

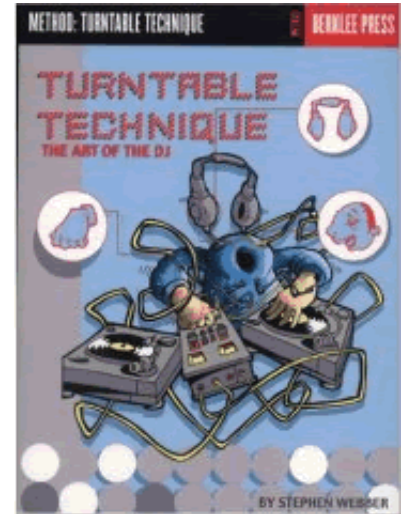
Turntablism to be Taught at Berklee College of Music



Wikki-wikki-wikki! Students at Berklee College of Music are throwing their hands in the air. The school has announced that it will be offering the first college classes in turntablism, the art of scratching!

Boston's Berklee College of Music, one of the leading institutions for the study of contemporary music, is breaking new ground in music education by becoming the first music college in the world to incorporate the study of turntablism into its curriculum. This spring semester, *Turntable Technique* will teach students the art of playing the turntable.

Turntable Technique will be taught by Professor Stephen Webber, a veteran of classical, jazz and electronic music who is considered a leading authority on turntable education, as the author of the first instructional method book to teach the turntable, *Turntable Technique: The Art of the DJ* (Berklee Press, 2000).



Berklee's decision to adopt the turntable as a musical entity worthy of academic study continues the institution's historical tradition of defying the music conservatory establishment by adopting new and often controversial music forms. In the 1940s, Berklee became the first music college to offer jazz in its curriculum, and later in the 1960s was the first college to adopt the electric guitar as a principal instrument.

Berklee Press was the first publisher to introduce a line of books and records to offer instruction in the art and techniques of the DJ. ***Turntable Technique: The Art of the DJ*** culminates the music education that Berklee College has made famous for over 50 years and offers a formalized method of musical notation so DJs can better communicate with and learn from each other. *Turntable Technique: The Art of the DJ* is now a best-selling title available as a book and vinyl set, and in DVD and VHS formats.

"Turntablism is musicians," says Webber. "Many of them, like DJ Qbert, are virtuoso musicians, who practice hours a day and constantly strive to push their art further. I recently saw Qbert perform, and he transported the entire audience; made us forget where we were and who we were, with nothing but a turntable and a piece of vinyl."

"People take it for granted today that jazz is serious music worthy of the same disciplined study as classical music," said Webber. "But when Berklee began teaching jazz improvisation in the 1940s and rock guitar in the 1960s, most other music schools perceived those musical forms as a threat to 'serious' music. It's the same situation with Hiphop and turntablism today."

As with jazz and guitar, the decision to create a curriculum for Turntablism was not made lightly, according to Gary Burton, executive vice president of Berklee College of Music and a legendary jazz musician. For the past year, Burton has chaired a study group of faculty members that has debated and dissected turntable music to evaluate how it would hold up to academic analysis.

Burton commented, "We knew that there was serious interest in turntablism from many of our students, but

we had concerns about how this emerging mode of music making could fit into a college music curriculum. So, we studied the work of some of the established names in the field and debated the musical issues, such as the lack, to date, of an agreed upon method for notating turntable performances, and how we could teach our students these skills within our educational approach. Issue by issue, we sorted out how we could do this at Berklee and respond to our students' interest."

Part of what makes it possible to offer the study of the turntable at the college level is the representation of scratching in music notation. Webber's method first appeared in his book *Turntable Technique: The Art of the DJ*, and consists of a "scratch staff" in which the movements of the record and the mixer's controls are expressed in standard musical notation. This is the first time that anyone has adapted standard musical notation to teach the turntable.

Noted electronic musician, DJ, creator of the soundtrack to the film *Monster*, and Berklee alumnus BT commented, "I'm extraordinarily excited that turntablism is finally being recognized as an instrument unto itself. The skill of rhythmically and melodically manipulating vinyl is a more than 25-year-old tradition and it'll be great to see people check off turntable as their primary instrument."

"That will be a while," says Webber. "At this point, we only have one class, as well as a vibrant club and an unofficial turntable ensemble. We want to let this grow organically." The course has already received a tremendous student response and has a waiting list of over 50 names.

History of Turntablism

Webber notes that the architects of Hiphop were young DJs from the Bronx in the 1970s. DJs Kool Herc, Grand Master Flash and Afrika Bambaataa changed what it meant to be a DJ by aggressively pushing the limits of mixing, interacting with the virtuoso dancers known as B-Boys and B-Girls, and assembling crews of MCs who spawned the practice of rapping. Grand Wizard Theodore, a protégé of Flash, was the first to start scratching, manipulating the record back and forth under the needle for musical effect. Grand Mixer DXT was tapped by Bill Laswell to scratch on the Herbie Hancock hit "Rockit," inspiring thousands of kids to head for their parents' turntables.

DJ competitions helped push the art form forward in the 80s and 90s, much like the legendary "cutting sessions" that took place in the early days of jazz. DJs who rose to prominence after success in battles include Jazzy Jeff (who teamed with Fresh Prince Will Smith), DJ Swamp, Roc Raida and Rob Swift of the X-ecutioners, and Mix Master Mike and Qbert, formerly of the Invisibl Skratch Piklz.

Webber points out that more recently, DJs have been appearing in Nu Metal bands, and with pop stars ranging from Moby to Sugar Ray. Progressive scratch DJs like DJ Logic have been playing with jazz acts from Medeski Martin and Wood, to John Scofield. Arizona's DJ Radar has even written, with partner Raúl Yáñez, a turntable concerto for turntablist and symphony orchestra. The term "turntablism" was coined by DJ Babu to refer to the practice of playing the turntable as a musical instrument.



Webber adds, Hiphop is more than a style of music; it's a culture. As with any culture, there are various artistic expressions of Hiphop, the four principal expressions being:

- Visual art (graffiti)
- Dance (breaking, rocking, locking and popping, commonly known as break dancing)
- Literature (rap lyrics and slam poetry)
- Music (DJing and turntablism).

Equipment

Generous support from select vendors allow the Berklee classroom for this prototype class to be equipped with professional state-of-the-art instruments and gear. Numark contributed their TTX hybrid analog/digital turntables, cartridges, analog and digital DJ mixers, and innovative CD turntables. Vestax supplied turntables, DJ workstations, and DJ mixers that link together so that multiple turntablists may perform together.

Calzone Case Company provided protective cases for all DJ components and created custom rollaway cases that enable the mixers and turntables to be easily rolled into the classroom from an adjacent storeroom for class and practice times. Alesis supplied "air FX" units, which use infrared light to allow DJs to control effects in "real time." Korg supplied KAOSS Pads, which allow users to intuitively incorporate sampling and effects controlling into their performance with the touch of a finger; and the KAOSS Pad entrancer, which does the same with video effects as well.