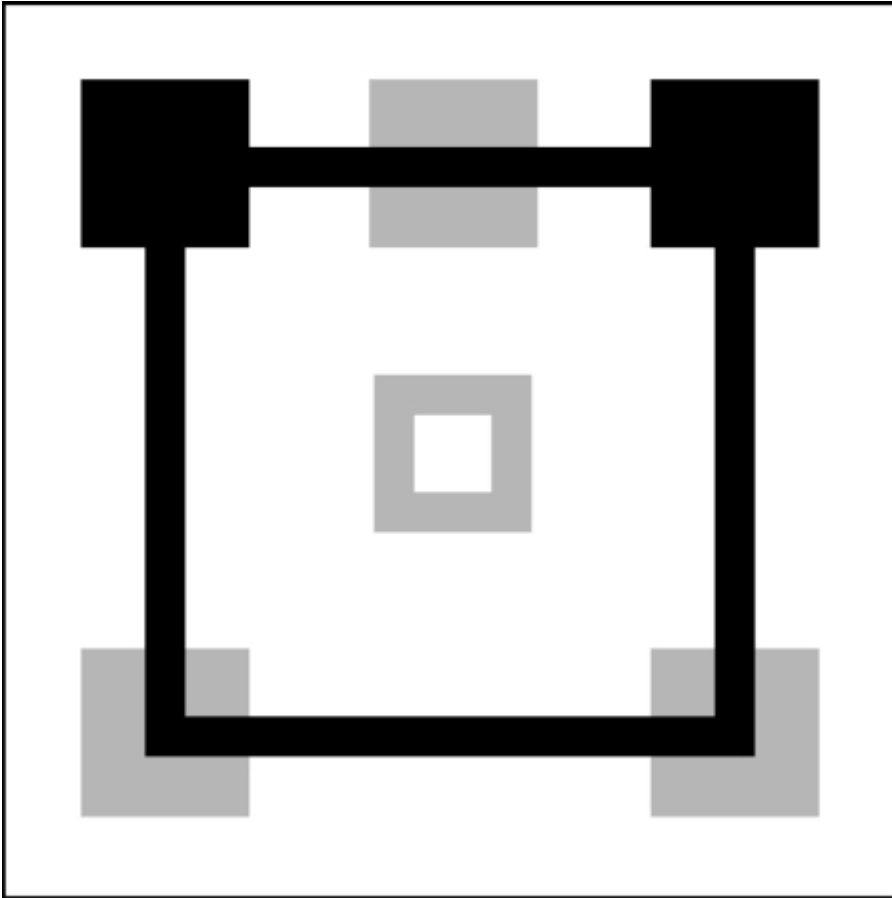


## Interview with Mark Reeder



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### **Introduction:**

Hello Mark, You recently released an amazing remix collection called "Five Point One" as a 2 CD and a DVD package. What makes this release so special is that the DVD contains all the tracks mixed in 5.1 surround sound. Also interesting is your selection of the artists you have remixed – amongst others, Die Toten Hosen, Bad Lieutenant, The Pet Shop Boys, Anne Clark and not forgetting Depeche Mode.

The release has been also available as download package since the 29th of June 2012. [Full release infos including buy links can be found here.](#)

**You came to Germany in the late 70s to promote Factory Records and Joy Division in Germany. In 1982 you brought Die Toten Hosen to East Germany. Years later you founded your own label MFS, which became an important crossroads for many techno and trance artists such as Dr Motte or Mijk van Dijk and you were the first label to release Paul van Dyk. How did you come to form MFS? On Wikipedia it states that you used to work for the state owned East German record label Deutsche Schallplatte/AMIGA and that you were able to convince them to start an electronic label. Is this the way this idea transpired?:**

Thanks, Im happy you enjoyed my album. To be exact, I initially didn't come to Germany to promote Joy Division or Factory. This honourable assignment was given to me by Rob Gretton and Tony Wilson because I was living in Germany. I was designated the Factory Records representative and became Tony Wilsons "man in Berlin" because it sounded good to say "Our man in Berlin" I guess and he told me years later, it looked good on paper – Factory Records.

Manchester, Brussels-New York-Berlin. He wanted me to start Factory Germany but there was never enough money available and I think he secretly wanted me to fund it myself, which I wasn't prepared to do. The founding of my own MFS label years later, was born out the production work I had been doing for the East German State owned record label – the AMIGA – for the meanwhile cult GDR indie band "Die Vision".

As I discovered much later, I hold the honour of being the first and only Englishman to ever make a record in the communist GDR. I made the album "Torture" for Die Vision during the declining twilight months of the GDR in the East Berliner AMIGA Tonstudio, in the Brunnenstrasse, which was a stone's throw away from the Berlin wall. It was a fascinating experience.

Naturally, at the time we were not aware this album was also going to become the last record of the GDR too. During the recording of this album, the GDR was slowly imploding upon itself. Of course, that political changes were going to have to be made were obvious to see, but no one could have predicted the fall of the Berlin wall. It was difficult enough for me to listen to the latest news from the studio staff or the band when they were talking about friends or relatives suddenly disappearing. I could only view it all as an innocent bystander and besides, if it all got to be too much I could always return to West Berlin at any time without difficulty.

We began the recording of Torture in summer 1989 and because we had to work in true communist style shifts, I finally finished the recordings on 2nd November 1989. *The wall fell on the 9th November 1989.*

Before the final mixdown and production, I decided with the studio technicians that we would take a short break while I went on my holidays with writer Dave Rimmer and Trevor Wilson.

We left Berlin in the night of the 8th November for our Eastern Bloc holiday. Destination, Nicolai Ceausescu's Romania, via Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Without any kind of precognition, we had no idea that the wall would fall the following evening and while we spent our afternoons strolling about Krakow, we didn't hear a word about it. So you can imagine our incredulous surprise and excitement when we first heard the mammoth news about fall of the Berlin wall many days later while in Hungary. No one had said a word to us. Our own personal Disneyland was gone. We thought that probably because we were "Wessies" people automatically assumed we already knew.

Suddenly, the world appeared to be different, Berlin was definitely going to be different.

Dave wrote a book about our experiences on that trip "Once Upon A Time In The East"

After we returned from the ruins of all the former communist countries, I agreed to mix Torture in a West Berlin studio, as this was the express wishes of the Brunnenstrasse studio engineers. I wanted their dream to come true too. This probably made Torture the first post wall East-West joint venture album too.

During this whole production process, I was able to get to know the people of the now one time AMIGA, and it was through this opportunity I was able to start my label MFS.

Directly after the fall of the wall, all the commie bosses of VEB Deutsche Schallplatten were given indefinite holidays and

AMIGA was renamed ZONG. When I heard this embarrassing name change I was horrified, sadly my suggestion that they should have called the label ZONY was not well received, simply because I don't think they had a sense of humour at that moment.

I was impressed at the new possibilities of this label never the less and I tried to convince the A&Rs there that they had to move with the times and motivate them with the newest sounds which was currently being played in all the coolest clubs in Berlin. Underground techno Music.

They hadn't a clue what I meant. I was confronted with a series of confused questions about techno and 12" vinyl.

"What is teshnoe?" "Komputermusik?" "what is a tvelfintch? Isn't that like an LP?" "What? Only one song on one side? what a waste!" All this was completely baffeling to them. The only 12" officially available in the GDR was an import of the Russian national Anthem and no one had that

in their collection (except me I guess). I thought they would eagerly take the opportunity to be the first East Berliner techno dance label to feature East German musicians, but after a series of unproductive meetings with the head A&R I realised I would have no other option than to start it myself. I asked if I could at least use their infrastructure and founded my own label "Masterminded For Success".

I wanted to use the letters MFS from the very start. I didn't want these three letters to disappear and wanted to use them in a different context. I knew that they would cause controversy too. I knew that the Germans have a passion for shortening long words into their initials and I also knew that the AMIGA (sorry, ZONG) would never suspect that Masterminded For Success could be shortened into MFS. Indeed, I understood that some of the people at ZONG would not be very happy.

On the day of my first press conference, I plastered the streets with posters that declared "MFS – We are back!" there was nothing anyone could do. Afterwards I had to go to each member of the company and explain my reasons for calling my label MFS, so that they knew it didn't have any political background. I think I really only got away with it because I was considered a "crazy Englishman" and was able to convince them with the music. The only problem was the realisation that regardless of the fall of the wall, virtually all the eastie kids didn't have computers or even instruments to make techno music on...

**MFS has been quiet over the past years, but not you. Even though not many people know your name, you released a collection of reworks of Blank & Jones songs on the album "ReOrdered" How did you come to this idea to produce such an album?**

I put MFS on ice. I simply didn't want to do it anymore. I invested all my time, money, creativity and energy in all my artists and I only got complaints back. I was drawn back into music production after I made the stylised, mock circus music for Joerg Buttgreits theatre piece "Captain Berlin vs Hitler". The Idea for ReOrdered came after I had made a remix for Blank & Jones Miracle Cure. I had helped them to get Bernard to sing on the track and as a thank you Piet Blank asked me to make a remix, but not trance or techno but in my old school Shark Vegas retro style. I admit at first I was not so impressed, but Micha my studio partner thought it would be a good idea and he managed to convince me to have a go. Back to the 80s. Making this remix in this style was so much fun. I asked Piet if he had any other tracks from their Logic of pleasure album that I could remix in a similar style and he sent me two. To make them fit into my concept, I had to completely rewrite them to turn them into songs.

I suggested to Piet that I take all their vocal tracks and rework and rewrite them in this manner and that is how ReOrdered was created. In actual fact, this is not a traditional remixes album, where a song is turned into a DJ clubtrack but the reverse.

I had to rewrite virtually all the tracks and create my own elements, as many of their original sounds didn't fit the concept. In turn I made proper songs from their DJ tracks.



**What in your opinion are further highlights in your Music career? Which projects were you also involved with? I can name one, Gudrun Gut.**

I cant really say what the highlights were, things like playing in the old SO36 or on tour with Malaria! or New order were cult, or playing in the now legendary Danceteria was very exciting too. Making an international superstar DJ out of a nobody like Paul van Dyk was also exciting at the time. It cost a lot of creativity, nerves and patience. The fact I have been involved behind the scenes, inspiring, producing and guiding was very satisfying for me. Although, I must confess being able to remix Sweetest Perfection or Underpass were real highlights for me. As for Gudrun, I really like her ideas and what she does and I've always found her music very interesting.

**Have you written your own music and compositions?**

Naturally. I wrote music for my own bands Die Unbekannten and Shark Vegas or Alien Nation and I've composed the music for Joerg Buttgrereit films.

**Lets talk about your most recent album "Five Point One". How did this artist collaboration happen? Especially the Depeche Mode remix?**

I already started making 5.1 surround mixes with Micha Adam my studio partner with the idea of making a 5.1 multi-channel surround sound album. Most of the tracks were remix requests that I had done. With the Depeche Mode remix, that happened by chance. I sent Daniel Miller some live photos of Nick Cave and the Birthday party that Alistair Gray had taken back in the 80s at their

MusicHall gig. He told me that Depeche were making a remixes album and if I wanted I could have a shot. Although the deadline was very close, I only had seven days to choose a track from their list and remix it. I wanted to remix something from Violator and I think I chose the most difficult track. What most people don't understand is the enormous pressure that is produced by the opportunity to remix such a high profile artist, especially when you yourself highly revere and respect the artists you are about to remix.

It is such an honour to remix DM and at first you think WOW!, then simultaneously comes that feeling of pure horror.

Naturally I wanted to make something that I, as a DM fan myself, would like, that's why I decided I wouldn't try and be clever and try and rewrite musical history as many others have tried to do in the past. I don't really like it when a remix is so dismembered that it has absolutely no resemblance to the original in any way and is completely unrecognisable. In my opinion, I wanted it to remain a ballad, like the original. It is a slow melancholic ballad and it must be treated and handled in such a way and differently to making a dance track.

I tried to use as many elements from the original version as possible, so that the sound would be recognisable. In the classic sense I remixed and rearranged them and replayed parts to give them my own sound.

I put so much energy in this remix. Similar to my John Foxx and Bad Lieutenant remixes, we had to cut out every single word and every sound we wanted to use and carefully reposition them by hand so that each sound or word would fit. The original song was played live and so there is a lot of tempo change, it starts at about 80 BPM and finishes around 87BPM and if that wasn't difficult enough to do, all the instruments were tuned to Martin's vocals, which actually meant they were 53% out of tune! I think that's probably the reason no one wanted to remix this song for DM Remixes Vol2 album. Phil Kieran had a go at remixing Sweetest Perfection but wasn't able to do much with it. I guess you can't put a square peg in a round hole.

If all that wasn't enough stress for me, a few days after we had started the remix, my 90 year old father fell and broke his hip, the doctors told my mother that he probably wouldn't survive the operation and my mum had a small stroke through all the worry. Crass indeed!

I had to immediately stop making the remix and go to my parents.

My father survived the operation but sadly died a few months later.

I had to make my DM remix under these circumstances.

As for the actual album, I had been translating the subtitles for the controversial Herbert Achtenbusch film "Heilt Hitler" from Bavarian into English, for Werner Schroedel and during this process I had explained my idea and wish to make an album in 5.1 surround. He was very impressed with the idea and that is why the album has been released on Kennen and not MFS.

**The collection of Artists is very unique – along with international giants like The Pet Shop Boys and Depeche Mode there is a remix for German Punkband Die Toten Hosen. Was the work different for each song or did you approach each song in the same way?**

Most probably I can only do one thing and that's why my album sounds like it sounds. I always like to try and create a certain type of picture and soundscape in my music. I usually like my sound to be dark and melancholic. Sometimes a track works well darker but occasionally it will work better in a more humorous way or with a breath of irony. I've always been inspired by film music and I like it when my mix is more like a soundtrack. It's a mixture of everything.

Of course I try at least to treat each song individually to give it its own colour, yet in this case, my only criteria was that I make the tracks in a similar way as I made music back in the 80s, with a limited collection of instruments and sounds.

**How did you come to the idea of making a complete remix album and producing it in 5.1?**

I've always been a sound technic freak and a huge fan of the 5.1 multi-channel surround idea. I thought it is unfortunate that only big artists such as Pink Floyd, King Crimson, Depeche Mode or

more recently Nick Cave have been able to release albums in 5.1 and I would really like to have an album with some of my other favourite artists in 5.1 too. It didn't exist, so I decided to make one. Making tracks in 5.1 is however not an easy undertaking. It is a very complex and expensive process and not everyone can do it and why should they? It is still a niche. This will eventually change with the development of modern technology in smartphones or iphones which will allow you to listen in 5.1 through DOLBY mobile, but that is the future.

Luckily, I was able to convince Micha that we should try it. Unfortunately, that also meant we had to remix all our remixes from scratch. Not an easy task, because with 5.1 you have to choose exactly where each sound is going to come from, where does the reverb and echo go and where you position each instrument in the mix. The key is to get the balance right. In the end though, it only depends on how the consumer has set up their own hifi system.



**The mixes all seem to have their roots in the 80s. What connects you to the sound of that time and especially with bands like Depeche Mode and The Pet Shop Boys?**

From the start it was our intention that the songs should remind you of the 80s. I am very familiar with this sound. I wanted to make a collection of remixes that reminded you of this time, but with a touch of today. I made it for those people who don't like the current musical sound styles and for those younger music fans who are interested in this kind of sound.

I used similar methods as I did in the past to get an authentic sound. Back then we had fewer

instruments and therefore we had a limitation to the choice of sounds. We had to create everything ourselves and that is what I've done with these remixes.

What connects me to this time are many different things. I lived in Berlin entirely throughout the 80s. I was able to experience and do things then that are impossible today. The 80s were a very innovative era, especially in Berlin. We had new wave, synthpop, avant garde, acid house and at the end techno. Berlin was abstract, rebellious and unconventional. Martin Gore was also very impressed and lived in Berlin for a while and that he was deeply inspired by this city can be heard in his music of that time. I got to know many artists like The Pet Shop Boys and I had the honour to have been involved with Die Toten Hosen at the very start of their career as their live sound engineer and I also helped to bring them to play illegal secret concerts in communist East Berlin.

**The sound of this album and your collaboration with Blank&Jones is rooted in the past. What is your opinion of the current clubsound, for example the techno sound in Berliner clubs such as Tresor or Berghain?**

I would prefer my sound to be defined as retro-modern. It is modern, but it appears retro. That's got something to do with the sounds I choose and the way that I compose. There are many new, young bands and artists that actually sound much more retro than I do, for example Queen of Hearts or Apparat who have changed their musical style so that they have more possibilities and scope. Certainly, I listen to club music and I am not an enemy of new club sounds. When I'm in a club I always hear something good. Unfortunately on the whole, I find most of the new clubtracks are pretty uninspiring and don't kick me.

Besides, after over 20 years of techno, I wanted to do something else. I never thought that I would go back to making 80s sounding music though. It simply just happened. What was apparent though, was that making music like this was much more difficult back then than it is today. We had synths that would constantly go out of tune the moment the humidity changed. We didn't have total recall on our 24 channel mixing desk and almost no midi instruments. Everything had to be recorded live onto a tape machine. Making music today is luxurious.

**Vince Clark (Erasure, Yazoo) and Martin Gore (Depeche Mode) have recently reunified themselves through a techno project. Don't you have the desire to start a new techno project?**

Yes of course, why not? Only at this moment I'm enjoying living out my "lost" 80s years. There were a lot of things I couldn't do back then because the technology wasn't around or I didn't have the instruments. Today, there are a lot more possibilities.

Producing is a lot of fun, especially in 5.1 surround. I made techno and trance for over 20 years and that's why I am in no hurry to make a techno record. Besides, I think others can probably do it much better than I could.

**The last question. What is your next wish, what do you want to do, or discover?**

As a film music fan, I would love to be able to make more film soundtrack music. I discover new music almost every day. That is the best thing about modern technology.

**Mark, thank you for the interview**

You are welcome!



## 2 comments

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