

# Mark Alsop

INTERVIEW PT. 2 – THE REMIXER

**hotdiscomix:** *Now let's talk about your work as a remixer.*

*When did you first start remixing and what gave you the interest to do it?*

**Mark Alsop:** I remember the wonder that I experienced after I bought my first 12-inch extended "maxi-Single" (vinyl). It was Soft Cell singing "Tainted Love". I knew the short album version very well, and it blew me away when I heard the extended mix. I was fascinated by the fact that you could take a short 3.00-minute track and turn it into something like this. The next 12-inch that I bought was Pete Shelley's "Homosapien". That was equally an astounding interpretation. As my DJ career firmly established itself in the late 80's, I enrolled myself at the Australian Film, Radio and Television school. I studied studio engineering and managed to arrange a special agreement with my lecturer. While the rest of the group at college worked at miking live bands, I went to the postproduction department and learnt the basic editing methods on a video and film editing system called the AMS Audiofile. The equipment at that time was valued at \$100,000! I put together my first ever track at the school. I worked on a single release for the Australian band Carnival Of Lost Souls (aka **Atlas**). It was titled "Without You" and was subsequently released in May 1991 on the 12-inch format on Love Records. At the same time, I worked on a mix of Janet Jackson's "The Knowledge", which was released on **The Best Of Hot Tracks 1991**. It was in this early 90's period that I also began to spend much of my time with my friend **Paul Goodyear**. He had recently bought a reel-to-reel and we spent many stinking hot summers days in his bedroom creating our first remixes that all saw their release on the United States labels Hot Tracks, Rhythm Sticks, and Discotech as well as locally on Pro-DJ and Ozz-Mix. In the winter I locked myself away in an East Sydney warehouse out the back of the newly moved *Disco City* and began to work with Ian Gordon from The Carnival Of Lost Souls. Our teaming produced the EP titled "The Funky Lunch". It was a mini album themed around differing versions of "Without You" and joined together with everything from classical music through to the campness of the Thunderbirds! On one occasion in the EP, Lady Penelope was known to fly past the speakers in an aeroplane! The Mini album was available across Australia and was launched at a local gay Hotel called the Oxford. It also had international recognition with a subsequent release as a remixed track on **NRG for the 90's Vol 14** on the Hot Tracks label, as well as the first track entitled "Baste", (lifted straight from the EP) released on Precision Eleven, being part of the USA Art Of Mix label. I then began to look at remixing workstations, so that I could set up my own little studio at home. I happened across my first editing system whilst I was out in the suburbs of Sydney buying the Australian DJ promo subscription service called Pro-DJ. They were set up in a small warehouse with a vinyl-pressing factory underneath. The system that they used and sold was the USA made Microeditor system. They were about to upgrade their studio and offered me their second hand workstation. The first Tracks I completed on the Microeditor system were Janet Jackson's "Throb" (subsequently released on Factor 3 Volume 10 in the USA) and Jinny "Feel The Rhythm" (released on Ozz Mix 13). In 1995, I packed my studio and belongings and moved to Queensland. I then primarily worked for the Australian DJ service Ace, which quickly obtained international recognition and featured in the monthly reviews section of DMA [Dance Music Authority].



Screenshot: Pro-Tools session

I moved back to Sydney in 1999, and finally changed my Microeditor system for the MAC based Pro-Tools. I currently spend most of my time learning this system as well as working in the clubs. My recent editing/remixing work sees my re-teaming with Atlas who received the prestigious honour of playing at the Sydney "Mardi Gras party '04".

**hotdiscomix:** *You have worked at Hot Tracks, Ace Remix, Discotech and several other remix services: Did you experience any differences in remixing for these services?*

**Alsop:** The major differences were to do with the structure of the track.

**Hot Tracks** preferred a 6.00-minute length and as I continued to work with them for many years, I noticed they began to adhere more closely to the 6.00-minute mark. I found this a ridiculous task, as my idea of reworking a track meant that I would use as many versions as was possible. In pre-structuring my mix, I cut up all the good bits of differing versions and lay them together. I then spend a lot of time making them flow in a continuous format. If I was doing just an EDIT of the one version, then it is quite possible to do a 6.00-minute version. I found that restraint highly restricting for me as it severed my artistic creativeness. I cannot remember ever turning in a 6.00-minute track because of this. I believe that the Hot Tracks policy was based on the overriding factor that most of their vinyl discs featured two tracks on each side. The preferred length of music cut to that disc at 45 rpm was about 12.00-13.00 minutes. Therefore, each track was going to sound better at a 6.30 length. Cutting at 33 rpm would allow longer mixes, however with degenerative effect to the sound quality. Being that these were intended wholly for club use, the 45rpm format was much preferred. Nowadays, I believe their policy is more “short and to the point.”

**Discotech** suggested, on quite a few occasions, that “stutter” or “shotgun edits” be used in the mix. It was all the rage when digital editing first became popular. I listened to many tracks that Discotech featured and decided that “shotgun edits” were not appropriate to my style of remixing. Those mixes have not withstood the test of time. The versions now sound horribly dated and actually quite annoying. I originally dabbled with a few in the mix of Janet Jackson “The Knowledge” [Best Of Hot Tracks 1991] but quickly dropped that idea from my later work. I viewed this kind of editing as a destructive approach that was quite vicious to the song.

**Ace** gave me free artistic creation. I had been known to “spin out” the guys by submitting a track that was so totally edited that it would swallow itself up and back-flip into a completely different mix. The best example of this is on **Ace Volume 13**, Ultra High... “Are You Ready For Love” where there were some questions whether I went too far this time (?) I think that, to date, this is one of my most creative mixes! There are many changes between mixes within my version. I spent weeks on creating and smoothing its progression, to make it sound fluid in its delivery.

Factor 3 really wanted to feature tracks that were completely remixed. Not just edited, but reworked from the ground up. I liked their service a lot, but the creation of the track was much more difficult.

**Rhythm Sticks** proved extremely easy and accepted the mixes without question! I believe that this approach of giving the remixer TOTAL artistic license removes the shackles to create something really special.

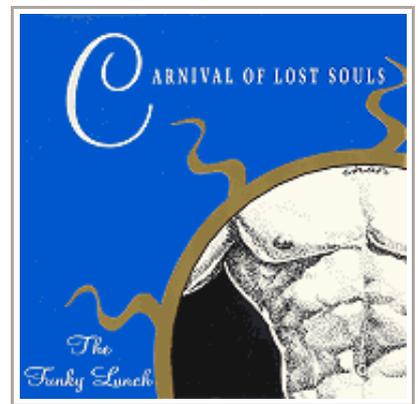
For those who found the housier remixes of “Are You Ready For Love” by ULTRA HIGH more functional but lacking the dramatic high frequencies of the NRG mix, three of the originals mixes are combined using additional percussion and effect programming. The outro on this remix repeats the stringy sections with drum tracks beneath to a truly stunning effect....

— Dance Music Authority - (Ace Volume 13)

**hotdiscomix:** *Please tell me more about your commercial releases and your work with Australian artists.*

**Alsop:** I have done a large body of my remixing work with the Australian group Atlas. They were born from the ashes of the Carnival Of Lost Souls (COLS). My relationship with them is a very close knit one. The sky is always the limit with our creativeness. When working on “The Funky Lunch,” our idea was to mash together thousands of different tracks to create a foundation for our vocal track. We had the idea, but needed to emphasise that the finished mix held an individual creativeness that would represent the Carnival.

Following is a review that was released with the album.....



## **CARNIVAL OF LOST SOULS — THE FUNKY LUNCH**

As the temperatures soar and the sun comes out of its long, all too long hibernation, the sounds that fill the dancefloors and bars will be long remembered. The heat, the sweat, the tan lines and oohh, those bodies! It is the season for jumpin', pumpin', lovin' and clubbin'. The sound waves beat from the speakers and bring this whole summer party phenomenon together.

One wonders from where these sounds and melodies that feel so good come from. Whose inspiration and musical talents transform our summers and lives into a feverish pitch with music we'll remember for many a year to come? How is it that such sounds can beat through the cold and dead of winter to arrive just in time for the sweat of summer?

One story goes like this...

Some wondered where those boys had got. Some wondered what they were doing together. Some wondered what the hell a DJ and songwriter /programmer were up to for so long. Some marveled at the way they diligently braved the rain and cold to set off to a recording studio in a galaxy far, far away..... The thermos was packed, the style of tea for the day selected and with military precision they arrived every sunrise. The morning turned quickly to lunch, into darkness and early evening. Stars twinkled above and the rain beat rhythmically against the studio window saying, "Keep working in there, 'cause it's miserable out here."

The boys gelled quickly together, two minds infusing a wealth of knowledge, ideas and music that was on the dance floors today and of yesteryear. A goal was to be met and the technology was going to be difficult to work with. The team had come together, not for the first time, combining the talents of MARK ALSOP and IAN GORDON.

Mark Alsop has worked many, many years as a Sydney DJ and remixer. He's seen them come and he's seen them go. In the current party circuit the promoters favour the less experienced thus in the climate of winter he could think of nothing better to do than remix to his hearts content and go overseas to see what the rest of the music industry was up to.

Ian Gordon is the inspiration of the group CARNIVAL OF LOST SOULS. For him it was a trying time ahead. A new line-up for the band, songs to write, people to teach. For him this was the calm before the storm. A time where he could forget himself for a few weeks and work with Mark creating a new concept in music: a concept so radical, to their knowledge it had never been done before.

The target that lay ahead was to create a new version of the Carnival's smash hit "Without You". A few weeks were set aside and the boys came together to discuss the concept that the song would take. The idea was to pull pieces from every favourite song, new and old, and to combine sounds together in such a way that a new song would be borne from it. Should it be in the current vein of techno? Should it be a rave mix? What about something girly? Or the disco sounds of days gone by? Should it be ambient or a slow groove? This was a big decision as the final product had to be marketable. After

days of previewing hundreds of records they had it! Why not do five mixes that keep everybody happy? And thus THE FUNKY LUNCH was conceived. A project that takes the listener through an epic journey of sound so descriptive in its texture that one feels overwhelmed by the vast amount of time, energy and dedication these boys have put into it. Indeed, over three months was taken to finish the basic tracks. Themes and ideas from the most current girlie tunes to the seventies disco sound and even the hard edge of techno versus Italo house was used. Songs we heard and loved on the dance floors of the eighties through to music just being explored. This concept was developing at an alarming rate and the boys realized that their goal had now grown to gigantic proportions.

Days and weeks passed. The winter grew colder and the days darker, yet the musical tunes emanating from this warehouse were somewhat magical and mystical playing on the airwaves and defying the cold of the day. For these tunes were full of a radiant warmth that seemed to stretch through the clouds and bring the sun shining through the one little window of this Darlinghurst warehouse. (A scene from Steven Spielberg one may think.)

Indeed, the concept grew beyond five tracks and quickly turned into seven. An introduction was needed. Something authoritative, something theatrical, something to throw the listener straight into the midst of the TECHNO themed "BASTE" version. An introduction that aggressively sets the feverish pace of what is to follow. Baste delivers much more than one can believe throughout its seven-minute time frame. We are thrown from deliberate hard-core Italo pianos into the rifts of techno synths. Only a couple of lines from the original song make an appearance here. The end of this version leaves the listener speechless. Could it be that one has felt they have just traveled from one end of the universe to the other?

Lady Penelope makes an appearance with the apt quote "Cancel the countryside run, Parker. We've just been called to an urgent assignment. Get out the Rolls Royce." and with the pop of a champagne cork begins the *Funky Lunch* which teleports us to the sounds of the Midnight Shift nightclub in the seventies and eighties. My! Those cowbells sound as fresh today as when Sylvester, Patrick Cowley and Donna Summer ruled our floors. This mix is brimming with sounds that are deeply laden in the back of our minds from when our hearts were young and the term disco was a state of mind, not just a place to go.

After a short, humorous interlude we plunge into the FEMME ROULADE... girlie or what! Within moments of the driving kick comes the familiar high energy charged sounds of a song we would expect to hear at the Flinders Hotel. Girlie in its concept, girlie in its deliverance. Is it this time one realizes that every mix is so completely different in its concept and vocal delivery as can be? An astounding piece of work that seems to change around every corner... and change it does! With a car-beep and thunder comes the PETIT FOUR, a highly camp little rendition of our youth. This delicately fades back into the sounds of rain and thunder, which sets the tone for the ambient and most beautiful BACI. A song that is unique as it reaches a new concept of love, hope and loneliness. It is not hard to envisage the emotion and time dedicated to expressing so much with the use of only two words..."Without You". Those words slowly and effortlessly caress the listener and let them know that this is heart-felt emotion in its true form. The dedication on the inside cover is to the endless courage, conviction and love that surrounds people with HIV and it is here in this song that the loneliness and isolation, warmth and love envelope the listener and enforce such a beautiful dedication. BACI was created throughout a period of struggle that continues today. It was approached by a lone man with his piano and is truly an outstanding original piece. With such isolative sounds of rainfall we exit BACI back into the rain and journey down a flight of stairs. In the distance is heard softly Carmina Burana chanting away

somewhere down below behind a sealed door. The listener approaches the door and upon opening it is hit full-thrust into the forthcoming crescendos that bound forth. It is with amazement that sounds can be so creative. I often wonder if the boys had milk laced with LSD on their Corn Flakes before starting out to the studio each day as the sounds and visualisation is so dramatically real. The opera turns out to be a record playing and is quickly dismissed with a loud scratch that heralds the MADGIE MIX. This song remixed by Mark and available on vinyl pulls the whole project together. This is the song in its entirety with a driving kick and Pet Shop Boys sound. It sounds as good today as it was a few months ago when it was burning across the dance floors of Australia.

*The Funky Lunch* delivers. There is something for everyone here and it has been pressed on a limited CD run with brilliant artwork by local talent, Anthony Chan. The CD is presented in bright azure blue and gold packaging with a quarter male torso teasing you for what is to come. Upon opening the box one realises that the artwork of the male torso does indeed have a “funky lunch”! The title of the project centred on this artwork. The fact that the boys spent three months of their Lives and many, many lunch-breaks working on this. Even the titles of the tracks have been named around foodstuffs and their presentation and preparation. Indeed, this concept has come together even better than anyone hoped. With warning the boys say, “Grab it now, girlfriend, cos if you miss this print run there won't be another”.

For a cold winter this time was very well spent.

Official Fan Club Pak- 1992

THE FUNKY LUNCH is a Well Hung™ release.

— CD Review by M. Fishpaw



With the Atlas and COLS projects, we had complete reign to do what we felt was right for the band. It was ultimately a dance single that we were aiming for, so I approached the mix with an energetic creativeness. Powerful driving kicks, percussion and synth hooks over dynamic bass lines would give the mix loads of energy. I never approached their remixes with the idea of doing a track that sounded like the original. We were trying to market Atlas worldwide and be representative of the track and true to the song.

I also did a track for the Melbourne group Love Construction. They did a great cover version of “Endless Love” [Colossal Records]. Paul Goodyear and myself turned the track into a more playable, dance oriented

commercial release. It was released throughout Australia and I am not too sure about its international exposure.

It was done to “I Will Always Love You”, “The Power Of Love” and “I Say A Little Prayer” – now Lionel Richie and Diana Ross’ soppy little number has been turned into a thumping club hit. One of the better attempts at a dance remix, with Love Constructions Anthony Jade and I’da (one very sexy looking couple) proving nice and strong convincing vocals. Remix whiz’s Paul Goodyear and Mark Alsop give us the Disco ‘till You Die mix, which is a hell of a lot more club friendly than the less adventurous Mirror Ball mix (track 2)...It’s gonna be big people!

— Club Kitten - Q News

Many compilation albums have been released containing my mixes. They vary from my individual releases for independent labels to the mixes that featured on the Ace subscription service. I have also

done some work with other Australian artists. Thankfully, those mixes did not see the light of day. I believe that some tracks are SO bad it is beyond a remixer's ability to make them better, unless the track is changed so much that it is no longer representative of the original.

Although I have done remixing and editing for many artists around the globe, I have not, as yet, had the opportunity to work *personally* with any of them. The remixing and editing that I have done has mainly been for two types of artists: (i) those that are now a part of Disco History, such as Sharon Redd, Kym Mazelle, Jocelyn Brown, The Weather Girls, Donna Summer, Lisa, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Tantra, Evelyn 'Champagne' King and Jennifer Holliday to name a few and (ii) current artists such as Janet Jackson, Pet Shop Boys, Marc Almond, The Human League, M People, Alison Limerick, Bjork, Everything But The Girl, Kylie Minogue and the list goes on.....

Jennifer Holliday's dubby "No Frills Love '96" is refashioned using elements of three versions, with Mark Alsop employing reverse beats and multi-edits cutting in and around the choruses. Two two-part mixes appear on this volume of ACE, the first with Sally Anne Marsh's energetic cover of the late '60s consciousness-trip "Windmills Of Your Mind." Largely available on 12", here no less than five versions take the track from 125 with a seamless transition to 136. Neither abrupt or choppy, the ascent to part two serves to amplify the heady themes of the song among dreamy synth lines.

— Dance Music Authority - (Ace Volume 14)

**hotdiscomix: Do you have a special manner in which you remix your songs; are there any specific features that make your remixes Mark Alsop remixes?**

**Alsop:** The first thing that I approach is the introduction. Building from a basic beat and percussion into the track can sometimes pose difficulty. Then there is the energy level. Does the track flow nicely already? Is the chorus the best part and should it be featured in the first part of the track to keep the punter on the dancefloor? Once I have figured the structure out, I just try to go with the energy of the track and build its excitement incrementally. I try to incorporate all the good bits of each mix and still maintain a continuity that makes you believe that it was actually *recorded* this way! That would have to be the final goal and the biggest pay-off: to have the track sounding SO smooth in its delivery, that everyone can believe that the artist actually did this in a studio and released the track in this arrangement! Effects can also play a large part in continuity. If I can find or generate a sound that fits well with the track, then once the edit is complete, the overlaying of that sound throughout the track can be integral to the continuity. One of the best examples of this is featured in "Jellyhead" by Crush [**Ace Volume 15**], where I found a "wah wah" sound that fitted in nicely after every 8 bars.

Remixers generally approach a mix with one of two ideas: either keep it true to the original or sample a little bit of the track (be it vocals or a riff from the Original) into their own composition and release it under that artist's name. As we all know, this second view to remixing can be a crowning achievement to both artist and remixer. It can encapsulate an audience that may not have cared for the track in its original form. This approach could also completely destroy a track. Sometimes the remixer fails to target the *true essence* of the original work. It could just be one singular sound within the original mix that gives the track a quirkiness that makes it work. If the remixer edits this out, the song can lose its edge or even sound moot. To date, my mixes have always stayed true to the original mix boundaries. I use many of the original sounds and vocal sections to build a base track. The finished product often sends a big nod to the original and can even be interpreted as a dance mix of the 7-inch or original mix. I like breathing life into the track by building an energy level that asserts exhilaration. Vocals have always been a major part within my mixes as well. Even though my remixing style is established, everything is open to change. I now intend to start doing mixes that are different to the original ideas of the artist. This is a complete backflip to everything that I have done before. I feel the change will fuel the motivation for more creativity and express more individuality. I aim to produce a more tracks from the ground up, only minimally blending themes from the original. My objective now is to



make the remix sound entirely different from its original. This is presently a goal that I am working towards as I have now tossed the PC and Windows programmes into the rubbish and converted to the Mac operating system where I am now free to create my own Pro Tools sessions.

Another softer track in need of a more directly executed mix is “Missing” by EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL, despite the veritable plethora of remixes now available. Mark Alsop here employs the unexpected: drum loops from the '93 Sure Is Pure remixes of Sister Sledge’s “We Are Family” (!) make this mix more cohesive.

— Dance Music Authority (Ace Volume 8)

**hotdiscomix: Which one of your remixes is your personal favourite?**

**Alsop:** Every remix is a challenge. Some mixes are approached with the idea that it would be the easiest thing in the world to re-work. Sometimes they can be the worst! The tracks that sometimes seem simplistic can be an editor’s nightmare when you open them up to see how they are created! “My favourite mix?” cannot be answered. I like all the mixes I do for different reasons. I love the blending and higher BPM join of two versions of “Party” by the Weather Girls (**Hot Tracks 14-1**), the magical way that Donna Summer fitted into M-People’s “One Night in Heaven” (Australian Pro DJ Pool Service), the massive editing of every single beat to join two mixes of Dr. Alban’s “Let The Beat Go On” (**Hot Tracks 14-3**) that were at a different BPM range and the list goes on. Each time an edit works there is a certain quiet thrill to it. There are also the times that a shiver can be sent up and down your spine. Unfortunately, it doesn’t happen all that often, but when it does, you just know that you have poured your heart into something amazing and created something really unique.

Dr. Alban’s “Let The Beat Go On” is an interesting 2-part mix. Starting off with the Housier version that has some really nice editing, the beat “goes on” and in a very smooth transition speeds up and turns into the “Original ‘euro” version after the break. So depending on your mood, there’s a section to make you happy.

— Dance Music Authority - (Hot Tracks 14-3)

**hotdiscomix: Is there a song in particular that you would have loved to have remixed?**

**Alsop:** There are thousands of tunes released yearly from artists all over the world. I would be a very unhappy person if I wished I had the *chance* to remix so many great tracks. My passion and love lies within the artist, not necessarily in the song. My all time favourite artist is Marc Almond. I have liked Marc’s music since I was 20 years old and I still think that he is the most gifted and talented man in the world! I was his guest at the “12 Years Of Tears” concert at the Albert hall on Sept 30th 1992. I also had the immense pleasure of meeting him backstage after his 5th Fan club convention concert at Heaven Nightclub on November 17th 1990 and even being interviewed by a Television crew! These are the things that have made my life special and I am so enriched by experiencing them. I would dearly love to work with him. Unfortunately, Marc has been quoted in the press as NOT liking remixes of his music. Understandably, changing the track, in any way, would ultimately reflect upon the artist’s original creation. From my own personal experience, Ian Gordon (COLS) and I spent many hours creating the flow and continuity to the lead track “Baste” from the mini EP “The Funky Lunch”. Unfortunately, Hot Tracks butchered it in the remixing process. It was a miscalculated interpretation. The track completely lost continuity and flow, becoming quite disjointed. Robin Write from the UK band The Midnight Shift once told me that he was appalled with some of the mixes he had heard of his award winning cover of “California Dreaming”. I also discussed this point with Alison Limerick, whilst sitting on her lounge room floor at Halloween eating all the candy. Oh such a tummy ache! She had a complete collection of all versions of her massively popular track “Where Love Lives”. She loved all the different interpretations. This view was in direct contrast to Marc Almond. Even though Marc had expressed disinterest in remixes, it didn’t stop me doing two mixes of his single “Black Kiss” as well as “Yesterday Has Gone” (a Duet with P.J. Proby) and even a double segued disc. I have personally sent all of these to him. I am unsure whether Marc liked them but I know that the fan club management asked me for extra copies for themselves! I did these mixes from a passion to make his remixes even more dance floor friendly. I hold

his music very dear to my heart and immensely enjoyed working on those tracks. I wish to learn even more remix techniques to be able to confidently approach him and work with him in the studio.

**hotdiscomix:** *Which of your capacities - DJ or Remixer - do you prefer and why?*

**Alsop:** I have always enjoyed a blend of both. Sometimes the scale may tip one way or the other; it doesn't have to be even. Both are enjoyable and creative and come with their positive and negative attributes. I enjoy the creativeness that I can bring to both. I flourish in the nightclub setting as well as the remix environment. The difference is that one is more immediately public (DJ) and the other becomes more public later (remixer) with the release of the mix. Either way, there are people who praise you and people who cut you down. I do both of these things not for money but for love. I am passionate about my work and take it to heart when people are outright cruel with their comments. No one can please everyone. Over the years I have chosen to stick my head in the sand and completely ignore the negative. If you let that kind of person influence you then you are NOT going to be any better for it. I have never modelled myself upon anyone or copied their style. I rarely listen to other DJs so I am in no way influenced by them. I believe that you ARE your own creativeness. Follow your heart and do what YOU think is right. That's the only way to be satisfied. When you look back on your life's work you can be proud of your style, individuality and artistic quality that you have breathed into your work.

**hotdiscomix:** *Thanks Mark, it has been a pleasure chatting with you and discussing your work. I wish you continued success in your career and future endeavors.*

