



**PARIS'S  
ED  
BANGER  
RECORDS  
BURNS  
THE  
CLUB  
AND  
EVERY-  
THING  
INSIDE**

**DIRTY  
DISCO**



**T**he entrance to Paris Paris is a small rotunda where an oversized pink Mickey Mouse statue stands sporting an oversized pink hard-on. From here, a staircase descends into a small, smoky basement not much bigger than a high school chemistry lab. Decorating one wall are the words *Le Monde Est A Toi*, with each letter in a different glowing font—Tony Montana's motto rendered as a neon kidnapper note.

I'd been in France's capital for two days and people kept telling me about this spot. Teki from TTC promised that it is "the only place left in Paris where fucked up things still happen."

Manning the turntables this Thursday night is Marco Dos Santos, who is also Paris Paris's artistic director. His selection is all skittering, computer processed beats until he mixes in "Ice Ice Baby," a move that's basically the equivalent of telling a fart joke to a room of *Harvard Lampoon*-trained comedy writers. But there's not even a dancefloor here, just aisles where some stand

and bop vertically once all the reserved seating nooks have been claimed. And really, when it comes down to it, no one is here to dance. They are here to look at each other.

But if I'm going to be really real with you, I should say that I probably couldn't have gotten past the ropes of Paris Paris if I wasn't with the crew of Ed Banger Records, a small French dance music label that specializes in hectic, filth-bathed electro and whose members get the automatic wave in at the door.

The Ed Banger office in Montmartre stands on the border between the world of *Amelie* and Paris's crack problem. The generic white blinds obscuring its large windows and glass door give the impression of an abandoned storefront, and if you don't know what to look for (or where you are going) you're likely to keep passing it, even if you have the address. Inside the front room of this modest space is the desk and domain of Pedro Winter, Ed Banger's founder and owner. Hanging on



Previous page: Justice's Xavier de Rosnay at Pulp. Top: Pedro Winter at Paris Paris. Bottom: French electro all stars Kavinsky, Sebastian and Justice's Gaspard Augé. Opposite page: The DJ's eye view at Pulp.

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the wall behind him are vintage Vision, Powell and Santa Cruz fat decks, while collectible Futura figures stand on top of the record storage unit that spans one side of the room. LL Cool J's *Radio* and Malcolm McLaren's *Duck Rock* are among the smattering of sleeves that have been pulled out for display. Downstairs with the promo boxes is the small studio where Winter creates electronic music under the name Busy P.

Winter is toweringly tall and his preference for Zoo York and Bathing Ape hoodies adds an impression of bulk to his lanky frame. He has a welcoming charm and is known to stay on the sidewalk until all of his people are inside the club. Born in Paris, Winter was 17 when he first started listening to dance music. It was 1992, during the genre's second wave in France, and Winter would spend weekends getting lost at thousand person raves on the city's outskirts. Two years later he discovered Parisian clubs like Rex and Les Folies Pigalle that featured the warmer, more soulful sounds of house. He began promoting parties and befriended the duo Daft Punk after seeing them play at the Ministry Of Sound in London. When they had no robot suits and only two indie singles to their credit, they asked him to be their manager. He was 20 years old at the time, and over a decade later he still has the job.

Winter went on to develop the management company Headbangers Entertainment and established himself as a respected DJ in his own right. Three years ago he started Ed Banger with the goal of being the label to put out the first release of what he thought were France's best new groups. The initial offering came in 2003 with an instrumental hip-hop single from former TTC producer Mr Flash.

Winter witnessed the golden era of electronica when Daft Punk 12-inches could sell 25 thousand copies, but he knows that feats like that are no longer possible—there are enough out of business record stores and defunct dance labels in Paris to prove it. “We know that to sell records you have to make big house, boom-boom music, but this is not the way we want to go,” says Winter. “When I’m putting out a record I have to sell three thousand to get my money back, which unfortunately is not possible with instrumental hip-hop.”

But Winter persevered—admittedly with more resources and connections



than most start-up labels have—putting out the records he wanted to. “I have no boundaries and no special goals,” he says. “I want to release smart music and class music and music I’m not ashamed of and music that makes people jump around in clubs.”

The second release on Ed Banger, an assault on Simian's “Never Be Alone” by the duo Justice, is still its most successful. Even though Ed Banger put out the remix three years ago, it still has a strong club following and was recently licensed under the name “We Are Your Friends” by EMI in the UK. Justice, made up of Gaspard Augé and Xavier de Rosnay, are the first global ambassadors of Ed Banger, and the “Never Be Alone” remix has come to typify the label's sound: cluttered yet catchy, raw and relentless, it maintains a promise of transcendence under the layers of electro menace. Justice have since completed remixes for acts ranging from Death From Above 1979 to Franz Ferdinand to Britney Spears, and their EP of original material, *Waters Of Nazareth*, will be released in the US on Vice Records. As they complete their debut album, Justice claim that what they are now working on sounds very different from what they are known for. “We did four or five songs with a heavy, distorted sound and now we can’t listen to that anymore,” says de Rosnay. “Everything we did for the album is really light and definitely music for girls and music for driving cars.”

Though some find the songs of Justice—as well as those of labelmates Sebastian, Krazy Baldhead, Vicarious Bliss and Busy P—abrasive, Winter believes that the music of recent years has prepped the public's sonic palette for what Ed Banger does. “[French dance music] used to be 4/4 beats—really easy and really cheesy with funky bass. Now you have to have a special ear to understand all the breaks of tempo. The last ten years helped, with Aphex Twin for example,” he says. “Now it is less restricted, without structure. In the '90s we were looking for the perfect sound, ten years later we are looking for the dirtiest sounds.”

After the rise of the disco house scene a decade ago, France has experienced a void in creative dance music, so it follows that the resources would be replenished by a new generation. “Daft Punk was like the rock kids discovering electronic music. Now in 2006, it's more like the kids of electronic music,” says Winter. “The guys who were born in the '80s, they grew up

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with Daft Punk. Their pop music was hip-hop, was Jay-Z, was the Neptunes.” Ed Banger artist DJ Mehdi—a former member of hip-hop group Ideal J and a producer of noted French rappers like Booba and MC Solaar—says that he and Winter have been exploring this cross section for almost a decade. “We were the first people in Paris to make that connection between dance music and hip-hop, and it goes way back to ’97,” he recalls. “We were quite alone.”

In a more explicit extension of this trans-genre breeding, Ed Banger may have found pop promise in their latest signee, 18-year-old cutesy rapper Uffie. Raised in Miami (with a brief stint in Hong Kong) as Anna Catherine Hartley, she was 15 when she came to visit her father in Paris and decided to stay. Eventually she began dating DJ and musician Feadz, who shared her love of crunk and other regional mutations of southern hip-hop. Earlier this year they recorded “Pop The Glock”—a lyrical riff on Audio Two’s “Top Billin” done in a fake English accent—and posted

it on her MySpace page, where it quickly became a download sensation. Uffie has since released her Mr Oizo-produced anthem “Ready To Uff,” cultivating a sound of Euro bubblegum booty bass that is heavy on tough talk but light on actual threat. Predictably, suitors from Steve Aoki to Pharrell Williams have expressed interest.

Though she was already friendly with Winter when she joined the label, Uffie admits she’s surprised how quickly the Ed Banger family accepted her. “First I felt kind of weird, because I was like, I just made a stupid track, I don’t know if I belong in the artist community,” she says. “But everyone is really encouraging.” As a sign of just how fresh from the oven her career is, when Uffie learned the day before her gig at the Elysée Montmartre that she was scheduled for 35 minutes instead of her usual 20, there was a brief crisis where she and Feadz considered recording three new songs that night, just so they’d have enough material to play. Following Winter’s advice, they stuck with their usual

**Top:** Teki from TTC  
(center) at Paris Paris.  
**Bottom:** Girls girls at  
Paris Paris. **Opposite**  
page: Uffie on Pulp’s  
dancelfloor.



## ED BANGER

set and Uffie came to the stage in high-tops and a black baby doll dress with gray spandex underneath. Though she couldn't quite pull off the sass that a transcript of her banter would suggest, when she asked the crowd if they were "ready to fuck," she got all the screams you'd expect.

Ed Banger is now entering a period of transition. Over the past three years they've established a name for themselves through 12-inches and streaming audio, and this August brings the release of their first full-length, DJ Mehdi's breakdance-inspired *Lucky Boy*. It will soon be followed by albums from Mr Flash and Justice. But over the past year this buildup has coincided with the formation of a larger community with other independent Parisian record labels. Like-minded operations include Institutbes, which is run by French goof troop rappers TTC, and the diverse Disque Primeur. Though everyone already knew each other socially, it wasn't until recently that they started to work together. "Paris is too small for us to ignore each other," says TTC's Teki. This coalition-building inspired the French magazine *Clark* to photograph 26 of the



Uffie onstage at Elysée Montmartre.

key players (and a toddler) on a basketball court for a group cover with a banner below that read, "La Révolution Française." As TTC's Tacteel says, "We are patient, we are greedy, we are not nostalgic and we are on a mission."

While time creeps towards 2:30 on this Friday night, from behind the turntables Justice's Xavier de Rosnay plays a set of throbbing electro that is periodically haunted by the ghosts of disco's past. Behind him Gaspard Augé watches with calm amusement as the crowd at Pulp continues to freak the fuck out. Pulp used to be a lesbian joint with a strict "no dudes" policy. Then Wednesday nights became mixed, then Thursdays too. Tonight it's stuffed with gays and straights, women and men and in-betweens. The club itself is a fire marshal's nightmare—packed so tight that elbows and shoulders are necessary to get from here to there. The ceiling is so low in places that the condensed sweat is touchable.

It's impossible to get wasted in here—the young butch bartenders are so overworked that it takes forever to get a cold one. The only option is to push against the bodies towards the narrow hall alongside the DJ booth and take a swig or three of warm rum straight from the bottle. Next to this small booze cache are the hacked up remains of a chocolate birthday cake for Winter who turned 31 today... or yesterday at this point. The Ed Bangers and their extended friends network are set up in the corner, getting blurry and pulling each other into the mess. Once Uffie shows up after her gig at the Elysée Montmartre, she appears behind the decks to perform "Ready To Uff" through a megaphone. Then she lights a cigarette and has another glass of champagne.

Sometime after four in the morning, de Rosnay throws on Feadz's "B!%\*\$ Run That," follows it up with DJ Funk's ghettohouse remix of Justice's own "Let There Be Light," then takes it to Prodigy's "Smack My Bitch Up." When the song transitions from its psychedelic, undulating bridge back into frantic satanic beast music, it's a moment so pulverizingly epic that I could forget my connotations of the electronic music scene with bad skin, big pants and third-tier American cities. It may not make me start talking nonsense about God being a DJ or miracles on the dancefloor, but it does help restore my faith. **F**

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