

# DJ Demp offers hip-hop, R&B jams at Salvation South Stage

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Before he became a DJ, DJ Demp was always the person people turned to at a function to provide music. Whether it was at church or a house party, he would haul out his speakers and cassette tapes and get to work uplifting the crowd. DJ Demp began his professional career by the time he was 13 years old and has since established himself as an internationally-known celebrity DJ.

This year, Tallahassee celebrated DJ Demp's birthday during its 25th annual "DEMP WEEK" — a week-long party featuring anti-bullying rallies, celebrity basketball games, bowling, sip and paints, spades tournaments and concerts.

DJ Demp is excited to keep the party going during his set at the Word of South Festival which will take place across eight stages in Cascades Park on April 8-10.

"You're always a student, so when you have events like this, this is where you're introduced to new artists, and all kinds of artists, not just musicians," says DJ Demp. "I think it's important that it's kid-friendly, too. You can bring your kids and let them be inspired to be an artist."

## Homework and hip-hop

The Word of South festival is a unique event featuring a blend of writers and musicians. After its 2015 launch, the festival has become known for its "mu-aushups" which brings musicians and authors together for combined sets. Musical acts include pop, bluegrass, jazz, country, and Americana.

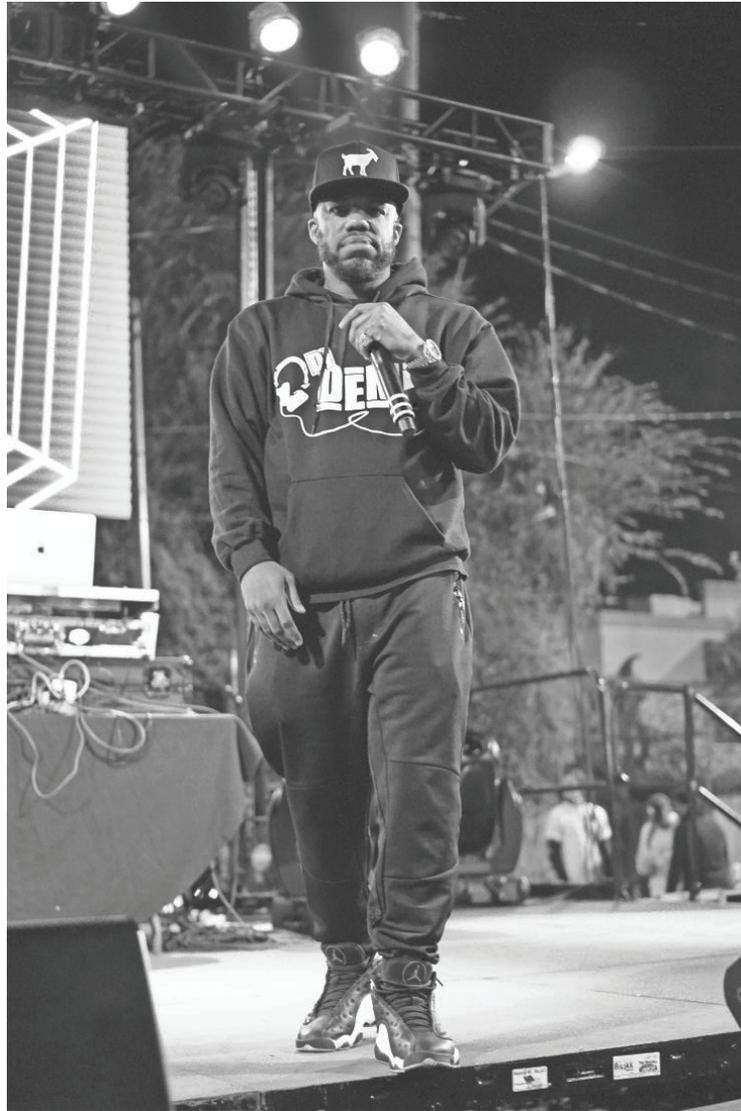
This year, DJ Demp will be bringing his own style to the stage, blending hip-hop and R&B jams mixed with other crowd favorites.

"I'm going to attend Friday and do a little homework on the audience to come up with a universal set," says DJ Demp, who is looking forward to visiting the different stages.

DJ Demp has worked at 105.7 The Beat in Tallahassee and performed alongside artists like Trick Daddy, Lil Flip, David Banner, Trina, and Juvenile. DJ Demp is a member of the group Ghostown DJs, who are best known for their classic '96 record "My Boo," which became popular again after the "Running Man Challenge" in 2016 nearly 20 years after it was first released.

## 'To be the DJ is to be the maestro'

DJ Demp says the title track from that record is a perfect example of the classic "blend" that a DJ would employ when mixing two songs together. It's a style that he continues to use, placing



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acapella R&B vocals played on top of an up-tempo hip-hop beat. While "My Boo" was an original song, it does outline that blueprint that DJ Demp uses in all of his performances.

"I might mix up Fantasia with Beyonce or Mary J. Blige and mix it with a hip-hop beat from another popular song," says DJ Demp. "Once you get into music, you can hear certain songs that you feel will match, even if you've never blended them before. It works out because the music is broken down into melodies, so the production and beats are similar on certain songs and they blend very well."

DJ Demp grew up listening to a good amount of jazz with his dad, and enjoys

all genres of music—from soft instrumentals to rambunctious beats. A major part of his process is reading the room, stadium, or club where he's playing music and determining what will keep the crowd engaged. When a DJ is doing his job well, he says they can go into a "zone" that allows them to amplify the listeners' energy with smooth transitions.

"To be the DJ is to be the maestro," he describes. "They're the person that controls the dancefloor and the evening. Vibrations in music can dictate a lot, and the music can control whether you're happy or sad."

## Considering the audience

## If you go

**What:** Word of South

**When:** April 8-10; Demp will perform with TaReef KnockOut at 1 p.m. Saturday, April 9, at the Salvation South Stage.

**Where:** Cascades Park

**Cost:** Free (except Jamey Johnson's Friday night show, tickets online)

**Contact:** For more information, visit [wordofsouthfestival.com](http://wordofsouthfestival.com)

When preparing to play a set, DJ Demp will go through his checklist of equipment. Laptop and headphones should be charged and at full battery, while his music libraries are organized according to genre and the type of event.

When hired to play a wedding or birthday party, he will ask for the artists and songs that a client loves and build an entire music library around those specific tastes. When it comes to preparing for a larger scale event like a stadium tour or a festival, it's all about considering the audience and what music will be the best match for the overall mood. DJ Demp says he most enjoys playing off of what the crowd needs and gauges his music choices from their reactions.

"You're like an artist painting a picture," says DJ Demp. "It's capturing your audience and still letting them have fun, but pulling them into the direction where you want to take them. I'm always impressed when I see a DJ play something out of left field, but once you can get the crowd to just follow you, that's powerful."

DJing has kept him on his toes, especially given that new music is produced daily through social media apps like TikTok. DJ Demp loves being versatile and capturing all ages and musical tastes with his sets.

For Word of South, he will share the stage with TaReef KnockOut, a Tallahassee native whose track "Lethal Simplicity" served as FSU Football's anthem in 2018. Together, he hopes to not only entertain attendees, but also contribute to the festival's one-of-a-kind atmosphere which will celebrate jazz legends Nat and "Cannonball" Adderley as well as an appearance by U.S. Poet Laureate, Joy Harjo.

"One thing I've learned from DJing is that sometimes you don't know until you get there," says DJ Demp. "Sometimes you have to follow the flow."

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*