

THE MAN WHO FORGOT HE WAS A RAP LEGEND

HIP HOP

BY JOSHUA BEARMAN

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The other residents were mostly elderly Jews, Yiddish speakers whose families had emigrated from the Pale of Settlement. T was from the Bronx, and he had been a direct witness to the birth of hip-hop; ten years earlier, his single “It’s Yours” was the very first hip-hop recording released by Def Jam, hashed out with Rick Rubin in his dorm at N.Y.U. That song became a hit, inspired a whole new sound in rap music, and placed T at the lead of a seismic cultural force. Many of T’s fellow patients knew he was a rapper or singer or something (“That nice boy from the third floor? They said he was a superstar.” “Yeah, right”), but this was his first chance to show them.

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Covering a whole decade, T La rock lorem ipsum Mus doloritamet, aut est mintem-posam destis eatur

- 1984 T LA ROCK & JAZZY JAY - IT'S YOURS
- 1985 HE'S INCREDIBLE
- 1986 BACK TO BURN
- 1986 BREAKING BELLS / BASS MACHINE
- 1987 THIS BEAT KICKS / SCRATCH MONOPOLY
- 1987 THIS BEAT KICKS (CHAD BEAT REMIX) / HAVING FUN / BACK TO BURN
- 1987 LYRICAL KING (FROM THE BOOGIE DOWN BRONX)
- 1988 LOVE BLIND / RUNAWAY
- 1988 FLOW WITH THE NEW STYLE
- 1990 T-LA ROCK & JAZZY JAY / NAIROBI AND THE AWESOME FOURSOME - IT'S YOURS / FUNKY SOUL MAKOSSA

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The head injury he'd suffered, an acute subdural hematoma, often leads to severe and lasting memory loss. When he was first brought to the hospital, his doctors had been unsure if he would survive, even as they tried to save him. At one point, T's family was told to call a priest.

The swelling in T's brain affected his hippocampus, the seat of long-term memory, which was why when he finally did open his eyes one day, shocking the critical-care nurse on duty, he was profoundly disoriented, and his mother, Sylvia, who had stood vigil for weeks, leaned over the bed to gently remind him of his name. “You’re Terrence Keaton,” she said. “You’re 32 years old. And I’m your mother.” Members of his family also stood by his hospital bed, but he wasn’t sure who they were. When he saw one of his brothers, T pointed at him and asked, “Who’s this?”

“It’s me—Tone,” his brother Anthony said. He was the youngest of the six Keaton kids.

“Where’s June?” T asked.

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At one point, the doctors thought T would be permanently disabled, and they tried to put him in a mental hospital. But Sylvia, a sixth-grade teacher, was a determined woman, and she made sure that T was not warehoused in the bowels of Bellevue but went to a place where he could recover. Haym Salomon was on the opposite end of the city from the Bronx, but every day she took the train there—an hour each way—to sit by T's side. For a

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FOURCOVES: IT'S YOURS / FUNKY

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Above the makeshift stage hung a long sheet of butcher paper, heralding the HAYM SALOMON TALENT SHOW in bubble letters. After a resident named Betty finished reading poems from her grandchildren, it was his turn to take the stage. He cut an odd figure up there: a six-foot-three former rap legend in a tracksuit, sweating from nerves in front of a room full of frail senior citizens. He may have seemed like a strange booking choice for Haym Salomon—but in fact, he felt right at home. Because he was home. “Please welcome,” the announcer said, “our very own musical maestro, the one and only T La Rock!”



“It’s Yours” was the very first hip-hop recording released by Def Jam

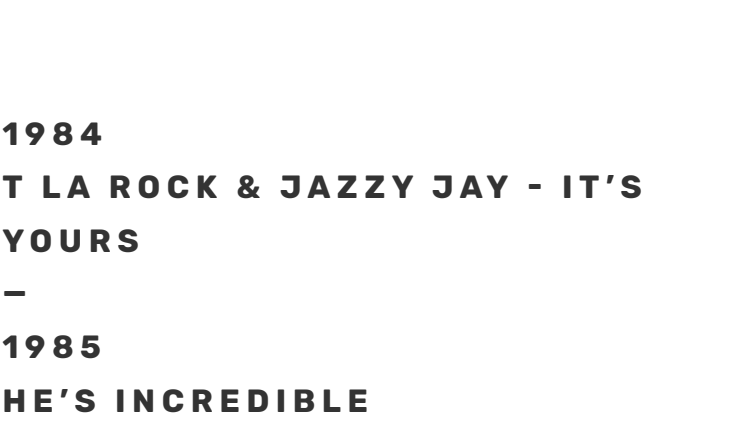
T LA ROCK & JAZZY JAY - IT'S YOURS

VINYL, 12", 33 ⅓ RPM

DEF JAM RECORDINGS 1984

The crowd waited. Some were asleep in their wheelchairs. A few no longer knew their own names. But those who were alert and awake were in quite a festive mood. They tapped their feet as the music started, waving at their fellow resident.

T had been living at Haym Salomon for some time, recovering from a traumatic head injury. Two years earlier, on April 1, 1994, he had been attacked on the street near his house in the Bronx. By the time he got to the hospital, he had slipped into a coma.



T LA ROCK SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Covering a whole decade, T La rock lorem ipsum Mus doloritamet, aut est mintemposam destis eatur

1984

T LA ROCK & JAZZY JAY - IT'S YOURS

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1985

HE'S INCREDIBLE

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