



The Banks & Steelz Origin Story...

Written By: Touré

It all started deep in Chinatown, in a noodle shop where the noodles are handmade. See, long before the RZA and Interpol's Paul Banks could become Banks and Steelz and make an album together, they had to become friends. So there they were in Chinatown, Paul Banks and the RZA and the RZA's martial arts coach, chopping it up over noodles. "It was a very Wu-Tang Clan thing for me to do," Paul said. "I brought up my favorite Wu-Tang song. I said it was "Bells Of War." He nodded and told me about the Nord Lead keyboard he'd acquired at that time and used for the song. I saw he was stoked that I'd said that. That was my first interaction with him where I felt an artistic connection." The RZA liked Paul right away. "He had a cool New York musician type energy." But they had to hang out a lot more before they could get to making music.

So they started breaking bread and playing chess all over the place. For years. What's it like to play chess with the RZA? "He's superior," Paul says with an air of resignation. He may be deeply hurt by this. "That's what it's like. He's whopped me every time we played." RZA was more charitable about it. "He's a good opponent, know what I mean? I got the sharper sword on the chessboard, but he's a good opponent."

Good energy and camaraderie flowed easily between them for years. Then, as RZA looked for someone new to record with, he thought of Paul. They jammed in the RZA's home studio in LA. All the while, Paul says, "His engineer kept referring to a folder of songs that RZA had made in one weekend after not being in the studio for three months. When I got back to NY I said send me a couple songs from that magic folder from his magic weekend. So they sent me those and the songs in that folder spoke to me. They had a sound that pulled me in. Those songs shaped the nature of the collaboration."

RZA says, "There's songs on this record that when Mr. Branson sends his shuttle into space, this is the soundtrack." Of course, this being RZA, he has to bring it back to Asia. "I feel like me and Paul are those two guys in John Woo's *The Killer*, Chow Yun Fat and Danny Lee. We don't know who's the cop and who's the criminal but we know both of you guys exist in their own world and they came together to take care of a new world. That's how I feel we are."

This album brings together two powerful men who have been friends for years and fans of each other for even longer. The album is a hybrid of their styles that feels like a natural blend of both of them. "It's a great balance of who we are," RZA says. "It's pop but it's not too pop. It's hip-hop but it's not hip-hop all the way. It's alternative, but it's not alternative totally. It's actually a melding of the right amount of each. Something about it feels modern and space age and something about it feels 80s to me. To me it forms its own genre."

Some things to ask about...

RZA says in the past "a lot of the pressure on my creativity has been that the burden of the weight has been on me. But in his case it was different."

Ask Paul What other rap-rock collaborations he likes. (None.)

RZA says they built up enough trust that they could coach each other's vocals and lyrics. "I could tell Paul, nah, say that over yo. Rock it like this. When I'm in the booth he could be on the other side of the glass like, nah Bobby, that was too hard, come back one. That dynamic is unique for us. Cuz you have two capable guys coming together. We answer to each other. We both make a good sandwich. Peanut butter is great by itself and jelly is great by itself but put em together and it's great."

Paul says *Straight Outta Compton*, was transformative for him

They recorded at the Wu studio but it was in Malibu where the lyrics came together. RZA said, "The deeper more esoteric lyrics on the album blew in with the Malibu wind."

Ask Paul about wisdom that RZA dropped on Paul, especially the meaning of, "A karate scene is better with a train in it."

RZA says the label didn't pressure him for this, he had an open schedule to get it done when he wanted to.

Paul loves RZA's verse on Anything But Words "He goes in on some human experience shit.

RZA said, "When I was first attracted to the guitar I was chastised by my hip-hop crew. But my like of instruments and pianos, my musicianship, has been appreciated in the circle with Paul who pushes me to play more."