soundrecording

Worlds Colliding in Clubs

by Janice Brown

Desktop production equipment is straddling the line between live DJ music and studio recordings for that emergent musical hybrid, the DJ/producer/remixer. The confluence of tools used in both electronic music production and performance is inspiring both the artists wielding them and the manufacturers designing their tools.

Julie Covello, aka DJ Shakey (www.djshakey.com), and Matt Moldover (www.moldover.com) have co-founded an electronic music party in NYC called Warper (www.warperparty.com), which hosts laptop performances by DJs who are using programs like Ableton Live, Native Instruments Reaktor and Propellerheads Reason for live-sound manipulation. Moldover shares, "I started doing live remixing about three years ago and actually helped to coin the term (I still own liveremixing.com). My live remixing (now "Live Remashing") project is all about pushing the limits of live, real-time sound manipulation with new technology and the approach of an improvisational musician."

Moldover elaborates, "The lines are blurry between the roles of DJ, producer and remixer right now because the tools of those trades have been homogenized in software. Ableton Live is the best example of this. It's a tool that first and foremost operates in the same way a turntablist does, 'live.' By working from that foundation, gradually adding the features a producer or remixer would use while keeping the whole thing user-friendly, they have created the first instrument since the turntable to change the way people produce and perform music."

For both studio production and DJing, DJ Kevin Sunray (www.kevinsunray.net) says he's tested almost everything, "from Fruity Loops, Sony Acid Pro to Cubase SX and Nuendo," but found his winner in "Reason, which I do almost all my music productions and remixes on." Sunray's typical DJ setup adds a MIDI controller to his PC running Reason, a Pioneer DJM-600 mixer, two Pioneer CDJ 100 DJ CD players and two Technics SL-1200 MK2 turntables.

Electronic musician could be added to the DJ/producer/remixer litany, as artists establish their sound using traditional and digital turntables, samplers and software programs as instruments. Working across those categories is Richard Devine (www.richard-devine.com), who goes to his live gigs with just two devices—a PowerBook, running Native Instruments Traktor DJ Studio 3, and his Allen & Heath Xone 3D mixer, which affords MIDI control over Traktor and Ableton Live. While Devine often works in his more traditional analog/digital hybrid studio, he says his DJing tools enable a similar experience when performing live. "It's almost like the DJ is creating new tracks from fragments and loops of songs and records," he explains. "You can cut out vocals and time-correct or time-stretch anything now to Lego-piece into your live mix—it's almost as if you were working on a track live but have the luxury of working with a crowd so you can instantly see if something is effective or not." That live feedback helps determine the artist's toolset and their application, Devine explains. "It's a great way to see if something will work out in the studio and vice versa. Sometimes I discover new tricks or techniques when playing live with software or new hardware."

Moldover echoes the point, "Building a software/controller DJ rig has definitely influenced the equipment I use in the studio, as well as the way I use it. Now that I'm combining more expressive controllers and custom software for my live show, I'm basically designing new electronic instruments, which are easily integrated into my studio. Playing with these instruments in the studio is a great way to inspire myself and execute new ideas. It's a nice cross-pollination that happens."

Covello uses an Apple PowerBook, an Indigo DJ soundcard and Ableton Live for her live performances, using a Digidesign Mbox to record on the fly. "I do music mixes for runway fashion shows—I used to do them in Pro Tools, now I do them in Ableton for the spontaneity, then export the mix to Pro Tools for fine tuning," shares Covello. "For remixes, I can experiment with and even perform my ideas live before committing them to a final form. I can even record while I'm performing—under the influence of the party people—their response and energy guiding the recording itself."

It's exactly this kind of artist that M-Audio is targeting with its new SynchroScience DJ line, introduced at Summer NAMM last month. Using SynchroScience's new Conectiv USB interface as a bridge into the computer, DJs can connect turntables or CD players to their laptop and then control the SynchroScience DJ app, Torq, using the same techniques employed when using traditional vinyl or CDs. According to SynchroScience product manager, Chad Car-

rier, the new product line also targets the artist/producer looking for a savvy production application.

Carrier says, "SynchroScience addresses the needs of these users by offering them familiar tools that they'd find in their DAW software: stackable effects, samplers, markers, ReWire support, etc. This provides the producers with a way to play out while maintaining more intricate control over their songs (as opposed to just playing the song from beginning to end). Conversely, the presence of these tools also makes the transition over to production a little easier for DJs—they'll be familiar with the methods and terminology used in DAWs as a result of using Torq." Where live remixing DJs once had to hijack studio tools, they're now getting the killer plug-and-play apps purpose-built for them.

Both Moldover and Covello look forward to the day when as much innovation goes into hardware tools, as they've seen in the software realm, in programs like Live, Reaktor and Max/MSP/Jitter. The Warper party serves as a sort of music technology expo, with the night's roster of DJs showing off their equipment preferences. Covello says typically DJs will come in with "a mutant guitar or homemade blinking foot pedal that is cooler than anything on the market." Moldover adds that when the gap closes between cheap, disposable MIDI controllers and expensive and difficult new instruments, "we'll see the blossoming of a new kind of music...People making live music with software are hungry for that new instrument. Let me know if you want my design..."