

## Music

Straight Outta  
Compton...N.Y.

AMITYVILLE'S PRINCE PAUL PRESENTS THE DIX

BY JESSE SERWER



The Dix (from L to R): Dik Gracin (Buster "Bus"), Peter O'Tool (Mr. Dead), John Handkock (Bimos), Rowdy Roddie Pipah (MC Paul Barman), Orgynius (Prince Paul), Burnhard Gets (Mr. Len), Don Johnsun (Don Richardson), Magik Jonsun (Don Newkirk)

Just who are The Dix?

While rumors of this legendary yet mysterious band abound, the truth is much harder to come by.

As legend goes, original members Orgynius, Peter O'Tool, John Handkock and Tro John first united under the name The Bangkoks in 1957, utilizing the popular doo-wop sound of the day as their way out of rough but little-known Compton, New York.

"Times was hard in Compton," recalls Orgynius, whose real first name is Orenthal, but chooses not to reveal his last name. "People think it is all about the West Coast Compton, but the real 187s and destitution was in Compton, New York. We were all collecting cans and bottles and trying to borrow sugar. There wasn't public assistance back then. Especially in Compton—people couldn't find it on the map."

It wasn't until the addition of Dik Gracin (aka "Lil' Richard") and the Johnsun brothers, Don and Magik, that the Dix really exploded, landing their first top 10 hit in 1962 with "Love Biscuit." Expanding into soul and funk, the Dix soon grew huge in stature and size, adding members one after the other: Rowdy Roddie Pipah, who joined after heading up the group's fanclub, and Burnhard Gets, a moonshine hustler the group met while touring on the Chit'lun circuit, were the ones that stuck.

At the height of the free-love era in 1969, though, the group encountered the inevitable downward spiral, and their sales went soft: O'Tool became depressed after Gracin stole a love interest and went solo; Don Johnsun got messed up on drugs while his brother Magik found the path to enlightenment studying with

the Maharishi.

The Dix had all but disappeared from the public eye, until hip-hop producer and musicologist Prince Paul encountered a rare 45 in a used record pile; his interest piqued, he decided to remix and remaster some of The Dix's greatest hits in a new hip-hop-friendly package called *The Art of Picking Up Women*, which also includes a PBS documentary on the forgotten legends, entitled *The Rise and Fall of The Dix*.

"Thank God for that young man," says Orgynius. "He said, 'Look at their hair and their suits—this must be some really hot music.' Now we can have our grandchildren see us on MTV and BET with Nelly and Chingy and The Game, if he allows us."

The Dix are, of course, one big made-up yarn. But this is the sort of thing people have come to expect from Amityville native Prince Paul (who doubles as Orgynius), the idea man behind Handsome Boy Modeling School, De La Soul's early recordings and the Gravediggaz, and whose credits include inventing the hip-hop skit and scoring Chris Rock's comedy albums and film, *Pootie Tang*. And the truth behind the real Dix—the random, comedy troupe-like cast of characters who sporadically and enigmatically show up on Prince Paul projects—might be just as colorful as the fiction.

Front man Peter O'Tool, for instance, is Mr. Dead, a Brooklyn MC and horror-film makeup/costume artist who helped bring the gore to the Gravediggaz videos; Pipah is MC Paul Barman, a Brown-educated, Woody Allen-like rapper who recorded a Paul-produced album for

Matador Records. Then there's Don Newkirk, a Paul collaborator since the pair's days growing up in Amityville who recorded a rarely heard 1989 LP for Def Jam but is probably best-known for his appearance on 3rd Bass' "Gas Face" and De La Soul's *3 Feet High and Rising*, both also produced by Paul. (The spelling of nearby hamlet Dix Hills provided inspiration for the name of the double entendre-loaded project.)

"We're all not very far from who we play in The Dix," says Newkirk, aka Magik Johnsun. "Buster [Dik Gracin] really looks funny like that. I really am the Eastern philosophy, religious consciousness guy like Magik." In fact, as he's explaining The Dix, Newkirk is literally planning a lecture on Kabbalah at the Shrine of Ma'at in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn.

"Paul is so good at taking fiction and bending it until you can't find the line between truth and fiction," the keyboardist/vocalist says. "He will find a part of you which people would find hilarious, and gets you to make fun of yourself. It is funny to him to see these shifts in consciousness in his friend of 20 years.... If I was in a cult with bare feet and a long robe and people following me, he would be the first person to throw an egg at me."

The DVD portion of the release, *The Rise and Fall of The Dix*, was directed by honorary Dix, Edward Wood and Alfred Hitchkok, aka *Jackass* cast member Chris Nieratko and former pro skater Ryan Monihan.

"This is our answer to Spinal Tap," says Company Flow DJ and sometimes Paul collaborator Mr. Len—Burnhard Gets—who decided to put out *The Art of Picking Up Women/The Rise and Fall of The Dix* on his Dummy Smacks label after adding

some come-ons to "I Luv U Girl." "Everything is a heavy-handed double-entendre."

But what exactly is the connection between the doo-wop loops, penis jokes and samples from a dating-for-desperate guys self-help tape that make up the seven-song *The Art of Picking Up Women* EP?

"I will just think of something and it takes on a life of its own," says Paul. "People rarely act on the ideas that just pop into their heads because they think it is far-fetched or they don't want to make the effort. I act upon the craziness of what I think, and do things I know won't sell just to freak people out. Each idea I come up with, I wonder how many record labels it will get me dropped from."

Whether The Dix will be a one-off project or the springboard for "forgotten" solo releases by the group's members ("After The Dix, me, Dik Graycin and my brother, Don Johnsun, had a group called Three The Hard Way—we're coming out!" says Magik Johnsun, er, Newkirk) remains to be seen. But based on the hilarious results of the *Rise and Fall* DVD, this crew certainly has a future as an entertainment unit.

"I think my next album, *itsTRUmental*, is going to be my last, so you might just find us on TV," says Paul. "I am developing a talk show. We are like a comedy troupe but we just use music. There are no black comedy troupes that are bizarre like us." ●

The Art of Picking Up Women/The Rise and Fall of The Dix CD/DVD is out now on Dummy Smacks Records. [www.dummysmacks.com](http://www.dummysmacks.com). Prince Paul's *itsTRUmental* is out May 10 on Female Fun Records. [www.culturama.org/femalefun](http://www.culturama.org/femalefun).