



PUBLIC ENEMY

**Due to Public Enemy's work, hip-hop
established itself as a global force.**

By Alan Light

RUN-DMC had a more revolutionary impact on the way records are made. N.W.A spawned more imitators. The Death Row and Bad Boy juggernauts sold more albums. Jay-Z has topped the charts for many more years. But no act in the history of hip-hop ever felt more important than Public Enemy.

At the top of its game, PE redefined not just what a rap group could accomplish, but also the very role pop musicians could play in contemporary culture. Lyrically, sonically, politically, onstage, on the news — never before had musicians been considered “radical” across so many different platforms. The mix of agitprop politics, Black Panther-meets-arena-rock packaging, high drama, and low comedy took the group places hip-hop has never been before or since. For a number of years in the late eighties and early nineties, it was, to sample a phrase from the Clash, the only band that mattered.

“I put them on a level with Bob Marley and a handful of other artists,” wrote the late Adam Yauch (the Beastie Boys were one of Public Enemy’s earliest champions). “[It’s a] rare artist who can make great music and also deliver a political and social message. But where Marley’s music sweetly lures you in, then sneaks in the message, Chuck D grabs you by the collar and makes you listen.”

Behind, beneath, and around it all was that sound. “When we came in the game, musicians said we’re not making music, we’re making noise,” said Hank Shocklee, leader of PE’s production team, the Bomb Squad. “I said, ‘You wanna hear noise?’ I wanted to go out to be music’s worst nightmare.”



Flav, Chuck, and X (from left), 1989

**“Cause I’m black and I’m proud
I’m ready and hyped, plus I’m amped
Most of my heroes don’t appear
on no stamps
Sample a look back you look and find
Nothing but rednecks for
400 years if you check
‘Don’t Worry Be Happy’
Was a Number One jam
Damn if I say it you can slap me
right here”**

— “Fight the Power”

Public Enemy came together in and around Long Island’s Adelphi University in the early eighties. Bill Stephney hosted one of the New York area’s first rap shows on radio station WBAU. Hank Boxley was DJ’ing local dances and parties under the name Spectrum City, and a neighbor of his named Carlton Ridenhour, a graphic design major and cartoonist, helped him with promotion by designing the posters and flyers. Boxley — soon renamed “Shocklee” — started mixing records live on the air, and Ridenhour — taking the on-air name Chuck D — found that he had an effectively booming, stenorian delivery; he modeled his voice after NBA announcer Marv Albert.

Fellow Long Islander Rick Rubin heard a tape of the WBAU show and immediately began efforts to sign Chuck to the fledgling Def Jam label. Rubin’s partner, Russell Simmons, initially found the crew’s sound too abrasive, but Rubin persisted. In the meantime, the size of the squad now known as Public Enemy (after a track Shocklee had crafted called “Public Enemy No. 1”) grew to include turntable wizard Norman Rogers, renamed DJ Terminator X, and Richard Griffin, or Professor Griff. A member of the Nation of Islam, Griff would eventually be named — Panther-style — the group’s “Minister of Information” and assemble the security-force-cum-backup-dancers dubbed the Security of the First World.

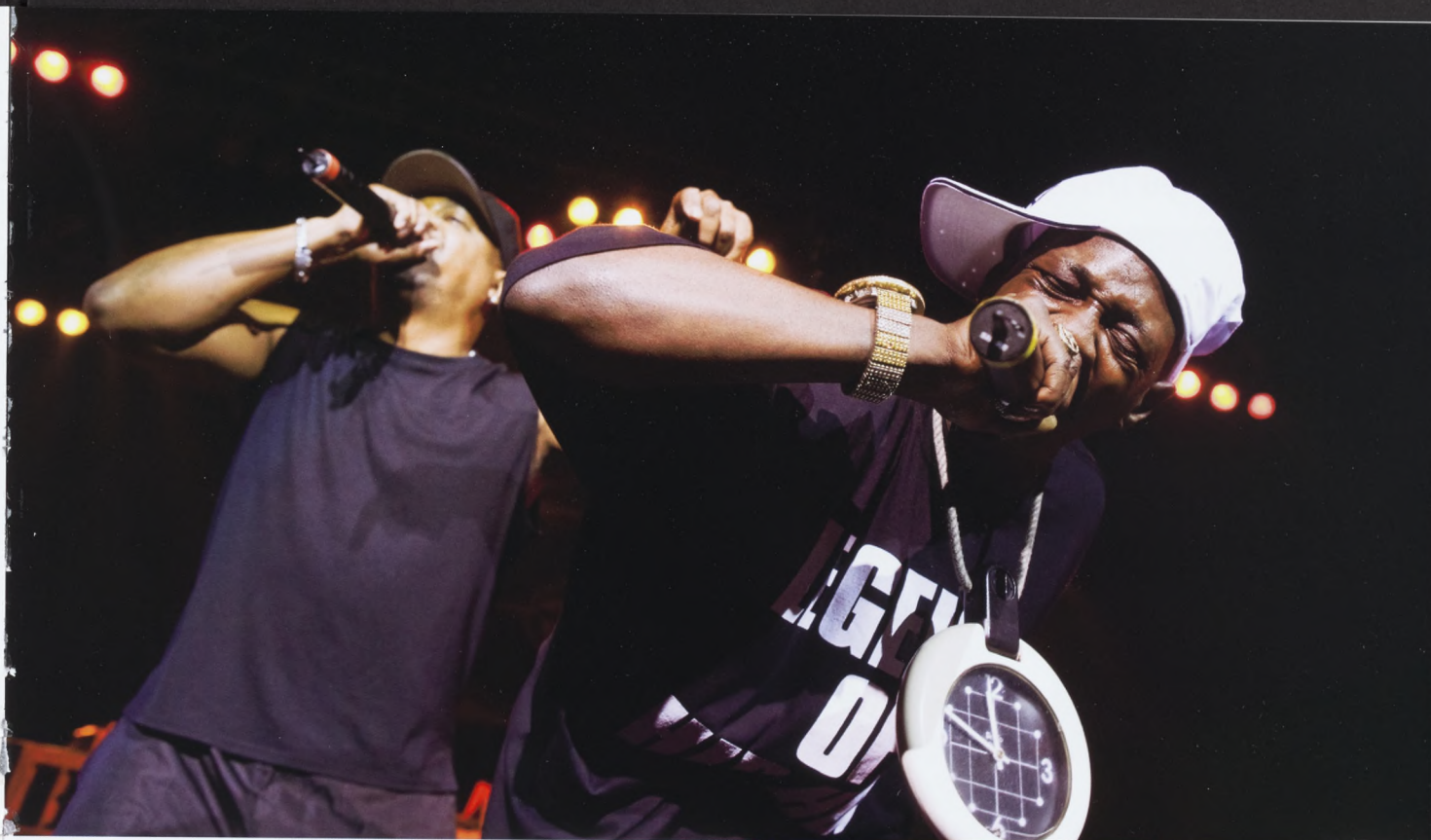
Chuck’s crazy friend William Drayton would often drop by the studio or phone in to throw his own madcap freestyling into the PE mix. Rubin wanted to sign Chuck as a solo act, but Chuck insisted that Drayton, known as Flavor Flav, be included in the deal. “They said, ‘What does he do?’” Chuck recalled, “and I said, ‘I don’t know, but it’s something.’”

The group finally signed to Def Jam in 1987 and began recording *Yo! Bum Rush the Show*. The first words on its first album are Flav saying, “Oh, Chuck, they out to get us, man,” and PE has certainly recorded more anti-media screeds than any other group that regularly topped critics’ year-end polls. But in light of these triumphs, it’s easy to forget the negative early coverage, such as this from Timothy White: “Featured rappers Flavor Flav and Chuck D spew boastful bile about gang violence . . . and the pleasures of misogyny . . . This is black rap at its grimmest, an invitation to stomp on tombstones and tenement corpses.”

Much of *Bum Rush* wasn’t all that far from the proto-gangsta rhymes of Schoolly D and Boogie Down Productions, but the rhymes were more sophisticated, more literary; tracks like “Rightstarter (Message to a Black Man)” articulated the sociopolitical frustrations of not just the ghetto but the black middle class as well. A close listen to “Miuzi Weighs a Ton” revealed that the “uzi” in question was not a gun but a metaphorical weapon — the brain. Simplistic in retrospect, perhaps, but no rapper had ever utilized that sort of construct before.

Out of frustration with those segments of the media who didn’t get what PE was trying to do would come the next two songs, “Bring the Noise” and “Don’t Believe the Hype,” which shot the group to hip-hop’s greatest heights. These two 1988 singles got to the essence of the message — shouting from the rooftops that the system, top to bottom, needs shaking up, and that hip-hop is the means to do it. The Bomb Squad sound had crystallized into an unprecedented assault, a deeply textured swarm of sampled beats, groans, horns, and sirens — “We use samples like an artist would use paint,” said Shocklee — blended with Terminator’s high-speed scratches.

The album that followed these singles, released in July, made good on their promise. *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* is, quite simply, the finest hip-hop album ever made. Flavor’s solo spot, “Cold Lampin’ with Flavor,” is a hilarious surrealist throwdown, and the jailbreak fantasy “Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos” offers some of the strongest writing to be found in all of pop music; the *Village Voice*’s Greg



Public Enemy live in recent years

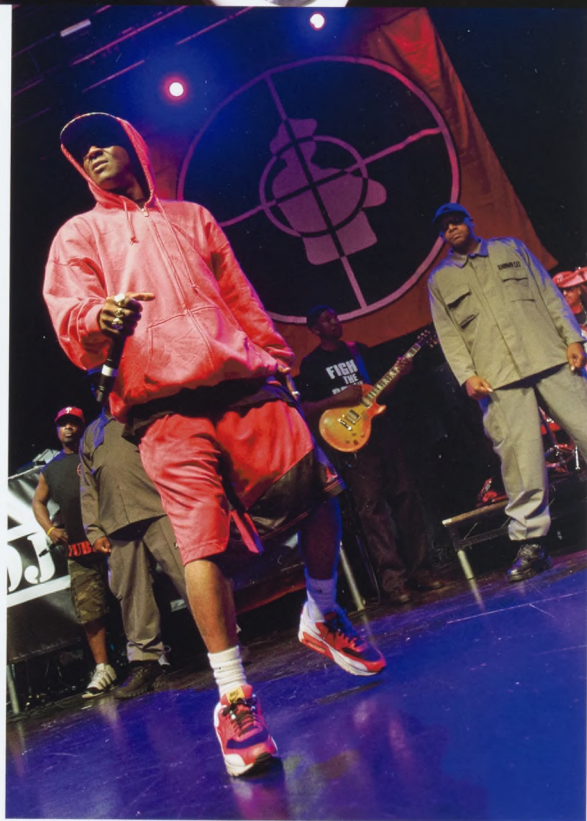
“We are what I consider one of the greatest performing bands in hip-hop history.”

Tate called Chuck “as formidable a poetic mind as African-American literary tradition has ever produced.” Around the time of the album’s release, Chuck made the oft-quoted statement that rap had become the “CNN of Black America.”

During the summer of 1988, the group’s unmistakable, mind-bending squeal was audible from nearly every passing Jeep and every playground across the country. Socially conscious rap was suddenly cool: Africa medallions replaced gold chains, rappers formed the “Stop the Violence” movement, and black nationalism was all over the radio.

Public Enemy stayed firmly at cultural ground zero when Spike Lee asked the group to write the theme for his next movie, the 1989 urban morality play *Do the Right Thing*. “Fight the Power,” which memorably opens the film to Rosie Perez flexing and shadowboxing, plays throughout on Radio Raheem’s boombox. It is perhaps PE’s most perfect single; *Rolling Stone* placed the song at Number Seven on its list of the 50 Greatest Hip-Hop Songs of All Time.

Do the Right Thing was certainly controversial. But the next time outrage came down around Public Enemy, the group wasn’t on the periphery, but right at the sizzling center. On May 22, 1989, Professor Griff gave an interview to the *Washington Times* in which he declared that Jews



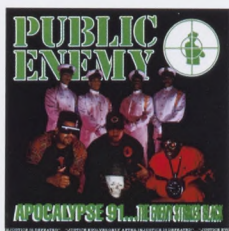
Flav steps out in Birmingham, England, 2011

are responsible for “the majority of wickedness that goes on across the globe.” In rapid succession, Chuck fired Griff, reinstated him, and disbanded the group. Griff then attacked his PE cohorts in a followup interview, and Chuck finally dismissed Griff for real. The incident had turned into a turf war between black and Jewish leaders, and the conclusion was satisfying to no one.

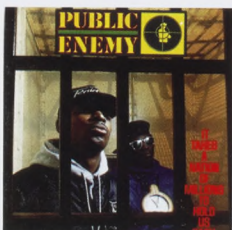
Selected Discography



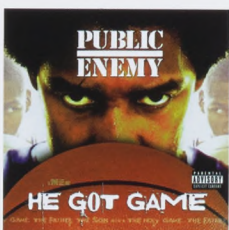
Yo! Bum Rush the Show
Def Jam/Columbia, 1987



Apocalypse 91... The Enemy Strikes Black
Def Jam, 1991



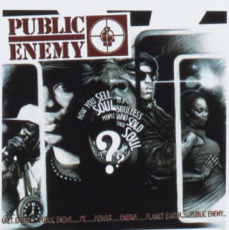
It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back
Def Jam/Columbia, 1988



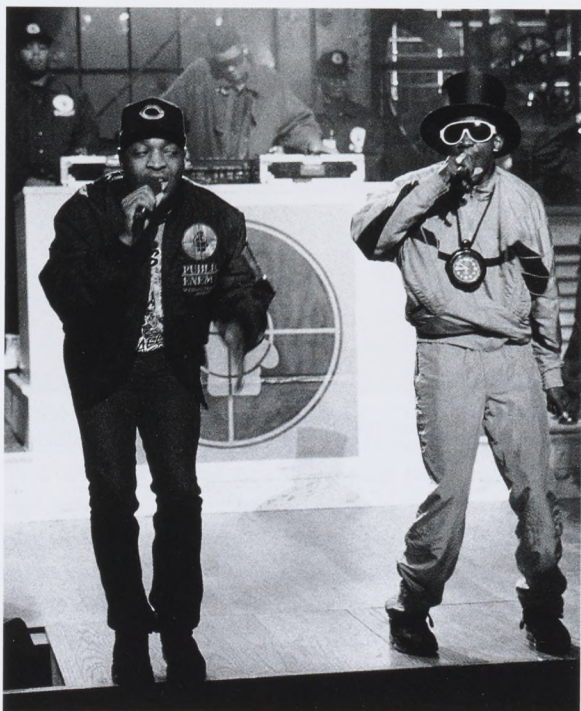
He Got Game
soundtrack, Def Jam, 1998



Fear of a Black Planet
Def Jam/Columbia, 1990



How You Sell Soul to a Soulless People Who Sold Their Soul?
Slam Jamz, 2007



Chuck D and Flav on *Saturday Night Live*, 1991

Spring of 1990 saw the release of *Fear of a Black Planet*, which honed the points of the first two albums into a more focused attack on white racism and the need for the black community to organize its response. In the aftermath of the Griff controversy, it marked Public Enemy's first visit to the pop Top Ten. The next album, *Apocalypse 91... The Enemy Strikes Black*, was the flip side of *Black Planet* – an examination of problems within the black community and the search for possible solutions. (The biggest hip-hop group in the land was known as Niggaz With Attitude, but PE was saying, “I Don't Want to Be Called Yo Nigga.”) The album was an even bigger hit, peaking at Number Four on the *Billboard* pop chart and quickly going platinum. There was yet another media scandal – over the song and video for “By the Time I Get to Arizona,” which seemed to call for the assassination of the state's governor after he refused to declare Martin Luther King Jr. Day an official holiday.

But after that, Public Enemy was never fully able to recapture the public's imagination. Dr. Dre had closed the gap between hardcore hip-hop and pop rap, and black America's CNN went full-on MTV. The group members took on other responsibilities: Chuck served as a live commentator for Fox television and Air America radio, Terminator X bought an ostrich farm (I kid you not) in South Carolina, and Shocklee and Stephney founded their own labels and consulting companies.

Most astonishing was Flavor Flav's bewildering television career. In 2004, he joined VH1's reality show *The Surreal Life*, during which he fell in love with actress Brigitte Nielsen. Their relationship led to a spinoff titled *Strange Love*, after which Flavor spent three seasons searching for a mate on *Flavor of Love*. (Chuck called the show “Flavploitation.”)

In the meantime, Public Enemy never stopped making records. *Muse Sick-N'-Hour Mess Age*, a 1994 attempt at a genuinely apocalyptic sound and warning that included some live instruments tossed into the mix, was a messy, flawed experiment. In 1998, the group reunited with Spike Lee for the soundtrack to his film *He Got Game*, and the title track – built on an effective, obvious Buffalo Springfield sample – was a minor hit. In 2007, their tenth album, *How You Sell Soul to a Soulless People Who Sold Their Soul?*, was a notable return to form.

Over time, Chuck came to envision a new future – he wanted “to give Public Enemy a cult status, like a Grateful Dead,” he said. Which is actually not a bad comparison for these veterans of dozens of national and international tours. Most recently, inspired by classic rock radio and professional golf's “senior circuit,” he organized the Hip Hop Gods tour

“We use samples like an artist would use paint.”



**After Public Enemy, you could never argue
that the music was just a fleeting fad.**

featuring Public Enemy, X-Clan, Monie Love, Schoolly D, Leaders of the New School, and Awesome Dre, and just like always, he's frustrated by the lack of coverage. "You didn't hear about any tours over the last ten years that weren't Eminem or Rick Ross or Dre or Jay-Z or Kanye," he said. "We [are] what I consider probably one of the greatest performing bands in hip-hop history," he went on. "It's not bragging, because I don't brag about myself, but my guys are the best in the business." (After seeing PE tear the roof off a tent at 2009's Bonnaroo, I can attest that he's telling the truth.)

Chuck D once claimed that his goal for Public Enemy was to create five thousand new leaders for the black community. It sounds almost quaint now, such a specific, focused, purposeful directive. In the face of the hypercapitalist consumerism that has dominated hip-hop for so long, it might

even seem like the ground PE gained was quickly, irrevocably lost. The social concerns PE introduced to hip-hop may seem relegated to the old-school history books, right next to suede Pumas and fat gold chains. But due to Public Enemy's work, hip-hop established itself as a global force. After Public Enemy, you could never argue that the music was just a silly novelty, a fleeting fad. More than anyone else, the group forced the world to take hip-hop seriously. Not a bad legacy for a single collective of young musicians.

And if, inevitably, the limitless promise of Public Enemy wasn't totally fulfilled, that's partially our fault, as well. "Rap is an introduction," Chuck said way back in 1991. "If people really want to learn something, they got to pick up some books. People might look at me because I'm giving them a first dose, but I'm not a doctor. I'm just a TV station." ●

BLOOD ON THE (SOUND) TRACKS

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ROCK MUSIC
IN THE MOVIES

By Roy Trakin

These days, rock music dominates movie soundtracks, but that wasn't always the case. Back in 1955, when Bill Haley and His Comets' "Rock Around the Clock" was used over the title credits for Richard Brooks' *Blackboard Jungle*, a film that depicted a "bleak and disturbing" view of juvenile gang activity in the New York City public school system, it caused an outcry. The combination of the raucous song and the movie's subject matter sparked controversy. No less than Clare Booth Luce, America's ambassador to Italy at the time and wife of *Life* publisher Henry Luce, condemned the movie as "degenerate" and insisted it be pulled as an entry in that year's Venice Film Festival. All the media attention helped make Haley's "fox trot" (that's how it's referred to on the initial Decca release) the first rock & roll single to climb to Number One on the charts.

It wouldn't be the last time veteran Hollywood producers like Sam Katzman saw the profit potential in combining edgy, youth-oriented subjects with rock music for success at the box office and record sales. The B movie mogul realized that if kids would shell out the bucks to see a film with a single rock song on the soundtrack, they would certainly pay for one that featured the actual performers. The revelation led to fifties rocksploitation flicks like *Rock Around the Clock*, *Don't Knock the Rock*, and *Go, Johnny, Go* — the latter two starring DJ Alan Freed, hosting performances by Frankie Lymon, Eddie Cochran, Ritchie Valens, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard.

British fans line up to see an early rock & roll movie, *Rock Around the Clock*, featuring Bill Haley and His Comets, the Platters, and others, Manchester, England, 1956.



Three films that brought rock into the movies

Upping the ante, writer-director Frank Tashlin's gloriously cartoonish Technicolor musical, *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956), was the first movie to build its plot around a rock & roll theme. The light-hearted satire of the early rock business featured busty Jayne Mansfield as an aspiring pop singer and girlfriend of a gangster (Edmund O'Brien). When the gangster enlists an agent to turn her into a star, the agent discovers she can't sing. But what she can do is emit a "piercing scream" – the perfect accompaniment to "Rock Around the Rock Pile," a song the gangster wrote while in prison for income-tax evasion. That flimsy plot serves as an excuse for a whole series of remarkable musical numbers – by such Rock and Roll Hall of Famers as Little Richard (the title track), Gene Vincent ("Be-Bop-a-Lula"), Eddie Cochran ("Twenty Flight Rock"), Fats Domino ("Blue Monday"), and the Platters ("You'll Never, Never Know"). The film turned out to be a major influence on a pair of young Liverpool lads named John Lennon and Paul McCartney, the latter playing "Twenty Flight Rock" the way Cochran did in the movie, earning his future partner's instant admiration.

No account of rock music's influence on movies would be complete without mentioning Elvis Presley, who, before descending into post-military service self-parody, showed his natural charisma in movies like the Civil War melodrama *Love Me Tender* and *Jailhouse Rock* (whose choreographed title set-piece may be the first-ever music video), both named after songs that soon became chart-topping hits.

The sixties ushered in more authentic movies, combining documentary-like realism with rock music in new and innovative ways, including D.A. Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back*, his cinema verité account of Bob Dylan's 1965 U.K. tour, and Richard Lester's groundbreaking *A Hard Day's Night*, which turned the lovable mop-tops into a droll, quick-witted rock & roll version of the Marx Brothers. Other rock

Elvis Presley gyrates in *Jailhouse Rock*, 1957.





Quincy Jones in the studio, 1969; and various soundtracks composed by Jones.



docs followed in quick succession, the most notable being Pennebaker's *Monterey Pop*, the Maysles' *Gimme Shelter* (about the Stones' ill-fated Altamont concert), Andrew Loog Oldham's recently rereleased *Charlie Is My Darling*, and Michael Wadleigh's box-office hit, *Woodstock*.

It wasn't just rock-oriented movies that boasted impressive soundtracks and hit albums. With the countercultural revolution in full swing, maverick directors like Clive Donner (*What's New Pussycat?*), Roger Corman (*The Wild Angels*), Mike Nichols (*The Graduate*), John Schlesinger (*Midnight Cowboy*), Michelangelo Antonioni (*Blow-Up* and *Zabriskie Point*), and Dennis Hopper (*Easy Rider*) increasingly turned to rock & roll to tell their contemporary stories. Simon and Garfunkel's winsome harmonies helped pinpoint the melancholy of an indecisive Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate*, and Harry Nilsson's version of Fred Neil's "Everybody's Talkin'" set the plaintive mood for the same actor's turn as Ratso Rizzo, the down-on-his-luck hustler pal of Jon Voight's Joe Buck, in the Oscar-winning *Midnight Cowboy*.

The seventies boasted a whole new era of movie music, including the blaxploitation flicks of Melvin Van Peebles (*Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*), Gordon Parks (*Shaft*), and son Gordon Parks Jr. (*Super Fly*), the latter two featuring Isaac Hayes (who received an Oscar for Best Original Song for *Shaft*) and Curtis Mayfield (whose hit soundtrack actually out-grossed the film). Soul stars like James Brown, Edwin Starr, and Millie Jackson performed the title songs to movies like *Slaughter's Big Rip-Off*, *Black Caesar*, *Hell Up in Harlem*, and *Cleopatra Jones*.

Quincy Jones, a recipient of this year's Ahmet Ertegun Award, helped set the pace for black action movies, with jazz-oriented scores for *Come Back Charleston Blue* and *Cool Breeze* – a remake of the classic caper melodrama *The Asphalt Jungle*. Jones and songwriting partner Bob Russell had previously become the first African-Americans to be nominated for a Best Original Song Oscar for "The Eyes of Love," composed for the 1968 movie *Banning*. That same year, Q also received a nomination for Best Original Score for *In Cold Blood*. In all, Jones composed thirty-three major motion picture scores, starting with Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker*, and including *The Slender Thread*; *Walk, Don't Run*; *In the Heat of the Night*; *The Italian Job*; *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*; *The Lost Man*; *Take the Money and Run*; *Cactus Flower*; *The Color Purple*; and the *Austin Powers* series.

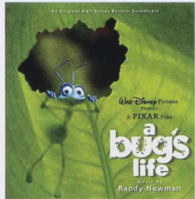


Donna Summer sings in *Thank God It's Friday*, 1978.



Throughout the 1970s, pop, rock, and disco began to play major roles in telling film stories – most notably the use of fifties rock in George Lucas' *American Graffiti*, the era-appropriate protest music in Hal Ashby's Vietnam saga, *Coming Home*, and Francis Ford Coppola's stunning use of the Doors' "The End" in his own war movie, *Apocalypse Now*. Arguably, the standard for movie-music synchronicity can be found in *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), whose Bee Gees-laced soundtrack sent disco hurtling into the stratosphere. The Grammy Award-winning Album of the Year has gone on to sell forty million copies worldwide, making it eighth on the list of all-time bestsellers. Yet another of this year's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees, Donna Summer, performed "The Last Dance" in *Thank God It's Friday* (1978), one of several mostly unsuccessful attempts to duplicate the *Saturday Night Fever* formula. Summer also contributed "On the Radio," the title theme to *Foxes* (1980), featuring a young Jodie Foster and a Giorgio Moroder score; Summer's "Love to Love You Baby" was included in the 1977 film *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*.

With the arrival of MTV in the 1980s, along with the quick-cutting style of the music video, rock's absorption into the cinematic language was complete. Filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese, John Hughes, Robert Zemeckis, and Cameron Crowe made contemporary music a seamless and integral part of their narratives. Some of the highlights include Tom Cruise dancing in his underwear to Bob Seger's "Old Time Rock and Roll" in *Risky Business*; John Cusack holding up his boom box beneath Ione Skye's window to serenade her



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Anita Pallenberg and Mick Jagger in *Performance*, 1970; various soundtracks composed by Randy Newman; Newman (second from left) receives his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, with Buzz and Woody from *Toy Story* and Pixar's John Lasseter, 2010.

with Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes"; Judd Nelson throwing a triumphant fist in the air while the Simple Minds' "Don't You Forget About Me" rings out in *The Breakfast Club*; and 2013 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee Ann Wilson and Mike Reno joining forces on *Footloose*'s "Almost Paradise."

Steve Jobs' Pixar Animation Studios released its very first feature, *Toy Story*, in 1995, but insisted to distributor Disney that it not be a musical. Instead, director John Lasseter tapped veteran songwriter and another of this year's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees, Randy Newman, to compose the score, which included two versions of "You've Got a Friend in Me" (one a duet with Lyle Lovett), as well as two other songs: "Strange Things" and "I Will Go Sailing No More." Newman, who comes from a famed family of film composers that includes his uncles Alfred, Lionel, and Emil (his cousins Thomas and David and nephew Joey are motion picture composers as well), launched a second, very lucrative career doing music for Pixar movies. In addition to *Toy Story*, Newman has scored six Pixar films, including *A Bug's Life*; *Toy Story 2* and 3; *Monsters, Inc.*; and *Cars*, earning Oscar nominations for all six, and winning a pair of Best Original Song honors for *Monsters, Inc.* ("If I Didn't Have You") and *Toy Story 3* ("We Belong Together").

Newman's own film work dates back to 1970, when his song "Gone Dead Train" was included in Donald Cammell's 1970 Mick Jagger vehicle, *Performance*, one of the earliest rock movies. He composed the scores for the Norman Lear/Robert Downey Sr. satire *Cold Turkey* in 1971, as well as *Ragtime* in 1981, for which he was nominated for two Academy Awards. He also penned three songs – as well as cowriting the screenplay – for *Three Amigos* (1986) with Steve Martin and Lorne Michaels, providing the voice for the singing bush. Other notable Newman scores include *The Natural*,



Parenthood, *Major League*, *Avalon*, *The Paper*, *Pleasantville*, *Meet the Parents*, *Seabiscuit*, *Leatherheads*, and *The Princess and the Frog*. In all, Randy Newman has been nominated for twenty Oscars, fifteen of them coming before his first win.

With numerous film directors and composers who grew up during rock's heyday in the 1960s and 1970s emerging over the past two decades, movies have reflected that musical influence even more. *Rolling Stone* journalist-turned-director Cameron Crowe, in particular, reflects that sensibility, in movies like his elegiac homage, *Almost Famous*, with its classic tour bus sing-along to Elton John's "Tiny Dancer." Crowe's ex-wife, Heart's Nancy Wilson – a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee this year – composed the score to several Crowe movies, including *Almost Famous*, for which she also wrote and produced its original songs; *Vanilla Sky*; and *Elizabethtown*.

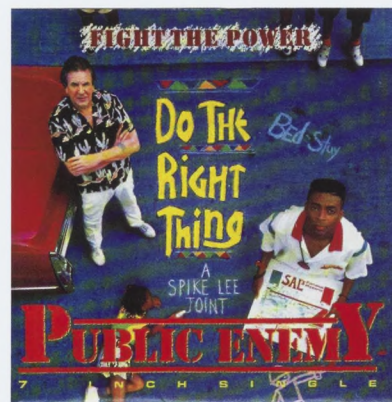
Starting in the mid-eighties, hip-hop began to infiltrate film soundtracks, as well, including *Wild Style*, *Beat Street*, *Tougher Than Leather*, and Spike Lee's groundbreaking 1989 movie, *Do the Right Thing*. Lee memorably used "Fight the Power," by Public Enemy, another 2013 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, to underscore the film's theme of urban racial upheaval. Among other hip-hop artists, Wu-Tang Clan's RZA has composed scores for movies including Jim Jarmusch's *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* and a Japanese anime called *Afro Samurai* that starred Samuel L. Jackson. As part of Achozen, his group with Shavo Odadjian of System of a Down, RZA contributed music to the motion picture *Babylon A.D.*

Almost six decades after "Rock Around the Clock" matched a new sound to movie images in *Blackboard Jungle*, rock music is practically de rigueur on film soundtracks today. The best recent example is *Not Fade Away*, *The Sopranos* creator David Chase's elegy to classic sixties rock, and a loving tribute to the music's role in forging a youth movement during that seminal era. Set against the backdrop of a reconstructed Wallich's Music City at the corner of Sunset and Vine, Chase's film posits the question of whether nuclear power will eventually defeat the promise of rock & roll. (Of course, among today's audiences for *Not Fade Away*, there's a whole new generation brought up on sounds like electronic dance music who look at rock & roll as previous ones viewed big band swing and jazz.)

During a discussion that followed the screening, a young fan asked Chase what he wanted members of his generation – one that has "witnessed the demise of rock as a dominant cultural force" – to take away from his film. Chase seemed stunned by the question, unable to come up with a suitable answer. What was once shocking has become nostalgia, but those celluloid images retain their primal power. When Little Richard wails, "The girl can't help it," as Jayne Mansfield bounces down the street, causing milk bottles to overflow in her wake, you know, thanks to movie music, rock & roll will never die. 🎸



Public Enemy with Spike Lee, and the film soundtrack that helped put them on the map.



Various Cameron Crowe films that feature music by Nancy Wilson of Heart.