

About the Zippy Movement

Jules Marshall
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There's a new and rapidly spreading cultural virus ripping through the British Isles. The symptoms of those infected include attacks of optimism, strong feelings of community, and lowered stress levels. Will their gathering in August at the Grand Canyon be the Woodstock of the '90s ?

A new and contagious cultural virus is ripping through the British Isles, a meme, an "idea with attitude". Like all successful memes, it confers advantages on its host : those infected suffer attacks of optimism, strong feelings of community, lowered stress levels, and outbreaks of "*pronoia*" - the sneaking feeling one has that others are conspiring behind your back to help you.

If these were not sufficient to ensure the meme's continued spread in this mutating, anxiety-inducing age of ours, add the effects of unselfconscious dancing till dawn, a strong dose of underground hipness, and a belief that technology can - indeed, should - be put to the furtherance of hedonistic and spiritual goals. What we have here is a major player in the premillennial cultural meme pool, and a loose-knit movement of folks who aim to change the world - while having the best time of their lives. Cyber-crusties, techno-hippies, post-ravers - the British media have tried pinning various compound names to its members.

But one name stands out, maybe because it was designed to. And for the moment it's sticking : zippies. It stands for Zen-inspired professional pagans, according to 50-year-old Fraser Clark, shamanic zippie spokesperson, club manager and editor of *Encyclopedia Psychedelica* (EPi), the magazine that first identified the "hippies with zip". According to EPi, a zippie is "someone who has balanced their hemispheres to achieve a fusion of the technological and the spiritual. The techno-person understands that rationality, organization, long-term planning, consistency and single-mindedness are necessary to achieve anything solid on the material level. The hippie understands that vision, individuality, spontaneity, flexibility and open-mindedness are crucial to realize anything on the spiritual scale".

Zippies are an unlikely fusion between the two sides. They are the product of UK dance-scene hedonism, cyber street tech, pagan spirituality, postpunk anarchism, and go-for-it entrepreneurism. As a movement, the zippie scene might never have passed childhood to reach its current state of maturity had Margaret "Nanny" Thatcher not been determined to beat some values (hers) into two very different (to the point of mutual antipathy) groups of recalcitrant citizens. These were folks who refused to bend the knee : so-called New Age travellers (or crusties) and ravers (house music enthusiasts).

Now, the zippies are planning the most radical musical invasion of America since the Beatles and the Stones first kicked up the shit 30 years ago. More radical in fact, since what is being offered is an entire cultural attitude, a postcyberpunk, postconsumerist way of life. If you've got nothing better to do (and who does ?!), plan on heading to the Grand Canyon this August. Woodstock revivals won't hold a candle to the zippie invasion of 1994.

Travelling Blues

Throughout the '80s, the travellers - basically a seminomadic cross between a Gypsy and a hippie - suffered systematic state brutality on a scale not witnessed in Britain in decades. The most famous incident was the Beanfield Massacre in 1985, where several hundred travellers were driven into a field near Stonehenge by police and army, their ancient lorries and caravans trashed, pets rounded up and destroyed, children and women harassed, and all men beaten and arrested.

This incident was not without prelude. In the late '60s, a free rock festival was held annually at Windsor, just outside London. By 1971 this had become so popular and was considered so close to the capital as to be a major source of anxiety to the government. The police banned the festival, and the people associated with it looked elsewhere to continue the tradition. They chose Stonehenge : it is miles from anywhere, it is one of the most revered sites in Europe, and it provides a killer backdrop for a rock festival.

Fraser Clark went to Stonehenge in the early 1970s. "I kind of came 'round the corner expecting to see a communal food tent and a few hippies, but there in front of me was what looked like the whole Cherokee nation : teepees as far as the eye could see".

The festival, designed to coincide with the summer solstice, rapidly extended into a monthlong love-in, police-free zone, and proto-anarchist community. Travellers formed convoys of up to 100 lorries to move around the country afterwards, from fair to fair selling food, crafts, and drugs as they went. "It was a pretty lawless place", says Clark. The cops never came - if they did, a bunch of kids would immediately turn over their vans. There was every drug under the sun openly available - but it really worked, and people started to think, "What the fuck do we need the government for anyway ?".

But during the '80s, the government came back with a vengeance. Each year the festival was banned and access to Stonehenge prevented - even to bona fide practicing druids.

The government didn't ignore the ravers either. Since the "acid house" media scare of what the British style magazines still refer to wistfully as the Summer of Love (1988), ravers and rave organizers were treated in a similarly brutal fashion. During "The Summer of Love", Britain took two US imports - ecstasy and house music - added large doses of street style and attitude, and created the most explosive new dimension to popular culture since punk. Tens of thousands of kids headed out past London's M25 orbital ring road to country raves - hence the "orbital rave explosion" as it is also known. The press picked up on the name, "acid house" (coined in Detroit and Chicago, and referring to the music's squelchy bleeps and "acid" sound), assumed it was connected with psychedelics (right idea, wrong drug), and fanned a huge backlash from the government.

Raised on entrepreneurial spirit, here were model capitalists taking in up to UK pounds 200,000 a night : using only fax and answering machines, mobile phones, and toll-free numbers, they played cat-and-mouse with police every weekend all over the country and brought up to 20,000 kids together in a field at a few hours' notice.

Instead of awarding them Thatcher Awards for Enterprise, the government banned the whole thing, attacking ravers with the same thuggishness they were simultaneously directing at the travellers. Expensive equipment was trashed or impounded, party-goers beaten up.

The crime shared by travellers and ravers : defying the British government by having unsanctioned fun smack in the rural Tory-voting heartland of England. Primal fears of violation by unwashed intruders were compounded by the worry that Britain's children might run off and join them.

Hippie Wisdom, Raving Savvy

By the end of the '80s, travellers and ravers were coming into increasing contact, at huge outdoor festivals like Glastonbury and in London venues like Club Dog and Whirl-y-Gig. "We'd all been to Stonehenge and been inspired", says Michael Dog, founder of Club Dog. "We wanted to recycle that vibe for the winter in London. When the government killed off the festi-scene, we were left as a repository of '60s values - like a zoo".

Club Dog had always been an acquired taste, but when house music came along, the club gave it serious attention : in fact, Club Dog now runs a packed dance-oriented offshoot, Megadog. "We're not tied to style and pretension", says Dog. "We'd all been into Kraftwerk and synthesizer stuff. Dance music was from the same head space, so it was natural to move into it".

At first there was mutual hostility. To many travellers, ravers were just a bunch of ecstasy-chomping city brats driving out to the countryside, messing things up for them, and playing soulless synthesizer music. Hell, most ravers had never seen a cow in their lives. To the ravers, the crusties were, well, crusty : scruffy hippies, rural van-dwelling squatters into dub reggae, industrial noise, and folk music.

But contact (and shared government harassment) broke down ignorance and spawned the zippie fusion. At one Glastonbury festival, Mixmaster Morris, an ambient-techno pioneer, found that neighboring campers were threatening to firebomb his bus if he played one note of techno. But by the time he finished his set, the same neighbors gushed : he had played the best music they had ever heard at a festival.

Then in May 1992, a smallish festival of hippies/crusties near Castlemorton found itself swamped by 30,000 ravers. The big draw was Spiral Tribe, an amorphous hardcore collective of more than a dozen squatters with a simple guerrilla philosophy : to play music as loud as possible for as long as possible. For four days and nights, that's what happened - hard, trancy house music mixed on the fly. The police let them onto Castlemorton because it was "common ground" - English legal tradition guarantees that all citizens have access to it.

But it wasn't long before the cops cracked down. As local politicians called for the paramilitaries, police helicopters hovered over the crowd day and night - drawing fire from distress flares and crossbows. Zippies are unashamedly psychedelic - hash spliffs, ecstasy, acid, mushrooms, and for the hip and well-connected, DMT. This penchant for mind-benders is partly to blame for the Establishment crackdown.

Ten members of Spiral Tribe were arrested and charged with "conspiracy to cause a public nuisance", which carries a maximum sentence of life in prison. At *Wired's* press time, the UK pounds 4 million showcase trial was due to end, and Parliament was pushing through the Criminal Justice Bill, which, if passed, will make squatting illegal and allow police to disperse any crowd of ten or more people who look ready to "do something" (the bill will give squatters 24 hours notice to get out or be prosecuted; this, incidentally, breaches the European Convention of Human Rights and Freedoms, according to Liberty, Britain's civil rights campaign group).

The Fusion

"Before zippies we had all these silly fragmented subcults not talking to each other", says Clark. "Hippies had dwindled to a few thousand around the country. I told them the ravers are our reinforcements, and they arrived just in time.

"The bottom line is unity. You have to have all types of people into it, then the powers can't pick us off. Also, a mix of ages is very important, to blend experience with enthusiasm".

Morris agrees : "Squatting, travelling - anything but being a bank clerk will soon be illegal. The example and wisdom of hippies proves to the young raver that there is an alternative and an opposition. The government has driven raves out of business in the last two years, and they're still taking people out for underground parties they organized three years ago. People have gone to prison for ten years and no one raised a finger".

Steve Hillage, former rock guitarist and founder (with Dr. Alex "The Orb" Patterson) of the zippie band *System 7* says : "Rock used to be a revolutionary and progressive force, but for the last five years ambient/dance music is where the progressive, experimental work has been revived".

Hillage, who grew up in the '60s, sees a positive element to dance culture : "Out of the awful materialism of the '80s this wonderful scene has emerged. I don't parallel it with the hippie movement, but I get a lot of the same feelings as when I was growing up. All different types of people there with a spirit of oneness. A lot of what is good about the UK scene is what was claimed to be good about the '60s, only this time it's real, not skin deep".

"The zippie movement has more positive energy and enthusiasm than anything else I've ever seen", confirmed Rose Roffe, a 69-year-old "Raving Granny" I met at the prime zippie nexus, Megatripolis. Cyberpunk critic Vivian Sobchak says zippies not only eschew the drippy technophobia of the original hippies but also avoid the "selfish, consumer-oriented and technologically dependent libertarianism" and "romantic, swashbuckling, irresponsible individualism" of cyberpunk.

"There is a world of difference between zippies and the cyberpunks", says Clark, who calls the latter isolated, alienated, and separated. "Cyberpunk was a mere prelude", he continues. "A zippie feels the terror and promise of the planet's situation and is prepared to use anything short of violence - magic, technology, entrepreneurial skill - to create a new age in as short a time as possible".

Zippiedom has become a deliberately broad church : it embraces the multinational businessman taking yoga classes as well as the hippie couple making candles to sell at festivals, the New Age traveller with a PC running off his bus's dynamo and the raver looking for a more meaningful buzz than ecstasy. "We need the maximum number of people to change in the shortest possible time. The best way is to make the alternative fashionable", says Clark. "There are no 'wrong reasons' for becoming a zippie".

To introduce the emerging scene to itself, Clark and his Evolution posse (the group that organizes zippie events, taking their name from Evolution, the now defunct descendent of EPi) established the Megatripolis club. Starting small, it rapidly outgrew its Soho venue, and 4,000 would-be raving zippies were turned away upon its reopening last October. The Thursday I went, I met a female professional gambler who "cultivates her intuition", a middle-aged lawyer, school kids, exchange students, graphic designers, and squatters. Part lecture hall, part Indian bazaar, part medieval courtyard, part pleasure dome, Megatripolis offers early evening talks by zippie thinkers (they call it "Parallel University"), trippy visuals upstairs, and ambient dance or a percussion jam in the "Virtualitiroom", where a bunch of Macs run the latest interactive demo from The Shamen or grainy graphics off some kid's floppy.

Techno-Optimism

The next day, I'm reminded by Matt Black of the zippie multimedia group Hex (see *Wired* 2.03, p. 90) that the

UK is "still in the Stone Age of personal computing. Hardware costs twice as much as in the States and is two years out of date. But we do have a strong rave culture".

Against all odds, technophobic Britain, the home of C.P. Snow's Two Cultures (where science has consistently been dissed by the liberal arts elite), is actually learning to love technology. Nerds, for the first time in living memory, are cool. "I spent my first twenty years as a hippie trying to get away from the techno side of things", says Fraser Clark. Now he's getting a modem for his PC.

"This is the strongest cultural force", says Hex's Black. "Maybe the force which will bring about the revolution in consciousness - which is what we are aiming at".

Almost entirely invisible to (arts-biased) politicians on the left and right, the UK has somehow developed the most creative bunch of software gamers outside the US, a huge explosion of independent TV production companies (in response to a late '80s boom in satellite and cable services, coupled with the rise of independents and the downsizing of the BBC). Britain, the first and most deregulated of the European telecoms, is in the process of laying the most advanced telecom infrastructure in the world - a testing ground for Baby Bell executives - where TV and phone traffic have been allowed on the same network since 1991.

But it's the huge dance culture that is the driving force and aesthetic polestar of this emerging techno-savvy British youth. More than a million people go to raves in the UK each week, diverting 2 billion pounds a year away from pubs, as a report from the Henley Centre think tank warned last year. "We are seeing nothing less than the rise of a new industry to replace the dead one that has not produced jobs", says Brian Davis, former journalist and organizer of the Cyberseed festival at South London's top club, The Fridge, last November. "TV is not feeding us what we want; there's no reason to stay at home. We're not pushing vinyl, but a complete culture. Can Sony or Philips do this ?"

No they can't. But zippies are not so naive as to expect them not to try to profit from what will inevitably be seen as another slice of market demographics. But as Michael Dog points out, "We've been ripped off so many times we're naturally sussed against corporatism".

Although evolution, not revolution, informs the zippie agenda, its submemes ensure that zippies will inevitably continue to come into conflict with the powers that be. "The political content of dance music is intrinsic", Will Sinnott, of the early zippie band The Shamen pointed out two weeks before his 1991 death. "It stimulates ego-role behavior reduction, offering the experience of unity and affinity with others. This experience invalidates liberal, individualistic ideology and creates true political opposition".

Zippie music is rhythmically rather than lyrically oriented - it really is in the music that the transformation occurs. Among the trancy reverb and sampled vocabulary of popular zippie songs can be found a Terence McKenna riff on goddesses, ecology, and the shamanic revival - and this woman's voice : "You can control some of the people all of the time; you can control all the people some of the time, but you can't control all the people all the fucking time".

"Thatcher did us a favor", says Michael Dog. "There's been a rejection of the control structure at the same time that the technology has appeared for us to remain totally independent. Fulfillment now comes not from political adherence but by not voting, in fact by having nothing to do with the system".

The pagan roots revival that the travellers brought to the zippie movement is fundamentally at odds with the government's insistence on Judeo-Christian pub culture and 11 p.m. bedtimes, no matter how hard the police crack down. Interest in the New Age is more than passive; it's rooted in a darker, indigenous Celtic/Nordic shamanism revival that has become increasingly politicized.

How big can it get ? The number of people aware of the zippie concept is growing exponentially : *The Independent* newspaper claims there are 60,000 squatters and 40,000 travellers in Britain, and that's just the hard core. Clark estimates there are 200,000 zippies in the UK alone.

Will it take similar hold in the US ? We'll see, Clark says. "Britain is socially and politically the most fucked up of the Western Democracies, the most divided by youth cults", says Clark. "Hippies never died out in the US, were never out of fashion the way they were here". This left intellectual ghettoes, resistant to the suggestion that a techno-based spiritualism could emerge from superficial dance culture. Clark was "flabbergasted at how far behind the US was" when he visited. "There's no infrastructure. Raving is more than music - there's a whole lifestyle. But toeholds exist in San Francisco and toeholds can lead to crazes, and suddenly it's massive".

See for yourself : Clark's "Megatripolis Advance Party" will host its free, annual megarave at the Rainbow Gathering at the Grand Canyon in Arizona August 1-15. Up to 60,000 people are expected. In a year when yuppie has-beens are going to fork over anywhere from US \$150 to \$5,000 dollars to relive a few fantasies (seated) at the two competing Woodstock anniversaries (festival organizers are targeting 250,000 and 40,000, respectively, at separate revivals on and near Yasgur's farm), maybe this is where the true spirit of the '60s will be found, but with a hard-nosed '90s realism.

"The recession forced us to cooperate", says Clark. "People are now prepared to listen to an alternative view. They may not agree, but, before, they had no reason to listen; the system was working from their point of view. The difference between zippies and hippies is that, this time, we're starting from halfway up the mountain".

How To Be a Zippy

Zippie Thinkers

Besides the obvious psychedelic heroes (Timothy Leary, Alexander Shulgin, John C. Lilly, and Terence McKenna), zippies have a fondness for paradigm-challenging folk scientists (Rupert Sheldrake, Richard Dawkins, Benoit Mandelbrot, Werner Heisenberg, and Douglas Hofstadter). Spiritual guidance comes from East and West, courtesy of Julian of Norwich, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and Shiva, among others. There's a distrust of the "twittering commercialism" of the US New Age scene.

Serena Roney-Dougal's *Where Science and Magic Meet* and Monica Sjoo's *The New Age and Armageddon* are currently popular. Marshall McLuhan gets the respect he deserves, as does intelligent fantasy author and one-time Hawkwind lyricist Michael Moorcock. So does Sid Rawls, for being the traveller spokesman and the media's favorite bogeyman.

Zippie Media

More cutting edge and less commercial than *The Face*, the style mag with a heart, *i-D*, has given zippie issues their only mainstream airing. *i-D* has beaten the pack, being the first in the UK to cover subjects from cyberpunk and chaos theory to the rise of pagan anti-road communities. As a national clubbing guide it's second to none, and check out the ahead-of-its time fashion coverage. *The Independent* daily newspaper is increasing its coverage of zippie issues and personalities, while zippie 'zines include *Zippy Times*; *Mind Food*; *Head*; *Dream Creation*; *Pod*, and *Tribal Messenger*. A zippie-esque BBS is Black Dog Towers, run by Black Dog Productions (some of the most innovative so-called "intelligent techno" artists around). It features articles on paganism,

anarchism, music, etc. Preferred zippie medium : word of mouth.

Zippie Music

With so many influences from such diverse backgrounds and ages, zippie music covers a wide and wonderful spectrum. There's very chilled-out ambient-techno : Irresistible Force, Aphex Twin, William Orbit, Astralasia, Future Sound of London, Higher Intelligence Agency, Pete Namlook and party organizers Telepathic Fish. Better-known early zippie favorites The Orb and The Shamen are a little too poppy now, while some find the KLF pranksters a little tiresome. Also in the mix : hippie icons who saw the light (System 7, Ozric Tentacles and Hawkwind, remixing at last) and more dancey stuff (D.I.Y., Spooky); House-guitar crossover acts (Banco de Gaia, Transglobal Underground, Seefeel); tribal beats (anything with a didgeridoo in it, Dervish samples, or Moroccan ululating); techno-dub reggae; or, most spectacularly, the holistic approach to live entertainment pioneered by The Shamen's Synergy tour in 1989 and 1990 and continued by Eat Static : in-yr-face lighting, live video mixing, hand-painted backdrops and hangings, dancers, and megastrobos. Record labels : Guerilla, Warp, Rising High, and Planet Dog Records. For clubs, try Whirl-y-Gig club recommended with Megadog and Megatripolis/Evolution.

Zippie Fashion

Zippies are not a cult and have no uniform by which one can recognize them. In the clubs, on the street, or at the festival, anything goes as long as it's you - and what's that ? Postmodern, postcommercial but not averse to fashion per se : guerrilla consumers already living at the end of history. Appropriated labels, logos, and slogans; typographical-pun T-shirts ("Groover" in Hoover script); combat gear; soccer shirts from the '70s; Tank Girl look; androgynous postapocalyptic or neo-hippie; the latest club look; the math nerd look; even a shirt and tie.

Zippie Hangouts

Stonehenge, Glastonbury, and other holy sites of Albion (ancient Britain); the Indian province of Goa; Thailand; San Francisco; Amsterdam; and North Wales during the magic mushroom season.

Zippy Pronoia Tour

The Planet Awaits a Sign

Any relatively conscious planeter has at least begun to suspect that the competition-based system within which human culture is currently operating is incapable of adapting and needs to be re-coded. A self-enclosed system cannot observe itself (i.e. it has no sense of humour) !

The Sign for which we all yearn (so deep in our hearts that it feels like world angst or personal depression) must announce in a Grand and Magickal manner -- as far removed from the old style Business Plan as possible -- that WE, the relatively conscious, are a hell of a lot more numerous than even WE supposed. This Sign must also demonstrate these numbers -- that, indeed, it is precisely because we have been increasing daily underground that the point has now been reached where the manifesting of such a Sign has become possible... and inevitable.

For consider : this Sign, because it will alert the next fractal ring of increasingly conscious planeters, will precipitate unimaginable global social change. Therefore, the most important questions become : from where in the culture could this Sign appear ? Are there already hints of it ? And, are YOU ready to help it happen ?

In very real, here and now terms, where is there a new cooperative cultural meme of sufficient and accelerating numbers into which we might usefully insert and apply our own skills and energies ? This meme must also make its adherents eager to swarm together in large celebrations of new lifestyle.

The news is good. Very, very good.

I see only one sociological phenomenon within Western Culture which has any chance of bringing about the required maximum change in the maximum number of people in the minimum period of time. UK Rave Culture has been evolving for five years now, and at its most accelerated, the tribal rave scene has united the raw young idealism and enthusiasm of Rave with the eco-wisdom of Festival Culture to produce a mix of meltdown proportions.

THE ZIPPY, harmonised in both hemispheres of the brain, technoperson and hippie.

Nobody has to give up anything -- merely start activating your ignored hemisphere. Literally ALL are welcome, for all will benefit. And it's because everyone will be happier when the evolution has occurred that it will succeed. You are invited (and very definitely needed) to make it happen.

Fraser Clark, London; May, 1994