

CULTURE

Twistin' and twirlin' at Crystal's Queer Country Jam



PHOTO BY CRYSTAL ENCINAS

Nine years ago, the sound of country music made Crystal Encinas' face curdle up like rancid milk.

"I wasn't into country—I hated it, in fact," she says. "I just couldn't stand the twang of it."

Encinas says she was more of an R&B soul, with a flair for dance music. But when one of her friends took her to a line-dancing event at C.C. Slaughter's, the twang began to tickle her toes.

"I picked it up really quickly; I started to like the music because I could dance to it," she recalls.

After the fateful night at Slaughter's, Encinas dug line dancing so much that she became an instructor every Tuesday night at the East Side Tavern, which is now the Egyptian Club. The event became so popular after a while that she had to divide the class in two.

When the tavern changed hands, Encinas was asked to be a DJ and teach line dancing at the lesbian club Choices. It was at this point that she decided to purchase her own DJ equipment—and multiply her CD collection 20 times.

These days, for queers, there is scarcely a name more synonymous with country music in Portland. Encinas, professionally known as DJ Crystal, now regularly spins discs and teaches line dancing for the Rosetown Ramblers, C.C. Slaughter's and her own club night, Crystal's Queer Country Jam.

She says the line dancing makes the music worth it: "If you just sit and listen to country all day, you'd just think, 'whatever.' But if you're dancing to it, it's a whole different story."

Encinas, who is 37, says a good mixture of people show up for her Queer Country Jam, and the age range is from 25 to 60. She has also been working on bringing more women to her gig at C.C. Slaughter's, which has traditionally catered more to men.

Though Encinas' DJ jobs are paid, she regrets still having to find a day job to pay the bills. She says: "I would prefer not sitting behind a desk."

She'd much rather sit behind a CD player.

Like Encinas, DJ Lauren (who prefers not to use her last name) became a disc jockey by way of chance. She used to sing with the Portland Lesbian Choir, and after concerts the group would throw a house party—and she would gravitate toward the CD player.

Now she works as a DJ for fund-raising events, private parties and many of the Lesbian Community Project dances, including a recent one held at the Echo Theatre.

"I consider myself an amateur even though

DJs doin' it for themselves

Three free-lance disc jockeys make waves and shake booties across Portland

BY KATY DAVIDSON

"I've been doing this for six years," she says.

DJ Lauren, who moved from Los Angeles to Portland 10 years ago, loves eclectic music—some of which she can't even play at dances because of its inaccessibility. In the City of Angels, she got into KROQ, a cutting-edge radio station that was among the first in the world to play alternative rock. Accordingly, DJ Lauren finds Portland's radio scene a bit drab.

"I'm a radio snob," she says. "I don't listen to Portland radio because it's so boring."

DJ Lauren says she likes contemporary artists such as Nine Inch Nails and Limp Bizkit, but one of her all-time favorite musicians is Frank Zappa.

"Sometimes I play what I want, and I always clear the dance floor," she says. "But I always take requests, I want people to dance."

Her collection of 3,000 CDs spans three decades of music—"I have an affinity for disco, but I get off on '80s music," she says. "I also listen to gay-boy music like the Pet Shop Boys, but lesbians don't really get into that."

Though most of her jobs are queer-related, she keeps her collection diverse because of the random events she's asked to do—spinning CDs at the Parkrose Middle School dances, for example.

"It's cool to see all the kids dancing. I play them 'N Sync, Destiny's Child, the Backstreet

DJ Lauren makin' noise at the Emma Goldman Dance

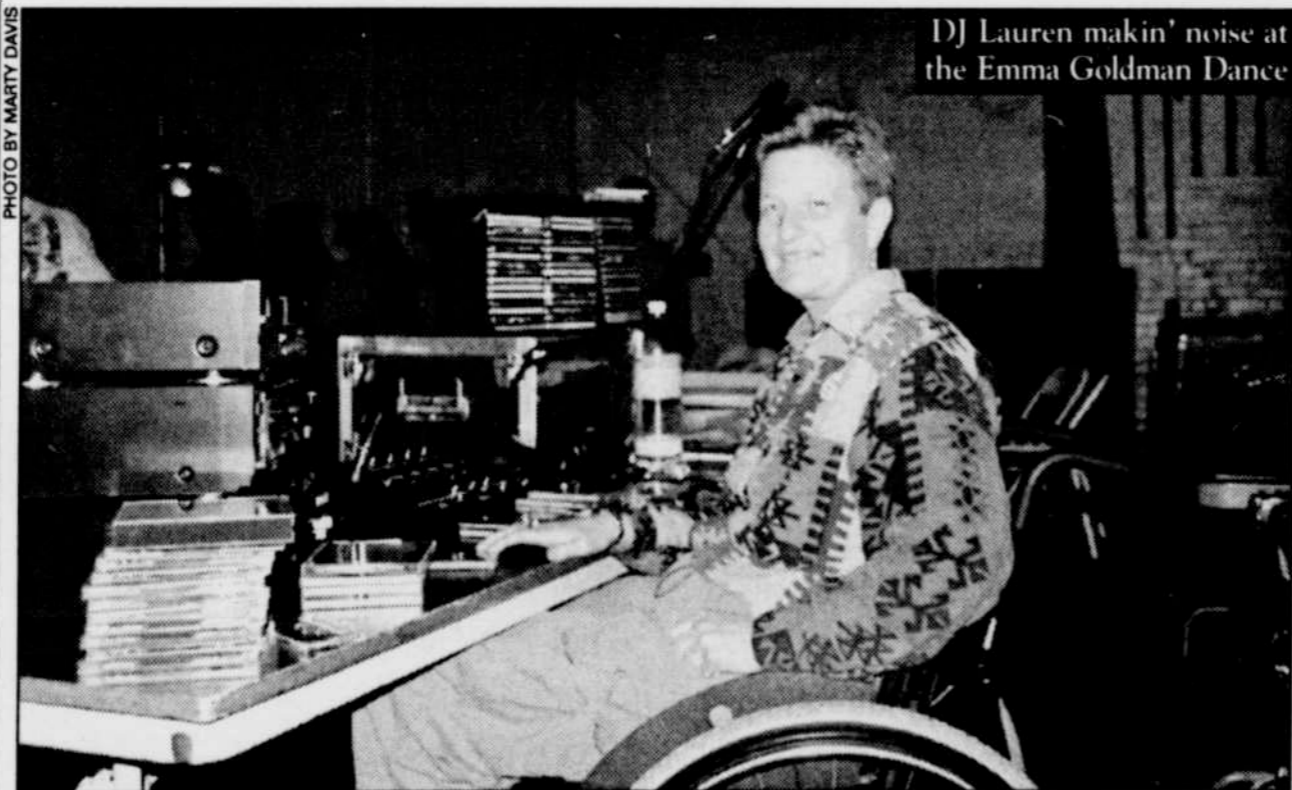


PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Boys—the bubble gum-type stuff," she says.

One of DJ Lauren's trademarks is to bring her golden retriever, Josie, to her jobs. When she worked as the DJ for the Millennium Magic dance last New Year's Eve, Josie's "life of the party" status manifested in hanging out and drooling by the food table.

Aside from Josie's loving company, DJ Lauren enjoys her work because of its sheer function. "I just love music—I love all kinds," she says.

At the ripe young age of 25, Remel Young sure holds a torch for older music. She grew up in Portland, teaching herself to play her father's drum set and listening to albums with her family.

"I've always played records," she says. "My mom would be cleaning up or something and she'd tell me to go put on some music."

Little did she know that she'd grow up and spin some of those same records for legions of clubbers.

When Young worked as a security guard at the now-defunct club Secrets, her best friend was the DJ. She was offered the opportunity to step into the spot when her friend left.

Young, now known as DJ Mello, currently works for the PlayHers Club, a roving dance night that was conjured up by Nita Reed and is sponsored by the Lesbian Community Project.

The event is usually held in downtown Portland at the Jasmine Tree (restaurant by day, dance club by night), and is designed for lesbians of color, but anyone is welcome to attend.

"There's always a good mixture of women, men, straight, gay, white, black," she says. "You can just dance and relax. We try to keep it as unhostile as possible."

For the PlayHers Club, Young spins R&B, hip-hop and old school, her favorite music.

"Older music just sounds better," she says. "I listen to a lot of old school like the Gap Band, Cheryl Lynn and Alexander O'Neal—a lot of the stuff from way back when."

Young, who lives with her girlfriend and her cats, sees music as an alternative to alcohol or drug abuse: "Music can help people," she says. "If you're upset, just throw on Parliament and let it take you away. You gotta have some kind of escape."

■ DJ CRYSTAL spins her country favorites every Wednesday night from 8 p.m. to midnight at C.C. Slaughter's, 219 N.W. Davis St.; at the PPAA, 618 S.E. Alder St., on third Saturdays; and at periodic Rosetown Ramblers dances.

DJ MELLO will shake some booties at the next PlayHers Club dance on June 20 at the Jasmine Tree, 401 S.W. Harrison St.

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