

The Rebirth of Hip-Hop

☒ You can't tell by looking, but I'm a big fan of hip-hop.

Let me clarify.

I grew up listening to lots of music: southern gospel, rock, country, R&B, pop, black gospel and old school rap. That probably defies logic to most, but that's just the way it was around the Bonham household back in the late '70s through the late '80s. Actually, anything that wasn't Christian was usually smuggled into the house by my oldest sister Rhonda and then secretly enjoyed by me.

We're talking Billy Joel, Queen, Journey, Chicago, Earth, Wind & Fire, Brothers Johnson, KC and the Sunshine Band, Andy Gibb, Chaka Khan and Boston all mixed together with the Singing Americans, Cathedrals, Winans, Commissioned, Amy Grant, Gaithers, Evie and everything else you can imagine.

Later on, I ventured into hard rock and metal (mostly Christian bands like Stryper, Guardian, Barren Cross and Bloodgood). But my true love was urban music that eventually gave way to a strong affinity for the early pioneers of hip-hop (i.e. Run DMC, Whodini, Fat Boys, Grandmaster Flash, ., Kool Moe Dee, L.L. Cool J and Grandmaster Melle Mel).

I mentioned all of that to help you understand why I'm so passionate about a music genre referred to by many names: Christian hip-hop, positive hip-hop, Gospel rap, holy hip-hop, etc.

To be honest, I wasn't always so gung-ho about it. After all, the earliest forms weren't exactly awe-inspiring. But despite

the shortcomings of those early pioneers of Christian rap, I tried really hard to appreciate their ministry and their music while staying away from the general market offerings that were becoming increasingly violent, sexual, misogynist and anti-authority.

But as time passed, countless faith-influenced emcees and disc jockeys have emerged and the game has slowly but surely begun to change. I hate to start naming names, but I can't help but mention a few off the top of my head: RedCloud, Pigeon John, GRITS, Japhia Life, Lecrae, Pettidee, Cross Movement, Trip Lee, Tedashii, Urban D, L.A. Symphony, Page One & DJ Because, Da' Truth, Kaboose, B. Reith, KJ-52, Shonlock, Braille, Group One Crew and Verbs.

So yeah, I may not look like the typical hip-hop head, but for some strange reason, I have this undying passion for the art form. I don't love all hip-hop. I just love all quality hip-hop. And in my opinion, most of the best hip-hop is based in the faith culture. Even the best general market hip-hop out there has varying degrees of faith attached such as thought-provoking lyricists like Talib Kweli and Common.

About two years ago, my frustration with the Christian music industry's lack of support for it's hip-hop brethren caused me to wonder what could be done to let people know about this music that deserves to be heard by a wider audience. That caused me to pursue some sort of documentary project about the history of the genre and it's struggle to survive in an industry that doesn't support it and within the confines of a church body that hardly understands it. Some footage for such a documentary has been shot and its tentative title is *The Rebirth of Hip-Hop*.

Even though I might not be the most qualified person (at least

to the naked eye) for the job, I would love to be part of a group of people helping to bring this valuable music genre to the forefront of the Christian music industry and beyond.

My point for this blog is simply this. Whether you like hip-hop or not, I would challenge every reader out there to find ways to bridge the gap between these artists and the audience that so desperately needs to hear their positive Gospel-infused message. If you know someone who listens to Jay-Z, Lil' Wayne and the like, do your homework and get artists like Pettidee, Japhia Life and Lecrae into their iPods.

In Romans 11:29, Paul writes that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (21st Century King James Version). I've heard various interpretations of that Scripture. When it comes to music, I believe that God is the sole giver of all talent, and the artists behind the Christian hip-hop scene have definitely been blessed with a significant measure of rhythmic and, yes, musical ability.

Just because the beat or the style of delivery don't appeal to your sensibilities doesn't mean they can't make a difference in the lives of young people and hip-hop fans of all ages who are looking for some hope in an otherwise hopeless world.

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