



Tastemaker

Gilles Peterson is one of Britain's most influential DJs

If Gilles Peterson's name is associated with a song, it's almost certain to be hot. Whether it's R&B, jazz, electronica or hip-hop, he's become an international cultural force as music impresario, record producer, label owner and radio and club DJ.

He's been in the game for more than 25 years, helping strengthen the cultural exchange between jazz music and DJ culture. Peterson's popular weekly *WorldWide* show on BBC Radio-1 is built on genre-defying programming; his play lists are likely to encompass everything from jazz hero John Coltrane to electronica legend Carl Craig.

Peterson's also a master of the compilation record. With more than 100 albums under his belt, he sees himself as "the Art Blakey" of the DJ scene. "[Blakey] did over 300 albums. I'm not there yet. But I've definitely done more than any other DJ that I know," he says. "I was doing stuff all the way back in the mid-'80s with a series called *Jazz Juice*." He's also done many compilations for Blue Note and had a label called BGP, on which he culled music from the Fantasy catalog.

Peterson just released two more comps: *The BBC Sessions* (RRM) and *Gilles Peterson Digs America: Brownswood U.S.A.* (Ubiquity/Luv N' Haight). On the former, he compiles two discs worth of enthralling in-studio live performances from the likes of Jamie Cullum, Amp Fiddler and Björk, while the latter boasts dusty grooves from artists such as Harold McKinney, the Ensemble Al Salaam and the World Experience Orchestra.

"I'm most proud of *The BBC Sessions*, because it really represents what I do as a radio person more than what I do as club DJ," Peterson says. As for *Digs America*, "I can't think of a better record company that I could have done

that with; they are so great at finding old, rare stuff."

Born of French immigrants, the 41-year-old tastemaker attributes his music obsession to growing up in South London. While he didn't come from a formal musical background, he remembers listening to classical, pop and prog-rock in the house. "Music was there, but I wasn't hearing any funk," Peterson says. "When I heard Grover Washington's 'Sausalito' in a club on a loud sound system, I freaked out. That was the beginning of my new passion."

A self-described "soul boy" as a teenager, Peterson rocked his first party when he was 14, getting his first whiffs of Maze, Bobby Caldwell, Cameo and Herbie Hancock. "I remember Herbie's 'Shiftless Shuffle,' from the LP *Mr. Hands*, having a real impact on me. Jazz became an infatuation with me," he says, "I was going to clubs that were playing that music, but it wasn't filled with old people or live musicians; it was DJs playing jazz. I related to that."

Through regular resident club gigs at places like the Electric Ballroom, the Royal Club and Digwalls, Peterson's reputation as a dazzling DJ increased, coinciding with London's new wave of black British soul in the 1980s and into the early-'90s acid-jazz scene. In the '80s Peterson was also involving himself with the city's pirate-radio scene, which eventually led to "legit" radio gigs at BBC and JazzFM.

Peterson says that his radio sensibilities enable him to produce such rewarding compilations: "I'm listening to music a lot. When I make a compilation, it's not something that I think too deeply about. When you're in something, there's less work to do on those compilations. Overthinking about it is usually when things go wrong." **JOHN MURPH**