



# DILLA TIME

**The Life and Afterlife  
of J Dilla, the Hip-Hop  
Producer Who  
Reinvented Rhythm**

**DAN CHARNAS**

With musical analysis by **JEFF PERETZ**



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*Designed by Gretchen Achilles*

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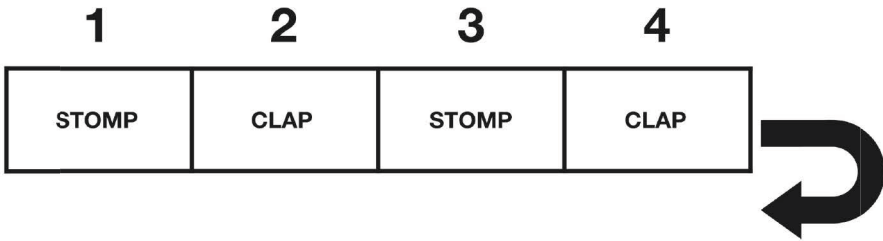
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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# 1. Wrong

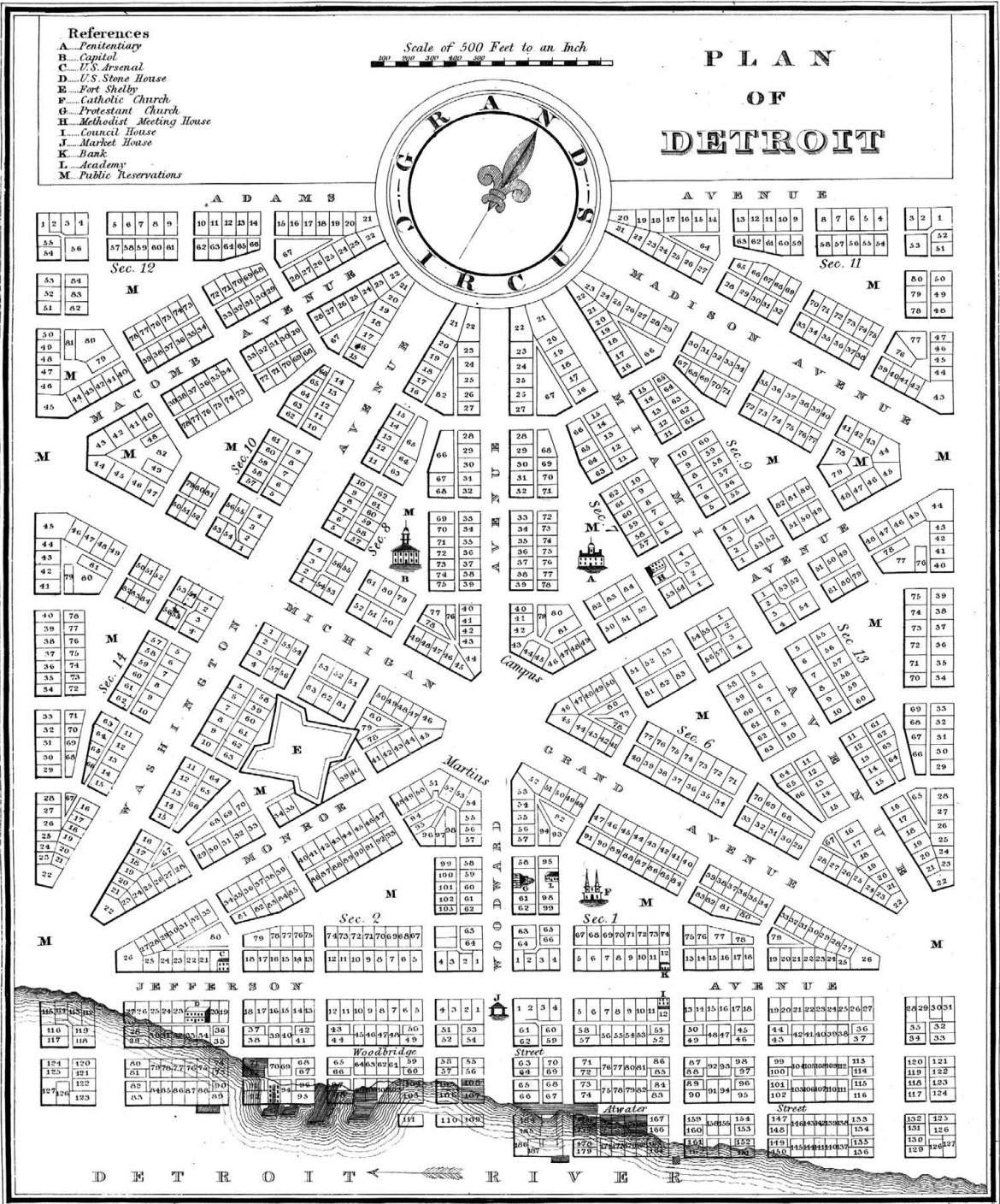
## TRY IT YOURSELF: A STEADY BEAT

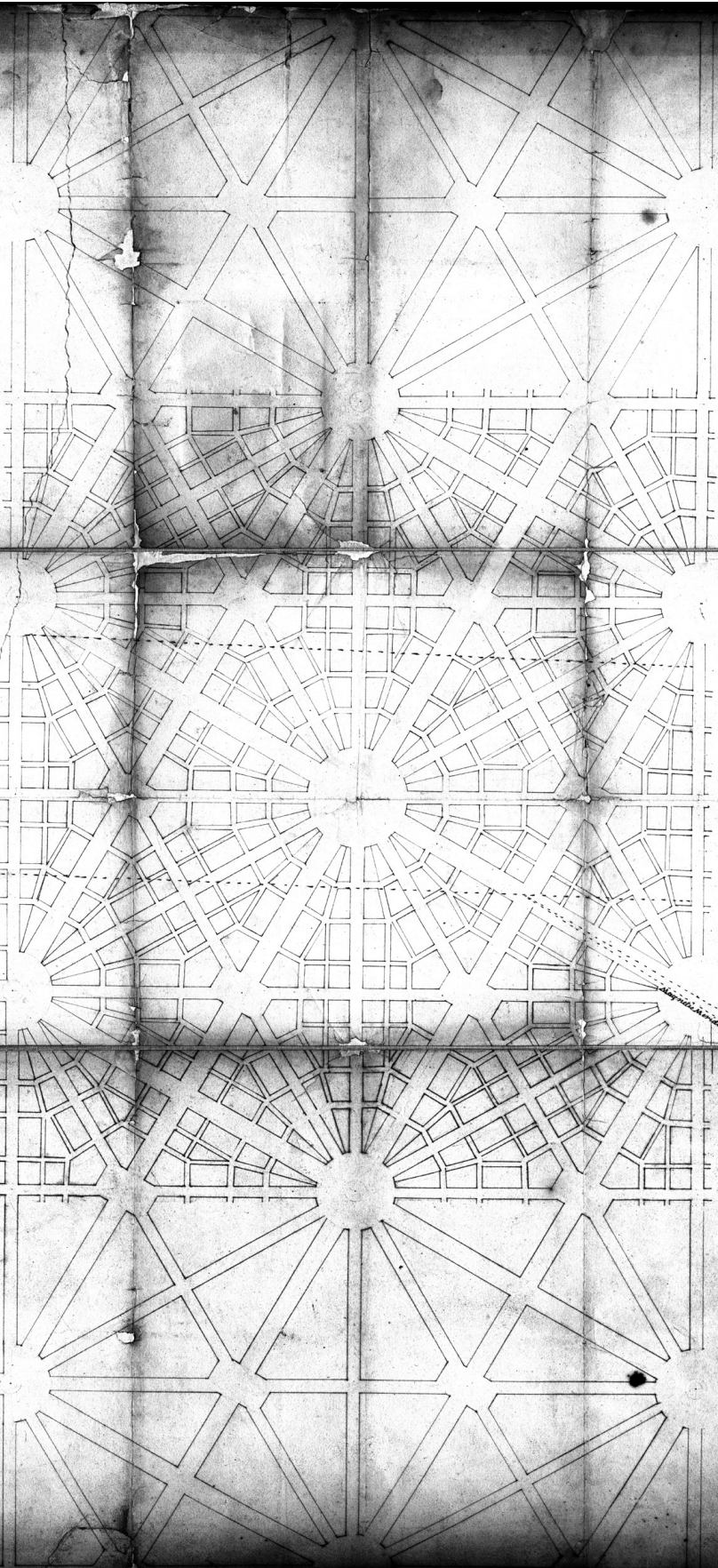
Stomp your feet and clap your hands alternately as you count to four:



# 2.

## Straight Time/Swing Time





**REMARKS**

The streets that were made and laid out  
and most are all 50 feet broad: the other  
streets that were laid out are 40 feet broad: the  
streets that were laid out are 30 feet broad:  
the public land has between the dotted lines  
reserving 50 feet wide roads of that space is  
divided by individuals

**A PLAN of the CITY of DETROIT**

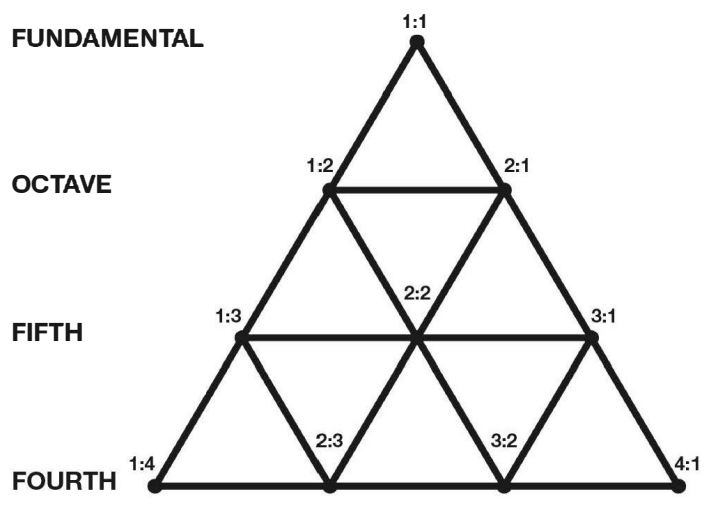
Drawn By **Abijah Hall** Surveyor of MICHIGAN January 1807

Scale of 500 feet to an inch

D E T R O I T

N I V E R





**TRY IT YOURSELF: MONORHYTHM/POLYRHYTHM**

**STEP ONE:** Tap your **LEFT** hand on your knee to a 2 count

**1            2            1            2**

LEFT	LEFT	LEFT	LEFT
------	------	------	------

**STEP TWO:** Tap your **RIGHT** hand on your knee to a 3 count

**1            2            3            1            2            3**

RIGHT	RIGHT	RIGHT	RIGHT	RIGHT	RIGHT
-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

**STEP THREE:** Now do both at the same time

**1            2            1            2**

LEFT		LEFT		LEFT		LEFT	
RIGHT	RIGHT	RIGHT	RIGHT	RIGHT	RIGHT	RIGHT	RIGHT

**1            2            3            1            2            3**

Not so easy, is it?

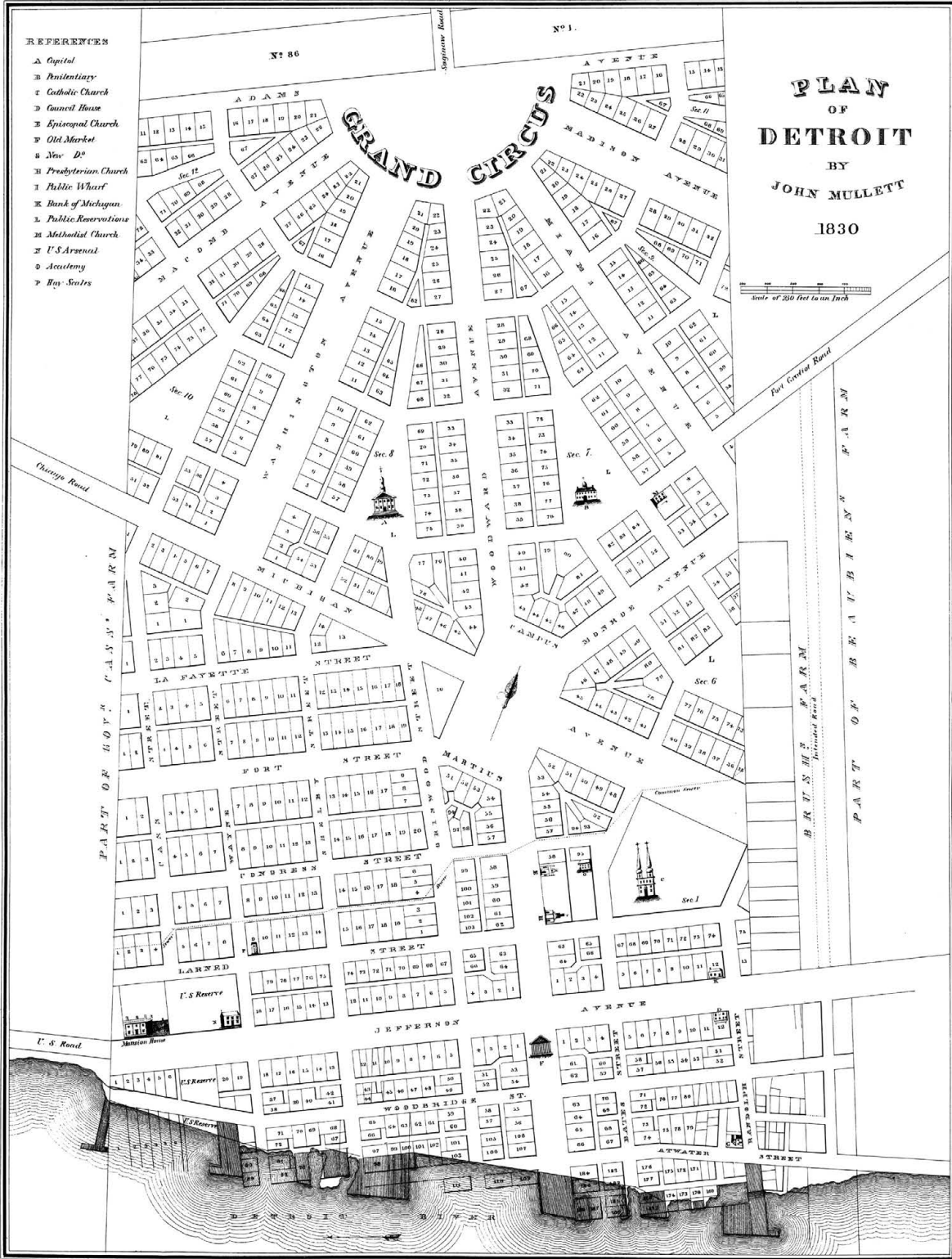


REFERENCES

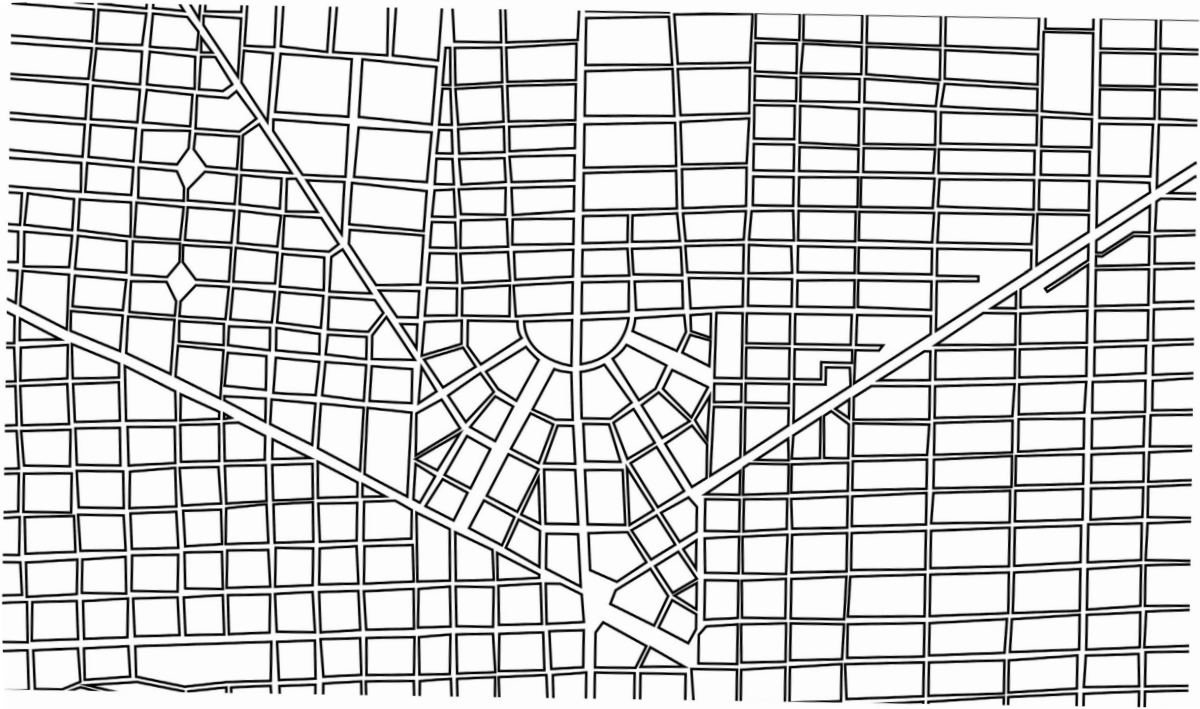
- Δ Capital
- Ⓜ Penitentiary
- Ⓢ Catholic Church
- Ⓜ Council House
- Ⓢ Episcopal Church
- Ⓢ Old Market
- Ⓢ New D<sup>o</sup>
- Ⓢ Presbyterian Church
- Ⓢ Public Wharf
- Ⓢ Bank of Michigan
- Ⓢ Public Reservations
- Ⓢ Methodist Church
- Ⓢ U.S. Arsenal
- Ⓢ Academy
- Ⓢ Hay-Stacks

**PLAN**  
OF  
**DETROIT**  
BY  
**JOHN MULLETT**  
1830

Scale of 316 feet to an Inch



# Map of Detroit



**TRY IT YOURSELF: UNSYNCOPATED vs. SYNCOPATED**

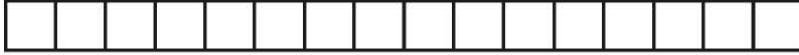
**STEP ONE: Unsyncopated beat—count out loud while stomping/clapping**

Count	1	n	2	n	3	n	4	n	1	n	2	n	3	n	4	n
CLAP					■								■			
STOMP	■		■				■		■	■	■	■			■	

**STEP TWO: Syncopated beat—count out loud while stomping/clapping**

Count	1	n	2	n	3	n	4	n	1	n	2	n	3	n	4	n
CLAP					■								■		■	
STOMP			■					■		■		■				■

In European music, time was expressed, with rare exceptions, as a straight, even pulse.\*

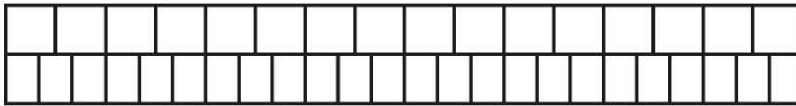


What emerged in the United States in the twentieth century was a practice of delaying the arrival of every other beat, creating an uneven, long-short-long-short pulse called *swing*.



One way to think about swing is that it's another artifact of polyrhythm.

Polyrhythm is what happens when you divide a segment of time into a pulse of twos while dividing that same amount of time into a second, simultaneous pulse of threes.

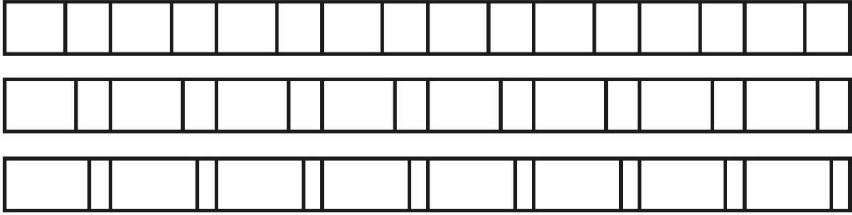


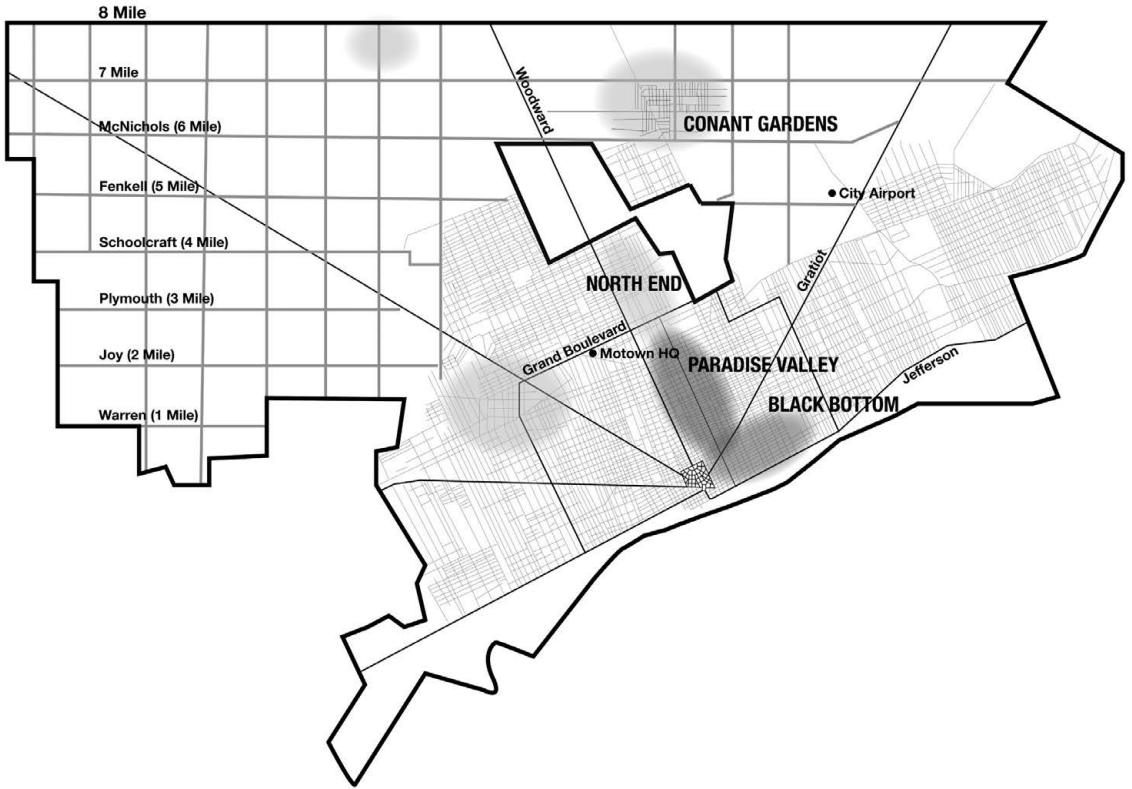
Swing is, in a way, what happens when you combine those two pulses into one: a segment of time divided into thirds, but playing only the first and third sections, which essentially is playing a pulse of twos . . . but uneven, or *swing*.



\* A phenomenon called notes inégales in classical music and the dragged second beat of the Viennese waltz are two of those exceptions.

Some musicians swing a rhythm only slightly, and some more severely. The expressions of long-short vary from performer to performer, an expression of individual, human time; and a reflection of the movement of the human body and a musical tradition wedded to dance.



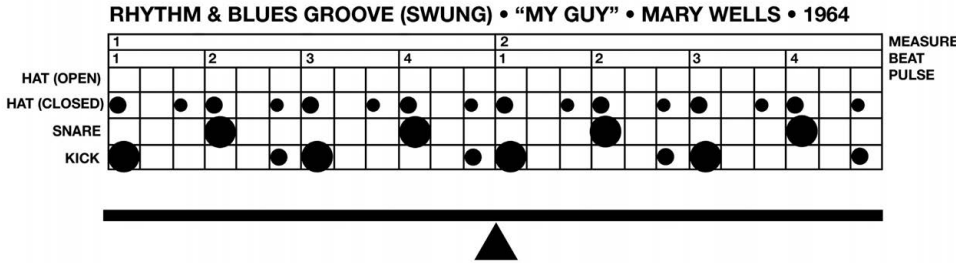


The place on the disorderly map where Black Detroiters were compelled to live was a dilapidated neighborhood called Black Bottom—so named for the color of the riverside soil—pushing northward along Hastings Street into a Jewish neighborhood called Paradise Valley.

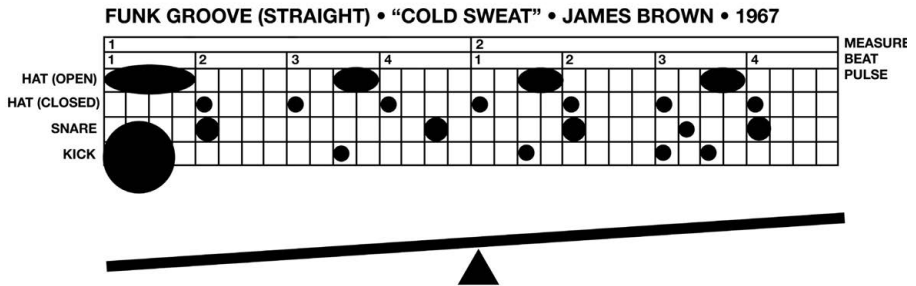
The main artery of Black Detroit had been flattened to build one of several new freeways allowing unimpeded travel from Detroit to the expanding suburbs, which were chewing up land and filling Thomas Jefferson's square-mile grid boxes with tract housing.



Listen to “My Guy” by Mary Wells from 1964: notice the even back-and-forth between the kick drum on the downbeat and the snare and claps on the backbeat.

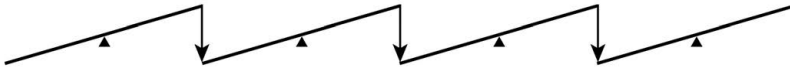


Now listen to “Cold Sweat” by James Brown—a song released only three years later, in 1967—which tilted the emphasis toward the first downbeat, or as Brown called it, the “One.”



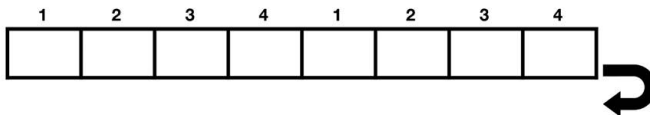


“Cold Sweat” shifted the balance to the One so heavily that the measures after it felt like a suspension, a held breath, building the tension for two whole measures before the next occurrence of the One.

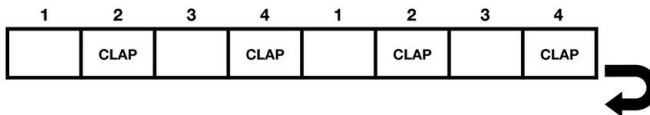


**TRY IT YOURSELF: SHIFTING TO FUNK**

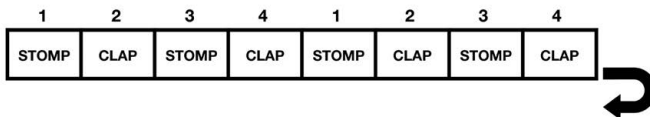
**STEP ONE:** Start a four-count (“one-two-three-four” and repeat).



**STEP TWO:** Clap your hands on every “2” and “4.”

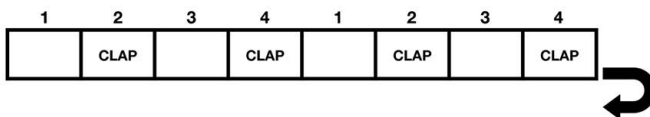


**STEP THREE:** Add foot stomps on every “1” and “3.”

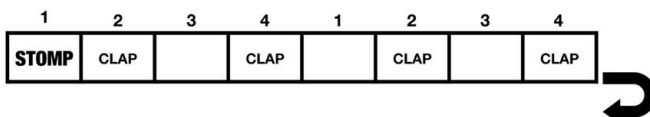


Listen to the evenness of this rhythm. This is a *standard rhythm & blues groove*

**STEP FOUR:** Stop stomping. Keep clapping your hands.



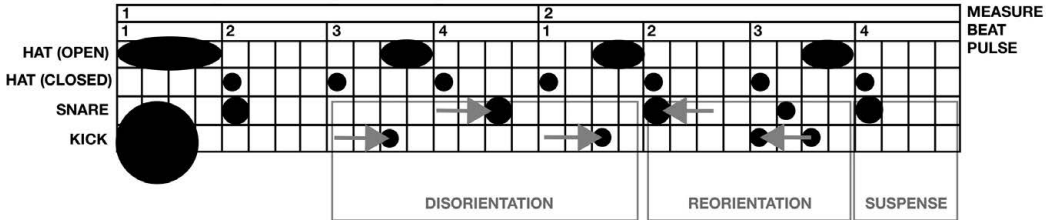
**STEP FIVE:** Add a big foot stomp on just the first ONE, and repeat.



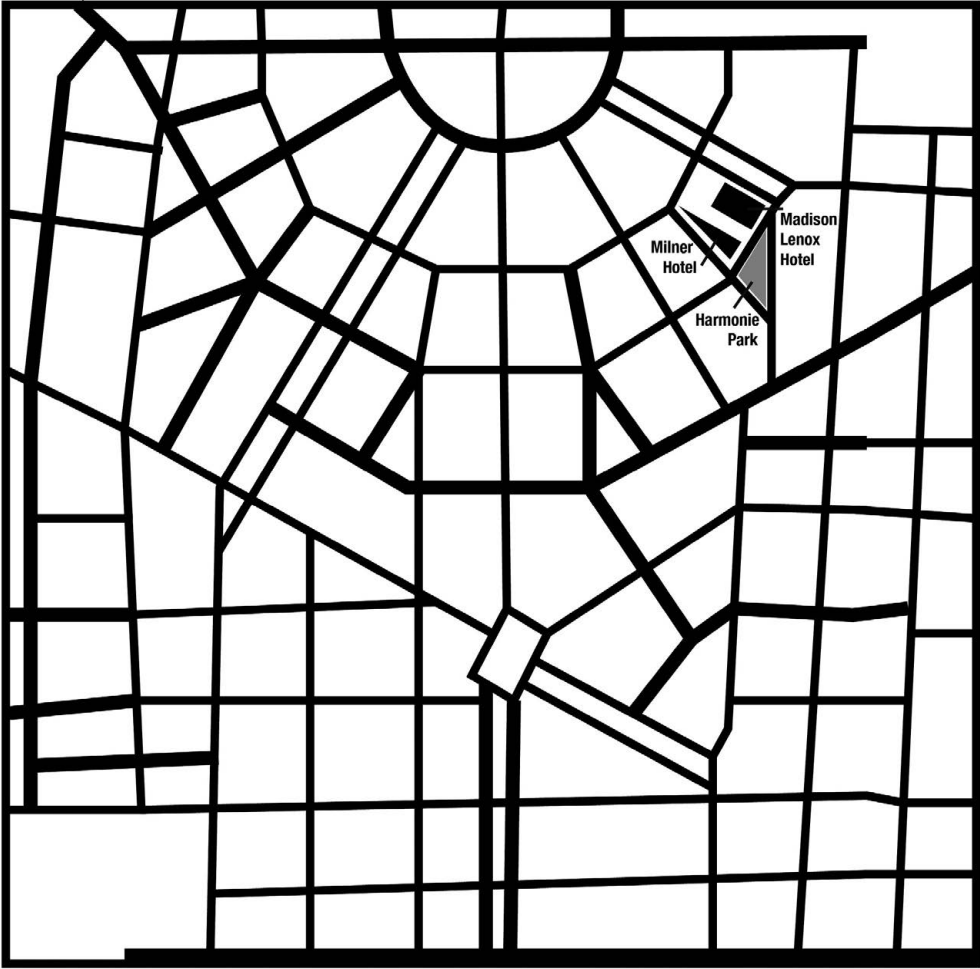
Notice the difference. This is a *funk groove*.

In “Cold Sweat,” the first couple of beats created *stability*, but the next few kicks and snares came *later than expected*, increasing *instability*, a pleasant disorientation and reorientation—with sudden silences *creating suspense* before the return of the One.

**FUNK GROOVE (STRAIGHT) • “COLD SWEAT” • JAMES BROWN • 1967**



As such, Detroit's map—a ruptured, offset, conflicted ghost of polyrhythm—could be more than a record of what had been. It might also be a prediction of things that had not yet come to pass.



## 4. Machine Time

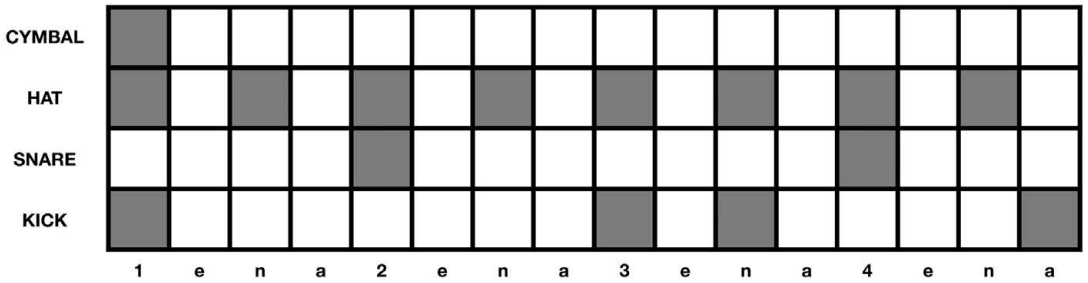
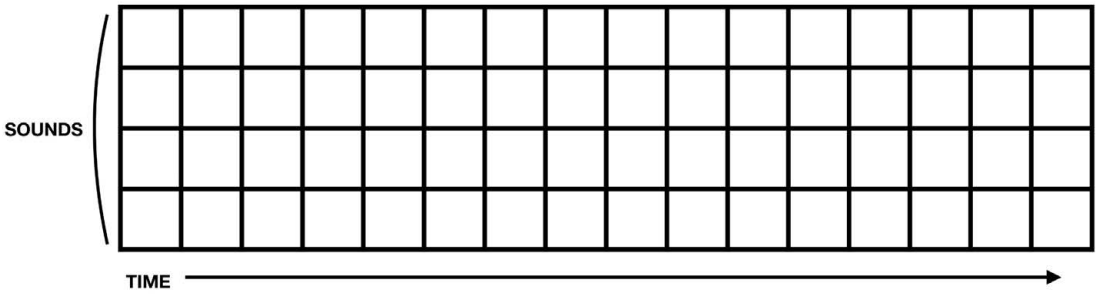
As the piano industry boomed in the late 1800s so too did the sales of new “pianolas”—pianos that played themselves, powered by pneumatics, and programmed with long paper rolls, long grids of holes that triggered the keys, working on the same principles as the first music boxes: a wind-up mechanism that was able to trigger sounds in sequence.

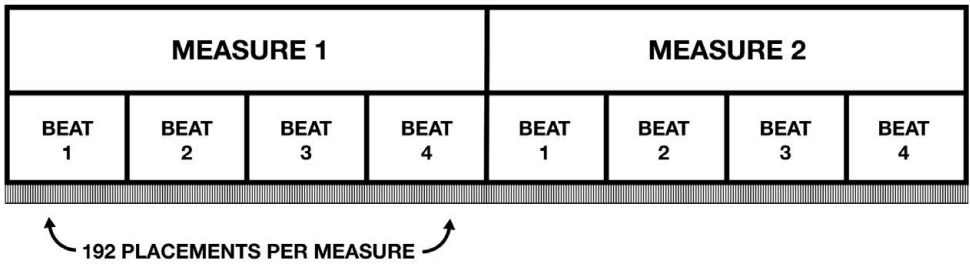
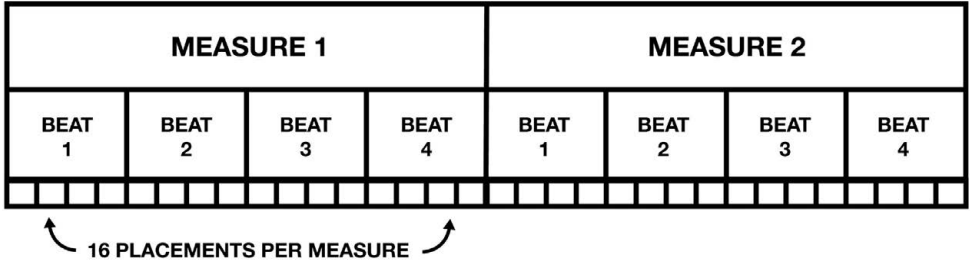




# 6. Sample Time

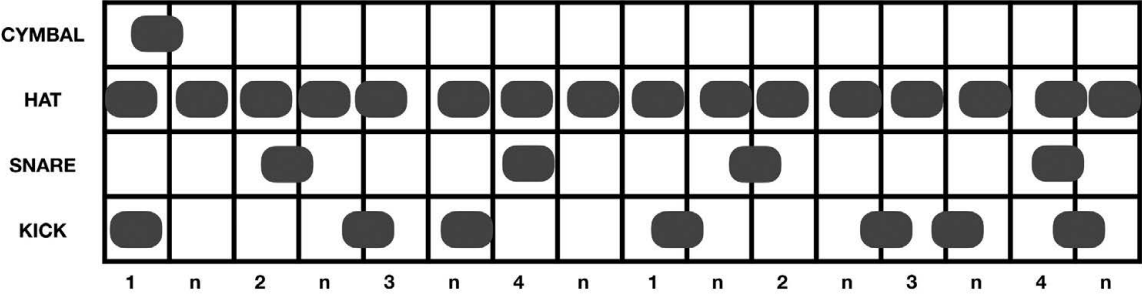
He wrote a program that displayed a visual matrix on the computer monitor, where each square going horizontally represented a sixteenth note increment in time—one-sixteenth of a measure; and each square vertically represented a different drum sound.



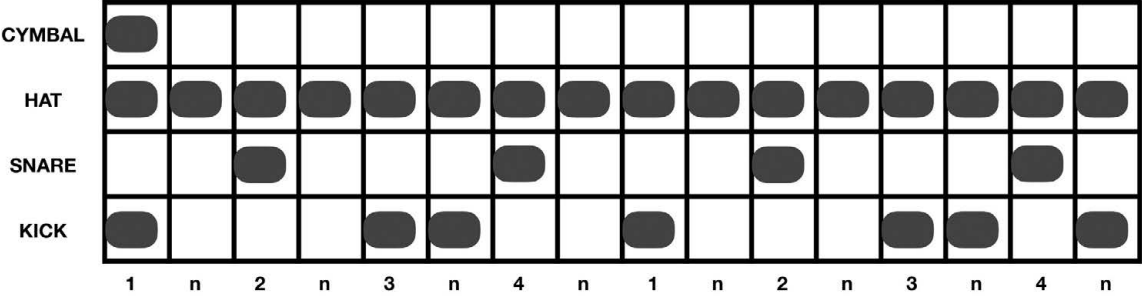


Linn realized that recording a user's real-time playing, and having it better reflect their timing, required the creation of a finer grid: instead of sixteen divisions per measure, his new number was 192 per measure.

**UNCORRECTED or UNQUANTIZED NOTES**

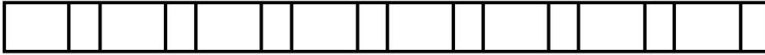


**CORRECTED or QUANTIZED NOTES, adjusted to nearest grid point**





By “shuffle,” Linn understood that Russell was referring to a perfect triplet swing.



What Russell was saying is that great grooves come from drummers playing somewhere between perfectly straight and perfectly swung.

Roger Linn found that if he delayed every other note in a pulse of 16th notes—essentially shifting the even 50/50 ratio between the previous and the following note and making it 66/34—the machine would automatically transform the user’s straight pattern into a perfect triplet shuffle. And if he reduced the ratios to, say, 58/42 or 54/46, he found that the adjustments would be more subtle, but that the patterns really *grooved*. Not straight, not swung, but somewhere in between.

<b>NO SWING (50%)</b>		
<b>SUBTLE SWING (54%)</b>		
<b>SHUFFLE SWING (66%)</b>		
<b>SEVERE SWING (71%)</b>		



*The LM-1*

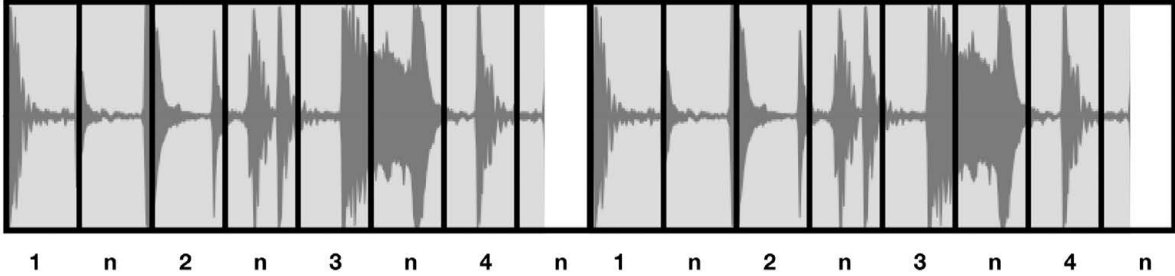


*The SP-1200*

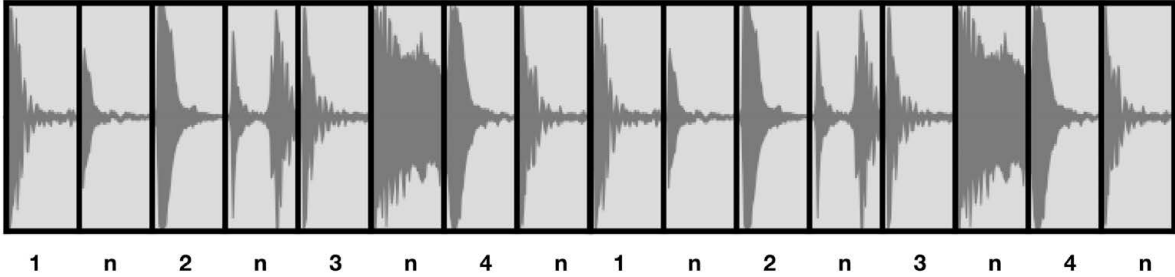


*The MPC60*

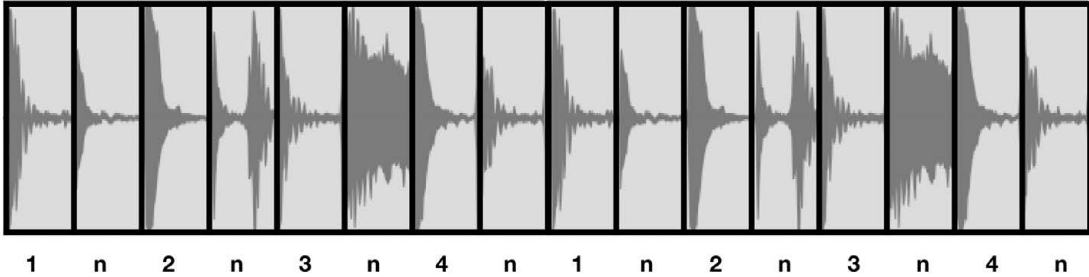
**DRUM SAMPLE NOT ALIGNED WITH MACHINE TEMPO**



**TEMPO ALIGNED by SLOWING DOWN SAMPLE**



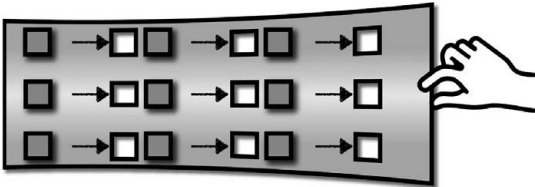
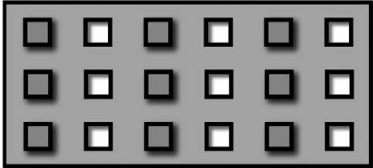
**TEMPO ALIGNED by SPEEDING UP SEQUENCER**



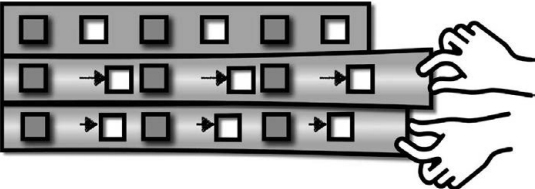
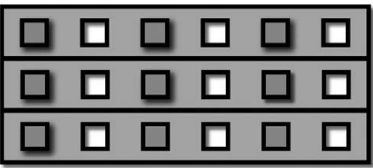
# 8.

## Dilla Time

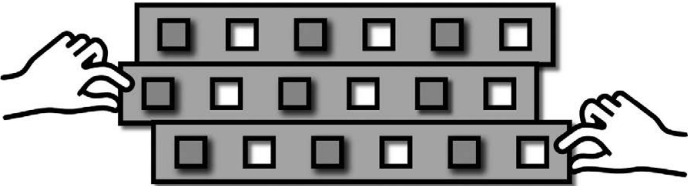
**SP-1200 SWING**  
Tracks stretched together



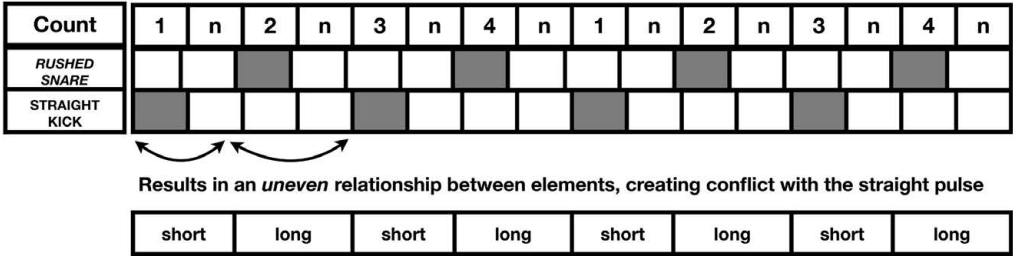
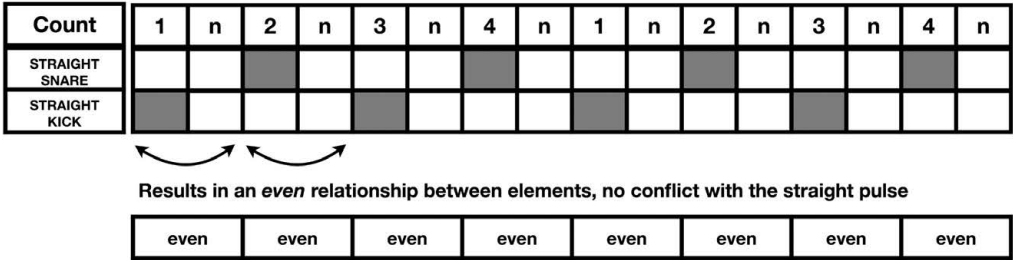
**MPC SWING**  
Tracks stretched separately

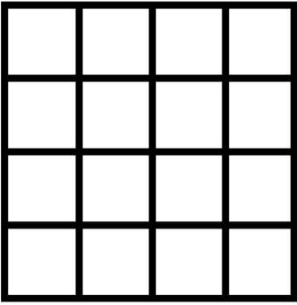


**MPC SHIFT TIMING**  
Events mover earlier/later

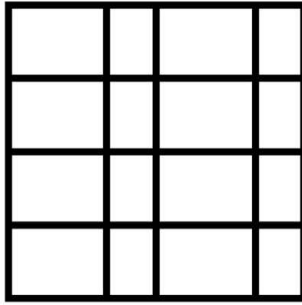


The kick and snare, usually equidistant from each other on the grid, now established a short-long-short-long pattern: *swing time*. So now there were two time-feels fighting each other: straight and swung.

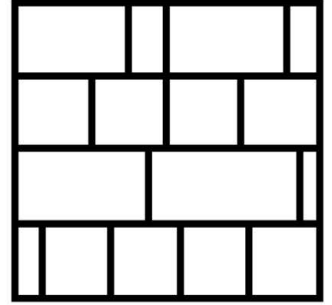




**STRAIGHT TIME**



**SWING TIME**



**DILLA TIME**

In a three-count, often the first beat is the call and the second and third are the responses, or strong-weak-weak.

1	2	3	1	2	3
<b>S</b>	w	w	<b>S</b>	w	w

A four-count is a multiple of the two-count, simply repeating that strong-weak polarity.

1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
<b>S</b>	w	<b>S</b>	w	<b>S</b>	w	<b>S</b>	w


In much of hip-hop, the rhythmic current is eight pulses per measure:

Count	1	n	2	n	3	n	4	n	1	n	2	n	3	n	4	n
HAT																
KICK																
SNARE																
	<b>S</b>	w	<b>S</b>	w	<b>S</b>	w	<b>S</b>	w	<b>S</b>	w	<b>S</b>	w	<b>S</b>	w	<b>S</b>	w

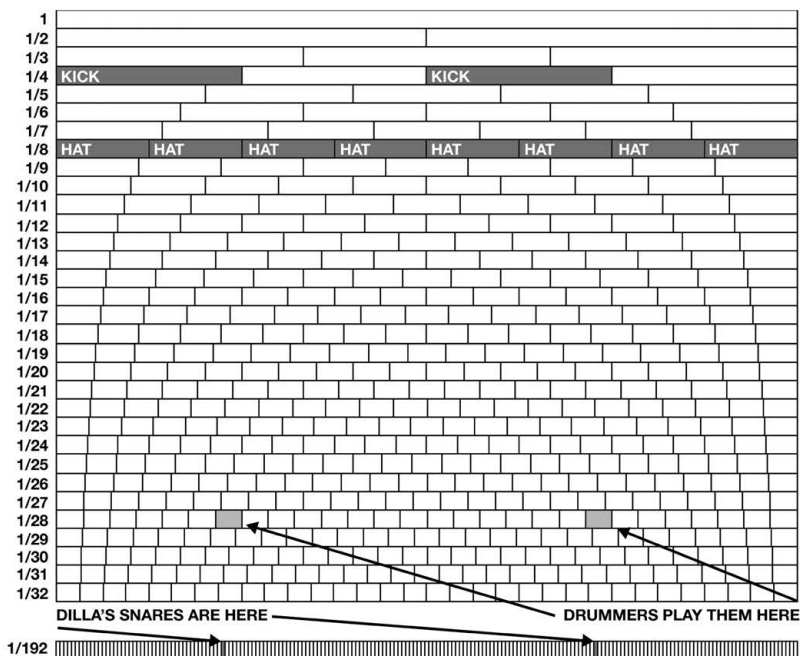
In that current, we expect both the kick drum (the “stomp”) and the snare (the “clap”) to fall on strong beats.

Because the rhythmic current—the most granular pulse—governs our expectations, changes on a microscopic level can ironically be jarring, and it is in this area, subverting the rhythmic current, that James did most of his work.

Count	1	n	2	n	3	n	4	n	1	n	2	n	3	n	4	n
HAT																
KICK																
SNARE																
	S	w	S	w	S	w	S	w	S	w	S	w	S	w	S	w


 Snare appears on a weak beat, rather than on a strong one, where we expect it

Crucially, the math of where Jay Dee’s snare falls is so granular that it doesn’t make sense with the rhythmic current of eight. Using the song “Go Ladies” as our example, we would have to divide the pulse not into eight slices per measure, but into 192 slices per measure, and shift that snare early by five of those slices (or five 128th-note triplets, in musical notation).





## 9. Partners



*The Fender Rhodes*

# 10. Pay Jay

The record contained the most severe deployments yet of James's signature time-feel: songs like "Pause" and "Come Get It" were the rhythmic equivalents of a train derailing and righting itself, repeatedly.

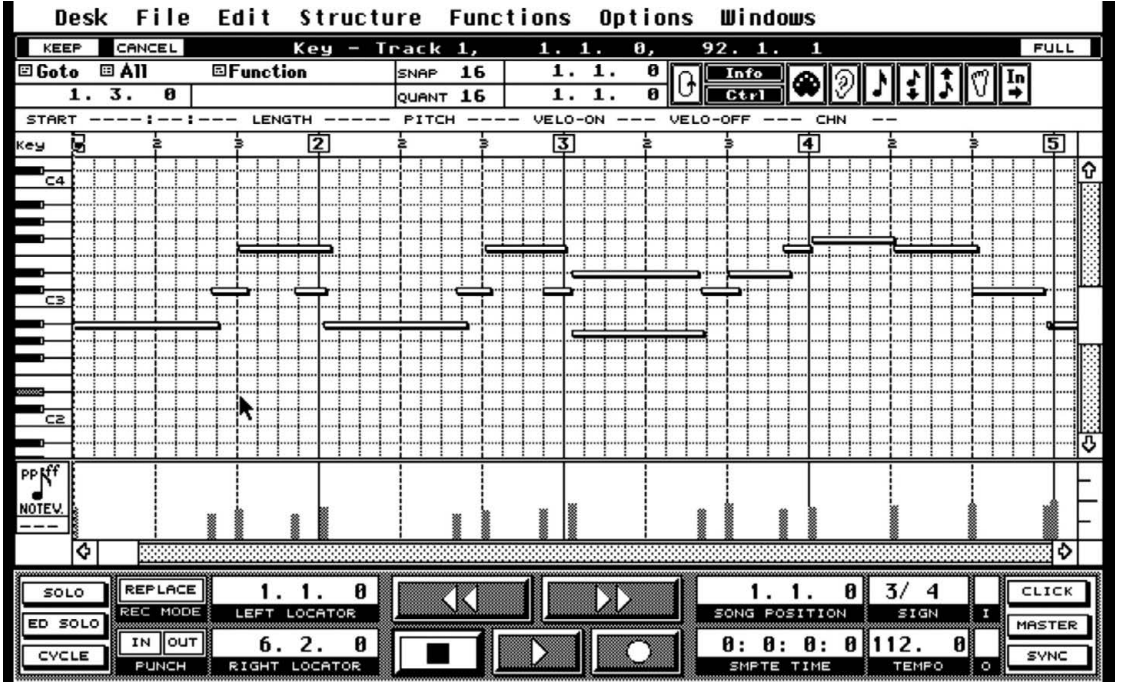
"COME GET IT" • J DILLA f/ ELZHI

Count	1	n	2	n	3	n	4	n	1	n	2	n	3	n	4	n	
HAT	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	▲ A
SNARE	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	▲ B
KICK	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	▲ C
BASS	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	▲ D

A. swung B. straight + shifted C. swung + shifted D. straight

# 11. Warp Time

Where drum machines used small LED lights and tiny LCD screens to help musicians and programmers navigate, computer sequencers allowed users to visualize *everything*: to see all the instruments and notes laid out in a horizontal grid representing the passage of time.



Modplug Tracker - [ARYX.53M]

File Player Edit View Window Help

Octave 4 Tempo: Speed: Follow Song

General Patterns Samples Comments

Instrument: None Spacing: 0

Pattern name:

3 2 4 4 5 5 6 6 8 9 10 11 0 1 0 1 7 5 6 6 10 11 11 8 9 8 9 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 7 6 6 6

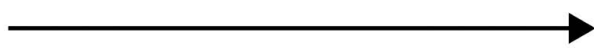
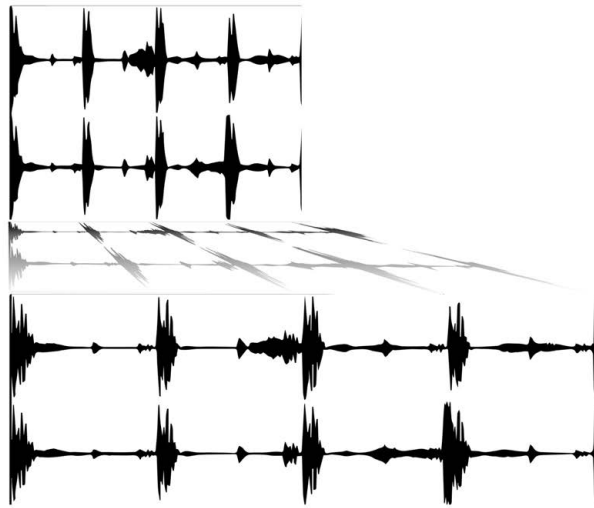
#3	Channel 1	Channel 2	Channel 3	Channel 4	Channel 5	Channel 6	Channel 7	Channel 8	Channel 9	Channel 10	Channel 11	Channel 12
0	C-4	G-3	F-3	F-3	G-3	F-3	G-3	F-3	G-3	F-3	G-3	F-3
1	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
2	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
3	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
4	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
5	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
6	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
7	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
8	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
9	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
10	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
11	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
12	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
13	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
14	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
15	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
16	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
17	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
18	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
19	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
20	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
21	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
22	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
23	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
24	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
25	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
26	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
27	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
28	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
29	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
30	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
31	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
32	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
33	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
34	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
35	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
36	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
37	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
38	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
39	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
40	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
41	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
42	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
43	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
44	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
45	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
46	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
47	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
48	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
49	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
50	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
51	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
52	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
53	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
54	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
55	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02
56	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02	-02

idy Row 28, Col 1 0:00:01

**TIME STRETCHING + WARPING**



One measure of music ...

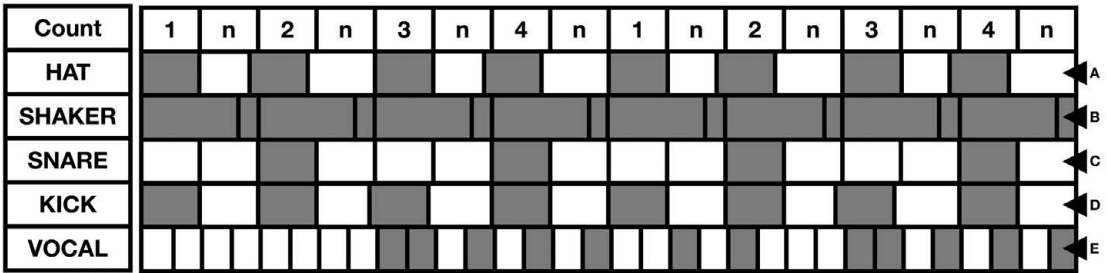


... is stretched to cover two measures.

# 14. Micro Time

Kristoffer Bjerke analyzed two Soulquarians songs: D’Angelo’s “Untitled” and Common’s “The Hustle” from Electric Circus—the former played by musicians, the latter programmed on machine by Karriem Riggins—in an effort to understand how timbre affects our perceptions of rhythmic conflict. Kristoffer Carlsen and Maria A. G. Witek looked at two songs with digitally created microscopic rhythmic conflicts: the Roots’ “Rock You” and Brandy’s “What About Us?,” produced by Rodney Jerkins—finding in Jerkins’s production three distinct pulses fighting with each other.

## “WHAT ABOUT US?” • BRANDY



A. straight + shifted early    B. swung    C. straight    D. straight + shifted early    E. straight + shifted late

## 16. Fragments



*J Dilla's MPC*

## Reporter's Notes and Sources

*Dilla Time* is the product of time itself: more than four years of intensive work, including four summers in and multiple additional visits to Detroit; and also three decades of experience and relationships in hip-hop, music journalism, and the music business. This book is a work of independent journalism: I did not seek approval from any entity, but rather endeavored to build trust with individual people. It is narrative nonfiction: all detail and dialogue is based on reporting and research; none of it is invented or imagined. Where I relay quotes, those statements happened in real time; where my sources are unsure of what exactly was said, I italicize those statements. Where I portray the inner thoughts and feelings of my characters, it is because they told me about them, or told someone else.

This book comprises the stories of many people, but chiefly it attempts to inscribe the life of someone who is no longer around to speak for himself, someone whose speech was often spare when he was alive. I have most heavily relied on reporting—direct interviews with more than 190 people—supplemented by published or unpublished interviews with James Dewitt Yancey, court documents, and the mass of fine journalism and research done on J Dilla and the other characters and topics in this book, from musicology to medicine, from the history of Detroit to that of digital audio workstations, all listed on the following pages.

My interviewing process was layered. I not only gathered information but often returned for readbacks and fact-checking in an attempt to catch any mistakes, to preserve nuances that might otherwise be lost, and to reconcile conflicting stories. Where those accounts remain in conflict, I have provided context in the footnotes. Some sources were loquacious and others circumspect. Some told great stories and several did not want their stories told. Many sources asked me to keep certain things they said or did off the record, and that is a trust I hold inviolate.

One of the most challenging stories to tell was of the relationship between Maureen Yancey and Joylette Hunter, whose narratives of the same events often diverge, and who have both established credibility in different ways. Another is the relationship between James Yancey and Monica Whitlow, who was forthright about the broad points of her history with James but somewhat guarded about their times together. One result is that Ms. Whitlow's story here is not as detailed as Ms. Hunter's. I have chosen not to attempt to interview James's two daughters, partly because they were very young children when he died but also to respect their privacy. Still another challenge was establishing the creation story of the will of James Dewitt Yancey, which I detail in a separate section below.

Fans and students of J Dilla will notice in this book that there are several widely and perennially accepted truths that my reporting has revealed as dubious: Beverly Dewitt Yancey's authorship of the song "It's a Shame"; James Dewitt Yancey's authorship of the original version of "Got 'Til It's Gone"; the idea that *Donuts* was composed largely in his hospital bed; the idea that James created his signature sound by simply turning off the timing functions of his drum machine. These are tales told by many of the sources cited and in some cases by James himself; then circulated and repeated without confirmation or further inquiry. My own conclusions are the result of new reporting and research, and a judgment about the relative reliability of each source and the feasibility of each story.

With my judgment comes a certain subjectivity arising from my many positions in relationship to my subjects. Some are positions of difference: a native New Yorker writing about Detroit, a white American writing about Black people and culture, a person from a middle-class family writing about families with less wealth, a Jewish person writing about Christians and Muslims. Others are positions of similarity: I was a record producer and beatmaker in hip-hop; many of James's friends and colleagues were and are my friends and colleagues; I am one of the few to write professionally about James who actually worked with him and visited the basement on McDougall. The thing about positions is that they work both ways: similarities can often create a compromising closeness and differences can create a healthy distance. Either way, I try to lead with care and empathy for the humans in this book, and I hope to counter whatever unwitting damage I might do with the greater weight of good.

There are three strong convictions driving my work: first, that J Dilla deserved a history that was true and comprehensive; second, that Dilla's core innovation was not fully understood nor properly framed and needed a name; and third, that digital sampling is an art form that deserves and needs the full protection of the law. We are overdue for the legislation of a compulsory license for portions of compositions and recordings, as we already have for full compositions. Call it Dilla's Law.

Lastly, as this is journalism, I am concerned with balancing reporting and research with readability. Therefore I have listed my sources in the rear of the book rather than cite each piece of information with a superscript in the text, as an academic work might do. I use footnotes for supplemental information that would otherwise disrupt the flow of the narrative. I suspect, also, that a few musicologists might quibble with some of the simpler ways I have defined musical terms in the text. There are almost always more complex ways of defining a phenomenon, and I have decided—as a storyteller—where to set the point of diminishing returns.

## THE WILL OF JAMES DEWITT YANCEY

Several aspects of the will's creation story are misaligned, and thus it makes the truth about that creation difficult to discern.

The memories of the creators do not line up. Micheline Levine recalls being worried about James dying intestate—without a last will and testament—which would be particularly disastrous for Maureen if James wanted to make sure that she was taken care of should he die. She remembers stepping up her efforts to get Maureen to have James create a will, and Maureen being resistant. She remembers being in Los Angeles, with James in his hospital room, taking James through his options as he filled out the will, and asking if he was sure he wanted Arty to be the executor. Micheline doesn't remember a notary being there, even though a notary stated that he witnessed the signing of the will.

Maureen Yancey says the reason that Micheline doesn't remember a notary being there is that she was not in the room at all; James didn't want her to see him in his condition. Instead, Maureen says she grabbed the blank forms from Micheline in the hospital lobby. She said that James filled out the will in his own hand, over time, and that she flew a notary from Michigan whom James trusted to observe the signing of the will at home. Maureen says that James explained to her his rationale for listing Arty and Micheline as executors thus: he didn't want his mother to have to mediate between the guardians of his children, one of whom still did not know about the other.

Even though he is listed as a witness to James's signing of the will, Maurice Lamb does not remember signing any document at the hospital. Nor does he remember signing anything while James was alive. He remembers instead, sometime *after* James's death, being asked by Maureen to sign some "lawyer papers" for the estate at Common's home on Sycamore in Los Angeles.

There are other misalignments. The presence of a notary is superfluous; California wills do not need to be notarized. The notary, Alfred L. Mitchell, was from Michigan, and had no notarial powers in the state of California. The signature of "James D. Yancey" is markedly dissimilar from his signatures on his driver's license and contracts as "James Yancey." The will



was not filed with the Los Angeles County Probate Court until October 2, 2006, nearly eight months after James's death.

One reason for the delay is that in August 2006, the estate's probate attorney, Michael Foster, advised Arthur Erk and Micheline Levine that the will was likely invalid because one of the beneficiaries, Maureen Yancey, was also one of the witnesses, and thus the court might reject the will entirely. The attorney recommended that the estate ask the person who notarized the will, Alfred L. Mitchell, to file and sign an affidavit stating that he was present with James and Maurice on September 8, 2005, in Los Angeles when the will was signed, an event that Maurice does not remember happening while James was alive. That affidavit was produced and notarized in Michigan in August 2006.

The will was accepted as valid by the court.

These misalignments make it hard to tell an effective story about this will. But they are not necessarily evidence of anything nefarious. Memories are fallible, especially in high-stress, life-or-death situations. James Yancey spared no expense for the things he wanted, and trusted very few people. People's handwriting changes with age and illness. And lawyers can take forever to file papers.

## INTERVIEWS

**Most of these interviews were conducted by telephone, video call, or in person. Several were conducted via text or email. Asterisks (\*) denote conversations and lectures from my J Dilla course under the auspices of the Clive Davis Institute at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.**

Aaron Halfacre, February 27, 2020	Carleton Gholz, February 25, 2020
Aaron McCray, July 19, 2019	Charles Moore, October 7, 2019
Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, May 3, 2017*; June 26, 2018; December 31, 2020; January 26, 2021	Chris "C-Minus" Rivas, December 12, 2020
Al Hayes, July 21, 2019	Chris "DJ Fingers" Price, July 31, 2019; June 19, 2021
Alex Borden, February 21, 2021	Chris "Peanut Butter Wolf" Manak, February 20, 2019*; June 26, 2020
Alex Richbourg, February 15, 2020	Christopher Ramos, April 7, 2020; July 1, 2021
Ali Shaheed Muhammad, January 9, 2020	Clarice Hayes, June 2, 2021
Alice Scarbough Yancey, November 7, 2019	Copez Wright, October 13, 2019
Alvin Blanco, October 28, 2019	Common, March 20, 2020
Amir Abdullah, March 3, 2021	Cornelius Harris, March 15, 2017*
Amp Fiddler, November 24, 2018; April 12, 2021	Craig Seymour, March 21, 2020
Andrés "DJ Dez" Hernández, August 9, 2019; April 16, 2021	D'Angelo, July 2, 2021
Angela Dewberry, July 1, 2021	Dan Zieja, August 13, 2019
Angela Nissel, March 20, 2021; June 21, 2021	Darrell Dawsey, October 28, 2019
Anne Danielsen, November 19, 2019	Darrick Grimmer, August 13, 2021
Arthur Jafa, June 2, 2021	Dave Cooley, June 23, 2020; June 2, 2021
Asya Shein, July 10, 2021	David Grandison Jr., February 6, 2019*
Beej Brooks, April 26, 2021	Dawn Elissa-Fischer, January 7, 2021
Beni B, April 15, 2020	Demian Hoings, January 21, 2020
Big Tone, April 18, 2021	Denaun Porter, February 24, 2020
Bill Johnson, February 1, 2019	Dennis Coffey, March 16, 2017*; August 5, 2019
Bob Power, May 3, 2017*; December 10, 2019	Derek Barbosa, January 1, 2020
Brian Coleman, January 19, 2020	Derek Dudley, March 28, 2020; June 24, 2021
Brian Cross, April 19, 2017*; March 6, 2019*; January 23, 2020; June 15, 2020	Derreck "Dee Phunk" Johnson, February 28, 2020
Carey Logan, July 20, 2019	Derrick Harvey, August 21, 2019
	Dion Liverpool, August 20, 2019

- DJ Dummy, June 7, 2021  
 DJ Henhouse, July 29, 2019  
 DJ Lefto, December 16, 2019  
 DJ Premier, June 7, 2021  
 DJ Rhettmatic, April 19, 2017\*; February 27, 2019\*; April 24, 2021  
 DJ Spinna, February 7, 2020; June 3, 2021  
 DJ Tony Tone, December 15, 2019  
 Drew Dixon, June 6, 2020  
 Eli Wolf, December 20, 2019; December 21, 2019; January 7, 2020  
 Eothen "Egon" Alapatt, January 4, 2021; January 8, 2021; April 21, 2021; June 29, 2021  
 Eric Coleman, June 22, 2020  
 Eugene "Hex" Howell, July 11, 2019  
 Frank Bush, September 5, 2019; May 29, 2021; June 6, 2021  
 Frank Sens, December 6, 2019  
 Frank Stratmann, January 16, 2020  
 Gilles Peterson, June 3, 2021  
 G. C. Cameron, April 19, 2021  
 Graham Finch, July 15, 2019  
 Guilty Simpson, October 10, 2019; June 19, 2021  
 Herman Hayes, July 21, 2019  
 Hi-Tek, April 18, 2021  
 Jack Splash, December 23, 2019; June 9, 2021  
 James Poyser, September 12, 2019; June 4, 2021  
 Jamon Jordan, March 15, 2017\*; March 16, 2017\*  
 Janell Hunter, May 6, 2021  
 Jason "J-Rocc" Jackson, June 21, 2019; October 10, 2020  
 Jason Moran, June 28, 2018  
 Jay Boberg, February 10, 2020  
 Jeff Bubeck, April 20, 2021  
 Jeff Harleston, February 28, 2020  
 Jeff Jank, June 26, 2020; March 14, 2021  
 Jeff Peretz, September 25, 2019  
 Jeff "DJ Jazzy Jeff" Townes, April 21, 2021  
 Jeff Weiss, August 8, 2020; August 9, 2020  
 Jefferson Mao, January 21, 2020  
 Dr. Jeffrey Zonder, June 28, 2021  
 Jerry Barrow, October 28, 2019  
 jessica Care moore, February 4, 2020; June 3, 2021  
 Jocelyn Cooper, February 7, 2020  
 Jocelyne Ninneman, July 10, 2021  
 Joel Stone, August 16, 2019  
 John Salley, February 21, 2020  
 John Yancey, September 6, 2019; April 14, 2021  
 Jon Bellion, March 6, 2019\*  
 Jonathan Dworkin, November 11, 2019; April 14, 2021  
 Jonathon Taylor, August 10, 2020; July 1, 2021  
 Joseph Patel, March 12, 2020  
 Joylette Hunter, April 22, 2020; October 14, 2020; April 24, 2021; July 1, 2021; July 6, 2021  
 JPEG Mafia, December 4, 2019  
 Junior Regisford, January 30, 2020  
 Kaiya Matthews, September 20, 2019  
 Kamaal "Q-Tip" Fareed, May 4, 2021  
 Karriem Riggins, October 4, 2020; January 13, 2021; January 14, 2021  
 Karyn Rachtman, March 3, 2020  
 Kelly "K-Fresh" Frazier, December 13, 2019  
 Kenny Dope, December 18, 2019  
 Kevin "DJ Head" Bell, March 6, 2020; June 7, 2021  
 Khary Kimani Turner, March 16, 2017\*  
 Kieran Hebden, July 31, 2020  
 Kim Osorio, June 14, 2020  
 Kim Weston, August 11, 2019  
 Kindra Parker, April 10, 2020; December 26, 2020; May 28, 2021  
 Lara Gamble, June 10, 2019  
 Larick "Cricket" Mathews, December 30, 2020  
 LaRoy Glover, January 16, 2020  
 Lorenzo "Zo!" Ferguson, November 23, 2020  
 Malik Alston, July 23, 2019  
 Martha Yancey, August 21, 2019; July 5, 2021; July 6, 2021; July 10, 2021; July 11, 2021  
 Mark Hicks, July 5, 2020  
 Marsha Ambrosius, November 6, 2019  
 Mary Wright, October 13, 2019  
 Maureen Yancey, October 19, 2018; February 22, 2019\*; September 26, 2019; December 5, 2019; August 1, 2019; April 17, 2021; April 24, 2021; June 30, 2021; July 9, 2021  
 Maurice "Bobo" Lamb, July 30, 2019; July 26, 2020; July 7, 2021  
 Michael "Serch" Berrin, January 15, 2020  
 Michael Buchanan, December 7, 2019; December 9, 2019; December 21, 2019  
 Michael Ross, March 28, 2017\*  
 Micheline Levine, November 12, 2019; December 5, 2019; February 7, 2020; February 14, 2020; June 29, 2020  
 Mickey Stephenson, July 20, 2021  
 Miguel Atwood-Ferguson, February 10, 2018  
 Mike Chavarria, March 12, 2020

- Mike Chavez, April 24, 2021  
 Monica Whitlow, April 2, 2021; April 4, 2021; June 25, 2021  
 Mr. Choc, June 4, 2021  
 Naim Ali McNair, April 27, 2021  
 Naomi Saalfeld, July 22, 2020; January 11, 2021  
 Nate Smith, February 13, 2019\*  
 Nicolay Rook, December 12, 2019  
 Nicole Hegeman, January 24, 2020  
 Nilusha Dassenaike, July 24, 2020  
 Olivia Fischa, January 5, 2021; June 26, 2021  
 Orlando Vesey, April 26, 2021  
 Paul Bender, July 20, 2020; January 14, 2021  
 Paul Riser, June 28, 2021  
 Paul Rosenberg, February 3, 2020  
 Paul Sewick, August 25, 2019  
 Perrin Moss, April 26, 2017\*; January 9, 2021  
 Pete Rock, February 7, 2019\*  
 Peter Adarkwah, August 27, 2019; June 16, 2021  
 Pharoahe Monch, February 28, 2020  
 Ron "Phat Kat" Watts, March 16, 2017\*; November 4, 2019; June 10, 2021  
 Phonte Coleman, December 15, 2019; April 9, 2021  
 Pino Palladino, January 14, 2020  
 Piper Carter, July 29, 2019  
 Que.D, July 15, 2019; April 6, 2021; April 7, 2021  
 R. J. Rice, March 16, 2017\*; January 10, 2020; March 9, 2020; June 28, 2021  
 R. L. "T3" Altman III, July 28, 2019; October 30, 2019; March 1, 2021; June 25, 2021  
 Raydar Ellis, September 5, 2019  
 Reta Hayes, July 21, 2019; October 17, 2019  
 Rich Medina, January 24, 2020  
 Robert Gasper, December 13, 2019  
 Rob Tewlow, January 6, 2020  
 Roger Erickson, March 21, 2020  
 Roger Linn, October 25, 2019  
 Roger Robinson, March 16, 2017\*  
 Ronnie "Killa Ghanz" Kelly, February 23, 2020; June 3, 2021  
 Ross Allen, June 20, 2021  
 Royce da 5'9", July 22, 2019; January 16, 2020  
 Sacha Waldman, June 17, 2020  
 Saunte Lowe, January 5, 2021  
 Shannon Cason, January 23, 2021  
 Sheila Bowers, January 18, 2021; June 24, 2021  
 Simon Mavin, June 19, 2020; January 12, 2021  
 Skillz, December 5, 2019  
 Dr. Spero Cataland, October 31, 2019  
 Stephen Henderson, March 17, 2017\*  
 Steve Mandel, April 28, 2020; May 28, 2021  
 Suave, September 9, 2019  
 Suemyra Shah, July 9, 2020; June 3, 2021  
 Tara Duvivier, February 20, 2020; June 7, 2021  
 Taz Arnold, August 5, 2020  
 Terrace Martin, June 1, 2021  
 Terrance Wright, June 26, 2021  
 Thad Baron, April 7, 2020  
 Tim Maynor, March 22, 2020; March 26, 2021; March 30, 2021; April 3, 2021  
 Tim Reid II, April 26, 2021  
 Timothy Anne Burnside, February 28, 2019  
 Tom Bacon, April 2, 2021  
 Tom Misch, June 20, 2020  
 Tre Hardson, March 29, 2017\*; June 13, 2018; February 7, 2019  
 Dr. Valerie Israel, April 21, 2021  
 Vincent "Mase" Mason, October 15, 2019  
 Waajeed, April 26, 2021  
 Ward White, January 19, 2020  
 Wendy Goldstein, July 9, 2020; July 10, 2020  
 Young RJ, March 16, 2017\*; June 29, 2021

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These are the important conversations with J Dilla conducted by journalists over the years, ordered by date.

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### Court Documents

**These documents were filed in the Superior Court of California, Los Angeles County, with regard to the estate of James Dewitt Yancey, deceased. Case #BP100879, ordered by date.**

- Yancey, James D. "California Statutory Will of James Dewitt Yancey." Signed and witnessed September 8, 2005, in Los Angeles, California. Filed October 2, 2006.
- Erk, Arty, et al. "Petition for Will and Letters Testamentary and Authorization to Administer Under the Independent Administration of Estates Act." Filed October 2, 2006.
- Erk, Arty, et al. "Affidavit Regarding Execution of California Statutory Will." Filed October 10, 2006.
- Erk, Arty, et al. "Petition for Letters of Special Administration." Filed October 10, 2006.
- Erk, Arty, et al. "Duties and Liabilities of Personal Representative and Acknowledgment of Receipt." Filed November 30, 2006.
- Erk, Arty, et al. "Letters Testamentary." Filed November 30, 2006.
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## Selected Discography

James Dewitt Yancey composed a countless number of beats in his lifetime, distributed occasionally in semi-formal “batches” sent to artists and executives, but often in informal dubs made for friends. The tracks and compilations were rarely named by James himself; they often acquired monikers as they made their way to artists, friends, and fans. Some beats were selected by artists and then finished by James himself in the studio; others, especially after his death, were simply lifted right from his beat cassettes or CDs as a bed for vocals. It’s why many of his beats show up in more than one place under different song titles by different artists.

Thus the most complete and revelatory discography of J Dilla would be an inventory of every beat he ever made—and beside each one, a list of all the forms in which that beat made its way out into the world, whether on official releases, mixtapes, batches, or bootlegs; whether during his lifetime or posthumously. A project like this would need to live online, and is truly beyond the scope of the more selective discography that follows.

Following are the releases by J Dilla as a recording artist, followed by a list of the most notable tracks he produced over the years, and a list of his appearances as a vocalist or musician. Lastly, I have created a section called “Batches,” in which I reference a select group of J Dilla’s more intentional collections of raw beats. It is not comprehensive, but comprises the most widely known and circulated compilations.

**As a Recording Artist**

All tracks on these releases produced by James Dewitt Yancey, except where noted.

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	LABEL
1996	Jay Dee	<i>Jay Dee Unreleased EP</i>	House Shoes
1997	Slum Village	<i>Fan-Tas-Tic</i>	El-Azim Waajeed/ Donut Boy
2000	Slum Village	<i>Fantastic, Vol. 2</i>	Barak/Good Vibe
	J-88	<i>Best Kept Secret</i>	Superrappin/Groove Attack
2001	Jay Dee aka J Dilla	<i>Welcome 2 Detroit*</i>	BBE
	Jay Dee	"Fuck the Police" b/w "Move"	Up Above
2002	Jay Dee	<i>The Official Jay Dee Instrumental Series: Unreleased Volume 1</i>	Bling47
2003	Jay Dee	<i>Vintage: Unreleased Instrumentals from Jay Dee of the Ummah (Volume 2)</i>	Bling47
	Jay Dee	<i>Ruff Draft / EP</i>	Mummy/Groove Attack
	Jaylib	<i>Champion Sound</i> <sup>†</sup>	Stones Throw
2006	J Dilla	<i>Donuts</i>	Stones Throw
	J Dilla	<i>The Shining</i>	BBE
2007	J Dilla	<i>Ruff Draft (Reissue)</i>	Stones Throw
	J Dilla	<i>Jay Love Japan</i>	Operation Unknown
	Jay Dee	<i>Jay Deelicious: The Delicious Vinyl Years</i>	Delicious Vinyl
2009	J Dilla	<i>Jay Stay Paid</i>	Nature Sounds
2012	J Dilla	<i>Dillatroit</i>	Mahogani/Yancey Media Group
	J Dilla	<i>Rebirth of Detroit</i>	Ruff Draft/Yancey Media Group
2013	J Dilla	<i>The Lost Scrolls Vol. 1 (EP)</i>	Ruff Draft/Yancey Media Group
	J Dilla	<i>Lost Tapes Reels + More</i>	Mahogani/Yancey Media Group
2014	J Dilla	<i>The King of Beats (Box Set)</i>	Yancey Media Group

\* All tracks produced by J Dilla except "The Clapper," produced by Karriem Riggins; coproduced by J Dilla.

<sup>†</sup> Tracks produced by J Dilla: "L.A. to Detroit," "Nowadays," "The Red," "Raw Shit," "The Heist," "React," "Strip Club," "The Exclusive," "Starz."

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	LABEL
2015	J Dilla	<i>Dillatronic</i>	Yancey Media Group
2016	J Dilla	<i>The Diary</i> *	Pay Jay/Mass Appeal
2016	J Dilla	<i>The King of Beats</i>	Yancey Media Group
	Jay Dee	<i>Jay Dee a.k.a. King Dilla</i>	Yancey Media Group/ Ne'Astra
	J Dilla	<i>Jay Dee's Ma Dukes Collection</i>	Yancey Media Group
2017	Slum Village	<i>Fantastic Vol. 0</i>	Barak/Ne'Astra
	J Dilla	<i>Motor City Collection</i>	Official Ma Dukes/ Nature Sounds
	J Dilla	<i>J Dilla's Delights, Vol. 1</i>	Yancey Media Group
	J Dilla	<i>J Dilla's Delights, Vol. 2</i>	Yancey Media Group

**As a Producer**

*These releases produced solely by James Dewitt Yancey, except where noted.*

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	CREDIT	LABEL
1993	T.H.I.Q.U.E.	"Sweet One"	as James Yancy [sic], produced with Adé	Super Sonic
1994	Da' Enna C	"Now"	as J.D.	Up Top
1995	1st Down	"A Day wit the Homiez," "Front Street"	as Jon Doe	Payday/FFRR
	Little Indian	"One Little Indian (Jaydee's *hit Remix)"	as Jaydee	Premeditated
	Poe	"Fingertips"—on <i>Hello</i>	as JD (drum programming)	Modern/ Atlantic
	The Pharcyde	"Runnin'," "Bullshit," "Splatittorium," "Somethin' That Means Somethin'," "Drop," "Y?"—on <i>Labcabin-california</i> . "Runnin' (Jay Dee Remix)," "Y? (Be Like That) (Jay Dee Remix)," "Runnin' (Jay Dee Extended Mix)," "Runnin' (Smooth Mix)"	as Jay Dee; co- producer, "Y?"	Delicious Vinyl

\* J Dilla is the vocalist and featured artist; all tracks composed by other producers.

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	CREDIT	LABEL
1996	A Tribe Called Quest	"Ince Again," "Get a Hold," "Keeping It Moving," "Stressed Out," "Word Play"—on <i>Beats, Rhymes and Life</i>	as The Ummah	Jive
	Busta Rhymes	"Keep It Movin'," "Still Shining"—on <i>The Coming</i> . "Woo-Hah!! (The Jay-Dee Bounce Remix)," "Woo-Hah!! (The Jay-Dee Other Shit Remix)," "It's a Party (The Ummah Remix)," "Ill Vibe (The Ummah Remix)"	as The Ummah	Elektra
	De La Soul	"Stakes Is High"—on <i>Stakes Is High</i> . "Stakes Is High (Remix)"	as Jay Dee; "Stakes Is High" co-produced by De La Soul	Tommy Boy
	Keith Murray	"Dangerous Ground"—on <i>Enigma</i> . "The Rhyme (Slum Village Street Mix)"	as The Ummah	Jive
	Mad Skillz	"It's Goin' Down," "The Jam"—on <i>From Where???</i>	as Jay Dee	Big Beat/ Atlantic
	The Pharcyde	"She Said (Remix)"	as Jay Dee	Delicious Vinyl
1997	Busta Rhymes	"So Hardcore"—on <i>When Disaster Strikes . . .</i>	as The Ummah	Elektra
	Crustation	"Purple (A Tribe Called Quest Edit)"	as The Ummah	Jive
	Janet Jackson	"Got 'Til It's Gone (Ummah Jay Dee's Revenge Mix)"	as The Ummah	Virgin
	Somethin' for the People	"All I Do (Jay Dee's *hit Mix)"	as The Ummah	Warner Bros.
	The Brand New Heavies	"Sometimes (The Ummah Remix)"	as The Ummah	Delicious Vinyl



YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	CREDIT	LABEL
1998	5-Elementz	“Whutchawant,” “Feed Back,” “Rockshows,” “Party Groove,” “Janet Jacme,” “E.G.O.,” “Don’t Stop,” “Searchin’,” “Crazze”—on <i>The Album Time Forgot</i>	as Jay Dee	That Was Entertainment
	A Tribe Called Quest	“4 Moms,” “Against the World,” “Busta’s Lament,” “Da Booty,” “Find a Way,” “His Name Is Muttu Ranks,” “Start It Up,” “Steppin’ It Up”—on <i>The Love Movement</i>	as The Ummah; contributions noted as JD	Jive
	A Tribe Called Quest and JD of Slum Village	“That Shit”—on <i>Funkmaster Flex • The Mix Tape, Vol. III</i>	as The Ummah	Loud
	Bizarre	“Butterfly”	as Jaydee for The Ummah	Federation
	Mood	“Secrets of the Sand (Remix)”	as J.D. of The Ummah	Blunt
1999	Heavy D	“Listen”—on <i>Heavy</i>	as Jay Dee	Universal
	Macy Gray	“I Try (Jaydee Remix)”	as Jaydee	Epic
	Nine Yards	“Always Find a Way (Jay Dee Remix)”	as Jay Dee	Virgin
	Phat Kat	“Dedication to the Suckers,” “Don’t Nobody Care About Us,” “Microphone Master”—on <i>Dedication to the Suckers</i>	as Jay Dee	House Shoes
	Phife Dawg	“Bend Ova” (later “Ben Dova”), “Thought U Wuz Nice”	as Jay Dee for The Ummah	Superrappin/ Groove Attack

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	CREDIT	LABEL
1999	Q-Tip	“Wait Up,” “Higher,” “Moving with U,” “Breathe & Stop,” “Let’s Ride,” “Things U Do,” “All In,” “Go Hard,” “End of Time,” “Do It, Be It, See It,” “Vivrant Thing”—on <i>Amplified</i>	as Jay Dee, produced with Q-Tip	Arista
	Que.D	“Underestimated,” “Supa Shit,” “Kilo,” “Cash Flow,” “Michelle,” “Rock Box,” “Don’t Stop”— on <i>Quiet Delicious</i> (reissued as <i>Quite Delicious</i> )	as J.Dahmer	Wajjid [ <i>sic</i> ] (reissued by Royal Flyness)
	The Roots	“Dynamite!”—on <i>Things Fall Apart</i>	as Jay Dee of The Ummah	MCA
2000	Bahamadia	“One-4-Teen (Jay Dee Remix)”	as Jay Dee	Good Vibe
	Black Star	“Little Brother”— on <i>The Hurricane (Music from and Inspired by the Motion Picture)</i>	as Jay Dee for The Ummah	MCA
	Busta Rhymes	“Enjoy Da Ride,” “Live It Up,” “Show Me What You Got”—on <i>Anarchy</i>	as Jay Dee	Elektra
	Common	“Time Travelin’ (A Tribute to Fela),” “Heat,” “Dooinit,” “The Light,” “Funky for You,” “The Questions,” “Time Travelin’ Reprise,” “A Film Called (Pimp),” “Nag Champa (Afrodisiac for the World),”	as The Soulquarians’ Jay Dee for The Ummah; “Time Travelin’” produced with The Soulquarians; “Funky for You,” “The Questions” produced with James Poyser	MCA

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	CREDIT	LABEL
2000	Common	“Thelonius,” “Payback Is a Grandmother”— on <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i>		
	De La Soul	“Thru Ya City”—on <i>AOI: Mosaic Thump</i>	as Jay Dee for The Ummah	Tommy Boy
	Erykah Badu	“Didn’t Cha Know?,” “My Life,” “Kiss Me on My Neck”—on <i>Mama’s Gun</i>	as Jay Dee the Soulquarian; producer: “Didn’t Cha Know”; co- producer: “Kiss Me on My Neck,” “My Life”	Universal Motown
	Frank-n- Dank (as Jaydee presents . . .)	“Me and My Man,” “Love (A Thing of the Past),” “Everybody Get Up!” “Give It Up II”	as Jay Dee	Fat Beats
	Guru	“Certified (featuring Bilal)— on <i>Guru’s Jazzmatazz: Streetsoul</i>	as Jay Dee	Virgin
	Innerzone Orchestra	“People Make the World Go Round (J-88 Mix)”	as J-88	Talkin Loud
	Mos Def	“Can U C the Pride in the Panther (Remix)”	as Jay Dee	Interscope
	Phife Dawg	“4 Horsemen”—on <i>Ventilation: Da LP</i>	as Jay Dee for The Ummah	Superrappin/ Groove Attack
	Royce da 5’9”	“Let’s Grow”—on <i>Lyricist Lounge Volume 2</i>	as Jay Dee	Rawkus
	Spacek	“Eve (JayDee Mix)”	as Jay Dee	Blue/Island
The Brand New Heavies	“Saturday Night (Jay Dee Remix)”	as Jay Dee	Delicious Vinyl	

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	CREDIT	LABEL
2001	Bilal	“Reminisce”—on <i>1st Born Second</i>	as Jay Dee	Interscope
	Busta Rhymes	“Genesis,” “Make It Hurt”—on <i>Genesis</i>	as J Dilla	J
	Chino XL	“Don’t Say a Word,” “How It Goes”—on <i>I Told You So</i>	as Jay Dee	Metro
	De La Soul	“Peer Pressure”—on <i>AOI: Bionix</i>	as Jay Dee	Tommy Boy
	Lucy Pearl	“Without You (Jay Dee Remix)”	as Jay Dee	Virgin
	Que.D	“In Yo Face”	as Jay Dee	Up Above
	Toshi Kubota	“Nothing But Your Love (Jay Dee Remix)”	as Jay Dee	Epic
2002	Busta Rhymes	“It Ain’t Safe No More,” “What Up,” “Turn Me Up Some”—on <i>It Ain’t Safe No More</i>	as J Dilla	J
	Common	“Soul Power,” “Aquarius,” “Electric Wire Hustler Flower,” “New Wave,” “Star *69 (PS with Love),” “Between Me,” “You & Liberation,” “I Am Music,” “Jimi Was a Rock Star”—on <i>Electric Circus</i>	as Dilla, co-producer	MCA
	DJ Cam	“Love Junkee (Dilla Vocal Remix)”	as Jay Dee aka Dilla	Inflamable
	DJ Jazzy Jeff featuring Slum Village	“Are U Ready?”—on <i>The Magnificent EP</i>	as Jay Dee	Rapster
	Frank-n-Dank	“Push,” “Where the Parties At?,” “I’ll Bet U Will”	as Jay Dee	Mummy/ Groove Attack
	Frank-n-Dank (as Jay Dee featuring ...)	“Off Ya Chest,” “Take Dem Clothes Off”	as Jay Dee	ABB

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	CREDIT	LABEL
2002	Slum Village	“Hoes,” “Let’s,” “One”—on <i>Trinity (Past, Present and Future)</i>	as Jay Dilla	Barak/Capitol
	Talib Kweli	“Where Do We Go?” “Stand to the Side”—on <i>Quality</i>	as J Dilla	Rawkus
2003	ASD	“Komm Schon”— on <i>Wer Hätte Das Gedacht?</i> “Wenn Ihr Fühlt . . .”—on <i>Hey Du</i>	as J Dilla	Eimsbush
	Common	“Come Close Remix (Closer)”	as J Dilla	MCA
	Eric Roberson	“When Love Calls”—on <i>The Vault, Vol. 1</i>	as Jay Dee, produced with James Poyser	Blue Erro Soul
	Four Tet	“As Serious as Your Life (Jay Dee Remix)”	as Jay Dee	Domino
	T Love	“When You’re Older (Ode to the Pickaninny),” “Who Smoked Sunshine?” “Long Way Back,” “Chiquita”—on <i>Long Way Back</i>	as Jay Dee	Astralwerks
	Vivian Green	“Fanatic (Dilla’s Remix)”	as J Dilla	Columbia
2004	Amp Fiddler	“Intro,” “You Play Me,” “Waltz of a Ghetto Fly”—on <i>Waltz of a Ghetto Fly</i> . “I Believe in You (Jaylib Mix)”	as J Dilla	Genuine
	Brother Jack McDuff	“Oblighetto (J Dilla Remix)—on <i>Blue Note Revisited</i>	as J Dilla	Blue Note
	De La Soul	“Verbal Clap,” “Much More,” “Shoomp”—on <i>The Grind Date</i>	as J Dilla	Sanctuary

\* “Intro” and “Waltz of a Ghetto Fly” are the same beat as “Things U Do” by Q-Tip; “I Believe in You” is the same beat as “Raw Shit” by Jaylib.

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	CREDIT	LABEL
2004	Frank-n-Dank	“Okay,” “Let’s Go,” “M.C.A. (Music Cemetery of America)”—on <i>Xtended Play Version 3.13</i>	as J Dilla	Needillworks
	Oh No	“Move”—on <i>The Disrupt</i>	as J Dilla	Stones Throw
	Slum Village	“Do You”—on <i>Detroit Deli (A Taste of Detroit)</i>	as J Dilla	Barak/Capitol
2005	Common	“Love Is . . .,” “It’s Your World”—on <i>Be</i>	as Dilla	G.O.O.D./Geffen
	Common	“The Movement”—on <i>26K</i>	as Dilla	Decon
	Dwele	“Keep On (featuring Slum Village)”—on <i>Some Kinda . . .</i>	as J Dilla	Virgin
	Dwight Tribble and The Life Force Trio	“Antiquity”—on <i>Love Is the Answer</i>	as J Dilla	Ninja Tune
	Lawless Element	“The Shining”—on <i>Soundvision: In Stereo</i>	as J Dilla, produced with Young RJ	Babygrande
	M.E.D.	“Push,” “So Real”—on <i>Push Comes to Shove</i>	as J Dilla	Stones Throw
	Slum Village	“It’s Your World,” “Who Are We?”—on <i>Prequel to a Classic</i>	as J Dilla; “It’s Your World” produced with Young RJ	Barak
Steve Spacek	“Dollar”—on <i>Space Shift</i>	as J Dilla	Sound in Color	
2006	Busta Rhymes	“You Can’t Hold the Torch”—on <i>The Big Bang</i>	as J Dilla	Aftermath
	Ghostface Killah	“Beauty Jackson,” “Whip You with a Strap”—on <i>Fishcale</i> *	as J Dilla	Def Jam

\* “Beauty Jackson” is the same beat as “Hi” by J Dilla; “Whip You with a Strap” is the same beat as “One for Ghost” by J Dilla.

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	CREDIT	LABEL
2006	The Roots	“Can’t Stop This”—on <i>Game Theory</i>	as J Dilla; co-produced by The Roots and The Randy Watson Experience	Def Jam
2007	Common	“So Far to Go (with D’Angelo)—on <i>Finding Forever</i>	as Dilla	G.O.O.D./Geffen
	Phat Kat	“Nasty Ain’t It,” “My Old Label,” “Cold Steel (with Elzhi),” “Game Time”—on <i>Carte Blanche</i>	as J Dilla	Look
2008	Guilty Simpson	“I Must Love You”—on <i>Ode to the Ghetto</i>	as J Dilla	Stones Throw
	Q-Tip	“Move,” “Feva”—on <i>The Renaissance</i>	as J Dilla	Universal Motown
2009	Illa J	“Timeless,” “We Here,” “R U Listenin?,” “Alien Family (Interlude),” “Strugglin,” “Showtime,” “Swagger,” “Mr Shakes (Skit),” “DFTF,” “All Good,” “Sounds Like Love,” “Everytime,” “Illasoul,” “Air Signs”—on <i>Yancey Boys</i>	as Jay Dee; co-produced by Illa J and Mike Floss	Delicious Vinyl
	MF Doom	“Gazillion Ear,” “Lightworks”—on <i>Born Like This</i> <sup>†</sup>	as J Dilla	Lex
	Mos Def	“History”—on <i>The Ecstatic</i>	as J Dilla	Downtown
	Raekwon	“House of Flying Daggers,” “Ason Jones,” “10 Bricks”—on <i>Only Built 4 Cuban Linx . . . Pt. II</i> <sup>‡</sup>	as J Dilla	Ice H2O

\* “Can’t Stop This” is the same beat as “Time: The Donut of the Heart” by J Dilla.

† “Lightworks” is the same beat as “Lightworks” by J Dilla.

‡ “10 Bricks” is the same beat as “The Red” by Jaylib.

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	CREDIT	LABEL
2010	Erykah Badu	“Love”—on <i>New Amerykah Part Two (Return of the Ankh)</i>	as Jay Dilla	Universal Motown
	Slum Village	“Lock It Down,” “We’ll Show You”—on <i>Villa Manifesto</i>	as J Dilla; “We’ll Show You” produced with Young RJ	Ne’Astra
2013	Frank-n-Dank	“Intro,” “Get Cha Bitch,” “Marijuana,” “Rite Bites,” “Street Life,” “Pimp Strut,” “Where the Parties At?,” “Y’all Don’t Want It,” “Sex on the Beach,” “All Seasons,” “Alright,” “Afterparty,” “Ma Dukes,” “Keep It Coming”—on <i>48 Hours</i>	as J Dilla	Delicious Vinyl
	Yancey Boys (Illa J and Frank Nitt)	“Dilltro,” “Fisherman,” “Lovin’ U,” “Go and Ask the DJ,” “Jeep Volume,” “Flowers,” “Honk Ya Horn,” “Slippin’,” “Without Wings,” “Beautiful,” “Quicksand,” “Rock My World,” “The Throwaway,” “This Evening”—on <i>Sunset Blvd.</i>	as J Dilla	Delicious Vinyl/ Yancey Media Group
2015	Slum Village	“Intro,” “Love Is,” “Tear It Down,” “Expressive,” “Windows,” “Yes Yes (Remix),” “Right Back,” “Too Much,” “What We Have”—on <i>Yes!</i>	as J Dilla aka Jay Dee, produced with Young RJ	Ne’Astra/Yancey Music Group
2016	Phife Dawg	“Nutshell”	as J Dilla	Smoking Needles



## As a Musician/Vocalist

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	ROLE	LABEL
1995	The Pharcyde	“All Live”—on <i>LabcabinCalifornia</i>	Drums	Delicious Vinyl
1998	A Tribe Called Quest	“That Shit”—on <i>Funkmaster Flex • The Mix Tape, Vol. III</i>	Vocals	Loud
1999	Que.D	“Supa Shit”—on <i>Quite Delicious</i>	Vocals	Waajid [ <i>sic</i> ] (reissued by Royal Flyness)
2000	Common	“Heat,” “Nag Champa (Afrodisiac for the World),” “Thelonius”—on <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i>	Vocals	MCA
	Erykah Badu	“Booty”—on <i>Mama’s Gun</i>	Bass, Drum Programming	Universal Motown
2001	De La Soul	“Peer Pressure”—on <i>AOI: Bionix</i>	Vocals	Tommy Boy
2002	Common	“Jimi Was a Rock Star”—on <i>Electric Circus</i>	Moog Synthesizer, Drums, Electric Guitar, Bass, Drum Programming	MCA
	Frank-n-Dank	“Take Dem Clothes Off”—on <i>Off Ya Chest</i>	Vocals	ABB
2004	B.R. Gunna	“Do Your Thang, Stupid”—on <i>Dirty District: Vol. 2</i>	Vocals	Barak
	Slum Village	“Reunion”—on <i>Detroit Deli (A Taste of Detroit)</i>	Vocals	Barak/Capitol
2005	Diamond D	“We Gangstas”—on <i>The Diamond Mine</i>	Vocals	Diamond Mine
	Lawless Element	“Love,” “Words from Dilla”—on <i>Soundvision: In Stereo</i>	Vocals	Babygrande

YEAR	ARTIST	TITLE	ROLE	LABEL
2005	Platinum Pied Pipers	“Shotgun,” “Act Like You Know”—on <i>Triple P</i> ; “Shotgun (Remix)”	Vocals	Ubiquity
	Sa-Ra	“Thrilla”—on <i>The Second Time Around</i>	Vocals	Sound in Color

### Batches

TITLE	TRACKS
1995/1996 Batch (“Whatupdoe Sessions”)	Includes the beats for “Still Shining,” “Wordplay,” “Stakes Is High”
1998 Batch (“Another Batch”)	Includes the beats for “Don’t Say a Word,” “E=MC2,” “Microphone Master”
1999 Batch (“The New Slave”)	Includes the beats for “Breathe and Stop,” “Payback Is a Grandmother”
2000 Batch (“Another Batch 2000”)	Includes the beats for “Let’s Grow,” “Love” (Erykah Badu), “Enjoy Da Ride”
2001 Batch (“New Installment,” “Da 1st Installment”)	Includes the beats for “Ma Dukes”
2002 Batches, Vols. 1–5 (“Da 2nd Installment”)	Includes the beats for <i>Champion Sound</i> , “You Can’t Hold the Torch,” “Push”
2003 Batches, Vols. 1–2	Includes the beats for <i>Jay Stay Paid</i>
2004 Batch (“Dill Withers,” “The Motown Tape”)	Includes the beat for “Move” (Q-Tip) and “Love” (J Dilla)

# Thanks

**My gratitude, first and foremost,** goes to everyone who sat for an interview for this book. I am honored by your trust and your candor, and my paramount wish is that I have done right by you and your story. Your names are inscribed in the Reporter's Notes and Sources section of this book.

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To James Dewitt Yancey, thanks for allowing me and Chino XL into your space, for humoring our two-man comedy show, and for two of the best beats you ever made. I doubt you would have imagined a future in which people would be writing voluminously about you; nor would I have imagined that I might be one of those people—which is why my dumb ass left my camera at the Atheneum and why I talked too much. Now, like you, I have learned the value of listening. I hope I've heard you.

I made my first trip to Detroit to work with Jay Dee; years later, I made my second to meet the family of the woman who became my wife. Wendy S. Walters imbued in me her love of the city. Her broad knowledge and incisive perspective enabled me to see how it connected to James Dewitt Yancey and so many other things; her mastery of language gave me the proper coaching to write about it; and her compassion got me through the process. Wendy's people have made a home for us in Detroit: I treasure Dr. Toni S. Walters, Jamie Kaye Walters, and Vincent M. Keenan, and am indebted to them for the support, guidance, and connections they provided that allowed me to bring my J Dilla students

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I sing the praises of another Detroit family. When I told Maureen Yancey-Smith that I wanted to write a book about the gift her son gave to the world, she granted me abundant time and access, and her generosity and candor made it possible to tell a much deeper story about how a family created and sustained James. To know Maureen is itself a gift, and for that I am grateful. Before I ever thought of writing this book, I felt blessed by Herman Hayes's friendship, and Herm in return has a friend for life. I am endeared and indebted to Martha Yancey and John Yancey; to Reta, Clarice, Rashonda, and Al Hayes; to Faith Lamb; and to Maurice Lamb. To Joylette and Janell Hunter, and to Monica Whitlow: you are important, your stories matter, and thank you for sharing them with me. This work is dedicated to Ty-Monae Whitlow and Ja'Mya Yancey.

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Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson functions in this book as he does in life—a polymath in a category of his own. Not only did he study Jay Dee as a fan and then become James's friend and collaborator, Ahmir was the first writer to argue for his significance as a producer, on the pages of *Okayplayer*. He's never, ever stopped testifying. This book is simply the latest in a chain of events that Ahmir started. In that sense, this book would not be possible without him, and also because he was always so bountiful in his assistance and encouragement. Ahmir talks a lot about following his "North Stars." In this endeavor, Ahmir is mine.

My path to the study of James Dewitt Yancey began with the people who first schooled me back in the mid-1990s: Mike Ross, Rick Ross, Craig Bullock, and Joe Willis. It continued when Derek Barbosa (also known as Chino XL) and I made our pilgrimage to Detroit in 1999. More than a decade later, I began teaching at NYU, where I was mentored by Jason King, who in my estimation wrote the very first serious explication of J Dilla's musical impact on traditional musicians in his liner notes for a 2012 vinyl reissue of D'Angelo's *Voodoo*. It was Jason who encouraged me to not only lead a class on Dilla but take them to Detroit. I am grateful to my students for the honor of studying with them, and to the following people at NYU for their help in making the course a reality: Brianne Hayes, Alan Watson, Chelsea Falato, Allyson Green, Carrie Meconis, Annie Stanton, Bob Cameron, Michael Dinwiddie, Jeff Peretz, Bob Power, Nicholas Sansano, Michael McCoy, and Noah Simon. This book was supported by several Tisch Dean's Grants, and to my school I am most grateful. Thanks as well to my colleagues Sheril Antonio, Karen Shimakawa, Fred Carl, Jim Anderson, Marc Plotkin, J. D. Samson, Sofia Rei, Lauren Davis, Errol Kolosine, and Matthew D. Morrison; and to Harry Weingar, Piotr Orlov, Ashley Kahn, Kendra Foster, Vivien Goldman, Ned Sublette, Bob Christgau, Mike Errico, Ayanna Wilson, Kyle Alfred, and the rest of the adjunct faculty, staff, and students of the Clive

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## **A Note About the Author**

Dan Charnas is the author of the definitive history of the hip-hop business, *The Big Payback*. He is also the author of *Work Clean*, a book that applies chefs' techniques to almost any life situation. The cocreator and executive producer of the VH1 movie and TV series *The Breaks*, he lives in Manhattan and is an associate professor at the Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music at the NYU Tisch School of the Arts.