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Mr. Greco

English 3

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### Bay Area Hip-Hop: The Movement

The thumping of stereo speakers replace the silence of the calm environment of Stockton, California. The normally quiet park has transformed into a festive gathering of all ages. A group of parents grabbing food, another group of kids playing games on the grass, and another group is dancing. Despite the variety of activities taking place, there was one factor that set the mood for the afternoon, which was controlled by a person behind a table surrounded by speakers, turn tables, and computers. Brian Sabio didn't arrive to party like the rest of the attendees, but instead, he came to set the party and to take control of the atmosphere. By pressing buttons and twisting knobs, he was able to get everyone to feel the way he wanted them to feel. The Bay Area style 808 bass drums combined with snares and a catchy hook was the perfect recipe to get the crowd moving.

Brian always incorporates Bay Area hip-hop into his mix because he has always been in love with the uniqueness that the Bay has to offer. More importantly, he has included the Bay in almost every single one of his mixes because the bay has always been about doing what you want with the music you create. By being in an environment with that type of music and culture, Brian has learned to be independent with his style and to always take pride and honor from the place where he calls home.

Bay Area hip-hop has been around almost as long as the first performance of “Rapper’s Delight” by New York’s, The Sugarhill Gang in 1978. Like many other genres of music, hip-hop has evolved to have its own sub-genres based off of different regions in the country, Bay Area hip-hop being one of them. Bay Area hip-hop itself has gone through its own transformations over time, but as a whole it is seen as being a type of music that is high energy. It is also very respected due to the fact that throughout its entire history it has kept its independence as a genre of hip-hop. Its uniqueness is a very important aspect because it easily separates itself from other sub-genres, which makes its message not necessarily more important, but possibly more interesting. For the last 30 years, hip-hop has become a platform for artists to express their views about nearly any topic. In addition, hip-hop recently surpassed rock as the most popular genre of music in the world and it shows no signs of its popularity slowing down anytime soon.

Todd Anthony Shaw was fresh out of his teen years when he and a friend, Freddy B, decided to start making music for people in Oakland. Shaw, however, was originally from Los Angeles. During the early 80’s he and his family moved to Oakland. By 1985, Shaw would start going by the name Too Short (poking fun at his below average height of 5’7”) and released his first album, Don’t Stop Rappin’. He would continue to make music to the early 90’s using self-produced beats from a TR-808 drum machine. Along with Shaw, Earl Tywone Stevens was also making a name for himself up north in Vallejo, California. Stevens, better known by his stage name, E-40, made his debut a year after Too Short with his group The Click. They continued to release projects until E-40 started his solo career with the release of his debut album, Federal. After independently releasing their music, E-40 and Too Short were among the first artists from the bay, let alone the West Coast to sign with a major record label. E-40 signed

with Jive Records in 1994, and six albums followed as a result. These signings ultimately boost Bay Area hip-hop's growing popularity.

However, not until the late 90's did the Bay find its most well-known aspect of hip-hop and culture, the Hyphy Movement. The word hyphy stems from the word hyperactive. The movement consists of sideshows, ghostriding, street racing, and dancing. Too Short and E-40 were continuing to make music during this time, but another artist from E-40's hometown of Vallejo was rapidly gaining traction during the Hyphy Movement. Andre Hicks, better known as Mac Dre started releasing music the same time as Too Short and E-40, but his change in style led to his music being the perfect accompaniment to the hyphy culture in the Bay. Mac Dre's status during the early 2000's was unmatched compared to any other artist from the Bay during the time. Mac Dre released eight projects within a four year period, which included Thizelle Washington, The Genie Lamp, and Thizelle Washington. From these albums came singles like Since '84, Get Stupid, and Feelin Myself, which instantly became Bay Area anthems. Thanks to the Hyphy Movement and music that came with it, Bay Area hip-hop saw some mainstream exposure for a short time during the early 2000's, however it slowly faded along with the hyphy movement. Around the same time, rapper Mac Dre was involved in a shooting in Kansas, which ultimately resulted in his untimely death. After a number of years with no major exposure to the rest of the country, hyphy saw a resurgence during the late 2000's with singles from Too Short and E-40. Along with these pioneers, the bay saw new acts such as Lil B, HBK Gang, and pop rapper G-Eazy. These younger artists were able to build off of the foundation that older artists created in order to create their own unique sound. This led to some of the most mainstream exposure the Bay has ever seen. The resurgence not only was carried on by Bay Area artists, but

also was carried on by artists from all around the West Coast. This was one of the first times the Bay Area sound had spread to artists from other regions to the point that they would adopt the style and use it as their own. Production styles from DJ Mustard heavily reflect hyphy styles and became responsible for national exposure of West Coast hip-hop. In addition, Canadian rapper Drake released a hyphy-influenced track, “The Motto,” where he pays respect to the Bay by mentioning the region and honoring late rapper Mac Dre, as said by Carrie Battan from the New Yorker. The resurgence of the hyphy culture later translated into the rise of many more artists from the Bay Area. The emergence of Mike Sherm, P-Lo, and group, SOB X RBE, helped convert the resurgence of the hyphy movement into an influence for upcoming artists.

With the large amount of diversity in regions across the US, hip-hop in the Bay was able to grow into its own unique genre of music. This can be attributed to the fact that artists from the region are known for constantly experimenting with different styles and staying independent to their own sound. This independence somewhat stemmed from the fact that the Bay Area has been a place where pioneers were able to express their ideas and be ahead of the curve. Brian Sabio gave some insight to this idea when he said, “First off, we never follow what other people do. If you think about the history, we were always ahead of the curve. If you think back to the 60’s, the hippie movement, the love movement, that free spirit, setting the tone about what the country could be and what the country could do, I think that makes the Bay a special place.” Similar ideas are found in Joe Matthews’ SF Chronicle piece about the Bay Area and how it has served as a “hub for both social and technological innovation.” This aspect of the culture was reciprocated in the hip-hop sound that was later created. As the Bay Area artists experimented, they were able to create a variety of sounds that were exclusive to the region. A specific bass

drum from a drum machine the TR-808 became a part of that trademark Bay sound, along with drum patterns that were groovy and easy to dance to. Xabi Sullivan (or his stage name, Lil Basque), from Mountain View, California, is an up and coming artist that has been rapping for nearly two years. From Sullivan's perspective, what made the sound in the Bay unique was "The level of fun that comes with the music, and behind the 808 differentiates this category of hip-hop from other variations from across the country."

Along with the subgenre of hip-hop, the Bay also brought its own movements. The Thizz movement fostered by late rapper Mac Dre, offered a new form of expression. The word "Thizz" was a substitute for the drug ecstasy, in an effort to create a counter culture around the pill just like how other rappers at the time mentioned other drugs, as stated by WaxPoetics. Movements like these show how the Bay takes pride not only in the music, but in the culture as well. When thinking about hip-hop in the Bay it's hard to exclude the culture and different aspects that come with the music. When addressing this topic, Sabio said, "My favorite aspect is the fact that we have our own lingo and slang and the way we do things. When you listen to our music it's not just about the music. You can't appreciate hyphy from your couch. You have to be out there at a party to feel what it's really like. Back in highschool, you'd have 50 people in a house stomping on the beat and when you'd walk outside you have people doing sideshows in their cars. That's my favorite aspect, it's not just the music, it's everything that comes with it." Not only do listeners feel this way about the music and culture, but artists do as well. Sullivan shares the same perspective: "What makes music fun for me is seeing people enjoy my music because music has really gotten me through everything in life." Even with hip-hop in the Bay being unique as it is, it's very hard to ignore the culture that it always comes with.

While Sabio has only been a part-time DJ for about three years, his love for the art has come from being surrounded by the music and culture from the Bay. Brian was raised in Stockton, California and is now a resident of Sacramento. Despite Stockton being part of the Central Valley, Bay Area influence is still very significant in the region including Sacramento. As a teenager, Sabio began rapping as a hobby, as well as produced instrumentals. After a while, he figured that neither were suited for him, however, his discovery of his passion of DJing followed. When explaining why he chose to DJ, he explained that, "I always like being the dictator of the type of music that's being played. I'd always be the only person to grab the aux cord in high school, so I think it was natural for me to be a DJ." Sabio DJs at local clubs and events, but is still improving on his craft everyday. When creating a mix for an event, he has said he almost always tries to incorporate some aspect from the Bay. This is partly because he takes pride in where he's from and believes it's important to represent your influences. In addition, Sabio has said, "I try to incorporate it as much as I can. I try to fight for the underdog. We influenced a lot of mainstream stuff today. I try to slip it in here and there." Sabio has credited his influences being the same artists that have influenced the new generation of artists today.

One trait that has always kept hip-hop in the Bay alive is the amount of pride artists and residents of the Bay have for their home. Throughout the years the music in the Bay has obviously grown but it has always been able to maintain a sound that is easily identifiable. Many artists that claim to be from the Bay Area often don't use mainstream styles, but instead roll with the "sound" that the Bay is known for. Whether it's using the actual sounds that have stemmed from Bay Area hip-hop, or just integration of the culture, artists are constantly seen honoring the region that they were raised in. Rapper Lil Basque reflects, "I do try to incorporate the Bay Area

into my music by trying to make the music danceable and fun. Bay Area hip-hop is unique because of the roots that historically have made their hip-hop what it is.” In addition, artists from other regions of the country contribute heavily to the Bay by incorporating the Bay into their music as well. Southern California has been seen adopting elements of hip-hop from the Bay, which has been seen in artists such as AzChike, 1Take Jay, and DJ Mustard who was mentioned earlier. In the 2018 Black Panther Soundtrack, Kendrick Lamar, a Los Angeles native, was the album’s executive producer. Lamar contacted Bay Area rap group, SOB X RBE to be featured on one of the album’s songs. Lamar’s only request for the group was to rap how they always do. By doing this, Lamar was able to expose Bay Area hip-hop to a mainstream audience. Lastly, as said by the 2018 New Yorker, “DJ Mustard’s trademark bounce is indebted to the Bay Area’s raucous hyphy movement—a wave of abrasive, early-aughts party rap recorded in defiance of mainstream trends.” Another aspect that allows hip-hop in the Bay to thrive is the constant respect and influence among the new generation of artists.

The Bay Area consists of many smaller towns and cities, which ultimately makes up the region, as a result, artists from any given city are more likely to be connected with artists from the present and artists from the past. The impact of artists from generations before has been more than evident today, thanks to the artists that have continued the legacies of older artists. Brian Sabio himself stated, “Alright well, let’s talk about how older artists influence new bay artists. You can see through all the people that came through Mac Dre, E-40, Too Short. Lil B was one of them from the Pack. SOB comes from the same side as Mac Dre, they’ve been influenced but not directly. H.E.R. is getting a lot of traction, she’s won a lot of Grammys, she’s not a rapper but she’s not a singer. You can tell how she was influenced. You can see how the regions around the

bay are influenced. HBK as well. P-Lo raps but he makes a lot of beats for rappers around the country and keeps hyphy alive.” Not only have there been influences surrounding the music aspect, but the influence from the pioneers have also transformed the identity of artists from the Bay. Rappers such as Mac Dre and E-40 are credited to creating the image of Bay Area rappers as being more entrepreneurial and distinct, which ultimately makes them more relatable as said by Joe Matthews.

Today’s Bay Area artists are continuing to follow in the paths of the pioneers, now more than ever. More Bay Area rappers aren’t just making music, but they are making music that is attributable to being Bay Area hip-hop, and as long as these artists continue to make music, rappers from throughout the Bay’s history will continue to be credited and honored. As for the future, artists will continue to make music and try to reach new audiences within and outside of the Bay, not necessarily for the fame, but for the recognition of their music and home. “There’s a reason why they (pioneers) planted these seeds. It’s for us to be able to use going forward.” said Brian Sabio.



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