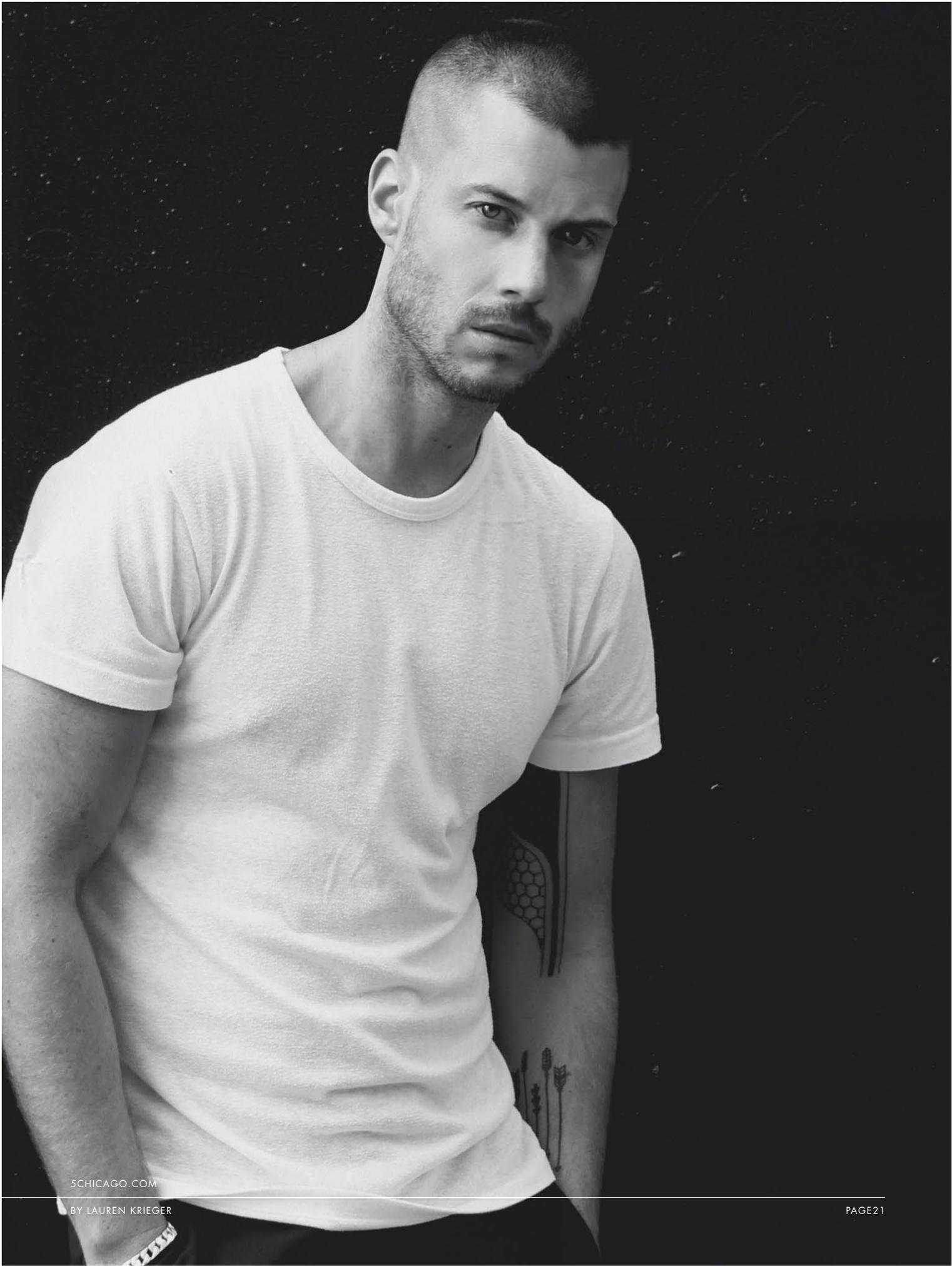


KARSTEN SOLLORS

A 5 MAG MIX VOL 60

It's a testament to Karsten Sollors' unyielding passion for the music that through his decades of DJing and producing, his musical influence continues to expand. Recognized for the soulful and sincere energy which he transmits, his music inevitably enhances the surrounding atmosphere, with rhythm, flow, and emotion a vital part of the story he tells. His experiences DJing across the North American festival circuit and residency at Sound-Bar in Chicago have introduced many house music lovers to his signature sound, while his work in the studio has connected him with some of the most legendary labels in the industry including Toolroom Records, UNDR THE RADR, Nervous and Farris Wheel Recordings. With a home base in Chicago and a new release just signed to Nervous, it's evident that Karsten's ever expanding role in the industry will continue to make an impact for years to come.

////// INTERVIEW: LAUREN KRIEGER



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Karsten provided 5Mag with an exclusive 90 minute mix, featuring some of his favorite fresh tracks including one of his latest productions. On a mission to transmit music that flows without restriction or labels, Karsten brings it all with this featured mix.

His innate desire to bring good vibes is not only experienced through his music, but through his words, and it was a total pleasure to catch up with him to get some insight into his world.

When you first started DJing did you imagine it would become your career?

It was a very different time then it is now when I first started DJing. It was the late '90s, there wasn't much in terms of social media and vinyl was the only format. I had just been sent to a boarding school in a remote part of Canada and discovered DJing through another classmate who had a pair of 1200s set up. Right around the same time I was invited to my first warehouse rave, and was able to witness a live DJ set for the first time. I wish I could remember who was playing, but at that point I didn't know or care who was DJing but more so how this entirely new experience was making me feel. I was sold!

I had convinced my parents to get me a pair of 1200s of my own, and started my record collec-

tion. I taught myself to beat-match, scratch, beat juggle and so on. I started off playing drum'n'bass and breakbeats, and at my first club gig I actually played a two hour drum'n'bass set all on vinyl, in the upstairs room of the only "cool" club in town.

A few years later, I actually brought a bag of records with me to Thailand where I backpacked for almost a year, I believe in 2005. Everything from minimal techno and '90s classic house to chill-out, breaks and drum'n'bass. I'd go around to different beach clubs and ask if I could play, and most of them would let me. I wasn't being paid but I loved it. I think back to that, and how crazy it was of me to be lugging around a bag of records on-top of all my stuff. In my mind, there wasn't such a thing as a DJ career. It was something I did because I loved the music, I loved the technical aspect of it and I love sharing the music I had collected with all my

friends and strangers on the dance floor. It was always a hobby for me, I didn't start getting paid to do it and take it seriously as a career until about seven years ago when I was offered my first residency at a place called 1181 in Vancouver, Canada. I work very hard at this, but sometimes I am still surprised that I get paid to do something that I love so much. It's a beautiful thing.

What is something that you learned when you were starting out that you think DJs starting today might be missing out on?

Pulling from what I just shared about DJing solely for the love of it, without really having that idea in mind that you can make a career from it – I think that instills the right values that a DJ needs to have. You can really tell these days when DJs are in it for the right/wrong reasons. I am very proud

of the evolution of DJing and obviously being a DJ today has so many more benefits. The technology out there is mind blowing. You can create any kind of set up you'd like which is constantly impressing me, I can show up to a gig with every track I have ever played and it all fits into my backpack. That's amazing! Sometimes I find some of these new guys get caught up in things that really don't matter, there's a lot of opinions and with social media those opinions sometimes get more press than deserved. At the end of the day it's all about the music, and the experience that is created for the people that come out to have a good time. It's not about the equipment, it's about the output. The music.

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I know it's hard to narrow it down, but what would you say is your favorite part of being a DJ?

I'm in love with it, and I cannot imagine myself not being a part of it [electronic music culture]. I started first as a raver, a dancer and party-goer. Then evolved into DJing and now as I've gotten older and am not "partying" anymore I have taken on a new role. When I show up to the gig, I like to show up early to get a sense of the crowd so that when I'm given the reigns, I have a good idea of where the room is at and where to take it. Like the captain of the ship, working with the crowd to create the best possible outcome on any given night. When I'm DJing I'm not hiding behind the decks, I'm usually dancing my ass off because I love it so much.

I go out to shows as often as I can when I'm not DJing, again, it's not just about work. It's who I am.

Do you feel that living in Chicago has influenced your DJ style?

Absolutely, I have great respect for Chicago and its rich history in electronic music. Fate brought me here, as I don't believe in coincidence. As a creative I am deeply inspired by my surroundings. Chicago is a special place that is full of talent, and in the first few months of being here I connected with guys like Gene Farris, Derrick Carter, Dom Brown, Steve Gerard, Michael Serafini, Intermod-

al, Redux DJs, Derek Specs and so many more. Being able to surround myself with such talent has really brought out the best in me. I'm constantly striving to learn, and grow and evolve; I've just been so fortunate with the friends and colleagues that I have made here who so graciously welcomed me into the Chicago underground.

Now that I'm representing Chicago on my travels, and tours I find myself consciously honouring the pioneers that came before me, in one way or another. It's interesting, I've always had a deep connection to Chicago, its history and music without really knowing it. Being here has really reflected that to me.

If there was one thing you'd like to be known for, what would it be?

I'd like to be an inspiration to others, and show that you can do this life in your own way there is no clear cut path or formula. I do everything I can in my personal life to stay balanced. I eat a plant-based diet, I work out every day, I get 8 hours of sleep most nights and I take care of my emotional state. Over the years, I've learned that these are all things that I need to do, in order to feel balanced and be able to thrive in my creative, career and personal life. I work very hard, and in a sense I'm always working as I love what I do, and it never turns off. When I first started producing I would be in the studio for 8+ hours and forget to eat, day

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would become night and I would end up feeling very emotionally/spiritually drained afterwards. Now, I don't force anything, I sit down and create when the juices are flowing and then get up and explore other parts of my life when they are not.

If I can impart any wisdom here is to take care of yourself first, and make sure you are fully charged.

I personally feel that this is the most important thing, even beyond music.

Secondly, Do not to be afraid to put yourself out there. I've consistently been doing this my entire life, sometimes with great fear; It has always paid off.

What are you most excited about doing within the music lately?

Currently it's the gigs, for sure. I just came off React Presents "Spring Awakening Music Festival" weekend where I played the Requiem stage along side John Digweed, Sasha, Lee Foss, Prok & Fitch, Anthony Attalla, Lee Burridge and home town hero Intermodal. To be on the stage with these pioneers is a true honor, and having the ability to share my music with the new generation of kids is really something that inspires me. Having people come up to me after to tell me that I made their weekend totally rocks my world. The night

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before I played in the main room at Sound-Bar (where I've been resident for over a year now) from 11:30-1:30, just before Gareth Emery. It was a trance show and I wasn't sure how it was going to go but it completely blew my mind. Those kids were with me from start to finish and I left feeling so full, I brought those vibes to the festival the next day and kept the good vibes flowing.

This year already I have played in Vietnam, New York, Toronto, Las Vegas, Vancouver and of course many local Chicago shows big and small. I have so much gratitude to all the amazing promoters that give me such a huge platform to share my music in Chicago, people like Dom, Dan, Martin and the entire team at React, Haider and Lawrence at Sound-Bar, Fei and The Mid, Matthew Harvat, Ryan Willing, Brian Boncher and so many more, I'm endlessly thankful to them.

One other thing that is exciting me is that the current climate of music is shifting, I think a lot of the American EDM kids are starting to look deeper to see what else is out there and they find us, the DJs who stand strong in house/techno, who have always been here and always will be here.

As you've played around the world, has anything surprised you about your experiences?

Everywhere I go, I find the same types of people. Music lovers, dancers, DJs, DJ crews, promoters

and people who care deeply about cultivating a scene out of the love for the music. Especially with electronic music, it's so universal. Anyone can understand and move to the beat without words and can connect with each other. I have made some of my best friends on the dance floor and I know that to be true for many people. That is a special thing. Whether I am in Chicago, Vietnam, London or Lima I know that I have a group of like-minded people that congregate every weekend in the name of good music and dancing. That's an amazing thing when you think about it.

What is your favorite type of crowd to play for?

I love playing after-hours shows, there's something magical that happens when it's early into the morning. People become more open, more in tuned and flexible. Some of my favourite moments have happened between 5-10am, when the crowd is holding onto every track, every sound, every emotion that's being transmitted. Somehow we all become one, dancing together and sharing the same experience. There are also certain crowds out there that consistently come with good vibes from the jump, for instance the Anjunadeep family, those kids show up every time ready to go. I've never had a bad experience playing one of those shows. All the artists on that label bring such a love to what they do and it really translates to their following.

What do you think makes house music so important to people?

I think of all the genres and sub genres of electronic music, house is the most widely inclusive. Maybe it's the vibe that house music transmits, and maybe it's something to do with the 4/4 being easier get into a groove with. Listening and dancing to house music can be a very spiritual experience, it really reaches into your soul which can be a very empowering experience. Music and sound is something that stays in our memory, it's the sound track to our lives. More often than not, house music creates a positive vibe an experience and we can never underestimate how the ripples of that affects the rest of our lives.

What first motivated you to get into the studio?

From the moment I started DJing I dreamt of making my own music, but it didn't come to me till long into my relationship with electronic music. After I started DJing full time, while living in Vancouver, Canada, I found myself remixing tracks in my mind. I was thinking about the tracks I was playing and imagining them in a different way, or even coming up



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with melodies and new tracks entirely. This came to a point where I couldn't really bear not having the skills to make that happen. So at the beginning of winter 2014 I decided to lock myself away all winter and learn my craft. I had a mentor I could bounce ideas off, and learn from, whom I met with every Tuesday for that year. I learned, and am still learning every session but now I'm at a point where

I can really do what I want with production and that is such an empowering thing for me. There was always a part of me that knew in order to take myself out of where I was, to really have a thriving music career; I had to make my own music, and I wanted to. So I made it happen! Four years later, I have 50+ tracks released on labels like Toolroom, Nervous, UNDR THE RADR, Farris Wheel, King Street Sounds, Great Stuff Recordings and so many more. It's very special for me to sit with that, and see that I did this all by putting my mind to something, and creating it for myself.

I love the backstory of your release on Roger Sanchez' UNDR THE RADR, can you tell us some detail on how this came about and what it meant to you?

Yes, it was a pretty cool set of events! Last year Roger Sanchez was in town playing a show, and I knew I wanted to share some of my music with

him. He played an amazing set that night at Primary nightclub. At the end of the night, I made my way into the DJ booth, introduced myself and passed him a few of my original productions to him on a USB key, some released and some unreleased. Fast forward a month, and I get a message in my inbox from someone in Mexico congratulating me on my music being played on Roger Sanchez' radio show! I couldn't believe it, I was in shock. I was so excited, so I checked it out and sure enough he introduced the track and mentioned my name, and being from Chicago. I was over the moon and had tears in my eyes. I tracked down his email and wrote a message to thank him. I mentioned to him that the track wasn't released or signed to any record labels yet. He said he wanted to release it on his label, and that I could send him a few more to make it a full EP. Thankfully I had just gotten a bunch of masters back, so I sent him four tracks the next day, and he took three more of them which ended up creating a four track EP called the *Give A Little* EP. It was such a cool set of events. The EP officially came out in April 2018, and the EP title track "Give A Little" which was the original song he had played on his show at first (and at numerous events around the world that year) climbed all the way up the charts to #16 on the tech house Top 100.

Releasing with Roger Sanchez and UNDR THE RADR means a lot to me. I've been a fan of his for 15+ years, and really was inspired by his career

and him as a technical DJ and person. He's such a great guy and It's truly an honour to be working with him.

What advice would you give to a new producer who is looking to get their music heard?

I think a lot of producers get stuck with 100s of unfinished tracks so my first bit of advice would be to learn how to finish your tracks. They don't have to be perfect, as much as we want them to be they never will be. So just finish them. When you get the sense that it's done, let it be. The more tracks you finish the more confidence you'll have in your music, and eventually the tracks get better and better. This way you won't be stuck with a bunch of killer 8 bar loops that just sit there and never get to see the dance floor.

One trick I came up with for myself is to map out my tracks right away. Once I have a cool groove going, I structure it. That way, it instantly becomes a full length song with breakdowns, then it's about building it from there. It becomes easier for me to visualize and conceptualize. So yes, finish your tracks!

As far as getting heard, that's a tough one and it's different for everybody. Over the years I've fortunately built relationships with certain labels so that now it's more like emailing a friend to catch up and sending music along with it in hope that

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they respond to it well.

Still, I have many goals with my production and labels that I would love to release on that I haven't yet. When I send my music out I'm very particular and specific. I only send music to labels I know the music could potentially fit, and I always make it personal. Never underestimate good manners, and respect. I still see/hear stories where producers are writing some generic email, and spamming it to every label/DJ they can possibly imagine. To be quite frank I find this pretty rude, and I think the labels do too. The amount of music that is being made these days, the amount of demos the big labels need to go through is outrageous, and you need to stand out from that. Take time, be focused, respectful and specific with your approach.

Another thing to keep in mind is that there is no such thing as an overnight success. Our society tends to sensationalize the very few instances where this happens, and it ends up affecting us all into thinking this is the norm. We live in a culture where we want everything now, everything fast. This is not how it works for 99.9% of success stories in any field. Take small steps everyday, fail forward and know that any career worth living takes time to build. When I look back three or four years, I have attained almost every goal I set out to achieve and I'm constantly making new ones. Don't let what you don't have yet, affect everything you've done up till now. Celebrate your

wins, learn from your losses and keep working hard.

Lastly, support your friends music. When they put out new music, shoot them a like and a comment, or better yet buy their tracks as that's what helps them chart and get more visibility. There's enough room for everyone to be successful, we are all different and bring something unique to the dance floor.

If you could only bring 5 records with you on a desert island, what would they be?

That's a really tough question, here's a list of some of my all time favorites that would be on the short-list:

- Midland - Final Credits
- Stimming - Tanz Fuer Drei
- Mobb Deep - Shook Ones Part 2
- Cajmere Feat Dajae - Brighter Days
- Frankie Bones - Behind The Groove
- KH - Question
- How To Dress Well - & It Was You
- Frankie Knuckles - The Whistle Song

Is there anything you would like to share about your thoughts or energy behind this mix?

I had such a great time recording this mix. I recorded it live from my home studio here in Chica-

go and wanted to make it a little longer than your typical one hour mix. Jam packed with lots of the music I have been playing out recently, along with one of my newest original tracks entitled "Kung Fu" forthcoming on Sydney Blu's label BLU Music. When I was writing the track and first added the sample it actually had me laughing out loud, and I hope it translates well to the listener and gives them that same sort of cheeky feeling.

I've also featured music by Harry Romero, Midland, Marco Lys, Oliver Dollar, Emanuel Satie, DJ Koze, David Morales, Satoshi Tomiie, Art Department and so many more. I believe it's a good reflection of the type of journey I like to create when I play. I'm not too stuck on playing entire sets fully in one sub-genre, I'm very happy to bounce around from deep and classic house to tech house and techno. I really just like to keep things fresh and flowing in a seamless way while staying in the range of house and techno. When I'm playing in the after-hours, or opening for a deeper genre of artist I tend to stay in more moody sounds and can also go very melodic. I think it's good to have that type of range as a DJ, you really never know what you're showing up to on any given night, being able to go with the flow is an important skill to have, in this trade and in life.

Thank you so much!