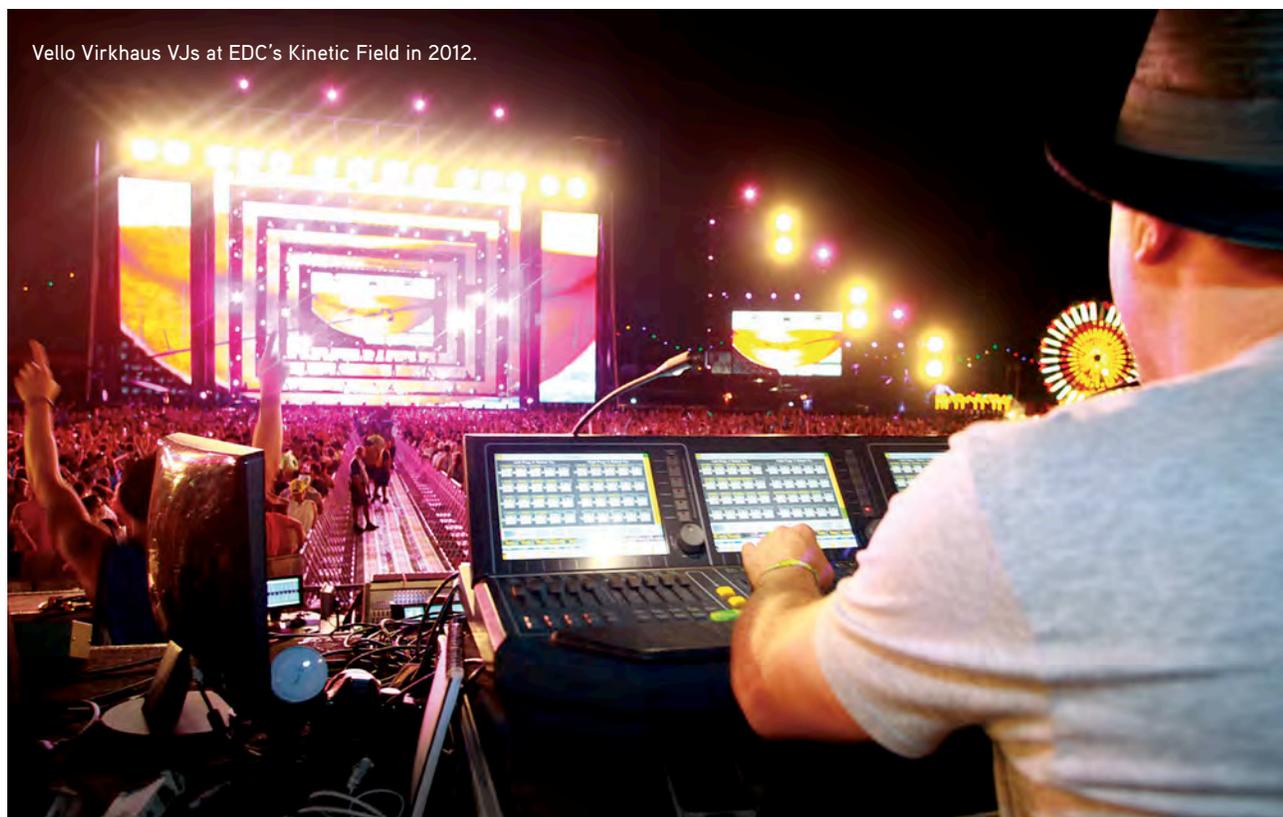


Vello Virkhaus VJs at EDC's Kinetic Field in 2012.



# Let There Be Light

The lighting/VJ team of Steve Lieberman and Vello Virkhaus flip the switch on EDC 2013

By **DAVID MORRIS**

▶ **WITH ROUGHLY 350,000** people set to descend on Las Vegas June 21-23 for the Electric Daisy Carnival, we caught up with the fest's visual conductors, lighting god Steve Lieberman and uber-VJ Vello Virkhaus, who tell us what we can expect from EDC's distinctive look this year.

## How are you involved in the electronic dance music scene?

**Lieberman:** I've designed [the lighting for] more than 200 nightclubs from New York to Miami, L.A., Vegas, Seattle, San Diego, Aspen ... everywhere. I started by working in clubs when I was 16 years old and have always been a part of the community, and since raves hit the East Coast, it's been a whirlwind.

**Virkhaus:** I'm in charge of booking VJs, creating video content and live VJ production for all the EDC stages, unless a particular sponsor or one of the artists has someone doing their own. I'll personally be on the Kinetic Field, which is

exciting because we will have a lot larger video surface to work with this year.

## What's your favorite festival to produce?

**Lieberman:** That's like asking someone which one of their children they love the most! Some are more enjoyable than others, but all are unique. The big ones are amazing, but are also more work. Ultra Miami and EDC Vegas are labors of love, but the labor is tremendous.

**Virkhaus:** It really is hard to pick. I've been with them all for an equally long period of time, and seen them succeed and get bigger. I love Insomniac and have been a huge supporter for years, and look forward to it every year. Ultra turned up the volume on production this year, and Insomniac is following suit, and I'm really excited to see them taking it to the next level.

## How much work goes into putting together a produc-

## tion like EDC Vegas?

**Lieberman:** It starts with a few of us the day after the show ends the year before. Design work begins six months ahead because there are seven stages to develop. With all of our back-to-back shows, we have to plan and can't procrastinate. The design process is pretty much me, and as I design, I bring it to Pasquale [Rotella, CEO of Insomniac] and his team, and we develop it. We bring in a vendor and a master electrician, and rates are approved. Then we see the finished product on-site. Even the new vendors have been with me for five to six years and a lot for 15-plus years, so the trust level is there, and there is less micromanaging. That's important because the main-stage cost for EDC is looking like several million dollars—just for that stage.

On the night of, my per-stage team is roughly 20 people—each stage has a master electrician and two to three people under him. There are also two

to four for each trade: lighting, video, special effects, etc., and those numbers can go deeper if you start counting stage managers and facilitators.

**Virkhaus:** Vegas is going to take an entire month of preproduction from producing custom visuals to the programming for the stages to prepping for different artists' unique productions. We also serve as support in a number of aspects for many artists' live performances.

## What's new for this year's production?

**Lieberman:** We have spent a considerable amount of time and money on props. This year's production will be more theatrical with a focus on set design with a tech-y, edgy feel. The pieces fit the theme and tie in ideas from the promotional graphics.

**Virkhaus:** There will be a lot more next-generation effects that we will premiere and a new experience that I'm working on. I can't say much about it other than it will involve crowd visuals!

## Can we have a hint?

**Virkhaus:** I'm going to VJ everyone's cellphones using the EDC app.

## Favorite stage this year?

**Lieberman:** Every stage is pretty amazing, and this is not your local jamboree. This is the largest electronic festival in the U.S., and my budget for this show is equal to 10 of my other shows combined! With thousands coming out, it's also not about just the DJs, but the whole experience. We want someone to be able to show up and not worry about who's playing. We want to suck them into the environments and make them part of the carnival.

## What's the biggest challenge when you produce an event like EDC?

**Lieberman:** The concept. Everyone from production always wants drawings, but it's not math! It takes thought and inspiration and a lot of leg-work, especially when you are tasked to design 50-70 stages a year, and this year I will be doing closer to 80-90! I really try to keep things fresh and not produce the same thing, so every day is a challenge.

**Virkhaus:** One of the biggest for me is mobilizing so many areas and keeping track of the content. I dedicate production coordinators to help make sure everything is loaded in correctly and all the components play correctly. On the management front, programming can take several days to three weeks for major festivals like Ultra, which have seven high-definition video outputs per stage, to complete.

## How do you guys collaborate?

**Lieberman:** Vello is a critical part of my team and usually becomes involved in the process after the design is complete. I send him screens and pixel maps, and he puts in the front end of the system from a graphic-design standpoint and plugs in the video of all the artists. There are multiple HD inputs that average VJs would flounder with, so he makes life much simpler.

**Virkhaus:** We've worked together for years on these electronic music shows, and he's one of my favorite people to work with. He gives me great toys to play with and spoils me. It's really wonderful not to have to do any production design and just be able to focus on VJing. 🎧



For more on what Lieberman and Virkhaus are up to, check out [SJLighting.net](http://SJLighting.net) and [VSquaredLabs.com](http://VSquaredLabs.com), respectively.