Back 2 Tape: Amsterdam

05/03/2020 On the trail of hip-hop: on his road trip in the Porsche Cayenne S Coupé, music journalist Niko Hüls meets rapper Pete Philly and DJ and sneaker expert Edson Sabajo in Amsterdam.

Without question, Amsterdam is one of the most creative hotspots in Europe. The urban style of the Dutch metropolis is characterised by life on the water, the influence of numerous cultures, a colourful nightlife and far more bicycles than inhabitants. Amsterdam has long since ceased to be an insider tip on the European map, but is a "must see" for all those who want to feel the diversity and creativity of the continent in one place.

Two people who have shaped the city's attitude to life over many years are Pete Philly and Edson Sabajo. They are guests of my "Back 2 Tape" journey on the traces of Hip-Hop and cultural diversity in Europe - and the next stop of my road trip in the Porsche Cayenne S Coupé. Edson and Pete are faces of a scene that has far more to offer than the four classic elements of hip-hop. They show me how something new can emerge from all this.

International influences shape the culture

Edson Sabajo is DJ and co-founder of the world-famous sneaker collective "Patta". Together with his current business partner Guillaume "Gee" Schmidt, he was what is today called a Frequent Traveller in the 90s. He recalls: "New York has always had multicultural neighborhoods, the Bronx for example. That has definitely influenced me to this day," says Sabayo with an American accent and always with a charming smile on his lips.

"Then, the first breaths of Amsterdam hip-hop appeared. We were still listening to Madonna or Cool & the Gang and suddenly there was this other beat. We were immediately infected," says Sabajo. "Soon after that, we were a solid community. Nothing was segmented here, be it graffiti, DJing or rap. There was just everything. And everyone tried everything. Even me." Sabajo started as MC, but without much success. The voice too weak, the beats too mediocre. "But I wanted to stay hip-hop."

A weakness for sneakers from all over the world

That' s how Edson Sabajo discovers his talent behind the mixing desk, becoming a successful DJ. Amsterdam's legendary radio show Villa 65 Dutch Masters distributed Edson's first mixtape, followed by his own show at HipHop 120 - the foundation for his career was laid. Sabajo travels around the world with his beats and brings inspiration from everywhere back to Amsterdam - literally at his feet.

Today he runs his own sneaker store, which is one of the most important spots in the Dutch hip-hop scene. "That's cool, isn't it?" Sabajo looks around proudly. "And it will stay that way. We want to be independent, not part of some chain. We're well established in the scene and it's important that you just stay real - in business as well as in hip-hop."

"Hip-hop has opened my heart"

Just like the sneaker store "Patta", Pete Philly is an authority on the Amsterdam hip-hop scene. In his home country Aruba, he came into contact with Caribbean music at an early age, followed by pop beats from Michael Jackson and funk albums from Prince. "There was finally something that we blacks could identify with and that gave us stability. I just thought, oh yes, this is my home", says Pieter Monzon - that's his civil name.

When the song "Me, Myself and I" by De La Soul was released in 1989, it was all over for Pete Philly. The groove, the lightness and above all the level of rap lyrics and self-empowerment still characterise the musician today. "Hip-hop has opened my heart", says the Dutch MC, who has already toured with superstar Kanye West.

Reinventing yourself again and again

At the age of 14, he started rapping in English. For Pete Philly, this language better reflects his ambition for poetry than in Dutch. In the Netherlands he thus broke new ground and became a respected figure in the scene.

"Fortunately, hip-hop continues to reinvent itself. What other music genre can claim this? Jazz maybe? No way. For forty years, hip-hop has been there for the youth and has been going through whole generations," says Philly. "It will never stop being fresh. British Grime, for example, is just giving me the feeling that hip-hop gave me in the early 1990s. I'm very grateful that hip-hop can entertain my life and help me see the world."

Hip-Hop as motivator

Pete Philly is back on the scene after a break of several years. Lyme disease, which is usually transmitted via tick bites, had thrown him off track after several successful years. "But the music cured me," Philly said. Seven years after his last album "One", he returned to the public in 2019 with new music. That fans still celebrate his art, which is somewhere between funk, rap, soul and R'n'B, is proven by his release concert for the EP "Lift". More than 15,000 people danced to the beat of Pete Philly - and the lightness of Amsterdam.

Back 2 Tape

In 2018, music journalist Niko Hüls embarked on a journey to the roots of hip-hop in Germany in "Back to Tape". Now, he's continuing his road trip across Europe in a Porsche Cayenne S Coupé. In cooperation with the hip-hop magazine Backspin.de, the Porsche Newsroom project "Back to Tape" sheds light on cultural influences through the four central elements of hip-hop: rap, DJing, breakdance and graffiti. In Part 1, Niko Hüls visits Berlin.

Official playlist of Back 2 Tape

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