

## Hip Hop History CIPHER Sounds

Written by Robert ID3295

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### Hip Hop History: CIPHER Sounds

The original hip-hop D.J.CIPHER Sounds was established in South Side Jamaica, Queens, New York in the year 1975. Little more than a year after the originators of the hip hop genre; Kool Herc, Afrikka Bambata, Grand Master Flash and others had created the hip hop culture and had begun to guide it through its infant stages in the Bronx, DJs Divine, Understanding, and Divine Justice had the idea to create their own sound system that would play in the parks and community centers of their neighborhood in Jamaica Queens. Thus CIPHER Sounds was born.

In the dictionary a cipher is defined as; A series of well-defined steps that can be followed as a procedure. On the streets of NY in the early 70s the word cipher had become widely associated with a spiritual sect known as; The Five Percent Nation (5%). They utilized the word to describe a group of their members who had gathered together in a circle to pass along knowledge to one another. This knowledge was known as "Divine Mathematics" The original founding members of CIPHER Sounds; Divine Justice, Divine and Understanding, were practicing members of the culture. CIPHER Sounds did their first gig at the Southern Queens Community Center and quickly became a neighborhood favorite. Their style of incorporating European disco records together with soulful break beats was popular with mobile DJs across the city, but CIPHER Sounds added a unique aspect to their performance by incorporating an echo chamber for the microphone, adding reverb and effects to the voice of the M.C. behind the music. This soon became their signature sound and would set them apart from many of the other street DJs in New York City.

As time went on two of the original triad; DJ Divine, and Divine Justice left the group to pursue other ventures, leaving DJ Understanding to become CIPHER Sounds. Using mostly family members and close friends in the group, Understanding began to solidify the buzz established by CIPHER Sounds in the streets of Jamaica Queens.

Showcasing their sound system and unique style of DJing in parks and schools like; Lincoln Park, Ajax Park, 48 Park and I.S.8 Junior high school, CIPHER Sounds created a reputation that would fill events. The buzz became so huge that CIPHER sometimes packed the park beyond capacity, occasionally causing the set to be derailed by the local police.

As the status of the group began to swell, CIPHER Sounds broke new ground as the first mobile DJs to become the house set for the popular Queens disco; The Fantasia, located on Linden

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and Merrick Boulevards. It was also at this time that he would meet and a young hip-hop upstart named Russell Simmons.

Russell was a club promoter who booked Hip-Hop acts like his own artist; Kurtis Blow and placed them in clubs such as The Fantasia, BG Manor, Le Chalet, and Christ the King. Russell had heard about CIPHER Sound and began to book CIPHER at his events. CIPHER Sounds would become the first Queens DJ set to battle against Bronx legend Grandmaster Flash at the Hotel Diplomat in Manhattan. CIPHER Sounds continued to work with Russell and in 1978 met Glenn Toby, a young man who was also making a name for himself in the hip-hop game, going by the name; SWEETIE G. Glenn introduced CIPHER Sounds to well known promoters Mike & Dave who also represented a hot group of Manhattan based rappers called The Crash Crew.

CIPHER Sounds began to work with SWEETIE G. and Mike & Dave, performing at the world famous Harlem World in Manhattan and the legendary Disco Fever in the Bronx.

By 1979 CIPHER Sounds was working with major recording artists like Michael Murphy of The System (Don't disturb this groove) and Bernard Wright who had a big dance hit with "Who do you Love" They introduced CIPHER Sounds to the Drum Machine. Soon after, CIPHER Sounds began working with up and coming rap groups including; Positive K, Kool Moe Dee of Treacherous 3, M.C. Spanky, Spyder D, The Crash Crew and Jimmy Spicer (Super Rhymes).

In 1981 he began to produce records and worked with Stetsasonic, Davy DMX, Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde, The Breakout Crew and the Fearless Four.

In 1982 CIPHER Sounds did a deal with Romell Records and produced and recorded two singles for the label 3 card Marley and Get moved on

He then moved on to sign a deal with Profile Records and began to do Dance music as well as Rap.

While working at Profile, CIPHER Sounds would meet and mentor a group of rappers (The RZA, The Genius and Old Dirty Bastard) that would later become members of the WU Tang Clan.

He also formed and produced a dance music group called Artz and Kraftz

CIPHER Sounds left Profile Records in 1988 and signed with Uptown Records as a producer, doing songs for Mary J Blige, Jeff Red, and Father M.C. After inking Artz & Kraftz to a deal with Motown Records, CIPHER Sounds began producing and writing songs for the movie; House Party starring Kid & Play. He would produce two songs for the soundtrack Surely and What a feeling. With the success of House Party, CIPHER Sounds appeared with Jeff Red on Soul Train, BET and Showtime at The Apollo.

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In 1991, Cipher Sounds left Motown and moved Artz & Kraftz over to Columbia Records and toured the United States on the strength of the single All of it. The song was also an underground hit in the U.K. and would take the group to parts of Europe, Japan and Canada, taking their sound world wide.

In 1994 Cipher Sounds left Columbia Records and signed to L.L. Cool J Uncle L Records while also producing for Ja Rule, Black Child, Helter Skelta, and the Original Gun Clappers.

In 1995, after 20 years of making hits and working with some of the most influential people in the record industry, DJ Understanding (Cipher Sounds) decided to broaden his talents and learned graphic design. In 1999 he started a business in Harlem, New York and his new multimedia company included but was not limited to; video editing, video production, an audio recording studio, as well as web and graphic design.

After establishing his venture as a full production studio, and becoming a major force in the industry right in the heart of Harlem, DJ Understanding was faced with a life-altering crisis when in 2002 his daughter was diagnosed with a congenital brain tumor at the age of 8 years old, thus causing him to turn away from the industry to concentrate on family issues.

Currently Understanding (Cipher Sounds) has returned to the entertainment industry in an effort to reestablish his position as a leader in the fields of music and video production and computer graphics.

You can reach The Original Cipher Sounds at: [www.myspace.com/ciphersounds](http://www.myspace.com/ciphersounds) or <http://www.ciphersoundsny.com>

Also check Cipher Out on the British Hip Hop <http://www.britishhiphop.co.uk>

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