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THE HARTFORD COURANT, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1991



RAP REVIEW

PUBLIC ENEMY AT THE SPRINGFIELD CIVIC CENTER

Public Enemy adds drama to rap repertoire.

By ROGER CATLIN
Courant Rock Critic

Public Enemy has been on tour twice already since the summer, performing before rock audiences first with the Sisters of Mercy, and then with Anthrax.

Now the group is back before its core audience, with the biggest rap show of the season. The value-packed performance at the Springfield Civic Center Wednesday featured

not only P.E., but Naughty By Nature, Queen Latifah, A Tribe Called Quest and the Leaders of the New School.

Public Enemy seems to have learned a lot from the rock-related touring — its sets and lighting were the most dramatic. On the current swing, d.j. Terminator X and his turntables are lowered from the ceiling on a lighting fixture, which is how Paula Abdul makes her entrance on her current tour.

On a similar sandbagged bunker set the group used when on tour with Anthrax, P.E. added some extra touches. Chief among them was a character dressed in the pointy-cap and gown of the Ku Klux Klan. He made his strongest statement by thanking black gangs for killing each other making it easier for his organization. But he was chased out by the grim, on-stage security forces in military dress. In the end, he was strung up and lynched in effigy during the chilling historical

track that is P.E.'s current single, "Can't Truss It," which concerns the slave trade.

But the preachiest moment came when tough-talking rapper Chuck D produced a skeleton from an oversized malt liquor bottle to show the future of blacks if they keep drinking the stuff.

Clearly, Chuck had a few things to get off his chest. But the set was also a very entertaining swing through the influential group's many hits, from "Public Enemy No. 1" and "Bring the Noise" to "Fight the Power," "Can't Do Nuttin' for Ya Man," "Don't Believe the Hype" and "911 is a Joke."

Chuck D's sidekick, Flavor Flav appeared in three colorful costumes, and his trademark kitchen clock medallions. And as much as they jumped around the stage, with their committed raps, the two have to learn that rapping along to their own voices on the

record takes away from the impact of their performance, no matter how effective the lights and staging.

That's certainly what made the opening acts so entertaining. Naughty By Nature, moved up the bill because of its current Top 10 hit, "O.P.P.," was all pumped up by their success. Queen Latifah, who had helped guide the group's career, jumped on stage to join them on "Wickedest Man Alive."

Latifah's own set, though, was somewhat lacking, even with her own live drummer (musicians are rarities in live shows).

But there was tough competition. A Tribe Called Quest was strong from beginning to end. The group closed on a high note with "Check the Rime," currently No. 1 on the rap charts.

And Leaders of the New School, a surprise added attraction, began the show in fine, energetic fashion.

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