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POPULAR MUSIC OF THE WORLD

VOLUME II:
PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTION

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Scratching
'Scratching' is a term used to denote the manipulation by hand of one or more phonograph turntables to create a sound not unlike that made by 'scratching' a record with a needle. The technique was invented by DJs who usually worked in tandem with a rapper, and Grandmaster Flash is most commonly associated with the initial development of scratching. Instead of using a turntable to play records, Flash used the turntable itself as an instrument, spinning it with one hand (forward and backward, mostly in short, rapid bursts) and manipulating its volume controls with the other. Flash often used the sound of needle against vinyl, hence 'scratching,' as a form of sound synthesis.

The sound became fashionable in the late 1970s when hip-hop and rap music performers developed it and found it eminently useful as a rhythmic element, as a 'break' to allow movement from one musical passage to another or as a means of joining together repetitions of a single passage. Scratching sounds were later incorporated in digital audio samplers and synthesizers, allowing their easy addition to almost any piece of music. The technique came to be widely used in alternative rock music by performers like Beck, the Beastie Boys and the Dust Brothers, who incorporated it as a stylistic element in music that relied heavily on digital editing and the juxtaposition of multiple sounds and styles.

Discography
