

## Around TOWN



France's Dubmood (left) and Switzerland's Stu are coming to Brooklyn for this year's Blip Festival, from Dec. 4-7

# Check your radar: Blip Festival comes to Bell House

By Meredith Deliso

New York is without a doubt the center of the chiptune music scene, those creative nerd boys making music from their Game Boys. It's even more fitting that DIY epicenter Brooklyn will be home to the Blip Festival, a four-day event featuring some of the best in the scene, from those right in the borough to innovators in Japan and beyond.

Organized by Manhattan art organization The Tank and the city-based artist collective 8bitpeoples, this year's festival finds a home at the newish Gowanus venue The Bell House.

"We really wanted to find a place that already had an infrastructure and that had a nice vibe to it," says Mike Rosenthal of The Tank, who has held the previous two festivals at such infrastructure-less venues as a disused bank on Wall Street and the Eyebeam Atelier in Chelsea. "We got a good feeling from these guys. It's a nice thing they're doing on the Gowanus. It's an area that's not really getting attention otherwise," adds Rosenthal, who lives nearby in Carroll Gardens.

The Blip Festival started rather innocuously when a group of chiptune artists, those who repurpose video game and home computer hardware such as the Nintendo Entertainment System to create low-res electronic music and visuals, were coming over to New York from Japan. Rosenthal and his friends at 8bitpeoples — Jeremiah Johnson and Josh Davis — used the opportunity to turn it into a festival.

"It just seemed like something people were

wanting," says Rosenthal. "I find it to be a wonderful combination of accessibility and subversion. It's really nerdy and obtuse but everyone who sees it loves it and gets it."

This year, nearly 40 artists invited by the organizers will come together over the course of four days in Brooklyn, highlighting the movement's global reach and diverse expressions.

"We still maintain what we consider to be an amazing quality in the music, which is hard to do since it's a fringe genre," says Rosenthal.

Since they also don't tend to invite groups back, that leads them looking farther afield for musicians. This year, there's Sulumi from Beijing, known for his pure Game Boy sound and IDM; Stu from Switzerland, a master of the Atari ST who uses only a square wave and a noise generator on three channels to produce his catchy dance beats; "gameboy mazafaca" USK from Japan; and Ikuma from Singapore.

While New York may be seen as the epicenter of this scene, Belgium and Sweden also have a burgeoning chiptune presence, and Blip Festival will welcome Brussels' m--n, as well as Sweden's zabutom, nordloef and Role Model as well as Dubmood, a cross-genre Swedish chiptune musician currently living in France who has been in the scene since 1996.

Fans also come from all over to Brooklyn specifically for the festival.

"We have audience members flying over from England," says Rosenthal. "This is their Woodstock."

Closer to home, some of chipmusic's biggest acts will be featured at the festival, including New York-based four-piece Anamanaguchi, which started their melodic punk sound in 2003 when the bandmembers were just teenagers. Two of the festival's producers are also some of the biggest names in the scene, with Jeremiah Johnson performing as Nullsleep and Josh Davis as Bit Shifter to some the weekend's biggest crowds.

Brooklyn-based artist Mark DeNardo makes his third appearance at the festival, with his current incarnation in the band Graffiti Monsters. With himself on PSP, guitar and vocals, he's joined by Louis Shannon (of Runtime Error) on Game Boy and alternates between Julian Holmse (of Fiasco) and Jeremy Wolfe Kivett (of Sourselves) on drums.

The band has been heavily involved in both Brooklyn's underground noise scene, playing at places like Death By Audio and Silent Barn, as well as the 8bitpeoples collective, playing their blend of 8bit, noise, folk and punk.

"What I sought out was to find a fusion of what I did — folk song writing with 8bit music," says DeNardo. "With Graffiti Monsters, we're trying not to limit the style, but there's definitely elements of dance electronica, and also old-school punk. There's also a whole country blues aspect to it that I'm not trying to over-emphasize."

Each year the Blip Festival audience gets bigger, going from about 200 people the very first night to over 800 at last year's

Saturday show. Recognizing that a lot of the fans of chiptune music are high schoolers (some of the bands, such as New York City's Starscream, are comprised of teenagers themselves), the organizers kept the festival an all-ages event.

"I think it's hard for high schoolers and college kids to see a lot of shows. It can be a frustrating experience. You live in New York where you get more awesome shows coming through than anywhere else. I wasn't in high school here or college, but I feel like it would drive you crazy," says Rosenthal.

Being in the scene has been a chance for DeNardo to engage with this younger crowd.

"For me personally, 8bit music is an opportunity to have a really great band, play in a really great city, and is an opportunity for friendship. There's a lot of opportunity for understanding youth culture in New York City that I probably wouldn't have had otherwise," he says.

Besides rabid fans, the festival will also serve as an introduction to those new to chiptune music.

"It's incredibly accessible," says Rosenthal. "I think that anyone can really come in and appreciate it for what it is."

*Blip Festival 2008 runs from Dec. 4-7 at The Bell House (149 7th St.). Tickets are \$15 a night or \$50 for a festival pass. For more information, including the full schedule, go to [blipfestival.org/2008](http://blipfestival.org/2008), [www.thebellhouse.nyc.com](http://www.thebellhouse.nyc.com) or call 718-643-6510.*