

Performing with a DJ: How to Successfully Interact with a Professional DJ

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Congratulations! You have the gig, you are performance ready, your costume is a masterpiece, your choreography is fabulous and your moves are crisp and clean...so what now? They even have a professional DJ to ensure a professional sound presentation. All you have to do is give your music to the DJ and perform...right?

Unfortunately, not necessarily – there is a lot more to the interaction between the dancer and DJ than the simple passing of a cd. In some cases, no matter what you do, you might get a bad DJ – one who purposefully messes up your music, cuts you short, yells silly comments in the microphone while you dance...or worse. With a good DJ, you don't have these issues...with a bad one, you can't avoid it.

I have been a professional DJ and a professional belly dancer for many, many years and I always strived for constant professionalism in both areas.

When I DJ, I take from my experiences with other DJs and performers. It is the same as when I teach belly dance. I take everything I disliked about what I saw others do/teach and put those things on my "I will not be like that/do those things" list.

What you are seeing in bad DJ behavior is usually the passive aggressive "you can't tell me what to do, I am too good for this gig" behavior. There is nothing you can do about it but turn in a bad report on him to the local version of Angie's List.

He has most likely simply decided that the gig sucked and was taking it out on people that either didn't matter to him or an act he thought was stupid/boring. Sometimes people like that get on serious power trips. As a dancer, these types of DJs are the ones who will cause problems.

As a DJ, I have smiled politely and played music to the best of my ability many times to horrendous events/performances. However.... it is not my job to "help" by messing around with the music and using special effects. The job of the DJ is to work for the people *paying

them* and not themselves. I have seen far too many DJs that play the music they want (regardless of what the audience wants) instead of what they are supposed to be playing/doing. I have worked plenty of weddings where the bride has said "Do not play song X". No matter how many requests for song X I get... I don't play it.

As a professional DJ I have managed (so far...knock on wood) to keep every performer's music timed, cued and played to their specifications. I have also managed to head off certain disaster by reviewing their music on my headphones prior to their performance.

I have discovered;

- songs were mislabeled (they really wanted track 11 not track 1 that was specified on their note)
- burned CDs that didn't play (it gave them enough time to send someone to retrieve the originals or find another CD with a song they could use)
- CDs with the songs in the wrong order (that is for the put it in and let it play crowd... you should always list the names and theme of the songs on the inside cover so when people like me verify your burned image against the list we can come up to you and say "Hey, that veil number is to drum solo music. Did you mean that?")
- Empty CD cases ("Here is my music, play song 2!"... but no CD inside)

How can you assist a DJ (who is conscientious) make your performance go well?

- Write a note you leave in the CD case with the following:
 - When you will be performing ("right after they serve the salad no matter what time it is", "10:30 sharp", "I am the 3rd act" kind of thing)
 - Do any of your songs need to be cued? (start the song 30 seconds into it)
 - Are you starting on stage or off stage?
 - Do you want to be announced? If so what do you want said?
 - WRITE DOWN THE PHONETIC SPELLING OF YOUR DANCE NAME. So many people have beautiful, wonderful

exotic names spelled in authentic and/or creative ways.... you really think a DJ who has never seen a belly dancer before in his life is going to say it correctly? I have been a dancer for over 10 years and I still don't pronounce everyone's name correctly when trying to read them without having heard them pronounced first.

- Write down the track number and the name of the song. If they don't match they can hunt you down and ask you. This is of course much harder if you have a DJ that is not familiar with your music. Many times I have given up, called the performer over and said "Listen to this song on the headphones. Is this the right song?" when dealing with novice performers using music I am not familiar with.
- If you make a burned CD:
 - burn it at a low speed. Not everyone has equipment that will play them (hard to believe I know..... but if you don't that is the equipment they will have)
 - bring more than one copy (what if it gets scratched or broken in your dance bag) or bring the originals with you and leave them in the car. Better safe than sorry especially if you are doing an "important to have a specific song gig" or a long set with lots of songs.
 - Test your burned CD in your *old* boom box or car stereo. Chances are that if the old stuff can play it you will be fine.
 - Label the CD with your name *and* anything you thing will assist the DJ with figuring out who you are if you are not the only performer of the night. Do things like "Dance name, set number, blue and silver costume)
 - Listen to your CD at home at full volume. It may sound great at "normal" levels, but when you really crank it up to the level you are going to hear it for a performance you might discover defects in the music caused during the burn process like those little quarter seconds of silence some burned CDs get.

- Do you want your CDs/Music back? Put your name and a contact number in the note just in case you forget to come back and collect your music.

What can you do about a troublesome DJ?

Not much. The best bet is to find the person who is paying the DJ (or you) and speak to them about what is going on. Remember, money talks. Finding the person that is paying the bill is generally the most effective route.

Most of all be professional even if they are not. It will be obvious who messed up. :)