

## Karizma biog

He's one of the most in-demand DJs on the worldwide house circuit, his productions are a must-check for any self-respecting house lover, and his remix talents are sought out by some of the biggest names in the music business. Truly Karizma is a man at the very peak of his game.

But then he's been doing this for a while.

Born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1970, Chris Clayton became fascinated by music from an early age. "My grandma used to go to flea markets and come back with all these records, and I was just OBSESSED with them!" he recalls, laughing. "This was when I was about five years old. I'd sit listening to all these records for hours on end, and while I was listening I'd be studying the liner notes and the sleeves. By the time I was seven, you could pick up any record in our house and I could tell you who played on it, who produced it and using what equipment!"

It was only natural that a desire to get involved with music would follow, and young Chris spent his teens learning to DJ – at that time playing hip-hop and the nascent 'Baltimore club music', a sub-genre that's today similar in style to Detroit ghetto tech/Miami bass but which in its early days drew much inspiration from the go-go music coming out of nearby Philadelphia – and playing in a succession of bands. By the age of 19, he was playing with his first "proper" band, a Baltimore club music outfit called Unruly. This would eventually evolve into Unruly Records, set up in the mid-90s by Karizma and partners Shawn Caesar and Scottie B (the label incidentally is still going today, though Karizma is no longer involved, and is most notable for launching the career of Spank Rock).

But the real turning point for Karizma came in 1995 when he met up, through the Baltimore club scene, with another local DJ, DJ Spen. Their paths began to cross more and more, both at leading local nightspot Club Paradox where Spen was resident, and at the radio station V103 where both Karizma and Spen had regular slots. Spen was already working alongside the leading lights of the Baltimore house scene, Basement Boys, and encouraged by this legendary trio, the two started working on a few tracks together, Karizma for instance providing the drum programming on Spen's remix of Jasper Street Company's 'Temptation (Lead Us Not)' for the Basement Boys label.

We have Mary J Blige to thank for the formation of Spen & Karizma as one of the leading lights of the late '90s house scene, however. The pair were working on a remix of her 'Beautiful'. "And I turned to Spen," Karizma recollects, "and I said, you know what, we should just do this, we should take over the world, man!"

There followed a string of Spen & Karizma releases on Basement Boys and other respected house labels, as well as remix work for some of the biggest names in the business, including such luminaries as Alicia Keys, Everything But The Girl and even Michael Jackson. The pair also worked with some of the most respected names in the house music industry, including the likes of Su Su Bobien, Bob Sinclar and fellow Baltimore native Ron Carroll. Their skills behind the decks were also in constant demand worldwide.

But times change and things move on. "I had many good years with Spen and with Basement Boys," says Karizma philosophically. "It was always a good relationship, we were separate but equal. But as in any relationship, you either grow together or you

grow apart. I wanted to do my own thing. But me and Spen are cool, I mean you know, we still speak and everything.”

Throughout the Spen & Karizma era, both producers had continued to work on their own individual productions and remixes. Karizma’s first solo release was ‘The Power EP’ on the UK’s Black Vinyl in 1999 and a number of other solo productions followed, including the ‘Shades Of K’ EP on Basement Boys in 2000. But eventually the time came to leave the Basement Boys stable altogether, as Karizma did in the early years of the new millennium.

Since then, he’s turned out a series of productions and remixes for some of the world’s most respected house labels. His own productions include the acclaimed ‘Ride EP’ for Defected in 2004, ‘4 The Love’ for Spen’s Code Red imprint in 2005 (a record which, with its “for the love of house/for the love of beats” vocal refrain, perhaps sums up Karizma’s musical philosophy as well as anyone could) and, last year, ‘The Kaytonic EP’ for UK label Hustle Music. Notable remixes, meanwhile, include his rubs of DJ Technic’s club anthem ‘Gabryelle’ for Defected in 2005, and of Liquid People’s ‘Son Of Dragon’ on Soul Heaven in 2006.

2007 has seen Karizma’s career move up to the next level, with the release of his debut artist album, ‘A Mind Of Its Own’, on R2 Records. Current projects include a remix album of the aforesaid long-player and a remix of Urban Soul’s classic ‘It’s Alright’ as part of Juno’s 10th Anniversary re-release series. In the meantime, Karizma continues to travel the world as a highly sought-after DJ, and has this year signed to the Connected Talent agency, as a result of which he recently undertook a Japanese tour.

As we said, Karizma’s a man at the peak of his game. Oh, and in case you were wondering about that name...

“It’s basically a corruption of Chris,” he chuckles, “I needed a name that was closer to my own, because back when I started out, I was also doing hip-hop, and I was using the name Justin Human. And that name was WACK!”