

## JAMES LAVELLE BIOGRAPHY

Described once as the Hunter S. Thompson of DJs, James Lavelle's career has spanned the last 18 years, and at 32 he remains as individual a figure in contemporary music as he was as a teenager, when he first gate-crashed his way in with the genre-shattering MoWax records. Back then he was obsessed with early street culture, DJing with Gilles Peterson at That's How It Is (the legendary club which lasted over 10 years), working with the visionary designer Nigo on Bathing Ape, and launching a label in MoWax. Now he divides time between his internationally-renowned DJ career, his UNKLE act with singer/producer Richard File, and a brand new independent set-up: Surrender-All, which combines music, fashion and art.

The DJing takes him to clubs like Womb in Tokyo and Fabric in London (which he was resident for 5 years) and he has been involved in working with designer Antonio Berardi. UNKLE are readying their third album after the international success of 'Psyence Fiction' and its follow-up, 'Never Never Land'. And Surrender is a new creative centre that connects everything Lavelle is interested in – a record label, a studio, a clothing line– to one, independently-run axis. "There's a whole new set-up. Trying to keep everything as simple as possible," says Lavelle bursting as ever with ideas.

As a young teenager growing up in Oxford, James became obsessed with early Hip Hop DJs such as Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa, giving him his first sense of identity. After seeing the earliest, and now famous, British Hip Hop documentary "Bombing", which focused on the legendary sound system The Wild Bunch, James soon decided that DJing was going to be his thing. Contrary to the mis-quote "I wanted to be a DJ because I couldn't breakdance", the true reason James chose this path was through ultimately trying to find an identity in the oppressive, non-encouraging music culture of eighties England, which he found through DJing and the whole package of Hip Hop (breakdancing, art and image).

At the age of 14, James ended up with a work experience job at the then-legendary Bluebird Records, where he proceeded to meet DJs such as Tim Westwood, Pete Tong, Paul Oakenfold, Gilles Peterson and Tim Simenon (Bomb The Bass). This would become his early musical upbringing; discovering early house music, the golden-era of Hip Hop and the whole sample culture that went along with this. Two years later, and having left school, James moved onto Honest Jons Records where he started to write record reviews for the Jazz magazine Straight No Chaser and culture magazine i-D. From this spawned MoWax; a label launched on a loan of £1,000 and which became legendary in the 1990s.

MoWax was fresh, frenetic and freewheeling. It didn't care about genres and consequently ignored them. And its innovative combination of music and culture spawned artists such as DJ Shadow, LA Funk Mob, DJ Krush, Carl Craig and Unkle. Equally, the label was involved in the young and upcoming eclectic and electronically influenced music scene which bred producers and artists such as Tim Goldsworthy (who developed into DFA), Trevor Jackson (who became Output Records), Futura 2000 and 3D (from Massive Attack), and was precursor to such records now as the ever-popular punk scene (Bloc Party et al) and sampled-based Hip Hop scene (Gnarls Barkley etc).

At it's height of madness – a time when with more than just music, it was ultimately the lunatics running the asylum – as a label MoWax worked with a cross-section of people from video directors like Jonathan Glazer, to fashion designers such as Alexander McQueen and Hussein Chalayan, and photographers the likes of Richard Avedon, David Bailey and Warren du Preez. Also working with Bathing Ape in Japan, producing books for Futura 2000 and Dysfunctional (the renowned skate history book), and putting on exhibitions throughout the World. It was a time which could never be repeated and where anything seemed possible.

Lavelle hung out with fellow-travellers all over the world: Nigo and MoWax signings Major Force in Tokyo, Massive Attack in the UK, and the Beastie Boys in New York to name a few. He also hooked up with pretty much every artist of any merit from the 1990s; from Radiohead, Oasis and the Verve to Beastie Boys and Carl Craig. He worked on Japanese clothing line Bathing Ape and produced MoWax toys for the now-leader in the new skool toy revolution Medicom. MoWax also spawned a global culture where the records, packaging, music and image became a whole; ultimately influenced by bands like Massive Attack, and George Lucas and the whole Star Wars influence of control in which every element was culturally brought together. More than just a label, MoWax was a lifestyle. And Lavelle lived it. And let's not forget that James helped to set-up clubs such as Blue Note, Fabric, Bar Rumba and The Scala (and was the first to ever do nights there), as well as The Gardening Club and Fridge (the latter being a place where at the age of 16, James became the youngest DJ to have a residency in London).

LAVELLE'S act UNKLE began as a loose MoWax 'supergroup', originally started by James, Tim Goldsworthy (DFA Records) and Kudo (Major Force fame). Having released a number of singles, Tim moved to New York and Kudo to Japan after which James proceeded to record artist and friend DJ Shadow, of which his 1998 album 'Pseynce Fiction' recruited guests like Thom Yorke, Mike D, Badly Drawn Boy and Richard Ashcroft to an album of beat-heavy experimental beauty.

Trimmed down to a duo of Lavelle and singer/producer Richard File, UNKLE collaborated with director Jonathan Glazer on the soundtrack to his stylish gangster movie *Sexy Beast*. In 2002 they released 'Never, Never Land', an album which brought an electronic dimension to the sound. Ian Brown sang 'Reign'. 'In A State', with remixes from DJ legend Sasha. There were contributions from Jarvis Cocker, Queens Of The Stone Age frontman Josh Homme, and Massive Attack's 3D.

The album track 'An Eye For An Eye' began as the soundtrack to a short film, created by Lavelle and Massive Attack's 3D and animated by long-time collaborators Shynola. The cartoon was premiered on the UK's Channel 4, who also profiled Lavelle as part of its 4DJ series. In 2004 Lavelle and File toured through the album with a soundtrack-style show combining DJing and visuals.

UNKLE are now readying their third album. Recorded in the Californian desert with Queens of the Stone Age producer Chris Goss, it features Ian Astbury and Josh Homme. "If the first record is UNKLE does hip hop, and the second record is UNKLE does electronic," says Lavelle, "then this record is UNKLE does rock."

UNDERNEATH Surrender's buzzing West London offices is the new Surrender Sound studio. In the last ten months alone, UNKLE and collaborators Pablo Clements of the Psychonauts and James's brother Aidan have remixed the likes of Layo & Bushwacka, Massive Attack, Black Mountain and Autolux.

Upstairs is Surrender, James' next clothing label. The clothes sell in shops like London's Hideout, San Francisco's Huf and Singapore's Surrender shop (which also houses a gallery).

Years after MoWax, James finally has a new place to call home. "It's a place for my creative freedom and a place to work in a more organic way. If MoWax was boys with toys," he smiles, "Surrender is about surrendering yourself to life."