
Spin City Mobile disc jockeys bring music - and atmosphere - to the masses

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Full Text (1250 words)

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They don't write songs or sing or play an instrument, but mobile disc jockeys are the life of the party for dancers and celebrants attending all kinds of events. Traveling deejays supply music for wedding receptions, class reunions, high school dances, Christmas and Halloween parties, Mardi Gras balls and more. Many of them bring the atmosphere, too, via lights and special effects. Twenty-five mobile deejays are listed in the Baton Rouge Yellow Pages. Many more get work through doing their gigs and word of mouth.

The public at large may think deejays are just spinning records and having fun, but deejays say there's more to their jobs than meets the eye - or ear. "The public hears that you're a deejay," said disc jockey Dax Roy, "and they think you're an adult that's never grown up. But there is a business side to this. For every hour that I'm a deejay, I spend a corresponding three hours doing support work for that hour." A good deejay also knows how to read a crowd, deejays say, giving it what it wants when it wants it. "It's really knowing the crowd and knowing the music," said Rob Payer, a mobile deejay who's also a morning deejay at radio station WJNH-FM (107.3). (Payer works with a partner, Will Roberts, former host of WBRH-FM's Crescent City Sounds.) "It's a combination of the requests, response from the crowd and good judgment," Roy agrees. Deejay gigs have a seasonal pattern as predictable as the seasons themselves: weddings in the spring; class reunions and corporate picnics in the summer; Christmas and New Year's Eve parties; and, locally, Mardi Gras balls during Carnival season. Just as events featuring deejays are predictable, so is the music that will be played. For wedding receptions, Payer said, "the first hour is pretty much the classier stuff, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Nancy Wilson. No matter what wedding it is, people strolling in from the ceremony think it's time to relax a little bit. The second hour would be more oldies, '60s and '70s stuff. "And you tailor it to the crowd. You spot some cowboy boots out there, you throw in a country song. Then that last hour, after they start getting all liquored up, you start throwing in 'Brick House' by the Commodores, 'Super Freak' by Rick James, 'YMCA'

by the Village People, stuff they'd dance to if they were at a club." "It's what the customer wants," said deejay and Advanced Audio owner Bo Bowen. "But it's also being able to read a crowd, and that's what we pride ourselves on, in knowing when to push for the energy and when to back off." Bowen has been a deejay since he was 13. Now 35, he books himself and a small stable of deejays. Bill Estess, an independent, relative newcomer who's been a mobile deejay since September, asks his customers what they want but also makes on-the-job adjustments, playing everything from Tony Bennett to Limp Bizkit. "If they're all 18- to 20-year olds," Estess said, "you know what you're going to be playing. If there are some older people, we mix in a little slow music so they can slow-dance. That's real popular. We'll just throw a mix out there, but if a customer tells me to play all slow songs, that's what I do, because they are paying me." The playing of local favorites by recording artists from south and southwestern Louisiana distinguishes area deejays from their peers in other parts of the country. Payer and Roberts, for instance, will be spinning music by Louisiana acts during their upcoming job for the Spanish Town Mardi Gras parade. "Almost all the songs are Ernie K-Doe, Irma Thomas, the Meters and stuff that will get people's feet tapping," Payer said. "And Will has such a knowledge of the local Louisiana stuff that he's able to dig some fun stuff up that somebody might not have heard before." "Even at our Christmas parties," Bowen said, "we'll still play some Mardi Gras music, like near the end of the night, when everybody's having fun." Estess programs local music from his list of 3,500 recordings. "If they want swamp pop," he said, "I've got Van Broussard." Of course, deejays beyond Louisiana and east Texas aren't likely to have zydeco acts on their playlists. "We do events all the way from New Orleans to Shreveport," Roy said. "People want to hear something by Wayne Toups. We also do a lot of work in Lafayette, where that's required." Advanced Audio's deejays, Bowen said, worked nearly 30 events in December, which is always a busy month. January, on the other hand, is a bad month for all kinds of entertainment, he added. "This is the only time I'm slowed up," agreed DJ Magic Mike, otherwise known as Michael Perkins. After January, Perkins said, work picks up.

"I'm getting ready for the Mardi Gras season. Then, after the Mardi Gras season, I got proms and sweetheart dances for the high schools. After that I got graduations and then the weddings kick in. Summer I got crawfish boils. In the fall, you got your football." Bowen's Advanced Audio offers lights and special effects as options, though such extras are not always appropriate. "It depends on what time of the season," Bowen said. "For the Christmas season, for the corporate parties, we charge more, but we bring out more lights. For your regular wedding, absolutely no lights. We don't want to be the center of attention because the bride and the groom

are the center of attention." A deejay since 1989, Roy finds demand for lights and fog at high schools and college fraternities and sororities. He agrees that there's no for place lights and effects at a wedding, for instance, at White Oak Plantation. Of course, effects can add to the price, but price remains an advantage deejays have over bands. Deejay costs can run from about \$150 to \$500 for a three- hour event. "The bands got too expensive and the bands weren't playing a lot of songs that the people wanted to hear," Perkins said. A band can also overwhelm smaller functions, the Denham Springs- based Estess said. "Do you need a live band for a wedding?" he asked. "If you're having something simple, the band may overshadow the wedding." One thing a deejay in south Louisiana can bet on is playing such perennial favorites as Van Morrison's "Brown Eyed Girl" and Clarence Carter's "Strokin'." "I'm sure if you ask any of the deejays if they're sick and tired of playing those songs," Bowen said, "probably all of them are. But you know what? Those are your hook songs. Every time you play them people scream and yell." "You have to have Juvenile's 'Back That Thing Up,' because so many know that song," Payer said. "You have to have Sisqo's 'Thong Song' and you have to have Carlos Santana's 'Smooth' and 'Gettin' Jiggy Wit It' by Will Smith" and Louisiana's LeRoux doing 'New Orleans Ladies.' They're staples."

[Illustration]

Photo: Color photos of: Michael Perkins queuing up songs on turntables; Colored lights moving over the dancers as Micheal Perkins plays some tunes at a party; Raychelle Grimes dancing with her father, Henry Landry, while disc jockey Robert McMurray plays songs at her wedding; Southern Beat disc jockeys Bill Estess and daughter, Shannon Arnold, crank up some country music; Robert McMurray grabbing a CD; Cover color photo of guests dancing to the beat of a disc jockey's sound system at a recent wedding (By Randy Bergeron)

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