



Back to the Future

By Duke Shin

SINCE THE FORMATION OF DJ COLLECTIVE ORCHARD LOUNGE IN 2000, members Spencer Lokken, Bethany Lokken and Ben Silver have been active around Chicago, with past and current residences at such music-minded destinations as Sound-Bar, Funky Buddha Lounge and Moonshine, and have opened for DJ illuminati like Kevin Yost, Metro Area and Booka Shade. With equal parts taste and skill, Orchard Lounge deftly crosses over genre lines, breaking down musical derivatives to weave a better (and more diverse) aural tapestry than most. Considering their musical diversity, perhaps it's not too surprising to see Orchard Lounge's hybrid amalgamations of throwback funk and future tech finding a new audience outside of the club.

From the early days of experimental Krautrock to danceable, hum-along synthpop, the lines between bands that play rock and electronic music have forever been blurred. Lately, it seems the nostalgic kickback in eighties-influenced sounds have brought this contradiction to the forefront, again. But while indie and electro-leaning hybrids gain all the industry press and exposure, the underground scene has flourished, with improvisational jazz-noodling and jam-band sensibilities being married to house rhythms (sans the cold attitude and asymmetrical haircut). Bands like the New Deal, the Disco Biscuits and Chicago's own Future Rock, perhaps incubated in the nineties melting pot of rave and hippie counter-cultures, are enjoying increasing successes. It's within this audience that Orchard Lounge is finding new fans, playing before, after and, at times, alongside bands, like at the annual Camp Bisco festival in Hunter, NY. And it all makes perfect sense, according to Ben Silver—who Bethany and Spencer both credit for initially pushing Orchard Lounge into the live-music fray.

"We were posting mixes online, and I was really trying to get them into the ears of people who don't want to hear electronic music. People who are into rock bands, or jam bands, or indie bands, whatever... and say 'Hey, check this out. It's maybe not four-on-the floor-stuff, but maybe a down-tempo mix.'" Silver's approach worked, and soon the crew started opening for live shows, where they found a new audience with, perhaps, an unexpected outcome. These audiences, unfamiliar with most DJs and records, were more open to hearing different sounds. "You can end a set with an ambient Aphex Twin track—you can't really do that in most clubs!" Silver exclaims.

And so Orchard Lounge has begun pimping e-music out to new audiences, and with rapid results. "Just this week, at a label party during the Winter Music Conference in Miami, we ran into a group who'd seen us in New York," recalls Bethany Lokken. "Across the room of this huge club, we see a guy sporting an OL shirt. He said he'd become interested in this music, from the record label Get Physical, by listening to our mixes!"

Now back from Miami, the Orchard Lounge will again play e-bassadors this Friday, spinning DJ sets along with a live performance from Future Rock, and allowing their varied musical tastes to reach a new audience. But does it ever get difficult maintaining a collective with three distinct personalities and tastes? "It hasn't been difficult to maintain the collective at all—if it ever does, I think the three of us will hang up the headphones in unison," Spencer Lokken says. "We absolutely love playing together... our tastes are so in line, even if one of us starts to get into a new sound, it won't be long until the other two members are fans as well. We simply want to continue to expose people to music they may have never been into before."