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May 21st, 2013

The Shadow effect

Behind successful musicians lie teams who work around the clock to fulfill their artistic visions. In producer Paul Blair (aka DJ White Shadow), Lady Gaga also found integrity, humility, and loyalty.

Written by Jourdan Crouch Fairchild

Photographed by Tyler Curtis

Paul Blair's [career](#) can be split into two time periods: BG and AG (before Gaga and after Gaga). The transition began on an average Sunday night back in 2009, when Blair was djing at a club in LA and a random guy asked if he had any mix tapes. "In Hollywood, people are always asking you for that, and most of them are full of shit," he says. But blame it on divine intervention—or on the fact that he's just that nice of a guy—Blair emailed over a link.

The guy then asked Blair on two separate occasions to compile mixes. "I didn't know who he was or why I did it," he says. The second time around, the guy—a creative director for Gaga—asked if

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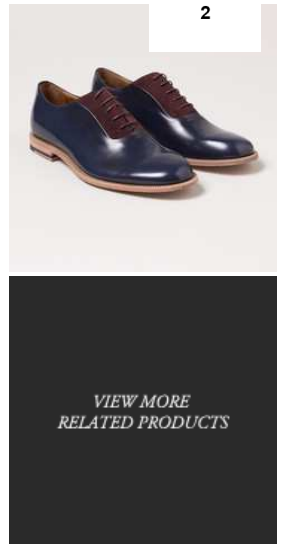
Blair would be interested in making beats for her new album. So during a plane flight on that very same day, Blair created 10 tracks on his laptop to send over when he landed. Two days later, She (you know who) called and said: "Hey, I wrote a song to one of your tracks. Can I play it for you?"



From the start, their relationship was rare for industry standards. "Nine times of ten, you never talk to, let alone meet the person you're writing a song for," Blair swears. "You could [win](#) a Grammy without ever meeting each other." He began skyping with LG—as he fondly calls her—and they finally met in Chicago over Lollapalooza weekend in August 2010. "She said to me, 'Do you wanna go on the road?,'" he says. "And I haven't been back since."

In 2011, Blair produced nine songs on "Born this Way," which received three Grammy [nominations](#). And now Team Gaga is polishing up her newest album, ARTPOP, which will be released in two volumes. The recording process is fast and dirty, and according to Blair, Gaga is always game. Blair continues his praise: "Everything that you ever see from her is her idea, like even that dress of meat." And when Gaga gets flack for her idiosyncrasies, Blair's been known to go postal via Facebook and Twitter. "I'm trying to realize that responding to that crap makes you just as big of a douche bag," he says. "But I'm from Detroit, and if you pop shots at any people in my life, I want to call you out."

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The Motor City actually played a pivotal part in Blair's path to being a dj. Although he grew up on a farm in Ohio, Blair's family moved to Detroit when he was in 6th grade. As a teenager, he'd sneak out of his parents' house to go to huge techno parties, and then during his freshman year of college while abroad in Japan, he spun some records for the first time in public. Back in the States, Blair started playing local clubs, and about that time, a promoter dubbed him DJ White Shadow—a nickname that most people still know him by. "It was a black club, and I was a super skinny, 6'4", white kid, so the promoter thought it was hilarious to name me after this old basketball TV show called "The White Shadow." Those were the glory days, he says, when it wasn't exactly cool to be a dj. "I was the dork that came to the party, and I'd feel uncomfortable if I wasn't playing the music."

So for 14 years, Blair club-hopped from gig to gig all over the country. He picked up tattoos along with the way, which are now "all lumped into one." Among them, a phrase stretching across his upper chest that reads: fortune favors the brave. "I got it back when I was young...when I wasn't as fortunate," he says. "To me, if you're more brave and fearless than the next person, you're more likely to achieve your goals."



And while those goals have inevitably grown with success, what enriches Blair's life goes beyond the studio or the Grammy stage. "It's so important to be nice and work hard," he says. "I was 33 when everything changed, so I'd been working hard for a long time. I don't go out and buy a Ferrari and bottles—I don't even care about the money." What does matter to him: maintaining relationships with family and friends and supporting aspiring musicians, i.e. answering a phone call from a random kid in Houston with production questions (like he did on the day we talked).

"A lot of people think we go out and party and do crazy things," Blair says. "I'm not saying we don't know how to have a good time, but our work is an intense labor of love. At the end of the day, it shouldn't feel like work." We couldn't agree more.

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