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'Doing that music which moves me': A conversation with Bristol hip hop pioneer, Krissy Kriss

ABSTRACT

From the early-1980s, the arrival of hip hop in the UK city of Bristol created a wave of new possibilities for multiracial Bristolians. In the medium-term, this would help yield the music popularly termed 'the Bristol Sound', exemplified by post-hip hop performers like Tricky and Massive Attack – all of whom were part of the city's early hip hop scene. More immediately, however, Bristol would become home to a vital hip hop party culture, centred on makeshift – and frequently illegal – parties thrown in warehouses, shebeens and small independent clubs in and around the city's storied Black district, St. Paul's. In this wide-ranging oral history conversation, which broadens the debate on Bristol hip hop and its diasporic sound-making, pioneering Bristol MC, Kriss 'Krissy Kriss' Johnson, discusses his memories and experiences of hip hop in the city. He provides fresh insights on diasporic Black

KEYWORDS

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identities in semi-rural contexts; the historic textures of teenage Black popular culture in Bristol in the 1970s–80s; the political realities of early-Thatcherism; the resurgence of British street racism in the 1970s; the psychogeography of Bristol neighbourhoods and historic change in St. Paul's; the historically grounded appeals of hip hop culture as a site of affirmative teenage Black identity and possibility; the lived experience of Bristol's DIY hip hop party culture. In doing this, Johnson offers a historically important Black perspective on a scene that has often been glossed by journalists and academics alike in terms of its utopian polyculturalism. By prioritizing his response as a young Black person in the historical particularities of his lived context, the conversation moves beyond the priorities of such accounts to provide a nuanced appreciation of Bristol's hip hop movement in the city's complex race and class geography. The account, moreover, recentres hip hop in the history of this party scene, which journalists have typically viewed from the prism of an overdetermined hybridity seen as peculiar to the city.

In the south west of England, the modestly sized city of Bristol has had a disproportionate impact on the development of popular music. Home to the so-called 'Bristol Sound', acts like Massive Attack and Tricky, born and grown in diversely scattered parts of the city, would famously open up the mutant hip hop-based sounds that became known as trip-hop in the 1990s – part reggae, part soul, part cinematic mood-sound; all hip hop beat magic. What is less widely appreciated, is the degree to which those outernational diasporic sounds were, in fact, born from the city's initial hip hop scene. From the early 1980s, Bristol was home to one of Europe's most vital hip hop party cultures. Organized around sound systems like the Wild Bunch (Massive Attack, Nellee Hooper, Tricky and DJ Milo are alumni), FBI Crew, Z-Rock, City Rockers and Fresh 4, it was a classic story of hip hop's youthful invention and DIY ingenuity. This scene – though generally attributed as being centred on the mythic Dug Out club – found its feet just as much in rough and tumble warehouse jams, multi-floor house parties, legally grey neighbourhood clubs and St. Paul's community centres. Sometimes depicted as hyper-local, it was, however, far from insular. Members connected with peers in London, Tokyo and New York, creating a de facto hip hop avant garde that was local, national and transnational. The less well-tracked repercussions of the scene were felt in fields as diverse as hip hop soul and Japanese cut 'n' paste.

At the end of 2021, following years of chasing trails as a journalist then scholar, I came together with fellow hip hop historian (and *GHHS* In-the-CIPHER section editor) Adam de Paor-Evans and a cast of the city's early hip hop players to collaborate on an archive of oral history interviews (de Paor-Evans and McNally 2021). Published as a special edition of Evans' *Headz Zine* project, and partly funded by the AHRC, the interviews represent a broad church of Bristol hip hop's first decade – from DJ Milo, Willie Wee and 3PM, to Turoe, DJ Flynn (Fresh 4) and members of Transcript Carriers. Our aim was to explore diverse experiences of Bristol hip hop in their social contexts; to understand where people were at when hip hop hit, how its rambunctious energy caught them and the directions they were propelled in as they sought to discern, then harness its potential.

The conversation, printed below, with my friend and foundational Bristol emcee, Kriss 'Krissy Kriss' Johnson, now known as Kinsman, is particularly powerful. For one, Kriss's journey betrays an almost Zelig-like capacity for

being at the heart of mid-1980s Bristol hip hop developments. Rising to local prominence with his own Z-Rock collective in the mid-80s, he was quickly co-opted as an emcee for the Wild Bunch. Kriss introduced them to future Massive Attack deejay Mushroom. He rocked parties with Soul II Soul and rapped on Smith & Mighty's definitive early Bristol Sound hit 'Anyone' (1988). That was before he went on to form your favourite Bristol rap group's favourite Bristol rap group, 3PM – with MC Kelz and DJ Lynx. Just as notable, though, is the candid, fascinating and often moving lens, Kriss – who was brought up in the largely white outer Bristol suburb of Southmead – provides on a type of semi-rural diasporic Black experience that barely registers in representations of Black Britishness. Folding onto the contexts of a resurgent far right politics, the rise of Margaret Thatcher and the fraught reality of 1980s British policing, his account leaves a resonant image of hip hop's force as a redemptive zone of utopian self-creativity.

James McNally: *What was growing up like?*

Krissy Kriss: As a Black kid growing up in Southmead, them days, you know? It's a weird one. I mean, now, being a grown man, through my eyes there's two stages in my life of growing up in Southmead. First was Fonthill Road, in the old estate, which is where we lived initially with me as a young kid, pre-primary school, up 'til the end of primary school. At weekends and in

Figure 1: Flowing, Bristol, 2019. Photograph by James McNally.

the summer, it would be bottle of squash, jam sandwiches, off to the fields, scrumping, jumping streams, picking berries, stuff like that, and you'd be out all day 'til supper. After school we'd mainly stay in the street playing 'Kerbs' or 'Please Mr Crocodile', 'cause only a couple of people owned cars so it was kinda safe, plus everybody knew everybody. Second, between the summer of leaving primary school and going to secondary school, we moved to the new estate, to a bigger house just below Twenty Acres. There, my spare time evolved to going to the local youth clubs – Brentry Lodge and Southmead Y. C. – but on lazy days me and the man dem could easily walk from my house to Rookie's in Brentry to where the mall is now on Cribbs Causeway. Pure open fields that lead to Little Stoke and Patchway.

JM: *It sounds almost semi-rural.*

KK: Well, it was rural, really. It was a little rank of shops on Southmead Road, and that was it. We're talking candles because of the power cuts. You had two pence for the phone box – no one had a phone! Black and white Rediffusion TV – you'd have a little machine, like those bubblegum things where you turn it and the coin drops, you'd have one of those boxes on the side of the TV. You'd put fifty pence in and then you could watch TV and an alphabet dial on the window sill to change the channel. But at primary school, there was a mixture of kids there, and my friends there [were] white and Black. The real change was going into secondary school. So I'm 11, my mum says 'right, you're going to St Mary Redcliffe'. My mum's a devout Christian, we were all brought up in the church, I was in the choir, so my mum wanted to send me to that church school. I wasn't really happy about that at the time, because I wanted to go to Henbury with my brother Michael. That's when I started to see the [racial] differences. That school then was about 1000 [pupils], and there were probably twelve Black kiddies in the whole school, maybe a few more. There were about four in my year, and then respectively over the five years, twenty max – *max*! – out of a thousand.

JM: *What was that ratio like compared to your primary school?*

KK: I wouldn't be surprised if it was about the same. But I think when you're little, what was more apparent was the have and the have-not, you know.

JM: *So it was at secondary school that you became aware of race?*

KK: More so, yeah. As twelve, thirteen going to the Southmead Youth Club, it was definitely very blatant then. The race or racism was coming strong. We'd have a game of football, it would be Blacks against whites. And it was just known… we knew *he* didn't like us, and *we* didn't like him, and we keep away from him. But racism, the N word and all that sort of thing, that flew, and we'd have our own dubs back as well, and a lot of people who dealt that shit couldn't really handle when it was sent back to them. There would be fights and stuff, and it got pretty brutal at some times. But at the same time, within the gaff, if I recall, when other areas came down – and that used to happen a lot as well – the same guys you're fightin' with earlier would be on your side when it was time to defend your own shit…

JM: *What kind of year would this be?*

KK: 1977, 1978.

JM: *In a historical sense that was square on the resurgence of the National Front and organized racism. Was there evidence of that*?

KK: *Yeah*! You had skinheads, all that sort of stuff. The KKK, I remember that being brought up a few times. But I got chased *many a time* – white vans, tinted windows, stuff like that. I knew not to walk back certain ways. Always [walk] in couples, or your crew. You knew what road not to go down, what pub not to go near. You soon learned. Your spider senses attuned a lot earlier in life. You saw looks, you saw things and you just knew. You'd go into a disco, and you're checking a girl from a different area: (girl's voice) 'oh let's go to the school disco'. [You'd say] 'the guys over there won't like it'. She'll be, 'oh it'll be alright'. But you *know* it ain't gonna be alright. It's time to get outta there. 'Cause, a group of guys, strength in numbers, all it takes is a kick in the head – I mean, we've seen it: you're dead.

JM: *So was that Bristol-wide, that atmosphere?*

KK: Obviously, I can't talk for everywhere. I could say it wouldn't be happening down in [Bristol's historic centre of Black life] St. Paul's, because you'd get beat down, simple as that. Easton too, Totterdown – you had mans up there you couldn't ramp with… you had mans in Southmead you couldn't ramp with. But [late at night] if a white guy wanted to trouble you, you either had to run, or, don't get me wrong, if you had the same amount of people we'd give it back. But more often than not, it would be grown men outside the pub giving you that distasteful look, ready to call you Black bastard and give chase. It happened several times with me coming home from school in my school uniform!

JM: *How old were you when you started to travel around to other parts of Bristol?*

KK: Early teens. My brother George – he's 4 years older than me. George was into his music, and I just followed that – his music was wicked. He introduced me to funk and jazz and soul, going to all-dayers and stuff like that. It would be clubs like Arnos Court – though I didn't get to go – Reeves, and Freeze, Romeo and Juliet's – that's probably at 15, 16 tryin' to be 18. Also Locarno, and Tiffany's, which had 16+ nights. Then eventually at 15, I got into the Dug Out. But I even think that that was living hip hop. Hip hop is a way of life, and a concept, and then a vibe and a feeling, and a *knowing*, I believe. The days of jazz-funk, for me, that scene was a form of hip hop. It was just amazing. Guys were getting there early to practise their dance moves in the mirror. Then by 10, 11, 12, it starts filling up and you're ready. You had to be able to drop some moves. You had burn-offs, just the same way you had breakdancin', but [it was] jazz dancing with the footwork – more footwork.

Then, after a few years of doing that, you're meeting other people from other areas, and other bonds are made, and through that you're invited to somewhere else. We'd end up going to house parties in Clifton and St. Paul's, St. Werburgh's or Totterdown. But it all started from going to – for me, anyway – from meeting people in the likes of Tiffany's or Prince's Court or Cinderella's. [That early experience] was at clubs in town, so this is a lot different to what soon evolved into the likes of [mid-late-1980s spots] the Moon Club, Mozart's and Tropics – which were just off-centre places to go, not mainstream clubs. You'd have your token amount of Black music in these other [city centre] clubs. You had Black bouncers being told to only let a certain amount of Black people in. It was fuckin' outrageous: 'Sorry guys, top of the road for

you, not tonight, got enough of you in there now. Try next week' – that sort of nonsense. It's interesting to see some of them now, when you're grown and they're all old. Just blow on you now, and you fall down. But you'd have none of that [in those later underground clubs in St. Paul's and Stokes Croft]. It took years for it to come to fruition, and for white people to come and realize that there wasn't half the trouble – a *third*, or a *tenth* of the trouble – that the media made it out to be if you go into St. Paul's.

JM: *What was your experience of St. Paul's before that club scene?*

KK: Initially, it was always family-related things. You'd go down there for, I don't know, a christening or whatever, as a family. But as a young man, again, [I'd go there] following in George's shadow. We'd all hang out down in town, down by the bandstand on Castle Green, again on the dancing thing – always music based – and when you see some of the other guys who lived in St. Paul's (Jamaican accent): 'whe you a-go, country bwoy! Go back ah country!' – meaning Southmead. But it's just dubs, taking the piss. And somebody who didn't talk patois – or the Brit-side patois, or even a hint of it – they might get ribbed a bit more. But St. Paul's represented, you know, Black high road to me. But it was six miles – it was a bus ride away, it was *far*. You wouldn't walk there just to pass by. You had to go there for a reason.

JM: *Did it almost seem like a mecca type of place?*

KK: (Thinks) I dunno. It was different. Night-time you had to know where you are, where you're going and where you *don't go*. So, it was quite imposing as well. It's dark, and lots of unknowns – so I don't think 'mecca' is the right word for me. I'd go there with my man dem, but I didn't know the streets [at that point]. I wasn't that familiar with it – 'cause when I'd go there with the family, and you're the youngest, I'm going to the house, and that's where we'd stay.

JM: *At what point, do you become aware of this thing called hip hop, which was starting to happen?*

KK: There's two: one occasion was in the Locarno, and a guy called Tookie came back from the States, and he done some poppin'. It probably wasn't even that good, but it was like '*whaaat!?*' That was seeing it physically. I knew what hip hop music was, or some of it. The other was coming back from Southmead youth club, and [New Edition's 1983 single] 'Candy Girl' was on the charts – which was pop hip hop really. But I think seeing that on the TV was what made me think 'I can do that, I'm gonna do that'.

JM: *Did it catch you immediately?*

KK: Yeah, yeah, totally. It was immediate.

JM: *What was the feeling it gave you?*

KK: The feeling was… um, I've never had to describe it before… it was *right*. The feeling was right. It was mine, it was ours – and that 'ours' stems from the Blackness, initially. 'Look at what these Black people are doing!' After years of being seen like Black people ain't coming with nothing, ain't really good for fuck all, do you know what I mean? Whether they're American or not, those miles were gone. They're there on that TV, like the Osmonds, like the Nolan Sisters, being the big stars, acclaimed – and they're *my colour*? Doing

that music, which moves me? *Fuckin' right*. Wicked. Don't get me wrong, the Stevie Wonders, Gladys Knights, they were always there before when I was little, but this was for *me*. I could associate with them. Immediate.

JM: *Why do you think hip hop did that, but reggae didn't?*

KK: Because I lived in Southmead and not in St. Paul's.

JM: *So, was there a split in that sense?*

KK: I can only speak for my side, really. I mean, I don't dislike reggae, there was reggae in the house, but St. Paul's was a small community, so you're hearing it everywhere. It simply is that. [If I'd grown up in St. Paul's] I would've been hearing it everywhere I went in the streets – St Nicholas Road, Grosvenor Road, the Inkerman, it's all reggae influenced. There wasn't any reggae influence [in Southmead]. Southmead is a couple of churches, a row of shops, a couple of schools and that's it. But in St. Paul's, there might've been 30, 40 per cent of the population were Black – that's thousands more people, or a 1000 more people, than the twenty [Black] people who lived in Southmead by us.

JM: *So did hip hop catch all your friends who you'd been into the soul thing with at the same time?*

KK: Yeah. Yeah.

JM: *So it kind of morphed into a crew?*

KK: Yeah. It was funny because each chose their own discipline. A couple of them went in the deejay way, I went emcee-wise, a couple went in dancing-wise. You just organically went that way.

JM: *What was your crew called?*

KK: Initially, it was Crazy 17, because we were all 17 at the time. Then, we went on to become Z-Rock, which morphed into KC Rock, and then not long after that I began emceeing with the Wild Bunch for a bit. After that I did stuff with Smith & Mighty, and then [from 1989] I was in 3PM.

JM: *When you started rhyming in 83, was there already a scene around it?*

KK: No, not really. We were the first to do a gig in Southmead. We hired the Southmead youth club, it was free entry, and we had people come from all over the place to it. There were jams going on around the city, but not many.

JM: *Was that the first time you'd been on a microphone in public?*

KK: In public-public, yeah. But that was 1984.

JM: *Can you describe it to me?*

KK: What we would've been playing, would've been a mirror image – based on what records we could obtain – of what we saw the Wild Bunch were doing, you know. But adding our own flex, our own influences. So Z-Rock, we all deejayed, but I emceed. Wallace, who's Double Z, he emceed. Claudio was Triple Z, I was Mellow Z and Michael, my brother, was called Dr Rookstein M.D. So it still had that American flex with the names, because that was our influence.

JM: *Zee, not Zed.*

KK: Yeah, Zee. Them days, you know, we were living hip hop, but it was brand new, therefore I didn't *know* we was living hip hop. But when I think of it, we were coming from the jam structures, where men and women, boys and girls, came together and danced. It wasn't a *hip hop jam* [in the competitive sense], it was a funky hip hop night. So it would have been tracks from, say, Just-Ice and Schoolly D to Roxanne Shante, to Chaka Khan, then going into the soul sort of vibes – [Fatback Band] 'I Found Lovin", Cherelle, D-Train, Odyssey and

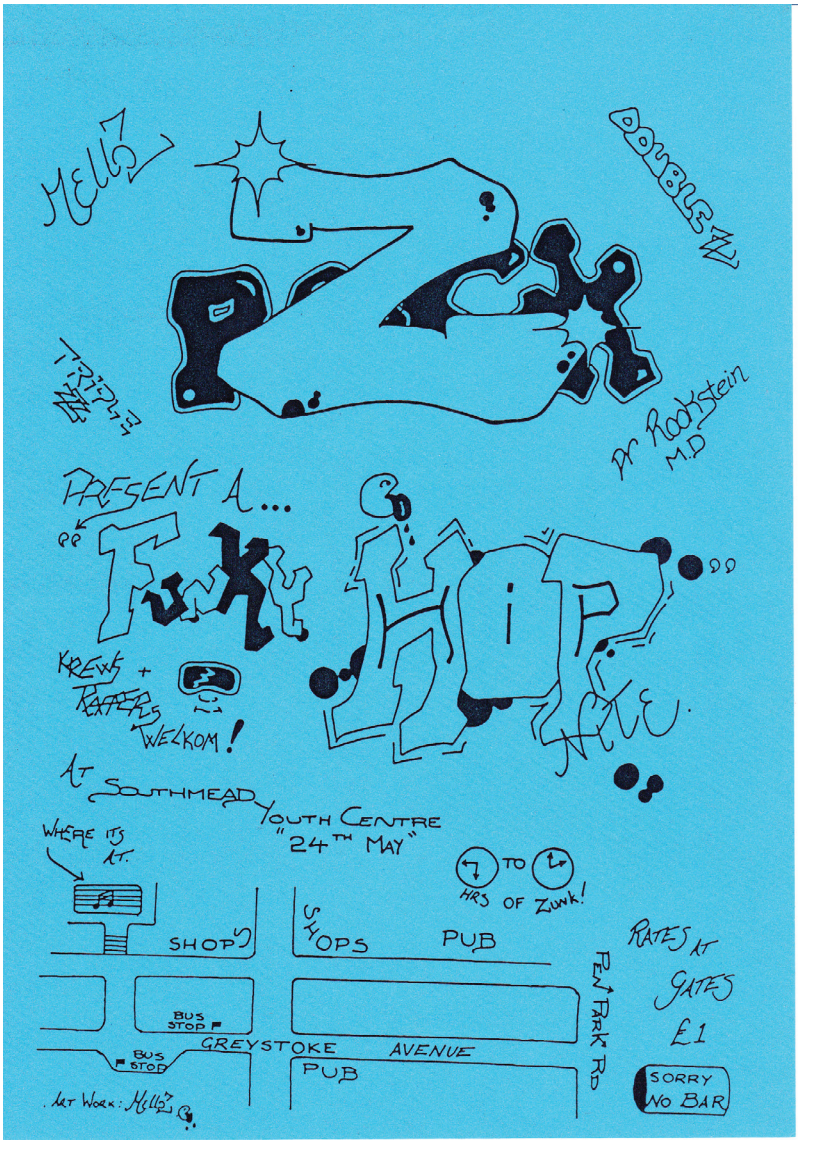

Figure 2: Z-Rock Present... Funky Hip-Hop Nite at Southmead Youth Centre, c. *1984. Artwork by Mello-Z, aka Krissy Kriss. Reproduced with thanks to Krissy Kriss.*

stuff like that. A mixture, but the soul-hip hop mixture. So on that particular night, I'd've been MCing, you know, and I was Mellow Z.

JM: *At the point of your first jam, were you aware of the Wild Bunch?*

KK: Going to their jams? Yeah, seeing Milo and Nellee deejaying – 1983, 1984, they were booming. They were stylish – I think that they used to get all their clothes from [fashionable Bristol boutique] Paradise Garage: ripped jeans and rockabilly boots with studs, the punk-but-not-punk thing mixed with hip hop – just different. They'd be playing jams music [i.e. early 1980s boogie] into a hip hop thing… It was a mish-mash. But it was men and women, because hip hop [later] went to where it was just blokes to a degree. But really, the reason why Wild Bunch stuck out more, I think, was because at that time you still had the likes of Prince's Court, the Moon Club or other situated clubs. When the Wild Bunch did it, it was a house party or a disused building, not in a club. They pioneered that in this city – and then eventually we did stuff, following them up to London when they hooked up with Jazzie [B of Soul II Soul] and the funki dreads and stuff.

JM: *Was it inspiring to have young Black men like Grant and Milo doing something at such a high level, so fresh and new?*

KK: It was, but you've gotta remember, them days there was no money in it. It wasn't 'oh god I want to be like them, because of the amount of money'. It was just for the love. What drove me is, one of the skills Milo had on the decks was the funky drop [he put] on it, but also it was *where did you get that track from*? It killed me. So I'd be hunting for *that* track. So, the inspiration was twofold, threefold, fourfold. It wasn't inspired to *be like* them, it was more like 'I'm a do some of that', while also recognizing, hats off and respect to them for what they're doing. So later, when they're asking me to come and rap with them, come and do a couple of bits-and-bobs? Of course, I will!

JM: *Do you remember the first party you did with them?*

KK: I can remember parties, but don't know which one would've been first. I remember [in London] we done Town and Country [Club], Artists Against Apartheid; we done the Wag Club; we done this underground one in this disused bus garage that everyone came from everywhere to and got raided by the police. I remember I met up with Jazzie through them and the Funki Dreads up in Camden, staying by Milo's and Nellee's and driving up to London frequently with Sarah Dunn and Mushroom in the black Beetle. I remember Artists Against Apartheid, 'cause we drove up, me and Sarah and Nick Walker and Mushroom. I gave Sarah my Kodak instamatic, and she took some photos, because that was my first big thing. Me and Delge [3D] decided what we're gonna wear – and we wore Hawaiian shorts, our goose jackets and Kangols. I had my Puma States and he had his Nike Penetrators, and Sarah got some shots. But it's a mixture [of memories], it's too long ago.

JM: *What was it like going to London in what was in some senses quite a territorial hip hop scene?*

KK: Because of how tight it felt with the crew, I didn't feel inferior or threatened by anything – I don't mean threatened as in a physical way. I didn't feel intimidated. I was just gonna do a thing. The importance was the enjoyment

of it, the vibe of it. I felt Milo, Willie Wee, all the [Wild] Bunch were *cool*. And I felt cool too, you know what I mean. I was minor league, I was *young bwoy*.

JM: *Did you feel that you had to work twice as hard to impress London crowds though? Were people kind of looking at you as if you were from the countryside?*
KK: I genuinely don't know. I don't remember thinking 'Oh my god, this is going to be rubbish' or 'What are they gonna think?' I don't remember that feeling. Because, you can appreciate, the guys arranged this night based on their contacts and what they'd done, so I was a part of that anyway. If other people thought that of me and my style, I didn't get to hear that because I was part of the Wild Bunch that's come to rock a jam – you know, alongside Jazzie and the Funki Dreads, or alongside Newtrament.

JM: *Was the bus garage party you're talking about in Paddington with Newtrament? There's a video of it getting raided by the police.*

KK: That was madness! I think that was the first time I realized the differences in this city to a major city. When the police were cordoning stuff off, nuff other people ran. But maybe because we had to get on the coach to get back, we didn't run. We had a little argument with the police and one of the policeman said, 'you guys ain't from here, where you from?' 'We're from *Bristol!*' They weren't used to the reaction we were giving. It was defiance. It wasn't that we were gonna pick up rock and bottle, we were just ignorant to how raw the police could be [in London]. We didn't really have an idea about how they could just pull you, throw you in the cell all night and you'll get a beating.

JM: *How would it have been different in Bristol?*

KK: The dynamic would be different because you downscale it. Then, if the equivalent was in St. Paul's… because that's the only area where it would have been, because nightclubs wouldn't have been playing the sort of music Wild Bunch was playing – you had to go to a jam or a house party to have that raw music. If you're in the gaff and the police come, you're secure. You feel safer because your house is just over there. You know the get-out routes. There's safety in numbers – and it ain't in the police's best interests to make a ruckus. So sometimes when the police come, the best way to do it is to contain. They know where they are [in St. Paul's]. They leave the scene, whatever.

JM: *Were the jams with Wild Bunch in Bristol different to the ones you were doing in London?*

KK: *Yeah*. Because the majority of the people coming to the jams in Bristol, you knew – or a high percentage, so therefore you had that and the comfortability of it. But it was interesting to see people reacting similarly, or in the same way to what you're doing in another city. But then, as a young Black man, you would see another young Black man who is a hard-knock or a top-notch, and you fall into place. Or you lock into your spider senses when you feel that one guy ain't checkin' for you. You just stay with the crew, do what you've got to do and then get back to the house. But that's because it's a bigger arena – there's more possibilities and parameters to take on board.

JM: *It sounds like the Bristol scene was pretty intimate.*

KK: If you think about how small Bristol is in comparison with other major cities – and it is the biggest city in the south west of England – it's still got the mentality of a village. But back then it was probably 450,000 people, just under

half a million. And you divide and divide down again, you know – Totterdown was Totterdown, Southmead was Southmead, St. Paul's was St. Paul's, Redland was Redland. There's ten, twenty, 50 people from each one, all different ages, who all like that particular one thing that made a particular club at the time successful. And then [you'd have] a few more people came along who just wanted that vibe or whatever. It was a 100-odd people [who went] religiously.

JM: *Were most parties in St. Paul's?*

KK: Majority, yeah. One of the best ones outside of the regime of the Wild Bunch would've been Hampton Lane – an FBI party at Phil [Jones]'s mum's house, fucking blinding. Willie Wee and Grant [Marshall] came to that one, and FBI had the funk: two brothers, Paul and Mark Cleaves. I think Phil's mum went on holiday or whatever and we had the whole house: three-story house in Redland, massive garden! So, yeah, you had the occasional ones that ventured out of the gaff.

JM: *So why did it become centred on St. Paul's?*

KK: Well, because it was most unlikely for any trouble to come police-wise, or any other sort of thing. Because the neighbours would've been more used to house parties and whatever. You couldn't just rock up in Henleaze – it would be locked down straight away. Not only because it was considered a 'Black thing', but because of the noise. I mean, living and growing up in Southmead,

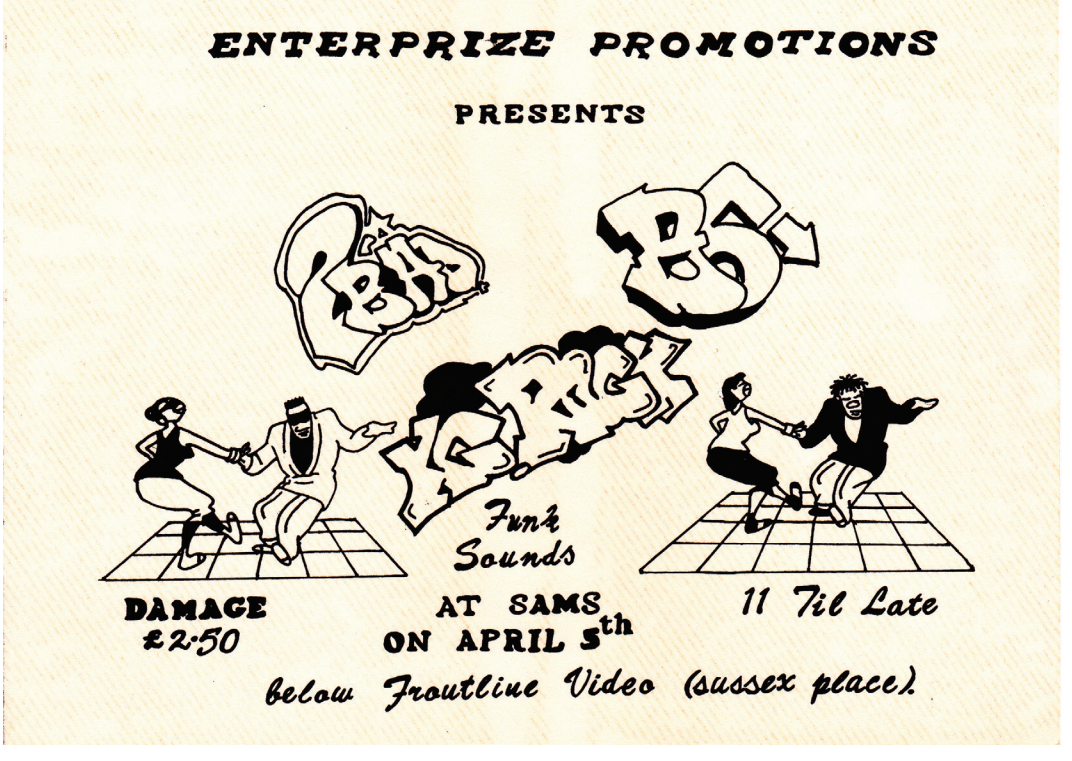

Figure 3: *KC Rock* Funk Sounds at Sam's Below Frontline Video, *St. Paul's, mid-1980s. Reproduced with thanks to Krissy Kriss.*

St. Paul's was the place everyone exodused to to go to experience that thing. That was the known place. It might've originated from that being the only place in the city where, before our time, you'd have [blues dances and underground clubs like] Ajax's, Dingy's, Bamboo – places that were renowned for after hours. So I don't think there was anything mystical or whatever.

But after that you had the Tropic, you had the Moon Club and you had Mozart's, which was a bit after Moon Club – but these are all wine bars/nightclubs, which just started to play this kind of music. It was [all around] Stokes Croft or Lower Cheltenham Road [both immediately adjacent to St. Paul's] before the Bearpit roundabout. But no one from town – I won't say white people, or townies – they would have no reason to go to any of these places that was just up the road. So the majority of the places were 70 per cent Black and 30 per cent white, or a mixture of colours or whatever. But that's where you went, because that's the only place that offered what you were looking for.

JM: *So were most of the parties being thrown at venues that were being hired, or warehouse venues…*

KK: Both, both. The established places were the Tropics, and the Moon Club and later the Thekla – they were owned by Denzel and Bentley. Mozart's, I can't remember who owned that. But it was the whole area – even down to Slicks the burger place [on Stokes Croft], everyone headed there afterwards. That was that stretch. That's where you saw ruckuses. That's where you saw mans drunk. That was our strip in *Grease*. That was ours. Everyone went there, man and that's where all roads ended. What's interesting, though, is we loved that [St. Paul's] was reported to be rough and nasty, and don't go down there. Those who went knew it wasn't, but it kept others at bay to a degree: idiots, or nonces, or people who wanted trouble. In a way, [it's] the fear factor of St. Paul's, do you know what I mean? I've had it growing up: 'Krissy, you're alright, but the rest of those coons down in St. Paul's, I don't like them' – oblivious to what they're really saying to me.

JM: *The party everyone always talks about is the Redhouse.*

KK: With Newtrament. That was St. Paul's, that was a wicked night. Crazy night. There's a picture in Beezer's book (*Wild Dayz*, 2009), actually, with me and Mushroom [later of Massive Attack] there watching. In that picture, there Mushroom's got a Z-Rock T-shirt on. That was when Mushroom got affiliated to Z-Rock, and I made him a T-shirt. That's testament to how everything was all crossing over. It's hard to remember exactly [the details of the party], but it was amazing. I didn't do anything that night. I didn't get on the mic I don't think, but [we were] still crew enough to be right there by the decks.

JM: *How did your connection with Mushroom happen?*

KK: Mushroom came on board through Michael. They worked in Michael's Restaurant together on Hotwells Road, and he came back one time with Rookie, 'cause we'd also hook up at Rookie's house to practise. It all started from that.

JM: *I read an interview where Mushroom said you went to New York together.*

KK: Yeah, we did – 1984 that was. By that time, I'd met his mum Sue and Dave his dad, and we were kin. So we arranged, rang my uncle, went over there,

spent six weeks there having an amazing time. We met all my family – it was the first time I'd met everyone, so he experienced all that with me. We came back with goose jackets and Cazals [glasses] and Kangols and shell tops and Puma States, you know what I mean? It was blinding. We saw some scary shit, we saw some beautiful things. We witnessed hip hop. We saw my cousin who lived in the projects – some scary fucking things.

JM: *Where were you staying?*

KK: In New Jersey, I even worked for a couple of weeks in the peach farms to get a bit more money – that's what paid for my goose jacket. Mushroom was *adored* by my aunt and by my cousins, so he was looked after. We just had an amazing time. We were 18.

JM: *Did that change anything when you came back?*

KK: For us? Yeah, fucking hell! I've got stories of when we turned up in Special K's [café and hip hop hangout] orchestrated. We both went in with our gooses and Cazals. We looked like people that were on TV. We looked like *Wild Style* the film. We had buckles and all that – *what*!? We were the first to come back with that flex in Bristol, in our circle.

JM: *So you were basically the dons.*

KK: We were boys, man…

JM: *Did you have a creative interaction with 3D in those days?*

KK: Yeah, me and Delge… His parents used to own the Beehive [pub] on Wellington Hill. We'd hook up on whatever day, work for the day, get fed. Then, we'd hang out in the bowling alley and write lyrics.

JM: *I think you're the only two emcees ever to have both used the word Subbuteo in a rhyme.*

KK: Yeah, man – kickin' like Subbuteo. I can still remember our first rap, which we were gonna make a track with. It was called 'Down in Black and White'. That didn't come to pass, but it's like a pass-the-rap, so he'd start with:

> *Delge*: I make your head turn and I will confirm
> That me and Krissy Kriss are on equal terms
> I like to paint, when I ain't just writin' with a marker
> Singing,
> *Krissy*: His skin's lighter
> *Delge*: Word, his skin's darker

Then I was:

> One Black, one white, we never mess up
> The soft suckers I will break, and in Black I mean bruk
> Brukking them up, when I rocking inna nuff company
> Every time I chat, me say me smoke my sensie.[1]

I remember [at one point when we used to write] Delge saying 'you've still got that American twang bro, you need to sound a bit more British'. And, I was like, 'that's me, that's how I'm doin' it!'

1. Wild Bunch's 1988 single 'Friends & Countrymen' has a similar set-up, with DJ Milo and 3D performing an anti-racism rap.

JM: *On the tune you did with Smith & Mighty ('*This Is the Time' on their 1988 single 'Anyone'*), I don't really hear an American twang though. I hear you fully formed – quite remarkable given the time.*

KK: Yeah. Dunno.

JM: *Were you consciously trying to sound Bristolian?*

KK: No. The closest I can get to that is what other reference do I have? I didn't know of any British rappers big enough to me to hear a tape or a track. But I didn't *feel* American. What they were talking about, I had no way of talking about that. My life wasn't like that, and it was so new I didn't realize I could turn that into talking about what it was like living in Southmead, or whatever. At the same time, I hadn't experienced being shot, or ruffed up because I was Black. I'd been called names and whatever, but it was different to [that history where] you wasn't allowed to drink from the same cup or sit on the same bus. I didn't experience that sort of thing. So maybe that's why there was so much passion coming out of what they said, which was then transferred into making us listen. The music, something triggered me, made me wanna do it – more so than reggae, more so than funk and soul.

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