

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

EMCEES IN THE ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME - PART 3 - GRAND MASTER FLASH AND THE FURIOUS FIVE

As of the writing of this lesson, only a small handful of Hip Hop artists have been voted into the prestigious Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In this series of lessons, we will learn more about each of these legendary artists.

The first Hip Hop artists to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame were Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (GMF&F5) in 2007. While the Sugarhill Gang, with the release of "Rapper's Delight" in the late Summer of 1979, showed the world that Hip Hop music could become popular beyond New York City, it was Flash and his five which showed the world that Hip Hop could make serious, critically acclaimed music. With a DJ at the helm and Emcees on the mic, GMF&F5 represented the culture of Hip Hop music as only true natives of the style could.

GMF&F5 started in the Bronx in 1978. Joseph Saddler (aka Grandmaster Flash), was already hard at work, crafting his DJ skills with local friends, the Livingston brothers.* Around this time, he started working with rapper Kurtis Blow**. This partnership got Flash interested in working with other rappers and therefore he recruited his friend Keith Wiggins (aka Cowboy) and the brothers Melvin and Nathaniel Glover (aka Melle Mel and Kidd Creole, respectively). Together they became "The Three MCs" and started to work on their act. Soon, Flash added two more rappers to the group in Eddie Morris (aka Mr. Ness/Scorpio) and Guy Williams (aka Rahiem). The six made some music under the names "The Younger Generation" and "Flash and the Five" before finally settling on "Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five" when releasing their first official single, "Superrappin'" on Enjoy Records in late 1979.

After recording "Superrappin'", which was much more successful critically than commercially, GMF&F5 signed to Sugarhill Records (yes, the same company that released "Rapper's Delight"). This partnership would see GMF&F5 fare far better in record sales. Their first releases on the label were the songs "Freedom" and "Birthday party" in 1980, both of which sold tens of thousands of copies. However, it was in 1982 that GMF&F5 would really make their mark on the Hip Hop world.

It was at this time that GMF&F5 would record, "The Message", which would go on to become one of the most, if not the most, important songs in Hip Hop history. What made this recording stand apart from others was its lyrical content. Up until this time, Hip Hop culture was about the party crowd. Hip Hop had started as party music. Its intent was to get people onto the dance floor and to stay there. Rappers were rhyming over samples of high tempo dance music from James Brown, Issac Hayes, the Jacksons and funk bands. Because the music was meant to keep the party going, the lyrical content of the music was also geared towards that end. Rappers wrote rhymes about the party scene, about having a good time and about their skills as Emcees. Nothing of what they were saying was very serious, confrontational or controversial. "The Message" was none of that. This song was about the harsh realities of the urban environment where Hip Hop was born. It was something that everyone living in the ghettos of New York and beyond could understand, but it was not something talked about in music. In the first verse of the song, you hear "I can't take the smell. I can't take the noise. Got no money to move out. I guess I got no choice. Rats in the front room, roaches in the back. Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat. I tried to get away but I couldn't get far, cause a man with a tow truck repossessed my car." People around the world were starting to appreciate Rap music but many had no understanding of the culture that spawned the genre. This song put people face to face with the truth of inner city living and did it in a way that was both informational and poetic.

Rap music was starting to grow up. It now was seen as a means to express greater truths than just what the party scene had to offer. This song became the catalyst for many of the subgenres of Rap that would rise to prominence in later decades such as Gangsta Rap and Conscious Rap. Once people saw that Hip Hop could be used to speak about serious and important things, it opened the floodgates of expression to a whole new group of people who otherwise may have had no voice. Now they could talk about the challenges of life through an artistic medium that spoke directly to their sense of identity, geography and heritage. This party music that was created by kids who were, as Melle Mel says, "forced to go out on the streets and make [their] own entertainment", was now also able to be used for deeper personal expression. Incidentally, as this song was also released on the Sugar Hill Records' label, this makes the company responsible for perhaps the two greatest Hip Hop recordings of all time.

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"The Message" was also a commercial success, selling half a million albums in 30 days. What's more, it put GMF&F5 on the map as true Hip Hop artists. This one song sent such ripples through the future fabric of Hip Hop that it can be seen as the main reason that GMF&F5 were the first Hip Hop artists elected to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

* To learn more about Grandmaster Flash, see the SCHOOL'd lesson on "Mixing, Cutting and Scratching".

** To learn more about Kurtis Blow, see the SCHOOL'd lesson on "Kurtis Blow".

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Heat: For something to be really "hot" in the sense of being figuratively "on fire" or really good.

EX: "That song is the best I've heard in a loooooong time." "Word. It's the heat!"

Kickin: Appealing or going really well.

EX: "The ride where you fly upside down while standing straight up is so kickin!"

Busted: Something ugly, wrecked or otherwise off-putting or disagreeable.

EX: "Thems are the most busted shoes I've ever seen in real life. I think they're about to explode offa your feet!"

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Which members of GMF&F5 actually were heard on "The Message"?
- 2) Who presented for GMF&F5 at their induction ceremony at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?
- 3) Which of the members of GMF&F5 is sometimes credited with creating the term "Hip Hop"?