

Bad Brains

Banned in DC – Greatest Riffs

Caroline Records



By Dan Marek
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Formed just after the fall of Black Flag, the Dead Kennedys

and the Sex Pistols, the Washington-based Bad Brains captured the aggression and attitude hardcore punk oozed in a time of unrest and political upheaval.

Once a jazz-fusion guitarist, founder Dr. Know was influenced by the fuzzy lines between reggae and punk in Europe and compiled the genres to spawn one of the most respected cult bands in America. Although they never garnered complete embracement from mainstream, they have been a monumental influence to bands such as the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Jane's Addiction, No Doubt and the Smashing Pumpkins.

Disbanded in 1995, the Brains issued two previous collections last year, *Live in San Francisco* and the much-anticipated Dub-only *I & I Survived*, to critical acclaim while fans jumped at the chance to get new material outside of their previous nine-album repertoire.

Banned in DC captures Bad Brains' raw power from their cassette-only debut to their latest compilation of Dub-only tunes while providing a rich retrospective of their style changes and groove-pumped Dub sessions. Starting off with the hard-to-find debut single "Pay to Cum," the power house of noise and energy explodes with lead singer H.R.'s rants speeding over the top belting out criticisms of pay-to-play venues and boasting individual freedoms.

Dipping into their fan favorite *I Against I*, "Re-Ignition" shows a mellower melodic side of the band, full of stop-on-a-dime rhythms and flagrant metal guitar while H.R. drifts off to keep your ears attune. The big rock intro to "Voyage to Infinity" shows off Dr. Know's abilities alongside the big-hair acts so popular around *Quickness*' release, but with rolling thunder drum lines by Earl Hudson it became evident they weren't about to conform to 'safer' ear-candy melodies.

Dub tracks like "The Meek Shall Inherit" and "I Luv Jah" show off the Rastafarian weight the band carried with them after a brief, yet life-changing meeting with Bob Marley backstage before the band left D.C. for New York. The Dub pieces blend an island feel with the political angst of hardcore while keeping the messages simple and to the point. Almost every album of theirs has been dotted with these rhythmically catching songs with bassist Darryl Aaron Jenifer's steady rock and sprinkled accents by guest musicians.

Ending off the way they began, "Riot Squad" reminds you that Dub is only one piece of this muscular band. The pounding rhythm and spastic guitar lines barrel over the listener with so much force, you'll be surprised that a hardcore act could deliver such a resounding instrumental.

Although many of the songs on *Banned in D.C.* were released on 1996's *Black Dots* album (a group of sessions from '79 that took 17 years to release), it compiles a great cross-section of the band Adam Yauch (the Beastie Boys) called "the best punk/hardcore band of all time." This latest adventure is a great tool for avid fans to get the cream of the crop, but it's an even better beginning to music entrepreneurs grasping the roots of a genre and start of a hardcore revolution.