⌐FIFTEEN¬
QUESTIONS

INTERVIEWS /ABOUT   f ⦿

Fifteen Questions Interview with La Fraicheur

Reading the Room

"I love a lot of music and I don't want to restrain myself to make it easier for others to figure me out."

Part 1

Name: Perrine
Nationality: French, based in Berlin
Occupation: Recording artist/producer/DJ
Current Release: Self-Fulfilling Prophecy on Infine
Recommendation: Susumu Yokota's album Zen/ Joe Sacco's graphic novel Safe Area Gorazde

Website / Contact: You can find La Fraicheur on Facebook

When did you start DJing - and what or who were your early passions and influences? What what is about music and/or sound that drew you to it?

I started DJing when I was 17 and my older sister would take me to Le Pulp, Paris lesbian club hosting pretty much the best electronic artists at the time. It was my first encounter with DJs at work in general and female DJs in particular. What made me start doing it myself was actually that I fell in love with electronic music but didn't like the club environment then, nor did I like to dance. So, I figured the only way to listen to that music again once the weekend was over and I was back in my hometown, was to buy the records and mix them myself.

For most artists, originality is first preceded by a phase of learning and, often, emulating others. What was this like for you? How would you describe your own development as an artist and the transition towards your own voice? What is the relationship between copying, learning and your own creativity?

I definitely learned a lot from all the collaborations early on in my production career. Working with someone is the best way for me to learn. My brain is not wired to understand manuals or tutorials, I don't respond well to those. I need to see someone use a software, use a synth, and immediately do it myself to actually engrave the knowledge in my body it seems. I can't really say there ever was a transition towards my "own voice" since my very first EP was a solo one, as is my latest release, my album, and all the collaborations in between. My collaborators have always respected my input and given space to my ideas and opinions so I never felt like it wasn't me, even when it was a duo.

I guess the relationship to my own creativity is exemplified with my album. It's political, it's emotional, it's diverse genre-wise and it's somewhere between club and road-trip music. It's not going one way which pretty much sums me up. I guess the moment you know you're confident with "your voice" is when what you create won't fit boxes and yet you know that's what you have to do, whether or not it might close doors (politics is risky) or make it harder for media or club-bookers to label your work.

What were some of the main challenges and goals when starting out as a DJ and how have they changed over time? What is it about DJing, compared to, say, producing your own music, that makes it interesting for you?

I'd say DJing is the social part of my work while producing is the selfish one. I've started as a DJ and I will always cherish DJing above all. Producing, and live performances, which came later to me, are something I love doing and will take more time to explore but for me, those are separate work that require separate sets of skills.

I hate this whole "just a DJ" thing, as if people that dedicate themselves to that craft are something less. You can be a very good DJ and a bad producer and vice versa. DJing will always be my first love, it's been over 15 years now and I still get high on the thrill of it. I'm one of the few sober DJs in the industry, but honestly, as soon as I start playing, I'm completely high on adrenaline. The pleasure to share music that moves me, the feeling of connection with strangers, being able to read what they need at a T time, the bond within society you get to create, the responsibility to craft the soundtrack to people's lives, to that sacred moment where they can let go of stress, pain, grief, and be free in their mind and their bodies - it's priceless and one of the most powerful experience I get to live.

Challenges and obstacles, as a female DJ, are bountiful but I've spoken about that topic often enough, I'm not gonna explain again how misogyny and sexism are keeping talented women out of work and out of the spotlight. But another difficulty is that I have played a lot different styles, sometimes people don't know how/where to book me or how to identify me (read: "sell me") as a DJ. In the past couple of years, I've been mainly booked to play techno, but I started as a soul and funk DJ, I've played Hip Hop, I can do hours of ambient and post rock, I can do house and disco. It seems that today you need to be specialized to be taken
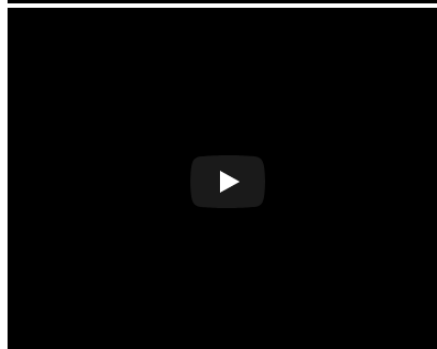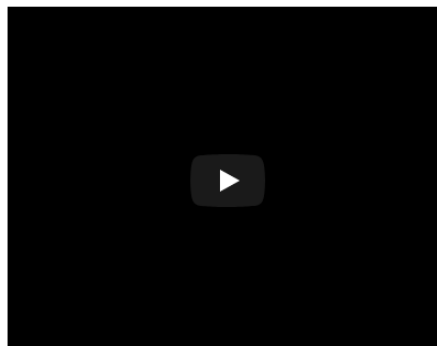
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It seems that today you need to be specialized to be taken seriously, as if exclusivity equals purity or seriousness. I don't believe that. I love a lot of music and I don't want to restrain myself to make it easier for others to figure me out.

How would you define the job and describe the influence of the DJ? How are the experience and the music transformed through your work?

There is a highly social component to my job as a DJ that I take very seriously. Clubs are refuges for a lot of people offering a moment of solace in a world treating them rough. Clubs are places where people go to lose themselves and find themselves in music, get all sorts of unhealthy feelings out of their system and feed the soul with energy. Clubs are places where you can be free, especially in Berlin, where your identity and space will be respected. So, to be in charge of creating the bubble for that is a big responsibility to me.

What was your first set-up as DJ like? How and for what reasons has your set-up evolved over the years and what are currently some of the most important pieces of gear for you?

My first set up was 2 Technics turntables and a Numark 2 channel mixer in my teenage bedroom. Over the years, I've played with laptop and controllers, CDs then USBs. I don't partake in that "debate" about what is considered "real" DJing. Do I believe some options require more skills than others? Definitely! Does it mean the most important part of the job isn't to read the room and deliver? Definitely not! That's the core of the DJ talent and that can come from anyone playing on anything.

Also, the whole "vinyl only" thing is classist. People from around the world with different social backgrounds can't afford the gear or the records, that shouldn't keep them from becoming a DJ.My preferred set up today is 3 CDJs and 1 turntable so I can play USB and vinyl and layer tracks and loops in a more creative, less linear set. To me, the main tool is actually the mixer, which is why I will forever be a Pioneer DJM girl and hate the Allen & Heath takeover.

How do you make use of technology? In terms of the feedback mechanism between technology and creativity, what do humans excel at, what do machines excel at?

My brain is not the most logical thing, so my relationship to technology has to be hands on. Most of my studio gear consists of very intuitive synths, like the Korg Minilogue, the Vermona Mono Lancet, Korg Volca Bass or Roland SE-02. Things that you can start to play with even before you actually understand how they work.

I very much love the sound of Elektron's Analog 4 for example, but I know my brain is not wired for that kind of thinking so it's not part of my studio. I want to have the least friction, the least intellectualization, the least delay between me and the sounds and what I can do with it. If technology requires or imposes a response time, some pre-organisation, something that can get in the way of spontaneous recording then it's out of my set up, no matter how good it sounds. I need results to be immediate from the moment a sound sparks an idea or an idea creates a sound. Patience is not my strong suit. I don't know what machines or humans excel at, but I know what I can do, what I enjoy doing and what my limits are, and being aware of that is, I think, one of my biggest strengths when it comes to producing. It means sincerity will always stay at the center of what I do, because I'm ok with what and how I do it.

Could you take us through a day in your life, from a possible morning routine through to your work? Do you have a fixed schedule? How do life and creativity feed back into each other - do you separate them or instead try to make them blend seamlessly?

My life changes a lot whether I'm on tour, which is most of the time, or if I'm home in Berlin. So, let's take a Berlin day.I'll wake up late, even when there is no gig, I still am a night person and can't really go to sleep before 3am. I have a morning cuddle session with my cat. Then I'll get up, make a breakfast smoothie, based on the Berghain recipe actually, some lemon water and take a shower. Daytime is usually dedicated to computer and email work: booking, promotion, tour logistics, label and release work, graphic design, skype meetings with collaborators etc... I can't sit long before I get unfocused so I usually break those up into sessions of 1 or 2 hours then do something not work-related in between: take a walk, read fiction, draw, craft, garden or build something in my home. Around 9pm is when my brain is the most focused, so that's usually when I start working on music for a few hours. I can also alternate music work with watching movies or documentaries. I don't force inspiration or focus. If I have something good to go on, I roll with it as long as I can, sometimes up to 6 hours non-stop. If I don't have it then I get busy with something else, it always comes back. Learning to let things come to you without the stress and pressure of "will I be able to finish this track?!" is one of the best lessons I've learned this year. Then I usually get some more computer work done at night since I work a lot with South and North America and when I'm about to go to bed is when they work. Then I have an "off screen" policy where I shut down everything at least an hour before going to sleep and go to bed with a book.

Let's say you have a gig coming up tonight. What does your approach look like – from selecting the material and preparing for, opening and then building a set?

It depends on where I play and the gear available so basically; records or no records? Playtime? Genre? Kind of crowd?If I can play vinyl then I'll go through my latest finds since I'm usually obsessed with a track and play it every time I can until it is replaced with a new obsession. Before a party I will also download new promos and gather friends' latest productions into specific playlist on my USBs. I never end up playing only

from those playlists but they are a help for my bad memory. It often happens that I play a track that I have no clue what it's called or who made it but I will remember very well the moment in my life, the party I played it at first and that's how I'll remember where to find it.

I never plan the evolution of a set, it would not only be counterproductive, but also take away most of the pleasure! The thrill of DJing comes from reading a crowd and grabbing them whether or not they were ready for you, and that can only be created in the moment. I'll always arrive on the dancefloor I play on, about an hour before my set, in order to catch the vibe, hear what the DJ before me plays and how people react. I'll figure out my opening track about 5 minutes before I start playing.

Can you describe your state of mind during a DJ set? What supports this ideal state of mind and what are distractions? Are there strategies to enter into this state more easily?

And an important part of my prep ritual is figuring out what socks I'm gonna play in and I always have very light spare clothes cos I get really warm from dancing while DJing. Comfort is the key to be able to forget yourself in the moment. I'm not supposed to be aware of myself when I play, I only think of the people, read the energy of the room and feed on it. I don't drink or do drugs, it's important for me to stay sober so that the connection I have with the moment is not tainted by an erroneous idea of what the vibe is or what my performance is like.

I don't really have a strategy to get into that "in the zone" state. To be honest, I am just really sucked in from the moment I start playing. I can be sick or jet lagged, but as soon as I start playing, things roll on their own. I'm not gonna say there are not hard gigs where you feel out of it and exhausted, but there's always an auto-pilot mode induced by music. It takes me in just as it takes the crowd in.

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