



Hey DJ, don't give up the day job

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Photographs
Courtesy of DJs

From exotic locations to appreciative crowds, the life of a DJ seems glamorous and fun – but it's hard to make a living from spinning records. We speak to two Thanet residents who've found ways to pay the bills and indulge their passion for beat-matching

JOSS BARNES

*Head of Music at
Wellesley House*

When he's not playing hard house as his alter ego DJ Enthus, Joss Barnes is shaking things up as head of music at Wellesley House, a co-ed day and boarding school for 3-13 year olds in Broadstairs. "We cover everything from Beethoven to the present day – music technology, rappers, DJ-ing," he says.

Earlier this year the school opened its own recording studio, part of Barnes' commitment to broadening the appeal of music. While there are plenty of brass, guitar and piano students at Wellesley, he points out, "Not every child plays an instrument, but there will be something that interests them, be it a film score, a chart hit, or a symphony. They might not want to perform, but maybe they want to be a sound engineer." This progressive approach reflects the school's ethos, which marries a long history (it was founded in 1866) with a modern outlook, emphasising the importance of creative arts alongside strong academic results.

Brought up in St Peters, Barnes is a Wellesley alumnus himself, while his mother has taught piano there for 30 years. He caught the DJing bug at a house party, while studying at London's Institute of Contemporary Music and Performance. After spending his student loan on a set of decks, Barnes taught himself how to mix, with help from dubstep pioneer Plastician. "Drumming and DJing are linked," Barnes says. "As a drummer, you count, and DJing is the same – counting and beat-matching."

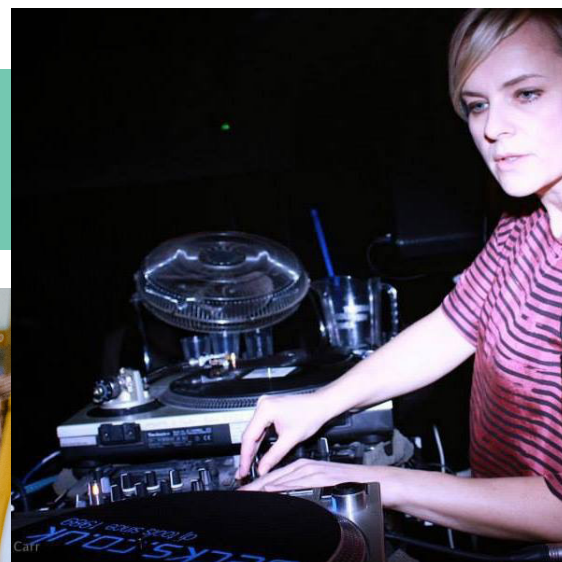
Within a month he'd secured his first residency, playing "everything from the Black Eyed Peas to hardcore jungle" at London club The Mist. "It was an absolute dive! The only time it would be busy is when I'd rope in all my college friends," he laughs. Returning to Thanet after graduation, Barnes became Wellesley's drum teacher, continuing to DJ at weekends. House parties evolved to bigger nights at Pasha and Egg, glamorous gigs in the Moroccan desert and lavish birthday parties with revolving 360-degree bars. He even set up his own festival, J-Fest.

Since being promoted to head of music and becoming a father of two, Barnes spends less time on the road, but still enjoys the variety of his two jobs. "If I was DJing and travelling constantly it would wear me down. And if I had to teach seven days a week, it would be a bit much," he explains.

Post Covid-19, Barnes' work has gone virtual. Many of Wellesley's international students have returned to their home countries, so he's navigating time zones on Google Classrooms, and giving remote drum tuition with the help of a multi-purpose controller. As well as performing with a virtual band, the Dukes of Distance, from his garage-cum-studio, Barnes is live-streaming his sets. "It's weird not having anyone around," he admits. "All you can see is how many people are watching, and that might [only] be three! But it doesn't matter, because I can play what I want."

wellesleyhouse.org

KATIE BARBER
Co-owner of
Albion Stores



“What I like most is the feeling you get from someone appreciating what you’re presenting”

On the surface, running a shop and spinning the decks seem like very different pursuits, but Katie Barber, DJ and co-owner of Margate boutique Albion Stores, says they’re both about “presenting stuff [I] love”.

“With the shop, it’s the labels, and with DJing, it’s the music,” she explains. “What I like most is the feeling you get from someone appreciating what you’re presenting.”

Opened in March 2018, Albion Stores - which Katie co-owns with partner Joe, a fellow DJ - perfectly encapsulates that curated approach. Inside the sun-washed space, the rails hold clothing from small, up-and-coming British designers interspersed with established names like Birkenstock and Champion.

They originally conceived it as a record shop - Katie and Joe fell in love with the three-storey building while living in London and bought it with the proceeds of their flat sale - but after discovering

the abundance of vinyl dealers in Margate they “didn’t want to tread on anyone’s toes”, so decided to merge their twin passions for fashion and music into a clothing boutique that also sold records. “The brands we sell is stuff we’ve loved for years and would wear ourselves, and the music is from friends’ record labels, or distributors that we know and like,” Katie explains.

Having DJ’d since university, Katie’s decades behind the decks have seen her play venues as varied as Glastonbury, a “plinth in the middle of the sea in Beirut” and Margate Arts Club, spinning everything from disco, house and techno to soul and folk, though it’s Balearic house she’s ultimately become known for. As well as bagging a ten-year residency at the Notting Hill Arts Club’s Inspiration Information night (after sending legendary broken beats DJ Phil Asher her mixtape), she’s played top London parties like Clandestino at The End and Faith, though never as a big-room DJ, preferring the intimacy

and varied music styles of the alternative rooms. “I’ve always seen it as a hobby rather than a job,” says Katie. “Sometimes I’m lucky enough to get paid something for it, sometimes I get tickets to festivals.”

Since opening the shop, Katie has swapped summers on the festival circuit for radio shows on Margate Radio and Brighton’s 1BTN FM. Post Covid-19, both are being recorded remotely. The crisis also temporarily closed Albion Stores’ physical shop. Luckily they were able to sell stock via their website as well as through platforms like Trouva and set up a Spotify playlist to recreate the in-store experience. “The support we had from people buying online and getting in touch to say they liked what we were doing has been wonderful,” says Katie, “but I’ve really missed having people coming in and mooching around in the shop.” Now the store has re-opened, she’s hoping a big summer sale and personal shopping appointments will entice shoppers back through their sea-green doors.

albionstores.co.uk

Photograph by Benjamin Eagle