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The 25 Best Hip-Hop Documentaries

BY SHANTÉ COSME | JUN 18, 2012 | 1:14 PM | PERMALINK

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# 1. Style Wars (1983)

Director: Tony Silver

More than any other film on this list, *Style Wars* manages to communicate the essence of hip-hop music without overtly focusing on the music itself. Instead, the film sets its sights on graffiti and break-dancing, centering on how the evolution of these expressions became vital to the vibrant roots of hip-hop culture spreading across the streets of New York.

*Style Wars*, which originally aired on PBS in 1983, follows several street artists, notably one-armed graffiti writer Kase 2, who is famous for his signature form of wild style called "computer rock" as much as for his boundless devotion to expressing his art.

If he was writing in his room, this wouldn't be the film it was; instead, we have an educational-sounding voice-over (this is PBS, remember?) describing the great risks he took to write on subway cars, and gorgeous visuals of graffiti-enveloped trains weaving throughout NYC. Kase 2's art is not just about aesthetics any more than Rock Steady's devotion to breaking is just about physical movement. It's about capturing a certain spirit, expressing something otherwise inexpressible, and ultimately making something your own. And that's all hip-hop really is, at

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it's heart, isn't it?

A film like this is not without accolades: *Style Wars* was deservedly awarded the Grand Jury Prize in documentary category at the Sundance Film Festival, and is widely viewed as a indelible declaration of hip-hop's commitment to originality at a fundamental time of its development.

Tags: [style-wars](#), [kase-2](#), [pbs](#), [graffiti](#)


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escobar

June 18th, 2012 at 08:58 PM

Ouhhhh, Idk about Beats, Rhymes & Life being at #7....Tupac Ressurrection was great, but had alot of the same footage and concept from Thug Angel (released 1 year prior)

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Pat

June 20th, 2012 at 08:11 AM

What about the very first West Coast Hip Hop documentary Breakin' n' Enterin', '83 ???

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huntingbro

June 20th, 2012 at 07:39 PM

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