

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

INTERVIEW WITH THE EGYPTIAN LOVER PART - 2

FM: What were you doing on the turntables that people had never heard or seen before?

EL: I took my talent from making pause-button mix tapes, where the words would repeat over and over again and I kind of created that with turntables. So, I learned how to make a word repeat three times and then keep going and I learned how to backspin real fast to keep the intro going without them noticing or even hearing the difference in me mixing. I'd keep the intro going and they wouldn't even know that the intro of another song's being played. So, it was pretty good, quality mixing.

FM: So you had heard a little bit of scratching and then decided to try to do more with it?

EL: I heard "The Adventures of Grand Master Flash on the Wheels of Steel" and I had already knew how to split, just cueing the record out loud, which you always did when making mix tapes, then you gotta scratch before you hit the pause and let the record go at the same time. So when I heard his technique and how he did everything, I used my own tricks from the the pause button mix tapes I'd made and turned it into a live DJ show.

FM: Explain what a mix tape is and how you put that together.

EL: You use a cassette tape to record a live mix of you cutting up a record. Like you pause after the breakdown and start over again and then release the pause button and keep doing that several times so the breakdown could be real long, and you start the record over, go back to the breakdown, then go back to the first verse, then cut back in the breakdown again on beat and it would just be all over the place like a live edit. And, maybe on the instrumental parts, I can do a rap over it. So, you can have a rap over the mix tape that you can't buy in the stores, just a street rap.

FM: What kind of equipment did you use to make mix tapes and how did you learn how to use it?

EL: The most inexpensive stuff I could find. A Pioneer record player. Maybe a Technik tape deck or Tascam or Sony. Whatever I could find at the time and I taught myself.

FM: Why did you start making mix tapes and what did you do with them?

EL: I was bused to school and it was a two-hour drive every morning and it was kinda boring listening to the radio. They'd play the good songs maybe once or twice in that whole two hours. So, I was like, what if I put all the good songs on one tape and you could hear em in the morning going to school? So, I brought my beat box (aka boom box) and my mix tape, played it and everyone liked it. Then somebody wants to buy one. And then, when one person bought one, everybody else wanted to buy one. Then they said, "can you put another rap on it?" And I was like, "There is no other rap. There's only Sugar Hill Gang. So, I guess I can make my own rap." So, I wrote my rap and put it on there and then I sold many tapes. And so, just by that, the whole school, even kids on different buses, wanted to buy tapes. So, I was just sellin' tapes like crazy at school. Then I was sellin' em for 10, 15 bucks. A friend of mine that I met called Snake Puppy from the group LA Dream Team (another pioneer of West Coast Hip Hop), he was workin' at a record store in Long Beach. And we actually sold mix tapes at the record store. And we actually started selling more mix tapes than he did records. That was pretty cool.

FM: How did you choose what to put on the mix tapes?

EL: I was going to the record shop every day, buying every record that came out and listening to it and figuring out which one I wanted to use.

FM: What was your favorite song to rap on top of?

EL: Probably "Bounce, Rock, Skate, Roll" by Vaughn Mason and Crew.

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FM: How were people finding back then what we today would call Hip Hop music? What'd you call it?

EL: Going to parties and listening to different things. There were a couple of record stores that would definitely buy a lot of stuff from all over America. I walked into one store called VIP in LA and when I walked in they were playing "Super Rhymes" (Jimmy Spicer) and we had never heard that before. Then there were a few stores in Hollywood on Melrose and they were battling to get all the DJs' money, so they would all play the hot, new stuff that came out. Anytime you walk into the store, they would say, "okay, I know he's a DJ and let's play this one." They'd play something with a little Rap in it or maybe a "Planet Rock" beat and I'd be like, "I'll take that, I'll take that and I'll take that." And we just called it party music or Rap.

FM: It sounds like, for you guys then, the record store was like your internet; where you found new stuff.

EL: And that was the best part of being a DJ. Actually going into the record store, different record stores, and hearing the music for the first time. Can't wait to play it at the party because nobody else got it but you. That was the best part of being a DJ, record huntin'. Looking for the new labels like, "Oh, this is tight right here. I wonder what this sound like? What's the name of it? 'Play at Your Own Risk' (Planet Patrol). Well, I got to hear this and take it home and it sounds like 'Planet Rock'. And then you're like 'Oh, we got a hit!'. It was just about reading the cover and learning who the producer is and taking a chance and getting everything on the same label. Like, Sugar Hill Gang ... I'd buy everything that came out and then one time you go home with a slow song. You'd be like "Oh, well. Put it on the mix tape." Because, maybe it was a good slow song but nothing you'd play at the party. Also, we knew that if you put on a new record at the party, that the next day everybody was gonna come to that store and buy that record cuz it would be the only store that would have it. People would be lined up at the door.

FM: We hear that, besides music, you loved to dance. What types of dances did you do?

EL: Every dance that was out. If you watched "Soul Train" in the 80s, you learned all the dances. That was one of the things about going to the parties because you actually see the dances before they'd get to "Soul Train". It'd be like every week someone would create a new dance, and "Soul Train" would get it a month or two later. It was kinda cool.

FM: Your music is heavily used today for the Funk Style of Tutting. When did that come in?

EL: It was coming up when I was coming up. That was the first Poplock move I did. I was like, okay, I wanna do Egyptian Popping, so I started doing Egyptian Poplocking and all the little things I saw on the Egyptian art and all that. And then somebody who did a lot of Popping as well saw me do it and they started doing it faster and more technical. Then somebody saw him do and then one day it was called Tutting, I guess. Everybody started doing it. It was one cartoon from Bugs Bunny when he was doing like Tutting a little bit and one dude used to call it Bugs Bunny and then another guy called it Boom Tutting and another guy called it Tutting. And I just called it get on the floor and pop.

FM: Back then did you notice the problems with authenticity/commercialism in music that we have today?

EL: Oh, definitely. We had guys come try to pay us money to play their records at Uncle Jamm's Army. It was never about the money with Uncle Jamm's Army. It was just about the people having a good time.

FM: Do you think Hip Hop can reinvent itself so that it can be around for another 40 years?

EL: Yes, but people will have to find other ways to find it. The internet, XM, Sirius, smaller internet radio and get away from commercialized stuff and go back to the underground where it was in the beginning and start all over again.

FM: Complete this sentence ... Hip Hop would never be where it is today without _____.

EL: Run-DMC. They went on MTV and showed the world that Rap was not just for the inner city kids. It was for everybody.

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FM: What do you see as your role in Hip Hop culture today?

EL: Just a pioneer still doin' his thing.

FM: What do you want people to say about EL today?

EL: That he's still out there doin' shows and still gettin' down. And you gotta go see his show cuz he doing crazy things with the records, playin' em backwards and forwards at the same time, rockin' the 808, turnin' the bass up and doin' the same dances he did 30 years ago.

FM: How can people see EL today?

EL: I'm still doing shows all over the world.

We often hear stories of what the early days of Hip Hop were like in New York, but rarely do we hear stories of how the culture was developing simultaneously in California. Therefore, this interview has focused mostly on EL's experience of the brand new culture emerging during that time. However, while this information has been primarily about EL making mix tapes, dancing, and rocking the parties as a DJ, it is very important to note that most of the world knows him first and foremost as a Rapper, and not just a Rapper, but one of the very first on the West Coast. In addition, he was one of the first to release a West Coast Hip Hop album, which he released off of his own label, Egyptian Empire records. But how did he make the transition into being a rapper? We'll let EL explain it in his own words. "I played the 808 live [with Uncle Jamm's Army] at the LA Sports Arena and everybody freaked out and thought it was a record and was asking me where can they buy it and I was like, 'You'll buy it soon.' And we went to the studio and made a record and that was how it all began. [I] wanted to make a record to catch women, so I made a record called 'Egypt, Egypt' with my name all in it, so all the women could say, 'That's his name, now I can go ask for him as a DJ.' That's it. I just got lucky and sold four million copies, but that was it." (*Source: Red Bull Music Academy Interview @ <http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/egyptian-lover>)

HIP HOP WORD OF THE WEEK

Boom Box: A portable, battery powered stereo used most commonly in the 1970-1980s. A staple of the early Hip Hop scene which has been almost entirely displaced by personal music players used with headphones.

EX: Customer: "I don't own any cassettes, but do you think I can find an old school style boom box that I can hook up to my MP3 player? I need music while me and my homies break in the park."

Best Buy employee: "I have a blue shirt. (drooling)"

Song reference: "Groundhog Day" by Eminem - "I saw my future is in this / That's how I know my mission / Little boom box booming / Spitting, practicing numerous writtens"

BONUS: NAME ANOTHER SONG/ARTIST THAT HAS USED THIS HHWOTW

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Looking back at part 1 and 2 of this interview, which of EL's stories intrigued you the most and why?
- 2) Where could you have seen EL perform this year?