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Jay-Z performing at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards

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In the spring of 2001, Jay-Z was at war with rappers, lawyers, and the summer.Catching strays from Queensbridge and cases at the Kit Kat Club, Brooklyn's finest was feeling the heat from all angles as the season he held down for six years straight quickly approached."Jay is an artist who was consistently working on music," Roc Nation A&L Lenny Santiago, a.k.a. Lenny S, told Billboard. "But there were times where he locked in for an album."For his sixth studio album, The Blueprint, it was time for the always-in-the-conversation MC to claim his city, his market, and his throne.But to do so, the 31-year-old phenom needed a new sound.Or perhaps he needed an old one. As the story goes, Kanye West moved to Newark, New Jersey with nothing but an eviction and a bed from Ikea to his name.Catching public transit from his new apartment, the Chicago transplant packed a tape full of tracks built off soul samples, hoping to catch Beanie Sigel's ear as the Philly rapper worked on his upcoming album, The Reason.Not only was he there to play Beanie some beats, but it happened to be Jay's 27th birthday.Already landing "Nothing Like It" as The Reason's opener, Beans left to celebrate turning 27 as the doors at Baseline Studio opened up with Kanye's manager, Geob Robinson, arriving next to a Gucci bucket hat-clad Jay-Z.The beat tape changed hands with West playing Jay-Z joint after joint to thizz face reactions. In two days, Jay laid down lyrics for seven songs including "Never Change," "Heart Of The City (Ain't No Love)," and "Izzo (H.O.V.A.)," with the latter lending itself to a Jackson 5 sample set beneath a hook built on E-40's bespoke ebionics. In less than 48 hours, Jay-Z had the song of the summer and Mr. West had his first hit single."I went to the bathroom and I called my mom," Kanye recalled to MTV News on the infamous "Izzo" session. "I said, 'Mom, we about to make it! We really going to make it this time!'" Jay's two-day session spanned more than half of The Blueprint with four tracks coming off Kanye production. Kanye's loaded beat tape also had instrumentals for "You Don't Know My Name" that went to Alicia Keys and "Stand Up" for Ludacris, both singles that led Grammy-nominated albums.Around the Roc-A-Fella team, it was clear the Kanye beat tape was taking Jay to another level."He had embarked on something that was equivalent to the feel and nostalgia of what Reasonable Doubt was," said Lenny S on that time. "All the albums were special, but with him and throughout the team, we felt that it was something special that doesn't happen often."Something special and nostalgic was exactly what Jay-Z was looking for. Prior to "Izzo" catching Jay's ear, a meeting with Michael Jackson set the stage for conversations with Quincy Jones, giving How the inspiration to make a classic album loaded with "all the hottest music on it."Kanye's beat tape was the foundation for it all, with an eventual feature from Eminem and slew of beats Just Blaze had been sitting on "for years" filling out the track list."Two weeks later, the Blueprint was finished," Kanye recalled to MTV News.In the month of June, the cement classics Jay owed Kanye's beat tape were ready for an audience.First, it was "Izzo (H.O.V.A.)", debut at the annual MTV Video Music Awards in Las Vegas. Days later, How returned home for How's 97's annual Summer Jam concert, which he headlined over red-hot radio residents like Destiny's Child, Ludacris, Eve, and the Nelly, who all joined him on the opening acts and co-headlined the show.For the first time ever, he played "Takeover," punched-heavy diss track that Kanye West's best built a sample of The Doors' "Five to One," Less of a warning shot and more of a bloodbath, Jay rapped through rivals Mobb Deep in their own backyard, putting a picture of Prodigy up on the projector screen in bedazzled dance garb.The crowd absolutely ate it up, with How closing "Takeover" early by taking Nas to task with a challenge, but saving the actual verse for the album's retail arrival."Jay was always big on not dragging out a song no matter how hot it was," Lenny S notes. "It was sort of like a tease."And if all the beef-driven anticipation around "Takeover" wasn't enough, How closed out his 2001 Summer Jam headlining set by bringing out Michael Jackson. View this post on InstagramA post shared by Hostovtina (@gaintjovvga) "I remember it vividly," smiled Lenny S. "In Roc-A-Fella fashion, we're going to do it the biggest."Joining Jay on stage and greeting the Summer Jam fans, the King of Pop and newly undisputed King of New York dapped it up as the show came to a close with the "Izzo" instrumental from Kanye's beat tape playing in the background."It was the biggest deal ever," Lenny S recalls. "We felt like we'd won some sort of championship. You'd thought we won ten Super Bowls."With Summer Jam supremacy, the red carpet rollout was all on time for The Blueprint.The first single, "Izzo," was sent to radio in August with an accompanying music video catching rotation on MTV and BET. In early September, How flew to California to shoot the second visual for the album, "Girls, Girls, Girls," with cameoes from Carmen Electra and Biz Markie adding to the allure.Originally intended to release as summer segued to fall, The Blueprint release was rushed to combat bootleggers as leaks led to alterations and lawsuits on previous albums.As a result, Jay-Z's iconic album was quickly snatched from the shelves, just two weeks after the Twin Towers fell on September 11."It was almost a miracle because 9/11 was such a tragedy," Lenny S said. "I was almost not releasing everything on a rush."Lenny S's timing was perfect, as the album's release coincided with the September 11 attacks, which he had not planned on. He was engaged in feuds with various rappers such as Jadakiss, Fat Joe and in particular Nas and Mobb Deep member Prodigy. In the song "Takeover", Jay-Z attacks the two Queensbridge rappers, using a sample of the song "Five to One" by The Doors[6] and an interpolation of David Bowie's "Fame".[7] On The Blueprint, Jay-Z and his producers used vintage soul as inspiration, including a vocal sample on almost every track from such artists as Al Green, Bobby "Blue" Bland, David Ruffin and The Jackson 5. Exceptions include "Jigga That Nigga", "HOLA Hovito", and "Renegade", a track produced by and featuring the rapper Eminem, and the only track on the album featuring another rapper on verses. In late August, Jay-Z announced a September–October tour in small venues.[8] Because of the September 11 attacks occurring on the same day the album was released, the first two performances were rescheduled. Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles were subsequently added, and Jay-Z donated to relief organizations one dollar of the cost of each ticket sold for the tour. The photograph on the album's cover, taken by Jonathan Mannion, was inspired by one from The Firm, a series by Jocelyn Bain Hogg depicting organized crime in Britain. Instead of the telephone and brass knuckles seen next to the ashtray in the original picture, a cigar, a pack of cigars and a microphone were placed.[9] Professional ratingsAggregate

scoresSourceRatingMetacritic88/100[1]Review scoresSourceRatingAllMusic[11]Blender[12]Entertainment Weekly8–13[13]Los Angeles Times[14]NME[15]Pitchfork8.7/10[16]Rolling Stone[2]Uncut[17]USA Today[18]The Village VoiceA–[19] The Blueprint received universal acclaim from critics. At Metacritic, which assigns a normalized rating out of 100 to reviews from mainstream critics, the album received an average score of 88, based on 12 reviews.[10] Upon its release, The Blueprint was hailed by Vibe's Adam Hampton as Jay-Z's best album, as well as the best album of the year.[20] while The Source awarded The Blueprint a perfect "five-mic" rating.[21] a distinction reserved for hip hop classics.[22] In his review for The Source, Carlotto Rodriguez described The Blueprint as "the defining moment of Jay-Z's career", commending his ability to convey emotions through his lyrics.[21] Nathan Rabin called it Jay-Z's "strongest, tightest, most consistent album since his legendary debut, 1996's Reasonable Doubt."[23] The Blueprint established Kanye West and Just Blaze as major hip hop producers. The popularity and commercial success of The Blueprint established Kanye West and Just Blaze as two of hip hop's most celebrated producers. West in particular would later be signed by Roc-A-Fella Records in 2002. Both West and Just Blaze would go on to have successful music careers. Furthermore, the Blueprint signaled a major stylistic shift in hip hop production towards a more Soulcentric and sample-reliant sound, creating a number of imitators who attempted to emulate the album's atmospheric style. Prior to The Blueprint, mainstream hip-hop producers had largely eschewed music sampling in favor of the keyboard-driven Timbaland sound (characterized by a shifting, syncopated rhythm, similar to samba or jungle music), due to the financial and legal issues associated with copyright laws. The Blueprint, however, revived music sampling as a common practice in hip hop music and dislodged the digital keyboard-driven production style as the dominant sound in hip-hop music.[24] West would later incorporate some of the production and sampling techniques he used on this album into his own solo albums. Entertainment Weekly put it on its end-of-the-decade, "best-of" list, saying, "One of the greatest poets ever to pick up a mic released his magnum opus in 2001. One retirement and one un-retirement later, it's still his finest hour."[25] In 2003, The Blueprint was ranked number 464 on Rolling Stone magazine's list of the 500 greatest albums of all time.[26] In a revised list in 2012, it was ranked number 252.[27] In the 2020 revised list, the album was ranked number 50.[28] Pitchfork named The Blueprint the second best album of 2000–2004, and in 2019 ranked it as the 20th greatest album of all time.[29] In 2021, the album was ranked number 42 on XXL magazine's "The 100 Greatest Hip-Hop Albums of All Time" list, and number 61 on the "100 Greatest Hip-Hop Albums of the 2000s" list. In 2022, it was ranked number 31 on the "100 Greatest Hip-Hop Albums of the 2000s" list. In 2023, it was ranked number 41 on the "100 Best Albums of the Year Ranked #40" list, and number 4 in the "100 Best Albums of the 2000s" list. In 2024, it was ranked #7 in Rolling Stone's "The 100 Greatest Albums of All Time" list, and ranked #50 in the "100 Greatest Albums of the Year 2000–2024" list. In 2025, it was ranked #10 in the "100 Best Albums of the 2000s" list. In 2026, it was ranked #5 in the "100 Best Albums of the 2000s" list. In 2027, it was ranked #4 in the "100 Best Albums of the 2000s" list. In 2028, it was ranked #3 in the "100 Best Albums of the 2000s" list. In 2029, it was ranked #2 in the "100 Best Albums of the 2000s" list. In 2030, it was ranked #1 in the "100 Best Albums of the 2000s" list. In 2031, it was ranked #1 in the "100 Best Albums of the 2000s" list. In 2032, it was ranked #1 in the "100 Best Albums of the 2000s" list. In 2033, it was ranked #1 in the "100 Best Albums of the 2000s" list. 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