

Tom Findlay is best known as being one of the two stars of Groove Armada. But we'll touch on them more later because this is **a biography** about Tom.

Born in the last third of the 20th Century, Tom discovered at a very young age that his life would be defined by the obscure funk and soul 45" discs that he'd play non-stop. Throughout his youth, his music tastes evolved to embrace everything from punk, jazz, disco, Black Sabbath, electro before eventually, overwhelmingly, he discovered house music. Spending daylight hours kicking footballs, at night he'd set about learning keyboards and guitars in his bedroom. By the age of 16 he was DJing at parties. You could say he had no choice: music chose Tom.

Born in Cambridge – the town that also gave dance music DJ Harvey, The Idjut Boys, secretsundaze and Tim 'Love' Lee of the Tummy Touch label – Tom was a familiar face in the free-rave scene. In 1991, he signed up to Manchester University. Upon realising that he was spending more time in the Hacienda nightclub than at his lectures, he and a few likeminded friends (now better know as Grand Central and Simian Mobile Disco) launched what would become hugely successful international music careers, by beginning their own weekly club night. At a course placement at an Afro-American college in America, Tom embarked on a lifelong love affair with the sound of black America, a groove that would form the foundation of all of his later productions.

Tom's studies then moved him to New York City's West Village where for six months he worked 'as a lackie' at Empire Productions. Working for Guru (Gangstarr), Jeru the Damaja and the Brand New Heavies he'd be in charge of wooing the Naomis and Kates off the catwalk and into the glitzy celeb-bashes that the company was promoting.

Returning to London, a spell in PR was short lived. Luckily Tom's friendship with Yorkshire's 6-feet-and-rising Andy Cato wasn't. The two met through Cato's girlfriend and not that long after they'd started discussing music, they were promoting their first London club night together. Called 'Captain Sensual At The Helm of Groove Armada' it took place at the Gardening Club 2, Covent Garden, getting off to a shaky start. They'd booked the house DJ Dave Seaman for the first night, almost going bankrupt over his DJ fee, amazed to read the next day's Euro '96 football tabloid headline referring to his goal-keeper namesake: 'Seaman sinks Armada'.

Undeterred and, indeed, spurred, Tom and Andy pooled all their exuberant enthusiasm and experience together, eventually tapping into huge vaults of previously undiscovered talent. Groove Armada was born. Their first production, a 700 limited edition 7" '*At The River*' (*'if you're fond of sand dunes and salty air'*) surpassed everyone's expectations in the world of dance and media. From such instantaneous success it felt like a short hop and dancefloor skip to worldwide fame, to becoming one of the best known and most loved dance acts. Uniquely, Groove Armada have always managed to straddle the worlds of upbeat dance music and mellow chill-out tunes. The former filled stadiums with crowds bouncing along to the big band sound while their downtempo work made it on to the thousands of chill-out compilations that saturated the 1990s – and can still be heard advertising Marks and Spencer's food on British TV today.

Groove Armada continue to be a global force in dance music having incorporated everything from folk to psychedelic soul to country-rock into their bassy house style. Their parkland affairs, Lovebox, (Clapham Common 2003/04, Victoria Park 2005-07)

have proved that Londoners don't need to get on a motorway to get their festival fix. By continually showcasing great UK and international acts they lure 35,000-strong crowds. The 2007 line up included come back gigs from Sly and the Family Stone, The B-52's and a riotous performance from Blondie among much other talent. Lovebox Weekender 2008 will see The Flaming Lips perform alongside many other huge acts.

Tom never rests on his laurels. He's continuing his mission to light up the world with sonic delights. The latest strings to his bow include co-producing Feast, a glamorous, gastronomic boutique club where quality DJs mixed up the tunes, world-class chefs mixed the ingredients while the champagne corks kept popping. In 2005, he made a seminal move into the world of digital music by launching www.tunetribe.com. A unique download site it offers hot-from-the-sound-desk MP3s of live sets from festivals and champions up-and-coming artists. Tom says, 'I see it as a credible antidote to i-tunes and Napster with an aim to keep the soul of the high street record store alive online.'

The latest project he thrust onto the market in 2006 was under his new recording moniker '*Sugardaddy*'. With bass-heavy beats the LP is addictive home listening, featuring collaborations with the singing sensation David Jordan, the writer Tim Hutton and Plantlife's lead singer Jack Splash. Tom describes it as having a contemporary feel mixed with a 'black' '80s edge. 'It's the boogie electro side of the '80s. Black but rootsy, with lots of old drum machines' he says. In other words, it focuses on a mixture of street soul and urban disco while at the same time sounding thoroughly modern.

Enthused about life Tom believes that dance music is in an interesting place. 'It's an exciting time to be DJing. I've been enjoying mixing uptempo sets with house, disco, electro German stuff and electro, inspired by people like DJ Erol Alkan and Franz Ferdinand and by living in London itself.' Home is in Stoke Newington, which he shares with his wife Jess, fashion editor at The Guardian newspaper. He's still kicking those footballs around, but these days you'll see his young son and daughter watching him from the sidelines.