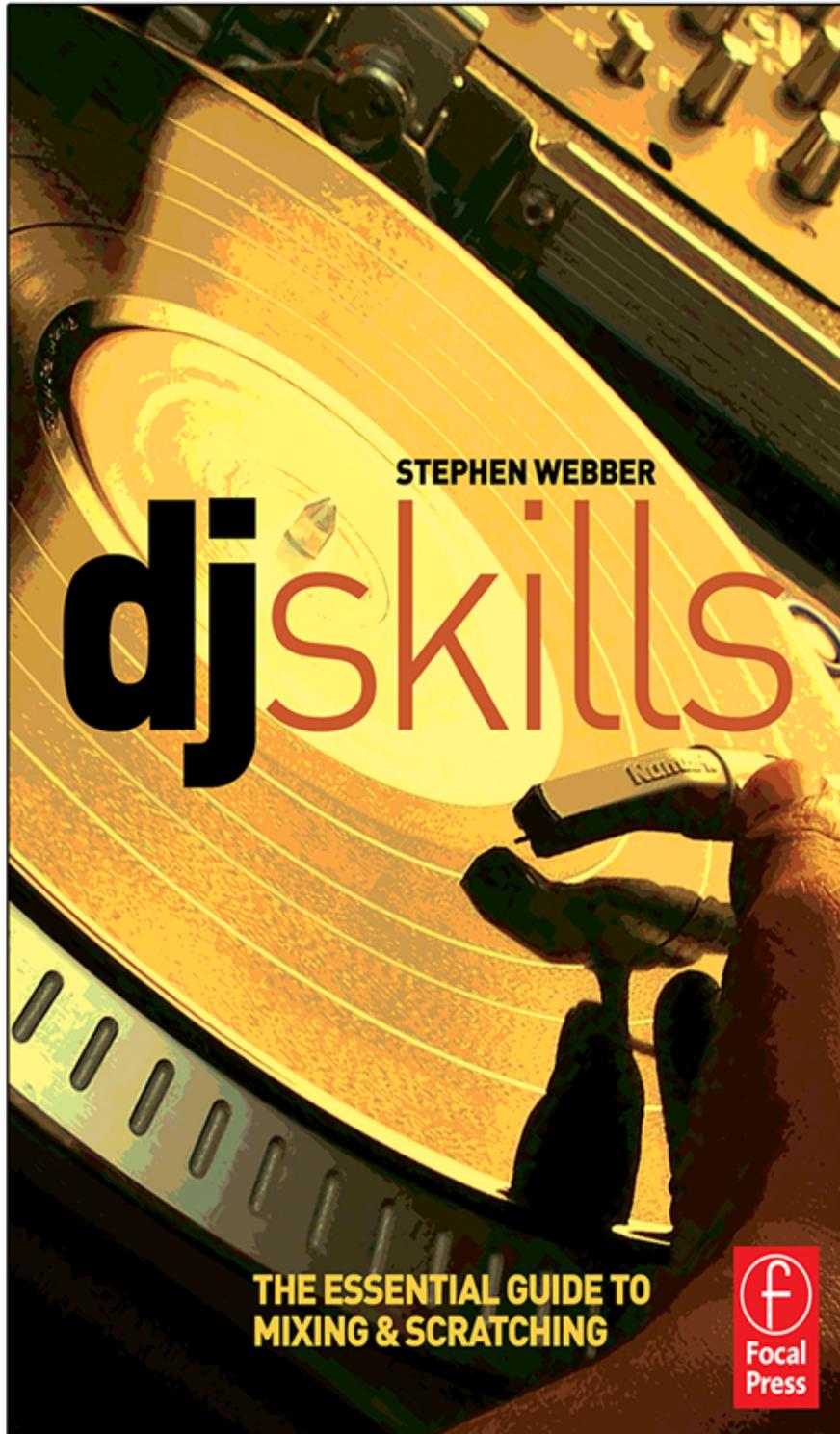




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# The Rise of The Hip-hop DJ

DJs were Hip-hop's original architects, and remain crucial to its continued development. Hip-hop is more than a style of music; it's a culture. As with any culture, there are various artistic expressions of Hip-hop, the four principal expressions being:

- visual art (graffiti)
- dance (breaking, rocking, locking, and popping, collectively known in the media as "break dancing")
- literature (rap lyrics and slam poetry)
- music (DJing and turntablism)

Unlike the European Renaissance or the Ming Dynasty, Hip-hop is a culture that is very much alive and still evolving. Some argue that Hip-hop is the most influential cultural movement in history, pointing to the globalization of Hip-hop music, fashion, and other forms of expression.

Style has always been at the forefront of Hip-hop. Improvisation is called free styling, whether in rap, turntablism, breaking, or graffiti writing. Since everyone is using the essentially same tools (spray paint for graffiti writers, microphones for rappers and beat boxers, their bodies for dancers, and two turntables with a mixer for DJs), it's the artists' personal styles that set them apart. It's no coincidence that two of the most authentic movies about the genesis of the movement are titled *Wild Style* and *Style Wars*.

There are also many styles of writing the word "Hip-hop." The mainstream media most often oscillates between "hip-hop" and "hip hop." The Hiphop Archive at Harvard writes "Hiphop" as one word,

with a capital H, embracing KRS-ONE's line of reasoning that "Hip-hop is a culture with its own foundation narrative, history, natives, and mission." After a great deal of input from many people in the Hip-hop community, I've decided to capitalize the word but keep the hyphen, to show both respect and deference to decades of tradition.

## Background

To understand any culture, it's helpful to look at the political and economic factors that faced the civilization that created it.

In 1945, Robert Moses, an autocratic New York state municipal official, proposed the Cross Bronx Expressway. His plan would displace tens of thousands of lower income families and necessitate the building of massive housing projects to replace existing tenements.

*"I dare say that only a man like Mr. Moses would have the audacity to believe that one could push (the expressway) from one end of the Bronx to the other," expressway designer Ernest Clark in an interview from the PBS series The American Experience.*

In the '50s and early '60s, scores of Bronx neighborhoods were leveled to build the eight-and-a-half mile stretch of highway, which to some became the symbol of "white flight" from the city to upscale suburbs in Westchester County and Connecticut. During Governor Rockefeller's administration, the imperious Moses was finally ousted from his state job, but the events he had set in motion were irreversible.

The Bronx became an area of destroyed communities, abandoned buildings, piles of rubble, and austere new high-rise housing projects surrounded by asphalt basketball courts and chain-link fences.

*Tough economic times in the '70s put New York City on a restrictive budget that had little money for social programs, and no money for music or art in inner-city schools.*

Gangs clashed with police and each other. The job of survival made concepts like art and civic pride seem a luxury.

In the excellent small book, *The Rough Guide to Hip-hop*, Peter Shapiro contends:

*The first generation of post-CBE (Cross Bronx Expressway) children in the Bronx was the first group to try to piece together bits from this urban scrap heap. Like carrion crows and hunter-gatherers, they picked through the debris and created their own sense of community and found vehicles for self-expression from cultural readymades, throwaways, and aerosol cans.*

All they needed was a leader, and they found Hercules.

## Kool DJ Herc

In 1955 in Jamaica, a young woman from the parish of Saint Mary gave birth to a son who would become the father of Hip-hop. As a child, Clive Campbell was inspired by local Jamaican DJs, who would set up their massive sound systems for outdoor parties in the open spaces (called "lawns") around Kingston, and enhance the dance by toasting on the mic over the instrumental sections of the records they played.

Top Jamaican DJs were fiercely competitive with each other. The size of their sound system and freshness of their records was especially important. DJs would name their sound systems. Duke Reid's was "the Trojan," while Prince Buster put together "the Supertown" sound system.

In order to play records no one else had, Jamaican DJs made record buying trips to the U.S. Eventually, the major Jamaican DJs raced to become record producers. They recorded local talent to have exclusive, danceable tracks to feed their sound systems, which led directly to the development of ska, rock steady, reggae, and dub music.

While young Clive Campbell was especially fond of records by the Godfather of Soul, American R&B singer James Brown, Clive's Jamaican roots shaped his concept of the role of the DJ and how to rock a party.

Immigrating to the Bronx in 1967 when he was twelve years old, Clive was growing up tall. At Alfred E. Smith High School, he spent a lot of time in the weight room, which earned him the nickname of Hercules. Like a lot of his friends, Hercules was a graffiti writer, running with a crew called "the Ex-Vandals." They were also getting into rocking, but the DJs playing the parties were not catering to this explosive new energy on the dance floor the way he and his young friends thought that they should. Hercules knew he could do better.

*One could argue that the first Hip-hop events happened in the community center of Clive's building, 1520 Sedgwick Avenue.*

Taking on the DJ name of Kool Herc, Clive charged the guys 50 cents, and the ladies 25. Herc's impressive presence (and mutually respectful relationship with gang members) helped keep order, and his choice of music helped draw the crowds.

At first, Herc was playing through "PA columns and guitar amps," but he quickly plowed his earnings into building up a massive sound system capable of bone-rattling bass. The Jamaican DJs he remembered from his childhood all named their sound systems, and Herc dubbed his "the Herculords system."

Another Jamaican influence was his work on the microphone. Herc would give shout-outs to his friends in the audience and extol

the virtues of his sound system, often in rhyme (à la Jamaican toasting style) over the instrumental portions of the records he was spinning.

Eventually, Herc turned his attention to increasingly complex manipulations on the turntables, and let his friends Coke La Rock and Clark Kent take over on the mic. They became known collectively as “Kool Herc and the Herculoids,” and were probably Hip-hop’s first DJ/MC crew.

One turntable technique Herc pioneered was the practice of extending “breaks.” The break was the part of the record when everything dropped out except for the drums and percussion, and sometimes the bass. This section was usually only four to sixteen bars in length, but it made the best part of the record to rhyme over, and the B-boys and B-girls (the name bestowed upon the virtuoso dancers, also known as “breakers”) would save their best, most crowd-pleasing moves for the break.

Herc got the B-boys off the sidelines and became their favorite DJ by playing just the breaks (or breakbeats) of the records, instead of the entire record. The “Clap your hands, stomp your feet” section of James Brown’s “Give It Up or Turn It Loose,” was one such favorite, as was the drum part on “Apache,” by the Incredible Bongo Band.

*Herc explained that he would go right to the “yolk” of the record, leaving off all anticipation and just playing the beats.*

By many accounts, Herc was the first DJ to take the stage with two copies of the same record in order to repeat a particular break by switching between two identical records. While he didn’t switch back and forth in perfect time, this concept of taking a portion, or “sample” of an existing record in order to create a new piece over which to rhyme (or rap) was the birth of sampling and looping, two of Hip-hop’s core musical concepts. Another Hip-hop staple Herc established is heavy bass with a sparse track, definitely an influence of his Jamaican background.

*By the summer of 1973, Kool Herc was setting up his sound system outside, like the Kingston DJs of his childhood.*

Instead of lawns, Herc and other early Hip-hop DJs would hold block parties on the asphalt basketball courts and playgrounds adjacent to neighborhood schools. The B-boys would show off their moves while the Herculoids rocked the mic, and Kool DJ Herc threw down the grooves—not just the stiff, overproduced disco sounds favored by the white DJs in the palatial clubs in Manhattan, but obscure funky records you had to dig for. These were records so sure to drive the crowd wild that Herc soaked the labels off so that competing DJs wouldn’t be able to find them. Records with soul.

The crowds were large and young. There were no movie theatres in the projects, cable TV and video games were still years away.

*In many ways, the birth of Hip-hop was the beginning of a ghetto Renaissance.*

The term “Renaissance man” depicts someone who is into many disciplines; its equivalent in Hip-hop culture is the “B-boy.” Often used to describe a virtuoso dancer, the “B” can stand for “beat” or “Bronx,” and often depicts someone skilled in multiple expressions of Hip-hop: graffiti, breaking, beat boxing (the act of emulating a drumbeat with your mouth), rapping, etc.



## Afrika Bambaataa

Impressed by Kool Herc’s block parties, young Afrika Bambaataa saw the potential of turning this burgeoning scene into a positive force with an international scope. He and his friends started to throw parties at the Bronx River Community Center, dragging their home stereos in to DJ for the gatherings. Setting up on opposite sides of the room, Bambaataa and his friends would signal each other with flashlights as their records were ending, so they could keep the music going non-stop like DJ Kool Herc.

Bambaataa was a born organizer. He was also a member of the Black Spades, one of New York City’s notorious street gangs. Inspired by the image of Africans fighting off colonialism in the 1963 movie *Zulu*, Bambaataa co-founded an organization called the Zulu Nation, and took the name of a nineteenth century Zulu King, Afrika Bambaataa, which means “Affectionate Chieftain.” It was 1973.

*Bambaataa threw himself into building the Zulu Nation, with a charter of promoting “freedom, justice, equality, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.”*

The Zulu Nation organized dance and DJ competitions and musical events, promoting peace and racial tolerance. Hip-hop crews provided an alternative to street gangs, and DJ and dance competitions were less dangerous than outright gang banging, even though fights would sometimes break out.

While violence was still a gritty reality in the poverty-stricken ghettos of New York City, the prodigious era of graffiti artists’ murals on New York trains actually coincided with a significant decline of hardcore gang activity.



**Fig. 4.1.** A recent photo of graffiti on a freight train. Graffiti like this is once again on the rise.

DJ Afrika Bambaataa quickly became known as the “Master of Records,” combining tracks from almost every genre into an eclectic mix full of surprises. “Bam” was one of the first of the young Bronx DJs to join the record pools, a system set up by the record labels to get new releases into the hands of influential DJs. This further expanded his growing collection, and turned him on to the quirky German techno band Kraftwerk.

Once record labels started to take notice of this new underground scene, Afrika Bambaataa produced “Planet Rock” (1982), a hit single containing samples from Kraftwerk’s record *Trans Europe Express*. “Planet Rock” launched a style known as electro funk, and was a big influence on Detroit techno and other genres of dance music.

*Bambaataa has toured the world promoting Hip-hop as an international movement, encouraging the locals to rap in their own language about issues important to their own lives.*

Life magazine featured Afrika Bambaataa in their “Most Important Americans of the 20th Century” issue, citing the positive work of the Zulu Nation, and Bam’s pure original vision of Hip-hop culture: peace, unity, love, and having fun.



**Fig. 4.2.** Grandmaster Flash at a recent gig.

## Grandmaster Flash

Joseph Sadler was another youngster who took inspiration from Kool Herc’s block parties and breakbeat innovations.

Sadler also studied the work of Pete DJ Jones, a more polished disco DJ whose seamless beat mixing was indicative of the exploding Manhattan club scene. When Pete Jones let young Joseph sit in on his system, Sadler discovered the concept of cueing up the next record in the headphones, a technique that made beatmatching possible.

While headphone cueing was already a standard practice among club DJs, Sadler’s mixer didn’t have this capability. Sadler was an industrious student of electronics, so he designed his own cue system, built it with parts from Radio Shack, then Krazy Glued it to the top of his mixer, and called it his “peek-a-boo system.”

Sadler set to work practicing, intent on developing a new level of DJ skills. Taking the name Grandmaster Flash, he combined the

seamless flow of Pete Jones with Herc's practice of repeating just the breakbeats and climaxes. In the process, Flash developed several new techniques, and redefined what it meant to be a Hip-hop DJ.

*Many point to Grandmaster Flash as being the first DJ to approach the turntable as a musical instrument.*

Flash was the first to mark his records with a line to show the beginning of a cue, something he dubbed the "clock theory." This allowed him to seamlessly extend any musical section using two copies of a record, perfectly keeping the beat. Flash developed and named the "quick mix theory," and executed it by counting the exact number of backspins necessary to repeat specific numbers of bars or beats. Practicing with two copies of Lowdown by Boz Skaggs, Flash got to where he could reconstruct arrangements on the fly.

He put together a set of only "the best parts" of a string of records, but when he first unveiled his new techniques in front of an audience, the response was anything but enthusiastic. It would take months of gigs for Flash to hit his stride and find his audience, but once he did, he was celebrated by legions of fans, including Debra Harry (AKA Blondie) who wrote and recorded "Rapture" in tribute to Flash.

MCs also gravitated towards Flash, and after packing Harlem's Audubon Ballroom with close to three thousand fans in September of 1976, Flash and his crew of MCs were at the vanguard of this new underground movement, which would eventually be known as Hip-hop.

**Flash organized his MCs into Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, a crew of rappers consisting of Cowboy (Keith Wiggins), Kidd Creole (Danny Glover), Melle Mel (Melvin Glover), Mr. Ness (Eddie Morris), and Rahiem (Guy Williams). They developed many of the house-rocking practices, phrases, and rhymes that became standards of the Hip-hop party, along with the Cold Crush Brothers, featuring DJs Charlie Chase and Tony Tone, MCs Grandmaster Caz, JDL, Easy AD, and the Almighty Kay-Gee.**

Early on, when fans and entrepreneurs would recommend to Flash that he and his crew make a record, Flash would wonder out loud why anyone would buy a record of some guys rhyming over other records. Rapping was something that happened at parties and nightclubs.

Everyone was taken by surprise in October of 1979 when an unknown crew called the Sugar Hill Gang scored a hit with "Rapper's Delight" on Joe and Sylvia Robinson's Harlem-based Sugar Hill Records. The hit proved there was an audience for rap records, considered up until that point to be a live phenomenon.

Flash and the Five responded immediately with a record of their own titled Superrappin' on the fledgling Enjoy label. They moved to Sugar Hill Records in 1980 to reach a wider audience, and found that audience with the party rap record Freedom.

*In 1981, an entirely different kind of record, aptly titled The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel showcased the culmination of turntable artistry up until that point in history.*

Performed live by Flash alone at the decks, the seven-minute collage still stands as a masterpiece of cutting, mixing and in-your-face creativity.

Flash and the Five also released The Message, considered by many critics to be rap's first socially challenging record, as well as Flash to the Beat and White Lines (Don't Do It), before splitting up.

Grandmaster Flash is playing better than ever as of this writing, and if you get the chance to see him live, don't miss the opportunity. The Old School doesn't get any better than Grandmaster Flash rocking a Hip-hop party.



## GrandWizzard Theodore

As a kid, Theodore Livingston developed "needle dropping," a technique that involves looping a section of a single record, in time, by lifting the tone arm and consistently dropping the needle an exact number of grooves earlier.

"My mother had a phonograph that she played in the living room," explains Theodore. "When she wasn't around, I used to take 45s, like 'Scorpio' by Dennis Coffey or James Brown records like 'Funky President,' and when the break part came, I used to skip the needle back and forth and forth and back, not knowing that my needle dropping skills were coming into play."

Theodore's brother, DJ Mean Jean, was Grandmaster Flash's DJ partner for a while, and Flash sometimes had young Theodore demonstrate his amazing needle drop technique during his sets.

*Many credit Grand Wizzard Theodore as being the DJ who invented scratching.*

Like Newton's apple, scratching found Theodore by accident.

"It was 1975, I was twelve and a half or thirteen, living with my mother on 168th street and Boston road. I was basically in the house trying to make a tape. Back then we didn't have no tape deck—you had to put the (boom) box in front of the speaker on top of a chair and hope that you got the clearest sound possible."

"My mother is the kind of person where, she doesn't play; she just comes out swinging. So I was playing two records, and she bangs

on the door, and told me: 'Listen, either you turn the music down, or you turn the music off.' While she was in the doorway screaming at me, I was playing one record on my right hand side, and I was holding the other record with my left hand. I wanted to keep the groove going, so I was moving the record back and forth while the record on the right hand side was playing. When she left, I realized what I was doing. Sometimes you find yourself doing something you've never done before, and you just keep practicing it and perfecting it."

<b>Reggae</b>	70-82
<b>Trip Hop</b>	80-92
<b>Hiphop</b>	89-105
<b>Acid Jazz</b>	110
<b>House</b>	119-128
<b>Break Beat &amp; Electro</b>	130-132
<b>Progressive</b>	130-135
<b>Trance</b>	135-140
<b>Techno</b>	140 and up
<b>Hardcore</b>	150-160
<b>Drum 'an Bass</b>	160-170

1. Davis was about as far from the New York City Hip-hop scene as anyone could get. Somehow, Josh (AKA DJ Shadow) turned out to be a Hip-hop DJ.
2. James Lavelle was the first to give Davis a chance when he was starting up Mo'Wax Records in the U.K. After many singles, Shadow dropped his first full-length album, *Entroducing*, which saw major popularity in U.K., Japan, and eventually the U.S.
3. The music was largely made up of songs from *Entroducing* and *Psyence Fiction*, but also included the *Dark Days Theme*, which was released as a single in 2000.
4. He also appears prominently in the Sundance Award-winning Doug Pray film *Scratch*.

## DJ Shadow: The Berklee Seminar

While growing up in the small college town of Davis, California, Josh Davis was about as far from the New York City Hip-hop scene as anyone could get. Somehow, Josh (AKA DJ Shadow) turned out to be a Hip-hop DJ.

Shadow is considered one of the pioneers of sample-based musical composition. James Lavelle was the first to give Davis a chance when he was starting up Mo'Wax Records in the U.K. After many singles, Shadow dropped his first full-length album, *Entroducing*, which saw major popularity in U.K., Japan, and eventually the U.S.

Shadow provided the music for the powerful documentary *Dark Days*, a film about homeless life in New York City subways. The music was largely made up of songs from *Entroducing* and *Psyence Fiction*, but also included the *Dark Days Theme*, which was released as a single in 2000.

He also appears prominently in the Sundance Award-winning Doug Pray film *Scratch*.

*In Scratch, Shadow gives the audience a glimpse into his rigorous application of the Hip-hop tradition of digging, searching for records everywhere and anywhere.*

Producing is another aspect of Shadow's career. He's played a major role in the production of records from Blackalicious, Latyrx, Lateef, and Lyrics Born on the SoleSides Crew label.

As a live DJ, Shadow was one of the first to embrace video DJing off of DVDs with the Pioneer DVJ. His current stage set-up takes video DJing further, with nine video screens presenting Shadow in silhouette.

Since *Entroducing*, Shadow's output has included *The Private Press* on MCA records, and *The Outsider* on Universal, which features collaborations with singers, rappers and live instruments, in addition to Shadow's virtuosity on the sampler and newly honed ProTools chops.

What follows are the comments that DJ Shadow conferred upon a packed recital hall at the Berklee College of Music before the release of *The Private Press* on MCA records, and represents an exciting moment in time for an artist whose artistic sensibilities and use of technology is constantly evolving. Full of his unique vision and philosophy of music and culture, this exchange of ideas shines new light onto one of Hip-hop's most notorious shadows.

Figs. 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 DJ Shadow tells about his journey from DJ to producer and recording artist at his seminar at Berklee College of Music.

*The first music that I remember pursuing on my own was music that was very technologically advanced.*

In 1979, Lips Incorporated had a record called *Funky Town*. I liked the robot voices and the laser sounds because it sounded like *Star Wars*.

My mom was always very suspicious of anything mainstream. She was always knocking anything that was too "show-bizzy." In 1980, the stuff I was subjected to was music like Eddie Money and Eddie Rabbit. So, that's what was going on, and I was like, "Man, I know there's gotta be something else!"

Then I heard Devo. That was the first thing I ever spent my own money on. That and *Rapper's Delight* were the first rap records I ever heard. It still sounded kind of like disco to me, especially *Rapper's Delight*, which came out in 1979. That was considered to be the first rap record.

*In 1982, my life changed when I heard The Message by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. What blew me away initially wasn't the music; it was the raw delivery of the lyrics. It was more potent than anything I had ever heard musically.*

It wasn't poetry; it was just reality. It was a very rugged song about a culture that I didn't know anything about, and about a city that I didn't know anything about: New York City.

Somewhere, I still have a tape. I used to lean over and tape the music that I liked off of a little AM clock radio. We're not talkin' about hi-fi here. I would just press record, and my parents would come in and be like, "What is this?"

I was goin', "Shhhhh, shhh, shh!"

A few weeks later, I heard *Planet Rock* by Afrika Bambaataa. These songs were "contemporary urban." Historically, a couple of years later, around 1985, you had the whole breakdancing phenomena, and Hip-hop really blew up on a wide scale. It was a media fad, and a lot of hype. You had movies like *Breakin'* and *Beat Street*, and that took Hip-hop to a nationwide level.

*The down side was that lots of people thought it had all been cooked up by the media. In 1985, everybody thought that Hip-hop, break dancing, graffiti, and everything associated with Hip-hop culture was just dead.*

That was definitely a bad year for Hip-hop music because a lot of artists sort of internalized that attitude and thought, "Well, I guess we're just supposed to get paid real quick and get out."

Then '86 came around. People used to come up to me and be like, "Oh yeah, you're the breakdance kid. You're the rap kid. Why are you listening to that?" It was music that was absolutely despised by every mainstream media outlet from Rolling Stone to MTV. They didn't realize that there was a much broader cultural context.

Now, I'm living in the major-label reality of the record world, and it's ill. Some of you might want to know how I ended up here.

I bought my first turntable in '84, and I was imitating all my heroes.

*I was imitating scratches that I heard on records like One for the Treble by Davie D or any of the early Run DMC stuff with Jam Master Jay.*

Any record that had a lot of scratching in it, I was trying to do.

In '87, I started playing mixes on a college radio station in town [Davis, CA]. I was a sophomore in high school and my first mentor was a guy named Oris. His handle was "Big O, the Ultimate Gigolo." He had the first and longest-running rap show on KDDS. He was the first person to say, "Man, how are you hearin' about all these rap records? I'm doin' a rap show, and I've never even heard of this stuff."

So, I started playing these mixes and bumped into a rapper named Paris. He was from San Francisco and was going to school there. When he got signed, he blew up. A couple of years later, after he graduated, we hooked up, and I started doing some production work for him.

Eventually, I just started sending tapes out. There's this station in San Francisco called KMEL. It was a very influential urban station. This station, at the time, was breaking records like Naughty By Nature's OPP, Chub Rock, and Main Source's Lookin' at the Front Door.

*I called up the program director there, and said, "You need to hire me. Nobody else is doing all Hip-hop mixes."*

He said, "Well, why don't you come up and tell my why?" I did, and he said, "Well, you're pretty funny. I'm gonna give you a slot."

By now, I had started college. I still didn't really know what I wanted to do. So, I sent some tapes around. My confidence was up. At that time, if you were doing mix shows on KMEL, you were getting jocked by every record label person who wanted their product played on the air. I just used to get bucket loads of promos from all the labels, and got to know all the A&R people. I said, "Well, check this out. I've been sending you my mixes so you know that your stuff is being played on the air, and now I've got some beats I want you to check out."

We're talking about labels like Profile, Wild Pitch, Big Beat—all pretty reputable labels. All of them wanted to give me work, but would say things like, "Why do you have to sample this weird stuff? Why can't you take familiar samples and loop them around?"

That's what everybody wanted me to do, and I was really depressed about it. But, one man gave me a shot. He worked for a Hip-hop magazine called The Source. I would send him a tape and say, "I think you should do this. This would be a good thing to put out."

*He would kind of laugh, and say, "Okay, I think I can get you three grand for this mix." I would hang up the phone and be like, "Very good!" That's when I thought, "This might work out!" [end pull-quote]*

Persistence is just the ultimate key, and also having confidence in the fact that you are presenting something different. If you're just trying to be yourself and offer music you really love, then somebody will eventually pick up on your passion and reciprocate that. That's what I think happened to me.

We had a show, one time in 1993, and we were sitting there putting the labels on the records in the parking lot before the gig. We had five hundred copies just to give out. And like I say: persistence. Record after record after record, never expecting anything. You never wanna put all your eggs in one basket.

*You just have to put out everything you do with the thought that, "I'll be lucky if this gets any attention whatsoever."*

I think, if I had my way, I'd be at home all the time, just working out of my house. But, people like to see that you can come out there and project yourself and not be afraid to play in front of people.

My next big break was when I got a call from James Lavelle at a label called Mo' Wax. He said, "Hey, would you like to do something really different?" And I said, "Yes, please!" All these other rap labels just wanted me to recycle. I did that, and it caught on in England. I worked that angle and stayed out there for a long time.

*Next thing I knew, I was putting out Endtroducing. I think if you just do things for the money, you're never going to make it anyway, so I like to do things that are going to be fun for me.*



### Where did you get your name?

I chose the name Shadow because, at the time in late '89 and early 1990, a lot of established Hip-hop producers were starting to step out from behind the boards and try to make their own name. I just thought that a producer's role should be in the back. I identify more with directors than actors. Directors can call all the shots, and they can still walk down the street and nobody knows who they are. I just liked that.

### Did you ever consider putting out a mix CD like Dan the Automator?

Yeah, actually, I have done something before. I did something called Brain Freeze. My man Cut Chemist from Jurassic Five and I wanted to do something unique because we had never DJed together before.

We decided to do a mix routine using all 45s. We performed it in San Francisco, and luckily, I taped our last rehearsal before we went out to the club, and that's what ended up being Brain Freeze.

People say, "Well, what's the big deal with mixing 45s?" But if you've ever tried, then you know what I mean. They're just a lot more temperamental, and they jump a lot easier.

How did you make the selections for your Brain Freeze record? I think that was just some of the hippest, most different-sounding stuff, and I was just wondering if you had that in mind before you started on the record.

One of the reasons Cut Chemist wanted to do this with me was because—and I'm not tooting my own horn because he's got strengths that I couldn't match—but he knew I was winning on the 45 side. And he just wanted to get inside the boxes and see who's in there. We just sort of dumped everything out on the table, and went, "Okay, we know we gotta play a certain amount of samples that people maybe don't know what the original source is. We gotta play a few things that are gonna get the floor going. We gotta play a few things that are gonna make people think." I think Brain Freeze was a good exercise for us to do, but I think Product Placement was a little craftier.

On Endtroducing, you had a track called Why Hip-hop Sucks in '96 with the punch line being "It's the money." What are your current feelings about Hip-hop?

It's a complicated thing. In the mid '90s, if you were making Hip-hop, you either belonged in the underground category or the commercial category. If you were making underground Hip-hop, you had to go to great lengths to articulate what time it was, and that you were down and weren't going to try to exploit the cultural aspects of Hip-hop. I think it's real cool right now.

*At the time, I was frustrated—not only with the commercialism of the mainstream stuff, but also this real incestuous and closed-minded attitude of a lot of people in underground Hip-hop.*

People were trying to keep a lot of aspects of the culture alive. I feel that Hip-hop music—rap music—is real strong right now.



**Fig. 4.2.3.** DJ Shadow addresses a full house in the David Friend Recital Hall at Berklee College of Music.

### Could you talk about Dark Days and the film industry vs. the music industry?

Dark Days was a documentary that I wrote the music for. It's the only film work I've ever really enjoyed. All I can tell you, from my experience in making film, is that the film industry can be even more obnoxious than the music industry. There's more money at stake, and people are more neurotic, and oftentimes, music is the very last thing the director thinks of. They think visually.

A lot of them do not think musically, especially if they're trying to make a Hollywood blockbuster. Music is just like, open up the latest copy of Rolling Stone and pick out four hot faces and ask them to do something for a soundtrack.

If my name is attached to something I need be able to put my weight behind it. Dark Days was the first time anybody came along and said, "This movie is at least a year away from being finished. I want you to really check it out." And when I saw it, I was blown away.



*It's about homeless people living in the subways in New York, and the movie was also made by the subjects.*

It's very fascinating and life affirming, and all the things that you hope a good movie or a record would be.

Is it a pain clearing all of the samples you use? Is there a lot of paperwork involved? How do you go about it?

Sample clearance is difficult, in certain cases.

*My personal philosophy is that my music is a collage medium.*

I look at it and go, "Yeah, that's a new piece of work." You didn't just take one giant image and put it in a new frame, like a lot of people who've gotten in trouble with samples were trying to do. I feel like what I do is a lot different.

Having said that, if I do sample something substantial, I don't have a problem trying to clear it, but I try and use things that are really off the beaten path. If I was just sampling James Brown and Sly Stone, it's easy. They have a whole business in place that takes care of sample clearances.

One sample on my new record is a whole vocal track, which of course I'm going to clear, but the record I took it from says "Number 321 out of 500." There's no information on it whatsoever, so we're just stuck. All I can do at that point is put it out, and hope that everything works out.

### **Was Private Press more software based, or was it all done with your Akai MPC sampler?**

Personally, I've always been afraid of embracing too much technology too quickly, because I don't like to spend my work time reading manuals. I'd rather just plug in and go.

*So, in that respect, I do use Pro Tools, but I still program in the MPC.*

I have two MIDI-ed together now, which is actually something that the Bomb Squad, Public Enemy's producer, used to do in the late '80s. They had two or three SP1200 drum machines MIDI-ed together. That is how they were able to create, what is, to me, some of the most amazing sample-based work ever.

### **What kind of Akai MPC are you using these days?**

In '96, I bought the 3000 and shortly thereafter, the 2000 came out, but I didn't like working with the waveform. I liked working with numbers instead, so I stuck with my 3000. Eventually, I bought another 3000. Now I just use both MIDI-ed together, and I do all my sequencing in the MPC.

### **Do you find the more that technology becomes available and the easier it gets to use, that you use it more?**

Always, in the past, I've tried to be very cognizant of not focusing too much on technology.

*I like the music to be from the heart, not from the brain.*

When I was working on this record, I decided to switch it up and do a song that's based entirely on a technical concept.

One song I wrote, called "Monosyllabic," was made entirely from one sample. Every single sound had to be extracted from the same two-bar loop. It was definitely the most labor-intensive thing I have ever done. And then to make it a little bit harder, I prohibited myself from using software programs to make crazy sounds. For example, reversing a small second of the sample, gating it, putting it through a Leslie cabinet, having a speaker hung in front of it, and then re-sampling that new sound. It's very unlike anything I've ever done.

### **How do you decide what direction you are going to take a certain track or sample? Is it an experimental thing, trying different things out?**

Yeah, plus lots of times, the nature of the sample will dictate what it should be. Some things just sound like they need to be treated in a certain way. I try to let the song and the sample dictate that, rather than saying, "I'm gonna run everything through my favorite piece of gear."

But, like I say, unlike a lot of producers—and I sometimes consider this a fault of mine—I'm just not up on all the latest gear. I spend more time taking in new music for inspiration, rather than scouring the music stores for the latest, greatest program.

### **Do you ever do live overdubs? Say, a live bass line?**

I like when producers mix live instrumentation with samples. Organized Noise and Outkast, for example, do it.

*For me personally, though, the sampler is my instrument of choice.*

It's the instrument I most identify myself with. I consider it a challenge to just constantly try and motivate my ears to do new things with samples. For that reason, I resist, whenever possible.

For this album, it's 100 percent samples again, and I didn't actually set out to do that. A lot of times, you'd have a record that people would find amazing that was just a four-bar funk loop with a sax playing over it for four minutes. I just thought, "Man, this is lazy." That's why, when I first started doing press, I was very vocal about no live stuff.