

= Neo soul =

Neo soul is a genre of popular music . The term was coined by music industry entrepreneur Kedar Massenburg during the late 1990s to market and describe a style of music that emerged from soul and contemporary R & B. Heavily based in soul music , neo soul is distinguished by a less conventional sound than its contemporary R & B counterpart , with incorporated elements ranging from jazz , funk , and hip hop to pop , fusion , and African music . It has been noted by music writers for its traditional R & B influences , conscious @-@ driven lyrics , and strong female presence .

Neo soul developed during the 1980s and early 1990s , in the United States and United Kingdom , as a soul revival movement . It earned mainstream success during the 1990s , with the commercial and critical breakthroughs of several artists , including D 'Angelo , Erykah Badu , Lauryn Hill , and Maxwell . Their music was marketed as an alternative to the producer @-@ driven , digitally approached R & B of the time .

Since its initial mainstream popularity and impact on the sound of contemporary R & B , neo soul has been expanded and diversified musically through the works of both African @-@ American and international artists . Its mainstream presence declined during the 2000s , although newer artists emerged through more independent means of marketing their music . According to music journalist Mark Anthony Neal , " neo @-@ soul and its various incarnations has helped to redefine the boundaries and contours of black pop . "

= = Etymology = =

As a term , neo soul was coined by Kedar Massenburg of Motown Records in the late 1990s as a marketing category following the commercial breakthroughs of artists such as D 'Angelo , Erykah Badu , Lauryn Hill , and Maxwell . The success of D 'Angelo 's 1995 debut album *Brown Sugar* has been regarded by several writers and music critics as inspiration behind the term 's origin . While some artists have ignored the label , others have received the designation with controversy because it may seem contrived to music audiences and imply that soul music had ended at some point in time . In a 2002 interview for *Billboard* , Massenburg said that genre classifications are often unpopular because they may be suggestive of a short @-@ lived trend . However , although he said neo soul is still essentially soul music , Massenburg felt there was a need to market artists of the genre for listeners to have an understanding of what they were buying .

In a 2010 article for *PopMatters* , music writer Tyler Lewis said that neo soul has been received with much controversy : " Given the way black music has been named by (usually) outsiders ever since the blues , the reaction to the name by artists who ostensibly fit into the ' neo @-@ soul ' category represents a wonderful example of black self @-@ determination in an industry that is still defiantly wedded to narrow definitions and images of black folks . " Jason Anderson of *CBC News* compares the etymology of neo soul to that of " new wave " and comments : " As imperfect as the term may be , neo @-@ soul is still an effective tag to describe the mix of chic modernity and time @-@ honoured tradition that distinguished the genre 's best examples . Neo @-@ soul artists tried to look both backward and forward , acting in the belief that a continuum might exist . "

= = Characteristics = =

Despite some ambivalence from artists , the term received widespread use by music critics and writers who wrote about artists and albums associated with the musical style . African American studies professor Mark Anthony Neal has described neo soul as " everything from avant @-@ garde R & B to organic soul ... a product of trying to develop something outside of the norm in R & B " . According to music writers , the genre 's works are mostly album @-@ oriented and distinguished by its musicianship and production , incorporating " organic " elements of classic soul music with the use of live instrumentation , in contrast to the more single @-@ oriented , hip hop @-@ based , and producer @-@ driven sampling approach of contemporary R & B. They also infuse jazz , funk , and African musical elements into R & B. In her book *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction*

, music author Anne Danielson wrote that neo soul toward the end of the 1990s exhibited a musical development that was part of " a remarkable increase in musicians ' experimentation with and manipulation of grooves at the microrhythmic level ? that is , the level in played music that is usually understood in terms of phrasing and timing . "

Noting that most of the genre 's artists are singer @-@ songwriters , writers have viewed their lyrical content as more " conscious @-@ driven " and having a broader range than most other R & B artists . AllMusic calls it " roughly analogous to contemporary R & B " . Dimitri Ehrlich of Vibe said that they " emphasize a mix of elegant , jazz @-@ tinged R & B and subdued hip hop , with a highly idiosyncratic , deeply personal approach to love and politics " . Music writers have noted that neo soul artists are predominantly female , which contrasts the marginalized presence of women in mainstream hip hop and R & B. Jason Anderson of CBC News called neo soul a " sinuous , sly yet unabashedly earnest " alternative and " kind of haven for listeners turned off by the hedonism of mainstream hip @-@ hop and club jams . " Neo soul artists are often associated with alternative lifestyles and fashions , including organic food , incense , and knit caps .

According to music writer Peter Shapiro , the term itself refers to a musical style that obtains its influence from older R & B styles , and bohemian musicians seeking a soul revival , while setting themselves apart from the more contemporary sounds of their mainstream R & B counterparts . In a 1998 article on neo soul , Time journalist Christopher John Farley wrote that singers such as Hill , D 'Angelo , and Maxwell " share a willingness to challenge musical orthodoxy " . Miles Marshall Lewis commented that 1990s neo soul " owed its raison d'être to ' 70s soul superstars like Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder " , adding that " in concert , Erykah Badu and D 'Angelo regularly covered Chaka Khan , the Ohio Players , and Al Green , to make the lineage crystal clear . " In citing Tony ! Toni ! Tone ! as progenitors of the genre , Tony Green of Vibe viewed that the group pioneered the " digital @-@ analog hybrid sound " of neo soul and " dramatically refreshed the digitalized wasteland that was R & B in the late ' 80s " . Neo soul artists during the 1990s were heavily inspired by the eclectic sound and mellow instrumentation of Gil Scott @-@ Heron 's and Brian Jackson 's collaborative work in the 1970s . All About Jazz cited Jackson as " one of the early architects " of the sound and his early work with Scott @-@ Heron as " an inspirational and musical Rosetta stone for the neo @-@ soul movement " .

= = History = =

= = = 1980s ? early 1990s : Origins = = =

Neo soul originated in the 1980s and early 1990s , with the work of musical acts such as Prince , Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! , Terence Trent D 'Arby , Joi , and Mint Condition , whose music deviated from the conventions of most contemporary R & B at the time . Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! -member Raphael Saadiq later embarked on a solo career and produced various works of other neo soul artists . Influential to neo soul , UK act Sade achieved success in the 1980s with music that featured a sophisti @-@ pop style , incorporating elements of soul , pop , smooth jazz , and quiet storm . The band was part of a new wave of British R & B @-@ oriented artists during the late @-@ 1980s and early 1990s that also included Soul II Soul , Caron Wheeler , The Brand New Heavies , Jamiroquai , and Lisa Stansfield . AllMusic 's Alex Henderson writes that , " Many of the British artists who emerged during that period had a neo @-@ soul outlook and were able to blend influences from different eras " . Other British progenitors of the neo soul movement at the time included Young Disciples and Omar Lye @-@ Fook , the latter of whom has been cited as " the father of British neo @-@ soul " and an influence on many future artists .

According to Christopher John Farley , Prince had been " carrying a torch for neo soul for decades , refusing to make R & B that played by the rules or fit into comfortable formats . In the mid- ' 90s , he was suddenly joined by a host of other soul artists who also wanted to break boundaries " . American artists during the early 1990s included Zhané , Groove Theory , Joi , Tony Rich , and Me 'Shell NdegéOcello .

= = = Mid ? late 1990s : Mainstream breakthrough = = =

The success of Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! ' s 1993 album *Sons of Soul* has been viewed as a precursor to the soul music revival in the mid @-@ 1990s . In a 1997 article for the *Los Angeles Times* , music journalist Cheo Hodari Coker cited the album as having " largely sparked the soul music revival that has opened the door for a new generation of singers who build on the tradition of Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder " . Allmusic editor Leo Stanley wrote that by the release of Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! ' s follow @-@ up album *House of Music* in 1996 , " their influence was beginning to be apparent , as younger soul singer / songwriters like Tony Rich and Maxwell began reaching the R & B charts . Like Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! , Rich and Maxwell relied on traditional soul and R & B values of songwriting and live performances , discarding the synth @-@ heavy productions of the late ' 80s and early ' 90s " . Malcolm Venable of *Vibe* cites the early work of hip hop group The Roots , who used live instrumentation , as a precursor to neo soul ' s commercial breakthrough in the mid @-@ 1990s .

Music journalists have credited the successes of D 'Angelo ' s *Brown Sugar* (1995) , Badu ' s *Baduizm* (1997) , Maxwell ' s *Urban Hang Suite* (1996) , and Hill ' s *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998) with shaping and raising the neo soul movement to commercial visibility into the late 1990s . According to Farley , D 'Angelo ' s album " gives a nod to the past , [...] mints his own sound , with golden humming keyboards and sensual vocals and unhurried melodies [...] His songs were polished without being slick and smart without being pretentious " , while Badu " brought an iconoclastic spirit to soul music , with her towering Afrocentric headwraps , incense candles , and quirky lyrics " . *Baduizm* sold nearly three million copies and won Badu two Grammy Awards . Hill ' s debut featured her singing and rapping , with deeply personal lyrics , and was one of neo soul ' s primary successes , achieving massive sales , critical acclaim , and five Grammy Awards . Subsequently , other female artists broke through with their debut albums , including Macy Gray , Angie Stone , and Jill Scott . The 1997 film *Love Jones* capitalized on neo soul ' s success at the time with its soundtrack album , which impacted the Billboard charts and featured artists such as Hill , Maxwell , The Brand New Heavies , Me 'Shell NdegéOcello , Groove Theory , and Dionne Farris .

According to Greg Kot , the musical collective Soulquarians--consisting of such artists as D 'Angelo , The Roots , Erykah Badu , Bilal , Mos Def , Common , James Poyser , and Q @-@ Tip--contributed significantly to the neo soul movement during the late 1990s to the early 2000s with its members ' " organic soul , natural R & B , boho @-@ rap " . The collective developed through the production work of The Roots ' drummer and producer Questlove . Following a minor decline in its hype , neo soul ' s mainstream popularity increased in the late 1990s with the successes of Hill , Maxwell , Eric Benét , Saadiq , and Les Nubians . It impacted more mainstream @-@ oriented R & B radio , while influencing contemporary R & B acts , such as R. Kelly and Aaliyah , to incorporate some of its textural and lyrical elements . In his song " When a Woman ' s Fed Up " (1998) , Kelly incorporated a more soul @-@ based sound and referenced Erykah Badu ' s 1997 song " Tyrone " in the lyrics .

= = = 2000s : Apex and mainstream decline = = =

With the success of albums by Hill , Badu , and Maxwell , D 'Angelo ' s second album *Voodoo* served as a further alternative to excesses of late 1990s R & B and hip hop , as neo soul reached its apex in 2000 . A production of the Soulquarians , it was an exemplary creative milestone of neo soul . Ben Ratliff of *The New York Times* called the album " the succes d'estime that proves the force of this new music : it is a largely unslick , stubbornly idiosyncratic and genuinely great album that has already produced two hit singles " . By the time of her second album *Mama ' s Gun* (2000) , Erykah Badu had been dubbed by writers as " the queen of neo @-@ soul " . She said of the honorific title , " I hated that because what if I don ? t do that anymore ? What if I change ? Then that puts me in a penitentiary . " Subsequently , other artists attained success in the early 2000s , including Bilal , Musiq Soulchild , India.Arie , and Alicia Keys , who broke through to broader popularity with her

debut album *Songs in A Minor* (2001) . Hip hop artists such as The Roots and Common , associated with the Soulquarians , released albums that incorporated neo soul , *Phrenology* (2002) and *Electric Circus* (2003) .

However , the decade later featured a decline in output by neo soul artists , with many of them failing to make a commercial impact after previous successes or not releasing a follow @-@ up album . Badu 's commercial viability decreased as each of her releases following her debut *Baduizm* departed further from that album 's music . Hill followed @-@ up her 1998 debut , considered the best @-@ selling neo soul album , with the 2002 live album *MTV Unplugged No. 2 @. @ 0* , a combative , confessional work in which she expresses her misgivings about fame . Melena Ryzik of *The New York Times* wrote in a retrospect of that " era of left @-@ of @-@ center black singer @-@ songwriters " , stating " many of them struggled to keep their creative momentum , conflicted about their early mainstream success . " Producer and Soulquarians member Questlove elaborated on the artists ' regression from the mainstream , saying " I think most of us went through our psychosomatic , quasi @-@ self @-@ saboteur stage . Once we got that first taste of success , I think just the pressure of reacting got to all of us . Some of us released some of the craziest records of our career . " Other artists such as D 'Angelo and Hill went on indefinite hiatus from the music scene . Tyler Lewis from *PopMatters* attributed the decline to " the downside of [the] rejection of the term [' neo soul '] " .

" The industry , which already has a hard time with unapologetic and complicated black artists , had no idea what to do with all these enormously talented individuals who rejected entire marketing campaigns designed to ' break ' them to the record @-@ buying public . As such , albums were shelved or delayed or retooled and artists were dropped from major labels and forced to go it alone , making the first decade of the 21st century the least " soulful " ? however you define it ? decade for the industry itself in ? well , decades . "

The *Boston Globe* 's Renée Graham wrote of the artists ' ambivalence towards the term in a 2003 article on neo soul 's standing , " Despite its critical success , if neo @-@ soul had an initial failing , it was the media @-@ created label itself ? a term that the artists , whom it was meant to represent , generally rejected " . In a 2003 interview , music publicist John Constanza said that " The neo @-@ soul movement is still there , but it 's been underground , and it 's trying to get the attention of the mainstream again " . Mark Edward Nero of *About.com* stated , " In general , neo @-@ soul has remained almost exclusive to R & B outlets such as urban radio and Black Entertainment Television [...] the majority of neo @-@ soul artists have yet to crossover to mainstream American music listeners , partially because the music 's sound generally focuses on artist expression , rather than popular appeal " .

During the mid @-@ 2000s , emerging artists such as Heather Headley , Anthony David , J Davey , Eric Roberson , and Ledisi signed to independent soul labels and received exposure through independent retailers , neo soul @-@ oriented web sites , college and public radio stations , city club venues , cable networks such as Music Choice and BET J , and publishing deals as writers and producers for major label @-@ recording artists . Erykah Badu and Maxwell returned from their respective hiatuses and released well @-@ received albums , her *New Amerykah* albums and his 2009 album *BLACKsummers 'night* , and they subsequently toured together . VH1 Soul 's series *Soulstage* , which began in 2007 , showcased new music by artists such as Badu , Jill Scott , India.Arie , Q @-@ Tip , and Saadiq .

== 2010s : Late period ==

Since its original popularity , neo soul has been expanded and diversified musically through the works of both African @-@ American and international artists . The more popular neo soul artists in recent years are John Legend , Anthony Hamilton , Jill Scott , Maxwell , Chrisette Michele , Leela James , and Raheem DeVaughn . DeVaughn has described himself as an " R & B Hippy Neo @-@ Soul Rock Star " , viewing it as a reference to his eclectic musical style . In its 2010 issue on critical moments in popular music , *Spin* cited D 'Angelo 's *Voodoo* and its success as a turning point for neo soul : " D 'Angelo 's pastiche of funk , carnal ache , and high @-@ minded , Afrocentric rhetoric

stands as neo @-@ soul 's crowning achievement . So unsurpassable that it 'd be eight years before we 'd hear from Erykah Badu and Maxwell again , while Hill and D 'Angelo remain missing . But Alicia Keys , John Legend , and Cee @-@ Lo picked up D 's mantle and ran with it " . Evan Rytlewski of The A.V. Club discerns " a line of revelatory , late @-@ period neo @-@ soul albums " with the releases of Maxwell 's BLACKsummers 'night (2009) , Badu 's New Amerykah Part Two (Return of the Ankh) (2010) , Bilal 's Airtight 's Revenge (2010) , and Frank Ocean 's Channel Orange (2012) .