San Francisco in the 1990’s was known as the mecca of the rave scene in America. Taking the same DIY sensibility as the UK scene, but incorporating a much more psychedelic San Francisco vibe. Outdoor parties, warehouse raves and psychedelic drugs fueled the scene in that decade, making it legendary.
With a little help from Wikipedia, we’ve compiled a timeline with a list of the events and artists that made the scene so special. In Part 1, we are attempting to help you understand the landscape and players in the scene.

It was an epic time, so epic that there’s even a movies in the works, produced by Martin O’Brien & DJ Jenô. Their site sums up that time quite nicely:

“San Francisco was the epicenter of the American rave scene and witnessed some legendary events that began in the early ‘90s. These all-night electronic-music dance parties attracted a diverse cross-section of people. Culturally iconic and socially important, the parties became a catalyst in the lives of so many of the people who experienced them.”

Here’s a run-down of some key events.

1991

**Wicked Sound System: DJ Garth and friends**

“In 1991 along DJ Garth with friends and fellow DJs Jenô, Thomas Bullock, Markie, Alan & Trish he founded the Wicked Sound System, and with the fellow members of Wicked organized the monthly Full Moon events that led to increased underground interest in rave culture. By 1994 the crew imported a custom Tony Andrews-designed Turbosound system, teaming up with a 1947 Greyhound bus which allowed the Wicked act to tour the States.”

**Funky Tekno Tribe throws their first parties…**

1992

**Young American Primitive releases self-titled single on ZoëMagik records**

1993

**Freaky Chakra releases Halucifuge on Exist Dance Records**

“Freaky Chakra emerged out of the San Francisco underground after a chance introduction to Exist Dance head Mike Kandel (a.k.a. Tranquility Bass) through mutual friend Miguel Fierro (a.k.a. Single Cell Orchestra). Kandel liked Bentley’s demo, and in the summer of 1993, Exist Dance released “Halucifuge”, which became an underground hit. “–Discogs

1994

**Pacific Sound System Begins**

Pacific Sound System throws the legendary outdoor party “Sunset” and is also known for the boat parties on the SF Bay. This guys are still at it 20 years later. Why did they get started, well
by there own works…”Sunset Sound System was created in 1994 with an undying dedication to bringing quality dance music and people together in unique and beautiful settings.” Nice work!

The Hardkiss Brothers release Delusions of Grandeur

Acid House artist “The Scientist” said of the brothers, in his RYM Ultimate Box Set list: “Scott, Gavin and Robbie, the Hardkiss brothers, ruled the underground San Francisco club scene during the early 90s with a mixture of acid, progressive house, deep house, tribal, and breakbeats. World-class DJs all, the brothers (in name) also ran their own Hardkiss label, releasing material as themselves plus myriad other artists, including Rabbit in the Moon (actually from Floridia but very similar in style) and Scott’s God Within project. Their label and group collective helped establish a unique San Francisco sound in the 90's that was highly psychedelic and continually morphing in style.”

1995

The San Francisco Raves calendar goes online

1996

SF House Collective starts new party called “Love”

1998

DJ Mark Farina releases Mushroom Jazz

1999

2000 *bonus track

‘Groove’ the movie about the SF Rave scene is released

Other artists, parties and crews active in San Francisco in the 1990's


This is a small fraction of the many artists and parties that help shape this time in San Francisco. If you can think of more that deserve to be listed here, email me at djstephenr@gmail.com.
In the 90’s, as San Francisco’s underground dance music scene was evolving and becoming globally recognized, there were elements of the scene that had little to do with the dancefloor. Ambient music provided an alternative to the throbbing house and techno that was being played at parties, and the “Chill Out” rooms at San Francisco raves provided a space for weary partygoers to rest, reflect and/or freak out in peace.

San Francisco, with it’s history of alternative culture and love for alternative forms of spirituality, was the perfect place for there to be an ambient music scene. Some of the major movements in the ambient music scene at that time had ties, either directly or indirectly, to San Francisco.

Jonah Sharp / Spacetime Continuum

If there’s a “godfather” of San Francisco ambient music in the 90’s, it’s Jonah Sharp. After moving to San Francisco in early 90’s, Jonah set up Reflective Records, which became a major
connection between the Bay Area ambient/experimental music scene and the rest of the world. Releasing music by major players in the IDM/Experimental music world at the time such as Ed Handley /Andy Turner (aka Plaid), Kid Spatula (Planet Mu Records label founder Mike Paradinas aka µ-Ziq) and Pete Namlook (Composer and founder of the Fax label), the label not only connected the dots between the scenes, but it also served as the launching point for newer talent at the time like Subtropic and Single Cell Orchestra.

Jonah’s own Spacetime Continuum catalog reads like a series of milestones for the SF electronic music community. His album Sea Biscuit is widely regarded as one of the best ambient records of the 90’s, and the record he recorded with Psychedelic pioneer Terence McKenna, Alien Dreamtime, served as a blueprint for the rave/psychedelic community for the next decade.

**Single Cell Orchestra**

Born in San Francisco, Miguel Fierro has his fingerprints all over the ambient and electronic music scene in San Francisco. Having released his first full length, Dead Vent 7, on Jonah Sharp’s Reflective Records, his roots in the SF music scene run deep. His first single “Transmit Liberation” released on ZoëMagik Records was a highly influential track in the development of Trip Hop.

While rooted in ambient, Single Cell Orchestra’s output has been very diverse over the years, seeing him collaborate with Freaky Chakra on the hard-hitting Astralwerks release “Freaky Chakra vs Single Cell Orchestra,” and even taking up stand-up comedy. Now residing in Los Angeles, he continues to produce music, with an upcoming release later this year on Architects and Heroes records, as well as performing as a stand-up all over the country.

**Silent Records**

Started in 1985 by Kim Cascone, the label served as an outlet for artists who made ambient music in a darker vain. As stated on the website, “Music of this nature was immediately absorbed by the industrial scene. Kim did not want Silent to be labeled an industrial label, or himself labeled an industrial artist. He wanted to convey something quite different.”

The labels roster of artists is far too extensive to list here, but a quick glance and you’ll see some of the most influential ambient/electronic artists to ever record music. The label’s run from ’86-’98 was a prolific one. With almost 200 releases, the label continues to cast a shadow over the ambient/experimental music community.

**Asphodel Records**

Named as one of the “top 10 independent labels in the world” by Rolling Stone magazine in 1998, Asphodel Records holds and special and unique place in the electronic music landscape of San Francisco. As the only real outpost for “Illbient” music on the West coast, the label did much to further the more abstract and diverse forms of the music.
With releases by DJ Spooky, John Cage, Robert Rich, Biosphere, Steve Roach and Ryuichi Sakamoto, to name a small fraction of the artists on the label, Asphodel intentionally created a diverse roster of artists that could be called “Ambient.”

There are many, many more artists, events and activities that influenced the SF ambient music scene in the 1990’s. As always, if you feel there’s something that’s been overlooked or omitted, please let me know. You can email me at djstephenr@gmail.com.

**Throwback Thursdays: San Francisco Raves in the 1990’s Pt. 3 – Interview with Gavin Hardkiss and DJ Garth**

It’s an easy thing to wax nostalgic about a music scene in a certain city at a certain time, but sometimes the story can get convoluted, altered or misinterpreted. This is especially true if you
hear the story second-hand, or through the lens of a fictional story or from a source that may know a lot about a time and place, but they weren’t necessarily there to give you a first-hand account. The story of San Francisco Raves in the 1990's has been told in bits and pieces and we’re going to the source to unearth more of that story for you.

Seattle had grunge, Detroit is the birthplace techno, Chicago has house, Manchester had Factory Records. Endless articles have been written about these mystical places, about the alchemy of the environment and how the unique mix elements made it something special. Of these stories, these myths, the ones the resonate the most are the ones from those who were there. The people that were in the city, behind the decks and in the studio making it all happen.

For part 3 of our series on the San Francisco Rave scene in the 90’s, we talked to two gentlemen that were in the eye of the storm, Gavin Hardkiss (aka Hawke) of the Hardkiss Brothers and DJ Garth of Wicked Sound System. Here is their take on what happened in San Francisco in the 1990's.

GAVIN HARDKISS
1. What’s your name, and how were you involved in the San Francisco rave scene in the 1990’s?

I am **Gavin Hardkiss**. I’m a DJ/producer who came up in those succulent times. I started a record label/ production crew/ gang of comic DJs with my friends from college Robbie and Scott back in 1991. We threw parties and made music and had the time of our lives.

2. What was the thing about San Francisco in the 90's that made it so special to you?

It was a vacuum. We were pretty unconcerned with what was happening elsewhere. Everyone was in love with the music and the times. I can’t remember anyone having a job. There was a constant flow of personalities from all parts of the world coming to check out the scene. New friends for life every weekend.

3. What are a few stand-out events for you at this time?

There were good times to be had every night of the week. So many magical moments. I liked parties that started at the break of dawn – **Boogie Buffet & Splash** were classic.

4. Who were some of the people involved in making the scene what it was at the time?

Everyone played their part kicking up on the energy and making it their own. I don’t like to single out individuals since everyone made it what it was. Dancers. DJs, drug dealers, doormen, coatcheck. Everyone got involved. Few people sat aside and watched.

5. When did you realize the significance of what was happening in the scene there?

I haven’t yet.

6. Why were the 90’s the right time for the scene to blow up in San Francisco?

God knows. Probably **Phikal** and the proliferation of **Ecstasy** together with the introduction of communication technologies. Remember that in the early ’90s there were no cell phones or Internet. People on the cutting edge had pagers. We would spend $500 per month on faxes. It was big news when they introduced voicemail.

7. What’s your top 10 tracks from SF artists from that era?
Mattski – Live at the Brotherhood

Soulstice – Superfunkidiculous Remix

Ultraviolet Catastrophe – The Trip

Freaky Chakra – Halucifuge

Studio X – Los Kings Del Mambo

Spacetime Continuum – Floatilla

Hawke – 3 Nudes Having Sax on Acid

Daisy Glow – Theme From Daisy Glow

**DJ Thomas – No Hassle From The Man**

Boozy & Swan – Champagne Beat Boogie

Read our interview with DJ Garth on Page 2.
1. What’s your name, and how were you involved in the San Francisco rave scene in the 1990’s?

Garth. I threw free outdoor monthly Full Moon parties with my friends starting in the spring of 1991. We called ourselves Wicked Sound System. These parties, along with a mid week club night called Come Unity at 1015 Folsom and hundreds of lawless loft, basement and warehouse parties Wicked threw, set the stage for SF’s rave scene.

2. What was the thing about San Francisco in the 90’s that made it so special to you?

Coming from London the climate in SF was a huge improvement. I spent a couple of summers in SF in ’88 and ’89 and fell in love with the City. It wasn’t expensive. Very free, no helmets on motorcycles, gays comfortable in their own skin and all that. The best thing about SF in the 90’s for me was just living the dream. Playing records for a living, throwing incredible parties, great friends. The city was very international and for a while the parties brought all the different factions of people together, gay, straight, black, white, red and yellow. Hippies, trannies, skaters, punks, art students.

3. What are a few stand-out events for you at this time?


Wicked, Full Moons, Come Unity, The Gathering, The Top, Bullet Proof Boats were my haunts. Our annual tours across the country were incredible. Nobody had dance music as a band before Wicked. Back home in SF we threw some great parties at Townsend and King St Garage with some early House hero guests – Harvey, Louis Vega, Tony Humphries, DJ Pierre, Francois K, Joe Claussel, Robert Owens and a few others.

4. Who were some of the people involved in making the scene what it was at the time?

Wicked was DJ’s Jeno, Garth, Markie, Thomas and Alan & Trish. Then we had a personnel change and CB took over sound and driving us on tour in his 1947 Greyhound bus, which inspired my record label Grayhound. Malachy and Simon Pearson from Come Unity, Eddie and Gail from Bullet Proof. DJ’s Josh, Ernie Munson, Hardkiss, Third Floor, BPM Records, Record Rack. Too many to mention. It was an army! There were loads of us.

5. When did you realize the significance of what was happening in the scene there?

We were having a ball throwing our parties and seeing the music catch on to a wider audience. Each month the crowds got bigger until at the 3 year Full Moon anniversary we had over 3,000 people at Bonny Doon Beach in Santa Cruz. Cops had to close down Highway 1 and Rolling Stone Magazine wrote an article about it. That was a pinnacle moment.

6. Why were the 90′s the right time for the scene to blow up in San Francisco?

The city had it all – psychedelics, beaches, sunshine. But the music hadn’t been presented right. Acid House deserved a new setting. We had to get people out of the clubs and out of their comfort zone. Everyone was pretty bored of the pick up scene, over priced watered down drinks etc. So once we showed them the way, they embraced it. There was a lot of fresh music coming out at that time. Mostly from New York, Chicago, Detroit and London.

7. What’s your top 10 tracks from SF artists from that era?

I’m not sure I could even name 10 from SF artists. We didn’t start making music right away. Most of the innovative records were coming from New York, London, Chicago and Detroit. Here goes…

DJ Garth & ETI – Twenty Minutes of Disco Glory

Thomas Bullock & Tim Love Lee – No Hassle From The Man

Rocket – People

DJ Rasoul – True Science
Furry Phreaks – Gonna Find A Way

Freaky Chakra – Trancendental Funk Bump

Simon – Future Dreams

Daisy Glow – Sunday In The Park

Hardkiss – 3 Nudes In A Purple Garden

Throwback Thursdays: San Francisco Raves in the 1990’s Pt. 4 – Interview with Jeno Void

2 Reactions
Like the city itself, our retrospective dive into the San Francisco Raves of the 90's has surprised us with much, much more than we originally anticipated. And this is a good thing. In this part 4 of 5, we have the pleasure of speaking with DJ Jeno Void, one of the key forces behind the Wicked Sound System.

1. What’s your name, and how were you involved in the San Francisco rave scene in the 1990’s?

I’m Jeno, I am part of the now infamous Wicked Sound System. Before coming to SF, I was DJing and throwing events in the UK, including a proto-Wicked jam called Whoosh. Along with a close knit group of friends including Markie, Alan, Trish & Emma (all later of Wicked) we’d turn a dusty East London bookstore basement into a intimate all night psychedelic sweatbox, honing an acid house and trippy disco inspired sound along the way.

At the same time was the emergence of the rave scene in the UK, with it’s negative tabloid exposure and the resulting heavy-handed police crackdown, which meant underground house jams like ours also became harder to pull off. Garth, who I’d met through my Tonka Sound System friends, had just moved to San Francisco and had invited us all to visit, so I was happy to jump on a plane with Emma & Trish and follow Alan & Markie & other Tonka heads out there for a much needed vacation. As it turned out those folks already visiting & hanging w/Garth were now jonesing to celebrate in a UK style, so the night after I arrived we hit Baker Beach, for a fun full moon inspired adventure.
That magical moon, along with old friends, new SF friends, & the Golden Gate bridge surprising us by appearing out of the fog at dawn, all helped contribute to an unforgettable welcome to SF. I fell head over heels for the city, stuck around, and along with the rest of what now was known as the Wicked Crew, played a pivotal role in the development of the early 90s scene. As anyone who was there will testify, those early full moons, along with the Wicked basement jams, the Come-Unity parties & even the larger Toontown events all helped provide a much needed spark to ignite the scene that followed. And that sound I mentioned, that we’d been honing back in the UK, now became a dominant part of the sound of San Francisco, a sound that combined with now emerging local producers & dis went on to garner worldwide attention, & lasted through the 90s, the 2000s and beyond.

2. What was the thing about San Francisco in the 90's that made it so special to you?

A mixture of things – the people & their openness, the laid-back pace of life, the mild climate & beautiful foggy coast, SF’s history of unconventional politics, as well as the musical influences of past eras – jazz, psychedelic rock, art-punk & the gay disco scene of Patrick Cowley & Sylvester. It was also affordable back then, in those pre-Internet days, so the city had become a gathering place for artists & freaks who didn’t fit in or belong elsewhere, who wanted to work on their art instead of working for the man. It was a refuge for sensitive souls, but also an embryonic playground for cultural provocateurs out to change the world.

3. What are a few stand-out events for you at this time?

That 1st Wicked full moon @ Baker Beach will always be tops for me. But there’s also the time we took a small sound system to a Grateful Dead show, not long after we’d arrived in SF. We drove Ernie Munson’s truck into the parking lot and set up the turntables and just went for it. By the time dusk fell, and The Dead were in full swing in the main stadium, we were also in full swing in the lot, turning on the psychedelic heads to new & trippy grooves. It was magical and unique cross-fertilization, long before events like Burning Man brought dance music and counter-culture together so infamously.

Also my early residency at Pete Avila’s Osmosis party was debauched fun. It was one of the more mixed crowds I had the pleasure of playing too – a lot of drag queens, club kids, ravers, hip hop heads, all kinds of fun loving folks. Should also mention the early Toontown parties at 650 Howard (now the Gold Club) which were a musical playground for me. Preston, later of the Stompy parties, was part of Toontown, and was obsessed with having the bassiest sound possible in the club. He’d have the sound guys heap bass bin upon bass bin in front of the DJ booth, until everything was vibrating like an earthquake. So perfect for SF.

4. Who were some of the people involved in making the scene what it was at the time?

There were a handful of American DJs & promoters out here before us, on a similar tip, but things hadn’t coalesced into a scene yet. It was missing the intent, and also the passion & magic I had experienced back in the UK acid house days. Doc Martin had tried to build something, but it just wasn’t catching fire, and he’d headed to LA instead. There were of course the gay club nights, and there were folks like Pete Avila, Jerry Bonham, David Hall, DJ Spun who were...
dropping acid & other house tracks in their DJ sets, but it was still missing the enticing outlaw vibes of a new subculture.

The arrival of the Brits and Europeans really helped catalyze that new energy. And my friends and I, for our part, we brought our fire, a do-or-die commitment, a balsy disregard for the rules, an already developed sound, and our devotion to music as a way of life that was thankfully compatible with SF’s left-coast openness. It wasn’t just us, there were a number of free-thinking folks in the city then, who were up for it. Too many to mention, but folks like Malachy, Cosmic Jason, Earthgirl, Nick Philips, & Donovan for example. However, in my opinion, more than anyone it was Alan (with Trish’s help) who behind the scene’s was passionately and intentionally out there, working his arse off to build something, to build a scene, to bring people together, to connect them as family, and send them away afterwards filled with love & inspiration to start something similar of their own. He was in so many ways the father figure of the early SF 90s scene.

5. When did you realize the significance of what was happening in the scene there?

It’s hard to say, we were so caught up in doing what we loved, that I don’t know that we were stopping to note the significance. But personally I’d have these moments, in the middle of an early full moon jam say, or at 4am in a dark warehouse somewhere, where you just couldn’t help but feel the overwhelming strength of connection between those people present, the bond we were forming and sharing. I had experienced it before, in my punk rock days, and at UK raves & acid house jams, but not this intensely. And it wasn’t something you could easily verbalize, so I’d just have to look at my friends and they’d look back and we had this intuitive understanding between us that we were sharing something incredibly and unforgettable, even if it was just in that moment.

Looking back at it now, and to call on a cliche to express it- it was simply love, in it’s pure and unconditional form, that lit us up like candles. And it made us better people in the end, which is the most significant thing, for me, when all is said and done.

6. Why were the 90′s the right time for the scene to blow up in San Francisco?

I’d go back to what I already said about SF at the time – it’s affordability & appeal to those innovative folks seeking new horizons & a less mainstream way of life. Add to that SF’s free-spirited music, art & counter-culture history, and you’ve got a fertile base for something new to grow.

This is where the dreams of America end, on the Pacific, there’s nowhere else to go, but to turn back & look at what this country’s become, for better or for worse, and find a way to reconnect with it. And so the empathy culture of the 90s, as antidote to the heavily individualistic and somewhat superficiality 80s was in my opinion inevitable. And for us cultural refugees from the UK, what we added to the mix was some some spark & some guts, that helped fire things up, and provide a blueprint of sorts. If we hadn’t come here, things would have still happened I’m sure, but in a noticeably different way.
7. What’s your top 10 tracks from SF artists from that era?

I might have to take some small liberties with your criteria as there wasn’t a great deal coming out of SF in the early/mid-nineties.

The Residents – Kawliga

Thomas & Tim Love Lee – No Hassle From The Man

Garth & ETI – 20 Minutes of Disco Glory

God Within – Raincry

Daisy Glow – Sunday in the Park

Freaky Chakra – Transcendental Funk Bump

Central Fire – Central Fire (Yes People It’s Time)

Ultaviolet Catastrophe – Trip Harder

Astral Matrix – Torture Vibes

Mad African – Dance Lil’ Sistah