

Too many DJs know how to DJ, says Marcelle van Hoof, “and that’s why they are so shit. They have these preconceptions about how things should be, and if you do it differently they say you can’t do it. I don’t agree with this.” There’s not much about the business of dance music that gets the thumbs-up from DJ Marcelle/Another Nice Mess, whose independent spirit and refusenik attitude define every interaction with that “boom-boom-boom music”, as she wittingly puts it, and “all this boring beatmatching”.

Van Hoof has been making a living as a DJ for almost two decades, holding down various European club residencies and radio slots while perfecting her anything goes style. A typical set, if anything in Marcelle’s orbit could be called typical, might include blasted Bristol techno, musique concrète, Monty Python skits or her beloved Muslingauze, all layered into a soupy, head-spinning collage over three turntables. At last year’s Sustain-Release, a tiny techno festival in upstate New York, I witnessed her rattling through a set of 200 bpm Tanzanian singeli for a rain-soaked pool party, leaving an audience of hip club kids both dazed and elated. “I am not too bothered about what an audience wants,” she says. “Sometimes winning people over is more rewarding than playing to the converted.”

Van Hoof’s anti-commercial instincts go back to her teenage discovery of bands like The Fall, The Slits and The Raincoats, but her interest in music grew into a lifeline when her mother’s death left her orphaned. “When I was 15 I had no parents any more, and that coincided with the punk explosion,” she says. “I grew up with music which was about the outsider, about feeling lonely, so music was for me a way of survival. I take it very seriously.”

Van Hoof’s commitment to playing by her own

rules is totally out of step with a young generation of DJs who steer their careers via social media and brand partnerships. Their entrepreneurial mentality is alien to van Hoof, who never thought of DJing as a career. She feels a closer kinship with outsider art, the non-canonical painters and sculptors who “do it out of necessity. They’re not interested in a career, they’re not interested in making it – they just do it.” Similarly, “what’s most important about punk is that you are real, you are authentic, you are yourself. I don’t see that much in the DJ world. Too many are acting like a DJ.”

In recent years she has been “making it” anyway, skirting the fringes of the mainstream with bookings at events like Primavera Sound, Dekmantel Selectors and Nyege Nyege Festival in Uganda, which has named her a lifelong resident. There’s no question of abandoning her all-vinyl sets for an easier (or lighter) life, although she does admit to taking the sleeves off to save space. “I believe DJs more when they’re playing with vinyl. It’s an investment, it costs money, it’s heavy. In every aesthetic way it’s superior. I could not bring myself to play with a USB – I would get physically ill or something.” When Malian DJ Diaki gave her a USB stick containing 150 tracks of his “crazy balani” rhythms, she simply pressed six tracks onto a dubplate, ready to be woven into unpredictable collages on-the-fly. Fear of boredom is a primary motivator. “For me it’s physically and emotionally impossible to just play a record,” she laughs. “I get itchy. Something has to happen.”

If the needle gets stuck in a groove, it can stay there for a few minutes. Mistakes aren’t really possible with this mindset; only surprises. In contrast, other DJs strike her as robotically dull. “Most DJs are accountants. They look at the beats

and it has to be the same – it’s like accountancy. It has nothing to do with authenticity or creativeness.”

Her first self-produced music appeared in 2016 following a technical crash course from Sebastian Schnitzenbaumer, who runs the Munich imprint Jahmoni. Her debut 10", *In The Wrong Direction*, followed a quartet of mix albums released on Klangbad, the label run by Faust founding member Hans Joachim Irmler, and her catalogue now runs to seven singles and two LPs of jittery dub and toppling techno under the moniker DJ Marcelle/Another Nice Mess. “I work very intuitively and I don’t really know the machines that well. It’s very spontaneous,” she explains. “I just play around, and because I’m limited in what I can do, it turns out very Marcelle.”

The album’s sleeves, like her personal website, are a further extension of the Marcelle universe: kitsch figurines, colourful crochet and 1960s bubble writing. Quirky rather than ironic, it’s a style that extends to her home, as visible in a new series of video mixes she’s been making while under coronavirus lockdown. Every episode is more technically accomplished than the last, combining clips from home and on tour: swimming in the Mediterranean sea and sunbathing, doing keepee-ups in New York, displaying her souvenir mug collection.

“I don’t live the typical DJ life,” she agrees. “I never took drugs in my life, I hardly drink alcohol. Not that I have anything against that, but some things are just not in my interest. I want to go to the flea market, eat soup, or go architectural sight seeing. It’s not about being an exception – it’s just being true to myself. If I was to do it like anyone else, there would be no point for me.” □ DJ Marcelle/Another Nice Mess’s *Saturate The Market, Now!* is released by Jahmoni

Do

Anything goes in the eclectic mixes of **DJ Marcelle** from balani rhythms to Bristol techno.
By **Chal Ravens**



Mess

The

Around

Courtesy DJ Marcelle