

As I continue my studies for this craft of rap music, curation is very much important to me. I get called to often write forwards for books, as well as liner notes for quite a few projects. Liner notes and album artwork is essential when I buy an album, just like reading the cereal box while eating breakfast. With the mergers and acquisitions of the shrinking majors, SONY-BMG has decided to reconfigure the RUN DMC catalog with complete repackaging, photos, and notes. Smart move as I've been getting Universal to stop treating hip-hop like a sonic ghetto, especially with my stuff. So for this T-dome heres the liner notes for this summers RUN DMC Tougher Than Leather reissue. Special thanks to Bill Adler and Steve Berkowitz.

TOUGHER THAN LEATHER

On the intro to Run's House, DJ Run's fresh, fly, wild and bold proclamation "We had... a whole lot of superstars on this stage tonight..." was the b-boy sound to be heard.

By the summer of 1988, I'd been an annual visitor to every New York-area arena that would host a Rush Production/Def Jam show, but this year, I was on the same stage and on the same bill with my idols, the legendary RUN DMC.

Hip-Hop Master Chuck D's Terrordome 5-22

Written by Chuck D ID1431
Monday, 23 May 2005 23:59 -

Back in 1984, Jam Master Jay followed through on a promise he'd made a month earlier, at the now legendary, college radio depot for hip-hop, WBAU/Long Island, and practically walked 3 tickets from backstage at the Philadelphia Spectrum—in the middle of a show. For that cat to do that opened me up further to everything RUN DMC was doing and was about to do. They earned respect. I'm not ashamed to say I became a male groupie that night --musically committed to RUN DMC (and I must mention Whodini, because their performance that night, really blew my cap back).

But back to the story. On that night in '88 I recall Run, the obvious headliner of the evening, proclaiming that there were “a lotta superstars” on stage before them that night. But truly, without any doubt, it was Run's House, indeed.

Rewind to 1986: I had --by way of endlessly promoting the greatest rap squad of all time,--gotten certain invitations and such, to the Raising Hell Tour that year. The Beastie Boys, LL Cool J, Whodini and RUN DMC were making their third trek through 60 cities, across the United States—hip-hop: Lewis and Clark style. I happened to be invited the final show of the tour... at Madison Square Garden, no less. Watching 20,000 screaming fans putting their Adidas in the air was a testament to the power of this group and Hip-hop at large, for that matter. For the third straight year, RUN DMC ruled hip hop, with sound, fury, and a total dominance reminiscent of the LA Lakers at the time. This was pure hip- hop. This was the house that RUN built.

Occasionally, as I was planning my dibs with Public Enemy, I would catch Run, D, and Jay, --fresh off some tour-- prowling the offices of Rush Productions. They were tight because the timing of their next album (which we now know as Tougher Than Leather) was being thrown off by cat-and-mouse games between Profile (their label at the time) and RUN DMC's management. RUN DMC was demanding a better deal after the success of Raising Hell. And why the hell not? Not only did they create a super-group, and make a label, but they damn near

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rebuilt and upgraded the whole genre of music.

You could tell that all this drama was having a twisted effect on the group. In the raging wake of Raising Hell, how could they not feel the pressure? Two years between hits is an eternity for the very radio-conscious rap market. They'd toured that record to the def. Anticipation was high all over. RUN DMC needed to make some noise.

I still consider Raising Hell, to be, simply, the greatest rap album ever recorded--because it raised the bar for all of Hip-hop. To me, that album was like Wilt Chamberlain's 100- point game. What next? How do you top that? You don't. Instead, you go another direction.

Tougher Than Leather was like coming back to score 97 points in a losing playoff game--a spectacular performance against all odds and expectations.

By the time Tougher Than Leather's first single, Run's House hit radio, me and my guys had just wrapped up our second album, It Takes A Nation of Millions To Hold Us Back. Our first album had been modeled after Raising Hell, but by the time we did this one, we'd had a full year to really find ourselves after bouncing off the influence of Eric B & Rakim, KRS ONE, BDP, and producer Marley Marl. It seemed that RUN DMC had also compiled all these influences. No matter how off-timed the release, the proficiency of Tougher Than Leather was amazing. When Run's House and Beats To The Rhyme hit—they signified two things:

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1. RUN DMC were back 2. They were ready to headline their 4th national tour. By the summer of 1988, Run's House was not only a song-- but the written theme for all of Hip-Hop, and now, the name of the national tour. Yours truly, and my crew, Public Enemy were chosen to perform on the Run's House Tour, along with; DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince, fellow Long Islanders EPMD, and the all-female West Coast crew, JJ FAD— produced by Easy E & Dr. Dre.

I can't leave out the infamous Hollis Crew:

DJ Hurricane , Kool E, Runny Ray, and Davey DMX (who in terms of production skills, instrumentation, and bass playing remain another of hip-hop's underrated performers). All in all, this was a powerful package. Run's House was one of two tours put out by the RUSH Productions rap empire that summer. The other tour, (called the DOPE JAM TOUR) carried what seemed to be every other hot name at the time. To see it on paper, haters and speculators felt that the artists and albums weren't strong enough to ride through the summer. How wrong they were.

First of all, RUN DMC had the unprecedented audacity to open their set with Run's House. Oh, My God. The nerve--and the catalog of hits you had to have-- to take the luxury of blasting off with your hottest record "first"! Traditionally, acts saved their hot songs for the end of the set, never the beginning. If that right there didn't set the tone, what else could? The whole set was packet with beats, bass,--the "funky drummer" thing that was happening at the moment, and JMJ on some wicked, slashing cuts. Whose house? No Question.

Still, with all this acclaim, the pressure had really gotten to Run. Like I said it's hard to notice 97 points when you crushed the world at 100. And him being still a young cat, he was affected by the perceptions of some unmet expectations. I felt it was my place to give them the reality of the greatness they achieved with this record. Spittin', cuttin', and high- octane, funk-rock beats were born on that disc. RUN DMC commanded stages and cassette decks in '88. I personally went through three cassette tapes of Tougher Than Leather myself that summer alone—bought at record shops, during stops on that unforgettable tour.

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Beats to the Rhyme — unbelievable classic—'nuff said. One listen, and you get the sense that this record was chopped and assaulted with DJ's sensibility and a surgeon's precision. The rumor of a scratched-in a cappella verse by DMC on this cut remains one of greatest untold production mysteries in Hip-hop. Then you have, Radio Station. So underrated. Can you imagine the honor I felt when I heard my voice cut into the hook? This song had great stage playoff, and sported classic lyrics like: "Run-DMC, goin' down like a Bufferin/reliving all pain...".

One night, somewhere on tour, RUN, D, and Jay answered a personal request of mine to put Ms. Elaine in the set---and J's cousin Bobby Walker played the drums on the song. As I recall they kept the song in their set for a week or two. Then there was I'm Not Going Out Like That another, hot, up-tempo joint; a great song that jumps off from the start and doesn't let up till the end.

During a show in Albany, Georgia, RUN DMC shot a video for another of my favorites, Mary, Mary. On that song, JMJ and Run flipped that old Monkees cut "Mary, Mary" that was on all those jam-packed, breakbeat records that every DJ was using, and executed it with mastery. I loved all of RUN DMCs rock-ish combinations (that they never receive proper credit for).

The album's title track, Tougher Than Leather was itself, equal parts wah-wah funk and rock-guitar.

Before Tougher than Leather came out, DMC told me that I had inspired him to make How'd You Do It Dee ; a serious, funk/breakbeat, get down, that is unparalleled to this day. On this song, DMC works wordplays like a game of lyrical 3-card Monte. It's funny, D has always said that I was his favorite rapper, while he, the "King of Rock" is part of my favorite group of all time.

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RUN DMC is so thorough that they even showed mastery in the endings of their songs. Soul To Rock and Roll is a perfect example—the beat gives space for rhyme and DJ play, and then ends with the chopped-up vocal "I'm the King Of Rock". Masterful. This was a lost art, swamped at the time by the laziness of a fade. Nobody, except Grandmaster Flash, five years prior, had enjoyed cutting up their own catalog and making new twists on it like RUN DMC did.

By the time August of '88 rolled around, the Run's House Tour had picked up much steam, Everybody who saw the show went crazy. RUN DMC kept the party live and The Hollis Crew even furthered the fun by reflecting the Papa Crazy track, and another clever JMJ cutup, They Call Us RUN DMC. The few times these two songs played on stage, The Hollis Crew made sure there was a party brought to the hardcore "hat and black" look. Everything about the vibe of that tour was just fun, and party, and pure Hip-hop--from The Glen E. Friedman design and photography, to the blue background, the Adidas, the gold ropes, and the red and black, Adidas tour jackets we wore (those are keepsakes for life).

The tour ended in the middle of August in the summer of 1988. The sense of unity the groups had on that tour was groundbreaking as far as rap shows went; and there hasn't been a collective as tight as that one since. Many of the promoters who saw the tour in cities where we had stopped earlier, wanted to see it and promote it again. We had a whole lotta superstars on that stage every night. But, that tour taught us that the only place for egos--was onstage, and out of all those superstars we all knew whose house it was.

Later, in the fall of '88, Public Enemy and RUN DMC played side by side, this time rolling through Europe and wrecking shows. There's a picture from that tour that I will always cherish, of our two crews, chillin' in a hotel lobby in Montreux, Switzerland. The photo is a reminder of the power of the group at that time. RUN DMC is indeed "tougher than leather", and they hammered the point home by creating one of the standout rap albums of all-time.

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I've always said that "Run is the Mind, Jay is the SOUL and DMC is the HEART; of RUN DMC." No past tense. There's no "was" when talking about Elvis or the Beatles, so I aint using it here. RUN DMC is the chief architect of Hip-hop. So when I say "Whose house?"— Y'all know what time it is.

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