

## EDM Backlash Brews (Again)

### *Superstar DJs Respond to “Play-Pushers” and Paris Hilton*

Hey hey, my my, EDM will never die...but it will get co-opted by the mainstream, like every genre of music does as it becomes popular. We've all heard the narrative that [dance music requires no skill to make](#), and we've even backed this narrative ourselves by making fun of newcomers who've mastered little more than the sync button. But this summer the narrative is particularly strong.

Perhaps it's because famous-for-being-famous stars like Paris Hilton are getting paid to DJ. To be fair, I've not heard her perform, but it's hard to respect the skills of anyone who can play their first gig on a huge stage with thousands of screamers while so many spend ten years twiddling knobs in their basements and pedaling mixes, hoping for such a break.

Naturally, big-name DJs have made efforts to distance themselves and the scene from Paris and her kind, if only to remind everyone that there's a lot more to mixing than finding the latest Gotye remix. Afrojack [had to be polite about it](#) because he and Ms. Hilton have been an item, but [Samantha Ronson and Deadma5 were not so kind](#).

It's not all is Hilton's fault. We're hearing about this more now because EDM has truly landed on the mainstream. [Bassnectar](#) and Diplo have recently done interviews on NPR. [David Guetta may be trite](#), but for better or for worse he has gotten people who don't know dance music to listen to dance music. It's becoming commonplace to hear official mashups and remixes on corporate radio.

[Mainstream popularity means that electronic music is now profitable](#), and where there's profit there's an effort to produce something that is as inoffensive (i.e. bland) as possible. DJ Tech Tools suggests that [big festivals kill the local club scenes](#) that give up-and-coming DJs a chance to grow. Deadmau5 is on the cover of this month's *Rolling Stone* and he took the opportunity to shout out all the fakers who just “press play” while [admitting to doing the same himself](#).

If superstar DJs are willing to question the legitimacy of other superstar DJs, why should we be surprised that non-EDM news outlets like *The Wall Street Journal* come out with headlines like [“The Dumbing Down of Electronic Dance Music”](#)?

If you read only one post on the “DJs as Button-Pushers” debate, let it be [the recent blog post from Bassnectar](#). He explains to his non-DJ fans the difference between DJing, mixing, song selecting, and what all this has to do with live performance. These are simple but important concepts many casual music fans don't understand. It's a good direction to point someone you know who accuses DJs of lacking skill. (A good follow-up would be an impressive deck-view set, like this one from [Kissy Sell Out](#).)

Here's a nice metaphor from the Bassnectar post:

The verb to “DJ” means you are playing music; broadcasting it for someone else to enjoy. That's it. It doesn't mean you are curing cancer, it doesn't mean you are playing guitar in a rock band.

However, just like the verb “running” there are a million ways to do it. You can run a race, you can run in place, you can run to escape danger, you can run towards someone you love, you can run for fun, you can fake-run, you can run on a treadmill, you can run up stairs, you can modify your run and skip or sprint or gallop or moonwalk. There are a million ways to run, and a million reasons for running. Same with DJing. There are a million ways to DJ (a small sound system at a house party, a playback set on the radio, a simple showcase of music you wrote for a special occasion, a seamless mix of your favorite songs, etc). What matters to me is the experience of those in attendance, how delighted/moved/stimulated/pleasured they are.

Dance music is only going to get more popular, so this surely won't be the last we'll hear of this controversy. More and more sites like [The Wub Machine](#), which allow anyone to build a terrible remix in seconds, certainly won't help.

But don't despair. EDM may be finding those for whom music is a background rather than a passion. But we know that great music and great DJs are still out there, and mainstream popularity will only help them find their audience.