

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

THE STATE OF THE HIP HOP UNION - 2012 EDITION - MCing

Every year, the President of the United States gives a speech to express to Congress how the country is doing and what his plans are for the coming year. FUNKMODE usually focuses these lessons on subjects that tend more towards the timeless. However, we also want to occasionally address where Hip Hop is at the present time, to give you knowledge on Hip Hop culture as it exists right now. In this lesson, we will address the current state of MCing.

Of all the mainstays of Hip Hop culture, it is clear everywhere in the world that the art of the MC reigns supreme. Rap music has been the primary means of spreading Hip Hop to the mainstream for decades and in 2012 it is as strong as ever. Far from the times of being a niche art form (as in the 1970s) or just starting to gain critical acceptance (as in the early 1990s), rap is now one of the most well known and lucrative of all musical styles. You might remember from an earlier SCHOOL'd lesson that the Grammy Awards (for excellence in music) added a category for rap in 1989 and the first was given to Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince. As of 2012, the Grammys now include categories for "Best Rap Performance", "Best Rap/Sung Collaboration", "Best Rap Song", and "Best Rap Album". While there are many ways to stand above the crowd as an MC, the Grammy awards are definitely indicative of some level of critical success. Some of the most recent rappers to win Grammys are Jay-Z, Kanye West, Eminem (all three of whom are multi-award winners in recent years) Lil Wayne, TI, T-Pain, Swizz Beats, Dr. Dre, Chamillionaire, Ludacris and Pharrell. Besides winning awards, there are many other MCs that are high on the popularity list right now. These artists have released extremely popular albums, have sold-out shows, get lots of play on the radio and are respected within the Hip Hop community and beyond. Some names you should know in 2012 are Rick Ross, Lupe Fiasco, Wale, Pitbull, Drake, Wiz Khalifa, Big Sean and Meek Mill. Those who know a little bit more about rappers in the underground scene will praise MCs like Tech N9ne, Krizz Kaliko and Hopsin. And, of course, being from the Bay Area, FUNKMODE will never forget to praise our hometown MC, E-40, who has been active in rap since before some of these MCs were born; yet he still tops charts and innovates as an artist.

On the subject of gaining mainstream recognition, we are now seeing more and more MCs receiving the highest honors music has to offer. In 2012, the Beastie Boys were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. These MCs started making music in 1981 and yet released their most recent album just last year; it sold nearly half a million copies. The Beastie Boys are excellent representatives of what it means to be MCs by innovating rhyming techniques and musical arrangements. With songs as diverse as "Brass Monkey", "Intergalactic", "Sabotage" and "Paul Revere", the Beasties paved the way for the current generation of rappers who continue to experiment with different sounds and ideas as they evolve the genre.

Other MCs who did much for Hip Hop culture as it was growing in the 1980s are still doing much to represent Hip Hop in 2012, though not necessarily in music. Two of the very first successful rappers, LL Cool J and Ice-T, can be seen actively working as actors in award winning TV shows and movies. DJ Run of Run DMC is currently working hard to produce his son, "Diggy" Simmons as a rapper. Run's family found popularity through their Reality TV show "Run's House" which ran for six seasons on MTV ending in 2009. Three of the most famous MCs of the 1990s, Will Smith, Ice Cube and Queen Latifah are now powerhouses in the entertainment industry. Will Smith is the biggest box office draw in Hollywood, Ice Cube has his own production company, and Queen Latifah is starring in movies, singing in adaptations of Broadway musicals, as well as producing TV shows and movies.

Of course, we couldn't have a conversation about MCs without acknowledging how these artists came to be. The MC was a supporter of the DJ who was the center of the block party or jam. The MC was an improvisational element of a Hip Hop party and was known for creating rhymes off the top of his or her head based on whatever was going on at the party at the time. The point here is that MCing is about freestyling if it's about anything at all. MCs in the 1970s honed their skills through live performance and battling and this is still the case in 2012. Some battle rappers have won so much respect that they made their way into mainstream popularity and released albums such as Jin, Iron Solomon, Mistah F.A.B., Immortal Technique and Rhymefest. Besides these artists, some of the most important names to know in the freestyle rap scene in 2012 are Arsonal, Thesaurus, Illmaculate, Nems, Serius Jones, Hollow da Don, Dizaster, DNA, T-rex, Charlie Clipse and Math Hoffa. What these guys can do with rhymes is amazing.

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There is no lack of Hip Hop music to listen to in 2012. Rappers are everywhere. It should be said, however, that finding very good MCs is not quite as easy. Of course, taste is subjective and therefore what one person thinks is "hot", another will quickly label "wack". While allowing for differences in personal preferences, FUNKMODE encourages lovers of Hip Hop music to think about what their favorite MCs or songs are doing for Hip Hop as a culture. If you believe that the MCs and music you love are good for Hip Hop, that is, they are moving the genre forward while promoting real artistry and authenticity, then you should support them strongly. And, if you are finding others who you feel are bad for Hip Hop, keep them off of your playlists and out of your headphones. The fans of Hip Hop music are as important a part of the evolution of the culture as are the artists. You have a say in what Hip Hop looks like in 2012 and you can for years to come. Use this power to make Hip Hop exactly what you want to see it be. This is what it means to be a real citizen of Hip Hop.

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Drop: To release or put out; especially an album, rhyme, or a beat.

EX: "Kanye dropped a new record last week and I think it already went platinum."

Off the Dome: To do something extemporaneously. In Hip Hop, this can apply to rhymes, moves or music.

EX: "I don't know where she came up with that last rhyme. I'm pretty sure it was straight off the dome."

Personals: A personal insult used in battle rapping.

EX: "That one kid had a real nice flow but he couldn't keep up with all the personals that one cat kept throwing down."

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Name three albums released this year by three different MCs mentioned in this lesson. (one album per MC)
- 2) Name a popular battle rap competition.
- 3) What method do you personally use to decide if you want an MC or song in your playlist?