

P.L.U.R.: AN INSIDE PERSPECTIVE
INTO THE AMERICAN RAVE CULTURE

HONORS THESIS

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by

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ABSTRACT

Electronic dance music, also known as EDM, is defined as electronically produced sounds recorded on tape and arranged by a composer to form a musical composition.

Disc jockeys are typically the composers of these songs, producing the music in a manner where it will be played for a live audience in a continuous set. EDM has not only taken over commercial music in the past few years, but has also infiltrated other genres of music, as it is growing increasingly popular.

Within the electronic music culture of the early 90s a mantra defining the rave movement was created: Peace, Love, Unity and Respect, commonly shortened to its acronym P.L.U.R. The four pillars behind P.L.U.R. are incorporated as standards on how to behave at raves and have transgressed to also define how the culture should treat interpersonal relationships.

This thesis will illustrate, through a documentary, the positive and negative connotations of American rave culture. The film will primarily focus on interviews with members of the EDM community such as DJs, promoters and audience members who frequently attend electronic dance events or festivals. The documentary will also include exploration on the social effects rave culture has had on American society.

HYPOTHESIS

Dance music has existed in the United States for over 30 years, but has reintroduced itself to American youth through newer progressions beginning in the early 2000s. With the era of the Internet and social media the popularity of electronic music has skyrocketed, making it the fastest-growing musical genre out there. According to the IMS Business Report of 2015, the 12th largest EDM clubs in the US generated \$505 billion in revenue in the previous year and 26% of all nightlife tickets sold in the country are for electronic music events. The growth of EDM festivals has also increased, as the overall festival capacity in North America has doubled since 2011 and quadrupled since 2007. My documentary will trace the history of this genre of music and the creation of rave culture and will also pinpoint the factors that have made this scene explode. Ultimately, I want the audience to understand why recent electronic music has created a booming counterculture and the context of that culture in America.

TOPIC

The four pillars of the rave movement, Peace, Love, Unity and Respect, can be broken down as such:

Peace: Hostility serves no purpose other than to defend the ego that is lacking inner peace. It is a common belief among the rave culture that violence is never the answer.

Love: Acts and feelings of goodwill towards all others. The exchange of gestures such as hugging can be seen in immense at any rave; this being the way of “spreading love”.

Unity: We are all united under the human condition

Respect: A person must show regard for the feelings of others through their actions and inaction, and one must have respect for oneself and the environment.

CHAPTERS

I. OPENING SCENE: ALICE IN WONDERLAND

I have Kirk Powell, a rave enthusiast; describe what a typical electronic dance event might look like. He goes on to explain how one may encounter heaven or hell: at a rave you may have the time of your life, or you may have a horrible experience. While Kirk is speaking I have B-roll footage of both EDM festivals and of people enjoying themselves at an EDM show. His comparison of these music festivals to Alice In Wonderland sets up a transitional segment of music (“Beam Me Up”, Cazette) with more B-roll footage to give audience members an inside perspective of what rave culture actually looks like.

II. HISTORY OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Juan Agudelo, a graduate student from the University of Texas, explains the history of electronic music in chronological order.

- Origins of Electronic Music

Juan begins by clarifying that electronic music can be traced back as far as the early 1900s, with the invention of electronic instruments like the Theremin (1919-20). The use of these instruments was mainly tailored for major universities who were doing sound research.

- Music of the 60s

During the 1960s there were advancements in recording technologies and electronic instruments such as the synthesizer become affordable. This is around the time when psychedelic rock bands begin incorporating electronic sounds into their music.

- Disco

Juan goes on to say that in order to identify the origins of today's rave culture we must pinpoint the birth of nightclubs/nightlife in America. In a time of growing social fragmentation, disco emerged as the perfect genre for marginalized persons to escape the pressures of every day life and dance the night away.

- Studio 54, The Loft, The Paradise Garage

These clubs became the foundation for what electronic music and its culture would later evolve into. Juan names New York clubs such as Studio 54, The Loft and The Paradise Garage as key components that made the gay underground scene tick, where the LGBT community as well as other discriminated minorities could dance, party and listen to great music. These audiences would go to a particular club in order to see a specific DJ, who usually had a residency at that club.

- The Big 3

With the "death of disco" electronic music was brought to the forefront and you had DJs playing with electronic sounds in new and interesting ways, creating new subgenres. New York, Chicago and Detroit were the three focal centers in the United States where this musical movement occurred. Juan describes that within these cities DJs like Larry Levan, Frankie Knuckles and Juan Atkins (The Belleville Three) became the founding fathers of the electronic music scene in America.

- UK Scene/Raves

Juan clarifies that while this music didn't become immediately popular in the US, it did catch on in the UK, in France and in Mediterranean islands like Ibiza. These massive parties started taking place, which is when the term "rave" officially began to define the scale of these events. Juan also mentions that the audience for these parties' changes as well, it is no longer a scene that is merely for the marginalized but now targets a broader, more generic audience.

- The 90s

While the rave scene blossomed in other countries, there was a connection made between the UK and the US as American DJs began to play abroad or would also play records at American nightclubs/parties that were from Britain. This allowed electronic music to then gather a huge following within the United States as this genre began to be played on the radio, which made it become extremely accessible. With the music attracting a larger audience the dance events in the US grew as well, beginning in the 1990s the rave scene was no longer about these imagined safe havens but is now just about partying.

III. 90s RAVE SCENE

In this section I've included video clips of mainly older ravers and promoters who describe what the rave scene was like during the 1990s. There was a higher amount of street promotion; people usually had to call a hotline and would follow map points in order to find the location of the party. During the 90s a rave could be thrown anywhere from a warehouse to an alley or even an abandoned building.

IV. DUBSTEP

C.J., a veteran raver, expresses how he witnessed the electronic music scene fall apart. This was due to many reasons: the force of police cracking down on raves had increased, the RAVE Act was passed in Congress and also many young ravers had aged out.

C.J. mentions that the invention of Dubstep, a new subgenre of EDM, allowed this music to be accessible again to a younger audience. I then incorporate a transitional segment of the movie with various B-roll video clips shot on my Go Pro at different festivals playing while a very popular dubstep song “Cinema” (Skrillex Remix) plays in the background.

V. FIRST EXPERIENCE OF EDM/RAVE

This is a turning point for the documentary because it is the first time we focus on current rave culture. I have multiple ravers describe their first experiences either with electronic music or at a dance event. This video footage allows the audience to understand why the rave experience is so enticing to people that frequent these events.

Rize, an EDM DJ, moves the documentary along by initially discussing his first rave and then by mentioning that he had never DJ'd until he began listening to electronic music.

VI. DJS

The art of DJing is one of the most important components in rave culture, without DJs, electronic dance music could not exist. I thought it was imperative to dedicate

an entire segment to DJs in order for the audience to better understand electronic music and its culture.

- Launch of DJ Career

I have various DJs explain how they began their DJing career. This helps the audience connect to DJs by seeing them as people, not just as artists.

- EDM Production

DJs such as AKREACHA (duo) and Rize explain how around 2010 it became essential for DJs to not only mix music, but to produce their own music as well. I added B-roll footage of AKREACHA DJing so that the audience can relate better to these artists and this genre of music.

- High Energy Music

DJ Phase, from AKREACHA, talks about the history of electronic music (after Dubstep) and describes how America loves to make music heavier, brighter and louder. He says “America loves high energy music”, which ties in to why this music has become so popular.

- Popularity of EDM

I incorporate different interview clips of DJs and ravers touching on the subject of how EDM has garnered the attention of American pop culture. One DJ, Joe B, says that he had never heard the term “EDM” until a few years ago.

- Popularity of DJing

The discussion of the growing popularity of EDM is a great transition into the topic of the rapid growth of DJs. DJs such as Rize and Wizard address

how you now have many DJs who are pursuing this art form for the wrong reasons and therefore are not representing the EDM community well. I incorporate a video clip of AKREACHA counteracting that argument by stating that they believe that if you want to become a DJ, you should buy whatever you can afford and get good at it.

- Why You Love It

I then have footage of DJs explaining why they love doing what they do. Every DJ mentions a different reasoning on why they enjoy DJing, this sheds light on why electronic music is so accessible.

- Superstar DJs

As electronic music has become more mainstream, the status of DJ in commercial spheres has skyrocketed. Famous DJs are like modern rock stars that get to perform in front of hundreds of thousands of people.

VII. MUSIC FESTIVALS

I included a transitional video montage to move into the section of EDM festivals, where the audience will see different B-roll footage that I recorded on my Go Pro. Following this, I have a few people who have attended these festivals talk about their experiences so that the audience can understand what these events are like. During most of the interview clips I also incorporated B-roll, which allow someone who has never been to an EDM festival the opportunity to see a visual representation.

VIII. RAVE CULTURE

Once we dive into the segment of EDM festivals, I have various ravers explain many aspects of rave culture. These interviewees talk about the sense of community, how you feel a part of a family with people that you've never met before.

Lauren, a trained dancer, also touches on the subject of dancing. Being able to express yourself through movement is key to the electronic dance scene. There are established forms of dance through different types of footwork (shuffling), but you are also given the freedom to dance however you want.

IX. P.L.U.R.(R)

Peace, Love, Unity and Respect, also known as P.L.U.R., is the credo of the rave community. This acronym is not only supposed to represent a standard on how ravers should behave and treat one another during a dance event, but in most cases transcends to also become a life philosophy.

During this section of the documentary I have different interviewees define what P.L.U.R. means to them. This will allow the audience to further understand the application of P.L.U.R in and out of the rave scene. We also touch on the subject of Kandi, which is plastic jewelry made from Pony Beads that people make to trade at some point during an EDM show/festival. In order to trade Kandi two people must complete the special handshake symbolizing P.L.U.R., which is expressed through each hand gesture. I have a few video clips of ravers showing the Kandi that they have traded so that the audience can see a physical representation of this jewelry.

I also incorporate a brief discussion on the parallels between the hippie countercultural movement of the late 60s and current rave culture.

From this point we move onto the controversial topic of an additional “R” in P.L.U.R.(R), which stands for Responsibility. There are members of the rave community, such as DJ Rize, who believe that Responsibility should be a part of P.L.U.R., specifically when talking about drug usage within the rave scene.

X. DRUGS

To deny that rave culture is very heavily involved with drug culture would be naïve. From an outside perspective the two go hand in hand, so I thought it was very important to include a segment where this topic is discussed.

XI. COUNTERCULTURE, ESCAPISM, NEOLIBERALISM

Now I focus on the bulk of the thesis: the main factors that have allowed electronic dance music to explode in America. Juan describes the definition of a counterculture and goes on to provide different examples of subcultures throughout American history. He goes on to explain that the rave movement is not overtly political like previous countercultures, but that it is escapist. Ravers are able to check out of their daily lives while attending an EDM event and can forget about their problems for that specific amount of time. American youth can escape social and political issues by attending these festivals and enter what are imagined to be utopian spaces. Juan also clarifies that he views these cultural changes through a lens of neoliberalism and reveals that electronic music festivals and the rhetoric of escape have become extremely commodified.

XII. EDM = COMMODITY

Juan explains that though the status of the US as world superpower has been questioned due to the series of wars it has endured, what has not been challenged but has exploded has been the power of the multi-national corporation. He reveals that it has been the growing influence of these corporations that has allowed the EDM scene to expand to its tremendous size. These dance festivals and superstar DJs are usually always sponsored by any number of companies, who are very efficiently packaging the idea of escape.

XIII. POPULARITY OF EDM

We continue to explore reasons of why electronic music has grown to be so incredibly popular. Juan mentions that the social aspect of rave culture is a big factor, if your friends are all doing it; it makes you want to do it. Also the opportunity to perform your identity, gender, social class and race is very enticing for American youth.

XIV. FUTURE OF EDM

Juan questions where the future of this music genre is going. He states that it could either be further marriage of huge festivals and superstar DJs or that the commercial bubble of EDM might eventually burst. Juan does include, however, that there are still many underground local electronic music scenes that are creating very innovative productions.

XV. CLOSING SCENE: TEACHING PLUR

Dr. Drew Stephen leads the movie to a closing section as he talks about how there is a lot going on in the United States. He says that with topics such as civil rights on

the forefront of American society it is common for young people to respond to those things. “I hope we’re teaching tolerance, and yes, I believe that that is a part of it (rave culture) that will continue outside of it”. This leads to a closing section of different B-roll footage from electronic shows/festivals while the song “Save The World” plays in the background.

XVI. CREDITS

I wanted to take the time to thank everyone who made this documentary possible, so I included a Credits section.

I also included a song selection credit to inform audiences of what songs were used during the documentary.

ON-CAMERA INTERVIEWS

AKREACHA

Andrew Knoy and Jeremy Gastrock make up the musical act that is Akreacha, a DJ duo based out of Austin, TX. Andrew and Jeremy are both graduates of Texas State University and met in the city of San Marcos, who then decided to create a tag team producer group consisting of DJ AK (Andrew) and DJ Phase (Jeremy).

Ashlyn Harris

Ashlyn is a rave enthusiast, who is very much a part of the electronic music scene in Houston, TX. She also owns her own company called Lÿnnish Jewelry that sells handmade bracelets, necklaces, earrings and rings.

Alex Leybovich

Alex is a managing partner and co-founder of DEAF Productions; an Austin based EDM production company that is dedicated to bringing the best DJs to the Live Music Capital of the World.

Cameron Joiner

Cameron is an alumnus from UTSA, who has been a part of the rave scene around the Austin/San Antonio area since 2009. He and his girlfriend Tori attend dance shows as much as possible.

C.J. Woods

One of the veteran ravers, C.J. has been attending raves since the late 90s. He discusses in the documentary what the culture and rave scene was like during the 90s and how it has progressed into its newest form.

Claude Bernal

Claude studied Chemistry at the University of Texas and now works as a QC Chemist at a pharmaceutical company in San Antonio, TX. Claude has traveled to various EDM festivals all over the country and has a passion for the various rave families he is a part of.

Daniel

Daniel's identity will remain anonymous due to privacy concerns.

Dot Quiroz

Dot is an avid raver and a huge fan of hardstyle, a hardcore EDM genre. Dot has attended festivals all over the country and loves to attend any EDM show that she can.

Dr. Drew Stephen

Dr. Stephen is a professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio, teaching courses through the Department of Music. Dr. Stephen offers classes over the History and Styles of Rock, Music and Film and Music Since 1900, just to name a few.

DJ Wizard

DJ Wizard is a local DJ, who spends most of his weekend nights spinning at clubs on 6th street in Austin, TX. Wizard is what you could call an “old-school DJ” because he still DJs on vinyl, something that is very uncommon nowadays.

Eric Redeker (Reddi)

Eric is an alumnus from Trinity University; he graduated with a degree in Communication and Sport Management. Eric is an inspiring DJ who goes by the name of Reddi. Eric incorporates a lot of glitch, dubstep and trap into his DJ sets.

Joe Belmarez

Joe, better known as Joe B, is an established DJ within the Houston music scene. Joe B has been djing since the late 80s and has witnessed the progression of this art form. Throughout the documentary, Joe B reminds us that electronic music or “EDM” is not a new genre although many believe it to be.

Juan Agudelo

Juan is a graduate student at the University of Texas. He provides a concrete foundation for the film, not only by giving the audience a very educational introduction to the history of electronic music, but also by analyzing why this music has become so popular. By viewing this cultural trend through an anthropological perspective, Juan helps viewers realize that the rave counterculture of today is not only escapist but also extremely commodified. These ideas are the groundwork of the entire thesis.

Kelby Dishman

Kelby is the founder and CEO of The RAMM Group, an EDM production company based out of Houston, TX. The acronym of RAMM stands for: Research Analytics Marketing and Management, whose mission is to become the trusted source in the Industry for marketing and managing nightlife business.

Kirkman Powell

Kirkman is not only a huge fan of EDM music, but is a DJ as well (DJ Styx). He enjoys attending electronic shows and is very much a part of the Austin rave scene.

Lauren Elizabeth Lightfoot

Lauren is a student at Texas State University, studying dance. She is also in the process of creating her own dance company called Momentum EDM Dance Productions. Her vision for the dance company is completely innovative with goals that include touring around the world with renowned DJs as a form of interactive.

Lucas Chavez

Lucas is an alumnus of Texas State University, graduating with a degree in Exercise and Sports Science. Lucas has attended multiple EDM festivals including EDC Las Vegas and Ultra.

Rize

Rize is an upcoming DJ in the EDM scene. He launched his DJ career in the Austin area in 2007 and his sound is mainly founded in the hardstyle/hard dance genres. Rize has recently been signed to record label Hard Dance Nation, and seems to have a promising future.

Shane Quade

Shane is a co-owner of Oh Bleep Events, one of the most successful EDM production companies in the city of Austin. He also owns an online ticketing company named Loop 1 Tickets. Shane has been a promoter in the electronic music scene since the late 90s, who shares his experience with the evolvement of the music and culture.

Tori Copenhaver

Tori is an alumnus of Trinity Univeristy and now works as a marketing manager at JM Austin Enterprises. She and her boyfriend Cameron, who was also interview for the film, have attended multiple festivals across the country. They are both avid listeners of Hardstyle, a hardcore EDM subgenre.

Trigga Mayk

Trigga Mayk is a local DJ, who got his start in San Marcos, TX as a student at Texas State University. He graduated from Texas State with a degree in Computer Information Systems.

STRUCTURE AND FORM/STYLE

The documentary has been organized in a topical progression; I placed each topic in a specific order based on the information given and on the timeframe of that information.

The film is also made to be extremely educational, the targeted audience is people who have never listened to this music and have never been a part of rave culture.

The film is mainly based on interviews with the various human components of rave culture: Promoters, DJs and Ravers. I do incorporate transitional segments of B-roll footage as well as sporadic Go Pro clips during interviews in order to strengthen the content of the topic being discussed.

BUDGET

- Equipment
 - Go Pro Camera: \$400
 - Camera (for interviews): Carlos Villalobos (father)
 - Tripod: Carlos Villalobos
 - Microphones:
 1. Lavalier: SRT Program
 2. Shotgun: SRT Program
 - Blu-ray Disc Burner: \$90
- Transportation

- Gas: \$150

LOGISTICS

The first step to creating this documentary, or any film for that matter, was to draft a storyboard. The functionality of the storyboard is to physically layout how the documentary will unfold, from beginning to end. This part turned out to be extremely difficult for me because I had to rearrange certain subtopics over and over until the transitions finally made sense. Trying to find enough people to interview was also pretty challenging. Mainly because I had to coordinate a specific time to meet with these people in other cities, most of whom I had never met before, and I also had a lot of people volunteer for an interview but would then cancel last minute.

Getting the right equipment was also a bit tricky; I wanted the documentary to look as good as possible but didn't want to have to spend a lot of money. My father let me borrow an HD video camera of his and I also decided to invest in a Go Pro camera to use to shoot B-roll footage. The Go Pro camera was extremely useful during the few EDM festivals I attended because it allowed me to record high quality videos of rave culture up close and personal.

LOOKING BACK

Creating this documentary has been one of the most challenging, yet rewarding experiences of my life. When I decided to base my thesis on electronic dance music and rave culture, I never imagined that I would learn so much; not only of cultural and social trends, but also of video editing software. Being able to produce a full-length film (2 hours) from the bottom up while doing all of the work on my own, has allowed me to

gain an incredible amount of knowledge. I learned a lot about video frame rates and about creating DVDs the hard way, by making mistakes that cost a lot of time to fix. These mistakes, however, have made me more confident as both an audio engineer and a video editor. The documentary will not only serve as my thesis for my undergraduate degree, but will also go on my resume, which can help me land possible job opportunities. Completing the documentary is one of my last requirements in order to graduate, which has been a long time coming, and being able to say that I've completed such a daunting project is a great way to end my college career.