

MUSIC

April 7, 2009

Music Is a Weapon

Filastine's Nomadic Sonic Rebellion

by [DAVE SEGAL](#)

Orianomada

In "Marxa," a track off Filastine's potent, diverse new album, *Dirty Bomb*, there's a sample of Afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti saying, "Music is the weapon of the future." It forces one to ponder if some sonic properties can be inherently threatening to the status quo. German producer Alec Empire used to say, "Riot sounds produce riots"; it's possible that this was not merely a catchy slogan to sell records.

Filastine, Orkestar Zirkonium, the Mole, Naha

Sat April 11 at 9 pm.

Price: \$8/\$10 ([buy tickets](#))

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"Like all sound bites, [Fela's statement is] an elegant falsehood," Filastine observes via e-mail from the wilds of New Mexico as he preps for a North American tour. "Music has been, is, and will be a

weapon. There is nothing so futuristic about it. It could be one of the principal weapons of the future, as other forms of resistance are made impossible or recuperated into advertising campaigns. Music doesn't need lyrics to be subversive; it can tell stories with frequencies."

In which case, Filastine is a raconteur of rebellion. His musical activities have consistently involved unconventional methods of operation. As a percussionist for guerrilla performance-art outfits like iTchkung! and Infernal Noise Brigade throughout the '90s and early '00s, Filastine beat the drum for leftist political causes, raising consciousness and heart rates. These groups often literally took their music to the city streets, striving to win hearts and minds proactively and viscerally, and satisfying Filastine's desire for politically engaged art and kinetic, inspirational sound. Infernal Noise Brigade participated in the 1999 WTO-meeting protest in Seattle and agitated at several other such confabs wherever the world's most powerful leaders gathered to make oppressive, unjust policies. If INB's efforts didn't exactly make earth a utopia, their motives and persistence were admirable.

But eventually, Filastine felt stymied in Seattle and realized he'd taken his artistic ambitions as far as he could here.

"I felt like Sisyphus, and Seattle was my rock," he says. "I put heaps of energy into making Seattle livable, or at least exciting—the INB, iTchkung!, speakeasy casinos in warehouses, New Year's Eve parades, street takeovers, film screenings, sound interventions. My collaborators were too few and the number of developers, disinterested hipsters, and cops too many. Better to spend my efforts on a project that can be deployed globally rather than fight, and continuously lose, a local battle.

"Of course, the same social pressures exist in Barcelona [where Filastine currently dwells]; in the last few years we've seen aggressive squat evictions and a clampdown on all types of street culture. But here at least I don't feel so lonely in acts of resistance. And as the economy slides and real estate plummets, I think it's possible that we can begin to retake physical space."

One wonders how Filastine—a nice, charismatic dude—developed into the globally nomadic activist with a sampler, drum machine, and cowbell. Was it a reaction to the dominant musical paradigm happening in Seattle in the '90s? Liberal parents? A William S. Burroughs phase in his teens? Immersion in the Crass Records catalog?

"All of the above, minus the liberal parents," Filastine replies. "I didn't have a political epiphany by discovering some particular injustice or seeing some influential documentary; I just had a gut feeling that I was born into a fucked-up world. Later I did a process of verification, or fact-checking, of what was already instinctual. So, using your examples of Burroughs and Crass, they simply articulated feelings that I hadn't had words for before."

Even before INB dissolved in 2006, Filastine had embarked on a fruitful solo sojourn that led to him crossing paths with Jace Clayton (aka DJ /rupture), who shared Filastine's ravenous appetite

for inflammatory, bass-heavy dance music from the first and third worlds. Clayton's Soot Records has issued *Dirty Bomb* and its 2006 predecessor *Burn It*.

"Jace put out a DJ mix called *Gold Teeth Thief*; I'm a thief with gold teeth, so I felt like the mix was talking to me," Filastine quips. "I sent Jace some tracks in the mail, and we got in touch. Later I was passing through Barcelona, his home back then, and we took the opportunity to master and cut the 7-inch vinyl that was my first release as Filastine [2004's 'Judas Goat']."

Dirty Bomb reflects Filastine's spongelike capacity to assimilate the sounds he hears during his extensive travels. Using a United Nations assembly of vocalists (including local thunder-lunged toaster DJ Collage on "No Lock No Key") will help him gain listeners who require lyrics, but, as he's noted, frequencies can articulate messages just as well.

Filastine believes his wanderlust has benefited his music. While Pitchfork's review of *Dirty Bomb* wrist-slapped him for going through genres as if ticking off names on a checklist, Filastine has earned his rampant eclecticism and deserves credit for putting a vital signature on styles rarely heard by Westerners.

"Any artist is a product of their experiences: 'You are what you eat' is as true for sensory input as it is for food," he asserts. "I feel comfortable deploying Moroccan melodies, Brazilian swing, or Limey dubstep wobble because I've spent enough time in Marrakech, Rio, or London that none of it sounds exotic to me. Combining these elements is exactly how music *should* sound, according to me."

The album's disorienting travelogue through carioca, dub, dubstep, dancehall, reggaeton, rap, rai, and other genres can be both thrilling and exhausting. Listeners may wonder who the *real* Filastine is. Can a musician become so sonically eclectic that he loses his identity? (Of course, this question presumes that having an identity, and hence being easily marketable, is a good thing.)

"It's definitely possible that a musician can go off the deep end with dilettantism, sonic schizophrenia," Filastine admits. "But it's more likely that a musician might make music that is homeless, lacking an established target audience. I know from my own tiring experience that inventing a genre from scratch is not fun."

While he's realistic enough to understand that left-leaning, global mashup music won't topple governments, Filastine notes: "Sound is a shortcut to trigger emotional states... a great tool for manipulation. It might seem kind of odd, but I think every flaccid pop song is a tool of direct manipulation and just as political as my music. When art is hegemonic, its discourse is invisible."

With his own info-rich website and a respected label releasing his music, Filastine is well-situated to advance his agenda in our brave new century. Eschewing cult-of-personality aggrandizing, he strives to use his position for altruistic purposes, even as he uses MBA jargon.

"Filastine is like any brand: As it successfully continues, it also builds power. I just want to leverage this power into creating alternate paths of distribution and performance.

"One example is a recent tour I did in Indonesia. A stopover on the way to an Australian tour made possible a series of free gigs across Java and Borneo. It was an experience so unmediated it felt hyperreal, for myself and [for] the small audiences. The problem is that I'm starting to burn out from touring—not the actual playing, which is a pleasure, but the booking and travel-agency duties that suck my time. I've got to flow like water, not get drowned in it. So now is the moment to find allies in the Anglo-American music industry who aren't assholes." ★

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Comments (14)

Nice. Rupture has skills, style, and good taste in music. 1

That Pitchfork review was random – it didnt even make sense.

Posted by g on April 8, 2009 at 12:42 PM | Report

duh I meant filistine. can be said about both anyways. 2

Posted by g on April 8, 2009 at 12:43 PM | Report

I've had a crush on this guy since forever. Thanks for checking in on him for us. 3

Posted by a_seattle_girl on April 8, 2009 at 7:06 PM | Report

BTW, both "Music is the weapon of the future." and "Riot sounds produce riots" are ideas that should rightly be attributed to Burroughs as he articulated them before either Fela or Alec Empire... I'm just sayin'. 4

Posted by mikez93 on April 8, 2009 at 9:14 PM | Report

Biggup Filastine! Tha "thunder-lunged" mic chatter will see ya Saturday! 5

Posted by Don Dadda on April 9, 2009 at 1:27 AM | Report

mikez93: You're right. I read about those concepts in the early '80s when I was in a Burroughs phase, but then forgot about them. Thank you.

6

Posted by [segal](#) on April 9, 2009 at 1:34 AM | Report

"My collaborators were too few and the number of developers, disinterested hipsters..."

7

So true...then again, Fil was kind of a victim of wrong timing/wrong electronic genre. He definitely could have found some love in the early millenium Seattle DnB scene that I miss so much.

Posted by nic on April 9, 2009 at 10:23 AM | Report

Yay let's idolize a womanizing African asshole who killed hundreds of women with his irresponsible AIDS fucking!

8

Posted by let me feela your cunti on April 9, 2009 at 11:25 AM | Report

why do retards like this who hate the military so much almost always dress in military clothes?

9

Posted by fuck communism! on April 9, 2009 at 3:13 PM | Report

Please never use this reticulated, prolapsed rectum's face again as an icon that pops up every time I click on The Stranger's home page. Seriously, I lose my lunch like Mike.

10

Posted by esp. not via a fisheye lens on April 9, 2009 at 4:15 PM | Report

Maga Bo is also from Seattle.

11

Filistine's IDM style beats show his drumming skills – something else that sets him apart from other globalista electronic producers (like Diplo).

I think Ghislain Poirier also adds live drum skills to his global influenced beats. He brings in another dude.

Posted by q on April 10, 2009 at 10:40 AM | Report

septum nose rings make anyone look like a total douche

12

Posted by you look like snot is dripping out of your nose on April 11, 2009 at 8:11 AM | Report

You gotta give respect for Filastine. He's an old friend with boundless energy and determination. He's a smart cat who seriously has his shit together and he's earned every bit of success that he now enjoys. He made Seattle a better place during his long tenure there, and now he's taken it to the rest of the world...

13

Posted by [tharp42](#) on April 12, 2009 at 9:14 PM | Report

fuck communism, feela your cunti, you look like snot.... is this one guy with turrets syndrome? or one 13 yr old boy with time on his hands?
this is a great article btw

14

Posted by props on April 19, 2009 at 11:29 PM | Report

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