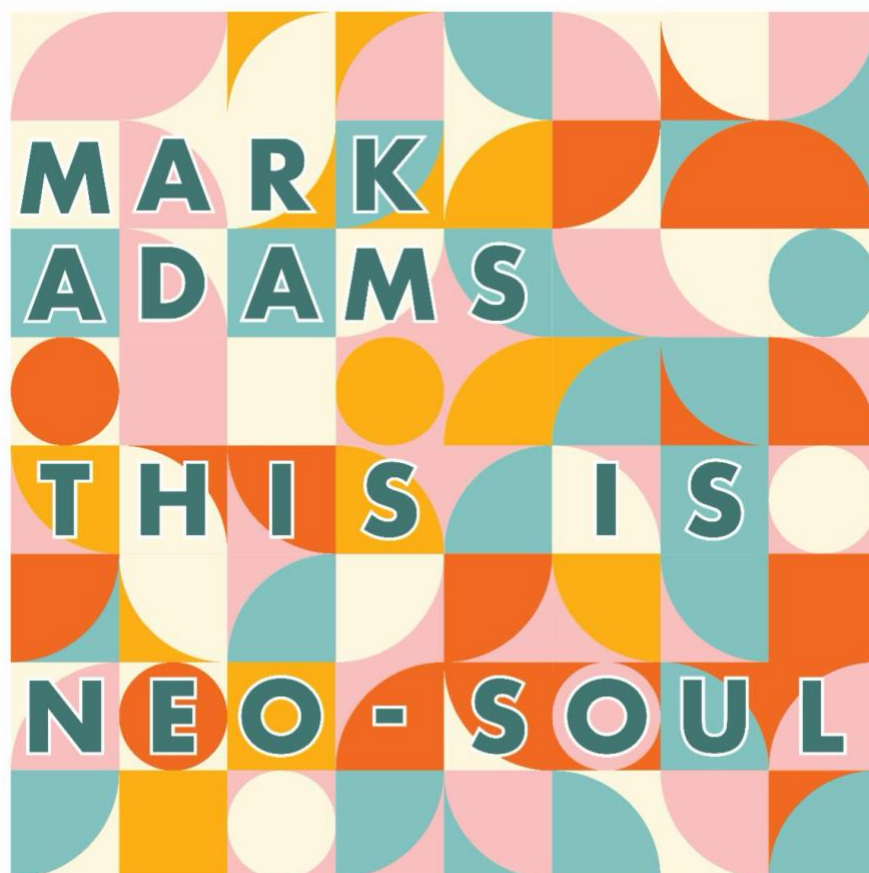




**Mark Adams — Longtime Roy Ayers Keyboardist and Musical Director  
— Returns With *This is Neo-Soul***

**A Ten-Track Album Featuring Veterans of the Roy Ayers, Chic, Lonnie Liston Smith, Luther Vandross, Gloria Gaynor and Chaka Khan Bands**

**Available March 20, 2026 on DownJazz Records, the Vinyl-First Label  
Founded by New York Drummer David Schwartz**





### [Stream Tracks from \*This Is Neo-Soul\*](#)

**DownJazz Records** is thrilled to announce *This Is Neo-Soul*, a new album from keyboardist, composer, and longtime **Roy Ayers** music director **Mark Adams**, arriving **March 20, 2026** — just over a year after Ayers’ passing at 84. The 10-track release — available worldwide on limited-edition color vinyl, CD, and digital platforms — gathers fifteen all-star musicians from the working bands not only of Ayers, but also of **Chic**, **Lonnie Liston Smith**, **Luther Vandross**, **Gloria Gaynor**, **Gil Scott Heron** and **Chaka Khan**.

Adams spent more than twenty years as the musical center of Roy Ayers’ touring group Ubiquity — the long-running, ever-evolving band Ayers used to carry his sound around the world — serving as keyboardist, arranger, and onstage ballast throughout thousands of shows. True to its present-tense title, *This Is Neo-Soul* isn’t a gaze into the rearview mirror. It’s a continuation of a language Adams lived for more than two decades.

After the “Godfather of Neo-Soul” passed on, Adams and producer David Schwartz chose not to retreat into archival reverence; they understood that Ayers’ sound was never fixed to one moment. It was — and remains — a living vocabulary. Schwartz puts the lineage plainly: “There is a triad. There is Roy Ayers, **Lonnie Liston Smith**, and then **Gil Scott-Heron** and **Brian Jackson**. That’s the triad that makes up this very cool neo-soul set.”

“It’s a Roy Ayers, ’70s sound, but we authenticated it with the people who played that music and the people trained by them,” Adams says. “I played with Roy for more than 20 years. He taught me everything. So we made this the real thing.”

“This is not a tribute band. This is the band. The true representatives,” Schwartz adds. “These guys grew up on this. Mark’s played this music in different formats over a thousand shows worldwide. This tutelage of mentor and mentee is evident in the album and in the band.”

The core band includes **Chris DeCarmine** (drums, Roy Ayers), **Dave Mullins** (saxophone, Gloria Gaynor, Gill Scott Heron), **Monte Croft** (vibraphone, Gladys Knight), **Steve Kroon** (percussion, Luther Vandross), and **Kenyatta Beasley** (trumpet, Mary J Blige). Additional contributors include Chic vocalist **Kimberly Davis**; vocalists **John Pressley** (Roy Ayer), **Jonathan Quash** (Mark Adams), and **Miya Bass** (Broadway-Lion King); guitarists **Bill White** (Lonnie Liston Smith) and **John Smith** guitar, (William Patterson); and bassists **Roy Bennett** (Bernard Perdie), **Donald Nicks** (Roy Ayers), and **Emanuel “Chulo” Gatewood** (Diana Reeves) plus Brooklyn gospel singers.

Throughout, the ensemble channels the neo-soul aesthetic into a modern framework — shaped by gospel harmony, jazz-fusion momentum, dance-music architecture, and global DJ culture.

Adams’ trip into Ayers’ universe began in 1991 with the audition that never happened. Fresh out of college, he arrived at a Manhattan studio prepared to play for Ayers, only for Ayers to skip the session and call his road manager, David Baldwin — James Baldwin’s brother — to ask how the “young cat” sounded. Baldwin vouched for him.

Days later, Adams was onstage at Fort Worth’s Caravan of Dreams. “I had never played at a jazz venue so large,” he says. “I’m playing with a superstar in his prime and I’m just in awe of it.” Midway through the set, Ayers stood behind him and barked, “Play the f—ing keyboards... you playing like you scared of the keyboard. They ain’t gonna bite you.” When Adams dug in, Ayers shot back, “That’s what I’m talking about.” What could have been a testy exchange marked the beginning of a decades-long bond.

“He was like a father figure to me,” Adams says — a family tie that continued unbroken into Ayers’ final years.

The idea for *This Is Neo-Soul* took shape after Schwartz saw Adams up close at SOB’s nightclub in Manhattan, where he was performing with Ayers. Standing a few feet from the keyboard rig, he watched Adams play independent lines on two instruments, shift key centers on command, and lock the band into place with total authority. “He’s classically trained, he has perfect pitch, he’s an amazing jazz player,” Schwartz says. “He was doing two completely different lines at once. I was like, ‘Oh man, this guy is badass.’” When the two later realized they lived in the same Queens neighborhood, the collaboration began.

Both men approached the project with the same conviction: the rare-groove and neo-soul tradition is not archival. It evolves. The harmonic depth, trance-like pocket, and melodic clarity of the Ayers aesthetic remain central, but the textures are contemporary — informed by hip-hop production, gospel changes, electronic atmospheres, and more. “That’s the band that’s on tour now,” Schwartz says. “Mark’s band is creating the next chapter of neo-soul.”

Across its 10 tracks, the album reimagines classics, reshapes fragments from Adams' past catalog, and introduces new material with dance-floor momentum. "**Don't Stop**," long a live Ayers burner as "Don't Stop the Feeling," opens the record with the explosive arrangement that had become a crowd favorite; Schwartz encouraged Adams to capture it with remixers in mind. "**Open Letter**," originally a ballad Adams wrote for his late aunt, became a dance track after DeCarmine and vocalist Kimberly Davis heard a different pulse inside it.

"**Don't Look Back**" grew from a gospel-inflected piano figure Adams was playing before a session; Schwartz brought in lyricist B Carter and returned with a complete arrangement. "**Talking Walls**" spotlights guest vocalist B Carter — a Kansas City Grammy nominated vocalist & lyricist with Adams layering keyboards around Schwartz's form.

Adams initially resisted revisiting Ayers' "**Vibrations**." "I said, 'We don't need another Roy Ayers song.' But David felt we did." The track ultimately became a modern reframing anchored by Davis' vocal, retaining Ayers' DNA while giving the groove a new contour. Lonnie Liston Smith's influence appears directly in "**Expansions**," a natural fit for Adams, who spent years leading the Soulful Night of Keys tours with Smith and Brian Jackson.

"**Daydream**" began as one of Schwartz's electronic sketches, with Adams adding piano over a gravity-defying aural bed written by Brooklyn gospel singer Tony Walker & Jonathan Quash adding vocals, a singer Adams has mentored since his teens. "**Dre's World**," expanded from a DJ interlude on Adams' 2009 album *Something's Going On*, reflects the lesson Ayers drilled into him: "Check everything out. Never dismiss nothing."

"**Sweet Tears**," one of Ayers' signature ballads, appears in the stepper arrangement Adams developed on the road as Ayers' health diminished — a way to keep the form stable while the feel opened up. The album closes with "**LLS Groove**," an instrumental nod to Lonnie Liston Smith. "Every other song has vocals," Adams explains. "It's almost like a Robert Glasper record — not the sound, but the approach: heavy improv with dance energy."

From the outset, Schwartz envisioned *This Is Neo-Soul* as a two-stage project. "The intention from day one," he says, "was we were going to write this beautiful album and then sample ourselves and make brand-new electronic dance music out of it."

Once the core album was tracked live, he and Adams began sampling themselves, creating source material for a global electronic dance remix edition arriving in the summer of 2026. Twelve DJs and producers are reconstructing the music, including **Jimster**, **Kaidi Tatham**, **Crackazat**, **DJ Spinna**, **Kai Alcé**, and rising names in the UK & European broken-beat and future-jazz scenes.

True to DownJazz Records' philosophy, the project is vinyl-first — engineered for warmth, depth, and physical presence. Schwartz built the label on the belief that rare-

groove and neo-soul records are meant to be felt in rooms: on turntables, in listening bars, and at community-rooted events. More than 200 U.S. record stores have committed to stocking the album and hosting listening sessions. “Come down to the record store, listen to the vinyl, or go to a vinyl listening bar,” Schwartz says. “There’s one in every town.”

Overall, “It’s kind of historic... a moment in time,” Schwartz says. He adds that Ayers passed away in the middle of the album’s production, imbuing parts of the music with subtle melancholy: “You can hear the whole arc,” he says.

For Adams, the record marks both a tribute and a handoff. But no matter which lens you look at it through, one core truth remains: *This Is Neo-Soul* — performed and helmed by some of the finest, truest Ayers heirs — does the deeply missed “Godfather of Neo-Soul” proud.



Keyboardist Mark Adams performing with Roy Ayers on NPR's Tiny Desk.

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**Mark Adams · *This is Neo-Soul***  
**DownJazz Records · Release Date: March 20, 2026**

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