



# Modern Hip Hop

## A constantly evolving art form

**TRENDSSETTERS** Artists like Kid Cudi, Kanye West, Kendrick Lamar, Playboi Carti and Tyler, the Creator have kept the hip hop scene alive.

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THE MIRROR STAFF

**T**he current state of hip hop seems to be one that has bored die hard fans for years now. It's not that the product fans are being given is bad, but rather the fact that we've heard it before.

Few artists have the creative ability to deliver something new with every album. However, when executed properly, the genre offers a kaleidoscope of invigorating sounds for listeners to feast on.

Artists such as Kanye West were among the first to show people that there's other sides to rap and hip hop. Ye introduced many to the soulful side of the genre, including samples and uplifting beats into his music. Songs like "All Falls Down" include catchy and soulful vocals that stick with listeners beyond a first listen, the reason why I still find it bumping in my house 20 years later.

Not only did West popularize the use of soulful samples, but he also brought to light the idea of rapping about something other than drugs and violence. This inspired many and drew a whole new demographic to the genre.

Ye influenced Kid Cudi, another pillar in what turned out to be modern hip hop. Drawing inspiration from Kanye's success in exploring

different topics, Cudi would go on to be a pioneer in the emo-rap scene.

He was the first rapper to openly talk and make music about his struggles with mental health. His hit song "Pursuit of Happiness" was not meant to be the party anthem that some have turned it into. Rather, it is a song with a worrisome undertone in which Cudi talks about driving drunk and not giving a care about life in the search for his happiness. These themes are prevalent through his music.

Fans attribute Cudi's vulnerable lyrics to saving their life, and many modern-day rappers owe their success to this trailblazer.

It's impossible to talk about the modern era of hip hop without mentioning the colossal impact of Soundcloud. As a free streaming platform, what separates the app from its competitors is the fact that anybody can post their music on it.

This feature allowed for up-and-coming artists to gain traction fast. The platform has given us some of the most relevant names in hip hop to this day. Rappers like Playboi Carti, Juice WRLD, XXXTentacion and Lil Uzi Vert all emerged from the Soundcloud era.

These new artists came with their own style and perspective of the genre, most of them resorting to mumbled-rap to deliver their flows, gaining success in the process. The

stylistic approach to the genre rubbed some fans the wrong way, with some claiming that the mumble-style approach disrespected the culture. However, a quick glance over their charting numbers tells a different story.

Autotune soon oversaturated the genre as new artists found interest in experimenting with their voice. Autotuned voices over energetically produced beats intrigue the younger demographic. Yet, nobody has perfected autotune quite like Travis Scott.

After releasing his second mixtape "Days Before Rodeo," it was clear Scott was going to be something special. His dark vocal performances over ominous beats on songs like "Skyfall" with Young Thug were a refreshing sound for the time.

In 2018 Scott proceeded to drop what some fans regard as one of the best rap albums of all time: "ASTROWORLD." The psychedelic beats and synthetic vocals transport listeners to a dystopic amusement park. Outros on songs like "WAKE UP" support the idea of modern rappers prioritizing their artistic vision for the album, rather than the accompanying lyrics.

Old school rappers conveyed their messages through aggressive poeticism, emphasizing their impacts through their lyricism. Nowadays, rappers use visual and auditory ambience to strike emotion in their audiences.

Looking through the discography of Tyler, the Creator, it is difficult to find two albums that sound alike. Utilizing sonic wavelengths and visual presentation, he creates a new persona for himself through every album, bringing characters to life in his live performances and music videos.

For instance, in his 2019 album "Igor," Tyler plays a character dealing with the ups and downs of a harsh love life. As a real-life Frankenstein, he expresses the concept of just wanting to be loved and treated well. Two years later, he reinvented himself as Tyler Baudelaire, a man much more content with his place in life on "Call Me If You Get Lost."

With rappers straying further and further away from the origins of the genre, many OG fans are left looking for the lyrical storytelling that was so prevalent once upon a time ago. However, artists like Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole have been successful in maintaining the sound that once was in this respect.

Hop hop has become vastly experimental and unconventional. But at its root, the genre strives to recognize the beauty that comes with struggle. Tackling topics like socio-economic adversity and mental health, artists have showcased levels of vulnerability that magnetically draw listeners in, cultivating a more raw and real hip hop scene.

## ENTERTAINMENT BRIEFS

**SHOW-STOPPING** | The VNHS Theatre Program will be presenting its first annual One Act Showcase on April 18 and 19. The show features ensembles of students from the Advanced Theater Company taking their turns in the spotlight as they perform original and published works in 20-minute segments. The show will take place in the black box theater, also known as Room 303. Tickets for \$5 will be available for purchase in the theater room, from any company member or at the door.

**FROM SCREEN TO STAGE** | In the fashion of iconic blockbuster movies, the VNHS Choir Program is putting on a Hollywood Music Spectacular. All three choir classes will come together to sing not only oldies but goodies, such as "Circle of Life" from "The Lion King," but also some modern pop hits like "Dance the Night Away" from "Barbie." The show will be on Apr. 25 and 26 in the auditorium. Presale tickets will be available for \$8 from any choir council member, or for \$10 at the door.

**...AND ACTION** | The award-winning Digital Media Program is hard at work preparing for its upcoming Annual Film Showcase on May 2 and 3 in the school's Donna Hubbard Auditorium. Led and advised by film and video production teacher Mr. Thomas McCluskey, film students have collaborated in groups of eight to write, cast, direct, edit and present their original films. Tickets will be available for \$10 in the video production room, from any film student or at the door.

**FIVE, SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT** | Sure to attract quite the crowd, the 2024 Spring Dance Show will be taking place in the school's Donna Hubbard Auditorium on May 9, 10 and 11. Centered around the theme of heartbreak, it will showcase performances by the various dance classes taught by dance teachers Ms. Reesa Partida and Ms. Diane Hula. Tickets can be purchased in advance for \$8 from Ms. Partida in Room 424, Ms. Hula in Room 426 or at the door before the performances.

**RHYTHM OF THE NIGHT** | The award-winning symphonies of the Strings Orchestra will fill the Donna Hubbard Auditorium with music on May 24. The concert will feature a collection of instrumental music performed by all band classes, under the direction of music teacher Mr. Robert Eisenhart. Featuring the award-winning musical ensemble, the classes will perform group and solo arrangements, boasting pieces they competed with at this year's competitions.