

And now for something completely different:



Entrepreneur is a DJ of all trades

By **EZRA GLINTER**
Special to *The CJN*

When Abby Tobias was 15, he wanted to be the next Jim Carrey.

But one night Corey Mandel, the owner of a local DJ company, spotted him performing standup comedy at an open mike night, and offered Tobias a job.



From then on, Tobias knew he had found his real calling.

"I was always a jokester, but also very passionate about music," Tobias said. "So the DJ business was really my first business. At the time, you would make \$50 a night, and at comedy no money, so it seemed like an amazing thing... And I was never very good at standup."

Soon Tobias was performing at weddings and bar mitzvahs, as well as bringing his skills as a turntableist into the clubs. But as much as he loved performing, he discovered that he also had a natural entrepreneurial spirit.

Today, the 31-year-old Toronto native is not only a DJ himself, but also manages DJs and other artists, owns a club, an event production company and runs Canada's first DJ school, the Scratch Lab DJ Institute.

Tobias' career as an entertainment entrepreneur got off the ground when he was only 17 and still a student at Thornlea Secondary School. He was managing the Boogie Brats, one of Canada's premier break-dance teams. By the time he was 20 years old, he had travelled the world with them, including a stint touring with Missy Elliot, and had helped three of their members join Cirque du Soleil.

In the meantime, Tobias also started attending Ryerson University, where he studied radio and television broadcasting, which he managed to balance with his budding professional career.

"I was never very scholarly, but it wasn't taking up enough of my time that I couldn't do it all," he said. "In my second year, I actually tried dropping out of university, but my school admissions were very supportive and were able to work around it."

When he graduated in 2003, he started his first

business, Sole Power, while living in his mother's basement. An event production company, Sole Power has grown to produce close to 400 events each year, employing over 100 performers. This February, Tobias will be able to claim one of his greatest successes with Sole Power— he will produce several events at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

In addition to running Sole Power, Tobias also manages Keys N Krates, a DJ trio that combines old-fashioned instrumentation with turntableism and live sampling, as well as the five-member group, the Eh! Team DJs.

Not content with merely performing, managing and producing events, however, Tobias started what would become his true labour of love in 2005, the Scratch Lab DJ Institute. Together with DJ Grouch and DJ Starting from Scratch, two of Canada's top DJs, he wrote the school's curriculum and began teaching both amateur and professional DJs of all ages. Today, the Scratch Lab DJ Institute is an accredited school offering a high school music credit, and has almost 2,000 students.

"It's my biggest labour of love, to be able to teach my class. We've written the rule book on

Still, Tobias takes time out to help out with numerous charitable causes. Each year, Sole Power provides entertainment for the Walk With Israel, as well as for many other UJA Federation of Greater Toronto events throughout the year.

"As I've gotten more successful, it's made me want to be more charitable," he said. "I can help with expertise in certain areas, where people would otherwise have to spend substantial amounts of money."

Tobias also puts his money where his mouth is, donating to causes he cares about, including a fund he started at the Hospital for Sick Children to provide young patients with musical instruments.

"I tend to choose quite a few charities that are child related. I have a soft spot for kids, so I do what I can," he said.

Tobias' concern for kids isn't limited to hospitals. He also goes around to schools and community centres, speaking to students about his life and what makes him successful. He is modest, crediting his co-workers with much of his success, but also says that the main ingredient is hard work.

"I recognize that I definitely have the entrepreneurial spirit, but I couldn't do what I do if I didn't have amazing teams working beside me, so I can take only



Abby Tobias, 31, found his true calling as a DJ in his teens. The Torontonian now runs the Scratch Lab DJ Institute, Canada's first school for DJs.

how to teach DJing," Tobias said. "It's recreational, but we also have a lot of active DJs who want to be better coming to take classes."

With so many businesses to attend to, Tobias' hands are more than full.

"I'd be lying if I didn't say that my life was completely chaotic and that it's a struggle to complete my tasks for each day," he said.

a certain amount of credit," he said.

"But the easiest piece of advice is to work hard. I always hear that people are grinding and hustling, when really they're sleeping until noon. You still have to be smart and make the right decisions and get lucky. But it's the type of work that everybody would want to be in, and if you're not working 12 or 14 hours a day, someone else is."