

Mixing: Dos and Don'ts for Successful Events
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Let's face it, we have all heard bad DJs, and when their mixing is bad, it's really bad. I usually call them "DJ Shoesinadryer" because that's what bad mixes sound like to me. There are several Dos and Don'ts that you can incorporate into your show to make sure that you aren't that DJ!

I was always told to start with the positives, so let's talk about the Dos in the world of mixing.

Get organized. I remember when I first started using Serato about seven years ago. I went to the Mobile Beat show that February and it was everywhere. When I got back, I bought the Rane SL1 box and a brand new MacBook. I didn't do my first gig using it until almost Christmas. It took me that long to get my library to where I felt comfortable gigging with it. Your library should be so organized that DJing becomes easy for you. Do you have the Mobile Beat Top 200 playlist created? How about the top songs from the 50s, 60s, 70s, etc. etc.? Do you have the BPM listed beside each song so that you can figure out what you would play next in your dance sets? You should! You must!

Know your limits. I have had several DJs work for me over the past 15 years that couldn't mix chocolate milk, but they had other skills such as an incredible voice, or more importantly, impeccable customer service and they received tons of great reviews and not one complaint about mixing. The reality of beat mixing is that it's a great skill to have, but isn't mandatory in the mobile DJ world. Reading the crowd and knowing what to play next is so much more important!

Build Sets. You're not DJ AM (R.I.P.) or Girl Talk. Those guys can drop any song, from any decade at any point in the night and people go mental. It's so important that you build sets out of "like" songs. A game that I got from Mike Walter that's really great especially if you are a multi-op and training DJs is to go and get a set of Jenga blocks. On each block, take a Sharpie and write the name of one of the Mobile Beat Top 200 songs. Shuffle them up, dump them on a table, then ask your DJ to build you a couple of sets. You can easily tell if they know what they are talking about or not. If you see something like "My Girl", "RESPECT", "Signed, Sealed, Delivered" stacked together, then you know they get it. It's a great tool for you as well. I usually build sets based on BPM or Decades.

Now let's talk about a few of the Don'ts.

Don't fake it. The truth is you can't fake it. Bad mixing is bad mixing any way you cut it. If you aren't good at beat mixing, again, that's OK. You can rely on the volume faders or the cross fader to prevent dead air, or you can even just drop in the right song at the right place. There is really only one way to get better at beat mixing, and that's to practice, and by practice I mean at home, NOT at a gig where someone is paying you top dollar. If you can't get a friend to listen to your train wrecks at first, no worries, just record your mix and then take it with you to the gym or your car and listen. You'll be surprised at how much better you'll get with some practice.

Be careful with the pitch. One of my rules when mixing is to try not to mess much with the pitch of the song that's playing. For example, if I'm playing something that's 120 BPM live and want to mix into a song that's 125 BPM, I would pull down the 125 to 120 before moving the fader over. Even though it's a small percentage, and probably nobody could tell, I just don't like messing with the song people are grooving to.

Don't cut it too short. One of the biggest advantages DJs have these days is technology. As I mentioned before, Serato completely changed the game. I don't even know if I would still be DJing if I was having to carry around all those records and CDs still. However, if you ever go out to nightclubs, you'll notice that those DJs are burning through songs, I mean they may drop six songs in 3 minutes. If you are a mobile DJ, which I feel like most of the readers of this magazine are, then that's not normally what your clientele is going to want (unless maybe you're doing a prom or something). Don't get so caught up on the fact that you have 25,000 songs in your library and you want to get to as many as possible. If you want to dump them early, maybe mix out at the bridge, or if they are working on the dance floor, let it ride!

Well, those are my mixing tips for this issue. Next time I'll be giving my MCing tips. Got questions or comments? Email me at info@bunndjcompany.com

Joe Bunn is hosting The PhDJ Workshop in Raleigh, NC on November 4th & 5th, 2014. Visit www.phdjworkshop.com for more information.