

## DJ Pathways: Becoming a DJ in Adelaide and London

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*I've had this visualisation just of me standing behind some decks and playing to people, and, I don't know, I've always wanted to follow that.<sup>1</sup>*

*The DJ is now the hero of his age.<sup>2</sup>*

In recent years the increasing visibility of star DJs such as Norman Cook (a.k.a. Fatboy Slim), Paul Oakenfield, Carl Cox, and Alexander Coe (a.k.a. Sasha) has led to the practice of DJing being regarded more seriously as a 'music career'. Some have gone as far as to argue that the DJ is now 'the most creative force in popular music'.<sup>3</sup> At the very least, DJing<sup>4</sup> has become a much more sophisticated practice over the last twenty five years, with skills such as scratching, juggling, backspins, and producing mash-ups now considered essential for any DJ wishing to progress into the professional ranks.<sup>5</sup> But how does one start out on this path to becoming a 'creative force' and what pitfalls await? What factors are involved in the young DJ's progress? Using longitudinal fieldwork from the *Playing for Life* international research project<sup>6</sup>, this paper follows the progress of four young people in London, UK, and Adelaide, Australia, who wish to become skilled and respected DJs.

Discussions of music (career) pathways appear in a number of publications in the fields of music education and popular music studies. Lucy Green<sup>7</sup>, for example, provides a comprehensive analysis of the learning practices, skills development and music education histories of rock musicians in Britain. Norman Stolzoff<sup>8</sup> traces the career pathway of Dancehall entertainers in Jamaica. Ruth Finnegan<sup>9</sup> has explored the pathways of amateur musicians in an English town. Other work by Bayton<sup>10</sup> and Bennett<sup>11</sup> has looked at the careers of rock and jazz musicians respectively, and Frith<sup>12</sup> talks briefly about career paths within a broader analysis of changes in the organisation of popular music production. Missing from the literature, however, is an exploration of DJ pathways – a gap this paper goes some way to fill.

In *The Hidden Musicians*, Finnegan uses the term 'pathways' as a metaphor to reveal various aspects of music-making in local contexts and the implications of local music 'for urban life'. In her study of amateur musicians in the English 'new town' of Milton Keynes, Finnegan found that these musicians followed 'a series of known and regular routes' which were 'both kept open and extended through their actions'.<sup>13</sup> These routes (or 'pathways') tend to be taken-for-granted and the musical pathway is only one of many routes that are traveled at any one time with 'people follow[ing] many pathways concurrently, and leav[ing] or return[ing] as they choose throughout their lives' (306). While these musical pathways are not 'changeless' they are 'established, already-trodden and, for the most part, abiding routes' which are somewhere for an

amateur musician to begin amateur/semi-professional/professional music-making (306-307).

Finnegan is not referring simply to career pathways in her formulation of the 'hidden musician'. Rather, her interest is in musical pathways and their relationship with the other routes traveled concurrently in everyday life. While recognising the multiplicities, complexities and convergence of these pathways, the specific focus of this paper is the career pathways of four young people as they attempt to establish themselves as professional DJs. It aims to add to the literature of Finnegan, Green and others by providing a close reading of the pathways of these young DJs. Particular commonalities in the development of the DJs are explored through analysis of local networks, cultural resources and informal mentorship.

The exploration of the career pathways of these young people will also allow comparisons with Simon Frith's observations of changing models of music career development. Frith argued that the old model of the music career – what he called 'The Rock' pyramid, in which musicians move from local to regional to national to international success before reaching the pinnacle position of superstar – is no longer the dominant model of career development or success. In the late 1980s there was a movement to a new music career model which Frith termed 'The Talent Pool'. The shift was related to a change in music sales policy which had come to depend 'on the relationship between a corporate center ... and a *periphery* of local music scenes'.<sup>14</sup> As a result there was no longer a pyramid structure based on a 'push from below' or an emphasis on success being 'earned by hard work, determination, and skills honed in practice' (112, emphasis original). In 'The Rock' each sector of the pyramid represented 'a different set of gatekeepers' to be negotiated (112). In 'The Talent Pool', on the other hand, 'there [we]re no longer gatekeepers regulating the flow of stardom' (113). As such, 'The Talent Pool' is not a model of 'making-it' for, unlike 'The Rock', it does not demand that musicians 'pay their dues' on the way to the top. While Frith's discussion is now dated<sup>15</sup> and while he is talking specifically about rock acts here, his discussion of career models in the music industry is still interesting to consider in the case of the career pathways of the young DJs who are the focus of this paper.

We begin by briefly introducing the four DJs under discussion here; DJ DeeAndrea and DJ Topsy from Adelaide, and London-based DJ Lady Lick and DJ Rangler. We then consider in turn issues of career expectations, progression, the readjusting of aims, and mentorship, before some closing words about how these DJs understand their place in the global music industry. Firstly, though, a few words about the *Playing for Life* research project.

### **Playing for Life: The project**

*Playing for Life* was an international, comparative and longitudinal project funded by the Australian Research Council (2003-2005)<sup>16</sup>. It explored the everyday music practices of disadvantaged or marginalised youth<sup>17</sup> as strategic pathways to agency, employment and socio-economic inclusion. The

project was underpinned by an acknowledgement that popular music is affectively and culturally central to young people at risk, that such young people have often clearly developed informal music-related strategies, networks and opportunities, and that these youth usually draw upon particular places and expertise in their local communities to develop these skills further. The project had research sites in Australia, Germany, the UK and the USA, and was designed to provide young people with opportunities to speak about their experiences. As such this paper foregrounds, wherever possible, the young people's voices and their articulations of what it means to become and to be a DJ.

Due to the fluidity of the research process in the two sites under investigation here, the participant observation and interviews we refer to in this paper cover different time periods. Fieldnotes with DJ DeeAndrea start in August 2003 and regular contact (i.e. every three to four months) was maintained up until a final recorded semi-structured interview at the end of 2005. DJ Topsy was likewise followed over two years, starting in February 2004 and ending in January 2006. Less regular fieldwork (i.e. approximately every six months) was carried out with DJ Lady Lick and DJ Rangler in London between August 2004 and May 2006. These face-to-face contacts – from which fieldnotes were taken – were supplemented by intermittent communications between the young people and the research team through emails, telephone calls and the chat forum on the *Playing for Life* website.

In addition, the young people had opportunities over the course of the project to use video cameras to capture their musical practices and other aspects of their everyday lives. This auto-ethnographic work<sup>18</sup> allowed the young DJs to record their practices as and when they desired. Consequently, this happened to different degrees; DJ Lady Lick and DJ Topsy used the camera only once, in both cases to record a brief autobiographical account. DJ Topsy was then filmed by the researchers – at her request – when she performed her first solo DJ spot. DJ Rangler used the camera a number of times to film some of his favorite UK Garage club nights. He also took a number of still photos at gigs where he DJed and recorded on video interviews he conducted with other people involved in London's UK Garage scene. It was DJ DeeAndrea, however, who really took to the video camera. He filmed himself practicing scratching and juggling techniques on his turntable, made recordings of some of his local gigs, filmed a detailed autobiographical piece-to-camera, and towards the end of the research decided to use the camera to make a local film on the Adelaide rave scene. A full reading of the fieldwork concerning the four young DJs was undertaken by both the authors. Relevant content analysis was carried out using both hard copies and utilising N5 qualitative analysis software where appropriate.

This paper is therefore based on rich ethnographic data coming from a project which was designed to provide an in-depth, highly nuanced exploration of young people's music-making. As such we are not claiming that the four young DJs are necessarily representative of all DJs in the early part of their careers. Rather the aim is to use these specific case studies to illuminate aspects of possible DJ pathways. The comparative analysis allows a glimpse

of similarities and differences in the routes these young DJs travel and their related experiences as they attempt to 'make it' in the (dance) music industry.

### **And on the decks we have...: Introducing the DJs**

DJ DeeAndrea is a white 19 year old male from the western suburbs of Adelaide. He lives in Camden Park with his parents who run a mechanics business. After dropping out of school he has experienced a succession of semi-skilled jobs. He began DJing in early 2003 and has since DJed the occasional friend's party in suburban backyards as well as organising his own party nights at a community centre. He has described himself as 'a DJ-in-training'.<sup>19</sup>

DJ Topsy, a white 18 year old female from Adelaide's north-eastern suburb of Wynn Vale, completed her high school diploma in 2005 before taking a gap-year travelling in Europe. She lives with her mother who is an Office Manager at a local car factory. With a history of volunteering at community radio stations in Adelaide, DJ Topsy started DJing in early 2005. Since this time she has carried out a solo DJ gig at an Adelaide bar, and done a number of sets at other local venues.

DJ Lady Lick is a white 21 year old female from North London. She lives in the Kentish Town area with her mother, step-father and three brothers. An early-school leaver, she has had a number of semi-skilled jobs including waitressing with her mother in a local café and working in a child care centre. She has recently qualified as a youth worker. With support from her musical family, DJ Lady Lick began DJing when she was in her early teens. Within 18 months she was DJing in pubs and has continued to perform regularly, including DJing abroad. She hoped to release her first album in 2006.

Like DJ Lady Lick, DJ Rangler is also from North London. An Afro-Caribbean man in his mid-twenties DJ Rangler lives in Kilburn with his brother. Tragically, his mother died three years ago leaving DJ Rangler and his brother with the responsibility for mortgage payments on the family home. For a number of years he has had regular work in a health food store and is now full-time. A couple of years ago both he and DJ Lady Lick attended a specially designed media course at a North London community organisation. The course – which included sound engineering – was for at-risk youth who had difficulty engaging in formal education contexts. The course nurtured and expanded DJ Rangler's musical interests. He was introduced to the turntable in his teens by his older brother, and later became deeply involved in London's UK Garage scene. Similarly to DJ Lady Lick, he has performed regularly in the UK and abroad and is currently working on an album.

### **Beginnings**

To begin, it is relevant to consider what factors might underpin a young person's attraction to DJing. Akin to the musicians in Green's study<sup>20</sup>, our young DJs cite a love of music as being the fundamental root of their enthusiasm. DJ Topsy states that 'I've always loved music and I've always

been into music, and I think that's probably why I picked [DJing] up so easily'.<sup>21</sup> DJ DeeAndrea confers: 'you gotta really love what you're doing and you got to be willing to spend every last cent of your money on new music ... just for the crowd basically'.<sup>22</sup> In the case of DJ Rangler, it was the inspiration of mid-1980s funk and soul (as epitomised by performers such as George Benson), along with the beginnings of hip-hop and groups such as Public Enemy: 'It was a phase that I really did love', he recalls, 'I could just relate to it ... it sounded good, it has good grooves on it, it was sampling good music'.<sup>23</sup>

Yet a love of music alone is not enough to prompt a young person to take-up DJing. For rock musicians there is the oft-quoted 'seminal event'; seeing a certain band perform and deciding at that moment that they just *have* to form their own band.<sup>24</sup> For our young would-be DJs, however, there was no seminal event. Rather there was individual motivation combined with specific opportunity. For example, DJ Topsy volunteered for a local youth radio show at a community radio station in Adelaide's northern suburbs.<sup>25</sup> After completing her 'panel training'<sup>26</sup>, she moved on to a community radio station in central Adelaide which specialised in dance music. She explains,

[I] really got myself involved in the station, and I met a lot of people. And the person who I was doing the show with, he said 'I DJ at here, such and such, would you like to come along?', and I said 'ah, OK', and he's like 'I'll teach you', and I'm like 'ah, OK, if you want'. So I went along and it became a regular thing.<sup>27</sup>

In London, DJ Lady Lick had a friend who owned a pair of DJ decks. 'I went on them once and I loved them', she says, 'within a few weeks I had my [own] decks and [was] practicing and practicing'.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, DJ DeeAndrea's interest in DJing increased when he started taking DJ lessons. 'I've always wanted to do [DJing]', he comments, 'but I just didn't really know where to start. I started having a few lessons and then gave that up, and got my own decks and just worked my way along the line'.<sup>29</sup>

As with other musicians, once the young person makes a more focused decision to be a DJ, they then need access to the tools of their trade, namely a pair of decks on which they can practice and perform. Like DJ DeeAndrea and DJ Lady Lick, DJ Rangler also became an owner of decks:

[My brother] was like, 'do you wanna ... go DJing?', I was like 'umm, yeah', you know, 'let's do this' ... So erm, he bought me a couple of belt drives ... I started on them and I thought 'I'm good at this ... I like this, I really do'.<sup>30</sup>

When the passion for music is combined with opportunity and access to decks, the young DJ can then embed him or herself further in the possibilities for music performance. The crucial foundation for this progression is the record/CD collection. As DJ Rangler notes, after his brother bought the decks, 'I started collecting records, and it [was] just sort of like a trickle effect'.<sup>31</sup> Many young people collect music, but the young would-be DJ begins to purchase records and CDs with regard to their potential audience. An earlier comment

from DJ DeeAndrea points to the necessity of spending money on new music 'just for the crowd'. In addition, as we followed DJ Topsy's progression from radio shows to live DJing, we witnessed her contemplating the direction that her record/CD collection would take – House music or Trance music. She felt she could earn more money as a specialist House DJ, but her personal choice of music was Trance. Her final decision was to build a collection of Trance music, and as an 18<sup>th</sup> birthday present both her parents gave her money towards building such a collection.

### **In the marketplace**

While not discussing DJs per se, Finnegan<sup>32</sup> has noted that 'budding amateur musician[s]' begin their careers with local non-professional opportunities. For our DJs this equated with their involvement in various community-based arts and DJ organisations in London and Adelaide. This is the first stage of the career pathway, with these opportunities enabling a form of 'apprenticeship in performing skills' that can be a springboard for a full-time career (17). DJ Topsy's involvement in community radio, for example, led her to be mentored by more experienced DJs – DJ Evan trained her in live DJing with CDs at a local bar, whilst her friend, Jodo, showed her how to work with vinyl on his decks at home. DJ DeeAndrea took lessons at a local DJing and skate board business ('Da Klinik') with DJ Shep. In the UK DJ Lady Lick notes that she, 'had loads of DJs come round who taught me'<sup>33</sup>, and DJ Rangler learnt primarily from his older brother before venturing out on his own.

The second stage in Finnegan's thesis involves the young musician fully exploiting their 'home area' by taking on local performance opportunities.<sup>34</sup> As examples of this DJ DeeAndrea performed at friend's parties and DJ Lady Lick had a regular set at the local pub. Musicians 'gradually build up their contacts more widely' and eventually move beyond the local. Thus, in the third stage of the pathway they 'start practicing further afield (17) – in the case of DJ Rangler and DJ Lady Lick this included performing in Germany and Spain respectively. Throughout these career stages there seems to be a gradual distancing of the DJs from their original music mentors as they attempt to – as DJ Topsy suggested<sup>35</sup> – develop as a DJ in their own right.

Take, for example, DJ DeeAndrea. Over a period of two years we observed that two Adelaide DJs, DJ Shep and DJ Ben, had been key mentors for DJ DeeAndrea when he began learning turntable skills. However, when DJ DeeAndrea reflected on his experiences at the end of 2005, their contribution was recognised but also downplayed. On the one hand he described DJ Shep as being his 'teacher for nine months'<sup>36</sup> and DJ Ben as being:

The first sort of DJ that I got in contact with. I got my first vinyl off him ... he was really good, he came over to my house, taught me a little bit about mixing. You know, he'd spend an hour on the phone every now and again to me, just giving me hints and tips about how to please the crowd and you know, it really helped me out.<sup>37</sup>

Yet on the other hand, when asked if he thought anyone in particular had been helpful in his development as a DJ and in navigating the music industry he replied:

Most of it I just did myself. Um, but again, I admire a lot of the locals. I watch what they do; I watch them when they're out. I'm on a lot of internet forums as well, I'm always keeping updated on there and just reading and taking notice of little things. But I don't think there are any DJs in particular that have really sort of helped me along, that I've really asked for any advice.<sup>38</sup>

In this telling of the story DJ DeeAndrea suggests that for the most part he was the central figure on the pathway to becoming a DJ.<sup>39</sup> The partial erasure of DJs Ben and Shep from the narrative of 'becoming-DJ' facilitates a distancing from these mentors and enables the establishment of DJ DeeAndrea as a DJ in his own right. Detachment is seen as an important step in making a 'name' for yourself, not only in the pursuit of global celebrity DJ status but also to etch out a place in the local scene where you are seen as distinctive, an entity in your own right.

At this stage different mentors became more significant in the pathways of the young DJs and often these mentors were not specifically linked to the music industry. DJ Rangler, for example, had mentorship in the area of entrepreneurship from a London arts organisation. Not only did the organisation offer further opportunities for DJing in London but also provided DJ Rangler with advice on developing his small business start-up which sought to promote soulful UK Garage and give opportunities to young artists (DJs, singers, MCs, producers) in the UK Garage scene. With the encouragement of his mentor, DJ Rangler put together a business plan and applied for (and was awarded) funding for a series of club nights in North London.

An entrepreneurial route was also explored by DJ DeeAndrea. Unlike DJ Rangler he had no specific mentorship in this area although he was certainly supported by a 'community of practice'<sup>40</sup> operating within Adelaide's PLUR (Peace, Love, Unity, Respect) rave scene. With some friends from this scene, DJ DeeAndrea developed the '2+2=1.25' concept. This meaningless equation arose through 'mucking about with friends'.<sup>41</sup> He then produced stickers emblazoned with the equation which he and his friends attached to people at a large Adelaide rave. The result was that the equation appeared in most photos taken by people at the rave; photos that were then circulated throughout the rave scene. According to DJ DeeAndrea people then began Googling the equation and contacting him via MSN. It also caught the attention of an Adelaide club promoter who went on to offer DJ DeeAndrea casual promotions work. Again this was not seen by the young DJ as an end in itself but rather as a means of building networks that could eventually secure him a DJ spot in the Adelaide club scene.

Along with such business ideas, all four DJs were also branching out from DJing in clubs to other forms of music-making. In particular there was a desire

to create their own dance tracks which could then be incorporated not only into their own sets but also those of other DJs. DJ Rangler and DJ Lady Lick were both working on albums in 2005/6, DJ DeeAndrea felt it was time to 'start putting some thoughts into sounds' and making tracks which could be played on radio<sup>42</sup>, and DJ Topsy was experimenting with 'mash-ups'<sup>43</sup>. DJ Topsy, DJ Lady Lick and DJ Rangler were also involved in presenting and/or producing programmes on radio stations (community and internet) specialising in dance music. DJ DeeAndrea was learning numerous urban dance styles including breakdancing, and also performing associated body-work related to the rave scene such as fire-twirling.

For two of the DJs an important development had been the opportunity to take on the role of mentor. DJ Lady Lick teaches DJing to teenagers as part of her work in a North London youth club. In Adelaide, DJ Topsy was asked by a young man to show him how to DJ:

He rang me and he said 'oh, I've just bought these decks and this mixer, do you wanna come over and teach me how to use them?' And so I actually went over and taught him how to use them ... And I know that I'm not a professional DJ and I'm not big, and I'm not very, very qualified, but my knowledge ... its not about how, if I can do it, its about knowing what to do. And I taught him what to do and how to do it, and then he has to learn for himself sort of thing. Like, the more I practice the better I get. Its the same with him – if I tell him how to do it, the more he practices, the better he gets ... And that was a pretty big thing for me, teaching him that.<sup>44</sup>

Having opportunities to pass on skills and knowledge in the same way that their own mentors showed them the art of DJing helps confirm that sense of being a DJ in ones own right. It also strengthens DJ Topsy's and DJ Lady Lick's identification as capable (if not 'professional') DJs. Club DJing is still a major focus in their lives and something all four young people aspire to as a full-time career. Yet it is clear from these stories of entrepreneurship, other forms of music production and the move to mentoring that performing live DJ sets is only one fork in a DJ's musical pathway.

### **Holding down the day job**

As we have followed the young people over two to three years, they have progressed from enthusiastic beginners to (albeit, irregular) live performers, whilst continuing, in the words of DJ Topsy, to 'practice, practice, practice'.<sup>45</sup> In the meantime, we have observed parallel career trajectories: DJ Rangler has been working from part- to full-time as a Shop Assistant at a health food store in London for the past five years, DJ DeeAndrea has had a stream of jobs including working at a fast food chain, in a department store, and at a food processing repair works. He is now working as a Storeman at a furniture supplier in Adelaide. DJ Lady Lick has become more involved in youth work as time has progressed, completing a qualification in youth work and now employed part-time at a youth club where she teaches young people 'DJing, MCing and much more'.<sup>46</sup> DJ Topsy, meanwhile, has completed her high



school diploma and was accepted by an Australian university to do a Nursing Diploma starting in 2007. She has also worked for a number of years at a fast food chain to supplement the household income.

There is an obvious importance to maintaining the day job. Namely, it provides a security which DJing is unlikely to ever bring. As DJ DeeAndrea puts it, 'if you jack in your [other] job and then it [DJing] doesn't work out, you've got nothing to fall back on'.<sup>47</sup> All four agree that it is love, not money, that keeps them DJing:

DJing – and you can ask any DJ this and they'll agree – isn't about money, it isn't about getting paid, its about feeling the music within yourself, and when you hear a favourite song, you just get a shiver down your spine, you can't explain the feeling.<sup>48</sup>

I guess you've got to really love what you're doing, you can't just be in it for the money, you can't just be in for, you know, like ... groupies or whatever, like 'oh! He's a DJ!!', you know ... Yeah, pretty much its just the love for it I guess.<sup>49</sup>

If you get to what you're doing and making money from it then its a luxury at the moment and its a joy, you know what I mean, and don't abuse it. That's why I get angry at the DJs, 'cos they're doing something that's beautiful and they get paid money and they live off this money.<sup>50</sup>

The love of music, the love of DJing, and the dream of club success appear to be the primary reasons these young DJs persist with DJing, despite the inevitable cash flow problems that arise. Though all four remain optimistic about DJing, their feelings about 'making it' have changed since we first met them. Despite the progress DJ DeeAndrea has made since our initial observations of his DJing lessons at Da Klinik in 2003, he recently stated:

By now I really wanted to be playing out and about. You know, maybe on a weekly basis, maybe just ... on occasions ... I may still in the future, I may just have this urge in the next year and just decide to blow a whole lot of money on a whole lot of new tracks and a whole lot of DJ gear and put in a CD and get some gigs. But, I don't know, I'm happy where I am at the moment.<sup>51</sup>

DJ Rangler feels that, despite some set-backs, he is happy with organising his own monthly UK Garage and House nights and being a respected member within the local scene. He notes, however, that:

I think its [DJing] got harder. If I did actually go after it [a few years ago] when my brother wanted me to, I'd most probably be in it right now ... Maybe I could have blown up and maybe things would have been a bit more easier on us, looking after the house and all of that, on top of that I think, erm, mum would've seen me actually get to the top, to get a point of where I am actually doing something with the DJing thing.<sup>52</sup>

Alternatively, DJ Topsy feels that:

Its not a matter of [DJing] getting easier or harder. It's a matter of I made a decision that I want to be a DJ and so I have to work for it, and it makes it harder in my life with the time factor, because I'm a very busy person ... But I'm learning things and I'm trying to get somewhere with it, I've got a goal and I ... want to get there.<sup>53</sup>

As time has gone on, all our young DJs have expressed an awareness of the proliferation of DJing whereby 'everyone wants to be a DJ'<sup>54</sup>, as DJ Lady Lick puts it. Yet, despite the pressures of competition, DJ Lady Lick followed this comment a year and a half later by stating, 'I'm aiming to be a full time DJ as I love it ... I have 2 [sic] work very, very hard to achieve that. As long as I'm on this planet my goals will be achieved'.<sup>55</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In our discussion of these Adelaide- and London-based DJs we have built up a picture of how musical (career) pathways can begin and proceed. Though the ethnographic research data covers a period of only two years, it is much in agreement with Finnegan<sup>56</sup> that the young people already have multiple pathways of which the musical pathway is but one. The young DJs have been leaving and returning to their DJing activities as time, enthusiasm, money, family and other circumstances dictate. However, we would also suggest that the DJ pathway(s) is not 'taken-for-granted' by these young people to the same extent as pathways were perhaps for the musicians in Finnegan's study. There appeared to be no real sense of a regular or established pathway in the DJ career. Instead there was a struggle to find a route that would lead to ongoing opportunities for performance and, subsequently, career advancement. In this struggle the four DJs come across as being quite shrewd in their efforts to professionalise themselves and in their decision-making processes regarding what needs to be done to achieve their ambitions. This is a far cry from the typical stereotype of the irresponsible musician living off government handouts.

Their struggle to 'make it' centres on hard work, practice and to some extent the notion of paying your dues. As such their understanding of the music industry and the DJ career appears to be still very much based on Frith's old model of 'The Rock' pyramid<sup>57</sup>, though perhaps not as rigidly structured. The superstar DJ remains the rarely achieved yet highly desired position at the top of the pyramid. Hard work and the honing of skills are perceived to be the only way to achieve such a highly regarded position. Progression to that point is seen as based on a series of steps, from an initial position where the young DJ is one of many just starting out, to doing house parties for friends, to playing the odd set in a club, to securing a regular club night and so on. Throughout this progression there is also a growing realisation by the young DJs of how difficult it is to get to the next step, to push past the gatekeepers. However, there are also a series of related activities running parallel to this such as learning to break dance, creating beats, recording an album, radio

DJing, and moving on to more entrepreneurial activities. These activities open up further possibilities and, potentially, new avenues whereby the rigid structure of 'The Rock' can be bypassed; a moving out of DJ performance as a way to come back in further up the ladder.

Linked to this issue, the DJs were regularly assessing where they felt they were situated on the pyramid in relation to their prior expectations of advancement. Subsequently there was an ongoing readjustment of aims. For example, given their age and their perception that an increasing number of young(er) people are now taking up DJing, the two DJs in their twenties questioned whether they would ever 'make it' as professional DJs and began to more seriously consider turning their energies and attention to other career paths. This was the case with DJ Lady Lick in regards to her concentrating more fully on a career in youth work (which she described as 'a good career path'<sup>58</sup>) rather than taking up more DJ spots in Spain. Indeed, in the end, just as Stolzoff<sup>59</sup> has noted in the case of Jamaican Dancehall entertainers where deviations from the music pathway are possible but rare, it seems that deviations from traditional labour market pathways are also rare. A 'sensible job' is still required to pay the bills, otherwise one can end up with no success as a DJ and no steady employment for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> DJ DeeAndrea, 19 years old, interview, December 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Brewster, Bill and Frank Broughton. *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life: the History of the Disc Jockey* (updated edition). London: Headline, 2000. 367.

<sup>3</sup> Brewster and Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life* 366.

<sup>4</sup> We use the term 'DJing' in this paper as specifically referring to someone performing gigs in public, rather than as someone who plays music on the radio. Brewster and Broughton comment that,

at its most basic DJing is the act of presenting a series of records for an audience's enjoyment. So at the simplest level a DJ is a presenter. This is what radio DJs do – they introduce music and intersperse it with chat, comedy or some other kind of performance. However, the club DJ has largely abandoned this role for something more musically creative. Out has gone the idea of *introducing* records and in has come the notion of *performing* them. Today's star DJ uses records as building blocks, stringing them together in an improvised narrative to create a 'set' – a performance – of his own (14, emphasis original).

It is to this 'DJ as performer' that all the young DJs in this paper aspire.

<sup>5</sup> For more on DJing terminology see for example 'A Taxonomy of DJs – Terminology' at [www.cs.ubc.ca/~tbeamish/djtaxonomy/terminology](http://www.cs.ubc.ca/~tbeamish/djtaxonomy/terminology).

<sup>6</sup> For a general introduction to the *Playing for Life* research see Bloustien, Geraldine and Margaret Peters. 'Playing for life: New Approaches to

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Researching Youth and their Music Practices'. *Youth Studies Australia*. 22:2 (2003): 32-39.

<sup>7</sup> Green, Lucy. *How Popular Musicians Learn: a Way Ahead for Music Education*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Stolzoff, Norman C. *Wake The Town And Tell The People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Finnegan, Ruth. *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*. Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> Bayton, Mavis. 'How Women Become Musicians'. *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*. Ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. New York: Pantheon, 1990. 238-257.

<sup>11</sup> Bennett, H. Stith. *On Becoming a Rock Musician*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.

<sup>12</sup> Frith, Simon. 'Video Pop: Picking up the Pieces'. *Facing the Music: Essays on Pop, Rock and Culture*. Ed. Simon Frith. London: Mandarin, 1990. 88-130.

<sup>13</sup> Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians* 305.

<sup>14</sup> Frith, 'Video Pop' 110, emphasis original.

<sup>15</sup> The role of the internet in circumnavigating the traditional music business gatekeepers would need to be acknowledged in updating such analysis (for more on this technological debate see for example Owen Gibson. 'Planet Funk - the first band to release a single by phone'. *Guardian Unlimited*. 10 April, 2006. [arts.guardian.co.uk/netmusic/story/0,,1750396,00.html](http://arts.guardian.co.uk/netmusic/story/0,,1750396,00.html)).

<sup>16</sup> The research team comprised Associate Professor Geraldine Bloustien and Dr Margaret Peters (University of South Australia), Dr Shane Homan (University of Newcastle, NSW), Dr Sarah Baker (The Open University, UK, formerly ARC Post-doctoral Research Fellow 2003-2005, University of South Australia), Professor Andy Bennett (Brock University, Canada, formerly University of Surrey, UK), Dr Bruce Cohen (Humboldt University, Germany, formerly ARC International Research Fellow 2005-2006, University of South Australia), and in 2003, Professor Tommy DeFrantz (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA). The Australian Research Assistants were Julie Pavlou-Kirri (University of Newcastle) and Danni Nicholas-Sexton (University of South Australia). The international advisors to the project were Professor Shirley Brice-Heath (Brown University, USA), Professor Henry Jenkins (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA), Professor David Buckingham (University of London, UK) and Professor Hartmut Häußermann (Humboldt University, Germany). Additional research assistance was provided by David van der Hoek, Peter Dutton, Mia Bennet, Nikolas de Masi and administrative assistance by Jane Broweleit. The Playing for Life website can be found at [www.playingforlife.org.au](http://www.playingforlife.org.au), the website was created by Andrew Plummer of *Scenestealer*.

<sup>17</sup> In *Playing for Life*, 'disadvantaged or marginalised youth' was defined as those young people who have been historically and culturally disenfranchised and who consider themselves to be socially dislocated or disadvantaged in relation to mainstream cultures. The Australian Youth Service's definition of 'youth' as being between 16 and 27 years old was followed here.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of auto-visual ethnography see for example Bloustien, Geraldine and Sarah Baker. 'On Not Talking to Strangers:

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Researching the Micro Worlds of Girls through Visual Auto-ethnographic Practices'. *Social Analysis*. 47:3 (2003): 64-79.

<sup>19</sup> Video, September 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Green, *How Popular Musicians Learn*, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Interview, January 2006.

<sup>22</sup> Interview, December 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, April 2006.

<sup>24</sup> See for example Winterbottom, Michael. *24 Hour Party People*. MGM (Video and DVD), 2001, in regards to the inspiration provided by the Sex Pistols concert on 20 July 1976 at Manchester's Lesser Free Trade Hall.

<sup>25</sup> Baker, Sarah. 'Young People and Community Radio in the Northern Region of Adelaide, South Australia'. *Popular Music and Society*. (2007): forthcoming.

<sup>26</sup> A standard requirement for any radio DJ wanting to broadcast without assistance.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, January 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, September 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, December 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Interview, April 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Interview, April 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians* 17.

<sup>33</sup> Interview, September 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians* 17.

<sup>35</sup> Fieldnotes, June 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Interview, December 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Interview, December 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Interview, December 2005.

<sup>39</sup> DJ DeeAndrea responded to this comment in a previous draft as follows:

Yes dj ben helped me out to get started.. sort of, around the time of my first gig or 2, ..but after that i was pretty much on my own.. I think i may have taken one question [from the researchers] as in 'who's helped you with your dj'ing' in the actual physical sence [sic], and another as 'who's helped you break into the "scene"..' Bah [sic], i cant [sic] remember anyway... but what u [sic] guys have written is fine... (email to the authors, 18 July, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> Wenger, Etienne. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (new edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>41</sup> Fieldnotes, September 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Email to the authors, November 2006.

<sup>43</sup> This is a relatively old DJ skill of mixing two or more songs together to create an entirely new track. With the introduction of cheap music production and mixing software, 'mash-ups' or 'cut-ups' have become increasingly popular. A recent example was the song 'Smack up the Orinoco Flow' – a cut-up of The Prodigy's 'Smack My Bitch Up' and Enya's 'Orinoco Flow' – which became a popular download from the internet.

<sup>44</sup> Interview, January 2006.

<sup>45</sup> Interview, January 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Email to the authors, May 2006.

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- <sup>47</sup> Fieldnotes, June 2005.
- <sup>48</sup> DJ Topsy, interview, January 2006.
- <sup>49</sup> DJ DeeAndrea, interview, December 2005.
- <sup>50</sup> DJ Rangler, interview, April 2006.
- <sup>51</sup> Interview, December 2005.
- <sup>52</sup> Interview, April 2006.
- <sup>53</sup> Interview, January 2006.
- <sup>54</sup> Interview, September 2004
- <sup>55</sup> Email to the authors, May 2006.
- <sup>56</sup> Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians*.
- <sup>57</sup> Frith, 'Video pop'.
- <sup>58</sup> Interview, November 2004.
- <sup>59</sup> Stolzoff, *Wake The Town And Tell The People* 154.