

INTERVIEW – TOBY NEAL – SYDNEY DJ

Toby Neal is an interesting phenomenon in the local Sydney DJ scene. He's made his mark for the last ten years playing a consistent style of funky house, played most of the clubs, never had a day job and has recently cracked into the overseas market with the US producers the **Sound Republic** and a world-wide 12" release. (label - Spatula City). After his DJ production partner **Illya** convinced him to post a few tracks up on a MySpace page (see <http://www.discogs.com/artist/Toby+Neal>) it all took off.

Toby's style – *house, funky, party house, nothing too techno or repetitive but nothing too ultra cheesy or commercial. Kind of like those great old funk and disco tunes with house beats, big horns, guitars and black female vocals.* Tried and true party music translated into house. He has a consistent sound and is a real stickler for good production. For the last ten years he's been obsessed with how to make a track sound the absolute best and biggest. In a way he's blossoming after years of sticking to and nurturing his style and a skill and approach to DJing born out of the magic heydays of the pre-Olympic Sydney club scene when there were hundreds of little clubs going on and everything was really inspiring and healthy. I talked to this professor of DJ about life, music and art in his brother's studio at Converse Media and the conversation was surprisingly frank and informative.

By Toby's own admission, he's no longer in demand in the manner to which he started out. Sure, he gets enough gigs to pay the rent but in his eyes the world of the Sydney club scene has shifted into one he doesn't quite fit into, at least for the moment. He's openly critical about the current culture describing it more as a fashion thing than a sub culture but is also quick to say that a new generation has come through and things change and that's a healthy thing. The "clubber of today", he suggests is not going for any of the reasons "the clubber of yesterday" went. The reasons, the drugs, the music and the fashions have changed and as a DJ you have to work a lot harder to please the crowd. Basically, everything has to be really accessible, it's all about requests and it has to be something the crowd knows. Stylistically it has also shifted from what it was all about when he was going out and working. Then it was primarily party music, funky, trumpets, vocals, bass lines (FUN MUSIC). What disco was all about in the first place, a certain style of music stripped down to its most obvious elements – perfect! Now he sees it as mostly electronic, synthesiser driven with no real instruments or human sounding vocals. It's become so narrow, so quickly to the point where every track sounds similar. But everyone seems to love it and Toby admits he is clearly in the minority.

Toby's high production values might well come from growing up in a family of musicians (both brother Braedy and father Chris are highly talented and successful screen composers). After playing saxophone from year 3 to 11, (eventually achieving first alto in the main school jazz band) to dropping music altogether because of a loathing of theory he finished school and briefly pursued his artistic talent for drawing comics, self-publishing and selling his work to comic shops. After a year of unemployment he took on an apprenticeship with his father learning the ropes of screen composition but music for film didn't turn out to be his thing either and in his spare time he started making dance music on an Atari with two old Roland samplers. As a young man Toby has plenty to do and offer and is ferociously dedicated to his own style of music. Right now he sees the production and writing of tunes as the real future for him and his co producer Illya and is inspired by the ultimate possibility of international touring and DJ gigs. The key for him is to get some big tunes out there around the world that everyone knows and then people start booking him to come over and play. Everything finds its place, which is really what's cool about it, be it house, jazz, rock or whatever. Small groups of people pocketed around the world

who are really into being there. When Toby first got into house music that's what it was like, going to little clubs he and his friends had never heard of before, with DJ's they'd never heard of with 90 or so people just vibing, having fun in this new thing. Although he sees it coming back to Sydney he knows it's booming right now in other parts of the globe and his recent exchanges in MySpace sending and receiving sound files only compounds the fact that there are overseas crowds who have already warmed to his style. Toby has a following building in Australia, which he loves but I get the feeling he'd be on a plane tomorrow if that invitation came through the mail.

You can check out some of Toby's stuff either at the myspace URL listed at the top of this interview (where you'll find links to his 12" releases: Do You Really Want (My love?), Feelin' Alright EP, 2Black2Gay / Sneaker Sex, Ivy Street EP and Watching You EP) or go to <http://www.myspace.com/> and click on the music link, pop in **Lamanex** in the search field and listen away to a whole heap of stuff he has up there. It's all pretty healthy, funky listening!!

Written by Damian Castaldi