

Mark Alsop

Interview (March 2004)

Name: Mark Alsop
Born: 1963
Zodiac: Gemini
Type of DJ: Club-DJ, Remixer
Website: www.markalsop.com



Mark Alsop - DJ, Editor, Remixer... whatever!

A chat with renowned Australian deejay and remixer, **Mark Alsop**. I sat down with Mark for a long chat in September 2003 in Berlin, during his three-month vacation around the U.S.A. and Europe. As one of the world's best remixers and deejays, Mark speaks of his career spanning twenty years, his thoughts on the current state of the dance music industry, his unique style of rearranging melodies, and a lot more. Due to time constraints and length, the latter part of this interview took place via e-mail until its conclusion in March 2004.

— Steffen Spranger, aka 'hotdiscomix'

INTERVIEW PT. 1 – THE DJ

hotdiscomix: Where were you born, where did you grow up?

Mark Alsop: I was born in Australia in a state known as South Australia. The capital city is Adelaide. Having been initially interested in catering, I studied at college for a certificate in Hotel and Restaurant supervision. I worked as a waiter and I lived in Adelaide until the age of 21. My career then saw the big move to New South Wales on the eastern coast of Australia. I lived in the heart of the city, Sydney. I continued working in 5 star hotels and mastered in gueridon service (cooking at the table). It was during this time that my interests began to change as I frequented the nightclubs along Oxford Street, then known as the "Golden Mile".

hotdiscomix: How did you begin as a DJ?

Alsop: It was 1984, and I had visited nearly every gay nightspot in Sydney. Within the nightclubs and hotels, I quickly became accustomed to the music that was being played. As music had always been a fantastic part of my youth (Soft Cell, Human League, Duran Duran), I wandered through the streets of Sydney in search of an import record store known as Disco City. I had heard that they supplied much of the music that was on the Oxford Street scene. It was there that I met a fellow DJ and marvellous friend, David Hiscock. He took me aside (literally!!!) and showed me a remix service from San Francisco called **Hot Tracks**. I started to buy each issue and became quite accustomed to the international sound. It was at this stage that I began to take notice that so much of this music was NOT being played within the clubs. This began to make me anxious and inspired me to obtain two (belt drive) turntables. Noticing that it was almost impossible to "mix" on these, I had them altered to allow pitch movement. It was very difficult with the belt drive system but I persevered until many years later. After I landed my first job, I bought the Technics 1200 turntables and life was then so much easier to mix!

hotdiscomix: Please tell me a bit about your DJ history.

Alsop: All this music that I was buying was surely brilliant. If it was good enough to be played across the United States, then why not in Australia? I practiced my skills at home and started to record cassettes so that I could listen back to this wondrous thing that I was learning. One afternoon I recorded a 90-minute tape, sat back and listened to it and thought "*Why not give this to someone in a club?*" with

the intent of obtaining a DJ position. I ventured to a small bar one night called 45's aptly named so, as it was at 45 Oxford Street. The club was a smallish place that packed the people in on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday night. I became inspired by the whole scene and found myself asking for the manager. I handed over the demo and received a call from the manager, Chris 'Crunch', within a couple of days. He liked the music and asked if I would work regularly on a Friday night. He mentioned that the mixing wasn't that important, but the variety and the sound of my demo were refreshing. After a few months on a Friday, he then gave me the Saturday night and within the next 6 months I was also offered the Sunday night as well. 45's proved to be a stable launching pad that saw my next job to be at the hugely successful and internationally renowned Midnight Shift.



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hotdiscomix: What DJs blew you away when you were growing up?

Alsop: All the DJ's that I know have a role model that inspired them. In my case, I can honestly answer that no-one was influential in my decision to become a DJ. I saw a gap in the music that was being played and it was this void that attracted me to become a DJ. I felt that while DJ's were making solid impressions, I had something genuinely *different* to offer. Sure, there were DJ's that I noticed, and I am the first to admit that they were good in their jobs, but as for "Blew me away"..... no one achieved that status!

hotdiscomix: What is your favourite club at which you worked?

Alsop: Back then, it was the Midnight Shift. I had my own night there and respected the club and the music that we presented. There has not been a favourite club since then, until I started work at an underground club named Manacle situated at Taylor Square, in the heart of Oxford Street. My work there has been the most enjoyable that I can remember for a long time. The management team are the guys behind the internationally renowned Sydney Leathermen. They have embraced both my music and music policy with warmth, support and total respect. I am very lucky to be working alongside these guys and playing to a target audience that I have loved and respected way before I started DJ'ing in 1984.

hotdiscomix: You have been on the DJ circuit for 20 years now. What was your all-time best moment?

Alsop: The years of 1989-1992 were the years that are filled with so many parties and so many memories. We were having warehouse parties at a venue known as the Hordern Pavilion. It was within the boarders of the Sydney Showgrounds, just a stone throw away from Oxford Street. I worked for party promoters, both straight and gay. I became resident at parties like "Bacchanalia", "Sweatbox", "RAT" and "Pride" and also did the "1989 Sleaze Ball". Throughout this time I was also residing at the underground "Paradise Garage" parties. I ended up to be the only resident, working every party, except for a 4-day Easter weekend when I became exhausted and fell one party short of a perfect track record! I almost gave up my nightclub work due to the intensity of work. The pay was great, the vibe was excellent and I quickly became a household name in those years. 1994 saw another spike in my career when I moved up the east coast to Brisbane, which is the capital city of Queensland. I started to work at their yearly "Queens Ball", held on the Queen's Birthday long weekend in June, and then started to work on their annual "Sleaze Ball". I have done and still continue to do most of those annual parties. They are now a bigger joy for me than working parties in Sydney. The Queensland audience and promoters are more receptive to my music policy, and in essence, the parties are a lot gayer. Their parties have fewer attitudes and the crowds are



Hordern Pavilion

just out to have a good time! It is exactly the feeling that was first captured in Sydney back in 1989. It is a pity that Sydney is so lost at the moment. The current aggressive music styles, and a clubbing culture that is hell bent on overactive drug use.....

hotdiscomix: *Have you ever played any gigs outside Australia?*

Alsop: I ventured over to Singapore in 2002 to work with the Fridæ promoters. I did their “Nation02 Party” in the Sentosa fountain gardens. It was an immense party and I met some absolutely wonderful and genuine people who worked for the Fridæ organization. I have kept myself working mainly within Australia for personal reasons.

hotdiscomix: *How do you prepare for an overseas gig?*

Alsop: As an example, I will use the Singapore “Nation02 Party”: I had always noticed that the Asian community likes to hear more commercial releases. For a couple of months before the event, I paid particular attention to the style of music that I played for suitability in the Asian market. I also listened to music in other clubs to give me a wider scope. I had quite a big list by the time the party was scheduled. When it came time to pack my “play crate” it was all these tracks that were packed first. I took a small amount of darker music in case I needed to break up the set, but as it turned out, my set was to be more commercially driven and these later tracks were never played. With the knowledge of doing a more commercial sounding party, I sought out rare remixes or House mixes that I thought the audience would like. My motto has always been that *“you may have heard the track before, but not THIS mix of it!”* I have always spent the major part of my week re-arranging the tracks that I feature in my clubs. I rework the introduction [mix in] as well as the mix out. I often re-arrange the flow by moving around verses, instrumental and chorus sections. In effect, I re-edited most tracks to give them a more energetic level. This passion to create a better sounding track is what made me take the next step and start to *remix* the music that was being featured within my sets.



hotdiscomix: *What's the typical Mark Alsop DJ set?*

Alsop: Ok, well, you have heard this from the mouth of every DJ. You have seen it in press from every DJ. If I read it again I will scream! So I don't need to say that the music selection is, in essence, a variety of music that the punters WANT to hear. By that, I don't necessarily mean commercial. My aim is to provide a truly uplifting and energetic set. In essence, a set that actually makes you *happy!* I stay well clear of the banging repetitious tripe that is catering to people on hard drugs. My essence is to provide the total opposite of all that. I like melody, I like vocals, and I like an *actual SONG*. I like to wrap all this up with driving basslines that weave their melody around the Diva styled vocals. I rarely cross over to the trance style beat range, thus I keep my music

centred within the “House” pace. 128bpm is a tempo that I sit comfortably at. My aim is to have most people leave and say that they actually *enjoyed* the music. In this day and age it is becoming harder and harder to do! I have never seen the music scene so fragmented before. There are now way too many styles and way too many opinionated people. We *do* have the best DJ's in the world and I have been around the world enough times over the last 18 years to know! I spend my whole week, years and indeed my life to my passion to play and construct music for people to experience and enjoy. Respect for that seems to be a thing of the past.

hotdiscomix: *Please describe your ideal DJ booth.*

Alsop: It should have 2 Technics turntables, a dual or 2 fully mixable CD players (Pioneer CDJ or the newer Technics), a mixer (Rane) and good *crystal clear* foldback. Not gigantic thumping speakers but more like the JBL EON range for club work. I like them as I can hear the nuances of treble rather than just a thud to mix to. And please don't forget some lighting!!!! There must be good visibility so that I can see what I am doing. I have played at parties before that are in the dark and I just can't see what I am

putting on the turntables! I little disturbing when I am put into the position that I have no idea what record I am putting on the turntable!

hotdiscomix: What do you prefer for your DJ sets: vinyl, CDs or MP3-files?

Alsop: I prefer CD, due to its

- Portability (I can carry around a small box containing 1,000 tunes. Try doing THAT with vinyl !!!)
- The number of remixes available. (Often the vinyl will have two or three mixes and the CD can have up to 10 or more mixes. This gives me so much more variety in my sets.)
- Ability to mix. (Mixing CD is now a joy with the advent of newer technology players)
- I can re-edit and restructure my vinyl recordings and place them on CD and play *them* at my clubs!

I do still like the feel and showmanship of working with vinyl. I take a box with me everywhere I go. On the down side, I don't like it for the embarrassing clicks, pops, scratches and jumps that it so surprisingly can do! All in all, I like the CD format. I like the way I can remix it, record it, play it, re-master it and present music on the night that is in entirely different league than just a vinyl recording. I have noticed many DJ's worldwide are CD now. Australian DJ's have been a little slow to embrace the new format. I believe that a mix of the two is the best thing for me.