

Digital Architect

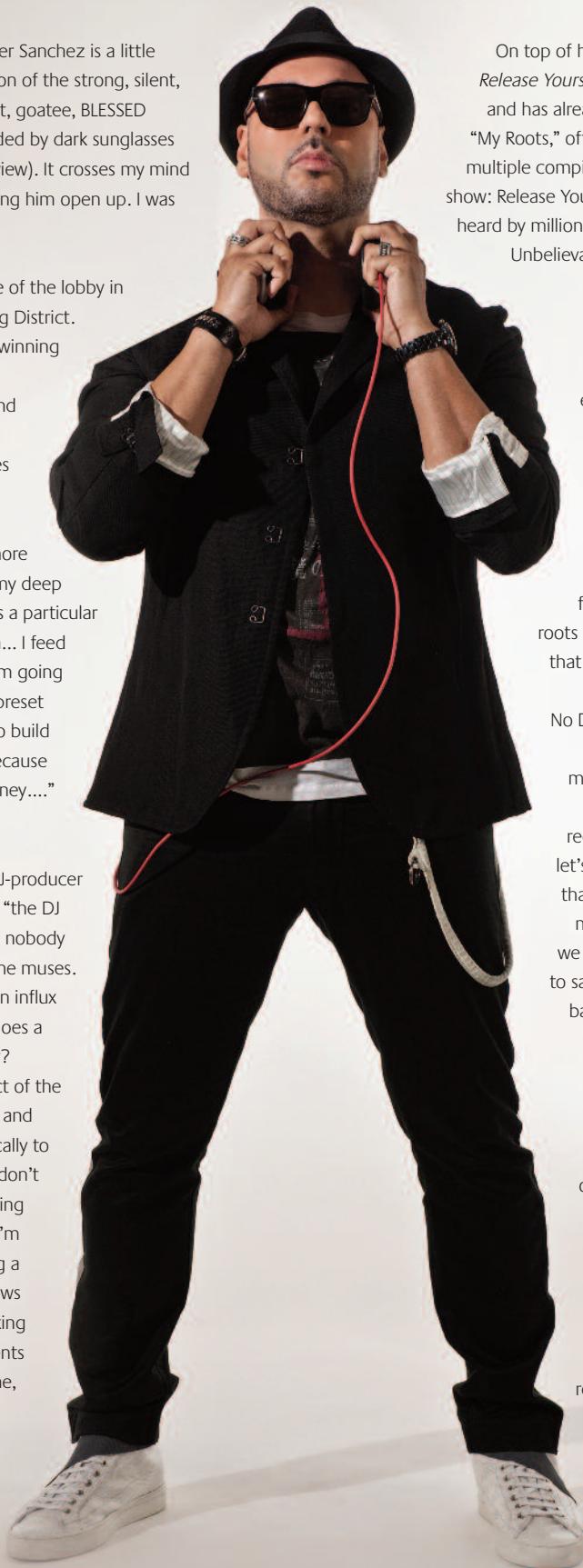
Roger Sanchez's music receives a surge from his past

Words by Vanessa Pascale

At first glance, Native New Yorker Roger Sanchez is a little intimidating, as he is the personification of the strong, silent, tough-guy type: tall, DGTL black t-shirt, goatee, BLESSED snapback on his head and eyes shrouded by dark sunglasses (that remain on throughout our interview). It crosses my mind that I might have a difficult time making him open up. I was happy to be disproved.

Roger and I meet in a room off to side of the lobby in The Standard Hotel in the Meatpacking District. It is the day after the Grammy-award-winning producer/DJ's set at Cielo, a club he characterizes as having a "sexy vibe and underground feel" -- the opposite of your larger upscale mainstream venues like LIV. With that being said, I was interested in knowing if sets at the abovementioned venues differ. "It's more organic than that. Cielo is what I call my deep house, my secret soul session. There is a particular sonic ethos I approach that night with... I feed off of the crowd. I rarely know what I'm going to play before I play it. I don't have a preset track list... Every record that I play is to build up to the fifth track going forward, because I believe in taking the crowd on a journey...." Roger explains.

An expert at his craft, the seasoned DJ-producer has been around since the days when "the DJ was the guy you stuck under the stairs, nobody saw and didn't get paid a whole lot," he muses. "Now, the DJ is the superstar." With an influx of DJs on the scene these days, how does a legend like Roger safeguard his career? Never concerned with the fame aspect of the job, Roger plays music from the heart and really pushes himself hard technologically to find another way to elevate his art. "I don't take the most popular records and string one right after another and say, 'Yay, I'm a DJ!' For me, there's an art in creating a mood, taking a track that nobody knows and creating an emotion out of it. Taking a combination of four different elements of tracks, maybe I take a beat from one, or pull one from another --creating something that's magic at that moment."



On top of his game, Roger recently released his album, *Release Yourself 13*, a mixed compilation of house tracks, and has already dropped two singles, "Troubleman" and "My Roots," off his next album, *Roots*. Additionally, he has multiple compilations in the works and runs a weekly radio show: *Release Yourself* (broadcasted in over 26 countries and heard by millions of listeners) and Podcast every two weeks.

Unbelievably ambitious, it's a wonder as to when this prolific producer has any time for sleep.

A number of transitional moments have perpetuated Roger's career in music. In the early '90s, NY DJ Tony Humphries "killed" his record at a Zanzibar party --resulting in a surge of phone calls from record labels. "That was my very underground moment." In 2001, his song "Another Chance" went to #1 in the UK and was a universal hit. And now, is another transitional moment for him. "I'm going back to my underground roots and really re-immersing myself in the sound that I started out with, but in a 2013 approach."

I mention his Grammy win for his remix of No Doubt's song, "Hella Good" which he deems as more of a highlight than a transitional moment. "I can't say it changed many things about my life, it was more of a moment of recognition. Remixes, are a bit different than, let's say a Grammy for 'Best Album of the Year,' that garners a type of attention. This is more a matter of, 'We appreciate what you've done, we recognize and we spotlight it.' And you get to say, 'I won a Grammy.' A Grammy never looks bad on a shelf. Never looks bad," he says with a big smile.

His retrospective journey additionally encapsulates his affinity for architecture. A former student of the Pratt Institute School of Architecture (one year shy of graduating), Roger has found a way to fuse his creative passions. His next album, *Architecture*, will highlight twelve architects that have influenced Roger during his studies. "I'm creating music based on an actual building or architectural design concept. It's kind of really bizarre, but I love it. One is called Zaha Hadid, who is my favorite contemporary, minimalist architect... It's going to be my ode to what would have been my career

and expressing it through music." Initially divided, a decision was necessary, so "music became the wife and architecture: the one that got away. But at the same time I have a lot of love for architecture and it's expressed in everything I do." Are there any regrets? Does he ever think, what if? "Not really," he confidently replies. Going off his immense success, it looks like the right choice was made.

Aware of how blessed he is to be playing the music he loves and connecting with people through it, there is a flipside of the coin, he tells me -- it takes him away from his family. "It's the challenge of doing what you love, then balancing out a life with that." The Sanchez family [his wife and he have an 18-year-old son and 6-year-old daughter] reside in Los Angeles, and have a home in New Jersey, but Roger is constantly on the move. During the summer, Roger returns to Ibiza where he is a resident DJ from July thru mid-September, which he's been doing since 2001. Roger would like to bring along his family, but touring isn't exactly conducive to family life, he explains. In a different city every single day, touring can be pretty brutal. "The pace that I do it at, I get in. Get ready for the gig. Do the gig. Get a little sleep. Run out to the next gig." He'd like to plan a special bus tour in the future so they can stay in a place for awhile and come along.

Not off base with my initial impression of Roger, when I ask what he thinks fans would be most surprised to find out about him, what he reveals validates that my tough guy theory of him is probably a shared notion. "So much has been written," he laughs. "The only things that aren't written are the things that I don't want to let out?... He racks his brain for something good. "I am a total softy for my daughter," he confesses. "When daddy comes home, my daughter does silly things like put bug-a-loo ears on me and starts to paint my face like a rabbit. And I just sit there. Then my wife snaps pictures. These are going to be blackmail shots for that next Chanel

blouse." He laughs. "The daughter runs the house." Friendly and admittedly gregarious ["I tend to talk. My wife told me, 'You never shut up,'" he laughs.], Roger, like his favorite person in the industry (see box), is not as intimidating as he looks – in reality, he's a really cool cat. ML

Favorite Person in the Industry

"One of the people, when I first started out, that was really, really cool to me that didn't have to be, was DJ Todd Terry. On my very first tour, I ever did to Europe, he was the headliner, and he sat me down and really broke down the whole industry for me. He said, 'Listen, you're new to this. I like you. Let me tell you what you need to know.' Ever since then I have a very special place for him, 'cause he's always been the guy everyone sees as this gruff, closed off person, but to me he's always been that really cool cat."

Favorite Movie

"I'm a big sci-fi head, one of my all-time favorite sci-fi flicks is *Blade Runner*."

Favorite TV series

"Right now, *Game of Thrones*, by far. I've read the entire book series. I'm actually working with the executive producer of *Game of Thrones*, so I kind of know what's coming but they've been very faithful to the book. Not a lot of people have read the books so they're getting shocked with everything. A lot of people die. The best tag line would be: 'Everyone dies.'"

