



DAILY TROJAN

Student Newspaper of the University of Southern California Since 1912

INSIDE



Students have fun while learning to scratch records. 7

www.dailytrojan.com

Tuesday, March 2, 2004

Vol. CXLV, No. 32

DAILY TROJAN
Lifestyle Desk: (213) 740-5645

Lifestyle

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March 2, 2004

When there's an itch, scratch

Scratching records has become a teachable art-form with the help of Professor Stephen Webber

By ZACHARY FRANKLIN

Staff Writer

Ever since Grand Wizard Theodore invented the scratch (manipulating a playing vinyl record back and forth), the turntable has never been the same. Now groups such as the Beat Junkies and X-Ecutioners as well as artists including DJ Q-Bert and Mix Master Mike have made careers of blending, beat-juggling and cutting up records. But could the turntable, a machine that has traditionally been used to play records ever be considered a musical instrument?



Mixin' it up. Professor Stephen Webber with Berklee College of Music, teaches students Turntable Techniques. Farnsworth / iStock

The Berklee College of Music in Boston, Mass., thought so, and this spring, heralded a class on the subject of "turntablism." The course, "Turntable Technique," will be taught by Stephen Webber, 45, who is a musician and producer and has been teaching at Berklee since 1994.

Berklee's decision to institute a class on turntablism is just another milestone in the history of the schools tradition of challenging the musical establishment. In the 1940s, Berklee was the first college to offer a course on jazz as part of its curriculum. And later, in the 1960s, it became the first college to recognize the electric guitar as a musical instrument. Regarding the turntable and turntable artists, Webber says, "Turntablists are musicians. Many of them, like DJ Q-Bert, are virtuoso musicians who practice hours a day and constantly strive to push their art further."

After Gary Burton, the executive vice president of the college, conducted a study that analyzed Webber's course proposal, the school eventually agreed that turntablism could be taught in an educational setting. "We knew that there was serious interest in turntablism from many of our students," Burton said, "but we had serious concerns about how this emerging mode of music-making could fit into a college music curriculum."

Webber's class is among many milestones in the academic acceptance of hip-hop culture. Todd Boyd, a professor of cinema-television at USC, blends hip-hop ideas in his cinema class. Professor Michael Eric Dyson at the university of Pennsylvania teaches a class on Tupac Shakur and his lyrics. Similarly, Harvard University and Temple University both offer courses dealing with the analysis of rap lyrics.

The Scratch Academy in New York City was founded in 2002 and currently teaches a six week program for aspiring DJs with classes taught

by world-renowned turntable experts such as DJ Jazzy Jeff, Mista Sinista and DJ Kay Slay. Although Webber's class is not the first to teach turntablism, "Turntable Technique" is the first formal teaching by any institution on the basics of scratching as well as the representation of scratching in musical notation.

President of USC's Hip-Hop Congress Rahman Jamaal said, "For a school like Berklee to teach a class is a big step forward in legitimizing hip-hop as a creative form as a useful endeavor. Having hip-hop accepted into education shows that it can be used as a beneficial tool."

"I would expect many more elements of hip-hop to be used in education as means to motivate kids in schools and to organize it as training grounds for other purposeful activities."

DJ equipment companies quickly expressed interest in contributing to a class on turntablism. Numark contributed their TTX hybrid analog/digital turntables, cartridges, analog and digital DJ mixers as well as some CD turntables. Vestax also gladly supplied turntables, workstations and mixers.

Calzone Case Company provided protective cases for all DJ components and created custom rollaway cases that enable tables and mixers to be rolled into the classroom from adjacent storerooms for both class and practice times.

Korg also supplied Webber's class with KAOSS Pads, which allow users to incorporate complex sampling and effects.



Vinyls are back. John Monterubio shows his mixing skills at "Open Turntable Night" which was held at Ground Zero, a coffee house on campus.

Richard Esquivel | Daily Trojan



It takes two to spin. Mina Long (left) learns how much fun scratching can be from her instructor Stephen Webber.

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