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Chicago DJ Bad Boy Bill Goes Old-School, Releases an Album

BY DENNIS ROMERO

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Bad Boy Bill, looking good with collaborator Alyssa Palmer

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Master of the House

Chicago's Bad Boy Bill broadens his horizons by releasing an actual album

You'd be hard-pressed to name an uptempo, superstar DJ who has won a major DMC (Disco Mix Club) battle championship—or even entered one. The super-club circuit is filled with producers, storytellers and understated mixers, but razzle-dazzle, scratch-and-juggle spinners they're not. While

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a few DMC winners (A-Trak, Craze) have made their way to the big-room scene, it's not in their genes.

There's really only one guy who can claim back-and-forth, hip-hop-style skills and a true-blue house-music bloodline: Bad Boy Bill.

The Chicago DJ has remained somewhat of an anomaly in dance music. He's not a hip-hop b-boy, techno banger or deep-house artisan; Bill has made his own way in the booth. His hard-house pogo can sound like a Six Flags television commercial (The Vengaboys' "We Like to Party"). And his loopy, quick-mix style would fit in with a Funky Tekno Tribe (DJ Dan, Donald Glaude) tag-team session at a wee-hours rave. But his roots point to genuine Windy City soul.



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"I think the true heads who do their research know that the original house music comes out of Chicago," says Bill, who won't reveal his age. "It's grown so much. I think it's exciting and cool to see other people's takes on it. Daft Punk, MSTRKRFT and Justice have a whole different perspective, and I'm definitely into that stuff."

While being a nuts-and-bolts DJ of the highest order has given the spinner unusual credibility in the fly-by-night club scene (a BPM magazine

popularity poll named him "America's Favorite DJ" in 2003, and he reprised the honor in 2006 by taking its "America's Favorite House DJ" title), Bill is taking a different tack this summer by unleashing his debut studio LP, *The Album*. Those expecting the rubbery, jackrabbit beats Bill is known for will be disappointed. *The Album* is . . . a proper album.

"I started out really focusing on the songs and a vibe that I thought was something people would want to listen to in the car, at home, or getting ready to go out," Bill says. "An album has to have more to it" than a mix CD.

The Album has a polish and glow that's familiar to mainstream radio. The advance single, "Falling Anthem," featuring the torch-trance vocals of Alyssa

Palmer, has already cracked the Top 10 on Billboard's Hot Club Play chart. The rest of the collection fits the feel-good zeitgeist of its Nettwerk label (home of BT, Morgan Page and Conjure One) and the toothache flavors of *über*-popular DJs Deadmau5 and Kaskade. But Bill goes downtempo, too, and has the *cojones* to cover Herbie Hancock's break-dance anthem "Rockit." He promises that each track will be remixed for proper, high-tempo club consumption.

Still, *The Album* is a long way from Chicago. Like a lot of second-generation house DJs, Bill grew up listening to WBMX radio's Hot Mix Five DJs. He took up the decks at 14, and in 1988, he won the Midwest sectionals of the DMC national battle DJ championships. He also landed on his favorite radio station thanks to house legend Farley Jackmaster Funk, who took Bill under his wing. The DJ soon became a headliner on the rave and club circuit. His relentless style put him in the weekend-warrior leagues alongside the likes of Carl Cox, DJ Dan and Donald Glaude. In 2003, he helped found Beatport.com, dance music's leading online retailer and a visionary purveyor of source material for the laptop DJ. But long before computer software such as Ableton Live helped digital DJs blur the lines between songs and remixes (see Joris Voorn's 100-track Balance 014 CD), Bill was putting as many as 50 tracks on some of his Bang the Box mixtapes—via vinyl.

At a time when Bill's relentless, hand-raising sound is bigger than ever among the Steve Aoki crowd, he is committed to keeping his ever-looping, nonstop approach rooted in the heart and soul of two-turntable culture.

"People are always looking for something fresh and new, but this scene is not fresh and new. It just seems that way because it has a new cycle," Bill says. "You can't think about what's going to be popular and trying to catch a trend. I just do what I like to do."

Bad Boy Bill with LA Riots and Charles Feelgood at the Fox Theater, 301 S. Garey Ave., Pomona, (877) 283-6976; www.foxpomona.com or www.myspace.com/cosmicevents. Sat., 8 p.m. \$25. 18+.



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