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DIRECTOR, CIRCULATION: NEIL EISENBERG
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SUBSCRIPTIONS: 800-658-8372 (U.S. Toll Free) 847-559-7531 (International) or nbb@omea.com

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GRAPHIC PRODUCTION ARTIST: Gene Williams

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GROUP FINANCIAL DIRECTOR: BARBARA GRIENINGER
PERMISSIONS COORDINATOR: Dana Parra 646-654-4696

BILLBOARD OFFICES

NEW YORK: 770 Broadway,
New York, NY 10003
Phone: 646-654-4500
Edit. Fax: 646-654-4681
Adv. Fax: 646-654-4799

NASHVILLE: P.O. Box 331848
Nashville, TN 37203

LOS ANGELES: 5055 Wilshire
Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036
Phone: 323-525-2300
Fax: 323-525-2394/2395

MIAMI: 101 Crandon Blvd., Suite
466, Key Biscayne, FL 33149
Phone: 305-361-5279
Fax: 305-361-5299

LONDON: Endeavour House,
189 Shaftesbury Ave.,
London WC2H 8TJ;
Phone: 011-44-207-420-6003;
Fax: 011-44-207-420-6014

e5 Global Media, LLC

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UPFRONT



World beat (from left):
FAUNA, DOUSTER and
CHANCHA VIA CIRCUITO



Border Crossing

ZKK Records Brings 'Digital Cumbia' Out Of Argentina

A few weeks ago, the usually hipster-heavy Brooklyn Bowl was bustling with a more diverse crowd than usual. There were still plenty of the cool kids, to be sure, but the audience also included older world music fans, Latin-American immigrants, Argentine expats and South American students.

This motley crew had come to see a showcase by ZKK (pronounced "Zizek") Records, a label born out of a club night based in Buenos Aires. The label signs only Buenos Aires-based acts, including **Fauna**, **Douster**, **Chancha Via Circuito**, **El Remolon**, **Frikstailers**, **King Coya** and **Tremor**. Its website lists 18 releases, 13 mixtapes and several official remixes.

The Brooklyn show was part of a recently wrapped two-week tour, which featured 10 of the label's artists and was centered on a performance at the month-long Biennial of the Americas festival in Denver. "We accomplished building our sound, label and artists in North America and inevitably the world," co-founder **Grant Dull** says. "People are catching on and it feels like a solid build, not something that fades away."

While ZKK works with both DJs and bands, the label is built upon a staple sound, a hybrid that Dull describes as "digital cumbia." The fusion between new and old sounds has helped the label achieve a global reach—not an easy feat, especially because few Argentine acts man-

The Indies

COURTNEY HARDING



age to break outside the region. "The music we put out speaks to other artists and DJs," Dull says. "The mash-up of sounds and ideas we create is a very contemporary, modern sound. We can connect to DJs who make other types of music because there are so many elements in what we do."

The label's growth is impressive, given that it was founded in 2008. ZKK started making inroads in the United States early; Dull says he met with the head of South by Southwest in 2007 and took six artists up to Texas the following year. From there, the label struck a deal with an agent, and since then, it has taken artists out on eight international tours. In the past, ZKK has released albums through distribution deals with Crosstalk Chicago and Nacional, and Dull says it's releasing music digitally through Seed and is looking for distribution partners.

The label is also in the process of launching ZKK TV, collecting pledges through fundraising website Kickstarter. ZKK's \$5,000 goal was met (and exceeded by \$413) July 20; the first episode of ZKK TV went live July 28.

Dull says ZKK hasn't forgotten its roots, and the parties continue in Buenos Aires. "A typical Saturday party brings in between 600 and 1,000 people," he says. "Those parties are a place for our DJs to try out new ideas and work with new artists. We use the stage as a lab, and if we get something that works, we take it on the road."

ZKK has also been aided by a number of high-profile media supporters, including tastemaking outlets like Latin culture site Remezcla and the Fader magazine.

"We first mentioned them in our August 2008 issue," the Fader executive editor **Julianne Escobedo Shepherd** says. "They were melding traditional styles with digital technology, and there is an increasingly strong community of DJs who are interested in creating hybrids. I remember seeing them in Denmark and people being into it, and thinking it was a great convergence of global music."

Shepherd thinks part of the label's success can be attributed to the fact that artists are willing to travel and play other markets. "A lot of other big cumbia acts never leave Buenos Aires," she says. "And the fact that Grant is from the States helps too, because he is able to navigate the system over here."

Another early adopter and longtime champion of ZKK is Remezcla, a Latino culture and event guide that is also a media sponsor of the tour. "The guys from ZKK are stand-outs," CEO **Andrew Herrera** says. "No one else in their scene is as organized as they are, and even though they are based in BA, they are connected with DJs and artists in cities around the world."

BILLBOARD.BIZ POLL

Which factor is most responsible for the disappointing summer touring season?

29% The economy



6% Market saturation—too many tours on the road

2% Other

10% Lackluster tours

8% Lack of marketing support from labels, promoters or sponsors

45% High ticket prices

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