

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

You want to become a Hip Hop expert? Learn the info below and you're on your way, yo!

LL COOL J

When a culture has been around for decades, it becomes commonplace to see things come and go. Songs that were once super popular become forgotten. Old dances get replaced by new dances. Fashion styles are being worn everywhere, then they disappear and then they're everywhere again. In this environment, it is not surprising that artists, even successful ones, eventually fade from the public eye as well. However, in today's lesson, we are going to profile a Hip Hop recording artist who has been part of the culture since the beginning and yet is arguably even more well known and respected today.

James Todd Smith was born in 1968 in Long Island, New York. His early childhood was difficult due to emotional and physical abuse from father figures in his life. Once his mother was able to get both of them away from these harmful environments, he found healing and happiness through music. When Todd (as he is known to family and friends) was 11 years old, his grandfather gave him a DJ system. Music was common in Todd's family as his grandmother sung in a choir, his mother played accordion and his grandfather played the tenor saxophone.

Though young, Todd took making music seriously. He recorded his first song in a studio when he was only 13. Without any idea what the result would be, a determined and optimistic Todd started sending these recordings to record companies. His friends took note of his determination to be a recording artist and gave him the stage name "LL Cool J", which stood for "Ladies Love Cool James". Eventually, one of those record companies showed an interest in Todd. This particular company was just starting out as well and they were looking for new talent to help them make a big impression on the industry. The company was called Def Jam, and it was started by then New York University student Rick Rubin, and fledgling entrepreneur and music manager, Russell Simmons. Todd started working with Def Jam when he was only 16 years old. The first Def Jam recording with an official catalog number was LL Cool J's, "I Need a Beat". The success of this one song, which sold over 100 thousand copies, paved the way for him to begin work on his first album. "Radio" was released in 1985 and went platinum.

1985 proved to be an important year for LL Cool J (LL) in another way too. In 1985, Warner Bros released the film, "Krush Groove", which was a fictionalized version of the real life story of Russell Simmons. LL made an appearance in the film as himself. It was then that he realized how much he enjoyed entertaining on camera. He followed up this job with a cameo role in the football movie "Wildcats" the very next year.

In 1987, LL released his second album, "Bigger and Deffer", which went double platinum. Most notable from this record, in the eyes of history, was probably his song, "I Need Love", as it was the first commercially successful rap love song. In 1990, he released "Mama Said Knock You Out", which became his best selling album ever and earned him his first of two Grammy awards.

The 1990s also saw LL return to acting. He was casted in "The Hard Way" in 1991 with Michael J. Fox and "Toys" in 1992 alongside Robin Williams. In 1995, LL got his first TV show. He starred as Marion Hill in the sitcom, "In The House" which was on the air for five seasons. In 1995, LL also got his first starring role in a movie. LL was determined to show that he was serious about acting and continued to train and audition. This led to even more opportunities and roles. In the late 1990s, LL was casted in the high profile movies, "Halloween: H20", "Deep Blue Sea", and "Any Given Sunday". Throughout this time, LL continued to release albums, as well. His 1995 album, "Mr. Smith" again went double platinum and 1997's "Phenomenon" was single platinum.

LL has done much more than music and movies. In 1992, he founded a non-profit organization to provide camps and education for young people, Camp Cool J. In 1997, he became an author with the release of his autobiography. He became an author twice more when in 2002 he wrote a children's book on sportmanship titled, "And The Winner Is" and with the 2006 workout manual, "LL Cool J's Platinum Workout". In 2008, he created a clothing line called "Todd Smith", inspired by his personal style. He is also a husband and father. LL has been married since 1995 and has four children, which he says he considers his greatest accomplishment.

Still, LL is far from done. In 2008, he released another album, "Exit 13", which was to be his retirement album. However, he is set to come out with "Authentic" in April of 2013. In 2008, LL launched the website, Boomdizzle.com, which helps artists get their music to the public in a unique social networking format. In 2009, he got his second

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regular TV job with "NCIS: Los Angeles". He stars as Special Agent Sam Hanna and it's one of the highest rated shows on TV. In 2013, LL hosted the Grammy awards.

He's the first rap artist to have ten consecutive platinum selling albums and is ranked #5 on VH1's list of greatest Hip Hop artists. He is one of the most popular and commercially successful Hip Hop icons ever. This kind of success is rare in any field, let alone the trendy world of Hip Hop. His philosophy for success is repeated by his son who, in an interview with Oprah Winfrey said, "You can do anything you want if you put your mind to it. Just stay focused." His daughter added, "Work hard and strive to be the best person you can be." His younger children joked that he pulls them aside to say these things, "every few days ... no, every five minutes." Clearly, it's this kind of optimism and single-mindedness that has allowed LL Cool J to stay on top of the industry for over three decades.

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Wyle Out: With "wyle" being a slang version of the word "wild", this phrase means to get crazy, especially with dancing.

EX: "The second I get on the dance floor, I'm gonna wyle out like you've never seen!"

Slammin: Excellent or of high quality. As if to say that something is so good, it slams you to the floor.

EX: "Her flows were so slammin, I had to go buy her album immediately."

Bangin: Excellent or of high quality. As if to say that something is so good, it makes a big impact and is hard hitting.

EX: "With those bangin beats and slammin rhymes, that album makes me wyle out at all times."

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Name another award LL Cool J has won.
- 2) What was LL Cool J's most recent movie?
- 3) LL Cool J also had a line of shoes. What were they called and why?