

Sounding Awful and Selling Great: The Real Art of The Black Eyed Peas

I'd honestly rather get a black eye than listen to The Black Eyed Peas. If you knew me, you'd know that means a lot because I have a very low pain tolerance, but I just cannot stand the Black Eyed Peas. Yes, their music is catchy, sure they have some good dance songs... but I cannot dance. I find their music to be annoying and over done. Not to mention they are ridiculous. Fergie, will.i.am, Taboo and whatever the other ones name is drive me nuts as artists. Actually, I would not even call them artists, which implies that they have talent and sing songs that mean something. I do not understand how people could like them. They are so awful. Case in point: The Super Bowl halftime show. I was actually in physical pain as they made their way through what seemed to be the longest halftime show in Super Bowl history. You would think a group as popular as The Black Eyed Peas would have at least one person that could actually sing without being auto tuned to the point of decency. But nope! I really just do not understand what kind of people would actually like the over produced non-sense that they call music. What I truly hate the most is that the songs have no meaning. They do not make me feel anything as they play loudly over the speakers at work or in the car. All of the songs are either about partying or dancing or the self-objectification of women. Why would people who consider themselves artists put no feeling into their art form?

Of course I'm not the only person on the planet who hates the Peas. I'm also not the only person who thinks their music is as shallow as a kiddie pool. In 2011, Dan Weiss wrote about

why people hate the Black Eyed Peas. Weiss states, "People hate the Peas not because of their lack of realism or accountability, but because their lyrics don't even pretend to carry heft or lead listeners toward anything but a big, unspecific party". He also mentions "their lack of specificity (some would say substance)". Basically, they do not sing about anything but drinking and dancing on the dance floor. So why do so many people love them? How have they become one of the biggest Hip Hop acts of all time? Why have they performed at so many major events like the Super Bowl with what seems to be a lack of talent? So like any person from my generation would do, I went to Google and asked why the Black Eyed Peas are so popular and was interested in what I got back as results. They have sponsors and endorsements with companies like Apple, Samsung, Pepsi and Bacardi. In this paper I'm going to look at the Black Eyed Peas' popularity and success through a commercial lens. Do people love them because they are associated with things that we use everyday?

The first step I took was to look into the Super Bowl performance and see if anyone actually liked that. There was a lot of backlash from people all over the country saying that the group was awful, but I did find one article by Rob Tahnenbaum that specifically talked about the performance and his praise for the group. He talks about how diverse the group is, featuring people of Mexican, Filipino and African American ancestry which appeals to a large number of the American population. They have diversity on their side, which makes them relatable as celebrities. They are living the American dream and people love to see that. People come to America for the equal opportunities that it has to offer to them. It does not matter here what color your skin is or how much money you have, if you have a dream and work hard, you can achieve it. They give people hope of success whether they are white, black, Hispanic, gay, straight or bisexual. Tahnenbaum furthers their connection to the American people by pointing out another

fact: “The Black Eyed Peas were the right choice for the Super Bowl, which began in 1967 with a game that didn’t even sell out, and has, propelled by the American impulse towards spectacle, transformed into the single largest annual corporate event, a multi-hour marketing marathon with 111 million viewers” (Tahnenbaum). While some people (like myself) think that the group is crazy for the stunts they pull on stage and all the lights and effects, they make a spectacle. What Tahnenbaum said made me think, he has a very good point. The country is obsessed with the grand gesture. They want to see that people like them can achieve fame and fortune. The country is constantly changing and getting more advanced in every aspect, including music. People like to be able to see the progress and what we are able to accomplish. The Black Eyed Peas embody the grand gesture. They build on what people are clearly known to like. That is what makes them such a corporate presence. They have changed over the years, but each time they change, people still love them because they modify themselves to what people are into during each new album period. In 2003, their hit single *Where Is The Love* came out as the Iraq war started. The song was basically a theme for all the people that were against it or just wanted peace. Looking at the Black Eyed Peas as a business, they are great. They know how to make themselves appeal to a large number of people and (based on the number of sponsors) know what deals will be the most lucrative for them.

I honestly could not believe how many names came up in the articles about the sponsors and endorsements that the Black Eyed Peas have. Their songs have been featured in commercials for Apple, Samsung, Bacardi, Pepsi, BlackBerry, Verizon, Coors and Levis. Wall Street Journal had an article in 2010 written by Jon Jurgensen that talked about the Peas as “The most corporate band in America”. Apple used their song in 2003 to launch a new store. The song “Hey Mama” was the first song associated with the dancing silhouettes in the commercials. After

the commercials came out the song was put “into radio rotation after telephone surveys demonstrated to radio broadcasters that listeners were already familiar with the song from television”(Jurgensen). This gives reason for their popularity and the reason for all the sponsors. I think by stating this, Jurgensen makes a point that with out the deals that The Peas have, they may not have to exposure that they do. The opportunity to be in even a sixty second commercial opens them up to thousands of people. This fact made me realize that the omnipresent feeling that I have about the Black Eyed Peas is not just a case of me hating them so of course I hear them all the time, it is a strategy. It is like they are taking commercials and endorsements as their first step in a very smart plan to get their music to everyone. The more sponsors, the more they can get people listening to their music just from recognition.

Jurgensen also explains that not only do fans love The Peas, but marketers do too. Marketers love the band for the same reason that fans do: they are diverse. But there is something else in it for the corporate thinkers; “the band achieves the near-impossible in these post-Michael Jackson times—making both kids and their parents feel cool”(Jurgensen). The fact that the music really has no meaning is actually a good thing in marketing terms. They can use catchy songs that people recognize and put them on a campaign for anything; they can use one song in a soda commercial and the same on in a beer commercial without an issue. The music does not resonate with a specific age meaning that companies will not isolate a demographic by using songs like “Boom-Boom-Pow”. This thought made me realize that the fact that the Black Eyed Peas’ music means nothing is what people like about them. It makes them diverse. So in the end nothing about the band really isolates anyone. They do not sing about specific problems of a race or gender. They just sing to make people listen. Their meaningless music means that a white kid from Kansas that may have never seen diversity can listen to the same kid of music as

a man that grew up in a tough area of Chicago without being judged by people in their respective areas. I think in a way the music is a tool for unity, it is that connection between two very different people. I guess you could say that I even think their music is good meaning with out actually having meaning. They have diversity in their group members and their songs, which is what makes them so successful and popular with so many people in the country.

After all this research about how diverse and marketable the Black Eyed Peas are, it left me wondering what kind of person does not like them. What kind of person am I if I do not like the most cultural diverse and least discriminating (artistically speaking) group? For this answer, I looked back to Tahnenbaum and his article entitled *If You Hate The Black Eyed Peas, You Hate America*. He breaks down what kind of people do not like The Peas and comes to the conclusion that white people, baby boomers and hipsters are not fans of them. While I am white, I would not consider that to be my reason for hating them and I'm too young to be a baby boomer, so I guess that leaves me with hipster. I don't consider myself a hipster; I think it's stupid. Which I guess makes me a hipster; I don't really know, I'm a little fuzzy on what qualifies as a hipster.

Tahnenbaum reasons that, "Hipsters tend to hate anything that's on network TV, except for Parks & Recreation. And they particularly hate Black Eyed Peas, who are the network TV of pop groups". I'm going to go ahead and say that I'm not a hipster because I love network TV. I also like pop music, just not them. I like songs that make me feel something and like I and others mentioned, the Black Eyed Peas don't have any meaning behind their over worked music. I do not think it makes me a bad person because I do not have every album they have ever had on my iPod. I think it comes down to taste. Everyone likes something different and although The Black Eyed Peas do not isolate everyone, it does not mean that people have to love them. I think hating the Black Eyed Peas makes me a Black Eyed Peas hater, simple as that.

I will say that I have a newfound respect for the Black Eyed Peas after this paper. They find a way to reach people that come from all walks of life and manage to make a ton of money doing so. They are very successful playing huge events such as The Grammys, The Super Bowl, the Victoria Secret Fashion show and the season kick off of the Oprah Winfrey show. Their diversity, and the ability of their music to reach everyone, is impressive and admirable. However, I still don't like their music. I'm not saying that if it came on at a club I would walk out a never go back. I would probably stay and dance (badly) just like everyone else; but I'm not about to go out and buy every album they have ever made and listen to them while putting their poster up in my room. Looking at the group from a commercial view made me realize they do what they do very well and for a reason.

Works Cited

- Jurgensen, John. "Black Eyed Peas: The Most Corporate Band In America." *The Wall Street Journal*. 16 Apr. 2010. Web. 13 Sept. 2014.
- Tahnenbaum, Rob. "If You Hate The Black Eyed Peas, You Hate America." *Pop Dust*. 7 Feb. 2011. Web. 13 Sept. 2014.
- Weiss, Dan. "Here's Why People Really Hate the Black Eyed Peas-- and Why It's Unfair." *SF Weekly*. 14 July 2011. Web. 13 Sept. 2014.