Webster Hall
128 Years, From Bohemian to EDM

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Managing Editors:
Gabe Rosenberg
William Dubbs

Contributors:
Kathleen Kang
Eric Swack
John Baierl
Ann Surber
Matthew Auster
Merry Li
Melissa Arroyo
Sean Mihaljevich
Kassandra Leidemer
Maimouna Siby
Peter Chu
Marisa Yang

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Homegrown in Brooklyn
THE RISE OF CAPTURED TRACKS

By Kathleen Kang
Mike Sniper of Captured Tracks, c/o Pop Montreal.

In today’s digital world, where independent record labels and artists are constantly devising new ways to remain competitive, Brooklyn-based record label Captured Tracks manages to find success by sticking with a traditional, homegrown approach. The label was created by Mike Sniper in late 2008, beginning with the release of his band’s Captured Tracks Volume One CD-R.

Five years later, Captured Tracks has a small but critically acclaimed roster with acts such as Beach Fossils, Wild Nothing, DIIV, and Mac DeMarco, and it is already one of the more prolific American independent labels with over 166 releases since 2009.

“It’s interesting,” said Pitchfork founder Ryan Schreiber. “For us to create this world, it feels like somehow it’s been around much longer. It sort of already has a sense of feeling like an institution. Mike has a really classic approach to what a label needs. I think Captured is one of the few current labels that has a compelling sense of mystique or mythology about it. I can imagine people being obsessed with Captured the way they were obsessed with 4AD in the early ‘90s. Looking at catalog numbers and trying to get their hands on every format and edition.”

When Captured Tracks started up, it shared a building with the label Mexican Summer. Katie Garcia, current label manager, was working as the label’s sole intern. “My first impression of Mike was that he was extremely mysterious and evasive,” Garcia said. “Mike was kind of like the Wizard of Oz. I didn’t meet him for the first three weeks that I interned there.”

During this time, Beach Fossils’ first 7-inch “Daydream” was being prepared for release. In several months, Beach Fossils’ self-titled LP, along with Wild Nothing’s debut Gemini, were released on the same exact day. “That was kind of what broke the label in a way,” Garcia said. “I was the only intern for maybe two or three months, and finally, I said, ‘Listen, I can’t be only intern. The label’s growing really fast; we need to get more people in here.’

Today, as the label manager (and fiancée of Beach Fossils frontman Dustin Payseur), Garcia not only performs traditional tasks such as putting records into production, but also helping search for new bands to sign. “I consider all of the bands we work with to be my friends,” she said. “I want to work hard for them because I feel connected to them as people, not just as musicians. I feel like that makes our label unique. A lot of other labels seem to have a more detached way of operating.”

The combined success of Beach Fossils and Wild Nothing allowed the label to expand in other ways. With his artists’ input, Sniper worked on reissuing selections from some of their favorite established independent artists, such as The Servants and The Wake. In addition, Sniper launched The Shoegaze Archives project to document and reissue overlooked material from past shoegaze artists. All releases are available on vinyl, cassette, and extended CD format.

“They’re bands from the ‘80s and ‘90s who kind of have a similar place in history to many of the artists who Captured is releasing now,” said Schreiber of the project. “They’re niche artists in the same way that a lot of Captured bands are. The records he puts out now are really almost like contemporary versions of those records.”

“I think Captured Tracks retains the essential spirit of the best independents from the past and yet seems able to compete and stand out in the present day,” said Caesar McInulty, frontman of The Wake.

So what exactly is Sniper’s formula for success? Schreiber says that Sniper is “one of the most insane collectors” he knows, possessing many unreleased rarities. It is this same obsession with finding new talent that powers Captured Tracks. Sniper claims he will only work with a new band if he is releasing their first record.

“If a label is to maintain any esteem or credibility,” he said, “it should maintain a 50 percent homegrown talent base. “If you can’t maintain that meager ratio, you’re probably not a record label—you’re a manufacturing plant with a cool logo.”

Developing a sense of community has been an important aspect of Captured Tracks from the start. “The intent was to do good by our bands,” Sniper said. “As a result, we’ve developed this community. Because of all of these bands coming up at the same time, they all tour together, they all play together. There’s that sense of community like there was for Factory, 4AD.”

Sniper demonstrates that even with a traditional approach, a small, independent label can succeed with the help of carefully selected artists and staff who are passionate and like-minded.

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The legacy of Skydog

A Renewed Appeal to Remember Duane Allman

By Erick Swack
Perhaps it is an outworn slogan amongst the select fans of Duane Allman who persist, but I must join the chorus by in appealing to you to recognize the greatness of what might be rock ‘n’ roll’s most forgotten talent.

Surely there have been others who have been overlooked in the collective history of rock—certainly the early black pioneers of the genre, for instance, have drawn the short stick. Indeed, Duane Allman’s historical persona is that of someone who has to be “remembered,” as to suggest that even in the years directly following his death, he faded quickly from rock consciousness—that he was a relic even in his own time.

This is, however, only further reason to affirm his status in the modern day as one of the greatest rock guitarists to ever play, and to look to the example of someone like Robert Johnson as a brilliant musician who only received the recognition he was due long after he had died.

There are reasons why Skydog faded from history, not least of which was the brevity of his career—he only received the recognition he was due long after he had died.

Not only was Allman a superior musician, but his playing was more distinct. His unique sound was largely a function of his use of a slide when playing the guitar, a tool that allowed him to bend and weave together notes the way no one with only a standard fret board could. He is widely considered the greatest slide-guitarist to ever live, although the style is not particularly common even today.

Though his recordings with other artists are shining examples of Duane’s brilliance, it was his work with his brother (amongst others) in The Allman Brothers Band for which he should be best remembered. The band’s At Fillmore East is widely considered one of the greatest live albums ever recorded, and brilliantly showcases Duanes’ flowing licks and soaring solos. Furthermore, the fact that the album was recorded live demonstrates Allman’s pure ability, without post-production or second takes that might allow lack of raw talent to be covered up.

Between the live album and their studio recordings, The Allman Brothers Band became the most successful rock band to come out of the south at the time of their debut. This paved the way for numerous other bands from the region, but also served as the foundation for a totally original sound that so authentically drew upon the layers of southern music traditions. To this day The Allman Brothers Band is considered the preeminent example, and founders of, the Southern Rock sub-genre.

For a time, Rolling Stone magazine beat back the ignorance of popular memory, naming Duane in 2003 the second greatest guitarist of all time (behind only Jimi Hendrix). However by the time of their 2011 rankings he had slipped to #9. While acknowledging the fact that Rolling Stone has a vested interest in changing the list so as to encourage consumption of what would otherwise be recycled material, this still reflects a tacit acknowledgment of Allman’s increasingly marginalized stature.

His status has become that of a “musician’s musician,” but his greatness should not be reserved for students of rock who happen upon his recordings. Not only does he deserve more, but so too do all those who seek out great music.

Because of this, I continue the appeal, so vividly carved in the dirt by I-20 in Vicksburg in 1973: Remember Duane Allman.
CBGBs: A Place All Their Own

by John Baierl
CBGB was the perfect venue for its time and place. In an industry dominated at the time by disco and other popular music, CBGB was the foil, simultaneously providing a grungy hangout for urban youth and granting young talent much-needed artistic freedom.

The man behind the operation of CBGB was its eccentric owner, Hilly Kristal. His commitment to creativity and openness to the new and the unknown crafted CBGB’s identity and fostered its rise to prominence on the New York scene.

Above all else, Kristal wanted to make a place where good music could interact with the community, and young, creative bands could develop their own sound. Kristal was particularly devoted to the creative aspect of rock. From early on, in a scene where cover music dominated the popular scene, Kristal insisted that his artists play entirely their own work. “I felt originality was the most important thing in rock,” Kristal said. “I felt very good about it, letting them do their own thing. In any art form, I think that’s the most important thing.”

For a mere four-dollar cover charge, a devoted and young fan base gained access to some of the most innovative and exciting musicians of the time, and the force behind it all was Kristal’s fearless commitment to fostering creativity for the artist. Bands like the Ramones and Television got an opportunity to develop, experiment, and blossom into the musical forces they would eventually become, and did so within a tight artistic community centered on CBGB.

Kristal remained the owner of CBGB until its closing in 2006 due to the skyrocketing neighborhood rent. He left behind a legacy of community and creativity that defined an entire era of rock music and gave rise to some of the most innovative art of the time.

“CBGBs wasn’t just about Hilly or the people who played there or New York City, it represented freedom for young people,” said Patti Smith. “To me, the name CBGBs could be a slang term at this point meaning freedom. Hilly offered us unconditional freedom.”

To the artists that called it home, CBGB held more than merely nostalgic significance. It was an embodiment of what they felt rock ‘n roll should be.

By any reasonable standards, CBGB was a dump. “I’m not trying to romanticize anything because in some ways it was a shithole,” said musician Patti Smith. “The sound was crap, there was always things breaking down and glasses breaking and people vomiting and the rats scurrying around in the back.”

Its dank and cramped interior along with the notoriously run-down bathrooms gave CBGB an aesthetic more akin to an abandoned closet than a music venue. It was indeed, to use Smith’s words, a shithole.

“But it was our shithole,” Smith said, “and that was the greatest thing. I’ve played a lot of places and it was the only place I’ve ever played that felt like our place.”

Smith was a frequent performer at CBGB throughout the mid to late 70s, and she became an integral part of a thriving scene of punk and experimental musicians in downtown Manhattan. Artists like Blondie, Television, Television, and later the Police and Sonic Youth would revolutionize the rock world and catapult themselves to music immortality, all from this cramped New York City music haven.

During its 12-year tenure on the Bowery in the East Village, CBGB & OMFUG (which stands for Country, Bluegrass, and Blues and Other Music For Uplifting Gormandizers) was the heart of a vibrant, progressive community of musicians inhabiting lower Manhattan. For these largely unknown young artists, CBGB gave them a free and limitless platform for self-expression and experimentation without the constant pressures of critical standards.

“In a club the size of CBGB, you get to play entirely their own work. And CBGB provided a one-of-a-kind place to do it. As purely a performance space, it was nothing special; the stage was only about a foot high and tiny, with performers usually busting right up against the audience. “When we started playing there, there was nobody there, maybe ten people, eight of whom were working there,” Frantz said.

Combine that with a mere 300-person capacity, and you get CBGB. Though not exactly easy on the eyes, the venue itself undoubtedly shaped the music that came out of it. In a setting like that, an artist had no choice but to be genuine.

“CBGB was the most important thing in rock. I felt very good about it, letting them do their own thing. In any art form, I think that’s the most important thing. — Hilly Kristal
the needle drops again

An Exclusive Interview with Music Vlogger Anthony Fantano

By Ann Surber
When 27-year-old Anthony Fantano isn’t working at the local pizza parlor in Plainville, Conn., he’s listening, reviewing, recording, editing—there’s very little downtime for the self-proclaimed “internet’s busiest music nerd.”

With over 118,000 YouTube subscribers and nearly 26 million total video views, Anthony’s blog/vlog The Needle Drop makes him not only the busiest but one of the most successful reviewers in the blogsphere. As part of the WESU Lecture Series at Wesleyan, Anthony spoke to an audience of his followers in September of 2012.

Through various internet social circles, however, I have been acquainted with Anthony for almost two years, and with this privilege was able to interact with him in a more intimate setting for a Q&A—the Athenian II in Middletown, over some veggie burgers.

Ann Surber: What inspired you to start reviewing music?
Anthony Fantano: A lack of success in what I was doing with my blog and radio show. Experimenting with something new until I found what worked for me as someone who covers music on the internet.

AS: How does your own personal taste affect the way you review music, if it does at all?
AF: It affects it in just about every way imaginable. I do say some indigestible facts in my reviews — for example, if a certain musician appears on a track, or if a sound has a “distorted” quality — however, my final judgment on what I’m hearing boils down on my personal taste. My reviews are mostly opinions, and I try to stress that as much as possible.

AS: How do you feel music reviewers such as yourself and the staff of Pitchfork affect the general public perception of a group or album?
AF: I think artists have a little bit more of a safety net in the internet age. Their hardcore fans can listen to the record before the critics get a chance to talk about it, and then make their own decisions on what they’re hearing. But with all of the competition to be heard out there, critics can stomp out the buzz of growing artists or even prevent the buzz of up-and-comers if the critics themselves are the exposure point for the artists they’re reviewing.

AS: How do you feel the influences of early rock and R&B still remain relevant in today’s music?
AF: I think they’re still relevant in the sense that they’re the foundation of a lot of music we hear today, and it comes out more boldly in the work of some artists—The Black Keys are definitely an example of that.

AS: How do you feel about the term “classic rock”? Do you believe that it’s taken on a loaded terminology in some circles of music?
AF: It’s loaded, yeah. Some genres don’t describe what a genre sounds like. Rather, it describes a group of people who listen to the music, the people who play the music or the era and time the music comes from. What does “punk rock” mean? What the hell is “blue-eyed soul”? And what does “indie rock” sound like? A lot of genres don’t describe things in a way that they should.

AS: What do you think about the criticism of artists like Fun. “selling out”?
AF: I think the term “selling out” has way less validity than it used to. Sure, it might not be the same as selling out in the Internet age isn’t the same as selling out in the ’80s or ’90s. Back in the day, companies wanted to use your hit song in a commercial because of the emotional attachment the general public has for it.

Nowadays, we have underground artists like Chairlift and getting famous off the back of commercials featuring their songs. We have companies with marketing departments filled with hip, young kids who want to use music from their favorite indie bands, ignoring the fact that the target demographic for the advertisement may not even be familiar with the band whose music is being featured.

Making money off your music these days — if you can do it — doesn’t mean changing your sound, changing your image, or compromising your morals. The option to do all those things is there, sure, but you don’t have to take it if you don’t want. “Selling out” isn’t as black and white as it used to be. It’s now a grey-scale.

AS: How would you describe the influence and power of the internet on the distribution of music?
AF: It’s allowed artists to promote their music for very little money, and leveled the playing field in terms of who listeners/labels have access to. If your stuff is on YouTube, SoundCloud, or Bandcamp, people can hear you in order for that to happen people used to have to print a record, CD, or cassette. We’re in a new age of sharing.

AS: Do you think that the positive sales trend in vinyl records will continue into the short-term and long-term future?
AF: I think the percentage of vinyl sales in the industry is growing partially because of the rise of digital killing CDs, and the fact that there is less physical sales overall. Let’s get that out of the way, ha.

But, yeah, I think people will continue to buy vinyl as long as there are nerdy music fans who want to get a bit more, uh, “intimate” with the music they hold dearly. Will there be more vinyl sales in the future? Well, there would be more nerdy music fans in order for that to happen, or the economy would have to pick back up. The chances of either of those happening are fuzzy at the moments.

AS: How do you feel about artists such as Lil B who have a prominent internet fanbase/are very successful on the internet?
AF: I feel he’s taken to the new model of music entertainment better than some artists have; however, not every artist can afford to make the kind of music Lil B makes. I think B is great at what he does with his music — which is essentially get an emotional rise out of people — but not everyone can follow that model and be as successful as him.

AS: What do you think about piracy?
AF: It hurts and helps. While it gives some artists the exposure they need to become relevant, it hurts them in the sense that they’re not making any money off the music they worked on all that time.

“Making money off your music these days — if you can do it — doesn’t mean changing your sound, changing your image, or compromising your morals.”

— Anthony Fantano
New York City’s Webster Hall didn’t always look as it does today, packed wall to wall with screaming 19- to 20-somethings, their writhing bodies bathed in a tidal wave of smoke and laser light. Though most widely recognized as a concert venue and nightclub, pumped full of mind wrecking distortion and enough throbbing bass to give even the most fit of club-goers a stroke, this wonderland of light and sound is merely the most recent incarnation of the historical venue.

Throughout its almost 128 year history, Webster Hall has served a myriad of purposes. The space has played host to various crowds during its tenure, lending itself to causes every bit as diverse as the patrons who currently frequent the nightclub the seven days a week events are hosted.

Located on the Lower East Side of Manhattan at 119 East 11th Street, the venue was commissioned by Polish cigar maker and entertainment entrepreneur Charles Goldstein and constructed by architect Charles Rentz in 1886. In its early history, Webster Hall was the site of countless “gatherings, balls, receptions, fundraisers, and social events.” One of the earliest events held there was a banquet for 60 members of Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish military members, planned by Charles Goldstein himself. Thus began Webster’s role as a “room for hire,” a space that could be rented for any social purpose to paying customers.

In 1892, an Annex located next-door to the original site at 125 East 11th Street was acquired for the Goldstein family to live in, and they soon built a ballroom, restaurant, and saloon in the remaining space of this Annex. Webster Hall at this time attracted an eclectic crowd, with some of the most prominent East-Village bohemians frequenting Webster to socialize. They threw lavish parties, costume balls and political fundraisers, hosted union and labor rallies, and networked amongst their peers.

Some of the more famous attendees of the early 1900s include the anarchist philosopher and activist Emma Goldman, Dada artists Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, author F. Scott Fitzgerald, as well as a number of other preeminent artists, activists, and socialites. Though the grand ballroom was on occasion rented out for “high-society” events as well, the location soon became known for the leftist and politically extreme clientele it attracted due to the owner’s indiscriminate booking policies. This was partially due to the accessibility of the venue to...
Due to the association with the hedonistic lifestyle of East Village bohemia and many of its patron’s extremely liberal views, Webster Hall gained several nicknames in the press: “The Devil’s Playhouse,” “The Blind Man’s Ball,” and “The Pagan Rout.”

The Lower East Side’s poorer immigrant community, who felt they could freely congregate in the space and openly discuss their troubles. In 1916, Webster Hall served as the headquarters for the International Ladies Garment Worker’s Union, a key organization for the development of the labor and women’s rights movements. A few years later in 1920, meetings of the Sacco and Vanzetti Defense Committee were held here.

This landmark trial led to the ultimate conviction and execution of two Italian immigrants, Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco, for a bank robbery which it is now believed they did not commit. Current public opinion holds that they were largely convicted based on their immigrant status and anarchist views— a key indicator of the social and political climate of the time.

Due to the association with the hedonistic lifestyle of East Village bohemia and many of its patrons’ extremely liberal views, Webster Hall gained several nicknames in the press: “The Devil’s Playhouse,” “The Blind Man’s Ball,” and “The Pagan Rout.”

Floyd Dell, writer for the socialist newspaper The Masses, recalls his time at the many of the costume parties of the era: “They were spontaneously joyous and deliberately beautiful, focusing in a mood of playfulness the passion for loneliness which was one of the things that brought us to the village.”

The masquerades and parties held at Webster during the 1920s also had extreme significance for the lesbian and gay community. They were allowed, and often encouraged, to attend in full drag, as it enhanced the scandalous reputation of the venue and the events held there.

During prohibition, Webster was operated as a speakeasy, serving liquor to all paying customers. During this time, it is rumored that the hall was owned by the infamous gangster Al Capone. Protection money was lavished on the police and local politicians in order to ensure that the party never stopped, and the club’s popularity soared.

When prohibition was extinguished the frivolity of the “raging ’20s,” and for the “return of John Barleycorn,” was thrown. The great depression in the 1930s, however, all but extinguished the frivolity of the “raging ’20s,” and for the next 20 years the now-famous hall was used mostly for labor gatherings, union meetings, and various other political purposes.

Though there were occasional parties, it was not until the early 1950s, when Latin performers such as Tito Puente began performing at Webster and RCA Records began recording in the newly-renovated studio space, that Webster began to regain its party atmosphere.

Starting in 1953, RCA Records established the basement of Webster hall as their official east coast recording branch: “Webster Hall Studios.” Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Louis Armstrong, Ray Charles, and many others recorded there, including Bob Dylan’s recording debut; playing harmonica on Harry Belafonte’s Midnight Special. “The Studio,” as the studio was called today, soon became a favorite spot for the recording of many Broadway show soundtracks due to the space’s excellent acoustics.

During the time RCA recorded at Webster (1953-1968), the ballroom featured not only Latin artists, but also folk singers such as Pete Seeger and Woodie Guthrie, and the stage played a central role in the rise of the folk rock scene of New York City.

In 1980, the club was purchased as a venue to feature emerging rock acts and renamed “The Ritz.” Acts that played during this time included Madonna, Tina Turner, Eric Clapton, Aerosmith, Kiss, Guns & Roses, Metallica, B.B. King and many others.

Siring made his first solo performance at The Ritz, and both U2 and Depeche Mode made their American debuts there. Prince and many others often referred to the venue as the “best stage in New York City.” The Ritz was the first venue to incorporate video in live performances.

However, by the mid- to late-’80s, rock and roll at Webster Hall declined, as attendees preferred smaller venues such as CBGB’s and others. The Ritz relocated away from Webster Hall in 1986.

This allowed for the purchase of “The Ritz,” by the Ballinger Brothers, four entrepreneurs free from the presence of the hundreds of drunk clubbers who walk blindly through the historical space. The venue has been intertwined with the culture and personality of the city— New York, and the Village in particular, would be a very different place without it.

It is because of this impact that Webster Hall was designated a New York City landmark in 2008. Hopefully, this is a sign that Webster Hall will continue to play an integral part in the city’s future while retaining the beauty and spirit of its past.

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Madonna, in 1993, and Tina Turner, in 1985, at Webster Hall. c/o Keith York City
Often overlooked for more “posh” and trendy venues by the traditional clubbing crowd, Webster Hall provides an experience like no other, both musically and visually.

The architecture of both the interior and exteriors is exquisite, and is best appreciated during the daytime, free from the presence of the hundreds of drunk clubbers who walk blindly through the historical space. The venue has been intertwined with the culture and personality of the city—New York, and the Village in particular would be a very different place without it.

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Elvis Presley and Eminem—two of the biggest names in music—realized that race and the color of their skin allowed them to reach audiences that others could not. Not to imply that Elvis was guilty of “stealing” black music; rather, his natural talent as an entertainer combined with the color of his skin allowed him to bring rock and roll, a predominantly black genre of music, to new (white) audiences and be very successful in doing so.

As a child, Elvis was inspired and influenced by white musicians, such as the country music singer Hank Snow, as well as black musicians, like blues artists Rufus Thomas and Arthur Crudup. He made his first recordings in Memphis between 1951 and Sun Records, a small record label focused on recording the music of local black artists from the Mississippi Delta region.

Sam Phillips, the owner and producer at Sun Records, famously said, “If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars.” Elvis was that white man, and although Phillips did not make a billion dollars off of Elvis, he had the right idea. 

Elvis was white, and although rock and roll did not experience the same mainstream success as black music at the time, he was able to bring it to the mainstream market in a way no black artist could.

Now fast-forward a few decades. Hip-hop/rap music is rising from black culture much the same way that rock and roll did. It is impossible to pinpoint a particular origin of hip-hop/rap music. James Brown, the creator of funk music, certainly influenced hip-hop music. During the 1970s, DJs in the Bronx began isolating and emphasizing the instruments and percussion in songs. The roots of rapping include, but are not limited to, rhythmic labor songs, blues, and jazz poetry.

Whatever its origins, hip-hop and rap music were entirely black styles of music, at least initially. The hip-hop/rap groups and rappers like The Sugarhill Gang, Grandmaster Flash And The Furious Five, and Ice Cube were all African American. Arriving on the scene a little later, 2Pac and Biggie Smalls were white exceptions.

Eminem grew up listening to many different rappers, most notably, LL Cool J. The Beastie Boys, and Ice T. Initially, Eminem struggled to gain recognition and in the black community. While his music was generally well received locally, his underground album, Slim Shady, was released in 1996, sold few copies.

But everything changed when Eminem released his first album, The Marshall Mathers LP, was nominated for Album of the Year at the Grammys, which was previously unheard of for a rap album. Being white also played a role in the playtime on radio stations (mostly rock stations) that would not play black hip-hop/rap music.

In his songs, Eminem openly admires Elvis, as an entertainer. His role being white played in his career. The following excerpts are from his song, “American Beauty.”

Source:
Turn on any popular radio station, look through any teenager’s iPod, walk into any college party and you’re bound to hear the infectious beats and catchy rhythms of Macklemore and Ryan Lewis’ hit single “Thrift Shop,” from their debut album The Heist.

The dynamic indie rapper and producer duo have achieved major success in the past year, with The Heist debuting at #2 on the Billboard 200. “Thrift Shop” has been certified double platinum with over 3 million copies sold and upwards of 100 million views on YouTube.

However, the rapper has not always possessed this widespread popularity and fortune; before The Heist, he was virtually unknown. Despite lacking the support of a major record label, Macklemore and Ryan Lewis have made a name for themselves in the hip-hop, rap, and pop music worlds.

The Beginnings

Ben Haggerty, better known as Macklemore, has been interested in making music his entire life and cites his upbringing and past experiences as great sources of creativity. Born in Seattle in a stable, two-parent household, Macklemore was greatly inspired by his city, known for its indie/alternative music scene.

Though he began listening to West Coast gangster rap like Biggie and Snoop Dogg, he eventually discovered underground rap groups such as Digital Underground and Freestyle Fellowship. “I was listening to a lot of West Coast underground rap like Hieroglyphics and Project Blowed and Abstract Rude. All of those guys were really styling at the time, just crazy stylin’s and cadences. And that’s what I really inspired by.”
Growing up in Capitol Hill, an area of Seattle known for its hipster scene and large gay population, a large majority of the neighborhood was black. He attended Garfield High School, the same school as Jimi Hendrix, Quincy Jones, and Ernestine Anderson, but described the school as “wild and disruptive.”

Due to his completely new environment, he started to focus more on music.

After a year at Garfield, Macklemore switched to Nathan Hale, which was in a predominantly white neighborhood and “much tamer.” Due to his completely new neighborhood and “much tamer” environment, he started to focus more on music.

Macklemore began rapping as a teenager with his group of friends called the Elevated Eyes. Through it all, he recalls he had “very few skill sets” back then, making dubs and mixtapes and started rebelling against his parents and getting into fights. After a year at Garfield, Macklemore switched to Nathan Hale, which was in a predominantly white neighborhood and “much tamer.” Due to his completely new neighborhood and “much tamer” environment, he started to focus more on music.

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Meeting at secondary school in the late 1980s, Guy de Homem-Christo and Thomas Bangalter set out to form a rock band. Originally friends because they both shared many similar rock musical influences – from Elton John to The Rolling Stones, to Supertramp and many more – the duo had planned to make rock music. After early criticism labeling their sound as little more than “daft punk,” however, they embraced the insult, changed their band name and genre. Specifically, de Homem-Christo and Bangalter fell in love with rock music. The two are guided by the principles of sharing their music with as broad an audience as possible and to not let their audience’s opinions be distorted by the media. The duo wished to not let their faces become the “face” of a genre – susceptible to the winds of change and commercialism. Therefore, they sported robot alter egos paired with life-altering experiences, releasing a number of what can only be described as wild music videos. This idea resulted in the historic performance at Coachella just a year later.

In 2006, Daft Punk stunned the world with their landmark performance at Coachella. This performance forever changed the way fans viewed EDM festivals. As a concert venue as massive as Coachella, most of the audience see the performers as little more than spcks on the stage. In an effort to give all attendees the same life-changing experience, Daft Punk put on a show for the ages.

Standing atop an LED pyramid in their classic robot outfits, the two used light and camera choreography like never before to create what Pitchfork writer Peter Macia described as a “relentless, dynamic show.” These elements amalgamated in the true showmanship brilliance that stunned all in attendance and launched the wild ride that resulted in the massive EDM festivals we have today. By the turn of the millennium, Daft Punk had introduced not only a fresh take on house music but also introduced visual elements. Bangalter and de Homem-Christo pushed the boundaries of house music and visual aid with their second album and music-video-movie, fully embracing and adopting their alter egos. Continuing down this path of robot alter egos paired with massive music festivals, Daft Punk released their third album and shortly thereafter, performed at Coachella. This performance made spectacular use of light and camera choreography like never before and changed the landscape of EDM forever.

Moving from underground warehouses to colossal venues around the world, Daft Punk and their robotic alter egos, Human After All seems to reflect the “human” nature of the duo and does not reflect the happy-joyous sound that once defined them. However, Daft Punk had not entirely lost their way and continued down their path of aesthetics, releasing a number of what can only be described as wild music videos. This idea resulted in the historic performance at Coachella just a year later.

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What do we think of when we think of R&B?

I think of its distinct tunes. I think of its artists—black, maybe white. How about Chinese?

The word strikes such a contrast with R&B that its mere appearance in an article about R&B seems completely out of place. The truth is, although there are great Chinese artists doing R&B, there is something very off about Chinese, or the whole Asian race doing R&B.

Asian music has been so universally appreciated. I think of its distinct tunes. I think of its popularity. I think of its Artists—black, maybe white. Of its Black sentiments in R&B Chinese people sensed the exoticism of R&B, but its explicit sexual implications were not to disturb people at all, which arouses the interest in the west, the Chinese prejudices. Foreign elements became the mainstream, and people start to realize what a huge gap there is between Chinese music industry and the Western one. In a sense, R&B did not only arouse the interest in the west, it also instilled a “we-need-to-do-better” attitude, which pushed for further studies of the west.

R&B was not only the musical form that facilitated this understanding. Rock, jazz, and then later disco all had similar effects. But I believe the reason why R&B appealed the most to the Chinese audience is because it is contained. Its arrangements are subtle and melodic.

More importantly, it expresses feelings and opinions with a sense of decorum—minus the explicit sexual implications—that do not offend people or disturb people at all, which is the Chinese way of dealing with difficulties, suffering, or conflict.

Some may even say that Chinese people sensed the black sentiments in R&B music that they could relate to without ever being able to expressly understand these sentiments. When you think about it now, the Chinese and R&B, it really isn’t that strange anymore, is it?
In 1959, after writing a string of minor hits such as Jackie Wilson’s “Lonely Teardrops,” Berry Gordy decided to open his own record label, which he called Tamla Records. After the release of Tamla’s first million-selling record, “Shop Around,” in 1960, Gordy merged it with his other label into one new company: Motown Records Corporation. With his newfound success, Gordy expanded his company by purchasing the property 2648 West Grand Boulevard that became Motown’s “Hitsville USA” studio, home to the extraordinary studio band The Funk Brothers. In 1959 Gordy began gathering musicians from the jazz and blues scene in order to form the studio band for his company. The Funk Brothers played the music for all of the hits produced by Motown Records during its Detroit era. This meant that, by the end of their run, The Funk Brothers played on more Number One hit records than The Beach Boys, The Rolling Stones, Elvis, and The Beatles combined, which made them the greatest hit machine in the history of pop music.

Despite their elaborate success, few know about the Funk Brothers and their quintessential role in making Motown an unrivaled success. Joe Hunter, one of the original band members, said that “hitboxes and the radio would be playing and people would say, ‘Oh boy, that’s Motown,’ but they never know us. Nobody never mentions too much about us. As years go by we wonder if anybody will ever know who we are or what we did.”

After World War II, the auto industry in Detroit experienced an enormous boom. This inspired many southern African Americans to migrate north for the newly-available job opportunities. Most of the Funk Brothers were southern gentlemen who moved to Detroit in order to work, although none of them aspired to work in the auto industry forever. Besides working in the factory, they would play in jazz and blues clubs where each of them were approached by Gordy or other Motown producers with offers to play for their record label.

The original line up of the Funk Brothers consisted of guitarists Eddie Willis, Joe Messina, and Robert White; keyboardists Johnnyketta, Joe Hunter, and Earl Van Dyke; bassists James Jamerson and Bob Babbity; drummers Ashford and Eddie “Bongo” Brown; and drummers Urrnel Jones, Richard Allen, and Barry “Papa Zita” Benjamin (who created the Motown drum beat). The band recorded all of their hits in Studio A, “The Snakepit,” which was the basement of the Hitsville U.S.A. home.  In Motown arrangers and songwriters would approach Earl Van Dyke, the pianist and accredited bandleader, with a general concept or idea for a song. He would then tell the band what they wanted, and they would create the track themselves or add on to the initial arrangements producers provided. It was common for Jamerson, Benjamin, or Van Dyke to kick off the music session with a beat they developed, followed by each band member coming in and adding their own sound. They produced music tracks so catchy and lovable that many of their songs became crossover hits from the R&B charts to the pop charts.

Prior to the introduction of the Motown sound, it was extremely rare for an African American artist to hold a hit on the pop charts. Black music was deemed unsuitable for white audiences, so it suffered from lack of mainstream radio play and exposure. The sheer success of Motown shows how essential the Funk Brothers’ musical creativity was in making the songs crossover hits, as well as immortalizing the tracks so that all generations past and present could appreciate the Motown sound.

When asked about the role they played, percussionist Jack Ashford said, “It was our job to lay the groundwork for the kids to have a place to develop their careers singing. We had the experience, they had the talent.” Although the musicians were vital to the creative process, they unfortunately took a back seat to the artists who sang on the tracks. In the mid ’60s, Motown artists put up hit after hit, but The Funk Brothers still remained unknown. Most of the Motown musicians were unrecognized because Motown did not credit studio musicians on its records. When Motown moved from Detroit to Los Angeles in 1972, The Funk Brothers were left behind. Upon losing their jobs at Motown, most of the musicians returned to their roots of performing in jazz clubs. Those that followed Motown to LA soon felt out of place in the foreign western music scene and ultimately returned home. The Funk Brothers were one of the most influential and commercially successful bands of all time, but their story remains relatively unknown because they went unaccredited for their work. They created a sound that America as a whole, regardless of race, could love and listen to, making their place in music history equally as important as the Motown artists who achieved fame and glory for the songs they produced.

Sources:
By Maimouna Sibi

Battle of the Studio Bands

Motown, Stax, and Muscle Shoals record companies were widely recognized as the hit-making factories of the ‘60s and ‘70s. These renowned companies were known to produce some of the greatest jazz, soul, funk, and R&B singles.

Ultimately, however, the backbone of the sound of these record companies was their studio bands. The Funk Brothers, Booker T and the MGs, and the Swampers.

Group: These three bands held the unique responsibility of creating, determining, and shaping the sound of ‘60s soul.

The Funk Brothers emerged from Motown Records in 1961 as Berry Gordy sought out several talented instrumentalists to become a part of his grandiose movement in making jazz and funk contemporary. Booker T and the MGs came from Stax Records bringing to the world pop charts the thick southern soul of Memphis, Tennessee.

finally, the Swampers, most recognizable as the first interracial studio band, arose from Muscle Shoals Sound Studios in Alabama. While you may have never heard the names of some studimusician, you have certainly heard their music.

Among the handpicked members of The Funk Brothers were pianist Joe Hunter, the phenomenal bassist James Jamerson, and the drummers/backbones of the Motown beat William “Benny” Benjamin and Uriel Jones. Joining the group a few years later were guitarists Robert White, Eddie Willis, and Joe Messina. Jack Ashford and Eddie “Bongo” Brown skillfully played, and Earl Van Dyke joined the group as its main keyboardist. From the band’s inception in 1959 until 1979, the band provided the background sound for almost every act on the Motown label. Some of these acts include Marvin Gaye, The Temptations, The Supremes, The Four Tops, and Stevie Wonder. The Funk Brothers were rarely credited for their work despite the fact that, if it weren’t for their syncopated, improvisational, harmonious sound, these artists would not have had the hits that exist to this day.

Until the release of the documentary The Shadows Of Motown, most of the band members remained unknown. The 2002 film opens with the claim that they “played on more Number One records than the Beach Boys, The Rolling Stones, Elvis and The Beatles combined.”

“People always say everything but the musicians, they would say it was the artist, the producer, the way the building was structured, the wood in the door or maybe even food,” said Uriel Jones, a Funk Brothers drummer. “But I’d like to see them take some BBQ ribs or hamburgers, anything and throw down in that studio shut the door and count off 1, 2, 3, 4 and get a hit out of that.”

The band was dismissed from Motown Records after the label moved to Los Angeles in 1972. Only recently was their contribution to soul and pop music recognized. It is indisputable, however, that the highly-revered Motown sound was sustained by the sturdy foundation crafted by its studio band. Founded in 1957, Stax Records brought the stark contrast of musical integration to the thick southern soul of Memphis, Tenn. with its studio band Booker T & the MG’s.

According to Reverend Lewis Kyles, civil rights leader, “Every time in Memphis, everything in Memphis was segregated, there was not one thing integrated, nothing.” The rhythm section was comprised of Booker T. Jones and Steve Cropper on the guitar and organ, Al Jackson on the drums, and Lewis Steinberg (later replaced by Donald “Duck” Dunn) on the bass. The band were highly recognized as a result of their first and biggest hit, “Green Onions.” The song entered the Billboard Top 100 and peaked at Number Three in September of 1962. Unlike The Funk Brothers, Booker T and the MG’s were well known and credited for their work.

Beng bircial helped not only to shed light and publicity on the band, but also to show “how black and white musicians could play funky soul music.” Stax Records, in their usage of a bircial studio band and integrated artists, helped to stop the discriminating between blacks and whites and to show that music was the sentiment of the people.

Booker T and the MG’s played on classic hits by Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Carla Thomas, Albert King, and Sam and Dave. Their sound was noticeably distinguishable from its smooth and classic adversary Motown as it possessed a raw, gritty, gutsy soul.

While Motown put each of its artists through an in-house charm school, with the hopes that each artist could fit in with white America’s image of style and grace, Stax wanted to keep the company sounding as “black” as possible. Booker T and the MG’s were loud, sassy, and unrestrained, and as a result, they were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, a 30,000 square foot building furnished with ‘70s-style orange velvet couches, overlooked the Tennessee River. The studio, nestled behind a CVS drugstore in the small town of Muscle Shoals, Ala., was the first in town to cut a hit record, Arthur Alexander’s “You Better Move On.”

Muscle Shoals studios played a strain of rhythm and soul proved helpful to young, talented, and misguided Aretha Franklin, whose overpowering, unique voice had not been given a proper sound at her earlier labels.

Typically, the rhythm section for Muscle Shoals studio was an all-white group of southern musicians. To many, it was profound that white musicians backed some of the soulful hits of Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, and Etta James.

The band consisted of four members: drummer Roger Hawkins, guitarists Jimmy Johnson, keyboardist Barry Beckett, and bassist David Hood. Known together as The Swampers, the band was featured on more than 70 gold and platinum hits. At a time where racial tensions were at boil in the Deep South, the four members combined projected the heavy, rhythmic, and soulful sound that Muscle Shoals became known to produce.

These three studio bands combined were the hit-making machines of the ‘60s and ‘70s. As they are now, studio band players were the unsung stars of the music industry. While the artist and the producer receive a bulk of money, fame, and recognition, it is the studio band that is responsible for adding the proper sound that makes a song a hit.

Motown, Stax, and Muscle Shoals Records were known to be each other’s competition, but ultimately, it always came down to a battle of the studio bands.

I’d like to see them take some BBQ ribs or hamburgers, anything and throw down in that studio shut the door and count off 1, 2, 3, 4 and get a hit out of that.” — Uriel Jones

Sources:


I was nine years old when I saw *La Bamba* for the first time. It soon became a family tradition to watch this film, as we sung along to “Donna” and “We Belong Togetherness.” My family not only admired Valens for his upbeat and catchy rock and roll songs, but also because he fueled Hispanic success in the music industry.

Ritchie Valens was born Richard Steven Valenzuela on May 13, 1941 in Pacoima, California. Prior to the Second World War, Pacoima’s population was predominately Mexican-American and Japanese, but after the war, many African Americans moved to Pacoima. It became the first mixed-race town in a predominately-white San Fernando Valley. Although Ritchie lived in a very diverse town, he was frequently discriminated against because of his Mexican heritage. Valens was exposed to all types of music in his childhood: his mother mostly listened to mariachi while his father listened to blues, flamenco, jump blues and R&B. As a child, Valens had a keen sense of music, and at the mere age of 5, he made his first guitar out of a cardboard box and a broom handle.

Despite any formal music training, Valens learned how to play the guitar and drums by ear. Valens even mastered the traditional right-handed version of the guitar, even though he was naturally left-handed.

When Valens was in junior high, he would often play the guitar and sing for his friends on the bleachers. By the time Valens entered high school, he became a guitar player in a local band named The Silhouettes.

In 1958, a talent scout who worked for Bob Keane, owner of Keen Records and who worked with Sam Cooke, taped The Silhouettes. The talent scout was so impressed with the band that he sent them to audition for Keane, who was then creating a new label, Del-Fi Records.

Afer the audition, Keane decided to sign Ritchie to Del-Fi Records on May 27, 1958. This was the same time that Valens took on the name Ritchie Valens in order to broaden his audience. That same year Valens released “Come on, Let’s Go,” which became an instant national hit and eventually sold half a million copies. Valens decided to quit high school and focus on his career.

After Valens’ first album became a success, he began work on his second album, which featured his famous singles “Donna” (about a real girlfriend) and “La Bamba.” Both became popular amongst teenagers. “La Bamba” was the first commercial rock and roll song sung entirely in Spanish, and it later ranked at 354 in Rolling Stone magazine’s list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time. His single also became the title of the 1987 film about Ritchie’s childhood and rise to stardom.

Although Ritchie was in a white-dominated music industry, he stayed true to his Hispanic roots. Ritchie became a huge star at the mere age of 16, premiering in many television shows including Dick Clark’s “American Bandstand” and the film Go Johnny Go.

In 1959, Valens accompanied Buddy Holly, Dion and the Belmonts, the “Big Bopper” Richardson, and others on a rock and roll tour that was traveling through the Midwest. Tragedy struck when Valens, Holly and Richardson boarded a small plane after a performance in Iowa. Shortly after takeoff, the plane crashed due to a snowstorm, killing them instantly. Valens was only 17, and he was the youngest to die that day. This day soon became known as “The Day the Music Died.”

Valens had much promise, and although his life was cut too short, his legacy remains. He was the first to push Hispanics to resist discrimination in a white-dominated music industry, thus fueling many successful Hispanic musicians and singers such as Selena, Los Lobos, and Carlos Santana.

Ritchie Valens’ music will never be forgotten, and his legacy to the Hispanic community and to rock and roll will continue to live in the souls of many.
the cherry