

Shocklee

Continued from Page 71
black middle-class family in Long Island (his uncle was a founding member of Kool & the Gang), he built a following in the late '70s as a deejay for disco parties and dances during high school. A neighbor

named Carlton Ridenhour helped him promote his events by designing posters and fliers. Rap was just being born when the two of them began attending nearby Adelphi University.

A student named Bill Stephey hosted one of New York's first rap radio shows on Adelphi's WBAU. Soon, the three students had gravitated to each other and began putting in all-night sessions at the radio station talking about the music and its untapped potential—artistic, commercial and as a means of political communication for black youth.

Shocklee started actually mixing records on the air, putting together instrumental tracks in the new rap styles. The threesome discovered that Ridenhour had a powerful voice on the microphone and, renamed Chuck D., he started rapping over Shocklee's tracks on the program. The core of Public Enemy was in place. When fellow

Long Islander Rick Rubin, co-founder of Def Jam Records and now head of Def American Records in Los Angeles, heard their program, he immediately offered them a contract.

The buzzing, rolling sound of Public Enemy's first album, 1987's "Yo! Bum Rush the Show," was unlike anything rap had ever heard. "When we came in the game, musicians said we're not making music, we're making noise," Shocklee has said. "I said, 'You wanna hear noise?' I wanted to go out to be music's worst nightmare."

Through Public Enemy's three subsequent million-selling albums, the sound painstakingly crafted by Shocklee and his partners in the Bomb Squad (including his brother Keith and Eric (Vietnam) Sadler) has continued to evolve. It was dense and skittery on 1990's "Fear of a Black Planet," funkier and more bass-heavy for their latest, "Apocalypse 91... The Enemy Strikes Black" (which lists Shocklee as executive producer, though he did less hands-on production than before, concentrating on directing the album's overall creative direction).

Through it all, Shocklee has remained a behind-the-scenes figure. He makes no attempt to separate his musical settings from the strident black nationalist messages in PE's material, but his priorities were always music and marketing, while Chuck D. acted as the focal point and spokesman.

Still, Shocklee attracted plenty of attention as the leader of this audio blitzkrieg, and he was brought in to produce records for rappers 3rd Bass and LL Cool J and new jack heartthrobs Bell Biv DeVoe. His talents have also been tapped as the remixer of hits by Janet Jackson, Paula Abdul and Sinéad O'Connor. And in a remarkable, unprecedented meeting of West Coast gangsta attitude and East Coast sonic sophistication, Shocklee and his Bomb Squad troops produced Ice Cube's 1990 smash "AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted."

Last year, MCA signed a deal with Shocklee and Stephey that established SOUL (the two producers subsequently had a creative falling-out which resulted in Stephey leaving the organization).

ALBUM REVIEW

★★★
VARIOUS ARTISTS

"Juice" motion picture soundtrack
MCA

"Juice" opens coolly enough with the rippling keyboards of Naughty by Nature's "Uptown Anthem," but then the group's rap kicks into the first of this soundtrack album's jarring bulletins from the front: harsh expositions of urban reality hitched to starkly inventive backing collages. With the exception of two comparatively lackluster new jack swing ballads by Teddy Riley and Rahiem, "Juice" beams a powerful message from 1992's hip-hop nation.

Eric B. & Rakim's cannily off-kilter rap schemes twist and curl through the title track's smoky horn lines. The ingenious sentiments of M.C. Pooh shrink, though, next to "Nuff Respect," veteran street prof Big Daddy Kane's dazzling, triple-time machismo.

Too Short abandons his signature dirt rap for a cynical warning in "So You Want to be a Gangster," while Salt-N-Pepa's nasty "He's Gamin' on Ya" admirably deflates male huff and puffery. Sheer relentless wins points for Juvenile Committee's "Flip Side," and Son of Bazerk's "What Could be Better Bitch" switches dexterously between Jamaican and Stateside mike misogyny. But the top-ranking knockout of this disc is Cypress Hill Crew's exotic and humorous "Shoot 'em Up." The L.A.-based group dares to slow down the pace, the better to savor the mock-gangster rap's intricate polyrhythms, counterpointed by the incessant mosquito whine of a Middle Eastern flute.

—ELENA OUMANO

Albums by the Young Black Teenagers (five white kids with a "black state of mind") and Son of Bazerk have lacked the focus and verbal skills of Public Enemy's work and have met with commercial indifference, but the eyes of the rap community remain fixed on Shocklee. "He's like [Motown founder] Berry Gordy," says Chuck D. "No one has his vision."

The producers of "Juice" came up with the idea of bringing Shocklee in to work on the movie. He had already met director Dickerson, who has been Spike Lee's longtime cinematographer, when Public Enemy wrote "Fight the Power" as the theme song for Lee's "Do the Right Thing" in 1989. "I liked him, but I was a little nervous [about the 'Juice' project]," Shocklee recalls. "He had never directed before, the producers had never made a movie, I had never scored a movie before."

Shocklee maintains that composing a movie score, though, is not all that different from producing a rap record. "For Public Enemy or Ice Cube," he explains, "we make what we call pictorial music. We try to give you an image that you can hear and look at." Indeed, the "Juice" score remains true to rap's aggressive beats and propulsive spirit without overwhelming the action on screen.

Eric B. & Rakim wrote the movie's theme (and the album's first single), a tense voyage

through the gangster life over a throbbing jazz bass line. Kane's high-speed rap stops the show in one of the film's early scenes. "Kane is like a Jedi rapper," says Shocklee with a laugh. "Imagine being in a spaceship and watching all these words fly by."

Serving as executive producer despite its suit-and-tie overtones means something simple to Shocklee. "It just means giving the artists the latitude to go in and do what they do best," he says. "We wanted these artists to go in the studio like when they first went in—with no expectations."

But drawing out the artists' strengths doesn't mean keeping the genre static. Shocklee has grand visions for the future, plans for merchandising, for video—even dreams of a rap opera. "In 1992, we want to do a lot of things that make people say, 'I can't believe they're doing that!'" he exclaims.

"Juice" also made Shocklee hunger for more meetings of rap and the big screen. "We're in a sound-and-rhythm age," he says. "And aside from Martin Scorsese and somebody like Tony Scott ['The Last Boy Scout'], a lot of directors haven't gotten how important sound is right now."

Yet Hank Shocklee's ambitions are grounded in the realities of a musical style still fighting for acceptance after 10 years on the pop charts.

"What rap needs now is to be good," he says. "Not great, not spectacular, just well-oiled and consistent. Once it gets out there like that, people can say that we have real music here and deal with it and not just hurry up and rush things out because rap might not be here tomorrow. Because, you know, it's not going anywhere." □

Alan Light is an associate editor at Rolling Stone.

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