

00:00:00	Music	Transition	“Crown Ones” off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs
00:00:05	Oliver	Host	<p>Hello, I’m Oliver Wang. We will be joined by Morgan Rhodes, my co-host, in the second half. She is stuck in traffic right now. But anyways, you are listening to <i>Heat Rocks</i>.</p> <p>We’re in the middle of our <i>Music and Popcorn</i> mini-series, where we invite a guest to join us to talk about a cinematic-slash-musical heat rock; and today we are rolling to Trip’s Pool Hall to play some <i>Street Fighter</i> and revisit Ernest Dickerson’s debut film from 1992, <i>Juice</i>.</p>
00:00:29	Music	Music	<p>“Nuff Respect” off the album <i>Juice</i> by Big Daddy Kane. Fast-paced, frenetic hip hop.</p> <p><i>Enter the dragon...</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]</i></p>
00:00:48	Oliver	Host	<p><i>Juice</i> opens on a Harlem morning, with an introduction to GQ, Raheem, Bishop, and Steel, four teens who spend most of their days ditching high school and jumping fences to get away from the cops. What we think begins as an ensemble piece coming of age story takes a darker turn as Bishop, played by Tupac in his first starring role, descends into madness.</p> <p>It’s perhaps fitting that this psychological thriller would be directed by Ernest Dickerson, who had cut his teeth as a cinematographer for not just Spike Lee’s early films, but also the 1980s <i>Tales from the Darkside</i> horror anthology series and then later helmed horror comedies such as <i>Demon Knight</i> and <i>Bones</i>, when he wasn’t putting in lauded television work, directing episodes of <i>The Wire</i>, <i>The Walking Dead</i>, and <i>Dexter</i>.</p> <p><i>Juice</i> became part of the hip hop cinema canon, not because it was primarily about the musical culture, but because it seemed to grasp hip hop’s early 1990s sensibilities. Rough and rugged, centering on the lives of young Black men and the occasional token women, and operating without a template or much of a budget. Dickerson might have been a generation older than most of his actors, but he seemed to have an understanding of hip hop zeitgeist in that moment, whether it was inviting the likes of DJ Red Alert and Special Ed to turn in cameos, or having Hank Shocklee and The Bomb Squad handle the store.</p> <p>The film soundtrack also captured the moment where hip hop was trading in the colorful new jack swing era for a darker palette of black bubble gooses and 20 below timbos. For every Aaron Hall croon, there was a Cypress Hill snare. For every Teddy Riley bounce, you had EPMD’s boom. And as we’ll get into, both the film and the soundtrack were a snapshot of hip hop in a transitional moment. To quote Big Daddy Kane’s contribution, “Nuff respect due.”</p>
00:02:31	Music	Music	<i>[“Nuff Respect” plays again]</i>

*I go beyond knocking them out the box  
You wanna be a comedian? Aight, where's Redd Foxx?  
So if I want you, believe I'm gonna get you  
I wouldn't give a damn if Tony Terry was with you  
So when I come in the same place as my enemy  
They all start running like their name was Sheer Energy  
I won't say what you are but I'll hit you  
You're found on a woman and a penis goes in you*

*[Music fades as Oliver speaks]*

00:02:45 Oliver Host *Juice* was the pick of our guest today, Sean Fennessey. I first met Sean going back almost 20 years, when we were both writing about hip hop for any publication that would have us. Sean became a core editor at *Vibe* magazine for part of the 2000s, before moving out west to Cali to join Bill Simmons' then new pop culture and sports venture, *Grantland*. Sean eventually became the site's executive editor, a title that he continues to hold today with *Grantland's* successor, *The Ringer*.

I had always known Sean as a music guy, but sometime over the 2000-teens, it was quickly apparent that he was also really into movies, and has brought his considerable insights into writing and talking about them on the site.

He also hosts *The Ringer* podcast on the movie industry called *The Big Picture*, and he's a frequent co-host on one of my favorite movie podcasts, *The Rewatchables*. When we first came up with the idea of *Music and Popcorn*, it was a no-brainer to try to get Sean to join us and I'm so pleased he was able to do so.

Sean, welcome to *Heat Rocks*.

00:03:47 Sean Fennessey Guest Oliver, I'm so—I'm so blessed to be here with you. Thank you for having me.

00:03:52 Oliver Host I am so excited to have you here, and part of it is I know how much you care about music and movies. And so, I was especially curious to see what movies and soundtracks you would pick for today. So, why *Juice*? Why this of all films?

00:04:06 Sean Guest Well, I'll cop to this. One, I knew if I put *Juice* on the list, you'd pick *Juice*.

*[Oliver laughs uproariously.]*

I put two—

00:04:11 Oliver Host I got baited? Damn!

00:04:12 Sean Guest I put two red meat, obvious targets that any dummy who I don't respect would have taken. I put the new Tarantino movie and I think I put *American Graffiti* on there.

*[Oliver affirms multiple times while Sean is speaking.]*

Which are wonderful films with great soundtracks that are very

meaningful to me. That being said, I've known you for 15 years. You've always been very decent to me in my entire life and career. And I know that you love and respect *Juice*. You have to love and respect *Juice*.

00:04:35 Oliver Host I respect *Juice*. Love? Well, we'll get—

00:04:36 Sean Guest Oh my goodness.

00:04:37 Oliver Host We'll get to the love part later, but—

00:04:38 Sean Guest Oh, Jesus. You're hurting me.

00:04:40 Oliver Host Yes.

00:04:41 Sean Guest Um, why did I pick it? Is that what you want to know?

00:04:42 Oliver Host Yeah.

00:04:43 Sean Guest When I saw the movie, it was transformational. And I think that there is a series of stories about young African American men at this time being made in America, basically from 1989 through 1994-95, that essentially converted an entire generation of people into sort of like, understanding um, a level of culture that maybe they didn't necessarily always have access to.

Or that they had never seen treated as equally as something like *White Heat*, which is the James Cagney movie which is featured in this movie. It confers the same level of dramatic tension, of rivalry, of intensity that you want out of a great film. And, you know, everybody knows about *Boyz n the Hood*, everybody knows about *new jack City*, everybody know about *Menace II Society*. I think *Juice* is the fourth in that quartet.

[*Oliver affirms.*]

Of meaning movies during this time that understood not just the lives of the characters but the music that informed the lives of the characters. This music, this version of this music, is my favorite music. This is the—the music that I think defines my taste.

00:05:48 Music Music "It's Going Down" off the album *Juice* by EPMD. Mid-tempo rap with a steady drumbeat.

*Well, it's the E with the juice, I'm down to get loose  
Strapped in black with the nine by the boots  
Hardcore funk that make you want to pump a chump  
My posse's thick so I will never get jumped  
The slayer, a beast from the east, I'm psycho  
If I had a glove, I would be bad as Michael  
Some say, yo, I sound rugged  
Pack with the ultimate rap with the power like snap*

[*Music fades as Oliver speaks*]

00:06:10 Oliver Host I think what stands out in thinking through a lot of this, too, is the ways in which *Juice*, within the catalogue of other similar films from that era, it's kind of easy to group some things together. For

example—and you have a lot of um, Black comedies. You have the House Party series that runs from '90 to '94. *Who's The Man?* comes out in '93. You have your sort of, what I would describe as your foundational dramas, that would include *Do The Right Thing* from '89, *Boyz n the Hood*, *new jack City*, as we talked about, Matty Rich's *Straight Out Of Brooklyn*, which was um, a very indie film but part of this lineage. That was—that's all 1991.

And then you have your rap parodies that come out, like *CB4* and *Fear of a Black Hat*. That's '93. As far as I know, *Juice* is the only film of its ilk to come out in '92, which, as we can talk about—especially in the second half—in terms of where hip hop is going, that's a really pivotal kind of transitional year. But all these other films, you understand the—I think the plot line's a little bit more, in a sense, kind of predictable.

So *Boyz n The Hood* to me is very much a coming of age film, right, between these key characters. And *Juice*, I mean, maybe the closest corollary would be, maybe like uh, *Menace II Society* because O-Dog's character is also kind of nihilistic. Um, you could say stylistically, something like later on, something like *Belly* from 1998. There's some—maybe some parallels with that.

But *Juice* doesn't really fit in, I think, easily to any of these other films that have a lot in common with each other in some ways. But this one—and partly it's because of what they decide to do with Bishop and his character that I feel like really takes them in completely different directions.

00:07:46 Sean Guest I agree with you. I think that's really astute. I don't know why that is. I don't know what it is about this dynamic. Dickerson did not write a lot of his own movies, but he did have the story by credit and a co-screenwriting credit.

00:07:57 Oliver Host Yes. Yeah, I noticed that.

00:07:59 Sean Guest And even in talking to people before we did this, a lot of them pointed out to me that he really did not write a lot of other films going forward. He goes on to make a couple more movies inside the studio system and then, as you mentioned, he essentially works in television now. He very rarely makes feature films now.

There's a part of me that wishes he wrote more of his own work, and I would have liked to have seen what those movies are like, because he is older than these characters but he does seem to have a general understanding of where these characters are coming from in a way that is different.

When John Singleton made *Boyz n the Hood*, there was this feeling, because of his age at the time, that it was a movie about his life. People thought it was extremely memoiristic. Whether that's true or not is debatable.

00:08:38 Oliver Host Oh, interesting. Okay.

00:08:39 Sean Guest But he was—I think he was 24-25 when he made that movie. I mean, that's extraordinary. Ernest Dickerson's in his 30s at this

point, when he makes the movie, and he's got some distance from it. And he's also been making movies with Spike in New York for almost a decade. And I think with that comes a different kind of approach. Now, he basically goes on to exploit that interest in genre that you're talking about. He—he makes *Demon Knight*, which is like, a fun movie, but it seems like it's made by a completely different person. Like, it doesn't—maybe there are some visual motifs that recur.

But I think partially what makes *Juice Juice* and makes it fit into this timeframe is it probably could have only happened at this time. The music, the way that Q's character is portrayed, the way that Ralph McDaniels and Fab 5 Freddy and all of these figures and—and Queen in that scene, like, fitting together in this timeframe. It's kind of just before mainstream America starts to pay attention. It's right at this crux, this sort of axis point before *Nomadic*, before *Ready to Die*, before all of these kind of signature—before this art form starts getting taken more seriously by a mainstream media, I guess, for lack of a better phrase.

00:09:56 Oliver Host

What you're saying also makes me think that expectations, even though—at least for me, as I was 19 or 20 when this film came out—I had a lot of expectations for it, because there weren't other films that I could turn to outside of the small handful I named. But it wasn't as if—I think like, when something like *Belly* comes out in '98, right.

This is Hype Williams in his feature film debut. We've already been accustomed to him because of every like, amazing visual music video that he's done with Bad Boy and whoever else. You know, it's got DMX, Nas, whatever. There's a lot of weight and expectation put on *Belly*. We expect that to be a big, important spectacle film.

I feel like with *Juice*—and this goes back to your point—it's able to exist at a point where those expectations aren't there. If the film kind of doesn't do well, no one thinks that like, oh, hip hop is taking an L because of it. Like, it's allowed to kind of breathe in a way where it can be a little bit—and from my point of view—a little bit weird. Like, to me, even rewatching, it's like, "God, this was kind of a weird film."

And yeah, I wonder, you know, even 2-3 years down the road, I feel like he would have just gotten more notes from somebody in terms of what to do with this and to make it coherent and more conventional way, whereas this kind of gets to live in its own space.

00:11:15 Sean Guest

Yeah, *Belly* is an interesting talking point. I mean, *Juice* is probably like a stocking horse in some ways for *Belly*. But *Belly* looks rich, you know? Hype's music videos personify a kind of wealth. Like a kind of glamor that he and Puff and all those figures at that time kind of introduced to the music. *Juice* was made for less than a million dollars, and you could tell.

[*Oliver laughs and affirms.*]

You could tell. It's shot in tenement housing, and it's shot with a bunch of pretty inexperienced actors. You know, "Juice" the Rakim

song is sort of emblematic and important to me, but it's not like it was—it didn't conquer the charts. But there was something about the morality play in the movie that people connected to. They connected the same way that I connected to it, that conflict between Q and Bishop. And even as it spirals out of control, you're like, "What happened to this movie that I was watching about these four friends? How did it become this immensely fraught showdown movie?" Like a Western really, at the end of it.

*[Oliver affirms several times while Sean is speaking.]*

But it does. I mean, it kind of becomes high noon. And Q has got to do everything he can to kind of get the black hat. That is the way they're positioning the movie, and Dickerson obviously, student of film, understands the classical design, and he pushes the movie into that. So while it feels weird, it only feels weird because it doesn't reflect on that *Scarface* archetype that we think of when we think of kind of quote-unquote "hip hop film."

I still really love it, but I don't necessarily use it as a signpost for what rap—the rap lifestyle represented. You know what I mean when I say that?

00:12:49	Oliver	Host	Sure. Right, right.
00:12:50	Sean	Guest	Like, I—Q kind of, sort of seems like the guy who would succeed, but I don't know. I mean, you're a DJ. Help me understand.
00:13:01	Oliver	Host	Well, no, I mean—I think—you know, the ways in which I thought of it as being, you know, again, a quote-unquote "hip hop film", it's not because it's trying to engage or talk to specifics around the music and the culture, despite Q having that engagement as a DJ.

But it really is—and I think you were alluding to this earlier—just that you have these films in the early 90s and a little bit in the late 80s that are really trying to focus on the lives of primarily young Black men in a way that you just were not seeing in the Hollywood Studio system at all. And so in the ways in which hip hop was basically putting those stories front and center for us to listen to, regardless of if the powers that be were interested in doing that, this felt like it was riding on that same kind of energy. And so whether or not it captures something essential about what hip hop in New York was at the time—

Actually, I had a question for you along these lines, uh, which I'll ask in a second. It was more just that its very existence seemed to be a validation, or at least in concert with the ways in which hip hop was really pushing from the margins and trying to assert itself in the center.

And to have something that you could go to a movie theater and watch—and maybe one reason it made 20 million dollars is because it had nothing to compete with in '92. Because there was all these other films that I mentioned either before or after, because we were starving just to see any kind of representation of that.

00:14:25 Sean Guest It might—that might be the case. I mean, obviously I’m a white kid from Long Island, so my perspective on that is I have no perspective. I—all I know is sort of what is put in front of me. I don’t have any awareness of my cultural bias, I don’t have any awareness of what is not being served in the market. There is a kind of like, baby was just born aspect of like, this movie just seems cool. It just—I just understand what they’re trying to say. I don’t—not knowing about *White Heat* is okay. I can still enjoy the movie. Now it rewards the re-watch because you get to pick up on those cues, but—

00:14:58 Oliver Host Well, the *Chinatown* thing, with the knife in the nose, like, when I watched the first time, I had never seen *Chinatown*. That would’ve gone over my head. And this time it’s like, oh, they’re riffing on—well, they even say, “Have you ever watched *Chinatown*?” So they make it more explicit. But I’m like, “Oh, there’s like, a meta-riff here,” right?”

00:15:12 Sean Guest Yeah and I’m—you know, not to draw the metaphor out too deeply, but the movie’s called *Juice*. Who’s got the juice is the central sort of uh, illusory dynamic in the movie. Same is true in *Chinatown*. *Chinatown*’s all about the control of water, and whoever controls the water controls LA. But who controls the water is this kind of like, inelegant, unholdable thing.

The movie is operating in the same way. It’s like, what is power? What is success? What is freedom? These are like, the big questions of the movie. Bishop is seeking a kind of freedom. Maybe it means going into a bar and joining this guy and firing off a shotgun to show off how powerful you are. Maybe it’s pursuing your dreams.

00:15:54 Oliver Host Morgan has just joined us. How’s it going, Morgan?

00:15:56 Morgan Host Good.

00:15:57 Oliver Host Sorry traffic was really bad.

00:15:58 Morgan Host Yeah, man; welcome to LA, baby.

*[Sean laughs.]*

You know how it is. You know just how it is. But I’m here.

00:16:04 Oliver Host So, Sean and I have been talking about the film and in particular around the character of Bishop, right, played by Tupac. And we have yet to get your thoughts on, and I’m curious in particular, right, as someone who—did you watch *Juice* when it came out in ‘92?

00:16:18 Morgan Host I did.

00:16:19 Oliver Host Okay. You were out in Atlanta at that point.

00:16:20 Morgan Host I was in Atlanta.

00:16:21 Oliver Host And so, what did you think in particular of Bishop as a character?

00:16:25 Morgan Host Uh, that’s a good question. I thought he turned up so quickly. I was

like, “That’s all it took? It took you seeing the robbery, my man doing the robbery down here at the Bar and Grill for you to just be—to become a thug?” And I have to say, it—what really was curious about me was, I was like, not only was the robbery a weird jump-off point for you, but I mean, I have to talk about placements because I’m a music supervisor, but they were playing Brand New Heavies in there.

*[Everyone laughs.]*

I was like, what’s thuggy about Brand New Heavies? This is acid jazz in the 90s, but okay. If that was the thing.

00:16:59 Music Music “People Get Ready (remix)” off the album *Juice* by The Brand New Heavies. Melodic, funky instrumentals and smooth singing.

*We’re gonna get’cha  
You better watch out*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*

00:17:16 Morgan Host But I just thought they should have fleshed it out a little bit more. Um, and it reminded me a little bit—this is a stretch—but there were parts of it that reminded me of *Reservoir Dogs*, because you always have somebody in the posse that’s turned up. Nothing in *Reservoir Dogs*—was it Mister Pink? Mister White?

00:17:34 Sean Guest Mister White. No. It’s Mister Blonde.

00:17:37 Morgan Host Mister Blonde who got turned up, and Harvey Keitel was like, “Oh no, what happened? All of the sudden this guy was just shooting, blah blah blah.” And that’s exactly what I thought of. I thought of that as I was watching it in prep for the show. But I wish there had been more backstory, because he just sounded like a thug that came out of nowhere. That came across that way.

*[Oliver affirms.]*

00:17:57 Sean Guest Let me ask you guys a question. I’m not a ‘Pac scholar.

00:18:00 Oliver Host Nor I.

00:18:01 Sean Guest New York person. I respect him. There are some records I love. For the most part, it’s not my guy. There’s some speculation that after this movie he kind of absorbs the Bishop persona as his outward persona as an artist. That a lot of the things that he does musically are kind of manifest from who Bishop kind of is in the movie, which is, uh, “Fuck the world. I’ll do what I want.”

*[Morgan and Oliver affirm.]*

Even beyond the sort of thug life cliché, literally the way that he presents himself to the world. Every interview he gives, he is direct and eloquent and smart but also he’s like a chaos agent. He’s like, “I’m gonna keep you on your toes at all times.”

00:18:43 Oliver Host I kept thinking of “Hit ‘Em Up”.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

Right? Which is as unhinged a Tupac as you will ever hear.

00:18:51 Music Music "Hit 'Em Up" by 2Pac. Mid-tempo rap with somewhat eerie instrumentals.

*Bad Boy murdered on wax and killed  
Fuck with me and get your caps peeled, you know, see  
Grab your glocks when you see Tupac  
Call the cops when you see Tupac, uh  
Who shot me, but you punks didn't finish  
Now you bout to feel the wrath of a menace  
N-gga, I hit em' up  
Check this out, you motherfuckers know*

*[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]*

00:19:12 Oliver Host I just—every scene where Bishop is just going, you know, fully psychotic on Q and his boys, I'm like, okay, "Hit 'Em Up" actually makes a lot more sense to me in terms of as a performance. Like, how do you get from this point to that point. It felt very in sync in that sense.

00:19:24 Morgan Host Sure, and a little bit of the backstory was he was so in character that he wanted people to call him Bishop all throughout, even when they were, you know, they had—you know, even when they were off set. And uh, apparently he kept showing up late to set, so one of the producers um, you know, tried to spook him into coming in on time and was like, "You know, you got fired." And when Pac found out it was a joke, he was hot, and then just like, roughed the guy up.

So there was a lot mentally, I think, he was carrying that I think he did embody that. And if you notice, that gold chain, that, you know, his piece, it ends up being his tattoo on his chest. So that same little gold piece he was wearing—

*[Oliver affirms.]*

—he ended up having that tatted. So I think he did take Bishop to the—to the hundredth percent.

00:20:10 Oliver Host We will be back with more of our conversation with Sean Fennessey about the 1992 film and soundtrack, *Juice*. But first, here is a brief word from some of our sibling Max Fun podcasts. Keep it locked.

00:20:21 Music Transition "Crown Ones" off the album *Stepfather* by People Under The Stairs

00:20:24 Promo Promo **Music:** Relaxing ukulele music.

**Manolo Moreno:** Hey, you've reached *Dr. Gameshow*. Leave your message after the beep.

*[Music stops.]*

*[Beep!]*

**Sara:** Hi. This is Sara, and I'd like to tell you about *Dr. Gameshow*. *Dr. Gameshow* is a band of geniuses, or nerds, or brilliant artists, or kids, or some combination of all of those who get together to make a show like no other that's family-friendly. It's an interactive call-in gameshow podcast.

When I found *Dr. Gameshow*, I found joy. I told my friends and family that if they weren't listening, they were wasting joy. I sent them the episodes that made me laugh until I cried, played it for them in the car. They laugh, too! Laugh their butts off. But they still don't listen on their own, so they're wasting joy. And I keep looking for someone to understand me. Maybe it's you! Give *Dr. Gameshow* a listen, and find joy.

[Beep!]

[Music resumes.]

**Jo Firestone:** Listen to [Dr. Gameshow](#) on *Maximum Fun*. New episodes every other Wednesday.

[Music fades out.]

00:21:12 Promo

Promo

**Music:** Classical orchestral music.

**John Hodgman:** Hey, everyone! It's I, John Hodgman of the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

**Elliott Kalan:** And I, Elliott Kalan of the *Flop House* podcast.

**John:** And we've made a whole new podcast! A 12-episode special miniseries called *I, Podius*. In which we recap, discuss, and explore the very famous 1976 BBC miniseries about Ancient Rome called *I, Claudius*! We've got incredible guests such as Gillian Jacobs, Paul F. Tompkins, as well as star of *I, Claudius* Sir Patrick Stewart! And his son! Non-Sir Daniel Stewart.

**Elliott:** Don't worry, Dan, you'll get there someday.

**John:** *I, Podius* is the name of the show! Every week from [MaximumFun.org](#) for only 12 weeks. Get 'em at [MaximumFun.org](#), or wherever you get your podcasts.

[Music fades out.]

00:21:58 Music

Transition

"Crown Ones" off the album *Stepfather* by People Under The Stairs

00:22:00 Morgan

Host

We are back on *Heat Rocks* talking the *Juice* soundtrack with Sean Fennessey.

00:22:06 Oliver

Host

Sean, I want to take us on a brief tangent here. I know you are a big fan of both Tarantino and Scorsese. I mean, you recently have been—have recorded a podcast with Tarantino. And these are two directors who are known for just the quality of their song placement in movies, at least amongst American filmmakers. And insofar as

we have someone who, you know, does a film podcast and a music supervisor in the room here, I want to ask both of you, what is it about what they do that you think is so effective about how they use, especially pop songs in their films?

00:22:40 Sean Guest

That's a very good question that I suspect you have a lot more insight into than I do. I can tell you as a serious fan what it does for me. It's all character. It tells you everything you need to know about the intention of the character. Particularly those two movies, and how the character is feeling, and what the setting of the film—what the setting of the moment is, you know?

In *Goodfellas*, if you hear a Charelle song set against a very violent act, that's a Scorsese trick. That's a move, that's an action that he's taking. He's setting something very sweet against something very severe, and he's creating this—you know, this collision. This emotional collision that's happening inside the character that's supposed to happen inside the viewer.

*[Oliver affirms.]*

So that's one version of it. The other thing too, I think Tarantino does that as well. Tarantino's a little showier when he does it, and has a little bit more of a crate digger approach to it, especially in his last couple of films. And he—to me, with Tarantino, it's a little bit more of a flex. In particular, the last movie, it's a lot of like, "Sure, you know songs from 1969 but you don't know these songs." And these are the records that were playing on the radio, and here's how I know. I listened to the recording of the radio station. What about for you, when you're looking to place?

00:23:51 Morgan Host

Well, I haven't had the good fortune of having those budgets.

*[Oliver laughs.]*

Uh, but also too, I think he consistently works with Mary Ramos, so we want to shout-out her. I feel like you made an excellent point about it being a flex. This is a little bit of um, "I'm not just a filmmaker, I could have been a DJ, but I chose this route." And it's a flex.

I have always said that his placements, they feel like a blanket. You are suffocated and surrounded in this time period, right? They underguard the scenes in a way that it doesn't take you out of the moment, even for me as a music supervisor, I never stop and say, "What's that song?"

Because it's similar to what we say about the difference between hip hop DJs and house DJs. By the time you—especially in contemporary DJs—when you fall in love with a song, the hip hop DJ has moved on the next. By the time you're like, "Yo, yo, that's my jam!" they're already to the next. Where your responsibility as a house DJ is to make your whole set feel like one long song, and that's the gift of Tarantino. That the whole soundtrack feels like one long song, one long period.

You can't—they move seamlessly from one point to the other. We'll be at *Reservoir Dogs*, and one of my favorites is Jackie Brown. You never get out of that car. You never leave the car. It's almost like the whole thing is El Segundo, LAX, and you never leave that car. It makes you think that every song you hear is in that car on the radio.

- 00:25:19 Oliver Host Totally agree about Jackie Brown, but to spin back to what Sean was saying about *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood*, I just loved when Quentin threw in “Hector” by The Village Callers in there.
- 00:25:27 Music Music “Hector” off the album *Live* by The Village Callers. Upbeat, funky, fun instrumentals.
- 00:25:43 Oliver Host Alright, let's bring this back to *Juice*, and specifically let's get into the music component of it. And one of the things that we've been talking about in the first half was how *Juice* was very much on a cinematic level this kind of transitional point in sort of what Black cinema was doing. But certainly the soundtrack, when you look at it—and I have to say, this soundtrack, I think, holds up tremendously well in ways that perhaps some of the other, similar so-called hip hop movie soundtracks of that era maybe not as much.
- This one holds up really well, and I do think it captures this really fascinating snapshot of where hip hop was at in '92, where you have this mix of up and coming artists that, in that era I would include Naughty by Nature, who did, of course, “Uptown Anthem” which plays during the closing credits. Um, you have Cypress Hill, who have one song on the soundtrack, but also a very prominent—we'll maybe come back to this later—a very prominent placement of “How I Can Just Kill A Man”, their very first hit, which happens in the movie itself.
- 00:26:38 Sean Guest Iconic scene. Truly iconic scene.
- 00:26:40 Oliver Host You have mid-career Eric B. & Rakim doing the main title track. You have Big Daddy Kane, which we talked about a little bit earlier with “Nuff Respect.” You got Salt-n-Pepa. And then you have late era new jack swing with Aaron Hall, Teddy Riley, um, to your point earlier, Morgan, some early hip hop-soul, or acid jazz with N'Dea Davenport and The Brand New Heavies.
- 00:27:01 Morgan Host You got Tammy Lucas in the record store.
- 00:27:04 Oliver Host Right, and what's interesting is who's actually kind of missing from this. Where if you're thinking about hip hop in '92, it's like, well, where's Pete Rock and CL. Though Pete Rock gets a shout-out on the flyer of the DJ battle, so it's like Pete Rock is still in there even if his music isn't in there. Really strangely, there's no Tupac, and maybe it's just because it was too early in his career for him to have enough of a body of work. But it still seems odd that, this being such an important film for his acting career, he didn't bother to say, “Yo, ‘Pac, you want to do a song for this?”

But that aside, I think it actually does a really great job of kind of capturing where hip hop was moving in that moment because we didn't really know that Biggie and Nas and Mobb Deep were just

around the corner, and a lot of like, the more prominent artists that were on this soundtrack were about to become kind of outmoded once '93, '94, '95 rolled around. But you still had this when they were kind of at the top of the game.

00:27:56 Morgan Host Sure. You mentioned Pete Rock, and uh, as soon as I saw the flyer, I was like, "Oh, Q, you're about to lose."

*[Sean laughs.]*

If these are your competitors, you're about to lose, player boy. You're going up against Richie Rich, Pete Rock, DJ Plazz? Like, it's a wrap. So when he—when he got a call back, I was like, "This cannot be possible." But it's film.

Um, one of the things that you didn't mention, maybe you were gonna get to it, was um, Cindy from En Vogue being in the film, but then no En Vogue music. And they probably could have gotten licensed that for—I mean, for a song, 'cause you're in there.

00:28:29 Oliver Host Which—and I didn't even—she looked familiar but I couldn't place—she plays Yolanda who is uh, Q's like, older girlfriend.

00:28:35 Morgan Host May-December.

00:28:36 Oliver Host And—

00:28:37 Sean Guest I have some questions about that relationship.

00:28:38 Oliver Host Yeah, I feel like—

00:28:39 Sean Guest It's a little—not totally sure what she's seeing in Q.

00:28:42 Oliver Host It's not very well developed.

00:28:43 Sean Guest High school student Q. Right?

00:28:45 Oliver Host But no En—yeah, it's surprising, there's no En Vogue. You're casting these folks, but you're not getting them to kick you some songs, though.

00:28:52 Morgan Host Right, and their scene where we meet them, where we come to meet them, you know, biblically—

*[Oliver laughs.]*

—um, they're playing that Aaron Hall, "Don't Be Afraid." And so another shout-out to Teddy Riley and Teddy Riley's discovery. That song is a jam, but that's not the one that I liked. There's another version of "Don't Be Afraid" which I thought was a missed opportunity, because there's a smoothed out, slow version of "Don't Be Afraid".

00:29:21 Oliver Host Also by Aaron Hall?

00:29:22 Morgan Host Also by Aaron Hall.

*[Oliver responds emphatically.]*

			Christian, can you pull that up?
00:29:25	Music	Music	<p>“Don’t Be Afraid (Sex You Down Some Mo’ Version)” by Aaron Hall. Slow, impassioned, multilayered singing over sweeping, grand string music.</p> <p><i>... can't see the light of day I know that we can make it if we only pray Baby, don't be afraid Ain't no need, ain't no need, ain't no need</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]</i></p>
00:29:41	Oliver	Host	Shout-out to the string arrangement on here. That feels a little extra, but okay.
00:29:45	Morgan	Host	“Sex You Down Some Mo’.” But maybe that’s what Frank would have picked. Q picked the rugged OG “Don’t Be Afraid.”
00:29:53	Oliver	Host	New jack swing version.
00:29:54	Morgan	Host	That’s it, and that’s what Yolanda wanted. But that was one of my favorite placements in the piece.
00:30:01	Oliver	Host	Sean, what did you think of the music and the soundtrack of it?
00:30:04	Sean	Guest	It’s in a very interesting inflection point, especially for hip hop. Obviously new jack swing and R&B and where it goes from here, it changes a lot, but it’s still recognizable. This is a kind of last moment before the icons show up moment in rap. And like, for us, Pete Rock and CL Smooth are iconic, but for the public at large, there’s just not as much mental awareness of them. But Nas is about to be on a Main Source record, you know.
00:30:32	Oliver	Host	Already has been, actually. Yeah.
00:30:34	Sean	Guest	Already has been. Biggie is coming.
			<i>[Oliver and Morgan affirm.]</i>
			Like, the figures, and then Jay, and then on and on. The figures who come to dominate the genre, and kind of define and contextualize the genre for a lot—for two more generations to come are not quite there yet. So you’re at this interesting point where it’s not especially totally just Boogie Down Productions, but it’s not Jay-Z. It’s this middle ground. And you know, the other thing that’s not here, interestingly, is there’s no Public Enemy in here either. Who was, you know, the defining artist fr Spike for all those years.
00:31:05	Oliver	Host	And again, Hank Shocklee and the Bomb Squad do the score, and so yeah. How did they not get PE for it?
00:31:09	Sean	Guest	And that like, wikka-wikka like, scratchity thing that is going on throughout the movie is indelibly Hank.
00:31:15	Oliver	Host	Yes, very.

00:31:16 Sean Guest That's very much true, and that is also a sound that you just don't hear really in rap. Maybe two, three years later, it kind of moves on.

*[Oliver affirms.]*

00:31:20 Music Music "Nuff Respect" by Big Daddy Kane. Very fast hip-hop instrumentals with frequent record scratches and distortions. Music plays for several moments before fading out as Sean talks.

00:31:37 Sean Guest So I like it as a document of that time. Like, it feels really, really true to '92 in a way. And like, Cypress Hill would be legendary to people 5-10 years from now, and they're still very successful artists.

*[Morgan and Oliver affirm.]*

But I don't know. I mean, like, Treach is in this movie. Naughty by Nature close out the film. I don't know, like, what is Naughty by Nature's reputation in 2020? Like are people really aware of who they were and what they did?

00:32:01 Morgan Host No, 'cause my coordinator was like, "He's cute."

*[Oliver laughs.]*

I was like, "Okay, so about him. Let me tell you about him." Vinny's in the film, too, as well. Isn't Vinny in a scene?

*[Oliver affirms.]*

00:32:10 Oliver Host I mean, yeah. EPMD are in the bar when it gets held up—

00:32:13 Morgan Host In the bar? Latifah's running...

00:32:14 Oliver Host —And Special Ed is driving off with, uh, with Yolanda I think?

*[Sean and Morgan affirm.]*

00:32:15 Morgan Host Special Ed. "Got It Made."

00:32:18 Music Music "Got It Made" off the album *Juice* by Special Ed. Mid-tempo, chill rap.

*I'm outspoken,  
My language is broken into a slang,  
But it's just a dialect that I select when I hang,  
I play it cool, 'cause cooling is all that I'm about  
Just fooling with the girlies, yes I'm busting it out,  
I'm Special Ed and you can tell by the style that I use,  
I'm creatively superior, yo, I never lose*

*[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]*

00:32:35 Oliver Host I mean, Sean, to your point just now, about Naughty by Nature and Treach, you know, there was a point, legitimately, around the time that "Uptown Anthem" comes out, where Treach is really considered, you know, in the conversation for best rapper alive in that moment. And I think on something like an "Uptown Anthem" you can hear just like quality of the flow and just the ferocity that

brings to it.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

00:32:57 Music

Music

“Uptown Anthem” off the album *Juice* by Naughty by Nature. Fast rap with a steady drumbeat and a few record scratches in the background.

*That's how I'm rolling my hair-do don't  
Win I will I got wanting competition ain't dope  
Beat you break you broke you smoke you take you  
Send you to your little group on mute, sooner or later  
When want to flip, tell them full semi half with a dip  
And all that other Ringling Brothers shit  
Sporty naughty hi bye greater than nature while I  
Shin slam the flim flam and then jam*

*[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]*

00:33:17 Oliver

Host

And it's—I forgot that, and this is something that I just don't feel like would happen today, is that “Uptown Anthem” was never released on an album outside of this soundtrack. So the two songs that—I forget the b-side, which is actually even harder than “Uptown Anthem”, but that just existed as its own, like, maxi-single. But it wasn't on *19 Naughty III*, and so it just kind of existed on its own phase.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

And I just feel like it's a kind of missed opportunity to capitalize. Like you should have just put it on. Maybe make it the bonus track if you need to, you know, on *19 Naughty III*?

*[Morgan affirms.]*

But not to capitalize on the prominence of “Uptown Anthem”, which I think for a lot of people, was considered like their pinnacle song. I mean, it wasn't as necessarily as commercially popular as like “O.P.P.” or “Hip Hop Hooray”.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

But in terms of like respect from the heads, like, “Uptown Anthem” is about about as high as it gets.

*[Morgan and Sean affirm.]*

00:34:01 Sean

Guest

It's interesting that “How I Could Just Kill A Man” isn't just here, and “Shoot ‘Em Up” is here.

*[Oliver affirms multiple times.]*

I don't know, is that a clearance issue? Is that because that record was gonna be too big for Cypress Hill, that they didn't want to license it to a soundtrack? This is an unusual mix.

There's obviously this long history now, especially of hip hop-centric soundtracks, where you essentially assign artists a song to deliver. And it's like, this is like, these songs will be for the *Above The Rim* soundtrack. This feels like an odd collection.

*[Oliver and Morgan affirm.]*

Some things seemed original, some things—that Aaron Hall song is not, that wasn't a song—that preexisted, they cherry-picked that. You know, I don't know. I don't actually know how this works, but how this is assigned is kind of fascinating to me.

00:34:45 Morgan Host Well, sometimes you can clear the rights for use, but you're not able to clear those same rights to use on a soundtrack. Sometimes artists want more and you're not willing to pay that. Sometimes there are sample issues, and you're just like, "We're not trying to do that for the soundtrack."

00:35:01 Oliver Host But along these lines, is it less expensive to commission an artist to create a new song for a soundtrack than license like a known hit?

00:35:08 Morgan Host It depends on the artist. It depends on the artist.

00:35:11 Sean Guest So there's one other thing about this, and it's related to what you're saying, and it's interesting to me.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

So, I don't know anything about Juvenile Committee.

*[Morgan laughs.]*

Juvenile Committee, obviously a bunch of—

00:35:21 Morgan Host "The Flipside", Juvenile Committee!

00:35:23 Sean Guest —obviously, a bunch of young boys that they got to make a record. There are not a lot of Juvenile Committee songs out there in the known universe.

*[Oliver affirms.]*

But at this time, there is a lot of teen and adolescent rap happening.

00:35:33 Oliver Host Da Youngsta's. Shyheim, the Rugged Child.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

00:35:34 Sean Guest Da Youngsta's. Shyheim, the Rugged Child. It's Another Bad Creation time.

00:35:38 Morgan Host This is '92. Criss Cross.

*[Oliver affirms.]*

00:35:42 Sean Guest We're on the verge of Criss Cross, the Hooligans, there's all kinds of, like, teenagers who are getting record deals.

00:35:48	Oliver	Host	Right. Young Black teenagers who were none of the above, actually, but yeah, sure.
00:35:52	Morgan	Host	Yeah, let's not speak on that too long. Usher is on his way out, he's not a rapper but to your point of teenagers getting deals.
00:36:00	Sean	Guest	And it felt like they tried to jerry-rig one onto this soundtrack that never really popped off, but I find that to be like an interesting subgenre of rap, too, you know, the fifteen year old who has bars.
00:36:10	Music	Music	"Flipside" off the album <i>Juice</i> by Juvenile Committee. Fast-paced, energetic rap.  <i>Some people they got homeboys like I do Like Stevie, Jay, Rock and the rest of the crew Yo, we chill with each other and we kill with another And we never ever keep anything undercover 'Cause if we do, we have to keep it in a circle You're soft as a nerd, so don't be tripping on the turf, yo This is what they say: 'Cause he was with us on that day First he was chilling with his nine and A.K. The cold thing about it, we didn't see it coming</i>  <i>[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]</i>
00:36:30	Oliver	Host	To your point, Sean, I am curious about who made the decision to get them on there. 'Cause to me this is like the weakest track on the whole soundtrack.  <i>[Sean affirms.]</i>  And there's some very decent like, kind of kiddie rap stuff out there. Like, early Mobb Deep before the infamous—where their voices hadn't changed yet, there's actually some decent stuff on there.
00:36:49	Sean	Guest	Juvenile Hell, speaking of juveniles.  <i>[Oliver affirms]</i>
00:36:51	Oliver	Host	This, however, I do not think is a pinnacle example of the genre.
00:36:56	Morgan	Host	No.  <i>[Oliver and Sean laugh uproariously.]</i>  No it isn't. And they might—since EPMD was in they might've gotten—this might've been a little bit earlier, but they might've gotten Illegal. Remember that group, EPMD?  <i>[Oliver affirms.]</i>  Eric Summer produced, with Jamal and stuff?
00:37:09	Oliver	Host	Jamal, "Fades 'Em All".
00:37:12	Morgan	Host	Yeah! That was a jam.

00:37:14	Music	Music	<p>“Fades ‘Em All” off the album <i>Last Chance, No Breaks</i> by Jamal. Mid-tempo, grooving rap.</p> <p><i>I drop lyrics off and on like a light switch</i></p> <p><i>I gets mad wreck when wreck is the concept sticking techs to fake n-ggas necks when they flex For those that don't know about my flows Let me introduce I'm ear tight plus pack a deuce deuce I'm 5 feet 5 inches</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]</i></p>
00:37:30	Oliver	Host	<p>So, okay. We talked about like the opposite of the heat track, so two questions here. The first one, what is to you the fire track off the soundtrack, regardless of its use in the film? That’s gonna be the second question, but just in terms of—as strictly song-craft, what is, like, what is the hype joint off this soundtrack for each of you?</p>
00:37:48	Sean	Guest	<p>It has to be the title track. The title track is unbelievable.</p>
00:37:52	Music	Music	<p>“Juice (Know The Ledge)” off the album <i>Juice</i> by Eric B. and Rakim. Fast, intense rap.</p> <p><i>Sip the juice, I got enough to go around And the thought takes place Uptown I grew up on the sidewalk where I learned street talk And then taught to hawk New York I go to Queens for queens, then get the crew from Brooklyn Make money in Manhattan and never been taken Go Uptown in the Bronx...</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]</i></p>
00:38:10	Morgan	Host	<p>That is fire.</p>
00:38:12	Sean	Guest	<p>So, can—can you—I know you know the sample mythology of that record—</p>
00:38:17	Oliver	Host	<p>I actually don’t know where the bass line is from.</p>
00:38:19	Sean	Guest	<p>I mean, that bass line is—</p>
00:38:20	Oliver	Host	<p>It does a lot of work. It does all the work.</p>
00:38:22	Sean	Guest	<p>It’s wrapped around my neck.</p> <p><i>[Oliver affirms.]</i></p> <p>It’s so powerful, and you know, he’s—he is the most controlled on the one rapper of all time. I mean, he really—we were talking about what Treach did for rappers. But Rakim, that sort of like in-pocket, relentless tone is just amazing. I mean, he is still amazing to me. And to open your movie that way, that sort of declaration of purpose is so great. I will listen to that song until the day I die.</p>
00:38:55	Music	Music	<p><i>["Juice (Know The Ledge)" plays again.]</i></p>

*A brand new morn', no time to yawn  
Shower's on, power's on  
Late for school, I catch the train  
Girls sip the style and whisper my name  
I push up like an exercise  
Check they intellect and inspect the thighs*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*

- 00:39:13 Morgan Host That is fire, I have no push back on that. Actually, my favorite track is "Is It Good To You". Yes.
- 00:39:20 Oliver Host *[Laughing]* You are gonna die on this new jack swing hill. I love that about you.
- 00:39:24 Morgan Host I am. I've taken so much heat for my new jack love, but it is the most—there's no pressure on it, it doesn't have to carry the weight of the story, it's light. I need a distraction while they're in there stealing from the record store. I need something to make me feel like not so bad about it. And I just love new jack. You know what, I've said it before, I love new jack swing.
- [Oliver affirms.]*
- I'm not gonna take anything away from the title track but this, at the point where it came in the movie I was like, "Aw, man."
- 00:39:52 Music Music "Is It Good To You" off the album *Juice* by Teddy Riley feat. Tammy Lucas. New jack swing with smooth vocals over a hip-hop beat.
- When my love comes down  
I don't have to run around  
I've got you and you know just what to do  
To fulfill all my needs and satisfy me*
- [Music fades out as Sean speaks]*
- 00:40:09 Sean Guest Do you think—do you think new jack swing could ever come back in any way? Could it ever be a key influence on something that is contemporarily popular?
- 00:40:19 Morgan Host If it's left up to me, Sean, I've got to bring it back.
- [Everyone laughs.]*
- 'Cause I—I just think there's so many—Teddy Riley gave birth to so many—so many children, sonically. And I think Pharrell's so devoted to him, and so enamored of his style that it's gonna be Pharrell that produces like a whole new jack swing album.
- [Oliver affirms.]*
- 00:40:40 Oliver Host I'm not gonna out you here, Morgan, but you are working on some rather high-profile projects. I'm like, if anyone could sneak in a little new jack swing to kind of bring it back, you're—you are well positioned to try and make that happen.

00:40:51 Morgan Host Listen. Oh man.

00:40:52 Sean Guest What about a little of Tony! Toni! Toné! somewhere? You know, like how we—how do we get that back in the conversation?

00:40:57 Morgan Host Well, we should've brought that up. When we were—we were doing our interview.

00:41:02 Oliver Host With Raphael?

00:41:03 Morgan Host With Raphael. We should've brought that up.

00:41:05 Oliver Host It's like, we gotta get TTT up in some big productions.

00:41:07 Morgan Host Or get Guy back together.

*[Oliver affirms.]*

Wreckx-n-Effect or somebody. See, Sean, now you got me going down the whole little—

00:41:17 Sean Guest It's good to love things.

00:41:19 Morgan Host I'm getting choked up in here.

00:41:20 Sean Guest What about you, Oliver? You're not—you're not picking a track?

00:41:21 Oliver Host Uh, no. It—to me it comes down to between “Uptown Anthem” and “Juice”. Uh, both of which have that just intense, just get hyped energy to it, and choosing between Treach, as we've been talking about, was at the top of his game, and Rakim, who still certainly had it in '92, I think is really tough.

And the way in which I chose between them was I was thinking, if I was at a party, and one of these two songs came up, which one would I be more lit up by? And the answer is actually pretty clear. It has to be “Juice”. And partially it's because of my well-established animosity towards bad synthesized keyboards.

*[Sean laughs.]*

And as good as “Uptown Anthem” is, the way that that song opens kind of ruins it until they do away with it and get the actual main beat.

00:42:04 Music Music “Uptown Anthem” plays again, then fades out.

00:42:16 Oliver Host So, apparently, someone found the harpsichord button on some Casio keyboard and decided to make the opening to it?

00:42:22 Morgan Host Right, and a blues album.

*[Oliver affirms.]*

‘Cause that's what it sounds like. Or gospel.

00:42:26 Sean Guest You know what it sounds like to me? It sounds like the song that a Vincent Price character would be playing if he was trapped in the top of a castle.

*[Morgan laughs.]*

And he was some sort of ghoulish man who'd been living alone for years and he developed this romantic harpsichord sound. Like, it's a very strange way to open a rap record.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

00:42:45	Oliver	Host	Maybe like if it was an acoustic harpsichord, I could roll with that. But the fact that it's a synthesized harpsichord, it just throws me off every time. As opposed to—again, to your point, Sean—like, the beginning of “Juice”.
00:42:57	Music	Music	“Juice (Know The Ledge)” plays again, then fades out.
00:43:04	Oliver	Host	So, it's gotta—it's gotta be “Juice”.
00:43:05	Sean	Guest	I feel like “Uptown Anthem” makes you wanna party, and “Juice” makes you wanna shadowbox. Right?

*[Oliver affirms.]*

It's like what do you want out of your rap anthem.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

It's like, do you wanna have a good time, or do you wanna be like, “I am the conqueror of the world.”

00:43:18	Morgan	Host	“I am Bishop.”
00:43:19	Sean	Guest	“Nothing can beat me.”
00:43:20	Oliver	Host	So we've established what our fire tracks off the soundtrack are, but let's bring this back to sort of the use of music in the film itself. And we've actually already talked about what I think has to be one of the key candidates here, which is Cypress Hill, and “How I Could Just Kill A Man”, which plays for not a short amount of time during this—effectively a chase scene between Q and Bishop in the projects, in the project building.

That song is incredible. I mean, just that in terms of everything, B-Real's voice, the amount of work that Muggs put into that production. I actually have like an entire webpage devoted to breaking down every bar in that production in terms of what Muggs is doing with it. It's like, I'm so in love with it. And it works so well in this film to kind of capture that—the energy, the sense of menace that is happening as Bishop is basically trying to gun down on the low Q moving through this project.

00:44:16	Music	Music	“How I Can Just Kill A Man” off the album <i>Juice</i> by Cypress Hill. Fast rap with multilayered vocals.
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*I'm ignoring all the dumb shit  
Yo, because nothing is coming from it  
I'm not gonna waste no time*

*Fucking around my gat straight humming  
Humming coming at you  
And you know I had to gat you*

*Time for some action, just a fraction of friction  
I got the clearance to run the interference  
Into your satellite, shining a battle light  
Swing out the gat*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*

00:44:36 Morgan Host As a music supervisor, I will say that is a fantastic placement. Not only the lyrics of the song but the spirit of the song.

*[Oliver affirms multiple times as Morgan speaks.]*

There's this—you said menacing, absolutely, but there's this sort of almost hazy, distorted feeling and spirit of this song and that's the spirit of the scene.

That it is Bishop trying to navigate and Q trying to navigate this maze of getting to each other and getting to the final act and the showdown and so I thought it was perfect.

There's a lot of other songs that could have gone there but that one is just the voice on the air. It's just the feel, the confusion that I think the song elicits. Perfect.

00:45:12 Music Music *["How I Can Just Kill A Man" plays again.]*

*It's gonna be a long time before I finish  
One of the many missions that I have to establish  
To light my spliff, ignite ya with insights  
And if you ain't down, bullshit!  
Say some punk try to get you for your auto  
Would you call the one-time, play the role model?  
No, I think you play like a thug  
Next hear the shot of a Magnum slug  
Humming, coming at you*

*[Music fades out as Sean speaks]*

00:45:32 Sean Guest Here's why it works so well for me. The song hits, Bishop is in pursuit of Q. He's chasing Q, it's the cat-and-mouse part of the movie. We enter this, essentially like, party scene, they're in the project.

*[Oliver affirms.]*

Everybody's looking at them. There's these odd looks as they kind of scramble through the party. And then they get onto the roof, and the song essentially—the roles change, you know. It sounds like Bishop is rapping the song to Q, and he's like, "I could just kill you." That's essentially what he's saying, and then by the end of the movie, it's Q who—it's like shoe is on the other foot, you got the juice now. How Q could just kill a man.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

Like that—it's doing so much work. There's no dialogue, really. It's telling the story. The song is telling the story of what happens to these two characters. Plus it's just—the song just bangs. It's just a great record.

*[Oliver and Morgan affirm.]*

00:46:19 Morgan Host Shout-out to Kathy Nelson, who was the music supervisor on that, and also to that scene at the end. I mean, just seeing it again, I mean, when I saw it originally it was just like when that scene—when he goes off the ledge. I mean, when he goes off the ledge. But seeing it again I was like—

00:46:34 Oliver Host Oh, shit, I didn't even think about that until now.

*[Morgan and Sean affirm.]*

Now I kinda like the Rakim song a little bit less, or maybe I like the film a little bit less for being a little too literal with that.

00:46:41 Sean Guest It's on the nose. It's a little on the nose.

00:46:42 Morgan Host It is super on the nose.

00:46:44 Sean Guest I mean, the movie literally ends with this guy saying, "You have the juice now."

00:46:48 Morgan Host Right, right. "Know the Ledge" is the name of the song.

00:46:51 Oliver Host Which is—and you might have been too young or too LI or maybe too white to know the answer to this, but were cats in New York actually using the word "juice" in '92, to the extent that it was? I think I had that question even back in '92, watching the film. It's just like, is this actual lingo that the young people are using?

00:47:08 Morgan Host Let's pose that to our New York listeners, cause you know, I'm West Coast, so I know we weren't using it out here.

*[Oliver affirms.]*

But I do have to say about the ledge though, watching it again. I mean, I love—I love—I think Pac was a prolific actor in this. The worst acting was when he fell off that ledge.

*[Oliver and Sean laughs.]*

I've yelled harder falling off of my bed.

00:47:27 Clip Clip **Bishop:** Come on, Q, don't let me go!

**Q:** I got you, Bishop, man! Come on! Hold on!

**Bishop:** Q, don't let me go!

**Q:** Just hold on man! I can't hold on, man!

*[Bishop screams as he falls.]*

**Q:** *[Screaming]* Bishop!

- 00:47:43 Oliver Host What about you, Sean, any stand-out scenes in terms of music in the film?
- 00:47:46 Sean Guest Well we haven't talked about "What Could Be Better Bitch" and Son of Bazerk.
- 00:47:51 Oliver Host Where was that in the film? I think I missed it.
- 00:47:53 Sean Guest I think it's near to the end, before Steel is killed. And, um, I don't—you know, Son of Bazerk is a Hank Shocklee discovery, complicated artist. I think the tonality of Son of Bazerk is a little different than a lot of the other artists on this soundtrack, and really in New York at the time. Much more aggressive, much more—almost like serial comic? Like I'm not totally sure what the—what do you know about Son of Bazerk?
- 00:48:23 Oliver Host Not a lot, but I always thought of him as, like, what if Biz Markie went off a really bad bender?
- [Sean affirms with "well put".]*
- You would end up with Son of Bazerk.
- 00:48:30 Music Music "What Could Be Better Bitch" off the album *Juice* by Son of Bazerk. Mid-tempo rap with a main vocal line rapping the below lyrics above a quiet backing chorus repeating "What could be better, bitch?".
- Here goes that funky beat, these lyrics are ghetto swift  
I'm ready to strip them down, pass me the forty dog  
A-yo is you ready Rawe, you know I don't give a fuck  
I'm ready to burn it up, so what could be better bitch  
You're digging the funky drummer and ready to go to work  
Bazerk at the center stage, producers is with it y'all*
- [Music fades out as Oliver speaks]*
- 00:48:48 Oliver Host A little bit of Pete Rock—sorry, not Pete Rock. A little bit of Chuck D kind of flow in that voice too.
- 00:48:53 Sean Yeah. I always think a little bit Akinyele, too, you know?
- [Oliver and Morgan affirm.]*
- Like, anyway. That just—that's just a weird record. Son of Bazerk is like, not really to be heard from again.
- [Oliver affirms.]*
- There's a few of those on this record, that sort of stuff always pops out to me. When you're like, cata—and yeah, when I was 20 and cataloguing all my like 12-inches and figuring out what records that mattered to me, it's always like the weird one that you're like, I can't

find another record by this artist. Why is this on this soundtrack with Salt-n-Pepa and EPMD. Like, how did this person get here?

00:49:22 Morgan Host

And Aaron Hall.

00:49:23 Sean Host

And Aaron Hall. All famous people.

00:49:24 Morgan Host

But you know as soon as this episode airs someone is gonna find Son of Bazerk, or Son of Bazerk is gonna reach out and be like, "Yo."

00:49:31 Oliver Host

Maybe him and, um, you know, Juvenile Committee are on some nostalgia tour, you know? Rock the Bells. The B-list, you know?

00:49:38 Music Music

*["What Could Be Better Bitch" plays again.]*

*We're turning the hands of time, what could be better bitch  
My pockets keep getting fat, I'm ready to set it off  
You give me the runaround, but here come the swan dive  
I roll with The Bomb Squad, you see it in magazines  
The brothers that know the time, so give me some depth y'all  
They call me a lover man, she gave me the finger, G  
But this is the new swing called "What Could Be Better Bitch"*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*

00:49:57 Morgan Host

I talked about "Nuff Respect". I like that song so much, it was hard for me to see Q scratching it up. I was like, "Come on. You're really scratching it." But apparently Omar Epps, before the shooting, had studied DJing, so that's all him.

00:50:14 Oliver Host

Which explains a lot.

*[Morgan affirms multiple times.]*

So, here's my really big nitpick, and what really brings *Juice* down in a certain way, is the scratching is not good.

*[Sean laughs.]*

And it would be more understandable if that were—if this film had taken place, let's say, in 1986 or '87. But by 1992, like, Cash Money, Jazzy Jeff, fricking Qbert, like, DJ Aladdin. Like, scratching is more advanced than what he puts down here. He's off-tempo, like he's not on-beat. And so I was like trying to—I was trying to figure out like, is this actually Epps, or did they get someone else to put on those workout gloves, which I'm not really sure what that does except for a style flex.

It just—it sounds really amateur, but if that actually is Omar Epps, that actually makes more sense. It's because it doesn't sound clean, especially for someone who is supposed to be battling with it. Like, that's not a clean routine.

00:51:10 Music Music

*[Audio of Q's scratching plays from the movie. It is off-tempo and rough.]*

00:51:27 Oliver Host

Actually, knowing that, I'm more sympathetic, because that would

make—'cause it sounds like someone who doesn't know scratching very well.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

It's kind of like a basic style, and it's not executed that well. But—so if they had brought in like a professional, if they had brought in like Terminator X, I'd have been like, "Dude, what happened?"

00:51:42 Morgan Host Or like a hand double. Like, get somebody's else's hands out here that really—

00:51:47 Sean Guest It's like the hip hop movie version of James Caan's phantom punch on Carlo in *The Godfather*. Like, well he clearly didn't hit him.

*[Oliver and Morgan laugh.]*

This is so obviously badly staged. It's an important movie, and we all love it, but there's just no way James Caan punched that guy. And this is like, well, Omar Epps is not a good DJ. It's okay. It's—for me, as a kid, seeing the movie, especially the scene where he is all over the crossfader in his bedroom, I was like, "This is captivating." This is like, how do I get closer to this?

*[Morgan affirms.]*

00:52:20 Oliver Host I think in '92 it was just cool to see that represented in a film.

*[Sean affirms.]*

In 2020, I'm like, that's still cool historically but like, he needs to spend a lot more time in that bedroom and kind of up his game for that to sound the way that it should sound.

00:52:34 Morgan Host I mean, especially if he was gonna win contests and stuff.

*[Sean and Oliver affirm.]*

00:52:38 Oliver Host If we were to make *Juice* today, what would be the equivalent, in the way that-right. These artists that we've been talking about, right? This transitional year of '92, that got on here. Your Naughty by Natures, your Eric B Rakims, your Daddy Canes, Teddy Riley, etc. If you were making this film in 2020, who would be the equivalent artists to put on here? Like, who would you get to do like the title track? Like, who's the 2020 Rakim? And I don't mean someone who sounds like Rakim—

00:53:02 Sean Guest Oh, you wanna know the artist, you don't want to—you don't want to know the Pac.

00:53:05 Oliver Host I mean, sure, let's say that you're remaking *Juice*, right—

00:53:08 Morgan Host And it's set in New York.

00:53:09 Oliver Host Sure. And you need the soundtrack to go with it, and you need something that is able to do the same kind of work that some of the songs on the soundtrack do. Who are the artists that you're going with?

00:53:19 Sean Guest When Kendrick is on an aggressive record, it gives you the same feeling that *Juice* can give you. Now, Kendrick is from Los Angeles, so that is not a New York artist. Maybe doesn't communicate what *Juice* needs to communicate. But, I mean, who is a New York rapper?

00:53:33 Morgan Host But, see, that was gonna be my thing. Who is a New York rapper who is young, who if we were redoing *Juice*—I mean, if it's just a, you know, if—just who? Because who makes me want to shadowbox like Pusha T. Pusha T is also not a New York rapper.

00:53:48 Sean Guest He would love to be, though.

00:53:50 Oliver Host Actually, I could see—I could see Pusha getting that call, to do the title track.

*[Sean and Morgan affirm.]*

And it doesn't—I don't think it has to be a New York rapper, necessarily. But to have that effect, right, just the amped-ness of it, I could imagine it being someone like Pusha.

You know, maybe one of like—I don't know if I would give one of the Griselda folks the like, the title track

00:54:08 Sean Guest I wouldn't give Griselda—or Betty the Butcher, you know, somebody like that

00:54:11 Oliver Host They would get, like, track nine. You know, that's where they'd fall. They'd get to be in one of the bar scenes for about a ten-second placement, and that's them there. But you're not getting—you're not giving em the opening credits, and you're not gonna give them closing credits.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

00:54:25 Sean Guest I mean, that's—the sort of super structure of New York rap doesn't exist in the same way, you know?

*[Oliver affirms.]*

You couldn't build the whole soundtrack out of this version out of the kind of like the gritty New York rap sound.

00:54:36 Oliver Host Well, let me put this question differently. Wait, where would you set *Juice* today, if you wanted to tell a similar kind of story? If it's not New York, what would be the equivalent by 2020 standards?

00:54:45 Morgan Host To me, it would be like, would you really set it in LA? Because that whole, you know—that whole gangster thing—the gangster thing is over, but it's different. So this is the time around *Colors*, this isn't *Boyz n the Hood*.

*[Sean and Oliver affirm.]*

I don't know, because I don't know if any coast is really reigning supreme where hip hop is concerned. And you can't put Drake on it,

and you know I love Drake.

*[Oliver laughs.]*

Cause you can't set it in Toronto, telling the six.

00:55:09 Sean Guest

It's not Atlanta?

00:55:11 Morgan Host

That's not—that's fair. It could be Atlanta.

00:55:13 Sean Guest

There is like a—still like a creative life blood of identifiable sound there, you could orient it around, maybe.

00:55:20 Morgan Host

It'd be trappy, though.

00:55:21 Oliver Host

I mean, I was thinking Chicago.

*[Sean and Morgan affirm.]*

Exactly. And, just—I know I'm painting with some stereotypes here, but just the idea of cities that still—where you still feel like there's a certain amount of grit. And, I mean, Sean, you were talking to me before we started taping, just about how much New York has changed, and other cities like San Francisco.

It—it's hard to give you like the New York or the Harlem that's being represented in 1992 *Juice*. Like, that Harlem doesn't really exist in 2020. And so I think if you find a city in which you still have some of that grit to it, it's not gonna be—I don't think it's gonna be New York to the same degree. And I do think maybe it's in the south, or maybe it's still in one of like the rust belt cities in the midwest.

00:56:02 Morgan Host

I mean, you could—maybe Chief Keef, if you're gonna do Chicago?

*[Sean affirms.]*

Maybe Chief Keef.

00:56:04 Sean Guest

That's the thing, is, if you're looking also to cast a Bishop, you know—this is against my better judgement, but—you need kind of a Takashi 6ix9ine kind of a figure, who's like, when you see this person, they indicate chaos to you.

*[Morgan affirms.]*

That's what they bring to the role. And you're like, "Something's gonna go wrong here."

00:56:22 Morgan Host

Until you find out he's a studio construct and snitch.

*[Sean affirms and Oliver laughs.]*

But before that—

00:56:25 Sean Guest

And that's the problem with a lot of Vegas rappers, that is actually is that one thing that has changed so significantly about the genre is—and, you know, Pac also, theatre kid, from Baltimore.

*[Morgan and Oliver affirm.]*

Self-creation in many ways. You know, comes from obviously a rebellious and activist family, but like so much of this stuff is self-mythology. And, you know, maybe somebody like that fits into the equation of the 2020 version, too, I don't know.

00:56:52 Oliver Host Sean, if you had to describe *Juice* in three words, what three words would you choose?

00:56:57 Sean Guest Wow, well, I think it has to be know the ledge, right? That's what—

*[Morgan laughs.]*

How else to describe it? Tells me everything I needed to know.

00:57:06 Oliver Host There you go. If listeners enjoyed checking out *Juice*, both the movie and the soundtrack, we got recommendations for what you should peep next. Sean, why don't you kick us off?

00:57:15 Sean Guest You know, if you like *Juice*, and you like Tupac Shakur, and you like Tupac Shakur on-screen, I would recommend the movie that has kind of fallen by the wayside on the Tupac filmography, which is a movie called *Gridlock'd*.

It's a comedy from 1997. It stars Tupac and Tim Roth as essentially two junkies trying to make their way through the world. And it's directed by Vondie Curtis-Hall, who was a really great actor who people may recall from *Romeo and Juliet*. And *Gridlock'd* is not exactly like *Juice* in its tone, but it captures that same incredible energy, intensity, and kind of comic sensibility that you see from Tupac in *Juice*, so if you haven't seen *Gridlock'd*, I would recommend you check it out right now.

00:57:50 Music Music "Never Had A Friend Like Me" off the album *Gridlock'd* by 2Pac. Mid-tempo rap with a smooth, grooving instrumental backing.

*Collect calls to my dogs from the county jail*

*Sending me mail*

*Heard the blocks in the same shape*

*Ain't nothing changed*

*N-ggas slanging at the same place*

*The same faces*

*We supposed to always hate our foes*

*This lifestyle is forever*

*Watch the game unfold*

*Shedding crocodile tears...*

*[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]*

00:58:05 Oliver Host For me, what comes to mind would be John Singleton's *Poetic Justice*, which was his follow-up to *Boyz n the Hood*, and a film that came out just a year after *Juice*. It also stars Tupac, albeit a much kinder, gentler Tupac, playing opposite Janet Jackson. And, oddly, Janet isn't on the soundtrack, but at least they finally got Tupac to record one for here.

He's on the soundtrack with "Definition of a Thug". Plus you got tracks by Naughty by Nature, Nice & Smooth, Tony! Toni! Toné!, who we were talking about earlier, and one of my all-time favorite Pete Rock and CL Smooth joints, "One in a Million."

00:58:41 Music Music "One in a Million" off the album *Poetic Justice* by Pete Rock and CL Smooth. Smooth, somewhat funky instrumentals under mid-tempo rap.

*I'm on the job like the mob every single day  
'93 no shorts, music is my sport  
The hot metal's on my waste, brother here's a taste  
In your face, the bass chilling like a masked villain  
Nobody better cause we one in a million*

*One in a million  
Funk for you baby  
One in a million  
Listen it drives you wild  
One in a million*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*

00:59:00 Morgan Host Going back to March of 1994, the director was Jeff Pollack, *Above the Rim*. This also features Tupac Shakur. This is about Wayne Martin, who plays basketball, and he's got loyalties to Tupac, who's a drug dealer, and an ex-basketball player named Leon.

At the time, I remember thinking, "I don't know what the movie's gonna be like, but the soundtrack is fire." Produced by Death Bell Records, who in 1994, were killing the game.

00:59:28 Music Music "Big Pimpin'" off the album *Above the Rim* by The Dogg Pound. Mid-tempo rap with people rhythmically snapping in the background.

*...back to my crib  
To see what's with my woman and my newborn kid*

*With my mind on my money and my money on my mind  
We do this every day about the same time, bitch*

*I was at the park one day, that's when I saw her face  
She looked kind of cavi to me  
But when I take her home...*

*[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]*

00:59:49 Oliver Host That will do it for this episode of Heat Rocks, with our special guest Sean Fennessey. Sean, what are you working on now, besides recording fifteen podcasts a week?

00:59:57 Sean Guest So many things. Uh, yeah, I'm the host of a show called *The Big Picture*. I'm frequently on *The Rewatchables*. Um, at the Ringer we're doing all kinds of things on our website, our YouTube channel. We have a couple of films in production at the moment so there's a lot going on right now.

01:00:11 Oliver Host And where can people find more about you? Where are you on the socials?

01:00:14 Sean Guest You can catch me @SeanFennessey on Twitter. That's more than enough, I feel.

[Morgan and Oliver affirm.]

I don't need to be sharing that much more.

01:00:20 Oliver Host That's good enough. Thank you so much for coming through today.

01:00:22 Sean Guest Thank you for having me. I really appreciated this conversation.

01:00:24 Morgan Host Thank you for picking this album.

01:00:27 Oliver Host You've been listening to *Heat Rocks* with me, Oliver Wang, and Morgan Rhodes.

01:00:30 Morgan Host Our theme music is "Crown Ones" by *Thes One of People Under The Stairs*. Shoutout to Thes for the hookup.

01:00:36 Oliver Host *Heat Rocks* is produced by myself and Morgan, alongside Christian Dueñas, who also edits, engineers, and does the booking for our shows.

01:00:43 Morgan Host Our senior producer is Laura Swisher, and our executive producer is Jesse Thorn.

01:00:48 Oliver Host We are part of the Maximum Fun family, taping every week live in their studios in the West Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles, where we always try to know the ledge.

One last thing. Here's a teaser for next week's episode. The next installment in the *Music and Popcorn* series, featuring Max Fun's own April Wolfe, of *Switchblade Sisters*, who came in to talk with us about Whitney Houston's break-out 1992 smash, *The Bodyguard*.

01:01:15 Oliver Host It surprises me that this film wasn't made in some version sooner, because especially when you think about all the thrillers coming out of the '70s and the '80s, this kind of basic storyline, you would think, would have made a perfect kind of film.

01:01:29 Morgan Host And for somebody else, you know what I'm saying? Whitney wasn't the only pop star around this time. We also had Madonna around this time. So, surprising that this wasn't a vehicle for Madonna.

01:01:38 April Guest One of the reasons why it seems that they went with Whitney is that—and no offense to Madonna—I mean, she doesn't have the kind of vocal capabilities that Whitney Houston did, like, never, right?

[Oliver laughs.]

01:01:51 Morgan Host Truer words have never been spoken.

01:01:53 April Guest So, she's a great like, stylist of things, and she's got a great image, and that was always kind of fun. You know, doing creative things. But Whitney Houston was just, you know, obviously a raw singer,

and that's what Kevin Costner was looking for, was that—um, you know, 'cause he was thinking early on what the songs were going to be.

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