

THERAPY – THE SEVENTH CLIMAX

ALAN X on tour with South Africa's most notorious club brand



AFRICA is often considered to be the birthplace for all living things and holds the answers to many of the mysteries of life on Earth. During a recent tour of the three main cities in South Africa, I managed to discover a few of those mysteries myself!

Taking a twelve hour flight is a daunting prospect when you have the added knowledge that you are going to be met at the other end by South Africa's most notorious party monster and celebrated DJ, Stuart Hillary – something tells you there is going to be no rest for the wicked! With a name like some intrepid explorer, Hilary aka Stuart H has brought what was once quaintly known as 'Black Music' to the masses virtually single-handed and injected some Funk into the local club culture.

His now defunct venue Gass was at one time home to his renowned Therapy parties and it was from here the journey began. Gass was initially set up by Stuart and his then business partner, Liverpoolian DJ Alan Inferno, more than seven years ago as an excuse to have some fun and party! At that time Johannesburg was being subjected to the torment of Trance predominant across the whole region and Gass provided an outlet for something fresh and exciting. The parties were known as Therapy for that is exactly what they were. The venue was a run down industrial unit in the forgotten end of town.

Before long the Therapy party became the hottest property in Jo'burg and like a magnet drew everyone from filmmakers and TV celebrities to drug dealers and big time gangsters to its doors. The club was ground breaking in that it became a melting pot for people of all colours and persuasions and was the first of its kind to run until the early hours of the morning. Stuart's regular morning sets outside in the courtyard became the highlight of the weekend! As a result of all this, other club owners and bar promoters arrived in the area and built their own facilities until within only a few years the area had literally turned into Johannesburg's very own gay ghetto providing entertainment for all with venues open around the clock.

Up until this point the authorities had turned a blind eye to the late night revelry of it all. Then one year when an international conference was due to be held in town they decided to start getting heavy with these fun loving law-breakers! Ironically it was while Stuart was playing as a guest DJ at another venue that the party he was at got raided and he was arrested, not for actually breaking the

law but for defending one of his fellow party people who was being abused by the heavy handed boys in uniform. As a result he was thrown in jail for two days despite the fact he had just been given some acid! Not being one to slouch around he promptly pulled up his trousers, rolled up his shirt-sleeves and proceeded to scrub the filthy cell clean while he reassessed his life!

After his release, Stuart and business partner Alan finally agreed not to renew the lease. Stuart bought a house, built a recording studio in the garden and thanked God that somehow he had survived all those years of madness and almost literally dancing with death! Not surprisingly as soon as he left the area, taking his brazen spirit with him, the whole gay ghetto that had sprung up around his energetic enterprise, collapsed and within two months there was not a single bar left open for business. So much for the copy-cats!

Fast-forward a couple of years and we find now that Stuart H has re-grouped and is still, with his friend and right-hand man Eugene Fisher working alongside him, promoting the return of the Therapy brand under his Next Step moniker. I flew out in September to play on their mini-tour of South Africa for the seventh birthday. This was the Therapy Seventh Climax Tour and in three days we took in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town for a whistle stop party tour like no other!

When I arrived in **Johannesburg**, the first thing that struck me was the organisation of things. These guys have learned quickly that you don't need your own venue to have fun – you just need a good idea, plenty of promotional skills and a mobile phone to hand. The second thing I noticed was the grass in Africa is like no other... after that, I didn't notice very much at all!

The continual cabin pressure of the twelve-hour flight takes its toll even though you land in the same time zone so the phat joint and two-hour catnap was most welcome. I was woken abruptly with the news that we had only forty minutes to get to the national Radio Five station where we had to do an interview with hot broadcaster Nicole Fox... to three hundred thousand listeners!

It was a vibrant drive as we frantically tried to think of controversial things to talk about while on-air. We need not have bothered as when we arrived there was a caller raging with anger down the phone-lines talking about the gay pride march that was planned for the following weekend. The caller was telling the nation that all drag queens were breaking some ancient law that states that people in a public gathering are not allowed to cover their faces and that he and some friends would be performing a citizen's arrest on any drag artist found with make-up on their face. Interesting!

The caller was quickly faded out and we chatted and chirped about why humans always draw lines around each other for all the wrong reasons. It seemed strange for a nation like South Africa to free themselves from years of Apartheid and yet come up with new and ever more ridiculous reasons to re-separate themselves into more oppressed groups.

We left and went for a tour of the venue Carfax to check everything was ready for the assault that was to come later. Carfax is a massive series of spaces and holds around 3,500 party monsters when promoted by professionals - with Therapy billed there was an almost audible buzz in the air. When they throw a party, EVERY-ONE comes out of the woodwork for some serious Therapy!

That evening the place was rocking. DJ



Delon warmed the room up nicely until I took over for the middle set. The place was on peak energy and brimming with starlettes, divaz and muscle boys. With a sound system to die for it was a thrill to play. When he took over at the end of my set, Stuart was on form and as outrageous as ever and literally collapsed several times with 'excitement' – so glamorous!

After playing inside we moved our gear out to the courtyard for one of our traditional Back-2-Back sessions. This is where the real party begins and the atmosphere was awesome. When you deliver a good tune here, the Jo'burg crowd really show their appreciation. Everybody was on the same buzz and rolling around in ecstasy...amongst other things. Maybe it is the drugs – they live for something called 'Cat', a white, powdered 'Super-Speed'. As the hot African sun began to rise you could see a smile on every festive face – Johannesburg is all about the people.

Job done we carried the semi-conscious Hilary to the car dumped her stylishly in the back and headed home to take an early nap. The next day our **Durban** flight was not until evening, which was perfect for our recovery schedule! We arrived, ate and headed straight for the renowned 330 Club. This is one of those small but bijoux clubs that has hosted every living DJ from Malcolm Duffy and Tasty Tim to international decksters like Carl Cox and Danny Tenaglia! That said this was our quietest night of the tour as numbers were not up to expectations but the three hundred that came made the club look respectable and went home with a good time behind them.

From here it was onward and upward as we struggled to get up early and by the skin of our teeth made the flight to **Cape Town**. This was the piece de resistance and the jewel in the crown that is Therapy-On-Tour with a slamming night at Cape Town's awesome Sliver club.

As the place rocked to the sounds of Therapy that, for some time, had obviously been missing from the local menu, Ari Nitzan, one of the club's co-owners and DJ supreme, told us it was their busiest night since New Year's Eve 2004. For tonight at least it was goodbye tawdry Trance and hello Dirty Dancing. From the DJ box the main upstairs floor was one big beautiful mess and judging by the reaction of the many Ex-Patriot British boys that now live in town, the Therapy effect was well received.

Meanwhile downstairs Ari and his team built up their usual eclectic set of funk'n', sweaty tunes before Stuart and I took over for another Back-2-Back session that went on way into the small-hours thanks to the fierce rulin' Doorwhore, Sabrina (aka Lance during the week). Like the perfect host, Ari's fierce 'n' funky resident DJ Leroy was always around to help out and between them their hospitality was second to none. This is typical of the South African warmth we found everywhere we went and with hotels like the fabulous **Glen Hotel**

(tel: +27 21 439 0086, www.glenhotel.co.za) to chill-out and stay at, Cape Town is a must see destination for everyone to enjoy.

Cape Town is about the people AND the place. Of all International destinations, with its backdrop of Table Mountain and Signal Hill, it has to be one of the most beautiful natural settings for a city and can be rated alongside Sydney for its awesome vistas, spectacular views and therapeutic climate. Let's face it, everyone needs a little Therapy like this every once in a while!

Therapy returns to Sliver in Cape Town for Boxing Day, 26th December 2004.

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