

Voices: Fresh, Fly, Fabulous: Fifty Years of Hip Hop Style Audio Transcript

1. Sal Abbatiello

Giving back to the community

1 minute, 30 seconds

It was a great time, and now I was developing talent. I was doing in-house stuff for the neighborhood because you know, a lot of people, like I said– the neighborhood really was doing bad. There was no jobs at that time, so I would do contests where the audience could make money. I would do Name That Tune, like it was on the TV show and I would give away money right there on the stage. We would have– we would give a ticket out and we would call your name, “Hey, number 365 come on down! You're the next contestant for Name That Tune!” And then I would line them up and then the DJ will play a racket and we would pay them right on the stage. And we had a bell, and then we had a spin-off.

Then the next– after eight weeks, we do the dating game, just like on TV. Three girls and then a guy; one guy and three girls. And I would get them tickets to a play because they would never have the opportunity to go to a Broadway play. And back then you could go down there, hit the guy off, get first row seats. I would have a limousine pick them up at the house. They would go to the play, I would send them to dinner, then they would come to the Fever and drink for free all night. So that was very popular, the dating game.

Then I did the gong show and we would have all the rappers be the celebrity judges. And a lot of people came out of The Gong Show and became recording artists. One of my big singers, Naobi, who lived around the corner from the skating rink, she won. And that's how Latin hip hop started. She made the first Latin hip hop record in 1984, but she won The Gong Show after many weeks.

2. Ralph McDaniels

Custom Fashion Designers in the Community:

1 minute, 2 seconds

In my community, there were custom designers. And the custom designers were basically looking at maybe what was happening in Europe. I don't know, I was young at the time. But they were doing something that had a European fit and now it started to come to Brooklyn, in the Bronx.

And you had fashion shows that would go on in the community. It might be a storefront and you knew some of these people that were the guys who made the custom suits for you, your uncle, or your dad. Or your mom might have went to some of these people to get a special dress for an occasion or something like that, especially in the Caribbean community. You saw a lot of that, and you didn't look at them in a high fashion way but really, it was. It was really, you know, it was something that they made. It was couture. It was something they made for you. And you know, it was special. So you just was like, "Oh, all right," and for years I took it for granted.

[LAUGHS]

Until I started doing my own fashion shows and I went back and got those people that I knew—that dude when I was a kid—and said, "I need you to be part of my show".

3. Rebecca Pietri

Timberlands as workwear

47 seconds

History starts on the streets. And what's interesting to me is that, when people ten, twenty years ago, it would be really interesting to see what people, when they see a traditional hip hop outfit... let's say a pair of Timberlands. Will they know that it's Timberlands from hip hop or Timberlands from Prada?

So it's kind of interesting to see where we forget, and where do you draw the line? That's a hard question to answer because Timberlands is a work boot designed for work wear, you know. It was always designed for that. It was elevated through hip hop, and other brands took it on. But a Prada in itself is made well, and it's elevated because of the craftsmanship that goes into it. But it's not a work boot, so it's kind of interesting, where do you go with that? I don't know

4. Cross Colours

The Cross Colours Mission:

1 minute

CARL JONES

Well, I would not say our mission was to create fashion or styles for hip hop. Our mission was to, in our minds, create fashion for the culture, which hip hop sort of, I want to say the right word, accepted..

TJ WALKER

Accepted. Accepted and also influenced.

CARL JONES

Yes, and influenced us. So, we were never trying to contribute to hip hop. We were trying to contribute to the world, to the culture, to our people, to people of colors, to models who had not had the opportunity to get-

TJ WALKER

Get exposure from platforms.

CARL JONES

Yes, in magazines. And in ads. You know, that was the whole purpose of starting the brand.

5. Karl Kani

Karl Kani in the context of hip hop style history

1 minute, 4 seconds

We changed the game with Black models. We gave a lot of models, who was just streetwear, street dudes, “Yo I want to model.” No one else gave them an opportunity to do that.

When we used to do the Video Music Box Fashion shows, all those Black men that was in the shows, that was the first time any of them was on a runway. And some of them went off to have great careers in modeling, but they needed the opportunity for somebody to put it out there. Think about the Magic Show. When Karl Kani and Cross Colours went to the Magic show, we were the only two Black companies there. The only two, that was it. Nobody else. To think of it, if we weren't successful, who knows that a whole urban streetwear section of Magic would have been there? Yeah, maybe somebody came around, came along at some point, but that doesn't matter. The fact is, we were there. We did that and we was able to sustain and be successful on a professional level to make the buyers feel like, “Okay, Black owned companies can produce a product that's going to sell. Oh okay, you're Black, you could design okay we'll give you a chance now.”

So that's what, that's really what it's all about. And that's what I talk about changing the game, calling yourself the originator, making moves, inspiring people, things like that.

6. Shara McHayle

Historical context of the 90s

1 minute, 20 seconds

It was about Nelson Mandela. It was about Africa. It was about, on a hip hop level, it was about Native Tongue. And Native Tongue was a group of hip hop artists that really gravitated to Africa. And just going back to the roots, what is the roots, and really learning what that was and the style changed.

It changed when there was an introduction, at least on a hip hop level, of the Fulani hoop earring, which derived from Africa, you know. It's wearing the ankhs on the chain. It was the colors of the flag, and that really made a difference. That was really, you know, where there was a streetwear explosion that was happening during that time.

It was really about identifying like, who are— Who am I? And I don't want to be defined by, I guess the general market, just America. Just, you know, what is our personal style? Do we really need to buy into that anymore? Do we create who we really are and can we make a statement? And that's what was happening at the time.

7. Dapper Dan of Harlem

Recognizing the impact of symbols in luxury and aspiration in Harlem:

1 minute, 24 seconds

The key to a luxury fashion at that time in Harlem was, what is it that would make people in the area look up to other people in the area?

So those items would be like alligators, crocodiles, lizards, furs until later on, I came up with this other idea: how to transform, how people feel about those items and how you transfer that energy into something else into a symbolic item.

And how I stumbled across that was one of the big gangsters who used to come to my store. He came in with a Louis Vuitton Pouch, and I had customers in there, and everybody was fascinated about this Louis Vuitton pouch. Right. And it occurred to me right then and there. I said, "What is it about this pouch, which is only \$5 worth of vinyl that makes this so significant?"

So I said, "Wow, it's the symbol. I can get the same amount of attention and the same amount of gross income if I can master those symbols." Right? So I said, "Dag, if that's how they feel about the pouch, imagine if I can have them walking around looking like luggage or just like that bag".

So that led me on the path to teaching myself everything about textile printing, silk screening and everything in that area.

8. April Walker

On competing in a male dominated space:

1 minute, 7 seconds

When I walked in the room, it wasn't like I was thinking that I'm the only woman. I just wanted to be the best and the fullest version of myself when I walked in that room, whoever was there.

So I think I was a little over confident. But that was my parents, they gave me that and it helped and enabled me. Otherwise, I would have gave up because there was a lot of adversity in being a young woman in hip hop, in a very misogynistic time when it wasn't popular. So part of my plan was just making sure the product led for the brand and not me. People didn't even know it was me behind the brand.

By the time I got on the map, I was like, "Okay we're here to stay, now I reveal myself." Because internally we created a culture in our tribe, and that culture was aligned with the external culture, which created an external tribe.

9. Daymond John

Behind the name, FUBU

1 minute, 19 seconds

I was frustrated. I was working at Red Lobster at the time, and I heard a lot of rumors of all these brands that didn't really like African-Americans, hip hop kids, inner city kids, whatever you want to call it. And those were maybe rumors, maybe not, but I can't trace any of those comments back. I can only trace a comment that was made by somebody at Timberland.

I think it was in the New York Times. They're not the same people now, but it was a comment something to the effect of, "We don't make our style of boots for drug dealers." I was a hard-working man at Red Lobster. I was buying a new pair of Timberlands every month, and you call me a drug dealer?

I felt like people were neglected in the community. We were giving our hard-earned money to these people and they were taking our money saying, "We don't like you."

And so I went home and I came up with a name. And at first it was called BUFU, "By Us For Us". But the name BUFU, B-U-F-U, just didn't it didn't seem to roll off the tongue

and when I said FUBU when I came over before. My partners, they were like, “You know, we like that because you don't know what it is. Is it an Asian oriented brand? Is it an Italian brand? Is it an American brand? Is it a dish? Is it poop? Is it like a poo platter? Is it Spanish?”

And they said it's something that people probably won't get but they'll remember, and that's how FUBU came to be.

11. Emil Wilbekin

LGBTQ+ Community and Hip Hop:

1 minute, 11 seconds

The thing about the LGBTQ+ community and hip hop is, you know, there are a lot of hidden figures. And I think it's a very complicated relationship, but there's so much influence from a lot of hidden figures, myself included, who are queer or gay. And you think about a lot of the stylists who have created a lot of looks.

And we don't talk about the kind of hyper masculinity and almost kind of homo thug look that Tupac and other rappers really embodied. LL Cool J, they really took their cues from what was seen in Black gay and queer spaces from the ballroom scene, and so that influence is really really important.

But, you know, we're now having this racial reckoning. We're also having an identity reckoning where a lot of the LGBTQ+ community is coming forward and taking ownership.

12. Tommy and Andy Hilfiger

Audio 1: Logos

52 seconds

TOMMY H

You know, we were trying to sell our logos into Bloomingdale's, in stores like that and they would say, “No we don't sell logos. No, we don't want logos. The logo has to be very small.”

And we said, “No, no, no, we like big logos because the big logos came from my love for sports.” And Andy said, “Hey, why don't you do hockey jerseys?” So we did hockey jerseys. They're really big with logos and then we did Rugby's and then we did football jerseys and basketball jerseys.

So we wanted to have our own Hilfiger team sports team and we wanted to get all those big logos into the stores. But the stores were really reluctant until the demand started with young people coming into the departments asking for the big logos. And then we couldn't make enough of them.

Audio 2: The Underwear Band

1 minute, 8 seconds

TOMMY H

Well when it started, the sparks started. We embraced the whole culture and we thought it was very cool, so we wanted to listen to what they wanted and we wanted to observe what they were wearing.

So what the sort of big takeaway from that was that they wanted way, way oversized. And, you know, kids who are maybe size 29 waist would want size 34 or 36 jeans and that was when we came out with Tommy Underwear with the waistband.

And when I was designing the waistband I was thinking boxing trunks like Mike Tyson would wear, Muhammad Ali would wear, where the label would go in the front. Because up until that time Haynes, BVD, even Calvin Klein, everybody had—underwear makers had labels in the back. But we wanted to make the waistband of the underwear look like boxing shorts and knew that the kids on the streets would drop the jeans low where you could see the underwear.

These audio recordings were created for The Museum at FIT's exhibition, *Fresh, Fly, Fabulous: Fifty Years of Hip Hop Style* (February 8–April 23, 2023). For more information, visit fitnyc.edu/museum.