

GENF

Brick by Brick

Azari and III are rebuilding house with their own blueprint

PHOTOGRAPHY
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Chicago house music began in the early '80s, the outgrowth of a new generation of synthesizers and drum machines. It emerged from the same scene as disco, a similarly integral part of gay club life. Though often instrumental, many of the songs were layered with amateur vocals, turning them into rickety R&B songs, often tinged creepy due to the thin ping of the electronics and shallow recording value. Twenty-five years later, these genre tenets are the founding principles of Toronto duo Azari and III, so it's strange, despite their locale, that they grow so upset at the suggestion that they make Chicago house. "I don't want to get stuck in this house thing because we're into techno, we're into house, we're into body music, disco, whatever you want to call it, whatever you want to label it, go right ahead," says one half of the duo, Dinamo Azari. "But we don't do Chicago house. We don't know what that is." Except, well, they do. Which maybe other half Alixander III realizes, quickly retracting. "We know it and we love it." And with this confused beginning, Azari and III embark on their journey to the future of modern dance music, though that future is still closely tethered to its past.

Later this year, Trax Records, one of the original Chicago record labels, will

relaunch with a new Azari and III single. Still, the group prefers a more watery definition of their origins, both to lend credence to their claimed 30 years of DJing and performing, and to give credit to the satellite members of the group and the diverse Toronto underground

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scene they emerged from. "These late night, mature warehouse parties where people are just dancing until seven in the morning—that's always been in our blood," says Dinamo. "That's very Toronto," adds Alixander. "African, Jamaican, small town, big city. We've got

this whole thing mashing up and we're finding this common ground." That underground heterogeneity led them to a slew of collaborators, including glam rocker (and Nelly Furtado backup dancer) Fritz Helder and recent Rwandan immigrant, the young, wide-eyed and interestingly named Starving Yet Full. Both sing on Azari's first single, "Hungry for the Power," happy in the spotlight. "There's an air of mystery," says Alixander. "We're pretty careful with what we put out there." Apropos of these cloaked desires have been the duo's videos, which very consciously do not show two Canadians in front of dingy electronics. The clip for B-side "Manhooker," an ambient electronic song, features the color-separated visage of the French woman who gilded the track with her vocals. The "Hungry for the Power" video is especially kooky, a wild take on the power/sex/money dynamic from films like *Wall Street* and *American Psycho*. In between scenes of a hooker tying up a businessman who ultimately comes to a very violent end, you see Starving Yet Full and Fritz Helder patrolling shadowy streets, scowling at the camera and dancing in silhouette. Alixander and Dinamo only make brief cameos.

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Azari and III outside their studio in Toronto, Canada.