

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

THE STATE OF THE HIP HOP UNION - 2012 EDITION - DJ

Every year, the President of the United States gives a speech to express to Congress how the country is doing and what his plans are for the coming year. FUNKMODE usually focuses these lessons on subjects that tend more towards the timeless. However, we also want to occasionally address where Hip Hop is at the present time, to give you knowledge on Hip Hop culture as it exists right now. In this lesson, we will address the current state of DJing.

When Hip Hop began, the DJ was the central figure of the culture. Everything that we call Hip Hop today, evolved around the actions of the DJ. When Hip Hop music took the culture towards the mainstream, it was the norm for a group or even solo rapper to be backed by a DJ. However, as we started moving into the Golden age of Rap music (late 1980s to early 1990s), DJs became less and less common as a staple of the scene. As Hip Hop music started relying heavily on sampled beats and drum machines to create the music, many would-be DJs moved from behind the turntables to behind a sound board as producers. In addition, before rappers started making Hip Hop music in studios and releasing albums, Hip Hop was only a live phenomenon. You had to go to a party to see an MC rapping and he'd only be rapping over a live DJ's beats. But once Rappers started releasing commercial records, you could just buy an album, listen and dance to it, without leaving your house or block. Once MTV became big in the early 1980s, you could also see Hip Hop performances in the form of music videos, again without leaving your home. Despite these changes, DJing is bigger today than ever, though in some ways it has changed considerably.

Every dance venue throughout the entire world has a DJ. This reality existed long before Hip Hop or the 1970s. In the 1970s, the party and club dance scene was dominated by Funk and Disco. Those styles have now evolved into Hip Hop and Electronic Dance Music (EDM), respectively. In each of these new genres, you have DJs who only play songs of those types for audiences (usually small venue DJs) as well as DJs who both play songs by other established artists and songs they produce themselves. As you might expect, just like Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash, the DJs today who go beyond playing songs, to actually making new music, are the ones who get the crowds, record deals and fame.

Within Hip Hop, you see two kinds of modern DJs. The first kind is the music producer. Since the 2000s, some big names have been Dr. Dre, Kanye West, Pharrell and the Neptunes, Swizz Beatz, Timbaland, MF Doom, DJ Premiere, The Roots, Lil Jon, Birdman, and DJ Khaled to name a few. In the 2010s, we saw new producers like No ID, Hit-boy, T-minus, Harry Fraud and the Justice League come on the scene. These are people who, if it were 40 years ago, would probably have been right alongside Kool Herc and GMF with two turntables cutting up old funk records. Today, using current technology, they cut together samples and produce incredible, multi-layered beats that are packing the dance floors and selling tons of songs. The second type of modern DJ is the turntablist. This is the DJ who built upon the cutting, mixing, and scratching techniques created by the 1970s Hip Hop DJs. You can see these DJs at clubs or at DJing competitions. One of the biggest turntablist competitions in the world is the DMC World Championships. 2012's competition was in London and was won by DJ IZOH* from Japan. Past winners were DJ Shiftee & DJ Vajra (USA), DJ Fly & Ligone (France) and the only DJ to win it three times in a row, DJ Craze (USA). Both producers and turntablists have an enormous affect on what is considered Hip Hop music today, because they are in control of the sound. They are the creators of what the majority of people are hearing and thus, like the DJs of the 1970s, what they produce is what people come to know as modern Hip Hop.

EDM DJs are some of the most well known DJs in the world today. The best play, not to small parties or even larger dance clubs, but to stadiums of people, just like recording artists. The top five DJs in 2012, according to DJ Mag, which is considered the authority in EDM, are Armin Van Buuren, Tiesto, Avicii, David Guetta, and Deadmau5. Other notables on the list are Afrojack, Skrillex, and Swedish House Mafia. These DJs both play music from other EDM artists and are EDM artists themselves. Though not playing Hip Hop music, they also use the techniques created by the Hip Hop DJs of the 1970s and therefore continue to preserve and promote the art created within Hip Hop culture.

Not to be left out, you can still see many of the original Hip Hop DJs still spinning at clubs around the world. Kool Herc still plays as well as GMF, Grandmaster Caz, DJ Jazzy Jeff, and Afrika Bambaataa.

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*see incredible footage of DJ IZOH in action at the 2012 World Championships @ <http://youtu.be/qdkq8ZFot74>

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Rolley: Short for Rolex, an expensive brand of watch.

EX: "Throw your rolleys in the sky. Wave em side to side and keep your hands high." - Notorious BIG

Flex: To show your abilities in an area or to physically threaten someone.

EX: "He's been really practicing his freestyle rappin and I think he's about to flex on those guys battling over there."

Drippin: To be wearing something, especially cool clothes or accessories.

EX: "That girl is head to toe drippin in Adidas gear right now."

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Name two EDM DJs not named here.
- 2) Name two turntablists not named here.
- 3) Name somewhere any of the old school DJs mentioned in the last paragraph played in 2012.