



In Our View: Jam Master Jay Never Lost Touch With His Roots

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By Walter F. Fields,

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RunDMC Member's Shocking Murder A Metaphor For Modern Life, Not The Rap Music Industry

The tragic shooting death of hip-hop artist Jason "D.J. Jam Master Jay" Mizell, of the group Run-DMC, will be quickly seized upon by critics of the rap genre as a further sign of the violence that they believe this urban music form breeds. This reaction is unfortunate and disrespects the memory of an artist whose was life contrary to the violence that ended it. If anything, his untimely passing may now motivate a new sense of political activism within the hip-hop community to confront gun violence.

By all accounts Mr. Mizell was well respected in the music industry, among peers and in his community. As the spin master for Run-DMC, Mizell was part of a pioneering trio who, along with the Sugar Hill Gang, brought rap to mainstream audiences. Though in the background supporting rap artists Run (Jason Simmons) and DMC (Darryl McDaniels), it was the beats of Jam Master Jay that came to personify the group and make them hip-hop royalty. The group was the first rap act to appear on MTV and the first to have an album go platinum.

They were musical pioneers who never lived on their laurels. From the late 1980's Run-DMC experimented with their art and along the way recorded some memorable music. Their 1986 collaboration with Aerosmith in remaking the heavy metal group's hit "Walk This Way" demonstrated the power of hip-hop to transcend conventional definitions of music. It also introduced Run-DMC, and rap, to a white audience and paved the way for the success of an artist like Eminem.

Always the innovators, they also set a fashion trend by bringing street gear to Main Street. No sneaker manufacturer's marketing campaign can do what Run-DMC's "My Addidas" did for sports footwear. Clever, catchy and above all things, fun, Run-DMC made it alright to sport a Kangol and keep your Addidas untied. In an era of "greed is good" Run-DMC kept the party going in the 1980's.

And the man in the middle was Jam Master Jay, headphones on, head tilted and hands moving furiously across the "wheels of steel". He brought the DJ out of the basement and into the living rooms of suburban America.

More importantly, Mizell never lost touch with his roots. He took to heart what many of us were told as children, "never forget where you came from", and reinvested his talent and resources in his community. Unlike so many artists who casually cast off their past like an old coat when they ascend to fame and fortune, Mizell understood that the past is always present. For him, success was a vehicle, large enough to bring everyone along for a ride.

If anything, his death is just another example of the senseless violence that is pervasive in our society.

