

Graeme Park: 30 years on the decks, 20 years on the radio.

The story of DJ Graeme Park really mirrors the story of the evolution of dance music and club culture itself. Graeme found himself working in a Nottingham record shop called Selectadisc in the early 1980s, when the very first house records began to filter through from Chicago, Detroit and New York.

When the shop's owner opened a nightclub, it was only natural he should turn to Graeme to select the discs. Determined to showcase this new style of music, his reputation as a house pioneer soon brought him to the attention of Mike Pickering at the Hacienda in Manchester, who asked him to cover for him while he went on holiday in 1988. Simply put, there was no-one else in the country who could do the job. The Summer of Love followed, and Parky quickly became one of the biggest names on the emerging dance scene. Aside from his nine year residency at The Haç, he was one of the first British DJs to play places like Australia, South America, the USA, Asia and beyond as well as producing and remixing tracks for the dancefloor, including The Brand New Heavies, Inner City, Eric B & Rakim, New Order, Sophie Ellis-Bextor and more.

The Hacienda was a club without a purpose until house music filled its cathedral-sized dimensions. It undeniably defined Graeme as a DJ, but after more than three decades as a DJ, that can only be seen as one chapter in an on-going tale: 'Yeah it was a very big chapter,' says Graeme. 'I guess the first was when I realised I could DJ and discovered house music from the US. The Hacienda was chapter 2, then chapter 3 was when it re-opened after closing for a couple of months in 1992. Chapter 4 was when it closed not long after I left and I played all around the world. I suppose Chapter 5 was the turn of the century and continuing my journey. Chapter 6 is where I am right now, with more variety to my gigs and music selection than ever before.'



As far as Graeme's concerned, things are as fab as ever. But where is dance music and club culture headed? Well, who better to ask directions than the man who wrote the disco A-Z? 'I started doing it purely by accident,' he details. 'And then realised I was actually pretty good at it. But I never thought I'd end up doing it for over 30 years. And I see no need to stop at the moment. I still love playing fantastic tunes in a variety of different clubs all over the place and people still want me to do it too.'

And where we are now is a very interesting place to be with regular gigs around the UK, Europe and beyond playing a selection of classic house cuts as well as new and current tunes to audiences made up of die-hard regulars and new clubbers too. There's also a variety of occasional productions, remixes and collaborations under various guises with people such as legendary Ten City vocalist Byron Stingily, Juan Kidd, Natasha Watts and his ongoing Yellow & Black project.

Although keen not to be bracketed as purely a 'classics' DJ, Graeme regularly delves into the thousands upon thousands of tunes he has collected on vinyl over the years: "House music has made people channel their tastes, so I went back to my roots and pulled out some forgotten classics," he grins, still in love with process of mining those rich seams of vinyl.

"I love seeing a crowd go wild to a tune they haven't heard for years or playing something really obscure from 20 years ago that people think is new."

In the past few years Graeme has reunited with original Hacienda Friday Night partner Mike Pickering for a variety of FAC51 The Hacienda club nights playing a selection of contemporary tunes alongside a variety of forgotten classics. "We want to try and recreate the excitement of the original Nude nights when nobody knew what we were playing from one week to the next. We're also both massive fans of the current crop of young house and dance producers who are making scores of huge club tunes that take their references from over 20 years ago. Response to our occasional sets has been massive from both young and older clubbers alike."

Alongside Mike, Graeme has been a major part of the critically acclaimed Hacienda Classical shows which have performed around the UK since 2016 to rapturous response. They've both been DJing and performing live alongside the Manchester Camerata Orchestra, Peter Hook and special guest vocalists to a set of classic club tunes from the 1970s up to the 2000s. This euphoric show has had rave reviews and gives you the chance to hear classic club tunes like you've never heard them before with a 70 piece orchestra, live percussionists and a choir. Graeme even performs some lead vocals at some shows too. The show opened the Pyramid Stage at the Glastonbury Festival in 2017 and has also performed at the Royal Albert Hall in London, Castlefield Bowl in Manchester and lots of other arenas and festivals around the UK as well as in Dublin and Dubai.

Graeme has also just finished work on his first compilation album release in years. "Long Live House Volume 01: The 1980s" is a triple CD or double vinyl album of early house cuts from 1985 to 1989 which were all massive tunes for Graeme in the early days of house. Released in December 2018, early reaction to the track listing has been huge.

Graeme is also working on a forthcoming music documentary called "Embrace The New" which features Johnny Marr, Shaun Ryder, Peer Hook, Rowetta, Clint Boon, Melanie Williams with others lined up too. Look out for the film in 2019.

Celebrating over 25 years on the radio with shows on Kiss, Galaxy, Key 103, Radio City, Juice FM, Forth One, the BBC and more, Graeme's years of experience help him understand the specialist skills required by a radio DJ:

'A lot of radio shows or DJs just play the same big tunes. You can't simply pretend you're in a club, you have to talk to the audience and put your personality and knowledge across without sounding like an idiot.'

His weekly Graeme Park Radio Show airs on scores of radio stations both in the UK and overseas and brings in a big audience with his mix of new and older tunes mixed together like only he knows how.

Whether through his live DJ sets, his radio shows, his productions and remixes or simply by getting to know his audience, Graeme has spent over 30 years getting his jocular personality across. He was there before it all started, he was at the forefront of the dance scene when it was at its zenith and he's still there, still rocking it, years later – longer than some of the people on the dancefloor have been on the planet!

And the best thing is he still loves it, still loves the music and still loves to play it for people to dance to.

'Yeah, for my entire career I've been finding good tunes that I want other people to hear. The reason I keep doing it is simple:

'It's my mission in life to let people hear good music.'

The Hacienda is now an apartment building (the developers asked Parky to DJ at the launch; he politely declined). At the back of the building there is a time-line, carved into steel, detailing the history of the club from Madonna's early performance to its closure. And there's Graeme's name not once, but twice, carved into the metal for time immemorial. What other DJs (what other venues?) have had that significance in clubland?

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