

Martín A. Biaggini: *Rap de acá: la historia del rap en Argentina.*

Buenos Aires: Editorial Leviatán, 2020. ISBN: 9789874745781.

126 pages.

Martín A. Biaggini's *Rap de acá: la historia del rap en Argentina* [*Rap from here: the history of Rap in Argentina*] brings its readers into the early days of the hip hop scene in Buenos Aires in the 1980s and early 1990s. In a quick read of six chapters, Biaggini situates his many interviews with key players of Argentine hip hop's early days within narratives outlining both the trajectory of popular music in Argentina and the sociopolitical context of a society emerging from military rule and in the grips of neoliberal restructuring and economic crisis.

Rap de acá opens 'allá' ('there', in the US) with a history of hip hop's origins in the US among Black and Latinx communities, drawing on the work of Jeff Chang and interviews with figures such as KRS 1. Biaggini continues providing an overview of the 'prehistory' of Argentine hip hop, discussing popular music in Argentina in the second chapter, the shift from the mid-twentieth century when tango remained a popular musical form to its displacement by "nueva ola" which combined twist and rock, to the introduction of what Biaggini, along with others, identifies as the first piece of hip hop in Spanish – "La Cotorra Criolla" (1980) by Malvaho. Its lyrics were written by Venezuelan humorist Perucho Conde who took inspiration directly from the The Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" (33). A music industry creation and a bid to appeal to a possible market, this and other early instances of rap, while getting attention, did not launch anything like a movement *per se*. Biaggini notes that "[t]hese sporadic musical experiences had no continuity nor direct influence in the development of rap in our country." (34)

If not the witty rhymes of a Venezuelan comic, what was it that caught the imagination of the early enthusiasts of Argentina's hip hop scene? In the third chapter, as the title "In the beginning was Break" suggests, Biaggini explains through multiple interviews how the breakdancing featured in films like *Flashdance* (1983) and *Beat Street* (1984) and the dance moves of the massively popular Michael Jackson consolidated youth communities in Buenos Aires and its suburbs, transforming spaces like the Parque Rivadavia into crucial spaces for *bboy crews* and encounters among them. In this way, the transition to democracy with the end of military rule in 1983 also meant a literal taking of the streets by *bboy crews* in places like Parque Rivadavia, an important association made by participants in the early days of this scene in their interviews with Biaggini. These comprise "la vieja escuela" ("the old school") and include people who would go on to be central figures in Argentine hip hop like Mike Dee and Karen Pastrana of Actitud María Marta.

Chapters four and five return to profiling the trajectories of groups and individual rappers in the late eighties and early nineties. The fourth chapter “El rap vuelve a nacer” (“Rap is born again”) profiles four groups, Los Adolfos Rap, who Biaggini identifies as possibly being the first Argentine hip hop group, Club Nocturno, Presa del Odio, and los Coprofagos. This chapter gives a sense of the interplay of genres and musical scenes that characterized Buenos Aires in this period. The members of Club Nocturno, for example, had been inspired by the synthpop of Depeche Mode and Thomas Dolby, before hearing the music of Run DMC and the Beastie Boys, who led them to incorporating rap as the defining feature of their style. In contrast, Presa del Odio (“Reservoir of Hate”) drew musically from heavy metal. Chapter five introduces the readers to rap artists who became more visible and enjoyed more commercial success, such as Jazzy Mel and Illyakuryaki and the Valderramas. This chapter includes long excerpts with Jazzy Mel about his trajectory from Buenos Aires to São Paulo and back, all in the context of the economic crisis of the late 1980s. Little is said about Illya Kuryaki and the Valderramas and their 1991 album *Fabrico Cuero* except that the young duo “came from a position of privilege, having access to recording equipment and samplers that no other adolescents had at the time in Argentina, in addition to having the attention of the media, who ignored the rest of the scene” (104). The position of privilege being that one member of the duo, Dante Spinetta, was the son of the influential rock musician Luís A. Spinetta. Eventually, Biaggini describes Jazzy Mell as belonging to a second generation of rappers who could be characterized as “payasos de la gorra” or “baseball cap clowns” (105), who would more likely appear on children’s shows than on those dedicated to music. These artists presented themselves as danceable and fun, and strove to distance themselves from marginality, the street, and certainly Blackness (103). The sixth chapter serves as a kind of epilogue, pointing out that despite the ups and downs of its early days, by 1995 one of Argentina’s leading newspapers, *Clarín*, would feature Actitud María Marta as the year’s most important break out artist.

Readers can take note of the disconnect between the promise made by the book’s title and the actual contents of the book. By the author’s own admission, the book centers on the hip hop scene in Buenos Aires and, despite the book’s subtitle, also deals narrowly with the beginnings of hip hop in Argentina during the 1980s and only barely reaches into the 1990s. Biaggini suggests that this is the first instalment of more volumes that will take on a more national scope and follow the trajectory of Argentine hip hop beyond the early 1990s, a history we can look forward to being written.

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