

Bad Brains' vocalist shares spiritual beliefs

By Bryan Peterson
Staff Reporter

In the early 1980s, Bad Brains had a track called "Pay to Cum" on the "Let Them Eat Jellybeans" compilation LP. That song introduced Bad Brains to a national audience as the seminal punk-funk-reggae fusion band.

Bad Brains had all the speed and fury of a punk band but had far more diversity than most. Vocalist HR continues to lead the band which defined this style of music.

Though synonymous with Bad Brains, HR also has had a significant solo career which has typically been oriented more toward reggae than punk. Through it all, HR has been one of the most-celebrated figures of the underground music arena.

HR has chosen to remain on SST Records for the release of his most recent solo album. It is an eight-song effort, although two of those are dub versions of other songs on the album. This makes for a sparse release, but there is plenty of moving material to please listeners.

Most of these songs are firmly rooted in Rastafarian sentiments and reflect HR's spiritual beliefs. He uses his music to declare and explore these beliefs, but stops short of proselytizing.

That is one of HR's strengths: an ability to share his beliefs without becoming overbearing, thus letting the listener enjoy the music to its fullest extent.

This strengthens many of the album's songs, particularly "Fools' Gold," in which HR sings, "It's not everything that glitters is gold/ You

can buy your wings/ But can the truth be sold?/ Don't you sell your soul for no fools' gold."

In the dub version, he says "Just take another look inside."

This is dedication without doctrine. Throughout the album, HR explores his beliefs without overwhelming the listener.

Things get more concrete during "Youthman Sufferer," a story of deliverance from the ghetto, but even this serves as an opportunity to praise Jah.

In his solo efforts, HR focuses most upon his reggae influences while avoiding the genre's clichés. These songs are more lively and inventive than much current reggae material because they reveal just enough of HR's other influences.

HR says in "Singin' in the Heart": "One aim, one goal, one destiny/ To set I people free/ In true love and unity." One can only wonder whether HR sees himself as a prophet as well as a musician.

Whatever the case, these songs form a strong collection of songs about HR's spiritual beliefs. The collection is marred only by "Don't Trust No (Shadows After Dark)," a song which abandons the trust and love which fill the rest of his songs.

The song is among the best on the album musically but it is hampered by an almost hostile message.

The two dub versions ("Fools' Gold" and "Youthman Sufferer") do not hinder the album but they do not add much either. A few more original songs full of introspection and dedication would

round out this collection quite well.

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Another musical side of HR is seen and heard on the new Bad Brains album, "Quickness" on Caroline Records.

The members of Bad Brains have slowed the pace a bit over the years while keeping their characteristic power and frenzy.

The influence these days is more from metal than punk, but it is an upbeat sort of metal influence which only adds to the music.

A grindy, growly guitar is found in most of the 12 songs on "Quickness." Also constant is the crisp drumming which both fuels and punctuates the lyrics.

A quick, steady pace is held until the end of the album, when things slow down for "The Prophet's Eye." Even there, Bad Brains maintains clarity and cohesion.

As with HR's solo album, "Quickness" places much emphasis on Rasta messages. At the same time, several of the songs are unrelated and almost distracting in their subjects, as in "Gene Machine" and "Don't Blow Bubbles."

The result is a less-unified release. Rasta themes are numerous but not central, and focus is lost.

Even so, the music does not suffer. Things move along at a good pace and then pent-up fury is released, propelling the songs even more strongly.

Songs like "No Conditions" capture the best ideas of HR's solo work and add the best music of Bad Brains.

Biblical themes are common ("Voyage Into Infinity," "The Messengers," "The Prophet's Eye") in song titles, but the content of the songs on this album is less personal and spiritual than in HR's spiritual work.

After a couple slower songs, "The Messengers" picks up the pace and prevents things from getting bogged down. This song shows a heavier punk than metal influence. Such an arrangement clearly would benefit other songs on "Quickness."

What is not clear is the reason songs like "Gene Machine" were included on this album. It just does not "fit" with the rest of the songs.

This is not a fault. It merely makes this a collection of songs by Bad Brains rather than a collection of thematically related songs.

If not by ideas, these songs are related by their sound, a potent mix of several styles full of energy and drive.

There is no "typical" Bad Brains song, but all of them have an uncanny ability to remain with the listener after the album leaves the turntable.

The heartfelt messages in these songs are presented well and show that Bad Brains remains one of the foremost American bands emerging from the underground to a growing audience.

The "Quickness" LP is a solid release. It could be made into an excellent album by trimming a few songs and replacing them with more connected, focused offerings.

HR's solo album and Bad Brains' "Quickness" album both provided by Project Import.

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want to get up on my lap, or might snap, just climbed right up there like they knew me forever," Jack said.

Jack said he has had two accidents, one when a dog wet on his lap and the other when a dog wet in his boot.

"The ones that wet on me, one was young puppy who got excited and the other one was an old female and she was just a nervous wreck," Jack said.

Wally said some animals do get excited but after the owner gets back with the camera, the pets are calmer.

"If you get too close then they get hyper, but if they (the owners) back up with me by the camera and sit there and talk to them, it's okay," Wally said.

Jack said cats are harder because they're too fidgety and they don't want to pay attention. One cat is easy but when owners want two cats' photos taken together, it gets difficult.

Jack said he has played Santa for hamsters and birds too, but the children usually hold the hamsters and then sit on his lap.

Wally said the shop has received visits to Santa from all types of strange animals, including a three-foot boa constrictor.

"Everything was all right last year until that woman handed him the snake," Wally said, and Jack shivered in agreement.

"She works at Bronco's Ham-

burgers and I haven't eaten at Bronco's since," Jack said.

Jack said all types of dogs visit Santa, including St. Bernards, a Rottweiler and two Newfoundlanders that ended up sitting by his side instead of on his lap.

Wally said some owners bring one or two but one woman brought in six dogs.

"We didn't think she was ever going to quit bringing in dogs," he said.

The dogs often are dressed for the season, too, Wally said.

"Some bring them with sweaters, some bring their hats, and some have their boots on," Wally said, speaking of the pets and not the owners.

And when Santa has finished his visit with the pet, "some jump off, head for the door and get the hell out of there," Wally said.

Wally and Jack agreed that all types of people bring their pets to see Santa.

They attribute it to the fact that people care so much for their pets.

"I would hate to go out on a desert island with you and your animals. If there was one drop of water, now who would get the water? Your dogs, wouldn't they?" Wally asked.

Wally turned around and asked his mother, Regina, "Who would get the water mom?"

"Fritz would," she answered, smirking.



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