



FESTIVILLE 2024

REGGAEVILLE FESTIVAL GUIDE



INTERVIEWS

**MORTIMER
MIKE LOVE
J WRITTEN
KAYA BLACK
MARLON ASHER
NADIA MCANUFF
UNLIMITED CULTURE
MYKAL ROSE & EMCH
LINTON KWESI JOHNSON**

**130
FESTIVALS**



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MAGIC MESSAGE MUSIC

MAGIC

“Music is a very powerful force and it’s a privilege to be able to share music with the people!” (Mortimer)

Summer, the most magical time of the year, has arrived - and so has our yearly **Festiville Magazine!** Browse the following pages and let them guide you to 130 international festivals, all set and ready to provide a much-needed soundtrack of peace, tolerance and unity. These gatherings are an important counterbalance to nationalist and right-wing tendencies sweeping the world right now, as they help us to (re-)charge on positive vibes and meet like-minded people from different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, thus fostering tolerance and keeping humanity alive. And to celebrate the music we love, with goosebumps on our skin and awe in our hearts! Awe-inspiring magical creations are here with the upcoming albums of **Mortimer (From Within)**, **Mike Love (Leaders)** and **Marlon Asher (Safe)**, which is why we chose these triple-M-artists for our cover.

MESSAGE

“The way that I want to be on is the way of a messenger.” (Marlon Asher)

To learn more about the message transported through the music, our authors have spoken to several artists about their creations. Thus, you will find in-depth interviews with **Mortimer**, **Mike Love** and **Marlon Asher**, of course, but also with **Nadia McAnuff**, **Kaya Black**, **J Written**, **Mykal Rose & Subatomic Sound System**, **Unlimited Culture** and **Linton Kwesi Johnson**. Not only do

their words provide context to their music, they also give us hope and inspiration to always strive for better and never give up.

MUSIC

“It’s all about the music!” (Mike Love)

Indeed, that’s what drives us at **Reggaeville!**: creating a space for music, bringing to your attention opportunities to gather and enjoy live performances and helping you discover new releases. Throughout the following pages, you’ll find reviews of upcoming albums by most of the artists interviewed, as well as by **Johnny Clarke**, **Rootz Underground**, **Don Corleon**, **Linval Thompson**, **Unstoppable Fyah**, **Rekall** and **Regyin King**.

Here’s another M: while the **Bob Marley: One Love** movie has created waves earlier this year, we present a short preview of the new book **Hit Me With Music: Roots, Rock, Reggae** by **Lee Jaffe** on page 74.

As always, we advise you to check our event agenda online at **REGGAEVILLE.com** for complete line-ups, news and updates. Also, we encourage you to visit the festivals which *do* take place (several were cancelled or postponed, e.g. **Reggae Jam International**, **Overjam Festival**, **Sierra Nevada World Music Festival** etc.) to show your support and ensure that future editions can take place. Finally, we want to say a heartfelt THANK YOU for your continued support - together we can make this world a better place by spreading this **Magic Message Music**.

May the force of the triple M be with you!

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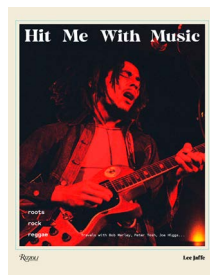
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NEW ALBUM OUT SUMMER 2024

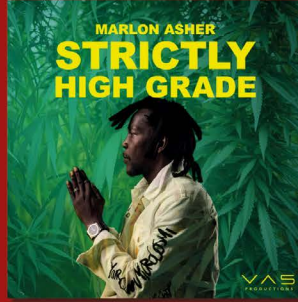
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A L L P L A T F O R M S

A portrait of Mykal Rose, a man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a black bucket hat with a colorful rainbow stripe at the top and a patterned shirt. He is pointing his right index finger towards the camera. The background is a solid pink color.

INTERVIEW

**MYKAL ROSE &
SUBATOMIC SOUND SYSTEM**

OBSERVE LIFE

ROCKIN' LIKE A CHAMPION

BY ANGUS TAYLOR

PHOTOS BY NINA RODRIGUEZ, MICHELLE HONEYCUTT & HASSAN HAJJAJ



New York's **Subatomic Sound System** combine a deep love of foundation dub and reggae music with a global ear and a drive to push technological boundaries - just like the classic Jamaican producers they admire.

So it's no surprise that they ended up in a ten-year recording and touring partnership with **Lee Scratch Perry**. And now the legendary **Upsetter** is no longer physically with us, **Subatomic** have a new album project, **Rockin' Like A Champion**, featuring bionic-voiced ex-**Black Uhuru** singer **Mykal Rose** and punk-rock-royalty turned neo-lovers-rocker **Hollie Cook** on harmonies.

The album combines the sense of history and experimentalism **Subatomic**, **Mykal** and **Hollie** all personify. It's a seamless blend of analogue and digital; of vintage reggae and modern bass music. **Mykal's** unmistakab-

le pure-singjay voice mingles with **Hollie's** celestial tones, garnished by **Troy Simms'** swirling East African horns and Jamaican veteran **Larry McDonald's** fervent percussion. Talking to **Mykal** and **Subatomic** founder, producer and multi-instrumentalist **Emch** via video call from New York and Florida, it's easy to see why they gel. Although **Mykal** takes a few questions to warm up, soon he and **Emch** are weaving in and out from each other, anticipating prepared topics on their shared passion for Ethiopian jazz melodies and how **Hollie's** harmonies compare with those of **Black Uhuru's Puma Jones**.

It's a free-ranging discussion taking in everything from **Jimi Hendrix** and **Bad Brains**, to **King Tubby** and **Scratch**, while keeping a constant thread of the new album's philosophy throughout.

How did you both link up for this project? I saw you did a festival show in Florida in 2022.

Emch: **Lennie Chen** who manages the **Wailers**, connected us through our booking agent for **Lee Scratch Perry**, who was also working with the **Wailers**. **Scratch** had passed, and I guess **Lennie** and **Mykal** were talking. We didn't know each other at all, they made the connection with us and it built from there.

Mykal: Actually, a bass player, **Frank Burke**, called me and told me **Lennie** was trying to reach me. **Lennie** had strong belief in me after working with me. That's how my part of the story went. **Emch** always a dig, you know? Like he said "*Boy, I want to come to Florida. I want to do some work, you know?*" (laughs)

Emch: I think that show came up right away. The booking agent said "*Listen, why don't you come down and do the show?*"

Mykal has a studio there at his house so we connected to do the rehearsals. I'll be honest, I wasn't sure about it at first. Having just finished working with **Scratch** for so long, I didn't know if we were ready to connect with someone we don't know. But as soon as we came to his house and met his wife and his family, it was such a positive vibe. Also, **Larry [McDonald]**, our percussionist, worked with **Sly** back in the day, with **Peter Tosh**. So **Mykal** and **Larry** had that connection. And I didn't realise that **Mykal's** first song he recorded was with **Scratch** when he was a teenager. So he started telling us those stories and we realised the common ground. What **Sly** and **Robbie** were doing with dub with **Mykal** and **Black Uhuru**, I started realising there is all this connection we can build off. Because for me to get into something like that, with someone like **Mykal**, I wanted to make sure we could do something great. I didn't want to come in and do a watered-down version of what he's already doing. Once we connected, saw the vibes, and

started making music together, right away I remember **Mykal** was like "*You need to give me a whole album of rhythms. Let's do this right away.*"

So this was the Rockin' Like A Champion album.

Emch: Yeah. We had already built a lot of **Mykal's** old rhythms to do the show... in our own way. He was like "*Yo, these sound really good. Give me fresh rhythms in this style.*" What we did with **Scratch** was try to represent the classic sound we love. And I think that connected with **Mykal** too. Like a lot of horns, getting back into Ethiopian melodies. **Troy Shaka Simms**, our horns player, is really into that. And I know **Mykal** is into the Ethiopian roots as well. I remember him hearing those melodies in the rehearsal and was like "*These melodies are crazy, we need a tune with this.*" So we just started building off that and the percussion with **Larry**. Often in reggae bands that you see touring these days, that's the first thing they get rid of. The horns and the percussion. They have extra guitars and keyboards. But for us those are really important elements. The beats we're doing are more electronic but it's that balance.

Mykal: Yeah, with the acoustic sound.

Emch: And for me building the rhythms, knowing **Mykal** has worked with **Sly** and **Robbie**, it's intimidating because those are some of the greatest rhythms of all time. So how do we take that further? You can't really take that further. You have to take it somewhere different. **Mykal** was talking a lot about the innovation they wanted to incorporate, like different sounds at the time. That was really inspiring to me, **Mykal** telling us how they'd listen to all this different music outside Jamaica trying to pull all that in and come up with something new. And I felt like "*Yeah, that was what we were trying to do with Scratch as well. We can do that the way we take in different sounds.*"

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BUSY SIGNAL ♦ RIN ♦ KY-MANI MARLEY
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QUEEN OMEGA ♦ L'ENTOURLOOP ♦ J BOOG ♦ JESSE ROYAL
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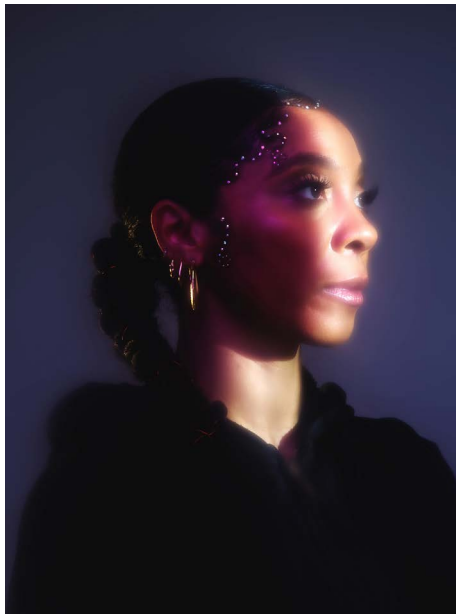
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How did Hollie get involved?

Emch: I've known **Hollie** for years through **Ari Up**. She lived in New York. At one point **Hollie** joined a reincarnated version of the **Slits**, who were originally a punk band from the 70s in London. **Hollie** had been doing shows in New York with **Ari**. I was doing sound for a show at a club just around the corner from my house. I think the soundman didn't show up. Funny situation. So I met her then and I didn't even realise. I think she was only 18 years old. And then I just saw her over the years. **Ari** had passed. We stayed in touch and talked about working together. And one of the rhythms that I'd recorded on with **Mykal**, I'd originally done for **Hollie**. He started talking about backing vocals, telling me about **Puma [Jones from Black Uhuru]** and how unique her voice was. **Mykal**, you said it made you think of opera the first time you heard it.



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& many more...



Mykal: Yeah, because we wanted something different. To add to the music scene, so I just told **Puma** “*Yeah, sing opera*” and that was it man.

Emch: I said “*That’s interesting because Hollie has a little bit of that vibe*”. Not exactly but different. I just liked that **Mykal** kept talking about doing things differently. A lot of veteran artists, they’re not looking to do anything different. They just want to keep repeating what they did before and try to make that stretch out. It was inspiring that **Mykal** wanted to push ahead. **Scratch** was like that too. To the day **Scratch** died **Scratch** was always trying new things. That’s what makes music exciting to people.

Mykal, what was it like working for Scratch back in the day? Are we talking about your early solo song from around 1974, *Observe Life*?

Mykal: Yeah. I used to go downtown to **Big Yard**, Orange Street. Where **Dennis Brown** used to be, and **Leroy Sibbles**, **John Holt** and all the singers. Every singer

from downtown would go to **Big Yard**. So you had to go through there. I ran into **Junior Delgado** and he always told me “*Yo, Scratch a do recording and you have fi come round to Scratch and record*”. So I went there and saw **Chinna Smith** and the musicians them. I talk to **Miss P**, **Scratch**’s wife, **Pauline**. **Pauline** said “*Yeah yeah*” and encouraged **Scratch** and we made the track. And it came out very good. It’s just what would happen in those times you know? Inspirationally, whatever I feel I sing. Up till today that’s how it is.

I want to ask about another old tune from before the Black Uhuru days just because of a vague New York connection. It came out on Key Records in 1976 - and the label says “produced by Sol Rauch N.Y.”. It was called *We Shall Overcome*...

Mykal: (pauses then laughs) Yeah! (Sings) “*We shall overcome the wicked!*” Well actually [it was] a friend of mine **Winston** from Waterhouse. Because all of us youths coming up who are not dancing, try to sing or keep something with music. Me and **Winston**

used to par in those times and **Winston** made a good friend who had a lot of production, they usually do jeans and all kinds of stuff. He asked the people them to get involved helping to produce [a song called] **Running Around. We Shall Overcome** was done by myself but it came out on the same **Key** record label. I think they gave him finance to do the recording for **Running Around** on the **Key** label.

You also recorded Freedom Over Me for Niney in 1974 as Michael Raprose? Why did you take that name?

Mykal: My brother usually called himself **Rap Rose**. He's still in Canada there. He has a restaurant called Rap. He used to be a disc jockey on the radio. So in the beginning when I just started out I said **Michael Rap Rose**. So it was like **M.R.R.** you know?

Thank you for confirming that. I always wondered whether your brother was on the harmonies and that's why you were called Michael Raprose.

Mykal: Oh, no. I had another brother who actually used to sing. He used to be a civil servant. He worked for Ministry of Works.

Joseph.

Mykal: Joseph, yeah. That's where the singing thing came from. He actually was the singer. But he had his profession, so he was never interested in the singing like that. Him and his friends, they used to have a group. They used to just do it for a hobby like. They used to sing the **Chi-Lites** and all kinds of foreign groups. **Delfonics** and **Temptations**. But my brother had an accident and he died. Him and **Sly** were good friends. So after that I started getting into talent shows and things. I started to tell **Sly** to record me and produce me. I was the first artist who actually recorded on the **Taxi** label.

Which tune was that?

Mykal: It could be **No No No** [You Don't Love Me]. On **Sly's** label.

You also did Artibella on Taxi, before Black Uhuru.

Mykal: Also **Artibella** and **Sun Is Shining**.

That Artibella, you really nailed the Ken Boothe sound but in your own way.

Both: (laugh)

Mykal: Oh yeah. Because in those days if you can't do the reproduction of the thing like that, you have to just be the sound of what it is. If you go less, then why did you even do the song? But you see how life is? As I go along, eventually I add my style. And then everybody wanted my style! (laughs)

Tell me about the evolution of your vocal style. The first 1976 Guess Who's Coming To Dinner for Niney is a very different sound to the Black Uhuru one with Sly and Robbie. When you did Born Free with Jammy and Yabby You, that's where I can hear that style coming. But what was the evolution for you?

Mykal: That was the thing. Started out like **Dennis Brown** but wanted to be myself back then, so that's when the sound actually started to emerge. Actually, when I started that sound, when we were recording for **Jammy's** for the **Love Crisis** album, **Tubby's** usually walked into the session and he'd say "**Jammy's** what kind of sound that **Mykal** a sing?" And **Bunny Lee** would say "**Yo Mykal, nah listen to Tubby's. Go do what you a do. The Arabian sound**". When **Bunny Lee** said "**the Arabian sound**" I didn't even know what he a talk about. Because we never went East when we talked about Far East, you know?

That's interesting because Jammy told me that he got Tommy McCook to blow an "Arabian" sound on the flute for that album. So maybe that's the connection.

Mykal: Ah, on the [I Love] **King Selassie**. Wicked, yeah yeah. And every time I lift my hat to **Jammy's**. Because the whole of we were from the same neighbourhood. He decided to start producing so give thanks. We have to say hail the **King** again. The **King** reign again. Brap brap brap.





Emch: It's really interesting what you said about the flute because **Troy**, our sax player, commented "*Man it's crazy. Mykal's melodies, they are so familiar to me in that vein of Ethiopian melodies*". When we perform, I'll hear **Mykal** and **Troy** playing off each other. That's one thing that made me feel this is something powerful with **Mykal**, how he really is like an instrument - different from a lot of vocals. People say "*They use their voice like an instrument*" but **Mykal** is like an instrument. He will do these melodic things with no words and interact with the horns or play off the drums. So it's interesting that some of that style maybe came from that Arabian flute. Maybe you heard that and started going in that direction because I hear that a lot. I try to bring that out in all the songs that we're doing. The interplay between his melodies and the horns and taking in that direction.

Emch, you grew up in Seattle, the birthplace of Jimi Hendrix. You mentioned Hollie being part of the Slits so it made me think of Dennis Bovell who produced their album, Cut. I interviewed Dennis for Reggaeville and he said "Jimi Hendrix invented dub" - what do you think of that statement?

Emch: That's really interesting because the thing that got me into production, using a lot of echoes and things, was **Jimi Hendrix**. When I was very young, playing guitar, everyone was trying to be this amazing guitar player but I noticed what was unique about his recordings was the production and the creativity. Like the album that starts out with a fake radio clip interview, **Axis Bold As Love**. Like a little skit. Actually our album with **Mykal** starts with a little skit type thing. I didn't really think about it until now but it was the same with the last album we did with **Scratch**. I like those little interludes that aren't necessarily even songs. Like a sound sculpture that takes people on a journey. **Axis Bold As Love** takes you on a journey into outer space. Whereas the journey with **Mykal** with this album is more like an inner journey, a spiritual journey. Taking people into another world. That's what was powerful about **Jimi Hendrix**. Beyond what he did on a single instrument was his ability to draw people into another world. I think that's one of the powers of music. The written word can transmit ideas through time but music can transmit emotions and feelings.

Hollie is the daughter of Paul Cook from the Sex Pistols. I read that you got into reggae through the punk group Bad Brains and worked with 24-7 Spyz. Two bands I listened to as a teenager that turned me onto reggae.

Emch: Interesting because I was in a band that had similarities to those bands. We opened for **24-7 Spyz** and people would compare us to **Bad Brains**. I heard **Bad Brains** as a young kid, a skateboarder in Seattle. They'd be playing these really fast punk rock tracks while people were on the skate ramp. And then the next song would be this really slow sound that I'd never heard before with a lot of

ROTO TOM

SUN SPLASH

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bass and echo. I hadn't even heard **Bob Marley** at that point. Like what is this music? A lot of people would fast forward those songs while skateboarding and I was like "No, no, what is this?" Someone said "It's reggae. Every couple of songs they'll take a break from punk rock and do reggae". I looked at the cover and saw a bunch of dudes who look like Rastas. I got curious about it so in a way that was my introduction to all kinds of reggae. It was dub even before I was aware of reggae. It just wasn't common in Seattle at that time. Rock music was so big. Blues and things that people were hearing because of **Jimi Hendrix**.

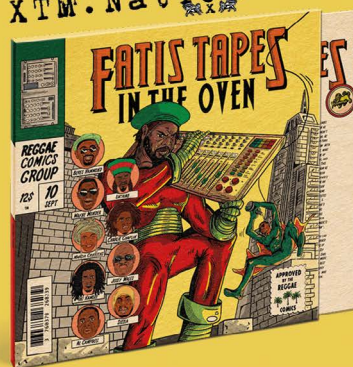
Ironically, I just did a show with **Dr Know** from **Bad Brains**. A couple of shows that were benefits for **H.R.** from **Bad Brains**. We played all their music and it was wild to get together. I actually expressed to him how meaningful his music was to me. It kind of changed the course of my life. It's been on my mind a lot working with **Mykal** too. How

he talked about bringing different influences to the early **Black Uhuru** stuff. At that time punk rock was popular. You were talking about the evolution of **Mykal's** voice and I noticed that that edginess in his voice or the music that was a little more hardcore than the other reggae going on. The last tune we put out, the last single **Put Down The Gun**, I was finishing mixing that just after doing this show for **Bad Brains** and thinking about that punk rock energy.

Mykal, when punk came out you were recording Love Crisis with Jammy. Did you have much interaction with punk in the 70s and 80s?

Mykal: My first time in England on tour with the group we were running into kind of punk vibes where we saw skinheads and things like that. But outside of that we've just been chopping our own cane you know? We're chopping our own sugar cane and then people say "Oh it has an edge of the rock and roll which is

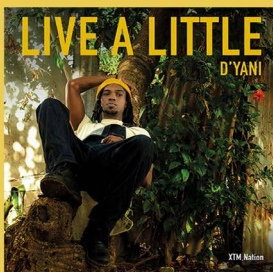
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over here and we like it” And I say “Wait, *wha gwan we don’t even know what we’re doing. We’re just doing music to free the people’s minds and sing about social issues*”. People are relating to it so it was just wow. We were not expecting this many people and it was crazy.

It’s a big question, Emch, but how did you get into working with Scratch?

Emch: That’s the longest story but to make it short, there was a band from Austria who had me play. **Dubblestandart**. They recently did something with the **Firehouse Crew**. And are huge fans of **Sly and Robbie**. To be honest I got a lot more into **Sly and Robbie** because of them. I grew up listening more to the **Scratch** sound. That dark, older analogue sound. They were working on an album with **Scratch** and asked me to do some remixes. The album was called **Planet Dub** and they had me do a **Chase The Devil** remix. They heard me play some stuff while driving around in the van on tour. It was before dubs-
teped had reached the US, 2006-7. It was very bass heavy music and they were like “*You’ve*

got to do a remix for the Scratch album in that style”. So we put this mix out called **Iron Devil**. Like a white label. They said it just went crazy and flew off the shelves. They said people in Japan were lined up for it. I think that changed our course a little bit because then we did a few more things like that.

And come 2009 in New York we did a concert with **Scratch** in Central Park. There’s a big summer concert series called **SummerStage**. The promoter knew we had done this work with **Scratch** and said “*Yo, we really want to get Scratch here. We’re curious about doing something like these remixes*”. We did the one show. And they just liked it. And we wanted to do more of that. That’s when I realised I was nervous about doing a show with **Scratch**, knowing people love his old sound. I was nervous about doing it in our style with a sound system show. That’s what helped us to put together the idea of the band, blending instruments and electronics. To represent that sound in a way where we could do things that sound really old and classic and things

that sound very new. I tried to do that on the new album with **Mykal** too. I love to hear him on old-sounding songs interspersed with new stuff. Like how **Bad Brains** would have a hard core punk song and then a reggae song. That contrast keeps it interesting.

Other producers who've worked with Scratch have said he had an outward-facing side for people who didn't know and more of an inner side for the people he was working with creatively.

Mykal: My experience was **Scratch** is always doing the opposite of the thing. If everybody used the guitar to do one thing **Scratch** would use the piano to do what the guitar would do. **Scratch** would do the opposite all the time, then come up with something different. I don't know how **Emch** experienced **Scratch** but that's how **Scratch** is. If you notice, **Scratch** rhythms, they kind of have a different thing about the skanking on it. Fi him skank them a stretch - you notice that? Whoa! It has a different sound you know? And he's a great person. He never stops trying to get better and better.

Emch: I hear what you're saying about his rhythm. Just the way he moved and carried himself. People are like "*What did you learn from Scratch?*" Like he's going to tell you some secrets. The most you learn is just from being around him.

Mykal: No secrets. Because every day he does something new. There's no dialect to the thing.

Emch: That's the secret right there. Every day something new. So creative all the time. Some people did say he would act crazy for certain people. And to some extent he would ward off people he didn't want to deal with especially. But there were definitely times we spent riding around in the car. A lot of times he didn't like to sit down in restaurants. So sometimes we'd be sitting, sometimes walking around causing havoc actually! One time we were in a restaurant that had

all these little statues of frogs. Maybe like a hundred. And he brought all the frogs to the table and put them in formation and was taking photos of them. The people in the restaurant were scared and didn't know what to do. But I don't think he did that for attention. He did that for fun too. He was a very funny person. He liked to joke around. There were a few times I remember no one else was around and he was doing stuff that was pretty wild. Inside his shoes, under the soles he had things like the Queen of England, some money, photos of the planets of the universe. He'd be taking things out of his shoes, restacking them, burying some things in the dirt. A lot of people would say that was crazy behaviour but I felt like he had his own rituals. His own sort of spirituality. It wasn't like he was out of control. He had his own system of doing things.

Mykal: When I was around **Scratch**, he never used to do stuff like that. I don't know where that came from.

(Laughter)

Emch: But it seems like at the **Black Ark** studio over time, some of that stuff developed. Like all his writing on things. He'd still do all that. What I saw being around him was just a development. He was always writing on things. Always decorating things.

Mykal: Well, hear this. Before he started writing on things he used to record every day. I can tell you this. Every day he'd record over by Washington Gardens. In a Kingston. Session a gwan. Musician a come. Musician a go. Up till night then the next morning you'd wake up and the same thing again. Always a record. That's how I know him. Always a produce.

Emch: And with us, he wasn't recording so much. He was writing all the time.

Mykal: Guess what, you met **Scratch** when he was off the chain!



(Laughter)

Emch: Yeah, he was just writing non-stop like in the car, checking in at the airport.

Mkylal: He's looking for places where no one wants him to write and he writes there.

Emch: That's also true, for sure. (Laughs)

Mkylal: Like maybe he goes to the embassy or something like that and he'd start writing on somewhere. He'd leave his logo or something. Like "*Scratch was here*" you know?

Emch: I heard that **Basquiat** in New York, the artist, was a big fan of **Scratch**. I thought a little bit about his style and **Scratch's** influence beyond music. Just on graphic artists. He became such a big thing. He touched a little bit of that too.

Mykal, as well as Scratch you knew King Tubby and his brother who was in the Waterhouse group The Jays.

Mykal: Scuner, yeah. Like with **Tubby's** now, I come from Waterhouse. Kingston 11. Waterhouse mi born and grow. From Thursday night to Friday to Saturday to Sunday, **Tubby's** sound would string up. And they put the steel horn in the trees. So even when the breeze is blowing the horn is rocking in the music, you can stay far and hear it. And that sound never breaks down because **Tubby's** is always on the spot! (laughs) And **U Roy** would usually come where I used to live. The bus terminus, everybody used to have to pass my house to take the bus. **U Roy** used to come up Penwood Road to the bus stop when I was a young kid. And **Tubby's** was always making amplifiers, building sound system boxes and speakers. That was just his thing man. Nobody else could do it. Everybody else had to send off to Germany for some kind of amplifier if they wanted to play sound. **Tubby** would make things for everybody. Because when they buy the amplifiers from America or England, it's not that warm when you get it and you don't get the big bass. When **Tubby's** make

it, all the business is fixed. So **Tubby's** time, boy, was legendary.

How big an influence was Tubby on you Emch?

Emch: Once I started to recognise what dub was, he and **Scratch** were the masters. Such different styles but I even think **Scratch**, what he was trying to do with the phasers was really trying to imitate the filter **Tubby** had on the MCI board. But he was doing it his own way. **Scratch** was always trying to create sounds heard in his head. He talked a lot about that. He loved water. He always talked about creating sounds of nature like water, thunder and lightning. **Tubby**, like **Mykal** was explaining, was an engineer, he was a scientist.

Mykal: You see when **Tubby's** makes the amplifier he has a little green light - they call it a "magic eye". And when he lift up the needle from the vinyl they have a reverb spring in a pan. They would knock the spring and it would make like a thunder. (Laughs)

Emch: Like a thunderclap! **Scientist** told me an interesting story. I used to do a dub festival called **Dub Champions Festival**. It got discontinued in the pandemic but we did a lot of shows with **Scientist**. One time he was telling me how when **Tubby** worked he actually liked to listen to classical music. He would be sitting there building his amps and things, listening to this symphony music and he would rock to it like it was dancehall! That gave me some interesting insight into his style. Because I felt like the way he mixed was like a conductor. Organising a symphony.

Mykal: Yeah, what I gained from that, **Tubby's** listening to the classical, is when he presents the sound he wants to go across to people when making his speakers and his stuff he's doing, it's just classic. If you have a speaker and it's broken, you take it to **Tubby's** and he winds it and fixes it back. When you get it back it play better than when you bought it. (Laughs)



Emch: It's that sense of knowing what you want to hear. He was an engineer who had ideas about what he wanted to hear beyond the possible. And then figuring out how to do it. For me that's an inspiration, using computers a lot in today's music. There's a lot of possibilities there but if you don't know what you're trying to hear, it might sound terrible.

Mykal: You're lost because you have to have a vision.

Emch: So working with **Mykal** I knew I wanted to have some stuff sound old. And for a computer to sound old, it takes work to make it sound that way. You have to record some things analogue or degrade some sounds so it's got that vibe. But there are also elements of the new technology that are amazing for the low frequencies. What **Mykal** is talking about with the **King Tubby** system, **Scientist** loved to talk about that. Expanding the frequency range was something that

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reggae really pushed and other genres didn't necessarily appreciate. Those low lows or the high highs. They thought "*Jamaicans are mixing the bass too loud*" but they said "*No, it's not too loud for our systems or what we want to hear*". The whole idea of our approach, we listen to a lot of dubstep, bass music, jungle, drum n bass. I used to love those really low bass lines almost like sine waves. They can be an octave lower than the actual electric bass. Once you hear the frequency it's like the lowest octave and it leaves a lot of space in the middle of the mix. I noticed the first time we played live, **Mykal** plugged in the mic on my normal setup for other singers, and the level that came through was so loud that after the show I said "*What's that mic that you plugged in? Because in sound check I wasn't ready for that! I had to turn things down*". He showed me it was just the normal mic! Oh man, the voice is like when the lion roars.

(Laughter)

Mykal: Like a **Tubby's** coming your way man!

Emch: His voice is so full across the frequency ranges, that I love having the really low bass that leaves a lot of space to hear the tone, quality and power of his voice. Sometimes it can get a little cluttered in the mid-range with the top end of the bass. A lot of times I don't even use a stick guitar, I just have the keys up top and the horns and then the low bass and then it leaves a lot of room in the middle for the voices to be heard. Of course, with dub that's the thing too. A lot of it is the low bass, not a lot in the middle, just a few blasts of it. **Tubby** was a master of that mixing-wise in his frequencies. **Scratch** did amazing things with his equipment, what he had to work with, but it was less about the frequency range and more about the creativity. **Tubby's** was almost like a sound quality thing.

KABAKA PYRAMID

EURO TOUR 2024

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

20/07	REEDS FEST, PFÄFFIKON, CH	16/10	FLUCC, VIENNA, AT
21/07	DOUR FEST, DOUR, BE	17/10	BACKSTAGE, MUNICH, DE
09/08	NO LOGO, FRAISANS, FR	18/10	HAUBENTAUCHER, BERLIN, DE
10/08	SOUTH FACING FEST, LON, UK	19/10	ELYSÉE MONTMARTRE, PARIS, FR
17/08	RUHR REGGAE SUMMER, MÜLHEIM AN DER RUHR, DE	20/10	PATRONAAT, HARLEEM, NL
18/08	LOWLANDS, BIDDINGHUIZEN, NL	23/10	DE ROMA, ANTWERP, BE
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The single *Put Down The Gun* definitely has a Robbie Shakespeare Black Uhuru style bass whereas other songs are more experimental.

Emch: For sure. I love that era of **Mykal** and **Sly and Robbie**, that is just magical. And a little bit of our approach working with **Scratch** was wanting to do something that harkens back to that. It's something familiar for people but also something that is new.

Mykal: But you know something, **Emch?** The **Mykal Rose** sound, wherever it goes it goes with me. Nobody else can carry it, go nowhere.

(Laughter)

Emch: I guess I mean I want to give support to **Mykal's** vibe in a way that I know people love that era.

Mykal: Multitalent! Multitalent!

Emch: But there are also tunes on the album where I hope you will think "*Man, I never heard Mykal do a tune like that*". Some tunes that hopefully will be familiar but others where we do very different things with the rhythm. The third single is a tune called *Happy Is The Man Who Finds Wisdom*. I always love when **Mykal** does philosophical tunes. This one to me is unique. It's got a lot of Ethiopian horns. It's got a very deep bass. It's very meditative. It's not the very up tempo sound system banging steppers beats. The label or the PR guy are like "*You putting this out as a single?*" But I'm like "*No, people right now they need a different sort of energy*". I'll let **Mykal** speak on that side of things but it's crazy in the world right now. It's hard to wake up and go through the day knowing how you should be feeling about things. And *Happy Is The Man Who Finds Wisdom*,



one thing I love about talking with **Mykal** is he's got so much experience and wisdom about life. Going back to songs like [**Black Uhuru**] *Happiness*.

Mykal: Yeah, there's moaning all over the world, man. People are dying and all kinds of things are happening. So we just have to just hope that people can be wise today.

Emch: I was thinking about technology and AI. Like a computer can get all this knowledge instantaneously. More than a human. But a computer doesn't have wisdom. Experience teaches wisdom. So a topic like that and creating music that supports that, I feel is a different sort of vibe for **Mykal**, for this album. We were talking about **Dennis Brown** and sometimes I almost hear his voice sounding like **Dennis Brown**. Oh man, I love that era. And I'm thinking about AI and how they'll be like "*That sounds like some*

amazing Motown song”, just recreated. But that’s the difference. **Mykal** is coming up with and he’s friends with all these guys and he’s got this history with them. He is that. It’s legacy. None of that is an accident or an imitation. It’s just in his bloodstream.

And to answer your question, some of the other songs, the title track of the album **Rockin’ Like A Champion**. Again combining Ethiopian melodies with more of a rockers beat. I just love that **Mykal**’s stories are great. I love music that is a story. He takes you on this story of being on the island at a sound system party, which is why the album art is depicting a sound system party on the beach, depicting the scene that it’s setting. So just trying to represent something musically that’s like a rockers beat, but it’s very bass heavy with the Ethiopian Melody. The combination of things is different.

Rhythmically, I’m not going to lie, I’ve listened to tons of **Sly and Robbie**. I thought a lot about **Sly**’s drumming and the interesting creative patterns he would do with side sticks. Of course **Larry McDonald** who does percussion, by the time the album comes out he will be 87. He does a lot of amazing things. He has a lot of very creative choices. Which is one of the reasons he worked a lot with **Scratch** over the years. He’s doing really interesting rhythmic patterns on the triangle. And with that song, it’s very interesting how reggae is in the US versus Europe. The steppers sound system thing is very big across Europe. But not at all in the US. It’s a very small dedicated scene here. But people love the rockers beat. Kicks and snares, all the rock and roll and hip hop. So I think some songs will connect with different people in different places. Not like that was intentional, we just wanted to do different kinds of music and not be too repetitive. There’s a song called **Streets On Fire...**

I was going to mention that one, the rhythm is very interesting. It’s almost like a bhangra type of thing.

Emch: Yeah, kind of unusual. I had a few rhythms I threw at **Mykal** when we got in the studio once I knew that he had already heard things that he liked. I wanted to make sure when we got in there he wasn’t gonna be like “*Yo, what is this? This is crazy*”. **Mykal**’s style of working in the studio is unique to me. Because he would hear two seconds of a beat. I would say “*How about this one?*” I was going to play him a few different things and he can tell me which one he wants. But as soon as he heard it he was like “*Run it. Run that on. I’m already locked in on it*”. He would start coming up with, not even ideas, he would sing a whole song over it. Then maybe go back and fix it up. So that was one where it was an idea, I didn’t even have the beat done, it was just kind of a loop. And he was like “*No, that one. Give that to me*”. Yeah, that’s funny you say that man. I thought about that as we started to flesh it out. I was hearing that so I was like “*Let me put in that kind of guitar and let’s do it like a bhangra type thing*”. You’ve just got to get a little wild sometimes with it because that makes it exciting for us as musicians and hopefully for people.

The other one is Times Getting Tough. I really like the furious triangle on that.

Emch: That’s another one I really like. It reminds me of some **Dennis Brown** vibes. In **Mykal**’s voice more than anything. That was a rhythm I had originally built, translated into a song we did with **Scratch** live. I said to **Mykal**, at the end of the day “*Can I play you another rhythm? I’ve got this one I know people love when we play it live*”. And he was “*Okay, let’s hear it*”. And then bam! And did it. When we play it out live, we play a very long version and dub it out and the percussion has got a lot of crazy triangle on it. I used to introduce that song live telling people **Larry McDonald** was the **Jimi Hendrix** of the triangle! It’s a joke but the way he plays that triangle live it’s like watching a lead guitar player do a solo. He’s making all kinds of wild faces and he’s killing that triangle! No one’s ever played a triangle like that before.

MYKAL ROSE x SUBATOMIC SOUND SYSTEM x HOLLIE COOK ROCKIN' LIKE A CHAMPION

DubShot Records - July 26, 2024

What a collaboration: the former lead singer of **Black Uhuru** meets **Lee "Scratch" Perry's** former band and London's top lovers rock songstress across 15 tracks and dubs. Yes, it's **Mykal Rose x Subatomic Sound System x Hollie Cook** with a new album.

Rockin' Like A Champion, released via **DubShot Records** and

Controlled Substance Sound Labs, sees the artists bring sound system culture kicking and screaming into the 21st century with a project that is as classy as it is diverse - not least thanks to the slick production, mixing, and mastering by **Subatomic's Emch**.

The album opens with **No Fear** (an atmospheric intro) before the title track starts the album proper. It's a heavy roots cut with the bass booming, horns swaying, and **Rose** providing furious vocals, with **Cook** equally backing them up to boot. **Get High** picks the pace up with a four-to-the-floor across dub engineering and samples with **Rose** discussing legalisation, while **Put Down The Gun** meanders back slightly but with the same vibe and an impassioned **Rose** urging peace.

Forward is more 'forward-moving' roots-dub, while **One Love** feels slightly less frantic, as **Rose's** lilting vocal winds across multiple breaks with **Cook's** sweet backing - with the title being self-explanatory. **Times Getting Tough** brings in a more resonant sound, deeper in hZ with great use of additional percussion and a sobering performance from **Rose** as he discusses the state of the world. Then, **Streets On Fire**



takes the lyrical theme one step further but musically it is a deviation with the four-to-the-floor gone, replaced by a dub-heavy imposing bassline and stuttering instrumentation.

Jah Take Us Away (Roots Mix) sees the sound wound back to the 80s, with the then-dance-hall trick of the root-seventh chord progression coupled with some heavy sonics across the engi-

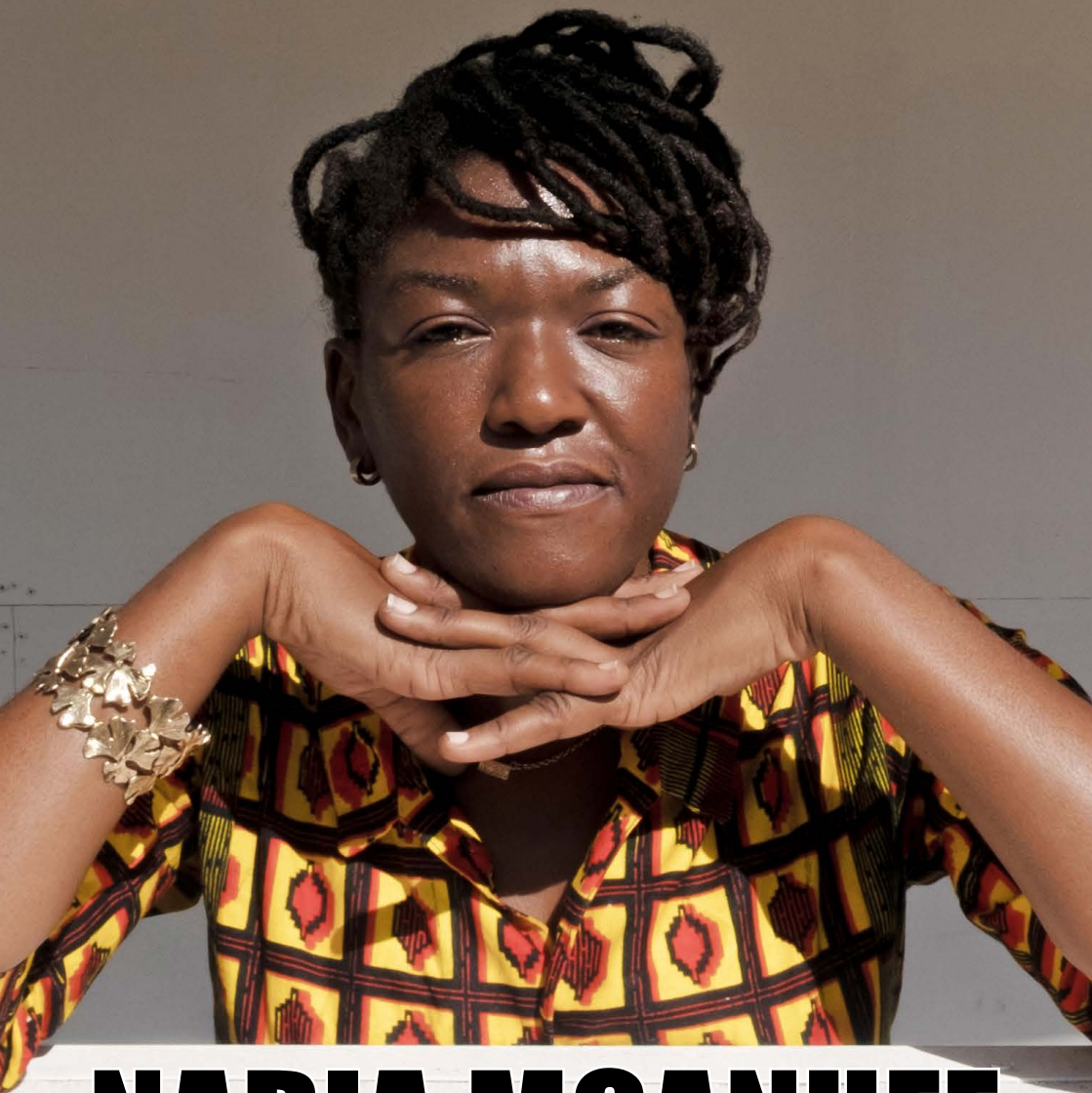
neering and **Rose's** engaging vocal around the need for faith. The album's main tracks close with **Happy Is The Man Who Finds Wisdom**. It may be a verbal mouthful, but musically it is a stripped-back affair focusing on smooth roots vibes with stark bubble rhythm keys, a heavy bass, running sax line plus gorgeous vocals from **Cook** and strong lyrics around enlightenment.

We then have dubs/mixes of five of the tracks. **Never Stop My Dream** is based on **Forward** and is atmospheric and ethereal, **Jah Take Us Away (Bass Mix)** sees an incredibly heavy bassline take centre stage, **Put Down The Gun Dub** brings much of the additional instrumentation to the fore, and **Happy Is The Man... Dub** sees the sax and (pleasingly) **Cook's** vocals take centre stage across a stark reworking. There's also a 'dubstrumental' version of **Get High** to boot.

Overall, **Rockin' Like A Champion** is a very solid and engaging release from the trio. Filled with a variety of sounds, it exudes class and substance. Admittedly, it would have been nice to have **Cook** to the front more - but that doesn't detract from what is an excellent release.

by Steve Topple

INTERVIEW



NADIA MCANUFF

HAPPY HOME

FINDING HER OWN SHELTER

BY STEVE TOPPLE

PHOTOS BY NKOSI STILL & MATHYS MEUNIER



It's not easy being the daughter of reggae royalty. But the effervescent, exceptionally talented **Nadia McAnuff** takes it all in her stride. In fact, she doesn't even do that - having forged a career for herself independent of her father. The previous culmination of this was a scintillating EP with band the **Ligerians**.

But now, they've taken their partnership one step further and have released their first full album, **Shelter From The Storm**.

So, **Reggaeville** caught up with **McAnuff** to discuss the album, her father **Winston**, the politics of roots, and more.

Nadia! It is so good to speak with you!

You too, brother!

So, you have a brand-new album out. It must be exciting for you because you worked with the Ligerians on your brilliant, brilliant EP, which obviously I know all about. And now you've done a full album. How does that feel? That must be amazing.

It feels great. The first album to me is like putting your feet in this ocean of music and genres, so it's like I'm here now, yeah? I'm a part of the one album crew. So, it's a great

accomplishment. It's been a great journey working with the **Ligerians** and getting to know them and now having this body of work that I can always say I've done with the **Ligerians** is an honour.

How did the decision to make an album come about after the EP? What was the process behind bringing you guys together to do an album?

Well, I think initially when we started working together, we knew that this is where it would go. And after the first EP, the

ans were like, “**Nadia**, we should do an album”. And I was like, “Really? Yeah, man, we should do it”. So, on my last tour, **François** was like, “Yeah, let’s do it”. One song after another. **François** is the drummer, and he has that whole vibe.

We completed the album before the last tour. And then when I came back, we started working on everything. But we all kind of decided to do it together because it’s, hey, it’s the way to go, right? And if you find a group of musicians that works this well together and if you just kind of blend in, it’s only natural. And then the bassist was like, “**Nadia**, I made this nice bass line, and you think your son **Samuel** would want to be on it”. And I was like, “What?” You know, because my son **Samuel**, he’s about to release his album too, which is his first album as well. And, yeah, that’s how we came together.

It sounds like quite a quick process!

Well, in a sense, it was. And this is what the **Ligerians** expressed to me because the way I work, I take time. I take time to write. Things come to me through different experiences, right? But for the **Ligerians**, they were like, “**Nadia**, now is the time. You’re here. We’re here together. You won’t be here when you leave. Let’s do as much as we can now”. And they pushed me to work a little faster.

So, some of the songs, a lot of my old fans might be like, “Oh, **Nadia!**” But the process is different. And this is what the music industry has become. And I don’t necessarily want to work this way all the time. But I have learned from my experiences that I should seize every opportunity, in whatever capacity I can. So, I decided to do that.



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And even some of the songs on this album, some songs I was going to work with another producer, like one song, and I said, “*No, I’m going to do it with the Ligerians*”. And so, some bits and pieces are ideas I’ve had in my head from before. But I must say that the creation of it has been, was fast. And the **Ligerians**, they write riddims fast too. You just tell them the genre and they go.

It’s all about, okay, this is how the music industry is flowing now. All right, this is how we’re going to flow. We’re going to be working with **Nadia**. We’re going to be working with **Chezidek**. Whoever’s ready, we’re here to back them and support them if they can work together.

And you had Tippy doing the mastering. How did you get him? Because he and Zion I Kings are some of the best people working in roots at the minute. Everything they do is brilliant.

The thing is I’ve worked with **Zion I Kings**, yeah. **David Goldfine** and I did some tracks together that they’re going to release soon. And what I love about the **Ligerians** is that they ask you. So, **Gabriel Bouillon** said, “*Nadia, who do you think, in your head, who were you like? Okay, you want them to mix the album for you*”. And I said, “*Tippy*”. He’s like, that’s who they were thinking of anyway. You know what I mean? And **Tippy** is great to work with him too, him and **Roberto Sanchez**.

They’re very open and they’re there for us right now, especially the people that are doing roots. This album might sound like a lot of different genres, but the root is roots. So, I really give thanks to them too for coming on board because a lot of producers are out there who really love my music, but I don’t know them.

I’m usually in my little box, as you can see here. So, it was great to connect with **Tippy I** and to have him work on something that I and others have created.

I mean, and Roberto as well! He’s someone, his name is just everywhere all the time, isn’t it?

He does everything. He’s a whole studio, like they have these AI studios now. That is **Roberto**. Please, I just want to tell everyone that **Roberto Sanchez** is that real-life AI studio that is there for us. And there’s a waiting list for him because he’s so great and he has the sound that we like, and he like adds to it and makes it even better in a way.

And he sings too. I didn’t know that. He’s a great singer, isn’t he? I had no idea. I had no idea because he’s so humble about it. But through working with **Linval Thompson**, **Linval**’s the first one that told me that **Roberto** sings and he’s working on his own little band. And I was like, what, really? Then I saw him playing online and I was just like, wow, I’m happy for him. We must support him in that sense too.

I was reviewing an album a couple of weeks ago and then Roberto was doing the backing vocals. Brilliant falsetto. He’s got this great falsetto which goes up really, high, but it’s still quite powerful. Really impressive.

These three-part harmonies, like, it’s just wow, and then the drumming and the keys!

Look, Shelter From The Storm: it’s undeniably a roots album. However, throughout it you intersperse wonderful flashes of other genres. Was it a conscious decision to do this?

Well, the thing is, like you, right, you’ve done your research, I can tell. And the **Ligerians**, they know me from **Agape** featuring **Nadia Harris** as well, the band that we formed.

So that has a lot of different genres, funk, soul, jazz, Afro[beats], drum & bass. So, for some of the songs, I asked the **Ligerians**, okay, **Freedom Of Peace**, can we mix roots and Afro? And with them, it’s like they work so well together, and they’re so know-

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ledgeable of all these different genres, that whatever you ask is what they give to you. So, the way you just explained it is exactly what they gave to you, and everyone's going to have their own definition of the rhythms and everything.

So, what happened is when you're cooking, there's ingredients. And if you put curry in it, curry's going to take over the whole thing, right? So, we decided to create this pie that has little elements of different genres, but the stem, like a book, is roots all the way. Just like with **Agape**, it's roots. And my son **Samuel** now, he's more into trap and a lot of different genres. That's his beginning because he's the new generation. But he loves roots, and he's a great roots writer. So, I guess **Jakub** formulated the base for him to kind of give him a platform for him to

sing on and feel comfortable on. And it just flowed. I even asked him, "*Hey Samuel, you could have given me some more bars*".

He made it really short and sweet, but it's the outro track. So, he's like, "*Mom, I didn't want to take too much from what you were doing*". So yeah, there's a little bit of something for everyone in this album. But the root is roots, always.

I've listened to you a lot – and I don't care what anyone says. You're a jazz singer, I think. I don't care about the roots, Afrobeats, whatever. You're a jazz singer. I'm sorry. Tell me I'm wrong [laughs].

Wrong? [Laughs] You're not the only one that said this. And I love jazz. And that's the thing. It's like some people say, "Oh, you're a roots singer. You're a jazz singer. You're



a reggae singer. Oh, you do drum & bass. I saw you with **Bugs In The Attic**". Yeah, I can do all of those. Yeah, but what is jazz without roots or reggae?

Yeah, okay. Yeah, you got me there. What I mean by you're a jazz singer is your interpretation. And you can't teach it.

It's interesting. You cannot teach that. No. Something in here [points to her heart]. Yeah, it's here. Because when I was growing up, we weren't allowed to listen to reggae music. I wasn't allowed to play the drums. A lot of things I wasn't allowed to do. But I still knew of my father. And I knew he was performing and things. But I was raised by a single mother. And she couldn't afford to send me to school for music. So, everything, even my singing, I taught myself. I watched these artists I just told you about. I watched

the way they sing. I take voice training classes on YouTube. Because that's what I could afford.

And I build myself. And I watch other musicians play. And I asked my mom to buy me a drum. And I just started practising and started playing on everything. So, all of this I taught myself. But from watching others do it.

And I love to look at the singers, how they form their lips, their tongue. You know, when they sing, how they breathe. When I got older, I was like, what, I think 23, I went to visit my dad. And I'm sure he was surprised. Because by then I had already had **Agape**. Formed it. We've been touring around the world. And I decided to start focusing more on the roots.

You mentioned your father. It's a tricky question, but one I have to ask. Having Winston as your father, real roots legend, has that been a positive or negative for you as an artist on your career, do you think?

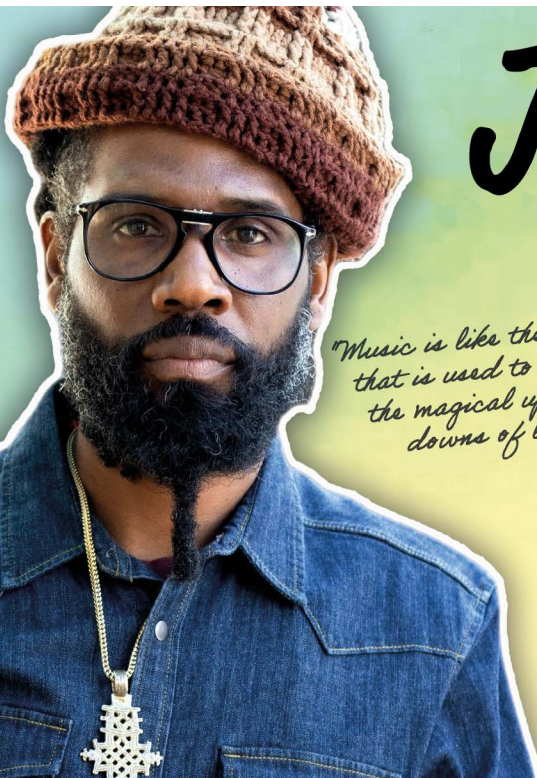
Well, I think that's a serious question. And it's all about how you carry yourself as an artist. What you do, the way you treat others, is how others are going to treat you. Right? So, I've heard the good and I've heard the bad. It has been a positive effect, and it has been a negative as well, because a lot of people see me and they say, "*Oh yeah, that's because of her father*", but they don't know that this is something I had to build. I was me before I went to see my dad when I got older. They forget that.

They forget about **Agape**. They forget about who I am, and some people say, "*Oh, that's Nadia McAnuff*". So, she's fine. She has

links for all the shows. She's going to get a lot of shows". Here I am again, nine shows for a tour for two months in France, which to me coming from the US is like, oh my God, should I do it? I do it for the people, not for the money. So, this is a tour of love for me. People think, yeah, I have a gold spoon in my mouth. No, everything I've been doing has been independently done.

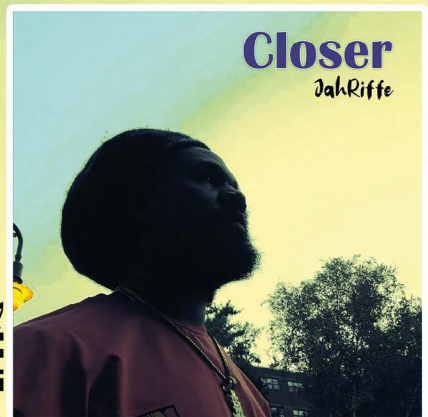
But still, I really give thanks because without him and that name, a lot of people wouldn't know me. And without him, I would not be here. I'm also here to represent my father, my mother, my brother, my ancestors. Because I am because they are.

It's very interesting. That was fascinating because, again, we've known each other for a few years, but I didn't realise that you didn't meet your father until after you'd formed Agape.



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Yeah, I mean, I've seen him now and then when I was younger, but he wasn't really in my life. He was with my brothers. And I had to come to the reality that when I finally went to meet him and spend time with him, I came to the realisation that everything was meant to be because I would have not wanted to be there when I was younger. So, all the struggle, everything I went through to get to this point, it was for a reason.

If your life had panned out differently, we may not be sat here now having this conversation.

It wouldn't. And that wooden spoon that my mum gave me helped, and it made me stronger.

What a great turn of phrase.

It made me stronger. So, I give thanks for both elements, and I really give thanks that both came together to support my mission. And that showed me that I must do this independently. I can't wait. I can't be like, "*Hey dad, can you link me with some festival?*" No. Me and the **Ligerians** or I alone or I and whoever need to be doing it on an independent level because you learn more, and you grow faster.

Look, I want to briefly touch on the fact you are a brilliant, brilliant live performer, especially when you've got drums in your hands as well. That is really your thing, isn't it? Why do you love the drums so much?

Oh, wow. Yes, I love the drum because it's a form of communication that you don't have to use words. It's a sound. And for me, everything is sound. Every single sound I hear, I try to sing something to it. Your hands? All the tip of your hands supports a different organ in your body. And you know how important organs are. So, when I was pregnant with my son, when I'm upset, I always play. And I'm always in an environment where I can play for hours. So, for me, it's healing as well. A lot of people say, "*Hey, Nadia, you should play the guitar. Hey, you should play the keys*". Bored. "*Hey, you*

should play... blah, blah". Yeah, I've tried all of them, and I can play them a little. But for me, Nyabinghi is where it's at. I love playing the bass drum.

I just don't have my own right now because that's another thing I practise playing with because it's like the heartbeat. So, I love to listen to my heartbeat when I write, and I love to hear the bass drum when I write because from less, so more is created. So, yeah, that's where my love of drum comes from.

There's something ancient about it as well, isn't there? I think it's very kind of connecting to everyone that came before us, I suppose. You know, it's such a central part of humanity, as much as talking.

Yeah. But it's less aggressive at times, and our feelings are not hurt as much when we're using sound. So, it just creates a better environment for whatever conversation that needs to be had because we get so lost and caught up in words, and words can be so provocative that it's like, hold on, let me play. And then, even the water. If you turn the water faucet down and it's like everything, everything is just, it's the beginning, before we had this.

I want to pick up on your son's love of trap. Since I've been working in music, Jamaican music and culture has seen sweeping changes. The music has really shifted over the past few years. Roots is still there, though, which I always find interesting. What do you think about these changes? Does music have to progress like this?

I feel we have lost the whole idea about different genres, because other than Favela Funky, which they say was created the other day, I don't see anyone else creating any other genres, right? I feel like every genre should progress, but when it comes to the vibration of the rhythm and it comes to the lyrical content, it should always be clean. Music, writing songs has always been about wordplay. There are so many old artists that



used to write about having sex with women in bars and corners, but that's not how they said it. You understand? So, the adults would understand. Yeah, the young ones would vibe with it, but the adults were the ones who really understood what they were saying. So, it just depends on the capacity that you are transcending in.

And the thing is the gatekeepers, right? We're gonna call them the gatekeepers. They introduce these things to the youths, but then they don't understand that as a gatekeeper, you're like a parent and you always must be the parent, right? So as a parent, what did we do? We spoon fed our youth certain things until they were older to understand. That's the same concept I think we should be using when it comes to introducing these youths to certain genres and the things that we say.

The gatekeepers made a big mistake when it comes to the youths in Jamaica. That's why we can't blame the youths. The gatekeepers started saying a lot of things, but then when you investigate their life, these youths are seeing them daily. They know their life. That's not what they're living. So now the youths don't want to hear anything.

A lot of them cutting off the locks, but there's still roots in their heart, right? And they're going to trap, they're trying other things. You see tattoos everywhere. You know, it's a transition, but like how you and I went through our experiences, and we learned from them, I am praying for this generation and the next one that they learn sooner than we did because now they don't have the time.

And these gatekeepers, they've made their billions. They have their homes in different isles. They're ready for whatever is to come, right? But the youths are still here, diving into what they have regurgitated, right? And they're lost. And there's all this gun, gun, gun, gun, gun. Everything's about gun and killing. And this is why you see Afrobeats, right? Because people want to dance, right? Afrobeats comes with a culture, right? The thing with a lot of Jamaicans, they don't love Africa.

They don't love Africans. They say, oh, you little black this, whatever. You know, when I started going to school in the US straight from Bobo Hill, they used to beat me, pull my dreads, call me all these names because I loved Africa.

And I still love Africa, right? So, because of dancehall, okay, dancehall's hatred for African music, I would say, because that's how we were trained. We were trained to hate ourselves, right? We weren't trained to love each other. That's why you see all other nations love themselves, right? So, people got to the point where they stopped.

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They don't want to hear about no killing or no pop, pop, dagga, dagga. They want to dance. Afrobeats come with a culture. They're giving you fufu and bitter leaf stew and all of them things. There are all these different dance moves, just like in dancehall, but it's a cleaner vibe. You understand what I'm saying? People are dancing again, talking to each other. Dance moves are being created and it's not a bunch of..., it's more on a, I would say it's very sexual, which is not like great, but I would rather make love than to have, than to fight.

So, it's all about how we're making these, these genres progress. Cause they're genres, right? We're the ones that generate them. So, it's all up to us.

So, if Afrobeats come on and take over, dancehall need to look into itself. You understand what I'm saying? Because remember, we're Jamaicans. We're the one that's always

singing over songs from other people. But I don't want to sing over no **Viceroy's**, no **Max Romeo's**. You want to sing over all of them, but what about the greats that are there? We should be supporting and finding out, hey, you sign up with this organisation as a young, you understand what I'm saying? There are things we should be doing for the, for the older generation who are still alive, who are still singing roots music. But we decide, okay, to support the ones who are coming.

They're coming for something. Everyone goes for something, right? It's something for something.

I had a conversation with Blvk H3ro last year and he said something very similar about Jamaican music and the gatekeepers in Jamaican music. And this is why he left Jamaica. Are we talking about an issue of social class here, do you think?

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They're from the richer parts of Jamaica. And we must remember this. We must remember the Coral Garden Massacre. And it's an association of Rastas that, even when I go to Jamaica, I try to play my mom. She has buses. She sends the buses to take them back and forth. And what happened is, we must remember that a lot of these gatekeepers did not love Rasta. Where's the lie? A lot of them did not love Rasta. They used to look at people like me and look down at us and call us names.

But when **Bob [Marley]** came into the thing, a lot of their parents saw that there was money involved in this. So, their parents groomed them to be this way. But they never loved Rasta.

So, if they come in and mess up the thing and do it a certain way, we cannot be surprised. We must remember that not everyone is in it for what Rasta came in it for. You understand what I'm saying?

You don't have to say them because the thing is, it's at the point where we all know the names and the names know themselves.

Exactly. But the result is that the country that gave the world the most conscious music of all time has missed the opportunity to expand on that and create a society which is truly egalitarian. Jamaica is now infested by the same corporate capitalism that infests the US, which infests us in the UK. It's as if you had something in the palm of your hands and it was taken away.

Yes. Because they didn't know the worth. They didn't know the worth of it. And then the gatekeepers that are within the rights, when it comes to your rights for music and everything, the way they're moving, it's like they think they're back in the days.

So, it's like you as an artist, you must really know your rights because if you don't, it will be taken away from you. And it's the same with reggae music and it's the same with

dancehall. If you don't value the thing, it's going to be taken away by someone who will value it more. And that person, nine times out of ten, they're capitalising off it. And it doesn't include you. It's like the red, gold and green flag.

It's like Rastafari. The last time I checked, we were supposed to be doing this together. Yeah, you get older. Your youths are in it. You're pushing them. You know, you're supporting. You guys are supporting each other, and the thing grows. And the elder is always there to guide. But in a lot of sense, the elder isn't there to guide. The elder is there wondering if you're going to take his cakes. It's like this. And it's sad because we can only work together. The only way we're going to win this struggle is by working together as a team.

The AIs are coming. What are we going to wait for them to come? You notice they can replicate every single one of us. So, is that what we're waiting for? And then when it comes, are we going to be upset? Who are we going to blame? We must blame ourselves. They say the robots are smarter than us, but who created them? Exactly. I told you we'd go off on like all sorts of conversation. That's great.

Look, back to Shelter From The Storm. It's a fantastic album. What do you hope listeners are going to take from this album, Nadia? What would you like them to take away?

Well, I just hope it inspires them to have just more hope for the future. There's a song on it called *Shelter From The Storm*, and music is my shelter from the storm. In a part of it, I say I've really found a home. This is my happy home. So, I pray that the listeners find their happy home through something. It might be singing, drumming, dancing. Starting a not-for-profit organisation. I hope it inspires them to do and not to wait. You see the album. You say it's been done. We didn't take too long to do it. Right now, we can't wait too long because the time is now.

To wrap up, are you going to tour the album with the Ligerians?

Yes. The tour is going to be in Europe. The first one is going to be on the 7th of June.

We have a total of nine shows over the span of two months.

It was lovely to chat to you, as always, Nadia!

I really enjoyed that. You too, brother. Thank you so much and give thanks to **Reggaeville!**



NADIA MCANUFF & THE LIGERIANS - SHELTER FROM THE STORM

SoulNurse Records - June 7, 2024

Nadia McAnuff's first, full solo album with the **Ligerians** is an exquisite body of work that, as the artist herself hoped when she spoke to **Reggaeville**, will let you find your "happy home".

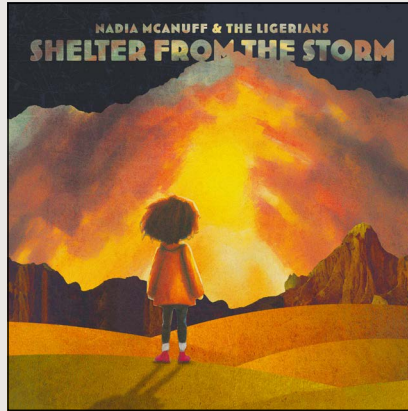
Shelter From The Storm, released via **SoulNurse Records**, is an overly roots album but interspersed with other genres, too. It should be noted that **Laurent "Tippy I"**

Alfred's mastering is superb: elevating each track while giving the album an overall classic sound from the heyday of roots.

Love Divine feels overly dub with its heavy, imposing bassline as **McAnuff** expresses praises to Jah, while **So Jah Seh** changes tack with its whining guitars and its narrative around following a righteous path. But **Freedom Of Peace** switches things up, drawing Afrobeats inspiration with its stuttering drum lines and regal horns - calling for protection of civil liberties.

Know Who is a real roots throw-back, with the keys' engineering designed to feel analogue and some delicious work on the guitar. **McAnuff**'s calling out of the "wolves in sheep's clothing" who bastardise Rastafari is strong, too. **Holy** winds the pace back with some melancholy minor key vibes and a meandering bass, and an equally melancholy narrative around false prophets.

From nowhere, steppers then appears with **Waiting Room** and its frantic drum line. **McAnuff** has built a sharp narrative around passiveness and spiritual indifference versus Babylon's mendacity, too. **Shelter** feels smoother than previous tracks: soul vibes crossed with stark dub breaks, with Jah



being praised once more. **Fade Away** mixes the album up again, leaning heavier into dub but with RnB vibes across the vocals and as **McAnuff** says, "peace is the only solution", as she implores peaceful resistance and unity against the system.

Sorry is a beautiful, fluid affair with distinctly funky soul undertones across roots overtones and mid-range electronic vibes across the synths and dub engineering. **McAnuff** weaves a narrative around personal integrity and faith being cemented by music, perfectly.

Shelter From The Storm concludes with **Yes We** featuring **YLSam** (her son **Samuel**, an artist in his own right). The track leans heavily into hip hop across the drums while keeping some roots vibes across instruments like the keys, almost revival reggae. There's a strong narrative, too, around standing firm against those who seek to divide us.

McAnuff is the consummate jazz-inspired roots vocalist, weaving intricate melodies and complex rhythmic patterns across performances which are filled with nuanced and expressive interpretations. **The Ligerians** are highly accomplished and have a marvellous synergy across their performances, both internally and with **McAnuff**, too.

Overall, **Shelter From The Storm** is a tour de force from **McAnuff** and the **Ligerians**. Musically complex but still infinitely listenable, it represents the pinnacle of her already long career, and should be viewed as a classic in the making.

by Steve Topples

A close-up portrait of a Black man with long, thick, dark brown dreadlocks that fall over his shoulders. He has a full beard and mustache, and is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. He is wearing a green button-down shirt. The background is a solid, bright blue color.

INTERVIEW

MORTIMER

FROM WITHIN

FIRM AS A BONE AND LIGHT AS A FEATHER

BY GARDY STEIN

PHOTOS BY JDASH CREATIVE LAB

When the world first heard his voice on the intro of **Protoje**'s song *Protection*, it was clear that this singer is going places. **Mortimer** is a gentle force, an amazingly talented artist who is not afraid to share his innermost feelings with us. His new album **From Within** is exactly what the title suggests: fourteen songs (plus three dubs by **Tippy I-Grade**), carefully crafted by **Winta James** and **Mortimer** himself, taking us deep into the latter's heart-space.

In an intimate interview, the artist granted **Reggaeville** vivid insights into the workings of his mind and the songwriting process, speaking about both dark places of his past and the bright joys of music.



I don't think we have to introduce Mortimer as an artist, because most people will already know you. Before we talk about your new album, can you tell us about your recent European tour with Tippy I-Grade and Samory I? What are some highlights you'd like to share with us?

It was awesome actually, I had an awesome time! It was a blessing to be able to be out there with my brothers sharing music, sharing the creative space with the rest of humanity. You know, with all the turmoil that's happening in the world, it's a joy to know that music can still bring us all together, no matter the time or space. So that was good, I had quite a few interesting experiences there too, some places I went for the first time and it was super cool. I've always dreamt of travelling the world, and

here I am getting to do it with doing what I love - music! (laughs) So yeah, it was a blessing, and big respect to **Tippy** and **Samory** as well, they were excellent road partners on the road. And our tour manager **Dama** [Damien Albert], big respect always.

Did you have any favourite show, where the vibe was special or whatever?

Actually, all of them were special in their own way, I loved every one of them. No, that's a lie, there was one that I didn't particularly like at all. I like sharing the vibe with the people, but the venue was very noisy. Anyhow, I enjoyed the Jazz Café in London, that was super awesome, I loved that energy there, that was one of my favourite places.

Were there any lessons that you learned? I think it was your first tour where you played a lot of shows in a row, right?

Well, there's always room for growth I believe, in this life. I always just talk to myself about these things. For one, I feel like I definitely need to lose back some weight, you see me? Because I see how rough it is on stage, it's very hard being on stage for so long and just keeping the vibes, and so I've learned that physical fitness is super important, so I need to get back on that now. Over the years I've kind of let myself go, being a family man and making music and going to bed late and eating all kinds of things and whatever, so now I'm gonna get back into that. Also, I've learned that music is something that you have to be patient with, that music is a very powerful force and it's a privilege to be able to do music, to share music with the people. The responsibility that we have to humanity as artists, as creatives, it's a great responsi-

bility, that's one of the lessons for sure. And another one is don't get too carried away (laughs) with all the newness, you know what I mean? Just relax.

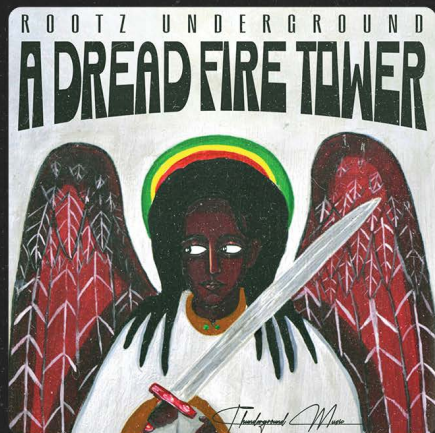
On your Insta you posted a video in the falling snow. Was that your first time experiencing it?

(laughs) Yes, it was my first time! I was in Sweden actually, it was really, really, really awesome, I never experienced anything like that before in my life, I only saw those things on TV.

Did you get to walk around in the snow, or try any winter sports?

No! We didn't have the time for all of that. We were constantly moving, some of the times we went to really nice hotels that we didn't even spend two hours in, you know? We would just go there, hold a little 20 minutes nap, change, get ready, head out again

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for an eight or nine hour drive, and then it's showtime right after that. You know the runnings!

Which other places in the world would you like to visit?

I actually have two places on the top of my list that I'd really, really love to visit, and that's Japan and Africa. I'd really love to experience Japan's culture, it seems like such an interesting place and I'm a big fan of the Samurai as well. I don't know if there are any remaining Samurais or if that age is over or if some of these temples still exist where they used to train their mind and the combat as well, I definitely want to see that. And I'd really love to visit the motherland for sure.

You will reach there! Turning to the new album now, when did you start working on that? Was it right after your EP Fight The Fight?

It's been a while, a couple years now. I actually started working on the album even before the EP! We got deeper into the works of it after the EP for sure, but I've always been working on music.

And can you tell us about the title, From Within? I mean, in some measure it's self-explanatory, but when did you decide that this would be the title?

From Within, for me it just kind of suggested the place where the album was coming from. I wanted this body of work to be as honest and open as I could be, just to express a few things out of my mind, so it was really simply from that place. Most of the things were internal, you know. I mean, everything outside affects the inside, and the inside affects the outside, but this body of work is more honest, more vulnerable than I've ever been.

Did you ever have doubts if you should put it out, since it is so personal?

Yeah, I have, but I let it stay anyway. I just let God guide my steps as I go, and trust that it will all work out for the best.



It is a great body of work, really! My biggest respect for that. I think the world needs something like this; this honesty and this inside view.

Thank you!

Talking about the production, you've been working with Winta James again on this one. How much did you yourself contribute to the songs?

For the most part we worked on them together. Most of the songs... I produce as well, you know, so most of my ideas I start from home at my studio and then I bring them to **Winta** and we work on them together in his studio, we add to them and we take away and we finish them up (laughs).

Who else was involved in the creation of the tracks, which musicians did you invite?

Monty, Devon Bradshaw, a man like Hector ["Roots" Lewis], he played on the first track *In My Time* and he also sung backgrounds on *Where Would I Be* as well. Sherieta and Chevaughn, those are two incredible singers, Tammi as well, Riff Raff, Beezie Coleman... yeah, quite a few!

How about the songwriting? Was that only you or did you get some help from others?

For the most part, like 99.9% that's all me. There are like two songs on the album that *Winta* actually came to me with the ideas for those songs and then we finished working on them together, but most songs were written by me.

Wonderful! Now, the first two songs, In My Time and Bruises, are the only features on the album. Damian Marley is on the former and Kabaka Pyramid and Lila Iké are on the latter. Can you tell us what made you choose these artists in particular and how the collaboration worked?

The collaborations were good! For *In My Time*, Gong and I, we weren't in the same space. We sent the song to him and he did his part where he was. *Winta* was in studio with him though, and I've met Gong, you know, super cool brother. I think with all that he stood for over the years and his messaging through his music, the things that he's aware of and his consciousness, I felt like he would be the right person to execute such a song. He could only add value to it, you see me? So *Winta* definitely went out of his way to facilitate this whole situation and I give thanks for that. It took many flights to and fro! (laughs) But we made it work and I give thanks.

Lila is amazing, very talented, very gifted, you know, super cool human being, and *Kabaka*, I've been listening to his music for years now. Him again too, you know, his brain space, I definitely knew that like...

this is for him! And that song spoke to both, the struggles as a person and struggles that you realised in the society as well, you know, it's all about where we're coming from to where we're going, all that we faced before and all that we're still facing now in present day, just in different forms.

True. Three songs were released already as singles, Whole Heap, Slowly and Not A Day Goes By. What reactions did you get so far from fans, from people on IG or wherever?

The feedback has been great! I'm super grateful for all the feedback, it's awesome to know that we can connect this way, this positive way, through the music that we make. It's always crazy to me because like I'm at home and I'm writing these songs and I'm feeling these feelings and all of a sudden it's out there in the world and somebody else knows all the lyrics to your song... it's crazy! Every time it's just mind-blowing to me that we can connect in such a way. I feel like there is so much common ground between us as human beings, and still we pretend as if there is none. We pretend that there are these barriers that block us from love, from loving each other, from treating each other fairly, you know what I mean, from the balance of life, from equality and justice... I don't know how we do it!

I think as soon as materialism comes in, you have greed, you have envy, all the negative. It's possession, I think that's what really puts us off the feeling-side, because as you say, feelings are universal. But we'll get there one day! The three singles mentioned have beautiful videos as well. Let's first talk about Slowly, which has an animated video by an artist called Ikem Smith. Was that your storyline, your idea that you put to him?

Yes! I just wanted something magical, something storybook-like, that fairy tale element. Because that's what I feel like when you're caught up and wrapped up in love, it's what it really is. Especially the

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sexy-time parts of love, the physical affection and all of them kind of thing, those sides of it, I do enjoy a lot, you see me. So I felt like, just as magical as I feel while... (laughs), you know, it's the same way that I wanted it to be put out in the video as well. And it's nature, it's nothing to be ashamed of speaking about! I mean, we've made so many things taboo, but it's nature, and that's how the animals came in, too, because the animals are basically giving their approval to what was naturally created, for us to be together in whatever ways that we want to be together.

Yeah, I love that scene in the woods, it's almost like a Lion King kind of vibe, the way they bow to the couple! That's a really cool idea.

Thank you. I appreciate that, and big up to **Ikem** as well. He did an excellent job getting that together, very talented artist.

Will there be videos for other songs as well?

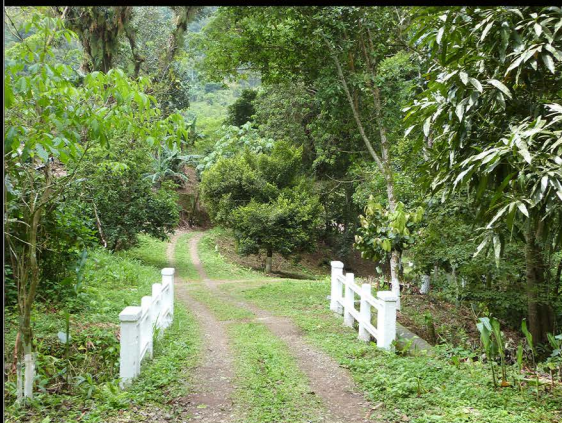
Yes, there will be! We are actually shooting the visuals for another song that's coming out, **My Child**. That was a letter to myself and my children as well, things I wanted to hear from my father that I never heard, and I tell it to myself and now I tell it to my children. And we just did **Not A Day Goes By** the other day, we did a video for that, we shot that at the **Habitat Camp** up at **Protoje**'s. I felt like it was a fitting environment for that song, based on the concept that we had for the video.

That's a very tough song. You touch the issue of suicide and even sing about that you tried to take your own life... If you care to tell us, what made you stop, what made you not do it? Maybe to inspire others who are in a similar situation, what can you hold on to if you reach that point?

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It's easier said than done, that's one thing for sure. Matters of the heart and the mind are not ones that you can dissect like a liver, you know what I mean, or you can just take out and fix or whatever. It takes a lot, and I know that a lot of people right now are going through the craziest things, mentally, emotionally, physically. But whatever the mountain is, it's worth getting over. It's not as easy as said, but for me personally, I was afraid to hurt myself in that way, even though I wanted to and I felt like I needed to, but... you know, on one of my attempts I was just shaking out of control, and also there was another side of me that wanted to live as well, so I said, *"Listen to the side that wants to live!"* Cause there is that side, even amongst the crowd and the noise and everything else, there is! If you just try to find a way within it all to kind of hear that voice that tells you to live. And just live, hold on for as long as you can, and live. Choose life always!

Thank you! And we are all grateful that you listened to that voice, that you're here to deliver music like this which will in turn help other people, you know. They'll definitely heed that call.

I find it very important to be human, you know, because that's what we all are. So, in a lot of my songs, I try to just kind of humanise myself. I don't want anybody seeing me as no kind of superstar or no kind of... you know, like it's all great and good that everybody thinks that *"Yes, Mortimer is good at what he does, he writes good songs!"* I really appreciate that, but my songs don't come from a place of wanting that. As a matter of fact, most of my songs are written to me, it's just written for me, and it's my hope that when it goes out there in the world that it impacts everybody else in a positive way, that's my contribution before I die. You know, I want to know that I contributed in a positive way before my eyes are closed, before this physical has passed.



It does, your music touches people not only in the reggae bubble, it's doing circles! You also sing about smoking, meditating, and you also have one song which is like a devotion to Jah, so what role do these topics play in your everyday routine?

I mean, God is in everything, always, that is the essence of our being. You know, there's no us without the acknowledgement of God and higher power. So, there's not a day going by that I am not grateful, thankful for the opportunity of life and for God guiding my steps over the years, and blessing me with the talent as well to do music. When it comes to herb, it kind of helps me to just relax and not overthink the process too much. It brings me to a place where I wouldn't go without it. It

works with me as I go deeper, you know? So yeah, it's part of my music making process for sure.

One of my personal favourites on the album is *New Roads*. Can you take us a bit through the creation process? Like, what new roads are you trodding, how was that song born?

I went to **Winta**'s house to make some music, and I stayed over, like a sleepover kind of vibe. So, I was at his house and he played me a fresh idea, a drum track and chords, that was it, there was nothing else on the record at all. He was just like "*Yo, bro, I'm having a thing, listen to this song!*" I listened, and then **Winta** went to sleep later on in the night and I was up, I stayed up in the studio, and by

morning, when he was awake, the song was finished. (laughs)

It's really a beautiful one! And then about *Balcony Swing*, is that something you remember from childhood? Was there a balcony swing on your veranda?

Well, not from my childhood. The story behind *Balcony Swing* is a story of my new love, you know, it was when I met my now wife. I'd moved out of my parents' place and I was living in an apartment, it was my first apartment where I actually paid rent and thing, not like couch-surfing with my brothers. Because technically, I had moved out a long time, but it was like cutching here and cutching there, just in the name of music,



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because my parents wouldn't facilitate music vibes and thing. The lady there, the landlady, she had a rule that she didn't want any females, she didn't want me to bring in any women, because it was a room inside a very big house. So, I rented a room, and my room came with a bathroom and a balcony. And on my balcony, I had a balcony swing, like one of those actual swings, you know? And that's where me and my girl used to spend a lot of time together, just talking. We'd just smoke and talk and smoke some more and talk and drink and talk. Like we'd talk for hours! And what I had to do is sneak my woman up. Sometimes she'd skip work and I used to help her to climb up the balcony. She'd throw up her work bag, and I hung over the railing and I'm like "Grab my hand!" It was that real Rapunzel kind of vibes (laughs). I stretched my hands down and helped her up and she climbed up on the edge of the balcony and stuff and I pulled her over. So, I used to sneak

her in through that door from the balcony so the landlady would never know that she was ever there. She found out eventually, but that's what the song is about. So yes, there was actually a balcony swing and there was actually a balcony!

None of my songs... I don't write any fictional songs. I don't write songs from a place of only observing. Songs that I write are actual things that took place in my lifetime, I don't write for just writing sake, to just write and rhyme and all of them kind of thing. I really want to get my experiences out there.

It is felt, it is really felt! It's a different vibe from all those pop songs. So, in that vein, what changes did you feel in Changes?

When I wrote *Changes*, I felt there was somewhat of a shift right before COVID. It was like, I remember doing **Rum Fest**, the Rum Festival here in Jamaica. And the energy



that was behind the EP, the EP had just come out and the whole thing was just going crazy, you know what I mean? Like *Lightning* was picking up, people were loving the vibes, I felt like a shift and I said to my girl in the car “Do you feel that? I feel like things are about to change!” For the better too, as a matter of fact, like more people hearing the music, it was interesting. Plus, I’ve been going through a lot of stuff within my own self that I was trying to conquer, and I felt that I was finally at a place where I could let some of it go. That kind of made me feel a whole change within myself. There are things, as I said in the song, that I used to be afraid of, that I’m not afraid of anymore, like losing people. For my own peace of mind, for my heart-space, I’m not afraid of that anymore. So, I definitely will choose myself and my peace and my sanity over any relationship at all. That’s one of the things that I’m not afraid of anymore. I’m not afraid anymore either of what I will become or how far my music will go, because I’ve surrendered to the universe and time and God. I just do my best and put it out there and leave it alone, to just do what it does. So, some of the fears and the worries and the strain that I used to carry, I no longer carry these anymore. That’s what that song is about, you know, feeling all of these changes in my mindset and in my heart.

That’s great to hear. This brings me to the last question about the album. From *Within* is deeply introspective, songs like *Rather Be or Heavy* or *My Own Tears* are songs that really reflect that inner view. Do you also get your inspiration from external events? Like, when you see what’s happening in the world, is that something you kind of process?

It’s a mixture of both, because, as I said earlier, everything outer affects the inner and the inner affects the outer as well. I can’t lie, though, I was locked in a space. When I wrote a lot of these songs, I was locked in my own head, in my own time and in my own space. I felt like I was just in my own world, so a lot of even what was going on outside didn’t penetrate those walls a lot of the time. There



were times when I had to pay attention to what was happening outside, yes, but most of these songs were from my sufferings internally, from my experiences that I went through as a person. And yes, what’s happening in the world does sadden me a big deal, it’s heartbreaking to see. And the present-day situations that are happening now, without us even going into it, it’s heart wrenching! I don’t know how we’ve gotten to this place at all. When you say it’s greed and money and land and people, it’s so crazy! But most of these songs were born from just me in here, which isn’t necessarily the best place to be all the time, because it kind of makes you unaware at some point in time as to all that’s happening around you, when you’re kind of

locked in like that, but I went through years of being locked in my headspace. With this album, I wanted it to be kind of... almost like a beginning to shed my old skin. In a sense just to put it all out there, get some of the burdens off my shoulders, get some of the thoughts out of my brain and out of my heart, some of the feelings that I was feeling.

I think a lot of people are not inside enough, they don't feel themselves enough. They are not reflecting enough because they're living externally, consuming TV shows and social media, always thinking about the next purchase, the next car, the next outfit, whatever. I think it's a balance, we need the "From Within" view as well.

I feel we need that kind of balance to even attempt to heal the world. It's going to have to start from each person. It's not an outward problem that we need to fix, because all of these outward problems that are existing now are a result of man's own mind and heart. So, we have to start with the person first, and if each person should try to work on that, then we'd have a better world at large. Because then there are certain things, love... love has become so unpopular these days. And yet it might seem like the most simple word, it's a four letter word and the concept behind it, everybody can probably reel off their tongues, off the top of their heads. But in a deeper sense, we've missed the essence of it. And it's the lack of it why we have so much going on these days, a lack of love for ourselves and each other. Because if we lack love for ourselves, we also lack love for the next person because it is impossible to love another person and not love yourself. And it's impossible to love yourself and not love another person because we are all one. You are me and I am you.

And now I have goosebumps! That's so true, thank you for the reasoning. What do you plan for the release? Like, do you plan a live show or some kind of celebration?

I'm still in the planning stage. I'd love to have... my idea is an intimate listening, and

when I say intimate, I don't mean like just a few people. It can be a lot of people, but still the setting is very intimate. I'd like to play a few of the songs acoustic as well. I'd love to speak about each song, to tell the story behind each song. I want the whole event to feel like you're getting just a peek into my heart-space, and into my mind as well. I hope we can put that all together.

And when can people see you live next? Do you have some gigs already lined up in the near future?

Oh, you know what, this summer, we're focusing on my album! I'm glad it's finally officially handed in, all songs are mixed and mastered, everything is on board and online. We're now looking to release it closer down to the end of the year, a little after summer. I'm not going anywhere for the summer, I'm staying put, focusing on it. But later down in the year, after the album drop, we're going to be back out there again.

Thank you so much, Mortimer. Is there's anything that you want to add to this conversation?

Well, I just want to encourage each and every one of us to keep love in our hearts, for ourselves and our brothers around us, and our sisters, it's as simple as that. And keep your head above the water as much as you can! Keep firm as bone and light as feather at the same time. Lots of love.

Oh, that's sweet. Thank you so much for your time and for the energy you put in the album and in your music, and for the challenges you overcome to do that, to be here, to enlighten us in that way.

Thank you for having me. I appreciate it. I'm glad we can connect through music. And I also want to say thank you to everybody who has been rocking with us so far. Everybody who has been listening to my music, thank you. Every like, every share, every cry, every tear, every smile, to every household, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. And yeah, keep loving, keep feeling, keep fighting!

MORTIMER – FROM WITHIN Overstand Entertainment / Easy Star Records - September 20, 2024

„Keep loving. Keep feeling. Keep fighting.“

One of the most emotive and versatile voices of Jamaican modern roots, **Mortimer** has stirred up international attention ever since releasing his EP **Fight The Fight**. His new album **From Within** seamlessly ties in where the EP left us (yearning for more!), and with **Winta James** in the producer seat once more and credits reading like the Who's Who of current reggae instrumentalists, the musical quality is guaranteed.

The album is off to a great start: **Damian Marley** joins **Mortimer** on **In My Time** (sitting on an impressive, brooding riddim), and **Bruises** sees **Kabaka Pyramid** and **Lila Iké** on the mic. Both songs talk about the traumatic experiences Black people had to endure over the centuries, so listen keenly and learn!

„Don't you be afraid of this world!“ In **My Child**, Mortimer sings out loud some of the things that he had longed to hear from his parents - both a reminder to himself and a message to his own children. The personal stories don't stop here: while **Balcony Swing** recounts falling in love with his wife, **You And Me** describes how this encounter has matured into a strong, long-term relationship. The tracks are less reggae-ish than the rest of the album, thus opening the doors wide to lovers of other genres (**Changes** falls into this category, too). When listening to **Slowly**, please watch the animated video by **Ikem Smith** - not that the song isn't enjoyable on its own, but these visuals are just something else.



If I were to choose favorites, it would probably be **Whole Heap** and **New Roads**. The former because of its stripped-down beginning, the fragility of the vocals, the intensity of the lyrics and the sophistication of the visuals by **Gwaan Films** (cleverly switching location from inside to outside when the drums drop), the latter because of its sheer beauty. This decelerated one-drop, this exquisite prudence

with which every single word is placed carefully on the exact right note, as if they were made of glass...

In absence of a title track, which song most embodies **From Within**? For me, it's either **My Own Tears**, a tender acoustic piece that derives its strength from the combination of gentle guitar playing by **Lamont „Monty“ Savory** and, again, the incredible pitch range this singer commands, or **Not A Day Goes By**. Next to its musical brilliance, it's such a brave act to open up like this, to be this honest, knowing that hundreds, thousands of people listen to the lyrics once the song is out... My biggest respect for that, **Mortimer**! It is this song also, along with the rootsy **Heavy** and the rockerz-style **Where Would I Be**, that was chosen by **Laurent "Tippy I Grade" Alfred** for the fabulous dub versions that close this intense album.

From Within is substantial, heavy stuff, nothing for the faint hearted or those seeking flitting enjoyment - this is deeply reflected life right here, with all its ups and downs and complicated feelings. **Mortimer's** talent is undeniable, and the way he calmly counters the dominant image of aggressive masculinity is awe-inspiring indeed. May many more follow your lead!

by Gardy Stein

INTERVIEW

A man with long, thick dreadlocks and a full grey beard is crouching on a sandy beach. He is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved button-down shirt and olive green cargo pants. He has a nose ring and is looking directly at the camera. The background shows a clear blue sky and the ocean in the distance. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

MIKE LOVE

WHERE'S ALL THE LEADERS?

FROM HAWAI'I TO THE WORLD

BY GARDY STEIN

PHOTOS BY JACKSON TYLER EDDY

A teacher, a healer, a singer and a player of instruments... **Mike Love**, hailing from the beautiful island of Oahu, is one of the most talented and conscious reggae artists I know, advocating for justice, peace, love or Mama Earth with every single song he puts out. Listening to his music and especially experiencing him live is like a wake-up call to get up and do something, to lift yourself and others onto a higher plane of existence, to create a positive impact. His new album is no exception: **Leaders** is calling on those who have the courage, power and will to make a change for the better, touching hearts and minds and souls.

Reggaeville met the busy one-man-band to talk about his new creation, and since this is our very first interview with him, we kicked the conversation off with some personal questions to get to know the **Mike** behind the love:



Greetings! Are you in Hawai'i at the moment?

I'm back home in Washington. Me and my son just got back from a trip to see family and friends a couple of days ago.

Yeah, I just saw the video on your Insta! I also saw that you do a lot of gardening. What's in bloom right now? Is there anything you can harvest at the moment?

Well, where we are the growing season is shorter, so we're still in our planting outdoor phase. We planted some stuff in the garden last week that we had started indoors, like bell peppers and eggplants... we're just doing a lot of veggies in the gardens and berries. I have a big raspberry patch and blueberry bushes, and this year I'm trying to get

some grapes established, too. I have some cold-hardy grapes and figs, and a cold-hardy kiwi. Actually, I only got that idea because I was in France on tour and I saw these huge kiwi vines everywhere, and it was up in the mountains where it was really cold. So, this one is supposed to be hardy down to like negative 20, which is how cold it gets here. And then I just try every year to plant more fruit trees. In Hawai'i, all the things we grow are so different. There I had banana trees, mango trees, avocado... those are all my favourites, but none of them will grow here! (laughs) Here, I'm growing apple trees, pear trees, plum trees, cherry trees and apricots, all the stone fruits... the big struggle here is just helping them survive through the winter.

So you are a very nurturing person! Turning to your musical growth, can you tell us how you started out in music?

I was really born playing music, I can't remember a time when I wasn't singing or playing instruments. My dad is a musician, my grandpa is a musician, my great-grandpa is a musician, so I come from a long line of musicians and composers. My earliest memories are playing with my musical mentor who was my teacher growing up, he taught me to play steel drums, steel pan and all the percussion instruments. I also took piano lessons growing up, and then as a teenager I got into playing the guitar and writing music. I started having bands, and then at a certain point I started doing a solo gig which was kind of the beginning of my career as a solo artist. That came really at the urging of my wife, one day she said "Hey, we're broke, we're on food stamps!" I don't know if they have something similar in Germany, but we

were raising three kids at the time, I mean we have four now, but back then we couldn't even afford to buy food. So, out of necessity, I started doing a solo gig, and it really taught me a lot about myself as a musician. One of the amazing things about playing solo is that you don't have a band to rely on, so if the music isn't good, if the performance isn't good, then there's nobody else to blame. You have to realise that you have to work on it. Also, if the crowd is not connecting to it, vibing with it, then there's nobody to turn to on stage, so it really kind of forces you to go deeper, to connect with the audience, to pull things out of yourself. You are trying to pull out emotions and help the crowd to feel something, so it really forces you to kind of go deeper in that connection.

Wow, that sounds intense! Then, in 2012, you released your first solo album called *Change I'm Seeking* - what happened after



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that? There was this song *Permanent Holiday* on it, which was a big hit, how did that push you out there?

Yeah, *Permanent Holiday* really got out there, it had a viral video which went around the world. At that point, I was playing a lot of shows locally in Hawai'i, and then I started going to the other islands, that was kind of the first step of touring. The first tour that I did in mainland US was in 2013, I think. From there I just started going out further, realising that this success on YouTube helped spread my music all over the world. I started being able to go and tour in Europe, in Australia, in South America, in Asia... It's been a beautiful journey since then. It's interesting how something like that can help you reach the people! For me, it's all about the music, and I never saw that song in particular as being the one song that people attach to (laughs). I just keep working and creating music, and I think that when people have that kind of introduction and then discover more music, it's a beautiful thing.

When did you found your label, Love Not War Records?

I did that when I recorded my first album. I've never released anybody else's music under that label, I just produce, record and release my own albums, like so many independent artists. I guess I'm doing all the work that a record label would normally do, but back then it was like *'Okay, so what do we need the record label to be called?'* And there was that thing that everybody would say, *"Mike Love not war!"* (laughs), so that's how the name came about.

It's a beautiful name, I love it! This brings us to the new album *Leaders*, because it is also on that label. It's released on the 5th of July - does the date have any meaning or was it just picked because it's summer?

You know, we went through a lot of numerical values and decided on that date, but it really kind of just came along in the timeline of things. When I finished wrapping up the album, mixing and

mastering and all, we had in mind that we would release it in late summer. And it just landed on that particular auspicious date. I really wanted to release the album this year because... I don't know if you know about numerology? I know a basic amount, and my life path number is an 8. I'm born on April 13th 1980, so my life number is an 8, and we're in 2024 now, which is also an 8 year, and I just turned 44! The interesting thing about this album now... I haven't even talked about it or released this information, but it's the first of three full-length albums that I recorded. So, **Leaders** is part of this big project that I've been working on, it's the first of the three. The second one will be called **Teachers** and the third one will be called **Healers**, and it's all built around that acapella track that appears three times in the first album. I sort of think of that track as the interlude that flows through the album, and it appears again in the second and the third album in different ways. If you put that aside and just focus on the full-length tracks, there are eight on each of the three albums. It just kind of worked out that way, so 8 is an important number for me, and I think it's a year of change and manifestation for me.

Wow, thank you for sharing, that's amazing. The title track you mentioned, Leaders, you often sing it live, so it's well known to your fans. When did you write this song?

I think it was first written 2015 or 2016. As you said, I've been singing it live because it was one of those things that, as soon as it came through, I felt I needed to start sharing it, because it had a power to it. It's something that people know, and there are a number of tracks on the subsequent two albums that people will be familiar with. Like **Humble** and **Children Of The Heart** on the first album, those will be the ones that I've been playing live a lot. So yeah, it's interesting to release music like that, to finally have studio versions of these songs that people have been searching for.

Yes, they have been waiting! I read some of the comments under your posts. Can you tell us who else was involved apart from yourself as producers or musicians on the album?

I produced it myself, but there was an intense amount of amazing musicians, including my band, **The Full Circle**. I brought my whole band up to a studio in California and we hunkered down and recorded all the basic tracks live, together as a full band, with the horn section and everything. That was a really amazing experience, to start it out and then have so many great musicians that did overdubbing on it. I worked with a really great string section back in Oahu, and I worked with some of the guys from **Rising Tide**, some of the original musicians from **Groundation**. **Mingo Lewis** did a bunch of the percussions, **Marcus Urani** played all the B3s [Rhodes keyboard] on the whole album and **Paul Spina** plays drums on a few of the tracks. So yeah, just amazing musicians and a bunch of really great singers, like my friend **Paula Fuga**, you heard her sing on the track **We Are One**. Amazing powerful voice!

Speaking about her, where's she from and how did you link up with her?

She was born in Louisiana, but she's from Oahu, she grew up there. I first met her a long time ago, over 20 years now, we used to go to a kind of jam session for all the local musicians in Hawai'i. I just remember the first time I ever met her, we were at this jam session and we're all playing music, and people would just sing, and then she opened her mouth and I just remember that I heard this sound and I had this voice in my head saying *"I'm gonna be making music with her for the rest of my life!"* It was like an epiphany, I thought *"That's the sound that I've been searching for!"* So I immediately sought out playing with her, and we became best friends and we've made tons and tons of music together. I produced her most recent album **Rain On Sunday**, a really beautiful album, and we just always play music together. We're like musical soul mates!

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The song you do together, *We Are One*, has such an important message with all the division and conflict going on in the world. You sing “I lay my armour down”, and I think it’s a literal meaning, not a metaphor, right?

Yeah, absolutely! It’s literal and spiritual. I grew up really attracted to the militant side of reggae music. You know, songs like *Declaration Of Rights* by **Johnny Clarke** (sings), **Peter Tosh**, all these songs talking about equal rights and justice, and it’s always about us having to fight for our rights. And it’s true, but also, there’s an element of the peaceful warrior, where we fight with music, and then I realised, maybe we don’t need to fight, maybe that’s the wrong approach. I think there are elements in this world, in this universe, that are completely out of our control as humans, and sometimes we fight so much against those elements when there’s truly nothing that we can do to stop those events from

occurring. Take what’s going on in Palestine right now, for example, it’s absolutely devastating, and when you focus on it, it makes it impossible to even get out of bed because you feel powerless against it. And then you have people that are utilising their power and their voices, marching and protesting, and yet still it continues, it seems to have no effect. And that can be the most devastating of all, to feel helpless and hopeless.

But, you know, I’m always reminded that there are forces in the universe that are bigger than all of this, and that we came into these bodies at these times knowing that we came here to learn something, to experience something. And as hard as it can be, this is spiritual growth and I think that there is a great force in the universe, the Most High Jah, and that is just balance. As hard as the war-mongers and the greedy corporate elite can work to try and push things out of balance in their favour and accumulate all



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the wealth and all the power, they're fighting against forces that they could not ever possibly be strong enough to truly control, and those forces will bring balance, the pendulum will swing back. It's nature, it's balance, and that's idea of laying my armour down, not fighting in those wars anymore. Putting your energy into something can sometimes actually feed it in a negative way. Hence the idea of focusing on and manifesting places of peace where the resistance comes from, rather than fighting against the negativity. Just removing our energy, our power and our wealth from the equation and divesting from the system.

Yes! That's what I love about the album, you give hope and you show a way out. For example, in *Blue Skies* you say "the revolution of Jah children has begun". Is this what you mean by putting the armour down?

Yeah, exactly! You know, revolution has to be an evolution, and I think there's a revolution that can come without bloodshed, without

anger, without hatred, without judgment. I think that the ultimate form of enlightenment that we are moving towards is to be at peace. To let go of toxicity, to let go of anger, hate and judgment. And I think that we see that all around, I think what people, what we all truly desire is that peace, and yet we live in a system that's designed to lead us astray, to distract us from that, and so you see more people that are finding ways to divest from that and create realities within this world that exist outside of that system.

Yeah, definitely. One of my favourite songs is *Children Of The Heart*. It's such a beautiful song, so positive and uplifting, and I wanted to ask what the Daddy and Mommy you sing about stand for in this song?

Well, I think that's the mother and father of creation, the Most High Jah, the Alpha and Omega, and it's that balance that we run to in our time of need to feel safe, to find enlightenment, to find peace. Also, when it came through it had many mean-

ings, because it's also the immediate family. You know, my need to protect and nurture my own children, and my wife's need to protect and do that as a mother and the different ways in which we do it. The dynamics that mother and father bring to the equation are so different, at least in our relationship, but we find our roles and we find our ways to be nurturing, and they're so different.

In the song, you sing "let the sheep sleep and wake up the lion". What do you mean by that?

That's another aspect of that idea of, if we are laying down our armour, resisting by divesting, then I think there are people living in this world, in this time, that are just not spiritually ready or evolved enough to even begin to hear a higher message or a higher call. They are just so willing to go along and believe everything that they're being fed, and no matter how much you reveal the truth to them, they don't want to see it because they're so inundated and controlled with that message and indoctrinated by the systemic ideas that we're taught from birth. The idea of *'let the sheep sleep and wake up the lion'*, it's like who's actually ready to embrace this? And then assist those who are ready. Don't keep hammering your head against the wall and trying to reach people that are just absolutely not ready. It's not their time to hear the message, to hear the call. It's that idea of utilising your energy where it's most needed rather than trying to fight these great big wars and save everybody. I mean, it's a great and beautiful ideal, but is it the best use of your time and energy?

Okay, I see. It's beautiful, and I think it's the longest song on the album – over ten minutes! You are known for making long songs, this is something that really sets you apart. How did that develop?

I think it's just a matter of having artistic freedom, of not ever approaching a song with anything other than the intention of letting it blossom and grow into the song it wants to

be, rather than having the idea of *'Oh, if it's too long people are going to lose interest or the radio is never going to play it'* I mean, maybe the radio is not going to play it anyway, even if you cut it down to three minutes. I just can't bother myself with thinking about things in those terms. I feel like I'll let the music be what it's going to be and take its form. And then whoever needs it, whoever's open to receive it, these are going to be the ones that connect with it. I have no expectations, if this album comes out and nobody listens to it, it's fine because it's already done it for me.

This will not happen!

For me, it's already done what it's supposed to have done for me. It has healed me already, just receiving the songs, crafting them, moulding them, doing all the work to put it together. It's been a great cathartic and healing process for me. And it's a huge amount of work! But, like I said, even if nothing comes from it, that's not my expectation. My expectation is just that whoever needs it will receive it.

Another very strong song is Temptation, it's almost ten minutes long. In it, you just pose a question. You say "the world is full of temptations, but do you have the strength to resist?" Can you say something about how you conceived that song?

It's really based around that simple idea. We're living in a world of temptation, but don't give in. I think we can all say that we are surrounded by temptations, and every day it grows more and more. We live in this world that's designed to really... I mean all the marketing and advertising, social media, is just so finely tuned to appeal to our natural instincts as humans, to be really focused on sexuality, on indulgence into these really addictive foods and chemicals, all of these things. It's a world that is centred around keeping us addicted to things, keeping us distracted, and a lot of that stuff is very low vibrational, it keeps us from ascending to our higher selves, it keeps us from evolving spiritually. And it's designed to do just that,



because when we're in those states, we're so much easier to be controlled by the system. That's the idea of that song.

It's really a reminder for me, too. All these songs, they just channelled their ideas so that I open myself up. You know, Jah plants those seeds and I start singing and I start playing and this idea comes out, and it's like *'Oh, we're living in a world of temptation, so don't give in. Don't let them lead you astray.'* And I'm like, yes, this is what I need to hear, every line in that song. Don't be distracted by lust. Don't be distracted by greed. Don't be distracted by all of these things because it keeps you from your true path. So, it's a reminder for me, all these lyrics, every time I sing them, I have to be reminded because I'm constantly being tempted and I constantly give in to my temptation. I have to remember that I'm going into these patterns again and I have to do the work and realise, why? Why do I so easily fall into those patterns of addiction and how can I finally break from that? And all these lessons, they keep coming back again and again.

That's why I love that you mentioned the strength, because it really takes strength to resist. And I love for you to invoke that, because people like to think of themselves as strong, so I think it will ring a bell when people hear that and they say, "Oh, yeah, I shouldn't give in to temptation because I'm a strong person!"

It's very empowering when you do make the right choice and you prove to yourself that you have the strength to resist. It allows you to extrapolate that over other areas of your life. It's been one of the most powerful practices for me, just practicing the art of discipline and resistance to temptation. I have a fasting practice, similar to detoxing, it's not only good for you physically, but it does remind you that you have the strength and the willpower. And it's also like a great reset, right? Because when you come off of that, it's like you're still in that mentality. And now that you've done this whole thing to clean yourself out, you're a lot less likely to go straight back into bad habits, drinking alcohol every night or whatever.



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- 11.07 Lancy (CH) | Plein les Watts
- 12.07 Lisbon (PT) | Lisboa Ao Vivo & more...

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- 06.07 Toulouse (FR) | Toulouse Summer Break
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- 14.07 Aulnoye-Aymeries (FR) | Les Nuits Secrètes
- 27.07 St-Georges-de-Montaigu (FR) | Elect'au Dub
- 17.08 Mulheim (DE) | Ruhr Reggae Summer
- 30.08 Bratislava (SK) | Uprising Festival & more...

SOOM T

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- 08.07 Marignies (FR) | Fadas du Monde
- 11.07 Joué sur Erdre (FR) | Dub Camp Festival
- 25.07 Nyon (CH) | Paleo Festival
- 18.08 Saint-Fargeau (FR) | Mammouth Festival
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- 14.08 Chamonix (FR) | L'Index en Fête
- 16.08 Saint-Fargeau (FR) | Mammouth Fest
- 17.08 Varaire (FR) | Le Vrai Repaire Festival
- 18.08 Mulheim (DE) | Ruhr Reggae Summer
- 23.08 St-Paul-lès-Dax (FR) | Tempos du Monde
- 24.08 Bar-le-Duc (FR) | Festival Watts à Bar
- 30.08 Bratislava (SK) | Uprising Festival
- 07.09 Vasles (FR) | Ouaille Note Festival
- 13.09 Oeiras (PT) | Oeiras Fest
- 19.09 Haarlem (NL) | Patronaat
- 20.09 Alençon (FR) | La Luciole
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- 12.08 Mieussy (FR) | SommAnd Festival
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- 30.08 Cinay (BE) | Tchestia Fiesse
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- 20.07 Néoules (FR) | Festival de Néoules
- 25.07 Nyon (CH) | Paleo Festival
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- 28.07 | BERGHaupten (DE) - BLACK FOREST ON FIRE FESTIVAL
- 02.08 | TRELINS (FR) - FOREZTIVAL
- 03.08 | VERTHEUIL (FR) - SUNSKA FESTIVAL
- 04.08 | MILTON KEYNES (UK) - REGGAE LAND
- 09.08 | COPENHAGEN (DK) - ONE LOVE COPENHAGEN
- 16.08 | MÜLHEIM (DE) - RUHR REGGAE SUMMER
- 17.08 | BUZÁU (RO) - VADOO CHILL FEST
- 18.08 | SAINT-FARGEAU (FR) - MAMMOUTH FEST
- 31.08 | SAN FERNANDO (IT) - SKINNER PARK
- 09.12 | MIAMI (US) - JAMROCK REGGAE CRUISE

& MORE TO COME ❤️



Definitely! I do that too, once a year for two weeks. Coming to a close slowly, let's talk about *Humble*, which was the first single out, a few weeks ago now. What feedback did you get for this one so far?

That was another one of those fan favourites that we played in the past. We dropped it because we knew it would be well received. There are a couple of videos on YouTube of me performing it with the band that people loved, so I knew it would go well. You know, the thing about why I love the studio version of it is... if you hear the live version, it's so much faster! Part of what we did, part of what I focused on was like really getting these songs in the right groove, the right feel, the right tempo. That was a song that I had originally written and intended to be in that groove, sitting nice and laid-back like that. Still a pretty fast song, but in that rockers kind of groove. And then I introduced it to the musicians

and **Sam**, my old drummer, he kind of had a tendency to take a song and push it to a tempo where it feels good to him, like most drummers would probably. And then we all just got used to playing it at that tempo. So, when we recorded all these songs, we spent a lot of time rehearsing before we ever went up to the studio, I would record the rehearsals and go back and listen to it. And I found it to be pretty amazing how a song would feel okay when we're playing it, and then listening to the recording I'd be like "Wow, it sounds like we're playing it at super speed!" (laughs). So we would slow it down and we would rehearse it, we really took the time to temper ourselves. And eventually when we played the songs, all of those tempos, they started to feel right.

I think it's the first album I listen to and I'm like "All the songs are just at the right tempo!" I listen to all of my old albums and I'm

NEW ALBUM OUT NOW





like “*Oh, the songs are super-fast, or something is off about it.*” This album is the first time where I really took the time and pulled from all of my recording experience in the past to really get these songs exactly where I wanted them to be, where I intended them to be. **Humble** is a great example of that, down to getting the clapping intro at the beginning. That was something that I wrote when we first did it. And it’s just beautiful to hear all of those little details coming into place. **Humble** started with just the bassline. It was inspired by a band, I think they’re the best reggae band to ever come out of Hawai’i called **Ooklah The Moc**. They never toured in Europe and they don’t really play anymore, but they’re a big band and amazing musicians. And the drum and bass are really, really amazing. **Jah Gumby** and **John Davis**, they just had a great, amazing kind of connection, they’re really like the band leaders, and they would create all these really cool drum and bass parts. **Gumby** is really the main force behind the

creativity of the band. As a side note, he was the one who produced the album **Jah Will Never Leave I Alone** that I did, he’s an amazing musician. So, one night I had gone to see them play and I got home and was like “*I’ve got to write a drum and bass with that kind of energy!*” And that was when I wrote that bassline and that drum part. And then, you know, it’s kind of like... (hums) the vocals just go like the bassline (sings), that’s where that whole thing came from, just from that bassline.

And then that idea of humbling ourselves... It’s so important because it’s something that we have to do constantly, especially in music. You can have a little success and people let it go to their head and they start thinking “*Oh, yeah, I’m the next big thing!*” And then the music just crashes because your ego takes control and then you lose sight of why you’re doing it in the first place. I think that’s the idea of constantly humbling yourself. I feel like the greatest

creative elements, the most magical, universal ideas come from the Most High. All we do is prepare ourselves, make ourselves open and ready. And if we're lucky and blessed enough, these magical, inspirational ideas come through us and we're able to share them with the people. It's such a great gift and such a great responsibility, and if you don't remain humble, then those gifts are taken away because it's not for us to take credit for them. It's not for us to revel in our own victories, to take advantage of the position and the power that people give us as musicians. Sometimes people idolise the musicians that they love, and when people come to me with praise, I just remember that it's not praise for me. It's all for this great gift of this music that's been given to me. So I just give it up to the Most High. And I'm thankful and I do my best to keep my ego in check and stay humble.



Yes, that's beautiful. Thank you so much for the reasoning, Mike. Will you have a release party?

Well, I think my whole Europe tour is the release party (laughs). I think I'll just be treating the whole touring for the rest of the year as a release party everywhere I go and really celebrating this new music and sharing it.

I was so happy to see you on the line-up of the Reggae Jam. This will be so cool, you will love it. It's in a small city and the stage is in the yard of a monastery, and there's a huge ancient tree and it just has this magic... you will feel it! It's my favourite festival over here.

Beautiful, I can't wait. I'm excited, and I love that. That's my favourite kind of festival too.

I think I'm through with my questions. If you want to say anything else about the album... I know there's a beautiful vinyl out there as well, so people should get one!

I'm just so thankful to be able to share it with the world. It's a project that I've been working on for so long, I've never put more energy into a project in my life. You know, I wrote the music, I arranged it, I produced it myself. It's the first album that I ever mixed myself in my own studio, that's really a new experience for me. I've always been a part of the mixing process, but I've always worked with a mix engineer and just been in the room. And this is the first album I've ever mixed myself in my life, so I'm really excited about that aspect of it, too. And sonically, I think it's exactly what I want it to be. I can't even tell you how many hours I put into it! (laughs) There's so much thought and attention behind every second of the album!

Yes, there are so many things to discover, little details... it's beautiful. It's really a joy to listen to it. Big respect for that, and thank you for the conversation!

Thank you so much, Gardy. I really appreciate it. I'm looking forward to see you at Reggae Jam.

Yes, me too! Until then!

MIKE LOVE - LEADERS

Love Not War Records - July 5, 2024

"Where's all the leaders?
Come out of hiding!
Where's all the teachers?
We need you now! To all
the healers, this is a call-
ing..."

The first time I heard these lines in one of **Mike Love's** legendary live shows, my whole body was covered in goosebumps - the combination of beautiful melodies, expressive vocals and oh-so-true lyrics just get to me!



"We're living in a world full of temptation, but do you have the strength to resist it?" **Temptation** poses a challenging question, and those who can full-heartedly answer in the affirmative are the ones we need to build a better tomorrow. It is one of those delightfully long songs, giving ample time to develop its musical grandeur and theme, the lyrics identifying TV, social media, drugs and

strip clubs as addiction-inducing. "Don't give in!" Intense wake-up calls like that are balanced by more soothing pieces of which the following **It's Gonna Be Alright** is a gentle example.

His new release **Leaders** contains eight of these magic pieces, plus the one quoted above which is both title track and connecting thread, surfacing in two interludes and an acapella studio recording. A first version of **Leaders** opens the album, slowly fading into **Children Of The Heart** - and the creative way this song starts sets the tone for what is to follow. Known for the overlength of his songs, **Mike Love** takes time and liberty to explore ways that make listening exciting. Whether vocoder, key transitions, extended soli of percussion and melodica or multi-layered harmonies, it's pure bliss discovering.

Remember comes straight to the point, reflecting on the journey of maturing from boy to man (a special treat here is the solo of what sounds like a resonator guitar at 3:30). The subsequent **Humble** was the first single and is spreading its positive message: "Let Jah light shine through you, be an example in everything you do, and goodness will follow you..." Up next, we hear birds sing before **Blue Skies** starts - in a way, the song is a praise of the beauty of creation, but **Mike** asks for rain as well. Balance!

We Are One brings to our attention the powerful voice of **Paula Fugo**, a fellow Hawaiian singer with whom **Mike Love** has recorded a lot. It starts with a Latin vibe flowing into a slow roots rhythm, elaborating on the need to stop fighting and to unite. The final song **Dark Days** touches base with **Love's** origins, as it is a completely acoustic piece - just the artist's warm, versatile voice and ukulele with some light percussions, guitar, strings and bass joining at the end.

Recorded with **Mike's** band **The Full Circle** as well as other accomplished instrumentalists like **Mingo Lewis**, **Marcus Urani** and **Paul Spina** from the original **Groundation** band, the musical level of **Leaders** is as top-notch as its lyrics, making it a holistic listening experience. Those who know **Mike Love** will rejoice in the album, both for its own sake and for tracks like **Leaders**, **Humble** and **Children Of The Heart**. Those who don't know **Mike Love** are strongly encouraged to lend their ears to this conscious messenger!

by **Gardy Stein**



ROOTS ROCK REGGAE

TRAVELS WITH BOB MARLEY, PETER TOSH, JOE HIGGS...

HIT ME WITH MUSIC

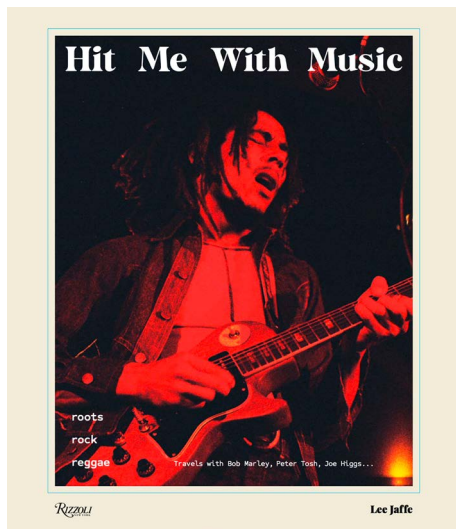
BY LEE JAFFE

PHOTOS BY LEE JAFFE

PUBLISHER: RIZZOLI

OUT SEPTEMBER 24, 2024

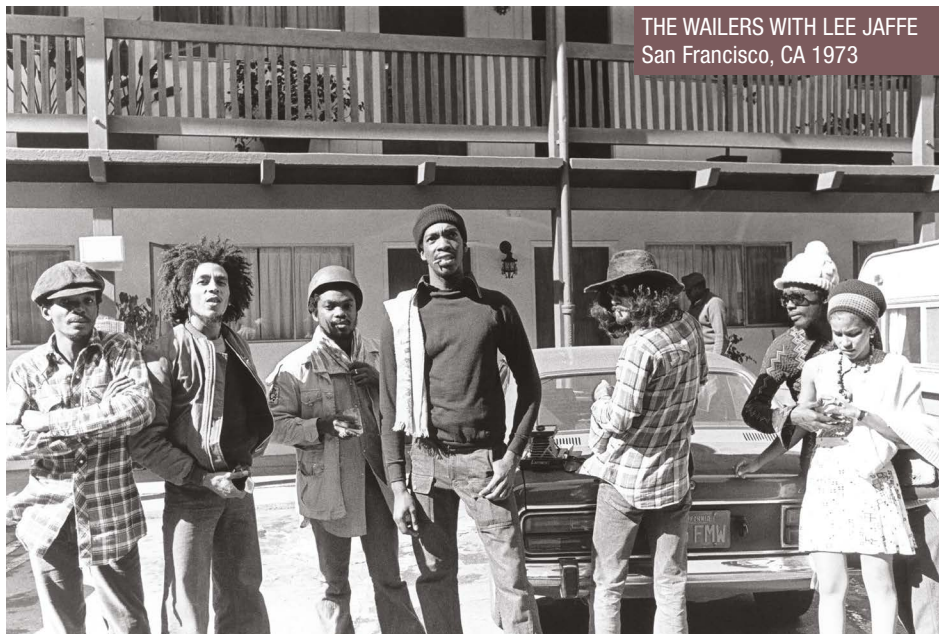
In his new book, Lee Jaffe reveals the world of the Wailers during their early years as an international act from 1973 to 1975. He also explores the start of Peter Tosh's solo career in 1976 with the revolutionary album, *Legalize It*.



FOREWORD BY CHRIS BLACKWELL:

I recently asked **Lee Jaffe** if he knew, at the time when he met **Bob Marley** in 1973, that he would become an international icon with enormous musical and cultural impact. The movie, **Bob Marley: One Love**, produced by **Bob's** children **Cedella** and **Ziggy** and

their mom **Rita**, had just been released, and I wanted to know what he thought. After all, he knew **Bob** much better than I did, having lived with him in his house on 56 Hope Road for three years, just prior to the movie's timeline of 1976-78. He told me he loved every frame of the film—that he





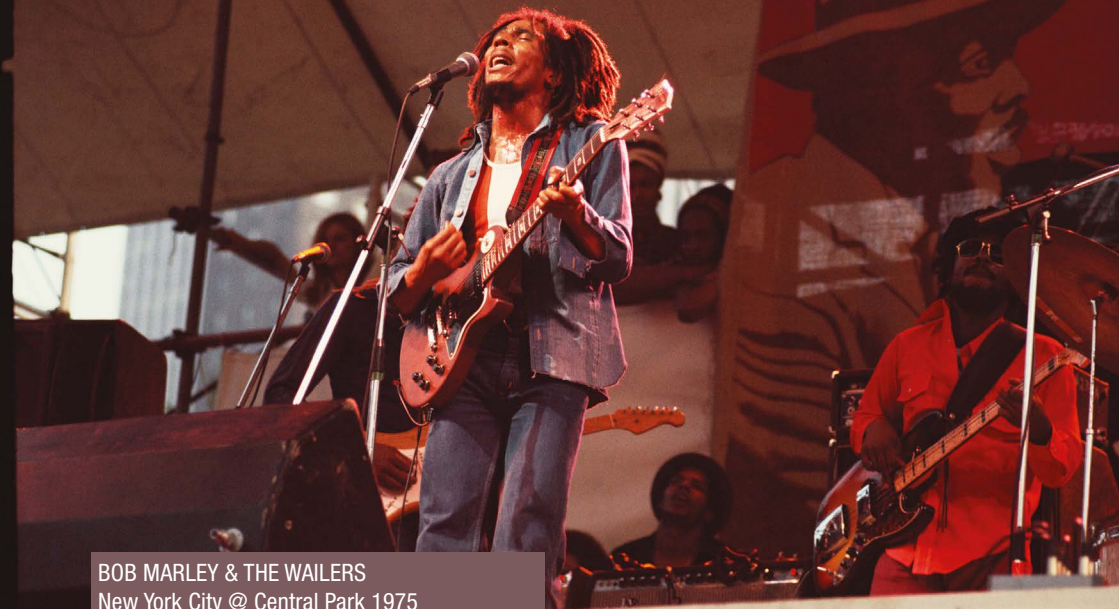
PETER TOSH, BUNNY WAILER & BOB MARLEY in Kingston, Jamaica @ National Stadium 1975



PETER TOSH & LEE JAFFE
Kingston, Jamaica 1975

was transported in time. He told me that he knew—with “1000% certainty”—upon meeting **Bob** and listening to the still-unreleased album, **Catch a Fire**, that the music would resound globally and have a vast cultural

impact. He said the movie made him reflect on the incredible accomplishments of **Bob’s** wife, **Rita Marley**, and **Bob’s** children in keeping his message of One Love alive over the decades since his passing.



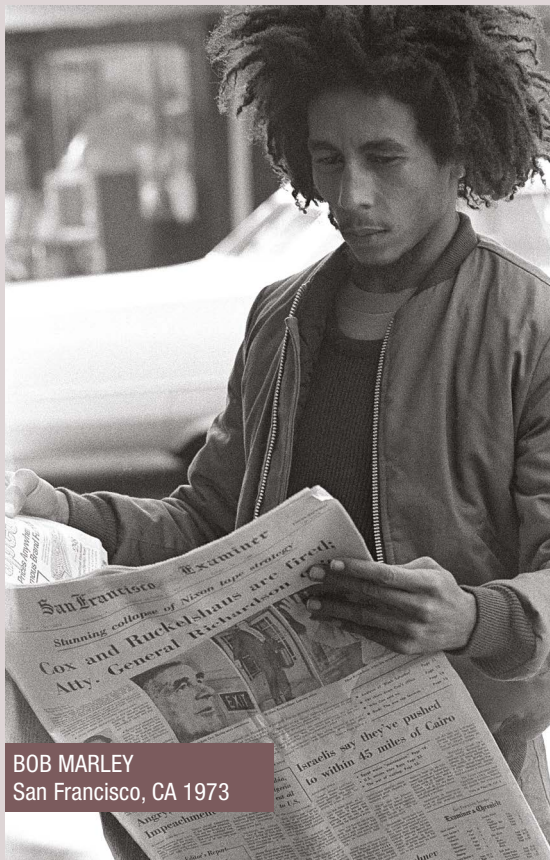
BOB MARLEY & THE WAILERS
New York City @ Central Park 1975

When the **Wailers** recorded **Catch a Fire** for my label, **Island Records**, in 1972, I felt that they would get somewhere if they had the image and energy of a black rock act.

Despite the skepticism of my colleagues, the gamble paid off, taking Jamaican music into an exciting future. Although we all realized we were onto something good, within a few years **Bob Marley and the Wailers** was an enormous international act, surviving the breakup of the original group.

But maybe **Lee** sensed something more than I did. He visualized how reggae would become the new center of global youth counterculture, while also opening doors for many other acts, and for Jamaica. Parts of that vision are documented in this fabulous book's photos, capturing the flavor of a unique time on the island and in popular music. In **Hit Me With Music: Roots Rock Reggae**, every shot—in its own way—expresses the heart and soul of the music and culture. Play some reggae and catch your own fire while you read the stories and view the photos that transport you in time.

Oracabessa, Jamaica, 2024.



BOB MARLEY
San Francisco, CA 1973

REDEMPTION
THE WAY FORWARD

SATURDAY, JUNE 1ST, 2024

QUEEN'S PARK SAVANNAH
PORT-OF-SPAIN

BIG
Sound
FEST

POINTBREAK
MUSIC FESTIVAL

Sublime RebeLution
STEPHEN MARLEY
Wiz Khalifa
A\$AP

PEPPER • TRIBAL SEEDS • FORTUNATE YOUTH • HIRIE
THE EXPENDABLES • BUMPIN LIGIES • DENM • BALLYHOO!
TROPICALE • ARTIKAL SOUND SYSTEM • PARGAFIRE
RODOLPH • HASH 'N' BUT • JOE GARBA • THE SUPERBULLINGS
THE BUSH KINGS • OF GOOD NATURE • CULTIVATED MIND • CRIMMART

PERFORMING FROM 12:00 PM TO 10:00 PM

JUNE 1 - 2 2024

THE LIONESS LAKERS MUSIC FOUNDATION

VERGINIA BEACH, VA

A TRIBUTE

Joe Higgs
THE FATHER OF REGGAE

THE JOE HIGGS FOUNDATION
IN ASSOCIATION WITH EARL "CHINNA" SMITH

JUNE 3RD 2024
4:00 PM - 10:00 PM

INNA DE YARD
6 SAINT ANDREW PARK, KINGSTON 10

JUNE

6-8.6.2024

ZION TRAIN

JABARUDU (JUN) • SPECTRO SOUND (JUN) • TING
KRAK IN DUB (JUN) & DEMOLITION MAN (JUN)
FOLEMIC (JUN) • FEHER FEKETE KEREK • SYNAHLO
DUBRISING (JUN) • SHADON PLAYER • BATTVA • F-HEAT
MUSIC • MUSTER REGGAE BULLDOG
JANAJKI (JUN) • HUNDREAD & MC TURNER (JUN)
JAH ANTON SOUND • WETT IN DUB • KING SOUND STEPPAS
BENNY FAGE & MC NAVIGATOR (JUN)
KING NALTY FETE • KING ROASTAZ • ROSS • GENERAL B MASSIVE
JAH MUSIC LIGHTAZ • JAH ROYAL & JAHVAL GYMALZ • GENERAL KRYSTOFFEN
LIMITED FLAVOUR & FRIENDS • GOODMAN
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EXCO LEVI • ROOTSETRAZ • SUNDUB
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roots up
rootsreggae | zion | afrobeats | zanghali

live on stage
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JAM/FR

Awa Fall & Alpha Steppa
COU/DE

Melane & Band
COU/DE

Shelly Quest & The Soul Pushas
USA/DE

Berlin Boom Orchestra
DE

Figurentheater im Kabuff
DE

Jah Lion Radio
DE

Tagesfestival
Samstag 14 Uhr
08.06.24 Odonien
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"Let your spirit fly" (Chill out area/bazaar/sound food/cocktails/kids area)

WORLD OF REGGAE

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QUEEN'S PARK SAVANNAH
TIME: 8PM

HIGH DESERT
REGGAE

RENO-SPARKS, NV

SATURDAY, JUNE 8

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FESTIVAL AGENDA 2024

The following pages list 130 events. For lineups, changes and newly announced festivals, please check the daily updated festival calendar on [REGGAEVILLE.com](https://www.reggaeville.com)

The posters are clickable and will take you straight to the event on our calendar. The QR code takes you to the complete overview.

PLEASE NOTE:

We take reasonable care in compiling this list, but we can't guarantee that everything is accurate!

Please check the official websites before you go and make sure to get your tickets only from official sources.

Redemption – The Concert



June 1

Queen's Park Savannah in Trinidad & Tobago

Big Sound Fest



June 1

Lech-Atelier in Landsberg am Lech, Germany

Point Break Music Festival



June 1 - 2

5th Street at the Beach in Virginia Beach, VA, USA

A Tribute To Joe Higgs



June 3

Inna de Yard in Kingston, Jamaica

Cultural Reggae Vibez



June 6 - 8

Festival Area in Horice, Czech Republik

Sunshine Reggae Festival



June 7 - 8

Camping du Staedly in Roeschwoog, France

Lion Heart Reggae Spring Festival



June 7 - 9

Camping Grounds in Hammonton, NJ, USA

Roots Up



June 8

Odonien in Cologne, Germany

World of Reggae



June 8

Queen's Park Savannah in Trinidad & Tobago

High Desert Reggae



June 8

Nugget Event Center in Reno, NV

Notes en Vert



June 14 - 16

Festival Area in Perigny, France

Bounce Musik Festival



June 15

The Gordon in Orlando, FL, USA

Victoria Ska & Reggae Festival



June 19 - 23

Various Locations in Victoria, BC, Canada

Internatinal Dub Gathering



June 20 - 22

L'Aldea in Tarragona, Spain

Bergamo Sunfest



June 20 - 23

Parco della Trucca in Bergamo, Italy

Point Reggae Music & Arts Festival



June 20 - 23

Thomas Point Beach in Brunswick, MA, USA

Brooklyn Reggae Cruise



June 20

Pier 36 in Brooklyn, NY, USA

Irie in the Woods



June 21 - 22

Festival Area in Gars, Austria

Reggae Rise Up - Maryland



June 21 - 23

Peninsula in Baltimore, MD, USA

Ithaca Reggae Festival



June 21 - 22

Stewart Park in Ithaca, NY, USA

Reggae in my Garden



June 22

Stadgarten in Konstanz, Germany

The Margate Reggae Festival



June 22

Dreamland in Margate, UK

St. Kitts Music Festival



June 27 - 29

Festival Area in Basseterre, St Kitts & Nevis

AKF Festival



June 27 - 30

Festival Area in Wassertrüdingen, Germany

Sound System Inna Di Hills



June 28 - 30

Alfar Natura in Alfaratejo, Malaga, Spain

Hampa Festival



June 28 - 29

Törringlund in Svedala, Sweden

One VI Music Fest



June 28 - 29

Cane Garden Bay in Tortola, BVI

Kalamazoo Caribbean Fest



June 28 - 29

Arcadia Creek in Kalamazoo, MI, USA

Lagata Reggae Festival



June 28 - 30

Festival Are in Azuara, Zaragoza, Spain

Tropical Crown Festival



June 29

Kufa Haus in Braunschweig, Germany

Dancehall Explosion



June 30

Boulevard in Paramaibo, Suriname

Baco Music presents:

FOUNDATION

HEBRON GATE - CELEBRATION TOUR 2024

- July 12 **VITRY-SUR-SEINE** Le Kilowatt
- July 13 **BURTENBACH** Sunrise Reggae & Ska Festival
- July 14 **MONTMARTIN-SUR-MER** Chauffer Dans La Noirceur
- July 16 **HAMBURG** Fabrik
- July 17 **MALMÖ** Plan B
- July 18 **AMSTERDAM** Melkweg
- July 19 **ZOETERMEER** Rastaplas Festival
- July 20 **S^T MICHEL DE CHABRILLANOUX** Festival de la Chabrieole
- July 21 **PFÄFFIKON** Reeds Festival
- July 23 **BORDEAUX** Square Dom Bedos
- July 25 **SEIGNOSSE** Le Tube
- July 26 **SINES** Festival Músicas do Mundo
- July 27 **OSTRÓDA** Ostróda Reggae Festival
- July 28 **ETAPLES** Festival Rock en Stock
- July 30 **ASCHAFFENBURG** Colos-Saal
- Aug 01 **KAVALA** Cosmopolis Festival
- Aug 02 **WIESEN** One Love Reggae Festival
- Aug 03 **MIREBEAU** Festival Les Heures Vagabondes
- Aug 04 **VILLEGUSIEN-LE-LAC** Festival Le Chien à Plumes
- Aug 18 **BENICASSIM** Rototom Sunsplash Festival



BIG REGGAE FESTIVAL #27

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MARDI 2 JUILLET à 19h
LA PINÈDE DE JUAN-LES-PINS (06)

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THE 49th CHICAGO MUSIC AWARDS

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MILLION STYLES
KING SHILOR
MARTINIQUE
MILITE CLARKE
CONNOR HUNTS
GENE HUNTS
JILL COLE
WARRIORS
ROBERTO SANCHEZ (BARASSIN)
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MÁS TIJED (LIVE)

ALPHA PUP (LIVE)

ROBERTO SANCHEZ (LIVE)
WITH THE ALLMIGHTY MARRISSA BAND

MÉS PABLO - I-MAN CRUZ (LIVE)

IRREGULAR ROOTS (LIVE)
WITH THE ALLMIGHTY MARRISSA BAND

LUKE D'AMICO

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5-7 JULY 2024

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ROTTERDAM ZUIDERPARK

6 JULI

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SteetStacks 12pm - Midnight Free to Attend

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SPACE KAMP WITH TROUBLE CITY ALL-STAR

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JINCHO EL RUSTICO - RAS RIM & UNITY VIBRATION

THE TABERNACLE - SOUND OFF

ELEPHANTS DANCING - MARRISSA JOY

Saturday, July 6, 2024

DJ MENACE
More information at SteetStacks.org
DIRLUM CIRCLE

JULY



Plein les Watts festival

16th edition

11/12/13 JUILLET 2024

PARC NAVAZZA - LANCY, GENEVE

* STEEL PULSE - MARCIA GRIFFITHS *
KY-MANI MARLEY - COLLIE BUDDZ
JOHNNY CLARKE & DUP ASANTE - LUCIANO
M'KALAMITY & THE MIZARDS - OPEN SEASON
NADIA MCANUFF & THE LIGERJANS - TIMANFAYA
THE TIGHTERS - KEEFAZ

Pener Splash

FESTIVAL-ANTIRAZZISTA

11-12-13-14 LUGLIO 2024

MONTESOLE - MARZABOTTO (BO)
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July 13th

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Black Reaction | Roots Man | Black Heart Universal | Soul Vibes

CONTRIBUTION \$30

Big Reggae Festival



July 2

La Pinède Gould in Juan Les Pins, France

International Festival of Life



July 4 - 7

55th & Grove St. in Chicago, IL, USA

Skank Festival



July 5 - 6

Barcena de Pie de Concha in Catabria, Spain

SummerJam



July 5 - 7

Fuehlinger Lake in Cologne, Germany

Reggae Woods



July 6

Zuiderpark in Rotterdam, The Netherlands

One Earth Reggae Fest



July 6

SteelStacks in Bethlehem, PA, USA

Plein Les Watts



July 11 - 13

Parc Navazza in Geneva, Switzerland

Reno Splash



July 11 - 14

In Monte Sole, Italy

Sunrise Reggae & Ska Festival



July 11 - 14

Festival Area in Burtenbach, Germany

Dub Camp Festival



July 11 - 14

Lac de Vioreau in Joué-Sur-Erdre, France

Reggae Therapy Festival



July 12 - 13

Le Diamant in Martinique

Reggae R Us Festival



July 13

Dynamic Drive in Toronto, ON, Canada

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LATINO
FESTIVAL
GENK**

**GRACY'S
BASH**
Frieslands Reggae Fest

ROMAIN VIRGO
TEACHA DEE
MELLO MARK
KEISHERA
SCHWARZPAUL
SINGING GOLD
SISTA GRACY
FRIERATION PRODS CONNECTION
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ELIJE and SEBASTIAN STORM
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JULY 14- 20, 2024
MONTEGO BAY, JAMAICA

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FEST**

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with **GLESBYGD'N**
ODD STRAINZ / TROLLKARLEN SOUND SYSTEM
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Néoules**
18-19-20 JUILLET 2024
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STANDS 500€ - 6000€
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FESTIVAL**

2024 **JULY 19-20**
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* DJ BLACKFOOT * BARK & HALL *
JAMAICAN STYLE CHILL AREA BY DEEDROOTS

FRIDAY 19 JULY 16:00-24:00H. SATURDAY 20 JULY 10:00-24:00H.

ZOETERMEER

**NOWA
REGGAE**

19 i 20 DE JULIOL 2024
PANG DE RIBES ROSES
VILANOVA I LA GAITIA
GRATUIT

AA REGGAE ORQUESTRA
& DR RING DING FT. BETANIA LÓPEZ
PERFECT GROUNDMAN & SINKY BEATZ
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KING NINE SOUND SYSTEM
CARLTON SHEPHERD & BABA MAKUORUJAH
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19-21. JULI 2024

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SOUNDSYSTEM · QUEEN OMEGA &
THE ROYAL SOULS · BANTU
LAUWARM · TRAKTORKESTAR**

20 YEARS 30%

**Weedbeat
Festival**

19.-21. Juli 2024

**MAMMOTH REGGAE
FESTIVAL 2024**

FRIDAY 19 JULY
NATTALI RIZE
TOMORROWS DAD DEEDS - LAKESIDE - HONOLULU

SATURDAY 20 JULY
THROUGH THE ROOTS
KUMAR & THE ORIGINAL PYAM - EASE UP - AARON WOLF

SUNDAY 21 JULY
JOSH HEINRICHS
KYLE SMITH - MURBEST - THE JIBE

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OSTRÓW WIELKOPOLSKI

24th FESTIVAL
**REGGAE
NA PIASKACH**

19-20 LIPCA 2024 • OSTRÓW WIELKOPOLSKI

Afro Latino Festival



July 13 - 14

Thor Park in Genk, Belgium

Gracy's Bash



July 13

Die Linde und der Yard in Varel, Germany

Reggae Sumfest



July 14 - 20

Catherine Hall in Montego Bay, Jamaica

Malmö Reggae Festival



July 17

Plan B in Malmö, Sweden

Wilkswood Reggae Festival



July 18 - 21

Wilkswood Farm in Swanage, UK

Festival de Neoules



July 18 - 20

Festival Area in Neoules, France

Rastaplas Festival



July 19 - 20

Nord AA in Zoetermeer, The Netherlands

NOWA Reggae



July 19 - 21

Parc de Ribes Roges in Vilanova I la Geltru, Spain

Reeds Festival



July 19 - 21

Lake Pfäffiker Pier in Pfäffikon, Switzerland

Weedbeat



July 19 - 21

Speicher in Nordstemmen, Germany

Mammoth Reggae Festival



July 19 - 21

Festival Area in Mammoth Lakes, CA, USA

Reggae na Piaskach



July 19 - 20

Piaski Szczygliczka in Ostrowie Wielkopolski, Poland

THE 30TH ANNUAL
**NORTHWEST WORLD
REGGAE FESTIVAL**
Niz Hood July 19 - 21
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BIG MOUNTAIN
NATTALI RIZE - PREZIDENT BROWN
REGGAE ANGELS - BRODY SHAMMOO
THE LAMBSREAD - MESSIAN SELAH
DROOP LION - SUNDAY WORLD CITIZEN
SUNDAY JULY 21st
JUNIOR TOOTS
THE LAMBSREAD - ARKANCELE
RAS INDIO W/ DE SOLUTION BAND
ARSON MORGAN SOUND
W/ DJ SHERM
MINORJ - IRAE DIVINE - MIKEY DUB
DJ AMBUSH AND BIG SOUND

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FESTIVAL**
TAKA METRO & BOOTHY - 4RAMBOS [DJ SOUND] KATHI - ALANIE [DIA TOTI] [MOTTO] [DE JALAN]
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WWW.BAYFRONTWORLDDMUSIC.COM
BAYFRONT FESTIVAL PARK, 5715 AVE WEST RAILROAD ST, DULUTH MN 55803
GATES OPEN AT 12PM RAIN OR SHINE
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Kianna Faith - Ramma Donn - Jah Curtis
Jeanre Group - and many more
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Trincan Steel Orchestra - Kareella - Singing Melody
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Illustration of a bear playing reggae on a boat with a crocodile and octopus.

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2024**
**SUN
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REGGAE FESTIVAL**
SIZZLA KALONJI
JULIAN MARLEY
MORGAN HERITAGE
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DEXTA DAPS
BLACK UHURU
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ASIWAD
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2024**

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GENTLEMAN - ALBROSIE
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UWE BANTON - KINSEYES - REBEL MUSIC
HOUSE OF RHODIM - DELIMAN - RUFFENACK - KITAYOLE KENDIA
HIRE JAM - TOMMY SHERBES & THE SHERBES - MORTAL KOMBAT
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JOHN TONG - SELESTA BANGEROER
24.-27. JULY 2024
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25-28.07.2024

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30 YEARS
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REBELLION - THE RECALLER
KUMAR - GUIDING STAR ORCHESTRA
MIKE LOVE - LEVEL 43
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MELLO MARK - THE JAZZERS
KHALIA - JAH LIL - RIK JAM
BANDA SENDA ROOS - SAMORA - SITA TUDU
LOYAL FLAMES - GUN JACQUES TIX
BLUW, RESHO - GANTANIAN - MELLO MOODS
LOVAL FLAMES - GUN CHING CHING
MELLOW MARK - IRIE MIAM
DR. JAZZ - THE JAZZERS
CODE RED - SILLY WALKS
ROBIN - THE JAZZERS
RIVERSIDE DISCO - SUN FIRE SOUND
SUN FIRE - THE JAZZERS
26-28 JULY
REISENBERG - REISENBERG

**UPPSALA
REGGAE
FESTIVAL 2024**
26-27 July

**REGGAEBOA
FESTIVAL**
EEK-A-MOUSE
& THE LIGERIANS
SKARRA MUCCI (BAND SHOW)
NATTY BO & SOWETO
EMETERIANS & FORWARD EVER BAND
PAYOH SOULREBEL & THE ROOTSKANK
CHALART 88 & MATAH ROCKY HOMBRE LIBRE
SUMERR IRIE ITES SOUND
LUVY MESSINGER LINTY SOUND
SKANK-FU HI-FI (X8 SCOPERS)
L'YAL STORM SOUND SYSTEM
MR. CHOLD TO THE WILD ROOTS
BERGOTTE NATURAL MARZIAN
BAKIN BLACK TO WILLIAM KEYS
UNRULY YOUTH SOUND
26-27-28
JULIO 2024
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PLAZA FAMILIA 11 MERCADERE
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**REGGAE
IN
WULF**
26.-27. JULI 2024
2 TAGE
REGGAE FESTIVAL
IN WULFERTSHAUSEN (AUSBURG)
MAINSTAGE
ROMAIN VIRGO • ETANA • MELLOW MOOD
LION D • UWE BANTON
KING I HOAN I HIRU DE LA
ROMANNO WALTER JAH MIAM

Northwest World Reggae Festival



July 19 - 21

Pfau Pfamily Pfarma in Mount Hood, OR, USA

Bayfront Reggae & World Music Festival



July 20

Bayfront Festival Park in Duluth, MN, USA

Edmonton Reggae Festival



July 20 - 21

Victoria Park in Edmonton, AB, Canada

Reggae on the Way



July 21

LeMay ACM Haub Field in Tacoma, WA, USA

Sun Splash Reggae Festival



July 21

Zuiderpark in The Hague, The Netherlands

LB27 Reggae Camp



July 23 - 27

Töserdő Autóskemping in Lakitelek, Zalaán, Hungary

Hill Vibes Reggae Festival



July 24 - 27

Sportzentrum in Telfs, Austria

Ostroda Reggae Festival



July 25 - 28

Festival Area in Ostroda, Poland

Reggae Jam



July 26 - 28

Klosterpark in Bersenbrück, Germany

Uppsala Reggae Festival



July 26 - 27

Festival Area in Uppsala, Sweden

Reggaeboa Festival



July 26 - 28

El Bierzo in Balboa, Spain

Reggae in Wulf



July 26 - 27

Festival Area in Wulfertshausen, Germany

Irie Vibes Roots Festival



July 26 - 27

Kortemark in Handzame, Belgium

Black Forest on Fire



July 26 - 28

Papelwaldsee in Berghaupten, Germany

Oregon Reggae Fest



July 26 - 28

One Love Lake in Junction City, OR, USA

Bournemouth Reggae Weekender



July 26 - 28

Kings Park in Bournemouth, UK

Reggae & Riddim Festival



July 26 - 28

Tredegar House in Newport, UK

Sunwave



July 27

Dell Music Center in Philadelphia, PA, USA

Belize International Music and Food Festival



July 27 - 28

Marion Jones Sports Complex in Belize City, Belize

Vancouver Reggae Sunsplash



July 27 - 28

Vancouver Art Gallery in Vancouver, BC, Canada

Hastings Reggae Festival



July 27

Hastings Oval in Hastings, UK

Songs Of All Ages



July 28

Addington Park in Croydon, UK

Simmer Down Festival



July 28

Handsworth Park in Birmingham, UK

Unruly Fest – London



July 28

Crystal Palace Bowl in London, UK

African Music Festival



August 1 - 4

Schlossplatz in Emmendingen, Germany

Keep It Real Jam Stuttgart



August 2 - 3

LKA-Longhorn & Private Room in Stuttgart, Germany

Festival Festenez



August 2 - 3

Festival Area in Le Palais, France

Reggae Geel



August 2 - 3

Festival Area in Geel, Belgium

One Love Festival



August 2 - 3

Festival Area in Wiesen, Austria

Reggae on the River



August 2 - 4

County Line Ranch in Piercy, CA, USA

Reggae Sun Ska



August 2 - 3

Domaine De Nodris in Vertheuil, France

Nomade Reggae Festival



August 2 - 4

Chemin De Manson in Anglefort, France

Boa Onda Festival



August 2 - 4

Vale d'Agua in Ericeira, Portugal

Culture Reggae Festival



August 3

Worumbo Riverfront Event Center in Lisbon Falls, ME, USA

Trio Fest



August 3

Charles County Fairgrounds in La Plata, MD, USA

Reggae Land



August 3 - 4

The National Bowl in Milton Keynes, UK

Palm Beach Jamaica Independence Festival

August 3

Wellington Amphitheater in Wellington, FL, USA

Lake Tahoe Reggae Festival

August 4 - 6

Palisades Tahoe in Olympic Valley, CA, USA

Reggae Night XXII

August 4

Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, CA, USA

A St. Mary Mi Come From

August 8

Gray's Inn Sport Complex in St. Mary, Jamaica

Boomtown Fair

August 7 - 11

Materly Estate in Winchester, UK

No Logo BZH

August 9 - 11

Festival Area in St. Malo, France

No Logo Festival

August 9 - 11

Festival Area in Fraisans, France

Africa Tage Wien

August 9 - 26

Donauinsel in Vienna, Austria

One Love Copenhagen

August 9 - 10

Halvandet in Copenhagen, Denmark

One LoVermont Freedom & Unity Festival

August 9 - 11

Manivestivus in Cabot, VT, USA

VP Records 45th Anniversary

August 10

Summerstage at Central Park in New York, USA

Jamrock @ South Facing Festival

August 10

Crystal Palace Bowl in London, UK

Houston Reggae Fest

August 10 - 11

Hermann Square in Houston, Texas, USA

Ruhr Reggae Summer

August 16 - 18

Am Ruhrstadion in Mülheim an der Ruhr, Germany

Rototom Sunsplash



August 16 - 21

Festival Area in Benicassim, Spain

Turnpike Reggae Festival



August 16 - 17

Landgasthaus Lönne in Herzebrock-Clarholz, Germany

Sheffield Festival of Reggae



August 17

Network in Sheffield, UK

Reggae on the Mountain



August 17

Festival Area in Topanga Canyon, CA, USA

Reggae Lake Festival



August 17 - 18

Gaasperpark in Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Roots in the Woods



August 22 - 24

Ski Resort in Trije Kralji, Slovenia

Dry Diggings



August 23 - 25

Gold Coast Fairgrounds in Auburn, CA, USA

Reggae Summer Night



August 24

Kulturrevier Radbod in Hamm, Germany

Bomboclat Festival



August 24 - 25

Beach in Zeebrugge, Belgium

Reggae on the Rocks



August 24

Red Rocks Amphitheater in Morrison, CO, USA

HIM Dub Festival



August 28 - September 1

Praia Fluvial in Rapoula Do Coa, Portugal

Uprising Festival



August 30 - 31

Festival Area in Bratislava, Slovakia

Reggae Fest Massive



August 31

Barclays Center in Brooklyn, NY, USA

Summer Chill Out Festival



August 31

Kantine in Cologne, Germany

HIGH
REGGAE *Priest* FESTIVAL
ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH, 2024

A TRIBUTE TO DENISE JONES

EXCO LEVI / FANTAN MOJAH
IBA MAHR / UNITY SOUND

and more artists to be announced
JAMAICAN CANADIAN ASSOCIATION
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WALDBAD MEHDERITZSCH

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SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2024

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SEPT 27, 28, 29

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IRATION | PEPPER
ROME & DUDDY, IAM TONGI
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TROPICOLIC, BOMPAN UGLES
DUBNY VIKING, BOMBERMAN, SYSTEM

CYPRESS | WIZ
HILL | KHALIFA
FORTUNATE YOUTH, TROUBLEMAN, DENN
JESSE ROYAL, VIBACORE
BOMBERMAN, WIZ UGLES

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Las Vegas

OCTOBER 4-6, 2024
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JAMAICA

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SATURDAY OCT 26TH 2024

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THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL: U.S.A. INC. (c) 2024

SATURDAY NOV 23RD 2024

THE FEELERS OF REGGAE
THE FEELERS OF REGGAE
THE FEELERS OF REGGAE
THE FEELERS OF REGGAE

General Admission
BRIGADIER JERRY

JAM KATY
DAKEYE
EMPERESS ARUA
WADI GAD
GENERAL SAM MEXLEY

CORONATION DAY

JASGEE & JAZZBOY

DUB IN JAH GARDEN

SHARE, GIVE AND RECEIVE
IN COLLABORATION WITH
HEPZY FOR FAITHFUL
I GRADE RECORD
ESOBIE RECORD

KING SHILOH SOUND SYSTEM
Presents
Tribute to Edition
22-23 NOVEMBER 2024
WORLD GEMET, EMBURY

TIPPY I GRADE
KIBIR LA AMLAK
NEGUS SHILOH, MARCUS GAD
SELECTRESS NURSTACRIS
RAS HASSSEN TJ, SYDNEY SALMON
WALKER JUDAH, RAS IBI

SATURDAY, NOV 30TH, 2024

REGGAE LOVE FEST

SHABBA RANKS
SUPER CAT
CAPLETON
MASICKA
CUTTY RANKS
TEEJAY
TINA HOODCELEBRITY
DOUG E. FRESH
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9TH ANNUAL

WELCOME TO
JAM ROCK

REGGAE CRUISE
DECEMBER 9-14, 2024
MIAMI • MONTEGO BAY • OCHO RIOS

ABOARD RCCL'S INDEPENDENCE OF THE SEAS

WELCOME TO JAMROCK REGGAE CRUISE.COM

10TH ANNIVERSARY

DECEMBER 11-15, 2024 • HARD ROCK HOTEL • RIVERUA MAYIA, MEXICO

WALKER SUN

SLIGHTLY STOOPID
SPONK FIGURE
SUBLINE
CYPRESS HILL
IRATION
FORTUNATE YOUTH
THE BLOWERS
2-TUP
& LOVE & DONOVAN FRANKENHAYTER
6th ANN. TROPICOLIC, BOMBERMAN

RETURNING GUEST PRE-SALE, MAY 6 • PUBLIC ON-SALE, MAY 7

High Reggae Priest Festival



September 6

Jamaican Canadian Association in Toronto, ON, Canada

Colours of Beat



September 6 - 7

Waldbad Mehderitzsch in Torgau, Germany

Zion Reggae Festival



September 20 - 21

Zion Ponderosa Ranch Resort in Orderville, UT, USA

Mission Bayfest



September 27 - 29

Mariners Point in San Diego, CA, USA

Reggae Rise Up – Las Vegas



October 4 - 6

Downtown Events Center in Las Vegas, NV, USA

Tosh Fest



October 19

Natty's Ocean View Ent. Center in Jamaica

Houston Jerk Fest



October 26

GSH Event Center in Houston, TX, USA

Coronation Day Celebration



November 2

Starlight Ballroom in Los Angeles, CA, USA

Dub in Jah Garden



November 22 - 23

Wondo Genet in Hawassa, Ethiopia

Reggae Love Fest New York



November 30

Barclays Center in Brooklyn, NY, USA

Welcome to Jamrock Reggae Cruise



December 9 - 14

Cruise Ship, Miami, FL

Closer to the Sun



December 11 - 15

Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Maya in Puerto Aventuras, Mexico

INTERVIEW



UNLIMITED CULTURE

INNA BAYERMAN STYLE

ARE YOU NUTS?

BY GARDY STEIN

PHOTOS BY JASMINA MAGLIARI

Even within the colourful reggae world, this band is certainly one of the more exotic species: **Unlimited Culture**, a group from Germany's far south, sporting a Rasta front man who sings in deep Bavarian dialect. Natty dreadlock inna Bayerman style! Active for more than 15 years now, they positively impact people whenever they perform live, bringing gleeful smiles and a few contemplative frowns to the faces of the listeners who understand the lyrics. Their music is both celebrating the joys of life and criticising social grievances, and their upcoming album **Bist Deppad?** is no exception.

Although the album wasn't completely finished by the time of our interview, **Reggaeville** linked up with **Lenny Souljah**, said front singer, to ask about content and form of the new release - and to have the more cryptic titles explained (because even I as a native German speaker don't understand everything):



It's been indeed 10 years since our last interview! What's new in the band Unlimited Culture?

We have a new drummer, he is called **Alex Drummie**. He used to play with us on several occasions, but now he's a permanent member. We put up a new live set, too, which is really great, but apart from that, everything stayed pretty much the same.

Also new is your upcoming album, of course. Can you first explain the title, what does Bist Deppad? mean?

Bist Deppad? actually means something like "Are you nuts?" or "Are you crazy?", just in Bavarian slang and a bit on the funny side. So, normally it's not meant very seriously, but it still encompasses serious topics across the album. In fact, the whole situation in the world today, in society, everyone fighting against each other, internet and social media rules and without it you can't do much... the track **Bist Deppad?** is a very critical song about society, and we kind of extended this to the whole album.



In one line of the song, you sing “take care of our mama”. I guess you mean Mother Earth, right?

Definitely! You notice everywhere how Mother Earth is being destroyed. And rich people already build big bunker for themselves where they could live in the worst case, when disaster strikes - it's just madness! That this is their solution instead of looking for alternatives... this makes me sick.

Do you talk about ecological subjects as well in the song *Alles Brennt* (everything is burning)? It sounds a bit like that in the beginning...

Well, I wrote that song when the war on Ukraine kept getting worse. I think what you mean is an excerpt from the perspective of someone who suddenly finds himself in the middle of this war. This feeling of being paralysed, with smoke and fire and tanks all around you, that's what the beginning is about.

In your opinion, what are little steps every one of us could take to protect mother earth?

That's always a quandary, I'm a bit divided on this topic. It's actually not the average people who are in charge, I mean, they are responsible too, but the biggest part of destruction, those who are to blame most are the rich people, the presidents, the managers. They are the ones who constantly travel back and forth with their yachts, who fly with their private jets even for short distances and whatever. Of course, we all can take the bike instead of the car and stuff like that, but I think that this isn't really the biggest percentage in contributing to earth's destruction.

True, the big players have to get involved, urgently! There is another song called *Hope*, and facing all these problems we just talked about, environmental pollution, armed conflicts, it's really hard sometimes to stay hopeful and keep a positive mindset. What gives you hope?

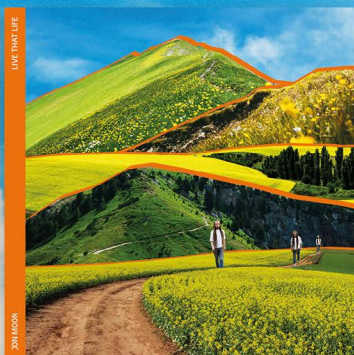
JON MOON

NEW EP

LIVE THAT LIFE

STREAM

NOW





Definitely my family, my surroundings... Hope never dies, when you communicate with the people in your inner circle you see that there is always a way. There has to be a way to continue! You know, I have three kids, so for me there are enough reasons to keep going and get up again when I'm down. So yeah, it's really my surroundings who give me strength, my mother, my family.

The song *Kalte Wasser* (cold waters) sounds a bit like a new start. Can you tell us how this one was created?

Sure. I wrote it in a time when more and more people came to me, complaining. Maybe I only perceived it so strongly, but everyone seemed dissatisfied, mostly about their job. And I thought, "*Hey, you have every possibility to start over, to open a new door!*", you know? You don't have to work 40 hours a week, if that's what makes you unhappy, change something in your life! Move into a trailer to save rent or try to cut other costs, if you really want you will find a way! Or just change

your job altogether, do something you feel passion for... even if you will earn less.

Good message! Generally speaking, your album leans towards reggae, of course, for example, *Heit Is Soweit* (today is the day) which is my favourite, I love the groove and the mood it puts you in. But then there is one song, *Disco*, which is completely different. Who brought that style in?

Well that one... I met with *Riese* (Philip Rie-singer, keyboarder of the band) in my studio and we planned to record the instrumental tracks for the song *Power* from our last EP. When we had finished that, we started jamming and I played a drumbeat on the computer, and we got carried away with the sound. Then *Riese* added some synthies, resulting in this 90s disco sound we really celebrated (laughs), and then we brought it to the band and elaborated on the idea. The lyrics were contributed by *Riese* too. He's a traveller, you know, so I think those words come from his heart. But the title is not final, we might change that, mind!



Ok, understood. Two of the tracks are re-released already and come with visuals as well. The first one of those is Dr. Feelgood - how was the creation process for that one?

Dr. Feelgood! In essence, we wrote that in gratitude to the doctor who provides us with the recipes for medical marijuana (laughs). Three of our band members, including me, really have a condition that warrants its use, and the song is a kind of homage to the physician who made it possible for us to obtain it legally.

Speaking of... since April, the consumption of Ganja is partly legalised in Germany. What has changed since then in Bavaria, which is known as the most conservative and strictest of the federal states?

(laughs) Well, prime minister **Söder** is running amok, he doesn't like that at all. But otherwise I don't see a lot of changes, it's not like the whole of Bavaria is suddenly smoking weed... not at all. It's still very

restrictive. Some bars put out signs that say "Please don't smoke weed here!", and obviously they are building more playgrounds now, since weed consumption is forbidden within a hundred-meter radius of those. The only real change I see is that a lot of people I know now start growing their own plants.

The second single which was just released is called Innerer Deiff (the devil within). How did you get the idea to write this song?

This is one of the few songs that didn't just come to me, but for which I really sat down with the intention to write something. I had no inspiration and I became grumpy because I didn't have any ideas, and then I thought "My inner devil prevents me from being productive", that's how the song started to develop. Because in fact, we all know the feeling, right? Everyone can find themselves in the song, and it turned out to be one of my most personal songs on the album!

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And how do you come to terms with your own inner devil? How do you overcome it, what are your methods?

Oh, that's a tricky one! (laughs) Most of the times, I just go for a walk. We are living in a trailer, and everything around us is beautifully green, so if I'm in a bad mood I tell my family "I muss ma kurz schnaufe!" (I have to breeze off).

Nature helps. I recently read an article that being in nature verifiably reduces stress hormones.

I believe that 100%! The weather alone has such a huge impact on our mood. Like right now, these last days it's been grey and it either rains or it's very windy. And if you compare how you feel under these conditions and the feeling during one day of sunshine and 25°...

Yes, true! Now, I listened to eight songs already, but I was told that two or three more are coming, and that there will be a feature on

one of them. Can you already say something about who that will be?

It's not 100% fixed yet, but we're working on a feature for the song *Werd Scho Werdn* (it will be ok), talking about those days that start off bad, a bit like the mindset in *Innerer Deiftl*. But the song tells you that things will work out, so it's an encouraging kind of vibe.

How did you work on the songs in general, did you all meet in the studio together or did everyone record the single instrumental tracks?

That was nice actually, we met in the Castle Studios with **Filu** (Umberto Echo) and **Morry**, the bass player of **Dub Inc**, the two of them were there as producers. We rented the place for a full weekend and recorded all the instrumental tracks, the riddims. It was planned to record the vocal parts as well, but I was sick so we couldn't do that. But we finished all the overdubs and everything, and I then added all the lyrics in my home studio.

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DRE JA

SCAN ME

DRE JA
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Produce by: Mining Gold, Fashion by Jovie & YAADAMUSIC

Do you already have a release date in mind?

We plan to release the album in September. Given that all goes as planned, we already reserved a club for the release party in Regensburg, so watch out for that!

Nice. Until then, where can people see you live in summer?

We play at the **Amerang Sommer Gfui** on July 6th, at **Pförring Open Air** on July 19th, at the **Brass Wiesn Festival** in Eching (August 2nd) and we have some club dates, too.

Ok, that's noted! As you mostly sing in the Bavarian dialect, is it hard for you to reach new audiences? I can imagine many people outside of Bavaria, even within Germany, don't understand all of your lyrics.

Well, yes, in a way. I don't think we will get a huge fanbase in Italy or France or wherever (laughs), but in Austria or Switzerland, for example, the dialect is very similar, so they do understand us. And also, the feedback that we get from gigs beyond Bavaria is always positive! Even though many people might not understand me, we get a great feedback because they really enjoy our music. We are just authentic and direct, a 100% of who we really are!

It makes you unique for sure! Lenny, I'm through with my questions, is there anything you'd like to add, about the album or in general?

I think this is the fastest production we ever did. We started out September last year, then everything went so quick, with **Filu** on board, **Alex** and **Oneness Records** joining in... and I am convinced that it is also our best so far!

On the one hand, the album is super personal, a contemporary witness, so to say, I kind of see the last year passing by in every single song. On the other hand, it will be our first album out on vinyl, and I'm really looking forward to every single that's ready to be released. There will be some more videos as well, but more in a home-made, low-budget

style, cause I realised that the time of the big video productions is over somehow, in times of TikTok and Instagram.

Ok, looking forward! Thank you for the time and the reasoning, and all the best for your summer and the release!

INTERVIEW

J WRITTEN

KALEIDOSCOPE





WORKS TO DO

BY SHRIK KOTECHA
PHOTOS BY LEE ABEL

J Written is an up-and-coming artist who hails from **Payne Land** in Kingston Jamaica - a serious ghetto area where life can be tough. Amidst the daily challenges he faced growing up, he nurtured his creative talents writing poems, speeches and essays as a youth, which has helped him develop into a multi-talented songwriter, singer, and actor in the recent **Bob Marley** biopic **One Love**. Just over a year ago, he came to the attention of **RAS Records** founder **Doctor Dread** who instantly recognized the talent this youth possessed and set about making music with him. Summer 2024 sees the

release of **J Written**'s debut solo project **Kaleidoscope** on **Nah Ramp Music**. Just like the definition of **Kaleidoscope**, which describes a constantly changing pattern or sequence of elements, the album consists of nine vocal and one dub track showcasing the eclectic style and themes of **J Written** as a songwriter. His style is unique as he incorporates both rapping and singing over carefully crafted rhythm tracks.

Shrik Kotecha spoke with **J Written** at his home in **Trenchtown** during an online interview to hear about this exciting young artist and his musical journey.

We first met very early on in your career around 2019 at the Trenchtown Multi-Purpose Centre with Dave 'Primetime' Green. I can see that you have been keeping yourself busy as part of The Wailers Trio, working on your solo recordings, and also a touch of acting. It must be good to keep busy?

It is, when it comes to the arts it's always a process of creation. And once you're creating the feel, you feel the God that's within you, because creation is what he does.

I hear that. Here in summer 2024, you present your debut solo album Kaleidoscope to the world. I'm very excited to learn more about the creative process involved in the making of this album, but before we do that, let's go back a little for our readers... Where does the name J Written come from?

Well, the name **J Written** came from my aunt. I used to write a lot around the house because I wasn't privileged to just go outside because we lived in very bad communities.

But while I was with my aunt, I used to write newspaper stuff, just articles to inform her of everything that's happening in the house throughout the day and then I would sign it off 'written by J' and the name came from that really. She used to call me Mr Written and that's how it was born.

You grew up in Payne Land and as you just mentioned, you spent a lot of time at home with your two sisters. Was that challenging being indoors so much?

No, it wasn't. It was the most fun experience for me growing up with two big sisters who knew everything. It makes life easier for you, especially because males have crushes on females, so you get to understand what they really want. You get to understand what you're supposed to aspire towards. My sisters, I love them to the max, but it wasn't just my two sisters though, because we have grannies, we have cousins

and so on. But in the house, it was just me and my two sisters because my parents used to work a lot.

And for our readers, give us an idea of where Payne Land is located in Kingston?

If anybody come Kingston, dem haffi pass through this likkle place dem call Three Mile. From Three Mile, you have Payne Land right there on Spanish Town Road. It's connected to most of the most notorious inner cities. Actually, you have Payne Land then you have Delacree Pen, Greenwich Farm, Two Mile, Trenchtown, you have Tivoli. It's one big stretch of inner cities going straight down so we grew up like just going to places and being involved in everywhere.

OK, so Payne Land is really located next to Three Mile close to Tuff Gong Studio?

Exactly right there. It's kind of like the first housing scheme from Three Mile with tall

Tikin by Koptiq Sun
 Author Geoffrey Forrest aka #KoptiqSun
 Composer Berisa Hasan aka #PianoZano
 Produced by Cool Running Maastricht



buildings and stuff. It looks quite archaic, but I'm telling it's the most fun place it could ever be because there's so much colour, there's so much life, there's so much things brimming down there, it's wonderful. I encourage anybody who wants to come out and be a part of the place because the stigma about the place is real, but it's just a stigma. The ones that forward will love it, it's my invitation.

What age were you when you started writing at home from reading newspapers and things?

I've been writing from when I was really young, really, really young. I wrote my first song when I was like maybe five because I had a crush on this girl, and it was a crazy thing. But I really fell in love with writing while I was going to high school. I still remember the very first thing I wrote about that I actually fell in love with. I actually wrote about the feelings of a flower, how a flower feels to be swished in the wind when cars are passing, it was mind blowing. My

teacher read it to the whole class, they loved it and they then read it to the whole school, and they loved it too.

Just listening to you, it sounds like there's been like this creative spirit within you pretty much from birth.

Well, I would assume so. I don't even know where it comes from, sometimes my mother laughs, because nobody else in my family sings. Growing up, my father used to dance and I used to skank a little bit too, but nobody was ever a singer. As you say, it's a spirit that found me and I want to use that spirit to give that same form of energy to the world and influence another soul.

Looking at this creative spirit that you had within you, when did you seriously start to channel that into making music and singing?

It was around the time I met you. I think it was like a year before I met you in 2019. I took it serious around that time, but I've been practising and owning the craft because

all I wanted to do was just write for people. I didn't even know I had a voice to be very honest, but big up **Binghi** and the other bredrins. They looked at me and asked "*Why yuh sound like this and all you want to do is write*" and I'm like, "*Oh, I didn't know I had the vehicle to carry the words. I just thought I could make the words and I started to sing*". Then **Dave Prime Time** came in the picture, and he was like "*Yo **Written**, I'm telling you, you're doing this stuff*". I really fell in love with making a difference in someone's day. It's a brilliant feeling, it's like climbing Mount Everest, that's so massive.

I can hear a lot of different musical influences on the individual songs. Where do they stem from? Who were you listening to growing up?

To be honest, I was mostly influenced around dancehall culture. Even though I sing, I tend to do a lot of deejaying also because we try to get as much said as possible. When it comes to influence, I would definitely say wi nah talk 'bout just singers we talk about selectors. When I used to come home to the door and outside **Agony Sound** ah play and then **Stone Love** would play and of course they would play some artists like **Buju** and **Dennis Brown**. I love **Dennis Brown** music. I'll be very honest with you; I wasn't even a big fan of **Bob**. I love **Bob's** music. It was when I got older, I started to realise what **Bob** was to the community and how influential he was. But when it came to music there's lots and lots of influence, I can't just tell you there is one or two. I do have favourite artists and you love the energy from dem. **Buju**, **Dennis**, **Cobra**, **Alozade**, it's all these people, yuh know.

Let's focus in on the new album Kaleidoscope which has been produced by Doctor Dread. Exactly how did that collaboration come together?

It's all a twist of fate. It's all about the talent and energy also. You *know* how long we were doing this. I met with **Lloyd Evans** from **Blue Mountain**, brilliant mind I'm telling you, just sitting down with him

would inspire you. And then I invited him to a show one Sunday downtown by **Bunny's** and there is this boat and we set up a whole band where we performed. It was the first time he was seeing me perform and he was really, really impressed. Then he said I'm going to link you to somebody and then all of a sudden, I got a call from my manager **Ob-adiah**, and then all of a sudden, it's **Doctor Dread**. And after that everything just fell in place. You know, working on the album he wanted to work with an artist. I wanted to work with him because he's a legend in this thing. So, it was a massive opportunity that presented itself at the right time. I won't tell you it's because I'm the greatest because I don't think I am. What I think is that I work really hard, and it was seen, and these people and **Doctor Dread** came up at that time looking for an artist and I was the one that was there.

Now to me, he's an absolute legend who founded RAS Records and has worked with so many greats including Jimmy Cliff, Inner Circle, Gregory Isaacs, Luciano, Freddie McGregor, Sly and Robbie, Steel Pulse, and Bunny Wailer - no pressure then!

(laughs) Every pressure on me, every pressure. But it's nutten to be afraid, you know dem say the strongest soldier just get the hardest fight. It's not even a fight, it's just a challenge and we look forward to it. Working with someone who has worked with the likes of these people is phenomenal. It's a big opportunity for someone stepping into the game. This is my first album, and this is the calibre I'm doing it at. I love that these people were some of my favourite artists. **Gregory** was phenomenal to me. **Night Nurse** was the first song I learned to play when I learned to play an instrument.

I may be mistaken but I thought that he had pretty much retired from music production and was focusing more on his food sauces? So, he must have seen something within you and your vocal ability to be brought back out of retirement.

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Well, he gave me that confidence and I gave him that also. The funniest thing was that when I heard about him, I thought he was like a doctor who is a dread, thinking he would give me a whole heap of bush herbs (laughs). But it was crazy to know that he was willing to step out of something like retirement to just come and be a part of the whole process. It isn't just him, as I said, **Lloyd Evans** did the same thing, he was phenomenal, **Obadiah** did the same thing. It's a crazy time of events. I couldn't be more grateful for these things.

Working with Doctor Dread, was it always the intention to record songs together to compile an album? What was the vision?

Well, the vision is always to bring forth your heart into the music at every single stage, even when you work on an album, you try to work around a theme and thing. I don't like bottling it like that because the truth is, art is something that represents the soul at the time and every situation influence the choices you make. Working in the studio wasn't like we're gonna do this amount of songs or that we're gonna record this very specific topic, it was all about let's do the best we can and create really, really nice music. Like just being in there with **Doctor Dread** and some of the musicians and big up **Remus** as well. We just create with a few ideas and we just getting things done. It wasn't all about setting up a process because when you have a template towards doing something you're just making a mould, you're not really creating anything new. You're making something off the mould that was there. So, we tried our best to be a bit original to the thing and keep it as real as possible.

And what was the thought process behind the title of the new debut album, Kaleidoscope?

This was all **Doctor Dread**. This is where the doctor comes in and he was surgical with it. I was thinking he and I would brainstorm and throw a few ideas out but then one day, he called my phone and he said "You know, J, I have this idea. What do you

think about this name **Kaleidoscope**?" and I'm like "You mean the thing that shows many different angles and perspectives towards one and see an image?". And I was like, yeah that would be cool and from that day, I was sold on it. Even after that, he came up with different ideas and I still felt **Kaleidoscope** is the right name. We all know what a kaleidoscope is. We all know the colours that it shows, and all know the angles and the perspective it shows of one very specific image, which is what we're trying to do with the music showing different angles and the same perspective. So, we wanted to show the balance.

Whilst I feel that the album has a firm foundation in reggae music, I feel that the title fits in really well with the variation in tempos, melodies, and subject material that our readers will hear.

Everything worked out in a certain way because we didn't go into the studio working towards a theme, but we work hard in many different types of sound. I remember we did **Keep The People Poor** where we went like indie dancehall, we had this sitar. **CJ** is the keyboardist, and he was killing it, I'm telling you, **CJ** was brilliant. **G Sharp** was brilliant. **Flabba** was brilliant. But as I said, we didn't go in there with any other goal other than creating good music and then the term **Kaleidoscope** just started to reflect everything we were doing because everything was different. The mission was always of love, showing a side of things that people don't see. That's why the songs are mostly about positivity and uplifting yourself out of certain states of mind. It's showing different angles, so **Kaleidoscope** just sat perfectly with my soul.

The ten track album was recorded at some of the premier recording studios in Kingston including Gussie Clarke's Anchor Recording Studio and Tuff Gong Recording Studio. Can you share what makes those particular studios special in terms of their respective sounds?



Alright, let me start with **Anchor**. To be very honest, **Anchor** is a phenomenal place. I wanted to record in a place where I could feel an openness towards my spirit, so we can be free instead of being constricted. So, we went to **Gussie Clarke**'s studio at **Anchor**, and we were sitting with **Fatta**. The space was so open, I met some of my favourite singers like **Barrington Levy** and **Protoje** up there. I met so many people up there and it was phenomenal.

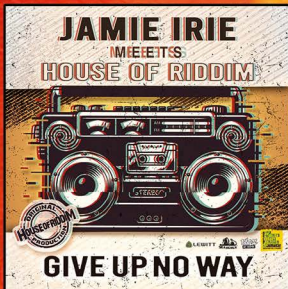
When it comes to **Tuff Gong**, that was all about frequency because me coming from Payne Land and then everybody knows the affiliation I have with Trenchtown down there and everybody knows what we do with the **Wailers Trio**. Going to **Tuff Gong** was simple to say, but being there was phenomenal. We deal with **Mondays**, we deal with **Mr Chow** where we hold a whole heap ah vibes, we feeling nice with the cannabis and

everything but it wasn't just about that, it was all about sitting in the places with people who would make you feel comfortable so you can create the art the best way possible and up at **Anchor** did have that and down at **Tuff Gong** did have that and we were never in the studios by ourselves. It was always everybody together. A family thing, phenomenal feeling from both places, man.

And I also think some of the tracks were recorded at JaMin Studio in Trenchtown?

Yeah, I worked on most of the demos there and then you take it to different spaces not because it's not capable of doing that but most of the time when I'm in the studio at **JaMin** it's just me recording. It's my opinion towards the matter. So I would take it somewhere else and then everybody else would be there and this is where everybody gives their opinion towards the whole track instead of me just giving them that and say-

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ing that's what I want to work with. If you're working as a family or unit, you can't be selfish towards the thought of that because you're creating music for people, not just for yourself, even though you want art to reflect you, the art should also reflect the soul of the people who you want to connect to. As I said that **JaMin Studio** has been my home from you know me. I love Trenchtown, I love everywhere there. It reminds me so much of Payne Land and that's why I fit in so easy. So, when I was there, I was there for quite some years, everybody treated me like I was born inna the place. I just have to give love and thanks for that every single time.

Let's focus in on some of the tracks, the opening track is titled Works To Do and opens with "No need for procrastination, we've got works to do, we've got to be fit and strong and ready until the work is through".

That very specific track was written for everybody, especially my guitarist **G**

Sharp, he always hear me say it to myself, it's a mantra. It's a song I sing to myself every time before I touch the stage before I perform, I give myself that power. It's kind of like a prayer. It was only fitting to start the album because we have many, many works to do, we have so much to do and once we take up this mission of positivity, even when things not working out, we can't just say well give up on this, it's a big cause. For example, you're doing such great work, if you just stop today, it would be like your loss, you only lose when you stop. We have so much things to do. As I said that song is a prayer. I literally clasped my hands. I'll go through that process every single time I touch the stage, even if I'm performing it.

It's a song of resilience and determination, just like Blood, Sweat and Tears. Both songs feature the bass player Errol 'Flabba' Holt, it must have been incredibly special to have him involved in this debut project?

Flabba is not what I expected. With someone with that level of reputation, you expect them to come in and to have an ego. **Flabba** came in and he just fit in, **Flabba** was there, chilling with us. As I said, we didn't even tell **Flabba** the line we needed. I don't like telling people how to do music. I said just listen what's there and tell me what you feel like. Of course. I have a suggestion, but I want to hear your opinion first. **Flabba** just went in on it (hums). It's actually my favourite song on the album.

I hear you, and of course there are so many other musical greats including Sly Dunbar, Earl 'Chinna' Smith, Robbie Lynn and Fitzroy 'Dave Prime Time' Green.

As I tell you, it's just a joy to know that all of these great ones come together. Even when we call the greats, we haffi call the ones who were there also like two smaller youths, **CJ** and **G Sharp**. They've been around me from ever since and they came in and they said these legends were there working and they heard the works and they realised they had to step up the game and we did something phenomenal. Everybody know the relationship between me and **Prime Time**. The man is coming like a father, even though we not related like that. But I can literally say it's nothing but love when it comes to **Prime Time**. He's helped me in many, many ways. It's not just musically, he can sit you down and hold some reasoning with you and show you how to evolve as a person mentally.

I was really touched with the depth of songwriting on the new album Kaleidoscope, there are nine vocal tracks and one dub track, did you write all the tracks yourself?

Yeah, definitely. What I can say is my name is **J Written**. I love writing. *I love writing!* But of course, when you're in the studio people will give opinions and that's a beautiful thing because the music is not just for me, it's for the world to consume so we open to opinions of people. I think **Remus** and **Doctor Dread** came in and they said a few things like change this or change that,

I'm very open to suggestions. Writing is a very spiritual thing to me because sometimes when I write, I don't know what I write until the work is done. So that's why I used to have this thing when I said the pen is mightier than me. I literally don't know what I write until I'm done sometimes, and I don't get high while I'm writing. I think it's a cheat code thing. I see it as the spirit coming through the pen and me just being a vehicle towards the words.

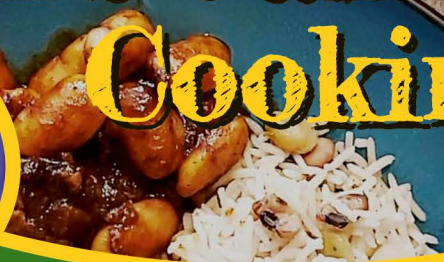
I love the feel-good, up-tempo vibe behind West Indies, where your vocals seem to hit some higher notes!

(laughs) It really wasn't easy! As I said, we were in the studio vibing and normally I sing with so much passion, it was nice for a tempo to hit notes without forcing it. The **West Indies** track was fun for me as I wanted to do something all about positivity, but we didn't want to make it too deep. At the same time, we wanted to represent the place we are from. It's not just about the Caribbean, it's all about the **West Indies** because when you look at the cricket team it's the whole cricket team of the Caribbean as one team integrated. So I wanted to do something just as a little tribute.

Musically, social media seems to be driving new music and we live in this new world of collabs. Nowadays, it's not uncommon to have four, maybe five collabs on an album but you've done the opposite, there is one monster collab featuring Alborosie. Tell us more about how that collab came together.

It was magical. I didn't know **Alborosie** personally before that, **Dave Prime Time** knew **Alborosie**, and **Dave** said to **Alborosie** that he had a young singer that he really believed in, and he loved the talent. One day, **Dave** came into the studio and saw me working on **Fear To Understand** and he was like I really like this one and he came on it and we were all in there creating, then when we're finished, he said **Alborosie** would be crazy on this track. I didn't think that he would do that. All of a sudden, I got

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a call and then it was like check your email. Then we spoke after that and we met a few times before the video shoot and it's a phenomenal energy. He didn't have to do it at the time. I was really young in my career at the time, and he is one of the biggest reggae stars in the world, so I really appreciate that he stepped down off the pinnacle that he was on and did that just for a likkle youth like me. Let me tell you, nobody can tell me nutten bad about **Alborosie** right now. It's not everybody do that; young artists reach out to these massive stars and they never reply or respond. But he literally loved the project.

Your music seems to bridge the roots of reggae to the current sound which is happening now, and it captures what has come before and what is here in the present and how the future may evolve. The song King Kong really merges all these elements into one for me.

When it comes to the music, it's all about conveying what the artist wants to say. It's all about conveying the message and the message is all about positivity. It's all about being strong within yourself, it's all about being powerful. A lot of people look down on themself because the situation seems so dire. When I say seems so dire, it's not really like that all the time, but someone tends to be in despair a lot. So I wanted to do something to show them that we are literally that powerful, even though people used to address people like ghetto youths, this and that, we have massive spirits. So that's where the term **King Kong** came from. When I was growing up, even when I was in the house, I was never a bredrin that followed anything that was happening. I used to be the leader, when my bredrins used to come over when I was a skanker, my bredrins became skankers. When I started to sing, my bredrins started to sing because I had such a massive spirit. We try our best to influence people the right way because what you want is a better world for everybody. My favourite thing to say is to do unto others as you'd like them to do unto you.

Kareem "Remus" Burrell from XTM.Nation also played an instrumental role in this first solo project working alongside Doctor Dread in the studio, again fusing the old school with the new school. What were the key things that they both taught you while making the album?

Remus taught me a lot, I won't lie to you. It wasn't all easy because you grow up knowing one form of sound and that one sound was pain, but we overcame pain by laughing as such, but **Remus** told us it was okay to relax. It was okay to let go and just live and reflect all of these things, not just musically but when you see him, you have to admire him because of how he approaches every situation, nothing really startles him. He's just looking most of the time and then by the time you look, you realise he isn't actually just looking but he's actually thinking, he's actually in the process. Then he'll just come with this bag of ideas to do this or try that. It's never a thing where he and I had disputes. It's a thing where he was always open to my opinions, and I was always open to his. Even more than me, **Remus** was like the earliest person at all the studio sessions. I remember being there one time earlier than him and he was frightened (laughs).

Remus taught me a very valuable lesson that nobody wants this for you more than you. So if you really want to do this, take it very seriously and of course I was doing that ultimately, but then dedication was a big thing and I saw his dedication and admired it and I wanted to meet his dedication.

When it comes to **Doctor Dread**, I learned a few things, like sometimes you're not going to always be comfortable with the situation and you just have to push through it. But ultimately the mission is bigger than you. It's not about settling your ego because he and I never had that problem ever. It was more about me not expecting the same thing from him that I've done with everybody else. **Doctor Dread** really just taught me how to relax and not push through as much because I'm already talented. I was born a fighter, so we fight everything even when we don't need to.



There's one song on Kaleidoscope that also gets the dub treatment and that's the song *Alright*. It's a song of upliftment and hope that I know will really touch the hearts of the people. What inspired you to write that particular song?

That song was written when I was on my way to Mo'Bay. I was driving through and listening to the beat, thinking what would I need to tell people that has already been said. I'm realising that most things have been said and I told myself what I really want to tell somebody was that it's alright, even when things are bad, it's alright because everybody goes through these situations. The situation influences the choices we make, and that doesn't necessarily make anybody a bad person. Even as artists, we go through very bad experiences, and we have to tell ourselves sometimes it's alright. So it was kinda a song to myself, but also a song to everybody who is going through the same situation.

And who's responsible for the dubwise mix?

The dub is solely **Doctor Dread!** I even have videos with **Doctor Dread** in the studio mixing dub, turning his hat the next way. When you see the **Doc** turning his hat a next way you know he is on it, he was there with **Remus** and **Fatta**, but **Doc** was definitely spearheading the dub. He really likes a dub mix and he went in on it.

The song *My Queen* has a really mellow, chilled vibe showcasing a different side to your songwriting and vocals.

My Queen is a song that I really wanted on the album because I wanted to show love towards the females in a way. I don't normally do a lot of female songs, what I normally do is a lot of love songs and love isn't just reflected to me around intimacy. It's a song for my queen but each man have their own queen. It could be a mother, it could be an aunt, it could be a sister. It could be some-



body that reflects that royal feeling within your life. I wanted to show that I appreciated my queen and who she was and I loved her for who she was even with all the flaws. It was quite reassuring that it came out that smooth. I've never heard my voice like that so I gotta give thanks to **Remus**. **Remus** was very much involved with that project. As I said, I wrote the song, we were building the beat, but he never stopped until I got the right vocals down. I really want people to just listen to that song and realise that it's not about having twenty different females. It's about having the right person around. It's about how can you want to be like **King Tafari** and live different from him. I only knew him with **Empress Menen**.

What do you have planned in terms of promoting the new album? Any live shows?

Well, we plan on being on the road. We're definitely doing shows because when you're doing music, promoting is a key part of it and being out there with the people performing is actually key. We're going to use every mode of promotion, interviews and

so forth but performing is my strong suit, I love performing. I love being in that state of mind. I love watching the people enjoy themselves. I love being in the moment, its very spiritual.

We wish you all the best on the release of your debut album and hope to see you performing live very soon too! Is there anything else that you want to share about this brand new album Kaleidoscope with our readers?

Well, the truth is, all I want is people to listen to it and give me their honest opinion towards it because we have more music coming out. When you hear criticism from people, it's like having a mirror in front of you. I just want people to listen to the work that is coming out. I'm never afraid to hear honest opinions. That's all I really want, and I want any young artists who read this to remember you only lose when you stop. Don't stop, go forward. Listen to the album, and make your own albums, put them out and get works done. We have so much to do. No need for the procrastination.

J WRITTEN - KALEIDOSCOPE

Nah Ramp Music - June 21, 2024

Jamaican artist **J Written** has been treading his artistic path since around 2018, with a part in the recent **Bob Marley** biopic, too. However, his debut album is now here and it shows an artist full of potential.

Kaleidoscope, released via **Nah Ramp Music**, sees **J Written** flex his musical muscles across 10 tracks. He's under the watchful eye of industry veteran **Gary "Doctor Dread" Himelfarb** and it shows across this slick and well-executed project.



Work To Do with its opening piano lilt has echoes of **Zion I Kings** in its lush arrangement, electric organ line, and nods to dub, while **J Written** builds a strong narrative around those of us who are spiritual following Jah's path because there are "people to save". **West Indies** ups the ante further with a more involved composition featuring fluid horns, a stirring string riff, and it all being wrapped up with **J Written**'s frantic singjay paying tribute to the Islands.

Alright is a tonal shift for **Kaleidoscope**, seeing Afro-RnB (drums on the former, additional instrumentation on the latter) come in across a brooding major-to-minor composition that is both moving and engaging - as is **J Written**'s impassioned vocal and lyrics about inner strength and faith. **Blood, Sweat, And Tears** winds things back to roots but with some nice inflections of soul and jazz, notably across the horns use of blue notes and **J Written**'s meandering, delicate vocal performance about conscious integrity.

King Kong is a fast-paced roots affair - feeling like steppers but without the four-to-the-floor.

It's made quick by the rapid-fire guitar skanks and double-time bubble rhythm at points. All this is levelled out by some nice breaks, and **J Written**'s quick-fire yet smooth vocal. **Prisoner** takes **Kaleidoscope** back to 80s dancehall with its root-seventh chord progression, stripped-back arrangement, and sprightly singjay from **J Written** - but then, the bridge breaks out into

something more fluid, and his lyrics about early lockdown are strong (and at times amusing).

Next, **Fear To Understand** brings superstar **Alborosie** on board across a modern roots track, with some pleasing rasping guitar and expressive sax lines. Both artists are well-matched (having worked together before) and there's great lyrical content about Babylon's toxicity. **My Queen** is an attractive and modern lovers rock track, albeit with the reggae influences toned down (the skank and bubble rhythm being distant).

Keep The People Poor is a forthright and unrepentant cut complete with a winding sitar and rasping guitar playing off against each other but across a hybrid cut of dancehall and rock; revelatory, much like **J Written**'s vocal and lyrics around Babylon's trickery. **Kaleidoscope** closes with **Alright Dub**, a decent example of the genre.

Overall, **Kaleidoscope** is a strong debut from **J Written**. He's at his most interesting when he a) branches off from roots, and b) maxes-out his understated vocal - but every track is extremely potent, and a bright future awaits.

by Steve Topple

INTERVIEW

KAYA BLACK

COVERED IN REGGAE



To the average listener, country music and reggae couldn't be more different. One is the sound of southern white America and the other, the vibration of black Jamaica.

But if you listen closely, country and reggae have a lot in common. Both favour short, simple songs of rebellion, love, poverty and faith. Country artists **Jim Reeves** and **Marty Robbins** were hugely popular in 1950s Jamaica, as its recording industry was getting started. And there is compelling evidence that reggae and country have a shared musical DNA stretching back to West Africa.

Singer **Kaya Black** is leading the charge to change received perceptions. As the Jamaica-born son of reggae photographer **Johnnie Black**, and a resident of Raleigh in North Carolina, he is well placed in both worlds. His new project **Country Covered In Reggae**, features reggae renditions of eight country songs by artists including **Luke Combs**, **Darius Rucker**, **Lady A** and **Willie Nelson**. It was recorded between country capital Nashville and Hawai'i, with producers **Riddim Up Kahi**, **Tyler Cain**, **J Vibe** and **Calvin Drumise**, and shaped by legendary Jamaican engineer **Errol Brown**.

"It's a very misunderstood genre" says Black of country, "But I think both of them go together. Reggae is known in Jamaica and country is known in America but a lot of them are very similar when it comes to melody patterns. The melodic and the vocal phrasing of country music and reggae music are very similar. Once you look past the stereotypical country pickup truck and alcohol and cowboy boots, you'll find a lot of similarities."

The timing couldn't be better for a reggae-country combo to drop. **Gramms Morgan**, who is based in Nashville, has been banging the drum for the shared heritage since his 2021 album **Positive Vibration**. And now **Beyoncé's Cowboy Carter** has brought the conversation around country's black roots, formerly the preserve of musicologists, into the mainstream.

Angus Taylor, a student of these historic links, jumped at the chance to talk to **Kaya** about his early life in Jamaica, his love of cover versions and why 100 years of segregationist marketing is finally being challenged.

You were named after the Bob Marley album *Kaya*. Is it true that your dad heard the name from Bob and decided to name you before the album came out?

Yeah, it came out in July 1978. My dad was told that the album was going to be called **Kaya**. After I was born I was unnamed for a while. It was like *"What do I get named?"* And my dad was like *"Kaya"*. I didn't think that years later it would have the significance. Because you don't sit there and be like *"Great, what was I named after?"* *"Marijuana."* *"Okay!"* But the significance is great. Looking back on it now the historical value of who my dad is, it really works.

Because we're talking about how the links between country and reggae are ignored, it's worth saying that *Kaya* was an album that was misunderstood by rock critics at the time. Coming off the back of *Exodus* it all felt a bit too soft and they didn't get that

the production was aimed at people using herb.

Kaya was really a love song album. From what I read in **Chris Blackwell's** book a lot of the songs were recorded in those [Exodus] sessions and while he was in Exile. He wanted to put out a love song album. That's why he came out with **Survival** right after. You come from **Exodus** talking about *"movement of Jah people"* and all of a sudden you're talking about *"my woman is gone"*. It's kind of like *"Okay, which direction are you going?"*

I think the production on *Kaya* is amazing. It was the first Bob album I heard and really got into.

Yeah, if you listen to the production value of it, the engineering side of it too, there are a lot of ear candy moments - like *"How did they get that sound? How is that possible?"* If you really sit down with headphones and study, that album is ahead of its time.

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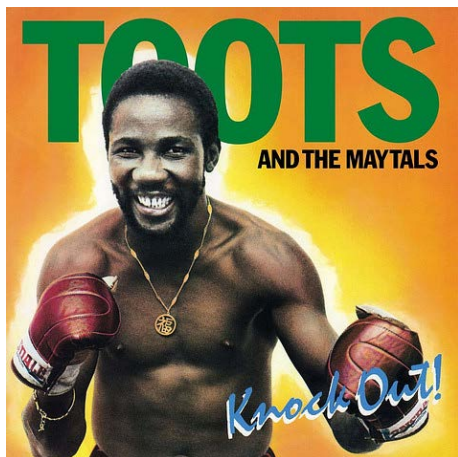


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Your dad took some great photos of Bob as well as album covers like Rita Marley Who Feels It Knows It, Toots' Knockout, Black Uhuru Guess Who's Coming To Dinner and Red, Gregory Isaacs' Night Nurse. How aware were you of that growing up?

It's like you flip through your dad's collection or you walk in record stores and you can't really tell anybody that your dad is **Johnnie Black** or your dad took this picture. Because they'd look at you and go "Yeah right, what are the freaking chances?". So I was aware of it but if I bragged about it, people wouldn't take me seriously. Until they put two and two together which wasn't until high school. I don't know if you know that I was in high school with **Collie Buddz**? There's a funny story about how I started realising who my dad was. Because there were a lot of Jamaicans and Caribbean people in this boarding school in Florida. And I was friends with **Duckie Simpson** of **Black Uhuru**. We would call each other and talk about music. And this is when all my friends were listening to **Black Uhuru, Red**. I said "I know Duckie Simpson of Black Uhuru" and he goes "Yeah, whatever". And I was like "No, I know him". My mother and dad divorced when I was young but I would go to Jamaica on spring breaks and summer breaks. So I went

to Jamaica and came back with a signed autographed album. And I guess from that moment on people kind of took me seriously. Actually **Collie Buddz** and I were in a high school band together. Now, we follow each other on Instagram and it's kind of full circle because we know and work with a lot of the same producers.

Which parish in Jamaica were you born in and where did you grow?

St Andrew, and then up in the mountains where my dad is still. To this day, he is up past Golden Spring. Up in the hills, in the countryside, in a very remote location. Everybody asks "Where is your dad now?". I left Jamaica when I was 4 years old. But I would go back every summer to visit my dad. I'd spend some time up there and go to **Reggae Sunsplash** and absorb that kind of life.

In 1982 you moved with your mum to France. What are your memories like of France in those early years?

When it came to France my vivid memory of exposure to music was having a piano. My grandmother's piano was brought from Jamaica to France. And I would go self-taught on the piano, trying to figure out melodies. I'd raid my mother's records and try and emulate that.

Meanwhile on those summer trips to Jamaica, your dad was very close with the organisers of Reggae Sunsplash. If Bob Marley effectively named you, then Dennis Brown at Reggae Sunsplash showed you your musical calling.

That was a pivotal moment, standing on the side stage, hearing **Revolution** by **Dennis Brown**, seeing the crowd reaction and just being like *"I think I want to do this."* This was either 1991 or '92. There were three artists that really stood out. **Lucky Dube, Ziggy Marley and the Melody Makers** and **Dennis Brown**. And you know with **Sunsplash** you go from night to day? It's night until morning. So I would kind of get lost in **Sunsplash**. I could get all-access passes and roam everywhere. So I was in the side stage, in the front row, studying all these greats.

Did you ever have any interest in photography or was it more about the music itself?

Photography was never my thing. That was my dad's thing. I was more in the sonic. I would just put headphones on and bury myself in the music. Where my dad was about the visual side, although he did have a sonic

side of how he listened to music, I really took to the sonic side of music. My mother saw something in me from the beginning. She saw my grades were getting better in school when I was in music. It gave me drive and determination and purpose. So she financed all my musical ambitions, paid for guitar lessons, piano lessons, voice lessons, acting off Broadway in New York. And then I listened to **Paul Simon Graceland, Cat Stevens'** greatest hits, **Teddy Pendergrass**, and then all of a sudden reggae started peering its head. It was one of my friends who figured out who my dad was and said *"You have a story to tell. This story needs to be told"*. I started out dipping a toe into the deep end and then finally jumping in and saying *"I'm immersed in this now, there's no going back"*.

How did you end up moving from France to the US?

My mom works for the United Nations. She had a contract every four to six years so we were always moving. We moved to France first and then we moved to New York, did a little stint in Barbados and then moved back to New York and that's how I ended up in the States.





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I interviewed David Rodigan many years ago and I asked him this question. Do you think that children whose parents moved around - Rodigan's dad was in the military - are more likely to become entertainers? There's something about the need to connect with people and make new friends quickly.

I think it's resilience and also boredom. (laughs) Because you're moving around so much so you don't become the cool kid. You don't really have long-term friends, so you just have to sit there and entertain yourself.

"OK how am I going to entertain myself? I'll pick up an instrument". And then that turns into "Hey, I'm going to do this". Everybody I know just spent some time in a room. I'm sure David Rodigan played around with record players and then started doing soundclashes. So I think it's because you spend a lot of time not having that option of long-term friendships. So music becomes your own entertainment. For me I would just get absorbed in the music. I would be like, ok I'm going to study this music, and

then I would pick up a guitar and I'd start figuring out the song and then I'd figure out the songs on the piano. So I think it's a lot of boredom and a lot of loneliness. And resilience. When my mum put me in boarding school that really taught me discipline. And I'm grateful for it.

How did you become a recording artist? You released a single in 2015 *Nothing To Show* with Sha Sha Jones and Mauricio but I guess you've been doing stuff before that?

I started out in bands. I actually got fired from and left a couple of them. Your typical local bands that were not doing much with their time and I saw myself on a different level in terms of discipline. I really took it seriously and I think I pissed a lot of my band members off. I just up and left a lot of my bands. Listen, I'm off to do something else because this is a waste of my time.

Nothing to Show was... I don't know if you remember the 90s band **Color Me Badd**? The producer **Hamza Lee** is the person that produced *I Adore Mi Amor*. That just happened through networking. Then I did a couple of EPs and a couple of songs but my pivotal moment when I started realizing that this could be something real is, one of my biggest influences is **Matchbox Twenty**. I've been in contact with the lead guitarist of **Matchbox Twenty** off and on. I just hit him up one day and said "*Hey, bucket list is to have Kyle Cook of Matchbox Twenty play on my record*". The next thing I know I get a message back saying "*Alright, let's go, let's make it happen*". I stopped and freaked out in my car for a minute, stared at my phone and went "*Did that just really happen?*" **Burn For Me** was recorded in Nashville and **Kyle Cook** of **Matchbox Twenty** came down. One of your musical heroes comes down and plays on your record. And it's like "*Dude, I grew up listening to you!*" Hearing him on my record, I get emotional even talking about it. It's like I still have pinch-me moments. And then working with **Errol Brown**, that's another pivotal moment.



Errol Brown is a hugely important engineer in Jamaican music. He was at Treasure Isle and then Tuff Gong. The last time I saw him was last year in Slovenia and he was the touring engineer with Steel Pulse. How did you start working with him?

That's another one of the pinch-me moments. Like you, I studied. When I started really listening to **Bob Marley Survival** like "*How did they come up with that sound? What is it about Bob Marley's Uprising that has that specific sound?*" At the time I didn't know what an engineer did. And then my dad was in the **Uprising** sessions. With **Bob** and **Errol**. So one day I was in **Tuff Gong** working on something, and **Roland McDermott**, who has worked with **Ziggy Marley** in the **Melody Makers**, said "*How do you feel if Errol Brown comes to mix the song?*" And I'm like "*What? Errol Brown? Yeah!*" He came down, he mixed one of the songs that's unreleased and ever since that we had a working relationship. And he's one of my dear friends. **Errol** is one of those forgotten treasures. A lot of people don't get enough credit but that man is so necessary. **Night Nurse** and so many early records of reggae music. It's the **Errol Brown** sound. So I'm always hitting him up because I want that sound. I'll send him a session and he'll mix it. And to have something like that at your disposal. It's hard

to get **Errol Brown** to work on your music. So when you have **Errol** in your back pocket, the stuff on the album **Country Covered In Reggae** that he's worked on...

I saw him in the credits mixing If I Told You and recording What If I Never Get To You. He recorded and his son Shane mixed Mendocino County Line.

It's funny because I'm an independent artist. So I'm working on a song in Nashville and in walks **Errol Brown**. And to me he's a dear friend. Yeah, this is **Errol Brown**, no big deal. It's like my dad. But all the engineers are on their phones literally going "*You'll never guess who is in my studio right now. Errol Brown*". So to have that at your disposal is one of those dreams come true.

What about guitarist-producer Tyler Cain - who produced If I Told You and Mendocino County Line? How did you link with him?

This was before he had worked on **Gramps Morgan's** album **Positive Vibration**. This is how funny social media is. His Instagram popped up. I read more about him and at the time a lot of people were saying to me "*You have that country sound*". So I thought "*Okay, when people think of country, where do they think of? Nashville*". So we got talking, I hopped on a flight, went down to the studio, worked on a track, came back and we've been working together now for like four, five years, maybe six. I didn't know he was going to work on **Gramps Morgan's Positive Vibration**. So it's being at the right place at the right time.

But Country Covered In Reggae isn't your first visit to cover versions. You covered the Commodores Easy in 2021 produced by J Vibe and I think Tyler Cain plays guitar on it.

Yeah, he did.

Mystical Faya

MY SONG

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And you also did a cover of Wham's Last Christmas.

Yeah, and **Errol Brown** actually mixed that song [*Last Christmas*]. *Easy* was one of those testing the waters kind of things because I was figuring out the whole country thing. Because when people think of *Easy* they think more of an urban song. It's a black-influenced song but there's a lot of country in it. So that was seeing how I'd sound on covers. So I was like "*Ok, I can kind of see how this works*".

Cover versions are tremendously important in the history of Jamaican music. In the 40s and 50s sound systems played American records and scratched the names out so other sound systems couldn't see what they were. Once we got to the early 60s they were trying to create their own versions and that's where blue beat and ska came from. A lot of these songs were covers. Songwriting really took off with Joe Higgs, Bob Andy and John Holt during the late ska, rocksteady era. So

reggae music and cover versions are deeply intertwined. And many of those cover versions were country.

Yeah, it really goes into the roots and the history of it. Like wow, how do country and reggae go together? And they do if you go deep down into it and you understand the history of it. Like you said, in the early days they would listen to American radio and they would do their reggae version. They call it a do-over. Sometimes it sounds better than the original. And people discover it through reggae music. People will listen to it and be like "*Wow that's a cover?*"

Two examples are No No No by Dawn Penn which originally was a Bo Diddley song. And Good Thing Going by Sugar Minott, where most people don't even know that's a Michael Jackson song, because everyone's heard the Sugar Minott version.

Exactly. And the list goes on. Even now, it's not really a country song, but **Romain Virgo** does a **Michael Bolton** song. I listen to it

and I think “*This sounds so much better than the original*”. So it continues. Here’s another perfect example. It’s not really reggae but **Tracy Chapman *Fast Car***. **Luke Combs** did a country cover of it and it made **Tracy Chapman** win a country award. Everyone was telling me “*Oh you should write your own original stuff*” and I’m like “*Yeah that time will come*” but you have the two kinds of artists. You have the people that don’t mind singing other people’s songs. Or you have the people that only want to do originals. I chose to start out doing a lot of country covers.

How did you choose the songs for this project? What made you decide to do those particular songs?

A lot of them are my favourite songs. Songs where I said “*I want to do this song because it’s significant*”. Like **Darius Rucker**, being a black artist in country music. Black country artists, that’s how it started. You’d have to look it up but one of the first commercial country artists was a black man.

Charlie Pride?

There you go, **Charlie Pride**. Thank you. I wanted to educate people in terms of the listening journey. *If I Told You* by **Darius Rucker** and then if you look further back they’d be like “*Oh, okay Darius Rucker has a song with Charlie Pride. And Jimmie Allen. And they’re all three black artists*”. So it’s kind of a journey. And then there’s **Willie Nelson** who covered the **Harder They Come**.

And he’s quite the herbalist as well!

Exactly. So it’s really digging deeper. You can go to like **Scotty McCreery**, who I think is the most recent one I have on the album. *I Love You This Big*. And then you have everything in between. **Lady A** and then I have the song with **Willie Nelson** and **Leanne Womack**. I did that with **Nikki Burt**, who is a well-versed female vocalist in Jamaica, who sang with so many artists.

Your 2018 EP *Everything To Me* had quite a pop rock sound. Now you’re doing country covers in reggae. In another interview with *Spotlight Conversations* you said you were “always in development”. Would you say you are quite a free spirit, musically?

Yeah, I’m always trying new things and I’m not afraid to jump into something. For instance *The Kind Of Love We Make*, when my producer was working on the rhythm I was like “*I don’t know how this is going to work? But I’ll try. I’ll do my best and come up with something*”. And it actually turned out to be my number one song on Spotify. How? I don’t know. Here’s a perfect example. When **Maxi Priest** recorded *Wild World* with **Sly and Robbie** he was saying “*I’m not doing that song! I don’t want to do that song*”, he said something in an interview. And then ended up being one of his biggest ones. And I think that’s what happened with *The Kind Of Love We Make*. You put out things and you’re like “*Okay, they like that song*”. Whereas you’re like “*I like that song*” and that song ends up doing nothing. Trust your producer. That’s what I’d recommend to people. A good producer will say “*I know where you need to be. And I’m going to get you there*”.

The producer was Riddim Up Kahi.

Riddim Up Kahi who worked with the **Marleys**. That just happened by accident. That’s how networking happens. **J Vibe** put me in touch with **Kahi**. And I put **J Vibe** in touch with **Errol Brown**. That’s how the industry works. It’s a circular motion.

I read an interview with your dad where he said he refocused his photography from taking photos of reggae artists to shooting nature more. And your dad’s done the cover picture for this project?

Yeah, so I was thinking “*How do I portray *Country Covered In Reggae**”? I’m a very philosophical person and sometimes I go so deep that people are like “*You could come up for air a little bit*”. Not everybody’s going to get it. I didn’t want to do your typical

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pickup truck cowboy boots, cowboy hat kind of thing. I wanted the people to be like “*It’s the country. It’s a walkway near my dad’s house in Jamaica and it’s really country*”. In Jamaica that’s what we call country. You live “*up country*”. It’s a walkway and I wanted a picture that was like “*Your journey is what you make it. The road is where you take it. The road will lead you to wherever you need to be*”.

I want to go a bit deeper into the history of country and reggae. I saw a photo of Miss Lou on your dad’s Instagram. And the history of country and reggae goes right back to the Miss Lou era. Before Jamaican music and culture was broadcast on the radio it was only foreign music that was played. A lot of country artists like Jim Reeves, Marty Robbins. Bob Andy covered Joe South Games People Play, Pat Kelly covered John Denver Sunshine, I think Dennis Alcapone was on a sound system El Paso named after a Marty Robbins song. Robbie Shakespeare was a huge fan of westerns. So the country thing stretches right back to the very beginnings of Jamaican recorded music.

If you listen to a lot of **Bob Marley** early stuff, if you listen to *Concrete Jungle* there is slide guitar.

On the international mix of the Catch A Fire album.

Because it was overdubbed by **Wayne Perkins** who played slide guitar in it. And the same thing with *Rock It Baby*. And **Wayne Perkins** being a country guitarist, there is a story about how he was sitting in the studio with **Chris** and he couldn’t figure out what he called “*the one*”. You know? The rhythm. **Chris** was like “*Just sit with it, just sit with it*”. And he said something in him just clicked and he said “*Okay, roll tape*”. And he came out with that. So I want to educate people with country music. There is a commonality. Because I think a lot of people in Jamaica kind of shy away from country because they hear the twanging, that steel guitar, and it sounds foreign to them. They

don’t know how to palate it. But if people just listen to it, it has a historical value and a historical meaning especially in Jamaican music.

But I wanted to go even deeper than that. Because you’ve already touched on people like Charlie Pride. I’ve got a book that’s called Faking It, The Quest For Authenticity In Popular Music by Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor. And in the first chapter they argue quite convincingly that in the US in the 19th century, early country and blues were just two sides of the same music. It was only in the 20th century when the recording industry started that the two musics got separated off. With Old Time being marketed as white music and Blues being marketed as black music. I’ve got another book here called African Banjo Echoes In Appalachia by Cecilia Conway. And there’s an argument that the banjo came from Africa and was inspired by West African instruments. And as you know, the banjo was used in mento in Jamaica. So there is a real link that is not coincidental between the music.

Right.

In the past people have tried to bring country in reggae together. Trojan Records released a box set of old country reggae covers. VP did the Reggae’s Gone Country album where Busy Signal did a great version of The Gambler. But outside of people who are specifically interested in the connection, these albums didn’t massively cross over. You’re fighting against 100 years of marketing. Since that time Gramps has been working to highlight the connection between reggae and country in Nashville and now Beyoncé has done a country album. So do you think the time is right now to educate people?

To answer your question I think it’s all about education. It’s about looking back and seeing the commonality. I mean **Ray Charles**, like you said talking about segregation and country music and R&B, *Georgia On My Mind*. He refused to play in Georgia and he said “I’m only returning if you stop segrega-





tion". And I think now is the time. I think a lot of people do it without education. I think there's a lot of miscommunication with the artists. Take **Beyoncé**, she's getting a lot of flack and bad publicity. Because country artists are like "*You've got to earn your way up. You've got to earn your way into the country scene*". It's one of those things where if you put the two and two together and stop the whole segregation thing and actually listen for what it is, there's a lot of urban music in country music. So I think now is the time to bring people together and take out the racism part of music. And I think melding reggae music and country music, predominantly a black form in Jamaica with predominantly a white form in America, it's about putting the two melting pots together. And trying to mix oil and vinegar. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. It's all about trying to get people to talk, communicate and bond through music.

I think despite the criticisms Beyoncé's getting, she has brought this idea of country having black roots into the mainstream and the timing is good for your project.

While timing is everything. I started on the album about 2 years ago and **Beyoncé** wasn't even a thing that I was thinking about. To me it was just an idea. I'd gone to **Tyler** and said "*I have these songs, what do*

you think about a country album?" And he was like "*Yeah, I'm down for it*". Four songs turned to six songs and six songs turned to eight songs and there you go. And before you know it I had eight songs of country. And here we are rolling out album two.

So I hear that once Country Covered In Reggae is out, you're working on a pop covers project?

I'm working on a second album and this is going to be more pop songs. That is hopefully going to come out in 2025. You should have the first single early next year. I'm gonna have the country album do its run but I'm already halfway done with the second album. I went to Hawai'i to record the vocals with **Riddim Up Kahi** and **Calvin Canha** from the reggae band **Through The Roots**. He produced a lot of those songs. And then the plan is to go to Jamaica in the summer to work with a lot of engineers out there. There are going to be a couple of surprises on that album if everything works out. It's going to be one of those historical journeys of pop songs from the 60s to 2000s. It's going to take you on a journey of pop music and how it relates to reggae music. And the name of the album, get this, is going to be **Dis Covered**. Like playing on "*dis*" how Jamaicans say "*this*" and then the word "*covered*". Like "*this is covered*".

KAYA BLACK - COUNTRY COVERED IN REGGAE

Kaya Black Music - June 21, 2024

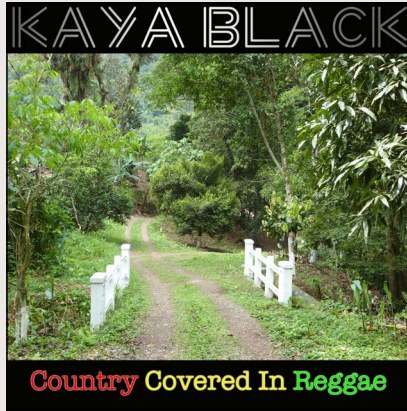
One of this writer's pet musical dislikes is sadly country music. However, once he heard that **Kaya Black** had taken eight tracks from the genre and turned them reggae, his mind changed.

Country Covered In Reggae, released via **Kaya Black Music**, sees **Black** take on a host of modern country tracks - with some classic thrown in. Fittingly, he recorded most of the tracks in Nashville itself - and it shows, as the album is exceptionally well produced and finished.

The Kind Of Love We Make (originally performed by **Luke Combs**) and now featuring **Riddim Up Kahi** (who also produced) sees **Black** take this country track and up the BPM somewhat, while keeping the major melodic features like the rasping guitar line - and the breaks that marry perfectly.

Heaven, the **Kane Brown** classic, is here produced by **Calvin Canha** and sees **Black** work lower down his vocal register as per **Brown's** original. Of course, the reggae overtones are obvious but they enhance the RnB-led track and bring it further to life. *I Love You This Big* by **Scotty McCreery** is the ballad end of the country genre, and **Black** brings that to life perfectly with a highly pleasing vocal and some starker arrangement than the original.

Would It Kill You, a relatively unknown track originally performed by **Kyle Cook** from **Matchbox Twenty**, has production from **Canha** and sees **Black** take the meandering, soft rock original and turn it into something spectacular with its electric organ lilting across the top of a slowly burning



reggae backdrop. *What If I Never Get Over You* featuring **Mesia Deshawn** was originally performed by **Lady Antebellum** as a brisk country-pop cut. The choice is inspired, as here, production from **Tyler Cain** sees the track lend itself perfectly to reggae - with great vocals from **Black** and **Deshawn** too.

If I Told You (originally performed by **Darius Rucker**), produced by **Cain**,

is gloriously enhanced by some sparkling horns while the lilting keys are partially kept, and a rasping guitar is brought in. Vocally, it's a difficult line but **Black** handles it with aplomb.

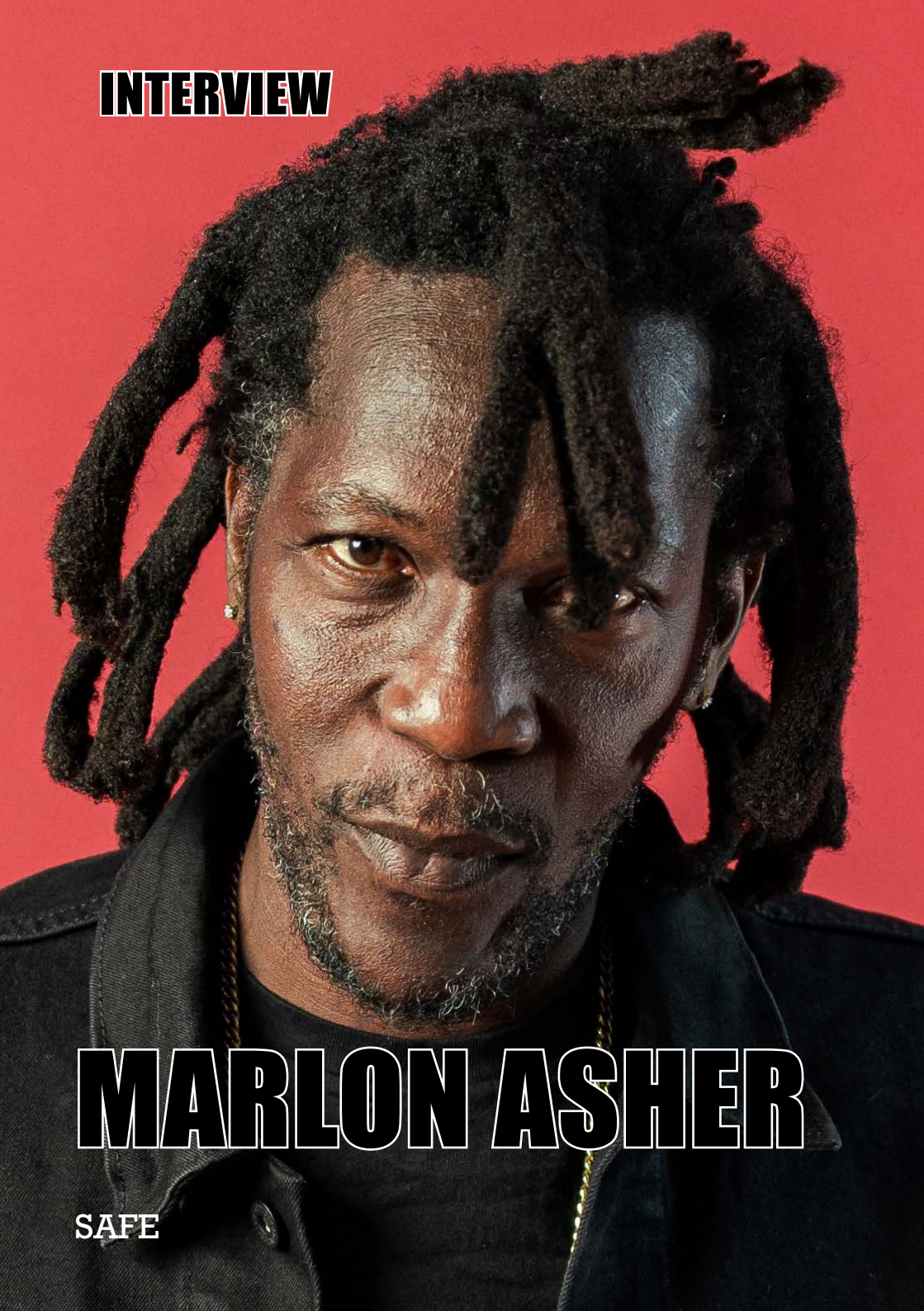
The **Willie Nelson** and **Lee Ann Womack** sombre duet *Mendocino County Line* is now featuring **Nikki Burt** and produced by **Cain**. It feels lighter and less foreboding with the reggae credentials - however, **Black** and **Burt** play well off against each other and the track pleases.

The album concludes with **Michael Ray's** modern country ballad *Get To You*. Produced by **Canha**, the original arrangement lends itself to a reggae reimagining - with the bubble rhythm and drums bringing urgency but the guitar keeping it grounded in Nashville. **Black** is brilliant again and it closes the album perfectly.

Overall, **Country Covered In Reggae** does what it says on the tin and more. **Black** is a stylish and accomplished vocalist and the excellent arrangements and engineering have produced a polished finish product. However, the genius is in the song selections - all of which cross to reggae brilliant. A surprisingly appealing project.

by Steve Topple

INTERVIEW



MARLON ASHER

SAFE

PREPARE FOR WHAT MIGHT BE

BY GARDY STEIN

PHOTOS BY JOSIAH LUKE PERSAD

His name is inextricably linked to the song that put him on the international map in 2004: **Marlon Asher** aka the *Ganja Farmer*. Still a crowd favourite whenever it is played, the tune is also more relevant than ever, as more and more countries decriminalise the use of cannabis, and there is an increasing demand for legally grown weed – farmers, rally round! The singer has since proven to be more than a one-hit-wonder, putting out several releases over the last 20 years: starting with **Unconditional Love** in 2008, **Marlon Asher** released the **Higher Learning Mixtape** in 2013, followed by **Illusion** (2015) and **Rebirth** (2019). As with the latter, he teamed up with **VAS Productions** for his newest album, one that was produced by none other than **Don Corleone**. The title **Safe** combines the artist's deep devotion to Jah, in whose embrace he feels forever protected, and his wish for a more peaceful time on earth.

In our first ever **Reggaeville** interview with the Trinidad & Tobago offspring, he lets us in on the creative process, some anecdotes with the featured artists, and his life as a family man:



Greetings, it's my honour to do this interview with you, Mr. Marlon Asher! Before we start talking about your new album, maybe you can give us a quick wrap-up of the last 20 years. What happened after your big hit Ganja Farmer? How did your career develop after that was released?

Give thanks for the opportunity! Well, for the last 20 years, I must say thank God for the progress that has been made. From humbly working on a construction site to having a hit song that stands the test of time... you know, after that song I started touring extensively. I'm still touring today, and I had the opportu-

nity to meet a lot of great singers that mentored me on the journey. The likes of **Sizzla**, **Capleton**, the big names! Meeting them as a fresh artist in the business back then was overwhelming for me at times, because I was a fan before I was a singer (laughs). So, I must say thank you to the entertainers that helped me along the way to perfect my career, my genre, my art form. Over the years I kept making music, because making music is very important to stay relevant. I got signed to a few companies like **Heat of the Tropics**, **Clear Port Entertainment**, and after that I got signed to my current record

label which is **VAS Productions**. They really took the music to a different level in the fact that they really focus on creating albums that could stand the test of time and making music that can keeps **Marlon Asher** in the limelight. So, since then I've been keeping myself busy making music, touring and juggling family and stuff in between.

I read that you received several awards, too?

Yes, I received the **COTT Award** in 2007. That's the collection company in Trinidad and Tobago, they recognised me. I just got an award from the government of Trinidad and Tobago for pioneering my genre and keeping Trinidad on the map. I got three awards from the Red Rocks in Colorado alongside **Slightly Stoopid**. You know, it's a huge venue, and when you get a sold-out show there, they give you an award with a little piece of the red rocks attached to it, so I have three of those. Also, I've just been nominated for

the **Caribbean Music Awards 2024**. So, yeah, I've been trying to do the things that are right for the music and hoping that it gets acknowledged, and so far, by the grace of God, it's been on the right track.

Nice! You are now currently located in Costa Rica, right? When did you move there, and do you plan to go back to Trinidad at some point?

It's only transitional! We just got some property in Costa Rica and we're now trying to do some renovation in order for the move in a couple years to come. It's very beautiful here, very similar to Trinidad, nice weather, there is a lot of wildlife and nature, so it's right up my alley! (laughs)

You mentioned family as well... on your Insta I saw a video of your son performing with you last year, and the caption said it was his first stage show. How old is he? Can you tell us about him?



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My son is 17 and he likes to sing R'n'B. He's got a lot of talent, you know, so I invited him to come on stage and sing one of my songs with me. He blew the crowd away and he's now thinking about reggae music, let's just say that.

Also on your Insta I saw that you met this little boy called Lake last year. You mentioned a possible collaboration, is something coming out any time soon?

Well, I haven't been around him for a little while, but he's a phenomenal youth. His ear for music tone is like no other I've ever seen, you know, he's on point with every note that he hears, he knows it from just hearing it. So yeah, he's upcoming and he got his own producing studio and... he's a little magician I would say, because he thinks like a great producer already, so definitely in time something will come along.

Now, turning to your new release, in collaboration again with VAS Productions. The title of the album is *Safe* - can you tell us about the concept behind this?

You know, the world is a place that is quickly becoming more and more violent. A lot of things are going on in the world, and this was a reminder to people that there is safety in our creator. Doing the things that God said to do keeps you away from the things that happen randomly in the world. So, prepare yourself, be safe, prepare yourself for the times that are coming. And remember that there is one that will always try to keep you safe, which is the Almighty, you can always trust in him.

Right! The album was produced by Don Corleon, who is one of the biggest producers ever coming out of Jamaica. How was that link made?

I'm personal friends with **Don Corleon**, you know, he's a good mentor to me musically. We've been friends for a few years, and he has been out of reggae music for some time. When we asked him to do a song for the album, he was like *"If I'm to come back into reggae and do it how I know it's supposed to be done, I just want to do it me personally, and not have all kind of different*

sound coming to the album!" He wanted the album to have one sound, one structure, not different producers with different ideas. He wanted to create the idea for the album and create the direction, so we agreed to that and he took his time and produced a well-rounded album.

Yes, big respect, it's beautiful, really! Let's first talk about the four songs which are out already. You have some great visuals out there, the first video was released a couple of months back, Strictly High Grade came out on #420, of course. Where was that video shot?

It was shot in Jamaica! I was in Jamaica for eight or nine video shoots at the same time. The company that recorded the video was from Jamaica, and they wanted it to be on the island, so I had to fly to Jamaica and get it done.

The song itself is another Ganja anthem, and in the video, the police persecute you. Is it still a problem where you live?

It's not a problem, but it's still hanging over a lot of people's head. There are a lot of people incarcerated, and this song was really to raise the awareness to the authorities in my country that the guys who are locked up for minor incidents are still doing time. I just wanted to raise our awareness so they can at least consider that, hence the idea for the video to show it could be nothing in the bag that you have, if you just look at it as medicine (laughs).

Is Ganja still illegal in Trinidad?

It's illegal, but it's decriminalised. So, you can have four plants, but people are still getting locked up because of it.

In Germany it was partly legalised in April, so you can grow up to three plants and walk around with 25 gram on you. It's getting better slowly, the world is learning!

I think over the years a lot of musicians were strong about the position of raising awareness, so I guess it must continue in order for things to free up and get naturalised.

Another great song is Plastic Smile where you sing about the fake attitude of some people, and that was also shot in Jamaica, I guess?

Yes, it was shot in Jamaica, and this song is about a lot of scamming and a lot of stuff going on in the world that people need to be aware of. You know, the plastic smile could be a lot of different things, it could be a person, it could be some situation you're going through, but it's something that people need to understand. These plastic smiles are there to strengthen you, because we can learn from things that confront us.

Also released already is an amazing feature with the one and only Sizzla Kalonji. You were on tour with him in Japan recently. Can you give us some ideas how that was?

It was a most wonderful experience! **Sizzla** has been my biggest mentor in reggae music. He often call me and say "*Yo, come to the Judgment Yard to hang out!*" My last album was recorded in **Judgment Yard**, so whenever I'm doing music, you can always find a song with **Marlon** and **Sizzla** because we hang out together a lot. Last year he call me up and say "*What you're doing?*" and I said "*I'm here, I have no shows.*" And I thought he wanted me to come to Jamaica, but he said "*I'm sending you a ticket, we're going to Japan!*" I was overwhelmed because I've never been to Japan! Getting there was a blessing for me, I had a great time, the people received the music with love and singing, it was a wonderful experience. I thank him for that, and I thank God for the opportunity!

And now you have another great song with him called Never See Us Fall which is empowering and talking about personal strength...

Yeah, it's about personal strength and growth, because a lot of times we tend to think that the other person is the reason why we're not getting by or not getting to where we need to go. But it's not wise to lean on things that bring you down, it's always wise to never let your problems get you down. When we say we never let us down, we're trying to improve our lives, something that will empower us from

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our own voice and our own words. I guess the way we receive it is how we want the world to receive it. Your inner strength is phenomenal, there is nothing stronger than the inner strength that you have, and you can always use that to enhance and elevate yourself.

The last one of those which are out already is Diamonds And Gold, and this features Tarrus Riley and Capleton, two other amazing artists. When did you contact them and invite them on the song?

The thing about **Capleton** and **Tarrus Riley**... you know, these are people that I look up to, and they appreciate the way I carry myself about when they are around. Me asking them to do a song with me wasn't that difficult I would say, because from when they heard that it's with **Marlon**, they immediately said "Yes, when is it happening?" This song has been nominated for the best collab for 2024, and I think this is the best collabora-

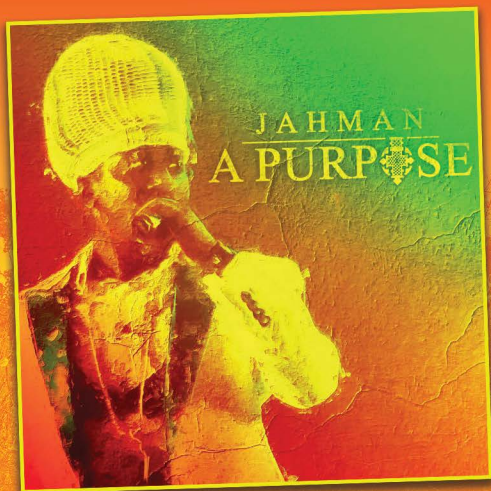
tion song for 2024, so it's always a pleasure to be amongst the greats, and I appreciate it, I must say thanks to **Capleton** and **Tarrus Riley** for showing the love!

The video looks like a lot of fun, too!

The energy level of **Capleton** is... it grows on you, because he has a lot of energy and whenever he performs, he gives that energy. If he's shooting a video, that energy comes out, so everybody just had to feed off of his energy and it was a success.

I can imagine! In the video, you see some youths who rob people, who take away money and jewellery and everything, so that's the theme of the song, right?

Yeah, this is actually something that is happening extensively in my country. I mean, it's happening all over the world, but extensively in Trinidad and Tobago where the youths are craving that gold and diamonds,



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and it's not that they're working for it, they're acquiring it from other means. We wanted to highlight that you have a soul to think about, and there is judgment and there is karma... We wanted to just try and reach out to the youths to let them have this awareness that you can't just do that. You got to acknowledge the good in people, you got to acknowledge the good that God do for you so that you can get by in life. This is what this song really wanted to portray, as the people in the country were kind of being in unrest with the violence and stuff.

And which of the four songs would you say is getting the most attention right now? I saw that you already did some radio interviews and everything, so which of the songs you would say is out there the most?

Well, since *Strictly High Grade* came out, it's been rocketing when it comes to views, so I would say that's the one that is doing really good right now. But also *Diamond And Gold* is a song that I think would carry on for a while, because of the message and the concept.

Those are not the only features on the album, though, there are some other great guests. The first track for instance, the introductory song is with Luciano, the Messenger! That's a beautiful acoustic piece, Nyabinghi kind of vibe, called Give Praises. How was that created? How did that song come about?

Most of the songs were created in **Don Corleon's** studio. **Don** made the music and he also had a writer jotting down ideas for the song, so that when the artists get the music, they would also get an idea of the song. So, the collab was made by me going to **Luciano** in Jamaica and asking him to be on the album. I wanted to show my growth and my success over the years, and also the friends that I made, so I went and he was like... he's full of energy, he's a much younger guy than his age, you know, he's young at heart. It was a blessing to get that track, because **Luci** is... let's say he's a personal guy, he is not too much out there, he's more up in the hills. So, it was a blessing for him to leave his quarters and come down to actually do a recording with me, and after the song was recorded, he was like "When is the video being shot?"

and I said “*Tomorrow!*” and he was like “*I’ll be there!*” (laughs).

Okay, great! So, Give Praises is the first song of the album, and the last song called King’s Highway and then Safe, the title track, is in the middle of the album. All of them sing about Jah in one way or other – was that a conscious decision to put one in the beginning, one in the middle and one at the end?

Yes, it was a conscious decision to keep that God-thought in people’s head throughout the album. We wanted people to really acknowledge what God had in them, in the people, that reason in mind that you have, that extra love that you feel for something that is happening... just that God is in people, we wanted to keep that throughout the album.

Then there’s another feature you already mentioned in the beginning, Slightly Stoopid, they join you on a song called I&I. How long have you been in touch with them?

They made me an official member of the **Slightly Stoopid** group. So, wherever they play, I could just show up and they will have me perform.

That’s so cool!

They were instrumental in me getting my work visa for America, so they are like brothers from different mothers to me.

You also did a track with Masicka called In The Hills, which is a bit surprising because he is more on the Dancehall side of things normally... How was that link made?

That link was made by **VAS Production**. After **Masicka** heard the song, he was like “*I’ll do this verse in 20 minutes. I just gotta eat first!*” (laughs) The song is called **In The Hills**, you know, and **Masicka** told us that he would show a different side of himself that people, that the world has never seen. He said people know him for Dancehall and they don’t know that he can do conscious music, so he wanted to show a different side of himself. We kind of choose that song so he could show his versatility.

Nice! In the song you say that in the hills is your happy place. Is that really where you find happiness?

Yes! Even in Costa Rica, I’m up on the mountains now (turns camera to show surroundings). This is where I find peace, you know, with nature all around.

Yes, I can relate! I like to be at the beach too though...

The beach is where I go to have some recreation with the family. I like the beach cause I could always listen to waves crashing and relax. It’s a different kind of relaxing on the beach. So yeah, I do love the beach too.

The last feature on the album is with J Boog on Call Me, which is a love song. Can you take us through the creation process?

Well, we wanted to have the album well-rounded and we realised that we didn’t have a love song on the album, so we contacted **J Boog** and asked if he would like to be there. He was sick at the time, so we couldn’t record him right away, but one day he got up from his sick bed and said “*I’m doing the recording today!*” I applaud him for that because the vocals came out good, although he was sick, so I do appreciate him taking that time.

You mentioned you shot several videos in Jamaica, so which of the other songs will have a video?

There’ll be a video for the **Luciano** combination, there is a video for **Safe**, we have a short interlude to preview the album, it’s called **On My Way** and I’ve got a video for that, too. **Revolution** has a video as well... I think there’s only three or four songs that don’t have video right now.

Speaking of Revolution, the lyrics say that it’s time to plan it, that we have to step up. What are those plans you’re talking about?

We all look at the news these days and we see injustice going on around the world. The real revolution is the reconstructing of the youths’ mind and their thinking, you know. We could always think that we can rebel

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against stuff, but I think the best way to rebel against stuff is to ensure that the next generation don't fall into the same brackets or category that we are in. So, the revolution is really the education of the next generation. Let's revolutionise them and get them prepared for what might be.

And what do you think is the most important lesson that the youths of today have to learn or become aware of?

I think the most important is self-awareness, cause the youths don't know of their power, they just abuse it, you know? The most thing the youths have to know is self-worth and self-awareness. Because they're giving away their lives, like they're worth nothing, and that's an issue because the youths are the future and we don't want a future where everyone is afraid of themselves.

You also mentioned this interlude, *On My Way*, and I think it's a great way to wrap up this interview. Where are you on your way to, what future plans do you have?

Well, I think the way that I'm on is keeping on that path of righteousness. The way that I want to be on is the way of a messenger, bringing those important messages to the people that may keep them safe. Not by my will, but by the grace of the Almighty, and this *On My Way* is a song that speaks to my family as well. You know, I'm a family man and I'm always away from the family, always talking to them by phone, but I'm always coming home. Music is something I love dearly, and I love my family dearly, my wife, my children, you know? So I keep it real. I'm on my way, I'm coming home.

Will there be a release party?

I will have a release party and I'm kind of carding it close to the date of the release of the album. I think I want to go viral with this release party! (laughs) The same way that people anticipate the album, I am here sitting, anticipating the release of this album. (laughs) Because I love the music the same way, and I listen to it to inspire me and keep me uplifted right now, so it's a blessing to be able to hear the music.

And I really hope to see you in Europe again soon. We miss you! Would you like to add anything?

I just want to say, give thanks to the Almighty for the opportunity to make good music. Thanks to **VAS Productions, Don Corleon, Keely Keyz**, all the people that were vital in the creation of this album, all the artists too. And I want to say to the world to live in love, there is a need for love in the world, and if we have a little extra that we could share with someone that is in need, that would be much appreciated.

True. Thank you, Marlon! All the best for your album, for your family, for the people that surround you. Keep it up!

I appreciate it. It was a joy talking to you. Have a blessed evening!



MARLON ASHER – SAFE

VAS Productions - August 2024

Exactly 20 years after releasing his hit *Ganja Farmer*, Marlon Asher returns with an oeuvre called *Safe*. While this is exciting news, even more thrilling is the name of the producer behind the twelve tracks (plus the short interlude *On My Way*): Donovan “Don Corleon” Bennett, the mastermind of the early 2000s who has kept a low profile in reggae music recently.



Here, they join him on the melodious *I&I*, another song giving praises to the Most High. While *J Boog* is an obvious choice for the love song *Call Me*, the final feature is a surprise given the deep, slow reggae sound of the instrumental that’s so different from his usual output. *Masicka* is, however, a perfect addition to the meditative *In The Hills*, a description of how weed should be enjoyed far

from city-life bustle as there’s “no interruption, nobody to kill my vibe.”

Listening to the opener *Give Praises*, a reduced Nyabingi piece featuring “the Messenjah” *Luciano*, we encounter two more outstanding characteristics of the release. For one, the consciousness and spirituality of the lyrics, coupled with deep faith that is mirrored in the final *King’s Highway* and in the title track, *Safe*. On the other hand, there is an impressive list of featured artists, most of which have accompanied *Marlon Asher* for years on his journey.

Thus, *Sizzla* is not only a respected colleague, but also a brotherly mentor who helped *Asher* with practical advice and even took him on tour to Japan recently. Together the two singers step boldly onto the laid-back, bassline dominated *Never See Us Fall*, encouraging us to “fix our crown” and keep pushing whenever obstacles come up. Equally powerful, *Tarrus Riley* and *Capleton* lend their well-known voices to *Diamonds & Gold*, a song complaining about the gangsterism that sweeps islands like Jamaica and Trinidad. “Why are their hearts so cold?”

Not cold but warm has been the welcome that US-band *Slightly Stoopid* has given *Marlon*, making him an honorary member of their group.

Speaking of: already a hit before the album was even out, *Strictly High Grade* has collected accolades ever since it was released on #420 and can be considered *the* *Ganja* anthem of the release. Along with *Diamonds & Gold* and *Never See Us Fall* it comes with a video produced by *Xtreme Arts*, telling the story of a man who’s chased down by police for a bag full of herbs. Also out on visuals is *Plastic Smile*, a warning against fake people who seem to have no morals whatsoever. “Where they come from I won’t go, I’ll be chilled where the wind blows.” Rounding off the album thematically, *Revolution* takes a fierce stance against Babylon, while *Stay* is a pledge to the lover who thinks about leaving.

The result of a fruitful collaboration between *Marlon Asher*, *Don Corleon* and *VAS Productions*, *Safe* is a superb album that gets better with every round of listening; testifying that the “*Ganja Farmer*” is much more than a one-hit-wonder. Big shout-out to *Matthew “Keely Keyz” Keaveny*, who wrote most of the lyrics, and *Kaylan Arnold*, who provided the sweet backing vocals!

by *Gardy Stein*

INTERVIEW

**LINTON KWESI
JOHNSON**

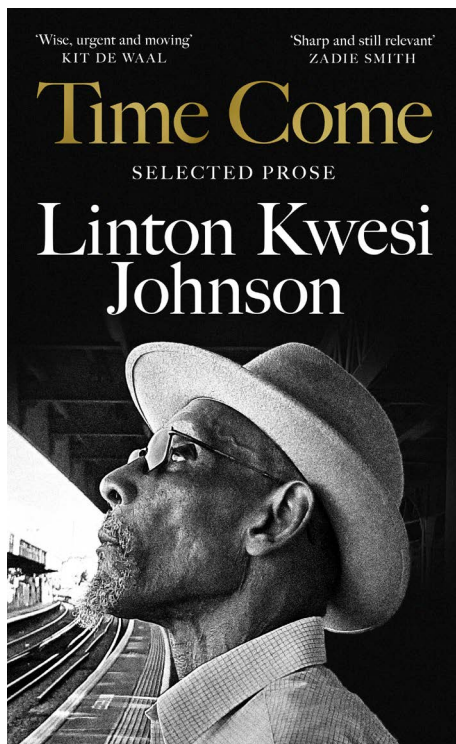
TIME COME

NEVER SAY NEVER

BY TOMAZ JARDIM
PHOTOS BY SUKI DHANDA

Few artists have the distinction of having their work define a genre. Yet **Linton Kwesi Johnson**'s name is synonymous with Dub Poetry, a term he himself coined to describe the new artform that emerged from the fusing of spoken word poetry with reggae music. **Johnson**, now 71, emigrated from Jamaica to the United Kingdom in 1963 and settled with his parents in the Brixton district of South London where he still resides. He has spent a career fearlessly chronicling the Black British experience and his generation's fight against racism and social injustice. It has been fifty years since the 1974 publication of **Johnson**'s first collection of poetry, **Voices of the Living and the Dead**. Not long after, **Johnson** began experimenting with reciting his verse over reggae rhythms in search of a wider audience for his poetry. With the assistance of Bajan-British master musician and producer **Dennis Bovell**, **Johnson** released his first album, **Dread Beat an' Blood**, in 1978. This album heralded the arrival of something altogether new: a lyrically-centred, dub-infused and unabashedly political and poetic form of reggae music. Subsequent releases on **Island Records**, **Forces of Victory**, **Bass Culture**, and **Making History**, further developed this new style, with songs that were as lyrically rich as they were instrumentally compelling. The searing social commentary of songs such as **Sonny's Lettah**, **Street 66**, **Inglan is a Bitch** and **Di Great Insohreckshan** came to define Dub Poetry, and to inspire a whole generation of others who have sought to express themselves through this revolutionary new medium.

Though **Johnson** rose to fame through his music, his 2002 anthology of written poe-



try, **Mi Revalueshanary Fren**, earned him far-reaching acclaim and numerous formal honours. Indeed, the book made **Johnson** one of only two living poets – and the only black poet – to have his work published as part of Penguin's *Modern Classics* series. In 2023, **Johnson** published his first book of prose, **Time Come**. The book, which draws together various writings on social, cultural and political issues over the last five decades, begins with a series of revelatory articles and reviews that **Johnson** wrote in the seventies about reggae music and its social significance. A paperback edition of the book appeared in April 2024.

You have spoken about the influence that the great DJs like U-Roy, I-Roy and Big Youth had on you, especially in helping you find your poetic voice. I'm curious to what degree the British sound systems may also have been important to your musical upbringing?

Sound systems were absolutely important, insofar as they provided the nexus for youth culture amongst second generation black youth from the Caribbean. Sound systems provided the nexus for the nurturing of a culture of resistance, because we were basically growing up in a racially hostile environment and the music afforded us an independent sense of identity. It was the only means through which we could socialise amongst each other and to assert our Caribbean-ness, our Jamaican-ness, to assert our roots, and to evolve an identity which gave us something to fall back onto, in the face of hostility. Town halls, youth

clubs, house parties - these were the venues until later on when sound systems got into clubs and so on.

Through your veneration of people like U-Roy, I-Roy, Prince Jazzbo, and other DJs, did you yourself ever attempt that type of performance, like toasting over records at a dance?

No, no, I don't think I was quick-witted enough!

I wanted to ask you about the circumstances that had you first put music behind your poetry, and about your working relationship with Dennis Bovell. What was it about Dennis that left you presumably feeling like he had the kind of insight to build the music to match your words? And how did this work? Did you present him with poetry and have him create music around it, or did you bring him something that was

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already fundamentally musical, that he then finessed in the studio with you?

Well, **Dennis Bovell** is a consummate musician. He lives, walks, talks, sleeps, eats music. I met him when I went to interview his band, **Matumbi**. They were playing at some club in London, and I was a freelance reggae journalist, or freelance journalist, full stop. And I'd known about him through the sound system world because he was the operator of **Sufferer's Hi-Fi** sound system. And they were based in Battersea. I'm from Brixton. But I think I heard him play at the **Metro Youth Club** up in West London. And then, when I was thinking of making a record, I talked to my friend from school, **Vivian Weathers**, who played bass on a couple of the albums. And it was he who said "*Well, of course you've got to use **Dennis Bovell** as the sound engineer, because these English sound engineers don't know how to record drum and bass properly to get that kind of Jamaican sound*". Because in those days, British reggae was looked

upon as being inferior to the real thing from Jamaica. So I got in touch with him when I got a deal with **Virgin Records** to do an album. And to be frank with you, I didn't know what I was doing! I had an idea of how I wanted the thing to sound. The basis of what I had was basically a beat and a bassline. And for the first couple of albums I did, I more or less sung or hummed the bassline to **Vivian Weathers** and then he played it.

Did you compose those basslines with an instrument in hand?

No, in the beginning, just in my head. Later on I would do it on the bass and simply play it for **Dennis** until he would say, okay, I got that. But before I even acquired a bass I would simply hum the bassline because it came into my head with the words. My first album, **Dread Beat an' Blood**, I happened to listen back to the other day and I found that it was a disaster! There were places where my delivery was out of sync

with the beat, but it was a learning process and **Dennis** gave us certain ideas about how to embellish the basic drum and bass track. And later on, he recommended musicians from his own band like the keyboard player **Webster Johnson** who played on **Forces of Victory** and **Bass Culture**. He was the **Matumbi** keyboard player. And he played stuff himself, like little intros, licks on his guitar, and a bit of keyboard as well. And we made **Dread Beat an' Blood**, but that was a learning process. I mean, that was like being thrown into the deep end of the river and told to swim. By the time I came around to making **Forces of Victory**, I knew I had a better idea of what I was doing.

With regards to embellishment, I think of a record like Making History, for instance, as a pinnacle of a record with such an incredible level of musicianship. Can you say something about the vision for making that record, and how you went about it?

Well, the music is built around the poetry. Everything is built around the basslines. That's the basis of my musical compositions, the bassline. Everything is constructed around that. And I think by then, I was able to play a little bit of the basslines myself. And of course, **Dennis** played them competently. And we would sit down and discuss, once we'd laid down the basic drum and bass, piano, organ and guitar tracks. **Dennis** and I would discuss what kind of arrangement we would put with it. I'd make suggestions about horn lines and stuff like that, and **Dennis** would say "Well, instead of that, why don't you do this?" And so it was a collaboration, the arrangements.

Another record to ask you about is LKJ In Dub, because there's almost a subtle irony to the critical acclaim it received, in that your words are actually stripped away. To what extent was that your project? Are you somebody who actually gets behind a mixing board?

I sit with **Dennis**. He does most of it really. "You like this? You like that?" I'd say yes or no. By then I'd worked up enough courage to actually touch the desk, to put in a bit of delay here, take it out there and so on. But it's mostly **Dennis's** work with a little bit of input from me really. It's mostly **Dennis's** ideas.

Thinking about the composition of your songs and poetry, do you tend to have an audience in mind when you write or when you made those records?

Me! If it sounds good to me, then you know, I think I can go with that. It has to satisfy me. With regards to the composition of those poems that became songs, I saw myself as a poet trying to work within an oral tradition and at the same time trying to find a bridge to the reader. I basically saw myself as a Caribbean poet working in a Caribbean tradition that drew from orality. You know, **Louise Bennett** was the mother of Jamaican poetry. So from the very beginning, I think I had the authority or the confidence to use the Jamaican language as the vehicle for my poetic discourses. So a Caribbean audience or a Caribbean readership or a Caribbean listenership would have been my focus.

That being the case, were you therefore surprised by how far your poetry has reached?

Absolutely! Absolutely surprised!

What do you think accounts for that?

The music! The power of reggae music. We wouldn't be having this conversation if it were not for reggae music. It's all about reggae music. In the beginning, with the inspiration I got from the reggae deejays, I thought that in combining my verse with reggae, maybe I would be able to reach a wider audience with my verse, instead of just writing poems and trying to get people to read publications or to see them in literary journals or magazines or the odd poetry reading in a community centre or a youth club. I thought,



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yeah, if I could put my voice with some reggae music, I would reach a bigger audience especially if the music sounded good and it was danceable, you know? I was just trying a thing, so to speak. And it worked!

I know in those early days you also opened for various punk acts, presumably playing for an almost exclusively white audience. How did they perceive you and what provided that apparent link between the punks and the British reggae scene?

Well, we have to look at it in the context of youth culture and black and white youth socialising together, and solidarity amongst the unemployed black youth and working class white youth, and marginalised white youth and so on. At the time, during the punk rock era, there was more possibility, or a democratisation, if you like, of creativity amongst youth. Everybody was trying to make a record. At that time, it seemed

as though you didn't have to be like the **Beatles** to make a record or the **Rolling Stones** to make a record. And punk was a medium for self-expression for a whole a whole generation of alienated youth, black and white. And it was also a time of anti-racist struggles, and there was solidarity between black youths and white youths. I think the punk era provided me with a space to have my own voice within that whole thing. And it wasn't just me. I mean, bands like **Steel Pulse** were around playing the same kind of venues, and **Misty in Roots**, for example. They did a lot of work with **Rock Against Racism**. I think **Rock Against Racism**, with the benefit of hindsight, played a very big part in bringing punk and reggae together.

Would you say, therefore, when you talk about British bands like Steel Pulse, Misty in Roots, and of course you're among them,

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that there was a common sentiment that you shared, which perhaps sprang from your collective experiences at that particularly unique moment in time?

Well, reggae music for our generation was the basis of our cultural identity and a way of connecting to our roots. Reggae music for people like me was the umbilical cord that connected us to our roots, to our ancestry, and to our families and so on. And the music that inspired us was rebel music, the rebel music coming out of Jamaica, music of protest and so on. And we could relate the sentiments that we were hearing in the reggae tunes coming from Jamaica to our own situation here in this country. So there was a sense of continuity and we all shared that, whether it was **Aswad** or **Steel Pulse** or whatever. And even though when lover's rock emerged, bringing forth a more 'romantic reggae' focused on boy/girl stuff and matters of the heart, the sound was still our sound, it was the Jamaican sound.

We have been speaking here primarily about Britain, but I'm curious what your reception has been like in Jamaica. Was your music distributed there? And did you perform there?

No, I wasn't really distributed there, it was a kind of word of mouth. Few people had ever heard of **Linton Kwesi Johnson**. And then when **Forces of Victory** came out, I got some airplay on **JBC**, the **Jamaican Broadcasting Corporation**, but not much. So amongst a few people in the music world, and in broadcasting, and some literary people - only they would have heard of me. But I mean, I never had a big following in Jamaica.

I know you read your poetry there, but did you perform there musically at any point?

Yeah, in 1979 or 1980 I did a couple of shows for **Peter Tosh**. **Peter Tosh** used to have a thing called **Youth Consciousness** every year. And I did one with him at the **Ranny Williams Centre** in Kingston and one at Hellshire Beach in St. Catherine.

How was that experience?

It was absolutely terrifying! I mean, the people were just standing there sort of looking at me, and I'm thinking that they must be wondering, "*Who is this guy, what's he on about?*" [Laughs]. **Herbie Miller**, who was responsible for spreading my name around in Jamaica and who was managing **Peter Tosh**, had invited me, and he said to me "Do six tunes". And so at the **Ranny Williams Centre**, I think I might have done three from **Dread Beat an' Blood** and three from **Forces of Victory**. And by the time I got to the fourth number, a well-known **JBC DJ** called **Baga Brown** - I think he was murdered some years ago - he said, "Come off the stage now, man! Come off now!" But he was the only heckler in the audience, so I just stood my ground and I just got through my set. Back in those days, I didn't have a band, it was backing tapes. And I just put my words to the backing. And they weren't used to stuff like that in Jamaica, it was like a new thing, but which later on became called 'playback', with people performing without bands. But it must have seemed weird to them at the time. Anyway, I got through the set, and I got kind of muted applause at the end of it. I survived! The second gig at Hellshire Beach, I was very well received. I did the same set and people liked it and I felt good about it. But that first show was... I mean, I was absolutely terrified! I mean, if they don't start pelting you with beer bottles and stuff, you know you've done an alright gig in Jamaica.

Forgive me if this question seems a bit tangential, but to me it relates to what we've been discussing and gets at the relationship between poetry and music that your work has straddled more explicitly than perhaps any other artist: What did you make of Bob Dylan winning the Nobel Prize for literature?

I thought it was wonderful because there are many people in the world of popular music who are great lyricists, whose lyrics

can stand as poetry and stand very well. Because the division between the written and the spoken is artificial; poetry only comes alive when you hear it, whether you're hearing it in your head or you're hearing it spoken. It's the hearing of the poem that makes it live and breathe. So I was pleased that someone like **Bob Dylan**, who wrote great lyrics, and whose songs captured the zeitgeist and that addressed the human condition in ways which were accessible, was recognised in this way.

I'd like to ask you some questions about your wonderful new book *Time Come*, and in particular, your reflections on reggae music and its place in history. I know you arrived in England in 1963 as a relatively young boy, really at the moment when Jamaica was embarking on a remarkable few decades of unparalleled musical creativity and output. How do you account for that explosion of creativity in Jamaica? Why then and why there?

I don't know if I have the answers to that [laughs]! It seems to me that there'd be a lot of different factors that contributed to that. Jamaican people are very creative. There's a whole heap of talented people in Jamaica and very strong folk traditions rooted in some African influences and a lot of other external influences. Jamaicans used to listen to American stations before we had our own radio stations. We used to pick up stations broadcasting out of New Orleans or places like that. So we were hearing American music and even though Jamaica is a little tiny island in the Caribbean, it was part of the modern world. And some of our musicians were schooled in Western traditions. **Alpha Boys School**, for example, played a crucial role in the birth of Jamaican popular music, because that's where a lot of our horn players got formal training, where they'd be playing classics, marches, film themes, and so on. So there were diverse influences - the influences from our African roots, the local Jamaican folk tradition, the European influences in the folk... I mean if you to listen to a lot of

Jamaican folk songs, you can hear a lot of Scottish and Irish influences, like the Scottish reel, the Irish jig and so on. Then there's the African-American music which came out of the plantation experience, which parallels the Jamaican plantation experience... It's all very complex. It's a unique melting pot out of which this sound came.

Well, they say "out of many, one people," maybe it's also "out of many sounds, one sound!"

Absolutely! I mean, it was a great big melting pot, with a lot of diverse influences which uniquely produced this sound.

In your writings on reggae, I get the impression that you saw yourself as a bit of an observer and a cultural critic looking in, rather than always as a part of the scene you were describing. Was that just the voice that you adopted for your writing or does that in some way reflect how you felt at the time?

You may be onto something there actually, because from a sociological point of view I guess you could probably call it 'sympathetic introspection.' I mean, I was always a great student of the music from when I was a kid, because I was learning so much about myself, coming here at eleven. I'd been already socialised in the Jamaican folk culture and so on, but there were things I didn't know, and I was learning about my own culture and my own roots from the music. So I wasn't just simply a reggae enthusiast. I was a serious student of reggae and I wanted to write about it with the same approach to it as a literary critic would to literature. So I guess stuff that I wrote is a result of those elements.

You write about Rastafari within the book with admiration, especially for its anti-colonial ethos, but it's not a movement that you joined. I wonder if you could say anything about how you saw the role of Rastafari in the 70s and how it intersected with, but also diverged from, your own outlook?

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Well, Rasta is crucial to the development of reggae music, both musically in terms of the Nyabingi drumming, and the anti-colonial sentiments which gave reggae music a unique ethos. I don't think you'd find any other popular music in the 20th century that was secular and yet with that level of deep spirituality. It armed reggae culture with a kind of a uniqueness in terms of dreadlocks, and the red, golden and green. And people began to remember, or even to discover, the ideas and the teachings of **Marcus Garvey** and the basis of anti-colonial resistance and anti-colonial sentiments. Rasta was crucial.

But it didn't strike a chord with you personally?

No, I grew up in the church like most Jamaican peasant boys from peasant families. Jamaicans are very religious people. And once I became politically conscious, I was leaning more towards atheism or agnosticism, and although I could identify with Rastafari and found it alluring, I couldn't bring myself round to the notion or feel comfortable with the idea that this man **Haile Selassie** was god. I also didn't think that repatriation to Africa as a whole-scale movement was something that was viable. I mean if people wanted to go back to Africa or go to Africa, then that was fine by me, but what was more urgent was gaining political, civil and political rights and freedoms, and to challenge the oppressive environments in which we live, and to fight for power - for black power, for people's power, for working class power. So I became a political animal and more or less abandoned any idea of the Christian ethos - that you're dying and you're going to heaven in Jesus' name, as **Bob Marley** says in one of his songs. I mean, I grew up taking all that for granted and then I broke with that completely. Once I discovered the part that Christianity and Islam played in the enslavement and oppression of black people, I rejected all religion. I was never hostile to religion, because I think it is futile to be hostile to religion because I think religion is something which is part of our human dimen-

sion, it's part of what makes us human - this need for a belief in something... I mean put it this way, there will always be god because god is the answer to all the questions that science can't answer.

You mentioned Bob Marley just now. I found some of the portions of your book specifically addressing Bob Marley particularly interesting, given you were writing from the perspective of the mid-1970s...

Back in those days, I was the only one who ever wrote anything critical about **Bob!**

Right! I wonder, however, if looking back fifty years later, you are any more forgiving in your assessments? For instance, you talk about the "unfortunate evolution" of the music of Bob Marley towards what you call "contrivance and vulgar eclecticism." Do you still see it that way?

No, I don't see it that way. I tell you what: I was a reggae purist one hundred percent. And I wanted the music to be accepted on its own terms. And I was pissed off by the idea that **Chris Blackwell** and other people in the business were trying to make it more palatable to a European or non-Jamaican listener or audience. Like in the early days, they'd put a lot of strings and stuff with **John Holt** to appeal to the British housewives, because he was singing nice, romantic love songs. But it was hard roots Jamaican reggae in the background. So it was kind of a diluting down for me, of the real authentic roots stuff. I was a reggae purist, and a self-righteous one at that. And of course, later on, I began to understand that **Bob and the Wailers** had incorporated a lot of American influences. They were inspired by groups like **The Temptations** and R&B music coming out of America. And they wanted to cross over and reach out to an international audience. So it wasn't alien to bring in rock and blues and other elements into their music. These were elements that they'd already been influenced by. My own outlook was significantly changed once I began to make records myself. You're in a studio making a record and you've laid



down your rhythm tracks and you think to yourself, well, there's a break there where nothing's happening. What would sound good there? Would a violin sound good there? Would the accordion sound good there? And then I began to see it differently, you know? But back in those days, I felt that this is our music, accept it on our own terms, rather than trying to muck about with it. But of course **Chris Blackwell** was a genius in the way that he made **Bob's** music more accessible to a global or international audience.

As I'm sure you're aware, there's the new biopic film *Bob Marley: One Love* out there. Have you seen it by any chance?

Yeah, I've seen it. I was a little bit underwhelmed by it. But I think for a younger generation of listeners who probably have just discovered **Bob Marley**, it will give them some kind of an 'in.' They'll learn something about the man and his music, even though it only covers two years of his life properly. But I found it a little bit underwhelming. I was so pleased, however, that the two Black British actors who played **Bob** and his wife, **Rita**, got the accents right anyway.

The opening chapter of your book quotes your own song, *Bass Culture*, to refer to reggae as "music of the blood, black reared, pain rooted, heart geared." You also write that the music "beats heavily against the walls of Babylon," and that "Jamaican music embodies the historical experience of the Jamaican masses." Would you still use this language to describe the music of Jamaica today? And if not, when did the music stop warranting that label?

By the eighties, the music stopped warranting that label, with the advent of the dancehall phenomenon. I mean, early dancehall, I loved early dancehall! You could dance to it. And there were some great lyrics, some very witty stuff that made you laugh and there was still an element of protest or social commentary. But then it sort of degenerated into purely libidinous sexual stuff - people talking about how big their cocks were and how

many women that they'd had and denigrating women and so on. That coincided with the end of the period of democratic socialism in Jamaica, and the new tenure of the Jamaica Labour Party. I don't know how these things work out. I haven't really thought about it deep enough, but that was a period of Reaganomics and Thatcherism, when economies were being restructured and the state was being shrunk however modestly at the time. But there seems to me to have been a whole shift away from the spirituality that was represented by Rastafari within the music, and a move more towards materialism, and the consumerist ethos took over from the message of peace and love and black liberation.

You also write about the decline of reggae as a soundtrack for this generation of Black British youth. I'm curious if you see any of the cultural vacuum that this has presumably created being filled with other art forms?

Well, it's one generation growing up and becoming adults and another generation emerging. So that music ended with one generation, and with a particular phase of our struggles for racial equality and social justice in this country, and the end of a particular phase in terms of our struggles to break down the colour bar and so on. If you look at Britain today, it's a different place completely from when I was writing all that stuff. I mean, we've been successful in integrating ourselves into British society and breaking down a lot of those barriers, so that the generation that came after didn't have to fight those battles. The things we had to go through weren't the next generation's preoccupations. But there's been a continuity in terms of different genres. Coming out of dub for instance, you had the drum and bass, you had jungle, you had dubstep, and even the grime music, which is the music of the black youth of today. So there's still that continuity, that link with reggae, the spoken word, and the rhythm, and the drum and bass track, and so on. So there's been change, but there's been continuity. What I find interesting is that even though the influ-

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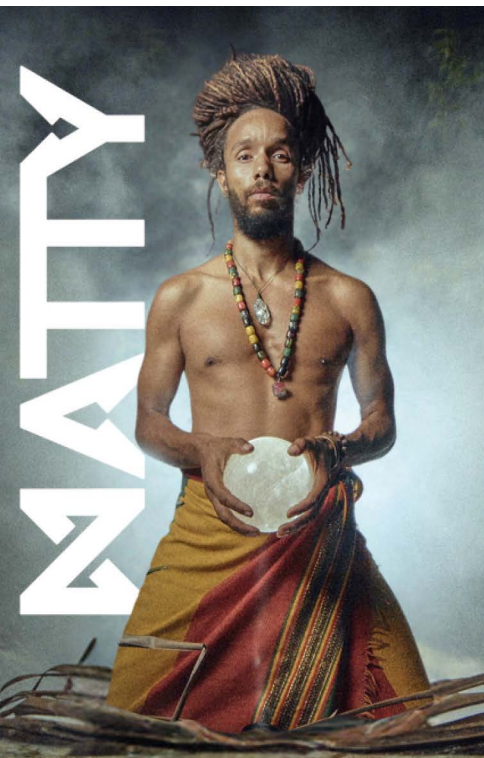
ence can be traced back to reggae, the grime music is mostly the product of the youth of second generation West Africans: Nigerians, Ghanaians and so on. It's their time now to make an impact on British popular culture in the same way that my generation did back in the days of reggae, and it's something new and something that sounds completely separate from the reggae tradition, but if you examine it from a historical or musical perspective, you can find that there is a continuity that can be traced back to reggae and sound systems and all of that.

You have described how your generation transformed British society through activism and insurrection, and that it was reggae that helped to propel that generation in its fight for social justice. Looking back fifty years later, would you say that reggae fulfilled the promise that you so clearly felt it had when you were writing in the 1970s?

Yeah, I think it did the job. I don't want to use too big a word, but it was 'phenomenal.' Phenomenal. I guess it was as important for that generation as protest music was in the Sixties, for the generation of the Vietnam War in America. Protest music played a big part in American politics back in the day.

Before we wrap up, I am always interested to know what the records are that have been seminal in the lives of influential musicians like yourself. Are there records that you played fifty years ago that you still pick up and play today? Do you still listen to a lot of music?

Not as much as I used to. I read more. God, it's difficult, because stuff that I listened to now that I was listening to when I was young would be like Miles Davis and John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk. In terms of Jamaican music, it would be the Skatalites and instrumentals; I still love Burning



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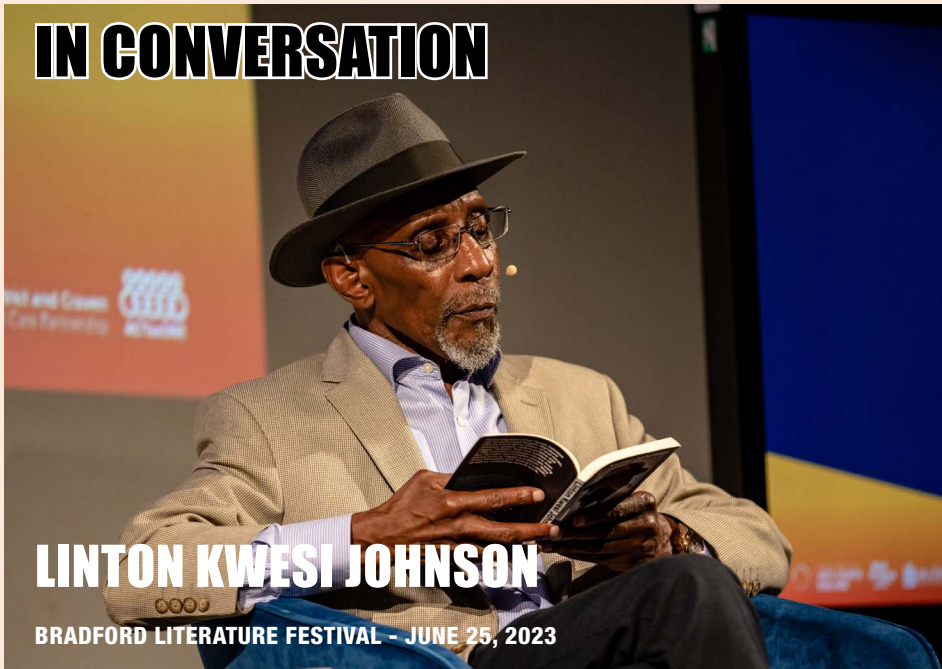
Spear. Bob Marley and the Wailers music I still listen to - it still sounds so fresh, so contemporaneous, as if it were made just last week! I still like to listen to **Toots** and the **Heptones**. A lot of the time when I'm playing old Jamaican music it's the Rocksteady stuff because that's the music of my youth when I was a teenager. You get nostalgic when you're an old man like me! You put on that old music. But I still love all the reggae greats: I love **Ken Boothe**, **Delroy Wilson**, all these people. But if I want to relax and chill out, I might put on **Straight, No Chaser** by **Thelonious Monk** or something like that. I even listen to a bit of classical music from time to time, on the radio. The station I listen to mostly is **Jazz FM**.

Finally, I've heard you say that you seldom write poetry anymore. What about future musical performance and recording? Is that also behind you or might we have the opportunity to see you in the future?

Well, never say never! I keep getting invitations. People want to bring me out of retirement, offering me *ridiculous* sums of money! And I'm thinking to myself, why didn't you offer me these monies when I was active, instead of now when I'm an old cripple and can't stand on the stage for two hours anymore because I've got arthritis! But I got a little bit tired of the adrenaline hit that you get performing, because it takes you too long to recover from. You know, you go and do a gig and everything goes right, and it's a kind of high that nothing can be a substitute for - not cocaine nor ganja nor anything else. It lasts for days and days, and it takes you so long to come back down to earth, it's too traumatic, man! But never say no. I still do poetry readings. And people keep offering me ridiculous sums of money to go back on the road, but I don't know. Let's see how the pension goes!

Okay, I'm glad to hear it's not a no!

IN CONVERSATION



LINTON KWESI JOHNSON

BRADFORD LITERATURE FESTIVAL - JUNE 25, 2023



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DON CORLEON presents FINALLY RIDDIM

Don Corleon Records - June 14, 2024

The name of **Donovan “Don Corleon” Bennett** is inextricably linked with some of the biggest reggae and dancehall anthems of the early 2000s. Remember **Good To Go**? Remember **Egyptian**? Remember **Mad Antz**? Classics fi real! Despite this success, it has become a bit quiet around him during the last decade, at least reggae-wise (his latest riddim release was the **Island Roots** in

2015 - meanwhile he’s been busy working with big names like **Sean Paul**, **Blacc Zacc** and **Big K.R.I.T.**), but he seems to return to the genre now. Not only did he recently produce the full studio album **Safe** for Trinidadian artist **Marlon Asher**, he also presents us with a new riddim called **Finally**.

The ten tracks represent a great mix of established and upcoming artists, with **Christopher Martin** kicking off the ride with the love song **Don’t Let Go**. On a similar level, both vocally and in terms of international recognition, **Gentleman** contributes **Watch Over Me**, a tune that is both a plea to the Almighty and a warning against the evil who rise against him. *“Touch not the anointed!”*

Love is also the subject of **No Disturbing** by **Keely Keyz** (who is better known as songwriter than as singer and has written or co-written the lyrics for seven tracks on this album) and **Defense** by **Meleku**. The son of **Sizzla Kalonji** impresses with his on-point vocal delivery, allowing himself to play around a bit with the high notes. **Pressure Busspipe** continues the love story with **Forever**, while *“Mister Singy Singy”* lets us know that **Kisses Don’t Lie** in



discovering that a relationship is coming to an end.

Tarrus Riley actually appears twice on the album, with a second substantial contribution called **It Nuh Mek Sense**. This is a heart-felt obituary to **Peetah Morgan** of the **Morgan Heritage** family, who passed away suddenly this February, at a mere 46 years of age.

The pain of losing a good friend is felt in every note here, and maybe it should become a tradition to remember reggae artists thus. *“Yes Rasta! I hear your voice...”*

Holding the flag up high for all female artists, **Kimeco** and **Taye** represent with **El Shadai** and **Ease My Mind**, respectively. Both are newcomers, although the former has already released several singles and here brings back memories of the 1998 **Jahmali** hit by the same name (**El Shadai** is an ancient name for God in the old testament, by the way). **T.O.K.**, finally, make the instrumental their own in style with **Much More**, in their characteristic mix of high (**Alex & Flexx**), middle (**Craigy T**) and bass voice (**Bay C**).

Musically, the riddim is reminiscent of **Don Corleon** classics like the **Drop Leaf** from almost 20 years back. **Finally** starts with a fantastic bass drop, followed by moody guitars and a steady drum pattern, and has a rather relaxed tempo of 80bpm. Some slight fade and delay are used, but on the whole, it is not overloaded with effects. A sweet, easy-going riddim to accompany us through the summer - let’s hope that **Vendetta**, as the producer is also called, is back for good in reggae waters!

by **Gardy Stein**

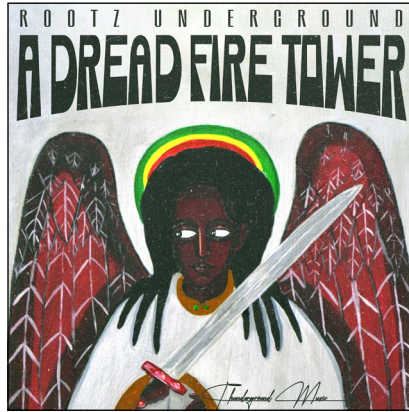
ROOTZ UNDERGROUND - A DREAD FIRE TOWER Thunderground Music - June 21, 2024

Rootz Underground, the band around lead singer **Stephen Newland**, is known for releasing music off the beaten track. After the exciting concept work **Red Gold Green**, their new album **A Dread Fire Tower** confirms this impression, as it is a little on the quirky side. Released on their label **Thunderground Music**, a variety of producers contributed to the oeuvre: **Natural High**, **Graham**

John Fenton, **Lance-O (Kulture Shock Music)**, **Paul "Scubi" Smith**, **Chris Reagan** and **Stephen** himself, lent their musical inspiration to the 14-piece track list, creating a multiverse of sounds to discover.

After a traditional **Rastafari Elders Binghi Intro**, booming drums and harmonic singing and all, the first track **Jah Army** starts with high energy. The **Most High Jah** features prominently in many lyrics, from **Seek Jah First**, a song that enumerates the names of African leaders in tried and tested Rastafari manner, via **Praise H.I.M** and **Until Shiloh**, which includes snippets of a speech of **Haile Selassie**, to **Foundation**. Special mention deserves **Izes Unto Jah**, as **Stephen's** son **Isaiah** makes his autotuned debut on one of daddy's productions. Another feature is the track **Brace Yourself** which has guest appearances by US-based **Fear Nuttin Band** (in which co-producer **Chris Regan** plays guitar), and Jamaica's smooth-flowing **5 Star Celestial**.

Sliding into a brick-hard hip-hop beat, **Rat Patrol** continues the vocal style **Stephen Newland** seems to have adopted for this release: a harsh, monotone and often angry delivery with some quite dissonant voiceovers. What is definitely



an interesting stylistic device in the individual songs mentioned so far becomes a bit overwhelming and, imho, difficult to endure on album length.

Good thing that there are tracks to relax and exhale, too! One of those is the beautiful **Warm Skin**, a sensual love story. A special treat for reggae purists, it brings to our attention the amaz-

ing vocal talent of **Ahbi Kufa**, a Jamaican singer called **Abigail McLawrence** in real life. She also shines her light on **Love For All** and **Diamonds**, a dense, highly energetic composition which features an as always up-to-the-task **Lutan Fyah**.

A definite highlight is the cover version of **Self Control**, a fine remake produced by **Natural High**. Originally sung by **Laura Branigan** (1984), it is here interpreted by female vocalist **Ada Nasiadka** who participated in the 2019 edition of **The Voice of Poland**.

The album closes with **Ark Of The Covenant** and its corresponding dub, turning to biblical themes once more. At the same time, the song is a very illustrative example of above-mentioned quirkiness, sounding more like a rehearsal where everyone gets the chance to let off steam and get carried away with momentary inspiration, be it instrumentally or vocally. In the end, however, this just adds to the aura of mysticism and oddity of **Stephen Newland**, **Rootz Underground** and their new release **A Dread Fire Tower** - they are definitely no people pleasers and go, instead, wherever creativity takes them!

by **Gardy Stein**

JOHNNY CLARKE and SLY & ROBBIE - LOVE UP

TABOU1 - June 6, 2024

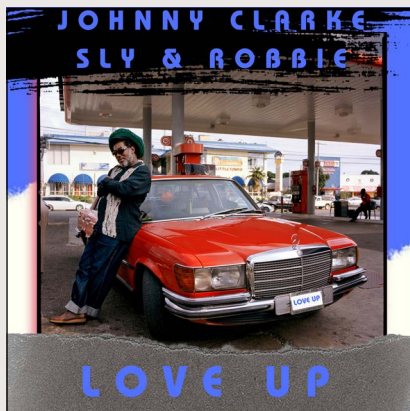
If ever there was a trio with a huge back catalogue to draw on, it would be **Johnny Clarke** and **Sly & Robbie**. Instead, though, on their new album they also draw in hits by other artists.

Love Up, released via **TABOU1** (exclusively available as download & vinyl in their new Music NFT shop.) sees the trio join forces for what is a retrospective look at some of **Clarke's** hits, as well as classics by other artists. But 'retrospective' doesn't tell the whole story - as each track has been reimagined by the team.

Love Up (originally **Love Up Your Brothers And Sisters** produced by **Bunny Lee**) sees a slight reimagining, with a deeper, richer sound, the inclusion of a shrill electric organ, and overall, a more intricate arrangement. **Play Fool**, a reworking of **Clarke's** original on the **Jackpot** label (produced by **Lee**) **Play Fool Fi Get Wise**, sees the sound broadened out with a heavy horn line, and some additional intricacy across other instrumentation.

Every Knee brings his self-produced **Gorgon Records** classic **Every Knee Shall Bow** into 2024, with an additional focus on dub engineering - including some well-placed reverb - and a speeding-up of the drum line. Then, **General** is a reworking of the **Black Uhuru** track **General Penitentiary**. It sees a key change, a heavier drum line, and some brilliant work across the keys to create a heady dub sound.

Johnny Osbourne/Studio One's **Jah Promise** gets the **Clarke, Sly, and Robbie** treatment - with a pleasing electric organ and guitar line, as



well as a lovely trombone (plus the obligatory dub tricks again). **Ride On** (originally **Ride On Girl**) doesn't stray far from **Clarke's** original, albeit with some great attention to detail on the rhythm section - while **Jacob Miller's** **Shaky Girl** sees the trio fill-out the arrangement, with **Clarke** smoothing out the vocal.

Bitty McLean's recent **As Far As Eyes Can See**

sees **McCLean** himself on backing vocals (as he provides across the entire album), after **Sly & Robbie** of course produced the original, too. Here, there's some excellent additional use of synths instead of the melodica and some vocal tweaking by **Clarke**, with the sound being fuller.

When you hear **Fire In A Kingston**, you expect the **Yabby You/Vivian Jackson and the Prophets** track. Not here, though - it is a reworking of the **Clarke/Lee** original **Fire And Brimstone A Go Burn The Wicked**, which is admittedly infinitely better the second time round.

There are three dubs: **Ride On Dub**, **Play Fool Dub**, and **Love Up Dubwise**, all of which are inventive and engaging.

However, the triumph across **Love Up** is **Clarke, Sly, and Robbie**. **Clarke** has lost none of his vocal skill over the years, nor his interpretative power - as seen especially on the cover versions. **Sly & Robbie** are still at the peak of their powers, too - as the new arrangements often deviate a long way from the originals; sometimes improving on them. This leaves **Love Up** as a brilliantly executed project that deserves to be a success.

by **Steve Topple**

LINVAL THOMPSON - GANJA MAN

Irie Ites / Evidence Music - June 6, 2024

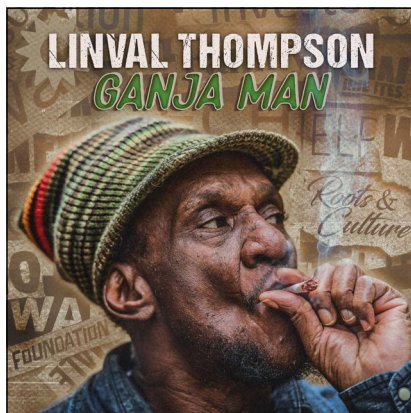
One of the last living legends of the golden age of roots, **Linval Thompson**, shows his power hasn't waned across his new album.

Ganja Man, released via **Irie Ites Records**, sees **Linval** team up with some stellar musicians, including the **Roots Radics**, **The Ligerians**, and **Dean Fraser**. Then, with the inimitable **Roberto Sanchez** joining **Irie Ites** on the mix and master – the sheer quality of the record cannot be overstated.

The title track is a rapid-fire-to-winding dub-heavy track, then we soon move to **Ruff & Tuff** with its brooding minor key, evocative chord progressions, and stark arrangement. **What Time Is It** fills things out, moving into something smoother complete with gorgeous horn line, well-executed backing vocals, and rasping guitar.

Conscious Man featuring **Eek A Mouse** utilises some lovely 80s-style synths, while the drum line is heavy and reverb haunting, and **Eek A Mouse** brings his rasping, nasal vocal to complement **Thompson's** brilliantly. The unapologetic **Pol-Ice Man** pulls no punches with its musical backdrop – relentless yet subtle, with an emphasis on the bass – nor does it with **Thompson's** vocal, which is urgent and pointed.

Next, **Trod Along's** arrangement matches **Thompson's** performance perfectly: meandering yet with purpose where the relentless bass juxtaposes with the winding and poetic keys. **Get Ready** leans into the soul influences with its lyrical electric organ and call and response backing vocals. **Ghetto Youth** picks the pace up with some nice guitar skanking and detail across the engineering to give analogue vibes.



Tune In featuring **Trinity** is a slick and rub-a-dub throwback affair – unfussy yet masterful in terms of its effective simplicity. A gorgeous arrangement complements **Thompson** and **Trinity's** vocals well. **Ganja Man** closes with **Marcus Garvey Says**, perhaps the album's strongest track: an extremely impressive musical arrangement with stand-out guitar lines, but also **Thompson's** wonderful

vocal filled with skill and moving interpretation.

As a treat on the CD and digital version, five of the tracks have dubs (**Pol-Ice Man**, **What Time Is It**, **Ruff & Tuff**, **Get Ready**, and **Ganja Man**) – all of which are polished and effective examples of the genre.

Lyrically, **Thompson** has constructed a searing project filled with pertinent and thoughtful narratives – from **What Time Is It's** ominous warnings, sermons around cannabis, **Pol-Ice Man's** damning indictment of servants of the system, and **Trod Along's** sincere description of life for the conscious under Babylon. **Get Ready** reminds us that Judgement Day is coming, while **Ghetto Youth** pleads for young people to rise up.

Thompson does not sound his age across the record – still having not only a very pleasing and listenable voice which he utilises well throughout, but also still a keen ear for incomparable production and arrangement.

Overall, **Ganja Man** is a fantastic body of work from **Thompson**, and all involved. Some tracks are instant classics, others slow burners- but all are stunning quality.

by Steve Topple



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REKALL - WINNING EP

Bassrunner Music - June 14, 2024

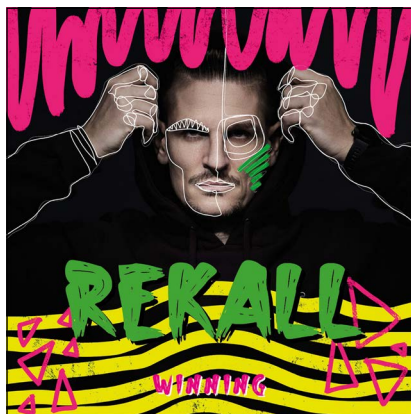
Austria's most exportable home-grown reggae/dancehall talent **Rekall** has returned with a new EP - showing his skills across five varying tracks.

Winning, released via **Bassrunner Music**, sees the artist move away from the **House of Riddim**-penned sound of his 2021 debut album **Unification** - instead giving listeners a smorgasbord of dancehall-led vibes. What **Rekall** and his team have done so well is to show his versatility across the record.

The EP opens with **Nuh Give Up**, produced by **Binnie Smalls**. It focuses on the Afro-dancehall sound that emerged several years ago, across that recognisable broken dancehall rhythmic clave. A tinkering balafon synth hones the Afro vibes, while a winding bassline keeps things moving. **Rekall** provides a brisk and rhythmically intricate lead vocal, giving a rousing narrative about determination and strength in the face of adversity.

Next, Jamaican artist **Leftside** comes on board for the title track produced by DJ **Hard2Def**. Here, the sound is nearer soca than dancehall with its frantic, dotted note-led drums. But it's up to date with its use of rasping synths and heavy bass line and bass drums. **Rekall** and **Leftside** play off well against each other, and it's lyrically another positivity-oozing affair.

Smalls comes back for production across **Family**. It's a soulful Afro-RnB affair - not quite a formidable Afrobeats track because of the use of softer, tonal synths and pared-back drum



line, but not quite RnB either because of the stuttering snare and hi-hats and winding bass. It's summery and fresh with **Rekall** showing his vocal-led abilities across a pleasing melody and equally pleasing narrative about love and dedication.

Not to hover too long on the polite, **Hard2Def** and **Rekall** swerve to the pum-pum on **Bend**

Over, a veritable dancehall banger circa 2020. We're back to that traditional dancehall clave again, along with the influences of EDM that rose to prominence a few years ago. The synth strings are raspy; the horns are heavily messed with; the vocoder bending, and the breaks hard. For real, it's lyrically a bruk-out gyal track but **Rekall** does it with style and urgency.

Winning closes with the **Smalls**-produced **Mad Me**. Here, the sound feels nearer to Afro-swing than anything else - albeit with the snare working off the third as opposed to hitting it direct. It's light with its use of staccato synths, but still grinding with its bassline. There are the ubiquitous nods to dancehall via the bass's riff, trap with the buzz-rolling hi-hats, and the RnB-led melody from **Rekall** cements the sound. He shows again he can turn his hand to anything, and the track is a hot cut.

Overall, **Winning** serves its clear purpose - that is, showing **Rekall** can turn his hand to anything and after **Unification** refuses to be boxed in. The beats are well-constructed, the melodies attractive, and **Rekall's** vocals solid.

by Steve Topple

RYGIN KING - RECOVERY

Rygin Trap Records - June 14, 2024

After a shooting paralysed him in 2020, it's been a long road through recovery for **Rygin King**. Now, his latest album reflects this journey as well as the modern state of dancehall. **Recovery**, released via **Rygin Trap Records**, sees **King** switch genres and styles up, down, and back again across 14 tracks all efficiently produced by the likes of **Damian Marley**, **Crawba**, **Savage World Music**, and more. But the project is also a retrospective on some of the events that have marred **King's** life in recent years along with the necessary bruk out and gyal tracks, of course.

The album opens with **Firm** as **King** sets the tone for the album: "A couple of years now mi no walk... so much to say mi need to write a book": heavy on the self-reflection across modern dancehall-influenced vibes but nothing too abrasive. Here, it's smooth Afro-RnB with **King** verbalising across singjay-meets straight vocal.

Things Done Change featuring **Damian Marley** opens with an imposing cello line, leading into heavily-orchestrated trap dancehall – all very **Jr Gong** – as **King** laments a regressive system vs progressive personal growth. Then, **The Intro** is hard trap dancehall but laced with a funky guitar line as **King** hails the need for self-affirmation and positivity in the face of adversity.

Deep Water is smooth Afro-RnB, as **King** discusses having 'gone through the darkest times' but all the while God is still there. **Recovery** featuring a potent **Chronic Law** is brooding trap dancehall but with a less abrasive sound than normal – as vicious drums juxtapose against



lilting keys, while **King** discusses the emotional impact of his shooting and its aftermath.

Whya Whya brings the Afro-RnB vibes once more, with smooth production complete with delicate piano but stuttering drums, and a sincere performance from **King** questioning life. **Hurting** is classy Afro-RnB again, where trap drums dominate against a backdrop of lilting guitars and a slick, precise vocal. **It's All Love** delves further into this sound with some blissed-out arrangements over the top of a skilled vocal from **King** – showing pleasing expressive peaking and trouncing along with good use of range and runs.

Moments featuring **Serani** sees Afro-dancehall beats crossed with some nice EDM strings and efficient vocals from both artists who play off well against each other. Then, **Drop The Top** goes full-on trap dancehall: trap beats meet dancehall instrumentation and classic singjay from **King**. **Tan Tan** is stripped-back EDM-led dancehall: light-touch on the instrumental arrangement, but full on with **King's** complex vocal. **Scared To Lose You** focuses on an Afro-dancehall sound, while **Bruk Out** moves **Recovery** into Afrobeats with its stuttering drum arrangement. The album closes with **Need Your Love** (cleverly sampling **Drake's Marvin's Room**), which is catchy and EDM-led dancehall.

Recovery is a clever and inspired album from **King**: reflecting on four years of personal trauma while also doing the same but for dancehall culture. It's slick, engaging, and a compelling listen.

by Steve Topple

UNSTOPPABLE FYAH x BRAINFOOD INTL. - REBIRTH 333

Ziah Records - October 3, 2024

This year is something of a rebirth for **Unstoppable Fyah**. Six years after his debut album, he's back with a body of work put together with a long-time friend.

Rebirth 333 is the first full collaboration album between Jamaican **Fyah** and Polish-German producer **Brainfood Intl.** It also features Serbian multi-instrumentalist **Aca** across all ten tracks - making the album a true cross-border affair. The production and mastering are very slick - delivering a rounded and complete package.

The album opens with **Rise** featuring **Fantan Mojah**, strikingly bringing something traditionally African to the album as regimental drums are back-dropped against pleasing choral backing vocals, a lilting piano line, and gently strumming guitars. **Fyah** and **Mojah** are impassioned with their cries for people to rise in righteousness and it's a glorious opener.

Change Me then treads a lovers rock path, featuring classic reggae musical devices coupled with some stark dub arrangement at points, and a passionate vocal from **Fyah**. **Clean Up Your Heart** featuring German soul singer **Flo Mega** is ostensibly roots, but with some nice inflections across additional instrumentation, with **Fyah** keeping vocal pace with an impressive **Mega** as they implore us to act consciously.

On My Mission is more dub than roots with its hard bassline, great samples, and **Fyah's** rapid-fire singjay around personal strength which uses clever wordplay around cannabis, while **Still In Love** is another lovers rock cut, but with intertwining dub



and reggae influences. **Nah Run** winds the ante back somewhat, as a stripped-back arrangement focuses on the keys and a smooth vocal from **Fyah** lyrically focuses on integrity with one's beliefs.

Stop Pressure Me switches things up, as a stepper four-to-the-floor makes the BPM feel rapid, while strings smooth this out and **Fyah's** frantic vocal is excellently executed

- filled with the frustration of the lyrics. **Light it Up** featuring **Lion D** brings things up to date, with its trap-influenced drum line, stark synths, and a great spoken word section from **Fyah** and vocal from **Lion D** around the legalisation of weed.

Next, **Eyes Wide Open** featuring **Zamunda** and **Inti** is a crisp and brisk roots cut, focusing on higher-register instruments and synths, with some great work across the ominous drum arrangement creating a feeling of foreboding. The three artists are well-suited, and the narrative around not falling for the system's tricks is strong.

The album closes with **Move and Groove (Bonus Track)**. It's a gorgeous cut, with its stark synths, heavy drum and bass lines, and pleasingly arranged horns. **Fyah** is at his rhythmic best, here, spitting bars at an impressive rate of knots across intricate melodic lines. It's heavy and winds really well.

Overall, **Rebirth 333** is potent work from **Fyah** and **Brainfood**. It has some great variations on basic roots arrangements; **Fyah** is an accomplished vocalist and lyricist, turning his hand to multiple styles brilliantly, and the album can be easily left on repeat.

by Steve Toppie

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SANORYI
ROBY STONELOVE
ZIGGY MARLEY
CHRONIXX

SUMMER 2017
100 FESTIVALS

FESTIVILLE 2016
REGGAEVILLE FESTIVAL GUIDE

INTERVIEWS
GENTLEMAN &
KY-MANI MARLEY

JAH9
DIELE
PROTOJE
MAX ROMEO
RAGINE FYAH
STEPHEN MARLEY
SILLY WALKS DISCOTHEQUE

SUMMER 2016
82 FESTIVALS