

Q&A

So About Those “DJ Rules” That Turned Las Vegas on Its Head...

By Lee Mills · February 10, 2014

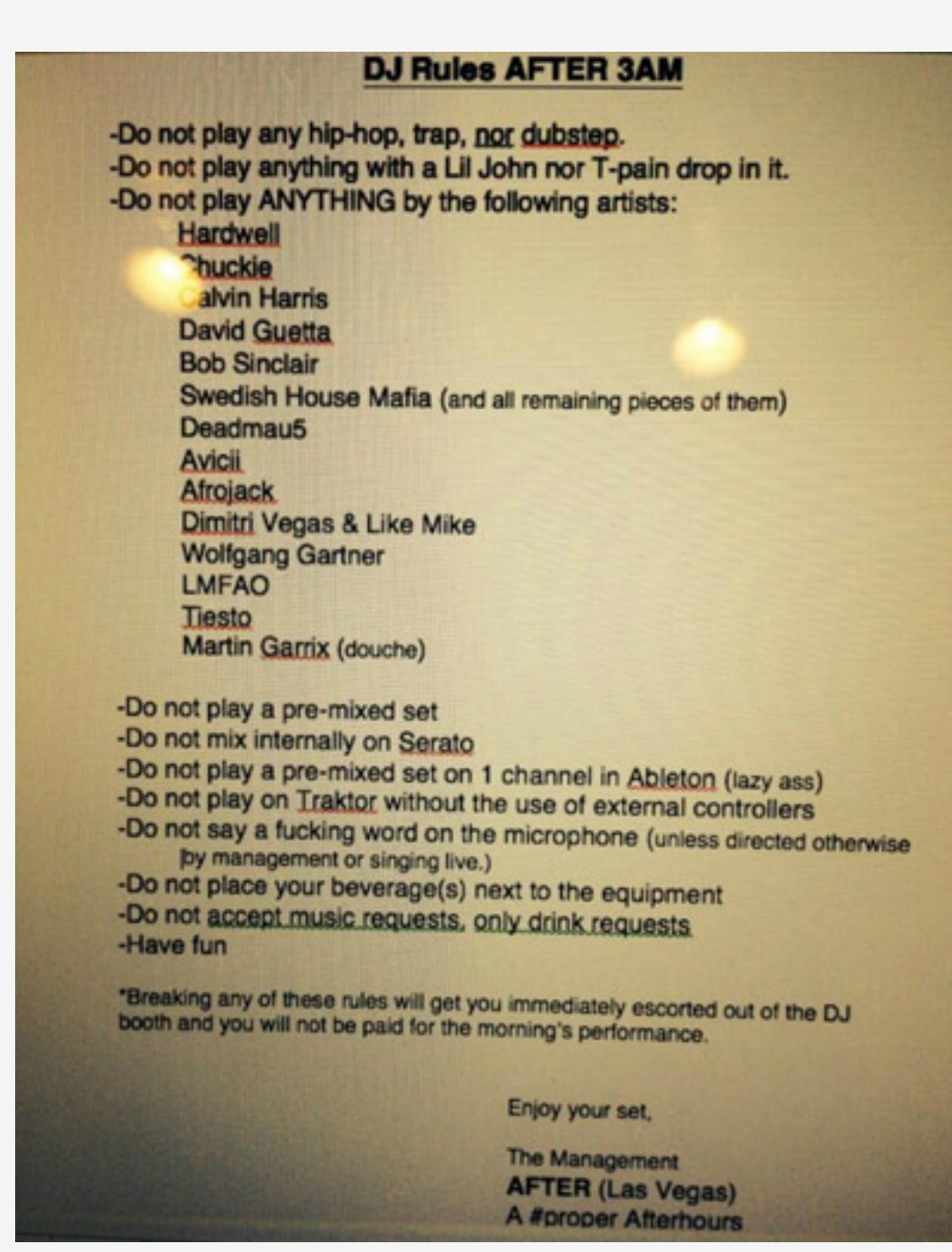
No hip-hop, David Guetta or premixed sets are just a few rules at Sin City's AFTER party that drew fire from the DJ community. But according to Spacebyrdz's Alex Clark, the restrictions were necessary—and no apologies are in order.

More than any city in the United States, Las Vegas has capitalized on commercial dance music's explosion in popularity over the last several years, transforming itself into a destination that's visited as much for its beats as its casinos. Big name DJs ditched longtime residencies overseas for the allure (and dollar signs) of Sin City, leading [David Guetta](#) to proclaim Vegas “the new Ibiza.” Since laying down roots in Nevada in 2011, Electronic Daisy Carnival has usurped the cache of Miami's Ultra Music Festival as America's premier dance music mega-festival, simultaneously growing into the largest such event in the world. With ticket and table prices climbing higher and higher and no end in sight, Vegas hummed on as a well-oiled, glowstick-waving machine.

Then, an image went viral last week promoting a set of “DJ Rules” that seemed to go against everything that allowed Vegas to climb to the top of the dance music mountain, implying that perhaps the machine had become *too* well-oiled. No premixed sets, no microphone shout-outs and a blacklist that included city mainstays and residents like [Afrojack](#), [Tiësto](#) and Guetta. Put forth by promoter Thom Svast for his new party AFTER, the rules attracted supporters and detractors in droves, arguing that they're either a breath of fresh air for a scene that was quickly become stale or an unnecessarily draconian set of regulations destined to suck all the fun out of the party.

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Alex Clark, along with his DJ/production partner [Oscar Molina](#), makes up the duo Spacebyrdz, a staple among the Las Vegas underground house and techno scene as well as one of the party's resident acts. Here, Clark breaks down the posting of the rules, its whirlwind aftermath and the start of the AFTER party series.



How did your partnership with Thom Svast start, and how did this lead to the “DJ Rules” list?

We've been good friends with Thom for a while. We were doing parties at the Artisan last year, and when he left there we were pretty much going to be done after, because they were going to go to more of a commercial format, and we don't want to conform to it. We don't knock it; it's just not what we play. When we left, he got this opportunity here and everything fell into place during January. The whole “DJ Rules” thing got released right before and we all posted it, and it went a lot more viral than we were expecting. I've never seen anything go viral like that before [*Laughs*]. I saw Sasha retweeting it and Max Graham, and all of these outlets kept re-posting.

People seem to take this list very seriously.

It's comical. The thing about these rules is they're not really rules. It's been like a full-time job... I've had to explain to people they're not really rules, we're just basically saying that we're not playing what these casino clubs are doing, because everything on this list is what the casino clubs are either doing or playing. They'll have premixed sets; we don't do that. The DJs are producing a type of sound that we're not trying to do. We knew that it would get some backlash, but most people were very supportive. Even [Kaskade](#) was like “all of the work I've done, and I didn't even make the list!?”

Despite all the positive feedback, there's been some backlash as well.

[A-Trak](#) posted something and he was like, “No hip-hop?” I love hip-hop, but nobody wants to hear that for afterhours. You don't go to a club at three or four or five in the morning to hear hip-hop. There's only one place that plays hip-hop after hours and that's Drais and it doesn't even go that late. We're not hating on any of those other genres, it's just saying that we're not playing them. And I think because we wrote it down we're getting more backlash from it. All these casinos don't write out “we're not going to play techno or deep house,” but they don't play it.



How did the first party go in lieu of all the recent attention?

The first gig went really well. We sold out all the tables on Monday before the event. The balcony's not supposed to be open, but there were so many people that they actually had to open the upstairs. It was an amazing vibe, everyone loved it. Steve Prior, who's a good friend of ours, he's a monthly resident, he played with us. From 10 until 3:30, it's a gay club, and then they transition from their music to our music every Saturday.

Is there anything specific you're going for stylistically or thematically with your residency? What kind of music have you been playing?

We just play all underground stuff. We literally get new music every single week, instead of playing the same music artist every week. And that's kind of the difference between what underground artists do versus commercial artists—they play the stuff that people know, so they can sing along. We play stuff that no one knows so they go, “What is that?” and maybe want to look into what it is. Personally, I'd rather go out and not know any of the tracks that are being played by the DJ and educate myself on what's being played, as opposed to knowing every song that is going to be played that night.

On [our label] Riff Raff, we have an EP coming out with some big remixes from Eric Volta, Dance Spirit [and] Clint Stewart who's one-half of Safeword. And our buddy Silky out of London just had a huge release. We've been playing a lot of their stuff.



What's it been like watching the explosion of clubs and dance music in Vegas over the past few years?

It's good and bad I guess. It exposes electronic music to a lot of people who wouldn't normally hear it, but we play more of the underground side—deep house, tech house, techno, minimal—and there really is no draw here, because the big casino clubs booking all the commercial music kind of changed the whole scene. It used to be good years ago in the Utopia/Empire Ballroom Days before it really blew up and became this whole EDM thing, and now we're trying to bring that back. There's always been an underground scene. It's just very small here and it didn't have a big draw, but now we finally have a platform and a location that's nostalgic for the parties that they used to have, so a lot of people are interested.

So there has been an audience for underground music in the past?

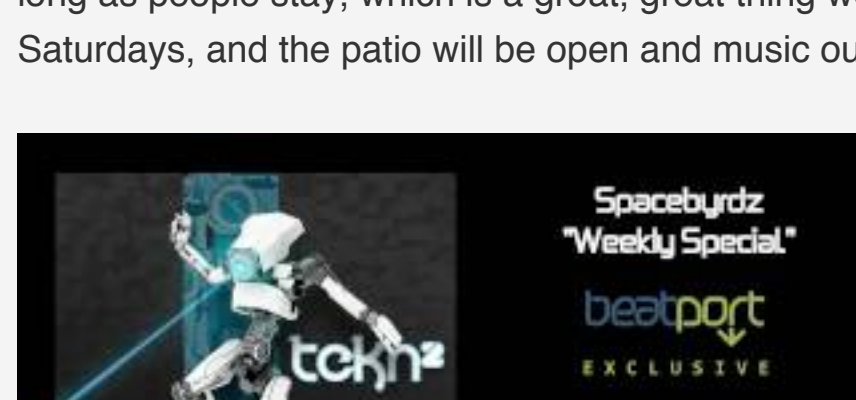
The locals have a scene here. Keith Evans did a party. Edgar, another local here, does Soul Kitchen—he's been doing that for about 10 years. Nothing big compared to what they're doing in the casino clubs, but there is a small underground scene here and everyone supports each other. They've had Richie Hawtin playing Halloween at Marquee and Jamie Jones is playing next weekend. The only time underground artist were playing here was during EDC or other festivals, then you wouldn't see them the rest of the year for the most part. Marco Carola played at Drais one time, Jamie Jones played there once before... That's the type of DJ we want to start bringing to the afterhours place that we're at.

Do you think more and more of the audiences who come to Vegas for commercial dance music will start to gravitate towards the music you guys play?

It takes education. Young kids don't really know what they like—bass music, high energy, lots of colors. Then you grow up, and your music palette changes. You start to appreciate a style of music you didn't know existed; you experience a vibe and something different. Hopefully, younger kids have heard this style of music and you might change the perspectives of a few people—that's how you keep things moving.

Will the parties run every week through the summer?

It's a weekly party as of right now, because it's still the slow season out here. Spring and summer is when it picks up. For now, it's Saturday afterhours, which is technically Sunday morning—3:30 until at least 8 in the morning, depending on how busy it is. Vegas runs on how busy it is, there is no cutoff time, which is another great thing. Parties can run as long as people stay, which is a great, great thing we have here. Once the spring rolls around it will be Fridays and Saturdays, and the patio will be open and music out there.



So it seems as though people could go out and see a Calvin Harris or hip-hop, then come and check out your party. You're not really stepping on anyone's toes with this.

You go to the clubs you hear whatever, and you want to hear something different for afterhours. You don't want to go to an afterhours club at 5:30 in the morning, and you just left Hakkasan and you hear the same music that would be completely redundant. What's the point in even going to afterhours if you're going to hear the same music? We welcome everybody. We want everybody to come out, and just experience the vibe and the people there and hear something different. In this town, all anyone everyone does is imitate each other, and no one's doing anything new or original or forward-thinking, so we're trying to take advantage of that. Plus, the venue that we're at is notorious for having some of the best afterhours Vegas ever had when it was Utopia Ballroom. So being in that room after it had been closed after five years was really cool.

What can we expect from future AFTER parties?

Everything's kind of tentative but one big thing, Max Graham who's more of a trance DJ who's been playing that at Marquee, he changed his tour to play afterwards with us on February 22, because he wants to play techno and tech house and underground music. He doesn't want to conform, because those places make you play a format, so he's going to come through and play an afterhours set, which is a huge thing. He's been real supportive of the whole “DJ Rules”—he gets the concept.

Last week was really good, and we got a really good response. I think it's going to draw a lot of attention from people coming in out of town and gonna want something different—I think everyone's tired of the same DJs being cycled through all the same clubs here, because that's pretty much how it's been for the past two to three years.