

# Spoken rhymes become voice of a generation

By Greg Schick

**T**he Sisco Kid remembers the teen parties given at the old Hevalo nightclub in the Bronx in 1975.

"The thing that I remember most was how loud the music was. The sound overtook you. The place was packed — a real sweatbox," he said. "Everybody was lined up around the block."

They had all come to see DJ Kool Herc, an innovative disc jockey from Kingston, Jamaica, and his posse, the Herculords, a dancing crew. Herc became popular for playing party music and imitating Jamaican toasting, a form of rhyming and chanting over music.

Kool Herc is widely acknowledged as the first rap DJ.

"I scan the place/I see a very familiar face/of my mellow: Wallace Dee in the house/Wallace Dee, freak one for me!" he said at one of his parties.

Thus started a tradition of speaking rhymes over a background song.

Other DJs tried to copy Herc's style, but Herc's was fiercely competitive.

Sometimes Grand Master Flash, a rival rap DJ, would come to the party. According to Flash, Herc would yell "Grand Master Flash in the house!" over his mike, and then he'd cut off his treble and bass and just play the mid-range.

"Flash, in order to be a qualified DJ, there is one thing you must have . . . highs!" Herc would say.

"Then, Herc would crank up his highs and the high hat would be sizzling," Flash recalled. "And most of all, Flash, he'd say, 'you must have . . . bass!'"

"I'd get so embarrassed that I'd have to leave. My system couldn't compare," Flash said.

But Grand Master Flash didn't quit. Born in Barbados, Flash worked as a DJ at parties, and this led to his forming the Furious Five in 1976. Five rappers — Cowboy, Melle Mel, Kidd Creole, Rahiem and Mr. Ness — rapped over Flash's backgrounds.

Flash is credited with inventing the basic techniques of cutting and scratching hip-hop

records.

Another party DJ, Afrika Bambaataa, was born and reared in the Bronx. As a gang member, Bambaataa formed the Zulu Nation, a gang with a dedication to music and not mischief, in 1976.

The second half of the 1970s brought the birth of rap and the advent of the party DJ. But it wasn't until the end of the decade that rappers began making records.

In the summer of 1979,

"Rapper's Delight" by the Sugarhill Gang was released. At the time, many deemed the disco-backed song a novelty record, and few foresaw the future rap would have.

Kurtis Blow capped 1979 with his release of "Christmas Rappin." Molded by pioneer producer Russell Simmons, Blow became known as the king of rap and landed the first major record-label deal ever cut for a rapper. Blow reigned for the first half of the '80s, making party records such as "The Breaks," "8 Million Stories" and "Basketball."

Soon, Brooklyn made its move into rap. In 1983, the Fat Boys emerged from Brooklyn to win a rap contest at Radio City Music Hall and a music contract to launch the band's career.

In songs like "Let's Get Funky," the Fat Boys dropped other more popular rappers' names to gain attention.

They'd say, "There are many other crews that rock the show/like Grand Master Flash and Kurtis Blow/Whodini and the Force MDs/Grand Master Melle Mel and Run-DMC/But it's time to show you that we also rock/You'll feel the funky rhythm all around the block/So just start to rock and everybody guess what/homeboys and girls, we're gonna pump it up."

Stetsasonic, formed in 1981 from the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn, started recording in 1985 and reached the height of its popularity in 1987-88. A third Brooklyn crew,

Whodini, injected funk and a European flavor to rap in 1983. East Flatbush created Untouchable Force Organization, produced by

the soul group Full Force, and the song "Roxanne, Roxanne" was the crew's tour de force. Havelock Nelson, author of "Bring the Noise: A Guide to Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture," tallied the records made to respond to "Roxanne, Roxanne" and their answer records at 102.

The predominant answer song was by Lolita Gooden, who called herself

Roxanne Shante. The song

"Roxanne's Revenge"

established Marley Marl as a

producer as well

as turning

Shante into the

queen of fly-girl

badness.

Not to be outdone,

Full Force produced its

own Roxanne, The

Real Roxanne,

supposedly the one who

inspired the original

song. None of the

Roxannes has since

won greater

popularity.

However,

the early '80s rap

scene truly was ruled

by Blow and Simmons. As well

as succeeding as a solo act, Blow

produced a group named "The Fearless

Four," which had two rap hits, "Rockin' It"

and "Problems of the World Today."

Meanwhile, Simmons was producing Dr.

Jeckyll & Mr. Hyde and Run-DMC.

Run-DMC eventually dethroned Blow.

Originally billed as the "son of Kurtis

Blow," Run was Joseph Simmons,

Russell Simmons' little brother. He

seemed to be the best choice for the

new king.

Bringing rock 'n' roll backgrounds to

its music, Run-DMC released its first

album in 1984. It finally annointed itself

as royalty in the 1985 release "King of

Rock."

The group's biggest breakthrough

was in 1986 with its album "Raising Hell."

With help from Russell Simmons' friend

Rick Rubin, the group got Aerosmith to

collaborate with it on a remake of "Walk

This Way" and ended up crossing all

kinds of barriers.

The group's follow-ups of "It's Tricky"

and "You Be Illin'" weren't as successful

as the Aerosmith team-up, but Run-DMC

had proved that rap was rock and that

everyone could enjoy it.

Rick Rubin brought even more juice

to Russell Simmons. The couple called

itself RUSH and its label Def Jam, after

pulling in groups the likes of LL Cool J in

1984, the Beastie Boys in 1986 and

Public Enemy in 1987.

RUSH pulled LL Cool J from Queens,

the same area that spawned Run-DMC.

Born James Todd Smith, and dubbing

himself Ladies Love Cool James, LL

recorded "I Need a Beat" in 1984 with

the guidance of Rubin. LL went on to

produce hits such as "I Need Love." And

under the tutelage of producer Marley

Marl, he released his third platinum

album, which included "Mama Said

Knock You Out," "Around the Way Girl" and "Boomin' System."

Rubin found the Beasties in Money Makin' Manhattan. The trio was coming out of the post-punk scene in New York, and Rubin helped it find its sound. Not viewed as real rappers at first, the Beastie Boys came off with a mocking B-boy style.

The Beastie Boys screamed out "Fight for Your Right to Party" in 1987, putting their debut "Licensed to Ill" over quadruple platinum and gaining credibility.

After relocating to Los Angeles with Rubin and his new label Def American, the group produced a well-built but less-than-acclaimed album "Paul's Boutique." The band came back strong in 1992 with its live instrument album "Check Your Head."

In 1987, Rubin found Chuck D and Flavor Flav working as DJs at Adelphi University in Hempstead, Long Island, which up to that time was another undiscovered area.

Public Enemy, the first radical rap group, then was formed with Terminator X as the DJ.

The group rapped about the bad treatment of African-Americans in the United States, relations between blacks and whites and corruption in the government.

This rap with a message also started appealing to a wider audience — old and young, black and white.

Chuck D became the outspoken voice of the black community and produced hits such as "Fight the Power," stirring a new controversy every year with the government or with Jews who said Public Enemy was antisemitic.

Although it seemed Def Jam had a monopoly on rap, quite the opposite was true.

In 1986, Doug E Fresh and Slick Rick put out the hitsingle, "The Show," with the smash B side, "La Di Da Di." The two stopped recording together and moved on to less smashing solo careers.

Their work has been kept alive by the sampling of those two songs by countless groups including Run-DMC, Color Me Badd, De La Soul, DAS EFX, LL Cool J and dozens of others who quote the famous intro "and it goes a little somethin' like this — hit it."

To challenge LL Cool J's claim as "the baddest rapper in the history of rap itself" was Kool Moe Dee. Originally part of The Treacherous Three, Moe Dee turned solo and took LL's comment personally. Thus started the continuing battle that encompassed everything from interviews to a dis song on almost every album the two have recorded since.

From the "Boogie Down" Bronx came Kris Parker (KRS-One) and his crew, Boogie Down Productions. With pro-Bronx/anti-Queens songs like "The Bridge is Over" and "South Bronx," BDP became the first gangsta rappers with their 1986 release of "Criminal Minded."

When the crew's DJ, Scott La Rock, died, Parker strongly established himself as "the teacher," one of the most



**Blunt:** marijuana rolled in a cigar wrapping

**Bogart or Bogarde:** to push someone around or hold onto something too long when others want it

**Bonin':** sex

**Boogie Down Bronx:** Bronx, New York, the birthplace of hip-hop rap music

**Book:** To leave a situation or place

**Boomin' system:** loud, powerful car stereo

**Boostin':** shoplifting

**Booty:** butt

**Bozack:** male sex organ

**Break beat:** an instrumental drum-dominated section of a song

**Buck Wild:** to act rambunctious and aggressive

**Buggin':** Completely irrational behavior

**Bust:** to do something

**Bust a cap:** to shoot a gun

**Caddy:** Cadillac

**Cali:** California

**Cappin':** to shoot a gun

**Cheeba:** marijuana

