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Artist Q&A: Maddie Feldman's DJ dreams as Disc Rocky



Maddie Feldman '27

Photo courtesy of Maddie Feldman '27

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There's a chill in the air outside, but it's not quite cold enough to keep people indoors — the few lawn chairs on Cannon Green are mostly occupied. Leaves from the trees surrounding the lawn's perimeter have drifted towards the ground, and the ones that still cling to the branches have turned from green to orange. With each step, the crunch of fallen foliage fills the air as people walk by. As I drag two remaining lawn chairs closer together, Feldman approaches from across the green.

Maddie Feldman is a member of the Class of 2027. She intends to major in SPIA. Outside of the classroom, she DJs under the name "Disc Rocky" and recently performed at Charter Club, her first time DJing on the street. Her performance at Charter occurred after the interview was conducted. She is also a member of the Air Force ROTC.

Feldman is also a contributing constructor in the Puzzles section.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and concision.

The Daily Princetonian: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? How did you get into DJing?

Maddie Feldman: I'm Maddie. I am a sophomore from D.C., and I have experienced two very strong dreams in the last year. And in fact, the first of those dreams was born exactly a year ago today. In preparation for this interview, I was looking to see at what point I was struck with DJ fever in the middle of the night.

I was checking through my email receipts. I reached out to probably 15 local DJs in the area to ask how they got started, what their first programs were. I had zero musical background. I grew up playing the piano, but my twin sister is an actual piano prodigy with perfect pitch, so taking lessons after my twin sister was pretty demoralizing.

DP: Sounds like music runs in the family.

MF: Music definitely runs in the family.

My second really strong dream ... I decided I really wanted to join the military, or at least try it out for the year. And so I've only ever had two dreams of this caliber, and I've acted accordingly.

DP: What kind of genres and music do you like mixing?

MF: I really do enjoy house music. DJ aficionados will likely hear that and think, oh, that's quite the cop out, because house music is distinctive for its long intros, long outros, and pretty monotonous beat structure. It's an easier genre to mix. That being said, it's the genre I like the most. I've been getting more into the French rave vibe as well.



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DP: Do you have a dream venue on campus?

MF: I think hitting the street will legitimize my aspiring DJ career. I was speaking with a friend when we determined that there are three learning curves to becoming a DJ. The first one is being proficient at the functions of the board, knowing the basics well enough to DJ in a dorm or the street, for that matter. The second learning curve is being comfortable enough to mix music that you haven't listened to before, or music that you know so well that you can do better tricks with. That, I think, is worthy of DJing in venues and clubs — which honestly could be a goal of mine in the future.

The third learning curve, which takes an extra 200 hours to learn, is that of an international DJ sensation.

With enough practice, I could really upgrade out of my own dorm room, which is pretty much the extent to which I've performed.

DP: If you could have any guest feature, who would it be?

MF: Oh, that's a really hard question. I just went to a Kaytranada concert over the weekend, and he is such a fun performer to watch live, so I can't even imagine how entertaining it would be to be blessed with sharing the board with him.

DP: What is your process when putting together a set?

MF: I've seen multiple different approaches. One of them is much more mathematical, and you time out all the bars so that you know the second the vocals begin of the new song. I take a less quantitative approach and have coded the stems of certain songs to correspond with the buns on my board. That means with one beat, with one touch of a button, I can turn on or off the bass, the vocals, the mids, whatever it is. I will typically mess around with the stems on the touchpad, as opposed to the EQs. I'm also trying to work on being less reliant on using the Serato-generated BPMs to help me determine the best follow up song.

I also am one for wordplay, so I'm working on that. Love a good word play remix. My twin sister, who has perfect pitch, hates my general approach, because as long as the pitches aren't complimentary, the entire mix is a wash to her.

DP: Your DJ name is Disc Rocky. Can you tell me the story behind that?

MF: Completely independent of my DJ hobby is my unpaid role as the Rocky mascot, Rocky the Squirrel. And I really need to stress that these are completely not associated with each other. Potentially an end goal would be to DJ in the squirrel suit for Rocky-sanctioned events. But until then, do know that my Disc Rocky name is both a play on "disc jockey" and the well known artist A\$AP Rocky.

DP: Do you see DJing in your long term plans?

MF: I hope DJing will continue to be a fun release for me. It allows me to view the time I spend listening to music as efficient and productive, which is definitely the product of a Princeton mindset, but gives me a fun, fun hobby with progress that I can measure tangibly, which is totally up my alley as someone who likes to hone in on skills quickly and get good at them. That being said, I by no means see this as a career of mine.

If really all else fails, at least I'll know that at least I'll be able to rely on my DJ and my mascot skills, right?

DP: Two very valuable skills, honestly.

MF: A professional mascot is well into the six figures, which is crazy. And I can do the splits but only in the squirrel costume.

DP: Is there anything else you would like to add?

MF: Definitely do contact me if you're interested in pro and potentially pro bono DJ work. I know that I'm one of 1000 Princeton students in recent years to commit to a DJing hobby. But by extension, if anyone is interested in learning how to spin the discs themselves, I'm more than happy to offer up my board whenever, wherever, time and place. I'm there.

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