

Miss Info Pens Bling Bling Hip-Hop's Crown Jewels

Written by MARK DE LA VINA ID1753
Thursday, 04 August 2005 00:33 -

The ultimate fashion accessory for hip-hop stars is bling - the bold, luxury jewelry worn by rap artists Sean "P. Diddy" Combs, Jay-Z and almost every other artist. An always ostentatious and sometimes elegant symbol of success, the jewelry has seeped into the mainstream with Rudolph Giuliani and Jessica Simpson shopping at stores such as Jacob & Co., the New York City jeweler of choice for such hip-hop and rap artists as 50 Cent and Nelly.

High-end houses such as Cartier, too, have introduced flashy lines that appeal to such fashionistas. At award shows, rappers, like movie stars, saunter down the red carpet wearing rented diamond-smothered pendants and rings from such Fifth Avenue fixtures as Tiffany & Co. and Harry Winston.

Charting the evolution of jewelry in hip-hop is Minya Oh, author of "Bling Bling: Hip-Hop's Crown Jewels" (Wenner Books), scheduled to hit bookstores Aug. 21. In the book, the music journalist and New York City radio host, who goes by the on-air moniker Miss Info, traces hip-hop's love affair with jewelry, from its early days with Kurtis Blow's modest gold chains to the platinum-popularizing ways of Jay-Z.

Hip-hop artists as jewelry aficionados is old news. Even the word bling, co-opted by "Live With Regis and Kelly" and CitiBank TV commercials, has lost its street cred - "frosting" is now the acceptably hip term. But Oh was inspired to write the book when she spotted a Cartier advertisement in Vogue magazine that featured large-face watches with diamonds on the face that screamed "bling!"

Oh's extensive look at the history of bling and hip-hop artists includes lengthy Q&As with almost every major rapper of the past 25 years, revealing that being conspicuously flashy isn't always what motivates music stars to turn themselves into walking diamond displays.

She talks to the likes of '80s rapper Slick Rick, who reminisces about the time he pushed the limits by wearing a three-carat diamond on a tooth that was so large his lips wouldn't cover his teeth, and Public Enemy's Chuck D, who suggests that the jewel-bedazzled rappers of the '80s wore so much metal around their necks that it was just a matter of time before they started wearing pots and pans.

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Like rapping, spinning records, break dancing and graffiti art, bling is an integral part of hip-hop culture, Oh says. It's just another form of expression, a glittery calling card for artists to express their personality as much as their success.

"Hip-hop artists were the ones who were leading the way to have this amazing, beautiful fantasylike view where there is no such thing as too much," she says. "There's no such thing as being overdressed - these are guys who wear fur coats to a picnic or diamonds to go play basketball."

Geno Giovanni, who promotes the Urbanology dance music and hip-hop gatherings held around the San Francisco Bay Area, says that the obsession with bling has gone too far.

"With BG from the Cash Money clique saying, 'I got the price of a mansion around my neck,' I think anyone would at least want to try it out just to feel powerful," says Giovanni, host of "Bass Line FM" on San Jose State University radio. "Jewelry is not just a fashion statement; it's a way to show wealth and power and that you're above the common person."

But Oh says that for many artists, all that ice isn't just a symbol of their stature. For RZA of the Wu-Tang Clan, his specially designed pointed, pyramid-shaped rings doubled as weapons. For the likes of Combs, wearing luxurious accessories allows a young black man to walk into a store that caters to well-heeled, older white customers - without being followed by a security guard.

Some artists have taken bling to the next logical step by releasing their own limited-edition designer jewelry, such the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Offshore Jay-Z 10th anniversary limited-edition series of watches, which can cost as much as \$69,500 at the company's New York City boutique.

"Corporate America wants to forget that bling is a hip-hop thing, that it is also about entrepreneurship," Oh says. "It has become about taking what the establishment does and making it your own."

Janet Tzou, a New York founder and designer of Baby Doll Gems and a journalist who has

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written for such hip-hop magazines as XXL, says that major jewelry houses can't ignore the trend, which has extended far beyond the hip-hop world.

"Jewelry is purely a luxury item," says Tzou, whose company's products are worn by Kirsten Dunst and Halle Berry. "It is not something like a house or food. So I think that when hip-hop celebrities are wearing and buying this stuff, that alone makes the big luxury behemoths sit up and take notice."

All of which is just the latest example of hip-hop's far-reaching influence on American culture, Oh says.

"All of these artists understand that bling is something that hip-hop can be proud of," she says. "It's a way that we have changed the world."

1980 - Kurtis Blow

"The Breaks." The bare-chested ghetto prince wore gold chains that were modest compared to later hip-hop fashion standards.

1986 - Run-DMC

"Walk This Way." In the early '80s, DJ Jam Master Jay defiantly wore thick gold chains in spite of the risk of sporting bling in sketchier neighborhoods. Like Slick Rick, Run-DMC favored "truck gold," as in they wore so much of the precious metal that you needed to back up a truck filled with gold and dump its contents around your neck.

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1987 - Salt-n-Pepa

"Push It." The groundbreaking female rappers helped popularize enormous "door-knocker" earrings and padlock pendants.

1989 - Public Enemy

"Fight the Power." More than musical revolutionaries, they also had a more socially conscious look, wearing beads and Afrocentric leather medallions, also favored by the likes of KRS-One and Native Tongues. Rapper Flavor Flav had his own spin on jewelry, wearing gold teeth and a clock as medallion, a symbol for hip-hop's wake-up call.

1996 - Tupac

"All Eyez on Me" album. The former member of Digital Underground made it cool for men to wear nose rings. He also helped make the diamond-encrusted Death Row Records pendants something of a badge of honor, a symbol of a membership in a musical gang.

1997 - Sean "P. Diddy" Combs

"Hypnotize." The hip-hop impresario synonymous with elegant jewelry sports diamond cuff links and flawless 20-carat pinkie rings.

1998 - Jay-Z

"Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)." Bling goes platinum when the Roc-a-Fella Records chieftain abandons gold jewelry for the pricier white precious metal. Like Combs, Jay-Z wears his bling as a symbol of his success as a rapper-turned-entrepreneur.

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2002 - Baby, a.k.a. Birdman

"Baby AKA the 1 Stunna" album. This Dirty South rapper, like such performers as Ice and Slick Rick, is known for his gold teeth, but he took it to extremes by investing \$500,000 worth of bling in his smile.

Source - [Davey D](#)