

DEREK B

car's been scratched. Go down to the pub and people say, 'You flash bastard' and you haven't changed or anything... All of a sudden you've got people attacking you for something you say on a record, all of a sudden you're a philosopher not a record maker, or you're a bloody sexist for stuff like 'Get Down'."

Indeed, stardom brings the dangers of being public property, but being in the limelight does elevate your status to that of 'philosopher'. And rap, more than any other genre, can be used in instructive and political ways.

"I see rap as a definitely pro-working class medium, through which you can express yourself without getting into too many legal battles. Most forms of music don't really deal with reality, apart from folk, they deal mostly with love. You listen to 95 percent of records in the chart and everybody is in love with everybody else. Rap's dealing with boastful things, which comes from the fact that you're working class, you gotta be the best at whatever you do, even when it's down to marbles, you gotta have the biggest marbles, etcetera. On top of that comes the gaudy American mentality, the best and biggest. Now after that comes the social comment, which has become the foremost thing."

The most militant rap, the biggest kick in the arse to the white running dogs of imperialism comes from Chuck D, Professor Griff and the Public Enemy boyees, whose new album Derek B finds:

"Brilliant, I think it's better than *Rattle And Hum*. Even as musical expression, to do what they do with other people's music is very hard. It's as hard as The Edge looking for another infinity sound. The music industry is taking Public Enemy a lot more seriously, not treating rap as a

second cousin, but I think it might always be treated that way."

Public Enemy talk some wild shit, but it's almost time it hit the fan. There's a lot of listeners out there, Derek B is one of them.

"This separatism thing [the concept of a separate black nation] is very deep-rooted. Until I actually had read this Farrakhan shit I thought everything was just crazy, looking for trouble, a lot of it makes sense but crazy sense. There's a lot of things on this planet that ain't fair — but there are things that just exist now, and you can't make a wrong with another wrong."

Derek B is a moderate man, more concerned with humanitarian than just those of a racial nature, but inequality for black people is a disturbing thing.

"Like treat me equally, don't treat me like an alien or alienate me from certain jobs or situations because of my colour. The Black population got to work through the runnings or whatever. But if the chance isn't there to get on the escalator of normality, that's when I get pissed off. Put you in this Alpha-Beta situation, put you all together where education is sub-standard so you never attain the level you need... things keep going in a circle — that's bollocks! Police state, future shock, Alpha-Beta shit."

Being an articulate guy, Derek B is seen as a role model for Black Britons.

"I try to do that, then I see myself falling into the Maggie Thatcher pot on the back posse, like upwardly mobile young businessmen. I've played with the System, broken the rules, but I haven't thrown a spanner in the works, it gets chopped in two, this system is so strong, it ain't going nowhere. It's like trying to stop a bus by yelling 'stop!' That bus is still going to kill you — bang! You got to work out how to slow it down and jump on."

"Rap is very much a question of identity, of who am I, what are my choices in life? It's political and

metaphysical, but it's also about having a hell of a good time pondering these questions."

And Derek B's style of rap is a whole heap of fun. There's a new album around April next year which Derek B said, quoting EPMD, "there'll be no mistakes allowed." And of course, a chance to see Mr B and Run DMC live cutting and rapping up a storm. Only suckers will miss it. See ya there, Mr B.
KERRY BUCHANAN

RUN DMC

Do Run DMC improvise their raps live?

"Oh yes, most of the show is all improvisation, so many things can happen that IT'S UP IN THE CLOSET... HANG IT UP IN THE CLOSET... Sorry, go ahead."

Having a little trouble with the kids there?
"Mm-mmmm."

Run, of Run DMC, AKA Joseph Simmons, is cool, even around screaming children. He's paid to be cool, Run DMC went to number one because they are cool. All popular music requires posture but rap requires strut, bravado, sprezzatura. You gotta be brave to get on stage with a turntable and a mike and a bunch of samples and make rhymes, you have to have bottle and nerve. Run has all those things.

Things have changed since Run DMC first began rapping. Rap has always been nasty but recent months have seen it turn wonderfully messy, a crossover nightmare of high art and kleptomania. It used to be thin white dukes like Cabaret Voltaire

(Slugging For Jesus', 1981) and Byrne and Eno (*My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, of the same year) who advocated the wholesale collaging of voices, textures and tapes onto new bass and drum lines; now everybody's doing it, chewing it, spewing it. The first time the UK remix of Eric B & Rakim's 'Paid In Full' came on, you knew the art had come full circle, back to the street. That purring beat (still sexy after all that sampling), the third-world vocal chant, the dipsy radio announcer — just too damn clever. Eric B & Rakim spurned the UK remix but their new album *Follow The Leader* prescribes the same bewildering blend of found sound.

To borrow from Run's laconic diction: such utility has influenced Run DMC, also. Listen to 'Mary Mary': one crescendo after another, a succession of nuggets swiped from rock's rusty bowl. And 'Papa Crazy', with the old 'Papa was a rolling stone' — line stopped right after the first word. The timing is exquisite — you hang out through the whole song for the rest of that line but they hold it back. But you can't use words like "exquisite" when you're on the phone to New York. Run is so laid back on the phone he sounds completely fucking horizontal. His voice is weary. I spent half the afternoon trying to ring you up, Run.

"Oh, well you're here now." He's been over at his mother's house for dinner. The kids in the background are making a racket. He keeps yawning. Run has been doing interviews all day.

Run DMC's latest album *Tougher Than Leather* is mixing more than just beats and words; it's sampling jazz and rock riffs, making for the jumble of a more complex music. Run likes that.

"We're happy with the album, everything's cool. We put more rock in and stuff like that, but we're satisfied with the outcome, mainly. Rock and rap go together nice. I think a lot of rock groups, they sound like

they're rapping to me. They really can't sing that good anyway, they sound like they're just talking."

How do you feel about rockers like Bon Jovi getting to the top of the charts?

"I think it's good, it's better for us because we make rock too. When rock does good, I feel good."

You've been sampling a lot of jazz, as well.

"Yeah, there's gonna be a lot more of that coming up now, it's the new thing that rappers are doing. And it sounds good."

What's making people latch onto jazz again?

"I dunno, that's just how it is. Somebody does well once,



Joseph "Run" Simmons

everybody tries it. It all comes from the beginning, things seem to evolve back to the start, over and over. Things that are new to the kids now were old to other people. Lotta times we do things that are new, but actually they're old. Like the kids now are wearing straight-legs, and that was from a long time ago. A lot of jazz we're using now, a lot of those jazz records are becoming very popular, like Bob James, yeah."

In some ways Run DMC are the cleanest of the rap crowd. Their raps are often bracketed by a strong social conscience. Certainly they're less prone to preaching violence than Public Enemy but it was at a Run DMC concert where a fan was shot.

Is that memory still a problem?

"With us we had one bad incident and ever since then it's been blown out of proportion. Mainly, we do millions of concerts and there's never any violence at all."

There's also the case of the Run DMC movie, like-titled *Tougher Than Leather*, a Rick Rubin-encouraged project conceived in the days when Run DMC and Def Jam were not big names. The group had difficulties finding a distributor for the film once it was completed, first (it was said) because of the violent content, and later because of its allegedly containing "anti-semitic" remarks.

"There is no controversy over that any longer. (yawns) Just making a movie is good, we feel. It's released in America. It's been going very well."

And yet your raps are often anti-drugs and so on — do you maintain that stance?

"That's just things that come out of us. We're positive people, so when we're writing, we're like in a trance, and positive things just come out."

Do Run DMC think they have a responsibility to be positive?

"No, it's just something we do. It's like, this is how we got where we are now, and that's what comes out of us."

Run DMC's stage show is meant to be pretty impressive, what does it consist of?

"Lights... cameras, and action. A lotta action. It's gonna be, uh, very incredible. Because of the visual thing, mainly (yawn). That's why it's gonna be better for you to see it."

You're sounding a bit tired, Joseph...

"I'm sorry. I've been doing a lot of interviews tonight. The others didn't have any, I had 'em all. But that's okay."

You looking forward to rapping in New Zealand?

"Yes. I'll be much more awake by then."

CHAD TAYLOR

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