

Stiletto Meets Stairway: A Journey into the Underground

Let's just clarify that this has little to do with fashion. But true to the title, it does involve a pair of high heels. The ones I wore to my first ever underground Dutch rave.

No surprise, I didn't start out as the electronic music addict I find myself to be today; following the beat of a good party like a dog in heat. I did, however, grow up in a home where music was always present. From the Rolling Stones, to Stevie Wonder, to Gershwin, to Chopin; silence would be the only outcast. In my kindergarten years, my favourite song was Lori Lieberman's 1972 classic "Killing me Softly". In primary school, it was all about the Backstreet Boys (not N'Sync because they were too mainstream at the time and I found JT's hair to be an insult to the eyes). Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band was my actual favourite record at the time, but I would have risked being an outsider had I not been able to join in on the 90's boy band mania.

By the time I entered my glorious pubescent era, I had found hardcore and punk-rock to match my rebellious hormones. I spent several years cutting thumb holes into my sweaters a-la Kurt Cobain and reading the true meanings behind the songs of the Red Hot Chili Peppers. By 11th grade I dropped out, and within the same year switched high school, to find myself in an international school mostly swarming with the nouveaux. I would still attend a rock festival or two, but my main social exposure to music would now consist of big clubs, bright flashing lights and shapely go-go dancers. It would be unfathomable to attend a club without a table, and wearing sneakers would be more shameful than not knowing anything of the headlining DJ playing on the night. Truth is, it didn't seem like anyone cared. It was more about being seen with paper spent on designer brands and bottles of booze, while luxury spending could be witnessed at its finest behind the bathroom stalls. It's always been fascinating to me how these super-humans could divert that much focus from the music onto such things as what other people were wearing (and if it was a real Louis Vuitton). It would take a very special species of human to not be affected by the vibration of even a decent beat, but these clubs seemed to be packed with them.

It didn't take long to catch on to the sheer transparency of the scene, and as the vitality of the neon lights faded in colour, so did my adolescent desire to fit in to the emptiness that was enclosed in these ironically bursting clubs. So when I moved to the Netherlands a few years ago, with a mindset open to all (well, most) things new, my senses were exposed to something entirely different. It sounds so cliché to say I entered another world, but to this day, that's exactly how it feels every time I walk down some grimy, shaking steps to approach the escalating pulse of a perfectly loud bassline.

The first time I walked down such steps I was wearing shiny, patent leather platform heels. I had just left another faux "dress-to-impress" event at a flashy little club which seemed far too pretentious for its own good, when some enlightened local soul recommended a walk over to a nearby place for some "real music". I was completely out of place in my premeditated little black ensemble and stilettos, but my soul had somehow found its right place. I was elated to find a space where heels were frowned upon more than being one of the few fools to get carried away by the beat in a bursting club. Rather than composed figures surrounding tables that may as well have been urinated on as a resounding claim on territory, the faces around me were glowing with pure satisfaction (as well as beads of perspiration). They wore their sweat proudly though, their messy hair and beer stained runners just further proof of their relentless dedication to dance. They had already connected with the music, and with others that were connecting with the music and, in those hours, the cosmos was in balance. We had found the house that Jack built.

A couple of hours in, I felt my right foot sink and instantly became shorter on one side. One of my expensive little patent heels had broken off. But just as the theatre folk say, the show must go on. Who was I to let a little wardrobe malfunction get between my house and my body? I had to make adjustments of course, but I

doubt anyone noticed my conveniently left leaning jerk. I don't remember feeling my feet; the DJ did a good job of keeping them going through the early morning hours.

It wasn't too long before I traded my heels in for my beloved Nike's and made those down-step visits a weekly affair. My taste in music also underwent a vast makeover, as it evolved through my repeated exposure, and constant search for new tracks and podcasts to retain my sanity during my studies. Now 4 ADE's and numerous festivals after, my focus shifted from the top 40 EDM tunes I'd hear on Slam FM, to the most orgasmic of of deep house, tech-house, techno, and bass house to name a few. I became a regular at some of the finest Dutch festivals, often living on oatmeal and instant noodles (not combined, fortunately) to save up for the many indulgent tickets I required during the spring/summer season.

By now, my devotion to the music has frequently brought me to the likes of London, Berlin and Ibiza. But while these trips have been incredibly eye-opening, I cannot dismiss the role that Dutch dance culture has played in my development. **To me, Amsterdam served as a gateway drug to the underground scene; the Mary Jane to my Ibiza, the Charlie to my Berlin.** And it's not the parties that I'm so drawn to, as could easily be assumed. It's the raw, honest culture that, within its realm, rids its people of vanity and fear, and unites under a mutual love, stronger than any conflict that may haunt the world outside it.