



Anyone who caught Stewart Walker's most recent appearance on [Boiler Room TV](#) couldn't have failed to have been impressed by his virtuosity on the decks. The US born dj/producer has been living and working in Berlin for some time now and has a long legacy of electronic music behind him. He has a new album coming out ["Ivory Tower Broadcast"](#) so we checked in with him ahead of that. Here's the words!

CGNY: Hi Stewart, thank you for taking the time to chat with us. For the Clubbersguidenewyork readers who may or may not know the ins and outs of Stewart Walker, would you mind giving them a short introduction?

SW: My pleasure. I'm Stewart Walker. I started producing electronic music way back in 1993 in Athens, GA. Athens was no place to be a music producer although the pawn shops were off the hook! Analog synths and drum machines were all over the place. At that time I got most of my inspiration knowledge from email lists like Analog Heaven and IDM and ordered all my music from short two-sentence descriptions. In a way it was awesome because I had no notion of what techno was and accidentally ended up with some classic records from UR, Ken Ishii, and Tetsu Inoue. On the production front, I was completely naive and basically would press record and just jam with arpeggiators synced to my 909 and 606.

Later, I got a much better education while living in Wisconsin thanks to the plethora of local parties and the relative closeness of Minneapolis, Chicago, and Milwaukee where I began to meet other producers. My career didn't really start happening until I moved to DC and then Boston as I was mailing out cassette tapes like a madman and traveling in the summers to the UK, Belgium, and Germany to check out what the euro scene was like.

After hooking up with Force Inc. and Mille Plateaux, I left the States in 2003 at a time that I honestly thought the American electronic music era was over. The enforcement of the cabaret laws and the Anti-Rave act pissed me off so much, and I was lucky to have a German friend in Boston who encouraged me to just do it. So I've been in Berlin now for a little over 10 years.

CGNY: Ivory Tower Broadcast is the title of your upcoming album, which will be your first release in 6 years. Can you fill us in on what you've been up to during this time?

SW: A couple of stories here: Most pertinent was that at the time 6 years ago I'd been running Persona Records for about seven years and I witnessed the change from running a profitable label which could support my life to a hellish money pit. When the distributor went bankrupt and I lost my life's savings, I didn't have the mojo to dust myself off and jump back into it. It's obvious to me now, but I learned the hard way that running a record label has very little to do with being a musician. So I'd get into these unwinnable situations when I couldn't relax in the studio because I thought I should be in the label office, and when I was in the label office, I was working to promote other artist's work because I wasn't in the studio.

Ivory Tower Broadcast is actually the third album I've finished during this span of time. I also recorded an amazing album with my old Persona friend Touane under the name Golden Parachutes, which was picked up by one label and then delayed for a year before the label owner decided to leave the business. Then I found a new label to sign it which got as far as pressing vinyl of the project, but then never found distribution. I feel ashamed to discuss it, but releasing an album is really difficult at the moment. On top of the manufacturing costs, labels have to invest in advertisements and publicity campaigns just to get the record heard, and then there's really no guarantee that the record will find good distribution, or shelf space in a record shop. If releasing an album is a Sisyphean task then so be it, but everybody involved from the artist to the fans needs an insane amount of patience.

CGNY: You used a lot of different (and unusual) instruments in the making of this electronic album such as a Japanese koto (taishogoto), Fender Jazz bass, Gibson Les Paul. Can you tell

us how you fell upon these instruments and sounds, and when you decided to incorporate them into your productions?

SW: I played guitar for a long time before I ever produced any music so the Les Paul is easy to explain. I've had it since I was 16 and so I've played Stairway to Heaven on it more than once. Once I got to Berlin though, I added a Roland Guitar->MIDI pickup to it because I'm terrible at playing piano. So composing from guitar comes a lot more naturally. Bass is also easy to explain: Live bass sounds great on pretty much any kind of music, and depending on how you play and eq it, you can reference entire eras of music history from dub to new wave. I returned to playing live instruments because it's faster for me to just press record to a click track and start playing. I get distracted pretty easily with synthesizer plug-ins if I'm just flipping through presets. And if you want a synthesizer to have funky dynamics it takes a lot of programming. Live recordings are looser in terms of timing and volume fluctuation which can be a pain until you really learn how to apply compression and eq.

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About the more exotic instruments I used like the Japanese Koto or the German zither, they stem purely from my weird little fascination about open string instruments and how universal they are in every culture whether it's an Appalachian Dulcimer, a Hungarian Cembalom or Chinese Guzheng. Because there is no damping of the strings they tend to ring out sympathetic resonances and create natural chorusing. The sound is just beautiful to me and suits my compositional tendency towards melancholia. The fact that they have never been used in pop or electronic production just makes them more exciting because they're untainted by historical tropes. Guitar, by contrast, has been used in recorded music for 70 years so it's difficult to not sound bluesy, or acoustic-earnest, or wokka-wokka Nile Rodgers, etc. When I add these other instruments to my music, I don't need to disguise the sound because of some other recording which also used it.

CGNY: There is a big difference between this album to the stuff you used to put out on [Tresor Records](#)

do you think that this is this a natural progression in your sound or did you intentionally try to make a more ambient/experimental album?

SW: After producing for so long, I can sometimes feel myself pull back from certain creative

choices because considered wrong for techno. The easiest example of this is turning the tempo knob. If I set the tempo to 119, I get anxious because it's under the traditional magic House BPM of 120. But there are hundreds of examples like that. Kicks go on 1, 5, 9, and 13, claps go on 5 and 13, and if you deviate from that, then you're basically making experimental music. Put only one clap on the 13 and you've created an entirely new genre called Dubstep. So now that I know the rules so well, part of my job as an experienced producer is to break away. This album began as an excuse to isolate my production anxieties and unwritten rules and tease them. But I wouldn't classify the album as ambient or experimental, or my most hated "chill out" designation. Instead, it's probably an homage to all the sounds I've loved from other artists outside techno from DJ Screw to Robin Guthrie, or John Carpenter to Jon Hassell, all combined with my own aesthetic. To me it's still a techno album because I'm working under the assumption that techno "is music you haven't heard before."

CGNY: You're from the states but you've lived in Berlin for a number of years now. We're all aware of the musical progression within Berlin but do you believe the city has helped to sculpt you as an artist?

SW: Absolutely. It's shaped me not only musically but professionally as well. It's a unique feeling to meet somebody when they're unknown and then a year later they've become an international superstar. Living in Berlin means that you hear techno all the time, so you can't help but become an aficionado. I never found this immersive creative scene that I was expecting where everybody is talking about production techniques and creative impetus. Instead, people mostly just talk about the usual life stuff like new restaurants and bars or their frustrations with the government bureaucracy. I guess the positive benefit of this is that these friends of mine are legitimized as musicians with mundane concerns outside of the glamour of weekend touring. Introducing myself as a musician in the States felt more suspicious, with this subtext of the knowing nod and the expectation that you were unemployed and living off your parents. So, I'd say the way Berlin has sculpted me as an artist is by allowing me the legitimacy of being able to function economically as an artist and afford an apartment and a separate studio, eat well, drink well, etc.

CGNY: I once saw an interesting promo video you made for [Native Instruments](#), did they invite you to star in the video?

SW: They did! The Remix Sets they were introducing at the time were a really exciting solution for me because as much as I loved Ableton, I missed the DJ's ability to transition between any two tracks. Ableton lends itself towards a more linear top-down flow. When they asked me to perform in the video, I was stoked because I'd never done any kind of controllerist routine.

Stewart Walker

Written by CGNY

Wednesday, 24 September 2014 14:29 - Last Updated Wednesday, 24 September 2014 15:11

When playing live, I was still performing long smooth mixes. So, it was fun to practice that little 90 second routine, then bring it back to the Traktor marketing manager. He'd say "too boring!" so it was definitely a challenge to present my sound with a captivating performance.

CGNY: And finally, we all saw your impressive live show on Boiler Room! Will you be touring? Hopefully you'll have a date in New York.

SW: I have a bunch of upcoming European gigs planned but nothing is planned yet for the US. I'm working with listed bookings and I'm sure a tour will be possible in 2015.

CGNY: We hope so Stewart! Thanks for your time!

For more on Stewart visit www.stewartwalker.com

www.soundcloud.com/stewartwalker