

EXPLORING THE RITUAL OF CYBER-FEMINISM



Interest in magick has seen a resurgence in the underground scene unparalleled since the '60s and '70s—call it societal dissatisfaction, a side-effect of the similarly wide interest in darker musical themes, or just the result of too much time on weird tumblrs, but whatever the source, magickal practices are integrating themselves everywhere. Club culture is, in fact, the perfect cradle for such ideas. Many people treat the club as an escape, rather than as a place to gather power—as if the world outside had ceased to exist after they went in. A closer truth, perhaps, is that people *remake their own worlds* in clubs.

Some go a step further, acknowledging and channeling energies good and bad to create a connection outside of the basic five senses. Two such minds can be found in Vancouver. Artist **Miki Aurora** and producer/DJ **Raghnath Khe** (real name **Ritch**) are crafting intriguing and necessary ideas, and their latest project **Dystopia Dreaming** could be the inspirational template for a new wave of esoteric feminists. The cyber-shamanistic ritual is equal parts acknowledgement of the difficulties and safety issues that women still face (a particularly stark reality in music culture), and DJ-led dance party. Connecting itself to simultaneous shared rituals in Houston, Texas and Mt. Shasta, California via livestream, the two seek to channel and reconceptualize these energies toward a more positive force.

A ritual night that becomes a dance party makes a lot of sense; the shared energy at most events can be a very powerful tool.

Miki: We're excited by the notion of the energy from the ritual being catalyzed by the dance floor; tapping into that human place where various ancient tribes in the past have found dance as a way to connect to the divine and reach certain states of consciousness. In fact, it's kind of a philosophy within this community, and it's something that all of the DJs playing at this event are familiar with quite specifically.

We've got a line-up of four women plus two gender-queer DJs spinning. It was a conscious choice to focus on the amazing female electronic underground talents within the local scene. Ritch has played alongside all of them in the past, so there is that element of trust with bringing them into this project! They are people we know and have watched their practice center around fostering that kind of deep dance floor, with their perspectives spanning out of the temporal and into deeper realms. We're really stoked to have them on the lineup.

Ritch: Selecting them was a very intuitive process as well. All of the DJs at our event have a lot of experience doing what they do, and they're all very talented. It's a mood, but it's also an ability to really channel music, and they all have that. The underground dance community in Vancouver is very strong. We're really excited to be combining all these different energies. The dance floor post ritual will catalyze everything.

It's rare to see collectives who use the idea of dance and nightlife to bring people together to actively participate in and encourage more esoteric and ancient practices.

Ritch: The West Coast scene in North America is very much like that. I remember small full moon gatherings in the forest circa 1999 which were very spiritually powerful. In the past few years here, we've seen a resurgence of these kind of events and festivals. What we are doing with **Dystopia Dreaming** is part of the evolution of this culture into more and more elevated and conscious places. The scene here is ready for that.

Miki: Yes, and there are specific flavors of this practice as well—ours being of a more dark persuasion. We're hoping to facilitate something on the cathartic side of things in terms of that; something that enables people to purge out their sorrow and their inner demons that have been fabricated by living in a patriarchal society. The ritual will include a facilitation of the attendees tapping into the looming depths of the festering wound that is the current situation for women in contemporary society and how fucked up it has become. Then, once we're all holding that space, we will begin the process of deep honoring for those culturally inflicted wounds. The ritual is about giving the space and time to honor that which is most often pushed into the back of our minds, or locked in the subconscious, because the wounds are often so painful for people to bear looking at during day to day life (and still be able to function).

Ritch, your music is very transformative towards the environment; how will it tie into the performance itself?

Ritch: When I DJ, the experience is very intuitive for me. I'm always waiting for signals of where the energy of the dance floor wants to go, with transformation in mind. I will be opening at the ritual, and the intention is to bring the energy of the ritual when I activate the dance floor. I already envision the power and intensity of what I will be carrying post ritual, and hopefully I will be able to channel exactly what needs to be present for the people to make the transition energetically from perhaps a more obvious ritual, to that of dance, expression, and release. Which is also a ritual.

Miki: Ritch and I will be leading the ritual, as well as six performers who will be visually articulating some components. We're taking reservations from the general public of people who are interested in attending.



There's been more of an increased focus in the last years on raising visibility and safety for women in nightlife culture from collectives like female:pressure and Girls Against. Can you tell me about Vancouver's underground feminist musical scene?

Miki: One thing we're seeing a lot of is the rise of consent culture as a strong pro-active force. It's something that is part of the mandate of the event, of course, but there's also a group that's doing workshops and training people to be consent ambassadors.

Ritch: There's a group in Vancouver called **The Consent Crew**. They hold workshops where they in effect train people on consent. The people who organize that are also heavily involved in the scene as DJs, event promoters and so forth.

Miki: It's definitely much-needed in rave culture.

Ritch: I feel there is a strong undercurrent of feminism in the more underground dance culture in Vancouver, and it's becoming more and more formed. People are realizing how essential it is, and are just really needing a little guidance in how to implement everything.

Miki: It's exciting too because lately there seems to be this heightened interest in spirituality and the occult arts. I'm feeling really grateful for the opportunity to use these mediums that have been a part of my life since I began my practice as a witch in my teens, to create platforms for spiritual activism and feminism within the local community.

When I was in my earlier teens I began working in ritual as a medium for navigating trauma in various ways. The structure and style of these rituals has varied, at some points leaning towards a darker side, at other times a more chill side. But wherever on the black/white scale of things the rituals have fallen, they've always been motivated by an intention for liberation for the human race, or alleviation of suffering. I don't necessarily believe in good or bad; perhaps the closest we can come to these labels are 'for' or 'against' the oppression of human kind?

When I was younger I kept toying with the idea of filming these rituals, because I thought it would be interesting to document what I look like during a time where I feel so disconnected from the physical world—when in the heightened ritual state. To see if I could capture the intangible movements that are occurring on the subtle planes. So when I was in art school in Barcelona, I finally got around to filming my first ritual, *The Whore of Babylon: Water*. Documenting my rituals on film has become a cornerstone of my practice ever since. It's interesting to see what the body is doing during such rituals, when there can be disassociation from your body.

And especially on a mass scale; I've attended rituals where the assembled power could feel overwhelming. Is this going to be the largest ritual you've performed?

Miki: I would say so, because of the weight of the subject matter as well as the size. I think there have been smaller rituals with larger audiences, but it's definitely up there—though at this point the reservations for spots within the ritual are still filling up.

Ritch: The way we have been inviting people is very personal. One-on-one interactions.

Miki: We've enabled people from the public to request reservations, but we've kept it from being an open door thing for the ritual portion of the night, because of the nature of the kind of ritual that we're doing and the sensitive nature of discussions surrounding female oppression.

It's something that is spreading in a lot of places; Berlin is somehow not quite up on esoteric nightlife ideas but I know there are a few new collectives springing up. European club culture—especially among the techno set—is so heavily focused on the space, sound system, all the technical aspects; I feel like there's less of an interest in spiritual connection, which is kind of amazing. The type of musical rituals you could create in Berghain, for example, would be massive.

Following Dystopia Dreaming—the medium of which allows you to connect with others across large spaces—do you see similar future projects reaching a larger worldwide scale?

Miki: Definitely. It was when I began collaborating with Ritch that my interest in interdisciplinary events was solidly piqued, and now it's something that I see myself continuously including within my art practice. We're always interested in the process of expansion!