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Keeping it Juicy: An interview with Robbie Rivera

John C (<http://edmchicago.com/user/john/>) December 17, 2014



Robbie Rivera is an artist that has led a very strong career in electronic music. From the mega hits that he has produced to his energetic live DJ sets he has proven himself as a top tier artist. Beyond his own artistic influence, he has founded Juicy Records, that has released tracks and supported the careers of many of electronic music's biggest names. Prior to his performance at Studio Paris we sat down to discuss his views on the music and look back at his successful career.

John C: Your intro to electronic music and the DJ culture came at a young age when you were still living in Puerto Rico. What was the culture like in Puerto Rico like at the time and what kind of an impact do you think it had on you as an artist?

Robbie Rivera: Man in Puerto Rico back in the day when I started was very different. A lot of the music was coming from Europe so there was a lot of Euro vibe kind of music mixed in with all of the freestyle from Miami, New York and Chicago, so it was a mixture of everything, along with the Latin music too. I think it really was that whole mixture that had influenced me a lot when I produce music. There is always a little Latin vibe in there.

John C: While you had seen success with the release of El Sorullo, it was the track 'Bang' that seemed to have launched your career and fame as a producer and DJ. Many producers say that their initial success felt very fast as they look back at it. What do you remember most of that time period when you look back now?

Robbie Rivera: Man, that track...there was a few tracks that led to that one, but that was definitely the biggest one, commercially in Europe and, well, all over the world. You know what I remember that was a great experience? I remember going to London for one week when I was 22..I think. I remember going and in one day I had 10 to 12 interviews, and these were interviews with MTV, BBC, Radio One... we had to do this show that was called The Big Breakfast, so these interviews were big, like the hardcore real stuff. I remember being like "Why are we doing all of this stuff?" and they were like "...because your song is top 10...next to Madonna and everyone else. This is pop music here." I remember thinking "What?! This is a dance track!" and they said "No, here it has become pop music, it is a track that everyone is buying." It made me very, very nervous - like puking and shit. I was really nervous but it was a great time. That track continued to sell for many years and years and it gave me this career and from there I still do the same thing. I haven't had a hit *that* big again, but I have had a lot of club tracks since. However, I feel like in 2015 another big one is going to come.

"robbie2"

John C: Perfect. In addition to your production success, you have also found success as a label owner, running Juicy Records. What led the desire for you to start your own label?

Robbie Rivera: Very easy... No one wanted my music. I was in college studying business administration after studying music production because I made a promise to my dad that I would do that, and since he paid for school I was ok with that.

John C: Seems like a good deal.

Robbie Rivera: (Laughs) Yeah, it was a very good deal. I could have dropped out but I didn't. Through the last year in college I was already making music and vinyl records and selling them to shops and stuff like that. Then I was trying to sell to labels like Strictly Rhythm and Cutting Records, but all of them would say no. Nobody knows your song... We don't get it... What is that... It sucks... stuff like that. So finally I was like, whatever man, I'll do my own label and we called it R and R Records, the first name I created was that, but my wife said "You need to change it, let's call it 'Juicy.'" We started releasing tracks ourselves and we got a call from a distributor in New York called Watson Music. They were one of the biggest distributors for dance music. So they called me and were like "we don't know who you are but people want to buy your records so come and place an order." So for that whole year, well for two years, you would go to my apartment, still in college, with boxes full of records. The UPS guy would come with his truck and I would give him all the boxes of records and my neighbors would be like "What the fuck is this guy doing in his house?" because the guy would keep coming in and out with boxes. I would be printing labels, you know...this was 10 years ago too, so it wasn't as easy as it is now.

Robbie's Manager: No it wasn't.

Robbie Rivera: Yeah, (laughs), these days you can probably do all this from a freaking app now. But that was a lot of fun man. My wife and I ran the whole label. After that, we were just getting a lot of tracks and a lot of producers. I remember (pauses) man.... I remember when AIM came out, you know the AOL chat, and I remember chatting with Steve Angello, with Axwell, with John Dahlback, and just swapping tracks like that, even David Guetta I remember, and we released tons of tracks from all of these guys back in the day. That was so much fun. You know something interesting? When Beatport first started, I gave them my first track via AIM. You know how you could drag a track onto the chat and transfer it? We were like the 5th label there...and you know what? I got another story. I remember years ago being in a music conference in France called Midem and there was this guy following me everywhere. Well it was the guy from Beatport and I was ignoring him until I finally had spoken to him. It's funny looking back, because Beatport is the shit now.

John C: As a label owner you hold a fairly impactful position for directing the music you choose to release on the label. Looking at electronic music as a whole, Do you think the music has gone in a positive direction?

Robbie Rivera: Right now we are in a great moment. There is a lot of great music coming out – especially in House, Techno, Tech House, and Deep House. All of those genres of music have been fantastic. Over the last few years all of the electro and progressive house just got saturated, you know, I do like that style of music, but everything has started to sound the same so I just stopped paying attention to it, and I think a lot of people did. That is why so many people are looking for new tracks and people are loving house music again, which is great.



John C: In terms of recent artists that have made a name for themselves, Can you name one artist that you think stands out from a production standpoint and another artists that stands out on a DJ Performance standpoint? They can be the same artist or different for each.

Robbie Rivera: Production wise, I like this UK kid, his name is Tom Staar, he produces a mixture of progressive and house, but he is very hypnotic. Being hypnotic, there is a lot of groove to it and it doesn't have the same elements of EDM even though it is classified as EDM. There are a lot of producers that are doing house tracks from Italy that are amazing. DJ wise, I don't go out a lot so I don't see a lot of DJs, but I did get a chance to see my good friend Dubfire, Ali, perform with all his gadgets in the booth. Now I have known him for 10 years and he is an incredibly nice guy. The guy went nuts, it was just awesome watching all of the things he does.

John C: His set up is really nice, he does literally have a command station of controllers between Ableton and Traktor.

Robbie Rivera: Yeah, he is good at it too. I did see a performance from Deadmau5 as well, I was on a trip and watching him perform. That is an artist I really respect and I really like his music.

John C: I will be honest with you, I set you up with that question to see if you would have chosen the same artist or two different artists depending on the role. Do you think that each role are distinct skill sets to base a career on, or do you believe to stand out in today's scene you would have to possess both?

Robbie Rivera: No, I think you have to release music and get your music played everywhere – by a lot of different DJs, a lot of different radio shows, you just have to make music and get it all out there. It used to be a little bit easier back in the day. There were only like 20 producers, and now there are like 500, well really a lot more.



John C: I cover a lot of local artists in my writing for EDM Chicago. Recently one of them provided the idea for an upcoming article. The idea was that as someone who has been in the scene in Chicago for some time (himself), he has noted that the scene in general has lost a lot of the mutual respect for others that used to be present. To clarify, we were discussing the us vs. them attitude that has become prevalent in our music, from the underground vs. mainstage to the vinyl vs. digital. What are your thoughts on the scene's change from your early career?

Robbie Rivera: You know that is a good question because there are a lot of people fighting and talking. This is 'underground!' No this is 'EDM!' ... and stuff like that, or the guy who hates on people playing a lot of pop. I used to also criticize people who played with digital set ups. At this point, if you can rock a crowd and have some originality to you set then go for it – not just opening your set in Ableton and pressing play and throwing your hands in the air, which is a bit pathetic. First of all, you are not enjoying yourself. I know I wouldn't be. When I am performing, I am looking at the crowd and trying to make everyone dance, even the guy in the corner who is alone and bored, I even want him dancing. But this whole fighting over the music, I don't know man... I don't know what is going to happen, it is different. It might be the result of the young generation being very different from back in the day. It's a different world, they are so into our social media and even more so into all of the gossip of what this guy did or what that guy did. It leads to rumors and fake stories, sometimes it is a fake story that hurts someone's career and I have even seen fake stories that boosted someone's career, but there is just a lot more information out there and everyone gives their opinion – it's wild out there. Did I answer your question?

John C: Yes, for the most part, but would you say that this is something that has worsened from the earlier days of your career?

Robbie Rivera: I don't know. I haven't been following what is going on these days in the business with the gossip and stuff, but I can say that early in the day it wasn't like that. Back in the day, there was just some conflict like House vs. Trance DJs: trance DJs saying, "oh you do house?" or the house fan saying, "ugh, you like trance?" You know... now one of the biggest trance DJs does EDM and now he does house, I think we all know who I am talking about. (The group laughs)

John C: Getting back to your music, if you had to go into your catalog and choose just one track you have produced to be the track you are remembered by as an artist, which track would that be?

Robbie Rivera: Funkatron, easily.

John C: Why?

Robbie Rivera: Because this track I did it in my house, in my room, with a really ghetto looking studio and only one keyboard. There was no computer. This one keyboard had a sequencer and a sampler and I had a Mackie board and a recorder. The sounds I had used nobody had used before. I was using what is called now 'side-chaining,' but back in the day no one knew what that was. I actually came across it by mistake, I was thinking "whoa, whoa, what is this doing," but it was side chaining, and it just made the whole track bounce. I finished the track and played it in Miami and the reaction wasn't good. I then played it in Amnesia in Ibiza, and they liked it. When I gave it to Morillo, he was just confused. I started giving it to Ministry of Sound and a bunch of DJs, but nobody wanted it. When I brought it back to Morillo and his label manager and he said "we should release this!" The track really became a huge track and influenced a lot of people. I remember being in Rome having pasta with Benny Benassi and he is telling me "Hey man, I am glad you made that track Funkatron because I copied the shit out of it for 'Satisfaction'"

(We both break into laughter)

Robbie Rivera: That is absolutely a true story too, if you speak with him you can ask him that. I remember being at Ultra Music Festival with Angelo and Ingrosso and having them tell me that they were inspired by my track, 'Funkatron.' That is definitely the track I consider the most special to me.

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John C: Tonight you are performing in Chicago. You have obviously played in many different cities, but is there anything about playing in Chicago that is particularly special or sticks out to you?

Robbie Rivera: Yes, House Music! I can play house music here – I can play whatever the hell I want here and it is appreciated. A lot of my hit songs have been extremely popular here. I have received a lot of support from here too with radio stations like B96, Mixin' Mark is a good friend of mine, he really supported my music since the Crobar days. I really love coming to Chicago, I have always had support here and I think I have played in every club that has been in Chicago.

A special thank you goes out to Robbie Rivera for taking the time to chat. Even with some major delays, he still insured that the interview had enough time prior to taking the stage. Check out his newest track featuring Billy W. "Sexy Anytime," which will be available on December 29th:



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Kaskade, Charlotte Lawrence | 4:01 |
| 4 | Break Me Down
Steve Angello | 3:57 |
| 5 | High
Alison Wonderland, Trippie Redd | 2:54 |
| 6 | Love Someone Else
Nicole Moudaber, Skunk Anansie | 7:10 |

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