

BLACK LADY DJs

(working title)

submitted by:
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A DJ is performing at a club. The DJ is a woman with long dark hair, wearing a black top, and is seen from behind, focused on her Serato DJ3 controller. The controller is illuminated with blue and purple lights. In the background, a crowd of people is visible, some with their hands raised, suggesting a lively atmosphere. The lighting is dim, with blue and purple hues dominating the scene. A person in the foreground on the left is wearing a white t-shirt with the text "THINK IT'S NOT LEGAL YET" printed on it.

Introduction

My name is Elizabeth Gray Bayne and I'm a filmmaker. I produce short form content and documentaries about the inner lives of Black women. From environmental activists and birth workers to designers and artists, my singular joy is treating our stories with dignity and reverence because each of our lives is a work of art.

Female disc jockeys have long held a fascination for me. I wanted to capture the pioneering women who've chosen to follow their passion. But with the ongoing pandemic, the music scene looks different than when I first conceived of this project. And I wondered, what is life like now for a DJ? What happens when you take away the venue, the crowd, and the night scene? As an artist and voyeur, I'm curious what happens when everything falls away and there's nothing left but the music.

"Black Lady DJ" is the working title for a visual essay that pays homage to the artists who create with music, weaving narratives and conjuring a vibe. By exploring the mundane and observing these women at home, I hope to give audiences a glimpse into what motivates them to get out of bed and keep spinning and perhaps reveal what many of us have discovered during this trying time, that no matter what's happening in the world, the beat must go on.

Specs

Format. Cinema vérité style punctuated with personal thoughts and insights from our subjects about breaking into the music scene, the community that embraced and mentored them, challenges in the industry and the passion that motivates them.

Genre. Observational documentary

Tone. Fresh, authentic, and personal



Logline

Black Lady DJs is an experimental documentary exploring the inner lives and outer personas of Los Angeles' leading underground female disc jockeys.

Characters



We've approached the following creatives about participating in filming:

DJ Lynnée Denise is an artist, scholar, and writer whose work reflects on underground cultural movements, the 1980s, migration studies, theories of escape, and electronic music of the African Diaspora. A self-described "DJ Scholar," her work has been featured at art institutions around the globe, from UCLA to the Goldsmiths University of London.



DJ Kita is resident disc jockey for Destiny Rogers and Armon and Trey, as well as host of "Young Blacky" on Sound Cloud. Before the outbreak, she performed throughout Europe, with tours through Stockholm, Paris, London, Glasgow, and Dublin.



DJ Val Fleury is a Liberian born DJ, producer and radio host who has toured the US and abroad performing at nightclubs, festivals, and fashion shows. The versatile DJ has worked with artists like Goldroom and Kat Dahlia, and even has original music fans can download from various streaming platforms.

Setting

Setting. Imagine a dance hall. A DJ enters with her heavy equipment in tow. You can hear the acoustics of the room as her footsteps approach the main stage. She sets up a folding table and drapes a nice table cloth over it. She plugs in the necessary cables, sets up her turntables, the two-channel mixer and the speakers. Last, but not least, the laptop comes out. A needle is placed on the groove. The DJ performs a sound check and tests out the EQs. She looks out at the room. It's empty, except for a couch and coffee table. She stands in her living room in front of a camera, ready to spin. Meet the new normal.

Story

Black Lady DJs follows the personal stories of a handful of underground artists in the Los Angeles dance scene. As we watch them go through the routines of daily life, we hear them share their respective backgrounds, how they saved up to buy their first set of audio equipment, how they learned the ins and outs of mixing, and found their stage name.

Archival footage and photographs will illustrate how their schedules once revolved around music, working six shows in one week in between shifts at a regular job. As our subjects recall how they spent their days off catching up on sleep or rehearsing, they reflect on the challenges of competing for stage time at a dwindling list of venues as favorite local spots closed over the years. The conversation will drift to the industry and how it's recent popularity has brought a new generation of fans, star names, record deals and big shows, but with very few women of color in the spotlight.

As our subjects perform in the front of a virtual audience while they live stream on social media, we'll hear them describe what first inspired them to spin. We'll hear about the inclusive communities that embraced them and the friends and mentors who educated and guided them at pivotal times in their lives. Most of our subjects will be 5-10 years into their careers and reflect on their progress. While some may be dismayed by the commercialism in a music scene that values image over talent, others may be more optimistic. Regardless, they know what they're up against and have come too far to stop now.



Addt'l Plot Points

While the main focus, will be the personal stories of our main subjects, but other areas we may explore include: 1) the increasing number of female booking agents, promoters and communities groups that have helped female DJs gain greater visibility, and 2) the irony that the industry has become cis white male dominated despite house and techno started in black and gay communities in Detroit, Chicago and New York.



DOCU-SERIES

We're starting with Los Angeles-based Black female DJs, but would love to extend the project to include artists across the US and abroad.

QUESTIONS?

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