

Mixing and Scratching, Ruling the Club

By Johanna Jainchill

Nov. 17, 2002

See the article in its original context from November 17, 2002, Section CN, Page 14 [Buy Reprints](#)

[VIEW ON TIMESMACHINE](#)

TimesMachine is an exclusive benefit for home delivery and digital subscribers.

THEY break. They cut. They scratch. And the crowds go wild.

Every June for the past five years, D.J.'s have gathered to do battle at a "spinoff" at Guitar Center, a music store in Manchester. These contests, which draw dozens of aspiring D.J.'s and many more spectators, bring to Connecticut what was once a distinctly urban art form that originated on the playgrounds of New York City in the 1970's.

"The D.J. vibe carries into Connecticut from New York City," said Scott Kennedy, a manager at Guitar Center. "People go to the spin-offs that regularly gig in New York."

When D.J.'s battle in a contest of musicality and dexterity, they are rated on skill, originality and musical composition by a panel of judges while the audience listens and cheers (at nightclub battles, they dance too).

D.J.'s who participate in these battles are called "turntablists," a term they coined to distinguish themselves from D.J.'s who only play records.

inMusic 2015

A turntablist will, for example, take a favorite part of a song, and will make that "break" into a song of its own by moving the record back and forth on the turntable, or by playing the same record on two turntables. The D.J. "cuts" a break by playing it repeatedly while mixing another record over it. The crossfader knob on the sound mixer allows the D.J. to switch between the two turntables, which he plays simultaneously. The trademark of the turntablist is the "scratch," literally scratching the record to create that ubiquitous "zigga zigga" heard in hip-hop, rock music and scores of commercials.

Sign up for the New York Today Newsletter Each morning, get the latest on New York businesses, arts, sports, dining, style and more. [Get it sent to your inbox.](#)

Last spring Palm Pictures released "Scratch," the first full-length documentary chronicling the turntablism movement and its stars as it became a mainstream musical form.

This has happened in Connecticut as well.

"In the past five years turntables and the D.J. business has really been growing," said Dana Clarke, general manager at Guitar Center, where the most popular industry-standard D.J. setup costs from \$1,500 to \$2,000. This includes the turntables, the sound mixer, the case and stand to hold them, and headphones. Basic sets start at \$300, while the best equipment can run up to \$30,000.

One of the musicians driving the turntablist trend in Connecticut is D.J. E.L. He has won many local battles and in 2001 he represented Connecticut in the regional finals of the DMC Championships, a worldwide event considered the ultimate battleground for D.J.'s.

D.J. E.L., a New Britain native whose real name is Jermaine Evans, decided to become a D.J. in 1995, while working toward his master's degree in communications at Central Connecticut State University. He saved his money to

buy a set of Technics turntables and taught himself by watching other turntablists in videos, and investing hours into practice.

Mr. Evans, 28, inherited his first records from his father, who initially thought his son would destroy them. He now understands that his son is a musician, too.

"My father was in a funk band in the 70's," Mr. Evans said. "Every weekend I'd see him go out and play and now they see me doing it."

Mr. Evans, a television technician at the local Fox affiliate by day, owns roughly 25,000 records, which he keeps at his parents' home near his apartment, where he has room for the 1,000 or so that he is now using. Despite new technology allowing people to play and "scratch" CD's as if they were records, most turntablists prefer to use vinyl records.

"D.J.'s are slow to accept new technology, but they're starting to change," said Steve Hottin, owner of New England D.J. and Audio Supply in Hartford. "The biggest problem now is finding vinyl records. We are going to see the decline of vinyl eventually but it has another while before that happens."

Mr. Evans will not give up on vinyl anytime soon. Like most turntablists, when he has time he spends hours "digging" -- flipping through crates of records in music stores in search of the perfect beat or lyric.

Mr. Evans concedes that battling in Connecticut is not on par with places like New York City.

"A lot of D.J.'s get up to battle and just mix the records," he said. "I'm cutting and scratching and juggling, you know. I take it to the next level."

On Nov. 8th Mr. Evans won a D.J. battle at Trinity College. In October he took second prize at the Numark/RedBull DJ battle at Club Hypnotik in Hartford.

When he is not battling, Mr. Evans practices on the turntables at clubs and parties, and on his Internet radio show, gotchaopenradio.com.

"I try to show my skills when I'm up there alone," he said. "I show off to show you I'm not a D.J. that just plays records."

D.J. Tom Grin, 27, born Thomas Craig, has been spinning since he was 15 and now is a headliner at some of the biggest nightclubs in the state, in addition to having played as far away as California.

This July in Hartford, Mr. Craig won Vibe nightclub's annual Battle of the D.J.'s for the second year in a row. "Making people relate to a certain mood or emotion, or to give them an escape for a brief lapse of time, I guess that's my mission," he said.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section CN, Page 14 of the National edition with the headline: Mixing and Scratching, Ruling the Club