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MAGAZINE



INTERVIEWS

**GENTLEMAN &
RICHIE STEPHENS**

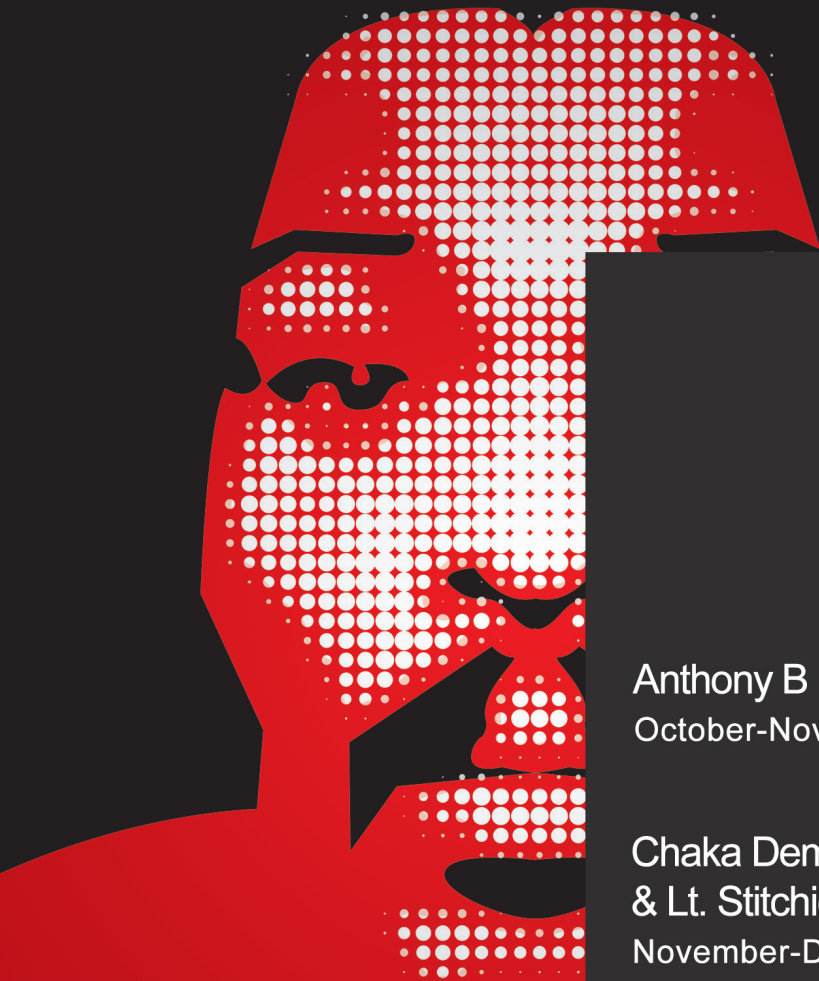
SHAGGY

MORGAN HERITAGE

EASY STAR ALL-STARS

MONO & NIKITAMAN

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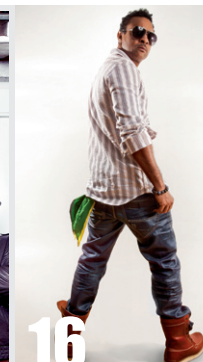
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CONTENT



08



16



24



36



46

INTERVIEWS

- 08 Gentleman & Richie Stephens
- 16 Shaggy
- 24 Morgan Heritage
- 36 Easy Star All-Stars
- 46 Mono & Nikitaman

PHOTOS

- 06 Chiemsee Reggae Summer 2011
- 14 Reggae Geel 2012
- 22 Reggae Sun Ska 2012
- 34 SummerJam 2012
- 44 Garance Reggae Festival 2012

- 50 Reggae Jam 2012
- 60 Ruhr Reggae Summer 2012

52 REVIEWS

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 **REGGAEVILLE**.com
MAGAZINE



CHIEMSEE REGGAE SUMMER 2011

PHOTOS BY ROBERT HEGENAUER

**CHIEMSEE
REGGAE
SUMMER**

INTERVIEW

GENTLEMAN & RICHIE STEPHENS

RISE UP FROM THE DUST

INTERVIEW GENTLEMAN & RICHIE STEPHENS

9

LIVE YOUR LIFE

BY URSULA MÜNCH
PHOTOS BY DANIEL ZIEGERT

They describe themselves as 'brothers', toured Europe together in 2011 and released two combinations already. Now Jamaica's Golden Voice Richie Stephens and Germany's number one reggae artist Gentleman are moving a step further with their release of *Live Your Life*, a joint album to hit the stores in late September. Munchy met both artists at Danny Brownie's studio in Kingston, Jamaica, to find out more about this musically and personally exciting project.



Who came up with the idea of the album and when did you actually start working on it?

Gentleman: First of all, there was no album planned. We did *Live Your Life*, the single, and the vibe was there, so we did *Warrior* right after. It's just a frequency that we are vibing on right now. We did some interviews at the Jamaica Jazz & Blues Festival and some journalists were asking us 'When can we expect the album?', so we just looked at each other and said 'Yeah man, it's a good idea, why not make an album?'. The momentum is so very special right now. When we write songs together, when we sing in the studio together, it is just pure inspiration. Everyone of us still has his solo career but we want to just use the vibe that we're having now.

How can I imagine the process of song writing, brain storming, coming up with ideas? One of you is in Germany, the other one in Jamaica. Do you just link each other to tell what ideas you have in mind or how does it practically work out?

Gentleman: Every song has a different way. Sometimes we have a song already that we are just making a combination out of. Sometimes we hear a riddim, for example from Danny Brownie, and we vibe it together to find a melody and lyrics. We're gonna have three solo songs each on the album and about six to eight combinations. It is a very round thing.

Are all the recordings done together in the studio in Jamaica?

Gentleman: It's a worldwide thing because we did recordings in Germany already, especially for the music like drums and the bass and then Danny mixed them in Jamaica. Who knows where we gonna master it? It's a universal production, so we can't really say it happened in Kingston or in Germany. It is all over the place.

Are you working with several producers or is there one person who is going to do the final mixing and mastering, someone you consider as the one producer of the album?



Richie Stephens: We have several producers working on it but most of the tracks are handled by Danny Brownie. If he is not the producer of them he is still mixing them or having something to do with it. Working with different producers is what makes the album so special still. We did some live recordings also with Gentleman's Evolution Band and we are glad to voice these tracks.

Is there a special motto, motive or spirit that leads through the album?

Gentleman: 'Rise up from the dust!'

Richie Stephens: The warrior spirit...

Gentleman: We all experience downs sometimes and it's about to get up again. The weaker you feel, at the same time you know, when you're over it, it will come out extra nice and extra sweet. It is about humanity in general, about vibes, perseverance, persistence.

Richie Stephens: Most of the songs are about inspiration. The album was born out of a tough situation: my son passed away. So I was invited to come to Germany and visit Gentleman and that's how we ended up doing the first song Live Your Life. Out of that experience we started recording other songs, such as Warrior, and we found ourselves writing certain songs. It is not an album of love songs that you traditionally hear from Richie Stephens. However we still sing about love on it. It's about inspirational songs and that is what people are gravitating to, when it comes to myself and Gentleman. So we just go on with that flow, because we like the positive vibration that we're feeling.

In the studio I got to watch you, Gentleman, recording a song while Richie, whom you called 'Mr Detail' was in the control room giving you advice. So when you are outside and he is recording, are you also handing in suggestions?

Richie Stephens (smiling and nodding): Yes, it works same way, same way...

Gentleman: It is just a fact, that Richie is more experienced. If I hear something, I will say 'Richie, I think you could do it like that.' But it is more him doing that because of his experience.

Richie Stephens: We are well together like that.

Gentleman: It's a good balance.

Richie Stephens: It is always important to listen to each other. I confidence his judgment as well. So if he says 'Richie, bring down that note or bring that up' I usually never hesitate, because he has a good ear as well.

What is the most significant thing that you learned from each other during your team work?

Gentleman: For me the whole thing of doing music with Richie is inspiring. I learned a lot when it comes to being here now and working with the media. Even after 20 years, I feel like now I'm ready to learn and I just recognize a lot of things. In the studio and the creative process I call him 'Mr Detail', because he strives for perfection. Sometimes he hears some little things that I would not hear and he corrects me. Together with Danny it's a blessing. It's a surrounding and an environment that squeezes the best out of me.

Richie Stephens: You are never too old to learn. Even though I've been in the game for





a long time, one of the things I enjoy about working with someone, who is a work horse and a professional, is that there's always something they're doing that I didn't know. Gentleman is a champion on the road as a touring artist performing 90 or even 105 minutes on stage per night. That is not the norm in our market but it is the norm in Europe. It is always good to watch him, to see the different intervals, when you stop and take a rest, bring on the background singers, all the little tricks... (laughs) In music you're never done with learning. It's always good to take a little piece from each and everyone. Everybody provides a diffe-

rent personality and charisma on stage that you can learn from.

Do you have a favorite song on the album?

Gentleman: If I had I wouldn't say so, because it's not doing justice to the other songs. Every song reflects a mood. It depends on the vibe. One day I feel one song more than the other one.

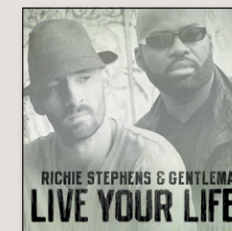
Richie Stephens: We are putting 150% on everyone.

Gentleman: It's all killer, no filler.



Review: Richie Stephens & Gentleman - Live Your Life (September 2012)

To be in the company of Germany's megawatt reggae star Gentleman is to see a person in the industry that is a true seeker, someone who strives to be „goodaz“, the term used for people in Jamaican patois as those that endeavor to pursue the best path in life - a positive, compassionate and helpful inspiration. So with this healer persona, giving hope, it is no surprise that his Jamaican colleague, Richie Stephens teamed up with him for a full-length project. Richie experienced a serious personal tragedy recently with the shooting death of his 22-year-old adopted son, up and coming entertainer Copper Cat who was killed in an apparent robbery in early 2011. Richie Stephens has an uplifting, epic, distinctive vocal style that has rang consistently over the past two decades both in reggae and in gospel. Kindred spirits, Richie's and Gentleman's project takes on the tone of a tent revival as the two share tunes in combination on six of the tracks and then they trade solos on the remainder of the five tunes on the set. The title song Live Your Life, performed in the current ballad style is a lush track with background vocals, building strings and a developed, infectious chant chorus and opens with sweet piano with lyrics that remind us that nobody really knows what tomor-



row will bring, so we should live our lives today. On Warrior, they pursue the trials and tribulations of music industry life and more. Evoking strong imagery on lines from Mr. Stephens like „I try to run but the warrior in me won't run away, I try to hide but the soul inside of me wanna stand, a million times I thought it was the end but here I am, still standing, the lion roars again,“ the line is punctuated by a sample of the sound of a lion's roar. Gentleman's themes are so solid, the metaphors, imagery, his use of harmonies, hooks, particularly on When You Get Lost are fuel for this revivalist fire. One tune that varies from the revivalist message, the combination, Heaven not only is a lovers tune, but also the most vintage, rocksteady-influenced song on the record. On Jah Not Sleeping we find the duo addressing tragedy head on, with metaphors straight to the head of those that move in violence singing, „Sometimes I wonder if you think about the love you've taken away when you're lying in your bed, “and Gentleman's counterpoint, „you're tossing and you're turning“. The song World Go Round introduces powerful female support vocals, and the sound a full band session with a live rhythm section.

by Justine Amadori Ketola



REGGAE GEEL 2012

PHOTOS BY PACO VAN LEEUWEN

INTERVIEW

SHAGGY

CULTURAL AMBASSADOR



ON A MISSION

BY MARKUS HAUTMANN

Shaggy is one of the superstars not just of reggae music but also within the international pop music fraternity spreading the popularity of reggae way beyond the distinct reggae massive. Yet, despite his enormous popularity, he is a modest, down to earth person, who willingly granted us an interview for this Reggaeville Chiemsee magazine at very, very short notice.



Shaggy, you probably have played dozens if not hundreds of festivals. So I don't think that you can recall your last performance at the Chiemsee Reggae Summer.

Of course, I do. That was four years ago.

Wow. Even I had to look it up. What is it about you being the "Cultural Ambassador of Jamaica"?

In fact, I am not. But what I am is an ambassador for reggae music and reggae culture just because of being an artist. But there is no official title of a "Cultural Ambassador".

I heard that you are planning a big festival in Jamaica like we have here in Europe?

We are in talks about doing that with a couple of partners in Jamaica. But nothing has manifested until now. We are still discussing about the venue etc.

So do you observe how certain things are done here to maybe copy some organizational features?

I certainly have to do a big amount of research. I take a close look at Rototom for example as it is a huge festival. And at Chiemsee Reggae Summer, too, of course. But we have big festivals in Jamaica, too. Sumfest for example. And I am quite experienced in promoting big shows like my annual "Shaggy & Friends". So I know what the undertakings are. But doing a festival with multiple days is a much bigger undertaking. So I look closely how it is done in Europe to perhaps adopt something. What we will certainly do is to incorporate international acts, like it is here in Europe. We want to attract an international audience. To create a festival vibe like it is here where local and international acts and people unite. But there will be no camping. Jamaicans are not used to that. They rather travel back and forth.

I can remember last time you performed at the CRS. The weather was really bad and everywhere it was muddy so a lot of artists did not come to the press confe-



rence to keep their shoes clean. But you just wrapped some plastic bags around your feet and walked through the mud. Now it took just one phone call to get this interview. It is quite rare that such a big star like you is so modest and so easy to deal with.

There is nothing special about that. I have met the biggest artists like Michael Jackson. Most of the times it is not the artists who sit on a high horse. It's mainly the people around them who want to be the artist themselves. They create this whole feeling like the artists are supernatural. But I don't want that shit. For me there is no reason to be on a high horse. I want to get my job done. Do a good concert, entertain people. All I want is a clean, non-smokers hotel room as that is essential for my performance. And I need a warm drink for my throat. But that's it. I have a job to do and I want to do it to the best of my ability.

You not only perform at reggae festivals but also at huge mainstream festivals with mixed music. Is there a different vibe at reggae festivals and other festivals?

The vibe is different. At reggae festivals it is a bit more personal. Most people you meet are into the same genre, of course. And it's quite a small fraternity. You share the same history and environment and that creates a special vibe. At other festivals you just don't know most of the people so naturally there is another vibe. But to perform at mainstream festivals and entertain such a diversified crowd is big fun. To see the organization at such huge festivals is very impressive. Luckily I have a tour manager taking care of everything so I can concentrate on my performance.

Recently you also concentrated on building a new label, "Ranch Entertainment". Is there a big difference compared to your former, very successful label "Big Yard"?

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No, basically it's the same. I just separated from my former manager Robert Livingston and therefore built a new entity. Most of the artists are the same, Rikrok, Ravon, myself, Red Fox, DJ Kru. I also still work with the producers of my big hits like "Mr. Boombastic", "Oh Carolina", "It wasn't me" and so forth. It's no big difference to Big Yard. It's just without Robert Livingston.

And you had an instant hit with your Jamaica 50 hymn "On A Mission". But not everyone appreciated that song as it is no reggae song but rather a dancefloor thing more or less. Critics say that it does not represent Jamaica.

I was never asked to do a Jamaica 50 song. In fact I was approached in my own living room and got asked if I had a melody ready. So I named a few and they just picked that one. That was not my idea. It was a song meant for an European release. It was just taken for the Jamaica 50 campaign but it was never meant to be the official Jamaican independence song. After all, there are so many Jamaica 50 songs. You just cannot pick one to be the official one. My song was meant for an European audience to be competitive in clubs, with the sound that is played there. So I invited Damian Marley, Beres Hammond, Tarrus Riley etc. and they joined me. But you know what? It is still the only song that is played. At every dance in Jamaica they play that song. On the radio stations that's the song they play. In the commercials that's the song they play. So it became the biggest song anyway. So I don't know why they cause such a mayhem. There is another song, "Find the Flag?" which was pushed for six months and had a big release party. But still no one plays it. I would like both songs to be played. But actually it is "On a Mission" that gets played.

On German radio another song of you gets played quite often. "World citizen", the song you did with our local favorite... Jahcoustix!



Yes, Jahcoustix. It's a song for a good cause, for the "Deutsche Kinder- und Jugendstiftung". How did that happen?

I was approached to do this song for an O2 campaign. I listened to that song Jahcoustix had already done and thought it had a great hook. So I took the song and did some changes on it and helped with the reproduction of that song. And the output was what you heard. Then we met in Berlin, did the video shoot and got the thing done.

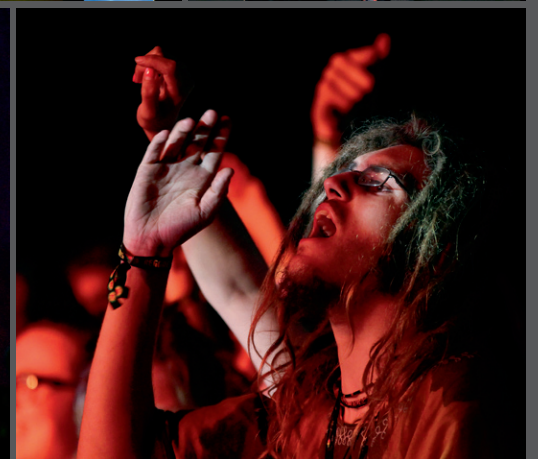
For our neighbors Austria you sang the official song for the EURO 2012. So I guess you are a football supporter. Do you have a favorite team in Germany?

A German team? Hmmm... Well, to be honest: I am a Manchester United fan. Is that bad?

No, that's up to you, of course.

Well, at the end of the day I am a Jamaican. I still live in Jamaica, I was raised in the inner city of Jamaica, I was born in Downtown Kingston. So I played football on the streets. That's my connection to football rather than being a fan of a certain team. I am too busy to follow all the matches. But at least I watched the EURO final. I am also into basketball. But my job comes first so there is not enough time to be a really dedicated fan. But I will be at the Olympics to support Usain Bolt, Shelly-Ann Frazer, Yohan Blake and the whole team. But to say that I am an avid, "religious" follower of sports would be an exaggeration. But right after this interview I will go to the gym. So sports is important for me, yes.





REGGAE SUN SKA 2012

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BUNEL

INTERVIEW

MORGAN HERITAGE

THE RETURN OF ROOTS AND CULTURE

INTERVIEW MORGAN HERITAGE

25

REGGAE ROYALTY

INTERVIEW BY JUSTINE AMADORI KETOLA
PHOTOS BY JULIAN SCHMIDT
(TAKEN IN AMSTERDAM 7/22/2012)

Reggaeville connected with Morgan Heritage while the band was in London on the 50th Anniversary of Jamaica's independence, August 6th. The band was on a rigorous European tour schedule promoting their 5-song EP *The Return*, which is in advance of a full-length album slated for early 2013.



You are making your return to Europe, how are the responses and experiences? It must be quite something to experience having been away for a while.

It has been really something. We have toured as solo artists but not as Morgan Heritage under that banner, all of the brothers and our sister Una. So

this tour is really something special to us, and it is really exciting because coming here to Europe is one of our strongest markets we have toured throughout the years. Just seeing the old fans again who have been with you from the beginning when there was just one album, seeing them there and singing the songs word for word. Now you have a catalog of singles, so it's just a joy every night. The shows have been sold out. It is just amazing to see the love of reggae music, so strong still, despite what people are saying. People are saying the market has changed, but we are shocked that these venues are full every night, it's a joy for us, our hearts are full.

What kind of feelings are evoked today, with Jamaica's independence, with the success of the Jamaicans at the Olympics, the response you are getting on tour representing Jamaica, how do you feel today?



We feel honored, as someone to represent a country like Jamaica, a little small island that has had such a strong influence throughout the world, which is reggae music and dancehall. And to see that Jamaica has 50 years of its anniversary, and to know where the country is coming from to where it's at now. You just feel such a small country, doing so well within the Olympics. We just feel honored and proud, of our athletes, of our music of our artists as brothers and sisters. It's just a happy feeling right now.

Your commentary during the song The Return song is that you are the return of Roots and Culture, what is your opinion of what is happening in terms of music out of Jamaica today and in contrast to what you are doing and what you see as a resurgence of this music rooted in consciousness?

The song The Return is a bigger meaning than just Jamaica, The Return means it is anyone throughout the world, cause every country you have the roots and you have a culture. So it is for anyone that comes from anywhere in the world that is saying, the world needs to return to its roots and culture. So if you are from England, English people can start to understand where they are coming from, where their past is, because if you don't know your past you don't know where



your future is. The song is for anyone in the world. Where it's at in Jamaica, dancehall which is the baby of reggae, is at the forefront in Jamaica right now. But roots and culture is still alive, it's not like roots has ever died, it's where people's minds are right now. You could have a guy get up today and say he just wants to hear dancehall and the same guy say he wants to hear roots and culture today.

So that's just how it is, it's part of life. We are all as individuals, it's not every day we as an artist listen to all kinds of music, so we are not telling people he can't listen to dancehall or he can't do this, cause we are all human, we all like to have a good time. There is a time and place for everything, that is the state of the world. The world has to return back to its roots and culture, and see life for what it is. We need a lot more love in the world you know. Back in the 40's, 50's and 60's when our parents were born, there was a lot more love in the world than today. A lot of violence, a lot of wars, it's just depressing sometimes.

It's all just people understanding where the music comes from. There are 24 hours in a day, in one day you could hear music from the 60's up until today. It's more like people of today of this generation need to respect and honor the music of yesterday.

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The new album/EP, *The Return*, slated for August, what is the plan for this in terms of distribution and outreach?

The release of the EP is called *The Return* and it is just a song and a gift for our fans that have been there waiting, asking, 'When am I going to get a new Morgan Heritage album?'. The new Morgan Heritage album will be out in 2013, we are out here on the road, still recording. At the same time we are finishing our sister Una's solo album and Peetah's solo album that we will get out probably before the end of the year. Everybody's focus is our day job, which is Morgan Heritage, that's our first priority. The EP is just something so the fans can get a taste of what the album is going to be like. They have waited so long, the EP is just a gift for them, to keep them comforted until 2013.

Will it be a physical and digital release or digital only?

It is going to be a digital release on iTunes and Amazon, in the digital outlets.

What songs from the album are you performing in the live shows?

We are performing *The Return* from the EP, that's the main song that we are promoting right now, letting people get used to it.

The song *Stand Up* on the EP has the rhythm from a tune produced by Shane Brown on the latest *Busy Signal* album, what are the producers and collaborators like on this album and where does this recording get done?

Most of the production is done in Jamaica and in Miami, as well as on the road. Cause we have our own personal studio on the road where we have been doing shows, before we came out on tour we had a few on St. Kitts and Nevis. We've been recording and some of the producers are Jason Farmer, he is the musical director for Ky-Mani Marley and has done big productions on the mainstream level for Keshia Cole and other big artists. But he's from our community, he is a reggae producer. And then you have Shane Brown that will have several tracks on the album. Then of course we produce as well, so you can see the production history, on our past albums that we've produced most of our music, but we have worked with people from King Jammy's to Bobby Digital to Fatis Burrell to Donovan Germain to Robert Livingston to Don Corleon. But you know most of the tracks we produce ourselves, or collaborate with these producers to bring a different flavor, so the music is always fresh.

What about The Return itself, who produced that song?

The Return was produced by Morgan Heritage and Shane Brown.

Last night [August 5th] you performed at the Respect Jamaica 50 shows in the UK, the birthplace of reggae in the global marketplace, what are your reflections on this and your plans as a band for your continued work in the global marketplace?

As far as performing at the event last night, it was an honor to be even invited to perform on such an event, which has been, twelve nights of reggae music, just to be invited with all the

talent that came out of Jamaica. As Jamaica got its independence today, just to be recognized as one of the artists that have been making strong strides in the reggae, we are honored and humbled to be a part of the event.

As for the work for the rest of the year, August 28th will be the release of the EP: The Return, which will be a four songs for the group and also the return of Morgan Heritage. The title track: The Return, another song Stand Up, the acoustic remix of Have No Fear, and the tribute to Michael Jackson where we covered The Girl Is Mine. For the rest of the year we are going to be putting out



a lot more singles, leading up to the release of a full-length album, for the first quarter of 2013.

You have performed as a unit in Africa several times since your hiatus from the US and North American markets, what is the experience

like there, do you interact on multiple levels, as in performances for government and business leaders, then larger shows for the public, what is it like?

The reception in Africa is phenomenal, it's like no where else in the world, it's like going back to where you come from and being

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accepted. It is a feeling that, you just know the show, Africa holds that. When we go to Africa, we play in stadiums and selling out stadiums, to see what reggae music is doing there, it's crazy. So when we go there we do like more shows for the people, we do meet the heads of government and so forth.

There are other family members working behind the scenes as you tour, would you like to point out some of those people?

In addition to the five members, we are introducing a lot of talent within the family, like our nephew, Gramps' son, Jemere Morgan, he is out on the road with us performing every night. We have Una's son Sly out there handling merchandise, so we are keeping the family involved, giving them a taste of what it is that we face here out on the road so they can understand themselves. The last few years we had Mikael our younger brother as a tech and roadie, but he is now back home in Atlanta producing, sometimes we have Laza from LMS out with us.

You have a collective spirit amongst the family members, what projects are you highlighting in terms of production and promotion?

What we are pushing now is Jemere Morgan and a friend of ours from the African community, so to speak, his name is Lord Alajiman. He is from a group called Daara J, one of the biggest rap groups out of Senegal.



We are helping him promote and we are also producing about 60% of his new album. He is a good friend of ours, we know him for a couple years now. We met up on tour maybe about seven years ago in Europe with his group and those are the two features that we are doing right now. And at the same time, our individual labels, that's what these solo projects are about, extending the Morgan Heritage family beyond just the blood of Morgan it is about the musical family now and we are just reaching out for the past four or five years, reaching out to the whole community and just sharing. Working with a family named the Bonetas in California and working with different producers in Jamaica and out of that came a combination with Mavado One By One which was a mega hit, just got out of control, which is still cleaning up the charts even here in Europe. There are so many different projects that we are working on.

Your stage over the years displayed a small altar representing several faiths, with spirituality at the center stage literally, what are your core beliefs as a band and your message in this regard to the massive? Your new song Have No Fear is really special in this regard, very uplifting.

Morgan Heritage, we are Rastafarians, we are Christians and the message is very simple, it's love, whether you are Muslim



whether, you are Buddhist, whether you are Christian or Catholic or whatever, we all have one common ground, and if we can all agree on that one common ground which is love, then we have no problem. The God that

we praise which is the God that we can't see or the one that we believe is controlling us all. You know he has many names so if we fight with somebody over his beliefs or whatever, it's a waste of time. That is the problem in the world today. Christians don't want to respect Muslims, Muslims don't want to respect Jews and it doesn't make any sense. If you believe in love and and I believe in love, that's the common ground and that is just the simple message of Morgan Heritage, love and peace.

What type of tour schedule will you have after the summer tour is over, going into the remainder of 2012?

There will be some tours planned, nothing is set yet. We are going to probably be going into the U.S. for some dates, but more than likely we will be doing spot dates for the rest of the year.



Review: Morgan Heritage - The Return EP
[VP Records - August 2012]

It is quite an ambitious project to make an album when you are considered part of reggae's royalty. Add to that a tendency for outside production projects, state of the art recording practices and band members pursuing their own projects. However after a multi-year hiatus, Morgan Heritage have planned their return well with a 5-song EP that they say is something just to whet the appetite of the fans in advance of their full-length album planned for early 2013. Several of the songs are co-produced by Shane Brown on the new album and the set leads with his track, Stand Up (Brothers and Sisters) which points to the social decay in Jamaica and serves as a call to take a stand, fight back and remember how „Jah-mek-ya“. This is a very important song concept, so necessary to send the message straight to the roots in Jamaica. Next up is the potential lover's classic, Love Stoned, which flexes the Morgan skills in making soulful, brilliant song structure combine with their innate talent as singers. The



song The Return is classic Morgan Heritage: strong hooks, roots and culture that can cross borders into pop realms. Returning to the social decay issue they question, „what happened to the youths of today?“ using the vivid imagery of „Caribbean queens gone wild“. The Morgan Heritage crew is here with the anti-

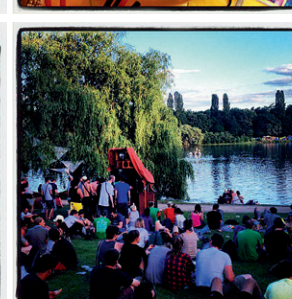
dote to the pollution plaguing the next generation. An acoustic version of a song they have planned for the album, Have No Fear, is delivered over a binghi riddim, sweetened by soprano saxophone, with Peetah singing that the „wicked have no future, the children are the future“, and the timely, „all they want us to do is live in fear, through the media they have the people scared.“ In a tribute to the late Michael Jackson, Peetah and Gramps trade lyrics on a reggae version of The Girl Is Mine where the harmonies, percussion and strings shine as true to the original, clearly the Morgan's had a great time in studio revisiting this classic.

by Justine Amadori Ketola



SUMMERJAM 2012

PHOTOS BY JULIAN SCHMIDT & BJÖRN FEHRENSSEN





EASY STAR ALL-STARS

THEY ALL LOVE MICHAEL JACKSON

THRILLAH

INTERVIEW BY MARKUS HAUTMANN
& ANITA BOOMGAARDEN

Covering songs is a frequent means in reggae music. There may not be a single successful pop or black music song that has not been reinterpreted by a Jamaican artist. New York based Easy Star All-Stars go a different way and take on whole albums. Following up on the hugely successful reggae tribute albums of Dub Side of the Moon (2003), Radiodread (2006) and Easy Star's Lonely Hearts Dub Band (2009) comes the reggae adaptation of the greatest selling record of all time – Michael Jackson's Thriller. The album, titled Easy Star's Thrillah will be released August 28, 2012 (a day before the 53rd anniversary of Jackson's birth). Easy Star's Thrillah brings back several of the reggae stars from previous albums, such as vocalists Michael Rose (Black Uhuru), Steel Pulse, Luciano, Mojo Morgan (Morgan Heritage), alongside the diverse playing of guests Yossi Fine (David Bowie, Lou



Reed, Stanley Jordan), Joe Tomino (Dub Trio/Matisyahu), Andy Farag (Umpfrey's McGee), and horn tracks courtesy of Israel's highly-acclaimed funk/hip-hop band Hadag Nachash. As festivals are a mixture of styles, too (reggae festivals mainly are spiced up with some hip hop, soul and R'n'B acts) we asked Easy Star's producer/arranger/guitarist Michael Goldwasser about his work and about breaking down musical barriers.

Michael, how did you come up with the idea to transform whole pop, indie and soul albums into reggae?

We started the Easy Star All-Stars a very long time ago. 1996 was when I first started recording.

We founded Easy Star Records and I guess by 1997 we started recording original music and what would happen is that we had a lot of great reggae musicians in New York, so I would put together a bunch of musicians, I would play guitar or sometimes bass and get someone to play keys and drums and whatever we needed and we thought „well we should have a name for the band“ and so we called it Easy Star All-Stars because

it's all about branding. Easy Star Records wants the name Easy Star in people's minds. So we didn't start out as an idea as being a cover band we just did original music in a studio with our very first album „Easy Star Volume One“ and there were a lot of various Jamaican artists and these „allstars“ were my friends and so we formed a band. Then we started playing live, we backed up various Jamaican artists when they came to New York, and we did our own shows, we did tributes to Augustus Pablo, right after he died, because he was one of my favorite artists and we did a Dennis Brown tribute. So we were just going along being a Reggae band, you know, but then one of my partners at Easy Star Records, Lem Oppenheimer, he



was a big fan of Pink Floyd and „The Dark Side of the Moon“ album and then he just had this idea as he was listening to „The Dark Side of the Moon“ -he thought what if we try to do this as reggae? So he brought the idea to me and our other partners. I first... well, I was... - I would say I was a little skeptical. It wasn't what I was up to as a producer and a musician but I quickly - just in my little bedroom studio - came up with a few arrangements, very basic and I realized „wow, this could really work!“ „The Dark Side of the Moon“ is a great album to take into reggae so we really just kind of started with this idea from one of my partners who had an inspiration. We weren't thinking „let's start a whole series of albums“. It was just, let's do this and, you know, we felt like

yes, the history of reggae is kind of littered with many, many great covers and also some not so great covers. But covering music is an essential part of reggae and I guess some people, people who don't know reggae, don't really realize that. But it's true, no one really seems to do entire albums but we just thought it would be a cool thing and that it could really work and that „The Dark Side of the Moon“ is the kind of album that people could relate to from US or UK or Germany or Jamaica. Such concepts about life and death an insanity, war, money, time - these are all very universal concepts so that's why we thought „The Dark Side of the Moon“ could work as reggae. And once we did it a lot of people really responded to it positively which is great, very, very

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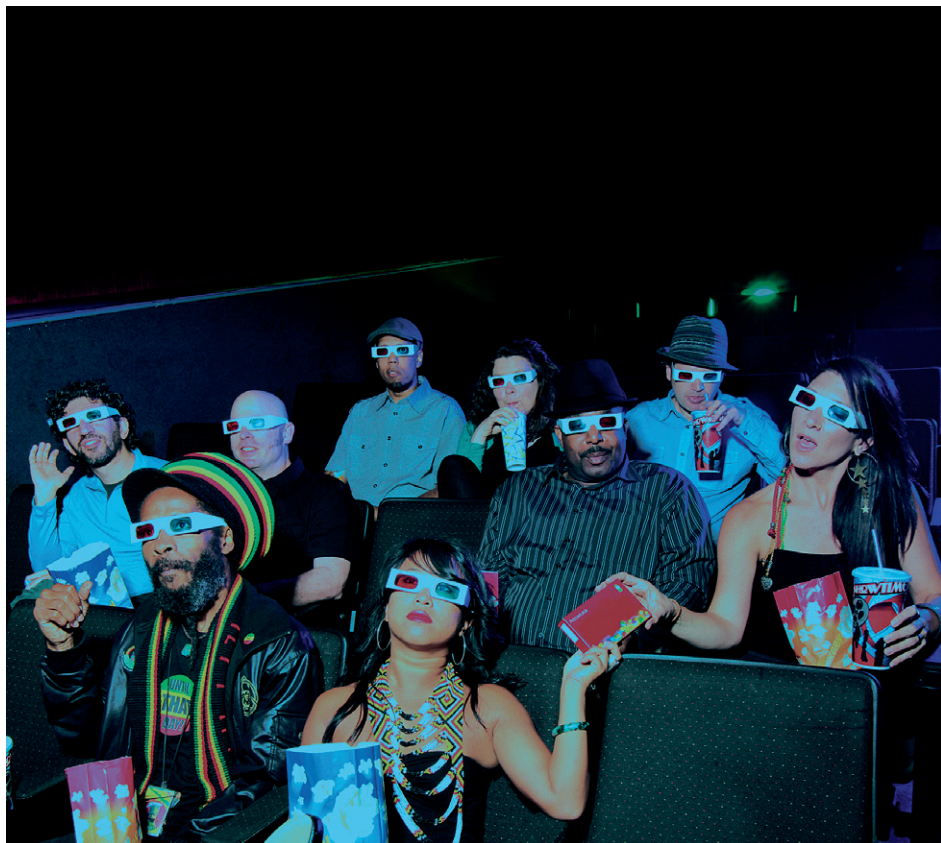
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gratifying for me as a producer and in order of the record label and the founder of the band. So we decided „hey! why don't we try do this some more“ so then the goal is to come up with albums that we think could really be interesting and cool as reggae. Where we can take these albums to different places that people might not expect, where we can take reggae music to places that people might not expect and where we can take pop, rock and R'n'B music to places where people might not expect. One thing I always think about is - what would this album sound like, if it had been recorded in Jamaica in like the late 70s or early 80s? It's just my favorite era of reggae. That's the basic concept, to take the album written by whoever wrote it but then we'll see how

it would sound in this alternate universe if the Beatles or Pink Floyd or Radiohead or Michael Jackson went to Jamaica to record this album.

How do you decide which albums to cover? I mean, the variety you do is quite big.

I explained why we chose „Dark Side of the Moon“ and then for the second album we didn't want to do anything too obvious. A lot of people said: „Oh! So you are going to do ‚The Wall‘ now or they expected us to do maybe another 70s rock group like Pink Floyd so we chose Radiohead instead. Because it's kind of a 90s version of „Dark Side of the Moon“ in a way, because of the themes, the universal themes and because of being so musically interesting and it has

some kind of concept, too. We also found out that Radiohead had been playing „Dark Side of the Moon“ over the PA system at their concerts, say like before they would go on stage or after they were on stage. So we thought that's got to be a sign. So that's why we chose it. And it also was an amazing challenge for me as a producer and arranger because over half of the songs on the album are not in standard 4/4-time which is what most, almost all reggae is. So it was an amazing challenge for me intellectually and creatively to do that. And then when we chose „Sgt. Pepper's“ we kind of felt like we always had that in mind as something that we probably would touch at some point because it's kind of the mother of all concept albums. You know it's one of the first ones and it's so highly regarded and the Beatles are so highly regarded, but interestingly there are many, many reggae covers of Beatles songs but not many from the „Sgt. Pepper's“

album so we thought that would be a really good choice. For any of these albums it's not the songs, I don't wanna make a reggae version of an album of crappy songs. I want to make a reggae version of albums with great songs that are interesting, that every song is different so that it allows me as a producer and arranger to have a wide variety of reggae and of our version of the album. So that's why we chose the Beatles. And then through this new one that we're doing, Easy Star's „Thrillah“, which is Michael Jackson's „Thriller“ in reggae.

Why did you choose particularly this album?

There's very interesting reasons why we chose this one. It's not a concept album, of course, but it does have great songs on it like I said we always want to explore great songs. And also many reggae fans may not realize this but R'n'B and soul music are so important to the history of reggae. I mean it's





had a huge influence on all what's happening in Jamaica starting in the late 50s and early 60s up till today. A lot of Jamaican artists we worked with on our previous albums they didn't know Pink Floyd, they didn't know Radiohead, they had heard of the Beatles but they haven't heard any of the songs, but they all love Michael Jackson. I felt like it was an important connection to say reggae is rooted in... lots of! It's rooted in African music but it's also rooted in black music from America and I thought it was important to do an album by a black artist for that reason. Not only to make great music but also to hopefully make people think about it, to make them understand the importance and the connection between Jamaica and American R'n'B music. Also we had a reputation for taking on things even when people would say: „No way!

You can't do that". People say: „You can't touch ‚Dark Side of the Moon! Radiohead is Reggae? Impossible! You can't touch the Beatles!" So it's the same thing. People say you can't touch Michael Jackson. Thriller is the best selling album of all time. Many people would say it's the greatest album of all time. So we like to say: "You know what? We're going to do it anyway!" And what people have always commented on our albums, even people who may not like them, have said that it's obvious that we treat the material with respect. We still try to bring humor to it, but it's always respect that comes through with all of our music because we really do honor and respect and pay tribute to the albums that we are covering. It's not like „Ah! Let's have some fun, and see what happens", but we really care. And hopefully that shows in

the music. But also for me personally - I'm a huge Michael Jackson fan. Ever since I was a small child. My parents - I don't even remember - my parents say when I was like say 3 or 4 years old I used to walk around and say that I was Michael Jackson because I loved Michael Jackson so much. Because my name is Michael I thought: „Oh, this is a special connection." I'm imagining that it's the same in Germany or all over Europe, that when „Thriller" came out, I mean it was so huge that you couldn't escape it. It was a game-changing album, it was an album by a black artist that had songs getting played on white radio. And you know Michael was one of the first black artists to get played on MTV which is really big deal. It was just such a big phenomenon.

I can confirm that people in Jamaica love Michael Jackson. But I am sure that there are voices claiming that there's only the real thing, in this case the „Thriller" album which must not be changed or re-recorded in any way. What do you answer these critics?

Well, I have never met a purist who is also a musician. I think that people who really understand music - like musicians - don't believe in that crap. They believe that music was made to be played and reinterpreted by musicians and enjoyed by everyone. There are no rules, nothing is sacred - it's music. And the history of music is the history of people reinterpreting other music from what ever culture. And that's what we do: explore music in a different way.



Review: Easy Star All-Stars - Easy Star's Thrillah (Easy Star Records - August 2012)

It is always exciting when two musical styles fuse to create a whole new experience for the listener. For the Easy Star All-Stars that discipline of adapting music from a completely different genre into reggae has become their first choice. Thrillah by the New York-based band marks the fourth full-length album, that entirely covers an already existing record. Choosing both the best-selling album of all time and a former release by Michael Jackson is a challenge, yet surely an intriguing combination for any music lover.

The time travel begins right with pressing the play button on the CD player: a funky Wanna Be Startin' Somethin' will have you grab your dancing shoes and sway easily to the interpretation by JoWil and Ruff Scott. Also Morgan Heritage-member Mojo and Steel Pulse' front singer David Dread do a great job performing the legendary fight over a female, the former popular combination of the King of Pop with Beatle Paul McCartney The Girl Is Mine. While this interpretation still impresses through the vocalists' achievement, some of the following tracks lack the expected excitement and power. The tracks are



mostly slowed down, slightly dubbed and properly but somewhat dispassionately represented. With Thrillah you can surely kick back and relax, remembering the days of oversized one-shoulder shirts and fingerless gloves while those occasional shouts, the subtle squeaks, and many of the other tiny musical accents the King

of Pop and his crew used 30 years ago, to make this music the unique art it still remains, are sadly missing.

Fair enough, a cover is a new interpretation and should never just be a copy, therefore will and always should result in a different style that will have its own fans. To hear popular reggae singers such as Michael Rose, Luciano or uprising Christopher Martin reflect pop classics is over all a fascinating affair.

All in all more than 20 musicians got together to record this production in five different countries, a fact that adds another interesting aspect to the project and makes it despite all criticism an album, both Michael Jackson- and reggae-fans should listen to.

by Ursula Münch



GARANCE REGGAE FESTIVAL 2012

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BUNEL

MONO & NIKITAMAN

MISSING IN ACTION

Photo: Core Sea

7 YEAR ITCH

BY MARKUS HAUTMANN



Photo: Timo Ullmann

They are an icon at the Chiemsee Reggae Summer. For seven consecutive years Mono & Nikitaman mashed down the Chiemsee massive, making it from the opening slot to being the headliner on Saturday night. This year the

duo takes a break from the CRS. Thankfully fans do not have to abstain from Mono & Nikitaman as their live DVD is going to be released soon. Reggaeville met M&N to recall some precious CRS moments and memories.

Mono, Nick, you performed at the CRS for an incredible seven times. Can you still remember the first time on stage at the Chiemsee Reggae Summer?

Sure! We played on the tent stage in the afternoon. Johnny Rewind was to come next but was stuck in a traffic jam. So we could extend our performance for another half an hour. The audience went completely crazy and we were absolutely out of our minds that the people partied so hard with us. They even knew most of the song lyrics although we hadn't released an album at this time. The tent was about to burst so we even put some of the cheering as a "Chiemsee skit" on our first album.

Was there another memorable experience at the CRS?

Oh yes. At our second time at the CRS –I think it was in 2006- we played at the main stage. As the opener, I guess. Of course, we were very excited. Unfortunately the weather was very bad all morning, it rained cats and dogs, so we feared that no one would make it through the mud to show up at our concert. But what happened was exactly the opposite. The area was really crowded. So Nick became very courageous. When we performed "Solang die Sonne scheint" (as long as the sun is shining) he told the audience: "I promise that the sun will come out when all of you make a big noise now." He also could have



Photo: Alex Davies

Review: Mono & Nikitaman - Live

ICD/DVV - Rootdown Records - September 2012

Only a few frequent Chiemsee Reggae Summer patrons may remember a CRS without a performance of Mono & Nikitaman. For an incredible seven consecutive years the duo delighted the Chiemsee massive what culminated in them playing the headliner slot on Saturday night at the CRS 2011. Plenty of footage from this memorable concert is used as skits in „Mono & Nikitaman - der Film“ („M&N - the movie“), a 30 minutes documentary of the career of Germany's most successful dancehall act. A good command of German is essential to understand the interview parts and therefore to understand how these two could gain their second to none status in the German speaking reggae world. Having started in their early twenties when there was almost no local / national scene of artists the documentary shows the duo's very beginning, the club where they met for the first time (an epic scene), Nick's adolescence as a punk, the messages they want to bring across, life on tour and general thoughts about being an artist. „We want people to take part in, to



witness our progress and development“, Mono tells in one scene and that is exactly what the documentary imparts. Without any doubt a must have for fans. For those who miss a M&N performance at this year's CRS there's a consolation in form of an almost 90 minutes concert, filmed in „Arena Wien“, a club in the capital of Mono's motherland Austria. In the

documentary she says: „A good artist is one who grows over the years, who changes and develops“. The concert is proof of the preliminary end of that development, showing the awesome entertainment skills of M&N. A filmed concert can never replace the experience of being personally there, but the perfect sound quality and numerous angles of views by several cameras create almost that feeling though. „A M&N show is a ceremony“, Mono says and she does not exaggerate. Several official music videos and the hip hop documentary „paint the town blue“, produced by Mono, round out the picture of this well done DVD which is aimed to shorten the long time until there's new material of M&N. **by Markus Hautmann**



Photo: Alex Davies

said to predict the lottery numbers from next week. This would have equally been unlikely as the sky was full of black clouds. But all of a sudden there was a little hole in the clouds so that the sun could shine on the audience for the whole song. Both of us had goose bumps all over. And believe it or not: I had dreamed about exactly that scenario the night before.

Why does the Chiemsee massive love you so much? Do you have an explanation for that?

At the CRS we got the chance to grow over

the years. And the audience could watch us grow and follow our development and evolution. Besides, the Chiemsee massive is well known for partying like there is no tomorrow. That fits quite well to us...

How is it to stand in front of thousands of delighted people who just came out to see you?

It is awesome, just fantastic. But in the situation itself, on the stage, you do not realize that completely. The big feelings come afterwards when watching the video.

Soon we also will be able to watch the video as your live DVD will be released soon. Are there also plans for a next album yet?

Until the end of November we will be on a big promotional tour for the DVD. Then we will take our first longer break from touring and producing. We need some time to recharge our batteries, sort out some things and then start anew. So watch out!



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REGGAE JAM 2012
PHOTOS BY JULIAN SCHMIDT

Out Of Many - 50 Years of Reggae Music

IVP Records - July 2012



To mark the momentous occasion of the 50th anniversary of Jamaican independence, record labels have been scouring their vaults to compile celebratory items. VP Records introductory 3-CD box set gives a cursory exploration of the evolution of the music, and weighs in heavier on the dancehall side of things.

Disc One begins appropriately with Lord Creator's Independent Jamaica, a cool calypso saluting the new nationhood. Hot Randy's ska follows, with the Skatalites Malcolm X and Alton Ellis intense Mouth A Massy still sounding superbly fresh. Hopeton Lewis Take It Easy and the Jamaicans Ba Ba Boom are classic rock steady, and for early reggae, The Gaylads I Love The Reggay is an uncommon treat; the roots spectrum is represented by Pablo's Java, Dennis Brown's Westbound Train and Junior Byles' Fade Away, though the UK dross of Capital Letters Smoking My Ganja sounds out of place. And before the disc ends, we have already hit the dancehall sounds of Johnny Osbourne's Ice Cream Love.

Disc Two has a slew of dancehall classics: Eek-A-Mouse's Wa Do Dem, Yellowman's Zunggzunggzuguzunggzeng and Wayne Smith's Sleng Teng are highly representational of the new sound, but Tippa Irie's novelty hit Hello Darling interrupts the flow. Then, back on track with Gussie Clarke's late-1980s hits, including Gregory Isaacs' Rumours and Shabba's Mr Loverman, before a few early 90s oddities like Ninjaman & Ninja Ford's Return of Father And Son and Lady Saw's C&W Give Me The Reason.

Disc Three veers between hardcore ragga, dancehall nu-roots, and pop: Beenie Man's Who Am I and Mr Vegas Heads High rub shoulders with Buju & Beres Can You Play Some More and Tanto Metro & Devonte's Give It To Her. Placing Mavado's thug-life Weh Dem A Do between Tanya Stephens' love ballad These Streets and Etana's brilliant Roots does not make a lot of sense, nor following Sizzla's moving Just One of Those Days with Sean Paul's throwaway Get Busy, though most were certainly huge hits. Similarly, the Horsepower Productions remix of Zunggzunggzuguzunggzeng just sounds like distasteful techno-trash—surely this should have been left off—and I'm not 100% convinced by Peetah Morgan & Hollie Cook's 2012 reworking of Lord Creator's opening salvo either. But overall, this box set is a good introduction to the myriad styles that have constituted reggae during the last 50 years. Despite some imperfections, there is plenty here to delight the casual listener who seeks to put contemporary dancehall within its proper context.

by David Katz

Jimmy Cliff - Rebirth

Universal - July 2012



40 years after his appearance in the seminal The Harder They Come, Jimmy Cliff's light shines as bright as ever. The legend continues to amaze reggae lovers as well as fans of other genres with his back catalog overflowing with

timeless classics. Which roots reggae addict, whether the seasoned connoisseur or the neophyte, would ever miss one of these relatively rare chances to see the man perform live?

And while Cliff could easily make a living from his past successes without losing his face - he is 64 years old -, he simply set his goals higher. "I want to become a stadium act", he told the Rolling Stone last year (certainly not referring to the African continent, where he should fill stadiums easily). Said he and presents his first studio album since 2004's Black Magic, the auspiciously christened Rebirth.

Having always been open to new and sometimes - for reggae standards - outright bold musical influences, Jimmy Cliff teamed up with punk icon Tim Armstrong as producer again. Armstrong, the lead singer and guitar player of the influential Californian ska punk and punk rock bands Operation Ivy and Rancid, had produced Cliff's 2011 EP Sacred Fire. The most striking thing one realizes after pushing play on Rebirth is its warm, lulling early 70s feel, evoking the old Upsetter days at times. The second surprise are Cliff's perfectly up-to-date lyrics - mostly strong political statements with his trademark revolutionary edge. This man is clearly too young to give up the fight, I find myself thinking with a contented smile. The true aficionados will be pleased to discover references to Cliff's biography every here and there. So, is Rebirth the rebirth of Jimmy Cliff? Yes and no. What you will get is not an overhauled version of the legend, but a journey through time back in the golden days of Jimmy "Ivan" Cliff. Rebirth sounds much less experimental than its predecessor Black Magic and sports a Jimmy Cliff in surprisingly good shape, backed by a group (Rancid) that is as unexpected as it is suave. Rebirth is an instant favorite indeed.

by Valentin Zill

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Macka B - Rasta Soldier EP

[Necessary Mayhem - August 2012]



Macka B's new EP comes hot on the heels of the well received album 'Change The World'. It kicks off with 'Innocent Life', pointing the finger directly at the murderers marauding our streets. The finger

pointing also extends to soldiers, police officers and vigilantes as 'nobody should be above the law'.

The 'Never Leave My Culture' track entails forcibly-delivered lyrics explaining that Macka B's culture is 'part of his persona'. As you'd expect, this culture has no tolerance for badness, madness or slackness. The next 'Old Fashioned' track accuses the youth of succumbing too easily to the (sheep) herd instinct, as Macka B sticks to 'old fashioned values, manners, respect, standards'. And he has no plans to start tweeting or changing his ways. 'Our Music' extols the virtues of the sweet sounds that keep us alive. Touching on a common theme - of neighbours complaining about the music - Macka B explains that he's prepared to compromise. Hence he doesn't plan to 'play at all hours of the night'. In fact, he'll go one step further, by giving a spin to the neighbours' choice, with Stevie Wonder and Barry White on offer! 'Outta Order' takes a formidable slice off those footballers engaging in racist behaviour. With a high profile court clash in London recently taking over the front pages of many newspapers this is a timely output. Showing that he can adapt to the times, it's delivered in a rapid style, before the pace changes in favour of a dub version wind down. The EP closes with the 'Rasta Soldier' title track. Reiterating many familiar themes, 'I and I soldiers fighting for truth and rights .. and we never give up the fight', it also concludes inna neat dub stylee.

As befits a reputable and long established MC, Macka B's vocals capably and comfortably carry this EP and it sure does rank in the consciousness stakes.

by Gerry McMahon

Street Soul Riddim

[Jugglerz Records - July 2012]



If you can rightfully call yourself Germany's number one reggae radio show, the expectations on your first riddim released on your brand new record label will surely be high - luckily the Jugglerz aka DJ Meska and Shotta Paul not only meet

them but manage to shine with the Street Soul Riddim. The mid-tempo one drop instrumental is a modern classic: various synthie pad sounds and playful sound effects go well with guitar, bass and drums to create a rich and technical flawless production full of vibes. The well-grounded arrangement sets powerful accents to create a climax within the riddim, which is an interesting benefit to each song. Again individually set, melodic background vocals top off the rounded production. Playing various sound systems such as Rolling Tone and Sentinel as well as their own successful radio show, the creators Paul and Meska prove to have learned from their many years of experience in the music business. It is love and dedication for reggae what had them meet and bond with all artists who gathered to voice this selection. Crooner Romain Virgo, Swedish Singjay on the rise Etzia or German power duo Mono & Nikitman are not only colleagues but long-term acquaintances. While the latter dedicated their track to all lazy people who struggle with getting up on Monday morning and prefer to stay in bed, most vocalists chose the love theme for their interpretation of Street Soul: Christopher Martin is overwhelmed by his feelings, Jemere Morgan knows no boundaries when it comes to his relationship and Romain is sad about his girlfriend leaving him. With Revolution Song Alaine found a great lyrical and musical fit to the instrumental, using the powerful sequences just right for her motivational words.

All in all the selection comes with ten equally strong voicings, that prove the saying of quality over quantity. Most of the artists are just as young and aspiring as the producers, a fact that gladly results in a motivational vibe to accompany the entire production. The spirit and commitment carried out by DJ Meska and Shotta Paul is a joy to see within a new generation of reggae and dancehall producers that hopefully has Jugglerz release more riddims of that caliber soon.

by Ursula Münch

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56

ALBUM-REVIEWS 2012

Slightly Stoopid - Top Of The World

(Stoopid Records - August 2012)



A sweet surfer soulful rock groove opens the album Top Of The World which is warmly tinged with horns, feeding off of brooding lyrics that are delivered over percussive, hip-hop grooves. The album art

is an image of a mosquito sucking the blood out of the earth drawing for the reality elements to define what being on the top of the world can symbolize. In a nod to the original steppers roots riddims, Don't Stop carries the banner of reggae high, as does Serious Man. More creativity in reggae with Mona June, featuring Angela Hunte a well-regarded top selling songwriter of a fave hit song of the past few years, the Alecia Keys and Jay Z, Empire State of Mind. This is a bold move by the hipsters from So Cal and here it works to serve as a post-modern mash up, classic rock groove meets a dancehall chorus for an inna threesome style tale, all with a syrupy sweet horn hook and phenomenal solo guitar. We Don't Wanna Go, is an ode to avoiding jail time as Slightly Stoopid begin reminiscing to times when they were caught on the wrong side of the law with the green or just with their skateboards. The instrumental, Deal With the Rhythm, a well-rounded, cinematic example of what the roots or modern hip hop dance and every other dub form owe to the dub, or the version in reggae. There are two straight-ahead reggae duets, one with the don Barrington Levy [Ur Love] and one with the great Don Carlos [Marijuana]. Both artists whose sound and live performance style combined with tour history are intricately woven into the fabric of the California reggae scene that Slightly Stoopid was born and bred in. The Slightly Stoopid camp is also joined by their own idols, and label/management mates from Silverback, in the form of Angelo lead singer of Fishbone on Ska Diddy means that the vibes pick up on this otherwise slower tempo set. Just Thinking features a stellar cameo Chali 2na who for me represents quintessential modern West Coast, Hip Hop, to the max as a member of Jurassic 5.

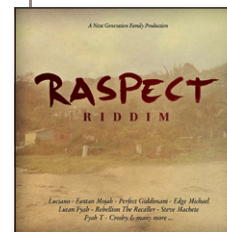
by Justine Amadori Ketola

ALBUM-REVIEWS 2012

57

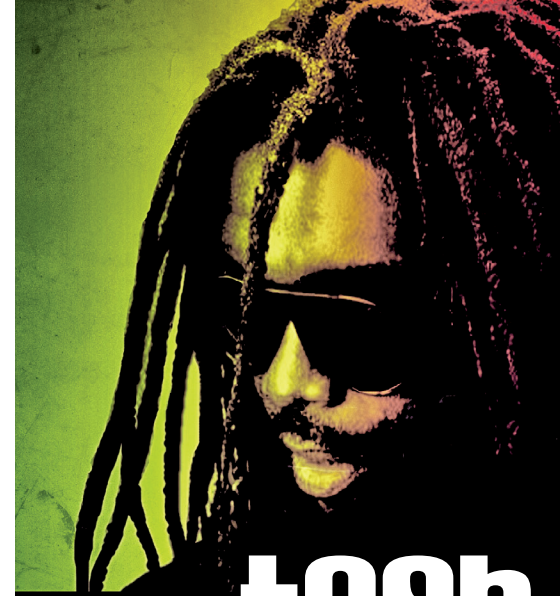
Respect Riddim

(Oneness Records - September 2012)



Munich's best Oneness Records have a new one riddim selection ready: the Respect riddim. This mellow 73 BPM riddim in F sharp minor had its first appearance on Fyah T & Next Generation Family's album Family-wise released last year. Fyah T & Next Generation Family, the producers of the Respect riddim, have chosen an interesting array of artists to voice their gem, ranging from today's top-ranking names in the conscious reggae world to promising and highly talented rookies. With its steady, comforting bass line and mystical, hopeful synthesizer sounds, the Respect riddim is an instant pleaser. A slightly dirty rock guitar adds additional spice. Perfect Giddimani demands respect for His Imperial Majesty, as "only, only, only Haile alone see [his] troubles". With his voice sweet as honey, yet of firm conviction, Haile Alone is one of the strongest and most impressive sufferer tunes of 2012. Gambian brother Rebellion the Recaller tackles a similar topic, but his smoky and slightly rough voice adds a soothing touch to Carry On. The MessenJah Luciano delivers as always, stating his firm will to fight in Jah Army over a riddim customized with an acoustic guitar. Lutan Fyah demands not only discipline to carry out Jah will, but asks each and everyone to show Respect And Manners. His message of a peaceful revolution - "Selassie I no run no wire fence" - is more topical than ever. Munich singjay Fyah T proves with No Respect that he has the ability it takes to ride a riddim with ease just like the big names, despite his young age. Without any doubt, each and every listener can subscribe to his crying out for respect from the forces of Babylon that try to keep us down continually. With the Respect riddim, Fyah T & Next Generation Family and Oneness Records release a selection that is of both musically and vocally outstanding quality. It sounds perfectly modern, yet seems aware of its roots. The Respect selection is a hot candidate for the European riddim of the year.

by Valentin Zill



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Junior Marvin - Smokin' To The Big M Music

[Junior Marvin Music - September 2012]



On Junior Marvin's latest release, Smokin' To The Big M Music, a compilation of sorts of his solo work, reggae is more of an ingredient in his recipe of musical stew than it is the final dish. With a who's who of credits and

studio dates ranging as far back as the 1970s, (Bob Marley is on the album's credits as a percussionist, as are several other Wailers), the 14-cut collection covers a multitude of genres and styles.

The opening track, Gypsy, soaked in '70s guitar funk isn't reggae, but it is unmistakably Marvin. Life Without You is next up and features a rock-reggae marriage of Junior and his Love band. Snappy horns and call-and-response vocals of Where is Love give way to the liquid-cooled bop of Supernatural, while the minor key slink of It's Alright reminds of Marvin's ability to keep the party light and lively.

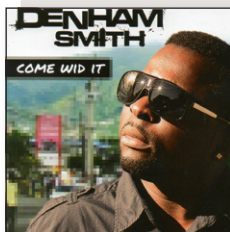
Live track Bad Mind People surprises more for the sound of audience applause in the middle of a studio set than it does anything else. Love Knows Everything is a bit of a left turn, with a squeaky-clean Strat tone that recalls the Eric Clapton records of the early 1980s. Ballad Our Day (Happy Family) is the passionate Marvin and rights the ship a bit before Boy Meets Girl and its Blaxploitation soundtrack vibe. The spry Children and elevating progression of Preacher Man demonstrate the guitar-slinger's ability to write and record upbeat numbers, but the disco soul of Rain and Let it Grow sound dated rather than nostalgic. The title track is an instrumental jam of guitar pyrotechnics that more than makes the case for Junior's ability to wail, but ultimately feels slightly self-indulgent.

For Junior Marvin fans, Smokin' to the Big M Music is the most comprehensive package available with a career's worth of soulful vocals and razor riffing guitar. The spirit of his affinity for reggae is evident throughout, but for those looking and listening for a roots-reggae album reminiscent of his Wailer stint may want to cherry-pick for their favorites.

by Larson Sutton

Denham Smith - Come Wid It

[Kingstone Records - July 2012]



One artist who set out to strengthen Cologne's position in the reggae world is Denham Smith. The yardie from St. Ann settled in Cologne in 1995 to further pursue his musical career. He had started at the tender

age of 15 years in Jamaican hotel bars. In 2010, he introduced himself to a wider audience with his successful tune Jezzibell on Oneness Records' Soul riddim. His 2011 mix tape Fusion in Me further raised the expectations for his album-length reggae debut. This debut album, called Come Wid It, is in stores now. Its 15 tunes are a sweet cruise through various styles and epochs of reggae music. With his soft, yet never too sugary voice he rides contemporary digital dancehall riddims with the same ease he takes on more classical and melodic riddims. His vocal style often reveals R'n'B and soul influences.

Come Wid It comes with riddims produced by some of Germany's most prolific reggae and dancehall producers, including Moritz von Korff, Ben Bazzazian, Jr. Blender, Guiseppe Coppola and Lazy Youth. Lovers tunes make up the majority here with Come Back being maybe the most outstanding one. This tune with its melancholic R'n'B-like piano melody line is a combination with Bay-C of T.O.K. and comes with a feel a bit similar to T.O.K.'s Footsteps. Still Love You sounds much happier. This tune, produced by Mafia & Fluxy, recycles a Studio One riddim. Just like Under Her Spell which is based on a Duke Reid riddim, it evokes an almost Bitty-McLean-esque approach to Jamaica's rich musical heritage. One is left to wonder whether Smith could carry out this approach in full album length. Especially Bazzazians riddims with their warm synthesizer waves contrast sharply with the classic material or Oneness Records' modern roots sound. Come Wid It is thus the very mature sounding reggae debut of an artist who does not want to limit himself and who actually has the capacities and skills to afford this versatility. Come Wid It is a state-of-the-art display of where reggae music is in Europe 2012.

by Valentin Zill



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