Hip Hop's Death and Music Evolution by Mark Skillz

It is said that in the last days of disco record companies were losing their shirts left and right. They had sunken millions of dollars into a dying art form and everyone was crying. There were signs everywhere “Disco Sucks”.

Some of everybody recorded a disco record Rod Stewart, the Rolling Stones, Phyllis Diller, Rick Dees (gotdamned Disco Duck) and too many others. It was a cash cow in the 70’s. White folks danced off beat in discothèques, had orgies in stairways, openly snorted cocaine, drank champagne – like the shit really tasted good, it was the time of their lives. That was until the ‘Disco Sucks’ movement caught momentum and people stopped buying Donna Summers records. And oh yeah, all those nights of bingeing on cocaine and sex led to things like herpes and then AIDS.

Now that sucks.

Lately there has been a lot of talk about hip-hop being dead. I’m not sure if it is or not, but let’s go back to my disco example first.

If you wanna see if Tommy Mottola is really a connected guy – you know some Italian cats like to say that they “know a guy who knows a guy that knows a guy that is connected…” well, Tommy’s allegedly one of those guys who knows some guys who can plant your ass in Giant Stadium. Anyway, if you want to piss him off try going into his office and getting a deal for a disco act. Just mention words like “fever”, “boogie” and uh while you’re at it wear a white suit a`la Johnny Travolta in Saturday Night Fever style. Then look out because some 400-pound guy in shades with a baseball bat is going to escort you to the parking lot the Jimmy Hoffa way.

Tommy was one of those record execs who lost his shirt during the disco days. Disco is a bad word in record industry circles.

But is disco really dead? I mean how can a style of music die? Well disco morphed into house, techno and you also hear elements of it in acid jazz.

For the record they also say that Jazz is dead too…

Well if you ask any trained jazz musician he might say two things, one of them being: “No, it’s not dead”, then he might say something like “it isn’t appreciated like it should be.” And he would be right.

What about rock? What about the rock n roll of Little Richard, Chubby Checker, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, Ike Turner, Jerry Lee Lewis and all of those guys is that dead?

Well no one is recording new records in that style anymore. What is difficult for me to believe is that once upon a time – a very long time ago, those acts (minus Jerry Lee Lewis) were supported by African Americans. But if you go to see Chuck Berry, Little Richard or anyone else of that genre now, you will be hard pressed to find a black face in the crowd.

Do you know why? Because we abandoned that style of music 50 years ago.

I have a test for you put an ad in a Minneapolis newspaper say something like “Producer with a million dollar budget looking for excitingly, fresh band in the vein of Prince and The Time” and see who responds. Do you know what you’ll get? Five fat guys in their late 40’s who have just dusted off their guitars and keyboards for one last shot. Do you know why? Because the youngsters around those parts are too young to remember Prince in his heyday. But hey, with a million dollar budget you can get the five fat, balding, 40 year- old guys in the gym for six months and with a diet program and plenty of Pilates you can make one hell of an attempt at resurrecting a sound of a bygone era.

What about Rhythm and Blues is that dead? Hell, Nelson George proved that twenty years ago with his groundbreaking classic “The Death of Rhythm and Blues”. When Rhythm and Blues died it supposedly morphed into R&B. I know your scratching your head asking yourself if you read that right – you did. Yes R&B stands for Rhythm and Blues, so let me ask you this…do you

hear any “Blues” in R&B music today? Ok let’s take a look at the top ten R&B songs of last year. Hold on let me get situated. Ok here were go:

Let’s put it like this: John Legend, Anthony Hamilton and Leela James come damn close! But you can’t get a Cuban cigar for it. Maybe a five dollar one…But uh…Mariah Carey, Nina Sky, Gwen Stefani, Pussycat Dolls, Faith Evans, Fantasia and Destiny’s Child? Can you honestly with a straight face tell me that those acts sound like they have been inspired by the blues? I"ll wait...

Whatever happened to Grunge, Modern Rock, Acid Rock, Industrial rock and all those other styles is the same thing that happened to the Do Do Bird and other extinct species – they got swallowed up. Whether or not you believe in evolution is on you, but one thing that is a fact of nature is that only the strong survive. The same applies in music.

So now is hip-hop dead?

Well, using my current line of thought I’ll say this: The hip-hop I grew up on is dead. And it had to die to make way for a new generation to interpret the music their way.

In a recent interview with Tommy Boy Records founder and CEO Tom Silverman, I asked him what was the music industry doing wrong today?

He told me that the majors are pouring 1.5 to 3 million dollars into their acts and the records aren’t selling. In other words record companies are losing their shirts with hip-hop and R&B. I asked some friends writers I respect “Is Hyphy Hip-Hop or a cousin?”

They all said, “Yeah it’s Hip-Hop.”

In all fairness I was supposed to call Adisa but I caught the flu, shit has had me out of business until today. Yo Adisa I’m gonna call home boy.

Anyway after some of the usual back and forth with this guy I say, ok, it’s a sub genre just like Grunge and all those other styles are to Rock. But never the less it is Hip-Hop as are Snap, Bounce, Krunk and Chopped and Screwed. It ain’t the hip-hop I grew up on, but it is hip-hop. One day in a couple of years from now all of those sub genres will give way for a new style of hip- hop. Speaking of which what happened to ‘Miami Bass’ is that still being done?