

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

HIP HOP CROSSOVER STARS

Despite its humble beginnings, it is hard to go anywhere in the world without finding people who are familiar with some aspect of Hip Hop culture. For some, the international success of B-boying (aka Break dancing) has been their introduction to Hip Hop. For others, hearing Hip Hop music opened their eyes to the culture. However, possibly in greater numbers than any other means, the movies have been how much of the world became familiar with the world of Hip Hop. Hip Hop dancers, rappers, DJs and graffiti artists have been appearing in films almost since the culture began. This crossover from Hip Hop to movies has allowed people outside of the regional areas of New York and California to become familiar, and fall in love, with the art of Hip Hop.

The movie "Wild Style" (1983) is often called the first Hip Hop film. Although it most prominently featured the graffiti aspect of Hip Hop culture, "Wild Style" also showed moviegoers rappers, DJs and dancers. Many of the Hip Hop artists casted were famous within the Hip Hop culture. However, because of this movie, people who are now Hip Hop legends like Busy Bee, Grandmaster Flash, Cold Crush Brothers, Lee Quinones and Fab Five Freddy were seen for the first time by people outside of their hometowns. However, the real crossover effect started to occur when Hip Hop stars were featured in non-Hip Hop movies. For example, also released in 1983 was the movie "Flashdance". In this movie, there is a very short scene featuring the Rock Steady Crew as random street dancers. While they didn't receive much screen time, because the movie went on to have worldwide ticket sales of over 100 million dollars, it catapulted B-boying and the Rock Steady Crew into international fame. As you know from previous SCHOOL'd lessons, the Rock Steady Crew is now the most well known B-boy crew in the world. You also know that you can find B-boying in nearly every country on the planet today.

In the early 90s, Hip Hop artists made even bigger moves into the world of TV and film. Fresh (pun intended) off of their win of the first ever Grammy award to go to a Hip Hop artist, Will Smith and his partner, DJ Jazzy Jeff, were cast in a TV series by NBC called "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air". Despite already being a successful rapper, this show took Will Smith to a place that no rapper had ever reached. This TV show made "The Fresh Prince" a household name beyond the world of Hip Hop. People that didn't know Will Smith as a rapper were finding and enjoying this show and then later becoming aware of the world of Hip Hop because of it. Also in 1990, another popular rap duo, Kid 'n Play starred in the comedy movie "House Party"**. This film was popular enough with general audiences that two sequels were made which casted (and therefore introduced) more rappers and R&B artists to the general public such as Full Force, TLC and Immature. Also due to the movie's success, Kid and Play started being featured in the TV show "Martin" starring comedian Martin Lawrence who was an actor in the first two "House Party" movies. Always a pioneer in the entertainment industry, Russell Simmons, co-founder of Def Jam Recordings, found a way to become part of Hip Hop's crossover success by starting a TV show on HBO called "Def Comedy Jam". This show was hosted by Martin Lawrence and featured many of the country's best up and coming African American comedians. While not exactly a Hip Hop show, it had a Hip Hop feel and it brought together the comedy and Hip Hop audiences. Though we can't go into all of them here, the mid to late 90s brought more and more rappers to general audiences such as Queen Latifah, Ice Cube, Ice-T, and LL Cool J.

What started in the 80s and 90s grew to epic proportions in the 2000s. This millenium knows Will Smith as one of the most popular and money-earning actors of our time. At the time of this writing, he is the only actor to be in eight movies in a row which have made over 100 million dollars each. Queen Latifah has starred in her own TV show, over 40 films, been nominated for an Oscar, an Emmy and won a Golden Globe Award. Ice Cube, on many critics list as one of the best rappers of all time, currently produces his own TV show "Are We There Yet?", has acted in over 30 movies and written, produced or directed over a dozen movies. Ice-T has been in over 60 movies, produced his own documentary in 2012 and currently stars in two different TV shows.

At the time of this writing, only three Oscars, one of the highest awards in movies, have been given to Hip Hop artists. Eminem won the first for the song "Lose It" in the best original movie song category. Three Six Mafia won the same award for a song they created for the movie "Hustle and Flow" and Sean "P. Diddy" Combs won the "Best Documentary" Oscar in 2012 for his film "Undeclared".

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It cannot be overstated how important the success of these Hip Hop stars has been to the success of Hip Hop itself. There are so many people that have come into Hip Hop because of first seeing these Hip Hop artists in a setting having nothing to do with Hip Hop. This does not only apply to new fans of Hip Hop but also new people within the industry that have been instrumental in spreading Hip Hop further. For example, a television producer who works with a rapper on a TV show might then want to feature that rapper in a Hip Hop documentary about their life or maybe help produce their next Hip Hop album. In the entertainment industry, it is not at all uncommon for this type of crossover to happen which is why so many rappers have been able to transition from music to directing, writing or performing. Sometimes people are dismayed when they see Hip Hop artists move into non-Hip Hop fields, believing that they are "selling out". While these feelings are not always without merit, it can also be as strongly argued that these crossover stars are more important to the dominance and success of Hip Hop culture as anyone in the culture.

p.s. Not to leave out Hip Hop dancers ... Jennifer Lopez made her first splash into entertainment as a Hip Hop dancer on the sketch comedy show, "In Living Color". She has since gone on to be one of the highest paid actresses in the US.

*The term "Wild Style" is a reference to a particular type of graffiti art created by artist Tracy 168. See SCHOOL'd lesson on "Graffiti".

** Kid and Play's roles in "House Party" were originally written for Will Smith and Jazzy Jeff.

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Fire: Excellent. Synonymous with the previous SCHOOL'd HHWOTW "Heat".

EX: "That new dance move that he threw down right there was straight FIRE!"

Clean: Brand new. Well taken care of. Fresh. High quality or other wise very appealing. Flawless.

EX: "That jacket is so super crispy clean, I don't even know if I can wear it. My body may explode from an overdose of awesome!"

Sketchy: Untrustworthy. Rousing suspicion.

EX: "Did you see that sketchy lookin' dude over there?" "Yeah, I think he might be up to something."

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

1) Name two of Will Smith's most popular movies.

2) Name one or two Hip Hop artists not mentioned here that also are in TV or movies.

(BONUS if you don't have to look them up!)

3) What do you think of Hip Hop artists (Dancers, Rappers, DJs, Graff artists, Beatboxers) becoming crossover stars?