



# FESTIVILLE 2021

REGGAEVILLE FESTIVAL GUIDE

## INTERVIEWS

ETANA  
CONKARAH  
REBELUTION  
ZAK & SSHH  
JESSE ROYAL  
UWE BANTON  
DAVID CAIROL  
DAN SHEEHAN  
MARIUS BROZI

SUMMER 2021

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## COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS!

Count your blessings! That's always good advice, and much more so in these challenging times. So, let's start this year's edition of the **FESTIVILLE** by being grateful for the summer sunshine warming our locked-down hearts. If you read these lines, it means you are alive (in fact, it means that your ancestors have managed to survive in an unbroken line from the first days of creation until now!), you are literate, having enjoyed formal or informal education, and you command both enough leisure time and the means to obtain internet access.

The latter is an important prerequisite to enjoy these pages, as, unfortunately, it will be yet another digital edition of **FESTIVILLE**, since our main outlet for the print versions, **SummerJam**, had to be postponed yet again to next year.

And they are not the only ones forced to do so – most European Reggae festivals and some of the US-American ones suffer that same fate. What this means for the parties concerned; for organisers, bookers, vendors and technicians; is vividly illustrated by two extensive **Reggaeville** interviews with **Marius Brozi (SummerJam)** and **Dan Sheehan (California Roots)**.

To present the artists' point of view as well, we interviewed **Etana, David Cairol, Zak & Sshh** (representing for the late **U-Roy** and his new posthumously album), **Rebellion**,

**Conkarah, Uwe Banton** and **Jesse Royal**, who talk about how they've handled the pandemic and what musical beauty they created in the past months of social distance. And beauty indeed it is – albums such as **Pamoja, Free Your Mind, Solid Gold, Vers(e), In The Moment**, and **Royal**, respectively, bring us a refreshing diversity of songs and sounds to groove, sing and dance along to, all reviewed on the following pages. Additionally, you'll find reviews of **Zagga, King Of The Dub Rock 3, UB40** and **Alborosie**.

Of course, **FESTIVILLE** wouldn't be what it is without just a tiny glimpse of live action. We have included a compact little festival calendar, including the available information on the scheduled festivals. Since these plans are in an ever-changing state, however, we urge you to regularly check the daily updated agenda on our website **REGGAEVILLE.com** to get the most recent information about the events.

Yes, this is another tough year with few chances to meet and jam to our favourite music together, but things are improving slowly, and we have each other to turn to, even if that still means to join a live stream or videochat with friends and fam. Stay strong, enjoy the simple pleasures every new day brings, and always remember to count your blessings!

# INTERVIEWS



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**INTERVIEW**

**CONKARAH**

**CONQUERING THE MUSICAL WORLD**

## A GLOBAL SUCCESS STORY

INTERVIEW BY STEVE TOPPLE  
PHOTOS BY ALIX CHARLES JR.

**Conkarah** is one of the more promising artists to emerge from Jamaica in recent years. He started honing his musical abilities while living in London. He dropped his first music video in 2009 – a Reggae/DnB fusion track called *Run Away*. Since then, **Conkarah** has focused on his Jamaican cultural heritage while also drawing inspiration from across the world.



Of note are his Reggae reimaginings of well-known songs. **Conkarah** has seen huge success with covers of tracks like **Adele's** *Hello* – which clocked up a staggering 111 million views on YouTube alone. These were interspersed with original songs such as *My Love* featuring **Rosie Delmah** and *Raggamuffin*. But his major breakthrough as a fully-fledged artist in his own right came in 2019/20 with the global success of *Banana* featuring **Shaggy**. The *DJ Fle Minisiren Remix* video clocked up over 40 million hits on YouTube and 148 million streams on **Spotify**. The track received heavy airplay, charted in numerous countries and even spawned a viral dance challenge, #BananaDrop #TheDrop-Challenge, across social media – the videos people did for it having clocked up over one billion views. Now, **Conkarah** back.

The Jamaican trailblazer is set to release his new EP, *Destination Unknown*, in October – and it's already shaping up to be an exciting, diverse project. Covering numerous styles and genres, the finalised record will surely cement **Conkarah** as a rising star in modern music. So, **Reggaeville** caught up with him to discuss the EP, how his personal (and geographical) journeys have influenced him as a musician and more.



### How does it feel being back with a new EP?

It's just great. We're looking to release it in October. I'm very proud of the work and the collaborations behind it. I'm very excited to share it with everyone.

### What was it like completing this project during the pandemic?

It's been a different experience for me. Obviously through **Banana** a lot more attention has been put on me as an artist and my career. I've been put in front of a lot more people to work with. So, it's been a great experience; interesting working with other people. We haven't finalised the full EP yet. But it does have influences from various genres: Reggaeton, obviously Reggae and Dancehall. And honestly, it's the first time I've worked with a broad group of people. So, **Destination Unknown** is kind of a melting pot of cultures, so to speak. I think that the EP itself will reflect that in the future when it's released.

### Was it the intention to make an EP that covered so many genres?

Yes, for sure. My musical career and the places that I've travelled to, it's taken from all of my experiences, culturally, and just been inspired by them altogether – and bringing that altogether in this one project. It was a great experience and I hope it's reflected for the listeners, when they hear it.

### There are some great collaborations.

Yeah, it was a great experience working with **Shaggy**. He has been like a bigger brother to me, giving me a lot of advice on the industry. And delving into the Reggaeton market with **Pedro Capo**. Working with these artists, that share the same passion as me? It's a blessing to be able to work with these talented individuals.

### You're extensively travelled. Is there anywhere in the world you haven't been?



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[Laughs] I haven't been to Africa yet. That's my dream. So hopefully when this whole pandemic cools down that's going to be one of the first places I visit.

**Has that travelling influenced who you are as an artist?**

Yeah, definitely. I think that my growth as an artist, if I looked at it, has definitely been a reflection of my travels.

**You've always been very diverse – but your cover versions stand out. Reggae seems to lend itself to cover versions. Why do you think that is?**

Me working on covers is always down to the chord progressions, and that's the challenge for me: I believe I can make any song Reggae! We take the chord progressions, and maybe slow it down a bit, or speed it up; make it Dancehall. There's just so many options for you to play with, you know? So, it's always a fun experience making covers Reggae style.

**We have to mention *Banana*, because it propelled you into the stratosphere. How was that, suddenly being thrust onto the global stage? And how has it affected how you're viewing the EP and its release? Is it more pressure?**

When the song became viral, and I'll be honest with you, not being cocky but I knew the song would be a hit from the moment I wrote it, in some capacity. This has been one of my lifelong goals: to have a song that reaches all corners of the world. I feel very proud; *Shaggy* and I speak about it all the time. During the pandemic, everybody was going through a hard time, so people having a moment of smiling, having fun, doing these videos – it felt good to know I was behind that. A lot of interviewers ask me about the pressure trying to follow up a song like *Banana*. I can tell you; I haven't felt the pressure at all. As I said, my goal was to have a song that reached the entire world – and I've achieved that. So, anything else going forward is for the love of



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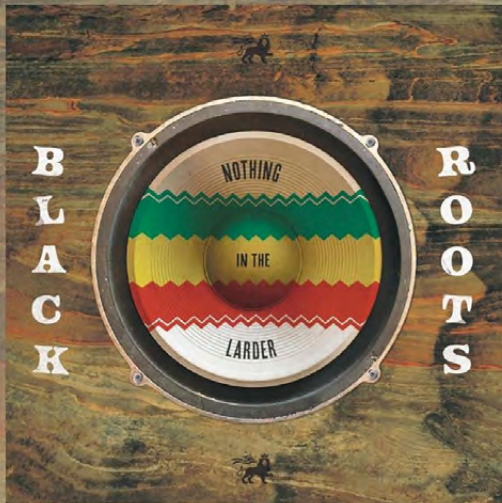
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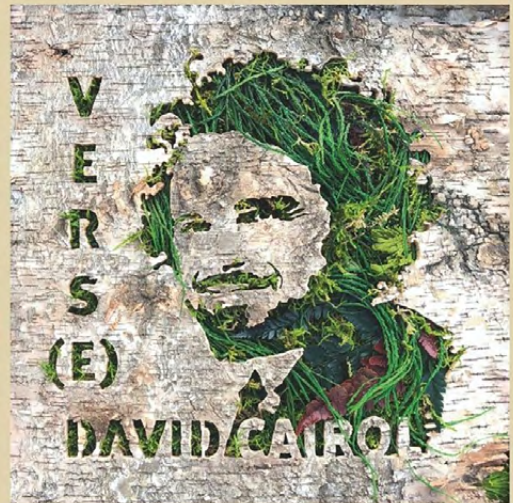


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CAIROL VERS(E)**



**NEW ALBUM**

**AUTUMN 2021**

music and enjoying it. I want to create music that will last a lifetime and have a legacy that will live on beyond my life. I'm excited. I'm happy about all the music that comes out. And whether it's 10 people that like it or 10 million people that like it – it doesn't really matter to me. Because I know that I'm going to connect with people in one way or another. So, I'm just happy about it. It's a blessing.

**Your latest single, Papaya, is also blowing up – having got over a million views on YouTube already. Are you feeling that you're now on the path you were hoping to be on?**

Yeah, definitely. Anything that happens musically, I'm just enjoying the ride. I've already made a name for myself and I'm very happy representing Jamaica and Reggae culture. **Papaya** was one of the tracks off the EP we decided to release first, because it's so fun and its summertime – it's perfect, lots of kids are enjoying the vibrations from it, so we just keep rocking with it and see how it goes.

**If people could take something from Destination Unknown, what's the message and vibes?**

Good vibes. Good vibes and positivity. Pretty much every single song has its own loaded, positive vibe and message behind it – and that's what I want people to take away from it.

**Pandemic allowing, are you going to be touring it?**

Yeah, definitely. Every day, every week – something new comes up. So, we'll have to see how things look when it's released. But I'm always eager and always willing to go out and perform and share my music with people.

**Conkarah – thank you so much for speaking with Reggaeville!**

I appreciate it so much, and we'll chat again soon! Bless up!



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**INTERVIEW**



**DAVID CAIROL**

**SINGING A NEW VERSE**



## FROM BIARRITZ TO KINGSTON

INTERVIEW BY GARDY STEIN  
PHOTOS BY MISA RAZIMOVA & PIERRE CARTON

Who is **David Cairol**? While the likeable young man from Biarritz in France is well-known both in his homeland and in Jamaica, the rest of the world still has some catching up to do. His prominence in the former regions has to do with his debut album **Initiales** (2013) and the sophomore **U.N.I.** (2017), but even more with his commitment to cultural education and bilateral encounters (you'll find out more about that in the interview below). And his voice! A voice that so hauntingly resembles the one of **Bob Marley** that **David** was invited as lead singer on a project that re-records songs of the legend.

His new album **Vers(e)** will hopefully convince more listeners of his vocal abilities, his full dedication to Reggae and the high regard he has for the instrumentalists who bring this music to life, a respect that made him work with some of the best Jamaican musicians to bring his vision to reality.

In an extensive interview, he grants **Reggaeville** unique insights into his upbringing, his humble beginnings as an artist and the creation process of his upcoming album, also speaking about the **Bob Marley Tracks** project and the amazing school exchange he organised:

**Hi David! Where do we catch you, are you at home?**

Yes, I'm in Biarritz, in Basque Country, close to the border of Spain.

**This is your first interview with Reggaeville. Can you introduce yourself to our readers?**

Sure! I grew up here in Biarritz, on the coast, and I was very interested in music from a very young age, always singing with my mother in the car, just for fun. I was listening to a lot of music, like **The Police**, **Supertramp**, all on cassettes back then. My father was a real music lover too, he used to buy one vinyl a





day, Funk and Soul, Black Music basically, so it gave me the taste of the groove somehow. I discovered a lot of American artists like **Jimmy Hendrix**, **Otis Redding**, this was the music he was listening to. But also French Pop, like **Gainsbourg**, and radio of course. The first time I was really in touch with Reggae, it was when I was 14 years old. I was supposed to go on a trip to England with my classmates, and I had lent a tape of **Lenny Kravitz** to one of my friends. He was supposed to give it back to me for the trip, but by mistake he gave me a **Bob Marley** tape, the **Legend** album, and when I put it on my headphones, I was like *"That's not Lenny Kravitz!"*. I listened to it and, really, it was a blast for me, everything changed after that. The goosebumps and the vibrations hit me so much... during the whole week in England I was listening to that tape, and when I came back, I tried to get more albums from **Bob Marley**. When I had heard all of **Bob**, I discovered that there was more behind the tree (laughs).

One of my friends said *"You know, there are more artists in Reggae, from Jamaica and the UK!"*, so I discovered **The Gladiators**, **Steel Pulse**, **Aswad**, all of these bands, I fell in love with Reggae during that time. I tried to buy vinyl as well in a second-hand shop, but I didn't have a lot of money, I grew up with my mum and we didn't have much. After that, I tried to write a little bit on my own. I was very shy when I was young, but the message and the vibe that Reggae is carrying, it meant so much to me that I wanted to share something about it!

**That would have been my next question, when did you start to make your own music?**

Well, I was in my room, trying to write some lines without knowing anything about music, guitar or chords. I wrote in English, not French, because, something strange, it's easier to write in English when you're shy because your friends will not understand so quickly what you're saying, so that made it easier for me. And, of course, the music that inspired me was in English, so that was the first step for me.

When I was around 18, my parents gave me a HiFi system. At that time you could plug in a mic, so what I did it was like a soundsystem, I played the Dub version of a vinyl I had from **Morgan Heritage** and recorded my vocals on tape. It was a version of the **Mellow Mood** riddim, I wrote one of my first song on that, called **One Day**. Step by step I built my lyrics and my voice, and my first fan was my grandmother. She was a fan of **Bob Marley** as well, we shared a lot of things together, and I was translating the lyrics for her. That was a great thing for me, and she said your voice is good, keep on going! Some of my friends also discovered what I did, but during many years it was just me in my room on the weekend, listening and recording.

**How did you learn to play the guitar?**

That was later, through some friends who listened to my music and passed it on to some other friends that were musicians. They discovered what I had recorded and said *"Wow that's cool, maybe we can do something together!"* The guitar player made a deal with me. He wanted to learn surfing, and I surf since my young age, so he said *"I can teach you playing the guitar and you teach me surfing!"* (laughs).

We played like a band together for some time, we did our first gigs in small venues, but eventually they quit because they had other plans for their life. After that, I began to play on my own in some bars over there, just me and my guitar. It was rough for me, because as a shy guy to be on stage in front of people, that was hard, but then I discovered the pleasure it brings sharing music with the people. It was getting better every day.

**And now you have established yourself as a singer, you have two albums out so far, and I think you have touched people all over the world already. I read that people keep telling you that your voice sounds almost like Bob Marley, and it's true. How do you feel when people tell you that?**



BOB MARLEY

# TRACKS

A recreation of Bob Marley songs

It's kind of strange, because **Bob Marley**, he is the king! Of course it's a compliment and I take it like this, I really love **Bob Marley**, he was like a teacher to me, so yes, I love when people say that, but at the same time it's very strange because a legend like him is hard to touch. I feel blessed to reach this compliment.

My grandmother told me that first, she said "You have something of Bob Marley in your voice". When I went to Jamaica to record my album, this album, **Vers(e)**, I met **Judy Mowatt** and we were in the studio, recording a duet called **Echoes From The Jungle**. When she heard the sketch, she asked "Are you singing that song? You sing like Ziggy! No, you sing like Bob!" It was very strange for me to hear that, coming from her. But since she was so close to him and it wasn't a problem for her to tell me that, I was cool with it. She said it was like magic, she said "Wow, you are coming from France, from another culture, and you have the same vibe!", she told me I carry the same energy in my music. I took that straight in my heart, it was amazing for that person telling me that.

**Judy Mowatt even introduced you to the producer of the Bob Marley Tracks project, right?**

Yes! A few days after that recording, we worked in the **Tuff Gong** studio, with **Marcia Griffiths** and **Brinsley Forde** and **Judy Mowatt**. Two days later, she gave me a call and she said "You know, I have a Dutch producer, he's recording with some of the

*Wailers and me, some of the live versions, and he's looking for a singer since a few years now. I think you are the one!"* Once again, it was amazing to receive that from her. There are so many singers in the world, and she was offering me that place in the project, so I accepted the idea that I got that sound and contacted **Peter Wezenbeek**, who is the producer behind it.

So far, we recorded 30 tracks, **Judy** did one with **Marcia Griffiths** as a lead singer, plus some other versions. We don't know when it's going to be released, the producer still has to deal with distributors and licenses to make it happen, to show it to the world, so we have to wait a bit till all that is set.

**Another project I want to talk about before we turn to your album is a school cooperation you organised between Jamaica and France. How did you make that happen?**

The first step was in France. I started to do song-writing workshops in 2007, and I developed a lot of projects with schools, working with students with social difficulties and handicaps. When I went to Jamaica for the first time in 2017, I went to the Alliance Française, a French institution that you can find all over the world, they provide French lessons for adults. I went there because two of my songs are used in their classes to teach French in foreign countries, so I introduced myself to see if we can work on a project together. I suggested to do some songwriting workshops in Jamaica

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as well, I told them that Jamaica gave me so much, with the music, with Reggae, that I wanted to give back something to Jamaica.

They contacted some schools and it was a success, because a lot agreed to do it. At that time, I didn't know anybody in Jamaica, I went there with my backpack for holidays only, I hadn't planned to work there, but it happened. The project created a small buzz in Kingston, a lot of TV stations like TVJ, Smile Jamaica and CVM, the Gleaner also, all medias were interested in what I was doing. I did a lot of interviews, and I met a lot of people, and that way I could develop this project in Jamaica. When I came back home, an English teacher in France proposed that I do an exchange between her high school and a high school in Jamaica, and we started the first project, a collaboration between St. George's College and a high school from my hometown. It was amazing to do that!

**Wow, that's such a great thing to do! Chapeau. And then the next time you went to Jamaica was to record your present album, right?**

Yes, in 2019, the year we met in Ostróda. I stayed two months in Jamaica that year, but the story of the album started during my first trip already. I met a lot of people back then, and I recorded a first version of the track *Burning Bridges*, but it was lost in the studio because the recording engineer had left and I couldn't get it back. The **Chronixx** album *Chronology* was like my soundtrack during that trip, and I loved the song *Skanking Sweet* so much, I was trying to find out who had produced it. I realised it was a French guy, **Matthieu Bost** from **Bost & Bim**. I tried to get his contact through my manager when I came back to France. We met in Paris and he listened to my music and he said "Wow, it's really great, if you want we can do something together!" so he sent me some riddims



**OUT NOW!**

**FOR THE CULTURE**  
**ALBOROSIE**

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**FEAT. JO MERSA MARLEY / COLLIE BUDDZ**  
**BIG MOUNTAIN / WAILING SOULS**



and I wrote something on it. I was really comfortable to work with him, so I proposed that he produce the full album. At the same time, I was in touch with a Jamaican producer, **Sam Clayton Jr**, who was living in France back then. He was recording a lot of artists in France, like **Nâaman** and so on. I called him up and asked if we could work together on the album and he said “*Yes, that’s a good idea!*”. So, during 2018 I wrote a lot of songs, 20, and at the end of the year I told them that I was ready to record.

We went to Jamaica in January. **Sam Clayton Jr** and **Stephen Stewart** recorded the first part of the album and **Matthieu** came in February to join us. We had prepared the songs and the sound that we wanted to have on that album, and we decided to build a team with musicians like **Sly Dunbar**, **Earl Chinna Smith**, **Bongo Herman**, you know, the old-school team, and that for me was a dream come true, to have them in the studio. I knew **Chinna** because I had toured a bit with **Inna De Yard** in France,

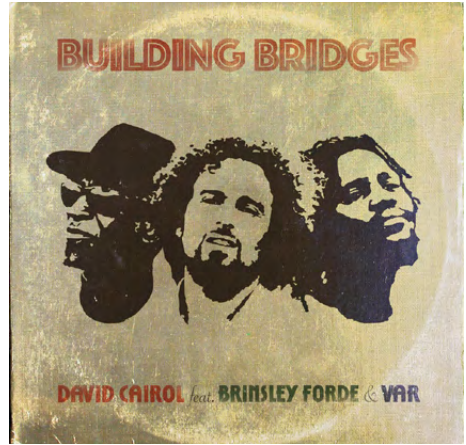
so we met during my first trip in Kingston, and when I came back it was nice because we already knew each other. He introduced me to **Winston “Bo-Pee” Bowen**, and he was always by my side in the studio, saying “*Don’t worry, don’t stress, it will be ok*” because some were a bit hard to understand, a bit rough, and **Bo-Pee** always helped me out, he was so gentle... I was so sad when he passed away. Beautiful people, I was really impressed by the way they work in the studio, live, because we in Europe, we don’t do that often. It’s not really live, everyone together, so I love that, quality working and the vibe was so nice... I won’t forget the first day, we recorded **Last Bus, Turn Up The Stereo** and **Morphed Faces**. Then **Judy Mowatt** came a couple of weeks after that, she wanted to understand what I was singing, the lyrics, that was very important for her. So, she came to the studio and it was another great moment for me... you know, if **Bob Marley** is the King, **Judy Mowatt** for me, she’s the Queen, and she has become something like my mother in Jamaica!

### Did you develop the song *Echoes From The Jungle* together with her?

I wrote that song maybe 10 years ago, a long time ago, and every time when I was trying to finish the verse, I had that chorus she does on *Black Woman*, “*Ladadadadaaaa...*” (sings). I didn’t know how to finish that song, and I was telling myself how amazing it would be to sing it with her one day. When I planned my trip to Jamaica and I thought it might be possible to meet her, I finished that song, the lyrics. And she came and interpreted the lyrics I wrote and did her line... it was very mystic to have that, to have her singing, it was just crazy, I was like a child. I told her “*I gotta give you a big hug, cause I wanted to meet you so long!*”

### Other features on the album are *Var* and *Brinsley*. I think the first version of *Building Bridges* was supposed to get lost so you could re-record the track with these fantastic singers! How did you link up with them?

It was late January in 2019, I was at **Dub Club**, and one French guy I know called **Sherkhan**, he was there with **Brinsley Forde** because they had just shot the music video for a song with **David Hinds** from **Steel Pulse**. **Sherkhan** introduced us and I told him that I’m a big fan of **Aswad**, and there was an instant connection. After that, **Brinsley** came to live at the guesthouse where I was staying, so he was my neighbour for the next 2 months. We were hanging out, cruising the city, going to concerts because it was **Reggae Month**, so we were always together. And I wanted to invite two singers on the song, so it was natural that I asked him because we have the same vibe. At the same time, he was saying that he wanted to write and compose his upcoming album, so I went to the studio with him to pre-produce his album, we were working on different songs together. We recorded a single for his album as well with **Judy Mowatt** and **Marcia Griffiths**, but that’s another story (laughs). Anyway, he came to the studio to record *Building Bridges* with me, and it was just great.



**Var** now, that was just another mystic connection, you know how that happens in Jamaica. During my first trip, I took my plane in Belgium and I was in the plane with **The Congos**, we played together on their tour before, so that was a funny coincidence already. Two weeks after that I was on the beach in Bull Bay, at **Jamnesia**, I was trying to surf but there were no waves. One Rastaman came to me and asked where I’m from, and I said from France and he said there’s a guy who is French too, and he introduced us. This man was the manager of **The Congos**, and he told me they were shooting the **Inna De Yard** movie at the time. He invited me to see **Kush McAnuff**, so we went to his house, and later we went to the **Dub Club**. On the way there, we stopped to pick up **Var**, and we spent the whole night talking about spirituality and Reggae music and messages and positivity. I told him that I was doing this school project and he did something with children as well, so we thought about something in common, a project in the future, and I told him we have to do something together one day. When I came back in 2019, **Brinsley** was in studio with me and asked “*Do you know that artist, **Var**, he’s on the same label like me, **JahSolidRock Music**, and my producer wants me to meet him in Kingston*”, so we invited him on *Building Bridges* as well.

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**Another artist featured on your album is Rik Jam in Heartcore. How did you meet him?**

I met him through **Olivia “Lili” Musiatowicz**, she was also in Kingston at that time and we were in the same guesthouse. She told me that a friend was coming to visit her that night, **Phillip McFarlane**, a great producer, and that he’s coming with a young artist called **Rik Jam** whom I should meet. So, they came and we talked about life and our past, and me and **Rik** had a lot in common, about our family, we shared some vibes. He invited me to listen to his music, and I was really impressed by his voice, the production, the vibe, I loved it! After two or three days I thought I have to invite him on a song, and I thought it would be cool to have him on *Heartcore* because it’s more modern, produced by **Bost**, and **Rik Jam** has that vibe like **Chronixx**, so I asked him and he said he was ready.

**The video for that track is also very special, very colourful... how did you find the dancers in that one?**

The dancers are from Kingston, I saw some videos on their website and liked their style, and when I asked if they want to be in the video they said yes. Their crew is called **Caution**, they have a good vibe, always smiling, I love that positivity in the music. And their style fits the vibes, I was looking for *Heartcore*, not hardcore, you know? (laughs).

**Another song I want to talk about is Banan Banan. Which language is that?**

Nice that you ask me that! This is my birthplace language, Basque, one of the oldest language in Europe, before Latin, before everything. We don’t know where it come from.

**Yes, I read an article about it once, it’s like a mystery because linguists can’t find any language that’s related to it. It’s like an island!**

That’s true, we were invaded by the Romans and then divided between Spain and France. The culture is very difficult here, it was very important for me to have a song on that international to have a song in Basque for the people to discover that. I wrote that song with a friend, **Maialen Errotabehere**, she is also a singer, always singing in Basque, she is known here. The song talks about a castle next to the sea, Abbadia in Hendaye. It was built by a duke in the 19th century, it includes an observatory, and every room in his castle represents a different country. One is dedicated to Ethiopia because he used to live there, so the song says if you are in Addis Ababa or in Abbadia, you can observe the same stars. We have oceans between us, but we have the same sky, the same sun, it’s about unity between the people. It’s a very poetic song, and we tried to use the words that were close to African languages to have that sound a bit. And then I invited a Jamaican choir, it was with **Sam** and **Stephen**, and they sing in Basque on this song, I think it’s a first in the world!

**Do you speak Basque?**

A bit, yes. There was a lot of oppression, especially in Spain, there you could even go to prison for speaking Basque. There was a revolution with the ETA, so now the situation changed. A part of my family lost that language, my father didn’t learn it, but my aunt did and she’s a teacher, so my family speaks it when we meet for Christmas or so. I learned it as adult, but it’s really hard because it’s not at all like French!



MARTIJN HUISMAN

# THE REGGAE NATION

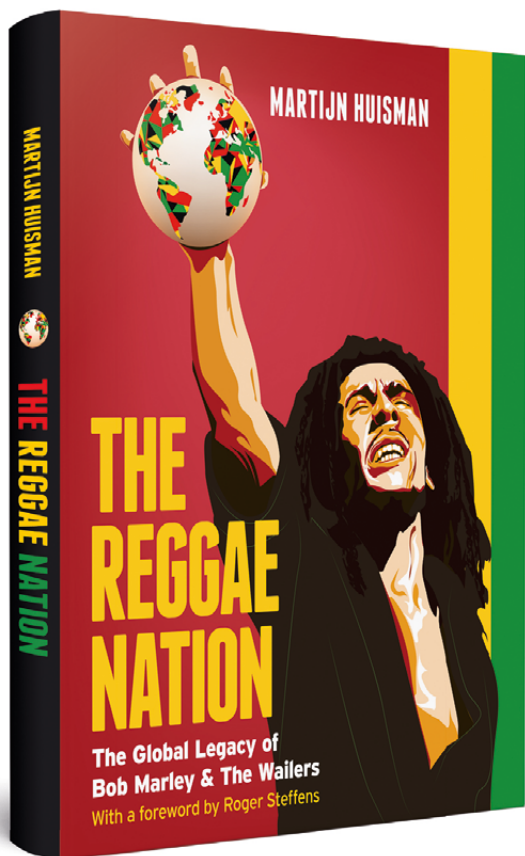
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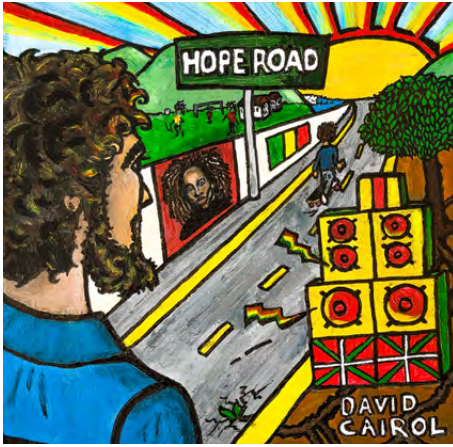


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**I always love when people include their native language on their songs. What is the story behind Hope Road?**

I wrote this when I was next to Hope Road in Kingston during my first trip. It came like magic to me, first verse, second verse, sometimes it happens like that. I was on the steps of the **Bob Marley** museum, going everywhere: to Trenchtown, to Nine Mile... of course there are a lot of references to **Bob Marley** and his life in the song, but it's also about my journey as a young singer, the way I see life and people and the way we behave as human beings. Hope for me is what Reggae music taught me, it's so important for me, for a lot of people, and this is what **Bob Marley** and other artists gave to people, giving hope, giving them some sun to keep on the way, so this is the road of hope, truly. And of course it's also about the way I choose to be, the way I choose to live my life as I discovered Reggae music, to do my own music, to live with music, it was the first thing I wanted to have and now it's like a dream come true.

**Speaking of, the last track, Music, touched me deeply, and it's just you and the guitar...**

This is one of the songs that I wrote very early. I was in South America at that time with a friend, it was my first travel ever far from home, just with a backpack and a

small guitar. We went from Peru to Brazil and I started to write that song on the way. I left it after that trip, but on that album I talk about organic things, about real music, and I wanted to pay a tribute to music, so I dug it out again. Music is like a goddess to me, I talk about music like that, if you replace 'music' with 'goddess' on that song it works as well, so music is god and god is music.

**The album is called Vers(e) – what was the motivation for that title?**

Well, it has different meanings... in French, 'vers' means forward, the direction you take, but 'vert' is also the colour green. And 'verse' as in a poem, because it's a new chapter for me, a new verse, a real step in my life as a musician as well, this album is something very special to me. It's like a double project, we have **Vers(e)** and **Reverse** which will follow next. It's in French, we have recorded it in France and in Jamaica, with some features from Europe this time.

**Do you have anything planned for the release of the album?**

We have some acoustic gigs during the summer in France, but a lot of things are still closed or cancelled for now. I have a first big live gig in my place Biarritz in October, where we present the music to the people, for the first time. I really hope we can play at festivals next year!

**I hope so too! Last question about the videos – six are out already, do you plan any more?**

Yes, I was supposed to shoot a video with **Judy**, but that day I fell ill, I had to go to hospital, and it was two days before leaving Jamaica so we couldn't do it. I will go back for that though, and also shoot a video for **Banan Banan**. **Morphed Faces** is already done and will be released in September, we shot it in Port Royal, in the ruins, that's amazing. **Last Bus** was the first song we recorded, we shot it in Nine Mile and in the studio in **Mixing Lab**.

**Great works. Thank you for the insights, David. Any closing words?**

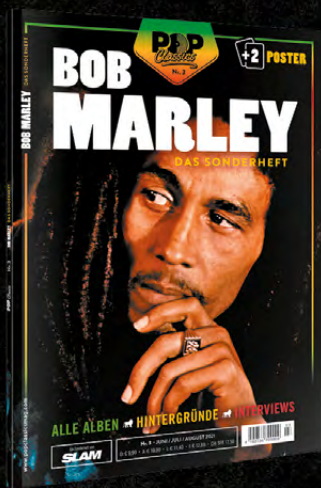
I want to thank my whole team and **Matthieu Bost** for the production. And I want to pay a big tribute to **Bo-Pee Bowen**, to **Sam Clayton Jr.**, and the backing vocalist on **Last Bus**, **Dalton Browne**, he left us as well, that was very emotional. These people were very important for the album and they passed before it was released, so that makes me very sad, but I hope we going to make them live on through that.

**Yes, their contribution will live on forever now.**



# BOB MARLEY

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## DAVID CAIROL - VERS(E)

Take It Easy Agency - Autumn 2021

David Cairol is a name y'all better get familiar with, because this man is definitely an artist on the rise. Not only is he a beautiful person inside and out, actively socially engaged, incredibly talented and well-connected, but his voice sounds so close to **Bob Marley's** that even **Judy Mowatt** remarked on the eerie resemblance, suggesting **David** as the lead singer for the **Bob Marley Tracks** project.



That's not what we'll talk about here, though; the focus is on **Cairol's** new album **Vers(e)**. The complexity of this release starts with the title, as "verse" can either mean "part of a poem or song" or, in French, "well-versed" ("versé"), "I pour" ("je verse"), "green" ("vert") or "towards" ("vers").

Produced in close collaboration with **Matthieu Bost**, the 11 tracks showcase a crazy amount of musical genius, from **Sly Dunbar** on drums via **Bongo Herman** and **Hector "Roots Percussionist" Lewis** on percussions to **Earl "Chinna" Smith** on guitar. Sadly, contributors **Winston "Bo-Pee" Bowen**, backing vocalist **Dalton Browne** and co-producer **Sam Clayton Jr** didn't live to see the release of this work, but their influence can be heard and felt throughout, especially on the skanking **Last Bus**, an instant favourite. It was both the first song recorded at the prestigious **Mixing Lab Studio** in Kingston, and the first video released.

Other tracks out on video are the marching **Grow In**, the touching **Music**, highlighting **David's** warm, on-point vocals, and **Hope Road**, a stirring autobiographic tale of **Cairol's** own musical journey. And the featured tracks, of course, which are a joy to watch and listen to!

First and foremost, **Building Bridges** combines three grand vocalists on an equally magnificent instrumental with contributions by **Winta James** on keyboard, **Bo-Pee** on guitar, **Danny Bassie** on bass and **Bam** on drums. The result is a beautifully intense, decelerated Roots riddim on which singers **David**, **Brinsley Forde (Aswad)** and **Var (Inna De Yard/Pentateuch)** unfold their magic. Less rootsy,

more modern in beat, the heartening carol **Heartcore** (pun intended!) was the perfect fit for Jamaican newcomer **Rik Jam**, another artist to look out for. How exactly **David** convinced this queen to feature on **Echoes From The Jungle** I don't know, but **Judy Mowatt OD** can be heard on the Nyabingi-influenced track, flowing on her signature Black Woman melody. Impressive!

Another song we have to talk about is **Banan Banan**, a first in many ways. Crafted on a Nyabingi beat as well, it's the only Reggae song I'm aware of that's sung completely in Basque, the mysterious language of **David's** home. He is joined by a 17-voice-strong choir from **The Nexus Performing Arts Company**, who sang Basque lyrics certainly for the first time in their lives. An amazing contribution to linguistic diversity, and a very poetic way of talking about unity... we are all watching the same celestial bodies!

With **Vers(e)**, **David Cairol** has managed to find an appropriate expression of his deep devotion to Reggae music. Rich in variety and talent, this release pays homage to the masters of their craft, the instrumentalists who've been around from day one. We need more releases that preserve their skills for posterity! Merci et chapeau, **David**.

by Gardy Stein

**INTERVIEW**



**ETANA**

**BRIDGING THE DIVIDE**

# TOGETHER IN UNISON

INTERVIEW BY STEVE TOPPLE  
PHOTOS BY MARVIN BARTLEY

**Etana** is not an artist to take things slowly. She's just released her fourth album in four years – **Pamoja**. And this Grammy-nominated, chart-topping musician shows no signs of musical burnout, as the project is filled with stellar tracks, slick production and her signature style and vocals. It's an eclectic affair, representing both her musical influences and her philosophy on the world. **Reggaeville** caught up with **Etana** to discuss **Pamoja**, working with other artists including **Vybz Kartel**, Africa, politics, the power of music and more.



**Pamoja is a remarkable project: already one of the stand outs of the year. One of the things that makes it impressive is its sweeping across genres. Was this the intention or was it natural?**

I think it was natural. The first idea was to have half of the album Afrobeats, and half reggae. But then it evolved into something that was nearer the meaning of ‘**Pamoja**’, which means “*together*”. I didn’t see it coming, I didn’t see it making all the twists and turns it did. But I’m excited with what we’ve ended up with. And so, yeah! I’m pleased with what I see and hear. Even the production of the album: I thought it would be hard. The plan was to work with other artists, and

I thought that would be tricky. But I guess during the Covid period, when people were just home, it made it easier for me to link up with people and just record.

**You mentioned the production. Credit has to be given to Chris Scott for the mastering. It’s superb.**

You know, this album? It got mastered four times [laughs]. After I got the first one, I said “*No, I want this and this and this to be done*”. Then I sent it back to **Chris**, he sent it back and then I said “*It’s still not right*”. He said “*Right Etana! I’m really going to work on this one!*” And he took a couple more days, then he sent me the third one

– and I was like “*Yes! This is it!*”. Except for one song. And I still corrected the one song. But when you correct one song on the master you then have to go over the whole thing again.

### **That poor man!**

[Laughs] I know! But in the end, he called me and said he enjoyed working with me, and the challenge I gave him. He also said he doesn’t work with a lot of artists in person like he does with me – and he’s surprised to hear what my ear is like. He said my ear was different. But overall, he said he appreciated working with me and I said the same to him. He’s very, very cool. He likes to listen, and so do I. We like to share ideas so we get the sound perfect.

### **Well, you did the right thing, because the overall sound is scintillating!**

Thank you! I’m happy to hear that! I know that I’m the hardest on myself. It’s one thing when you want a particular sound: you hear it in your bones, hear it in your soul and if it’s just not coming together? That’s the hardest part for me. Trying to get the sound I feel and hear, somewhere in the centre of me. And I just wanted it to be that on the record. Imagine the task!

### **Every track stood out. But particularly Fly with Fiji. Both your vocals are superb. But it also stood out that despite recording your vocals separately, you sound like you recorded them together!**

I recorded my vocals in Florida, and he recorded his in California. But the mixing engineer who recorded his vocals is the same one who did *Burned*. He had a real professional who was already familiar with my voice put it together. So, I’m not surprised that you felt like we recorded it together – because of the people who did the vocal recording.

### **It’s a very impressive song.**

Thank you. And that note **Fiji** did at the end? Wow!

### **Yes! Superb work. Other tracks stand out, like the brilliant one with Damian, Turn Up Di Sound. How was that working with him?**

So, we were emailing him backwards and forwards for a while. And then a few weeks later, he just sent back the track and said “*This is what I have so far*”. But when I listened to it, I was like, “*So far? You think you need to do anything else to it???*”. And I said, “*OK! Let me see what else he’s gonna come with*”. So, I text him back telling him it was good, but I’d wait to see when he was comfortable. So, he sent it back when he was comfortable. And I was like “*Yes, now I see the difference*”. Because then he did this big intro, waking up the track in the beginning. He ate it. I said to **Andre [Morris]**, he ate it up. **Damian** ate it. The way he responded on this track was so wicked. He just ate it.

### **Nothing else needs to be said! It’s classic Damian: Roots meets Hip Hop beats with a booming bassline.**

Yeah! He took control of the song. He was cool, too, because I’m sure he understood why I did three different mixes on this song. I sent him two, because I wasn’t going to put it out without him hearing it. I wanted to see which one he preferred – and he picked the same one I picked, so we were on the same page! It was easy working with him. As long as I was patient enough to make sure he was comfortable. I think that was the point of me being as patient as I was: to make sure he was comfortable on the track and comfortable with the end result.

### **The track was then reimaged later with Alborosie. You did similar with Not 4 Sale, which was with Wezi. It was about smashing the system’s enforced ideas of being a woman, from a woman’s perspective. You then did a second version of that with Patrice, Natural Beauty, which brought in a man’s views on this. It’s very clever!**

Yes! You got it! Thank you. I’m glad you got it. That was the intention. Because we, as people, we experience some of the same things. But we don’t necessarily feel the same





way about it, or express it in the same way. So, from a man's perspective, talking about the woman, how royal the woman is, and how everything about the woman is beautiful and sexy – I needed that part of it, and **Patrice** delivered it. Even the way he delivered it was sexy and cool, you know?

**Pamoja does feel really “together”, because you’ve drawn artists from all over the world. How was that during lockdown?**

I think the internet makes it easy. **Wezi** hit me up on Instagram. She messaged saying that she was a fan, and wanted to say hi and asked if we could work together at some point. I told her I was doing an album with collaborations and I'd like to send her a track. I did think it was maybe a bit quick! But I sent it anyway. She was really excited, she jumped on it right away and I got it back in a week. She said *“I wasn't sure if I was supposed to add any notes or anything because*

*I didn't want to overpower you on a song!”* And I said: *“Listen. When you do your part, and I do my part, it becomes our song and our sound. And when we put it out it becomes the people's song. So, I'll do the best I can do, you do the best you can do and when we put it together we'll make something amazing”.*

It was wicked. It was just easy. Working with **Alborosie** was the same thing. Working with **Fiji** – he actually told me he wasn't feeling well...

**What???**

Imagine that! So, I think the internet made it easy. Normally an artist would be like, *“I'm travelling tomorrow morning”*, or I would be all over the place, not having enough time to sit down and really do it. So yeah, I think this whole lockdown has made me more creative, I've had more time to concentrate – I wasn't travelling all over the place, so I've had more time to talk with people.



**I have to ask you about Clap. It's a real fusion of genres and styles. The only way to sum it up is Neo Soul.**

That's the closest thing! Because if you think of Neo Soul stuff from the late 80s, I hear a lot of that in the song, especially the delivery. But I still wanted it to have the feel of Afrobeats, and the vibe of Dancehall, so I brought all three of them together. So, I think it made the track interesting. It's something that it stays with you, sticks in the back of your mind and lingers for a while. And that's what I wanted to do. I wanted the listeners to be walking around and then suddenly hear (sings) **"Baby don't you let me go"**. You know? Stuff like that. I wanted the music to talk to them long after they stopped listening.

**And that's what it does. So, narrative-wise there's a lot going. You've mixed the conscious messages with more relaxed vibes. Do you think that's an important mix to have?**

I think I'm always for the message in the music. Because not only do adults listen to music, but families – driving in the car to anywhere, music is playing in the background. So, I think it's a good idea, and a very important thing for creators and me, to deliver messages and songs that people can grow with. Songs that keep us together as a people, keep us strong, positive, rocking – everything that is positive. Even when I'm performing live, doing the strong songs with the serious message and the Roots and it's just so strong – I see that people get the message. But I think that, especially now when we've been through so much over the past year and a half – even if there is a message, I want it to be something that people can rock to – and if you're not thinking too hard about it, you wouldn't even realise that the message is so strong. I want you to feel good and feel enriched at the same time, without feeling burdened to understand where I'm coming from.

*Flat Bridge*  
**DEAN FRASER**



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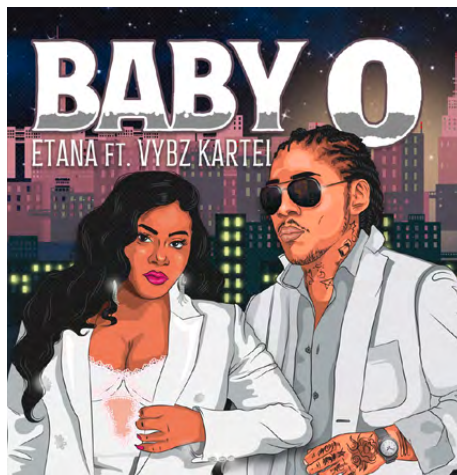
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**Vybz Kartel struck the balance of conscious and bruk-out really well on Of Dons and Divas. And it works so well because people who might not be conscious, it opens their eyes and you draw them into deep messages without them even realising.**

Yes! Exactly. That's the point. To do it without people even realising. But then, the people who are conscious are appreciative of the message just the same. You have people who are deeply, deeply conscious and connected to everything that's happening. And so, because I have a lot of fans like that, I don't want to lose their interest in a project. But on a broader scale I think people need to loosen up a bit and work together to build back something better than we had before.




As for **Vybz Kartel**, he's a beautiful person inside. I think he's very intelligent and very talented. Even when people ask ques-



tions like “*Why do you think you could've done a song with Vybz Kartel?*” – I'm thinking “*That's because he's intelligent! He's talented! He's smart! He knows what*

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to do!” Like, how do you not know this? He responded beautifully on this track [*Baby O*]. Also, he shows that he is quite aware of what he’s doing. In one of his regular Dancehall songs, he’d say a lot of derogatory things. But this song shows that he also views women in a different light. And I think that is the most impressive point in *Baby O*, it’s just to say: “*Hey. Even though I talk about all of this stuff, I do know that a woman is a Queen, is royal*”. And it’s just so warming. It’s wicked.

### **What was Malaika (“Angels”) about, as it’s in Swahili?**

It’s saying “*My angel, I love you*”. It’s about a woman who is in love with someone, who may not have a lot [of material wealth] – but she would be with him and marry him just the same. But more than anything, the one line that made me do the song is “*My angel, I love you*”. Because if you think about Africans and their history; not to say that there isn’t much wealth, and money, and gold and all the things we want and need in Africa – Africa is rich – but think about the history of the majority of some of the places, not countries because I don’t like to separate Africa like that, Kenya is Kenya, Ghana is Ghana, that’s how ‘they’ see it. But in our minds, Africa is Africa – so I say there are ‘parts’ and ‘places’ in Africa. So, when you think about its history, Africa has been through a lot of pain and struggle and there’s still a lot of that. But if we can find it in ourselves to love each other, regardless of what we have, as a family, as a person, as a citizen – I think we can go a long way. So, “*My angel I love you*”, regardless of who you are, where you are, no judgement, no nothing, I just love you. That’s why I chose that song, because that’s what it says to me.

**You mentioned Africa having gold and the things we need. We still have corporate colonialism extracting the wealth from the people there. But Pamoja comes out with a very strong message of African unity.**

### **Given this message, do you think Africa and its people are moving towards a point where they can break the shackles of this?**

Well, I think there’s a lot of work to do. I remember some years ago, I went to Ghana or the Gambia; one of the two. And all the leaders came together in a meeting, they were all gathered. But there wasn’t much going on. So, I said to somebody: “*Why is nobody really saying anything?*”. He said that leaders didn’t want to come together because they didn’t want to lose what was coming in their directions. If they unite, they’d have to give up some of the things they like or have; then they’d have to share. And that is another problem. Then, they’d have to think about what would happen if they cut some of these ties with other political people. So, it’s a lot of a mess. But I think as generations come up, they become wiser, they start making different moves within themselves – not even politically, not even up top, I’m talking about the people on the ground. They’re making different moves, becoming more independent, more business-orientated, more everything. Eventually, governments and people [in power] will have to catch up to them. Will it change politically? As long as we have the same people in place, I doubt it. But we, the people, have the power to make them change.

### **So, do you think change will come from the bottom up?**

Exactly. I think it will. Because we’re more aware of how things were. Recently, I did some research on apartheid [in South Africa] and how the whole revolution started. And I realised that even in that revolution and how political it was too, and the reason for that revolution, and the reason in the first place – it’s deeper than I thought and more political than I thought! To understand it all you have to go all the way back to when the French and the British were there and were fighting over the space. You’d have to go back then and all the way through their political growth to under-

stand why the revolution started in the first place. So, I think we're getting more educated and we're understanding a lot more than we did prior to now. Information is at the fingertips. You can google stuff, even though it takes more than Google now, everything is right in front of you, you can find videos – a lot of stuff we never had before. With time, I think there will be change. And it will come from the bottom, up.

**The access to music in terms of change from the bottom up is going to be crucial. Would you agree?**

I agree. There was a time when I wrote maybe three songs I can think of; there's more – but I've seen changes from the beginning. With *Wrong Address*, when I did (sings) "*We don't want no trouble*", about a woman who applied for a job but didn't get it because where she's from. A couple of years later the Prime Minister of Jamaica arranged to have young adults bussed from their communities to work, and from work, back home – and they opened up opportunities in the airport and different place for them to get employed, especially if they're from a low-income community. And it still sheds light on the same prejudices, and I wouldn't even say prejudices – I'd say classism. And it still sheds light on that classism today. Someone interviewed me about it last year, and she said she cannot believe that people are actually still facing these situations today – and the song was played over and over.

There was another situation where I wrote a song, in which I said: "*I'm not afraid*". And from the time that I wrote the song, even all the way up to now, it's important that we remember not to be afraid. Because fear was one of the reasons why, even going through this whole pandemic, a lot of people ended up in the hospital or even died – because of fear. And fear was an intricate factor in implementing all the rules and making all the changes they did

over this time. They used fear to do that, to gain control, and to implement those rules. And we always have to remember not to be afraid.

And there was another time I wrote about the police doing all the things they do, and one day it would turn back on them. But I never thought it would have the turn-back I see now. It's weird. It's not anything I'd want to see because yes, I want people to have respect for authority. This is how our system is set up and this is how it works; this is how it has worked over time. But we have to right the wrongs somehow. And in writing that song, I never thought I'd see it in my time. Music is powerful. Not even the artists sometimes understand the message that's being put into the song. Because the song and the messages come from a place that even we can't touch. Somewhere in the universe; somewhere that's connected deep inside at the centre of us. A lot of us creators don't understand that place completely. I find that sometimes when the message comes, you can't even control it – you can't slow it down. You just have to write. Like, when I get the messages, I just have to write and sing. I have to record it and put it out. And once it's out, sometimes you don't even know what it is. But it does the job it's supposed to do. And that's the amazing part of creating. Sometimes I feel like a vessel; a portal. Like something comes through me and to the world, and it does wonders. I'm grateful that I'm able to do that, and to be used like that by some kind of positive force. Some people call it God, some people call it the universe. But I'm glad that I'm able to be a part of something so powerful.

**There are some songs where the meaning I take from it is often different to the artist's!**

It does the work. Even in songs that I write, I know what I was going through, I know what I wanted the outcome to be – but I never would have thought that so many people across the world would have found so much strength in, for example, *I Rise*. Even

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the other day I saw a note asking the question: *“If you had to sum up your life in two words, what would it be?”* And somebody had said *“I Rise”*. People come to me about different tracks that brought them through divorce; cancer; almost death situations. So, I know the music is powerful. And the message of **Pamoja** is important, especially now. Not just for Africa and Africans, but for us as a people and a whole: the togetherness and family, togetherness as a community, in a country and as a world. We need to come together. And a lot of people say to me: *“Well, Etana, that’s never going to happen. Because there are too many differences. People fight. They don’t like each other because of colour and class”*. And I say: *“Hold on”*. One thing I’ve heard over and over again, even though the news

sounds like a bunch of jargon – I’ve heard the line [on the news] over and over. It said: *“Covid didn’t care if you were rich or poor, black or white, Spanish or wherever you’re from. If you got Covid, you had a chance to die – or you died”*. So, even in a catastrophic hurricane or storm, it’s not going to go through and picking whose roof top will be lifted. It just picks up wherever it goes. And so, underneath all the craziness – we all know that we live in one world together, and at some point, we’ll have to work together.

**It is that simple. But the system would have us believe it isn’t.**

When I watch the news now, I hear the division that’s still being created, the different political division. And I thought





that after the changeover of the politicians, and now we have **Joe Biden** in the US, that it would actually stop – and people would start to come together again. But I realised, it's almost like people are attracted to the different sides – like different sides of a team. So, I think the message of **Pamoja** is important. We need to remember or have it somewhere in the back of our minds – anywhere – that we need to come together.

**That is the perfect way to end our time together! That was wonderful. Etana, thank you so much for chatting with Reggaeville – we'll have to do it again sometime!**

We should, I enjoyed talking to you as well! Thanks for having me!



JESSE ROYAL

# Royal

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**ETANA - PAMOJA**

Freemind Music - June 25, 2021

It only seems five minutes since **Etana**'s 2020 album **Gemini**. But she's back, showing time has no meaning when it comes to searingly good projects.

**Pamoja**, released via **Freemind Music**, is simply glorious. Like its namesake, the album brings together the worlds and cultures of Africa and Jamaica in both musical and lyrical form. **Etana** and **Freemind**'s **Andre Morris** (her husband) are responsible for much of the writing (the synergy shines through), along with a plethora of other talents. **Chris Scott**'s mastering is stellar, giving **Pamoja** a sympathetic, warm and rich feel. Overall, the album sweeps across genres and the globe.

**Legacy** featuring Kenya's **Naiboi** winds across smooth AfroDancehall that's interspersed with elements of Soul. **Melanin** sees **Etana** join forces with Tanzanian singer **Nandy** across a forthright Afrobeats path. **Not 4 Sale** with Zambian songstress **Wezi** is a fusion of Roots, Dub engineering and some Dancehall/Trap vibes via hi-hat buzz rolls. **Walking Away** pares things back to Roots-Soul sensibilities, and **Malaika** expands on this beautifully.

Back to Jamaica. **Baby O** sees **Vybz Kartel** and **Etana** create an almost Lover's AfroDancehall track. A stop in Ghana with **Stonebwoy** follows on the stuttering AfroDancehall **Proppa Fly** takes us to Polynesia as **Fiji** helps cement a Roots-Soul fusion with both artists giving absolutely stunning vocal performances (check out his soaring falsetto). **Clap** is gloriously ambiguous: really Neo Soul, incorporating elements of Ambient RnB, Dancehall and Afrobeats.



We stop in Kenya again with **Wyre** helping deliver **The One** - a smooth, 21<sup>st</sup> century RnB Lover's Rock track. **Damian "Jr Gong" Marley** and **Etana Turn Up Di Sound** with a Revival Reggae-Hip Hop fusion. **Natural Beauty** takes **Not 4 Sale**'s riddim and expands it, with Sierra Leonian-German artist **Patrice** giving a conscious man's perspective. Europe isn't missed out either as **Turn Up Di Sound**'s

riddim is reimagined with Italian star **Albrosio** across **Jamrock Vibe**.

Thematically, aside from the positive relationship messages from **Pamoja**'s love songs, the album feels like a response to world events since 2020's **Gemini**. **Etana** gives a powerful cry of black pride with **Melanin**. Across both **Not 4 Sale** and **Natural Beauty**, she smashes the system's toxic notion of femininity. **Malaika** ('*Angel*') sees **Etana** both provide a positive message of love without the need for riches - and a powerful sermon on the need for humanity to collectively love each other over material things and power.

Overall, the title track encapsulates **Etana**'s vision for **Pamoja** perfectly and beautifully. Essentially AfroDancehall, but with leanings more towards the Afrobeats side, it features Jamaica's **Yahsha** (who also co-wrote several other tracks) and Kenya's **Michael Bundi** - as the three deliver a cry for unity across both the Motherland and world more broadly.

**Pamoja** is stunning from **Etana**: musically extremely detailed; the production first rate; vocally she and her collaborators at the top of their game; lyrically delivering a plethora of messages and overall, it's an inspired project with a cry for common humanity and unity at its heart. Powerful, and one of the strongest releases of 2021.

by Steve Toppie

**INTERVIEW**

**JESSE ROYAL**

**BLACK, ROYAL & RICH FOREVER**

# BUILDING HIS THRONE

INTERVIEW BY GARDY STEIN

PHOTOS BY SAMO & NKOSI

**Jesse David Leroi Grey**, better known as **Jesse Royal**, has firmly established himself as one of the big names among the young Reggae Revival. His 2017 album **Lily Of Da Valley** heralded an impressive development and, dropping fantastic singles and collaborations left, right and centre, that development now culminated in an oeuvre called, simply, **Royal**.

The simplicity is deceiving, though. **Royal** is a highly complex album, both in message and versatility, and the artists featuring on six of

the eleven tracks are nothing short of stunning. To understand and grasp this complexity, **Reggaeville** reached out to the man **Jesse Royal** himself with a truckload of questions in tow. An excellent storyteller, he let us in on precious behind-the-scenes moments, comments on his collaboration with the producers and explains some of the important lyrics. The conversation, which he joined with his new-born daughter in arm, was as entertaining as it was enlightening, and the best thing about it is that you can read along now:

What's up?

**I'm good. How are you? How is the family?**

The family is great, as you can see (holds baby up).

**Is she sleeping?**

What's... sleeping? (laughs) I wish!

**The joys of parenthood... how old is she now?**

Five months.

**Bless her. Before we talk about your new album, I want to ask about your latest IG post... it shows you next to a footballer, Walter Boyd. Can you tell us non-Caribbean's who that is?**

**Walter Boyd** is one of our most legendary football players! He was the crowd favourite. He had a particular shoe that he used to wear, and he made Puma sell way more pairs in the time that he was playing. He used to wear a red boot that was called the **Puma King**. It was full red, and he wore number 10.



On the journey... you know, the one time that Jamaica went to the World Cup, on the road to France, he was an integral part of that entire process, he was like a one-man-army. If you are from Jamaica, you know the feeling of seeing **Walter Boyd**, and you remember those red boots running down the centre of the field and taking on defenders, so it's a very euphoric thing for us.

**I read the comments and he seems to be quite important to Jamaican sport.**

Yeah man, he is super important, and it is important that we always remind the youths dem of we history, cah if you don't know where you're coming from you cyaan really know where you are going.

**Do you still play football?**

Yeah man, as much as I can! It's a very holistic workout, you get fitness to agility to... (talking to squirming baby) chill out please! ... yes everything, so we still play football!

**On a business side, you are involved with the Jacana Company. What is your position there?**

I'm a shareholder and brand strategist. **Jacana** premiered dispensary in Jamaica, it is one of the, if not THE cleanest herb that you can get in Jamaica. We have research facilities and we are coming up with some ingenious ways now of servicing the community, because we really just feel like herb is going to be a big part of moving Jamaica forward. Not only financially, but socially as well, you know? It's important for it to be normalised and we start deal with the health and the wealth of the herb versus the stigmatisation and the discrepancies weh it always a get.

**Community work seems to be a major focus of your actions... in another interview you said it's important for you to be useful to other people and to maximize your time on earth... can you elaborate on that?**

My thing is, we benefit from a lot of work that other people do. Something as simple as there will be people who are going to read

this interview and get inspiration from the journalism that you did! There's plates that I use, that I didn't make, somewhere somebody in this world found it important to make a plate, and I made a dish and served it on that plate. There is somebody else who made the forks, so... if we really look around us, we are living in a world where other people were brave enough to follow through with their ideas. You know what I mean? From the car you drive to the gas station that you pull up at, these are all ideas that individuals put in place to hopefully try to make life a little easier or better for other people. So, for me it's just fulfilling that cycle of life, and you use so many things that it's important for you also to find a way to be useful. That is the whole basis of that conversation, just make sure that your moral compass is always aligned and you know that in the midst of you using all these other things, remember to be useful to somebody somewhere in some way.

**Some people say "I don't have fans or followers, I cannot move things the way other people can". so they find excuses to not do things because they think they are not in the position to do it... but as you said, there are small things everybody can do!**

Yes, let me tell you this, I was having this conversation yesterday. There are way less excuses to not do it than there are reasons to do it. So if you have one reason why you can't do it, there are twenty reasons why you can. You need to know where your focus and your energy lies, and what you are trying to do. Even if you're going to plant one acre of land, and you can't plant it all at once, you can plant one row at a time, right, and if you plant one row for 365 days, at the end of the year you will have planted an acre.

**Your focus and energies have clearly been on the upcoming album, which is simply called Royal. In the press release you said that "Reggae has a different tone, a different feeling, a different mood" and that it's just royal music. Can you tell us what you mean by that and why you called the album Royal?**





All right, let's start here. Reggae is the King's music, it's the only genre around the world that is literally dedicated to the truth, whatever that may be. It might be the truth about the system, the truth about love, the truth about marijuana, the truth about life. We aren't dedicated to entertainment as much as we are dedicated to deliver the truth as message, whatever that is. So, when we talk about royal music it's because we have that responsibility as the caretakers and the ones who carry the flame right now. It's important for us to know the story and grow the glory.

Why we call this album **Royal** now it's because it is literally the most vulnerable I've ever been on a project, where I speak on real situations from parenting to friendship to disloyalty to love and the good and bad

that comes with that. So, when we listened to all the songs and we came together as a unit, people said *"Hey, we never heard you speaking like that before, you clearly are comfortable with really giving people a glimpse into your life now. This literally feels like the most honest you've ever been with your audience, this feels like a stripped-down version of Jesse Royal, it feels like just Royal."* We had a couple other ideas of how we are going to name the album, but after this reasoning, the general consensus was that this is exactly what it should be called. This is a true representation of where I am in life, and we are very aware of who we are and who we need to be in this space, in our time, for our generation. It's nothing short of royal! Regaining the kingly side of our story, not just attaching ourselves to the idea of 400 years of slavery, identifying ourselves with bigotry or some people and perspectives that are first of all ignorant and then second of all not true. We don't have to own labels put on us by other people, the whole royal thing is just to remind the youths dem of our story. We are kings and queens, not former slaves. We're nothing short of royal!

**Before we talk about the individual songs in more detail, let's look into the production of the tunes. There are a few different producers on the album, but the one most present is Sean Alaric. How did you connect and what was working with him like?**

**Jason Panton**, who is a good friend of mine, he and **Sean Alaric** are friends. **Jason** heard a beat from **Sean** and he sent it to me and was like *"Yo, Jesse, listen to this, this is a wicked beat, I think this can work in Reggae music right now!"* We started fleshing out the song, linked up with another one of my bredren named **Vision** and worked on the whole idea of what **LionOrder** is. How easy that process was and how steady the songs were made me very confident in the potential of the relationship between me and **Sean**. After we created that song, I did a writing ses-



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sion in LA. I flew **Sean** out, I flew two other producers out, I flew **Jason** out, **Protoje** joined us, and I had some other people on my team that were there. We literally took a week to just create. Whatever comes up, whatever comes out, we just created the space for creation. And that experience gave us probably 80% of the album. In a week! In one week, we got the ideas and direction of the album, and after that it was kind of just smooth sailing.

I thought about other conversations that needed to be had, and we directly went out to people like **Drelegs**, who did the song called **Home**. My brother **Alandon** and I connected in terms of creating that whole concept. There is a song like **Rich Forever** where we actually developed the progression in **Sean**'s studio, but then we went to **iotosh** to create the whole picture, you know. I'm just showing you how interactive



it has been, it hasn't been "*There's a beat and we sing on a beat*", we literally tried to create songs, create ideas, which is why the music wraps around the melodies so much.



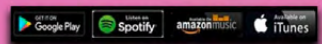
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**Yes, it sounds very organic, even though there are many different people involved...**

Yeah man, very organic, and it sounds like you're on one train, it doesn't feel like you're hopping on different trains. It's one train, one journey. I'm actually proud of the work that we came up with and I'm extremely happy and excited to share it with the world, you know what I mean? (laughs)

**You mentioned Rich Forever, and of course everybody is curious... how did you get to work with Vybz Kartel? How did the link come up?**

You haffi understand that everything in a life is what it is and it will be what it should be. With that said, everything happens in ways that sometimes we wish we could explain, we wish we could describe in a very real manner, but the reality is that dem tings is just divine. The conversation that we wanted to have on *Rich Forever*, there is only one person who could have spoken, who we were trying to speak to in the way that we did, and that's **Vybz Kartel**. To me THE greatest lyricist to ever come out of Jamaica, and arguably one of the greatest lyricists in the world. Arguably! I've heard **Jay Z** speak of how profound he thinks **Vybz Kartel**'s writing is, so...

*Rich Forever* was almost like a song weh we did have to use fi light a fire under the youths dem tail just fi remember *"Yo, we are what we are and that's the way it's gonna be!"*.

Like **Bob Marley** say, we got something they could never take away, despite all the confusion and illusion and dem trying to get us to be delusional and identify with an identity that is given to us, not who we actually are. It's important to me that somebody like **Vybz Kartel** say *"Rich Forever, family we treasure, in a system that breeds depression who will ease this tension, every man fi demself, cheese intention, meaning greens that evil intention. No matter how me teach dem need detention."* If you get what I'm trying to say, all these songs are deliberate, with a deliberate message and a deliberate goal, we are trying to do away with certain labels and try fi wipe the board and start fresh and give the youths an opportunity to be their greatest self and not feel like dem a run a race weh dem already start 20 steps behind, you know?

**Thanks for the spiritual connection. Now for the practical side, how did the song reach Vybz Kartel and how did his verse reach you in the studio?**

The right people at the right time! (laughs) Respect is out there in a di world from both parties, and we just make it happen.

**There are some other very exciting collaborations on the album... Protoje of course, you mentioned LionOrder already and it's been out there for two years doing extremely well. The one who opens the album though is Samory I with High Tide And Low. Did you have him in mind when you created the track?**

Yeah! I wanna tell you something funny. That's a beautiful track produced by **Natural High** who are some great, great, great producers, **Jordie** and **Blaise**. When we created the track, I had two individuals in mind. I won't say the other's name, but the energy of **Samory** did just stand out to me. He is a very warm, spirited and light-heart-



ed youth, and him energy just jump out and me say "All right". We already had the concept written, and we just needed the delivery, the frequency, and I would say **Samory** outdid even what I expected of him! Like, he took it and brought it somewhere... zionly! Me definitely give **Samory** a whole heap a respect. From him vocal abilities and his incredible, incredible voice, him know how fi use it, you know.

That's why we put it up first, we needed something that would just open the gate, not too wide, just enough so that you can get ready fi where we a go, because you know it's not expected, it's not an expected album in terms of sonics, but me sure seh the ones dem will find something weh dem enjoy.

**Sure! And then you have some other great features, like Runkus on Like Dat. I think he even produced the riddim, right?**

Yes, me and **Runkus** did work pon **Like Dat**. Funny story! We went to the studio, me and **Runkus** did suppose fi link up for a while, so we pulled up the **Like Dat** beat and we started vibing. **Runkus** is a super creative youth, me like working wid him, you know, so we connect and we roll ideas off a each other, and then we got the song and flesh it out. Then **Runkus** pull out another riddim and was like "*Yo, just say something pon dis one.*" Me say all right cool, and him start play and me sing "*It might cost my life but me nah stop till dem all pay di price, Lord, it might cost my life, but me nah stop till di people get wise...*" (sings) And **Runkus** just say "*What? Pull up... what?*"

Me did leave that there, **Runkus** called me back the day after, saying "*Yo, I know our song was the plan, but then this song is actually a vibe.*" And I was like "*Oh it was just a freestyle, I don't know if it can make a song.*" And **Runkus** said "*Royal, I never asked you to trust me in life before, just trust me on this one!*" So I just gave him my



blessing, and then he sent me back a verse that he did, and it blew my mind. Then he sends me a message saying **Munga** wants to be on it, and then **Kabaka** came in, and then **Royal Blu**, and it ended up being a song called **5Gs**, and it's a song that did really good for **Runkus**. I'm so happy that I could have helped in the process, one, but also just the genius of it all... I mean, he took a freestyle and turned it into a big tune, you see me, you haffi give people dem props, cause I didn't see that in the song. As I said, we met to record a song for my album, and we came up with that! And that just shows you the respect weh me have for these individuals, it's not just like "Yeah mek we do a song together", it's like I genuinely think they are creative people and I genuinely think they are dope and I want to work together. I think Reggae needs a lot more connecting, a lot more working together, because that's what's gonna make us the industry that we crave!

**Yes, especially, as you said, 5Gs did good for Runkus, but it did good for everybody on that song! I was so happy to see him on the song list.**

He's great, he's going to do great things. A lot more collaborations on this album, and if you noticed, you don't see any females on this, so just get ready for another project! Deliberate.

**Wow, that sounds exciting! Another name I was happy to find was Kumar. You worked with him several times before, right?**

More than work, man. **Kumar** is my brother! Which is why we sang this song we did. **Kumar** is somebody who I think is incredibly talented. I'm a big fan of his work, and I'm also his brother, as I said. That particular song is a couple of us who are brothers, **Unga** is on the song, **RiffRaff** also, so... it's just good for me to be able to share the platform with some of my brothers.



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**BIG YOUTH**

BMG

Out July 16th





**One brother who is not from Jamaica but all the way from Ghana is Stonebwoy. Dirty Money is one of the highlight tracks for me personally, so I'm curious to find out how that link came about.**

Stonebwoy and I have been friends for a while. I've always respected his work, I've always respected his work ethics, and we have a couple of common friends. Somebody who was also very integral in making this happen is a producer and agent, actually my agent in Europe, Riga from Hemp Higher. So he was connecting the dots and making it happen, so I always shout out to Riga. Me and Stonebwoy been good friends, but as me say me have a huge, high level of respect for the importance that he put on connecting Africa with Jamaica. It's somebody who has worked tirelessly in terms of bridging the gap, and we love the ethic and will work together and connect Africa and the Caribbean because we are one people.

**As you said in the beginning, Reggae is royal music, and a lot of elements came from Africa of course, so it's great to see the link come back full circle.**

Right!

**Another track I want to talk about is Natty Pablo. By the way, I really appreciate that you put all the lyrics in the press release! What made you do that?**

Because it's important for you to actually understand what I'm saying and why I'm saying it. Natty Pablo, like me say, is one of those songs weh... in Jamaica there's a whole heap of Rastamen, elders, in volatile communities, in places where it seems that there is only desolation. But then there is some Rastaman who help the youths dem think upful when it comes to food, help edify the youths dem in terms of blackness, help edify the youths in ways of survival that don't have to do with negativity. And also there are some individuals who have

been brave enough to fight some fight and try to use the little weh dem have to develop the mass, so the idea of exposing **Natty Pablo** to the world is something that had to happen in terms of... Rastaman don't just sit down on the hillside, you see me, we don't just complain about the problems, we actually try to be the solution! We strive every day to try to be solutions to the problems that the governments create. So, you hear me say: *"Natty Pablo smuggling the truth, tending to the destitute, breaking down the laws that they built to keep we mute."*

**And who are the names you mention? Narcos, Dr. Sebi, Naldo?**

Narcos... these are people who use illicit means and done some bad things with what they've got. So, the song says *"We ain't nothing like the Narcos, tell me weh we can't go with this contraband inna we cargo."* **Dr. Sebi** is a doctor, somebody who helped us to realise a lot of the root causes of a lot of issues that we face as people in general, and then as specific to our race. I recommend everybody to check out some of **Dr. Sebi's** videos, it's definitely transformational, life changing. **Naldo** now is one of my favourite footballers, **Christiano Ronaldo**, in Jamaica we just call him **Naldo**. That's what I say, I'm a *"Top striker like Naldo, el jefe head honcho."*

**Ah ok, I see! And what are the Swallowfields?**

Swallowfield is a community in Kingston, Jamaica, that is near and dear to my heart. A lot of friends that I grew up with live in there, some have lost their lives or whatever. Swallowfield is one of dem garrisons in Jamaica weh me just feel responsible to help some youths come out of there, you know.

**Another song we have to talk about is Black, of course. Next to the deep meaning, the music is very crazy, the sounds used, the musicians involved. Were you there in the recording sessions?**

Yeah man! **Yared Lee** is a very creative like youth. The idea of **Black** is something so necessary for our youth, like one of the first lines say, *"Black excellence, beaming with confidence, hard work and diligence we use to tear down wall and break defence. Mi rise a nuh accident, everybody needs oxygen, Mansamoussa is back again, warn me enemies, tell me friends."* It's like the idea of us reclaiming the glory of what we as black are and making black beautiful again. It's a thing weh we just remind them of the glory that comes with being melanated. The thing about it now is that **Black** is a song weh... it's very funky, the horns and the drum patterns and so on, it's a very funky song and we love it, we love the concept and everybody thinks it's dope. We took some risk, nobody has ever heard of **Yared** before in the production world, but he's a youth weh... he did some dope things and he has a dope future, so we give him a chance, you know?

**In Home you hear the voice of your daughter who says "Papa, I miss you!". Here in Germany we say Papa as well, is it common in Jamaica too?**

No, it's not common, that's what she calls me. She lives in Oslo, you know, so that's her special way of calling me. In Jamaica dem say Daddy. (laughs)

**How did it feel to be on stage again for the album launch, after all this time of lockdown?**

It's been a while since I performed for a live audience, so you can imagine the level of excitement that's bubbling within me. It's dope, it's a great time to give people some music, coming out of this time period where everybody was down, felt chained to negativity, every day it was some other bad news. I just feel like, Reggae being the genre that it is, it's important for us to come and make our voices heard, the vibrations felt, and remind people seh there is still good people, there is still good music in the world.







**Yes, for sure. I think I'm through, do you want to add something?**

As a general scope, I just want to send my love to **Reggaeville** for consistently supporting Reggae music and being a flag-waver for years upon years. A lot of time people don't really give **Reggaeville** the credit you deserve, for the work and effort weh **Julian** and nuff a de ones dem put in, so me just send my love and mek you know seh **Jesse Royal** a check fi you. We definitely are grateful, for the work you keep doing over

there and giving us a platform, so... love to all of you and to all the German fans, all the German artists, musicians and engineers, in general to all European festival promoters, you know.

**I'll pass that on! Thank you so much for the reasoning and the behind-the-scenes view of your album, it was a pleasure.**

Give thanks for your time.  
Jah guide and protect!



## JESSE ROYAL - ROYAL

Easy Star Records - June 11, 2021

"You are the very best part of me, it's deeper than biology." (Jesse Royal, *Home*)

With **Royal**, Jesse Royal releases a sophomore album that is incredibly versatile, multi-layered, rich in sound and message, and... extremely personal. As the quote above from the gentle, **Dreteg**-produced *Home* illustrates, the artist addresses very intimate subjects, such as the distance-stricken relationship to his firstborn.

Explicit focus of the album is, however, the affirmation of the royalty of his fellow Kings and Queens. Looking into the etymology of the word **Royal**, we find that it comes from the Proto-Indo-European root \*reg- ("move in a straight line" or "direct", thus "lead, rule"). The same root is present in the album's main producer **Sean Alaric** (Visigothic in origin, his name literally means "all-ruler"), and that's just what these two kings do!

Their combined prowess was first evident in the seminal *LionOrder*, an exquisitely crafted tune featuring **Protoje**, released two years ago and roaring through speakers worldwide ever since. **Sean** also signs responsible for the slowed-down *Differences*, the laid-back *Natty Dread* and *Natty Pablo*, a different kind of Ghetto anthem with a nineties-bassline and some crazy lyrics.

With *Dirty Money*, **Alaric** contributed yet another lighthouse track. Not only is its' Afrobeats structure highly infectious, not only does it feature one of the hottest Ghanaian artists (**Stonebwoy!**), not only are its lyrics highly topical, but the entirety of these precious pieces make it a sonic crown. I can't wait until we can wear that in the clubs!



*Rich Forever*, produced by the brilliantly innovative **iotosh**, is probably the biggest surprise of the album. Featuring no less than **Vybz Kartel**, the song makes an amazing progression from grim piano notes via Nyabingi drums and Trap beats to a grand finale of a bubbling Reggae beat. Again, I highly advise you to pree the visuals and pay close attention to the lyrics.

*Black* is an equally important track that excels both in songwriting and instrumental composition. Originator is the yet little-known **Yared Lee**, who managed to knit a complex Reggae riddim which sounds anything but usual. A unique and fresh approach we have become familiar with is also that of **Runkus**. He created the fast-paced *Like Dat* and joins **Jesse** in a lyrical settlement with a girl that "Sold out my love".

This leaves us with the first and the last track, two more features lending a royal shine to the whole release. *High Tide Or Low*, on a HipHop-drenched beat produced by **Natural High**, rings with the piercing voice of **Samory I**, lending a wonderful contrast to **Jesse's** more casual style. While it opens the album with a creed, *Strongest Link* closes it with a commitment to friendship and family. The positive riddim, developed by "Unga" **Thompson**, is the perfect fit for featured artist **Kumar**, a brother and soul-mate to **Jesse**.

**Royal** is high-quality work from start to finish, an organic display of talent and collaboration that marks the preliminary climax of **Jesse Royal's** career. He lets us in deeply on his life here, sharing his reality and vision with a world that's better ready to hear what he has to say.

by Gardy Stein

**INTERVIEW**

**MARIUS BROZI**

**THE NEXT GENERATION**

# SUMMERJAM

INTERVIEW BY GARDY STEIN

“*Feel the Beat!*” is the motto of the next edition of the prestigious **SummerJam Festival**. It was supposed to celebrate its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year, was postponed to this summer during the first lockdown and had to be deferred again to next year. Feeling the beat is something we all miss terribly, but while live events are more of an optional social and cultural need for the audience, their lack has threatened the basic survival of those who depend on the income they generate: artists, musicians, promoters and festivals.

35 years of **SummerJam** – most of us can’t imagine a summer without this Cologne-based highlight. In order to understand the challenges faced by those who’d normally be working overtime by now to make sure the line-up is complete, that all hotels are booked, shuttles organised, and licences signed, **Reggaeville** linked **Marius Brozi** to contribute his point of view on the current situation. He is a true **SummerJam** baby and has grown up to take over most tasks from his father



**Karl-Heinz Brozi**, founder and CEO of the Fühlinger See GmbH in charge of the local logistics since the festival settled permanently in Cologne in 1996. The other big player who started **SummerJam** in 1986 (at the beautiful Loreley back then) and has run it ever since, **Contour Festival**, has now taken a step back and leaves the operational business in the capable hands of the **Brozi** family. **Marius** tells us what’s behind this development, how he’s preparing for next year, and why collaboration between the festival organisers is more important than ever.

**Greetings Marius! You are part of SummerJam since day one. What was it like to grow up as a festival baby, and when did you start to really work as part of the team?**

My mum told me yesterday that I was part of it even before I was born, in her belly (laughs). When I was small, my Dad was always busy working at the festival, he didn’t really have time for us, so we were there only for an hour or so. When we grew older, we stayed a bit longer, and I remember that for me and my sisters, the Haribo stand was the most interesting. One of the team always accompanied us there to make sure our candy bags were full.

My first memory from “behind the scenes” experiences were when I passed to say hi to my dad, meeting the officer-in-chief who offered little **Marius** to see his police-car and such things... Later I attended some meetings, and the first time I was really part of the team was around age 14. I started by fetching stuff for people, and then step by step my tasks grew. I was assistant to the production office, for example, then I coordinated the first stalls... I think I watched everybody at work at some point. And now there is almost no sector I don’t partake in!



### Who is part of the SummerJam production team?

Well, it was always two companies. On the one hand, you have the Fühlinger See GmbH from Cologne. That's my dad's company, taking care of the local logistics, the whole infrastructure, the stages, the vendors, the necessary official permissions and so on, so that's where I come from. On the other hand, the Contour Festival GmbH from Stuttgart was responsible for the booking and the artistic side. **Klaus Maack**, the CEO, has planned to retire for quite some time, he is 70 now and wanted to take a step back after 2018. So, the discussion was on how the whole event will continue. **Klaus** had offers from some big companies, but he's been working with us from the start, so when my dad and I decided to invest in that, we agreed on taking it over from **Contour**. In 2019, I spent two or three days every week in Stuttgart, learning the trade from **Carlos**, the whole paperwork and

so on. **Klaus** was responsible for the main booking, and **Carlos** dealt with the details like accommodation, transportation and so on. I started booking the first acts in 2019, then took over the whole thing in 2020.

### Who is the core team currently?

It's my dad, **Jutta** for public relations, my sister for the ticketing and our newest member **Phil**, who has been working on-site for a few years and is now in charge of all local matters, all year round. Then we have a lot of freelancers who come in when the need arises. I did an apprenticeship as an event manager at a different company, doing my **SummerJam** tasks on the side in the summer, but a few years back I joined the team full-time. For the trades involved, we will also stick to the same players, the sanitary crew, the caterers, the stage crew and so on. Most of them have worked with us from day one, so this is like a big family in a way.

**What changed for you since you took over?**

For me personally, it's more work. I'm actually taking care of both sides now, everything I did before on the local side of things plus the booking, that's really a lot. My daily chores right now include social media, and also taking over the bookings from this year, or actually last year, to the next. The contracts have to be changed, there are some new conditions with paragraphs on the Corona situation and so on. We really hoped that it could take place this year, but it won't, so this whole process had to start over again. Also, I take care of funding possibilities, applying for Corona aid and cultural support. It's less

stressful right now since we don't have to deliver in two weeks, but we still try to prepare well in advance, so there is a constant flow of basic chores.

Also, there is a lot of networking going on with other festivals. During the last months I spoke a lot with **Sheriff** from **ReggaeJam**, for example, but also with other festivals from other scenes, other genres, talking about which synergies can be used. For instance, decorations that you buy together, using it in one festival first and then in the other, as much as possible locally, so the transportation costs and the environmental impact





won't be too high... these networking things are taking place in the background. Last weekend for example [18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021], there was a big networking event called **Festivals For Festivals Playground**, about 350 people from 80 festivals were invited to discuss the future of festivals in Germany. It was organised by **Höme Festival Magazin**, an independent online medium focusing on smaller festivals, it took place at the **About You Pangea Festival** area close to Rostock. It was very interesting, ... we talked about sustainability, inclusion, what value festivals have for society on the whole, and networking in Germany.

**Wow, that's interesting, this mutual support is a nice thought. Does this networking extend to other European Reggae Festivals?**

Yes, I'm in touch with the festival community, with **Rototom** for instance, but especially with those Reggae festivals that border on the

**SummerJam** weekend. I'm in close contact with **Fernando** from the **Portuguese Musa Cascais Festival**, or with **Irene** from the **Couleur Café Festival** from Belgium. We are in touch to find out which artists from overseas we can invite.

**Why is that important?**

It is getting more and more difficult to bring in artists from Jamaica, for instance, because a short-haul flight to the US, where you have a huge Reggae fan-base, might be more profitable for them than the long-distance-flights to Europe. That's much more expensive, and the Reggae community in Europe is on the decline generally. So, unfortunately, it is money that decides in these cases, and sometimes even prevents a booking. That's why we collaborate closely, adapting our schedules accordingly. The likelihood of artists to come here gets bigger the more shows they are able to play.



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**Is there a change in the booking procedure compared to pre-Corona? Do the artists ask higher fees or do they have different needs?**

Well, most artists know **SummerJam**. I mean, we've been around for 35 years, so most of them have performed here before and we have a long connection on which we can build. They understand that we don't have a donkey shitting gold in our basement (laughs), they know it is a challenging time for all parties concerned. So, most agree to stay in the booking process under the same conditions. Some managers insist that their artist has made a big development in the last year, asking for more, sometimes twice as much money, and then I have to explain them our situation. The costs for festivals in general are rising, the whole logistics, transportation and all that, on the other hand we don't know yet how much the flights will cost when travelling is possible again, so both sides have to stay fair and flexible. There are so many things I can't foresee...

**What other challenges do you see ahead?**

I'm not really sure... I can imagine that some artists will cancel last minute, so we have to prepare for substitutes. Sometimes you have construction sites on the streets, like right now, the whole parking around the Fühlinger See area is blocked and we would have had to re-route all the traffic, so it saves us a lot of stress on this behalf that the festival couldn't take place this year – one of the few plusses. Also, we'll have a new government in Germany in autumn, so we might have different regulations for noise protection and so on. We'll just have to wait and see.

**Will anything change with the next edition, do you have any ideas you want to implement?**

We recruited a new colleague who will take care of the local issues, to relieve me a bit. Especially in 2019, I was in double charge, so to say, and whenever I went to check on something, my phone didn't stop ringing.



And yes, I do have some ideas: some major topics are on my list, structures that have to be reconsidered and improved, and then also some new decoration and atmospheric ideas and so on, but I have to take care to not take on too much at once. You have to find a good balance, the festival has to stay true to its roots of course, but there is always room for improvement. On the other hand, we are bound by regulations, as we are a festival very close to the city. For example, in 2019 we had an area at Bridge 3 which I tried to establish as additional spot, so we had a soundsystem playing there. At night, the music started to get louder and louder, and residents started complaining, but the person responsible wasn't around to turn it down, so... for every novel concept you need someone reliable who's in charge, that's the real challenge. Also, I don't want to sit down and decide these things, I'm a fan of discussing ideas with the whole team.

For example, we had the **Roots Centre** at Parking Lot 2, and in 2019 we changed the set-up a bit and called it **Vibes Village**. I want to establish that as additional stage to present newcomers. For me it's important that the up-and-coming artists get this platform, get the chance to introduce themselves and grow their fan-base. In Jamaica, a lot of new artists are coming up right now, but in Germany it is difficult for young talents to be seen and heard.

### **How do you inform yourself about these newcomers?**

There are different pillars to that. One is, I'm in touch with a lot of soundsystems, from Stuttgart, Cologne, Berlin, and they know what's going on in their city. Then of course we get a lot of emails from up-and-coming-artists, so many that I can't check all of them. Also, you have some smaller booking agencies who sends me their picks, I listen to them and we talk about the possibilities to include them in the line-up.

### **Speaking of inclusion - do you have a special policy on including female artists?**

I always try that, but to tell you the truth, in the past decades Reggae was a business dominated by men. So even if I intend to book more female artists, there is a limit in the sense that I can't book the same artists again the following year. I have to think economically as well, I have to sell tickets, and there is a gap between the top-selling female artists and the smaller ones, there is no middle, so to say. This is part of the **Vibes Village** concept, I really want to push female newcomers there so they can assert themselves and be more known.

### **Who would you like to invite, if budget wasn't an issue?**

Well, I recently compiled a list of every artist who has been on stage during the last 34 years, and I came up with more than 600 names. That's really a lot! But, yes, I would like to have **Lauryl Hill** one day, and personally I'm a fan of **Tash Sultana**, and also **Manu Chao** would be nice to have. We tried to get him for years, but he is very special in that he asks for high fees but at the same time he doesn't want the festival to display advertisements, so that's very difficult.

### **What other difficulties can arise in the negotiations with artists?**

Recently, at least for the last three years, it has been increasingly difficult to get the artists to agree that our partner, the **WDR Rockpalast**, is allowed to film and later broadcast their performance. It was always a matter of individual arrangements, we tried to explain to the artists that they have the unique opportunity to have great professional material from their shows which would normally be very expensive to produce. Other festivals don't do that because they don't have a cooperation like that. Now, some artists say that they have to be seen live, they don't want to be available on screen afterwards. Some of them have asked for a share in the streaming rights or for an extra payment, so we have to explain

that the WDR is not a pay-per-view channel. The **Rockpalast** is a cultural institution with a long tradition, and they always captured those great shows at **SummerJam**. I don't really know what it will be like after Corona. Everyone is so used to streaming now, but online streaming is used up so quickly, it might work for 2 or 3 months but after that... I hope that the artists agree to have their live shows filmed, with all the emotions going on between artists and audience, rather than posting a stream where the artist is alone on a stage at the beach or whatever.

What I can say, my parents were in St. Lucia once on holiday and were at a local beach bar, and in the corner was a little screen where **Chronixx** was seen on the **SummerJam** stage (laughs). I don't think this takes away from the artist's sales, on the contrary. When I see great footage of an event, I want to go there!



### **Last question, what was a special moment or a highlight from the past SummerJam editions?**

There are so many stories... Generally, I always get goosebumps when I stand on the side of the stage and see thousands of arms in the air, the emotions in the audience, there is nothing more exciting than that moment. I can't really describe that feeling. A funny memory is from 2013, we had **Snoop Lion** in the line-up, although it felt more like a **Snoop Dogg** show really. He had his security with him, two huge guys, and after the show he had to be shuttled to the next gig. Backstage there were I think 10 or 15 Vitos, so that nobody could tell which one **Snoop** would enter. When his bodyguards each entered a different car, both of them tilted to one side under their weight, that was a funny sight. **Snoop** must have been used to already or might have been laid-back due to natural relaxants.

**My highlight 2019 was Buju, I've always been a huge fan and it was such a magical moment to see and hear him after all these years... I cried tears of joy during the whole concert!**



Nice. **Buju** was one of the artists for whom we had a lot of challenges to overcome in advance. Because of his past, there was a big scepticism amongst Cognians, but also other German LGBTQ associations, and we didn't know if we could get him to perform. There was a lot of political pressure, even up to people from the parliament trying to prevent his appearance. I was very grateful that my dad and **Klaus** were there to help me through these talks, that was really tough. But we reached an agreement.

**I can imagine. Do you have any closing words?**

After all these Corona limitations, it feels as if we're going uphill now, as we say in Germany, and after the past 1.5 years I am confident that we can hold the festival as usual next year. Maybe we have to put up a few extra disinfection stands, but I think that we can party together again, enjoy the lake and let our souls soar.

**Thank you, Marius, we'll see you next year in Cologne!**



PHOTO OF SNOOP LION & BUJU BANTON BY ELJER

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# FESTIVAL AGENDA 2021

Here is our compact little festival calendar 2021, including the currently (July 1, 2021) available information on the scheduled festivals. Since these plans are in an ever-changing state because of the pandemic, we urge you to regularly check the daily updated agenda on our website [REGGAEVILLE.com](http://REGGAEVILLE.com) to get the most recent information about the events.

## East St.Louis Jerk Festival



July 2

Frank Holton State Park in St. Louis, IL - USA

## Legoreggae



July 2-3

Harripila Aretotan in Legorreta, Spain

## Big Ship Music Fest



July 3-4

County Fairgrounds in Port Charlotte, FL - USA

## Reggae Explosion



July 3

A-Kerk in Groningen, Netherlands

## Kansas City Reggae Music & Jerk Festival



July 3-4

Kauffmann Legacy Park in Kansas City, MO - USA

## Atlanta Rum & Wine Festival



July 4

Piedmont Park in Atlanta, GA - USA

## Florida Jerk Festival



July 4

South Florida Fairgrounds in West Palm Beach, FL - USA

## BRT Weekend



July 9-11

Beach & Boardwalk in Atlantic City, NJ - USA

## Ostroda Reggae Festival



July 9-11

Amphitheater in Ostroda, Poland

## Táwpa Máqiwen



July 10

Los Coyotes Campground in Warner Springs, CA - USA

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19th EDITION

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## Seasplash Festival



July 15-18

Martinska in Sibenik, Croatia

## Nowa Reggae



July 16-17

Zona Esportiva in Vilanova i la Geltrú, Spain

## The Feel Good Festival



July 17-18

Lake Pavillion in Fairburn, GA - USA

## Festival De Neoules



July 21-24

Festival Area in Neoules, France

## One Love Reggae Reunion



July 29-31

Camping Girasole in Lignano, Italy

## Uppsala Reggae Festival



July 31 **Live Stream Event**

Fyrishov in Sweden & Harry J Studio in Jamaica

## Hastings Reggae Festival

July 31

The Oval in Hastings, UK

## Dub Station Festival



July 16

Domaine de Fontblanche in Vitroville, France

## Afrika Tage Wien



July 16 - August 2

Donauinsel in Vienna, Austria

## Bayfront Reggae & World Music Festival



July 17

Bayfront Festival Park in Duluth, MN - USA

## Öland Roots



July 14-24

Sandbergen, Sweden

## Giants Of UK Reggae



July 30

Tutbury Castle in Tutbury, UK

## Roots & Yam Jerk Fest



July 31 - August 1

Exposition Park in Los Angeles, CA - USA



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**AUG 1**

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August 1

Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, CA - USA

**Live From  
The Valley**

August 1

Sandwell Valley Country Park in West Bromich, UK

**Overjam  
Reggae Festival**

August 5-6

Sotocje in Tolmin, Slovenia

**Dream Wknd**

August 5-9

The Hip Trip in Negril, Jamaica

**Nomade  
Reggae Festival**

August 6-7

Festival Area in Frangy, France

**Roots Up**

August 7

Odonien in Cologne, Germany

**Miami  
Reggae Festival**

August 7-8

Marketplace in Opa-Flocka, FL - USA

**Jammin Music,  
Food & Drink Festival**

August 8

Norbury Park in London, UK

**Africa Festival  
Würzburg**

August 12-15

Mainwiesen in Würzburg, Germany

**No Logo Festival**

August 13-15

Festival Area in Fraisans, France

**No Logo  
Festival BZH**

August 13-15

Festival Area in Saint-Malo, France

**Sun Up Festival**

August 14-15

The Pavillon in Huddersfield, UK

**MILTON KEYNES REGGAE FESTIVAL**  
SAT 14TH AUGUST 2021

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(TOOTS HIBBERT MEMORIAL SHOW)  
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**Rebellion**  
STEEL PULSE · INNER CIRCLE · THE GREEN  
ISRAEL VIBRATION · KEZNAMDI  
DJ MACKLE · JUDGE ROUGHNECK

SUNDAY AUGUST 22, 2021  
**Rebellion**  
STEEL PULSE · THIRD WORLD · THE GREEN  
MYKAL ROSE · KEZNAMDI  
DJ MACKLE · JUDGE ROUGHNECK

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+ MUCH MORE TBA

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**AUGUST**

## Milton Keynes Reggae Festival



August 14

Campbell Park in Milzon Keynes, UK

## Cardiff Reggae Festival



August 14

VSA Warehouse in Cardiff, UK

## Truckee Reggae Fest



August 20

Truckee Regional Park Amphitheatre in Truckee, CA - USA

## Bath Reggae Festival



August 21

Kensington Meadows in Bath, UK

## Reggae On The Green



August 21

Mount Trashmore Park in Virginia Beach, VA - USA

## Reggae On The Rocks



August 21-22

Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Morrison, CO - USA

## Simmer Down Festival



August 22

Handsworth Park in Birmingham, UK

## Reggae On The Heath



August 22

Kenwood House in Hampstead Heath, London, UK

## Rasta At Shasta



August 26-28

Festival Area in Mount Shasta, CA - USA

## Dry Diggings Festival



August 27-28

El Dorado County Fair & Event Center in Placerville, CA - USA

## Uprising Festival



August 27-28

Festival Area in Bratislava, Slovakia

## Sheffield Reggae Festival



August 28

Charity Car Park in Sheffield, UK



## Colors Of Beat



September 3-4

Waldbad Mehderitzsch in Torgau, Germany

## Irie Fest



September 4

Belmont Park, Beach House in San Diego, CA - USA

## Positive Vibration



September 9-10

Baltic Triangle in Liverpool, UK

## City Splash Festival



September 12

Beckenham Place Park in London, UK

## Houston Jerk Festival



September 18

Buffalo Bayou Park in Houston, TX - USA

## Colorado Cool Vibes Reggae Fest



September 18

Levitt Pavillion in Denver, CO - USA

## Sunclash meets Shutdown



October 1-4

Ibiza Rocks Hotel in Sant Antoni de Portmany, Spain

## Reggae Rise Up Las Vegas



October 9-10

Downtown Event Center in Las Vegas, NV - USA

## Best Of The Best



October 10

Bay Front Park in Miami, FL - USA

## Cali Roots – The Baja Sessions



November 3-7

ME Cabo Hotel in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico

## Jamming Festival



November 13-14

Casa Babylon in Bogota, Colombia

## Closer To The Sun



December 8-12

Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Maya in Puerto Aventuras, Mexico

**INTERVIEW**



# **DAN SHEEHAN**

**MAN ON A MISSION**



It will have been three full years from **California Roots 2019** until the return in May of 2022, but **Dan Sheehan**, Co-Owner and Producer of the largest Reggae festival in the US, hasn't been resting. During Covid, **Dan** has pushed forward numerous new initiatives and programmes and finally had the time to launch a brand-new festival, **Cali Roots - The Baja Sessions**, coming to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico November 3-7 of this year. **Reggaeville's Brad Metzger** caught up with **Dan** right after his return to live music in Santa Cruz, CA in May where he teamed up with music venue **Felton Music Hall** for three days of outdoor concerts featuring **Tribal Seeds** and others as well as a pair of incredible acoustic sets by **Arise Roots** in front of a very small group of fans thanks to Covid restrictions.

In our conversation, **Dan** was very open about his fears about possibly having to find a new career over the last year, his wish to never have to put on a virtual event, as well as more exciting plans for the future.



## CALIFORNIA ROOTS

INTERVIEW BY BRAD METZGER  
PHOTOS BY JOE WILSON (BULLDOG MEDIA)

**It's been a wild ride for you during Covid. You rescheduled the original 2020 Cali Roots to October 2020 then to May 2021, now it's been rescheduled to May 2022. What went into those decisions and how tough has this been for you and your team to schedule, plan and reschedule three festivals?**

With the first one we're like "Alright, we'll move this October, we'll play this by ear and see how this goes". July of 2020 I was like "Yeah, October's probably not going to happen", so we gathered as much information as possible and then we decided "Alright let's go to May 2021, we should be fine". Then probably, October, November of last year I really knew May of 2021 wasn't going to happen. It was right on the cusp of everything, and by this time we have... you know **Cali Roots** is just one of my show life, and we refunded and moved and postponed and cancelled and done this thing hundreds of times over the last year.



So it was like, we're just going to move this to May of 2022 instead of trying to battle through the fall. We don't know at this point things are going to happen but at the time it's like *"Do we really want to do that? Do we really want to have limitations on what we can and can't do?"* I'm definitely against the whole vaccine requirements and all that stuff. I didn't want to put ourselves into that situation. I knew there would be a lot of traffic on the road, and everyone and their grandma's going to be touring, plus all these other festivals are trying to make up for the past year, so I said *"Let's just ride this out, we can sustain this economically and come back in 2022, make it a four day festival and just kind of come back with it"* and, you know, every day, I'm like yeah that was the right decision, I feel really confident about the decision that I made and we're looking really good for 2022, granted the show's been on sale for almost two years but... But it's been good, we're thankful that we have a very loyal fan base, a lot of people have stuck with us and supported us through all this and I think it's all going to pay off in May of 2022.

**How did you and your team mentally handle so many cancellations and changes?**

At first it was like, alright, we'll get through this, it's going to be all right and we'll do this thing in October. As it went on and on, there were definitely days where I was like *"Holy shit like, am I going to have to figure out another business to start? Do I have to go get a job somewhere? Is our industry ever going to come back? Will events ever be the same?"* You know obviously if you watch the news and stuff, you know it's like all Debbie Downer stuff. **Fauci** was out there saying we'll never shake hands again. There were definitely some times where it was tough mentally. Obviously we had to lay off some of our staff and there was a heavy workload that was coming in and it was me and one other person handling everything ourselves. I have a couple other venues that I'm overseeing plus the festival, so there were definitely days where it was very mentally challenging. And then there were days where there wasn't much going on, but I just didn't have the urge to work on anything because I was just tired of working on stuff that might or might not happen, you know? I was tired.

**You were seriously considering in your mind "I might need to find another career?"**

Yeah. For a second there, I needed to figure this out, like we're going to have to do



something, and we didn't do any drive-in shows. I just didn't feel like those made sense. You run the numbers and they just do not make sense. Doing a show and putting on a show, it's an uplifting experience for me. Like the attendees going to a show, for me, putting on the show and executing it, and all that stuff is part of how I get replenished, mentally and spiritually. And to not have that, it was wearing on me. But then again, I've owned my own business for a very long time, between **Cali Roots** and other businesses before that. I'm not going to work for somebody, so like alright, what are we going do? Okay, let's maybe look at real estate... but my love and my passion and what drives me is this industry and putting on events and being a part of the music. And so, that feeling came and went and, you know, we came back and now I strongly believe that we're on the verge of something huge, not just for our festival but I think for events in general.

**You have been extremely busy during Covid launching a bunch of new things. Good Vibez Bedtime Series, Center Stage with Reggae Icons, Can't Stop the Music virtual events, Couch Sessions, two Cali Roots Riddim albums. Why was it important for you**

**to stay so active and keep Cali Roots part of people's lives? What got the best response and what will endure post pandemic?**

**Dan:** I think all of it will endure. For me it was extremely important that we stayed relevant. When you think about it for **Cali Roots**, the festival, it's going to be three years between the last band that played **Cali Roots** in 2019 to the first band that plays in 2022. It's going to be three years. As we were going through this, in the earlier part of it like the **Couch Sessions**, the **Bedtime Stories**, and the **Can't Stop the Music**, the first one...those were all done out of trying to nurture ourselves and our fans and to provide some feel-good content that helped us get through it. Because to me it was rough there for a little bit, for everybody. It was rough, so we felt that we had a platform to be able to provide some really good vibes and good spirits and really uplifting content. And there was a time there where things got really hairy, all the race and you know **George Floyd**, and all the stuff that went with that. It was a very tense time in this country that we felt, alright we have a platform of music and energy that we can push out there and in the earlier parts of it, that was definitely a big part of it.



### Sounds like you almost took it as a responsibility.

Absolutely, 100%. That's the thing, I think our platform is strong and so we do have a responsibility. Also, you have to be careful in those situations because you have to stand on the right side you know? And silence is sometimes just as bad as doing something bad. We thought that was our responsibility, and I think it worked out, and it provided us a bunch of content, although I'll be happy if I never do another virtual festival my life again. The first **Can't Stop The Music** virtual festival was great. The second one was great too, but the first one, the viewership was through the roof and it was this really powerful thing because we were all in the midst of lockdown and so everybody was at home. The **Cali Roots Riddim**, the first one, was in the works before the lockdown. We were working on that in late 2019 so it's kind of trippy to think that the riddim actually hasn't even played on-site yet. It hasn't played through the speakers at The Bowl yet. So we have a lot of ground to make up. It's another one of those flags in the ground. There's no other festival doing this, whether it's in the US or Europe or even Jamaica. There's no festival that has their own riddim that's well produced and has great artists on it. I'm really

proud of that and it's been great to work with all these artists and with **Adam** over at **Ineffable Music** and just really pushed the message of the festival and pushed the name of the festival out there to a worldwide audience. Again I think for a festival in Monterey, to keep doing that... we're always trying to figure out how we can keep pushing the envelope.

### Can you comment on the financial implications of the reschedulings and the past year for you? And on any aid you have or have not received?

It's been tough. I mean obviously take your main revenue stream, and come to a complete stop on it, you know? And that ticket money, that's money that fans have paid for a service that hasn't been provided yet so it was definitely challenging. Thankfully we really kicked off our brand side, the clothing side of things, and that really helped carry us through. We made some good money on that, and enough to keep the lights on. As I've said we had to lay off much of our staff, we moved offices to a much smaller office in a different, less expensive part of town. We had to make those adjustments. We did get a loan from the government, and then like everybody else, currently waiting on our shuttered venues grant from the SBA

to come through. It's just been a process you know, dealing with the government and, you know, they're in over their heads and the IRS is extremely backed up, which backs up the SBA. There are Mom and Pop restaurants and venues, as you know, shutting down daily right now because they just can't afford to stay open anymore.

**So you applied for one of the shuttered venues grants and you're just waiting? Have you been approved and just waiting for funding?**

We check all the boxes. I have two applications in, one for the **Fremont** and one for **Cali Roots** and we check all the boxes, we qualify. It's just a matter of the government getting through it and at this point if and when it comes, it's going to be great. Fortunately we're not in a position where we're in trouble, we're fine. It's tight but we'll get through it.

**I was fortunate to be at your recent return to live music at Roaring Camp. What did that mean to you? And by the way the Arise Roots acoustical performances were epic. That group without any drum and bass, with the focus on the lyrics and the guitar was mind blowing.**

Yeah, **Arise Roots** is special, they're a great band. I think they're very underrated. But you know, the comeback of music, it was good. Yeah, it felt good to be out there and provide music for the fans but also to have our staff out there working, so many people that I haven't seen in over a year. These are people that I would see a lot more than once a year, so to see those people again it was a beautiful thing, it was good feeling. I think it's just the tip of the iceberg of what's on the horizon for all of us as far as getting back to it, hopefully. I'm hopeful that people stay as positive as they have been. I think we all can take certain things for granted and when abruptly taken





from you, like literally within two or three days, everything just changed for the event world and to take that away... I'm hoping that that people really know now we need to keep supporting the music and the art.

**Many artists credit you with helping to launch their careers by featuring them at Cali Roots. What do you think about the responsibility and frankly, power? And who are the next rising stars, the next Stick Figure or Hirie?**

I think very seriously that it's an important responsibility that we have. We tried to put together a plan through the pandemic, on how to feature some of these new artists on the rise, virtually, but it just never panned out. For the US Reggae scene, **Cali Roots** kind of sets the bar, you know. We might not have the most tickets out of other Reggae festivals in the country but we are the bar-setter. I think there are some tours that look at us, there are other various festivals outside of the Reggae space, that look at our line-up and see where the billing of some of these artists are. I do feel that it's important to groom new up-and-coming artists because we are only as strong as our artists and we want to make sure that we keep providing the stage for some of these artists to grow. For me, some of the artists that I'm really excited about... the **Elovaters** could keep growing to a level of potentially being a headliner in the next five or six years.

I like **Artikal Sound System**, I think **Logan** has something special. I think bands like **The Movement** are poised to rise and **The Movement's** been around for a long time. It's like, how do we keep showcasing some of those bands? How do we keep getting those bands bigger looks on our stages and in front of bigger crowds that end up trickling down to a band playing or closing out **Red Rocks** or larger tours happening for them? It's an important task that I have as far as making sure that we're putting the talent out there that will continue to grow.

**Other than just listening to a bunch of music is there anything you do to decide who you're going to invite or to formulate your game plan? What does your process look like?**

I have a grid, an idea of who I want. The big list at first and I start whittling down, and obviously we take surveys from our fans which I think is important. You've got to listen to the fans and the fans on the frontlines listening to it, you know more than I am. I definitely listen to what they're listening to, then I do a little more research on the band. I listen to the music and the recording quality and see what we can find online as far as live performances go, and then we look at tours and we look at social media interaction. Looking at those things like, do they have a very engaged fan base? Or you know, these guys are only posting once every two weeks or two months and this is not consistent. I'm talking to other bands and other tour managers. I have vast relationships with tons of tour managers throughout our industry, so I ask how are these guys on the road, trying to go as deep as possible and on as much information. Especially with the young bands, you want to make sure that if you're giving somebody that shot, that they want the shot and they're hungry for it.

**Makes sense. Is there anyone who you have always wanted to play Cali Roots? You and I have talked about Burning Spear.**

Yeah, I've sent **Spear** several offers but they don't entertain it.

# Best of **BIG FEET RECORDS** 2021

## STEPPIN' TO THE BEAT



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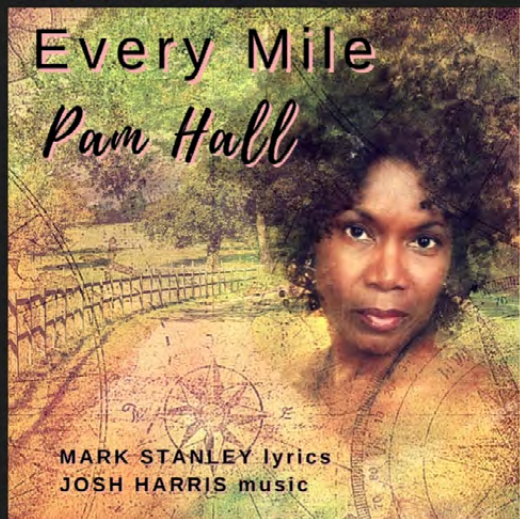
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**Lenn Hammond**  
**Prince Alla**

**Silvertones**  
**Junior Kelly**

**Is there anyone else who you really would love to have again who maybe hasn't played in a really long time or who's never played Cali Roots?**

I think, kind of outside the Reggae space, like **Manu Chao** has always been an artist that I've wanted to get. And he is one of the guys that doesn't really play that much. **Fat Freddy's Drop**... we've done shows with them outside of **Cali Roots**, we'd love to have them on. **Seeed** from Germany has been one I've always wanted. **Buju** has always been on the list but you know, obviously there's probably slim to no chance of him playing the US in the foreseeable future. **Toots** is another one that I regret not booking and that's probably one of my bigger regrets. And, you know, another unfortunate one was **Lucky Dube**, he's another one that I wish I booked before he was killed.

**You wrote a serious, yet sarcastic social media post a few years ago asking people to**

**limit guest list requests. What was that, and what motivated you to do that? it was very interesting.**

There's this entitlement that some people have, that they should be getting on the guest list even though they're not necessarily doing anything for the event, they're not doing anything for the music. I have no problem working with people and giving guest list to the people that are actually contributing to the success of our events, the success of some of these artists, to the music as a whole, but it gets tiresome when there's just like all these people that want to guest. If you think about it, if you give 100 guests, and that's \$200 / \$250 a ticket, it adds up you know. Then they're back there, especially the artists guests, they're backstage, you know, making a ruckus and not necessarily being part of the ecosystem.

And right now as we go into 2022, we're going to limit it even more. There are a lot of people that I haven't talked to in a year... it's







easy for people to hit me up for guest list but then you know you've never even checked in on us or on our business last year and while we kind of struggled through keeping everything relevant, you know? So yeah, the guest list definitely and billing are my two biggest headaches. It just adds up and all of a sudden you have like 2,000 people on the guest list. They're consuming the resources and all that stuff.

**What was the response by some people from that post? Were there some interesting or unexpected responses?**

I mean everybody knew. People know it. Some people probably knew it was directed at them. You know, it's like it's like going to a restaurant, and like you know the guy, and you're asking for comp meal every time you go in. It's like, dude, you know this ticket is not free, there's something attached to this, there's money attached to this and it costs something to make this ticket happen. So whether that's the lost revenue from it, whether that's the wristband itself, or the staff that's handling it.

**There was a lot of debate last year when an American festival was perceived as insulting many of the old school Jamaican Roots artists. From Alborosie's new song Bun A Fyah: "Promoters Cali Europe, Make me share some real facts. You eat from Reggae music but you never give back. Fellow local artists get the headliner spot. Why do Jamaican artists turned to opening acts. Roots Reggae artists turned to opening acts." Albo has played many Cali Roots and will be in 2022 so he must be a supporter of Cali Roots but has this harmed the reputation of the Cali movement? What do you think about this whole drama and tug of war between 'real' Reggae and Cali Roots Rock or whatever you want to call it?**

That is a good question. I think the festival that did it, they were completely out of line for doing that. The way they did it wasn't thought out properly, you know. I've been a big proponent of, how do I integrate more Jamaican Reggae into **Cali Roots**. You know, it's unfortunate that sometimes, it's the music business, right? And you know the business side of it forces me to book bands and sell tickets. The billing portion, it's hard. If a band, **Alborosie** as an example, if he can sell 500

tickets at the **Catalyst**, and X, Y and Z band that that go ahead of him can sell 1,000 tickets at the **Catalyst**, you know, then... my billing is not based off of legend status, or things like that. I try to base mine off of... you know, it's like, is this band selling a lot of tickets now? Which makes them currently a bigger band.

**Alborosie** might be bigger in Europe and other Caribbean markets, but you know, this band can sell more tickets in California, which is where our festival is based. So it's definitely a little complicated but, I also think we've done a really good job of integrating more Jamaican acts, more Caribbean acts into our festival, in paying tribute to those acts, and trying to influence listeners of **Rebellion** that "*Hey, there are all these other bands out there, you know?*" I do it on my radio show on **Sirius** and I try to, you know... **Center Stage** was designed for that as well, how do we pay tribute to the legends and educate people? Because a lot of it comes down to educating people. It's unfortunate but a lot of Roots Reggae festivals in the country are gone, you know, like in California, **Reggae On The River** and **Sierra Nevada [World Music Festival]** are both gone. So we have to educate the younger fan base on who these Roots Reggae artists are.

### **I mean, do you consider Rebellion and Stick Figure Reggae music?**

Yeah absolutely. I mean I think they're American Reggae, you know. It's the American Reggae scene, it's definitely Reggae. **Stick Figure** especially, he's doing a lot more of that dubby stuff, than a **Rebellion** but yeah, I think both are considered Reggae at the core. They might have the influences of other music in it, you know, even bands like **Dirty Heads**, there's Reggae influence in it but it's not necessarily that one drop Reggae by any means.

### **Speaking of Sierra Nevada festival. I hear it's for sale. Have you been approached?**

Yeah, I've known **Gretchen** for years and

right after **Warren** got sick and he was not able to operate the festival, they approached me about booking it and running it, and so for a minute there I was trying to help them salvage it and kind of put together the best possible line-up possible. Things didn't work out, and time ran out and so we got booking really late on it. So instead of trying to force something and potentially set it up for loss, we decided not to do it and then Covid hit and unfortunately **Warren** passed away. I'm always there to help **Gretchen**, I've always looked up to **Warren**.

### **Do you have an interest of taking that [SN-WMF] over?**

I would be a part of a partnership that would do it, but timewise, I just don't have the capacity to do it.

### **Speaking of that, you have Cali Roots - The Baja Sessions coming up. Closer To The Sun sold out instantaneously for 2021. Are you going to do anything for people who have attended Cali Roots, or is it going to be just completely like login and good luck?**

We'll do presale to the **Cali Roots** database first. That'll probably be a day earlier. And, I mean, the goal is to sell it on the on sale. We're trying to develop these destination things. I'm working on something for the winter as well, something like **Whistler** or somewhere along those lines. It's about keeping these things to about 3,000. **Closer To The Sun** is bigger, like 8,000, but I want to stay in that 3,000 to 4,000 capacity destination vessels, have a higher ticket price, get a really exclusive thing and really sell that experience.

Right now, I just want to get this **Baja 1** under our belt, figure it out. It's November 3-7 in Cabo. It's going to be an experiment to see how it goes. I mean, **Closer** blows it out but it's also been five or six, seven years wherever they're into it, you know, but I also feel our brand is strong enough and there's this pent-up demand that I think will play to our advantage.



**Well, I've been hoping you would do something like this for years, so I'm very excited and I will be the first one to buy a ticket and not ask you for a comp.**

Gotcha. I love that.

**I noticed that you have a cannabis link on the Cali Roots Presents site with a "Coming Soon" message, is there anything coming cannabis related?**

We did have a cannabis product that Jallibird did and I'm currently looking for a provider that that can provide us a white label cannabis, something we can call our own. We're in the works on it. I really want to find something that can be, like a cookie or something that can go into multiple states, you know, because I really think that's the key to it, really being able to go into every state. That has growers in every state because obviously you can't bring it across state lines and so you have to have different growers in every state. And having that distribution, having a California one, an Arizona one, a Colorado one, an Oregon, Washington... kind of our money zones. We're working on it.

**You have said you have built your festival on brand on the core values of family. What does that mean to you?**

We are a family-run business. You know, we treat our fans and our staff like our family. We treat them like family, they treat each other

like family. I think it just means that we're all in this together and you're in a safe place with us, you know? So having love and trust in the process. I think it's important to have that kind of core to it where everybody believes in what we're doing here. So, the fans believe in the festival, we believe in the fans and it kind of makes for a whole unity thing.

**I've been to many Cali Roots and I've never seen a fight,**

Yeah, we've had like one in the last seven years.

**You look at other music festivals and they happen all the time.**

Yeah, and you know, people drink like fish at **Cali Roots** too, so it's not like it's because everybody's smoking weed. People drink a lot at **Cali Roots**. So, it's, it's really good vibes. The energy is so strong and I think that's something that we've all missed and we can't wait to get back to it.

**I think it's also that people in general that really are true Reggae fans, they have an acceptance of other people, that many people don't necessarily have.**

Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. That kind of goes back to that family values, like it's acceptance and acceptance of other people what no matter what they're doing or whatever walk of life they're walking in.



# INTERVIEW



# REBELUTION

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

## HOPEFUL TIMES

INTERVIEW BY GARDY STEIN

PHOTOS BY YANNICK REID & SAM MEDINA

Founded by five Santa Barbara University students from Isla Vista, California, **Rebelution** has come to be one of the most important players in the US-American Reggae scene. They have consistently grown over the past 17 years, releasing high-quality music, from their breakthrough-album **Courage To Grow** in 2007 to **Free Rein** in 2018.

Fast forward to 2021, their newest feat **In The Moment** has just seen the light of day, an intimate discourse about time and its tendency to pass way too fast the older we get. Listening through the 15 tracks of the album, a lot of questions popped up that called for answers, so **Reggaeville** arranged for an online interview with **Eric Rachmany**, wordsmith and lead singer of the band, and new father at that. He replied to each query in a calm and comprehensive way, revealing many interesting details about the band's operational mode and the album. Read on to find out what **In The Moment** is all about:

**Greetings Eric! It's so good to connect with you again. How is the general mood in California at the moment? Do you feel any change after the elections?**

It's crazy, it kind of feels like a new era and I'm not sure if it has to do with things politically or with the pandemic slowing down. Everything seems very hopeful, and people are announcing live shows again... you throw this all together with the creation of our new album, the timing is just crazy! It's amazing how all this worked out to where we're releasing an album, and we're looking forward to performing. It's been so long since we got on stage! I think there is some good energy around, you can feel it in the air.



**Definitely! I could feel the excitement building up prior to the album release. On your Instagram account, for instance, there is a lot of active communication with your fans. It seems to be a strong focus of Rebelution to stay in touch, to ask people's opinion, to keep your audience informed... do you take turns in managing the social media channels?**

Yes, we are a very hands-on band. After 17 years of being together, we still oversee almost everything. We've had the same manager since the beginning, and he really knows what our style is, he understands who we are as people... so, we still oversee everything, but he does a great job helping us to run our social media.

**That's great. And because I really like this connection you keep up with your audience, I've picked some of the questions written by your fans under a post you did a few weeks back. The first one is, how does it feel to be a father?**

(laughs) It feels great! That's been the biggest life change for me in the last year and a half and I... it's just, you can't explain the amount of love you can have for someone in this world! It's the best thing that ever happened to me, it's amazing.

**Dianadaely05 wants to know what's the best advice given while going through a struggle?**

I think it's a couple of things. One, patience is very important. It's not like you could just snap your fingers and get out of whatever struggle you're going through. The other thing is, listening to music. This is a huge part of my life in getting out of personal struggle. Whether it's live music or recorded music, actually any art form is a great way to jump-start you in the right direction. That's one thing I really see **Rebelution** having a big role in, we get comments all the time saying "*Hey, your music got me through this tough time!*" and that's the best compliment we can get. I know music has done that for me, I know music has gotten me through some dark times. Everybody suffers at some point in their lives, and I think the arts have a very important role in getting people out of those dark situations.

**True, thanks. Another question by averynice\_girl is: Which things inspire you the most when writing new music?**

That's a good question! I think it always changes, I can't say that there is one thing that inspires me the most. One thing I really miss is to travel and hearing different experiences, talking to different people in different cities, in different countries... a lot of the times when I'm speaking in first person through the songs, it's not necessarily just about me. When I say the word "*I*", sometimes I think about myself in somebody else's shoes. I think listening to other people's stories, knowing what they go through, that's very inspiring.

**Ok. And now we're zooming in closer on the album, as floresa\_164 asks what inspired the cover artwork?**

After the album was done, I was looking back at it, trying to find the overall theme, and I noticed that this theme was time. There were some songs that dealt with the notion of "*You have a lot of time in life, be patient!*" and some other songs were like "*You don't have a lot of time, go for it!*" Looking back, everything had to do with time. We were thinking about what is a good artistic illustration that represents time, and the hourglass came up, our bass-player **Marley** had the idea, I think. We loved the way the artwork came out, just because it shows the day turning into night, you have the sun and the moon, you have many different ways of looking at time. That's the overall theme on the album, so the hourglass felt appropriate for the lyrical content.

**Would you call it a concept album when time is so prominent?**

I wouldn't call it a concept album, I think none of our albums are. But if we were to have one, this would be the closest. Time is really the theme for 90% of the album, and I didn't plan it like that! When looking back at it, it is sort of strange that this theme kept coming up. Maybe it was just kind of what I was going through, I think part of it is fatherhood, looking at young life, thinking about my time, it all kind of correlates.



**Were you able to come together as a band and record the tunes in the studio or did you ask producers to come in? How can we imagine the production process?**

Our touring guitarist, **Kyle Ahern**, he did a lot of the production, he kind of brought our ideas to life. A few tracks we had recorded many, many years ago and we brought them in, the old ProTools Sessions, and sort of re-vamped it. One song was recorded ten years ago, another song maybe 20 years ago... Again, this concept of time just blows my mind!

It was a challenge, because usually we'd go to the studio and track everything live, we are kind of old school, believe it or not. But we weren't able to do that because of the pandemic, so what we did is to record from home individually and send it to **Kyle**, and he was able to add a production we really liked. Four or five tracks were sketched by the other band members, then they sent it to me and I would track it, pass it on to **Kyle**, so we all acted as producers of the tracks along with him. There are also a couple of instrumentals

sent to us by different producers, but for the most part it was really recorded from home, sent electronically, which we had never done before, so that was new territory for us. It was challenging, but also very much fun. We are a live band, that's how we got started, so we wanted to come up with something that we could still perform live, we didn't want songs that had a ton of samples or something we couldn't recreate live. Now it feels like, even though the album was produced electronically, it still has that live band feel and we know that we'll be able to perform it on stage!

**Which of the songs are 10 and 20 years old?**

The oldest is ***Simply Captivating***, it's actually on a Hard Rock flavor. I remember when I was a young guitar player, I bought this delay pedal and I created that riff. Over the last 20 years, I struggled to write to that song, and I ended up writing the lyrics about struggling to write a song (laughs). We were looking for songs to add to the album, and our drummer **Wes**, he comes from a Rock background, he said "*We gotta put that song on!*" And he brought it back to life.

Then there was another track, *What Life Is*, which is more of a funky breakbeat song with a horn section. We recorded that about ten years ago, I found it on my hard drive when I was looking through the old stuff, and it decided to bring it back.

**Who is the “you” in “You make me feel so good about what life is”?**

(laughs) Actually, those lyrics were written by a good friend of ours, I just wrote a little on that. It’s a love song, and it’s about being surrounded by people that make you feel good about what life is, which is who your friends should be! Your friends or your lover or your family... life is short and it’s important to be around people that make you feel good constantly!

**Speaking of, there are quite a few love songs on it, I think *Initials* is one and *You And I* as well. As for *That Zone*, I’m not sure. Is it a love song?**

It is more about being put in a friend zone, someone that doesn’t want to take it to the next level, so it’s that vibe.... Again, going with that notion of time, it says “*Hey, life is short, if there is a connection let’s build on it!*” I would say that’s a frustration kind of love song (laughs). For the other songs, I was living on the island of Guam, that’s close to South Asia in the Pacific, so being on this island, you hear a lot of Lovers Rock, a lot of Roots and Island Sounds, so I think I was very inspired by these island vibes when I wrote *Initials* and *You And I*.

**On *That Zone*, a band called Durand Jones is featured. Can you introduce them to us?**

They’ve been around for about five years maybe, but they are still growing, they are really coming up right now. They are more of an RnB-Soul-Funk group. We toured with them a couple of years ago, they are really phenomenal, they have a nice throwback sound. I kind of felt like that song, *That Zone*,



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had a nice RnB feel along with the Lovers Rock, so we felt like **Durand Jones** would be a nice mix-up to throw on that song, and we really like the way that one came out. He has such a nice RnB voice, when he starts singing it just captures your attention immediately, so we're excited.

**There are some other exciting features on the album as well, all from Jamaica. Was it important for you to include Jamaican artists on the album?**

Yes, absolutely! You know, we never knew **Rebelution** was going to get that big here in the US and other places around the world, and because our name is associated with Reggae music, it's important for us to showcase Reggae music from Jamaica, the place that really created Reggae music, the place that's so influential for us. I don't want the Jamaican culture, the Rasta culture, that culture to be lost, so if **Rebelution** is going to be associated with Reggae music, I just want to make sure that people know what Reggae music is in Jamaica. It's important for us to collaborate with Jamaican artists, both legendary Roots artists that have influenced us and some of the modern stuff, so we considered **Kabaka Pyramid** and **Busy Signal** and **Keznamdi**, these kinds of artists. It's also showcasing talent that we think is amazing, and it's an honour when those guys want to collaborate with us!

**How did you link up with them?**

Well, I met **Keznamdi** before, in person and over the phone, he's a really nice guy and the track *Places Unknown* came out great. **Kabaka**, you know, I'm a big fan of him, I think he's an amazing lyricist, and our manager contacted him and he said yes.

**Busy Signal** now, we had our manager reach out, and I was kind of surprised he was down to be on the track, because **Busy** is a pretty prominent artist and I'm sure he's very busy (laughs) and it ended up working out! I think the name **Rebelution** is known to some of these artists, which blows my mind, because



even though these guys are newer artists, we still look up to them, even as modern artists. It's great, I'm so excited that they jumped on the album!

**The Kabaka feature is called 2020 Vision. Who brought that in?**

The beat was sent to us by a guy named **Calvin Valentine**, more of a Hip Hop producer, but he tried some Reggae beats, too. I love the riddim, it's actually an old **Pablo Moses** song called *Let's Face It* and he sampled it. Listening to that and thinking what a crazy year 2020 has been, and then about 2020 visions, I started thinking about being prepared for any negativity that comes your way, turning it back around and killing them with kindness! That's what we are saying there. Unfortunately, there are haters out there, but instead of letting that hatred get to you, it's about taking it in and putting it back out in a positive manner, that's the name **Rebelution** for us. People might think of Rebel, of violence or aggression maybe, but for us it's speaking through the music non-violently. I think the song *2020 Vision* has to do with that, it's saying that we're prepared for any negativity coming our way, it's not going to get to us. When we sent the song to **Kabaka**, he said "Yes, I've been feeling it lately in my life too!", so he was able to write to it pretty quickly. We actually did a short music video, a visualiser, that will come out in the next weeks.



**Adapt, Survive is a very strong track as well. Was that also written in the mindset of the Corona situation, that we have to find a way to get through? What's the basic message in this one?**

It really is a song about the war on drugs, the war on cannabis particularly. We've been involved in this organisation called the **Last Prisoner Project**, they are a non-profit organisation that tries to get non-violent cannabis offenders out of prison. A lot of people are still locked away here in the US for just possessing marijuana, even in States that are recreationally legal! So, you have people in prison in Colorado, in California and so on, and the **Last Prisoner Project** is dedicated to get these people out. I think just being involved in that organisation in

the last several years and doing fundraisers here and there for them, is a topic that we want to discuss and keep telling people to get involved somehow. For us, we actually have our own cannabis products, we have things that we sell, so it didn't feel right making money off these products, knowing that there are people in prison still for possessing cannabis or selling it. I mean, we really feel like they should be out, so we feel that this is a good message getting out to our fans.

**Another message that rings in Future Depends is the importance of education. Can you say something on that?**

It is, it's a lot. Our keyboard player **Rory** came up with the music to that song, and I



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asked him “*What do you want to write this song about?*” And he said “*Well, I’ve been doing a lot of cultivation in my backyard, gardening, green house and so on*”. Simultaneously, I was doing the same thing at my house, and also we were having a baby, so I was thinking about the parallels between planting and harvesting in your garden and raising a new-born, seeing a child grow up. You have to be patient, you have to protect and nourish them, so it really felt like hitting home when **Rory** told me that. It was a really fun song to write!

**In your opinion, how would the education system in the US have to improve to make future generations grow better?**

One, there is not enough funding for education. We have funding for a lot of other things... I look at the taxes and I see the tiny little fraction that goes to education, that’s really frustrating because education

is everything for the youth. Secondly, I think it’s really important that we have more specialised education. Like me, I did not thrive in the education system, it was very strict, you learn about the same things that people have been learning for decades, and a lot of it is really misinformation. For me, I wish that there was more emphasis on the arts. The arts, music and dance are always the first programmes to be cut in schools, and that’s such a shame because the arts are such a vast section of specialised education! I feel like if there was more of that, kids would really thrive. A lot of people can’t relate to English classes and science and maths, so I think it’s really important on a case-by-case basis to see where the kid thrives. Everybody has a knack, a talent, so it’s a shame that we are still under this strict regimen of the education system that hasn’t been changing for many, many years.



**In the song you also say we should be grateful. What are you grateful for?**

I'm grateful to be alive, every single day. We named this album **In The Moment** because no matter what way you look at time, whether you have enough or too little, you should just be present in the moment, just be thankful that you are alive every single moment. Life is beautiful, and it's just another reminder to be present and thankful.

**You take another spin on time in Old School Feeling. It sounds a bit as if you take a trip back into the old days. What do you want to evoke with this song?**

The instrumental was created by Kyle, and I immediately thought of the **Roots Radics**, of **Gregory Isaacs**, of some of my favourite Lovers Rock songs, and it just felt appropriate to write about that. With these style of songs, come on, they're just timeless and they make you feel so good, I'll never get sick of a DJ playing that kind of music! That's what I wanted to write about, so the instrumental drove the lyrics for that one.

**To Be Younger is very funky in the original version, but then in the end you pick that one up again in an acoustic style, which gives it an almost melancholy kind of feeling. Is that something you struggle with, growing older, missing the youthful days?**

Yes, you hit it right on the head. You know, the full band version is upbeat, a little more danceable, and the acoustic version is more melancholy, maybe a little bit more truthful to the mood of the lyrics.

When I was writing that song, I was thinking about how fast time has gone by, and there might have been some times when I wasn't living in the moment, and in that regard it is a melancholy song. I think the acoustic version really demonstrates the mood of the lyrics, of the song. I like both versions a lot, but it felt like we needed to put that acoustic version on there as well, just to feel it.



**While this one ends the album, Satisfied starts it. What is special about that one, why was it chosen to be the opener?**

It was the last song that was created for the album, our bassie came up with the bassline. He sent it to me in MP3 and he named the file **Bigfoot Riddim**. You know who Bigfoot is?

**Yes, this creature like a Yeti?**

Marley came up with thick basslines, it was a funny title and I was thinking about that. Well, I wasn't going to write about Bigfoot, but I thought about a footprint and how **Rebelution** leaves a big footprint all over the world. When I think about being on stage and playing for the people, even in front of a hundred fans, it feels like thousands of fans, and to me that's having a big footprint, having a big voice no matter how big or small the size of the crowd is.

You know, no matter how small you are, you can have a big voice, and that's what **Rebelution** feels like, the whole **Rebelution** family feels like. We have a big footprint. It felt like a great song to start the album off with "*We're back, here's the scene, it's everybody, not just us!*" We like the way that one came out.



**So, the album is there now and you even announced a tour in late summer. How does that make you feel? How do you prepare for it after this long lockdown?**

It feels great! I really miss performing, being on stage, that's the time I get to really express myself through music, so I can't wait to get back on stage. We are all really, really excited, the ticket sales are just amazing, they are going to be packed shows.

**Will there be any admission limits in the venues?**

Right now, it's completely open. I think the venues will be fully operational by the time we get there, they'll be at full capacity.

**Great, I'm a bit jealous! In Germany, most festivals have been postponed again until next year. I'm through with my questions actually, do you want to add anything? Do you feel we left something out?**

No, thank you for covering it all. You always do your homework before these interviews, I appreciate you asking good questions! I can tell that you're really into your work, I appreciate that, thank you so much for covering us!

**Thank you for releasing beautiful music, as you said it's the right time for an album of this magnitude. It will make people happy, give them hope, push them through. Have a great tour! Right on!**



## REBELUTION - IN THE MOMENT

87 Music / Easy Star Records - June 18, 2021

When was the last time you really lived in the here and now? As **Abraham Maslow** once said, “*The ability to be in the present moment is a major component of mental wellness*”, so let’s all take a deep breath. Our health coaches **Rebelution**, who have just released their 7th studio album **In The Moment**, will take good care of us!



Crafted during the long months of lockdown, touring guitarist **Kyle Ahern** was literally instrumental in the oeuvre’s production. Since the band could not jam and record in the studio as usual, **Kyle** collected their ideas and arrangements, fleshing out the sketches with layers recorded by the individual band members **Eric, Wes, Marley** and **Rory**. The final product includes 14 novel tracks and one acoustic version, and although **In The Moment** is not really a concept album, time is a central focus of the release, as the cover illustrates.

Perfect entry, **Satisfied** immerses us in the band’s signature Alternative-Rock-Reggae sound and urges us to focus on ourselves: “*Are you sure, are you good, are you satisfied?*”. Discussing choices such as quality or quantity, mind over matter or fairness & equality, the track invites both serious reflections and casual sing-alongs with the catchy hook. Laalalalaa...

The same difficult balance between contemplation and sonic pleasure is achieved by **Adapt, Survive**, a discussion of legalization politics, and **Future Depends**. The latter is a relaxed construct built on an airy flute melody and the conviction that our future depends on how carefully we tend to the seeds planted, the children born today. “*Plant a seed for the future depends!*”

Diving further into the wealth of the skanking sweetness of Reggae music, both **Initials** and **You And I** will fill your heart with love. **Eric**’s voice is at its most beautiful here, full of warmth and emotion, a stark contrast to the overload of auto-tune in **Old School Feeling**. The track itself is a nostalgic feel-good tune that plays with deep bass-lines, high piano-notes, dubby echoes and reverb -

the ultimate soundtrack for a summer party.

Speaking of... we haven’t looked at the guests yet. While **Durand Jones**, a US Soul-band heard on **That Zone**, was new to me, all other artists are old acquaintances, such as **Keznamdi**, who features in **Places Unknown**, joining **Eric** in a reflection about how fast life passes.

A big surprise is **Busy Signal**, who appears in **All Or Nothing**, both vocally and in the video which just dropped. Last but by no means least is **Kabaka Pyramid** on **2020 Vision**. Next to his accurate lyrical delivery and **Eric**’s melodic spin on the “*rise above the haters*” theme, the song is made special by its high-energy riddim. Produced by **Calvin Valentine**, it re-creates the vigor of **Let’s Face It** by **Pablo Moses**, who can even be heard in the background.

Off the beaten Reggae path we have the powerful **Heavy As Lead, What Life Is** and **To Be Younger**, a realisation of how fast time is passing. The bittersweet melancholy of the subject is intensified in the acoustic version that closes the album.

With **In The Moment**, **Rebelution** have created a next-level expression of who they are, what preoccupies them and where they are headed. Nice one!

by Gardy Stein

**INTERVIEW**



**UWE BANTON**

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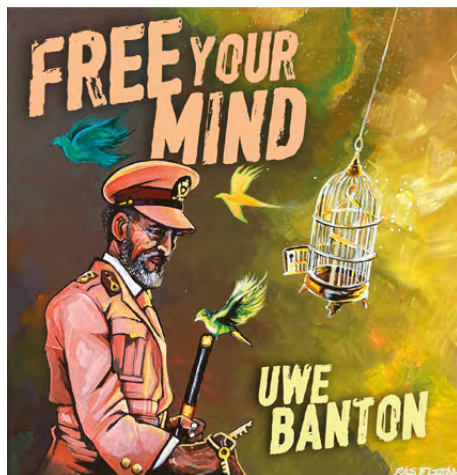
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# RETURN OF THE KING

INTERVIEW BY STEVE TOPPLE

It's been a long nine years since **Uwe Banton**'s last album, **Mental War**. So, thankfully he's back with a brand-new project. **Free Your Mind** sees the German legend deliver a sweeping and expansive project across 18 tracks including three Dubs. The album also delivers a rich narrative about the world around us and the state of it and society. But will **Banton**'s new offering truly 'free our minds'? **Reggaeville** caught up with him for a chat to find out more.



## How does it feel to be back with a new album?

It feels so great. I'm really so thankful. Producing an album is always a long process; a long path; a long way; much work and much dedication from your heart – you put your heart and soul into it. Sometimes, along the way of trying to accomplish a project like that you come across so many obstacles that the goal you want to reach seems so far away, or it's been put further away from you. So, to be actually at the point where I can say “*Yes, everything is done now from my side*”, all that needs to be done is for it to be released onto the online platforms and for the CD to actually be able to hold in my hand? It feels great, I'm really thankful and humbled. Thankful to God that he's made it possible again and given his blessing. I'm thankful.

## When did you actually start the process of forming **Free Your Mind**?

Some of these songs I started work on as far back as 2016. When I started working on them, it's not like I had this album **Free Your Mind**. I was just starting to work on new material. You know, I always work on ideas. Let's put it differently – after the release of **Mental**

**War**, there's a lot of work involved in playing shows, and touring, playing the album and promoting it. And then there was a time I did a few single releases for other producers. But in the meantime, I always work on any ideas I have, I try to catch them and record like a draft and then get back to it at a later point. But for these songs, this album, I can say there are songs like *Do Good, My Smile* and also *Ark of the Covenant* – those are the songs I started work on in 2016 and then step by step they took on more shape and form. The song **Free Your Mind** actually is a song I only really started to work on last year. Later on, when everything was complete, I decided that was a good album title. The decision to name the album, that was a decision that came at a later point. So, it was a process that took a few years. But it's not like I'm every day in the studio working on it. I have to do a lot of other stuff, also, to keep the ball rolling and sustain myself. So, sometimes I work on it more and sometimes I have phases where I'm not working on it so much. But overall, it's not to lose focus and to keep your eyes on the prize and trying to work towards the accomplishment.

**The world has changed a lot between 2016 and 2020 – from the pandemic to the murder of George Floyd. Composing an album across that length of time, did your personal feelings about the world change during the process and did the narrative of the album evolve as well?**

My general idea about the world didn't. But rather, since last year and the worldwide pandemic state, it's more the realisation that, well, this is the point we've reached now. Because honestly, a lot of things we've seen unfolding have been anticipated for a long time. If you're a religious or spiritual person, then you are aware of a lot of the things that are happening could be interpreted as some of the signs that are written about in the Bible. So, what is taking place should not come as a surprise. It's only that the time that it's actually happening, now, it takes a moment to digest it and to realise that this is actually what is happening now. It's nothing new, it's just another level of what was going on before – which has to

do with the development of humanity, of technology, which means things can happen on a global scale that were not possible to be done before.

**You talk of things being on a global scale: that's one of the standouts of the album, that parts of the album were recorded across five countries with over 30 musicians. How did that work, and is this interconnection the only positive of globalisation?**

Well, some of the album was recorded in different countries. Take the song *Hurry Up and Come*, the Lover's Rock duet. **Squidly Cole**, who played drums on it, is a very good friend of mine. I contacted him asking if he could record some drums on it. He said yes, and shortly after he happened to have a recording session at **Tuff Gong**, and this is where he recorded the drums. Some of the backing vocals were recorded in South Africa, some of them in Costa Rica – therefore it is correct to say it has been recorded in different countries.



On your other question, I think there are more positive aspects of globalisation. I think that we probably tend to take what is positive for granted, and what is negative stands out, and doesn't feel right. I think a balance is necessary, but I don't think we should accept the things that don't feel or seem right about it. In this aspect, because of technology, I can say that it has provided a lot of stuff that makes it easy to record an album, that makes it more affordable to do some part of the recordings or productions. When I started with my first band back in the 1990s, when we decided to go into the studio and record some of our songs it was always a great task financially – we had to save up thousands of Deutsche Marks, and then go into the studio – and as a young, inexperienced musician, this is when I learned that studio time is money! You know, you got to be ready when you go into the studio! You can't think you can go in there and try out stuff. Because every hour costs a good amount of money. So, you had to be ready and prepared to go into the studio. That means when you sing those notes and record your tracks it's not going to be like 20 takes and one of them is the good one. What you have nowadays, you can have an affordable mic at home which can produce good quality; you can have a good interface; you can record all your vocals at home, in your own time, when there's peace and quiet and when everybody else is sleeping – which is a great advantage for low budget productions but which doesn't mean low quality. It can result in better quality because you can really take your time and be relaxed about what you're doing – there's not time pressure or money pressure behind it. You can send files from Jamaica to Germany, from the UK to Russia – those are some of the good aspects. Communication through the internet is good also – it's a positive aspect that people can have access to my music from any point on the globe.

But the negative point is then that the companies that distribute our music digitally dictate the price and the value of our work. So, we

as artists have very little to no power to determine the value of our work. Which makes it very difficult to be working as an artist. Since the digitalisation, the price is dictated to us. If I produce a CD, I can still say “*Well, this is my price*”. But digitally, we have no say in how much our music is sold for and no say in how much people pay when they stream our music. I don't think this is fair. In the future, it's good for real music and real art for artists to find a way to grab hold of at least a little part of the handle to determine the value of our music. There are definitely many other aspects of globalisation that aren't positive – digitalisation has been heavily promoted by companies and political leaders. But they don't really like to talk about how much exploitation is connected to this: how the minerals for these technical devices are being mined by children in the Congo; supporting armed rebel groups and child soldiers – those things are really some things that are big injustices. And if we want to live in a sustainable and a peaceful world, humanity needs to seek and find ways to create a fairer and more just world for all of us – not just those who are already in a fortunate position to continue to hold onto that status quo, and those of us who are unfortunate are just unfortunate. This is not good for humanity. It's a curse. And we need to find ways that we can achieve more blessings.

**Colonialism never really ended, did it?  
We now just have corporate colonialism.**

Yes, definitely. We find that when in former times it was nations that were exploiting other nations, we find now it's corporations. Right now, we find it's even just people who have money. Billionaires are determining the direction humanity is going. There are many examples – like **Elon Musk**. Why is it possible that one man alone can have so much power that he can send countless satellites into space without us, without humanity, being asked. He's making his deals with political leaders and nobody really has any say about it. Do we want this really? OK, maybe it has some technological advantages, but is this

really the right way for us to go, as humanity? Does technology mean that we have to do everything that is humanly possible – and is that the good way? I think not. We have to ask ourselves how we live as humanity as a whole. Not just for ourselves, but for others. We are one – there is only one humanity, and this is where we're amoral – this may sound a bit abstract. But we need to think as human beings, and see each other as human beings – and that way we can achieve more and be more sustainable.

**And in the time you were speaking about Elon Musk, dozens of children will have died of starvation. How we can resolve that is one of the major issues with it: we use technology for these purposes while others don't have access to life's essentials.**

Yes, exactly. Does it make humanity as a whole better? Does it make humanity happier? What is the happiness of the few who can

afford this in contrast to the suffering of millions? Is it worth it? No, I don't think so. I think it will create more problems. There are still a lot of issues we need to overcome. And we need to aim, and work towards, overcoming these problems.

**We could talk about moral and philosophical issues all day – but we're supposed to be talking about your album!**

Well, it's part of it. Because that is the essence of the message.

**It is, and the album itself covers a huge number of issues. But it doesn't feel preachy. It comes across as unpatronising, more like you're encouraging people to "free their minds". Is it important to you how the message is relayed?**

Yes, absolutely. This comes from life experience. How much do you achieve when you want to push your opinion onto someone

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else who probably has a different opinion? It's more about speaking to each other and expressing your own opinion without trying to put the other person down. This is not the approach. Because most of the time you achieve the opposite. And I think it's important to have that balance. My personal views, my spirituality, is something I can only share with people. It's something I was converted to. No one preached to me. It's something I heard about, and with my own will I started to research it, to learn more about it. And I think this is what I see more my role being: inspiring people with my thoughts, because my songs are an inspiration. It's like the ideas of my songs, sometimes I happen to hear them. It's like the ideas I get are sometimes sounds, melody lines that come into my brain. It was not something that was injected into me! It was an inspiration. And when you have that, have these ideas, you need to grab them and repeat them in your head and then try to build around them. This I think is the way to build a good song: to let it have a natural flow.

**You talk of inspiration: there are many tracks on *Free Your Mind* that are inspirational. But there are also many different derivative genres of Reggae covered.**

Well, that is the result of it being produced over such a long stretch of time. It's taken many different inspirations over a few years, and then I could take time, sit back and listen to it. That's one of the big challenges when producing an album. You're so much into the detail sometimes, that you lose the overall view. So, when it takes such a long time, you can listen to your tracks over and over. Ask my children! They have known some of the songs since 2016! So, it's always interesting. When I play them back when they're a draft, I listen to them in the car and the children sing along with certain parts – it gives you an idea! Like *“Well the children love it so this is a good hook line!”*

**So, it wasn't a plan to cover so many genres? Or was it?**

Well, it was both. I always try to put a lot of colours into my albums. Because I grew up



listening to a lot of styles of music: Lovers Rock, Dancehall, Roots. The first Reggae music I came across was **Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Inner Circle**. Then, there was already a broad spectrum of styles. During those days, their music had a lot of differences. It was Roots Reggae but they had Rock in it, they had some Disco vibes in it. During the 80s, I listened to a lot of Dancehall – **Yellowman, Shabba Ranks** – until I realised to myself that music and message-wise, where do I want to go personally? And it had to be Roots. Because spiritually it meant so much to me. I grew up with a lot of Lovers Rock, listened a lot to **David Rodigan**’s programme over here on **Forces Radio**. **Rodigan** always gave us a very broad spectrum on what were the latest releases in the UK. There, it had a very strong Lovers Rock industry with great productions. Not everyone likes Lovers Rock; people who are into Roots or got into Reggae after the era. But Lovers Rock played a big role in the Reggae scene in the UK. When people were going out partying, or going to a club, Lovers Rock had to be played – otherwise the women wouldn’t come! The men, they wanted someone to dance with!

### **Lovers Rock almost acted as a transition for people to get into Roots?**

Right. And it has beautiful melodies, so everything plays a role. I grew up with all of that. So, I cannot deny that, or try to erase it from my own biography. I get all kinds of different inspirations. For example, ***Hurry Up And Come*** was an idea I had for quite some time. I didn’t at first have in mind to write it as a duet. But when I happened to pass through South Africa in 2019, I was invited to do a show there – and I had three wonderful backing singers. I shared this song with one of the singers, **Afrika Cele**, and said I was looking for a duet partner. **Afrika** when she heard the song she said *“I absolutely love it! Let me be your duet partner!”* She’s a great singer. **Afrika** has been active in the South African music scene for quite some time, and I love her vibes, too – so, the song speaks for itself.

### **There’s also a wonderful flute solo from Eliane Hobbing on *Birds Have To Fly*, too.**

She’s a classically trained musician. To me, the track with its chord progressions is almost like a children’s song, you know? Because the message is so simple and it’s not

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The pandemic is also having devastating consequences in Jamaica. The tourists stay away - the main source of income for the country. Even before the pandemic, the situation was difficult: high unemployment, a lack of educational and leisure opportunities, especially for young people, often create a vicious circle of poverty, crime and violence. And at the same time Jamaica is such a tremendous source of creativity, influencing the music culture around the world.

The kids and youth department of the FC St. Pauli - the "Rabauken", the Reggae / Ska band Yellow Umbrella feat. Longfingah and the Organization HELP Jamaica! e.V. together try to bring love to the streets and to Jamaica. The FC St. Pauli Rabauken have collected jersey sets and footballs for young people in Jamaica. A country where football is very important and is played on every street corner, but many of the young players cannot afford jerseys or balls. The organisation HELP Jamaica! e.V. from Berlin promotes under the motto: Education For A Change! educational projects as well as sports, art and culture in Jamaica, has sent the collected donations as sea freight to Kingston and had them distributed to various schools across the country. And the band Yellow Umbrella wrote a tune together with Longfingah.

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heavy at all, it doesn't bring any thoughts into your head. It's a light song and I think we need that type of music.

**It's such a brilliantly constructed album. You also worked with Frank Pollak and Giuseppe Coppola from BuffBaff Records. Do you think the German Reggae scene is as alive as it's always been?**

I think it was more diverse ten years ago. Because we had more people who wanted to try out Reggae as a style. And many have to learn that being a Reggae artist is not an easy life. There's competition going on. But you have to really identify yourself with what the music is about. And maybe after sometime they get the feeling it restricts them too much into a particular style or message, and they want to try something else. Reggae is a very special music. I started listening to it when I was at school. I tried to convince my school mates of this fantastic music. But many of them, if

not most, were saying "Yeah, it's OK – but it all sounds the same, it's so slow". Now things have changed a lot. Because Reggae style has become part of the mainstream sound. But back in those days, when you had Rock music, which was showing how tough you are, and you had Disco and Soul which was more for entertainment and having fun. But Reggae was so different, it had a different beat. So, not everyone found it attractive. Back to your question, there are still some musicians that are very productive. **BuffBaff Records**, for example, and **Frank** – for some years now he's been part of the **Evolution Band**, playing with **Gentleman** – but now they've started **BuffBaff** and are doing a lot of stuff. Especially since last year, since the pandemic it's become very difficult for many artists and musicians. But **BuffBaff** are keeping up a good schedule. So, there are still a lot of other good, excellent musicians that have played on my album.

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**One of the artists coming through is Jon Moon who you worked with on *What Kind of World*. How was that?**

He's an excellent musician, trained – studied music. He's started producing some work, his own album and the **Rasta Riddim**. He's a very cool brethren. He knows what he's doing musically, he has a very good message, does a lot of collaborations with artists from South Africa. And I really hope we're going to hear more from him in the future.

**What stood out was Ganjaman's mastering. It's just perfect: the finished sound feels like it's live. But your name, Uwe, is everywhere – because you did a lot of the mixing, too!**

When I was putting the credits together, I felt like *“Do I have to put my name everywhere?”* This might come across as self-praise, but it's the reality. The way I work with **Ganjaman** is I do the pre-mixes at my own place and then send them to him; he puts them through his own equipment, does some fine-tuning and tweaking and makes

the sound crystal clear. Most importantly is doing the balance on the mastering, because being that it is not an album that was recorded in one way in a studio with all the same settings, it makes it difficult to have an end-product that is balanced. **Ganjaman** is a master of his trade. He is a perfectionist. And he knows what he's doing, I've been working with him for so many years which I'm thankful for. I'm really happy to be working with him. He does a great job.

**Overall, with *Free Your Mind*, is there a message that you want people to take away from it?**

Well, in many ways this message of *“Free Your Mind”* can be taken as what it is. This is what Reggae has done; the Reggae and Rastafari message – this is what it's done over the decades. When I came across Reggae as a young teenager, for the realisation and the feeling I got from it – I remember watching an interview on TV with **Black Uhuru – Michael Rose** and **Ducky Simpson**. There was an English moderator called



**Alan Bangs**, and he told them a quote from **Mick Jagger**, that said that *“In Rock and Roll, what people are not aware of, is that we are actors – and what they’re seeing on the stage is an illusion”*. He asked both of them what their opinions were on this, and one of them replied *“Yes, we are actors but we deal with reality”*. In other words, we’re acting and representing something on stage, but what we are singing about is actually reality. This is what I feel is the purpose that Reggae music has: to open up people’s minds towards reality, whether that be the physical plane of the earth or on a spiritual level. We are singing and speaking and talking about things that are a reality to us. Whether you want to believe in the spiritual part or not, this is our faith. We don’t come to convert people to our faith, but to create awareness; to open up people’s minds and

say *“Look, here’s something; if you’re interested you can learn more about it”*.

This is what I hope this album will do. The music came to me as a gift, as it came to many, and since it has done so much for me and my life, I feel like it’s part of my mission to spread it as well, to share it; to let other people feel what I felt, so they can pick and choose – take it up and make it become part of their own life as well.

**Well, it’s mission accomplished then. Because Free Your Mind does all those things. Uwe, thank you so much for chatting to Reggaeville.**

You are very welcome, give thanks for having me.



## UWE BANTON - FREE YOUR MIND

Rasta Yard Records - June 18, 2021

The return of Germany's **Uwe Banton**, nine years since his last album **Mental War**, is a highly anticipated moment. And with his new project, he certainly doesn't disappoint.

**Free Your Mind**, released via **Banton's Rasta Yard Records**, sees him cover 18 tracks, including three dubs. To say the album is slick would not do it justice. **Banton's** hand is all over it: from song writing, to performing many of the instruments via mixing. The quality of the record is top class. Of note is the mastering from **Ganjaman**: a sympathetic yet rich affair which gives **Free Your Mind** the feel of a live album; no mean feat as many of the recordings were done in different countries.

Musically, it's as detailed as it is long. The overriding feeling is that of Roots. But **Free Your Mind** is interspersed with flashes of other genres and styles. Its opener, **Ark of the Covenant** with **Ras Yohannes**, has flashes of Nyabinghi with its pattering drums; **Speak the Truth** drops in some Steppers towards the end, while **What Kind of World** has a brilliant Dancehall clave rhythm bridge. **Do Good** sees **Banton** embrace Jazz with a brilliantly executed Skat. This thought is expanded upon via **Stop the Talkin's** blue notes across his vocal melody. **My Smile** feels like a slowly swaying, minor key Ska-Roots hybrid, and **Birds Have to Fly** is filled with musical nods to Funky Soul and a gorgeous, fluttering flute solo from **Eliane Hobbing**.

Straighter Roots also feature. The title track is upbeat and bright. **This Train** and **Wir Weigern Uns** are brooding and unnerving, while **I'm Not Afraid** with **Ganjaman** treads a traditional path. **Deep Mess** delivers a folksy guitar opening be-



fore settling into Roots – but the pattering Djembe-style drums are back. **Keep Learning** feels like a Roots-Soul amalgamation with **Banton's** highly melodic vocal line. Meanwhile, **Banton** provides two Lovers Rock tracks: **Hurry Up and Come** with the sublime **Afrika Cele** and **No Special Reason**. And the three Dub versions (**Wir Weigern Uns**, **Deep Mess** and **Ark of the Covenant**)

are expertly executed.

But if the musical content is rich and varied, then **Banton's** lyrical creations are a positive smorgasbord of ideas. For example, **Banton** deals with the search for spirituality and faith under Babylon in **Ark of the Covenant**, before discussing how the system represses those who **Speak the Truth** and delivering a diatribe on the state of society and the planet across **What Kind of World**, with a cry for unity in the face of the former in **Deep Mess**.

**This Train** delivers a call to spiritual arms, while **Birds Have to Fly** reminds us that those of us who are conscious can break from Babylon's shackles and soar. The vulnerable yet resolute messages of **My Smile** and **I Am Not Afraid** are cleverly juxtaposed with contradictory musical backdrops and the title track encapsulates it all perfectly. The album serves as both a series of ideas and a broader narrative on finding your spiritual self amidst the chaos of the world we live in.

**Free Your Mind** is near perfection. **Banton** has crafted a lavish, interesting and evocative project which both moves you and makes you ponder – and is a very welcome return to form for this consummate artist.

by Steve Topple

**INTERVIEW**

**ZAK & SSHH**

RECLAMATION FOR JAMAICA

# U-ROY - THE ORIGINATOR

INTERVIEW BY ANGUS TAYLOR

PHOTOS BY MICK ROCK & LAWRENCE WATSON



In 2020 and 2021, the Reggae world was rocked by the passing of two of its pioneers. They were **Toots Hibbert**, the man who coined the word 'Reggae' in song, and **U-Roy**, the deejay who transformed talking over records from side-line to main attraction. Both men recorded their final albums for **Trojan Jamaica**, a label founded by **Zak Starkey**, son of **Ringo Starr** and drummer in **The Who**, and singer **Sshh Liguz**. Taking the name of famous UK imprint **Trojan**, but based in Jamaica, the label aims to restore foundation Reggae to its former glories.

Thus far, their support has yielded mainstream acclaim. The **Toots** album **Got To Be Tough** posthumously won **Hibbert** the Reggae Grammy. The July release of **U-Roy's** posthumous album **Solid Gold**, recutting classic songs with a bevy of guest singers and players, carries similar expectation and emotion.

Like **Starkey** and **Liguz'** first **Trojan Jamaica** release, Reggae-meets-Blues experiment **Red Gold Green And Blue**, **Solid Gold** is packed with vocal and musical talent. Featured vocalists include **Ziggy Marley**, **David Hinds**, **Richie Spice**, **Tarrus Riley**, **Big Youth**, **Santigold** and **Rygin King**. **Mick Jones** from **The Clash** appears on guitar and electronic sfx.

Using a core band of **Sly** and **Robbie**, **Tony**

**Chin** from **Soul Syndicate**, and **Robbie Lyn**, the recording goes back to the ska days, when all musicians played together in a room. This approach culminates in epic 15-minute jam, **Every Knee Shall Bow**, where **U-Roy** and **Big Youth** do friendly lyrical battle, with an accompanying Dub mix by **Scientist**.

**Angus Taylor** spoke with **Zak** and **Sshh** on video call in the UK, as they eagerly awaited resuming their activities in Jamaica. They talked about their love of Reggae and its birth island, as well as their friendship with **U-Roy**, **Toots**, **Big Youth** and the form's greatest musicians. Their chemistry as a couple was evident. They finish each other's sentences. They collapse into fits of laughter and lean on each other in moments of sadness. Likewise, their passion for the music was fully apparent. Having listened to their heartfelt championing of Reggae, it was impossible not to come away buoyed by their enthusiasm for the project.

It's been such a wild ride of furious recording at their Ocho Rios studio, that the conversation often spills into other, unreleased album projects featuring **Jesse Royal**, **Big Youth**, **Bob Andy** and more. To **Zak** and **Sshh**, **Trojan Jamaica** feels like one big flowing holistic experience (as anyone who has visited Jamaica will attest...)



**So where are you guys now?**

**Zak:** Between High Wycombe and Henley. We've got a studio here where we bring back recordings from Jamaica and get them ready for mix.

**How much time have you been spending in Jamaica?**

**Sshh:** Not enough recently!

**Zak:** It's very frustrating but we always take a pinch of sand home in our suitcase!

**When did you first go?**

**Zak:** In 2012. We went to find **Toots**. Because we love **Toots and the Maytals** so much.

**Sshh:** We kept extending our stay...

**Zak:** ...because we couldn't find him. Then we were in the restaurant and someone brought our dinner over and said "Oh I know **Toots**. Doing a gig tomorrow night, wanna go?" He was doing an acoustic show as a warm-up for his tour. Probably the last tour,

when he got hit by the bottle. So we got to meet **Toots**, all the band of the **Maytals**, all the **Hibbert family**. And ever since, if **Toots** played in London we would go and say "Hello". And when we were in New York with **The Who** or whatever, if **Toots** was in town recording, we kept the relationship going. We were invited to play our version of **Get Up Stand Up** which we recorded with **Santa [Davis]** and **Fully [Fullwood]**...

**On your Issues covers album.**

**Zak:** That's right, yeah. We were invited by **Kingsley [Cooper]** to play at the opening of the **[Peter Tosh]** museum in 2016. And then we stayed on a bit and made a lot of friends. And then we came back to do it again the next year. And then we stayed until...

**Sshh:** We never really left...

**Zak:** Except for going on tour for a month here and there with **The Who**. We didn't leave until the end of 2019 when we went to tour Brazil with **U-Roy**. I think that was January 2020.



**Tell me about your individual journeys in Reggae before you went to Jamaica?**

**Sshh:** I grew up in Australia but my dad's from Birmingham. He was on the dole with **UB40**. So he would always play me **U-Roy** records and **Big Youth**. It was a soundtrack to my childhood. Whenever **UB40** were in town we would go and see them. My earliest memory is of a **UB40** gig. When I was about 3 years old. Backstage trying to run up and do the dancing up the wall and I ran straight into the wall! So it's always kind of been there. It feels familiar and like home really. And when we went to Jamaica in 2012, back then there was no way that we thought we would end up in this position we're in now. We used to cut up and sample...

**Zak:** [**Big Youth's** album] **Screaming Target**. Just bits and bobs for our own private use. When you're dealing with a score it can take so long to get even an answer and then you've got to go through publishers and you've got to go through record labels. So we just did it privately for ourselves. But

when we met **Big Youth**, he did it again for us!

**Sshh:** So it ended up fulfilling our dream really.

**How about you Zak?**

**Zak:** I was listening to what **Sshh** was saying and dads come into a lot, don't they? My mum had the **Bob Marley Rainbow** concert or was it the **Bob Marley Live [at the Lyceum]**? Then my dad went "You've got to check this out" and it was **Burning Spear Man In The Hills**. Brilliant record. So dad kind of steered me into it. Then I got into Punk and obviously reading the music press, **John Lydon** and **The Clash** were steering us all towards Reggae. I got into **The Ruts** and obviously **The Ruts** were a very, very Reggae influenced band. I saw **The Ruts** with **Misty In Roots**. And then **The Slits**. I heard **U-Roy** through hearing **The Slits** doing *Man Next Door*. I thought "Who's that by?" And then I traced back and came across **U-Roy**. And it just sort of grows. As you probably know! (laughs)

**You've already blown my mind by saying your dad was into Burning Spear. Was anyone in The Who into Reggae?**

**Sshh:** Toots supported **The Who**.

**Zak:** In '74 **Peter Townshend** liked the **Funky Kingston** record so much that he invited **Toots and the Maytals** to open for **The Who**. They opened in America and the UK, I believe.

**So at what point did you say "Let's do a Reggae label"? Was that tied up in you meeting Toots?**

**Sshh:** It was really tied up in the **Peter Tosh** concert.

**Zak:** Yeah, because we met so many people who accepted us as musicians. As crazy as they are! We had the idea for the **Red Gold Green And Blue** record. We didn't have a record deal. **Sshh** had her own record deal with **BMG**. So at the **Peter Tosh** concert we were waiting to go on stage and I was sitting next to a guy with a mohawk. A bit older than me. I was really nervous and I needed a piss. So I said "Would you mind holding my guitar while I go and have a piss?" So I gave it to this guy, came back and said "Thanks, I'm **Zak**". And he said "Hi, I'm **Freddie McGregor**". Woah! Because I didn't realise he'd changed his hairstyle.

**Sshh:** He'd turned into a Punk basically!

**Zak:** I put the idea of the Blues record to him and he went "I'll do it" straight away. Then we had a session with **Robbie Shakespeare** at **Anchor** in Kingston on one of our tracks. **Robbie** was playing the bass and we got on really good.

**Sshh:** So by the end of the night he'd sort of ended up producing it?

**Zak:** Yeah, he was producing it, like voluntarily. It was a really great relationship we got going in a day, you know? And **Sly and Robbie** had done a remix for us before.

**Sshh:** **Sly and Robbie** are really one of the backbones. They are very good friends of ours in Jamaica. They feature on a lot of the **Trojan Jamaica** recordings. They're really great mates.

**Zak:** So **Freddie** agreed to do the record but asked us to pick the track for him. And then **Robbie** said "Yeah". Everybody got the concept of the Blues and the Reggae music. **Toots, Michael Rose, Big Youth**, everybody just got into it. We were just trying to take the lyrics and change up the music on the spot with everybody. A great band, **Tony Chin** and **Sly and Robbie**. **Robbie Lyn** didn't come in until **U-Roy's** record. We didn't have any keyboards. Maybe a hint of one or two keyboards.

**Sshh:** Then we went on tour in Australia.

**Zak:** With **SSHH** to support **Primal Scream...**

**Sshh:** And **Liam Gallagher**. And on the days off we were mixing **Red Gold Green And Blue**. When we finished, we spent three months in Australia and I think we went straight back to Jamaica and met **U-Roy**.

**Zak:** The **U-Roy** thing was amazing because a good friend is **Wayne Jobson**.

**Sshh:** Big up **Native Wayne!**

**Zak:** He said he had this idea for **U-Roy**. He's got a credit on the album, because it was his concept. From the day he called us, which was the 5th of May, we met with **U-Roy** and gave him the idea of "We'll recut your greatest hits" - which is really hard to cut them down, to get 10 out of about 40! We started recording on the 26th of May, a really quick process. It was all done and dusted except for the guests, within a week.

**Which year did you do the recording?**

**Zak:** We started in 2017 and then **U-Roy's** album was in 2018. We built the studio in





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Ocho Rios, which is gathering dust and we're trying to get back there. We've just got to have our jabs before we can go.

**How did you come up with the idea of calling it Trojan Jamaica? Obviously Trojan has been various companies and had a long history, some good, some not so good. Was there a sense of trying to reclaim it?**

**Sshh:** You nailed it!

**Zak:** What happened was we got a message from someone saying **Trojan West Indies** trademark is available. So we bought that for \$800. We've got a studio in Jamaica. We've made five records on the trot. With a few short breaks for me to go off and do bits with **The Who**.

**Sshh:** We went in and went "Let's just make the music and then we'll go there".

**Zak:** We funded the first five records ourselves. Then we went to **BMG** with the idea for a label and with the records. We made a distribution deal. And we licensed the name **Trojan**.

**Sshh:** But it's as you say, it's about taking it back to Jamaica. That was our intention, to take it home.

**I interviewed Big Youth in Kingston in 2019, and it was before he'd got his Order of Distinction, so he was feeling a bit undervalued. But he was really excited about working with you guys...**

**Zak:** It's friendship, you know what I mean? Especially **Big Youth**.

**Sshh:** **Big Youth** is such an incredible soul of a man. He has a pure heart.

**Zak:** He is a **Big Youth**. And also a big man.

**Sshh:** He's like an incredible force of talent. He's a force of nature really. Just as a person. But when him and **U-Roy** were doing *Every Knee Shall Bow...*

**Zak:** That sort of vocal clash on the last track...

**Sshh:** Epic.

**Zak:** One take. We were in the control room, all there, everyone dancing and going fucking mad. And they just did it. 15 minutes long.

**Sshh:** Unedited. Incredible.

**Zak:** It was the real shit man. The only thing missing was the sound system.

**We've already touched on this: everyone loves Reggae but as an industry, it's tough for Reggae labels to succeed. There's a joke that goes around that the best way to become a millionaire in Reggae is to start off as a billionaire. Do you feel daunted?**  
(Big laughter)

**Zak:** Fucking hell. That says it all.

**Sshh:** It does but you know what? I am so sick of hearing that Reggae is a niche market. It really grinds my gears. Because it's really not.

**Zak:** It's Pop music.

**Sshh:** You can hear on a daily basis. Whether it's on the TV, not so much now going into a shop or in a taxi but you hear it everywhere, in movies all over the place. And the influence that it's had on modern music is undeniable. It feels like Reggae music is undervalued. And I think that now the **Koffees**, **Protojes** and **Chronixxes** have brought the new wave and brought it back round again. You hear **Toast** on people's playlists all the time and I don't even know if they realise that it's Reggae. It's Pop music.

**Zak:** I always thought "It's Pop music not World Music".

**Sshh:** It really fucking pisses me off! Because they deserve so much better.

**Zak:** Nowadays it's all about the numbers, you know? It's not about the feeling. And we don't get that. You don't hear a great song and check out the fucking views and plays and then decide. You either go with it or you don't go with it. You go on the feeling.

**Sshh:** And what was really special with the **Toots** record last year, that was the first record he put out in a long time but it showed he still had it. He still wrote great pop songs.

**Zak:** With a message.

**Sshh:** With a strong message. And he got the Grammy, which was well deserved.

**Zak:** We just wish that he could get to...

**Sshh:** Hold it you know? He was doing the interviews before he passed so he got to see the love and respect and that it was still alive and well. It's heart-breaking that he couldn't go out and tour because he was really just on stage...

**Zak:** ...all the time. In the studio it was like "Yeah, this guy is larger-than-life, that energy".



**Sshh:** But I think for him to see the **New York Times** and all these mainstream publications like **Vogue** sitting up and engaging and taking notice... I think for Reggae as a whole it seems to be coming into the mainstream media a bit more now.

**Zak:** And **U-Roy** got a lot of that too. It's a shame that he bloody died to get it. But the **Telegraph** and everybody was writing about him and his influence. And that's the reason we made the album, to show everyone he was the originator.

**Sshh:** He invented rap. Without **U-Roy** there might be rap but he was very much a cornerstone of it. **Beyoncé** and **Jay Z** fucking sang him at **Coachella**. So it doesn't get much more mainstream than that, does it? But it is next level heart-breaking that **U-Roy** couldn't be here to see the response his music is having now.

**Zak:** We did tour with **U-Roy** as a 4-piece with **Sshh** singing all the vocals, **U-Roy** toasting, a Brazilian trumpet player, me playing the guitar and the sound system.

**Sshh:** And a Brazilian rapper called **BNegão**.

**Zak:** From a band called **Planet Hemp**.

**Sshh:** It was mega. They went mad for him. We did club gigs for like 1,000 people and then the big kind of carnival type gigs with 150,000...

**Zak:** In São Paulo... they were holding up his albums.

**Sshh:** They were going bonkers for it. **U-Roy** came out on stage to huge cheers. So the fact that we got to take him out and reintroduce on such an epic scale...

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**Zak:** We were really hoping to do it again. But it was not to be.

**Sshh:** But his music will live on.

**And sadly, the engineer Barry O'Hare passed as well, before the album could be released.**

**Sshh:** That was horrible.

**Zak:** That was a week after **Toots**.

**Sshh:** **Barry** is our man. He was one of the first people we met in Jamaica, at the **Peter Tosh** show.

**Zak:** He was doing the front of house sound and we popped behind to ask if he would make us very loud! That was the first time we met him in 2016. **Barry** obviously lives in Ochi. So he was kind of our guy. The only guy we trusted with the keys to the studio.

**Zak, as a drummer, Reggae must be very interesting. I've interviewed most of the great living drummers, Sly, Joe Isaacs, Fil Callender, Horsemouth, Santa, Mikey Boo and so on. And it really comes across to me how much drumming pushed the music forward historically.**

**Zak:** Yeah, absolutely. That's why we got **Sly** to do it, not me! (laughs)

**Sshh:** And **Horsemouth**.

**Zak:** Yeah, **Horsey** is on about a third of it, **Cyril Neville** played a bit of drums but **Sly** is pretty much...

**Sshh:** He's the backbone.

**Zak:** **Sly** was really into the sound and wanted to create something new. That's the way **Sly** thinks "How can we make something unique?" And his style as a drummer is probably the most unique of all time. The first guy to embrace the electronics. When all the other drummers were scared. He could see the future. And he's still doing that.

**Let's talk about the album. The first single is Man Next Door ft. Santigold. As well as being a big tune for Horace Andy, Man Next Door is based on Garnet Mimms A Quiet Place which also spawned Johnny Dollar, which Sly released on his label. Why step up to that song?**

**Zak:** Garnet Mimms did *Cry Baby*, right? Well, we had three playlists. And the third playlist was basically the 11 that were on there.

**Sshh:** Yeah, we went through it and planned out all night long. We'd jam it out and then we go into the studio.

**Zak:** And like the Blues album, it also had a lot to do with what song suits what guest singer. You can't just do the ones you like, you've got to consider who might be singing it. It took a long time for us to get that album finished because the guest singers weren't there at the recording. We did it along the road for the next 6-9 months. Getting all the guests to sing and it would have to be edited together in a way that it complemented each other. You've probably noticed that it's not exactly like the originals.

**Sshh:** There had to be a bit of freshness. Otherwise you're just doing a cover.

**How did you go about choosing the guests?**

**Sshh:** For example with **Rygin**, we just happened to meet.

**Zak:** **Sshh** went to see him and brought him back to the studio that night. In Jamaica, the musical scene is very "*Let's do it now*". Where in England it's like "*Let's do it a week, Tuesday at 4:35 because we got dinner with my mother-in-law at 7:30*". Something stupid like that. It's a bit like LA where it's "*Can you be here in 5-minutes? You've got a riff, let's go*".

**Sshh:** **Jesse Royal** is on the record and we'd already done a bit of work with him on something else. He sings on **Small Axe** and that's his nickname.



**“Yeah, sorry Jesse, we gave Small Axe to someone else!” (laughs)**

**Zak:** Yeah, wouldn’t work would it? And then we made a record with **Jesse** that **Sly and Robbie** produced as well. It’s excellent. It’s a **Sly and Robbie Present Jesse Royal**, much like the **Sly and Robbie Present Michael Rose**.

**Sshh:** And **Big Youth**. We had to do it with **Big Youth**.

**Zak:** We made a full record with **Big Youth** that’s got original songs. **Jesse’s** record is completely original too. But **Tarrus Riley** and **Tom Drunk** were an obvious fit. You need someone with a really beautiful, sweet voice. With a bit of a rasp. And we’re really into **Tarrus’** music.

**Sshh:** **Richie Spice** was another where I went to a gig and he was playing and he was like *“I want to do **Wear You To The Ball**”*. And he sings it so great, such a unique voice.

**Zak:** It’s almost got a doo-wop approach. There is a lot of that influence in Jamaica especially with the older guys. Everyone heard that music, Doo-Wop, Rock ‘n’ Roll.

It’s amazing when you call out a song. We did the second volume of the Blues record which isn’t coming out for another year or so. We would have the band there and at the time it was **Horsey** and **Jackie [Jackson]** and **Tony Chin**. And we go *“Ok, shall we play **Be My Guest** by **Fats Domino**?”* And everyone just went *“Yeah!”* (laughs) **Bob Andy** came and sang it beautifully. Another sadly missed friend.

**The Rygin combination [Stop That Train] is really interesting because it illustrates the level of respect for U-Roy that stretches through the ages. When you get a modern artist like Rygin on the record, it shows that every dancehall artist, however young, looks at U-Roy and says “If it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t be doing this”.**

**Zak:** Absolutely. **Rygin** is something else, isn’t he? He’s like a rockstar really. He’s a huge **Dennis Brown** fan, you know? He’s got a very great song sense. I read a fantastic interview where he was talking about **Daddy U-Roy**.

**Sshh:** The multi-generational influence of **U-Roy** is undeniable. For the female artists as well like... well it’s a different record but... (laughs)



**Zak:** We've made a lot of records!

**Sshh:** But **Ce'Cile** really loves him, **Tanya Stephens** really loves him. It crosses over. It just touches something in people. It's really inspiring.

**Zak:** So spontaneous.

**Sshh:** Powerful.

**Zak:** Huge voice. Very reserved.

**Sshh:** Dignified. You would not expect...

**Zak:** That sound to come out from a microphone, you know? He knew what he'd done. Because I chatted to him about it, asking him how come **Bob, Peter** and **Bunny** made that special version of **Kingston 12 [Shuffle]**? And he went "*Because I was it, man!*" So he knew where he was at but he wasn't ramming it down your throat. **Toots** would walk in and be like...

**Sshh:** "*I am the inventor of Reggae!*"

**Zak:** As soon as you'd switch on a camera, you'd hear that "*I'm the creator of Reggae*". But he wrote the song! He wrote the song.

**Let's talk about a song that doesn't have a vocal guest, Wake The Town. The rhythm Girl I've Got A Date was played on by Jackie Jackson originally, so that's a nice link to Toots. But is it Robbie Lyn doing all that amazing keyboard soloing on there?**

**Zak:** Yeah. **Robbie's** such a cool guy. That was the first time we'd recorded with him, on **U-Roy's** album. All those backing tracks, we cut nine tracks on the first day! I mean nine! Who does that? It's like the 60s, you know what I mean? The day before I said to **Sly** "*Here's a list. I'm going to go home and learn those three and we'll come in tomorrow and record those*". And he went "*...NINE*". (Laughs) So that's what we did and then the next day we cut another three, I think, and it was done. All the backing tracks were done in two days.

**The album has a very live feel to it. Are most of the rhythms just everyone in a room?**

**Zak:** Everybody. It was all cut live with **U-Roy** doing the vocals over in the corner. **Sshh** was singing the song parts as a guide for everyone. So it was **U-Roy, Sly, Robbie, Cyril Neville, Tony Chin, Robbie Lyn**, me on guitar, **Sshh** singing the vocal parts.

**Sshh:** I remember me and **U-Roy** were sitting on the sofa singing along when **Sly** was doing an overDub. We were singing along and we got told off because it was coming down the drum mic! (laughs)

**Zak:** Because no one wears headphones, right? We're just in the room so there's a bit of spill onto everything. That's why our records sound like that. There's a big stereo mic in the middle of it and that's what gives you the big picture. When all the instruments go like that [interlocks hands] you need to record that. You can't have it all separate or it will all sound like the fucking **Eagles!**

**It's like going back to the ska days...**

**Sshh:** Yeah and it adds a grittiness. Then it was mixed by **Dave Sardy** and he says he mixed it at full volume. He never did it quietly and you can tell that when you hear it. It's like it's jumping out of the speakers at you.

**It was Curtis Mayfield's birthday yesterday [the day before interview, June 3rd] and you have Queen Majesty on there with Robbie Shakespeare singing. Anyone who's seen Sly and Robbie perform live knows about Robbie doing a bit of singing. But it's still so surprising how delicate his voice is for such a big guy who plays such a deep, low instrument. He really does sound like Junior Menz who sang Queen Majesty with the Techniques.**

**Sshh:** Voice of an angel!

**Zak:** He reminds me of **Frankie Lymon**.

**Sshh:** He sang to me in the studio. There's a picture in the studio from the first time and he's like holding my hand and my heart just broke! I couldn't believe it.

**Zak:** You were crying.

**Sshh:** I was crying.



# REGGAE Vibes Music

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**Zak:** He came over to me and he started to play the bass on my shoulder and then sang to me as well. It was so moving. That's why he's got two tunes on the Blues album, you know? *Queen Majesty* was so suited to his voice.

**Robbie's taste is very diverse isn't it? He's into Rock and Metal and all sorts.**

**Sshh:** He's a Punk Rocker, man!

**Zak:** I think that's why we sorted fitted in. Because he's that style, isn't he?

**Sshh:** With his bondage trousers! **Zak** said to him "You have the beautiful baby face and this amazing voice, why didn't you sing more?"

**I'm probably going to get told off by the big man at Reggaeville if we don't talk about Ziggy Marley! He opens the album with Trenchtown Rock...**

**Sshh:** Oh yeah **Ziggy!** There are so many great artists on this album. He was a natural choice really and he really makes it his own. He really attacked it.

**Zak:** It's a very backing vocal driven song usually. But we turned them off. We made it so you only hear **Ziggy** and no backing vocals on it. It's almost like a Rock singer. It's stripped back and it's just **Ziggy**. Kind of approached it a bit like the band **Free?** That rawness. Strip back and get rid of all the...

**Sshh:** ...distractions.

**Zak:** Because **Ziggy's** voice is so strong, it didn't need all that stuff.

**Sshh:** "Brutalise me with music!"

**Zak:** As he says...

**Sshh:** But it's amazing because we worked with him a couple of times now and he is always just incredible.

**Zak:** Yeah, he's great on *Three Little Birds*. The **Toots** version of that is killer, isn't it? So different.

**Sshh:** But I think he really is such an incredible artist.

**Zak:** Yeah man, maximum respect to him because he jumped. As soon as he knew it was **U-Roy**, he's right in there. All these guys were, you know? I wish we had done more tunes but there was no time because **U-Roy** was going on tour in France. That's why the whole thing was done so quickly.

This was in 2018 and he was doing a 6-week tour of France and by the end of that I would have been with **The Who**. We had to cram it all into that week.

**How did you get Scientist on the album for the final track? Because he's not in Jamaica, he's in LA.**

**Zak:** We've done some things with **Scientist** before. When we play live in LA, we usually play with **Tony Chin...**

**Sshh:** Fully Fullwood and Santa...

**Zak:** ...and we met this guy called **Dub Robot [Brian Wallace]** and we got him to play sax in the band and do the Dub effects and stuff. Check him out online. He is a far-out dude. And he is **Scientist's** engineer in the studio. So that's how we got to meet **Scientist**. And he remixed something for us...

**Sshh:** He said he was going to make me sound like a diamond.

**Zak:** A polished diamond! And I was going "*You're trying to pull my bird, aren't you?*" And he said "*No man!*". He did that version and he also did two 7 inch Dubs where we're hoping to get a lot of guest singers together and maybe do something special with it. I don't know yet. All we have is the Dub.

**So you end with a 15-minute tune, Every Knee Shall Bow.**

**Zak:** Two 15-minute tunes! Because it's double vinyl and the second disc is just two of them.

**You played with the Soul Syndicate guys and Sly and Robbie, both of whom traded as the Aggravators playing for Bunny Lee, and that's one of his rhythms. I didn't know that Dub was 15 minutes long until I looked at the end. I wouldn't normally listen to a 15-minute song unless it was Fela Kuti or something and it's very like Fela Kuti, in that time really flies.**

**Sshh:** Yeah! That's the great thing, isn't it? It's great when that happens.

**Zak:** And it naturally structured itself.

**Sshh:** We couldn't edit it. We couldn't do it. It had to be in its entirety.

**Zak:** Then **Scientist** did the Dub. First he sent two shorter Dubs which are the ones we were talking about and we were like "*It's got to be the full*".

**And how did Mick Jones get involved? He must know U-Roy and Big Youth from back in the day...**

**Zak:** I played with him in 2011. We did a gig together and I put the band together for him to do a charity show and we became really great friends. Then **Sshh** was in England and I wasn't there. Maybe playing with **Toots**?

**Sshh:** I saw **Mick** out and about and said "We've been working with **U-Roy**". I was telling him that we were just finishing off this **U-Roy** record and asked him if he would be involved.

**Zak:** He said "Of course". Like everybody said "Of course".

**Sshh:** And we thought that he was just going to do the guitar but when he sent the track back, he added all these little **Big Audio Dynamite**-esque synth sounds.

**Zak:** And that's another mix you haven't heard yet. The **Mick Jones** synth mix.

And he also sent a beautiful film of himself playing it.

**Sshh:** In a full three-piece suit!

**Zak:** At his studio. We asked him "*Could you film yourself doing it?*" and we were just expecting a phone thing but he sent a proper film of himself playing it.

**Sshh:** He's brilliant, **Mick**.

**Zak:** He's one of the few people I know that, when we played that gig with him, when he is playing music he never stops smiling. Not everybody is like that.

**It would be a bit crass to say "I hope this wins another Grammy" but what are your hopes for this album?**

**Sshh:** We just want it to fucking go and for everybody to hear it.

**Zak:** And let everyone know about **U-Roy**. We're making a documentary about him too, which is in the works. We've got a 10-minute version so far which is almost like a trailer. Directed by **Gabriel Jagger**, **Mick's** son, a very talented director.

**Sshh:** We're just trying to make the legacy of **U-Roy** live on.

**Zak:** We're really trying to get some Hip-Hop artists involved to talk about **U-Roy** and although they're not on the record I think there's a few people who have got to own up.

**Sshh:** Our goal is just to make **U-Roy** a household name. Even more so.

**Zak:** He's a real artist, a true artist. They're great pop songs anyway but then you add him to it, it becomes something even more special. Because it adds originality. He's the originator!



## U-ROY - SOLID GOLD

Trojan Jamaica - July 16, 2021

Daddy U-Roy was commonly considered to be a genial giant of Reggae and his toasting legacy to the Hip-Hop and Rap genres is now widely acknowledged. This *Solid Gold U-Roy* release sees **Zak Starkey** and **Sharna 'Sshh' Liguz** - in liaison with a load of luminaries - re-record some of his hits. And if past patterns are anything to go by, it's hard to see this album avoiding a Grammy nomination.

The new release opens with a valiant effort from **Ziggy Marley** on the oft-reprised *Trenchtown Rock* track, which is largely redeemed by characteristically timely and evocative inputs from U-Roy. This is followed by *Man Next Door*, with **Santigold's** clear and crisp vocals contrasting sharply (but successfully) with U-Roy's more earthy drawl which drives the delivery. Next up, **Shaggy's** input on *Rule the Nation* will be warmly welcomed by his many adoring fans, whilst old-school adherents may well argue that U-Roy's inputs make this track a worthy candidate to be dutifully deployed daily on the soundsystem. Then **Tarrus Riley's** capacity to convey pain on the *Tom Drunk* track, alongside U-Roy's exasperated delivery, make for a good blend, augmented by a smooth choir effect on the chorus.

This is followed by the early U-Roy hit *Wake The Town*, a cheerful upbeat introduction setting the tone, with gentleman **Robbie Lyn** delightfully driving and decorating the track via his omnipresent keyboards. Then **Rygin King** gives the classic *Stop That Train* the royal treatment with the help of a hard-hitting rhythm, before **Steel Pulse's David Hinds** joins U-Roy on a well-worked combo of yet another *Soul Rebel*



classic tune. It's notable for its tight percussion, ably embellished with intermittent backing vocals, as the guitar technician earns his crust with **Chin, Starkey** and **Shakespeare** making their presence felt. Thereafter the U-Roy staple *Queen Majesty/Chalice In The Palace* allows the softer vocal style of **Robbie Shakespeare** to link with the (other) legend, on a track ably augmented by brass, courtesy of **Dean Fraser, Dwight Richards** and **Hopeton Williams**.

Continuing on the 'classic tune' trail, **Jesse Royal** appears on *Small Axe*, to complement the 'main man', with crystal-clear vocals on a track that features (all too rare) booming brass. Despite the foot-stomping introduction, the next input *Wear You To The Ball* sees U-Roy at his light-hearted best via chipper contributions, as the perfect foil to **Richie Spice's** 'straight guy' inputs, whilst the track chugs along with a delightful swing preceding a sudden halt.

Appropriately enough, the final vocal input on *Every Knee Shall Bow* comes in the form of a homage to Selassie, as U-Roy confirms his spiritual disposition on a tasty (15 minute) track entailing a thrilling duet with much melody, rollicking rhythms and sweet sounds. The legendary **Big Youth** (and **The Clash's Mick Jones**) join U-Roy for a hectic delivery, before the same track - in an instrumental dub-style - winds up the collection in a contribution that is periodically punctuated with drum drills and an abundance of echo effects.

My guess is that you'll hear a lot more about (and from) this release. Either way, long live **Daddy U-Roy**.

by Gerry McMahon

## ALBOROSIE - FOR THE CULTURE

VP Records - June 4, 2021

**Alborosie's** latest album is a bold and ambitious project: taking Roots music and culture along with reflections on life in the 2020s and packaging it up across 14 tracks. But it is mission successfully accomplished, thankfully.

**For The Culture**, released via **VP Records**, is practically a one-man show: **Alborosie** did the production, engineering and mixing. No mean feat to do that and perform on them all – but he, with the help of the **Roots Radics** band and some vintage analogue gear, has pulled it off immensely. The mastering from **Chris Athens** enhances the authentically rich, old skool and culture-focused feel.

**For The Culture's** deep dive into Roots takes many forms. Authentic, stripped-back vibes are heard across **Challawa** and **Ginal** featuring the supreme **Collie Buddz** (along with some dystopian synth horns and rasping strings). Heavier orchestration and a slowed Steppers bridge feature, along with the incomparable **Wailing Souls**, on **Life To Live**. This intricate sound continues on the title track with its Dub engineering. But its bridge has chord progressions nearer to Soul; a theme which expands elsewhere.

**Bun A Fyah** has heavily layered, harmonic backing vocals and **Albo** delivering a performance expansive in range. **Out Of The Darkness** takes this feeling further, with its Doo Wop-turned-Choral backing vocals and whining electric guitar. Then, **Unprecedented Time** has a gorgeous counter-performance from an electric organ. **Bob Marley's** signature style is nodded to in **Walking**, and harder, more abrasive Dub also gets a look in across **Ready** with **Jo Mersa Marley** and **Never Let Me Down** – both focusing on forthright bass lines and drum arrangements.



**Albo** also branches out into Revival-esque merging of Roots and Hip Hop. **The System** and **Break My Chains** both feature dominant Hip Hop drums. **Listen To The Waves** expands on this, bringing back **Out Of The Darkness's** choral backing vocals, and adding some almost 90s Hip Hop-Soul instrumental arrangement. But then, the album's closing track **Where Do You Go?**

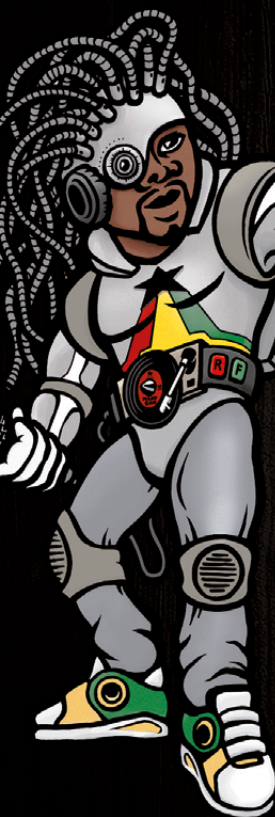
featuring **Big Mountain** throws back to 90s Reggae-Pop with a dash of Dancehall on the bridge.

It's a potent musical voyage. Then, **Albo** has weaved complex lyrical narratives throughout. Babylon, its proponents and the effect both have on the rest of us get taken down across **The System**, **Ginal** and **Ready**. Songs of empowerment include **Break My Chains** and the **George Floyd/Black Lives Matter** anthem **Listen To The Waves**. **Albo** repeatedly deals with the issue of cannabis via **Challawa** and **Never Let Me Down**. Music and culture feature across the title track, which espouses their importance, and **Bun A Fyah** – lamenting the corporatisation of both.

But **Albo** offers up hope, too – across the pandemic-led **Unprecedented Time**, the wholly spiritual **Life To Live**, the humble **Out Of The Darkness** and song of faith **Walking**. **Where Do You Go?** concludes the album perfectly: offering a message of unity, love and solidarity.

**For The Culture** is an impressive body of work from **Alborosie**. Rich and intricate, it delivers on its namesake's promise and offers a pertinent voyage across both 21<sup>st</sup> century Roots, and life more broadly.

by Steve Topple



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## KING OF THE DUB ROCK 3

JahSolidRock Music - June 25, 2021

It's always pleasing when a trilogy is completed. None more so than when it's from a legendary producer. So, enter **Sir Lloyd Coxone** to deliver the goods.

**King of the Dub Rock 3**, released via **JahsolidRock**, is a glorious delve into Roots and Dub, available across 12" vinyl. Production comes from **Ras Denco** and **Marc Baronner**, with all the tracks

being recorded at **Tuff Gong Studios** and **Coxone** executive producing this, the third **King of the Dub** project. His hand is all over it. The record is pure Roots/Dub class.

The A side opens with **In The Jungle (Tuff Gong Version)** from **Apple Gabriel**, with its traditional root to 7<sup>th</sup> chord progression as a centre piece coupled with tinkering Djembe, a one drop bass and some classy Doo-Wop backing vocals. **Gabriel's** narrative on the daily struggle of life in Babylon's human 'jungle' is pertinent. **Earl 16** and **Mutabaruka's Back to the Roots/Ship a Come** is a haunting affair, with an intricate percussion line (honing in on Nyabinghi) and a pleasing horn arrangement. The lyrical content is well-constructed, too – as the pair extol the virtues of Rastafari, its history and relevance now.

**Brinsley Forde** and **David Hinds** give us **Chillin' (Tuff Gong Version)**. It's pacier than previous tracks, with richer instrumentation, a busy horn line and some gorgeous chord progressions. The pair's storytelling of violent colonialism could easily be relatable to life under the system today. Next, **Chezidek** with **Spiritual People** brings in an electric organ running a countermelody, a brooding minor key complemented by a whining guitar line and the bass hitting the one to create momentum. **Chezidek**



delivers a pertinent call for unity against a backdrop of reminding us we're all the same regardless of what the system tells us.

Then, on Side B **Var** opens with **You Alone**. It's slow and meandering, like its lilting guitar riff with pleasing Dub breaks and engineering – finished by **Var's** lyrics promoting humble self-confidence of Rastafari and praising Jah.

**Micah Shemaiah's Rubadub** winds things back to early Dancehall but with a more intricately arranged feel that you'd expect from a Sound System, bringing the style up-to-date. Lyrically, it hones in on the vibes around dancehalls in that late 70s era (including the eponymous dance) and works well.

Finally, **Ras Teo** gives us **Way Up**: a Roots-driven piece with its stark bubble rhythm, bending guitars, swaying horn section and **Teo's** pleasing backing vocals. Lyrically, he gives a strong warning to the uninitiated and a reminder to the conscious to maintain course despite what Babylon throws at us. The Dub versions of **Spiritual People**, **Rubadub** and **Way Up** are also to be highly commended. **Denco**, **Baronner** and **Coxone** have really put thought into the reworkings, with authentic scratching, pull-ups, vocal re-jiggings and engineering paying homage to the genre perfectly. An excellent inclusion.

Overall, **King of the Dub Rock 3** is the perfect addition for **Coxone** admirers and newcomers alike, finishing the trilogy perfectly. The arrangements are rich and detailed, performances strong and narratives thought-provoking. All hail the king of Jamaican-British Roots and Dub.

by Steve Topple

**UB40 - BIGGA BAGGARIDDIM**

SoNo Recording Group / Evo Music - June 25, 2021

It was not until 2006, when the infamous **Reggae Sunsplash** festival was resurrected once more for a four day and night event in St. Ann with the most humongous line-up I ever experienced for a Reggae show, that I personally realized the magnitude of **UB40**. Since that performance; which was – up until today – their only performance ever in Jamaica, where I witnessed even the roughest set of badman and the realest thugs bussing a blank to **Red Red Wine** and **Can't Help Falling In Love** in sheer enthusiasm right there in the homeland of Reggae music; I have the utmost respect for the band from Birmingham and I am continually intrigued by their works and success.

With **Bigga Baggarriddim** the band formed in England over 40 years ago follows its own tradition of releasing projects named after one another – in this case the **Baggarriddim** album originally released in 1985 and the **Little Baggarriddim EP**; and another habit of re-releasing riddims with new voicings on different records. This time instrumentals that appeared on the last **For The Many** album are being used once more, which is still enjoyable as they are timeless Reggae classics. With new vocal recordings by artists from the four corners of the world – Jamaica, New Zealand, the UK and India - they are given a new twist and a great variety of style.

On eight different music tracks collaborators like **House Of Shem**, **General Zooz** of the **Reggae Rajahs** and **Blvk H3ro** present their talent and are testimony to the international links and friendships **UB40** cultivate throughout the industry.



**Winston Francis** graces a nimble and playful Steppers beat with his convoluted love story in which he declares his affection to **My Best Friend's Girlfriend**. **Blvk H3ro** floats smoothly and light as a feather on a laid-back One Drop riddim as he explains **I'm Alright** before rapidly toasting over a dark, horn-driven Dancehall beat asking **What Happened To The**

**Have Not's?** Also **Burro Banton's** son **Leno Banton** solidly tames this riddim with his reality check **Show And Prove**. The young DJ talent is well accompanied on **Bigga Baggarriddim** by Birmingham MCs **Slinger** and **Pablo Rider**, two original guest artists from the 1985 **Baggarriddim** album, who return in 2021 and represent the strong movement emerging in the UK in the 1980s just like fellow deejays **Gilly G** and **Tippa Irie**, who also appear on two features. A special highlight is the union of **Inner Circle** and **UB40**. With their tremendous experience in the mainstream music industry the two big players created the Pop-infused Reggae classic **Rebel Love** with new overdubs that manage to convince the listeners without sounding cheesy. 15 tracks eventually resulted from the relationships **UB40** have with “*some of the Reggae friends we've met*”, as band member **Robin Campbell** describes it.

15 tracks that cover the different styles and forms of the genre, including even some spring-reverbed dub parts and leading to the most eclectic album yet of the infamous band from England. Even when you're already familiar with some of the instrumentals, featured artists and the album title **Bigga Baggarriddim** is a joy to listen to, presenting solid, timeless Reggae in top quality.

by Ursula ,Munchy' Münch

**ZAGGA - 17/06**

Amini Music - June 17, 2021

“*Small but perfectly formed*” is the best way to describe Jamaican artist **Zagga**’s new album. Honing in on his Earthstrong, across 10 tracks he gives the world a taste of his Gemini credentials.

**17/06**, released via **Amini Music**, sees **Zagga** flourish with the signature Soul-meets-Afrobeats style he’s cultivated over the years, continuing his move away from Reggae, as seen on 2020’s **The Isolation Project**. **17/06** is almost entirely self-created by **Amini/Zagga** – aside from **Chimney Records**’ slick mixing and mastering. It shows – as **Zagga** sweeps across styles, genres and subjects with synergy throughout.

Various forms of AfroDancehall litter **17/06**. **Unforgettable** (produced with **Big Laugh Music**) sees **Zagga** opt for a smooth vibe, with its acoustic guitar, soulful chord progressions and reduced emphasis on the driving rhythmic clave. **Tribe Govament** with **Jahvillani** sees the AfroDancehall do an edgy turn with its Trap buzz rolls, stuttering snare and rasping strings. **Jah Open Doors** has stuttering yet rich orchestration and heavily syncopated percussion. **Heart Clean** gives this idea fluidity with the syncopation wound down. But **Jamaica Wah Gwaan** with **Kabaka Pyramid** sees the AfroDancehall stripped right back, creating a heavy, brooding vibe. **Zagga** merges the AfroDancehall vibes with straighter Afrobeats on **Bad and Hungry**.

But **17/06** also delves into softer, Afrobeats-RnB territory. **Secure** with **Tarrus Riley** is almost a throwback RnB cut with its winding bass riff and melodic, running keys. **Mama’s Prayer**’s flowing yet stuttering percussion is complemented by



a lilting guitar. **We’ve Got Heart** (produced with **Yo West Music/AGM Team**) is perfect Afrobeats-RnB: richly arranged strings, flowing keys and delicate guitars juxtaposed with slow but stuttering percussion. The album’s finale, **Just Another Day**, is perhaps the most orthodox but evocatively so – almost traditional African meets Western Folksy Rock-Soul.

Overall, **17/06** is a musically deft project with impressive and varied vocal performances from **Zagga** – which he then cements with his lyrical content.

**Zagga** has deftly combined love songs with message music; his romanticism and positive female imagery being repped across **Insecure** and **Unforgettable**. His conscious work is subtle yet thought-provoking. **Mama’s Prayer** gives a moving message of love for both mothers and women more broadly; similar praise is found on **Jah Open Doors**. The mood changes, as **Zagga** deals with Jamaica (and the world) being under pandemic authoritarianism on **Jamaica Wah Gwaan**. **Tribe Govament** is fascinating, as it discusses how the system wants certain demographics to fail and the importance of rising above this. **Heart Clean** focuses on living consciously and having good societal intentions, while **Bad and Hungry** is the opposite – tackling poverty-induced violence. **We’ve Got Heart** is a cry for common unity and humanity, while **Just Another Day** reminds us that while the system grinds us down – it’s transient, and emancipation will come.

Overall, **17/06** is a very pleasing and well-crafted project. Cleverly constructed, it’s compelling and engaging listen – and is perhaps **Zagga**’s strongest work to date. Glorious.

by Steve Topple



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# YEARBOOK - BACK ISSUES

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