

## Music and Memory in *Keepintime*

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*Abstract: In this essay, the author examines Keepintime: Talking Drums and Whispering Vinyl, a thirteen-minute award-winning film that documents a musical encounter between three hip hop turntablists and three session drummers that took place in Los Angeles in the year 2000. Through a close reading and analysis of the film, the essay explores the musical, cultural, and discursive terrain that connects the musical traditions represented therein, critically examining issues surrounding the African diaspora, identity formation, cultural memory, as well as trans- and inter-cultural exchange.*

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Hip hop documentary filmmaking has a lengthy history that dates back to *Style Wars*, a 1983 film about graffiti writing and early hip hop culture. With the widespread availability and relative affordability of digital video cameras since the late 1990s, increasing numbers of hip hop artists and enthusiasts are documenting different facets of hip hop culture themselves in films such as *The Freshest Kids: A History of the B-Boy* (2002), *Breath Control: The History of the Human Beat Box* (2002), and *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme* (2003) which document the history of B-boying/B-girling, beatboxing, and improvised MC-ing or freestyling, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Such films have played an important role in historicizing, representing, and constructing hip hop culture and hip hop identities, often providing a much needed corrective to mainstream representations of hip hop which tend to focus on the more sensational and antagonistic aspects of the culture.

This paper examines one hip hop documentary, in particular a film titled *Keepintime: Talking Drums and Whispering Vinyl* that documents an encounter between three hip hop turntablists and three drumming elders. The sense of musical, cultural, and generational dialogue that animates the film provides a resonant point of entry into issues and debates surrounding African diasporic musical practices and filmic representations. *Keepintime* raises a number of

important questions about diasporic intimacy, identity formation, cultural memory, and transcultural exchange. What do such musical encounters tell us, for example, about the relationships between different musical practices associated with the African diaspora? And further, how are notions of diasporic intimacy and cultural memory complicated by the fact that the musical practices featured in the film have moved beyond the diasporic communities in which they first developed? In this context, I use a close reading and analysis of *Keepintime* as a means of opening up discussion about these issues and exploring the musical, cultural, and discursive terrain that connects the musical traditions represented in the film.

### Keeping Time from Bebop to Hip Hop

On January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2000, three of Los Angeles' most recorded session drummers—Earl Palmer, Paul Humphrey, and James Gadson—were brought together with three of L.A.'s most acclaimed hip hop turntablists—Babu, JROCC, and Cut Chemist. One of the results of this historic encounter was a thirteen-minute award-winning film by director/photographer B+ (aka Brian Cross) titled *Keepintime: Talking Drums and Whispering Vinyl*. A DJ himself, Brian Cross is also an accomplished photographer and writer. He served as photo editor for the now defunct hip hop magazine *Rappages* from 1993 to 1997. His 1993 book *It's Not About a Salary: Rap, Race, and Resistance in Los Angeles* includes essays, interview transcriptions, and photographs that document the development of hip hop culture(s) in Los Angeles. In many ways, *Keepintime* continues the pattern of discourse that Cross initiated with his earlier work. For example, in an article about the *Keepintime* project that appeared in *Tokion* magazine which, together with its parent company Knee High Media, funded the film, Cross summarizes the encounter and the musical dialogue it engendered as follows: “Somehow as the words disappeared and the rhythms took over, bridges were built in the air. Bridges that speak through the rift that exists between the hip hop generation and its ancestors. Understanding was suggested and new beginnings seemed possible” (B+, 2000: no pagination). The film's premiere in the year 2000 attracted 1500 people to downtown Los Angeles, although the club where it was screened only held 400. Since then, *Keepintime* has been screened at numerous film festivals including the Hip Hop Film Festival which toured internationally from 2004 to 2008. The film's widest exposure to date came through DJ Shadow's tour in support of his 2002 release *The Private Press* during which Shadow used the film to introduce each concert. At the time of this writing, the film is posted on Youtube in two parts,

which have been viewed upwards of 8,000 in the case of Part One and 12,000 times in the case of Part Two.<sup>2</sup>

The film begins with a series of still photos of the aging drummers. Onscreen text provides biographical details about each musician and makes clear the intention behind this meeting. “[W]e brought them together,” the text reads, “to talk about old times, to listen to how their work has influenced the hip hop generation and to play if they so desired. LA’s Kings of the beats were to meet LA’s Kings of beat juggling.” In this opening section of the film, we also learn that a fourth Los Angeles drummer—Roy Porter—was originally intended to participate in this exchange, but he passed away before the film was made.

After this introduction, Babu performs a beat-juggling routine using two copies of Monk Higgins’ “The One Man Band Plays it All,” a recording that features Paul Humphrey on drums. The three drumming elders (including Humphrey) look on with puzzled interest as Babu skillfully manipulates two copies of the recording on twin turntables, creating a new drum groove out of the recorded sounds of Humphrey’s drums. Next it’s JROCC’s turn to perform for the onlookers by cutting up the drum work of James Gadson. Before long, Humphrey and Gadson jam with Babu and JROCC creating a funk-oriented musical dialogue between drums and turntables. The dialogue continues in the final scene of the film as drummer Paul Humphrey trades musical phrases with Cut Chemist on turntables.

*Keepintime* features an innovative sound design developed in part by DJ Shadow who appears momentarily in the film as an onlooker. Bits of spoken dialogue are sampled and then redeployed at several points throughout the film. In one voice-over, one of the drummers observes that turntablists take a recorded musical fragment and “make a loop out of it.” The words “make a loop out of it” themselves are sampled and turned into a loop, blurring the lines between the film’s form and content. The word “funk,” spoken by James Gadson, receives similar treatment. This audio sample is repeated (often with the addition of digital reverb for added emphasis) at key moments in the film. The emphasis on sampling, so integral to turntablism and to hip hop culture generally, is extended to the visual content of *Keepintime* as well. Video footage of the encounter is juxtaposed with onscreen text and with a series of still photographs of the musicians. Coupled with the film’s sound design, this dense layering of visual information creates an audio-visual remix of the encounter analogous to the musical remixes created by turntable practitioners such as Babu, JROCC, and Cut Chemist. The still photographs function as visual samples of the event as do the numerous close-up shots of details such as a loudspeaker woofer, Earl Palmer’s embroidered slippers and sports coat,

and Paul Humphrey's diamond encrusted "PH" ring. The film also includes samples of video footage from the event that was shot on a digital home video camera by JROCC, who is described in the film as "an amateur videographer and a professional vinyl toucher." The inclusion of amateur video footage (or at least footage shot in an amateur style using a hand-held camera) is something that is common to many recent hip hop documentaries including *Battle Sounds*, *Freestyle*, and *The Freshest Kids*. In these films, as in *Keepintime*, the inclusion of amateur footage helps to "keep it real" filmically, contributing to the construction and performance of hip hop authenticity in filmic terms.

In his book *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop*, Murray Forman suggests that one of the defining features of hip hop culture is its intensely spatial nature. "A highly detailed and consciously defined spatial awareness" he writes, "is one of the key factors distinguishing rap music and hip-hop from the many other cultural and subcultural youth formations currently vying for popular attention. In hip-hop, space is a dominant concern, occupying a central role in the definition of value, meaning, and practice" (2002:3). Given the emphasis on regional and local geographies in hip hop culture generally, it is perhaps not surprising that B+ would have chosen to focus on drummers and turntablists from a shared urban environment, the city of Los Angeles. By focusing on an older generation of L.A. drummers, the film suggests that hip hop culture in L.A. has local musical roots that extend beyond the initial wave of West Coast rap in the mid to late 1980s. This is very much in keeping with the narrative of Cross's book *It's Not About Salary* in which he writes: "An arc of sound and shared historical experience stretches back through time across this city [Los Angeles] forming a bridge between bop and hiphop, rap and scat" (1993:6). Interestingly, Cross's history of Los Angeles hip hop begins with a discussion of Charlie Parker's 1946 visit to Los Angeles during which he recorded the now legendary Dial sessions, sessions that included Roy Porter on drums.

In addition to their extensive recording careers in rock and roll, R & B, soul, and funk, Palmer, Humphrey, Gadson, and Porter all have extraordinary credentials in the world of jazz. Earl Palmer has performed and/or recorded with a number of jazz giants including Dizzy Gillespie, Harry "Sweets" Edison, Sarah Vaughan, Dinah Washington, Milt Jackson, and Barney Kessel—this in addition to essentially laying the foundation for rock 'n' roll drumming on early recorded classics by Fats Domino and Little Richard. Reportedly the most recorded drummer of all time, Palmer continued to be one of Los Angeles' top-call session drummers into the 1970s and 1980s, recording with Neil Young, Tom Waits, Elvis Costello, and many others in addition to his work in the field of jazz.<sup>3</sup> Paul Humphrey's list of performing credits is no less impres-

sive. He has recorded with jazz greats such as Wes Montgomery, Jimmy Smith, and Kenny Burrell in addition to extensive studio work with musicians ranging from Marvin Gaye to Steely Dan to Frank Zappa. James Gadson has similarly performed and recorded with many jazz artists including Herbie Hancock, Benny Golson, John Handy, and Ramsey Lewis. Like Palmer and Humphrey, Gadson also has a lengthy list of studio credits with artists in a range of genres, including Bill Withers, B.B. King, Smokey Robinson, Diana Ross, and Beck, to name only a few. Not surprisingly, Roy Porter—the fourth drummer who was to have been a part of this project—also had an extensive jazz background having recorded with Charlie Parker, Eric Dolphy and others in addition to recording several “rare groove classics.”

The drummers’ shared background in jazz is an important subtext in the film, a subtext that is part of a larger pattern of discourse in which turntablism is constructed as being related to, or even a *part of*, the jazz tradition.<sup>4</sup> Numerous parallels can in fact be drawn between jazz—bebop in particular—and turntablism. As in the bebop revolution of the 1940s, turntablism privileges improvisation, innovation, experimentation, and extreme technical virtuosity. In much the same way that bebop musicians signified on popular culture by basing complex melodies and improvised solos on the harmonic structure of popular “Tin Pan Alley” tunes, turntablists create elaborate musical remixes using elements of popular music recordings. The similarities go further: Scott DeVeaux’s observations on the “subcultural wardrobe, the impenetrable lingo, the refusal to play the expected role of entertainer” in *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* could easily be applied to turntablism (1997:24). Like the “cutting contests” of the bebop era, turntablists demonstrate their technical mastery in highly competitive turntable “battles.” Perhaps the most striking similarity between the two musics is the emphasis that practitioners of both place on their music as “art” while simultaneously drawing on forms and technologies associated with popular culture.

*Keepintime* points to the affinities between jazz and turntablism in a number of subtle ways. The first voice-over that we hear in the film is taken from Brian Cross’s 1991 interview with drummer Roy Porter, portions of which are printed in *It’s Not About Salary*. “You talk about bombs in drumming,” Porter states. “I heard this drummer doing some other stuff like da-di-di-da-di-da-di-di-da-ba-doom... [continues imitating drums vocally]. But it was years later that it came to me that that was the first time I heard a ‘bomb’ drop.” The term “dropping bombs” came into parlance in the jazz world during World War II when modern drummers such as Kenny “Klook” Clarke began punctuating the time with loud, sporadically placed bass drum accents that came to be referred to as “bombs” in what might be seen as a signifyin(g) comment on the vestiges

of European military drumming that informed pre-modern drum set performance. This practice represented a radical departure from earlier styles of jazz drumming in which the bass drum played a steady quarter-note pulse four beats per measure. In the film, Porter's reference to "bombs" draws a parallel between the argot associated with bebop drumming and that of turntablism. Within hip hop culture historically, the term "bomb" (or more commonly "the bomb" or "da bomb") has been widely used to refer to something in a positive way.<sup>5</sup> More specific to hip hop turntablism is the west coast magazine *Bomb Hip-Hop* and its affiliated label, Bomb Hip Hop Records, which issued the hugely influential *Return Of The DJ* series. Released in 1995, volume one of this series, *Return of the DJ Volume 1 – The Bomb DJs*, was the first all-scratch DJ or turntablist album ever released. As such, it had a tremendous impact on the burgeoning genre of turntablism and on the discourses associated with the music. The reference to "dropping bombs" in *Keepintime* adds historical depth and resonance to hip hop and turntablist usages of the term.

Jazz drumming legend Max Roach, who participated in one of the earliest hip hop/jazz collaborations in a 1983 performance with hip hop Renaissance-man Fab Five Freddy and the New York City Breakers, summarized the connections between jazz and hip hop cultures in a 1988 interview titled "Hip Hop Be Bop." His insights are worth quoting at length:

From Jelly Roll Morton to Scott Joplin right up there to hip hop, it's all in the same continuum. Hip hop is related to what Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker did because here was a group of young people who made something out of very little. . . . Hip hop came out of the city's poorest area, out of miserable public education, out of miserable housing. They didn't have instruments to learn on and take home and play, they didn't have rhetoric classes to learn how to deal with theatre, they didn't have visual art classes. And yet these people came up with a product of total theatre. On the visual arts side they came up with something erroneously called graffiti. On the dance side they came up with break-dancing. And on the music side, because they didn't have normal instruments, they invented a way to create sounds with turntables. They came up with something that affected the whole world in terms of rhythm, movement, the spoken word and the visual arts. They joined the ranks of the Louis Armstrongs and Charlie Parkers because they created something out of nothing. No one gave them any kind of direction; they had to do it themselves with the materials they had available. (quoted in Owen 1988:60)

Roach suggests that one of the things that connects hip hop culture with earlier diasporic modes of music making (as represented in the work of Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker) is the shared experience of creating “a way out of no way,” to use a vernacular expression drawn from African American folklore. This narrative is evident in *Keepintime* in Earl Palmer’s description of how he created makeshift drums in his youth. “We used to make drums,” he explains. “We’d get an orange crate and get some inner tube from a tire ... and get a spool from a spool of thread and stick on this piece of wood. ... [T]hat rubber was the spring. You had a foot pedal. You had a lard can cover for a cymbal and anything you wanted to lay out there was the snare drum.” The analogy with hip hop culture in this context is clear: in much the same way that Palmer made drums in his youth using discarded household objects, the progenitors of hip hop used the materials that they had on hand—namely turntables and LP records—to create a new musical instrument. By repurposing turntables in this way, hip hop practitioners have turned a technology designed originally for the passive consumption of recorded music (a technology, I would add, that has been largely written off by dominant society as obsolete) into a vehicle for the active creation of music.

Palmer’s comments also hint at the difficult socio-economic conditions under which his early musical talent developed in his native New Orleans. Palmer grew up in one of the oldest and poorest areas of New Orleans, a neighbourhood known as Tremé. “You came up hard in the Tremé,” Palmer summarizes (quoted in Scherman, 1999:3). A parallel is easily drawn with the impoverished social conditions under which early hip hop emerged and flourished in the Bronx during the 1970s and early 1980s. The construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway between 1954 and 1963 had a devastating impact on several of the borough’s poorest neighbourhoods, driving property values down and paving the way for the proliferation of high-density housing projects. To compound matters, a wave of arson plagued the Bronx in the mid 1970s, further decimating the infrastructure of the borough. In this light, *Keepintime* attests to the shared potential of jazz and hip hop to effect upward social and economic mobility for many musicians. This is made evident through several close-up shots and/or still photographs in the film of the drummers’ apparel: Paul Humphrey sports a diamond-encrusted “PH” ring; Earl Palmer wears an embroidered sports jacket and embroidered slippers; James Gadson flashes a gold tooth when he clenches a drum stick between his teeth. One gets the sense that these men have each made a lucrative living from music. In much the same way, hip hop has

transcended its early roots in the impoverished communities of the South Bronx to become a multi-billion dollar global industry.

At one point in *Keepintime*, a voiceover from one of the drummers states: “This is an instrument that always attracts kids. It makes the most noise. But until they really want to play, it will be a while before they understand what it is really made for—to keep the time.” Although this statement is made specifically about the drum set in the film, it can be easily applied to turntables given their tremendous currency in contemporary urban youth culture. The inference that both instruments are meant to “keep the time” can be read on several levels. Drums and turntables keep time in the musical sense of generally maintaining the regular pulse and flow of the music. Even as drummers and turntablists temporarily depart from the musical flow, marking and manipulating the time in complex ways (through cross accents and drum fills or through beat juggles and record scratches as the case may be), the underlying tempo generally remains constant. Indeed, the ability to maintain a steady tempo and a sense of flow as one manipulates the time is often a benchmark of musical ability in both idioms.

I would argue that the emphasis on “keep[ing] the time” is also intended to be read at a deeper level, especially in light of the film’s title. The phrase “*Keepintime*” suggests that turntablists preserve the musical traditions—literally *keep the time*—put on record by their drumming predecessors in a technologically mediated form of cultural memory. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the final minutes of the film during which Paul Humphrey and Cut Chemist trade musical phrases.

In this pattern of call and response, Humphrey and Cut Chemist begin by tapping their respective instruments with their hands, symbolically connecting both instruments to hand drumming traditions associated with the African diaspora—djembe and conga playing for example. Following this introduction, Cut Chemist scratches out a shuffle feel, a groove based on a “gapped triplet” or a ternary division of the beat. Prior to the advent of rock ’n’ roll, rhythms based on a gapped triplet were strong signifiers of African American music and culture, of jazz and blues in particular. After Humphrey responds to the shuffle rhythm in kind, Cut Chemist changes the rhythmic framework by scratching out a syncopated funk groove with a binary division of the beat. Humphrey’s response follows the rhythmic contour of Cut Chemist’s musical statement but retains a swing or gapped triplet feel at the sixteenth-note level and for the most part this is true of the rest of the musical exchange as well. Rhythmically, then, the dialogue between drums and turntables that closes the film recalls multiple facets of African diasporic music from hand-drumming traditions to jazz and blues to funk and hip hop. The scene thus highlights the



ways in which turntablism (and hip hop culture more generally) function as potent and portable sites for cultural memorialization. The musical exchange also suggests that musical performance can provide an opportunity for the transfer of cultural memory across social, cultural, musical, and generational divides.

Turntablism itself has become truly international in scope over the past decade, influencing musical practices in diverse social and cultural locations around the world as increasing numbers of musicians around the globe have chosen to make turntables their primary instrument. This has been due largely to the dissemination of turntablism audio and video recordings as well as to the rise of the internet as a vehicle for the exchange of scratch techniques and other information related to turntablism and DJ culture. Even within North America, musicians from diverse social and cultural locations have contributed in significant ways to the development of the idiom. This is evidenced in *Keepintime* by the fact that the three featured turntablists in the film come from different cultural backgrounds: JROCC is African American, Babu is Filipino American, and Cut Chemist is European American. In this light, it is perhaps more accurate to speak of *inter-* or *trans-*cultural memory with respect to the ways in which turntablists engage and extend musical knowledge within and across communities.

### “Get out of my house” (Roach): Cultural Ownership, Appropriation, and Memory

The issue of musical and/or memory transference across cultural boundaries needs to be carefully examined, given the lengthy history of appropriation of African diasporic musical practices by largely white-owned corporate interests surrounding the music. With this in mind, I’d like to return to the interview between Max Roach and Frank Owen cited above. At one point in their discussion, Owen questions Roach’s assertions concerning the militancy of hip hop as a black art form: “Is the black militancy you here [sic] changed by the fact that some of those beats were sampled from John Bonham, Led Zeppelin’s drummer, and the fact that hip hop often uses music from a wide variety of sources, many not obviously black: like Kraftwerk, Billy Squire, the Monkees, Elton John, Billy Joel, Mountain ...” (1988:73). To this suggestion, Roach heatedly responds:

Hip hop swings. I never heard Led Zeppelin swing. Jesus Christ, now hip hop comes from Led Zeppelin, you motherfucker ...

Led Zep is a poor imitation of black conscious music. European music didn't even use rhythm until they were exposed to black music. You're just trying to say some shit that blacks wouldn't have nothing if it wasn't for whites. (73)

As Owen tries, unsuccessfully, to interject and clarify his meaning, Roach continues:

You're English and you come to this country and try to tell us that everything we got came from whites. That's a white supremacist [sic] attitude. These black folks, the off-spring of slaves, created something that you white people could never even dream of and now all of a sudden you're saying that white people started it. You're telling me Charlie Parker came out of a white experience.

The interview ends with Roach forcibly ejecting Owen from his house: "I've had it with you, you motherfucker. Get out of my house" (73).

This exchange raises troubling, but nonetheless important, questions surrounding issues of cultural ownership, appropriation, privilege, and power. Although I share Owen's discomfort with Roach's seemingly essentialist comments on the unity of "black music," Roach's frustration is understandable given the history of colonizing appropriation that has surrounded Afrological forms. As Ajay Heble notes, "Roach understands well what's at stake in the politics and assessment of black music. He knows that for too long, ... black music has been denigrated, dismissed, or contextualized, by white critics, as having white cultural precedents" not to mention the widespread appropriation of Afrological forms by largely white interests (2003:246). At issue is whether or not it is possible to share in and learn from another individual's or group's memories without appropriating those memories. Writing about cultural memory surrounding trauma and loss, Dominick LaCapra refers to this process as "empathic unsettlement," a state that "involves a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place" (1999:699). In *Keepintime*, something approaching empathic unsettlement seems to take place in the musical exchange between Cut Chemist and Paul Humphrey; the pattern of call and response between drums and turntables effects reciprocal (ex)change through, and on, the cultural memories informing both performers' crafts. That said, it is clear that the drummers and turntablists come from very different social, musical, and historical backgrounds. This cultural distance is evident when drummer Paul Humphrey is invited to try his

hand at the turntables. “I don’t know anything about all that jigga jigga stuff” he responds. “You play that and I’ll play this.”

The complexities surrounding (inter/trans)cultural memory and musical performance are alluded to in the packaging of the DVD version of *Keepintime*, the liner notes for which consist of two quotations. One, taken from Ben Sidran’s book, *Black Talk*, emphasizes the role of the performer in transmitting cultural memory and “keeping the time.” “The musician is the document” Sidran writes. “He [sic] is the information itself. The impact of stored information is transmitted not through records or archives, but through human response to life. And that response is ongoing, in the air, everywhere, an alternative constantly available to those who have ears to hear” (quoted in *Keepintime* DVD). In *Black Talk*, Sidran situates African American musical practices, jazz in particular, in relation to African oral cultural traditions, suggesting that oral cultures offer a compelling alternative to the Western literary tradition. The reference to Sidran’s work in the contextual materials related to *Keepintime* affirms turntablism’s status as an oral tradition with roots in the African diaspora. It also highlights the role of turntablists in the transmission of musical knowledge from one generation to the next. Just as the drumming elders featured in the film can be thought of as veritable groove libraries given their decades-long experience in supplying rhythms to performers in a range of idioms, turntablists cull beats from the multitude of vinyl recordings produced over the years, preserving them and presenting them in modified form to a new generation of listeners.

The other quotation included in the DVD version of *Keepintime* is taken—somewhat curiously perhaps—from Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History”:

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was.” It means to seize hold of memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. . . . This danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. (quoted in *Keepintime* DVD)

By referencing the work of Walter Benjamin, one of the most influential European cultural thinkers of the past century, the film posits a strategic set of alliances among drumming, turntablism, and cultural theory and thus provides a point of entry into broader issues of social discourse. Read

in the context of *Keepintime*, Benjamin's statement suggests that turntablist culture doesn't simply preserve past musical traditions, but rather actively recalls and re-engages those traditions in order to reflect the present more fully and to impact the future. For Benjamin, dominant understandings of history as the reified and immutable past can be released from this reification when a threat—"a moment of danger"—forces us to recognize that history is continuously reconstructed on the basis of present needs. Hip hop developed at one such moment of danger when economic impoverishment and rampant gang violence severely threatened African American communities in the Bronx during the 1970s. Turntablism emerged as a new form of hip hop in the mid 1990s at what might be construed as yet another moment of danger, at a time when digital sampling technology and the hegemony of rap music within hip hop culture—gangsta rap in particular—threatened the continued existence of the hip hop DJ. History and memory, the twin pillars of musical "tradition," often form the locus of hegemonic norms governing musical performance. However, by engaging musical history as a process rather than a product, many turntablists—including those featured in *Keepintime*—have resisted the dominance of history, locating "tradition" squarely in the present. *Keepintime* participates in this pattern of discourse in crucial ways, articulating music, musicians, and communities across musical, generational, and cultural divides.

Since the film's release in 2000, the important cultural work instigated by the *Keepintime* project has continued. With the exception of Earl Palmer, the participants in the initial encounter performed together for an audience of 1100 at a sold-out concert at the El Rey Theater in Los Angeles on December 29, 2002, with the addition of percussionist/flutist Derf Reklaw, and DJs Madlib, Nu-Mark and Shortcut. The results were released on DVD in 2004 as *Keepintime: A Live Recording* which also includes a copy of the original *Keepintime* film. In November 2002, these musicians traveled to São Paulo, Brazil where they collaborated with celebrated Brazilian percussionists and turntablists including Wilson Das Neves, Ivan "Mamão" Conti, João Parahyba, Nelsão Triunfo, and DJ Nuts. This remarkable intercultural musical encounter resulted in another film, *Brasilintime*, that was released on DVD in 2007. In each of these projects, the musicians involved re-engaged and re-activated musical history and memory as powerful tools in processes of identity formation, community building, and intercultural dialogue. "Rhythm is remembering" reads some on-screen text in the opening minutes of *Keepintime: A Live Recording*. Perhaps this is what "keeping time" is all about. 🍀

## Notes

1. See Watkins (2005) and Stewart (2009) for a more detailed discussion of the history of hip hop film.

2. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kbwRoikF9o> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqNekrOjk1w>.

3. Palmer's biography *Backbeat: Earl Palmer's Story* by Tony Scherman (1999) provides a detailed account of his career as well as a partial (but still extensive) discography.

4. This pattern of discourse is evident in other hip hop documentaries as well including *Scratch* and *Battle Sounds*. See Stewart (2009) for an analysis of these films including their references to jazz.

5. As with much hip hop slang, the term "da bomb" eventually crossed over into general parlance and, as a result, it largely fell out of fashion in hip hop circles.

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