

t was old school friends Jan, Andrew and Simon pursuing their near-obsessive love of soul music and 70's funk that inspired them to form The Brand New Heavies. Growing up in the London suburb of Ealing, the trio of childhood friends became avid record collectors, and then regular clubbers on the rare groove scene where they would hear records by the likes of James Brown, The Crusaders, Mass Production, the Meters, Rufus, and a mass of early to late 70's funksters. "At the age of 15, we were very passionate about dance and soul music", Andrew recalls, "and we got so into it that the only thing left was to try it ourselves". Rehearsing regularly at Jan's home the boys put their grooves on to tape, and were later over the moon when DJ's at the seminal 'Cat in the Hat' club began cutting from James Brown records to cassettes of the band's jams.

Initially an instrumental-only band, the BNH would augment their trio with a brass section; playing the clubs and rare groove parties for several years where they built a significant and fiercely loyal following among - what was then - a cult audience. They even secured a record deal, but were swiftly dropped by a confused record company when Acid House burst on the scene; preferring to jump on the latter bandwagon

It was Acid Jazz, the maverick independent that gave the band the relatively tiny budget of £8000 to record an album. The result, in 1990 was a muscular, funky album of original music with its roots firmly in the 70's funk mould. In a world full of samples, sequencers, and electronic bleeps, it was refreshing to hear an album played by musicians with real instruments, and the rave reviews that followed reflected the same.

In the U.S.A. TBNH were like a breath of fresh air. White hot Delicious Vinyl, the Los Angeles based independent label, seized upon TBNH, but put the band together with their own vocalist N'dea Davenport: an excellent, gutsy, soul singer who re-recorded some of the, Heavies songs made with their former singer Jay Ella Ruth who had since left the band.

Releasing *Never Stop* - from the album - as a single in the U.S.A. proved to be an uncanny move. The college radio stations played the single by this new English band, and R&B radio played the single because it was essentially a contemporary soul record. BINGO!, the single raced into the R&B charts; a first time hit by a U.K. group since Soul II Soul some four years previous. In the U.K. the eponymously titled BNH album spawned the hits "Dream Come True", "Never Stop", and "Stay This Way", therefore broadening their audience from rare groove cult to mainstream success.

When BNH played live in the USA they were greeted by audiences that hadn't seen live funk bands in a long time, but especially impressed were the rap community who saw in the Heavies a band playing grooves that rappers would usually sample from old 70's records. So impressed with the BNH were

legendary funksters and R&B artists like Ray Charles who invited the band to play his 50th anniversary in the music biz, where the Heavies finally met some of their heroes like Stevie Wonder and Quincy Jones. By the time the band played New York it was the new young hip-hoppers that latched on to their sound. After a blazing 'Heavies set at the S.O.B. club the gig ended in a near riot when O-Tip from A Tribe Called Quest and MC Serch from 3rd. Bass joined them onstage for some drastic free-styling over the 'Heavies non-stop grooves. It seemed that everybody was fighting to go on stage with the band, whilst some 2,000 ticketless punters outside were fighting to get into the gig.

After the reception received in New York it seemed an obvious move to make a hip-hop record. They did. Their next album was a first of its kind. In June 1992 The Brand New Heavies recorded *Heavy Rhyme Experience Vol. 1 LIVE* in the studio with Black Sheep, Pharcyde, Main Source, Master Ace, and Grand Puba Maxwell to name but a few.

Following the release of *Heavy Rhyme Experience...* the entire group returned to London then out to L.A. to work on their second album proper which was to become *Brother Sister*. 'Brother Sister' was released to critical acclaim, platinum U.K sales, and a sold-out tour that took in the major summer festivals. In the U.S, the groups first single "Dream on Dreamer" was launched on MTV and BET and a sold out club tour followed. The Brand New Heavies had now carved out their niche as one of the finest contemporary soul/dance groups, albeit paving the way for the likes of Jamiroquai, as well as US soul stars D'Angelo, Maxwell, Erykah Badu and a slew of up and coming neo-soul bands.

The Brother Sister tour was to be N'dea Davenport's last tour with the band for a while. She was originally signed to Delicious Vinyl as a solo artist and it was always in the cards that she would eventually make her own album. After her marriage in '96, she set up home in New Orleans and began writing for her debut solo album.

With the departure of N'dea Davenport, it looked as though it would be tough to find a lead vocalist to fill her shoes, but alas, such is the 'Heavies credibility among the International soul fraternity that none other than SIEDAH GARRETT came along. SIEDAH was well known world-wide as a prolific singer and songwriter of remarkable pedigree. SIEDAH originally hooked up with Michael Jackson through Quincy Jones who played Jackson a demo of, "Man In The Mirror". As an in-demand backing vocalist Siedah had performed with everyone from Donna Summer to Madonna.

The boys met up with Siedah in '97 to write and record their fourth album, the result of that collaboration became the album *SHELTER*. With the smash single "Sometimes" and the club anthem remix feat. Q-Tip of A Tribe Called Quest, the Heavies continued to build on their reputation as the gold standard for live funk. The album went platinum in the U.K and the group toured

extensively around the world, culminating with a tour in the U.S with Erika Badu.

The Brand New Heavies continue their tradition that started in 1989 when the band recruited local girl, Jay Ella Ruth (TBNH) to their ranks. Followed by N'Dea Davenport who established the band as a dynamic force on the world scene then Siedah Garret, and most recently... Carleen Anderson. Originally from the U.S, Carleen is the daughter of the legendary Vicki Anderson and step-daughter of Bobby Bird, both members of the James Brown Revue since the early sixties. The band is currently working on new material with this gifted singer as well as reuniting in Los Angeles with N'Dea Davenport and singer songwriter.