

Transformations (AKA DeepChord & Fluxion) in San Francisco

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Daniel Bromfield



When *2001: A Space Odyssey* came out at the height of Flower Power, stoned hippie kids would sneak into cinemas and lie on the floor to take in Stanley Kubrick's visuals. This came to mind at the world premiere of dub techno veterans DeepChord and Fluxion's new, improvised Transformations project at San Francisco's Gray Area. Housed in a converted movie theater that sprawled in front of the audience before coming to a stop at a 30-foot wall of fractal visuals, the evening was as much a "happening" as a dance event. The mostly well-dressed 30-somethings in the crowd were as happy to dance as to sit cross-legged on the floor—or to sit back in one of the cushy red chairs that lined the venue.

Gray Area was once Grand Theater, an 870-seat movie palace built in 1940 that housed a dollar store for years before becoming an art space in 2014. Judging by the vast swaths of sectioned-off floor space, they're still trying to figure out what to do with all that room, but no matter: the yawning art deco interior was a wonderful environment for a dub techno event. During most of DJ CZ's opening set, the big room was occupied only by a few throngs of people staring raptly at Zoey Vero's psychedelic projections. In spite of the quiet music, snatches of conversation were scarce, and all eyes were on the stage.

CZ's music gradually built in intensity as more people flocked in, though he saved the full-on beats for when the crowd had a couple beers in them. Brock Van Wey's rare bvdub set was when the party really started. Though the taciturn man in all black played mostly pad-based soundscapes with sad vocal samples—like the ones heard on his albums—he'd occasionally trigger a beat that had the audience on its feet.

Finally, Rod "DeepChord" Modell's hulking, Mingus-like frame strode to the stage, followed by that of his much smaller Greek partner, Fluxion, and the kick drums set in. The drums were fast and kind of wet, as on a typical DeepChord production, though the chords that floated on top were dyed-in-the-wool Chain Reaction. It would've been hard to guess this music was improvised, but then dub techno isn't known for throwing curveballs, so it was still satisfying.

By this point, the crowd was on its feet, and there were a few enthusiastic dancers. But still the chairs were all occupied, as were the small tables on which the monitors were perched. A few people had even carved out little spots to sit on the floor. Absent were the wide grins so often on the faces of revelers at these kinds of events. Even the most dapper, sober San Francisco professionals seemed to have their eyes glazed over.

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Zoey Vero