

# RECORD REIS

Reis Lourie pursues his passion for music and connects to his religion as a DJ

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The energy at the Forest Hills Halloween Party starts out as low, dull and unenergetic. The dance floor is empty, and the room echoes with flat conversations—but not for long. At 5:30 p.m. sharp, in walks Reis Lourie (11), DJ board in hand, ready to revive the party. Once his equipment is ready, he releases a set of chill, background music to steadily build up the energy and get things going. But it's later on in the evening when he really starts to turn it up a notch. Suddenly, the dance floor is full of kids dancing and singing to the blasting tunes of trendy halloween songs. Colorful beams of neon light flash in every direction as sparkly streamers linger in the surrounding air. The energetic spirit has finally arrived at the party.

For the past four years, Reis has been performing as a DJ at a variety of events, amping up the energy at bar and bat mitzvahs, birthday parties and even weddings. What started out as a mere hobby has steadily grown into a flourishing career and strong passion.

## Starting Out

Reis's passion for DJing began with his own bar mitzvah. It started out as a simple suggestion from his mom to DJ a portion of the celebration. Little did he know that this decision would soon alter the course of his life.

"I was always interested in doing something for my [bar] mitzvah," Reis said. "There's always a grand entrance. My mom wants there to be a special, cool thing that just makes it unique from everyone else, so she brought up that idea. I love music, I'm super passionate about it, so I went with it. I didn't really realize until later that I really had a passion for it."

It may be difficult to DJ ones own bar mitzvah with zero knowledge or expertise. In order to better grasp the fundamentals of DJing, Reis reached out to various professional DJs and managed to get a few quick beginner lessons from a DJ that was known by his mom.

"He taught me how to do the very basics a few weeks leading up to my [bar] mitzvah. I borrowed his equipment and I did a small set," Reis said.

By the time he got a better understanding of basic DJing principles and practiced a bit, Reis finally felt prepared to DJ for his own bar mitzvah. Since he still remained fairly inexperienced, the procedure as a whole was made somewhat simple for him to avoid complications.

"I walk in and I just DJ'ed a 15 minute set," Reis said. "Everything was already set up for me. All I had to do was really just press buttons at certain times. I already knew exactly what songs were going to be after this one, and I knew exactly when I needed to switch out of this song where I needed to start. There were cues in it for when I needed to do something, and I was also overlooked by another DJ."

After successfully DJing his bar mitzvah, Reis's interest began to expand. The desire to build his skills and expertise increased, inspiring him to seek ways to improve.

"From that, I tried doing it on my own a lot, but it's just hard because I didn't really understand the actual principles," Reis said. "So I got more lessons with [a DJ], where he came to my house and he taught me craft and specific DJ skills that you just need to know."

Over time, Reis gained enough experience and traction in DJing to the point that professional entertainment companies began to track him. One of these companies, Utopia Entertainment, reached out to him seeking an interview, impressed by the teenager's skills and talent.

"[The interview] wasn't really talking as much," Reis said. "They wanted me with zero preparation to come in. I'd have five minutes to prepare a 10 minute set, then do the set. So I'd just walk in and they'd be like, 'Hey, we need a Motown set.' And so I'd have five minutes to prepare, go through different songs, put it together, but a lot of the time it's improvising."

Fortunately, the interview was a success, and from there Reis signed a contract to work with the company, who he still works with today. However, the beginning of his DJing career wasn't completely smooth, as he was still presented with some challenges and judgment considering his age.

"When I first walk in, I'm already looked down upon," Reis said. "People underestimate me because of my age. You don't see a 16-year-old DJ walk into a wedding, right? That's not expected."

That was the case while Reis was just starting out. But as his popularity rose under Utopia Entertainment, audiences became more familiar with his abilities, and his age soon became irrelevant during his gigs.

"Now, because people know me, it's not just about proving myself," Reis said. "They know me from past events. So it's about keeping the reputation and keeping my performance the same or even higher. Each time I go in, I basically have to set the bar higher."

## The Process

With DJing an event comes an extensive and carefully-planned procedure. Weeks prior to the event itself, specific preparation and constant communication is required in order for the event to be successfully set up.

"A week prior, I'll get the itinerary, then my boss will send a separate email full of song requests," Reis said. "I'll go through that, pick out the ones that I know will be good and then from that, I develop a set based on past sets that I've done."

For the majority of events that Reis DJs, the night starts out with cocktail hour, or the period before the dancing begins. During this time, he sets the scene with some chill background music to get things started.

"I use it as a time to warm up, get a sense of what people react to, basically what type of music will capture or catch people's attention," Reis said.

Eventually, the energy increases within the crowd and the dance floor starts to fill up. At this point, Reis will recognize this as his signal to shift to some louder, more upbeat music. This follows with a period of nonstop dancing from the crowd. While it may seem simple, it's more of a challenge to DJ an audience than one might think.

"It's like you're doing a complex game of toss," Reis said. "Basically, you're throwing out a song, and then you have to see how they react to it."

While he DJs for a ranging variety of events, Reis finds that he is most commonly requested to perform at bar and bat mitzvahs. These occasions are ones that Reis has grown to specialize in, since he finds that he has a rather unique connection with the crowd of youngsters.

"I have a different understanding of what music is popular now, like what parts of songs people actually want to hear," Reis said. "Because I'm younger, that's my connection. I'm able to understand younger crowds, which tend to be difficult."

## Family Ties

Ironically, the party business doesn't just reside with Reis; it also runs within his family. Reis's mom, Simcha Lourie, has been running her own party and event planning company for years, Simcha's Events.

"I've been doing weddings and special events in St Louis for around 18 years at this point in time," Simcha said. "I really like to create custom experiences for my guests, depending on their occasion and what their preferences are."

Under Utopia Entertainment, or sometimes as a freelancer, Reis is occasionally hired by Simcha's Events to DJ. For Simcha, she has to view Reis from a professional lens while he works under her company.

"I have to treat [Reis] like a vendor, so he has to be professional," Simcha said. "I'm running my event, so I'm in charge of all the vendors. He's like any of my other vendors. But of course, I want him to do well, and he always comes through, which is great. My clients are always impressed with how young he is and how talented he is."

Reis has an attitude quite similar to Simcha's when it comes to working at her business's events.

"I have to look at it from both perspectives, as in, she's my boss in this situation, and she's my mom," Reis said.

DJing at Simcha's Events isn't all that easygoing for Reis just because he's working with family. In a way, Reis finds it more overwhelming than usual.

"It adds a lot of stress, because I have to uphold [Simcha's Events'] high reputation, because she needs to uphold this reputation," Reis said. "I understand that's how a lot of party planning businesses work."





## Religious Relationship

Throughout the course of his DJing career, Reis has learned to find connection within working at mitzvahs and his own Jewish identity. The tons of mitzvahs he's DJ'd at over the years served as more than experience; they also brought him closer to his own religion.

"All together, experiences of seeing different mitzvahs and different perspectives and different traditions, of how certain families tend to organize their parties; it connects me more to the community with Judaism for sure," Reis said.

Furthermore, Reis even finds his Jewish identity to be a useful tool when it comes to DJing at mitzvahs. His personal experiences with mitzvahs serve an important purpose while working at these events.

"It gives me an upper edge," Reis said. "I've experienced mitzvahs from multiple different sides. I've worked them, but I've also attended one. I've had one. My older brothers had one. So, I know the perspective of what a lot of the crowd has and what their experience is going into a mitzvah. And so I'm able to use that to my advantage."

As someone who is Jewish himself and once had his own bar mitzvah, Reis understands the importance that having a mitzvah can be to someone.

"To me, DJing a mitzvah is an honor," Reis said. "So I take it very seriously when I do it. You only have your mitzvah once, so you got to make each one the best it can possibly be."

## Personal Growth

The long duration of Reis's DJing career has served as a long journey representing the growth he's had not just as a DJ, but as a person. Over the span of his career, DJing has acted as more than just a passion to Reis; it's taught him many new unexpected ideas and lessons, and changed his identity and character.

"Overall, it's made me just a more resilient person," Reis said. "I've dealt with things that adults have dealt with. I've had serious conversations, meetings outside of just the work environment with my boss and managing schedules and calendars, it feels like a real job."

Reis's Dad, Michael Lourie, has observed these effects that DJing has had on his son's life. Michael started out as Reis's "roadie," driving him to and from events and assisting him in setting up his DJ equipment. His role eventually diminished as Reis got older. However, he was able to watch Reis grow and develop much closer. A key part of his development, as Michael observed through events whenever things didn't go perfectly as planned, was his ability to problem-solve under pressure.

"As a parent, you want to go in there and try to fix everything for him," Michael said. "But you realize this is his

event, and he's there with Utopia Entertainment, and he's part of a team that's working to troubleshoot and problem solve all this and be cool under pressure, and not show the guests that you're sweating. You just have to be cool under pressure and figure out the problem. To have a chance to learn those skills in a real life situation, I think is really, really valuable."

Problem-solving under pressure is a skill that Reis himself also recognized is one he learned through DJing over the years. The various challenges that being a DJ has posed on him helped him to learn some valuable lessons, specifically about issues that are out of his control.

"A lot of the time, it's not always directly my responsibility," Reis said. "I can do a perfect set, and still people might not dance. It's really hard, because if you saw my perspective, it's that I did something wrong. I have to realize that's not always on me. It's not always directly my shortcomings that change the event."


As of now, Reis continues to spread his name as a DJ and gains traction and popularity with each event he works. He has fun doing what he loves most while working hard, strives to focus on whatever task is at hand.

"I'm taking things one event at a time, just trying to make a name for myself even more," Reis said.

Looking forward, Reis has no idea how his career as a DJ is going to evolve. However, Michael has high hopes for Reis's future, whether it be as a DJ or not.

"Reis [DJs] because he really loves doing it," Michael said. "He loves music, he's always had a really good sense for music. Reis is someone who has a lot of really interesting hobbies. He just has his hands in a lot of different things. He's very mechanical. He loves building and creating things. DJing is one thing on a list of a few. It'll be interesting to see what he chooses for himself. I think that's going to be what's fun for us to watch as his parents, is that he could take things in a number of different directions, and whatever he does is gonna be great."

*Captions: Reis Lourie (11) conducts a DJ set for a crowd of kids at a halloween party Oct. 18. Reis DJ's for a variety of different audiences, one of these being children. Though they broaden his audience range, kids can sometimes be a challenge to Reis while DJing. "I've had to deal with a lot of different people, like annoying kids who just want to mess up whatever you do, or just get in the way trying to distract you," Reis said. (on page 36 and 39)*

*Reis utilizes multiple components of technological equipment to DJ his set. Reis possesses a well-developed set of equipment that makes DJing events more simple for him. "It's all put together in a case, and it makes it really convenient for portable stuff," Reis said. "I take off the top, and then there's two wires that you plug into right there, already labeled for left and right. There's a power socket in the back so I can charge multiple different things." (on page 41)* 



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"It's about controlling the energy. It's the communication between the crowd and what you have to offer."

Reis Lourie (11)