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Pop Music

## Making Music History: Bad Brains at CBGB, 1982

by Christopher Johnson



Deborah Feingold

The Bad Brains, circa 1982. From left: HR, Dr. Know, Darryl Jennifer and Earl Hudson Corbis © 2006

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### A Christmas Eve Performance

See both sides of Bad Brains, captured live at CBGB in 1982:

[Hardcore Punk: 'Supertouch'](#)

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The Bad Brains were known for their sweaty, muscular, high-energy performances, led by singer Paul "HR" Hudson. [BadBrains.com](#) © 2006

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### Looking Back on an Era

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*News & Notes*, October 12, 2006 · After 33 years in business, the landmark New York City nightclub CBGB will close its doors for good at the end of October. But before the lease is up, the club will host some pioneering bands from its past to celebrate the venue's legacy as a music mecca.

In the late 1970s and '80s, the Washington, D.C.-based group Bad Brains set a new standard for hard-rocking gigs at CBGB -- and this week, the seminal black punk-reggae band said goodbye to the club with three reunion shows.

It's been a long road for the four members of the band, who met as teenagers in the nation's capital. Led by singer Paul "HR" Hudson, the group quickly earned a reputation for high-energy punk songs with positive messages.

After some run-ins with police in Washington, D.C., the band found a welcome home at CBGB, which by the end of the 1970s had shrugged off its American roots music past -- the name is an acronym for Country Blue Grass Blues -- to embrace some of the most pioneering bands of the day.

The Ramones, Blondie and the Talking Heads all got their big breaks at CBGB. And the club's founder and owner Hilly Krystal says the Bad Brains fit right in.

"They were very talented -- more than talented -- and very exciting," he says.

For his part, "HR" Hudson says those first CBGB shows helped sustain and encourage his band. "It was showing us how, through group participation and staying together, we can make our dreams a reality."

By 1982, Bad Brains were a regular act at the club. On Christmas Eve of that year, the club produced a holiday show that was meant to showcase a new, heavier form of punk rock that fans were just starting to call "hardcore." The Bad Brains headlined that show -- and fortunately, a small camera crew caught the band in the act, at the very top of their game.

A newly released DVD of that performance also captures the group at a creative crossroads. Influenced by Bob Marley and Jamaican music, the band started writing reggae songs. And that night, the band switched back and forth from high-speed punk grinds to dubbed-out reggae, thick with Rastafarian philosophy.

The disc isn't the best footage of a Bad Brains show -- the shots are often out of focus, and the sound quality can muddy and uneven. But it's a valuable document for fans who never got to see this influential band in their heyday, playing at such a famous venue.

Soon after that Christmas Eve show, Bad Brains put out their first album, *Rock for Light*. But after sporadic attempts at touring and recording, the band members broke off to pursue their own musical projects. They have

recently reunited to work on a new album.

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