



Thom Svast Speaks on the Irony of AFTER's "DJ Rules"

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Over the weekend, the dance music Internets were ablaze with talk about [some DJ Rules](#), primarily because *they were super on-point*. The list was to be put up in the DJ booth at AFTER, a new after-hours event going down in Las Vegas from 3:30AM to 8AM, and lays out what can be best described as the reverse of today's EDM scene. Everything from not allowing trap, hip-hop, or dubstep to be played to various ways of saying "don't play pre-mixed sets," this is groundbreaking stuff in a city where DJs are paid top dollar to be EDM jukeboxes for crowds that don't know what good dance music is to begin with. Come to find out, DAD homegirl [Dani Deahl](#) knows one of AFTER's managing partners, a guy by the name of Thom Svast, so we figured we would have a chat with Thom to discuss his journey, these DJ Rules, and what Vegas dance music heads can expect from AFTER (which kicked off on February 1 and was a great success, we heard).

First off, tell the people who might not be up on your history about how you've been involved with the dance music scene.

I started my music career in the mid-'90s in Chicago and partnered in a promotion group called Family Chicago. I did some time touring to various parts of Europe, Asia, and South America. I co-founded Calamity of Noise (CON artists) with Stellar and did some touring as Svast & Stellar. I've been producing for about eight years under the name SVAST. In between, I got into nightclub management in Las Vegas where I managed at Pure nightclub, and directed a couple of after-hours at Seamless and Artisan. Here I am now as the Managing Partner of AFTER.

AFTER's a new thing, right? Can you tell us about how this new after-hours event got going?

A previous employer of mine had recently parted ways and I was looking for something new to get involved in. I saw so much potential in the underground after-hours scene in Vegas that no one was tapping into and I was blessed to have met my current business partner in the process. I believe most club owners don't see dollar signs in the things that aren't mainstream. I have found great personal success in being different. Being different is what creates a new and lasting product that people want or will eventually want once you open them up to it. My business partner believed in my vision and entrusted me with it. He allowed me to run with my ideas. From there I surrounded myself with a small team of brilliant progressive minds and launched AFTER from conception to this point.

We kind of have an idea about the reasoning behind these DJ rules that have circulated online, but can you break down your stance regarding today's dance music scene and the way some DJs approach it?

People in Las Vegas and coming to Las Vegas pay more to see a DJ than they do to see a live concert. So I find it absolutely appalling when these guys, or girls for that matter, go up there and play pre-mixed sets. It's offensive to the consumer and unfortunately most people are ignorant to whats actually going on stage. These guys twist knobs and make heart symbols with their hands and people think they're earning their keep. The other side of it is the whole [ghost-writer issue in the EDM genre](#). As an artist I am dumb founded that someone else can paint a picture for you and you stamp it with your signature. I'm close with several big name techno, tech-house and deep house artists, and I can say that I am only aware of a few with ghost-writers, but in the EDM side of things I know over a handful of writers that write for several of these big name guys making millions. Some are nothing more than pop stars with engineering teams behind them. I'm not hating on them for reaching that point, but its no longer an artistic music. It's now pop art, and complete garbage. There is no soul with a team of writers.

Was this list of rules something that was set in stone from the beginning?

I was in my office one day listening to my usual CLR podcasts while I'm working and reading the launch of the "new" club residencies in Las Vegas, and it just turned me a bit that people were excited to see the same guys playing the same songs over and over and over again. Sometimes the same song two or three times in one night. Even [Steve Angello](#) admitted that the music is currently unoriginal and stated, "I'm allergic to where dance is going now." (As a side note, Im a big fan of Steve Angello's work as [Mescal Kid](#).) I didn't want to put DJs on my roster that didn't earn their keep and give a legit show to the audience. People come to the clubs to spend their hard-earned money and I won't take it from them by duping them into something that isn't real. The people I book at AFTER don't need those rules, and that's the irony of me posting them. I read the comments and laugh because people haven't done their homework on us. I only book top-notch talent. Even my resident DJs are all great producers in their own right ([Black Boots](#), [Spacebyrdz](#), [Steve Prior](#)...). My sense of humor is very dry and somewhat crass at times, and it shows in the "Rules." I have nothing personal against any of these people, nor do I personally know any of them, but we all see the interviews and I see many of the riders and know the first-hand accounts of several of their egos. We're simply dealing with taste and a big gap in most personalities. I'm stoked by other peoples success, but not by how many choose to handle that success, and they get people to by into something that isn't real.

What's the situation with booking; let's say you guys book a DJ who might spin more of a trap or dubstep set; would you be booking them in hopes that they'd be flipping their style for your event, or is your aim to totally steer clear the kinds of DJs that are outlined in this list?

My aim is to book purists to their dedicated genre. I don't have room for open-format DJs. If they're happy in their work, I'm happy for them as well, but they won't play our stages. I laugh when people send me demos and I tell them this isn't what were interested in and they reply, "I can make you a set of whatever you want. I play everything." No thanks. I want dedicated artists who eat, sleep, and breathe their respected genres. Purists understand whats going on in their scene and know what the forefront of that genre is and can put that effort into their sets every time they play. They don't go to Beatport's Top 10 and download all. They take the time to dig deep into the crate to give a new experience every time. That's what we want at AFTER. A new and different experience for everyone. You leave feeling like you were just a part of something great.

AFTER kicked off on February 1. Talk to us about what the after-hours crowd in Las Vegas can expect from this event, aside from no-trap or deadmau5 tracks.

The night opened with Black Boots from [Ultra Records](#). Many people only know Black Boots for their current more commercial-sounding work, but their roots lie much deeper. Pedi used to produce as Lightknife with dope releases on Italo Business and Lot 49. Techno is his background. Mikey Francis used to be a lead singer in a really good independent rock band called Afghan Raiders. They both have a heart for the deep and dark side of music, and it shows in their techno sets. Spacebyrdz recently came off an EP on Mexa Records called *Devils Drugs* and the two tracks both broke the top 10. Steve Prior's new release with Peter Pizzutelli has charted and gained mad love on Anthony Attalla's beatport chart. Knowing their backgrounds and musical abilities tell you what happened through out the night.

How'd the first AFTER go? Anyone violate these rules?

Definitely no violations. These guys are all on board. They all played on Traktor, but our DJ booth is 10 feet long and it looked like Drumcell's desk. There was no less than two controllers per person. Spacebyrdz play with five controllers. The technology has made people lazy and ignorant, but the flip side is the amazing sounds you can create by remixing on the fly and layering tracks. That's what I want to see on the computers. Anyone can put tracks in key and hit a spacebar to play them in sync. It doesn't make you a DJ. What makes you a DJ is how far you can push the technology or equipment that you're using to benefit the performance.

Since this list circulated online, what's been the reaction from the people?

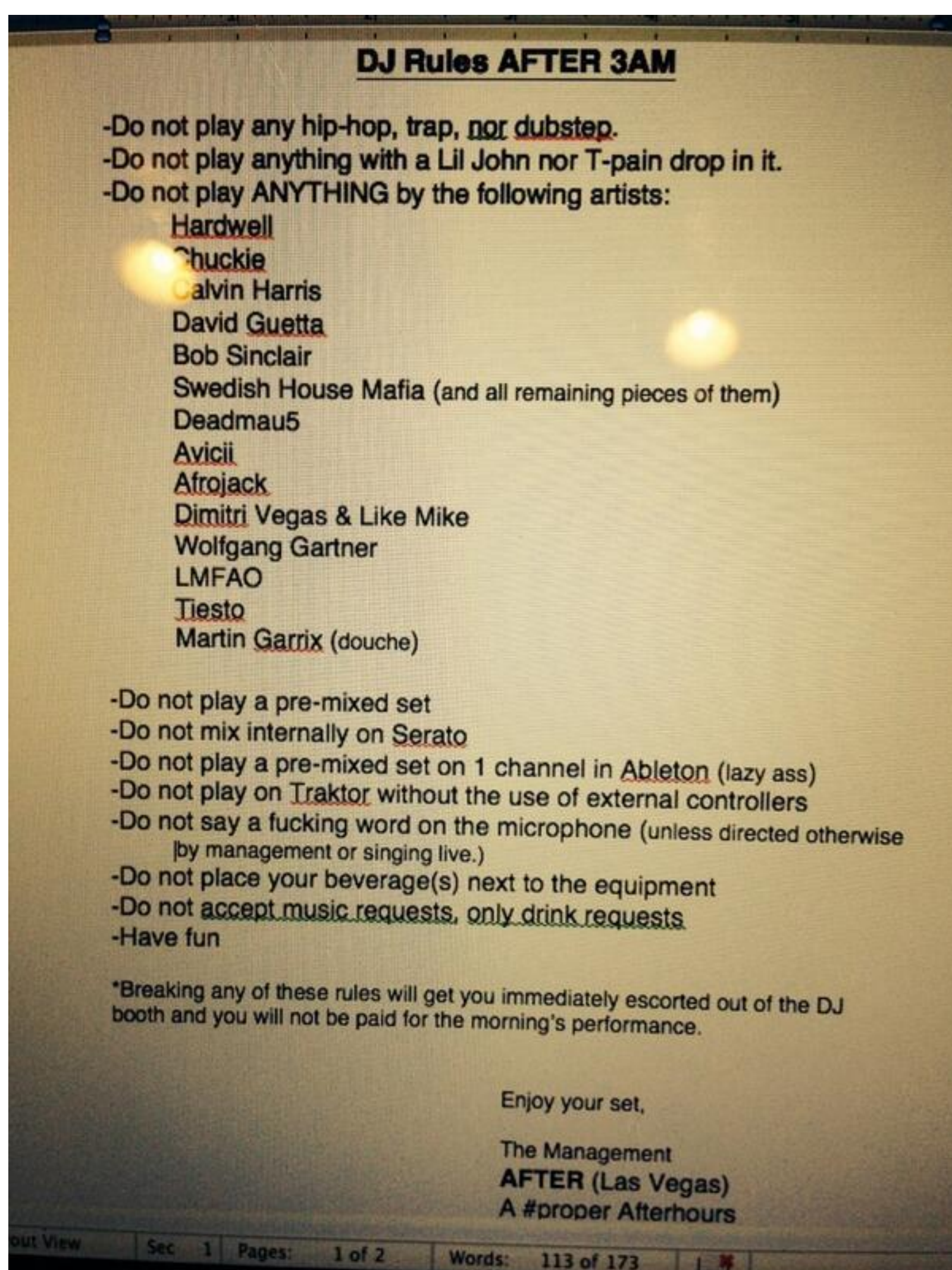
The support and feedback has been nothing short of amazing. Our goal was to change and bring awareness to the scene in Vegas, but now it looks like we may have influenced the world. Our goal was not to put people down, but to put people in their place. We're tired of the same ole'. People don't understand it if they don't live in an environment where a sound is so drowned out. Most DJs in Vegas play for a paycheck, not for music, so they emulate the guys listed on our Rules sheet. We're tired of hearing the same shit over and over again. Why would I want to go to a club and spend five or six hours there and then go to an after-hours to hear the same fuckin' songs again? That makes absolutely no sense. We have caught some flack in the process, but that is expected. People take their music seriously, and I love them for that, but they take it a bit to personal. If you love and play that music, rock on. We just don't want you playing at AFTER. There are people who want to hear what you have to play, but its not what we want. I find it humorous that [Mark Farina got kicked off the decks at Marquee in Vegas](#), [Dennis Ferrer](#) and [DJ Shadow](#) got kicked off the decks at Mansion in Miami, and [Darin Epsilon got kicked off the decks at Lumen in Chicago](#), but we post something that stands up against the status quo and those people lash out at us saying were being judgmental. Were only stating what sits in the Psyche of most of the underground community and the music lovers that follow them.

What do you hope to achieve by sticking to what's essentially the antithesis of the current EDM scene today? Are there plans to branch AFTER's aesthetic into a regular club setting, before the after-hours timeframe?

We're not hoping to achieve anything in the current EDM scene. We're hoping to keep the roaches alive, because underground lives forever. In a nuclear winter roaches will survive, and that's exactly what will happen in our music scene. The "EDM" bubble will burst and the underground will still be riding along. doing what they always have been doing. I do have a certain respect for the pop scene because it's brought more people over to the music, and I believe if they are properly educated on the music they'll seep into the underground and allow us to flourish without having to change what we are. Basquiat painted ignorant (street) art, and even in his growth he never changed because his work was a raw reflection of his inner self. Everyone's struggle is real and underground artists put that struggle into music. That is why it's pure and will never go away, because it's from the soul.

Someday very soon there will be a true underground nightclub in Vegas, not just an after-hours.

For more information AFTER, check out [their website](#) or [their Facebook page](#).



<http://doandroidsdance.com/features/thom-svast-interview/>