

# INTERVIEW

by Mickey Weems

## ABEL'S HOUSE

For years, DJ Abel Aguilera has been consistently giving the Circuit world some of its most memorable dance floor moments and creating some of its best song remixes. Much more than a DJ, Abel is also a consummate master of beats and melody. By himself, he is a dedicated artist. With Ralph Rosario, Abel is one half of the duo known as Rosabel.

I remember a DJ Abel moment during White Party-Miami 1998 in the Salvation nightclub. After a particularly intense set, he received an ovation for about 5 minutes. He got on the microphone, and, full of emotion, he announced to us, "This is MY house!" We roared our approval.

Fast-forward 8 years to the mega-nightclub called Space during the Miami Winter Party. Abel was spinning a 20-hour set (10 am Sunday until 6 pm Monday). At about noon on Monday, he had built up a solid groove, and had a few thousand of us packed into the huge space. Without warning, he shifted gears from salsa-tribal house music to disco house with Viola Wills' classic remake of "If You Could Read My Mind." I screamed on the dance floor out of sheer pleasure, impressed by his audacity and his flawless sense of what works, and what would make *me* work. Abel's house, indeed.

The reason why Abel can get away with things that other DJs would never dare is his familiarity with all different kinds of music. Growing up in a Cuban-American household, getting his start during the golden age of disco, and maturing into one of the most well-rounded DJs in the Circuit scene, Abel's extraordinary reputation is further enhanced by his mastery of remixing technology.

I think of him as an architect.

Today, Abel designs songs that Gay men flock to hear across the US, Canada, and Brazil, and then he uses these same songs and savvy to construct a united, pulsing community from a crowd of strangers. Let's take a closer look at the house that Abel built.

### The Foundation

Few DJs are as solidly grounded in diverse musical genres as Abel. Beginning his career some 30 years ago, he remembers the disco days, just before dance music was structured with computer-generated precision.

It was also during this time that DJs were perfecting the art of producing a continuous beat over the entire evening with two turntables. DJs could slow down or speed up a record's beats per minute and match up two songs over their earphones before shifting from one song to the next. But it was devilishly hard to match up beats from two songs for more than a few seconds.

"It's really hard to blend disco songs into a smooth segue," he told me. "You have to karate chop them" - that is, turn off the volume of the outgoing song and turn up the volume on the incoming song without missing a beat.

The only way to make an extended version of a song was to splice together pieces of audiotape by hand, and then re-record it onto vinyl. Since most dance music was done with live tracks, the beat would subtly shift according to the tempo of the

musicians. People like Ralph Rosario of the Hot Mix 5 began to remix songs, adding electronically generated drum tracks and synthesizers to the music and giving the songs consistent rhythmic uniformity.

The early to mid-'80s brought forth electronic music called "house," with computer-generated beats measured out with such precision that an extended segue could be created, a blend of both songs as one ended and the other began. The pioneers of electronic music were Gay music producers and musicians from the late '70s. "It was Giorgio Moroder and Patrick Cowley who started it," Abel said. "Later on in the '80s came groups like Ah-Ha and New Order."

This is when Abel saw new possibilities for music.

### The Framework

All the elements for really danceable house music with an international flair came together with freestyle (a.k.a. Latin hip-hop), the marriage of electronica with soulful lyrics, Latin sensibilities, strong syncopation, piano, and maybe a horn section thrown in for good measure. Musicians, hooks, rhythms, samples, and loops became raw material for the remixer, the sound architect who took all the building blocks and constructed a sonic space that shifted the focus from the artist to the dancer.

Abel teamed up with Ralph Rosario and formed Rosabel. They took the spirit of freestyle and began to build songs that were especially favored by Gay men in Gay male clubs.

"We're both Gay, and we both love to dance," said Abel about himself and Ralph. "We don't make songs the way that Straight remixers do. We understand our people."

I asked Abel an impossible question: how does Rosabel construct a song for a Gay male audience?

"We start with the voices if the original song has lyrics," he said. "We try to be as original as we can to the artist."

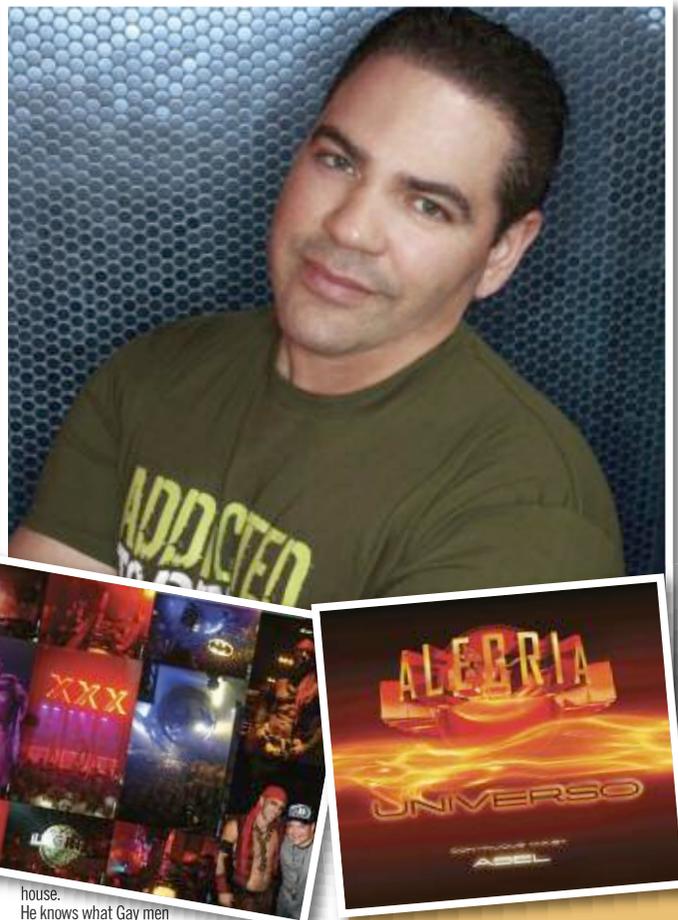
I found it fascinating that the first thing they do is connect with the human element. They make it a point to honor what the musicians are trying to say in the music they make.

Artists send their songs to Rosabel to make their songs dance-worthy, to make them sparkle in the volatile and ever-changing world of club music. This means that the music must inspire the listeners to pay attention to their bodies at least as much as they care about whoever is singing the song, writing the music, and remixing the final product.

Bottom line is this: will it make people move? "We try to think about the dance floor more than ourselves," he said. Tiesto and Oakenfold, take note.

### The House of Abel

The secret of Abel's success lies in his ability to integrate all of his knowledge of what makes people move with his awareness of who is dancing in his



### ANOTHER CHA-CHA

DJ Abel Aguilera Captures A Essência Do Alegria DJ Abel delivers with "Alegria: Universo" the latest in the "Alegria" series of mixed CDs based on the festive long-running party of the same name. A double-CD dose ("The Peak Hour Session" + "The After Sunrise Session"). DJ Abel has distilled the essence, energy and flavor that is the traditionally 17+ hour party, into two tight 70+ minute mixes.

#### Disc One - Peak Hour Session

- 1 Intro - Tony Moran, Jody Den Broeder & Ric Sena / Universo Alegria
- 2 Drew Tribe / Bitch N Beats [Mix 1]
- 3 Raffae-Lo / Watuski [Original Mix]
- 4 Massi & De Leon Present Breathwaite / Show You
- 5 Chus & Ceballos / Go On! [Rosabel Reworked Original Mix]
- 6 Alex Cohen feat. Sasha Fox / Don't Be A Hater
- 7 Leana / Pack Your Bags [Ralph Rosario Dub]
- 8 Alexander & Mark VDH / Encaruate (Strip) [Original Mix]
- 9 La Lupe / Besito Pa Ti [Rosabel Chusma Dub]
- 10 Tania / Me [Rosabel Anthem Mix]
- 11 Bob Sinclair feat. Steve Edwards / Together
- 12 ALTAR feat. Jeanie Tracy / Everybody Up

#### Disc Two - After Sunrise Session

- 1 Intro - Sin Morera
- 2 Ultra Nate feat. Chris Willis / Give It All You Got [Original Mix]
- 3 Southside Hustlers / Right Before Your Eyes
- 4 Dirty South / Minority [Dirty South Remix]
- 5 Jaimy ft. Jackie Desouza / Talk To Me [Lovin' Me]
- 6 Anane / Walking On Thin Ice [Louie Vegas Mix]
- 7 Kobbe, Maurel & Faurville / Talk To Me [With Your Body]
- 8 Rosabel feat. Tamara Wallace / Looking 4 Men
- 9 Karen Young / Hot Shot [Ralph Rosario & Craig J. Vocal Remix]
- 10 Soul Avengerz / One Luv [Original Mix]
- 11 Dajae & Full Intention / What Do You Want? [Original Mix]
- 12 Frankie Knuckles / The Whistle Song [Eric Kupper Remix]
- 13 Freemasons / Pacific [Original Mix]

Look for DJ Abel's latest mix, *Alegria: Universo*, out now on Silver Label/Tommy Boy. The next three Alegria parties are Alegria: Xtreme 8 (Black Party Weekend) (March 30) and Alegria: Memorial Day (May 25) and Alegria: Pride 2008 (June 29). More info on [myspace.com/alegriaevents](http://myspace.com/alegriaevents) Also, Rosabel will be performing at Miami's Winter Party 2008 on Saturday, March 1.