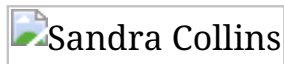


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Sandra Collins – Interview



The Collins family name has always been in the bright lights of showbiz. Sandra Collins' father was a successful comedian, her mother was a talented singer, and to top it all off, her godfather is none other than legendary comedian Milton Berle. Sandra has been carrying on the greatness of the Collins name by electrifying audiences across the globe with her dark, progressive DJ sets for over ten years. In recent years she has been nominated for Best Trance DJ and Best Electronic Artist and has received awards from numerous dance publications to back her title of America's Trance Goddess. In 2000 Sandra proved that trance is not a man's world with the stunning release of one of trance's best albums to date, Transport 3. Her latest release, Cream, takes the listener on an emotional journey through the world of progressive and deep trance. Sandra's mixes are recognized in the dance culture as being a symbol of quality in their style. Hip Online is proud to present this fantastic female DJ!

Could you give us a brief overview of how you got into Djing?

It goes back to when I was like eight or nine, going to skating rinks and bringing records to the DJ. When I look back at my life, I have always been Djing, making paused mixed tapes and other mixed tapes. I used to give my dance teacher and DJs at the skating rinks records, I used to go to all night skates, but I picked up my first record and mixed it on a turntable in 1987.

That was back in Arizona, and the reason I got into this was because the guy I was dating at the time was a DJ. DJs were not really popular then, they did not get paid, and there were not any huge events or anything like that. I really did not think it was going to go anywhere. I was just having fun with it and playing records. My boyfriend would make a tape for me and there were always a couple songs I did not like so I would make my own tape. (laughs) I just kept doing it and it became something I could do for a living, which worked out for me.

What was the hardest skill to pick up for you? Beat matching or balancing of the sound?

The beat matching. It's weird because it takes a while to get the hang of it, but once you nail it you've got it. Then you have to practice actually doing it good, and once you learn that then you start to listen to what you are playing. Many people who are just learning to mix, they'll just mix two records together forever because they are on beat and they are really not listening to what it sounds like. So you got a big mess. Once you learn how to mix without thinking too much, then you can listen to what you are doing and then you can learn to EQ, then how to crowd. It's just weird. It's all steps. I'm still learning today.

When did you feel confident that you could do this as a career?

I was good at Djing before it was a career. When I started playing in LA, the Storm rave, and they called me to Shrine that was amazing. I was nervous because it was my first big event and I have never flown across the country. I have never been to New York. I was confident that I could do it because I have been doing it in my bedroom for so long.

Was it your first time on a big system?

I played at little cafes in Arizona but this was for four thousand people with my idol, Frankie Bones, so I was nervous. It was hard because when you play

at home then you have to transition to a bigger system, you have to learn to listen all over again. Now I cannot mix at home, I can only mix on loud systems. (laughs)

Did working as an A&R rep at Harthouse give you insight and an advantage?

It was one of my favorite labels so I was excited that they chose me. I worked for Planet Earth, which was a distributor for Harthouse and different labels. Jason Bentley recommended me to work for Harthouse. I'm good at doing the A&R part but I'm not good at keeping my desk in order or papers. (laughs)

That's why you hire an intern.

Yeah! I could tell you what songs you need to put out as singles or I could tell what to put on a compilation.

What's up with the Coca-Cola commercial you did a few years ago? Did they use your music or were you actually in the shoot?

I was actually in the commercial. It was just after Lost In Time came out. Coca-Cola wanted me to DJ and it was cool because they have done a few types of music commercials but it was with rock and a mosh pit. They kept stopping and starting the commercial every time they would mess up. Finally I was like, 'Look, today when we do the commercial, do not stop and start filming, just let me keep playing because if you let me keep playing you are going to catch what you want to catch. Just let me build that vibe it will work out a lot better than if you stop and start.'

From my own personal experience with filming, sometimes it's just better to let the cameras keep rolling and let things happen naturally.

Exactly. I felt confident in saying that to them. The people that are here are all people that know me and I know how to create that.

What was the setting? What were the producers looking for?

It was a dance floor and everyone had Coca-Cola cans in their hands. In the end they put a different song over the commercial.

That sucks.

I did not play that song! (laughs)

Let's talk about your mixed releases. Congrats on getting Cream out. I'm having a tough time deciding what cd I like better, Transport (3) or Cream.

Cream is more of listening cd. It does not chug real slow and build, and it's not anthemy. It just goes in different directions with quality music backing it up. I have not heard from the public yet, but a lot of friends seem to like Cream better. I was like, 'Oh shit, I hope people like this cd.' This is not what I spin at a club, this has more emotion and feeling to it. This does not build like a club set, but with seventy-four minutes, it's hard to do.

Cream reminds me of when I first got into listening to early trance and some techno in a sense that this record has those acid sounds and it is trippy, which makes this cd easy to listen to from front to back.

Yeah? There is a song on there, "Chiller Twist" ("do you hear it"- Bet Two for Good Mix) that reminds me of the old Eye Q, the old '95-'96 sounds that are updated a little bit. I really like the tracks that I put on there. There was a large selection of tracks that were sent to me that made it hard to choose.

How come no Sandra Collins tracks on the release?

I have not made a track in so long. The intro I worked on, but I'm constantly on the road on tour and you really have to your mindset in the studio. You have to take time off, and with my schedule it's hard to do both. It's hard to come home for those one or two days, go into studio, and the last thing you

want to do is listen to dance music. After this year I'm going to take some time off. I'm taking voice lessons right now and I'm going to sing on my new stuff.

That's cool. It's good to see you expanding.

I have always wanted to do that. I have been writing lyrics and I cannot wait until I have some time off to work on that.

You have had success with your twelve-inch releases in the past though.

I really was excited about making those tracks. You go through a love/hate relationship with everything you put out because you like it but you are afraid the label will not like it. Then the label likes the releases, then you worry if the public will like it too.

So you're overanalyzing?

Yeah! During this process you're like, 'Oh, it sounds weird,' and then everyone likes it and you like it again. (laughs) That's how it is with everything I do.

For the compilation, was there much planning in piecing the songs together or did you just let things happen naturally?

I did not have anything preplanned. I sent out emails to a couple of people letting them know I was releasing a cd and I'm collecting new material for that. I got boxes and boxes of cds and records, they are still coming and I am overwhelmed. That happened with Transport too and I had to listen to all of it whenever I had time, whether in a car or on the plane.

What gets you excited about a track?

A song that brings out an emotion and that feeling when I first heard dance

music. It could be melodic or hard techno.

Has your taste changed over time?

Actually I'm starting to play a lot deeper, and I think people are expecting me to play a certain way. People change and I'm not going to do the same thing all the time. It may be because I'm getting older or the music taste out on the scene.

You may be female, but you play some deep, dark tunes. Do you catch people off guard?

Many people like it. This is therapy for me because I am in the position where I'm trying to please a crowd but I'm also still doing what I set out to do, and that is playing music that I love. It makes me feel good. I'm hoping people that listen to me feel the same way I do and they feel that. If they do not feel that way, they are looking for another sound.

How long do you play for on an average night? Your building block style keeps getting heavier as it goes.

Yeah, I like playing longer. I have booked for two hours lately but I really like playing for three or four hours.

How many records do you kill in a three to four hour period?

It's funny because I'll bring one box and it's not even full and people go, 'You can play three hours off that?' I can, because I know what I want to play.

How do you think trance and techno has changed over the last eight years in America and globally?

Trance is weird because when I played eight years ago it was trance but some of it was house with vocals, but I guess now you would call that

progressive house. Harthouse, they had artists that were a bit faster, harder, with a bit go up and around, and now it's mixed with a groove and crossover into other styles.

One thing that I have noticed is many DJs are spinning progressive house and trance together.

Me too. I play mostly progressive house, hard house, I go from one style all the way to the next. I do not think I would consider myself a straight up trance DJ, but the title was tagged to my name. When you listen to me it's not what you think.

What do you not want to see happen to the growing dance culture in America? I think this past year with all the media hype connecting drugs and dance, and the cancellations of the summer festival was a set back for the scene.

That scares me. My boyfriend was going to have a huge party in Carolina and he had every permit, and they told him everything was fine and in the end they did not let him throw the event. They had him pay for every permit and they know they were not going to let him do it. Different cities have different laws. Do the cops have to run the thing?

Good question.

I have been playing in clubs and I have not been playing a lot of big parties because of that. It feels like Footloose all over again. People are not going to be able to dance anymore.

Who do think made a name for themselves in 2001?

Max Graham and John Creamer.

Max Graham has produced some of finest music as of recently.

I think the scene was saturated with cd releases this year.

Is that a good or bad thing?

I do not know. I'm not Global Underground and so I do not if their releases are selling. They really crank them out and I think it confuses people on which one to buy. I like to have my cds live their life until it feels right to do the next one.

One thing I find interesting about Cream is that you are an American artist/DJ representing a European club. It must be an honor.

It's funny. With Transport 3 I was the first American to do the Transport series as well.

You understand the club culture overseas. Why are we not doing the same here with cds and magazines exposing club culture?

I know. When I was working with Twilo, I was telling them, 'Get your logo going, a clothing line, why not you start a label and start putting out mixed CDs?' Because they could have done so much with what they had. Basically they were starting to do that, but then they got shut down. I was supposed to do a Giant (club in LA) mix cd before I did this Cream cd, but it fell through because Giant had this thing where they had some drama, so I ended up not doing a Giant release. They are putting out cds but it's not the same thing as the UK vibe. The UK has always got good logos, designs, and clothing to go along with everything. Poor Twilo.

Because you have traveled all over the world, when it's all said and done, where do you want to retire to?

That's a hard question because I'm not finished seeing the world. I want to be by the water but not too far from civilization. I grew up in the desert. No matter where I am, I'm always going to be young at heart.

+Larry Sarzyniak

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