

Mastering the mix: Hampton U's deejay culture

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By Arriana McLymore

Numerous talents graced Hampton University's campus throughout the years. Whether it is through dancing, singing or acting, Hamptonians used the university as a place to hone their performance skills. One talent that is often overlooked is the art of deejaying. When it's time to party, disc jockeys are some of the most sought-after students. They are often asked to attend Hampton Harbor apartment parties, 12 to 2 sessions in the student center and other school-sponsored events.



Becoming a deejay takes time and practice. From building a brand to mastering how to mix songs, deejaying is a craft to be respected. HU disc jockeys come from a long line of success stories. Hampton alums such as **DJ Envy**, **DJ Babey Drew** and DJ Tay James have worked to make their names known worldwide for the deejaying skills.

New York native Raashawn "DJ Envy" Casey is one-third of Power 105 FM's "The Breakfast Club," alongside Charlamagne Tha God, and Angela Yee. "The Breakfast Club" has become one of the top-rated urban radio programs in the country, with syndication on more than 30 stations nationwide. The program is also broadcast on iHeartRadio.com and the iHeartRadio mobile app. DJ Envy has accumulated various awards for his deejaying talents including the National Mix Show DJ of the Year Award and the DJ of the Year Award, given by the Global Spin Awards.

Andrew "DJ Babey Drew" Bisnaught's claim to fame as Chris Brown's deejay quickly made him popular amongst hip-hop and pop crowds alike. Some of DJ Babey Drew's other famous clients include hip-hop star Li'l Wayne, Kelly Rowland, Jordin Sparks and the Kardashian-Jenner clan. Bisnaught is currently on Atlanta's Power 96.1 and Z-104 FM in Virginia Beach, Virginia. DJ Babey Drew has been featured on VH1's second season of "Love and Hip-Hop: Atlanta," BET's "106 & Park" and "Rap City," ABC's "Good Morning America" and "The Oprah Winfrey Show."

DJ Tay James is continuing to build his brand by performing across the world as Justin Bieber's deejay. The 2009 Hampton University graduate attributes the campus to much of his success. "If I didn't go to Hampton, I wouldn't have a job right now," said James during the DREAM Digital Symposium last fall at Twitter headquarters in San Francisco.

Many of the Hampton U.'s deejays used the campus as a way to build their network and skills. One of the most notable deejays on campus now is Cameron Benboe, a senior finance major from Louisville, Kentucky. Known as "DJ Camo," Benboe said he began deejaying before attending HU, "I

started between my eighth grade and freshman year of high school."

Benboe is a self-taught disc jockey who turned to YouTube and other resources to learn how to spin. "There was a solid period where I deejaying in my room," said Benboe. "I started with my computer. I was making mash-ups of songs with other instrumentals. I went from that to actually mixing songs together." After saving money to buy equipment, Benboe began to take his talents to the next level.

One year later, Benboe started to let other people listen to his mixes. He created CDs, began working parties and worked to build his brand in his home state. Benboe said that his transition to Hampton U. was easy. "I looked at it as moving into a new market," he said. "I was looking for a good opportunity to expand and get a different fan base."

Before arriving at HU, Benboe researched the known deejays on campus. DJ LP, Audio Tha DJ and DJ Tay James continuously popped up on his radar as notable names. "The Hampton network of DJs is really big," said Benboe. "I'm not going to say that's the reason I came to Hampton, but it was a plus."

From the moment Benboe stepped on Hampton's campus, he was ready to perfect his craft. Benboe continued to practice in his dorm room and network with other campus deejays. The most crucial part of his success has been his ability to market himself. "Deejaying is something that's fun, but it is also a business," said Benboe. "You have to connect yourself professionally. Part of the reason why I've been progressing is because I've really taken the time to plan out how I market the brand myself. It's all very strategic." Benboe creates his own fliers and graphics for his events.

Benboe notes that knowing the history of deejaying is just as vital as understanding the business side of it. "I'm part of the few people in our generation who took the time to go back and learn the basic elements of scratching and mixing," said Benboe. "With the technology that's available, it's very easy to lose sight of the craft and the art of deejaying. You have to know where it came from to know where it's going."

Although people may enjoy what deejays do, said Benboe, they often do not fully comprehend the complexity of the job: "People don't see everything that goes behind the scenes. They just see that you're in a booth deejaying for three hours, but they might not understand that it took another three hours to prepare for that night."

Benboe explained the difficulties that come with performing for picky crowds: "This song is playing right now, but I'm thinking five songs ahead because I'm trying to create a mood for the audience." He noted that he practices during the days leading up to performances and continuously tailors his sets to his audiences.

Benboe believes that he has grown a lot at Hampton. He has taken the time to help out rising deejays on campus: "I feel blessed to say that I've done the things that I've strove to do. I feel blessed to be in a position to help someone else get to where I am."

Deejays that Benboe has influenced are Barry "DJ Barry B" Palmore and

Tyler "DJ Rico" Ware.

Ware says Benboe is an inspiration: "He's done a bunch of events and has done a lot to make himself successful here at Hampton. Seeing how he's come up and what he had to do in order to put his name out there inspired me to do the same. Last year he gave me some encouraging works on how to be successful as a DJ, such as being more active on social media and getting more involved with [the Office of] Student Activities."

Unlike Benboe, Ware, a junior marketing major from Brooklyn, New York, began deejaying after he arrived at Hampton U. Before his freshman year, Ware helped high school dance teams mix their music for their performances. "I didn't start deejaying with real equipment until I came to Hampton and saw student deejays," said Ware. "After that, I decided to learn on my own through YouTube."

Ware's success is beginning to blossom as he is being asked to perform at more events. With over 30 on-and-off campus events under his belt this year, Ware believes he's off to a great start. During the 2014-2015 school year, Ware deejayed the Class of 2017's annual Onyx Shout out, Hampton U.'s inaugural Hip-Hop Conference, and numerous social gatherings around campus.

Like Benboe, Barry "DJ Barry B" Palmore began building a name for himself before arriving at the university. Palmore, a second-year student in the five-year MBA program, began deejaying in his hometown, Hackensack, New Jersey. His first spinning lessons were taught by his mentor and high school math teacher.

"He was offering deejaying classes after school and thought it would be really cool to learn how to spin," said Palmore. His interest grew as the classes continued to progress. "I was really one of the only students who committed, so I started learning a lot more than everyone else." Palmore learned as much as he could from his mentor and before long, began helping his mentor with party engagements. It was then that his mentor suggested that Palmore begin deejaying on his own. "I would go on his gigs," said Palmore, "and he would say, "You really have a strong grasp of music and you know how to sway a crowd."

Eventually, Palmore began saving his money to buy deejaying equipment and book events in his home state. Now at Hampton, Palmore has branded himself as DJ Barry B and is working to establish a network of fans and supporters. "I've hooked up with a lot of deejays on campus, specifically DJ Camo, DJ Vince and JRoc," said Palmore. "They basically set the foundation for me because they want me to succeed."

Palmore has worked events such as the "Ogre Dolla Holla" and the Hallow-Harvestfest in Holland Hall. His brand is continuing to grow as more clubs and organizations request his services. Palmore is using his Hampton University connections to create a presence outside of his hometown.

"I feel that Hampton is a good start to help me get my name out," said Palmore. "I see myself deejaying at premiere clubs in the near future. Hopefully, I'll be able to get my name out there with DJ Taye James, DJ Jazzy

Jeff and Kid Kapri."

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