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Teacher I.Emerge shows students Joseph Silver and Graham Golden how to spin at the Scratch DJ Academy in New York.

The New Piano Lesson: DJ Classes Sweep the Burbs

Hip-Hop Craze Fuels Demand For Instruction in Scratching; Educating Dr. Rocktapus

By ANDREA PETERSEN

ON A RECENT Saturday afternoon, Graham Golden performs a standard rite of teenagerdom: the weekly music lesson.

But the 13-year-old isn't learning Chopin or Pachelbel. His teacher's name is I.Emerge—and the instrument is two turntables, a mixer and a pair of headphones. Graham is in DJ school. And today he is learning to scratch.

"I tried guitar but it wasn't fun," says the Pelham, N.Y., teenager. "I want to be like Funkmaster Flex," he says, a popular New York DJ.

These days, teens eager to establish their cool credentials are flocking to DJ lessons. There, they learn to create music by manipulating other people's songs on a pair of turntables, in the process creating their own new sounds.

In the past year or so, DJ schools have opened in cities nationwide, from New York to Bloomington, Ind. A new textbook, "Turntable Technique: The Art of the DJ," is one of publisher Berklee Press's top-selling books. At one public high school in Providence, R.I., the afterschool DJ club has as many members as the piano club. Last year, a music camp in Bethesda, Md., added DJ lessons to its roster of piano, guitar and voice lessons.

While turntables may seem retro in this digital age, pros insist that nothing can beat them for creative flexibility. A few new CD players try to mimic the action of a turntable, and some DJs are experimenting with digital music players like the iPod. Nevertheless, sales of turntables have grown at double-digit rates the past few years at Guitar Center, a national music-store chain.

For parents, DJing raises issues that soccer and ballet lessons don't. The equipment can be expensive: A pair of top-of-the-line turntables like the Technics 1200 series can run \$1,000, and that doesn't include the mixer, speakers, headphones, or the records. Cheaper "DJ in a box" sets from companies like Gemini and Numark can be had for a couple hundred dollars.

And while it is unlikely that your teenager will get busted by the police for playing a school dance, much of what a DJ does—altering other

people's music—is illegal because it violates intellectual-property laws. A lot of DJing also happens in nightclubs, where alcohol and drugs have been known to flow freely.

Fueling the interest in these lessons is the rise of the DJ to pop-culture icon. Far from the wedding or radio disc jockey of old, who simply plays one record after another with a bit of chatter thrown in, DJs are now performers in their own right. They layer snippets of music so artfully that the original material is all but unrecognizable.

Moby, the pop star, got his start as a DJ. Top performers like Paul Oakenfold sell out stadiums. Stars ranging from Britney Spears to Limp Bizkit now tour with DJs backing them up.

Skinny high-school kids are sharing in the reflected glory. "I'm pretty popular—and I don't play sports," says Ben Garlock, a.k.a. Dr. Rocktapus. *Please Turn to Page D3, Column 3*

Plus

DJ 101:
A primer on how to try this at home.
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Playing the Paramount

Most pint-size DJs never get beyond doing gigs in their basement or for their friend's birthday party. But a few have managed to land gigs at clubs where they are otherwise too young to get past the velvet rope. Jonathan "DJ Shrifly" Shriftman, who lives in Ponte Vedra, Fla., bought his first set of turn-

Lesson: DJ Classes Sweep Suburbs

PJ Learns to DJ

Too busy for formal classes? Here's Personal Journal's DJing primer. Today's DJs bear little resemblance to the guy who played "My Girl" at your wedding. They spin two records simultaneously or even take snippets of multiple songs (For example, mixing Johnny Cash vocals with beats from rap group Public Enemy).

■ What You Need

Mixer

Lets the DJ blend sounds from two records.

Turntables

The DJ's instrument. They cost from \$300 to \$1,000 and up for a pair.

Speakers/Amplifier

Any home stereo speakers will do.

Headphones

To listen to and cue up a record without the audience hearing it.



■ The Moves

Step 1

Use the "pitch control" to speed up or slow down the two songs so they have the same tempo. This lets you mix the sounds without throwing off the dancers.

Step 2

Grab the "crossfader" lever on the mixer to jump between songs on the two turntables. Push it to the right and the right turntable plays. Ditto for the left.

Step 3

Start scratching. Move the record under the needle to create new sounds. There are more than 60 types of scratches including the "chirp" and the "crab."

tables from eBay when he was 11—and played his first club gig at 13. Recently the 15-year-old DJed the New Year's Eve party at the Paramount hotel in New York, which gave him and his mom hotel rooms and paid Jonathan \$1,500, which went straight into his college fund. The next morning he caught an early flight back to school for a 9:30 a.m. algebra test. "It's like a double life. It is crazy," he says.

Jonathan's mother, Felice Shriftman, says she chaperones all his shows, though out of respect for her son's hepcat reputation she usually goes incognito. "Jonathan says, 'don't tell anyone you're the DJ's mother,'" she says.

Most kids, however, toil lower down on the glamour chain. Ben, the 17-year-old from Maryland, has occasional gigs

playing church youth-group mixers, school dances and friends' parties, where he sometimes persuades their parents to pay him \$100 or so.

Before you let your kid take a paying job as a DJ, you might want to check with the state child labor and liquor laws. In California, for example, it is illegal for anyone under 18 to work in a bar or nightclub.

A Chance to Spin

For most underage DJs, however, it can be tough to get performance time in front of actual dancers. Ryan McClafferty, 12, practices with his turntables almost every day after school, imagining a crowded and rocking dance floor in front of him. "I try to start my sets a little bit down tempo, and then build them up," he says.

To give him a chance to finally perform in front of a real crowd, his parents are planning to rent a hall in their local park. "We're going to have a party and let him spin," says Bonnie McClafferty, his mother.

While kiddie DJs often encounter skepticism from the older generation, some parents are warming up to their kids' hobby, and even trying it themselves. Ms. Garlock (the mother of Dr. Rocktapus), recently scratched for the first time. "He let me do it for a minute, and it was really a revelation—it was fun," she says. "But I wouldn't tell him that."

Where to Learn

Scratch DJ Academy

New York (www.scratch.com)

Note: Guest teachers include DJ legend Grand Wizard Theodore (who "invented" the scratch in 1975).

You Know Me DJ Academy

Lakewood, Colo.

(<http://youknowme.biz>)

Note: Founder Yossi Goodman also teaches ballroom dance. Curriculum includes field trips to nightclubs.



Metatrack Studios

Washington, D.C.

(www.metatrackstudios.com)

Note: Owner Juliette Siegfried is a former teacher at the prestigious Sidwell Friends school.

MegaGrooves

Bloomington, Ind.

(www.megagrooves.com)

Note: The school is planning a DJ summer camp this year.



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