Well, 2011 was quite a year wasn’t it? Few would have predicted that the original line up of Big Audio Dynamite would have reformed and toured the world, but the ‘new ride’ has been just as much fun as the old one, and the signs are that we will be hearing more from the best band in West London during 2012.

More about what the future may hold for BAD later, but first a little about this new venture, which will be a quarterly publication dedicated to BAD past, present and future, and of course, related projects.

Earlier this year whilst uploading an old issue of The BAD Times to my blog pages, I hit upon the idea of having a new magazine dedicated to all things BAD, and decided to give it a go. News breaks instantly via digital media, and even if BAD decided not to continue past 2011, there’s so much to look back on. The enthusiasm of the fans on BAD’s official facebook page, and the two fan sites; The Big Audio Dynamite Appreciation Society, and Planet BAD…Where The Shuttle Don’t Stop, along with the various forums such as If Music Could Talk, shows that the passion for the band is still there. Old recordings are often being re-evaluated, whilst new ones keep being unearthed, so there will always be plenty of things to fire the imagination. Our ‘feature presentation’ this time around is the band history. I started work on this some time ago, and different versions of it have been floating around in cyberspace for a while now. However, I have taken the trouble to re-edit it all, update it, and produce new graphics to complement the text, so it is certainly an upgrade on what has been published before, and I hope you enjoy the journey through BAD’s back pages.

This issue also includes an excellent article on Dreadzone from my good friend Justin Goldring a.ka. El Blanco Dread, and I’m hoping this will be the first of many. It’s always interesting to hear different people’s perspectives on things, and I would welcome your contributions for future issues. So please drop me a line with your articles, suggestions, ideas and feedback, and welcome to Planet BAD.

Here’s to 2012: Increase the peace!

DAVID
davidparker19@yahoo.co.uk
At the start of last year, if you had promised me a Legacy Edition of “No.10 Upping Street”, to complement 2010’s two disc version of “This Is Big Audio Dynamite”, I would have been a happy man. This hasn’t happened yet, but I’m certainly not disappointed about this, because what did happen has been more than a bit special.

From late March to early September BAD toured the world, played festivals, and appeared on prime time TV. Reviews were good, with the better writers also pointing out that music the band recorded all those years ago, was not only influential but underappreciated too, and we finally saw the band get the acclaim they deserved for being so far ahead of the game all those years ago.

Things were a little quiet news-wise as 2011 drew to a close, but this was not too surprising considering that BAD’s rhythm section were back on tour with Dreadzone, soon after the BAD tour ended. Then, after the success of the Justice Tonight show in Liverpool back in September, Mick, Pete Wylie, The Farm and Davo (along with numerous very special guests) took the show on the road during December, in support of the Hillsborough Justice Campaign.

However, reports from those ‘in the know’ suggest that a new BAD album is still a real possibility, and it would appear that the band are now considering their options in terms of how their material is released. Previously unissued songs which may have once looked like certainties for the Legacy Edition of “No. 10 Upping Street”, could now be considered for re-recording, as the band dip back into their song pool and consider tracks for their proposed new album.

Of course tracks such the Strummer/Jones penned “U.S. North” and “Dog In A Satellite” are familiar to most of us, as unofficial recordings have been circulating for some years now, but the band surprised us all with “Rob Peter, Pay Paul”, earlier this year. The song was originally written circa 1988, before it was revamped for last summer’s tours, and it would surely be a feature of any proposed new album from BAD in 2012.
A release to mark the 10th anniversary of Joe Strummer’s passing later this year has also been proposed, and the aforementioned Strummer/Jones compositions could also be held over for this project.

The Justice Tonight tour also seems set to continue during the New Year. I was lucky enough to attend the Manchester show last December and it’s a great night out for a great cause, which I’m sure people will continue to support.

Over on facebook, a nice archive of BAD related scans is growing over at Planet BAD…Where The Shuttle Don’t Stop. This is a great resource for new fans, and a nice trip down memory lane for those of us that have been around a little longer. Uploads include tour flyers, magazine articles, cover artwork and rare photographs.

It’s nice to see that the friendly, generous spirit that has always been present at the forums and communities is still going strong, and this was also very much in evidence at last year’s shows, when new friendships were formed by many of us. It’s also great to see band members past and present, and people close to the band, supporting these sites and sharing their own recollections and information.

See ya in there!

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**Official:**

http://www.bigaudiodynamite.co.uk/

https://www.facebook.com/bigaudiodynamite

http://twitter.com/bigaudiodynm

**Fan Sites:**

http://www.esmark.net/bad/bad.htm

http://planetbad.wordpress.com/

**Facebook Fan Pages:**

https://www.facebook.com/groups/114625448652048/

(Planet BAD...Where The Shuttle Don’t Stop)

https://www.facebook.com/groups/7936112814/

(The Big Audio Dynamite Appreciation Society)

https://www.facebook.com/pages/Planet-Bd-Fanzine/107460682667364/

(Planet B@d Fanzine)
Planet BAD Presents

**BIG AUDIO DYNAMITE**

History
Following the success of The Clash’s 1982 album “Combat Rock”, the band continued to tour through early 1983, but internal disagreements about which direction the band should take eventually saw founder member Mick Jones fired from the band in September for “drifting apart from the original idea of The Clash”.

Mick had produced the first version of The Clash’s “Combat Rock, (originally titled “Rat Patrol from Fort Bragg”) which was shaping up to be a double album until the band decided to hand over production duties to veteran producer Glyn Johns. The Clash’s previous album “Sandinista!” had been a sprawling three disc set, and the band’s record label were looking for a more commercially viable single album.

Therefore, Johns was called upon to trim down the album, shortening several tracks, and cutting out some performances all together. The producer had previously worked with the likes of The Rolling Stones, Small Faces and The Who, and had also assembled an un-issued compilation of The Beatles’ ”Get Back” album back in 1969. Rather like “Combat Rock”, the album would finally be issued as “Let It Be”, after initial mixes and track listings could not be agreed upon by the band.
“Combat Rock” saw The Clash’s passion for experimenting and exploring different musical styles continue, and it could be argued that John’s single disc compilation gave it the coherence that was missing from the “Sandinista!” set.

“Overpowered by Funk” featured a rap from Futura 2000, whilst “Inoculated City” included a sample from an advertisement for a brand of toilet cleaner towards the end of the track. William S. Burroughs collaborated on “Ghetto Defendant”, providing spoken word accompaniment to Joe Strummer’s vocal, whilst “Red Angel Dragnet” took its inspiration from Martin Scorsese’s “Taxi Driver”, incorporating some of the dialogue from the film.

The overall picture was one of a band developing rapidly, taking influences from everything that was happening around them, and looking to embrace the new rather than rest on their laurels. Whilst The Clash were never considered a ‘singles’ band, the album also showcased the fact that they were capable of writing radio friendly hits, and this was evident on the Stones style rocker “Should I Stay Or Should I Go” and funk/punk anthem “Rock The Casbah”. Both tracks were instrumental in getting the album noticed by the wider public.

Despite the album’s success, internal conflicts saw the band implode, and it’s also worth noting that musical differences were not the only thing tearing at the heart of The Clash during these times. Drug problems had forced drummer Topper Headon to leave after “Combat Rock” was released, and Mick’s late arrivals at rehearsals had given way to accusations of ‘rock star’ like behaviour from the other members of the band.

Mick played his final show with The Clash to 150,000 people at the US Festival in San Bernardino, California on May 28, 1983. The Clash were already without Topper at this point, and Mick’s departure would follow in September. Mick reflected on the internal politics that eventually split up the group during an interview for the BBC 2 programme Def II, circa 1990:

“It all started going wrong actually when Topper left…Topper left and it was never really the same, but we could have carried on, but then I got fired (laughs) …but we’d really stopped communicating by that time. We just managed to maintain a grunting level of civility, you know, before, but it was kind of all set up as well, you know, I was set up really, and that was kind of political, behind the back”.

“People were moving and trying to be influential, and different people were coming between members of the group, you know, things like that. All the things that start happening, you know, when you become really successful… you become a different kind of asshole. I turned up the day I was fired and got me guitar out, you know, and I think it was Joe it was who managed to muster up the courage to say that he didn’t want to play with me anymore, and when somebody says that to you…I just packed my guitar…just whoa… hey, you know, OK bye, and that was it. I walked, and Bernie came running out after me with a cheque in his hand, you know like a gold watch or something…which added insult to injury, but I took it anyway, and about two days mourning, and I started on the next group.”
The first incarnation of Mick’s new group was called TRAC, which was an acronym for Top Risk Action Company. The group featured ex Clash drummer Topper Headon, former Basement 5 bassist, Leo Ezee-Kill Williams and John Boy Leonard, the former saxophonist with Theatre Of Hate. TRAC recorded demos during 1984, but nothing was officially released, and there would be further changes to the band’s personnel before they finally evolved into Big Audio Dynamite.

Mick spoke about the formation of BAD during an interview for the BBC2 programme Def II, circa 1990:

“**Big Audio Dynamite was formed on the dance floor if you like, that’s how I saw it. I saw it the same as how I saw it in the first days. I saw Don (Letts) and Leo standing in a club, the two dreads in the band, right, and they were my friend's anyway right back from the punk days. Don was the DJ in the Roxy club, and Leo worked behind the bar, and I saw them, and I went over and put myself in-between them, you know they were both standing there with dark glasses looking really cool, and I went and sort of said, you know, "let me get in there fellas", and I kind of stood in-between them, and I looked again at both sides, and thought hey I’ve got a group".

The band had briefly been known as Real Westway, but Mick was keen to use the abbreviation BAD, as this was a tip of the hat to the influence of the emerging hip hop scene on the sound and philosophy of the new venture. Mick had been working with his friend Tony James, and his band, Sigue Sigue Sputnik, mixing the sound at their concerts. He had also offered the help of his roadie Flea, and let the band use his Ford Transit van to travel to and from their early gigs. One night whilst travelling back from a Sigue Sigue Sputnik gig in Hastings, Yana the band’s FX lady, suggested the name Big Audio Dynamite as the full title for the BAD acronym, and the new band finally had its full name.

BAD would take in the influences that could be heard in Mick’s later work with The Clash, and experimented further with samples, new musical styles, and hip hop beats. Don Letts had directed and filmed “The Punk Rock Movie”, and made videos for a number of musicians including The Clash, Bob Marley, The Pretenders, and The Fun Boy Three. Mick asked him to join the new group to help to contribute non-musical ideas to the project, which would include taking responsibility for the cinematic samples that became a feature of both BAD’s records and their live performances.
Don spoke of how he came to be involved with Big Audio Dynamite during an interview with the Pop Matters website in July 2002:

“Don’t call me a musician. Mick got me involved 'cause my ideas were strictly non-musical. I took a cinematic approach to song writing, hence the script-type lyrics and samples, which was my department. When we played live my keyboard had coloured stickers on the keys to show me what to do. That's punk rock!”

Leo had been on board since the band’s first incarnation as TRAC, but with Topper Headon and John Boy Leonard now out of the picture, a new drummer Greg Roberts was recruited via the traditional way of an advertisement Mick placed in the New Musical Express. For a short while the band would remain a four piece. However, when photographer Dan Donovan arrived to take early publicity shots, he mentioned that he was also a keyboard player, and Mick told Dan that there was a place in the photographs, and indeed in the band, for him too.

The first gigs took place during 1984, and showcased material that was still in the production stages. A partial bootleg recording of a concert at the Sheffield Leadmill on July 10, 1984 included performances of early demos “Strike”, “Nation”, and “Interaction”, which gave indications of the unique sound that was beginning to evolve, along with a version of the song that became BAD’s first single, “The Bottom Line”.

“Keep Off The Grass”, a reworked dance version of the “Bonanza” theme, complete with samples was also performed at a number of early shows, and whilst this track was never issued commercially, most fans are familiar with it as it continued to be used as a show opener when the band was well established.

BAD recorded demos during December 1984, and these included four songs, namely, “The Bottom Line”, “Sudden Impact”, “BAD”, and “Sony” which would find their way on to their debut album. Another track from this period, “She Beast” was not commercially released, but became a favourite with the fans at the early shows.
The first BAD single “The Bottom Line” was released in 1985. It had been written towards the end of Mick’s Clash career, and was originally titled “Trans Cash Free Pay One”. The song was a hybrid of hip hop beats, and a simple but catchy guitar riff, along with a voice sample proclaiming, “The horses are on the track!”

The 12” version featured raga style toasting from Don Letts and Leo Williams during the second part of the song, in contrast to Mick’s punk singing style during part one. The single was well received, but failed to make the UK top 40. “The Bottom Line” was backed by a remix of “BAD”, and over in the U.S. Def Jam records supremo Rick Rubin was suitably impressed, and put out his own mixes of the two tracks on a Def Jam 12” single.

This was a major honour for the band, making them label-mates with some of acts that had inspired them, and placing them at the forefront of the new movement.
The album “This Is Big Audio Dynamite” was issued in October 1985 at the same time as The Clash’s new line-up released their own new album “Cut The Crap”. Many reviewers compared the merits of both albums, with “This Is Big Audio Dynamite” generally getting the more favourable reviews. In Rolling Stone no.465, David Fricke called the album “an unexpected gamble” from Mick, but acknowledged that it heralded “a new beginning” for him, whilst he referred to The Clash’s efforts on “Cut The Crap” as “retro-punk”.

Mick reflected on the initial reactions to “This Is Big Audio Dynamite” and the shows that preceded the album during the Def II interview:

“When we first did our first LP…people thought what’s this? They saw the cover and people thought oh, he’s got some dreads in the group he’s gonna make reggae records…and when we came out and we were playing this music…this is even before we had the record out, we’d do some gigs you know, and we just made a horrendous racket, and we were like the first people in this country to have samplers, you know.”

BAD promoted the new album with a short six date tour of the UK in November 1985. This was followed by a one off date at the Porchester Hall in London on February 6, 1986 before BAD flew out to play two dates in the USA. 1986 saw the release of BAD’s second single “E=MC2”, a song influenced by the films of Nicholas Roeg, and regarded by many as the strongest track on their debut album.
BIG AUDIO DYNAMITE
SPY PARTY
THURSDAY 6th FEBRUARY
LIVE AT THE PORCHESTER HALL
PORCHESTER ROAD, LONDON W.2.
DOORS OPEN 8.00 p.m. / DAMAGE £3.50. ADVANCE TICKETS FROM
The song incorporated a number of samples, most notably from Roeg’s 1968 film, “Performance”, which starred Mick Jagger, and its video, directed by Don Letts and Roeg’s son Luc, used clips from Roeg’s films including “The Man Who Fell To Earth”, “Don’t Look Back”, and “Insignificance”.

The single captured the public’s imagination and gave BAD their first hit record, reaching number 11 in the UK charts. It is now regarded as the first rock hit to incorporate sampling techniques.

Spurred on by their recent success BAD toured the UK throughout April, May, and June, and issued the track “Medicine Show” as the third single from their debut album. The single gave BAD yet another top thirty hit, reaching number 29 in the UK charts during the summer. Like “E=MC2” the track bore little relation to the majority of the music that was dominating the charts at this time, taking a cynical but realistic look at the media’s influence over consumerism.

Whilst recording their first album BAD had held regular film shows in the studio’s green room and many of the movies they screened had provided the inspiration and cinematic samples that appeared on both “E=MC2” and “Medicine Show”, with samples from the western films, “A Fistful Of Dollars”, “The Treasure Of The Sierra Madre”, “A Fistful Of Dynamite”, and most famously “The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly” being used on the latter.
The advertising campaign for the single borrowed the phrase from “The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly”, “one bastard goes in and another comes out”, using a photo of Mick toting a machine gun which was taken from the video shoot.

The video gave a faithful and amusing recreation of the themes explored in the song, and featured cameo appearances from former Clash compadre’s Joe Strummer, and Paul Simonon, along with former Sex Pistols front man John Lydon.

“This Is Big Audio Dynamite” was given the Legacy Edition treatment by Columbia in 2010 to mark the 25th anniversary of its original release. The two CD set included a number of alternate mixes and 12” versions, along with an unreleased track from the sessions, “Electric Vandal”.

As work started on BAD’s second album, Mick’s former Clash song-writing partner Joe Strummer was invited to join them in the studio. Typically, Joe slept under the piano in the recording studio, and also got involved with the song-writing process. Four years after the release of “Combat Rock”, the legendary Strummer/Jones partnership was back in business.

Produced by Joe and Mick, the album boasted the five Strummer/Jones originals: “Beyond The Pale”, “Limbo the Law”, “V Thirteen”, “Ticket”, and “Sightsee MC!” Whilst the album’s title, “No. 10 Upping Street”, was also suggested by Joe as an alternative to the ‘downer’ of Downing Street during the Thatcher years.

Joe and Mick also collaborated on further material during this period, with a view to contributing songs to a film soundtrack. Whilst none of this material has seen the light of day, one of the songs they wrote together, “U.S. North” was a feature of BAD’s live shows during the early part of 1987, whilst another “Dog in a Satellite” has also surfaced online.
The first single from the album “C’mon Every Beat Box” was written by Mick and Don, and was similar in structure to the Eddie Cochran classic “Summertime Blues”. Added break beats, an anti racist message in the true spirit of The Clash and samples from a number of movies including the “Cotton Club”, and “Batman” gave the song its trademark BAD sound. Star Hits magazine’s description of the song as “Eddie Cochran meets Run DMC in MacDonald’s”, was a fairly accurate summary for any late arrivals to the party.

The song narrowly missed out on the UK top 40; despite the added bonus of a free one sided white label 12” of the Def Jam remix of “The Bottom Line” being given away with the 12” version. Speaking to Janice Long earlier in the year during an interview for BBC radio one, Mick had cited Def Jam recording artists The Beastie Boys as one of his current favourite artists, along with Prince whose work would influence a number of future BAD recordings. Mick’s reference to Prince came as no surprise, given that BAD had been closing their shows with a cover of Prince’s “1999” since late 1985.

“No.10 Upping Street” was released in November 1986, and whilst some tracks had a more of a rock feel to them, the mix of break beats and samples which had been a feature of the first BAD album were still prominent overall. The lyrics addressed the social and political issues of the time, and whilst this had also been a feature of BAD’s first album, it was accentuated here, with Joe Strummer’s inimitable contributions to the song writing process.
Again reviews were favourable; with some critics drawing comparisons to how the original line up of The Clash may have sounded approaching the late '80's, had they not imploded after the release of “Combat Rock”. And whilst a full reformation of Mick’s former band was out of the question, BAD’s front man had always seen his new band as a continuation of The Clash’s ideals and philosophy. Therefore, it must have been satisfying for all concerned to see the media pick up on this, whilst recognising the achievements of Big Audio Dynamite in their own right.

The album was promoted by an eleven-date tour of the UK during November, and BAD’s hard work paid off as the album rose to the top ten of the UK album charts. The tour ended at the Brixton Academy, London on November 15, 1986, and footage from this show was used in the video for BAD’s next single “V Thirteen”, which would be issued the following year. The video would also feature a cameo appearance by Mick’s friend and maverick scouse genius, Pete Wylie.

BAD played a one off gig at the 1018 Club in New York City on December 13, before seeing out the year with a final appearance at the Brixton Academy, London on December 15.

A remixed version of “V Thirteen” was issued as a single during early 1987, and BAD toured the UK during February and March in support of the single. On this tour the band chose to play smaller venues, and a club type atmosphere ensued, with a number of support acts being given a chance to impress before BAD took to the stage.

Like “C’mon Every Beatbox”, “V Thirteen” narrowly missed the UK top forty, despite receiving quite a bit of airplay at the time of its release. ‘Club’ and ‘Dub’ mixes of “Hollywood Boulevard” were coupled with the lead track, and promos of “Hollywood Boulevard” were also circulated.
Following their UK tour, BAD toured the USA and Europe before returning to London for dates at the Hibernian club and the Brixton Academy in November and December respectively. The “Upping Street” album was given a final promotion push with the release of a third single “Sightsee MC!” which was accompanied by a promo video directed by Jim Jarmusch. Four different mixes of “Sightsee” featured on the 12” single, but as the track had already been available on the album for the best part of a year, the single only just scraped into the top 100 in the UK.

BAD spent the first half of 1988 working on their new album, and the first single from these sessions “Just Play Music” was issued in the spring. The single had a more mainstream pop sound, and included samples from the 1960’s TV programme “Jukebox Jury”, along with the voice of ’60’s pop promoter Larry Parnes. The video used footage shot during the summer of 1987, when BAD had played large outdoor venues supporting U2 in the USA and Europe. Again the single was only a minor hit, narrowly missing the UK top forty.
BAD’s third album “Tighten Up Volume 88” was released in June, and featured cover art by former Clash bassist Paul Simonon. The album took its title from the influential series of Trojan reggae compilation albums issued during the 1970’s. Reviews were not quite as favourable this time around, and “The Battle Of All Saints Road”, a semi autobiographical re-write of “The Battle Of New Orleans” featuring elements of the BAD story, raga style toasting, and a sample from the Trojan ska classic, “The Great Wuga Wuga” by Sir Lord Comic, was one of the only tracks that the critics seemed to agree on.

If the legend of The Clash had given a positive slant to the reviews of “No.10 Upping Street”, Mick’s former band appeared to cast a much darker shadow over the “Tighten Up” set. The album was overflowing with radio friendly tunes, but perhaps lacked the cutting edge that some critics were looking for.

With subject matters such as the predictions of a local newspaper astrologist on “Mr Walker Said”, a forgotten, eccentric blues guitar hero called “Esquerita”, or songs that simply celebrated the joy of living such as “Rock Non Stop” and “Champagne”, the album was considered a little too light for most critic’s tastes.

Of course, any criticism aimed at the album would be justified by subtle reminders that these tunes came from the pen of an ex member of The Clash, but the irony of these comments would not be lost on Mick and the band. As it appeared that the criticism levelled at some of The Clash’s albums upon their original release had now been conveniently forgotten.
In truth the album was unfairly dismissed by most critics. Along with “The Battle of All Saint’s Road”, the Prince influenced “Applecart” was a classy pop song with real hit potential, and whilst social and political issues didn’t dominate this collection, they were there all the same. In the shape of the album’s underrated title track, the Tommy Steele style Jones/Letts composition “Funny Names” which addressed racial intolerance, and “2000 Shoes” which was an ode to the obsessions of Imelda Marcos.

The album showcased an entertaining mix of styles overall, and remains a favourite with the BAD fan-base despite the (mostly) negative critical reaction.
BIG AUDIO DYNAMITE
ON TOUR.

MCP Presents

NEWCASTLE MAYFAIR SUITE
SUNDAY 17th JULY 8.00 pm
Tickets: £6.00
Available from B/O Tel: 091-252 3109. Volume Records,
Old Hitz Records Newcastle, Virgin Records Durham,
Sunderland, South Shields, Other Record Shop Hartlepool,
Newhouse Music Middlesbrough
(Subject to a Booking Fee). No U18’s Admitted.

LIVERPOOL ROYAL COURT
MONDAY 18th JULY 7.30 pm
Tickets: £6.00
Available from B/O Tel: 051-709 4321
and all usual agents.

BRADFORD ST. GEORGES HALL
FRIDAY 22nd JULY 7.30 pm
Tickets: £6.00
Available from B/O Tel: 0274-752000.
Cavendish Leeds and Huddersfield Information Centre.

BIRMINGHAM POWERHOUSE
TUESDAY 26th JULY 8.00 pm
Tickets: £6.00
Available from B/O Tel: 021-643 4715, Odens Theatre,
Ticket Shop, Oasis & Tamfest Records Birmingham,
Poster Place Coventry (Subject to a Booking Fee).
No U18’s Admitted.

BRISTOL STUDIO BALLROOM
MONDAY 25th JULY 7.30 pm
Tickets: £6.00
Available from B/O Tel: 0272-276183, Virgin, Revolver
and Rival Records Bristol and Bath
(Subject to a Booking Fee). No U18’s Admitted

PORTSMOUTH GUILDHALL
WEDNESDAY 27th JULY 7.30 pm
Tickets: £6.00
Available from B/O Tel: 0705-824355
and all usual agents.

NEWPORT CENTRE
SUNDAY 24th JULY 7.30 pm
Tickets: £6.00
Available from B/O Tel: 0633-59676
and all usual agents.

TOWN & COUNTRY CLUB
FRI/SAT/SUN 29/30/31 JULY 8.00 pm
Tickets: £7.00
Available from B/O Tel: 01-397 3394, LTB, Premier,
Keith Prowse (Credit Card 071-741 8989). Open All Hours
and Stargreen (Subject to a Booking Fee).
No U18’s Admitted.
BAD toured the UK during June and July in support of the album, and decided to overlook a number of the album’s more commercial tracks, when “The Other 99” was chosen as the second single from the album.

The single had a similar melody to Bruce Springsteen’s “Hungry Heart” with a lyric that celebrated the positive, ‘glass is half full’ approach to life. The sampled voice of Richard Attenborough, from the acclaimed 1947 movie “Brighton Rock” can be heard at the beginning of the song, and whilst the critics felt that it was a stronger single than “Just Play Music”, the song had little impact on the UK singles chart.

Following the UK tour Mick became seriously ill with pneumonia, and BAD were inactive for the rest of the year whilst Mick recovered from his illness.
During the late eighties the Acid House movement had the biggest impact on youth culture in the UK since punk rock, and the charts and clubs were dominated by both house music, and the music of indie bands such as the Happy Mondays, The Stone Roses, and Primal Scream, who acknowledged the influence of modern dance music along with that of classic ‘60’s rock and soul records, a sound which the critics dubbed, “indie dance”.

The acid house movement was obviously an influence on BAD’s new songs, and when their fourth album, “Megatop Phoenix” was issued in September 1989, the dance influence could be heard throughout the collection. During an interview on the BBC2 programme Def II shortly after the album’s release Mick discussed the influence of house music on the band’s new material:

“I've been really influenced, like even though I wasn't even there, by the what's been happening at acid house, you know, but it's not like...all the group say 'you can't make an acid house record', which I'm not anyway, but they don't want me to, 'cause they think that everybody will laugh at us, you know what I mean, for jumping on last years bandwagon, you know it's like 'flaccid!' (laughs) but that's not what I'm interested in, I'm interested in the next bit along.”

In the search for ‘the next bit along’ the influence of modern dance music had been added to the already eclectic mix that made up the BAD sound, and whilst there was an obvious dance influence running throughout the album, and songs that made reference to the club scene, the band’s earlier influences were still evident.

Therefore, the resulting album was very much an original Big Audio Dynamite record, rather than an attempt to jump on the acid house or indie dance bandwagon.
BIG-AUDIO DYNAMITE

"MEGATOP PHOENIX."

THE NEW ALBUM FEATURING THE TRACKS JAMES BROWN AND CONTACT

B.A.D. GETS SUPER-BAD!

PRODUCED BY MICK JONES & BILL PRICE

ON COLUMBIA CASSETTES, COMPACT DISCS AND RECORDS.
“James Brown”, a homage to the eccentric lifestyle of ‘the godfather of soul’, was issued as a promo single for the album, and this track was also given a full single release over in the U.S. The video for the track cast Don in the role of J.B. and the 12” remix also featured samples of the man himself.

In the U.K. the first single to be issued from the album was “Contact”. A radio friendly pop song which sampled the guitar riff from The Who’s “Can’t Explain”, before evolving into a dance track.

In both videos, the influence of club culture is evident in the band’s appearance, with longer hairstyles, Stussy bucket hats, and the looser, sportier attire that was favoured by all night ravers.
Elsewhere on the album the sampled voices of Arthur Scargill, Alfred Hitchcock, and Bernard Cribbins could be heard, as the music took in elements of The Beatles, Prince, and dub reggae, along with the aforementioned club sounds. Further samples included a steal from The Pretty Things’ “S.F. Sorrow”, the theme music from “The Great Escape” and George Formby!

Only BAD could produce an album that managed to successfully combine so many diverse influences, and produce a sound that was unmistakably their own.

Reviews for “Megatop Phoenix” were generally good, and the band toured the UK between September and December to promote the album. Club culture was also influencing the band’s live performances, and with additional samples from current club hits being thrown into the mix, the roots of the next incarnation of the band, BAD II, started to emerge.

The original line up of the band bowed out with a song called “Free”, which was written for the movie “Flashback”. The film starred Kiefer Sutherland and Dennis Hopper, whose sampled voices could be heard on the record.

Don, Leo, and Greg then left the band to form their own group Screaming Target. Leo and Greg would also go on to enjoy further success with Dreadzone, who are still going strong today.

1990 saw the formation of Big Audio Dynamite II, and Mick explained the reasons for the personnel changes during a later interview with Pulse magazine during 1995:

"Without being too Sergio Mendes about it, Jones’ phrase for waxing analytical, the history of B.A.D. divides neatly into two phases. There was a ‘80s band ("We just got fed up with each other"). Now, there’s a ‘90s band ("They came up out of the ranks, out of the audience.")
The new personnel consisted of Nick Hawkins on guitar, Gary Stonadge on bass, and Chris Kavanagh (who had previously worked with Sigue Sigue Sputnik) on drums. Andre Shapps, who had previously worked as a roadie, also started to work with the band and co-produce tracks with Mick. Early live dates in Europe during March also featured original keyboard player Dan Donovan before he left the band later in the year.

Concerts were recorded at the Paradiso, Amsterdam on March 23, and London’s Alexandra Palace on August 10, and a compilation from the two shows was released in 1991 as the ‘legal bootleg’ album, “Ally Pally Paradiso” which was given away with BAD II’s first full album, “The Globe”.

The first new material from BAD II to be issued in the UK was an eight-track album titled “Kool Aid” in 1990. The album was a limited edition, and intended as an introduction to the new band.

Amongst the highlights were the opening track “Change Of Atmosphere”, a great rock song that sampled both The Who’s classic “Baba O’ Reilly”, and a routine from British actor and comic genius Peter Sellers, “Innocent Child” a straight rock ballad that recalls Mick’s early musical influences, particularly Ian Hunter and Mott The Hoople, a re-worked version of “Free” by the new band, which was re-titled “Kickin’ In”, and the album’s title track “Kool Aid” which sampled Bob Marley’s “Could You Be Loved” before anybody else had thought about doing it.

The two guitars clash of Mick and Nick Hawkins certainly gave the new band a different sound, and this was even more evident during their live appearances. On the album whilst “Change Of Atmosphere” (despite the samples) and “Innocent Child” veered towards a more traditional rock sound, the influence of club culture was still very much in evidence over the rest of the album, which was a natural progression from the mighty “Megatop”.
Further concerts followed with a short UK tour during December. The band now had DJ’s on stage with them, playing records both between, and during each track so that the show was presented in a rave style.

Mick also collaborated with Aztec Camera front man Roddy Frame during 1990 on the song “Good Morning Britain” which they had written together. The song was included on Aztec Camera’s excellent “Stray” album, and made the UK top twenty when released as a single credited to ‘Aztec Camera with Mick Jones’.

In 1991 BAD II’s first full album “The Globe” was released. Shawn Stussy designed the cover art, and the band continued to wear Stussy clothing almost exclusively during this period.
Some of the material from the limited “Kool Aid” album, was included on “The Globe”, but different mixes were used for this release, and the lead track “Rush” which had appeared on the “Kool Aid” album as “Change Of Atmosphere”, also underwent a title change. The success of “Rush” in the U.S. was instrumental in the album going gold stateside, and the single was voted Best Modern Rock Song of 1991 by Billboard.

During the same year The Clash’s “Should I Stay Or Should I Go” was re-issued after featuring in an advertising campaign for Levis’ 501’s, and it reached No.1 in the UK. Mick had included “Rush” as the double A side to The Clash’s re-issued single, and whilst it was The Clash track that got all the airplay, this did bring the music of BAD II to the attention of U.K. audiences. During a BAD II tour Mick gave an interview to the television show New Music in Toronto and explained his decision to allow “Should I Stay Or Should I Go” to be used for the Levis advertisement:

“I wouldn’t have done it ten years ago, but I did it now because that’s what it’s like now, you see… (and) if you wanna be out there, that’s what you do. And also it opened up a whole door for a lot of people who never knew about The Clash before. We’ve got a new audience now.”

He also brought the attention back to his new band by saying:

“People keep harping on about it, (The Clash) but I’m actually out here doing something now that I’m really into, and people out there really like it, and so people keep coming on, and harping on about The Clash all the time, you know, and it’s years ago, and I’m doing something now which is great”.
During the same interview Mick was asked about the samples used on “The Globe” album, including the use of The Who’s “Baba O’ Reilly” on “Rush”, and The Clash’s “Should I Stay Or Should I Go” on the album’s title track, and commented:

“We’re not in awe of our past in any way, you know, we bring it forward with us. I think it’s always important to show were you come from, and as far as sampling yourself, I think everybody else is doing it, so why not?”

The band toured the UK during August, and followed this with a date at the Sound Factory in New York on September 9. Mick played a short solo set at the New York Palladium on September 28, and this was followed by dates in Chicago and Minneapolis, before the band’s final UK gig of the year at the 051 club in Liverpool on December 19.

BAD II started 1992 with a concert at the Town and Country Club, London on January 31, before leaving the UK to play two dates in Melbourne, Australia on March 5, and 6th. This was followed by a number of American dates headlining MTV’s 120 Minutes Tour along with Public Image Ltd, and Blind Melon.
“The Globe” was issued as a single, and a remix by The Orb was also released. The band played further US dates with U2 and Public Enemy, and a third single from “The Globe” album, “Innocent Child” was also issued in some countries.

A live EP titled “On The Road Live ’92” featuring a version of “Kool Aid” recorded at the Riviera Theatre, Chicago on October 5, 1991, and versions of “Can’t Wait”, “Contact”, “Innocent Child” and “Rush” recorded during BAD II’s headline slot on MTV’s 120 Minutes Tour at The Ritz, New York City on April 24, 1992 was also released.
During 1993 BAD II toured with U2 on their Zoo TV tour, performing dates in Australia and Japan. To tie in with the tour a double CD titled “The Lost Treasures of Big Audio Dynamite” was released exclusively in these two countries. The album compiled deleted twelve inch remixes by BAD I & II, along with a new track called “Looking for a Song” which sampled “Get up and Dance” by Afrika Bambaata.
Versions of “Innocent Child” and “I Don’t Know” had also been included in the soundtrack to the 1993 film “Amongst Friends”, and both these tracks and two solo performances from Mick Jones “Long Island”, and the instrumental “No Ennio” were included on the soundtrack album. Out takes of Mick’s work on the “Amongst Friends” soundtrack are also circulating amongst BAD fans.

In 1994 BAD II shortened their name to Big Audio as a homage to their Liverpool fan base who had always referred to the band in this way, and put out their first new material since 1991, with the full release of the single “Looking for a Song”, and the album “Higher Power”. The band was bolstered by the addition of two new members, namely Andre Shapps on keyboards, and D.J. Zonka (Michael Custance) who also provided additional percussion and backing vocals.

The album was promoted with a seven date UK tour in November. A promotional CD featuring songs from the album recorded live, along with a question and answer session from Mick Jones called “Modern Rock Live from London” was issued to radio stations to promote the album.
Several mixes of “Looking for a Song” were issued, and one version of the single included live versions of “Rush”, and a reworked “Medicine Show” which had been recorded at the Mick Ronson Benefit Concert at London’s Hammersmith Apollo, on April 24, 1994.

Two videos were shot to promote “Looking for a Song” and the track was a minor hit in the U.K.

A promo version of “Looking for a Song” featured a new track called “Mirror Man” which was written by, and sampled the voice of Lionel Bart, along with an extra CD titled “Greatest Hits - The Radio Edits” which compiled the singles by BAD I& II released to date.

A further cover of the old Tommy Steel hit “Rock with the Caveman” was recorded for the soundtrack of the 1994 movie “The Flintstones”, and this was issued on the resulting soundtrack album.

In 1995 CBS released “Planet BAD - The Greatest Hits”, whilst the band signed a new deal with Radioactive Records and released the album “F-Punk” in June, under their original name of Big Audio Dynamite"."
Most of the promotion for the album was undertaken in the U.S. where the band toured between October and November, before returning to the UK for performances in Birmingham and Liverpool on December 20 and 21 respectively. The album was much more guitar orientated than previous BAD albums, although club influences were still very much in evidence.

“I Turned Out A Punk” was issued as a single to promote the album with initial promotion copies being issued on a blank disc without the band’s name. The single also featured on the CBS compilation, and a video was shot to promote the track.

A video was also shot for another of the album’s more punk orientated offerings, “Psycho Wing”.
Guitar World magazine called “F-Punk”:

“(BAD’s) most cohesive (album) since This Is Big Audio Dynamite, bridging the gap between rock and underground dance music…this time acid house, ambient and the ultra-fast beats of jungle.”

Pulse Magazine also ran a feature on the album, and again the reaction was favourable:

“For all its brittle beatbox rhythms and guitar crunch, F-Punk is a pop record. It has the texture of a made thing: self-consciously shaped, not spontaneously generated. Still, it’s in no way precious, slick and overworked. B.A.D. doesn’t disguise labour.

It employs craftsmanship as a means of generating music that sounds casual, unstudied and, occasionally, downright ragged. And that’s no mean feat.”

"The words were first this time," says Jones. "I had a tape machine. I worked on the rhythm of the words by reading them. Then, I put them down. I put the chords later. I’ve never done that before."

"The technique works. F-Punk’s songs subordinate lyric content to speech cadences. That explains their anthemic quality. They're catchy and chant-like because they're built on simple, repeatable phrases. Jones describes BAD's working methods...

We learn the song in the morning, and we record it in the afternoon. We record it very basically, with the band all playing together. Then, we take it to another place; we remix parts of it. That's how you come to hear the band really playing and, the next minute, it's completely different. It's not like funny time signatures or anything."

"As a role model, then, what is Big Audio Dynamite recommending? Nothing more (or less) profound than this: keep the faith, Percy Faith / I'm gonna try I swear. It's a line from F-Punk's It's a Jungle Out There. In plain English, standard American translation it means, Kids, love guitars with a vengeance, but don't ever be afraid of keyboards."
Despite these positive reviews the album wasn't a major commercial success, and the next year BAD would play no live dates at all, as they worked on new material, which would see them change direction once again.

Work started on BAD's second album for Radioactive, “Entering a New Ride” during 1996. Chris Kavanagh and Gary Stonadge had already left the band, whilst guitarist Nick Hawkins played on the sessions, but left to form his own band Dynamo Jo, after the album was completed. New members Joe Attard (DJ/vocals), Bob Wond (drums/vocals), and Daryl Fulstow (bass/vocals) were recruited along with Ranking Roger (vocals) who had previously enjoyed success with both The Beat and General Public. There were now two DJ's in the band, and the emphasis switched from the guitar driven music of the “F-Punk” album, to music that once again reflected current trends in UK club culture.

Unlike “Megatop Phoenix” though, Mick's vocals were not present throughout the album, and he was credited as being the guitarist and MC. This meant other members of the group contributed more to the album vocally than on any previous BAD project, and it sounded somewhat different to anything the band had issued before. So different, in fact, that Radioactive Records refused to release the album when it was finished, as it seems they couldn’t work out how to market a band who could change styles so dramatically from one album to the next.

Promotion copies of both the single “Sunday Best”, and the album were circulated, and Norman Cook a.k.a Fat Boy Slim gave the “Sunday Best” single the following enthusiastic review in Wax magazine:

“Mick Jones’ Ladbroke Grove contingent return from an all too long absence with a shockingly good record. For my mind this venerable statesman of rock/dance crossover has a genius for keeping up with the pace of underground dance and incorporating it into his own sound. Mick carries on with his love affair with promoting London as his beloved metropolis after dark, but he’s interjected the social/big beat - breaks and sirens to astounding effect. Remember this was the man who in the Clash introduced a generation of NME readers to rap, funk and reggae, and if you don’t like the A side there’s a tough instrumental on the flip. Go ahead London.”
Despite these positive comments Radioactive refused to change their stance, and both the single and the album remained officially unreleased. BAD fans started an internet campaign known as "BAD Aid", in which all fans were encouraged to write to Radioactive records showing an interest in the unreleased album, and requesting its release, but despite a great deal of time and effort by a number of BAD fans the album remains in the Radioactive vaults to this day.

Pro-quality CDR copies have been circulating amongst BAD fans for a number of years now. So in the end the BAD fans didn’t lose out, but the record company did, and in many respects so did the band, as the album really deserved it’s full release, and the royalties that would have come from it.

BAD played two dates in Hull on August 9, and 10th 1997, as part of a Mick Ronson tribute, and this marked the first and last time that any of the material from the “Entering a New Ride” album was played live.
The BAD Sound System was formed during 1997 and consisted of DJ’s Mickey Custance and Joe Attard, Andre Shapps on keyboards and samples, and Mick as the MC. The Sound System held regular DJ sessions at Club Maximum in London, but it seems that Radioactive Records’ decision not to release the “Entering” album signalled the end of Big Audio Dynamite as a band, with the name only being associated with the Sound System after BAD’s final appearances in Hull in August 1997.

1998 saw the BAD Sound System play further dates in the UK and Europe, and they also remixed records for other artists including DJ Punk Roc, and Hurricane #1 (1999). The official Big Audio Dynamite website: www.bad.co.uk was launched in 1999, and tracks and out takes from the unreleased “Entering a New Ride” album were made available as MP3’s on the site.

In 2010 a 25th anniversary Legacy Edition of “This Is Big Audio Dynamite” was issued, and rumours about the original line up of the band reforming began to circulate.

Mick along with former Clash bassist, Paul Simonon, had been touring the world with Gorillaz, and this had obviously given him the appetite for going back on the road again. In April 2010 Don Letts told Billboard.com that a re-union was being considered for 2011, saying:

"I could lie to you and say 'Not in a million years,' but...if Mick wasn't tied up with Gorillaz it might happen this year. (Mick) has looked at me and said, 'Maybe next year,' but who knows. I've got to admit that in the past I'm not a great one for reformations; I always think if you're lucky in life, you get a window of opportunity, use it to the best of your ability and then fuck off and let someone else have their turn. But here I am 25 years down the line considering the thing."
The reformation of the original line up of BAD was officially confirmed on 25th January 2011 with the announcement of a 9 date UK tour, which delighted fans that had probably given up hope of ever seeing the band in action again.

From late March to early September BAD toured the world, played festivals, and appeared on prime time TV. Reviews were good, with the better writers also pointing out that music the band recorded all those years ago, was not only influential but underappreciated too, and we finally saw the band get the acclaim they deserved for being so far ahead of the game all those years ago:

‘Not just a reformation - this is their time’ – The Times

‘They remain a joy’ – The Observer

‘Easily the reformation of the year’ – The News of the World

Don also said that further Legacy Editions of BAD’s albums were being considered:

"There’s definitely more stuff; whether Sony thinks it's worthwhile, that's another matter. But there seems to be a lot of respect for Big Audio Dynamite. Time has shown that a lot of the things we were dabbling in back then have come to manifest themselves today...so hopefully we'll get to do some more."

Original keyboard player, Dan Donovan left the band before their Glastonbury appearance, and was replaced by Davo who now plays both keys and guitar with the band. Reasons for Dan’s departure remain private, and whilst it was a shame to see an original band member go, the introduction of Davo has really given BAD a new edge. His guitar work complements Mick’s playing superbly, and this has really added to the 21st Century BAD live experience.

At the time of writing nothing has been confirmed for 2012, but with rumours of a new album, and further Legacy releases still in the pipeline, there may well be new chapters that have yet to be written in the history of this great band. Go ahead London...
It seems odd that many Big Audio Dynamite fans didn't follow Dreadzone when the original line up went their separate ways. I myself followed Mick and the BAD moniker when he went on to form Big Audio Dynamite 2 with completely new personnel. I did however keep my ears and eyes open to what was going on for the other band members even though I was still following BAD 2 who went some way to healing the pain when the original line up split.

The other four members of the original along with Greg's brother Steve were busy forming their own BAD 2 (Although Dan stayed on with BAD2 for some time and was drafted in a little later) in fact it was more of a BAD 2 considering the line up. Screaming Target named after Jamaican deejay Big Youth's debut album featured Don on main vocal duties. Its difficult to understand why many BAD fans remained following Mick's projects which went on to Big Audio then on to Big Audio Dynamite again with many personnel changes along the way, without following the bigger percentage of the band.

Screaming Target as a group discontinued after just the one stunning album 'Hometown Hi-Fi' and two singles 'Who killed king tubby?' and 'Knowledge and numbers'. The album featured Dan Donovan on keys as well as Tim bran and Jon Roberts with Chrissie Hynde and Pete Wylie appearing also. Chezere was the female addition who supplied vocals and footwork according to the album insert.

As a fan it's difficult to have a complete lineage to the beginnings and endings of each band and its various members, time and age conspire against me. But two years after the release of Hometown Hi-fi, Dreadzone (The name was suggested by Don Letts) released their debut album 360 degrees (Actually released by Greg Roberts and Tim Bran as a duo with Leo and Dan joining after the album's release) followed by Performance, a strange 6 track live album which was recorded straight from mixing desk to standard audio cassette with Alison Goldfrapp providing vocals and Dan Donovan still sharing keys and FX with Tim Bran.
The Dreads became festival favourites and the following years saw 'Second light'
'Biological radio' 'Sound' along with an extended version, ‘Once upon a time’ followed a
radio 1 sessions album and ‘Live at Sunrise’ followed the year after in 2006. Beatz and
bobz volume 4 was mixed by the Dreadzone soundsystem and Dreadzone were respon-
sible for a great deal of remixes including Skunk Anansie and Garbage to name but a
few. In 2010 The Dreads latest studio album was released 'Eye on the horizon'.

The band personnel has changed over the years with both Dan Donovan and Don Letts
having earlier input. Master of ceremonies MC Spee came on board in 2000 and both
Chris Oldfield and Chris Compton joined in 2007. This followed a year of tragedy when
Greg’s brother and band guitarist Steve Roberts sadly passed away.
After 2010’s ‘Eye on the horizon’ the band released a kind of first instalment of greatest hits album ‘The Good the Bad and the Dread’ Greg made it very clear it was an impossible job to fit 18 years of music making on to one disc and suggested a possibility would be to release further instalments. The band have covered so many genres in their music, it still remains hard for me to explain their sound, listening to ‘360 degrees’ then perhaps to ‘Eye on the horizon’ one would be excused for presuming two different bands. And in many ways that is probably quite true, regardless of personnel changes Dreadzone have evolved and morphed into a different sound over and over but the vibe remains the same.

The real Dread experience is live. I have seen my fair share of bands live but the Dreads pretty much top the lot, atmosphere, sound, vibe, the lot. Added to that the fan friendly attitude of the band, it is a fantastic and unforgettable experience to see them perform live. I have had the good fortune to meet the band and I can say they are the finest and most friendly people you could hope to meet. It is testament to the band that they always make time for their fans; they are approachable, kind and generous with their time and make you feel part of the Dread family. It’s an added bonus that as a fan it’s not just the music that appeals but also the band members who make being a Dreadzone fan that little bit more special.

The Soundsystem remains an added entity to the Dread phenomena and offer a great opportunity to sample the Dread flavour. It a strange thing to try and describe but when you listen to Dreadzone you just know it’s them, even though some of their tunes couldn’t be more different. They have managed to evolve and change their sound yet have kept it too...a paradox if ever I heard one but it’s true. I suppose it’s similar to BAD, you knew it was them whenever you heard them. The difference is that Dreadzone have covered trance, dub, break beat, hip hop, ska and reggae styles to name but a few much in the keeping of Greg and Leo’s musical roots. Dreadzone just get stronger and stronger, when BAD reformed in 2011 Greg & Leo still managed to keep to their Dread duties and even played Glasto with both bands........!!

In a nutshell Dreadzone have many aspects to them that I would imagine BAD would have had, had they continued. But they also have so much more; MC Spee and Earl 16 complement each other on vocals and Greg applies some delightful beats with the ever present drum machine and Apple Mac combining to make a backdrop to the whole experience. With a riddim section that has been together for the best part of 30 years it’s not hard to understand why they are so damn awesome.
Greg produces, Dj’s and writes and has taken Dreadzone forward time and time again. When I met him at a recent gig he was talking of continuing to do that and wanting more fans, and discussing what sounds he wanted for the new album. In my eyes he is an underrated pioneer and nothing seems to have quenched his desire to make music of the highest calibre whilst always pushing the boundaries for new sound experiences.

I look forward to what’s next and get the feeling there is plenty to come…. In all my years as a fan of music, nothing excites me more than the anticipation of a new Dread tune…reminiscent of teenage years following BAD.

So all you BAD fans who may have missed out on Dreadzone, it’s never too late, the back catalogue is available if you look hard, I still hunt down the odd vinyl and oddity on ebay. Most of the albums are readily available and fun can be had seeking and nailing a couple of the rarer discs.

The Dreads are back in the studio as I write & I for one am hugely excited at the thought of a new album. 2012 also sees the re-issue of ‘Second light’ which Greg has suggested will be released sometime in March. 2012 looks set to be even more exciting than ever.

Check out Dreadzone:

http://www.dreadzone.com/

https://twitter.com/#!/dreadzonemusic

https://www.facebook.com/dreadzone

https://www.facebook.com/groups/125944414175268/

http://gregdread.wordpress.com/
So following the success of a one off show in Liverpool to raise awareness for the Hillsborough Justice and Don’t Buy The Sun campaigns back in September, this collective of like minded performers, and a host of very special guests, decided to take the show out on the road, reach more people, and get their message across to the masses.

I was fortunate enough to attend the concert at The Ritz in Manchester on Friday 2nd, December, and it was a truly wonderful evening. The Farm opened the show with a short set that showcased their biggest hits and got the crowd into the spirit of things. Indie dance anthems “Groovy Train” and “Stepping Stone” were followed by “Love See No Colour”, and the punch the air, sing along of “All Together Now”, which has now been adopted as the tour’s signature song.

They were then joined by Pete Wylie and Davo from Big Audio Dynamite on guitar. Wylie’s songs “Come Back” and “Story Of The Blues” clearly illustrate how little things change as governments come and go, and empty promises turn to dust. Originally released during the recession hit eighties, these songs are just as relevant now as the day they were written.

Wylie has a great voice, and a larger than life personality, and his timely reminders of why these shows were taking place, were often punctuated with humourus anecdotes. He gets the message across in his own inimitable way, and his new song “The Day That Margaret Thatcher Dies” is perhaps the best example of this.

He described it as a ‘celebration’ song, explaining that whilst other artists have written anti Thatcher songs, no one has captured the celebratory mood that he expects to follow her demise. The crowd echoed these sentiments, singing the lyrics and punching the air in agreement.
After the poignant Johnny Thunders cover, “You Can’t Put Your Arms Around A Memory”, the mood was lightened again, as Wylie recounted a story about the men in suits at his record company objecting to a single release of the song “Heart As Big As Liverpool”, as they didn’t think it would sell outside of his hometown. He then joked with the audience that “they were wrong…because nobody in Liverpool fookin’ bought it either”.

A great version followed, and whilst the song may not have attained the hit status it deserved when it was originally issued, like The Farm’s “All Together Now”, it is now synonymous with this campaign. After closing his set with the wonderful “Sinful”, it was time for Mick Jones to take centre stage.

There was a real sense of anticipation about this, as Mick would be playing Clash songs, which given the odd notable exception, hadn’t happened since he was actually in the band all those years ago. Mick has certainly never used the back catalogue of his former band as an incentive to sell tickets to concerts, having followed his own path with Big Audio Dynamite, Carbon/Silicon and Gorillaz. It seems fitting therefore, that these songs are only being revisited now in the name of justice. As this is indeed in keeping with the spirit of The Clash. As Mick told John Robb during an interview when the tour hit Sheffield:

“I think Joe would be with us completely. I feel he is with us all the time. He would be pleased we are doing this for sure and that it’s not a waste of time doing the numbers for some pointless nostalgia tour”

So when the opening bars of “Train In Vain” began to echo around the venue, you could sense that people knew that they were about to witness something special. Mick may not have played these songs for nearly 30 years, but they remain a big part of many people’s lives. It was no surprise therefore, to see every word being chanted back to a beaming Mick by the ecstatic audience. This communal sing-along continued through The Clash anthems that followed. Mick taking the lead on “Should I Stay Or Should I Go”, whilst Pete Wylie and Peter Hooton lead us through “Stay Free”, “White Man In Hammersmith Palais” and “Clampdown”.

There was a truly great moment at the end of the “Clampdown” as Wylie apologised for getting some of the lyrics wrong, joking that Joe Strummer also did this all the time. After Mick replied that he didn’t recall this happening, Wylie retorted, “well, you might have been there….but I’ve got the videos!”
Now it was time for the first encore. For the other shows on this tour the guests appearing had been well publicised, but word on who might be appearing at the Manchester show had been a closely guarded secret. We had been promised something special for the encore, but as Ian Brown and John Squire walked out onto the unlit stage without announcement, I think it would be fair to say that the vast majority of the audience were not expecting this to happen. Before the encore, I didn’t think it was possible for the evening or the atmosphere inside the Ritz to get any better, but by now it felt like the roof was about to come off!

After performing “Elizabeth My Dear” from the iconic Stone Roses debut album, Ian and John were joined by Mick, Pete, Davo and The Farm for an encore of “Bankrobber” and “Armagideon Time”, with Ian taking lead vocals on “Bankrobber”. The atmosphere was electric and as everyone left the stage, the crowd were chanting for more.

Mick, Pete, Davo and The Farm returned to the stage with John Robb, who told us that they might need some help with the vocals on the next song. The band launched into “Janie Jones” and John Robb dived into the crowd, inviting people to take to the mike and be lead vocalist on this Clash classic. Who has never dreamed about that then? A good natured rush to the stage followed, with everyone down at the front trying their best to get a piece of the action.

One final encore followed as Mick lead the band through a rousing rendition of BAD II’s biggest hit, “Rush”. It had been a truly great night for a truly great cause.