



one of those block-rockin'

Inside the spin cycle of club DJs

BY AMANADA ASH



DJing has become a great hobby and part-time job for University of Alberta law student Luke Morrison. He's come a long way since his junior high days, when making old-school mixtapes and using two tape players was all the rage, and spinning tracks for hall parties dubbed you as cool. But looking back now, Morrison can only ascribe his present status as a highly respected Edmonton DJ to his love for music.

"I've always been a music nut," Morrison laughs. "When I was growing up, my mom's sister would always have different albums, so there was always a constant stream of music in the house. I started buying all of those really cheesy Euro-dance compilations from HMV when they first started coming over in

the early '90s. I can't remember what the section was called—I think it was just called dance, when you go to the back of HMV in the dark corner—but yeah, I got into electronic music really early on."

According to Morrison, DJing is considered useful to some and not to others. When bigger names pass through the city, he's always interested to see which consider themselves to be along the lines of big musicians and which are in it just to play good party music. Morrison even admits that some people DJ simply because of the job's social aspect, which is code for getting laid and getting paid.

Becoming a DJ is just like becoming a musician, and if there's one tip Morrison can give to aspiring DJs—especially those who spin and mix house or techno—it's to be original.

"Music selection, above all else, is what makes a good DJ," Morrison explains. "If you want to make it beyond the generic club scene, you have to find something new and find a niche for yourself that no one else is doing. You have to find something that's not being done already."

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alking into the club looking classy, you strut in time with the pumping beats and flashing lights. You sashay over to the bar, lean a bare arm on the counter and order a rum and coke, nodding your head to the music as you scope out the place for friends and prospective dance partners. Just then, "Smack That" miraculously emerges out of the previous Justin Timberlake tune. You scrunch up your face in disgust and proceed to engage in a superficial conversation with the homophobic welder from Fort McMurray standing beside you, all in order to avoid being asked to grind by the short-statured, libidinous collar-popper from across the way.

These are the typical series of events that many of us females have experienced in a club, and believe it or not, a DJ controlled each human activity performed during an evening like this. From the moment those sexy legs enter the club to the moment your sweat-drenched hair leaves, DJs master your every mood.

DJs tend to evoke thoughts of high-school dropouts who've chosen to spend their weekends playing "Cadillac Ranch" at weddings, but the reality is, no matter if you're playing a MSTRKRFT remix or "The Chicken Dance," there's still a certain amount of skill that goes into the art. Yes, that's right, the art. Many musicians tend to view DJing as simply a cop-out—as stealing other people's hard work only to screw around with it—but from personal experience, learning which songs to play in sequence, avoiding gaps in between them and making sure their beats match is a lot harder than it looks or sounds—even if you're just doing it for the sake of a house party.

Ryan Cornelius, aka DJ Spincycle, is the Edmonton representative for Urban Warner, and aside from organizing and promoting such shows as Billy Talent and Evanescence, Spincycle teaches DJ classes every Sunday from 6–8pm at Rum Jungle in West Edmonton Mall, also known as *the* place to meet skanky, 16-year-old girls or get stabbed in the heart. Curious about this world of electronic music-making, I decided to take some lessons to understand just what was involved in DJing, how much practice would be necessary to throw an awesome bash and what sort of mad skills a club DJ has that I already don't.

When I began the lessons, I quickly realized that vinyl wasn't the God of DJing. CD players with scratching capabilities, or CDJs, are the new black and mixers—the board filled with knobs and dials sitting between the two CD players—have a lot of buttons that I still don't have the slightest clue how to use. Rather than the traditional analog scratching of a vinyl, these players will read a CD and simulate scratching digitally with a faux turntable. Really, all of the equipment is like an instrument in itself. A song can be manipulated to no end, especially if you decide to mix it with another track, and needless to say, I was scared.

In order to DJ, you really need to know your music or at least have past experience playing an instrument. The first lesson is listening to two songs at once and determining which one had higher beats per minute (BPM in the DJ world). This is fairly easy to accomplish once you let your body bounce in time with the music (that's right, DJs don't dance to their own music just

to look suave) or if you've been subject to a metronome when you were a kid. However, training your ears to separate the two different songs—even if they're not playing at the same time—takes a bit of practice.

The next step is of learning how to fade tracks, adjust their tempos determine which should be played side-by-side. Just by using the cross-fader on the mixer—which is slid from right to left—and up-faders—one on each CD player—you can blend one song into another or mix tracks together. Changing the tempo of a song can slow things down for your audience if they're looking a bit tired, and

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build things up again into a climax of techno glee. The mood of the empty Rum Jungle dance floor immediately fell into my power. I was addicted.

In addition to being able to control the pace of a dance floor, a DJ's mood can also affect the tone of a club depending on what sort of day he/she is having. Scratching is the ultimate indicator of a DJ's disposition. For the most part, scratching can be used to blend one song into another either gradually or immediately. Baby scratching (little scratching motions on the CD player) can be performed at varying speeds, and as Spincycle described it, really fast baby scratches usually indicated your crush caught your

