

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

YO! MTV RAPS

In order to grow from a local trend to a worldwide cultural phenomenon, Hip Hop had to find ways to get national and international attention. Some B-boys crews, like Rock Steady, were traveling the world teaching and performing in the 1980s. Rappers were beginning to tour and sell albums overseas. Even graffiti artists were having their work shown in famous museums outside the US. But, as the music has always been the most popular aspect of Hip Hop culture, it has had the most power in bringing Hip Hop to the world. In 1988, Hip Hop teamed up with rapidly rising MTV network and created the show "Yo! MTV Raps" (YMR). Perhaps more than any other single event, this program brought Hip Hop culture to the world stage.

When the show began, Hip Hop was already being shown in music videos on MTV. There were also interviews being done with rappers and live performances from MCs. However, YMR brought these all together in a weekly 2-hour program with an exclusive focus on Hip Hop. It is this focused format that made such a strong impact, as people were able to tune in at a specific time and get a concentrated dose of the biggest news and trends in Hip Hop culture. The show was a product of Ted Demme (a production assistant at the time who later became a famed film director) and television executive Peter Dougherty. The idea was to give a weekly platform for the growing number of music videos coming from the Hip Hop community. In fact, 1988 was a great year for hip Hop music. In '88, DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince released "He's the DJ, I'm the Rapper", NWA released "Straight Outta Compton", and Public Enemy released "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back", all of which produced memorable and even history-making music videos. However, music videos themselves were fairly new as MTV had only launched a few years earlier in 1981. But with the growing popularity of rap music due to groups like Run DMC, MTV felt like there could be a chance for a show based on Hip Hop culture to do well. With hindsight, we see that those producers were more correct than any of them imagined at the time.

The premiere episode had higher ratings than any MTV series up until that point. It began with a special show hosted by Run DMC in front of a live stadium crowd. It had appearances by DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince and Public Enemy as well as videos by LL Cool J, the Beastie Boys and Doug E. Fresh. The very first video played was "Follow the Leader" by Rakim (with Eric B). After the premiere, the show came to be hosted on a weekly basis by Fab 5 Freddie, a graffiti artist who had become a big player on the Hip Hop scene (look for a future SCHOOL'd lesson to feature Fab 5 Freddie). One of the producers of YMR had come to know Freddie from the New York art and music community and saw him as the perfect blend of personality and knowledge to represent the new Hip Hop television brand. Freddie served the show well as its host until the producers decided to take it to a daily format. At that point, Freddie was worried about being overexposed on television and therefore new hosts, Dr. Dre (not the producer) and Ed Lover took over the daily duties while Freddie hosted on weekends. As each of these three had strong connections in the Hip Hop scene, it was natural for them to get popular guests on the show and conduct meaningful interviews with the important players in Hip Hop. However, as the show quickly grew in popularity, the hosts and producers didn't have to do much to get great guests on the show. Anyone who was or wanted to be known as a serious part of the Hip Hop community sought to be on YMR. So many artists that are considered legends today were just getting their start when YMR began. It can be said that YMR was largely responsible for helping to create their legendary status in the first place. For example, at the end of the very first episode, Chuck D and Flavor Flav talk about all of the up and coming artists that you will see on the show. This list of artists included Salt-n-Pepa, MC Lyte, Kool Moe D, Heavy D, Rob Base and DJ E-Z Rock, 2 Live Crew, EPMD and Biz Markie, all of whom are now known as pioneers in the rap game. The show became such an institution within Hip Hop music culture that it started popping up in the lyrics of many rap songs.

Though a few years earlier a similar type of show "Video Music Box", had already started airing in New York (and still airs as of this writing) and shortly after BET would start airing "Rap City", no other show would come to have the power or influence on the worldwide presence of Hip Hop as YMR. In an interview, host Ed Lover said, "The importance of the show back then was MTV's first foray into hip-hop music ... I think 'Yo! MTV Raps' had the greatest impact on hip-hop in anything that ever existed. Because we took it from a regional genre, as far as the artists are concerned, to an international genre. 'Yo! MTV Raps' was on all over the world, almost in every country. I've met people throughout my travels and they told me that they started to speak English because of 'Yo! MTV Raps'. It made hip-hop music a global powerhouse. It made people a lot of money because it went global. And that's what 'Yo! MTV Raps' did." The show also became influential because of the presence of so many African American people in the production and creation of the show. Current journalists working today have credited seeing YMR and realizing that they too wanted to be a part of something similar. Current MTV journalist and radio host Sway Calloway says of YMR, "For me being at MTV and watching what Ed, Dre and Fab 5 Freddy were able to accomplish, I went in there with humbleness and humility and hope that I could only bring the same phenomena and integrity that they brought but do it my own way," he said. "And so I like to believe that I haven't let down the legacy of people who come from the same environment,

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live on a mainstream platform and not forget where it came from, but at the same time not closing doors to where they can go. And it was them that inspired me."

The show changed format in 1996 and was retitled "Yo!". It featured special guests hosts and had a shortened time slot. This format continued until 1999, when it finally went off the air. By that time, MTV was making a strong move away from being a music video centered network. However, in 2011, MTV brought back YMR as a special and featured three classic Hip Hop songs and music videos, "It Was a Good Day" by Ice Cube, "My Mind's Playing Tricks on Me" by Geto Boys and "Scenario" by Tribe Called Quest. It had interviews with important people in the industry about their thoughts on the show and those particular videos. VH1, MTV's sister network, also produced a documentary under their "rockDocs" series called "Yo!: The Story of Yo! MTV Raps". This is a must watch documentary for those who want to understand the impact this show had, not only at the time, but on the generation of Hip Hop artists to come. If you want to get a great history lesson on the golden age of Hip Hop, jump on them interwebs and find as many episodes of YMR as possible. There are more culture defining moments found there than perhaps any other single source available. That is the legacy of YMR.

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Parlay: To relax, hang out or "chill".

EX: "Me and my boy are just parlayin' here at his crib until y'all show up."

On the under: To keep something secret and "undercover" or "underground".

EX: "My Mom has no idea I'm doing this as a surprise, so keep it on the under til next week, a'ite?"

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) What are Fab 5 Freddie, Dr. Dre and Ed Lover's real names?
- 2) Where can you find episodes of YMR today?
- 3) Are there any rap music videos today? If so, where?