

# Diving into Digital

Live mixing evolves with the advances of technology.

BY ERIC MONKHOUSE

Ten years ago it was mind-blowing to see a DJ beat-match vinyl on three turntables. Dancers huddled around the booth, devouring every adjustment. Many DJs still spin vinyl, allured by its feel and warm sound qualities. As a moving meditation, spinning vinyl activates the right brain, which results in a heightened “non-thinking” state of awareness. However, the goal posts have changed over recent years. Many movement facilitators are playing music in non-nightclub environments and simply need a reliable soundtrack. Although the need to mix music smoothly remains, beat matching has become less of a challenge with the rise of technology. The challenge now is to creatively edit, loop, layer, and program digital tracks either with CDs or on a laptop.

As the technology for making music evolves, so does the need for tools to make that music. Customized controllers are designed to maximize workflow and have brought fun and showmanship into digital DJ-ing. Digital pioneer DJ Mouldover describes “controllerism” as “the art of manipulating sounds and creating music live, using computer controllers and software.” Despite the criticism that there is little skill involved in button pressing and mouse clicking, the digital revolution has given DJs an infinite resource for creative self-expression.

The digital domain has also made the DJ’s life a lot easier. Now you can take your entire music library on the road, with no more aching shoulders and fear of lost luggage at airports. Digital files can be re-downloaded, unlike scratched or warped records, and

music download websites have made it easier to access “always available” catalogues of music. Latest remixes can be emailed across the world, and newly formed labels can reach DJs without large monetary or environmental costs.

Remember to interact and have fun with your audience. If you’re not facilitating with a wireless mic, you can embody more of the DJ/performer energy by turning your laptop to the side so you can face the crowd. Adding drummers or live instruments to the mix is always a plus, and gives you an organic, improvisational edge. To keep your laptop up to speed, always keep a minimum of 5Gb free on your hard drive. When you import or download tracks, use no less than a 320-kbps compression rate, as any less tends to distort on a professional sound system. And keep an eye on the system EQs—step onto the dance floor to hear if the midranges are too high, and adjust the bass. Meticulous re-mapping of your controller will give you a foundation for inspired play and blur the line between performer and selector.

The age of wireless mixing is upon us with devices like Nintendo’s Wii and the iPhone. DJs and facilitators are free to control from the dance floor, making selections from the dancers’ perspective. Perhaps one day we’ll be so tuned in to technology that we’ll anticipate every mood by channeling songs from our brain straight to the sound system via biofeedback software. One thing is certain—technology will continue to enhance our ability to intuitively meet the needs of the dance floor. ●

## DIGITAL ESSENTIALS

Mac laptops have their own internal sound card with good drivers. PCs will require an additional sound card. All your software can be controlled with midi signals via a USB cable from an external keyboard, thus eliminating the need to touch the laptop.

### ABLETON LIVE

A creative tool for recording, production, and performance. It’s easy to learn, with a flexible and simple interface.  
WWW.ABLETON.COM

### TRAKTOR

An industry standard, this virtual turntable allows creative mixing ability, but no recording or production tools.  
WWW.NATIVE-INSTRUMENTS.COM

### MIXMEISTER

Determines the key and tempo of your tracks and offers intelligent song suggestions for compatible mixing.  
WWW.MIXMEISTER.COM

### SERATO VINYL SCRATCH

Bridging the analog world of vinyl with the digital world of audio files. A unique hybrid that maintains the art of mixing.  
WWW.RANE.COM

### PACEMAKER

A portable DJ system that has space for 120GB worth of tunes in a handset slightly larger than a mobile phone.  
WWW.PACEMAKER.NET

### ITUNES

Free audio player platform with a limited cross fader and some basic editing tools.  
WWW.APPLE.COM