

NITZER EBB

With an unusual name, Teutonic beats and aggressive sound, it is often assumed that Nitzer Ebb originated within the German techno scene, but the truth of the matter is that this trio hailed from the UK, Chelmsford in Essex to be precise. Formed in 1982 by school friends Douglas McCarthy [Lead vocals, guitar], Vaughn 'Bon' Harris [vocals, percussion, guitars] and David Gooday, [percussion], Nitzer Ebb were influenced by the harder sounds of the early techno pop scene, distilling elements from several other genres too until they had created their own identifiable sound, characterised by extremely powerful rhythms, minimal hooklines and fierce, chanted lyrics.

From staging small shows in their local area, Nitzer Ebb's infectious mix of pounding beats, militaristic imagery, angst and anger was soon filling alternative dancefloors across the UK, leading to live dates in London where the group caught the attention of PWL producer Phil Harding. Realising the trio's potential he helped them establish the label Power Of Voice Communications, producing and releasing their debut single "Isn't It Funny How Your Body Works?"(1985). The Nitzer Ebb sound was one of an impassioned techno rage, captured perfectly on three further singles "Warsaw Ghetto"(1985), "Warsaw Ghetto Remixes"(1986) and "Let Your Body Learn"(1986) which all raised their profile considerably to the extent that in Europe they were soon regarded as the leading exponents of the new Hard Beat or Electronic Body Music (EBM) scene. Taking Phil Harding with them, Nitzer Ebb signed to Mute in November 1986 and released the extremely brutal beats of "Murderous"(1986) followed by the 'International Funk Aggression' of "Let Your Body Learn" (1987) a smash hit in the clubs of New York, whilst the follow-up "Join In The Chant"(1987) was an early and somewhat unlikely hit on the UK acid house scene. Their debut album "That Total Age" (1987) captured the essence of Nitzer Ebb in a perfectly formed package, its combination of controlled anger and irresistible rhythm that becoming for many the most definitive example of the Nitzer Ebb sound. Embarking on a worldwide tour they discovered that their energetic live show was also just what dance music fans had been waiting for, their popularity on the Spanish coast alone resulting in a demand for 3 gigs a night.



This infectious sound attracted the attention of fellow Essex lads and label mates Depeche Mode who invited Nitzer Ebb to accompany them on the lengthy European leg of a highly successful world tour, exposing them to exactly the right audience for their sound and image. Returning to the studio following the tour they completed their next album "Belief" (1989) as a duo following the departure of David Gooday and ditching their militaristic image in favour of a more subtle approach to their output. Regular producer Phil Harding also left for pastures new and was replaced by Mark "Flood" Ellis, who in beginning a long relationship with McCarthy and Harris was also instrumental in steering them towards a more refined sound. With Nitzer Ebb's own world tour in the pipeline the duo recruited Julian Beeston to assist them with Beeston becoming a regular contributor both on and off stage.

Their third album "Showtime"(1990) revealed a less confrontational sound and an accessibility that particularly appealed to audiences in the USA. The single "Fun To Be Had"(1990) even received a

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groovy remix by grandfather of funk George Clinton and reached number 2 in the US dance charts. By the time Nitzer Ebb released "Ebbhead" (1991) even a previously reluctant music press were warming to their sound. On this release Nitzer Ebb were slower and more orchestrated, mixing their hard, industrial beat with raw guitarsamples and more fully developed songs. Promoting the album with a global tour that took them from the southern states of the USA to appreciative audiences in Siberia, Nitzer Ebb were enjoying the fruits of their truly international appeal. By the time that their fifth album "Big Hit" (1995) arrived, Nitzer Ebb had been through

another metamorphosis. Gone was the techno rage that had become their signature, being replaced instead with a wider use of real instruments, particularly guitars and drums. The songs too were more complex, dividing Nitzer Ebb's fan base between those who simply wanted them to go on making Electronic Body Music and those who supported their desire to develop. David Gooday rejoined the group but purely to provide artwork for this album and McCarthy and Harris hired a third member, Jason Payne [percussion] to their main line-up, recruiting John Napier [guitars, percussion] to assist with their live performances. "Big Hit" was their last record to date with all concerned taking an 'extended hiatus' following its completion which effectively spelled the end of Nitzer Ebb's activities as a group.

Since "Big Hit" Nitzer Ebb's members have chosen to concentrate on their various solo and side projects, a practice McCarthy, Harris and Beeston had begun in 1989 with their collaboration with Die Krupps. Douglas McCarthy has been a regular collaborator with Depeche Mode's Alan Wilder on his Recoil project. Bon Harris meanwhile has relocated to Los Angeles worked as 13mg and with his latest three piece outfit Maven.

The rediscovery of the Hard Beat/Electronic Body Music genre by a new generation of music fans has seen Richie Hawtin (Plastikman) include Nitzer Ebb's 'Let Your Body Learn' on his seductive "Decks EFX & 909"(1999) mix compilation and an exciting set of Nitzer Ebb remixes commissioned by novamute. The series of three 12" singles have seen Derrick May, Thomas P. Heckmann, Terence Fixmer, The Hacker, Phil Kieran and LFO's Mark Bell get to grips with the classic vintage of "Let Your Body Learn" (1987/2002), "Control I'm Here" (1988/2004) "Murderous" (1986/2004), 'Shame' - Nitzer Ebb vs. Thomas P. Heckmann' (1989/2001) and "Join In The Chant" - Nitzer Ebb vs. Derrick May (1987/2001), the latter being a previously unreleased 1989 remix by the godfather of techno himself.

