

THE END AND THE BEGINNING

The unique genesis of American Recordings and comments made on the label's day of birth encapsulate the core values and intentions of the label and its creator, producer Rick Rubin.

Nearly 20 years ago, American Recordings came into the world in a most unusual way. From 1983 to 1993, Rubin's label was called Def American Recordings; but when Rubin found out that the word "def" had been added to the 1993 edition of Webster's Dictionary, defining it as "an 80s street word that means 'excellent,'" he decided to drop the term that had become far too mainstream, and in fact, a cliché. "Def" had become this catchall catch phrase for hip-hop or rap culture," Rubin told the Los Angeles Daily News. "It just didn't feel right anymore."

RUBIN COULD HAVE JUST taken out a full-page ad in *Billboard* with the international "no" sign over a photo of the Def American logo to announce the change, but



Rev. Al Sharpton delivers the eulogy to "Def."

instead, on August 27, 1993, he put "def" to rest by holding a full-blown funeral to mark its passing. Rubin had a plot, a coffin, and a black granite headstone purchased at the Hollywood Memorial Park Cemetery (now the Hollywood Forever Cemetery), and reserved its Chapel of the Psalms for the funeral service. The controversial Reverend Al Sharpton was flown in to deliver a proper eulogy for "def" in the chapel, pall bearers that included then Warner Bros. Records Chairman Mo Ostin, prominent entertainment attorney John Branca, and the Geto Boys' Bushwick Bill, carried the coffin into the chapel where some 500 mourners were invited to pay their final respects by filing past the open casket and leaving some sort of memorabilia with "Def" on it – a t-shirt, hat, coffee mug, CD. Someone even placed a Gold record in the coffin. As the Rev. Sharpton so aptly put it, "Def died of terminal acceptance."



Rick Rubin puts his Def memorabilia into the coffin.

Flower tributes arrived from Andrew Dice Clay



Inside the chapel.

and Sir Mix-A-Lot, and mourners included the entire Def American Recordings staff/family as well as friends such as Tom Petty and Roseanna Arquette, members of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, the Cult, Depeche Mode, Slayer, Pearl Jam and Nine Inch Nails, among others. During the service, mentalist The Amazing Kreskin read the minds of Petty and Arquette.



Petty, Kreskin, Arquette

After the service, the mourners accompanied the casket outside where it was placed into a 19th century, horse-drawn hearse. Rubin and Sharpton, flanked by a retinue of Black Panther-type armed guards, lead the procession that now included a New Orleans-style funeral marching band playing "Amazing Grace" and "When The Saints Go Marching In."

The mourners wound their way through the cemetery to the gravesite where "def" was finally laid to rest, spending its eternity in the company of luminaries such as Rudolph Valentino, Tyrone Power, Bugsy Siegel, Cecil B. DeMille, and John Houston.




Sharpton, Rubin make their way to the gravesite.



The coffin is loaded into the horse-drawn hearse.

"When we bury Def," said Sharpton as the coffin was lowered into the ground, "we bury the urge to conform."



 *The funeral marching band leads the horse-drawn hearse and the 500 mourners to the gravesite.*

The cortege – nearly a score of stretch limousines and some 200 cars - was then escorted by a dozen Los Angeles Police Department motorcycle cops a few miles away to the Shatto 37 Lanes bowling alley where, long into the night, the birth of the label’s new name, American Recordings, was celebrated by some 2500 family and close friends.

Rock’n Roll hadn’t seen anything like the **Death of Def** in decades. And likely never will again.



Rubin was – and is to this day - guided by two principals: “Do the right thing at the right time for the right reason,” and whatever it is, “make it the best it can be.” Financial gain has never been the main impetus for anything he’s been involved with; integrity, truth and making a great record was and is. The core of *The Death of Def* event and the birth of American Recordings embodied those principals.

Def was dead.
Long live American Recordings.



Rev. Sharpton, Rubin, Mo Ostin



American's George Drakoulis, Sharpton, Bushwick Bill, Rubin, Ric Menello, Mark DiDia



Mourners say their final good-byes



Rubin, Depeche Mode's David Gahan and Raging Slab's Greg Strzempka at the American birthday/bowling party



Rubin visits Def's grave a few months after the burial