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Shiny Objects

Om Records founder branches out

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On two-part album 'Intermittent Dreams'/'Intermittent Soul', Om main man Chris Smith explores a wider gamut of sounds than ever before

You might know San Francisco's Om Records best as the label that, alongside Naked Music, helped establish the Bay Area as an epicentre of the global deep/soulful house scene in the late 90s and early 00s. You might now them best for the long-running *Mushroom Jazz* and *Om Lounge* compilation series, which focus on more leftfield, downtempo sounds. Or you might know them best for their hip-hop catalogue.

It doesn't really matter, because none of the above really prepare you for *Intermittent Dreams/Intermittent Soul*, the latest offering from label co-founder and co-owner Christopher J Smith. Released under his Shiny Objects moniker, the album's a two-part affair: *Intermittent Dreams*, which dropped in August, finds him

exploring downtempo/midtempo pastures and has an experimental, psychedelic feel, while *Intermittent Soul*, which came out last month, is closer in feel and tempo to Om's more traditional deep house input – just without the trademark soulful sweetness.

Instead, there's an altogether moodier, broodier feel, with elements of both European-style progressive/melodic house and synth-y nu-disco. The tracks here would work in the warm-up or on weary small-hours floors, for sure, but really it's designed, like *Intermittent Dreams*, as an end-to-end listening experience, rather than being crafted with the dancefloor in mind. Which was, as Smith explains below, the whole point.

With Om's 25th anniversary looming on the horizon as well, we gave Chris a call at his home in San Francisco – a home he'd been unable to return to for a little while, due to the forest fires that have been raging in California. But with that danger thankfully now passed, Chris was able to tell us all about his Shiny Objects...



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Shiny Objects - 5AM With You feat. Matias Tasley

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You had a couple of Shiny Objects EPs out previously, around 2012 or so. So what was the impetus to start up a new alias back then, and what was the impetus to bring it back now?

"Well, musically that material was... I've actually put about eight singles and EPs out under that name over the past six years, really at that intersection of house and techno and disco. That's what I do in my DJ sets: I go on this journey where I'm playing dark funk and some deep shit, into disco and techno, and the Shiny Objects moniker was really just me, on the production side, going down that route."

So just to differentiate it from the more straight-up house-y stuff under your own name?

"Yeah, exactly. That was where it started. And then this album started with me – and I'm sure you've heard this from a million different artists and producers! – wanting to make more of a complete artist album. It started off wanting do to more kind of midtempo, electronic material that wasn't DJ-driven, and that would hold together as an album. And then I ended up making a lot of material that what was more uptempo, more kinda weird dark funk stuff, and that's when I decided to split it into two parts. So the first half is more sort of dreamy but gritty, and then the second half is the more uptempo, funky stuff."

For me, *Intermittent Dreams* is more... almost psychedelic, more of a listening experience, whereas *Intermittent Soul* is more dancefloor-friendly. Is that a fair analysis?

"Yeah, absolutely. I really wanted *Intermittent Dreams* to keep that consistent vibe, and not wander into more uptempo material."

Was the listening experience the *only* reason for splitting the album like that, or is there an economic advantage in releasing the album in two parts?

"I don't think there's any economic advantage to anything, these days! *[laughs]* No, in fact my label manager was pretty opposed to the idea, he said it just makes everything more complicated, but I really wanted to keep them as two separate bodies of work that nevertheless tie together."



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Did you ever think that approach could be counter-productive, in that someone could buy one album and get a one-sided picture of what Shiny Objects is about?

"Well, maybe! But I really just wanted to have a body of work that someone could press play and listen to the whole album as an experience... and then the same with the second part but in a different mood. Music, from a listening perspective, it's all about your mood and how you're feeling and what you want to hear right now.

"In the past I've always mixed things up a lot but then it was like hold on, when I want to listen to an artist, I'm in a specific mood and I want that to flow through, you know? It's like, if you're a Beatles fan, you know if you're in mood for *With The Beatles* or *Sgt Peppers* that day."

Is the album entirely a one-man affair, or have you been working with other people?

"It's pretty much me doing all the live production and mixing but I did bring in my friend Matias Tasley to play harmonica and guitar on the track *5am With You*, and there's another guitarist called Steve Freund who plays on *Event Horizon*. He's the guitarist in Matthias's band, MT & The Wolves. I really wanted a kind of David Gilmour-esque guitar solo on that track – which is basically just blues guitar, which is what Steve does."

When I first heard *Intermittent Dreams*, I was thinking "this is a bit of departure for Om"... but then it's not, really, is it? Because as well as the deep, soulful house there's always been that downtempo strand to the label, with the *Om Lounge* and *Mushroom Jazz* albums...

"Yeah, we've been doing downtempo electronic music in various forms since the very beginning. We've put out tons of hip-hop records, too! We put out *Groove Armada* and *Underworld* – we've always handled a diverse range of material. On the DJ side we were really known for deep house, but the label's always been a lot broader than that.

So do you see *Intermittent Dreams* as a continuation of that, or is it still something of a departure in your eyes?

"I don't really see it as either, because this wasn't really about Om as a label, it was about me as an artist and what came out. Basically I started making a couple of tracks, like *5am With You* and *Event Horizon*, and I thought 'Okay, there's a nice groove here, let's make a whole record with this groove'.

"For me, when I'm making music, what comes out is what comes out! I don't wake up in the morning with a track in my head, then go in the studio and bash it out."



Let's talk about Om Records more generally. You've touched on how broad the label's output has been but looking back at the discography it strikes me that it's become even broader... when I was listening to, say, Colette's album 15 years ago, I wouldn't have expected the same label to be putting out Bassnectar records!

"Yeah, that's true. With Bassnectar, what happened was we met at Burning Man and became friends. Then he did a track for the *Golden Gate Breaks* album, and then we put out his first single for Om, which was much more space-y and breaks-y than the stuff he does now. So that's how that came about: it wasn't like we just signed Bassnectar out of the blue, there was a relationship there."

Is that important to you – to work with people you get along with personally?

"Absolutely, there's no other way to do it! You basically have a vibe with someone or you don't. Obviously we have to like the music, first and foremost, but if you don't like the people it's generally not going to work. And conversely you often you end up signing things from people you knew anyway – Kaskade, for instance, was my production assistant at Om for several years before he started making music for us."

And now you've got the label's 25th anniversary coming up...

"Yeah! It's been quite a run, so we're excited to get to this moment. Our plans are still kind of taking shape, but we've got a new wave of artists that we're working with right now, we've got Twin Kids, Body Language, Rocket Empire, Reptile Room... so for our 25th anniversary we're doing an album where you'll see some collaborations between these artists and some of our more established people like Kaskade and Mark Farina. We didn't just want to do a compilation of legacy stuff."



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Shiny Objects - Bad Acid

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What about the events side of things, because I know you've been quite busy on that front?

"Yeah, I run a couple of venues in San Francisco, Great Northern and Monarch, plus we've been doing these big block party events, with 10,000 or 15,000 people and multiple stages, right in the middle of the city. So because I'm also running these venues, we've kind of taken a step back from putting on any Om events these past few years... but now that we're developing this new stable of artists we'll definitely be doing some events on the west coast and hopefully further afield in the US as well."

"But again, what I didn't want to do was what people are always asking me to do, which is like, a big event with all our legacy acts, I'd rather do something that's more forward-looking. I mean, I love all the stuff we've done over the years, but I don't want to keep rehashing it."

Am I also right in thinking Om is purely an albums label these days?

"More or less, at the moment. We haven't put any vinyl out for a while – we've kind of removed ourselves from the fray of putting out club singles week in, week out. We still do singles but they're not the focus any more."

What brought on that decision?

"I think it was about three years ago that we started the transition. Constantly pushing club tracks on the download sites now is a tough job, because there's something like 10,000 tracks released every week... that's not a fun proposition. We'd rather focus on artist albums, something with a bit more substance."

Has having the venues helped in terms of keeping things going financially, or are the venues and Om separate entities?

"Yeah, they're completely separate. But it's played a part, in that between the venues and my own music, I don't have to focus exclusively on running the label, which I think has helped keep it going, just in terms of my own sanity and me not burning out with it."

"That said, running nightclubs is a complete fucking nightmare, so it's hard as well! But I have really good partners, so that makes it work."



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Shiny Objects - I Get You, I Got You

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Last question... what's next? With 25 years of Om under your belt, are any thoughts of retirement or moving on starting to creep in?

"Well, I already have my next EP ready, and a bunch of new music I'm working on... no, I think I can continue doing this for quite a while. I feel young, and I'm still doing it, you know? I can get out there and DJ and party with the best of them! I have a lot of things I'm doing but I'll continue to DJ and produce music and put on events for the foreseeable future."

Words: Russell Deeks

Intermittent Dreams and Intermittent Soul are out now on Om Records

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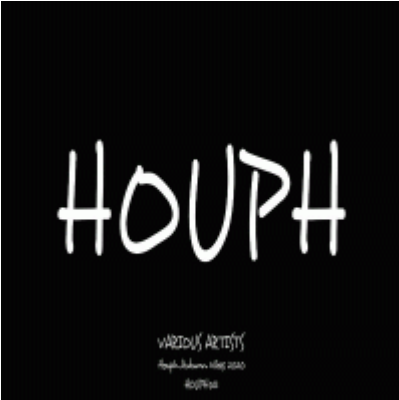
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