

It's a workday lunch at Thundercloud Subs, and local hip-hop guru DJ NickNack — Nick Malkiewicz to the dotted line — is confessing. "I used to play the trumpet — actually the cornet," the DJ/producer says. "But whenever I got braces — way, way back in the day — I couldn't play anymore."

The school band's loss turned into hip-hop's gain. NickNack's new album, "Re: Construction" (Crowd Control Records) is one of the best to come out of the burgeoning Austin hip-hop scene. Clearly, Malkiewicz has been busy since his horn days.

In fact, he's busy today. Already penciled in for the afternoon are stops at Alien Records, Music Mania and the city's other purveyors of underground grooves. A taxing agenda, no doubt, but the fact that Malkiewicz is early for the interview says something about the way he's handling business — or, more precisely, promotion.

"Locally," he says, "the best way to do it is to have a presence. That's done by doing a lot of shows, doing the residencies, the weekly gigs, having CDs there, having posters, having fliers — just annoying the [heck] out of people."

Recently, he was doing exactly that — the show part, I mean — at his Red Eyed Fly CD release party. Like the album itself, the live show was about collaboration — from the precise scratch-swapping of "In Too Deep" to the clown-car show-stopper of a freestyle medley featuring a stage full of area MCs that was the night's highlight.

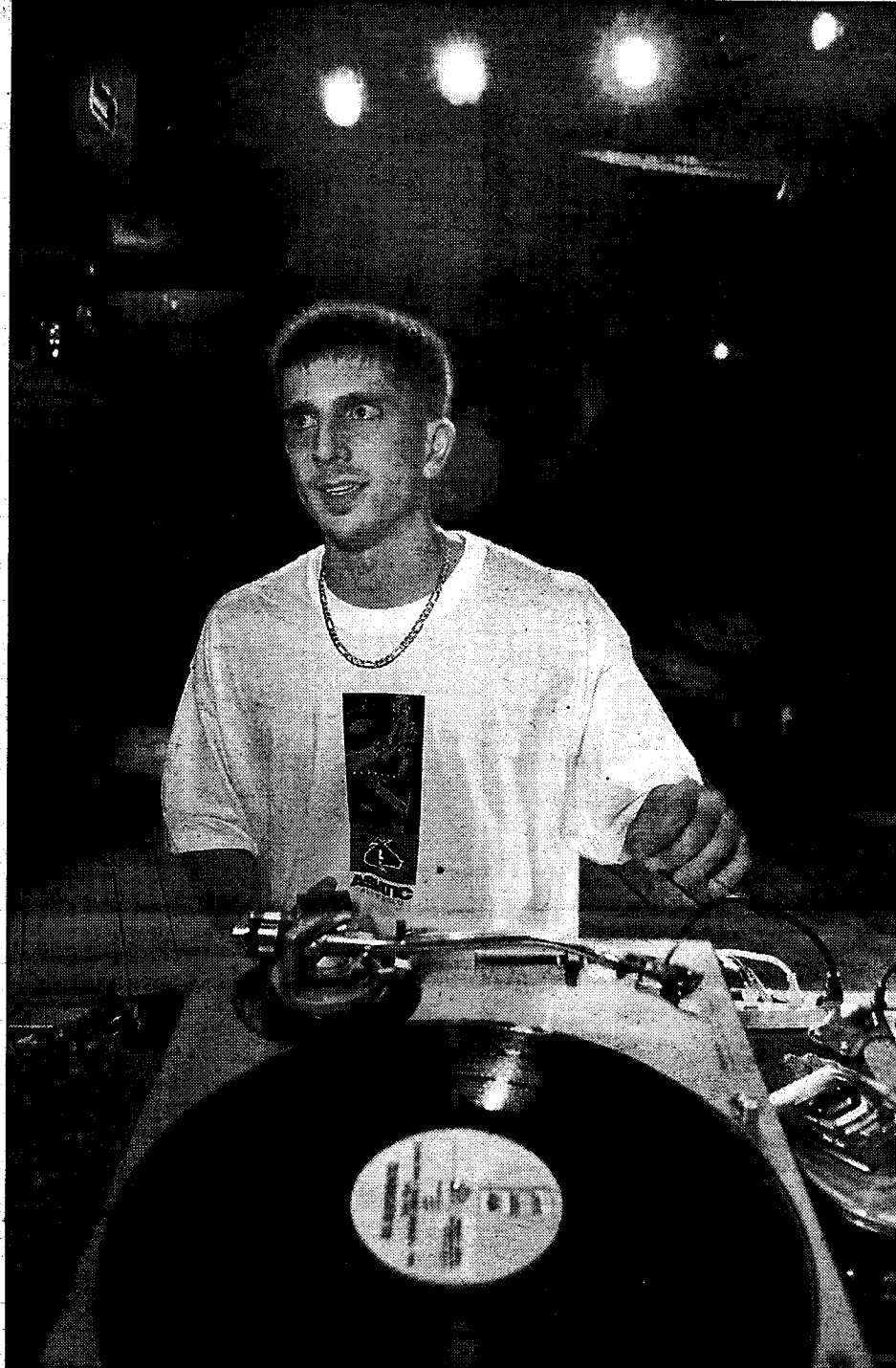
"On a national level," Malkiewicz continues, still talking business, "it's very, very, very important to hit college radio, man. You know, underground hip-hop thrives off the 88.7s, the 91.7s. It doesn't thrive off the Beat 104.3."

Malkiewicz would know. After emigrating from Plano to Austin to attend the University of Texas, he started the "B-Side" mix show on student radio station KVRX before graduating (literally) to KAZI 88.7's Weekend Warmup Show. And that's only the tip of the iceberg. He's also juggling a Web site (www.crowdcontrolrecords.com), regular gigs at Red Eyed Fly and Plush and a full-time day job.

"If I can do it," he asks, "why shouldn't I?"

The excellent "Re: Construction" offers no convincing answer. The album sails smoothly along on a remarkably deep pool of Texas talent. Not that he needs outside help. Malkiewicz is more than capable of holding it down solo, crafting a record with the street cred of a turntablist excursion and the broader appeal of more conventional rap albums.

The list of artists Malkiewicz has already turned the tables alongside



Kevin Virobik-Adams for American-Statesman

DJ NickNack, aka Nick Malkiewicz, had a CD release gala at the Red Eyed Fly.

reads like an underground equivalent of Puffy's pager. In 1998, he pulled off a then-major coup in producing "Long Distance," a 12-inch collaboration between Organized Konfusion MC Prince Poetry and Texas' own QB. Malkiewicz, however, plays that one down. "When Organized Konfusion was still together, we opened up for them," he recalls, "and afterward, we had the after-party at my apartment. They were just chilling at my crib, and I was talking to Prince Po on my balcony and was like, 'Dude, let's do a record.'"

That record and his old Riverside apartment — where a "dinky digital 12-track in the closet with a bunch of dirty clothes" gave birth to "Re: Construction" — are fading in the rearview these days. Malkiewicz has moved out and on, rising with the fertile Austin scene. "I think Austin can hang with [any-

body] . . . A lot of these major acts — like Alkaholiks for example — they have to give respect to the local MCs." He emphasizes the "have to" before launching into an enthusiastic account of local MC Bavu Blakes battling Tash of Tha Liks — and winning. Malkiewicz punctuates his story with a prediction: "It's just a matter of time before the powder keg explodes, and when it does, there's going to be a tidal wave that all of us that have been working together are going to ride on."

Somewhere in between all of the explosions and tidal waves, Malkiewicz is working on a slew of projects — including a decidedly un-hip-hop musical endeavor: picking up the old trumpet. How's that for reconstruction?

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