

## Press Release

### Two Hip-Hop Legends Break Ground on New Musical Territory At MIT See 7 Talented DJs Come Together at *MIT Sounding*

the wave function collapses, harbanger DJ Septet Concert takes place on January 16th, 2020 at 8:00pm in MIT Building W97 (345 Vassar Street, Cambridge, MA) and is open to the public. Tickets and info at [sounding.mit.edu](http://sounding.mit.edu)

*harbanger* (pronounced “harbinger”), a turntable septet created by Visiting Artists **Harry Allen**, Hip-Hop Activist & Media Assassin, and X-Ecutioners’ **DJ Rob Swift**, in a groundbreaking concert featuring **DJs Axis Pro, Bobby Bangers, Don Santos, Emoh Betta, Menace, Slipwax, and Treeman** debuting compositions by **Breakmaster Cylinder, DJ Treeman, and DJ Don Santos**.

The concert will also include performances by **Da Odd Couple (Rob Swift and Mista Sinista)**, an energetic, psychedelic collection of scratch-based beats that (head) nod to the future while embracing the genre’s roots, and **Dilly**, a British musician and DJ.



Cambridge, MA, December 18, 2019 -- Massachusetts Institute of Technology announces the *harbanger* project by veteran journalist and historian Harry Allen, DJ Rob Swift, MIT Professor Eran Egozy and MIT research scientist Phillip Tan, who have combined forces to create a rare DJ septet with DJs from the Boston area and beyond. The project culminates in a concert open

to the public where the DJ septet under the direction of legendary DJ Rob Swift performs on January 16 as part of the [MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology](#)'s *MIT Sounding* series.

### **A Turntable Orchestra**

The DJ septet *harbanger* (pronounced "harbinger") is a unique collection of seven DJs performing as a single unit. Under the direction of legendary DJ Rob Swift, each DJ will play their part, using the turntable as an instrument to bring seven or more different sounds together into one piece.

Allen is working closely with Eran Egozy, MIT Professor of the Practice in Music Technology and co-founder and CTO of Harmonix Music Systems to help bring the CAST residency to fruition.

"When I spoke to Harry, I got pretty excited about what he was trying to do because it was so crazy. I had never heard of trying to mix music with that many DJs at one time." says Egozy. "I thought MIT would be the perfect place for this kind of experiment."

### **The Process**

In order to find the right individuals for the *harbanger*, Allen and Swift evaluated several video submissions from DJs and producers before doing in person interviews. The submission process required entrants to perform 10 specific scratches and a beat juggle (manipulating two or more samples) in a one-minute routine.

The duo looked for technical acumen, hip-hop knowledge and the ability to work well within a group when narrowing down the field. Finally, after holding auditions in October at Killian Hall, amidst the locally-based Table Manners crew and others, they found DJs Axis Pro, Bobby Bangers, Don Santos, Emoh Betta, Menace, Slipwax, and Treeman; the members of *harbanger*.

### **The Media Assassin**



Harry Allen, Hip-Hop Activist & Media Assassin, came to the attention of the general public for his work with Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees Public Enemy in the late 1980's. Since then, Allen has remained on the forefront of music journalism, as a writer, radio host, and speaker.

According to Allen, MIT was his one and only choice for an institution to host an experimental DJ septet and residency. This was due to the school's fertile history supporting off-center musical genres, from mainframe computer music in the '60s to Indonesian gamelan percussion today.

"In terms of production, there is a lot of music at MIT, and that was one thing that attracted me to being there. Plus, the kind of weird types of music that can take root there," says Allen.

Allen will also teach a 6-class course on the progression and development of the DJ in hip-hop, entitled, "How DJs Invented Hip-Hop: The Rise and Rise of the Turntable in Rap Music." The classes will feature one expert guest per session who will join via Zoom. Attendees will get a rich history lesson on hip-hop culture that includes lectures on the days before hip-hop, founding fathers of the genre, battling, the future of DJing, and more.

Allen sees the course as an opportunity for a two-way exchange. "I'm not going there to tell them something that they don't know. More to share the story as I see it and then to collaborate with them in this process of building knowledge," he says.

**Master Instructor Rob Swift**



DJ Rob Swift is a world-renowned turntablist who has released a litany of solo projects, and has worked with artists ranging from Herbie Hancock to the Blue Man Group. Swift began DJing at the age of 12 under the tutelage of his older brother and has racked up many accolades and accomplishments over his storied career.

There are a number of teaching DJs around the world, but not many who are experienced behind the turntables and the podium, which is what made him perfect to conduct *harbanger*. “Rob’s reputation is so high as a DJ, combined with his work as a professor, that I couldn’t think of another DJ who could do this,” says Allen.

Swift began teaching at the New School for Liberal Arts in New York City in 2014. He currently teaches DJ Skills & Styles course. A few of Swift’s students have advanced to such a proficient level that he has enlisted them to a top tier class that he has dubbed the Brolic Army. Brolic Army is an annual online DJ battle that was launched in 2017. It exclusively features Swift’s students that have taken his class whether in person or via Skype.

### **From Burned Out Buildings to Billions**

Swift will be bringing his unique teaching skills to MIT as part of the *MIT Sounding* program, where he will teach students the six-basic hip-hop scratches over the two-week period. The class will also give students the opportunity to gain historical context of the DJ’s importance in hip-hop.

“The main thing I want everyone to take with them is the idea that this art form is not the kind of art that has any sort of formal foundation,” says Swift. “I’m teaching techniques that were literally

created from rubble. It's not like any of these pioneers had lessons in music, it's not like they studied Bach or Beethoven, but yet through being resourceful, intuitive, and creative, they developed ways of manipulating the turntable that didn't exist before them."

### **Back To The Future**

Although hip-hop has not been at the forefront of MIT Sounding, DJing is not foreign to MIT students. Former student and current Research Scientist Philip Tan and the MIT Dance Mix Coalition were a major part of that history and he is happy to see the spotlight on the artform return to campus.

"We've always had faculty who were really into remix culture, hip-hop dance, and various forms of contemporary music," says Tan "Some of those courses haven't been run since I was an undergrad. It's about time that these course offerings came back."

Given his history as a DJ on campus, Tan is acting as a contributor to the residency and helping bridge the gap between the vinyl foundation that he and CAST visiting artist Rob Swift grew up with and the digital technology that most DJs on campus use today.

"I've learned a lot from watching Rob's videos, so when I heard he was going to be on campus, I said 'this is going to be awesome,'" says Tan.

### **The Next Level**

Eran Egozy feels that hip-hop and DJing are underrepresented at MIT. With any success, that will be a thing of the past.

"I hope that this [CAST artist residency] awakens a dormant interest that I believe exists at MIT," says Egozy. "*harbanger* will bring together members of the MIT community who have a deep interest in hip-hop and DJ culture, and then open new avenues of exploration in the future"

### ***the wave function collapses, harbanger DJ Septet Concert***

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MIT Building W97 (345 Vassar Street, Cambridge, MA)  
Open to the public

Info and tickets at [sounding.mit.edu](https://sounding.mit.edu)

**Concert tickets** <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-wave-function-collapses-tickets-86596212603>

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This performance is part of the 2019–20 *MIT Sounding* series, an annual concert series curated by Evan Ziporyn, faculty director of CAST and professor of Music and Theater Arts, and presented by the [MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology \(CAST\)](#).

### **Class info (for MIT students)**

How DJs Invented Hip-Hop: The Rise and Rise of Turntables in Rap Music

January 6–9, 13 & 14, 2020 (6 sessions)

A look at the origin of the hip-hop DJ, their effect on culture and the genre, and how, despite setbacks, DJs could continue to invent hip-hop’s future. Led by Harry Allen, Hip-Hop Activist & Media Assassin.

How to Scratch: Six Techniques in Six Days

January 6–9, 13 & 14, 2020

An introduction to scratching with master instructor DJ Rob Swift.

DJ History and Technology

January 10, 17, 24 & 31, 2020 (4 sessions)

Philip Tan reviews the evolution of music, technologies, and practices of the modern dancefloor DJ.

### **ABOUT THE MIT CENTER FOR ART, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

A major cross-school initiative, the [MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology \(CAST\)](#) creates new opportunities for art, science and technology to thrive as interrelated, mutually informing modes of exploration, knowledge and discovery. CAST’s multidisciplinary platform presents performing and visual arts programs, supports research projects for artists working with science and engineering labs, and sponsors symposia, classes, workshops, design studios, lectures and publications. The Center is funded in part by a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Evan Ziporyn is the Faculty Director and Leila W. Kinney is the Executive Director.

Since its inception in 2012, CAST has been the catalyst for more than 150 artist residencies and collaborative projects with MIT faculty and students, including numerous cross-disciplinary courses, workshops, concert series, multimedia projects, lectures and symposia. The visiting artists program

is a cornerstone of CAST's activities, which encourages cross-fertilization among disciplines and intensive interaction with MIT's faculty and students. More info at <https://arts.mit.edu/cast/> .

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Image: courtesy DJ Rob Swift