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by Ericka Blount Danois



It's the first day of school at **Philadelphia's** High School for Creative and Performing Arts in 1987, and Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson is sitting in the office waiting to get school tokens, watching in awe as Tariq "Black Thought" Trotter, an incoming freshman, is being suspended for messing around with a girl in the bathroom.

The two start to chat as they sit on the bench, though they hail from far-flung worlds. Thompson grew up in West Philly; his mother bought him trendy clothes from thrift shops in **New York's** Greenwich Village, and his doo-wop singer father had him

working as his bandleader by the time he was 13. Trotter, a visual artist, graffiti writer, singer, and MC, grew up in South Philly, where his parents were involved with the notorious crime syndicate the Black Mafia before both fell to the streets—his father was murdered when he was 2; his mother would be killed right after his junior year in high school.

For a long time after that initial meeting the teens could barely remember each other's names, but worked in tandem in the lunchroom—Thompson banging on the table as Trotter rhymed for 45 minutes nonstop. Inside the walls of the school, the musical expectations were high. The quartet who would become Boyz II Men walked the halls like it owned them. Miles Davis was taking students Christian McBride and Joey DeFrancesco out of school to do workshops. Amel Larrieux (who would later find success in the duo Groove Theory with Bryce Wilson) was getting alternately teased and pursued by boys, including Thompson, who bragged to her that he had a hip-hop group. Problem was, he didn't.

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- Life of Pi
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