

# Notion

Collaboration, Feature

# Danny Howard

In collaboration with



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***Discovered by Radio 1's talent search back in 2011, now flash forward to 2019 just before his performance at Hideout Festival in Croatia, we get to grab a hot seat with British dance music DJ, Producer and BBC Radio 1 Presenter Danny Howard.***

Five hours before a Friday evening slot on Radio 1 and Danny Howard is jovial, albeit a little tense. He's processing everything that needs to be done before 7pm, when he'll be covering for Annie Mac in place of his usual slot at 11pm. "I've always got music coming in and I'm always searching for new tunes, so it's about a week long process before I finalise it all on Friday," he says, making a last few tweaks before settling into our conversation. "But what happens is that I get to Friday afternoon and I'm like, 'Shit, I've got all this music that I want to play but I don't know how I'm actually going to fit it into two hours!' So that's what I'm working out now."

Danny's regular, 11 o'clock show places him at the latter end of Radio 1's Friday night lineup, right after dance legend Pete Tong. It's an accomplishment that he still seems somewhat in awe of, despite the fact that the number of hours he's spent both behind and in front of the decks make this achievement about 15 years in the making.

Above all, Danny is champion of dance music, and his tenacious approach as a producer, tastemaker and broadcaster has seen him dominate lineups from Amsterdam to Ibiza, Chicago to Vegas. Ahead of a busy summer of gigging, festivals and new releases, we jumped on a call with the artist to get to grips with the journey so far.

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Turtleneck MAISON MARGIELA

**You pride yourself on being a tastemaker as much as a musician. What do you look for in new talent?**

I look for a balance of originality mixed with what's popping off in the clubs and what I think would sound big on the radio. When I say originality, obviously there are lots of producers out there who have their own sound, but sometimes it might not quite fit with what I play or what I think the audience will want to listen to. I just want to strike a good balance really, something that I know will fit in nicely but also something that will stand out and prick people's ears up.

**How does the music that you play on the radio and the tracks you play live differ? Is the kind of 'excitement' that you want to generate different?**

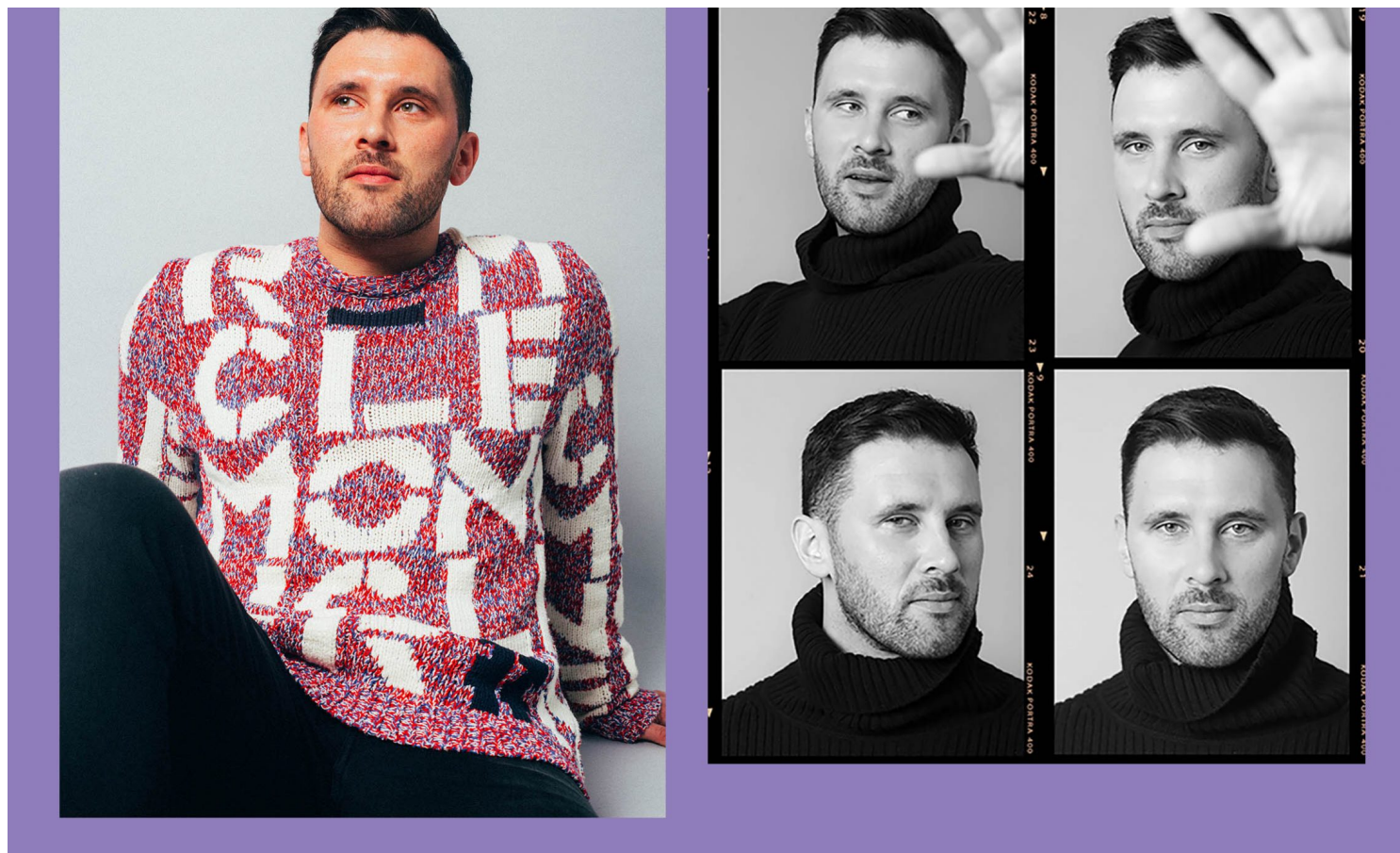
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time of day. Radio is meant to be reflective of mood and people's daily routines. When I cover for Annie Mac like I am tonight at 7pm, people have just finished work and are in their cars driving home, so they'll want to hear big tunes and things that they know. When I do my usual slot at 11pm, people are either on their way to the club or at home having a few drinks with friends or whatever, so you can go a bit underground and a bit deeper. When I'm programming the show it's all about just making sure that the tunes make sense for that time of day and are whatever the audience wants. When you're playing in a club you're of course playing to an audience that's in front of you, so you can see their reaction. If you need to switch it up, you can switch it up; it's instant.

## **Which artists do you think will be big for 2019? Who are you most excited about at the moment?**

For an accessible tip, I'm really proud of CamelPhat. I know they've had a few hits now, but I've championed them since I've started Radio 1, and to see them come through and smash it in the way that they are doing is amazing for them but also a great feeling for someone like me as a broadcaster who can play a small part in that journey. I played all their tunes pre-'Cola', and then when 'Cola' came along I was sitting in for Annie and had the opportunity to make it Hottest Record in the World. I took a gamble on it because I loved the record, and then that summer it blew up and became a massive hit. Since then they've just been untouchable. I think this year is the year for them.

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Jumper MONCLER Trousers BELSTAFF

## Who's your up-and-coming tip?

I would say look out for Prospa. They've been getting a lot of love on Radio 1, and again, I also champion them on the show. At the start of 2018 I named them as my Future Fire artist which is basically like a One to Watch. To see them come through and be on festival lineups like Glastonbury this year is another moment where I'm really glad we could support these boys early on and help them on their journey.

## Talk me through your early experiences with clubbing and dance music, how do you think the scene has evolved over the last 10 years?

First and foremost I'm a raver. I was always watching videos online of everyone from Green Velvet to Tiësto to Carl Cox. I remember Tiësto was playing this gig in an arena in Amsterdam and back then it was quite unheard of for a DJ to play that sort of venue. I just wanted to get into dance music and get out as much as I could, but I was only about 12 at the time. As soon as I was old enough, or, just about old enough, I was straight out in the clubs in Blackpool. We had

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If there was a big DJ, they would play the Syndicate. You never realise how lucky you are at the time to have something like that on your doorstep, but there's nothing really like that in Blackpool anymore.

## **And where did you go from there?**

Once we'd introduced ourselves to the scene on our doorstep, me and three other friends used to travel around every weekend. We'd look online at the listings and we'd travel everywhere, from Cream in Liverpool to AIR in Birmingham to London... Anywhere in the UK really. We'd just go to as many club nights and see as many of our favourite DJs as we could. It was an old school way of doing it; jump in the car on a Saturday morning, go to our destination, rave and then come back Sunday night ready for college on the Monday.

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Turtleneck MAISON MARGIELA

## **There's definitely a new way of consuming music in the internet age. Do you think dance music will ever be at risk of reaching its peak?**

I don't think it's at risk of reaching its peak because what is its peak? Everything works in cycles. House music was ruling the charts 20 year ago, and then in 2019 it's all about house again. Things go in cycles, but it's not as if something is going to reach its peak. Dance music is such a broad genre. There are genres and then there are sub-genres, and then there are sub-genres of that. The culture is too massive to ever be in danger of dying; it's always going to be there. Things just move in different directions, and that's what's great about it. People seek the next new thing, and then the next new thing after that. So it's actually the opposite; dance music is always exciting. It's like, 'What can we discover next? What sound is new? Which artist is hot?' Anyway, hopefully that's the case... I'll be out of a job otherwise!

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covers everything from drum n bass to trance to house and techno. House has its own subgenres... it can be techy, it can be soulful or it can be jazzy or disco. When you're a house DJ it can push and pull you left and right which is what keeps people engaged.

## **How do you apply that push and pull to your work?**

It's particularly fun when it comes to radio. I can afford to be a bit more diverse and experimental. I guess it's also just being aware of the times and what's working, what people want, what the audience wants and adapting from that. There are tunes that I was playing seven years ago that I wouldn't dream of playing now. It's just being aware of what people want and what you're there to represent.

## **You've done some huge residencies. Is it ever a struggle to keep the energy up for each set?**

When you love something so much it's never a struggle. Of course there are times when you're ill or you're tired or you're hungover, but when there's something that you've got to do, in the build-up to it you're going to moan and feel a bit drained, but as soon as you get on the decks it's like someone has flipped a switch and you forget that you were tired or ill. You just do your job and you get involved and immersed in it. And then as soon as you're finished and you walk out the club you're like, "Ugh god, I forgot I was ill." Subconsciously you just get on with it because you love it so much.



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## **How do you go about constructing a set? Is there a particular arc that you tend to follow or do you play it by ear?**

It's spur of the moment to an extent. When I'm on the way to a gig or building up to a gig, there are some tunes where I'm like, 'I definitely want to play that.' The first thing I do is think about what my first tracks are going to be. Your first two or three tracks are probably the most important so I always try and get in my head what I want to do. That could be in the car on the way to the club or it could be as I walk in the room. You might have an idea of what you want to do but then you get in the room and it's completely different vibe so you have to switch it up and adapt. I only ever really think three or four tracks ahead. So, I'll have a record in my head and I'll think, 'Right, can I play this now?' If I can't play it next because it doesn't make sense I'll

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## **what about when it comes to your own music? how do you approach those projects?**

I can get idea down in a few hours, but it's a process. These days, with the technology we have, a producer can make a track within an hour, but it's much more than an hour. Getting the idea is the hard bit, but then you've got to test it out in the club, tweak it and make sure it actually works. Right now we've got a lot of generic, below-par, average music, and I think producers are too quick to put stuff out because they feel a pressure that they won't get any gigs or make any money if that don't. We're sort of flooded by all of this generic shit. It's important to take time, get the track to a point where you're happy with it, and then just sit on it. Don't think, 'Right I've finished it, let's get it out.' I think sit on it. You've made it. Once you've released it there's a high chance that it could be forgotten about in a few weeks. You've got to make it your own and get people excited and get people who follow you aware of it so when it does feel right to release it there's hype there and you're not having to gas it up yourself. You want an organic demand for it. I've got a track at the moment that I'm playing. I've put a couple of videos up online on my Instagram. It's called 'Beat Control' – it's a sample of an old 2 Unlimited track that my Mum used to play around the house. I'm already getting messages from DJs and people asking what it is or when they can get it, and that's really exciting for me. It means that there's a demand for it there. That's what producers should do.

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Jumper MONCLER Trousers BELSTAFF

**I guess when people don't bother to do what you've just described, that's when dance music is at risk of reaching its peak, because people are sacrificing innovation to be able to just churn something out.**

Yeah. I don't release that much music but when I do I want to make sure that it's right. I did a collaboration with Mark Knight last year called 'You Can Do It Baby' and that stayed in the Beatport Top 100 for nearly six months. I think it's only just dropped out now. For me, in this market, that's incredible, because most tracks come and go within a month or so. The fact that that track stuck around was amazing to me. We made it this time last year and we both played it all summer, but we didn't release it until November. If there's one bit of advice I can give to producers it would be make a track, tweak it, play it, hammer it and then sit on it. Treat it like your baby.

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platform that I never thought I'd be able to achieve and it's enabled me to do so many things, see so many places, meet so many people and it's something that I'll always cherish and love so hopefully it'll continue!

## **Tell me about Nothing Else Matters. What prompted you to launch it?**

Oh god. I don't know whether to tell the real story or the 'official story' for this one. Nothing Else Matters But The Music was the original tag line which came from a night out that I had with my friends years and years ago. There was a night in particular that we went to in Birmingham. On this occasion we went to see Erick Morillo. I was going through quite a tough time that particular weekend and I did my first pill that night. I came out, and my friends obviously knew about it and were like, "So, how was your night? How did it feel?" And I was like, "Wow, it was like, nothing else mattered but the music!" It sounds really cheesy, but that's the real story! That's where the name came from. I wanted the name to come from an experience. We started a club night and called it Nothing Else Matters. We did a show in Manchester and London and that's where it all started.

## **How has it evolved since then?**

The record label happened and we did a deal with Sony, but it never quite worked out so I pulled it out of Sony last October and we're about to relaunch fully independent this summer. We've a lot of good music, so watch this space for Nothing Else Matters.

## **What else have you got lined up for the rest of 2019?**

I guess the label is the biggest one. I'm really excited to do it independently and I've got lots of great music and a lot of up-and-coming artists as well as established artists, so look out for that. I've also got my own music coming which I'm going to be releasing on my own label. I've got another collaboration with Mark Knight following up from 'You Can Do It Baby' and of course the Radio 1 show. Then I've just got lots of gigs really. I'm going to be in Ibiza a lot playing lots of amazing festivals. It's all good and it's all go.

**[Catch Danny Howard playing at Hideout Festival between the 1st – 5th of July 2019.](#)**

Tags