

## THE MIXTAPE IS A DEAD ART

### *Funeral for an art form.*

By Tracey Sargent

Before CDs and electronically accessible music were widely available, mixtapes were sourced from other tapes, vinyl tracks or recorded straight from radio. Depending on your recording facilities you had to figure out how to limit background noise, decide how much of a break to allow between songs and at the end of each side, and constantly monitor the recording to avoid jarring 'clicks' of the stop button between tracks. The whole process may seem frustrating and quaint in retrospect, and certainly those elements were present, but there was also a strong sense of creative satisfaction to be gained from the finished product.

At a fundamental level the mixtape was about more than just music, the mixtape was about making connections. While the mixer was in control of crafting the right songs in the right order, they also had to maintain a connection throughout the recording process. This meant that mixtapes were the result of a deeply involved experience. Just like receiving a hand written letter, the gift of a mixtape meant that another person had dedicated time and effort into creating something meaningful. While perhaps not consciously appreciated, these human connections formed between letter writers and letter receivers, or mixtape recorders and mixtape recipients were only one step removed from each other.

Unfortunately though, these emotional connections built in music by mixtape creators have been lost. New technologies have provided us with the means to create compilations quickly, without the need to invest much effort or consideration. While we can now readily share our entire CD collection, download tracks straight to our computers, burn songs direct to CD, or compress tracks onto our iPods or MP3 players, that human to human connection which the mixtape represented has become far too distant to appreciate.

We can now share all of ourselves through music at the press of a button or the click of a mouse, but in doing so the storytelling capabilities of mixtapes no longer apply. While no one can deny the extraordinary advantages that new technologies offer to music lovers and music sharers, track skipping and shuffle functions mean that even if a message was to be conveyed through a sequence of songs, it is unlikely to be appreciated by the recipient.

Times have changed and music technology has evolved to a point that the mixtape, that most personal and most accessible of art forms has sadly faded from existence. Its passing should be noted and mourned but certainly never forgotten.

The concept of a mixtape first developed in cassette form and was revered as a delicate art form shared with our friends, potential boyfriends and girlfriends, or just with ourselves. This was a medium that rendered us all artists, producing our work on a very personal level, and valued not for aesthetic appeal but rather for what they represented and what they contained.

Looking back the technology surrounding mixtape production may seem unsophisticated and awkward, but therein lies some of their appeal. Recording a mixtape on cassette was a very physical process, requiring the artist to be in attendance at all times and demanding from them much thought, dedication and time to complete. However for all the frustration and time wasted in their creation, there was something inherently romantic and intimate about the crafting of a great mixtape. The compilation experience could never be rushed or ill measured; everything had to be well planned and carefully selected.

After making the difficult decision of what songs to include on the mixtape, further considerations followed such as determining what song order works best, what balance will be struck between Side A and Side B, and what overall theme the mixtape is to address. All such considerations were ultimately dependent on the goal of the mixtape, or more specifically who was to be the recipient of the mixtape and what message the mixtape was intended to convey. A mixtape could be created to provide the perfect blend of tunes for a trip to the coast, could be designed to capture the best tracks from the weekly charts, produced to share your favourite songs, or compiled to cheer a friend or win a heart.

**A simple truth of modern life is that time is precious, everybody is busy and there are never enough hours in the day to get everything done.** Technology has advanced to help us fit more into our lives, ensuring that we gain much in convenience and efficiency. But the sad truth is that while we gain, we also lose. We are told that technology should never get in the way of 'human stuff', but by its very nature technology provides us with direct ways of ensuring our human to human connections become more indirect. Such has been the case with the mixtape.

