



COMMON: *BE* (g.o.o.d./Geffen records)

by Rick Petinak

SOMETIMES, AN ARTIST WHO HAS SURVIVED AN INDUSTRY AS SIMULTANEOUSLY fickle and cutthroat as the record business hits the proverbial wall. It happens even to the best of them, and Chicago born emcee Common (originally known as Common Sense, until he lost a copyright suit to a reggae band of the same name) is absolutely among the best of a very dreary modern Hip-Hop landscape. In Common's case, he hit the wall on his last album, *The Electric Circus* (2002). Some attribute this deviation from an otherwise stellar career, then five albums strong, to his newfound romantic relationship with singer Erykah Badu, and the subsequent soul-searching mission he apparently embarked upon that may have led him to record such an eclectic but inconsistent and downright bad album. Common may have been thinking, as many artists often do, that he was taking the genre to virgin territory and new creative heights. Faithful fans did not concur. *Circus* tanked, and many doubted his ability or motivation to rebound.

Common's newest effort, *Be* (2005), is proof that he is most definitely back. He even makes reference at one point on the album, a bit in self-jest, to a photo spread with Badu featured in *Essence* magazine a couple of years back, saying, "...they said the crochet pants and sweater was wack/saw *The Corner* and said 'that n*ggas back...". Whatever it was that provoked Common to return to his tried and true formula of gritty urban dialogue set against the soulful melancholy of South Chicago, fans should consider themselves blessed. He has produced in *Be* a classic work of unbridled emotion, insight, love and hate all rolled into eleven tracks produced mostly by fellow home-town hero Kanye West, with two songs contributed by Jay-Dee of Slum Village. The first single from the album, the aforementioned *The Corner*, features West and The Last Poets. A haunting soul vocal clip, signature West, strings together the stripped-down but pinpoint percussion track with enough harmony to allow Common to weave another of his trademark street tales of stark realism tempered with the empathy of one who has received both his talents and tribulations from the ghetto, as evidenced in lines like this: "...Now I rolled in a Olds with windows that don't roll/down the rows where cars get broke in and stole..." Common branches out his commentary on *Be* to cover the intricacies of love and lust on the plush groove of *Go*, and his contempt for hypocritical and sub-par colleagues on the standout *Chi-City*. Equally impressive is *Testify*, an intriguing tale of courtroom drama and deceit with a brilliant surprise finale.

A bonus treat here is the inclusion of Common's live performance with West of *The Food*, from the second season of *The Dave Chapelle Show*, where fans first got a hint that Com was back. He seems fully cognizant of his dynamic return, rhyming on *They Say*, again with West and also John Legend, "...they say my life is comparable to Christ/the way I sacrificed and resurrected twice..." In fact, to this point, Com's best album may have indeed been his sophomore release *The Resurrection* (1994). Certainly, it will always be the favorite of many fans, as it brought us one of Hip-Hop's greatest individual songs, *I Used to Love H.E.R.* But *Be* is a force to be reckoned with in its own right. The maturity of Common, born Lonnie Rashied Lynn, is evident here and adds a depth across the whole album previously only glimpsed on 2000's *Like Water for Chocolate*. Fans who abandoned Com after *Circus* and unfamiliar ears alike should appreciate this gem. The album cover photo, certainly intended to evoke memories of Marvin Gaye's masterpiece *What's Going On?*, signals the achievement of another great work...if not a masterpiece, a damn good album to say the least.

RATING:



SUSTAINABLE IS ATTAINABLE, CLEAN ENERGY NOW!

-by Shawn Putnum



A PROFESSOR SHOWS HIS SUPPORT AT THE ROLLING SUNSHINE TOUR.

DURING THE SPRING '05 SEMESTER AT FRESNO STATE University, the Renew CSU collective was formed. It was the result of a successful teach-in followed by a student convergence at Chico State University. The collective is working within the statewide fight for a strong sustainability policy for the entire CSU system. As a result of lots of persistence, hard work and dedication, there were many accomplishments throughout the semester for the collective as well as long term coalitions built for the future.

WHAT IS THE RENEW CSU CAMPAIGN

The Renew CSU campaign is working on implementing a sustainability policy that would set standards for clean energy, green building and energy efficiency. The clean energy policy asks for a commitment to obtain at least 25 percent of total electricity from renewable sources by 2014 and 50 percent by 2024. Of this, the equivalent of a half megawatt of renewable energy per CSU would begin by 2010. The Green Buildings Standard requests that all renovated and newly constructed buildings be designed and constructed using green building guidelines equivalent to the LEED silver standards developed by the U.S. Green Building Council. The Energy Efficiency Policy requests that energy use per student should be reduced by 20 percent by 2014 and 40 percent by 2024.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE FRESNO STATE RENEW CSU COLLECTIVE

Throughout the entire semester, the FSU Renew CSU collective had lots of reasons to celebrate. In March, the Greenpeace Rolling Sunlight tour paid a visit. The daytime festivities included free solar-powered slushies for handwritten letters to President Welty. The evening concluded a free potluck, two live DJ's and a screening of *The Fourth World War*. The event was very successful for creating awareness of our campaign to not only other campus groups but also professors and members of the progressive community.

In April, students celebrated Fossil Fools Day, an international day of action advocating for the need of independence from fossil fuels. Students celebrated first by holding a massive work party to assemble props for one of the two days of action. On the first day of action, students bolted into classrooms with dinosaur masks on yelling "Don't be fooled by Fossil Fuels" as they turned the classroom lights off and taped an informational flier to the light switch. One

professor thanked collective members later and said he left his lights off for the remainder of the day in solidarity. Later in the week, students assembled at the free speech area to collect more handwritten letters, gather petition signatures and make phone calls to Chancellor Reed's office urging him to support the Renew CSU campaign. Also in April, students joined up with the Recycling Club and the Campus Peace and Civil Liberties Coalition for tabling on Earth Day.

WHERE THE CAMPAIGN IS AT NOW AND WHAT DIRECTION WILL IT TAKE THIS FALL...

The semester ended with the 100+ hand written letters and hundreds of petition signatures collected throughout the semester being delivered to President Welty asking for his endorsement of the campaign.

A week after the semester ended Wetly announced his support with a letter to Chancellor Reed. At a statewide level starting July 1st the CSU system will purchase 15 percent of their electricity load from renewable sources. This is the largest contract for renewables from any institution of learning and double the current largest purchaser's contract. On July 19th the CSU system will announce the results of their final feasibility study on clean energy. On September 20th Cal State will announce their goals for clean energy, energy efficiency and their new guidelines for green building.

When school gets back in session you can expect lots of work from this group. We are planning on conducting lots of teach-in's on sustainability and clean energy to build a larger group. We will be participating in Energy Actions Campus Clean Energy Challenge (www.energyaction.net) - a multi national student lead fight for clean energy. One of the main local campaigns we will start is for a Strategic purchasing contract for Fresno State to purchase more environmentally safe products. It is also our hope to start a Sustainability group at Fresno City College.

SUSTAINABLE IS ATTAINABLE, CLEAN ENERGY NOW!

Shawn Putnam, Fresno State Renew CSU Collective
For questions and comments please email shawn@energyaction.net

For more information on the Renew CSU campaign visit www.renewcsu.org