



Bill Lovelace keeps collected.

# Laid-Back

## Cali DJ Practices Precision

By Chrissi Mark

**Long Beach, Calif.**—Left Coast native Bill Lovelace is cool and collected, but he runs his mobile DJ business with anything but a laid-back mentality.

"I meet with my brides and grooms at least two times, in my home office here, to discuss all of the details," he says, "and I like to get together with them three weeks before their ceremony and fine-tune everything."

Such meticulous planning reflects the sharpened instincts of a 20-year DJ vet. "There are always problems, you always plan out a certain agenda, a certain schedule of events and sometimes they don't always go accordingly, so as a professional you have to know how to change gears and keep it running smoothly."

He keeps it running smoothly by being "in tune with what's going on," and always staying in contact with the bride and groom. And even when something goes wrong, Lovelace keeps his cool. "Right before the grand entrance we're getting ready to line up the party," he recalls of one gig, "when someone spilled red wine on the wedding dress of this bride. Everyone was freaking out, so I calmly got the bartender to get some club soda, and with the banquet manager we cleaned her up real quick."

Like many in the business, Lovelace's first interest in DJing came through osmosis. After watching his best friend spend a great deal of time at radio and club gigs, Lovelace went out on a limb. When his sister got engaged (March 30, 1985), he simply told her he'd play the wedding. Now the date marks dual anniversaries: his personal life as well as his professional debut.

He pulled off his "very first gig" by borrowing equipment and relying on friends to help out. Lovelace says it was that experience and "seeing people having fun dancing," that launched him into the business of DJing. "I said to myself: 'Self, this is a great way to make some money and have fun at the same time.'"

No kidding. Lovelace used the money to buy his own equipment and then landed a job in the promotions department at KRLA radio, which gave him the chance to gain industry experience hosting concerts, working with and learning from other DJs (like the late Wolfman Jack—how cool?) and other big-name DJs. As the '80s partied on, Lovelace hooked up with the club scene at The Hop, an oldies-but-goodies nightclub owned by singer Bill Medley of the Righteous Brothers.

"I was doing banquets for [Medley] also," he says, "kind of like the wedding singer, without so much singing. It was one location you'd always work at."

Lovelace never lost that loving feeling, as his DJ hobby progressed into a thorough resume, and he began to focus on performing at weddings. "I love doing weddings because they're always different," he says. "When I worked at clubs it was the same people coming in, pretty much the same music. But with weddings you get to be more diverse, you get to use some of your music creativity." Now, Lovelace says about 90-percent of his gigs (more than 50 per year) are weddings, which are mostly of the "somewhat contemporary, traditional-type."

Being focused squarely on the wed-

after the couple were pronounced man and wife, Lovelace pumped the lyrics, "Never make a pretty woman your wife," and, "Get an ugly girl to marry you." To Lovelace and the cackling guests, it played out hilariously.

It was four years ago when Lovelace took the step from part-time DJ to full-time. He quit his sales job in the flooring industry to devote his daytime to wedding preparations: meeting with banquet managers, wedding coordinators, networking and introducing himself to other wedding professionals in the immediate area. About two years ago, he created a home office to replace meetings at clients' homes or coffeehouses. Lovelace couldn't be happier, having everything more accessible, organized and professional.

Though at first losing a Monday-to-Friday income caused some queasiness, Lovelace says the familiar feeling comes with any big business step, like his jumps from LPs to CDs, and later CDs to digital files (he uses Virtual DJ software).

"Another thing that has changed immensely is that I formerly used two turntables and a microphone"—not so much the Beck song, but the actual hauling of equipment and crates of records. Now he's got it all—22,000-and-growing MP3 songs—on his computer.

"It's been a lot of work ripping the music onto the hard drive, but it's a big reward," he says. "It's nice to be able to, if someone comes up and asks for a song, within six seconds have it on and not be fumbling through CDs anymore."

Nonetheless, Lovelace says he remains prepared for the worst. "For a good year I brought my CD players, CDs and computers to acclimate myself," he says. "I do still carry backup CDs in case there's a problem with the computer, but in two years of being computerized, I've never had a glitch at all—knock on wood."

What hasn't changed for Lovelace are the timeless tactics of reading the crowd. "There are certain songs you can play, like 'Yeah' from Usher right now and certain groups will just pack the dancefloor. Some of the older audiences will respond to 'Old Time Rock-n-Roll' by Bob Seger,"

ding business allows him to portray himself as an expert in his market, which has helped him take big business leaps (going full-time, digital, etc.) in a business that has changed over the last two decades. For example, at nearly half of his wedding gigs, Lovelace is hired to play for the ceremony as well as the reception. "They're not hiring the string quartets or the harpist anymore, they're able to hire a DJ." To pull this off seamlessly, he's equipped with two sound systems, so as not to interfere with tearing down the setup after a ceremony and lugging equipment past the guests to the reception.

"It works out well," says Lovelace, "I always let the client have input, that way they're able to customize exactly what they want for their ceremony, so they can have the standard, traditional wedding march music, 'Here Comes the Bride' type stuff, or, as the bride's walking down the aisle, they can play 'At Last' by Etta James."

The oddest song request, he says, was "If You Wanna Be Happy," by Jimmy Soul. At the bride's request and

Lovelace says. And with his well developed ability to read the crowd, he never worries about a party getting sluggish.

Over time he's also sharpened his organizational skills and through meetings gets to know his clients and their specific needs and wants. "Whenever I meet with a bride and groom, we talk about their music likes and dislikes and what they think that maybe the majority of their guests might like," he says. "Some brides and grooms do not want me to play 'The Macarena,' which I'm more than happy not to play, so on my wedding planning sheet, there's a spot on there for songs they don't want played."

If the situation arises that, when he sits down to his insisted-upon "no-obligation consultation" with potential clients, their personalities don't mix, or he feels he isn't the right DJ for them, Lovelace tries to usher the clients off to a DJ he knows from the American Disc Jockey Association. And he says the ADJA members would do the same for him.

With business cards and brochures, he's expanded his networking to others in the industry—photographers, florists, videographers, etc. If clients haven't yet found a vendor, they can come to Lovelace. His website also has a referral page with links to other professionals in the wedding business.

One list not on his website? An equipment list. "To me the equipment isn't the major part of a wedding," he says. "It's like if a photographer had a website, you don't know if he had a Canon or a Nikon." Though he doesn't feel brands are relevant to clients, he does keep up with his digital computerized system, professional Shure wireless microphones and JBL loudspeakers. And that's what he tells the "probably one request every two years from a groom, mainly it's a groom, that wants to know what kind of equipment I have."

From the 1980s through today, Lovelace has kept up with the DJ Joneses. "The biggest struggle was right after 9/11 for everybody in this industry. For corporate parties, the whole industry was put on hold. And since then I've noticed people don't have as many holiday parties as they used to."

To Lovelace, the industry has yet to fully recover. His December holiday bookings have waned, but fortunately for him, his focus on weddings has enabled him to get through the slump without so much as a dent in business. Plus, he says, "It seems like more people are getting married since then, two years after September 11. I think we've had a surge of weddings."

The surge in weddings has been a boon for Lovelace as well as his competition, but he doesn't worry about that, either. "It's Southern California—

## Lugging with Lovelace

- 1 Digdj.com computer system
- 1 3-GHz Pentium 4 processor
- 1 DAC-2 controller
- 1 Denon DN-X400 mixer
- 2 Shure UT-Beta 58 wireless mics
- 1 dbx Driverack PA unit
- 2 QSC PLX 3002 power amps
- 2 JBL MPro MP215 speakers
- 1 JBL SRX718S 18-inch subwoofers

it's a huge market," he says. "I don't know how many thousands of mobile DJs there are, but there are a lot of them." He's learned to welcome the number of competitors, and has thrived in the ADJA, where, he says, "we mainly network together, and so it's not so much competition, it's almost like a family.

"I mean, yeah, we're still bidding against each other for a lot of the same gigs, but in the same regard, we learn from each other too."