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Electronic Dance Music and Culture in the Pacific Northwest

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<u>**Electronic Dance Music and Culture in the Pacific Northwest**</u>

A Brief Introduction:

"A digital multimedia exploration of Electronic Dance Music (EDM) history and theory; the Pacific Northwest rave experience of the 21st century."

In today's world of music, everything is constantly changing alongside the progression of technology. With these developments, new musical genres have emerged and many people are still unaware of them. If you listen, you can hear these styles and genres being used in popular music.

For the past several months I have jumped headfirst into the EDM and rave scene. I have been documenting, observing, and researching all that it has to offer. I have been networking with people involved, be they **DJs**, Go-Go Dancers, Participants, Promoters, or Photographers. It has been a truly rewarding experience.

Far too often, I see research about music scenes that are told only by text and the occasional grayscale photo. Music is more than just what you can hear; it is a full sensory experience. I wish to show the world of raves and Electronic Dance Music through words, photography, video, and sound. This will all be primarily found on a website dedicated to showcasing my thesis in a multimedia format.

Chapter 1: History of Electronic Music

The doorway to electronic music was first opened sometime around the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Composers were striving for new sounds to fuel their compositions and needed new instruments to breathe a new life into music. While some composers, like Stravinsky, push the envelope with theory and ideas, others looked for new tools.

With the advances in electricity, everyone was experimenting. New electrical objects ranged widely from appliances to new musical instruments. As with any inventions, many come and go, and only a few actually make their place in the world.

The Denis d'or, invented by Václav Prokop Diviš, was first mentioned in the year 1753
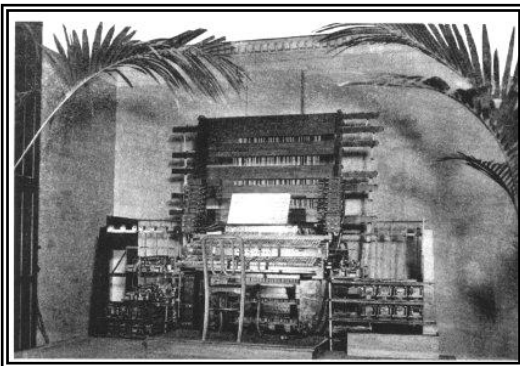
1 Teleharmonium, invented in 1987 by Thaddeus Cahill.

and is thought to be the first electric musical instrument invented. It was a chordophone that, by using brief electrical charges sent through the metal wires, could imitate other instruments (much like today's keyboards).

The Teleharmonium was an early electronic instrument, developed by Thaddeus Cahill in 1887, that opened the door for many of what you see today. The instrument weighed in at around 200 tons, was steam powered, and provided concerts to the public over the phone.

The Theremin, developed in 1919, was an early electronic instrument that was controlled by the player without being touched. The device was patented, and named after Leon Theremin. It works by using two metal antennas

1 Theremin, 1919

as sensors, one to control the pitch and frequency, and the other controls the volume. To make sounds, the user simply moved the hand in the electrostatic field between the two antennas. Moving the hand closer to can increase the pitch and volume, whereas moving the hand away can lower. It has been used in many movies/TV series (such as the original Star Trek series) and with many bands (such as Dragonforce) because of its eerie sound.

Ondes Martenot, invented in 1929 by Maurice Martenot, is an instrument similar to the theremin but with timbral controls and loudspeakers. It is most known for being used in the Turangalîla-Symphonie by composer Olivier Messiaen.

The Synthesizer was invented and has been reinvented and modified since as early as 1876. However, the instrument was not widely known until a man named Robert Moog came along and adapted the instrument for modern use in 1964, making it available commercially. Through many adaptations and adjustments, the synthesizer has gone from being able to produce single tones to full symphony pieces.

While there was an abundance of instruments appearing, there were also numerous composers that were interested in the new area of music as well.

Charles Koechlin *(November 27, 1867 – December 31, 1950)*, a French composer, used the Ondes Martenot in a movement of his Symphony No.2 op.196 (1943–44). The piece called for four of them. Because of the rarity of the instruments, the movement is often omitted from performances of his second symphony.

Edgar Varèse *(December 22, 1883 – November 6, 1965)*, a French composer who later moved to the United States in 1915, is probably the most well known composers for pioneering electronic music. He is also known by many as the "Father of Electronic Music" (NY Times, 2011). One of his first pieces to use electronic sounds as music was his Amériques (1918-21 revised 1927), which used a siren in the percussion section.

The Theremin was by far Varèse's favorite electric instrument to use, study, tweak, and publicize. One piece he wrote for the instrument was Ecuatorial (1934) in hopes to receive a grant for pursuing electronic instruments. In the 1950s a request was made to rewrite for the Ondes Martenot, since fingerboard Theremins were hard to be found.

Poème électronique (1957-58) was a song composed for the 1958 Brussel's World Fair. The song and architecture were both used to create an interactive sound to be heard by a couple million people.
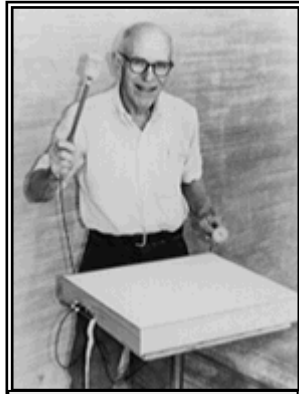
Joseph Schillinger *(September 1, 1895 – March 23, 1943)*, an Ukranian born and later American composer worked with Leon Theremin on his electronic works. Schillinger went on to write the piece, *First Airphonic Suite (1929),* for Leon Theremin, who also happened to play the Theremin part in the premiere.

Henry Cowell *(March 11, 1897 – December 10, 1965),* an American composer, had an interest in rhythm. Because of this, he commissioned Leon Theremin to help create the world's first electronic rhythm machine, the Rhythmicon. The instrument could produce sixteen rhythms simultaneously. Cowell went on to write several pieces that called for the Rhythmicon. Sadly, it didn't take long for the instrument to become obsolete.

Olivier Messiaen (*December 10, 1908 – April 27, 1992)*, was a French composer who was influenced by the many styles of music found throughout the world. He was also one of the

first composers to use an electronic keyboard, and also one of the first users of the Ondes Martenot, in orchestral work. The instrument proved to be a frequent instrument in his works.

Max Mathews *(November 13, 1926 – April 21, 2011)*, known as the father of computer music (Grimes, 2011), contributed much to the world of electronic music. Matthews wrote the first program for computers to not only synthesize sound, but to play it back in 1957. Due to the lack of computing power, it was a very time consuming process. Matthews later worked together with programmers John Kelly and Carol Lockbaum to create a synthesized performance of Harry Dacre's "Daisy Bell" (1892) on the IBM 7094 (1961). He programmed the accompaniment while the other two tackled the voice synthesis. This work was later referenced in 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968).

3 Mathews with his Radio Baton invention. Photo credit: Patte Wood

Mathews also invented a little something called the Radio-Baton. The device uses two batons on a three dimensional receiver, similar to the Theremin. The user could then conduct their own virtual symphony. This device was also a precursor to features of today's videogame controllers (such as the Nintendo Wii).

Robert Moog *(May 23, 1934 – August 21, 2005)* is a man who helped shape the popular, electronic, common, and recorded musical world into what we know today. Moog is the inventor of the Moog synthesizer, which was the first widely (and easily) distributed electronic instrument. His invention led to its use in the popular record "Switched-on Bach" by Wendy Carlos in 1968. Moog's machine gained incredible popularity and use after being showcased in the Monterey International Pop Festival in 1967. From here many musicians swept up the new instrument, and thus imbedding the synthesizer in popular music.

Wendy Carlos *(born Walter Carlos, November 13, 1939)*, is responsible for the famous "Step-on Bach" record (and recently rereleased CD and MP3 format). Carlos's album showcased the Moog synthesizer's use as an actual instrument. Carlos also wrote music for "A Clockwork Orange" (1971), which brought even more attention to the instrument.

Through these composers, the idea of electronic music was planted in music culture. From these roots, the modification and progression of electronic music and instruments was quite quick and exponential. What was once only a new and experimental sound has since been imbedded and locked into today's popular music.

With the growing popularity of the synthesizer, the sounds of popular music began to change. The big band sound began to merge with new electronic sounds. With this, the age of **Disco** flourished, and led to the birth of EDM.

Chapter 2: History of Electronic Dance Music

What we know as Electronic Dance Music today is a mixing pot of origins. Whatever culture you travel to, it will have its own style of EDM. After the invention of electronic instruments, many places in the world started to explore the new medium. From France to Jamaica, the world started to play.

The first big genre to grab hold of the electronic sound was Disco in the 1960s and 70s, and it took the world by storm. With good music, lights and disco-balls, and innovative dancing, it is no surprise that the dance floor was constantly on fire.

However, Disco seemed to fizzle about as quickly as it first ignited. The scene died after an anti-disco event was held in 1979. At Disco Demolition Night, held July 12, 1979 in Comiskey Park, Chicago, Illinois, fans were asked to bring their records old and new to be destroyed at a baseball game.

After the decline of disco, some people decided to DJ on their own. They used records, synthesizers, and drum machines to weave new music.

Because of how society now shunned the Disco scene, it went underground and gave birth to House, the parent of today's Electronic Dance Music.

The genre that is most openly accepted as the first kind of EDM is House. There are several speculations about the origins of House. Some say it originated in clubs (notably The Warehouse in Chicago from 1977-83), and others say the artist Giorgio Moroder (Generation

Ecstasy, 1998) was key in developing the standard techniques used. Moroder is well known for his use of the synthesizer to create purely electronic music, his use of the drum machine to create a steady four-to-the-floor rhythm, and his extended megamix of "Love to love you baby" in 1975.

From here the club life started to take off. People were no longer going to the disco, they were going out clubbing. However, due to regulations clubs and bars could only stay open so late. Because of this, people started to throw unauthorized all-nighter parties, running until the sunrise. These parties were thrown in remote locations, like large abandoned houses, warehouses, and at times even in the middle of large and remote fields or forests. These unauthorized parties were called raves.

The Big Bang Theory 4 in Portland, Oregon 2011

Like any music scene, raves have their own share of drug use. This quickly became a target in discriminating the scene. All it would take is one person overdosing (or rather, taking the drug and failing to properly hydrate) for all rave events in a city to be banned. This led to a rise in raves being called parties instead. Promoters frequently found that if they called the event a rave, it would be raided or stopped by the police. This led to a decline in rave frequencies in the late 1990s.

Even though unauthorized raves started to decline, larger and more publicized events started to happen. Clubs started to play the music, but still had limited hours. Through the world and the night, the popularity of EDM continued to grow.

Today, almost every Friday and Saturday night you will find at least one big rave, or rather 'party,' going on in the Northwest. Many of these events will legally run until the crack of dawn with plenty of security to watch over the place. Events are usually themed and have age requirements of 16 years and older, 18 years and older, and 21 and older.

Jaden finishes up a set in Portland, Oregon in 2011

Between the three different groups of events, you will see completely different crowds. 16+ events tend to have the highest attendance. Not only is this because of a larger acceptable age range, but also because it is a way for young kids to express themselves and bond outside in a moderately safe environment, escaping temporarily from the angst in a teen's life. 18+ parties have a nice balance between mature partygoers and the adventurous. People in this range tend to not be as scantily clad as the younger category. This is likely due to a lack of desire to rebel. The 21+ crowd has been there and done that, but still enjoy a nice scene.

Raves are rapidly becoming very popular. It won't take long for them to be just as popular, if not more, than normal concerts. Electronic Dance Music is now no longer just played in clubs, warehouses and forests, but has also embedded itself in just about any popular music. If you listen to the Top 40, the new Britney Spears' song will have a dubstep **break** while the new Lady Gaga song will have strong house influences.

Chapter 3: Musical Genres

As with any category of music, there are multiple subgenres. Calling Electronic Music 'Techno' is about as accurate as calling 'Screamo' Rock. One might need to be a little more specific for others to know exactly what you're talking about. If you were choose a genre from the many to be the name of this kind of music (besides Electronic Dance Music), one could use House, since it was the first.

As with any modern music, the evolution tends to be fast paced at a tempo that matches advances in technology. In the EDM scene there are dozens of genres, many of which are barely discernable from each other. However, there are some bigger genres that generally tend to encompass many others, or are more popular today. Here are some rundowns of such genres.

House (118-135 bpm)

House first immerged in the early 1980s in Chicago, Illinois and is commonly thought of as the first genre of Electronic Dance Music. It is a branch from Disco and has many African American and Latin roots, such as blues, jazz, funk, R&B and soul. Much of the earlier House music would generally use blues scales. House will usually use common time and phrases that last in multiples of four (4, 8, 12, 16…). Since the 1980s House has gotten faster and has been slowly moving away from its roots. Today, there is a need to distinguish 'Classic House' from today's House. Some popular artists in this genre include: Daft Punk, Basement Jaxx, The Bloody Beetroots, Benny Benassi, DeadMau5, Dirty Vegas and MSTRKRFT.

Trance (125-150 bpm)

Trance first popped up on the musical radar in the 1990s. It's a genre that heavily focuses on melody, buildups and breakdowns. Trance is a music based heavily on synthesizers and multiple layers. It is regarded as a thoughtful genre, and is just as likely to inspire people to think as it is to dance. Unlike some of the other big first EDM genres, this one was actually made by Caucasians instead of African Americans. Trance albums tend to have longer tracks that many other genres. Some of the famous artists in this field are easily the most identifiable worldwide artists.

Paul Oakenfold in Portland, Oregon 2011

Popular Trance artist include: ATB, Paul Oakenfold, Paul Van Dyk, and Tiesto.

Techno (120-160 bmp)

Techno originated from a group of African American friends in Detroit, Michigan sometime in the 1980s and didn't become popular until the 1990s. It was in the 1990s when the general population started to encompasses all EDM as Techno. Techno is very similar to Trance, and is in a way, the harmony to its melody. Unlike Trance, Techno focuses on the rhythm instead of the melody. Techno also doesn't have as many instruments (synthesized) as Trance, this makes it easy to mix with other tunes while DJing. There isn't just one beat or rhythm that is used in this genre, but rather many new and previously unexplored ones. This keeps the music interesting and fun. Popular Techno artists include: The Chemical Brothers, Kraftwerk and Aphex Twin.

Drum 'n' Bass (160-190 bpm)

Drum 'n' Bass (also known as Drum & Bass, D&B, and DnB) popped up in the 1990s. DnB features bass and sub-bass lines and is a 'cleaner' and more structured version of **Jungle**. Drum & Bass songs typically feature many breaks (a solo of drum beats, typically with a drum machine). This genre claims to grip its primitive roots in music, tracing back to Caribbean and African beats. However, in the Northwest of the United States, you are more likely to find more **wigger**s than African-Americans or Islanders celebrating the music. DnB music can be found in many places in the media, including movies like "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels", videogame series' like "Grand Theft Auto" and as well as many TV commercials. Some of the most popular artists for D&B include Goldie and Pendulum.

Dubstep (~140 bpm)

Dubstep is an offspring of Drum & Bass, born roughly at the turn of the 21st century. This genre is often described as the dirtiest, grimiest, and filthiest EDM genre today. It features very low and often overbearing bass lines that feature a 'wobble.' The songs often sound much slower than 140 bpm because the beats are usually taken at half tempo, making the songs sound around 70-80 bpm instead. Beats one and three are

Bassnectar Concert in Portland, Oregon 2011

usually strong, giving it a more laid back beat as compared to D&B's heavy one, two, three, four

beat. Often times, there will be a simple melody, vocals or sound effect that will be a feature of the song. This genre is quite popular among young audiences. Some popular artists include: Skream, Skrillex, Rusko, Datstik, Excision, Bassnectar, and Zeds Dead.

Hardcore (90-300+ bpm)

Hardcore is a very diverse genre that originated in the 1990s and has since grown exponentially. It features fast and hard quarter note beats that encourage fast paced dancing. This style of music is popular among many producers because of the lack of equipment needed to write the music. All one really needs is a good computer and one of many computer programs. This genre is popular to play at the end of a long rave (2:00 AM – 5:00 AM) as a way

Showtek in Portland, Oregon 2011

to keep the crowd energized and pumped for the rest of the night/morning. Some popular artists include: Zymurgy, Showtek and Hixxy.

There are numerous other genres out there, but just about all have roots that trace back to these basic types. One can only imagine what other kinds of music will emerge through time, but hopefully it is just as good as the past and present!

Chapter 4: Culture

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With any musical genre comes its own culture. Granted, the look of the scene has changed dramatically through time, some features have stayed the same. There are many aspects to the rave subculture, from fashion to careers, all playing a role in fueling the scene. For some, participating in the rave scene is an occasional splurge, and for others it's a way of life. This is a look into some of the things that become a part of any involvement.

Lights, Lasers, Glow!

What would a rave be without **glow sticks**, **LEDs**, lasers, and lights? Just music, that's what, and there's more to EDM than just music.

In many shows, the lasers and sound systems are contracted. Great sound is always essential, but great lights can make a show. Spotlights, strobes, lasers, fog machines, disco balls, black lights and homemade lights are all found at raves.

Even participants come decorated for the events in a glowing fashion. They will wear glow sticks, LED lights, **EL wire**, glow in the dark or UV paint/dye/clothing and **rave gloves**.

Glovers at DubWarz PDX 2011

All of these lights are there to add to the full body sensory experience of a rave, be the **raver** sober or intoxicated.

Drugs in the Scene

It doesn't seem to matter what genre of music you look at there will be drug use, be it past or present. The 1960s were acid, 1970s were marijuana, 1980s were cocaine, 1990s were ecstasy (rise of the rave era), 2000s were methamphetamines, and today could be considered the decade of synthetics (like JWH-014, however it is still too early to tell what this decade's big drug will be).

Ecstasy in pressed tablet and capsule forms.

Drugs in the EDM scene have always been around. In the 1980s, the scene started off with acid, created a rather psychedelic musical trip. In the 1990s, when the music started to change, so did the drug. MDMA, also known as ecstasy, became the drug of choice. The drug creates a feeling of euphoria and love (which is later followed by a crash of depression). Users tend to show a higher self-confidence and an increased urge to dance. The senses when intoxicated are also more pleasurable than sober (such as touching a soft or fuzzy fabric). There is also
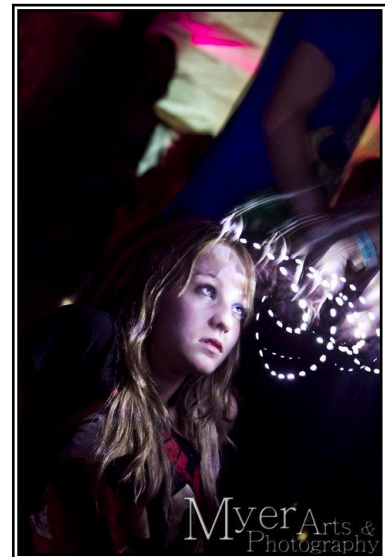
a hallucinogenic feature to the drug. It isn't uncommon for a **glover** at a rave to lean over to someone sitting against a wall, obviously enjoying their trip, and as "Are you **rollin**'?" When receiving an answer no more than a nod the glover will then pop over in front of the tripping

raver and begin to give a **lightshow**. When done, hugs will be exchanged and the glover will move on to the next roller.

Ecstasy has proven troublesome in the rave scene due to one of its side effects: the loss of control over the body's core temperature. Far too often, when you hear about someone who 'overdosed' at a rave, they simply didn't keep hydrated while dancing all night. It is recommended for someone taking ecstasy to drink a quart of water an hour, and far too few people actually manage to do so. There are many side effects of ecstasy. One, is that is tends to cause the user to grind their teeth. Users will

A raver spins a hula-hoop at The Big Bang Theory 4 in Portland, Oregon 2011

usually wear a mouth guard, binky or chew gum to avoid grinding. Users will also wear gasmasks, handkerchiefs or surgical masks coated in menthol to increase the high they receive from ecstasy. Another side effect that affects most males is the inability to obtain an erection. This can actually be a comfort for women who go to raves. Recent studies have also shown that frequent users of ecstasy have an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease due to holes that seem to appear in the brain.

Fashion and Costumes

Fashion is a huge aspect in the rave culture. Within this subculture, there are many other cultures inside. For seemingly each genre of music, there is a unique stereotype. Candyravers, Cybergoths, and E-tards tend to be some of the more popular kinds of ravers in the area.

Candyravers (or any variant of Candy Kids) are the ravers that like to release their inner child. They are often seen wearing **Kandi** (beaded jewelry), stuffed animal backpacks, fuzzy hats and brightly colored clothing (often with childhood memorabilia prints).

Candy Kids often exchange kandi with a fellow raver they wish to remember. In this exchange the kids will make a peace sign and touch their fingers together (representing 'Peace'); then each will form half of a heart and bring the two pieces together (representing 'Love'); next both palms are flattened and pressed together like a stationary high-five (representing 'Unity'); and lastly the fingers of both hands are interlaced as they take turns pulling a bracelet from one hand to the other (representing 'Respect'). This exchange is an example of **'P.L.U.R.'** in the scene, Peace, Love, Unity and Respect. Some go as far to add another 'R' to the end that represents Responsibility, creating **'P.L.U.R.R.'**

Cybergoths tend to listen to the darker genres of EDM out there. They dress in dark clothing with bright neon accents and tend to wear dramatic makeup and **cyberlox**. Some even wear decorative contacts.

E-tards are the kids in the scene that give raves a bad rep. They are there only for the high they get from the drugs. You will often see these kids littered along the back walls in what are called cuddle puddles. They are often giving each other lightshows and massages while sucking on pacifiers and posing for pictures with a '**thizz** face' (the face one makes when chewing a tab).

Apart from stereotypes, there is a lot more to the fashion scene. Many raves will have a theme, encouraging people to dress accordingly and often offering a discount to ravers who show up in costume.

Other fashions ravers tend to sport include **cargo pants**, go-go boots**, furry leg warmers** (think fuzzy, very fuzzy) and animal hats**, synthetic dreads or falls**.

Go-Go Dancers and Dancing

Go-Go dancers are like the cheerleaders of the rave scene. Their purpose is to look hot and keep the crowd dancing with the DJs. Often working with the same local DJs they learn how to cue audience members, keeping the night as fun as possible for as long as possible. These girls tend to have a fashion all their own that is constantly evolving.

Go-Go Dancers on stage for Showtek: The World is Mine tour in Portland, Oregon 2011

Today they can be seen sporting multiple bras or bikini tops with some spandex shorts, bikini bottoms, or booty shorts. Accessories will commonly include tights, belts, go-go boots, and fuzzy leg warmers. The dancers will usually dress to a party's theme and match as a group, making them easily identifiable. Showing so much skin is not just for pleasing the crowd however, it is also to help keep cool in a hot room while dancing all night.

DJs and Producers

DJs and producers are the heart of the scene. They are the ones that release and mix the music; they are the ones that give the scene purpose. The difference between a DJ and a producer is basically that a producer will record, write and release tracks and albums, whereas a DJ will stick to live performances and mixes. Most producers can be called a DJ, while a DJ must actually release material in order to also be called a producer.

The basic equipment to DJ requires a mixer and a turntable. With the turntable comes the question: CD or vinyl? While vinyl is 'going out' and becoming more expensive many DJs still prefer the sound and quality over CD. A new DJ might go with CD just because of the cost difference, and with so many new DJs coming out today, more and more are using CDs over vinyl.

Many DJs will also use a computer to aid in their music making. There are many vinyl turntable simulators and mixing programs out there, including: Serato, Traktor Scratch Pro, Ableton, Reason, and Torq.

One may state that Electronic Music is not music at all; one may also state that DJs aren't musicians. However, I feel that the ability to skillfully use turntables, synthesizers, and computers to make music that people love makes these DJs artists/musicians. It may not take much skill to make noise, but to create music capable of bringing together is a feat in itself.

Definitions of Key Terms

Break – a kind of solo, usually for bass or rhythm.

Cargo Pants – big and oversized pants that are often worn by ravers who dance to hardstyle.

Cyberlox– a fake and often playful form of dreadlocks often made with tubular crin.

Disco – A funky music thrived in the 9070s

DJ – a disk jockey, one who spins and mixes records for an audience.

Dread Falls – a bunch of synthetic dreads or cyberlox tied to an elastic band that are attached to the head on buns. The dreads will then 'fall' and cover the rest of the head.

Drop – when the line of music or bass is added after an intro.

Drum and bass – a genre of Electronic Dance Music focused on the bass and sub-base line.

Dubstep – a seemingly slow paced genre of Electronic Dance Music that features low bass wobbles.

EL Wire – Electro-Luminescent wire that has many different decorative purposes.

Glover – a raver who uses rave gloves to give lightshows

Glow sticks – a plastic container filled with liquids that have a chemical reaction, causing them to emit a bright neon light.

Hardcore – a fast and upbeat genre of Electronic Dance Music.

House – a funky and soulful genre of Electronic Dance Music.

Jungle – a rhythm filled genre of Electronic Dance Music that holds African and Caribbean roots.

Kandi – bracelets or other jewelry, often made of plastic pony beads, that many ravers wear and trade at events.

LED Lights – Light Emitting Diodes that have many purposes in the rave scene due to their small size, lack of heat, and bright light.

Leg Fuzzies – leg warmers that are made with thick and furry fabric and often brightly colored.

Lightshow – an improvised display of moving light given from one raver to another.

PLUR(R) – Peace Love Unity Respect and Responsibility

Rave Gloves – gloves that have LEDs in the fingertips used for lightshows.

Raver – one who goes to raves.

Rollin' – a term for someone who is under the influence of drugs, namely ecstasy.

Synthetic Dreads – Dreadlocks made with synthetic hair.

Techno – a genre of Electronic Dance Music that focuses on rhythms.

Thizz – a slang term for ecstasy.

Trance – a genre of Electronic Dance Music that focuses on melody, build ups, break downs, and progressions.

Wigger – a white kid who dresses in a wife beater and jeans several size too big. Often found sporting bandanas on their faces. They are often young suburban kids who think they can be black gangsters.

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