UC Santa Barbara

Raab Fellows 2024

Title

Understanding Why We Spin

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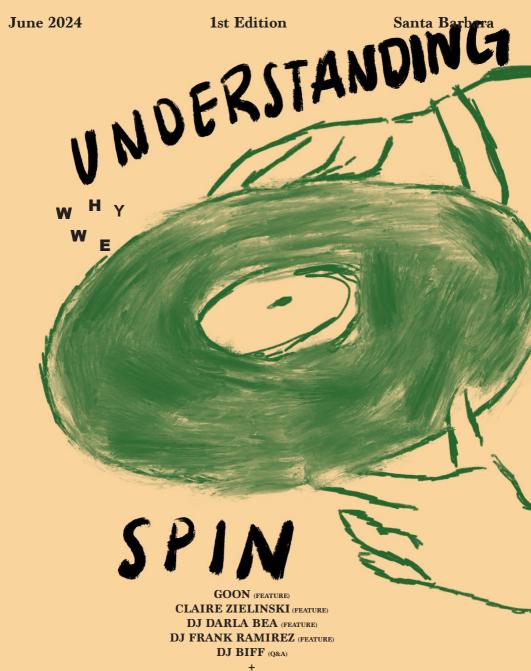
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FOREWARD BY AUTHOR GLOSSARY

Forward

I was recently listening to Scottish DJ and producer Barry Cant Swim's latest album When Will We Land, when in the midst of my shuffle a song titled Deadbeat Gospel began playing. Spoken word poetry over a euphoric Barry melody composed of live drums, tambourines, clapping, synth keys, and vocal chops flooded my ears through my headphones.

The poem describes the supposed religious experience that can be felt through a live musical experience:

Try and envision a religion that's based upon smooth transitions

Shameless, nameless, blameless faces that put blind faith in Chase & Status

Their amazing graces, their faith in Faithless

If God is a DJ, then we pray that he plays deep basses

Forever and ever and ever, amen

Because I'm baptized in my own sweat

There's no communion, we've only got community

DJ killing it so much, I wrote a f*****n eulogy

That I can literally feel the music

I am a minister of sound, and

I've got a choir of high-definition speakers blasting me with blasphemy

And sacrilegious instruments

Live music is such a gift to listeners that they write poetry comparing it to a divine experience. And it's true. Live music is catharsis for many, it is for me at least. If I think of my favorite memories, they are at concerts and DJ sets where the music is loud, and good, and the night goes on forever. These unforgettable feelings and once-in-a-lifetime moments are thanks to these musical experts who create a space of love and light with their melodies, chord progressions, vocal samples, musical curation and dedication, their BPM choices and their mixing. DJs attempt to become psychologists to a crowd of strangers, and they're successful. They somehow read the room like a book, sewing together a night to remember for a sea of people who show up to feel the music and dance the night away.

But, how do DJs feel about these expectations placed upon them? All the high stakes of paid events, the neverending creative process of music discovery and curation, the competitiveness of it all, the vulnerability it takes to stand on an elevated surface above a crowd of people and play what you think sounds good: why do they spin?

I interviewed five different DJs to ask these questions. Here are their stories.

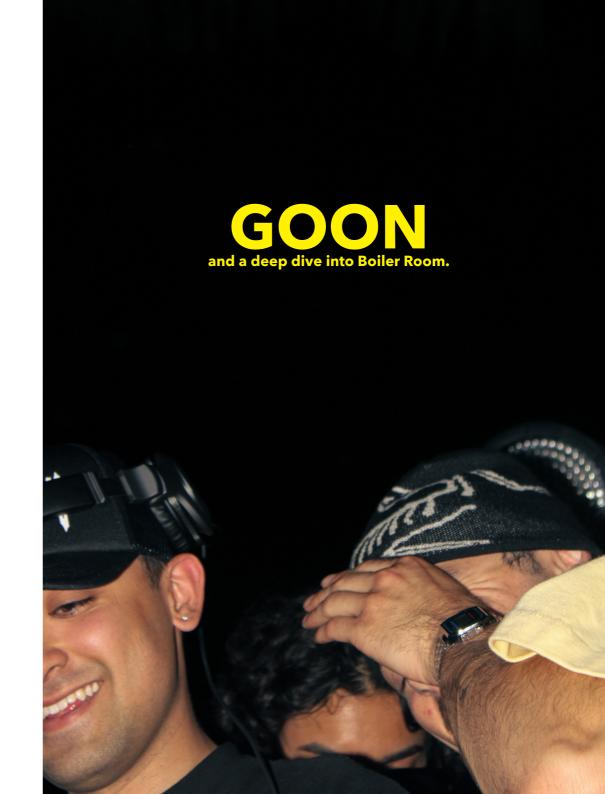
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ave you ever been to a Boiler Room? And no, I am not talking about a room that holds mechanical equipment in some scary, desolate boat or warehouse that hasn't seen the light of day since its construction. The kind of Boiler Room I am talking about is an intimate space filled with loud music, DJ equipment, people, dancing bodies, chatter, and producers—where the lines between spectacle and spectator become blurred. Event goers attending a Boiler Room set form a sphere around the spinning DJ, creating a cocoon of sound and energy in the middle of the room, like it is the beating heart of the entire building. And that is quickly what it becomes, for the DJ is (more often than not) on the same level as the crowd, allowing attendees to interact with the artist. By dancing with them, standing alongside them, chatting with them, or in some vile and extremely rare cases, messing with their decks, chords, or even psyche.

This unique and hard to come by environment is what makes Boiler Room so special. It's a space where trust is the name of the night as everybody expects respect, positivity, maturity, and support (or PLUR: peace, love, unity, and respect, as coined by the Electronic Dance Music (EDM) community). To be able to stand next to some of the best DJs in the world as they work their "magic" is undoubtedly at the top of any music lovers list. I became familiar with Boiler Room (both the company and idea) in the late 2010s as I aimlessly scrolled YouTube looking for something to watch. I thank the algorithm now in retrospect, as this mindless day became one that shaped my experience with DJ culture forever. Those familiar with Boiler Rooms know which of the many iconic sets was the one that rolled into my suggested feed: Kaytranada Boiler Room Montreal DJ Set. I don't know why I clicked on this video, I didn't even know who Kaytranada was. But after I finished it, I knew I was quickly wrapped up in a cultural zeitgeist.

Present day, if you type "Kaytranada" in Youtube's search bar, "Boiler Room" auto populates underneath it first. The 42-minute, 10-year-old set now stands at a whopping 21 million views. Although this traction is in part due to producer-DJ-extraordinaire Kaytranada's musical abilities and style, it is also in part due to the crowd surrounding him during his set. Under r/electronicmusic on Reddit, a post titled "Kaytranada Live DJ Set - a Phenomenal set with a whacky crowd" is full of comments by redditors pointing out their favorite crowd members, or "characters," accompanied by essential timestamps of iconic moments in the set, as if they're citing a source for an academic journal. The publication Deep House Amsterdam has a whole annotated transcript of this Montreal set, with a glossary of key characters and separate acts. Additionally, those featured in the background of the set make annual posts to update lovers of the video. Kaytranada stays at his post, DJing alongside his crowd who never leaves.



I cite this example to show off the essence of Boiler Room: transparency. A look into a sweaty club and a sea of people enjoying themselves excites our primal desires in a natu-

ral way, ways that million dollar budget TV shows and films can't replicate. It is hard to get anyone to watch a 42-minute long video. Now throw in that it is simply a DJ set of one person mixing with people dancing around them, and you would think it'd be impossible. But, the pinnacle of Boiler Room is to "tell stories from the fringes," and 21 million views don't lie: we are clearly entertained by this style of documentation and the subject it presents.

An integral aspect to Boiler Room is that all sets are always filmed and broadcasted to the internet. According to the Boiler Room site, a webcam taped to the wall filming various sets is how the brand began. With an inside look into Europe's underground scene, virtual watchers gained context on their favorite DJs that had never been remotely available—not in this way at least, as live streaming on the internet was in its infancy. In a 2016 article by Ruth Saxelby in the

magazine Fader, Boiler Room creator Blaise Bellville mentioned the visual element of Boiler Room and what the ability to really look into the musical community does for viewers.

"When we first met people who had been watching [Boiler Room], they would describe it as a keyhole into the U.K. music scene, and so that would start to shape your thinking of like, you know, why do these people matter?" Boiler Room creator Blaise Bellville said in his interview with Saxelby. "And you would come to the conclusion that having some visual context to these things that you read about — or heard little snippets of from overseas — helps you as a fan, wherever you are in the world, understand that these were tangible real people."

To see partygoers in a natural state of bliss is relatable and infectious to watch. A look into the crowd dancing, exchanging looks, whispering conversations on the side, people scooting past one another, all while the DJ is smack dab in the middle, allows the viewer to be a part of something that may be thousands of miles away. The dance floor is in your living room. (Artwork above by @kristofferson)

Though I have loved sets like this for years, Boiler Room sets, and really DJ performances in general, did not strike a chord with those in my close circle of friends, and a lot of my

favorite sets were not drawing the numbers that Kaytranada's set was. I just sort of accepted that Boiler Rooms were not even in the periphery of the 20-somethings around me in Isla Vista, the city where UC Santa Barbara stands. Backyard band shows and sunset walks were in the forefront for my peers, and I was right there with them, enjoying my time. So, I am sure you can imagine my shock when on one random Friday September night in Isla Vista, I am parking my car on the overcrowded Camino Del Sur street in front of my house, when I look at the telephone pole and see a stapled black poster with a big, thin white circle enclosing white text that begins with the word, "BOILER..."

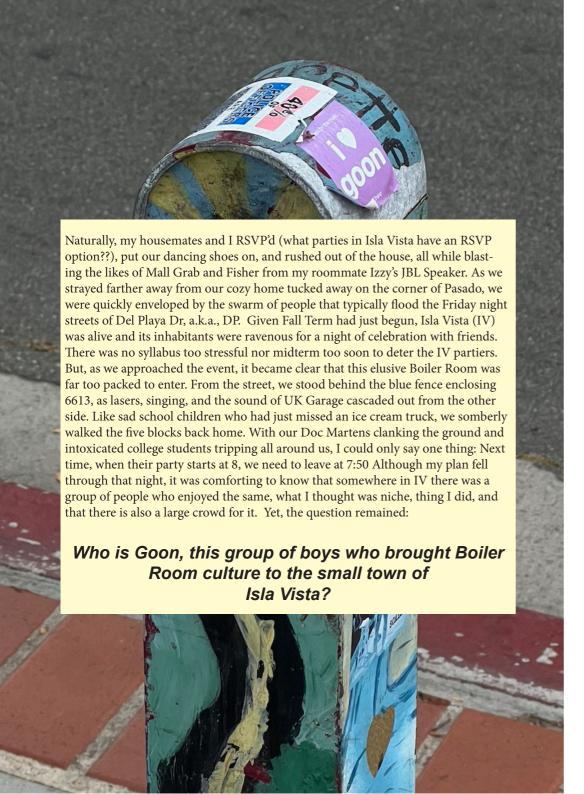
After quickly putting my car in break, I ran out to the poster, and I saw this:



Many thoughts ran through my mind, with the primary one being, "well I guess I do have plans tonight."

I was stunned by not only this level of marketing, but also the nod to the Boiler Room. I knew that those in charge of this event were people I needed to meet. I ran into my house, probably startling my housemates, and made them all go to the Instagram post associated with the event, @g00n.inc. On this feed is where I saw the Instagram post publicizing this Boiler Room-esque event, accompanied by Sammy Virji and Flowdan's track Shella Verse. The caption read:

HIII ISLA VISTA, MISSED U SM. LETS WELCOME UCSB BACK WITH A DANCE PARTY 2 REMEMBER. DANCE MUSIC AND EDM ALL NIGHT. 8PM - 12 AM . RSVP IN BIO. BRING YOUR DANCING SHOES AND GOOD VIBES



"We are a collective, a music provider; but it's not just music. We do design, production, social media marketing—we are building a character within Goon"

That quote comes from Goon themselves, the California based DJ duo composed of 21 year-old, music producer Keito Frank and 20-year-old graphic designer Randel Korgan. It was 2022 when the two met as freshly moved-in IV residents, having been matched solely by chance on Facebook. Keito had a DJing board, the two told me via our Zoom interview. and at first they were just messing around. "Then, we started actually practicing and DJing for our friends or at the most a group of 20 people, and it kind of just turned into this whole thing over time." But the duo claims they started out "absolutely horrible."

"We were kind of just seeing what we liked, and at that point we weren't very good at DJing. We really were just bouncing ideas off each other without having a vision," explained Keito, and after a night of too much fun, the boys spilled alcohol on top of their decks, frying their gear and stopping their set. It was this turning point where the boys decided to take things in a different direction, and after their fourth or fifth time DJing together, the boys landed on the name Goon. Inspired by their friend Adam's sketch of a monkey with the word "GOON" across it, they were ready to be an official duo.

Isla Vista is no stranger to a DJ or two making waves through town. Arguably one of our most famous ex-IVers is a DJ: the one and only UCSB alum Steve Aoki. Aoki lived at the famous Biko house on Sueno Road where he produced DIY records and ran underground performances out of the house.

Present day, Aoki is internationally known, and is still in the DJ and EDM scene—but it wasn't even that long ago when he was making his strides in our two-mile town. Now, most would say there are plenty of DJs in Isla Vista. This could be in part due to the fact that the art of DJing has picked up significantly with the introduction of TikTok and mainstream-ification of EDM, leading people to find a semi-affordable deck at guitar center and give it a spin. But to me, Goon is playing in a league of their own, and are finding small but noticeable ways to set themselves apart from the rest.

At the time I write this, and have interviewed the boys, we are witnessing a commodification of dance culture in Isla Vista. With the rise of Instagram accounts like @ deltopiaofficial, @dplighthouse, @ pulseofiv, accounts that publicize house parties in Isla Vista, we are seeing a rise in parties demanding a fee for entry. As you will read in this zine, this new development of monetizing parties is abnormal, and not true to the core of IV party "culture."

As annoying as it sounds, back in the day, a party with a cover charge would be a laughingstock; now, parties have early bird specials, tiered pricing—but hey, at least girls usually get a discount. On the other side of this is Goon—though they ask for an RSVP, you don't have to pay a fee to attend their shows, and you don't even have to show proof of RSVP. "Out here in IV, the party scene is so oversaturated with events costing a lot of money," Randel explained. "That really excluded a lot of people from being able to enjoy the scene and this beautiful community of people who just want to come together on weekends and dance. If you're charging you're not really being inclusive of, mostly broke, college students."

The boys explained how they could make a killing off tickets but they continue to keep the parties free of charge. Still, party goers are not completely off the hook: when you RSVP to a Goon show, you are forever in their system to receive texts they send out, mainly to publicize upcoming shows, like the one I got at the beginning of this story. With an influx of people coming to their shows, and their following growing, I was curious about how these two handle the pressure of young college-aged onlookers that most likely have little context for the DJ's influences, which include the likes

of Fred Again, Skrillex, and Four Tet. "Performing in IV brings a different crowd each show," Keito said. "There are so many people walking down DP looking for a random party." With this unpredictability, the boys stay in the realm of what they can control and they do what they want more than solely pleasing others, but it is a dance between the two. "We never want to sacrifice our aesthetic or our sound to get people in the door," Randel said. "But at the same time, we want to make sure people are going to like what we play—it's a delicate balance."



To me, and many others I assume, with this uncertainty, a formula or routine would be in order—but not for Goon. Drawing from evergreen novel inspirations, whether it be new tracks (sometimes called IDs), other DJs, or feeling out the crowd, they completely improvise their sets. No plan, no pre-recording, just in the moment curation, mess-ups included, because to them, mistakes are a part of it. "Keito and I have those moments all the time. At the end of the day, we are playing music for people. It's not that serious, they're gonna forget whatever mistake you just made in a couple seconds. You gotta dust off your shoulders and don't let your ego get too hurt," Randel explained.

Now, that isn't to say no nerves are involved. In their 360-degree Boiler Room set up, the two explained how you can't even take a moment to turn around/away from the crowd, because there they are behind you too. "I remember at our Boiler Room show, it wasn't too packed. Then as we were DJing, Randel goes, 'Bro. Look up.' and there were people all around and on the roof of the adjacent building," recalled Keito. The two called this experience surreal, something they had never seen before—in their words, "your heart drops, but then it starts racing." And this feeling is a big reason for Goon's motivation to keep spinning. "We are keeping it simple and having fun, we really are always have a good time," Randel said, "It's kind of like this big celebration of community that we have built over the last year and a half. It's really sweet when you see all your best friends having fun

with a bunch of strangers, and they're all enjoying the music you're making."

It isn't just students who love Goon, either. Lao Wang, a noodles, buns, and brew spot street in IV, often lets the boys set up shop and spin the night away. The initial negotiation went something like this:

Keito and Randel would go with their friends to Laos and sit for hours on hours. After making friends with the cashiers, their friends had the idea of asking for a set within the small establishment of Laos. "I thought it was so stupid, and probably the worst idea ever," said Randel, "but I was like, just ask, because you miss 100% of the shots you don't take." Well, that same day, Laos replies with, "can you do it tonight?" Thus, the birth of their in restaurant set Goon Wang, which since the time of this interview has occurred on multiple occasions. "You have 18 to 19 kegs, college students and loud, good music—that's a good party."



"Goon is going to rule the world, even if we don't do it right now," Randel said, ambitiously. "We don't want anything more than this, and it's gonna be fun. You know, this all came out of nowhere: it just suddenly felt like we were able to create something, like we were able to put something out there. We are really grateful for this creative outlet, and we couldn't even see what is happening now, a year ago. We are ready to show people what we do. So, um, I guess stay tuned."



At some point or another, mundane Isla Vista Thursday nights—Friday eve, if you will—metamorphosize into an additional day of the weekend —"Thirsty Thursday," as coined by college adolescents. Like clockwork, they get out of their lectures, finish up their work, collect with their friends, and hop on Bill's Bus every Thursday to enjoy a night downtown with few funds and a rich itinerary.

There are plenty of spots to hit downtown, and each offers typical characteristics: grimy pubs where the air is hot and the floors sticky, restaurants that serve brunch by day and turn into clubs by night, three-story madhouses with a different musical genre for each level—whatever your liking, there is most likely someplace with low lighting and expensive drinks for you to enjoy with your best mates.

It was a random Thursday in January of 2023 when, in typical fashion, I dragged my friends to EOS, a club that hosts DJs of all calibers, from local to visiting acts (since I have been in SB, I have witnessed sets from the legendary DJ Tennis, DJ Seinfeld, Omnom, and plenty more) all for under \$20. It is here where I end up on a Thursday night, for their music selection is what I love. I can begin my nights at the clubs that play mid-2010 anthems, but I can only handle Pitbull and Ke\$ha for so long. What I need is a high BPM track (Beats Per Minute), vibrant lighting, and dancing figures all around me, and EOS offers this all. After waiting in a long line stretching the perimeter of the white brick building, my friends and I were given the nod into the club. This particular night was packed with people since we had just gotten back into town from Winter break. With elbows digging into our ribs and various loud conversations drifting past our ears, we all made our way into the more tame room EOS has to offer. I felt a wave of comfort when I heard a fast-paced electronic tune taking over the red-lit room.

Dancing with my friends, I glanced over at the girl DJing against the wall I got closer and saw she had on a shirt splashed with writing. Squinting my eyes, I was able to make out it's text:

He told me to choose him or techno. Sometimes, I still miss him.

Enamored with this shirt, I needed to know more about this girl. I did my research and discovered it was no other than Santa Barbara local, Orange County-born Claire Zielinski: raver, DJ, yogi extraordinaire. In a somewhat serendipitous fashion, Claire uniquely discovered EOS, in an even more unique time—roller skating during a worldwide pandemic at Santa Barbara City College. "The picture is pretty much a ton of middle-aged people in the SBCC parking lot getting faded on roller skates," Claire said.

CLAIRE ZIELINSKI



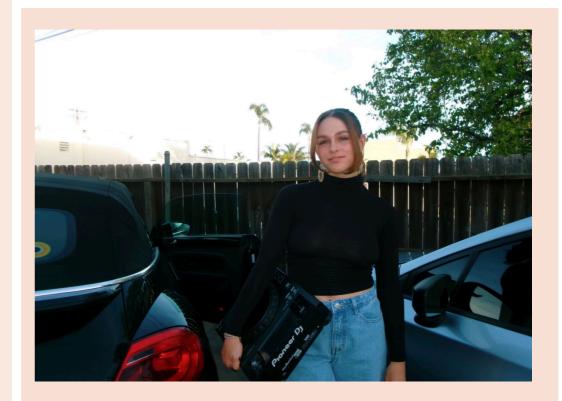
It was perfect for the then 19-year-old who found the change of pace from her OC community refreshing. It was here where Claire met EOS owner Bix, who once brought a lowrider and a mixing board to their weekly skate sesh and provided the tunes for their ride. But, Claire had been into the music scene before her life in Santa Barbara.

When Claire was 16 she met a girl at her steakhouse job named Chloe. Chloe could come off as standoffish, but Claire thought she was the coolest girl ever. Chloe took a liking to Claire, and from there showed her the ways of the raves, "and debauchery." Fake ID in hand, the two ventured off to Insomniac events in Southern California. The brightest of lights, over-the-top fireworks, pulsating bass pumping out of million-dollar sound systems: these are all things the festival production house Insomniac specializes in. Focusing on underground music scenes, Insomniac was created in the name of DIY culture in Los Angeles to uplift music, creativity, and community. So, imagine being a highschooler surrounded by your peers who are playing generic radio hits in the school parking lot out of their Honda Civics during the week, and on the weekends you're being exposed to events like Electric Daisy Carnival or Escape Halloween, billion-dollar productions taking place in your own backyard—yeah, I think I'd take a liking to the latter too. And when Chloe got a DJ boyfriend, Claire was introduced to the idea of DJing herself, so as she got to Santa Barbara post-high school, DJing was fresh on her mind.

Arriving in Isla Vista as an SBCC student, Claire found herself surrounded by even more DJing, but this time through Greek life—and it didn't start off too easy. "Our two guy best friends were in AT Ω and all their friends would DJ, and when I'd try and slide in, they were super mean and wouldn't let me spin. I felt discriminated against since I wasn't in Greek life, and also for being a girl," she explained. But this did not knock her off her passion for music and DJing. With a Covid unemployment check, initiative, and spite, Claire purchased a turntable—the Pioneer XDJ RX— and \$800 speakers. And with her own equipment, Claire began hosting her own parties on DP, and soon after embarked on her first outside-of-ahouse gig at none other than Backstage in Downtown Santa Barbara.

Remember how I had mentioned the many nightlife venues in Santa Barbara? Well, Backstage is one of them, and it stands at a whopping three stories offering dueling piano bars, a mechanical bull, karaoke, themed nights, and, of course, DJs. With her name up in lights, Claire embarked on her first Club gig—which was also not her favorite due to some drama regarding an ex-at-the-time boyfriend, two girls, and her friends as eyewitnesses to this typical college boy activity. Turbulent night aside, Claire felt like the feeling of Backstage didn't fit her vibe well anyway, too "open and Bar Mitzvah-ish," she said. Claire continued DJing at her house in IV and continued the roller skating adventures too. One day while skating beside a downtown Santa Barbara pond, Claire wound up skating next to Bix.

"I remember being super nervous when I was telling him all about what I loved doing, and then he was like, 'Yeah, we can get you on at EOS, like



super casual." So, with this nod from Bix and a co-sign from a friend of a friend, Anna, Claire began DJing the following January. And now, three years later, after transferring to and graduating from UCSB, Claire is not only a resident DJ at EOS but also works for the club's bookings and social media management side.

"It's nightlife you know, it wasn't always super organized behind the scenes," Claire explained. With the help of Google Sheets and her innate Gen Z social media skills, Claire began working on EOS promotion across media platforms, and also handling the hands-on tasks of booking and coordinating with DJs. From making the weekly stage schedules to planning when and where to pick talent up, taking them to lunch, and paying them out, Claire is an integral part of EOS. "I love the lifestyle of a DJ. I think it's so cool to see all of these people thriving off this career," she said. "It's inspiring, because I'm like, wait—maybe I can do that too."



When Claire began doing bookings for EOS, she was the only female DJ. Now, in 2024, Claire has landed multiple female resident DJs, and they have spun at EOS multiple times. "I'm just super interested in making the scene more femme in Santa Barbara," she said. "My goal is to make it a more equal place between genders. Girl power is power for everyone."

But, as much as she is involved with the club scene itself, it's the music that keeps her coming back.

I have always found DJing to be a superpower. You're standing in the room as this provider of atmosphere, which you do by supplying music that you believe matches the energy of the crowd. It is a job where you dissect the feeling of a room and curate sounds that keep that momentum going, all while trying to be as seamless and chill as possible because it is your selection that is sonically supporting the room; there is no hiding. When I asked Claire how she approaches this, she gave credit to the music. "I have this deep, deep love affair with music," she said, hand on chest. "I could almost start crying. Music is everything." Growing up with a Grateful Dead-head father, music has always been in Claire's life as a means of connection.

She finds that when DJing, authenticity comes out in your vibe, and the crowd will feel that and reciprocate that energy—but, this isn't always the case. "Anytime I play techno, people run out of the room," Claire said. Berlin hardstyle techno is her favorite, but it just isn't always what people want to hear in the club. "I would say disappointment is normal as a DJ. You just got to move on. As an artist, it's better to cater to the audience in that moment, because if not, you won't get booked and people won't know you." So, Claire occasionally does a techno-themed night at EOS, "that way no one can get mad," she says.



This past May, Claire had a DJ slot for the San Luis Obispo annual music festival Shabang, and she has plans to travel to Germany to explore the music scene further, all while continuing her amazing work at EOS. "I'm not really trying to get famous. I'm just enjoying what I'm doing right now," she concluded. "I want to keep giving back to the DJ community, continuing to center women, and giving that feminine energy because that's who I am as a DJ."

DJ



DARLA BEA

The scene is this: three-year-old, Santa Barbara native Darla has a microphone in one hand, and in the other, is a tape recorder. As her small legs run 'round rambunctiously, she is interviewing, telling, and recording. Whether it be at relatives' homes, living room with her parents, or in the solitude of listening to television conversations, Darla had been creating a radio show before she could even explain what was going on. "I didn't recognize it until later in life," Darla says now, in 2023, as an 8-time winner of Santa Barbara's Best Event DJ, radio show host of Rock it Properly, MC, and music curator—all since 2007. "Look at what your interest was as a young child, and it will kind of define what your career is."

There are a lot of scenarios where Darla could have chosen to pursue a different field, for she earned a UC Santa Barbara degree in Art History, got certified in graphic design, public relations, and marketing from UCSB, and even worked at a marketing agency. Instead, she used these experiences as leverage for her musical capabilities and human connectivity expertise—because the fact is: Darla was destined for music, and playing music for others.

In her childhood, Darla's mother (who Darla calls a human Jukebox) would listen to everything from Swedish Shred Metal to the Long Beach band Sublime. Before Darla was even born, her father had gone to radio broadcasting school (fun fact: some of the station IDs for KCSB F.M., UC Santa Barbara's, indie, non-commercial, and educational community college radio, are done by her dad), and while Darla was in college, he partook in a tribute band, ranging from Led Zeppelin to The Doors, performing in multiple venues in Santa Barbara. And Darla had a special hand in this live music equation: she curated the music that played to get the people pumped up as the musicians set up the stage. And the post-performance playlist that kept people in the club? That was also Darla's doing, and she had gotten comfortable with curation by exploring various music genres as a teenager

As the Santa Barbara High School cheer team captain, Darla found herself in a diverse realm of culture, students, and the sounds they brought along with them. "People wanted to give me music," Darla said, describing how once a friend made her a mixtape of songs that they discovered on their recent family trip abroad. Darla's friends observed her in this musical element at practices with the marching band, and in their free time too. "The Latina cheerleaders with their Walkmen would put headphones over my ears and show me the popular Spanish anthems, and my African-American cheerleading friends would teach me their certain subsect of music," she explained. With a constant pencil to paper and CD cases tattooed with post-its, she was always taking notes. "This was pre-internet, pre-Shazam, so all you could do was write down lyrics and hope to God you'd find the song later."

Post high school, she became immersed in the Isla Vista music scene, taking trips down to DP to catch band shows, hanging out with the Jazz band, foreign exchange students, and the theater kids. But she still felt like there was no job for this activity of mental music logging. She was set on the fact that she was potentially just archiving it all for a rainy day—until she realized during her certificate program that even though she was a postgraduate student, she still could have her own KCSB radio show, something she was too busy to pursue in her time as an undergraduate.

From there, Darla embarked on crafting her very own show at 28 years old. Given her love for radio and extensive marketing experience, she understood formulaic routines and had a deep understanding of what people really wanted. With help from her past boss at her marketing job, Darla was able to get her show down to a science and make time for other work that paid, since KCSB is on a volunteer basis for programmers. She decided to make a theme every week, making sure the episodes were completely different genres, eras, and topics she could deep dive into. From Surfing the Waves with Dick Dale, an American surf guitarist that used Middle Eastern scales and melodies, to Nigerian party music, she wanted to make her show a unique experience each time. "I don't like to do the same thing twice," she said. "And unlike some radio hosts out there, I wasn't doing this for my health, I wanted this to lead somewhere, and I wanted to make sure of it." From there, Darla's show Rock It Properly was born.

KCSB was, and is, very encouraging of digging deep into the libraries of music collections and going beyond the surface. Do you like Swedish music? Well, they'll encourage you to think beyond just ABBA. With constant research, Darla became familiar with musical sampling, the act of reusing a portion of one sound recording in another recording. She could often track a song to its original sample. For example, upon finding a tune from a genre like House, she would trace its beat to a much earlier Disco song, labeling the physical CD with its given evolutionary roots, expanding her sonic knowledge two-sometimes-three-fold, depending on how deeply a song was sampled. And she did it all without technology, without sites like WhoSampled, a database that can tell you the origin of any song. "I feel like I did the groundwork," Darla said. "People want to dispute you, you know. 'Oh, you could've just looked that up,' they say now. But it's like no man. I've been taking myself on all these little musical field trips through different countries and genres and themes and holidays."

After six months of Rock It Properly airing on KCSB, Darla was invited by a loyal listener to have her own live, in-person DJ set at The Mercury Lounge in Goleta. "I had no idea how to do that," Darla said; but excitedly, she agreed to do it. "I had no pressure. I wouldn't have known if I was making a mistake, because I wouldn't have even known it was a mistake." With naivety, a laptop, a mixer, and no headphones or microphone, Darla headlined her first set, calling it L'80s Night, and it was an instant hit. With this event being hugely successful, she was offered a monthly slot at The Mercury Lounge.

Darla began marketing her events with self-made posters and public calendar publicity. Her events were nothing short of extravagant, with decorations, lighting, and 80s party favors. "I don't do things small," she said. "I go all out, and that's probably why I'm exhausted."

Now, Darla is a household name in Santa Barbara. From those early sets at The Mercury Lounge, Darla got her first clients for weddings, which she is often sought out to play for. And she is highly recognized not only for her talent but for the amount of indisputable hard work she puts into her events and bookings.

When marketing herself, Darla will present clips of her with add-ons like lighting and glow sticks. Then she has to make estimates, speak with wedding planners, and figure out logistics. "It almost becomes about everything but the music and you go, woah, this is weird," she said.

On top of the planning, she has to lug gear, be on the phone with clients, email, do invoices, and be, as she puts it: chained to your desk, "As a career DJ, people will say 'This DJ didn't get paid, why do you?' and I explain that it takes me longer to get my equipment up, it is top of the line at that, then I'm going to work with you, be on site, then I'm going to strike [take down] my own gear and take it home. And also rent in Santa Barbara."

Darla attributes this business mentality to her boss she mentioned previously. By gaining knowledge on deposits, non-profit event rates, and business parameters, Darla was pushed out of her nest and realized she deserved to be paid for her art, so she had to speak up for herself as an independent contractor. "I've noticed some DJs still feel icky about being paid, but again, I want to support myself and be able to live in my hometown."



Darla at the Mercury Lounge

But, in this male-dominated industry, DJing as a woman bleeds into every aspect of the gig, from the booking to the event itself. The DJ industry is growing rapidly: The International Music Summit report for 2024 found that the dance music industry is at \$11.8 billion, a 17% increase over just 12 months—yet women were most likely to be disenfranchised, from being interrupted, questioned, and judged unfairly for their position in the music industry, on top of a glaring pay gap where women have a higher chance of finding their male counterpart make more (shocking, I know).

"It's a very hard industry to have a spouse or children or even a pet," said

Darla, as gigs typically run through the night, and a bulk of the job is music research, planning, and practice. "That's why in particular I think it's male-dominated. From energy levels to dangerous club situations of people drinking and on drugs at night, as a woman, it's hard to contend with those things."

The night before our interview, Darla DJ'd a winter teen ball. After the eventwrapped, while striking equipment, her roadie who assists her with tech and lighting equipment looked at Darla and said, "There is no one else that could have done that job but you." He said this because all night Darla deeply connected with this crowd of 13-year-old girls. From teaching them the Limbo, Macarena, and Cha Cha Slide, to explaining different games—she goes beyond the booth. "Anyone can DJ," says Darla. "Anyone can put music on and use expensive equipment, but are they

resonating with who is in front of them?"

How does this connection to the crowd come about for Darla? She is a psychic. At one event in particular, she saw a couple sitting down in front of her, and as natural as taking a breath, Darla knew exactly what to play to get them out of their seats: an old Smokey Robinson song. Suddenly, the two morphed into lovebirds, laughing and kissing. "They came up to me and asked if I knew that the song I played was their first dance wedding song, and this night was also their anniversary," Darla explained, having not known either of those facts. "I just looked

at them and knew to play that song. I'm like The Terminator III with that little eye." With an intense background in music cataloging and marketing, these real-life experiences have taught her about demographics. From age groups, to different cities, to ethnicities; Darla knows what the people want, from Los Angeles senior citizens to teenage girls from New York to LGBTQ+ crowds in Downtown Santa Barbara. Darla calls herself a chameleon and sees that it behooves her career to blend in. She doesn't want someone to think she only plays one genre or does one kind of event, because the truth is, she likes every-

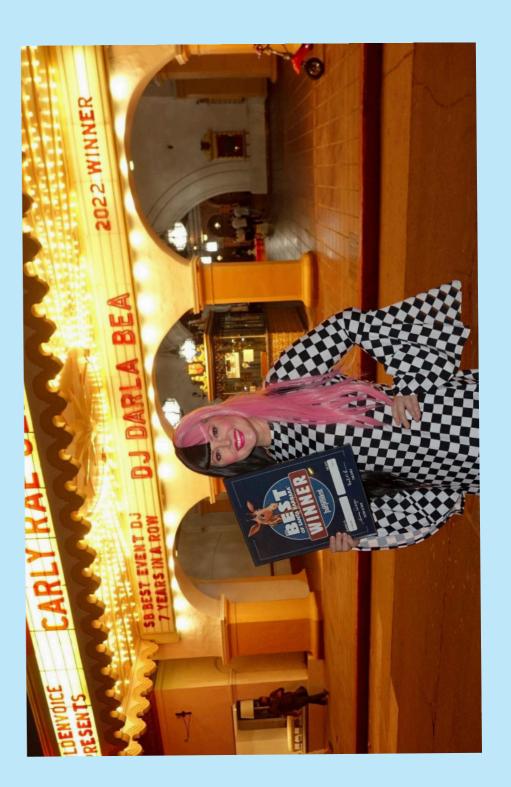
thing—except country music, that one is slightly hard for her to play, "but that's just because I am from Southern California, not the South." (Still, I know Darla would rock a cowboy hat for a Wild West party and DJ the best rodeo this town could offer.) When Darla spins at something like a wedding where she carves her set around the listeners, she shows her love for music by creating an aura for the room she is surrounded by. This is natural of course, as she is a part of these events but they aren't specifically about her. She does what makes people happy and keeps them dancing, "I know everyone is not as nerdy as me, they don't always want a deep-cut track," she explains. It is at KCSB where she is honed into her mothership of music discovery. In the solitude of a studio where she can wear

whatever she wants, play what she wants, and dance how she wants, she gets a little more creative release. And fans of Rock it Properly, some of whom have been tuning in for 16 years, can nerd out with her while she teases them to "get a life, people!"

From all her work, Darla has found she is interwoven into many different lives. After one of her recent gigs, she walked the streets of downtown where she was met with people recognizing her for DJing their weddings, hosting parking lot parties, or emceeing their child's sixth-grade graduation. To see the dent and impact she has made in her community fills her with a joy that seems too good to be true, but it is true, and it shows up in the form of people consistently joining DJ Darla Bea on the dance floor and the airwaves after almost 20 years in this industry.

"It's when you learn a song, and you think you might be the only person in the world to know it, and then you're at a Brazilian wedding, and you play it and suddenly everyone is in a conga line singing all the lyrics," says Darla. "You get a high from seeing people react and sing to a prerecorded song. I am not a band, musician, or singer, so it's gratifying, that connection."

"That was my whole intention. I feel like I have something to give the world," Darla says. "It really fuels my soul." and that is she spins.





As I scrolled DJ Frank Ramirez's Instagram after our interview, I came across this comment: "Hey Frank, can you please call me? I would like to buy some CDs from you, my old ones are all scratched, hit me up."

Suddenly, the stories DJ Frank Ramirez had just told me splashed into my mind, and his impact on the 805 music scene of the central California coast was made clear.

"I call myself the 805 Original Homegrown DJ; the Original Now Digital, putting it down for the Black and Brown since 1979," says Frank. "And that's a mighty long time."

Frank Ramirez was born and raised by his grandmother in the Santa Barbara area. "I was very active in choir, plays, and after-school sports," Frank said. "She kept me busy with these activities, and they gave me an opportunity to be myself." From La Cumbre Junior High to Santa Barbara High, Frank walked the SB campuses with lowriders driving along the streets surrounding the schools, blasting Marvin Gaye and Motown hits. Around this time, Frank found himself at his first internship with the KTMS radio station in Santa Barbara, which was conveniently located next to a record store in De La Guerra Plaza. This is where he got his first vinyl: Rick James' Come Get It! From here, he began spinning on vinyl.



While creativity began blooming all around him in a golden era of music, 17-year-old Frank made his move to Santa Barbara City College. It was at this campus on Cliff Dr. where Frank's Chicano Studies professor heard about the interest Frank had in music and entertainment. The professor then connected Frank to Joe Rizo, one of the members of Radio Chicano, a program running through KCSB. "When I started, I was intimidated because I was just some kid out of high school hanging with University kids. It took me a while to find my on-air personality," Frank said. But he quickly cemented himself in the group alongside Joe, and two other members: another UCSB student, and a maintenance worker. Through Radio Chicano, Frank was able to educate himself in radio broadcasting, earning his very own Friday night slot from nine p.m. to midnight. When he began his own program, it was all old school: think Earth Wind & Fire, Tower of Power, The Gap Band.

"It was Friday night KCSB with Frank Ramirez: the Master Blaster, living it up on a Friday night: the urban adventure, fresh tracks on wax," is how Frank describes what his weekly program was all about. During his time on the air, oldies moved to the side as hip-hop and R&B had their revolution in the late 80s. When this began, Frank lived up to his fresh tracks on wax brand and leaned into this rising genre. "I was able to expose my community to that [hip-hop] through KCSB," Frank said, because as he continued programming, he started gaining recognition from the community through immering himself in it. He was not shy about putting his name out there as a master of ceremony (MC) and host for various events, and he began DJing at various Santa Barbara locations, like clubs and bowling alleys. This expanded his network rapidly, leading him to occasionally hit the 101 Highway South to visit Los Angeles and do DJ sets there; he calls this City of Angels era "The Summer Soulful Experience."

Research and reading periodicals led Frank to discover record distributors across the country, connecting himself with people like Frankie Ascensio, a New York-based DJ and record distributor who gave him the hook-up on all things East Coast. And when all the West Coast artists were on the come up—Egyptian Lover, N.W.A., The Unknown DJ—Frank continued his L.A. side quests. "I'd knock on doors and go, 'Yo, this is Frank Ramirez from KCSB Radio, can I get some records?" he explained. "I was known for my L.A. runs and returning with a trunk full of records. From here, he'd pass records along to other DJs for their own programs, always spreading the love for music.

Around '89, KCSB advisor Elizabeth Robinson caught wind of Frank and asked him to join her on her second gig, local Public Access television. So at 19 years old, he was officially on that crew too, handling set design and audio, honing in on his adoration for entertainment and television production.

On set one day, Frank's friend and coworker Mike Queen had a brilliant plan: "Why don't we start a hip-hop show?"

"Sure, that sounds good," Frank said to Mike. "So we started Check It Out Video Show in 1992." Check It Out Video Show continued airing until 2012. 20. 12. 20 years of hard work, being on the air ~ten times a week, traveling to Santa Maria then down to Santa Monica to have exposure in other Public Access realms. Nobody was working harder than these two.

With all of these opportunities, Frank made it a point to become a staple in all types of communities, especially communities of color, where he'd lend a helping hand where he could, from MCing to DJing. "Whenever shows came to Santa Barbara,



like Roger and Zapp or Grandmaster Flash, they would have me be the MC because I knew the music," Frank said. And when he wasn't hosting parties in Santa Barbara, he was at other parties in L.A. getting coverage for Check It Out Video Show. He met artists like Jay Z, Ice Cube, Stevie Wonder, and Beyonce at the start of her career (and more, but we'd be here forever if I listed them all). He worked on red carpets for the B.E.T., awards, attended the Latin Grammys, went to a Michael Jackson album release party—and this still isn't even all of it. "I would videotape it all, bring it back to Santa Barbara, cut and splice it up, and the final product would go on our show," Frank said.

This lifestyle for Frank quickly turned from a hobby to a true passion. And when Mike left the show at Episode 39, Frank carried it out completely alone to the show's conclusion. "This industry is the school of hard knocks. There is no training for what we do, you know," Frank remarked. "We just learn as we go."

From doing street promotion for places like Interscope Records and the Santa Barbara Bowl alongside promoter Moss Jacobs, and people such as filmmaker Warren Miller, Frank's ability to spread the word through a city was unmatched, for his voice was everywhere—and the locals loved him. Store owners in the 805 would let him hang his posters up in the store. His fellow hometown DJs were patiently waiting for his arrival from his post-record pull commute for their round, grooved, piece of PVC, a.k.a., the hottest new record straight from the recording company. "Hair salons, barber shops, liquor stores, auto part stores; I got to know all of these people," Frank said, describing just how diverse his reach was, and still is.





"I am still relevant and in demand. People will still call me and say they need me to DJ their fundraiser, or MC their event, and just be a viable somebody in the Latino and black community," Frank says. "There's a lot of DJs out there, but I don't know any DJ who has had his own TV show for twenty years."

To the youngsters: "You may not know me, but your parents do." he adds.

But with this longevity comes massive industry change. Frank has seen the music industry flip itself inside out numerous times, and when the industry went digital it proved just how constant this change would become. "There are those of us that spin vinyl, but we also have Serato now," Frank says, referencing Serato, an online DJ program where songs are stored, loaded, and mixed digitally. "There is a truer sense of being when we're young, fresh, inspiring, and exciting. But now it's like hey man, I can download everything off Spotify and press play and not have to worry about things."



With technological shortcuts and music sourcing through the internet versus physical vinyl, Frank finds the delivery of performance and style has changed thanks to the digital world. "It's a deeper sense [with physical records]. You gotta know where the breaks are, you gotta know the beats per minute, you gotta know where to drop the needle on the record." Frank said. "The record only has one groove."

But, this isn't all too bad for Frank. He also uses online music databases to source a song on the fly for someone making a request: and this specifically comes in handy when you're DJing for a crowd in Santa Barbara where the crowd can be a mixed bag, and pretty unpredictable. Frank recently DJed for the opening of a new Cookie store in town, Cookie Plug, a hip-hop-themed bakery specializing in massive cookies. But, across the street was the Santa Barbara International Film Festival. "You had all these white folks right there, and I'm over here playing all this hip-hop," Frank recalled. "So I played a little Dave Brubeck. And then I saw them all with their thumbs up."

Frank explained that he likes the challenge that comes along with not immediately knowing a crowd's taste. For him, it's all about reading age, race, but also the vibe of the group, "Not everything should be so easy, especially music. You gotta really find what works."

Frank Ramirez transcended the term hometown hero, for he elevated his community in ways nobody but him could. From uplifting people of color from towns all across the coast to the constant investments into his musical community, Frank never quits, and he is not going anywhere. "I've gotta give it up first and foremost to KCSB and Radio Chicano because they helped put me on the map," Frank says, adding that he found his self-worth when he saw bringing his music to the table was indispensable. Enriching his community with musical diversity is how he formed an unbreakable bond to his city.

"Bringing in new music, representing it on KCSB, in the 805; I had a sense of purpose there. So, I always try to do good. I pride myself on being a good programmer of music, you know, not just play one type of genre," Frank says. "I want to be a well-rounded DJ and lend myself to be a conduit for the community."

So, remember that Instagram comment I brought up earlier? The follower reaching out on Frank's page for new physical music, because his last purchase from Frank was played so much to the point it got scratched up to no return? People not only seek out his music, but they love it so much, that they buy tangible copies, which in this digital landscape, says everything about his meaningful impact on the 805. The ability to transcend eras, connect with community, and share your art: this is what music is all about.



Q. What is your name, and how old are you?

A. I am Rob Evans, a.k.a DJ Biff on KCSB, and I am 71 years old from Goleta, California.

Q. How did your family end up in Goleta?

A. My family got a job in General Motors, Delco. And most people got here the same way. It is a big italian plant, and there's one on Hollister

Q. What was your childhood like in Goleta?

A. Oh man, I'm so lucky. So lucky. We were kind of near Lake Los Carneros, that was like our backyard. We rode bikes there, tree forts, it was just a great place to grow up.

Q. How did your love for music begins

A. I think in part it is because my dad really loved music. He always had the stereo playing albums, and I just loved music. And I liked everything. My dad got interested in Jazz which I had never listened to before him, but I'd also listen to AM radio all the time, and I discovered KCSB in 1967. All of a sudden there was an FM radio playing albums. You could call them up and request something. It was pretty eye opening. KCSB has been my favorite since then.

Q. How much was music a part of your life at this point?

A. It was a big, big part. We had a lot of live music, and there was a lot on the UCSB campus. My first concert was Jimi Hendrix in Rob Gym. Not the best place for acoustics, but between there and the Earl Warren Showgrounds, that's where all the concerts were.

Q. Wow, I never knew Hendrix played here! I feel like we have a good amount of live music on campus still, but the atmosphere I'm sure isn't the same. Have you noticed a difference in music culture in Goleta?

A. There are no concerts anywhere. A couple of places have music, but they're just small cover bands. That's all the live music you hear now.

Q. When did you begin programming at KCSB3

A. 1994.

Q. What was the technology infrastructure like at that time

A. It was a lot more basic. No computers, they were just called carts. They're like eight or four track tapes that we'd record on. Then you'd stick it in the machine. But now it's all computerized. Other than that, we still have turntables, cassette players, CDs. I play about half of my show on vinyl. And they take up room. I have a couple thousand albums, and a couple thousand CDs.

Q. What was the first show you did on KCSB?

A. A friend of mine and I got on K-JUICE, and then we co-hosted. It started as jazz, and then I started playing things I liked more. Now I play everything. My show is called Planned Spontaneity.

Q. What was the beginning of doing radio like? How did you feel

A. It was like a whole new world. It's great. If you love music, it feels nice to share it. There were a lot of programmers then too like there is now. The whole studio's a buzz of people doing different things, so it's really cool.

Q. How do you like the music curation process?

A. I really look forward to it. I will be out and I hear a song, and think, I'm gonna plan a set around this song. It really gets the creative juices flowing, trying to make a set out of one genre.

Q. And how do you DJ outside of KCSB in Santa Barbara?

A. I do weddings, birthdays, parties and stuff. It's a hobby for me though. I don't like to make a living off of it.

QRA W/DJBIFF

Q. What was an average day in IV like for you as a teen?

A. Surfing all the time, hanging out in IV or at friends houses. One time we watched Paul Kantner from Jefferson Airplane where the Bank of America used to be. I was actually there when it burned down. But then they rebuilt it and he played there and we talked to him.

Q. That is so cool. What was the Bank of America burning down like?!

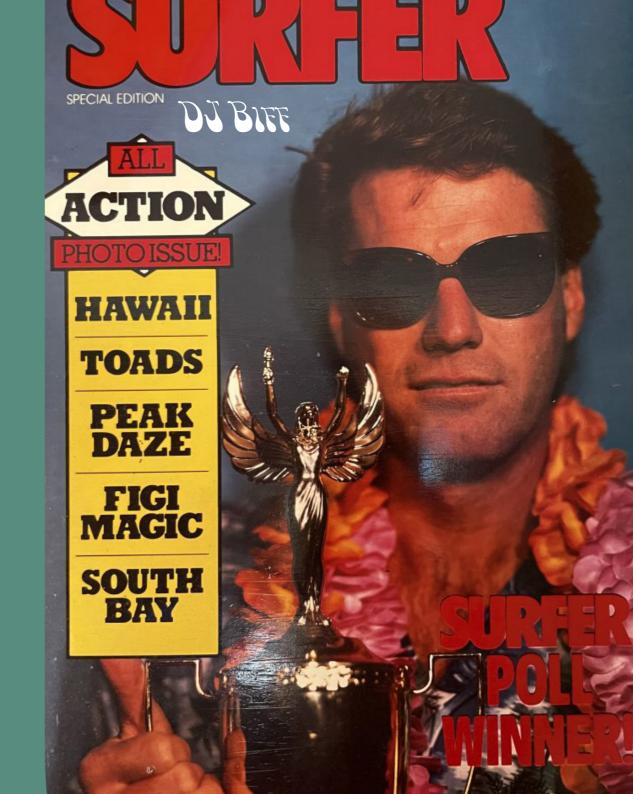
A. I was at the corner store next to it, it was my first job. There were police everywhere, they set up a common center at the General Motors. It was trippy.

Q. So you got started in '94, and you're still programing. What keeps you wanting to do that?

A. I've been on and off since I started. I do like, two to three years in a row then I kind of step back and recharge. Then come back again. I feel like I don't want to say or do the same things every week. I want to keep it fresh. I don't know how regular programmers do it and say the same thing every day. I'd lose some creativity.

Q. So what keeps you coming back?

A. The feedback from the listeners. People calling in going, "Oh I love this song!' You can't hear that kind of music anywhere except KCSB which makes it really unique.



A.M. Radio

short for amplitude modulation, which refers to the means of encoding the audio signal on the carrier frequency. In many countries, AM radio stations are known as "mediumwave" stations.

BPM

beats per minute.

B₂B

back-to-back, commonly used when two DJs collaborate on one mix live.

CDJs

compact disc players designed for DJing.

Check It Out Video Show

DJ Frank Ramirez's TV show that ran for twenty years where he'd document the up-and-coming music scene in southern California.

Chicano

a term originating in the 20th century describing people of Mexican descent, particularly those who were born in or have ancestral ties to the United States. The term was coined during the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 70s as the Mexican American community faced civil rights and social justice issues, and is used to celebrate and affirm the cultural identity of Mexican Americans.

Devs Beach

shortened term for Devereux Beach in Isla Vista.

DJ

shortened word for Disc Jockey, who selects and plays music for their audience, curating tracks and mixes to curate specific energy in the atmosphere.

D.P

shortened term for Del Playa Dr, the last road before you reach our ocean that roars below Isla Vista cliffs. This road is packed with huge beach houses on both the left and right sides, renters are mainly young adults who go to school in town.

F.M. Radio

FM radio, or frequency modulation radio, is a method of radio broadcasting that uses a carrier wave to transmit high-fidelity sound over the air.

I D

an unidentified or unknown track. If you look in the comments of a DJ set, you can see viewers commenting "I.D. @ insert minute mark??" when they hear a song they like but don't know the name of.

1.V.

shortened term for Isla Vista, the small, coastal town north of Santa Barbara where UC Santa Barbara stands.

K-JUC

KCSB's programmer training course.

KCSB

independent, non-commercial, and educational community-college radio based at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

MC

master of ceremonies, or mic controller, of an event. They introduce performers, engage with the audience, and maintain the flow and energy of the event with their words. Not every DJ is an MC though, as some DJs never touch the mic.

Mixing

the process of seamlessly transitioning between two or more tracks during a set, involving adjusting tempo, volume level, and EQ of whatever track you want next.

Phonograph Cylinder

now called records, hollow cylindrical objects with audio recording engraved onto the surface which produces sound when they're played on a phonograph.

Phonograph

now called a record player or turntable, these devices translate the physical deviations off the record and create sound out of vibrations through a stylus or needle.

Pioneer DJ

well-known tech brand in the world of DJ Equipment.

Planned Spontaneity

DJ Biff's KCSB show playing every Tuesday at 6 p.m.

Rekordbox

DJ software developed by Pioneer DJ. Many people claim this is industry standard over an application like Serato.

Rock it Properly

DJ Darla Bea's KCSB show, playing every Sunday at 8 p.m.

Sampling

extracting a segment, known as a sample, from one sound recording and integrating it into another recording or musical composition.

Serato

popular DJ software application.

Wax

another word for vinyl, inspired by the wax phonograph cylinder music was put onto when the phonograph was first invented.

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&

Thank you for reading my work and showing interest in this community. I hope my writing can inspire you to create everything you've been dreaming of.

Fay Harvey is from the North Bay Area of California, where she grew up writing, acting, filmmaking, singing, and dancing. After the Covid-19 Pandemic changed her course of direction in her senior year of high school, she decided to attend the Santa Rosa Junior College where she earned her AA in Comunication. From there, she trasferred to UC Santa barbara where she recently earned her B.A. in Communication and a Minor in Professinal Editing from the Writing Department. Fay has always loved live music and especialy got into DJing once she moved to Isla Vista. Fay plans on pursuing her love for writing and interviewing, and she plans on leading a life of creativity in whatever stage she finds herself in next.

