

THE MIDDLE-AGED WHITE GUY'S GUIDE TO CHRISTIAN RAP

presented by
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all about represent'n, front'n... and a bunch of other stuff you don't understand.

For a long time now I've enjoyed Christian rap music, but the challenge has been in understanding it, the genre, the beats, the culture. Not too long ago a young man named Sope (SHOW-pay), a rapper who goes by the name Spoken, began attending my church and he quickly became a friend. When I asked him to help this middle-aged white guy understand holy hip hop, he took me to school and together we've created The Middle-Aged White Guy's Guide to Christian Rap.

BEATS

- ...are the music on which the artist overlays his subject matter.
- ...are often permeated with a heavy bass line (which is why you saw your neighbor's kid stuffing a subwoofer in the trunk of his car).
- ...are designed to elicit a physical response like head-bobbing, but not in such a way that it detracts from the lyrical content.
- ...are diverse with some being bare and stripped down with others featuring full orchestrations. The best beats combine layers of sound and both complex and simple patterns in a cohesive and complementary way.

Do

Listen to "Joyful Noise" by Flame. Listen for music that engages you immediately, the drum pattern that feeds into the rock guitar riff, and a beat that gets your head bobbing. If the sippy cup in your center console is buzzing like the T-Rex is out, you're doing it right.

Do Not

Blow the windows out of your Volvo while "dropping" your favorite beats.

SPITTIN'

- At heart, rap is poetry laid on an instrumental bed. Like all poetry, its power depends on lyric, metre and presentation.
- The best lyrics keep on giving every time you listen as they grow toward a fuller meaning.
- Rap lyrics often use similes, metaphors, alliterations, and a variety of rhyming patterns. One of the most powerful lyrical tools is the double entendre which allows the rapper to connect the sometimes abstract truth with very concrete realities.
- Great rappers balance complex rhyme schemes with the straightforward presentation of facts.
- The most evocative lyrics speak to issues the listener is facing. For the Christian rapper, the content revolves around the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Do

Think on lyrics like "Them awards can't follow you to the grave//You livin' for them whips and chains, then you a slave."- Lecrae

Do Not

Gravely misapply your love for rap music by attempting a funny answering machine message. We will not wait for the beep.

EMCEE'S

- "Emcee" is a derivative of M.C. (Master of Ceremonies).
- All emcees are rappers but not all rappers are emcees. A rapper spits his rhymes on stage; an emcee is a rapper at the top of his game, one who can control a crowd and lead them along with him.
- Emcees typically draw from many musical genres, allowing them to innovate in their field.

Do

Get to know Lecrae, Flame, Trip Lee, Shai Linne, Tedashii.

Do Not

Take it too hard if you are ostracized for your insistence that Carman was a rapper.

HIP-HOP... (THE CULTURE)

- ...is the broader culture from which rap music emerges; rap is the musical expression of that culture.
- ...has distinctive worldview, language and fashion.
- ...worldview glorifies drugs, sex and possessions. Christian hip-hop maintains the rap art form and the neutral aspects of the culture and uses it to preach Christ.
- ...language involves the use of Ebonics (which means ignoring much of what you were taught about grammar). It has evolved its own vocabulary: homie, dawg, hood, bling, etc.
- ...fashion is fanatical about sneakers (especially Jordans, known as "Jays"), the ball cap (known as a "fitted") and accessories (earrings, chains, etc). Thankfully the era of baggy, ill-fitting clothing has largely come to an end.

Do

Listen to "House of Representatives" by The Cross Movement to take a crack at deciphering the lingo.

Do Not

Try too hard to adopt hip-hop slang. Seriously.

ROOTS

- Because no one thought to document the early days of Christian rap, there is some debate about its roots. What is known is that it emerged in the early to mid 80's in Nashville and Los Angeles.
- Popular groups like Gospel Gangstas and L.A. Symphony emerged in the 90's and were followed by artists like The Ambassador and Da' T.R.U.T.H.
- The Internet brought about an explosion of interest in Christian rap.
- Today's most popular labels include Lampmode Recordings, Reach Records and Xist Music.

Do

Listen to Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight", a good sample of the genesis of rap music.

Do Not

Assume that D.C. Talk's "I Luv Rap Music" is where it all began.

REFORMATION... (THEOLOGY)

- A trend in Christian rap is expressing profound theological truths through this genre. The sheer word count in many rap songs allows in-depth theological engagement. Some refer to this as "lyrical theology."
- Many of today's most popular Christian rappers are theologically Reformed, having been influenced by pastors and theologians such as John Piper, John MacArthur, Mark Dever and C.J. Mahaney.
- Recent albums have taken on theological themes such as the atonement, putting sin to death, the attributes of God and biblical manhood.

Do

Listen to Shai Linne's "Taste and See" and enjoy this celebration of God's goodness.

Do Not

Build a theology based on rap music. God's Word always transcends our cultural styles and moments, but in this moment, there is much good to find in holy hip-hop.

CHALLIES TOP TEN

Need a place to start? Here are ten of my favorite tracks.

Joyful Noise by Flame

God Is Enough by Lecrae

In Adam All Die by Shai Linne

Make War by Tedashii

Robot by Trip Lee

The Invasion by Trip Lee

Unstoppable by Voice

Don't Waste Your Life by Lecrae

Taste and See by Shai Linne

Go Buck by Flame



Challies.com



RoleModelRecords.ca

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