

## ROBERT MILES

### BIOGRAPHY 2006

The story of Robert Miles, born Roberto Concina, is that of three journeys, geographical, spiritual and above all musical. Though he's circled the globe many times and picked up more than a few glittering prizes along the way, it's music and Robert's sheer love of it that has propelled him from a small town in the Swiss mountains to success in the world's music capitals and beyond. Moreover this same love of music burns as fiercely in him still as he prepares to undertake the next phase of his remarkable voyage.

#### EARLY DAYS

Robert Miles' journey began in 1969 in the Swiss town of Fleurier from where the family moved to Italy when he was still a young boy. It was here in the small rural town of Fagagna, some 100km from Venice that the young Robert first discovered his love for music via the family piano and a pair of turntables.

Abandoning early thoughts of a career in electronic engineering to dedicate himself to music he left school at 17 and turned his technical knowledge to setting up a pirate radio station, making his debut as a live DJ around the same time. This combination of self-sufficiency and drive is a recurring motif in Robert's career and one which was later to prove all too necessary in his dealings with and eventual escape from the corporate music machine.

Over the next few years he built his reputation as a live and radio DJ and increasingly taken over by an enthusiasm for experimental and electronic music treated his home region to the sounds of some of his formative influences; Kraftwerk, Robert Fripp, Brian Eno, Bill Laswell, Future Sound of London, even Stockhausen, several of whom he's collaborated with over the years and with whom one can see him having an ever increasing kinship.

#### DREAMLAND

The Robert Miles story for the world at large begins of course with the composition of 'Children' in 1994, written in a 4m x 4m bunker studio he had personally soundproofed and assembled in a converted garage not far from the family home. 'Children' was Robert's immediate and typically honest emotional response to pictures of the child victims of war with which his father had just returned from a humanitarian mission to the ex-Yugoslavia. So moved was Robert by the plight of these innocents, caught up in so much devastation and atrocity, that he felt compelled to begin work on the track the very next morning as he returned from playing his DJ set in the early hours.

'Children' was to be a life-changing track for Robert in many ways, most of all perhaps in the confidence and reassurance that after much hard work and a number of initial stumbles he had for the first time 'found' himself as a composer, As he was to discover the first time he aired the track in public at his next DJ set;

"I was anxious to see how people would take to this piece. The following Sunday morning I opened my DJ set with 'Children', feeling both scared and excited... the DJ just before me had ended with a very heavy piece. To break the existing mood with a melodic tune and a long intro could have simply cleared the floor. The people in front of me stopped in their tracks, their eyes fixed to the console almost in annoyance. I felt my blood run cold and I remember lowering my eyes in fear. The record reached its soaring climax. From the floor came a thunderous noise... I lifted my gaze and saw a sea of hands reaching up high and a smile stamped on every face. A girl approached me in tears. "What music is this?" she asked me. I don't think I shall ever forget that moment, when I realized that my feelings had been conveyed through my music. My dream turned into reality."

From there the track built steadily from the underground, championed by DJs and club audiences one by one around the world. Typically when the track first arrived as a single in the UK, Radio 1 refused to play it as it was an instrumental and moreover a 'dance' instrumental at that, rather an

ironic turn of events for a ex-radio DJ. Only in 1996 when pressure from the UK club scene became overwhelming did 'Children' finally make the playlist and explode into the national consciousness and beyond, becoming a global phenomenon in the truest sense. 'Children' reached #1 in 18 countries, selling a staggering 5 million copies worldwide. In defining a genre it opened the door for much of the 'chill-out' and down-tempo music that followed in its wake.

Not surprisingly Robert had by this time been hungrily snapped up by a major label, BMG's 'Deconstruction' and temporarily escaping the media frenzy that had engulfed him returned to his bunker in Italy to finish the rest of what would become his first album 'Dreamland'. On release 'Dreamland', which also includes the singles 'One and One' and 'Fable', was perhaps even more successful than 'Children' itself, racking up a mighty 16 platinum and 12 gold discs in 21 countries around the world. Industry plaudits naturally flowed and the following year (1997) Robert picked up a host of trophies including a Brit award (Best International Newcomer), two BMIs and a World Music award (Best Selling Male Newcomer of the Year). Wherever the peaks of the music world were to be found that year, Robert Miles was assuredly at the summit.

### 23AM

With corporate champagne flowing and balance sheets healthily in the black everything seemed in place for an equally glittering second album to follow, aside that is for the one factor seemingly always excluded from such calculations, the wishes of the artist himself!

An essentially private man with a seldom-found integrity and devotion to his music, Robert Miles has poured his passion and energies, his very heart and soul into becoming many things over the years, composer, producer, musician, DJ, but one thing he has never had any interest in, indeed instinctively quite the reverse, is becoming a commodity and it was to the threshold of this precipice that he felt himself being pushed by label, management and media alike during the preparations for his second album '23 AM'.

Still inexperienced in the ways of the music business and feeling himself increasingly alienated from the people around him, Miles not only withdrew completely from the interview circuit (during the previous year he had been doing up to 15-20 interviews a day) but also asked that instead of new photographs on the album cover and elsewhere he be represented by a black silhouette of himself to represent what he felt was his place in the pop-star system, "to suggest the insignificance of 'image' – music above everything else". One can only imagine the mixture of incredulity and horror with which this news was greeted in boardrooms around the world.

Now resident in London and distanced as far as he was able from the trappings of the fame-game, Miles meanwhile set to work on the music for '23AM';

"I wanted this to be a conceptual album; an album which would reflect the experiences and understanding gathered on my travels. 11 pieces describing the life cycle of a normal human being, such as I wanted to be - starting from birth, through the vicissitudes of everyday life, to maturity and finally to death. The scores were the translation into music of my state of mind at that moment: the desire to hold on to a normal life, to run away from those who wanted to overburden me; the need to be free again to give vent to my feelings."

Eventually released in November 1998, '23AM' (containing the resolutely titled single 'Freedom') was enthusiastically greeted by many of Robert's early fans and indeed is still cited by many as the preferred album of the first two. For a variety of reasons however it failed to repeat the sensational commercial performance of its predecessor. The artist's refusal to take part in any TV or radio interviews undoubtedly contributed and a spectacularly mishandled record company marketing campaign did the rest. The increasingly strained relationship between Miles and his record company and then-management had now been pushed beyond breaking point, with the inevitable acrimonious consequences.

Locked in a contract in which both record company and management had envisaged Robert Miles functioning as a kind of musical slot-machine, producing lucrative pay-outs of 'Dreamland'

clones for the foreseeable future regardless of his own artistic needs, and seemingly unwilling to perform on any other terms, Robert was for a while at a loss to do next. The major label career which less than three years earlier had seemed so promising was not only in tatters but as things stood seemed set to stop him releasing any of the music he actually wanted to write for the foreseeable future, thus consigning not only his career but his own musical voice to oblivion. Was this all he had forward to after so many years passionately learning his craft?

There was only one thing for it and with characteristic determination he set about freeing himself from the shackles of the corporate machine. It would be a gruelling process that would take several years but eventually, at considerable professional and legal cost, Robert would win back his artistic independence. He was at last free again to get the music he wanted out into the world.

## ORGANIK

The years in which Robert had been professionally silenced were far from dormant however as in the meantime he had been circumnavigating the globe as a live DJ. Visiting cultures and peoples in all points of compass (quite literally, from Lapland to South Africa and Brazil to Japan, it's easier to list the countries he didn't visit than those he did) and ever receptive along the way he had assembled a burgeoning mass of influences and experiences that were ready to find their way into his music. Personally recharged and artistically reinvigorated he relocated to Ibiza in early 2000 to begin work on what would become his third album 'Organik' in a secluded finca kilometres from the nearest town.

The record that emerged the following year was a deeply personal and for Robert a cleansingly contemporary one. Darker, more leftfield and drawing on a far wider palette than anything which might have been envisaged at the close of '23AM', 'Organik' draws on the deepest exploration of his musical self and earliest influences thus far as well as reflecting to a certain extent the traumatic period from which he was finally emerging (as titles such as 'Separation' and 'Release Me' would suggest). All of this is further synthesised with the experiences of his recent travels. As Robert said at the time "I've seen and experienced a lot of different cultures and that has had an effect. It's the interaction between European electronic music and other, more traditional sounds that fascinates me now."

Though undeniably introspective in tone, 'Organik' is in many ways a very outward looking album too; the influences from Robert's travels abound (India being particularly apparent) and there is often an air of joyful exuberance in the trying out of new musical directions and colours. For the first time too Robert worked with a host of instrumental collaborators, some of whom like Bill Laswell were early influences, others such as Nitin Sawhney and Trilok Gurtu friends and more recent discoveries. All were undeniably what are termed 'musicians' musicians' and the inspiring quality of their contributions reflects this, providing a fascinating counterpoint to the electronic textures Robert weaves around them.

This more experimental approach was not to everyone's taste however and most particularly not, as might be expected, at the average major record label who when approached simply did not understand what 'Organik' and the 'new' Robert Miles were all about. Finally bowing to the inevitable perhaps Robert decided to set up his own company 'S:Alt Records' (an acronym of 'Suitably Alternative') to put out his own music his own way. Remarkably the video for the album's lead single 'Paths' similarly fell foul of the mainstream, being banned by MTV as 'potentially disturbing'.

## FILM SOUNDTRACKS

If the music industry didn't get 'Organik' however then the film industry assuredly did. Over the years the often cinematic quality of Miles' music has meant that it has been taken up in the soundtracks of more than 100 films and TV commercials, and with 'Organik' Hollywood gave Miles his highest Soundtrack profile yet, placing the driving 'Trance Shapes' in the Matt Damon thriller 'The Bourne Identity'. In the world of Independent European Cinema meanwhile 'Improvisations PT2' was used to complement Ryuichi Sakamoto's score for the film 'Derrida'.

Nor was this appreciation at all one-sided. Robert has a long-standing love affair with the screen; "I have worked on music for adverts, but since the age of 14, when I became interested in music, it has been my dream to compose and produce a film score". Since the release of 'Organik' Miles has increasingly has been dividing his time between London and Los Angeles where in typically pragmatic style he's set himself to the task of developing a soundtrack career, taking ever-increasing amounts of scoring work as he builds up his profile in one of the toughest competitive environments on earth.

#### ORGANIK REMIXES

Further developing the collaborative element that had been such a liberating part of 'Organik', 2002 saw the release of a remix album, suitably titled 'Organik Remixes' which assembled reinterpretations of many of the original album tracks by a choice selection of leftfield and dance orientated artists including Future Sound Of London, 2nd Gen, Si Begg Alex Kid, Da Lata and KV5.

Future Sound Of London's pleasingly Beatle-esque reworking of 'Paths' further underscored the visual potential of Miles' music in being used to spearhead Jaguar's Winter 2004/5 TV ad campaign in the UK, while Robert's 'S:alted Remix' was used by Gucci for the launch of their new website in the USA. The mixing of cultures and musical styles that formed such a key part of 'Organik' is particularly evident on this track in both its remixed and original flavours. As Robert himself says "In a city like London that blend is not unusual, but not many other places have that same multi-cultural vibe. That is one of the reasons London is one of the best places in the world for music."

Robert has always enjoyed a very active relationship with his fans and a particularly engaging facet of 'Organik Remixes' is its inclusion of remixes by Kuzu and Fissure, two members of Miles' on-line community who secured their place on the album (and \$3000 each) by taking part in a remix competition run through his website.

#### MILES\_GURTU

Some of the most fruitful collaborations featured on the 'Organik' album were those featuring Indian jazz pioneer and master percussionist Trilok Gurtu and as India is the place on his travels that Robert found perhaps most beguiling what could be more natural than to explore the collaboration still further. So was born the 'Miles\_Gurtu' album released in 2004.

Another element of 'Organik' explored further on 'Miles-Gurtu' is that of live playing and the album is rooted in a very 21<sup>st</sup> century reimagining of the classic Jazz trio featuring ex-Mahavishnu Orchestra member Trilok on drums and percussion, Jon Thorne, whose jazz-tinged work with Lamb had been so innovative, on double bass and Robert and Mike Patto on keyboards. Still further live input was provided by 'Organik' veteran Nitin Sawnhey on guitar and other players including Paul Falloon, Toshinori Kondo and The Urban Soul Orchestra. All of this is then given a further dimension by interacting with Robert's cutting-edge electronics and superb production techniques.

The resulting album is quite remarkably successful and was lionised not only by those interested in the leftfield but also many in the Jazz and Asian underground worlds too.

#### THE FUTURE

Robert Miles is one of those rare musicians who takes the active development of his art as a central part of his professional life, and particularly in the various projects that have followed 'Organik' one can see a conscious and highly rewarding effort on his part to explore and develop new areas of his musical interests.

As he says himself "I have been working hard since I moved to London in 1996 to define my sound, and learned a great deal about life, music, the World (well different than the one described in my school books!)...Now I feel ready to move to a new phase of my creative life."

Already in the pipeline are a new Robert Miles solo album, which characteristically seems set to explore yet another facet of his musical personality with a new focus on songs and indie-rock based textures, yet another collaboration this time with guitar legend and experimental music pioneer Robert Fripp, and an album of more experimental music which will be released under his original name of Roberto Concina. Along the way there will be doubtless more soundtrack, production and remix work too.

In the course of his long journey Robert Miles has already travelled remarkable distances along many paths and ever restless, driven by the twin needs to explore and express the worlds outside and in, will undoubtedly cover much ground yet to places hitherto unimagined. In surveying it all, how and where does he place himself?

“After having ‘experimented’ with techno, electro, house, trance (the real one!!!), breakbeat, jungle, drum’n’bass, trip-hop, downtempo, ambient, fusion, world, jazz, rock, traditional music...I see myself as a 360 degree producer/composer/musician who loves creating ‘moments’. Driven by the need of finding emotional spots and conveying them through my compositions, something that will make a difference. It’s nice to dream...sometimes dreams become reality.”

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