

women. hip hop. life.

SAY MY NAME


A FILM BY MAMAMESS



women. hip hop. life.

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 A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE

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SYNOPSIS



Photo by Mamamess

In a hip hop and R'n'B world dominated by men and noted for misogyny, the unstoppable female lyricists of *Say My Name* speak candidly about class, race, and gender in pursuing their passions as female MCs. This worldwide documentary takes viewers on vibrant tour of urban culture and musical movement, from hip hop's birthplace in the Bronx, to grime on London's Eastside and all points Philly, Detroit, Chicago, Atlanta, and L.A. in between.

Featuring interviews and musical performances from a diverse cast of women including Remy Ma, Rah Digga, Jean Grae, Erykah Badu, Estelle and newcomers Chocolate Thai, Invincible and Miz Korona, this powerful documentary delves into the amazing personal stories of women balancing professional dreams with the stark realities of poor urban communities, race, sexism, and motherhood, as the more than 18 artist featured in *Say My Name* battle for a place in a society that creates few chances for women. From emerging artists filled with new creativity, to true pioneers like MC Lyte, Roxanne Shante, and Monie Love, these are women turning adversity into art.

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CREDITS

2009, 73 MINUTES, COLOR
UK/USA
ENGLISH

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

Nirit Peled

PRODUCER

Dave Hemmingway/Mamamess

WRITER

Nirit Peled

CINEMATOGRAPHER

Dave Hemmingway
Nirit Peled

EDITORS

Chris Scheer
Christopher Hillswright

MUSIC/SOUND

Ronen Sabo
Dave Hemmingway

CAST

Aaries
Big Manda
Chocolate Thai
Dr. Roxanne Shante
Eryka Badu
Estelle
Georgia Girls
GTA Crew
Invincible
Jean Grae
MC Lyte
Miz korona
Monie Love
Mystic
Princess and Diamond
Remy Ma
Rha Digga
Sparky Dee
Shanika
Trinie

**FESTIVALS, SCREENINGS &
AWARDS**

- South by Southwest Film Festival
- AFI Dallas International Film Festival
- Sarasota Film Festival
- Full Frame Festival



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DIRECTOR BIO

Nirit Peled (Israel, 1973) has been working in Amsterdam as an audio-visual artist for the last eight years. She is a community based, cultural artist and film director, as well as co-founder of Mamamess, a production company she runs with her partner Dave Hemmingway. Her work can be broadly categorized within video and interactive projects. Recently Peled has been focusing more on directing short films, animation and documentaries. She has also worked on numerous political, cultural projects with inner city youth, both in the Netherlands and abroad.



For her recent project and debut documentary, SAY MY NAME, Peled traveled around the world documenting female vocalists, MCs, and spoken-word artists in urban environments. The sequel SAY MY NAME IN AFRICA is still in production. Other recent projects include POETRY IN MOTION, three beautifully animated poems by the Jamaican poet Staceyann Chin, and the documentaries REDNOSE GOES TO CUBA (about two DJs collaborating with Cuban musicians in Havana), and THE BATTLE (about Arab-Israeli rappers).

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SUBJECT BIOS



Photos by Mamamess

Chocolate Thai (NYC)

'If the chick is gonna be true herself, then the next chick, and the next chick is gonna show you different versions of hip hop - that is gonna look bananas!'

Chocolate Thai grew up in Harlem, New York City. She became known for her appearances on Showtime's battle MC reality TV show, *The Next Episode*. She displayed some fierce abilities and made it to the final round, but one of the highlights of the show for her was that she got to meet MC Lyte, one of her role models.

When I followed her in NYC she was struggling to raise her kid alone (but with some support from her family), making the most of free studio time to record tracks for her new mix tape and trying to get gigs to pay the bills. She's an inspiring woman, always full of energy and determined to keep on fighting. Chocolate Thai loves the mic, she's all hip hop.

Estelle (London, UK)

'All I need is one mic and one micstand alone.'

Estelle is a British UK-based artist, though her parents are from Africa. I've known her ever since she was a young, independent hip hop MC in London. Her debut album '1980' surprised for although it contained rhyming, it also featured a lot of singing. When we met in London to do an interview for Say My Name, she'd already made a name for herself in the UK, and was just beginning to record and work more in NYC. Estelle's hit single 'American Boy' featuring Kanye West has sparked much attention worldwide. From her beginnings as a London underground artist, she's well on her way to international stardom.

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Monie Love (New York, NY)

'Moving to the States was important. I had to throw myself in the lion's den and be amongst the best of the best in order to be the best.'

An old-school MC, Monie Love moved from London to the US as a young woman. She'd already achieved commercial success in London and she went on to achieve international fame after performing 'Ladies first' with Queen Latifa. She then went on to release the acclaimed 'Monie in the middle'. Now, she has three children and is a radio personality in the States. She's an open, strong and opinionated woman. We met early on during my research and she's been a great and genuine supporter of Say My Name ever since.

Roxanne Shante (New York, NY)

Roxanne Shante is a pioneering female MC from Queens, NYC. Known as one of the first female MCs, she was just 14 when she recorded her first track 'Roxanne's revenge'. Not many people know that in that same year she also had her first child. Having been so successful at such a young age, she 'retired' from hip hop to complete her studies in her early twenties. Currently, she works as a psychologist and is something of an entrepreneur. She's no longer active as an MC.

MC Lyte (New York, NY)

'Hip hop is the backdrop of my life.'

MC Lyte was the first female hip hop artist to receive a gold record, certifying over 500,000 units sold. We met early on in my research, and I had the pleasure of seeing her a couple more times over the years it took to make this film. She's always been a role model and source of inspiration to me. The first time I met her alone with my video camera I asked her to give me a free style. She looked at me as if I came from a green planet and said: 'This lady behind the camera is asking for a free style, I don't do anything for free, anymore!'. With that she gave me one of my first lessons in the art of interviewing hip hop legends.

Jean Grae (New York, NY)

'I know I'm on the right path, To who I'm gonna be at last. Don't rush me.'

Born in South Africa and raised in the infamous Chelsea Hotel in NYC, Jean Grae always had a strong voice on New York's underground hip hop scene. Known for her signature voice and FIERCE lyrics, she used to be known as 'What? What?', but changed her name to Jean Grae. A couple of years ago she was endorsed by Talib Qualif and signed to Black Smith hoping to achieve commercial success and 'get that Grammy.'

I've followed Jean over the last few years, and she's been maturing as an artist. Extremely active online, she puts her thoughts and life into words that are iconic to me.

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Invincible (Detroit, MI)
Hip Hop activist.

'Hip hop to me, you know, is like the Ambassador Bridge, it becomes like a message in a bottle.'

Invincible moved to Detroit when she was young. She has strong political views, she's a fierce lyricist and she's an activist.

Earlier in her career she was a part of the 'Anomalies', an all girl group from NYC. Labels that wanted to turn her into the female Eminem showed an interest but she went her own way. Now, she's busy with all sorts of community work projects and she's becoming something of an Icon in Detroit's underground scene.

She works closely with Detroit Summer, a multi-racial collective that aims to build a sense of community amongst artists and activists to shape a positive vision for social change.

Sparky Dee

'We express it through our MUSIC, how we feel. It gives us a chance to talk out, to speak out.'

Sparky Dee is an old school MC. Born and raised in Brooklyn, she was known for her work with Spider D – her partner at the time and the father of her children.

She was also known for her rivalry with Roxanne Shante, which was detailed on vinyl. She made name in the late 70s and then disappeared. When we met her for an interview we discovered that it was drugs that took her down: she confesses to having been a junky and homeless.

Now she's living in Atlanta, has found God and her way back to life, and she wants to go back to music.

Georgia Girls / GA Girls (Atlanta, GA)

"What's special about a Georgia Girl? I mean we are prime time women. Some people think it's trashy... Who cares... we feel good about ourselves, nice bodies; we get it out there, you know what I mean?"

The Georgia Girls are an all-girl group from Atlanta; put together by Big Manda a young, local MC. The members have changed since its inception but they're still going strong.

They came to prominence with the song 'nothing like a GA girl', featuring Princess, who is now a member of the hip hop / crunk group Crime Mob.

Although the song was never officially released, it leaked onto radio and became a huge anthem for the girls of Atlanta.

Following them in Atlanta gave me a glimpse into the life of a southern woman. They take pride at being from the sassy south, and in the typically slower beats that create the distinctive hip hop sounds that come from there.

Miz Korona

"I'm determined To make a permanent place in the ground"

Born and raised in Detroit, Miz Korona made a name for herself freestyling and winning battles in the city's nightclubs. She found herself in the right place at the right time, and she was a good performer. She even got to play a small part in the film 8 Mile High, which gave her 'some shine' – some exposure.

Now she's a veteran of the battle scene but feels like she's grown out of it and wants to become 'more' than a battle MC. when we meet she was working hard to record her debut album and develop herself into a fully-fledged artist.

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Shanika (London, UK)

'hip hop is more slow, it's like a groovin' thing, but grime is strictly war'

Shanika is a young British Grime MC. We met at an open mic night, held at a youth center in the rough East end of London. We ended up spending a few days together. She allowed us a glimpse into her teenage life - fighting with her boyfriend, running to and from home – and we quickly became close. Her mom is a Jamaican immigrant. With two other young children to manage, she can't keep up with Shanika. Instead, Shanika's found comfort in the open mic nights – on stage she has a voice and she managed to make a local name for herself as a young Grime MC. For a while, we hooked up every time we were in London but we've lost touch with her the last couple of years. We simply couldn't track her down. We plan to keep trying....

Trinie (New York, NY)

*"Females in the industry, they go through a lot of stuff...with the men...[but] they don't want to come out and say a n****r smacked the shit out of them. Or... they getting really fucked in the industry, because they don't want anybody to look at them like they soft."*

Trinie grew up in Trinidad against a backdrop of drugs. After the death of her father, her family escaped the island and moved to Brooklyn. Discovered by Wyclef, she became his prodigy; and when we met she was busy recording her first tracks at his studios in Manhattan.

Her tragic life story has left its mark on her: in complete contrast to her sweet appearance, her lyrics are rough and raw. She's young and she's a newcomer to hip hop. She's excited about her ability to rhyme, and she harbors hopes that fame will lead to money, and a way out of the ghetto for her family.

Remy Ma (New York, NY)

"Never mind what I'm rappin' about, look at my life...a broken home. My mom wasn't really there. My dad wasn't there at all...I never finished school, I smoked drugs, I sold drugs...how do you expect me to be the perfect role model for your kid?"

Born and raised in the Bronx, Remy Ma had a tough childhood. Many remember her as the She made a name for herself being a member of Fat Joe's Terror Squad. My first memory of Remy? She ventured into commercial hip hop and later, she signed with Universal.

When we met her she was struggling with the majors, trying to get her album out, and she'd just won the BET award for 'Best Female Hip Hop Artist' of the year 2005. She was raw and very honest. We saw her take the stage at various panels, where she rejected all accusations about the state of commercial hip hop, especially when it came to women.

Mystic (Los Angeles, CA)

'...it looks really pretty, and it looks very together, and we look really successful... What they may not see, is the story of, of our lives.'

Mystic is a conscious rapper from the San Francisco bay area. When she came out her rhyming and singing lead to comparisons with Lauren Hill. Unfortunately, her record deals fell victim to disputes between majors and smaller, independent labels. Her commercial success was short-lived and she'd soon had enough of 'industry bullshit'. Despite all that, she's been an inspiring icon in the hip hop world: she's stood up for grassroots hip hop, demanding that the scene take responsibility for its community, and its young women in particular.

When we met in LA she was studying to become a teacher. She's planning to continue rhyming and open up her own school.

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WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT SAY MY NAME...



"I loved SAY MY NAME. What a project!"

Pat Aufderheide
Director, Center for Social Media

"A compelling documentary on women in hip-hop... rarely didactic and never plodding or obvious...a joy to watch."

Leonard Pierce
A.V. Club

"Heartbreaking and exhilarating"

Cindy Widner
The Austin Chronicle

"I thought I had died and gone to heaven"

Michael Tully
Hammer to Nail Ambitious Film

MORE INFO

Hi-res photos are available for download on this film's web catalog page at www.wmm.com.

Official website for SAY MY NAME is www.saymyname.org

For press inquiries please contact:

Teri Duerr, Publicity Manager
tduerr@wmm.com | 212.925.0606 x306

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Film: Day Four, Or, From Remy To Rogen

By Leonard Pierce

March 17, 2009

Most of the week, I have what passes for a life in San Antonio to attend to, but does that mean I'll leave you, the loyal AV Club reader attentive enough to notice the South By Southwest sidebar, hanging? Hell no, it does not mean that. It does not mean even a little that. I will jet up to Austin when I can, and when I can't, well, that's why God created screeners. My living room may not have the energy or the bill of fare of the Alamo Drafthouse, but it has a better selection of liquor, and the chances of Harry Knowles showing up are practically nil. So let's get on to today's viewing.

SAY MY NAME is first in line, and it's one I've been looking forward to for quite some time. Hip-hop is all grown up now -- it's got a good thirty years of action under its belt, and that means the ladies should have their say by now. But the rap world is still widely perceived as a man's man's world, with rampant misogyny in both the lyrics and the life. The bitch-and-ho paradigm still largely holds sway, and pimp and player anthems still dominate the charts. The ladies are largely expected to be in the club to peel for the gents, not to grab the mic and represent. **SAY MY NAME** is a compelling documentary on women in hip-hop by the Dutch multimedia artist and filmmaker Nirit Peled, in which a diverse array of female rappers, DJs and R&B performers -- hailing from the Bronx, Britain, and Europe -- frankly discuss the expectations, tribulations and experiences of gender, sexuality, and race in a musical genre where machismo is the cheapest available fuel.

Peled gets props right off the bat for the sheer weight of diversity at play in her film; there are interviews with everyone from big stars (Jean Grae and Erykah Badu) to veteran performers (Estelle and Remy Ma) to brash newcomers (Invincible and Choc Thai). European, British, and American voices are heard; issues like lesbianism, sexism, abuse, and unequal opportunity are all given a chance to be examined, as are rarely-discussed aspects of the scene like the influence of white fans and performers, and the bizarrely taboo subject of class. But while there's no question this film is driven by a cause and a easily detectable sociopolitical stance, it's very rarely didactic and never plodding or obvious.

Part of the reason for this is that, Peled's skill as a director and interviewer aside, she has such a terrific cast of characters to work with. No one who steps in front of her camera is shy about speaking to the realities of being a female rapper, from the threat of violence to the shadow of sexual abuse to the simple economic realities of having to hustle twice as hard to make half as much money. But what really illuminates the film, and makes it a joy to watch in its best moments, is the pure enthusiasm and energy these women have for performing. They know they have a hard road ahead of them, and many of them have precious few illusions about where that road will eventually take them, but everyone in **SAY MY NAME** straight-up loves what they do, and any time they're shown performing, there are no doubts about why they stay in the game. Thankfully, Peled gives plenty of screen time to performances, and the soundtrack is stone solid.

Grade: B+

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Hammer to Nail

Ambitious Film

By Michael Tully
March 31, 2009

Say My Name — When the footage of Roxanne Shante performing “Roxanne’s Revenge” back in the mid-1980s came on early in Nirit Peled’s doc about females in hip-hop, I thought I had died and gone to heaven. But as she jumped around to more modern MCs, the old-school hip-hop nerd in me became distracted by all the omissions (Salt-N-Pepa, Sweet Tee, Heather B, Ladybug, even JJ Fad). Gradually, though, I was able to squash my urge to watch the movie Peled hadn’t made and instead appreciate the one she had made. *Say My Name* really picks up momentum in the latter half, when heated topics such as sexuality in hip-hop, motherhood, and rape fuel the discussion. I saw this with a small crowd of elderly Caucazoids—i.e., not hip-hop heads—and everyone seemed engaged throughout. (Final note: Erykah Badu is, hands down, the most alluring and intriguing woman in music.)

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SXSW FILM

DAILY REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS

By Cindy Widner

Documentary Feature, Documentary Competition

D: Nirit Peled; with MC Lyte, Chocolate Thai, Monie Love, Roxanne Shante, Erykah Badu, Estelle, Georgia Girls, Sparky Dee

"Female MCs' names have always been larger than their record deals," says MC Lyte in this beautifully constructed document of women hip-hop artists. That might even be stretching it: The names themselves have tended to fade toward "obscure" rather than "old-school." Instead of highlighting the few breakout exceptions, Dutch director Peled bores into the history and embraces the breadth of female-driven hip-hop, from way-back upstarts Sparky Dee and Roxanne Shante (age 14 when she hit) to current phenoms Georgia Girls and Estelle. They are stories that start and often end in obscurity but that also encompass the robust lives of talented women, full of good and bad: drug abuse, motherhood, domestic violence, rape, career success. Shot over five years and honed from footage of more than 250 artists, *Say My Name* avoids the survivor-syndrome trap, instead focusing on drop-dead skills, nonstop style, and at times a ferocity far more terrifying than mere gangsta rap thuggery. It's a lyric both heartbreaking and exhilarating.

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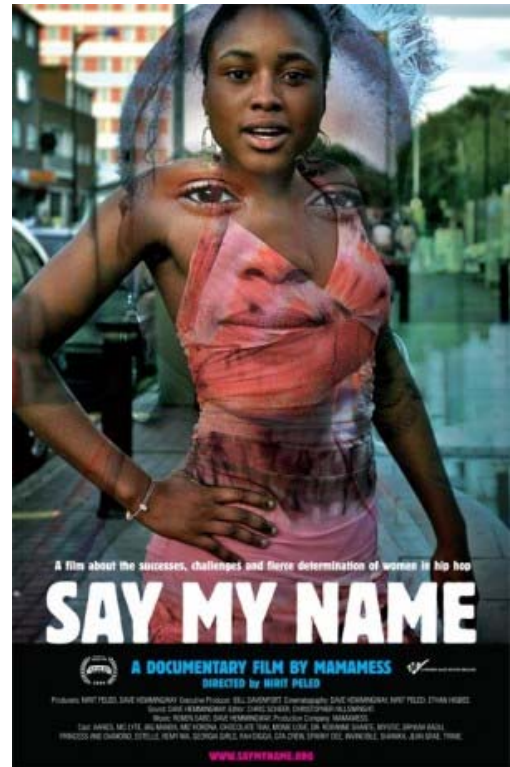
SXSW Film Preview: Say My Name

By Elizabeth S.
March 12, 2009

We may not be hip-hop experts, but we do know how rare it is to find artists in rap and hip-hop genres who also happen to be women (you can count them on one hand).

It's 2009, and it seems that not much has changed from the birth of the scene: the men get the label love, and the women are left trying to catch a break and get heard. The guys use offensive and misogynistic lyrics and their albums sell, while **Queen Latifah** seems to be the last female rapper whose [empowerment piece](#) got any radio play. How does it feel to be a woman making her way in a genre of music that tends toward the misogynistic?

"It takes a lot more to gain respect with just lyrics," one of the female MCs states in **SAY MY NAME**, a SXSW World Premier documentary feature. First-time director **Nirit Peled** focuses on the growing female presence in the realm of rap and hip-hop, with stops in the Bronx, London, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, LA and Detroit.



Featuring performances by and interviews with **Erykah Badu**, **Estelle**, **MC Lyte**, **Monie Love**, and other female musicians, [SAY MY NAME](#) looks into the experiences of women who are trying to find their place in hip-hop. Battling gender inequality, race and class barriers, these women persevere so that art can be created.

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ECHOES OF CONCRETE

BEATS, ARTS & LIFE

January 9, 2009

Another indie movie to be seen in 2009.

They are lyricists, they all have a lot to tell but they are struggling in their everyday lives to just be themselves, WOMEN with a strong passion. It's funny because two months ago, we had that conversation with [T-Love](#) & my friend Aline right before they grab the mic & turntables at [Mama Shelter](#) (Paris). Taura was wondering, why was it almost impossible to be a black woman, mother, entrepreneur, journalist female MC's and get props from our "male" society. She was counting all of her girl friends who had to make a choice between being an artist and building a home 'cause the battle was too intense for the few remaining places. At the end of the conversation she realizes that someone and probably herself has to make something on the subject.



And then, three weeks ago, while I was surfing on the web, I find that "[Say My Name](#)" trailer by [Mamamess](#), a production company from the Netherlands. In this documentary, it's not only about black women, it's about being a woman, period.

As I'm curious, I wrote an email to know more about SMN. Nirit Peled, the director and instigator of the project told me that everything started in 2003 but it was hard to find financial partners so they mostly shot in 2006 in the US and UK.

You'll find in that movie ladies such as Monie Love (who's always involved in panel discussion for women in the Hip Hop industry), Roxane Shante, MC Lyte, Jean Grae, Aaries, Rah Digga, Estelle and more. Some of the US citizen will have the chance to premiere it this year but Mamamess is still looking for some good samaritains to premiere it in France too. So let's call on producers, festivals etc. to contact them [here](#).

PS: They shot on the same purpose Say My Name in Africa (Luanda, Abidjan), the movie's still in the making. Check this [here](#)

Enough talk, Just watch.

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HELL ON FRISCO BAY

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 2009

ADAM HARTZELL: SAY MY NAME



Sadly, for those outside of the [Hip Hop Nation](#), juxtapositions of women and Hip Hop are more likely to lead towards thoughts of booty-shaking than rhyme-making. Nirit Peled's documentary [Say My Name](#), (screening at the [Roxie Theatre](#) on Sunday August 30th as part of the Women Make Movies Film Festival) should correct that viewpoint for the casual viewer. But it provides an equal service for those heads with full Hip

Hop cred. With so many female MCs dropping knowledge and dope lyrics one after the other, even the most diehard fan's understanding of Hip Hop can't help but be changed. Hip Hop is not just a man's world. Like so much else in this world, men just dominate it. **Say My Name** is a call for recalibration of the control masculine rhetoric has within and around Hip Hop.

As Tricia Rose has noted in her latest book [The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop ...And Why It Matters](#), Hip Hop does need to reroute where it has been headed. The misogyny (which walks intimately hand-in-hand with homophobia) is one of the areas on which Hip Hop needs to come correct. The most infamous incident of this is the image of the credit card being swiped through a dancer's thronged buttocks in the video for "Tip Drill" by Nelly. (A clip of which makes a brief appearance in Peled's documentary.) This video sparked a protest at the historically black Spelman College where Nelly was coming to support a bone marrow registry drive as part of his charity work to help leukemia patients. Nelly cancelled his appearance rather than accept a meeting with campus leaders to face the music of the critiques of his music. Beyond such visuals as in "Tip Drill", there are lyrics of equal disrespect. Rose advocates for a redirection away from the nihilistic lyrics while also asking us to keep in mind that Hip Hop is not alone in purveying such societal ills. As Michael Jeffries notes in his contribution to [Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology](#) (HHFA), the mainstream shorthand of Hip Hop as "...the prime criminal in the business of pop cultural female misogyny, all but excus[es] other musical genres and cultural products." And in spite of the misogyny easily found in the videos late at night on BET, there are women MCs trying to reframe the game so that women have entry points into Hip Hop other than ass first. Through the likes of female MCs speaking for themselves in Peled's documentary, "...Young women fans", according to Eric Darnell Pritchard and Maria L. Bibbs in HHFA, "are finding that there is a place for them in Hip Hop culture, and they do not have to settle for the role of a male rapper's sex object or helpmate in order to have a presence." We need to be "turning up the noise", as Jeffries says, on the women Hip Hop artists being dampened by the nihilistic, which is exactly what is accomplished in the documentary **Say My Name**.

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The reach in this documentary is impressive considering Peled is from Holland. Although interviews with certain luminaries are missing, ([Queen Latifah](#) and [Missy Elliot](#) being the major lacunae), Peled was able to provide ample time for elder stateswomen such as [MC Lyte](#) and [Monie Love](#). These are women whose lyrical skill was matched with a tonal texture that made an imprint on this writer's young mind growing up. Particularly intriguing is the section on Roxanne Shanté, the rapper brought in

to recite the lyrics to the infamous response record to UTFO's single "[Roxanne, Roxanne](#)" entitled "[Roxanne's Revenge](#)". (This was the 'unofficial' response record. UTFO produced their own response called 'The Real Roxanne'.) The ethical disagreements over reciting lyrics written by others, the place of verbal battling in Hip Hop, and the disposability of some players in the industry all are underscored by the saga of this Roxanne. [Erykah Badu](#) is one of the more recent Hip Hop luminaries whose commentary serves the documentary very well. She has some poignant things to say about motherhood and the female beauty ideal. As if hearing Marlo David Asikwe (in *HHFA*) when she laments that black women Hip Hop artists do not attend to "the mothering body" with the same level of attention as the sexual body, Peled brings attention to the mothering Hip Hop body. This segment is quite significant regarding how motherhood can inspire (as well as disrupt) the careers of these female MCs.

Regional Hip Hop genres are also represented, from the rapid fire lyrics of British Grime to the socially conscious creed of Detroit's [Invincible](#). (The presence of *Invincible* also allows for a lesbian voice, although whispered at those familiar with *Invincible* rather than shouted out explicitly in the documentary.) When Peled represents the '[Dirty South](#)' with the Georgia Girls, her footage of them performing in a high school gymnasium touches on the significance of high schools to the Atlanta variant Hip Hop. "...The high school", notes Jocelyn A. Wilson in *HHFA*, "works as a key environment for developing relationships that contribute to the strong network ties of the southern hip-hop community of practice."

So much is touched on in a short 73 minutes. Aspects I haven't mentioned include how the ghetto environment is a point of inspiration, but also something that can hold some artists back. And being held back is part of the overarching theme of Rose's powerful critique *The Hip Hop Wars*. The harmful trends in Hip Hop, the misogyny and other forms of violence and nihilism, are holding back those who most need to be propelled forward. One way to propel forward is through documentaries such as Peled's where women are launched into the discourses of Hip Hop rhetoric, negotiating their own terms. As Pritchard and Dibbs explain, "...As for many youth hip-hop is a clear way of making meaning and receiving/imparting knowledge in a way that is relevant to their cultural, economic, social and political realities." To turn away from the enticing beat is to also turn away from the most vital means youth have presently to express themselves. *Say My Name* is a desperately needed call and response to reclaim a female space for Hip Hop. Bring the noise, [indeed](#).

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WOMEN MAKE MOVIES
462 BROADWAY, SUITE 500
NEW YORK, NY 10013
TEL 212.925.0606
FAX 212.925.2052
WWW.WMM.COM