

A 'step' by 'step' tour of the Skrillex Mothership

 By [Brandon Williams](#)

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Six times Grammy award-winner Skrillex hosted the Cape Town leg of his Mothership Tour at the Ostrich Farm last weekend. Being a massive dubstep enthusiast, there was simply no way I would miss an event of such epidemic proportions. Not even death could have stopped me. My reanimated corpse would still have found its way past security.

We arrived at the Ostrich Farm and proceeded to drive down a meandering rustic road of sand towards the parking area. To my surprise there wasn't a single ostrich in sight. I assumed they're all cowering in a subterranean bunker - and for good reason: there's a storm approaching, a bellowing blizzard of bass. Trying to find parking wasn't as nightmarish as I feared it would be, but upon stepping out of my vehicle, I instantly regretted my decision to wear flip-flops. While the concert area itself was grassy and somewhat lush, the parking area was a barren wasteland wherein sand managed stealthily to sneak its way into every orifice. The venue has hosted such legends as Paul van Dyk, so it isn't the worst and it's a great place to get a semi-outdoor festival feel without having to venture too far from the city.





A gentle breeze diffused the scent of smouldering "herbs" around the venue. Suburbanites were bracing themselves, reinforcing liver and lungs for the imminent audio storm. So we were chilling and bobbing our heads to Niskerone as we did some reinforcements of our own. True to his style, he dropped some ill jungle drum and bass beats, yet it was still way too early and the crowds were still way too sober to be jumping, stomping and just exuding energy in general. So the floor was sparsely populated, little hamlets of neo-hippies chilled on the grass in their circles, squeezing out their last bits of conversation before verbal audibility became compromised. The sun began to set, chemicals in glow sticks began to buzz. This is not to say that Niskerone didn't have a banger of a set, but, unfortunately, the vast majority of the crowd was still hunting for parking spaces around that time.

An ethereal gathering of "steppers" and "stompers"

Darkness completed its takeover and Haezer took the stage. All glow materials had awakened into their true forms and what was once a crowd of people became an ethereal gathering of "steppers" and "stompers". The beats drop and it's as though a mystical finger suddenly pushed the crowd's "on" button, triggering an explosion of energy and colour. What impressed me most about Haezer's dubstep set is the fact that he is not a dubstep DJ. Yet his tunes were indeed filthy and the fact that I was able to detect slight elements of breakbeat, industrial and glitchy electroclash in his mix, means that he masterfully managed to work a sense of his own style into a genre he doesn't usually dabble in.

Not having eaten since lunchtime, I decided to check out the food-and-drinks area. On my arrival at the food stalls, I noticed that the queues were not long at all. "One hot dog and chips please," I said to one of the obvious strategically gorgeous cashiers. But I'm not complaining, who doesn't appreciate a beautiful cashier? I'm given my food almost instantly. The presentation was great, slightly gourmet - they even added some relish. And then my world came crashing down: "R30 please." R30 for a hot dog? Not more than 10 chips and a drizzle of relish? It must be all that expensive water buffalo they're putting in the meat these days. At least the food was fresh and tasty, service was super and the cashiers were eights on the hotness scale.



Bartering a kidney and femur for two drinks

I also realised that soon all hell would break loose and when that happens its best not to be sobre. Yes, there are a few noblemen who have the ability to have fun without having to take a drink. These people exist - believe it, and kudos to them! But the sad reality is that the vast majority need to be on a level higher than sobriety in order to appreciate the music fully. So I headed over to the bar, which wasn't crowded at all, and was served within one minute of waiting. But just like the food stall, I was soon reminded that great service comes at a price. After bartering a kidney and femur for two drinks, I bade the market area adieu. All in all, I was impressed with the unsullied service delivery, something marketplaces at massive events still struggle with. However, the prices still hover above the exploitation line, one of the primary reasons people feel the need to sneak their own alcohol into events like these.

Not catching the end of the Haezer set due to my mission for sustenance, I heard a familiar beat. It's not the song I have in mind, but I can definitely tell that parts of the song have been sampled and remixed. The song I am referring to is, My Eyes by Kaskade (Alvin Risk Remix), and I thought to myself, what a wonderful world. I also thought to myself, aaah, that's so cute, how nice of Haezer to open the way for Alvin Risk by remixing one of his songs, my favourite Alvin Risk song to be precise. But then I looked up towards the DJ and I saw a black-and-white diamond jersey, a famous trademark of Alvin Risk. It then dawned on me that this was not Haezer paying homage to Alvin, but Alvin himself! Abandoning king and country, I made haste as fast as my little legs could carry me, to see a real live member of the dubstep Justice League.

Glorious pain

It was exactly like the EPs! The super-spiky high-pitched laser-like synths, synonymous with the Alvin Risk style, pierced the veil of the crowd's sanity. I was a little annoyed with the electro house sections of his set. However, this statement is entirely biased. I went to the concert for dubstep and dubstep only. But I'm sure that a "mothership" has many compartments, so why shouldn't a Mothership Tour have multiple genres? The electro house enthusiasts certainly seemed to be loving, and grooving to, every minute of it. But when it came to dubstep, Alvin Risk certainly ripped it! I literally felt his synths scratching and clawing away at the layers of my brain. Like blistering hot lasers they scorched each beat, deep into the tissue. And just when it seemed that we could take no more, he did something revolutionary, something I haven't seen any dubstep DJ do. He sang his own vocals! In a solo that was almost angelic. I was rendered limp, drifting away on a cloud of euphoria. It was like an anaesthetic, numbing the glorious pain as the music peeled away my resistance, exposing the sub-levels of the skin in preparation for his final drop. And when that drop came, the filthy hand of dubstep rained down its acidic retribution upon the raw flesh.

Then came 12th Planet. Science talks of a 12th planet called Nibiru, which will one day slam into the Earth, obliterating life as we know it. I couldn't have chosen a better name for this DJ. This guy, despite being very commercial, goes hard as a mother! And that is something nobody can take away from him. With Alvin Risk's set severely weakening the bones, 12th Planet's skull-crushing bass utterly reduced them to dust. His music, so grungy, so absolutely despicably filthy, clung to the skin like a thick brown drippy sludge. The crowd screamed in blissful agony with every single drop as the corrosive filth sizzled through their skin, each drop harder and dirtier than the first.



Stream of obscenities

The stream of obscenities spewing from 12th Planet's mouth reinforced the American ghetto feel of his tracks and only served to drive the crowd even wilder. So wild that a woman even got atop the shoulders of her mate, and flashed her breasts not only for the cameras, but for the entire venue. For her bravery and "perky" sense of commitment to the cause, she was awarded with applause and a mass cheer of approval. At that point the party had become a snowball travelling down the Drakensberg Alps and nothing could stop its merciless onslaught of the landscape. Then came the Trap. Aaaah, Trap music - the hip hop-like cousin of dubstep.

In my opinion, the black sheep of the EDM family; however I'd be lying if I said no Trap tune has ever got my head involuntarily bobbing. But, like Alvin's electro, my attitude toward the abrupt, almost brutal shift to trap is somewhat biased. Those who have fallen into the trap remain on the floor while people like myself (not too many), welcome the break to leave the floor for refreshments and to answer the calls of nature they had been rejecting all night. Despite feeling like a god, nothing makes a man feel more mortal than a ping from nature. So I began my trek across the grassy plains to the ablution facilities.

Ablution is an area in which large-scale events have always been direly lacking. It pains me to say that this time it was no different. Sufficient in number to keep queues short, the porta-potties were iron maidens of scum. With a shortage of toilet paper and dressings of bodily waste and mud coating their interiors, this is the only time in my review that the word filth will carry negative connotations. The dubstep nation is wild, but we are not outlandish barbarians! And we, like any other human beings, have a right to relieve ourselves with pride and dignity.

That being said, 12th Planet's set drew toward an end, and this is when he once again cranked out some seriously ill dubstep tunage. The crowds scurried towards the stage from all corners of the savannah, to join him in his final moments of glory. His set was crowned when he took a leap of confidence off the stage, onto the receiving hands of the crowd. There was a humorous point where he almost capsized, and he then decided that it was time to surf his way back to the stage. As I stood there thinking "Wow, how awesome do you have to be to get that right?" he ran from one end of the stage, high-fiving everyone in the front row, before returning to the DJ box, to receive his cheers and applause, and to deliver a warm welcome speech which went something like this: "Put your f@#\$king hands together and give it up for SKRILLEEEEX!". With that, the lights dimmed, and just like Nibiru, 12th Planet's wake of digital desolation, had come and gone.

A second sound rig?

It should be mentioned that the sound towards the back was terribly soft, especially when one considers the open-air environment. This is another common problem with events of this nature. And a possible cause for everyone swarming and compacting near the front like a giant game of Tetris. Once considered prime real estate, I soon found myself hating my position near the front. I'd been compressed to the point where a step in any direction would trigger a squabble. And quite frankly dubstep is but a shell of itself if there is no room to step. I'm no engineer, but for the love of Pete, is asking for a second sound rig at the back really asking that much, after we've just spent R400 plus on a ticket to a one-night event? And the fact that we were unable to leave the venue, due to there being no stamps or armbands at the gate, left a bitter taste in many of the party-goer's mouths. This not only shows poor planning, but a blatant lack of consideration for the very people lining the organiser's pockets.

So 12th Planet exited and the crowd, more charged and electric than ever, cannot contain their excitement any longer. A few reggae tracks play to keep them jammin' while the stagehands prepared the stage for Skrillex. Five or six tracks later a mighty crash of bass blasted the unsuspecting crowd's eardrums to smithereens and the five-minute countdown timer appeared on screen, ticking down by the millisecond to a progressive trance-like backtrack. After what was possibly the longest five minutes of my life, smoke filled the stage for the 10-second countdown and, on zero, the venue erupted as pyrotechnics lit up the dance floor. The awe-inspiring silhouette amidst the smoke had the masses roaring. The moment we had all been waiting for, the moment the ostriches had fled from, Hurricane Skrillex, had touched down on the farm.



He pumped out banger after banger

As he opened his set, the crazy high-energy body-moving experience was taken to an entirely different level with sound that suddenly became so loud that the bass vibrated every single one of my internal organs. It's a miracle that the security barriers didn't topple over with the sheer number of people trying to scramble their way to the front. The intensity of the restraint exercised by the crowds, not to erupt into a giant mosh pit was immense! With such a vast inventory of smash hits to choose from, it didn't matter what he dropped. For such a nice sprite, he too had quite a filthy mouth, but none of that mattered. He pumped out banger after banger, such as Kill Everybody, Ruffneck Bass, My Name Is Skrillex, First Of The Year, Dnb Ting, Make It Bun Dem and, of course, his claim to fame, Scary Monsters & Nice Sprites.

How does one go wrong when every track on your track list is a crowd pleaser? Heads were banging in every direction and hair whiplashed as people stepped, jumped and stomped. From above it must have looked like a mass exorcism. Even some of the milder tracks had been given some extra juice. He mixed in more grunge, wobble and synth to several of them, making them way harder. His transitions were smooth, not seamless, but smooth and clean, and his build ups differed from track to track. This is something I appreciated as so many DJs use the same cliché build ups in too many of their tracks.

If Alvin Risk was synth and 12th Planet was grunge, then Skrillex was perfect balance and harmony. He brought together the best of both dub styles and the results were similar to what happens at the place in Cape Town where the mighty cold Atlantic and warm Indian oceans meet - a rich explosion of life and diversity. Even the visuals were an ever-changing dazzling display of mind altering, vision warping, liquid-like animations, strobes, and lasers, which culminated at the part where the crowd was taken up into space on Skrillex's mothership. This was accompanied by breathtaking visuals of nebulae, and outer space imagery, and romanticized with tons of smoke, pyrotechnics, lights and brilliant laser beams, just above the crowd that stretched all the way to the back. It was a dazzling outer body experience. This was followed by a fantastic remix of Benni Benassi's Cinema, which would form an emotional conclusion to a red-hot rough set.

Several things could have been done better from a technical and humanitarian perspective, but, musically, it was very hard to find fault with any of the sets. Each of the artists ripped their hearts out and laid it on the DJ box for all to see and feel. At any concert, regardless of genre, the audience feeds off the artist's energy. And as far as energy goes, we were at an all-you-can-eat buffet. Dubstep fans that weren't present have no idea what they missed!

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