

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

TEDDY RILEY AND NEW JACK SWING - PART 2

Throughout these lessons, we have learned about many people who have been important in the development of Hip Hop culture. In Part 2 of this lesson, we will continue to learn about New Jack Swing (NJS) and its creator Teddy Riley. (get Part 1 @ <http://bit.ly/KVwwyG>)

While it is difficult to put into words exactly how New Jack Swing (NJS) sounds, it is fairly easy to understand after you've heard examples as those at the end of Part 1 of this lesson. One of the first things you realize about NJS is that it was meant to be party music. It is composed in such a way as to have crowd appeal and to get those crowds dancing. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the music spawned its own dance style which we will learn more about later. If you're familiar with early Hip Hop/Rap music, you know that it too was meant to keep a party crowd on the dance floor. In this way, NJS was a return to the feeling and style of those 1970s songs. However, NJS also took the party style to a whole new place by combining the sounds of Hip Hop music with the melodies and vocals of R&B. You'll remember from Part 1 that around the late 1980s, Hip Hop and R&B did not cross paths often. Still, Hip Hop was experiencing a popularity at that time that unprecedented for the genre. It can be argued that it was only a matter of time before its influence was felt in other genres of music. But while other people may have started to move in that direction, it was Teddy Riley who made the most successful and popular combinations of Hip Hop and R&B anyone had ever heard. Besides innovating the fusion of the Hip Hop/R&B sound on the actual instrumental tracks themselves, Teddy used a couple of other techniques to bring the styles together. Though it is incredibly common in Hip Hop music today, Teddy brought into the mainstream the practice of having MCs rap lyrics on the breakdowns or intros of R&B songs. Teddy also influenced many artists who were always known as pure singers to lay down raps on their tracks. Some R&B groups even started including a rapper as a full-time member of their line up for a Hip Hop sound in all of their songs. Rappers were singing, singers were rapping and everyone was dancing. In fact, not before the time of NJS or since has there been so much dancing by Hip Hop or R&B artists as a whole.

While NJS obviously changed the landscape of urban music at the time, it had an equal and perhaps greater effect on the Hip Hop dance scene. As we've said many times, Hip Hop dance is primarily a freestyle party dance done to funk or Hip Hop music. The dance style follows the evolution of the music. Even styles which have taken on a life of their own such as B-boying or Popping are still influenced heavily by the type of music being played. The use of the Swing Beat drum machine rhythms brought back many of the moves of actual Swing dance from the 1930s/40s. The rap duo Kid N' Play used many original Swing dance moves. They even called one of their dances "The Funky Charleston" which is the actual name of one of the most popular Swing steps. And they weren't the only rappers dancing. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was actually harder to find a Rapper or R&B artist not dancing in their music videos or concerts. Big Daddy Kane, Kool Moe D, The Fresh Prince, MC Hammer, BBD, Bobby Brown, Janet Jackson, and even the vocal marvels of Boyz II Men danced hard as they performed.

As for the exact style, NJS dancing in general was a lot like the music ... upbeat, high energy, exciting, fast and repeating. As with most music made using sampling and drum machines, the beat often repeats following certain rhythm schemes. It was common to see NJS dance moves that didn't change much except for the facings or sides of the body being used. For example, if the move was a simple side kick, you might see a person kick to the left and then to the right and repeat that back and forth over an entire eight count. Or, following the beat, you may see a dancer do the same kick move in a "single-single-double" (kick right, left, right, right) or a "double-double-single" pattern (kick right twice, left twice and then right, left, right, left). Though energetic, these moves were often simple enough for people with a decent amount of rhythm to do. As such, the music created a new wave of Hip Hop culture that found its way into house parties, block parties, dance clubs, music videos, TV shows and movies. In fact, it was around this time that Hip Hop dance started finding its way into dance studios as a regular part of their curriculum. Before this era, there were definitely B-boy and Funk style classes offered here and there. After NJS, however, this new style was in high demand and therefore was taught in studios everywhere.

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Much of the Hip Hop dance you see today in movies, on TV shows or in concerts is a combination of what came out of the NJS era mixed with the earlier B-boy and Funk Styles. Today's Hip Hop choreographers were teenagers or children when NJS was most popular and therefore their choreography is reflective of that influence. This means that many of the kids learning Hip Hop dance today in studios, from music videos or the internet are practicing NJS moves whether or not they've even heard of NJS dancing or music specifically. For example, the "Spongebob" move in the "Jerkin" style was being done by NJS dancers 20 years ago and by West Coast Swing dancers 60 years before that.

There is so much more that can be said about a musical genius like Teddy Riley. He produced so many great artists, so many great songs and inspired multiple generations of people to be musicians, singers, rappers and dancers. Even Michael Jackson called on Teddy to help produce his 1991 album "Dangerous" which became the number one NJS album of all time (to hear the obvious influence and presence of Teddy Riley, listen to MJ's song "Jam"). However, with the little space we have left, there are two things, unrelated to NJS, that we wish to say about Teddy.

First of all, unlike many aspiring singers/producers, Teddy saw the value in working with a group as opposed to "going solo". Teddy said, "I wanna do something different. Everybody wants to go solo after doing a group. I wanna do another group ... I don't wanna be solo because you can't look back and say, 'Yo, fellas, help me out!'" In the music industry, or any industry where there is a lot of potential for fame or money, it is rare to find a person who understands that your success is only as good as the people you have around you to share it with. Secondly, Teddy set high standards for his group. Speaking during an interview in the late 1990s, Teddy's second group called "BLACKstreet" said, "When you're into BLACKstreet, you can't do things like smoke, drinkin', drugs, or be in rehearsal and not trying your best. You gotta give it your all." All of these things are values that FUNKMODE also holds highly and strives to live by with their crew. Nobody is perfect, but it is inspiring to see people at that level also making it a priority to always try to be their very best. We encourage all of our readers and students to take this example to heart and try to do the same.

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Flash: To suddenly get really angry.

EX: "I was watching these two people talking outside and out of nowhere the dude just flashed on him."

Step off: To step away from. Usually said as a warning to someone who is unwelcome or threatening.

EX: "That crazy lady kept talkin' trash to me so I told her to step off before I end up flashin' on her."

No diggety (no doubt): Without a doubt. For certain.

EX: "Are you gonna pick me up at 8pm?" "No diggity, homie. Fo' sho'!"

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Name two movies that featured New Jack Swing.
- 2) Name the other members of Teddy Riley's group BLACKstreet.
- 3) What does the final Hip Hop Word of the Week have to do with Teddy Riley?