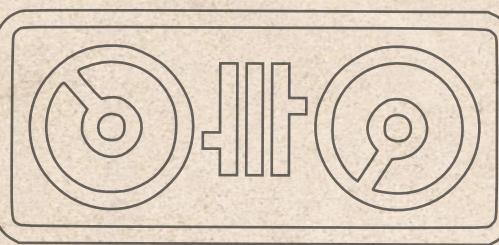


# NUJABES



A Japanese producer and DJ known for blending jazz, hip-hop, and atmospheric instrumentals, shaping the lo-fi and chill-hop genres.



## Nujabes: The growing legacy of the Godfather of Lo-fi'

A favourite for hardworking students the world over, the relaxing tones of lo-fi hip hop make it a hidden giant of the music industry. Alex Walden traces the origins of the genre through its underappreciated founding father Nujabes and gets to the bottom of the unlikely link with anime.

# MASTER MASTER

at creating

# SOULFUL ATMOSPHERIC BEATS

that

that

# TRANSCEND GENRES



One of the best things I've discovered about going to university is the complete melting pot of people you'll meet. Naturally, as an utter music nerd, I love finding out about what music people listen to. I mean seriously if you would've told me when I started that I'd be rekindling my love for Led Zeppelin and would swap listening to Kanye West for The Vacations, I'd be surprised. Despite all these new genres and artists I'm discovering from people, there's one genre that everyone listens to: lo-fi hip hop. Even when his label began to take off, Nujabes still found time to DJ.

Ah yes, lo-fi hip hop, whether you're cranking out a huge dissertation or just relaxing on your bed, it's there for you. If you're a nonstop livestream viewer or playlist organiser once again, it's there for you. Lo-fi is one of the biggest genres among young people right now yet often with new genres we tend to associate the fact that a music genre is new with the concept that it has no history yet we can easily trace. One prominent figure who played a vital role in the creation of lo-Fi is Nujabes. Despite

being critically acclaimed as "The Godfather of Lo-Fi", in the grand scheme of things I can't help but see Nujabes as the unsung hero. Despite his career and fanbase, there's just an incredible impact this man had on the music scene that I think was forgotten too easily. However, being my usual fan-boy self, I'm going to attempt to do the impossible and break it down for you.

#### A star is born

Jun Seba was born on February 7th 1974 (many hip-hop heads will recognize this as the birth date of iconic producer J Dilla as well) in Nishi Azabu, Tokyo. Growing up, Seba was a huge fan of music and began to dabble with the art of DJing. After reversing the order of his name to make his iconic stage name, Nujabes was officially born. While DJing and producing on the side is fun, it rarely brings in the big bucks in the beginning, so Nujabes decided to make a name for himself through a more corporate method and during his 20s, he opened two record stores, T Records and Guiness Records. After a few successful years at the shop, Nujabes decided he wasn't done yet and set up the record label Hydeout Productions in 1998. The label was moderately successful with its roster of local legends such as Uyama Hiroto while also acquiring overseas talent such as American artist Emancipator. Sadly, Nujabes' story ended briefly due to his unfortunate death in 2010 due to a car crash. While he is still missed today, his legacy arguably grows more every day.

#### What made Nujabes so iconic?

Samurai Champloo's refreshing blend of hip hop and samurai is a must-watch even for non-anime fans. To describe Nujabes as the godfather of lo-Fi sounds like an outrageous take to someone who doesn't know who he is, yet after learning about his work and listening to his projects, the influence is clear as day.

Nujabes' music was the definition of perfect chill music: it doesn't control you, it works with you. Around the 90s era of hip hop, the trend of sampling had completely exploded. Behind every major hit, there was a producer who had taken a slither of a soul or jazz song and had completely reworked it to the point where you couldn't even recognise the sample in some cases (producer J Dilla is very well known for this). Nujabes was no

# The Legacy of

A quiet legend  
with an everlasting echo

Rest in peace



Jun Seba, aka Nujabes, is still popular with music fans five years after his untimely death.

Nujabes was one of the contributors to the soundtrack of the anime series *Samurai Champloo*.



different to any other producer in the fact that he sampled too, but the way he would sample would be so different. Nujabes didn't want to take a piece of music and completely flip it on his head so you could try to work out all the secret little differences to the original sample. Instead, he wanted the sample to effectively take the lead on the whole song, letting his production take a back seat. The reason for this is as clear as day (and you can find it throughout the Luv(sic) Hexalogy album). It's because Nujabes is just like me and you: he appreciates music for what it is. He doesn't want to rework it and put his spin on it but he wants to show you the beauty behind the sound. It's as if he's managed to tame the music and in doing so has trained each instrument to stand out in their own specific way. You can piece together every little detail at your own pace. That's the true definition of perfect "chill" music to me: it doesn't control you, it works with you.

#### The anime connection

Although I could go on for ages about how his music has reached legendary status, it's not enough to fully support the claim that he's the "Godfather of Lo-Fi." After all, lo-fi is more than just a collection of chill beats; it's evolved into an entire cultural phenomenon today. When I mention the word "lo-fi," there's a strong chance your mind immediately goes to the iconic "lo-fi girl," the animated figure who has been endlessly studying to the backdrop of mellow tunes. It's no stretch to say that this little anime character has become the face of the lo-fi hip-hop scene. That's significant because the anime influence on lo-fi hip hop often gets overlooked when discussing the genre's development. But where did this connection come from, and why has anime played such a pivotal role in shaping the aesthetics and vibe of lo-fi music? The deeper roots of this influence are worth exploring to fully appreciate how this genre has evolved beyond just music into a broader cultural movement.

Nujabes' music has a few ties with anime culture. In 2004, Nujabes' and Shing02's song *Battlecry* premiered as the theme song for the anime series *Samurai Champloo*, and he got production credits for the outro song *beat Laments the World*. Often when hearing that an artist you like made the theme song for an anime, you think that it would be your favourite musical thing about the show. However, I find myself saying that it's the show's

fine details that truly make it a show for hip hop fans. Throughout the show, there's a plethora of lo-bap/jazz beats that can be heard when scenes escalate or fights inevitably break out, as well as this the cutaway sound to signify a change in scenery is a literal DJ scratching. It's a nice to make an abrupt change in scenery be smooth yet also keep that abrasiveness to it.

The show *Samurai Champloo* falls into the category of all-time great anime that got a US distribution on the late-night Cartoon Network channel Adult Swim. Surrounding itself with shows such as *Full Metal Alchemist* and my personal favourite of all time, *Cowboy Bebop*, it's no wonder that the show's anime/hip hop fusion completely took off and resonated with future artists of the lo-fi genre.

Nujabes never got to see his full legacy take shape. I hope he can see it from a better place. I feel like there's a sense of comfort that is similar to the nostalgia of thinking back to staying up late watching Adult Swim TV shows that is prominent in lo-fi hip hop and that is what makes it so great. It's great at capturing that comfort while also stripping away the nostalgia so you can focus purely on music instead of constantly trying to think back to a better time.

#### Nujabes' tragedy

Honestly, I can't help but feel sad when thinking about how Nujabes had so much potential. Like many artists who die young, he didn't get to see his full legacy take shape. Combined with his jazz-inspired beats and his anime soundtracks, it's clear that this man had a gift that was only just beginning to take shape during the peak of his short-lived career. However, it is good to know that what he made what became essentially the building blocks for one of the most popular genres among young people today. I just hope that he can see it from a better place.

Rest in peace, Nujabes.