

# CLUBS

INFRARED RAY The fiery Ray Velasquez burns up the booth.



## Interview

# Greasing the wheels of steel

DJ Ray Velasquez yearns to be the "social lubricant" of NYC's underground scene

By Sage Meridyth Jacobs

Kansas City transplant and self-proclaimed "cultural provocateur" DJ Ray Velasquez opens his weekly Sunday-night radio show, *Nocturnal Transmission*, with the following words: "Tonight, we dissolve music boundaries, disrupt placebo culture and explore extreme possibilities." That's as good as any way to describe what Velasquez has been trying to accomplish since he first got on the decks and developed his Afro/Latin/jazz/house/anything-goes sound, which he describes as "new eclecticism." Although he moved to NYC just a year ago, Velasquez is already appreciated as a spinner who adds a touch of musical sophistication to the city's DJ scene. His emotionally engaging sets (at his Balanço Azul, Mondo Disco, Mondo Bossa and Aphrodisia shindigs) are unshackled from the confines of the usual genres, and in the process of creating these sets, he forges his own deep, tropical jazz-based sound. TONY recently spoke to Velasquez about his music and the

goals he hopes to achieve through his deejaying.

**Time Out New York:** You've got a unique spinning style—how did your sound develop?

**Ray Velasquez:** I've always been interested in eclecticism—I have never understood why you could only be one thing. My musical interests were always wide and varied. A lot of what I am playing now contains elements of music I enjoyed as a child. I remember hearing "Girl from Ipanema" on the radio when I was young, and certainly bossa nova is a component of the music I am playing now. I can also hear elements of the film soundtracks that I loved—Peter Sellers themes, James Bond, mod films of the late '60s—in the music I play. I'm also heavily influenced by the jazz tradition. These sounds have always been with me, and I think all of it came together as I became an adult and as other artists started to make this kind of sound—people like Rainer Truby, Jazzanova, UFO, a lot of stuff coming out of Italy. Their central theme seems to be a sense of sophistication, or a retrofuturism that is inspired by the cin-

ematic sounds of the bossa nova-jazz era of the '50s, '60s and early '70s—sort of a neomodism.

**TONY:** When you deejay, what sort of scene are you trying to create?

**RV:** I generate musical environments that, hopefully, act as a social lubricant for people to be able to interact in a positive way. I'm trying to lower the level of fear that exists within people, and I think that music can be used to dissolve boundaries. I guess I am evangelical in the way that I do this: I want people to get turned on to stuff; I want people to bring these sounds home with them. So there is a conversion process there. And any time I can assist and inspire the public to convert from being passive participants in music and culture to active participants, then my vision has succeeded.

**TONY:** You vary your sound somewhat for each of your parties. How do the vibes differ from night to night?

**RV:** Thursday night is Balanço Azul, where I play records from each of my formats: Brazilian stuff, African sounds, world music mixed with deep jazzy house music, and broken-beat style tracks. Mondo Bossa is every other Friday at Void—it's a retrofuturistic cocktail party, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* meets *Blade Runner*. For that party, I play modern Brazilian electronic music—which I refer to as "samba electronica" or "nova bossa nova," with a sprinkling of deep house. Mondo Disco, on the other hand, is straight-up, roman-

tic deep house. It's very jazz influenced, with some vocals here and there; it's a little more pumping than Mondo Bossa. Then there's my Aphrodisia party, which I describe as "Café del Mar meets the groove from Ipanema." It's got that Ibiza chill-out vibe; it's a very islandy, global groove, with a touch of Asian- and African-flavored sounds.

**TONY:** Can you tell me a little bit about *Nocturnal Transmission*?

**RV:** *Nocturnal Transmission* started out as a chill-out show—about seven years before *chill out* was really a term—on the University of Kansas' radio station. I played music like Kraftwerk, Cocteau Twins, Pink Floyd, and Simon and Garfunkel. In 1990, I brought the show to community radio, and it evolved into a broader program: I would mix it up by adding things like Primal Scream and house music. I then took it to commercial radio [KLZR in Lawrence, Kansas], and it has been there ever since. I produce it in Brooklyn, burn it onto CD and send it to the station.

**TONY:** You spoke earlier about the listener being an active participant when you spin. Can you explain that?

**RV:** What I despise most is the dumbing down of people, and that has to do with the public and the way they'll consume anything. Do they want something just to have it, or do they want something in order to experience and be engaged by it? That's why I talk about passive and active participants. A lot of times, it is just too much trouble for people to be engaged in music. When they go out, they often have no connection to the music—it's a backdrop for them to be cattle. It makes no difference whether they are at McDonald's or at Twilo. Are we going through life trapped in a cultural McDonald's, never being cultural adventurers? That's what I hope to get and create at my gigs—cultural adventurers: people who are ready and willing to be touched, to be engaged in something.

**Balanço Azul is every Thursday at Halcyon; Mondo Bossa runs biweekly Fridays at Void; Mondo Disco is every Friday at the Leopard Lounge; Aphrodisia is every Saturday at Galapagos. See daily listings for more details. You can hear *Nocturnal Transmission* online from midnight to 2am on Sunday nights at [www.lazer.com](http://www.lazer.com).**