

The best Jewish hip hop (and hip hop by Jews) of 2018

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Think of Jews in rap and your brain will most likely land on Matisyahu or the Beastie Boys. But Jews are making some of the most interesting rap right now, even if it's not exactly at the epicenter of the genre (with the exception of Drake, arguably the defining rapper of the decade).

Here are five of the most notable rap albums by Jewish artists in 2018, from Drake's zeitgeist-gobbling blockbuster to MC Paul Barman's nebbishy nerd rap to one of our favorite Bay Area upstarts.

Action Bronson — “White Bronco”

The story: A former chef and [VICE travel host](#), Bronson came to fame with '90s-style East Coast rap peppered with references to fine cuisine and obscure sports figures. His style is less idiosyncratic these days, but he's still a fearsome stylist, and “White Bronco” encompasses some of the best production he's ever rapped on.

How Jewish is it?: He doesn't talk much about his upbringing as the son of a Jewish mother and Muslim father, but his self-deprecating sense of humor and nasal, New York-accented voice wouldn't be out of place onstage in the Catskills.

How good is it?: Solid. His best albums remain “Dr. Lecter” (2011) and the “Blue Chips” series with producer Party Supplies, though he's toned down the misogyny of his early music. “White Bronco” is the sound of a young gun mellowing into an old standby.



<https://youtu.be/fZA8vgQsREQ>

Drake — “Scorpion”

The story: “Scorpion” feels like the beginning of the end for the biggest Jewish rapper ever. Recent revelations Drake had fathered a secret child with a French adult film star, as well as his flirtations with alarmingly young women and irritating ubiquity on streaming playlists, means “Scorpion” isn’t the coronation it wants to be.

How Jewish is it?: Not very. “Scorpion” celebrates Drake’s blackness more than his Jewishness, sampling classic hits by everyone from Boyz II Men to Michael Jackson to imply Drake has earned his place in the African American pop canon.

How good is it?: Meh. Its 90-minute runtime is less exhausting than it looks on paper, but the dissonance between the victory lap it wants to be and the PR course correction it needs to be prevents it from congealing into a great rap record.



https://youtu.be/DRS_PpOrUZ4

Frak — “Limewire ‘03”

The story: 24-year-old Alex Fraknoi splits his time between competitive battle rap, teaching kids the art of writing and freestyling at Youth Speaks (an S.F.-based organization) and recording wordy indie-rap records such as “Bagels” and this year’s “Limewire ‘03” — both of which make explicit reference to his Jewishness throughout.

How Jewish is it?: None of these songs zero in on Frak’s heritage, but he drops as many references to American Jewish culture as he can, whether he’s bragging about eating bagels and lox or, on the song “Spine,” when he empathizes with a Holocaust survivor.

How good is it?: Very. Once you get past his nasal voice, it’s easy to be seduced by his knack for making seemingly obvious connections between words that no one ever thought of, like rhyming “flash past your eyes” and “flash-pasteurized.”



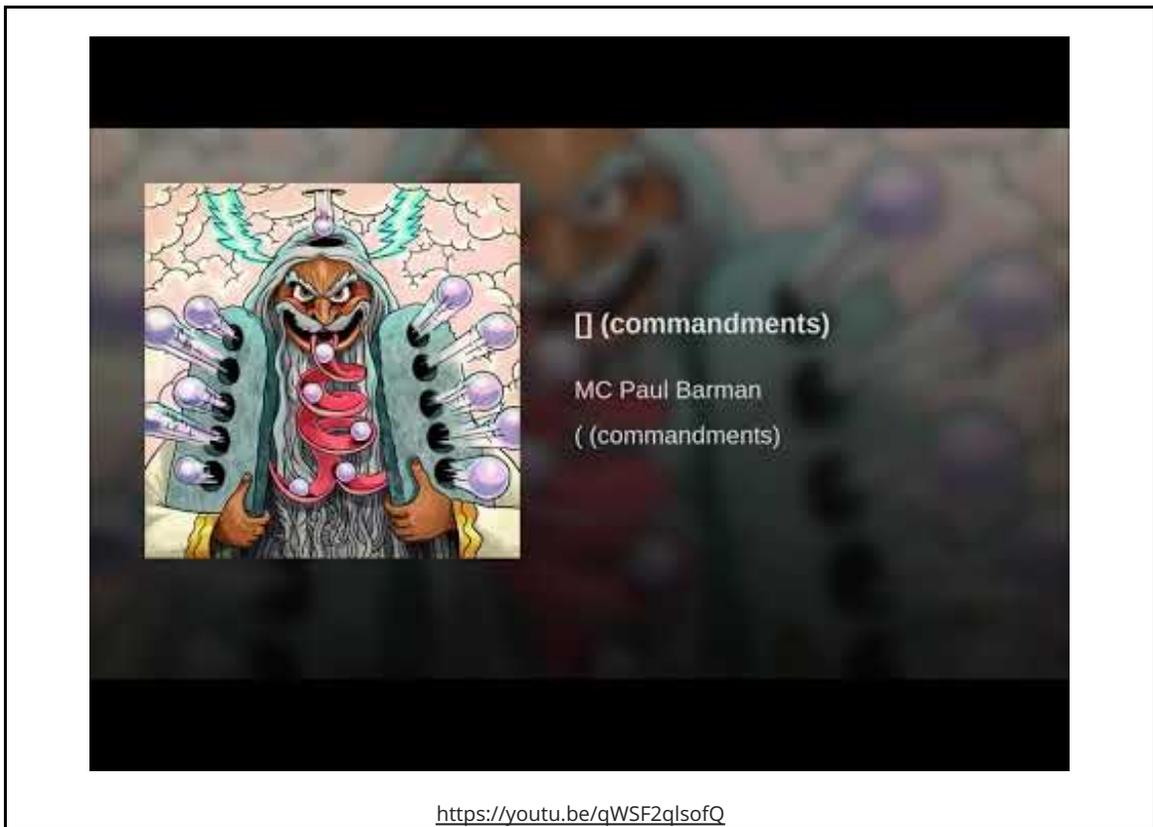
<https://youtu.be/Vnk1Ek4ttGU>

MC Paul Barman — “(((echo chamber)))”

The story: MC Paul Barman is every cliché of the nerdy, self-conscious, white, Jewish rapper turned up to 10. But you might just get the same sort of guileless thrill from surrendering to his toilet-humored, too-clever-by-half rhymes as when Meryl Streep bursts into song in “Mamma Mia!” This is his first album in nine years.

How Jewish is it?: Militantly, from the parentheses that surround the title to a reference to “Forward playmates” — hopefully a reference to the Jewish publication the Forward, which as far as I know does not (yet) boast a retinue of nude models.

How good is it?: Subjective. You’ll know exactly what you think of his music in about five seconds, so the least you could do is pull up a song and just press play.



<https://youtu.be/qWSF2qlsofQ>

Mac Miller — “Swimming”

The story: The fifth album by the Pittsburgh rapper born Malcolm McCormick, who reportedly had a bar mitzvah and a Star of David tattoo on his hand. He’d always been candid about depression and addiction, never more than on “Swimming,” released after his [breakup with singer Ariana Grande](#) and barely two months before his [fatal overdose](#) in September at the age of 26.

How Jewish is it?: Aside from the quick hit of “Respect to Adonai,” not very, which isn’t too surprising from someone who once rapped that he was a [“Jewish Buddhist consuming the views of Christianity.”](#)

How good is it?: Very. Its lush arrangements epitomize a [new breed](#) of [L.A. funk](#) that’s pretty yet slightly unwholesome, as in druggy and tending toward despair. If it’s destined to be a rap classic, it’s as much because of vulturism as because of how good it sounds when you put it on.



<https://youtu.be/SsKT0s5J8ko>