



**WARNING!**

# THE GREAT DJ AGENCY SCAM

Words Max Daly

*At least two closely linked DJ agencies have been scamming DJs across the country for hundreds of pounds. If you're a DJ who wants to make it big, you need to read this...*



IT WAS BILLED on the flyer as 'Kreme de la Kreme: a night of 'classy, sassy house music: sexy, stylish, lavishly rich!' at Biagio at Bankside, a bar and restaurant in south London. But the evening before the event, on Friday December 2 last year, Wez, one of several DJs lined up for the gig, took a call from his agency. There was to be a last-minute change to the venue. It was now to be held at Club II AD, another small bar-cum-club, across the river in Aldgate.

He had booked a hotel in south London so he could get some sleep before the five-hour drive back home to his young family in the north east the next day. He had been told that he would be playing a marathon three gigs that night, but that had been whittled down to one. And now the venue had changed at the last minute, leaving Wez wondering how many

punters would turn up to hear his tunes.

Wez was used to being messed about by his agency. This was the first gig they had given him since signing on the dotted line three months ago. By now they should have given him about 15 gigs. When he had signed up, his contract promised weekly, well-paid, high profile DJ slots, photoshoots, web design and expenses. It had cost £500 to join, yet even as a seasoned DJ, it seemed like a good opportunity to boost his career.

It was only when he turned up at the new venue that Wez realized he wasn't the only DJ suffering at the hands of the agency.

"I arrived and the place was empty. There was no gig. The only other people there were the other DJs on the bill. We had all been booked by the same firm, the Paul Hauer Agency," says Wez. "We began to suspect that we were being strung along, and that we weren't alone."

## ADVANCE FEE FRAUD

Wez, along with a string of fellow DJs, had become the victim of one of the newest forms of what police call 'advance fee fraud', a scam better known for targeting wannabe glamour models. In this instance, a seemingly respectable, well-connected DJ agency with a central London address promised its clients a steady stream of lucrative gigs and publicity for a £500 up-front fee. In return, for many of its clients interviewed by *Mixmag*, it delivered virtually nothing.

At the start of 2011 Wez received a text message from a man named Riki, asking if he was interested in joining the Paul Hauer Agency. Wez called him up and Riki mentioned some respected DJs on the circuit whom he said were on the agency's books. He said DJs who signed up got a minimum five gigs per month. They would be paid an average of £100 an hour, so the joining fee could be made back in a couple of nights' work. He said the agency would provide a free photoshoot, travel expenses, apartments to stay in overnight and web design. Riki emphasised how good the customer service was: the agency was always at the end of the phone to answer questions.

In August 2011, after talking to his wife about the possibility of playing gigs in London every weekend, he gathered £500 in savings and signed the contract. And that, says Wez, is when communications started to fade.

Gary, another DJ booked for the December 2 gig, had done exactly the same thing a few months before. Riki had called Gary offering him the chance of signing up to the agency. "I researched them on the internet, on DJ forums, and there was not a bad word to be found," says Gary. "Their flyers looked legit. A lawyer looked over the contract and it all seemed fine."

But as with many of the DJs who put their trust in the Paul Hauer Agency, as soon as he handed over the £500, the promised gigs vanished.

"When we turned up at the Aldgate venue we realised it was not going to happen," says Wez. "We got chatting and all the DJs had the same story: all booked by the Paul Hauer Agency, all had stumped up the up-front fee but had very little to show for it."

Despite repeated phonecalls and emails to the agency asking why the gig had been so badly handled, whether they would receive any compensation, or indeed if there were any other gigs for them, the DJs were met with a string of excuses, ranging from the after-effects of the London riots (which had occurred more than three months earlier), to missing cheque books and incompetent event managers.

When the unhappy DJs, who had begun to gather a group of around 20 others who felt they had been conned by the Paul Hauer Agency, hinted that they might contact *Mixmag* about the

situation, Riki's jovial mask slipped, and he issued thinly veiled threats, even mentioning that he had spent time inside prison in Europe.

One London-based DJ's dogged attempt at getting his money back led him to become one of the few DJs to have actually met Riki (believed to be a former dancer at Stringfellows nightclub) and to receive something of a refund. Terry says he demanded a refund after getting zero help from the Paul Hauer Agency.

"I met Riki in Canning Town late at night about six months ago. He was supposed to give me some money back and I was going to give him my opinion on a possible warehouse venue. He parked up in a lovely BMW. He was a big black guy, just over six foot tall, and he had a sort of German accent. Anyway, true to form, he was a nice chatty guy, but he didn't have the money nor the keys to open the warehouse. Oddly enough, he did put £200 in my account a month later - and that was the last I heard of him."

## ALL QUIET ON THE GIGS FRONT

The Paul Hauer Agency, which describes itself as 'A music management and promotions agency who [sic] promotes acts to labels and industry professionals', was set up in 2009 by Paul Hauer and Inge Paul, an Austrian businesswoman. It advertised its services on MySpace, Facebook and Twitter. Riki was the persuader, and a small team of secretaries whose names appeared to change every month or so processed payments and dealt with complaints. While the agency, which had about 70 DJs on its books, did offer some a good service, not only setting up gigs but paying them as well, some DJs say they were not paid for a string of bookings.

In January this year the agency was forced by the financial authorities to cease business because of a failure to submit its annual accounts. However, in an email sent to its roster of DJs about the closure of the agency, its bosses blamed "The emails circulating by various DJs against the company" for "forcing the company into liquidation", and offered them the chance to continue their contracts with a new agency, DN4 DJs.

Amy, a DJ in her 20s, decided to transfer her contract from Paul Hauer to DN4 DJs in the hope of getting some of her money's worth.

"I had joined Paul Hauer because I wanted to up my game," she tells us. "I had played Pacha but I really wanted to push things forward. Riki certainly had the gift of the gab and in theory it looked like I'd get my £500 back in less than a month. I had my photo taken in a professional studio and it was great, I was ready to go," says Amy.

"But after that, it went quiet on the ▶▶



gigs front. When I asked what was going on, why they were not promoting me, why I had no gigs, all I got was hot air. There was so much fobbing off you wouldn't believe it." After around four months, by which time she should, according to her contract, have been offered around 20 gigs, Amy had been given just two.

"The first one was at a low status venue in east London for which I was never paid either wages or taxi expenses," says Amy, "and at the second the management pulled me off the decks after 20 minutes because they thought I was going to play chart music. They took £500 off me, and apart from paying a photographer £100, they didn't invest it in anything. I've had nothing from DN4 DJs either."

Despite the fresh branding and professional-looking website, DN4 DJs, 'An international booking agent for a roster of exceptional talents' which boasts that it can offer UK DJs 'More opportunity to play abroad and to gain that worldwide experience' does seem to be heavily linked to the wreckage of the Paul Hauer Agency.

### NEW COMPANY, SAME STORY

While DN4 is a different legal entity, the two firms share the same company director, Janet Sally Baker, the same 'music manager', Riki Matthews, and office worker Jasmine Clifford. DN4's HQ is a rented office space on London's Regent Street, a minute's walk from the office used by the Paul Hauer Agency. Both firms booked their DJs into the same London bars, the Thomas A Becket and Arch 365. Crucially, they have an almost identical modus operandi: to cast the net out for DJs eager for a break on the London club scene, promise them a boost to their career in exchange for a big up-front fee, only to offer a barrage of excuses

with very little end product.

DN4 DJs began recruiting a fresh wave of DJs by posting 'DJs WANTED' adverts on the free classified ad site Gumtree, among other methods. It was a recruitment drive that has seen, according to one person connected to the company, at least 50 DJs sign up since March. The DN4 DJs fee is £470, and there is an added clause in the contract that stipulates that DJs may be sued if they 'Slander the company verbally or written or in any form of communication causing defamation of character'.

Yohann, who does not want to give his real name, was one of the first DN4 recruits. A tech-house DJ in eastern Europe for 10 years before coming to the UK, he was keen to break into the domestic club circuit. He answered an advert on Gumtree for DJs, sent in a mixtape and was contacted by a caller who told him to speak to Riki. Yohann got the full treatment, with promises of 60 gigs a year all over the world.

At DN4's unmarked office in Regent Street he was met by a member of staff and taken upstairs to a suite of three rooms occupied by three DN4 employees. To his surprise, he was asked to pay the £470 sign-up fee in cash, so had to go out and get it out from a cashpoint in the street. When he asked why, he was told the card machine had broken. At the time he remembers feeling something was wrong. It wasn't the first time he would get that feeling with his new agency.

In May this year, after being ignored and passed around for three months by a string of DN4 characters each offering a different excuse for the lack of bookings, Yohann was given a gig. Unfortunately for him it was double-booked, and he was sent home. When he eventually got Riki on the phone - after being warned against 'hassling'

## "THEY TOOK £500; ALL I GOT WAS HOT AIR"

him by other DN4 staff - Yohann demanded his fee back, saying that DN4 were in breach of contract. Riki apologised, blamed it on what seemed to Yohann like the fifth events manager to be fired in the space of a few months and said his payment for the double-booked gig, and some high profile gigs, would be coming Yohann's way.

Although Yohann did eventually receive two hours' pay for the double-booked slot, the promised gigs turned out to be damp squibs. One was cancelled; the other took place in front of 20 people in a tiny upstairs room at a run-down venue in north London.

### THE CON GOES ON?

When *Mixmag* interviewed Yohann in August this year he told us he had been warned by DN4 not to contact any other DJs about his concerns over the company, as doing so would jeopardise his chances of getting a full refund. He was asked to take down negative comments he had made on a DJ forum about DN4 DJs.

As is the case with several of the DJs signed up to DN4 who *Mixmag* has spoken to, Yohann pointed out that his DJ name appears on flyers on DN4's website, despite the fact he had not even been informed he was to play the gigs. Not only is Yohann keen to get his money back, but, despite the threats, he is eager to remove his name from DN4 publicity material. He also wants to warn other DJs to stay away from the agency.

"You can tell from DJ forums that DN4 DJs is still recruiting more people to sign up, but it's clear that they do not have enough gigs for all the DJs on their roster," he says. "So they are happy to sign people up and take their money knowing that they will be unlikely to give them the gigs they are promising. This company has wasted so much of my time and money. Right from the start they gave me lots of hope, and they were very good at stringing me along in this way.

For me, I'm not sure I want to be a DJ any more in this country."

*Mixmag* understands that as a result of its investigation a number of DJs, who believe they have been defrauded by DN4 DJs and its former incarnation as the Paul Hauer Agency, have lodged formal complaints with the UK's national fraud reporting centre, ActionFraud.

"I've never heard of this happening before, but it's not a surprise," says Bill Brewster, co-author of *How To DJ (Properly): The Art And Science Of Playing Records*. "The advice I give people is very simple. One: throw your own parties, build your own crowd. Two: make music. You look at all the most popular DJs and almost all of them started out with a party of their own somewhere. There are no shortcuts to getting a name."

DN4's habit of threatening and harassing its dissatisfied clients appeared to intensify once it became known to the company that *Mixmag* was carrying out this investigation. Several DJs, as well as the author of this article, were sent threatening messages over the phone or by text from Riki. One DJ was told that he was 'Going to be got', and the next day his home address was texted to him. Some of those receiving the threats became so concerned they called the police. One discontented DJ was told by a man purporting to be a millionaire that the company was being revamped and he should sign a new contract. And when *Mixmag* contacted DN4's director (and former Paul Hauer director) Sally Baker for her response to this article, we were met with silence.

There are many reputable DJ agencies around but the lesson of the DN4 and Paul Hauer victims is clear, and aspiring DJs should take note: be extremely wary about paying anything up front, and remember; there are no shortcuts to success. ©

**All DJs' names have been changed. If you think you've been a victim of this scam call ActionFraud on 0300 123 2040**

