

THE ROOTS HISTORY

1987. Philadelphia High School for the Creative and Performing Arts, second day of school. A student named Ahmir Thompson walks into the principal's office seeking a lunch pass. At the same time, a freshman named Tariq Trotter stumbles in, gripped by school guards who caught him engaging in %extracurricular+ activities with a ballerina in the ladies bathroom.

Luckily, Thompson has designs larger than lunch, and Trotter's game is wider than women. Thompson is a jazz drummer and Trotter is an MC, and decides to create music together. They can't afford turntables, microphones, or DJ equipment. But then again, they are secretly glad about their dollar deficiency--their collaborations wouldn't have that something-from-nothing spirit that built hip-hop and rock. So, Trotter rhymes over Thompson's rented drum kit. Eventually, they call themselves the Square Roots, and Thompson adopts the name Questlove and Trotter takes on Black Thought.

1989. Valentine's Day. The Square Roots debut their first show, facing off against classmates Boyz II Men. Questlove now looks back and asserts that the R&B group cheated, doing a New Edition routine complete with matching gear and glitter in their hands. The Square Roots are upstaged by the glamour and glitz. It would become a recurring theme.

South Street, Philadelphia. If you're not familiar with it, think of Manhattan's Greenwich Village or San Francisco's Haight Ashbury. Bohemia and art so democratic it is literally on the street. This is where Questlove and Black Thought perform on corners using buckets, pans and pots for percussion. Even today, The Roots' live show exposes their rigorous training ground, rocking it despite hecklers, police, thrown objects, competing artists. Club owners take note, and offer them indoor shows.

1991. Black Thought attends Millersville University, outside of Philadelphia. In between sitting in a class dreaming about 50,000 fans up in the stands screaming out, he meets fellow student and rapper Malik B. Bassist Leonard "Hub" Hubbard also joins the band and they become The Roots. Keyboardist Scott Storch rounds out the sound.

1993. The Roots proceed to Germany for a concert and industriously decide to record an album to sell at live shows. Indie label Remedy Records releases it; called *Organix*. As part of their European excursion, they all cram in a London flat.

1995. The Roots graduate to Geffen, or what Black Thought called it, %sharecropping+, and release the album *Do You Want More?!!!!?* At the height of the industry's over sampling phase, this album includes none. Instead, they rely on new group member human beatbox Rahzel the Godfather of Noyze as well as guest jazz artists Joshua Roseman, saxophonist Steve Coleman and vocalist Cassandra Wilson. %Proceed+ and

"Silent Treatment" become hits. The Roots live show gets further exposure on the second stage at Lollapalooza and the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland, originally made essential by Miles Davis and Marvin Gaye.

1996. Quickly reloading after their major label debut, The Roots release *Illadelph Halflife*, starring the popular single "What They Do," whose music video is hailed as one of the most eloquent and innovative of all time. The Roots renaissance begins. Keyboardist Kamal Gray and human turntablist Scratch become members of the band.

1999. Commercially, things come together with the release of *Things Fall Apart*. The album soars close to platinum, selling 900,000 copies, and included the Grammy-winning hit single "You Got Me," featuring Eve and Erykah Badu, written by Jill Scott.

Even as they are excelling in the stores, The Roots showcase their strength on stage with the double concert album *The Roots Come Alive*.

At the same time that their commercial base expands, they create one for other people. Along with the Jazzyfatnastees and Jaguar Wright, they organize the musical salon Black Lily which gives Beanie Sigel, Bilal and Musiq their first shine.

2000. The Roots win the Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group Grammy for "You Got Me" and back up Jay-Z for his MTV *Unplugged* special.

2001. The Roots support Moby on his Area One Tour.

2002. The Roots release their sixth album *Phrenology*. "Black Thoughts" lyrics are their most personal to date. The 10-minute plus "Water" anchors the album. It's a message to now-former group member Malik B. about his descent into drugs and is the luxuriating and ambitious type of song not heard since Issac Hayes dropped sitcom-long compositions. Amiri Baraka, Nelly Furtado and Cody Chestnut co-star, and for the first time added punk and 80s R&B influenced guitarist Ben Kenney to the mix to hone a rock edge. Kenney goes on to play with Incubus. *Rolling Stone* proclaims that with *Phrenology*, The Roots created a "blueprint for twenty-first-century pop music."

2003. The Roots attend the Grammys, in honor of their nominated album *Phrenology* and to back up Eminem's performance. Having completed several years of the Okayplayer tour and Questlove having produced for Da Angelo, Christina Aguilera, Justin Timberlake, Macy Gray and Joss Stone, The Roots begin work on their seventh album. Harkening back to the golden era of jazz and their method of recording The Roots' first album, Questlove, Black Thought, Hub and Kamal create their latest opus through a series of jam sessions with artists that fortuitously pass through Philadelphia. The exchange of ideas, long sessions and loose vibe create unexpected results. Guest musicians . Brooklyn-based guitarist Captain Kirk (Kirk Douglas) and percussionist Frank Knuckles -- collaborate as well. The band replay jam session tapes and develop songs from the cells within.

2004. The jam sessions gain momentum and reach, well, a tipping point. Finally, there is enough material for an album, but not too much. Questlove, citing that his favorite albums are under 35 minutes, limits the opus to 11 tracks. The band names it *The Tipping Point*, based on the Malcolm Gladwell book, expecting the sum of their good work since 1987 to finally push them to their own epidemic of success. Scott Storch returns from producing songs for Dr. Dre, Christina Aguilera and Beyonce to orchestrate the electronic first single "Don't Say Nuthin.'" The chorus defies the rules of rhyme-along hooks: it's largely mumbled and inaudible. Black Thought assumes multiple roles in the video, executive, old man, kid rhyming in the street, representing the myriad influences on the album as a whole. The album features Jean Grae, Martin Luther, Devin the Dude and Dave Chappelle in an appearance on "In Love with (The Mic)" and an homage to Sly and the Family Stone in a virtual duet on "Everybody Is a Star."

2006. After a two year break the Roots get serious and release, 'Game Theory' filled with 14 hard hitting tracks that express their views on the state of the world. 'Game Theory' is The Roots' most thought-provoking, incitive album since their 1999 breakthrough 'Things Fall Apart' and will be the group's debut for Def Jam Records, home to the world's premiere Hip-Hop artists.

"There was too much going on that we couldn't just sit back and not speak on it," says lyricist Black Thought. Drummer Questlove describes the album as "very mature, serious and very dark."

The band addresses everything from their uneasiness about society on, "It Don't Feel Right," to troops at war on "False Media" and government monitoring on "New World." The band also honors their fallen friend and producer James Yancey a/k/a J-Dilla whose death from kidney failure in February devastated the Hip-Hop world. All tracks are wrapped around hard hitting beats and murky grooves deploying samples from Sly Stone, the Ohio Players and the Jackson 5 among others.

2006 and on. This period may be more important than the rest, because if you really understand The Roots, you'll know they are as much about what they have done as what they haven't. The brilliance of The Roots is not that they are real musicians or that they make insightful literary references in their album titles, but the shifts they constantly make, which make them analogous to time--always moving. It's the list of what the band has yet to explore that Questlove creates and crosses off while The Roots record an album (speed metal, electronica, drum and bass, Stones-style rock--done, done, etc.). The real secret in watching The Roots progress is in what you think they will do vs. what they do. It's the gap, the space between things that they bridge--tried/not tried, expected/unexpected--like the silence between beats which makes music.