afternoon sun glancing off terraced rooftops. Walking through Easton towards Tom Ford’s house, I pass a man in a T-shirt printed with a huge orange bass clef design.

“Jungle was my generation’s sound system music,” declares Ford. “We’re sitting in his front room/studio; one wall is lined with records, and elsewhere sit a large PC monitor and scantings of hardware. Kahn and Neek’s was Grime, which is why they sound so influenced by that. That’s always going to stick.

And Jungle’s still the most futuristic, exciting, psychedelic music; those records made in 94 are still untouchable.” Ford’s work as Peverelist elicits similar future-shocked sensations. Evolving Jungle’s heightened sensory states, it appears to operate on the body at molecular level; double-helix kick/snare strands snake around one another in intricate ballet; dazzling melodic flourishes shatter the moment you examine them too closely; sub-bass explodes abruptly, whipping the ground from beneath your feet.

“I got into music by accident,” admits Ford. “I made a tune, put a record out; then suddenly you’re thinking about another one. It just tumbled forward from there.” It’s surprising from someone whose music is so defiantly unique, and who has been active in Bristol’s dance community for the last decade (more than one of Young Echo’s members calls him, only half-jokingly, “Daktu Pev”). Having fallen for Jungle as a teenager, Ford moved to Bristol to study at the university in 1997. He managed Rooted for a decade until its closure, established Punk Drunk in 2005, and released his own debut 12” a year later.

In interview, Ford is thoughtful and slightly elusive. He’s cautious not to place his music, instead articulating the Peverelist sound as the point where his own musical loves converge: Jungle and the rolling drum ’n’ bass of Bristol’s Krust and Die, dub, reggae, Techno. 2009’s Jervis Mindshare album telegraphed the strange members of eerie, hallucinatory lucidity, but his music tights with studied care around obvious genre signifiers. Its overall feel is one of a music existing on some parallel timeline, converging briefly with other styles before detaching again. His recent music has slowed in tempo to align with Techno, but has retained its compulsive nature and Junglist humility. “I maintain I’ve been doing the same thing the whole time,” he notes. “It’s just the context around it that changes.”

Livy Sound came about when Ford began collaborating with the studio with Joe Cowton in openeden sessions that birthed the first Livy 12”.

“The whole thing almost happened by itself,” muses Cowton. Originally from the Lake District, Cowton moved to Bristol in 2009. He swiftly connected with Idle Hands, who released Cowton’s early 12” – skeletal House whose bass oozed suggested Kassim Mosse’s fluid hardware jams dropped into the chasms void of DMZ’s Loefah. “With Loefah was what was so striking was not only the dread, but how everything cut through,” enthuses Cowton. “Everything’s upfront, there’s nothing hidden, there’s no running surprises or anything like that. It’s minimalism, but it’s so fucking maximal.”

His hardware based Techno for Livy uses a handful of materials to channel early Grime with shattering intensity: razor handclaps and slashing strings, all peaking violently in the red. “If you play it in a club, does it need any more than this? And if not, delete it, there’s no point in having it there,” he emphasises.

“A friend told me his graphics tutor taught him that the more you put on the page, the more chance you’ve got of alienating it; therefore go for the absolute bare bones. It gives it a certain clarity, doesn’t it? Especially with the sound system element – if you want it to cut through, anything else is cluttering your frequencies.”

Stennett, the mastermind of the trio, uses intricate manipulation and careful arrangement of sampled material in the studio, and couldn’t be more different to Cowton’s spontaneous approach. It was born of his teenage experiments making hiphop and a love of “fucking up sound using processing”. Originally from Cheltenham, Stennett took the same sonic arts course in Bath as Seg Gainsborough – often referred to as ‘the dubstep course’, due to the number of West Country producers who studied there – before moving to Bristol and connecting with Livy. His work is dramatically varied: phoshorescent melodies over four-to-the-floor, Skull Disco-esque percussive flurries and frosty broken Techno. It’s united by close attention to textural detail; despite appearing loopy on the surface, no two moments sound quite the same.

Striped of the studio’s possibilities for painstaking sound manipulation, Stennett’s role in Livy Sound live is vastly different. Ford and Cowton take command of drum machine and samples respectively, while Stennett plays live engineer, daubing effects to reshape the music in the moment: dissolving everything into vapour or twisting a recognisable motif into something entirely stranger.

“I love that it’s a real dub process, he’s feeding everything back into everything. It is chaotic, every now and then you get a shriek or a massive pop from the mixer,” says Cowton. “I think if there’s a common thread [through Livy], it’s this idea that music should be something you listen to and you feel enlivened by, you hear it and you’re like, yes, that’s amazing. Indeed, there’s something new in its realistish about experiencing Livy Sound live; the way its intricate rhythmic interplay organically dissolves and rearranges itself is mesmeric. Their recent collaborative work is similarly charged: Pev & Cowton’s upcoming “Endpoint” simmers with energy, colliding the latter’s brusque drum machine crunch into Pev’s iridescent synth drones.

Live, Livy Sound’s hardwired improvisational approach blurs the trio’s individual music. Crumbled away through processing, track divides become irrelevant and are subsumed to the whole, in much the same way that Young Echo mask individual input beneath collaboration and the group cover of Nexus. Ford identifies the similarity between the two collectives as “forming a hub and using that to push on each other to do things”, highlighting how intra-group feedback loops of friendship and advice home individual projects. Indeed, a bond of mutual respect exists between both groups; each recognises aspects of itself in the other. If there’s a deep connection between the two, it’s inextricably linked to their experiences in Bristol in the last few years, and it’s characterised by a desire to escape unpredictable external factors and create a persistent context for their work. All appear tired by the cycles of rapid turnover and obsolescence that define much UK dance music – Young Echo perhaps precociously so, given their relative youth – and so are telling wary of defining what they do.

“I don’t overthink it. It comes naturally. As soon as you start to think what you’re doing, you’re getting yourself rules you’ve got to conform to. Other people can decide what it is – we’re just doing it,” emphasises Ford. It’s night and we’re sitting in a pub garden five minutes up the hill from Stokes Croft. The Livy trio have spent most of the day at Optimum Mastering, finalising the masters for the “Endpoint” 12”. “The lack of manifesto is actually quite exciting,” agrees Cowton. “It’s like, OK, what’s next? We’re defining it from the inside out. The music we’re making fits into our agenda because it is our agenda. That’s similar.

Leaving the pub shortly afterwards, the panoramic view from the hillside again draws the gaze downward to St Paul’s. Everything’s calm now, though just a few days earlier you’d still have felt the sound system tremors from all the way up here. Young Echo’s Nexus is out now on Ramp; the Livy Sound compilation is released this month. Thanks to Chris Farrell, John Stevens and Alex Digard