

FRANKIE

One day Slough will recognise it's contribution to house music with the naming of the Terry Farley Estate. Until that date comes the good citizens of Chicago already have the honour of the being the first to recognise a; sorry, the godfather of house music with Frankie Knuckles Way. With a career has spanning 4 decades of DJing and an association with quality that has followed him through his career. From his remix of 'Let No Man Put Asunder' thru 'Tears' to 'Keep On Moving.' A key member of Def Mix who will soon be celebrating 20 years of existence with a weekend of parties at London's Turnmills. Put plain and simply Faith Strobelight Honey Fanzine loves Frankie with a Terry Farley interview with the man himself.

The last time most of us saw you at Turnmills was for Danny Rampling's farewell party that was fabulous, I stayed there till 12'o clock Sunday lunchtime. What did you think of that party?
Oh, I was over the moon about that party because I absolutely love Danny Rampling and we've been really great friends for a long time. I have an enormous amount of respect for him. It kind of threw me for a loop that he was actually retiring! Because to me this is one of those lifestyles that the minute it sucks you in it has you for the rest of your days but I guess that isn't necessarily true with most folks.

Well he's still looking for his restaurant.
Yeah - and what's it like a year, a year and a half now?

Exactly maybe he'll be back?
Well I know he's done the occasional gig here and there and I believe he's going to play with us this summer.

OK, where will that be do you know?
At Pacha I believe, please don't quote me on it but I think he's going to be playing with us at Pacha.

Let's get back to the start of Def Mix. Did that coincide with you moving back to New York from Chicago?
Yes it did and it wasn't something that was planned at all. I had just moved back to New York and I was playing downtown at this club called The World, which was probably the most popular club at the time because the Garage had closed. Everybody was going to The World and this other place round the corner that David Mancuso owned called Choice. The World closed at 5 and then everyone would go round the corner to Choice and stay till noon, 1, 3 o'clock in the afternoon and I used to hang out there as well. What happened is that when I went to join the record pool when I got back right at the same Judy and David was just coming online with Def Mix.

I had a number of different people who were pushing remixes on me and people that were trying to book me to travel to do all these different gigs in the UK. And sitting down talking to Judy she was like 'what are you doing now you're back in New York?' and I said 'well I'm trying to get my footing, I'm playing at the World right now - I'm just taking one day at a time'. But then I went on to tell her about all these different remix offers I was getting. I mean I had all this stuff in Chicago before I got back to New York and I think that that's pretty much what opened the door. You know she was hanging out in the office talking and I'd just met David for the first time. I guess after I left they had a meeting about it and decided that perhaps they should bring me on board as I had something to bring to the table and I think it was like a couple of days later or a week later or something that I went back into the office, we sat down and they presented the opportunity to me. So it worked out perfectly because you know all of a sudden I'm told that I need management and I'd never had management before. So Judy and I sat down, talked about it and we decided to do it on a trial basis for 6 months and that six months turned into twenty years!! I'm still here and I'm still with her.

The whole Def mix sound, and there is a definite sound from the remixes, do you think that it's a sound that could have only come from New York and only at that time? Do you agree that it was very evocative?
I think that it could have only come from this company and I'll tell you why. With you being a producer and remixer as well. You guys knew exactly what you were trying to achieve with all the different stuff that you worked on remix wise and production wise you knew exactly what you were after, where that bottom needs a sound, what that kick needs to feel like and all the different elements that you would put into the work that you were doing and the quality of what it needed to sound like. I mean you guys knew exactly what you were after. Well we did the same thing here, everything we did needed to go through quality control and Judy was quality control. You guys might have been different. You might have been your own quality control.

SAYS



Pete was the quality control... Haha
So you know what I'm talking about? Judy was our quality control as she and I come from the same place. David is younger than we are, but she and I came from the same place. We both grew up listening to the same music and listening to the same styles. Music that was coming out of Philadelphia and most of the music that was produced in Philadelphia back in the late 60's to early 70's. You can still listen to it now and still hear the quality of the recording. That was the bar she set. It had to be as good as that or better and I think that having that kind of quality control at the helm of what we were doing is what helped define the sound we came up with. I think that sticking with it as long as we have, we don't remix as much as we did, and that sound has lasted...

Absolutely
Like the sound of Philadelphia. It has lasted and it probably always will.

In my opinion your hook-up with Satoshi was the template for that whole kind of thing - do you agree?
Absolutely

How did you guys meet?
It was my first tour of Japan; the cosmetics

company Shisheido were launching a new line of cosmetics for men. They were doing a whole month promotional thing and they brought me in to be the DJ at all these different parties they were having all over Japan. What happened was the advertising company who booked me in for this had hired Satoshi to pretty much play a fanfare before I would start every night and Satoshi was in the DJ booth with his keyboard and would do a whole different number every time and I just kept listening to everything he was doing every night and thought 'damn this boy is playing!' I mean he spoke no English at all but I had an interpreter with me, we began to talk through the interpreter and we became friends. I remember one of the last things I told him just before I left after being there for a whole month was that we need to keep the lines of communication open and that it would be nice to work with him someday and he was saying the same thing. So what happened is when I got back to New York, I think it was 2 months later he called me up, said he had this idea for a song and he sent me a cassette in the mail. I thought it was brilliant. I thought it was fine just the way it was, all instrumental. So I played it to Judy and she said 'it a beautiful melody but I think it needs some lyrics, I think it needs a singer

on it.' Judy was being the old school executive producer that she is. So I called Satoshi back and said 'If you could get anybody in the world to sing on this track who would you want to sing on it?' and he said 'Robert Owens'. I was like 'well hell that's easy!!' Robert and I are very good friends. I had just brought him into NYC because we were about to get started on his album because Chris Blackwell at Island Records had offered me an album deal so I had brought Robert in to talk about possibly doing this album with him. So what ended up happening was we were going to 'test the waters' so to speak and work together on 'Tears'. So that weekend Robert and I sat in my apartment and wrote the lyrics and melodies to Tears. And it worked out pretty well so Satoshi came in and we went and recorded it. The rest was history.

A friend of ours describes his favourite ever clubbing moment as when he heard you play Sounds of Blackness 'Pressure' at the Sound Factory at 6am with the whole drama of the lights and the glitterball flooding the room. Did that residency of yours help shape how you were making records at that time?
Yeah it had a lot to do with it. That was probably the busiest time for us at Def Mix

FRANKIE

because I think we were pretty much living in the studio 5/6 days a week and I had just started working at Sound Factory and what happened was I had just signed a deal with Virgin UK. Eric Kupper and I had just finished doing the Whistle Song and I had been testing the Whistle Song out there and it was creating a big buzz. So to me Sound Factory was perfect to test all this material out. David was working at Red Zone at the same time and I might be in the B room at Quad recording and he might be in the A room or the penthouse working on whatever he's working on up there and I'm downstairs and it could be Saturday night and I'm at Sound Factory playing and he's at Red Zone or something that that. David would bring tracks that he'd finished working on earlier that day to test them out at Red Zone and if I was working he'd run over to Sound Factory when he got off work, because the Sound Factory would be open until noon the next day and Red Zone would close at 5 in the morning. David would come over and all of a sudden we're both in the booth at the same time so a lot of the stuff we were working on we pretty much used our dance floors as a testing ground. What happened is when I did The Pressure it was the same thing it was just a matter of testing it out and the very first night is probably the night this guy is talking about.

Haha

You know what I mean? We just choreographed this whole thing with the lighting and strategically choosing just the right moment just when everybody was peaking on whatever they were on! You know what I mean?

Absolutely

And it was just a strategic move and it just snatched everybody wide open.

Danny Rampling came for his 30th as well didn't he?

Yeah

I remember him telling me that that was the record that stood out as well.

Yeah it really just blew everybody's minds

I read in a magazine that you've described the Sound Factory as the last great room in New York. Do you still stand by that? What does that club mean to you?

It was a turning point for me. I had just moved back to New York after being in Chicago for a long time whilst running two clubs of my own in comparison to working in a place like the Sound Factory but you know the clubs I had here in Chicago were really small potatoes compared to that and my whole world completely turned around when I moved to NYC. I was playing at places like that and it brought a lot more focus to me. I mean the whole scene changed because before that whatever house music anyone knew anything about was all Chicago house and all of a sudden there was the introduction of New York house at that particular point and so there was a NY house scene, the garage scene and those are the things that were most prevalent at the time

It seemed like that to me as well. I went there quite a few times. Their seemed to be so many fabulous and interesting people around at that particular moment in time!

Oh yeah absolutely and everybody was hanging out.

Is there nothing like that at NY at the moment?

Honestly I couldn't tell you. I would possibly say the Crow Bar but it's a completely different animal now. New York City nightclub scene is a completely different animal now. When you're talking about the kind of

celebrities that are hanging out now, you're talking about Paris Hilton! They are more like celebutantes, somebody like that to me, she's gotten her status from her folks and from her parents' name. The kind of people that were hanging out at places like the Sound Factory, you're talking about artists like Keith Haring, singers like Luther Vandross, people that had made significant strides within this business, artistry and stuff like that that brought a lot to the table. You know they were right down there on the dance floor with everybody else like regular people. That's classic New York. I mean you could be walking around Madison Avenue or anywhere around Soho and bump into anybody and nobody goes crazy, they just treat them like they're regular people. So if someone like that is dancing right next to you and you're in a club like Sound Factory it shows you a real side of them. New York doesn't have that anymore I don't think. I don't think there are any clubs that have that in NY anymore.

I have a cheeky question here, where the rumours of Junior Vasquez sabotaging the booth on the alternative weeks true?

Well he didn't play alternative weeks when I played there, he had quit so there is no truth to that rumour. The only reason I went to work there was because he had walked out and he was one of the partners. There were three people that owned it. Which was Phil Smith, Richard Grant and Jnr Vasquez. What happened was Jnr walked out and because I used to hang out there every Saturday night I thought he and I were friends. I would always go to the booth and let him know I was there, then go hang out over by the refreshment area. Phil Smith and I had become friends at the same time. Phil used to have this floating VIP room where you could get a drink because the place was really a juice bar and he had this floating VIP room. Phil would always wait until I got there to

start up the VIP room, it would be in one spot one week and then another week it might be someplace else. So he would grab me by the hand and say 'lets go up to the VIP room' and I thought it was a lot of fun. I mean what the hell! I felt like I belonged. So it was kind of fun and cool to do that. What happened was I was in the studio working on the Whistle Song and I get a phone call from Phil Smith saying Junior walked out am I available to play there Saturday night. It was a Monday when he called. So I had around 4 to 5 days to pull my shit together to go in there and play. I was like, 'yeah sure no problem'. Then I thought about it and I was like 'wait a minute'. Now if it had been anybody else, if it had been someone like Larry who I grew up with and had a long standing relationship with there is no way I would have gone and played. Because even when the Garage was open and Mike Brody who owned the Garage would fall out with Larry and call me up to ask me to play I wouldn't do it just out of respect for the fact that it was Larry's room, that room was built to his specifications. We had that kind of camaraderie that kind of respect and much as I tried to develop that kind of camaraderie and respect with Jnr it just didn't happen. So when Phil called me up and asked me to go and play I said 'Yeah sure'. I mean I thought about it for a couple of days and of course I asked around 'they just offered me the Sound Factory what should I do?' and David was like 'take it!'. And I asked Judy and she said 'you'd be a fool not to take it.' It just kind of went around like that for a while and by that Wednesday I told Phil - 'yeah I'll be there'. So I went in and I did it. Of course Jnr ran around the city after I played there the first night saying that I stole his job from him and this, that, the other you know and I was like that makes no sense, 'you're a one third owner of that place how do I take your job?'

So it was just one of those strange rumours then? A New York rumour?

Oh yeah there was all kinds of rumours going around like that.

Do you still do the party in Chicago called the House of Blues?

Yeah yeah

When does that happen?

It usually happens twice a year, 4th July and Thanksgiving. But I have moved it around a couple of times. Sometimes I move it to Sound Bar and this year I'm probably going to try some other rooms. Because House of Blues is a theatre so it isn't always available to me even if I try and book it nine months in advance. It's not always available. Sometimes they might have somebody like Tom Jones in there or the late James Brown or someone like that.

Do you get to play disco music there?

I get to play whatever I want.

Do a lot of the old Chicago crowd come out for that?

I don't go there. I don't play that old school stuff, not at all.

Not even once a year?

No not even once a year and I'll tell you why, there are a lot of old people. You know it's interesting because I had lunch with an old friend the other day and he was planning on producing this big old school party and wanted to know if I would be interested in doing it. So I said no and he was like 'I really gotta ask you why?' I said that as much fun as those parties are they cater to one particular audience

and that's the people who used to hang out back then. So doing a one off or something like that is fine but in this city there are so many people who are just completely locked into that and even if I played that stuff every week there wouldn't be enough of those people to come out and support it so what would be the point? These people want me to play this but they aren't coming out to support it so where does that leave me? I have to live in the here and now. Its not that I just live in Chicago, my career is everywhere else in the world. I have to travel wherever I'm wanted. There is nobody in this city who can pay me what I pay myself, that's one thing and number two I have lived all those records I remember getting them all when they were new. When they were promos I helped break them and helped turn them into classics, come on lets move on! Its 35 years later and why do I have to still play them? Just because a handful of people want to hear them! The thing about the people who are going to come out, really get it going and really enjoy it are all old people! They are responsible, they have families and kids who are adults now - you know what I mean? Their kids are hanging out! Ok so if I'm going to do something like that I'd rather do it on my own terms the way I want to do it in a much more intimate setting and be completely off the cuff. It's not going to be something structured or planned out like that. There are some many people who are playing these old school sets and they are playing the same old shit. My friend was like 'well that's why you should do it because there is so much stuff you could turn people on to' and I'm like 'look, I'm too busy concentrating on right now and what's happening now and trying to stay in this game'. I am trying to stay with the audience that's happening right now. If I go and do stuff like that it makes me feel like I'm stepping back and I don't think that would be very beneficial to me.

Ok one question about the Def Mix album that's coming out with Defected in England. Did the track selection trigger any specific memories for you?

Oh yeah a lot. A lot of memories.

Was it painful to leave anything off? Have you even done a tracklisting yet?

Well we're still working on it. I'm still working on it, David's working on his and Satoshi's working on his. I mean I've been looking at this discography every day now for the past nine months and I mean looking at it is like choosing your top friends on myspace! Every day or every week it can change - I mean the top 5 pretty much stays the same. I mean 'Where Love Lives', 'I'll Be Your Friend' and those things will stay the same but there's so much other stuff that we did that I think is absolutely dynamic and amazing. I mean its not all 126bpm. It's not all up there like that. I mean there's a lot of other stuff, a lot of great soul stuff that we did that's truly dynamic and should be a part of it but you know every day it changes. We'll see.

SAYS

We've asked friends of Faith Strobilight Honey to contribute by naming their favourite track or remix by Frankie Knuckles, David Morales or Satoshi Tomiie in honour of our LOVE for the twentieth anniversary of the Def Mix collective.

Quentin Harris (Restricted Access)
Mariah Carey - Fantasy (Def Club Mix)
 My fave Def Mix remix is the David Morales mix of Mariah Carey's 'Fantasy'

Judy Russell (Downtown 161)
First Choice - Let No Man Put Asunder
 I love so much of what Frankie has done over the years but for me Frankie Knuckles = 5 words 'LET NO MAN PUT ASUNDER.' Reason why - the way Larry Levan paid tribute to his friend Frankie every time he played it at the club - it was always an experience.

Karisma (Cohesive Productions)
Mariah Carrey - Fantasy (Dub)
 I could pick the Morales mix of Jamiroquai's 'Space Cowboy' but I'm gonna go for another Morales remix, rather a dub that I love, which is Mariah Carrey and the 'Fantasy' (Dub). I love this because it breaks down into a Latin coolout, then comes back in with Mariah's vocal. On point.

Honey Dijon (Peaches)
Stevie V - Dirty Cash
 My favourite producer from the Def mix crew was David Morales from the days of his residency at the Red Zone. It was the first time I think anyone captured the New York



after-hours sound on vinyl. It was dark, sweaty, sexy, slower in bpm than most house tracks in the late 80's or early 90's, and so atmospheric. The one track that stands out to me is Stevie V's Dirty Cash.

Kenny Hawkes (20/20)
Donna Summer - Melody of Love (Wanna Be Loved) (Stomp Mix)
 Oh man, so many I can think of, but if I have to name one, I guess it's going to have to be Donna Summer - 'Melody Of Love (Wanna Be Loved)' (Stomp Mix) on Casablanca Records. It's a timeless mad fucked up dub, that you can still play out now!



Jimpster (Freerange)
Frankie Knuckles - Your Love
 Well as far as I'm concerned Frankie Knuckles pretty much IS house music, and 'Your Love' is right up there in the top 10 club tracks of all time. Knuckles production legacy goes way beyond that of his peers due to the sheer quality and vision in his remixes as well as original material. A true legend.

DEF MIX

Bill Brewster (DJ History/Lowlife)
Sheena Easton - 101
 Killer late night classic from the end of the 80s. A favourite of Vasquez at the Sound Factory, where he would often pull this out just as night was turning into morning. You need two copies, though, the main mix intro is very short and the dub is promo only.



Roual Galloway (Shrunken Head)
Frankie Knuckles - It's Hard Sometimes
 The start of the end of modern soul at the early Southport Weekenders. The lazy beats of Frankie supplement the inspirational vocal delivery of Shelton Becton. A sublime soulful end of the night anthem.

Nick Chacona (Moodmusic) Frankie Knuckles - Waiting on my Angel
 Reasons why? It's a historic milestone in the evolution of house from Italo, disco and synthpop, and mainly because it's the JAM.



Sasse (Moodmusic)
Robert Owens - I'll Be Your Friend
 I have to admit I'm quite a fan of old Morales stuff, but it's more or less impossible to pin it down to one remix only. Maybe 'Let Me Show You Love' from Romanthony or Inner City 'Watcha Gonna Do With My Lovin'. Or his Red Zone mixes of 'I'll be Your Friend'. It must be the Robert Owens one. It's a classic TUNE which always sounds fresh and sooo emotional. And such a classic production taking the NYC vocal house thing to a new coolness. Fucking brilliant.

Harri (Sub Club)
Clive Griffin - I'll Be Waiting (Red Zone)
 A Sub Club anthem that I still play today from time to time.

Yogi (DJ Mag)
Frankie Knuckles - Tears
 It's one of the most soulful garage records of all time. The lyrics are not about the usual subject matter of love. The lyrics are quite unusual and very clever. It's a beautiful record with Robert Owens at his best.

Terry Farley (Faith)
Phil Perry - Amazing Love
 Brings back some amazing memories when I first heard this played by Tony Humphries at a warehouse party in Wembley promoted by the Ramplings. It's a proper six am lights on euphoric end of night moment. Run a very close second by the tougher side of Def Mix with the Morales mix of Black Sheep.

Diesel (Xpress 2)
Pet Shop Boys - So Hard (Red Zone Dub)
 It's a record that myself and Rocky have played a lot over the years. It first came out about '90-'91 and it was a big record at a night we used to play called 'The Yellow Book'. A great example of Morales building a groove, very atmospheric but dark in mood. Also another tune if pushed vocal wise it would have to be 'I've had enough' - Denitria Champ (Frankie's favourite Mix) an absolutely stunning spiritual vocal tune remixed to perfection by Frankie Knuckles.



Dave Lee (Joey Negro)
Black Sheep - Strobilight Honey (Morales Def Mix)
 David Morales told me this was his second attempt at the mix of 'Strobilight Honey', his initial sweeter version having been knocked back by the record company. As a remixer myself, I know it's hard to re-do a mix and really turn it out after your first version didn't get a good reception from the label. But Morales excelled himself.

Murray Richardson (Rebel Waitz)
Doug Lazy - H.O.U.S.E.
 All of Morales' early remixes for Def Mix



were spot on and all had absolutely killer deep basslines, for me personally his finest productions being anything he put his hand to in 1990!. It's impossible for me to pick just one favourite but his mixes on Doug Lazy's 'H.O.U.S.E.' were dynamite! And his 'Dub me mix' of Yello's 'Unbelievable' is a ridiculously good track too!

Jerome Sydenham (Ibadan)
Frankie Knuckles - Tears
 This is not only one of my top all time House tunes but it came at a time when I thought it couldn't get any better. The Song, the vocal and the production came together with such perfect harmony it was a heavenly experience hearing at Club Zanzibar with tony Humphries doing it extreme justice in the mix. A classic.



Hectors Romero (Def Mix)
Ce Ce Peniston - Finally
 I first heard 'Finally' by chance. I was hanging out with some friends at Shelter nightclub, NYC back in '91. The DJ was Timmy Regisford and he dropped 'Finally' for the first time there and it was an instant classic. I didn't even know Timmy but I had to train-spot and asked what it was. Sure enough it was Morales' latest remix gem that he just received fresh out of the studio. A classic Def mix moment for a classic Def mix remix.



Louie Vega (Masters At Work)
Robert Owens - I'll Be Your Friend (Red Zone)
 Or Frankie Knuckles and Satoshi Tomiie with 'Tears' or Frankie Knuckles 'Whistle Song'.

Frankie Knuckles (Frankie Knuckles)
Frankie Knuckles - It's Hard Sometimes
 Of the stuff I've written and produced I would have to say 'Its Hard Sometimes'. It's very personal. Number 1 it's the first song I've ever written solo - y'know I wrote the lyrics to it solo. I wrote the music with Satoshi but I wrote the lyrics solo and probably of all the stuff that we've remixed I would have to say David's remix of 'What Is This Thing Called Love' by Alexander O Neal.

