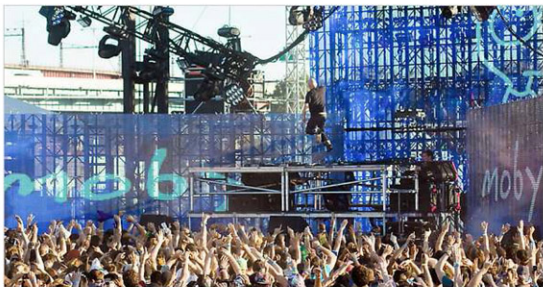


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MUSIC REVIEW

Hard-Driving Star D.J.'s Serve Up the Thumps



Willie Davis for The New York Times

The D.J. Moby delivers his set to an arm-waving crowd at the Electric Zoo dance festival on Randalls Island. The event was sold out on Saturday and Sunday. [More Photos »](#)

By JON PARELES

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Sunlight hit sequins at Electric Zoo, a two-day electronic dance festival on Randalls Island. For 12 hours a day on Saturday and Sunday, disc jockeys (not all using discs) pumped out 4/4 beats from four stages, and dancers in party costumes — with cat ears, fake-fur leggings, fluorescent wigs and all kinds of glitter — raised their hands in the air to channel them.

Multimedia



Slide Show

[The Electric Zoo](#)

It was the second annual [Electric Zoo](#), sold out with 25,000 people each day.

In a musical zone that diligently parses itself into subgenres, the festival's 67 acts added up to both a dance marathon and a broad-spectrum survey, from crowd-pleasing trance and relentless techno to abstract minimal house. In the three tents and on an outdoor main stage, with D.J.'s front and center acting more like cheerleaders than technicians, every style put bodies in motion.

The dominant beat was the sound of house music; it probably ran continuously through the festival from at least one stage. It has been a club-music constant for decades because it works: a kick-drum thump that's blunt enough so anyone can find the downbeat, with a dollop of swing from syncopated high-hats. It can drive a party all by itself, as a rhythm section with the dancers' bodies



inscribing silent melodies. It can be the foundation for perky pop tunes or experiments in texture. And it can reconfigure a pop hit for club use.

Dance music is no place to quibble over authorship. Sets at Electric Zoo mingled self-produced music with samples and remixes that dissected songs down to usable elements and surrounded them with new superstructures; the Yeah Yeah Yeahs' "Heads Will Roll," with its injunction to "Dance till you're dead," got multiple treatments.

Soon after a set from [Moby](#) that traversed house, techno and gospelly exaltation, Fedde Le Grand remixed Moby's "Natural Blues" (itself based on an old gospel vocal). The music wasn't inflexibly hipper-than-thou either; fans shouted approval for samples from Kings of Leon, Black Eyed Peas and [Lil Wayne](#) that were soon surrounded in new electronics.

Sunday's headliner was [Armin van Buuren](#), whose video display spelled out his genre in letters 10 feet high: TRANCE. His music shared that kind of obviousness. Mr. van Buuren has become one of the world's most popular D.J.'s with a particularly triumphal version of trance, infused with the bombast of European classical music: marchlike beats, swelling (synthetic) orchestral chords, arpeggiated melodies and, at times, quasi-operatic chorales. The inexorable trance arc from sustained chords to big beat to swooshing crescendo was thrilling for about the first 10 minutes — and then, the next times around, monumentally cheesy. Electric Zoo offered better, less self-important trance from Markus Schulz (more tuneful) and Above & Beyond (more ebullient).

The trance D.J.'s worked in suitelike cycles; Victor Calderone also used the house beat, but in a superb set of continuous accretion and transformation, stripping down the beat and subtly adding layer upon layer so that every few minutes everything had changed.

The house and trance thump was so pervasive at Electric Zoo, and sometimes so automatic, that the exceptions sounded even better. One tent featured acts bordering on hip-hop, balancing the shiny electronic sounds of much of the festival with some corrective sludge and murk. The Glitch Mob, one of very few acts to include live instruments, sometimes pounded on three sets of drums to push its hip-hop remixes even further into bass-heavy foreboding.

Bassnectar veered in and out of hip-hop with startling, unpredictable mixes so dense they threatened to implode. A-Trak deployed electronics but also flaunted an older disc-jockey skill: virtuosic scratching. A set by Diplo jumped around, from oozy deep-bass remixes to the international drumbeats he has used in productions for M.I.A., but the attention spans were short; he kept interrupting songs to get shouts from the crowd. (Perhaps he craved reassurance.)



At a different extreme, there were the techno D.J.'s who used just a few sounds at a time in widely spaced registers, but with relentless impact. Boys Noize — so austere that their video display used only red, black and white — dispensed buzzing, distorted riffs over dry drumbeats, as the chords that topped them jabbed with happy aggression. Steve Aoki went for more brute force: a huge, pounding 4/4 stomp topped with his own buzz-saw lines and siren swoops. Climbing on top of his equipment table, he pumped his fists in the air like a rock star and shouted into a microphone that, with technological acumen, had also been set to distort. At Electric Zoo it was another human-electronic interface working efficiently toward its goal: more dancing.