

Ashland University grad makes waves in the music industry

At a young age, Howard Perlmutter started making mix tapes and deejaying

DAN STARCHER Staff Writer

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Howard Perlmutter (L), aka Perl, talks with on stage with singer Eddie Money, one of the artists he currently manages. *The Daily Record*

Before he even knew what the profession was called, Howard Perlmutter, a 1995 Ashland University graduate, was spinning records, DJ style, in his bedroom in Pepper Pike. Known professionally as Perl, he started his music career making mix tapes for his mother to listen to in her car.

“My family always had musical ability, they played instruments and sang,” said Perl, who now lives in Cleveland. “They didn’t do it professionally; it was more for fun. But, we were always listening to or playing music when I was growing up.”

At the age of 5, Perl started rigging up his stereo to produce the tapes for his mother. While his friends were out playing football or baseball at the park, Perl admits that he was in his room trying to wire components together to create a music studio.

“It was trial and error; I would get shocked and I blew up a couple of speakers,” he said.

When he was old enough to start getting an allowance, Perl would visit the local record store and spend it on “those little 45 records.”

Having only a single turntable to work with, Perl started talking in between songs as he changed records and introducing the next song on the tape. Soon, his friends at school started asking him to mix tapes for them.

The popularity of the tapes grew to the point where he would hand out surveys to the other kids asking them what songs they wanted to hear.

He then would listen to popular radio disc jockey Casey Kasem and, emulating him, he would count down the top 10 songs his friends suggested for the mix tapes.

Because American Top 40 with Casey Kasem aired on Sunday mornings, Perl would sneak his Walkman inside Sunday school to “I got a Sony Walkman and I would sneak it into Temple and listen to him,” he said. “It was really important for me to hear him talk and see how he performed the countdown.”

The turning point for Perl happened a few years later at his cousin’s Bar Mitzvah when he saw his first live DJ playing records for others at the celebration.

“I thought, ‘Wow, you mean that you can actually play records for other people and get paid for it?’ I was in disbelief,” he said.

Perl went up to the DJ and said, “I don’t know who you are or what this is, but on Saturday nights I am going to ask my mom to drop me off wherever you are and I am going to work for you for free.”

That DJ turned out to be Terry Macklin, who was known as the Bar Mitzvah king of Cleveland and Perl still enjoys a working relationship with him.

“He was only about eight or nine years old, but he was loving what he was doing,” Macklin said about his protege. “He invited me over to his house and he had this little music setup, it was something to see. He was very impressive, even back in those days.”

Perl would meet Macklin at gigs and help him entertain audiences. “He has had phenomenal success,” Macklin continued. “He is hanging around some of the biggest stars out there. I am very impressed at how well he did.”

Eventually Perl converted his bedroom recording studio into a radio station after it caught the attention of a neighbor kid who happened to be into electronics.

“He said he was going to make me a transmitter so that he could listen to what I was doing in his house, it was crazy,” Perl said. “I thought, you are going to build me a what? I didn’t know what that was.”

With the transmitter in place, Perl started broadcasting radio shows over the airwaves. But, unknown to him at the time, the transmitter broadcast a radius of about a mile.

“People started calling our house requesting songs,” he continued. “I even made parodies of commercials that were playing on actual radio stations.”

Perl, then, started interning at local radio stations and making contacts that led to the formation of a production company with Lee Mars of the group Nine Inch Nails.

From there Perl went on to write and produce songs, promote live shows and manage artists such as Eddie Money and Jose Feliciano, as well as, bring top acts like Bruce Springsteen, Bruce Hornsby, Bob Dylan and Janet Jackson to Cleveland. He also has been elected by his peers as a lifetime voting member of the Grammy Awards.



His current project includes international recording artist Helen Welch in the production of “SUPERSTAR — The Songs. The Stories. The Carpenters.” a docu-musical that makes its debut on Sunday, March 31 at 3:30 p.m. at Cleveland’s Ohio Theatre where Welch will perform 20 of Carpenters songs.

Welch is also scheduled to appear in Ashland on Oct. 6 with the Ashland Symphony Orchestra.

Reporter Dan Starcher can be reached at 330-287-1626 or dstarcher@the-daily-record.com. He is on Facebook at www.facebook.com/WoosterWriter and Twitter at www.twitter.com/danstarcher.