



Cut from a *different cloth*

As London's fabric celebrated 10 years of doing things on their own terms recently, we delve into the key cornerstones of its continually evolving legacy as the premier club in the country...

It's impossible to understate the effect fabric has had on the last 10 years of UK club culture. When the Farringdon venue first swung open its doors on Friday 25th October 1999, it did so within weeks of Darren Hughes' vastly ambitious Home on Leicester Square — a hugely publicised, hyper-branded and archetypal superclub venture with then superstars Paul Oakenfold and Danny Rampling as residents.

Yet while Home inevitably flopped as a credible venue and sunk without trace, fabric's 1700-capacity venue has thrived on an aural diet of only the most honest electronic sounds. It has remained packed to the rafters most weeks, ever since.

These days, fabric is pretty much the global standard-bearer of cutting-edge, underground music — played from the heart and without concession by the most

significant, and oft-unsung, artists of its era on one of the best soundsystems you will ever hear.

No single genre or innovative sub-strain has evaded its ceaselessly diverse programming and no venue in the country, possibly the world, comes close. But how did a dreamer's dream built on underground values become a globally renowned institution? We celebrate 10 key facets of the club's carefully tended make-up that might go some way to explaining the enigma.



1 Big room clubbing brought back to acid house basics

It was 1990 when fabric chief Keith Reilly first chased his dream of owning his own acid house inspired venue. By the time he found the dank, disused, starkly industrial meat-packing warehouse labyrinth that would become fabric it was 1997. The commercial era of the superclub had corrupted the UK dance scene with clubs more interested in global domination than decent parties in their own backyard. Supposed 'superstar DJs' with egos to match their wages were plying glam house to the masses. Not good. With fabric, Reilly sought to place the focus back where it belonged — the music. And proper music at that. Only the scale and size of his three-roomed 1700-capacity venture had anything in common with the idea of the superclub. There wasn't — and still

isn't — any décor, just big dark warehouse rooms rocking out to cutting-edge sounds and one of the best soundsystems in the country. Yet it wasn't without its early detractors. Or doubters.

"I had the whole world telling me I was completely bonkers and it would never work," remembers Keith. "And when I say the whole world I also mean the vast majority of agents who came down and said there is no way they would want to do anything with us.

"One classic comment was 'It's not very West End is it?'" jokes Keith. "You're kind of missing the point mate, that's exactly the fuckin' point of it — to not be West End."

2 Serious attention to the science of sound

In Reilly's own words "the single objective of the club has always been to find new and interesting music and play it on a really hot soundsystem. It really couldn't be any simpler".

And that's about the beauty of it. But fabric's meticulously attentive approach to sound is anything but simple. A perfectly set Martyn Audio system that literally wraps tracks right around you rather than thrusting them in your face, is backed up by a team of dedicated engineers that flat EQ the system for the individual frequencies of every night. Not only that, they're on hand to tweak the template to the optimum right 'til the last beat. "The secret is having engineers that care around all night and having DJs that work with them," believes head sound engineer Sanjeev Bhardwaj. "A lot of clubs think it's okay to have one person doing the sound and lights, but you need people doing their specific jobs all night long."



3 Belief in the true role and art of the resident

Given the booming cult of the superstar DJ, it was a bold move when fabric announced their Saturday night residents as the understated, relatively unsung duo of Terry Francis and Craig Richards — both voracious consumers/conduits of the most cutting-edge grooves.

All the same, short-sighted sections of the media asked, 'Who are they?', and even the more informed tastemakers questioned if their modest stature would help fill a venue of fabric's colossal size.

But it was a decision that helped define the club's stance as a whole — substance before style, honesty over ego and integrity above hype. After all, the underground pedigree of neither DJ was in question thanks to Francis's role in shaping the London tech-house sound with Wiggle and Richards' involvement in the electronic odysseys that were the Tyrant nights, alongside Sasha and Lee Burridge.

Their sets across the years have provided the musical bedrocks of the club's sound and highlighted just how important a decent resident really is.

"It was a big deal when Keith made us residents and I hope we paid back that trust by delivering the goods," says Richards. "We weren't just warm-ups, but asked to play peak-time sets most weeks."



4 Celebrating the art of musical rebellion

No one individual has done more to break rebellious, experimental music to British youth than the late John Peel. But despite the fact that Peel's nightly Radio 1 shows made him the first UK DJ to champion the original visceral acid house and techno sounds that emerged from Chicago and Detroit, he hadn't properly connected with the sweat-licked UK dancefloors that they helped spawn. Until fabric stepped in and got him to play room three in 2002, that is.

"We had many long conversations trying to convince John to come and do it," remembers Keith. "Every club he'd done before they'd almost had to call the police to get him out of there because it had gone that badly — people just didn't get it. I was absolutely adamant that it would be totally different down here. People love their music and would respect what he has given to music."

When Peel found out that Reilly had recorded and archived just about every Peel session he'd ever listened to, the Radio 1 enigma agreed and his ensuing, appropriately eclectic set of punk, techno, hip-hop, hardcore gabba and leftfield weirdness went down as one of club's classic moments. Peel went on to compile his only compilation CD in his distinguished history for the 'fabricive' series.

"He finished up with 'Teenage Kicks' and we couldn't even get him out of the room because the whole room was singing it for 15 minutes after," recalls Keith.

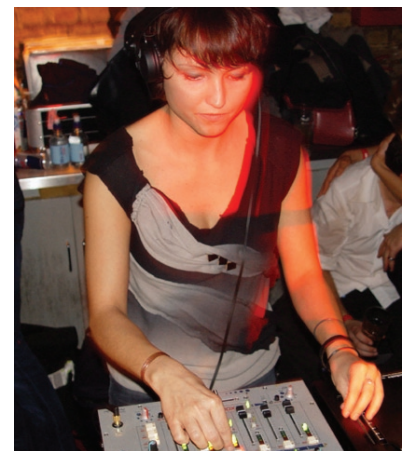
5 The hedonism, the freedom and the legendary room three after-parties

You probably don't need telling that fabric Saturdays come into their hedonistic, warped best from 5am onwards. The inevitable tourists and clubbing casuals have scarpered, the regulars and music lovers lock in and an invisible mist of debauchery floods the venue's caverns. The times when Ricardo Villalobos' or Richie Hawtin's epic sets have unravelled deep into Sunday morning have provided some of our favourite clubbing moments, while the sporadic room three after-parties are the stuff of legend.

M-Nus's Magda recalls the time room three became an unrestrained abyss of Sunday daytime experimentation for the first time, back in 2004.

"I had been playing in Germany and took the morning flight out so I could join Richie, Ricardo and the fabric gang," she remembers.

"When I finally arrived I joined everyone in the dark warped atmosphere of room three. Everyone had already played for hours and wanted a break so they just told me to play. I ended up playing for hours and twisted it out into really weird tracks, even broken beat leftfield rhythms, but the crowd just didn't stop."





6 Not being afraid to step into the unknown

From the future bass growl of dubstep (fabric first hosted a FWD room back in 2001) to the trippy percussive odysseys of Ricardo Villalobos, fabric has never been afraid of venturing into unknown, untested musical territory and placing their findings on one of the biggest platforms in the country. Even when it wasn't the safest bet.

"Everybody wants to talk about Ricardo now but the most interesting thing for me was when we first put him on in 2002. It wasn't a busy night because no-one knew who he was and the people that were there didn't really like what he played," remembers Craig Richards. "If I was going to make one point about it, I'd say it wasn't always easy putting on people like Ricardo, Luciano and even Steve Bug. The numbers dipped for a period and a lot of the people that now rave about those sounds, they were saying, 'I hate this music, it's really boring and dull!'"

"On one level we introduced these sounds," he adds. "But on another level we subjected people to that music because some of it was pretty weird and not necessarily everybody's cup of tea but people still absorbed it and still went with it."

7 Presenting quite possibly the finest CD series ever

Matching the essential role of the '90s rave mixtapes with all the sleek, effortlessly stylish design and futuristic experimentation you'd want from a taste-making noughties clubbing institution, fabric's CD series have had one singular aim — to offer an honest, unrestricted representation of all the mind-blowing music that gets played down there.

Dropping each month like clockwork and at just £6 for subscribers, every fabric clubber has their own favourites. Swayzak's disco-edged 2004 odyssey, Andrew Weatherall's rousing electro and techno contribution in 2004 and Tayo's dot-joining dubwise selection in 2007 are three of ours, and we've got no problem saying the Commix CD earlier this year was the best drum & bass mix we've heard in nearly a decade — period.



8 The flagship fabriclive nights

To experience fabric at its most rowdy and boisterous there's only one night to go — Friday for fabriclive. A decade of sweaty, talent-stuffed sessions have made scene heroes out of The Plump DJs, captured breakbeat at its most innovative, brocked out to Hype's flagship Tru Playaz d&b raves, celebrated grime spitters like Wiley and Dizze Rascal and witnessed explosive live shows from Hybrid, Pendulum, LCD Soundsystem, Modeselektor, Buraka Som Sistema and countless more.

With the growing dubstep influence, Kill Em All's indie-disco thrash-outs and Switch & Sinden's bass-driven Get Familiar sessions, there's no danger of them losing their raucous relevance either.



9 Living their labour as a love and a lifestyle... 24/7

Speak to any DJ that has played fabric and they will all tell you of the passion, friendliness and dedication of the team behind it. Run with rigorous professionalism but the uncompromised and friendly ethics of an old school acid house party, fabric isn't a job for the close-knit team that work there — it's a 24/7 lifestyle.

"There's a very thin line between work and social life — everything just merges into one," laughs self-confessed rave junkie and head of Saturday programming, Judy Griffith, who

even books her annual holidays from Sunday nights to Saturday afternoon to avoid missing a night.

"People ask me, 'Don't you get sick of being at the club', but that's exactly the place I want to be! I really, really want to see all the acts I'm putting on. The idea of any promoter not wanting to hear what they're creating is just bizarre to me.

"It's such a supportive, passionate team all driven by the same thing — music — and we're lucky that there's enough people each weekend to support what we do."

10 Modesty in approach

You'd think the fabric team would be welcome to a pat on the back after a decade of doing away with the doubters, outlasting the pretenders, presenting the most cutting-edge music they could find and causing roadblocks as standard. Just don't expect them to ask for it.

"I don't know if you can actually say we've really broken any acts," believes Keith. "I see this place as a support centre, giving artists that really deserve it the platform to share their sound."

"It's great if we lifted the profile of quality music that, if not always abstract, was under celebrated but I don't think we need to necessarily be proud about bookings because that's not our vibe," adds Craig Richards. "I can't stand the idea, and the British are awful for it, of sticking flags in things and saying we were here first. We're just following our passion for music."