

## VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Best of International Hip-Hop  
(Hip-O Records)

Like jazz and blues before it, hip-hop started as a black American art form but has found wide acceptance in the culture. But only recently did hip-hop follow its cultural ancestors to become a worldwide phenomenon.

The results are quite fascinating, if somewhat erratic.

Hip-O Records' new collection of hip-hop from all over the world is a terrific snapshot of how this music has spread across the globe, from Portugal to Israel to Japan. The 14 tracks from 14 countries in 12 languages is a wonderful curiosity and a must-have for fans of rap and hip-hop.

Rapping is not a skill that translates into every language. French — in the form of Switzerland's Sens Unik and the French IPM — and Hebrew — from Israel's Shabak Samech — sound a little odd but grow on you. Arabic's guttural fast pace forces singers into a raging and staccato delivery reminiscent of Mad Cobra's manic, reggae-inflected work.

Some of this work is breathtakingly good. The languid and haunting "Agite" by El Sindicato Argentino del Hip-Hop deserves to be a stateside hit. Mr. Mann & Pointblank, from South Africa, create an instant classic with a ferocious old-school rap over a haunting vocal version of Ludwig van Beethoven's "Für Elise."

The only flat-out flop on the disc is the only other English-language piece, "Feline Forces," by Australia's Trey & Beats-R-Us. It sounds like amateur night at the hip-hop karaoke club. Skip track 12 at all costs.

— Sean Scully

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