

Hardcore Holiness

Bad Brains frontman HR

Washington, D.C.'s Bad Brains was a major part of the first wave of hardcore punk rock to blast American shores in the early '80s.

Taking their cues from London trends, they also merged punk with reggae and helped touch off a state-side craze for both ska and hardcore, reportedly influencing groups as diverse as Henry Rollins, No Doubt and Metallica along the way.

The group's integrity suffered after the mid-'80s, when vocalist HR (aka Human Rights, born Paul Hudson) and his brother, drummer Earl Hudson, left the band to focus more on the reggae side of the Bad Brains sound. At the same time guitarist Dr. Know (born Gary Miller) and bassist Darryl Jenifer were moving toward the harder-edged rock side of the band's roots.

After years of ups and downs including a failed post-grunge era incursion into major label recording, as well as infamous incidents of physical violence on a mid-'90s reunion tour, the original Bad Brains lineup still plays occasional shows together — sometimes under the moniker Soul Brains.

We caught HR on the phone in New York City as he prepared to start a new leg of the DIA Global Rock Showcase tour, for which he was the headliner throughout 2005. In conversation, the singer comes off like the world's friendliest hippie philosopher — a Liverpool, England-born American Rastafarian with an eminently gracious,

somewhat mystifying manner of speech. "I'm one of the most phenomenal musicians you've ever met," he says, without apology.

"I owe so much to my fans and loved ones."

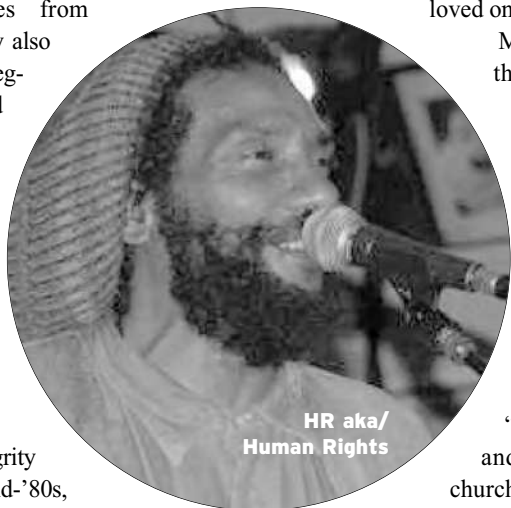
Modesty (or lack thereof) aside, HR transcends the obstacles of Bad Brains' turbulent history through his unfailingly bright outlook. "You can get something good out of something bad," he says. "Through the love and guidance and church and all the beautiful friends, I was able to finally achieve my objective. And that was to establish life and creation, and love, and musical happiness through being able to live positively, and in a very professional and upright manner."

Though it's been some time since new HR recordings have surfaced (the latest is DIA Records' *Out of Bounds*, released in 2000), the artist's dreamy/rough-hewn proto-reggae sound, which he describes as "the essence of soul music," still enjoys a loyal cult following. Meanwhile, historians and fans of HR's first professional band, the legendary Bad Brains, will be happy to know that it's not all reggae, all the time. If there's one thing HR thrives on, it's diversity.

"I truly am grateful for the gift of God's music," he says, "whether it's reggae, niabingi, hardcore, soul music, or symphonic tribulations of the angels that come from the Holy One."

EW

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HR aka/
Human Rights

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