Griselda takes over winter: Westside Gunn & Benny the Butcher albums

By REX NAYLOR
Staff Writer

Westside Gunn and Benny the Butcher of the Griselda record label, alongside Black Soprano Family (BSF), released separate albums, both Nov. 13. Gunn released "Heelmatic," while Benny the Butcher and BSF released "A Friend of Ours 2," a sequel to the 2018 album, "A Friend of Ours."

The Buffalo natives became known for grimy storytelling, with hard-hitting, style beats, and both new albums continue this trend. For fans of gritty, uncompromising coke-rap and soulful boom-bap, the ecosystem grows with two major statements.

Dropping in tandem, the projects offer a check-in to where Buffalo hip-hop stands today; despite hints from Gunn about leaving the solo album atmosphere.



ILLUSTRATION BY LILIANA MIRABELLA

When comparing "Heelmatic" to Gunn's monumental albums like "Flygod" or the "Hitler Wears Hermes" series, his new project feels sharper lyrically and laid back aesthetically.

The boom-bap beats never left on songs like "Martin 4ese," "Koke Slam" and "Don Pistola" in the first half of the album. The tracks in the back half of the 16-song album feature jazz loops on "Egyptian Cadillac," "Price Choppers" and "Hurt + Heel."

"Hurt + Heel" stands out more than any other song on the LP as it's the longest song on the album, running over seven minutes with a four-minute saxophone solo from jazz musician Jeremy Kern.

"Don Pistola" is the ultimate fan service to Griselda loyalists as Gunn, Butcher and Conway the Machine unite for the first time since 2024 on "Griselda Express."

With wrestling references packed into each track and reliable features from Benny, Conway and rapper Steve God Cooks, along with all-time great rapper Nas, "Heelmatic" offers a sound for anyone willing to give the album a listen.

Fans are quick to label this one of Gunn's strongest projects in recent memory with nothing but praise. Appreciation doesn't go the same way when looking at "A Friend of Ours 2."

BSF was founded by the Butcher in 2012 while he was in Elmira Correctional Facility. The group focuses on gritty-east style sound with mafioso lyricism, hence the name.

The Butcher and BSF teamed up releasing "A Friend of Ours 2" as the album represents the pedestal the Butcher has brought himself to. BSF shows the Butcher's evolution from street life and incarceration, to an executive in the industry and a mentor.

Feedback ranges greatly on forums like Reddit, with many fans feeling Butcher wasn't as ambitious on the new project. One of the concerns many had before the album was that the same formula was being used far too often.

The album doesn't stray away from Butcher's identity, and while it delivers many memorable songs, it doesn't hit at the same level as his best work does.

The Butcher stepped back into the trenches with a persona that solidified his underground rise with a mob-inspired background.

He returns to home turf, playing it safe, choosing to stick to what's known to work instead of experimenting with broader soundscapes. With only 10 tracks in 30 minutes, the album favors a raw, percussive boom-bap style with tight, lyrical punches.

Features from artists Rick Hyde and ElCamino give a service to "Tana Talk 3" and "The Plugs I Met," both being two of the most successful projects coming from the Butcher.

Songs like "Channel Boots and Caine Sales" highlight the solo capabilities of the Butcher and set the album's tone. "Channel Boots" opens with a "Godfather"-esque sound with piano keys slightly off-kilter.

"Caine Sales" gives a return to the street with sharp lyrics like "I watched friends turn into ghosts like Matthew Perry." Perry was an actor, best known for his role in "Friends" as Chandler Bing, who passed away in 2023.

The album as a whole experiments between boom-bap and a light mob sound you'd hear if Vito Corleone walked into a room. Everyone who's a part of the project leans heavily into the sound, making it work.

The production stays true to the Griselda formula with dark instrumentals and hard-hitting drum loops with introspective street-oriented storytelling. In some regards, the production feels dated but finds a way to remain fresh and keep replay value.

Despite certain aspects the Butcher has tested more than once, the features add value to each track with a new voice delivering strong verses effortlessly.

The 30-minute-mob-inspired tape may not be what fans wanted initially from the Butcher, but it serves its purpose and is a necessary anchor in the Black Soprano Family ecosystem.

Both Gunn and Butcher gave fans a new set of songs to rotate for the rest of winter alongside the rest of their discographies. The albums demonstrate why Griselda is still around today and how projects can be memorable despite routine album releases.

Together, these releases highlight the duality of Buffalo's finest, one pushing the boundaries of sound, while the other fortifies the gritty foundation he's come to master.

Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang resigns as personal scandal grows into a corporate crisis

By ANTHONY ANGELILLO
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A corner booth inside a Denny's in East San Jose, California, still has a plaque marking where three engineers met over bottomless coffee in 1993 to plan Nvidia, now the biggest supplier of artificial intelligence (AI) chips.

Jensen Huang, the engineer who went on to run the company for the next 33 years, resigned Nov. 12 as president, chief executive officer (CEO) and board member, effective immediately.

His exit came the morning after reports that the board was preparing to oust him over two affairs, including one with a woman U.S. intelligence officials suspect to be a Chinese spy. Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Colette Kress will serve as interim CEO while retaining her CFO role.

The first public sign of trouble came in October, when The New York Times reported that U.S. officials had concluded Alice Huang was a Chinese intelligence asset who had grown close to the Nvidia CEO.

She held a senior role at Megaspeed, a Singapore-based data center company, and is a Chinese citizen and a former television reporter who shares the last name Huang but is not related to him.

Megapseed bought about $4.8 billion worth of Nvidia chips over two years, and federal investigators spent more than a year investigating whether the company helped Chinese buyers circumvent U.S. export controls. That case started at the Commerce Department before moving to the Justice Department, and Megaspeed has said it would cooperate in the investigation.

Huang treated the report like a business matter at first, telling an interviewer in late October that dealings with Megaspeed were normal and that Nvidia had checked where its chips went.

"We've studied all their deployments of our GPUs and counted every one," Huang said.

Then, Nov. 8, it all started to unravel. Huang sent a company-wide email admitting to an affair without naming anyone.

"I was unfaithful to my wife. My actions hurt her and our children," Huang wrote, later asking people to give his family privacy.

Huang and his wife, Lori, have been married for 41 years, and both of their children work at Nvidia.

The board opened an independent investigation that same day into reports that Huang had been the target of a foreign intelligence effort, while saying it still had confidence in him.

Two days later, the independent directors brought in former acting U.S. Attorney John H. Kim of the Southern District of New York and his law firm to run the review.

Washington came knocking as well, with three Republican House committee chairs asking Huang to attend a closed-door briefing Nov. 18 about his ties to Alice Huang. Sen. Kevin Cramer R-ND went further, urging him to resign and pointing to the risk of extortion.

Any chance Jensen had of riding out the investigation shrank Nov. 11, when a report citing five people who worked at the company revealed a second relationship, this one with Kimberly Powell, the Nvidia vice president of health care who reports directly to him.

Former employees said the two were filmed being affectionate at a San Jose hotel during the company's developer conference in March, though the video has not been made public.

That second relationship appeared to violate Nvidia's code of conduct, which tells employees to "avoid situations where our actions create conflict" and lists personal relationships among employees.

Reports surfaced that night that the board was preparing to remove him, and his resignation was announced before the stock market opened the next morning.

The selling started in after-hours trading Nov. 11 and carried into the next morning, when Nvidia stock fell as much as 14% and the company's market value dropped below $4 trillion, putting it behind Apple and Microsoft.

Nvidia was once worth $5 trillion, more than any company in the world. The company makes up about 7% of the S&P 500, and many 401(k) retirement accounts are built around funds that track that stock. Nvidia is worth 25% less without Huang and had already sold more than 20% in the month before Jensen left.

Many of the people who worked under Jensen wanted him to stay, and an anonymous survey of 232 Nvidia employees on the workspace app Blind, taken Nov. 9-10, found 88% believed he should remain CEO.

Kress spoke straight to that workforce in her first message as interim CEO.

"I believe deeply in this company and in its future," Kress wrote, thanking employees for holding steady through a rough stretch.

Leaving Nvidia does not end the trouble for Huang and Washington, where Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., said the resignation "does not absolve him" and House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said Huang "did the right thing for the company and for the country."

Rep. John Moolenaar, R-Mich., who chairs the House select committee on China, said Jensen agreed to brief lawmakers on his relationship with Alice and on Nvidia security practices.

Nvidia still plans to report third-quarter earnings Nov. 17, as it announced in October. Kress was always scheduled to post the written commentary on the quarter, but now she has to rely on a multi-trillion-dollar company behind her.

ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY ANGELILLO

