Detroit Electronic Music Festival will be a world party

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Forget Woodstock in all its incarnations. The year 2000 in Detroit has given rise to a musical event of unparalleled magnitude – and the revolution will be electronic.

The Detroit Electronic Music Festival celebrates both a city on the rise and the underground musical genre rooted within it. Long overdue in the city that originated electronic dance music, the festival is expected to draw one million dance music devotees from across the world.

The festival plugs in noon to *midnight Saturday-Monday, May* 27-29 at Detroit's Hart Plaza. Presented by the Detroit Recreation Department and Pop Culture Media, the first event of its kind will grace the international waterfront bringing attention to a vibrant city subculture. All proceeds from the festival will be donated to the city's recreation department and its "Be A Partner" children's programs.

It all began a few years back with an idea and shared passion for electronic music. Carl Craig, a world-renowned electronic musician and CEO of Planet E Records, and Carol A. Marvin, owner of Pop Culture Media, entered uncharted territory, aiming to create a festival dedicated to what has been called the most popular music genre worldwide. According to Marvin, a Livonia native and Plymouth resident, the time was finally right.

"Everyone that's working on this is the very best at what they do," she said. Marvin started her own company in 1993 with The Michigan State Fair as her first client. One year later she became a director of the Montreux Jazz Festival, a background that gave her the experience necessary to get a brand new project off the ground. "I love electronic music," said the festival's executive director. "I really believe it's the creative people who will move Detroit forward."

One of those creative people, Carl Craig, traces his electronic origins back to growing up amid the industrial sphere of the Motor City. "It made us see technology as our friend," said Craig, from the spacious downtown loft that serves as Planet E's headquarters. Influenced by the recession the city suffered in the '70s and the way mass media visualized the future with films like *Blade Runner*, Craig said, "We gravitated toward making

Richie Hawtin

music with machines." At the same time, synthesizers seeped into popular music and bands like Kraftwerk and Durran Duran helped integrate technology as a mainstay in music.

"It's the greatest export we have," said Marvin of electronic music. "It's never really been celebrated in America, let alone Detroit."

But when more than 63 carefully-chosen performers fall upon one of four stages Memorial weekend, that will all change. This music that has the ability to cross social boundaries – age, race, sex – will be at the forefront of a celebration to remember. Headlining acts will not compete, but rather their music will be heard throughout Hart Plaza allowing the entire crowd to dance to one beat.

As a headliner and integral part of the electronic scene for almost 15 years, Richie Hawtin said: "We've waited a long time for something like this to happen. The music is now gaining popularity in North America."

With that popularity has come a certain stigmatism against the all night dance parties or raves associated with electronic music. Hawtin said this event, open to all and held during daylight hours, is just what the scene needs to gain credibility among those who don't truly understand what the electronic evolution is all about. "This is the opportunity we need," said Hawtin, who calls the festival a "big stamp of approval."

As a Windsor resident, Hawtin holds a different view of the Detroit scene, but it all comes down to this unifying music. "We make music that is quite futuristic, but we're not out to alienate people," he said.

He's not the only one awaiting the festival. "I'm really pleased, really excited," said Hannah, a DJ signed to Planet E Records and performer at the festival. Originally from London, England, Hannah now resides in Detroit. She's spent time preparing for the festival by flyering and spreading the word. "I hope the sun shines," she said.

Marvin believes the festival became a reality thanks to the efforts of Ernest W. Burkeen Jr., director of the city's recreation department and city officials *who helped make this dream* come true. "It takes courage to create something new," said Marvin.

At the center of it all will be Detroit artists performing Detroit's music for an international audience of listeners. Perhaps that's been the most difficult task for Craig, as artistic director. "I'm an artist putting together and artist list." It was Craig's responsibility to choose the acts that represent electronic music in Detroit, the world and exemplify the future of this

Carl Craig

music.

When asked what the future of electronic music will be, Craig claims he can't predict the unknown. "It always morphs. The future of music is only going to be created by events like this." For Craig and artists like him, the festival offers artistic and *spiritual satisfaction.* "It will possibly further the development of Detroit," he said.

"It's gonna make history," added Marvin.

Don't miss the free Detroit Electronic Music Festival. Check www.electronicmusicfest.com for details. To volunteer, call (313) 961-9200.

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Techno *from page E6*

his raw musical material. These producers are often DJ's themselves, although not all of the most popular DJ's are producers.

The first electronic producers didn't live within this DJ-oriented universe, a relatively new phenomenon in the electronic world. These first producers were the Henry Fords of their craft, creating Model-Ts that, while later revered, were nevertheless replaced by fuel-injected Lexus Suva.

German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen created some of the most seminal music of the genre. It was Stockhausen who in 1953 composed the first piece of music using synthesized tones, Studie I, and has since become the leading figure of European new music.

Stockhausen's earliest work was produced by looping segments of pre-recorded sounds on audiotape. But he later graduated to the use of synthesizers, which dominate the modern electronic landscape along with the tape loops orphan child, a prolific device known simply as a "sampler."

The sampler is a digital recorder, using microchips to store and play back sound instead of magnetic audiotape. Tape loops were a primitive way of sequencing pre-recorded musical data to create a performance. With the advent of transistor and, later, microchip technology, it became possible to sequence the data in a much more efficient and qualitatively different manner. The music formerly recorded on tape, was digitized — and played back by samplers precisely when programmed to by the producer.

Think of the old the player pianos of the Old West. Punched holes in sheets of music would "tell" the machine when to play a note. In the same way, programs entered into sequencers tell the machines — synthesizers and samplers — when to play back sounds.

By the 70s, synthesizers had become consumer electronics, available to the general public. Electronics were lending a space age feel to art-rock acts like Yes, Rush and Tangerine Dream.

In stark contrast was the clinical precision of Germany's Kraftwerk, one of the first acts to glorify electronic production as an end in itself. Kraftwerk would later become one of the prime influences for a group of Detroit musicians that would create the sound that has come to be associated with the entire gamut of electronic music: Techno.

One of the many regional permutations electronic music has evolved into over the years (see accompanying sidebar), Techno draws on seventies funk influences such as George Clinton's Parliament Funkadelic, marrying it with the unlikely spouse found in Kraftwerk's cold precision.

In fact, one popular electronic music journal described Tech as "George Clinton and Kraftwerk stuck in an elevator with only a sequencer to keep themselves busy."

Created by three fledgling musicians in the mid to late 1980's, Techno revolutionized the way the most of the world listened to music. Detroiters Juan Atkins, Kevin Saunderson and Derrick May became international icons for recording some of the first Techno tracks, yet remain anonymous in the city that inspired them.

To a large degree, techno and other forms of electronic music have not become as commercially viable in the United States as they have abroad.

Explanations for this vary, some of the more popular of which site the fact that techno artists are relatively faceless, their music often lacking lyrics, and when lyrics are present they're usually samples of someone else.

Another possible reason is the lack of a flashy stage show. Techno has been relegated to night clubs where DJs lurk in dark booths behind walls of equipment – a far cry from the arena-style rock and roll shows that Americans have relished for decades.

In the end, perhaps no one can say for sure why electronic music hasn't taken on the cultural significance here that it has abroad. But, if they have their way, the organizers and musicians of the Detroit Electronic Music change that.

The official glossary of electronic music

House: TechNet predecessor, House emerged in the dance clubs of Chicago and New York in the early 80's. House features the same kick/snare drum repetition in 4/4 time as Techno, but with more organic sounds and real (usually sampled) vocals.

Techno: A more abstract form of dance music than house, Techno's characteristic repetitive sampled drum sounds and synthesizer melodies make it a soundtrack for introspection, not to mention great for dancing. Bass-heavy and often lacking vocals, there are many sub-genres of techno with have varying degrees of palpability for the uninitiated masses. Some seek to be as hard and abrasive as possible, while others lean more toward the organic house sounds that occasionally make their way to the fringes of commercial radio. Created in Detroit in the Early to mid 80s.

Jungle: Too intense, fast paced and dark even for many of today's troubled, Ritalin-hungry teenagers. Jungle featured sampled drumbeats, called "breaks" played back at breakneck speeds often exceeding 170 betas per minute (more than twice the pace of an average rock and roll ballad). Jungle marries these rapid-fire snare and cymbal breaks with impossibly low synthesized bass lines that are felt as much as heard. Created in London in the early 90s.

Hip-Hop: Jungle's very distant domestic cousin. Hip-Hop, also known as Rap, emerged first in the streets of New York's more salty boroughs in the very early 80s. It is similar to Jungle in that both are based on sampled, looped drum beats – although hip-hop is played at a far slower tempo and is more oriented toward melody and lyrics. Perhaps the most popular form of electronic music, at least domestically.