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 woudn’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 *M!ssundaztood* album and Christina Aguilera’s 2002 *Stripped* album to modern R&B along the lines of Alicia Keys, Joss Stone, Ms. Dynamite and early 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 embassador 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?[[1]](#footnote-1)*). 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 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.

By the mid-2000s, MTV was overrun by ringtone commercials and reality shows, degenerating into an obnoxious “youth” channel that really no longer deserved to include the word “music” in its title. At the same time, I became increasingly disappointed with pop music as I perceived the musical landscape to be infiltrated by the synthetic beats and nasal, soulless voices of Fergie, Rihanna, Shakira and the Pussycat Dolls, foreshadowing the electronic-oriented music of future stars Katy Perry and Lady Gaga. Meanwhile hip hop started working its way towards the upcoming “bling-bling” explosion of minimally talented rappers such as Lil Wayne, Pitbull, Flo Rida, Kanye West, Timbaland and Pitbull,[[2]](#footnote-2) to name a few, who took down with them formerly respectable artists Eminem and Jay-Z. The German scene was already ruined by the successful label Aggro Berlin, with arrogant wannabe gangsters like Sido and Bushido propagating themes of money and violence in a very non-funky way. It wasn’t so much the topics that bothered me as the general lack of class and the cheap-sounding beats. My perception of this “decline” of pop music might have been partially due to my evolving music taste as my teenage years progressed, but in retrospect I can still confirm that the musical landscape witnessed a stylistic shift when electronic music gradually superseded hip hop as the dominant subculture. At a certain point in time it was no longer “cool” to like hip hop, the genre became increasingly ridiculed, a victim of commercial overkill and its own delusions of grandeur.

Where would I go now? The next step, which would lay the groundwork for my adult music taste, was brought to me by yet another male influence in 2005: My first boyfriend, who was 5 years older than me. As non-feminist as it may sound, I owe a great deal of my development to a series of male impulses (brothers, boyfriends, friends, acquaintances) that I appropriated to shape my taste, skills and self-image. He introduced me to boombap from the 90s: A Tribe Called Quest, The Pharcyde, Jurassic 5, Funkdoobiest, Cypress Hill, The Fugees, The Roots, Mos Def, Das EFX, and also some German old school rap like Blumentopf, Stieber Twins, Freundeskreis and Torch. He didn’t do it in a “hey, listen to this!” sort of way, the music just happened to be playing at his place when I was there - and I was hooked. This was music I’d been waiting for my whole life without being aware of it. Because he had lost or given away a lot of his teenage music collection over the years and didn’t know much about downloading music, he wrote lists for me with recommendations that I proceeded to acquire religiously. From that point on I hardly paid any attention to radio or the music charts, except for a few rather un-poppy jazz/soul-oriented sounds like Amy Winehouse and Christina Aguilera’s swing-influenced *Back to Basics* album, which featured productions by old school hip hop producers such as Gang Starr’s DJ Premier.

Around the time I turned 18, graduation approached and I grew out of the relationship that had shaped my new taste in music, but my love for hip hop had long since taken on a life of its own. At the same time my friends and I were enjoying our new-found liberties of being of age, going out to bars and clubs. Not long before my inevitable break-up, we ended up at a party called “Soulfood” in the next biggest town. I had no clue beforehand what kind of party it was because one of my friends found out about it somehow, though without any details, and we went because it was Saturday and not much else was going on in the area. We got there shortly after the doors opened at 10 pm, greeted by the sound of hip hop beats and the sight of b-boys taking advantage of the still empty dancefloor to practice their moves. I could not believe my eyes and ears. I would never have thought anybody else knew about A Tribe Called Quest, let alone that there would be a party like this in my area.

Soon afterwards I got wind of a certain CD one of my friends had been handed at the door, she said it was some kind of “mixtape”. I beseeched her to make a copy for me, which I proceeded to listen to routinely for the following months. I was fascinated by the skillfully crafted blends between the songs, a seamless collage of funk, soul and hip hop, both old and new from the sound of it. There was no tracklist, which gave this legendary mix an air of mystery. I did everything in my power to find out the names of the tracks, from googling lyrics to straight up asking the DJs at the party. For the rest of the lifespan of the party, I never missed a single Soulfood night, always coercing my friends into joining me until it became a ritual and also a part of my identity. I collected the posters and flyers, which ended up all over the walls of my room. In my insatiable curiosity I needed to find out who these people were that organized such an event. I found the information on the website of the cultural center that housed the club, went to one of their meetings and simply asked to join them. Soon I found myself helping out in the afternoon before the party, putting up those big black curtains that divided the room, carrying around equipment and moving sofas in exchange for a few guest list spots and drink coupons for the party, which made it easier to convince my friends to keep frequenting the party – in addition to attending the informal weekly meetings.

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

1. The original quote being „But why is the rum gone?“ (Jack Sparrow, Pirates of the Carribean) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kanye West and Timbaland may be recognized for their production skills, but by all means they are not talented rappers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)