

Dear list,

pls find further below a quick'n'dirty transcription of a radio interview I did with Chuck D from Public Enemy on his current and future digital agenda. I contacted Chuck directly bypassing the Australian tour management and appreciate Chuck's determination to squeeze me into PEs extremely busy touring schedule to make this interview happen.

A short list of web links referred to in the interview:

www.publicenemy.com ; Chucks digital record label: www.slamjamz.com ; the fan funded music production platform: www.Sellaband.com ; social website for classic Rap and HipHop: www.HipHopGods.com ; social website for female Rap and HipHop artists: www.SHEmovement.com and the to-be music aggregation system: www.SpitDigital.com among others

A mp3-file can be found here: http://neture.org/download/PE/01_PE_ChuckD_2011_complete.mp3

A pdf file can be found here: http://neture.org/download/PE/PE_Chuck-D_Interview_2011.pdf

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Interview with Chuck D from Public Enemy

- on the occasion of Public Enemies Australian Fear of the Black Planet - Tour 2010 / 11

questions: Jan Hendrik Brueggemeier (jan at neture dot org)

Chuck D: My Name is Chuck D from Public Enemy No I. What's up, Jan?

JHB: Let's talk about the future, but before we get there. I assume that you are enjoying the Australian summer on your tour here.

Chuck D: Of course, I am enjoying the Australian summer. It is actually an extension of the summer that we had coming from South Africa.

JHB: Yes, you were touring South Africa, so how was that?

Chuck D: It was wonderful. It was our first time there. And we have been asked to come there for 23 years even back in apartheid days when our music was banned. So it has been a very rewarding experience to be able to go to South Africa and playing in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and most of all Soweto and building with the people and doing a special performance there.

JHB: How have you perceived the situation there. And how does it feel in comparison to the United States?

Chuck D: Well, it seems that the people there are really trying to grow with a new identity of themselves, but you have to be careful what you loose in the transition. They come from people that struggled. They call people born-free instead, who were born after 1992. People that might not be connected to the struggle of the apartheid and the struggle from the fight of the past. So that's a whole different world. They are trying to have the older tell the younger how to go about with the new South Africa. So it was good going there in 2010 and feeling the people out.

JHB: In terms with the Public Enemy agenda being politically and culturally independent do you feel it is more rewarding to look at the South like South America or Africa than actually look around in the U.S. or Europe?

Chuck D: Yes, it is rewarding, because you see a lot of different governmental structures do things to people good and bad that you can learn from and take back to your own people to give them perspective of what they think what's good or bad and tell them, well, that's going on in the rest of the world. So you are not the first or you are the first in some cases. They also can look at the South of the U.S. at a particular time. Ever since the 1970s you have to look at other places and struggles.

JHB: Talking about independent distribution, independent infrastructure. Let's talk about the Internet. There is stuff going on. In particular you are behind or driving certain initiatives and maybe you could tell a little bit about that.

Chuck D: Well, we started www.publicenemy.com in 1998. I wanted to be able to reach to people directly and no longer with my record company to deliver videos and the music to the record company. We wanted to go directly to our people and that's why we built www.publicenemy.com for a direct voice.

JHB: You said in 1999 Public Enemy turned independent. What do you exactly mean with that?

Chuck D: Meaning that you don't have a mayor sponsor that come along and make you part of the machine, buy your way into TV and all that. We had to independently find our way to get our music and videos and stuff out there. And then we left DefJam in 1999 and released the first HipHop mp3 album "There's a Poison Goin' On" on Atomic Pop (now defunct). And then I started SlamJamz, my digital record label, in 2001 and www.rapstation.com in 2000. So our whole thing was the delivery over the Internet as being our freedom.

JHB: Where does it lead to? Is e.g. www.Sellaband.com one consequence of turning independent?

Chuck D: Right. The beautiful thing about Sellaband is that it can show that people in your audience can actually become investors of something.

JHB: The act is proposing to produce an album and then is waiting for the investment through its fans ...

Chuck D: ... to the creation of it, yes. And I think this almost like having stock into something. So if we put together this album it is almost an album that is put together by its collaborators. It will be inviting a lot of different artists and producers from different areas to put together what they would feel be beneficial to be put together as a Public Enemy record. We are really looking forward to that.

JHB: You were record breaking for the Sellaband platform, because you scored 75.000 US\$.

Chuck D: Yeah, but I don't think that's thing to hold our hat on. I think what we want to do is to show that method works and then we gotta still complete the whole process. It is a long road to finish off. ...

JHB: This is just the beginning ...

Chuck D: It really is. (laughs)

JHB: Turning independent is always related to a business model. How does Public Enemy operate?

Chuck D: Well, a business model is just as an independent to be able to understand that you get quality out of each item that you deal with and not thinking that you have to get something in mass numbers. So if you got people that understand about making something from the beginning and carefully making it and not going into this thing that you think you guys spent a lot of money making it, that's something that we think is a good thing.

JHB: Part of the business as a musician includes then the digital promotion but there is still touring, live performances, merchandising, etc ...

Chuck D: All you want is show artists that they can do it. We always have been able to do it. We want to show artists that they can do it. It is a lot of effort to do that, man.

JHB: You were involved in the discussion of digital copyright violation. What is your take on it?

Chuck D: I believe that file sharing is a great way to get the music and the culture across. Look what is happening now, you got people who do their own little internet radio shows and something is got to get the music around. So I think file sharing is a great way. So if someone is a fan of something they really got to be fan of something. It is like one of these days where the artist is communicating and the music is communicating to the artist. So it is interactive. I think this interactive thing has never happened before. That's the beautiful thing we need to take home.

JHB: The music and the artist is interacting ...

Chuck D: The music, the artist and the fan are all interacting together. So like I am just checking some music that is going out there that we have done and some opinions. Everything is just interactivity

JHB: So it is more about exchange ...

Chuck D: ... cultural exchange.

JHB: ... cultural exchange and joining in the conversation.

Chuck D: Yep.

JHB: But it is also quite a commercial world and a lot of social websites feel a bit dodgy because of some people involved in them and corporations.

Chuck D: I know, it is a corporate world, but we are still independently. Like when we built www.HipHopGods.com or www.SheMovement.com these are small social niches. So we capitalize on this, this very important.

JHB: What is the idea behind HipHopGods.com?

Chuck D: Classic artist have to have a place to go in HipHop and Rap. They can't go to normal radio or TV stations. We have to have our own thing. So thats very important.

JHB: You are addressing in particular artists who are in business for more than 15 years.

Chuck D: Yes, if they make a song, they are always in the studio. We want to encourage them to make videos and to stay making music. A lot of them feel like 'Ok, I am making my music but where can I put it'. And that's www.HipHopGods.com.

JHB: And the SheMovement.com?

Chuck D: For women. Women and HipHop, to have a place to be seen and promote their music.

JHB: Do you see this as an extension of your label like SlamJamz?

Chuck D: Yes, I do. Although HipHopGods or SheMovement won't have anything on my label per se but SpitDigital is a aggregation system that we are setting up, where we gonna allow people to start their own labels on the digital chip and then be able to go to tune chord and than to iTunes or Amazon and digital stores. So that's the next revolution to make sure that artists have the tools for their own digital label.

JHB: As we all grow older while staying more active while growing older where do see the future of Public Enemy going beyond any 3-5 year plans, what is the big picture you are imagining?

Chuck D: The big picture is making rapstation.com work as a directory for all Rap and HipHop shows. The big picture is making HipHopGods.com work for artists who are established and know that they've got a home. The big picture is making SheMovement.com work and the big picture is www.SpitDigital.com. All those four are making new services for the genre instead of ourselves.