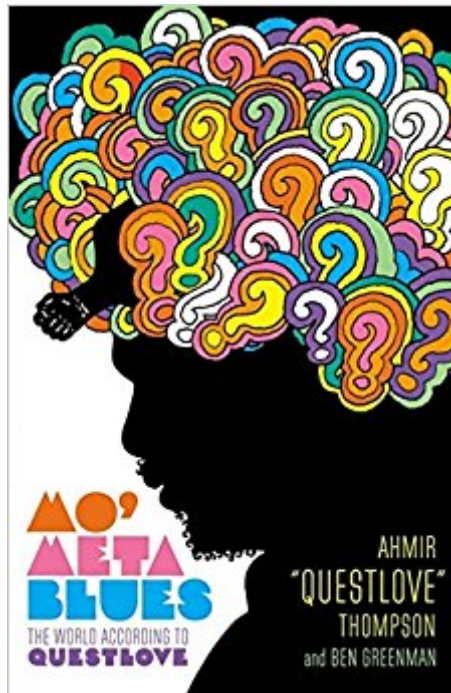


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# Mo' Meta Blues: The World According To Questlove



## Synopsis

"You have to bear in mind that [Questlove] is one of the smartest motherf\*\*\*\*\*s on the planet. His musical knowledge, for all practical purposes, is limitless." --Robert Christgau

**MO' META BLUES**

The World According to Questlove

Mo' Meta Blues is a punch-drunk memoir in which Everyone's Favorite Questlove tells his own story while tackling some of the lates, the greats, the fakes, the philosophers, the heavyweights, and the true originals of the music world. He digs deep into the album cuts of his life and unearths some pivotal moments in black art, hip hop, and pop culture.

Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson is many things: virtuoso drummer, producer, arranger, Late Night with Jimmy Fallon bandleader, DJ, composer, and tireless Tweeter. He is one of our most ubiquitous cultural tastemakers, and in this, his first book, he reveals his own formative experiences--from growing up in 1970s West Philly as the son of a 1950s doo-wop singer, to finding his own way through the music world and ultimately co-founding and rising up with the Roots, a.k.a., the last hip hop band on Earth. Mo' Meta Blues also has some (many) random (or not) musings about the state of hip hop, the state of music criticism, the state of statements, as well as a plethora of run-ins with celebrities, idols, and fellow artists, from Stevie Wonder to KISS to D'Angelo to Jay-Z to Dave Chappelle to...you ever seen Prince roller-skate?!? But Mo' Meta Blues isn't just a memoir. It's a dialogue about the nature of memory and the idea of a post-modern black man saddled with some post-modern blues. It's a book that questions what a book like Mo' Meta Blues really is. It's the side wind of a one-of-a-kind mind. It's a rare gift that gives as well as takes. It's a record that keeps going around and around.

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## Customer Reviews

"Attention White Girls: Stop reading about vampires and read what Questlove has to say instead. Mo' Meta Blues is a magical kaleidoscope about a high concept, low maintenance genius named Ahmir. Like him, it's smart, funny, sweet and in a thousand places at once. Read it or rot on your vine."--Amy Poehler"Questlove is an artistic giant and spiritual genius whose roots go back to Curtis Mayfield and so many others. This book is a gem to read and a joy to feel! Don't miss it!"--Dr. Cornel West"I truly love this book. I felt like I was having a conversation with Ahmir, and I may have even said aloud a few times, "What? No way!" It's everything I want to know about someone who is obsessed with music...his love for music (contemporary/revolutionary/cool) is tireless. I am forever a fan of Questlove's fanaticism."--Fred Armisen"A busy thicket of musical geekery . . . likable . . . funny . . . MO' META BLUES has an open-mike, improv-night spirit . . . The end pages on my copy are crammed with song titles; they resemble the back of a popular girl's senior yearbook." --Dwight Garner, New York Times"Smart, funny, insightful . . . [The] joy of this book is getting to live inside Questlove's jam-packed, restless brain for a while . . . Four stars." --Rolling Stone"MO' META BLUES isn't just a memoir. It's a dialogue about the nature of memory and the idea of a postmodern black man saddled with some postmodern blues. It's the side wind of a one-of-a-kind mind. It's a rare gift that gives as well as takes. It's a record that keeps going around and around."[MO' META BLUES] is incredible . . . [Questlove is] one of the more unabashed music geeks to ever walk the earth . . . a student of music and pop culture. But, as the book demonstrates, Thompson is also a wonderful storyteller." --Pitchfork.com"A thoughtful, incisive analysis of hip hop-and pop music in general-from one of its foremost contemporary architects . . . a book with as much warmth, heart, and humor as introspective intelligence. Fanatics and newcomers to the music will both find plenty of revelation here." --Kirkus Reviews (starred review)"A hip hop thinker with historical perspective . . . an excellent book." --Philadelphia Inquirer"After reading it, you'll feel like you know Questlove. The book is intimate and funny. Plus, you'll come away with a crash course in hip-hop history." --NPR.org

Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson is the drummer and co-founder of the Grammy award-winning hip hop band The Roots. He's also a world-renowned producer, arranger, songwriter and The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon bandleader. Ben Greenman is an editor at The New Yorker and author of several acclaimed novels, including Superbad, Please Step Back, and The Slippage. As a journalist and

critic, he has written widely on music and pop culture.

I love this book. It's like a short history of hip hop, The Roots, Questlove, and more. He brings up so many good points. Music is a language. It's always communicating something. This book gives an honest and clear look at where hip hop came from, where it might be going, the dilemmas and joys of music-making and movement-making, and all the important questions at hand. I am in love with the perspective and appreciate for music shown by Questlove. I am a music teacher, and as such, his use of albums like textbooks is perfection to me. I am so excited about this book. And what's more, it's an easy and enjoyable read. You won't want to put it down!"The exceptions don't prove the rule. They shame it. They banish it." ~ Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, pg. 56

"Music has the power to stop time but music also keeps time."Mo' Meta Blues was a delightful musical journey. Sure Thompson shared the details of his life but it was more like the soundtrack of his life. I appreciated the fact that this book was not structured like a chronological biography. There were memos from the publisher, footnotes from The Roots comanager, and extended playlists spread throughout the text. "When you live your life through records, the records are a record of your life." There was not a time when music was not apart of Thompson's life. His parents had a band and Thompson likened them to Johnny Cash and June Carter. Thompson was tapping out patterns at eight months old which blossomed into a drumming career. He obsessed over album reviews and covers. The small details and obscure facts that he shared throughout the book about certain pieces of music, groups, and individuals kept the book interesting. It is no secret that Thompson is a Prince fan and his affinity for the artist is as prominent in the book as is his presence in The Roots band. The Roots individually and as a band come together and take shape in the text but those experiences do not overshadow or dominate. It's quite obvious that Ahmir and Tariq "Black Thought" are total opposites but make for a great balance within the band. Only a few weeks prior to reading this book I found out that Scott Storch was an original member of The Roots. Thompson mentioned Storch but considering his rise and fall in hip-hop I expected and wanted more details in regards to their relationship. This would not be a legit hip-hop memoir unless the Source Music Awards of 1995 were mentioned. Thompson referred to the show as hip-hop's funeral. While making a swift exit from the show, Thompson was given a demo cassette of an artist who would leave his mark on neo-soul and R & B music for years to come. That artist was D'Angelo. The highlight of the bio was how Thompson came to know local Philly youngsters before they became the famous neo-soul artists we are now so familiar with. How he described meeting Alicia Keys had

to be my favorite celebrity moment of the entire book. Thompson has a wealth of knowledge about music that is astonishing but was in no way hubris in his presentation. The footnotes provided by The Roots comanager, Rich, gave even more depth to the narratives. The ending was a bit abstract which was my only complaint with the book.

I've been a fan of The Roots since the mid-nineties. What initially attracted me to them was the interplay between the live band behind the rapping, thus merging two forms of music that I had love since I was a little kid but up till then had seen as mutually exclusive, at least in what would truly be categorized as hip hop (vs. rock rap like 311 or Rage Against The Machine). Anyway, I already digress. When I found out that Questlove had written a book, I can honestly say I had mixed feelings, first because on a number of music-related films I've seen in recent years, the camera would turn to him as this sage-like authority on music, and he seemed all too pleased to play the part, making me wonder if he was full of himself. On top of that, when I heard The Roots took a gig as a backing band on a late night talk show, as much as I respect an artist's freedom of direction and need to make money and have an audience, I couldn't keep the term "sellout" from popping up in my head. Nevertheless, the high ratings on this site suggested this book would be a worthwhile read, and were they ever right! If you haven't already lost interest in this review, unless you're both a musician and a voracious reader, you probably will soon since my reasons for loving this book are very personal. Still, it moved me so much I just felt the need to testify. Now the review begins in earnest: What moved me most about this book is the fact that Questlove, like me, is clearly a musician, music lover, and a voracious reader of both reviews (are you reading this?) and books about music. He states early on that like me, musician autobiographies are one of his favorite kinds of books, and that when he decided to write one, he decided to take an avant garde approach to writing it by including atypical elements like memos from the co-author to the editor, a soundtrack to his early life (precisely what I have students of mine do and have considered writing an entire book on myself), and a sort of foil to his voice in their long-term road manager, who at first gets his own chapters but ultimately, and I'd say more effectively, gets a sort of veto power in the form of footnotes. At first, the skeptic in me saw all this as a shallow gimmick, but it didn't take too long for me to view it as a brilliant remix to the format of what's become (I believe) the best selling non-fiction genre: the memoir. In terms of pure content, the book serves as a fantastic first-hand retrospective of hip hop's golden era in the nineties, not to mention a delivery room recounting of the birth (and ultimately death?) of what is sadly seeming like a brief and wonderful hybrid of hip hop and R&B in neo soul. The list of names present at the house party jam sessions at his place in Philly contained

the bulk of the roster of artists who revolutionized my concept of what could be done with music between 1999 and the mid-O's. Genres aside, this is ultimately the story of a person who has dedicated his existence to music while rarely compromising his principles (yes, I'm deliberately contradicting my earlier accusation). This struck such a chord with me because I have put a massive portion of my adult life into developing my skills in creating music. It is partially the lack of desire to compromise my principles that has kept me from "making it big," but another part of it is not being able to find a band that is willing to stick it out long enough to make a name for itself. In Questlove's impressively honest recounting of The Roots' existence as a band, he shows what a challenge and a rollercoaster it is to keep a band going. From the hand-to-mouth struggles of their early days to the mixed reactions to their later albums, it's evident that it's been no walk in the park for the roots and Questlove, who is clearly his own separate institution on so many levels, but it seems like it was (and continues to be) all worth it. To go back to my earlier comment on the TV gig, reading his explanation of it makes total sense to me, and it looks like it's actually been a phenomenal boon to the band. I don't normally watch TV, but I'm now curious to see them do their thing on that show since it sounds like there's lots of love, intelligence, wit and hard work going into it. The last element I'd like to address is his love for music. Like Questlove, I would call music my one overt addiction (I even recorded a song about it back in the days of my Tascam 4-track called "Musical Junky"). To hear Questlove talk about his genre-spanning appreciation of music hit home so hard, especially the element of having certain songs and artists that you kind of secretly appreciate. (I thought that I was the only one who frequently skips tunes on my iPod to avoid shame when friends are listening.) The last detail that really jumped out was when he mentioned DJing and not playing his own stuff when he does it. It's a trip to hear someone at that level make a statement like that, but let's just say I know exactly what he means. It's one thing to put your songs out there with a band on stage, but when playing them next to other artists' tunes that have the dance floor moving, what if people clear the floor like what happened in the club in Florida? That was a super poignant detail in the book, but it also shows how the art of music is not only about selling records and making people want to shake that thing, and for that I am very thankful for all Questlove and other uncompromising artists like him have done. P.S. After reading what I wrote, I realized I didn't address my earlier suspicions about him being full of himself. In getting to understand him better, I realized that he really is a sage-like authority on music, which is why documentarians more in the know than me sought him out for his input. I'd actually say that after reading this book, I'd consider him to be impressively humble and practical.

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