KAVITA KULKARNI

Whatever That Heartbeat Is

Ian Friday on Dance Music and Digitization

I first met Brooklyn-based DJ and dance music producer Ian Friday in 2016, about a decade after I fell in love with house music via dance parties in NYC in the mid-aughts, when events such as Libation (co-hosted by Friday) at Sullivan Room in the West Village, Ubiquita at Guernica Bar (formerly Save the Robots) in the Lower East Side, and Soul Summit in Fort Greene Park, Brooklyn, were on regular rotation for some of the people I hung out with. In the 1990s, Ian Friday was one of the architects of the artist-run Tea Party Collective, whose claim to greatness was a weekly daytime event—the Sunday Tea Party—they hosted from 1994 to 2001 in downtown Brooklyn. The Tea Party hosted a wildly popular open mic followed by a dance party into the nightlife hours, deejayed by Friday. In 2006, Friday—who is also an associate director and curator for The Colored Girls Museum in Philadelphia—founded the label "Global Soul Music," whose sound he describes as "ongoing black music cultures connecting house, soul, afro beat, jazz, and world music."

I recently spoke with Friday about his experiences as a DJ and dance music producer in New York City in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when digital technology was wholly transforming musical electronics and impressing on DJ and dance culture along the way. The conversation, by way of the edited transcript below, touches on rhythm as an acoustic, social phenomenon; on the vinyl shop as a venue for community building; and on syncopation as a way of applying human spirit to technology.

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KAVITA KULKARNI [KK]: **Let's start off with the basics. Where are you from and what were your musical influences as a young person?**

IAN FRIDAY [IF]: I'm from Brooklyn, New York—East Flatbush. I grew up in a time where the neighborhood was mixed but changing as part of the white flight of New York City of the '70s. I grew up in a middle-class family in a pretty multicultural apartment building with families from the Caribbean, like my parents, [and] Indian folk, Filipino folk, folk from Haiti, Puerto Rico, Africa. So, it was pretty multi-culti in terms of the kids I went to school with, the kids that I played with. And then it's something to be said about being a first-generation kid. My parents definitely carried the traditions and culture by way of food and music from the motherland of Grenada, but I was sort of like a New World explorer.

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So, I grew up in East Flatbush with people from all walks of life living in that building. You know, how people gather around meals, around music, around parties, kids hanging out—Brooklyn had a particular heartbeat, a particular rhythm. The music you played reflected the type of person that you were, that you wanted to be, how cool you were, how corny you were, based on the radio stations that you were listening to.

Kid conversations—*What's your favorite song? What are you listening to? Do you like Chic? Do you like Peaches & Herb? The Bee Gees?* These are the things that we talked about. These are the things that we listened to. The roller disco had an impact on me musically. I grew up in a time where you stayed up late to check out Mr. Magic because he was going to hit you with this new thing called hip hop, and you can only hear it late night. And that has its own appeal because it was underground—it wasn't everywhere, it wasn't pop, it wasn't commercial. And at the same time, you stayed up late to check out Gil Bailey, who was going to hit you with the new dancehall songs. It was all this music that was together.

I mean, the other part—being of Caribbean parentage, you know, you gotta play piano, all of that kind of stuff. So, I studied piano for probably about a decade, sang in choirs, did all the things. My mom was very, very active in keeping us busy, keeping us engaged with things, going to the opera, going to the ballet, checking out musicals. I was that type of kid. My heroes were Sammy Davis and Fred Astaire. I was taking my great aunt's cane and trying to tap dance in the living room. I was a precocious type of kid.

There was an age difference between my parents. My dad was what I would call more conservative so, he liked the Everly Brothers, he liked John Denver. He liked Light FM-type stuff while my mother was hipper. So, she was going to play Bob Marley and Marvin Gaye. She loved Tom Jones and Paul Anka. That was what was hip at the time and played at the house. And then there was a Caribbean station called LIB, and on the weekend, they played music. And so, you got to hear soka and reggae and all the things. So, music in the house was a big part of it.

One of my cats I always reference in interviews is Timothy Snipes from Ebbets Field [Apartment Complex]—Special T! We used to walk from my house to Ebbets Field as kids just to sit in his bedroom, to watch him go back and forth with records. You had never seen it before. And it was the coolest thing for me. And so how we socialized was definitely connected to this new art form called DJing. And at that time, parties, especially in Brooklyn, incorporated all these different musical forms. It wasn't just beats. You're going to play some dance song, you're going to play some reggae, you're going to play some stuff from the radio, you have to play it all. And so, your musical IQ developed, your ability to sort of take in all these different sounds. For me personally as a DJ, as a producer, as a lover of music, it was born in *that*. I love music. I can't even say I'm a house head or a hip-hop head. I like music. I'm a music head.

KK: And what got you into DJing?

IF: So, there are a couple people I like to shout out as influences. Calvin Gordon. Errol James. Also, high school folk. My cousin Robbie I grew up pretty close with. He was the first person I knew that was into computers. He was a geek in that regard, and he loved electronics. He had a DJ set up, and before I went to college, I was fascinated by playing around with records. Also, in high school, my senior year, I was on the radio. I had a history class with Mr. Caulfield at Brooklyn Tech. We had this huge radio tower, and we did a history class for kids that could not go to school, on the radio.

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And so just being on the radio in that way was fascinating to me. And then, as I went to college—I went to Wesleyan University—I wanted to pursue that interest. We had a pretty popular radio station, and a section of the station at prime time [was] called "Music for the People." And they played Black music, basically. And so, I started there in my freshman year and wanted to do a show called "Sounds of the City." And it was Friday night, and we had Technics Quartz turntables. So, of course, with DJing, you have either the spin wheel to change the pitch control, or now they have the slide. But with this Quartz turntable, it was literally digital.[1] So, if this record was at 0.0, and then you wanted to mix it with this other record, you had to know, *Oh, I have to increase it 1.1*. I mean, it was literally pressing buttons which meant you couldn't really do it on the fly—you had to really study tempos of records in order to mix on the radio live. So, I was obsessed with trying to get that right.

At that time, folk like Timmy Regisford and Tony Humphries, they were on New York City Radio. I have to shout out the Latin Rascals—they were on the radio too. Now, they were doing things that I did not know how they were able to do it, but it seemed like seamless mixing. Latin Rascals in particular, they were masters at editing. So, you can go from one record to the next record to the next record in a way that wasn't humanly possible to actually do, but in my ignorance, I *was* trying to do, you follow?

[Friday describes going to the Paradise Garage for the first time when he was a college freshman, taken by some seniors who were members, and the tremendous influence the club had on him as a DJ].

I never had heard music that sounded like that. I never had seen a club perform like that. And it was impactful because it was theatrical. Larry Levan was an incredible storyteller, and the people that [the club] attracted were themselves artful characters, receiving and transmitting energy back and forth with the DJ, [creating] this unbelievable synergy of a party, of a club experience. And in some ways, I think we've been chasing that particular feeling for a long time.

I do a show on Twitch where I've been able to implement videos and all these different cool things.[2] Basically, I've been checking that for 40 years because Larry Levan was doing that in the early '80s. They were using video. I can remember a mix where he brought down the video screen—and we're talking about a club that holds 3,000 kids—a huge video screen comes down and he's playing Dinosaur L's "Go Bang!!!" It's funny that I remember the details. And in the song, the lyric is just *bang, go bang, go bang, go*. And he's playing a Star Wars fight scene between some starships, overlaying the sound from the movie into what he's playing, and just creating

1. Technics released its first turntable that used quartz crystal oscillators in 1975 with the SP-10MK2 model. "Quartz-locked" or "quartz-controlled" were technical descriptors used in the marketing of turntables in the late 1970s and the 1980s, signaling the near-perfect speed control that these crystal oscillators afforded. This type of advanced speed control was particularly good for mixing dance albums that had live drummers and inconsistent beats. However, as the brochure for the Technics SP-15 Quartz Synthesizer Direct Drive turntable explained, this posed a problem for pitch control: "The vast majority of quartz-controlled turntables do not maintain their usual level of rotational speed accuracy when the pitch control is used." Using a "quartz phase-locked pitch control system," the SP-15 came with pitch control buttons and a digital display that allowed for pitch variation in increments of 0.1% up to ±9.9%. These days, all Technics turntables technically use quartz speed control, but now the quartz crystal oscillators are integrated into microcontrollers.

2. Ian Friday streams his weekly show Libation Live every Sunday on Twitch (Twitch.tv/IanFriday).

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FIGURE 1. Brochure for Technics SP-15 Quartz Synthesizer Direct Drive Turntable (World Radio History)

a moment which is visual, which is sonic, in a time when that really didn't happen, utilizing technology to create an experience.

KK: Yeah, you hear a lot about the sonic qualities of house music and club music in the '80s and '90s, but people who were actually there often describe it as a multi-media experience. And that's a quality I think we take for granted with today's digital media ecology and all the possible myriad influences on it, like the club as a multi-media performance space. So, then after college, you came back to Brooklyn? [Yes.] What was going on there at that time, musically speaking—where were you hearing music?

IF: I graduated in '87 and the Garage closed in '87. I thought I was going to be able to party there. And then the AIDS epidemic hits. And, obviously, the Garage was a queer space. It was a queer sanctuary. It was a safe space for folk. And you can't deny the influence and impact of that energy on the city from a cultural perspective. People were dancing and there was a vibrancy to the city. And so, when the epidemic really hit, clubs were shutting, places were closing, and the city felt almost like a wasteland. So much loss, so much sadness in a city, a living organism. And so, it certainly impacted the party.

We were like a lost tribe looking for a next place to go. And whether or not it was The World or MKs, clubbing shifted into smaller spaces. It became less underground, or the underground was more like the velvet rope. So, then you're trying to fit into a different notion of what is cool and hip. It wasn't quite *free to be you and me* like it was before, or *come as you are*, which is what was appealing to me. It was, *do you look a certain kind of way?* Model culture in the city came to the fore, and those were places that you wanted to go to get your party on. But it certainly was a different kind of vibration. And it impacted the music.

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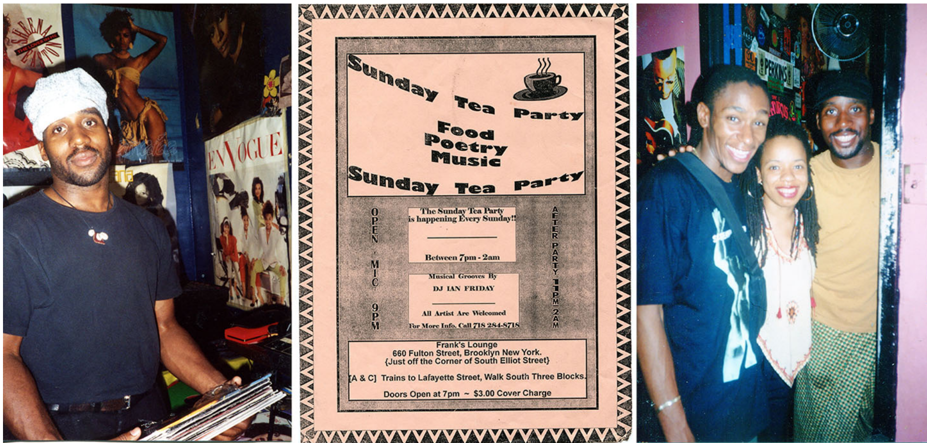

FIGURE 2. Photos from the Sunday Tea Party, Brooklyn, 1994–2001 (courtesy of Ian Friday)

Things kind of went a little quiet. It went a little smaller. It was a little different. It was not as diverse in the same way. I mean, New York City is always going to be diverse, but in terms of what it felt like to party, musically. . . . And I guess I could relate that moment to post-9/11, in terms of what the city felt like. The city took a blow and kind of went dark to recover, like an animal went into the corner to heal.

And then I started to do my own thing. I was going to lounges, poetry readings, those type of things. So, my artistic interests were expanding—plays and that kind of stuff. Still partying, but again, we were looking. And then Club Shelter opened up in '90 or '91, and it had that feeling. Timmy Regisford was already renowned from being on the radio, from producing music, and he opened up Club Zanzibar. Tony Humphries had gone to England, and then he came back. So, it felt like we could exhale again and go get that thing that was missing in the city. And so, if Garage was getting two thousand, three thousand kids, Club Shelter was getting eight hundred, a thousand people. So, there was a drop-off. And that lasted for a year or two, but it was something.

In '94, I started the Tea Party as a means to bring all of my creative, artistic interests together. So, poetry, visual art, dance. I hosted, I read poetry, I deejayed the party after. It was everything that I loved. My mama cooked the food. I was always interested in being a part of community and building community, and music, culture, food, and art was an entry point always for me by way of producing an event. Those are the elements that brought us together. And so, taking advantage of the opportunity to give an event, to throw a party, we started in '94 at Frank's Lounge [in Fort Greene, Brooklyn], and then we moved to the Y[WCA] in '96 and bought equipment.[3] We were in a bigger space, and we threw parties as well as Shango dances. And we were into the Afro-bohemian vibes of Brooklyn, the Brooklyn Black

3. Frank's Cocktail Lounge was a three-generation, family-owned bar and dance club that operated from 1972 to 2020 in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, a historically Black neighborhood adjacent to downtown Brooklyn. The nearby YWCA, built in 1928 and the first in the country to racially integrate its programs, still operates today as a multi-use facility with housing for low-income women as well as an Art-Deco concert hall (currently operated as the performance arts space Roulette Intermedium). The concert hall is where The Tea Party once held its weekly Sunday events.

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Arts Renaissance of the late '90s, as we like to call it, while I was old enough to recognize that we were part of a continuum.

And so, being able to sort of consciously and intentionally be a bridge musically, where you were going back twenty years into the '70s, playing Curtis Mayfield, digging for records, and being around an audience that was open-minded—there was already sort of an artistic openness. And once you're around the right people, that gives you the freedom to drop a jazz record or play Fela [Kuti] and create this musical milieu of different styles. Though I was part of the original hip-hop class, I would not consider myself a hip-hop person. But if someone said, *Hey, Ian, check out this record, this is dope. You might play it*—I would play it. Mos [Def] was part of our fam. Erykah [Badu] was part of our fam. So again, being a lover of music and being a DJ that came out of a tradition of different sounds and styles and playing that forward in front of an audience that wanted and was open to all of that, I mean, that was an incredible blessing for me.

I'm always looking for, I'm always listening to, I'm always checking out music. Music is a very big part of just who I am. And as a producer, I utilize that love. I produce dance music. I love all music, but I produce dance music. I trust my DJ ear. My DJ ear is different from my producing ear, so I'm always trying to make him happy—is this a record that he's going to play or he's going to buy? Because I feel like my DJ ear is very discerning.

KK: I like this idea of having a DJ ear and a producer ear, and we'll get into your experiences on the production side of music in a bit. But in terms of the timeline, now we come up to the early 2000s, which is when you're really seeing a shift and expansion of DJs using digital formats and technologies, like CDs, CDJs, and DJ controllers. I'm curious, as someone that was seeing that happen right in front of your eyes, how you would describe what was happening?

IF: I mean, we hold on to what we know, what we're comfortable with. There's a conversation about how a "real" DJ knows how to play on vinyl and all that kind of stuff. And you can say that. But what is possible now wasn't possible before, and with each new technological development, it creates an opportunity for a new thing to be artfully done. Now, you could be left back and be a purist. And I have traveled the world with flight cases of records, and it's a pain in the butt, but [when] you're young, this is what you did, and this is what you wanted to do. This is what you aspired to do. That's all you knew to be able to do.

And I still have thousands of records. I will intermittently collect a record if it only came out on vinyl. I recognized that things were changing when I was traveling. And I went to different towns, and I would go to flea markets to try to do some record digging. And we were at this one spot and asked the innkeeper, *Are there any flea markets?* And she had a teenage child, I dunno, maybe thirteen. And she's like, *What's that? What's an album?* And this was early 2000s. I was like, *Holy cow, there's going to be a whole bunch of people that have no idea what this format is*. And so, as a DJ I can easily romanticize those moments of Special T and Grandmaster Flash, when the art form was new, doing incredible things—backscratching and cutting records and knowing the breaks and all that kind of stuff. You have to know the breaks on records because the records had live musicians on them, and the tempo would change. So, you

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had to know your music, you had to study: *this where the break is, this is where you can mix this record in, at this moment*. There was a lot of study and practice to get it right because each record had a different heartbeat attached to it.

And so, when things became digital, there was still records. The conversation around the quality of the MP3 versus the quality of the vinyl, the record sounding warmer and blah, blah, blah, blah, and all these types of things. It was really based on the fact that our ears have been trained to listen to music in a particular way on vinyl for, you know, 75 years! And now you have a generation of folk that are like, *What's that sound on the record? It's not sounding clean. It's popping. What is this? What's this distortion? I don't get it.* While the older folks [get] nostalgic for those old days. You're like, *Well that's warm, that's great.* But we were doing the best we can with the technology that was happening in that time.

And so, for me, I was holding on [to vinyl] as a DJ, because what people often don't think about is that it's not just playing the vinyl, it's getting the vinyl. So, the importance of the record store to get the records—it was a space where community was formed, globally. It's not just one thing that builds the culture; it's everything that advances it and changes it. So, you go to the record store to buy the vinyl. And I've met great friends because every Friday we went to the same store. You see the same people chasing the new record. *Oh, you like that, what's that?* You start talking about music. It's that water cooler experience that actually has gotten lost. Everybody's in a silo. Back then, there was a gatekeeper. There's Phil D. You'd go to Dance Tracks. *Yo, what's the hot record?* He had listened to 40 records, and he's like, *Yo, Ian, you would like this one*. And having someone as a filter—there's so much more music out there now with less filters, and who has the time to go through everything?

So, this is that part of vinyl and of digitization, that advance in the technology that has impacted so many things beyond just playing records—how we gather, why we gather, the information of where to gather. I mean, Friday night at the record shop was like a party. And it got you ready for the party. It got you to know where the cool parties were going to be. *Where you going to be? All right!* And that was globally. You go out to Japan, and one of the things that promoters wanted to take you to [was the record shop], because you got to get some Japanese pressings that were only out there. I worked at a record shop myself, Dub Spot owned by a Japanese woman. And we had Japanese imports, and people came specifically to the shop to get records that they couldn't get at other record stores. So, there's a culture around vinyl as well, not just the playing of it.[4]

So, dance music for a long time stayed in that format while people were sliding into CDs. So then, for you as a regular non-DJ consumer, you're going to buy the compilations if you want that kind of thing, right? The mix CD became a thing. So, it didn't just go from vinyl to MP3. The CD had its day. DATs had a hot second. [For DJs] it's, *how do we get the music to the people?* As the DJ, I'm just a conduit. I'm

4. The mass closing of record stores, like Dance Tracks and Dub Spot, in New York City and across the country in the aughts, was chronicled by music journalist and scholar Ben Sisario in his blog, *Crimes Against Music*, and in *The New York Times*. See Ben Sisario, "The death and life of great Manhattan record stores," *CAM* (blog), *Blogspot*, April 23, 2008, https://charmicarmicat.blogspot.com/2008/04/death-and-life-of-great-manhattan.html; and, Ben Sisario, "Record stores Fight to Be Long-Playing." *New York Times*, April 18, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/18/arts/music/18reco.html.

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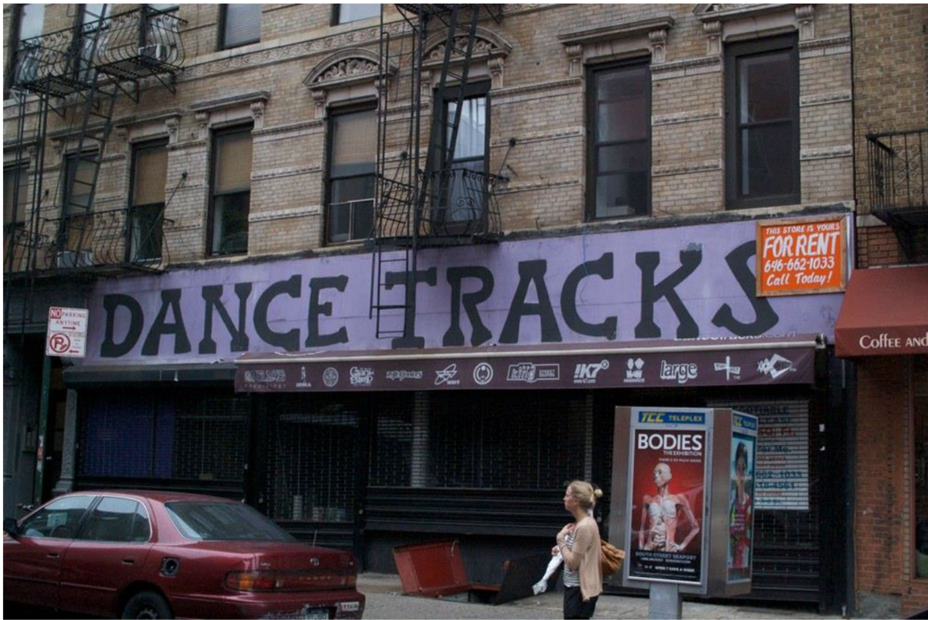

FIGURE 3. Dance Tracks record store after it closed in 2007 (courtesy of Tim C. Varney).

a taste maker and I want to be able to play cool music that I'd like to turn you on to. And I will take whatever form I could get it to give it. It worked for me. So, I had to kind of move away from vinyl because everything was being digitized and it wasn't vinyl coming out anymore. You got me?

Now, I will use rekordbox because it does translate into a form that I'm familiar with. I could use my CDJs in that way. I don't need to bring a computer. I mean now, as of the pandemic, yeah, I have a DJ controller now, but my approach is the same—*how are you going to get this new sound to the people?*

As a producer, as a remixer, you think about it from a business perspective. iTunes is selling records for 99 cents. You can get records à la carte. You didn't have to buy the whole album, whereas before you had to spend $15 to $25 on a CD. So, from a producer's perspective, it's all money. The CDs might cost $2 to make, but what the companies can make off of the consumer is a wider margin. A wider margin means that producers, remixers, artists get a bigger piece of the pie. But now you're dividing that pie. Now that pie is 99 cents. So, the impact on the industry had a reverberating effect on me, the producer. As a DJ, CDs, whatever—I'm going to play whatever. You give me a thumb drive, and I don't have to carry a whole bunch of records. I could go on a plane and have thousands of records in my pocket. It is fantastic; just from a logistical standpoint, made my life easier.

But now, part of the thing that made me remember records is that I could touch it, I could see it. A label had colors. There were names, there were credits, and all that kind of stuff that made you attach to a record, to a piece of art. You knew who created it, you knew who played on it, you knew who arranged it, you knew what label it was on. You knew all these things. Now, I'm going to play about thirty new records tonight, and I can listen back to the show [three days later], and I can only tell you probably 10% of what

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I played in terms of name and artist. So that's the effect of this digitization on the DJ consumer. It's like, *What's that record? I don't know*. You don't remember.

How do we build memory? Part of it is, I can only tell you from my own experience. I like going to school; learning from a teacher in front of me is how I like to learn. But now, if you gotta go online and go to YouTube University, it's a different experience, and whatever triggers your mind to attach the information to it, it's different. I mean, we know there are studies that people do have shorter attention spans, blah, blah, blah. But that impacts my work as a DJ. You feel me?

KK: That makes a lot of sense. You touched on it just now, but I'm curious about your perspective on technology as a music producer, and whether like your ear, it's different from the perspective you have as a DJ. You told me once you used Pro Tools. Is that what you learned on or were you making music in other ways before that? And where'd you learn?

IF: I always call out Kevin Hedge and Josh Milan, the duo Blaze, as mentors. I would call out my good brother Wilfred Hilton, who was part of a hip-hop group, Alpha Omega. He sang a lot of hooks for Salt-N-Pepa and worked with Hurby Luv Bug and all of that—that was my homeboy. And so, just sort of being around music making, being around creatives, somewhere in that time we gathered and talked about trying to make a track, but no one knew what the hell they were doing. I got close to Kevin Hedge, and he invited me to the studio out in Newark. And just watching them work was so inspiring. I loved it.

Jay Rodriguez of Groove Collective fame, he had done a collaboration with Ron Trent, noted DJ and producer out of Chicago. They had done a collaborative project, and I happened to run into him, and he wanted to do a part two of the project. And he knew me as a DJ and was like, *Hey, man, let's do this*. So, he gave me some musical parts to go play with. And another friend of mine, John Meredith, an engineer, we would go to his studio. And because of my relationship with a bunch of musicians, he gave me what was like a cumbia rhythm. And in the end, we did a whole song. I wrote a lyric, I performed on it. It was a whole thing.

But that whole process put the bug in. Me and John set up my first Pro Tools rig and I wanted to try to make music. And because of my theater background, because of the Tea Party, my access to other creatives and my natural collaborative spirit, I had drummers coming, a drum kit in my house, trying to figure out how to record live drums. And working with artist Maritri [Garrett] to record her album project. And just believing. It is the stupidity of youth [laughs] that you can do something big and create something beautiful. And we actually did! And I learned a lot. It was very, very difficult. The advent of things like Pro Tools and these DAWs, it gave folk access. You didn't have to go to the big studio, you didn't have to spend all this money, have this big budget to be able to rent out studio time.

I mean, yes, you have to make the investment. And of course, at that time, [with] places like Guitar Center, you could get a little Guitar Center card and you could get your Apple G4 Tower. And you could have a whole setup. I used an MPC 2000 for beat making. I had my Motif [Synthesizer], which I still have. And you use what you can, your creativity. And of course, the advent of loops—there were libraries where you could get sounds and play around. It was a new language.

I mean, I always say I've been a creative and artist all my life, but doing music taught me how to work. It wasn't a natural gift, a natural language. The other stuff,

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I could use talent—this, I really had to study. I had to figure stuff out. I had to call cats like Frankie Feliciano, another big brother of mine, to ask, *Yo, how does this work? I'm getting this error message on my computer, and it is frustrating the hell out of it.* And that's how you learn—the mistakes, the problems, how things work together.

And I still learn each and every day. There're always new plugins. There's always new stuff to figure out, to learn. But it was really just about human spirit. You're always going to feel the spirit, human spirit, even through technology, if human spirit is applied. If it's technology only, you're not going to feel the spirit. So, the conversation about quantized versus live musicians—if your goal is to express your human spirit, it's going to come through. Because of all that I am, I'm interested in something that feels alive. So, syncopation is very much a part of what I'm interested in creating. Whether or not I'm utilizing a loop, whether or not I'm utilizing a machine, there are ways to manipulate it so it doesn't feel mechanical, even if it's on beat.

Part of the expression of my blackness, my Caribbean-ness, my Brooklyn-ness is through rhythm. And so, the beat, dancing on beat, whatever that beat is, whatever that *heart*beat is—that is the spirit. You want the soul; you want the spirit to be felt. So as a producer, even utilizing these tools, this technology, I don't want it to just feel mechanical. And because I do work in a collaborative fashion, I do work with musicians, too. They bring life. But the beat, that steady beat, the click is a way for us to all lock in, for us to be in the same room to communicate. That's how I view it. Its cleanliness might seem like, *Oh, it takes something away from life and spirit.* But again, that beat is what I'm moved by. Or at least that groove.

Dance music is about that groove. Hip hop is about that groove. House is about that groove, right? And the records that we like, whether or not it's James Brown or Michael Jackson or Prince . . . once drum machines came in, you get to see how the human spirit applied the new technology to make something new. Does it erase what was great beforehand? No, I don't think so. I think it adds to it. I think if you're nostalgic and you hold on to your time, then everything's like what everybody says: *Oh, this is garbage. This is what the young people listen to.* It's what they listen to because it's their language now. I mean, I can't understand half of what is being made in terms of pop music. That's just the truth. If it doesn't appeal to me, it doesn't appeal to me. But there are new artists that do.

So, I don't think it's a generational thing. I think because of digitization and because of the access to making music, there is so much more music out there. Because of all the [social media] platforms, there is so much music out there. And there has always been terrible music. There's always been shitty music. You can't just say it's terrible because it's new. There's always music that you don't like outside of your tastes. But you could find great artistic, creative uses of the technology that advances what's possible.

And I guess thinking about it from, again, what Larry Levan did in that time—I had the blessing to edit for Western Records a CD of their recording of the last night of the Garage. And listening to him as a DJ twenty years after he passed away, you're like, *Wow, he was certainly limited.* My attention span has shrunk. And he was like a DJ god then. But his skill as compared to kids today, it just didn't hold up. And I know that's sacrilege, right? [laughs] It's like how they talk about basketball, the heyday of the '90s, Charles Barkley. Those kids, they were amazing in their time, but

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they're not as skilled as the kids today because they just have access to better stuff, better information, better technology.

And music is like that. There are things I see kids do. I'm like, *Wow, how do you even figure that out?* And I don't feel like chasing it—it's not my style. It's not what I want to do. But I can appreciate it because I know what goes into creating some new stuff. And yeah, the technology can make the process easier. That's what technology does. I don't hear anyone lamenting the advent of the remote control. Your ass used to have to get up to go turn the channel off. Ain't nobody said, "*This goddamn remote control messed up my tv!"* [laughs] Nobody says that.

So, whether again, as a DJ, as a producer, as a lover of music, if technology is used with human spirit, your spirit will be touched by it still . . . if it's artfully used, right? Quantized, not quantized. Click track or no click track. You can tell terrible music that is just bland, but that ain't just technology's fault. You know what I'm saying? There have been bland records with kids playing they hearts out to themselves that just really didn't hit. The difference is that it was minimal because there was less access to the studio.

Global Soul—the music that I produce—is by the fact that I have all these different influences. I myself am a fusion. So, my viewpoint, my creative output is going to be a fusion. So, when I reference my Indian friends and those conversations about music; when I reference Haiti, my neighborhood, where the sounds of the city influence my approach to making music—it's what I hear, it's how I walk, it's how I dance, it's how I move. I don't move in a stiff fashion. We've got a little *rhythm* to our gait, and it's going to come through in the music. And so, from the very start, whether or not it's a loop that is being manipulated, there's going to be some syncopation. It's not going to be just straight because that's boring.

And so, you're trying to get it right. What's going to be funky to you? It's like how you dance—in my DJ, is my dancer. I want to be able to dance. It's called dance music for a reason. We always reference places like the Garage because that was the first place you were free to be able to just dance in any fashion. But you were attaching that dance to the rhythm, whether or not you were able to do a cartwheel, a back bend, a back flip, a split, a two-step. That's the appeal of house music, the music in that time, where there was no judgment. It was a space for Black and brown bodies to be free. It was church. And so that is what has carried through to my DJing. Let's create a space where you're free to be and to dance for Black and brown bodies . . . and *white* bodies! Whatever body was in the building, we could just be free and feel safe to be.

There is a different kind of energy—and, I don't want to make any separations—but I've been to hip-hop clubs, I've been to dancehall clubs, and it's a different kind of vibration. And I don't know if everybody, every type of bodies can feel free there. One can put on the particular adornment to be in those spaces. But for me, complete freedom was in the underground house setting. And so that syncopation, that Caribbean-ness, that Blackness, that New Yorkness, all the things that created hip hop in terms of all these communities come together, like creating something from nothing—I apply that. I literally will use sounds from my keyboard, my machine, MP, loops, samples. I'll cut 'em up. You know, it's like Uncle Mel Cheren from West End [Records]. He's like, *Yo, you can make great music with pots and pans if you're applying human spirit to it*. That's really my thesis about this: the technology can set you free too.

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Where I'm coming from is like, *Yo, I'm going to use what I can.* So, I couldn't have done what I've done without Pro Tools. It was something that I could afford, something that I could learn. It was like learning frigging Chinese at first. Painful. But you have to want to do it. And the ambition to create with whatever you have to create with is what's allowed me to create some underground closets. I'm proud to say, I mean proud and *surprised* that records I made in '06, kids still dance to today. That's a whole generation later where folk are like, *Yo, I love this record*, or *I sing with this record*, or *this record did something to me*. And so just being honest with your art, authentic with your art. And New York City . . . Brooklyn is a big part of my inspiration. It's a big part of who I am.

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