



Joe Bermudez Interview on About.com

FROM DJ RON SLOMOWICZ, YOUR GUIDE TO DANCE MUSIC/ELECTRONICA.

Do you ever meet someone with so much drive, passion, and talent that you just know that they are going to make it big one day? The first time I met Joe Bermudez at the Winter Music Conference in 2000, I knew he was going to be a big force in the future of dance music in the United States. As a writer for DJ Times, an in-demand touring DJ across the US, and a remixer and programmer for Open House Party, he educates and entertains a growing legion of fans.

DJ Ron Slomowicz: How did you get started as a DJ?

Joe Bermudez: I got started in radio when I was 18. The short story is I had just been kicked out of my house and had no job, so I really had nothing to lose. I drove by this radio station on the way home from another job interview and thought it might be fun to do. I literally went up to the station and demanded that they hire me so I could pay my rent. Luckily for me, they did, and the rest is history.

RS: How did you make the move from the radio to spinning clubs?

Joe Bermudez: I guess it was just a natural progression. Locally, people had heard me on the air so my name was familiar and eventually I was asked to DJ a club. The first time I spun a club was actually the first time I was ever stepped foot inside one though. I was pretty nervous, but I guess it all worked out.

RS: What song or songs inspired your love of dance music?

Joe Bermudez: Rollo & Sister Bliss were huge influences early on. Their remixes of Kristine W - Feel What You Want, Faithless - Insomnia, and the OT Quartet - Hold That Sucker Down really made me take notice of the genre.

RS: How is spinning mixshows different than spinning clubs?

Joe Bermudez: When you are spinning a mixshow, you don't get to see your audience like when you do at a club. Also, the people listening are usually at home or in their car so there are no fancy lightshows, go-go dancers or ecstasy to keep them interested. You can't play beats all night long or you will lose them to another radio station or Saturday Night Live. You have to play songs with hooks.

RS: What's it like programming one of the most influential radio shows: Open House Party?

Joe Bermudez: OHP has really helped me learn how to program. It is the largest live syndicated show on the planet, airing on over 150 radio stations every Saturday night all over the US. Basically, that meant I had over 150 program directors to deal with every Monday morning if we played something they didn't like so I had to learn real quickly how to keep a large scale diverse audience happy.

RS: How many different mixshows do you do each week?

Joe Bermudez: I do ones for Kiss in Cleveland and Youngstown, OH plus KRNJ in Phoenix, AZ. Then there's Rotation on XM, Resident Nation on Music Choice, and I still fill in from time to time doing the top of the hour mixes on OHP.

RS: What effect have you noticed satellite radio has had on dance music?

Joe Bermudez: For the first time, everyone in the country is on the same page. Before, you would have regional hits. Miami wouldn't play the same record as San Francisco because they didn't feel it was their sound. That has always been one of my issues with dance music—that there is no unity. A hit is a hit no matter where it's played. Now, we finally have a national

broadcast playing one record that reaches all the markets slowly unifying the dance community.

RS: How did your first remix project come about?

Joe Bermudez: I had gone through a really bad break up. I didn't want to leave my house and was miserable. Some friends of mine in NYC were trying to get me to go to a strip club to cheer me up. I finally agreed, but only if they let me play in their studio after. I ended up working on Mya's "Case Of The Ex" and became hooked.

RS: Are you Mac or PC?

Joe Bermudez: I am on a Mac now.

RS: What's your favorite keyboard/outboard gear?

Joe Bermudez: Probably my Novation K Station. It's nice and small so it doesn't take up much room, but the sounds are big and very easy to tweak. I tend to use that as my controller a lot.

RS: What software do you use?

Joe Bermudez: I sequence using Cubase SX 3 and a ProTools Mix Plus system.

RS: I saw you quoted in an advertisement for Cubase. What role do you think corporate sponsorships will play in your DJ career?

Joe Bermudez: They keep me sounding fresh. Basically they let me play with their toys first before the general public to see what I like and dislike about them. Getting to use various plug-in's and VST's before other DJ's is a huge advantage.

RS: Are there any other companies out there that you would like to be sponsored by?

Joe Bermudez: Some free software from Native Instruments would be nice. A new Access Virus keyboard wouldn't hurt either. Maybe even a new Macintosh 12" Powerbook G4. You pretty much just opened Pandora's box. Ask another question real quickly or we will be here all night discussing gear... ha ha.

RS: What has been the most challenging song for you to remix?

Joe Bermudez: I would have to say Kelly Clarkson's "Breakaway." The original is in a 6/8 time signature, which is basically a waltz, and the label wanted a mix that was 4/4 for the mixshow guys to play. It was really frustrating trying to get the vocal to lock to that kind of groove and I almost gave up. It seriously has thousands of edits to make it work and I am surprised at how good it sounded in the end. I am glad I stuck it out as the mix played a

huge role in helping her go number 1 at CHR with only a 5-spin victory over Maroon 5.

RS: I notice that you often team up with other people for remixes. What role do you say you and Josh Harris play when remixing a track?

Joe Bermudez: When we do a remix, Josh's primary role is to talk shit to me on Instant Messenger... ha ha. Seriously though, we are both able to do a record completely on our own, so when we do decide to team up and combine our talents, I think it tends to make the process more creative and efficient. I may think of something that Josh would have never thought of and vice versa. Four ears are certainly better than two.

RS: How important do you think remixing and production is for DJs?

Joe Bermudez: Nowadays, I would say it's pretty important. Labels are not commissioning big remixes like they used to so if you want a hot remix, you pretty much are stuck doing it yourself. Each year, the bar gets raised for DJs and you have to be able to do more and more if you want to survive and stay in the game.

RS: Several of your remixes are pop-oriented—let's say mid-tempo—mixes of Kelly Clarkson or Jesse McCartney. Do you play these remixes in your club sets or are these mainly for radio and mixshows?

Joe Bermudez: They are primarily designed for radio, but I see them getting some serious club use in the next few years as tempos continue to slow down. I actually closed my night in Chicago this past Friday with my Behind These Hazel Eyes remix and the crowd went nuts for it.

RS: Where do the remix names come from—i.e. lasik surgery, pinky swear, regal? Is there some inside joke her that you care to clue us in on?

Joe Bermudez: I honestly don't know. My wheels are always spinning and I guess I need as many creative outlets as I can get so I just started coming up with smartass names for my mixes.

RS: In addition to remixes, are you working on any original productions?

Joe Bermudez: There are a few in the works. I am keeping them quiet for the time being though. Trust me, you will definitely know when they are ready.

RS: You often spin in circuit and gay clubs as well as straight clubs. As a straight man, what's it like to spin to a gay crowd? Is it any different than spinning to a straight crowd?

Joe Bermudez: Musically it's a little different. A never fail record in a gay club would be Deborah Cox while in a straight club, it would be a Paul Van Dyk track. The logic behind it is the same though. You are simply reading the crowd and trying to play the best records to keep them dancing.

RS: What's the biggest crowd you have ever DJed for?

Joe Bermudez: Open House Party has an audience in the millions so that would be the largest radio crowd while Blue Ball in Philadelphia or Cherry in DC both had pretty massive club crowds dancing live in front of me.

RS: What are your biggest / hottest records in the clubs right now?

Joe Bermudez: Deep Dish is on fire lately and their Say Hello record looks to be my dance track of the year. The Mariah Carey is still a lot of fun as well. "We Belong Together" is just a record everyone knows so it tends to work no matter where I am.

RS: What are your most favorite club records of all time?

Joe Bermudez: I absolutely love Peter Rauhofer's mix of Perfect Love by House Of Prince. It still sends chills up my spine.

RS: I was told by a mutual friend that the song "Unspeakable Joy" by Kim English had a profound effect on your life. What's the story behind that?

Joe Bermudez: Back when I started going out to clubs, it was during the whole Razor-n-Guido explosion. I remember going to Machine in Boston with my old roommate Jeff and hearing Darren Friedman drop "Unspeakable Joy." The song was the peak of the night for us and we were running around like two schoolgirls with our hands in the air screaming at the top of our lungs. It was a great feeling that I have never forgotten.

RS: Who is your favorite DJ to hear spin live?

Joe Bermudez: It's too hard for me to pick just one. When they want to be, Deep Dish are pretty amazing live. Gabriel & Dresden seem to always keep me dancing. Sander Kleinenberg is great too. The list just goes on and on.

RS: Your website—www.JoeBermudez.com—is pretty incredible. Did you design it? How often do you update it?

Joe Bermudez: My friend Brandon Mosley and I came up with the concept and then he went and locked himself in a room and made it look more incredible than I could have ever imagined. I try to keep the playdates and audio samples updated monthly and we do a complete overhaul on the site once a year.

RS: I have sort of watched you from the beginning - getting your start with support of the internet DJ community. How has using the internet and making contacts helped your career?

Joe Bermudez: The internet is great because it puts everything at your finger tips. If you want to know what's going on in London or Los Angeles, all you have to do nowadays is "Google" it. When I started, I was living in Maine so the internet played a huge role in my education process. I would stream sets from top DJs and see how they put their sets together. I would read message boards and see what about those sets people liked and disliked. It just made everything more accessible for me.

RS: You do so much: DJ, remix, mixshows, write for DJ Times, spokes model, etc. How important do you think it is to be so multifaceted in the dance music industry?

Joe Bermudez: As with anything in life, the more you can do will only benefit you in the long haul. As the dance music industry continues to consolidate, more and more people have to wear several hats for the first time. Pretty soon all DJs will have to be multifaceted or they will be stuck working at Starbucks instead of spinning records.

RS: What advice do you have for up and coming DJs out there?

Joe Bermudez: Just stick to it. If this is what you truly want, then don't give up no matter what anyone says. Just do your thing and have fun with it.

RS: Anything you want to say to dance music lovers out there?

Joe Bermudez: I look forward to seeing you on my dance floor sometime soon.