

# Mp3 Justice System - Sounds Of The Rooftop

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Rooftop Soundcheck was the group's debut album in 1994. It wasn't the first Hip Hop record to use live instruments, but it was the first Hip Hop record where all you got was live, original music. No Samples, No Drum Machines, No Loops. Justice System a 14 MP3 Songs HIP HOP/RAP: Alternative Hip Hop, JAZZ: Acid Jazz Details: This review was done originally in 1994. This album is the remaster of the original, Rooftop Soundcheck. Kymm Britton and Dee Philipp Binggeli The infusion of live instruments into the sample-heavy world of hip hop continues to enliven the evolving art form of rap. Real guitars, real drums, real voices singing out over a relentless beat -- this is the future of hip hop, and no other band embodies this bold ideal better than Justice System, six (sometimes seven) musicians working together to create a unified rap flavor, invigorating a genre that all too often sounds mechanical and soulless. Quite a goal for six young men who grew up together in tiny Greenburgh, New York, forming Justice System some five years ago while still in high school. But one listen to the band's initial effort, Rooftop Soundcheck, proves that Justice System has created one of the liveliest and most exciting debut albums in recent memory, sounding like a clarion call to the rap community--wake up and dig the new flavor. Justice System's history begins at Woodland High School in Greenburgh, New York, where in 1990 rappers John "Jahbaz" Dawson and Tom "Folex" Foley hooked up with longtime friends Chris "Wizard C. Roc" Nordland and the brothers Alex ("Coz Boogie") and Eric ("Eric G.") Gopoian to form a band that, as Folex puts it, "would rely on real people making music and having something to say, and not hiding it behind DATs and samples." A year later, multi-instrumentalist Alex "Mo'Better Al" Auld came on board to add some spice to the mix and help with demos. The legendary Zulu Nation, a major influence, heard Justice System's tape and invited the fledgling band to open some of their shows, where the sextet was introduced to another hero: Afrika Bambaataa. By this time, Justice System was building a steady following in Manhattan's downtown club scene, playing sold-out shows at S.O.B.'s, The Grand and the New Music Cafe. MCA Records caught the buzz and promptly signed the band on to an exclusive contract. Thus Rooftop Soundcheck, was born with its moving tribute to their heroes, called "Dedication to Bambaataa." Says Jahbaz, "We were listening to people like Curtis Mayfield, Isaac Hayes, Coltrane, Stevie Wonder and

Bambaata, and we were affected by the spirituality in that music. But when we looked around and saw how many musicians these artists had influenced, and weren't getting their due, we wanted to correct the situation. Because it's artists like Bambaataa that set the foundation for all that was to follow." Key tracks from Rooftop Soundcheck, which was produced by Justice System with help from Eddie Martinez (guitarist for Chic, Patti LaBelle, Run D.M.C. and others), include "Soul Style," based on the Langston Hughes poem "Negro Speaks of Rivers," one of the best explorations of the creative process ever put on the record; "Summer in the City," the debut 12" and first video (which was shot at night on the streets of New York City); and "Trouble on My Mind," a song Folex calls "a breakdown of the last four years in the lifetime of Justice System. It tells how to watch out for sharks in this business, and how you have to keep your focus on the music and not get distracted by people who want to use you." But the element that sets Justice System apart from the rest of the hip hop pack is their strength as musicians. "It's all about takin' it to the stage," says Jahbaz. "You have to be able to do it live, and this is a real band which doesn't rely on pre-recorded technology to get its message across. So our sound is more organic and alive, and when Folex and I are rappin' over that soulful music behind us, the power is undeniable." And the power of the sample-free music of Rooftop Soundcheck is undeniable. One listen, and you'll stay for the show.

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