

VOLUME ONE A-K

WOMEN AND MUSIC IN AMERICA SINCE 1900

An Encyclopedia



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DJ, Club

A club DJ (or disc jockey) is the person who plays and mixes recorded music at a party, discotheque, or nightclub. In conducting the research on women DJs, specifically club DJs, one may quickly conclude that although the numbers of women DJs are rapidly increasing, women DJs continue to be marginalized in the club scene, journalistic discourse, and media representation. The main issues perpetuating this gender differentiation are threefold: accessibility, promotion, and professional connections within the community.

Accessibility is a major issue confronting not only women trying to break into the DJ scene but also those who are already established. To begin a DJ career, women must be able to access equipment (such as turntables and a mixer) and music either by purchasing their own, borrowing a friend's, or, perhaps like many women DJs, becoming involved in com-

munity radio. Once they have access to equipment and music they must gain the basic skills required to perform as a DJ. This often includes self-teaching or learning from others who are already experienced. The next step is locating the spaces to gain "spinning" experience with an audience. Opportunities for women DJs to play are often found in the queer and women-based communities because women DJs are favored to play for women-only spaces. There are also a number of DJs who suggest that the queer community, particularly queer-identified men, is less threatened than heterosexual-identified men are when the role of the DJ, often seen as a role of power in the music industry, is held by a woman. It is important to mention here that women DJs are often expected to prove their technical ability, more so than men, to gain equal respect and to be taken as seriously in the profession. Rosalind Gill and Keith Grint suggest, "the cultural association between masculinity and technology in Western societies . . . operates not only as a popular assumption—from which much sexist humour about women's 'technical incompetence' has been generated—but also as an academic truth" (Grint and Gill, 3). Stereotypes like this perpetuate the myth that women are unable to learn technical skills and maintain what is referred to as the "boy's club" in technical arenas.

Historically women have not been socialized to be self-promoters, yet promotion is a vital part of the DJ industry. Many women DJs talk about having to be aggressive, determined, and persistent in order to achieve success in the scene, as well as knowing someone who is already established on the inside, which can be problematic because the DJ circuit continues to be dominated by men.

There is a great need for women DJs

to come up with their own concepts and methods of promoting themselves, thus allowing women to be in control of their own DJ promotion. The focus may then shift from the associated novelty of their gender to their skills and reputation as a DJ. One important tool that many women DJs use to promote themselves and their fellow DJ "sisters" is the World Wide Web and related Internet services.

Establishing personal contacts through various DJ communities has historically been difficult for women DJs because of the lack of women on the circuit. In recent years this has changed drastically owing to the increased number of women DJs on the scene, as well as the women DJ collectives that have begun to surface. Sister, "a place for female DJ's to get gigs without bias," was co-founded in October 1997 by DJs XJS and Siren with MC Linzee, who were early to join. Sister evolved from a woman DJ cooperative that existed from 1993 to 1995 called Your Sister's House with the likes of DJs Polywog and Charlotte the Baroness. Primarily, Sister provides support for women DJs (new to, or established in the scene) and a space where women DJs are "viewed as a DJ first, and then as a woman, when you're behind the decks." Together this group of seven resident DJs and a long list of guest DJs throw monthly parties.

Another collective that acts as a "forum for information, networking and conversation about independent music from a [women's] perspective" is Indiegrrl, established by Holly Figueroa in May 1998. This group of DJs, performers, and managers is interested in women's roles in the independent music industry. SISTERDJS is World Wide Web community and an electronic mailing list founded by DJ Dazy, a guest DJ for Sister. The list includes more than

175 women who are well-established DJs as well as those who are trying to break into the DJ scene. DJ Dazy promotes the list as "a wonderful source of advice and resource-sharing for new and experienced selectors alike" (Palmer, 108).

At the turn of the millennium, the subject and status of women DJs is finally being addressed in other mediums. In 2001 Jane Walker and Jackie Pelle released a one-hour documentary entitled, *Spinsters*, which investigates the issues and concerns for women DJing in the Club scene. Walker and Pelle interview many women DJs from Canada, the United States, Britain, including DJ Heather, Misstress Barbara, Freya, Denise Benson, Jennifa Mayanja, Forest Green, XJS, etc. Throughout the documentary these DJs talk candidly about their experiences as women DJs and they also discuss the problematics of having to continually address their gender in relation to their DJ status. Although the documentary does, at times, rely on a male producer to validate some of the concerns raised by the women, Walker and Pelle have produced a valuable and educative tool for anyone who is interested in DJing and/or the club scene.

See also Electronic Dance Music; Music Technology; Underground

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