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"Hip Hop is counterintelligence. It's not how much knowledge or books smarts you got... Using a turntable is innovation."

- Michael Deet, Filmmaker

GV9 SOULFUL WAYS: THE DJ

Review by: Allan Baldwin, Writer

*"It's hard to write a review about a DJ documentary without comparing it to the granddaddy of them all: **"SCRATCH"***

After all, what more could be said about the art form after the exhaustive definition that was? What with the inclusion of all the pioneers and gods of the game, and it's delineation of radio DJ, turntablist, etc., you would think there would be very little left to say or any new way to present the topic.

But after watching **Soulful Ways: The DJ** I now wonder: *if there were an elective class on the topic, might this be a better alternative?*

It's at least an excellent supplement. The quickest way to understand how Soulful Ways does something new with the information is to look at how it's organized. If "SCRATCH" mimicked the live cuts on records by rewinding images and replaying key elements of an interview, **The DJ** takes the reference to a whole new level.

The documentary is divided into chapters like: "What is a DJ", "The Basics" and "DJ Styles" on the one hand, overlaid with short howto's named after particular scratches like: "Baby Scratch", "Transformer" and "Hamster Switch". Traditionally in writing and film-making, you would expect all those how-to's to be grouped together under one of the main chapter titles, but then like the art of DJing, **GV9 Soulful Ways** is not traditional. That's where the cut-and-paste nature of the performance art and musicianship of DJing is clearly reflected in the ADD jumps and cuts of this documentary.

Like any respectable postmodern work, the process is revealed through bloopers woven into the inter-

views themselves. And in that way it's clear that while "SCRATCH" is a great documentary, it was made by someone from outside the culture looking in. The fabric of **GV9** is clearly made by someone from the inside who's living it.

"A DJ spins for the love of it, not the money, not the fame ... he's alone." - **Justin BUA**, Distorted Urban Artist, Director.

Since the pioneers are covered elsewhere, Soulful Ways is a window into what is happening right now, in a particular scene (LA), with names even the most studied DJ academic may not recognize. Names like **P-Money, DJ Hint, A.N.T.I., DJ Ethos, DA Scientist, DJ Handprints** and others tell the bedroom tale of becoming a musician in a way that, even if you've seen other such documentaries, speaks to the universality of the DJ's experience.

Watching **Soulful Ways**, I couldn't help but think how pioneers like **DJ Qbert** (who's given a shout-out), outlined the major discoveries, and now kids are following in their footsteps in one-bulb bedrooms and basements around the world. It's as if guys like **Grand Master Flash** discovered fire and now everyone cooks with it. Like with every generation's build on the past, this new generation doesn't talk about the early days of pause tapes and not being able to afford turn-



tables like **Mix Master Mike**. They are one leg up, talking about their first mixer and how laptops and keyboards are the equipment they aspire to rounding out their sound.

What also sets **Soulful Ways** apart is the quick jumps from profiling the sub-group of LA-based DJs and their labs to the MCs and how they write to the beat. How they write lyrics by phone, through texting and across state lines. To the painters and video directors like **BUA**, and how they capture and honor the culture. All this interspersed with homemade music videos, quick DJ wisdom about contract negotiation and managers.

My favorite interview, however, was with **Mike Perry**, author of **"Turntable Timmy."** Since much of the information outside of this particular group of artists wasn't new to me, I concentrated on filmmaking craft until Perry showed up. This interview alone was reason enough to watch **Soulful Ways**. The combination of an insider like director Bob Bryan interviewing and filming **Perry** was priceless. Oh, the memories and that book. Oh, the way **Perry** sat reading to his daughter his new book on low riders (**Daniels Ride**). Yup!

"Yes, I just play records."

-DJ Handprints (38 Cal DJs)

This statement brings the conversation full-circle. Where once DJs had to battle against the prevailing belief that DJing was not musicianship the way a Pianist or a Cellist

is, the DJs in **GV9** benefit from the growing understanding that this view is far from the truth. And while all the DJs featured know and agree on the names of particular scratches and combinations, a big name of the culture, **Kutmasta Kurt** (who's a staple throughout the documentary) flaunts the fact that he just plays; he doesn't know nor cares what they've come to be called. Again this is a shift away from the apologies the pioneers have had to make up until now and shows that DJing has either gained mainstream respect or is powerful enough not to care.

- Allan Baldwin, Writer <gumkojima@me.com>



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