

# DJ IS A FEMALE WORD

Justine Renkel does not like to be called a DJane, a term commonly used in German to describe a female DJ. In any case, she is best known under her stage name LaRensch. Without a prefix, because people know who she is – a DJ in her own right. Surprisingly enough, the idea to stand behind the turntables didn't come from attending one of the parties she used to beg older friends to attend with her when she was just 16; it came up one Christmas Eve when she was sitting with her grandma late at night and googled information about women who were DJs. Coincidentally a DJ friend saw a picture of her wearing headphones on Instagram and sent her a message: Come round and I will show you how it works, if you like.

Without playing an instrument or having any musical education, she learned everything from scratch in these bi-weekly sessions: counting along, matching the right tempos etc. "Everything is allowed, but the transitions have to fit," she explains. When she was hired for the first time in Zurich, where they were looking for a female headliner, she was completely overwhelmed at first. She played songs that she liked and thought would fit together. The result was largely acclaimed. "I always get a lot of positive feedback, because my music creates a positive mood," LaRensch says. "And if people are in the mood, they'll dance to anything." But having an antenna for the audience and the right timing is also the key to success.

Developing her DJ skills with the help of a mentor was a good start, but there came a point when she wanted to try things out for herself. The new digital technologies helped a lot, not just for

cueing or fading but also for building up the music collection that she carries along on a simple USB key. "Putting up vinyl is much more challenging, because it's all about listening and trial and error. It's also more expensive and time-consuming. I can do it, but it takes a lot of practice," she says. At the beginning she listened to music a lot to get a feel for the structure of tracks. Nowadays she relies more on algorithms to suggest suitable music for her sets, buying regularly from Bandcamp where the artists receive direct remuneration.

The Internet is not just an important tool for digging out music, it is also great for connecting people, so LaRensch is on Instagram checking regularly for booking requests. Instead of sharing private moments, she prefers to draw attention to her gigs and new mixes instead. As a student in Economics and Graphic Design, she regards being a DJ as a kind of hobby that allows her to earn a little money. She combines music and networking to help the FLINTA DJs she is supporting within the "women\* in music" network with dedicated workshops and regular meetings, exchanging information on booking requests and other DJ-related topics. "It's good for women to get together and exchange ideas," LaRensch says, pointing to the lack of opportunities for this: "There are so many male collectives in Hannover; out of a total of maybe 30, there are only two made up of women."

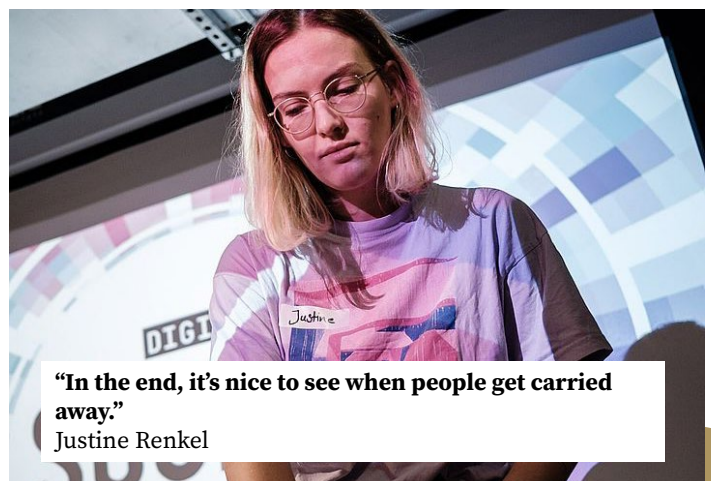
Having said that, the DJ is not keen on turning her network into a collective. "The network character allows everyone to participate and contribute," LaRensch says. However, in a new event series called "1000 German Discotheques", which

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co-founder of the QENEM collective

**Date:** 10 February 2022

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combines the theatre and DJ strands, the network functions as a collective. Hannover seems to be the right place for starting a FLINTA network in music: it has a soft spot for LGBTQI-related topics and supporting this type of pioneering initiative. For the people in the network it acts like a feel-good bubble where they can experience themselves without being confronted with the gestures of dominance common within all-male or mixed communities.

Do DJ sets with FLINTA at the turntables differ from the ones with male DJs? "People are happy when there is a woman as DJ. Especially in Berlin, people consciously seek diversity, and while Festival audiences are more diverse, club audiences tend to be more male," LaRensch answers. "I know a lot of people who don't go to the typical clubs anymore because so many negative things have happened," she adds, pointing out the new Weltspiele club: with three dancefloors, radio station and studios it has its dedicated "awareness teams" that can be approached at any time to deal with the negative sides of clubbing like drug abuse, catcalling and other forms of sexual harassment.

At least her parents don't need to fear about their daughter's involvement in the international party scene. "I have my life under control. No drug excesses, not my world, never will be,"

she says. The tragic example of famous DJ Avicii shows that being a DJ can be lonely. "I've met people who had several gigs every weekend in different cities, and I had the impression that they were alone a lot. Once you get about 1000 euros per gig, you can make a living out of it, but that means not having time on the week-end to be with your family or go to birthday parties." On the other hand, LaRensch enjoys DJing with her colleagues a lot, especially building up a relationship with the dancing crowd: "Usually you have eye contact with people, there's always feedback, interaction. DJing itself isn't characterized by loneliness, it's more about the audience. In the end, it's nice to see when people get carried away."

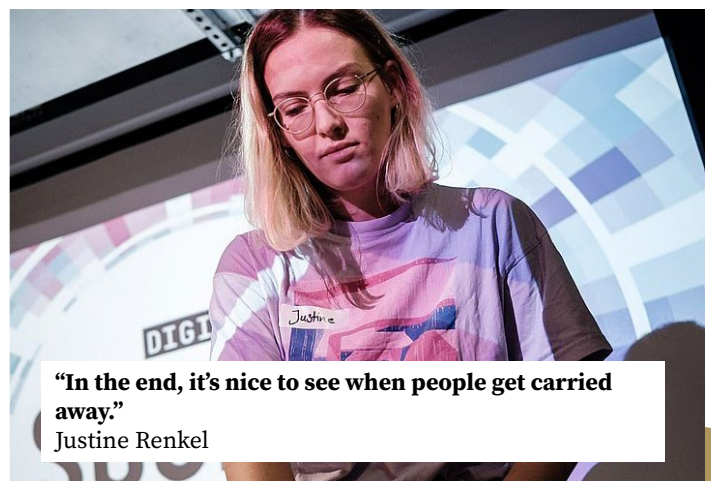
For the future, LaRensch hopes for more rehearsal rooms for DJs, because equipment is expensive at the beginning when you are still learning. She would be happy to have more clubs run by women and more social diversity behind the turntables. As the person responsible for booking for the SNNTG festival in Hannover, she issues the call to other bookers: "The same few people are always booked by default. Come one, think outside the box." And, of course, her greatest hope is for normal life to start again, to be able to enjoy memorable parties in nice locations with good friends and good music.

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