

BIG APPLE RAP

STORY BY PETER GRACE

I'm walking down Seventh Avenue, it's a gloriously sunny New York afternoon, and I've just had lunch at the park. Here, about three blocks down, there's a crowd of people outside the Carnegie delicatessen. A crowd of maybe 30 people, and I'm about to walk past as someone says, "Hey! That's Run DMC!"

(Run DMC have turned white American rock and roll upside down. When Funkadelic sang, "Who says funk bands can't play dance music, who says dance bands can't play rock music, who says rock bands can't play funk music ...," they were predicting the coming of Run DMC. And that's right — if it's good, it'll make you dance. The single 'Walk This Way,' which features the greasy talents of Aerosmith, who screamed it originally in 1976, has taken Run DMC to No 4 on the US singles charts, and the album *Raising Hell* has gone to No 6. Really.)

Now, on the corner of Seventh and 55th, I watch as those familiar track-suited, Adidas-sneakered rappers come clear of the crowd. DMC is making for a stretch limo, black for really important people. He's smiling and signing autographs, and wearing the trademark Homburg hat,

Jam-master Jay, dressed in black, is already climbing into the limo. Run is standing in the road, looking downtown, tossing his head



Lovebug Starski

angrily and cussing under his breath.

I decide to approach Run. Sidling through the autograph hunters, I offer him my best salesman's handshake. But I'm not through introducing myself when a mention of Bill Adler, Run DMC's publicist and my contact at Rush/Def Jam

Records, provokes an angry interruption.

"Bill Adler? You seen Bill Adler?" Run asks, but he's not listening. "I'm looking for Bill Adler," he says, exasperated. "I'm supposed to be in Miami in six hours, and I can't find Bill Adler and I'm getting real mad ..."

Well. Getting in the way of Run getting mad isn't something I want to add to my list of experiences, so I stand clear while Run fusses about finding a cab to take him downtown. Coming across the street is the elusive Bill Adler, who Run introduces to me as Adler gets him a taxi. Adler is a self-confessed "aging hippie," a bearded ex-Rolling Stone writer. He wears this fixed frown and talks in a deep, no-bullshit growl. He's an alright guy.

Borrowing a quarter, Adler phones Rush, the management company headed by Run's older brother, Russell Simmons,

who handles the business side of Whodini, Run DMC, LL Cool J, Kurtis Blow and about 30 others. Adler then gets off the phone and we look for DMC and Jay, but where, a few minutes ago, there was a crowd and the two stars, now there's a bare pavement and an abandoned limo. So Adler pushes me into a cab, yelling at the driver the address of Rush's new Greenwich Village address. It's also the home of Def Jam Records. The centre of the hip hop universe.

This Def Jam

Rush/Def Jam is on Elizabeth Street, a block away from the Bowery, where drunks sit all day long with their bum friends and drink whatever poison it is they drink, and where the shops sell used restaurant equipment and where chic art hobo Keith Haring sells stick figure T-shirts. Rush have bought themselves a building, with an opaque glass-fronted, and inside, a burnt-out decor blurred in twilight haziness.

Rush is full of legend. The guy who answers the phone is one of the original rappers, while another young kid sits at a desk with nothing to do, "scratching" with a desk blotter. DMC's little brother walks around rigged like his sibling: Homburg-hatted and shoelace-less.

Lovebug Starski comes up and mugs for the camera in front of my jet-lagged photographer, while I talk to Russell Simmons, the 28-year-old president of Rush and co-partner in Def Jam. Simmons himself is a talented artist, his performances on Jazzy Jay's '(This) Def Jam' and LL Cool J's 'That's a Lie' show this.

I ask him whether he

would release any singles of his own.

"Can't," he says between bites of fried chicken. "This is a major label. Got albums to do. Big career. Overseas tours. Can't do it."

Now everyone's yelling, phones are ringing madly, calls from *Time* magazine, *Spin* and radio stations from all over. Def Jam is big news. Each time Adler handles them with the same manic promospeak: "Yes, NO! A bigger, better album than ever!" He motions to



Promotions man, Mr Bill.

Simmons: "Speak to her, she's from *Time*, it's important, just for five minutes." Simmons doesn't want to talk to anyone, but Adler cajoles him and he talks between chicken bites. A major label, busy being busy.

King Kurtis I

I turn to Simmons. You manage Kurtis Blow ...

"I don't want to talk about it," he says.

What does that mean?

"We haven't heard from him lately, I don't know if he's still with us."

So you and Blow aren't talking? Russell's still on the phone to *Time*. He looks up. "He's just jealous."

Adler spins around in his chair. "What, about KB? KB? Fuck him!"

Can we print that?

"Please," says Adler. "Kurtis Blow has been attacking us in the press. I hate to use the term but Kurtis is like the black sheep of rap right now. He's really set himself off from all his old friends. In effect, he's lied to the press about what Run DMC are all about. There's been this on-going controversy, and we've been at great pains to demonstrate that our music isn't violent. Our music, the music of Run DMC in particular, promotes the most benign qualities. It's about peace and love, it's about, what?" He turns to Simmons.

"It's very positive," Simmons stresses. "None of this peace and love shit. It's positive, that's all. The lyrics in 'Raising Hell,' 'Cut the head off the devil and throw it at you.' That's a positive statement. Run DMC's music is hard, but it's not mean."

Concert violence is an obstacle to rap gaining wider acceptance. A Run DMC concert in Oakland was stopped after 45 people had to be hospitalised. The next night's concert in LA was cancelled by the authorities who didn't want a repeat performance. Rush says the troublemakers are the gangs, not Run DMC fans, but the general public isn't making that distinction.

King Kurtis II

A little sensationalism never hurt a story, so when I spoke to Mr Bill, whose job it is to get Def Jam played on the radio, I pressed him for more on KB.

"Well, you've got to be realistic. Run DMC's first album went gold. Run DMC on their second album went gold. Run DMC's third album is a massive hit. LL Cool J sold over 700,000 copies. Whodini's had two gold

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