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STUKES

From: Washington, DC

Three tunes: 'Asura,' 'Braxis' 'DLADWYA'

For fans of: Tygapaw, Sterac, KYRUH

MARSHALL STUKES was born in Virginia, and though he moved around as a kid, he considers himself a native of the state's Washington, DC area. He grew up on hip-hop and R&B, but one day, when he was 10, his father brought home a CD of Linkin Park's 'Hybrid Theory,' and Stukes fell in love with a new sound. Others, like Slipknot and, especially, System Of A Down, followed — something about the powerful yet precise music proved innately appealing. He was aware of electronic music's existence, but an unlikely source — the trailer for video game Assassin's Creed II — encouraged him to dig deeper.

"It had Justice's 'Genesis' on it," he recalls, "and I'm like, 'what the fuck is this?' It blew my mind. I'm like, 'all right, I need this.'" From there, it was on to Daft Punk and Deadmau5, then producers like Skrillex and Figure, "music that blended well with my metal sensibility," as he describes it.

Now DJing and recording as STUKES, he's come a long way from those days — which is not to say the music he makes isn't rife with the same propulsive power of his early musical loves. In 2021, he dropped the life-affirming techno three-tracker 'DLADWYA' on the Black Techno Matters label, followed by the rigorously fierce 'Closing' EP. Now, following this past June's self-released cut 'Stop Deadnaming Them,' Stukes has unveiled 'Asura,' two cavernous tunes complemented by a pair of

equally massive remixes, on BTM. (The release's title comes from the manga and anime series One Piece, Stukes explains, adding "I am a big nerd.")

Stukes' dive into production began while he was a student at George Mason University, just outside of DC, when a friend introduced him to FL Studio.

"It was some random day on campus," he recalls, "and he pulled out his laptop and showed us FL, me and four other people, and then we would spend nights making beats. I would try to make hip-hop beats and dubstep and EDM and stuff like that, but it never clicked with me. But eventually, something did click. I tell everyone I've been producing since '08, but the first 10 years were shit music. The first tracks that I really felt good about were actually 'Braxis' and 'Dathomir.'"

Self-released in 2020, those two tracks are self-assured slabs of billowing techno, but only begin to hint at the sound of his later work. The 'Asura' EP's title track, for instance, is a monster, with a syncopated kick anchoring a swirling squall of sound, while the release's other original, 'The Betrayal,' barrels like a freight train traveling through the netherworld.

The darker edge of his more recent releases, which have a borderline dystopian feel, is a product of his preferred taste rather than an effort to send a specific message.

"With my early stuff, and still to this day, I just make, like, whatever," he says. "But I think with my background in metal, and in sci-fi and horror — I love those kinds of movies and I love those soundtracks — I guess that's what comes out in my music most of the time." At its core, it's simply the kind of techno you'd want to hear in a dark warehouse, low-end booming beneath heaving synths.

Stukes came to DJing relatively recently, having

avoided the artform for years.

"I have a friend who always told me that I needed to DJ, but I was always like, 'No, that's too hard!' But then the pandemic hit, and I'm like, 'you know what? I'm just going to buy a DJ controller and jump right in, because I'm not doing anything else. I might as well learn.'" Apparently, he's a quick study. Not only has he been a core member of the community-building activist collective Black Techno Matters — "employee number three," he says — but he's also a resident of another notable DC crew, Undertone.

Stukes is currently spending much of his time on Black Techno Matters duties, building out the BTM website and the like, while still setting aside time for his own creative outings, perfecting a recently unveiled live set while working on his modular setup. ("But I still can't live without FL Studio," he says). He also fashions cinematic ambient music under the Marshall Willis name — a third Marshall Willis EP will be coming out next year on Not Yet Remembered Records — and he has the eventual goal of soundtrack work.

"I've actually made soundtracks for mock movies," he says. "I made one during the pandemic called I Know What You Didn't Do Last Summer, because everyone was stuck in the house, which was synthwave and dark wave-inspired. Those are very meta-adjacent genres, really."

"And I want to do a full remix album," he continues, "just bounce out all the stems from three EPs, and then have all my friends remix it. It would be something that harkens back to Linkin Park's 'Reanimation' for me. I think that'd be really cool." In his heart, he may still be true to his metal roots — but Stukes, and his music, have already traveled miles beyond.

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