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### DJ Shadow

Subba-Cultcha talks to legendary sampler fiend Josh Davis, aka DJ Shadow, about his recent tour, current album *The Outsider* and the reaction to his change of direction.

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Having built up a considerable and loyal following with the release of his landmark masterpiece *Endtroducing* in 1996 and it's follow up *The Private Press* in 2002, both of which consisted of sample-based instrumental hip hop, Josh Davis aka DJ Shadow threw his fans a curveball this year with the release of *The Outsider*, marking a notable change of direction. Subba-Cultcha caught up with the man himself to discover that, unsurprisingly, it's all part of the plan...

**You've been touring of late. How's that been going?** Very well. It's been the biggest and the best tour that I've done. I can only really think of three shows that were duds out of seventy, which is good. The London shows are the last two of the year, and I only tour once every three or four years, so it's nice to rap up in London because the UK is where I first made my name. The tour kicked off here as well actually, with the Wireless festival. All along I wanted to start things off somewhere like Australia or Japan, somewhere really neutral so we could kind of break in the show, but it ended up being a trial by fire. I was sitting there thinking 'How am I possibly going to do a show that will top the 2002 tour?', which was already a huge leap from the 1999 tour, and we had less than half the time to get the tour together as we had in 2002, just two weeks really. As soon as I was able to, I started talking to my visual guy Ben about different concepts and saying 'I'm reasonably sure I'm going to do this song, and I'm reasonably sure I'll do that song, so start generating ideas', so that's kind of how it started. I knew I was going to do *Seeing Things*, and I had a very definite idea for the visuals, so we started on that first. I was still working on the album, so it was tough. I was definitely nervous because when you're at home trying to put a show together, you never know what's going to work with the crowd and what's just going to not go over well. I only made one tactical error I think in putting the show together when it comes to song choice which I was able to easily rectify, it was the very last song. It was mainly because I was trying to get away with not playing *High Noon*, *Midnight* or *Organ Donor* because those are the songs I've had to do all along, but I just could not make the equation work. I couldn't not play *Organ Donor*, so I still do that. I'd never done *What Does Your Soul Look Like? Pt.3*, which is the mellow one that ends *Endtroducing*. I had never done that song live, so I thought it'd be kind of cool if that was the last song, but for some reason when I would play it just wouldn't really drop. It almost seemed as if people didn't know it or didn't expect it, so I ended up putting *Midnight* in its place and it works really well.

**The new album is somewhat of a departure for you. Was that intentional?**

Totally, yeah. The thing of it is, anything that's intended to last for a long time must renew itself. I've always considered my career to be a forty year plan and I just don't think it's in the long term interest of me or the people I'm trying to give music to for me to just do the same thing over and over again. It occurred to me before starting this record that after *Endtroducing* and *The Private Press*, people were assuming that that's what I was going to do forever, instrumental sample-based music, because that's what most people knew me for, but I've done a lot of other stuff. I helped start *Soulsides/Quantum*, I've done rap stuff all along with them, I started my career working with area rappers, over the last four years I've worked on several side projects where there weren't any samples, and a lot of that was to condition my fans, to kind of say 'Get ready because this is important to me at this time.' The only other example I can think of is, in the process of me working on this

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record, I started thinking about when the Beastie Boys put out Check Your Head because when that record came out, not every song on there was for me necessarily but I remember getting the impression that they'd reached an age where they didn't want to just sub-categorise all of their interests. They grew up on punk, that's represented, then they got into hip hop, that's represented, and they like funk and louny jazz, that's represented. I thought it was kind of brave that they just went 'Ok, we've turned 30, we don't want to spare anybody all of our interests, we just want to put it all out there', and I thought that's the only record I can draw an analogy to with The Outsider.

**The title itself, The Outsider, seems like somewhat of a statement regarding your place in music. Was that the idea?** Yeah, but it's not a statement in so much as I'm put upon or I'm different because of it or I'm on some next level shit, nothing like that. It's just basically an acknowledgement of the fact that, in any way that you can think of, from the very beginning, I've been an outsider. Growing up in Davis, California and listening to hip hop in '82, I used to get into fights at school because of the music I listened to. I think there's a lot of music like that; punk went through that in certain places. I've always been an outsider, and I don't mean that in any way other than the fact that it's just the case - I don't know any other reality. People say to me 'So, tell me about hyphy', and I'm like 'I'm not a hyphy guy'. I like and respect the music and I'm a fan of the scene and the artists involved, and to that extent I recruited some of them to help give something back to the scene that's given a lot to me. I'm not an insider in that scene though anymore than I'm an insider in any other scene; I know a lot of people in the scene but I'm still an outsider. It's not that that's a good thing or a bad thing, it is what it is, and the fact of the matter is as well that I like to be where the masses aren't. I don't like to move with the pack, I like to explore things in my own time, and sometimes that means that I'm getting into this genre or this artist or this album two years after they're the hype or two years after their prime or two years after the scene has kind of died. I listen to things and I get inspired by things completely out of any time sequence or marketing sequence, and most of the people that I really identify with and can talk about music with at length and really bounce ideas off of are exactly the same. One friend I can think of in particular has collected every single Timbaland production since he started and has been doing so for about five years, but now it's like the cool instant thing to drop his name out of anybody's mouth, whether you're Chris Martin or whoever, and my friend is starting to wonder. The thing is though, the definition of hipster bullshit is turning off of something just because everybody else now likes it. If I like something, I like it for life. It doesn't matter when it's cool or when the marketing says you're supposed to like it. That really bothers me about music journalism, when people say like 'Forget that, it's all about this', you know, 'Forget so and so, here's the new so and so'. It's like 'Fuck off!'. If they did something good then that stands forever, let it be what it is. Only about 10% of people think that way though. It's really hard to resist marketing and I think that most people do get sucked in to, like, 'What am I supposed to like right now?'. I think the bottom line is that for a lot of people music is just another cultural attachment by which you can express yourself, it's not their life, where as for me it is my life. I think I just care about music more than most people, I have a very definite opinion about most things musical.

**Compared to Endroducing and The Private Press, The Outsider seems a lot more organic in the sense that it's not as tight and there seems to be more going on stylistically. Was that also the intention?** I wanted to play with the concept of what an album is supposed to be. I'd done three pretty conceptual albums in a row, from Endroducing to Unkle to The Private Press. I had my own internal themes and technical requirements that I was placing upon myself when working on those records to make them sound homogenous and unified from front to finish. With The Outsider, I realised it's naive to think that people still buy a record and listen to it for 80 minutes all the way through every time. It's a mixtape world that we live in, it's an iPod world we live in. I just wanted to make songs, I wanted to put out seventeen individual unique songs that had as little relation to the other songs on the album as possible, just to really show the full strength of what I can do. I could do a whole album like This Time, I could do a whole album like 3 Freaks, I could do a whole album like Erase You, but I wanted to just do a record where every song was self-contained and powerful in its own right. It is different in that respect and I understand for some people that it's jarring. It also represents how I listen to music when I'm at home because I don't really listen to albums all the way through anymore. I make compilation CDs of all the different music that comes to me, whether it's a record company person handing me a new CD of some big group or if I'm in Sao Paulo and I buy a bunch of Brazilian music or if I buy a bunch of Korean music, and I'll get home and there'll be a bunch of hyphy vinyl that I've been sent, and I'll just sit and listen to it all, totally out of sequence, out of context, out of timeline, and it all ends up in the melting pot and makes sense to my own listening taste. That's the way I've digested music now for years. In some ways I think that this is the most personal record I've ever done because it really is everything I like and everything that I feel like I stand for right now.



**Have you started thinking about the next step yet or are you still very much involved with the current record?** I have, yeah. After about two or three months of the record, whatever album it is, I always go through the inevitable let down because whenever you make a record you think 'This is going to be the one that sets the world on fire' and inevitably you have to scale back your expectations. I go through that for a couple of months then I start thinking about my revenge and I start plotting that. So yeah, I definitely have some ideas. People get really wiggled out on the internet and they start asking things like 'Is it all going to be like this from now on?' and the whole thing that I was trying to say with this record is that I wanted to just press reset on any expectations because what I really wanted to do was just basically build and destroy and go forward fresh. I can literally choose any direction now and that feels really liberating. It could be all moody ten minute sample-based opuses on the next record or it could be sixty second thrash punk songs, who knows. I never know until it starts coming out.

[www.djshadow.com](http://www.djshadow.com)

'The Outsider' is out now on Island records (Check our review: <http://www.subba-cultcha.com/article.php?id=3002>)

Thanks to the wondrous Helen @ Holler...

**Philip Goodfellow**