

# Flip top – college essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

MANILA, Philippines – Someone once asked Julius and I if we were finally calling each other boyfriend and girlfriend. Julius knew that I didn't want to be called a girlfriend (even if I totally was) because the title came with so much pressure. He saved me the panic attack and answered sarcastically, "We don't believe in labels; we're indie." Remember when indie simply meant doing it yourself? Now indie music no longer means that an artist isn't good enough to be signed. Instead, it's "too good" to be played on the radio or to be shared with everyone else.

Maybe I've been to one too many gigs feeling judging eyes on me or maybe I'm just a self-absorbed newbie who feels out of place at times. Either way, I feel indie rock is getting a little overplayed. Not that too much rock music is bad but a breather from it can be good, too. Fortunately, Manila's indie hip-hop scene is "straight blowin' up." When Julius asked me if I wanted to watch a rap battle, I thought he meant one of the videos he usually watches online. Imagine my horror when he explained it was a local rap battle league, the only Filipino one.

The first FlipTop Battle was held at the start of the year. I was surprised to see so many people at the event since the only marketing they did was an online poster. FlipTop has English and Filipino conferences and contrary to what most think rap battles should be, the battles aren't strictly Freestyle. Emcees are encouraged to do research on their opponents and pre-write their rhymes. Of course it's more impressive when one refutes the other's attacks on the spot but it's also about the style and the word they choose which are emphasized by the lack of beat to ride on— every battle is a capella.

The brains behind the FlipTop Battle League is 22 year-old Aric Yuson. " With all sorts of clutter in the hip-hop world, people will hear one emcee/group and think that that's all there is to (it)," he says about the current state of hip-hop, " I admittedly don't know everything about hip-hop. Even when I'm 60 I'm sure I'll unearth some really sick emcee from around 1992 and still have my mind blown away. What's important is to never stop searching, never stop learning, and to never stop wanting and trying to improve or learn more.

I think that would also be the proper attitude involving anything in life, actually. " Aric has always been a fan of the battling aspect of hip-hop and watches different battle leagues online such as America's Grind Time Now and Canada's King of The Dot. He wanted to apply it to Philippine culture and has been successful in doing so. " As for rap or emcee battles, I enjoy the spontaneity, competition, and of course, the relatively twisted humor employed in degrading your opponent" Aric shares.

The facet is entertaining in itself, but ultimately I enjoy how concepts are formed and then articulated in battle verse. Sometimes, it's not so much the offensive one-upmanship of the rhymes as much as it is the degree of cleverness needed in formulating a line. " We, including Aric, were all surprised at the turnout of the first event. So many groups were outside the venue, holding practice battles before they went inside. The crowd grows larger every time to the point of venues not being able to accommodate everyone. The (insults), besides being every Filipino male's pastime throughout grade school, high school, and a bit in college, probably appeals to Filipinos with non-confrontational mindsets," Aric explains. I may be wrong

on this one but I can imagine how people enjoy watching and admiring things that they can't do. So if the mind-state is along the lines of ' Dang, I couldn't ever think of insulting someone like that face-to-face, much less in rhyme form,' then they'd probably be amazed at how emcees seem to be able to keep their composure before, during and after the battle.

Of course, the battle emcees all know that, whatever they say, it's merely for the sake of the battle and that they shouldn't hold anything against their opponent. Unless it's a grudge match, then that's an entirely different thing. " One thing FlipTop aims to do is to " educate the masses both on a hip-hop-cultural level and on a commonsensical level," Aric says. I ask him what he sees in store for FlipTop. " All in all, complete advancement for hip-hop as we hope to get more acts to perform here and there. Aric is the son of well-respected writer Alfred Yuson and when I ask him what his father thinks of FlipTop he laughs and says, " I don't think he's ever watched it and he's probably not aware of it in its entirety. " If only he knew how his son is bringing together a new breed of wordsmiths and calling attention to what I thought was a dying culture in the Philippines. I used to think indie music had a certain sound until recently. As long as you still have an independent mind, you could call yourself indie.

Although I don't see why you should even bother calling yourself that since no one cares about labels anymore. It is what it is — the same with my relationship; I've gotten past the fear of being labeled a girlfriend and all the things that come with it because nothing's changed, really. Independent artists keep progressing because individuals love them enough to lend their support. The official YouTube channel of FlipTop Battles currently has 11

million hits in just a span of four months — I guess that shows how much this league is loved.