

ELEVATOR MEETS DJ ANGELO



Hello Angelo! It's nice to have you here. You're an internationally renowned DJ who is especially known for his versatile abilities behind the decks. How did the connection to Elevator come about?

Well, I've been working alongside Reloop since 2009 as one of their main artists. This relationship helped me build on my existing following in Germany as I've also been touring here regularly for the past few years. I actually spend a lot of time in Germany each year, so I discovered Elevator which is a really great store that stocks a huge range of products, many of which I own and use professionally. I also met a lot of the Elevator staff at Musikmesse in Frankfurt and had beers with them a few times. Cool guys.

We all know you for being a true vinyl virtuoso and advocate for turntablism culture. What exactly made you get so interested in this particular field of DJing?

I fell in love with vinyl because I was always fascinated from a young age at how „hands-on“ it is as a medium for playing music and for DJing. It's physical, it's analog, and it has its limitations, but vinyl lets you have direct control over the sound with your bare hands and demands a high level of skill to use it creatively. I like being able to have that much power over the sound, being able to manipulate audio with my hands - scratching, pitching, rewinding, juggling. It's so much fun when it happens right before your eyes. For me there is no other control that comes close to this feeling and the tightness for audio manipulation. And because vinyl is such an old technology and turntables are such a clumsy instrument, you can't fake your DJ skills in anyway which I find both charming and challenging. I love modern technology but will never stop appreciating human skill in DJing and in any other art form for that matter. I guess I've always felt at home around vinyl and turntables so becoming a DJ and turntablist came quite naturally for me.

Are there any differences from the sound to digital mediums like CDs or controllers?

Yeah, I think that a lot of people will tell you that vinyl sounds better than digital – I don't know if this is necessarily true. I agree that vinyl sounds warmer, but it also has more noise because of the physical nature of how you play vinyl. And of course vinyl degrades the more you play or scratch it. These aspects are not ideal and I have a lot of precious vinyl that I can no longer listen to. So my love of vinyl is not so much about the sound quality or about being a purist - it's more about its tactile nature and being able to manipulate it directly instead of in an indirect digital way. I have respect for DJs that still choose to play only with real vinyl, and at the same time, I'm not a snob to those who only perform with digital technology. What's important to me is how good they are. Class is class whatever the medium and I wouldn't expect a young DJ to understand vinyl culture if they were born in an MP3 era. Digital technology can however, make DJs lazy and hide behind their gear. Personally, I'm happy to have started in the vinyl era when DJing was a lot more challenging in so many ways, which provided healthy training conditions. Back then,

you had to be technically skilled to perform tight with vinyl, and you also had to work a lot harder to acquire (and afford) music. There was no option for laziness or shortcuts so it weeded out those who weren't serious about the craft. But of course everything evolves, as it should and now that we're in the digital era, I love the convenience and creative opportunities that digital technology brings. But with cheaper gear options and downloadable music, DJing has become so accessible for the masses that it's become somewhat of a lifestyle hobby for every man and his dog. Understandably, this is hurting a lot of genuine professional DJs out. But as they say, "cream rises to the top" so today's climate simply demands DJs to work harder in order to survive.

Apart from being a respected international club DJ, you are particularly known amongst DJs worldwide who learn from your online tutorials. How do you feel about the contribution you've made to the art form?

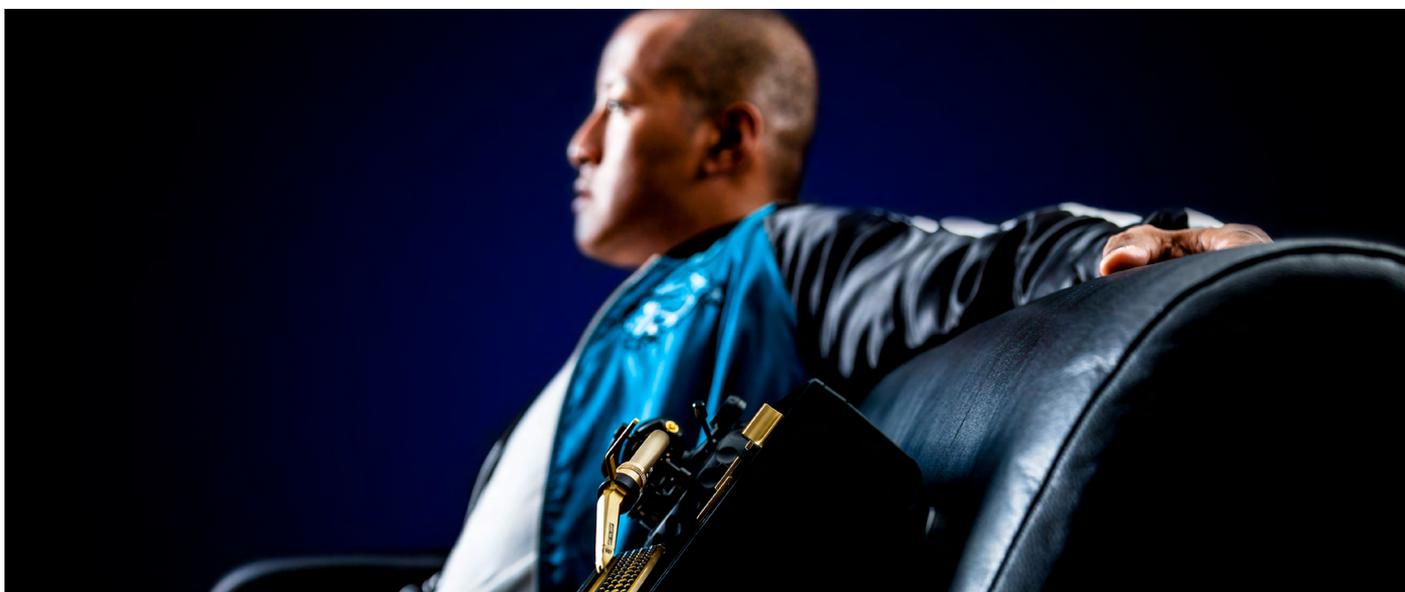
I feel proud that my work resonates with so many people. It's not clear how much of a difference I've made to the culture and to other DJs lives and it's not something I feel a need to measure for my own satisfaction. All I ever cared about since day 1 was that people would respect my work, my art - which I guess is what all artists hope for. But judging by the wealth of supportive comments and private messages I receive every day, I guess I'm doing an ok job :) It's a blessing for sure which drives me to keep pushing and reminds me that I made some good decisions regarding the direction of my life. I've always believed in doing whatever makes you happy, and if you can help others along the way at the same time, you should do so. Karma is a real thing. So in every tutorial I make, I really give my all for the benefit of those learning. I will try my best to continue in this spirit as and when I can but I must focus my energy on my personal goals and reaching my own potential. I think new DJs often forget this and assume I'm some kind of a 24 hour DJ helpline sat at home waiting for their queries :) But I'm not a made man, and I'm working really

hard every single day on all areas of my business and still trying to grow and progress in the industry just like they are. I've already done more than most in helping my fellow DJs so I hope they understand that I rarely have time to answer the influx of personal queries, especially lazy questions that they could easily research and answer themselves! For example, I'm commonly asked: "where can I find those tracks you're playing? what techniques did you do? can you make a tutorial on how you created this routine?" how can I be like you? what equipment is right for me?". It's flattering but if I'm honest, I sometimes feel a bit disappointed to read comments like this, especially as for the past 8 years, I've been teaching people to think for themselves and be original because if you can't do these things, you're going to struggle making any impact in the DJ game. Real talk. A lot of new DJs want results quickly and decisions to be made for them. Having so many resources at our fingertips can make people dependant on being fed information because that's so much easier than figuring out your own way forward. Tutorials can be a great place to start but never a substitute for your own hard work.

Plus, I don't know why but in recent years, I've received so many private messages asking if I can give them my personal DJ gear! I find this strange and perhaps it's a new trend to expect things without working for them but I was raised to never ask for handouts and to earn everything. And believe me, I started from the bottom.

And how do you feel about the current state of the DJ scene?

I think it's an exciting era for DJ culture on the whole as the recognition for our profession is at an all-time high. We also have all the resources we need to become artistic entrepreneurs. For example, I've nurtured an independent career operating not only as a performer, but also an educator, and a brand influencer amongst other things. I basically wear a lot of hats and I believe there are opportunities if you can be multi-skilled however, it's no secret that the scene is over-



saturated. So many DJ products, DJ schools, record pools, but most of all, there's way more DJs than there is a demand for them right now. Sure, it's creating healthy competition and positive communities, but it's also creating destructive effects on the culture. A lot of copycats and people exploiting the business. Also, DJs are very passionate and opinionated people and are often quick to criticize anything another DJ does. Every day I read negative and often uninformed comments from DJs pulling each other down and asserting their "expertise" on each other. I see the same tired comments over and over again but I guess it's human nature to feel bitter if you're not getting your dues and you see other DJs doing better than you. Not everyone can make it in the entertainment industry but as fellow artists, DJs should respect each other's artistic choices. I think it's a reflection on today's society as a whole for many to "hate" on each other from the safety of their laptops and not to be happy for another person's success. Sad to see this happening but I'm too busy focusing on my own grind to get caught up in any of that nonsense. I think if all DJs did the same, the culture would be much more progressive. Good vibes only! But with more DJs also comes more talent and right now I think the level is really high with the worlds of music production, finger drumming, and turntablism all merging together. I just hope that DJs continue to remember their role as entertainers rather than getting caught up in trying to impress each other with technical feats. Even I'm turned off by a lot of current DJ performances that are not musically enjoyable for a regular audience. Musicality first every time!

Your extraordinary activities regarding social media and videos are quite impressive. Besides your detailed tutorial series, we can also find creative routines and even a tablet scratch performance during a parachute jump. Where do all these ideas come from?

The ideas come from the depths of my strange mind and then I just find the right people to pitch the ideas to. Most of the time they say yes (laughs). It's always been my goal to offer a breath of fresh air to the DJ industry, to challenge preconceptions, and not to be too influenced by what has been done already. I believe being similar or compared to other DJs is not necessarily how you make your own mark. So when it comes to expressing my art, I'm always trying to think of new concepts and directions - basically roads untravelled in DJ and turntablism culture. It's a noisy marketplace and everyone is trying to get noticed but originality will always stand out and get more attention. Before social media and online videos, we didn't really have access to what other DJs were doing so there was a certain purity in the culture. But now with the constant sharing of information and the influx of DJ content, I believe this has become detrimental to people's creativity and originality. Instead of looking inwards and developing their own style, they are perhaps looking outwards too much. It's

common sense that if you constantly watch other DJs and hang out with other DJs more than you spend time by yourself and your craft, you'll always be influenced by them instead of discovering and formulating your own ideas. This is one of the reasons I choose not to watch other DJs too much, and why I don't produce content myself too often.

I'm not anti-social in any way but as a DJ, I've always been happy being a bit of an outsider and have never been interested in running with the pack. I try to discover new spaces for DJs or turntablists to exist and sectors to transcend. I've never really blended in anywhere my whole life so standing alone doesn't bother me. Of course, I love spending time with friends, my DJ colleagues, and I have so much love for all my supporters but I always encourage beginners to be themselves and to harness their own original thought. So whether I'm performing in a club, making a routine, or filming a tutorial, I always try my best to bring something of my own to the table. Or should I say turntables? :)

Currently there are lots of discussions about the new Technics turntables and their price. How important is the turntable that you use in your opinion and what are your preferences?

The quality of the turntable is super important for me. I'm a technical DJ so I need a turntable that is built strong and can handle all of the punishment that my performance style demands. In the past, my turntable of choice was the Technics 1200. It's been everyone's favourite for the past 30+ years and nobody could beat it. But in recent years, the technology has become common knowledge and it's always inevitable that products will continue to be bettered - even a classic like the Technics 1200 can be improved on. I still love and use them on a regular basis but I also enjoy using Reeloc's RP-7000 and RP-8000 turntables because they do everything the Technics can do, but also have some new school features (such as higher torque and ultra pitch) for modern turntable performances. And if I want to, I can even adjust the torque/brake to make them feel like a classic Technics.

As is known, you are a true performer. Besides a tight performance, how important is it for you as a DJ to party with your heart and soul along with your crowd?

Very important! You don't necessarily have to get wasted like the people in the club but you should have an understanding of how they experience the party from their perspective. Each night a DJ works, he/she has the responsibility to entertain a room full of people, each with their own expectations. So having exposure to club culture as a customer will help you relate more to your audience and be able to serve them better. We're in the business of creating experiences through music

so it helps to understand the relationship between music and emotions. If you've never been on a dancefloor yourself, completely enveloped in the music, and in a state of euphoria, it would be hard to deliver that experience to someone else. So I think it's healthy to occasionally let your hair down and party with the crowd. It certainly helps if you love the music you play and the job you do. Never trust a DJ who doesn't dance, right? :)

As far as I know, you have never participated in a DMC battle, although when it comes to turntablism, the competitive aspect is very prominent. Why is it that you have always decided against competing?

Well, the truth is, I did compete and win several DJ competitions in the UK from 2000 to 2006, but as none of them are running anymore, I never mention them in my credentials. I often found myself in scenarios where I wasn't enough of a turntablist for a turntablism battle, or too much of a turntablist for a DJ battle! As for DMC, I actually did enter in 2003 and 2004 but at that time I was still really inexperienced and my skill level wasn't up to the standard for that era. So I didn't progress too far. Although, I love the battle culture and enjoy watching DJ's compete, competition never really felt like my path. I started DJing with a goal to become well-rounded, versatile, and skillful, but with a purpose to entertain people with music. So whenever I competed, I took it as an opportunity only to gain experience and not so much with a real desire to win. For me, Turntablism isn't only about battling, and being considered better than other DJs is not something I care for. My biggest

competition has and always will be myself, particularly as I've faced a lot of personal battles in my life in order to get to where I am today. I appreciate that a lot of my supporters would love to see me compete but I'm hoping they will consider me as more of a „People's Champ“ :) I have nothing but respect to battle DJs and my many friends who are champions, but I prefer to use the same time and energy creating and achieving other things, and being known for much more than just a DJ title. But will I ever compete again? Probably not but I'll never say never ;)

I can totally understand that – I think that's pretty cool.

In your sets you combine tracks that at first glance do not seem to match, but as soon as the tables start turning they complement each other perfectly. How much work is it to find these perfect matches? And furthermore, is this the crucial factor to get the crowd excited?

I do have a versatile style, but I wouldn't consider myself strictly an 'open format' DJ, because I do have limits on what I will play. I try to select what I consider is good music from a range of different genres but mostly centered around hip hop and broken beat music. As a music-lover first and a DJ second, I collect whatever music that I feel. I always have ever since I was a child and I still do it now but as a professional DJ, I also collect music specifically for my performances. I think to come up with creative mixing ideas, it first starts with having knowledge of a lot of music - from collecting music, listening to it, knowing a lot of artists, understanding the energies of different tracks. So that's the no. 1 thing. A good knowledge of music and understanding the emotions of how that music makes you feel. And then it's more a case of the technicalities, which is how you put things together. That could depend on what tempos they are, what keys they are in, which words match other words in different tracks etc. It's kind of like a two-step process - you have to know a lot of music first and you also need to have the technical skills to piece things together. It's a lot of work! (smiles) And it's always ongoing. My brain is full of music and beats and I have ideas all the time. On the train, before I go to sleep, in the supermarket. Ideas of songs or samples which could go well together etc. Feel good fusion!

Ok, how do you fix that?!

Well, I get to the turntables as soon as possible, or if I can't get to my turntables, for example if I am travelling, I'll maybe open my laptop, throw some things into Ableton and do a basic sketch to see how it works. Some ideas work better in your head than in real life, but sometimes you get lucky and things sound really good after your first sketch. I'm constantly playing samples and remixing songs in my mind anyway. This is the nature of turntablists. Sort of like a blessing and a curse :)



Are you touring at the moment? How's life on the road?

Yes, I'm touring regularly and doing a lot of dates in Europe right now.

In fact, I'm embarking on some tours for Reloop, testing out their RP-8000 turntables and RMX-80 mixer in the clubs. Germany, Austria, Sweden, and Spain were all scheduled. Aside from that, I'm always touring on my own and, I am currently preparing for my Asia tour this November and December as well. Can't wait. I always love touring warmer countries when it's winter in Europe! I'm also hoping to reach new places for 2017 such as the Middle East, Africa, USA, and South America who are always showing me so much love. Touring is fun and experiencing new things will never get boring (apart from the repetitive airport/flight processes) and I take all of these experiences as blessings and new opportunities to grow. The only bad things about being on the road is having less time with people you care about and less time actually being at home to create new material. Also, tiredness is something you have to deal with a lot, which can really effect your live performances and disappoint fans. So powernaps are a must!

The headline was „Turntablist On Tour“, right? That has become your personal tour name?

Yeah, it has become my personal moniker and hashtag. It came from a title of an old mixtape I made. I'd always dreamt of being an international DJ, seeing the world, and entertaining different nations because as a child, I never had the chance to travel anywhere. So when I was making that mixtape, I had only just started to get booked internationally. So in a way, the mixtape was me trying to project my future, almost like a personal challenge I set myself. The mixtape represented sounds from different parts of the world. That was quite a few years ago... I really should do another mixtape soon haha. But yeah, Turntablist On Tour has kind of become my identity, because when I'm tour, I perform in clubs and I also teach turntablism in DJ schools whenever I can. I makes my tours much more exhausting but I feel I have a responsibility to represent turntablism wherever I go to as many people as I can and spread good vibes. Whatever the language barrier, music and this art form brings people so much joy. So the brand represents much more than music and my craft. It also represents hustle, cultural exchanges, and chasing your dreams - which are things everyone can relate to.

As last question – what would you tell someone who is starting out as a DJ (opening this catalogue) and reading this interview? Is there any advice?

They should ask themselves how serious they are about it and depending on how serious they are, that should relate to what they spend on their first setup, within their budget of course. In

my case, I didn't know if I would love DJing in the beginning. So I started with very cheap gear and it was really, really terrible stuff, but somehow I found a way to use it. I basically bought 2 spares from a twin deck disco setup for £25 each. They had 10 inch platters and were literally only the top layer of the turntables. I had to build a base for them out of wood and solder the mains cable and RCA cables onto the circuit board myself. The platters were so wobbly that I broke needles almost every week. I then bought a £50 Radioshack mixer and I started buying records. After a few days of experimenting and teaching myself how to mix, I was hooked! So at the beginner stage it's always good to minimise the risk and try things out before you spend a lot of money. If a friend of yours has decks, ask if you can play with them and see if it's for you. But if you need professional advice, you can always go a DJ store like Elevator to ask questions and try the different ranges of products. But don't go crazy because buying the best gear doesn't make you the best DJ. It's all about your passion, how hard you work, and how original you are. And it's still possible to perform quite well with cheaper stuff. Start slowly. And in some ways, it's good to start with products that are limiting, because then you have to make up for it with more skill and creativity.

So it's like, if you can mix on cheap stuff, you of course can mix on expensive stuff. But that won't work the other way round?

Well I think adapting to any DJ gear can be a challenge, whatever level you're at. I remember finding it hard to play on Technics at first after getting used to the feel on my really poor belt-drive setup. But when you have a tough beginning, I think you have better training for the future. So I don't think it will hurt to start with cheaper stuff and just focus on having fun. You should be motivated by the love of music and the desire to share that with others instead of approaching DJing on a quest for fame and fortune. Respect the art. Respect the profession. Respect your fellow DJs. I fell in love with DJing early, and I never stopped touching my turntables when I was a kid. That's the kind of passion you need to need to really progress in this game. The rest will fall into place. So figure out whether it's for you. If you're unsure and are going to buy gear, don't go crazy with your spending because if you really do love it and get better, you can upgrade as you go. And my final 2 words - work hard! That's not an option. Work smart too. Be resourceful. Use online tools that cost nothing. Make moves that impact on others. Be strategic without compromising your integrity. Basically work harder than everyone else. Most of my grind goes unseen and what you actually see publically are the results of a lot of sacrifice and years of dedication.

So I think we are finished - thank you for this nice interview Angelo!

Yeah, thank you for having me Elevator. Keep up the great work!