

KEEPIN' **IT REAL.**

the Positive Influence of Hip-Hip and
R&B Music on Today's Youth

By Corrie Pelc



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When most people think of hip-hop and R&B music, certain thoughts and imagery may come to mind - violent behavior, money being thrown around, scantily-clad dancing women, luxury cars, and bling, bling, and more bling. None of these things are what people would call "positive," especially when it comes to having an impact on today's younger generation. Nor are the stories in the media of hip-hop and R&B musicians surrounding violence against women (such as with R&B singers Chris Brown and Rhianna), murder (such as the shooting death of rapper Tupac Shakur), and drug use (such as the deaths of DJ AM and rapper Ol' Dirty Bastard).

However, there is a positive influence that hip-hop and R&B music has on today's youth, mainly in its ability to tell a story from the perspective of youth living in urban environments, says Toki Wright, hip-hop artist and Hip-Hop Studies program coordinator at the McNally Smith College of Music in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He explains that traditionally hip-hop has been about what is going on for young people in the inner city, which has opened the door for certain conversations that had never happened before. And

discussing topics such as sex and drugs is a positive because we are living in a society where these things exist. So the positive, Wright says, is in addressing these topics rather than sweeping them under the rug.

Hip-hop and R&B's ability to freely discuss real topics, regardless if they are negative or not, is also deemed a positive by Adam Cruz, DJ and producer for indie music company Mixtape Sessions. And it's this realism that had an impact on Cruz. "Whenever I heard the truth in an artist's music, I could relate more," he explains. "I felt they were a friend telling me the secrets of their life. It also implored me to get productive through its encouraging lyrics."

In order to keep current and continue to tell it how it is, Cruz says the content of hip-hop and R&B music has been changing to reflect what's going on in the world today. "I think that, more than ever before, youth look to hip-hop and R&B artists to tell their true stories through music," he says. "Slowly, it seems like these artists are shifting their lyrical content, especially in light of the unstable economy and other current events." For example, Cruz says both lyrical and video content for hip-hop and R&B artists is moving away towards showcasing an extravagant lifestyle. "In today's world, the idea of, for example, that a rapper will throw hundreds of

dollars into a crowd is less in vogue than in prior years. You can even see this in more recent music videos. The over-the-top budgets just aren't there anymore."

Wright also says hip-hop music had an absolutely positive impact on his own youth. "No where else could I look to see people who looked like me or dressed like me - it felt good," he says. Wright says hip-hop was his version of a great storyteller that was coming from a familiar situation and translating it into words, and it taught him at a young age that he could also have his voice heard in the same way with practice and experience.

So what about today's youth - who are the hip-hop and R&B artists that they can look to for a positive message? Cruz sites current hip-hop and R&B artists such as Mary J. Blige ("She is

honesty and artistic evolution personified"), rapper Lupe Fiasco ("Really brings a strong sense of truth to his work - a level of authenticity that is rare") and singer/rapper M.I.A. As having a strong positive influence on today's youth.

"Even a 50 Cent or Eminem that people don't always regard as being a positive influence are by having a different perspective on the world," Wright adds.

And as a father himself, Cruz sees hip-hop and R&B music continuing to have a positive influence on the future younger generation. "I think we'll see more honesty in the content of music (and) this will help the art of good music evolve," he says. "My kids will hopefully reap the rewards of years of good music to come."

