

# LOCAL NOISE

## **Pasobionic**

29/4/05, The Hopetoun, Surry Hills.  
Pasobionic, Tony Mitchell, Nick Keys.

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### **Summary:**

“I’m just too shy, I like hiding away in the background and trying to keep the attention away from myself. So I don’t dress up, and just keep my head down.”

Local Noise spoke to Pasobionic at the Sydney launch of his solo album *Empty Beats For Lonely Rappers* at the Hopetoun in Surry Hills. In a relatively short interview, the softly-spoken producer talked to us about the origins of the name Pasobionic from his graffiti tag Paso, and getting into hip-hop via graffiti in primary school in the 80s. He also mentioned the marked separation in his life between hip-hop and Islam. He spoke about the diverse sampling practices of *Curse ov Dialect*, the intricacies of sampling in general and the differences of producing with TZU and Curse. Other points touched upon included his CD duplication business, working with Elefant Traks and instrumental and live hip-hop in Australia.

### **About:**

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Local Noise is an ARC-funded research project from the University of Technology, Sydney. Its focus is on Australian hip-hop, and the localisation of hip-hop in different cultural, societal and educational contexts.

**P:** Pasobionic

**TM:** Tony Mitchell

**NK:** Nick Keys

*[Recording starts in with a conversation about Curse's tour in the US.]*

**P:** ... It was like, we played 16 gigs in 18 days, it was a big manic road trip.

**TM:** And was that set up by Mush?

**P:** Yeah, set up by Mush.

**TM:** And when you played in the States, who were you touring with?

**P:** There were three other acts; they were all on the Mush label, so it was kind of like a Mush tour.

**TM:** And who were the others?

**P:** There was one guy called Listener, and there was a guy called Radioinactive, and Andre Afram Asmar. And Circus (Shapeshifters).

**TM:** Did you go to the Bay area?

**P:** Yep, we played in San Fran.

**TM:** 'Cause there seems to be an incredibly thriving hip-hop scene around there?

**P:** Yeah, yeah definitely. So much good stuff coming out of there.

**TM:** Where does the name Pasobionic come from?

**P:** It's actually my tag, Paso was my tag. I kind of got into the whole thing through graffiti, so, there is no deep meaning to it, I just liked the flow of the letters and it just kind of stuck.

**TM:** And when did you first start to get into graffiti?

**P:** In primary school, around grade five or six. A kid in the school had [the two books] *Spray Can Art* and *Subway Art*. And we used to sit there in lunchtime and copy out all the pieces, and it all started then. Around the same time there was a lot of hip-hop gigs played on the radio, early Run DMC, first Beastie Boys album, LL Cool J, stuff like that.

**TM:** Right, and this was in the early 80s?

**P:** That's right, yeah.

**TM:** And what's your ethnic background?

**P:** My parents are from Pakistan.

**TM:** Are you a Muslim?

**P:** Yes.

**TM:** Sorry to be interrogative...

**P:** That's all right.

**TM:** Are you influenced by any of the Muslim MCs in US hip-hop?

- P:** Not really, no. It's weird; they are kind of two really separate parts of my life. I haven't really figured out a way to reconcile them.
- TM:** The thing that I have always been amazed and intrigued about with Curse is how incredibly kind of multicultural they are, and how all the members of Curse seem to explore their ethnic backgrounds, particularly Borce [Vulk Makedonski]. And it really is multicultural hip-hop, not only in the MCing, but especially in the samples, and you must be heavily involved with finding the samples.
- P:** Yeah, it's weird with Curse. The other guys tend to bring more to the table in terms of production, and I just kind of put it all together. Most of the samples I find I source off old second-hand records, and I find a bit of old ethnic stuff, but I leave that mainly up to them.
- TM:** Because they seem to be hunting for really obscure ethnic stuff.
- P:** Yeah, that's right, that are really deep into it.
- NK:** I remember reading an interview with Raceless who was saying they went hunting out in the suburbs, at the folk markets in the suburbs, looking for Macedonian folk music and stuff.
- P:** Yeah, they do that all the time, totally.
- TM:** But I know that on your album [Pasobionic's solo album, *Empty Beats for Lonely Rappers*] you were talking about a sample you used on the last track which you got from a friend whose grandfather died. Can you say a bit more about that, what was the actual sample and where did it come from?
- P:** It was from this French classical record, Saint-Preux, from the 70s. And it was kind of this weird mix of classical orchestra type music with rock beats underneath it, mixed really low, but yeah, it just had an amazing singer over the top.
- TM:** Right, 'cause there is also a really amazing flute that you use on one of the tracks too?
- P:** Yeah, that's off this Japanese meditation records, and it's kind of like this traditional thing. There's this guy from America who plays the clarinet, and they sort of just bang along and it's all intertwined.
- TM:** The thing that I guess I thought of first when I was listening to the album, was DJ Krush, there seemed to be certain similarities with the way the beats are put together, and it's very sparse, like he is quite often. Was he an influence?
- P:** Oh yeah, for sure. All those guys, him, Vadim, Shadow, they are all a big influence. I guess I grew being quite a straight up hip-hop head, giving nothing else the time of day. And I bought this record, it was a Dr. Octagon record, and there was a beat on that produced by DJ Shadow, who I had never heard of at the time, and I really like the beat so I said 'Oh, I like this guy's production, I might check out some other stuff'. And then *Endroducing* came out and I bought it expecting something similar to the Dr. Octagon and I thought 'This is weird, it's all instrumental stuff'. But the more I listened to it the more I liked it and I realised 'Wow, he's doing something totally different, this is amazing'. And that's also how I got into DJ Krush, because he does a track with DJ Shadow on the *Meiso* album, and I had never heard of Krush but I said 'Oh cool, it's got Shadow on it, I'm going to buy it'. And I bought it and thought, 'Oh, this other stuff is pretty good as well'.
- TM:** So you are really involved with three different activities really aren't you? You've got your stuff, then TZU and then Curse. It must be a difficult job juggling the three?
- P:** Yeah, it can be at times, but it's really fun as well. I guess I'm just really lucky, because I like all sorts of hip-hop, and it's cool to have different outlets to express the different things that you're interested

in.

**TM:** What are the main differences between working with TZU and working with Curse?

**P:** OK. With Curse, none of us are musicians to start off with, as in we don't play any instruments. So we work in a different way, it's all sample-based, and also maybe not as professional as TZU. With TZU, the other guys play lots of instruments; it's a very focused little group. So yeah, Curse is very different.

**TM:** Curse seems to me to be very performance based, lots of costumes, dressing up, Adam usually taking his trousers off or something. And a lot of people actually respond negatively to Curse, I've talked to people who really don't like them at all, they don't think what they are doing is hip-hop, it's too theatrical and crazy...

**P:** Too weird, yeah.

**TM:** So with TZU there's a stronger musical influence?

**P:** That's right. We just finished a new album with TZU, and all the tracks on that are mainly written with just vocals and guitar or vocals and keys, and built on from there. It's a more traditional form of song writing.

**TM:** With Curse, you're really the only one who looks like you're a hip-hop person, with your tracksuit and stuff, whereas they are all wearing crazy costumes, it's kind of like you are the hip-hop anchor.

**P:** Yeah, I think it's mainly because I'm just too shy, I like hiding away in the background and trying to keep the attention away from myself. So I don't dress up, and just keep my head down.

**TM:** I get the impression that there is a sort of compactness in the Melbourne hip-hop scene that seems a lot stronger than in Sydney. There's a kind of interaction, and a cutting edge creativity going on in Melbourne, which you don't find so much in Sydney.

**P:** Yeah, it's weird. A lot of the crews like Music vs Physics seem to be a little bit more experimental than crews in other states, you don't really hear much stuff like that. So yeah, Melbourne does really have that edge.

**NK:** Symbiotic Sounds Systems seem to be proponents of that.

**P:** Yep, totally.

**TM:** That *Ant Farm Aphids* album, which I thought was really interesting, quite avant-garde and quite different from hip-hop. But I mean, has that scene developed around a particular place?

**P:** Yeah, sort of. We are all friends, we all hang out and we are all based around Brunswick, Fitzroy sort of area. So just through that, and similar tastes, so you tend to band together.

**TM:** Is that where you grew up?

**P:** No. I grew up in Macleod, out in the northeastern suburbs.

**TM:** You all seem to have a strong interaction with The Herd.

**P:** Yeah, I guess it's just through playing a lot of gigs with them. And I guess you could also say that all The Herd, TZU and Curse they are all sort of outside the more conservative hip-hop scene, so they all have that in common. And even beside that, they are all just really nice people, really down to earth, and that's the main thing.

- NK:** Ozi Batla said something along similar lines, saying The Herd didn't really feel that they were part of the hip-hop scene. The people that they have started working with and doing shows with, you know, they get along with those blokes.
- P:** Yeah, that's right. And I guess it's also that we are really into each other's music.
- TM:** There is a kind of kind of conscious political edge to The Herd's stuff, and TZU and Curse's stuff. And Combat Wombat as well. Are they in the same scene as well?
- P:** Yeah, they are definitely.
- NK:** Like, you'd never see homophobia in The Herd, TZU, Curse or Combat Wombat, whereas it still exists within the staunch scene.
- P:** Yeah, that's right, it's weird.
- TM:** I was reading an interview that you did in the *Brag* and you were saying now by this stage that the Australian hip-hop scene has become so diverse that it is almost like there is room for everything, from underground, to avant-garde, to conscious, to beer-hop and all the kind of mainstream stuff.
- P:** Yeah, for sure, I think there is room for it all. And I think it's getting bigger, and I think that will just become more apparent as it progresses.
- TM:** I mean, in terms of things like airplay and CD sales, do you think that you have made headway in the last couple of years?
- P:** I'm not so sure with CD sales, but definitely with airplay, especially at the community level, there is a lot of support.
- TM:** In terms of people coming along to your gigs regularly?
- P:** Yeah.
- TM:** Do you play places like Revolver in Melbourne?
- P:** We used to quite a lot. Not so much anymore, but we did play there quite a bit.
- TM:** Where do you tend to play these days?
- P:** It's kind of different with the different acts. With TZU, I guess to play bigger venues now, and a bit more selective with the gigs we play. But we haven't really been playing many gigs with either band because we are in the middle of recording albums with both, just taking a break from the whole thing.
- TM:** Is this [gig at the Hopetoun] part of a national tour with this album [*Empty Beats for Lonely Rappers*]?
- P:** As national as I can afford with my time, it's pretty much just Newcastle, Sydney and Melbourne. They offered me a lot of other gigs, but I just didn't have the time.
- NK:** Because you run a business as well don't you?
- P:** Yes, that's right.
- TM:** What's the business?
- P:** It's a CD duplication business.
- TM:** Right, and that pays the rent?

- P:** Yeah, exactly.
- NK:** Do you deals with Elefant Traks, or do they have their own suppliers?
- P:** We've just managed to get them on board. They were doing bigger runs and we weren't able to match their prices, but just recently we've got a competitive manufacturer who is giving us good prices.
- NK:** They're doing some great stuff, in terms of distributions, and how hard Tim [Levinson, aka Urth-boy] works to keep the label churning over.
- P:** Yeah, it's really good to see. That's why I choose them with the solo album. They run a really tight ship, and they are so honest in dealing with you. And it's only five months into the year and they have already put out three releases. It's really good to see an independent Aussie hip-hop label doing such great stuff.
- NK:** And then Hermitude is coming out later this year as well. I guess you must have listened to their stuff closely?
- P:** Yeah, it's really nice.
- TM:** I mean, in terms of instrumental hip-hop, where do you see it going, what sort of direction?
- P:** In terms of Australian instrumental stuff?
- TM:** Well yeah, I guess so.
- P:** Um... I don't know. It's hard to say. Because I don't really know of too many more people who are out there doing it, like, you get producer albums, like Plutonic Lab put out an album with MCs on it, and J-Red, also from Obese. But it seems when producers set out to make an album they always recruit MCs to get on board. But with straight instrumental stuff, there aren't too many people doing it.
- TM:** This is why it's *Empty Beats for Lonely Rappers*, it's a very solitary pursuit, you do it on your own, in your bedroom or your studio.
- NK:** In many ways it is headphone music isn't it? The space of instrumental hip-hop is really to turn the light out and put yourself into the headphones and get the textures as they roll from left to right ear, or whatever.
- P:** And that's how it is when I make it I guess, it's the best why to write the tunes.
- TM:** I was wanting to ask about the really long song at the end of the last album, 'The Travel Song' [from TZU's *Position Correction*], that was pretty amazing. And there were some really strange samples on that. Was that something that you put together?
- P:** No, not really, that was one of the MCs who put that track together.
- NK:** 'The Travel Song' was Joel's [Joelistics] baby wasn't it?
- P:** Yeah, that's right. Both him and Pip [MC Seed] rap on the song, but it was his idea and he wrote it.
- NK:** Yeah, we talked to him about that, about his road trips and his Kerouac influences.
- TM:** But there was a kind of string quartet on it I think?
- P:** Yeah, there was.

**TM:** It was kind of interesting and unusual for hip-hop.

**P:** Yeah, the strings were arranged by a guy from True Live. It's a really interesting set up with the strings, they have violin, cello, keys, double bass and drums. It's a different set-up for a live hip-hop band.

**NK:** Towards the end of the Curse album there is a long list of guest raps. Is that kind of the whole circle of the Melbourne crew that we are talking about here?

**P:** Pretty much.

**TM:** 'Cause I think there's about 12 people isn't there?

**P:** Yeah, that's right. That was just a fun track to do you know, to get everyone in the studio from Melbourne.

**TM:** And Little G, she was on that as well, with Liones.

**NK:** She's the one who calls herself the 'wog-origine'.

**P:** Yeah, that's right. Her brother Nick is also on that track.

**NK:** The other thing that I had to ask relates to sampling, sample culture, sampology. It's an interesting thing that has arisen from the contemporary world we live in.

**P:** For sure.

**NK:** So I guess the question is, where are these ideas leading?

**P:** Yeah, it's weird, it's heading in all sorts of different directions, some people are taking it to the micro level, in that they take a trumpet for example and rearrange it, others are doing the mash-up thing where they are sampling a whole track and adding another whole track. It's interesting because it's all over the place. And the cool thing with sampling is, for people like myself who can't play any instruments, you can still put together a song and still express yourself and be creative with music.

**NK:** What you were saying about the micro level, is that how you do it?

**P:** Yeah, all my beats are like that, just getting individual bits and building it, but in terms of samples, not really, I like to use longer, more melodic samples.

**NK:** That's an issue, for me at least, sometimes it becomes a little too fractured and fragmented. Sometimes you can listen to the micro level stuff and you can start visualising the bars, and you can hear where it is cut. Whereas in a traditional music sense, you strum a guitar and there is the long echo of the acoustic.

**P:** Yeah, fully. Sometimes the music is so processed that it's hard to separate the process from the finished piece. You're listening to it going, 'How do they do that?'

**TM:** So do you spend a lot of time digging in second-hand record stores?

**P:** Not as much as I'd like!

**NK:** Classic answer.

**TM:** In Melbourne, and again it's grass is greener sort of stuff, but the record stores in Melbourne are so much better than the ones in Sydney.

**P:** I don't know, every time I come to Sydney I love going to Gould's on King street, do you know it?

**NK:** Old Bobby's! There's like 40 000 vinyls.

**TM:** I don't even go in there any more it's so chaotic.

**P:** That's what I like about it, there is no where like it in Melbourne. It's so chaotic, and admittedly there is so much crap, but it makes it so much more rewarding when you finally find something good.

**TM:** Well, you have to spend all day in there looking.

**P:** Yeah exactly, that's what I like about it. You can have so much fun just exploring, you move aside a pile of books and there's a crate of records. You move that and there's more stuff that's been hiding.

**NK:** But that's the experience of modern life really isn't it? You know, you look here and pick out a pile here and there, and you chance upon things rather than going directly towards the source of anything.

**P:** Yeah, I think that reflects Sydney as well, just the traffic and the crowds, it's manic.

**TM:** Who do you think are some of the best scratch DJs in Australia? Have you heard Nick Toth?

**P:** A little bit, but not a lot. I mean, I guess there are the obvious ones like J-Red and Dexter and his crew, who are amazing. I don't know, with my scratching I kind of prefer more melodic, sparse and rhythmic scratching as opposed to the fast, technical frenzy. I used to really enjoy that stuff though.

**TM:** Yeah, you used to have people like The Invisible Scratch Peoples who were just this amazing spectacle of pyrotechnics...

**P:** And everyone going crazy...

**TM:** Yeah, and there's a degree to which scratching has become a spectator's sport, especially in scratch battles.

**P:** Yeah, it's amazing the amount of skill those guys have, but I'm just more into the music rather than the competition and all the bragging and boasting.

**TM:** Yeah. Did you see Q-Bert either of the times he came over?

**P:** I saw him the first time he came down, late 90s I suppose. That was amazing, I'd never seen anything like that, or even heard that sort of scratching. I think the first time I heard him was on the Dr. Octagon record and it just blew me away.