

Review

Wang, Oliver. 2015. *Legions of Boom: Filipino American Mobile DJ Crews in the San Francisco Bay Area*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. ISBN 978-0-8223-7548-7 (pbk). 218 pp.

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Legions of Boom is a valuable addition to scholarship specific to DJ culture and Filipina/o-American involvement in hip-hop (Villegas et al. 2013; Tionsgson 2013). Wang chronicles the Filipino mobile DJ scene from the late 1970s until its demise in the mid-1990s. Central to the story is the role the Filipino community played in building a 'soft infrastructure' that provided space, funding and opportunities for aspiring DJ crews to perform. Wang considers this support system 'as much part of the scene story as the DJs themselves' (57).

According to Wang, the scene developed based on three distinct 'social preconditions': the development of non-stop DJ mixing styles in the 1970s; immigration patterns that led to an influx of Filipino families to northern California; and suburban spaces, notably garages, that allowed DJs to perform without the need to enter the tightly-controlled club culture downtown. Additionally, the DJ crews fostered an entrepreneurial spirit enhanced by their family networks that provided both the capital and the occasions (parties, weddings, christenings) to keep the DJs busy.

Also central to the book is the male camaraderie and mentorship within the crews. Wang observes that within popular culture the depiction of the DJ is often as a lone figure, when the reality is many DJs, regardless of genre, are part of larger affiliations. The Filipino mobile DJ crews flourished because of their external and internal support systems. Because mobile DJing requires numerous speakers, lights and promotional efforts, the crews were effectively mini-corporations that hired numerous people to help load, set up and promote each event—not to mention the DJs that played the music.

On the topic of maleness in DJing, Wang attributes the overwhelming percentage of males among the crews, and DJing in general, to the embodiment and reifying of popular ideals of hegemonic, Western manhood (66). DJing's empha-

sis on technological mastery, the competitive environment and DJ competition discourse that uses words such as 'battle', 'destroy' and 'weapons', further attracts young men to the practice. That is not to downplay the importance of female participation. The Go-Gos, the first all-Filipina DJ crew, had notable success in the early 1980s. Further, according to Wang, females held a powerful presence on the dancefloors, and parties would not exist without their participation. Still, Wang asserts that the relationships and mentorships among male crewmembers were just as important as, if not more so than, meeting women.

Throughout the 1980s, at the height of the Filipino mobile-DJ scene, the crews gained further notoriety by creating 'alliances' with other crews, and participating at 'showcases', huge parties that featured regional competitors. San Jose, Daly City, Vallejo and Union City/Fremont saw the growth of groups boasting loyal followings that would travel to see them perform. Wang is clear to stress the heterogeneous nature of Filipino culture in the Bay Area. Children of immigrants from specific parts of the Philippines did not often fraternize with others from different regions. As a result, Filipino/a youth from all over the Bay Area would coalesce at these events, fostering further relationships among them.

Wang writes in an accessible style appealing to both scholars and casual readers, and when DJ terminology is introduced it is explained simply. Written in a loosely chronological manner, the book contains numerous interviews of the scene's past members to form the basis of its little-known history—a history overlooked because of the ephemeral nature of live DJing. Numerous crews played countless parties between them, yet each event's focus was on its 'liveness' and not recording the music. Wang deftly points out that hip-hop culture made the move from a live medium to a recorded medium in the late 1970s. Mobile DJ crews of the Bay Area did not make this transition. If tapes of the popular showcases surfaced, they would certainly add an aural element both for fans and for future research.

Wang illuminates a subculture that was practically unknown or simply ignored. He acknowledges that there is much more to uncover and provides several ports of entry for future researchers to build on. *Legions of Boom* is a substantial work that shines light on yet another example of a musical genre's relation to the formation and maintenance of cultural identities.

References

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