

The attraction of Magnetic Man

As electronic music's first 'supergroup', Magnetic Man made waves by bringing dubstep to the masses. Founding member and musical pioneer **Artwork** caught up with *Rob Garratt* to explain why the genre has proved so popular



You were never meant to know who Magnetic Man are. Formed in 2007 as an anonymous collective, bringing together three key talents of south London's emerging dubstep scene, early gigs were played – spookily – behind screens. The plan was to stay faceless – or so band members Benga, Skream and Artwork claim today. Instead they were thrust overground, signing to Columbia in 2010 and releasing an eponymous UK top five album, featuring guests including Katy B and Ms Dynamite, which put dubstep on mainstream European radio. A sell-out UK tour in winter 2010 solidified their position as the poster boys for the genre; festival dates with an ear-splitting Dhs4.5 million sound system and epilepsy-inducing light rig followed.

When we caught up with Artwork he was mid-way through a US arena tour playing to 20,000 fans every night, but the 37-year-old says he's looking forward to dialling it down for a solo DJ set, under the MM name, at the Chill Out Festival's official Trilogy after-party on Friday April 20.

How are the US audiences reacting to dubstep?

It's gone crazy out here; they've been waiting for something new and now

it's really taken off. It's taken decades. If you think about it, hip hop was the dominant music for three generations. They've been desperate for something new for some time.

Why has the music exploded globally so quickly?

It was the internet that did it – everyone just got used to it. Drum'n'bass would be big in one city then move on to another, and another country a year after. With this music and the internet, for the first time it could go round the world all the time.

'Dubstep got to the people a lot quicker this time, so it's not so watered down'

Hasn't something been lost in the transition to the mainstream?

You get that with every single art form. There will always be a watering down of music to sell it to more people, and that does go on. At the same time you still get the most amazing new music coming up. [Dubstep] got to the people a lot quicker this time, so it's not so watered down.

What will you be playing in Dubai? I don't know – we'll see what happens on the night. [Laughs] I don't ever

water anything down. I know the guy putting the party on and he told me it's a cool club, there's a whole load of music people there, play whatever you like. I still play from CDs. I want to try to move on and upgrade to memory sticks.

You were seen as the leader of Magnetic Man in the early days.

I don't think I was the leader. It was just that I had the studio and the record shop (Croydon's Big Apple Records, where dubstep's first main musicians met) and they were doing

it on their own, making tunes on Playstations. I had a £40,000 [Dhs200,000] studio and they were bringing in these tunes. I'd be going, 'How did they make that?'

We know Croydon: having visited a few years ago, there's no scene there now at all.

There never was. You speak to people in America and they say they wanted to go to Croydon to see the birth of dubstep – but there's nothing there. There are dubstep tourists!

But there was never any clubs, just the record shop. Don't go to Croydon – that's my advice.

They should put a plaque up where Big Apple was.

Yeah, they should.

What do you think of being called 'a supergroup'?

I never liked it, but there are worse things to be called.

Do you ever get recognised on the street?

No way, not even at the gigs. Ollie [Skream] and Benga get grabbed the minute they get off stage, but I can wander off and have a drink at the bar and no one notices. I've just got one of those faces.

How was playing at Creamfields in Abu Dhabi last year?

It was good – there was some kind of weird thing with tickets so it wasn't the busiest one. It was really good.

But you've not been to Dubai?

I've wanted to come to Dubai for a long time, it's one I've always had on my wish list. From what I've seen, it just looks... I'm expecting to be blown away. Everyone says it's fantastic.

If you had to guess, how many Magnetic Man albums do you think they'll be?

God knows. Ten? So who else is playing this festival we're at?

The Kooks and De La Soul – and Tony Allen.

Tony Allen? That's rough. I'll see you at the front.

See you there.

Artwork plays Trilogy, Souk Madinat Jumeirah on Friday April 20. Dhs150, or free to Chill Out Festival ticket holders. www.timeouttickets.com

► **NEXT WEEK:** DJ Adam J discusses his new single: the first major music track about Dubai