

PULSE MUSIC

A full-page background image of DJ Steve Aoki. He is wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt with large black polka dots, black pants, and white-rimmed sunglasses. He has a beard and is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. His arms are outstretched to the sides.

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**Famous Dis
EDM Djs**

Exclusive interview Steve Aoki

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**Music
Evolution
Innovation
Fashion**



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Being a musician since I was a teen, Guitar Center is the staple. You need anything to create, it's there. You need a Guitar Center. You gotta give it homage. It's a tool shed, and without the tool shed, it's hard to create.

One of the most famous DJs

When it comes to the world of Electronic Dance Music (EDM), Steve Aoki is a household name. He is the founder of his own label, Dim Mak Records, subject and star of the 2015 documentary *I'll Sleep When I'm Dead*, Billboard Awards winner for Best Mix Album, Grammy Awards nominee, and a three-time Guinness World Record holder; one of which is the record for the "longest crowd cheer." His three albums, *Wonderland* (2012), *Neon Future I* (2014) and *Neon Future II* (2015) debuted at No. 6, No. 2 and No. 1 respectively on the US Dance/Electronic Album Billboard charts. Shows by Steve Aoki have become iconic through his trademark stunts including acrobatic crowd surfing, hurling cakes into the faces of screaming fans and drenching audiences with gallons of champagne.

In April 2016, Aoki joined over 55 other musical acts on the SunFest stages in West Palm Beach Waterfront. We caught up with him to learn what we can expect from his show and why it will be much more than just a cake in the face!

Many EDM fans cite you as their first

exposure to the genre. What is it about your music and performances that attracts new audiences?

For the last 20 years, I've been doing my label, Dim Mak. All that time, even before I was a DJ, I'd been finding, signing and developing artists in many genres like hip-hop and rock. Now Dim Mak Records is immersed in electronic music, but back then, we signed [indie rock bands] Bloc Party and The Kills. Also, whenever I do an album, I reach out to people outside of the electronic community, like Linkin Park and Fall Out Boy, and a lot of hip-hop artists like Kid Ink and Wakka Flocka Flame. So I feel like my sound and headspace are very diverse.

The bedrock of my music is in electronic but the channels and wingspan are far and broad. I sample guitar sometimes, or use 808s [a 1980s drum-mimicking synthesizer] and different sounds that emulate different things that aren't particularly just electronic. So people that listen to rock, hip-hop and other genres might find a synergy because I do all those different collaborations.

My journey

EDM has come a long way from geeky kids spinning records in dark corners. You're well known for your engaging showmanship and the production quality of your sets. Can you explain this evolution of the DJ?

I started seeing that change when electro really came into being around 2007. I remember in 2007 when Daft Punk emerged with their live show and it blew people's minds. We have to give them credit for really being the first spectacle performance from the electronic community that shook the world. It was like something you fell into and became hypnotized by their whole production.

And then Justice was, for me, the second artist that really had this rock 'n' roll punk spirit with their 2008 show at Coachella. Their production had this huge wall of Marshall amps and their sound was really distorted, loud and noisy and they had this punk attitude. People were going crazy; they were going off! I was definitely waving the flag for the whole new punk uprising in electronic music. I started sampling guitars, screaming on the mic and implementing the same processes of how I would go about being in a band but doing it as a DJ.

These artists gave me a platform and a forum to be able to do that because now there was an audience that wanted that kind of energy on stage. Years later, it has obviously evolved into what it is now, but that was kind of the springboard.

Your concerts are world famous for being gigantic parties with mammoth crowds and your dynamic stage presence. Can you explain why and how partying and the spectacle that comes with it became your trademark?

One of the hardest things to do is to find something unique that connects your fans to your music and your show. My aim or goal in my shows is to really connect with the crowd the best I can and the most efficient way possible with my short time on the stage. I do it through my dynamic shows, my music and the variations of what the music means to me. I introduced a raft to my show in 2009 and cake-facing was introduced in 2011. [Being hit in the face with a cake is a highly anticipated initiation into the inner circle of Aoki's devoted fans.]

I'm not saying I'm the founder of the cakes – people have been throwing cakes at each other for a long time! But I've definitely made it a signature that is unique to a Steve Aoki show. I've probably caked like 8,000 people's faces! And it's fun and for me it doesn't get old. I enjoy it because every cake face is a different cake face.

“It has been a long journey. Whenever I work with different artists, I expand as a song writer, as a producer, and I always want to try and find the bridge between my world and their world.





“The craziest thing I’ve probably done during a show is the balcony dive - it was pretty scary. I was like, ‘This could result in an injury of mine,’ but somehow I survived.

EDM rockstar Steve Aoki has built quite the name for himself. The Grammy-nominated artist clearly has talent, and he is all over the scene, but there are some things about this 38-year-old that most people don't know. Here, we present our list of 15 things you probably didn't know about Steve Aoki. Check out part one below, and stay tuned for part two, coming soon!

Number Fifteen: He Has Two Homes. Aoki currently resides in both Ibiza and Las Vegas. This makes sense, as these are two super hot spots for EDM DJs.

Number Fourteen: He Was Good to the Animals. Aoki may not be a vegan now, but he was for five whole years! There's something we can respect.

Number Thirteen: His Father Founded Benihana. Aoki's father is former professional wrestler Hiroaki "Rocky" Aoki. That's impressive enough and in and of itself, but did you know his father also founded the very first Benihana restaurant? The restaurant was founded in 1965 and was located in New York City. He reportedly earned the money to open the restaurant by driving an ice cream truck through Harlem.

Number Twelve: He Learned How to Market From His Father. Aoki has a very recognizable brand, and he was able to properly and successfully develop it with the help of his father. According to Aoki, "The strength in everything [my father] did was pushing his marketing and work and art and sportsmanship all to one brand, which was Benihana. He raced Benihana powerboats. He had hot-air balloons branded with Benihana. He marketed to one thing. His influence is unconditional. Now I see why I mar-

ket everything toward Dim Mak."

Number Eleven: He Was Influenced by Punk. In fact, Aoki used to be in a punk band! He grew up surrounded by punk and hardcore music, and he was the vocalist for the band This Machine Kills from the years 1997 to 2000.

Number Ten: He Was Straight-Edge in College. All throughout his college career, Aoki didn't touch a single drop of alcohol, and he didn't use drugs at all. Ironically, Aoki is known today for spraying crowds around him with champagne.

Number Nine: He Learned a Lot From DJ AM. Aoki developed a budding friendship with the late DJ AM just as he began DJ'ing in 2004. DJ AM was able to show Aoki how to properly beat-match and scratch.

"When I'm at a show, I'm there to have fun. Let's just not care for a moment. So this cake in your face is to make you lose your mind. And it's not about caring about whatever you are wearing and caring what other people are thinking about you. Out of the context, I'm trying to develop something else."