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21 questions with Kenneth Thomas



"Kenneth Thomas is without doubt one of the most promising young DJs in the electronic scene right now. There's an intelligence and a well-defined style to his sets. He's quickly emerging as one to watch in the next generation of superstar DJs," Paul Oakenfold.

Music has always been a spiritual place for Kenneth and because the depth of dance music goes well beyond the conscious level, there's an underlying exploration of emotion in every set and track. As a performer and producer, he has the ability to blend and explore all dance music genres. Mixed between the big room melodies you find tweaky electro edges and tech fueled moments – some call it Trance, others may call it Progressive House. We call it an incredible journey that has every crowd on their feet with smiles on their faces and hands in the air.

Beyond headlining most major clubs in North America and traveling the globe, Kenneth has also become a juggernaut in the studio. Over the past 7 years he's completed over 75 original tracks and remixes for labels including Perfecto, Coldharbour, Enhanced, Hope, Armada, Om, Cuurve, Alter Ego, Pacha and more. Early hit singles include top 10 Beatport hits "Ghost in the Machine", "The Orange Room" and Coldharbour hits "Tonic" & "Achems Razor."

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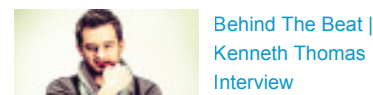
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Last year saw his singles "Drive" & "Piece of Me" top the charts in the UK and Beatport. Recent remixes for Perfecto, "Need You Now" and "Firefly" garnered massive support and praise highlighted by "Firefly" holding the #1 on Radio 1 for two weeks. His recent remix "Stronger" was tapped by Ministry of Sound as "Track of the Day" and blogged out to over 1 million people by MOS. The end of 2012 found one of KT's personal mashups, "Waterfall Language" become one of the biggest bootlegs in dance music, including opening Tiesto's Club Life radio show and Armin van Buurens' encore at the "DJ Mag Top 100" celebration party.

Now Kenneth is taking his production and A&R skills to the next level with the launch of his own imprint IAMPHOENIX records that launched in 2013, debuting with his own single "These Chords."

Check out Kenneth Thomas's 'Obsessions' #319 while getting to know our new friend



OTB: Where are you from? How has your hometown influenced your style/sound?

KT: Im from Detroit, Michigan. The birthplace of Techno. I'd say Detroit has thought me to stand up and stay true to my most honest sound. Detroit is an underdog, the city is on its own, clawing its way back and I hold on tight to that Blue-collar mentality. You have to stand tall, have faith and work hard living in this area to survive. That has thought me to stay true to my sound.

OTB: Is anyone else in your family involved in music?

KT: No

OTB: How do you define your sound? When did you realize you found your sound?

KT: My sound has always been about music that touches my soul. Melodic, emotional music. I think I kinda always knew my sound, since day one, the core has always been there, Melody and Emotion.

OTB: Why is your podcast called "obsessions"? Story behind the name?

KT: I was trying to come up with a name for the new radio show. I wanted something that really connected what this sound and what this music meant to me. The funny thing about dance music, something that really sets it apart from other genres of music is, there really isn't causal fans. People who discover dance music, like really discover it, have that 'moment' where it clicks and they really get it. And when they have that 'moment' they go all in, hook line and sinker. People who connect to dance music are usually overwhelmed by it, obsessed by it! My show is focused on what we are all obsessed with, if you're listening to it, if you've found it, then this is probably your Obsession too.

OTB: How did it feel to be featured on Beatport's "Top 10 Must Hear" Trance Chart for Hiding?

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KT: Its really great. Its the 2nd time this year we have been on that chart, we were #1 with my Nueva Digital remix of Hazem Beltagui – Into The Blue and now #3 last week for my collab with Molly Bancroft, Hiding. Its so great that “trance” has finally been accepted beyond the typical 138bpm epic sound. The Into The Blue remix is pretty much tech-house or progressive and Hiding is a dark moody brooder that just erupts. Its great that the industry standard which is Beatport recognizes that Trance is so much more than what it had been categorized a few years ago and that they are recognizing tracks like this. I love it!

OTB: Techy question: what do you produce on?

KT: Macbook Pro with Logic Pro 8. KRK Rokit 8 monitors with a 10 inch Rokit Sub.

OTB: What’s your preferred set up in the booth?

KT: I’ve recently moved to Traktor on my Macbook Pro. Im routing that through the Nexus 900 Pioneer mixer and I use the Traktor X1 controller. Before that It was just burned CDRs and I love the new set up. The way of foldering and organizing music as well as all the effects, looping, all the bells and whistles from Traktor. The looping effects really help make transitions flawless. I’m all about smooth, seamless mixing and the tools on Traktor really amplify that. Its perfect for my style of djing.

OTB: Which DJ/producers would you say have been the biggest influence on your style over the years?

KT: I would say my biggest influence was Oakenfold. His sound 1997-2002 was just so lush and melodic, he played records no one else played and had a sound no one else had. It was pitched back, chunky trance but years before the birth of progressive-trance. Also, I often say, the big mix that has my truest sound encompassed is the Sasha GU mix from Ibiza. Again, it was forward thinking, cutting edge “trance” but with a much more mature edge.

OTB: Your must have item when traveling?

KT: A comfy hoody. It keeps you warm on cold airplanes, it can cover up your head when you need to get plane sleep between gigs and with my bad back, I can roll it up and put it behind me for often times, much need arch support.

OTB: Describe your WMC 2013 experience in one word...

KT: Dizzying

OTB: Are there any festivals you have not played that you want to?

KT: Although I have played Ultra, it was years ago on some tiny stage with a 30 min timeslot. Would love to play it proper someday soon.

OTB: Favorite headphones?

KT: V-Moda Crossfade 2s. Looove em! Perfect for working on music on planes, djing and they are tanks. I would crack my Sonys and Pioneers in the first week.

OTB: What are you listening to lately both EDM and Non EDM?

KT: EDM wise, im loving everything from Dinka and Nigel Good right now. Everything on Enhanced is killing it in the trance realm and all of Tiestos' Musical Freedom releases are massive in the clubs. Non-EDM I always enjoy Coldplay. There's also a sorta folk-acoustic guy, Martin Sexton has been on rotation for the last 10+ years for me.

OTB: What your 'Go-To' track that we'll find in all of your sets?

KT: My own mashup of Porter Robinson and Coldplay – Waterfall Language has been a staple closer for 6 months. Also Tiesto & Allure – Pair of Dice is always one of the biggest moments of any set. Nigel Goods remix of Johan Vilborg – Altara has been a stunning opener to many of my sets.

OTB: Do you have any pet peeves?

KT: In the dj realm, any djs who are oblivious of how their music sounds, levels, volume- wise outside of the DJ booth. When the volume is just piercing or the high end is out of control and it would only take a second for the DJ to stop and take note of his surroundings and adjust and make the night so much better. Ego fueled club security and management is also so distasteful.

OTB: If you could have any DJ residency in the world, where it be?

KT: Avalon in LA, Pacha in New York and Ministry of Sound in the UK? That's not too much to ask is it?

OTB: What have you learned from touring with big edm acts such as Calvin Harris, Chuckie & Tiesto?

KT: Probably that everyone is human, they are just normal people walking in extraordinary opportunities and blessings. It's a reminder never to get caught up in the hype, these guys are doing some of the biggest things in the industry yet are just musicians like me trying to make music, share it and live the adventure.

OTB: Where do you want to retire? Why?

KT: To be honest, I don't even approach that thought yet, I'm so focused on living this life now and what's in front of me, I have never thought about retirement.

OTB: Where do you see the dance music industry going in 2013?

KT: Just bigger and better. I see our industry continuing to grow but I do think the music quality will get better. I think some of cream will rise to the top and the best acts with staying power will keep rising and some other acts might fade away.

OTB: Which DJs/producers would you say have been the biggest influence on your style over the years?

KT: As mentioned earlier, Sasha's classic sound coming out of the 90s as well as Oakenfolds were huge for me. Also, Tiesto and Armin have been very big. Tiesto has done such a great job transitioning from trance to his more current sound yet I feel he still didn't lose his core vibe. I appreciate that, keeping the core intact. On the deeper side, I love the minimal groove coming from deep house and Toolroom over the past

few years. My appreciation for house helps me keep the focus that this is “dance music” not just anthem music. I always try to maintain danceability and chunky elements to my sound with that in mind.

OTB: If you had the ability to give a person who has been deaf all their life the ability to hear one song... what would it be?

KT: Although a scenario like that I would probably wrestle over for days and days, shooting from the hip I would say,

30 Seconds to Mars – Kings and Queens.


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