

Spinning with flair

The DJ Pierre Ravan tells Effie-Michelle Metallidis about his personal take on house music

One tends not to think of the dance floor as a spiritual court, nor of the DJ as its philosopher-king. But sit for a while with Pierre Ravan, and it becomes clear that the longtime producer and DJ believes he transmits more over the airwaves than a funky beat.

"Spirituality is not what people think," he says, his smooth head reflecting the purple lights of Coco's Restaurant in Dubai and adding to his slightly otherworldly air. "Don't think you need to go to Thailand or India to get spirituality. You can dance and get it."

Even if he manages to reach only one person on the dance floor, he says, "then my job is done for that night".

It is a job that has had a long trajectory. The native of Iran, who is now

in his forties and based in Dubai a week per month, was one of the first faces in house music when it began more than 20 years ago. He remembers being influenced as a young mechanical engineer by the clash of disco, new wave and the birth of the 808 drum machine.

"The basic drum and high hat, ksh, ksh, ksh" – he enthusiastically bashes out air drum – "The four by four rhythm was just coming in. It was something totally new."

On his travels, he picked up the sound of deep house in San Francisco and other beats emerging from parallel movements in Europe. It was while living in France that he got his big break and began spinning for top designers who, in turn, introduced him to the club scene.

"Twenty years ago it was all vinyl,

by the way," he points out. "You had to be really special to get the promo." (Longevity has led to a few quirks: he still requests vinyl decks for live sets and lugs around a rotary mixer from the US that he can't find in the Emirates).

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Pierre Ravan at his home in Dubai where, he says, "I can be comfortable". Pawan Singh / The National

Although he has been in and out of Dubai for more than 12 years, he finds himself gravitating more towards the emirate these days because it is the one place where he is most at peace. "I feel myself here, I can be comfortable here," he explains.

For Ravan, blending moneymaking with a self-professed "spiritual" style holds no conflict. He compares materialism and spirituality to the two wings of a bird: "You have to have things, but at the same time don't get attached. It's about balance. Without that balance, you can't reach contentment."

He says his musical style extends the practice of trying to promote harmony and balance in the world.

"It's not that you have to have some ethnic chants or some tribal

drums," he says, sighing. One gets the impression he has been through this many times. "Spiritual music means any music which touches your heart. It can be Metallica. It's not a kind of style. Spiritual means anything which connects you to your inner self and your soul is in touch, not your body."

His past albums – all house music, all riffing off the idea of a musical caravan – keep with this theme. The latest *Karavan* is scheduled for release next April; past collaborators include Bob Sinclair, Claude Challe, DJ Gregory, Laurent Wolf and the Emirati DJ Haneef Raisani. Whether soulful house, jungle or progressive, Ravan tries to give each track a core "that takes you where it should take you," he says. "My whole concept is about feeling the love in your heart,

being together and being united." Hippyish, perhaps, but that is just as resonant with the crowds today as when he first began.

His next gig is at the Rooftop Madinat Jumeirah on New Year's Eve, where he played four years ago on the same night. Last time, he also spun at the now defunct Trilogy; this time, there are likely to be live percussion and a few other surprises that he won't disclose. What he will confirm is that the venue meets his top criteria for a good party.

"The people are really important," he says. "You have to think about the venue, too – how is the atmosphere, the vibe. And definitely, you need a banging sound system. We are not playing Mozart's *Requiem*, we're playing house music. We need a kickin' bass line."