Push the Tempo: A Socioeconomic Look into the New Status of the DJ in America

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

Austin Antoni

Thesis Advisor

Professor Dom Caristi

Signed

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

April 2015

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2015
Abstract
The celebrations of dance and music have long been cultural strongpoints in history. The mystique behind the power of music created emotions and shared experiences allowed regular men and women to lead audiences on a journey of sound and the human soul. While the professions that these people operated in have changed in names and specificities, the role has long been a staple of our socioeconomic sphere. The latest incarnation of this role is the disc jockey whose job is to present and perform music for the nightlife masses. Progressions in global movements like electronic dance music and electronic music festivals have allowed disc jockeys in America in to reach superstardom and unseen levels of fanaticism amongst mainstream music listeners. Even with the soaring acclaim of these disc jockeys, questions have surfaced that debate whether the disc jockey’s initial purpose has been obscured. In this socioeconomic investigation, I probe into the cultural and economic specifics of what have given the disc jockey this propulsion to the stars and whether this new status will change the future definition of the profession.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank Professor Dom Caristi for the guidance and advice he provided for me in this project. His knowledge of media and entertainment was a great help in creating ideas for me to structure my arguments around. Dom’s patience and willingness to listen made him a great advisor and a brilliant professor.

I would also like to thank my mother and father who picked me up when I was running on empty. I love you both.
CONTENTS

1. Introduction

2. Unlikely Beginnings

3. A New Era of Entertainment

4. A State of EDM

5. Lasers in the Night Sky

6. The Effects of Success

7. Conclusion
Chapter One: Introduction

Centered in room is a group of people, illuminated only by spots of dancing flame. As they pass around a studded goblet filled with a viscous black liquid, there arises a muttering of some sort accompanied by the dull thump of drums. Suddenly an incantation is heard, starting slowly and building into a rhythm, matched only with the pace of the drums. The rhythm rises into the darkness above the group, increasing in vigor and energy as the spots of flaming light seem to grow with the tune. Faster and faster the beat grows as the people sway and move like waves upon the shore. The people are soon in a frenzy of sound and life, embracing the rhythm of the night with full abandon of inhibition and fear. Screams ring out through the room not of pain or sorrow but of unhindered joy and bliss. Their yelps and yips leap across the canvases of the drums like deer through a meadow on the long-awaited first full day of spring. These people, this thriving mass of flesh and soul, harmoniously cry out into the night with no regret, no remorse, and no desire to let the restrictions of normality hold them back from being one with dance.

Normally this throng would have been orchestrated by some envisioned figure. This figure who first passed the cup, first muttered the incantation, first beat the drum, whether he be of spirituality, religion, or great motivation, was indeed more special than the rest of the group in which he resided. This simple person gave birth to a sort of freedom and created a manner of existence that allowed the individual to become one with his fellow man and the music. Now is this person filled with some sort of divine power over man? Realistically not and historically professions such as witch doctors, priests and the like have never been able to provide any type of evidence to the contrary. Nonetheless the acts of these individuals in history have always
served as examples of what can happen when a regular person dons a larger than life persona in order to bring forth new energy, youth, and unity from the everyman.

In our current society the disc jockey, or DJ for short, has taken the mantle of this historical individual. While this humble individual does not don the cloth or the mask, he is able to portray an air of divinity in the way he can unite the masses under one mind and one heart via a pilgrimage of drums, words, and movement. The modern club or lounge is the church, the temple, the sanctum of a DJ’s power to convene the masses towards worshipping the celebration of music and life. Regardless of the effects of alcohol or other mind-altering substances, the DJ remains the apex of creating a single unified group for the purpose of dancing. The incredible truth of this larger than life action is that the DJ can be average and still unite people’s minds and hearts through the immense power of playing the correct records at the appropriate time. What truly makes a DJ great is when the act of selecting a track creates a defined mood; the emotions of an individual can be influenced and even controlled. The setting of the mood is what brings people together until an entire room is feeling the same emotion or living with one heartbeat, if you will. These concepts of bringing people together to not only observe but to be a part of music’s engineering of emotion at the hands of an artist are what makes the DJ and his setting truly magnificent.

At a purely historical level, the DJ is one in a long line of professions whose job is to start the party. If he does his job, then the mass of people are successfully led through their desired ritual and acquire a certain emotional state (i.e. joy or inspiration). Whether it is as the village elder, the priest, and the minstrel and so on, the DJ has inherited a position whose job isn’t only to play music but to able to make an event an interactive experience for all those involved in the ritual of dance. Today’s disc jockey has risen to such great cultural heights that it can be said that
he or she has continued and built upon the “divine” persona of the ancestors that from whom he or she had evolved. DJs have been able to leave the humble club and now play in cathedrals of sound and steel with monuments to melodic artistry framing them. They’ve been able to earn hundreds of thousands of dollars for single performances, travel in luxury across the globe and lead advances in musical and production technology. Modern-day DJs are now subjects of idolatry that could rival even legendary rock stars. With every new note and every new beat, the veneration for DJs and the music they play has grown and grown. This growth has allowed the DJ to garner levels of fanaticism that strengthen the idea that DJs have leapt passed being an afterthought opener to a bona-fide headliner.

Through the general public’s newfound awareness of the DJ’s place in the world of musical performance, the men and women of disc jockeying have become the trendy socioeconomic figureheads of this generation. People want to see DJs, be DJs and follow in the footsteps of DJs. These expanding trends have forged new marketplaces for businesses across the world. Innovations in the umbrella genre of electronic dance music (EDM) have opened the doors for new techniques in disc jockeying and production, ultimately leading to the birth of a new type of cultural and business-oriented venture: the electronic music festival. Furthermore, EDM’s culture has dipped into the mainstream starting new trends in night life and youth cultures, propelling the disc jockey’s everyday popularity into the cultural stratosphere. In this global resurgence of the DJ, deep pockets of this socioeconomic boom have formed, with the United States being a prime example of this case. The US has long been a home of disc jockeying with roots in the conceptions of genres such as House, Tech, and Hip-Hop founded in Chicago, Detroit, and New York respectively; therefore, it should come as no surprise that the global resurgence in disc jockeying would allow countries with footholds in the industry to lead
this new renaissance. As of now it seems that the world of disc jockeying is again the “in thing” in American culture ala the “It Girl” of early Hollywood’s past. Unlike the “It Girl” though, disc jockeying’s previous successes in America combined with a lack of a single polarizing face of the industry have created multiple factors that have led to the widespread popularity of the practice and enjoyment of disc jockeying amongst the American public. Ultimately, it is has been through the changes in an American nightlife practices, achievements in electronic dance music, the booming economics of music festivals, and the superstar progression of DJ culture itself that the modern disc jockey has been able to expand its influence into multiple facets of America’s socioeconomic sphere.
Chapter Two: Unlikely Beginnings

The resurgence of the disc jockey in the United States was not something that came overnight but rather as a natural evolution stemming from a long history of change and innovation to fit the social and economic spheres of many eras. Through technological advances in science and technology and cultural advances in arenas such as the night club, the figures and practices that we today now associate with the disc jockey were born. Almost as a cliché, disc jockeying’s tools and foundations were created through somewhat of a series of unrelated events.

French scientist Leon Scott de Martinville invented the phonograph in 1857, marking the first device ever made to effectively record sound. Scott’s device “traced the wave form of sounds spoken into a small horn on a rotating cylinder covered with soot-coated paper” (The Talking Timeline.com). Scott’s device’s product was, in essence, the first sound recording.

This technological landmark was followed by Thomas Edison’s phonographic cylinder in 1877 coupling the recording of sound with the ability to playback what had been captured. What happened was that sound was captured by a performer singing or performing in front of a number of horns that then imprinted the sound waves onto a number of wax cylinders connected to the horns (Cylinder Preservation and Digitalization Project UCSB). Wax was later replaced
by tinfoil, gold and plastic on the cylinders but no matter the material, the method Edison put in
place would lay the groundwork for vinyl records, CDs and later the most used recording
medium for current disc jockeys: wav and mp3 files

The simple functions of recording and playback have been the backbone of disc jockeys as long
as they have existed. At its core, a DJ’s purpose is to play recorded music in real time to
entertain an audience. Through the evolution of technology this goal became more and more
easily feasible, leaving almost a need to be grateful for the first inventors.

So with technological advances assembling the future mediums for sound recording and
playback it was only a matter of time before these methods would be used for the entertainment
of the masses. With the birth and taming of radio waves came the possibility to transmit words
and sound across distances, ushering in the accidental birth of disc jockeying. In Bill Brewster
and Frank Broughton’s book *Last Night the DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey*
the authors detail the historical event that played the biggest role in how disc jockeys were
conceived. On Christmas Eve 1906, Canadian Engineer Reginald A. Fessenden, a colleague of
Edison’s, was intending to transmit radio waves between the US and Scotland. These waves
were uncoded radio signals – music and speech – and were intended to be delivered from Brant
Rock, Massachusetts through telegraph operators on ships in the Atlantic. While these operators were only used to hearing static and beeps, Fessenden placed the necessary number of receivers to boost signal strength on some United Fruit Company ship, allowing the waves to not be stretched too far and break up. He began his broadcast by quoting the Bible and performing (admittedly poorly) in song and on violin ‘Oh Holy Night.’ Through the use of an Edison phonographic cylinder in the process, Fessenden unknowingly became the world’s first disc jockey because he played a record over the airwaves (Pg 28-29).

Brewster and Broughton go on to note that radio disc jockeying was furthered the following year when American Lee DeForest invented the triode and made regular broadcasting possible (Pg.28). While this act earned him the title of ‘the father of radio,’ he is not given the title of the father of disc jockeys. It was Fessenden’s initial broadcast that opened the door for radio’s rise and the disc jockey’s development into a prolific figure associated with the playing and distribution of musical entertainment.

While inventors gave disc jockeys the technology and mediums to present music to a large audience, radio disc jockeys only could connect with audiences over the distance from broadcast booth to living room. Through the birth of the night club, the disc jockey finally
became a performer of music rather than a presenter. This transition began in 1943 in Leeds, England where English entrepreneur Jimmy Savile crafted the idea that the public might pay money to hear recorded music. Holding a small soirée at a local mutual society, Savile played a number of jazz records for wartime soldiers and guests. While the event was a colossal failure, Savile’s gamble marked the beginning of what we now call “club disc jockeying” (DJ History). Savile’s vision came to fruition in the 1950s when American dances known as ‘sock hops’ allowed radio disc jockeys to take the role of a human jukebox. These events laid the stage for programs such as *American Bandstand*, hosted by DJ Dick Clark, to become American institutions and for radio disc jockeys to gain live performance popularity (Brewester and Broughton, pgs 58-59). With the success of American sock hops paired with global creations such as the discotheque in Paris during World War II, disc jockeys were given their first opportunities to be seen in-person playing music to audiences, thereby adding a face to the personality hidden in the sound waves.

While 1943 marked the birth of club disc jockeying and the 1950s gave the setting for the first live DJ events, the disc jockey’s home, the night club, had been constructed much earlier. Webster Hall located in the East Village of Manhattan, New York is officially credited as the first modern nightclub.

![The Webster Hall marquee](image)

*Figure 4: The Webster Hall marquee*
Push the Tempo: A Socioeconomic Look into the New Status of the DJ in America

According to Webster Hall’s official timeline, it was commissioned for construction in 1886 by Polish-born cigar maker Charles Goldstein and designed by architect Charles Reitz. While it has played host to a variety of musical and social events, it transitioned into a full-scale nightclub in 1989 under the management of Canadian nightclub promoters Lon, Stephen, Doug, and Peter Ballinger who sought to bring the same nightlife excitement to an American nightclub from the success they had seen in their Toronto clubs (Webster Hall.com). This club and the ones that followed would embody the blend of celebration and innovation that attracted disc jockeys to its stages. With the public being able to engage one another in a mecca of sound and style, disc jockeys were able to add to the repertoires of these Webster Hall and other clubs, giving the disc jockey the platform to reach the popularity of bands and other performers who owned the nighttime entertainment spots. It is today’s modern nightclub that is the culmination of technological achievements in musical performance and design which stemmed from cultural needs to present sound and ultimately music to a vast number of people who want to be entertained and thus the business endeavors that followed to satisfy these needs. This socioeconomic need in places worldwide would provide the opportunity for disc jockeys to rise from radio personalities into full-fledged performers.
Chapter Three: A New Era of Entertainment

Through the echoes and success of institutions such as Webster Hall, the American nightlife has now become centered on the enjoyment of music. Our cultural desire to enjoy music has long attracted businesses to create invested experiences to fuel an ever-expanding modern nightlife economy. In a February to December 2014 analysis by EventBrite.com titled ‘The Nightlife Economy: How Much Do People Spend on a Night Out?’, the popular event website delved into how much the average American nightlife enthusiast spends on a night out and where specifically the money is going. The data was taken from 10,000 events and 4,000 attendees within the top six metropolitan areas: New York City, Atlanta, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago and Austin. In the first graph the analysis showed that while food and drink were consistent areas of expense, the majority of money spent by today’s average American nightlife enthusiast was placed into tickets for events.

Figure 5: Nightlife Share of Wallet

The average event-goer spends $81 on a night out and goes out 2 nights a week.

It should be no surprise that ticket prices to an event take up the majority of per person expenses because they provide an initial reason to partake in other nightlife expenses. Think of it in a hypothetical example. A man wants to take his girlfriend out for her birthday. Her favorite band or DJ is in town and playing at a popular venue. He buys two tickets but chooses to add to the pre-event experience and also makes a dinner reservation. They spend money at the restaurant but save money for possible refreshments at the event. The pair goes to the event where they have a generally good time. They dance and sing and naturally need something to drink after a time. They spend money at the venue’s concession stand and the pattern of celebration and rest continues again later in the night. All-in-all the purpose of the night out was to enjoy music for a celebratory occasion and money was spent immediately for that purpose; however, through the course of the night money was spent in ways that didn’t directly influence that purpose because other needs arose that the couple believed would ultimately increase their overall enjoyment of the event. This example doesn’t even factor in transportation costs and the precise number of drinks and food the couple purchased.

With this in mind, EventBrite.com broke down expenditures even more to show that at the heart of all nightlife spending lays the desire to enjoy music. The 10,000 events that EventBrite.com polled were categorized in eight ways: music, holiday/seasonal, food & drink, entertainment, performing & visual arts, charity & causes, fashion & beauty, and community & culture. As the chart shows, 64% of all nightlife tickets are purchased for music events. This incredible majority displays that today’s average American nightlife enthusiast craves music above all other forms of entertainment, which in turn has coincided with the analysis discovering that EDM and hip-hop/rap shows sell the most nightlife tickets clocking in at 40% and 31% respectively of all music ticket sales (EventBrite.com).
Push the Tempo: A Socioeconomic Look into the New Status of the DJ in America

Nightlife Event Category Breakdown

Music Owns the Night
64% of all nightlife tickets are for music events
- Music
- Holiday/Seasonal
- Food & Drink
- Entertainment
- Performing & Visual Arts
- Charity & Causes
- Fashion & Beauty
- Community & Culture

Average Price of a Music Ticket

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NYC</td>
<td>$34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATL</td>
<td>$28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>$18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHI</td>
<td>$13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUS</td>
<td>$10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 6: Nightlife Event Category Breakdown

Overall, it is incredibly intriguing to see that the leading percentage in this analysis of specific music ticket sales is electronic dance music, which is performed by mainly disc jockeys and/or producers. This finding only gives credit to the notion that per person America’s socioeconomic environment (in respect to musical events) has been heavily influenced by the growing trends associated with disc jockeys, in particular electronic dance music and its culture.
Chapter Four: A State of EDM

What has added to the average American nightlife enthusiast’s increased interest in electronic dance music and its DJs is the simple reality of the current society. We now live in a digital world with knowledge and direction available at the click of a mouse. Our society’s advancements have taken music from records to cassettes to CDs and now unlimited audio files. The increased ease in access to music has reshaped how music affects our cultural identities, ushering in new tastes and preferences on what the American public sees as popular entertainment. Leading these trends is electronic dance music, a genre long dominated by DJs who sought to break the mold of what made traditional popular music. Where baby boomers had rock and roll, and Gen X’ers had hip hop and punk to work out their longing for rebellion and personal freedom, millennials have EDM (Godard). Its spread in popularity amongst DJs over time was due to the opportunity it offered in recycling, reinventing and engineering of music through electronic mediums (i.e. drum machines, synthesizers, analog and later digital mixers) with the final goal of adding a DJ’s personal style and skill into a dance track. EDM began as an underground movement in the 1980s towards the end of disco era. French veteran DJ David Guetta, who began his successful career in clubs of Paris, detailed his perspective in a 2014 interview with CNN. “There was a movement called ‘disco sucks’,“ he says. “It was a shame to like disco, but then there was no music to dance to, so some DJs started to use old disco records, but the B-sides and the acapellas, and we began producing beats with drum machines” (Alvarado). In the late 1990s and 2000s EDM and its artists began to transition into the mainstream, following a path blazed by hip-hop and its artists before it. Where EDM’s path differed from hip-hop was in a matter of musical structure. Hip-hop’s structure featured vocal artists, rappers and singers layered over a disc jockey’s beats and live instruments. Instead of the
DJ acting as a supplement to the rapper or singer, EDM offered the chance for disc jockeys to finally be the featured performers themselves, giving them their time in the spotlight.

With EDM’s propulsion of the disc jockey to the forefront of songs and into mainstream popularity, today’s American pop stars are now turning to electronic beats. DJs like David Guetta, Diplo and Afrojack have been able to boost their own mainstream popularities through collaborations with pop stars. Armed with veteran knowledge of the industry and groundbreaking innovations in music production, DJs are now able to create “pop-EDM” songs that are helping to bridge the gap between the world of the disc jockey and the mainstream. The rapid expansion of EDM production software such as Ableton AG and Fruity Loops has also aided DJs in their pop music transition through the utilization of vast libraries of digital instrument samples to produce songs (Twells). The ease of accessibility to these samples and how they can be quickly layered with recorded audio (i.e. vocals) has led to DJs being able to produce tracks in a matter of hours. Digital productions for EDM tracks are polished and mastered to levels that even trick the human ear into believing they are hearing a tangible instrument. These innovations in production have allowed DJs to become producers of music and performers of it, ultimately giving DJs the artistic legitimacy that many would not associate with the record players. For instance, the producer-DJ David Guetta has been a pioneer of “marrying EDM to pop,” forging new billboard-topping pop-EDM collaboration stars like Nicki Minaj, Akon, Kid Cudi, and Fergie (Feinstein). These integrations have helped EDM and DJs become more involved in popular culture, making dance music more accepted among listeners. In essence what has occurred is a symbiotic relationship where EDM artists gain access to a wider fan base while pop artists feed off the fresh hype surrounding EDM (Feinstein). Long time DJ and electronic artist Ryan Raddon (aka Kaskade) perhaps summed up this point of acceptance.
best in an interview with Forbes magazine. Raddon said “I think mainly people were just ready to hear something new... My parents listened to rock and roll; that’s their music. And then hip-hop came along. This is the next generation of music” (Mac). Raddon’s words encompass what many Americans have seemed to notice, feeding into EDM’s ascent into mainstream culture and what Americans deem as popular music culminating with a 2012 consumer report by the International Music Summit (IMS) which concluded that EDM had become the fastest growing mainstream genre in the United States (Feinstein).

Besides innovations in the music industry and how music is ultimately produced, EDM and DJs spread in American pop culture has been greatly aided by social media and its connections. In today’s digital era, “success” is measured in followers, video hits, downloads, hashtags, tweets, retweets and likes (Alvarado). Belgian DJ duo Dimitri Vegas and Like Mike, recent winners of four EMPO 2015 awards and the currently number two DJ act in the world according to DJ Mag, have experienced social media’s influence in the success of their EDM career. "For us it (social media) has played a very big role... We can make a new track and with one click, it'll be spread all over the world. Twenty years ago you had a vinyl, and that vinyl had to go to a distributor, and six months later maybe another country would have the vinyl... All we did for one year is talk to DJs by Facebook and somehow that got us our first gig. Social media has been the biggest factor in our career” (Alvarado). Today audiences of DJs are able to enjoy their favorite tracks from their phones and laptops and post about it on Facebook or Twitter from the comfort of their own living rooms. Music streaming services connected through social media such as Spotify have made on-the-go and at home listening easy and accessible. Even more compelling is that Spotify’s usefulness has led to an electronic song claiming the top streamed song in its existence. Avicii (Tim Bergling), a DJ Mag Top 100 DJ as well, holds claim to this
honor thanks to his pop-house anthem, “Wake Me Up” which features indie-pop singer Aloe Blacc on vocals.

In addition to Spotify, the growth of sites like Beatport and Soundcloud, which allow the average listener to make direct comments on specific portions of an artist’s work, has fed into Gen Y’s and millennials’ needs to have their voices heard (Kent). With large libraries holding hundreds of genres of music, Beatport and Soundcloud have given modern disc jockeys platforms to display their productions and mixes, appealing to current listeners and attracting new listeners curious of new takes on familiar music. By “borrowing, adapting and tweaking — all essential elements of any DJ’s set list” – DJs have been able to foster a cultural intrigue in how music can be invented and reinvented (Kent).

Electronic dance music’s rapid mainstream ascent through social media has even allowed the DJs behind it to gain enough momentum that the well-known award shows have even sought to recognize them for their progress in American music culture. In 2012 MTV’s Video Music Awards (an event dominated by youthful trends in pop culture) saw fit to add a category for Best Electronic Dance Music Video, but that was only the start (ClubGlow.com). In 2013, five electronic DJs gained nominations outside that category even though no winners were produced. 2014 was even greater. DJ Avicii’s track ‘Wake Me Up’ was nominated for Best Pop Video.
David Guetta’s ‘One Voice’ was nominated for Best Video with a Social Message. In total, 14 DJs affiliated with EDM were nominated for awards. MTV smartly noticed this rise and went a step farther creating the MTV Clubland Awards, an award show purely dedicated to disc jockeys and club music (ClubGlow.com). The awards have catered to all types of DJs inside and outside of EDM leading to the vast promotion of disc jockeying as a whole. Disc jockeying’s accolades also have accumulated outside the pop-culture awards sphere with internationally known DJs like Sonny Moore (aka Skrillex), whose net worth is near $15 million thanks to his success as an EDM DJ and producer, winning three Grammys to date for his tracks (Studarus). Even more impressive though are the more recent achievements in the return of house DJ originators Daft Punk. After taking a multi-year hiatus from the music scene, the French duo returned with their generation-defining album ‘Random Access Memories’ that blended the origins of EDM with popular music influences of the present day. In 2013 after selling 339,000 copies in the US in the first week, it took the top spot on Billboard Top 200 – the first time they had ever been there (Westbrook). Daft Punk’s success even surpassed Skrillex’s Grammy wins, awarding the duo four times: 1) Album of the Year for ‘Random Access Memories,’ 2) Record Of The Year for their track ‘Get Lucky’ which featured pop star Pharrell Williams, 3) Best Pop/Group Performance for ‘Get Lucky,’ and 4) Best Electronica Album (Grammy.com). By claiming the awards normally reserved for rock or pop artists, the victory intensified the spotlight on electronic music culture and disc jockeying’s blossoming status. With this in mind, the magnitude of Daft Punk’s success at the 2013 Grammy’s cannot be understated as it was a breakthrough not only for EDM but for DJs who had never achieved that level of national commendation before.
It is thanks to the actions of disc jockeys like Daft Punk and David Guetta who have transcended the blending of EDM and popular music culture that DJs now have a newfound prevalence and legitimacy in the mainstream, creating an immense desirability for all consumers of the genre. This growing desirability has made the marketing of it a top priority for businesses wanting to capitalize on this rising industry. In the end, the growing acclaim of EDM and its new producer-DJs in America cannot be measured just in simple accolades. With people experiencing more and more electronic dance music every day, the natural progression of a public desire to interact with the men and women at the forefront of the industry has been created and groundbreaking works in performance have come as a result.
Chapter Five: Lasers in the Night Sky

With the public's desire for EDM and the DJs to be seen in performance, promotion and event companies have had to work hard in order to earn enormous sums of money that now drive the industry. EDM's current rise into the event industry did not come without some initial setbacks mostly due to original relations with the raves of the '80s and '90s. This image problem made most businesses hesitant to endorse the growing genre because of the problems of past consumers. Ecstasy and other mind-altering drugs that were thought to add to electronic music's effect on the senses often led to overdoses and criminal activity which quickly gave rise to wide negative sentiments in affiliation with raves and electronic music. This led to the decline of the lifestyle and genre because of fear for mental and physical health problems. So then, how did businesses get EDM and the DJs who performed it to come back into the graces of American hearts and pocket books? "Basically, by doing its best to shed the word "rave" and all its associations: drugged-up kids slumped on dancefloors, hospitalizations, and the statistically rare but reputation-tarnishing deaths...the association of techno with ecstasy, we really had to overcome that stigma," says Gary Richards of the LA-based promotions company Hard Events (Reynolds). To shed this image, promotion companies essentially need to rebrand electronic dance culture to reconnect with the digital generation. Enter the music festival.

Now the music festival's importance in American culture has spanned over years and locations from the Newport Jazz Festival to the Monterey International Pop Music Festival to the culture defining Woodstock (Brooks). With a rich business history of success, the music festival is a tried and true method in America of bringing people together for the purpose of enjoying the music of multiple artists on a grand scale. Like EDM itself, the growth in popularity of music festivals has no doubt been helped by the internet. A network of blogs, media outlets, promoters
and retailers helps facilitates the sale of tickets, and spread awareness (aka hype) about festivals and performing artists (Godard). With EDM so closely tied to the Internet’s unlimited channels of communication, companies have decided to seize the opportunity to reach a wide range of consumers to promote these festivals. Live Nation, the largest concert promoter in the world, now views electronic dance music festivals as its greatest growth opportunity. In 2012 the promotion powerhouse raked in $3.9 billion and acquired a 90% stake in two EDM festival organizers: U.K. based Cream Holdings Ltd, and Los Angeles’ HARD Events (Godard). Other companies like Insomniac Events (which also was acquired by Live Nation in 2013) have seen that different locations in the US have helped grow their flagship touring festival Electric Daisy Carnival and their new locations (Complex.com). To track the effects of their economic footprint on different locations, Insomniac hired Beacon Economics “to measure its impact on the cities who so graciously hosted their non-stop festivals (Godard). Beacon’s analysis estimated that EDC 2010, held at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, generated roughly $42 million for the local economy over the course of two days. In 2011 the festival moved to the Las Vegas Motor Speedway and expanded its lineup to three days.

Figure 8: EDC Las Vegas
There the festival supported an estimated 1,400 full-time jobs and generated $136.4 million for the Las Vegas economy. The following year’s festival topped that: the festival generated $207.048 million for the Las Vegas metro area, an increase of 57% from 2011.

In Chattahoochee Hills, south of Atlanta, the arrival of TomorrowWorld, the US version of the most popular electronic festival in the world TomorrowLand, has achieved similar amazing results in its two year existence. Featuring 300 DJs on a 500 acre plot of farmland, TomorrowWorld’s economic impact “was calculated at $85.1 million, with $70 million of it in Atlanta and neighboring areas, according to a study paid for by the event’s producers” (Ruggieri). According to the analysis, that dollar figure was the same amount the NCAA Final Four Championship games brought to the city in 2013.

In Miami, veteran electronic music festival Ultra has seen this occur for fifteen years.

According to a new study conducted by the Washington Economics Group and commissioned by Ultra Music Festival, the festival’s annual economic impact on Miami-Dade County is an astounding $79 million, including $32 million in labor income and $50 million in GDP contributions (Gonzalez). With income so large, these festival promotion companies like Ultra
are seeing not only the growth of their companies and DJs they sign on but also the community that they take over for a few days a year. In an interview with the Miami New Times, Ultra Music Festival creator and executive director Russell Faibisch said, “‘We always knew from the huge crowds that we draw that we had a major impact on our local economy, but we did not realize it was this huge… We see ourselves as partners in the economic prosperity for Miami-Dade County and hope to continue and expand our contribution to the magic that makes our area unique’” (Gonzalez).

While helping grow communities and local economies have been noble byproducts of electronic music festivals, there has had to be something deeper that has kept the big name promoters and event planners believing that EDM and DJs provide the best experience for their consumers. “Simple, an unrivaled audible experience with surrounding spectacles expertly curated for an unforgettable experience,” says leading electronic entertainment and production company SFX in an April 2015 Audience Insights report. In the company’s latest monthly report, data was taken from 437 users on leading electronic dance music streaming and service site, Beatport. What SFX assembled was a part of an overarching study to understand electronic dance music’s audience, their movements and behavior within the music space. The findings not only solidified companies like SFX’s commitment to supporting electronic dance music and disc jockeys but also adding to the cultural experience of the millennials that heavily partake in it. First, SFX examined what electronic dance music means to those users with the most noted words being “dance, energy, fun, happiness, parties, and love” (SFX). Upon further examination of electronic music culture, “almost 50% of fans said that “it’s a way of life,” 95% agreed that “it has created a culture that’s bigger than music itself,” and 93% agreed that ‘it’s a defining aspect of their generation.” When asked about the music festivals, 99% of those surveyed said they
show up at festivals because they like the music with 99% also saying they like the stages, lights and lasers at festivals, followed by 96% liking the art installations throughout the festivals (SFX). Finally, the report shed light on the activities of those fans that went to music festivals. SFX noticed that digital activities, referring to activities that require a device to interact were a common thread. Breaking these activities down further, SFX saw that fans were using their smartphones to interact in a multitude of ways with the top activity of taking photos or videos coming in at 79%, looking up info about artists or songs at 51% and using Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat or other social media to post about the festival while they are there sitting at 50%. The conclusion that SFX was then able to come to was that the EDM festivals equaled “connected fandom” (SFX). The desire to be connected in the collective experience together in combination with the attractions of festival production have resonated most strongly with millennial generations because of the sensory stimulation they have experienced in our digital world. Overall, it can be said electronic music and the subsequent production involved in music festivals are simply natural extensions of the current digital culture with the accompanying light shows, pyrotechnics and confetti all contributing “to the effect of sensory overload,” along with the visual sensibility of electronic music (i.e. costumes, neon and glow sticks (Kent)).
Chapter Six: The Effects of Success

Through the mainstream acceptance of electronic dance music and subsequent boom of electronic music festivals, disc jockeys have now become celebrities in their own right. The ridiculous sums of money that electronic dance music festivals earn are now directly influencing the paychecks of top disc jockeys. For example, Calvin Harris, who was making roughly $200,000 in 2012, now costs over $400,000 dollars to book for an “average” show and closer to $500,000 for special events (Ward). EDM’s acceptance in the cultural mainstream has aided in this justification according to Forbes; the 10 highest paid DJs combined to earn $115 million in 2012 (O’Malley). Then the highest paid DJ, Tiesto, made $22 million. Today, Calvin Harris has seized this title and tripled the amount the Tiesto made. Feeding into the incomes of these DJs of what Forbes calls ‘The Electronic Cash Kings List” has been the combination of earnings from live shows, merchandise sales, endorsements, recorded music sales and external business ventures (O’Malley Greenburg). The incredible sums of money awarded to DJs nowadays have also forced festivals to raise their ticket prices in order to stay profitable. As this graph by SeatGeek shows, the average price has greatly increased amongst top-tier festivals EDC Vegas, Coachella and Ultra in the past few years (Ward).
While it seems the increasing profits of DJs and the increasing prices of shows to see them have created a dangerous financial situation that could topple the popularity of the industry if the price floor drops out, American people and businesses have not faltered in their fascination with DJs. “Businesses want to employ DJs regardless of prices because of the entertainment they can provide to a hungry audience. “...if they’re talented and making interesting music, we’ll book them,” says Jen Lyon, who with business partner Katie Longmyer organizes the Brooklyn Electronic Music Festival and regularly books DJs throughout New York city (Robehmend). The public’s desire to have DJs start the party has also led to concessions and acceptance even from festivals like Ultra to the rising costs in the industry. To keep their customers happy, Ultra’s promoters have introduced a payment plan for its pricey tickets. So even if one can’t afford to buy their tickets immediately, they can put their desire to enjoy their favorite DJ on layaway (Godard). Even the technology companies that supply DJs have promised to further the growth of their products for the use of DJs at all skill levels and popularities. At the 2014 National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM), VP of Business Development for Numark Adam Cohen spoke to the lengths that business now have to go to appease the consumers desire’ for everything DJ. "Having a DJ at an event or club is no longer an option if you want to stay relevant—it is a necessity... As long as professionals are in demand, there will be complementary market for aspiring professionals who want that work” (PR Newswire.com) To satisfy this necessity, something that has helped existing DJs and amateurs wanting to be DJs has been the invention of products like the DJ controller. Utilizing existing digital media like mp3s and designed to be smaller, lighter and more portability than traditional turntables, mixers, and CDJs, controllers have given the bedroom DJ a chance to get into an actual booth. “Digital media is now incredibly accessible to general consumers, through MP3 downloads and sharing
sites, allowing many more people to get into DJ setups", said David Arevalo, director of marketing, professional sound and visual division for Pioneer Electronics USA Inc. With the climb in popularity and the ability to access music with downloads and digital music, it's a segment that has growth, and promises more” (PR Newswire.com). These more user friendly devices have now given the budding DJ a shot that he or she would not have had twenty years ago while still allowing current DJs to take advantage of technological innovations that they can use to make their work more efficient.

Although businesses and the people in charge of them have made the general consumers' dream of disc jockeying more feasible, it has invited discussion on whether or not a lowered barrier of entry and EDM’s rapid mainstream transformation of DJs into overnight millionaires has diluted what it means to be a DJ. This discussion, now titled “#REALDJing,” has been supported by many industry elite veterans with a call for bringing back a passion for learning technical finesse and inspiration behind the decks. The leader of this movement Alain Macklovitch (aka A-Trak) has remained true to what makes him a turntablist and a DJ's DJ. Since winning the world famous DJ competition DMC in 1997 at the age of 15, Macklovitch has been a champion of blending the new with old within disc jockeying’s culture. He introduced Kanye West to Daft Punk, launched the Brooklyn-based taste making imprint, Fool’s Gold, and stormed stages across the globe with his unique blend of hip hop, EDM, and turntablism, setting him apart as one of the industry’s most unique talent (Spada). For A-Trak, DJing has been a medium of self-expression and he has wanted to educate US fans to what being a DJ really means, not the misnomer as it currently exists. In a recent interview, Malkovitch expanded on his view saying, “There’s this giant paradox right now where the whole of America is infatuated with DJing, but nobody really knows what the hell DJing is” (Spada). Where pop culture sees
Push the Tempo: A Socioeconomic Look into the New Status of the DJ in America

DJ'ing as good for the mainstream, Malkovitch would argue that its transformation and the continuance of easy entry methods into the profession will continue to obscure what real DJing is. For Malkovitch, "as long as there's craftsmanship somewhere—there's artistry" which an overreliance on technology and musical uniformity brought upon by manufactured pop tunes can only serve to harm. At its core, the words of Malkovitch and other #REALDJs seek not to condemn the popularity of DJing in America but to educate those so desperate to be involved with it. In their eyes, the road to being a top DJ is best traveled by those who forge their own unique path, not by those who simply want the quickest way to becoming an electronic cash king.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the closing chapter of Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton’s Last Night the DJ Save My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey, the authors offer an impassioned definition of the DJ’s job. The duo states, “A DJ’s job is to explore music and break unheard tracks, to live in the moment with a spontaneous, improvised choice of music, to seduce a roomful of people and hold their attention for hours at a time” (pg. 545). What makes DJing enjoyable for those inside and outside the booth is that it comes from a pure love of music and the celebration of dance.

In today’s America, the disc jockey has taken the cultural and economic embodiment of this idea to heights never seen in its history. The nightlife economy of America now revolves around music events. Electronic dance music’s ascent to a mainstream genre through disc jockeys producing and then playing popular music within the genre has given DJing national acclaim. This national acclaim and mainstream momentum then allowed businesses to revive large scale electronic music performances which have grossed eye-popping profits for businesses and surrounding economic areas thanks to the electronic festival’s attraction to the millennial generation. Financial success by way of mainstream song popularity and increased performance opportunities created the superstar celebrity DJs, earning salaries that dwarf current pop stars’ takes. In the process of gaining this status, general consumers added to the DJ industry through their desires to be their own DJs. The celebrity status of EDM DJs though has not come without resistance with other leading DJs warning that with increased status comes the responsibility to keep the artistry of what Brewster and Broughton would also see as ‘Real DJing.’ Ultimately, the progression of the disc jockey in America is a classic tale of “being grateful for where you’ve come but not forgetting what got you there.” While EDM, festivals, money and rabid fans have
put the spotlight on the disc jockey what will keep him there is a continued dedication to remaining innovative and loyal in the pursuit of self-expression and music craftsmanship.
Works Cited


"EDM Scores 14 Nominations At This Year's VMA Awards." Club Glow Washington DC. N.p.,  


<http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/fall09/bein_k/history.html>.


Images Cited (in figure order)


