



RISK JOCKEY

Über DJ/remixer Junior Vasquez
unleashes earth-shattering mixes and
gears up for Pride. By A. Blair Boone
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANN LICHTENSTEIN

Every Sunday morning at his party *Earth*, über DJ/remixer Junior Vasquez, the reigning King of Afterhours, proves he doesn't just feel the beat like no other — he commands it. For well over a decade, Junior has transformed a seemingly ordinary night out at the clubs into a dramatic event resembling an evening at *Cirque du Soleil*. With singing acts, celebrity impersonators, dancers, acrobatic performers and a gigantic video screen on stage that plays a variety of images from music videos to scenes from *Sex & The City*, the superstar DJ has maintained an unparalleled legacy in nightlife. But the mix master is about to step into a new arena as he prepares for his first Heritage of Pride Dance on the Pier, an annual outdoor event that could be one of the most defining moments of his legendary career. "I am flattered. I've never even been to the Pier Dance before..." Vasquez says lightly, but then without missing a beat, he adds with pride, "And now I am the Pier Dance."

The much-talked about and eagerly anticipated New York Pride attracts over 500,000 people for the weekend's events at the end of June. Previous years' Pier Dance DJs have included David Knapp, Monty Q, and Susan Morabito. Rob Ladd Jr., this year's Dance Chair, says, "The selection process was very competitive. The com-



mittee reviewed entries from all over. We are very excited to have Junior join us this year. We have never had a caliber of DJ quite like Junior. His support of our community and his incredible ability to transform music, creating a new art form, was a major factor in our selection of Junior for this year's DJ." He aims to silence any skeptics by adding, "Junior will know what to play. You wouldn't serve breakfast at dinner. You might not get tea-dance, you may get classics instead. But he will know what to play." Junior's relentless tenacity in the remixing world has landed him work with some of the greatest talents in pop culture like Cher, Madonna, Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston, The Pet Shop Boys and Elton John. His significant connections have already produced a secret list of possible celebrity performers that's sure to top last year's guest singer Deborah Gibson.

His popular weekly party *Earth* at New York City's Exit, the largest club in the United States, will undoubtedly benefit from Junior's appearance at the Pier Dance. While thousands of revelers absorb the best of Junior under the sun, the *Earth* party afterwards will show another aspect of the turntablist's diverse style. Fans and critics agree that at his best, Junior's ability to properly arrange the order of a variety of musical genres is unparalleled. From gospel to anthems to tribal to hard house, he even manages an occasional flirtation with a good old-fashioned Motown oldie or one-of-a-kind New York bitch-track for the more savvy listener and voguing queen. Industry insiders say what places Junior ahead of the competition isn't just his diverse knowledge of contemporary music, nor his in-depth research for the obscure track, but his natural restlessness with current music trends and tastes. "Right now I'm into a less produced sound, it's sort of going back to what Sound Factory once was," Junior explains.

His restlessness first showed itself in the early 70s when Junior, fresh from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, began pursuing a career in fashion at F.I.T. in New York. Frustrated early on, he turned to his first love, music, to lose himself. "I've always been interested in music. Music is like fashion. It's always going to repeat itself." In the beginning, he tracked the careers, and emulated the sounds, of DJs like Larry Levan of The Paradise Garage. But Junior's ambivalence toward a variety of DJs makes him quick to point out, "I'm only influenced by what I like." Eventually, he created a legacy for New York City nightlife that began with Bassline, The Sound Factory, Tunnel, Twilo and his current residency, the party *Earth* at Exit. His most notable tours have taken him to South Beach, Europe and Japan, gaining him praise worldwide. As for making a serious love connection — who's got time? Today, Junior continues to remain faithful to his first love — music. While working, there simply isn't room for anything else.

Rocky relationships, power plays over clubs, and poor management in the past, have forced Junior to develop a demanding air. Known more for his uncompromising atti-

tude than for his humility, Junior denies rumors regarding his reputation. "The biggest misconception is that I am a bitch on wheels at the turntables." He says this idea stems from the fact that people confuse Vasquez's focused attention for bitchiness. "I'm the first to admit that I create a lot of the viciousness," he says. "I'm very territorial." A sign on the door of his old DJ booth that reads 'I am 51% sweetheart, 49% bitch, don't push it!' conveys Junior's real spirit. The true drama is found in his music.

Some may consider the Sound Factory or Twilo stint as the height of his DJ career, but Junior disagrees. "There is more happening now than there was back in those days." He remembers these venues fondly but doesn't get lost in the past. "I don't get it when I see people wearing Twilo T-shirts at Earth... they mean well — it's paying homage in a way." Similarly, he doesn't lament over not having any foreseeable projects with some stars he once worked closely with like Madonna. After *Strictly Rhythm* released the witty underground club hit "If Madonna Calls" where a voice portraying Madonna leaves repeated messages for Junior, their dynamic relationship slowed to a standstill. Madonna's camp fell silent on the subject of Junior and new projects were sent to other DJs. Junior sums it up as an honor to work with some of the big artists, but goes on to say "when a project is done — it's over. If they call in the future, that's great, but if not, they have their reasons." In any event, Junior remains busy with possible upcoming projects with supermodel Naomi Campbell, designer Donatella Versace and a show in Soho at the Deutsche Gallery featuring his work as an artist before DJ stardom. "It's kinda like a look at the man behind the man," Junior laughs.

Apart from his preparation for the Pride Pier Dance, his biggest efforts recently have been collaborating with the manager of his own record label JVM, Jerome Farley and Tommy Boy Records to produce his CD, *Earth Music*.

And after Pride, what's next? One thing is for certain as he thinks about his future, he will remain a fixed figure in House music and in the public eye for just as long as he sees fit to be there. History and the sheer number of gay and straight fans he continues to draw speaks for itself. The name *Earth* almost limits the range of his music that seems to push toward the horizon, creating its own universe. While his original sounds continue to attract a huge number of fans, he also eclipses the competition and inspires a new generation of DJs and remixers. But Junior recognizes the added exposure Pride will bring to him. "I am also scared to death. People think that I don't get worried about these things, but I do. It's a big event. It's not just New Yorkers, there are people from out of town, gay, gay friendly, freaks, fag hags, everybody is there." Rest assured, this summer Junior will make waves and have both New Yorkers and out-of-towners alike screaming, "Don't you want some more... Oh yeah!" ♦