

Dena Sweat  
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### An Acquired Taste

Hiphop is like my favorite dish, spaghetti; I'm not sure when it became my favorite but I know I've always enjoyed it. I can't recall the beginning of this love but I can remember when I've come across the best and worst of this Italian cuisine. I can describe in detail my feelings of elation when I smell the sauce simmering on the stove. Harsh thoughts flood my mind of cooks who have spent all of 10 minutes preparing what they call spaghetti.

My experiences with Hiphop mirror these encounters, both good and bad. To me, Hiphop encompasses more than beats and rapping. I choose to use KRS-One's definition (and spelling) of Hiphop as it relates to a culture. The illustration of Hiphop as being something you live as opposed to an art form goes beyond its musical basis. The music is the stem of my Hiphop tree, while elements like fashion, breaking, and language are its branches.

One of my earliest experiences with Hiphop occurred in 1988 with the song "It Takes Two"<sup>1</sup> by Rob Base and DJ EZ Rock. This particular summer, like so many others, was spent at my grandparent's home in Hampton, Virginia. My two sisters and I would entertain ourselves by creating dances to the latest songs. My older sister, 14 years old at the time, was the choreographer, DJ, and costume designer. We practiced day after day perfecting routines to various songs. When my parents came to visit, we would perform in full costume (meaning biker shorts with a multi-colored shirt, two pairs of interchangeable coordinating socks, and a pair of British Knights). When I think back

I can't help but smile and "be geeked" as Common used in his song "I Used to Love H.E.R."<sup>2</sup> Hip-hop, at the time, was a reflection of myself, fun and exciting.

Unfortunately, my opinion changed years later. With the infiltration of gangsta rap into the Hip-hop culture, the mood changed from carefree and lighthearted to serious and violent. Although I kept up with the most recent rappers, fashion, and terminology, I wasn't the huge "Hip-hop Head" I once was. One particular experience I distinctly remember occurred in early 1997. My friend and I were watching MTV when a bulletin announcing the murder of Biggie Smalls flashed across the screen. I was in shock when my friend uttered "Good. That's what he gets for killing my baby Tupac."

Appalled by her comment, the breaking news, and an overwhelming feeling of sadness, I just sat there asking myself "When did it (Hip-hop) become so serious?" Shortly after, I lost interest altogether. I heard the latest songs from my younger sister's radio but I really wasn't listening. The rappers weren't talking about anything of great importance and their lyrics weren't profound or even creative. Smoking blunts, having random sex, and the entire gangsta lifestyle was an aspect of the culture to which I could not relate.

Similar to my behavior after coming across some awful spaghetti, I stayed away for a while but I returned. One album, *Black on Both Sides* released in 1999 by Mos Def made me realize that there were still Emcees out there who had a message. One song for instance "Mr. Nigga"<sup>3</sup> spoke of the social inequalities and injustices African American males experience. This song and others like it made me seek out authentic and creative Emcees who don't fall into, as one critic labeled the "plastic rap," image.

Common acknowledges the commercialization and exploitation of the Hip-hop but remains hopeful that it will one day cease. Like Common, my experiences with Hip-hop have been both positive and negative. My taste and opinion of the Hip-hop culture is ever changing. New artists, fashions, and trends are the flavors and seasonings in this dish I love, called Hip-hop.

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Base and DJ EZ Rock, *It Takes Two* (Arista Records, 1988)

<sup>2</sup> Common Sense, *Resurrection* (Relativity Records, 1994)

<sup>3</sup> Mos Def, *Black on Both Sides* (Rawkus Records LLC, 1999)