SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

SAMPLING - THE EVOLUTION OF HIP HOP MUSIC (PART 4)

There are two complaints that you will commonly hear about Hip Hop music. The first is that it's not real music because there is no real instrumentation, just stolen parts of other songs. The second is that there's no vocal talent involved in having someone on the microphone "just talkin'" (as opposed to singing). Are they right? Is there no vocal talent necessary in rapping? Is Hip Hop music nothing more than stolen parts? To answer these questions, as usual, we have to go back in time to the beginning of Hip Hop.

If you'll remember from past lessons, the creation of Hip Hop music was quite accidental. Those who laid the foundation for the genre had no idea that what they were doing would make them pioneers of a whole new culture and international musical movement. The rapping part of Hip Hop music began when DJs started toasting or shouting out to the crowd as they played their music at parties. Toasting evolved and became what we recognize as rapping when DJs turned the mic over their friends. These friends (who became known as MCs) took the simple shout outs and developed them into complicated rhymes that would cover the length of entire songs. The instrumental part of Hip Hop music was the result of the DJ isolating the break sections of popular songs and looping them or mixing them together. Those DJs were just trying to play the best parts of the songs they loved. They weren't trying to start a new music style. Therefore, as you see, DJs weren't trying to be musicians, and MCs weren't trying to be vocalists. Both were just trying to be entertaining for the people at their parties, using what they had available to them.

In the early 1980s, a very important technological advancement moved Hip Hop music forward yet again. The digital audio sampler, also known more simply as a sampler, made it possible to take any part of any song and make those cuts available at the touch of a button. Not only that, but samplers made it possible to slow down, speed up, and change the pitch of any sample. Not only that, but samplers made it possible to take even the tiniest parts of songs like a single drum beat, horn note, guitar strum or piano key and allow you to play them as you would notes on a keyboard. No longer did you have to use turntables and records to cut breaks out of songs. You can imagine what samplers did to DJs in Hip Hop then, right? Even though DJs were the ones who popularized sampling and created the desire for sampling machines in the first place, their creation made them unnecessary in Hip Hop music and they started to disappear. However, looking at the situation in another way, one could say that Hip Hop DJs never went away but actually turned into what we call today Hip Hop producers like Kanye West, Dr. Dre and Swizz Beatz*. With the creation of the sampler, people who did not play instruments could make music. Producers could put together tracks based on samples of older, popular tracks and rappers could lay down their rhymes on top of them.

Does this mean the Hip Hop critics are correct? Rappers aren't vocal artists and DJs aren't musically skilled, right? As with many things, it all depends on your perspective. Many excellently skilled vocalists such as Mariah Carey not only don't play any instruments but many vocalists don't even write their own songs. This doesn't mean they can't sing well. Writing is a very different skill from singing. Playing an instrument is a very different skill than writing. Many rappers don't play instruments but some do. Some are excellent singers*** and some are not. Many excellent singers couldn't rap to save their lives. The point is that each of these things are different skills and are done by people with different levels of ability. One of the things that brings Hip Hop down and makes the critics right is when "artists" end up making Hip Hop songs that become really popular even though they actually don't have any real talent. But that happens in all musical genres, from country to classical to rock. People without skill shouldn't be taken as representatives of the entire style of music. Some rappers have incredible vocal skills, writing talent and performance quality. Some producers can play many different instruments, compose music and put together samples in genius ways that most would never imagine themselves in a million years. In fact, there are even Hip Hop bands, such as The Roots, who play Hip Hop music only using guitars, drums, horns while rapping over the music the instruments create. There are very, very talented people in Hip Hop music and there are very, very untalented people. Unfortunately, sometimes the untalented people get far too much attention because they made a catchy song and really talented people get unnoticed. Again, this is something that happens in all artforms and has since people started making art. You, as a creator and consumer of art have the ability to play a part in the success of Hip Hop music. You can learn which rappers have real ability and which producers are skilled musically. You can seek out those people and choose to listen to their music instead of simply listening to whatever is popular at the time. If you care about Hip Hop, or if you care about any art form or product, take the time to find out who really put some effort into its creation and make that what you choose to listen to, read, watch or use. Really think about this and then take action.

* The very first samplers were actually created in the 1960s but it wasn't until the 1980s that samplers became available to the general public for purchase.
** Producers are the people who put the instrumental parts of Hip Hop songs together. They can do this either by arranging samples into a new song or by actually composing music and having it be played by a band.
*** For example: Missy Elliott, Lauryn Hill, Andre 3000 (from Outkast), Cee-lo, Drake

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Feel me/you/it: to understand, agree with or like something or someone. EX: "I'm really feelin' that new track by Eminem." or "You better do your School'd homework or you're gonna get bounced from class. Ya feel me?"

The Cutties: a far away area, or in the middle of nowhere. EX: "I was gonna go over to my friends house but then I found out he lived out in the cutties. No way I'm rollin all the way out there!"

On point: exactly right, perfect or excellent. EX: "I saw a b-boy crew perform last night and they were on point. I can't believe some of the moves they were stringing together."

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

1) Listen to the following songs and name the song that sampled them.

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hl4UrqgCjQ
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0l7gF2NaUQ
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-3UauuSkgM
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yt3p-F2x7rY

2) Name the brand and model of a sampling machine.