



Title: Spice 1

Artist: Spice 1

Year: 1992

Type: Studio Album

Genre: West coast hip-hop, gangsta rap

Length: 56 minutes

Label: Jive

Producers: Ant Banks, Spice 1, Blackjack, E-A-Ski & CMT

Peak chart performance: 14th, U.S. Billboard Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums, 1992

Scene: Oakland/Bay Area

TRACK LISTING

1. "In My Neighborhood"
2. "187 Proof"
3. "East Bay Gangster (Reggae)"
4. "Money Gone"
5. "1-800-Spice"
6. "Peace to My Nine"
7. "Young Nigga"
8. "Welcome to the Ghetto"
9. "Fucked in the Game"
10. "Money or Murder"
11. "City Streets"
12. "1-900-Spice"
13. "Break Yourself" (featuring MC Ant)
14. "187 Pure"

As the west coast and gangsta rap began to assert its authority over the rap scene in the early '90s, one of the names at its forefront was a cold blooded cat from out of the San Francisco Bay Area, **Spice 1**. An underrated and relatively obscure star of the early '90s, Spice was down with **Too \$hort**, **Ant Banks**, and the rest of the Oakland/Bay Area based Dangerous Crew headed by \$hort; his music can be summarised as **MC Eiht** style rapping over Too \$hort style beats. But that summary tells a criminally bare story, akin to saying 'Plato was a philosopher' and leaving it at that. Spice was a gangsta rapper down to the bone, as this album demonstrates.

Spice 1, accordingly, will not appeal to those who aren't into synth-heavy, west coast style rap music. One or two tracks might have some sort of crossover appeal to other rap fans, but generally speaking, this one is not for casuals. *Spice 1* is, in its entirety, hardcore ghetto tales about doing the dirt: killing, murders, robberies, and drug dealing; and when the artist is finished with his work for the day, kicking back with a 40 oz. to drink and a big fat blunt to smoke.

So what makes it different and what makes it noteworthy? After all, gangsta rap albums investigating the above mentioned themes are a dime a dozen. What sets *Spice 1* apart is the artist's brilliant technical ability as a rapper, with the vocals featuring an extremely diverse range of rapping

styles, and the lyrics being crafted with impeccable skill and an irreverent sense of humour. Spice just communicates this raw energy throughout the album, and beyond that, his technique is just outstanding and he has this ability to be very resourceful and innovative with his vocals in particular, whether that's featuring a dreadful, yet hilarious attempt at rapping in reggae-influenced Jamaican patois on **East Bay Gangster (Reggae)** and **1-800-Spice**; or stuttering his rap to great effect on **Money Gone**.

But above all else, Spice is a masterful storyteller, as he demonstrates on the tracks **187 Proof**, **187 Pure**, **Money or Murder**, and **In My Neighborhood**; and it is this ability which makes this album worth listening to from a lyrical and vocal viewpoint. None of his predecessors nor contemporaries, and I daresay none of his successors, can match Spice for this killer combination of technical ability, innovativeness, and storytelling skill.

Though the album is very one-dimensional and simple in terms of thematic focus, the way Spice goes about expressing himself on the theme is complex and multi-dimensional. The sole derivation away from the theme is on the socially conscious track **Welcome to the Ghetto**, which, rather than glorifying the crime and poverty which characterised the area Spice grew up in and represented, condemned it.

In order to be a good one, a rap album must succeed in two distinct areas: vocals & lyrics, and productions. In the words of **DJ Quik**, "Lyrics ain't nothin' if the beat ain't crackin'".

The production on *Spice 1* is mostly handled by the excellent **Ant Banks**, ever a capable hand to accompany and support the lyrics and vocals of Spice, and various other rappers. **Ant Banks** did a good job, laying out the bass heavy, funk-based synths for which he is famous; serving up the perfect instrumental complement to Spice's rapping style.

However, there is one problem with them: they're backwards and outdated, even by 1992's standards. 1992, after all, was the year **Dr. Dre** dropped *the* seminal g-funk album, *The Chronic*, a release which revolutionised rap music both in instrumental and lyrical capacities. Consequently, pretty much everything else from 1992 feels a bit archaic and behind the times, *Spice 1* is no exception. Although Banks did a good turn in terms of providing instrumentation which perfectly suited Spice down to a tee, I think he rather fucked the dog on this particular point, as he did a much better job in producing a more current sound on his other 1992 release, this time for **Too \$hort** on the platinum record smash hit *Shorty the Pimp*.

On the whole, *Spice 1* is a pretty fucking good release. Spice is known by very few, but he is certainly worth looking up if you are into early west coast hip-hop, for he was one of its finest names. His talents on the microphone and with the pen and notepad are first rate, and the production supplied by Ant Banks is tailor made to allow his storytelling to thrive. Anybody who enjoys the poetic stylings

of Compton-based outfits such as [Above the Law](#) and [Compton's Most Wanted](#) would do well to check out this release from further north in California.

Recommended tracks: **187 Proof, East Bay Gangster (Reggae), 1-800-Spice, Money or Murder, Welcome to the Ghetto**