

Kevin Lin

A Beatboxing Progression

** = *beatbox*

It's all about sounds. Listen:

Ppppfffftttt

It was a noise at best.
An undecipherable sound – a fart was as good as any other guess.
Yet – determined - I pursed my lips and continued – nevertheless

Pppffttt

“Aiyah – Kevin, ni zai gan shen me?” my mother shook her head, disapproving
Translation: “Kevin, what the hell are you doing?”

My 16-year-old eyes revolved in their sockets
“It’s called beatboxing mom” I mumbled, and walked away, hands in my pockets

It had been a few weeks since my journey had begun
With a group called the Roots, the track called: The Lesson Part One
As if I needed any proof that Nature’s symbolism could not be outdone

I was entranced by the sounds backing the rapper Black Thought
Such a raw, organic beat: So clearly human, yet its sounds so clearly not
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Each snare and kick today still sharp in my mind, never to be forgot

And as had been the case with soccer, pokemon cards, and midnight Halo sessions
What began as a fascination quickly evolved into obsession
And thus began my slow – slow – beatboxing progression

To be fair I had little idea where to begin
No instructional books, like for piano and violin
So I did what I did best – just listened

Listened to Rahzel, to Bizmarkie, to all of the greats
And in the best form of flattery, I began to imitate

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My friends were encouraging in my unconventional musical path
Said one: “Dude, it sounds like your mouth is taking a crap”
And another: “Kevin, what are you doing? You’re Asian, not black”

Meanwhile, my endeavors were not taking well to my mother
Who, when hearing my strange new sounds, could only hide and run for cover
Wondering how her diligent violin-playing, Bach-loving son had been replaced by another

Knowing that the stream of disapproval had no stopping,
I never stopped striving towards my dream of beatboxing

Practicing wherever I'd go, spitting beats wherever I was walking

I listened to more hip-hop— relearned how to breath
Found fellow beatboxers, and exchanged techniques
Learned to distinguish a snare from a tom, a hi-hat from a cymbal
Learned how to build complex rhythms from the sonically simple
And a few months later, 'round 20 miles of spittle wetter
I realized I'd made progress – way beyond a little better

And to be sure, at school, when I put my skills to the test
My once-disparaging friends were now colored impressed

Although it was great, and I felt like the man
When my friends snuck off, trying to beatbox into their hands

I knew I had to do more to make my beats real
It was legitimate musical affirmation that I wanted to feel

So that month, when I saw an ad for a local Apollo night
I knew there couldn't be a moment more right

So I tore at the dotted line, and without hesitation
I scribbled "Special K, Beatboxer" on my application
And envisioned the prize: \$300 and affirmation

Two weeks later I found myself behind a dark curtain
Peeking out into the crowd, I felt less certain
But suddenly a voice boomed: "He claims he's a Human Beatbox, let's welcome Special K!"
And a pair of hands ushered me into the spotlight onstage

So there I stood – a 5'7 chinese boy in a button-down shirt and v-neck sweater
In front of a crowd of 300 faces – mostly black, some white, none asian, looking like they'd already heard
much better

I took a deep breath, set my feet, and put the mic to my lips
And hit my first hi hats – tststs – I'd never sounded so crisp

No turning back - I built up my first beat **
The crowd sat silent – but I'd have them out of their seats
So I launched into it - my finely tuned routine
No longer Kevin Lin – I was Special K, Rhythm Machine
Creating sounds out the boundaries of sonic reason
Dropping beats harder than a retiring policeman (stop)
Showcasing months of hard work turned into syncopated agility
I was David Blaine for the blind, creating audio impossibilities
And as I launched into Drop it like it's hot, **** finishing my last cover for the night
I looked to the crowd, felt the mic in my hand, and knew all was right

I'll cut the story short – yes, I walked away with the prize
Three hundred dollars richer, and a new fire in my eyes

Thinking back on the last four months of struggle and grit
Of fart noises, listening sessions, and hands covered in spit
of every bad joke, stereotype, and insult that I'd put up with
I smiled, knowing, in the end, it'd all been worth it