

**I am an American We are One Nation**

## **DJ HAS A SPIN ON BEING AN AMERICAN**

Free classes are about honoring his heritage, giving to the community

### **SHAD POWERS**

USA TODAY NETWORK

*Each week, this series will introduce you to an exceptional American who unites, rather than divides, our communities. To read more about the American profiled here and more average Americans doing exceptional things, visit [onenation.usatoday.com](http://onenation.usatoday.com).*

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. - As sounds bounce off the walls in classroom 414 at Desert Hot Springs High School, the teacher eagerly hops from student to student to share his expertise.



**DJ Alf Alpha, the son of Mexican immigrants, is from California's Coachella Valley.**

USA TODAY NETWORK

The teacher is Rafael Lopez, more famously known as DJ Alf Alpha.

The 32-year-old first-generation American is making a living creating music and giving back to his community. When we met, he was wearing a hat with the words "Super Sonido."

"Super Sonido, it's English and Spanish, meaning super sound," he said. "I'm an American first, but I can't forget my roots. I didn't want to just be a guy at a club playing Justin Beiber's music. ... I need to have my own sound. And for me that's Latin rhythms like cumbia, with traditionally American music like hip-hop or Black Sabbath laid on top of it."

Alf Alpha has graduated from playing dance clubs to playing his own music on the biggest stages, at events like Coachella and South by Southwest. His father, Rafael Sr., and his mother, Maria Guadalupe Reveles, were born in Mexico. As young adults, they both left for California in search of a better life. They met at a facility where they were both learning to speak English. They got married and had four children (Alf Alpha is the youngest).

"Obviously I'm American first — but my blood is Mexican 100 percent," Alf Alpha said. "You should have pride in where you come from, and I do."

And that is evident during his DJ class. In conjunction with the school district, he offers an eight-week free DJ camp after school once a week. He converts a classroom into a beat lab.

Alf Alpha moves from station to station listening to what the seven students — five boys and two girls — are working on, offering advice.

He teaches the class at one local high school for six or eight weeks and then does it at a different school.

“I know people always say this, but I really do learn from them as much as they learn from me,” he said. “They keep me fresh. It’s pretty cool to be tapped in like that. And really ... they just become my friends.”

Q& A WITH RAFAEL LOPEZ

### **What does it mean to you to be an American?**

I feel like as Americans, it’s our job to make this world a better place. To work hard. My parents are immigrants, both from Mexico, and that’s not lost on me. My belief is that we’re all part of one human race, and I think a lot of people get it twisted. People think that one group should be highlighted over another. ... Black people, Mexican people, white people; we’re all Americans. And that diversity of culture is why we are the best country in the world and will continue to be.

### **How does your heritage inform your music?**

I’m trying to merge American culture like hip-hop and electronic music ... through my spin on being Mexican American. Basing it around Latin percussion like cumbia or chicha. ... I like taking that sound but throwing hip-hop beats on top of that.

### **Being from the Coachella Valley, how much of a lifechanger was it for you to play the Coachella Music and Arts Festival in your backyard?**

Coachella was a dream come true. Always was a goal, and I’ve been going to Coachella since it started, since I was 15. Saw Rage Against the Machine and these cool bands.

### **One of the ways you’re giving back to the community is through a DJ class; how did that come about?**

I wanted something more than just the usual DJ gigs at a club. I mean don’t get me wrong, I like getting that money, but do I really want to be in a club ... every Friday night? So I tried to expand, working at art galleries, or doing things that are more a part of the culture here in the desert. And then a friend of mine that worked in the school district office proposed the DJ camp or class idea, and I said let’s do it.

### **And how are the classes going?**

I love showing them the history of DJing ... and then showing them what the possibilities are now with technology. Then seeing them have their own spin on it. Maybe they can make a career out of it like I have. Sometimes even after the class is over they reach out to me, with some stuff their working on.

## RAFAEL LOPEZ

**Stage name:** DJ Alf Alpha **Location:** Palm Desert, California **Age:** 32 **Profession:** DJ **Mission:** Giving high schoolers in his community an after-school option by teaching DJ classes, with the goal of bringing more music and creative people into the world.

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