

# Marin Independent Journal

## DJ defies musical logic

By Paul Liberatore

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Jason Kibler, aka DJ Logic, has been called an ambassador of hip-hop, a title he's earned through his groundbreaking collaborations with rock, jazz and, unlikely as it seems, even folk and bluegrass musicians.

A "turntablist" or "scratcher," he creates beats and soundscapes with a pair of record turntables and a sampler, electronic devices that have become a new instrument in popular music.

Because of his openness and ability to improvise, he has been embraced by the Grateful Dead family of musicians, who invented the jam band nearly 40 years ago and continue to lead the way in rock improvisation.

In the past two years, the 29-year-old Kibler has toured and performed with Bob Weir's band, Ratdog, as well as bassist Phil Lesh's group. Last New Year's Eve, he sat in with Weir, Lesh and the Dead, then known as the Other Ones, at the Oakland Coliseum Arena.

"The Deadheads saw something different, a DJ scratchin' Dead records," Kibler says, speaking by phone from his home in the Bronx. "I was scratchin' on the vocal chorus of 'Franklin's Tower,' and people were like, 'What? Oh, wow, interesting sounds.' I was adding textures where I felt they were needed. I threw a couple of hip-hop beats behind some Dead songs. People were open-minded. They enjoyed it."

On March 28 at Marin Center, Kibler will perform for the first time as a trio with Weir and bassist Rob Wasserman in a benefit for the Grateful Dead's Rex Foundation.

Back in February, he and Wasserman, a Sausalito resident, joined forces at a Woody Guthrie tribute concert at the Grand Ole Opry's Ryman Auditorium in Nashville. In what was an imaginative and startlingly different piece for an acoustic music audience, Kibler and Wasserman played behind a recording of Studs Terkel reciting a Woody Guthrie poem.

"We followed all these folk and bluegrass people," Wasserman recalls. "We were another whole dimension, the most unusual thing that night, the highlight of the evening, I was told."

Wasserman, an ambitious collaborator himself, has found a soul mate in this young turntable master from the Bronx. "Every time I turn around, he's collaborating with someone else, which you don't associate with a scratcher," he said. "He's very thoughtful and creative and open. In that sense, we're in the same world. You have to reach out to create new things."

Born in 1972, Kibler was 9 years old when the Bronx spawned hip-hop music and culture. At first, he was no more than an avid young fan, documenting the nascent sounds of DJs like Grand Master Flash, Kool Herk and Africa Bambaata. Ask him who invented scratching, and he responds without hesitation: "Grand Master Theodore. He's from the Bronx, too. He discovered the scratch by mistake. He was just a regular DJ, playing records. One day someone walked in the room, he stopped the record, and boom, there was the first scratch right there."

When he was 14, his mother gave him a pair of turntables for Christmas, and within months, he was scratching at house parties all over the Bronx, Queens and Manhattan.

After seeing Kibler spinning at a high school dance, Richie Harrison, a next door neighbor and a drummer in an alternative rock band, invited him to play with his group, Eye and I. It was Kibler's first experience interacting with other musicians.

"He thought it would be cool to add a DJ," he remembers. "At the time, there were no bands trying to do that. It was interesting because at that time people weren't looking at the turntables as an instrument. The musicians I was playing with were looking at me as a musician, but I didn't realize it until a few years later. I was just learning how to play my role around them, looking at them like a third turntable and trying to add sounds to what they were doing."

Eye and I was part of a collective, the Black Rock Coalition, with another promising band, Living Color. Like Living Color, Kibler's group was soon signed to Sony's 550 label, forcing him to make a life decision. A star high school basketball player, he passed up several college scholarships to make a record and go on the road as the opening act for Living Color. With his new direction, he needed a professional name, calling himself DJ Logic, which he picked out of a thesaurus.

After Eye and I broke up, Kibler began jamming with eclectic clarinetist Don Byron, saxophonist Joshua Redman, guitarist Vernon Reid from Living Color and other jazz musicians.

"I started learning about improvisational jazz working with different jazz musicians," he says. "I was playing with them at the old Knitting Factory in New York. I was still a teen-ager and wasn't supposed to be in there. I couldn't even buy a drink. I was there just to play and leave, that was it."

Kibler joined the young jazz trio Medeski, Martin and Wood on stage for their Shack Party shows at the Knitting Factory, which led to him touring with them and playing on their "Combustication" album.

He has since gone on to form his own band, Project Logic, releasing two albums, "Presenting Project Logic" and "The Anomaly," recording with a diverse group of musicians that included an Israeli violinist, a didjeridoo player and an opera singer.

In recent times, he has performed with the jam bands String Cheese Incident and Widespread Panic as well as banjo great Bela Fleck and the New Orleans-based Dirty Dozen Brass Band. His most unusual association to date has been with the Del McCoury Band, the country's most popular bluegrass group.

After meeting members of the McCoury Band at a music festival, Kibler took the stage with them at an award show, uniting hip-hop with traditional string band music in all likelihood for the first time ever.

"I didn't know what to think, and they didn't know what to think, but they were open to trying it," he says, unable to hide his amusement. "We opened up with 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.' I had that record, so I was scratchin' that in the beginning, and then I was doing rhythm scratches to what they were doing, going in and out, letting them set the pace. It was something I hadn't tried, and it was a challenge, but people dug it. I love playing and going to new places, turning people on to something different. I'm looking forward to doing more of that."

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## IF YOU GO

DJ Logic, Bob Weir, Rob Wasserman, Bruce Hornsby and Mickey Hart and Friends perform at "Life, Music and the Pursuit of Happiness," a benefit for the Grateful Dead's Rex Foundation at 8 p.m. Friday, March 28, at the Marin Veterans Memorial Auditorium. The event includes a 5:30 p.m. reception and dinner with the artists plus a silent auction. Tickets are priced at \$1,000, \$500 and \$250 for the reception, dinner and concert. Tickets for the concert only are \$100 (orchestra), \$55 and \$40 (dress circle). Dress circle tickets are available from the Marin Center Box Office at 499-6800. Other tickets are through [www.gdstoo.com](http://www.gdstoo.com) (hotline 457-6388) and TicketMaster at 472-8497.