

Las Vegas Sun

Electric Daisy Carnival: Tables are turning for women in the DJ world

By [Andrea Domanick](#) ([contact](#))

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When most people think of women and the Electric Daisy Carnival, a stereotype might come to mind: A scantily clad siren decked out in pasties and holding glowsticks, writhing about a go-go cage. In the world of electronic dance music (EDM), that image is almost as iconic an accompaniment to the music as the thumping bass lines. What's rarer is to see a woman behind the decks making those beats. But that's beginning to change.

"In the early days, I would get booked just because it was a novelty to have a woman up there, but times have definitely changed," says Detroit-raised, Berlin-based DJ Magda, who began spinning more than 15 years ago. "The amount of females in the industry now has grown so much since I first started, and there's not just more of them — they're all really, really good."

"So much" is a relative term. Magda is one of seven women from more than 100 DJs performing at this weekend's Electric Daisy Carnival at the Las Vegas Speedway. Still, that's more women than any other year of the internationally reputed dance music festival's 16-year history. Last year's lineup featured three women; 2010 had none.

The disparity isn't specific to Electric Daisy Carnival; the EDM scene is decidedly male-dominated. Last year, popular UK dance music magazine "DJ Mag" made headlines when not a single woman made it onto its annual reader-voted Top 100 DJ List. Decades after women broke into rock and roll and even music company executive suites, no one has a definitive answer as to why there are so few women DJs. The women at EDC tend to shy away from an obvious possibility: sex discrimination.

Many of the women playing this weekend's festival have been DJing since the '80s, and they're skeptical of a glass ceiling.

"There have always been female DJs. It's not that DJing ever wasn't an option for women, I just think not a lot of them realized they could," says L.A.-based trance artist Kristina Sky, who performs at EDC for the first time Sunday. "It's been a slow change."

Sky herself stumbled in the world of DJing by chance 10 years ago while working as a promoter and manager for local jockeys; she was already collecting records when a DJ she knew offered to show her how to spin them herself. Today, Sky has performed for crowds from Costa Rica to China and has shared the stage with the likes of Madonna and EDM legend Paul Oakenfold.

"I've been going to EDC as a raver or a promoter since the very first one, but I never thought I'd get to play there as a DJ," she says. "It's just a bucket-list moment for me."

Fellow DJ Nicole Moudaber, also performing Sunday, attributes the few number of women on the scene to the cultural conditioning of gender, with girls not as exposed to the intimidating array of sophisticated electronic equipment.

"DJing is very technical, and women are not trained to be as technical as boys are. People — both men and women — are conditioned to think women don't do things like that," she says, adding that the technical complexity and prowess required of DJing might seem daunting to many women. "I think that's the main thing we need to focus on, to get women out there and do it and not be scared."

Born in Nigeria and raised in Beirut, the London- and Ibiza-based Moudaber says her multicultural upbringing taught her to bend the rules about what girls and boys are supposedly fit for. Like Sky, she started her career in EDM as a promoter around 15 years ago and says that DJing was just "the obvious next step." She soon began collaborating with notable house and techno artist Carl Cox — who both hosts a stage and performs at EDC on Sunday.

Although being a woman was never an explicit obstacle for Moudaber's success, she says there's still the occasional frustrating stereotypes to break through.

"Sometimes after a gig, promoters will come up to me and admit they booked me because I was cute and I'd make the party look good, but say that when they saw me perform, they were blown away," she says. "It pisses me off, but it also adds more weight to a performance. In the end, if you're good, you're good."

Sky agrees that image is still more of a factor for women DJs than men, and the attractive blonde has deliberately chosen to downplay her looks, often performing in a beanie and tank top.

"The rule I took from the start was not to come from a gender role at all. A lot of girl DJs feel pressure to dress up, wear a lot of makeup and be glitzy and sexy, and a lot aren't taken very seriously because of that," she says, noting the trend of the "topless DJ" that has become popular in Europe. "Many have felt they have to do that in order to get shows, and it feeds into a negative cycle."

Nonetheless, the recent boom in EDM's mainstream popularity is helping do away with some of the novelty factor for women, as the scene's visibility is inspiring more girls and women to start DJing than ever before.

"We've always known women in the scene, but there's been an explosion in the last few years because EDM is so huge now," says Miriam Nervo, who with her twin sister, Olivia, make up the DJ duo Nervo. She and other women playing EDC this weekend all noted the increase in letters from female fans citing them as inspiration to start DJing and producing. Advances in production technology, making it cheaper and easier for anyone to make beats in their bedroom, have also drawn more women.

Nonetheless, the gender factor remains a sensitive subject — if only because it's a label even EDM veterans like Magda can't eschew. "I'm sick of getting asked about being a woman," she says. "It doesn't affect me. I don't know why people make such a big deal about it."

As with many of the women playing EDC, there's a toughness and defensiveness in her voice when speaking on the subject of gender. But it's that very attitude that helped get them there, and that's helping change the face of the EDM scene, if only incrementally.

"I refuse to feel any different," Moudaber says. "In the end, the music speaks for itself."

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