

Hamilton's My Shot is a Perfect Rap Song

By Noah Weinberg

As revolutionary as its titular character, Lin Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton* took pop culture by storm in the mid-2010s. The near-flawless stage show pioneered theatre, not only for centering itself around a founding father but also by doing so through the prism of hip-hop. *Hamilton* is hip-hop to its core, filled with dazzlingly rapped verses embedded with numerous references to the likes of Notorious B.I.G., Ja Rule, and Grandmaster Flash. *Hamilton* isn't just a groundbreaking show filled with hit after hit, but the musical's third track, "My Shot," makes a compelling case as a "perfect" rap song.

The play begins with the song "Alexander Hamilton," a hip-hop meets show tunes exposition-filled odyssey. The following track, "Aaron Burr, Sir," finds Hamilton grabbing a cold one with his boys: Aaron Burr, John Laurens, Hercules Mulligan, and Marquis de Lafayette. Originating from drastically different backgrounds, Hamilton's pals trade '80s styled, simplistic schoolyard rhymes with banal rapper bravado. Not only does "Aaron Burr, Sir" provide the necessary context of the colonists' motivations, but the song directly juxtaposes with "My Shot," a five-minute-plus-long display of Hamilton's lyrical dexterity.

"My Shot" is Hamilton's search for acceptance, his search for a group, and an idea to believe in. Alexander knows life's hardships all too well, having lost his mother to illness and his father to abandonment. He's acutely aware that this colonial uprising is his one "shot" to make a name for himself. Seriously, what's more hip-hop than that? "My Shot's" opportunity-seizing qualities are eerily reminiscent of Eminem's "Lose Yourself." However, instead of winning a rap battle at the end of *8 Mile*, Hamilton has to defeat the British Empire.

The most significant element of "My Shot's" genius comes from Alexander Hamilton's impeccable rhyme scheme. In contrast with "Aaron Burr Sir's" elementary AABBC pattern, "My Shot" conveys Hamilton's energized and borderline arrogant personality through complex, internally woven rhymes. Take an excerpt from Hamilton's opening verse as an example of this nuanced penmanship:

"I'mma get scholarship to King's College
I probably shouldn't brag, but dag, I amaze and astonish
The problem is I got a lot of brains, but no polish
I gotta holler just to be heard
With every word I drop knowledge"

This immaculate lyrical display should be the stuff of hip-hop legend, but because "My Shot" is within a historical musical, it's viewed as fatuous and corny. When asked why it took a whole year to write "My Shot," composer Lin Manuel Miranda explained to both MSNBC and 60 Minutes:

"Here comes Hamilton, and it's rhyming six lines on a line. It's insane, polysyllabic, internal assonance... He needed to be from the future, just this world-beating intellect, (he) needed to be unimpeachable... This is the song where Hamilton comes into the room and blows everyone away with the strength of his oratory. So every couplet has to be amazing."

“My Shot’s” brilliance isn’t just exhibited through magnificent writing; in fact, the record’s genius also presents itself in other ways. The song title’s ironic nature foreshadows Hamilton’s premature demise (spoiler alert: Aaron Burr shoots and kills Hamilton in an infamous duel). In addition, there’s “My Shot’s” ascending chord progression from G minor to E flat major, which sonically indicates to the listener that Hamilton and the colonists need to “rise up” in search of independence. Broadway show tunes might not be your cup of tea (Revolutionary War pun intended). However, the calculated wordplay, inventive flows, and hair-raising live instrumentation make it undeniable to dismiss “My Shot’s” argument as a flawless hip-hop song.