

# SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

## HOW TO CHOOSE HIP HOP MUSIC THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU

In the last few decades, there has been more commercially and independently produced Hip Hop music than any of us could listen to in a lifetime. What's more, every day a ton of new Hip Hop music is being made. Faced with this reality, the question arises as to how can we find the Hip Hop music that is best suited to our interests and needs as individuals? In today's lesson, we are going to present a series of ideas to help our readers answer this question.

## KNOW YOURSELF

Who you are determines what you listen to. Yet, without getting too philosophical or existential, how do we determine what aspects of ourselves are necessary to consider when it comes to choosing music? Many people would say that the choosing what music is right for you is as simple as determining whether or not the music is age appropriate. However, while that issue is important, there is far more to finding the right music than that. We suggest that the primary factors that will influence the style of Hip Hop that you will find most interesting are, in no particular order, age, general personality, how you access/acquire music, how you play music, social interests, upbringing, your reason for listening to music, and mood. Let's take a look at how each of these factors will determine what is right for you. Age will determine what content is relevant to you, appropriate for you, and what suits your stylistic tastes. For example, a young person would not be suited to more explicit lyrics<sup>(1)</sup> while an older person may not relate to the content created by teenage rappers<sup>(2)</sup>. Those who grew up in the Golden Age of Hip Hop might be partial to those early styles<sup>(3)</sup> while younger people might gravitate towards newer trends<sup>(4)</sup>. Personality will affect your choices possibly more than any other factor. A fun-loving, easygoing person might enjoy the early 80s party sound of Hip Hop<sup>(5)</sup> or the more modern techno influenced Hip Hop club music<sup>(6)</sup>. A serious, internally focused person might want to pursue more downtempo, lyrically focused tracks<sup>(7)</sup>. If you can only get music through the radio, your choices will likely reflect a leaning towards Top 40s, pop-styled Hip Hop<sup>(8)</sup>. Or, maybe you're the modern day equivalent of the old school crate diggers who spent countless hours combing through vinyl to find the best kept secrets in music. If you have time to comb the internet, you will likely see that your musical choices will tend towards what we call the underground or independent Hip Hop artists<sup>(9)</sup> that are not widely known but still deeply loved. If you play music on cheap earbuds that came with your phone, you might not care much about the Hip Hop music produced by artists who slave over every sonic ounce of their albums. However, if you're someone who invests heavily in high end audio equipment like headphones, speakers and amplifiers, you would do best to seek out the producers who are making the kind of music that will maximize the potential of your setup<sup>(10)</sup>. Social interests determine a lot about what you will seek out musically. Whether it is feminism<sup>(11)</sup>, social inequity<sup>(12)</sup>, racism<sup>(13)</sup>, economic oppression<sup>(13)</sup>, sexual discrimination<sup>(14)</sup>, war<sup>(15)</sup>, or even positive issues like being ones best<sup>(16)</sup> or helping others<sup>(17)</sup>, there is Hip Hop music out there to address and support those issues. Many of us listen to what our parents listen(ed) to and therefore even our modern interests reflect that influence. In addition, where we grew up combined with our experiences (good and bad) there will determine a lot of what appeals to us. As a specific example, Gangsta Rap, while shunned by many outside of these areas, was the voice for millions trapped in the hopelessness of inner city life. The music expressed their frustrations and gave them something with which they could identify. If you are someone who listens to music primarily to dance, your interest in Hip Hop will be very specific, seeking out the tempo and sound of music that is best suited to your particular Hip Hop dance style<sup>(18)</sup>. If you listen to music to chill out, the more common downtempo, laid back Hip Hop sound<sup>(19)</sup> may be more your pace. Finally, perhaps even more than any of the things mentioned here, your mood will determine your interests. At any one point in time, depending on how you are feeling, any of the types of Hip Hop mentioned above might be perfect. We can be complicated creatures, seeking out squeaky clean Christian Hip Hop one day and hardcore, explicit Gangsta Rap the next. Take the time to think about how you fit into the many categories listed here. Once you do, you will be well on your way to finding the kind of Hip Hop that you will love.

## KNOW YOUR MUSIC

Assuming you've invested time evaluating yourself and your particular interests, now it is time to learn how to evaluate your Hip Hop music. The two most important factors to consider when choosing music are content and style. As simple as those two categories sound, they can actually become quite complex when broken down. Instead of letting this become a source of intimidation, think about the complexity as providing that many more choices for you. For example, content and style can be broken down to lyrical composition, message, tone, tempo, rap style, rhyme style, word choice, vocal quality, language, musical style crossover/influence, musical style, performance style (live vs simple recording vs heavily produced), style of instrumental composition, and it all can be broken down more from there. And, rest assured, there is so much Hip Hop music available that there is an abundance to cover every detail mentioned here. Therefore, when you listen to Hip Hop, think about

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these things. Listen to the lyrics for not only what the song is about, but how the artist puts together his/her rhymes. Listen to the words chosen and how each word is said. As you listen, think about how what you are hearing relates to you. Does what you are hearing motivate and uplift you? Does the music make you want to move? Does the artist paint a picture of the world that resonates with your own experience? Does the music challenge your views of the world and your place in it? Does the music make you think? Does the music make your speakers sound like technological miracles? These are all important questions to consider when evaluating your music.

## FOLLOW YOUR FAVES

A trend in movies today is to find stories that allow the creation of sequels. For some, this has become a source of frustration. But why has this development come about and proven such a successful movie making strategy? The simple answer is, people like what they like. We all gravitate towards what is familiar. Whether it be fashion, food, people, geography, reading, relaxing or playing, when we find something we like, we often stick to it. While, in general, you never want to limit yourself to discovering new things, this actually is a great way to find music that you connect to. Many Hip Hop lovers follow certain producers and buy everything they put out. Other people know that particular artists always deliver quality goods and sounds and therefore keep buying their music. Still others are devoted to certain genres, grabbing up everything that comes from those areas of the Hip Hop sonic landscape. Whether it be fast rappers<sup>(20)</sup>, New York artists<sup>(21)</sup>, or conscious Hip Hop<sup>(22)</sup>, sticking to something stylistically specific can provide you with all you need to keep your ears and mind happy.

## HUNT FOR WHAT YOU WANT

If you don't put forth the effort to get out there and seek out what will appeal to you, you're left with no choice but to take what you can get. While some might find luck with this strategy, most will end up listening to music that only partially fits their tastes. For example, earlier we mentioned only listening to the radio for your music. While there are some people who are sincerely drawn to Top 40s Hip Hop almost exclusively, those people are far less common than those who listen to those same Top 40s songs because they are too lazy to find anything else. This is not to say that you can't enjoy what is played on the radio. However, it is far more likely that, with some searching, you will find music that is even better suited to your specific tastes. But, if you're not listening to the radio, where else are you going to find your music? The answer to this question has changed significantly since Hip Hop began. It used to be that the best place to find new music was at the jams/block parties in New York. Then, as Hip Hop became more popular, dance clubs, TV shows and movies featured new music to seek out. Around the same time, Hip Hop music started becoming commercially available and people flooded music stores, buying vinyl, tapes and CDs of their favorite Hip Hop. Commercial Hip Hop arrived around the same time as MTV and for many, music videos became the place to find new Hip Hop. As music became easier to produce, the street hustlers came up and started selling their music out in the streets. DJs also started releasing mixtapes of up and coming artists and you could find those in some stores or in your neighborhood. With the advent of the internet, digital music became king. Now, the best place to find new Hip Hop is online. Internet video brought back the popularity of music videos and now those are again a good place to find new music. Music blog websites<sup>(23)</sup>, music review websites<sup>(24)</sup>, early release websites<sup>(25)</sup>, record company websites<sup>(26)</sup>, artist websites<sup>(27)</sup>, radio station websites<sup>(28)</sup>, magazine websites<sup>(29)</sup>, TV websites<sup>(30)</sup>, streaming music websites<sup>(31)</sup>, and music sales sites<sup>(32)</sup> all feature new music from Hip Hop artists and, depending on the source, give you the option to listen, download or buy. Beyond all of these means, the best way to find new music might still be the old fashioned way, word of mouth. Recommendations from family, friends or fellow Hip Hop lovers often carry more weight than any other source.

## RECOMMENDATIONS (PLEASE CONSUME BEFORE EXPIRATION DATE)

While we chose to use general language for this lesson, we realize that you might be looking for specific recommendations. As we can't predict when you might be reading this, it is hard to suggest anything that will be relevant at that time. However, because we don't want to leave you hanging, we are going to make some suggestions based on where we were when this lesson was written, which is early 2015. With that in mind, what follows are specific places where you might find the kind of music that will correspond to the types of specific criteria we've laid out throughout this lesson. Please be aware that these examples are not all-inclusive and absolutely represent the bias of the writers here at FUNKMODE. This is just a starting point. It is up to you to go beyond to find what really calls to you.

1) Ice Cube, Busta Rhymes, Lil Jon, Eminem

2) ABC, Kriss Kross, (Lil) Romeo, (Lil) Bow Wow, The Pack, Mac Miller, Willow Smith, Joey Bada\$\$, Diggy Simmons

3) De La Soul, KRS-One, Nas, Notorious BIG, Tupac, Public Enemy, LL Cool J, Tribe Called Quest, Wu Tang Clan, Rakim, EPMD, Run-DMC, Beastie Boys, MC Lyte, Queen Latifah

4) Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole, Wale, Nikki Minaj, Iggy Azalea

5) Fresh Prince, Beastie Boys, 2 Live Crew, Kid N Play, MC Hammer

6) LMFAO, Lil Jon, Pitbull, Azealia Banks, Flo Rida, T-Pain

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- 7) Nas, Jay-Z, Mos Def, Common, Talib Kweli, k-os, Kendrick Lamar, Wale
- 8) Nikki Minaj, Iggy Azalea, Kanye West, Lil Wayne, Drake, Flo Rida
- 9) Tech N9ne, Immortal Technique, Slum Village, Aesop Rock, CunninLynguists, Blackalicious, Apathy, Black Milk, Aceyalone, Brother Ali, Hieroglyphics, Jurassic 5
- 10) The Roots, Jay-Z, Dr. Dre, Eminem, Kanye West, Fugees, Common, Nas, De La Soul, Rage Against the Machine, Public Enemy,
- 11) Queen Latifah, Missy Elliott, MC Lyte, Mos Def, Common, Talib Kweli, Eve, Lauryn Hill, MIA, TLC, Rye Rye
- 12) KRS-One, Public Enemy, Rage Against the Machine, Black Star
- 13) Just about everyone
- 14) Macklemore, Fat Joe, A\$ap Rocky, The Game, LE1F
- 15) Rage Against the Machine, Public Enemy, Yasiin Bey, Talib Kweli, Tupac, Lupe Fiasco, KRS-One, Immortal Technique, Killer Mike
- 16) Kendrick Lamar, Nas, Jay-Z, FUNKMODE
- 17) Queen Latifah, KRS-One, Nas, Mos Def, Lupe Fiasco, Kendrick Lamar
- 18) Each B-boy and Funk Style has a type, as does newer styles like Krump, Turfin, Jerkin, Shuffling, and hard styles.
- 19) Nas, Jay-Z, De La Soul, Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg
- 20) Busta Rhymes, Twista, Yukmouth, Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, Watsky
- 21) Jay-Z, Nas, LL Cool J, Notorious BIG, Run-DMC
- 22) Public Enemy, Boogie Down Productions, Common
- 23) Undergroundhiphopblog.com, theboombox.com, pigeonandplanes.com, ihiphopmusic.com, djbooth.net
- 24) Hiphopdx.com, allhiphop.com, deadendhipho.com, rapreviews.com
- 25) Hiphopearly.com
- 26) Strangemusicinc.com, wmg.com, sonymusic.com, aftermathmusic.com
- 27) lifeandtimes.com
- 28) kmel.com, wild949.com, hot97.com, power1051fm.com, power106.com
- 29) Xxlmag.com, vibe.com, thesource.com, thehypemagazine.com
- 30) Mtv.com/music/hiphop, bet.com
- 31) Spotify, Pandora
- 32) iTunes, Amazon, CDBaby, eMusic, Napster, Rhapsody

## HIP HOP WORD OF THE WEEK

Raise Up: To prepare to fight or engage some serious situation. Said as if someone is raising up to meet a challenge.

EX: "If you think he's gonna walk away with my skril, he better raise up, cuz I'm comin' at em, you know the deal!"

Song reference: "On and On" by Missy Elliott: "If you step to me / I shall throw blows / Raise up like I's break nose"

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

## EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Give 3 examples of a Hip Hop style, artist, producer or song that is for you and explain why.
- 2) Listen to music from an artist listed under "RECOMMENDATIONS" that you are unfamiliar with and report on what you hear.
- 3) Visit one of the websites suggested and recommend one song based on what you find.