

Syracuse University

SURFACE

Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects

Spring 5-1-2012

Mouth's Cradle Presents: Wisdom Teeth

Kevin Hegedus
Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone



Part of the [Audio Arts and Acoustics Commons](#), [Composition Commons](#), [Interdisciplinary Arts and Media Commons](#), and the [Music Performance Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hegedus, Kevin, "Mouth's Cradle Presents: Wisdom Teeth" (2012). *Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects*. 104.

https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/104

This Honors Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

Mouth's Cradle Presents: Wisdom Teeth

A Capstone by Kevin Hegedus

Advised by Professor Ulf Oesterle

Read by Professor David Rezak

12 May 2012

Abstract

It has been nearly four years since my artistic collaborator Brandon Linn and I began recording and performing hip-hop music under the name Mouth's Cradle. The music community at Syracuse University has been very welcoming to us. I was able to learn about music theory and performance through my studies as a B.A. in music at the Setnor School of Music, while consulting with my professors and peers in the Bandier Program for ideas on how to make Mouth's Cradle succeed in the music industry.

My time as a student at Syracuse is almost over and I wanted to put on the biggest Mouth's Cradle show yet as a way to celebrate my experiences here. The planning for the show took a year and would have been impossible without my friends and collaborators in all different areas of the arts.

With my bandmate Brandon Linn, a.k.a. the DJ Master Rogers, I made a full-length album of original hip-hop songs. Our album *Clark Kent* is our third full-length record, and is available for free download on MouthsCradle.com.

With Bandier student Joseph Ahern, I completely redesigned MouthsCradle.com, making it a convenient hub for the download of the album *Clark Kent*, as well as a portal to Mouth's Cradle's other social media ventures, which include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts. I maintain these accounts and use them to communicate with fans all over the world who discovered Mouth's Cradle's music through the Internet but have never seen us perform live.

With fashion major and Honors student Grace O'Meara, a.k.a. SAI'NT FLOSSA FULL OF GRACE, I styled every participant in the show, from musicians to stagehands, in red and purple clothes. Red and purple are Mouth's Cradle's colors, and we wanted everyone involved in some way with the show to fit our strong visual aesthetic. Grace also designed for me custom jewelry pieces that reflected the themes explored in the visual aesthetic of the show, including earrings made out of real wisdom teeth.

With Bandier student Jeanette Wall, I reissued a previous Mouth's Cradle album, *The Next Big Thing*, on red and purple vinyl with new art by Elizabeth Scafuto.

With Syracuse rock band Half Sister, I orchestrated full-band arrangements of every Mouth's Cradle song. For the first time, Mouth's Cradle performed live with drums, bass, and guitars, instead of our usual electronic backing tracks.

With landscape architecture major and ESF student Nick Imperial, I designed the interior of the venue itself. Together we rigged a system of red and purple curtains that filled the blank art space with bold color. I also made thirteen spray paint murals that decorated the space.

With Syracuse artists Greg Mawicke, Emily Ramon, Grace Heraty, Sam Sodomsy, Minjae Yoon, Molly Snee, Max Kwok, Kelly Fitzsimmons, and Cam Morgan, I put together a red and purple art show, including commissioned works based on Mouth's Cradle songs. Some of these works were auctioned to benefit

QuERI, an organization that seeks to improve the public education experience for queer youth.

Mouth's Cradle's show *Wisdom Teeth* was not only a fun, loud, and raucous night, but also a multi-disciplinary musical and artistic experience. With my friends and collaborators, I created music and curated an evening of art that brought the music to life. I saw my hard work paying off as the venue filled with people, all wearing red and purple, dancing and having a good time to hip-hop music. It was a night I will never forget!

Contents

Summary of Capstone Project - 6

Reflections on Capstone - 14

Acknowledgements - 30

Summary of *Mouth's Cradle Presents Wisdom Teeth*

Mouth's Cradle is a hip-hop duo formed by Brandon Linn and I in the summer of 2009. We met each other in 2008 through mutual friends and began collaborating musically without realizing how seriously we would begin to take this collaboration in just a few months. Our friends loved the first songs we made and encouraged us to make an album. We made an album called *The Next Big Thing* and it was quickly chosen by iTunes to be featured on the main page of its pop section as a "New and Noteworthy" release of 2010. Just like that, we were hooked on the idea that we could make music that was widely liked and received, while expressing ourselves honestly, with no record label.

Since then, we have accumulated a fanbase of several thousand kids from all over the world. Internet marketing was crucial to us as we were largely unable to tour around the country and promote our music due to school, work, and my health problems. We self-release all of our music through the Internet, and since our formation, we have released five albums: *Baby Teeth EP* (2009), *The Next Big Thing* (2010), *Mouth's Cradle Vs. The Hype* (2010), *Mouth's Cradle Is Terrible!* EP (2011), and finally *Clark Kent* (2012).

Mouth's Cradle consumes all of my free time and much of my time when I should be doing schoolwork. Because of my time-consuming passion for this project, I wanted to incorporate it as part of my educational experience by using Mouth's Cradle as an Honors Capstone Thesis. This thesis evolved over a year of hard work and became a project called *Mouth's Cradle Presents Wisdom Teeth*.

There were four distinct elements that made up the project *Mouth's Cradle Presents Wisdom Teeth*. First, there was the creation of a hip-hop album called *Clark Kent*. Mouth's Cradle started working on this album in May of 2011, so this process took about a year by the time the album was released on April 10th. Secondly, this album was promoted to fans through Mouth's Cradle's social media sites. Thirdly, a music video was created to promote lead single "The Fever". I had never made a music video before, so it was an intellectual challenge for me to collaborate with a director and also figure out exactly how to present myself visually. Lastly, all of these elements formed musical material that I presented at *Wisdom Teeth*, a big show on April 21st, where I debuted this music to the world and accomplished dreams of mine, like playing with a full band in an entirely decorated and styled venue.

The methods used for phase one of the project, the recording and production of the album *Clark Kent*, were contained in my home studio. My Macbook is the most important tool in my arsenal. I did all of my recording work on *Clark Kent* using the program Logic, which was a relatively new undertaking for me. Logic is a professional-level audio recording program. Its simplified version, called GarageBand, is free software that comes automatically with the purchase of an Apple computer. I am used to this recording interface because I used it to make three of Mouth's Cradle's albums. Logic is still an interface to which I must get accustomed. I find the whole thing daunting still, in some ways, but I've noticed the easiest way to learn is just by doing.

To add to some of the intellectual difficulty working with a new interface, I also used for the first time a microphone setup to record for *Clark Kent*. I used to only sing into my computer's microphone to record. This method was very "lo-fi", but provided me with quick and easy results that I could send to Brandon and have him mix and master. Brandon has a great ear and is able to make even low-quality audio sound professional. For *Clark Kent*, however, I wanted to step up my game and make the most professional product I could. With the help of my friends Rob Dekker and Sam Mason, who are audiophiles and experts at sound equipment, I compiled a home studio using an AudioTechnica 2020 condenser mic and an Alesis MultiMix 12 mic interface. This way, instead of recording my vocals straight into my computer, I sang into a microphone, which connected to a mic interface, which connected to my computer. I could tell instantly that this was the setup for me. My vocals sounded lush and professional for the first time!

Brandon and I also altered our collaborative methods for the songwriting and production of this album. For the first time, Brandon was the almost sole creator of the instrumental aspect of our music. In the past, he and I co-created beats, but now it was up to him and I could focus all of my efforts on lyricism and melodies. Although he absorbed much of the production duties, I found myself busier than ever trying to record just the right take. I began studying voice privately with Syracuse professor John English in the spring of 2011, and I wanted to make sure that my singing was at its highest level possible for these recordings. Most of my work with Professor English was to make sure my voice

was relaxed, healthy, and comfortable. The toughest part of this recording process was to let go, let my body relax, and not worry about my vocal sound and just concentrate on the good feeling of healthy singing. Ironically, by becoming more focused on feeling rather than sound, my sound improved greatly.

The second phase of this project was the social media marketing of *Clark Kent*. I consider social media to be the perfect match of poetry, visual arts, and time arts – a truly engaging form of media of which many do not yet realize the artistic potential. I will now defend my position of social media as art:

Social media is a form of visual art because the way web pages look. Graphic design is extremely important, and I was lucky to work with my sister, Andi Crow Hegedus, who is a graphic design student at Temple University. It is important for all social media pages, including Facebook and Twitter, to have professional-quality band photos that fit in with a design aesthetic that lets fans know not only that the band takes themselves seriously as musicians, but also that they have a distinct style that separates them from other acts. Over four years, I have established many visual trademarks for Mouth's Cradle, and it was interesting to see how they evolved with *Clark Kent*. The most important visual trademark of Mouth's Cradle is **red and purple**. These two colors have been present in Mouth's Cradle mythology from the very beginning, and for *Clark Kent* I took it a step further by having all of our press photos in black and white with red and purple trim. I also made sure the text and backgrounds of all social media pages were red and purple.

Social media is a form of poetry because the message I communicate through text to fans is an extension of my lyrical writing. Sometimes I tweet lyrics from my songs. Often, I tweet jokes or poetry I've written. These thoughts and images, combined in Twitter form, create a textual atmosphere that again contributes to the overall brand trademark of Mouth's Cradle. Some of my trademarks are that I only type in all caps, I make constant literary allusions but rework them with hip-hop slang and language, and I refer to my friends and fans as a collective called #CRADLEGANG. This is a way to let fans feel like they are my friends in real life, and that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Social media is a time art because the artistic experience of social media is delivered over time. Tweets are collected as I write them, and fans can read them from front to back as a sort of story that I am constantly updating every day. In this case, to get the true atmosphere of Mouth's Cradle, one must follow the band for a few weeks to truly get the feel of how I choose to document my daily life on a regular basis.

The methods for the third area of the project, the music video, involve a direct collaboration with my friend Danila Usov. Danila is part of a film crew called Romura, and I decided to work with him on a whim to create a video. I saw him in a restaurant and I really liked the clothes he was wearing, so I decided to say hello. Literally within twenty minutes of talking, we decided to collaborate and make a video. I had been waiting for a video director to cross paths with me for years, and when it finally happened, the mutual recognition between us as goal-driven artists was instant.

To film, the two of us drove around in my car with his cameras in two six-hour sessions, and took video of me, performing the song “The Fever”, in different cool backdrops around the Syracuse area. We only ended up using a quarter of the footage we shot, and it was all footage of me dancing by the statues of a Buddhist temple in east Syracuse. I chose this location on Danila’s advice because he thought it was beautiful, and many of the lyrics in my song “The Fever” are about Buddhism. For instance, one line “Big green trees and my legs in the lotus/Try so hard to live in the moment” is a reference to meditation in the lotus position and trying to focus on being present in the here and now. Directing a music video at a Buddhist temple was intellectually fulfilling for me and contributed to the atmosphere of the song.

Lastly, the most exciting and challenging of the elements of *Mouth’s Cradle presents Wisdom Teeth* is the show itself, Wisdom Teeth. This show was be very special to me because it was my last show as a Syracuse student, and I wouldn’t have been satisfied as a performer unless I put on the biggest show I possibly can. I wanted to make a strong artistic statement and create a fun night that kids will remember for years.

To do this, I worked with a large team of collaborators. Among them were a film crew (Danila Usov and his Romura crew), a web designer (Joseph Ahern), a backing band (Brian Ludwig, Nick Imperial, Kevin Muldoon, Sarah Aument), a venue manager (Nate Larsen), a show manager (Jeanette Wall), a stage designer (Nick Imperial), visual artists (Greg Mawicke, Emily Ramon, Minjae Yoon, Grace Heraty, others), and a sound manager (Rob Dekker). Along

with all the collaborative work I've done with Brandon Linn over the years, the biggest challenge for me was letting go and allowing my collaborators to use their talents while I remained present as a coordinator and director. This show, through its planning, became much bigger than just me, and I intended to provide a creative forum where my friends can shine in their respective fields of talent.

The show was significant to me on a creative scale because it allowed me to take on challenges I've never faced before. Before the project began, I asked myself, "What will it be like to orchestrate my electronic songs for a live rock band? What will it be like to self-record and produce an entire album using my own studio with new equipment?"

The show *Wisdom Teeth* was also significant culturally to Syracuse students because it aimed at being more than a hip-hop concert. It was more like a contemporary art installation, blending art, music, costume, and performance for maximum emotional impact. More than anything else, my goal for this show was to create a space where people could let go and have fun. By turning a venue into a red and purple wonderland, it allowed the space to seem like a fantasy world for participants. People could forget their cares and inhibitions, dance, and have a fun night surrounded by friends. This was my way to give back to my friends who have supported me throughout my four years at Syracuse. I wanted to celebrate their hard work and give them a night to be free and have fun.

Lastly, I believe this show was significant in the scheme of hip-hop on a global scale. Hip-hop is thought by many to be a lowbrow art, and I intended to change this vicious stereotype by creating a theatrical context for my hip-hop

music. Hip-hop is not just music – it has always been about style, art, and attitude – and I intended to create a space that celebrates all of these aspects.

Mouth's Cradle Presents Wisdom Teeth was the story of an artist's evolution as he discovers himself in an academic environment. It was about friends, collaboration, creativity, and having a good time. It all took place on April 21st at Spark Art Space. Red and purple attire was required, and admission was free.

Reflections on *Mouth's Cradle Presents Wisdom Teeth*

Why do I do hiphop?

(“Hiphop” is the umbrella term for a cultural expression that includes rap music, turntablism and beat production, hiphop dance, hiphop fashion, and graffiti art. “Rap” refers specifically to a style of music.)

As natural as my choice of expressing myself in the medium of hiphop feels to me while I do it, the question of why I do it has plagued me for a while. Hiphop has a young history. It originated among the black urban poor of the Bronx in the 1970s. I do not fit this mold. I live in the suburbs of Allentown, Pennsylvania. I am white and I am gay.

Being gay in hiphop is a revolutionary act. There are very few LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) practitioners of hiphop, and the few that do it are often relegated to a niche scene, or perform with only a minimal awareness from the public or critics. Truly, LGBT rappers will only have conquered hiphop when their influence is noted in many scenes, from many parts of the country, making many styles of hiphop. I believe my presence in hiphop as a focused and goal-driven artist with a growing fanbase is significant to the art form of hiphop on a global scale. I intend to use my music as a mouthpiece for expressing the LGBT experience as I see it. By sharing my story, I hope to work to end the second-class treatment of LGBT people in the United States.

Being white in hiphop, however, is not a revolutionary act, but one that comes with its own challenges and sensitivities. White rappers are a sociological phenomenon that fascinates me personally. I devoted much of my junior year of

college as a B.A. student in music to scholarly studies on white rappers, and at first intended to write my Capstone thesis on the growing number of white rappers and how these rappers lay their own claims to “hiphop authenticity”. Instead, I chose to create my own music for a Capstone project and, in doing so, define my own version of authenticity.

Rap is a unique style of music because in order to be a valid participant in it, one must establish his or her own claim to hiphop and implicitly defend his or her use of the medium as a mouthpiece in every line of every song. In order to understand why this is, one must contemplate the origins of hiphop.

Hiphop scholars have different impressions of what hiphop authenticity actually means, and several have written entire essays on the topic. My extremely condensed impression of the spirit of hiphop is that hiphop is a music borne out of frustration and struggle. This struggle at first was racial and economical. In the slums of the Bronx, where the poor black population were forced to abide as one of many results of centuries of cultural oppression by whites, frustrated African-Americans turned to hiphop as an art that dealt with what it meant to be black in America post-slavery. African-Americans were “free”, but harsh living conditions and few options for escape from these conditions seemed as hopeless as the bonds of slavery.

With this brief description, one can already see the dangers of being a white rapper. Whites throughout recent history have been appropriating black cultural forms. For instance, rock and roll is a direct descendant of the early efforts of black blues musicians. But hiphop is so important as a window to

investigate this phenomenon because its racial negotiation is occurring right now. Its history and sense of frustration is so young that its transition from a black music to a white music is in observable stages. It's presumptuous for a white person to take a music so recently tied to the frustration of being oppressed *by whites* and use it for his or her own expression. Because of these corresponding factors, white hip-hop artists, in order to be credible, must reevaluate what hip-hop means in both the global and personal sense. Many white rappers, like Eminem (who is the most critically and commercially popular white rapper of our time) validate their claim to hip-hop through their upbringing in "the 'hood", their life of poverty, and/or their presence in a black community from a young age. However, making untrue claims about one's upbringing can result in public ridicule. Vanilla Ice is one such rapper whose intentional concealment of his middle-class childhood has led to a damaged credibility that affects him to this day in the public consciousness. Perhaps if he came clean about his life story from the beginning, he would have seemed like a more credible rapper, even though he didn't live the rough life that is the inspiration for many rap songs. Rap in its essence celebrates artists who stay true to themselves.

My personal claim to hip-hop comes from my gay identity. I believe the LGBT rights movement to be the new major civil rights movement. While it is problematic to compare the gay and black experiences because skin color is more visibly obvious than sexual orientation, gay people are treated like second-class citizens in the way they are refused the institution of marriage, which comes with certain social and economic rights. Gay people, like blacks, are the victims of

physical and emotional harassment, and have been the victims of highly publicized hate crimes. Also, because being LGBT is not often obvious on a surface level, society treats gay people like they do not exist. Homophobic slurs and jokes, as well as the constant reinforcement of heteronormative thinking in institutions like schools, have haunted me my whole life. Because being gay was never offered to me as a viable option when I was young, I denied my own sexuality for years. I suffered intense depression because I didn't understand the kind of man I was becoming.

I need to be a rapper because I want to provide an example for discouraged LGBT youth. I want to rear my head in a genre that is still largely discouraging of openly gay artists to prove that the lines between what is appropriate behavior for gay and straight people will soon be blurred irreversibly. I also want to voice the frustrations and depression of my gay experience as a way to provide an artistic outlet for youth who may be undergoing the same powerful and dark feelings. Recently, there was a campaign empowering gay youth called "It Gets Better", discouraging gay youth from turning to suicide by promising a better future. I don't want to merely say "It Gets Better" – I want to live "It Gets Better" through my music.

While I believe this aim fits the doctrine of hip-hop as I see it, the fact remains that I am white and interpreting a musical genre that in its inception was Black. Because of this, I have to be constantly aware of my lyrics and presentation to make sure I do not trip on the fine line between appropriation and parody. I struggle on a daily basis with racism and making sure I am not being

racist. I worry sometimes that because I am white there are times when I'm being racist and I don't realize it. All I can do is try my best to be aware of my self.

Mouth's Cradle, therefore, is a musical project that sits on a crossroads between my perceptions of race and sexuality. It is influenced daily by my struggles to find myself within both of these arenas. My musical influences while making the album *Clark Kent* were other rappers who sit at similar crossroads in their exploration of race, gender, and sexuality. While making *Clark Kent*, I took a great influence from the rappers V-Nasty, Kreayshawn, and Riff Raff. These rappers all have in common that they are white, and that their time in the public eye has only begun. In fact, many of these artists saw jumps to being perceived in mainstream musical consciousness as recently as 2012.

Kreayshawn and V-Nasty are white female rappers from Oakland, California. They are both 21 years old and they both rap as part of a collective called White Girl Mob. I love Kreayshawn's music because it showcases a goofiness and colorful sense of humor that seems to be specific to the Bay Area of California. Other high-profile contemporary rappers from the Bay, such as Lil B, share Kreayshawn's love for irreverent stream-of-consciousness ramblings disguised as freestyle rap. Kreayshawn's sassy, tactful wordplay combined with her extravagant Japan-inspired sense of style, make her a natural contender for the title of next big rap-pop icon. V-Nasty, as a foil to Kreayshawn, doesn't mince words and dresses far more "butch" than her White Girl Mob counterpart, sporting white t-shirts and Oakland Raiders hats.

Both rappers are unique in the world of hip-hop in the way that they are heterosexual women but almost always rap from the perspective of a straight male. V-Nasty especially thrives on taking the perspective of a male pimp. On her song “More Bitches”, she raps, “Four bitches equals forty toes/They all down, hoein is all they know/Gotta make a stack just to get out the cold”. In these lines, she portrays herself as a heartless pimp who only cares about women who pay her. Kreyshawn is equally ready to dominate women in her rhymes: “I’m colder than the fridge and the freezer/I’m snatchin all your bitches at my leisure”.

In this way, Kreyshawn and V-Nasty challenge the traditional role of women in rap by taking on a male perspective. This is powerful because male rappers dominate in hip-hop, and misogynistic language is a normal way of expressing feelings within the context of hip-hop. Rap has always celebrated the pimp lifestyle. Pimps, like drug dealers, are street hustlers delivering a product. Rap constantly borrows slang from sex and drug pushers because these industries avoid commercialism through their illicitness, and rap in its spirit seeks to avoid commercialism in the same way.

Since rap is historically a boys’ game, Kreyshawn and V-Nasty are important because they seek to “roll with” the boys rather than resign themselves to the role of a passive exploited female. At the same time, by being female while taking on the role of a male pimp, they necessarily parody and comment on the importance of this misogynistic language in hip-hop. In their almost goofy appropriation of gender-based exploitation, they show how ridiculous this perspective really is.

A male white rapper whose music I consider beautiful and powerful is Riff Raff. His confident ability to freestyle, combined with his jarringly high voice and colorblind sense of style, make for an exciting listening experience. His lyricism too is admirable because he is able to dexterously spin nonsense phrases with such sonic color that they sound profound. One-off punchlines like “Adversaries call me on my Blackberry” and “Diamonds dancing on my fist look like a blank disc” tell instant, memorable stories.

He also is an important rapper to me by the way he embraces his racial identity in rap. He dresses like society’s nightmare of the “wigga” – a white kid who tries to imitate black people through his dress and mannerisms. In Riff Raff’s case, includes the most garishly colorful clothes from famous hip-hop brands like Coogi, flashy chains with pendants decorated with pictures of Slimer from *Ghostbusters* or the Kool-Aid Man, gold grills, and blonde cornrows with neon gummy bear beads. This sense of style is inspiring to me because I have elements in my own personality of this fascination with hip-hop fashion and mannerisms, and I am comforted to see a white rapper so intent on embracing these fascinations. Riff Raff makes me feel more confident that I can be who I want to be and express myself loudly through style.

Rappers and musicians were not the only things that influenced me as I made new Mouth’s Cradle music. I was also inspired by the independent scholarship I did in other areas of the humanities. A study that is extremely important to me is the study of religious doctrines. Two doctrines that influence

me are Kopimism and Buddhism. This influence is reflected on not only my lyrics, but also in the way I brand and present my music.

Kopimism may be an unfamiliar name to readers because the religion is so new. It began in Sweden with a 19-year-old philosophy student named Isak Gerson. He began the religion, and then applied unsuccessfully for government recognition before finally getting legal recognition in January of 2012. Thus, the religion is perhaps one of the world's newest. It is also a tremendously exciting religion because of its potential to change the world's opinion on the appropriation of art commonly known as "sampling".

Sampling, as it applies to hip-hop, is the art of taking a clip of an existing song and using this short clip to construct a new song. This art began with the use of turntables at hip-hop's inception in the 1970's. A DJ would take a funk or soul record, isolate a few bars from the instrumental section, and loop it over and over again to make a dance beat. He or she would accomplish this by playing two identical records on two turntables, one with each hand, and constantly manipulate the records to create an infinite loop of these isolated "grooves" from the records. Rappers could then rap "freestyles" (improvised rhymes) over the beat while "breakers" (hip-hop dancers) did their signature floor moves. The party could go on all night as long as the DJ had enough endurance to keep up the loop.

Nowadays, sampling is done digitally. Master Rogers (the stage name of my collaborator Brandon Linn), the DJ of Mouth's Cradle, samples music digitally in a variety of ways. A common way is to make a digital loop of the "break" of a song by isolating a few seconds of audio and pasting it continuously

until a loop is formed. From here, he orchestrates additional instruments to complement the beat using his synthesizer. Another way that Master Rogers samples is from vinyl records, like the way it was done the golden age of hip-hop. However, he tends to hook turntables up to a digital sampler, where he can record segments of audio and assign them to drum pads. Then, he can play these pads by pressing buttons rhythmically, and use cued segments of audio percussively to create entirely new compositions out of recorded sound.

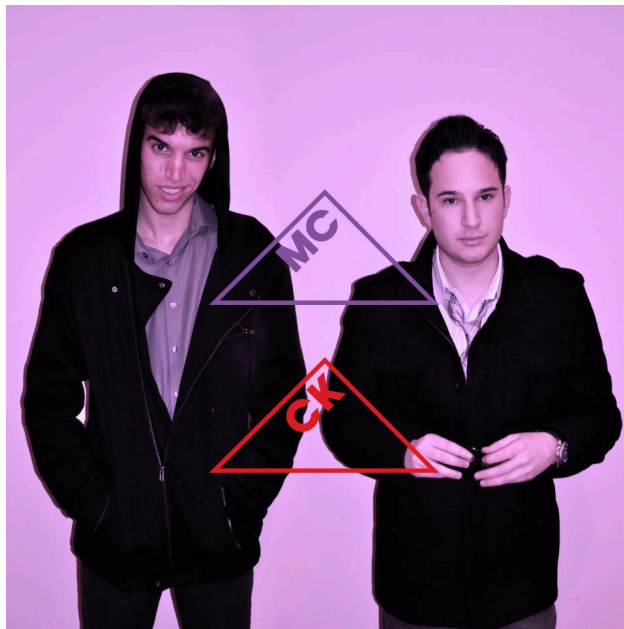
All of these methods, in the hands of a tremendous musician like my friend Master Rogers, can create eye-opening sound compositions that transcend the source material and even make the source sound dull in comparison. Mouth's Cradle uses samples in almost all of our songs. In fact, nine out of the ten songs on *Clark Kent* were made using samples. The problem with this is that sampling is illegal and punishable by heavy fines in civil court if the owner of the sound recording ever discovered our use of samples.

We have not yet had any legal repercussions from using samples in our albums. Often, independent artists with small fanbases such as ours need not worry about such consequences. Use of samples is so commonplace among digital artists that it would be difficult for litigation to keep track of every illegal use of samples. There is a way to sample legally, but it involves paying sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars to copyright holders. Mouth's Cradle has no budget, and we view sampling as our creative right despite the threat of legal counteraction. We are citizens of a digital age, and we believe that the

sharing of digital information is something that defines us personally and culturally.

This is why Mouth's Cradle chose to be influenced by the doctrine of Kopimism on our album *Clark Kent*. Kopimism teaches that the copying, pasting, and sharing of digital information are religious sacraments akin to Holy Communion. These processes are a way for children of the digital age, like myself, to reconcile our Internet identities with our real-life selves. All of my work is performed digitally. A lot of my social interaction is digital. My life is led on my computer through the sharing of information. It makes sense to me that I would embrace a religion that emphasizes the development and celebration of the digital self.

In order to show our affiliation with Kopimism, we used symbols of Kopimism on the front cover of our album:



These “MC” and “CK” triangles mimic the Kopimi symbols design by Isak Gerson and used on his website. Gerson asked that his followers copy, share, and redesign these logos appropriately to show support for the free sharing of information promoted by Kopimism. Mouth’s Cradle has officially become a part of Kopimism’s religious movement by practicing its ideology through our illegal sampling of musical recordings, and also has promoted the movement through our appropriation of their symbols. I have communicated with Isak Gerson on Twitter. He expressed to me his support of our use of his symbolism.

The triangle symbols we used are red and purple for an important symbolic reason. Ever since I began Mouth’s Cradle with Master Rogers as the DJ, our colors have been red and purple. On one level, I choose these colors because I like them aesthetically. I also like the way that they clash on the color wheel. Since they are near each other on the spectrum, when the colors are used together, they clash in a way I enjoy. I’ve always liked visual art that is overwhelming to the eye. It creates in me an aversion, and then a curiosity to this aversion that makes me unable to stop looking. Using busy patterns of red and purple alongside each other creates an overwhelming visual experience.

On another level, I have a superstitious use for these colors. I have engaged in a nonscientific but personally fulfilling investigation of auras. My favorite resource on the matter, *The Secret is in the Rainbow: Aura Interrelationships* by Ruth Berger, discusses the importance of color in our lives and the idea of wearing or creating environments with certain colors as a means of controlling psychic emanations. Purple is an important color on this spectrum

because it is indicative of psychic activity, an aspect of my life that I am working to enrich and develop through daily practices of psychic self-awareness. Red is a fiery color with a striking presence that commands attention. This reflects the light I try to bring to my onstage presence as a hip-hop MC. I must be striking and commanding enough to control the energy of an entire room.

The third reason I use these colors is to pay homage to the original influence of Mouth's Cradle – garage rock band The White Stripes. From the beginning of their careers, The White Stripes only ever dressed, performed, and created album art in the colors red, white, and black. As a developing music fan, I was completely entranced with the visual world Jack White created with this simple color choice. When I was creating my own color scheme, I added purple to the three colors already used by The White Stripes, and have continued to use these four colors as Mouth's Cradle's musical and visual aesthetics develop.

Therefore, my color choices for Mouth's Cradle are meant to pay homage to The White Stripes, stimulate psychic growth in certain areas of personality, and most importantly – to aesthetically clash. The idea of aesthetics colliding and clashing is very important to my creative doctrine when it comes to finding influences or making art under the moniker of Mouth's Cradle. In the same way that red and purple clash on the color wheel, I am interested between finding sonic experiences halfway between two extremes. Because there are so many aesthetic poles in music, finding an in-between route doesn't promote a centrist, conservative sound, but actually creates a sometimes confusing but always rewarding culture clash.

I am interested particularly in the halfway point between “cute” music and “scary” music. Although I already talked about some musical influences for the album *Clark Kent*, I wanted to write briefly on my lifetime musical journey and how it led to my current sound. When I was young, I was interested in chart-topping 1960’s pop, especially from the early to mid-sixties. British Invasion groups, as well as girl groups, provide many aesthetic jumping-off points for the way I structure my songs and the distinct chord progressions and harmonies I choose.

An element that seems to unify 1960’s pop is its “cuteness”. Perhaps the music didn’t feel cute at the time, but in comparison to the sometimes dark and violent music that tops the charts in 2012, music from the 1960’s can seem innocent and even naïve. A song like “It’s My Party” by Lesley Gore (one of my favorite performers) is a straight-forward pop tune about relationship drama at a party. In comparison to party anthems of 2012, Lesley Gore seems like a prude.

I revel in the 1960s’ golden age of saccharine pop gloss combined with tightly structured anthems. Often, songs were under three minutes long (another major difference from today, where singles are often between four and five minutes long) and beautifully orchestrated with orchestral, as well as rock, instruments. I always strive for that kind of concise but blissful pop, even when I’m writing rap songs. Perhaps my most successful attempt at imitating this era, a song called “Honey from a Stone”, coincidentally is the most beloved Mouth’s Cradle song by fans.

However, as much as I love cute music, I also adore listening to the scariest and often most graphic music I can find. My most obvious departure into this kind of dark territory is my love of violent contemporary gangsta rap music. V-Nasty, the aforementioned white female rapper from east Oakland, generally raps about her exploits as a pimp or street soldier. Waka Flocka Flame, a male African-American rapper from Atlanta, writes tight, simple anthems about the reckless life of a drug dealer.

Apart from gangsta rap, I often find myself listening to Norwegian black metal music. This music and scene is admirable to me because of its cold brutality in its music and visual presentation. Singers wear paint on their faces to resemble the pale coldness of corpses. The music is mixed often without midrange frequencies to evoke the starkness of a midwinter forest.

I am attracted to this kind of music because it represents what I see as the polar opposite of my childhood. When I was young, I used to be scared of submitting myself to supposedly “evil” influences in my music – from the satanic themes of black metal to the violent themes of hip-hop. Now that I’ve grown up, these influences represent part of the rite of passage to adulthood. No longer content to hide behind the sweetness of 60’s music, I consider myself a full connoisseur of the broad emotional range of music. In fact, I see the split between cute music and scary music as one that I can creatively explore with my own perspective under the moniker Mouth’s Cradle.

When I make merchandise this summer, I intend to create a shirt that says “MOUTH’S CRADLE” with the “O” replaced with a pentagram and the “D”

replaced with a heart. This invocation of traditionally Satanic and traditionally Valentine's Day imagery will to me represent the broad contrasts in Mouth's Cradle's sound. In fact, this summer, I want to release a whole line of Mouth's Cradle merchandise. I have t-shirt designs in the works, a Mouth's Cradle red and purple vinyl record released with Miscreant Records, customized toothbrushes that say "Mouth's Cradle Loves You" on them, and I want to design posters and stickers.

Alongside a new merchandising line, I have many goals for the future of Mouth's Cradle. I want to tour the east coast with Master Rogers, and also take a musical trip alone to the West Coast, where I can finally fulfill my dream of seeing life on the other side of the country while playing some shows. I will fund this tour with proceeds from merchandise.

I also plan to start my own record label: #CRADLEGANG. #CRADLEGANG is the name I have given to Mouth's Cradle fans worldwide, and so I want to create a label on which all of my rapper friends and I can release the music we want and have it distributed online in accordance with the Mouth's Cradle brand. I already have one act signed to this label: Bird SOOT. This white male rapper from Allentown, Pennsylvania is one of my best friends and also an extremely talented unheard voice in hip-hop. He deserves to have his albums distributed to the Mouth's Cradle fanbase.

I am also planning to release another mixtape – my first solo mixtape ever. I will change my stage name to YOUNG CRYBABY after the John Waters movie *CryBaby*, and I will release an all-rap tape inspired by the contemporary gangsta

rap I listen to. All of my releases thus far have been a mixture of rap and pop – this one would be almost entirely rap for the first time in my career. It will be a good exercise to become a quicker and more competent rap author. I look forward to the personal challenge, and the freedom to market myself as a solo artist for the first time.

Brandon and I will continue to work together. I don't know for how long, nor what our next project will be. I foresee our next project being extremely pop-based featuring acoustic instruments. This would be a development in our sound and a new exercise to test our abilities as producers.

My experience in doing my Capstone this year – the creation of an album, music video, and live show – allowed me to form new collaborative relationships and test the limits of my abilities in several artistic mediums. I realize now how hard I have to work to maintain this level of creative growth. My Capstone was hard work, but I do not anticipate taking a break this summer. The moment I get home, it's time for recording writing up contracts for #CRADLEGANG, budgeting for merchandising and a tour, and figuring out how to raise money for future endeavors.

Mouth's Cradle is my life's work and my greatest joy. For years, I've put all of my creative efforts into this project. I never foresaw spending so much time on one aspect of my creative life, but now that I have realized my calling to the world of hiphop, everything is starting to make sense. Hiphop is who I am and what I do. I can't wait for my contributions to the genre to be accepted by the larger community.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without help from:

- Ulf Oesterle, advisor and social media guru
- The Crown-Wise scholarship
- Danila Usov and Romura Films
- Andi Crow Hegedus, graphic design
- Alyssa Stone, photography
- Laura Napolitano, poster design
- Rachy Becker and Yulia Gorman, street team
- Grace O'Meara, for fashion and concept design, as well as overall creative advising
- Rob Dekker, for doing sound
- Nick Imperial, for space design and construction
- Half Sister, for being the opening act and helping me perform Mouth's Cradle songs with a live band
- Sam Sodomsky, for songwriting, creative advice, and mentoring me in all areas of this project