

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

QUEEN LATIFAH

Since Hip Hop culture began, its aggressive street origins have made it largely the domain of the male side of the population. But, over the years, outstanding females have emerged as b-girls, DJs, graffiti artists and MCs. With a career spanning two decades, Queen Latifah (QL) is possibly the most outstanding Hip Hop artist of them all. In today's lesson, we will cover the origin and unprecedented career of the "Queen" of Hip Hop.

QL was born Dana Elaine Owens in 1970 in New Jersey. Her father was a police officer and her mother a High School teacher. When she was very young, a muslim cousin gave her the name "Latifah", meaning "delicate". Her performance talents were begun and developed in her church choir and through school shows. Always a fan of Hip Hop music, in High School she was known to practice freestyle rapping and singing around the hallways. This eventually led to her forming a rap group with two of her girl friends called "Ladies Fresh". They would perform at school functions mostly while just starting to find their artistic voices. Interestingly, it was QL's two friends who did the rapping in this group while QL accompanied them as the beat boxer. QL's mother encouraged her group and together, they made the decision to reach out and invite a local DJ to attend one of their school dances. DJ King Gemini accepted the invitation and this introduction led to the beginning of QL's professional performance career.

DJ King Gemini was just starting himself into producing and he began hanging out frequently in his home-based recording studio with QL and her friends, seeing them as having potential to go the next level. He recorded QL on a demo titled, "Princess of the Posse" and passed this on to Hip Hop legend, Fab Five Freddie, who hosted "Yo! MTV Raps" at the time. Freddie was able to get this into the hands of an executive at Tommy Boy Records and aided in her getting a recording contract as a solo artist. At only 18 years old, QL was working with a big recording label and creating her first official single, "Wrath of My Madness". The success of this single opened up the door to producing a complete album with Tommy Boy. "All Hail the Queen" came out a year later and was praised by critics and fans alike. Before the age of 20, QL had a hit record and was embarking on a European performance tour. In 1991, QL released her second album, "Nature of a Sista", but this would be her last with Tommy Boy.

It became clear early on that QL had a very unique and attractive style to her music, both in sound and content. QL was part of the political and conscious rap movements. This is perhaps the part of QL's career that distinguishes her most. She has always been a positive rapper but not by shying away from controversial topics. Her third album, "Black Reign", was her first on her new label, Motown Records, and her most successful commercially, going gold. It produced the song "U.N.I.T.Y." which denounced degrading women through actions or speech. This was especially significant given the state of rap music at the time, when gangsta rap was gaining ground and the use of negative speech in reference to women on the rise. However, this song was met with great support by both the rap community and the musical community at large, and earned QL a Grammy Award for best solo rap performance. QL's lyrics were empowering to women and still highly popular which established her as a role model for women in particular, a role she has wholeheartedly embraced over her career.

Most people today know QL for her acting career. This began in 1991 on TV's "The Fresh Prince of Bel Aire" with Will Smith (also his first real acting job). QL started in movies in the same year with "House Party 2", starring fellow Hip Hop artists, Kid 'n Play, and "Jungle Fever", directed by Academy Award nominee, Spike Lee. In 1993, she landed a starring role in the TV show, "Living Single", which successfully aired for six years. This, of course, led to even more acting roles with even bigger name performers. In 1998, she was in "Sphere" with Dustin Hoffman, "Living Out Loud" with Danny DeVito and in 1999, she co-starred with Denzel Washington and Angelina Jolie in "The Bone Collector". But it was in 2002 that she would get her most critically acclaimed role to date. Despite never having performed in a musical, QL was cast as Matron Mama Morton in the movie version of the Broadway hit, "Chicago". Her vocal and acting talents got her a nomination for an Academy Award, a BET Award for best actress, and a Golden Globe nomination. Since that time, she had another critically acclaimed role in the movie-musical "Hairspray", as well as starring roles in movies such as, "Bringing Down the House" with Steve Martin, "Last Holiday" with LL Cool J, "Beauty Shop" with Kevin Bacon, "Taxi" with Jimmy Fallon and "Stranger than Fiction" with Will Ferrell.

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

QL's mother ran a Jazz club for a time and this influence has been felt strongly in her music. After a few more successful rap albums in the 1990s, QL broke through with "The Dana Owens" album in 2004, which featured her performing vocal covers of popular Jazz songs. Since then, her albums have been focused on singing. In 2007, QL held a Jazz concert with the "Queen Latifah Orchestra" in Hollywood before a crowd of thousands.

What hasn't QL done? She's worked at Burger King. She led her High School basketball team to two state championships. She had a daytime talk show for two years called "The Queen Latifah Show". She's a spokesmodel for Cover Girl and has her own makeup line called "The Queen Collection". She has her own music production and management company, Flavor Unit, which started groups like "Naughty By Nature" and managed artists like LL Cool J and Outkast. Flavor Unit is co-producing, along with Will Smith, a second daytime talk show for QL which is due to air in the Fall of 2013. She's done voiceover for the character of Ellie in the super successful "Ice Age" movies. She was the second rapper (after Will Smith) and first female rapper to be nominated for an Oscar. She was the first Hip Hop artist to get a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. She's written three books which, while in some part autobiographical, have focused on delivering inspirational wisdom and encouragement to women. And, to recap, she has earned one Grammy Award, six Grammy Award nominations, four BET Awards, one Golden Globe Award, two Screen Actors Guild Awards, two Image Awards, one Academy Award nomination and one Emmy Award nomination. It is rare to see an artist in the music scene or in Hollywood who is such a positive example of living well while also being so incredibly successful. QL is truly one of Hip Hop culture's heroes. She is a shining example of the power of Hip Hop to elevate the best of us into the spotlight.

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

On the ones and twos: A reference to a DJ being on a first and second turntable when playing albums. Can apply loosely to DJing music in any way.

EX: "You're listening to DJ FUNKMODE spinning it for you live on the ones and twos."

On the hush: To keep something relatively secret or "hushed".

EX: "I have an idea that I think is going to be major but I need you to keep it on the hush, okay?"

On the real: Truthfully, honestly.

EX: "On the real though, I thought I'd never get all that work done last night."

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) What other movie did QL do voiceover for?
- 2) What is the name of QL's most recent book and what is it about?
- 3) Pick a quote from Queen Latifah at the link below and explain why it means something to you.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001451/bio>