

Public Enemy Set to Celebrate

Groundbreaking rappers bring their seminal record *Fear of a Black Planet*

By James Jennings

WHEN VENERABLE PUBLIC Enemy front-man Chuck D states matter-of-factly that his group are “the Rolling Stones of the rap game”, it’s no idle boast: The pioneering, politically charged collective is approaching its 30th anniversary together and, by Chuck’s count, are currently undertaking their 70th tour – a staggering number for any group, hip-hop or otherwise.

TOUR PREVIEW

Having turned 50 this past August, the man born Carlton Douglas Ridenhour is celebrating another important milestone in 2010: the 20th anniversary of Public Enemy’s seminal *Fear of a Black Planet*, an album the group intends to perform live in Australia that still sounds ahead of its time two decades on from release.

“The album was like our *Sgt. Pepper*. It dealt with some very complex issues but still had leanings towards good funk,” says Chuck when asked to explain the album’s continued relevance. “What we were able to do back then was speak on some issues that might seem like it was a long time ago, but 20 years isn’t all that long. Racism and classicism changes itself yearly like a new car – you just gotta recognise the model.”

Revered for its intricate layering of samples (“A large amount of preparation went into it – collecting data tapes and sounds,” reminisces Chuck), *Fear* is also one of the last rap albums made before copyright laws put an end to hip-hop’s sampling free-for-all. A recent analysis by two U.S. law professors discovered that under today’s sample clearance system, P.E. would lose \$5 per sold copy of *Fear* in 2010 – a loss of five million dollars if the album went platinum on today’s charts. Regardless, Chuck is proud of the album’s heritage. “Our knowledge of records just allowed us to come up with something that was a little more dense. That was our musical identity, but it doesn’t mean we invented it – we just learned from DJ culture and embellished it.”



OLD HANDS
Flava Flav
(left) and
Chuck D

With a reputation for giving one of the tightest live shows in the world today, Chuck says Australian audiences can expect the classic P.E. line-up during their visit in December and January: Hypeman Flava Flav, Professor Griff and the

Far from being a nostalgia act, P.E. are already at work on their 11th album, after raising \$75,000 through the fan-funded company Sellaband (the group have circumvented record companies by releasing music via the Internet for well

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plastic UZI-toting SiWs (DJ Lord, the current man behind the decks, replaced Terminator X after his retirement in 1999). When asked to comment on P.E.’s legendary live status, Chuck admits it’s a double-edged sword.

“It can work for and against you,” he says. “Against you in that you have to come out and top what you’ve done before. But then again, in hip-hop the expectation of a performance has been lowered so much that this generation expects nothing more than the bare minimum. It undercuts the beauty of the art form.”

over a decade now). “We’re always in perpetual motion as far as the studio is concerned,” says Chuck.

Having outlived most other hip-hop acts from their generation, Chuck says Public Enemy’s resilience ultimately stems from a desire to serve hip-hop culture as a whole, not just the group’s own self-interest.

“The whole thing with us coming to Australia so many times in the past – I think this is our sixth tour – it’s about paving a road for somebody other than yourself,” says Chuck. “It’s not about us – it’s about the genre of hip-hop.”

TOUR BRIEFS

Huge Blues Fest for 2011: Bob Dylan, B.B. King and Elvis

April 21st to 25th

In addition to the usual suspects – Ben Harper, Michael Franti, Robert Randolph and the Blind Boys of Alabama – Byron’s East Coast Blues and Roots Festival has snared three amazing headliners for 2011: Bob Dylan, B.B. King and Elvis Costello. Supported by a host of local talent – including C.W. Stoneking, Saltwater Band and the decidedly un-blusy or rootsy Washington – on the event’s very well-received new site, this year promises to be one of the shows of the year.

Grinspoon Get Back to Business

December 26th to January 8th

Alt-rockers Grinspoon are treading up and down the East Coast promoting their 2009 album *Six to Midnight*. The party fires up on Boxing Day in Byron Bay and virtually does not stop until they reach South-Western Sydney. The band is playing 12 gigs in only 14 days with the support of Ballarat punk rockers, Howl, and Chicks Who Love Guns.

The National’s High Violet Tour

January 7th to January 10th

Crammed between their performances at the Falls Festival, Southbound Festival, and Cross-Linx Festival, Brooklyn indie rockers the National are still finding time to slip in a few Oz performances on their own terms. The band will play back-to-back shows at the Enmore Theatre in Sydney and the Palais Theatre in Melbourne on their High Violet tour.

The Soft Pack’s Way Too Short Stop

January 5th to 7th

These non-stop Cali rockers are returning to Australia for a dreadfully short tour after a stellar response from their first ever Aussie tour last July. The tour kicks off at Sydney at the Manning Bar and wraps up at the Corner in Melbourne with fresh, local acts supporting both gigs.

Hot Hot Heat: Still Hot

January 3rd to 6th

This January, these Canadian rockers will be down under promoting their first self-produced album, 2010’s *Future Breeds*. The buzz around the band is rising, once again starting to rival the interest they had when they first burst onto the scene with their 2002 *Make Up the Breakdown*. Hopefully this time they capitalise on the mood.