

## The History of Rock Music: 1995-2001

Drum'n'bass, trip-hop, glitch music

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### Hip-hop Music

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(These are excerpts from my book ["A History of Rock and Dance Music"](#))

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#### *Hip-hop becomes mainstream, 1995-2000*

**Pre-Life Crisis** (1995) by Nashville's rapper, multi-instrumentalist and producer [Count Bass D](#) (Dwight Farrell) was the first rap album to feature all live instruments.

New Orleans's [Master P](#) (Percy Miller) was the leading entrepreneur of unadulterated gangsta-rap. He turned it into the hip-hop equivalent of a serial show, with releases being manufactured according to Master P's script at his studios by a crew of producers. His own albums **Ice Cream Man** (1996) and **Ghetto D** (1997) were the ultimate stereotypes of the genre. In 1998, his musical empire had six albums in the Top-100 charts.

Atlanta's producer Jonathan "[Lil Jon](#)" Smith and his East Side Boyz coined a fusion of hip-hop and synth-pop called "crunk", from the title of their debut, **Get Crunk Who U Wit** (1996).

The first star of East Coast's Latino rap was Christopher "[Big Punisher](#)" Rios, a second-generation Puertorican of New York who died of a heart attack shortly after climbing the charts with **Capital Punishment** (1998).

The British still had a difficult relationship with hip-hop culture. [Roots Manuva](#) (Rodney Smith) was a true rapper, as the oneiric production of **Brand New Second Hand** (1999) owed to drum'n'bass and trip-hop, and his Jamaican roots crept out on **Run Come Save Me** (2001), that was also unusual for its confessional content.

In 1996 two rap singles reached the #1 spot in the pop charts. But also in the same year the Bay Area's Tupac Shakur/ 2Pac and (a few months later) The Notorious B.I.G. were murdered, two events that highlighted the violence inherent in the genre and in the industry.

A brief commercial fad was the opulent, or "jiggy", style served by producer Sean "Puffy" Combs on his own **No Way Out** (1997), credited to [Puff Daddy](#), and on **Money Power & Respect** (1998) by rap trio [LOX](#).

Whether it was a female response to gangsta-rap or a reaction to the new teenage idols, female rappers stepped up to the crude vocabulary of the men: New York's Kimberly "[Lil' Kim](#)" Jones, with **Hard Core** (1996), Philadelphia's [Eve Jihan Jeffers](#), with **Let There Be Eve** (1999), Chicago's Shawntae "[Da Brat](#)" Harris, the first female rapper ever to score platinum with **Funkdafied** (1994), produced by Jermaine Dupri, and Miami's "[Trina](#)" (Katrina Laverne Taylor), with **Da Baddest Bitch** (2000), were representative of this raunch, aggressive, obscene, materialist, vulgar and profane tone.

In the second half of the decade, hip-hop artists became more conscious of the essence of hip-hop: it's the process, not the structure that makes a song a hip-hop song. Its process is a process of deconstruction, and can be applied to just about anything that has ever been recorded. The new awareness in the process resulted in a new awareness of the importance of sampling. The role of the sampling device in transforming both the sampled and the recipient material became more and more obvious to a generation of post-Malcom X African-Americans who, politically speaking, had been raised to challenge and transform stereotypes. Hip-hop artists became semiotic artists, artists who employed sonic icons to create a fantastic universe grounded in the real universe. The same process led to a rediscovery of melody (even pop crooning) and then to a rediscovery of live instruments, whose warm and humane sound linked back to the rural roots of hip-hop's urban African-Americans. The metamorphosis of hip-hop was also due to its own commercial success, which, de facto, removed it from the streets and moved it to the much more sophisticated lifestyle of Beverly Hills villas and Manhattan high-rise condos.

The obvious weakness of the entire hip-hop movement was in the lyrics, which were mostly naive, stereotyped, clumsy; and, in fact, did not age well.

### ***Sophisticated hip-hop***

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The "sophisticated" age of hip-hop can be made to start with the [Fugees](#) (1), a trio from New Jersey (Lauryn Hill, Prakazrel "Pras" Michel, Wyclef "Clef" Jean) whose **The Score** (1996) fused hip-hop with jazz, rhythm'n'blues and reggae. Even more sophisticated was [Wyclef Jean](#) (1)'s first solo project, **The Carnival** (1997), a virtual tour of the black world, from Cuba to New Orleans to Jamaica to Africa, boasting eccentric arrangements.

Shawn "[Jay-Z](#)" Carter (1), the most commercially successful hip-hop artist of the era, epitomized the state of the art, from the gangsta-rap landmark **Reasonable Doubt** (1996) to the eclectic double album **The Blueprint 2 - The Gift & the Curse** (2002), mainly produced by Kanye West, to the post-modern concept **American Gangster** (2007).

New York rap was also resurrected by the success of Earl "[DMX](#)" Simmons' **It's Dark and Hell Is Hot** (1997).

Los Angeles' trio [Abstract Tribe Unique](#) offered a lyrical blend of soul and jazz on **Mood Pieces** (1998).

Ditto for Philadelphia-born [Bahamadia](#) (Antonia Reed), whose **Kollage** (1996) was a smooth, laid-back exercise in recasting the soul-jazz ballad into the context of rap music.

Chicago's hip-hop duo [All Natural](#) (rapper David "Capital D" Kelly and dj Tony "Tone B Nimble" Fields), members of the "Family Tree" posse, offered passionate raps on **No Additives No Preservatives** (1998).

At the turn of the century New York unleashed the creative geniuses of the [Antipop Consortium](#), whose **Tragic Epilogue** (2000) created a new genre ("digital hip-hop"?) by wedding rap with the new aesthetics of "glitch" music, and of Ian Bavitz, alias [Aesop Rock](#) (1), whose albums **Float** (2000) and **Bazooka Tooth** (2003) overflowed with eccentric arrangements and haunting textures. [Sensational](#) delivered nightmarish, stoned, warped, non-linear rapping over lo-fi beats on **Loaded With Power** (1997).

New York-based spoken-word artist and hip-hop producer [Mike Ladd](#) (1) was more interested in sculpting a musical background to his poetry than in beats and rhymes on **Easy Listening 4 Armageddon** (1997) and especially **Welcome to the Afterfuture** (1999).

The most significant stylistic revolution of New York rap came with [Dalek](#) (3), the project of rapper Will Brooks and producer Alap "Oktopus" Momin. The five lengthy songs of **Negro Necro Nekros** (1998) and the electronic ethnic ambient noise hodgepodes of **From Filthy Tongue of Gods and Griots** (2002) delivered a baroque psychedelic version of Public Enemy's creative chaos. Dalek thrived halfway between the neurotic and the transcendental, the same way that industrial music did in the late 1970s. **Absence** (2004) was explosive like shrapnel, dense like a lava stream and, still, elegant like a peacock's tail. But this was barely hip-hop at all. It was just layers of sounds and noises.

### ***Instrumental hip-hop, 1995-2000***

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DJ Shadow's instrumental, sample-based hip-hop music was represented in Britain by [Herbalizer](#), i.e. disc-jockeys Jake Wherry and Ollie "Teeba" Trattles, whose most daring experiment was **Very Mercenary** (1999).

San Francisco-based disc-jockey and virtuoso of the mixing board [Dan "the Automator" Nakamura](#) (1) sculpted Dr Octagon's **Dr Octagonologist** (1995), a collaboration with rapper [Kool Keith](#) and turntablist Richard "Q-Bert" Quitevis, Handsome Boy Modeling School's **So How's Your Girl** (1999), with Prince Paul, and the science-fiction concept album **Deltron 3030** (2000), with rapper Del Tha Funkee Homosapien and turntablist Kid Koala.

Another notable album of abstract instrumental hip-hop was **Soulmates** (2000), by Los Angeles' Elvin "[Nobody](#)" Estela.

DJ Shadow also helped create a new artistic figure: the turntablist. As more and more genres adopted the turntable as an instrument, it was inevitable that "virtuosi" began to appear. Atlanta's [DJ Faust](#) (1) was first to record an all-scratching album, **Man Or Myth** (1998). While he never realized a significant record, drum'n'bass specialist [DJ Craze](#) (Nicaraguan-born Aristh Delgado) stunned the crowds of Miami with his acrobatic routines at the end of the decade.

New York's quartet of turntablists [X-Ecutioners](#) (1), featuring turntablists Robert "Swift" Aguilar and Anthony "Roc Raida" Williams, marked a nostalgic return to the era of virtuoso scratching with the elaborate performances of **X-Pressions** (1997), while [Rob Swift](#) (1)'s solo albums **Soulful Fruit** (1997) and the jazz tour de force of **The Ablast** (1999) were creating a new place in music for the technique.

The most influential dj collective of all times, [Invisibl Skratch Piklz](#), consisted of turntablists from the San Francisco Bay Area and the Sacramento area of Latino and Philipino descent: Richard "[DJ Q-Bert](#)" Quitevis (1), who also released the instrumental sci-fi concept album **Wave Twisters** (1998), "Mixmaster" Mike Schwartz, who also released **Anti-Theft Device** (1998) with producer Naut Humon (of Rhythm And Noise), Philippines-native Dave "D-Styles" Cuasito of the "Beat Junkies" crew, who debuted solo with **Phantazmagorea** (2002), a collection of songs composed entirely from scratching, Ritche "Yogafrog" Desuasido, "Mixmaster Mike" Schwartz, Jon "Shortkut" Cruz, Lou "DJ Disk" Quintanilla, etc. Starting with *Invasion of the Octopus People* (1996), this collective of scratch virtuosi developed a separate art of DJ-ing.

[Live Human](#) (1), a San Francisco-based trio led by turntablist Carlos "DJ Quest" Aguilar, played sophisticated jams and adopted a technique of live sampling that continuously reinvented their compositions during live performances. The improvised music of **Live Human Featuring DJ Quest** (1997), bridged the gap between hip-hop and jazz better than any fusion or crossover project.

Canadian turntablist [Kid Koala](#) (Eric San), a spiritual disciple of Coldcut's sound collages, downplayed his virtuoso show on **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome** (2000) with an irreverent anarchic cartoonish humour.

Jason "[DJ Logic](#)" Kibler (1) contributed to redefine the turntablist as a jazz improviser on **Project Logic** (1999) and especially **Anomaly** (2001). DJ Logic seamlessly integrated the noise of his turntable with the instruments of his jazz combo (flute, saxophone, organ, violin, organ, trumpet).

### **White rap**

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During the 1990s, white rap acts caught up with blacks. Initially, white musicians such as Beck didn't quite get the whole point of rapping. Thus, for example, [Everlast](#)'s **Whitey Ford Sings The Blues** (1998) merely used

hip-hop as a rhythmic background for his folk-style meditations. On their debut album **G. Love & Special Sauce** (1994), Philadelphia's [G. Love & Special Sauce](#), led by guitarist and vocalist Garrett Dutton, bridged vintage talking blues and contemporary rap.

Blaxpotation of rap began in earnest with the most celebrated white rapper of the era, Marshall Mathers, aka [Eminem](#) (2), whose **The Slim Shady LP** (1999) and **The Marshall Mathers LP** (2000) unleashed angry rants at the society of the USA and resonated with the masses of disaffected white kids from the suburbia.

The whole model of the "singer songwriter" was revolutionized by the advent of white rappers such as Eminem: they introduced not only the syncopated rhyming but also the brutal subjects of rap music to an audience of middle-class white kids.

One of the most influential figures at the turn of the millennium was white producer [EL-P](#), aka El Producto, born Jaime Meline in New York. He founded [Company Flow](#) (1), whose **Funcrusher Plus** (1997) and especially the instrumental **Little Johnny From The Hospital** (1999) were the most bombastic, ebullient and explosive works of the time, and crafted the soundscape of [Cannibal Ox](#) (1)'s **The Cold Vein** (2001), a project risen from the ashes of Company Flow (Vast Aire and Vordul Megilah), before releasing his first solo album, the neurotic sci-fi concept **Fantastic Damage** (2002). Throughout his work, EL-P harked back to the anthemic, ebullient and explosive mix of Public Enemy.

EL-P's influence was visible on Rjyan "[Cex](#)" Kidwell's fusion of hip-hop, pop and avantgarde electronics on **Being Ridden** (2003).

[cLOUDDEAD](#) (2), a trio of white hip-hop artists from the Oakland-based "Anticon" collective (producer David "Odd Nosdam" Madson and rappers Adam "Doseone" Drucker and Yoni "why?" Wolf), transcended the canon of hip-hop music on the six-movement **cLOUDDEAD** (2001) and **Ten** (2004). They offered hip-hop distorted through the lenses of a dystopian vision or through the nervous breakdown of an urban werewolf. The sound effects constituted the core, not just the periphery, of the music, at times even reminiscent of ambient music and industrial music. Doseone also fronted [Subtle](#) (1), a sextet featuring guitarist Jordan Dalrymple, keyboardist Dax Pierson, clarinetist Marty Dowers, cellist Alexander Kort and electronic percussionist Jeffrey "Jel" Logan. Despite the jazz-like line-up, **A New White** (2004) was devoted to progressive rap-rock fusion with a fixation for the catchy Sixties. Having mastered the technique of mixing hard beats and dense textures, Subtle interjected psychedelic, glitch, illbient, hip-hop, industrial, pop and even atonal chamber music into Doseone's frantic, demented, acrobatic rapping on the better choreographed **For Hero For Fool** (2006). Subtle's trilogy of concept albums, continued by the more melodic **Exiting Arm** (2008), chronicled the life of a rapper, Hour Hero Yes.

Tim "[Sole](#)" Holland, the main brain behind the "Anticon" collective, unfolded his erudite stream of consciousness with punk fervor over a fluctuating layer of samples and live instruments on **Bottle Of Humans** (2000) and **Selling Live Water** (2003).

Another white member of Oakland's "Anticon" posse, Brendon "[Alias](#)" Whitney (1) wed introspective lyrics and downtempo atmospheres on **The Other Side of the Looking Glass** (2002), and then moved towards noir jazz with the instrumental album **Muted** (2003), thus coining a (lush) fusion of forms: singer-songwriter of the 1970s, trip-hop of the 1990s and jazztronica of the 2000s.

Anticon also nursed the talent of frenzied rapper [Sage Francis](#) (1), Paul Franklin, the best lyricist of his generation, whose **Personal Journals** (2002), mostly produced by Sixtoo, and **A Healthy Distrust** (2005), mostly produced by Alias and Reanimator, became the classics of "emo hip-hop", his interference of political and personal discourses enhanced by a new generation of beatmakers and producers.

Canadian hip-hop producer and rapper Richard "[Buck 65](#)" Terfry was, at heart, an existential hobo whose laments relied on piano and guitar as much as on the traditional hip-hop arsenal. The 45-minute long piece **Language Arts** (1997) and the concept album **Vertex** (1999) displayed a unique art of stark storytelling and philosophizing, mixing folk into hip-hop.

The border between vocal and instrumental tracks was blurred in the wasteland sculpted by Canadian dj Robert [Sixtoo](#) Squire (2), a member of the "Anticon" collective, on the lengthy jams *The Canada Project*, off **Songs I Hate and Other People Moments** (2001), *Duration Project*, off **Duration** (2002), *The Mile-End Artbike*, off **Antagonist Survival Kit** (2003), *Storm Clouds & Silver Linings* and *Boxcutter Emporium*, off **Chewing On Glass & Other Miracle Cures** (2004). The guesting MCs are merely part of the murky, downtempo, post-industrial production, just like the samples, the electronics, the fractured beats and the live instrumentation.

Atlanta's white producer [Prefuse 73](#) (1), Scott Herren, also active as post-rocker Savath & Savalas, heralded laptop-based hip-hop with **Vocal Studies + Uprock Narratives** (2001), a tour de force of fractured, warped, incoherent stream of consciousness that mixed glitch music, deconstructed vocals and jazz patterns. Two albums later, Herren gave his project a more organic and humane face by employing a vast assortment of voices on **Surrounded By Silence** (2005).

[Northern State](#) was a trio of college-educated white female rappers from New York (Julie "Hesta Pryn" Potash, Correne "Guinea Love" Spero and Robyn "DJ Sprout" Goodmark) that rediscovered the Beastie Boys sound on **Dying In Stereo** (2002).

[Party Fun Action Committee](#), featuring Aesop Rock's producer Tony "Blockhead" Simon, penned the goofy hip-hopera **Let's Get Serious** (2003).

San Francisco's [Gold Chains](#), aka Topher LaFata, mixed rock, reggae and techno on **Gold Chains** (2001).

[Atmosphere](#), the project of Minneapolis-based rapper Sean "Slug" Daley and producer Anthony "Ant" Davis, coined an introspective "emo-rap" on

### **God Loves Ugly (2002).**

All in all, white hip-hop music was more influential on white popular music than on hip-hop proper: it grafted the production, rhythmic and rhyming techniques of black hip-hop music onto the old singer-songwriter genre (whether political, introspective or sociological). The political "discourse" of white hip-hop remained fundamentally different from the discourse of black hip-hop. The former was conditioned by the tradition of Euro-American political idealism, which, instead, was never truly part of the Afro-American discourse, which has been traditionally centered on civil rights. Ditto for analytic/existential introspection, which was never truly part of the black repertoire (the blues was a kind of atmospheric introspection, and, in any case, a community-wide introspection, an "inter-spection"). Even the most extreme cases (such as Eminem) displayed a psychoanalytic quality that was generally missing in black hip-hop. Ditto for the sociological analysis, which was more rational than antagonistic: white rappers displayed an analytic approach to refounding society as opposed to the cynicism and fatalism of black rappers. To summarize, white hip-hop and black hip-hop had different purposes and functions. Ultimately, it was a matter of human geography: the suburbs as opposed to the ghettos. White people had an "American Dream" that is still very much part of their subconscious (whether one succeeded or failed): black people's "dream" was still Martin Luther's dream, a wildly different kind of dream.

### ***R&B auteurs***

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The Fugees' vocalist [Lauryn Hill](#) (1) delivered in a versatile, booming voice the elegant and sincere allegories of **The Miseducation Of** (1998), across a broad stylistic range.

Virginia's singer-rapper-songwriter Melissa "[Missy](#)" [Elliott](#) (1) and Virginia's producer Tim "Timbaland" Mosley (members of the hip-hop production crew "Da Bassment") proved to be a lethal combination: Elliott's sultry vocals, gymnastic raps and female-centric lyrics coupled with Timbaland's stuttering, digital grooves created a mood that was simultaneously sensitive, confrontational, hedonistic, stark and futuristic on **Supa Dupa Fly** (1997). The duo veered towards a format that mixed freely intimate ballads, dancefloor tracks and angry raps on **So Addictive** (2001).

Texas-born singer-songwriter [Erykah "Badu"](#) Wright (2) revisited soul music via digital glitches and intense hip-hop, blending live instrumentation and samples in a fluent and never discordant manner, notably on **Baduizm** (1997) and **New Amerykah Part One - 4th World War** (2008).

At the turn of the century, [Kelis](#) Rogers inherited the crown of Queen Latifah and Missy Elliott with her feminist-tinged fusion of hip-hop and rhythm'n'blues on **Kaleidoscope** (1999), aggressively produced by The Neptunes (Chad Hugo and Pharrell Williams).

Missouri's laid-back pop-rapper [Nelly](#) (Cornell Haynes) became the genre's biggest seller with **Country Grammar** (2000), **Nellyville** (2002) and the double album **Sweatsuit** (2004).

Songwriter and pianist [Alicia "Keys" Cook](#) dramatically increased the level of musicianship with her **Songs in A Minor** (2001).

Outkast's [Andre 3000](#) (Benjamin) rediscovered Prince's erotic funk-soul music on **The Love Below** (2003).

This was the age of superproducers [The Neptunes](#) (Chad Hugo and Pharrell Williams) and Tim "Timbaland" Mosley, both based in Virginia Beach, both masters of the new digital technology based on the "Pro Tools" software introduced in 1991. Both owed a lot to Teddy Riley, the Harlem producer who had made Virginia Beach the Mecca of the new sound in the first place, when he opened his "Future Recording Studios" there in 1991. The Neptunes were emblematic of the cold and thin sound of the digital age (as opposed to the warm and thick sound of classic pop, soul and rock music). Both could work on just about any kind of material, as proven by their co-production of white teenage idol Justin Timberlake's **Justified** (2002).

[Timbaland](#) pioneered the technique of custom-creating the beat via digital keyboards instead of adding a break-beat to a sample. Timbaland's strategy of musical estrangement (stuttering beats in alien timbres, unstable melodies that warp the conventions of singing along) was first experimented on Aaliyah's second album **One In A Million** (1996), and even more in the single *Are You That Somebody* (1998), whose arrangement bordered on glitch music; and blossomed on Missy Elliott's **Supa Dupa Fly** (1997) and **So Addictive** (2001), albums that were canvases on which the producer laid ever more creative beat patterns. Timbaland was, in fact, the first major hip-hop producer to cross over successfully into pop, crafting two million sellers: [Nelly Furtado's Loose](#) (2006) and Justin Timberlake's second album **Future Sex/ Love Sounds** (2006), albums credited to mediocre singers that the producer turned into sonic extravaganzas.

### ***Hip-hop 2000***

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Other significant albums released at the turn of the century included: **Seven Eyes Seven Horns** (1999), by producer Phillip "[Scaramanga](#)" Collington, who worked on Kool Keith's Dr Octagon project; Walter "[Killah Priest](#)" Reed's spiritual tour de force **Heavy Mental** (1998), from New York; Curtis "[50 Cent](#)" Jackson's **Power of the Dollar** (2000), from New York, a catchy product for the masses, produced by "Trackmasters" (i.e. the duo of Jean-Claude "Poke" Olivier and Samuel "Tone" Barnes), from a former crack dealer destined to become a rap superstar (**Get Rich or Die Tryin'** in 2003 and **The Massacre** in 2005 set records of sales); the [Metabolics'](#) **M-Virus** (1999), a New York duo produced by Bimos; Christopher "[Ludacris](#)" Bridges' **Back For The First Time** (2000), from Atlanta; **Coming Forth By Day - The Book Of The Dead** (2000), by New Jersey's jazz-hop crew [Scienz of Life](#); and **Let's Get Ready** (2000),

the fifth album by New Orleans rapper [Mystikal](#), a pupil of Master P who adopted a James Brown-ish persona.

Houston-based Geto Boys' rapper Brad "[Scarface](#)" Jordan established himself as the existentialist philosopher of rap art and reached his narrative peak with **The Fix** (2002) that sounded like the punch-line on hip-hop's entire "comédie humaine".

[People Under the Stairs'](#) second album **Question in the Form of an Answer** (2000) was a collection of jams almost entirely created from funk and jazz samples, the project of Los Angeles Mike "Double K" Turner and Chris "Thes One" Portugal, bent on reappropriating the D.I.Y. aesthetics of early party-rap.

The new auteurs included: Kansas City's Aaron "[Tech N9ne](#)" Yates, with the horrorcore rap-rock fusion of **The Calm Before The Storm** (1999), **Anghellic** (2001) and **Absolute Power** (2002); and New York's Terrence "[Tes](#)" Tessora, with the apocalyptic post-industrial soundscapes of **Take Home** (2000) and **x2** (2003).

The idea of combining hip-hop and live instruments was explored in novel settings. For example, the [Dakah Hip Hop Orchestra](#), organized in 1999 in Los Angeles by saxophonist Geoff Gallegos with up to 60 players and MCs, blended hip-hop, jazz and classical music on the 12-song cycle of the **Unfinished Symphony** (2004).

The master of diction and free-form rapping was New Orleans' [Lil Wayne](#) (Dwayne Carter), who had debuted with **Tha Block Is Hot** (1999), produced by Mannie Fresh (Byron Thomas), but reinvented himself on the trilogy of **Tha Carter** (2004), **Tha Carter II** (2005) and **Tha Carter III** (2008).

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