

Album Review

Beasties Find New Sound With Which To Excel

Paul's Boutique: College-Boy Clever & Homeboy Stupid Fresh

by Rob Farnham
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For a group whose recording history began with the transcription of harassing phone calls to Carvel's ice cream parlors ("Cookie Puss"), the Beastie Boys certainly did well for themselves with 1986's "Licensed To Ill," the first rap album ever to go to number one on the pop charts.

That album's use of enormous guitar riffs, scratched from Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath records, among others, to accompany whomping drum beats appealed at least as much to metalheads as to rap aficionados.

The result was multiplatinum sales and nationwide notoriety for the rude attitudes and calculatedly offensive behavior of the three Beasties.

A great deal has changed since "Licensed," however. The group quit their label, Def Jam, in a dispute over royalties, and split with producer Rick Rubin, apparently because they resented the credit he was receiving for their sound. Further, they cleared out of their native New York to spend more of their time out in California.

The group's members even pursued some outside projects (Anyone remember Adam "King Ad-Rock" Horowitz's performance in "Lost Angels?") But now the bicoastal Beasties are back in action, with a new label, Capital, a new

producer, Matt Dike, and a tremendous new release, "Paul's Boutique."

The fifteen tracks on "Boutique" show a marked departure from the earlier Beasties sound, passing up most of the big guitars in favor of samples and scratches from a wide range of sources, with a distinct emphasis on soul and R&B from the pre-disco '70's.

The boys have taken on the challenge of extracting good music from a bad decade, cheating up the mix with the snap, crackle and pop of record noise, gratuitous bursts of flatulent clavinet chords, theme music snatched from "Jaws" and "Psycho," and eccentric percussion sounds thrown in all over the place.

No two tracks employ the same mix, resulting in an album that wanders from the minimal synth-funk of "Car Thief" to the menacing metal of "Looking Down the Barrel of a Gun" to the amphetamine country hoedown of "Five-Piece Chicken Dinner" (Don't worry, it's short).

Stuff like this just shouldn't work together. So it's quite an accomplishment that tracks like "Shake Your Rump" and "Hey Ladies" kick out the way they do, with beats, instruments, found sounds, and vocals combining to move the cuts along potently.

But when your group is three MC's,

the rhymes are truly crucial, and MCA, Mike D, and King Ad-Rock come through again with lyrics that are literate, obtuse, socially conscious, grossly offensive, college-boy clever, and homeboy stupid-fresh like you would not believe.

Pop-culture people and places (Chuck Woolery, Spanky from the Little Rascals, 7-11) show up with historical and literary figures (Ponce De Leon and J.D. Salinger), and sports heroes with obscure journeymen (Japanese baseball star Saduharu Oh and former New York Knick Hawthorne Wingo).

The tracks are also loaded with inside jokes and cryptic references (Who is this Ricky Powell guy, anyway?). On "Paul's Boutique," there appear rhymes that may never before have been imagined, such as "You're all mixed up / Like pasta primavera / Yo, man, why'd you throw that chair at Geraldo Rivera?" ("What Comes Around") and "You broke up with your girl / It ended in tears / Vincent van Gogh and mail that ear" ("Hey Ladies"). This wall of words (the entire inside of the fold-out cassette sleeve is covered with lyrics in tiny, tiny print), in combination with the fast-changing, ultra-varied music, is capable of getting you to laugh, think, and move all at once.

The group's attitude hasn't changed much, so parents and teachers will still be obligated to hate them. The Boys still boast, crudely and loudly, of scamming

"girlies," abusing assorted chemicals, starting fights, and engaging in all manner of sociably anti-social behavior (at least they advocate the use of condoms, or "jimmy protectors"). But every now and then traces of conviction and character sneak onto a track, such as the condemnations of racism and intolerance that crop up all over "Boutique." These may actually be hints of ever-so-slightly greater maturity to come from the Beasties. But probably not.

"Paul's Boutique," with its "b-boy bouillabaisse" sound, is probably less accessible to mainstream listeners than was the power-chord punch of "Licensed," but it's well worth the extra effort of getting used to the busy audio collage pumping out on tunes like "Shadrach" and "Egg Man." By refusing to stick to the style of their initial success, the Beastie Boys have found a new sound with which to excel. They have shaped bits and pieces of the surrounding culture, incorporating elements from music, literature, sports, politics, and who knows what else, into a dense, complex multitrack construction that rewards careful listening and works in your head as well as on the floor. An ad, sampled on the album (and presumably the source of its title), says "For the best in men's clothing, call Paul's Boutique." I would be inclined to say, "For the best new collection of hip-hop creativity, get "Paul's Boutique."

Snorkin



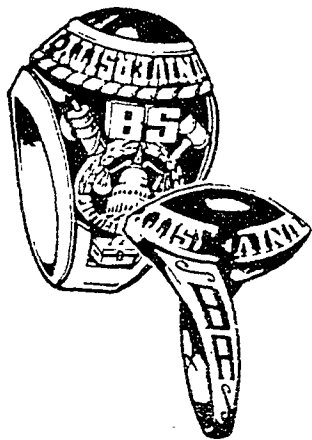
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