

Konkrete is the moniker for two producers from opposite ends of the music spectrum mostly providing beats for hip-hop stars. Hotly tipped, and hailing from Stratford, East London, they currently reside at hip-hop music making's cutting edge.

Comprising unashamed studio junkies, Jim McNeilly, and partner in rhythm, Martin West... they bring the very broadest creative inspirations to the table.

Born and raised on the mean streets of Belfast, McNeilly had a misspent youth, listening to a music mad father's Elvis collection, his mother's James Brown LP's and an older brother's Clash 45's. Growing up during the height of the sectarian troubles, music for Jim was both a refuge and a passion, finally becoming the all consuming obsession it is today.

Production maestro, and yang to Jim's Yin is Martin West, a new soul rebel and music minded B-Boy, who is heavily into his hip-hop. He is responsible for laying down Konkrete's instantly identifiable beats. Born into the multi-cultural melting pot, and urban music Mecca, Hackney, he was raised in a deeply musical family, his mother having worked as an A&R scout for Decca records throughout the sixties. The label was then home to the Rolling Stones and a host of other iconic R&B stars. Martin grew up surrounded on all sides by the very best music of every conceivable genre... at home, on the streets and in the underground clubs of his inner city neighborhood. All of which proved pivotal in shaping the music Konkrete are making.

Out of the many musicians and artists to inspire him, it was legendary musician and hall of fame artist, Stevie Wonder who left a indelible mark. Martin describes this heritage artist as "The only genuine, music genius of the last 50 yrs". In addition to Stevie, Motown record's sixties and seventies roster have also hugely influenced West's work in Konkrete.

With influences diverse as Presley, The Clash, Stevie Wonder and JB, its no accident that the East Londoners sound is so original and also hard to define, whilst always managing to remain contemporary. Jim McNeilly and partner Martin West, both love American hip-hop, dancehall reggae and street soul, all key colours in Konkrete's musical paint box. Their music is best described as a mid Atlantic fusion of all three, with a unique and quirky, rock twist which is all their own.

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Listening to their stripped down sound and expressive beats, it's hard to believe Konkrete hail from Belfast and London respectively, because the duo's sound is quite unlike anything currently coming from the UK, a fact the pair see as one of their many musical strengths.

The remix picture however, is just a small sample of Konkrete's musical brief, which currently includes recording 17yr old music prodigy, singer songwriter, Sam Roman's debut album. West and McNeilly have also written and recorded 7 tracks with Detroit's newest white rapper, Stock, who's currently performing stateside, and also in advanced talks with major record labels. Konkrete's production CV has been further augmented by work with London based Jamaican singer, Sandy Lamb, and former Dome Records artiste, Vicki Young. Topping out a very credible, current production list, is the duo's work with MOBO winners, Street Politik on their debut long player, "A Pound And A Promise", and former Endz front man, MC Bunzi D, whose Konkrete produced "Angles" is getting major play from BBC 1Xtra and attracting the influential attention of R1's Jo Whiley.

Konkrete are rapidly becoming a two man music factory more than capable of producing, remixing and songwriting for a raft of credible acts, both new and established. Currently working with several major and independent record labels, in the UK and abroad, the duo aim in their own words, "To raise the bar in British music making to the highest level and to compete with our transatlantic cousins on totally equal terms."

With passion, ambition and undeniable talent, Martin West and Jim McNeilly are perfectly placed to put the UK's increasingly diverse music scene back on the international radar.

The past few years have seen quantum leaps in raw, home grown talent across every musical divide. Now Great Britain has Konkrete... producers capable of taking that talent to the next level and beyond.

"The future's arrived ... and it's as heavy like Konkrete."

After a recent trip to the heart of London, I caught up with one half of Konkrete Productions to find out a little bit more about this producing duo.

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John - Sup Martin, firstly would like to say thanks for taking the time to speak to ThugLifeArmy.com.

Martin - Yeah, firstly Id like to say thanks to yourself, Robert and the whole ThugLifeArmy family for all the support and love you have been showing over the last year.

John - Stateside you may not be that well known, can you tell the peeps a little about Konkrete Productions?

Martin - Konkrete Productions has been going for about 5 years now. Myself and Jim McNeilly set up Konkrete as a vehicle for producing both established and new artists. Our studio is in East London, right in the heart of UK urban music scene. Our aim is to produce music that is capable of competing with our US cousins on the same playing field.

John - Could you tell us a little bit about the artists that you're currently working with?

Martin - On a Hip Hop tip we are working closely with MOBO award winners, Street Politik, also former ENDZ frontman, Bunzi D, Detroit rapper, Stock and Chi town mc Lazarus.

We have just finished co-writing and producing Sam Romans debut album entitled Giving My Life which is pure Soul!

Other artists that we have worked with include Estelle, Sandy Lamb, Sherrisa Stewart, Keisha White, Vicki Young, Anton Gordon, Big Ben, Wayne G-Spot Marshall, the list goes on!!!

John - Rumour has it that Interscope and rap artist The Game where interested in using some of your beats, what happened with that situation?

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Martin - Yeah, that was a mad situation! Our US representative had been shopping our beats on the West Coast, Interscope being one of the labels, and they showed some interest at first, and then went quiet for about 6 months. Then about 2 months before Documentary dropped we were contacted with an offer for two beats. Unfortunately, both had been sold a couple of weeks earlier, we were seriously pi\*\*ed!!!!!!

John - You're heavily involved with the group Street Politik, what can we expect from them?

Martin - Man, those guys are untouchable in my eyes. They really are raising the game for UK artists. We mixed half their album, A Pound & A Promise, and co-wrote and produced two tracks, Life Goes On & My Life. They have features by Grafh, who as you probably know is tearing up the scene right now, Keisha White, Swiss (So Solid Crew) amongst others. Production comes from us, JD (So Solid), Toonheadz (DMX, Rough Riders), Mr Woo and Black Hand. A Pound & A Promise is out now in selected outlets in the UK and New York with a major release due this year.

John - What music are you listening to at the moment?

Martin - I love Soul music, artists like Omar, Musiq Soulchild and Raphael Sadiq, it chills me out.

Hip Hop wise it's all about Pac! Simple as that. Before I hit the studio, if I'm doing a rap session, I have to listen to Pac, if I don't, the session isn't gonna work!!!!!!

I love Game, Busta, and Rhymefest. I'm also feeling Necro. I love the way he tells it how it is, real Hip Hop with a message.

John - Is there any artists that are inspiring yourself at the moment and any that you would like to work with?

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Martin - UK artists inspire me. Acts like S.A.S, Roots Manuva, Blak Twang, Sway, there's too many to mention. It's a struggle to blow in the UK if you're doing Hip Hop because the industry doesn't support homegrown talent the way the US does. Hopefully things are starting to change.

Obviously we want to break the states, so working with Game, Busta, Kanye or Dr. Dre would be cool, although I like the idea of finding new talent rather than jumping on the coat tails of established artists and blowing them up!!!

John - What can we expect from Konkrete Productions in the near Future?

Martin - Were actually taking a year out and concentrating on the business side of things. We have tracks coming out all through this year on compilations and artist albums.

Hopefully the ThugLifeArmy.com track is gonna work and we are all going to benefit from what could be a first of its kind.

John - Do you think UK hip-hop is going in the right direction or do you think it should be more of a carbon copy of the US scene?

Martin - I do actually think it's going in the right direction musically. Things are progressing all the time. I get the impression the US see UK Hip Hop as Dizee Rascal and Lethal B, which is wrong because that is Grime. We are always going to be 10 years behind the US which is fine seeing as that is where Hip Hop originated. I think it's down to the producers to get their game up and realise that we are as good as our American counterparts.

John - Are there any producers at the minute that you would like to work with and why?

Martin - Masters At Work, Johnny "J" and Dr. Dre out of respect for what they have achieved and done for the music industry. We don't really like working with other producers because we have our own sound that belongs to Konkrete Productions.

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John - If you were not blessed to be in the music business, what do you see yourself doing now instead?

Martin - I used to be in the graphic design field, so I guess it would be in that kind of area.

John - Do you have any advice for people who want to get in the game of producing?

Martin - Yeah, simple. Know your trade. Study the business. The easy part is making the beats, the hard part is earning from it. Be prepared to sacrifice money and time to reach your goal. Expect rejection, but stay strong and know that failure only comes to those who give up.

John - Well thanks for all your time Martin, it's much appreciated, I hope we can catch up at a later date and kick it and good luck in the future.

Martin - Thanks John, it's been great talking to you. Maximum respect to Robert, Johnny "J" and all the ThugLifeArmy.com family.

More information about Konkrete Productions can be found on their website, [www.urbankonkrete.com](http://www.urbankonkrete.com) and also

Myspace

<http://www.myspace.com/konkreteproductions>

\*Interviewed for [www.ThugLifeArmy.com](http://www.ThugLifeArmy.com) by UK Staff Member John.

John can be contacted at [John@ThugLifeArmy.com](mailto:John@ThugLifeArmy.com)

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