



Words by Terence Teh, photo by Dennis Shaw

SOUTH RAKKAS CREW SHAKE IT, DON'T BREAK IT

The long awaited EP for Diplo's fledgling Mad Decent label drops this week from electro dancehall production duo Dennis 'Dow Jones' Shaw and Alex G, aka Orlando's almighty South Rakkas Crew. Entitled 'The Mix Up' it's a bangerlicious collection of skank heavy dancehall riddims mashed with SRC's trademark digital electro bounce and claps... yeah, plenty of claps. South Rakkas rip pop/technoid/roots reggae/hip hop samples and flip them into new wave, low end club music, toasted by dancehall artists Kid Foreigner, Capleton and "singjay" (a Jamaican style of reggae combining toasting and singing) female Sandy Smith. Creators of infamous new dancehall riddims like the speaker junking 'Bionic Ras' and the cosmic sci-fi 'Crack Whore' (which saw a cheeky Lily Allen re-rub) South Rakkas have produced the cream crop of dancehall stars – Beenie Man, Elephant Man, Bounty Killer, Capleton, Lady Saw, Mr. Vegas, Sizzla... their progressive bump bringing club music a whole new flavour. With Alex G studio-bound for the weekend, we spoke to Dow Jones about the South Rakkas ruckus.

SRC's background as high profile dancehall producers is well documented, but what about your earlier work with the pop industry?

That's why we ended up in Orlando. Alex G and former South Rakkas Crew member Riprock used to be the production duo Riprock 'n' Alex G Ent. I used to manage their company when I started South Rakkas as a side project. We love the music so it was a labour of love. We have collectively written, produced or remixed for artists like NSYNC, Britney Spears, Brandy, Michael Jackson, T-Pain, Chris Brown, Good Charlotte, Pink, DJ Shadow, Shakira, Christina Aguilera, Lily Allen, Beck, Duran Duran... We all relocated from Canada - from Toronto and Mississauga.

South Rakkas Crew isn't just Dow Jones and Alex G, is it?

As far as the production, yes it is just us two. We do have an extended family of people we work with, a couple of MCs for our live shows and a couple of artists we are putting together albums for. The first artist album we are going to put out is from a new "singjay" artist out of Jamaica named Sandy Smith. That album is scheduled for released early 2008 in Japan. The other artists include Kid Foreigner and Bigga Boss a.k.a. Mr. Dockery. Trixx "The Human Jump Off" has been our MC on tour and The Phlash is responsible for our artwork.

What are your favourite aspects of living in Florida?

Life in Canada was great, except we couldn't make a living doing what we loved. There just weren't as many opportunities in urban music. Alex G hates the weather here in Florida. He misses the seasons, and finds it way too hot. It is really hot but that's what air-conditioners are for! I can't say I miss the Canadian winters. I would rather be here. Universal, Disney Land, and Sea World are added bonuses.

Let's talk about the Mad Decent EP, people are totally hyped about it – are you happy with everything right now? Any personal picks off of the EP?

I can't complain. We are more popular than ever. Things are really picking up. The kind of response we have been getting has been great. I can't wait to get started on another South Rakkas project. I really love all the songs and one point or another every song on the EP has been a favourite.

What riddim do you wish you'd written?

I wish we had written 'Sleng Teng', 'Stalag', really anyone of those classics that started it all. Those are riddims that will live forever. I hope our electro-dancehall style can be revered in the same way some day.

Can you highlight any super memorable recording sessions with crazed artists?

My most memorable sessions are the ones with the big artists in Jamaica like: Capleton, Sizzla, and Elephant Man. Being in those sessions leave no questions as to why those artists are at the top of the food chain. They are incredible talents. They will get in the studio write and record a song within a few hours. I remember thinking, "How freakin' cool is this?" when we recorded Capleton in Jamaica for the first time. It was in his back yard one night. No studio just a laptop headphones and a mic. The session was engineered by DJ Kareem from Renaissance Sound Crew. He assured me that this is how Capleton usually records. They set him up in the corner of his yard, back against the wall and surrounded by a semi-circle of his peoples - about 15 dreads. Then he just ripped it up in a couple of takes.

How was your London show when you came to Fabric?

The London show was great. We got a lot of love. This was our first time in London. They had a cool crowd; a real mixed batch.

The DJ line-up included The Rub, Sinden, Switch amongst others.

There was a good mix of musical styles. It was not, in my mind, a typical dancehall crowd but they loved it. London reminded me a lot of Canada; cultures enjoying cultures. [Check the live footage: www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9hN70XIr_8]

What's the secret to make that shit BUMP!

Alex G has a great technical background that makes all the sounds pop and the bass rumble. The rest is using our own experiences creatively. A lot of it comes from growing up in Canada. I think the wide influence of music that comes from a diverse mix of cultures comes across in our music. We take from what we know - hip hop, reggae, house, techno, electro, dancehall, RnB, Top 40, rock...

What do you think about the UK music scene right now?

I think the UK music scene is fresh. It is so progressive. There is always some new style coming out like grime or dubstep. They are always pushing boundaries. I think we need more of that here in the US, it is way too formulated over here. The UK is definite ahead of the curve.

The upcoming Addict Canadian tour features some dope artists – Bonjay's on there, did you like what they did with the 'Bionic Ras' riddim?

I remember when I first heard that song. Diplo called me and said he was up in Montreal touring and heard some girl singing over our 'Bionic Riddim', and tore up the show. He later emailed me the live segment. It feels good to hear stuff like that. I didn't know who Bonjay was before that. It's a bonus to see non-traditional dancehall listeners enjoying our sound.

Are you looking forward to playing with Megasoid?! That show should be amazing?

Alex G is much more in tuned to what is going on in the music world. It may surprised everyone but in the past I have purposely not listened to too much dancehall or any other music for that matter. My theory was that the less music I listened to the less influenced I would be by what is going on out there. So... that has changed since I got back into the DJ thing and now I am trying to soak it all in. I am now just beginning to know the DJs, producers, and artists out there. So far what I have seen of Megasoid is... well... they're little nuts, no? I can't wait see them live.

SOUTH RAKKAS TOP 7

1. Living in The South I have really started appreciating the dirty, dirty, with T.I. being my favourite Dirty South artist. 2. The old school freestyle and booty has never died out for me. 3. I like Kanye West's 'Goodlife' and 50's 'I Get Money'. 4. As of the last week I am really digging 'Life We Live' by Let's Go To War. I saw the video on their MySpace page and was an instant fan. 5. There are so many hot mash-ups and unofficial remixes, most of which I don't know who to give the credits to. 6. As far as dancehall, I love the retro stuff from the 80s and 90s. 7. I like Switch's remixes; the tougher sounding electro stuff. 'Harder Better Faster Stronger' from Daft Punk... Basement Jaxx. I like most things hype.

South Rakkas Crew 'The Mix Up' is available this week on Mad Decent. And if you happen to be in Eastern Canada throughout November, SRC will be hitting Toronto 7th, Waterloo 8th, Ottawa 9th and Montreal 10th for the Addict @ Mad Decent tour.

www.myspace.com/southrakkas www.southrakkascrew.com