



Banks & Steelz *Anything But Words* (WARNER BROS.)

★★★★★★★ 7.5/10

It's hard to imagine how Paul Banks (the brooding lead singer of Interpol) and RZA (the de-facto leader of Wu-Tang Clan) ever came together as friends or musicians, but it's a fairly simple story of admiration and mutual respect. After Banks referenced RZA as an influence while promoting his solo album, a mutual friend brought the two together. Over a breakfast of mezcal and a dinner of noodles in Chinatown, Banks & Steelz was formed.

The fusing of rap and rock has created musical Frankensteins in the past, and hearing the phrase "rap rock" today still triggers flashbacks to white dudes embarrassing themselves (looking at you, Limp Bizkit), but Banks & Steelz make for a more harmonious union. The unlikely duo of powerful performers share a decidedly New York swagger and they come out swinging with album opener "Giant." "Platinum plaques in my portfolio/My lines are fine as wine and/Blow your mind like cocoa," RZA growls in rapid fire speed, ego blazing.

Throughout the album's entirety, Banks serves as a foil to RZA's braggadociousness, an icy voice of reason tempering his partner's rhymes with his steadfast choruses and subtle hooks.

Any concerns over either Banks or RZA being underutilized are quickly put to bed; there's never any indication of a power struggle between them or the many collaborators that lend their talents. Ghostface Killah, Method Man, Kool Keith, and even Florence Welch make appearances, with Welch's gorgeous contribution to "Wild Season" being a particular standout.

Anything But Words is not a straight-up barrage of raps or a joyless post-punk exploration that you might expect from RZA or Banks respectively; the beats are unexpected, punctuated with flourishes of a flute or a xylophone that seem completely out of the range of either musician (if you're specifically a fan of early-era Interpol looking for those furious basslines and angular riffs, then you'll likely be disappointed). Instead it's a departure from their comfort zones that pays off surprisingly well for two artists collaborating for the first time. (www.facebook.com/banksandsteelz/)

By Natasha Aftandillians