

HOW DO YOU SEE ME NOW ?

A short story by Boombass.

At the end of the summer of 1995, after months spent in New York, I returned home. I'd packed a sampler and some vinyl records, which were going to pile up with the others in the flat my brother and I were renting in the 10th arrondissement. I missed Philippe, my friends, Paris and the studio. I didn't know it yet, but that stay in the cradle of American hip hop had changed my life. I realised that I wasn't about to dethrone Dj Premier, Pete Rock, Timbaland and all the others by trying to do the same thing. Then something clicked, on my way home from a night out in a New York club. I played instrumentals from American rap EPs at speed, at 45 rpm instead of 33, or at plus 8 with the fader on my SL-1200 MK2. It was obvious that there was something to do, and I went to bed with the idea in my head. Philippe, for his part, was also seeing his life change. The Motorbass album, written with Etienne de Crécy, was unanimously acclaimed by everyone in the electronic music world. The turntables began to spin under his hands, and raves extended his nights. He realised that the shadow of the recording studio would not be enough for him. To celebrate our reunion, we recorded two tracks in a bit of a haphazard fashion. *Foxy Lady* and *Dinapoly* were released in 1996, and are like two Polaroid photos of our approaching thirties. They sum up the experiences and musical discoveries of each of us, our friendship, and the way we'll be doing things with Cassius in the years to come. More than twenty years spent doing a thousand and one things, including five albums and five children between us. A lifetime where music and his world merged with our friendship. Cassius was a playground where time was forever fixed on the duration of a finished song. We were building a shared musical memory, with passion but not without ego. The miracle was that we managed to juggle with each other's egos. On the rare occasions when we had to distance ourselves a little, Cassius had acted as a punching bag, and our friendship had always been preserved. Two days before the release of *Dreems*, our latest album, time stood still again, but in a new way. Everything stopped with a phone call or an accident. When someone close to us disappears, our memory becomes a hostile universe. Life took over from Philippe, and mine became a dark, endless, exhausting slide show.

As the summer of 2024 approaches, I'm unpacking my travel bag in the 18th arrondissement, having rented a two-bedroom apartment 5 minutes from Les Abbesses for a few days. A temporary return to Paris, after a necessary move to the Normandy coast. The sea and the starry nights reconnected me with the present. Now, even if my friend is no longer there, he's still there, in my cells and in my heart. In one of those flash dreams in which we cross paths, which have become more frequent, I had the impression that he was shaking my hand, or perhaps holding it out to me.

I started to miss Cassius, I thought I'd better put on my old suit, just to see. Among our never-finished projects, the idea of a *Best-Of* or a compilation of our 'best songs' is on the list. There's an old-fashioned feel to it that we liked. A celebration of our adventure seemed to me to be a good first step in this Cassius outfit that's still a bit loose. This morning, it's not the sound of the waves that wakes me up, but a neighbour snoring. 'I'm in Paris', I say to myself, and in the neighbourhood where it all began. It was while I was taking a shower that I decided to go and see Philippe, who was also snoring peacefully, at the Montmartre cemetery. The sun was with me all the way, but the alleys were

shaded by trees. It takes me a good half hour to find the headstone. Instinctively, I'd been heading in the right direction, but a sudden emotion sent me in the opposite direction. I haven't been back here since he arrived. For this strange reunion, the only ray of sunlight filtering through the leaves spills over Philippe's grave. The words 'You always knew how to welcome your friends' come out of my mouth, and we finally have a laugh. I had to blow my nose as I left the cemetery, and in the middle of Avenue Rachel, memories of an evening at Thomas Bangalter's house came flooding back. He used to live in one of the buildings you have to walk past to get to the boulevard. Thomas and Guy-Man had started recording *Discovery*, or finished, I don't know, but we hadn't heard anything yet. Thomas had set up his synths on a mezzanine, and there was one in particular that caught my eye. I thought it looked sexy on its steel legs, which looked like the legs of a dancer. So I asked him what it was. After turning it on and letting it warm up, he launched into an improvisation that resembled the magnificent synth break in *Aerodynamic*. The beauty of the sound grabbed me straight away. 'It's a Yamaha CS60'. When he finished his solo by moving his left index finger, which he was pressing on a strange black velvet strip placed above the keyboard, an interminable and majestic glissando towards the lowest notes burst out of the speakers. 'Try it. He let me take over, and I struck a chord. Philippe and I had the same obsession: to look for the best and often find even better. Two days after I fell in love with Thomas's Yamaha CS60, I bought a Yamaha CS70m in Australia. In 1999, the internet was full of bargains. Later, I found a Yamaha CS80 and a Yamaha CS50, which joined the studio. Beyond the spirit of competition, those five minutes on Thomas's mezzanine allowed us to find a colour that would stay with us until the end.

When Philippe and I first met, we were talking about our not-so-distant teenage years. He was in a band, and I admired him when he told me that at school he had sung covers of Trust, Metallica and the Police in front of everyone. Fifteen years after that school concert, in the Labomatic studio, we were recording his voice through a Neumann U47 microphone. Born of experiments with the Yamaha CS80, *20 Years*, which appears on the album *Au Rêve*, was the first song Philippe sang seriously with Cassius. A sample kept repeating 'How do you see me now?' and he pulled out a soft leather notebook with sketches of lyrics. A text he'd started about his father, whom he'd lost when he was very young, fitted in perfectly with the chorus, which went round and round. After twenty years without him, the son wondered if his father was proud of how far he'd come. Guy-Man and Éric Chédeville remixed it, and the new version ended up on our third album, *15 Again*, under the title *See Me Now*. Listening to the *Best Of* selection in the little rented flat I've just returned to after my walk, *See Me Now* begins. When Philippe's voice, which we had sped up at the time, begins, I wonder in turn, after five years without him, if he's proud of how far I've come since then. I wonder how he sees me now, and if he's still cutting me off, even from those he's joined up there.

BOOMBASS, 2024