

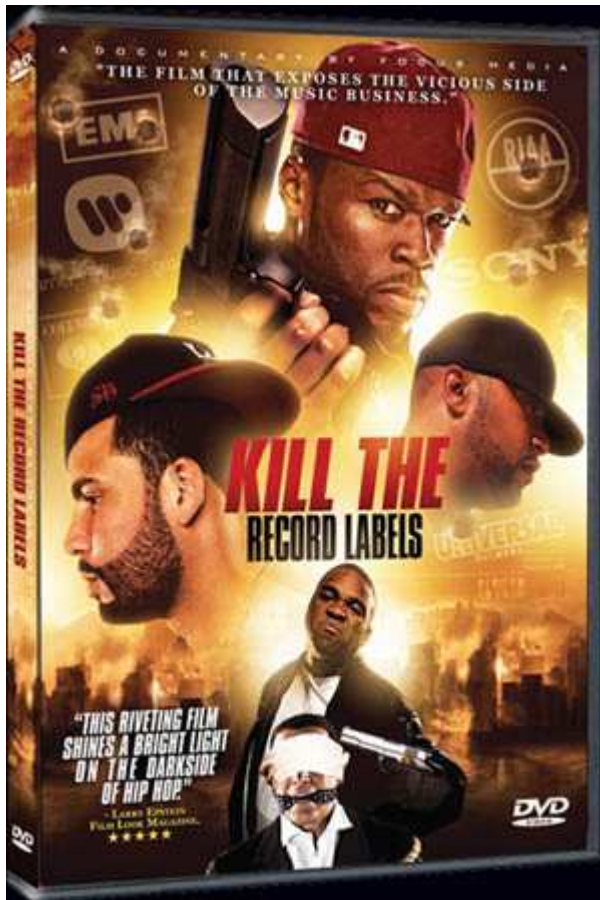
<http://www.wiretapmag.org/blogs/arts/44352/>

WireTap Blog: Arts and Lifestyle [Got a tip? WireTap blog](#)

July 15, 2009

Review: Kill the Record Labels

Posted by [Tolu Olorunda](#) at 11:55AM



Film Review:

On January 16, 2007 two popular Atlanta-based DJs were arrested on racketeering charges. [DJ Drama](#) and [DJ Cannon](#), the more famous of the 17 detained, [were accused](#) of selling music CDs—mixtapes—illegally. In the stunning raid of the Atlanta offices were both DJs produced their mixtape series, SWAT teams seized over 50, 000 cds, computers, recording equipments, cold-hard cash, bank statements, and vehicles. The hip-hop community was, understandably, shaken up.

A new documentary out, [*Kill The Record Labels*](#), hopes to place under better light the repercussions such incidents will have on hip-hop. It argues that the Recording Industry Association of America ([RIAA](#)) and the major Record labels are bringing about the destruction of hip-hop music by sabotaging the efforts of mixtape DJs.

Mixtapes are a compilation of songs composed by a DJ and artist. The DJ and the artist collaborate, on mutual terms, in the making of a mixtape. On most occasions, the record labels have no direct influence upon what songs are featured on the CD; but, as revealed in the documentary, DJs are often given “authorized permission” from labels for the songs. This happens because mixtapes, whether acknowledged by the labels or not, can help boost the album sales of certain artists. They fall directly into the hands of street consumers, and are less concerned with industry-set standards for music recording.

Budding Brooklyn rapper [Maino](#), who credits mixtapes with giving him the fame he today enjoys, described them as a “direct shot” into the “vein” of the Hip-Hop audience, contending that most DJs know what precise sounds the fans are interested in, and can cater to that demand more appropriately than an A&R or label executive is able to. The threats being advanced by the RIAA, at the behest of the record labels, is not “helping” artists, he says.

Maino is no exception. In fact, many Hip-Hop artists share similar thoughts. Houston rapper Mike Jones echoed Maino’s concerns, though going further, with the suggestion that those who are ordering the raids of mixtape shops are, in essence, “trying to kill hip-hop.”

Kill The Record Labels tries to explain the other side of this tragic conundrum. The four major record labels—Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group, EMI, and Sony BMG—have suffered a sharp decline in record sales the last decade. In 1996, the documentary reports, annual net sales for the big four was \$14.5 billion, while 2007 only ushered in \$11.5 billion. After some soul searching, the labels concluded that the culprits in their income loss was not the quality of music being produced, or the quality of artists being signed, but the internet (downloading) and mixtapes (piracy).

Ironically, many DJs see things differently, arguing that their efforts, in promoting artists through mixtapes, should be applauded and rewarded by the labels. They raise the examples of rappers whose mixtape-start prepared them for the international scene, far more than the efforts the record labels put forth. 50 cent, Chamillionaire, and Lil’ Flip were among those invoked.

What disturbs many observers is that there seems to be a more sinister objective at play -- the criminalization of rappers.

Many in the documentary drew parallels between police surveillance of drug dealers in the past and ongoing surveillance of successful rappers. Rappers are the new kingpins, they said.

But even with escalating tension brewing between record label executives and mixtape DJs, most DJs vow to keep on doing what they're good at. As New York-based DJ Green Lantern put it, "the consumer will not be denied."

Kill The Record Labels is a rich resource for those unsure of what the future holds for record labels in our cyber-controlled world. The most important fact, this 46-minute documentary asserts, is that before record labels existed, DJs did. The fight might have subsided, but the battle is far from over.

====