



WORK HARD. PLAY WELL.

Dutch DJ-Producer Hardwell talks about being labeled the world's #1 DJ two years in a row, career highlights, and favorites

Words by Vanessa Pascale

Robbert van de Corput, or Hardwell as he's best known, is dressed in a black tee and black pants. The 28-year-old is having pre-show drinks with his entourage in the corner of a large, practically empty room. Through the wall, the bass-heavy set played by the opening DJ inside Marquee New York can be heard. It's just before midnight, still a couple of hours before the Dutch DJ-producer takes the stage, when Hardwell's tour manager steals him away from his coterie and escorts him to where I'm seated for our chat. He is composed and unassuming, despite being given the impressive label, World's #1 DJ in *DJ Magazine's* annual Top 100 DJs poll in 2013 and 2014.

Later on, I will see him in his element: behind the decks. Phones concurrently spring into the air as soon as he appears to record video and snap photos of the DJ playing in front of a screen projecting colorful graphics. His music, which he describes as "euphoric, energetic, sometimes emotional, electro-house," overwhelms the packed venue and hypnotizes the crowd. "How Deep Is Your Love" booms through the speakers, and hands reach for the ceiling. *This* is a typical night for the Dutch DJ. When he's not traveling the globe playing sold-out shows for his massive following (he has 8.3 million Facebook followers, 3.4 million Instagram followers, and 2.8 million Twitter followers), he's in Breda—a small city close to Belgium where he was born and raised. "All my family and friends live there—that's what I call home."

This March, Hardwell premiered his new single "Run Wild" in Miami at the Winter Music Conference and brought fans a virtual reality 360 video live stream experience. "A lot of festivals right now are doing live streams and we want to take it to another level. You can watch it on your phone, your computer. You're actually *in* the party. It's like 360, so you can look wherever you want. I think it's definitely the future," he tells me about the option available to those who can't attend the show due to it being sold-out or too far to travel to. Miami was like a vacation for him, where he could catch up with fellow DJ friends like Zedd, Skrillex, Tiësto, and Martin. "We're all good friends—like one big family... We don't see each other that often and when we bump into each other on festivals it's always like one minute. The other guy has to play on that stage, the other guy has to play on that stage, so it's always really busy and in Miami we're always a week off."

You mentored under Tiësto.

Hardwell: "Yeah, Tiësto mentored me. He was always my role model. He was one of the guys that got me into EDM when I was 12 and he's always been a big inspiration for me. That's like my big brother."

You were #1 DJ two years in a row. How do you think you got there?

Hardwell: "Hard work. Dedication. I think that's it."

How do you think you beat out everyone? What sets you apart?

Hardwell: "It's not about beating everyone 'cause to me, it's not really a competition. People always say 'Best DJ in the World,' that's not the best DJ. At that point, you're the most popular DJ. I think one of the reasons I became #1 DJ, I was the first guy of the new generation that really popped up... Before me, the other DJs were 40-45, around that age, and I was like one of the first young guys that represented a new generation. I think that's one of the reasons why. You vote through Facebook and my generation grew up with Facebook, so it's not really fair to the older guys 'cause they don't have a fan base like that on social media. So, that's one of the reasons—besides hard work and putting out great music, playing great sets."

What do you think people would be surprised to find out about you?

Hardwell: "That I started as a hip-hop DJ 'cause I fell in love with the art of deejaying, scratching, turntablism. Playing hip-hop is so much more difficult than playing to house tracks. So I started out with playing hip-hop 'cause I wanted to learn how to scratch and everything."

Besides the usual stuff, what do you always travel with?

Hardwell: "I think my Nintendo 3DS. On airplanes when I get bored, I'm a big fan of Nintendo, so I play *Zelda*, *Mario Kart*, all those games."

Do you have any rituals before you go on stage?

Hardwell: "Having fun! [he says excitedly] That's really it. It sounds weird, but I always, as you can see, do a couple of drinks. I like to be surrounded by positive people, positive energy. Get in the mood. I always try to get my friends with me on the road and just have fun before I go on stage."

What can we expect this year?

Hardwell: "A lot of new music. I'm working on a second album, but it's not going to be released this year. It takes more time to finish that album. The normal stuff."

Any collaborations?

Hardwell: "A lot of collaborations, big collaborations, as well. But I'm still working on that. It's all going to be a part of the second album."

Are you watching anything on TV?

Hardwell: "*Better Call Saul* on Netflix. It's the lawyer from *Breaking Bad* who has his own series right now. They just released the second season."

Who are you listening to?

Hardwell: "That really depends on my day. Most of the time, I like to listen to reggae. I like to be surprised with new music. I listen to a lot of hip-hop and R&B stuff."

What has been the highlight of the last year?

Hardwell: "Last year, releasing my first debut album, my first artist album. Starting my new I am Hardwell World Tour, and definitely I think the biggest highlight was my foundation. I started my foundation United We Are. We did the world's biggest guest list show in India. We put 100,000 people on the guest list and all the money we raised went straight to education for the youth in India. We're definitely going to do more shows like that in different countries." **ML**