



DJ
DAVID
STONE

BY **RENATO PAGNANI**

PHOTOGRAPHY **AARON PEDERSEN**

SHOT ON LOCATION AT 99ten
MODE MODELS
STYLIST LAWLESS VINTAGE [CAITLIN AND DANI]
MAKEUP CALVIN ALEXANDER
HAIR AMY LAING

NO 110

DJS AND FASHION TAKE A SPIN, EVERYONE
ON THE DANCE FLOOR →

A BAD DJ CAN KILL A PARTY.

A good DJ can turn a party into a religious experience, where time fades away and all that's left is the beat – and everyone around you, all together.

The last DJ set I attended before the pandemic was in November of 2019. Headlining the fifth anniversary party for local venue 99ten was Ernest Greene, aka Washed Out, an American pioneer of the indie dance subgenre “chillwave,” a humid, hypnagogic brand of dance music that sounds like old cassette tapes melting after being left too long in the sweltering summer sun. (You've heard his music if you've ever watched *Portlandia*; he provides the theme song.)

Greene's set, full of both the tracks trending in the dance world at the time, left-of-centre curveballs, and some of his own classics, enraptured the packed house at 99ten. Little did I – or the rest of those in attendance that night – know that, just a few months later, attending such an event would be unthinkable.

Neither did David Johnston, who goes by David Stone when he's in the DJ booth. During the first few months of 2020, Johnston was DJing almost every weekend. Between his permanent recurring gigs at local venues Y Afterhours and the Bower, as well as regular appearances at other clubs around Edmonton, Johnston's calendar was full, and indefinitely so, it seemed.

So when the world abruptly stopped in March of that year, Johnston admits that no one in the local community knew exactly what was going to happen.

“It felt like the air just got sucked right out of the room and everything evaporated,” he says. “If you were any kind of performer, you were having an existential crisis. You didn't know whether something that you had invested your entire life force into was ever going to have value again.”

Johnston also had to find a new way to record *BPM*, his long-running radio show on CJSR, which he had been doing every Saturday night for over 20 years from the radio station's studio in the basement of the Students' Union Building at the University of Alberta.

He scrambled to find a new way to record the show from home. Johnston was lucky to already have the basics, but he had to quickly upgrade his equipment to produce a show as good as he could from the studio. →

I'M A DJ. I GET THE
PARTY STARTED.

— AVICII





I DIDN'T COME UP AS A DJ,
SO I DON'T PLAY BY DJ RULES.

— DEADMAU5



Shirley Tse, who DJs as Yelrihs, didn't have a radio show that she needed to record remotely at the onset of the pandemic, but she had friends who pivoted to online video streaming platform, Twitch, to continue DJing for audiences live, albeit through a screen.

The transition from DJing in person to livestreaming took some time.

"You don't have the energy of having people around you when you're livestreaming," explains Tse. "You're in a room by yourself, so you can't feed off the crowd in the same way. Instead of faces and bodies, you see usernames and emotes. You get all of your feedback via text rather than whether people are dancing or not."

Twitch DJ sets are now commonplace, just another platform to help DJs grow an audience, even as things begin to return to normal and in-person sets resume.

But others, like Piyush Patel, aka DJ Gulzar, were more reluctant about venturing into livestreaming. "It's great to have another platform to play music for people, especially one that makes DJ sets more accessible for those who can't attend live events, but nothing can beat having a bunch of people together in a room reacting to the songs you're playing. A lot of DJs add visuals to make their virtual sets more engaging, but at the end of the day, you're still just staring at a screen."

How excited is Patel at the prospect of DJing in person again now that clubs are beginning to open back up?

"The first time I'm back DJing will be euphoric," he says. "There's nothing that beats being able to play music in front of people and share that communal experience. I miss people. I miss dancing. I miss that energy. There was a monthly event called Transmission at 99ten, and my friends and I would all go together. We knew each other's favourite songs, and when one would get played, we'd go crazy. It's nights like those that I can't wait to have again."

Patel wistfully reminisces about both DJing and live shows in general, even though he plans to return to both cautiously.

"You know when you're dancing, and it's really sweaty, so you step outside to get some fresh air, but you can still hear bass through the walls, and then you hear a track you really like start playing, so you rush back in because you don't want to miss it? You can't replicate that virtually." →



IT WILL BE GREAT TO HAVE
A FASHION CAREER DURING AND
AFTER MY DJ CAREER.

— TIESTO

Tse has already returned to DJing in person again — outdoors, for now — as well as begun hosting a weekly show on Global DJs Radio. Her first non-Twitch set in over a year took place at the end of June on the former Mercer Tavern’s patio, just as COVID-19 restrictions were starting to be lifted.

“That was my first time being out since the pandemic started, so I was definitely anxious beforehand,” she says. “I wasn’t sure what it would be like, but it ended up being a very beautiful day, and everyone was very cautious about the restrictions at the time.”

Tse says she cannot wait for the day she’s back curating vibes in a dark, packed club full of gyrating clubgoers who are in sync with the pulse of the beat.

“It will be a wonderful moment, when that finally happens.”

Some reacclimatization will be required after distancing from others for so long, admits Johnston. “Getting used to being around people again in a space where we’re so close to each other, it’s going to take a little while to rewire the brain.”

But, like his fellow DJs, Johnston is ecstatic about returning to the club.

“The reason why I do what I do is to share music in a room with people, and I can’t wait to have that experience again,” he says. “I’ll probably be overwhelmed with emotion the first time I’m in front of a crowd and they’re responding to a set. I’ll never take it for granted again.”

He thinks the pandemic has also given the community a chance to perform a long overdue self-evaluation.

“People will quickly go back to licking each other’s faces and dumping shots on each other,” says Johnston. “It’s going to be like nothing happened from that perspective.”

“But I think it’s all the things that have happened during the pandemic more than the virus itself that will leave a lasting impact. Things like Black Lives Matter, Indigenous Lives Matter, minority visibility, women’s rights. I think we’ll see greater representation across the spectrum in clubs, not just in terms of the people attending shows, but who is performing, the kind of music we’ll be sharing, and the kind of culture that want to build going forward.”

“My hope, and I know it’s optimistic, is that we’ll emerge as better people after this transformational period in history. Dance culture, like the rest of culture, has a remarkable opportunity here, albeit under horrible circumstances and at a monumental cost. I just hope we can take advantage of it.” **ED.**



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