

PHARRELL



HIP-HOP
2nd Biographies

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Timeline

1973: Pharrell is born on April 5th in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

1985: Pharrell meets Chad Hugo. They form a lasting relationship and will go on to make music as N.E.R.D. and the Neptunes.

1998: Pharrell catches the attention of the music world when he produces Noreaga's song "Superthug."

2001: The Neptunes gain global success with Britney Spears's "I'm a Slave 4 U." N.E.R.D. releases their debut album *In Search Of...*

2002: The Neptunes win Producer of the Year at both the Source Awards and the Billboard Music Awards.

2004: N.E.R.D. releases *Fly or Die*.

2005: Together with Japanese artist Nigo, Pharrell debuts two clothing lines called Billionaire Boys Club and Icecream. Pharrell is voted the World's Best Dressed Man by *Esquire* magazine.

2006: Pharrell releases his first solo album, *In My Mind*.

2008: Rocket Ayer Williams, Pharrell's son, is born. Pharrell designs sunglasses and jewelry for Louis Vuitton.

Seeing Sounds

Many people know Pharrell Williams as a rapper and fashion **icon**. Few people realize that Pharrell has changed the way popular music sounds with his **innovative** music production.

Pharrell was a creative and curious child. He loved hip-hop, but his life wasn't shaped by the streets. So he made hip-hop that fit his own experience. He followed his passion for music, for skateboarding, and for space exploration.

Pharrell Williams was born on April 5, 1973, in Virginia Beach, Virginia. His mother, Carolyn, was a teacher, and his father, Pharaoh, was a handyman. Pharrell's parents worked long hours and did not make a lot of money. Pharrell said that his family ate "a lot of pork and beans" to make the food budget stretch between paychecks.

Pharrell has two younger brothers named Cato and Psolomon. There are gaps of 10 years between each child. Later, his parents divorced and his father remarried. From his father's second marriage, Pharrell has two younger half-brothers, Pharoah and David.

As a child, Pharrell spent a lot of time on his own. The TV became his best friend. One of his favorite things to watch was the Jackson 5 video for "Shake Your Body (Down to the Ground)." Pharrell dreamed about music.

Pharrell also remembers listening to music in the backseat of his parents' car. His parents would listen to a lot of classic soul music like the Isley Brothers, the Spinners, and Earth, Wind & Fire. Pharrell would stare at the stars while listening to the **jazzy** rhythms of the music. He saw colors and shapes that changed and moved as the music played. Pharrell actually saw the sounds because his brain is wired differently. This happens with creative people sometimes.

Pharrell loved music from an early age and associated colors with musical notes.

Pharrell was inspired by
A Tribe Called Quest.





Pharrell was not allowed to go outside and play while his parents were at work. So school was the time when he could have fun with his friends. Pharrell wanted to talk about his favorite music and TV shows with his friends during class. He was not a great student, scoring Cs and Ds on his report cards. He would daydream about music instead of paying attention in class.

Pharrell's grandmother was the first to spot his musical ability. Pharrell would take all the pots out of the cabinets and bang on them like drums. His grandmother suggested that he take music classes and play on a real drum set. He had several music teachers and attended a music program for gifted and talented children. There, Pharrell played drums in the band.

In music class, Pharrell learned to read and write music. In an interview years later, Pharrell thanked his band teachers. If they had not seen his talent, Pharrell would not be the star he is today.

Pharrell was in love with hip-hop. When he went home, he listened to artists like Public Enemy and Pete Rock. But the song that changed his life was "Bonita Applebum" by A Tribe Called Quest. That song blew Pharrell's mind.

"Bonita Applebum" was different from other songs. Most songs have a pattern of *verses* and a repeating chorus that is connected by a bridge. The rap group had used a *sample* and looped it. It made the whole song sound like a *bridge*. This created the strange effect Pharrell was hearing. Even as a young man, Pharrell found the technical side of music production fascinating.



Pharrell and Timbaland met in school. Both went on to become famous music producers.

Pharrell did not grow up in the inner city like many popular rappers. He grew up in a *diverse* community. In Virginia Beach, Pharrell was exposed to a wide range of music like hip-hop, punk, and classic rock. He did some break dancing to the old-school music of Afrika Bambaataa and Run-D.M.C. But Pharrell also listened to classic punk bands like the Misfits. And his nickname was “Skateboard P. Pharrell.” He never quite fit into one group.

In seventh grade, Pharrell met Chad Hugo. Chad played the saxophone and also liked a wide range of music. During breaks between classes, the two students would rap while Pharrell played the drums. Pharrell also played drums in his high school’s marching band.

Pharrell and Chad played music together for years. After school, they spent their time making music. They experimented with samples on a Casio keyboard. They made beats on a drum machine. They called themselves the D.P.S., a name they took from the movie *Dead Poets Society*. This movie was about a special teacher who encouraged boys to find inspiration in poetry. This was not the kind of image a typical rapper would choose!

Pharrell also played in a hip-hop group called Surrounded by Idiots (SBI) with Timbaland and Magoo. Magoo and Pharrell rapped while Timbaland worked as the *producer*. Like Pharrell, Timbaland went on to become one of the most respected hip-hop producers in the industry.

SBI broke up before recording anything, but their brief time together was an important moment in hip-hop history. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship between Pharrell and Timbaland, who have worked together many times over the years. It was a meeting of two great musical minds.

Vocabulary

accessories	(noun)	items that are worn in addition to clothes, such as belts, sunglasses, shoes, pocketbooks, etc.
airwaves	(noun)	the sound put out by radio stations
Billboard	(noun)	a music magazine and website
bittersweet	(adjective)	happy and sad at the same time
bridge	(noun)	the part of a song that connects the verse to the chorus
cameo	(noun)	a brief appearance by a celebrity
collaboration	(noun)	two or more people working on the same project
compilation	(noun)	a collection
composer	(noun)	a person who writes music
controversial	(adjective)	likely to start public disagreement
cutting-edge	(adjective)	new and different
debut	(adjective)	first
diverse	(adjective)	coming from many different backgrounds
documentary	(noun)	a nonfiction movie
falsetto	(adjective)	singing that is much higher than your normal voice
hook	(noun)	a catchy tune or beat that helps makes a song easy to remember
icon	(noun)	a famous person
innovative	(adjective)	inventive
instrumental	(noun)	music without words
jazzy	(adjective)	fun and lively
limited edition	(noun)	something produced in small numbers
lukewarm	(adjective)	not good but not terrible
mentor	(noun)	someone who acts as a guide or a teacher
minimal	(adjective)	very clean and simple
naysayer	(noun)	people who criticize and doubt you

HIP-HOP

Biographies

Beyoncé
Chris Brown
Sean Combs
Drake
Dr. Dre
50 Cent
Jay Z
Nicki Minaj
Pharrell
Pitbull
Rihanna
Usher
Lil Wayne
Kanye West