

Joel Zimmerman doesn't like being called a DJ. The 28-year-old dance music phenomenon from Toronto, better known as deadmau5, rolls his eyes at the description, which he sees as a hopelessly outdated way of describing what he does. His sets are closer to live performances. He plays mostly his own material, assembling tracks on the fly, using cutting edge computer technology, including software he's helped write himself. "There are no CDs involved," he explains. "It's a technological orgy up there and I try and keep it more my music than anyone else's. If people come out to see deadmau5 I want them to hear deadmau5 music."

It's an approach that's catapulted deadmau5 into dance music's A-list. It's no exaggeration to say that he's the most exciting name in clubland right now. Over the last four years he's released a string of club hits, starting with the trance-house hybrid *Faxing Berlin* in 2006. It was followed by the euphoric filtered keys of *Ghosts N Stuff* in 2008.

In May 2009 deadmau5 charted in the UK singles chart, reaching Number 14 with the lush atmospherics of *I Remember*, his collaboration with American producer Kaskade. Later in October 2009, Zimmerman released his 2nd artist compilation album, *For Lack Of A Better Name*, which brought together the best of his single releases from the previous 12 months. It's not hard to see why the pulsing dance groove of *Hi Friend!* featuring MC Flipside and *FML's* military percussion and hard-hitting bass hook continue to fill dancefloors around the globe. The first single was a new version of *Ghosts N Stuff*, featuring vocals from Rob Swire, one half of drum'n'bass/rock fusionists Pendulum. It's electrifying stuff and reached No. 12 in the UK charts.

This year has seen no drop off in his relentless work schedule. In February he performed at the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver 2010 during the live medal presentations. In March, he was nominated for four International Dance Music Awards, and won a further three, including Best Artist (Solo) and Best American DJ. In April he won Dance Recording of the Year, for "For Lack of a Better Name" at the Juno Awards.

One of the biggest events on his calendar this year was in May when he sold out three dates at O<sub>2</sub> Academy Brixton. He went on to sell out Glasgow, Hull and Liverpool, by far his biggest tour to date. Fans attending the shows were treated to the visual orgy of his new stage show, and of course, the unveiling of his highly anticipated L.E.D 'mau5ehead'. Like a mutant rodent Frankenstein, it had finally been given life!

In June, Beatport announced the winners of their annual Beatport Music Awards, awarding deadmau5 Best Electro House Artist, Best Progressive House Artist, and "most influential, relevant and forward-thinking person in electronic music over the past 12 months." deadmau5 also performed live at the Electric Daisy Carnival 's Kinetic Fields section in Exposition Park, Los Angeles

This summer deadmau5 makes his main stage UK festival debut at Creamfields on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> August Bank Holiday weekend. And will also be an exclusive resident for Cream @ Amnesia in Ibiza performing every Thursday until 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

Ever expanding his horizons deadmau5 will also be a playable avatar within the forthcoming DJ Hero 2 video game being released in October. Plus MTV has got deadmau5 in to serve as the house artist for the "2010 Video Music Awards" set to air live from Nokia Theatre in Los Angeles on Sunday, September 12, 2010.

Hard to believe then that four years ago, Zimmerman was all but unknown. He grew up in Niagara Falls, Ontario, 75 miles south east of Toronto. As a kid he was obsessed with computers. When he was 15 he started making chip tunes. "They're musical compositions made using the chips from old computers," he explains. Fellow chip tune alumni include Jesse Keeler from MSTRKRFT, while hipster duo Crystal Castles are heavily influenced by the scene. When Zimmerman was 18, his chip tunes attracted the attention of the nu metal musicians in Los Angeles. At the time, artists such as Marilyn Mason were exploring a more electronic sound. Zimmerman ended up contributing to Mötley Crüe drummer Tommy Lee's 1999 rap metal album *Methods Of Mayhem*. Ten years later they remain friends as well as collaborators; last year they released two electro house singles — *Chicken* and *Redic* — under the name W.T.F.?

Around the same time, Zimmerman became involved with a dance music radio show in Niagara Falls called The Party Revolution. It was a low-budget affair run by the local dance music record shop, Electrified Records. "Back then, cutting edge dance music in Niagara Falls meant Babylon Zoo," he laughs. His job was "technical whizz kid". In other words, he was the one who knew how to use a computer. "All those guys were interested in was recording two turntables onto a computer and burning off a CD so they could send it the radio station," he explains. "I over took them when it came to technology. I learnt about digital audio and making music on computers, new editing techniques. Every new bit of technology that was released to do with making music, I was on top of it, while they were still dinosaurs out playing on turntables."

Zimmerman is still a technical whizz kid. While he was earning his dance music stripes, he worked as a web developer. Together with long-term collaborator Steve Duda, a programmer and studio engineer from Los Angeles whose CV includes Nine Inch Nails, Zimmerman writes music making software, including one of the programmes he uses in his live show; he describes it as "like a drum sequencer and sample player on crack". From 2006 to 2007 he worked for Image Line, the Belgian company behind the Fruity Loops virtual studio programme, now known as FL Studios. Add to which, he helped write an iPhone app called Touch Mix, which allows you to mix tracks on your mobile. He's not at the cutting edge of music technology so much as creating it.

However, in the early '00s, when he tried to convince local recording studios that they needed to embrace computers, no one was interested. "They had an old school approach to recording music. I was telling them, You've got to get a PC. But the mullets as I call them, the proper studio engineers, were really in denial about that kind of thing. It was rocket science to them. They didn't get it." Zimmerman did. Eventually he managed to convince a small studio in Toronto to let him install new technology and he helped record numerous local bands.

Zimmerman says that his dream at the time was to be a producer, working on other people's music. He wrote his own material, "IDM (intelligent dance music) like Aphex Twin, that kind of thing", but it was more a hobby, "just very obscurely in the background, nothing to do with the kind of thing I make now."

His first proper release in 2006 started out as a joke. It was called *This Is The Hook*, written together with Steve Duda, under the name B.S.O.D. (which stands for 'blue screen of death', computer jargon for the Windows error message). They took a house beat and added a digitized voice explaining what was happening. They were taking the piss out of how formulaic house can be and they thought it was hilarious. What they hadn't counted on was it going to Number 1 in online record store Beatport's chart.

They decided to write more B.S.O.D. material, not least because as Zimmerman candidly explains: "It was at a time when I was pretty financially strapped. I was earning \$1000 a month. My rent alone was \$800. Money was pretty tight. We were like, If we can make some money doing this, we should play along with it." They made a whole B.S.O.D. album and remixed *Hurt* by Christina Aguilera, but the money ran out and Duda had to return to LA. "We may do some more B.S.O.D. stuff in the future," says Zimmerman. "And we're still working on software together."

One of the first things Zimmerman wrote after Duda left was *Faxing Berlin*. He released it under the moniker deadmau5, using the same name as his one-man web developing business, which was itself named after a dead mouse he found in his computer one day (the unusual alphanumeric spelling is so it can function as a user name for online chat-rooms). He sent *Faxing Berlin* to British DJ Chris Lake, who passed it to Pete Tong, who played it on his Radio 1 show. The subsequent exposure turned it into one of the biggest records of 2007. The clever fusion of trance chords and house beat spawned a series of imitators. "It was quite a buzz to know that I'd influenced the course of dance music," says Zimmerman with a smile.

Tracks such as *Not Exactly*, *Sex Lies And Audiotape* and *The Reward Is Cheese* followed. 2008 deadmau5 was the biggest selling artist on Beatport. However, Zimmerman's next masterstroke was to do with his image. Part of the deadmau5 logo was a grinning mouse head with oversized ears. He decided to turn it into a mask. He contacted a firm in Toronto who made props for films, who agreed to build it. The first time he wore it at a club in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the audience were stunned. "I remember putting it on and looking out of the visor and seeing everyone in utter bewilderment," he says. "They were like, Who is this guy? Is he for real? But they warmed up to it real fast. When the lights came on in the helmet and they started blinking to the beat, the place went crazy." It was a stroke of genius. Dance music is often accused of lacking a sense of theatre. Not Zimmerman. There are shades of Daft Punk about the deadmau5 head.

He tells a story about wearing a crystal encrusted variant of the mouse head to the a Grammy Awards ceremony, where he was nominated for Best Remixed Recording for his version of *The Longest Road* by Californian house producer Morgan Page. "Even though no one knew who I was, as I was walking up the red carpet, all these reporters and TV crews were stopping me. In the end I actually missed the award because it took so long. although it didn't matter because sadly I didn't win."

No Grammy just yet, then, but you wouldn't bet against him winning one in the future. deadmau5 on a dizzying upward trajectory. Dance music just got very exciting again.