





## IN THE STUDIO: ALIAS

Anticon's dream-hop maestro steps away from the sampler.

WORDS: BRANDON IVERS PHOTO: MORGAN HOWLAND

Ever since crate-digging purists became indie rap's greatest limitation, artists like Anticon's Alias have gone far out of their way to shake up expectations. Shying away from both mainstream rap's fascination with synth gloss and hip-hop traditionalism, Alias' lo-fi experimentation recalls records that never existed, resulting in a dusty combination of garage production and gritty electronics.

Alias' sound transformation didn't happen overnight. A string of releases (beginning with 2003's *Muted*) show the evolution in progress, with each release up to last year's *Brookland/Daklyn*, and his latest collection of remixes, increasing in musical ambition and instrumental range. And contrary to conventional wisdom, the results haven't sucked. Perhaps Alias proves you can teach an old sampler dude new tricks?

Alias' *Collected Remixes* (Anticon) is out now. [www.myspace.com/alias](http://www.myspace.com/alias)

### WHY DID YOU SHIFT TOWARDS USING SYNTHESIZERS?

When I first started making beats, it was all with a sampler and records—that was it. It was kind of this unspoken rule that everything had to be sampled off rare records, and it started getting really restrictive. I had done music like that for a while, and I just wanted to figure out my own sound... figure out what notes go together. So I bought a guitar and a Korg MS-2000, and just started toying around with them, figuring out chords.

### WAS THERE ANYONE THAT INFLUENCED YOU TOWARDS PARTICULAR GEAR?

Dax Pierson [from Subtle] was probably the most influential person for me. [He] had all these vintage synthesizers, and he'd let me sit around and play with them. And then I went on a tour with Themselves, and Dax was on that tour, too. Listening and watching what he was doing, playing basslines, and just doing different effects and stuff made me want to start messing around with synthesizers and tweaking my own sounds.

### DO YOU SEE ANY PARALLELS BETWEEN CRATE-DIGGING AND FINDING OLD SYNTHESIZERS?

Definitely. There was this one time I found a Casio CZ-101 at this swap meet, and I got it for like 30 bucks. It was kinda cool; I was all excited about it, and this guy stops me and was like, "Is that a CZ-101?! Man, I'll give you \$50 for it right now!" No [laughs]. But yeah, it's got that same "on the hunt" feel... finding that little gem in a big pile of stuff.

### WHEN YOU'RE WORKING WITH NEW GEAR, HOW DO YOU GET THINGS TO SOUND DIRTY?

Mainly through using compression and adding a lot of reverb. But one of the main things I use, as far as effecting, is the [Boss] SP-303. I don't really use the sampling part of it—I use it as an effects processor. It has this "vinyl simulation" effect, which has three different knobs: one is for compression; the other two are for a warbling sound and little clicks and pops. But if you turn down those other knobs and just use the compression, it really gives this fat, warm sound. It's really cool to run synths into that while you're recording... It really flattens everything out and takes away that clean tinniness. I also run drums into the SP-303 sometimes to give them that 12-bit SP-1200 sound.

### BUT YOU'RE STILL USING AN MPC, RIGHT?

I definitely use the MPC [2000]... I use it to chop up and sequence before I record into Pro Tools. And from Pro Tools, I do the arranging and further editing. But basically, I have my turntables running into my SP-303, and the SP-303 running into my MPC. It's kind of in the path of the turntable, so if I'm sampling drums and I want them to be fat and dirty, I can use that [SP-303] compression effect before I even sample them.

### SO DO YOU JUST GO PIECE-BY-PIECE, RECORDING EACH PART INTO PRO TOOLS AND ARRANGING IT FROM THERE?

Yeah. I used to start with the drums, but lately I've been doing the drums last. Because the drums are such a focal point in my music, I always want them to be really prevalent in the mix. So I've been kind of building basslines and melodies around a click track, and once I get a feel for how it's going to sound, I'll move on to the drums. That's where I end up spending the most time.

### YOU ALWAYS HEAR PEOPLE CLAIMING THEY CAN'T MAKE ANYTHING BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE CERTAIN PIECES OF GEAR. HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE THAT?

I didn't even own my own MPC until 2001! I was always borrowing other people's MPCs or bringing records over to people's houses. I was never like, "My shit sucks because I don't have my own equipment..." I really think you just have to make do with whatever you can get your hands on.



In Alias' studio (counter-clockwise from top): Casio CZ-101, Korg MS-2000, Akai MPC 2000XL, Boss SP-303