

THE DIGITAL DJ GEAR BUYER'S GUIDE

2020



The ultimate guide to picking
the right digital DJ gear &
software while avoiding all
the common pitfalls



DIGITAL DJ TIPS
THE GLOBAL DJ SCHOOL

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THANKS

We'd like to thank all the hardware and software manufacturers who have helped us with assets for this guide, and a special thanks to those who support Digital DJ Tips in other ways too.

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Take The DJ Test

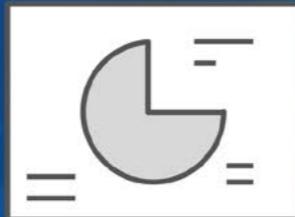
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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR



DJ CONTROLLERS HAVE REVOLUTIONISED

the world of DJing. These clever little boxes control two or more virtual “decks”, and allow you to mix between those sources. They usually connect to a laptop computer that runs DJ software and also holds the library of music being played, sometimes also giving access to music on a streaming service.

Nearly always nowadays, DJ controllers also contain the audio circuitry needed for you to DJ properly - as a minimum, this means a headphones output (for you to prepare your music “in private”) and a master output (for your audience’s speakers).

Put the software on your laptop, connect the controller, plug in some speakers and headphones, and you’ve got a powerful DJing system that can do things DJs just 10 years ago would have struggled to even imagine. And as the DJ controller market has matured, the units have become more powerful, more stable and cheaper.

This is great, but one thing that can’t be said about DJing since digital is that it’s got simpler. Digital DJing has, alongside all the advantages it brings, made things somewhat tricky for the newcomer.

TO START WITH THERE ARE MANY DOZENS

of DJ controllers to choose from. And there are lots of different flavours of DJ software. As if that weren’t confusing enough, many controllers work with more than one type of software. Then there’s the computer platform (Mac? PC? iOS?).



Once you start seriously considering making a purchase, especially if you're coming to digital having used analogue gear in the past, you're also going to start seeing alternatives to DJ controllers on sale - and no doubt you're going to wonder whether you wouldn't be best going for one of those systems instead. Both Denon DJ and Pioneer DJ have capable "all in one" or "standalone" DJ systems that don't require a laptop at all, for instance.

Then there are traditional record decks and mixers, which can be coupled with special vinyl and interfaces to make digital vinyl systems (DVS). There are "modular" systems, where you build up your perfect DJ set-up from lots of smaller devices that plug together. There are systems that have the ability to play music from CDs or USB devices as well as your laptop, tablet or smartphone.

And then there's another question: "Do I really need a DJ controller at all?" Many DJs (including myself) started their digital journey just from a laptop running DJ software. Nowadays, with some excellent iPad, iPhone and Android software that uses the touchscreen for control, ultra-minimal DJing from just a computing device with no additional hardware is a possibility. Should it be your route too?

THAT'S WHAT THIS GUIDE EXISTS TO HELP you with. If you're just starting out down the digital DJ route, and you're considering buying your first DJ set-up, this guide is here to help you find your answers to all of these questions, and to put you in a much stronger position to buy wisely.

Brought to you by [Digital DJ Tips](#), the biggest DJ school in the world, it draws on our many years of experience helping new DJs take their first steps, and so we are pretty sure you'll find it useful in answering lots of the questions you're no doubt asking yourself, and to help you clear some of the confusion around buying digital DJing gear.

We're extremely excited about how digital has changed DJing. It's brought the ability to DJ to the hands

of practically any music fan who is motivated to learn. No longer do you need to invest many thousands in bulky equipment that's hard to move around and difficult to master; nowadays, you can spend a fraction of what it cost to get yourself set up 10 or 15 years ago, and using easy-to-learn software, get yourself at least good enough to play your first "public" show in a fraction of the time it used to take.

NOW, OF COURSE, THERE'S A WORLD OF difference between mastering all the tools that digital offers to you and actually becoming a good DJ! The effort that goes into doing that - developing the ability to read a crowd properly, learning to sensitively move from one track to the next, complementing rather than upsetting the flow of the music, developing deep musical knowledge - is a lifetime's work, as it always has been.

That's why we've made it our mission to help as many people as possible become great DJs and DJ/producers, through our world-leading training courses. We've trained over 23,000 students since 2010 - so if you want to learn the skills, you're in the right place - just go to [DigitalDJTips.com/courses](#) and start today! However, you're going to need some gear... and that's what this guide is all about.

The beauty of digital is that it lets anyone have a go. Who's to say you might not be the next big DJ superstar? There's only one way to find out...

Happy digital DJing!

- Phil Morse
Digital DJ Tips Founder
January 2020

THE LAST 12 MONTHS IN DJING

THE DJ WORLD NEVER STANDS STILL, AND THE LAST 12 MONTHS

have seen a resurgence of activity by the gear and software companies, following a period of relative calm.

The new hardware battleground is undoubtedly the standalone DJ system - we're talking about DJ set-ups that don't need a laptop to be present, but that have a lot of the power of laptop systems.

While it is still mainly "early adopters" who are jumping on board this style of DJ gear (70% of our community currently still DJs using traditional DJ controllers), standalones are a rapidly growing area. This sector is being driven by Denon DJ and its Prime 4 unit, which is hugely powerful and offers most of the features laptop DJs have got used to, with the advantage (for many, at least) of the laptop not having to be present.

Pioneer DJ has battled to keep up, with mixed results so far. Its XDJ-XZ is its current flagship standalone, and while it has much going for it, it doesn't have anywhere near the power of the Prime 4. However, we fully expect "next generation" standalone gear from Pioneer DJ in 2020, and also expect a whole raft of similar products from Denon DJ itself, plus Rane and Numark - as a minimum.

If standalone systems are the new frontier for hardware, a less tangible but potentially even more disruptive development is the rise of streaming or "online" music services for DJs. Think about it - streaming isn't even in a battle with physical or downloaded music any more as far as consumers are concerned - streaming has won. Spotify, Apple Music and the ilk are the way most people consume music nowadays away from their DJing (and the way people who aren't DJs have done it for years...).

For DJ use, the past 12 months have seen Beatport launch Beatport Link, offering a viable way for pro DJs to play with music from Beatport's catalogue without owning it. Meanwhile Serato has sidled up with TIDAL, and SoundCloud has partnered with just about everyone, being available in software from all the major names.

Perhaps the biggest development is again in Denon DJ's Prime 4. This unit can work wirelessly with TIDAL, meaning you can walk up to any Prime 4, log in with your TIDAL username and password, and as long as the location has WiFi, you can DJ with your whole TIDAL library.



THE ROLAND DJ-707M IS A COMPACT AND POWERFUL CONTROLLER AND IT MADE WAVES AMONG MOBILE DJS IN 2019



BEATPORT LINK IS A STREAMING SERVICE DESIGNED SPECIALLY FOR WORKING DJS.

CLOUD LOCKERS FOR OUR OWN MUSIC, UBIQUITOUS INTERNET IN
DJ booths, all the streaming services on all DJ gear and software, and a single login to access your collection wherever you play - this is the future, and it's getting close. Internet in DJ booths will become a given, just like electric power - and then it'll all become very normal.

The final big trend I want to highlight is connected to a style of DJing. The EDM scene saw DJ/producers (or perhaps more accurately, producer/DJs) playing what I liked to call "victory lap" DJ sets - sets that were technically pretty simple to perform, but that were packed with exclusive versions of tracks - both the producer/DJ's own and from other producers. While it has always been possible to grab semi-exclusive re-edits of tracks from DJ download pools and places like SoundCloud, we've noticed that more and more DJs are making their own re-edits in this way to play in their sets.

While thankfully the art of DJing has resurfaced after its decimation by at least some "push button" superstars from the EDM age, the "exclusive re-edits" idea has stuck, and we think this will grow in 2020.

This is not least because software like Serato's easy-to-use Studio, Mixed In Key's Captain series of semi-automated composition tools, and online offerings

from the likes of (for instance) next-gen sample company Splice and mastering service LANDR, is continually appearing and improving. These apps demystify the whole art of making your own "bootlegs", and we expect to see this all become much more mainstream in 2020.

So - with gear getting more powerful and thus opening up new possibilities, with the way music is delivered to DJs moving online with all the potential advantages that brings, and with DJs getting awesome new ways to pre-prepare bootlegs, re-edits and remixes for their sets, these are intriguing times indeed.

There are more ways than ever for imaginative DJs to make their mark on the scene going into 2020, and we're excited to have not only journeyed the past 10 years with you, but to be here to move into the next decade too. So stick with us as we document, teach and assist you on your own journey through modern digital DJing into 2020...

Phil Morse
January 2020

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

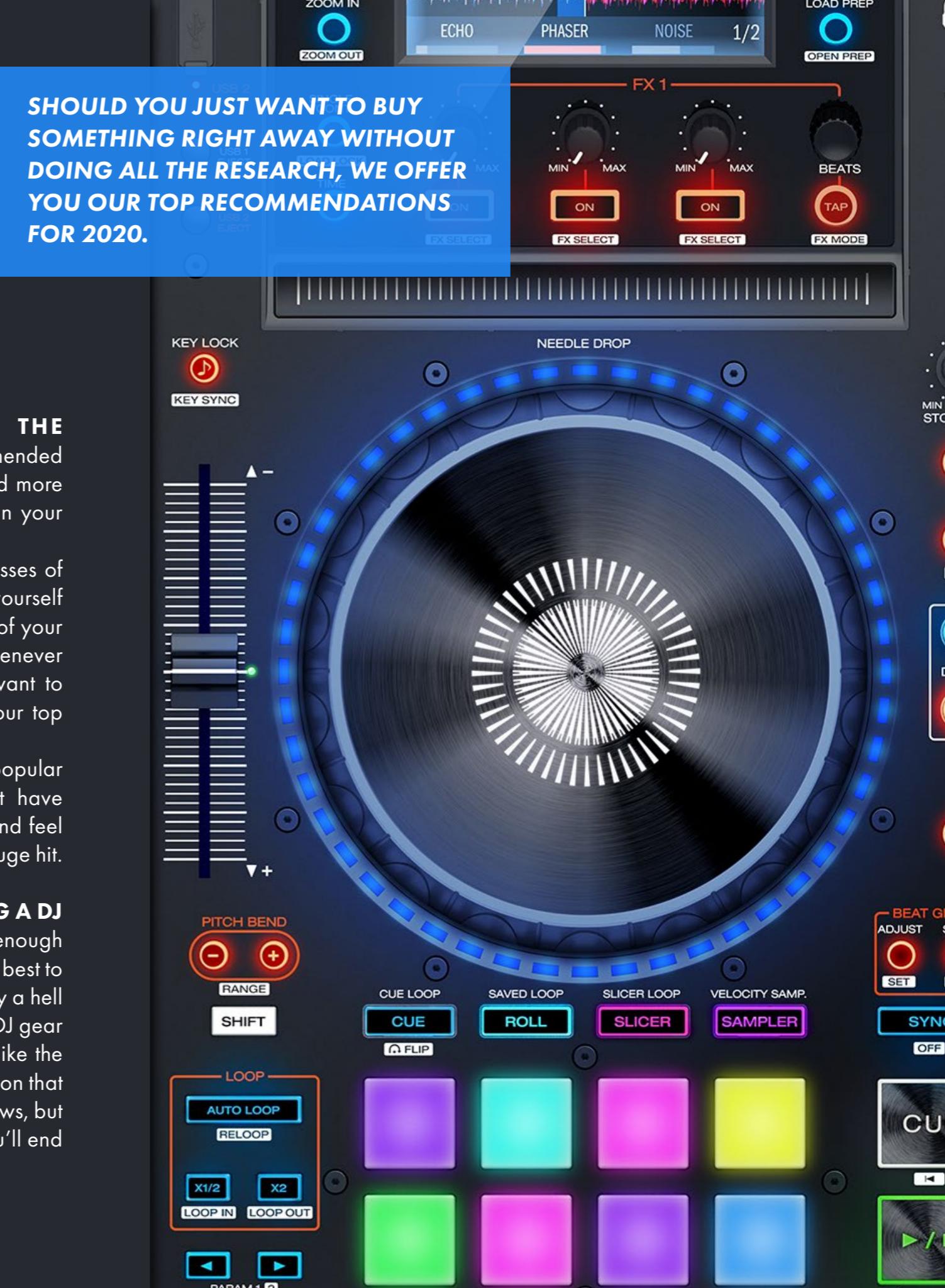
THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO BE USED ALONGSIDE THE [online reviews](#) on the Digital DJ Tips website. There, you'll find lots of recommended controllers, standalone systems, modular gear, production stuff, mixers and more in one guide, with links to our in-depth reviews and videos to help you in your buying decision.

The summaries here in this guide will help you to make sense of the masses of information we provide for you in those reviews. We suggest you immerse yourself in all the information in this guide first, in order to make sure you're aware of your options, and then browse the online reviews next, referring back here whenever you find something that you need clarification about. Should you just want to buy something right away without doing all the research, we offer you our top recommendations for 2020 here too.

Pioneer DJ's DDJ-1000SRT is basically the Serato version of its hugely popular DDJ-1000 Rekordbox controller, something much asked for. It doesn't have comprehensive control over Serato, but it does have the Pioneer DJ look and feel straight out of the pro DJ booth that many Serato DJs have hankered for. A huge hit.

FINALLY, A COUPLE OF TIPS ON HOW TO APPROACH CHOOSING A DJ controller or standalone system. Practically all choices nowadays are good enough for you to learn to DJ on. Also, there is no "best" DJ set-up. When buying, it's best to trust your instinct a little; as a DJ, you're going to be using the system you buy a hell of a lot, at least if you want to get good at this game. If you think a piece of DJ gear looks too small, or too big, or is too heavy or too plasticky, or you don't like the shape of it, or you think it makes you look like you're playing with a toy - act on that instinct. That stuff matters! So choose something that not only gets good reviews, but that you feel you'd be comfortable using. Because remember, hopefully you'll end up using it not only in your bedroom, but in front of other people too.

SHOULD YOU JUST WANT TO BUY SOMETHING RIGHT AWAY WITHOUT DOING ALL THE RESEARCH, WE OFFER YOU OUR TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2020.



THE TYPE OF DJ GEAR YOU CAN CHOOSE FROM IN 2020

BACK IN THE "OLD DAYS" IT WAS ALL SO simple. You had two turntables, and a "mixer", which was a box that sat between them and made them blend together. That was it. Boy, how it's changed! Nowadays we are bombarded with weird, wonderful and ever-changing DJ technology, each innovation promising to wipe the floor with the last, each manufacturer refreshing, revamping and relaunching its gear every year, shouting loud about the new features as if they're the only thing worth knowing about.

And while DJ controllers are far and away the most popular way to digital DJ today (the vast majority of our audience at Digital DJ Tips uses a DJ controller and a laptop to DJ with), they're not the only choice - far from it. While this guide contains lots of this type of DJ controller - single boxes with two "decks" and a mixer, plus audio circuitry and a way to connect a computer of some kind up - you need to be sure that this is the right route for you in the first place. So let's take a second to look at types of alternative DJing "systems":

NOWADAYS WE ARE BOMBARDED WITH WEIRD, WONDERFUL AND EVER-CHANGING DJ TECHNOLOGY... MANUFACTURERS REFRESHING, REVAMPING AND RELAUNCHING THEIR GEAR EVERY YEAR...



A TECHNICS SL1200 TURNTABLE: ONE OF THE ORIGINAL TOOLS OF DJING.

"TWO DECKS AND A MIXER"

THE CLASSIC DJ SET-UP: TWO TURNTABLES (usually Technics) and a DJ mixer (usually a Pioneer DJM-something). I saved for years to be able to afford just such a set-up as a twentysomething DJ. There are still pockets of DJs who use such gear, and there are scenes where it's a badge of honour to perform from real vinyl on a system like this. Trouble is, most music isn't even pressed on vinyl nowadays, it's expensive, these systems are bulky, and to perform in this way is really to ignore any of the changes that have happened in DJing since, well, the DJ CD player...

"TWO DJ MEDIA PLAYERS AND A MIXER"

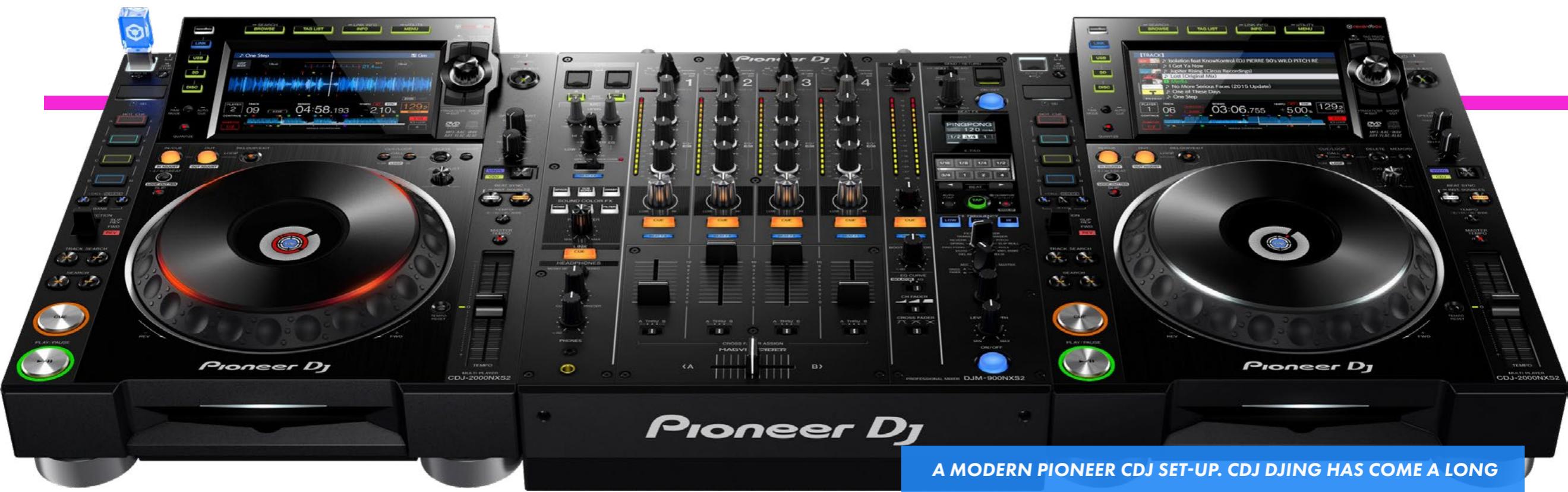
A MEDIA PLAYER IS WHAT YOU USE TO "SPIN" YOUR MUSIC.

A "CDJ" is an example of a media player: it's basically a CD player designed for DJs, where once you've slid the CD in, a platter lets you control it as if it were a record. Indeed, some early CDJs even had "real vinyl" on them. Most, though, are "fixed platter", which means the round bit doesn't actually turn when the music is playing, but nonetheless can be used to control the music when touched.

CDJs were the first time vinyl DJs saw a need to shout "it's not real DJing!" (something they've been doing regularly ever since...), but nonetheless CDJs caught on really quickly, and are still dominant in much of the world as the standard way to DJ. As it's always been easy to burn your own CDs from music bought online, DJ CD players free up DJs from having to buy physical vinyl, meaning all the advantages of digital music discovery are brought to the table.

TODAY'S CDJS ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE COMPLEX,

being able to play from USB sticks and drives as well as playing audio CDs, and Pioneer's latest models even have the "sync" button so hated by vinyl DJs (and many CDJ DJs, actually. "It's not real DJing!" goes the cry...). In recent years, this kind of set-up has become more and more like a type of big, expensive DJ controller. Currently the dominant brand is Pioneer DJ, though Denon DJ has issued a strong challenge by way of its SC5000 Prime and SC5000M Prime media players (which don't actually play CDs at all, only "solid state" digital music). Most modern Pioneer CDJs (and XDJs, the company's own "non CD" version of a type of device) are less "media players", and more "controller decks", with fantastic screens giving much the same feedback as laptop screens, and capable of controlling not only Traktor, Serato and other DJ software by third party companies, but also, Rekordbox DJ, Pioneer's own DJ software. This means you can plug your laptop straight into a DJ booth-style Pioneer set-up and play from software just like you can when you plug your laptop into smaller, more consumer-focused DJ controllers.



A MODERN PIONEER CDJ SET-UP. CDJ DJING HAS COME A LONG WAY SINCE THE FIRST UNITS APPEARED OVER 20 YEARS AGO.

DIGITAL VINYL SYSTEMS (DVS)

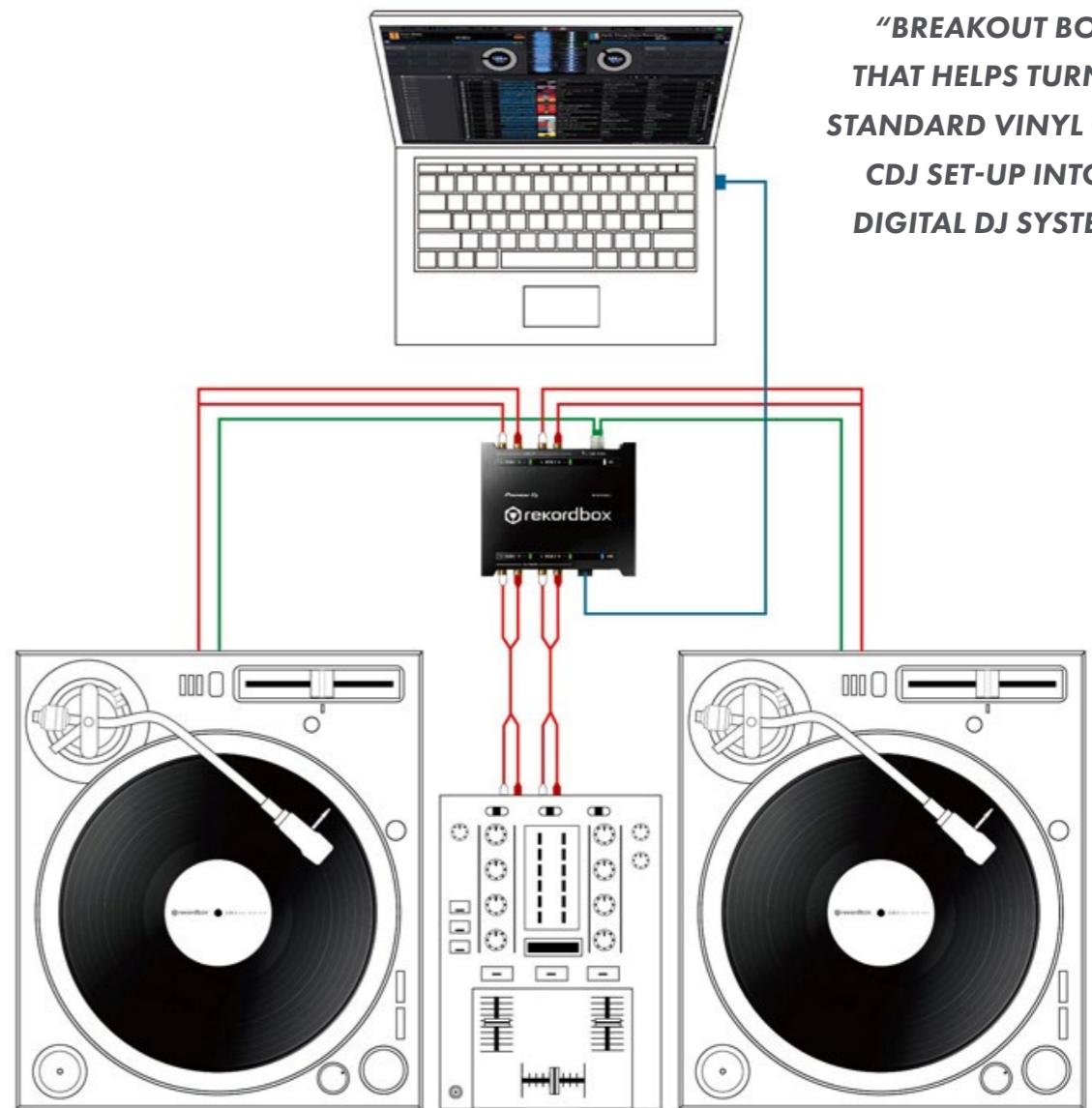
A DVS SYSTEM CAN BE THOUGHT OF AS A WAY OF "ADAPTING"

either of the above set-ups to turn them into laptop DJ systems. In that respect, a DVS can be seen as a "half way house", bridging the old, analogue ways and the new digital world.

Here's how it works. You use special control vinyl or CDs, that instead of containing music, contain computer code (shrill, screechy and very much not music when you accidentally actually do listen to it). You plug a special box, often referred to as an audio interface or "breakout box", in-between your record decks or CD players and your mixer and speakers, and connect this box to your laptop, which runs DJ software. (Nowadays, you increasingly don't even need this box, because many modern DJ mixers have all the circuitry in them needed to do this already.) The laptop intercepts the computer signal from the control vinyl or CDs, and sends music from your hard drive to the mixer and speakers, following your every manipulation of it on your decks or CDJs. You get to use your usual gear, but you get many of the advantages of using DJ software at the same time.

Advantages? Well, you can use your existing gear (or the club's) and still have many of the benefits of using DJ software. It "looks" like "real" DJing (even though you can apply all the tricks of digital nonetheless). It can feel more natural to DJs coming to digital having used analogue in the past. And because the majority of clubs still don't have the kind of modern, digital-friendly CDJ/XDJ set-up described above, but most do have at least some kind of DJ CD players and mixer, DVS is a surefire bet for DJs who can't be sure what they'll find when they turn up to play at any given venue, and for this reason DVS remains immensely popular. Disadvantages? Tricky to set up, and expensive if you have to buy the analogue gear first and then add on a DVS system to make it "digital".

A DVS SYSTEM
COMPRISSES CONTROL
VINYL OR CDS, AND AN
AUDIO INTERFACE,
SOMETIMES CALLED A
"BREAKOUT BOX"
THAT HELPS TURN A
STANDARD VINYL OR
CDJ SET-UP INTO A
DIGITAL DJ SYSTEM.



MODULAR DJ SYSTEMS

REMEMBER HI-FI SEPARATES, WHERE YOU'D HAVE A TUNER, AN

amplifier, a CD player, a record deck and a tape recorder, instead of just buying one box with the lot in? That's how a modular DJ system is. Just like the original DJ gear ("two decks and a mixer"), a modular digital set-up is where instead of all being in one box, the parts are separate. You get to pick and choose the items that make most sense to you and to your DJing style, dependent on size, weight, functionality and so on. The pro set-up on the previous page is really just a modular set-up itself.

Do you only need one "deck" and a load of buttons? Then buy a pad controller, a single "deck" controller or DVS turntable and maybe a small software mixer. Really interested in triggering samples? Buy a "button" controller designed to unlock that part of your DJ controller. Got a DVS system (see above) but want extra control over parts of your software that your record decks and control vinyl can't give you? Grab a small device that unlocks that stuff for you, and wire it in alongside the DVS. Want to use a feature like Traktor's Stems format? Add a Stems-ready deck.

Modular systems let experts "build to measure", but essentially, a digital modular system does what an equivalent all-in-one does (should such an all-in-one exist)... but simply split across more than one box.



THE MODULAR DDJ-XP2
CONTROLLER ADDS PADS
AND TOUCHSTRIPS TO YOUR
DJ SET-UP FOR MORE
PERFORMANCE OPTIONS.

LAPTOP-ONLY DJ SYSTEMS

REALLY, DJ CONTROLLERS ARE JUST AN alternative to using the mouse and keyboard to control your DJ software. Sure, they're a great fun alternative, but all DJ software can also be controlled without anything else plugged into the computer at all. And some DJs do just that.

Whether because they're just starting out and can't afford a DJ controller, or they want to travel light, or they just love the whole minimal thing, for these DJs, a controller is one box too many. I actually started out like this, because in 2005 I couldn't find a Midi controller ("Midi" is the technical word for how digital music devices talk to each other and to computers) that was good enough for my needs, So I hacked and adapted how all the keys of my computer controlled my software... and DJed like that for several years!

If you go down this "laptop only" route you're still going to need some kind of audio device to turn your laptop's one audio output into two (one output for your headphones and one for your speakers) - but nonetheless, this is still just about as minimal as digital DJing gets.

DJING ON DJAY FOR IOS



STANDALONE DJ SYSTEMS

THIS TYPE OF GEAR LOOKS SIMILAR TO THE LAPTOP DJ CONTROLLERS

that the vast majority of digital DJs use, but with a few differences. Such units may have CD slots on the front, although this is getting rarer. They will have USB slots on the top, so you can plug in USB sticks and play music from those too. They may also have standard inputs, so you could plug record decks or media players into them, as well. And many also work just fine with laptops and DJ software. Some may play nicely with your iPad or iPhone - some may even communicate wirelessly with such devices to grab music from them. But what they all share in common is the ability to be used without a laptop in some way, shape or form should you wish to. This type of all-in-one system definitely came of age with the release of the Pioneer XDJ-RX (now replaced by the XDJ-RX2 and joined by the XDJ-RR), a system that for the first time packed a laptop-rivalling screen that shows waveforms and library information; it was joined in 2016 by Denon DJ's MCX8000, and this year by Denon DJ's Prime 4. For us, these are the first such systems that actually feel close to laptop/controller DJing, just without the laptop and this could very well be the way DJing is going.

IOS/ANDROID APPS

BEING ABLE TO DJ ON YOUR IPAD, ANDROID TABLET OR EVEN

smartphone is now a reality. Not only is it a reality, but it's incredibly addictive and a lot of fun. It's truly amazing what you can do on such devices and with apps like Algoriddim's djay and Traktor DJ 2 available, tablet and smartphone DJing isn't going away any time soon!

Really this is just a new take on the laptop-only DJ system described previously, and it's actually coming full circle, with a number of DJ controllers now able to work with the iPad and a couple with Android, so you can use your iOS or Android device as a direct replacement for a laptop in such set-ups. Expect this to only get more common over time. Like with laptop-only systems you might want to consider a compatible audio interface for that all-important separate headphone output here.

By the way, DJing on iOS has been around longer than on Android: 2015's guide was the first time we included Android software, recommending djay from Algoriddim and Mixvibes Cross for Android. Android recently added multi-channel audio to the platform chalking off another obstacle in the way of it someday soon catching up with iOS when it comes to DJing. After all, there are many more Android devices out there than iOS devices...



**DENON DJ'S PRIME 4
WAS THE STANDOUT
STANDALONE SYSTEM
THIS YEAR.**

WHY YOU'LL NONETHELESS PROBABLY CHOOSE A DJ CONTROLLER

(PLUS SOME DRAWBACKS)



WHEN ALL'S SAID AND DONE, YOU'LL PROBABLY CHOOSE A DJ controller (and by that, just to reiterate I mean a device with "decks", "mixer" and "audio interface" built in). Here are the assumptions I'm making about you to make that call on your behalf.

I'm guessing the idea of playing on traditional, simple all-vinyl or CD systems is not of appeal to you - mainly because you're reading a digital DJ guide! I'm also guessing that a full nightclub-style system is an expense that's prohibitive to you. Likewise, while adding a DVS system to a vinyl or CD system to make it digital will give you an awesome set-up, I'm guessing the commitment, complexity and huge ticket price of such a system will rule this option out for you too.

DJing from just a laptop would be tricky (and look rubbish) you're thinking, and probably wouldn't even feel like DJing. You're right. Laptop-only DJing is great as a backup or for those of us who learned on "real gear", so can compensate for its weirdness, but it's no way to start your DJing career. This is also why manufacturers put out controllers that work with iOS and Android devices: The touchscreen is not so hot for truly immersive DJing, even with the best DJ apps.

Nowadays, out of all the "alternative" system types we discussed, the one most likely to appeal to you instead of a "normal" DJ controller is a standalone system that can work without your laptop too if you want it to, such as Pioneer DJ's XDJ-X2 or Denon DJ's Prime 4.

They're often very appealing to mobile DJs, who enjoy the reliability and convenience of having to set up a laptop at every gig, for instance - but as they have become more and more powerful, they've also become a truly viable alternative for a wider audience too.

LATER ON IN THE GUIDE WE ROUND UP the best of these - but I think you'll still most likely decide that standard DJ controllers are the way to go, coming back to cost efficiency, portability and choice. But just so we go into this with our eyes wide open, let's look at some of the disadvantages of using DJ controllers.

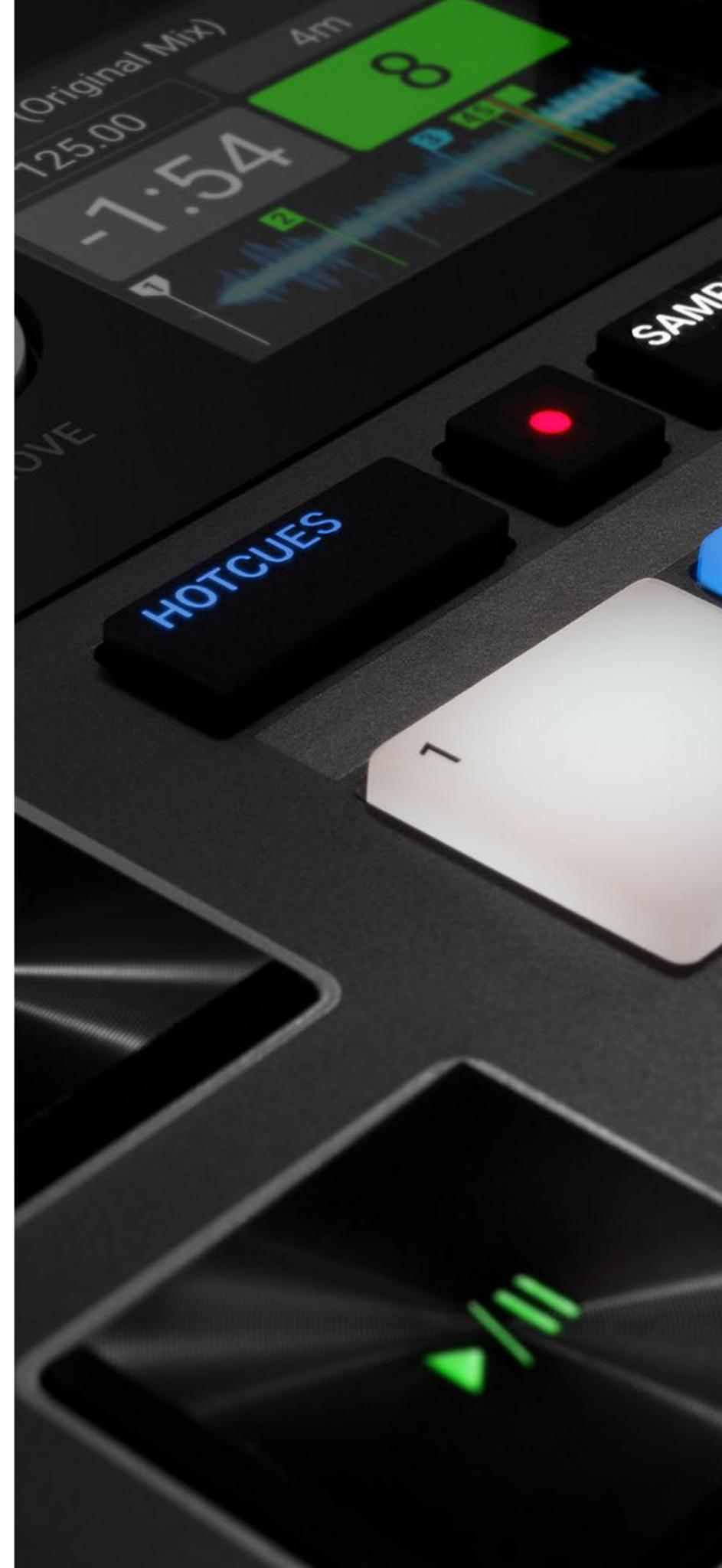
Depending on where you are in the world, you may find there is considerable resistance to using DJ controllers in your local venues. While in some parts of the world DJs are literally given a table to set up their own gear on (so you can bring what you want), often bars, lounges and clubs have gear they've invested heavily in, and rightly or wrongly the managers of such venues can't understand why "these new DJs" are insisting on bringing small, cheap-looking plastic boxes to DJ on when the venue has provided pro-grade gear to use (this is why DVS systems certainly have a niche; there isn't anywhere near as much of a stigma attached to using DVS in such venues as there is DJ controllers).

Even when you have club management that's happy for you to bring a DJ controller to play from (at least, in theory), there's the issue of finding the space to set up. That's why certain DJs occasionally settle on more minimal, modular systems; having maybe a single slimline controller and a laptop is more likely to be tolerated in cramped DJ booths than a big all-in-one, and as long as you're comfortable with using such gear - and many experienced DJs are - this can be a great alternative. (Often, DJs combine this with some kind of DVS control for a truly powerful digital set-up, that still uses the club's gear too.)

ANOTHER DISADVANTAGE OF DIGITAL

systems is the chance of a laptop crash or failure, as this means curtains for the music; this is why digital DJs should always have a backup plan in place, even if it's just a short mix on your phone that you can switch in should your laptop fail and need a reboot for some reason.

But all that said, I bet you still want a DJ controller, yeah? I don't blame you. So now that we're definitely all on the same page, let's start to make sense of what's out there.



WHY SOFTWARE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HARDWARE

WE'VE ALREADY LEARNED THAT THE

controller is only really there to do some clever stuff with the audio, and to give you cool, purpose-made controls that make your DJ software easier to use. It's the DJ software that actually does all the clever bits.

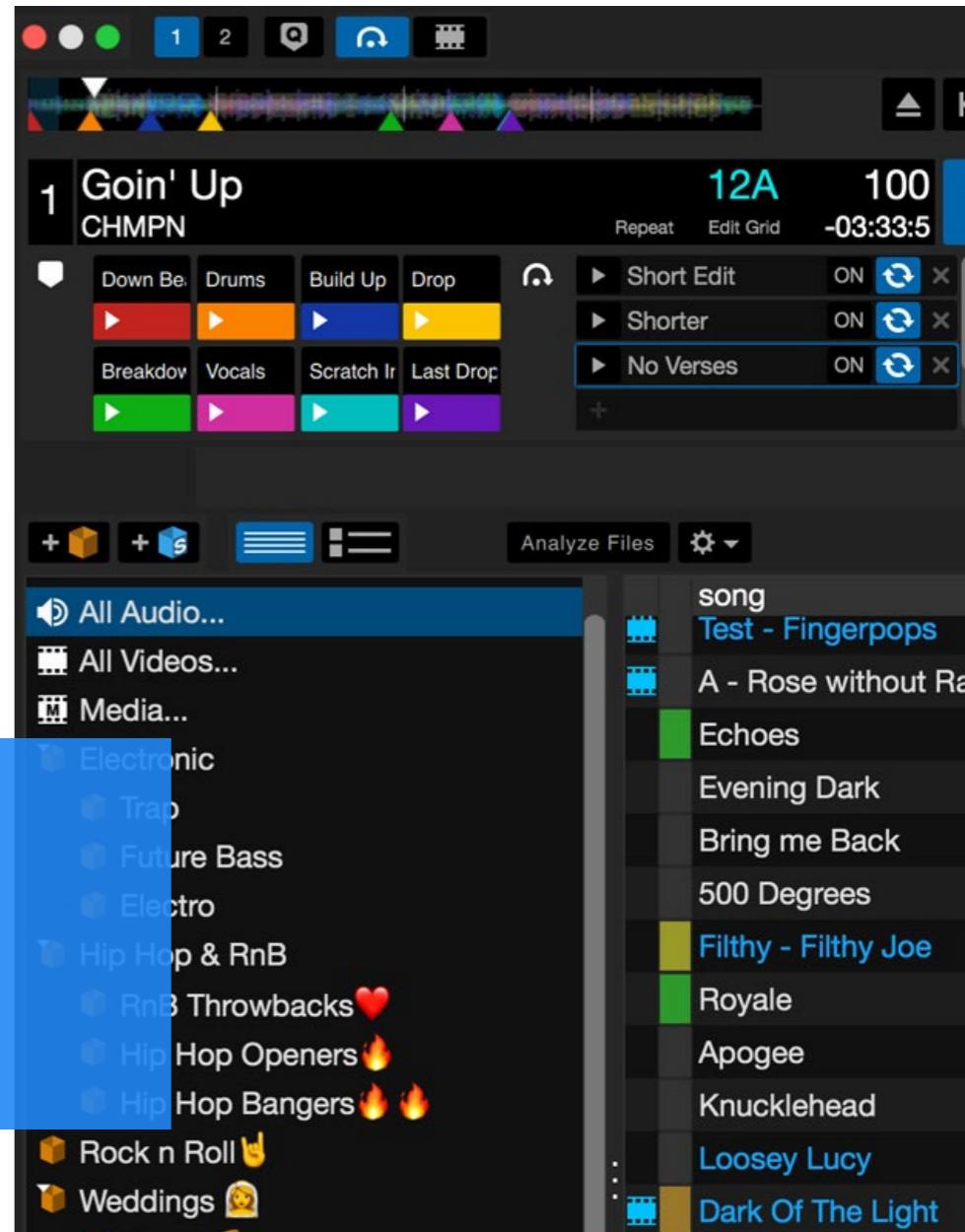
IT'S THE DJ SOFTWARE THAT LOADS THE

music from your hard drive into your computer's memory for playback, or grabs the next track from your streaming service. It's the DJ software that monitors what you're doing on the so-called "transport" controls (play, pause, forward, back, speed and so on) to manipulate the music. It's the DJ software that watches your every move on the mixing controls, not only the volumes but all other controls and then alters the audio to your exact instructions. It's the DJ software that gives you two decks, or four decks, or a load of clever samples, or all the amazing effects like echo and filter and all the rest. Think of your DJ controller as a dumb box that takes all the glory, and you're not going to go far wrong. Even if you go for a "flavour of 2020" controller with built-in screens and all the rest, it's the computer that's doing the hard work.

SO IN ORDER FOR YOU TO BE ABLE TO

choose a DJ controller wisely, you're going to need to understand DJ software, and the choices that are out there for you. That's why before looking at the best controllers for each piece of software, we are going to take a short while to explain a bit about the software itself. If you haven't made up your mind what software platform to go for, this will help you to narrow down your hardware choice considerably. Changing software is much harder than changing hardware: Pick your software for life, even if your DJ controller is "just for Christmas!"

IT'S THE DJ SOFTWARE THAT WATCHES YOUR EVERY MOVE ON THE MIXING CONTROLS, NOT ONLY THE VOLUMES BUT ALL THE OTHER CONTROLS, AND THEN ALTERS THE AUDIO TO YOUR EXACT INSTRUCTIONS.





SERATO DJ SOFTWARE

SERATO DJ IS A HUGELY POPULAR AND STABLE PLATFORM

for digital DJs. A couple of years ago Serato DJ received a nice high-resolution interface refresh, and its two flavours are now known as Serato DJ Pro and Serato DJ Lite. The music streaming gap left by the now-shuttered platform Pulselocker has also been filled by Tidal and SoundCloud.

Serato doesn't make its own hardware, instead partnering tightly with manufacturers, thus guaranteeing the required amount of quality control over the hardware to ensure great performance. Accordingly, there is simply no such thing as poor jogwheel performance on any Serato-compatible controllers; they all work as tightly as each other, which is to say they are all excellent. So to an extent, any Serato-compatible controller will give you a decent DJing experience, meaning you're really looking at what hardware features are important to you when choosing.

The software is all about usability, meaning you're more tied to what Serato's engineers have decided than with some other platforms (a Midi editor has been added, though). This means that there tend to be fewer

"head scratching" moments when learning and using Serato software. It has a more logical, capable music library system than say, Traktor, and plays more nicely with iTunes/Apple Music (the app, not the streaming service), the software of choice for many DJs when it comes to planning DJ sets.

It also handles non-electronic music better than all the others. Extra effects are available as paid-for add-ons, as is video mixing capability. Meanwhile, the Serato Flip re-editing expansion allows fast, intuitive and genuinely useful re-editing of tunes - on the fly, if desired - that can be saved and recalled for future playback - great fun for attention-challenged DJs who want to make basic but meaningful changes to "finished" recorded music.

Previously, you couldn't spin with Serato DJ without a licensed controller or audio interface plugged in; that's all changed thanks to the Serato Play expansion that gives you the ability to spin with up to four decks using just your keyboard and trackpad.

FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR SERATO



PIONEER DJ DDJ-1000SRT

PIONEER DJ'S DDJ-1000SRT IS BASICALLY the Serato version of its hugely popular DDJ-1000 Rekordbox controller, something much asked for. It doesn't have comprehensive control over Serato, but it does have the Pioneer DJ look and feel straight out of the pro DJ booth that many Serato DJs have hankered for. A huge hit.





2

ROLAND DJ-707M

ROLAND'S DJ-707M IS ONE OF THE MOST insanely powerful Serato DJ controllers ever made, with a huge array of input, output and standalone features never before seen in such a device. And it's small - designed for space-conscious mobile DJs. Niche, for sure, but a very good controller for its intended audience.



3

PIONEER DJ DDJ-SB3

PIONEER DJ MADE A SPLASH WHEN IT INTRODUCED THIS controller in 2018, that had the Pad Scratch feature onboard, also known as the "Jazzy Jeff button". It raised some eyebrows in the scratch community when it was introduced, but it's a good tool for new DJs to learn about scratching on a controller.





4

MIXARS PRIMO

LONGER-TIME READERS WILL RECALL THE VESTAX

controllers such as the VCI-100, VCI-300 and VCI-380. Small, but professionally built and with all the features enthusiast DJs need, they fell from favour in the onslaught of bigger, beefier models that did essentially the same thing. The Mixars Primo is a throwback to that type of controller - and none the worse for it. A connoisseur's controller, if you can find one.

HERCULES STARLIGHT

5

HERCULES' LATEST SERATO DJ CONTROLLER is a tiny two-channel device that's got touch-sensitive jogs, performance pads, bass / filter roll-off knobs and, as the name suggests, onboard lights that pulse in time with the music. A great choice for a micro controller.





TRAKTOR PRO DJ SOFTWARE

TRAKTOR HAS RECEIVED A SHOT IN THE ARM THANKS TO THE release of a string of Traktor Pro 3 updates in the last year. It brings an overhauled audio engine, new single knob Mixer FX, and new hardware in the form of the Traktor Kontrol S4 Mk3, the Traktor Kontrol S2 Mk3, and most recently the Traktor Kontrol S3. While recent updates haven't brought the features revolution that many were hoping for, it's been enough to rekindle the passion of loyal Traktor fans who had been waiting patiently.

TRAKTOR STILL IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR DJ PROGRAMS among the readers of Digital DJ Tips. It's quite complex (many think over-complex), but the flipside of that complexity is that it is capable and customisable to an extent not shared by any other DJ software. The company endured a considerable "wobble" in 2019 with large-scale redundancies and a big question mark over the brand's future, but the ship has been steered, and at least for now, everyone is cautiously optimistic that the worst has passed. Development continues on the next generation Traktor DJ 2 software that the

company says will eventually supersede Traktor Pro, but for now, Traktor Pro continues to soldier on and get the required love from Native Instruments to remain an option for DJs.

IF YOU DECIDE THAT TRAKTOR IS THE WAY TO GO FOR YOU, your choices of controller that are ideal for it are actually quite limited: Native Instruments manufactures its own controllers, and so maybe isn't massively motivated to help other people's controllers work seamlessly with its software. While it is possible to use Traktor with practically any DJ controller (like several DJ software packages, it can be "mapped" to do this, and comes with "mappings" for many popular models), in practice what users tend to find is two things: One, it's harder than they might have wished for to get such pairings to work properly; and, even when they do, the performance is not as good as with Native Instruments' own controller range.

THREE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR TRAKTOR



TRAKTOR KONTROL S4 MK3

NATIVE INSTRUMENTS' BRAND NEW UPDATE TO ITS FLAGSHIP four-channel control comes with motorised Haptic Drive jogwheels that are smooth, silent and feel fantastic to spin on. It's also got onboard effects and Mixer FX controls, onboard deck displays and a streamlined performance pad section. A worthy update to the venerable Traktor Kontrol S4 line.



2

TRAKTOR KONTROL S2 MK3

THE TRAKTOR KONTROL S2 MK3 DOESN'T HAVE THE motorised jogs, onboard displays and comprehensive effects section of its bigger brother, but it's still a capable device that has controls for Traktor Pro 3's Mixer FX. It also retains the streamlined performance pads layout. A solid entry-level controller for beginner DJs, and a good backup for gigging pros.



3

TRAKTOR KONTROL S3



AND THEN WE HAVE THE NEW TRAKTOR KONTROL S3, designed to sit between the two controllers in spots one and two. While it lacks the comprehensive effects controls of the Kontrol S4, it gets four channels, and an Aux input to make it more useful in pro situations. Whether you go for this will depend on whether you need those features over the S2, and whether you can find the extra money for the S4, which is the better bet over this.



REKORDBOX DJ SOFTWARE

THE NEWEST DJ APP ON THE BLOCK, REKORDBOX DJ IS a development by Pioneer DJ of its existing Rekordbox platform, turning Rekordbox from a DJ library/music preparation tool into a fully fledged DJ program, just like Serato DJ Pro and Traktor Pro. There are several reasons why this is important.

FIRSTLY, PIONEER DJ GEAR IS STILL FOUND IN DJ BOOTHS ALL around the world, and its controller range (for other people's software) sells bucketloads, too. Having its own DJ software means the company can offer its own hardware/software solutions, keeping DJs in its own ecosystem.

SECONDLY, THIS SOFTWARE WORKS WITH THE SAME LIBRARY system as Rekordbox, the software used by many pro DJs to prepare their music to play on in DJ booths on Pioneer DJ equipment. That's because it IS Rekordbox - Rekordbox DJ is simply an extension of that software.

THIS IS ACTUALLY A CRUCIAL SELLING POINT, BECAUSE IT means Pioneer DJ can bundle Rekordbox DJ with DJ controllers of its own manufacture to "hook" beginners in, and as those DJs grow into their hobby or career, Pioneer DJ can stay with them. All the work done by DJs on their music while they were DJing with a controller (cue points, comments, analysis etc) is not lost in the "switch" to digital CDJ / DJ booth DJing - something none of the other platforms can offer.

AS A PIECE OF SOFTWARE, IT FEELS LIKE A CROSS BETWEEN Serato and Traktor. It has good FX, four decks, a deep and comprehensive tagging system in the library, a decent sampler and sequencer, and video and DVS control too. Lighting Mode and the ability to play lyric video files are some of the new developments in Rekordbox DJ this past year or two, and at the rate Pioneer DJ adds new features and ships updates (ie very fast), this is definitely one to watch...

FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR REKORDBOX DJ



PIONEER DJ DDJ-400

THIS TWO-CHANNEL CONTROLLER TAKES THE CDJ / DJM
club set-up layout and distills it into a portable device for home use and bar gigs. The deck controls and Beat FX layout help new DJs get up to speed with Pioneer DJ's hardware workflow for easier transition when they start gigging at clubs.

PIONEER DJ DDJ-1000

THE DDJ-1000 IS ONE OF PIONEER DJ'S MOST feature-packed controllers, having two full-size CDJ-style jogwheels with full-colour displays onboard for viewing track details, album art and waveforms. It's also got Beat FX onboard taken from the DJM-900NXS2 mixer. One for gigging pros and those who want an experience that's as close to a CDJ / DJM set-up as possible in a controller.



PIONEER DJ DDJ-800

PIONEER DJ'S DDJ-800 IS ESSENTIALLY THE "CUT DOWN"

version of the DDJ-1000, with more traditional jogwheels and two channels on its mixer, and various other things removed when viewed against the DDJ-1000. Smaller and more portable, for some DJs this will be a good compromise, but the price is not far removed from the more capable DDJ-1000, so many DJs will just find the extra cash and go for the bigger brother.

3



4

PIONEER DJ DDJ-200

A BRAVE LITTLE CONTROLLER, AIMED AT THE SUPER-casual end of the market. The DDJ-200 is small, light, simple, and doesn't even have a sound card, instead coming with a mono splitter cable so DJs can use it with headphones and speakers that way. It is also designed for use primarily with phones and tablets, and with Pioneer DJ's own WeDJ app and third party apps. This is the mobile/streaming option - laptop beginner DJs who own their own music files should go for the DDJ-400 instead.

5





VIRTUAL DJ SOFTWARE

VIRTUAL DJ IS A POWERFUL DIGITAL DJ PLATFORM THAT IS popular with professional and mobile DJs because it's easy to use and is packed with plenty of features. Like Serato DJ, Virtual DJ doesn't make its own hardware controllers and audio interfaces, but it's got the largest gear compatibility list out of all the DJ apps in this guide. That includes controllers made by rival manufacturers that have their own DJ software such as Native Instruments and Pioneer DJ; Virtual DJ's programmers just go ahead and ensure their software works fine with as many controllers as possible.

VIRTUAL DJ IS A PACESETTER WHEN IT COMES TO ADDING new features, and it's often one of the first to add digital DJ innovations. Having received a hefty update (the version at the time of writing is called Virtual DJ 2020) the latest version of the app focuses on fresh updates for VJs and those who spin with visuals, as well as bolstering its livestreaming features such as having streaming-specific skins baked in for more engaging livestreams. Currently, Virtual DJ is the only laptop DJ app that lets you

stream from multimedia content libraries that include music, video, and karaoke files.

IT'S ALSO GOT SOME ADVANCED FEATURES THAT OTHER apps in this list don't have such as cloud-based track recommendations, in-app editors that let you work with your music at a deeper level, and even a special Sandbox mode that lets you "audition" how a mix sounds before you actually execute the transition during a performance.

IF YOU CHOOSE VIRTUAL DJ, IT'S WORTH CHECKING OUT HOW much a licence for your DJ controller costs - Virtual DJ has different prices depending on what gear you'd like to use it with, ranging from US\$49 to US\$199. You can also choose to subscribe to it at US\$19/month, which lets you use it with all compatible hardware, or pay a one-time US\$299 fee. If you want access to the streaming catalogues, you'll also need to pay a monthly fee for each that you plan on using.

FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR VIRTUAL DJ



1

RELOOP TOUCH

THE RELOOP TOUCH IS A FOUR-CHANNEL DJ CONTROLLER FOR Virtual DJ 2020 that comes with a large seven-inch touchscreen capable of displaying up to four virtual decks. That means you can see what you're playing without having to stare at your laptop while you mix. It's got two jogwheels, eight performance pads per deck, three band EQs with filters on each channel, and two Fader FX Unit sections that are comprised of four faders each. The touchscreen can even display video for when you're mixing visuals or video clips, and it can also be used for controlling effects, browsing through your library, and managing playlists.



2 NUMARK NS6II

THE NUMARK NS6II IS A REVAMPED VERSION OF THE ORIGINAL NS6. It comes with two USB sockets for plugging in up to two laptops for back to back sets and switchovers, two high-resolution in-jog displays, and touch-sensitive knobs. The performance pads have switchable modes that give you quick access to hot cues, loop functions, a sampler and a slicer. The NS6II also functions as a standalone mixer for routing DJ media players and turntables without a laptop.



PIONEER DJ DDJ-1000

WHILE VIRTUAL DJ WORKS WITH PRETTY much any DJ controllers out there, we've included this one as an example because it's one of the most popular DJ controllers right now, and because it demonstrates how well Virtual DJ's engineers get third-party units working with their software, something evident by the implementation of the DDJ-1000's jogwheel screens here.





HERCULES DJCONTROL INPULSE 300

THIS TWO-CHANNEL CONTROLLER LOOKS MORE mature and “serious” compared to Hercules’ quirkier designs, but it’s still got a raft of features aimed at beginner and casual DJs like the Beatmatch Guide and Intelligent Music Assistant that make it approachable.

5

NUMARK DJ2GO2

NUMARK’S TINY DJ2GO2 CONTROLLER IS ONE OF the smallest on the market. You get two small jogwheels, a mixer section with a crossfader, pitch controls and some cue point buttons for spinning wherever, whenever.



OTHER LAPTOP DJ SOFTWARE: TWO TO TRY

MOST LAPTOP/CONTROLLER DJS USE ONE

of the packages above, but they're not the end of the story. There are lots of other DJ software programs out there, and just because they don't have the same user base as the "big boys", doesn't mean that they're not worth a look.

Nearly all DJ controllers are "Midi mappable", meaning you can attach them to your computer, load any of the following pieces of software, and "map" your software to "learn" the knobs and buttons of your existing controller. That way, you could try out any of these programs even if your controller was sold to you for use with something else.

Sure, there's work involved, but there's a great user-driven mapping site over at DJ store, [DJ TechTools](#), where you can download and share mappings made by others and by you. Even easier, many controllers already work "out of the box" with the programs below, because the program developers have done the mapping for you. The best place to check this out is the manufacturer websites of each of the following DJ programs.

DJAY PRO 2

EASILY ONE OF THE BEST LOOKING DJ APPS, DJAY PRO 2

for mac is also powerful, packing more and more features "just under the hood", in much the same way as other Apple-specific software, "keeps it simple" for users, but has a lot of power once you start digging. It works on Mac and PC laptops, and it packs contemporary features like cloud-syncing of your music library, AI-powered Automix, Spotify streaming, a pad sampler and sequencer, and support for DJ controllers as well as media players and DVS.



?



MIXXX

MIXXX IS A FREE, OPEN SOURCE DJ APP that's got all the basic digital DJ features you'd expect in a piece of modern DJ software. It's got four deck control, support for multiple audio files including lossless FLAC, sampler decks, the ability to create custom FX chains, and the ability to broadcast your mix online. You can even use it with a DVS and Midi gear for hands-on control.

FIVE OF THE BEST DJ LAPTOPS

LAPTOPS ARE THE HEART OF YOUR DIGITAL

DJ system. It's where you download and manage your music library and, if you decide to spin with a laptop in the DJ booth, it's what your DJ software will run on. Whether you end up spinning with media players and thumb drives or DJ controllers and DVS, your laptop will be an integral part of your set-up and it's advisable to get the best one that fits your budget. Things to look out for will be its processor (quadcore is the current standard), onboard RAM (nothing lower than 8GB), hard drive space and operating system. Almost all DJ apps are cross-platform these days, so it's up to you to decide whether you want to take the Mac or the Windows route.

1

—



APPLE MACBOOK PRO 16

The creme de la creme of Apple's laptop line boasts an eight-core Intel i9 processor, 16GB of RAM and a whopping 1TB of space. That's enough power for DJing, producing and even editing video.



2

DELL XPS

DELL'S POPULAR XPS LINE GOT A refresh this past year that brings a new OLED display, an Intel i9 processor and up to 32GB of onboard RAM. A beast of a Windows machine that can handle even the toughest of DJ/producer work, including music production and video (from US\$1099)

MICROSOFT SURFACE LAPTOP 3

3

THE TOUCH-ENABLED SURFACE LAPTOP COMES IN 13.5" and 15" models and are equipped with quad-core Intel i5 chips and up to 16GB of RAM. (from US\$899)





4

HP SPECTRE 13

HP'S SLICK SPECTRE LAPTOP NOW comes with an OLED display with thin bezels and comes in at just 1.30kg. You also get Intel i7 chip, up to 16GB of RAM and up to 1TB of storage.

APPLE MACBOOK AIR

THE 2019 REFRESH OF APPLE'S "fits inside a manila envelope" laptop gets a spec bump that makes it even more capable of dealing with the rigours of DJing. It's now got an Intel i5 chip, 8GB RAM and up to 256GB of storage.

5



THREE OF THE BEST STAND ALONE SYSTEMS

SO IF YOU'VE BEEN PAYING ATTENTION, you'll have figured out that standalone systems are on the up. Nowadays the best of these systems feel very much like using a DJ controller with software, and also packs most of the same features. It can feel liberating DJing on a unit like this if you've been using a laptop to DJ from for a while - and you may just like it! We think that for mainstream adoption, the next year or two will be the tipping point - but if you're ready to plunge now, here are our best three recommendations.



DENON DJ PRIME 4

Denon DJ's Prime 4 standalone DJ system has been a revelation. With a powerful CPU built in, it has taken what this type of DJ set-up can do to a whole new level. It can analyse music fast "on the fly" for key, beatgrids and so on, it has the ability to stream over WiFi, it has pretty much all of the performance functions of a decent controller, it has four genuine standalone "decks", can work with a built-in hard drive, works with Serato if you do want to use a laptop - the list goes on. The current cream of the crop in this category.



PIONEER DJ XDJ-XZ

PIONEER DJ'S XDJ-XZ HAS A LOT GOING FOR IT. IT IS classic "Pioneer" in look and feel, with full-sized pro jogwheels and an awesome mixer with flagship hardware FX built in. As a standalone controller it is only two channel, so best thought of as being like the XDJ-RX2, our number 3, but with two extra mixer channels for external devices or software control (it works as a software controller for Rekordbox DJ and Serato too, for when you do want to use it with a laptop).



PIONEER DJ XDJ-RX2

THE PIONEER DJ XDJ-RX2 IS A RIGHTFULLY POPULAR standalone system with all most DJs will ever need, including mobile DJs. Two channels, the same screen as the XDJ-XZ, performance pads, perfectly usable jogwheels - it's the sweet spot between a controller and a club system. It has onboard Color FX from the DJM-900NXS2 mixer (Dub Echo, Sweep, Filter, and Noise) plus a parameter knob for added tweaking.



FIVE OF THE BEST DJ MEDIA PLAYERS

THIS TYPE OF EQUIPMENT IS DESCENDED FROM STANDALONE

DJ CD players, the type that replaced record decks in DJ booths almost completely back at the turn of the century. As digital DJing took hold, they were first used by laptop DJs via digital vinyl systems (DVS), with special "timecode" CDs and audio interfaces - and indeed, some DJs still DJ like this to this day.

However, DJ media players quickly developed further, adding USB sockets so DJs could bypass the CD slots entirely. Nowadays, the best of them play perfectly with laptops and DJ software via direct connections, and have amazing screens and features, making a pair of them - alongside a digital DJ mixer - effectively a huge (and expensive) DJ controller. The CD slot is becoming optional, too!



DENON DJ SC5000 PRIME

DENON DJ'S SC5000 PRIME IS A BEAST OF A MEDIA PLAYER, packing loads of power and next-gen features that leave its competition in the dust. It has a touchscreen onboard that has multitouch, and has a unique dual layer feature that lets you play two songs simultaneously from just one unit. It also features eight multifunction trigger pads for expressive hot cues, loops, slices and roll playback. A serious contender for the professional / club DJ booth crown currently owned by Pioneer DJ's CDJ-2000NXS2 media player.





9

PIONEER DJ CDJ-2000NXS2

THE CURRENT CLUB KING, THIS IS THE PLAYER YOU'LL find in the best DJ booths worldwide. It works with files straight from USB, CDs, Rekordbox analysed files on USB, plus with Rekordbox DJ software, Serato DJ software, and Traktor Pro software. It has a great, large touchscreen display, and an industry standard look, feel and layout - not surprising because it is the industry standard. It's prohibitively expensive for home use, though.



DENON DJ SC5000M PRIME



THIS DEVICE HAS ALL THE GOOD STUFF FOUND ON the SC5000 Prime including the touchscreen and extensive performance controls, but it replaces the jogwheel with a 7" rotating vinyl platter jog that gives you an authentic turntable feel. One for scratch and battle DJs who want a contemporary media player that feels as close to a turntable as possible.





PIONEER DJ XDJ-700

4

THIS IS A SMALL, SHALLOW MEDIA PLAYER THAT HAS A built-in stand to raise it to standard height. Like the XDJ-1000MK2 below it drops the CD slot, but makes up for that with thoroughly modern features - it has slip mode, sync, and a large colour touchscreen. You can even load tunes over WiFi.



PIONEER DJ XDJ-1000MK2

5

THIS DIGITAL-ONLY PLAYER BUILDS ON THE ORIGINAL XDJ-1000 by including library browsing features like Track Filter and Track Matching, both of which are inherited from the flagship CDJ-2000NXS2 media player. It sports the same touchscreen as the CDJ-2000NXS2, and comes with support for high resolution FLAC and ALAC lossless music files.



FIVE OF THE BEST DJ MIXERS

DJ MIXERS WERE TRADITIONALLY THE CENTRE “PART” OF EVERY
DJ set-up, and still are away from the controller world and in practically every DJ booth in the world. Nowadays, mixers can work with digital-friendly media players, resulting in a kind of hybrid “software controller plus hardware mixer”

model - DVS without the timecode, if you like. Mixers offer DJs a versatility not found in even the very best DJ controllers, and are still very much a part of today’s DJ climate.



PIONEER DJ DJM-900NXS2

THE FLAGSHIP REPLACEMENT FOR THE DJM-900NXS, THE
DJM-900NXS2 is evolution rather than revolution. That said, some of the changes are pretty big: twin USBs, much improved FX, and the frankly awesome USB FX send/returns are the technological improvements that most jump out. As part of a bigger set-up with a pair of CDJ-2000NXS2 players it clearly represents the ultimate Rekordbox DJ system - but one that does come at a considerable premium.





DENON DJ X1800 PRIME

THE DENON DJ X1800 PRIME IS THE COMPANION MIXER to the SC5000 Prime media players, and it's a robust four-channel mixer that's got onboard FX, a 24-bit / 96kHz sound card, and the ability to sync with the SC5000 Prime players for tightly locked tempo-based effects. A solid offering by Denon DJ that's at the heart of the entire Prime set-up.

3

RANE SEVENTY-TWO

RANE'S LATEST FLAGSHIP BATTLE MIXER has a high-resolution screen onboard for viewing Serato DJ's waveforms, performance pads, fader contour controls, and knobs and buttons for Serato's FX. It makes for an impressive set-up when flanked by a pair of Rane Twelve controllers, but it can be used with turntables and other media players too. One for digital battle DJs who want nothing but the best.





4

RELOOP ELITE

RELOOP ELITE IS A PREMIUM TWO-channel mixer for Serato. It sounds great, it has all the functions you'd expect from a mixer at this end of the market, and it pairs really nicely with Reloop's decks, of which the RP8000Mk2s are particularly innovative. The built-in FX aren't quite up to Pioneer standard for our ears, but they're pretty good. It's also quite a bit cheaper than its closest competition, the Pioneer DJ DJM-S9 (a mixer we also recommend).



5

NUMARK SCRATCH

THE NUMARK SCRATCH MIXER HAS a built-in audio interface, also designed to use with Serato as a DVS mixer – although it works fine as a standalone DJ mixer too. Simple, nicely done, and loads of fun, and the quality is there where it counts. Sure it makes compromises, but none of them are dealbreakers, and it opens scratching with Serato up to a whole new sector of the market, as it's by far the cheapest mixer in this line-up.



TOP FIVE PRODUCTION KIT FOR DJS

FOR MANY DJS TODAY, "DJ/PRODUCER"

is the aspiration, not just "DJ". It's not surprising: DJ/producers who get even just one track into the dance charts can look forward to gigs in other cities and internationally, and from there, who knows? A successful production is like a business card, and it can open doors like nothing else. If your ambitions are beyond a residency in your local club, or running a small DJ business where you live, producing music is pretty much a necessity in 2020.

Luckily, it's also easier than ever to produce. Using software like Ableton Live, and spending some time to learn the basics (our [Music Production For DJs](#) course has helped thousands of DJs get their first tracks made...), it's possible to apply all you've learned as a DJ relatively easily to producing, and make dancefloor-devastating tunes for far less outlay than was the case even five or ten years ago.

And actually, you don't really need any gear at all apart from good headphones/speakers and the laptop you already own to start producing... but the five devices we've listed here will make your music production exploits more fun and easier.

PUSH 2

Ableton's own Push 2 controller is still the most premium device you can get for clip launching and music composition using a pad controller. The RGB backlit velocity-sensitive pads and the onboard OLED display make performing intuitive and enjoyable, meaning you spend less time glancing at your computer. Ableton Live 10 makes the Push 2 even more powerful, and remains to be the top-shelf choice for dedicated Live performers.



MASCHINE MK3

Native Instruments' latest Maschine offering has a sleek new look with bigger performance pads, a touch strip, and eight touch-sensitive knobs. The biggest new feature is the onboard audio interface: Maschine MK3 now has a pair of ¼" line outputs, ¼" line inputs, Midi In and Out jacks, a ¼" headphone output, and a Midi input jack for connecting a footswitch. Great for DJ/producers who want to create music with a groovebox or pad-style controller.



3



UNIVERSAL AUDIO APOLLO X4

4



NATIVE INSTRUMENTS KOMPLETE 12

5



SERATO STUDIO

Universal Audio put out a solid desktop interface for DJ/producers who want even more inputs and outputs compared to its more compact Apollo Twin Mk2. This time, you get four Unison-enabled preamps, two headphone outputs, and four line outputs and a pair of speaker outputs. A beast that sits comfortably in the heart of any home studio, and even on the road.

Native Instruments' beast of a music production suite packs a ton of soft synths, plugins and sample libraries, and with four different configurations to choose from, NI's esteemed music production bundle is better than ever. Pair it with a Midi keyboard like the Komplete Kontrol S49 Mk2 or the just-released Komplete Kontrol A-Series and you've got a turnkey soft synth studio solution with hands-on control.

Beatmaking for DJs, by DJs. It doesn't get any simpler and easier than this! We love using it to make quick DJ edits and also to come up with beats since it comes with great sounds built in. It also now has audio tracks, and you can buy it outright if you wish (there was resistance to the "subscription model" Serato was implementing solely with this software).

FIVE OF THE BEST IOS & ANDROID DJ APPS

TABLET AND SMARTPHONE DJING HOLDS LOTS OF APPEAL FOR A WIDE RANGE OF people. From true “dabblers” (after all, the apps are really cheap - once you own a tablet, of course), to “serious” DJs wanting a second system, to people who simply need something compact that they can use anywhere, as the storage space in tablets has risen along with their capabilities, today’s models can match laptops in all the areas that count.

And with Android software and hardware finally becoming available alongside iOS versions, that’s a whole new (and potentially the largest) sector of users about to discover how easy it can be to DJ - and DJ well - on a small, handheld touchscreen device...



DJAY (FOR IOS)

ALGORIDDIM'S DJAY FOR IOS SQUEEZES IN A TON OF features, functionality and power into an app made for the iPad and iPhone. It's got four deck mixing, Spotify integration, and AI Automixing built in. If you subscribe to the djay Pro upgrade, you then get the ability to mix video in high-resolution 4K, and you get access to the brand new Looper feature that lets you trigger loops and sounds while you spin. It's compatible with the iPad Pro's Smart Keyboard, and if you'd like to spin with actual jogwheels, it works with controllers like the Reloop Mixon 4 and Pioneer DJ DDJ-WeGO4 and you can now map it to any Midi controller using the Midi Learn feature.



DJ PLAYER PRO (IOS ONLY)

DJ PLAYER PRO IS A MAVERICK IPAD DJ PROGRAM, majoring in the fact that it's written from the ground up in-house by the software company. They claim that means the best sound quality, best responsiveness, lowest latency, smoothest response, and overall, the most “pro” DJing experience on iOS. It also supports most timecode vinyl formats, for scratching, and the Native Instruments Stems format, for DJing with constituent parts of tracks. One for the specialists, then, but worth a look.

3



WEDJ 2 IPHONE & ANDROID

PIONEER DJ'S FORAY INTO IOS DJING COMES IN THE FORM OF

WeDJ, a two-channel app for iPhone & Android. It's got a simple interface at first blush, but it has plenty of mixing power if and when you want it: you can access hot cues, Pad FX, X-Y pad effects, and even a sampler via menus that you toggle on and off. WeDJ is also compatible with certain Pioneer DJ controllers including the DDJ-200 if you want tactile control while you mix.

4



TRAKTOR DJ 2 (IOS)

TRAKTOR DJ 2 IS THE NEXT GENERATION OF TRAKTOR, WHICH

will eventually be available on Mac, PC, Android and iOS. For now, the iOS version has SoundCloud integration, built-in song recommendations and all the essentials - although at the moment this is definitely a stripped-down app compared to "full strength" Traktor Pro.

5



MIXFADER DJ (IOS & ANDROID)

MIXFADER DJ IS THE COMPANION IOS / ANDROID APP TO THE

Mixfader wireless crossfader. It lets you scratch and spin on your smartphone or tablet connected to the Mixfader via Bluetooth for portability or scratch sessions on the go. The app lets you access thousands of beats and loops for you to scratch over, and you can record your performance within the app. You can even scratch using a timecode vinyl and a turntable connected to your smartphone or tablet.

THREE OF THE BEST DJ CONTROLLERS FOR IOS & ANDROID

HOOKING IOS & ANDROID STUFF UP TO DJ CONTROLLERS WAS

until recently a bit of a Wild West, same way hooking laptops up to DJ controllers was 10 years ago. If you're a geek with time to spare this was all fine, even fun, but for everyone else? You just want it to work, right? So here we've listed five DJ controllers that do just that - work.

To achieve this they all have a couple of crucial things in common. Firstly, they are Apple certified. (This is still mainly an iOS world; only one of these - the

Reloop Beatpad 2 - works with Android natively.) That means they come with a lead to plug them into your tablet or smartphone. Pretty basic, but don't take it for granted with all gear sold as "iOS compatible"! Sometimes, you need to jump through hoops just to achieve this. Secondly, they can all charge your device. (Again, don't take this as read with all gear.) Only thing left for you to check is that the controller you're choosing comes with the correct lead to fit your tablet or smartphone.



RELOOP MIXON 4

IF YOU WANT THE MOST "PRO" EXPERIENCE

possible DJing with your iPad, right up to the iPad Pro, the Reloop Mixon 4 has it. Four channel mixer, great jogs and pads, decent pro-quality metal construction, and a built-in iPad stand that works right up to the size of the iPad Pro - it's all here. As a bonus, it comes with Serato DJ in the box, so you have a choice of platforms to use. Highly recommended.





2

RELOOP BEATPAD 2

BUILT TO A HIGH STANDARD IN METAL, with a handy slot for positioning your iPad at the back of it (it is in fact compatible with all iOS devices), and designed to work with Algoriddim's djay software, this is the most "pro" iOS DJ controller yet. Performance-wise, Steve Canueto, our scratch tutor, described the jogwheel control as "outstanding". The Beatpad 2 takes iOS DJing to a new level, and is the only controller here that works with Android, too (again, djay).



TRAKTOR KONTROL S2 MK3

FOR DJING WITH THE "NEXT GEN" TRAKTOR DJ 2 FOR IOS, the Kontrol S2 Mk3 is a great choice. It has an iOS socket on the back for easy plugging in of your iPad, although there is no built-in stand, so you'll need to figure out how to prop the iPad up. Its stripped-down feature set complements the minimalistic feel of Traktor DJ 2, as well, and together they make up a neat little DJ system.



3



TOP FIVE TURNTABLES FOR DJS

WHETHER TO USE IN A DVS SYSTEM, TO LEARN TO SCRATCH “how it’s always been done”, to rip vinyl, or even for true old-school “vinyl only” DJing, turntables aren’t going away. Sure they’re still niche, and sure they won’t be a purchase for most DJs - but they’re definitely still a “thing”. Here are our favourites.



AUDIO TECHNICA AT-LP1240XP

A PROPER HEAVYWEIGHT TURNTABLE AND GREAT VALUE FOR money at the “pro” end - built for use anywhere, and also optimised for scratch DJs and the “90 degree” layout they prefer, thanks to its second start/stop button.



NUMARK NTX1000

YOU GET A LOT FOR YOUR MONEY WITH THIS SEMI-PRO turntable, which is from the same stable as the much more expensive Denon DJ VL12 (which we also recommend). This is the cheapest turntable we recommend if you want something that’ll last.

3

RELOOP RP-8000MK2



WE'RE INCLUDING THIS AS IT INNOVATES IN WHAT IS USUALLY
a pretty conservative area of DJ gear. Half performance turntable, half Serato DJ controller, it has built in pads, and an awesome analogue pitch scratch mode that nobody else has.



5

4

STANTON T.92 MK2 USB



A GREAT VALUE TURNTABLE WITH FUNKY LOOKS AND THAT
has the added advantage of straight-to-laptop ripping via its USB output. Solid, even for use in public (where many cheaper turntables tend to show their weaknesses).

TECHNICS SL1200/1210 (MK2/MK7)

WHAT TURNTABLE ROUNDUP COULDN'T INCLUDE TECHNICS?
But the truth is that the new lightweight SL1200/1210Mk7 is a disappointment in real world use (although very nice for home use), due to feedback issues. If you can find a pair of the old Mk2s, though, they'll last you a lifetime.

FIVE TIPS FOR BUYING AND SETTING UP YOUR FIRST CONTROLLER

HOPEFULLY YOU'RE NOW AT THE STAGE of choosing between two or three models. This is of course where you can spend days, weeks even reading every review online, getting "analysis paralysis" when you could be DJing. Don't let that be you. It's time to choose!

To save you pain, I want you to bear the following "smart buyer" tips in mind. They'll help you choose fast and well, then get going without missing a beat.

THIS IS OF COURSE WHERE YOU CAN SPEND DAYS, WEEKS EVEN READING EVERY REVIEW ONLINE, GETTING "ANALYSIS PARALYSIS"

1 BUY A CONTROLLER THAT'S MADE FOR THE SOFTWARE YOU WANT TO USE

PREVIOUSLY I SPOKE ABOUT THE "WILD WEST" IN IOS and Android DJing until recently. Well not so long back, it was actually like that in laptop DJing: Lots of technically advanced but very user-unfriendly products with scant instruction manuals, convoluted set-up processes, extra drivers and firmware updates needed, patches for different operating systems, and often next to no advice how to get your choice of software working with your choice of controller. Luckily in the last few years manufacturers have wised up, and the best controller/software combinations today are tightly integrated and easy to set up and use. They're the ones we've covered in this guide. Step outside of the manufacturers' intentions for their gear by all means, but if you do, expect extra steps, head-scratching, and mucho late-night forum delving. You have been warned...

2 FACTOR IN THE COST OF THE "PRO" VERSION OF THE SOFTWARE

IF YOUR HARDWARE OF CHOICE COMES WITH "LE", "INTRO" or "lite" software, it is not the full package. Things like various effects, loops, recording, and more will be disabled or absent. The idea is you can get going with such software, but you're going to want to upgrade to the pro version soon enough. So factor in the cost of doing this: The cheaper the DJ controller, the more likely it is to come with one of these cut-down versions of the software. Getting rarer nowadays.

3

READ THE MANUAL CAREFULLY, ESPECIALLY THE SET- UP INSTRUCTIONS

Even the easiest-to-use DJ controller needs a modicum of setting up. You may need a driver for your PC, you may need to set some audio routing. You'll possibly need to change a few general settings so it all works smoothly. You may need a reboot or two even. But nowadays, instruction manuals are pretty good - if you bother to read them, that is. Judging by our forums and email inbox here, many people don't, and go through hours or days of struggle because of it. Read it, read it again, and read it again if you have to - the answers are in there, and knowing what everything does on your controller is the first step to conquering it.

4

DON'T SWEAT YOUR CHOICE!

I know the pain of choosing a DJ set-up. People think things like "if I don't choose right, I won't learn right, I won't get good!", or "the reason my friend is good is that he's got a better controller than me". But just as photographers will tell you a smartphone camera in the right hands is better than a DSLR in the hands of a goon, same with DJ gear. Every single controller in these pages is great for learning on, and every single controller can sound fantastic. Put any of them in the biggest club in the world in the right hands and nobody in the place would ever know it wasn't the club's usual gear being used. Plus here's another truth: There will always be someone looking down on you, whatever you buy! You can't avoid it - it's just the price of progress that vinyl and CD DJs will tell you you're playing with toys. Trust me - you're not. Next...

5

GET SOME DJ TRAINING

We review a lot of gear, and the manual writers, God bless 'em, do a great job of explaining features - but they're not very good at telling you how to use them. Often after 20 pages of what everything does, they may attempt a short "your first mix" section. It usually says something like "get two tunes playing, use the crossfader to move smoothly from one to the next". Great! Off you go...

Seriously, DJing comes easy to some, but most benefit massively from being shown the basics (and the not so basics later on). Best person to show you is someone who has been there and done it; if you have any friends who DJ, time to blag some free lessons from them! Of course, we've got loads of courses too, and our [The Complete DJ Course](#) course has helped thousands of absolute beginners master the basics. You can find out about this course and all of our others on our courses page at [digitaldjtips.com/courses](#).

SEVEN EXTRAS EVERY CONTROLLER DJ NEEDS

SO THE SHOPPING CART'S OPEN, YOU'RE in the [Amazon store](#) or wherever, and you're ready to hit "buy now". Before you do though, time to think about the other bits and pieces you'll need to finish your set-up. Two pieces of good news here: First, you probably have some of them already, and second, you don't need much. Here's what you've got to have covered:

SPEAKERS

HAVE YOU GOT A HOME CINEMA SYSTEM? HI-FI? 2.1 SYSTEM FOR GAMING?

Loud portable speaker? Yes? As long as you can have that in the room you want to DJ in, you're sorted. Your controller can plug into that. (You'll need a cable, though. Don't use Bluetooth. There's a delay, see? DJs don't like delays.) Still want to buy something? On a budget, go for a loud twin satellites-plus-woofer gaming computer speaker system - the Logitech type stuff. Bit more? I love Pioneer DJ's DM-40s. More? Look at the Rokit range from KRK (you'll need two, they're sold separately), or Reloop's Wave speaker pairs. These are all "powered" meaning you don't need separate amplifiers. Oh, and don't use them for parties. You'll blow all of the above if you do, sooner or later. Rent a PA, or use someone else's speakers (I didn't tell you the last bit).



KRK'S ROKIT RANGE IS A POPULAR CHOICE FOR A HOME DJ STUDIO, BUT DON'T DISCOUNT ANY SPEAKERS YOU ALREADY HAVE - THEY MAY WELL BE UP TO THE JOB.

THE PIONEER DJ HDJ-X10 IS OUR CURRENT FAVOURITE HERE AT DIGITAL DJ TIPS BECAUSE IT BLENDS GREAT SOUND WITH COMFORT AND SUPERIOR NOISE ISOLATION.

2



HEADPHONES

MORE IMPORTANT THAN SPEAKERS, HEADPHONES ARE

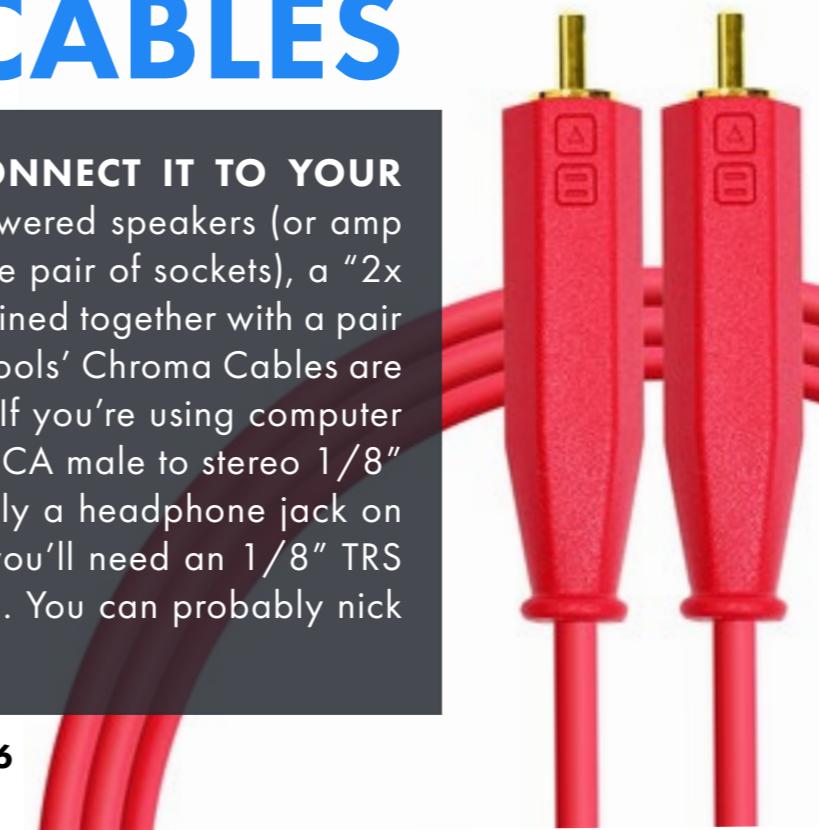
absolute essentials for any DJ. They need to be able to cover your ears to isolate you from ambient noise, be durable, and be loud. Traditionally, DJs have flocked to the Sennheiser HD-25 II, and we hear very good things about the V-Moda Crossfade LP. Our current favourite at the Digital DJ Tips office is the Pioneer DJ HDJ-X10 which sounds fantastic and is comfortable enough to be used for hours on end. Coiled cables are preferred by most DJs (you don't trip on them as easily), and detachable cables mean you can replace them if they break.

CABLES

YOUR CONTROLLER WILL COME WITH A USB CABLE TO CONNECT IT TO YOUR

computer, but you'll need cables to connect its audio output to your powered speakers (or amp and speakers). If your speakers have "RCA connectors" (a red and white pair of sockets), a "2x RCA male to 2x RCA male" cable will do; it will usually have two wires joined together with a pair of sockets on each end, red and white, for right and left channel. DJ Techtools' Chroma Cables are awesome and durable, plus they come in different colours and lengths. If you're using computer speakers that have an 1/8" TRS socket for an input, you'll need a "2x RCA male to stereo 1/8" TRS male" cable. If your computer speakers are the cheap type with only a headphone jack on them that's meant to be plugged in to a computer headphones socket, you'll need an 1/8" TRS female to 2x RCA male lead. Buy one longer than you think you'll need. You can probably nick one from your Dad's old stereo in the garage anyway.

3



THE MINIMUM YOU'LL NEED IS A CABLE TO GO FROM YOUR CONTROLLER TO YOUR POWERED SPEAKERS OR AMPLIFIER AND SPEAKER. THE USB CABLES FOR THE COMPUTER ALWAYS COME WITH THE CONTROLLERS, THOUGH.



PORTRABLE SPEAKER

WHILE YOUR “STUDIO” OR “MAIN” SPEAKERS WILL BE GREAT FOR practising at home, you’re often going to want to listen to your DJ sets, your streaming service, or even do a bit of DJing with your controller (especially if you choose a small one, or DJ from some iOS software) away from those speakers. Enter your portable speaker. Chances are high you’ll buy a Bluetooth one, which is great, but just make sure it has a Line In so you can plug a cable into it from your DJ set-up when needed; Bluetooth can have a delay on the signal making the gap between what you “do” on your gear and what you hear noticeable, and highly annoying! We like this little Minirig 3 speaker, as it’s well-built, loud and feature-packed.

THE MINIRIG IS
WELL-BUILT, LOUD &
FEATURE-PACKED

4

STAND

LAPTOPS NEED RAISING IDEALLY FROM their “sitting position” at the table you’ll no doubt be setting your gear up on, so a laptop stand is pretty much an essential, especially if your eyes struggle at all reading your computer screen. We are particular fans of the Magma Traveler model.





TRANSPARENT PLASTIC COVER

THIS TYPE OF SNUGLY FITTING PLASTIC LID IS A GREAT IDEA BOTH FOR COVERING

your controller up at home when you're not using it, and for putting over it when you stash it in its bag, case or backpack to travel with. These polycarbonate cases protect the knobs, faders and switches from accidentally getting bent in transit or worse, as well as keeping the dust out in-between times. The biggest name in the game is Decksaver.



6

BAG, CASE OR BACKPACKS

YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO BE CARRYING YOUR DJ GEAR around in a plastic bag, in the box it came in, or even worse, under your arm. And nowadays, you don't have to. All the manufacturers of bags and cases - names like, Magma, UDG and more - now have "budget" no frills cases, with models that go all the way up to all singing, all dancing trolleys, backpacks and even "true" hard cases made of plywood and aluminium. For most, a mid-range backpack or shoulder bag will suffice.

A DECENT DJ BAG WILL PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT AND WITH MODELS FROM BASIC (AND CHEAP) UP TO PRO DJ BACKPACKS AND TROLLEYS, THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE.



FINALLY...

DIGITAL DJ TIPS EXISTS TO INFORM, ENTERTAIN AND EDUCATE the modern generation of DJs. Our guides, website and seminars at DJ shows are all designed to help DJs get started in this game, either as a great hobby or to earn a part-time or even a full time income. But did you know we are also the biggest online DJ school in the world, with over 23,000 students in 163 countries having taken our courses? We have over 20 online training courses covering all aspects of DJing, mixing and music production, from beginner to pro. [Check out all our online DJ courses here.](#)

For instance, our popular [The Complete DJ Course course](#) has tons of practical advice on choosing a digital DJ controller, and it's also the best way to get a flying start with your new controller. It's sold many thousands of copies and helped countless DJs to get from complete beginner to first gig - fast!

To make sure you're getting the latest DJ news and opinion first, be sure to join Global DJ Network, the private Facebook Group for our Digital DJ Tips community. It's the perfect place to hangout and meet DJ friends, ask for help, get advice, talk DJing, post gear pics and talk about gigs - and it's FREE to join! [Click here to join Global DJ Network.](#)

If you have any questions please either email us at info@digitaldjtips.com, or reach out to us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#).



Take The DJ Test

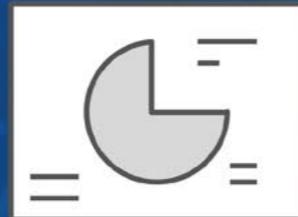
Discover Your DJ Score - How Well Will You Do?

1.



TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO
ANSWER YES/NO QUESTIONS

2.



FIND OUT IMMEDIATELY
HOW YOU'VE SCORED

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