

OFF THE FLOOR

Books, art, movies, etc...

Words: KIRSTY ALLISON



HARDCORE WILL NEVER DIE

Renowned journo Matthew Collin is back with a new book exploring the global force that is electronic music...

MATTHEW Collin became the intellect on ecstasy culture after publishing the *Altered State* book in 1997. Using literary journalism picked up in his 'style magazine' period, writing for *The Face* and *i-D* — before moving into hardcore BBC Foreign Correspondent-level current affairs work — his interweaving of big hit interviews with reliable, unbiased, agreed narrative perspective defines him as the don of documenting the audacity of youth rebellion against Babylon, with acid house as the strand in the uprisings he's drawn to. In books such as *Guerrilla Radio*, *This Is Serbia Calling*, *The Time Of The Rebels* and *Pop Grenade*, he repeatedly balances investigative journalism with brilliant writing in the exploration of, what don't appear to be, cultural anomalies. He offers hearty reassurance of conspiracy-vibe themes getting recognised, evil overlords getting busted, and general street party solutions to wider suppression. *DJ Mag* spoke to him down the line from his Balkan home in Belgrade about *RAVE ON*, his new tome published by *Serpent's Tail*, which magnificently explores the global power of tribal white electronic noise three decades on from acid house...

You open the global dispersion of dance music with chapters on the classic capitals: Detroit, Berlin, Ibiza...

"I said to friends, I can't do this [book project] — I almost turned it down, because it's so big, widespread and complex, and so much history, you're looking at tackling the history of the world over the past 30 years."

So how did you do it?

"I started off thematically — in the end it became

logical to do it geographically. You cannot avoid doing a book like this without Ibiza, and these days, Las Vegas — like it or not. The thematic idea of rave culture as an outlaw political movement, a turbo capitalist shiny EDM thing, and people want it to take over the world, as a global phenomenon of techno capitalism. I also wanted to look at spirituality, and the spiritual vision rave offers. Some of those places identify themselves, others were more logistically appropriate to time and budget. In the introduction I say there's no way of documenting it definitively in one book."

Dave Haslam would agree...

"The way current affairs experience (covering state of emergencies, riots) has informed this [is with reverence and credence to] eye-witness reportage. I wanted to get over how it looks and how it feels from being there — and how being into that thing at the moment feels."

You do it gloriously. Smashing Israel and India together, and the European chapter with the whole Spiral Tribe vibe... I love when you say, "They even rebranded raves as 'festivals' in a bid to obscure the role played by one of the scene's most powerful motivational forces: drugs..." while the interlude in the middle on Kazantip is awesome too...

"I was writing about rave culture as a temporary autonomous zone, this kind of lawless state that exists just for one night, outside the boundaries of normal experience, legality and consciousness. Kazantip is such a bizarre place with its own president, constitution; an extreme manifestation of becoming its own republic with ministers. It also demonstrates the weaknesses of the concept,

and real world problems: the Russian annexation of Crimea, or the campaigning morality of the conservative priests of the orthodox church. The whole thing fell apart, the fantasy couldn't hold against the reality, but it went out with an incredible story."

So is rave just a weekend culture - or can it be a tool for revolution?

"It's subjective — there was no manifesto written, so it gets interpreted in different ways: rites of passage, weekend lunacy, but lifetime careers, DJs in their late 50s still performing every weekend. In France, the French techno activists, they see it as revolution. In Israel there's the spiritual, psychedelic experience. Others, it's against suppression, and others just want to get wasted and listen to good tunes — and there's nothing wrong with that."

"In South Africa proper deep house, in the old school sense, is mass market music and on [mainstream] radio — tens of thousands of people go raving to that. Then they have their own specific indigenous gqom music, which came out of Durban, the third city, made on cracked software on cheap home computers, and it's like grime — people doing it for themselves without reverence. It's very punk."

"Without the massive geo-political event of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Berlin wouldn't exist as a creative techno capital of Europe. Dubai could be called one of the harshest terrains for culture, but there are people growing flowers in the desert... Ibiza and the ongoing debate of 'Has Ibiza lost it: Is it a massive money-making machine with a smiley face...?'"

A great theme in this global anthology is the resonance of one's environment and the art created there. You've got a quote from Derrick May, from 1988: "I just react to my environment... The people, the intensity, the paranoia, all the things that make Detroit what it is..."

"Many of the interviews were gathered from 30 years of reporting on dance music, but I did over 200 more... There's a globalised template, the DJ playing similar clubs in similar cities around the world, so it becomes a standardised point where, if you stayed in one city for long enough, you would probably hear all the top DJs of the moment passing through at one point over a period of a few months."

DJ Mag just showcased Raving Iran at the Doc N Roll Film Festival in London — and it was too politically sensitive to film the Q+A. It's incredible that the white noise of repetitive beats doesn't disappear...

"All music has become more electronic over the past 30 years — developments of artificial instruments from the '80s studios is what everyone does. Dancing and celebrating and reaching a higher state of consciousness goes to a deeper human need, outside all the genres of dance music."

• Rave On is out 11th January on Serpent's Tail. There's a launch party for the book at Rough Trade East in London on 16th January.