The Cultural Roots of Hip-Hop

There are many theories about where the cultural roots of Hip-Hop are and the origins of this socio-cultural musical phenomenon. A lot of people disagree about who really founded Hip-Hop, and who has significantly contributed to the Hip-Hop movement and massive underground culture. Some say the true roots of Hip-Hop are in the heart of Africa, others say it is an artistic product of Black resistance to oppressive White culture and centuries of American slavery.

Many people suggest Hip-Hop started when early African-American slaves would get weary of their (upward, upward) work and start to express themselves through speaking out, singing “phrases that would cheer them up.” A lot of the time these words were “accompanied with dance movements.” However, traditional African poly-rhythms with universal “voice instruments” must have created quite the sound during the years of American slavery, no doubt a sound that resembles what we now call Hip-Hop.

However, this does not mean that Hip-Hop is necessarily exclusively Black, per se, although it has definitely been highly influenced by Black American culture. These roots helped create and shape what many people call the true origins of Hip-Hop, or at the very least, the early formation stages of this amazing and resilient culture.

Hip-Hop culture, including the five elements of Hip-Hop, discussed later, emerged from New York City in the Bronx at 1970s block parties. These large parties, originally outdoors, were thrown by community members who shared their loud equipment for the entertainment, inspiration and joy of other people. “In the 1930s, more than a sixth of Harlem residents were from the West Indies, and the block parties of the 80s were closely similar to sound systems in the Caribbean. It’s not shocking, then, that people began to lyrically speak over the sound systems, rhyming in a style that closely resembled a traditional African-American and Afro-Caribbean entertainment style called “toasting.” During a “toast,” people would tell “long, rhymed tales of great heroes.” However, Lil Rodney Cee, of Funk Four Plus One More and Double Trouble, will tell you that Cowboy, of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, was the first emcee (MC) to really talk about the DJ. Afrika Bambaataa, a community leader/poet who was one of the founders of the Hip-Hop movement and often credited for being the first well-known rapper, was instrumental in developing the party scene. Mixing these traditional African poly-rhythms with upbeat music has always been the hip-hop style that we call “toasting.”

The Cultural Roots of Hip-Hop

Society’s own Raquel Granath and Misty Lou Cook. They demonstrated how to act and how not to act in front of legislators. After that we watched the movie School House Rock, which also explained the legislative process in a funnier more cartoonist way. Then Janica Henderson, and some youth from Seattle King County Coalition for Homeless Youth (SKCCY), spoke about their Youth Advocacy Day experiences. We spent the rest of the time making posters and signs to display at the actual Youth Advocacy Day.

On Feb 28, 2007, Youth Advocacy Day took place. It was a wonderful experience and it was my first time ever being there. I was co-facilitator with Jim Theofelis, Executive director of The Mockingbird Society. It was a new experience but it turned out to be a great one. It was quite eye opening to go and experience the legislative process in action. We opened the day with introductions. Soon after we had a few speakers, who came and gave personal testimonies from Youth Advocacy Days in the past, and how they were affected by not having something like SB 1201.

Then the people who made posters got a chance to go on a march around the Capitol campus, holding their signs high. During this time we could also go into the capitol building and watch the session to see exactly how bills are debated and how the whole legislative system works in action. I then went with the same process in the counterpart. After that, we had a few skits done by The Mockingbird Theatre group who also discussed the legislative process. The people who helped create, Youth Advocacy Day, and the people who are going to help keep Youth Advocacy Day here. It is amazing to see that one group can have, and you can see it through Youth Advocacy Day. Giving people a voice, that is what matters most.

I have to say that I agree with her. She also said, in regards to life and her personal philosophy, “If You Believe It… Then Be It… and Live It…or Leave It Be.”

Countless teenagers living in America with poverty and heartache struggle find solace, sanctuary, and infinite inspiration in expressing themselves through the written word (emceeing), beat-boxing, graffiti art, break-dancing and, more and more, DJing, since cheap digital computer technology is now relatively easy to get a hold of, even for the most impoverished populations.

Hip-Hop is multi-cultural in its roots, in its core, in its essence. In fact, TAKI 183, the world’s first well-known graffiti artist, was “a Greek teenager from Washington Heights named Demetrios.” One of the first graffiti groups ever was founded by TRACY 168 in 1972, a “white kid that was so tough
Happy Spring! First, let me begin by expressing my appreciation to all of those youth, professionals, community members and organizations who participated in this year’s Youth Advocacy Day. What an amazing day with over 100 of us converging on the Capitol campus! I am especially proud of the young people from The Mockingbird Society who planned and implemented so much of this year’s event. It was so inspiring to listen to youth from Seattle, Everett, Pierce County and Olympia attend Youth Advocacy Day and participate in such an extraordinary way.

It is during these times when I wish we could get the general public to witness the courage, passion and tenacity demonstrated by the youth who get up and speak to the group. Their willingness to come before their peers, legislators and others to give their testimony to the struggles they have endured is so moving. I want to thank each of the groups that attended and especially the young people.

As many of you know, our primary legislative agenda this year is Extending Medicaid to Age 21 for youth exiting foster care.

HB 1201 and its companion, SB 5305, have traveled through the legislative process with a few bumps but continue forward. In fact, HB 1201 has passed out of the House of Representatives and will advance to the Senate very soon. Please continue to check our Web site for updates—your support has been instrumental in moving this legislation along. If you are interested in getting our Advocacy Alerts please contact Lauren (323-5437/lauren@mockingbirdsocity.org) and ask her to add you to the ASK-Y Advocacy list.

Finally, let me share with you that we have received the preliminary evaluation from the University of Washington for the 2006 implementation of the Mockingbird Family Model. In the spirit of transparency and accountability we will put the full evaluation on our Web site as soon as it is finalized. Let me close in the same vein I began—by wishing you all the best of Spring and by thanking the young people who each and every day become stronger leaders through their work at The Mockingbird Society. Together, we are all building a world class foster care system.

Jim Theofelis
The Importance of Models

Andrea Roldan

Models, we see them all the time: on billboards, magazines and commercials; why are they important? They’re not. Unless you’re a designer or photographer, they would be significant but generally speaking, models serve the purpose of making us feel insecure and below social standards. Well then, what am I talking about, right? I’m talking about each and every one of us as individuals. We are all models whether we know it or not, not “industry” models but role models.

A role model is “A person who serves as a model in a particular behavior or social role for another person to emulate.” When we were young, we all had role models. They may have changed over the years but there is always someone that we have genuinely told, “You inspire me,” or “I admire you.” Our role models have an influence on the way we behave, what we believe is important, and even, sometimes, are an inspiration as to the kind of person we want to become. When we choose our role models, they don’t necessarily know that we look up to them, just like we might not know who looks up to us.

A Visit to Sephora

Jamica Henderson

On February 19th, The Mockingbird Society made a trip to Sephora for a work experience event. Sephora is a “top-of-the-line” make-up store that first opened in Europe. Our visit was from 9-11 AM at the Bellevue WA location. Although we didn’t have much time, it was really fun and everybody enjoyed themselves.

When we got there, breakfast was waiting. After we were done, we entered a room that was filled with all kinds of make-up. All of us became excited. After we entered the room they took us to the area where you apply make-up. There were four Sephora make-up artists that worked there to train us. The lesson for the day was to learn how to apply make-up to our eyes, lips, and cheeks. The idea was to learn how to apply make-up and look natural with some “jazziness”.

The staff showed us what to do, how much to apply and secrets to make-up. Once they showed us the basics, we were paired up and we practiced on each other. Once we were finished, they took a picture of all of us in a Sephora mirror with our new beautiful selves. I really liked how everyone still looked natural even with the make-up on.

This was a very fun experience for me because I am truly not a make-up person. I never wore make-up of any sort. I always wanted to wear make-up because it “brings out your beauty,” but I never knew how to do it so I never wore it. After this event, I will always wear eye shadows and a little blush now that I know how easy and fun it is to put it on.

It was really nice to get the chance to learn how to apply make-up with the help of professionals and look beautiful and natural at the same time. I want to thank Sephora for giving us this opportunity and showing us another way we can bring out the beauty in ourselves.

Meet the Staff: Zahra Abasheikh

Hi, my name is Zahra Abasheikh. I am seventeen years old and I am from Somalia and High School. In my spare time, I like to write poetry, read, play volleyball, hang out with my friends, write stories, and talk on the phone with my cats. I used to have a cat when I was living in Texas. My cat died the same day I left Houston to come to Washington.

Although I would still rather live in an independent living home then a foster home, so far, my experience with foster care has been fun and it did help me get this far in life. I mean, I really do love my old foster parents as if they were my own biological parents. I just tend to have a better relationship with them when I’m not in the house, and even when they were placements she had put me in, meaning there was not enough time for her to check out the foster parents. I would like to place them here. I believe that this is still going on with kids who are in foster care and that’s why they end up either running away or wanting to commit suicide.

If I could change one thing in the foster care system it would be to have the kids in foster care make their own decisions. I know you probably think, “They already make their own decisions.” Well, if you’re wrong; some foster kids only say things that sound good to their foster parents and nothing else. It’s not that they don’t know what they want, it’s just that we don’t want to disappoint the foster parent or case worker. I mean, some kids have probably never had an experience to say what they want or what they want. But every kid knows that they have to say something.

The reason I want to be a part of The Mockingbird Society Youth Lead program is that I believe I have a voice and the only way I can get my ideas and success out is by writing. I think I can help The Mockingbird Society but The Mockingbird Society can help me. I love to write and I’m working on finishing my book called “The Last Star.” I do believe that I can do a lot for The Mockingbird Society. I have perfect English and love to write interesting stories, and I also believe that every story has an interesting part in it, and a very important part at that.

News Flash!

March 6 WA State Representative voted on House Bill 1291 Extending Medicaid to Age 21 for Foster Youth Alying Out of Care and passed it, 95 to 1! Please see our Web site for more information.

The Scariest Day of My Life

Melissa Stringer

I just thought I had to be strong for my family, but I was wrong. What they needed was someone to be there fully not halfway. I always felt like I had to hide my tears from them… until my brother was sitting there when I was hiding my pain inside. I wouldn’t let my family see me in pain.

Sitting here now, I actually started to see something I was always afraid to see. I saw love that couldn’t be broken. There was a bond in that room that was so strong. I realized at that moment Ben would pull through for his family and for himself. I think that sometimes we forget how precious life really is and when you think of all the pain you run through, it’s worth it. I hope that this happens it often catches us by surprise and the only thing we can do is cry.

The one thing I can do for him at this point is be there for him. I have been and just pray for him. I guess the only thing that really gets me is that with all this going on my aunt and uncle still have the strength and courage that they have always had. I envy them. I envy my cousin because he is the strongest little boy I know.

This article is dedicated to you Ben Ben – I love you too.

Hip-Hop, continued from page 1

that he was allowed to hang out with at the 1st COIN and COOL EARE were other famous writers (“taggers”) from the sixties with roots in Chicago. The 1st COIN and COOL EARE are influencing our younger siblings, other children and even our peers. Children are more vulnerable to inheriting our behaviors and beliefs so it is especially important to make a positive impact.

The one thing we can and must become good role models are: spending quality time with our loved ones and our peers to let them know that they are loved and worthy, participating in activities that they enjoy and let them know what you enjoy, reading and helping them with their homework; always encouraging them to do good things and, when they have a problem, listening and giving quality advice. Being aware and active is the key to making a difference.

Realistically, for every positive there is a negative quality. We must know whether we want to be positive role models, or negative ones. Only then, we are enabled to act in the ways of that which we have chosen.

I wish I could have been a little less strong in my answer to the question, “are you people going to be the same?” I wish I could have been a little less strong in my answer to the question, “are you people going to be the same?” The day my cousin went into surgery I didn’t know what to think or do. I wish I could have been a little less strong that day.

When someone you love goes in for brain surgery, the only thing that runs through your mind is, “Will they be okay? Are they going to be the same?”
In our work and in our living, we must recognize that difference is a reason for celebration and growth, rather than for a reason of despair.

~ Audre Lorde

Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

The 1962 American classic To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee is the inspiration for The Mockingbird Society. As a child, Harper Lee’s father used to read to her, and her first love was literature. When she was about 11 years old, her mother took her to see the 1962 movie adaptation of her book. The film was a huge success, and it made a big impact on Harper Lee. She grew up in a small town in Alabama, where she had a strong sense of community and a deep respect for the values of the people who lived there. The Mockingbird Society was founded to honor this legacy and to promote social justice and equality in the world.

Women’s History Month

It’s women’s history month and so it’s time for us to pay our respects and admire some of the amazing, resilient and phenomenal women who helped shape and define our history, or, should I say, “her-story.” Great women leaders like Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Maya Angelou, Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, Ella Fitzgerald, Mia Zapata, Kathleen Hanna, Lauryn Hill, Ani DiFranco, KD Lang, and many other incredible women helped form the foundation of this, and many other countries and societies.

The Mockingbird Society would like to honor and extend our great respect for these women. They lived their lives, their accomplishments and their dedication to improving the lives of all around them. They cared about humanity, equality and rights for all people, and lived their lives according to their own self-established values. They went down in history for what they strove and fought for, socially, politically or otherwise. These women deserve to be honored, respected and admired, for they wrote the scripts to the future that has become our present, and it is indeed apparent that so many of them and still are, in some cases, brilliantly, amazingly, phenomnally, incredibly devoted and compassionate beings that brought new perspective, meaning and clarity to the world.

Get involved with women’s her-story at these and other upcoming Women’s History Month events:

Women’s History Month Events

Wednesday, March 14, and subsequent 2nd and 4th Tuesdays, 7-9 p.m.; Bush School

Women’s History Month events will feature oral histories, presentations, and discussions on the contributions of women throughout history. The events will be open to the public and are free of charge.

Adversity

by Anonymous

Today, I am only twenty one. I have many new goals today. My biggest desire is that through my experiences I can help others overcome difficult circumstances like the ones I faced back then. Regardless of how much adversity we face with enough power and hard work many more things can be accomplished. I believe this applies to everyone.

~ Forza

HB 2002: Foster to 21 still has openings and is accepting applications NOW!

Youth and families, please join us!

Mockingbird Times, March 2007