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Raised on R&B, Schooled by Fusion, & Empowered by Punk Rock,

DARRYL JENIFER

Blends Brains & Brawn

IN THE LONG, HOT, MIDDLE MONTHS OF 1967, AS THE VIETNAM WAR raged on, deadly riots erupted around the country, and thousands of youth flocked to Haight-Ashbury for the Summer of Love, the Temptations prepared to release an album they weren't exactly sure about. They were already stars, but this new LP was aimed at a whole new audience, and they were nervous about losing their integrity and the fans they already had.

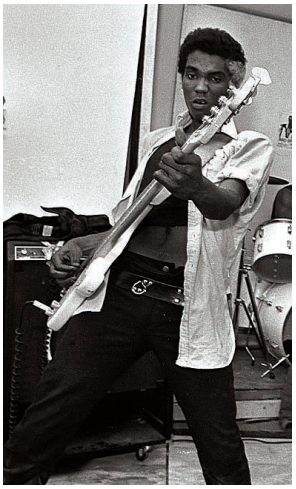
They needn't have worried. *In a Mellow Mood*, a collection of strings-drenched standards chosen for maximum crossover appeal, turned out to be a hit with both black and white record buyers. For one particular six-year-old in southeast Washington, DC, in fact, it planted a seed that would one day grow into a giant tree with surprisingly far-reaching limbs.

By E.E. Bradman

Photos by Jason Gould

Four and a half decades later, Darryl Jenifer still remembers how James Jamerson's bass lines on Copacabana-ready classics like "Hello Young Lovers," "Ol' Man River," and a pre-Stevie Wonder version of "For Once In My Life" opened his ears and set him on a path toward a once-in-a-lifetime crossover of his own. As a member of Bad Brains and one of the co-creators of a daringly original brew of reggae, punk, soul, and fusion, Jenifer has inspired musicians on every point around the color wheel, providing a shining example to artists who express their influences in fresh ways and play multiple styles with conviction and intensity.

Jenifer's musical journey, which began with a 1964 James Brown concert at DC's Howard Theatre and his introduction to Jamerson three years later, continued in the early '70s with rhythm guitar gigs in neighborhood funk and R&B bands. As a devoted member of the Stanley Clarke fan club, Jenifer was invited to join jazz-fusion group Mind Power with friends Earl Hudson, Hudson's brother HR, and Gary "Dr. Know" Miller, taking over bass duties from HR. The band had dreams of becoming the next Return To Forever, but there was a new fever sweeping the land in 1977. When friend Sid McCray introduced Mind Power to punk rock, Jenifer dove in headfirst and renamed the band after the Ramones song "Bad Brain."



LUCIAN PERKINS

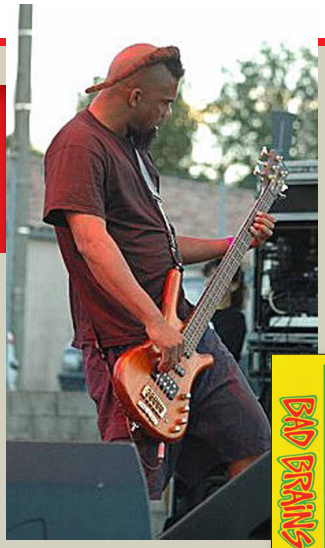
Darryl Jenifer in the studio, circa 1985

Few could have predicted what came next. Jenifer married his love of complex fusion with a knack for aggressive English punk, perfecting a scorching style that blended Stanley-inspired double-stops, riffs that recalled Black Sabbath, and a precise intensity that was several notches above his contemporaries. A chance encounter with Bob Marley in 1978 turned the Brains on to reggae, and their first two albums—their 1982 self-titled debut and 1983's *Rock for Light*—are certified punk-and-reggae classics that kick-started the American hardcore scene and inspired genre-straddling heavyweights such as Fishbone, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Sublime, the Beastie Boys, Nirvana, Living Colour, and No Doubt.

I Against I (1986) and *Quickness* (1989) turned up the hard rock and metal quotients, and when the Hudson brothers occasionally left to pursue other projects, Jenifer and Dr. Know maintained the brand, sometimes working with other singers and drummers. The late Beastie Boys bassist Adam "MCA" Yauch produced 2007's *Build a Nation*, the Brains' eighth studio release and their first album of original material in 12 years. Contrary to taking it easy between tours, however, Jenifer did studio bass work for Rick Ocasek, Lil' Jon, and Jonathan Richman, as well as producing tracks in his upstate New York studio for Bedouin Soundclash, Stiffed, Shwayze, and Sublime. By 2010, he had landed a gig with Lauryn Hill and released a solo album,

The Hundred Percenter

An Appreciation By Fishbone's Norwood Fisher



Norwood Fisher

"We heard about Bad Brains sometime around '79 or '80, and we couldn't believe they were black. We were young musicians trying to find ourselves, and hearing a black band do something like that allowed us to own punk rock. That was important.

"Darryl was rippin' it, pullin' chords, and his playing was airtight. He was solid, fluid, so fast, and he made it look effortless. I didn't hear the sound of struggle, I heard somebody nailing it. I didn't notice the fusion influence back then, but it totally makes sense. The funny thing is that I was listening to bands like Return To Forever, too, but Bad Brains and the Clash pulled me away from that; they spoke to my excess teenage energy much more than fusion did.

"When we did the *Licensed to Ill* tour in 1987 with Murphy's Law and the Beastie Boys, MCA would be playing Bad Brains songs at soundcheck, and he knew Darryl's lines backward and forward. That was the first time I clearly heard all the chords Darryl was pulling and the intricate stuff he was doing, because some of the earliest recordings didn't display it well. MCA was playing with a pick, and killin' it!

"Last night, watching them play the first couple shows of the new tour, I saw a band appreciating each other, the music, and the audience. They give of themselves, they were enjoying themselves, and it was awesome. And Darryl does not disappoint. He's a 100 percenter! His production on the new album is incredible—I think that as a producer, songwriter, and bass player, he's coming into an amazing space. I look at him and wish for more output." —AS TOLD TO E.E. BRADMAN

In Search of Black Judas, that showcased his deep knowledge of various reggae styles and his plentiful production chops.

It makes perfect sense, therefore, that Jenifer is in the producer's seat for the Brains' latest, *Into the Future*. Like most of their catalogue, it dips into hardcore, reggae, and hard rock/metal, but Jenifer's production brings the band deeper into the 21st century while showcasing each player's strengths, including his own. His airtight mind-meld with Hudson on songs like "Yes I," "Come Down," and "Suck Sess" is custom-built to invoke mosh-pit chaos, while his front-pickup tone occupies a perfect space underneath Dr. Know's thick guitars on rockers like "Fun" and "Earnest Love." Meanwhile, his choices on the album's reggae grooves, including the old-school "Make a Joyful Noise," the dubby neck-snapper "Jah Love," the funky "Rub a Dub Love," and the loving send-off to Yauch, "MCA Dub," are a master class in taste and tone.

Despite the bumpy journey the Bad Brains have endured, Jenifer is far from bitter that they haven't achieved the mainstream success many fans envisioned for them. His confidence about the band's place in history hasn't stopped him from pursuing new challenges, though, and his ability to stay inspired while doing justice to the group's legacy makes Jenifer uniquely prepared to take Bad Brains past the naysayers, and far into the future.

When Bad Brains hit the ground running, who were your rock bass influences?

There weren't many, but I was way into John Paul Jones and Geezer Butler. That "doomsday riff" in "How Low Can a Punk Get," from our second album, was inspired by my love for Black Sabbath songs like "Sweet Leaf" and "Iron Man." And I dug what Captain Sensible from the Damned did on "Machine Gun Etiquette." Later on, I was into what Kip Winger was doing.

Wait … Winger?

[*Laughs.*] I liked some of what I heard him do in the context of the pop-metal Winger was playing.

Back in the day, you were listening to fusion, too, right?

I got really deep into Stanley Clarke—at a certain period of my life in the '70s, I was into dudes like Stanley, Percy Jones, and Jaco Pastorius. When we started out as Mind Power, we were going to be a new Mahavishnu or a baby Return To Forever.

How did the arrival of punk rock change your feelings about fusion?

When punk rock came in, I realized I didn't have to know how to play in order to express myself on my instrument. That empowered me, because I could be creative in any way I wanted to. Punk rock taught me that I could be somebody in music without being a virtuoso.

Did the band's love for fusion find its way into the music?

"Regulator" is my punk-rock version of a line from Weather Report's "Mr. Gone." "Pay to Cum" was inspired by a George Duke song. The intro to "Don't Need It" is us being punk, but still wanting to play our instruments well.

When I look back now, I can see that the Great Spirit inspired us to do things like put a Stevie Wonder-style ending on "Sailing On." We were

naïve and fearlessly creative. It wasn't contrived, either—we weren't sitting around somewhere thinking about mixing styles. We loved punk rock, we loved fusion, and we wanted to make our own brand.

How did reggae and Rastafari become such a big part of Bad Brains?

In 1978, I went to see Stanley at the Capital Center in DC, and after the show, I got his autograph on a dollar bill. Behind him, onstage, was this dude with big dreadlocks, and I couldn't believe that black people could grow their hair that long. I didn't even know who Bob Marley was, and to tell you the truth, I didn't know he was playing. I was there to see Stanley Clarke. When the Wailers began playing, I was complaining that Family Man Barrett's bass was too loud, but then I got absorbed into the music, and I started to feel the magic. That was the beginning of our journey into Rasta culture.

When you got serious about reggae, how did you learn to play it with authenticity?

I didn't just listen to the music or the bass line—I thought about the people playing it. I listened to Family Man and Flabba Holt and Lloyd Parks and learned the differences between reggae, rub-a-dub, sound system, and ska. If you want to play music that encompasses different styles, take time to learn the differences, and think about the players. If you want to play Earth, Wind & Fire's music, for example, you have to look at Verdine White's personality and how he approaches his bass lines.

What do you listen for when you're learning a new style?

It's all about texture and attack. Is the bass player using a two-finger walk or a one-finger claw? How many fingers are they using on the left hand? Are they playing the bass line on just one string? To get the right sound, pay attention to how many fingers you're using and which part of your fingers are touching the strings. At the same time, you can't lay down weight if your playing is too "studied." There's an unstudied type of locomotion to the rub-a-dub style, and there is a sort of nimbleness, too, like the Lloyd Parks sound.

What's the advantage of nailing the little things?

There's a difference between imitating stuff, like a wedding-band musician, and really playing something. I can play punk rock, I can play with Metallica, or I could play with the Wailers and not be imitating anyone, because I have lived those styles.

Do you care about those details in your own playing?

Yes. Being heard over and under Dr. Know's wall of guitar, for example, has a lot to do with how I approach single notes, when I drop to the octave, when I hit those 1st-and-5th double-stops. I'm selective about when I flip it, pick it, and downstroke it, know what I'm saying? I try to be creative with textures and double-stops, which I learned mainly from listening to Stanley Clarke, like the way he did it on "School Days."

When did you settle on the perfect

instrument and amp for Bad Brains?

For the first couple years, most of the basses I played were borrowed from people in bands that opened for us, but I got my first real bass, a Fender Jazz Bass, around 1980. I was never that much into equipment—give me a Jazz Bass, Rotosound strings, a cable, a .60mm Dunlop pick, and an Ampeg SVT, and I'm done. I never wanted any pedals between me and my amp, and I still don't. I believe in relying on my fingers and my bass to get the sounds I need.

Seems like that green Modulus has been your main axe for years.

I got it when we were on 48th Street in New York in 1980 or '81. I was pretty abusive to my basses, sort of a rebel youth thing, and I didn't want a bass

"DON'T TREAT MUSIC LIKE A HOBBY, OR ELSE IT'LL SOUND LIKE IT'S A HOBBY."

that would be so sensitive to cold weather, with the neck warping and things like that. So when I saw the Modulus, with its carbon fiber neck, I figured it would be durable enough to survive the cold or whatever happened onstage. The beautiful thing about this Modulus is that every time I pick it up, it feels as new as the day I got it.

How do you go back and forth between strong rock and deep dub tones?

With the Modulus, I can get a sustained, solid sound when I play power chords with a pick, and then I can tuck the pick away, move up the fretboard, and thump on some rub-a-dub. This bass has a real resonance, a deep tone, to it. With Rotosounds, the Badass bridge, and EMG pickups, I plug into an SVT and have a nice foundation

for rock stuff—but when I want rub-a-dub, all I have to do is roll off the high end, move up on the neck, and do the one-finger claw like Jamerson. My soundman, Andy Stackpole, helps, too. We've worked together for 20-something years, so he knows how and when I'm trying to fill the room.

When I saw you with Lauryn Hill, you covered the bottom end on a 5-string while Doug Wimbish added effects and upper-register soundscapes.

I played a 5-string with Ms. Hill and I liked it, but it didn't feel like a real bass: I'm a 4-string purist. Doug is my man, and one of my inspirations. I think we'll probably do some more stuff like that.

What's it like to play with Earl Hudson after all these years?

Earl is like my big brother. When we were younger, we were like a dance team on *Dancing With the Stars*: "You're going too fast!" "*You* spun me around!" [*Laughs*.] But all that struggle between us forged a brotherhood that has made us a locomotive force. Mackie [Jayson], who played with us on *Quickness* in 1989, is another one—we grew up in this together. When I play with other drummers, it can be good, but it's not the same because we haven't put in enough time to develop the chemistry.

What inspired you to put out *In Search of Black Judas*?

I'd been making riffs and beats for years, and finally, I told the folks at ROIR that I wanted to try making an album. It's like a mix tape, and I wanted to put it out there instead of me riding around listening to it in my car.

How did you produce the latest Bad Brains album?

I knew the styles we wanted to cover—some fast hardcore, a more involved sort of rock, and two or three types of reggae. We'd focus on a track, go home and back to our lives, and then come back and work some more. We got a bunch of material out of that. It's more organic than going in and writing, rehearsing, and trying to record everything in a week. This record took nine or ten months, maybe a year.

There's footage of the recording sessions in last year's *A Band in DC* documentary, but I was surprised they didn't mention *Into the Future*.

I'm not a supporter of that movie. There's some cool stuff in there, but how the hell are they going to begin and end a movie about Bad Brains with a band fight? HR and I have probably argued like that three times in our lives, but they took that vulnerable moment and sensationalized it. I told the director, Look, I know this isn't a promo video and I'm not trying to censor you in any way, but bookending the movie with all that negativity does not represent who we are. They stopped taking my calls.

The film makes one wonder if Bad Brains would have achieved a different kind of success if not for HR.

First of all, I don't think I would still be alive if Bad Brains had experienced the rock-star success people think we should have had. As for HR, he's a deep dude, a complex and very intelligent guy, who gave everything—his mind, his psyche, his spirit—to make the music we made. We are a family of creative brothers, and sometimes, like any family, we're dysfunctional.

We're God-fearing dudes, we love each other, we love music, we love the people, but we're human beings, too.

Looking back, I should have gotten someone like [Adam] Yauch, someone who really knows the Bad Brains, to make the movie. If Adam had done this, people wouldn't have left the movie feeling like they'd just seen a tragic Hollywood story. But it's okay; we've been through stuff before, and we'll survive this, too.

Yauch was an early fan. What are your memories of him?

We go way back, to the early '80s, when the Brains came to New York from DC. As the Beastie Boys became more famous, Yauch kept in touch, and we would hang out periodically—he'd send me little nuggets of weed with each of their new records. One day, during one of HR's breaks from the band, Yauch called me to say that he'd seen HR and that we should get together and do a new album. So he instigated that, and we went out to L.A. and made *God of Love*. A few years later, he called and said, "D., you ought to let me produce a record." So we went down to Oscilloscope, laid it down, and Yauch was walking around like a substitute teacher, telling us, "Come on, you guys, you gotta do it one more time!" [*Laughs.*] That's how we made *Build a Nation*. It was a beautiful time. He was my little homey, my brethren, a talented producer and bass player, and a funny guy. I miss that dude.

Jenifer and Adam "MCA" Yauch

What's your next musical adventure?

Bad Brains are hitting the road, and I'm making a record with a band called White Mandingo. It's me, Murs, and Sasha Jenkins. The album is sort of like a hip-hop *Tommy*; it's a story about a black kid, but it's hip-hop and rock, and it's pretty dope.

What advice would you give to a player who wanted to take it to the next level?

Go learn your Graham. Go learn your Jamerson. Jamerson will teach you how to play what's right for the song and how to accompany singers. He was one of the busiest bass players ever, but if you weren't listening for it, you couldn't tell, even under singers! Listen to the Carpenters to hear how they played great music without having to show off. Don't treat music like a hobby, or else it'll sound like it's a hobby. Play it. Be it. Live it. Make sure you have your vision and your passion. And stay inventive. **BP**