

Merrimack College

At the Intersection of Rock and Rap

Analyzing the History of Fusions

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The start of a brand-new decade never fails to feel refreshing. It is a time to reflect on the ups and downs of the past ten years, and mentally wipe the slate clean as the fresh decade approaches. Preparing for what the future will bring is an exciting thought, and what will come next is inevitably unpredictable. The same is absolutely true for music. A decade is a fantastic lens for examining the changes in popular, live and underground music. Every single decade since the 1920's has brought forth new changes in style, instrumentation, performance and delivery. Some of the most notable of these changes include the emergence of jazz in the 1920's, the popularization of Big Band in the 40's, the British invasion in the 60's, the fight for the legitimacy of rap in the 80's, and the domination of synths and computer music beginning in the 2000's among dozens of other examples. However, the most interesting example throughout decades to analyze that was not mentioned is the fusion of rap and rock styles of music in the popular eye beginning in the mid 80's and 90's.

The alliance of these two styles of music impacted our current landscape for music more dramatically than any other combination. The importance of this specific fusion stretches from the general public's acceptance of hip-hop itself, and the gateway for other styles of music to be blended with rap, such as country, metal, jazz, and electronic music among others. But to truly see its effect on the world's music, we must take a look at the origins of the individual styles as well as how the styles were initially blended. The growth of the styles alone and as a duo will eventually lead us to what our music landscape looks like in 2020.

There were numerous steps that led us to coin the term "rock" as a category for performance. This evolution occurs from the 1930's to the 1950's, mainly in the southern parts of the United States. The style was ushered in and influenced mainly by African American

musicians and culture.<sup>1</sup> Genres such as jazz, country, folk, and rhythm and blues types of music come together and evolve to create the basic rock instrumentation and sound. Common instruments that were maintained in rotation were guitar, bass, drums, vocals, and sometimes piano. Artists in the 1950's such as Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard helped popularize the style on a mainstream level. Their styles influenced the next generation of musicians in the 1960's, where artists like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and Bob Dylan helped shave off the "& Roll" part off of the term Rock & Roll for the rest of time. These artists as well as The Byrds, The Grateful Dead, and Love highlighted the idea of experimenting in music; trying to create sounds and feelings that have yet to be captured by the gift of audio recording. It is around this point where we see our first glimpses of rock music contain elements that are consistent with hip-hop music.

Hip / Hop & rap music is also directly derived from African American culture. Its evolution as a style by itself occurred much more frantically than rock music's. Individuals like DJ Kool Herc, Coke la Rock, and Afrika Bambaataa transformed the emcee title from the host of an event, into the main event.<sup>2</sup> The emcee, or otherwise "Master of Ceremonies" was previously responsible for making announcements and providing a liveliness to a social event, usually fueled by disco music and or a DJ.<sup>3</sup> The title was enhanced to otherwise be known as "MC" when the host would deliver their speech rhythmically over the music that the DJ provided from spun records on a turntable. Disco music serves as a major influence to the origin of the genre as

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<sup>1</sup> Stuessy, Joe, and Scott David Lipscomb. *Rock and Roll: Its History and Stylistic Development*. Pearson, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Stuessy, Joe, and Scott David Lipscomb. *Rock and Roll: Its History and Stylistic Development*. Pearson, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Toop, David. "Rap." *Grove Music Online*, Grove Music,

the basic music elements of disco are the groundwork for the entire style, and because of the culture movement in the gathering that eventually transformed to hip-hop.<sup>4</sup> The idea slowly gained turbulence, and in the late 1970's, we see our first recorded songs that are completely hip-hop. The music, lit by the flame of the culture, was grabbing attention and providing listeners with a fresh sound in music, although not everyone in the public eye was pleased with the outcome. It is not until the mid-eighties where we start to see a general acceptance to hip-hop as a legitimate form of musical expression. Which is around the same exact time that Hip-hop artists predominantly hailing from Def Jam started to blatantly combine the two styles, as if they were never two different entities at all.

There are four periods of time that we can separate the fusion into that summarize the general state of where the style stands as a whole. From oldest to most recent, the time periods are as follows: Before the Inception - 1960's and 1970's; The Classic Blends - 1980's to Mid 1990's; Nu-metal & Kid Rock - 1990's stretching into the early 2000's; and The Modern Approach - 2010 - present day. Almost every track containing both elements of the original styles can be placed into one of these categories. However, with anything, there is always allowance for exceptions. The middle two categories will most likely spur the most internal controversy on which category a song fits best in.

By far the most intriguing examples to examine are in the first time period. Each of the songs in this category are unique in their own ways, and use staple elements of hip-hop / rap music that were not yet solidified or even thought about yet. The elements that are portrayed in these extremely early cases tend to be strictly in the vocal delivery. The lead singers deliver the

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<sup>4</sup> Questlove. "Questlove: Disco and the Return of the Repressed - How Hip-Hop Failed Black America Part IV." *Vulture*, Vulture, 13 May 2014,

lyrics in faster, rhythmically dominant phrases that lack true melodic pitch and a general melody. The emphasis is on the rhythm and animation of the voice rather than how pleasing it sounds, or if it's in key. However, it is not the only element that shines in this time period. There is also an emphasis on minimalism and repetition that are aligned with classic rap stereotypes, as well as some lyrical content we may be used to hearing when thinking of hip-hop / rap by itself.

“Subterranean Homesick Blues” by Bob Dylan is the first track off of his game-changing, 1/2 electric 1/2 acoustic album in 1965, *Bringing It All Back Home*. It is potentially the most dominant example in terms of vocal delivery, and by far has the most lyrical content. Dylan starts the album off with an electric bang, and bombards you with lyric after lyric for the entirety of the song. The backing music is true messy rock music, but Dylan delivers his vocals like a cymbal ride in a fast jazz tune, giving the feeling of constant forward movement. This technique of delivery that focuses on the rhythm and speed of what he’s saying rather than the pitch gives Bob Dylan the ability to tell a descriptive story in a short amount of time. The song has been cited as one of the most influential songs Dylan has released, and is ranked on Rolling Stone’s top 500 Songs.<sup>5</sup> It was also the first Dylan song to chart, peaking at #39 on the US chart.<sup>6</sup> The lyric video for this song is also often regarded as one of the first modern music videos.

Bob Dylan would later make an appearance on a 1986 Kurtis Blow song “Street Rock” (falls into the second time period) where he starts the song off with a 4-bar rap verse.<sup>7</sup> So hopefully this means there’s still a chance for a Migos & Bob Dylan collaboration in the near future.

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<sup>5</sup> Rolling Stone. “500 Greatest Songs of All Time.” *Rolling Stone*, Rolling Stone, 29 July 2019

<sup>6</sup> Songfacts. “Subterranean Homesick Blues by Bob Dylan - Songfacts.” *Song Meanings at Songfacts*

<sup>7</sup> Schneider, Martin. “Bob Dylan Raps on a Kurtis Blow Album, 1986.” *DangerousMinds*, 26 Aug. 2016,

One of San Francisco's premier psychedelic-rock bands, Love, created a flowing folk-rock song containing hip-hop elements. The song comes from the back end of their 1967 opus, *Forever Changes*, with a title of "Bummer in the Summer." This track is a simple folk-rock song based off of a C and D major chord for the majority of the song. Arthur Lee's (front man and lead singer) vocals are delivered in a fast-speech like manner in chunks of two measures each. The verses he "raps" are separated by an instrumental tag moving up the C major scale, and a dance-like break towards the middle of the track. The tag and the instrumental break down are used to establish some form of melody in a track that is predominantly rhythm based. Arthur's vocals sit on one note, and don't provide any noticeable melody. The backing track consists of a piano and fingerpicked guitar switching between C and D chords over a fairly basic drum beat. The lack of something melodic to latch onto and the combination of simplicity forces you to pay more attention to Arthur Lee's rap-like vocal delivery.

There are a handful of other notable songs that boast the fusion such as "The Judge" by Pigmeat Markin in 1968 and "Year of the Guru" released by the Animals in 1969. The Animals song has a lot of similarities to the Love song previously discussed. It is delivered in chunks like verses, except this time there is much harder rock instrumental with larger instrumental gaps between the lyrics. On the other hand, Pigmeat Markin's 1968 song is quite possibly the first recorded hip-hop song<sup>8</sup> and the potential birthplace of funk music. The drum groove is fluid and lively creating a nice space for wonky rhythms to be created, which the guitar does. Pigmeat is also rapping like a champion for 1968. Using schemes and deliveries that have about 15 more years to be normalized. The funny part was, he was more of an entertainer and comedian than a

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<sup>8</sup> XXL STAFF. "Did Pigmeat Release First Hip-Hop Song? - XXL." *XXL Mag*, XXL MAGAZINE, 14 Apr. 2011,

musician.<sup>9</sup> This was the only song that he released, and it turned out to be extremely ahead of its time, and well as revolutionary.

The real question is if these artists were aware of how progressive these vocal performances were going to be. It's fair to say Bob Dylan tried a lot of varying styles, but did he ever recreate anything equivalent to "Subterranean Homesick Blues"? Not totally. It seems that the main reason these artists chose to rap was to fit a substantial amount of words into a measure or two. The idea that they were in fact attempting to start something completely new seems to be false, as each of these artists has only one song that can truly be formatted to fit the argument. In fact, Bob Dylan States that Kurtis Blow introduced him to rap music around the time of his given feature, so it's fair to assume Bob Dylan was completely unaware of the vocal style as a game-changing artform while recording "Subterranean Homesick Blues." Spoken word as an art form is most likely what the artists were relating their delivery too. It is the most similar form of art that existed at the time. Spoken word emphasizes meaning within the words, and can be delivered in an animated way, which eventually has become a staple idea for artists like Old Dirty Bastard, Danny Brown, Eminem, Zelooperz, etc. in the future.

Before we move on to cover the next selection of music, we need to be sure to highlight that some rap songs cannot be placed in any category, as they don't contain enough elements of rock to stand out as a confident fusion point. For example, The Wu-tang Clan's debut album in 1993 is a seminal record for hip-hop as a genre and culture, but it doesn't contain any rock elements for it to be placed in the third time period. A song like "C.R.E.A.M." is dominantly sampled and filled with NY grimy swagger; there's nothing protruding to be traced back to rock.

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<sup>9</sup> XXL STAFF. "Did Pigmeat Release First Hip-Hop Song? - XXL." *XXL Mag*, XXL MAGAZINE, 14 Apr. 2011,

Even artists like Run-DMC who have a lot of key tracks (and the most important track) in the second time period, have an equal number of tracks that do not qualify for examination. A song like “Sucker MC’s” would be hard to examine as there is only a drum machine and vocals, compared to “King of Rock”, which includes lyrical, musical, and vocal styles that fit in the center of a Venn-diagram for rock and rap.

While thinking of an example to separate the first two time periods, there are two songs that usually come to mind in terms of the first real progressions in hip-hop music: Sugar Hill Gang’s “Rapper’s Delight” and the Fatback band’s “Kim Tim III (Personality Jock)”, both released in 1979, with the latter being released first. However, these time periods are meant to separate the kinds of fusions of the styles rock and rap, NOT key moments in rap’s history where it makes marks on society. Those two songs serve as the pinnacle of the first era; the goal has been unknowingly reached, and a new bar is set up to be reached with experimentation. With that being said, I believe that Kurtis Blow’s debut album, released in September 1980, is the first indication that the musical combination music has moved on to a new time period. Kurtis Blow’s self-titled debut is the first full length release by a rapper, and it is full of surprises and what we now would potentially call oddities for a rap album. These oddities include: A full on cover of “Takin’ Care of Business” by Bachman-Turner Overdrive II, extremely funky guitars on nearly every track that would suit most funk rock bands, a complete R&B /Soul ballad, a loosely based Christmas song, and one of the most iconic and quotable rap songs of all time, “The Breaks.”<sup>10</sup> Does this prove that rap has never coexisted without rock elements? Yes, and Kurtis Blow was rap’s first true “rock star.” He embodied the classic flow and witty boasting style of rap to the

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<sup>10</sup> “Kurtis Blow.” *Hip Hop Golden Age*, HHGA, 29 Sept. 2015, [hiphopgoldenage.com/artists/kurtis-blow/](http://hiphopgoldenage.com/artists/kurtis-blow/).



point where he became the new standard for rap music to come in this time period.

One group was ready to tackle the new standard and make the style their own. This group was RUN-DMC. What more can be said about his legendary group? They took rap and flipped it upside down, and always claim the crown in history books when referring to the origin of rock/rap. Their approach was simple, minimalistic beats powered by a drum machine, punchy samples, guitar riffs, and the collaborated exchange of shouted lyrics. This execution was partnered with real swag, but in a way, we haven't seen before in rap. This is swagger you don't want to mess with; their egos aren't as inviting as a Kurtis Blow type figure. They present themselves as tough, cold MC's, a presentation that only gets more intense as N.W.A., Ice-T, Eric B & Rakim, etc. come into the scene. Run- DMC's music backs up their persona right off the bat with the B side off of their first single, "Sucker MC's" is a kickoff that would rightfully place them at the top of rap in terms of influence and popularity.<sup>11 12</sup>

Their debut album sticks with the punchy sample and drum machine approach with the instrumentals, only having one song, "Rock Box" really being able to qualify for a placement in the second period. It's not until their second album, "King of Rock" where they fully embrace the Rock-Rap fusion. To begin with, the sounds on the drum machine on this record are much more expanded, providing for more sounds to have rock drums origins with the kick, toms and snares. The feel in this record is much more in your face; Run DMC sounds like they are about to jump out of the music and start rapping' in your personal bubble. The heavy rock riffs on nearly every track really add to the drill sergeant vocals. "Can You Rock It Like This" is a great

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<sup>11</sup> Brown, Jake. *Rick Rubin: in the Studio*. Accessible Publishing Systems, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> EDGERS, GEOFF. *WALK THIS WAY: Run-Dmc, Aerosmith, and the Song That Changed American Music Forever*. PENGUIN Books, 2019.

example of all parts of their music coming together to etch their staple sound. “Roots, Rap, and Reggae” is a fun detour from the usual approach with the instrumentation, and is one of the first indications of a left-field type of rock rap fusion, with the feel of this song being completely reggae/rock. An interesting observation about this song I found is when they all sing the title throughout the song. It always sounds like they could be saying “rock” instead of “rap.” It brings up the notion that they thought the two were interchangeable.<sup>13 14</sup>

The group continues to experiment with this sound on their third album, *Raising Hell*, released in 1986. This is the point in the group’s career where they hit superstardom with the hit single from the album, “Walk this Way.” Thanks to the priceless guidance of Def Jam co-founder, expert producer Rick Rubin, Run DMC teamed up with Aerosmith for a reimagining of their past hit from 1975. The traditional drum set is replaced with a drum machine and the vocals are delivered over guitar loops taken from the original song. This song is a landmark song for the music industry in several ways. First, it helped propel *Raising Hell* to being the first hip-hop album to be certified Platinum and Multi-Platinum in the United States.<sup>15</sup> A record is deemed platinum once 1,000,000 copies of the album are purchased and shipped, in the present day, stream counts and physical copies, and digital copies all combine to determine platinum eligibility. DMC’s numbers purely off of physical sales in the mid 80’s really shows you how popular they had become, as regular mainstream artists usually have one to several platinum albums. This song also helped Aerosmith achieve a commercial comeback. Their album sales

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<sup>13</sup> EDGERS, GEOFF. *WALK THIS WAY: Run-Dmc, Aerosmith, and the Song That Changed American Music Forever*. PENGUIN Books, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, Jake. *Rick Rubin: in the Studio*. Accessible Publishing Systems, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, Trevor. “Run-D.M.C. Raised 'Hell' & Hip-Hop's Profile: Rewinding the Charts, 1986.” *Billboard*, Billboard, 17 Aug. 2018

increased noticeably after the release of this song and they began to release hits again.<sup>16</sup>

Their alliance with Aerosmith helped legitimize their image and musical potential in the public eye thanks to the familiarity of Aerosmith. They were a well-known band with a large established fan base that gave DMC the numbers they needed to go big time. This is a moment in music history where a lot of people probably have their first positive exposure to rap music. This is the song that is the bridge that establishes a newly recognized genre, Rap/Rock. It was the perfect combination of a cool friendly groove, and the yelling rap approach. The sample that plays in the verses contains a lot of notes and helps fill up the musical landscape with the addition of drums and vocals. There's a lot more to analyze than the usual DMC song which is sprung from minimalistic drum machine beats. The importance of Musical fusion is self-evident and made the obvious gesture that the way to make it big time was to be a Rap-Rockstar and combine the two sounds with precision.<sup>17</sup>

Enter the Beastie Boys. A group of white kids that started a garage band in the late 70's ended up being potentially the most inspiring and influential Hip-hop group there ever was. Their delivery and song topics make Run DMC sound like a walk in the park. Their debut album in 1986, *Licensed to Ill*, is a rock-rap masterpiece and was the first ever hip-hop album to top the Billboard charts. The Beastie Boys took the delivery style of Run DMC, gave it a white raspy voice, and made it nasty, in every sense. They used samples in a similar way as DMC. Hard hitting, and spotty so it allows complete focus on the vocals. However, these sample choices helped them out in the same way that "Walk this Way" did. They used samples that people could

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<sup>16</sup> EDGERS, GEOFF. *WALK THIS WAY: Run-Dmc, Aerosmith, and the Song That Changed American Music Forever*. PENGUIN Books, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> EDGERS, GEOFF. *WALK THIS WAY: Run-Dmc, Aerosmith, and the Song That Changed American Music Forever*. PENGUIN Books, 2019.

recognize and latch onto. Among these recognizable samples are “When the Levee Breaks” & “The Ocean” by Led Zeppelin, “Low Rider” by War, and “Sweet Leaf” by Black Sabbath.<sup>18</sup> The list of samples this album has to offer is quite overwhelming. But a unique quality to this album compared to most of the time was that some of the most catchy and recognizable leads on the record were not sampled. For instance, Slayer’s guitarist Kerry King performed the Guitar on the classic track “No Sleep till Brooklyn” thanks to Rick Rubin who was also in the works with the band at the time producing their albums.<sup>19</sup> Compare it to “Girls” which uses a silly beat that is made from stock keyboard sounds from the time.

Everything that happened in rap built up to the release of *Licensed to Ill*. Under Rick Rubin’s watch, the group was able to pull off what everyone before them wanted to do so perfectly by being wild, original, cocky, and experimental. You would think that the first #1 hip hop record and first diamond certified hip hop record (10 million shipped) would have come from a combination of something other than what the Beastie Boys is and wouldn’t be littered with elements of rock and roll to the point where its genre breaking.<sup>20</sup> It's one of those things in history that is a one-off thing, and could probably never be replicated. On paper it would never work, but in reality, they are legends.

Rick Rubin, as mentioned before, played the largest part in combining the two genres and popularizing hip hop to the masses; the two cannot be said apart from the function on the same wavelength. Without the fusion of hip hop and rock guided by Rubin there is no mass popularity of hip hop, it would have to occur in another that history did not write, obviously. A quote from

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<sup>18</sup> “Licensed to Ill by Beastie Boys: Album Samples, Covers and Remixes.” *WhoSampled*, Discogs, 1 Jan. 1986,

<sup>19</sup> Brown, Jake. *Rick Rubin: in the Studio*. Accessible Publishing Systems, 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, Jake. *Rick Rubin: in the Studio*. Accessible Publishing Systems, 2009.

him before the song recorded rightfully explains his thought process with the familiarity in samples; “I was looking for a way to bridge the gap in the story of finding a piece of music that was familiar and already hip-hop friendly so that on the hip-hop side it would make sense and on the non-hip-hop side you'd see it wasn't so far away.”<sup>21</sup> His hip-hop production discography in the 80's includes albums like *Radio* by LL Cool J, *Licensed to ILL*, *Raising Hell*, *It's Tricky*, & *Tougher Than Leather* by Run DMC, and *Yo! Bum Rush the Show* by Public Enemy, who would later take the torch last held by the Beastie Boys. Rick Rubin has been quoted as having a “touch of gold” and “the most successful producer of any genre” said by Rolling Stone Magazine.<sup>22</sup>

There are several other essential fusion songs in the second time period as well other than the ones mentioned. All except for one, “Ice Ice Baby” are deeper cuts from albums and do not come close to the popularity of Blondie's “Rapture”, released in 1981. Blondie combines her original sound she usually performs with as well as two rap verses in the second leg of the track. She spits like a member of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, using that classic ABC rap delivery for nearly two minutes. You can hear the group's influence on her delivery and lyrics, as she names drops them and a couple of other rap figures in her first verse.<sup>23</sup> She raps over a very open rock track with a drum break and repetitive guitar chords. It also should be noted that she is one of the only female MCs that is directly mentioned in this fusion of style. Not too many other female MC's other than Sha-Rock seem to be the front-woman for music that is blended with the two styles.

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<sup>21</sup> EDGERS, GEOFF. *WALK THIS WAY: Run-Dmc, Aerosmith, and the Song That Changed American Music Forever*. PENGUIN Books, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, Jake. *Rick Rubin: in the Studio*. Accessible Publishing Systems, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Myers, Marc. “The Rap in Blondie's 'Rapture'.” *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 10 June 2019,

Holding the torch from the Beastie Boys and bearing a political weapon known as their voices, Chuck D and Flava Flav of Public Enemy bring some of the most in your face rapping and production period. Key tracks from their seminal album, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back*, boast their lifestyle revelations over bomb style beats filled with rock elements. “Don’t Believe the Hype” has quirky, clean electric guitar chords through and uses traditional drum sounds. Compare that fusion to their wild “Bring the Noise” that uses a guitar sample that shreds through your earphones in a swirling manner. They are one of the artists that's normal sound is rooted in rock rap elements, not dominantly one or the other in terms of production.

Public Enemy was the last big group to fuse rap and rock music in the second time period. A whole new scene is about to emerge with the release of one single album. Rage Against The Machine’s 1992 self-titled debut album puts the whole music industry in question. The world was not ready for a strictly Rap Rock group that sometimes seemed like more of a political revolution rather than an attempt at making enjoyable music. This record alone initiates the third time period and inspired a massive wave of artists to recreate their sound in their own way. No one comes even close.<sup>24</sup>

The self-titled album is a political and electric bombardment over the span of 10 tracks and 53 mins. Song topics range from police brutality, revolution, USA corruption, government wrongdoings, etc. The singer, Zach De La Rocha, delivers his raps in an abrasive full force manner. These raps are written in a poem like form, and delivered in an animated way as a slam poet would. “Some of those that work forces, are the same that burn crosses”, & “Those who died are justified, for wearing the badge, they're the chosen whites” are lyrics from “Killing in

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<sup>24</sup> Currin, Grayson Haver. “Rage Against the Machine: Rage Against the Machine.” *Pitchfork*, Pitchfork, 17 Dec. 2017,

the Name” that are consistently repeated in the verse and choruses respectively. The repetitiveness really drives the meaning of the song to the listeners brain. To help, the tone of his voice is also very believable. The way he is bellowing these stories gives the feeling that he’s experienced or witnessed every messed up thing he raps about.

On the instrumentation side, we have the only rock rap fusion that can certainly be labeled as perfect. “No samples, keyboards or synthesizers used in the making of this record” appears on the album’s booklet<sup>25</sup> and prepares you for the rock rap album where the rap fusion is dominantly in the vocals only. The guitars are absolutely roaring on every song at some point. They are great at building up their tracks to explode at different peaks, and can maintain the energy they create and properly diffuse it. Palm-muted guitars quickly kickoff the album on “Bombtrack”. They quickly build to the first drop before the lyrics come in. As for most of these songs, once the verses kick in, the band settles in a hard funk execution and leaves the loudest stuff for the choruses and breakdowns. The bass guitar is always either distorted or carrying that funky high pitched twang to it. It’s an intriguing variation of bass on the album that is mixed masterfully with the rest of the instruments. Although the performance is intense and occasionally brainwashing, there are little layers to break down musically as the instrumentation is simple and overdubs are sparse. Like the Love song from 1967, the instrumentation is choicefully one-dimensional to ensure the focus on the lyrics rather than being swarmed with layers upon layers of sound to analyze. They keep the need for analysis simple, and where it needs to be.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Rage Against the Machine. *Rage Against the Machine*. *Rage Against the Machine*, Sony Music Entertainment Inc, 1992.

<sup>26</sup> Hall, Jeffrey A. “‘No Shelter’ in Popular Music: Irony and Appropriation in the Lyrical Criticism of Rage Against the Machine.” *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2003, pp. 77–89. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/23414989](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23414989). Accessed 6 May 2020.

This band and sound is one of the largest influences for the Nu-Metal sounds. Nu-Metal can be described in a lot of ways, but generally, it is the combination of metal music and rapped/yelled lyrics over heavily distorted guitars with lots of intense rhythmic breakdowns. It's the first sub-genre created that includes the rock rap combination at the core of the genre; it cannot be considered Nu-metal without the fusion. Lots of bands started to have massive commercial success late in the 90's and early in the 2000's with Nu-Metal as their main style. This is one of the most blatant times in music history where we see a "scene" develop. A scene can be thought of as a subgroup of people who remain loyal to the style, look, location, and stereotypes of the pop-culture phenomena. Limp Bizkit, Linkin Park, Slipknot, Korn, and System of a Down are among the most popular people in the genre.<sup>27</sup>

Even though these bands were extremely popular with young audiences, they faced an horrendous amount of backlash simply for the style. Nu-metal was obtaining a sour taste because of artists like Korn and Limp Bizkit. Even at one point earlier in my life I had a negative disposition on Nu-metal because of some of the songs I had heard from less notable bands, Papa Roach, and Limp Bizkit. The third time period is an interesting one to look at as well due to the sheer popularity of the style aided and injured the fusions progress simultaneously. On the positive side, the fusion was normally recognized and legitimized as a style with the help of the sales from singles and albums, but at the same time, the experimentation of the genre seemed to be put on hold, as almost rock rap fusions were being performed with the Nu-metal edge. It tainted the general public's idea and what the fusions could sound like. The biggest single individual that was wrapped up in the pros and cons of rap rock in the third time period was Kid

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<sup>27</sup> McDonald, Chris. "Nü Metal." Grove Music Online. September 03, 2014. Oxford University Press. Date of access 6 May. 2020,



Rock.

Kid Rock doesn't make only Nu-metal music. He makes Rap Rock music that sounds exactly like what you think rap rock would sound like if you've never heard it before and had to make a guess. His fusion is pretty unique and takes a more classic rock approach to it, but still goes hard when necessary.. This approach also comes with singing and hooks upon hooks. It took awhile for Kid Rock to fully find his sound; he had been making just hip-hop in the early part of the 90's. His fourth album, *Devil Without a Cause*, is where he finds his nook and hits his commercial peak. The song "Cowboy" is a great depiction of one of the ways his rap rocks songs could go. This is a western rock track oriented to the title, with sirens, calm electric guitars, ooo harmonies. The title drives the lyrical and musical themes, which Kid Rock delivers in a rude tone with that redneck pimp notion really shining through. "I am the BullGod" keeps the same redneck attitude, but this time the instrumentation is leaning more towards a Nu-metal sound. The chorus is sung as a replica of Chris Cornell and the verses are rhythmically delivered like Zach De La Rocha. Although the album may be met with a lot of criticism for its sounds and kind of swagger it boasts, it's really the first time we see the culmination of all sounds rap rock has worked towards, even though it falls flat every now and then.<sup>28</sup>

There are many important and essential songs and groups to rap rock that have not been mentioned for this time period yet. The oddness of this time period is one of the first glimpses of total artistic freedom people are granted today. Rapper turned actor Ice-T was first turned into a rocker when he became the lead vocalist for the hard rock group Body Count. This record was

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<sup>28</sup> Erlewine, Stephen Thomas. "Devil Without a Cause - Kid Rock: Songs, Reviews, Credits." *AllMusic*, All Music,

released in 1992 as well and takes more of a thrash metal edge to it.<sup>29</sup> There are also humorous topics and lyrics stretched across songs and short skits, making it unique for an album that is rock / rap. “Evil Dick” is a solid example that really doesn’t need much more explaining than that.

Bands like Sum 41 brought a pop-punk edge to the rap rock fusions. The songs tend to be pumped up with fast guitars and drums and performed with angsty whiteboy vocals. Take the 2001 song, “Fat Lip”, A song that's instrumental screams early 2000’s. The vocals are rapped in a Beastie Boys type manner over inviting, poppy guitar leads. Pop punk oriented fusions like this are usually fast paced and filled with energy, the rapping helps with a load of lyrics in a short time and aids in the extraction of energy from the lead singers. The third time period really showed us that there are endless possibilities for fusions, but sometimes it’s hard to get right.

The fourth and current time period that we live in was ushered in with the release of Kanye West’s Magnum Opus, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, or *MBDTF* for short. The release of this album sat at the start of a fresh decade in 2010, and helped bring a few Hip-Hop voices in the journey to superstardom (Nicki Minaj, Cyhi The Prince, Kid Cudi, etc.) and began confirm the legacy of some others (Jay-Z, Rick Ross, Raekwon, Pusha T, etc.).<sup>30</sup> All of the sounds Kanye achieves with the aura of the whole record, obscure and non-obscure sampling, and the intricacy layered in the mix and lyrics were immediately being reproduced by his contemporaries. What was also going on when this was happening, was a deeper bleed of fusion that was occurring indirectly. Nearly every song has elements of many genres, one which is rock music. The influence from rock appears in the form of song structure and rock samples

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<sup>29</sup> Knopper, Steve. “Ice-T Hasn’t Totally Lost His Taste for Rage.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 31 Mar. 2017,

<sup>30</sup> “Kanye West - My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy.” *Discogs*, Discogs, 1 Jan. 1970

(“Power”), guitar solos (“Devil in a New Dress”), vocal melody (“Hell of a Life”), feeling of the grooves (“Gorgeous”), aggressive drums (“Monster”), and the way Mr. West presents himself as a dystopian rockstar lost in love throughout the album (*Dark Fantasy*). The influence comes full circle once Rolling Stone recognized MBDTF as the best album of the 2010’s.<sup>31</sup>

This time period is the first where we see rap music dominate all kinds of music consumption, distribution, and general public influence. The complete acceptance of rap as a musical form initiated many non-hip-hop artists to collaborate with people in the genre, and or have the genre influence their own music, just like rock did before. This idea hit its peak in 2019 with the smash hit “Old Town Road” by Lil Nas X. His country inspired rap song was soaring on the country charts before being removed for not including enough country elements in it. The seamless acceptance between the styles was showcased when Billy Ray Cyrus provided a chorus and verse as a part of a remix. There are several versions of this track remixed with several other artists like BTS, Young Thug, and Mason Ramsey, but the Billy Ray Cyrus version was the one to skyrocket the popularity of this single. The almighty power of a country rock and rap blend was enough to become the longest running #1 single of all-time on the billboard charts.<sup>32</sup> It is a clear marker to where this genre may be heading for a fifth category. It would be intriguing to see Old Town Road be the beginning of a powerful country rap movement, which has never occurred other than an attempt by Young Thug, which only yielded one notable song to compare with, “Family Don't Matter”.

The beginning of 2020 already brings us another indication that Rock and Rap are

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<sup>31</sup> Dolan, Jon, et al. “The 100 Best Albums of the 2010s.” *Rolling Stone*, Rolling Stone, 3 Jan. 2020,

<sup>32</sup> Anderson, Trevor, and Gary Trust. “Lil Nas X's 'Old Town Road' Breaks All-Time No. 1 Record With 17th Week Atop Billboard Hot 100.” *Billboard*, Billboard, 29 July 2019,

currently existing on a similar wavelength. Ozzy Osbourne's latest solo album (and potentially final) features two tracks that include Post Malone, the latter of which is a track taken off of Post's own album, *Hollywood's Bleeding*, released in October, 2019. The Ozzy track features Post Malone in the second verse belching the same melody in bursts as Ozzy was in the first verse. He succumbs to Osbourne's style of singing while on his track, and Ozzy does the same. While on Post's "Take What You Want from Me." The chorus the Ozzy sings on the track is more accustomed to hip-hop, with the focus being on the melody and sound of his voice rather than the range and sheer power he can produce (Especially with a computer's help, too).

Having one of the fathers of metal music and the artist with the 8th most monthly listeners in the world as of March 2020 (52.9 million monthly listeners) proves the longevity of popularity the fusion brings. Even the idea of the two collaborating creates enough hype to deserve the listen for a lot of people. Collaborations like this bring two very different worlds together in terms of fans and assists in the ever-changing flow of music culture. The fifth time period allows for almost every collaboration to exist without backlash. While the co-signs the artists give each other by working on the track together are important for their individual success, it seems more important that we are lucky enough to experience a fluid music industry where collaborations like this are now more common.

But even far before these two examples of massive intersections of collaborations, we have artists pushing for rockier sounds in their sound in style in this time period. In the same year as *MBDTF*, Lil Wayne released his first and only rock album titled *Rebirth*. This comes after he was arguably the most popular artist in the world after the release of the *Carter III*. This album can be understood as the culmination of all the poorly received aspects of the third time

period; meaningless lyrics, overproduced guitars, uncomfortable genre blend on the ears, and formulaic ideas. However, commercially it was a success and it provided Lil Wayne a break from the sound he had been used to for 15 years at this point. It also showed there was commercial viability in this music still in the 2010's, even if it was far below par. "Prom Queen" is a key track to be able to get a sense of why it was popular, and why it was critically disliked. Oh, and Lil Wayne most certainly did not play any of those guitar licks.

Lil Wayne wasn't the only one making big changes to his sound at the start of the decade. Ex-Blink 182 drummer Travis Barker works with lots of hip hop artists now. He produces songs and also provides drums for other people's work when they want hard hitting drums with lots of linear fills. The pop-punk drummer turned rap released an album called *Give the Drummer Some* and features appearances by Slash, Lil Jon, Kid Cudi, Snoop Dogg, Raekwon, and Tom Morello from Rage Against the Machine, among TONS of other notable names. All the songs contain clear elements from both styles; it is very apparent that this album was aiming for a 50/50 split of rap vocals and deliveries paired with rock instrumentation. "Can the Drummer Get Some (Remix)" is a great example that includes several rap verses from Lil Wayne, Game, and Rick Ross with hard rock drums and guitar in the back.<sup>33</sup>

The widest range of fusions is also found in this modern period. Common blends tend to be either industrial, emo based, or driven by classic rock samples. Let's take a look at three varying examples to show the extreme differences. "ON GP" by Death Grips is a great example of a forward-thinking industrial fusion. Death Grips is a hip-hop trio that has always used blended rock samples, guitars, and apocalyptic drums together to achieve a unique sound. In 2015, the

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<sup>33</sup> "Travis Barker - Give The Drummer Some." *Discogs*, Discogs, 1 Jan. 1970, [www.discogs.com/Travis-Barker-Give-The-Drummer-Some/release/4304022](http://www.discogs.com/Travis-Barker-Give-The-Drummer-Some/release/4304022).

second half of their double album, *The Powers That B* takes the noise and guitars to the next level. “ON GP” showcases a muddy heavy rock beat with sporadic percussive guitars and absolutely brutal rapping. Death grips is a wonderful example to analyze to see how deep and excruciating the fusion can be. They open up a whole new world to how unwelcoming this sound can be while still being enjoyable. Other songs from their discography like “Ring a Bell”, “Giving Bad People Good Ideas”, “Dilemma”, and “Black Paint” among several others use a similar basis.

Lil Peep’s product when blending the two styles may have never reached its full potential due to his death in late 2017. He was pioneering a sub-genre for rock rap that gained a ton of momentum and support from his fans and contemporaries. He used a blend of rapping and singing accompanied with a gloom / bittersweet delivery over washed out depressed guitars. One of his breakout singles. “Benz Truck (Remix)” portrays the emo rock / rap fusion being executed at a high level. The EP it hails from peaked at #38<sup>34</sup> on the Billboard albums chart, and was released far before he reached the popularity he garnered post death. Peep’s stylistic approach has influenced countless new artists including Lil Uzi Vert, Trippie Redd, and the late JUICE WRLD, who was also reaching superstardom off similar musical principles as Peep. Lucid dreams is a great example of his style of blend where he takes the guitar arpeggio and the song from Sting’s hit, “Shape of My Heart.” This song would eventually peak at #2 on the Billboard 200.<sup>35</sup>

The next example we are going to look at is “Love Game (feat. Kendrick Lamar)” off of Eminem’s 2013 album, *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. This example may be the softest sounding

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<sup>34</sup> “Lil Peep.” *Billboard*, Billboard,

<sup>35</sup> “Juice WRLD.” *Billboard*, Billboard, 2019,  
[www.billboard.com/music/juice-wrld/chart-history/HSI/song/1073139](http://www.billboard.com/music/juice-wrld/chart-history/HSI/song/1073139).

connection of the two genres musically. This song samples the Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders 1965 track, “Game of Love.” The whole song is essentially ripped from this one, sampling the hook, guitars, drums, and bassline from two entirely different sections of the song. The verses are delivered in a fast storytelling manner, where both MC’s tell their peculiar love story. Both of them sing unique melody lines compared to the original during the hooks, making this seem like a direct attempt at creating a 50/50 song. Several other tracks coming from this album have similar compositions, like “Berserk” which samples “The Stroke” by Billy Squier and “Rhyme and Reason” which samples “Time of the Season” by the Zombies.<sup>36</sup> This is a trend he continues to work with up to the present day.

There are tons of other great examples from the 2010’s that drive the fusion deeper and deeper. City Morgues “SHINNERS13” experiments with heavy computer generated guitars and yelled vocals in a short song that packs a mighty punch. Kendrick Lamar’s “Pride” sounds like a psychedelic fantasy gone wrong. Danny Brown’s “Golddust” takes an Embryo and Joy Division sample and flips it on its head.<sup>37</sup> The list is almost never-ending, and that's how it should be.

Trying to think of what popular music is going to sound like by the year 2030 is a hard, weird, and impossible task. We just experienced the rise of rap music to the #1 genre and the notion of music creation always being genreless in the past decade. The next trend is always something people are not expecting, and I believe that will happen again in the coming decade. I also believe that some kind of fusion of hip-hop and rap will be at the forefront of a whole new lineage of artists. Maybe we’ve already heard a glimpse of the next popular transition with Death

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<sup>36</sup> “The Marshall Mathers LP 2 by Eminem: Album Samples, Covers and Remixes.” *WhoSampled*, 1 Jan. 1970, [www.whosampled.com/album/Eminem/The-Marshall-Mathers-Lp-2/](http://www.whosampled.com/album/Eminem/The-Marshall-Mathers-Lp-2/).

<sup>37</sup> “Golddust by Danny Brown on WhoSampled.” *WhoSampled*, Paul White, 1 Jan. 1970, [www.whosampled.com/Danny-Brown/Golddust/](http://www.whosampled.com/Danny-Brown/Golddust/).

Grips, City Morgue or other cutting edge artists. So let us establish the fifth time period right now: The future. Anything that seems groundbreaking for sound that endures both rock and rap elements should be placed here. If it challenges your current notion of combination of style then it certainly deserves a spot in the futuristic group. If I had to make a guess, I would presume that fusions based off of computer music and noise are probably next up. I think human ears are slowly craving more and more sound as we evolve. Now what this will sound like, I don't know. You only know you know when you know.

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