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The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash: My Life, My Beats



Synopsis

A no-holds-barred memoir from the primary architect of hip hop and one of the culture's most revered music icons—both the tale of his life and legacy and a testament to dogged determination. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five fomented the musical revolution known as hip hop. Theirs was a groundbreaking union between one DJ and five rapping MCs. One of the first hip hop posses, they were responsible for such masterpieces as “The Message” and “Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel.” In the 1970s Grandmaster Flash pioneered the art of break-beat DJing—the process of remixing and thereby creating a new piece of music by playing vinyl records and turntables as musical instruments. Disco-era DJs spun records so that people could dance. The original turntablist, Flash took it a step further by cutting, rubbing, backspinning, and mixing records, focusing on “breaks”—what Flash described as “the short, climactic parts of the records that really grabbed me”—as a way of heightening musical excitement and creating something new. Now the man who paved the way for such artists as Jay-Z, Sean “P. Diddy” Combs, and 50 Cent tells all—from his early days on the mean streets of the South Bronx, to the heights of hip hop stardom, losing millions at the hands of his record label, his downward spiral into cocaine addiction, and his ultimate redemption with the help and love of his family and friends. In this powerful memoir, Flash recounts how music from the streets, much like rock ‘n’ roll a generation before, became the sound of an era and swept a nation with its funk, flavor, and beat.

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Customer Reviews

It's a good book. At times when I read this book it made me realize that it really isn't 100% about hip hop, but about a man's struggle. How everyone's life can go zig zag zig... forward, back and hopefully forward again. It shed light on a few things for me: Like why Flash has such an articulate vernacular (read, nerdy sounding speech), whether all the rumors of him hitting rock bottom were true or not, & how he had an almost obsession w/ bettering Kool Herc, the originator of the Hip Hop style of dj-ing. The book is made up of very concise chapters that are quick and easy to read. There are a couple of things that I liked about the writing style too. There is an ongoing theme of how Flash relates everything to two records spinning, from the wheels on his bike to watching clothes spin in a laundromat when he is flat out busted and broke. Also at times the end of one chapter would purposely blend into the next chapter. Pretty much like Flash quick mixing at a set. And from a visual perspective, sometimes when there is an ascension or de-escalation of ideas or thoughts in a paragraph, the placement of letters in this paragraph were made to mimic this theme to form a set of steps or the like... In narrating his story Flash does skip or neglect to elaborate certain points quite often. I would have wanted to know a lil more of his dealings with Enjoy Records, how much he got from that "Flash Former" gadget, how successful he was after he split with Furious and then recorded w/ Electra, how he felt when he eventually went up against Kool Herc, etc., etc. etc. I dunno, maybe this just didn't fit into the way the book was set up. Maybe it would have killed that rise-fall-rise human drama theme that the overall book is exhibiting. I dunno.

Over the last five years or so, as hip hop culture has moved into its third decade, there have been more and more books published about its early days. Books like *Yes Yes Y'All* and *Can't Stop Won't Stop* have sought to trace the development of b-boying, DJing, MCing, and graffiti from their disparate origins in the early 1970s into the unified "street" culture and big business hip hop has become. This autobiography by one hip hop's pioneers traces the early years of this evolution through the personal story of someone who was there from the start. In many respects, Flash's story (at least as he presents it), is a classic American rise and fall story. We meet him as a child with an abusive father with a killer record collection, who ditches the family and a mentally ill mother. Then through a succession of foster homes, the calm of The Greer School in upstate New York, and then back to the Bronx and Gompers VoTech High School. During these teen years, the slightly nerdy kid with a love of music and electronics manages to marry the two and more or less invent turntablism. Through hard work, innovative techniques, and the help of friends, he rises to local fame as a street and then club DJ. Then the perfidious Sugar Hill Records scoops him up, uses him

up, and dumps him. Oh yeah, along the way he succumbs to the classic "rock star" pitfalls of not keeping his business affairs in good order, getting wrapped up in partying, women, and drugs.

I just finished reading Flash's book. Let me start off by saying Flash has always been one of my heros, not just in Hip-hop -- but in a life. Out of all the Hip-Hop figures I would read about I felt like I had something in common with him. I grew up a nerdy kid who dabbled with computers and Radio Shack electronics sets. I remember fixing my portable tape player at the age of 4 or 5, because my dad wasn't home to open it up and place the belt back on the motor. Moreover, I was drawn into Hip-Hop because it was electronic -- because my Commodore 64 and records interested me as a child far more than the guitar, drum, or trumpet lessons I took did. The first time I heard Flash's "Adventures on the Wheels of Steel" as a DJ, I wanted to track down every record used in that set and recreate it; I took the records I already owned and tried to create answer records of some sort. The days, months, and years I spent in my bedroom dragging pieces of vinyl back and forth, fantasizing over turntables were made possible because of Flash. Flash had the guts to try something new and abstract and put it out for the world to see. There was no worry of conventions. He took a risk that evolved an entire culture, music, and industry. But back to the book, Flash goes in depth about his upbringing: his parents, his mentally ill mother, his sisters, and most importantly -- his father's record collection. He talks about digging through heaps of garbage to find wire so he could built a makeshift tube amplifier; salvaging speakers from stripped cars in South Bronx lots; perfecting cutting in a grungy basement. You get a feel for the grunge that gave birth to what Hip-Hop would come to be.

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