

ARMIN ONLY

Coen Bom

Armin Only

Translated by Eva Weidema



Uitgeverij Carrera, Amsterdam 2009

 **armada**



Under the authority of Cloud 9 Music B.V.

© 2009 Coen Bom and Uitgeverij Carrera, Amsterdam

Original title *Armin van Buuren – Eén op één*

English translation by Eva Weidema

Cover design by DPS Design & Prepress Services, Amsterdam

Cover photograph by Barend van Herpe

Typesetting by Mat-Zet B.V., Soest

ISBN 978 90 488 0323 1

NUR 661

www.uitgeverijcarrera.nl

Uitgeverij Carrera is an imprint of Dutch Media Uitgevers bv.

Table of Contents

Introduction	7
1 Predestined for the A2 Motorway	13
2 The 2007 Top 100 Awards	17
3 Armin Josef Jacobus Daniel van Buuren	23
4 New Year's Eve 2007 – Crobar, Buenos Aires	34
5 David Lewis – Armin's Booking Agent	40
6 Peppermint Party, Dubai – 27 February 2008	46
7 Maykel Piron – Director of Armada Music	59
8 Sundance Party, Eilat, Israel – 1 March 2008	63
9 Erika	73
10 Armin Only, Getting There – 18 April 2008	78
11 Armin Only, The Night – 19 April 2008	83
12 Allan Hardenberg – Director of Alda Events	94
13 The Queen's Birthday 2008 – Leiden	98
14 350th Broadcast of A State of Trance – 1 May 2008	103
15 She and B3, Spain – 2-3 May 2008	114
16 The Van Buuren Family	125
17 Raymond van Vliet – Director of Cloud 9 Music	140
18 Sunshine Festival, Kołobrzeg, Poland – 25 July 2008	143
19 Global Gathering, Stratford-upon-Avon, UK – 26 July 2008	155
20 Tomorrowland, Boom, Belgium – 27 July 2008	162
21 In Armin's own words	168
22 Sander Bouma – A&R Manager at Armada	173

23	One year with Armin	177
24	Six Flags, Mexico City – 29 August 2008	185
25	The 2008 Top 100 Awards – Ministry of Sound, London	191
26	For fanatics	201
	Discography	209
	Tour schedule	

Introduction

The first time I met Armin van Buuren was at a club in The Hague. It must have been towards the end of 1999. At that time, I was manager of the «O» Dance Theatre, although it was known among most partygoers as 'the O'. It had only been open for three months, but 'the O' had already firmly established itself as one of the Netherlands' most prominent clubs. Although DJs are now among the world's greatest stars, this was hardly the case back then. Nevertheless, a new generation of promising DJs appeared on the horizon – bringing with them something 'new'. The name of somebody called Tiësto was dropped remarkably often by a lot of people and, after he had performed several gigs at our club, I quickly began to understand why. His music was refreshing. This melodious, expertly built-up trance music was later to become his trademark. The most notable difference, in comparison to DJs of the 'older' generation, was his remarkable enthusiasm when he took his place behind the turntables. Regardless of whether or not the audience was willing to take part, Tiësto was clearly having a good time – and his enthusiasm was catching. An evening with Tiësto was a new experience.

It suddenly became clear to me why, six months earlier, people had already suggested I give Tiësto a chance at another club where I was in charge of programming. At that point in time, I didn't think it was a good idea. Nobody had ever heard

of him and I was keen to put what I would call the 'leading brands' on the bill. In any case, Tiësto had an enthusiastic manager who called me practically every week. His name was Dave Lewis. Dave was a nice guy, a smooth talker with an accent from Brabant, a largely rural and laid-back province in the southern part of the Netherlands. In spite of all his attempts, I stood firm on my decision. At that time I was working at Asta Movement in The Hague, a club that would be closing down in a few weeks before the demolition crew was due to tear down the building. Taking a risk with a new, unknown DJ didn't look like a good idea at the time. I've thought back on that quite a few times...

With this idea running through the back of my mind, it wasn't so strange that I immediately agreed when Dave Lewis approached me in 1999 asking me to give a talented new DJ a chance. Within a very short space of time, Dave had grown into a renowned name in the dance scene. He represented DJs such as Marco V and Ferry Corsten, but his biggest success had been DJ Tiësto. 'I've done it again! I've found a new one, hurrah!' was how Dave would announce his new discovery. I was all ears. 'I've got Armin van Buuren!' he said.

I had heard the name Armin van Buuren before. Several of his records, including 'Blue Fear' and 'Communication', had been released by a record label owned by a friend of mine, but I know that making records and spinning are two entirely different disciplines. This is something Dave understood as well. 'But this boy can really spin, believe me, mate!' I believed him and scheduled a date; on a Saturday night, the best night of the week. In the first place, because by now I had learned not to doubt Dave when it comes to new DJs and in the second place, because I wanted to do this guy a favour in the hope of getting priority the next time I wanted to book Tiësto for a gig. Opportunism isn't an unknown phenomenon in the dance scene.

Early on the scheduled day a fairly tall, blond young man appeared at the door of the discotheque's office. 'Hi, I'm

Armin,' he said in a friendly tone of voice. He did not resemble the average house producer in the least. At that time, I expected house producers to look a little unkempt and to be a little spaced out and to ask if they could light up a joint in the office within minutes of starting a conversation. Armin had a kind of high-spirited, student-like air about him and striking up a conversation came naturally to him. After we had exchanged about two sentences, it felt like we'd known each other for years. He was smart, too. He told me, maybe by way of confirmation, that he was a law student at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands' most renowned university in that field.

As soon as Armin got behind the decks, it seemed as if he was possessed by some kind of alter ego. The man who I saw at work here didn't bear the faintest resemblance to a law student. I saw someone who loved what he was doing, with a passion for music and a style that was all his own. It became instantly clear to me: the dance scene had gained a new potential star.

At that time, there was talk of a change in the scene. Thanks to a TV performance by Tiësto – including tears of joy during Inner City in de RAI – Tijs Verwest was a rising star. Not only in the Netherlands, but also abroad, with the UK as his principal market. Ferry Corsten had already reached stardom in the UK thanks to his hit 'Out of the Blue'. The popularity of both of these DJs in the UK opened doors for many of their colleagues. Suddenly, DJs such as Johan Gielen, Marco V and even Armin van Buuren were more frequently crossing the border to perform abroad and, thanks to the publicity these events brought with them, these DJs attained star status.

Because of the enormous media coverage DJs were receiving, lesser-known DJs in the Netherlands suddenly became celebrities as well. We couldn't even keep track of all these new names. The days that every discotheque had its 'own' DJ who did his stint behind the turntables from eight in the evening until five in the morning and then helped clean up afterwards

were far behind us, thanks to the rise of house parties in the nineties, but after the year 2000, the hype surrounding DJs was really assuming serious proportions. They played at four or even five different venues throughout the country and were very well paid. Fifteen hundred guilders (approx. seven hundred dollar) for a two-hour show was the rule rather than the exception. These were the days, if you were lucky enough to be a club's programmer. Popular DJs were numerous and a DJ's status was often unrelated to his international success. Even everyday, run-of-the-mill Dutch DJs benefited from this general DJ pampering.

It became increasingly difficult for clubs in the Netherlands to book 'big boys' like Tiësto, Ferry Corsten and Armin van Buuren. Often, the offers from foreign clubs were more attractive or more challenging and only a handful of clubs were given the opportunity to book one of these gentlemen at all. Luckily, the «O» was one of them and in the period between 2000 and 2003 we were able to schedule quite a few performances by Armin van Buuren and his colleagues.

Armin considered the club in The Hague as home turf. The absolute climax was Armin's marathon performance on 26 October 2002. During 'Armin «O»nly', our title for that night's show, he had spun for more than twelve and a half consecutive hours. After this marathon session, he entered the office, almost annoyingly bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. 'I could have gone on for hours, actually,' he said, with a big smile. 'And did you know, I didn't even stop once to take a leak?' he added. What a breath of fresh air compared to the other stereotypes! Don't even get me started on the number of DJs who run out to take a leak every five seconds during a set. Whichever way you look at it, Armin «O»nly was a memorable evening and, until today, is still the longest consecutive set Armin has ever played. Some of the biggest Armin fans still consider it the best and most memorable set ever.

Over the years, a sort of friendship developed between

Armin and myself. Not that we ever visited each other's homes, but at an early stage you could say there was this 'click' between us. Since October, Armin has been a columnist in the radio programme I present every week. Even in something relatively trivial as this, he distinguishes himself from his colleagues: no matter where he is in the world, I can always reach him for his column. Armin will always make time for radio stations, even for relatively small ones such as Fresh FM, and is prepared to set an alarm clock if he happens to be in a different time zone. That's what I call being passionate.

The column was more or less what induced me to write this book. Every week, I have animated conversations with Armin from all corners of the globe and he tells me all about his experiences. I often wonder what it must be like to be Armin van Buuren and, since he was voted the world's most popular DJ by *DJ Magazine* – never say 'best DJ' to Armin – his life has only become more hectic. It is thrilling to hear about the adventures of the world's number one and how he can get himself motivated to perform every night. He once told me it's because of his love of music. Because music, and especially trance music, is the most important thing on earth for so many people and Armin, no matter how exhausted he may be, feels his energy level rise every time he looks into the rapt faces of his audience and hears this music – no matter where, no matter when.

Starting in October 2007, I followed Armin around the world for a whole year. I went with him to all his performances – a report of which has been included in this book – and by interviewing his friends, colleagues and family, I tried to find the 'true' Armin. Is he really the friendly, conscientious and polite young man everyone thinks he is?

Predestined for the A2 Motorway

An often used catchphrase of Armin's during an interview is: 'I was predestined to spend my life in a traffic jam on the A2 motorway, on the way to a law firm.' The fact that I've heard this repeated more often than not, might mean that Armin needs a new phrase to replenish his repertoire of original replies, but it might just as easily mean that this one comes alarmingly close to the truth.

Armin obtained his law degree in 2002. At that point in time, he was performing all across the globe and was one of the best-known and most popular DJs in the world. 'That was pretty strange. One day I would be on stage, spinning for a crowd of ten thousand, and the next day I was just a regular student.' The decision to choose DJing as a profession was not an easy one. 'I had made up my mind to try it for one year and, if it wasn't a success, I could always fall back on my law degree.' This didn't correspond to the image most people had of DJs at that time. One of Armin's colleagues said, 'Someone like Armin is just a student who likes to play music. A real DJ should be passed out in the gutter at half past nine in the morning.' House music and drugs were so closely intertwined that not a single interview with a DJ or producer was ever concluded without the question 'Do you use drugs yourself?' And, to be honest, that was a question which could very well be asked of most people interviewed.

It always bothered Armin enormously that house music and drugs were systematically associated with each other. Whichever way you look at it, this association did not come out of the blue. The origin of house music can be traced back to the gay scene in cities like Chicago and Detroit, where the new drug XTC had come as a revelation to partygoers. People were talking about the resurrection of love, peace and happiness, a feeling that many yearned for after the grey and drab eighties. XTC was the love drug that bestowed a sense of euphoria on its users. With this drug, everyone seemed friendly and happy and people lost their inhibitions. House music seemed to intensify these feelings; the monotonous rhythm of the beats brought the audience to a trance-like state. The tempo of the first house records was slow, around 120 beats per minute.

House music also found its way to the Netherlands and it was especially pioneers like Eddy de Clerq and Joost van Bellen who broke new ground with DJ sets at the Roxy discotheque in Amsterdam. The Netherlands was ready for house music – and XTC, the drug with which it was inextricably associated – and house parties were held everywhere, often to the horror of the local authorities. I do have to add that, in the early days of house music, XTC really was a widely used substance at underground parties. It was all very new, and if you were ‘cool’, you went along with the crowd. Many people took ‘their first pill’ at this time.

The number of XTC suppliers grew in proportion to the drug’s popularity and although the ready supply increased, its quality did not improve. A lot of people ended up taking pills that were of an inferior quality, or were even dangerous, and the inextricable link between house music and XTC slowly began to fade. The fanatics amongst the partygoers, whose taste for hallucinogenic or psychedelic drugs didn’t subside, switched to alternatives like speed and cocaine, whilst those who were less inclined simply took a pill every now and then, or – and this happened more and more often – just stayed sober. The concept of ‘sober’ in the world of house music doesn’t mean limiting

yourself to soft drinks all night long. In the scene, 'sober' just means: no drugs.

Within the shortest time, the Netherlands obtained a leading role in the house music scene. For example, the 'gabber' variant originated here, and then went on to conquer a large part of the world. The Dutch word 'gabber' (meaning friend) remained the worldwide term for this hard-core style of house music. Finally, there was a Dutch word commonly used throughout the world other than 'apartheid'!

In the early nineties, even more variants hit the house music scene. Without a doubt, the one that was most important to Armin is 'trance'. The name already says it all: music that puts you in a trance-like state; usually with elements that originated in new wave music. Experimental producers like Olivier Lieb and the German duo Jam & Spoon put trance on the map. 'The Age of Love', a recording from 1990 that was remixed by Jam & Spoon in 1992, is still known today as a true trance classic. The remix, of course. However, if you want to pinpoint the origin of contemporary trance, it will probably be Paul van Dyk's 1993 remix of Humates 'Love Stimulation'. From that moment on, more and more trance records came on the market: Energy 52 with 'Café del Mar', Marmion's 'Schöneberg' and Paul van Dyk's 'For an Angel' conquered the dance floors of the underground and Robert Miles made it to the commercial charts worldwide with 'Children'.

'Trance' has been a universal concept since 1999, not only as a subculture, but as a recognized genre in the world of music. Throughout the world, trance became one of the most popular movements within the dance scene and, thanks to DJs such as Ferry Corsten, Tiësto and Armin van Buuren, the Netherlands was acclaimed as the number one country for trance. Many people believe that the movement is now 'past its prime', but in practice, the opposite seems to be true: if you look at the prestigious *DJ Magazine* Top 100 of the most popular DJs in the world, you'll see that out of the top 10 DJs, six

are trance DJs. Armin van Buuren's busy schedule also confirms that trance is still far from being past its peak.

The type of people who go to trance events are generally considered to be 'pretty well-mannered', a qualification that can have a negative connotation in certain circles, but certainly isn't meant as such. Generally speaking, a trance audience will be made up of fanatics who are real music lovers. 'For a lot of people, trance is a way of life,' is something I've heard Armin say frequently. And if you take a look at all the Internet forums, for example, it's not difficult to understand why this is so. The enthusiastic response to a new record or a DJ set is catching. It seems as if every single visitor to a trance event is well-informed; they know the titles and the names of the artists and the number of people who can recite lyrics and sing along is remarkable. Armin says, 'If I'm performing somewhere there are always fans who know all the songs, who post the tracklist on the Internet and evaluate my set.' He adds, 'They make very few mistakes. Of course, they can't possibly know every record. I play a lot of music that's never been played before, but the amount of information these people have continues to surprise me. How can they know all that? There's even a fan who has his own site with a list of every single gig I've ever performed. Right from the very start! I got together with my manager to compare notes, and he was practically spot-on, every time.'