

# Sound Advice

Need a soundtrack for your business, your brand, your life? Musical-minded entrepreneur Michael Smith has the beat.  
BY LARA MORGENSON



## POWER DJ

### MICHAEL SMITH DESCRIBES

himself as an interior designer of sound. A reasonable description, considering that his company, Michael Smith Events, sets the mood at LA's hottest spots, from Katsuya to Monique Lhuillier. He began crafting his musical takeover nearly a decade ago when he heard DJ Z-Trip performing at a musical festival. Then working in product placement, Smith was inspired to change his tune and begin spinning at nightclubs, which in turn led to deejaying at splashy parties for Chanel, Gucci, and others. But it was a gig pumping up the volume at a little hole in the wall called Hyde that took Michael Smith Events to the next level.

**LOS ANGELES CONFIDENTIAL:** How did you make the move from deejaying to programming background music?

**MICHAEL SMITH:** I got a nightly at Hyde when it first opened, and [Brent] Bolthouse took a liking to the music and asked me to program the music at Katsuya. I always had the idea to do a background-music company, sort of like a high-end way to DJ without being there.

**LAC:** How does it work?

**MS:** I came up with a computer platform that allows you to control and program the restaurant, boutique, or hotel just like a radio station. Friday night at Katsuya: high energy; Monday afternoon at Katsuya: chill. Since then I've taken on Fred Segal Flair boutiques, Dot Dot Dot, and 16 Lucky Strike locations across the US and Canada. Now I have more than 50 places worldwide—it's amazing. I'm also programming people's lives—their homes, fitness [sessions], cocktail parties.

**LAC:** So each place has a sound that's unique?

**MS:** It's like the interior design of a space. You have the food, the look and feel, the service, and the brand. But what about sound? What clients are you expecting? I build what's called "sonic identities."

**LAC:** What do you mean by that?

**MS:** I love client interaction because I have my passions, but business owners have theirs and they know what they want. They want their afternoons to be chill so people stay and have an extra drink or an extra sushi roll. My clients have been seeing revenue growth and trends like better bar business. It's amazing to know that music has an impact beyond just being cool.

### SMITH'S SONIC IDENTITY

I put a twist on a basic playlist and ordered these songs like my life... in a DJ set.

- The Cure, "Close To Me" (Closer Remix)
- Blue Boy, "Remember Me"
- MGMT, "Electric Feel"
- Seu Jorge, "Rebel Rebel"
- Led Zeppelin, "D'yer Mak'er"
- Young MC, "Bust A Move"
- Marvin Gaye, "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" (Fun Machine Mix)
- Emilie Simon, "Fleur de Saison"
- Nina Simone, "Sinnerman" (Felix Da Housecat's Heavenly House Mix)
- Santogold, "L.E.S. Artistes"
- Louis Armstrong, "What a Wonderful World"

**LAC:** What's the hardest part about deejaying an event?

**MS:** You're going into war. The weather could be terrible and everyone can be in a bad mood. The food didn't come out right. The power went out. So when I'm deejaying, I've got all my bombs. This room is dead, what can I do to shake it up? I throw in a little classic.

**LAC:** What song always works?

**MS:** Michael Jackson does not miss, and Prince's "Kiss"—that's a good fire-starter.

**LAC:** Any misses?

**MS:** "She Drives Me Crazy" by Fine Young Cannibals. I played it and missed so hard. You have to appreciate what you love, but you have to know that's a song you sing with the windows up.

**LAC:** What's the best thing about your line of work?

**MS:** Being able to bring people together and engage them. You can throw a \$3 million party and have terrible music. Or you can throw a kegger for 50 bucks in a massive room with bumping music, and people will have the time of their lives. That's the power of music. ★