

DE LA SOUL

CLASSIC CATALOGUE FINALLY AVAILABLE FOR STREAMING

BY EMMA SAUNDERS FOR THE BBC

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WHY DID IT TAKE SO LONG?

Speaking to the BBC in 2016, De La Soul's Kelvin Mercer, aka Posdnuos, described the unavailability of their back catalogue as “heart-wrenching”. He explained that the band's samples - more than 70 on 3 Feet High and Rising alone - had (mostly) been cleared for release in 1989; but their contracts failed to predict the rise of digital music.

“Our contracts on those early albums said specifically ‘vinyl and cassette,’” he said. “The wording wasn't vague enough to lend itself to [new] music technology. “So once the whole age of digital music came into play, new deals needed to be cut for those entire albums. Their record label at the time, Warner Bros, “just don't want to deal with it”, he added.

“They're like, ‘Is it worth it?’ They've got to go through almost every song with a fine comb to make sure this sample or that sample was cleared. “It's been a very lengthy, draining process.” Now, however, the process is complete and one of the last remaining classic acts to be missing from streaming services has joined the party.

At long last, De La Soul's back catalogue, including classic albums like 1989's 3 Feet High and Rising, is to be made available for streaming.

The landmark shift has been in the works since Reservoir Media bought the group's master recordings in 2021. Complex licensing issues around De La Soul's use of hundreds of samples have held back the move until now.

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“WE VOWED TO BRING THEIR MUSIC TO STREAMING, AND IT MEANS THE WORLD TO OUR TEAM TO MAKE GOOD ON THAT PROMISE AND EXPOSE A WHOLE NEW GENERATION OF LISTENERS TO ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CATALOGUES IN HIP-HOP HISTORY.”

WHO ARE DE LA SOUL?

Posdnuos (Kelvin Mercer), Trugoy (David Jude Jolicoeur), and Maseo (Vincent Lamont Mason Jr.), aka De La Soul, formed in Long Island, New York in high school, and they soon caught the attention of producer Prince Paul. 3 Feet High and Rising, which was their debut album, reached number one on Billboard's top R&B/hip-hop album chart and often appears on lists of the greatest albums of all time. Humorous and eclectic, it preached the power of peace and positivity - and featured famous tracks such as Me Myself and I, The Magic Number, Buddy and Eye Know. In 2010, the album was inducted into the Library of Congress'

National Recording Registry, a list of sound recordings deemed “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant”. “De La Soul didn't just open the door to the possibility of being different. They kicked it in,” wrote journalist Vikki Tobak in an essay commissioned to mark the occasion. But the record's heavy use of samples also caused headaches for their record label. An interlude called Transmitting Live from Mars used elements of The Turtles' 1969 song. You Showed Me without permission, resulting in a lawsuit that cost the band more than \$100,000 in damages.

WHO CLEARED THE SAMPLES?

The 3 March release date marks the 34th anniversary of the release of 3 Feet High and Rising, whose colourful, psychedelic songs marked a defining moment in the history of sample-based rap. To celebrate the news, the group will also digitally release their hit single The Magic Number on 13 January. In June 2021, Tommy Boy Records - which previously had the rights to De La Soul's back catalogue having been with the group for 30 years -

was acquired by music rights company Reservoir for a reported \$100 million. Faith Newman, Reservoir executive vice president of A&R and catalogue development, said on Tuesday: “When Reservoir acquired Tommy Boy [Records], the first call we made was to De La Soul. “We vowed to bring their music to streaming, and it means the world to our team to make good on that promise and expose a whole new generation of listeners to one of the most important catalogues in hip-hop history.”

