

A CHAT WITH JUSTIN HAYWARD OF MOODY BLUES

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BAD RELIGION



BAD RELIGION

Tested

Dragnet/Sony (Germany DRASAMPCO 3952)

Bizarrely, Bad Religion's U.S. label, Atlantic, passed on this album; however, the band's German label felt differently, and happily for US fans, *Tested* will not only receive wide distribution Stateside, but be priced the same as a normal domestic release.

This is Bad Religion's first live record, and they are rightfully proud of it. So proud, in fact, that the album was accompanied by a two page press release explaining just how different it was from normal, run of the mill live albums. And an explanation is needed, because *Tested* doesn't sound



like ANY live record you've ever heard. The first thing you notice is just how little crowd noise there is. What happened, was the audience gagged? For there's virtually no screaming fans, few sing along with the band choruses (the most evident, and hilarious, is a German crowd stumbling over the words on "Generator"), not even wild applause after the big hits.

But, if you've ever had the good fortune to stand backstage at a show, then you'll instantly recognize the sonics of *Tested*. This is what the group actually sounds like onstage, before the music begins echoing across the auditorium, bouncing off walls, and drowned out by the shouting fans down front. Thus, what Bad Religion have produced isn't a record which brings the concert experience into your bedroom, but you into their milieu instead. The audience is not omnipresent because the album was recorded directly off the band's mikes, and while that kept crowd noise to a minimum, it also means that any missed notes and vocal errors WERE picked up, and there they remain.

And that's how it should be. For *Tested* is the true sound of Bad Religion live. It was recorded across 57 cities, here and in Europe; afterwards the group sifted through hundreds of hours of tapes, and chose the most electrifying performances of 27 of their songs. The setlist spans their entire career, pulling songs from all of their albums (bar *Into The Unknown*, of course), with only a slight emphasis given to material from *Recipe For Hate* and their last album, *The Gray Race*.

Ever, if you caught any of the shows on Bad Religion's last tour, it's unlikely you saw the set presented here. Several of the songs included were not part of the band's usual repertoire, thus the listener gets to revel in live takes of the likes of "Portrait Of Authority" and "God Song."

Three previously unreleased songs sweeten the already honey drenched pot. The first, "Dream Of Unity" is a slow, simmering number where Bobby Schayer's drum tattoo is matched by Greg Graffin's stirring vocals. "It's Reciprocal" slams across the dancefloor, and the title track steams and features some phenomenal guitar work from Brian Baker.

And, in fact, it's Baker's contribution that shines throughout *Tested*. While Schayer and bassist Jay Bentley drive the songs with their tight rhythms, and guitarist Greg Hetson provides the melody's backbone, Baker soars, swoops, and dazzles. His guitar leads give the older material not just a whole new lease on life, but a whole new twist. Still, Graffin inevitably remains the focus, and his vociferous performances sets the songs alight.

The last few years have been a true test for Bad Religion, and this album proves that the band have not only passed with flying colors, but been strengthened in the process.