

RISING STARS



THE NEW MIX(ERS)

Six DJs driving the scene as artists, remixers, producers, label owners and nightlife catalysts gather at Halo Lounge

BY AMY FLURRY PHOTOGRAPHS BY MALI AZIMA

MAKEUP BY SHIRLEY GLOVER/NARS PRODUCT SPECIALIST



Electric slide. Jeff Myers, right, spins Chicago-influenced dance-floor funk and Salaah Swan, left, is a veteran radio DJ.

Before Dylan Eiland became a budding star of the indie-electro club circuit—before he launched his own production alias, Le Castle Vania, before he was invited to open for celebrity DJ Steve Aoki in Los Angeles and booked to headline some of the hottest parties at South by Southwest, before hipster clothing lines started sending him boxes of freebies and *URB* magazine included him among the “Next 100” artists to watch—he was, like his other friends, throwing impromptu house parties, DJing at raves, and occasionally hosting dance-rock nights at clubs around Atlanta. He even had designs on a 9-to-5, flirting with a career as a hair stylist.

But about a year and a half ago, Eiland, who had regular DJing gigs in Los Angeles, returned home from a short trip and was asked to remix a track by the local indie band Snowden. He sent his Le Castle Vania remix of Snowden’s “Black Eyes” to a few DJ friends back in L.A. and in New York, and it was leaked online. Within a week, the song was playing on both coasts and that month promoters from spots as far-flung as Sydney and Tijuana were phoning to book him.

“Put simply, it’s a fusion of indie rock styles with electronic dance music,” he explains. “It’s music for people who are into the rock scene, but with more of a party vibe. There’s crowd surfing and stage diving. It’s happening right here.”

DJs like Eiland are setting the city’s pulse, putting down the beat at clubs, restaurants, promo parties, celebrity birthdays, and fashion events. They are influencing what we groove to and how we party here in

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"About eight years ago I was DJing in Amsterdam and Berlin and they weren't playing a 'down South' set," says Tayari McIntosh, who goes by the moniker DJ Trauma. "I was playing Lil Jon and others, and when I returned home I had e-mails asking what else was coming out of Atlanta. By 2004, after Usher's "Yeah, Yeah!" broke internationally, there were whole 'down South' sets in these same places."

But the ever-changing topography of the new music landscape—file sharing, online networking pages like MySpace, photo and music blogs—as well as the new style-setter status of DJs has also given way to a rush of iPod interlopers attempting to command the dance floor.

"Today everyone's a DJ" says Salaah Swan, 33, whose tenure as a radio personality in the mid-nineties for Georgia State's student-run station WRAS sparked her interest in stepping behind the turntable. The self-taught Swan, AKA DJ Boom Bip, eventually began mixing on-air, and after graduating, segued to producing her own show at community radio station WRFG for five years and DJing in clubs and at private parties.

"But not everyone can cut and scratch or hold a blend," she says, with much of the deep house only available on vinyl. "Not everyone can play three hours of all house, or three hours of all reggae or three hours of all '80s. And try as they might, they all can't catch that beat. It gets away from them."

Like many in her cohort, Swan sees much of Atlanta's club scene more and more circumscribed by the radio. "I think it used to be more open, you could get away playing a house set on the main floor of a club or old school without having to touch on radio hits."

Catering to commercial tastes is not something you would accuse Swan or her counterparts of, and not because of musical snobbery. More accurately, they are the pioneers of sound, often testing new recordings of their own in the clubs or playing new music from afar on alternative airways long before they make it mainstream. And the same can be said for the fashion that follows. DJs today are tracked by teenagers around the world to see whose sneakers and clothes they're wearing or, if they have their own brand. And designers admittedly dip into the nightlife and find inspiration behind the sound booth and the dance floor.

"If a look is in vogue today, if a certain hair style is suddenly popular, you saw it happen in the clubs last year," says local DJ demigod Kai "KZR" Alce.

At his home studio, a sort of mission control for his record label, NDATL Muzik, the floor-to-ceiling shelves are packed with thousands of records, organized by label, artist/producer, and style. Turntables, speakers, an MPC sequencer and digital sampler, and a couple of keyboards leave only enough room for a few chairs. It's here Alce, who nurtured Atlanta's house music scene with a nine-year Saturday night residency at MJQ Concourse, is joined by other musicians and producers including Richard Corey, a 29-year-old blind keyboardist. The sessions are rooted in a vintage Detroit sound—that is where he first started spinning—but layer various styles, instruments, rhythms and beats into his heady and highly danceable meditations. This year alone the Norwegian label Planet Harrier will release a 12" by Alce called "Disillusionment EP" and NDATL Muzik will issue "The Floating EP." Alce is also closer to realizing another goal: opening a small venue in East Atlanta. "I'm ready now," he says. "I've gotten into my brew."

DJ Mike Zarin, 24, feels that Atlanta has only grazed the surface of the underground house music scene. For four years running he's hosted Houseworks, one of the longest running shows on WRAS, and he's been spinning in Atlanta's club circuit since he was 17. "Music unites people in ways nothing else can," says Zarin, who remembers the salad days of electronic music around the millennium at the Nike Pavilion in Buckhead and The Church and Crescent Room in Midtown, all now defunct. These days he packs the dance floor at Lava

Sound proof. DJ Kai "KZR" Alce, who runs a home studio for his record label NDATL Muzik, mixes beats and turns out EP's he hopes to someday play at his own venue in East Atlanta.

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In the mix. Mike Zarin, DJ Trauma and Dylan Eiland are all trailblazers in the DJing circuit both in Atlanta and worldwide.

Lounge every other Thursday with his crew, 4Deep, and the random Industry Monday at Halo Lounge.

"The past was important in building the foundation, but I feel confident that right now is the most exciting time for the genre," says Zarin. "All of the world now has access to what we're creating."

A vibrant part of the music culture is the after-hours spot, the place to continue the party. Not drug-bender raves for kids from the suburbs or seedy sleaze-fests, the after-hours scene now, according to both Zarin and Jeff Myers, is a more sophisticated crowd of dance diehards from a broad spectrum of Atlanta nightlife. Myers, who spins an up-tempo, Chicago-influenced dance-floor funk under the moniker DJ Jazspa, moved from that city where he produced raves and threw after-hours loft parties with Mark Farina and Miles Maeda, two of the country's most sought-after DJs. He followed Midwest rave legend Tommie Sunshine to Atlanta where, together, they worked at Satellite Records. "I taught myself how to spin records in Satellite's basement."

A few years later he opened his own record shop and label,

Jazz, Space & Bass and partnered with Chris Nicholson of South City Allstars on a 12" remix EP by funk act Cadillac Jones that put the Atlanta-based band and the label on the international map. Then came the wildly popular "Mondays Forever" night and the "Cab-bagetown Heroes" party, at 97 Estoria.

When the citywide 2:30 a.m. last-call ordinance went into effect, Myers, 35, dipped back in his after-hours roots, producing parties called Afterlife with Darren Carr, at random locations. Fast-forward a few years and the two have teamed up again on a completely different venture, as co-owners of Midtown's cozy-cool new restaurant, Top FLR.

Deliberately kept below the radar of most, finding these early a.m. soirees involves keeping an ear to the ground (or doing a little online trawling). What's sure is that eventually you will find the empty warehouse in the Westside rail yard or the Mattress Factory lofts near Oakland Cemetery. Through its door you will enter one of the most exuberant dance parties you could hope to be a part of, and you won't be turned away. ○