

RIM4

STREAMING

HIP-HOP

**MUSIC FORWARD
2023**



INTRODUCTION



Hip-hop music has been a vital powerhouse of storytelling and connection since it evolved from its roots in the Bronx, New York to its current widespread popularity and economic success. Just over fifty years ago, hip-hop was born out of Black creativity, and its influence on culture has been undeniable ever since. Hip-hop has developed and adapted to represent different styles and capture people's experiences across the nation and around the globe, and along the way it has garnered millions of loyal and engaged fans. From New Orleans bounce, Miami bass, and Atlanta trap music in the south to the hyphy sound of Oakland, to the Chicago-born, New York City-adopted drill, hip-hop continues to be a force in American culture.

With a history of connecting people and creating opportunities for individual and societal growth, hip-hop tells the story of how determination and creativity can set the stage for success. It all started with 'two turntables and a microphone' – and since then, hip-hop has been at the forefront of technological adoption as its fans have enthusiastically embraced the streaming era. According to new survey data, 80% of hip-hop fans say they couldn't imagine living without music and 93% say they are likely to continue using their favorite streaming service.

Streaming helps hip-hop artists bring their stories and creative expression to the world beyond the local block parties and clubs. And that expression resonates with people of all ages and backgrounds. Today, hip-hop is one of the most popular genres on streaming services, which have expanded access for old fans and new listeners alike. My own love of hip-hop blossomed growing-up in Atlanta, listening to local legends like Outkast and Jermaine Dupri on CDs and iTunes. Now, I listen to everything from Migos to Ice Spice to Megan Thee Stallion on streaming services, discovering new artists from my hometown and beyond.

As part of this report, DiMA interviewed leading digital executives involved in hip-hop: **Timothy Hinshaw**, Head of Hip-Hop and R&B at Amazon Music; **Ebro Darden**, Senior Global Editorial Head of Hip-Hop and R&B and Host, Apple Music 1 at Apple Music; **Eric "Stens" Stensvaag**, Director of Curation at Feed.fm; **Joshua "J1" Raiford**, Vice President of Music Programming at Pandora; **Carl Chery**, Creative Director and Head of Urban Music at Spotify; and **Tuma Basa**, Director of Black Music & Culture at YouTube. These executives shared new perspectives and interesting insights on the state of hip-hop today and where the genre is headed.

To learn more about hip-hop fans in the United States, we also partnered with MusicWatch to survey listeners about their love of the genre and relationship with music streaming. The results offer a fascinating snapshot of the state of hip-hop at 50. And because we want to make sure you have something fun to listen to while you read the report, we asked the executives we interviewed to highlight some under-the-radar and up-and-coming hip-hop artists that everyone should try.

As we celebrate hip-hop's golden anniversary, we see a picture emerging of the power of music to tell vital stories, connect people both locally and globally, and drive and shape culture. Stream hip-hop music forward and read on to learn why.

Sally Rose Larson
Vice President, Government Relations and Public Affairs

STREAMING
HIP-HOP
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Timothy Hinshaw

Head of Hip-Hop and R&B

Ebro Darden

Senior Global Editorial Head of Hip-Hop and R&B / Host, Apple Music 1

Eric "Stens" Stensvaag

Director of Curation

Joshua "J1" Raiford

Vice President, Music Programming

Carl Chery

Creative Director and Head of Urban Music

Tuma Basa

Director, Black Music & Culture

amazon music



feed.fm

pandora

Spotify

YouTube

HIP-HOP FAN PROFILE

HIP-HOP STREAMERS ARE LOYAL

93%

of hip-hop streamers are likely to keep using their favorite streaming service.

HIP-HOP FANS ARE OVERWHELMINGLY MUSIC-MINDED

80%

of hip-hop fans said they couldn't imagine living without music.

HIP-HOP FANS ARE AVID LISTENERS

78%

of hip-hop streamers listen to music daily.

HIP-HOP LISTENERS ARE EARLY ADOPTERS

Hip-hop fans are
25%

more likely to use new features on streaming services than the average listener.

HIP-HOP FANS CARE ABOUT CURATION

85%

of hip-hop fans enjoy playlists provided by their streaming service.

HIP-HOP FANS LIKE RECOMMENDATIONS

67%

of hip-hop streamers say recommendations make them more likely to listen to their preferred service.

HIP-HOP FANS ARE MUSIC DISCOVERERS

78%

of hip-hop fans cite music streaming as a primary source for music discovery.

HIP-HOP FANS ARE EVERYWHERE

58%

of hip-hop fans live outside of cities, in suburban or rural areas.

HIP-HOP FANS MIX IT UP

63%

of hip-hop fans are also fans of R&B, with 38% fans of Classic Rock; 38% Country; and 33% Top 40.

HIP-HOP FANS FUEL THE STREAMING-SOCIAL FLYWHEEL

71%

of hip-hop streamers follow artists or music influencers on social platforms or view their posts.

85%

of hip-hop streamers say they go to streaming services after checking artists out on social media.

HIP-HOP LISTENERS ARE "LEAN-IN" STREAMERS

75%

of hip-hop streamers like to pick their songs and create playlists.

HIP-HOP LISTENERS ARE HYPER-ENGAGED

Nearly

60%

of hip-hop listeners consider themselves "hard-core" fans.



Data from MusicWatch survey conducted online between July 22 and August 4, 2023.

**STREAMING
FORWARD**

Q *Hip-hop is one of the most popular genres on streaming platforms. Why do you think that is?*



Ebro Darden (Apple): Hip-hop has always been the soundtrack to youth culture and has served as the voice of the marginalized - helping people in those communities find their voice and relate to one another through shared stories and experiences. We are talking about fifty years' worth of phenomenal artists, music, and content that is so engaging, authentic, and meaningful to both those creating it and those listening to it. I think that streaming has made it so much easier to measure the true impact of hip-hop on not just music, but on the culture. It has always been popular, but it was so much harder to measure because sales, radio data, and consumerism didn't really reflect what was happening in the real-life culture.



Timothy Hinshaw (Amazon Music): The scale of hip-hop's impact on streaming is staggering. In 2021 alone, Amazon Music customers around the world asked Alexa to play hip-hop and R&B tracks more than one billion times. This popularity is driven not only by hip-hop's immediacy, but also staying power. We see Amazon Music customers coming to Rotation—our hip-hop and R&B brand—to stay up-to-date on the most current artists. At the same time, those same customers are also seeking out the music that defined different eras of their life—the music they grew up with.



Eric "Stens" Stensvaag (Feed.fm): In a word, portability. The ability to stream hip-hop's recorded history from nearly anywhere is just the latest evolution for an art form that dates back to the invention of two technological landmarks: the boombox (1975) and Sony WALKMAN (1979). This portability (e.g., carting records to block parties) lay at the heart of hip-hop, and provided the lifeblood to a style whose mainstream acceptance was delayed. Hip-hop has transported from the specific neighborhoods that birthed this music to the global stage, while communicating powerfully about the individual, often marginalized experiences of its creators.

Streaming represents a partial return to the singles-oriented culture of hip-hop's origins, with playlists extending the hip-hop mixtape tradition. Hip-hop's vitality draws from the streets and from young people, for whom streaming offers unbeatable value combined with optimal access.



Joshua "J1" Raiford (Pandora): Hip-hop is not just music. It's fashion, lifestyle, history, and stories. Hip-hop sets trends and is pop culture.



Carl Chery (Spotify): Rap listeners have historically been early adopters. They tend to identify new trends and mediums ahead of the curve, so they carved out a piece of the streaming pie when fans of other genres were still consuming music through other avenues. Hip-hop artists also release music at a relentless pace.



Tuma Basa (YouTube): Hip-hop has always been one of the most popular genres at the grassroots level – in the clubs, in cars, and in the streets. The mainstream music industry caught up once monetization came into play and when streaming platforms made the music more accessible to the average person.



What makes hip-hop fans special?



Timothy Hinshaw (Amazon Music): Hip-hop fans are some of the most sophisticated, discerning fans in the world. We are keenly tied into cultural trends, whether it's the hottest new sound or the newest thing in fashion. Hip-hop is more than just a genre; it's a lifestyle, a culture, a way of living. Hip-hop fans know and embrace this, and we always have that in mind when creating programming for them.



Ebro Darden (Apple): Hip-hop fans are passionate and highly engaged. They don't just *listen* to hip-hop, they *LIVE* it - the beats, the rhymes, the experiences at live shows - all of it. It's a relationship with the artist that goes beyond just being a fan.



Tuma Basa (YouTube): Realness, full stop. It doesn't get any more real than the core hip-hop audience: the candor, the honesty and the authenticity. Go read the comments on any hip-hop-focused media outlet...a spade is a spade is a spade!



Eric "Stens" Stensvaag (Feed.fm): KRS-One coined, "rap is something you do, hip-hop is something you live," an idea Nas distilled into "Represent!" Today's hip-hop fans are as diverse and representative as this mighty art form. Unsurprisingly, for a genre that began with "two turntables and a microphone," they're also highly adaptable. Most recently, this meant embracing a) the melodic, auto-tuned flow of Kanye West et al., and b) trap's insistent hi-hats and triplets, while migrating from viral mixtapes to streaming.

In the spirit of Grandmaster Flash, hip-hop has prized opportunistic, inventive boundary blurring. Any break can earn its place on the platter. Topically, MCs broadened from hype and braggadocio to increasingly explicit lyrics anchored in BIPOC urban realities. At their best, fans have rebelled against racist norms, with an increased condemnation of institutionalized racism and celebration of our shared humanity. For those raised on Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet*, we're thrilled that this revolutionary group's prediction is coming true.



Joshua "J1" Raiford (Pandora): Hip-hop fans are diverse and passionate. They come from all walks of life but love different aspects of hip-hop culture.



Carl Chery (Spotify): Hip-hop fans have an insatiable appetite for music. Fans who consider themselves part of hip-hop culture abide by a code. Hip-hop fans also love discourse. They're constantly looking to debate on behalf of their favorite artists or albums.

Q As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of hip-hop, how have you seen its evolution, and what role has streaming played?



Tuma Basa (YouTube): There are no limits. Streaming took the ceiling off what and where the music could go. Barriers to entry were lowered and the floodgates opened, which created more opportunities for the music to be heard and for more families to be fed.



Joshua "J1" Raiford (Pandora): Hip-hop started in 1973 at a party in the Bronx, but has evolved into mainstream pop culture. It's infused in fashion, sports, entertainment, politics, and everyday life. Streaming helped spread hip-hop across the world at a rapid pace.



Carl Chery (Spotify): Hip-hop has evolved in so many ways, from the production to the mechanics of rapping. The rules of hip-hop are also constantly changing. The same things that were once frowned upon can become standard practice years later. Rappers used to be called sellouts for having endorsement deals. It's pretty common to see artists become brand ambassadors for companies like McDonald's or Nike. Rap used to have a somewhat adversarial relationship with R&B. Now, the two genres are intertwined to a point where they're, at times, hard to distinguish from one another. Each generation always introduces new ways to approach hip-hop. Over the years, many fans have consumed hip-hop through unofficial channels that didn't count towards the chart. Streaming was instrumental in making hip-hop the #1 genre in the U.S. for the first time.



Eric "Stens" Stensvaag (Feed.fm): Hailing from middle America, my first hip-hop experience was Run-DMC's "Walk This Way" (1986). Between Aerosmith's brilliant DNA, the MCs' tag-teamed delivery, and Jam Master Jay's scratching, I was hooked. "Walk This Way" was the first of three power punches into the mainstream, followed by Dr. Dre's *The Chronic* (1992). Puff Daddy landed the finishing blow with *No Way Out* (1997). Puff's debut also served as a bittersweet coronation of the Notorious B.I.G., whose ability to straddle the underground and mainstream nearly erased the distinction...and led to massive successes for DMX, Jay-Z, etc.

Streaming has majorly impacted hip-hop. Artists like Lil Wayne repurposed the mixtape as an online marketing tool for audience development. SoundCloud broadened hip-hop to encompass a DIY, unpolished sound and shorter songs. Today, there are still adherents to traditional, in-the-pocket flow (Kendrick Lamar, Megan Thee Stallion, DaBaby), but they've been supplanted by rappers largely indebted to SoundCloud and trap aesthetics (Lil Baby, Post Malone, Future).



Ebro Darden (Apple): Streaming has made music overall more accessible to people all over the world. But, specifically with hip-hop, it has extended the reach of the genre far beyond what radio or the album ever could. It's available easily and everywhere, and there is no limit to the opportunity for discovery. Really not just streaming, but advancements in tech in general have heavily shaped hip-hop's evolution and continued success - things like Garage Band and Logic and sonic technology like Spatial Audio have changed the depth and quality of the listening experience.



Timothy Hinshaw (Amazon Music): As the world comes together to celebrate hip-hop's 50th anniversary, it's important to realize how streaming has connected hip-hop fans to the genre's history. In the past, if you wanted to hear more music from an artist like Queen Latifah's catalog, that might involve a trip to a record store or some crate digging. Now, fans can ask Alexa to play Queen Latifah's *Black Reign*, and they're instantly immersed in that world. Not only that, but fans can discover the artists that influenced her and discover songs like The Crusaders' "Message from the Inner City," which Latifah famously sampled in "U.N.I.T.Y." Hip-hop fans have the entire history of hip-hop available to them because of streaming. And it's our responsibility to create programming that connects our customers to the genre's history and tells that holistic story.

Q *Where does hip-hop go from here? What are the trends that will define the next decade?*



Carl Chery (Spotify): Becoming mainstream. I think we're going to keep seeing legacy acts build a successful touring business. I think we're heading towards one of the most drastic musical and cultural shifts in our lifetime, especially as hip-hop becomes more global. Each generation typically introduces new ideas, but there's always a clear thread that connects it back to tradition. This new generation is leading us towards truly, uncharted territory.



Tuma Basa (YouTube): All the different countries' flavors are what's next; it's international and global. In the next ten years, we will see Turkish hip-hop, Latin trap, Ghanaian drill and more sub-genres continue to take off. Santan Dave and Central Cee in the U.K. are probably the best examples thus far of this current development.

I think we are going to see more off-shoots evolve that may not give credit to hip-hop, but stem from the culture.



Timothy Hinshaw (Amazon Music): The future is female. We have seen it since Nicki Minaj first came on the scene and kicked down the door creating a path for all of the amazing female rappers we enjoy today. I think we'll see a real push from female rappers in all directions of hip-hop. Who's the next Lauryn Hill?



Ebro Darden (Apple): The amazing innovation, experimentation, and storytelling that we see from hip-hop artists today heavily influence other genres - a truly inverted relationship from where it all started as an aggregate of other sounds and samples of music. Now hip-hop is pushing others to innovate. It represents the best of all aspects of music - from creativity, to technology, to vocal styling, and storytelling. That's what hip-hop is.



Eric "Stens" Stensvaag (Feed.fm): "What's gettin' ready to happen with hip-hop?...You know what's gonna happen with hip-hop? Whatever's happening with us" - Mos Def, "Fear Not of Man"

A few thoughts for hip-hop's future:

- Greater diversity encompassing more female and LGBTQ+ artists, which will enrich the storytelling behind this lyrics-driven art form while welcoming more fans.
- The art form broadens to encompass other regional styles from both the U.S. and abroad, while the U.K.'s outstanding grime artists get more play.
- Producers continue digging in the crates—which in digitized format have never been deeper—and using the newest technology to create future classics.
- Tomorrow's MCs express all the joy, rage, despair, hope, dreams, fear, horniness, boredom, irreverence, and love of life in stunt-filled lyrical displays.



Joshua "J1" Raiford (Pandora): Hip-hop will continue to evolve and diversify into new sub-genres and sounds. As technology advances, there will be new and innovative ways to discover and consume hip-hop, giving more exposure to a wide variety of artists across the globe.

Q *What has streaming meant for hip-hop artists?*



Joshua "J1" Raiford (Pandora): Streaming has given a platform and exposure to artists who may not have received it otherwise. It's made it so an artist does not need the backing of a major label to get their music to the masses. It's also provided an additional source of revenue.



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Eric "Stens" Stensvaag (Feed.fm): Streaming's early-2000s ascent coincided with record album sales for a handful of rap superstars (Eminem, Nelly, 50 Cent), who extended their hot streak in streaming as sales declined. For up-and-coming artists like Young Jeezy and Drake, online mixtapes were self-released alongside official albums, helping generate viral demand (in Drake's case, leading to a record deal) alongside traditional marketing.

Streaming's second decade opened the playing field, with online platforms allowing underground artists to upload tracks without label involvement. While the SoundCloud era was criticized by some in the establishment, its arrival introduced vitality and variety into a now mainstream genre. Today's artists savvy and/or lucky enough to break through the noise can bubble-up through streaming, leveraging this into radio and tours. And while Drake still rakes in an outsized portion of streaming royalties, even O.G.s like De La Soul recognize the necessity of a streaming presence.

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Carl Chery (Spotify): In some ways, it's the medium that allowed hip-hop artists to finally be valued for what they're actually worth. Hip-hop has been the most influential genre of music for over two decades, but streaming gave hip-hop artists numbers that were undeniable. Many people started saying, "hip-hop is the new pop." There's hip-hop DNA in every other genre now. It's inescapable. Hip-hop artists became the standard in many ways.

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Tuma Basa (YouTube): Streaming has meant more hip-hop music than ever before. It has democratized hip-hop and made it more accessible, removing barriers to entry for up-and-coming artists and widened the talent pool.

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Timothy Hinshaw (Amazon Music): Streaming has allowed hip-hop artists to build their businesses in ways we couldn't even fathom a decade ago. When we launched Rotation in 2019, our goal was to create the everything store for hip-hop and R&B fans. Each week, we see customers tune-in to the newest rap Rotation playlist to hear their favorite artists' new music—the same way they used to tune-in to shows like "Rap City" and "106 & Park" when I was growing up. Only now, if our customers want to go deeper, Amazon Music can connect fans instantaneously to an artist's merchandise or their most recent livestream on our Twitch channel. Hip-hop and R&B artists are more connected with their fans than ever before, and the catalyst for that connection has been streaming.

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Ebro Darden (Apple): Streaming gives artists the opportunity for a much more direct to consumer approach - because of things like Apple Music for Artists as an example, artists have invaluable tools to better find, serve, and engage fans and build new audiences.



Who are two lesser known or up-and-coming hip-hop artists that you think are particularly talented and deserve recognition?



Joshua "J1" Raiford (Pandora):

Lil Poppa
Gloss Up



Gloss Up



Carl Chery (Spotify):

Doechii
Symba



DoeChii



Tuma Basa (YouTube):

Icewear Vezzo
Lola Brooke



Icewear Vezzo



Timothy Hinshaw (Amazon Music):

Baby Money
Babyface Ray



Babyface Ray



Eric "Stens" Stensvaag (Feed.fm):

That Mexican OT
Ice Spice



Ice Spice

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About DiMA

DiMA is the leading organization advocating for the digital music innovations that have revolutionized the way music fans and artists connect. We represent the world's leading audio streaming companies, whose innovations are driving the economic engine that saved and revitalized the music industry, bringing it forward from the depths of the harm caused by piracy into a brighter future.

For more information visit our website: www.dima.org, or follow us on X (f/k/a Twitter): @digitalmediausa. For media inquiries, please email: media@dima.org.