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Melleefresh & Princess Superstar

The 00s glam queens are back...

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New single 'Let's Do It Together' sees two veteran female artists joining forces for the first time. And both are old friends of iDJ, so... time for a catch-up

It's been heartening, in recent years, to see more female artists rising to the top of the dance music tree. Yes, there's still a long way to go – there are still too many all-male line-ups, and the stories that have emerged in recent times of harassment and sexual assault have been stomach-churning to read. But things do seem, at last, to be improving – something to which the success of artists such as Charlotte de Witte, Nina Kraviz, The Black Madonna, Amelie Lens, Ida Engberg, Peggy Gou and the many other female and female-identifying DJs and producers who are now at a bill-topping level attests.

But female artists and DJs have, of course, always been around – right from the earliest days of our culture, when DJs like Lisa Loud and Nancy Noise ruled the roost. They just often didn't get the credit they deserved. So when we heard that two well-known but perhaps slightly overlooked female artists of the 00s had joined forces, naturally we wanted to find out more.

The women in question are Melleny Melody, AKA Melleefresh, and Princess Superstar. Melleefresh is perhaps best known for a string of deadmau5 collaborations between 2005 and 2008, including *Hey Baby*, *Attention Whore*, *SexSlave*, *Cocktail Queen* and *Afterhours*, the latter of which won a Juno (the Canadian equivalent of the Grammys) in 2008. But she first featured in **iDJ** a good five years before that, when her 2001 album *Super Happy Darkness* (<https://open.spotify.com/album/0st8dEG1MwX0FjqrwtMqUv>) picked up a rave review from yours truly for its blend of Deee-Lite-ish 60s hyper-kitsch and hipster electro-pop. She's also been running Canada's successful Play Records label for a full quarter-century now.

Princess Superstar, meanwhile, scored a couple of UK Top 20 hits with *Bad Babysitter* and Mason collab *Perfect (Exceeder)* in 2002 and 2007, respectively. Somewhere in the middle there, she graced the cover of **iDJ**, when we discovered that behind the potty-mouthed rapper mask lies the far more demure, down-to-earth and highly intelligent Concetta Kirschner. She's since gone on to work with the likes of Moby, The Prodigy, Grandmaster Flash, Arthur Baker, Todd Terry and Armand Van Helden.

And now the two of them have collided on *Let's Do It Together*, a gloriously camp n' kitschy, NSFW, pop-tastic electro-rap-house mash-up that sees the two fierce ruling divas still pulling zero punches, raising a middle finger to industry sexism AND ageism and quite clearly having a ball while they're doing it. Gotta love that M1 line, too! So here's what they had to tell us about it...



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It's been a long time since we spoke – about 15 years since Princess was on the cover of iDJ, and nearly 20 since I reviewed Mellee's *Shiny Happy Darkness* album...

Princess: “Oh my god, has it been that long? 15 years... that's just insane!”

Mellee: “That's funny. Wow, that's a MILLION years ago... do I look the same?”

Pretty much... and you certainly sound the same! It's good though, because we're all still here, aren't we? In an industry that has an incredibly high turnover of people, that in itself is cause for celebration, I think...

M: “That's true, that's very true”.

P: “It completely is. We're still kicking. And here we are!”

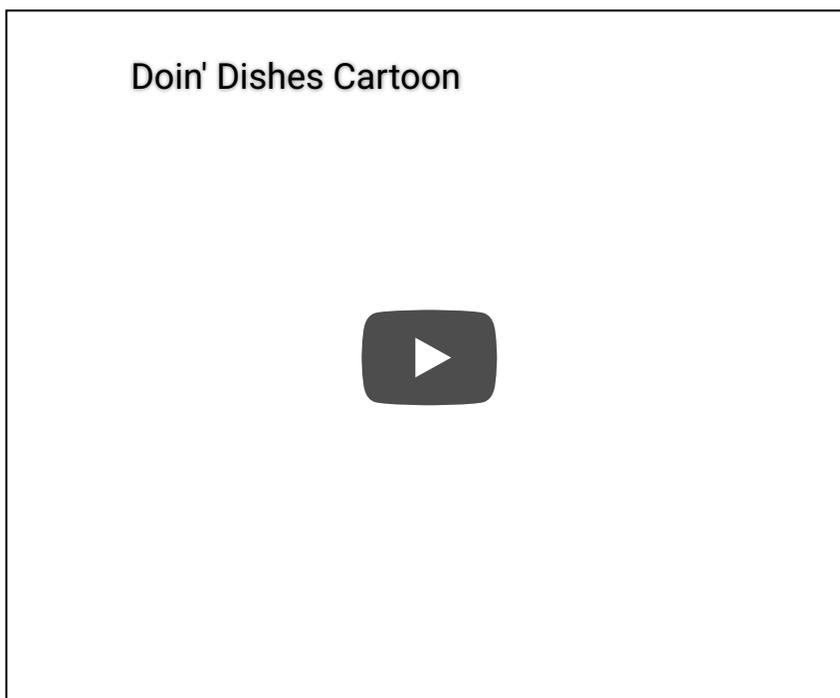
And now the two of you are working together. So how did that come about?

M: “I reached out to Concetta to see if she'd be interested in putting a rap on my track. Because, have you heard this kid Powfu, who did a rap on Beadadoobee's track *Coffee*? He's just a young kid from Vancouver, and he put a rap into her track which is a very sweet track, and her chorus comes in on top of his rap called *Deathbed*. And he put it out on YouTube and TikTok and it just went crazy

“On my track I was really just singing a chorus, and I thought it needed some more lyrics, so I thought it could be interesting if I got a super-cool rap on there, and I thought of Princess. Because when I put out *Beautiful Rich & Horny*, her track *Perfect (Exceeder)* came out around the same time and I thought, I would like to meet this person, because we obviously were thinking along the same lines.”

So this is the first time you've actually worked together?

P: “It is, which is pretty crazy because we've both been going since the 90s. She came at me saying I've done this instrumental with a chorus on it, and I would love you to be on it. Our mutual friend is Peaches, and it was just so cool, I loved the song right away, and I love mixing hip-hop with house – hip-house is my favourite genre, basically. So I was super-psyched.”



It makes sense: you both have these cartoon-y, larger-than-life personas. Concetta, you told me years ago that Princess Superstar is essentially a character you play or a mask you put on – is that still true? And Mellee, is that the same for you – Melleny the person vs Melleefresh the character? And does that in itself create a bond between you?

P: “Yeah, I think so. For sure. Although I think today, there's more of me in Princess. Back then I was more into making this persona but I think now, the two have really synthesized. Princess has gotten more Concetta-like.”

M: ““Well, I've been Melleny Melody for many years. When I do voice work and when I go shopping at Tesco, I'm Melleny Melody. Only now, I tend to do Melleefresh a lot more. Melleny Melody runs Play Records, and Melleefresh is one of the more glamorous, outrageous artists signed to the label – that's one way to explain it.”

Let's talk about Play a minute... you've always had those two strings to your bow, being an artist and a label owner as well. Do you think that's been key to your longevity in the game?

M: “Maybe. Because being both 'business' and 'talent' keeps me on top of things. If I was just a performer, I don't think my career would have lasted as long as it has. It's not so easy to convince big labels that your next single is going to be the big hit they're looking for. Having my own label and distribution with Label Worx has allowed me to get my material out and not have to wait for anyone's permission.

"I can pick and choose who I want to work with, mainly because I own the label. I manage all my own material, and I make sure it gets out and continually promoted. We also have a recording studio in London – Play Deep Studios in Kings Cross – so we've diversified. I get to record and also take new talent there for writing camps."

We seem to be in a period when things are hopefully getting better for women in music, with more female artists rising to the top. So do you feel like your time might have come?

P: “I do. I mean, I had an amazing run back in the day, but I think now more than ever it's time that women really have an opportunity to... there's more acceptance.

M: “Erm... has my time come? I don't know, I mean, how long have I been trying to hit the big time? It feels like forever! But sometimes I feel like maybe I was ahead of the time, too. Like with *Doin' Dishes*, which had a little animated character video... a lot of people do that now. A lot of my music has been kind of ahead of what's been happening.”

It's never too late for people to catch on though, is it?

P: “Actually, one song I'm working on is called *Getting Older (Pussy Still Pops)* – one thing I really want to get out there to the world, and to other women, is to embrace ageing. You know, we live in a very youth-oriented culture, and I turned 50 a few months ago. So I wrote this song, and we're going to shoot the video in August. I really wanna give women hope that you can still be amazing at 50. Or at whatever age, really.”



I'm a year ahead of you there, but I'm quite enjoying being in my 50s. You can be as grumpy as you like, for one thing! And you do start to get a little respect, I think, just for being in the game so long...

P: “I love being in my my 50s, I really do. It's cool because you don't give a shit any more. You've done it all before, you don't really care what's cool or not cool this week. I feel so much more confident in myself now.

“And I have a kid now too, which is amazing. She's 10, so I get to be a kid, and she loves music so I get to do music with her now, and it's like a whole new chapter.”

How much does your daughter know about Princess Superstar, though? Because some of your lyrics and costumes over the years have been quite risque, to say the least, and times and attitudes have changed. As she gets older, is she going to tell you off for being too overtly sexualised or anything like that, do you think?

“Well, it's funny you should ask, because somehow she came across the *Bad Babysitter* video. I never showed it to her, but I guess she looked it up. And she was quite upset about it... so I had to explain to her that, you know, this was meant to be a joke, and it was something aimed at adults, not something for kids.

“But at the same time I've told her, there's nothing *wrong* with a woman's sexuality. I mean, I wouldn't let her wear revealing clothes – I don't myself, in my day-to-day life. But Princess Superstar is a character, and it's fun to be her – in that context, as an artist, female sexuality is fun. But no, she's not going to hear my full discography until she's a few years older yet!”



And coming back to the age thing... Mellee, any thoughts?

M: “Well, you see, I was 25 when *Doin' Dishes* came out and I'm still 25, because I have a time machine! I have a DeLorean, so I can just go back to the future whenever I feel like it. But, you know... I have some FRIENDS in their 50s and yeah, they tell me that when you get to that age, it's like... who gives a shit?

“If you don't like me, if you don't like my music, I don't care. I love my music, I love what I'm doing, and I'm going to keep on doing it. And there's obviously some people out there that like it, because it does sell, you know?”

Do you feel like you can perhaps serve as role models or mentors for younger female artists?

Mellee, with all your experience running a label and as an artist... what advice would you give to anyone starting up a label now, and what advice would you give to any young female artists, in particular, who are starting out now?

M: "I'd say, if you wanna do a label, get a degree in law, because there's gonna be a lot of contracts and a lot of things are gonna happen along the way that you need to be ready for. I've never spent so much money as I have on lawyers' fees in the last few years!

"And as a performer... it seems the best thing right now is to not wait for labels to come round and give you a record deal. To actually get out there and start doing it, singing your music and performing your tracks on Instagram, that seems to be the way to go. Or if you can, make your own videos and get them up on YouTube, on TikTok, on Instagram Live. It's really up to you to make things happen, because no one's going to make it happen for you."

Finally, what else is going on for the two of you right now?

P: "Right now I have a show on Tastemakers Radio on Dash Radio, that's every Thursday at 7pm Pacific time. So I'm still DJing on that show and that's really fun... and I'm working on some new music as we speak. I'm really excited about it, it's like modern hip-house and I'm excited because I haven't really put out much in a while."

M: "I've been doing a Play Records project because it's our 25th anniversary this year. So I've just finished putting together this video where nine DJs that have been on Play Records have done little 15-minute sets, and some of them have live performances with them. We have a DJ in Scotland, Hotknife, he had Billy Newton-Davis singing with him, and Concetta and I did our track together with her superimposed behind me – that was really cool. We're just in the process of editing that and hopefully that'll be out before the year is out. It will be on YouTube but I'm hoping to get it on Beatport as well. I have till the end of the year, so we'll see where it ends up!"

Words: Russell Deeks

***Let's Do It Together* is out now on Play Records**

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