

Hip-Hop, Fresh Squeezed

Have accordion, will rap:
the unlikely sound of Julz A.

White guys and live instruments may be minorities in hip-hop, but they are not so rare. Julian Hintz, who performs as Julz A, below, still manages to be a hip-hop anomaly, however: he rhymes while playing the accordion. The instrument is less apt to roll with the posse than roll out the barrel, but onstage Mr. Hintz, 27, is polka's antithesis. Fingers



fanned out at chest level, terry-cloth band on his wrist, leaning back slightly, he strikes a classic rapper's pose despite playing an instrument that has been relegated to Dorkville at least since the Beatles. Mr. Hintz has long aimed to sex up the

squeezebox: after he picked up the accordion at 16, the first song he learned to play was "Purple Haze." Today he uses a wah-wah pedal and distortion on tracks like "Julz-A.com" ("What's that new sound/ accordion lowdown" and "the accordion man/ with the rockin' hand") from his first solo EP, "Squeeze Rock," to be released at a Knitting Factory show on Aug. 30. Mr. Hintz discussed a few other modern appearances of the accordion with Andrew Adam Newman.

"ROCKY RACCOON," the Beatles (1968): "This is one of those songs where the accordion fills a theatrical role. It comes in for about 10 seconds — when 'the doctor comes in, stinking of gin' — and then disappears again. And it's intentionally played badly — the style of drunk playing."

"COLD, COLD GROUND," Tom Waits (1987): "Every time I tell people I play the accordion, they say, 'You must love Tom Waits.' I don't. The way he uses the accordion is a gimmick. He's just taking accordion waltzes and sticking them into a minor key to create this scene, and even though he's trying to create this dark mood it still seems sort of goofy."

"THE DOWNEASTER ALEXA," Billy Joel (1989): "It's a beautiful swooping ballad with solid songwriting and a great melody. I can't really complain about it except that the accordion is not featured. I personally play accordion as if it's the guitar in a rock band — the accordion is playing the main riff rather than the guitar player doing it. But in pop music the accordion oftentimes works as padding to give harmonic support."

"PARTICLE MAN," They Might Be Giants (1990): "The riff for the accordion is the most similar approach to what I do in these examples. It has a unique line that uses no traditional accordion style. There's no one-two style (boom, chick, boom, chick) that's so prevalent in traditional accordion music."

"JESUS DOESN'T WANT ME FOR A SUNBEAM," Nirvana (1993): "I'm a big Nirvana fan. The accordion-playing was very traditional, but it was still a traditional punk-rock song. It had a melancholy quality that was kind of sweet."

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Section 2

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