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16. Where You're From *and* Where *They're* At: Connecting Voices, Generations and Place to Create a Leeds Hip Hop Archive

Sarah Little and Alex Stevenson

Body

Hip Hop culture emerged in 1970s New York, built on the four elements of DJing, breakdancing, graffiti and rapping. By the early 1980s, Hip Hop, or rap music,¹ became a global phenomenon, and in the United Kingdom, reggae soundsystems² started to incorporate US Hip Hop into their playlists. The release of seminal early Hip Hop films such as *Wildstyle* (Ahearn 1983) gave rise to the first wave of British youth engaging with Hip Hop culture. Despite the common perception of the emergence of British Hip Hop culture being London-centric, cities such as Leeds, with their long-established reggae soundsystems, proved a fertile environment for early pioneers to forge their 'glocal' (Bennett 1999: 1) interpretation of Hip Hop culture. Whilst much of the existing literature on British Hip Hop tends to focus on London (Bramwell 2015; Hesmondhalgh and Melville 2001), a number of studies exploring the role of Hip Hop within other cities and regions across the United Kingdom have recently emerged (see Bennett 1999; Lashua and Owusu 2013; Williams 2020; de Paor-Evans 2020). However, as is the case with many other popular music scenes, Hip Hop in Leeds has been largely overlooked.

Cohen et al. (2014) recognize the trend within recent decades for the preservation and positioning of popular music cultures as sites of 'heritage' through the development of music archives. North American institutions such as Harvard³ and Cornell⁴ both established scholarly Hip Hop archives in 2002 and 2007, respectively. Baker et al. (2016: 8) argue that since then, a significant number of individuals and community-led groups have attempted to establish archives to preserve the material aspects of the music cultures from which they emerged, referred to as 'DIY' (do it yourself) archives (Baker and Huber 2013: 513). As a popular music culture, Hip Hop is no exception to the 'DIY' archive trend. This is perhaps understandable, given Hip Hop's characterization as an art form possessing an enduring ethos of self-facilitation (Little 2019; Speers 2014). Such 'DIY' and community-produced archives aim to preserve and curate the written and oral histories of Hip Hop culture.

This chapter explores the history of the Leeds Hip Hop scene as a site of cultural significance in the emergence and development of UK Hip Hop culture from the late 1970s onwards. It focuses on the planned archival partnership between the community-led group The Hip Hop Historian Society (HHHS) and Leeds Museums as an example of what Baker (2017: 3) refers to as ‘community-led, grassroots, specialist archives [...] dedicated to specific genres, artists or locales which are marginalized’.

Leeds, Hip Hop and the museum

HHHS is a Leeds-based community-led collective voluntary group formed in 2018, co-founded by Leeds Hip Hop Graffiti Artist Monks⁵ (a.k.a Monkee), and consisting of Hip Hop practitioners and supporters whose aim is to document, preserve and celebrate the history of Hip Hop culture in Leeds. The group has a pre-existing relationship with the Local Authority-funded Leeds Museums. Since 2014, both organizations have collaborated to produce an annual Hip Hop history month community day at Leeds City Museum and HHHS has donated artefacts, which have featured in a number of ad hoc Leeds music exhibitions. Marek Romaniszyn, Assistant Community Curator for Leeds Museums, has been involved in the development of the Leeds Museums’ relationship with HHHS since the first Hip Hop celebration event in 2014. He recalls the significance and scale of this event, stating ‘it was huge, Afrika Bambaata came down and there was around 3000 people’ (Romaniszyn 2021: n.pag.).

In 2019, the HHHS and the museum began drafting an agreement to create a permanent Leeds Hip Hop history archive to be housed at Leeds Museums in order to document and celebrate some of the key events and practitioners involved in the development of Leeds Hip Hop culture. The artefacts are intended to be a blend of material artefacts (including event posters, albums, album artworks and notable press articles) and a recorded collection of oral histories gathered from Leeds Hip Hop practitioners. Despite delays due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, work has continued such as preparing interviews and artefacts to be included in the future archive.

Methodology

This chapter draws on semi-structured interviews with key artists, promoters, practitioners, community project leaders and Leeds Museums staff to expose a history of Leeds Hip Hop, and to explore the interconnections between generational experiences to investigate how this history might discover and locate its voice through the further development and expansion of the archive. The Interviews explored both participant's experiences of Hip Hop culture in Leeds and their thoughts about the creation of the archive. This approach draws on the process of co-curation to gather data as a means to 'facilitate[ing] different ways of remembering *and* [...] also the invitation to contextualize these memories in different discourses' (Beate 2020: 58, original emphasis).

Initially, one key practitioner from each of the generations since the emergence of Hip Hop was selected for interview based on their age, longevity and engagement with the Leeds scene. A 'snowball' or 'chain' sampling method (Patton 2002) was then implemented to help select further participants, which were based on suggestions from initial interviews until enough information-rich narratives were gathered that covered the past five decades with significant overlap. The findings from these interviews were synthesized to build a history of Leeds Hip Hop, and through this process, the challenges of historicizing a multi-generational popular music culture were investigated.

This chapter does not claim to offer a definitive history of Hip Hop in Leeds, however, the contributions from participants offer new insight into the culture over the last five decades. The findings are structured chronologically to focus on each era, and generation, of Leeds Hip Hop history in turn (reflecting the structuring framework utilized in McNally's 2010 'Home Grown' Hip Hop history exhibition⁶). This supports a valuable dialogue that is in keeping with the long-term ambition to tell the broad and rich story of Leeds Hip Hop through the creation of the planned archive.

Mixtapes and sound systems: The late 1970s to mid 1980s

DJ Weston (2021), a member of the early generation of Leeds Hip Hop artists, has remained consistently active in the Leeds scene and remembers his earliest memories of the emergence of Hip Hop's presence in Leeds. He recalls in the late 1970s and early 1980s mixtapes⁷ from the United States beginning to filter through to the United Kingdom, with US Hip Hop tracks occasionally being played at music events and clubs that were otherwise focused musically on playing reggae, dancehall, soul and funk. Khadijah Ibrahim (2021), the founder of the long-established street poetry jam collective Leeds Young Authors, recalls a similar experience of early US Hip Hop tracks proliferating through the playlists for Reggae sound system gigs during that same time period.

At that time, the geographic locus of venues and events interweaving Hip Hop music was concentrated in various Blues and underground clubs around the Chapeltown and Harehills areas of North Leeds. Both Ibrahim and Weston recall Fox's club in Chapeltown as a key venue where early Hip Hop tracks would be played. Weston recalls that Hip Hop could be heard amongst Funk, Soul and Reggae music at Studio One in Sheepscar and the Starlight Ballroom in Shaftsbury. Ibrahim also describes how Hip Hop was played alongside other music genres on the Reggae sound systems in Leeds: 'In Chapeltown, Reggae music was definitely at the heart of what was being played, but [...] you'd definitely hear Hip Hop' (Ibrahim 2021: n.pag.).

In 1983, Weston recalls the formation of 'Breakin' the Mould' one of the early street break dancing crews from Leeds, along with 'Connection '84'. The following year, Leeds record store Jumbo Records held a body-popping battle, where Weston remembers 'the energy of the crowd, all pushing through, and closing in, it was amazing' (2021: n.pag.). Weston remembers that this element of Hip Hop culture, at that time in Leeds, was largely a youth culture: '[the] only places you'd hear Hip Hop before 1987 was in youth centres, and you often had to bring your own records' (2021: n.pag.). For Weston and the break dance crews he was associated with, the culture 'died around 1985' (2021: n.pag.) before re-emerging with renewed vigour and presence around 1987. By this, Weston explains that he is referring to a significant downturn in

the presence of Breakdance crews and battles/competitions. He remembers this as a national cultural shift, and estimates that it was driven in part by that early generation reaching adulthood:

I've spoken to old skoolers about what happened [...]. My theory is that we all reached an age where we all had to get jobs. Before '86, if you were 18 and a break dancer you were old, that wasn't heard of.

(Weston 2021: n.pag.)

Weston's recollections of this are supported by Hip Hop artist Project Cee, who, reflecting on his experiences in the rural south-west of England, explained 'there were people at that time [mid-1980s] who were probably five years older than us, and they just kind of thought of breakdancing as really childish, and they very quickly moved on' (de Paor-Evans and McNally 2021: 155).

Weston also recalled his simultaneous involvement in graffiti writing, remembering large and active graffiti crews present in Leeds at that time. He began DJing in 1986, going on to DJ for Leeds/York Hip Hop crew New Flesh for Old (Ninjatune) and Jehst (YnR). Although prior to this time there were few Hip Hop DJs, partly due to the expense of equipment, Weston remembers an influx of Hip Hop DJs in and around Leeds in 1987, which included Bradford DJ John Bidy and (BBoy crew) Soul City Rockers (who went on to co-found the DJ group Nightmares on Wax with George Evelyn and Kevin Harper).

One of the earliest documented video recordings of Leeds Hip Hop artists appears in the BBC Hip Hop documentary *Bad Meaning Good* (BBC 1987), featuring Leeds Hip Hop rapper Daddy Speedo. Weston and Khadijah recall Speedo's emergence in the scene along with fellow MCs Boddy Popper and KD Ranko, all of whom transitioned from toasting in the Leeds Reggae scene to rapping over Hip Hop. In the late 1980s, UK rappers would routinely adopt American accents (Stevenson 2017) and, in Leeds, Hip Hop artist Testament (2021) even admits to continuing to be influenced by the American accent in his lyrical delivery through to the late 1990s. The specific turning point at which Leeds MCs began to rap in their own Leeds accent is difficult to pinpoint, though available recordings of Leeds artists suggest this shift began in the mid 1990s, as evidenced in the unreleased posse track *Drinking Tea with the Lads* (1993) by Progressive Agenda and New Flesh for Old (Emery 2017).

The emergence of a homegrown scene: Late 1980s–90s

The early 1980s saw the emergence of a Hip Hop presence in Leeds through Breakdancing, Graffiti and imported mixtapes; however, the late 1980s bore witness to the development of a distinct Leeds Hip Hop culture through the establishment of Hip Hop nights, Hip Hop DJs and locally produced mixtapes. Weston recalls that around 1987 an increasing number of city centre clubs began to play Hip Hop tracks, as DJs realized that the younger generation, now of club-going age, possessed an appetite for the Hip Hop sound.

One of the first distinct ‘Hip Hop nights’ in Leeds took place first at Phono and then later in the downstairs room ‘Rickys’ at the city centre club Coconut Grove, with Soul City Rockers’ Hip Hop night called Downbeat. Weston remembers its popularity and that ‘other nightclubs started [...] seeing the queues outside – they would even send spies down from other clubs to write down the set list so they could go back and play [it] in their club!’ (2021: n.pag.).

Though it is challenging to ascertain a specific date when a Leeds Hip Hop scene was established in earnest, a robust approximation can be extracted from interview participants’ recollections of the time period when Leeds artists began to produce their own musical material. Whilst this may be considered to signify a shift away from Bennett and Peterson’s (2004) notion of a ‘Translocal’ towards a ‘local’ Leeds Hip Hop music scene, this would be an oversimplification, due to the glocal nature of Hip Hop participants, who are described by Alim as ‘negotiating their identities and memberships in the simultaneously localizing and globalizing imagined world of Hip Hop’ (2009: 107).

Weston recalls 1989 as a cultural shift in the emergence of a Leeds Hip Hop scene as artists began to produce their own mixtapes. Around this time some notable Leeds artists also became active in the scene, including Nightmares on Wax (whose broader camp at this time Inner City Leagues, included Shane ‘10 Tonn’ Fenton and others), LSK, Breakin’ the Illusion (BTI) – who later went on to found Low Life Records with Leeds artists Braintax (T.E.S.T. and FourNine) and LFO, alongside established sound system crews such as Ital Rockers.⁸

A technological evolution: Early 1990s–2000s

The early 1990s ushered in a new era for Leeds Hip Hop, both in terms of sound, prevalence and shifts in inter-crew relationships. Technological developments including the increasing availability of sampling and home recording equipment played a key role in this shift, which enabled further development in sound and resulted in a shift away from the faster tempo electro-beats (that characterized much earlier Hip Hop) to Boom-Bap, New York-style Hip Hop beats. Weston recalls that changes in the availability of technology also impacted interrelationships between crews and artists in the scene. Historically crews were more closely connected within the Hip Hop community, which was driven by the scarcity of technological resources and the need to share, as well as limited outlets through which to hear and receive new music. However, the 1990s saw crews and artists empowered with the ability to record themselves at home, without the same need to share equipment or source significant funds in order to pay for commercial studio time.

In the late 1990s, UK Hip Hop began to enjoy a further proliferation of artists/crews and further national exposure. Within this creative environment, the next generation of Leeds Hip Hop rappers developed their own style, showcasing their material at various, now regular and established, Hip Hop nights within the city such as Fresh Jive and Drum Major (at The Wardrobe). For Weston, the late 1990s signified a cultural turning point where the commercialization of Hip Hop music led to fragmentation within the scene and shifts in artists' motivations for producing music. The next generation of artists emerged from an environment where commercial endeavour and entrepreneurship were a familiar element of the context of Hip Hop. Monks has a buoyant recollection of the Leeds scene in the late 1990s:

Jehst was on the Leeds scene [...] after I put on the Therapy nights at Warehouse we formed the Therapy Allstars, which was Tommy Evans, Jehst, DJ X, Agent M, and ADM [...] there was Testament [on the scene], as well as Afro Physiks [...] then we formed Junkyard Tactics [...] there was a lot going on.

(2021: n.pag.)

He goes on to expound on other elements of Hip Hop culture 'during that time [the mid to late 1990s] we painted Way Ahead Records artwork and formed the crew Triple A with graf writer

Rocaine and Insa' (2021: n.pag.). Monks also remembers playing the inaugural date of Leeds' long-running community music festival Hyde Park Unity Day, established in 1996 as a response to local civil unrest and street riots.

Testament, Leeds-based Hip Hop artist in the critically acclaimed live Hip Hop band Homecut, recalls his integration into the Leeds Hip Hop scene in the late 1990s. 'I started my degree at the University of Leeds in 1997 and wanted to start a band. [...] We first played youth centres and college events [...] our first paid gig was at The Faversham for [promoter] Tony Green' (2021: n.pag.). Having spent the last two decades delivering hip hop workshops in schools and developing Hip Hop theatre productions, Testament's experiences of the Leeds Hip Hop scenes demonstrated a tapestry of involvement in a number of cultural, Hip-Hop-related communities. He recalls that 'as a live band, we [Homecut] had more of that crossover appeal, we got booked for all sorts of different gigs' (2021: n.pag.). Testament, Monks and Weston all recall that Leeds Student Radio (LSR), as well as a number of local pirate radio stations, were supportive of Leeds Hip Hop acts giving airtime to Leeds artists either through offering slots to run Hip Hop shows and/or through playing local Hip Hop.

Later, Testament became MC and host for the regular Leeds Hip Hop night *New Bohemia* (The Faversham), which ran from the mid 2000s for a number of years playing host to a wealth of United Kingdom and local Hip Hop artists including Jack Flash and Tommy Evans. Speaking on notable artists and practitioners who were active in the Leeds scene at that time, Testament remembers Kid Kanevil, BBoy Shane '10 Tonn' Fenton, Monkee (now Monks), and B Girl Firefly, and his involvement with key Leeds Hip Hop collective Invizible Circle.

Invizible Circle were a notable Leeds Hip Hop crew in that they formed as a cooperative in 2001. Inspired by US Hip Hop group the Wu Tang Clan, the perception of the power drawn from belonging to a collective, and following veteran Hip Hop DJ Oddball's proclamation that selfish promotion amongst the Leeds scene must end, founding members including J Bravo, Monks, DJ Combine, Totally Dis-illusioned (T.D), Kid Kanevil and Agent M would pay subs [subscriptions] to the collective, which were used to record, promote and support the collective's 30-plus members. The collective both proliferated and divided over time, branching off into more discrete projects, including Invizible Circle Records, whose artist roster included Leeds-

based acts BTI and Junkyard Tactics; however, Invizible Circle, in name and in its original form, exists as a prominent part of the history of the Leeds Hip Hop scene.


Defenders of Style MC Prys recalls the point in time that he and his fellow crew members first became involved in the Leeds Hip Hop scene:

I started listening to Invizible Circle, getting passed down tapes that were from the older graf crews, we were really into graf so that got us into the scene. We looked up to the likes of 9ine Lives, Monkee, Double D Dagger, Eliphino, we were just blown away by what they were doing.

(2021: n.pag.)

Promoter Harry Lotta remembers the long-running, community-focused Hip Hop night Lyrically Justified as a similar example of a Leeds-based music collective and platform created to nurture local Hip Hop talent (Lotta 2021: n.pag.). Lyrically Justified, formed with an ethos of promoting love, music and a strictly open mind policy (BBC 2008), was initially set up at Leeds Metropolitan University in 2004 by Harry and fellow collaborator and DJ Ms Sykes, and eventually moved to a regular listing at Leeds city centre club, Carpe Diem until 2011.

What is clear from the interview participants' responses is that intergenerationality in the context of Leeds Hip Hop history is more complex than solely the age of the artist. For example, despite Homecut being active on the scene into the late 2000s, Testament places Double D Dagger, Arro (Miniature Heroes) and Jack Flash into what he considers the 'next generation'. Defenders of Style (who were active from the mid 2000s) cite 'looking up' to some of these artists as the previous generation of established Hip Hop artists, indicating that the level to which an act is established and the degree of critical 'underground' recognition they have received plays a role in defining one generation from the other.

When Weston recalls the earlier days of Hip Hop in Leeds, he states that 'every generation "came through" at the same time in the sense that everyone was into the break dancing. Then, when the clubs became more musically segregated Hip Hop heads pulled back a bit' (2021: n.pag.). Tony Green, a long-established Leeds promoter who has supported emerging Leeds Hip Hop acts through hosting Leeds Hip Hop nights and larger scale gigs in the region, similarly described the Leeds scene 'breaking up' in the early 2010s as the different elements of Hip Hop splintered. From around 1997, Tony established regular Hip Hop nights such as Freshjive at the Faversham (see  Figure 16.1). He mentions that alongside the musical acts at

his nights, which would regularly have more than 700 people in attendance, there would also be local BBoys and BGirls such as DMW, Weston, Roy, Andrea, Firefly and Sean from Leeds crew Breakers Unify, as well as many high-profile scratch DJs/Turntablists who had competed in the DMC world DJ championships.

Figure 16.1: A Freshjive flyer, c.2010. Courtesy of Freshjive events.

Green recounted the numerous events he put on in partnership with Shane '10 Tonn' Fenton from around 2004, highlighting the importance of ensuring that Hip Hop events in Leeds represented the scene. 'Once I'd started working with him [Shane] [...] we got to [...] the roots of the culture, and I started to really understand it, and what it meant to the city, and what it meant to kids' (2021: n.pag.). Green described how important the BBoys and BGirls were at their nights:

the floor, the lights; it was a prerequisite of anywhere we were, so when they walked in, it was like '*this is for me, this is my night*'. We gave them all VIP cards so they never had to pay for anything [...] they were our celebrities.

(2021: n.pag.)

Green remembered the early 2000s as a golden era for Hip Hop in Leeds:

as a club scene we were potent, we were in the middle of it, and it represented [...] you came to a Hip Hop night and it wasn't 30 lads in a corner just rapping [...] it was big, charismatic, full of all sorts of people, dancing and partying, and that's what Hip Hop was.

(2021: n.pag.)

Monks also recalled working closely with BBoy 10 Tonn and his family's charity movement *Speak to the Streets*. In an interview in *The Guardian* in 2011, Fenton described this scene as being 'about making things happen and bringing people together and empowering the youth' (Slack 2011: n.pag.), highlighting the significant role Hip Hop has played within the communities of Leeds.

A 'golden era' and the return of the rap battle: The 2000s–10s

Echoing Tony Green's reflections on Leeds Hip Hop's 'golden era', MC Matter remembers the prominence and popularity of Hip Hop in mid 2000s Leeds recalling the *8 Mile* Rap Battle competition series coming to Leeds in 2005, which for Matter was a significant cultural flashpoint: 'Jack Flash entered and all the next Leeds MCs were out in force' (Matter 2021: n.pag.). Matter also recalled that, following this, Leeds club Dr Wu's sat for a period as a locus of Hip Hop activity. For Matter, this prolific period for Leeds Hip Hop inspired his generation of Leeds artists, including 'Defenders of Style, Alphabetix and all of them [...] we did stuff for each other, supported each other' (2021: n.pag.).

Matter also identified the re-emergence and return in popularity of the acapella rap battle scene within Leeds Hip Hop around 2009, with regional artists Lego (York), Dialect (Leeds) and Lunar C (Bradford). For Weston, this re-emergence heralded a welcome cultural turn within Leeds Hip Hop where the characteristics of the battle event demonstrated a return to the raw energy, sense of fun and close crowd proximity of the germinal years of the Leeds Hip Hop scene. Whilst Green also described this as 'the next chapter, all those kids coming through, like Matter, the Don't Flop thing'⁹ (2021: n.pag.), he also described how eventually, after the broader appeal of the battle competitions waned, these events become much smaller-scale events with the same 50 or 60 hardcore Hip Hop heads attending, lacking the broader appeal of the party vibe that the previous Hip Hop events offered. Green described how once he stopped putting on dedicated Hip Hop nights that the bigger mainstream clubs and venues 'swallowed bookings up' (2021: n.pag.) leading to a lack of engagement with the local Hip Hop community and limited support opportunities for younger up and coming artists that there had been previously.

Conclusions

Our interviewees highlighted that themes of 'inspiration', 'know-how' and 'a sense of unity' all held a place within inter-crew relationships of the same generation, which encouraged descendant generations of Leeds Hip Hop. Conversely, direct mentorship and the explicit

‘passing on of Hip Hop knowledge’ between generations played a less significant role. For Weston, whilst older and younger generations inspired, and continue to inspire each other, a stronger sense of connection and mentorship could have been fostered within the scene. Testament remembers mutual love and respect between newer and older generations of Hip Hop culture in Leeds but highlights how eventually younger generations were not necessarily looking up to older generations for support. Matter expounded on his experience of Hip Hop’s inter-generational relationships stating ‘Hip Hop is a generally belligerent culture that doesn’t give a sh*t what anyone says to them, especially the generation before them, but everyone got on, it was all cool, there was no animosity’ (2021: n.pag.).

Against these collegial experiences of Hip Hop interrelationships, the scene has not been without its share of disagreement or Hip Hop ‘beef’. Monks recalled several graffiti ‘wars’ over the decades between rival crews, with Green describing the negative impact of graffiti wars at his club night on both himself (e.g. breaking up fights), and the venues and neighbouring businesses who were often caught in the firing line.

These practitioner accounts have highlighted how the interrelationships and connections within Leeds Hip Hop, both across time (intergenerationally) and across the culture, are more complex and nuanced than simply ‘one generation following another’, or a particular crew or artist being linked to another. There is also both division and interconnection within the culture’s elements, demonstrated in Green’s account highlighting the fundamental importance of the relationship between promoter and artist. A number of the artists alluded to the sonic shift away from Electro-beat towards the Boom Bap sound (in the 1990s) as a point of distinction within Leeds Hip Hop history. Weston pointed to a similar distinction between an ‘old skool’ rap style and the subsequent shift to more complex wordplay and multi-syllable rhyming (in the 1990s), and then later to ‘Grime’ style of rap (in the 2000s) as a means of distinguishing generations.

Most of the histories of Leeds Hip Hop are oral and become manifest only through the memories of lived experience of the individuals and groups involved. Weston recalled numerous practitioners who were fundamental to the development of the scene in its early years whose influence would have been otherwise forgotten due to a lack of physical documentation of their involvement. Much later in the lineage of Hip Hop history, Prys noted the challenge with

documentation of the events of Leeds Hip Hop history: ‘there was no YouTube or camera phones then [...] it was mixtapes’ (2021: n.pag.).

Any archive of Leeds Hip Hop history(s) therefore needs to be one which positions the members of its culture and their lived experiences centrally in the curatorial process. Peter (2020: 61) explains that this approach is fundamental to ethical curation: ‘If co-curation is to advertise and evidence civic engagement (including that of co-curators), exhibitions have to include, or be the result of, several (and equal) voices’. Leeds Museums curator Marek also positions this approach as key to successful curation

[in] ethical community collecting the people in that community are the experts, I think they should be able to come to the collections development meetings and say what they would like to be included [in the archive] and bringing their narrative and their stories with the objects [...] the museum can facilitate, provide a platform.

(Romaniszyn 2021: n.pag.)

Marek added the importance of the relationship between the museum and the Hip Hop community developing over time in which

contemporary community collecting should be people focussed. [...] It should be about creating that balance between the Museum being a neutral platform and communities populating it with their stories and things that are important to them. [...] It’s important that this is a community led, organic and authentic relationship that develops over a long period of time, to build that trust.

(2021: n.pag.)

Drawing parallels with the structural narrative of this chapter, Weston maintains that a Leeds Hip Hop archive should document the point at which Hip Hop music began to be played in Leeds and its narrative should begin with the earliest Breakdancers and Graffiti writers, including everyone involved in the culture from that point onwards. Whereas for Ibrahim, intergenerationality in Hip Hop stretches much further back into history. Reflecting Rose (1994), Ibrahim traces Hip Hop’s roots back to the griot and the storytelling traditions of West African cultures, which in turn influenced the ‘toasting’ of the reggae soundsystem culture, suggesting that a Leeds Hip Hop archive must do more than begin its narrative with the inception of the first Leeds Hip Hop artists and recognize its deeper roots.

For the curator(s) seeking to create a Leeds Hip Hop archive, the above insights suggest a need to make connections between generations, phases and time periods in the history of Leeds Hip Hop culture. Whilst on the one hand the interconnections between different generations emerge somewhat organically; in the liminality between the artists, gigs and venues remembered, on the other hand, there is no clear, distinct lineage between generations of Leeds Hip Hop practitioners or definitive phases in its history. The story(s) of Leeds Hip Hop exists as an interwoven, and rhizomatic fabric of histories whose lineages co-exist at the same time as both connected and disparate.

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Notes

¹There is much contention about the amalgamation of the terms 'rap' and 'Hip Hop', with rap sometimes considered a reductive term, only referring to Hip Hop music, with the term Hip Hop relating a wider culture (Krimms 2000).

²Originating in 1950s Jamaica, the collective term soundsystems refers to both the music amplification and playback system and the people that operate these systems (Woods 2019).

³The Hiphop Archive & Research Institute, <http://hiphoparchive.org/> Accessed 1 December 2021.

⁴The Cornell Hip Hop Collection, <https://rnc.library.cornell.edu/hiphop/> Accessed 1 December 2021.

⁵As a significant proportion of the histories are drawn from oral and lived experience, it is not always possible to verify definitive or correct spellings of artist and Hip Hop practitioner names or monikers; however, every effort has been made by the authors to check and cross reference these.

⁶<https://urbismanchester.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/home-grown-the-story-of-uk-hip-hop.pdf>
Accessed 1 December 2021.

⁷The term ‘mixtape’ refers to a music recording (originally on a cassette tape) containing a number of music tracks often from a combination of different artists, which have been ‘mixed’ by a DJ to flow from one track to the next.

⁸Ital Rockers went on to become Iration Steppas.

⁹Don’t Flop is a UK rap battle organization established in 2008.