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Electronic dance music keeps the party going

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Electronic dance music heats up in New Hampshire

By Michael Witthaus // mwitthaus@hippopress.com

I once was a DJ.

Back then the letters meant *disc jockey*, and I spent a lot of time lugging heavy stacks of 12-inch vinyl from party to bar and back home. The tools of my trade consisted of — to quote the '90s Beck hit — “two turntables and a microphone.” Added to that were lights, mammoth speakers and one or two whiz-bang effects machines. On the more adventurous nights, I had some video monitors hooked to a ¾-inch tape player.

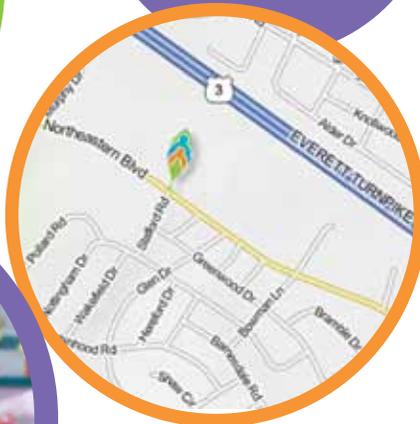
A roomy van and a strong back were prerequisites.

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cient way to build a fan base and generate bookings, Porter says.

“It helps in networking and exposure,” he says. “Hundreds of people can have my mix; I don’t have to meet them personally in order for them to hear me.”

As robust as the scene is these days, it can also be volatile. Selecta suspended its Sunday night event in mid-February, with plans to resume in late March. However, two weeks later Hyde announced on Facebook that the event was permanently cancelled. “We hold no responsibility to TJ’s,” he wrote.

Sundays will continue at TJ’s, though — with K-Swiss at the helm, at a new event called “Eargasm.” Porter has no immediate plans to shake up the formula — he appeared frequently at Selecta, and he and Hyde are friends. “It was rather last-minute,” he says. “So I’ve got a lot of straightening out to do before I try changing anything. We do intend to keep moving forward and bringing in talent from wherever we can.”

Another longtime fixture on the EDM scene is the Amber Room in Nashua, a massive venue tricked out with lasers, smoke machines and state-of-the-art sound. On a recent Saturday night, DJ Luis “Luis G” Gelpi warmed up the crowd with a mix CD while he got the rest of his equipment situated.

His gear is typical for many DJs: a laptop running Serato, a popular mixing program, and a couple of Technics turntables. He soon gets to work, moving his hands over the vinyl

discs with a scratch mixer’s finesse. But the 12-inch records are there only for show; his computer does all the work. A laptop screen with a pair of animated circles that look like analog clocks mark the time in beats per minute, as he plays a remix of Jason Derulo’s “Don’t Wanna Go Home” and back-to-back songs by Chris Brown and Rihanna.

The crowd, at this point mostly women dancing with each other, eats it up.

“I’m playing to the women anyway,” Luis says with a smile.

Luis G loves every minute in the booth; his talent is watching and responding. Technology once limited the DJ field to a few hot-handed turntablists, but computers changed all that — and not always for the good. MP3s unleashed a lot of amateurs who were good at tweaking a program but not as skilled at taking the pulse of a crowded club. But an individual who can follow the mood like a spotlight tracks a dancer can be an alchemist.

“If you love doing something you’ll never work a day in your life again,” Luis says with a smile. He pulls out his smart phone and shows a few videos of past nights, wild packed dance floors and hypnotic lights. “That’s what I’m talking about,” he says.

In a short time, the party will go dark, but only briefly. “I opened this room five years ago and I’m going to close it,” he says, referring to the recently announced plans to shut down Amber Room for renovations. The club will reopen in a few months, informa-

3-D music: The table of the future

Seacoast musical duo Bastinado made history recently with the first full-length American concert on a groundbreaking electronic instrument. Invented by a team at Barcelona’s Universitat Pompeu Fabra, The Reactable is a round translucent table that uses three-dimensional objects to operate a virtual modular synthesizer.

The objects, called tangibles, react sonically to a glowing light in the center of the table and to each other.

“The interaction between the central pulsating dot and the pucks, and proximity, determine if it engages,” says Joseph Carringer of Bastinado, who programs the device, played by his partner Josh Harris. “There is some touch sensitivity; you can open panels to change things on the fly, and puck twisting is done by hand like a fader. It’s a finesse instrument, but that’s not the right word. It very much has its own feel.”

The music emitted is more soulful than you’d expect from a machine. That, says Carringer, is what drew Bastinado to The Reactable. Unlike many EDM tools, “it’s an instrument in the true sense that you’ve gotta develop the sound and the feel of the music. It doesn’t make the music for you.”

It looks and sounds like science fiction, and the first time Carringer saw the 48-inch-high unit, which sells for about 10,000 Euros, he didn’t believe it.

“A turntablist we worked with sent a video of an Italian performer using a Reactable,” he says. “I took a look at it and said, ‘That’s not real, this is some kind of joke.’ Then I spent the next 72 hours researching it.” When he showed it to Harris, his partner reacted much the same way, even though the seasoned keyboard player who once served as musical director on a Seal tour was invited to look at the unit in 2008. “He thought it was a gimmick,” Carringer says. “It looked so unreal, that it could do those things.”

The first Reactable prototype was built in 2005, and the device was commercially launched in 2008 with a beta of Reactable Live, the Apple OS X software that drives the

unit. Icelandic songstress Bjork tested one onstage at the 2007 Coachella Festival, but Bastinado is the only touring group in the U.S. using The Reactable exclusively. There is one of two privately owned units stateside.

“The other one is being used as a piece of art in someone’s living room,” Carringer says.

The search that led Bastinado to The Reactable began after a difficult performance.

“We did a gig where people were coming up with requests because we had a laptop, but everything we were doing was live compositional electronics,” Carringer says. “Because Josh dropped a Britney track, people thought we were playing songs. We decided to ditch the laptop permanently.”

At Bastinado shows, a tablecam linked to a giant screen follows the shuffling tangibles, each decorated with hieroglyphics and haloed in glowing white, gliding across the unit’s gorgeous blue glass surface. It reminds Carringer of what drew him to performing: “I grew up watching DJs in booths and seeing the gentle touch of the hand across the vinyl to control the BPM as they were blending in another song.... It doesn’t really happen anymore, so there’s nothing for the audience to watch.”

That’s definitely not the case with The Reactable, an instrument so beautiful that there are three in U.S. museums. Bastinado recently brought theirs to the Children’s Museum in Dover.

“We’re working with them to be the fourth installation of Reactable Live in the United States,” Carringer says. “I think it would be really amazing for the kids to interact with.”

Learn more about The Reactable at www.reactable.com. Watch Bastinado performances on www.bastinadomusic.com. Reactable Mobile software for Apple iOS and Android devices is also available.

See for yourself

Bastinado, with by Reactable, performs a no-cover show on Thursday, March 29, at 8 p.m. at Two Ceres Street in Portsmouth, www.twoceresstreet.com.