

House Music, As Mikki Afflick Sees It...

We are honored to feature Mikki Afflick, House Empress, in this month's issue of Deep House Magazine. Mikki whose musical career spans over four decades in the genres of Soul, Disco, Club and House – on the past, present, and future of House music speaks candidly with us.



PAST

Mikki's roots started in Panama where she was born. Her dad joined the U.S. military to provide a better way of life for his family. While he was in the service, Mikki was raised by her mom and grandparents in Panama until her dad brought his family to Brooklyn, New York when Mikki was five.

"My early exposure to music came from my dad. He was a partner in a club that would have basement parties. He would also have two-day parties Friday night into Sunday morning, until 6am or 7am Sunday. It was the time of the Black Power movement in the early and mid 1970's.

It was a time when you would see speakers in windows as you walked to school. It was the day of going to the Empire Roller Skating Rink on Saturday afternoon in Brooklyn with pom poms on your roller skates."

The House Empress, Mikki Afflick.

PAST

Meet Mikki Afflick

CHILDHOOD

When I was about 9 years old, my grandmother would give me money and I would save that money so I could go to the neighborhood record store to buy 45's. They were about 50 cents a record back then. Then later 12" vinyl which cost \$2.99-\$3.49. I would go without lunch to buy my records. One night, during one of my dad's two-day parties, his system stopped working. I went to my bedroom and got my little all-in-one turntable set up, and man I had the people going crazy! They started calling me "LaMarr Renee " from WBLS, one of the female pioneer disc jockeys.

I started playing instruments at a young age when I got an organ from my mom's Godfather. I never got any formal lessons, but I would be playing the crap out of that organ. You couldn't tell me anything! I would have my sister sitting right next to me and I would tell her, "Hit this one, hit that one." She wasn't even two years old, but I had her with me banging on that organ. I was writing music, of course, I didn't know what I was doing, but I was doing it! I was writing a symphony!

When I was 12 years old, and since I had very good grades, my dad bought me a dual cassette recorder as a gift. When he gave it to me, it opened a whole new world. I would listen to the radio stations and with me having this dual cassette, I could do what is now known as editing. My dad heard a few edited tapes and would ask me, "Where did you get that?" I said, "I made it." He said "What do you mean you made it? How?" I told him that I just went back and forth on the recorder and cut the tape and glued it with clear nail polish. I didn't realize then that what I was doing was editing. The very first tape I did was with the song by Tavares, "Heaven Must Be Missing an Angel." I just loved that song as a kid, I don't know why but I did.



**Early Producer In The Making -
Mikki teaches her baby sister how
to play the organ while writing a
symphony.**

When my family moved to Spring Creek on the border of East New York, I didn't have many friends. Coming from where I grew up – in an urban area – where we played outside, the kids in this new neighborhood seemed a little bougie. They didn't play outside and didn't know any of the street games. I was like "Oh man I don't like it here," so I stayed in my room with my radio, and watched my favorite TV show, The Sonny and Cher Show. I couldn't wait for Sundays to watch it. Cher was and still is my all-time favorite artist. Music became my everything. I was a loner; it was just me and my music. One of the few friends I had lived across the street and her father was a music collector. I tell you this man had a record collection that took up the whole living room, shelves and more shelves, wall-to-wall vinyl. I'd never seen anything like it in my life.

I would ask him "Who's this group, who's that?" He would tell me to go ahead and play his records. He had early Chicago, Linda Ronstadt, and my favorite band, The Allman Brothers. That's how I got into rock music, from his collection. I would later in life go on to meet and sit down and talk with Greg Allman a few years ago before his passing.

Into Adulthood-The Music Way

I always thought my dad had a huge record collection, but this man had a record shop in his house. The only other person who had more vinyl than my friend's father was my childhood friend, then later my DJ mentor John Juliano Jr. – DJ Hassan aka Peno. This was the New York promoter Nini Eternal Sol's husband. He also played at the Ozone Layer with David Morales in the early '80s.

I was the avant-garde, bohemian, punk rock, kid, who didn't fit into any cliques or follow the way other kids dressed or acted in my neighborhood. I was in my own world. I guess I've never really changed. In music, I found my escape.

In high school, I had a friend named Yvette and she had a brother named Vinny who had a DJ set up in his room. We would leave school and go to her house. The girls would be doing one thing, mainly talking about clothes and boys, but I wanted to be in the room with the guys learning the true art of beat-mixing music. Vinny taught me how to scratch, how to bring it back and forth, how to hear the first beat in the groove, and how to ride records. Everybody had two turntables and a mixer. My dad had a set up too. He had two belt drive Technics and a Gemini mixer. I was learning how to DJ battle in Brooklyn, it was no joke! It was serious business. Back in those days, where you came from in Brooklyn was how you DJ'd. Flatbush DJs played differently from Bed Stuy or Brownsville DJs. Your "hood" was your signature style. I was with the Flatbush DJs although I lived in a different area in Brooklyn.

During my last year of high school, and in my first year of college, I got bit by the Paradise Garage bug. It changed my life to the point that when I was supposed to go away to college, even after my parents paid tuition, room and board, I was like "Nope I ain't trying to go upstate and miss the Garage." I got bit by that bug so bad that I got thrown out of the house. My dad put me out because he got angry that I kept coming home late. He told me "You keep testing me, you keep coming home later and later, next time you stay where you're coming from!" I went out that Saturday night, Larry Levan played an edit I did. I planned on being home by noon, but I was so excited, celebrating with friends. My friends said, "You're already in trouble, you might as well stay out." I made it home by 9:30pm Sunday after leaving out Saturday late evening. My dad had packed up all my belongings, all my vinyl, and my clothes and left them on the front lawn, out in the rain. I had no place to go, but to a friend. The trains stopped running because it was raining so badly and all I had was \$20 in my pocket. I took a cab to Manhattan to live with my friend in her dorm room. I was crying in the back of the cab. I thought about jumping out and not paying. I told the cab driver what happened and that all I had was \$20. He said "I'm not going to charge you, but promise me you'll make something of yourself, don't be out there doing drugs or having a bunch of babies." I promised him.

Disco was fading and a new style of music was being heard. Not to get into who made House music first, but in New York and New Jersey, we had our own thing going on. We called it Club Music. Boyd Jarvis and Timmy Regisford by Visual, "The Music's Got Me". Timmy Regisford, Merlin Bobb, and John Robinson on WBLS, in New Jersey Tony Humphries at Club Zanzibar and Kiss FM, artists like Temper-Anthony Malloy's "Don't Do Me No Favors", Colonel Abrams, "The Music's Got Me", this was all early Club "House" music. We called it Club music back then.

If New York City was the king of nightlife how the hell would we not have our own style of music? I have deep roots in New Jersey in my early years of DJ'ing. I dated a New Jersey promoter who threw loft parties downtown Newark in the early '80s and was their resident DJ.



Mikki DJing at a private celebrity party in the 1980's.

PRESENT

I am truly growing into my greatness. Having had two near-fatal accidents back-to-back in 2011 and then one year later in 2012. It has taken me years to get myself together. I've been doing a lot of inner work and soul-searching because, at the end of the day, I have to be pleased with myself. I can't look for other people to validate me. I've been working on a healthier me, including working on weight loss and a better way of eating. It's been a long, close to two-year journey. I'm still striving to reach my goals. I'm doing this for myself. This is how I feel about my music. I use making music as my healing mechanism. Each track I produce is therapeutic for me. They are my babies. It's sometimes been hard for me to share them with the world.

To show you how long I held on to music, I just released a track produced by my two nieces, on my record label Soul Sun Soul Music which was established in 2009. I had it for about 10 years. I released it on my album called "Lost Road Trip" Volume 1. It's my early productions I did 10 to 15 years ago. Volume 2 is coming out later this year with unreleased tracks from 2004 to the present. Honestly holding on to music for that long and not releasing it felt like it was blocking my blessings. Once I released it I felt a load had been lifted from my shoulders. But one of the best things was having my dad be the first person to purchase it at midnight on the day of its release.

I have several projects I'm working on including my first album, which I'm excited about. You'll get to hear my many styles of producing and genres of music. I'm excited about recently releasing the track "Metamorphosis" on legendary A&R Gladys Pizzaro's (formerly of Strictly Rhythms Records) label Launch Entertainment. One of the mixes hit the top at #1 in less than a week. It's a great accomplishment for me making it my fourth #1 this year. Music today does not have longevity so it's groundbreaking for me to have a track with staying power.

I also have a production coming out with House music legend Marlon D, called the Darien Gap. It's an instrumental. The instruments take the place of vocals, but even with no vocals you still hear a story in the music. I can remember hearing instrumentals from back in the day and remembering how some tracks would take me on a journey. Tunes like "Double Journey" by Powerline and E2-E4. What's missing in today's music is the journey. I hope with my music I bring back that feeling. "Da Stankness" after several months is still strong on the dance charts, I produced that in my likeness "If Mikki Afflick was a track then... there you have it." There are many producers whose music I admire.

My mentor David Morales would call me during the pandemic to check on me a few times a week, to make sure I was okay and to make sure my music was on point. He's a great mentor. Louie Vega, Osunlade, Joe Clause, ABICAH Soul, and Ron Trent to name a few are all those who inspired me when I produce. Also, Ultra Nate, I admire her staying power in this business as a singer, songwriter, Dj, and party promoter. There are many but those are my favorites.

I don't like to rush my music. I often have tracks that are years old before I release them. People sometimes ask, "When are you putting them out?". I'll tell them "When it's great, I'll release it". I don't like releasing mediocre music.



Mikki with mentor David Morales in Croatia.



Mikki Afflick night clubbing in NYC.

"I've learned nothing happens in this life until God and the Universe say it's supposed to."

-Mikki Afflick

If there is anything that I would never do again, it's holding on to music and not releasing it and sharing it with the world promptly. I had to learn discipline in producing music. I can thank Josh Milan for taking the time to sit with me and mentor me in respecting the art of production. Having a very supportive partner is key. My life partner is my greatest cheerleader. Good friends who support you are also key.

I am a Grammy Inductee (2021) and I do not take that lightly. I must thank Louie Vega and Yvonne Turner for grooming me as an inductee. I still have hopes and dreams of being nominated and winning a Grammy.

Although I've submitted my music to be considered in the past, it hasn't been recognized yet. It would be great if I were to produce more commercial music by working with mainstream artists like Rhianna and Beyonce. I'm working with younger producers who are into R&B and Hip Hop. I produced Hip Hop tracks in the early 2000s. I want to have a broader base and not limit the music I produce.

**Looking to
Faith.**



Future

Mikki Afflick in the studio producing upcoming track.

At one time or another every track has to be broken, right? So why is it that we are so stuck in the past? I feel it's very important to talk about this. I love my classics, but it is very important to feature new music and new producers, and American-based producers as well. Think about it, back in the day when we were going out to clubs, if the DJs played classics that were 40 years old at the time we would have been listening to Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, and Ella Fitzgerald. We would be hearing Hi-De Hi-De Ho (1934). Chubby Checker, "The Twist" (1965). At this point classics should not be going back 40-50 years. Why do we continue to do this? Going back 20 years to 2003 is a long time. Can you name a track from 2003 that resonates with you? Hmm, no! That's the DJ's fault. We're stuck. It doesn't end.

The younger DJ's are even becoming stuck. They don't have to play the same music their mentors play. It's a great injustice. If you are 17 to 24 years old, you should be playing and learning to produce music that's going to bring your peers in and get them familiar with this genre of music. If they are listening to Chris Brown, H.E.R, then try remixing these artists' music. I know people our age may not want to hear it, that's what they should be playing to get their peers interested in the genre. They aren't having their peers come out and support, so when they get booked, they play what the crowd wants to hear (our age group). Where are the 18-22 year olds? If they are your friends, get 10 of them and get them to bring friends and listen to this style of music. They may like the music. It's not happening however because they are stuck in our age group.

Back in the earlier days we were considered kids and we partied with the older generation. This is not happening in the Black Soulful House Music Community. It is happening in the White Techno and progressive community with their DJ's. But promoters rarely book Soulful or Afro-Black DJs for these venues.

I was having a conversation with a friend of mine who's into Techno – EDM – Electronic Dance Music – and was just at the Brooklyn Mirage. I asked him how much the tickets were, and he said \$130.00 each. He bought two. How many of us will spend that money to see our favorite DJ? I'll be honest, we don't even support our own at a weekender for \$100 with line-ups featuring our favorite DJs. We get mad when DJs change up their style of playing because they are trying to make a living. Our people try to pay us little or next to nothing for the "Love of House".

I'm excited about playing in Egypt this October for the Tambour Cruise. It's a dream come true to be spinning with top DJs for this once in a lifetime experience. I will also be starting a monthly residence in Brooklyn this July called Heal. I'm excited because I'll be curating the parties based on my vision.

Although we go through highs and lows with House Music, it's my passion and it's future is bright.

Interview by: Lisa White

You, as a DJ, must leave the dancers with at least one vocal track that makes them remember the night.

What track was the anthem for the night? The DJ has to touch your soul.

- Mikki Afflick



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