

John Meagher hits the decks with top female DJ Papillon and finds a serenely spiritual woman who shuns the usual frenzied trappings of the trade

Mixing it up with the Sultanness of Spin

It was the moment when Katherine Michael realised she had to change her life around completely. The Bray woman had entertained dreams of being a DJ, playing the world's most fabled venues to thousands of adoring clubbers, but the reality was very different. She was working as a dental nurse and had begun to hate the monotony of her job.

"I remember I was just about to go into surgery and I broke down," she says. "It all came to me at that moment that I didn't want to do this any longer and I wanted to do something more interesting with my life. It had been building for a long time and then it just happened. It probably wasn't a nervous breakdown, but it was close."

Today, 29-year-old Katherine is better known as Papillon, a DJ who packs the crowds into some of the hottest clubs in London and Dublin as well as dance's epicentre, Ibiza. "It's the best feeling in the world when you look out onto the crowd and you see everybody being so happy with the music you're playing."

Now she wants to help other budding DJs realise their dream. A one-day workshop, DJBasix, will teach the practicals of the business, from how to operate the equipment and 'beat-mix' vinyl to judging the mood of a crowd and altering the tempo to get the greatest possible results.

"It's essential to have confidence if you're going to be a DJ," she says. "When I was younger, I

used to think I wasn't trendy enough to do it. All DJs seemed to be exceptionally hip, and I didn't feel that I could be. I'd had a very sheltered upbringing and doing something that made me the centre of attention wasn't something I was used to."

The stage name she chose, Papillon — French for butterfly and the title of one of her favourite books — reflects her new-found confidence. Katherine Michael certainly came out of her cocoon. Her change of attitude emerged one day when she got talking to one of her dental patients. The woman was a life coach and, intrigued by their conversation, Katherine arranged to meet her again.

"I didn't know much about life coaching — I'm not sure I'd even heard the term before then — but this person really opened my eyes and helped me realise that a lot of things you think you can't achieve can be achieved if you set your mind to them and go in with the right frame of mind."

She quit nursing soon afterwards and set about breaking into the male-dominated field. "I knew the music I liked and I found that if you approached club promoters and were passionate about what you did, they would give you a chance. I don't know if being female helped. I like to think they took a chance on me because I knew my stuff and was a new face."

She started DJing in Dublin 'style pubs' such as Dakota and 4 Dame Lane and found that her confidence grew. "Once you get



Star turn: Katherine Michael, aka Papillon, spins a number at Cocoon in Dublin. Picture by Martin Nolan

started and get to know some people in the scene, it all appears to be easier than when you're on the outside looking in. And it's easier to go to somewhere like Spirit [also in Dublin] and say that you've got experience in established venues under your belt."

When she first got involved in the scene, Katherine admits to having had a fondness for alcohol and wasn't averse to trying drugs as well. "I'm not interested in either now and I avoid them," she says. "I'm very health-conscious and want as few toxins getting into my body as possible. Drugs are certainly a major factor in dance music, but you don't have to be on them to have a good

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time or to be a top DJ. If anything, it would be really foolish for a DJ to drink heavily or to take an E while they're at the turntable."

Her new-found fascination with life coaching led her to adopt a more spiritual existence than before. She talks passionately about beauty coming from within and is a disciple of the New Age movement, Inner Light, which preaches of a lifestyle of meditation and a near-vegetarian diet. Every day, she consumes a litre of a blended drink made up of herbs, grass and water.

"It's really helped clear up my acne," she says. "I used to have horrendous problems with it when I was younger. Anybody who has bad skin will know how upsetting it is and how you feel that everybody is looking at it all the time. When I was younger, I tried medication and changing my diet, but nothing seemed to work. When I first started DJing, I'd get my make-up done and I'd be wearing a huge amount of foundation to try to cover the spots up. But healing comes from within — if you stop feeling stressed and start enjoying life, it can help get rid of a comparatively minor complaint like acne."

She admits that some of her friends find her fascination with New Age remedies to be unusual. She is a fan of guru Tony Robbins and has already done five 'empowerment' fire walks.

Inspired by her success as a DJ, Katherine Michael is anxious not to sit still. "Everybody can get into a routine that becomes boring after a while. It's important to find new challenges," she says. "I want to make music in the future, not just remix music, but original compositions."

"And I'm interested in getting my name out there as a visual artist," she adds. "Painting is something I love. I used to paint when I'd get home from a club at 4am and I'm starting to get commissions."

"What I'm doing now is certainly a far cry from my life five or six years ago. I know people can be very cynical about anybody trying to do something completely different. But if you really want to do something, go for it. Don't just talk about doing it. Take the chance."

DJBasix takes place in the Temple Bar Music Centre, Dublin, on October 9. Call 086-3945417 for further details.

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