

September
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IN THE CITY

STRATEGIC **SPIN**

DJ Irie hangs with Dwyane Wade, Jamie Foxx and...Barack Obama? How did he wind up running with such an A-list crowd? The story is pure music ... and scratch.

BY ELIZABETH RAHE

At Miami Heat games this season AmericanAirlines Arena will pulse with energy, talent and larger-than-life personality – and we're not just talking LeBron, Dwyane and Chris. DJ Irie will be working his mixes and stoking the crowd to keep it as hot as the action on the court. Over the past decade, the official DJ of the Miami Heat has become an integral part of the home-game experience – he even has a championship ring to show for it. But it almost didn't happen.

"I thought my following would think I was a sellout...I would lose my edge," says Irie, who was already a successful club DJ when Heat management approached him in 1999. "I left the meeting with my mind made up that it was not the right fit for me." At a second meeting, however, Irie saw a challenge to break new ground and make the gig his own. "Thank God, I did," he says.

Thus, Irie became the first team DJ in the NBA, and his world expanded exponentially. He continues to be the life of the party at velvet-rope clubs and exclusive private celebrations throughout South Florida, the Bahamas and beyond. He also uses his name and influence to benefit philanthropic causes. He has not planned his life, he says, but he has taken advantage of the opportunities that have crossed his path – and the contacts he has made with some bold-faced names.

His own name came by way of opportunity. Ian Grocher was born in St. Croix and raised in Miami, and he went to boarding school in Jamaica. There, sharing a room with now Grammy-winning reggae artist Sean Paul, his love of music blossomed. His first gig was at a skating rink, where he said his name was DJ Ian. "The head DJ said, 'No, that's a horrible name. You have to be DJ Irie.' In Jamaica *irie* means good and positive...So that became my moniker."

In 2005 he saw a chance to put other DJs and entertainers in touch with clients, and he founded Artist Related, which now books engagements around the globe. He met actor/singer/comedian Jamie Foxx when he was filming *Miami Vice*, ended up working a couple of parties for him, and the two became friends and collaborators. Last summer he traveled with Foxx on the 32-city *Blame It* Tour.

DJ Irie

in the city

Another collaboration, with former Miami Dolphins linebacker Jason Taylor, resulted in Irie's DJ Spiniversity, Powered by Scratch DJ Academy, an after-school program at the Jason Taylor Reading Room in Miramar. In May, the first class graduated from Spiniversity, which works as an incentive for the kids to meet educational goals. In June, Irie celebrated the sixth DJ Irie Weekend, a party and celebrity golf event to benefit Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Miami. In July he received a commendation from the City of Miami for his philanthropic work, and then he traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in the White House Next Generation Leadership Conference. (On Twitter July 27: Yooo the oval office is REALLY OVAL! I thought they just called it that.....)

"I woke up in a cold sweat this morning thinking of that. It was one of the most amazing days," he says of the conference, in which a select group of community leaders from across the country met to network and discuss how to tackle challenges. "I left there with a better understanding of how to use my assets to help my community and my country," he says.

Irie was in the group discussing social networking, and it's no wonder. The man has more than 22,000 Twitter followers, maintains a presence on Facebook and MySpace, has a website (www.djirie.com) and a newsletter. His connections online and offline make him valuable not only as a community leader but also as celebrity endorser, or in current parlance, brand ambassador.

These associations typically have a charity component. For instance, Irie recently signed on as ambassador for Specialty Automotive Treatments in Fort Lauderdale, which helped sponsor DJ Irie Weekend – and customized his 2011 Denali SUV. "Everything that he stands for – from his enormous success and likability to his incredible creative vibe and philanthropic heart – are synonymous with the SAT brand and culture," says owner Rafael Jorge, who will host an Irie benefit event in October.

A new line of DJ Irie jewelry is in the works from his association with Levinson Jewelers in Fort Lauderdale. "It will be fun, cool and chic, but also very wearable and reasonable," Robin Levinson says. The jewelry, which will benefit Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Miami, will be ready for the holiday season, with a party to kick it off, of course.

In the meantime, Irie is focused on the excitement surrounding the Miami Heat this season. "A regular game will be like a playoff game, and a playoff game will be like New Year's Eve," he says. "I've been wrestling with myself... How can I innovate and bring new things to my position to match the intensity of the game and the crowd?"

One new trick? Video. Specially produced clips will add a visual dimension to call-and-response activities – his high-energy interaction with the crowd that gets them on their feet, dancing, shouting and singing.

"My personal mantra is to work hard and try to deliver the best experience possible – to exceed expectations. If you do that consistently, you will see opportunities and doors open that you would never think of if you had tried. That's how I've been living my life, and I think I'm going to stick with it."

The strategy seems to be working for him. ●



The Spa at
The Diplomat

Fort Lauderdale puts spa indulgence on sale

Now is the perfect time for some self-indulgence...without any guilt. Through September, Lauderdale Spa Chic offers packages of innovative treatments and therapeutic spa experiences at 15 Fort Lauderdale area resorts and day spas for \$99, up to half off regular rates. **Here's a sampling:**

- › Chardonnay Sugar Body Polish, Neck, Back & Shoulder Massage and pedicure at **Spa 66, Hyatt Regency Pier Sixty-Six Resort & Spa.**
- › Diplomat Massage and Aromatherapy Bath at **The Spa at the Diplomat, Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa.**
- › Rapid Rub Massage, Hot Paraffin Pack treatment and Oxygen Blast Mini-Facial at **Bliss, W Fort Lauderdale.**
- › Aromatherapy Salt Glow and Swedish Massage at **The Spa at Lago Mar Resort & Club.**
- › Eminence Stone Crop Facial or Wellness Massage at **The Spa at Ritz-Carlton, Fort Lauderdale.**
- › Eyelash extensions and complimentary touch-up at **Diva's Day Spa.**

See all the offerings at www.sunny.org/spachic, including resort special packages and rates in conjunction with a stay. For instance, the Spa Escape package at Harbor Beach Marriott Resort & Spa includes deluxe overnight accommodations with choice of a daily Swedish Massage or European Facial per person/per day for up to two people per room (rates from \$329). Spa Atlantic at The Atlantic Hotel offers an upgrade to a Grande Deluxe Oceanfront guest room with large private balcony, 20 percent off all spa services and \$100 per day in spa credits (rates from \$219).

Lauderdale Spa Chic, presented by the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau, 954-765-4466, www.sunny.org/spachic.

– Elizabeth Rahe

RAYMOND JAMES ENNIS CLASSIC

with the
Chris Evert
Hospital



Chris Evert draws celebrity, competition and charity to Boca Raton and Delray Beach

Comedian Jon Lovitz describes his interests as comedy, tennis, golf and women, not necessarily in that order. "In fact, if I could make a beautiful woman laugh on the tennis court, that would be ideal." He surely will get that chance at the 21st annual Chris Evert / Raymond James Pro-Celebrity Classic Nov. 5-7 at the Delray Beach Tennis Center. He joins Evert and other expected luminaries, actors Jeffrey Donovan, Scott Foley and Maeve Quinlan, tennis pro Vince Spadea and musician Gavin Rossdale, with more names to be confirmed later. Festivities include the Chris Evert Pro-Celebrity Gala, an evening of music, auctions, dinner and dancing at Boca Raton Resort & Club. Other events at the resort include Tennis and Lunch with Chrissie and Friends on Nov. 5 and, later that evening, cocktails with the pros and celebrities for box holders, patrons and sponsors. It's all in the name of kids in need. Over the past 20 years, the event has raised more than \$18 million to help abused and neglected children in South Florida.

Chris Evert / Raymond James Pro-Celebrity Classic, Nov. 5-7, Delray Beach Tennis Center and Boca Raton Resort & Club. Tickets: Chris Evert Charities, 561-394-2400 or www.chrisevert.org.

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