

## Guetta's good, good night

He's the biggest DJ in the world right now, yet his flashy celebrity excesses and chart-friendly productions have led many to accuse David Guetta of selling out. Will fans in Abu Dhabi be won over next week? Words *Rob Garratt*



David Guetta is huge; a megastar, the biggest DJ in the world right now. His tunes are blasted with clockwork-like regularity from pop stations across the globe. He's equally at home playing live to festival crowds of up to 80,000 or to the A-list celebs who attend his exclusive weekly Ibiza club night. Scene-defining *DJ Mag* ranks him as the number one in the world.

Meanwhile, he counts the likes of Usher and 50 Cent among his friends. His string of hit singles, featuring stars including Akon, Taio Cruz,

swimming pool and a garden that boasts huge Hollywood-style lettering that reads 'MUSIC' and 'LOVE'.

Many assume his commercial ascent of recent years is the result of a conscious decision to adopt a radio-friendly style, betraying his earlier work. Yet in a recent interview with *Time Out Dubai*, British DJ Paul Oakenfold – who signed Guetta in the US in 2002 – said: 'A lot of people are jealous of Guetta – that's all it is. He works with great singers on great songs, and how is that selling out?'

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Snoop Dog and Rihanna, has flipped the music industry on its head – he, the producer/composer, is the big name; they are merely the featured guest queuing up for a slice of the pie.

Yet all this success inevitably comes with a backlash. Guetta is known for arrogance and excess. He jets about with pampering minders in a private plane and lives in an Ibiza mansion described by one journalist as 'belonging to a Bond villain' – complete with Buddha heads carved into the stone, a crucifix-shaped

A lot of the backlash (and success) can be put down to just four minutes of music. 'I Gotta Feeling', Guetta's 2009 production for The Black Eyed Peas, has been declared the most-downloaded song ever, with more than seven million sales in the US alone. Its universal vocal hook – that 'tonight's gonna be a good, good night' – has proved equally infectious on both dancefloors and airwaves across the globe. At the crux of this debate is cause and effect – whether Guetta is changing the shape of

music today with his overtly commercial house-pop, or allowing his own style to be warped by the demand for that very music.

MadJam, the Dubai and Beirut-based DJ who will be warming-up for Guetta at Abu Dhabi, says the DJ's approach has helped to boost the house genre. 'David Guetta has been one of the few guys of our generation that has made our lives as house DJs easier by incorporating big-name artists into dance music. Some would call it a sell-out, but it really makes the music we play reach a much wider audience.'

Whether masterful invention or cynical manipulation, Guetta's talents took a long time to flourish. Growing up in Paris, born the son of a Jewish-Moroccan sociologist and a Belgian mother, Guetta landed his first DJ job at 17, the resident at a dodgy backstreet club in the French capital. He gigged in Europe throughout the late '80s and '90s, before scoring his first minor hits in 2001 and 2002 with a trio of tracks with American R&B singer Chris

Willis, drawn from debut album *Just a Little More Love*. A 2003 remix of David Bowie's 'Heroes' (released as 'Just for One Day (Heroes)' by David Guetta vs Bowie) helped pave the way for album number two, *Guetta Blaster*.

Follow-up *Pop Life* (2007) won over the UK, but it was 2009's *One Love* that secured international fame, propelled by hits featuring Akon ('Sexy Bitch'), Kelly Rowland ('One Love Takes Over') and Rihanna ('Who's That Chick?'). The record went on to sell more than three million copies internationally, and secured Guetta's first Grammy win for Best Remixed Recording, Non-Classical, for the Rowland collaboration (he would win the same award a year later, for remixing Madonna's 'Revolver').

Follow-up fifth album *Nothing But the Beat*, released last summer, took the formula further. The ambitious double LP was split in two, with one disc of electronic instrumentals, and a second vocal disc featuring no fewer than 17 guest artists, from hip-hop royalty including Snoop Dogg, Ludacris and Timbaland and rappers Minaj and Lil Wayne to R&B superstars such as Usher, Chris Brown and Akon. But by now many critics were tiring of what looked like cynical dancefloor bait, and the record picked up a stack of negative reviews.

Guetta will be touring nothing but that album when he takes to the decks at Abu Dhabi's Yas Island on Friday March 2. For the converted, it will be a sacred opportunity to see a megastar in full flow. For a

detractor, there will be shameless pop-tastic tendencies deployed to get the drink-buying masses on their feet. But either way, no one can deny it's an opportunity to see one of the world's most famous DJs exercising his technically unrivalled and much in-demand skills at the peak of his commercial ascension. So worth a look, then. *David Guetta plays Yas Arena in Abu Dhabi on Friday March 2. Tickets Dhs195-Dhs9,500; over 18s only. www.thinkflash.ae (800 35274).*



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