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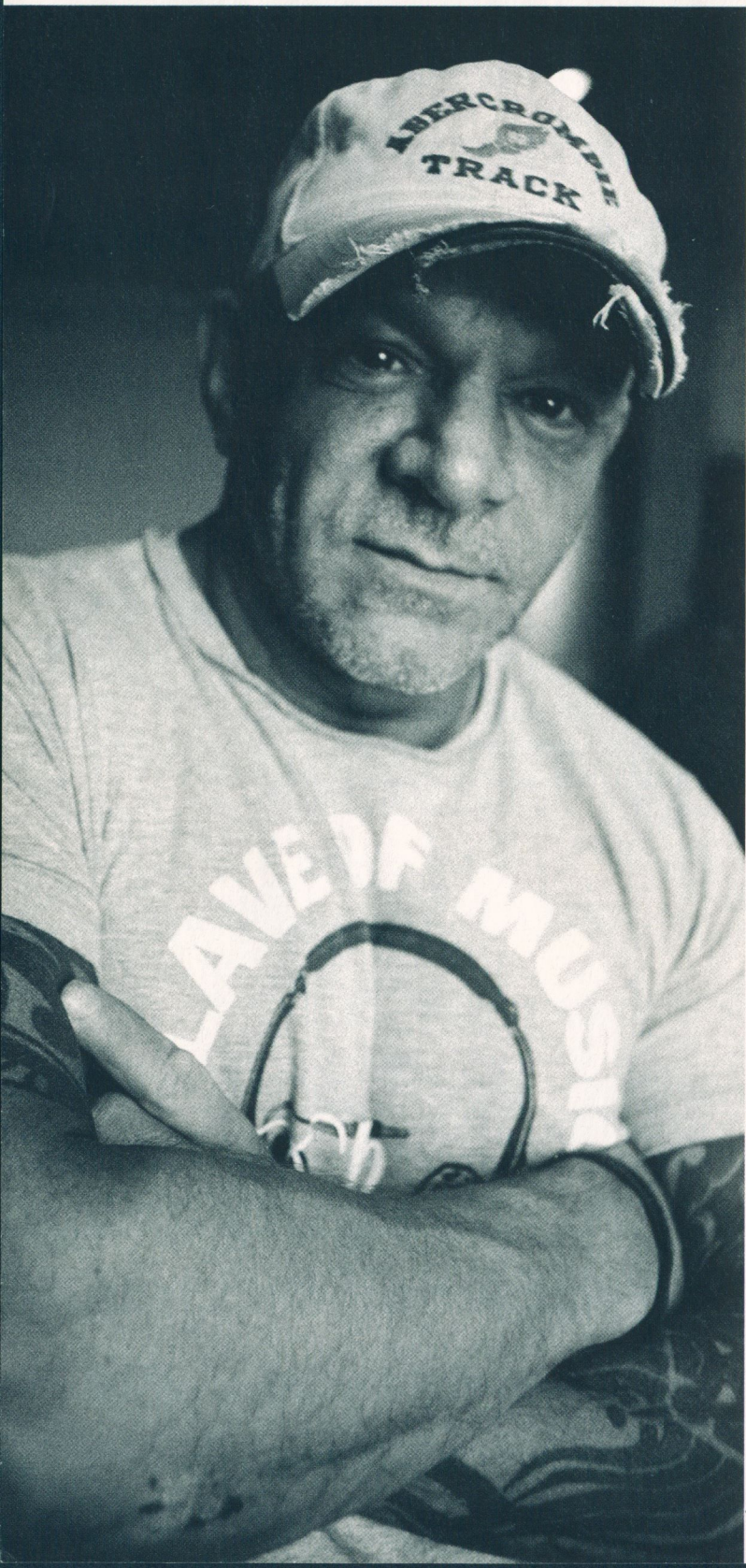
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Junior Vasquez

The DJ high priest gives a tour of his studio lair

How do you become the DJ king of New York City? You reinvent the wheel. Junior Vasquez did so, presiding over Sound Factory's all-night dance party in the late '80s and '90s. Years spent rubbing stones together fueled the fire for one of clubland's most illustrious careers, but not without infamous drama. The innovations Vasquez might be best known for happened behind the decks, where his custom rig allowed for the manipulation of the records he played a good 10 years before technologies like Ableton would make such live remixing a standard requirement.

URB: YOU'RE KNOWN FOR YOUR ELABORATE DJ GETUPS, INTRODUCED OVER A DECADE BEFORE MOST.

We had a good sound technician—Steve Dash—help me incorporate my ideas. I used to [delay and loop] the way Larry [Levan] did with the reel-to-reel-two-track tape. Then I heard about the JamMan. I'd brought the Akai sampler loaded with a cappellas, samples and a mini keyboard. I'd have cowbells and tambourines and play them through a mic. I thought of this joystick, where the sound on one channel would go around the room without affecting what's coming out on all the speakers. I used to have this thing that I invented. It was a spindle. I put a piece of pencil at the end of it. If you put that on top, where the record goes, you could make the records go backwards. The pencil point would hold the record up. You'd put the record upside down, so the part you wanted to play would be on the other side. You'd take the stylus off, turn that around and screw it back on. Then you put the needle on the back of the record to play it backwards. The sound guy eventually customized all my turntables to play backwards with a switch.

HOW DID YOU LEARN STRUCTURE AND ARRANGEMENT?

I spent years editing for Shep [Pettibone]. I was next in line through the Latin Rascals at that point. Then I started editing for Arthur Baker. I went through reels and reels. When you do that, you hear beats, everything. I'd do quarter edits on hi-hats. I understood verses, chorus, bridges, verse, bridges, breaks.

NOWADAYS, WHAT DOES THE DJ AND CLUB EXPERIENCE MEAN TO YOU?

The club scene in New York is bizarre now. I don't think it has that much prevalence anymore. When I did it, we had a very exclusive venue. People knew what they were getting. Now it's scattered. I have to figure out a way to say goodbye to that a little bit. I'm moving more into my producing and remixing.

EVEN THOUGH THE NYC CIRCUIT MAY NOT BE PREVALENT TO YOU ANYMORE, YOU'RE STILL STEEPED IN IT.

Yeah, that's because of my own sick, warped personality of being competitive.

WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENED BETWEEN YOU AND MADONNA?

What happened was between her lawyers and my lawyers, end of story. I'm glad it gave me a lot of publicity. Even if we didn't fight, she would have moved on. She uses different people for different sounds. She knows I'm relentless. That was not my record at all; it was an import. Strictly Rhythm got it and they wanted me to do it. I said, "Fine." She assumed I had something to do with it because I was stupid enough to put her voice message on it. That might have been my big mistake, but what the fuck. I always say, "Get over it." We worked [together] on ["Hollywood"]. It was through Donatella Versace. She said, "I want Junior to do it, whether you like it or not." If [Madonna] had a sense of humor, she probably would have thought it was flattering.