



MUSIC

BEHIND THE DECKS: **LEWIS G. BURTON**

by [Alex Brzezicka](#)

The founder of the techno rave and performance platform, **INFERNO**, guides us through the seven circles of their queer heaven.

Lewis G. Burton features in our new series featuring creatives operating in the shadows, behind the decks, curtains and scenes. It's time for the most exciting DJs, producers and directors to take the front seat they deserve. Right under the spotlight.

Seven years ago, London's queer community witnessed the birth of something special. Out of the dissatisfaction with the state of the back-then scene, love for music and transgressive art, **INFERNO** has risen. Ever since the first event in February 2015, it was crystal clear that the platform, founded by Lewis G. Burton, stands for freedom of expression and pushes the boundaries of genres and gender. Forming a community that has the power to burn through conventions, break and set rules for the new generations, they champion trans+, non-binary and LGBTQ+ DJs and performers with **INFERNO** paying tribute to creatives often marginalised by the mainstream institutions.

Enter **INFERNO** for a multisensory, ethereal experience. Erase your past life data, appearance and presumptions: you get a chance to exist in the flux space that accepts everyone. Throw yourself into it and get lost in the layers of strangers' fabulous outfits and affection for otherness. It's always a matter of time before anything underground will see the daylight. We advise you to join the **INFERNO** now as nightwalkers operate best in the shadows. If you dare, join us on the exclusive tour and, more importantly, the next event: it's a fundraiser for one of the crucial members of the collective, **sweatmother**.

We asked Lewis G. Burton to be our devilishly dazzling guide through the fiery fun-pits of **INFERNO**. They showed us mercy and shared a story from the first spark of an idea to the burning-hot sensation that **INFERNO** is now.

How did Inferno start?

The idea started like 8/9 years ago now. **INFERNO** was born out of frustration. The queer scenes at the time were dominated by white, cis, gay Muscle Marys. It wasn't queer at all. It was just gay. Everybody was playing house music and disco music. It was everywhere. Anywhere you went in East London, all the gay club sounded the same. We were a rebellion against that. Also, at the same time, I just graduated from art school. Myself and a lot of my queer and trans peers who were applying for opportunities were getting rejected from institutions so I really wanted to carve out a space for emerging queer artists that weren't being taken seriously by the art world or the institutions of galleries. The work was too transgressive and performative to be considered anything near cabaret or drag or whatever.

That's really fabulous. It's so great to see **INFERNO thriving and established in the queer scene seven years later. How does feel to be able to create that kind of community?**

It really just started out with me, my friends and their friends hanging out together in Dalston Superstore, listening to some good music and dancing. Then spending the weekend partying together. It just happened really organically and grew and grew and grew. It was maybe three years ago, there was a time when we were just like 'well, we're outgrowing the yard now'. Obviously, every year a new generation of queer kids come to London and they just know about

INFERNO from seeing us online or because of the people that we book in the community that we have around us. Then they can jump on. It's grown so big now since then. It's really just fab. Everybody is really nice, kind and lovely which I love.



How would you encourage a newcomer to explore INFERNO? No matter how open, any new space can be a bit intimidating at the beginning.

Don't feel pressured to dress up. Don't feel like you have to look a certain way or dress a certain way. Just be nice to everybody. I think everybody's really sweet at INFERNO. There are never really any issues. Even going through the crowd like people like 'I'm sorry. Sorry, sorry'. Everybody's really nice and polite. Everyone chatting in the smoking area, go make some friends there even if you don't smoke, just start talking to people and compliment them on their fabulous outfits. You'll make friends. So many people have found their community and their friendship circles at INFERNO. Just enjoy yourself. Let loose. It's a space free of judgement. We have a huge team there to support you so if anything makes you feel uncomfortable, you need help with anything or maybe you are just a little bit too drunk and like 'how the hell do I get home', the team can be there to support you.

That's so important. Have you got any night that was particularly special for you?

Oh, so many special moments have happened over the years. We're going for so long but one of my favourite parties that we did, we basically had a night planned and then the licencing from the venue was taken away from them three days before the part. We were like 'Oh my God, what are we going to?' and luckily, my friend Jim, he's an older queer who has done so much for the community, he was doing a regular weekly party at one of the old venues that just reopened that I grew up in as a club person, I was there every Friday. I got to do INFERNO in the venue and that night was so special to me. We got to take over the ICA on the night of Brexit back in January 2020, just before the pandemic, and that was an iconic moment. Not only being in an institution that we've got fought so hard to be included in and create space for our community to be recognised by them. That was a moment. Also, to be there on the night of Brexit and then have 25 performers from all over Europe coming together to perform, DJs from around Europe together, as well as the INFERNO crew to show solidarity. Even on the night of Brexit, it felt very radical and amazing. We had a queer porn cinema in one of the rooms in the ICA. It was perfection. The whole night was perfect. The performances were great. DJ sets were amazing. All the visuals and installations were incredible. It was a nice day and strolling down that catwalk up the gallery to go for a cigarette.





Art is always a political statement. How does that thought influence INFERNO? Is it always political for you?

Yeah, I think so. Even starting off, going against the grain of that white, cisnormative Muscle Marys gay kind of thing, that in my eyes, obviously gay people still have issues within society, but they are a lot more accepted than for example trans people or any kind of queer person that is visibly going outside of the norm, the heteronormative idea of what's considered normal, you know. It's a reflection of my own journey and of my own journey of my trans identity, being very aware of that and also encouraging more and allowing more trans people to take up space within nightlife. The platform evolves and changes over time with the needs of my community, mine needs and everybody's around me.

You've mentioned your journey so can you tell me a bit about how did you start getting into DJing and found your space within that industry?

It was actually really funny. I got asked to dj at this club that I mentioned before. It was called East Block. Larry Tee who produced lots of RuPaul's early music was doing it every Friday night there. Larry Tee's an old New York club kid and an iconic DJ. He gave me my first gig. It was my birthday party. I was probably 23 so like seven years ago. I got the third room to do a little takeover in. I tried to play music with my friend. It went disastrously. We had a big argument and he stormed outside. I was left there with this stuff and I was like, 'What am I doing?'. I had this premix Ministry of Sound 90s Dance Classics CD on. I put it in and let it all play. I just pretended I was DJing. I got booked for a private party from there. It's snowballed and I got booked for more gigs. I was just learning on the job. I was playing pop music in all the queer clubs for a few years. At this point, INFERNO would also be going. I started DJ maybe a couple of months before INFERNO launched. A few years into INFERNO, I was like why not play techno? I love this music. Also, I felt like I had reached the level of 'cool, I can play pop music, I can do a great job with this, but I want to challenge and push myself'. Waxwings who is part of the INFERNO collective gave me some DJ lessons. I really like stepped it up and started playing techno and haven't looked back since.





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It's scary but there's power in the community. You don't have to be that afraid when backed by support and love. No matter how unstable it seems, where do you see INFERNO and yourself in the next seven years?

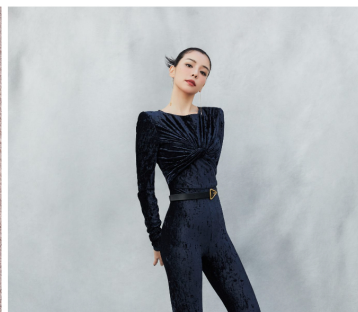
I don't really know to be honest. I really feel that I take each year as it comes. I want to continue having this space for community and I want to continue performing and djing at it and having my friends do that. It's become a bit tricky now because we are so big that we need to find a balance between integrity. Then also, we want to be able to book bigger people and more exciting people, but with that comes more people coming to the party. I'm in this difficult balancing act of keeping the authenticity and integrity as well as booking people that will keep the venue happy. They both cost and running costs on their side. Also, keeping the community happy. I want to keep them excited. I want to keep things fresh and exciting for them. I'm balancing all of that. Next year, we'll probably do four or five events. I want to make sure we keep the authenticity there. That's my main goal for INFERNO. There have been lots of different conversations with the team where going to take it. People have been like 'maybe we should launch a label or do something like that'. I don't know that I don't have time to do that anymore. If some other team members would take the lead, I would be happy to do it. Personally, I'm just going to keep doing the party because I love doing it. It's my baby. It's my community. I love doing it but there are no major goals. We're achieving everything we want to achieve. Maybe we're going to work with the ICA again and do the INFERNO summer. It's going to be fine. It's going to be fabulous.

Definitely, there's so much potential. When playing live you can access a special kind of power to move the crowd, let them release their emotions or escape the real world for a while, how does it feel like, being able to do it?

I love djing. It feels very magical for me. It's never anything I thought I would be doing. It was never a goal in my life but I just stumbled upon it and it happened. I love it so much. I just love being able to tell my story, my history, through my music, through the songs I select and play, and allow people to come on the journey with me and how they respond to it. x

Get tickets for the next event this Friday [here](#) and donate to the fundraiser for [sweatmother here](#).

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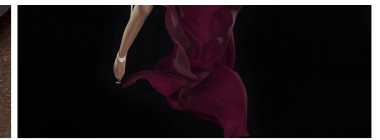
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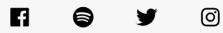
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