

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

MIXING, CUTTING AND SCRATCHING - THE EVOLUTION OF HIP HOP MUSIC (PART 3)

When Jamaican immigrant Clive Campbell came to New York and started hosting parties under the name DJ Kool Herc, he put into action ideas that would mark the beginning of an entire urban culture known as Hip Hop. One of his most significant contributions was the way he used his turntables to isolate the break sections of records. This technique was the birth of what we call today "Breakbeat DJing" and is the foundation of Hip Hop music. Breakbeat DJing later led to sampling (a topic for another lesson) and the creation of a new art form called "Turntablism".

As with most new inventions and original ideas, one person is the creator and then many other people come in later to help take the creation/idea to a new level. This pattern is definitely true in Hip Hop. What Kool Herc started, other DJs would come to develop and perfect. One such DJ was Joseph Saddler (aka Grandmaster Flash*). Flash was also originally from the Caribbean area (Barbados) and his parents had moved their family to the Bronx. Flash was just a few years younger than Herc and was extremely interested in electronics, records and music. He would follow Herc around and try to understand how he was using his turntables to isolate breaks. Flash really liked what Herc was doing but he also thought Herc was a bit sloppy in the way he executed his technique. Flash believed that, with time, he could do it much better and thus set himself on a path to becoming a master DJ. Through years of practice, Flash himself innovated many new DJ techniques. One of the most important of these techniques, called the "Clock Theory", would serve as a remedy to Herc's inconsistency in mixing. Flash realized that he could draw a line on his records to mark exactly where a break section began and ended. As a record is circular like the face of a clock, his marks would be like hands of that clock. Therefore, he could say to himself, "this break section begins at the 2 o'clock mark and ends at the 10 o'clock mark." This technique allowed Flash to achieve near perfection with the way he put together portions of records. In Hip Hop, we call taking apart certain sections of songs and putting them together in new ways, cutting and mixing. Flash became a master of these techniques and that is why he is known today as Grandmaster Flash.

One of Flash's young friends and students, Theodore Livingston**, created another technique that practically defined the sound of Hip Hop music. One day, while practicing with his turntables in his room after school, Theodore's mother came into the room to yell at him about his music being too loud. He didn't hear her coming in and so her sudden appearance startled him. He quickly put his hands on the records to stop them from moving and they made a very funny but cool sound. He kept moving his records back and forth under the needle and playing with this unique sound, which today we call "scratching". He realized that this scratching not only sounded cool but could be used as a transition between cuts and mixes, thereby providing a more interesting and seamless flow to the new music he was creating. Today, nearly all DJs scratch as they switch from one break to the next or one song to the next and they all count the person they call "Grandwizzard Theodore" as the person who gave them this technique.

A new generation of DJs took what Herc, Flash and Theodore did to even higher levels still. By isolating the sounds of the records further, they could cut and mix the sounds up to a point where you might not even be able to recognize the original songs any longer. These artists are known as "Turntablists". Turntablism is an incredible and complex art form that is still being developed today. There are turntablist competitions all over the world and those that win them are considered the best DJs on the planet. Turntablism really has to be seen to be understood and appreciated. And so ...

Here are a few videos to get you started:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-iCITjDeRE>

<http://youtu.be/DwkLIPqpuZA>

<http://youtu.be/C1LKdBcn7UY>

<http://youtu.be/VO6XmF62jOY>

(All of these videos are EXCELLENT and showcase incredibly talented DJs. We highly recommend you watch them all.)

All links were active as of 10/10/2011

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* Grandmaster Flash and his MC group, the Furious Five, were the first Hip Hop artists to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (2007).

** Theodore was only 13 when he started learning and creating his DJing techniques.

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Shorty/shawty: a little kid or a female. EX: "I was hangin out at the FUNKMODE studios and I saw them teaching a bunch of kids. Them shorties got game, yo!"

Schooled: to teach someone something, usually in a way that shows off the superiority of your knowledge or skills. EX: "I thought I knew what was up with Hip Hop but then I started rappin with some of them cats from FUNKMODE and I got straight schooled!"

Kicks: shoes, usually athletic. EX: "All that's keeping me from being off-the-charts fitted is those new kicks. Once I lock those down, it's on like Donkey Kong!"

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Name a famous DJ from current times (not one mentioned in this lesson).
- 2) Can you still see DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash or Grandwizard Theodore DJing today? If so, where?
- 3) How are turntables like instruments?
- 4) Name a song where you can hear scratching.