

STEP INTO MY PARLOUR



By Shaun Proulx

SHAUN PROULX TALKS TO JUNIOR VASQUEZ



Name a DJ other than **Junior Vasquez** who has held the world's attention for so long. Here is a man whose reputation precedes him – about five miles before he walks in a room. Arguably the most famous DJ in the world, Vasquez is a legend in his own time for many things: Beginning in the late 1980's he practically created the worldwide DJ movement that has transfixed music lovers, today inspiring turntablists not even born back then. Throughout his roller-coaster career he has created new mixing techniques, and written, produced and remixed songs for artists ranging from Madonna to Whitney Houston, Cher, and Janet Jackson, to name just a few.

But Vasquez's reputation has two sides to it. His enormous ego. His temper. His admittedly outrageous fees. When I interviewed DJ Bill Bennett for *Xtra* late last year, he shared a story with me that sounded vintage Vasquez: A party-promoter pal of Bennett's in the U.S. hired Vasquez at a cost of \$30,000 to open a new nightclub. According to Bennett, in a fit of rage over something, Vasquez abandoned his gig at two in the morning.

Here in Toronto, Vasquez was a no-show for a much-publicized gig just last year.

When I chatted with him on the phone recently, the person I got was a man at a crossroads. The past year has been an interesting one for Vasquez, namely because he's been sober for the first time in six years. He chain-smoked throughout the interview, sounding tired, reflective, and indecisive, while at the same time hopeful; indeed his new album, *White Party 7*, contains the happiest sounds we've heard from him in a long while.

Among many other things, Vasquez shared with me the battle he has fought over his addiction to crystal meth, his near-brush with death last year in a Texas airport, and his thoughts on the age-old story about his supposed feud with Madonna that just won't go away.



Is it safe to say I'm talking to a new Junior Vasquez?



Meaning my head is clear? Junior revived, I guess. Or alive.



Did it sometimes feel like you weren't living?



When I did crystal meth for all those years I didn't realize I was missing out on my life.



How long has it been since you last did Tina?



I'm sober one year this weekend.



Congratulations.



Now I can go through gay pride and my birthday and all that shit's in the past. Before I was thinking: how am I going to get through those things without crystal? I'm having more problems giving up cigarettes.



Was meth a party drug for you? A sex drug?



It was work drug. For me, I did it to stay awake and stay focused. It was a catch- 22. I thought I needed it to stay focused, but I wasn't focused because I was on it. Then add in the Xanax. I did it to play, to stay focused. My sets got outrageous. You're playing eighteen to twenty hours, which is insane.




How many times a week would you do meth?



Every day. Maintenance bumps as I call it. You'd have your black Tuesdays. Ash Wednesdays. Holy Thursday and then Good Friday. Thank god it's here again.



Describe the new Junior.



I like music again. Before I hated it. I didn't go record shopping at all. I'm enjoying mixing and producing. I'm in a relationship, which I couldn't have before. I don't get triggered as much now. I lost six years, so I'm trying to pay attention and enjoy things. Sometimes it's a struggle. I'm always too worried about what others are doing, instead of what I'm doing. I'm very competitive. I used to flip out over everything. I take a step back now. I have a theory about the things that went wrong in my life: this too shall pass. Meaning I survived it once. I still find it an uphill struggle, because the party scene hasn't slowed down. There are after hours clubs everywhere and I feel like I'm missing out on things, things I started. But I don't want to get back in the scene. I don't know what I'd be up against. It's not about judging what other people do. I just want my life to be different. I also have to think about my retirement.




How old are you?



Fifty-six.




Describe the old Junior.



Tweaker. *(Laughs.)* That was a period through Twilo and Exit and I was at the top of the game but I was all about getting high and so were my friends. I was just fucked up. I thought I was doing good and wasn't. But you have a close call with death and you wake up.




Tell me about that.



Less than a year ago I was supposed to do a three-city thing with Las Vegas and Miami and back to New York, and I had a seizure in Texas. I bit my tongue out of my face in an airport getting off an airplane. Scared the shit out of my manager. I went to hospital, but was so fucked up I checked myself out and went to my New York gig. I felt like my whole body was in a hole.




Then you were *really* high when this happened.



That was the straw. My body was so messed up. My joints were dried up. I was taking so many drugs. I didn't know what to do.




It takes a big fucking man to pick himself up from that. And if I may say, in your case, a man with a big ego to boot.



(Long pause.) Thanks.



You are synonymous with drama on the dance floor. Was all of that, all of your negative history, because of meth?



No, I was always like that. I've always had drama. My competitive nature and the drama took me to where I am today.



Do you regret all that drama?



No, I don't regret anything. A tiny bit of regret was going to both my parent's funerals high. That might be part of the reason.



You lost your last years with them because you were never sober.



And then I buried them - while I was high. Throwing crystal packets out the limo window on the way there. *(Long pause.)* And worrying my brother and sisters. That I regret. But still I enjoyed those years.



Your sobriety over the last year has been well publicized. Do you feel you have any fans to win back?



No, I don't think so. I do have a fan base and I think they love to hate me sometimes. Some think I'm good, some think I should just do after-hours. Someone else said I should get out of my coma. That came from a tweaker, but I can't pay attention to that. I'd rather have three hundred people appreciate me over a thousand who don't get it. That's my attitude. I can't please everyone, that's obvious. But I sure have pleased a lot of people over the years.



You've also pissed them off. A friend of mine once threw water bottles with his friends at your DJ booth because they thought your playing sucked so badly. What was it like to be up there in your shoes when that happened?



That was Miami?



Yes it was.



That wasn't my territory. I threw candles back. I think that was the first part of when I was getting high. It just wasn't my territory, it was the wrong venue and that wasn't good. I don't know what they were expecting out of me.




Is god a DJ?



I suppose. He's everything, isn't he? DJs are gods, I guess




I looked you up on Wikipedia and the whole section about you focused exclusively on the infamous falling out you had with Madonna and the song "If Madonna Calls". Isn't that old news?




Yeah, but that was also pre-crystal. That was way before that. It spiraled and is way bigger than everyone makes it to be. Her and I remain friends whether I did that song or not. She would have moved on because she just moves on to who ever is current. I don't regret any of that publicity. We're alike that way. I still do her songs.




I've been listening to your compilation, *White Party 7* – that's a happier sound, coming from you.



Well, I think I've always been spiritual or gospelly in my music, even through the dark period. I just like gospel house. But I think *White Party 7* is for that audience,




You're one of the original greats – where do you go from here?



Well, into retirement. No. I guess ... (*Pauses*) I don't know. Oblivion, I guess.




Comment on the fact that it seems everyone and their mother wants to be a DJ.



Yeah. Good luck. Because technology makes it very easy now. There's always a price. The fees I demand are outrageous. I wouldn't do it now. There's no life in it. We're not looked at as gods anymore. The DJ market is too saturated. But it's hard to stop DJ-ing; I enjoy the showbiz part. It's extremely difficult to give up the spot light.



Why do you call the fees you demand 'outrageous'?



It's a lot of money ... it's \$10,000 and up. I don't get out of bed for less than that.



Thank you, Linda Evangelista. Do you think you're worth it, Junior?



Absolutely.