

The following email exchange has been transcribed to maintain as much of the original formatting as possible, with details like contact information omitted at the respect of the correspondent.

The sender of each email will be denoted in [square brackets] like so, for ease of clarification. Additionally, the date of receipt will also be included for citational purposes, if so required.

[Novalaxia] - 15 June 2024

Dear Plasmadancer,

Apologies for the email. I'm currently researching the historical developments of J-core as a musical genre between 1999-2011 for an analytical project, and was wondering if you'd be able to provide me with some contemporary insight into how the genre and some of its artists felt about the scene during the 2000s, as I'm aware that you were in correspondence with some Japanese freeform producers like Betwixt & Between and GULD, among others, who were active to various degrees in the J-core scene and contributing to various groups like **HARDCORE TANO*C** at the time.

I'll list my questions down below - feel free to answer as many, and with as much detail, as you're willing.

1. When/How did you first become acquainted with the J-core/Japanese freeform scenes? (if you have any particular anecdotes/perspectives, you can add them here)
2. Would you say that fans/producers outside of Japan were familiar with the tracks/artists behind these scenes throughout the 2000s? How did people learn of new developments within J-core & Japanese freeform at the time?
3. What kind of relationship did doujin freeform producers have with J-core during the 2000s? I know that a few freeform producers like B&B and Alabaster contributed a number of tracks to **HARDCORE TANO*C** - were there any sentiments that artists in these circles may have shared about how J-core was developing at the end of the 2000s?
4. To what extent was there a link, if any, between the J-core and doujin freeform scenes throughout the 2000s? How much collaboration occurred between the two groups (and any others) outside of the aforementioned artists contributing to **TANO*C**?
5. How much of an impact do you think doujin freeform had on influencing the early sounds of J-core, and vice versa? Do you think that freeform producers may have contributed to general perceptions of J-core when the latter was beginning to attract interest through the wider Internet?

I hope these questions aren't too imposing - you're more than welcome to answer in as much detail (and add anything extra that may not exactly be covered by the above if so desired) as you're comfortable with! Thank you for your time!

(P.S. I had the chance to listen to the [B&B set](#) you recently uploaded onto Youtube. Incredible stuff, thanks so much for continuing to preserve & share freeform for people to discover ^^)

With kind regards,

Novalaxia

[Plasmadancer] - 20 June 2024

Hi Novalaxia,

Thanks for your email, one of the most interesting I've had for a long time! I'd be more than happy to help and share a few thoughts (and have already been considering some of the points over the last few days).

This is a quick email though, to at least let you know that I've seen the message. From tomorrow I'm away for a few days, but I'll do my best to get back to you properly next week. One reason for the delay was a search for a J-core set I mixed in 2004(!), which must be one of my very first and could be of interest. Whether I find it or not, I'll be back in touch asap.

Best wishes!

PD

[Plasmadancer] - 3 July 2024

Hi again!

Apologies once again for the delay, but I'm finally able to get a few thoughts down in reply to your questions! Unfortunately I couldn't find that 2004 J-core set, but I'll let you know if it turns up in the future. I can remember a couple of the track titles at least, which could be helpful.

Starting with question 1 - I'll try to keep it relatively brief as this one could go on for a long time! The first connection to J-core was probably around 2002-2003, as I was getting back into happy hardcore. I'd grown up on hardcore/jungle from 1992-1996 and was looking for mixes and tracks that still had a mid-90s feel to them. Thanks to myspace I ended up finding a Japanese DJ who was mixing mid-to-late-90s UK happy hardcore with the occasional Japanese track. I wish I could remember his name (and wish I had the mixes here, many of them were great), as it was mostly thanks to speaking to him that I learned of new artists and releases. One was an artist called Moment, and the album [Happy Hardcore to You](#), which was almost exactly what I was looking for.

From there I found the music/community site Muzie, which alongside myspace was the place where most producers seemed to be sharing their work (which is also starting to answer your second question!). It didn't take long for me to find some hardcore/trancecore artists there, but

the majority was what I now realise was J-core. Truth be told I wasn't a fan of a lot of it, and most of it wasn't anywhere near as well produced as the Moment album. I was starting to do some mixing of my own by then though, so in 2004 I put together a set of tracks entirely from Muzie. I wish I could find it (in fact as writing this I'm having one last search), but interestingly I remember that there was an early version of Technorch's Gothic System in there, different to any released version I've heard. There was also a REDALiCE track in there, maybe something by Thanatos, and one called Saitama for Algernon by Rebirth. I'll update this if the mix ever reappears!

Most important for me though, as a freeform fan, was finding Betwixt & Between's pages on Muzie and then Myspace. At that point (2005-6) he had some RaverRose tracks on there, as well as tracks like Awakening, Disturbed Mind etc, and the NRGetic Romancer Live PA that really introduced me to freeform. I'm a little sketchy on the timing, but around then I got in touch with DJ Yousuke on Myspace and we became good friends. He shared a lot of sets with me, but in a sign of how separate J-core already was from freeform and other hardcore scenes he never used any J-core tracks, even in his happier sets. Long story short, it was thanks to him and Cogi that I was given Awakening and some other Betwixt tracks, and I was able to buy Khaotic Dimension while still in the UK. Thanks to Betwixt's Live PA I had already found FINRG (via Alek Szahala) and was mixing FINRG and Betwixt/Hase/Full Circle tracks by late 2006.

In my experience then, Muzie and Myspace were the main places that people in the scene(s) were learning of things. A few years later mixi was the main place where people learned of events and got in touch with other ravers/listeners (Facebook etc not becoming popular in Japan until much, much later). As for people outside Japan in general, it's hard to say, but in terms of freeform there seemed to be much more connection between the artists than there was between listeners. Betwixt, Cogi and Nomic were all in contact in the early 2000s, and Guld was speaking to Proteus, Orfeus and others very early on. On the whole though, the scenes were still separate and doing their own thing, which is why my sets from 2006 onwards were able to stand out just by mixing Japanese and Finnish freeform.

Q3/4. These are easier to answer briefly, as on the whole there wasn't much of a relationship at all. You're right that Betwixt and Alabaster were the main artists that crossed between the two, but for other freeform artists there had been at least some relationship with the Finnish (and some extent the UK) freeform scene from the very early years, rather than with the J-core scene. By the time younger FINRG artists like Substanced appeared there was a lot more awareness of the Finnish sound, and younger artists like Le Dos-on/Hyphen and others focused on that style (and then UKfreeform once FINRG became less active).

In the early years I think Betwixt was a massive influence on Tano*C and the J-core scene, as his sound was so dark and unique, with a connection to the Finnish sound that only he and Hase had. I definitely think he (and Hase) influenced some of the Tano*C guys, as you can hear in the older Hardcore Syndrome compilations. Alabaster was always on the outskirts of the main freeform scene here though - those times he was booked (a good example is a Kawasaki freeform event called Project Karma) the crowd and other artists loved it and wanted more -

there was so little contact between the scenes that they hadn't heard anything of him previously. Thankfully that changed from the CODEX years onwards.

Something I should have mentioned before now is that there was a huge difference in the atmosphere between events organised by the two scenes, not only in terms of sound, but also atmosphere, artists, and ravers/customers. It was very rare to see a Tano*C fan at events like NRGetic Romancer, but they did start to trickle in over the years. One of the biggest reasons they would give for not coming along earlier was the intimidating atmosphere of things like Romancer or Tokyo Hardcore Construction, as the freeform scene here had roots in club subcultures that J-core definitely didn't - elements of goth, punk, or industrial, and the 'dark raver' aesthetic that people from the 'otaku' cultures of Tano*C didn't have much experience of. It wouldn't take long for them to realise how welcoming the freeform scene was, but that was a huge barrier in general, that both scenes were working from very different starting points! It also explains why Romancer collaborated with things like the subculture event EverFree in later years instead of Tano*C, and why I only went to a handful of J-core/Tano*C events over the years, the atmosphere (and music) was just too different!

CODEX was a big change, and if that had happened a few years earlier there might have been much more crossover. There were definitely ravers there who were Tano*C fans, and Alabaster was a constant. Technorch was also booked as a guest for one event, but it's telling that during the event soundcheck his first question to us was, 'So, what's the freeform scene like these days?' On the other hand most Romancer ravers/DJs thought the balance of CODEX had gone too far away from the darker roots of the scene here, and many only reappeared when Alek Szahala played as a guest in 2015.

Q5. I might have answered this one already, in part, but the biggest influence by far was Betwixt (and Hase, but his output was much lower, of course). There were artists like umbrella and Thanatos who clearly had some Finnish influence, but the early years were filtered through Betwixt. Alabaster's use of Finnish style filtering was important too, and in the later years I think ikaruga_nex was massively important as a crossover - he would often be seen at CODEX and other 'darker' events before that. Surprisingly I think the J-core sound influenced freeform (or NRG at least) through Guld's anime remixes. Although he didn't pay too much attention to J-core in general, he was booked to play at quite a variety of events and had at least some links to producers/DJs like M-Project and DJ Champ. He was also a happy hardcore DJ under a different name in his early days, but I don't know much at all about that. I'd love to learn more, and wonder if there was any J-core connection there?

Well, that was quite a rambling attempt to work through the questions! I hope it's of some use, and of course feel free to get in touch if anything needs expanding on. It's an interesting exercise to recall a lot of this - I'm actually intending to record the history and my experiences in a more organised way some day, but this has just confirmed how long it would take to put it all in order!

Thank again for getting touch - all being well there should be some more sets going online soon, whether my own or some from the archives.

Best wishes!

PD

[Novalaxia] - 4 July 2024

Hi Plasmadancer,

Thanks so much for this detailed account of your experiences with early J-core and freeform! There's a lot of information here that I'm quite surprised to learn about, like the separation between the two scenes in regards to events and audiences - I didn't realise there was such a marked difference between TANO*C and freeform listeners, considering there's a few people clamouring for the Betwixt/Alabaster styles of freeform to return to TANO*C in the comment sections of old **HARDCORE SYNDROME** uploads. I'd like to think there's definitely less of a disconnect between perceptions of J-core and other darker hardcore genres now than there was 10-15 years ago, but to what extent of a difference there is might vary from person to person.

It's remarkable to know that there was a decent amount of online communication within the various 'doujin' music scenes even before the advent of video hosting websites like Youtube. Many sources discussing early J-core developments allude to the spread of new music and ideas through peer-to-peer networks and early "social media" like imageboards and MySpace, but I could find very little to corroborate these claims outside of firsthand accounts (like yours!) and articles written at the time. Your connection with DJ Yousuke and Cogi is definitely an interesting anecdote, because I did actually enquire with *Electronica Exposed* about how the Full Circle DJs got into contact, and the label owner actually mentioned that DJ Yousuke was his main contact between the two parties (through MySpace!) It gives me the impression that artists within the J-core and freeform scenes were rather tightknit in terms of their proximity to a variety of connections, and it's legitimately exciting to hear about how FINRG artists were in contact with some of the Japanese freeform names throughout the 2000s. There's a few remixes like *Eternal Cannon* (DJ Rx Remix) and *Airwave* (Betwixt & Between Remix) that suggested a degree of collaboration between the Finnish and Japanese scenes, but it's cool to know that it ran further than I realised!

I'm curious to know what kind of freeform events there were during the 2000s and early 2010s, as you've experienced and documented a number of sets across the years on the *Thank You For The Horse* website and Youtube channel. You mentioned *NRGetic Romancer*, as that's one of the main events that you've covered over a long period of time, but were there any events of similar size and scope that you would consider noteworthy towards building an audience/rapport for freeform? There's a couple of uploads on the TYFTH channel regarding GULD's recent appearances at an event called *Dark Dimension*, but your accounts suggest that *NRGetic*

Romancer and CODEX appeared to be the main events for Japanese freeform at the height of its popularity.

If you ever manage to find your old J-core set (or any really old freeform sets that you happen to come across in the meantime) I'd love to take a listen sometime! In the meantime, would you be okay with me citing segments of your response in my work? I'll make sure to update you when I've completed a first draft of the finished piece in return - I've got quite a bit of writing to do on Japanese freeform now!

Thanks again for getting back to me! I appreciate how much detail you were able to remember and piece together, so it was worth the wait!

(P.S. Looking forward to any sets you post online!)

With kind regards,

Novalaxia

[Plasmadancer] - 23 July 2024

Hi Novalaxia,

So sorry for the delay - you might have noticed that TYFTH as a whole was quiet for a few weeks, as I wasn't well earlier in the month and have been catching up on things since then. Firstly, I'd be totally fine with you citing some of the points I made in that last message! At least some was on the rambling side, so if any of it needs to be clarified or cleaned up a little then please feel free to let me know.

Just to add on to a couple of your comments in the last message, it really can't be overstated how early the Romancer and FINRG guys were in touch. The fact that Orfeus played an NRGetic Romancer set in 2004 is a great example! DJ Yousuke was the Romancer member with best level of English, and thanks to that I think he was in touch with plenty of people in the UK hardcore/freeform scenes. Via MySpace we were first communicating in English, but by the time I went to my first NRGetic Romancer we had switched to Japanese.

By the time of the Eternal Cannon and Airwave remixes the FINRG forum was in full flow, and all the Japanese artists and producers checked it - though as this was in the days before reliable computer translation they rarely if ever posted there. I became a FINRG member in 2008-9 and from that point was the go-between for a lot of the more 'official' things that happened between FINRG and the Japanese scene. For the longest time Japanese artists wanted to release on FINRG, but DJ Rx was of the thinking that their production wasn't up to the required level. One exception was the Japanese artist dexterpupure, who I helped submit some tracks to FINRG. They were added to and mastered by Tyranoid, and are still on the FINRG soundcloud.

It was thanks to talks with DJ Swoosh a little later that the Airwave remix was released, and a few years after that there were plans to release a number of Betwixt & Between tracks on FINRG, which sadly never happened. Interestingly the Epyx & Cyrez track Distant Illusions originally began as a collab between them and Betwixt, with me as the intermediary, but Betwixt thought the whole process was too slow and awkward and E&C carried on with it themselves. If you listen to it, it has a definite feel of something like Surendrajit at times! Another side note, Surendrajit was originally going to be released (with Phaedra) on Kreatrix, but I think some language issues led to a few misunderstandings and it didn't happen (I wasn't involved in that at all). Finally, Alabaster's Ruins of Jade was supposed to release on FINRG/Hybridize, with is why I included it in my Hybridize - NRGetic Romancer promo mix that released at one of our events. I'm not sure why that never happened!

As for other events, there really weren't any of a similar size to Romancer. Occasional one-off events would take place at the same venue (StudioCube), often organised by NRGetic Romancer ravers, like Destroyed High and [Energy Cocktail](#) (A one-off where Eryk Orpheus and Kevin Energy played.) Operation Karma in Kawasaki was another, which I mentioned in the last message. Pre-CODEX, the best NRG/freeform event aside from Romancer was actually in Nagoya, organised by a DJ called Taber Hardshuffler (who plays hardstyle now but it still active). It was called Funeral and had a small group of NRG DJs and aspiring producers of its own. Betwixt played there once, as well as ConfigSys from Australia. I was invited to play, but the event ended before I was able to (something that's happened a few times over the years!) Funeral was (and maybe still is) the closest in terms of atmosphere to NRGetic Romancer, with its [dark, very underground atmosphere](#). A great example here - Taber is the dancer in white in the first minute or so, with Dairin (a well known raver of the time and organiser of Destroyed High) in the background.

Sadly CODEX came after the height of freeform's popularity here, and as it struggled to bridge that J-core/freeform gap it didn't bring enough of the old scene's ravers over to it. Still, it made a good effort, and did a huge amount to keep the Japanese freeform scene relevant and in the minds of people outside Japan.

Well, it looks like I've gone on another long ramble! I'll end things there, but feel free to get in touch if you have any other questions. One of the main things I've been catching up on is sorting out more sets and streams. You can expect one of each in the next week or so!

Best wishes!

PD