



meet your neighbor

Jamil Hamilton aka DJ Jahsonic

Spinning from Marvin to Marvin Gaye Park

BY MACEO THOMAS

When you walk upstairs at Marvin on the corner of 14th and U Street, NW, you stop and ask yourself “What’s going on?” It is an early Monday evening and the dance floor is framed by a couple of early diners having drinks in a booth and at the bar, but still the DJ’s focus is uninterrupted. He dances back and forth in his booth doing this funny thing with his hand as he brings it to his mouth while cueing the next point in the record. You do not need to be at the end of his gig to see he is tireless. Jamil Hamilton is DJ Jahsonic, a DJ’s DJ, playing his blend of hip hop, soul, funk and rock on Monday nights at the restaurant named after his neighborhood hero, Motown legend Marvin Gaye.

“Older members of my family knew [Gaye’s] Dad, because he was a minister,” recalls Hamilton. “I just knew he was from the area and it was a point of pride that he was from Deanwood.” Jamil was raised by his grandparents near the fire station on 48th Place in Deanwood, one of Northeast DC’s oldest neighborhoods, and one that stands out for its relatively low density, tree-lined streets and mixture of brick and wood-framed houses. He recalls his grandparents’ stories of living in Langston Terrace as they watched the neighborhood change “from a prime Mecca for African Americans entering the middle class...to the civil rights eras and the riots, to the subsequent drug era and now the resurgence.”

Part of the resurgence of the area has occurred in Watts Branch Park, now officially renamed Marvin Gaye Park after the Deanwood soul singing hero. It has been scrubbed and cleared back through the efforts of park renovators, the non-profit organization Parks and People.

Jamil easily remembers his youth of the eighties. “That park was off limits,” he says unequivocally.

“It was the rule,” he adds to emphasize the reality of his generation’s engagement in the park. Recognizing that rules are occasionally broken, he adds the conditional, “If you rode your bicycle through there, you rode very fast because you were afraid of all the junkies and the other unsavory characters lurking there.” He recalls the time, or two, he tried the short cut to get to the McDonalds finding crack pipes, needles, and other drug paraphernalia on the way.

Over the years, Hamilton has not strayed too far from home. After doing most of his schooling in DC, including Smothers Elementary, Kelly Miller Middle School and Ft. DuPont Seventh Day Adventist School; Hamilton went to Hampton University. He returned to DC after a year and finished his degree in architecture at Howard University. He and his wife now own a home overlooking the park from 57th St.

“It was always expected that I would go to college,” he responds when quizzed on his success during such turbulent times. “I operated under that directive.”

It was at Howard where he learned to DJ. “I was the guy carrying the records,” he remembers of the days when all the music was vinyl and carried in milk crates stacked in the trunk of the car. He had been going to parties with his DJ friends and one day the op-

portunity arrived when a party was a DJ short. He bought “this real bad Gemini stuff – the Chevrolet Chevette of DJ equipment.”

Now, Hamilton co-hosts a weekly radio show on WPFW dedicated to real hip hop where all the music is digitally recorded, even though the DJing is nearly the same. He rotates as DJ and host of the show, Decypher, with his DJ crew, the Soul Controllers - DJ Book, Dj Stylus and Bushhead Ed.

“Ain’t nothing like the real thing” when it comes to good music and Hamilton takes his DJing as a community responsibility. “It’s like most people in this town who are creative -- they have a day job that pays the bills, that they may derive some professional satisfaction from. But the thing that allows them to stay balanced is their creative outlet; and that is how I see it, as a creative outlet. I’m not doing it necessarily for the money; I’m doing it just because it needs to be done. People need to play good music. People out here want to hear good music, so, it’s a cultural education program and that’s what I see I do.”

Because of his busy DJ life, work life, home renovation life and newlywed life, Hamilton has not been able to find time to enjoy the park two blocks from his home. However, on July 26, Hamilton will return to Marvin Gaye Park as the DJ Host of the Capital Hip Hop Soul Fest, spinning and dancing all day long.

Welcome back and let’s get it on!

DJ Jahsonic plays every Monday at Marvin and every other Saturday at Jin, both at 14th and U St. NW. The Soul Controllers can be found on WPFW 89.3 on Thursdays from 10pm to 11pm and at www.worldsflyest.com. ★

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