

= House of Music =

House of Music is the fourth studio album by American R & B group Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! , released on November 19 , 1996 , by Mercury Records . It is the follow @-@ up to their critically and commercially successful 1993 album Sons of Soul . Recording sessions for the album took place at several recording studios in San Francisco , Los Angeles , Oakland , and Sacramento during 1995 to 1996 , with production handled primarily by the group members . The album was named after a record store in the group 's native Oakland .

Following their hiatus as a group , Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! members Raphael Saadiq , D 'wayne Wiggins , and Timothy Christian Riley worked on songs for the album independently before putting together their finished recordings . Collectively , they sought to emphasize musicianship rather than production technique during the sessions . House of Music expands on their previous work 's traditional R & B influences with live instrumentation and balladry . Music writers have noted the album for its incorporation of traditional and contemporary musical styles , themes of love and romance , and witty , sensitive lyrics .

House of Music reached number 32 on the Billboard 200 , on which it charted for 31 weeks . It was certified platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) . The record received widespread acclaim from critics , who praised its musical style , classic influences , and the group 's musicianship and songwriting . An expected international tour in support of the album did not materialize , and House of Music proved to be the group 's last album together , as they subsequently disbanded due to creative differences and pursued separate music careers .

= = Background = =

Following the commercial and critical success of their 1993 album Sons of Soul , Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! took a hiatus as a group . During their break , the group 's main members Raphael Wiggins , D 'wayne Wiggins , and Timothy Christian Riley worked on songwriting and production for other recording artists , including D 'Angelo , En Vogue , Karyn White , Tevin Campbell , and A Tribe Called Quest . Raphael Wiggins adopted the surname Saadiq for his professional name in 1994 , meaning " man of his word " in Arabic , and released his solo single " Ask of You " in 1995 . Their work outside the group led to rumors of a break @-@ up during the time between albums . House of Music was titled after the name of a record store in the group 's native Oakland , California , which had closed several years prior to the album 's release . In an interview for Billboard , D 'wayne Wiggins said of naming the album , " We title all our albums at the end of the project . We sat back and listened to everything , and it reminded us of this mom @-@ and @-@ pop store around our way in Oakland . " The album 's cover and booklet photos were taken by photographer William Claxton .

= = Recording = =

Recording sessions for the album took place during September 1995 to September 1996 at various recording studios in California , including Brillian Studios and Hyde Street Studios in San Francisco , Coda Studios and Grass Roots Studios in Oakland , Encore Studios , Image Recording , and Westlake Recording Studios in Los Angeles , and Pookie Labs and Woodshed Studios in Sacramento . The group used vintage recording equipment and , for certain tracks , a 40 @-@ piece orchestra . In contrast to their previous work , each member arranged , composed , and produced songs on their own before putting the finished recordings together . In a 1997 interview , Saadiq said of working independently of Wiggins and Riley , " What I did was write a lot of stuff and rehearse it for about a month , then recorded it live . Then they would add their parts separately . " He worked with his own recording crew , comprising guitarist Chalmers " Spanky " Alford , drummer Tommy Branford , and keyboardists Kelvin Wooten and Cedric Draper .

The album 's opening track , " Thinking of You " , is one song that the group conceived and recorded together . D 'wayne Wiggins recounted its recording in a 1996 interview for USA Today ,

stating " Usually the first track we start off with sets the pace . We did it at 3 in the morning in Ray 's studio in Sacramento , and we were just having fun with an Al Green vibe . " Saadiq later said of developing the song , " I was just playing around and started singing off the top of my head . I never wrote anything down , it was just what came out . " " Annie May " , one of Wiggins ' songs for House of Music , had Saadiq 's backing vocals pre @-@ recorded and subsequently overdubbed to the track 's final mix .

Wiggins found the group 's hiatus constructive to recording a follow @-@ up , so as not to produce an album derivative of Sons of Soul . He said of the music in an interview for Billboard , " It 's not just a bunch of grooves that we put together and made sure that the tempo fit . Lyrically and musically , it talks about something , and you 're able to feel the emotional buildup that we felt when we were making the songs ... It 's funny though . Even though we did the music separately , when we got together , it all had the same kind of sound . " The group intended on recording with an emphasis on musicianship rather than production . Wiggins noted a lack of synthesizers as distinctive of the music , adding that " On a lot of the songs , you can just imagine a five @-@ piece band performing . " Guest musicians for the album included rapper and producer DJ Quik , percussionist Sheila E . , and the Tower of Power horn section . House of Music was mastered by audio engineer Brian Gardner at Bernie Grundman Mastering in Hollywood , California .

One of Saadiq 's songs for the album , " Me and the Blind Man " , was excluded from the album 's final mix . Originally issued on an album sampler sent by the group 's label to music journalists , the recording is a moody , bluesy song with surreal lyrics about lust , longing , and a fictitious blind man 's secret powers . In a 1997 interview for Yahoo ! Music , Saadiq expressed that he meant to show " a darker side ... some depth " to listeners with the song and said of its significance to the album , " To me songs like ' Blind Man , ' make the whole sound , the House of Music . " He said that it was not included on the album to equally represent each group members ' songwriting , stating " They didn 't want anybody playing favorites , so one of my songs had to come off . "

= = Music and lyrics = =

House of Music expands on the group 's previous traditional R & B @-@ influenced work with live instrumentation and an emphasis on ballads . Dan Kening of the Daily Herald said it is " half a tribute to their ' 60s and ' 70s soul music roots and half a masterful blend of modern smooth balladeering and danceable funk . " Music journalist Jennie Yabroff of Salon felt the songs are mostly " ballads ? long , slow , emotional numbers with muted beats " that accentuate the lyrics . Drum wrote that mid @-@ tempo songs such as " Thinking of You " and " Still a Man " " lean heavily on ' 60s soul / R & B given a contemporary face , " while up @-@ tempo songs such as " Lovin ' You " , " Don 't Fall in Love " , and " Let 's Get Down " have elements of funk .

Music critics described the lyrics on House of Music as witty and sensitive . Michaelangelo Matos of the Chicago Reader characterized Saadiq 's songwriting as playful and quirky , while comparing his tenor singing voice to that of a young Michael Jackson . On Wiggins ' songwriting style , Matos said his melodies and rhythms are more subtle than those of Saadiq and observed " burnished obligatos , hushed burr , and starry @-@ eyed falsetto " in Wiggins ' singing . Saadiq alternated as lead vocalist with Wiggins throughout the album . Richard Torres of Newsday attributed the group 's lyrics on the album to their " [belief] in the power of love and the lure of romance . "

According to Saadiq , the opening track " Thinking of You " is " a really soul , southern , funky song " inspired by Al Green . It has light guitar strokes and Southern twang by Saadiq , while " Top Notch " draws on jazz and psychedelic elements . On " Still a Man " , he sings from the perspective of a man who was left by his wife to raise their children alone . The backing vocalists sing the song 's meditative hook , " Have you ever loved somebody / Who loves you so much it hurts you to hurt them so bad ? " On the lighthearted " Holy Smokes & Gee Whiz " , Saadiq 's older brother Randall Wiggins sings lead . The song was described by one critic as an " update of the Stylistics ' ' Betcha By Golly , Wow , ' " with " a dead @-@ on impression of Russell Thompkins ' unmistakable falsetto and precise diction . " " Annie May " is a salacious , humorous song about a lapdancer , while " Let Me Know " is a love song with Wall of Sound elements . According to Nick Krewen of The Spectator

, " Wild Child " is " a ballad in the grand sense of Earth , Wind and Fire 's ' Be Ever Wonderful . ' " " Party Don 't Cry " is a meditation on mortality with jazzy , philosophical tones . Rickey Wright of the Washington City Paper said the song " expresses an overt spirituality unheard in the Tonies ' past songs . " The closing track is a gospel @-@ influenced instrumental and variation of " Lovin ' You " composed by Saadiq . Its sole lyric is a universalist platitude .

= = Reception and legacy = =

The group 's fourth album , House of Music was released on November 19 , 1996 , by Mercury Records . The label intended on a release date during the peak holiday shopping period and ran ad campaigns scheduled for network cable , syndicated television shows , and radio stations . House of Music charted at number 32 and spent 31 weeks on the Billboard 200 . In its first eight weeks , the album sold 318 @,@ 502 copies in the US . Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! inaugurated its release with a satellite press conference and in @-@ store performance at a small business retailer in the San Francisco Bay Area . They also embarked on a tour of historically black colleges and Black Independent Coalition record shops after " Let 's Get Down " had been sent to R & B and crossover radio on October 28 as the album 's lead single ; its music video was released to outlets such as BET , The Box , and MTV . Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! performed the song as a musical guest on the sketch comedy show All That , while on Soul Train , they performed " Let 's Get Down " and " Annie May " . " Thinking of You " was released as the second single on March 11 , 1997 , by which time House of Music had sold 514 @,@ 000 copies , according to Nielsen SoundScan . On August 6 , the album was certified platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) .

Reviewing House of Music in Entertainment Weekly , Ken Tucker found Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! ' s imitations of classic sounds " intelligent , sometimes brilliant " , " witty " , and " tremendously likable " , with " a new recurring theme : what makes a man a man and a woman a woman , explored with both frankness and slyness . " Sonia Murray of The Atlanta Journal @-@ Constitution hailed it as " the most versatile and efficacious of the trio 's four albums " , while Chicago Tribune critic Greg Kot said " they find rapture that is steeped in reality rather than in the upwardly mobile fantasy concocted by many of today 's less tradition @-@ conscious R & B crooners . " " The Tonies serve as a sort of stylistic missing link " , wrote J. D. Considine of The Baltimore Sun , " suggesting what would have happened had the soul styles of the ' 70s continued to evolve , instead of being tossed aside by the synth @-@ driven sound of the ' 80s . " Michael A. Gonzales from Vibe said the album " glows a vision of blackness that is superb , mad smooth , and crazy sexy . " He described it as " a wonderland of harmonic delights , softcore jollies , and slow @-@ jam fever floating on the tip of Cupid 's arrow " , showing the group " exploring the sensuality of black pop without sounding like boulevard bullies stalking their objects of desire . " Robert Christgau deemed " Thinking of You " a " hilariously gutsy " and spot @-@ on Al Green homage while writing of the group 's artistry in The Village Voice :

After the album 's release , the group dealt with growing tensions stemming from creative differences , business @-@ related problems , and Saadiq 's interest in a solo career . In an interview for Vibe at the time , Saadiq said of the situation within the group , " There 's a quiet stress between us that no one really talks about . And what 's sad about the whole thing is the fact that our friendship is disintegrating . Who knows , House of Music could be the last Tony Toni Toné album . " However , they remained committed to promoting House of Music through 1997 . On February 28 , the group taped a performance for VH1 's Hard Rock Live special . According to an interview with Mercury vice president Marty Maidenbergh in October 1996 , an international tour for the album was expected , with concert dates in Japan and the United Kingdom , but it never materialized . In November 1997 , Saadiq told the Philadelphia Daily News " there should have been like four singles from that album . You 'll have to call Mercury on that . It went platinum with no promotional tour . We did our job and they made their money . " They subsequently disbanded and each member pursued an individual music career .

In retrospect , Christgau attributed the album 's success to Saadiq 's lead role in the group while claiming " only with House of Music did they become true sons of the soul revival , the most

accomplished r & b act of the ' 90s . That 's still the album to remember them by . " AllMusic editor Leo Stanley points out Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! ' s " traditional soul and R & B values of songwriting , " writing that they " successfully accomplish their fusion of the traditional and contemporary [...] within the framework of memorable , catchy songs . " Stanley noted its influence on neo soul artists such as Tony Rich and Maxwell at the time . Chicago Reader writer Michaelangelo Matos viewed that the album showcased " the contrast between Saadiq 's and Wiggins 's styles " , which " had grown so pronounced that the tension only enhanced what was already the group 's best batch of songs . " Rashod Ollison of The Virginian @-@ Pilot deemed the record " a flawless gem " where the band 's " amalgamation of traditional and contemporary styles coalesced beautifully . " In The Rolling Stone Album Guide (2004) , Fred Schruers said " House of Music consolidates the triumph of Sons of Soul for a masterpiece of 1990s R & B , an album that is as steeped in soul tradition as anything by Maxwell or D 'Angelo , but that mixes the homage with humor and deft contemporary touches , thereby creating a new space all its own " .

= = Track listing = =

= = Personnel = =

Credits are adapted from the album 's liner notes .

= = = Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! = = =

Timothy Christian Riley ? acoustic piano , clarinet , drums , electric pianos , Hammond B @-@ 3 organ , percussion , producer

Raphael Saadiq ? bass , guitar , keyboards , producer , vocals

D 'wayne Wiggins ? guitar , producer , vocals

= = = Additional musicians = = =

= = = Production = = =

= = Charts = =

= = = Album = = =

= = = Singles = = =