

## GANG GANG DANCE

of kids who grew up on hardcore is essential to the current American underground musical landscape in general, and to Gang Gang Dance in particular. Although DeGraw and DeWit met and eventually moved into the Embassy, the group house that was founded by Nation of Ulysses in DC's Mount Pleasant neighborhood, both skim over their arrival at a punk rock mecca in the mid-'90s and instead focus on their discovery of other cultures there. "There's nothing to do in DC, so everyone just spent all their time learning about different kinds of music," DeGraw says. "Because of the Ethiopian side of the neighborhood that we lived in, Ethiopian music was obviously the main thing that we could physically access." DeWit, meanwhile, initially moved into a predominately black DC neighborhood while working a job at Tower Records. He had never so much as heard hip-hop before, but was suddenly immersed in black culture, smoking weed for the first time, getting exposed to hip-hop, jungle, trip-hop and go-go and generally bugging out.

As the cultural fabric of Washington DC began to rearrange DeGraw and DeWit's musical imaginations, DeGraw simultaneously talked his friend Jim Loman into moving to DC, where the trio linked up with guitarist Raquel Vogt and formed the Crainium. Loman not only implemented a sort of punk-feminist manifesto for the band, but also enforced a schedule of hyper-regimented practices. Soon they were touring and recording an album produced by Guy Picciotto from Fugazi. "Basically the process taught us discipline," DeWit says of the Crainium. "And I transformed so much during that time that I stopped doing any sort of drugs or drinking or having sex. I was looking for some new gender in this new... it was this crazy weird kid shit, and music was the sacred thing." Although DeWit remained in the Crainium, he increasingly recognized his detachment from the DC punk community. "Through those realizations of myself," DeWit says, "I started to play music with free jazz guys that had kicked heroin and been in Vietnam and they were just blowing their horns and feeding off my energy, then I would go to Crainium practice and then I also got involved in this theater group." The theater group was named Vashis, after the woman who refused to undress for the king in the Bible's book of Esther. "I started meeting thugged out house producers and thugged out gay dancers and having these jam sessions," DeWit continues. "Everyone was just rocking out and I was the one playing drums and there were dancers hanging off poles and Indian MCs who hated my guts because I was this white dude, but slowly I started to win them over and they were in my face freestyling like, 'Uhh! Keep it tight!' I'm getting goose bumps just thinking about it, you know? That felt so much more revolutionary than being in this obscure avant punk band."

When that avant punk band eventually dissolved, DeGraw began considering a move to New York where he could maybe show his visual art at real galleries, and eventually DeWit and Loman made the move with him. Soon DeGraw and DeWit were going to art and fashion parties and performing informally with various collaborators including Bougasos, who had continued to do performance art and sing, and Diamond. At some point DeGraw and DeWit found a rehearsal space, and it happened to be shared by Animal Collective and Black Dice. "Those guys were a huge influence," DeWit says. "They were younger than us and

Lizette Bougasos's bandmates often refer to her as L.E.B., after the Wu-Fung's RZA, one of her heroes.

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