

*This is an essay I wrote about my experiences as a female DJ. It was published in the journal for one of the colleges at the University of Toronto. (Unfortunately, I can't remember which one and I never got a copy). I think it was published in 2003.*

## **My Female DJ Experience**

### **By: Jocelyn Dee**

Being a woman in a male-dominated music scene, specifically the drum and bass scene, is both a blessing and a curse – it helps me to stand out and get noticed, but not always for the best reasons.

As a little background info, my name is Jocelyn Dickey (a.k.a. Jocelyn Dee). I have been DJing professionally for nearly 8 years, and play predominantly drum and bass. I have played at most of the big nightclubs in Toronto including Turbo\Sound Emporium, Big Bop, Funhaus, Una Mas and Surface among others, and made numerous appearances in Ottawa and Montreal and on Toronto's key underground radio stations CKLN 88.1fm and CIUT 89.5fm. I have released 6 DJ mixed CDs to date and numerous mix tapes in the past (before CDs became the accepted format).

For those unfamiliar with drum and bass (dnb), I would best describe it as an underground form of electronic dance music with heavy bass and beats just a little too fast for it to achieve pop music status. With dnb, I think you either love it or you hate it, so the fans of the music tend to take it pretty seriously.

Apart from DJing, I also work for Rinse Magazine, an independent bi-monthly print publication focussing on the North American dnb scene and breakbeat music in general. For the past two years, I have worked as a writer/news editor and recently been promoted to the role of copy editor. I've also worked as an events promoter and currently help organize a monthly event showcasing talented female artists, which I will discuss more in the paragraphs to come.

Hopefully this puts my experience into perspective. Since I've been around for a while, I have had a lot of time and personal experience to shape my opinions on what it means to me to be a female DJ in a male dominated musical scene. Although there are a lot more talented women behind the turntables now than when I started, I think the women are still outnumbered in dnb by a fair margin.

When I started out, I was usually the only female on the bill. People generally remembered who I was because of this. I didn't get remembered because I played a great set or because I was talented, it was generally just because I was a woman. As I mentioned earlier this can be both good and bad. In the music industry, and in the entertainment industry overall, it's generally thought anything that creates a buzz around you and helps you get noticed is good, but for my own personal gratification I wanted to be recognized for my talent and not because I had breasts...

I often felt people thought the only reason I was booked was to be the token female in the line up, not because I had talent. I feel because of this I may have been scrutinized more severely than some of my male colleagues. People expected me to play a crappy set, and as soon as I hit the decks they were waiting in anticipation for me to screw up.

Sadly though, there were women DJs at the time perpetuating this stereotype. Because there were so few female DJs, some who could not mix at all were getting booked simply based on their gender.

I must say though, there have always been people along the way supporting me 100 per cent. From promoters to friends, to fellow DJs, this support is the reason I am still involved in dnb today.

Moving ahead to the current state of the scene. I am happy to say there are more talented female DJs now than ever before so it is no longer possible (at least here in Toronto anyway) to get booked simply based on the fact that you are a woman. You have to be good or the fans won't stand for it. I have already mentioned that dnb fans take their music seriously, so most of them are very knowledgeable about the songs and can easily tell a good DJ set from a bad one.

Now there are enough female DJs to fill an entire line-up and there are frequent "lady's night" type events featuring only women DJs. I think this can be both good and bad. The good things are they help women DJs get exposure and help fans to see that they are talented and can rinse it out as well as the men. They can also be fun and are a little bit different from the typical DJ event, so have the potential to draw a crowd. They can potentially be bad if people/promoters get of the mindset that they only want to book or see female DJs at these types of events.

But I figure if other people can organize female-only events, than so can I. I am a woman after all, and as I previously mentioned I think they can be a positive. Currently, I am part of the Chicks Dig It collective, which organizes events featuring female DJs playing all genres of music. Our last event featured 11 DJs and 1 MC performing in 2 rooms and we still did not have enough space on the bill to fit in everybody we wanted to play. The response was great and we had well over 300 people who came out to support us.

All in all, I feel blessed with the opportunities music has given me and thankful to all the people who have helped to make it happen. I think women DJs have worked hard to level the playing field and earn the same respect afforded their male colleagues. But I think there is still some inequality (in the dnb scene at least) that needs to be addressed. Eventually, I would love to see a bill with male and female artists of equal numbers, with both sexes enjoying prime time sets.

To end off I'll relay something that happened earlier today. I posted a message about our next Chicks Dig It event on an Internet message board. As a reply somebody posted, "hate this women's lib shit ... remember the good ol' days when you would smack a ho' and she'd be back in kitchen makin' pie in no time?"

As long as people still think it's funny to say something like this, I still think there's some work that needs to be done.

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