

## The Perils of a DJ

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It was two months after her graduation. Nothing had changed very much. There was not even a celebration the day she got her degree. That was a PhD of course, the culmination of nine years of school. Well, here she was out in the world, 'on the streets' as so many people refer to it. Almost everyone (everyone being real friends in a real world) insisted that she would get a taste of the real world now ---; and *that* - unlike the academic one - was what it was all about.

Well, she swallowed hook, line, and sinker hoping to bite into a free creative source of pleasure. This was a gambit she could now afford, personally having obliged her intellect and searching self by trading the path of psychologist.

Freedom! Unanalysis, soul, music, drama, let there be. She had talent enough, even beauty. And, supposedly, she had smarts.

Well the light dawned one day on beginning opportunity when she noticed that there was a nightclub which had an admirable DJ for its music.. Aha - surely an opening here as this guy must be just a filler - climbing as he does all over the booth, telling embarrassing jokes, playing mostly the pits of what little good disco music there is, and worst of all having no sense of rhythm. A DJ with no sense of rhythm - the ultimate mismatch on the job.

Well here was a move in the right direction and it would be fun. So she went to the managers of the club one afternoon and asked if she could try, practice, learn. Oh yes, she had a good knowledge of music, and oh yes she could mix, blend, and play the music well. The club could use a DJ. Hence started a long train of events to procure what is, in effect, a very simple job. One manager did say he would help, but two or three warned "no offense against you but women generally can't do this job - we know, we've had experience with it". "That's ok" she said, "I'll do it".

So she came, day after day, to see the man who would help her. The first problem, incredibly, was just getting her hands on the equipment. So much discourse passed day after day but she hadn't touched the machines. Then it was records. Her personal file was geared to jazz. She loved disco though too. She loved dancing and she loved to get it on. She needed some of the club's records, sacred records under lock and key. The days passed. There were two or three hour wait periods, then a little time at the machine, and eventually a good record or two from the club besides. Now, in very short time - literal practice time that is, - for the days went by with discourse, ah discourse, alternating with periods of wait - she was obviously able and good. Sometimes she danced, little sways to the syncopated beat, here and there, just hanging around. Hmm, a dancer too. Voice - ? Well she had sung solo up to ten years ago. The voice now was passable at least.

The man supposed to hire her had transferred clubs leaving the manager of the room where she

would work, the room with the abominable DJ, her one remaining key. This man was a person who cared little about DJ's and who seemed rather unreceptive to an outsider like she.

You see the club was a complex in more ways than one. Managers upon managers. No outsiders, work your way up from the inside. Guys galore. Do as you're told when I feel like telling you, and, if I feel nasty, you suffer and I don't feel good ever so don't worry about that.

This manager now had to let her into his records and his booth. Ok. He gave her the keys; he had seen her around; he'd honor the promised opportunity for work, but the theory that a job was open to her, one and a half months later, was now much more vague. Disturbing? No. After all, her talent over that of the mismatch was indubitable. Audition and settle the issue. Yes, THE MANAGER said she could audition. He even ventured that she give it her best try.

The audition was coming up. But let us mention the potential splendor of it all. She liked this club, yes, loved it, in fact. She did not like it the way it was, no soul, cold as ice, a barren sex exchange. But she would infuse the inklings of a new attitude. Or try. She could already feel the charisma of her approach. She would draw (for all clubs were hurting) and invigorate it. It wasn't method, it was an art, admittedly simple but real. To top it off, the booth was quite a tower. A mirrored projection high on the red carpeted walls - aglitter gloriously. Heavenly box.

The daytime cleanup crew liked her music and her ways. Though her benefactor had said no, she was ready to audition. She knew it. This was getting heavy. She was asking for the job, no kidding. The benefactor had brought her in here and he was not an overlord. He would have to wash his hands of it. He hoped no one would remember his help.

She insisted she was ready and set an audition night. But who likes insisters? Who likes insisters in skirts? Two months had gone by, mostly wasted, since she'd started this spree. She wanted to scream "Can I have a job, an audition, a chance, an ear? I am willing to prove myself. I'm more sick of talking than you".

Ok, the night's the night. Spacesuit, spaceshoes, eyelashes, and what a feeling. Free breezin', groovin, gonna get down, gonna give it to ya.

Good evening everyone around the club. She'd be up for a set at ten. The man who hires DJ's was coming to see her from another club. He would say yes or no.

As a live band plays, she ascends the booth to arrange her records. Then comes, wouldn't you know it, the abominable DJ, six foot six, high blood pressure, a fumin' and a freakin'. There are, mind you, no managers on the floor but he knows she's to audition. He also knows there is a DJ opening in the club. "You are not going to audition", yelp, growl. Shuffle, shuffle, she gets her numbers set. "Did you hear me? You are not going to audition. Get down from this booth." Forward, she sorts the records. "Bitch. Don't you understand English?" E T C At ten minutes end, he has forced the records from her hands and collected the albums. Now, what could she do. Descend. No audition tonight. Where is a manger? No one here.

The DJ hirer has been held up. The club manager isn't working. How can these things possibly happen as they do? There are too many devious hurdles.

But she returns to tell the manager "nasty, nasty, nasty, how it all happened". And oh, don't let her forget, the abominable DJ said records are missing since she's been around. The big reply, he casts his eye, he says he'll reach a decision. Reach a decision?? Dismissed. No more questions please. Now where is he in this club? Can't let go. She wants it, needs it, and did she not work for it?

Now someone may wonder why she continued this crazy course. She has been at it, no pay, for well over a month. She loved the club, the music, the rapport, more and more and more. She wanted to express herself, soulfully.

Through a lot of detail, another night. She pulled it off, an unexpected big two hours, loving it. But the abominable DJ is back. "See the manager", feigning command, he says. The manager says "the voice is terrible. The cuts were good but the voice is bad". "Huh", she thinks. "Too loud", she thinks. But bad? No one ever said that. Can she work on it? Ok. Will he listen again? Grudgingly, yes. Tomorrow? Yes. Who can tell what he wants.

Back again - practice, testing, talking. The sound man says she's right where she should be. Others want to know the problem because they can't see any. Mr Manager has sleazed by her. Next day, next, and next he's caught. "Keep practicing. Too High. Make it lower." Lower? How low can she go? A paper bag over her head would obliterate gender. But there is a chance he means what he says. How's my voice you, you, and you. Fine, fine, sounds ok to me.

Around in circles, round she goes. He says there is a job, work on the voice. OK, ok, she will. He says call me tomorrow. He says start practicing and he'll come see, but sleazes out the door. He says be sure of the voice, keep practicing. He says call me tomorrow. There is a chance he means what he says. He says that if he sleazes out the door leaving her alone in her cherished tower to labor for no one's ears save her own, he is a busy man. He says he has a lot of things on his mind. He says he will put her on the payroll for the days she practiced, so do him a favor and keep at it. He might mean what he says. He says for three weeks what he says, and call me tomorrow.

She is choking. Suffocating. In the meanwhile, humiliation sets in; reason reluctantly takes over. Despairingly, she asks the DJ hirer to phone the manager and see. Is it yes or is it no. It's simple now, easy now: "No". The cuts were good but the voice was terrible. No higher judge, no thing to do. No thing to do, facing him, icy countenance, one month before. Did he enjoy to toy? Did he feel pressured? Surely, a grown man, manager of a club, had guts enough to nip her at the start. Should she have stood on her head, or receded to a corner? Surely acting herself was wrong.

"Mr DJ hirer, do *you* have anything? May I audition for you at *your* club? He could see her position. "Well, yeah. I'm opening another room. Call me in two weeks." And after two weeks he says "Come back in another week". And we're off.

It kept coming, his audition. It could, but then again, it could just as well not, have happened. That was a small problem compared against the bigger one of whether a job existed at all. There were ten million reasons she could not know which determined it. And, like anything else, there were always ten million DJ's. Should the best man win, it may be she.

A week or so later, she ran into her dear friend, the manager. He said "Hello lady" more warmly than ever before. He cast his eye, inviting her to stop, "Hel-lo", she walked on. Hardened, they told her when she started. These men were hard.

Another month of time and the DJ hirer had to tell her something. He had known, by and large, her trials with Mr Manager (he knew Mr Manager). He felt empathy and in a fool moment had granted an audition. Now he must recant. He inhaled deeply and riveted his eyes to her head. Swoop - "I've decided not to hire any women". And then "I've got X, Y, and Z DJ's coming in already". Said she, "what does woman have to do with it"? And, "Why didn't you tell me you were full one month ago"?

Well she got her first gig right around that time. Two nights a week elsewhere as a substitute. The people didn't mind her being the DJ. They danced.

Save Mr Manager, she still liked the people at the club where she was never goign to be a DJ.

Postscript 2021: Looking at this writing in 2021, and having watched a lot of videos from Sammy the Bull Gravano, Mafia underboss to John Gotti, I cannot help but connect the Mafia way of operating to what I experienced in 1976. The club was one of several owned and run by the Mafia. Clubs were one of their fortes. They had the best, glittsiest vibes, and 'insiders' tended to man the ranks. One day, as on many, I was in the office of the club where the previous night's monies were counted. One young representative called me aside and told me to be smart and to not come back before I got myself into something that would be impossible to get out of. I never came back. I subsequently experienced aspects of other clubs belonging to the same network.