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THE DJ PLAYING GOD

STAFF WRITERS — MARCH 4, 2009

Twenty-five years after setting up his turntables on Oxford St, Mark Alsop will play the role of -'God of Mardi Gras' on the Surry Hillsong float -" an ironic twist considering Alsop does not suffer from a God complex, nor has he ever played a Mardi Gras.

In a world where DJs are the new rock stars and a healthy ego is considered just as important as the selection of records you carry, it is surprising yet refreshing to realise just how self-effacing Mark Alsop is.

Originally an Adelaide boy, Alsop's career began out of a desire to see Oxford St partying to some new tunes.

Having gone to quite a few clubs, I found that the kind of music I listened to wasn't being played on the street, he recalled of his introduction to the Oxford St scene in 1982.

I used to buy my records at Disco City on York St and was being introduced to music that wasn't being played on the strip, and then one day it hit me -" why don't I try and play the music in the clubs. So I walked into Club 45, which was next to Patches, spoke to the boss and said I'd like to learn DJing.

Next thing Alsop knew he had a Friday night slot, then a weekend residency. This grew into a locally and internationally viable career, which has seen him take on some of the biggest parties overseas and develop a healthy fan base at Manacle, Arq and big-time events like Inquisition.

Now a veteran of the scene, Alsop struggles to find the balance between pleasing old-time fans, the entry-level clubbers and his own desire to stay musically progressive.

Back when I started, the music was just music. People didn't have such pre-defined ideas. Everyone just went out and there were so many clubs that basically you knew what club played your kind of music.

But of course nowadays, with fewer clubs and so many different styles of music and downloading, everyone's got an opinion.

I'll play what I think should be getting played in the clubs and then throw in a track I know the kids want to hear.

It's about education and not bowing down to management because management is commercially driven. All they want is bums on seats and drinks at the bar.

A lot of the management in the commercial clubs just don't see the bigger picture, that there are an equal number of people out there who are after the experience and to kind of learn something.

Don't confuse that forthrightness with ego. Alsop has no delusions of grandeur when it comes to what he does.

I'm just compiling what other people in the world have put together. It's so easy to take on this godly profile, but it's usually not your music that you're playing, so as a DJ you need to be respectful of the people who have, he said, seemingly unaware of the trouble such a statement might get him into with other DJs.

But that's Alsop -" he says what he says, and does what he does without ever stopping to apologise. It's a trait which has stood him well in a career which is 90 percent about staying one step ahead of the style crowd, but may have also cost him the opportunity to ever play a Mardi Gras party.

It's great that now in my 25th year I've been asked to be a part of this float. Mardi Gras have never really been involved or supported my career.

Every year there are 15 or so DJs, so in 25 years I find it strange that I've never really been asked to be involved -" except once when they asked me to be in the Retro, which was a slap in the face because what I'm always trying to present is the sound of tomorrow.

I think it might be because I did some interviews way back in the '90s where I was asked about Mardi Gras. I suppose I tell things as I see them and I guess Mardi Gras perhaps took offence, he explained without wishing to elaborate.

Irrespective, Alsop continues to engage the community in his own way, on his own terms at his dance nights.

It doesn't bother me anymore -" in fact I think I'd be more surprised if the phone rang and it was Mardi Gras. I have my residencies and do the Rising Day Club every week which is always packed out.

There are other parties out there that have thoroughly supported me -" Toy Box, Frisky -" and those parties are immense and I'm glad for it.

info: Alsop is playing Manacle on March 6 from 10.30pm; Rising at Phoenix on March 8 from 11am-1pm; Manacle on March 8 from 3pm-7pm and Rising at Phoenix from 10am on March 9.

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