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One-on-One with Bobby Burns

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Description

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By: Calisa Paulson

Just hours before he was due to take the stage for his very first performance in Tri and Tobago, Wall Records DJ and Producer Bart Ruitenbeek aka Bobby Burns found himself holed up Trotters on the afternoon of Saturday, 5th July, watching his Dutch country take on Costa Rica in the 2014 World Cup. His life-long love for music took a momentary backseat as he rooted for his squad in a gripping match that went to penalty kicks but the Dutchmen earned the right to move on to the semi-finals.

It was only then that Burns, a Holland native, could focus on his true passion, the one that has garnered him international success and sent him on whirlwind tours moving so quickly that he uses his Instagram account to keep track of where he's been. Mauritius, Israel, New York, Atlantic City, Los Angeles and Las Vegas - which he calls his second home - are some of the places he's graced with recent performances. Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) was his latest stop on a tour which will go on to Antwerp, Ibiza, and Mykonos, then back home before moving on once again.

That's the rock-star life for a man who has been obsessed with music since he first discovered Michael Jackson's "Thriller". That ground-breaking album was just the beginning of an extensive musical life, which included tap-dancing at just five years old, clarinet and saxophone lessons, and - surprisingly for a boy growing up in 1980s Netherlands - a preference for 'gangsta' rap.

In fact, it was his affinity for NWA and Public Enemy, among others, that landed him his first gig as a DJ: spinning for a school party. While it wasn't his most successful performance (he emptied the dance floor by playing unpopular tracks so his crush could dance with her date) he'd been bitten by the bug. Soon, he was making mix tapes for birthday parties with a cassette player given to him by his father began making a name for himself.

By 12, he'd saved up enough for his own turn tables and with the help of a bouncer friend he eventually started hanging out in a club called 45, noting all the records played by the DJs before heading off to buy them himself. Years later, he was throwing his own parties and that's when things started taking off.

With 17 hours of R&B and Hip-Hop mix tapes under his belt by the time he reached college, Bobby Burns - going under the name BartJay at the time - was chosen to spin at a popular nightclub. While he honoured his parents' request to complete his degree in Business Management, he realised that the suit and tie life wasn't for him and went from spinning at night to pursuing his dream full-time.

Burns' natural affinity to blending musical genres motivated him further to experiment with his own brand of music. Under the guidance of two friends working in the Dutch music industry, Burns learned how to produce music as well. Following an inspirational trip to Ibiza in 2002, he started focusing on House music and teamed up with Casablanca Collective later that year to produce his first track, "From Holland".

He sat on the song for three years before dropping it during a set one night. It hit big, becoming that year's summer anthem and attracting the attention of an experienced producer who was getting ready to try his hand at DJ-ing: Nick van de Wall, who eventually went on to become Afrojack.

By 2005, BartJay had finally become Bobby Burns, switching names once again to coincide with his transition into producing. Though he was still an unproven DJ, Afrojack had sent Burns with hundreds of tracks in a variety of genres and based on their chemistry in the studio the experienced DJ decided to take a chance. Together they launched Hot Kid Oven Records in 2009, releasing "Romania", "Avoid" and "Ghetto Blaster", which got so much attention on YouTube that record labels started calling.

Before they knew it, Bobby Burns and Afrojack were watching people get lost in their music as far away as the US, a memory that still awes him today. With a surplus of music to release, they launched Wall Records, and the rest - as they say - is history.

Nowadays, Burns serves as a producer, performer and A&R, helping to build exposure for records sent to him by talented up-and-comers. He says he gets the biggest kick out of collaborating, as two pairs of ears are better than one. That would explain the success of many of his collaborations, including two of his most recent hits, "As Your Friend" and "More Than You'll Ever Know", which saw him working with Afrojack and Ansol and Wolf, respectively. There are more collaborations coming up, with five new tracks on the horizon - all vocal radio songs - for which he is teaming up with talented UK singer He Robinson and his old pal Afrojack, just to name a couple.

As I tried to wrap up my interview, Burns, who started out with a cassette player and a love for music so strong he just couldn't stop listening, seems to love his home team with the same fervour. Totally pre-occupied by the Netherlands vs. Argentina pairing in the World Cup semis, he tells me somehow, "I'm confident they can take the Argentines, and it's hard for them to follow up by beating World War One and Two rivals Germany in the final. If the Netherlands have to lose, he'd rather see them fall to his second favourite team, Brazil."

If his passion for his home team is any indication of his work ethic, then luckily for international superstar, passion is a hard thing to kill.



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