

I suppose I first showed signs of becoming a DJ when I was a child and I gradually ruined the CD player in my room, the kind that's built into one of those cheap compact stereos, by constantly rewinding my favorite parts of certain songs. As a ten-year-old I knew nothing of such things as samples or loops, but in retrospect, that's what I was trying to do. I might have been the happiest child in the world had someone given me a CD with nothing but continuous ten minute loops of those song bits that I cherished so much, that I spent the entire song waiting for impatiently and were gone too quickly. But then again, maybe it was this exact rarity and uniqueness that made these snippets so special, because in Germany in the 90s repetitive music with catchy melodies existed in abundance in the form of techno, and I hated techno with a passion. To me, techno was those annoying monotonous songs on a certain famous youth magazine's compilations that I always skipped over to get to N'Sync, Christina Aguilera, Destiny's Child and Coolio; the kind of songs they played on that stupid TV show "Club Rotation" on the music channel VIVA that made me change the channel or turn off the TV in disgust; too fast, too cold, machine-made songs where nobody sang and the people who made them had names made up of words like "bounce" and "future" and "project" and exclamation marks; the kinds of songs that those crazy green-haired people on TV danced to in those big parades. My knowledge of the concept of a DJ was restricted to DJ Bobo, who also made weird music like this, but at least there was some singing in there.

No, electronic dance music and I were never meant to be – to this day I can't stand the mind-numbing "four-to-the-floor" beats that have dominated club culture, especially in Europe, for decades. No, I needed repetition of a different kind, and I found it in hip hop and, eventually, funk. Thankfully, even though I was oblivious to the existence of hip hop as a subculture (I wouldn't have known how to categorize the few rap songs I knew, such as "Gangsta's Paradise"), or the concept of "subculture" for that matter, a lot of commercially successful pop music of the 90s was influenced by a hip hop aesthetic. Whether it was the Spice Girls' break-y drum beats, the mandatory (and admittedly terrible) rap part in every Backstreet Boys song or the b-boys in Britney Spears' videos, in a way I was already enjoying elements of hip hop years before I stopped considering it "that dumb music my big brother listens to".

It turned out to be that same brother who predicted correctly that I would eventually become a hip hop fan, and he was the first in a series of men who helped make it happen (more on that later) by regularly sneaking in popular hip hop tracks onto the mix CDs I asked him to burn for me because he possessed the only computer in our house and the knowledge to download songs. I was already obsessed with collecting music, not only swallowing my pride and pleading with my brother to download songs for me, but also spending my tiny allowance on CDs, begging relatives to buy me CDs, going through their collections, recording songs from the radio onto cassette tapes in my little brother's room whenever he was out, even

recording music videos (usually from MTV) onto VHS in the living room whenever it was unoccupied. When I got a small TV set in my own room at age 13 I hardly watched anything but MTV (and various other music channels that kept emerging and disappearing). After my CD player finally gave out completely I reverted to listening to my CDs with my DVD player and TV. Everytime there was some kind of award show on MTV (MTV Video Music Awards, MTV Europe Music Awards and so on) I stayed up at night to watch and record it.

Presumably largely due to MTV's selection in the early 2000s, my early teenage music taste clearly developed towards music with a more or less distinct "black" quality, from groovy pop such as P!nk's 2001 *Missundaztood* album and Christina Aguilera's 2002 *Stripped* album to modern R&B along the lines of Alicia Keys, Joss Stone, Ms. Dynamite and Beyoncé Knowles to outright hip hop artists like Eminem and Jay-Z. Whenever I had a long break or a class was canceled (and sometimes after school) I automatically headed to the "multimedia" department of the local drug store to listen to (and occasionally buy) CDs from the "black music" section. Some albums I bought without even listening to them because I relied on my favorites such as P!nk and Eminem to deliver something I would like. I often tended to favor obscure album tracks that were never released as singles, foreshadowing my enduring self-conception as an ambassador of "the tracks less played". I could also listen to the same albums or songs repeatedly countless times, even continuously for days on end, without getting sick of them – another valuable skill that has proven to be useful since I started DJing.

Eventually my oldest brother, probably tired of downloading songs for me, let me use his computer and showed me how to download songs myself. I suddenly found myself participating in the eternal fight over computer time between my three brothers that I had previously been excluded from. Whenever I could get to the computer I downloaded music and made mix CDs, which I put in jewel cases with elaborate hand-crafted covers and playful titles, inserting the word "mix" into simple words (*Mixshake*), movie titles (*The Lord of the Mixes*, *A Beautiful Mix*) or even movie quotes (*But Why Is The Mix Gone?*<sup>1</sup>). Naturally I would take any opportunity to share the music I loved with my friends, copying CD albums and making mix CDs for them, bringing CDs to their house or showing them songs at my house, sharing my earphones with them on the bus - the discman of course being a steady and indispensable companion wherever I went along with a case full of CDs.

All of these things seemed perfectly normal to me. I never consciously considered myself an extreme music enthusiast, never thought about what I was doing or *decided* to do it, I just did it. Like a song? Put it on a CD with a bunch of others. Need to put it somewhere? Get a case. Need to know what songs are on it? Put a piece of paper in the case. Teenager with a lot of

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<sup>1</sup> The original quote being „But why is the rum gone?“ (Jack Sparrow, *Pirates of the Caribbean*)

time on your hands and a drawer full of pens? Might as well make it look nice. That was the kind of logic under which I operated. I thought all teenagers were probably doing the same because teenagers generally place a special value on music. It has only started to occur to me step by step over the past few years how nerdy some of this behavior really was that came so naturally to me, especially as I come to realize that my friends back then, although they all had their own passion for music, weren't taking things as far as I was by any means.

Mid-2000s MTV gone -> boyfriend (just in time) old school hip hop

Soulfood (dancing before as child: rock'n'roll, basement routines) -> getting involved in party organization, love for nightlife

Move to Potsdam -> Ralf -> new hip hop (just in time)

EMW parties -> software -> CLRA -> controller

More gigs, finally Funkstelle