



FESTIVILLE 2025

REGGAEVILLE FESTIVAL GUIDE

INTERVIEWS

**RIK JAM
KONSHENS
KEZNAMDI
CIMARONS
ROYAL BLU
STEEL PULSE
NAOMI COWAN
HELMUT PHILIPPS
META & THE CORNERSTONES**

128
FESTIVALS



TEZNAMDI



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COME TOGETHER AND MAKE IT WORK

"We Jah people can make it work! Come together and make it work." (Bob Marley, *Work*)

Before saying anything else, we want to say **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!** to **King Marley**, who would have turned 80 this year. Reggae (and **Reggaeville**) wouldn't be what it is today without this man, so we haffi give props every time! In the quotes framing this editorial, we go with the numerical flow and refer to 1980, the year in which one of the most celebrated **Bob Marley & The Wailers** albums was released: **Uprising**. And a global uprising is needed more than ever indeed, so let's join forces for a revolution of love and peace!

Back to the here and now, **Reggaeville** proudly presents the 15th edition of our **Festiville Magazine**, fresh off the press and duly delivered to your eagerly waiting hands. Fifteen years of providing you with all you need to know about the festival summer (on the following pages, we have again assembled 128 international reggae festivals), new music and behind-the-scenes information straight from the mouths of your favourite artists.

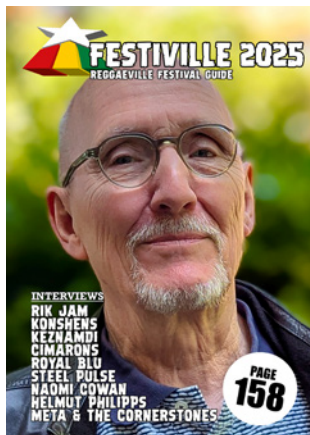
Among the interviews (plus album reviews) in this edition, you'll find our cover artist **Naomi Cowan**, who presents her new

release **Welcome To Paradise**, as well as **Keznamdi (Blxxd And Fyah)**, **Royal Blu (Spain Root)**, **Meta & The Cornerstones (Echoes Of Time)**, **Cimarons (Harder Than The Rock)**, **Konshens (Pool Party)**, **Rik Jam (The Genesis)** and author **Helmut Philipps**, who talks about the English version of his book **Dub: The Sound Of Surprise**. Another interesting reasoning is included with **David Hinds**, reflecting on the 50th anniversary of his band **Steel Pulse** and the experience of being on tour with **Bob Marley** back in 1978.

Make sure you visit **REGGAEVILLE.com** regularly for all the details, and for staying up to date with last minute line-up changes, new releases, concert reports and festival reviews (including many photos and videos), as even the most mobile among you cannot catch every event – leave that task to us! What we ask you to do, dear readers, is to enjoy the upcoming season to the max, to soak in the good vibes and share them freely, to cause ripple effects that will ultimately make this world a better place. Be kind, be generous, and always stand up against injustice!

And, in case you feel overwhelmed by the turmoil of this world or the many tasks ahead of you, take one step at a time and remember: *"Where there's a will, there's always a way!"* (Bob Marley, *Zion Train*)

INTERVIEWS



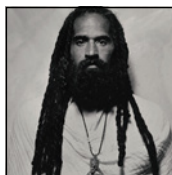
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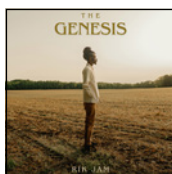
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PUBLISHER REGGAEVILLE.com

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Julian Schmidt - julian@reggaeville.com

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Celine Diels (Meta & The Cornerstones)

Destinee Condison (Naomi Cowan)

Frank Seltier (Steel Pulse Live)

Julian Schmidt (Vybz Kartel)

Keron Alexander, Destinee Condison &

Shaqan Pryce (Royal Blu)

Mark Warmington & Chaba (Cimarons)

Peter Parker & Jlué (Konshens)

Phillip McFarlane (Rik Jam)

Ursula 'Munchy' Münch, Dietmar Krehl &

Alice Peperell (Helmut Philipps)

William Richards (Keznamdi)

AUTHORS / EDITORS / TEAM

Angus Taylor, Björn Fehrensen, Gardy Stein,

Jessica Knight, Rune Fleiter, Tomaz Jardim,

Ursula 'Munchy' Münch, Veronique Skelsey

LAYOUT Peter Pusch

ADVERTISING

advertising@reggaeville.com

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INTERVIEW

A portrait of Naomi Cowan, a woman with dark hair and a nose ring, wearing a red sequined top and multiple necklaces of red and silver beads. She is standing in shallow water, with a blurred green background. The text 'INTERVIEW' is at the top left, 'NAOMI COWAN' is in large letters across the middle, and 'ON CHERRY-PICKING HER FAVOURITE INFLUENCES' is at the bottom left.

NAOMI COWAN

ON CHERRY-PICKING HER
FAVOURITE INFLUENCES

WELCOME TO PARADISE

BY JESSICA KNIGHT

PHOTOS BY DESTINEE CONDISON

Naomi Cowan thanks her friend and collaborator, **Runkus**, for introducing her to **Toddla T**, the co-producer, writer, mixer and engineer on her forthcoming album, **Welcome to Paradise**. This release follows **Star Girl**, her 2021 covid mixtape baby with **Walshy Fire**, featuring **Jesse Royal**. Although Cowan's hit single, **Paradise Plum**, topped several reggae charts and earned **Cowan** a place in new wave reggae music, she felt there was more to be done to flesh out this track into a full listening experience. Cue **Toddla**, who pairs perfectly with **Cowan** to lend his broad ranging reggae, hip hop and UK Garage influences as **Cowan** continues to experiment with her border-crossing sound.

Cowan began this project whilst she was in London filming the **Bob Marley** movie, **One Love**, in which she plays **Marcia Griffiths**, one of the **I-Threes** in **Bob Marley and the Wailers**. Co-star **Hector Roots Lewis** was uber-ed to studio sessions to lend his bass skills when not playing **Carly Barratt** on set or practising drums in his hotel room. This album is an international all-rounder grounded in Jamaican roots. **Jazzwad**, **Dub Chronicles** and **Cristale De Abreu** are just some of the artists featured, and **Scientist** grounds the work by mastering the songs on Jamaican soil.

It's not always easy for children of reggae artists to find their own voice. **Cowan** learns from her parents, **Tommy Cowan** and **Carlene Davis**, who are fearless about moving between roles and genres within the music industry. **Tommy Cowan** wore many hats within reggae, and added many more when he transferred his skills into gospel, as did **Carlene Davis**, who sings across both genres.



Naomi and I talk via Google Hangout, and soon realise that we're within a few miles of each other in the hills of Kingston. **Naomi** laughs when I ask her if she noticed that the waveforms for the first and last tracks of the album are almost identical. It's no surprise, she says, since being **Libra**, it's all about balance.

You feature a little Kartel poem on *Welcome To Paradise*. He lands in Trinidad today, right? It was reported in the Gleaner that he's been banned from visiting a school and singing certain songs. I was curious to know what you think about that in terms of being an artist, and freedom of expression.

Boy, I have this conversation with people all the time, not just in relation to music. **Kartel** can only do what he's doing now, which is putting out the message that he hopes for people to receive. But other parties are not obligated to believe that. They don't have to think that he's a changed man. I feel very neutral about it. All of us as artists, that's what we struggle with in terms of speaking our truth, being ourselves and then wanting to be received and heard by the masses. But the masses are not always gonna love you and that's just a part big part of the reality.

Now the little voicenote that you hear [on the album], **Kartel** now, when he came out of jail this year I had a chance to meet him. He was doing some party at **Meca**. [I] never ended up going but I texted him the next day and the voicenote you hear at the end of the song, that's the voicenote he sent in response.

I saw another interview that you did where you were citing Alicia Keys as someone that made an impression because she's natural, she's doing a gangsta thing, she's playing classical piano, she's throwing in all these supposedly unexpected combinations, right?

Yes, yes, absolutely. Obviously I've always emulated my mom [reggae & gospel vocalist, **Carlene Davis**] in certain ways but I always wanted to have my own identity and with **Alicia Keys** I saw this balanced being in front of me. I've always been a girly tom-boy. I think I've played every sport imaginable except for basketball so I've always had this little athletic vibe about me but then I was still a girly-girl... We're always looking for someone to look up to. And because she was really good as a singer, and she played an instrument - I grew up playing the piano - experiencing her vibe and seeing how she

presented herself made me feel like I found a space where I could belong. It's so crazy how presentation can change the trajectory of somebody's path.

I felt a definite structure listening to the album. It opens up with references to your parents. The way it progresses takes you from the historical old school reggae rocksteady, and then it dabbles in these places where it sounds to me like you're experimenting, you're figuring things out. Toddla T presumably is a strong influence on that. So I'm wondering how much of [that] rings true to you, and where is it you're hoping this album will take you?

When I went into this project with **Toddla** I was like "*Boy, Toddla, I have a bunch of demos recorded. Would you be interested in being a co-executive producer with me?*" **Star Girl** was really cool. It didn't necessarily cement my identity as an artist. I'm an experimental person and I'm a multi-faceted artist. Different influences come from different places. I shared with **Toddla** that my decision to pursue reggae music was actually very spiritual in such a way that when I first started writing music I was more looking at indie-soul acoustic pop - or maybe indie-soul type of music. I felt like God really called me to do reggae, I don't want to say I lost my way but I would say that by doing the **Star Girl** project it was super experimental, but I still didn't get to share with people who I am as an artist through my sound.

That's what made up **Paradise Plum**, it had this hook but then the verses are conversational, but then the music now is anchored in reggae, so of course the bassline, we always have some foundation sounds but then the drum pattern tends to be hip hop. I didn't realise that was my sound until I was working on this movie. It was so ethereal for all of us because the set and the outfit is like true to the era of the seventies, and we were listening to so much **Bob Marley** music. In our green rooms where we would be waiting in between scenes they left instruments in there





for us, like guitars, so many times we were just having jam sessions in between because we don't have nothing else to do. Nuff times we doing **Bob** songs, or we just freestyling or whatever, and it's just so wild because it just reminded me of the power of – not just the power of reggae – but I think it was like the power of authenticity and staying true to you, because when **Bob** started to work on **Exodus**, which is what they highlighted in the film, he decided to really take it another level with his sound, and that's when he brought on **Junior Marvin**, who was a rock guitarist, and **Chris Blackwell** got involved. So him even doing that was risky, if you think about it.

Toddla and I just had a good time working together because he was a bit more seasoned as a producer. **Toddla** is a grown man with two kids and a wife, you know? So he's not caught up in the hype of the music business anymore.

He's clearly a geek in the music. It feels like you guys came together and created a free-flowing album where it's not forced to be reggae and remain that throughout.

Yeah, yeah. One thing with **T** as well – he speaks about this publicly – he has ADHD, right, but it works as a super power in music because he works really quickly. I had a bag of different riddims from different places. He said *"If you're willing to start from scratch, write some new stuff, maybe we can keep some of the old stuff"*. And I said *"Let's go for it"*. My creative challenge was to keep focused as best as I could without limiting myself. Almost every track has extreme reggae influences except the one with **Cristale [De'Abreu]**, the **Welcome to Paradise**, cos that's a full on garage, UK, dancehall type thing. The biggest challenge was [to] keep the sonic vibration, the bassline, the keys, whatever the case is. I wanted to make sure it still felt like a reggae album in honouring what reggae has done for me, and the fact that I



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know that I'm meant to carry the torch in my own unique way. So how do I give myself a playground to play in but at the same time make sure that the message is clear?

I look at your parents, the fact that they were diverse – your dad wore so many hats within the music industry. And then they both decided to make this move into gospel. So I'm wondering if seeing your parents have that fluidity in their own personal progression has relieved you of any hang-ups about doing you?

Absolutely. I think both in their evolution, one, but also in their struggles too. I saw them struggle because they want to honour their choices, spiritually. I'm so happy because now that I'm on these big stage shows and in these environments they can come to support me. I got invited to this underground jam session in [the Bronx] called **Voice Out Jams** and it literally was a basement. It was

someone with a band. The place full a weed smoke, it's all young people's music, but the point was my mom was in there, people were like, **Carlene Davis** is here? Wow. But it's like their presence in the spaces, it also brings like a seal of approval to say like "*Yo, the people before us are supportive of our growth*". You need the support of the elders, if you want to call them that, you need the "*Keep going*" from the people that helped to form the foundation of what we're doing. So it's been a double-blessing in that way.

Scientist mastered everything. What has that relationship been like?

[Scientist] mastered *Paradise Plum*. I was like "*Toddla, what if since the intention of this album was for **Paradise Plum** to be felt throughout multiple tracks, what if we just work with the engineer that helped cement that?*" It was a lot of trust. Choosing to trust his experience as a reggae music mastering



**LISTEN TO
SOUL-REBEL MARLEY**



engineer. And then trusting that the music was good to begin with. He was wonderful to work with, and I think he was right for the project, given the creative direction.

How much was there a back-and-forth versus you just handing it over to him track by track?

Oh no, there was a lot of back-and-forth. After a second revision I did a bunch of notes and highlighted, this is what this sounds like. He does analogue mastering, so each master has to be done over. If you're making a change, he's going to master over an entire song. That adds to the energy of it too, that helps.

Do you have a long standing relationship with Runkus and Hector?

Runkus, yes. **Runkus** is one of my best friends and also one of my favourite people to collaborate with. He and I started working together when I was working on **Star Girl**. Because when **Walshy [Fire]** and I were in the studio almost every day **Runkus** was always invited to come and co-write, and he and I started to link up to just write. I featured on tracks from his **Out:Side** album, you know. We developed a friendship from there. At least four or five years of friendship and collaboration with **Runkus**.

With **Hector** now, we were working on the **Bob Marley** movie together. All of us were in this hotel. I wasn't on set every single day, so when I had a day of working on stuff for **Up To The Time** and **True Lies**, I said to **Hector**, would you be open to writing the bassline for me and he said yeah. We hopped in an Uber, went to the studio, and did it.

Hector is a very humble and sweet-spirited person. He really loves music. My room was above **Hector's** in the hotel and, girl, **Hector** is a fantastic musician. A wicked drummer. Can I tell you that he was practising almost every night on a drum pad, because I could hear him. In this film they actually used his live drums. He's one of the few people who the drums are actually his.



Here's the thing, one thing people forget – I know this from observing my parents – is, when I sit down and add you to my song and you are producer or whatever the case is, we're sharing. It's almost like having a baby, having a child with someone, which means that for the rest of the lifetime of this child, I have to deal with you. Someone wants to license a song from us, I have to know that you and I are going to be on good terms for the long term. I just want to work with people that have a good soul, they're all about the love of what we're doing. I call them lifers. Even if sh*t goes wrong between us, I know you're still going to respect the work that we did.



Yeah man, Hector's never going to threaten you like Blake Lively did Taylor Swift. He's never going to threaten to release your WhatsApps ['allegedly'].

[Laughing] Exactly.

How did you get Winta James on the project?

So **Winta** now, I was on the *Gratitude* riddim – that's a riddim he dropped a couple years ago. That's my first time working with **Winta** was on that riddim and I loved working with him. He was really good for me in terms of a challenge. The song is in a much lower register than I'm used to, and he brought out a much lower tone in my voice that I was appreciative of. When **Toddla** and I set the intention to do this album, **Toddla** decided to come [to Jamaica] and we booked a house in the mountains and every day we just wrote. One of the days he invited **Winta** to come through. I'd come back onto the hill after spending half a day at the passport office and I was just mash-up. I come back up the hill and oh my god, the riddim for *Cherry* was playing and I just sunk into the couch. I [felt] like I was in a resort in Negril in 1992. It transported me.

I want to hear about Dub Chronicles and Jazzwad.

Dub Chronicles now, ah man, really cool band in Toronto. So I was in Toronto and I decided to put out a pop-up acoustic performance. The guy who helped me put it on said *"I have a band for you"*. These guys rehearsed and knew all my music within like a day. So when they came to do the soundcheck I was blown away by how the music sounded. How on point they were. I said to these guys, I going send you this song. I going give you acapella. So I sent them the acapella *Moments* and was like *"You guys just mind vibing out to this?"* That was it. I really hope to be able to work with them on the road moving forward.

Toddla brought **Jazzwad** into the fold when we started working on the album. Of course, **Jazzwad** is legendary. My first live band show in the UK was a festival called **Boomtown Festival**. It was in the woods. **Jazzwad** was the musical director of the band. So they had booked me, **Jada Kingdom** and **Sevana**. That was my first time working with him. **Toddla** wanted to make sure we had authentic keys on certain songs, **Jazzwad** is behind so many dancehall artists and legendary songs. We call him **Uncle Jazzy** – don't tell him that. When we were together it felt like we had this dancehall uncle, you get me?

That's what you need. A dancehall uncle to raise the daughter of this reggae and gospel... you have to throw in a likkle dancehall. Exactly.

So if Jazzwad is your dancehall uncle what kind of godfather would you have in some other music styles?

Oh! **Beres Hammond**, for sure. He feels like a godfather. Only because of his writing style. I don't think I intended to do this, but when I first wrote *Piece Of Mind*, my mom thought I was doing a Beres cover. After **Protoje** had given me that demo, she came into the studio and she goes *"Is that a Beres song?"* I never purposefully tried to emulate him, but what

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JULY 14

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All White

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**GLOBAL
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JULY 17

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I love about his storytelling is how he's so cheeky and you don't realise it because his voice is so nice, you know what I mean? People don't realise that **Beres** is talking some real things, ennuh? Him a talk you some things wha you nuh fi do. He's definitely a godfather from that vocalist storytelling standpoint, him and **Dennis Brown** to me. Because they're telling a lot of real things in a sweet way.

The video for *Paradise Plum...* You're wearing platform heels, riding a bike, singing to camera and weaving in and out of all these kids. Not many women would hop on a bike in those shoes.

[Laughing] It's true. I went to University in Toronto and so when I lived there I picked up the habit of bike riding as transit in the warmer months. It was my way of saving money. I did my Bachelors in media production but I decided to minor in law.

You minored in law? Was that to be more knowledgeable in the music industry?

I do still get legal consult when needed but – here's the thing, my dad really wanted me to be a lawyer. At the time I wanted to be a broadcast presenter, so he was like, you'd get really far if you have a law degree because you'd be more respected, but I didn't want to be a lawyer. So I did the minor in law to appease him but truthfully it equipped me to be able to read through documents. I understand legal language if I'm reading a contract, as annoying as it is to read them. There's a lawyer [in Jamaica] called **Ron Young**. He was like "*Boy Naomi, for the next chapter of your life just shout me when you're ready*". I do believe in the later part of my life I want to be able to help younger women and have a safe space for them to develop their careers without feeling like they're sacrificing their worth. There's endless stories of girls who've become involved with – whether it's with



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management or producers or stuff like that, that's just annoying... Why can't someone work with you because you're good at what you do?

I saw that you were a speaker on the We Inspire Girls To Be Strong tour.

I just did one, in Yallahs in St Thomas in March, for Women's Month. I'm back active with them again which is awesome. So I'm doing Manning's High in Mandeville with them.

How did you come to be involved with that?

Just for context, I was **Miss Teen Jamaica** when I was in High School. When I won this

pageant I went through this experience of representing Jamaica on different platforms. The feeling of, wow, just by being this "*pretty girl*!" I could help somebody or my voice would matter... Here it is, I have supportive parents, I got to go to a good school, I've got older siblings that were really supportive of me, that loved me, took care of me, encouraged me. Literally told me I could do anything. Not everybody had someone that looked at them and said "*You're smart, you're beautiful, you're capable*". Especially in Jamaica where girls kind of get pushed aside or maybe they might feel like they not going amount to nothing, rae rae, because they come from a certain kind of community.

Paired with the fact that one of my best friends at Campion – this was a divine thing. One of my best friends from first form, her mom was a teenage mom. She had two kids back-to-back at the age of 18 and 19, right? She had a full-time job as an accountant or whatever but every weekend when I would sleep over **Auntie Pat** was going to the library. She was like “*Oh I’m studying for my MBA*”. She was always studying to advance herself. I remember being so enamoured by her work ethic. Mind you, she’s living in Beverly Hills. Imagine you come from country, you can find your way to living in Kingston 6, with two kids going to good schools? **Auntie Pat** inspired me to help girls from underprivileged communities because I know what I was gifted with. I was born into this. I don’t take it for granted. That inspired me from that time.

I specifically respect that you didn’t do top-down philanthropy. You worked with somebody to be more targeted. You go into the community.

When I first came out of college I was trying to do my own thing, trying to start a non-profit, register a non-profit – I was trying to do the thing and a little voice inside of me said “*Don’t be top down. You’re much more of value when you meet people where they’re at*”. I was trying to raise money trying to get computers, iPads donated, which is great and dandy but I realised... When I went into the Girls’ Home a little voice inside said, look at these girls. All they want is to be your friend.

In terms of playing Marcia Griffiths, did she have any influence in terms of creating the character?

My connection to **Marcia** goes far before this movie but it feels like I accidentally embodied her. When we did the **Paradise Plum** artwork [it’s] on this yellow square and it’s a direct haptic to **Marcia Griffiths’ Play Me Sweet And Nice** album, where she’s in a yellow top and she’s splashing the water. She wasn’t involved in anything other than I told

her I was going for the [**One Love**] audition. She was like “*I’ll pray for you*”, but she didn’t have a say in it.

Because I had this relationship with her I was able to consult with her on things. I was having some difficulties with the foreign people when it came to the headwraps. Having her support was helpful for me being vocal on set, saying this is not how it was done. Me as a Jamaican playing a Jamaican in the big, big movie, it can’t be inauthentic, because they’re going to come for my neck. **Ziggy** was the one that had to front the whole thing. Thankfully his involvement allowed that, but if he wasn’t there, I don’t know. You would have probably seen me in that movie with an Afro, not a headwrap.

You’ve included these curious little snippets of women saying things about feminism, like on *Women Respect*. I think you have a lot more to say [but] on this album you’ve stayed in quite a restrictive theme.

I grew up as a conscious person, meaning I grew up with half Rastafarianism, half Christianity. I’m going to act in a way that’s influenced by scripture, but it doesn’t mean I have to quote it. If I found your wallet on the floor and I gave it back to you, I’m not going to turn the other cheek. I’m like “*Hey, here’s your wallet*”. Christ consciousness is my way of being. There’s a lot of things that I feel and see and think. I guess I don’t write about it because it’s so innate to me, but I do know there’s value that I can bring to the world through that wisdom.

The second piece is that I tend to write more about love and self-love and self-empowerment.

I know that for a 13 year old girl, when I was that age I was not trying to hear no equal rights and justice – I don’t even know what that means. You know what I want to do as a little girl? You want to feel beautiful, you want to feel strong, you want to feel smart. So



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I write for the version of myself that needed to hear me, right? I think about those things a lot. I haven't gone as deep as I know I have the capacity to because I'm thinking of the next gen. Hopefully this kind of music resonates with them so they can grow up with me so when they're in their late teens, early twenties, and my next project is more conscious, they're now forming their sense of self as young adults and we can grow up together.

I don't know what there is out there for the young girl that wants to feel – you want to feel cute, you want to be loved, you want to be admired, but you also need to be reminded that you're strong and you're smart. But the music tends to be so extreme. What if we could have that kind of a movement through reggae, girly music, but empowering girly music?

NAOMI COWAN - WELCOME TO PARADISE

Easy Star Records - September 12, 2025

Welcome to Paradise is a compact 30-odd minute album of ideas brought to you by **Naomi Cowan** via **Easy Star Records**. **Cowan's** music skills have been described as "Diverse" in response to her previous releases, including the chart-topping single, **Paradise Plum**. **Welcome to Paradise** extends this. **Woman Respect** might tell listeners that "you never seen a man born no baby yet",



but it is her pairing with **Toddla T** that birthed this Toddla-in-a-candystore experimental work – god-fathered by **Scientist**, who mixed the album, analogue-style.

Deep male vocals **Ba Ba Boom** give a nod to **Cowan's** father, **The Jamaicans' Tommy Cowan**, in the opening track **Beautiful Ska**. A sample of an early interview with Naomi's reggae and gospel vocalist mother, **Carlene Davis**, also features. Pleasing horns meet and greet some high registering lush female harmonies. This is that range that people describe, introducing the direction that this album is going: multi-dimensional.

Having borrowed **Cowan's** voice for the **Gratitude** riddim during the Covid lockdown era, **Winta James** lends his writing and production skills to **Cherry On Top**, thereby adding another fruit to the mix. **Beautiful Ska** is a strong riddim that off-sets the smoky-sweet qualities of **Cowan's** voice and reearranges her father's classic in a way that will appeal to reggae new wavers.

Plenty more musical aunties and uncles forward as **Cowan** converts her personal influences into her personal style. **Johnny Osbourne** recreates a version of his infamous catchphrase for **Cowan's**

Version. This song is a curious combination of steel pan bubbling blended with pop-esque vocals and hip hop drops. **Lonely Love** features **Runkus**, whose influence is to take sounds of the ancients spiralling from binghi drums that swirl around a plughole only to be swallowed into the murky depths of more hip hop drum patterns, reverb, and drops. Reggae meets its progeny; this is a recurrent feature of **Cow-**

an's work.

Cowan's diversity also extends to her vocal range. She titillates with tension on **True Lies**, delivering that quintessential stretched violin quality that is the signature sound of any Jamaican-trained voice. A visual representation is available on YouTube. **Woman Respect** has a touch of the **Tanya Stephens** about it, offering some adeptly handled, tongue-tripping lyrics. A fascinating final track fuses all the key-changes of a 90s love song with a surprise twist of roots baseline and reggae foundation vibes. Think **Celine Dion** canoodling with **Beres Hammond** in the backseat of a Jute on its way to **Sumfest**, and listen out for **Vybz Kartel's** cheeky soundbyte.

The album ends as it means to go on. Having nurtured both her home-grown roots and the foreign-derived styles that influence her, **Cowan** has an orchard of ideas from which to pick. The interspersing skits hint at the range of topics beyond love songs that **Cowan** has the potential to convert into powerful messages. Once she diversifies these themes in future work, which I've no doubt she will, then **Cowan's** cherry will reach its peak.

by JESSICA KNIGHT

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CIMARONS

HARDER THAN THE ROCK



UK'S FIRST REGGAE BAND

BY ANGUS TAYLOR

PHOTOS BY CHABA & MARK WARMINGTON



The eldest child in a family often has it the hardest. They set the path their younger siblings can follow - without support and acknowledgment for the lonely trail they've blazed.

This analogy can be applied to foundation UK reggae group **Cimarons**. Britain's first reggae band, they were formed in Harlesden, North West London in 1967 by guitarist **Locksley Gichie** and bassist **Franklyn Dunn**, along with drummer **Maurice Ellis** and keyboardist **Carl Levy**. They became the go-to musicians for London - and the wider country's - burgeoning reggae scene.



They were the first reggae band to embark on a precarious tour of West Africa, and to reach Ireland, Japan and Thailand in the early 70s. They backed **Bob Marley**, **Pat Kelly**, **Ken Boothe**, **Toots and the Maytals** and **Jimmy Cliff** when they came to the UK, and beyond.

Their initial lead singer **Carl Bert** left before completing debut **Trojan LP In Time**, and was replaced by **Winston Reedy**, who became their longest serving frontman. In 1975 they had a surprise number one hit in Jamaica with a cover of **Bob's Talking Blues**, which led to them recording second album **On The Rock** at the legendary **Channel One**, **Randy's** and **Black Ark** studios in Kingston.

But where the next wave of bands they inspired, such as **Aswad** and **Steel Pulse**, went on to lasting international acclaim, **Cimarons** did not receive adequate recom-

pense or recognition for their pioneering status. They moved from label to label, signing to **Polydor** for 1978's psychedelic rock infused album **Maka**, then to **Virgin** for 1980's **Freedom Street**. 1981's **Paul and Linda McCartney** financed covers collection **Reggaeability** failed to add up to the sum of its parts commercially. **Reedy** went solo and the group disbanded due to lack of opportunities.

Yet after a four-decade hiatus, a series of commemorative events encouraged their return. In 2014 their friend **Delroy Washington** asked Brent Council to honour them with a blue plaque at the **Tavistock Hall** in Harlesden, the youth club where they formed. During the 2020 covid lockdown, with live music at a low ebb, **Gichie, Dunn, Ellis**, and new singer **Michael Arkk** performed in a streamed concert as part of Brent's **No Bass Like Home** festival.

This sowed the seeds for a 2024 documentary, **Harder Than The Rock**, directed by **Mark Warmington**, which told the heartwarming story of the group's rise, demise and comeback show at **Brixton Hootananny** (where **Reedy** joined them on stage). Sadly, **Maurice Ellis**, and longtime compatriot and guest vocalist/songwriter **Bobby Deigo Davis**, passed away during the making of the film.

In June 2025, the group released an eighth album, also titled **Harder Than The Rock**. Backed by a top team of Spanish musicians, overseen by maestro producer and seal of quality **Roberto Sanchez**, it revisits old and fresh material, standing proudly alongside their best work.

Angus Taylor met **Locksley Gichie** and **Michael Arkk** in person at London's **Barbican Arts Centre** to hear about the new record and their story. A longer transcript of their 2-hour plus discussion will be published on **Reggaeville.com** and contains many fascinating historical details.

Congratulations on your new album. It sounds great. How did you decide to make a new album after such a long break?

Locksley Gichie: You know it's a long journey. We started about four years ago.

Michael Arkk: Before the pandemic.

Locksley Gichie: On and off. Because the finance wasn't too good. So we had to start financing ourselves. We were doing this until **Michal** our manager came up with a brilliant idea. Because he knew this bredda...

Roberto Sanchez.

Locksley Gichie: Yes, he reached out to him and it was a very good idea.

Michael Arkk: It was in November, late last year. We went to Spain at Santander. It took us about a week to record the album. As **Locksley** said we did some preliminary works. So when we went to Santander at **Roberto** we were kind of well ready. So it didn't take too much.

He's a very good musician, producer and engineer. He studies the sound and he did a very nice production.

Locksley Gichie: Very, very talented. He knows the sound.

Michael Arkk: The horns.

Locksley Gichie: He did the arrangement on the brass section. Brilliant.

What inspired you to do another album after so long? Because the group went on hiatus for a while.

Locksley Gichie: It just felt right, you know? Because **Michael** joined us from a friend of ours, a keyboard player. **Charles.** He joined the group and we had to give him an interview.

Michael Arkk: (laughs) Yeah, an interview!

Locksley Gichie: And a friend of our daughter, she was working for the council and she came up with this **No Bass Like Home**. And that was the first time **Michael** worked with us. **No Bass Like Home** wanted **Cimarons** to be part of it. We did three tracks and it's amazing because that's the last time **Maurice** played with us. It was so good because we took him back out of retirement. (laughs) He was a bit rusty but he did great. **No Bass Like Home** was a good launch for us and **Michael**. Because we didn't have a vocalist. We asked **Winston** first if he wanted to do it but I think he couldn't. I know he's a bit upset now he didn't! So that's where it started from and **Michael** joined the group from then on and we did a few gigs.

Michael Arkk: We started preparing for the show we did at **Hootananny**. That was the first live show because **No Bass Like Home**, we didn't have an audience because the pandemic was around, so that was virtual. So from there we started preparing because it was a long time that **Cimarons** hadn't been on stage as full band. So we took the time and it went well.

You can see in the documentary that Winston took the mic on stage and joined you for the song Harder Than The Rock. That must have been quite a moment.

Michael Arkk: That was a moment. I think we had a break between songs and somebody said "**Winston** is in the audience". I thought he was closer to the back. So I stopped and said "I heard that **Winston** is here". (laughs) I didn't know it was him just there. I called him on stage and he came up. And the rest is history. He came on, I handed him the mic and he just went into it.

Totally unplanned.

Both: Totally unplanned.

Michael Arkk: That was such a magical moment.



How did the documentary get made?

Locksley Gichie: It was at the same time we were doing **No Bass Like Home**. The cameraman was called **Mark [Warmington]**. He was just enquiring if there was anything he could do to get a reggae band. We met at Tavistock Road where the blue plaque is. He says to me that he is a cameraman and he is interested in doing a documentary with a reggae band. And because the plaque was there, he chose us. As the foundation. And when I told him the story of **Cimarons** he couldn't believe it. He didn't know it was a band in England that really did so much and nobody give us the credit. And this was just around the time of covid. We started doing bits and pieces going around the area. And we took a couple of shots here and a couple of shots there. And it slowly came together but it took four years. It's amazing everything just came together. And **Cimarons** tour is like that. It just happened. We didn't have to do much hunting. Everyone was drawn to us.

Let's talk about some of the songs on the album. You redid some of your classic tunes. *Ship Took Us Away* is on the same rhythm as your cover of the O'Jays *Ship Ahoy*. But you did this version before on your *Live At The Roundhouse* album. So tell me about the history of the song and that version.

Locksley Gichie: *Ship Ahoy*. O'Jays. What year was it?

About '73? It came out on the Ashanti label in 1974.

Locksley Gichie: Yeah about '73. We were doing some backing tracks for **Dandy Livingstone** for an album called **Poor People** or something like that. He wanted to do *Ship Ahoy*. So we went to **Chalk Farm Studio** and we did *Ship Ahoy* for **Dandy**. But it sounded so good that when we started doing our first album *In Time*, I said "**Dandy**, we'd like to have that track" and he said "*Oh, you can have it man!*" (laughs) So that's how *Ship Ahoy* came along.

On the Ashanti label, it was credited to Love Children not Cimarons.

Locksley Gichie: That was the name **Dandy** used. He gave us the backing track and we did it over. **Winston** had just joined. And we finished it off on the *In Time* album. And then we started doing it on our live shows. At the time we were doing a lot of tours. There wasn't much happening in England. So we were doing a lot of tours around Europe. Paris, France, Holland, Denmark. When we went to Cork we found that *Ship Ahoy* had become an anthem. Every time we did *Ship Ahoy* the crowd went so crazy! (laughs) So it ended up on the live album *At The Roundhouse*.

But how did it become *Ship Took Us Away*?

Locksley Gichie: It's amazing. Because that song holds the crowd so much, we extended it. We were extending, messing around and it came naturally. We'd stand on stage and we'd say (both sing) "*ship took us away*" because we'd said *Ship Ahoy* about four times already and the crowd didn't want us to stop. So we just ad libbed and *Ship Took Us Away* was actually written live.

But then on this new album you decided to do that specific version?

Locksley Gichie: Yes, because it's more original. It's our lyrics. Instead of doing

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Ship Ahoy which we have done so many cuts already. The **O'Jays** must have made a million already! (laughs) So we just decided to do our **Ship Took Us Away** so at least we can get a part of the royalties, you know?

Michael Arkk: This last version that we did in Spain, part of it was actually written in the studio as well. Because he suggested to me the bit about "*they took us away all over the Caribbean and America*". That bit that was ad libbed in there while we were doing it! (laughs) So it's an interesting outlook on that song.

I really like the flute playing on the new version.

Locksley Gichie: Yeah, really nice. And the horn section that **Roberto** added, he's been working about 30 years with those guys. He said when he started his first band, just

those young guys used to play, so they gel. It didn't take no time at all. He just went parp parp and they pick up.

So the album is a mix of new songs and older songs. Tell me about the new songs that you've brought to the album.

Michael Arkk: One of the new songs was **Oh Jah**. **Locksley** and I wrote that somewhere in Hackney, two years ago. And there's another new one, **Give Love**, which I wrote a few years ago as well. And **Green Gold And Red**, that is one that **Locksley** wrote and when I heard it I thought "*This is good*". And before **Dego** passed he sent me the lyrics to **I Will Follow You**. When I sang it first time, he liked it. So I knew that was in the bag! And then **The Fool Said**, he didn't finish writing that one. So I finished it. Because he got iller and iller, so those are the brand new ones that we got in.



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So the songs that you two wrote, how did you get inspiration for them?

Locksley Gichie: *Oh Jah* was one of Michael's friends.

Michael Arkk: Yes, you've probably heard of him because he used to play bass and riddim for **Culture**. His name is **Huey Iz-achaar**. He has a studio off Kingsland Road. So we went down there and we wrote it in his studio, in his front room there. **Locksley** took his guitar and the lyrics started to flow.

Locksley Gichie: The drum tracks were there already. We just chose one we liked and went on that drum track. It just came together. I had an idea for the opening line, the main part of it (sings) "*Oh Jah*", the chorus. (they sing together) "*Oh Jah put our trust in you, guide and protect us and see us through*". And as it goes along...

Michael Arkk: We add lyrics from there.

It's very moving in the documentary that Dego wasn't able to play on your comeback tour but he contributed to the album.

Locksley Gichie: Yeah, because we knew **Dego** from 1970. From when **Dego** came to London with **Dave and Ansel Collins**. He was living around the corner from us in West Kilburn. He spent more time in our house because our house was like HQ! You name it, **Pioneers**, **Pat Kelly**, **Ken Boothe**, everybody used to come to HQ. Because **Ci-marons** was the band. So that's why **Dego** was coming around. We became really good friends over the years. Gradually until his passing. It was the happiest time of his life. He was really happy because he was looking forward so much to getting back on stage and performing. So it kept him going for a long time. He fought hard. But there were so many things happening in his body that he couldn't make it.

Michael Arkk: You could see his enthusiasm on **No Bass Like Home**. And when we started filming the documentary, a song



that he really put a lot into was ***Ethiopian Romance***. But life is what it is. He was so looking forward to being with us at the **Hootananny** and coming out to work but it didn't happen.

In the very end in the credits the documentary dedicated to his memory is very powerful. Especially with Maurice passing away as well.

Locksley Gichie: That hurts man. Every time I see the documentary it brings tears to my eyes. Because **Maurice** was so close to us.

Michael Arkk: I don't remember which song it was. But he and I were right by the door of the studio because I'd just come out of the vocal booth and he had done the drumming earlier. We were now listening to a rough mix and I didn't know that was the last time I would see him.

Let's talk about a bit of history. How in the late 60s/early 70s the original lineup went on the first reggae tour of West Africa.

Locksley Gichie: Yeah, that was a good and bad experience. What happened was there was this African brother called **Eddie**. I think he was from Nigeria or Biafra. We used to rehearse in Stoke Newington because we used to rehearse in Harlesden, but in Harlesden anybody who heard us rehearsing, it became like a dance! The next thing you know it's full! Everybody comes in like a party. So we wanted a bit of freedom and space in Stoke Newington. And this brother came in, **Eddie**, and he said "*I'm looking for a band to take to Africa. Are you guys interested?*" At first we thought he was joking but he was serious. We said "*Ok, we don't mind*".

But he said he wanted us to do soul. We said "*But we're a rocksteady band*". So he said "*You can do rocksteady too, but concentrate on the soul*". At the time we had a singer called **Legs** who wasn't a reggae singer, he was more of a soul man. So we decided we would do half an hour of soul and half an hour of reggae. And **Eddie** brought this record to us and he said "*I want you to do this record exactly the way it is*". And the record was *The Champ*.

The Mohawks.

Locksley Gichie: And we were thinking "*Why?*" He said "*Don't worry about it, in Africa, soul is the thing. You got to do James Brown*". So we did **James Brown Papa's Got a Brand New Bag**. We did quite a few soul songs. We did 50/50. Half was rocksteady. Then **Legs** would do the soul. Anyway, he took us to Africa. And he didn't give us much information. When we got to Ghana Airport, coming off the plane we hear a lot of noise (makes sounds of cheering). Me and **Frank** are walking into the lounge and **Frank** was saying "*It sounds like a big artist is on the plane with us!*" We got to the airport lounge and cameras were going flash flash! And they asked us questions. "*Which of you are in the Mohawks?*" **Eddie** told the

guy who booked the whole tour that **Cimarons** bass player and keyboard player were ex-members of the **Mohawks**.

When the keyboardist was really a white man who made TV theme songs, Alan Hawkshaw!

Locksley Gichie: He didn't brief us. We didn't know nothing. And he's telling the story saying "*This is Carl Levy from the Mohawks and Franklyn from the Mohawks*". On the way from the airport to the hotel people were lining both sides of the street! We were superstars! We had kids running behind the bus all the way to the hotel! So we got to the hotel and we said "*What's going on Eddie? You could have at least told us before that we are Mohawks*". A soul band.

In England you only do one hour but in Africa you do two. The first night we played, people went crazy! The soul was good but the rocksteady hit them so hard they couldn't believe what was happening! "*What kind of music is this?*" But they were loving it! The first night we did one hour. Coming off stage the club went mad! "*More more!*" The promoter said "*In Africa you do two hours you don't do one hour*". We said "*No boss, we do one hour*". After five minutes he says "*Fellas, if you don't go back on stage they're going to smash you into bits!*" (laughs)

But after a while we enjoyed it, because that's how we ended up playing some of our tracks so long. Because when we do a live show you'll notice we do **Ship Ahoy** and then we'll extend it. Because in Africa we were doing a song extended. We used to do **Papa's Got A Brand New Bag** for about 15 or 20 minutes.

Going back to the album, you also redid Morning Sun, your 1970 collaboration with Al Barry from the Aces. So can you tell me the history of that song and why you decided to do it again?



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Locksley Gichie: It's funny, the first album we did wasn't **In Time**. We did an album before **In Time**. But there wasn't a name for it. Because if you remember **Philip Chen**, the bass player, a brilliant musician. He wanted to do an album. They didn't have any cash. He just said "*Cimarons if you just come in and do an album, you do my album and you have an album for yourself*". Couldn't turn it down. Funnily enough we'd just been back a couple of months from Africa.

We didn't have a vocalist at the time. I did most of the singing. I did about four or five original songs. I can't remember the lyrics or the song but we were playing a song in the studio and **Al Barry** walked in. Coming now from **Desmond Dekker** and **The Aces**. He said "*Play that track again*". And he just came up with (sings refrain) "*La la la dee la la la da la la da*". And then "*Way out in the Morning Sun*" and that was it. And it wasn't

until a couple of months after that the record came out on 45. **Al Barry** and the **Cimarons**. Which was good.

That they gave you the credit.

Locksley Gichie: (laughs) And that song became so popular. Yeah, just does something to the audience. It's a song that was always at the back of mind, so whenever we do a live show we've got to do it. And we ended up recording it again. Because **Michael** adds something extra to it. With his voice.

On the credits for the album that I was sent it has Carl Levy as co-writer of that song and also on *Reggae Rhapsody* and *Mother Earth*. So he played a big role.

Locksley Gichie: I don't know what happened there but he got part of the credit! (laughs) Some things you can't remember. But all I knew was that song really was one of my songs. I can't remember the lyrics I was

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doing on it but the original rhythm was my rhythm. It's like when we did some tracks for **Tapper Zukie**, his first album. We went to his studio for the day. Same thing, we were at his studio doing a couple of tracks. **Zukie** came in and next he came with **Man Ah Warrior** and I'm thinking "*That's my song!*" (laughs) We ended up doing quite a few tracks for him on **Man Ah Warrior** with no recognition. Not one mention. That's reggae music for you in the early days.

We need to talk about your experiences with Bob Marley. Delroy Washington told me his side of it.

Locksley Gichie: **Bob Marley** was like a dream come true. Because from school days I used to have this part-time job next door to a record shop. **Bob Marley** come out with **Simmer Down**. And that record blew me sky high. And then come 1972, we were in rehearsal and **Delroy Washington** came in with this brother. Very short guy with a big afro. We didn't stop, we just kept on playing. And he just stood there and didn't say a word. And **Delroy** said "*Is Bob Marley, you know?*" We said "*Where, where?*" (laughs) And that was **Bob Marley**! And he said to us "*The man them sound good, you know? You know any of my songs?*" And **Cimarons**, any song we liked, we used to rehearse it. And we started with **Duppy Conqueror**. He said "*What? Me can't believe it man! What other songs do you know?*" And we did **Soul Rebel**. That was it! (laughs)

So then you played some concerts?

Locksley Gichie: Yeah, he was in England with **Johnny Nash**. He wanted to do a couple of live shows here. So we did a couple of rehearsals with him and **Johnny Nash**. And we did the **Apollo Club**. **Johnny Nash** and **Ken Boothe** and **Bob Marley**. And then we did **Mr B's Club** in Peckham. People couldn't believe it because people didn't know **Bob** was in the country. Then we did the **Bamboo Club** in Bristol. Saturday and Sunday. Sunday night **Bob** did about four songs and he couldn't come off stage. He came off and they lifted him up! And put him back on! (laughs)



And then we used to hang out with him. Down by his flat. Smoking and drinking and thing. And me and **Bob** became very close now. We used to exchange ideas. I said "*Bob you love James Brown innit?*" And he started laughing because he uses a few **James Brown** phrases in his voice and I could hear it. This was the same time he got the deal with **Island Records**. He wanted to do a tour and he went home to Jamaica and brought back **Bunny**, **Peter** and **Familyman**.

And they lived in that house in Neasden where they put the plaque up in 2012.

Locksley Gichie: Yeah. **Bunny** and **Peter** weren't happy. They didn't like the scene. But we used to do a lot of rehearsals. Because at one time **Frank** was rehearsing with **Johnny Nash**. Playing bass for him. I used to be with **Familyman** and **Carly**. So **Bob** was experimenting. He was using both drummers, **Maurice** and **Carly** in rehearsal. One day we were just messing around on **Concrete Jungle**. And I was into rock. **Santana**. So on **Concrete Jungle** we started doing some licks. (Sings **Concrete Jungle** lead line from **Catch A Fire**). **Bob** went crazy! Because we used to he say to me "*Gichie I don't want to copy nobody. I want a sound nobody has. I want my own sound*". **Bob** heard me playing **Concrete Jungle** and said "*Bloodclot! Gichie you a genius you know? That's the sound that I hear in my head, you know?*"

When he got the deal with **Island Records**, he came back from Jamaica with the raw mix. He phoned me one Saturday evening. He said “*Gichie, grab the guitar and come in the studio now, Ladbroke Grove.*” And he was rushing. He said “*That guitar you were playing on **Concrete Jungle**, play it now for me.*” It’s over one year ago! And I’m thinking “*What do I play?*” (laughs) Because it’s just a feel. You just get inspired. And I forgot what it was. I was just feeling out trying to get back in. I wasn’t relaxed. I would have got it right but I needed more time. But anyway he got upset and we had a big argument. And I got pissed off and I left. He was carrying on too bad. “*Bomboclat*” and all this.

Didn’t you say in the documentary that he wanted you to join the band?

Locksley Gichie: That was after. What happened was he fell in love with me and **Levy**. He wanted **Cimarons** rhythm section. He comes and says “*Levy, Gichie we’re going to America next month and I want you guys to come with me.*” And I said “*Bob it just can’t work you know? Cimarons is my baby. I can’t abandon Cimarons.*” Anyway he went to America without us and that’s when he brought in **Al Anderson**.

You mentioned in the documentary that Bob suggested doing *Talking Blues*.

Locksley Gichie: Bob said to me “*Gichie, you guys are always covering other people songs. How come you never do over my songs?*” And we said “*Ok Bob, we’ll think about it!*” (laughs) *Talking Blues* wasn’t planned. We were at **Chalk Farm Studio** one Saturday evening. And it was meant to be **Jackie [Robinson]** from **The Pioneers** doing a solo album, producing it himself. It was **Syd Bucknor**, the engineer, and the session started at 3 o’clock. We go to the studio, set up ready to go. Three hours, no **Jackie!**

And **Syd Bucknor** says “*There is a tape here and enough space for one track. For us*



to do a recording.” We rehearsed *Talking Blues* to include it in our live show. So we said “*Oh, let us do Talking Blues. Sydney, run tape.*” One take! About a week after we were in Japan. **Tommy Cowan** from the **Jamaicans** would come to England every now and then. He was checking **Webster [Shrowder of Trojan]** to see what music he could use. He went through all the tapes and the very last song he came to was *Talking*



Blues. I wasn't there but I heard the story. When he heard it he said *"That sound good, man"*. And he says that he wants it. So we revised it and we put the harmonies on it and that was it.

So we're in Japan with the Pioneers. We got a phone call from Jamaica. **"Cimarons! You're number one in Jamaica!"** **"What you talking about, number one?"** I put the phone

down. About a week later he phoned back **"No, no, you guys are number one in Jamaica. You've got to leave Japan now and come to Jamaica"**. Japan tour was so good and we were enjoying it. Because the people love reggae music so much in Japan. They loved **Cimarons**. So we left Japan and came to England and then Jamaica. We just missed out, because when we arrived in Jamaica, **Talking Blues** was number 10! And people

thought it was **Bob Marley** at first. In Jamaica it wasn't called *Talking Blues*. It was called *Cold Ground*. (laughs)

But it did well. We did a couple of tours there. I remember the first show we did was at the **Ward Theatre** in Kingston. And I grew up as a little youth listening to the radio on Christmas Day. My mind was blown because I'm thinking "*Wow, as a youth I used to listen to these people on the radio and now I'm here*". And we started off (sings intro to *Talking Blues*) and the crowd reacted! It's a lynching mob! (laughs) We did a show in Kingston at a club called the **Turntable Club**. **Turntable Club** was no smoking and that was a regulation. We did a concert there and oh gosh, the place did fall apart and the backstage was pure ganja smoke! (laughs) **Big Youth** said "*Boy, me love Cimarons now because it's the first time I get to smoke a spliff in Turntable Club!*"

On the new album you also cover a Studio One classic, *Eternal Peace* by Johnny Osbourne.

Locksley Gichie: I used to do a disc jockey show. On a pirate station. **RJR**. I used to do Friday nights. And that song, the **Johnny Osbourne** version, the lyrics "*We need Eternal Peace. Tell it to the people searching for Eternal Peace*". It just suits the times. So I said "*Michael we've got to do that over you know?*" We were listening to the **Johnny Osbourne** version and it was good but through **Michael** we added a bit extra and changed the whole rhythm section around. And made it our own.

And Makeda Moore added some guest vocals?

Michael Arkk: Yeah, she took a part of a verse there and she just nailed it so well. She gave it a new feeling and created an atmosphere. I wanted to stop and cheer! (laughs)

Locksley Gichie: She's brilliant, man. Brilliant singer.

And what about remaking *Mother Earth* from your 1978 album *Maka*?

Locksley Gichie: Again it suits the times. A lot of songs **Cimarons** did were timeless. *Mother Earth* is one of them. *Mother Earth* is for everyone. And she's under threat. We've got to keep reminding people that Mother Earth is very important. So it's a very special song that suits the times. Because we didn't want to drift too far away from the original **Cimarons**. We're really a roots group. The first reggae roots group in England.

Michael Arkk, can you tell me about your history and how you joined the group?

Michael Arkk: I came into England in 1987. To a place called Walsall. I was invited by one **Reverend Dr McGregor** and I came singing gospel. He and I met at a convention in Jamaica. At a place called May Pen. Time went by and I became a woodcutter. I went down to that area to collect some money but the people I sold the wood to, haven't paid me one second of attention. If they had come and said anything to me I would never have met the **Cimarons**. So when I decided "*Today this is not going to happen*", I decided to go up to that church where I had sung some years before. I had a friend there. She is a brilliant singer and I wanted to borrow a couple of dollars from her to pay my fare back to Manchester. That's Manchester, Jamaica! And she said "*Go round to the church, there is a letter there for you for nearly a month now*".

A lady gave me the letter and it was an invitation to come to England. I decided "I'm going back home to call **Dr McGregor**". I decided to walk down to the police station which was over a mile away. I forgot how hungry I was, how tired I was. I was so excited about this letter. And the miraculous thing is, because then we didn't have mobile phones and we were too poor to have a phone in the house, the little money that my mum gave to me, if it rings it would take your money anyway. It made three rings and the exact person that I wanted to speak

A close-up, low-angle shot of a man with dark skin and thick dreadlocks. He is smiling with his eyes closed, looking upwards. The background is a bright, slightly hazy sky with soft clouds. In the lower right, a blurred view of a mountain range with green vegetation is visible.

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to answered. By the time I told him *“I just got the letter sir can I still come?”*, he said *“Yes”*. (Makes noise of phone hanging up) It finished. (laughs).

I came to England and kept on singing gospel but our community got saturated very quickly. It was only certain church groups that accepted the brand of gospel that we did. It was the Old Testament roots reggae brand of gospel from that section of the Bible. I think that’s why I fitted in with **Cimarons** because I had a roots connection, even though I was into the gospel side.

That is how I came into being introduced because **Charles** we worked together before, and he knew **Locksley** and **Cimarons** needed a singer. So I’m very grateful to him for thinking of me so well. To have introduced me to this band that was the band of all bands. So I feel as if the journey from where I didn’t get the money led to this point. That church gospel and now into roots reggae with the **Cimarons**.

Which gospel or reggae singers influenced you when you were younger?

Michael Arkk: We couldn’t listen to reggae in our house because my dad was a minister. But when you go past the shops and hear the jukeboxes play...

Luciano had the same situation.

Michael Arkk: (laughs) I haven’t met him but he is from the adjacent community to mine! Anyway, **Toots**, **Jimmy Cliff**, later on **Bob Marley**, **Sam Cooke**, the usual names... because that’s what came via radio into Jamaica. So I found it easy to mimic them. Anything I heard from **Sam** or **Toots**, within hours I can sing exactly what I hear. So although we couldn’t dance or listen to it in the house, when you go down the road you could have a little dance and a little listen! (laughs) So we had the whole of the earlier singers, the **Mahalia Jacksons**, the **Aretha Franklins**, **Five Blind Boys From Alabama**. All of those old gospel songs and

sounds. It helps to bring the soul aspect of my thing.

What are your plans now you’ve finished the album?

Locksley Gichie: Well, as you know we’re not getting much younger. (laughs) So we’re trying to do as much touring as we can do now. And of course we want to do a follow-up album as well. So this is just the start.

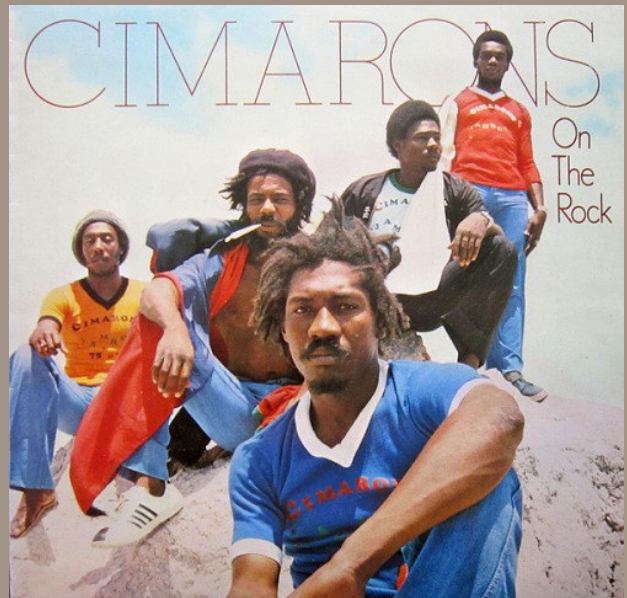
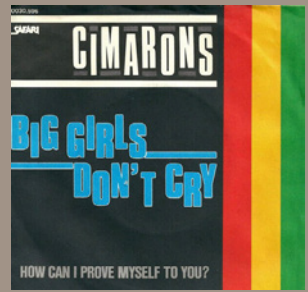
Michael Arkk: I think a national tour or a few international dates will be very good for us. To open other markets to become aware of the **Cimarons**. Because no other band on Earth has the history of the **Cimarons**. One person in the documentary said without **Cimarons** possibly there would be no reggae in Europe. Because when **Bob** came, he came to **Cimarons**. **Toots**, **Jimmy Cliff**, **Ken Boothe**, everybody came to **Cimarons**.

Locksley Gichie: Pat Kelly.

Michael Arkk: Pat Kelly and all the early guys came to **Cimarons**. That needs to be made known to the masses. That it is **Cimarons** that took reggae into Europe and into Africa and Asia. So it would be good to retrace these steps. And we talk about the documentary but there is a film in my opinion! We did mention having somebody like **Spike Lee** take an interest but it’s how to get it to him? So we need to perform somewhere in America and invite him. Or some other person here like **Guy Richie**, maybe? Somebody who understands the vibes. And can put it together very well. It would be expensive but I think it would be commercially viable.

Locksley Gichie: It would make a good movie.

Before we finish, Locksley can you say something about Harlesden through the years? It became such a big place for reggae music when you came over. And it just got bigger and bigger.





Locksley Gichie: Yeah it did! With Harlesden you got **Matumbi**, **Aswad**, **Brinsley** used to come to HQ. Because he was sitting there when we were doing the **In Time** album. We did a couple of tracks and he said “*You guys write all the songs?*” And I said “*Yeah, we write all the songs you know?*” And then **Brinsley** went missing for about a couple of months and came back with songs that he wrote. In Harlesden you had about four record shops. In the early days the first club, **31**. And then **31** became the **Apollo**. And it used to draw people from all over London. It was a good place to be, the **Apollo Club!** You got **Vivian Jones**, **Junior English** and the list goes on.

Right up to people like Chukki Starr and Gappy Ranks today.

Locksley Gichie: Yeah, still carrying it.

Michael Arkk: Did **Vincent Nap** come from there as well?

Locksley Gichie: Yeah, **Vincent Nap** was from the area. So all the artists and musicians started there in Harlesden. It was the place to be man. And **Cimarrons** influence the whole lot of them!

Thank you very much for your time.

Locksley Gichie: A pleasure.

Michael Arkk: You’re very welcome. I’m **Cimarrons** and I’m still learning!

CIMARONS - HARDER THAN THE ROCK

June 13, 2025

One of 2024's most heart-warming reggae stories was the revival of foundation UK group **Cimarons**, as told in **Mark Warmington's** documentary **Harder Than The Rock**.

The first reggae band to form in London, they worked with Jamaica's biggest artists in the early 70s, scored a number one hit in Jamaica covering their friend **Bob Marley's** *Talking Blues*, and made pioneering tours of West Africa, Asia, and Europe. Despite these milestones, they suffered from a lack of management and missed out on the success of next wave UK bands like **Aswad** and **Steel Pulse**. They disbanded due to a scarcity of work in the 1980s, with lead singer **Winston Reedy** going on to a solo career. Since reforming, minus **Reedy**, in 2020, the group has weathered the loss of original drummer **Maurice Ellis** and of vocalist/songwriter **Bobby "Dego" Davis** (who both died during the making of the film).

So poignant is their tale that fans will be rooting for their comeback album, also titled **Harder Than The Rock**, to be an artistic achievement. And thanks to founders **Locksley Gichie**, **Franklyn Dunn** and new singer **Michael Arkk** linking up with top Spanish musicians supervised by maestro producer-engineer **Roberto Sanchez**, it is the reverently organic, beautifully rendered work one would hope for.

Several classic **Cimarons** songs are revisited respectfully and energetically. The album begins with *Ship Took Us Away*, a **Dunn** helmed offshoot of their 1974 cover of the **O'Jays** *Ship Ahoy* (and as heard on their 1978 LP *Live At The Roundhouse*). Featuring nyabingi percussion, wave



crashing echoes, additional ad-libbed lyrics and beautiful flute playing by **Lucho Lopez**, the new version is a worthy companion to previous iterations. The same can be said of first single *Morning Sun*, a revisit to their enduringly popular 1970 collaboration with **Aces** singer **Al Barry**. Garnished with subtle horns and **Sanchez's** shimmering vintage organ, it's a wonderful showcase for **Arkk's** big,

gospel inspired yet silky smooth vocals.

A retread of 1978's **Dunn** composed *Harder Than The Rock* has special meaning, as it saw **Reedy** and **Arkk** share the mic at **Cimarons's** reformation gig at **Brixton Hootananny**. A blissed out cover version of **Johnny Osbourne's** 1979 **Studio One** standard *Eternal Peace*, chosen for its lyrical resonance, features a guest verse from next generation talent **Makeda Moore**.

The newer songs are just as nicely executed. Fervent plea and second single *Oh Jah*, co-written by **Arkk** and **Gichie** at **Huey Izachaar's** studio in Hackney, stands with the band's cultural back catalogue. The soul-ballad-evoking *I Will Follow You*, sung in heavenly higher registers by **Arkk**, was written by their friend **Dego** prior to his passing. Partly penned by **Dego** and finished off by **Arkk** is the joyous rebuke *The Fool Said*, a return to the churchy literary that **Arkk** trod before his **Cimarons** career.

The combination of the **Cimarons** material, **Arkk's** singing and the sure touch of **Sanchez** and his musicians make this a pleasing reckoning for all the hardships the group has faced. Hopes will be high for the follow up album, already being planned.

by **ANGUS TAYLOR**

INTERVIEW



KONSHENS

WE NEED A LITTLE BREAK

FOCUS ON THE GOOD ENERGY!

BY GARDY STEIN

PHOTOS BY PETER PARK & JLUE

With hits like *Bruk Off Yuh Back*, *Pull Up To Mi Bumper* or *Gal A Bubble*, he left an indelible mark on Jamaican dancehall – and continues to do so: **Garfield Delano Spence** aka the **Paahty Gad** aka **Kon-Don** aka **Konshens**. Throughout his impressive career, he has managed to establish his brand with a combination of determination, authentic lyrics, clever marketing and unrivalled talent (and, admittedly, his good looks have done no harm, either).

For the summer of 2025, the artist has a new treat in store for us, an album called **Pool Party** including 15 sizzling original tracks by innovative producers like **Izzy Beatz**, **Tony Kelly** and **BomboCat** as well as exciting and unexpected features. **Reggaeville** caught up with **Konshens** to talk about his music and how it can give us a break from the stressful times we live in:



Greetings Konshens, how are you today?

I'm great! I just got back off the road. I'm in Columbia, I'm here to record.

We'll talk about the new album likkle more, but first... you've been living in Miami for some time now, do you see any changes since Trump took over, since the new government is there? How is life in the US right now?

Well, in Miami, everything is very hectic and everybody's walking on eggshells, basically. You know, the situation with the immigrants, I think that's affecting everybody who's not born in America. So everybody's kind of on edge trying to figure out what the next thing will be. Then, you know, with all the trade

talks and the taxes... it's all just very chaotic right now. But we have life, you know! We're going to make it work regardless.

True. Yeah, I hope things will calm down all over the world soon, we just have to stay positive and hopeful. On Instagram, you posted a picture saying "My first fight is on June 6th". What is that about? Have you started boxing now?

No, no, no (laughs). That was just me playing around. The album was initially slated to release June the 6th, but now it's changed to June 27th. So that was just me having some fun. There's a lot of people asking me about it.

Ok. But is boxing a sport that you ever took interest in doing?

No, never! In combat sports, maybe, I would say more MMA. I used to be very active in sports, basketball, football, swimming, track... I used to do a lot, but not anymore. Now my sport is being a dad. (laughs)

That takes a lot of energy for sure! As does stage, I guess. People in Germany certainly remember your energetic appearance at Summerjam in Cologne last year. You had a great show, and my highlight was when you invited Romain Virgo on stage and you performed *We No Worry Bout Them* together. You mentioned that it was the first time that you performed this song with him live. How did it feel in that moment to be there with all the fans, with Romain on stage?

To share this moment with an audience that showed both of us so much love over the years, it was a good vibe, a very good vibe! And that's an artist that... I see him as a little brother, and I'm just proud of who he's become as an artist and as a person. It was good to see him perform first, to get that good energy, and then me perform and have the opportunity to call him out again, it was just so real for me, I loved it.

I can imagine! Which other artists have you performed with on stage, can you mention some highlights?

So many! **Tarrus Riley** would be a major one, and I think I've done collaborations and performances with almost every artist. You know, Jamaica has a culture of artists sharing the stage, and I've been a part of a few of those. It's always a good energy to share the stage with my peers.

Talking about stages, you seem to have a huge fan base over in East Africa. How often have you been there, what was your most recent stay over there?

I think it was two years ago, I did a nice show there. East Africa showed me so much love! It's been midway in my career,

they just fell in love with me and I fell in love with them, and it's been a love story. I've been to Kenya, Uganda, I've been to Rwanda, to South Sudan, Juba... I touched quite a few places in East Africa.

That's great. And I see that, apart from the album production, you are so involved with other projects as well. You released singles like *MaFren*, *Rum Bus*, *Slow Motion*, *Messi*... this one was done with an African artist, right?

With **Harmonize**, he is from Tanzania.

This sounds like a full-time job. How many hours do you spend on music every day?

This is lifestyle for me! You know, being in the studio is like being in the living room watching TV, it's like second nature. I mean, even when I'm on tour, when I'm on the road, I normally have my mobile studio with me. I'm never too far from the studio at any given point, I've never been. That's how I like to live my life.

Nice! Now, the fruits of this lifestyle are ripe, let's say, and your new album *Pool Party* is about to be released. How long have you been working on this one?

I would say two and a half years. But there are songs on this album that are 12 years old, so it's very much, for me, a full circle album. Like, songs that I started in one frame of mind, then I went into a different frame of mind, and now I'm back in a certain frame of mind, and the songs are there. So I think that it is also important to not put a time stamp on music, it's not music geared towards a particular era or a particular moment in time. It's songs that, ten, twenty years from now, they can still be relevant because I don't limit it to slangs or whatever, you know what I mean?

Yes, understood. Which producers were involved in this production?

Izzy [Beatzz] did a lot of songs on there. He's a super talented producer and we happen to just be in Miami and ended up





in studio a few years ago, and then we just started making music. I think he has five songs on the album, but we have like 50 songs together, we just took those that fit this album the best. Then **Markhize**, people know him from *Gal A Bubble* and *Stop Sign*, so he's on the album too. I didn't want to start mentioning names and forget some, but those two stand out.

Yeah, it's a nice mix of styles and flows on this album. Let's get a bit deeper into some of the songs. The *Intro* comes like a prayer,

you're saying that only God can judge you, and you're asking him to protect your family... Is praying something you do in your daily routine? Like, would you say you are a religious person?

I'm not religious, but I'm very spiritual. You know, I believe in God, I believe there's a creator, I believe somebody is watching over me, but don't ask me to name him.

Sure. It's a sweet start into the album, hearing your gratitude, calling this protection down...

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SATURDAY

SUNDAY

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THIRD WORLD - T.O.K - ROMAIN VIRGO - BUGLE

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You know, this album is called **Pool Party**, and that's really the mode that I'm in during the last five, six years. I feel like the world has just been in constant turmoil, and I really didn't want to come and do an album that is a reflection of that turmoil. I think we need a little break, a little mental break, and for me... you know, I could go and try to make music to tap into what's happening and to be a kind of therapist to get the people vent through the music. But I'd rather be the person that make people just enjoy themselves for a moment and take their mind off of the stress that's been going on. So, that first song, **Our Father**, was kind of my moment of reverence before all hell breaks loose (laughs).

Perfectly placed! And also the cover, I mean, it looks like a pool party, of course, but then you have the fire everywhere, the smoke... what does this symbolise?

Basically, what I just said! It's all this turmoil going on in the world, but let's just have a party, let's just dive into this music and let the music be our therapist.

That's cool! The second song is *Money Dealings*, talking about money and spending and "real life meanings". It might come across a bit materialistic, but you are somebody who actually spends money on the right things, if I may say so. Can you tell us something about the charity work you do?

Well, I haven't been in Jamaica for a while. I've done quite a few charities, not just in Jamaica, even in Kenya, the first time I went there. You know, giving back is something that... I don't think it's something you *have* to do, but I think it's something you *should* do. I think it's an individual decision, and for me, it's a good thing.

FATBABS NEW ALBUM

FEAT. CAPLETON, NAÂMAN,
CHRISTOPHER MARTIN,
BIGA*RX, QUEEN OMEGA,
JAHNNERATION, MARCUS GAD,
JAH LIL, BLVK H3RO, DAVOJAH, CHEEKO,
NYLE BANKS, CLAYE, DERAJAH, VANZO,
ROE SUMMERZ, KIMECO, WALSHY FIRE,
MISCELLANEOUS, SIKALION





Big respect for that – and you don't show it off! I love people who do such things quietly, you know, not bragging about it, just doing what is good. Thank you for that. Now, of course there's a lot of party songs on the album, a lot of songs for the dancers, for the ladies. What I realised in the first few of those, like *Back Dat Azz Up*, *Gyal Time Again*, *Badman* or *Tight & Good*, you seem to hail the 90s dancehall a lot. Like, you mention *Bedroom Bully*, there's a Buju sample and a remake of the Bookshelf Riddim, for example... What does this era mean to you, how much 90s Dancehall is in the artist Konshens?

So much! I think that was the era that I was falling in love with music as a fan. Looking back at the 90s, early 2000s, it's actually the heyday, the big time for dancehall, which even is a reason for me to make this album called **Pool Party** and make it be about fun music and good energy and party music, because people need that! And if you think about the heights of dancehall music, it wasn't about... Even though I'm guilty of this, I sang a bunch of depressing songs too in my time (laughs), singing about worries and problems and fake friends and serious topics, and these are important. But the big times for dancehall music, people were sin-



ging about parties and love and them vibes, good vibes, and I think that's what made people fall in love with Jamaican music and dancehall music. So, I wanted to tap back into that part of our culture. I think you fell a little bit victim into being overly lyrical, and though that is good, for me, I wanted to write the soundtrack to people's parties' lives, you know, I want people to look back and say, when you hear certain instrumentals, come on, you remember where you were, how your hair was, your girlfriend, your boyfriend, you remember your friends

in the party... I wanted to make more music like that. So five years down the line, ten years down the line, that's what people are thinking "*This song reminds me of that good moment, not just a bad moment!*"

Yeah, that's great! That's why for me, the 90s dancehall is the best. And tracks like *Gyal Time Again* have that vibe.

If you try to name your top five or top ten songs from the 90s or 2000s, they weren't singing about struggles and singing about seriousness in life, they were singing about

ALBOROSIE

& SHENGAN CLAN

- 04.06 Schaffhausen (CH) | Kammgarn
- 05.06 Rubigen (CH) | Mühle Hunziken
- 07.06 Valence (ES) | Iboga Nits de Vivers
- 08.06 Kalavryta (GR) | Helmos Mountain
- 13.06 Péngny (FR) | Festival Notes en Vert
- 14.06 Saint-Chamond (FR) | La Rue des Artistes
- 18.06 Groningen (NL) | Spot Groningen
- 19.06 Hannover (DE) | Faust Kulturzentrum
- 20.06 Hořice (CZ) | Cultural Reggae Vibez
- 25.06 Lisbonne (PT) | Monsantos Open Air
- 27.06 Madrid (ES) | ReggaeMad Fest
- 28.06 La Seyne/Mer (FR) | Couleurs Urbaines
- 04.07 Köln (DE) | Summerjam
- 05.07 Anneyron (FR) | Erva festival
- 10.07 Chambéry (FR) | Les Estivaes en Savoie
- 11.07 Lancy (CH) | Plein les Watts Festival
- 02.08 Humboldt (US) | Reggae On The River



BLAIZ FAYAH

- 04.07 Köln (DE) | Summerjam Festival
- 11.07 St-Jean-sur-Richelieu (CA) | Shatta Therapy
- 12.07 Québec (CA) | Festival d'été de Québec
- 15.07 Montreal (CA) | Festival Nuits D'Afrique
- 18.07 Montreux (CH) | Montreux Jazz Festival
- 25.07 Biarritz (FR) | Biarritz Hall Music Festival
- 01.08 Estavayer-le-lac (CH) | Estivale Open air
- 02.08 Geel (BE) | Reggae Geel
- 23.08 Gießen (DE) | Shatta World Festival
- 11.10 Marseille (FR) | Fiesta Des Suds
- 17.10 Roubaix (FR) | Dancehall Together
- 24.10 Baie Mahault (GP) | Lacazart
- 26.10 Fort-de-France (MQ) | Grand Carbet
- 20.11 Nantes (FR) | Warehouse
- 21.11 Bordeaux (FR) | Salle du Grand Parc
- 22.11 Toulouse (FR) | Le Bikini
- 28.11 Besançon (FR) | La Rodia
- 29.11 Aarau (CH) | Kiff



KY-MANI MARLEY

- 25.07 Uppsala (SE) | Uppsala Reggae Festival
- 26.07 Cantalupo Ligure (IT) | One Love Fest
- 27.07 Boechout (BE) | Sfkns festival
- 01.08 Vertheuil (FR) | Sun Ska Festival
- 02.08 Bersenbrück (DE) | Reggae Jam
- 03.08 Berghaupten (DE) | Black forest on Fire
- 05.08 Schaffhausen (CH) | Kammgarn
- 07.08 Le Lavandou (FR) | Théâtre de Verdure
- 08.08 Wiesen (AT) | One Love Festival
- 09.08 Fraisans (FR) | No Logo Festival
- 14.08 St Carles de Peraltà (ES) | Las Dalias de Ibiza
- 20.08 Benicassim (ES) | Rototom Sunsplash
- 23.08 St Anne d'Auray (FR) | Les Galettes du Monde
- 24.08 Mülheim (DE) | Ruhr reggae Summer

L'ENTOURLOOP

- 28.06 Bruxelles (BE) | Couleur Café
- 11.07 Roma (IT) | Sherwood Festival
- 12.07 Bellaria-Igea Marina (IT) | Beky Bay Festival
- 18.07 Pfaffikon (CH) | Reeds Open Air Festival
- 20.08 Benicassim (ES) | Rototom Sunsplash
- 29.08 Bulle (CH) | Francomanias
- 30.08 Veyras (CH) | Tohu Bohu Festival
- 03.10 Madrid (ES) | Pirata Beach Fest
- 11.11 Manchester (UK) | Band on the Wall
- 12.11 Bristol (UK) | Electric Bristol
- 13.11 Londres (UK) | Electric Brixton

MARCUS GAD

& TRIBE

- 20.06 Levrin (CH) | Saint-Jean Rock Festival
- 21.06 Haverfordwest (UK) | Uneathed in a Field
- 28.06 Wassertrüdingen (DE) | Afrika Karibik Fest
- 27.07 Ostroda (PL) | Ostroda Reggae Festival
- 31.07 Eeklo (BE) | HELDEN IN HET PARK
- 01.08 Bersenbrück (DE) | Reggae Jam
- 08.08 Telford (UK) | Soul Revolution Festival

QUEEN OMEGA

- 25.06 Lärz (DE) | Fusion Festival
- 26.06 Madrid (ES) | ReggaeMad Fest
- 27.06 Berlin (DE) | Sonic Pluriverse Festival
- 28.06 Loulé (PT) | Med Festival
- 29.06 Bruxelles (BE) | Festival Couleur Café
- 10.07 Lancy (CH) | Plein les Watts Festival
- 12.07 Burtenbach (DE) | Sunrise Festival
- 13.07 Montmartin/mer (FR) | Chaufer Dans La Noirceur
- 19.07 Munich (DE) | Old but Gold Party
- 20.07 Frandorf (DE) | Afrikanisches Kulturfest
- 24.07 Breitenbach am Herzberg (DE) | Herzberg Fest
- 25.07 Uppsala (SE) | Uppsala Reggae Fest
- 26.07 Gignac en Quercy (FR) | Festival Ecaussystème
- 03.08 Humboldt (US) | Reggae On the River
- 16.08 Porsgrunn (NO) | Porsgrunn Ska og Reggae Fest
- 17.08 Amsterdam (NL) | Reggae Lake Festival BV
- 24.08 Northamptonshire (UK) | Shambala Festival
- 27.08 Pordenone (IT) | Music in village
- 29.08 Bratislava (SK) | Uprising Festival
- 01.10 Castres (FR) | Le Bolegason
- 02.10 Lyon (FR) | La Rayonne
- 03.10 Strasbourg (FR) | Espace Django
- 04.10 Schaffhausen (FR) | Kammgarn
- 08.10 Tours (FR) | Le Bateau Ivre
- 09.10 Paris (FR) | Cabaret Sauvage
- 10.10 Nantes (FR) | Warehouse
- 11.10 Alençon (FR) | La Luciole
- 12.10 Budapest (HU) | Akvárium Klub



JAH9

- 05.07 Köln (DE) | Summerjam
- 09.07 Haarlem (NL) | Patronaat
- 12.07 Twann (CH) | Lakesplash

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the good times! We need to focus on the good energy more. There's so much bullshit happening in the world, I think we need to give some attention to the good energy that's floating around too.

Definitely. That's what's coming across. Also, I like that you play with your voice a lot, like in *Shek It*. Was that rehearsed or did it just come out like that on the riddim? I think that just came out. Some of those beats... there are some very good productions on there, and I think some of these beats kind of led me to experiment and to try different approaches and to let the influences in the world be known, the different styles. I mean, to just be a sponge too, and see what I make of them. Some of them are Afrobeat type flows, some of them are some New Age flows, but very much heavy with the hardcore 90s dancehall style. So I think it's a good likkle blend.

Definitely! In the video for *Shek It* we see an Asian theme even, from the actors to the dresses. How did that come in?

This was all influenced from the production. If you hear the top line, it has this vibe, that's really what popped into my head, and we just brought it up with the music video.

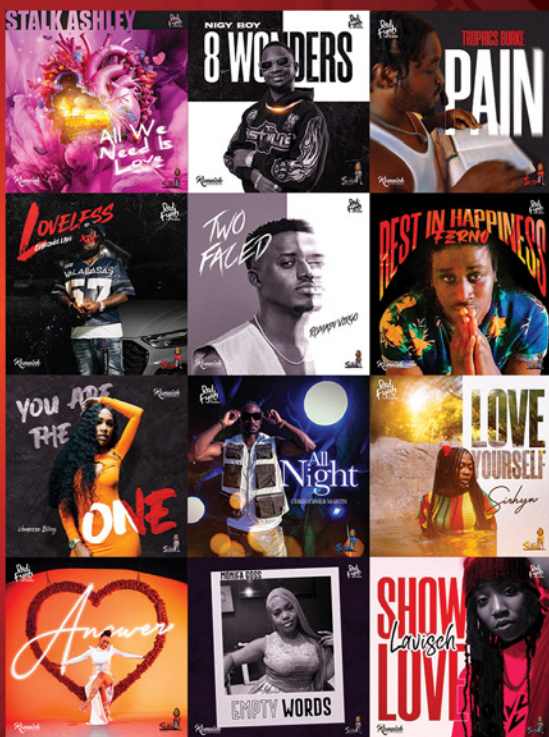
Okay. And then, talking about the featured artists, we hear Charlie Black on *Gyal Time Again*, which is a great track, we hear Skillibeng on *Bend*... have you worked with him before?

No, never. It's the first time, we just reached out and made it happen. I like his minimalist flow, I like that a lot. People will say it's ABC and it's basic, but for me, I think he's making music that everybody can appreciate, even if you don't understand per se. I'm looking forward to see what he will become in a few years from now. He's very promising and I like his style.

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SLYDA

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Fyah
Riddim

OUT NOW!



Another promising name on the album is D'Yani on *Wet And Wild*. Is that also a first time collaboration?

First time, yeah. He is a wicked, wicked, wicked young singer. Ladies love him! And he's very humble. For me, it's not just about who has a lot of Spotify streams or listeners or who has big numbers, for me it's about how the chemistry will be and who have that level of understanding to know that it's not just about being in this cloud world, but really be invested in making some good, lasting music. I wouldn't even say good music, but some lasting music, some impressive music.

Less known in a reggae context, could you introduce Eric Bellinger and Moyann, who are on the song *Rich Sex* with you?

Eric Bellinger is actually a big R&B singer, a songwriter first, he has written for almost every R&B artist, a lot of big songs from **Usher** to **Chris Brown**, a lot of people. And he's just a very decorative songwriter, and his singing career is actually good, too. I just have a connection with him, we have a vibe. That was his hook, he actually sent that song to me and asked me to do a verse, and then I did another verse for him as well, and he's like *"Yo, we'll do a swap and you take that song."* And then **Moyann** is also promising, a nice promising female artist from Jamaica. We need more female artists from Jamaica, too, so I'm always open to helping them.



That's cool to see a lady on there, too. And then there'll be a track with Lil Duval. Isn't he a comedian?

Yes, he's an American comedian slash artist. He had that song *"I'm living my best life..."* (sings). so that's how I heard that he could sing. So, you know, that song, it's kind of comedic, but it's about party and having fun and seeing a lot of women in the venue. His voice came to my mind, and I reached out to him, and I love the vibe. A nice summer party anthem!

And then, last but in no way least, another great feature is The Game, who's actually not reggae/dancehall, but rap. The song you have with him is called *Battle Zone*, maybe one of the most serious ones on this album...

Adding that song is because I can't help myself. I'm **Konshens**. So even though I'm trying to party, there's some seriousness going to find its way in there. That song is really me not trying to dwell on the seriousness of life, but just mentioning it. I mean, we are living in serious times, you started this interview talking about **Donald Trump**, the instability in the world. The song is just basically telling everybody to just stay prepared, stay ready, stay on your toes. I mean, we want to party, we want to have fun, but be ready, stay ready, you know what I mean?

That's what everybody should be! A song that surprised me is *Show Me*. It's very different. Was that something Izzy came up with or did you work on it together?

You see, your reaction is exactly what I wanted from this song, your *"It's very different."* I love that! This song, I think I did it initially like 12, 13 years ago, I actually did a video for it and everything, but I didn't release the song.

I just did a video and the song was out. So, I was playing it and **Izzy** heard it and was like *"Yo, what the hell is that?"* Yeah. And we redid the production, and he added... we were listening to **Purple Rain** and some **Prince** and some 80s pop/ R&B. So, we decided to make a beat that kind of was in that style, and that's how we came up with that wicked, wicked track.

It's really cool. You already mentioned being like a sponge, absorbing different styles, and *Deserve It All* is a mix of Afrobeats and Amapiano, not only in the beat but even in the vocal arrangement, the choir and all. Were you inspired by a particular artist for this one?

100%! There are a few artists that sing like that, one from Nigeria called **Asake**, he uses that choir a lot in his songs and it always gives me goosebumps. I wanted to do a style like that, but I didn't want to make it a serious song. I didn't want to sing about sadness, so I decided to make it basically my mantra, the way how I'm living my life, what I believe, what I'm putting out in the universe. I deserve it all! I worked for it, I'm welcoming it, I deserve it.

It's a great message, and what I like is also that you say "I never born with it", just to show that your success is nothing that's been gifted to you, it comes from hard work and perseverance. Are there other messages you want people to take from the album?

My approach with this album, I hope everybody just take it their own way. We've tried our best to make it flow a certain way and make it have somewhat of a storyline, but have the freedom to just listen to it how you want and take it how you want. People ask me to explain the album, but I don't want to explain the album, I want *you* to explain the album to yourself.

Last question, is there going to be a release party or are you preparing a tour for the album? What are the next steps?

All of the above! Release parties are coming up in various cities, and a tour is definitely coming up, too. It took me two and a half years to get the album ready, so I want to promote this album for like two years too.

The fans are ready for it, I'm sure!

I believe so, too.

Konshens, thank you so much! I just want to say big up to you and the team, it's great work! And all the best for the next steps.

I hope people enjoy the album. It's coming from my heart and from my brain, a little bit (laughs). I hope everybody loves that. Thank you so much for having me here!

KONSHENS - POOL PARTY

Submachine Entertainment - June 27, 2025

Crazy politicians, wars and conflicts, stress and depression – every day we're faced with struggles and challenges, both globally and personally. Enter **Konshens** – your musical lifeguard, here to hit pause on the world burning, on a mission to give you a break, throwing a **Pool Party** as therapy. For his latest album, he cooked up 15 tracks, a genre-blending ride with vibes for many moods and something for any fan from every corner of the world. You'll get your dose of dancehall, but he's also throwing in some Afro-beats and a splash of hip hop.

Old school purists will appreciate the slightly tweaked version of the classic **Bookshelf** riddim by **Tony "CD" Kelly** for the track **Bad Man** and bounce heads will recognise their 1998 fav by **Juvenile**, **Mannie Fresh** and **Lil Wayne** that **Konshens** turned into **Back Dat Azz Up**, proving he can spit rapid-fire dancehall lyrics over just any beat.

Modern and fresh instrumentals were contributed by producers like **BomboCat**, **Markhize**, **Track Starr** and **Toast** hitmaker **IzyBeats**. Some songs come in light and breezy, others hit with a hypnotic, sensual vibe, and a few get deep or carry an almost sombre tone like **Money Dealings**. There are sing-along anthems such as the hilarious, sunny, pop-driven **So Many** featuring comedian **Lil Duval** and the long-awaited reward **Deserve It All** taking listeners on the journey from *"bare hard work, ah never no luck"* to *"the house, the cars and living like the stars"*. Bold dance instructions like **Bend** and the mystically exotic **Shek It** for the confident dancehall queens are mandatory, and some



cheeky shots are fired at haters and bad mind: *"I see you watching my story and I know you don't like me"*. To round it up vocally, **Konshens** invited colleagues such as **Charly Black**, **Moyann** and **Eric Bellinger** to his **Pool Party**. With **Skillibeng** and **D'Yani** he's giving a platform to young talents from Jamaica and on the dark track **Battle Zone**, veteran rap star **The Game** delivered the

perfect counterpart with his deep, distinct voice, dropping powerful lyrics about the ever-ready grind in life's battlefield.

With his sonically and lyrically multifaceted new album, **Konshens** has effectively emerged from years of *"tragedies, trials, and the losing of the passion"*, as he admits in an interview, into a comeback era or what he calls *"another rebirth"* in the intro of **Our Father**, the spiritual and emotional opening track.

Pool Party might just be more than therapy for its listeners – it's also proof that the artist himself is back in his "own lane" where music and the process of creation is concerned. He put his heart into this body of work and crafted music in a pure way, simply trying a style here, flowing with the vibes there, singing whatever the beat told him to – without overthinking and calculating too much. Even though he doesn't consider it his responsibility – yes, the lifeguard dress on the cover is just because it looks super cool and that cannot be denied – he actually had the desire to be the person *"to provide a little time out, a smile"*. And yes, we're smiling!

by URSULA 'MUNCHY' MÜNCH

A portrait of a man with long, dark dreadlocks and a full beard. He is wearing a white shirt with a tan bag slung over his shoulder. He is sitting next to a window with a wooden frame, and the light from the window is illuminating his face. The word "INTERVIEW" is written in white, outlined letters in the top left corner.

INTERVIEW

KEZNAMDI

BLOOD AND FYAH

FOREVER GRATEFUL

BY URSULA 'MUNCHY' MÜNCH
PHOTOS BY WILLIAM RICHARDS

With **Blxxd And Fyah**, **Keznamdi** unveils his sophomore album, the powerful successor to his critically acclaimed debut **Bloodline**. Across 12 tracks, he delivers a masterful blend of classic reggae infused with a modern, contemporary sound – each song enriched with remarkably profound lyrics. **Keznamdi** doesn't rely on clichés; he has stories to tell – about history, politics, society, and his own personal reflections and emotions. In this interview as well, **Keznamdi** offers deep insights into his upbringing in a spiritual Rastafari family, his creative process, and his most recent adventures in Ghana.



Your album carries the evocative title *Blxxd And Fyah*, an expression from the third track *River Jordan*. Why did you choose this name and what do the expressions “blood” and “fyah” stand for?

Blood really stands for the sacrifice that we put in, the work and the energy. Fyah represents the rebirth of something, the burning away of something, but also the fire that is needed to tackle the matrix that we're in today and tackle all the injustices of today. And then it's also a play on words between my first album, which was called **Bloodline**. It was a very special time in my life. It was the first time becoming a new father and, you know, that bloodline. We used that play and we released the album at a time when it was a blood moon. So, we just work with the play of things, for all the artists and the creatives who like these storylines. But **Blxxd And Fyah** really represent the journey of becoming a man, a human being, and being a humanitarian to making sure that we're using our art to contribute to the progression of humanity.

You start the musical journey of the album with your sister Kelissa on the track *I Am*. Was that important to kick it off together with family?

Me and **Kelissa** we have a lot of ideas together. ***I Am*** was actually a song that we recorded in our little bedroom at the time, like seven years ago. It was very spiritual, but I don't feel like at that time I was ready to tackle that concept. The concept was there and the chanting and the lyrics, but I feel like I had to live a little more life and gain a little bit more wisdom to tackle such a heavy topic. And then **Kelissa** is definitely – maybe I'm biased – one of my favourite artists from Jamaica. She doesn't have a big catalogue released but because I am her brother, I get to hear a lot of the stuff that is unreleased. She's a very special human being when it comes on to music. So, I think it was set to really begin the journey on the project with **Kelissa** and her angelic voice.

I Am, this opening track, is truly monumental, a real goosebump piece about our existence as human beings, the history of mankind, but also our individual stories. What inspired this song?

It wasn't just this one specific inspiration. At that time, I was going through a very spiritual time and spiritual awakening in my life. I wasn't smoking, I wasn't drinking, I was on a different heights when I was making that song. At first it was just a chant, it had no meaning. We were trying to find and put words to the chant but then, we said "We just create our own meaning with it". It's a chant and it's a feeling and it's very abstract. But it's basically talking about trying to use music to define God, that big word that everybody uses, whether you are from Islam or a Christian or just a spiritual person. Even if you are an atheist, you can't deny that there is some kind of energy or force that exists that binds humanity and living things together, you know what I mean? And it's really just capturing that omnipotent-ness of the word God.

At the end, you added a quote from Dr Arikana Chihombori Quao, a medical doctor and activist, speaking about the urgent need of unity amongst the countries of Africa and "The pact for the continuation of colonisation in Africa", a shocking document that shows how deeply Africa is still dependent on former colonial powers like France, and how shamelessly these countries abuse their power. How did you come across her speech? Why did you pick this quote and put it right at this point on the album?

Basically, my mom sent that speech in our family chat group, probably like a year ago or two. My mother always sends me these revolutionary activist kind of things in the group. I feel like Africa is in a very special place right now. It's going through a huge transition. It's the future and nobody can deny that. I, too, grew up in a third world situation and I feel like imperialism still

lingers and is still very prevalent in our societies today. And it's just sad to see such a massive and powerful continent to be under these strict contracts that have been signed years ago. It's great to see the rise of **Ibrahim Traoré**, seeing what he's doing on the African continent. The last leader that I see speaking so profoundly was probably **His Majesty**, when he was talking about the unity of Africa. There's no secret about it, there is no way forward. There is no way forward for Africa or even for Africans in the diaspora without the unity of the actual continent similar to the United States of America. We need the United States of Africa. Growing up in a Rastafarian household, Africa was a big topic all the time in conversations. And then, obviously, our family was able to manifest living on the continent for like ten years of my life. So, Africa holds a very special place for me.

There's a common theme in the album that weaves everything together, it is that third world struggle, that colonial bondage. It really struck me that in those days, even though we come from far, that leaders actually signed a contract that says, "*We'll let you free, but you would have to sign a contract that says you have to continue the imperialist way of living*". And so many countries signed this pact and it's almost like a betrayal to me. I relate it back to me as an independent artist. When I get certain contracts that come my way from different labels, it's very tempting because of everything that comes with it. Automatically, you get like a hundred people servicing your music, a full distribution of your music, you get PR, you get an advance that looks very shiny, but in the long run, is it really beneficial for you as a musician and an artist? And it's the same thing even with countries. You get all these grants from IMF, you get in their system and all these benefits, but in the long run, where are we a hundred years later? "*Imperialism is a bad student*". that's what **Ibrahim Traoré** said. I keep mentioning **Ibrahim**



Traoré because he's very inspirational right now for a lot of Africans in the diaspora and on the continent and what he's doing to fight against imperialism. I wanted to do my contribution to the conversation of what's happening and using art to bring forth that conversation.

Also, *River Jordan*, the third track I already mentioned in the beginning, leads us through history, from the Jamaican National Hero Paul Bogle and his Morant Bay rebellion to Marcus Garvey's Black Star Line and eventually also the Queen of England, who died and "got 'way with murder, she rip we off". I also believe that one cannot repeat often enough the crimes committed by colonial powers around the world, and we shouldn't be blinded by romanticised notions of royalty. Does the misrepresentation of history frustrate you as well, or why do you bring up this topic so often?

It's the same thing. The funny thing is that the Queen doesn't really like to come to Jamaica. Because whenever she comes to Jamaica, the Rastas go to the King's House and protest. Because it is, as you said, this romanticising this whole thing of royalty and stuff. Society today likes to numb things. It's easier to not talk about it, it's easier to just to put it under the carpet because it's such a hard conversation to talk about. As I say in one of my lyrics "she dead off and she get 'way with murder", I feel like the Western powers need to hold a little bit more accountability for what they have done. And it's this kind of fake accountability where they apologise but there's nothing really there systematically to make the changes that need to happen for these countries whom they built their empires on to rise up and become an empire. There's just too much separation going on on Earth because of these massive colonial powers that still have their foot in African necks and Caribbean necks. I saw something that came up on my feed the other day saying that Nigeria paid back all of the debts that they had to the IMF.

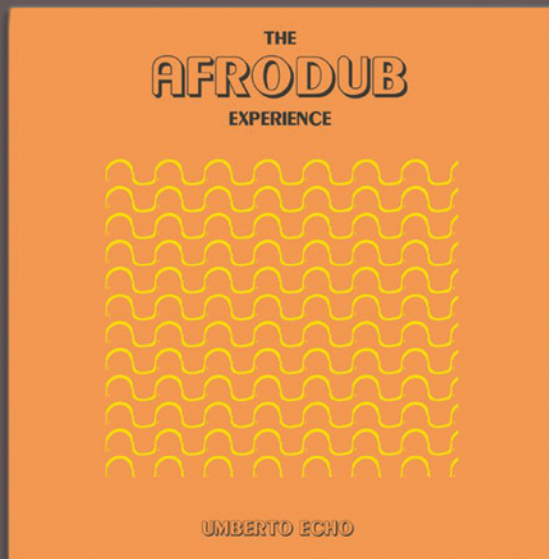
I didn't even know that this is possible because of these contracts that they have, how they just make sure that you're in debt... That's commendable! It's just showing you that Africa is waking up and it is the future. There's no going on around that. The youths and the leaders are waking up. Some leaders are sitting down and saying "Yo we need to pay back IMF so we can start on a clean slate and start rising up our economy". I'm not a politician so I don't really know the depths of things but I'm a human being so I can feel things and I might not know it on an education level where I learned political science and all of these things, but I definitely know it from a human level, and I can feel things.

Your track *Colonial Bondage* is a beautiful horn-driven ode to your beloved homeland Jamaica. The country is independent since 1962, yet you are feeling the bondage. You sing about greed and that "them sell out we land and the beautiful beaches, all for the tourists" – what else do you base this feeling of bondage on? In what ways do you perceive or experience this dependency?

When it comes on to politics, the ball game is on a different level. Whether you want to justice me for saying this, but I feel like a lot of the leaders are playing in a ball game where they don't realise how advanced it is. So, we end up taking these loans from IMF, we end up selling our land – but does this really help our country?!? Is this really beneficial to us as people?!? Or are we just going more and more in debt to these big colonial powers? Right now, there is a big conversation going on in Jamaica about the **Bob Marley** beach, which is a very important conversation. This is a place where a lot of the locals and a lot of families lived for generations. It's one of the most beautiful beaches in Kingston. So, it's a big attraction for these massive companies who want to build a big resort. But when you build those big resorts, the locals are not going to have access to the beaches. Jamaica is already in a bad situation when

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it comes on to that. The majority of the beaches, especially the best beaches, locals don't have access to them. And you have to understand that it's not like Jamaica has parks, football fields, and places where people can go to destress, like you have places in the US and Europe where a youth can just go to a gym, a push-up place... they don't have that. What we have in Jamaica are the natural resources, which are rivers and beaches. When you close this off to the locals, the only place where they can get a little peace of mind... and now you're gonna take this away? I get it on a business level, where tourism is our biggest export but there needs to be some kind of compromise. You can't just come to Jamaica and buy a coastline. Right now, there are miles of coastline selling in Jamaica. That should be illegal! To protect the longterm-ness of the vision. In one of the lines of the song I say *"protect Rastafari as a culture"*. People

don't come to Jamaica for beaches. If that was the case, they'd go to the Bahamas, they can go to Bermuda or other places that have prettier beaches. They come to Jamaica for three things: Rasta, reggae and ganja. Right? That's why people come to Jamaica. That's Jamaica's fame. When you go to Jamaica now and you go to these resorts, they have all the Rasta slogans and all the things they commercialise hypocritically. But they have no system in place to treat Rastafari as a native, as an indigenous culture that we have to protect. It's almost like something that they have to use because it brings in the tourists but that they don't really want... up to this day, you can't wear dreadlocks going to school. I remember in school, every September my mother would have to go to the Ministry of Education to defend my case of not cutting my hair, because I was going to a Catholic school. That is another example where I feel like

Young Legend - by Richard Gayle (2022)

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we have to get out of this colonial mind as African people, as third world people.

The other day I saw the Prime Minister of Barbados has removed the Queen as their Head of State. In Jamaica we still have the Queen as the Head of State. That's the mentality. We should depend on ourselves, like all other third world countries. When you hear me sing ***Colonial Bondage*** I sing it for Jamaica, but it's for all third world countries. Every country has a natural resource. As a leader you just have to be creative, see what you can use it for to make a business, to make money come in. And then recycle it, in your country, rather than just selling it. We don't even own our own bauxite. Jamaica exports one of the richest soils when it comes on to bauxite and we sell it away. If people don't know, bauxite is what people use to make aluminium, to make spoons, forks... Jamaica never made a spoon or fork yet. How is that?!? Why don't

we have a factory where we make our own spoons saying "Made in Jamaica"? The first thing that **Ibrahim Traoré** did with the gold in Burkina Faso, he made a plant that now you can actually refine the gold in the country rather than sending it to France.

I'm not gonna say I know the answers, because I know that the ball game that these politicians are playing is a bigger ball game. But we have to get a little more creative, create new ideas. Jamaica has a history of a lot of ingenuity and forward thinking. We are talking about **Paul Bogle**, about **Marcus Garvey** who inspired a massive Pan-African movement across the entire world. You had **Bob Marley** who raised the consciousness through his music. These are the kind of people we have amongst our culture. Politically, I would love to see the same ingenuity, the same new ideas, the same creativity... but it seems like it's just stagnant and the same old colonial mind.

You already made a lot of suggestions of what people could do to take action. At the end of *River Jordan* the speaker is saying that Rastafari people should come together as an “executive body and identify what we want to do. Let us start to do something now!” Who are we hearing there?

My father.

Yes! So, what should be done and put in place by Rastafari people in your opinion?

First of all, my father was very upset that I recorded that extraction actually. It was a very small collective and a meeting happening up at Skyline Levels amongst like 15 or 20 of the Rastafari elders and leaders in Jamaica. But it was so profound that I had to take out my phone and just record it. That was just a little piece I caught, but what was being said was very profound. I think the main thing is that, as Rastafari, our biggest weakness is financial literacy. When you look at the example of the Jews, when they were crucified by **Hitler** and all of the injustices that happened towards them, they became very united. But one of the main things that they did to unite was bring in money and know economics. I feel like that is where we lack as a Rastafari movement in this jungle that we live in. When you go into the lions and the giraffes and the elephants and stuff, in their jungle, it's all about strength and agility and speed and who is the toughest lion to beat, to go kill that and bring food. You know, our jungle is money. We choose to live here in Babylon. And in Babylon, to conquer Babylon, you have to have finances, your finances together as a people. So, I think the base that we need to start at, in my opinion, is figuring out that part, figuring out how to create a united front where we can bring in some funding and stop waiting on the government to give us things.

Speaking of your mom and dad. How was growing up in a Rastafarian household like?

I think, growing up as youths, we were

very privileged to have parents who have such a high conscious understanding of the universe. When I look at all my peers, it's not until they were like 20 years old when they started to question themselves and do a search and just go a little bit deeper than what society feeds you. For me, it was the opposite. From when we were little, from birth, I was around my parents who are challenging the status quo, living in a time where you can't watch too much TV, you can't eat certain foods. You know how attractive these foods look to you when you're out there in the world as a youth, and you see your peers eating pizza and chicken and all of those things, and they look nice and it smells good and everything, but, you know, your parents grow you up to hold your discipline and hold your order. Not everything that looks nice, might be good for you. So, on a health and from a food perspective, that consciousness and understanding... when going to the groceries with my mom, we would spend hours there because she looked on all the ingredients *“Make we see what these ingredients say? Alright, oh, you can't have that”*. And it's the worst thing, you know? Growing up, my parents allowed us to eat chicken and fish. They didn't eat chicken, but they allowed us to make our own decisions, but now, most of us now, we don't eat that. We made that decision on our own. All of the things that we used to fight my mother for, we used to say *“Please, Mama, we want this...”* and she said *“No, you can't have that”*. Now, it become instilling in me, where I'm doing the same thing for my kids.

It was a very contained home, because not a lot of parents or kids were allowed to even come and play with us growing up, because at that time, it wasn't like now, where Rasta is the trending topic, where most of my peers now have dreadlocks and you have hairdresser just for dreadlocks, you know? Back in the day, we used to get teased for dirty hair and parents wouldn't



want their kids to come over to our house, because your parents are using drugs, because marijuana was considered drugs at that time. It's not like now where it's this medicinal thing. As a family, we became even closer because of that, because all we had was each other. Growing up, I played with my little sisters, because that's all we had. People never really wanted to come, do no sleep over at our yard, because those are monsters. How my father looked, he looked like a Taliban with his black beard and dreadful dreadlocks, serious and a big spliff in his mouth, saying "*Jah, Rastafari!*", make them quiver and shiver. So, yeah, my parents, we give thanks for that upbringing.

Also, on the album you're not alone, you welcome not just family but fellow artists, for example Mavado and Marlon Asher, which is a real surprising combination of artists, but it works wonderfully. The three of you captivate with your voices, weaving together in perfect harmony over the spheres of the beat – and when the horns rise, it's a moment of pure upliftment. How did this collaboration come about?

That record was actually presented to me by **VAS Productions**. **Ricardo**, who is the owner of **VAS** and me are good friends. He's the one who produced **Masicka** *Who Fi Stop We* and all of this stuff. He has a lot of records, a lot of massive hits out there. We always talked about doing a record together. Him and **Major Seven**

sent me this song and it was [sings] *“High grade from West, strictly indoor, come and have a smoke”*. It wasn’t really tailored yet, it was just a demo idea, but it was bad, bad, bad. I went to the studio and within two minutes I sent it back to him and then we all enjoyed it. They were already in contact with **Mavado** to get him on it. It was a long process. This record is two to three years old, and I think we went to Miami twice and I almost gave up and then last minute thing again, he said *“Yo, we’re ready. Let’s do it”*. We went back to Miami, we shot the video, **Mavado** just gave us a real, real strength. I’ve worked with a lot of artists and he’s very humble. At first, I was reading it wrong, but when I met the person flesh to flesh, it was a very genuine youth, one of the most genuine artists I’ve met. He’s just a profound personality.

Marlon Asher is also signed to **VAS**. He came on the third verse and gave us a little bridge and just blessed the track. **Marlon Asher** has arguably one of the biggest marijuana songs so to have him on a song about marijuana was a great fit.

I think what might also surprise many is the combination of Keznamdi and Masicka. The song is called *Forever Grateful*. How did this collaboration come about?

We have a little history, and we respect each other’s work. My first show in Jamaica was in this small little place called Village. At that time, **Masicka** had a song with **Kabaka** called *Choppingz*. I think **Kabaka** brought him along and we made the connection from there. He was trying to get me on his other album and just through time and thing, it never happened.

And then this one now... he was working with **Don Corleon** and **VAS** in Miami. I reached back out and he just said *“Send the tune!”*. He sent it just the next day! I was very excited because I just feel like **Masicka** is the voice of the streets right now. He tells real stories. It’s very inspi-

ring for anybody who is trying to better themselves. Whether you come from the ghetto or uptown or wherever it is, his music is very motivational. You don’t see a lot of that represented in dancehall right now. I feel like dancehall uses more of shock value. They will show a girl skin out or drugs or guns... And for a little youth who is 16 years old, of course, that’s going to entice a youth and it’s more exciting for a youth to see. So, they use a lot of shock value to get views and fans. However, I feel like **Masicka** is the opposite. He takes the slower route, not the so commercial route. He builds his catalogue and does the groundwork. As a musician and as an artist, I appreciate music like that because it’s not the easiest thing to do because it takes longer. Not going the hype route and just taking the true route of artistry and telling your story is very commendable.

Masicka is definitely my favourite artist out of Jamaica right now, ever since, even from before him buss. You can check the DMs for history to proof how we show we love for one another.

For the singles *Pressure* and *Time* you already released two music videos that were shot in Ghana. Tell me about this trip to Ghana, the experience there and why you chose this as the right place for the visuals?

As I said, I spent a lot of time of my youth in Africa, but in Eastern Africa and a lot of Jamaicans’ ancestry comes from West Africa. In that whole time of living on the African continent, I never got a chance to connect with my roots in West Africa. It was only in Eastern Africa: Tanzania, Ethiopia, I’ve been to Egypt, South Africa, Kenya, all of these places, but I never got a chance to go to Ghana, Senegal, Togo, these places that are rich in culture and music. As an adult now, after recording the album, there’s a lot of tones and textures that feel very African. Records like *Pressure*, even *Time*, the guitar on *Time* is very African and West African.

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Especially for my generation, I wanted them to see that **Kez** is going to Africa and making that development and pushing that. That is one of the main reasons why I went to Africa, and it was crazy! We tweeted out and put on Instagram that we're going to be in Ghana, "*Pull up to this address!*" and hundreds of people came! We also tweeted that we needed some bikers, and they came, man! Big up the god of bikes **Meek Mills**, **Dream Chasers**, big up the whole bike scene there. They showed us nuff support.

Funny enough, another story, while we're on the continent, I think the government won some kind of seat and they called the radio station to play **Victory**. Then **King Lagazee** was like "*Yo, you know that Keznamdi is actually here?!*" So, while we're shooting a video with a hundred bikes behind me, **T** is in the truck trying to get my attention because he's like "*The President of Ghana wants to meet you!*" In just spending a week in Africa, we were at

the President's house meeting with him. He was telling us how he loved reggae music and how it's a big part. We met the Minister of the Mining for Gold, the Vice President, all the dignitaries were there. It was really cool that we got a chance to have that experience for something that I just booked, a simple round trip, and it turned out to be this fruitful!

Wow, what a story! It's wonderful that the album is now the soundtrack of those memories. Besides your original tracks, you chose to cover *Pomps And Pride*, an amazing song by Toots & The Maytals. What does this song mean to you and why did you decide to do your version of it?

Primary Wave Music, the publisher actually reached out to me to do this song. They sent it and it wasn't where it needed to be creatively. They were trying to get a remastered and reproduced version of **Toots'** records because a lot of them weren't recorded really well. They wanted to revisit his catalogue to do a tribute with young artists



like me. They reached out to different people and that's why they sent me this song. But it wasn't what it is now. I produced this one. I really wanted to do it, so I took my musicians and we recorded it over properly, added the little modern twist. I sent it back to them a month later and they were really happy with it. So, they brought me on to produce the entire tribute. They flew me and the band over, we got all of **Toots'** files – it was like a dream come true. I learnt so much in that process diving into **Toots'** catalogue. For a little while I had to become **Toots** because I was demoing all the songs also for the artists like **Ziggy Marley**, **Gwen Stefani**, **Mick Jagger**, all of **Toots'** big friends. I loved the record and wanted to include it on my album. Big up to **Primary Wave** and **Brandon**, they allowed me to put it on my album. But also **Toots**, he's the forefather of reggae music. He was one of the first people to take this culture and tour it all around the world. I felt like it was very necessary to celebrate this person's catalogue and the best thing you can do for an artist is to cover their work. I wanted to

do that for **Toots** and his contribution to music and our culture.

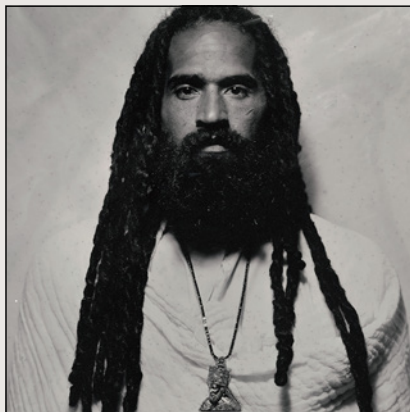
That leads me back to the song with Masicka *Forever Grateful*: what are you grateful for today, Keznamdi?

As the song says: I am grateful to be able to follow my dreams and pursue this music that is just a constant, daily voice to follow. I remember since I was 12, 13 years old music is all I wanted to do. I think my 16-year-old self would be proud of the body of work that I created. But more importantly, the confidence to believe in yourself because you'll always have trials and tribulations as a human being. And the biggest priority: I have a beautiful family and that to me is one of my biggest achievements, to raise two healthy boys and have my woman and still manoeuvre in this industry. We give thanks to the Most High! The music takes me to some places and allows me to meet a lot of really cool people like yourself and have these conversations. I don't know what I'd be doing without music... so we give thanks.

KEZNAMDI - BLXXD AND FYAH

August 2025

Angelic, almost hypnotic, **Kelissa's** tender chants draw us into the captivating sonic universe of her brother **Keznamdi** and his second album **Blxxd And Fyah**. Following his highly acclaimed debut **Bloodline** in 2020, the Kingstonian singer returns this summer with a powerful new body of work comprising 12 compelling tracks that impress both musically and lyrically.



The monumental opening track, aptly titled **I Am**, delves into the “*omnipotent-ness of the word God*” and takes listeners on an evocative journey through human history – from ancient Egypt and the crucifixion of Jesus to our own personal origin stories, starting with birth and cutting the cord. Delicate flute melodies and a plaintive violin create goosebumps, before the rising choir adds emotional dynamic. The mystically African-inspired soundscape seamlessly transitions into a quote by **Dr. Arikana Chihombori Quao**, a medical doctor and activist, as she speaks on the shocking “*pact for the continuation of colonisation in Africa*”. She is not the only one given voice through original recordings: **Keznamdi** also includes a passionate excerpt from a speech by his father **Errol “Chakula” McDonald** – a singer, musician and devoted member of the Rastafari community himself – urging unity and “*to come together as an executive body and identify what we want to do*”. These original recordings are as moving as they are motivating.

Keznamdi's lyrics, too, are rich with historical references about **Paul Bogle** and the Morant Bay Rebellion or **Marcus Garvey**; they offer sharp critiques of political and social develop-

ments, while also delving into personal and emotional themes of gratitude, appreciation, love, and spirituality. **Pressure** addresses the economic burdens caused by minimum wage, rising prices, and resource scarcity, highlighting a political landscape more consumed with itself than with the struggles of the people. **Identity Crisis** tackles the dangers of new media, where an entire

generation “*glued to the screens*”, risks sacrificing truth in the pursuit of likes and views.

Keznamdi, describing himself as a songwriter, largely self-produced the album, with select tracks co-produced by **VAS Productions**, **Major Seven**, and keyboardist **Llamar “Riff Raff” Brown**. Besides his sister **Kelissa**, guest features by **Masicka**, **Mavado**, and **Marlon Asher** enrich the album with precisely calibrated and beautifully harmonious performances. A vibrant and spirited cover of **Toots Hibbert's Poms and Pride** is a radiant highlight.

In the track list each song is thoughtfully placed, contributing to a layered narrative centred on the theme of **Colonial Bondage**. Musically, the artist remains rooted in his Jamaican Reggae heritage while skilfully blending classic elements like the drumming with fresh textures and compelling beats, resulting in a contemporary and modern sound. With **Blxxd And Fyah**, **Keznamdi** created a holistic and truly accomplished body of work that is both thematically profound and musically diverse.

by **URSULA ‘MUNCHY’ MUNCH**



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GO LEM SYSTEM
CROSS
& Supporting
LA VELA PURICA
SCHÄLSCH STEWAK
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T.O.K.
LUCKY DAIRIE
SANCHEZ
CECILE
THE SKATALLITES
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MOSLIM
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Sonntag 6.7.
BEENIE MAN
& Supporting
LUCIANO
STEEL PULSE
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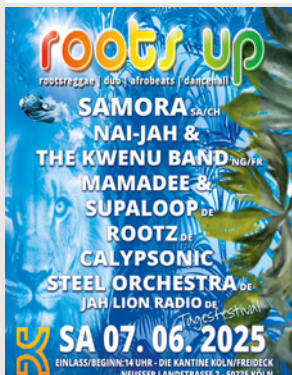
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FESTIVAL AGENDA 2025

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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.

Westchester Reggae Festival



June 1

Westchester County Center in White Plains, NY - USA

Cali Vibes



June 7 – 8

Marina Green Park, Long Beach, CA - USA

SXSW London



June 2 – 7

Various Locations in London, UK

Notes en Vert



June 12 – 15

Festival Area in Perigny, France

Joe Higgs Legacy Tribute



June 3

Bob Marley Museum in Kingston, Jamaica

RenderFest



June 13

Festival Area in Atlanta, GA - USA

Reggae Fest – Atlanta



June 6

State Farm Arena in Atlanta, GA - USA

Dub'n the Creek



June 13 – 15

Big Foot Camp in Willow Creek, CA - USA

Roots Up



June 7

Die Kantine in Cologne, Germany

Reggae in my Garden



June 14

Stadtgarten in Konstanz, Germany



JUNE



One Love – Father's Day Concert



June 15

Mable House in Mableton, GA - USA

Rise & Shine Village



June 20 – 22

Centro Panta Rei in Passignano sul Trasimeno, Italy

Victoria Ska & Reggae Festival



June 18 – 22

Various Locations in Victoria, BC - Canada

New Rules – Canada



June 21

Rebel Night Club in Toronto, ON - Canada

Cultural Reggae Vibez



June 19 – 21

Festival Area in Horice, Czech Republik

Truckee Reggae Festival



June 21

Truckee River Park in Truckee, CA - USA

International Dub Gathering



June 19 – 22

Pla dels Catalans in Taragona, Spain

Point Break Music Festival



June 21 – 22

On The Beach in Virginia Beach, VA - USA

Keep It Real Weekender



June 20 – 22

Various Locations in Stuttgart, Germany

AKF Festival



June 26 – 29

Volksfestplatz in Wassertrüdingen, Germany

Ithaca Reggae Festival



June 20 – 22

Stewart Park in Ithaca, NY - USA

ReggaeMad Fest



June 26 – 29

Autocine in Madrid, Spain



St. Kitts Music Festival



June 26 – 28

Festival Area in Basseterre, St Kitts & Nevis

Zion Boska Festival



June 26 – 28

Private Forest in Sutivanac, Croatia

Festival Couleurs Urbaines



June 27 – 29

Festival Area in La Seyne Sur Mer, France

Kalamazoo Caribbean Fest



June 27 – 28

Arcadia Creek Festival Site in Kalamazoo, MN - USA

Righteous Rockers Music Festival



June 28

Crossover in Tampa, FL - USA

Jerkfest – Los Angeles



June 29

The Beehive in Los Angeles, CA - USA

CLICK HERE TO LISTEN





JULY



ERVA Festival



July 3 – 5

Festival Area in Anneyron, France

One Earth
Reggae Festival

July 5

SteelStacks in Bethlehem, PA - USA

Bergamo Sunfest



July 3 – 6

Festival Area Bergamo, Italy

Reggae im Herzen



July 5

Herzenbad in Radolfzell, Germany

Skank Festival



July 3 – 6

Barcena de Pie de Concha in Cantabria, Spain

New Rules
Festival - Jamaica

July 5

Trewlany Stadium in Falmouth, Jamaica

Big Reggae Festival



July 3

La Pinède Gould in Juan Les Pins, France

Lake of Riddims



July 5

Festival Area in Offenburg, Germany

SummerJam



July 4 – 6

Fuehlinger Lake in Cologne, Germany

Öland Roots



July 9 – 12

Festival Area in Sandbergen, Sweden

Reggae Fest –
Brooklyn

July 5

Barclays Center in Brooklyn, NY - USA

Plein Les Watts



July 10 – 12

Parc Navazza in Geneva, Switzerland



Reno Splash



July 10 – 13

Parco Peppino Impastato in Marzabotto, Italy

Dub Camp Festival



July 11 – 13

Lac de Vioreau in Joué-Sur-Erdre, France

Lakesplash



July 11 – 12

Lake Biel in Twann, Switzerland

Reggae on the Way



July 12

Airport Taverna in Tacoma, WA - USA

Gracy's Bash



July 11 – 12

Die Linde und der Yard in Varel, Germany

Reggae Therapy Festival



July 12 – 13

Stade Louis Achille in Fort-de-France, Martinique

BRT Weekend



July 11 – 13

Various Locations in Atlantic City, NJ - USA

Afro Latino Festival



July 12 – 13

Thor Park in Genk, Belgium

Bomboklat Festival



July 11 – 13

Stadio Comunale in Pofi, Italy

Margate Reggae Festival



July 12

Dreamland in Margate, UK

Sunrise Reggae & Ska Festival



July 11 – 13

Festival Area in Burtenbach, Germany

Reggae Sumfest



July 13 – 19

Catherine Hall Stadium in Montego Bay, Jamaica

SUN Splash
REGGAE FESTIVAL
SUNDAY 13 JULY 2025

ALPHA BLONDY - BEENIEMAN
SHENSEEA - INNER CIRCLE
MORGAN HERITAGE - CAPLETON
THE CONGOS - TEEJAY

BADDERMAN - AVION BOYZ - BEACH BOI
LA ROUGE - MIERO YIC - ONE MAN
REINFORCEMENT

ZUIDERPARK | THE HAGUE

TICKETS SUNSPASHFESTIVAL.NL

Festival de NEOULES
17-19 JULIET 2025

GROUNDATION • HADJA JONES • OBEY ROY & JUNIOR ROY
MC KALAMITY • FIREBET & MISERE • KIK • RASPAROUS
QUIDER SUPER ET SON GROUPE DISCOUNT • ATUL • BROUSSAI
MAGRY BOLLE • JAWA RIFT meets ROOTS RAID • GANG JAH MIND
LES DIGALES ENGATSEES • STEEL ALIVE

NEOULES VAN (BQ) - INFO & BILLETTER SUR FESTIVAL DE NEOULES

DOWN TOWN - FESTIVAL - 17.7. - 18.7.

LINE UP

THE LINE UP
DIEP MUNG PAKHONG
MAYOR
AGABAY
THE LINE UP
DIEP MUNG PAKHONG
MAYOR
AGABAY

Rastaplas

2025 JULY
FRIDAY 18
SATURDAY 19

CLINTON FEARON
HEMPRESS SATIVA
FEAT. PAOLO BALDINI DUBFLES
U-BROWN
& THE ASHAMBAND **CHANNEL ONE**
RIK JAM KING SHILOH
& DALWAYNE & VIBRONICS
1&1 FOUNDATION
ANGELICA MAYA
BOOM SHAKALAK & WILLOW HIFI

* DJ REGGAE BARBIE * DJ EHA * U-NIEK SOUND *
RACK & HENRI * SHAMBA LION SOUND SYSTEM (LIVE) *
SHAMBA LION SOUND SYSTEM (LIVE) *

FRIDAY: 18.00-24.00 U
SATURDAY: 12.00-24.00 U

ZOETERMEER NOORD AA

18. - 20. Juli 2025

2025 AFRIKANISCHES KULTUR FEST
PRÄMMONT

QUEEN CHIEF
BOHNDIO
KANTONIA
DOL 4 DEL SON
YERRETTA JOHANNES
MAYOR DIA
KINDER-BOA
KINDER-BOA
KINDER-BOA

WWW.AFRIKANISCHES-KULTURFEST.DE

NOVA
REGGAE

18-19 JULIET

MASSIS SOUND • DJA PAUL • SPIN PAKHONG • KAGABAY DUBS
KAGABAY DUBS • DJA PAUL • SPIN PAKHONG • KAGABAY DUBS
KAGABAY DUBS • DJA PAUL • SPIN PAKHONG • KAGABAY DUBS
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REEDS FESTIVAL
18.-20. JULI 2025
AM PFÄFFIKERSEE

L'ENTOURLOOP
STONEBWOY
JESSE ROYAL - CALI P
ASIAN DUB FOUNDATION
DUB FX FT. MR. WOODNOTE
EESAH - SALATIEL
ITALIEE - SISTA CARMEN
NEWEN AFROBEAT

NICKY B FLX, CARMAYLTON, HARR GASSER,
SKANDINO, DE SOCRATE, DJ HENRI, KOLLA,
IRAY, SELECTA LUCKY TUNE

STREETFOOD & BAZAAR - SELECTORS TENT
SIDE EVENTS: BARNING AREA, CAMPING
CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND

LEGIE 25
18-19 JULI 2025

REGGAEPIASTKACH.PL

THE 1ST ANNUAL NORTHWEST WORLD REGGAE FESTIVAL
July 18-20 Mt Hood Oregon

FRIDAY JULY 18TH
TELLER YOUNG KING • MIKEY DUB
DUB 2 MELON • YOUNG SHANNY
PUNNY ATTACK • JALANZO

SATURDAY JULY 19TH
SISTER NANCY • MAYLON ASHER
REGGAE ANGELS • KETTER OYONDE
JATAYAN • BRAY SHAMAR
KAYE JAY & THE RIMNEY
MECHKEELEY

SUNDAY JULY 20TH
FLORIAN LUCAS
JULIAN WHITE & FRIENDS
KALAN WOFFE & THE SHIFT
LATE NIGHT DJ'S

JALANZO • BIG SOUND • MIKEY DUB
MC SCHLE

CHARTER AIRCRAFT: CASH LINDSEY • PABLO FERRER (FLY)
MAYN PRAIRIE PRANK • BRITISHWOOD OREGON

NWWRFCOM

51 FEST

IRIE IES live mix feat.
BIG RED

CLINTON FEARON **YANISS ODUU**

TAÏRO
VOLODIA
AND MORE...

SAMEDI 19.07.25

39€

INFO & BILLETTS: ZONE51.NET

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SATURDAY JULY 19, 2025
ROMAIN VIRGO | TIMAYA | CHARY BLACK
KENYATTA HILLCULTURE | WOODBINO SKA
DJ SOUND OF FAUN

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PERFECT BUILT-UP DAY! BRINT'S BUTTER
(BUYER ONE FOODS)
BAYFRONT FESTIVAL PARK ON-PAVE PARKING (BAYFRONT DUTY FREE STORES)

LB27 Reggae Camp 2025

Sun Splash Reggae Festival



July 13

Zuiderpark in The Hague, The Netherlands

Reeds Festival



July 18 – 20

Lake Pfäffiker in Pfäffikon, Switzerland

Festival de Néoules



July 18 – 20

Festival Area in Neoules, France

Reggae na Piaskach



July 18 – 19

Piaski Szczygliczka in Ostrowie Wielkopolski, Poland

Downtown Festival



July 18 – 19

Rosengarten in Wangerooge, Germany

Northwest World Reggae Festival



July 18 – 20

Pfau Pfamily Pfarma in Mount Hood, OR - USA

Rastaplas Festival



July 18 – 19

Nord AA in Zoetermeer, Netherlands

Zone51 Fest



July 19

Les Tanzmatten in Sélesta, France

Afrikanisches Kulturfest



July 18 – 20

Rebstockpark in Frankfurt/Main, Germany

Bayfront Reggae & World Music Festival



July 19

Bayfront Festival Park in Duluth, MN - USA

Nowa Reggae



July 18 – 19

Zona Esportiva in Vilanova i la Geltrú, Spain

LB27 Reggae Camp



July 22 – 26

Tőserdő Autós Kemping in Lakitelek, Zálán, Hungary



BABABOM
FESTIVAL

23-27 July

2025

f i o

IRIE VIBES *back to the*
ROOTS FESTIVAL

24-26 JULY 2025
KORTENMARK 1 BE

ECHO MINOTT *IN THE HOT PEPPERS (JAM)*
ABA SHANTI-I (UK)
WASSIE ONE (UK) **ABAKUSH (UK)**
POWER DREAD SOUND SYSTEM (FR)
GIRAFFE SOUNDSYSTEM
SATTA SOUND SYSTEM
THE LIQUIDATORS (FR) DUB UP
GIANT TREE ATOMIC SPLIFF
DJ DESPERADO MYSTÈRE
REJOICE (JAM) & STAFF (JAM)
SCARLE & SCARLE SOUNDSYSTEM
REDEMPTION SOUNDSYSTEM
FLPSTR MYCELIC RECORDS
SKYLARKING EAST END ROCK
WINNER ROOTS RALLY CHINAESTET



progettoaletheia.it

JULY 22-23-24-25-26-27 2025

ONE LOVE FEST
LA NUOVA UMANITÀ

VILLA ANIMA
SASSO MARCONI
(BOLOGNA)

GLOBAL CELEBRATION OF RASTA
BOB MARLEY
THE ONE LOVE
JULY 2025

AREE E PROGRAMMA
OVI.PROGETTOALETHEIA.IT

BIGLIETTI SU
WWW.TICKETMASTER.IT

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KY-MANI MARLEY / BURNING SPEAR / ALBOROSIE
SUD SOUND SYSTEM FT. PAPA LEU SELECTOR
LA ADA POSSE / RADICI NEL CEMENTO / MELOW MC
THE ORIGINALS (AFRICA UNITE & THE BLUEBEATERS
EUGENIO FINARDI / MODENA CITY RAMBLERS / BRUS

OSTRODA
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24-27.07.2025

DUB INC^(FR) INNA DE YARD^(JAM)
LJAHMAN LEVI^(JAM) MORTIMER^(JAM)
THE SELECTER^(UK) MARCUS GAD^(UK)
CHRISTOS DC & THE LIGERIANS^(USA/FR)
THE SUNVIZORS^(FR) YAVAMUFFIN^(PL)
TABU^(PL) DAMIAN SYJONFAM^(PL)
SPIETY^(PL) BANACH^(45/00/PL)
KONOPIANS^(PL) SKANKAN^(PL) LISU^(PL)



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FESTIVAL

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JULIO
2025

BALBOA • EL BIERZO



Bournemouth
Reggae
Weekender
2025



UPPSALA
REGGAE FESTIVAL
2025

25-26 July

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PROTOJE ANTHONY B
& THE DISCOGATION
KY-MANI MARLEY MARCIA
GRIFFITHS
DON CARLOS KALLE BAAH
MORTIMER JAH LIL KHALIA
RIK JAM DALWAYNE
SILLY WALKS DISCOTHEQUE
ANGELICA GEO SOUNDKILLA
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& THE PERISING
SISTER NANCY

MARLON ASHER-ARISE ROOTS
MARA LYLA JESSE JAMES PARIAH
QUINCY SOL-KAT MALL-SPEARX
ERIC MATHIAS-BLAIN JORDAN-SHIVA VIGH
FESTIVAL MC JUNGH-ERANIS

July 25th - 2025

2025 SUMMER
DOWN
FESTIVAL

Sunday, 27th July 2025

Handsworth Park Holly Road,
Birmingham, B20 2BY

LUCIANO

DAVID RODIGAN
THE BEAT FEAT. RANKING INR



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ÉVÈNEMENT REGGAE DE L'ÉTÉ

DU 31 JUILLET AU 3 AOÛT 2025
CHEMIN DU MANSIN, 01350 ANGLEFORT

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DANAKIL **PIERPOLJAK**
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(4 SCENES SOUNDS SYSTEMS)

10€

African
Music
Festival

25. JUBILEE

31.7. - 3.8. 2025
SCHLOSSPLATZ
EMMINGEN | DE

GENTLEMAN **STONEBWOY**
MARLEY'S GHOST feat. DELLÉ from Seed
MORGAN HERITAGE **SAMORA**
GANGBÉ BRASS BAND **AGOO GROUP**
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THE GREATEST BAND & AMF ALLSTARS

Online VVK unter: afrikaba.reservix.de
Tickets: Reservix 0761 888499 99

Bababoom Festival



July 23 – 27

Marina Palmense in Fermo, Italy

Uppsala Reggae Festival



July 25 – 26

Festival Area in Uppsala, Sweden

Irie Vibes Roots Festival



July 24 – 26

Kortemark in Handzame, Belgium

Reggae Fest – Baltimore



July 26

FG Bank Arena in Baltimore, MD - USA

One Love Fest



July 22 – 27

Villa Anima in Sasso Marconi, Italy

Reggae on the Mountain



July 26

Festival Area in Topanga Canyon, CA - USA

Ostroda Reggae Festival



July 25 – 28

Festival Area in Ostroda, Poland

Simmer Down Festival



July 27

Handsworth Park in Birmingham, UK

Reggaeboa Festival



July 25 – 27

El Bierzo in Balboa, Spain

Nomade Reggae Festival



July 31 – August 3

Chemin du Manson in Anglefort, France

Bournemouth Reggae Weekender



July 25 – 27

Kings Park in Bournemouth, UK

African Music Festival



July 31 – August 3

Schlossplatz in Emmendingen, Germany

REGGAE IN WULF
1. & 2. AUGUST 2023
HERE WE GO AGAIN
TICKETS www.reggae-in-wulf.de

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TYPHOON • T'HOFF VAN COMMERCE • CHANNEL ONE
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LITTLE KIRK • SOPHIA BROWN • MARCUS GAD • BIG JAH
BESAH • INOHAI • ZAMUNDA • TREESHA • GANJAMAN • I-FIRE
OTOSHI • ANTHONY B • LUNA CORRAL • LYNN ANDO • PLASJA
KAYLAN ARNOLD • ORIGINAL RISING SUNS • AKEEM GARRISON
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FLAVIA COELHO • STAND HIGH PATROL DJ SET FLYE • MARINA P
BLAIR PRODUCTIONS • MEGALOM • YOUTEST • PAUL SIMPSON
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SAT 2 AGUT
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FATBASS • I FEEL YOUR LOVE REMIX TO KALABAS • U BROWN & BIG RED
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LORD KOSHY • FEAR • BITE THE SOUND • DJ PIONE • HARLAN BARTY
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KALABAS • WANDER SOUND SYSTEM • THE HONORABLE MENTOR
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SUNDAY AUGUST 3
The Reggae Experience

AUGUST



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CULTURE
REGGAE FESTIVAL

REGGAE LAND
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YB MARLEY • ALPHA B • LISA • PHASE • SPINAGRA BOND
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AUGUST 1st & 2nd 2023
FRIDAY
ALBOROSIE • CHARLY BLACK
FANTAN MOJAH • LUCIANO • YELLOWMAN • REZNAMI
TARRUS RILEY • MR VEGAS
JULIAN MARLEY • AERO • I-SACTINE • TURBULENCE
SUNDAY
BUSY SIGNAL • QUEEN OMEGA
TARIO WORLD • T.B.K. • DOMINAI WIGGS • BUBBLE
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CUBI DAI • ANGEL MUSE

BOOMTOWN
POWER OF NOW
MARIBOU STATE • SEX PISTOLS • SEAN PAUL
OVERMONO • HYBRID MINDS • NIA ARCHIVES
KOFFEE • AZALEA BANKS • RUIMENTAL
JAMES HYPE • HONEY DIJON • JYOTI
JAM KRU • 999999999 • ANFISA LETYAGG
BABYLON CIRCUS • THE BLESSED MADONNA
BONEY M • BRASS AGAINST • CRAIG CHARLES
FAT DOG • FEROCIOUS DOG • GIRLS DON'T SYNC
HOT & BRASS BAND • I HATE MODELS • JAYDM
JOEY VALENCE & BRAE • JOY ORBISON
KENYA GRACE • HOJEY RADICAL • HURUPFT FM
NOVA TWINS • PA SALLIE • THE MARY WALLEPERS
THE WAILERS • THE WURZELS
REGGAE GOES ROUNDA

Reggae in Wulf



August 1 – 2

Festival Area in Wulfertshausen, Germany

Dream WKND



August 1 - 5

Seven Mile Beach in Negril, Jamaica

Reggae Geel



August 1 – 2

Festival Area in Geel, Belgium

Rock Reggae & Relief



August 2

Stage AE in Pittsburgh, PA - USA

Black Forest On Fire



August 1 – 3

Pappelwaldsee in Berghaupten, Germany

Culture Reggae Festival



August 2

Worumbo Riverfront Event Center in Lisbon Falls, ME - USA

Reggae Jam



August 1 – 3

Klosterpark in Bersenbrück, Germany

Reggae Land



August 2 – 3

The National Bowl in Milton Keynes, UK

Reggae Sun Ska



August 1 – 3

Domaine De Nodris in Vertheuil, France

Reggae on the River



August 2 – 4

County Line Ranch in Piercy, CA - USA

Jerk Fest Los Angeles



August 1 & 3

Various Locations in Los Angeles, CA – USA

Boomtown Fair



August 6 – 10

Matterly Estate in Winchester, UK

[illegible]

JerkFest Toronto



August 8 – 10

Centennial in Toronto, ON - Canada

Jamaica Independence Festival



August 9

Kanaanbadet in Stockholm, Sweden

Afrika Tage – Wien



August 8 – 18

Donauinsel in Vienna, Austria

Turnpike Reggae Festival



August 15 – 16

Landgasthaus Lönne in Herzebrock-Clarholz, Germany

Montreal Rise Reggae Festival



August 8 – 10

Bassin Peel in Montreal, QB - Canada

Aarhus Reggae Festival



August 15 – 16

Voxhall in Aarhus, Denmark

Lion Heart Music Festival



August 8 – 10

Paradise Lake Camp Grounds in Hammonton, NJ - USA

The Return of Rub-A-Dub



August 16

Bliss Lounge in Stone Mountain, GA - USA

No Logo BZH



August 8 – 10

Festival Area in St. Malo, France

Reggae Lake Festival



August 16 – 17

Gaasperpark in Amsterdam, The Netherlands

One Love Festival



August 8 – 9

Festival Area in Wiesen, Austria

Rastafest



August 16 – 17

Reggae Lane Park in Toronto, ON - Canada

No Logo Festival



August 8 – 10

Festival Area in Fraisans, France

Rototom Sunsplash



August 16 – 21

Festival Area in Benicassim, Spain

**RUNR REGGAE
SUMMER FESTIVAL**

3 DAYS OF LOVE, PEACE AND MUSIC

PROTOJE MEETS TIPPY I
"THE LIVE DUB EXPERIENCE"

JULIAN MARLEY
& THE UPRISING

KY-MANI MARLEY

LILA IKÉ-STONEBWOY

MORTIMER AND MARY MOORE

**U-CLUB SOUND ARENA • DUBSTATION
ROOTS REGGAE BEACH**

22-24 AUGUST 2025

SEE OUR WEBSITE, FACEBOOK, TWITTER @ RUNRREGGAE AND @ RUNRREGGAE FOR TICKET INFORMATION

NEOGEO RISE UP:
OREGON
WEDNESDAY SEP 20, 2017
7:00PM - 11:00PM
Presented by NEOGEO + COLUMBIA

MAIN ACTS:

DAMIAN + STEPHEN MARLEY + Iration
MICHAEL FRANKLIN + SPEARHEAD
JESSE RUTLAND + STEEL PULSE
BASTARD! THE EXCHANGERS + RAINY GIRL
ARTURAL SOUND SYSTEM + BORN TALK + ETHAN TUCKER
DIE LAMMA + THE RUST BATHHOUSE

SPECIAL GUESTS:

SLIGHTLY STOOPID + CYPRESS HILL
ATMOSPHERE + CALIB BLOOD + THE CLOWNS
FORTUNATE YOUTH + POPPER
DENAR + SATSUKI
BEACH LIFE + CLARK WOODS + ELLIEMAC
IRON PROSPERITY + YEM SON

DOORS 6:00PM

NEOGEO RISE UP: OREGON

A vibrant poster for the Streetz Festival featuring the artist Popcaan. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a pink tank top, a large silver chain, and a watch. He has a serious expression. The background is a stylized illustration of a city street at night with palm trees and a building. The text "STREETZ FESTIVAL" is in a white box with a black border, and "POPCAAN" is in large, bold, red letters. Below it, "AUGUST 30th 2026" is written in yellow, and "at NATIONAL STADIUM" is in white. The "PRINK & LIVE" logo is in the bottom right corner.

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SUNDAY 31 AUGUST 2023
MOTCHIN PRIORITY, HERTS

Roots East



August 17

Castle Park in Colchester, UK

Reggae Rise Up – Oregon



August 29 – 31

Deschutes County Fair & Expo Center in Redmon, OR - USA

Roots in the Woods



August 21 – 23

Trije Kralji Resort in Trije Kralji, Slovenia

Uprising Festival



August 29 & 30

Festival Area in Bratislava, Slovakia

Ruhr Reggae Summer



August 22 – 24

Am Ruhrstadion in Mülheim an der Ruhr, Germany

Bomboclat



August 29 & 30

Beach in Zeebrugge, Belgium

Reggae on the Rocks



August 23

Red Rocks Amphitheater in Morrison, CO - USA

Streetz Festival



August 30

National Stadium in Kingston, Jamaica

Vermont Reggae Festival



August 23

Festival Area in Burlington, VT - USA

Helsinki Reggae Festival



August 30

Ääniwalli in Helsinki, Finland

South East Soul & Reggae Festival



August 24

Garon Park in Southend, UK

Holo Holo Festival – San Diego



August 30 & 31

Petco Park in San Diego, CA - USA

HIM Dub Festival



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August 31

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October 3 – 4

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Ta'Qali Concert Area in Attard, Malta

Reggae Rise Up – Las Vegas



October 4 – 6

Downtown Events Center in Las Vegas, NV - USA

Far East Reggae Cruise



September 11 – 16

Cruise Ship in Tokyo, Japan

Mission Bayfest



October 17 – 19

Mariners Point in San Diego, CA - USA

Holo Holo Festival – Sacramento



September 27 – 28

Heart Health Park in Sacramento, CA - USA

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October 19

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Rebel Salute – USA



September 28

Miramar Reginal Park in Miramar, FL - USA

Welcome To Jamrock Reggae Crusie



October 27 – November 1



Cruise Ship in Miami, FL - USA / Jamaica

A close-up portrait of a Black man with a beard and short dreadlocks, looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a light-colored collared shirt. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage and a hint of a blue sky.

INTERVIEW

RIK JAM

HAILING THE ALMIGHTY WITHIN

WELCOME TO MY GENESIS!

BY GARDY STEIN

PHOTOS BY PHILLIP MCFARLANE

Some artists enter the scene with a bang, delivering that one-hit wonder or going viral for some reason or having big names at their back who promote them. Others grow quietly, steadily, honing their skills and building solid foundations over several years before stepping into the spotlight, but once they do, they have all it takes to succeed. **Ronaldo Ricketts** aka **Rik Jam** definitely belongs to the latter category. The young Jamaican artist set out on his journey in 2016, starting to record, release and perform under the able tutelage of **Phillip McFarlane** and his **Irie Yute Tapes** label, a guarantor of high quality in both sound and lyrical content.

With **The Genesis**, **Rik Jam** now presents his first full studio album containing 13 tracks (and an *Intro*) of which ***Hail The King, Journey*** and ***Caution*** have created quite a stir already. In our first ever **Reggaeville** interview with him, **Rik** talks about his humble beginnings, his strong faith and what his musical journey has taught him so far:



Greetings Rik Jam! So nice to finally talk to you. Where do I catch you?

I'm in, California, a place called Los Osos.

Los Osos? Sounds Spanish. Do you speak Spanish?

No, I just look up a few words and try to put it in my song, you know, like "*Bendito es el hombre, I forever win.*" (sings)

Muy bien! I only speak it a little bit myself, but I'm doing Duolingo to improve (laughs). Now, since this is our first ever interview with you, let's go back a little bit. Where did you grow up, how did you start in the music business? Who is Rik Jam?

Rik Jam is a loving individual, full of humility. I spent my early days as a child in a community called Fletcher's Land. Somewhere

downtown in Kingston, you know? So, I spent part of my childhood life with my mom and most of my family members, in the yard. It's a big space! Who's not family, ends up being family. And my music journey actually started with that same household, with a Christian background from my mom. Full-fledged Christian! We were listening to music right along, but I didn't recognise the gift that I had, being able to sing everything and being able to be on the same pitch of what I'm hearing on the radio. You know, like, mimicking everything, doing harmonies without even having the knowledge that this was a harmony because I was listening. So, the very moment my mom heard me singing, she was like, *"You have to be singing in the church!"* That happened when I was about eight years old, and fast forward a few years, we're actually going to church full time now, as an adolescent I started singing in the church choir. Fast forward to when my mom passed, I took a break from church. I moved from Fletcher's Land into a place called Stadium Gardens to live with my dad. That's where the music journey actually started in terms of reggae. When I started high school, I started being in the choir and in the band. Right now, my band member for **Island Federation**, we went to the same high school together and he was the person who actually encouraged me to be a part of this band and the choir in school. That was very hard times for me, you know, and I actually give thanks for that experience and for him to be able to help me move on that path, straight and narrow. So, ever since, we did great things with music!

There were times in high school we won the **JBSB** [Jamaica's Best School Band] band competition in Jamaica, founded by **Rayven Amani**. And before that too, we were on the high school choir of Saint Andrew, we came third that year, 2014. So, it was great, great vibes, great energy too. Fast forward to our ending of the school year, we met **Phillip** [McFarlane] at our second stage in the band competition finals. He was a judge for the final stage at the Edna Manley Concert Hall.

When was that?

That was 2015. He said out of everyone's performance, my voice and my sound actually caught his attention, so he wanted to work with me. So, after the competition, we exchanged numbers. Unfortunately, I lost my phone for half a year after that. When I do get back a phone, I sent a message to him and say *"Yo, I'm here!"* and he say *"Why you never shout me?"* That's what he said, so I told him what happened and he said *"Let's work!"* But right then he was not in the country, so I wait until he's back and we link up and we started making music. He was very persistent, and he keep asking me *"Are you sure you want to do this? Because the very moment you make this first song, there's no turning back."* I literally said *"Yo, this is my stuff! Let me just work with everything possible, I'm willing to learn!"* Ever since that... We released **Love Never Lost** in 2018, and it was a different feeling from there, and I was like *"Alright, let me just work with this."*

I think in the same year you had a single called **Life** and then **Change My Life, Countless Dreams, Ready Fi Them...** Which of these tracks, of your early works, was the most successful?

Out of those, I'd say **Change My Life**. Well... I think **Life** and **Love Never Lost** actually did a great deal, but when the audiences heard **Change My Life**, they were like *"This tune is going to be the real thing!"* So, I did what we can, and we did countless streams, just seeing the traction, taking time growing... you know, just steady building.

And from releasing these songs to going on stage, how was that? When was your first performance as Rik Jam?

My first performance, very official performance, was in 2022. I went and toured with **EarthKry**, **Austin Reggae Fest**, that was like my first, first official show on stage, you know, in front of hundreds or thousands of people.



**Were you nervous?**

Yeah, I was very nervous! But in my head... I was nervous, but at the same time, I'm saying to myself *'I'm already here, so what's the point of being nervous, this is what I want to do, so let's go and do it!'* I realised that was part of the journey and it helped me, I looked back on that, and I really needed that, you know, to help me grow.

Cool. You're also on tour right now, you are having some great shows ahead, but you already did some gigs. How was the tour so far?

The tour has been good! It's my first headline tour, and it's a joy to be here with amazing people, the team... The shows were really amazing so far, we had small venue shows and we made them worthwhile, just as we wanted them to be, and we had big festivals, too. **Havana Festival** in Florida, that was awesome, and we did the **Austin Reggae Fest** in April, too. I got fortunate to be on the second day there as well, you know, I got to be there with the likes of **Kabaka Pyramid**,

Nattali Rize, a whole lot more that day. It was awesome! I give thanks to be here and we look forward to the remaining dates.

Between stage and studio, what's your favourite?

I like both, you know. It's a monumental thing, because it actually is a part of learning. Every day we learn, so I like to be in the studio to understand what this is about, what that is about, how I approach the harmonies of the songs, what I want to put into this track... It works well, and then when I go on stage now, it actually pays off, because the stuff that I learned in studio, it's getting implemented on stage unconsciously. I enjoy it, you know, I feel it!

Sounds great! And now you have your album coming out. When was the decision taken to produce it?

We were having this conversation in 2023. I mean, we had a lot, we create every day, every chance we get. Every day there's this new idea **Phillip** comes up with. So, when

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I heard some of the tracks, I knew this was going to be awesome. We recorded some of the tracks, fixing it up and stuff, waiting for a whole month, and then we're like *"Yo, we can't just release it right now. Let's create an album, let's work on that!"* So all the songs now, the new releases that you hear like **Caution, Journey**, they come from this album. And there's a lot to come, so be on the lookout. (laughs)

What's the final title?

It's titled (lowers his voice) **The Genesis**.

Can you explain why you chose that name?

You know, there's new beginnings, a new generation reggae. Let's say we still have the same old school vibe, we still bring back everything from the blueprint that we learned along the way, along the time. And it's still in the now, you know? I wanted it to resonate with a lot of people, because

I believe everybody in the world have a genesis in something, you know what I mean? No matter what. So, I just feel like starting up something for everyone. So, this is my start, this is my beginning, this is my genesis. So, people, welcome to my genesis!

Who is involved in the production of the album?

Almost all of the songs are by **Phillip**. We did part of the production with **N'namdi Robinson**, that's the son of **Nambo Robinson**. I have a special track on the album that he produced, it's called **Emotions**. We will be performing it throughout our tour, and it's a very sentimental song for me because it speaks... actually, every song has its own story, but that song actually speaks well in terms of what I'm talking about in my story, my life, you know? So, big up **N'namdi** every time!

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I love this song, too! It's very touching, I like how you say "you never know when it's goodbye". So that's like a kind of wake-up call to enjoy life and the moment, right?

Yes, it was definitely a wake-up call! Ever since my mom passed, you know, I felt like I lost my way. But, as I said, give thanks to my friends, to **Janeel**, to **Joel**, my drummer for the band **Island Federation**... they done a lot, you know, they welcomed me in a safe space for me to express myself that I didn't really have much at home. I spend so much time with my friends, not even in my own house, so like, I give thanks for them too, because they're a part of the journey. It reminds me a lot of how we should just be concerned about how this life is, and at the same time enjoy it, because you just never know. My very favourite person, I thought she would be around for who knows how long, I lost her at 13! So, that was my wake-up call.

My condolences. I just lost a friend from Guinea on Monday, so yeah, you really never know. Cherish life as long as you have it!

After the Intro, which is great, you have a song called *Hear My Cry*, which is like a very intense prayer to God. You sing "this is the path I choose" – so far, did you ever regret it? Did you ever think about doing a different job, follow a different path?

Let me just say, I've never regretted it. I do think about why it is taking so long for me to get where I want to be, but that's just me being in the emotion at the moment, until I get to speak with someone about it. It's like, this is just what the journey is about. It's not going to be easy, so don't watch other persons making it that quick, because you're not them. You are you and you do what you have to do to make sure you get where you want to be. I look into that, and I just started doing my own stuff and I just don't dwell in the past that much. I don't watch what other people are doing, I only just congratulate them for their success, you know? So that's all you got to do. And once you do that, self-acceptance comes along. You just bring forth some peace for your mind! You just do what you have to do, and you shall be all right.



True. There's a very deep understanding of faith in that song, and in other songs like *Give Praise* and *Hail The King*. You mentioned that you grew up in a religious household, is that something that you also practise in everyday life? What's your relationship with God?

Every day, I have the Almighty within, because without him, our works would be impossible, you know? A lot of people think that there's no God, no supreme being, and they're just doing a lot of stuff because they know the way and they're doing what they're supposed to do, until they're in this compromising moment that humbles them or puts them at base. They're going to be like "*How has this happened? God, why?*" They don't realise that they are calling upon the same person that they were forgetting when they're in times of high, and that's why we always have to do it, every time. I don't just practise it within myself; I always encourage people to remember that you have somebody that is above you and is watching over you. So, everything that you are doing, you give thanks for it, because you don't know when you will be losing it. Hail him always!

You already mentioned the song *Caution*, which is out on video since last December. Who is in the video with you, standing at the car, singing along?

She's a new singer, a new prodigy, her name is **Kaiz**. Wicked, wicked singer! Check out her new single called ***Feel Like*** on the same riddim as ***Caution***. That song too is just wonderful. It's about raising awareness for the people, to be aware of the times. Strange things are happening!

That's something that comes through in all of your songs. Every single song is so conscious, even the love songs are conscious in a way! Also *Journey*, it's really a nice song too, and it seems that it's very personal. How was the shooting of the video for that? You are running a lot in there...

It was pretty much a journey; it was really a rough journey for me (laughs). For that video shoot, I didn't have the concept, it was **Phillip** who came up with it, that we're going to be in the cane fields and we're going to run, because it's a part of the journey. In my head, I was like "*Oh man, I'm going to run,*

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really?" He told me to get my bag and stuff, so I did that, and we went on the journey and the video shoot started, and I had to run and sing at the same time! It was really, really challenging, but as I said before, it's a part of the growth and I enjoy it. I enjoy being in that space, learning and growing at the same time, so I get to understand what it actually takes to be everlasting, you know, for your music to be everlasting. You have to do a lot of work for people to actually come and love it and for it to be played for the next generations.

Well, it turned out a beautiful video! Another one is *True Love*, which looks like more fun where acting is concerned. Where did you shoot that one?

It was shot in Saint Thomas, in a part called Reggae Falls, where you saw the falls in the starting of it, and then along the road leading into Saint Thomas. It was a great vibe!

Yes, I love the children dancing. Who were they?

You know, I wasn't there at that shoot, it was the day after the one at the fall scene. So, they did that shoot... they just play the music and let them dance and stuff, you know? It was in the community near my home. I didn't even realise, until someone asked me about it when the song came out.

Sweet! And now a question that might interest all the ladies out there, is the lady in the video your *True Love*?

No, she's just an actress. (laughs) Not just an actress, she's an artist, too. She's a reggae artist by the name of **Jhazahra**, people can check her out. Her music is really good, it's like a very aggressive dub type of stuff, urban music, you know? So, for those who are actually familiar with **Aza Lineage**, there's similarities there. Yeah man, big up **Jahzahra** every time.



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Talking about the features on the album, I didn't get the full list yet, but the one I figured out was Rebelution on the track Stereo. How did this collaboration come about?

It was brewing from a longer time, you know? Throughout the years, when I made my first appearance on stage with **Earth-Kry** in 2022, **Rebelution** singer **Eric** actually reached out to **Phillip** and said he loves the work that he's doing, and he loves the music of ours. He wanted to link up in due time, so over the years, the connection and the relationship was made to that extent where we got that safe space where we were able to connect on a musical level and stuff. And in December, I got this message that I was going to be on the road with him and his band called **Unified Highway**. It was very amazing at the time, I was so shocked, wondering how this is going to work, but we actually made it work and in January we came on the road, and we did some shows with them for like two weeks. It was amazing! It was awesome, I have to thank God the Almighty for that. So, that actually

brought us to the point where we said *"Yo, we would love to do some songs with you!"* And we did some songs, and he actually said he'd love to put a song on my album too, so we get that done and I was like, *"Awesome!"* I heard his verse first, I was actually battling with this song, what to put on it, but when I heard his verse, I was like...

... that's it!

Yes! So, I was looking for something to complement what the other person was saying, so that became the second verse.

Another feature is heard on *Fight With You* – who is the lady singing on that one?

She's a singer from Hawaii called **Taye Louise**, she's a beautiful singer, I want everyone to look out for her!

We have also two more songs which are not really reggae, that's *Troubled Streets* and *Cry Blood*. Who is featuring on those?

Troubled Streets, that's more like a hip hop type of vibe, it features **Taye Louise** again,



and **Dalwayne**, of course. And the other one, **Cry Blood**, that's a real aggressive one. It's like a... I took back some verses from **Destine**, and it's just a different way of singing it, with **MediSun** on it.

In *Book Of Life* you say “my focus is reggae music”. Did you ever think of venturing into any other genre?

My main thing is reggae, you know? So, until I cement my place in reggae to an extent, I won't stray too far. Reggae is always there, always my place to go, my place to stay.

Okay, great. The last song I want to ask about is *Stronger*. What was your inspiration for this song?

Stronger is actually... I don't want to say it's like a prayer, because we're always reaching out to the Almighty because I'm from a spiritual household. I think the generation that grew me was more spiritual, but that song for me is to reach out to a lot of people out there. Every song should be resonant, so people can relate to it, you know what I mean? I'm just praying for people who never get to see some great achievements in life, like they never get to see their kids born, that they get to be appreciative of certain things they get. So, in most of my lyrics



I was remembering some people, some friends of mine that I grew up with, especially in school, and who passed very early, before me, and this song was reaching out to all of that and more, you know?

It's a nice song! And I wish you to grow stronger every day, with every show and with every song you put out and with this album, of course, to reach international audiences! Last question, you announced that you'll be in Europe again, so what's the plan?

We're going to be in Europe at **Uppsala**, in Sweden, we're going to be at **Reggae Jam**, so it's gonna be a good time, we're looking forward to play good music for the people of Europe. And we're gonna be in UK too, we're going to do two shows there with **Israel Vibration** in August, so it's going to be a good vibe!

Wow, definitely! Thank you so much for this behind-the-scenes view into your album. It's really great, congrats to the whole team. And safe travels – make the people happy with your music!

Thank you **Gardy**, and stay safe too, no matter where you go. Keep giving thanks for everything. God bless you!

RIK JAM - THE GENESIS

Irie Yute Tapes - July 25, 2025

"In come a ting call... who have ears let them hear!"

Ever since this youth started out a couple years back, our ears have indeed been wide open to not miss the word, sound and power he spreads: **Rik Jam** is an exciting talent from Fletcher's Land, Jamaica, discovered and nurtured by **Phillip McFarlane** and his **Irie Yute Tapes** label.



With **The Genesis**, **Rik** now presents his first full studio album, giving us a glimpse of the artist he has grown into. From the powerfully arranged **Intro** to the 2023 released **Hail The King**, the 14 tracks included bear witness to a sensitive and thoughtful soul, endowed with a unique voice that is able to translate emotions like joy, gratitude and love, but also insecurity, pain and faith. Thus, the gentle **Hear My Cry** slowly unfolds like a flower bud in the sunlight, its prayer-like lyrics instantly relatable by the quiet, almost vulnerable manner of the singer's delivery. *"This is the path I chose, protect me on this journey!"*

The quote is a perfect passage to the subsequent track **Journey**, a reflection of individual lives' trajectories and the difficulties one may encounter. With fine musicians on the beat (**N'namdi Robinson** on guitar, **Phillip McFarlane** on keys, **Kamardo Blake** on bass, **Sheldon Palmer** on sax and **Randy Fletcher** on trombone) it is a joy to listen to, but I recommend watching the accompanying video as well – pure eye candy! While at it, go ahead and watch **Caution** and **True Love**, as these contain some fine locally shot visuals, too.

Expanding scope and reach, the album also sports some exciting features. First to be mentioned among those is the laid-back **Stereo**, a recent addition to the track list, featuring US reggae heroes **Rebelution**. Their compatriot **MediSun** joins **Rik Jam** on **Cry Blood**, a hard-hitting song of truth about the suffering of the poor. Bringing a talented lady to the mic, Hawaiian

singer **Taye Louise** turns **Fight With You** into a sensual affair; a more ferocious side of her is evoked in **Troubled Streets** to which **Rik's Irie Yute** colleague **Dalwayne** adds his vocals, making it one of the many highlights of the release. Speaking of: in a recent interview, **Rik Jam** named **Stronger** and **Emotions** as having a special place in his heart, and they'll certainly conquer many of yours, too! While the former rings like a prayer, tying in neatly with the beautiful **Give Praise**, the latter (produced by **N'namdi Robinson**) is a very personal account of the story **Rik** is about to write in the **Book Of Life**, this song being another intimate offering.

Modern roots (**Journey**, **Caution**, **Stereo**), reggae (**Give Praise**, **Hail The King**), nyabingi (**Emotions**), hip hop (**Book Of Life**) or a blend of genres (**True Love**, **Cry Blood**) – **The Genesis** has it all, a multi-faceted gem that people from all walks of life are bound to enjoy. Its biggest strength, however, is the deeply touching voice of **Rik Jam**, transmitting his likeable personality as well as the aspirations, hopes and dreams he has for the future. Ears wide open here!

by GARDY STEIN



INTERVIEW

META & THE CORNERSTONES

ECHOES OF TIME

TELLING THE DEEPER STORY

BY GARDY STEIN

PHOTOS BY CELINE DIELS

When it comes to authentic, hand-made and conscious roots reggae, his name cannot be left out: **Mouhammad Yahya** aka **Meta Dia**. Together with his band project **The Cornerstones** he has taken the world by storm with albums like **Hira** (2017) or **Dia** (2021), filling our ears with beautiful music and our hearts with uplifting messages, enthusing audiences around the globe during his immersive live concerts.

The Senegal-born, Brooklyn-based artist now presents his newest offering called **Echoes Of Time**, a “*reasoning between the past, present and future*”, as the press release tells us. With big names like **Kubix** on guitar and **Manjul**

on percussion as well as featured artists **Tarus Riley**, **Samory I** and **Stonebwoy**, expectations are high indeed – expectations that, rest assured, are not disappointed.

Once more, the album showcases both the impressive versatility of **Meta**’s voice and the topical scope of his lyrics, ranging from African history to virtual cyphers, from love stories to tales of faith and gratitude. **Reggaeville** was granted a glimpse behind the curtain of these songs’ creation, and while the interview was a joyful occasion of reconnecting with this humble and likeable human being, it also meant expressing our condolences for the most recent passing of the artist’s mother.

Meta, it’s so good to see you again! Thank you for taking the time for this interview. Before we speak about your new album, I want to say that I am so sorry to hear about the loss of your mother. How are you holding up?

It’s not an easy situation to go through, especially as a traveller. Travelling is a big challenge, but, somehow in life, we are given this mission and I feel that it’s also a blessing because my mom always supported what I do. I am able to do this music today because she was part of the big inspiration. I discovered music through her! She was also a singer when I was young, and we were doing some recording at home, so our home was really musical because of my mother. She loved music, world music, all genres of music, and reggae also, so I discovered it from her. She’s a big influence, and not only as a mother, I would say, but also as a friend. My friends were making fun of me all the time, the ones that are close to me, because

always they would tell me “*Man, you talk to your mom three times a day!*” But because of that, because we talk all the time, we wouldn’t even feel the distance. You couldn’t even feel it because we talk all the time, you know? And to suddenly wake up and just see this news was very shocking to me. As soon as I heard it, I just went straight to Senegal. It’s painful, but also I’m very grateful, not only because she’s my mom, she’s been a beautiful mom, but also because she’s a very beautiful person. I’m the only child, too, so I know that connection, that feeling. I’m grateful because I get to realise that in life, there’s something very important to pass on. And I think that what she passed on to me is the love and the gratitude and the faith. Faith and accepting, that’s one of the hardest things. I feel like my heart does accept it. I do miss her, but I accept the fate and that’s the strength that I’m holding on and the sweet memories that I have.

Thank you for giving us an impression of who she was. From the picture you posted, she seems to shine, such a beautiful person!

Definitely. She was my really close partner. Right before my show in Odéon, I get her a visa, and she was supposed to come. She got her visa Monday, and Thursday she was gone. It's very... life! It's life. We are grateful.

As you just said, you are a traveller. You've had a long journey already, from Senegal to the US, to New York, then touring all over Europe... Where are you based right now?

My home now is Brooklyn, New York. That's where I've been based the past 25 years. You know, I lived in the US more than I lived in Senegal (laughs).

Do you feel at home there, too?

Yes! It's home because I feel like I grew up there and with everything also following with my careers, I built it there. It's something that just happened that I didn't even expect. But it ended up being a comfortable place for me to be in because I feel the electricity from the people, coming from different places in the world. And I'm always fascinated by this unity where you can have everybody from different places, you learn about cultures, you hear stories... It's never boring because New York people come and go, so I feel like it speaks to me musically, and that ended up getting me to be addicted to this place. I love travelling though!

Yes! Last year, we met in Germany, you came to the Summerjam. In the Reggaeville Yearbook, you said that it was a special experience for you to come to a festival, not as an artist on stage, but as a visitor. Can you tell us what made this experience so special for you?

I feel like there were so many key factors... One of it is, you know, I never experienced a festival as an audience, and to be able to witness it as an audience, that was something very new to me. I could feel also that sensation, that drive of trying to find who's on what stage playing next. Also, to be out there

and feel the bass, not only in the backstage but in the crowd, that was amazing! And the other part also, a lot of times we go to this festival, we see these journalists coming from different horizons, different platforms, doing interviews with the artists... To now be also on the inside, being close to **Reggaeville**, seeing how you operate, conducting the interviews, going after the artists, all of this was very beautiful to witness. And the stands, the shopping, buying clothes, all of that, and crossing people that would be so surprised to see me in the crowd and would not believe it! So it was so many keys combined, that what really made this special. It was really a highlight for me, you know?

That's so cool. And now, speaking of you on stage, you just had a show in Paris, right? How was that, how did that go?

It went very well! I'm super grateful to see everybody coming there, it was a lot of people. It was a challenging show, because that's the same week my mom transitioned, and I feel like I have to hold that faith that she gave me, the love that she gave me. Because when she was around, she never wanted me to back down or give up, you know what I mean? And I wanted to hold strong and go on stage and share the love and celebrate her also, I sang a song about her... So it was also my way of showing the respect and playing the song and continue, you know, because that's what she always wanted for me: to never give up and to continue. And I felt like she was there with us in the room.

Speaking about connections, you mentioned on an Instagram post that you have some spiritual guides from back home. You mentioned two names, Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Tijan. Who are they?

These are our elders who wrote some amazing books, way back. They were writers also, and they were guiding the people towards faith, towards the discipline, towards the Islamic tradition with the understanding, the tolerance, the love, the coexistence, which is very important. They weren't about radica-



lism, we were given this gift of celebrating and understanding the value of humanity, of mankind. We can be Jewish, Christian, Muslim, no matter who we are, we were just given this understanding that we are the children of Adam, you know, the children of love. And that coexistence, that faith, that oneness of the Almighty, it's very important to us in Senegal, and that's what they give us. That's why, in Senegal you see we celebrate Christmas, we celebrate Eid, all of that, it's totally that message of peace, love and harmony that you hear from my music. That's how we always stand by the spiritual guidance.

Thank you. As you said, all of this is heard in your music and also in your new album. First of all, congrats on this beautiful release! What made you call it *Echoes Of Time*? It's very mystical.

The album is a conversation between the past and the present, and also a vision towards the future, that's what made me call it **Echoes Of Time**, because it's a lot of reflection. When I lived in Senegal, being a young man, leaving home for the first time, that was my first travel overseas. And, reminiscing my home

where I grew up, with my grandparents and how they left also, that was the last time that I saw them, trying to say also that was the *Sweet Memories* that always live on. You know what I mean? Also, I'm reflecting about the present day today, how we are in this modern world that we call civilised. Why so many violence is happening? History is repeating itself, all of that, with us on the screen always and the lack of coming together... sometimes I feel like we are next to each other, but we are so far away because we are trying to dig into a world that is out there. But at the same time highlighting also the beauty that is inside, because today, the world seems like it's getting smaller as we can connect, as we can call each other from a distance, see parts of the world through our phones, but also needing that fine balance.

And when it comes to the future too, I feel like we are in the middle of a storm. But everybody is looking on their phones, you know what I mean? And the danger is in front of us, so we have to wake up! We have to wake up and not get lost in this imaginary world, we have to be in the reality and realise that,



when we look around us, we can see it. It's very important, it's all about being alive, so we should find that balance. It's a nostalgia, it is everything in it, in that conversation.

The title track talks about these things you just mentioned, it says that we should not let ourselves be ruled by the algorithm, don't just stick to your screen... When did you start to work on the album?

I would say I've been working on it for five years. A lot of times I say that making an album is a state of mind, you know what I mean? Where you are in that moment and in that time, and I felt like when I finished the **Dia** album, I was starting to dive into these new ideas. They came in many forms, but I couldn't find the exact words. I was like, we are all schizophrenic people, I came up with this name, lunatics, but it didn't come across until it got so clear to be **Echoes Of Times**. It was drafted piece by piece, a piece of lyrics, a piece of music, a reflection here and there... And when I finished the **Dia** album, that's when I was

able to go back to my hard drive and to take some of those pieces and add new pieces, and along the road to the studio until it was being done.

Ok, nice. In which studio was it recorded?

I recorded the album at the **Real World Music** studio, but I started it in my studio in New York, composing the tracks and playing piano, bass, guitar, recording the vocals... So, when I finished the whole concept of the album, I started picking the songs that would go to the album and did the rehearsal and then we recorded it.

So, you basically did everything yourself? The songwriting, the lyrics, the singing, the laying of the tracks... That's all you?

Definitely! Pretty much with all of my albums, I produce everything, I compose everything and bring it (laughs).

Wow. You're amazing! Did any other producers come in on this album?

Yes! There are a few tracks, this time I included a few other producers. One of my brethren from Senegal, his name is **Weich**, I co-produce with him **We're Gonna Make It**. And another friend of mine who lives in the Netherlands, his name is **Atau**, he did that Afrobeats song **Ayee**, I co-produced it with him. And there is another brethren called **Hamidi Mouloud** who did one song, **Madina**, he's an oud guitar player also playing reggae. These are the songs that I included on the album.

Let me ask about that one, Madina... it's in Wolof, right? What are the lyrics about?

Madina is a city in Mecca. It exists in many Arab countries, if you look at it, because it's just called "the city" or "the holy city". In Senegal also, we have Madina, I grew up a little bit in this area. So I took the **Madina** name, to talk about the city, but the biggest Madina, that's where the **Prophet Muhammad**, Sallallahu alayhi wa sallam, exiled when people from Mecca were giving him a hard time, he moved to this place, a



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peaceful place. So, **Madina** is paying tribute to him and his message of peace, love and unity, that's what this song is about. Talking about that he's a messenger of the Almighty, and we'll never going to deny that. So, paying the tribute to the love and the city of Medina that's in Mecca, and all the Madinas that are around the world.

You mentioned already *We're Gonna Make It* and *Ayee*, two songs that have great featured artists. In *Ayee* we hear Stonebwoy, so it's a Sene-Ghana kind of combination. How did you link up with him?

When I had the song that I was working with **Atau**, I'm like "Okay, *Afrobeats* is very nice, a lot of young African people are coming with this trend of music. As a roots reggae artist, we have to also give this part of the new generation strength. But how to do it without us going too far out? And **Stonebwoy**, I know that he's polyvalent

when it comes to this genre with the reggae and Afrobeats, so let me reach out to him and we do this." Then it happened very smoothly. When I reached out, he was very receptive about it, he tell me "**Meta, big brother, we have to do this!**" and I'm like "*When I listened to this song, I thought of you, so we should work on it!*" And that's how it came across. We did the song together and I feel like it's a beautiful song, because a lot of times, if you look at the story of many African people who are married back home and go to Europe and sometimes facing problem of papers, couldn't go back or have a girlfriend and couldn't go back. Time is going until the relationship is destroyed. And so I was giving this hope to say that I'm coming back home, to say "**Darling, I miss you!**" And the girl is saying "*You promised me, but you haven't come to the promise yet.*" So, it's this story about these long-distance relationships.



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Yes, that's difficult. And then, *We're Gonna Make It* has Samory I on it, a big name out of Jamaica. Did you meet him on one of the festivals?

Yes, actually, he was playing a show with **Mortimer** in the Netherlands and, after the show, we started talking, having a conversation, and I found out that he also knew some people from Senegal, and we were like "*Wow, the world is very small!*" He was getting ready to go to Senegal to play a show there, and we're talking like "*Yo, I'm making my new album, I would love us to do something!*" He was also very receptive and open to it. I sent him the track, he's telling me "*Bro, I love this song!*" He gave all of his heart to it, and that's how it came across. It was like a sweet alignment because when I sent him the song, he was in Senegal himself.

Nice! And then the third big name on the album is Tarrus Riley, in the song *Just For The Soil*. How did this collaboration come to pass, and what do you mean by the title?

Well, the connection has been there for a long time because with all of my albums, I'm working with **Shane Brown**. He mixed

all of my albums and also is the manager of **Tarrus Riley**, so we crossed many times in the studio. This time we felt like it was about time to collaborate, because when I wrote the song, ***Just For The Soil***, I'm talking about inheritance. A lot of people fight about inheritance, if you look at it, brothers, families, all of that. And I wanted to highlight this kind of problem that society is facing, no matter if it's Asian, White, Black, Arabs. A lot of times, the story of inheritance is always here, and we were trying to send a good message to say that we have to love each other, because mankind is more valuable than material things. So, I'm making the album, it's being mixed by **Shane**, and I'm thinking about... you know how the mind works? **Tarrus** and his **Blak Soil Band**. And I'm like "*You know what? This is like a kind of connection!*", so I tell **Shane** to make **Tarrus** listen to this song. When he heard it, automatically he gave me a call, he's like "*Brother, I love this song! I love the vibe and the way you compose the music!*" So, anyway, he took one of the verse and writes the song, and that's how it came across, smooth, through **Shane Brown**.



That's a cool story! Another great song that I think embodies the whole concept of the album, the past-present-future conversation, is *Walls Of Colonization*. It talks about the times of colonisation and its effects on the present situation, but also about where Africa is going in the future. Can you tell us more about the concept of this song?

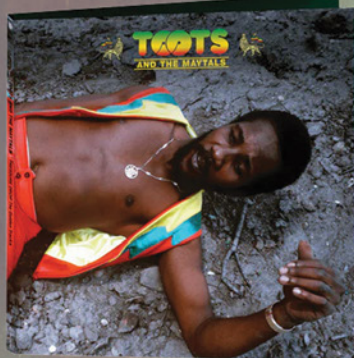
I'm glad you talk about it, because this song comes from a very deep place. When it comes to politics sometimes, I feel like politics can make the artist come across like a division, like a radical, you know what I mean? Anything that has to do with division between Black and White. I'm just not that person! I'm more into accepting different cultures, embracing cultures and differences, because I see it in one. When I was in Senegal and the countries of Africa that I've been many times, I'm seeing that, 'Okay, I was there, I studied in school, I was given certain books, but all of those books, what did they give me in the end? They gave me just one part of the story!' I see a lot of young people struggling to find themselves, because in those books, why am I not seeing my story? Why is it always **Victor Hugo, Napoleon**, all of that? Why not for example **Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, Cheikh Ahmed Tijan**? Why not **Askia Mohammad**? Why are these stories not in the books? They are writers, they wrote some very important books, why didn't we incorporate them in our history books at school?

And I'm looking at the streets, the stadium, the airport, and I'm just seeing names of colonisation! This also erased certain parts of our confidence, you know what I mean? Because if your story is kind of cut off or buried, it's hard to find your purpose in life, who you truly are. That's why I wrote this song, the ***Walls Of Colonization***, because the books and the walls, that's just the story of the coloniser. And I'm saying that we must arise, we must come out and also write our own story by coming together. Because we cannot do it... Senegal cannot do it alone. Ethiopia cannot do it alone. And I feel like a lot of the times, when you look at the Caribbeans, for example, the whole focus is on Ethiopia. Yes, Ethiopia maintained a part of the story by not being colonised, by having **Haile Selassie I**. But the story is bigger and deeper, it spreads all around Africa! And the story of Africa is the story of humanity, not only for Africans. We have to dig in to make sure we can preserve all of this history, because there are geniuses, there are books, there is big wisdom that is fading away! If you go to search for these books, they are mind-blowing. So, all of this needs to be brought to the surface and we need to honor also our warriors, our teachers, our ancestors by naming the streets, by naming the stadiums, by naming the mosques, all of that! Yeah, that's the message.

That's very deep! I think you should really go to Guinea one day, I was there last year and they do this, you know? They named their airport after the first president, Ahmed Sékou Touré, they name their streets after their national heroes... they have a very strong connection with tradition and scriptures, they are very aware of their heritage.

That would be interesting! I would love that. And now, you see it more and more, Africa, the young generation, is being aware and highlighting this part. But the only thing we must not forget as African people is to always maintain the love for humanity. Because sometimes we can say revolution, but when we say revolution, it's not to create enemies.

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It's not to create more separation and to say *"Okay, because they did that, we paint everybody with the same brush."* We have to be very careful of that because the good people exist everywhere! We cannot just go radical. For me, that's the point that I'm just like *"Okay, let's take our rights back. Let's stay strong, let's honour our ancestors. Let's be part of the evolution. But let's not go as a revolution that want to make enemies, because it won't help."* The world, what it needs is not about Africa, Europe, Asia, it's togetherness! You know what I mean? Togetherness and equal rights and justice, how we reggae people say. The love!

Love for all humanity! Yes, that's beautiful. And then, what does *Namanalla* mean?

It means *"I miss you"* in Wolof. It talks about how time is going. Mostly like, you know, we work, we work, we work, but we forget the family, we forget spending time with our families. So, it's saying that our children are getting old, but I play with the words, I say that our parents are getting young and our children are getting old. So, to just say that, spend time with your family!

That's so important! Thank you. You already mentioned the song *Sweet Memories*, in which you talk about your grandparents, so that leaves us with *Ready And Steady*. It's a very nice way to step into the album, it's so energetic. Was that the reason why you decided to make it the first song?

When I did it, I didn't even realise that it would be on the album. After I finished recording the album, the demos, in New York, I just sit down there with the guitar one day and I just start playing and it just start singing *"Ready and steady, ready and steady."* (sings) and I'm like *"Oh, these chords are nice!"* And I just started mapping it, I finished the lyrics later in the studio. So it has that kind of fresh feel because, all the songs I was building them throughout these years, but *Ready And Steady* came pretty much last minute. And when we listened the sequence of the album, I'm like *"Yeah, it makes sense to give the audience a big power in the beginning!"* Ready and steady. We are inspired by the divine light.

That's really cool. And you say that there's "a prayer written in the heart of men". What is the prayer?

The prayer is the love. The love is the prayer.

Oh, that's very beautiful. I think it's a perfect way to finish the interview. Last question, will there be a release party?

Yes, definitely. We are planning a release party, the vision is to do one release party in New York, one in the Netherlands, in Belgium and in France, like in the cities where we are more active. And hopefully we can do something in Germany for that with you guys! (laughs)

Yeah, that would be nice! Meta, thank you so much! It was so good reasoning with you. I wish you all the best for the album release, may many people hear it and conceive your message and feel the beauty of the music. May it spread happiness and love in the world!

Thank you, we appreciate it. It's been a pleasure, good to see you too!

META & THE CORNERSTONES - ECHOES OF TIME

September 2025

A few years ago, when you googled “Meta”, the name of artist **Meta Dia** was among the top results. While this has changed due to the omnipresence of a certain social media platform, nothing will ever change the fact that **Meta Dia** ranks among the global top reggae artists. After his celebrated **Hira** (2017) and **Dia** (2021), he now presents a new album called **Echoes Of Time**.

Promoted as “a reasoning between the past, present and future”, it unites time and space in a diachronic, international appeal. Assembling masters of their craft, we hear **Kubix** on guitar, **Daniel Adelaide** on keys, **Fayce** on organ, **Rupert McKenzie** on bass, **Stepper & Didier** on brass and **Manjul** on percussion – pure musical bliss!

The album starts with **Ready And Steady**, a song created spontaneously in the studio. It vibrates with a joyful energy, encouraging us to go on, no matter what. Forward movement is an element in **Matrix**, too, a piece that is on the rock side of things until a Nyabinghi bridge at 2:45 breaks the monotone drum pattern. “On and on and on and on!”

Both **Namanalla** and **Madina** contain Wolof, one of the dominant African languages in Senegal and the mother tongue of singer **Meta**. While the former advises us to not forget spending time with our loved ones in that hamster wheel of modern life, the latter is a spiritual gem, hailing all the holy cities of the world. It was produced by oud-player **Hamidi Mouloud**, bringing another cultural facet to the table.



In **Good Spirit**, an exciting production that uses scratching and brilliant harmonies (shoutout to backing vocalists **Al-diner Laurent**, **Ivan Richardson** and **Tamara Nivillac!**) on a steady reggae beat, **Meta** warns against the dangers of too much (social) media consumption: “Don’t get lost in this virtual cypher, full of vanity, full of predators and hyenas!” The subject is taken up again in the

title track again, but **Echoes Of Time** touches on much more, telling us to wake up and be aware of manipulation in an intense, urgent crescendo.

Revelation says that “each and every one is beautiful” and, musically, gives off a certain **Bob Marley** vibe. Remembering the king! Getting lost in sweet memories can be beneficial, as recent studies have shown: looking at old photos reduces stress and boosts your mood. Losing yourself in **Sweet Memories** is a good idea, then, as this song has a beautifully laid-back riddim on which **Meta** remembers his grandparents. While **Walls Of Colonisation** takes a look at the difficult past of African countries, it focuses on the present situation and the continent’s future, too.

Special mention deserve the features: **Tarrus Riley** discusses matters of inheritance on **Just For The Soil**, **Samory I** joins **Meta** on the reassuring **We’re Gonna Make It** (a creation by **Weish**), and none other than **Stonebwoy** throws his Afrobeat skills in to garnish **Ayee** (produced by **Atau**). With **Gratitude** and **Divinity**, the album ends on a very spiritual note. Full of light, wisdom and instrumental finesse, **Echoes Of Time** takes us on a delightful journey – don’t miss it!

by **GARDY STEIN**



INTERVIEW

STEEL PULSE

50TH ANNIVERSARY

A NEW BEGINNING

BY TOMAZ JARDIM

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the formation of **Steel Pulse** in Birmingham, England in 1975. Arguably the greatest reggae act to come out of the UK, **Steel Pulse** continues to perform and record music that chronicles the Black British experience and the quest for social justice through the lens of Rastafari. **David Hinds**, its cofounder, lead singer and primary songwriter, was born in Birmingham to Jamaican parents who immigrated to the UK as part of the Windrush generation. **Hinds** founded **Steel Pulse** alongside **Basil Gabbidon**, after the two met as students at Handsworth Wood Boys School. As the band found its footing, it aligned itself with **Rock Against Racism**, an organisation of artists determined to stand up to the racism of Britain's growing far right political movement. As part of this camp, **Steel Pulse** gained popularity opening for punk acts such **The Stranglers** and **The Clash** who were similarly aligned.

In 1978, **Steel Pulse** came to the attention of **Chris Blackwell**, who signed the group to **Island Records** for what would be a trilogy of groundbreaking albums that helped to define the sound of British reggae. **Handsworth Revolution** (1978) and its lead single **Ku Klux Klan** contained both the uncompromising social commentary and musical intricacy and depth that came to typify the band's output. The same year, **Steel Pulse** opened a string of European dates for **Bob Marley**, who later referred to the group as a personal favourite. **Steel Pulse** followed up the success of **Handsworth Revolution** with **Tribute To The Martyrs** (1979), and then **Caught You** (1980), before moving to **Electra** for a second trilogy of albums, starting



with the seminal **True Democracy** in 1982, and followed by **Earth Crisis** in 1984, and the Grammy Award-winning **Babylon The Bandit** in 1986.

Though pressure from record companies would see **Steel Pulse** pursuing a more commercial sound through the eighties and nineties that the band would ultimately regret, they nonetheless achieved a number of benchmarks during this era, contributing a song to the soundtrack of **Spike Lee's** critically acclaimed film **Do The Right Thing** (1989), and performing at the inauguration of American president **Bill Clinton** in 1993. The return of **Steel Pulse** to the production of more militant roots reggae came first with 2004's **African Holocaust**, and most recently, with the release of **Mass Manipulation** in 2019. True to form, **Mass Manipulation** takes on diverse and pressing social issues, from racist policing, to global warming, to human trafficking, all in heavy reggae.

2025 marks 50 years of Steel Pulse. How does that make you feel? You don't look old enough to have started a band 50 years ago!

I don't look old enough, but I sure feel it! How does it make me feel? Well, you're saying five decades, you're saying half a century. To be honest with you, as **Burning Spear** said in one of his songs "*I and I survive*" and it's all about trying to survive this industry and the wickedness that came with it. So I feel blessed that we're able to weather the storm, for want of a better phrase.

Because it's been 50 years, I'd like to start by asking you a few questions about your earlier days. How did your experience growing up as a black youth, in particular in Birmingham [UK], shape your outlook and also give shape to the music that Steel Pulse made?

Well, put it this way: I was taught at school that the first seven years of one's life are the most significant; the first seven years sort of set that precedent. And so even though it's a long time ago, I still look at many things through those eyes when I was seven and growing up. And growing up in Britain at the time was kind of a weird one, simply because although we were born in Britain and recognised as British, that never necessarily equated to all the British standards and expectations, because of the family background I came from, which was from Jamaica. And it was all about that migration that took place that I had no knowledge of until I was a teenager, growing into an adult, and then it all started to make sense. Britain, being the colonial power over Jamaica and so many other islands, asked the Jamaican populace to come to the motherland to repair the country after World War II.

So did your parents come to Britain in the 1940s?

Well, the war ended in 1945. And by 1948, that invitation to the Caribbean started an influx of colonial subjects. So my dad went first, and then raised enough money to send for my mother. She came over in '55 and then 'bam', here I was, the following year.

So being in Britain now, but coming from a Jamaican culture, with the language, the food, you name it, I was raised as a Jamaican in its fullest sense. My parents didn't know how to fully adapt. They adapted for the sake of work, but as far as the other British cultural type of things, like the food, what they listened to, and what they talked about, it was all foreign to the Caribbean populace that flowed into Britain. So for me growing up in England with a Jamaican background, I found it a bit weird adjusting. Did I experience racism? Hell, yeah! The local neighbours would call us "*Blackie*", "*Nignog*" and "*Wog*" which was a common name that they called black people back then, which was an abbreviation for Gollywog. I don't know if you know what a gollywog is? It's like a little puppet minstrel kind of thing used as a motif on jars of jam. So that was a slogan: "*Hey gollywog, why don't you get back in your jam jar?*" Things like that. So those were the kind of slogans that we were exposed to in British society; we weren't quite fitting in.

Once Steel Pulse formed, the group first found popularity opening for various punk bands, whose members came from a different segment of British society that also felt they didn't fit it in. Can you help me understand the alliance of sorts between the reggae and punk scenes in the UK at the time? How did you perceive each other? What was it that drew the two movements together?

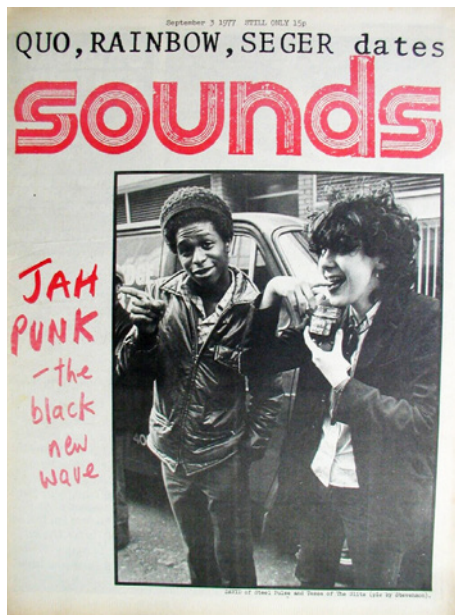
In all honesty, it was like night and day, chalk and cheese, oil and water, you name all the opposites. However, there were one or two people in the industry who saw the connection, and who saw an angle of getting our music established by using the punk rock genre. But for people like **Bob Marley**, I mean he wouldn't have known anything about punk rock music. Coming from Jamaica, he wasn't used to seeing these weirdos with their hair all colours of the rainbow, their ears, nose and eyebrows pierced with safety pins, but it was the punk's way of rebelling against the system. **Bob** had to be briefed and educated to know what's going on in the British music scene. It would

have been someone like **Don Letts** that was familiar with the industry who probably encouraged **Bob** to recognise the union of both genres. **Bob's Punky Reggae Party** song testifies to that. And he went out there and he started mentioning all the big names - **The Clash, The Jam** and all those acts - and lo and behold, the British public bit on it.

So there's a lot to the very early start of the whole punk rock era. Initially a lot of reggae bands didn't see themselves related to it. The general consensus was that it was white people's music, noisy and non-melodic, with lyrical content that had nothing to do with our energy. Plus we were too busy trying to find our culture, going back to Africa, to hell with you guys, that kind of thing. But then we had our management saying "*Listen, this is the way to go*". With reluctance, we said all right, let's see what you're on about. And so we did our first show at a place called **The Vortex**. We were opening for **Generation X**, that had **Billy Idol** as their frontman. And there were all these guys in the audience spitting at us! And we said "*What the hell's going on here!?*" And at one point, our frontman at the time stopped the music and said "*Anybody who spits or throws beer bottles or beer towards the stage, will get the microphone stand planted in their cranium!*" That stopped them. It was only afterwards that we learned that this was their way of saying, gosh they really dug what we did...

But did you guys socialise with the punks or did you tend to stick to yourselves?

Ultimately we did, but not at first. Over time, it became cool to be hanging out with the punk rockers. You started to understand why they behave the way they behave and that it's all about anarchy - they've seen the system for what it was and anything that the system disapproved of, they were into. The punks just made their mind up that anything the establishment was going to say yay or nay to, they'd do the exact opposite. So we said, after all "*Gosh, I kind of like that! It's a bit like us, really, but from a white man's perspective*".



And before you know it, we're out there with **Generation X, The Adverts**, and then on a whole UK tour with one of the most popular bands at the time, **The Stranglers**.

So from there you mentioned Bob Marley. How important was opening Bob's 1978 European tour to the early success of Steel Pulse? How do you think back on that?

When I think back, I would say it's the most significant milestone of the band's career. Obviously, playing the inauguration of **Bill Clinton** was also a big one, but this one I'd say is at the top of the list. And it happened at a time where the band could barely string three or four chords together. All we knew was that we had a sound that sounded like no one else's. We also had a publicist that saw all the angles under the sun back then. You know, they invented stories - they even had us advertised as much younger than what we really were at the time. So it was all the gimmicks, the bells and whistles that came with hype and publicity, and we were a part of that in a very big way. Cops would come



into our dressing room and the next thing you know, our publicists would say “Guess what? Steel Pulse got raided! But they didn’t find anything”. And the people would say “What!!?” In reality, all the cops did was say “Hi guys, how you doing?” but the publicists took it to the max! Instead, they would say that they had come to our dressing room searching for drugs and they didn’t find any. And bang, it was always all over the local paper, and magazines like **Melody Maker**, **Sounds Magazine**, and **Black Echoes**. So all the little gimmicky type publicity was there. So the **Bob Marley** tour came up, and we would have been fools not to do it - and we’ve never looked back since - everything sort of fell in place at that time.

I want to ask you about your songwriting and the things that strike me as unique about it. Your songs address a lot of immediate political events and injustices, be it Trayvon Martin or George Jackson or the KKK or climate change. And one thing I’ve noticed is that you often insert yourself in them and write from the first person, which helps to give them an emotional depth and power. In

***Biko’s Kindred Lament*, for instance, it’s not just about Biko’s murder, but how “the night Steve Biko died I cried”; in *Ku Klux Klan* we also see things through your eyes: “Walking along just kicking stones and minding my own business” or more recently in the song *Don’t Shoot* we look out from your eyes, as you sing “I’m choking, I can’t breathe”. Does placing yourself at the centre of these songs lend them greater power?**

I’ve never really looked at it like that, but you’re absolutely correct as far as not seeing it from a third person’s perspective. I think my upbringing has something to do with that. I was exposed to the news a lot with my father and exposed to all kinds of scenarios when it came to movies. And one common thread with me watching these movies, me reading the newspapers, me watching what’s going on TV, was always imagining, well, wow, what if that was me? As a kid growing up, for example, we’d switch the TV on and we’d see black folks fire-hosed in America during the civil rights movement, and dogs. As you know, in England, none of that was going on, where dogs were biting at you and being hit with truncheons - none of that was

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going on in Britain. There were animosities, but not at that kind of capacity. And I remember things my father said that have stayed in my head, like the day **Malcolm X** got assassinated when I was eight going on nine. And I remember him clearly saying he knew that was going to happen. He felt they were going to get this guy. Because as far as my father was concerned, your **Muhammad Alis** and your **Malcolm Xs**, your **Martin Luther Kings** did no wrong. They were seen as the way to go to get our liberation as a people. So I sort of held on to the shirt tails of that kind of sentiment, you see what I'm saying? So I didn't really look at it the way you did just now, where I sort of did away with the third party perspective and had me within the mix of things, walking around minding my own business, "*Don't shoot*", all that. I never really looked at it like that. But I can only believe that's where it stemmed from: Me always feeling, well, that could have been me...

So yes, I have this tendency to go about writing based on things I've experienced and kept saying to myself "*Well, what the f***, that could have been me! Steve Biko, that could have been me!*" You know, so that's how I sort of looked at things and still do as a matter of fact.

There's a complexity to the sound of Steel Pulse that one often doesn't find in reggae, especially in terms of the arrangements. I think, for instance, of True Democracy or of Tribute To The Martyrs, and the layers of sounds, right down to the little percussions. And the production is so gleaming and bright. To what extent were those recordings the product of the band's vision versus perhaps the vision of a producer? Because to my ear, there are not many records that you can put on that level. They really exist in a world unto themselves.



30.07. FRANKFURT, ZOOM
03.08. BERLIN, FESTSAAL KREUZBERG
05.08. KÖLN, LIVE MUSIC HALL
06.08. HAMBURG, FABRIK

ZART DICE





Well, it's a bit of a juxtaposition, really, and a conglomerate of things happening at the same time. And I could say this: if I turned the clock back, half that stuff you're talking about, I wouldn't do it anymore. I wouldn't do it! The percussion layers, the chordal complexity... I've got this thing where I believe things could have been done a lot more simply, but we were trying to impress ourselves and impress the world with a new and a different approach. I also at the time attended art college for a few years, where the kind of guys I was hanging out with were all exposed to jazz rock. So it became like sophistication, it became like that's where it's at. The chords that came in as well, they weren't regular chords, they weren't regular B major, go to D minor and all that kind of stuff. It was all about, you know, B7b5, and D6m5, and all those kind of chords. And we were saying "*Damn, so if I could figure*

this kind of chord and put it into reggae, it'll give reggae a different approach to what I normally hear and see". But not realising, "*But wait a minute, David, you haven't really gone through all the rudiments of what basic reggae is about. Why are you taking it to the level where you're taking it, where you want to add all these weird chords, seven flat and fifth chords, and 11th chords, and augmented ninth chords. What are you going to do all that for when reggae is not about that?*" We just thought the music needed to have that kind of approach, and hoped that our message got into the equation at the same time. And so it took a few years after to realise that had we simplified that part of the song or this part of the song, it would have been a stronger song than what it is now. So when I look back on my career and those albums that you mentioned, all I can think of is shoulda, coulda, woulda.

Wow, I don't think True Democracy and Tribute To The Martyrs could get any better!

Well, it's funny you should say that, because **Grizzly**, our drummer that passed away six years ago, felt that. Out of all the albums we did back then, **Grizzly's** favourite album was **Tribute To The Martyrs**. And it's the one that, every time I hear it, I sort of cough during the conversation or something like that, or you know, excuse myself to go to the bathroom, that kind of thing. Yeah. And it was all because it had all the bells and whistles of what you said you sort of like about the **Steel Pulse** sound at the time. And **Grizzly**, every time they asked him "Which is your favourite album?", he pointed to that one every time. And after a while, I started to accept it. Because what you have got to remember as well, when **Grizzly** started out as a musician, he was not in the reggae genre at all. So he was simply looking at music from music's perspective, as opposed to whether I like reggae or not. It was like, is it good music? Is it bad music? Do I like this music? And that's how he was looking at it.

I wanted to ask you about a tune on the album Vex, called Back to My Roots, where you sing "searching for fame and gold/we gained the whole wide world/ and almost lost our souls/ got brainwashed by the system/what a heavy price we paid". And it seems to me this is a pretty remarkable piece of self-reflection about the journey of how you guys have evolved as a band but took some traumatic turns in the process?

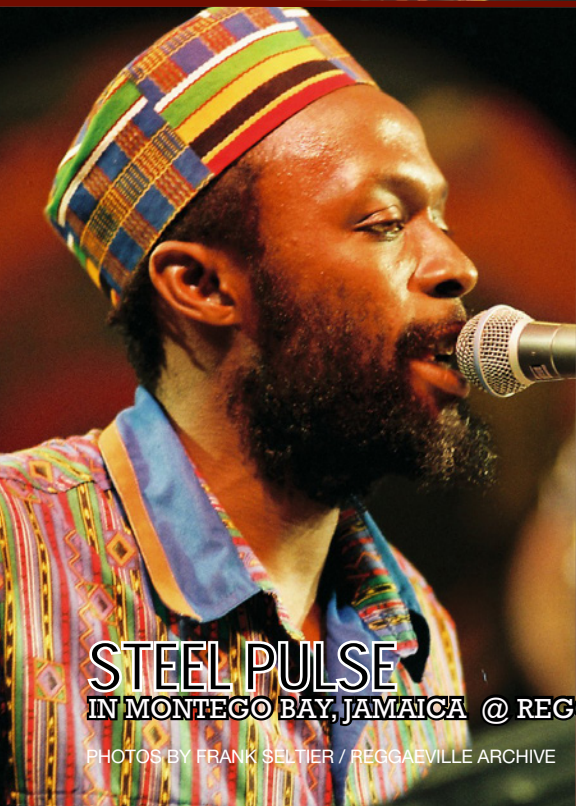
Well, let me tell you why that song was written in the first place. Reggae and the artists involved weren't getting their fair dues within the industry, as far as popularity, record sales, the whole thing that it takes when it comes to being in the pop genre, R&B genre, rock genre, and we said "*Hey, wait a minute, people turn up at our concerts, but ain't nothing happening with us. We're still driving a bloody Toyota, where Joe Blow is driving a Range Rover*". What's going on? So a lot of the reggae acts around that period of time, in the 80s, started commercialising

music. We tried all kinds of ways to let the music be acceptable by the industry.

So that was a self-conscious desire?

Yes, it was a self-conscious decision. Don't let anybody fool you. It was the same with everybody. They're looking at it and they're saying "*Look, there's money to be made, we're not making it. Why?*" And we sat down and we said "*Well, this is the reason why. Well, who's going to want to listen to that? All you're talking about is Jah Rastafari all the time. Nobody else knows who Jah Rastafari is*". So that, now, no longer became a subject matter if you want to make a commercial hit played on the radio, with everybody going dancing to it. So we saw at the same time that there were songs that were recognised the moment they were played, and the band became popular or commercialised. **Bob Marley's Could You Be Loved**, for instance: you go to nightclubs, it's playing; **Third World, Now That We've Found Love**. So everybody's saying "*Well, it seems as if every time these guys do songs like that, it's where it's at*". So everybody tried to do little things to the best of their ability. **Freddie McGregor** did it. **Aswad** did it with **Don't Turn Around** and **Jimmy Cliff** - you name it. And we got crucified for doing it. All of us did. Our fans were dropping us like hot potatoes. Once we started, you know, tracks like **Don't Throw Me Out Of The Disco**, what the hell is that? **Steal A Kiss, Schoolboy's Crush**, all these little songs I was starting to write, thinking maybe if I write this, some other R&B act could adapt to it, and it could find itself in a film... But after all of that, we're looking at what the hell happened. We lost our fan base, and we're out with all these lollipop type songs. What the hell's going on? I said "*This is the last time I'm doing any tracks to suit the record label. Screw you all, I'm not interested, I'm going to go my way...*"

You tackle so many sensitive social and political issues in your songs. I wonder if there are ever things that you find are just too



STEEL PULSE
IN MONTEGO BAY, JAMAICA @ REGGAE SUNSPLASH 1992

PHOTOS BY FRANK SÉLTIER / REGGAEVILLE ARCHIVE

difficult to put into song? Like things that you think are important, but ultimately that you just find too challenging to adequately encapsulate?

That's a very good question! I like to know that I'm current when it comes to issues. And what I've learned over the years is that there's certain things you just don't talk about, or if you do, you do it on a superficial level, or you just simply skip the subject altogether and hope that it never comes up. We've done songs that address racism in the United States, which as you know is sort of our stomping grounds. And I remember writing a song called ***Put Your Hoodies On***, which was about the **Trayvon Martin** incident, and then we went back and wrote ***Don't Shoot*** which was based on the **Michael Brown** incident in Ferguson, Missouri. And we'd be checking our mail and our social media platform and saw the odd piece of hate mail. You know *"Don't to Charleston, South Carolina or else!"* and we'd say, wait a minute, what's this going? And apparently there's a lot of people amongst our fan base that we thought, as lovers of reggae, would be all behind obliterating racial tensions and about unifying the world. But we find that, a lot of times, it's just as far as it goes. *"We like the music, but stick to what you do. Don't start coming to our politics"* and all that kind of stuff.

So I had to be watching what I had to say on a racial level and although I still delve in and try to use the clever art of songwriting and playing on words to make it happen. Religion is another thing that I'd really like to drive home, which I've realised I've got to be iffy about. For me, it's a sucker's game. I look around and all the preachers have all got Rolls Royces on their front lawn. So where's that collection box going every Sunday? So I've got this thing about religion, but it's a very touchy subject. The sun shines out of the preacher man's ass, if you see what I'm saying. I was in Ghana just last week, and I've seen what religion has done to Africa. At the very end of the day

the truth be known as far as I'm concerned: it's the church that's making the money and the people that don't have the money. They think that they're all forgiven if they keep donating. I'm saying, wake up! And someone said to me *"Dave, you go tell anybody what you want to say about religion, you might not live to see tomorrow!"* Because there's people that are so hell bent in their approach and the way they've been steered in the direction of religion that it's taboo to have it as a discussion.

There's another situation as well, where as a Rastafarian, I've evolved. When we started out as Rastafarians, its philosophy had a lot of facts to it. But as I grew into the whole movement and dissected each aspect of it, I've learned that not everything went the way I was initially taught. Therefore, I have to be careful with whom I discuss those kind of conversational pieces with, because you've got some people that are regimental in how they were raised as Rastafarians, and have not really seen the world on an international scale in the way that I have. I've come from a period of time where if I'm having lunch with someone, they dare not be there cutting into meat, especially pork, in my presence. That's how it all initially was back in the day. *"What? And you're going to eat that in front of me? Who do you think you are?"* Like I said, I've grown. I've gone to certain countries where people could eat an insect because it's going to be their only meal for the day. And I said, there you are, criticising someone or pointing the finger at someone because they ate the slice of pork in your presence. What difference does it make, Dave? You're not eating it. It's not your thing. So I've sort of learned how to evolve.

Can I ask you about something that may be even more controversial? What do make of the increasingly contentious issue of homophobia in the context of Jamaican music and dancehall? Does that count among those topics too difficult to address?

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It's a very good question. Yeah, right now, when it comes to homosexuality, when it comes to the black race, whether you're in Jamaica, or your community in England, or among the billion-strong populace of Africa, homosexuality is a no-no. Right? And it's based off religion. Our religion has been taught where people say, well, "*Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve*". So that is what religion has done. So, generally speaking, they have that kind of a mindset. So you'll find your **Bounty Killers**, your **Beenie Mans**, your **Buju Bantons**, you name them, and when it comes to homosexuality they can't tolerate it at all. When it comes to me now, I'm more of a realist as far as the way the world is going. Now, not everything in the world I'm going to be in favour of, but I've got to understand that the world is changing around me. I remember growing up as a kid where you could not announce to anybody that you're illegitimate. In England they

would say "*Oh, he's a bastard*". Because being a bastard in England was like a no-no when I was a kid growing up. Now, nobody gives a toss if you're illegitimate or not. So it's telling me that the world is growing, so learn to grow with it.

So I see more important issues in this world than someone's sexual preference. If it's the wrong thing to do, or the right thing to do, at the end of the day it's going to be God's decision. I'm here to address issues that I think that are important to me, and to where I think my people need to be. So, I've learned to see where the world's going and ask, where does it really affect me? I mean, I've got a friend within the industry whose daughter decided to have a sex change and he didn't know what to do. He's bewildered. "*What do I now David?*" I says "*Well, you know, call him by his new name*". That's what I was suggesting, you know, and

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years went by, and he says “*Well, David, it's working, you know, I've got to get used to it*”. So yeah, I'm not saying I'm accepting everything; all I'm saying is that the world is changing.

A year or two ago, I paid a visit to the **Dr Martin Luther King** museum in Memphis. And I went there with a worker that I had with me. And on the way out, it was all about buying memorabilia and souvenirs. And all of a sudden, he sees all these LGBTQ trinkets and stickers for sale, and this is in the **Dr Martin Luther King** museum. And he was

livid! So he said “*Martin Luther King would never have stood for all this stuff!*” I'm saying “*Hold on, how much do you know about **Dr Martin Luther King?***” And he didn't know that much - just that the civil rights movement came to liberate the people. But what he didn't seem to realise was that **Martin Luther King** wasn't about just liberating black people. He was about liberating people, period. So I said to him, my hunch is that if **King** was alive today, he would have tolerated that and moved on because it's a victimisation of other people. And he opposes all forms of victimisation. So although he's a preacher

man that says Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve, I truly believe that he would have embraced the fact that there's such a reality out there and moved forward. Because like me, he had bigger fishes to fry when it comes to human harmony. Because at the end of the day, that's the most important thing. We're looking at wars right now. If you look at the paper, there's ongoing wars all the time, for ridiculous reasons. Israel and the Gaza Strip, Russia and Ukraine; in certain parts of Africa there's militias and you name it, it's everywhere. So that's my take when it comes to that issue.

Repatriation to Africa has been a consistent theme for Steel Pulse. In *Stop Your Coming and Come* you talk about Lalibela and Addis Ababa and Shashemene; in *Rally Round*, you sing about repatriation as a must. What is repatriation for you?

Well, repatriation stemmed out of us as blacks born in Britain not knowing ourselves. A couple of decades went by where people were making it clear that you don't belong here. So with all those things thrown at us at that time, we didn't think England belonged to us, so we didn't belong in England. So repatriation, especially with the words of **Marcus Garvey** which reggae artists like **Burning Spear** and the **Mighty Diamonds** echoed in their lyrics, became like a big thing now – guess what, we're all going to go back to Africa. So it was a central principle of being a Rastafarian. So we all adapted this kind of mindset, but we adapted it for the reason that we were tired of the West and the treatment we were getting. We looked at all the people throughout history who got lynched, shot, jailed for many years, your **Mandelas**, your **George Jacksons**, your **Malcolm Xs**, and it's like **Marcus Garvey** prophesied that we're not going to know ourselves until we go back to it. So we all said, we get it and we're all heading back. Now over the years, I've grown to realise that sometimes it doesn't have to be a physical activity – it's more of a mindset. But physically, I still do believe

there needs to be some kind of establishment in Africa. But that doesn't necessarily mean that I need to be there forever, because I'm international, and I believe that the world is international. If I was a multi-millionaire, the first thing I'd want to do is have property on every continent. So that's how I look at it now.

In Africa, there's a lot of potential there. It has a growing economy. I think the Rastaman should be able to set up shop or have some foundation there in Africa at some point in their life.

But let me tell you something. This time a year ago, I was in the Australias, but there was a lot of island hopping. And I got to an island called Fiji and we were there stranded for two days because there was a storm and we couldn't fly. In Fiji I had to keep pinching myself that I was on the planet. There wasn't any hostility of any kind. Everybody's courteous. Everything was just beautiful. And I wish the world was like that everywhere. So I've learned that there's certain parts of the world where all the tension that the West has to offer simply isn't there.

Do you continue to write?

Yeah, I continue to write. I wear different heads when it comes to writing. Sometimes I try and do something that's completely different. Sometimes I try and repeat something, but with a different approach to it. Because once it was written 40 years ago, a kid coming up now would never have heard it. I sort of bob and weave based on what I expect as an audience. I'll give thanks that we've had several generations that have grown to love **Steel Pulse** and know **Steel Pulse**. You know, when someone who's aged 70 comes along with his grandkids, and they say "*Grandpa used to play this all the time*". That kind of thing. I sort of feel good about that. It shows me that we still have a career ahead of us that can last as long as we remain able-bodied. This fifty-year milestone of ours feels like a new beginning.

Steel Pulse



Photo Credit Adrian Boot April 1979



ISLAND

STEEL PULSE on tour with Bob Marley and The Wailers; Rotterdam, 7:7:78

FOR MARLEY this latest European tour is no big deal, but to Steel Pulse the exposure could make all the difference to their fortunes. Everything seems to be coming together for them at the moment.

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ON CONSCIOUS FASHION AND LYRICS

BY JESSICA KNIGHT

PHOTOS BY KERON ALEXANDER, DESTINEE CONDISON & SHAQAN PRYCE

Royal Blu's debut album, **Spain Root**, exists because a team of talented creatives in their own right – singers, songwriters, engineers & producers – pooled resources and captured the results in Kingston's one and only **Harry J** recording studio. It also exists because the lone yute **Blu** spent much time traveling between Spanish Town and Kingston, hence representing his “Spanish” roots in the title track and elsewhere. This trod was not only a place to learn to manage anxiety whilst observing the many facets of human nature on an oversubscribed seven-seater Juta bus, but also a place to tend to heart-break and contemplate gun violence.

Since their first **Class Is In Tour** of 2017, **Sean “Royal Blu” Francis** and **Sebastian Anthony Bennet**, aka “**Runkus**” have released **G** and celebrated nearly 1 million streams on digital platforms. Not content to juggle the latest blend of reggae, dancehall and hip hop in the duo's previous releases under **Island.Wav**, **Keron “KaleX” Alexander** and **Aundre “RiddimBoss” Edwards** have merged with “the **Gs**” to produce **Spain Root** under the fresh collective **G.Wav**. It is the first of many forthcoming works from when the **Gs** met the **Wavs**, and **Akina Eman** inserted her yummy female vocals as the full stop.

Protoje, **D'Yani** and **Kabaka Pyramid** provide additional Jamaican roots to an album that never forgets where it's coming from. Here, **Blu** connects the many thoughts he had whilst traveling on buses with his lyrical output, explains the formation of **G.Wav**, and tells the story of the moment that he switched to writing conscious lyrics.



So how are you feeling about releasing your debut album?

It feels so surreal overall. It's been a journey. It has helped me to understand and appreciate artists who have so many albums already, especially ones who tour a lot, and have a full family to take care of while still working on an album, because it's a lot of work. It's the most work I've ever done, but I'm really happy with it. I'm really happy with the team that I work with, **G.Wav**, which **Runkus** is a part of as well, and **KaleX** and **RiddimBoss** as producers.

Yeah, I want to know more about G.Wav. It's a relatively recent collaboration, right?

Yeah, yeah, it was actually established at the beginning of working on this album, when everything kind of started to centralise musically is when we developed **G.Wav**, which was probably started [in] 2024.

So you formed it as part of creating this album?

Yeah. It's a collective that's going to work on music outside of this album as well, because we have **Akina Eman** as well, who is featured on my album. We're going to do more music with her, and release music under **G.Wav** with her as well. Everybody involved. Right now my album is the focus with **G.Wav**, it was primarily created because of my album.

Tell me more about the background of G.Wav.

The end of 2023 is when I brought all of this music to **KaleX** and **RiddimBoss** who has a production camp called **Island.Wav**. And I basically told them "*Yo, I'd really love if you guys could just produce this album for me overall*". I've never had production on my music until **G.Wav**.

I played them a playlist that I had on SoundCloud. They took weeks to give me feedback. My anxiety is through the roof. So I was overthinking it "*Do they think it's trash?*" And I was asking them to link up, link up, link up so we can discuss it. And we were fi-

nally linked up. They were like, in less harsh terms, "*Yeah, it is trash, but we can fix it. We can work on it*".

There were a lot of songs at that time that I didn't play for them, because I didn't want to give them everything [at] one time and overwhelm them. At that studio session I played some more songs for them, and they were like "*Yo, why didn't you put these in the playlist? Now we're talking*". From that link up, we just linked up more, and we got way more intentional with the music that we created, and the direction that we were going with the music and the whole theme of the album, and what I wanted it to be.

And **Runkus** said "*Yo, why not just be a collective? We all do music. We all link up very frequently. We're all friends. We all have the same common idea. So let's just make this a thing and call it G.Wav*".

Where do you see yourself going in your musical adventures? You have anyone's album to come on next?

Mine is the current focus. But **Runkus** has been working as well. The capacity in which we work on everybody's album is different, because **Runkus** is a genius and a maniac on his own. **Runkus** is a guy who plays guitar. He engineers, he sings, he writes, he does everything. He's a one man army. But he's working on music that will have a lot of **G.Wav** music on it. **Akina Eman** as well, we have music with her, coming too, very soon.

What would you say the unique qualities are for each person that they bring to the table?

Alright, so hmm! So we have **Runkus's** characteristics. **KaleX** does engineering as well. He does the recording for me overall. We're all jokesters, but he's almost like a professional jokester. He's a producer as well, very great producer, very great vocalist, artist, writer as well. **RiddimBoss** is just a powerhouse because he plays almost every instrument: drum, guitar, bass, keyboard, plus he produces, helps with harmonies. **Akina Eman**, the only female in the group.



She's such a calm powerhouse because she doesn't speak as much, but when she does it's very powerful. She's always saying something very deep or thought provoking! Very great writer. One of my favourite writers in Jamaica. That's generally the overall vibe of everybody. Oh, and me.

Yeah, don't forget yourself.

[Laughing] Forgot me. I'd say songwriter, I'm very keen with songwriting and harmonies. So whenever recordings are happening, I like to be there as well. Because I like when people have certain inflections in their voice when they're saying certain things, and I like when they deliver certain things a specific way when recording.

I want to go back to your album processes now. The tracks move through lots of different...

Feelings.

So can you take me through?

There was no song that we went into the studio with a genre in mind. It was more of just a feeling. Every time I go into studio **Wav** would ask me "*Yo, what are you feeling today? What's something that you want to express?*"

You started emotionally.

Yeah. And my producers, all of us listen to the same stuff as well. So I can say specifically **For Life From Kingston**, with **Protoje**, we made the beat for that song the night before we went up to link **Proto** - me and **RiddimBoss**.

When we went up to **Proto** we had three rhythms for him. **RiddimBoss** was like "*All right. I'm going to play this one first to reel him in and then I'm going to play the actual rhythm that I want to play for him*". And so said, so done. **Proto** was like "*Yo, this one,*

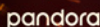
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this one, you guys have more rhythms but this is one, I promise you". That's where we approach music from every single time. So it's not necessarily a genre, but just a feeling, any feeling that we want to capture. We also intentionally keep some aspect of it Jamaican, whether it is a dancehall pattern, or to incorporate like the reggae horns or a reggae bassline, or something.

I'm excited about this concept of your group that you've pulled together and how you're planning to work.

Yeah, man, that's the aim. I have a wide variety of listeners. For instance, a song like **Ten**, a reggae purist is not going to like, but people who have been hardcore fans of me, they love a song like **Ten**, because they understand *"Oh, this is all Blu has been from the beginning of time"*. But then you have songs for the purist like **Light My Way**. In the girls' segment, like **Shoulda Love**,

it's a reggae girl song. I want to ensure that there's something there for everyone, even if it's just one song. If you press play on **Spain Root** and you find one song that you rock with, my job is complete.

Where you come from, geographically and musically, is important to you.

I grew up in Spanish Town, but I went to high school in Kingston and my mom worked in Kingston. So that commute back and forth from Spanish Town to Kingston – you learn a lot about people. I learned a lot about myself. I've gone to Europe, America, Dubai – different places, and it's like, no matter what, I'm always that same young man from Spanish Town. I remember they have the seven-seater vehicles, and sometimes they use them for taxis. I'd be at the exact back of the vehicle, and you know, sometimes they turn a seven-seater into a ten-seater. It's like ten people in one car.

I remember a lot of times my heart was racing at the back of the vehicle, I'm like *"Yo, what is this?"* And I had to learn on that journey that *"Yo, that is anxiety. You're anxious about being at the back of this vehicle. You feel claustrophobic. You feel kind of just like you can't escape. You can't move"*.

I've had to deal with heartbreaks. You reflect on a lot. And I think that's what I really tried to embody with **Spain Root**. A lot of those thoughts that I expressed on that album is stuff that I thought about while back and forth from Kingston to Spanish Town, or from Spanish Town to anywhere in the world.

There's something that happens when a lyricist is able to describe a social situation, positive or negative, using poetic language. How does this word sound power alchemy, work for you?

I mean, every time I hear that it's so powerful because it's true. Even if we just look at the idea of daily affirmations. Words are some of the most powerful things in life. I've always been interested in words. When I got into music **Junior Gong** was a huge influence. What I listened to more than anything else, more than the production, more than anything, was just the way he said things and what he was saying. How is he able to say these things and make it sound so cool and also why do I feel what he's saying? Why does it evoke emotions and feelings out of me, you know? I think that's such a powerful thing. We can make or break nations with just words.

Can you recall any other lyrics and artists that stand out for you?

Stephen Marley. Chronixx. My word, **Chronixx**. Especially being a Spanish Town native as well. He's not just a singer. **Chronixx** is one of the greatest lyricists in Jamaica: *"Life never sweet like ah chocolate vanilla / Train line mi born mi nuh born in a villa / Likkle monkey watch how you ah talk to Gorilla"* [**Ghetto Paradise**] – like

that's crazy. He doesn't waste lyrics. So for me, it's always **Junior Gong, Stephen Marley, Chronixx, Protoje, Kabaka. Runkus** is insane to this day. He says some stuff that I didn't even catch. So many people – **Haile Celestial**.

Then you have people like **Sizzla, Buju**, all these people. **Bob Marley**. I'm naming all these sons and forgetting him. But **Bob Marley** was a crazy lyricist. I had to do a cover for **BBC 1Xtra** for his Earthstrong earlier in the year. As a Jamaican, everybody knows **Bob Marley's** songs, but to sing it back by heart is completely different, and what I learned in doing that is that this man, he's a genius.

You start the album with a prayer. Then you shift into political and social commentary. There are a few love songs, then you're back to politics and gunman. You end with Little Brother. How intentional was that structure?

The structure was very intentional. And it's also very important to me because that's my mom praying on the intro. It was a random prayer, because she'll just WhatsApp me stuff from time to time. Anytime I leave the house she'd pray for me, so I had to incorporate that. I haven't necessarily walked the safest path, or been to the safest places. Those prayers and the intentions behind those words and in the prayer have guided me a lot.

How the album progresses, it feels a lot like night and day when I think about it. It feels like leaving Spanish Town and coming back to Spanish Town. So the beginning of the album feels like my younger self leaving Spanish Town and the stuff that I've witnessed, from the political violence to my personal struggles that I went through, like going to school, and the opening track speaks to exactly my journey.

I went into girl songs because I've had to navigate being in relationships, or, failed connections with women... the frustration of

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dealing with a heartbreak. The girl segment, specifically it starts with basically, should I love?

You mentioned earlier that you have anxiety...

It's more of a worry, for if people would understand where I'm coming from, or worrying about being rejected. It was so bad that I don't even know how I'm doing music right now. I can tell you a story of when I was younger. I was a part of a play as a child. It was a play for Heroes Day. I believe I was **Sam Sharpe**. I had a few lines to read on a stage in front of the school. When I say a few lines it was probably like three lines, max. When I went in front of the school to speak I choked. I froze. I held the microphone, and I looked up and saw the whole school looking at me. They had to move on. On that day I was like, "*Yeah, I'm never touching a microphone ever again*". To this day,

I'm still extremely shy, but I feel powerful. With a microphone in my hand I become a different person.

How did you discover that, if you told yourself you'd never pick up a mic again?

In high school we have the culture of beating desk and clashing one another. I remember my crew, who was younger than the crew we were clashing. Everybody was clashing, and you know, people railing and making up noise and stuff, and it was my turn. I was known as a very lyrical person from high school days. I never had to actually show that I was a lyrical person in front of a live audience. So when it was my time to clash I start singing some lyrics and when I finished everybody was like "*Yo bop, bop, bop, bop!*" And I was like "*Oh, maybe I can do this*". That validation made me feel, ok, this isn't that bad. I remember it like yesterday.



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What's your take on how you came into conscious lyrics?

[When] I was in high school I sang nothing but gun lyrics, gun, girl, weed – kind of thing that I had no business singing about. As a matter of fact, my vice principal confiscated my first song book, and he was flabbergasted seeing the lyrics. *“The devil is in this child! What is he singing about? What is he writing about? He's possessed!”* And it really wasn't that. It was just like, for me, it was all entertainment, and it was all just me figuring out the bearings of music, and learning how to write, and learning how to express myself, and also emulating the artists that I was listening to at the time, which was **Vybz Kartel**, **Aidonia**, **Mavado**.

At that time I was listening to rap music heavily as well, and it always intrigued me how much they could do with their music. There was Gangsta rap, there was Conscious rap. There was all kinds of rap, and it's like *“Why can't I do this with the music that I do? Why can't I do more?”* And I think, like 2011, 2012, that was the moment where I just said *“I'm going to pursue something more”*. I want to be able to sing my songs in front of my mom and my family.

Way Too Fast [track 13 on Spain Root] seems to be an example of you making that transformation.

Yeah, for sure. That, and what had happened when I lost a friend. It was the same 2011, 2012 I lost a friend. We called him **Tractor**. He was short and stocky, built like a tractor. That was a huge turning point, because he died in a fatal shooting. It was a big thing in Jamaica, like the news coverage for it, and his funeral was huge as well because he was well known as a kid. Well, yeah, I started to look at my gun lyrics and stuff like that in disgust. I was actually disgusted because it's these same things that I'm singing, the same messaging in this thing aided in me losing my friend, and for me, that was one of the most traumatising things I've had to go through as a human to this day.

That's 14 years ago. I held it together at the burial, and by the time I got home I started bawling, and I was like *“Yo, this has to change. I want to sing things and put messages in the world that are positive”*. I'm not perfect by any means, so I still slip up, and I am who I am. I'm a human. That was the moment where I even locked my hair. It was an intentional change.

So that's where **Way Too Fast** came from. I was still a teenager at that time, and I felt like a man, the emotions that I felt were heavy, like a full grown, fully developed adult. I wouldn't have made that decision to make a more conscious step in music. Me and my friends, we're just a bunch of yutes who grew up way too fast.

You also spoke about religion in terms of the harm that it causes, with colonisation when missionaries [went to Africa]. And then you've spoken about locks-ing up. Has there been any tension between you constructing your identity in terms of your mother, who clearly is very religious, you changing to locks-up, and then also discovering the flip side of religion when it's used as a tool?

I remember when I locked my hair. When I wanted to lock my hair. There's a in my scheme, she'd always be at the shop that I went. Her locks were so nice, so every time I saw her I'd always ask her like *“Yo, what was the process of locks-ing in your hair, and how do you maintain it?”* And the day I decided that I wanted to lock my hair I told my mom, but at this time my older brother, **Taj Francis**, who is also an artist – you can look him up. He's dope.

I know him.

But yeah, he had locks before me. I use him as a gateway to things that I can do. I've always done that from since I've been younger. So he locked his hair, I was like *“Alright. Then I'm going to lock my hair”*. When I told my mom she was just kind of like *“Oh, you know that they say that locking your hair brings the spirit of weed smoking”*. And I'm

like “*Mom, chill. The spirit of weed smoking? What are you talking about? You can smoke weed without having locks*”.

And you can locks and don't smoke weed.

Yeah, exactly. I don't smoke. That's ironic, it's so funny. But yeah, it's always been a tug of war. Ultimately, I think my mom just wants me to be in the church cause she's a pastor. She's coming from the place of what she knows and what she's been taught: you give your life to God. And when this life is over, when this rapture happens, all of God's people go to heaven and live happily ever after. I get that. From an empathetic point of view, I understand it. I try not to be too hard on her to enforce the things that I've learned growing up, and the things that I now understand, and the things that I've had to unlearn. I know it's coming from a place of, she doesn't want to go in heaven and know that her sons aren't in heaven with her.

You know we're talking about a generation before AI. Sometimes I don't know the difference between what is AI and what isn't. So how do I teach somebody that their whole world has been shaped by what they read in the Bible, or the religion that they follow? At the end of the day I just reassure [her] that everything will be okay and she doesn't need to worry. And that's my message to anybody else in this world. As long as you walk the righteous path everything will be okay, you know. You don't have to worry. We'll all be fine.

Not only does your album contain many positive messages but you have comic lyrics as well. I'm thinking of the song *Ten*, which is a prayer for stylists who will have to deal with “yute dem [who] have no talent and them overcompensating”. It's a backhanded way of encouraging artists to have more than a pretty image.

Yeah, yeah, that was my exact intention, because they've always said that talent is like 10% of what you actually need to make it in the industry. I get it, I hear it, I understand. But there's this influx of artists that

look so dope... I feel like they'll have such a great career in fashion... But then, when they open them mouth to sing it's just like this is absolute garbage. It's absolute trash. So it's just kind of like “*Yo, why can't you guys sound as good as you look? How about we start by sounding good before looking good?*” I love that song so much, because it's something that I've been wanting to say without coming across too disrespectful.

That's where comedy comes in.

Everybody can cosplay as an artist. But your image without talent and without a proper message, you're wasting everybody's time. The only person's time you are not wasting are the designers. You don't need a stylist, bro. Just use your brain. For me, it's a slap in the face. I know what it's like to work on my craft. I had to walk in the hot sun to go to studio for a couple kilometres up a hill during high school on the weekends when everybody was at Sovereign and TGI. It's not just about an image, you know. We glorify all of those stuff, and don't actually glorify the work that it takes to be an artist. Which is why, in the opening when you asked me about the album process I had to say, I've gained so much respect for artists who have released albums on top of albums while living a real life, while touring, while having to interact with fans and smile and wave, because it's difficult. No, it really pisses me off because you're skipping the line. Why are you skipping the line?

I think you're actually in different lines.

For sure.

The role that albums play when someone crafts a collection of songs that deal with many different topics, maybe overlapping topics, they're a microcosm for the broader world and other people's experiences. As an artist grows in their career, and grows wiser and deeper with the music, after a lifetime you have a series of albums which show that progression. Is that something that you think about yourself?



Yeah, yeah, yeah, 100%. My next bodies of music will be a continuation and a data representation of what you just said. I want people to see and hear the growth overall. This album, for me, represents not just the physical, emotional and spiritual / mental aspect of being back and forth from Spanish Town, but it also represents my mom, and just how much she's prayed for me, and also my brothers as well. She was a single mom. Everything that I know and believed from an early age was because of her. So I had to incorporate her in this album.

Going forward there'll be more things that I learned along the way outside of her. There'll be more ideas, and there'll be more representations of the growth. I believe that life is a series of different seasons. That's how I look at my life. My life is continuity, and I want to represent that in music every single time.

It's beautiful, the conscious vibes that I'm feeling. Thank you so much. That was two hours very well spent in my life, and I hope you feel the same.

It was amazing. Thank you very much. This was great.



ROYAL BLU - SPAIN ROOT

Easy Star Records - June 27, 2025

Hark! The artists are sharing their toys. Isn't that nice? Not only that, but they're taking turns. First in line is **Royal Blu**, whose debut album, **Spain Root**, will slip down the slide after a gentle push from **Easy Star Records**.

It will be followed by works from other members of the new collective, **G.Wav: Akina Eman**, **Runkus**, and **Island.Wav's KaleX & RiddimBoss**. **G.Wav** formed after **Blu** asked **Wav** to transform loose tracks into this cohesive album. **Runkus**, a collaborator of **Blu's** since 2017, was invited to the playdate, and suggested the collectivising. Lastly, **Eman** got her foot on the ladder of artists supporting each other in the creation of fresh work. So what can we expect from **Blu** as we stand with our "arms wide open" at the bottom of the slide?

Firstly, thought-provoking lines demonstrate **Blu's** talent as a lyricist. "*If I win the argument, then I lose you*" is one such line from the pre-released **Arms** featuring **D'Yani**. (A word of caution: The last time I saw **D'Yani** perform, it was with **Jah Lil** at Kingston's **UNPLGD**, end of 2024. A wave of sweaty bosoms, whose owners screamed in **Beatles**-mania levels of hysteria, threatened to flood the stage. Perhaps **Blu** and **D'Yani** should let the **Arms** video, which is seductive, do the talking. Jamaica needs these reggae new wavers to headline tours, not newspaper articles reading "*Talented artists drowned in cleavage*".)

Ok, what else?



There's comedy, there's tragedy, there's danger, there's romance. In **Ten**, **Blu** fulfils **Amy Winehouse's** criteria that an album must include a song with a decent punchline. **Ten** contains several. "*Dirty laundry but them clothes clean*" vents **Blu's** frustration at singers abusing their stage presence to chat f*ckry whilst styling hollow lyrics in pretty clothes. **Way Too Fast**

is a wise reflection on a fatal shooting in **Blu's** close-knit community, which provoked his shift to conscious lyrics. Despite denouncing the bad-man themes, **Blu / G.Wav** retains the best of dancehall riddims across many of the songs. The "*reggae girls section*" contains a song for fellas grappling with unrequited love. Both producing and listening to love songs is a healthy alternative response to rejection, recommended over joining an online Incel group. One more reason to listen to the album.

Each day in the studio **Blu** responded to **G.Wav's** questions: What are you feeling? What emotion do you want to build a riddim around? The results blend many genres, giving something for reggae purists on tracks such as **Light My Way**, featuring **Kabaka Pyramid**, and something for **Blu** purists, who expect the unexpected. The merger goes beyond **G.Wav**. **Protoje** features on **Life From Kingston**, which plaits together all the features of Jamaican music and its spawn – strands of horns + staggered drops + rubber-bounce bass + wicked rapping + layered reverb + slick production = BAM. **Life** stands out as a something-for-everyone song on this something-for-everyone album.

by JESSICA KNIGHT

A portrait of Helmut Philipps, an older man with a bald head, a grey goatee, and round glasses. He is wearing a blue and white striped polo shirt under a black leather jacket. The background is a soft-focus green and yellow bokeh.

INTERVIEW

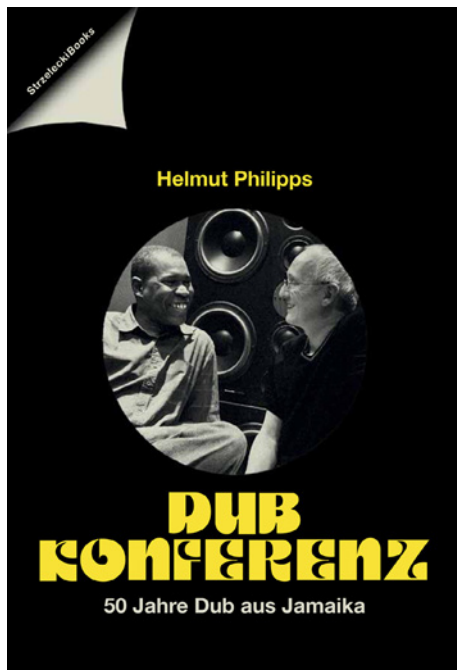
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THE SOUND OF SURPRISE

IN DUB CONFERENCE

BY ANGUS TAYLOR

PHOTOS BY URSULA 'MUNCHY' MÜNCH,
DIETMAR KREHL & ALICE PEPERELL



Helmut Philipps is one of a select group of reggae authors whose experience in music is both theoretical and practical.

A successful sound engineer in Germany for over 30 years, he turned his hand to writing for the **Riddim** magazine and then to books. In 2007 he co-authored his scene's historic account **Reggae In Deutschland**, before focusing on his specialist subject with 2022's **Dub Konferenz**, on the art and science of Jamaican studio-as-instrument.

After acclaim for **Dub Konferenz** in Germany, he enlisted the help of **Reggaeville's** own **Munchy** to translate it into English, with additional chapters and a new title **Dub: The Sound of Surprise**. Released last year, the book received further praise for its aerial view of the development of dub in Jamaica, the UK and the US, and for its technical and

contextual appraisal of the music's central figures. It contains fascinating myth-busting essays on **King Tubby**, **Lee Perry**, and **Errol Thompson**, as well as interviews with **David Rodigan**, **Bunny Lee**, **King Jammy**, **Scientist**, **Clive Chin**, **Fatman**, **Linval Thompson**, **Mad Professor**, **Dennis Bovell**, **Sylvan Morris**, **Pat Kelly**, **Ernest Hoo Kim**, **Barnabas**, **Style Scott** and **Souljie Hamilton**.

Angus Taylor sat down with the venerable **Mr Philipps** in person, at London's **Barbican Arts Centre**, while the author was visiting the UK capital. They discussed his early years as a trainee priest, drummer, producer and engineer, how this led to writing about dub, and the very nature of dub itself. The picture that emerged was of a man who wanted to learn, understand and codify the first principles of this unique Jamaican invention, as told to him by its main architects.

Before you became an engineer and a writer you started as a musician.

Before I started as a musician I studied theology. There was a time when modern pop music had an influence in the practise of theology. If you went to church they sang modern tunes with a drum and a bass and so on. This is when I started playing drums. I never learned it. But this was a time when everybody could make a recording. It was the time of the punk movement. They would go to a cheap studio and make one or two tunes and release it on their own. Not through a company.

So I was the same with the group I was playing drums with. But it was not punk, it was Latin music. We recorded an album on eight-track analogue. I was the percussion player and the drummer. So with eight tracks you only have one track for the whole percussion. So I was the only one who knew *"This is a vibraslap, this is a conga"* and so on. I sat on the board and I said *"This has to be low, this has to be high, this has to be left, this has to be right"* and I fell in love with that kind of work. The influence and the impact that you can bring from the board to the music. And then I built my own studio and suddenly there were these **Super Ape** and the **Scientist** albums. I didn't know where they came from. I didn't know about sound system. I didn't know what dub wanted to be. But I loved the opportunities that this kind of mixing gave to us. This is the start of everything.

You told me before that you produced some pioneering reggae in Germany.

The first professional way of producing. There had been some productions earlier in the 60s. But there was this year, I think '83, when four groups in Germany started doing this with a professional approach. And we were one of them. The singer was called **Natty U**. I met him by accident in the reggae department of a record store and we started talking. He was a nerd and had a studio and was a composer and a very good singer. I was a nerd and had a studio so I said *"Come on, let's work together"*.



I had already released this album before for this Latin group. And I said *"I don't just like being in a studio for fun. I want to have a goal. To have a finished product at the end. No matter how long it takes"*. A Jamaican singer who I met joined in for one tune. And so it happened that we produced and released a reggae album. **Nah Prejudice**. At that time it was so unusual that everybody wanted to talk with us. *"How come white people can produce this music?"* It was a big discussion. *"Are white people allowed?"* No one is discussing this today. Since **Gentleman** and **YT** and all those guys. So we had to find answers to the questions. We just made the music from what we learned from the recordings we got from Jamaica. So it was step by step.

Where did your engineering journey go from there? You've also done engineering outside of reggae music.

When we released the first album we had no experience. We didn't know about owner rights and publishing rights. We worked

with a company in a town close to where we lived in Dortmund. They had a major person from the TV [**Götz Alsmann**] who was also a well-known musician. They brought us together. The man from the telly was the top act and we were the support act. So we got to know each other and at some point this guy asked me *"Hey, you have a studio, can I make some recordings?"* And then one day he said *"I'm going on tour with a guest vocalist from the UK. Could you come with us and do the sound?"* I went with them for five days and these five days lasted for 34 years!

So how did you start writing about music?

When the magazine **Riddim** came out, there were not too many writers in Germany so they knew me and asked me to write some reviews. I had already written for some magazines but that was not serious. And as I said, we had to learn about reggae. We had to learn the music, the background, how it was produced. We had already been in Jamaica with **Natty U**. **Natty U** was the first German artist to perform in Jamaica. So I knew a little bit and I started writing. And it was the same story. From issue number two until now.

So what was it like going to Jamaica with Natty U?

That was weird. That was 1991. To promote this event we first went on tour in Germany

for two weeks as support for **Linton Kwesi Johnson**. And **Natty U** was not a roots singer. He was more into **Studio One** and Lovers, **Gregory Isaacs**. And the people who went to **Linton Kwesi Johnson** in the 90s hated it! One story is that we had a cover version of **Another Day in Paradise**. But at the time **Phil Collins** was the enemy! And every evening the group and **Linton** came and said *"You have to play that tune, it's an important tune"*. We were on the stage and at the side of the stage **Linton** and his band stood there to support us. And the people booed us and threw things! We are probably the first reggae band to ever be booed in Germany! (laughs) Years later **Linton** played in our town. And made a speech and said *"You had a great artist here in this town and I was on tour with him and the people didn't show him respect"*. And we were sitting in the audience!

How was the reception in Jamaica?

It was half and half. Plenty of people loved it because Jamaicans always love it when their music goes around the world. We were invited to radio stations for interviews and the **Gleaner** had a big article three pages with six pictures! Most of the people loved us but there was an elder Rasta who said *"Every country can do a special thing. One can make good Mercedes cars and one can play good reggae music!"* (laughs)

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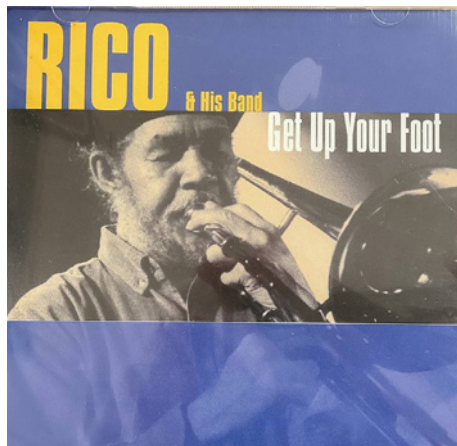


In the 90s you also engineered two albums by ska and jazz trombonist Rico Rodriguez.

The album **Rico - You Must Be Crazy** was recorded on March 29th, 1994 in Dortmund, where I live. The concert took place in a small club called **FZW**, which no longer exists. The place was rammed with 400 people. I was asked by the German label and booking agency, who worked with **Rico**, to produce the album. At that time there was no official live album by **Rico**. That's why the album has the subtitle "**The Official Live Album**".

The concert was recorded by a huge mobile studio, which was a coincidence. We had ordered a smaller truck, but the day before, the big one had recorded a concert by the German superstar **Herbert Grönemeyer** in the **Westfalenhalle**, one of the largest halls in Germany at the time. As the **Westfalenhalle** was less than a kilometre away from the **FZW**, the mobile company decided to park the big truck in Dortmund for the next day.

When **Rico** arrived at the venue, his musicians were astonished. It was the first show of the tour and **Rico** hadn't told them that the concert would be recorded for an album. Jazz musicians go on stage without rehearsing. At certain points in the show, this led to pro-



blems. Wrong breaks, disorientation in the arrangements, problematic for a record release. The audience didn't notice. One magic moment was when the crowd started singing to **Jungle Beat**, which gave the album its title. I decided to cover up the weak points of the performance with some dub effects. There were no dub parts during the show. When **Rico** heard my mix, he wanted me to mix his next album too. That's why I later mixed his album **Get Up Your Foot**, which was recorded in London. I used the moniker **H.P. Setter** in the past for my work as a producer and engineer. There are a few dub releases of mine under this name.



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SCAN ME

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How did you become co-author of the book *Reggae in Deutschland* with Olaf Karnik in 2007?

At the time **Gentleman** was doing very well and selling lots of music in Germany. **Seed** were coming up with their first big tune **Dickes B.** There was a huge book publisher in Germany who asked my co-author to write a book. He wanted to write the book with his friend. They split the topics between them. And the other person was meant to write about the history of reggae in Germany.

They came to my place and interviewed me. And to be honest, the person who had to interview me didn't know anything. She never heard of the group's names. The other guy said *"I have to write the book with this guy"*. I got an email from the publisher asking for samples of my writing and if it would be possible to jump into the project? Half of the book was already written by my co-author. They had some conditions but they were under time pressure. I had nine months to write half the book.

I said *"Ok, but we have to talk about the concept"*. Because there were some points where I said *"That is not right for a book on that topic"*. And I was in a good position so they followed me. The main part of the book for me - was I wrote the history of how reggae came to Germany and how Germany started producing reggae. And this is crazy because everybody is talking about **The Beatles** at the **Star Club**. **Millicie Small** performed there with a German backing band. Nobody knows that this was the beginning of reggae in Germany.

What was the reception like to *Reggae in Deutschland*? And how did you then decide to write a book about dub?

That book was also voted Best Book Of The Year. Twice in a row. The reception was great. Of course there was no other book on that topic. The history part was the only published history. If you are interested you



have to read my part in the book. I have a daughter and nothing impressed her as much as the fact that her father wrote a book. Even though I was on the telly and I worked with prominent musicians. And I love to write a book because it's a different feel. If you write an article it's like daily work. A book is something special. A book stays. The article is gone when the next issue comes out.

I had been really nervous because it was the first time I had done a major work like that. So when the book was done, the reaction was nice, so I decided I would write a new book. I had several topic ideas but they all turned out not so good. And then a friend said *"Helmut you are so into dub music and you are an engineer. You can describe what it is and how it works. What about writing a book on dub music?"*

The initial interviews were with engineers who were touring Europe. Your first interview was with Souljie Hamilton. A greatly respected but fairly undocumented engineer.

Souljie Hamilton was very nice. He was on tour with **Taxi Gang**. This is where I saw him first. Then he was on tour with **Firehouse Crew** and **Luciano**. I saw him and I knew he was one of the greatest engineers and who can do a real live dubbing. He could react to what the musicians play and the musicians can react to what he is mixing. Then **Gentleman** released a new album and had the idea to tour through Germany with **Souljie Hamilton** as engineer. They performed in a town close to where I am living and I am a friend of **Gentleman** so it was easy to organise. We sat in the **Nightliner** and I asked him about the history of dub. And he is one of plenty of people I spoke with who said *"What is this strange interest in dub music? Dub music is nothing special. Dub music is for the sound system. And it was our daily job. So we don't understand the hype around dub music here in Europe"*. Most of the people didn't know that there were these albums that sold like bread! And he gave me answers. I met him a few years later again because I had some more questions. He was a very shy guy. He said *"I did what I had to do and it's not my idea. It was a mixture of Sly and me"*.

Sly is very similar in sharing credit for his innovations.

It was the same with **Pat Kelly**. When I spoke with **Pat Kelly** he also said *"What is this interest in dub music? It was my daily work. I was never interested in creating my own style. I copied the style of King Tubby. Because this is what the sound men wanted. What the people wanted to hear"*.

I met him in a situation where he was not in a good mood. Before I arrived at his spot he found out that his good friend **Bunny Lee** released an album without telling him. And then I came and asked him for some studio details and he was almost like *"You*

will not understand you have no idea how a studio works". And I had to tell him *"You know what? I have my own studio. I can understand the equaliser and the high pass filter and what they are"*. And that made him mellow. And then in the end we spoke for two hours. And a few days later I saw him perform live and went backstage and had a few more questions. He was a trained engineer. But trained in those days is something different to trained in these days. They were more electrical. They could repair radios.

How did you go from the German to an English version of the book?

I didn't know what would happen with that book but people loved it. Three times in a row, Best Book Of The Year. And everybody was saying *"You have to release that in English"*. But the German edition was self-published and I knew I couldn't do an international edition because of taxes and shipment. People in Europe and England bought the German version so I knew about the problems. And then somebody came from Switzerland and made me an offer. And he was at that point the only one.

Why did the title of the book change from Dub Konferenz to The Sound Of Surprise?

That was from the publisher. He didn't understand the title. And he wanted different artwork. And I was by that point not really into discussing and fighting over it so I agreed. The other reason is while I was doing my research I found an old article from the 70s.

By Richard Williams.

He named dub *"the sound of surprise"*. And I fell in love with that phrase. So I said *"What about this title?"* And the publisher loved it. I'd already had the experience in Germany where people from the sound system scene wanted me to present the book on their sound. I had over 50 presentations in a year. A lot for an independent book. And two thirds of it had been with sound systems. So I wanted a sound system on the cover. The

publisher didn't understand why I wanted some speaker boxes! (laughs) But I ended up as the winner with that discussion.

So what were the content changes made to the English edition?

Two extra chapters and a few parts. The aim of the German book was to write the history of dub in Jamaica. There is just one chapter on dub in the UK. Because the UK is the centre of changing the way people react to dub music. Then we came to the international version and we can't only be fixed on Jamaica and the UK. I had to write a chapter on the US. And this is what I did.

I always tell the people when I am asked what was the nicest meeting I had, "*Style Scott was the nicest interview*". And someone came to me and said "*Can you write liner notes from that interview for a reissue of Dub Syndicate Echo Beach?*" I went

through the transcript and I noticed that the interview part that I took was little. And the rest was very interesting. So I decided to let **Style** speak in his own words to tell the story. It was an easily made new chapter. But it was a sign of respect to what he did.

And of course, we should talk about how Munchy did the English translation.

Munchy's husband is from the town where I live and I am the godfather of their eldest daughter. She came on board after the German edition had already been published and there was a demand for an English version. **Munchy** knows a lot about reggae and Jamaican culture, and we are both trained sound engineers. This ruled out common mistakes such as confusing channels of a mixing desk with tracks of a tape machine. **Munchy** knew what I was talking about. She was the perfect translator and a good friend.

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One of the main themes of the book is the influence of jazz on Jamaican music and dub in particular. There is the improvisation of the engineer on the mixer. The breaking down of the individual instruments, almost like a solo. But the book is almost like a Jazz piece. The opening chapters are a narrative history with lots of contributors mentioned. And then the individual people start speaking for each chapter like a solo. And then it all comes back together again when you start talking about what is dub music as a whole.

It's a nice idea! I'm a great fan of biographies. I wanted to write the book in the form of a biography. And the person I am

writing about is dub. I love books with an intro and an outro. So the format was clear. Everything that is written in the book about the influence of jazz on reggae I didn't know before I started writing. One major informer was **David Rodigan** who told me that **Tubby's** had a room filled with jazz music. And **Fatman** told me that when **Tubby** came to the studio the first thing he did was take off his shirt and the next was going to that room and taking out one jazz record and playing it. **Pat Kelly** told me that everybody who worked there had access to that room. There was a cassette player and they could copy. He copied all the jazz singles, took them home and listened to them.



And if **Tubby** had the greatest jazz collection the person who had the next greatest must be **Coxsone**. So by knowing that and then listening to the early dubplates, most of the people, at least the horn players and melody players come from the **Alpha Boys School**. They are highly trained jazz musicians. And the very first long player from **Coxsone, I Cover The Waterfront**, when he didn't have his own studio yet, is a strictly jazz album. With **Don Drummond** and **Roland Alphonso**. And on the back there are liner notes saying *"Most people tend to think that the root and greatest influence on reggae music is calypso. And they are wrong. The greatest influence on reggae music is the modern form of jazz"*. And I found enough quotes in that style. The Jamaicans didn't play calypso, they played mento. But they sold it to the Americans as calypso. You know the story.

Before you wrote this book, the main reggae writer who combined writing and engineering experience is Chris Lane. Did you have much interaction with him?

From time to time we sent some emails and things. He didn't tell me much because I didn't have many questions. But he was the one who had the advert for the **Dub Sequeldo** album. You know the pre-release of **Dub Serial**? And **Dub Sequeldo** the advert is from December 1972. Which means '73 is not the first year [that a dub album was released]. The first year was 1972. But it's a pre-release. It's not an official one. You see I never planned to write the book on the anniversary of 50 years of Jamaican dub music. But when the book finally was done it happened that it was exactly 50 years after the first dub album. So the German edition says 50 years of Jamaican dub music.

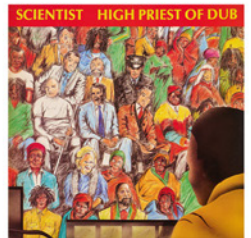
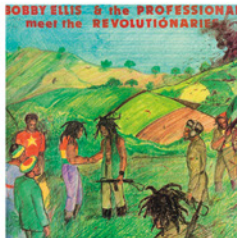
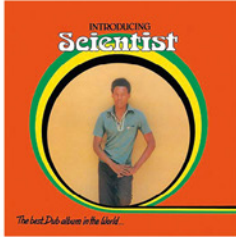
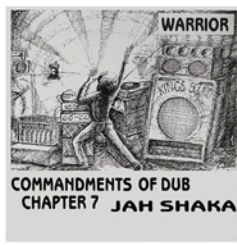
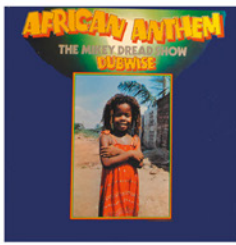
What I like about the book is that it sets Tubby in his proper place in dub music. He's not really the creator of dub. He's the populariser of dub. It's a bit like how U Roy was not the first deejay. But he was

the deejay who made everyone say "I want that on my record". Santa Davis was not the first drummer to play The Flying Cymbals. But he was the one that made everyone say "I want that on my record". And Santa told me that it was Tubby who made his drumming sound that way with the high pass filter that made everyone want it.

Yeah. Because he had this one filter. No other board had this filter. And the story goes that **Dynamic** sold this board because they had no use for it. And then dub became important and it could sell. And they were really vexed with themselves to give away that board. And the other thing is **Tubby** didn't want to use it. Because from a technical point of view it was not correct. But then he said *"Let's try it and see what happens"*. And in combination with the flying cymbals sound because the filter works the most impressively on high frequencies, if you hear that on a sound system with the real heavy loudness it can surprise you!

But it also puts other people in their proper context. As you read the book you keep seeing the importance of Errol Thompson. Like how Errol Thompson taught Ossie Hibbert. I've always loved Errol Thompson but now I realise just what a giant of the music he was. And the chapter on Sylvan Morris is very moving.

To me Errol Thompson was the first dub-bist. **Sylvan Morris** is not the biggest dub engineer. But he is accepted in Jamaica as one of the best sound engineers they ever had. And this is what's so sad because in the end [when he lost his sight] he couldn't even copy tapes. **Rodigan** told me **Alton Ellis** stood before him and was crying saying *"I saw him copying tapes and he was the best engineer. That can't be"*. And finally he came to a point where he couldn't even copy tapes. So he went to **Dynamics** in the mornings and was standing outside begging for money. As long as he could find the way on his own.



The other really interesting thing in the book is that dub music was made for deejays to toast over. It's so fascinating because the later versions as you get into the late 80s are not dubs. They are just straight versions for deejays. They're so sparse that you can't really play them without a vocalist. Errol Thompson's dubs were notoriously busy. But that was still driven by sound system for a deejay to toast over.

Yeah that was one thing. And another thing is what **Clive [Chin]** told me. They were kids. They were 17 and 19 and they were just playing around. Flushing the toilet and breaking glass. It was just youths playing in the studio. They had their own studio and they could do what they wanted. If you listen to **Ossie Hibbert** I think it's **Leggo**. It's filled with the same sound effects.

You said Style Scott was your favourite interview. The Channel One interview with Ernest Hookim in Jamaica was the most challenging and time consuming to secure.

I wanted to speak with **Jo Jo**. **Jo Jo** was not in Kingston. I think he was in Miami. And what I didn't know was **Jo Jo** was seriously ill. He died a few months later. But the engineer was **Ernest**. I called him from day one when I was in Kingston and asked for an interview. And it was always the same answer. Full of distance and not very friendly, "*Call me in the afternoon*". And it became our daily thing. Every morning, afternoon, every evening. He always said "*No*". And then a few other people said to me "*I will speak to him. He has to do it*". But nothing happened. So then it was really the last day. And I said "*Today or not. Because I fly out tomorrow*". Then he said "*Ok, then come*".

I expected an angry old man. And I got a friendly old man who had all the time in the world. He said "*Ask what you want, I'll tell everything*". I have a really good memory of that evening. I was totally happy and proud to have him finally. Because he is one of the major players in that business. Even though his dubs are not so interesting. He was a representative of the famous studio.

Did you have a similar experience to me when I interviewed Scientist? I grew up with Scientist's dub albums. I found them calming and meditative. I was expecting a quiet person like King Tubby. A stereotype of a Scientist. I wasn't expecting such a big personality!

He has a big ego. But he had a hard fight. And he doesn't understand the legal situation on composition. And writing lyrics. And doing the mix. For him it's all the same. But the law is different. This is why people who are doing remixes these days get a lot of money for it. They sign a contract before they start working and they get two percentage points. He was paid \$20 for the day. He is a character who likes to fight. Because this guy was 15 or 16 when he came to **Tubby's**. And there was **Jammy's**, a very respected engineer. And here comes this young guy and says "*I can do it better*". That is the story. To me he was very friendly. I met him twice. Once I came to London when he had this event at **Red Bull**. They promised me a one hour interview. And I ended up with 20 minutes.



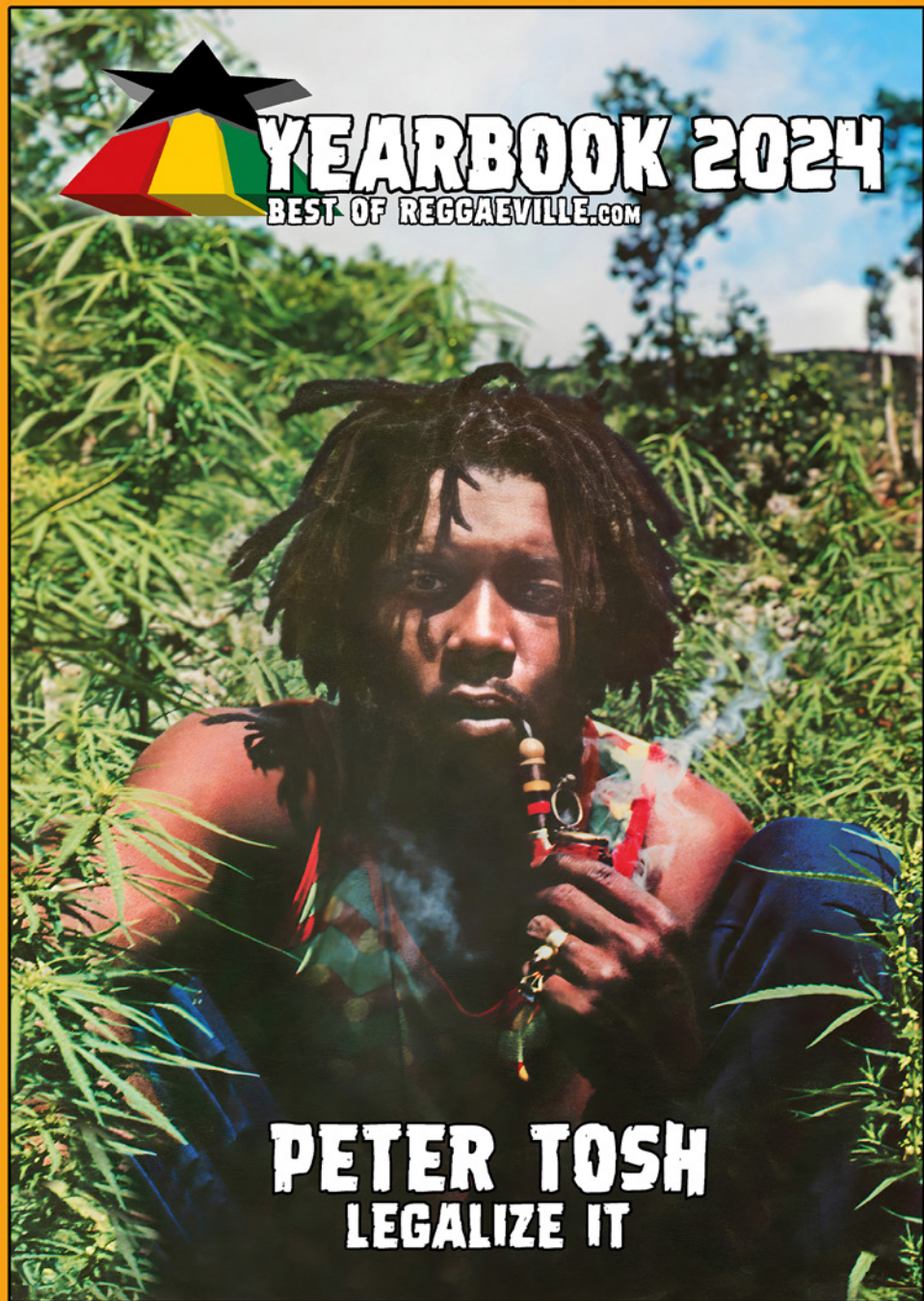
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PETER TOSH

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Then four weeks later he came to Berlin. To do some live engineering. So I said “*Ok. I’ll take the chance and drive to Berlin and pick him up at the airport and bring him to the location because he promised me a next interview*”. But there was terrible weather. Berlin was dead under snow. We couldn’t find the place because the sat nav couldn’t recognise the streets. So we spent two hours searching for the club. And we were talking the whole time. I was the driver I couldn’t record. But I got to know him because we spoke about politics and about labels and so on. And then we came to the club and nothing was there that he wanted to have for doing a mix. And there was a DJ set up on the roof. And he asked “*Is there anything that I can use to put delay and reverb in the music?*” I said “*I will check it out*”. So I went there and there was one reverb and one delay. But he didn’t know it. So he said “*If I tell you what I want, can*

you fix it for me?” And it was the best thing that could have happened to me. Because he described exactly what he needed. And I fixed it for him.

Finally at the end of the book you look at what dub music actually is. You make the argument that a lot of post Shaka modern dub music isn’t really dub. Can you summarise what you mean?

Yes, I can but this is thin ice. (laughs) It all started with **Shaka**. And **Shaka** started it at a time when Europe got into techno. Which came from the States. **Shaka** was the one who noticed the effect of putting the kick drums and playing around with that. And the so-called steppers which is included in dub for many people, for me it’s a different music. Steppers is a different music because steppers has no original. That is the main point. And the other thing is it’s like four to the floor.





So you mean because sometimes modern roots producers put a record out with no vocal on the A-side. Just three or four dub versions.

Yes, there is no vocal. There is just a steppers version. It's mixed like a dub but it's mixed like psychedelic music. And some sounds start changing their name. "We are not playing dub we are playing steppers". And there is nothing wrong with that. The music is nice. The steppers music has its followers but it's not dub. **Mad Professor** said it must be a version to be dub. And the story of **Style** playing with **Dub Syndicate** in Jamaica. These are the main witnesses for what I'm saying. Some people think that I have written my own opinion in that book. But that was not my aim. My aim was to ask the originators why and how they do it. "Why did you do it and what did you feel about it?" And so many said "We didn't like it in the early stages".

You wouldn't have been able to get the answers from these artists if you didn't have your engineering background. You were able to ask them questions that they don't get asked.

That's what some of them told me. That was the technical side of things. I was interested because I was producing reggae music. I was interested in the rules of the music. Not in

the rules of the method of production, how you put the equalisation on. But there are certain things that belong to the music and are needed and there are other things that are not needed. These rules are important to me. On the private side I'm not interested in these kinds of rules. You can mix things with everything. But I wanted to be as close to the original as possible. This is why I didn't want to bring my opinion in. I was just asking and in the end I put it together. I repeat the statements from **Style** and **Mad Professor** very often. When they say "No version, no dub". Or "No sound, no dub". And I saw the face of **Style** when he said "I wanted to play with **Dub Syndicate** in Jamaica but they wouldn't understand". He was really sad about it. He said "I know they are right because what we did was un-Jamaican". That was his creation. Un-Jamaican.

I had many presentations and readings at sound system. And a few of them came to me and said "**Helmut**, thanks for the book because you grounded us again. We did forget". You are in a similar position to me. We are journalists. We want to analyse. We have our own interpretation of things. I can live with that. I know that maybe in three years or five years there will be a next book on dub. And my book is history.



DUB: THE SOUND OF SURPRISE

Edition Olms - October 1, 2024

For over ten years, German music writer and engineer **Helmuth Philipps** quietly and diligently assembled his book on dub. He could often be found backstage at shows and festivals in Germany and the Netherlands, or visiting Jamaica, chasing down interview subjects, gathering the strands of his ambitious history of the most influential music form ever to sit on the B side of a single.



In studying dub, **Philipps** noticed that key Jamaican studio pioneers **Coxsone Dodd** and **King Tubby** were jazz aficionados. Dub, in its deconstruction and reconstruction of well-loved songs, focusing on individual instruments, is similar to jazz. The text is peppered with references linking the two forms. Even the structure of the book could be said to resemble a jazz tune: the opening few chapters being a con-

In October 2022, the book was self-published in German as **Dub Konferenz**, topping the **Riddim** magazine book poll twice, and getting an accompanying exhibition at **Reggae Jam Festival 2023**. This year, it has been translated into English by **Reggaeville's Ursula 'Munchy' Munch**, and published by **Edition Olms** under the new name **Dub - The Sound Of Surprise** (a phrase taken from a 1976 **Melody Maker** article by **Richard Williams**). It contains two new chapters, one on dub in the USA and another on **Roots Radics'** drummer **Style Scott**. Thanks to the exhibition assets, it also has colour photos and a browsable coffee table format.

While the text is academic in its crediting of sources via footnotes, **Philipps** takes care that his language is as clear for the layperson as possible. As a trained engineer, he asks questions that solicit answers from his subjects beyond the scope of most reggae journalists. He is therefore able to chart the history of dub in terms of the technology available to its practitioners with a simplicity and clarity not seen before in a reggae book. Only the articles of **Chris Lane** have so deftly fused studio and writing craft.

ventional narrative history of the development of dub, the middle chapters zooming in on individual practitioners like soloists, then relaxing into some freeform riffs on the nature of dub itself.

Despite the book's discographies being very album-focused, **Philipps** is consistent in highlighting dub's connection to sound system in Jamaica. While a dub LP for its foreign devotees is a complete listening experience, even the busiest and most experimental dub was designed as a backdrop for a deejay or toaster to take the mic. He also clearly draws the line between UK dubmasters responding to the Jamaican tradition such as **Mad Professor** and **Dennis Bovell**, and what came after.

When assessing known dub legends like **King Tubby**, **Philipps'** technical nous allows him to question some myths about the great man. His framing of **Tubby** as the populariser rather than the inventor of dub, could equally be applied to key players in his story (**U Roy** elevating the art of deejaying via **Tubby's** sound system and drummer **Santa Davis**, whose work with **Tubby** 'bust' the already-existent 'flying cymbals' pattern). **Philipps** supplies a much-needed aerial view on the complex and volatile controversy involving **Scientist**, **Linval Thompson**, **King Jammy** and

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Greensleeves. He is similarly forensic on how **Lee Perry** got his **Black Ark sound** and why no engineers could operate it.

Crucially, he gives welcome focus to dub's lesser appreciated figures. He is enthralling on **Errol Thompson**, and moving on **Sylvan Morris**, whose reputations will be rightly elevated by his work. The same can be said of his interviews with **Errol Brown**, **Pat Kelly** and **Barnabas**.

The chapter on **Channel One**, the result of **Philipps'** most time-consuming and hard-won interview with **Ernest Hookim**, is dense but fascinating. As is the reason why 'engineer's engineer' at that studio, **Souljie Hamilton**, isn't better known (he didn't want to be).

Philipps' technical expertise means he is occasionally quite rigid in his arguments on more cultural matters. His assertion, influenced by Austrian musicologist **Maximillian Hendler's** writings on jazz, that since pre-slavery African societies didn't have electricity, their influence on dub is negated, is a curious one. The very nature of ancient ancestral memories is that they are 'inborn' and unverifiable - certainly to someone from outside the culture - so little headway can be made here. This is one of several counteractions to US academic **Michael Veal's** 2007 book **Dub - Soundscapes And Shattered Songs In Jamaican Reggae** (recalling UK academic **Brian Ward's** **Just My Soul Responding** critiques of **Nelson George's** **The Death Of Rhythm & Blues**). Likewise, **Philipps'** dismissal of mento as a colonial pastime ignores **Dr Carlos Malcolm's** theories on its Cuban and Central African lineage in his book **A Personal History of Postwar Jamaican Music**.



More persuasive, if similarly ambitious, are **Philipps'** arguments in his freeform closing chapter, that much post-**Shaka** dub-influenced music is not really dub. His reasoning, that what passes for dub has departed from its Jamaican roots, will please Euro steppers' vocal critics. But time is the master, and language evolves. The word "dub-plate" no longer means what it did in the 70s.

The word "ska" to foreign

next-wave scenes encompasses a mish-mash of 60s Jamaican music. The word "singjay" has loosened considerably. Dub, like art, is what people say it is. Whether it's any good, is another question.

Yet these minor observations are ultimately peripheral to the main thrust of the book, which is the development of dub in Jamaica and its offshoots. The true test of its collective worth is whether it will be added to reggae's historical canon and used as a resource by students and journalists to understand the music. The answer is a resounding, spring-verberating 'yes'.

Munchy's translation is everything you would expect from someone so fluent in English (although the deep-voiced **Eddy Grant** might take exception to the suggestion that he 'whined' when inspiring **Bunny Lee** to name his musicians the **Aggro-tors!**). She also assisted with contextual content on one of the new chapters.

The book's layout, where its colour photographs and Q&A interviews break up the main text, recalls the format of the **Rough Guide To Reggae** by **Peter Dalton** and **Steve Barrow** (who is mentioned several times). Given its invaluable utility, **Philipps'** work could be described as *The Smooth Guide To Dub*.
by **ANGUS TAYLOR**

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