

new york, new york. by spike jonze (from dirt)

If you wanna fill up the magazine with Mike D. and Sofia Coppola and more (endless) skater fashion spreads, fine. But count me out. - Music journalist and DIRT contributor, Charles Aaron in a recent letter to us regarding DIRT's editorial content and his participation in it. With that in mind I walk across town to Times Square to meet up with Adam Horovitz and Michael Diamond (one third of Charles' problem with DIRT). They are having a meeting with some guitar companies about some ideas Adam has. I've spent all morning running around Lang Communications corporate headquarters, and it feels good to be outside, away from the fluorescent tubes of bureaucracy.

The Beastie Boys have been recording in their original hometown of New York for the past few weeks. They made a pilgrimage of sorts, having moved all their gear from their current homes in Los Angeles to New York for the month of May, where they've begun production of a new album. The line up is the same as last time: Horovitz (Adrock) on guitar, Adam Yauch (MCA) with the bass, Mike D. on the drums and Keyboard Money Mark. Mario Caldato Jr. has come east too, to engineer and coproduce again, and their percussionist, Bo Bo is here too. When I arrive at the restaurant where I'm meeting them, Adam has already started his pitch. Standing in the middle of the room, he's spilling full speed about his plans to reinvent the electric guitar as we know it. Behind him are large white tablets of paper with notes and diagrams illustrating what he's saying. At different times in his lecture, he raises and lowers his voice to dramatize certain points he wants to make about dischordal sound waves and other concepts I don't understand. The table is full of executives, designers and engineers from all of these huge guitar companies. At the end of the table are Adam's wife, Ione Skye, Mike D. and the Beasties' New York conceptual coordinator, Peter. I slide into a chair by the door to avoid interrupting Adam's flow. The guitar company suits look awestruck. Adam's intensity and passion have consumed the whole restaurant. Even the waiters and the diners have stopped serving and eating to absorb the science that Adrock is dropping. With a thin wooden stick he slaps the diagrams as he snaps out theories that make these guitar designers rethink every thing they've ever made. When it is over, there is a moment of silence before the room explodes into a fury of excitement. The words "genius," "brilliant~ and "expense account" are flying through the air like Super Dave Osborne. Mike, Ione and I follow Adam, who is still deep in thought, out of the restaurant and leave Peter to handle the

battle zone of business cards and financial proposals that has enveloped the table. Once outside, Mike nonchalantly pats Adam on the back, "King Adrock, he's a genius." I've heard Mike say this before with much more conviction, but this time around, he says it more just in passing. Something tells me this business lunch is typical of the past few weeks they have spent in New York.

Adam and Ione are off to another part of the city. We'll meet them in a few hours at the recording studio downtown where the Beasties spend their nights playing music and filling tapes. Mike and I start walking down Broadway to the studio they are renting for the month which is 20 blocks away. He tells me that recording has been going really well. They have eight songs done already and figure they will probably finish the record by the beginning of October. They'll go back to LA in June and work on it all summer, then return to New York to wrap it up. I'm surprised it'll be done so quick because of the time it took to do the last one, Check Your Head. Mike tells me that part of the reason they came to New York to start recording in the first place, "We were there (at G-Son, the Beasties' LA studio) every night for two years of our life working on that record. We are kind of paranoid of that happening again. So it was just important to start recording somewhere new. My personal selfish reason? I didn't want to be in the studio and be worried about doing Grand Royal (the Beasties' record label and merchandising company that shares a building with G-Son) stuff. So that way I was able to come here and blow everybody the f" off. Which I'm doing dramatically well." As if responding to this statement, Mike's cellular phone begins to ring. No doubt~ some music industry big wig calling with a deal to make. At that very same moment, we pass a panhandler. Mike reaches into his pocket, pulls out his still ringing wallet-sized phone and drops it in the man's hat. It takes me a few steps to realize what he has done and stutter out a protest. But Mike calmly cuts me off, "If it is really important, they can write a letter." He gazes around at the traffic and the rushing crowd we share the sidewalk with, "What a stunning afternoon." What? Michael Diamond? The fast moving record company exec, throwing away his cellular pocket phone? Not returning calls? Not indulging in free business meals? What is going on? What is New York doing to these guys? I've never seen Mike so relaxed. Or Adam so busy. I start to think again about Charles' wishes for our editorial content and how unprofessional he thinks we are. My gut feeling as a journalist is telling me, "Spike, you're on the verge of breaking something big, like those guys with Watergate." Maybe I can win Charles back if this story is as huge as I think it is. I tell Mike that I need to buy a tape recorder and we enter one of the notorious rip off electronics stores. Mike is so passive that I could have said I was getting him a lobotomy and he would have said okay as long as I was paying. I buy a bulky tape recorder that is lavender and says mini" in big letters on the side. My head is more

mini than this thing is. As we get to the studio, I'm trying out some music journalism questions like, "Is recording in the city bringing a lot of new elements and influences to your music?" Mike laughs at my attempt but answers anyway, "It hasn't really changed what we are doing (musically). But in New York, you have so much more contact with the outside world." Walking up the stairs I see his point quite clearly. On one floor there is a modeling agency and on the next, a martial arts studio. We pass by the door just in time to catch a young man spinning through the air and shattering a cinder block with a flying kick. After he lands, I see he is the instructor as he bows to his kneeling pupils. When he looks up, who should it be, but the third Beastie, Yauch. His students return the bow by lowering their heads respectfully to the mat. Yauch lets out a sharp, biting command, "Aye," and the class springs to their feet and charges him. In what I suppose is a spar, ten on one, the students simultaneously take swings and kicks at him, as he gently and gracefully flips them one by one across the room. They land tumbling and jump up to return for another attack. Yauch looks like a machine, spitting bodies out behind him as he spins to toss another. Mike leads me up the stairs. I had no idea Yauch was so well trained in martial arts. When did he start all of that, I ask Mike. "MCA is a star," Mike mutters mystically, as we enter the studio's lounge. Mario C. is standing wearing a slinky dress on top of a table in the middle of the room. He is surrounded by long, thin, beautiful creatures, models of the Vogue variety, who peck and paw at him, pinning and pulling his dress in a rush to perfect his outfit. Mario doesn't seem to notice as he is too wrapped up in playing Sega PGA Tour Golf 2 with Money Mark. Mike disappears off down a hallway, and I sit down to see if I can find out what's going on here. The door bursts open and it is another one of these women, straight out of a beer commercial. "Mario's on in one minute!" She purrs as she exits the room. The other women take the video game controller from Mario and rush him out. This is the first time I get a full look at him, and except for his five o'clock shadow, he looks dashing: high heels, pearls and plunging neckline. The room is quiet now, just Mark, the Sega and me. Mike has started getting to business on the drums in the next room and his beats are seeping through the walls. Mark turns around and sees me. He says hello and notices my confusion, "They're having a fashion runway show downstairs." Mark turns back to the golf game, "Billy Idol was supposed to model that outfit but he just sprained his ankle walking down the stairs in those heels so they grabbed Mario. He modeled in a catalog for them last week." He explains to me that this studio, although it doesn't have the basketball hoop or skateboard ramps like G-Son, does have a plethora of activities in the building. The door bursts open, and it is Horovitz, this time dressed in a three piece suit. "Dow Jones is up 12 points. I was just down at Wall Street. The market was mine today. He yells through the studio as he sheds the suit and throws it in the corner, "Come Mark, we have a lot to do," and he leads Mark away from the game and in to join Mike in the next room. I sit back and absorb all of this. Maybe I'm just not used to the New York pace of things. These guys don't seem to be having any

trouble with it. Mike, Adam and Adam grew up and lived here until three years ago when they moved to Los Angeles. From the next room, I hear a funky groove starting to form and feel slightly calmed. At least this is still the same. Based on what I've seen so far today, I wouldn't have been surprised if they had formed a kabuki theatre group. Yauch walks in, still in his martial arts clothes, and I feel the room fill with his inner peace. He sits down lotus style on the floor in front of me and offers a blissful welcome "How were your journeys my son?" I tell him briefly what we've been doing over the past few weeks but quickly switch to ask about his journeys. He has been leading a vagabond lifestyle for over a year. Since Check Your Head came out in the spring of '92, he has been in Los Angeles for maybe a month. He spent the first six months touring with the band, through the US twice, Europe, Japan and Australia. Since the touring ended last year, he has been snowboarding all over and walking through Nepal. He was in Utah for a few months and Alaska for a while too. I ask him if he has any advice for fellow travelers. He turns his head up to the side and pauses. I can see him looking out into the universe for an answer "Don't bring your stand up bass unless you really need to. It's a pain in the ass." I'm speechless. Although his words are so simple, I understand the true message he is telling me about how to live life. I nod. And bask in his zen, but only for a moment. Yauch has spotted my inner struggle, and he inquires, "What is troubling you, young voyager?" All at once, I spew out my insecurities about what I should be writing about in DIRT and the pressures I feel from the outside world. I tell him how hard it is to write something that will be interesting to everyone. I tell him of the letter and how tormented I feel when people don't like our work. Then I collapse in exhaustion, feeling free now that I have dropped that burden. With a wamm laugh, he tells me, "Say what you want to say. the way you want to say it and even if it's not decipherable to everyone, you've said what you wanted to say. The people who know what's up will know what's up and the other people... Yw can't worry about the other man." With these words, he rises to partake in the music making, leaving me to soak up the wisdom that still saturates the room."