

A Brief History of Timbaland

There was an old man named Michael Finnigan

He grew whiskers on his chin

The wind came up and blew them in again

Poor old Michael Finnigan, begin again...

*uhh (hah hah) yeah I like dat Uhh, it's the Q to tha B to tha double E spittin' lovely
And it don't stop, rocks shine through my tank top Where your bank stop?, I
deposit all of one drop (hah) Thank not, excuse me but uh I like to flow cause this
Joint knocks harder then Indica and I be off the wall like The Lox, Night box filled
with Benjamins (woo) Me and my girl Missy gettin' pissy up in Benigans, Makin'
all you other rappers begin again, like Finnigan...*

27th April, 2008. Derrick May visits Glasgow to introduce a new movie called *Hi Tech Soul*, a history of Detroit Techno roots and genesis. He is generous with his time and with the questions from the audience. The energy of the man is visible. He's irrepressible and constantly in motion. Mentally, he's still connected to the mood and landscape of the Detroit that generated his early music. At times, there are hints of a slow burning anger that never rewarded the pioneers of techno, that never even acknowledged their achievements. He stresses that he is an artist not an entertainer.

When someone asks what is he listening to today he thinks hard and finally mentions a track called 'Enfants' by Ricardo Villalobos. I hadn't heard it and so, later that evening, I begin to trawl the internet. It's an EP and it's on The Pirate Bay, so I download it. I spot a 5 cd history of Timbaland Beats and I download that as well. *Hi Tech Soul* is up there too.

But now, I'm curious about the Timbaland compilation and so I google music blogs that might tell me more. It turns out to be a mixtape, a labour of love posted by alexanderr popov on a blog called The Fly Life. Popov lists the tracks, adds a list of his own random thoughts on the selection and there is a series of comments from readers (im.pres.sive-eff.ort; oh sjit; no "All Y'all" ?...buggin' yo!...).

In its own way it's a serious work of scholarship. It may not have the expert finish of German philology (one of the comments points out that 505 and 514 are by danja, not Timbaland, for instance) but it pointedly fills in the gaps in our knowledge that German philologists are likely to ignore. This is typical of both music blogs and contemporary bootleggers. Their dedication, their obsession with musical history and their desire for completion help create a vast communal archive that resists the hierarchies of knowledge. This is not just 'history from below' as Eric Hobsbawm might see it, but scholarship from below as well.

One webpage - hip-hop-blogs.blogspot.com - dedicates itself to listing approximately 320 other sites that are devoted to the genre. The majority of these sites post a comprehensive array of old and new school hip hop, transferring rare vinyl to mp3, collecting stray singles and remixes, compiling informative mixtapes and collating the elusive biographical facts on past DJs, Mcs and producers.

Posting the entire albums as most of these sites do is, of course, illegal. But the recording industry and, indeed, the artists themselves in hip hop are in many states of mind on the exact nature of the crime here. Mixtapes have a history buried in the 1980s alongside the beginnings of hop hop culture. While indie rock and the noise/experimental scenes fetishes the memory of cassette mixtapes, rap artists have continued the tradition. Cassettes are unsentimentally abandoned and the current trend for mixtapes is built on published tracklists and torrent files that allow the download of the accompanying music.

At Mixtapetorrent.com it is currently possible to download the most recent mixtapes released by the top rap and hip hop artists and a well-stocked archive preserves their earlier offerings. These mixtapes differ though from *A Brief History of Timbaland Beats*. Alexanderr Popov's selection was inspired by a fan's enthusiasm and uploaded for the pleasure and admiration of other like-minded fans. Mixtapetorrent.com offers tapes uploaded by artists at the top of their field – Lil Wayne, Raekwon, Jay-Z, Method Man, Kanye West and 50 Cent. The 'tapes' are promotional, mainly appearing in advance of a new official album. They might include tracks from the album or play on the themes of the official release (several Jay-Z American Gangsta themed mixtapes circulated before the 'real' album). There are often blatant directions from the Mcs to check out related websites and to watch for the date on which their album's scheduled to drop. They also function though as a curious form of critique by artists on their own work and often they allow those artists a freedom not possible on the high-pressured commercial record company release. Nas, for instance, one of the most prestigious artists in the hip hop world recently found himself releasing *The Nigger Mixtape* through these sites as it was the only forum in which he could express himself as he wanted. Hiphopgalaxy.com reported the event saying:

NAS will defy his record label bosses at Def Jam when he releases THE NIGGER MIXTAPE - after he was pressured to drop the controversial word from the title of his forthcoming album.

The I Can hitmaker announced earlier this month (May08) that he will be changing the LP title from N**ger to Nas, in an effort to appease Def Jam executives' fears over the racially charged word.

However, on a forthcoming underground collaboration with fellow hip-hop star DJ Green Lantern, Nas will finally be able to use the name - and achieve his original aim of making a political statement about hypocrisy in hip-hop.

The independent mixtape will hit stores next month (Jun08), and his Def Jam release will follow on 1 July (08).

As of June 08 at least, the mixtape was available for download on blog sites and ready to welcome Barack Obama's nomination with a song called 'Black President':

Im thinkin' I can trust this brotha
But will he keep it way real?
Every innocent nigga in jail - gets out on appeal
When he wins - will he really care still?

That kind of release reasserts a genuine desire to communicate with an audience and the old intimacy of cassette mixtapes does live on in this new format in all sorts of ways. Despite their promotional functions, there is a generosity to these mixtapes that belies any marketing ploy. With anything from 15 to 25 tracks as the norm they offer substantial content. The versions and remixes they contain, as well as the guests spots by other producers or Mcs, reveal more playful aspects of the

artists' work and undercut the 'us and them' barriers that celebrity and stardom can generate between fans and musicians.

As for the issue of piracy, that recently exploded in confusion with the arrest of DJ Drama, the best know compiler of mixtapes, who was reputedly paid \$15,000-\$25,000 per tape by record companies promoting their artists. The police, working with the Recording Industry Association of America, raided his office in Atlanta, seizing 81,000 discs and pressing charges related to racketeering. Reporting on the arrest the New York Times spotlighted the dilemma when companies, copyright, marketing, fun and music making all co-exist in a legal gray zone.

Mixtapes are, by definition, unregulated: DJs don't get permission from record companies, and record companies have traditionally ignored and sometimes bankrolled mixtapes, reasoning that they serve as valuable promotional tools. And rappers have grown increasingly canny at using mixtapes to promote themselves. The career of 50 Cent has a lot to do with his mastery of the mixtape form, and now no serious rapper can afford to be absent from this market for too long.

As mixtapes evolved from a street-corner phenomenon to a cornerstone of the hip-hop industry, record companies tried to figure out ways to cash in. Mixtape D.J.'s like DJ Clue, DJ Kay Slay and others have released major-label compilations full of tracks that abide by copyright rules. But it's not easy to turn a mixtape into something you can legally sell: part of the fun is hearing rappers remake one another's songs and respond to one another's taunts; a great mixtape captures the controlled chaos that hip-hop thrives on.

By the summer of 2007 Drama had released his next mixtape, *Gangsta Grillz 16: The Streetz Been Waitin* telling MTV,

"Get it how you can get it...It's a statement for me. It's nothing more than feeding the streets. We're giving out 15-20,000 at Birthday Bash. I'm in city to city, state to state all the time. I'm doing my thing, going back to my roots — hand to hand — giving them out. If there's another way of getting it, so be it, I don't have control over that. But it's a promotional item, as all [mixtapes] are."

The mixtape controversy is an extension of an older struggle over copyright that is rooted in the history of sampling, a key element in the genesis of hip hop. From early classics such as 'Wheels of Steel' by Grandmaster Flash through to the present, this music has relied on the ability to lift, loop and recycle breaks and slivers of older recordings. As Tricia Rose puts it in *Black Noise*, 'Sampling in rap is a process of cultural literacy and intertextual reference.' In fact, as she points out, sampling is a means of writing history:

Sampled guitar and bass lines from soul and funk precursors are often recognisable or have familiar resonances. Some samples are taken from recent charted songs, making them eminently recognisable. Rap fans can recognise that Eric B & Rakim took the bass line for their cut 'Paid in Full' from Dennis Edwards 'Don't Look Any Further' a popular R&B song that topped the charts only a year earlier. In addition to the musical layering and engineering strategies involved in these soul resurrections, these samples are highlighted, functioning as a challenge to know these sounds, to make connections between the lyrical and musical texts. It affirms black musical history and locates these 'past' sounds in the 'present.'

The historical drive within sampling fulfils a genuine need. A glance at any bookshops music section demonstrates the scale of the industry that has build up around white musicians such as the Beatles, the Stones, Dylan and everyone who came after them. In contrast, most black musicians from the same period remain anonymous (who can easily name the members of the Four Tops, the Temptations,

The Impressions or perhaps even the Supremes?). Likewise descriptions of how their music was made or recorded are woefully scarce, a history now vanishing.

In *The Library at Night*, Alberto Manguel charts the reluctance to open libraries to the black population in America:

In the American South, libraries were not open to the black population until the early twentieth century. The first recorded was the Cossitt Library in Memphis, Tennessee, which agreed to provide the LeMoyne Institute, a school for black children, with a librarian and a collection of books. In the Northern states, where public libraries had opened their doors to black readers a few years earlier, the fear of treading forbidden territory was still present as late as the 1950s. The young James Baldwin remembered standing at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, admiring “the stone lions that guarded the great main building of the Public Library.” The building seemed to him so vast that he had never yet dared enter it; he was terrified of losing himself in a maze of corridors and marble steps, and never finding the books he wanted. “And then everyone,” he wrote, as if observing himself from the distance of many years, “all the white people inside, would know that he was not used to great buildings, or to so many books, and they would look at him with pity.”

Lack of access to libraries fosters illiteracy and prevents the accumulation of a history of one’s own, never mind access to the history of others.

Building an alternative history of one’s culture into music is an established means of preserving and transmitting. Irish music is littered with fiddle tunes whose titles function as a storehouse of references to a history that often couldn’t be written down. That history, as in hip hop, covered not only the great events of the past but equally, it contained tributes to small, everyday incidents.

What hip hop samples have been able to do, though, is to extract whole passages of music from a few seconds to entire elements of a song and build them into a new, complex layering of sounds. This goes beyond a history of the culture to speak about the personal history of the maker, their history of listening over years and their creation of a personal musical landscape. In a track such as 'Wheels of Steel' by Grandmaster Flash, for instance, there is a virtuoso collaging of Chic's 'Good Times', Queen's 'Another One Bites the Dust', the Sugar Hill Gang's '8th Wonder', Blondie's 'Rapture' and Spoonie Gee's 'Monster Jam'. Cutting between these sounds. The result is a new sonic landscape that carries within it a history of Flash's own listening habits, a critique of his peers and a self-portrait of his musical consciousness.

This combination of elements becomes even more pronounced with later hip hop producers. RZA, for instance, from The Wu-Tang Clan, builds samples that reflect everyday tensions on the street, quotes from old martial arts movies, and fragments of soul music. All of these are combined in a cinematic sprawl. RZA directs his own street epics, soundtracks to movies that are conjured up through the samples and raps, interior landscapes that are both part escapism and part documentary.

Digital culture enables this accumulation of personal libraries of reference. iPods encourage the curation of private memories while restoring lone songs to the place that vinyl singles once inhabited. Every mp3 is itself a sound sample and digital music technology now allows a producer to delve into the dna of any sound and extract the necessary code to add to his or her own singular library. Timbaland, for instance, has built an extensive sound library to draw on rather than collecting samples. His range of reference is as broad as that of RZA, but in terms of sheer sound rather than quotations from film or music. If he succeeds in creating a

personal world as unique as that of the Wu-Tang Clan, it's through the playfulness with which each track is assembled. Working with long-time friend Missy Elliott, in particular, it's possible to see how a shared world of playground rhymes, invented slang and private codes underpins the deep swing structures they put in place. On *Supa Dupa Fly* they make music that verges on nonsense at times, a hip hop Lewis Carroll world:

Beep, beep, beep, beep
Who got the keys to the jeep?
Vrooooooom (I got em baby)
Beep, beep, beep, beep (Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep)
Beep, beep, beep, beep
Who got the keys to the jeep? (I got em baby)
Vrooom

A Brief History of Timbaland Beats is a natural outgrowth of this playfulness as the music is transmitted through the web. The love and theft implicit in the gesture is rooted in digital technology itself and in the new forms of music making, and listening, that has evolved from it.

A Brief History of Timbaland Beats

August 10, 2007



'you... confused?'
'nah... motherfucker' – jay-z
'yeah right...'

Vol 1

01. Timbaland and Magoo - Beep Beep (4:1 8)
02. Missy Elliot - Slap! Slap! Slap! (4:05)
03. Ms. Jade - She's a Gangsta (4:34)
04. Tweet - Sexual Healing (Oops Pt.2) (4:47)
05. Aaliyah - Are You That Somebody? (4:27)
06. Ginuwine - Pony (5:21)
07. Ludacris - Phat Rabbit (4:5 8)
08. Nas Ft. Aaliyah - You Won't See Me Tonight (4:22)
09. Aaliyah - If Your Girl Only Knew (4:51)
10. Ms Jade Ft. Nelly Furtado & Timbaland - Ching Ching (4:34)
11. Timbaland - What Cha Know About This (4:31)
12. Bubba Sparxxx - Twerk a Little (4:21)
13. Timbaland - Up Jumps Da' Boogie (Remix) (4:17)
14. Snoop Dogg - Snoop Dogg (What's My Name Pt. 2) (4:03)
15. Nicole Ray Ft. Missy Elliott - Make It Hot (4:27)
16. Kelis - Running Mate (Unreleased) (3:32)
17. Slum Village Ft. Ms Jade - Disco (Timbaland Remix) (4:15)
18. Timbaland Ft. Lil' Kim, Missy Elliott, Mocha - Hit 'Em Wit' Da Hee (Remix) (4:04)

Vol 2

01. Petey Pablo Ft Timbaland - I (4:50)
02. Twista - Who Am I (4:16)
03. Jay-Z - It's Hot (4:15)
04. Missy Elliott Ft. Eminem - Busa Rhyme (5:00)
05. Missy Elliott Ft. Juvenile & B.G. - U Can't Resist (4:36)
06. Missy Elliott - Pass That Dutch (3:39)
07. Pastor Troy - Tell 'Em It's On (4:37)
08. Tweet - Call Me (2:56)
09. Genuwine - Love You Down (5:03)
10. Petey Pablo - Raise Up (4:46)
11. Missy Elliot - The Rain (4:12)
12. Aaliyah - Hot Like Fire (3:3 8)
13. Memphis Bleek Ft. Jay-Z and Missy Elliot - Is That Your Bitch (4:3 8)
14. Jadakiss Ft. Bubba Sparxxx - They Ain't Ready (2:53)
15. Missy Elliott - Let Me Fix My Weave (4:00)
16. Timbaland & Magoo - Luv 2 Luv You (Remix) (6:40)
17. Timbaland & Magoo - 15 After Da' Hour (4:10)
18. Interlude - Mr. Richard (0:50)
19. Justin Timberlake - Cry Me A River (4:50)

Vol 3

01. Jay Z - Hey Papi (4:32)
02. Missy Elliot - Lick Shots (3:32)
03. Shawna - Shake That Shit (Ft. Ludacris) (3:55)
04. Aaliyah - We Need a Resolution (4:02)
05. Jay-Z - Nigga What, Nigga Who (3:53)
06. Missy Elliott - She's A Bitch (3:24)
07. Missy Elliott - Slide (3:43)
08. Missy Elliott - Wake Up (4:07)
09. Missy Elliott - Cop That Shit (3:33)
10. Missy Elliott - Scream A.K.A. Itchin' (3:57)
11. Missy Elliott - Whatcha Gon' Do (3:15)
12. Ms. Jade - Count It Off (Ft. Jay-Z) (3:59)
13. Fabolous - Right Now & Later On (4:00)
14. Jadakiss - Nasty Girl (3:57)
15. The Lox (Ft Eve) - Ryde or Die, Bitch (4:49)
16. Aaliyah - One in a million (4:30)
17. Missy Elliot - Izzy Izzy Ahh (3:54)
18. Missy Elliot - Sock it 2 me (4:19)
19. Ms. Jade Ft. Nate Dogg - Dead Wrong (4:29)
20. Aaliyah - Love Me (3:5 8)

Vol 4

01. Aaliyah - Dont Know What To Tell Ya (5:04)
02. Brandy - Afrodisiac (3:47)
03. Justin Timberlake - Futuresex-Lovesound (4:02)
04. Ms. Jade - Jade's a Champ (4:36)
05. Llyod Banks - My House (3:37)
06. Snoop Dogg - Get A Light (Ft. Damian Marley) (3:41)
07. Jay-Z - Dirt Off Your Shoulder (4:05)
08. Liva, Pusha, Sandman, Malice, Pharrell - What's Up (4:55)
09. Young Jeezy - 3 A.M. (Ft. Timbaland) (3:56)
10. N.O.R.E. - For A Minute (Ft. Nature and John Doe) (4:13)
11. Lil Kim - The Jump Off (Ft. Mr Cheeks) (3:54)
12. Obie Trice - Bad Bitch (4:09)
13. Jay-Z - Hola' Hovito (4:32)
14. Jay-Z - Get My Shit Off (3:07)
15. Missy Elliott (Ft. Nicole & Outkast) - All N My Grill (4:31)
16. Brandy - Come as You Are (3:44)
17. Kiley Dean - Kiss Me Like That (4:12)
18. Bobby Valentino Ft. Timbaland - Anonymous (4:55)
19. Brandy - I Tried (4:45)
20. Nelly Furtado - Glow (4:02)

Vol 5

01. Clipse Ft. Re-Up Gang - Re-Up Anthem (3:57)
02. Mack 10 - Nobody (ft W.C & Timbaland) (4:46)
03. Fat Joe - Everybody Get Up (4:20)
04. Missy Elliott Ft. Nelly - Pump It Up (3:07)
05. Gemstar (Da Goldenchild) - What Yall Want Ft. J-Rock (2:50)
06. Lloyd Banks - I'm So Fly (4:00)
07. Ms Jade Bubba Timbaland - Ugly Remix (4:10)
08. Nas - You Owe Me (4:47)
09. Aaliyah - Try Again (4:45)
10. Usher - You Make Me Wanna (Timbaland remix) (4:25)
11. Boyz II Men - Cant Let Her Go (Timbaland Remix) (5:08)
12. SWV Ft. Missy and Timbaland - Can We Get Kinky Tonight (4:44)
13. John Doe Ft. Lil' Jon & Timbaland - Rollin' (4:17)
14. Trey Songz (Ft. The Game) - Wonder Woman (Timbaland Remix) (6:20)
15. Magoo Ft. Bubba Sparxxx - Lights Out (Remix) (4:43)
16. Missy Elliott - Big Spender (3:10)
17. Timbaland Ft. Bassy - Talkin Trash (2:28)
18. Floetry - Say Yes (Timbaland Remix) (4:45)
19. Aaliyah - Are You Feelin' Me (3:10)

some thoughts:

- the stretch from 'hey papi' to 'whatcha gon' do' is probably my favorite. slitherin' beats that register in the Upper Ether. so is the closin tangent on 'what cha know about this' (crazy good).

- tried not to OD on missy but it was impossible. understandably half of the Hottest (and most, ahem, Forward Reaching) went to her, during the Golden Era between 97 to 03. 'slap! slap! slap!?' 'lick shots'? 'slide'? (the most under-appreciated) good half of this is not a test!??

- are some people still talkin about danja doing the dirty work? i hope not.

- clipse come through and steamroll huge beats like 'put you on the game' and ray-j's (really now) 'unbelievable' ('re-up anthem') into real bangers.

- talking about shock value is obviously pointless, it's existence doesn't add to or detract from.

- there were obvious omissions. some had reasons. missing a couple more sparxxx for certain.

- wonder woman remix? say yes remix? big spender? don't know what to tell ya? yeah.

- jay-z's reaction when he first hears the 1-second bleep off 'dirt off your shoulder'.

(is why he had the best ear for beats. until kingdom come, anyway).

- sequencing was given care. not saying couldn't have been improved. this was a labor of love.

- kelis' 'running mate' is probably a top 10 timbaland beat (no wonder it didn't get on the album). so is 'hey papi', 'pony' and 'resolution', but you already knooo that.

- ...so is the last minute of 'hit 'em wit' da hee (remix)'. you know how you looped that shit and slapped it on a tape. 60 minutes of Funk.

Posted by alexanderr popov on The Fly Life
(<http://flylife.wordpress.com/2007/08/10/test/>)