

BEHIND THE CLASSICS



Sheryl Nields/Courtesy of Maverick Records

WRITTEN BY: JOE PERRY AND STEVEN TYLER
RECORDED: MARCH 9, 1986, AT MAGIC VENTURE RECORDING STUDIOS, NYC
PRODUCED BY: RICK RUBIN AND RUSSELL SIMMONS
VOCALS: JOSEPH "RUN" SIMMONS, DARRYL "D.M.C." MCDANIELS, STEVEN TYLER
GUITAR: JOE PERRY
TURNTABLES: JASON "JAM MASTER JAY" MIZELL
DRUM PROGRAMMING: RICK RUBIN
FROM THE ALBUM: *RAISING HELL* (1986)



"Walk This Way"

RUN-D.M.C.

Jason "Jam Master Jay" Mizell got his start as a DJ in the late 1970s and early '80s, spinning records behind rappers at parties in the Hollis area of Queens. "We would have to find a hard beat to rap over," he once explained. "We would take an old rock record and just open up, drums only, followed by guitar, [then go] to the other turntable and start another record so we could rap over this hard drum beat." One beat in particular that caught his ear was the opening of Aerosmith's 1975 classic "Walk This Way," during which drummer Joey Kramer lays down a funky, unadorned beat for two full measures.

By 1986 Mizell was well-known as the DJ of rap group Run-D.M.C., providing the musical bed for MCs Joseph "Run" Simmons and Darryl "D.M.C." McDaniels. The trio was at New York City's Chung King House of Metal recording studio in 1986 with producers Rick Rubin and Russell Simmons, attempting to come up with one final track for their third album, when Mizell began tinkering with the "Walk This Way" intro. Rubin's ears perked up immediately, and he suggested that the group not just sample the beat but remake the entire song. "Jay thought that was the greatest idea," D.M.C. later recalled. "I didn't."

Run also opposed the idea, but Rubin finally convinced the rappers to go home, listen to the song and transcribe the lyrics—which they had never heard, having only been exposed to the opening beat as it was looped by DJs like Jam Master Jay. What they heard horrified them. "We got on the phone with Russell, Rick and Jay and said, 'This is hillbilly music! You're gonna ruin us!'" D.M.C. said. Finally they relented, and halfheartedly took a pass at recording it at the studio the next day. Dissatisfied with the results, Rubin was determined to re-record the track—this time with Aerosmith lead singer Steven Tyler and guitarist Joe Perry, who signed on for a fee of \$8,000 each. The two flew into town the morning after playing a show in Philadelphia, meeting up with Run-D.M.C. and company at Magic Venture Studios in Manhattan. "I thought they'd show us some ideas on how to rearrange the song, but all they had was a drum track," remembered Perry. "Rick Rubin says, 'All you've got to do is play the song the way you play it.'" Perry fired up his Schecter electric guitar—with the words "Protest and survive" burned into the head—and let rip.

Tyler laid down his chorus vocal, Run and D.M.C. recorded their verses, and finally Tyler overdubbed his own interjections into the verses. A brief sample of the collaboration's inspiration was retained: Kramer's original drum intro and a snippet of Perry's 1975 guitar performance can be heard beneath the second verse.

Within five hours "Walk This Way" was complete. The song became a Top 5 hit, launching Run-D.M.C. into the mainstream and setting the stage for Aerosmith's major comeback the following year. The two acts remained friendly and reunited for a tour together in 2002. Two weeks after the last show, Jam Master Jay was shot and killed in a Queens recording studio by a still-unidentified assailant. Run and D.M.C. have steadfastly refused to perform without him, even when the act was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2009.

Today the initially skeptical Run and D.M.C. are happy to eat their words about the wisdom of covering "Walk This Way." "It took us from Hollis to Hollywood to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame," D.M.C. said. "So what do I know?"

—Chris Neal