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DJ SANDRA COLLINS TALKS BEING A WOMAN AT THE FOREFRONT OF NEW ELECTRONIC MUSIC & HER NEW DOCUMENTARY "GIRL, YOU CAN'T SPIN FOREVER"

HANNAH DEUPREE · OCT 8, 2013

When we got the chance to sit down with EDM culture legend, Sandra Collins- the opportunity was larger than life. [Sandra Collins](#) has spent nearly half Of her life behind the decks doing what she loves. In 25 years she has seen it all, heard it all, and was there with electronic music at it's birth, through the growing years and now at it's forefront of the music industry world-wide. To say that she is experienced is an understatement.

In 2003, filmmaker Kandayce Jordan approached Sandra with an idea for a documentary, "Girl You Can't Spin Forever." The documentary was to include the women in dance music that came down the same path as Sandra- the rising female power in EDM culture. Why do they choose this career? What drives them? Sandra Collins has the answers to this and more. She shares her experience and her insight with us in a very special one on one interview. See what she has to say about the film, about leading the path for female DJ's, the evolution of dance music culture, and more.

HOW DID YOU FIRST GET APPROACHED BY KANDEYCE TO DO THIS DOCUMENTARY? WHAT WAS THE SPARK THAT GENERATED THE BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND HER THAT LED YOU AGREE TO DO THIS?

It was in 2003 at the Dance Star Awards in Miami. She came and pitched this idea for a documentary to me and I immediately got on board, and from then on we were inseparable. She went on tour with me, we made it work. I think that the idea behind "Girl" was an idea of independence, but it really evolved and took on its own life after we started. Neither of us were ever expecting it to take on the life-form that it did. She was really trying to find herself, but the life of the movie took itself on after we came together and formed our own relationship.

IT SEEMS LIKE YOU TWO REALLY ENCOMPASSED THE REALITY OF THE FEMALE PRESENCE IN EDM CULTURE- DO YOU THINK THAT WOMEN IN THE DANCE MUSIC INDUSTRY ARE GOING TO CONTINUE TO FLOURISH, OR DO YOU THINK THAT EVEN WITH THE SPIKE IN FEMALE DJ CAREERS, THIS WILL ALWAYS BE A MALE DOMINANT PROFESSION?

I think that comes down to evolution, period. I think that overall things will fall into more of a balance. In regards to that, I think that gender does not play a huge role. At the same time, I think as much as this world wants to believe they are progressive in their thinking, there will always be a few things that hold them back. Maybe they don't realize it, but you know- we're all going to be stuck in our own beliefs. Personally, I do believe that things are going to become more balanced. But as a woman, it's not really until you're working in this industry that you realize there are certain things that males can get away with that women can not. It's about just pushing forward through it, and not letting anybody, or anything stop you. That was my approach to it.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT'S WHAT HAS GOTTEN YOU SO FAR? YOUR MINDSET?

You know, it could have been written in the stars. I guess you can say that I am here today because I am so adamant about that, and I don't let anybody or anything get in my way. Maybe it is what helped me, maybe it has nothing to do with it. I'm not completely sure, but I know it's what I believe.

THIS FILM TOOK 10 YEARS TO MAKE-- THAT'S A REALLY

LONG TIME! THAT COVERS A HELL OF A LOT OF MATERIAL, YOU SEE AND HEAR A LOT IN TEN YEARS. WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT OVER THAT PERIOD OF TIME IS THE MOST CONSISTENT MESSAGE THAT YOU, THE TEAM AND THE AUDIENCE WILL TAKE AWAY FROM THE FILM?

Actually, it's funny. The title "Girl You Can't Spin Forever" and Kandeyce's original idea for the documentary have nothing to do with the actual film. Like I said, the idea really came to life after we had formed our own relationship. The documentary I guess took a side-step. Honestly, she had to chase me around for a while. Which is exactly what I wanted her to do. I held back a lot at first. I was hiding who I was, probably because I was ashamed at the time. I was a party girl, and maybe I didn't want her to see that. I got protective of what was really happening, but now that it's not that time in my life anymore I can be more open. I guess at the time I just really thought she was trying to get something on me. She kept trying and trying, and I just kept protecting myself-- so that's why it took so long. But the reflection of this really comes through in the story. My uncertainty and my hiding took part in the making, and it's hard to explain but it comes through in the movie.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST THING YOU WERE TRYING TO HIDE? WAS IT JUST THE PARTYING OR WAS IT YOUR ENTIRE PERSONAL LIFE THAT YOU WEREN'T READY TO LET ANYONE INTO? WHAT WERE YOU RUNNING FROM THAT YOU HAD TO KEEP KANDEYCE OUT FOR SO LONG?

Ok. At the time I was a party girl. I was young... and I felt like people that wanted to make movies were all about the story. They were all about trying to find something out about someone. I thought that maybe she was waiting to see these crazy parties in my hotel rooms every night, you know in my head that's what reality TV and movies want to show. I thought, "I'm not going to do that. No way I'm going to let her see that. If she want's to do a movie, she can make it fiction." Now, where I am at today I feel like I have been able to show a little bit more. I am not ashamed of who I was, and maybe I can help others, you know? I can show people who I am.

I THINK IT'S VERY ADMIRABLE FOR ANYONE TO BE ABLE TO COME OUT OF THEIR SHELL AND SAY THEY'RE NOT ASHAMED OF THEMSELVES, OR WHERE THEY'VE BEEN. IT HOLDS A LOT OF RESPECT. IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAD A MOMENT OF CLARITY WHERE YOU DISCOVERED THAT YOUR PAST DIDN'T DEFINE WHO YOU ARE, AND MOVING

FORWARD TOWARDS NEW THINGS IS REALLY WHAT DEFINES YOU. AM I RIGHT?

Right, exactly. Who I am today and who I was then is two completely different people. If anything, I want to tell the truth about who I am. The next person might see it and say "Wow, I can learn from that." We're not perfect, and if you can learn off of something real, and not off an object like Barbie then it's an accomplishment.

THAT'S SUCH A TRUE STATEMENT. IF YOU CAN LOOK AT SOMEONE AND SEE THEIR STORY INSTEAD OF INVESTING IN AN OBJECT, YOU HAVE SOMETHING SO MUCH RICHER. SO SPEAKING IN TERMS OF WHERE YOU ARE, AND WHERE YOU'VE BEEN- YOUR CAREER TOOK OFF IN THE UNDERGROUND LA MOVEMENT IN THE LATE 90'S. WHAT POINT DID IT BECOME REAL FOR YOU? THE UNDERGROUND DANCE MOVEMENT TO THE DANCE STAR AWARDS IS A BIG LEAP. WHAT CHANGED? WHERE DID YOU EVOLVE?

This is seriously the most interesting part about me and what I am doing. Had I started later and been involved later in the scene- I don't know if i would have made it. I started at 11 years old in Arizona. I was up all night bringing the DJ music and I loved it. I loved the music. I went to teen clubs where my sister was a DJ, and this was the days where there was help. You were the help, you assisted the DJ by bringing them new music and picking tracks out with them. I mean, this is definitely not something a parent would probably want for their kids, but my mom was totally supportive. She was supportive of whatever I wanted musically. Eventually I had a boyfriend out there in Arizona who was doing that in the mid 80's when I picked it up. There was no career in it though, it was something that I really enjoyed doing. It was like, "Hey I like this." Then it was "Hey, people really like that I do this." Then it become more and more and more people, it just got bigger. So we came to LA. The music is just in my heart. I'm not a very good communicator with words, so when I play music- it's how I communicate. It wasn't a culture then, it was my heart. Now it's like, oh wow. I have a career!

IT'S A GIFT TO BE ABLE TO SPEAK MUSIC, AND YOU DO IT SO WELL. BUT I THINK THAT'S IT SO GREAT FOR THE FANS TOO- THE MUSIC REALLY HAS IMPACTED SUCH A HUGE PART OF THIS GENERATION- DO YOU FEEL THAT ENERGY? DOES IT IMPACT YOU AS AN ARTIST AT ALL?

When everyone can sync as one, it's so powerful. People are always like "Thanks for playing, it was so great!" But really, like- Thank YOU. Thank you for being here because this is a collaboration, and there are no exceptions to that rule.

YOUR CAREER TOOK OFF AROUND THE SAME TIME AS EDM LEGENDS SUCH AS [PAUL OAKENFOLD](#), SACHA & DIGWEED AND MOBY. NOT ONLY DID YOU GUYS BEGIN YOUR CAREER A THE SAME TIME, YOU ALL WORKED SO HARD TOGETHER TO ENSURE EACH OF YOUR CAREERS TOOK OFF. YOU WORKED TOGETHER SO EVERYONE SUCCEEDED. DO YOU SEE THAT IN TODAY'S INDUSTRY NOW THAT IT'S SO BIG? IS THAT CAMARADERIE STILL THERE?

Paul Oakenfold took a liking to me early on, and he is very smart, very successful, and was not afraid to take me on because he liked what he heard. Sacha and I were really good friends, and he also was not afraid to support me. Today? No. I think that there are a lot of DJ's that don't want to bring anyone on, that don't want to share their piece of the pie, they want it for themselves, and they don't want to support the next artist for whatever reason. Not all of them, there are still artists out there who are not afraid to bring up new talent in this business. You can't be afraid to support new talent. It was big part of what built us, and it still needs to be a big part of it today. We can't all spin forever. You have to know that it's for the people- it's not for us.

POWERFUL STUFF! YOU'VE PAVED SUCH A STEADY PATH FOR DJ'S, PRODUCERS AND FANS IN THIS CULTURE, JUST BY BEING INVOLVED. YOU'VE SEEN SO MUCH AND YOU'VE SEEN THE CULTURE CHANGE AND EVOLVE. FROM THE LATE 90'S TO TODAY-- WHAT HAS THE MOST DRASTIC CHANGE BEEN IN DANCE MUSIC? WHAT ARE THE POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES?

From the beginning there were bound to be changes. But what comes to mind is the stages. Look at the stages! I knew that the day would come. I trusted in the music we were playing, I trusted in the way it was moving that one day it was going to end up in LiveNation's hands. I have absolutely no negative opinion about it. I know that maybe because of how big it's gotten that it may be a little dumbed-down, but there's still going to be another bit of separation. I think that the change we're going through now started about 3 years ago. I think that people were ready to hear something different. Things needed to change and move. And it doesn't bother me at all, it fell out of the nest and it's matured. Not everyone feels this way, I mean with the changes there has been some negative talk, there's a lot of parody sites out now, and it's just evolving the way it needs to. Negatives and Positives.

WHAT ABOUT THE CHANGES IN THE MEDIA? THE NEGATIVE COVERAGE? I CAN AGREE THAT THE INCEPTION OF "EDM" FROM "DANCE MUSIC" HAPPENED ABOUT THREE YEARS AGO. IT'S WHEN THE PRODUCTION VALUE, MUSIC, AND FANS CHANGED-- BUT IT'S WHEN THE DRUG-LIFE, THE TRAGEDIES AND ALL OF THE HORRORS OF THIS CULTURE CAME TO LIFE TOO. THOUGHTS ON THAT?

This has been happening for a long time. I think that someone has to take the blame no matter what, and what's popular right now is the EDM scene, so of course we're going to take the blame for it. Twenty years ago it was Black Sabbath and the rock scene that took the blame for it. I've seen it happening no matter what. Music, Drugs, and Freedom to express yourself all go hand in hand. But on the other hand, I really think that drugs and the evolution of them are getting out of control. Technology has really taken off and allowed people to create these drugs that we really have no idea what they are. We can add all kinds of things into drugs now. Nobody knows what they're buying and there is a huge lack of education. There are some drugs out there right now that are so very destructive, and they have nothing to do with music. All it is someone wanting to make some money by selling some drugs, they have no idea what's in it- you have no idea what's in it and that's just what's going on. The bath salt thing? I don't even understand it. I don't like where it's going at all. But the fact of the matter is that someone has to take the blame.

DO YOU THINK THAT THE CHANGES IN GENERATIONS HAVE A LOT TO DO WITH IT? WE WENT FROM HAVING A CARE-FREE CULTURE OF PEOPLE, TO A VERY CONSERVATIVE CULTURE OF PEOPLE, AND NOW WE'RE JUST KIND OF IN THE MELTING POT BETWEEN BEING CARE-FREE, BEING CAREFUL, AND BEING STUPID.

Sure- I think that the way we choose to surround ourselves is crucial. You need to be aware, and you need to know who your friends are. Like, come on. Why would you hand somebody something when you don't even know what's in it? Why would you walk off and leave them alone? You walk away for a little while, thinking they're okay and then it's "Oh Shit, they died." It's about community, it's about education. Way before this whole music thing even started, this was going on. And it's so heartbreaking to be at the front of this questioning myself. It's heartbreaking to wonder whether or not I am creating a space for this to happen. It really breaks my heart, but I truly believe that it's not just the EDM scene, it's all relative.

DO YOU THINK THAT YOU WILL CONTINUE TO DO WHAT YOU'RE DOING?

Yes, I do. Music is in my heart, this is what I love. I think that I would like to start writing my own music- writing is really what's calling to me right now. I've been constantly traveling and touring, and I didn't expect it to become as big as it has. But I really feel like my place right now is to just write my music. And I don't feel like for me, touring is the right place to write. For me, writing involves my whole heart, and when I'm touring it kind of pulls me apart. So now I'm here, I'm waiting and I'm going to write.

LOOKING FORWARD TO THAT! WHAT HAS YOUR GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT BEEN THROUGHOUT YOUR 25 YEAR CAREER THAT REFLECTS ON BOTH WHO YOU ARE IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE, AS WELL AS WHO YOU ARE ON THE DECKS?

You know, I never really feel like I'm finished. But I've always stuck to what I love- I've set the bar really high, for myself and I've paved the way for female DJ's. I don't do this for the awards. The awards are fine, but it's not what I'm doing this for- I don't consider them to be accomplishments. I see people dancing on the dance floor and that's my accomplishment. If someone writes me something nice, that's my accomplishment. I got an email the other day and someone said "i just want to thank you so much for sending me music while I was in Iraq, because it got me through what I was going through." This guy was fighting, could have died in Iraq, and he enjoyed listening to my music while he was there. That's a huge accomplishment. The money for me in all of this is gas money- if I can get from point A to point B, and I can get something to eat then I'm all good. It goes without saying that my accomplishments are helping people through their hard times and onto the next day, I've done something great.

AWESOME TO HEAR SUCH GRATITUDE. LAST QUESTIONS-- NOW THAT "GIRL" IS DONE, AND YOU'VE BEEN OFF

TOURING- WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

I'm going to finish touring for the premiere of Girl, and then after that I've got so many ideas I need to narrow them down. I definitely want to write, that's the next thing in my life that I need to do. I really want to see where this movie goes- I want to see what happens with that and where it takes me. I really appreciate you taking the time to interview me, it's been a pleasure!

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