

Though it seemed to be a sad indictment on the contemporary punk scene that the best DVD released last year was *Bad Brains: Live at CBGB 1982*, perhaps it was purely just testament to the power of the Bad Brains. Back in issue #22 of BLUNT, soundbyte with muscles, Henry Rollins, gave us his frank assessment of the first time he laid eyes on this all-black hardcore juggernaut in 1979.

"You have to remember the context," Henry explained, "I went from listening to 'Stairway to Heaven' to seeing 'Pay To Cum' being performed by these guys from a Washington DC ghetto. Forget it, your mind never becomes unblown from that experience."

And it was the same experience all over the world last year, when the 24-year old CBGBs footage was unleashed upon a now thriving hardcore and punk community. Kids everywhere, eager to seek out the roots of the genre, had their minds posthumously blown by the sound and performance of Bad Brains in full-flight.

"Throughout our history it's always the next generation of people that the music touched," says 'Brains guitarist Dr. Know (real name Gary Miller). "Now we get kids who come along to our shows and then we have older fans who maybe have moved on and don't even go out, they are lawyers and doctors, whatever, people go on with their lives and become who they are. But they will come to our concerts and maybe



they aren't even there for the music but more to acknowledge that at some point in their lives the music helped them to move forward. For me, that's the greatest gift... besides my kids."

Speaking down the phone line, Dr. Know sounds calm, chilled and at one with Jah. He is happy to have the original Bad Brains line-up back together again, and says he is still basking in the afterglow of three back-to-back performances last October, the last shows ever given at legendary punk venue CBGBs in New York. He speaks often about "the Father" and "the Spirit", and indeed, no matter how off topic

he gets, almost every answer invariably boils down to: "The spirit willed it to be, so it was."

Ask him why it took so long for such awesome footage from 1982 to finally surface, and he'll tell you, "It's all relative. I think there is also going to be a DVD from those shows we did just this last October. So the Spirit works how the Spirit works and this DVD came out and you ask why it took so long, well, it took so long because the Father said, the Spirit said, 'Okay, the DVD from '82 and now the DVD from '06.' And that's it."

And in the same way that the Spirit brought these four African-American kids from DC together to play insanely fast punk rock in the last seventies, so too did it bring Dr. Know, vocalist H.R., bassist Darryl Jenifer and drummer Earl Hudson back together once more in 2006. Having endured a career loaded with controversy, break-ups, reformations, name-changes and uneven album releases, Bad Brains have just completed a new full-length recording, *Build A Nation*, and spirits are high.

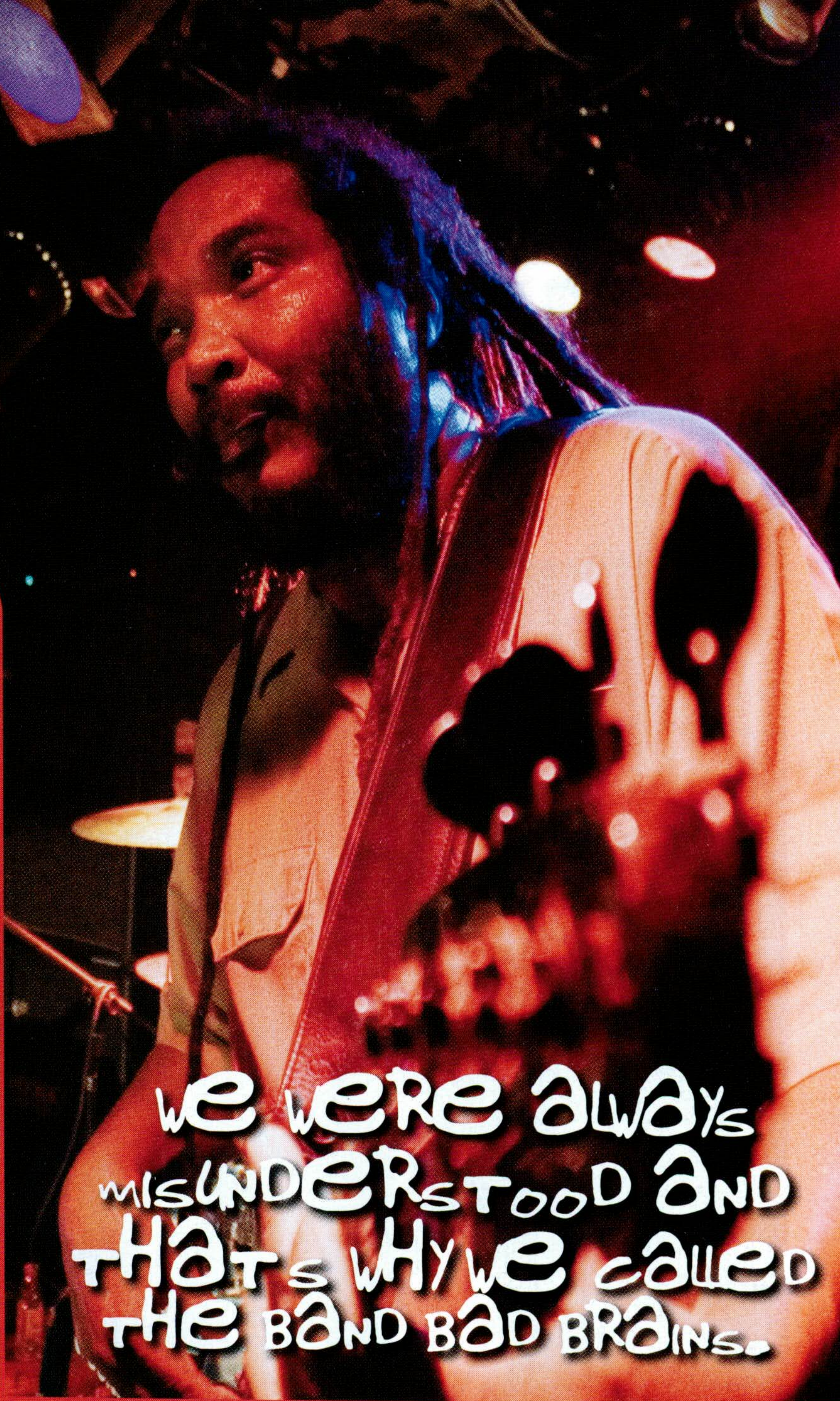
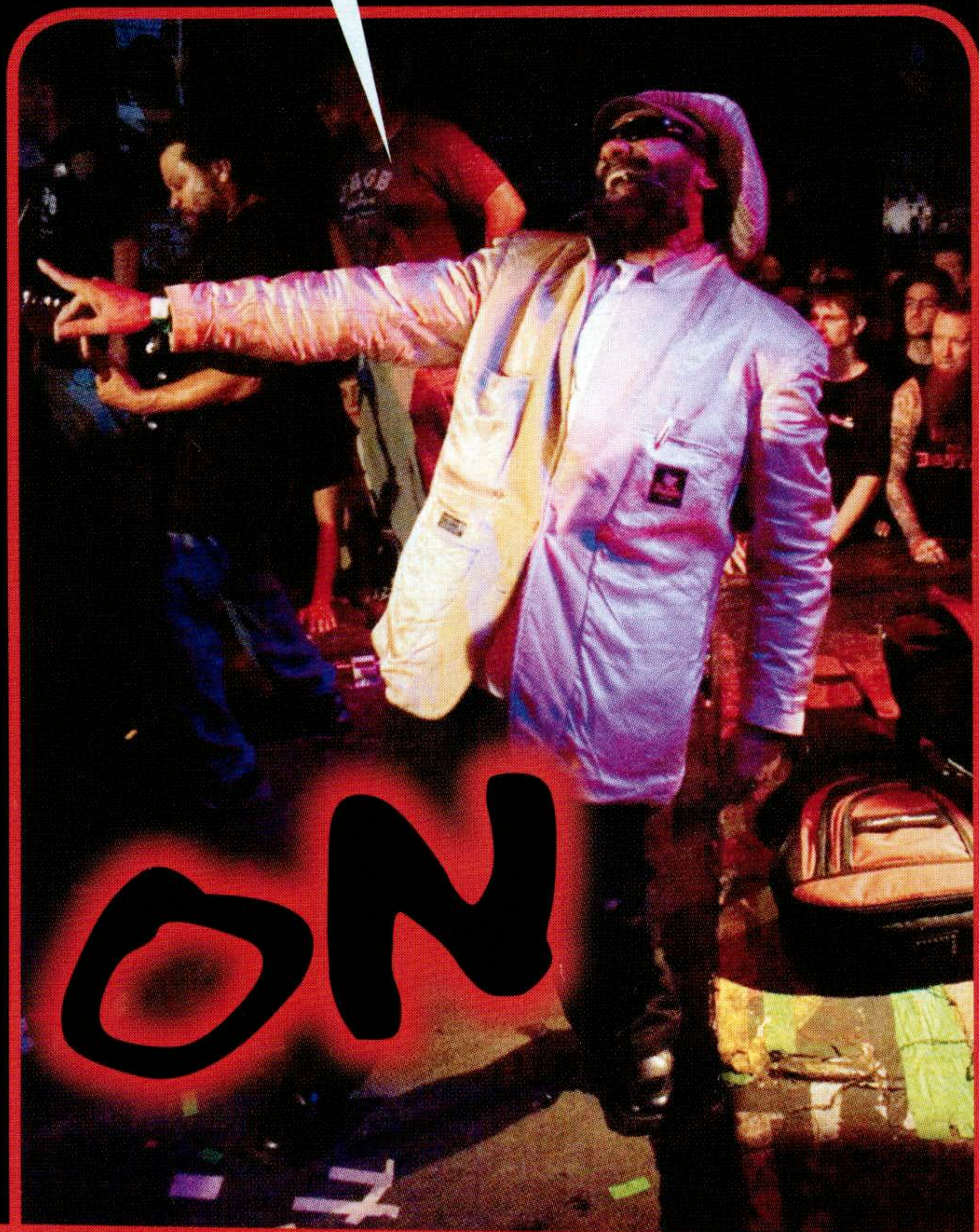
Long-time friend of the band, Beastie Boy Adam "MCA" Yauch, oversaw production after convincing the 'Brains that people like Ric Ocasek of the Cars had done them a grave injustice in trying to tidy up their sound. Yauch suggested that the very first recordings such as the infamous "ROIR" cassette were the best, and the band agreed.

"Adam Yauch approached us and it was very good, his take on this thing, 'cos he's really into reggae and he's really into rock 'n' roll and he's just

SAILING

RASTA HARDCORE LEGENDS STILL BANNED IN DC AND MOST OTHER PLACES. BY MATT REEKIE





WE WERE ALWAYS MISUNDERSTOOD AND THAT'S WHY WE CALLED THE BAND BAD BRAINS.

really into music," explains the Dr. "So he wanted to help us do a record and he said, 'I want you brothers to do what you want to do, but I want you to go back to the old school.' So we said, 'Okay, fine.' So this new record is very old school reggae and old school rock 'n' roll. That's what it is. And all the records we do are what they are, we can't, like, 'Okay, let's sell out.' Otherwise we'd be bad rich and you and I wouldn't be talking right now."

After many uneven and some just plain awful releases since the eighties, the surge in interest surrounding *Build A Nation* is huge. A younger market has been attracted to the band via releases like the *Live At CBGB 1982* DVD and the recent *American Hardcore* documentary, one of the upsides of this being that Bad Brains are not forced to carry as much of the old baggage in relation to the controversies that engulfed them at various times, most notably the cynicism surrounding their conversion to Rastafarianism, H.R.'s often outright homophobia, and the temporary changing of their name to Soul Brains.

"It's all relative, it's all relative," pleads Dr. Know peacefully. "We were always misunderstood

and that's why we called the band Bad Brains. It wasn't about the Ramones either. It goes back to our black thing, James Brown, God bless his soul he just passed away. 'I'm BAD!'

"Our thing was that we wanted to do the best that we could do, and when you strive for that then all these other things and experiences and revelations and all that... basically, we all fall short of the glory, okay. We didn't know what we were doing, but we wanted to really be positive and all these things happened in our lives, but ultimately, at the end of the day, that's all who we are. That's it, for real. And the music, as I was saying to you earlier, touched people's lives. That's the Spirit working through us. There are a lot of stories and a lot of life, but I can go to my grave happy."

Long after Dr. Know is in his grave, new people will be turning on to the music and P.M.A. (Positive Mental Attitude) of Bad Brains. In spite of whatever criticism their lifestyles may have attracted, or the dodgy records that dot their more recent discography, nothing can deny that those early Bad Brains recordings just gather power as the years go by.

"The thing with the media today and technology is that kids know now," states the guitar player matter-of-factly. "They are not copying anymore, they are searching for the source, 'Where is this coming from?' That's how the Spirit works. I live it, so I'm really happy and content."

And by the chilled tone of his voice, it's difficult to doubt him. While Bad Brains may have had personal and musical differences of opinion in the past, Dr. Know - in his usual ultra-chilled, Spirit-repping way - says there is an undeniable chemistry at work when these four soul brothers get in a room on on a stage together.

"I love when we play together. We're a lot older now and everybody has their different agendas. Obviously it's not about the money because we're not those people. But when we play is when play, that's when the Spirit makes that happen."

Good night and Jah bless. **B**

Bad Brains: Live at CBGB 1982 is out now on CD and DVD through MRA. *Build A Nation* is slated for a June release on Megaforce.