

Match Up Two of Hip Hop's Best KRS vs Jay-Z

Written by Davey D ID4379

Tuesday, 27 May 2008 03:39 -

A long held favorite past time within Hip Hop circles is to debate the skill set of our favorite icons. It's part and parcel of the culture as many of us have spent countless hours analyzing and over analyzing someone's rhyme flows, dance moves, album concepts, artwork etc.

Within those debates there are just some universally held beliefs that rarely get challenged unless someone is deliberately trying to cause controversy and strike a nerve by going over the top. One such universal truth was broached this weekend, but this time the folks were serious as an all out heated debate unfolded around the issue of Hip Hop's all-time best emcee.

For years it didn't matter what brand of Hip Hop you embraced when it came to discussing the best, KRS-One and Rakim always held the top spots. Names like Nas, Jay-Z, 2Pac (Tupac) and Biggie to name a are usually in people's top 5 or 10, but those two top spots for most people unshakingly belonged to the God and The Teacha-hands down.

The older the participants in these discussions, the more underground oriented and those who identified more to New York style Hip Hop, tended to be more resolute about the universal acceptance of Rakim and KRS being Hip Hop's all-time best emcees.

There's no denying that both have changed the game. When it comes to KRS his skillz as a scar tested battle emcee and incredible stage performer has been unrivaled. A KRS show could go on for hours with him delivering hit after hit after hit that would leave the crowd exhausted because he just brings so much energy to the stage. Rakim while not having the same hyped up stage has epitomized the essence of cool. His writing and his delivery is akin to the greatest of jazz players. Like I said those two emcees always held the top spots.

But as they say, nothing lasts forever, and so I guess I shouldn't have been surprised when I found myself involved in a heated debate this weekend with some hardened New Yorker and long-time Hip hop head who were both insistant that the top spot now belongs to Jigga Man aka Jay-Z.

My boy Mookie a Bronx born former emcee from the group Red, Black & Green who used to roll with King Sun and my other boy Sean out of San Jose a long time fixture sat up watching the

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Laker game and had the debate of debates.

Mookie a long-time KRS fan kept extolling the virtues of Jay-Z, citing his long track record of consistency in hit-making. Both him and Sean talked emphatically about Jay's last album "American Gangsta" as if it was some sort of landmark record that symbolized the start of a new era in Hip Hop. Mookie's main beef with KRS is that for a period of time he was in a slump where he released several albums that in his words, were "wack" and lacking both musically and even lyrically.

The argument then centered around having hit records at which point I had to shut folks down and not allow them to measure an artists based solely on album sales and commercial success via radio play. If we did that we'd have to look at how much money and promotion have been behind a Jay-Z album and did his sales match up to the all the exposure.

I explained that KRS has a set of fans and Jay-Z has a set of fans. Jays fans may be the Hot 97/ commercial radio crowd while KRS may be the underground/ so called backpack crowd. My contention is that you have to look at an artist and take into account how he resonates with his base. KRS still sells out shows. KRS still connects with his audience at shows. Like Jay his catalogue of hit songs is deep.

Mookie and Sean argued that Jigga is a rapper's rapper noting that Jay has managed to stay on top in the fickle, topsy turvy world of commercial Hip Hop which in many ways is harder. Many commercial artists are here today and gone tomorrow.

They maintained that Jay-Z has managed to consistently reinvent himself and stay relevant. He still delivers hits and garners respect from all corners. His flow has never gotten lazy. His albums are always on point. Mookie went so far as to praise Jay-Z for pushing the envelope and reaching out to experiment with new sounds and styles.

He didn't elaborate but my take was he was referencing Jay-Z hooking up with southern rappers like UGK, or west coast producers like Rick Rock, experimenting with the production of a young Kanye West and before that the then emerging Neptunes. Mookie and Sean kept saying the industry owes Jay a lot.

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I countered by pointing out that KRS did the same thing in both concept and sound and at times may have been ahead of his time.

For example, he laced us up with ragga-muffin and reggae style. Today its common place in Hip Hop to the point that we actually forget KRS was on the front line of helping usher that sound. People forget about how he was flipping things on albums like Criminal Minded. We forget about the early work he did with Just-Ice. We forget about Mad Lion. Today we go to a club and listen to Beanie Man and dance the night away to Damian Marley and forget that once upon a time that was ground-breaking and KRS was apart of that foundation in terms of how its now so much a part of Hip Hop.

We often overlook that KRS sparked a conscious movement along with Public Enemy and X-Clan. We forget about his concept of "Edutainment". We forget about 'stop the Violence" and the movement it sparked with the Urban league. We forget about the HEAL Foundation he started when he did an album and was trying to raise money for people to read. We forget that KRS was one of the first rappers to lecture at a college and even pen an editorial for the NY Times. He was one the first to do a song demanding that Mumia Be Free. We forget that KRS took on the police with songs like Black Cop and Sound of the Police.

Jigga could only hope to be so political and have such impact. His political movement up to date was boycotting Crystal, wrapping himself in the American flag after 9-11, demanding the troops come home on one of his song "Beware of the Boys" with Punjabi MC and showing Obama slides during his recent concerts. And in all fairness I will note that Jigga has done a number of songs that touched upon social topics including his recently released Minority Report about Katrina and the cut he did with Dead Prez called Oh Yeah.

The KRS I recall was boldly showing Malcolm X in his videos and making no bones about it. Am I the only one who remembers "My Philosophy" and KRS looking out of the window holding an Uzi ala the infamous Malcolm X pose.

For better or for worse KRS was a pioneering figure along with Schoolly D and Ice T for what we now call Gangsta Rap. The album Criminal Minded which featured KRS" partner the late Scott La Rock together they were known as Boogie Down Productions) was a classic album both in sound and in its perspective.

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Our debate got so heated that we started comparing albums song by song. We started out Criminal Minded vs Reasonable Doubt to see which really resonated within Hip Hop when it they were first released. Both albums squarely connected with the streets and marked a big change in Hip Hop in both sound and concept.

Our debate exploded around songs like; South Bronx vs Can't Knock the Hustle. The Bridge is Over vs Ain't No N---, 9mm Goes Bang vs 22 Twos. The debate raged on..

We then went and compared the KRS" all time classic album "By All Means Necessary" vs Jay-Z's classic In My Lifetime Vol 1. We went song for song..My Philosophy vs A Million, I'm Still Number 1 vs "Who You Wit".. We went on and on.

As I said earlier, the main ding against KRS was his mini drought of albums that weren't hitting and reaching his usual standards. Mookie wanted to point out albums like 'sneak Attack', "Krystyles" and "Keep It Right" as proof positive that KRS was over. He said KRS lost his edge. I reminded Mookie that Jay-Z lost his way with Blueprint 2 the Gift and the Curse. And while I was personally feeling Kingdom Come way too many Jigga fans was about to call it a day with dude.

Mookie and Sean said Jay came back hard with American Gangsta and I responded by insisting that they go listen to KRS" new joint with Marley Marl called "Hip Hop Lives".

The debate ended with us not watching the game and me promising to share the debate with my readers.

Since then, I re-listened to a lot of Jay-Z's songs off his earlier albums and of course American Gangsta and there's no denying, he is one of the best ever. But I also relistened to KRS's classics and having been around long enough to recall what those songs meant when they dropped, I still have to give KRS the edge. Both Jay-Z and KRS have a ton of songs. They resonate deep with their respective audiences. Both have changed the game. They both can flow.

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The tie breaker for me is Jay-Z vs KRS on stage-Jigga better bring back up in the form of either the Circus Du Solei or a J-Lo, Hallie and Beyonce dancing back up butt naked and even then that won't be enough to overtake focused KRS doing battle on stage.

Nuff said.. what do y'all think when we match up two of Hip Hop's Best KRS vs Jay-z?