

BY KERRI MASON

STARS

PAUL OAKENFOLD

SPECIAL FEATURE

AFTER TOPPING THE DANCE WORLD, BRITISH DJ/COMPOSER PAUL OAKENFOLD IS REALIZING HIS HOLLYWOOD DREAMS

Seven years ago, Paul Oakenfold sat down with new manager Marc Marot and laid his cards on the table. They were impressive: Years of dominance as a touring DJ. The first European DJ to open the floodgates on the American market. A growing list of pop and underground remixes, including a tight relationship—personally and artistically—with U2. A name globally synonymous with dance music.

But the superstar wanted more, or perhaps less: He wanted the challenge of scoring films. Marot—who had just resigned from a 10-year stint as president of Island Records and who also counted noted film composer Trevor Jones as a client—had the prescription.

"You couldn't [score films] unless you were known as a composer, and obviously the shortcut to that is becoming known as an artist," Marot says.

At the time, Oakenfold had two hits vying for position in the U.K. top 10: the theme to TV series "Big Brother" and trance banger "Bullet in a Gun." But neither was under his own name. "That was my case in point," Marot says. "Both were on the charts at the same time, competing against each other at retail and for radio play, and neither had anything other than

Nelly Furtado and Ice Cube and two songs that became hits via the new world of licensing: "Ready Steady Go," used in a Saab spot, and "Starry Eyed Surprise," synced to that bubbly, roller-skating Diet Coke spot, now held up as one of the most successful combinations of music and images in advertising produced up to that point.

"In that instance, [the agency] actually came to us asking if they could use the track," says Three Artist Management's Richard Bishop, Oakenfold's U.S.-based manager. "We looked at the story boards and felt it was a good combination of music and images, so we said yes."

The journey to Hollywood had begun.

Oakenfold's remarkably diverse career started in the early '80s, when he was a hungry twenty-something obsessed with new music, particularly hip-hop. The U.K. native held down three positions at the same time: A&R for Profile Records and Champion Records and promoter for Rush Release, the U.K. promo company for upstart label Def Jam.

"I was working for Russell Simmons in those days, and I was very aware of Oakenfold and his interest in urban music, and music in general," says

his writer's name; he wasn't identified as the artist. It was not good for the brand."

So together they drew up a sketch of the future they called "Paul's Journey Plan." The goal was to develop Oakenfold's name all over again, this time as something more than just a DJ; i.e., a curator of other people's work, known only to a niche market. This time he had to become known as a creator of music, in the broadest sense, so that Hollywood would come calling. The first step was a physical move to Los Angeles from England in 2002.

But back up a moment. Film music? For a man who'd been at ground zero of the dance music revolution, DJ'd for thousands at the Great Wall of China, toured with Madonna? "There's a point in life where you've got to look at yourself and say, 'What do I want to be doing in 10 years' time?' He'd gotten to that point," Marot says. "Unlike many of his contemporaries, Paul was a successful A&R man. He'd been a successful businessman, building [his record label] Perfecto. He'd been a very successful DJ, the first superstar DJ. But it got to a point where he wanted a little bit more grounding in his life. It's a surprise to everybody how much he really does love film music and how much he knows about it. He's really studied in the art."

This year alone, Oakenfold scored three complete films, and he speaks about them with such ardor that his commitment to the discipline is hard to question.

"I've been fortunate this year to try different sounds," he says. "[Anime full-length] 'Vexille' is a real traditional score, a lot of strings. [British action film] 'The Heavy,' the one I'm working on now, has a lot of live instruments, and [family drama] 'Nobel Son' was very electronic. I'm really happy with them."

The development of Oakenfold as artist began with 2002's "Bunkka" (Maverick), his first full-length album of original music in his then-15-year-long career. More guitar- than beat-driven, it contained collaborations with Tricky,

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PAUL OAKENFOLD'S current album, 'Greatest Hits & Remixes,' is his second chart-topper on Billboard's Top Electronic Albums tally.

OAKIE ON THE CHARTS

Since Billboard launched its Top Electronic Albums chart in the June 30, 2001, issue, Paul Oakenfold has scored a half-dozen top five albums, including his current chart-topping "Greatest Hits & Remixes." His top five career albums appear below. But several of his earlier successes predated 2001, including his "Tranceport" album in 1998, "Global Underground: New York" in 1999 and "Perfecto Presents: Another World" in 2000. Also, Oakenfold has frequently produced or remixed recordings credited to other acts. The titles here are ordered by peak position on the Top Electronic Albums chart. If more than one title peaked at the same position, ties were broken by the number of weeks spent at the peak.

TOP FIVE ELECTRONIC ALBUMS



Rank	Title	Peak Position	Debut Date	Label
1	Bunkka	1 (2 weeks)	July 6, 2002	Maverick/Warner Bros.
2	Greatest Hits & Remixes	1	Nov. 10, 2007	Perfecto/Ultra
3	Swordfish: The Album (soundtrack)	2	June 30, 2001	Warner Sunset/FFRR/London-Sire
4	Creamfields	2	Aug. 28, 2004	Perfecto/Thrive
5	Perfecto Presents... Great Wall	3	Oct. 18, 2003	Sire/Reprise/Warner Bros.

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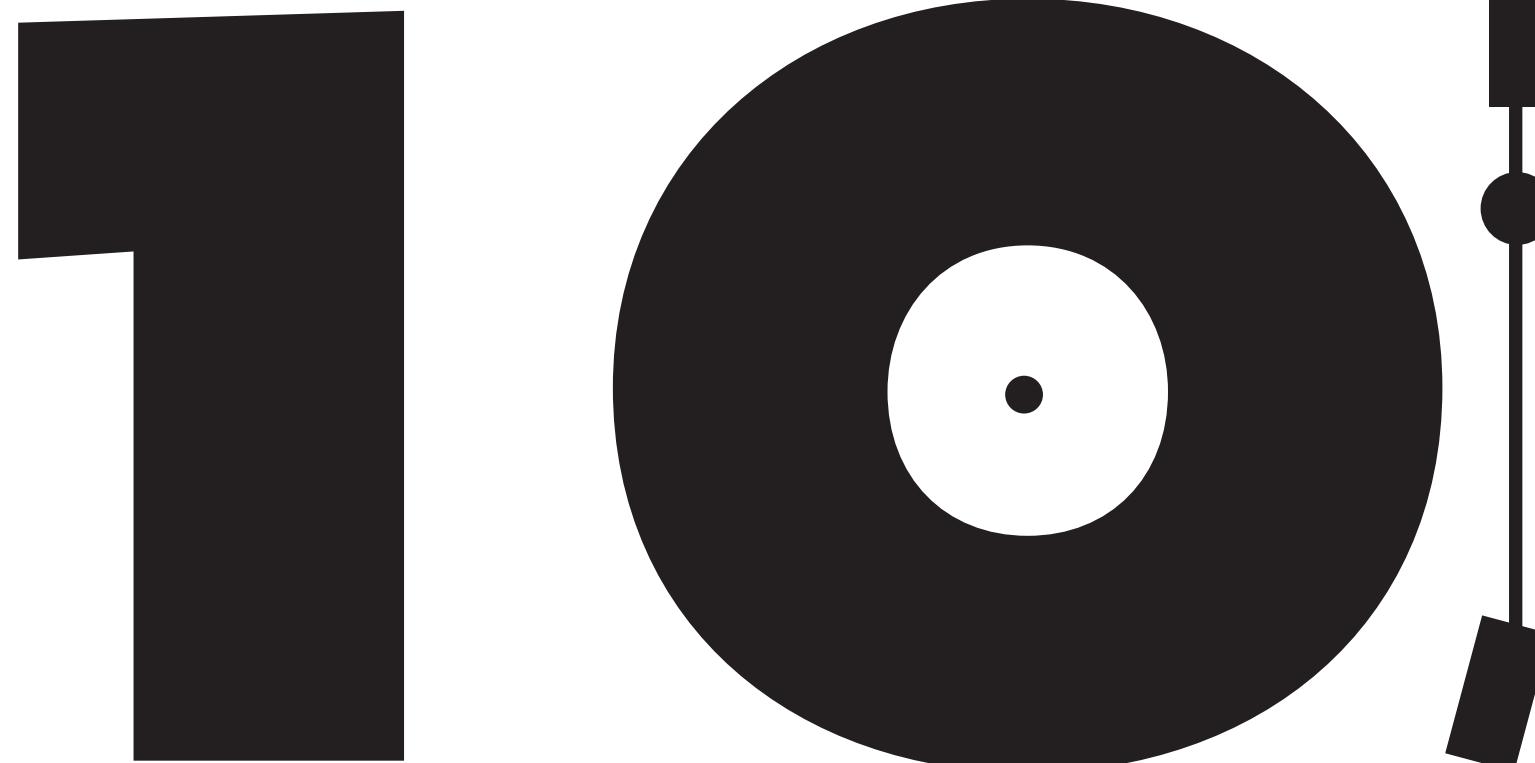
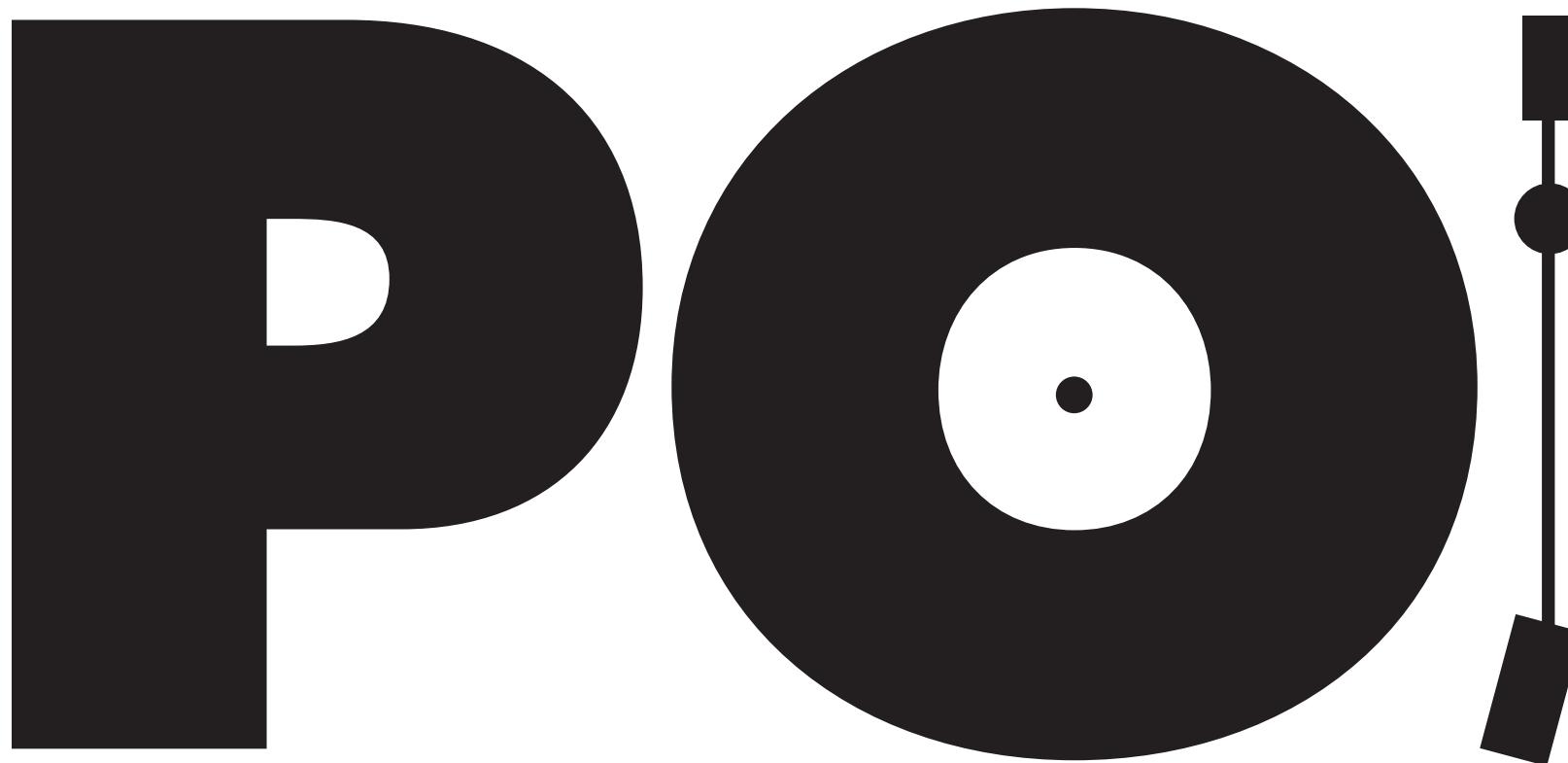
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from >>p52 kind of achieved a lot of what I wanted to achieve. What was I going to get from it personally? Now I'm playing with orchestras.

How did that come about?

I was the first DJ to play the Hollywood Bowl, and I used a six-piece orchestra to make more of a show. Then I thought, "Well, I'll use a 20-piece orchestra [for Miami's Winter Music Conference]," so I hired the Miami Philharmonic, and it worked really well.

Then I was invited to play with the Boston Pops, which was really nerve-wracking because the people are sitting down and watching me. Normally in clubs they watch you and they study you, but they're dancing, they're in the moment, they're feeling it. But this was an older crowd. But if I could get someone to sponsor it—it costs a lot of money—I'd be on the road with a full orchestra.

I always look for the challenge. To score games and film is a challenge, to go on tour with an orchestra would be a big challenge for me. That's what motivates me. And the way you have to travel these days, it makes you not want to get on a plane.

In 2002, you did a remix of Justin Timberlake's "Rock Your Body" that was positively disco-y, and it made it onto the radio. People didn't expect it from you.

He's got soul, that guy. I looked at the pace and the elements of what he was singing and how he was singing it. My approach to remixing has always been [about] keeping the integrity of the artist. I won't say, "All my remixes are 130 [beats per minute], they're all the same drums." You play to the strength of the song and the delivery of the vocal. I don't want to pitch his vocal up, I think that's wrong.

"Rock Your Body" is midtempo; it's more of a funkier, melodic fill. There's an old band called Slave, a band I came across, that I thought was really, really funky. The rhythm felt very comfortable to sit under something like a Timberlake record. I did a mash-up of that, where I took the complete rhythm and put his vocal over

it, but obviously it could never have been released.

But then I did the version that is on the record, which goes to the strength of the lyric and gives you a real funky, soulful feel. So it's not going to be a remix that will be played by every DJ, but it's a mix that maybe Mark Ronson will play, rather than Tiësto. I think that's why I've been doing so many remixes, because I'm really versatile.

The "Starry Eyed Surprise" sync in the Diet Coke commercial seemed like a perfect union. What did you think of it?
If the music fits the visual as it did there . . . I didn't write it for the commercial. I find it difficult to write for commercials because

they never know really what they want. They always want something that sounds like someone else. I find it easier to write for film. I don't mind if they let me get on with it; it's just when they really don't know.

I wrote for Hummer, [and] because that's rhythm and pace, it's quite easy to find a starting point. But even with games—I'm doing the "Bourne Ultimatum" game, before that I'd done a James Bond game—you sit there and the people you're working with, they'll say, "Can you put in a little bit of Michael Jackson's 'Thriller'?" And you're like, "What? OK, it's the wrong key and it won't work, but I'll try it."

Has the DJ scene developed the way you thought it would, since you were there from the beginning?

Not to go on about it, but I certainly feel we need more acts for the scene to be embraced in a normal way, especially in America. They, for some reason, can't get their heads around that it's DJ-driven and DJs are artists, DJs do make music, DJs do remix, and DJs are on the front line.

But because they're not perceived in the old-fashioned way as an artist, sometimes it's difficult. I wish there would be more Chemical Brothers and Underworlds, but they're DJ-based acts anyway.

There's room for a lot more acts. I'm always looking for those acts to sign to my label, but they're hard to come by. You've heard the [David] Guetta

record; we're doing really well with it. How far can we take it? Who knows? The mainstream doesn't necessarily see it.

When I toured behind [2002 album] "Bunkka" in America, we did about 50-odd shows. I had a band, and we were up there touring the hell out of it, and it was difficult, to be honest. The club fan base, they didn't necessarily want an act. They were just into the rhythm and the tracks.

It's strange. "Starry Eyed Surprise" crossed over onto the pop charts, "Ready Steady Go" was on commercials and in film, and it's still a stretch. You can sell out 15,000-capacity venues like the Hollywood Bowl, but they still don't necessarily understand why or how.

—Kerri Mason

SLOWP

DAVE HOGAN/GETTY IMAGES



PAUL OAKENFOLD, center, gathered with SHIFTY SHELLSHOCK, left, and TC in 2003 in Cape Town, South Africa, at a stadium concert to benefit the Nelson Mandela Foundation and to raise AIDS awareness in Africa.

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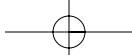
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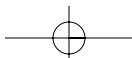
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from >>p50 Patrick Moxey, president of Ultra Records, Perfecto's U.S. distributor. "He's always been into music with beats, whether it was hip-hop or rock/dance crossover. He's pioneered a lot of these sounds. He has an ear for talent and hits."

He proved his clairvoyance by signing Salt-N-Pepa and Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince at age 22.

"Paul is a music man. He has a very broad church," says David Guetta, an artist signed to Perfecto whose poppier sound diverges from the label's usual hard trance. "I don't think label identity is as important as it used to be. It comes down to the record and how it's positioned. Inside dance music, the genre definitions seem very extreme, but beyond, it's so subjective. I want to be part of [the] people who push dance music to be equal to rock, pop, whatever. We share that belief and commitment."

Two years after his two fortuitous signings, everything changed for Oakenfold. He vacationed on the Spanish island of Ibiza and became immersed in the music that was popular there: a style of dreamy dance known as Balearic, which later branched off into many genres, including the most popular, trance. He brought it back to London, thus kick-starting Europe's nightclub, and later, rave culture. He even co-produced (with Steve Osborne) one of the definitive albums of the period, Happy Mondays' "Pills 'N' Thrills and Bellyaches." Soon, this European style of dance music—less groovy and more aggressive and electronic than U.S. house—had gone global, and Oakenfold was widely identified as its primary emissary.

Ruling the world is one thing; ruling the United States is quite another. But in 1995, Oakenfold set out with the stated goal of doing just that. "There's a reason Paul became the best-selling DJ in the U.S.," Moxey says. "It's because he did something like 150 U.S. and Canada tour dates for two years in a row. And it was like, Tuesday night in Nashville: Paul Oakenfold. Monday night in Omaha [Neb.], next to the rodeo, it's Paul Oakenfold. And that's how he broke. He really paid attention to the fans, the people all over America. He brought the music directly to them."

Oakenfold learned his carpet-bombing tactics from his old friends in U2. In 1990, Marot headed the band's reinvention efforts for Island during the "Achtung Baby" era. "They had never had anyone remix their music," Marot says. "We introduced them to Paul as a concept." He remixed the band several times, including the track "Even Better Than the Real Thing" for "Achtung Baby," and joined the group's Zoo TV tour as an opener.

In the years that followed, Oakenfold did everything a DJ could conceivably do: He played for 70,000 at Clapham Common in London, sold out the Hollywood Bowl, DJ'd live with the Boston Pops, released countless compilations and traveled the United States on the Area:One tour with OutKast and Moby.

Film music became a real option in 2001, when producer Joel Silver approached him to score some scenes for "Swordfish." The process instantly clicked for him.

"I've watched him in spotting sessions. He's able to really get to the nitty gritty, right to the heart of the project very, very quickly. It's very impressive, and it's all to do with his knowledge," Marot says. "I think he feels he's on the point of proving himself to a serious Hollywood industry, an industry that doesn't give its money away very lightly to people who can't deliver. Scoring is technical. It's difficult; it's conveying a mood in 42 seconds or 1.3 seconds. It's not something where you can build a mood like you can on a fantastic trance hit. So I think before he made his big declaration, 'This is really what I'd like to do,' he wanted to learn the craft. And that's what we've been slogging away at."

Oakenfold has two more films slated, in addition to videogames, a few pet-project artists to produce, another artist album for himself somewhere down the line (he released "Bunkka" follow-up "A Lively Mind" in 2005) and more DJ'ing gigs with orchestras. Plus, Perfecto/Ultra just released his first career retrospective, "Greatest Hits & Remixes." "Outside of [the "NOW" series], it's got to be one of the most amazing track listings I've ever seen," Moxey says.

Even if the next decade marks another evolution for Oakenfold, his grand years in the world's DJ booths, taking thousands of people on one shared journey, will remain. "DJ'ing is always going to be the cornerstone of his career," Moxey says. "He'll do everything, but even as he's doing everything else, somehow the experience of the DJ to the audience is at the core of [his] sensibility."

'I ALWAYS LOOK FOR THE CHALLENGE'

OAKENFOLD TRACES HIS PATH BEYOND THE DJ BOOTH



While **PAUL OAKENFOLD** still spins for the crowds, his creative focus has shifted to scoring films and licensing his work for advertising.

Back in 1985, Paul Oakenfold was a hip-hop A&R guy, signing acts like Salt-N-Pepa and DJ Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince to U.K. label Champion. ■ That summer he vacationed on the Spanish island of Ibiza, picked up an undiscovered style of dance music and headed back to London ready to evangelize both. ■ Soon, all of U.K. youth were clubbing and listening to progressive electronic dance (they call 1987 their "Summer of Love"), and Oakenfold began to blaze a path that so many DJs would eventually follow. ■ He toured the world, collecting massive paydays; opened for U2 and Madonna; played for crowds in the hundreds of thousands; launched his own record label (Perfecto, now home to white-hot DJ/producer David Guetta); remixed countless artists; and became an international icon: the first true superstar DJ. ■ Nearly 20 years later, the man they call Oakie has changed. You won't find him in too many DJ booths, raising his arms Jesus-style when the big trance drop comes. These days, he's composing original film scores (three in this year alone: for the Alan Rickman/Danny Devito vehicle "Nobel Son," Japanese anime full-length "Vexille" and British gangster flick "The Heavy"), collaborating with the likes of Pharrell and actress/aspiring singer Brittany Murphy on his own solo albums, DJ'ing live with full orchestras and licensing songs to advertisers from Diet Coke to Hummer. ■ And he says he's happier than he's ever been. ■ We asked Oakenfold to track the journey from DJ stardom to artistic fulfillment.

Did you always want to score films?

Probably without realizing it, if that makes sense. My father would take me to see films and we'd discuss the music, because he was a musician. Then Joel Silver, the producer, contacted me completely out of the blue [in 2001] and said, "We want you to co-score a John Travolta/Halle Berry movie," So I got the opportunity to work on "Swordfish."

I put everything on hold, went to L.A. for three months and just really enjoyed the process. I thought it was a wonderful opportunity for me to move away from DJ'ing and move on with my career in the direction I felt was right.

So I did a bunch of cues for various different films; "Matrix Reloaded," "Shrek," "Collateral." They were a means for me to get into actually scoring a whole film.

How do you even begin to fit music to images? How does your mind work?

I read the script and I write notes. It'll say, "Big fight scene, lead actor is being chased." So I'm sitting there thinking, "Percussion, drums, pulsing sounds, tension." Then I sit with the director and we go through it all. It's primarily his vision; his film,

his vision. It's completely different when you're making your own artist record. So we talk through what he's looking for.

Once they start shooting, I get dailies, so what he shoots today, I get tomorrow. I write away; if he likes it, great, and if he doesn't, then I start again and continue to work until he's happy with it.

Is it hard to be beholden to someone else's vision after you've controlled your own destiny as a DJ for so long?

I've never been one of those people who's very precious, I think because I started in remaking. You're remaking other people's stuff, and if they don't like it, they don't use it. The pressure's always been on, so I'm kind of used to that.

Of course it's my responsibility, and if it's a failure, then I'd get fired. But that's the process. But consciously, five years ago, when "Swordfish" came along, I knew this was going to be more my destiny and where I was going to end up.

Were you tired of DJ'ing, or did you change focus because you had other options?

A bit of both. I love DJ'ing, but I've

continued on >>p54



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