

Throwback: MC Hammer-Pump It Up



Stanley Kirk Burrell, earned his stage name from famed baseball player Reggie Jackson when he was a bat boy for the Oakland A's. Jackson thought Burrell, who was already dancing in the Oakland, Coliseum parking lot as a boy, resembled the legendary 'Hammerin' Hank Aaron.' In the '80s Burrell honed his natural talents for dance with his love of funk, soul and hip-hop and started a record company called Bust It Productions. Around 1986 he recorded the EP *Feel My Power* produced by Felton Pilates from Con Funk Shun. The buzz in the clubs around "Let's Get It Started" from Power and Hammer's live show secured him a record deal with Capitol. *Power* was rereleased as *Let's Get It Started* in 1988 with additional tracks and Pilates produced it. Although mediocre as a rapper Hammer quickly established himself as the James Brown of hip-hop. The huge scale choreography, dynamic videos and easy to follow lyrics was innovative. B-boying was one thing but Hammer brought an individualized dance to hip-hop that had roots in Brown but was clearly his own. ["Pump It Up"](#) came from this album as did ["They Put Me In The Mix."](#) and ["Let's Get It Started."](#) He used his success at this time to release music from the female duo Oaktown's 357. *Wild and Loose* from 1989 spawned ["Juicy Gotcha Krazy,"](#) ["Yeah Yeah Yeah,"](#) ["We Like It,"](#) and ["3-5-7- Straight At You"](#) two of which became radio staples but all neighborhood hits. They would record three more albums but nothing with the same kind of urban panache as their debut.

Hammer's second album *Please Hammer, Don't Hurt 'Em* would be a rap/pop juggernaut selling the most of any album in 1990 and becoming the first in rap to achieve diamond status. ["Pray,"](#)

which reflects Hammer's religious roots that had him form a group called The Holy Ghost Boys before his secular focus, was his biggest song ever. The Rick James's sample of ["Super Freak"](#) for ["U Can't Touch This"](#) reminded people of Rick James's genius and helped take the song straight to the mainstream and these commercial feats set-off MC Hammer the franchise. He would endorse a variety of products and there were lunchboxes, a doll and a Saturday morning cartoon. His shilling for KFC and the baggy pants trend caused the biggest backlash and [In Living Colour](#) parodied him. Fans and rappers misunderstood his unique entertainment and overt sampling as an affront to real MCing and creativity. He responded by dropping the MC from his name and continuing his path while dissing east coast rappers like LL Cool J along the way. *Too Legit 2 Quit* would not be as big as *Don't Hurt 'Em* but the video for ["Too Legit To Quit"](#) had a Michael Jackson imitator give Hammer his approval and prompted the real Jackson to call and let him know that he was a fan of his work. ["Addams Groove"](#) was the other single from the album and did well on the *Billboard Hot 100 Chart*. *The Funky Headhunter* in 1994 would be his last album to produce hits and contain any of the momentum he attained earlier. ["It's All Good"](#) and ["Pumps And A Bump"](#) were the singles to bring the heat. But after this release he would record *Inside Out* that flopped and by 1996 he had his infamous financial breakdown and filed for bankruptcy. He has consistently recorded music through the years but nothing with a glimmer of his former impact. Instead he has had other successes such as reality TV, a VH-1 biopic, web entrepreneur with [Dancejam.com](#) and pitchman. He still performs and puts on a spirited show with crew of dancers. He and Michael Jackson were one of a few artists to attend James Brown's funeral in 2006. In the time since his music career lost steam MC Hammer's accomplishments have been better understood and appreciated. No rapper who enters or wishes to become a major product spokesperson can ignore the road to it laid by Hammer. Run DMC would popularize Adidas sneakers to the rap audience but it was not on the same level as promoting

a good all Americans could recognize. The mega-pitchmen status of Snoop Dogg and Diddy was lead by Hammer's commercial explosion. There has been no hip-hopper since him to bring the soulful dexterity of dance as an individual or with a troop to the forefront of rap.