

An interview with Niki McNally... by Fiona Walsh

<http://www.fionawalsh.com>

NIKI MCNALLY

One of the few female DJ's on the scene, Niki McNally is rapidly gaining respect and a following with the close knit and competitive EDM community here in NYC and she's only 24! Niki is set to release her first track. I got the chance recently to chat with her.

<http://www.Nikimcnally.com>

<http://www.Myspace.com/nikimcnally>



Fiona: Hey Niki, first of all you've got to have some Irish in ya girl! McNally? Tell us about that?

Niki: Well it's on my father's side. He's Irish and French-Canadian. I've never been to Ireland but would love too. I have a lot of Irish friends! The Sweeney's are staying with me at the moment!

Fiona: How did you get started in DJing and music?

Niki: There is music in my family. My grandfather is a classically trained pianist. My grandmother is a singer/songwriter and my mother plays the guitar and sings. I've loved music since I was very young. My Dad got me my first stereo when I was 7 years old for Christmas. Pretty much obsessed with music from an early age. Writing lyrics, memorizing them. Everywhere I went I had to have music. I used to sleep with my headphones glued on.

Fiona: What kind of music were you attracted to initially?

Niki: I went through all the stages which I think is important. I started with pop, hip hop, rock, pop rock. I got on the internet and listened to Interpol, Joy Division; the Pixies was one of my favorite bands. When I was 15 my friend Max gave me my first mix CD of electronic music and I'd never heard anything like that before. A Seb Fontaine mix and I immediately thought, "What the hell is going on here?!" It sounded so trippy and interconnected and wasn't like the music of American house I was listening to. It was more like a journey where every song was part of something bigger. Really magical and that's how I fell into it. I also listened to Sasha's Global Underground mix. I knew right there, this is what I want to do. This is for me. This is how I can express myself.

Fiona: So how did you transition from being a fan of the music to spinning yourself?

Niki: It's funny because I used to have recurring dreams when I was younger. And one was of a really small room with screens and buttons everywhere and I never knew what it meant. I had another recurring one. You know the song "Rhythm is going to get you?" Well the boogie monster was the rhythm and it was chasing me around! I kind of put it together. I just woke up one day and thought this is what I was meant to do.

Fiona: What was the first piece of equipment you got?

Niki: My friend gave me two turntables. He said "Here, knock yourself out". But one of them was broken so it was really hard to knock myself out! But I did my best to learn. I moved in with my boyfriend who was a DJ in the city. He taught me more than I already knew. I practiced a lot at home. I started getting vinyl from Satellite. My first gig was at Le Souk. It was my first real gig. I was 19.

Fiona: So being a woman in this predominantly male industry, what's that like?

Niki: It can be tough sometimes but I try to keep in my mind that I'm an equal. And when people try to stick me in all female gigs or are making judgments based on how I look and then I get behind the decks and they can't believe what is coming out of the turntables is from me! That's a nice surprise!

Fiona: I've seen you spin at Cielo and Sullivan Room.

Niki: Yes they are my two residencies so I'm there pretty regularly.

Fiona: Two great rooms – very DJ friendly I'd imagine. How does a DJ get booked in these high profile clubs?

Niki: It happens through hard work. You need to show the promoters that you can handle the task of adding to the party which is really important. You can't just come in with good music and expect to get booked again. Because unfortunately the way the scene has evolved over the course of the last few years, it's different. You used to just play good music and people loved you and booked you. Now it's more about promoting. Now the DJ has a lot more responsibility besides playing out.

Fiona: As a DJ how do you ensure that you get to play the kind of music you want at a gig?

Niki: I've played a lot of other places but I don't get to do what I want to do musically except in Cielo and Sullivan. You don't want to spread yourself all over. If you want to make something of yourself, you really need to take pride in what you do and what you associate your name with. I turn down a lot of gigs because they just don't want to pay and expect you to nod and smile. I choose my battles.

Fiona: How would you describe your sound?

Niki: I have a very wide sound and I like to layer the music not simply play songs. I do play a lot of techno house, house mixed with a little bit progressive. In Buddha Bar I would spin a really worldly sound that's more chill. If I'm in smaller rooms, I just keep it really sexy and down tempo. I have a lot of chill out music and I love playing that. You want to brand yourself but you don't at the same time! When someone comes to hear you, you want them to know the kind of sound they're going to get. If I'm playing a club gig, I usually stick to techno house; it's got that underground sound that's kind of approachable. I don't program everything ahead of time but you have to be organized and have an idea of what sound you want to deliver.

I put them in energy level order. I also make sure I mix in key – that's a very important thing for me. A lot of dj's don't think about that but I do.

Fiona: You play off CDs right?

Niki: Yes. Right now I'm in the transition of reburning my book because that was just a hot

mess. I couldn't even zipper the thing anymore! When I have a gig such as Sullivan room where I'm opening, I just burn a few mp3s and I use them. But in general I like to have all my CDs with me.

Fiona: If you're opening for someone, do you feel like you need to match their sound or start low key?

Niki: I think I sometimes over- think who's coming after me and it doesn't always work. I like to know what they're about but I don't try to match their sound. You can be aware but can't have it dictate your set.

Fiona: You're about to release your first track. What will that sound like?

Niki: It's kind of housey but there are some techno elements. The backbone of the track has a little bit of tribal shuffle in it. I wanted it to be friendly and sexy. I'm sending it to Forensic Records. I may have to edit it to make it fit their sound a bit more. It's hard to take the time to focus solely on producing but I need to release tracks to get to where I want to go. But I do love playing out so much!

Fiona: What kind of equipment do you have Niki?

Niki: I produce off Logic and Ableton. I have 4000 dollars worth of speakers. I have an Allen and Heath Zone 92 mixer and 2 Pioneer CDJ 1000s and I have two Technics 1200s. I also have an 88 weighted keyboard – midi compatible. It's huge (I take piano lessons also). I have a tiny controller which you can map with Traktor and it allows you to use it without bringing a big mixer along.

Fiona: Any great DJs you would love to work with?

Niki: Danny Howells is one. Steve Lawler. Love Digweed. Joris Voorn. He's my age too. He's my favorite producer at the moment.

Fiona: Any words of encouragement for young female DJ's

Niki: Just follow your heart. It's really tough being a DJ or anything in the arts. Art is just hard to break into but if it's in your heart, just follow it because you will never forgive yourself if you just settle.

[Niki McNally Summer 09' Mix V.1](#)
