

Music

Lost Island

FIFTEEN FORGOTTEN LI HIP-HOP CLASSICS

BY JESSE SERWER

The excellent job California's Stones Throw Records has done unearthing Connecticut's lost hip-hop classics begs the question: Why hasn't anyone archived Long Island's classic contributions to the hip-hop canon? From 1987 to 1993, Nassau and Suffolk counties collectively produced a crop of artists and records that rivals, if not tops, the output of any other geographical region during that time, be it the Bronx, Queens or L.A. And while De La Soul, EPMD, Rakim, Public Enemy, KMD and the Leaders of the New School have left their mark on history, MCs from Central Islip to Long Beach have faded back into obscurity, their influential records long out of print. With the help of the godfathers of Long Island hip-hop, Chuck D and Hank Shocklee, Public Enemy's DJ Johnny Juice and Strong Island veteran RA the Rugged Man, we've put together a list of forgotten LI classics that demand a second chance.

1. SON OF BAZERK BAZERK, BAZERK, BAZERK

(S.O.U.L./MCA, 1991)
The first of three releases to come out on Hank Shocklee's short-lived S.O.U.L. imprint, this anomaly featured the dapper, James Brown-inspired BazerK and a PE-like cast of Freeport-based characters called No Self Control. Production-wise, the Bomb Squad upped the ante on their chaotic mishmash of soul samples, bouncing around multiple genres in the space of single songs. "That was my favorite project to work on," says Hank Shocklee. "It should have blown up." An anachronism in gully 1991, BazerK (like Chuck D, a former DJ on Adelphi's WBAU) was a suit-clad showman "who was more into the glitz and glamour when hip-hop was still about hoodies," Shocklee recalls. The whereabouts of NSC are unknown, but BazerK recently made an appearance on Flavor Flav's still-unreleased solo debut.

2. J.V.C. F.O.R.C.E. DOIN' DAMAGE

(B-BOY, 1988);
FORCE FIELD
(WARLOCK, 1991)

Take your pick from either album by this Central Islip trio who brought the words "Strong Island" (coined by Chuck D in his days as a DJ on WBAU) to the masses on one of 1988's best and most under-appreciated singles. "Interestingly, I was in England when I first heard this record," Chuck D recalls, and indeed, "Strong Island" may be better known in the UK than the island it celebrates. J.V.C.'s jazzy first album, *Doin' Damage*, earned some attention, but *Force Field* went largely unnoticed, though it could be the better of the two, with DJ Curt Cazal flirting with the short-lived hip-house sound hitting at the time, while AJ Rok and Bee Love kept up the hard-edge rhymes. "They were like MOP in terms of their rawness," Shocklee says. "The energy level on *Damage* was just crazy."

3. MC EZ AND TROUP "JUST RHYMIN/GET RETARDED" 12"

(FRESH, 1988)
Can Eisenhower Park do the Get Retarded? While the name "EZ and Troup" never surfaced again after this 12"-only release, the artists themselves were not obscure: EZ was Craig Mack, the Wyandanch/Brentwood MC who helped launch the Bad Boy empire in 1994 with the understated "Flava In Ya Ear"; and "Troup" was Diamond J, original DJ for EPMD, co-founder of the X-Ecutioners and, more recently, touring DJ for Prince, P. Diddy and Da Band. The B-side, "Get Retarded" is one of those timeless, unmistakable jams that doesn't sound one bit dated. In fact, the "Zoom Zoom Zoom" a cappella beat thing Mack does is the beginning of the Bad Boy sound.

4. SPECTRUM CITY "LIES/CHECK OUT THE RADIO" 12"

(VANGUARD, 1984)
This is the record that started it all, the first widely-released hip-hop record conceived and created on Long Island, and the vinyl debut of one Chuck D. Spectrum City, for those who don't know, was the DJ crew founded by brothers Hank and Keith Boxley ("Shocklee" came later), which grew to include Chuck, Terminator X (then DJ Melo-D) and Professor Griff. The crew, for all intents and purpose, became Public Enemy in the mid-'80s after hooking up with Bill Stephney and Flavor Flav at WBAU. This white-label single, issued through classic jazz and disco label Vanguard nearly 10 years after Hank and Keith started DJing parties around Roosevelt and Hempstead, was Spectrum's only official release. In 1992, years after it was recorded, "Check Out the Radio" appeared on the soundtrack to the film *South Central*.

5. RUMPLETILSKINZ WHAT IS A RUMPLETILSKIN?

(RCA, 1993)
Building on the jazzy beats and group

chants of their Uniondale brethren Leaders of the New School, but getting things a whole lot grimmer, Rumpeltitskinz could have been big with the right promotion and, perhaps, a better name (when was the last time anyone said "skins"?). Not too long after this album came out, groups like Onyx and Black Moon took off with a similar vibe and feel. An above-average album from one of hip-hop's greatest years, it's a shame it was the last time we've heard from Remedy Man, Capitol LS, Jeranimo or R.P.M.

6. ORIGINAL CONCEPT STRAIGHT FROM THE BASEMENT OF KOOLEY HIGH

(DEF JAM, 1988)
Before Public Enemy became official, Rick Rubin wanted Chuck D to head this Hempstead unit anchored by Doctor Dre of *Yo! MTV Raps* and morning-radio fame, also a host on WBAU at the time and the Beastie Boys' original DJ. It would have been an odd fit, as the often-silly party

tracks on *Straight From the Basement* are far from PE's political chaos. Original Concept released a number of 12"s (notably "Can You Feel It/Knowledge Me," and "Pump That Bass," both from '86), most of which are collected on *Straight From the Basement*.

7. TRUE MATHEMATICS "FOR THE MONEY" 12"

(SELECT, 1988)
True Mathematics was part of the extended family of artists and projects (Leaders of the New School, the Kings of Pressure, Young Black Teenagers and Son of BazerK) created and cultivated by Hank and Keith Shocklee, Chuck D and Eric "Vietnam" Sadler of the Bomb Squad after the initial success of Public Enemy. A mysterious Hempstead MC whose real name even Hank Shocklee can't remember, True Math released a number of singles and the misleadingly titled LP *Greatest Hits*, but his apex was this gold-digger-dissing 1988 track. With vocals recorded to sound like True was telling his tales of money-hungry women via telephone (a style repeated during his appearance on PE's "Get the F**k Outta Dodge") and a funky James Brown sample, "For the Money" is a

classic late-'80s b-boy document, backed with "K.A.O.S.S. (Greeks In Effect, Part 2)," a curious ode to frat parties.

8. K-SOLO TIME'S UP

(ATLANTIC, 1992)
Brentwood's Kevin Madison didn't make great albums, but he had a tight flow and a unique "gimmick" (spelling out words), and in the early '90s, these things got you places. A member of the EPMD-affiliated Hit Squad, Kevin Self Organization Left Others (in the late '80s, a great many rappers thought their names had to stand for something, often going to absurd, bizarre lengths to do so) recorded two albums for Atlantic, *Time's Up* and *Tell the World My Name*, before moving to California in the mid-'90s, where he recorded a still-unreleased album for Death Row. Putting this out probably isn't on top of newly-paroled Suge Knight's to-do list: In the meantime, check Solo rocking an early Pete Rock beat on *Time's Up*'s "Letterman."

9. GRAND DADDY IU SMOOTH ASSASSIN

(COLD CHILLIN'/WARNER BROTHERS, 1990)
Another MC rocking a gangsta godfather style long before it was the fashion, and an oft-forgotten artist in the Cold Chillin' stable, Hempstead's Grand Daddy IU burst onto the scene in 1990 with the singles "This Is a Recording" and "Sugar Free" before dropping his slept-on debut LP, *Smooth Assassin*. Always an intimidating presence on the mic, IU's entry into the gangsta era, 1994's *Lead Pipe*, was quietly received, but he's remained active as a producer and MC, working with legends like Big L and the Notorious B.I.G. before their deaths. A comeback album through Universal is expected early next year.

10. SUGAR BEAR "DON'T SCANDALIZE MINE" 12"

(COSLIT/NEXT PLATEAU, 1988)
Freeport's Theodore Jackson scored a big enough hit with 1988's "Don't Scandalize Mine" to tour Europe on it. Packaged with "Ready to Penetrate," it was produced by a young GM Web D, later known as X-Ray

of the Monsta Island Czars, and appeared on the classic DJ Red Alert compilation *We Can Do This*. Overall, the two tracks received enough attention to earn Sugar Bear a reference in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, but only after the release of a UK-only single.

11. SERIOUS LEE FINE NOTHING CAN STOP US

(ARISTA, 1988)
Descended from the Choice Five MCs, a mid-'80s Island act that also included original Uptown Records signee Woody Rock, Uniondale's Serious Lee Fine managed to put together two albums on big-time Arista (*Bust This Again* was never released) without many people ever hearing of them. Run-D.M.C.'s Jam Master Jay secured Serious C, Lee Ski and K Fine their deal with Arista and produced much of *Nothing Can Stop Us*, though the pioneers allegedly stole some rhymes from their lesser-known brethren.

12. YOUNG BLACK TEENAGERS YOUNG BLACK TEENAGERS DEAD ENZ KIDZ DOIN LIFETIME BIDZ

(S.O.U.L./MCA, 1991);
(S.O.U.L./MCA, 1993)
The world definitely wasn't ready for a crew of suburban white boys (and one half-Puerto Rican DJ) calling themselves "Young Black Teenagers," but, surprisingly, both these records hold up well more than a decade later, thanks to Bomb Squad production and rhymes that, though dated subject-wise, were pretty good. Nonetheless, YBT are remembered first for their name, secondly for DJ Skribble's second career with MTV (he's also DJed for Anthrax and did the scratching on The Fugees albums), thirdly for Kamron's role as white, dreadlocked black history student "Jamal" in *House Party 2*, and, fourth, for the cover art on their debut, which transposed the Teenagers onto the *With the Beatles* cover.

13. TOO NICE "I GIT MINZE" 12"

(ARISTA, 1990)
Early proponents of the "hip-house" sound, which lit up dancefloors in 1990

and 1991, this Suffolk duo's deal with Arista yielded the spotty but slept-on *Cold Facts*, and this very underrated single. The B-side to "I Get Minze" was "Cold Wild Strong Isle," a call-and-response ode to the Island; "Two Can Play That Game" appeared in the Wayans Brothers' blaxploitation send-up *I'm Gonna Get You Sucka*.

14. KINGS OF PRESSURE "GIVE ME THE MIKE/YOU KNOW HOW TO REACH US" 12"

(NEXT PLATEAU, 1988)
The first of several acts assembled by the Shocklees after PE, the Kings of Pressure were the result of a famed 1987 tryout in Hempstead. "Me and Chuck really didn't have aspirations of doing PE: We thought we were good at managing and directing others," recalls Hank Shocklee. "So we found the best rhymer in the area and tried to put them together. We'd sit these guys down and hold these sessions that were like classes and seminars on the business." Eventual PE member DJ Johnny Juice, who would go on to produce tracks on *The Adventures of Slick Rick* and PE's *Yo! Bumrush the Show*, got his breakthrough at the tryout, but his partner Busta Rhymes failed to show up. "The idea was for people to think there was this whole army of artists—the groups had names and logos before there were members," recalls Juice. "Now, this is the template for everybody in hip-hop." The Kings of Pressure, however, were never particularly successful despite their stellar first single and, by the time of their 1989 LP *Slang Teacher*, the group was down to two of five original members.

15. HYENAS IN THE DESERT DIE LAUGHING

(COLUMBIA/SLAM JAMZ, 1996)
The first release on Chuck D's Slam Jamz label, the Hempstead-based Hyenas In The Desert's psychological rhymes and dark soundscapes bore some similarities to the "horror-core" style pioneered by the RZA and Prince Paul's Gravediggaz. Despite a rave review in *Rolling Stone*, top-notch production from PE's Gary G-Wiz, and an impressive video/single "Concubinez," the album disappeared quickly. ●