

Hip-Hop Journalist Role

Written by Westside ID263

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Hip-hop and journalism crossed paths last night in a roundtable discussion with some of the biggest names in contemporary music criticism.

The event, sponsored by the Clive Davis Department of Recorded Music at NYU and held in a packed-beyond-capacity lounge of Pless Hall, marked a celebration of the recent release of the book "And It Don't Stop: the Best American Hip-hop Journalism of the Last 25 Years."

Organizers expanded the room in Pless Hall by opening three sets of double doors and adjusting the audio equipment so everyone in the back could hear, causing a half hour delay.

"I guess hip-hop's just too popular for NYU," said Jason King, chair of the Clive Davis department, who moderated the discussion.

Raquel Cepeda, the editor of "And It Don't Stop" and former editor-in-chief of hip-hop magazine "The Source," was on hand to field questions. Other hip-hop journalism gurus present included Dream Hampton, a Tisch graduate and co-author of Jay-Z's autobiography, and Robert Christgau, Village Voice critic and editor.

Christgau got the ball rolling by clarifying the distinction between the music journalist and his or her subject.

"Pop music is not cerebral," he said. "Journalism has to be cerebral and critical."

Bill Adler, author of the Run/DMC biography *Tougher than Leather*, offered a caveat to those considering journalism, music-oriented or not, as a career.

"It's hard to make a living as a writer," he said. "I did it out of love, and love doesn't pay the rent."

Sasha Jenkins, an established critic of hip-hop culture who got his start via self-publication, said he preferred not to be pigeonholed when asked to define hip-hop journalism.

"First of all, the concept or term "hip-hop journalism" is not my thing," he said. "At the end of the day, I'm a journalist."

Nelson George, author of "Hip-Hop America" and co-author of Russell Simmons' autobiography, used a recent celebrity incident to illustrate how hip-hop as a social phenomenon has changed over the years.

"When Jay-Z wears a suit, everyone at the MTV Awards is wearing a suit and tie," he said. "I thought hip-hop was all about saying "fuck you" to all that stuff."

Jenkins drew the discussion of hip-hop's future in this country to a close when he heralded the rise of "rap culture", the corporate commodification of music for profit.

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"In America, hip-hop is dead," he said. "Long live rap."

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