

DJ PRO Magazine (November, 2005)

You work with a mix of very different musical styles. Do you think variety is the key of your success?

Yes, I think variety helped my early career a lot. At the time (1983/4) most DJs just played one style of music but during the early part of the 1980s there were several scenes going on in Britain. There was the Rockabilly revival with bands like the Stray Cats, there was the Two Tone Ska thing, there was the New Romantic scene, and also the Soul Boy scene. The first club I DJ'd in (the Dirtbox) was a warehouse party that attracted kids from all these different scenes, so I played music that suited the mixture of people. For instance I'd play "Planet Rock" by Soul Sonic Force followed by the Clash "Rock The Casbah", followed by a 1958 rockabilly track like "Jungle Rock" by Hank Mizzell, followed by a '70s funk tune like War's "Me And Baby Brother". The thing about the warehouse clubs, which were mainly illegal, was that people wanted the music to be tough and slightly crazy. I played cajun, go go, surf music, old blues - anything that had an edge to it. Those were my favourite times for DJing - everyone in the clubs were so open-minded and the atmosphere in London then was amazing. All the new rap and electro stuff was coming in from New York and it was great to mix that up with old Sixties Soul, punk stuff and ska. I think it was because my mix of music was so different that I made a reputation so quickly. Within a year of starting DJing I was voted best club DJ in London, I DJ'd for Frankie Goes To Hollywood in New York, was working in Europe a lot and was given a dance music column in the Face Magazine. Having said that I realized I was lucky to start DJ'ing just when the whole London club scene started taking off. I was in the right place at the right time.

How can you describe the musical influences between your starting years (1985) and today. Do you find harder for young people to make it nowadays as a DJ?

I guess in my early years I was influenced by music I liked from the past especially Rockabilly and 1970s Funk. Of course when I first heard "Rappers Delight" and "Grandmaster Flash's "Adventures On the Wheel Of Steel" I was blown away. Back in 1976 I was a punk and went to see the Sex Pistols. I loved that idea of rebel music and to me Rap was the rebel music of the 1980s. After rap and electro my next big influence was house which first hit big in London around 1986. Since then my favourite musical influence now has to be Latin House. I think Latin House is the most passionate music around at the moment. As for making it as a DJ today I think it's probably harder for someone starting out now then it was when I began. Everyone wants to be a DJ now, people see how famous all the big name DJs are today and they want to be like them, so there's much more competition. It was easy for me to break through because the scene was smaller and newer back in the 1980s, now I think it's much harder to get a reputation.

You have worked in Nyc, Europe, Rio de Janeiro, L.A and Tokyo among other places, does all this exposure to different cultures influence your music?

Yes and no. No because almost all the scenes in Europe are just kind of copies of Britain and the US. So although I enjoy working in Europe and like the enthusiasm of the clubbers, I haven't really been exposed to cultures that are that different from London. New York was a big influence for me though. Just hearing all that great dance music from DJs like Larry Levan at Paradise Garage was inspiring. Rio too had a big influence. Hearing samba and the amazing percussion on the carnival records really got me into more percussive music.

Do you change your approach to DJ'ing depending on the venue, country and audience, or go always with an steady idea already in your mind?

Most places when they book me to work have a pretty good idea of what I play, so I just take my

current playlist and keep my approach pretty similar. Now and again a club will say they want more house or more R & B and Hip-Hop than I would normally play and I'll change my mix accordingly.

What's the importance of latin music in your mixes, do you find that latin music offers new possibilities for the DJ's to experiment on?

Latin is very important in my mixes right now. In fact I think Latin dance music is currently the most exciting music in the world. Some nights I'm playing 80% Latin music - lots of Latin House, some Salsa, lots of Merengue (Elvis Crespo, ilegales etc), one or two Boogaloo tracks and , early on in the set, some Bossa Nova. Latin music is great for lifting the mood of a club - I don't like dance music when it's too heavy or aggressive and most Latin music is happy and uplifting. It's also great to see couples dancing to Merengue and Salsa - I like it when clubbers "interact" with each other. To be honest I think that two of the biggest tracks I've played at Chinawhite since it opened have been "Suavemente" by Elvis Crespo and "Micaela" by Sonora Carruseles, both these songs always fill the dancefloor wherever I play them.

And yes, Latin offers many possibilities for DJ's to experiment with - either by sampling old Latin tracks or by incorporating Latin rhythms into their house sets. The great thing is that Latin covers so many different styles - Tangos, Mambos, Bossa, and all the ones I've already mentioned, that you can never run out of ideas.

You use a lot of non traditional DJ music (40's swing, rockabilly,etc..) in your mixes, can you talk to us a little about why do you use those influences?

I love that music because it was the cutting edge music of it's time. I think guys like Louis Jordan or Elvis Presley were real innovators and it seems a shame to me if their music was totally forgotten in clubland. I just like to remind people that there's this great history of dance music behind us and that just because it's old doesn't mean it can't be exciting

1989 was a historical year for Germany (and the rest of the world as well) . What were your cultural and musical impressions when you toured east Germany that historical year?

I DJ'd with a rap band called the Stereo MCs and we spent two weeks touring East Germany. Being there just before the Wall came down was quite an experience. Everyone we met was nervous because they thought that the East German Communist Government might suddenly crack down on the movement towards freedom and lots of young people were already escaping the country. It was obvious that the old order was about to collapse but no-one knew how violent that collapse might be. We played in East Berlin and five thousand kids turned up to see us. They were so excited at seeing a Western group playing and the atmosphere was electric. They all were wearing T-shirts with home made copies of things like the Sugarhill and Def Jam Record label logos. I was also amazed at how much these kids knew about rap music - they couldn't afford to buy US imports but they all listened to West German radio and US Forces radio and they knew all the new releases. There was such hope in those young kids that everything was going to get better for them - I really hope it did.

What are you working on right now?

Still working four nights a week in London, also working with my wife Julienne on getting her debut album ("Strange Paradise" by Sophisticated Savage) ready for release and writing a DJ novel based on my experiences DJ'ing around the world in the 1980s

When you DJ for other people (sony music, Bacardi, Monaco Grand prix, etc..) do they give you the freedom of choosing your musical selection or do they dictate the exact music needed for each

particular situation?

Most of these people know the kind of music I play in my regular club sets and they usually want something similar for their parties, so they just let me get on with it. The most they'll say to me is that they want ambient music for the first couple of hours (While people are eating or drinking etc) and then to do my normal stuff. But sometimes they'll want a certain style of music to go with the theme of their event. For instance, a few years ago, I did a launch party for Levis and they wanted a 1960s vibe - so I played 60s stuff all night, which I really enjoyed. Recently I did a party for a company that sells Brazilian swim suits (lots of female models in bikinis) and they wanted a real carnival atmosphere so I played lots of Samba and Batucada grooves.

For the last four years you have been a DJ resident in the famous China White club in London and you are an important part of the worldwide "chinawhite set" sound. Can you tell us how you secured your place in the China White club, and what do you think has kept you there and made you a big influence on their sound?

Actually, I've been at Chinawhite now for over five years. I knew the manager Patrice from the 1980s club days in London. I lost touch with him until about 1996 when I found he was the manager of Trader Vic's Bar in London's Hilton hotel. This was at a time when I was really into the Tiki scene so we'd wear Hawaiian shirts and go to Trader Vics for rum cocktails.

I was also into that whole Swingers/Sinatra thing and Patrice used to give me free drinks if I made up CDs of lounge music for the bar. Anyway one day he told me he and some friends were opening up a new club and did I want to be one of the D.J.s. He said the club was going to be different from everywhere else in London and they wanted the music to be different too. Well at that time 1998/99 most clubs were playing either rap or house so I played African music, arabic music, Latin, rock, swing, Sinatra and people really went for it. I think the club scene in London was ready for a change and, luckily for me, I was there at just the right time. Over the last five years the music policy has become a bit less crazy but I still like to surprise people and hopefully play them music they may not have heard before.

Besides being a DJ you are also a novel writer, can you talk to us about that aspect of your life?

Well I've written one novel about a detective in Los Angeles in the 1950s. It's called "Ritual Of The Savage" and I set a lot of the book in Tiki Bars with exotica bands playing and in beatnik clubs with cool jazz in the background. I've always loved the 50s music and style so this book is my tribute to that era and some of its culture. My next book is about being a DJ in the 1980s. It shows how easy it is to get caught up in all the drugs and groupie bullshit that went with that scene. I also wanted to let people know what it was like working in places like the Soviet Union during those times. I was the first Western DJ to do a warehouse party in Moscow and it was so strange. The owners could only get one turntable, so I had to DJ with a big "boogie box" cassette player and this old Russian turntable. Halfway through the night the cops raided the place but the promoters gave them all champagne and they got drunk and ended up dancing with everyone. Weird times. That sort of thing has gone now, Moscow has big clubs with all the latest equipment, so I just want to show people how it was before global clubbing got as big as it is now.

You have worked alongside with some remarkable DJ's like Paul Oakenfold, Jam Master Jay, Africa and Todd Terry among others. What did you learn from those experiences?

Well, I learnt that Todd Terry isn't very talkative :0) Seriously it was great working with all those guys especially Jam Master Jay because his cutting was so fast. It was interesting to see how good they all were at building up the atmosphere on the dancefloor - having people go really crazy - and then they'd take it down a bit and then build the buzz up all over again. It's strange but although all the big name

DJs are great in their own way one of the best DJs I ever heard was this young Japanese guy I saw in a small club in Tokyo once. His mixing was incredible - he mixed rock, house, jazz, rap and funk without ever once losing the beat. I was with some other English DJs and we were all like "Wow, this guy is something else!" We tried to talk to him after he finished but his English wasn't too good and he was kind of shy. So we never found out his name - I hope he's still DJing somewhere .

What advise can you give to young people trying to make it as a DJ around the world?

Play the music you really love. Most people can tell if a DJ is passionate about his music. Also , when you are just starting out play everywhere you can. It doesn't matter if it's a little bar or a half empty club because the more experience you get playing in front of people the better you'll be. It's cool to stay in your bedroom and do great mixes but the best DJs are those ones who understand what the crowd on the floor wants and knows how to keep people dancing.

How do you see evolving the DJ scene in the next few years?

Well technology is advancing so fast it's hard to say. Several DJs in London are now using their laptops and MP3s to D.J with but I still think there will always be a demand for some guy (or girl) with a box full of great records , a couple of turntables and a sound system.

Anything you might want to ad for our readers?

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