

First Stryke Policy

DJ Stryke plots a local dance music timeline

By Leah Gliniewicz

published: April 11, 2002

Still smarting after a long weekend spent playing host to friend and über-producer Josh Wink (in town to perform at South Beach's Crobar), Greg Chin -- a.k.a. **DJ Stryke** -- sits behind a desk in the airy, white-walled SoBe hotel-turned-office-suites headquarters of his Substance Recordings label. The pair met in 1995 at the Edge in Fort Lauderdale (now the Chili Pepper), where Wink would come to spin. Perched near the corner of Stryke's desk is his very own custom DJ action

figure. The muscle-T-wearing, Barbie-sized black male doll stands behind two toy turntables, sporting a short-cropped plastic coif, whereas Stryke's head is shaved.



Stryke a match: Greg Chin, a.k.a. DJ Stryke, meditates on the subject of mixology

Where:

Liquid Nightclub,
1532 Washington
Ave., Miami Beach

Details:

Every Saturday.
Cover is \$10 to \$20.
Complimentary
admission before
midnight with flier
or e-pass. Call
305-531-9411.

Subject(s):

[DJ Stryke](#)

Outwardly, he hasn't changed much since the early '90s, when he began spinning ambient, hard techno, and progressive house in South Florida clubs and on two Miami college radio stations -- Florida International University's WFIU-AM (540) and the University of Miami's WVUM-FM (90.5). But his T-shirt-and-jeans exterior belies the newfound entrepreneurial spirit that moved him to launch Substance with three partners last May.

"I've fought the businessman side of me for so many years," Stryke relates. "But after seeing how the industry can really eat its artists up, I thought it was important to get in there on the business level and show that you can have ethics and morals, take care of your artists, and still go to bed comfortable."

Before he became a DJ or businessman, the Jamaican native was a classically trained musician. At age four, he started piano lessons; he began composing at ten, when he moved from Kingston to Miami. He bought his first Roland SH-101 synthesizer at age 12 and started professional DJ gigs two years later.

But don't try to pigeonhole him as a techno DJ. He *hates* that. "Everyone does it for me," he remarks offhandedly. "Categorization can lead to elitism and closed-mindedness, i.e. 'I only listen to house!' or 'I only listen to trance,'" he complains. "How about, 'I listen to good music, regardless of genre?'"

Grounded in his classical roots, his biggest musical influences are Beethoven and Chopin. His tunes travel among techno, ambient, experimental, house, trance, and drum 'n' bass -- sometimes in the same composition.

"Most of the songs don't take their birth in modern music. Most of them start out on the piano as a classical-type piece," he says. "A lot of my chord structures are classically influenced."

The soft-spoken musician began spinning in October 1992 at the Groove Jet (now Rain) Friday-night event, Sanctuary. Stryke has noticed a conspicuous dip in quality over the past decade of club life. "I would say a lot of dance music on the beach -- not all of it but a good percentage -- is

just garbage. There's no real substance there, and that's fine. I think there's a time and place for good-time, feel-good dance music, but I don't think it should be *all night*.

"The music used to be... now, this is old man Greg speaking," he jokes. "Electronic music was really just starting to develop, so there was a real hunger and thirst for music. I think eventually somewhere along the line, it turned into, 'We want to be seen,' and it didn't matter what was playing or who was playing. That's the main change."

But he's optimistic that the refinement will eventually rebound. "I think now we're getting back to a new level of music appreciation. It has taken some time, but it's getting there."

The elements of good electronica became the topic of conversation for Stryke and Wink during the latter's visit -- with both agreeing that it's about more than just cranking beats on synths.

"I think it's a combination of -- for lack of a better term -- *soul* and fusing that with technology," opines Stryke. "I think it should be music with some thought. When you put thought behind how you're structuring the music, I think you make good music."

Stryke now holds residency at Liquid in South Beach, where he spins every Saturday and enjoys a global audience. For his live performances, he uses three turntables and digital CD players.

"I really try to keep the energy up and utilize effects processors and nonlinear DJ techniques. I try to keep it interesting. I treat it as a live performance and mixdown," he says. "I love playing hard. To me, the whole thing about dancing is about releasing primal energy. Although I do love playing ambient sets as well."

Though he hadn't performed a live show in nearly two years because of various stresses (such as lugging around equipment, including eight synthesizers at one point), he committed to three spinning engagements during the Winter Music Conference.

Stryke's latest, *Pages from the Blue Diary*, is his second full-length release since his 1997 debut, *Reality Base*. Inspired by the three-year relationship with a woman he met and fell in love with in the Dominican Republic during the last leg of his 1998 tour, Stryke says *Pages* is not a happy record.

"The album goes through the beginning of the relationship, all the way up to my own personal healing process," he admits. "Yes, the girl does know that the album is based on her. The title is an inside thing. We're still very good friends."

Stryke wanted to cover different electronic genres on *Pages from the Blue Diary*, which exacted an emotional toll on its creator. That's probably why, he theorizes, it took him so long to put it together.

"Pretty much everything I write has a story behind it, which is unusual for dance music. It's pretty natural for me when I write a song," he says. The breathy, piano-based ballad "Lost" tore him up to record.

"There were days where I would just emotionally break down in the studio. Songs like 'Lost' took me forever to complete, because I would just break down crying while I was singing," he confesses. "The writing just kind of flowed. It's my way of exorcising my inner demons, I suppose."