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John Steventon

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Introduction

People come to DJing from different places and for different reasons, but you can split them up into those who love the music, those who want to make money and those who think that DJing is cool and want to be famous. You may fall into one or all three of these categories, but the most important one is loving the music.

If you're a good DJ and get lucky you may become rich and famous, but when starting off if you don't love the music you may become bored and impatient with the time and practice you need to invest in your skills, and quit. Even if you do manage to get good at DJing, if you don't love playing and listening to the music night after night, working in clubs will start to feel too much like work. DJing isn't work; it's getting paid to do something you love.

When I started DJing I already loved the music, but the first time I experienced the true skill of a DJ working a crowd (Sasha, Ibiza, 1996) I fell in love with DJing and knew I wanted to be one. The mechanics of it didn't occur to me until I first stood in front of two turntables and a mixer; all I wanted to do was play other people's music and have control over a crowd.

About This Book

This book is based on my website www.recess.co.uk, which, since 1996, has given new DJs all over the world the start they needed to become great DJs.

Because beatmatching is a complicated and important skill for DJs who want to play electronic dance music (house, trance, progressive, drum and bass, breakbeat and so on), it has its own chapter (Chapter 14), and I mention it frequently. However, the book also contains the mixing skills and musical structure knowledge that enable you to mix rock, indie and pop music, or to DJ at weddings or other parties, so no one's left out.

I use a very simple technique for starting off as a DJ, which begins with the basics of starting tunes and matching beats and then covers the skill of creating transitions between tunes, important for any kind of DJ to master, whether you're a rock, wedding, pop or dance DJ. You can find many other ways to develop your skills, but because these other approaches skip the basics and involve a lot of trial and error and confusion, I've had much more success coaching DJs with my method than with any other.

You can find the equipment sections and information about how to use the variety of function options available to you in Parts I and II, and these are relevant to all DJs. Part III covers mixing skills like beatmatching, scratching, musical structure and mix transitions. Please don't assume that because different skills are associated with certain genres, party DJs should rip out the beatmatching and scratching information, or club DJs should skip anything that mentions party DJing. Knowledge is skill, and the more skilful you are as a DJ, the better you become and the more work you get.

Foolish Assumptions

Sometimes, I make the foolish assumption that you will get my sense of humour. Don't worry; I know I'm not funny, so I don't try too often. I won't distract you from the subject at hand, but every now and then something takes over and I try to be funny and entertaining. I apologise for that now, but after all, an entertaining, humorous approach is what the *For Dummies* series of books is famous for.

Apart from that, this book assumes that you want to be a DJ, you want to put in the time it takes to get good at it, you love the music and you won't get fed up when it takes longer than ten minutes to become the next Deadmau5, Zane Lowe, DJ Qbert or award-winning wedding DJ. I also assume that you don't have vast experience of music theory.

Icons Used in This Book

Every now and then, a little *For Dummies* symbol pops up in the margin of the book. It's there to let you know when something's extra useful, essential for you to remember, may be dangerous to your equipment or technique, or if what follows is technical gobbledegook.



This one's easy: it highlights something you should burn into your memory to help you progress and keep you on the right path on your journey to becoming a great DJ.



Tips are little bits of info that you may not need, but they can help speed up your development, make you sound better and generally make your life easier as a DJ.



When you're starting out as a DJ, you may need to navigate your way through a number of tricky situations. A few of them end with broken records/needles and CDs, a crashed computer or a damaged reputation as a DJ. Heed the advice when you see this icon, and proceed with caution.



They're unavoidable; words put together by someone else in a small room that mean absolutely nothing. Where possible, I try to translate technical DJing terms into plain English for you.

Beyond this Book

The information contained in this book doesn't end when you get to the end. Find out more about DJing by checking out the bonus content available to you at www.dummies.com. You can locate the book's e-cheat sheet at www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/djing, where you'll find handy hints and tips. Be sure to visit the book's extras page at www.dummies.com/extras/djing for further DJing-related information and articles.

You don't need to download anything to understand what I write, but hearing or seeing something instead of reading about it can sometimes help clear up any questions. After all, DJing is about what you hear and feel; it's not something that's easily written down.

Where to Go from Here

Go to the kitchen, make yourself a sandwich, pour a nice cold glass of water or hot cup of coffee, put on some music you love, and jump into Chapter 1 or whichever chapter takes your fancy! If you want to know about beatmatching, go to Chapter 14; if you want to know how to connect your equipment, go to Chapter 13.

When you feel inspired, put down the book and try out some of the techniques you've read about. If you want to spend 20 minutes roughly mixing between tunes just so you can hear the music, but don't want to concentrate on your skills, do it! Your love of the music and DJing is just as important as the mechanics of how you do it, if not more so.

You can also jump online and check out the video and audio clips that support this book at www.recess.co.uk.

Part I

Getting Started with DJing



For Dummies can help you get started with lots of subjects. Visit www.dummies.com to learn more and do more with *For Dummies*.

In this part . . .

- ✔ Solve the equipment minefield using your knowledge of the hardware.
- ✔ Find out which music you want to play before you start – you need to feel passionate about whatever you choose.
- ✔ Explore your shopping options – weigh up the personal touch versus the convenience of shopping online.

Chapter 1

Catching DJ Fever

In This Chapter

- ▶ Having what it takes to be a DJ
- ▶ Mixing mechanics and creativity
- ▶ Reaching the journey's end – the dance floor

The journey you take as a DJ – from the very first tune you play when you enter the DJ world to the last tune of your first set in front of a club filled with people – is an exciting, creative and fulfilling one, but you need a lot of patience and practice to get there.

The affordability of DJ software and smartphone apps means new waves of people are introduced to DJing daily – inspiring them to become DJs. Hundreds of DJs the world over are on a quest to entertain people by playing great music. Everyone needs an advantage when they compete with hundreds of like-minded people. Your advantage is knowledge. I can help you with that.

Discovering DJing Foundations

DJing is first and foremost about music. The clothes, the cars, the money and the fame are all very nice, and nothing to complain about, but playing the right music and how a crowd reacts is what makes and moulds a DJ. As the DJ, you're in control of everybody's night. As such, you need to be professional, skilful and knowledgeable about what the crowd wants to hear, and ready to take charge of how much of a good time they're having.



What kind of DJ you become lies in how you choose, use and respect your DJ tools and skills. Become a student of DJing as well as someone who loves music and performing to a crowd, and your foundations will be rock solid.

Equipping yourself

When you first begin your DJing journey, you can equip yourself with two things: knowledge and hardware.

You can split knowledge into two: what you're about to learn, and what you already know. You can pick up and develop mixing skills like beatmatching, scratching, creating beautiful transitions and choosing pieces of music that play well together in time.

When it comes to playing music to a crowd, picking the right music to play – regardless of which genre you've chosen – is the most important part. Learning how to read a crowd comes with time and experience.

A sense of rhythm, a musical ear for which tunes play well over each other and the ability to spot what makes a tune great are all things that you'll have developed from the day you were born. Out of those three things, a sense of rhythm can be the best secret weapon you bring when first finding out how to DJ. I've played the drums since I was ten, which has given me a very strong sense of rhythm and a sixth sense for beat and song structure.

Don't worry if you don't know your beats from your bars or your bass drums from your snare drums; I explain all in Chapters 14 and 15. You need to dedicate some considerable time to developing a feel for the music and training your brain to get into the groove, but with time and concentration, you won't be left behind. The same goes for developing a musical ear and recognising which tunes have the potential to be great. With experience, dedication, determination and, yes, more time, you can develop all the musical knowledge you need to become a great DJ.

The hardware you use as a DJ can define you just as much as the music you play. The basic equipment components you need are:

- ✔ **Input devices to play the music:** You can choose from CD players, MP3 players, a computer with DJing software, or turntables that play records.
- ✔ **A mixer:** This box of tricks lets you change the music from one tune to the other. Different mixers offer varying control over how you can change the sound as you mix from tune to tune.
- ✔ **A pair of headphones:** Headphones are essential for listening to the next tune while one is already playing.
- ✔ **Amplification:** You have to be heard, and depending on the music you play, you have to be LOUD!
- ✔ **Records/CDs/MP3s:** What's a DJ without something to play?



Providing that your wallet's big enough, making the choice between CD and vinyl is no longer a quandary. The functions on a turntable are equally matched by those on a CD player, and digital DJing (see Chapter 9) means you can use your turntables to play music files through computer software, so you're not limited by the availability of music that's released (or not released) on vinyl or CD. So the decision comes down to aesthetics, money and what kind of person you are. You may love the retro feel of vinyl and enjoy hunting for records in shops, or you may like the modern look of CD players or the versatility of computer DJing with a controller and prefer the availability of MP3s and CDs – it's your choice.

Making friends with your wallet

DJing costs money. Whether you shop online or go to the high street, the first thing to do is look at your finances. If you've been saving money for long enough, you may have a healthy budget to spend on your equipment. Just remember, the expense doesn't stop there. New tunes are released every day, and you'll be bursting to play the newest, greatest tunes. You may start to think of the price of other items in terms of how many tunes you could get instead. I remember saying once: 'Fifty pounds for a shirt? That's ten records!'



You don't get the personal touch, but shopping online can be cheaper for equipment and music. If you can't afford new DJ equipment right now, use free or demo software on a computer to develop your skills and then spend money on DJ equipment or controllers for the software when you can. Flip through to Chapters 3 and 9 for more information.

Knowing your music

Throughout the years I've been helping people to become DJs, one of the most surprising questions I've been asked is: 'I want to be a DJ. Can you tell me which music I should spin?' This seems like a ridiculous question to me. Picking the genre (or genres) of your music is really important, because you need to love and feel passionate about playing this music for the rest of your DJ career. (Head to Chapters 4 and 5 for more on genre and music formats.)

After you've found your musical elixir, start to listen to as much of it as you can. Buy records and CDs, listen to the radio, search the Internet for information on this genre and discover as much as you can. This groundwork is helpful when choosing tunes you want to play and when looking for artists' remixes, and is an aid to developing your mixing style. Doing a tiny bit of

research before you leap into DJing goes a long way towards helping you understand the facets and building blocks of the music you love. Become a student of trance, a scholar of jungle, a raconteur of rock and a professor of pop – just make sure that you start treating your music as a tool, and be sure to use that tool like a real craftsman would.

Researching and discovering

You know the music you want to play, you've decided on the format that's right for you, you've been saving up for a while; now you need to wade through the vast range of equipment that's available and be sure that you're buying the best DJ setup for the job at hand.



With technology advancing faster than I can write this book, you can easily get lost in the features that are available to you on CD decks, turntables, mixers and in software releases. Take as much time as you can to decide what you want to buy. Go online and do some research and ask others in DJ forums for their thoughts on the equipment you're thinking about buying. Make sure that you're buying something that does what you want it to do, and that any extra features aren't bumping up the price for something you'll never use.

Here's a brief guide to help you know what to look for when buying equipment:

- ✓ Turntables designed for DJ use need to have a strong motor, a pitch control to adjust the speed the record plays at and a good needle. They also need to have a sturdy enough construction to handle the vibrations and abuse that DJing dishes out. A home hi-fi turntable won't do, I'm afraid. Check out Chapter 6 for more.
- ✓ Mixers ideally have three-band EQs (equalisers) for each input channel, a cross-fader, headphone cue controls and a good display to show you the level (volume) at which the music is sent out of the mixer, so you don't blow any speakers accidentally. Chapter 10 goes into more detail on this and other functions on the mixer.
- ✓ CD decks need to be sturdy enough that they won't skip every time the bass drum booms over the speakers. Jog wheels, easy-to-navigate time and track displays, and a pitch bend along with the pitch control are all important core features of a CD turntable. Chapter 8 is dedicated to everything CD related.

- ✔ You can use computers with DJ software in various ways, from using mouse clicks and keyboard strokes to using dedicated hardware controllers – or you can simply use your existing turntables/CD decks and a mixer to control the music on the computer. I explain all of these choices in Chapter 9.
- ✔ Headphones need to be comfortable, to sound clear when played at high volume, and to cut out a lot of external noise from the dance floor so that you don't have to play them too loudly. Your ears are very important, so try not to have your headphones at maximum all the time. Chapter 11 is the place to go for guidance on headphones and protecting your ears.
- ✔ Volume and sound control are the watchwords for amplification. You don't need a huge amplifier and bass bins for your bedroom, but similarly a home hi-fi isn't going to be much use in a town hall. Chapter 12 helps you find the right balance.

Connecting your equipment

After you have all the pieces of your DJ setup, your final task is to put together the jigsaw. Knowing how to connect your equipment isn't just important, it's vital. If you don't know what connects to what, and what the ins and outs of your setup are, you can't troubleshoot when things go wrong. And things do go wrong, at the worst of times.

Eventually, you'll be showing off your DJ skills and someone may ask you to play at a party with your equipment – equipment that you connected up a year ago, with the help of your 4-year-old brother. Think of the soldier who can assemble a gun from parts to functional in minutes; that's how comfortable you need to be when connecting the parts of your DJ setup – except you only need to kill 'em on the dance floor. (Chapter 13 tells you all you need to know about connections.)

DJing Takes Patience and Practice

No matter what kind of DJ you are – rock, dance, party, indie, drum and bass or any of the hundreds of other genres out there – it's all about picking the right tunes to play for the people in front of you, and the transition as you mix between them.

It's all about style

Style is the true creative avenue, because it's all down to the music. The order you play your tunes in, changing keys, mixing harmonically, switching genre, increasing the tempo

and creating a roller-coaster ride of power and energy are the reasons why one DJ is better than another.

Picking the right tunes comes with knowledge, experience and the ability to read how the people are reacting on the dance floor (check out Chapters 20 and 21 for more on this), but you can discover, develop and refine the mechanics of how to get from tune to tune through practice and dedication.



Beatmatching (adjusting the speed that two tunes play at so that their bass drum beats constantly play at the same time) is the skill that's regarded as the core foundation of the house/trance DJ. Given enough time, patience and practice, anyone can learn the basics I describe in Chapter 14.

Many genres of music aren't so tied into the skill of beatmatching, because the speeds of the various tunes mixed together vary so much it's almost impossible to do. But this doesn't mean there's no skill in rock, pop or party DJing – the skill is in choosing which music you play rather than the transition between tunes, and you still need to avoid a cacophony of noise as you mix between tunes.

After the core skills of creating the right kinds of transitions, what sets a good DJ apart from an okay DJ is creativity. You need another set of building blocks to help develop this creativity. How you stack up these blocks plays a big part in determining how skilled a DJ you become:

- ✓ Good sound control is the first building block of your skill and creativity. You need a good ear to gauge whether one tune is too loud during a mix, or if you have too much bass playing to the dance floor. This skill is something that develops, and you can hone it through experience, but a DJ with a good ear for sound quality is already halfway there. Chapter 16 covers sound control to create a great-sounding mix, and Chapters 19 and 21 have information about controlling the overall sound of your mix when playing live or when making demo mixes.
- ✓ Knowledge of the structure of a tune is the second essential building block in your quest to become a creative DJ. Knowing how many bars and phrases make up larger sections of tunes is important for creating exciting mixes. In time, DJs develop a sixth sense about how a tune has