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YOYAKU

Yoyaku

Encompassing multiple labels, a record store, distro company, artist agency and event series, Yoyaku has spent a decade edging from the Parisian underground towards global domination, becoming a nexus for all things minimal in the process

Words: **ANNA WALL**

"IT FELT LIKE ENTERING A VIBRANT NEW WORLD," says Benjamin Belaga, founder of Yoyaku, remembering when he first moved to Paris from Strasbourg in

2015. "Around that time Paris was experiencing a renaissance of vinyl culture and clubbing. There were new labels, new promoters, and a rapidly evolving scene hungry for

fresh sounds."

That's when Yoyaku was born, becoming a fundamental part of the scene with its distinct sound and a collective of artists that built

“We were a younger generation, full of ideas and energy, collaborating on events and releases without fully knowing where it would all lead, but that was part of the excitement.” - BENJAMIN BELAGA

a following worldwide. “We were a younger generation, full of ideas and energy, collaborating on events and releases without fully knowing where it would all lead, but that was part of the excitement,” he continues. Nowadays the multi-faceted Yoyaku operates as a record store, distribution company, artist agency, global event series, and releases music across multiple imprints.

Right from the beginning the team simultaneously introduced several sub-labels: AKU leant towards minimal house, YoY focused on electro, while Joule embraced deep house and dub techno. At the time, minimal house was experiencing a resurgence, and early releases from Varhat — real name Vincent Lubelli, who worked alongside Belaga with the labels and roster in the early days, and is also the producer behind the Hostom 12” series — such as 2016’s ‘VRHT777’ EP were quintessential of the sound: deep and introspective, with hypnotic rhythms, and suitably club-friendly. French artist Janeret’s ‘Bright’ EP on Joule was released the same year, exploring dubbed-out chords alongside skippy hi-hats and ethereal breakdowns, a sound that paved the way for the label’s later EPs. The releases across the Yoyaku labels were mellifluous, with a warmer, groovier sound than the stripped-back minimal of the early ‘00s. In 2017, the team decided to stop referring to them as sub-labels entirely. “We prefer to let the music speak for itself and announce each release on a weekly basis without necessarily emphasising which imprint it falls under. Currently, we have around 15 different sub-labels, and over the past 10 years, we’ve put out about 250 releases across all our affiliated labels. Since we operate our own distribution, we have the freedom to launch new imprints or one-off projects very easily,” explains Belaga. The A&R process is largely guided by personal taste and they are open minded, signing music that moves them in some way — whether that be on the dancefloor or in more intimate

home-listening settings. The catalogue now includes multiple EPs from Hostom, Cabanne and Zendid, Netherlands-born artist Roger Gerresen, pioneering Japanese DJ and producer Satoshi Tomiie, former Concrete resident Sweely, as well as releases from legendary artists such as Laurent Garnier, Chez Damier and more.

Growth

As the record store and distribution network grew, so did Yoyaku’s musical scope. Over the years the label has explored a multitude of genres, including ambient, electronic jazz, funk, progressive house, and much more. It was all about releasing timeless music, connecting their listeners to new sounds, all the while still having Yoyaku’s distinct stamp on it.

The label has had a strong visual identity from the beginning, with an in-house creative studio, Atelier 14, consistently brainstorming new ideas for the vinyl releases. They’ve explored many modalities, including screen printing, laser engraving, and embossing, and have also begun experimenting with 3-D visuals and interactive design, such as a special record with Laurent Garnier, featuring a chip in the sleeve that, when scanned, reveals an augmented reality version of the artwork.

DJ/producer Sébastien Belguise helped to establish the Yoyaku record store, which in 2020 moved to Chapelle XIV, a multi-disciplinary gallery space that also serves as the distribution headquarters. The shop specialises in second-hand vinyl and stocks releases from Yoyaku’s distribution network and affiliated labels.

2024 was the label’s most successful year for vinyl sales, and at the beginning of this year the team announced a return to “100% vinyl”, subsequently deleting their digital store and removing the releases from online streaming. While they’ve seen substantial international growth through digital channels, they believe it’s crucial to remain committed to vinyl and its unique culture.

Chapelle XIV’s recently renovated

basement is equipped with a high-end sound system, and has already hosted a range of events, from album launches to creative showcases. Recent live streams from the store have been gaining a lot of attention online — one set by Tomoki Tamura reached over 1.6 million views — and respected artists from across the world, including Delano Smith, Fred P, Magda, Vera, Jonny Rock, and Mayell have played. “The store is a point of discovery not just for our audience, but for us as well. While Yoyaku has certainly influenced the scene, we are just as much influenced by it. We are witnessing a new wave of producers, DJs and labels bringing fresh perspectives and pushing boundaries in exciting ways. It’s inspiring, and we’re happy to be a platform for their growth, helping their music reach new audiences through our distribution, labels, and events,” says Belaga.

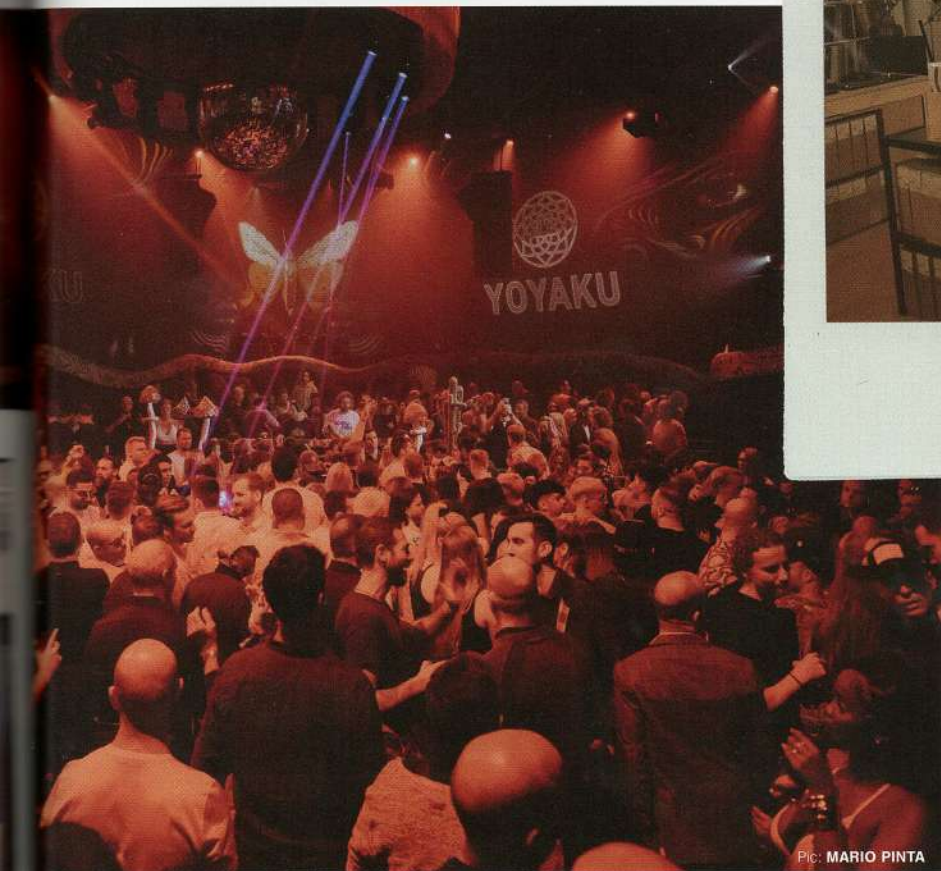
Tracy Bakala played a fundamental part in building the booking agency. Drawing on her networks from previous roles in the music industry, Bakala began joining the dots between Paris and other cities worldwide, finding opportunities for the early roster of artists, including Varhat, Cabanne, and Hostom. “We



Vincent Lubelli, Michael Jeanneret & Benjamin Belaga at the old shop in Belleville



Benjamin & Tracy Bakala



Pic: MARIO PINTA

started doing events all around the world, and we also realised at some point that there was a big interest in South America and the USA and it became really strong for us, so this was important. We started to do all these showcases here and there, showcasing all our artists and

eventually inviting guests, artists that we felt are really part of our vision and our connection," explains Bakala. The agency was rebranded as Interwave in 2021, with new additions that included O.BEE and Tomas Station. When the pandemic hit in 2020, things took a momentary pause,

and like many agencies and record labels, simply surviving became a challenge. "Yoyaku's event in March 2020 with Villalobos at a 10,000-capacity venue was one of the first to be shut down. "What I can say is we are passionate and resilient. We've had so many moments in these last 10 years when we were like, 'Wow, this is tough'. Not only during Covid, but running a huge agency, it's really hard mentally and physically. But we are standing here because we have a diverse business, we do a lot of different things. If it was just a booking agency, I don't think we would still be alive," shares Bakala. Meanwhile, Yoyaku continued to press and release vinyl, surviving those years with solidarity and consistency – and when the



pandemic restrictions were lifted, it came back stronger than ever.

Family

To celebrate Yoyaku's 10th anniversary, it announced a world tour with 60 events across 30 countries. "We have this feeling to be like a family. We do showcases and all of our artists are really having fun all together. This is the most beautiful thing, to see the happiness of your

artists. The 10-year party we had in Paris was when I realised that actually, it's very amazing," says Bakala, referring to a 24-hour event with Ricardo Villalobos, Rareh, ERIS, Mari.te and many more. It was a great success, and testament to the dedicated following that Yoyaku has cultivated over the years.

Bakala reveals exciting plans for events later this year in Istanbul,

Barcelona, Bahrain, Detroit, London and other important territories, including Australia and South America. In January, Yoyaku hosted an event at Zanzibar's new venue Why?Not Club — owned by Bakala and Marlon Schäder — as part of a week-long run of events in collaboration with other minimal institutions SlapFunk and Half Baked.

Gimme 5



Blinkduus Dischetto 'Suarella Funk' Crossed Grooves

Benjamin Belaga: "A fusion of electro and new wave from a young and promising producer from Corsica, bringing fresh energy to our Crossgroove series. This release comes with two

sleeves, one of which is printed on PVC using a zenithal art technique. When the outer sleeve is removed, the artwork comes to life, creating an animated visual effect that enhances the listening experience."



Hostom 'HOSTOM 009' Hostom

BB: "Hostom has become the central focus of Vincent Lubelli, an artist with over 30 aliases, who has now dedicated himself entirely to shaping and evolving this project. With a sound rooted in house, groove, and

progressive house, he continues to reinvent himself, bringing a fresh, dynamic energy while preserving the signature identity of the label."



Soulstatejazz 'SOL 3' Chapelle XIV Music

BB: "SOL 3" is a double LP on Chapelle XIV Music, where Tom Ellis and his ensemble push the boundaries of jazz, house, and electronic music, creating a deeply immersive and evolving sound experience."



Flabbergast 'Consolation In Constellation' Chapelle XIV Music

BB: "Flabbergast, the duo of Vincent Lemieux and Guillaume Coutu Dumont, unveil their debut album 'Consolation in Constellation', blending experimental elements with electronic, jazz,

and futuristic grooves for an interplanetary auditory journey. This immersive work, combining spontaneous live improvisation with classical composition, is accompanied by surreal visuals from artists Marius Escande and Sarah Illouz, further enhancing the album's cosmic exploration."



Sweely 'What's The Name' YYK No Label

BB: "What's The Name" by Sweely on YYK No Label is a bold and original statement, shaping a new generation with its expansive sound and unmistakable groove. Blending punchy rhythms with playful energy, the track

captivates from start to finish, showcasing Sweely's signature style. Its infectious vibe and boundary-pushing approach make it a standout release, keeping the dancefloor alive and electric."



"Yoyaku started as an idea born out of a vibrant scene, and it has evolved into a dynamic ecosystem bridging music, art, and culture. We'll continue pushing boundaries, championing artistic integrity, staying open to new collaborations."

For Yoyaku, the next chapter is all about growing sustainably, while staying true to its core values. This year there'll be a follow-up album by Soulstatejazz — an electronic jazz collective led by Tom Ellis — on Chapelle XIV Music, and more releases that are yet to be revealed. "Yoyaku started as an idea born out of a vibrant scene, and over the years it has evolved into a dynamic ecosystem bridging music, art, and culture. We'll continue pushing boundaries, championing artistic integrity, and staying open to new collaborations that challenge and inspire," says Belaga. "Now we are feeling more and more motivated and passionate about this, and I want to keep going," expresses Bakala. "I want to bring our vision, our project and our artists all around the world. I love to make people happy and to connect people, and I feel so blessed because the music gave me everything."



Listen to DJ Mag's The Sound Of: Yoyaku mix from 6th May