

# RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW

A bona fide hero in his South American homeland, DJ/producer Alok opens up about having psy-trance DJs for parents, his huge hit 'Here Me Now', and DJing at our WMC pool party this year...

Words: HAROLD HEATH



**B**razilian DJ/producer Alok (real name Achkar Peres Petrillo) began his career at the tender age of 12 — his early start perhaps unsurprising, as both his parents were successful DJs. As a young child, Alok, along with his twin brother and mother, moved to Holland and spent time in a squat in Amsterdam. His mum was the cleaner in a nightclub and fell in love with the energetic bounce and smooth shiny riffs of psy-trance, as did his father when he visited. Both parents eventually returned to Brazil and pioneered the psy-trance scene back home, becoming successful DJs and starting the Universe Paralello festival, which is now a nine-day event.

We caught up with Alok in-between meetings via a crackly phone line, his accent a beguiling mix of Brazilian and Dutch, with just a tinge of London. Again unsurprisingly, the young Alok's first musical love was the frisky charms of psy-trance. However, he moved to London in 2010 and became influenced by, "a different type of sound. I wasn't living with my parents anymore so there was no pressure to do psy-trance", and Alok became captivated by house music. He clearly remembers his father saying to him, "Listen son, I cannot help you in this market — if you go into this scenario you have to do it by yourself."

However, it was clearly a smart move and one that has paid off, allowing the young producer to continue the family tradition while following his own muse.

"I think that how I live nowadays continues the story of my parents," he says.

## HEAR ME NOW

His first big dance music break came in 2007. "I had three songs at the No.1, No.2 and No.3 positions on Beatport... it was an insane moment, and I remember thinking, 'Oh I'm going to have a lot of festivals outside of Brazil', but then suddenly I had other breaks in my career which were much, much bigger. So it's been kind of like upgrades, evolution. I would say the biggest break I had was with 'Hear Me Now', which really gave me a lot of opportunities and brought me to a different level."

Indeed, 2016's 'Hear Me Now' on Spinnin' Records was absolutely huge, with platinum sales all over Europe, chart placings worldwide and nearly 377 million Spotify streams. One of the catchiest earworms of 2016, 'Hear Me

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Now' was built around a melancholy vocal hook that owed more to introspective rock than to stadium EDM. Its acoustic guitar chords and dreamy flute riff provided a smooth, emotive backing for Zeeba's wistful lyrics, and its crossover success gave Alok the freedom and confidence to write and release exactly the kind of music that he wanted, drawing on broader pop influences.

"'Hear Me Now' broke all the barriers for me," Alok says, "and put me in a place where I wanted to be, which was feeling free. I was always inspired by Coldplay and U2, so why not bring that influence into what I was doing?" Although you might not hear it explicitly in his current productions, Alok's other big early influence is perhaps a little more surprising. "In the beginning of my career it was 100% The Prodigy, no doubt!" he says with feeling. "And it's crazy because afterwards my influences went to Coldplay, U2, Red Hot Chili Peppers... and nowadays, who really inspires me are artists like David Guetta, what he did in the past, and Avicii. Those guys who brought electronic music to a different level. It's not only about the sound anymore, it's about the artist, and they took the risk with it."

## MIAMI FEVER

Alok is no stranger to the Miami Winter Music Conference and will be playing at the DJ Mag Pool Party at this year's event, an occasion he's very much looking forward to.

"I'm really excited about it," Alok says. "This is a moment where you can bring the new stuff, you can be more experimental and people are expecting something new. It's the moment where you have to show the new releases. And it's also the moment where I connect to the electronic scene. You see, I live in two different worlds, I live in the pop scene and I also live in the EDM scene, and so it's really important for me to keep the balance. In Brazil I play parties not connected with electronic music; I'm playing with pop singers singing pop songs, and it's really important for me to keep them connected."

So how does he manage to walk the tightrope

between DJing pop and dance?

"When I play the EDM scene, I can be more experimental," he says. "I can try new stuff, I can play a longer set, but when I'm playing the pop scene, I have to play my big hits, the set has to be more dynamic... even the communication is different. For me, everything is about balance."

This striving for balance is clearly working out very well indeed for the Brazilian star, who has already hit a number of impressive milestones in his career. His music is a carefully achieved equilibrium, a constant attempt to offset and equalise the different elements and influences of his sound.

"I have pop songs, which are the ones that connect with the electronic scene but also with the pop scene — with children and my grandma! But I also have a sound that is really specific, and which is more connected with the electronic scene. I used to call it 'Brazilian beat' but I feel like I can't be limited to this anymore, it's much more now. Nowadays I feel like it's something more mainstream, but with influences from Brazilian beat, from psy-trance and from EDM as well. I don't really like to be limited in my sound."

A brief listen to some of Alok's star-studded back catalogue clearly demonstrates his elastic approach to genre, with his productions ranging from electro-house bangers such as his Armin van Buuren collaboration 'United' featuring Zafir, to deeper festival anthems like the rubbery-basslined 'Fuego' with Bhaskar. We leave the last word on his music and ethos to the man himself.

"I would say that my music doesn't have to have a limit," Alok says. "I think that it can break the barriers, because honestly, talking about my music, I'm so happy when I see children listen to it, my grandmother listen to it, or the electronic scene listen to it — it's crazy: the power of music!"

A sentiment we can only agree with, and one we're looking forward to witnessing first-hand around the pool this year in Miami.