



Since his first release in 2003, Stuart Li better known as Basic Soul Unit has carved out a rocksteady place in the ever-shifting and nebulous world of underground dance music. Born in Hong Kong and raised in Canada, Li attributes his musical upbringing to the multicultural landscape of his hometown of Toronto. Growing up in the 80's with Chinese Jamaican relatives from his father's side, there was always a mix of Soul, RnB, Reggae and Soca in the backdrop at family gatherings. Just before high school, he would discover college community radio which in addition to the music mentioned also injected the new and burgeoning sounds of House, Freestyle and Hip Hop to the rotation. Toronto being geographically in-between Chicago, Detroit, New York and with a healthy dose of influence from British expats, absorbed all of the sounds of these dance music centres into it's exploding scene during the early 90's. While anchored in the soul and groove of the music he grew up with, Stuart's curiosity and open-minded approach to music led him to deeper and more exploratory corners of the scene. It is this mixture of influences which informs his versatile sound to this day.

In the late 80's even before high school, Stuart found his way to independent dance music record shops in downtown Toronto like Starsound, Carnival Records and

Play De Record. That was the beginning of a lifetime passion of not only collecting but sharing his love for music across dance floors. If that was the start, the moments spent in the early 90's on dance floors in darkened lofts and warehouses across his city made clear to Li the power and purpose of dance music. People from all different backgrounds and walks of life were sweating in unison on the concrete or well worn wooden floors. The soundtrack was a mix of deep and soulful house, jacking beats, as well as early techno. As the decade continued, Stuart dug his way into disco, soul and funk (the songs that provided the backbone of the house music he loved). At the same time he kept an ear on new developments with different strains of house, techno, broken beats, future jazz, drum n bass all entering the scene. Li then started to make his way from bars, lounges and small clubs across the city building up his experience playing in front of crowds. Stuart developed his sound through his influences into an ebbing and flowing journey of deep soulful and mechanically jacking sounds (with a good measure of classics thrown in). Fast forward to the present and Basic Soul Unit has appeared in some of the most respected clubs and festivals in the world such as Fabric, Panorama Bar, Tresor, Rex Club, Mutek, Dekmantel, Sonar Hong Kong and Pohoda.

## BASIC SOUL UNIT (TORONTO - CANADA)

### BIOGRAPHY



With the same open spirit, Stuart delved into making music. His first appearance came on the flip side of the inaugural release of a small Toronto label called Iwanai. Over the next 15 years Li built up a venerable catalogue including 2 full length albums on some of the most relevant underground labels including Versatile, Mule Musiq, Dolly, Mathematics, Creme Organization, Nonplus, Skudge and Dekmantel. The breadth of these labels is testament to the versatility of Stuart's music as it often finds its way into different corners of the underground spectrum. His music can at times be lush and melodic, other times jacking and dirty, or abstract and angular. The common thread that ties it together is that sense of soul and groove which he grew up with in the 80's and 90's. Basic Soul Unit's music has also appeared on seminal compilations and mixes such as Cassy's 'Fabric 71', Tama Sumo's 'Panorama Bar 02' or Boddika's 'Think And Change' on Nonplus. Given his years of experience, Stuart started his label Lab.our in 2013 with long time friend Jason Ulrich (aka J-UL) aiming to give a platform to local artists for exposure. 2018 will see Lab.our stepping it up with a compilation of all Toronto artists. The future will certainly have more twists and turns but one thing certain is that the word 'Soul' will remain essential in Basic Soul Unit.