

Substance: Rise and Shine

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Peter Kuschnerit's Substance project debuted in 1998 on Chain Reaction, the German label that's put out a dozen or so of the best dub techno releases of all time. Chain Reaction was an oddly egoless affair. The music was packaged in metal tins with almost no artwork, and artists like Vainqueur, Fluxion, and Hallucinator seemed to draw from the same primordial soup of chords and echo. So did Substance, but his *Session Elements* was sharper than most of the stoned drifts on that label. It was music for dancing, with tough beats and minimal atmosphere.

Twenty-one years later, after some time spent by Kuschnerit as DJ Pete, Substance is back on the Ostgut Ton label. That's the label of the great Berlin club Berghain, and listening to his new EP *Rise & Shine*, it's obvious what kind of architecture Kuschnerit has in mind for his music. This is cavernous, decadent German techno, less purist than the cliché and happy to integrate influences from dub and ambient music but still tough to imagine outside the biggest of rooms.

There are five tracks. "Rise and Shine" starts with pinprick synths and follows a shuddering 2-step beat: slowly, distant little siren-things that would sound great lost in some distant corner of an airplane hangar-sized club start to flicker in and out. It's a track with a lot of heft, but I couldn't help thinking the main synth riff sounds a little stupid, almost like a rock riff a kid might write.

"Countdown" is a sort of broken-beat thing reminiscent of early Boards of Canada, maybe something off *Hi Scores*, with its chords cascading at a rhythm that seems to defy the pace at which the flanged, skittering drums move. In its liquid sound design and fantastic use of the stereo field, we hear bits of the old Chain Reaction artist emerging.

"Bird Cave" is an intriguing ambient track that loops what sounds like a cello, or perhaps the low moo of a cow, in dead space amid hiss and mechanical rumbles; it seems to anticipate something. It's a bauble, but I wouldn't have minded if it lasted longer.

"Distance" is dub techno at its heaviest, with resonant creaks and scrapes that suggest something massive being dragged across a floor. You'd be forgiven for missing how fearsomely syncopated the drums are given that they sound like they've been coated in butter.

The Berghain banger is "Cruising," by far the longest track and the only one with a real 4/4 throb. Someone yells distressingly in the distance as plumes of steam hiss; it sounds so much like the decadence we associate with German clubbing it's almost funny. (Is the name a gay joke?)

This is a promising re-introduction to a vaunted moniker, and he's done a good job transposing the sound-design skills required to make good dub techno to different contexts. It's a great demo reel and certainly makes me want to see a Substance DJ set. It's in the nature of this kind of music, though, that it's not as suited for home listening as the murk on Chain Reaction. *Session Elements* brought to mind images of water, wind, surf, messages barely breaking through the static. Here, it's hard to think of anything but the club.



<https://youtu.be/nA6Aru8qfKM>