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Moraga's one-man band

By Cathy Dausman



DJ Ryan O Photo Cathy Dausman

"I've loved music my whole life," DJ Ryan O says.

While the "O" stands for Oettinger (his last name) it could also stand for out and about, as the 40-something Moraga resident connects with community while plying his second career.

Oettinger explains his goal is to read his crowd, then deliver "a celebration" by bringing his audience along on a musical journey. DJ is an acronym developed when on-the-air radio hosts jockeyed vinyl record discs ("American Graffiti," anyone?), but Oettinger insists, "If you just push 'play' you're not a DJ." For starters, Oettinger doesn't confine himself to a booth. And unlike a live band that might take breaks, he takes none. He relies on technology but always has a backup plan, explaining, "There is no second chance (to get it right)."

Mistakes? "I make mistakes all the time," he confesses, including the time Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" abruptly cut off during a holiday party because he had

selected an incomplete version of the song. Oettinger's challenge is to bridge his audience's diverse demographics. He clusters songs, but his playlist includes hip-hop, country, hit songs, rock music and alt/grunge. He discovered Latin and Caribbean music during the five years he spent in Miami. Then he embellishes the music, re-mixing it, adding percussive beats, clean version hip-hop lyrics and streaming it together electronically. "That stuff doesn't exist off the shelf," he says.

DJ work and a strong vocal presence go hand in hand. Oettinger listened to FM rock music growing up in Southern California. When he had the chance to speak on the air with then-DJ Ryan Seacrest the die was cast. In college at Cornell University Oettinger worked at WVBR, first pulling graveyard shifts and later hosting Friday "drive time" afternoons, developing a patter styled after his LA radio favorites.

Oettinger worked nights at a college bar in Ithaca to earn extra money, played bars in San Francisco, played for gas station openings (his day job is with Chevron) and even performed as a DJ in Miami department store windows. When he arrived in Moraga in 2009, Oettinger offered to play at the Pear Festival. "Since then it's been word of mouth," Oettinger says.

Moraga's Recreation and Facilities coordinator Kimberly Nelson says Oettinger has also performed and emceed at the Moraga Treeline Triathlon and the town's new Leisure Sport Triathlon. "He brings such a good energy and does a good job reading the crowd," Nelson says. "We don't need to give him a playlist."

Between full-time work and parenting (he and his wife have two preschoolers), Oettinger manages to squeeze in 20 DJ events per year. "I'd rather DJ than golf, go to bars or take guy trips," he says.

Although an extrovert, Oettinger says each event necessitates hours of music preparation and a two-hour setup ahead of a four-hour performance. DJ work leaves him "physically exhausted, mentally awake ... and starving!" But DJ Ryan O figures he still has another 10 years left on his playlist.

"We're a big musical family," he says. And yes - he does take requests.

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