

## Jazz's Influence on the Production of Rap Music

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### Abstract

*Historically, jazz has struggled to maintain a stable place in the music industry. The pay model used by music streaming services such as Spotify pays the artists each time their songs are streamed, inherently undercutting genres such as jazz and classical, where a single song may be over ten minutes long. Financial struggle has coincided with academic underrepresentation for jazz, with much of its scholarly discourse focusing on its struggles, rather than innovation within jazz or how jazz is influencing other genres. The purpose of this research is to highlight jazz influences used in the production or composition of rap music instrumentals. This production includes all of the compositional elements of the "beat," or backing music that rappers make music over. Through an oral history methodology, the perspectives of industry experts will be used to illustrate the influence of jazz. This research holds an important place in the current music industry as it would highlight why consumers find aesthetics associated with jazz to be appealing.*

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### Literature Review

Over the last two decades, both jazz and rap music have been significantly underrepresented in music-based scholarly discourse. Overall, the literature surrounding rap music is quite limited from its start in the 70s until the mid-2000s. While rap has started seeing greater academic representation in recent years (Williams, 2011, 437), jazz's literature still focuses on the debate as to whether the genre is formally irrelevant (Walls, 2009, 1). This asphyxiation of jazz's struggle to see mainstream success in today's music industry has hindered the genre from moving past the success it saw as a mainstream genre in the '40s, resulting in little room being left to highlight new artists

or innovations in the genre's sound. Those scholars who have highlighted modern jazz have noted its influence on numerous artists and genres that are seeing current success (Stewart, 2016, 305). Numerous current rap producers, including Flying Lotus and Terrace Martin, have noted the influence jazz has had on their art, and artists such as Chris Dave and Robert Glasper, who seek to fuse jazz and rap music using a mix of electronic and acoustic instruments are seeing considerable commercial success (Thomas, 2017, 29). The pattern of jazz aesthetics being implemented in rap music in recent years acts as the primary focus of this research, which will look further into what brings the genres of jazz and rap together, and

how their relationship may impact the future of both genres.

### **Methods and Findings**

This research is based on the oral history methodology, utilizing interviews as a method of gathering first-hand perspectives of music producers, including Lamont Holden and Michael D'errico. To thoroughly contextualize jazz and rap's relationship, the perspectives of music business professional Dr. Dain Estes, as well as seasoned jazz pianist Jarrett Cherner were also included.

When asked how producers integrate jazz aesthetics into their sound, both Holden and D'errico cited sampling, musical borrowing of snippets of a song used for recontextualizing it into a new piece, as the primary technique used by producers. On this topic, D'errico noted, "Hip hop has always used samples to pay homage to black artists before them, such as Public enemy sampling James Brown" (M. D'errico, personal communication, February 17, 2020). This statement highlights a cultural connection that rap and jazz share as historically African-American art forms. Through sampling, producers aim to place themselves within a lineage of African American music as a way of showing respect. Similarly, Holden cited young artists as reviving older music through their sound, stating, "Look at a YBN Cordea, he's brand new and has a heavy influence

from Tribe Called Quest. So there'll be kids who listen to him and go back and listen to Tribe" (J. Holden, personal communication, January 7th, 2020). Holden noted a "cyclical nature" in musical influence, explaining that many older genres are often recontextualized into modern music through techniques such as sampling, citing the 90s boom of jazz-rap groups such as A Tribe Called Quest and De La Soul as a previous example. Many narrators also shared similar views on why jazz currently struggles commercially, citing an unwillingness to let go of the sounds of the past and explore new ideas. On this topic, Dr. Dain Estes noted, "I think what we're seeing with jazz is that the innovation is coming from hip hop artists that are employing jazz and the jazz artists they're working with" (D. Estes, personal communication, February 12th, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Throughout each of the four interviews, narrators acknowledged a potent connection between the sonic aesthetics of jazz and rap music. As rap continues to hold a large share of the mainstream, it will be crucial for the development of both genres to see what success jazz-influenced producers see. If producers continue to bridge the two genres together, jazz may find the innovation it needs to regain commercial viability.

### References

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