



Catching up with Paul van Dyk

The Grammy Award-winning DJ-music producer talks about his new album, where his luck *might* come from, the worst part of the business and more

Words by Vanessa Pascale · Photo Credit: Christoph Köstlin

Paul van Dyk recently made his rounds here in Miami for Winter Music Conference, a “tradition” that begins at Space on Friday night, is followed by a boat party Saturday, and then ends at Ultra on Sunday. Paul loves coming down to Florida since it has one of the longest and strongest electronic music scenes, he tells me as he reminisces about playing in Gainesville, Orlando, and Miami since the early 90s. While in the Magic City, he normally stays in Brickell, since it’s conveniently located near downtown. Fond of the area, he’s flirted with the idea of getting an apartment in here. “We’re not there yet,” laughs the 43-year old, during our chat this past February at Lobby Lounge in Mandarin Oriental New York.

When Paul is not jetting from city to city and various countries around the world to DJ for massive crowds, he spends half his time in Los Angeles and the other half in Berlin. During this time, he is also producing new albums like, *The Politics of Dancing 3*, which comes out May 4th. The third in a series, he describes it as a DJ mix compilation. “For the first one, I took music from other people and remixed it all and then mixed it together.” This one is different. “Instead of somebody sending me their music and me remixing it, I actually went to the studio with the people so I could make new music. Essentially, it’s an artist album, that name-wise is still linked to the original concept, but it’s kinda an evolution of it,” Paul explains.

How would you describe your music? I ask. “It’s energetic. It’s always subjective. I always try to put as much substance into what I do. It’s danceable—a lot of people say its trance music. I’m not a typical techno guy, but I have techie beats. I’m not EDM, but I have a poppy hook... I think most people would consider me a trance DJ—some people are even blaming me for it.” He laughs.

Paul is still in high spirits from the great turnout for his show the night before, despite the fact that he’s dealing with a cold. “There was a

moment I was clearing my nose [last night at his show] and my ears popped and I was kinda like, *Ok, everything sounds weird now*. It was a bit like a water bubble. But it was amazing,” he beams. From New York, Paul flies back to L.A. then to Dubai, Europe, back to the U.S., Asia and Australia—and that’s only his schedule till April. He knows all this because he just had a look at the calendar before meeting with me. The waitress comes by and Paul orders a café latte.

One item he often has with him while traveling, that is not music-related, is a book. He is currently reading, *The Journey Home*, which was recommended to him. “I like reading because I imagine what it looks like, what they are describing, so that occupies my brain, therefore I’m not in business-mode or whatever. I can relax the best because I’m diving into that world. I’m walking that little path in that book, that’s what I like about it.” I ask him about his passions outside of music, and he takes a moment to answer. “I think that when you’re a really passionate musician, then that’s the passion. Somehow everything sort of revolves around music... I like good food. I make good soups.” He smiles and laughs. Growing up in East Germany, Paul learned to make something tasty out of almost nothing. “People say my soups are good,” he adds.

While talking about other favorites, I discover that Paul and I share the same favorite T.V. show. “I’m a big fan of *The Big Bang Theory*,” Paul confesses enthusiastically. “I’m not such a freak as Sheldon, but I can be. Let’s put it this way, I have a really weird way of saying things like he does.” Happy to have “another geek” around, he feels that Sheldon’s behavior has made his own more universally accepted. “I’ve had some funny, raised-eyebrows [before],” he says with a chuckle. “Now, it’s like an established way of speaking.” As for movies, he gets to catch up on those while on the plane. The latest one he caught was *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay- Part 1*.



Do you have a favorite restaurant?

"A lot—in LA there's a Korean BBQ place, in Miami an Italian restaurant run by Argentineans on Flagler, opposite of the court house. I like sushi too. In Berlin there is a great restaurant that makes soups, I get inspired."

You have been doing this for so long and have a list of accolades, what stands out as your biggest 'WOW' moment?

"I've had some crazy, major, super-duper, mega wow things. The stuff that means even more to me as a person, as well as an artist when I'm in the studio is the dedication and passion they [fans] seem to have for my music. Just yesterday there were people virtually from all over the world, a whole group from Argentina that came... They came from everywhere. There were people that actually tried to come up from Miami and they had to take four different flights. They had this whole thing of tickets because everything was oversold, canceled, a journey through the states—and their passion. Also, when people tattoo themselves with lyrics of my songs on some body part—*this* is more like, Wow-moments, because you can't just take the tattoo off. Of course, it's a great feeling when you're on a big stage, and there's a lot of people and they enjoy the music you make, but to me, the little intimate things actually have an even bigger wow impact."

How do you know that your fans traveled so far? Do you talk to them?

"Obviously with Facebook and Twitter, there's a lot of *Hey, I'm stranded here and I'm there*. Some of these guys from the U.S. group have seen me 100 times. They've really been everywhere, wherever I play in the US, I see them. They're going to be in San Diego and LA next week."

Wow! So you recognize them?

"Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Of course. Of course. Sometimes it's like, *Is that person looking very similar?* No, it's actually them. It's great, and it gives a homey feeling wherever I go."

Are you responsive on social media? Do you interact?

"With Facebook you always have to be careful, if you write too much your algorithm goes bonkers and then nobody sees anymore what you actually write. Twitter, yeah, it's me responding to the direct questions and comments and stuff. Of course, we also use it to tell people, *hey, new record is here and there*, but it is mainly a direct contact."

Best part of the job?

"Best? I get to do what I love doing, worldwide, and I'm even paid for it—it's great [laughs]."

Worst part?

"When you're an artist, you express yourself through your art form. Obviously, there is one person, especially with the internet, you always seem to find people that lose a common sense of respect for each other in how they attack, write, comment, whatsoever, and they seem to forget that despite that they might hold a CD or have a download of some album, I'm an artist who is actually passionate about what I do. And sometimes these things, I don't let them too close of course, but they hurt, you know? If you're making music with the right passion, then you give a lot personal things into the music, and obviously if somebody is like [he makes a splat sound], it's painful. It's like you're telling someone, *This is important to me*. And this person is just like, *ha, ha, ha*. But I guess every artist has that—if you do paintings, photography or whatever... But then on the other hand, what I just described with the fans and stuff, there's so much of that. I love what I do and I'm very, very lucky and I know that."

To what do you owe your success; are there any words that you live by or words of advice that have kept you in the business for so long?

"I have a great team that I work with. All these things that I'm doing I couldn't do on my own. I'm very dedicated to what I do, so I'm focused as much as enjoying it. I just love what I do and I think it's just coming across. I'm not some kind of marketing muppet. As much as I sit here now, I was on stage yesterday. I'm not playing someone else's role. I think this is authentic and this is probably why people are relating to it and connecting to my music and to me as an artist."

Does the constant traveling ever get tiring?

"It gets tiring every time, but the energy again, I'm really lucky. They [the fans] give so much energy. Yesterday, I was really sick, there were moments when [he makes a sick feeling sound] and then you see how much it means to my audience, what I do and then I'm jumping like a little flower boy. It is tiring, of course, plane, hotel, plane, show, in and out—but as an artist to have a global audience. It is great!"

Do you get to see a lot of places while you're traveling for work?

"We try to find time in the day to see a few things, but when it's tour mode it's focusing on that. Last time we went to Australia and drove through The Twelve Apostles, rocks in the oceans, Philip Island and saw kolas and weird stuff. We do stuff. We try. This is all a source of inspiration. It all ends up—like *that* little sound goes back to the kola that pooped on my tour manager. They don't move, and then they turn around and there's another day. In that moment, my tour manager passed, and [he makes a splat sound]. I'm a very well-liked victim of birds flying around and losing it. I've had it a few times. People say it's good luck. Now we know—*that's* my secret to success, constantly getting shits from birds. Yeah, [laughs]—these are the stories and many more." **ML**