

Contradictions in the *Bad Brains*

**Bad Brains
I Against I
Fringe**

review by Dragos Ruiu

What would the Lords of the New Church sound like on Valium, trying to play reggae? Not a pretty picture is it? Well, now give them just a tad of Speed and what do you have? Bad Brains!

It's not really that bad. These four rather rastafarian looking dudes got together in 1977 in Washington D.C. from alleged jazz fusion backgrounds — although the only fused thing you will find on this album are the amps on some of the tracks. Their music ranges from amazingly lyrical slow reggae to hyperactive heavy metal/punk.

This is a band of contradictions. In 1980 they had a hardcore indie release called "Pay to Cum". Then in 1981 the Cars' Rick Ocasek (!) produced their album *Rock for Light*, and following that in 1983, the group went POOF.

Well, 1986 rolled by and these guys decided to give it another stab . . . and we now have *I Against I*.

It's certainly an interesting album, and slightly schitzo at that. It doesn't know whether it wants to tear off into screaming metal guitar solos or stay with the pulsing reggae beat.

There is a lot of talent here, the music itself is very crisp, and the recording and production help it. This is an amazingly well mixed recording considering these guys call them-



Bad Brains attempt fusion of styles

selves punk. This album is very strong, and it would not be surprising if it crossed over into mainstream and picked up a few hard rock fans.

Unusually enough, the producer for this album, Ron St. Germain also produced the 'Miami Vice' theme by Jan Hammer! Apparently the Brains put his talent to good use and got this clean album instead of the usual feedback slop typical of the genre.

The fervent energy on the metal portions



of this album like "Let Me Help" contrast violently to the almost pop-ish guitar reggae of the next song "She's Calling You". The lead singer, who goes by the monicker "H.R." does not have a very melodic voice, but it is smooth and integrates well with the music.

Which brings up one of the most interesting vocal recordings on the album — the track entitled "Sacred Love" sounds something like you would expect the helmet radio

on a jet to sound like . . . in a large garbage can! The story behind this particular track is that it was recorded while H.R. was in jail. Apparently he did a little time by mistake, because he was mistaken for someone else, and he recorded the vocals for this track in his jail cell!

So if punk or white noise is your bag, check this out, it will surprise you. If it isn't, but you're feeling adventurous, try it — you might just like it.

Melody Farm is ultimately tone deaf, confused

**Melody Farm
Theatre Network
Run ends Mar. 5**

review by Paul Morigeau

Melody Farm is an alternately insightful and confused play. A dignified depiction of mentally handicapped men in a group home is offset by an annoying marriage relationship and an implausible and forced conclusion.

The play focuses on four mentally handicapped men in a group farm on the prairies. The men face problems involving sexuality, independence, and friendship, and their plight is

portrayed with taste and humour. Nolan, played by Rod Wilson, is blind and is an idiot savant. Putkka, played by Richard Wolf, is a delightfully belligerent pyromaniac with a speech impediment, while Richard, played by Kevin Moore, has Down's Syndrome. Erik, played by Christopher Moore, is a mysteriously silent introvert.

Unfortunately for the men (and for the audience), the couple, who are the proprietors of the home, have marital problems. Marg feels unfulfilled, while Karl is angry at her for showing too much affection for the men. Karl, played by Steve Mousseau, is a

bullying lout who cares only for improving the value of his land, while Marg finds sustenance in her relationship with the men. Unfortunately, Mary Hawkins is too stiff to make her transition from the bored housewife to the impassioned protector of the men believable, and her emotional arguments with Karl become tedious.

Karl's two-dimensional character contrasts well with the wards, that continually surprise us with their strong emotions and compassionate portrayals, thus questioning many stereotypical perceptions of the mentally handicapped.

A strong statement about the active lives of the mentally handicapped is tainted by the conciliatory conclusion. Without revealing the conclusion, I must say that it is hard to believe that the playwright Ken Mitchell honestly expects the audience to condone Karl's abusive treatment of the men, and accept that life in such a home is preferable to life in another institution.

Melody Farm is playing at Theatre Network until March 15. It is part of the Carleton Trail Series, whereby plays alternate between theatre companies from Manitoba through to British Columbia.

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