



Nightlife

How to become a hot DJ

Use these tips from the pros and you'll be spinning with the best of 'em.

BY ROSS COHEN

THE COMPLEX ART FORM known as hip-hop is the joint production of lyricists, singers, beat-makers, producers, backup dancers, publicists and bodyguards. But back in the day, it was all about the DJ.

In the summer of 1975, a 13-year-old GrandWizzard Theodore discovered the manipulation of a record, known as the "scratch," in his South Bronx bedroom. A fan of loud music, young Theodore used the caustic warble sound that



came when he pushed and pulled a record to drown out his mom's pleas for quiet. Local turntable gurus Grand-master Flash and Afrika Bambaataa put their own spins on the technique, and the first modern DJs were born.

Skip ahead three decades, and hip-hop culture — particularly

the prowess of the DJ — has become a fascination not only for urban youth but for cultural historians and carpooling mothers who can't help but bounce along to everything from Outkast's *Hey Ya!* to Usher's *Yeah!* Last spring, Boston's elite Berklee College of Music added a course on record-spinning to its curriculum. And two years ago, the Library of Congress made Grand-master Flash's 1982 single *The Message* one of the first 50 recordings, alongside Woody Guthrie's *This Land Is Your Land*, in the National Recording Registry.

So as the craft's most prestigious yearly event, the DMC (Disco Mix Club) World Championships, preps for its national finals next Saturday in Los Angeles, USA WEEKEND summoned a Jedi council of turntable masters to drop knowledge on the skills, attitude and arsenal you'll need to wax rhapsodic, so to speak:

🎧 **The basics.** To scratch and mix, you need to know your BPM (beats per minute), or record speed, and how to use the break, or drum solo, to get heads bobbing. If you can't make it to the Scratch DJ Academy, a New York institution co-founded by Jam Master Jay, a book (*Turntable Technique* by Berklee prof Stephen Webber) or DVD (*Wild Style* or *Scratch*) can get you started.

🎧 **The raw materials.** Besides two turntables, headphones and a mixer, you need vinyl. Lots of it. "Digging" is a DJ's quest for unique beats and rare recordings. Most are quicker to rat out their momma than to give up their favorite hard-to-find vendors. Scour the Salvation Army or flea markets. For samples, *Sesame Street*, political speeches and gangster-movie monologues are fair game.

🎧 **Go public.** The DJ battle, often an impromptu display at a nightclub or house party, is a chance to showcase your wizardry and flavor. But you'd better be off the meter. "I've seen guys set the vinyl on fire while spinning or flip the turntable over and scratch upside down," says L.A.'s E-Swift, aka Eric Brooks. "My thing was to stand on a stool and scratch with my foot."

🎧 **Rock the block.** Still, most crucial are the gyrating booties. "If I had my choice, I'd DJ dark, sweaty house parties," says New York-bred Danger Mouse, the hottest mixmaster on the scene since his *Grey Album*, a hybrid of vocals from Jay-Z's *Black Album* and beats from the Beatles' *White Album*, sparked an online craze. "A hundred people packed in a basement."

🎧 **Pick the right alias.** "You try names on until one fits," says Berklee's Webber, dubbed Professor Scratch. His roll call boasts Radar Ellis, DJ Agent Orange Gomez and the Queen of France. Monikers go from playful to the ultra-literal. Says L.A.'s Funky Redneck: "My neck is really sensitive to the sun." **TV**

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