

FESTIVILLE 2020

REGGAEVILLE FESTIVAL GUIDE MAGAZINE



INTERVIEWS

ETANA
DRE ISLAND
RICHIE SPICE
BUJU BANTON
THE WAILERS TRIO
ROOTZ UNDERGROUND
RAS MUHAMAD
ARISE ROOTS
LUCIANO

SUMMER 2020

NO FESTIVALS



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4
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FLOYD

STOP:

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- Police-violence
- Corruption
- Killing US!!!

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RIGHT!!!
TO BREATHE

BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTEST IN HANOVER, GERMANY - JUNE 6, 2020

PHOTOS BY CHINA HOPSON



Corona and **BLM** are the characterising terms of this weird year of 2020 so far. The former – apart from the appalling numbers of deaths attributed to Covid-19, of course – is to blame for existential hardships felt by almost every member of the music industry, for a rather dull summer without our beloved festivals (and thus the reason why our Festival Guide turns into a Magazine this time around) and for the rise of alternative concepts such as the Instagram **Verzuz Clash Bounty vs. Beenie** or drive-in concerts, exemplified by **Gentleman's** recent appearance in Hanover, Germany which is captured in pictures on the following pages.

Black Lives Matter, instead, is a welcome and long overdue international movement against the continued oppression of and discrimination against people based on the colour of their skin, tragically triggered by the violent homicide of US-citizen **George Floyd**. It finds its repercussion not only in society, as demonstrations make people unite on the streets around the world, but also in art and music. Thus, **Anthony B** performed his brand-new song **Mr. Officer** on a rally in Vienna on June 4th, while many other artists voice their concerns in new releases or interviews.

To share these with you, we present the words, sounds and powers of bands and artists like **The Wailers Trio** who celebrate 50 years of **Soul Rebels**, **Rootz Underground** and their

triple album **Red - Gold - Green**, the debut **Now I Rise** by **Dre Island** as well as **Etana**, **Richie Spice**, **Arise Roots**, **Ras Muhamad** and **Luciano**. A special place is reserved to the return of the Gargamel: **Buju Banton** is not only featured on the cover, but also with an extensive interview about his eagerly awaited album **Upside Down 2020**.

Other treats found in here include album reviews of **Chezidek**, **Rebellion**, **Groundation**, **Paolo Baldini** and **Jahmiel**, plus an album feature on **My Cup Runneth Over** by **The Wailers feat. U Roy**.

Due to the ongoing and ever changing situation regarding live events, we will not include the usual Festival agenda in this issue. However, you can find all confirmed dates on our website Reggaeville.com, so make sure you check that out! And to not let that sweet Festival feeling slip away completely, we will spoil you with a collection of rare festival photos from the Reggaeville archives: **Sumfest**, **Sunsplash**, **Sundance**, **Rebel Salute**, **Reggae Jam**, **Africa Unite...**

Unity is a good closing word, incidentally, because it is what we need, now perhaps more than ever. So: unite, people, both with your inner self and with others. We got your back!



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FESTIVILLE 2020



GENTLEMAN & THE EVOLUTION

HANOVER, GERMANY @ AUTOKULTUR - JUNE 4, 2020

PHOTOS BY CHINA HOPSON

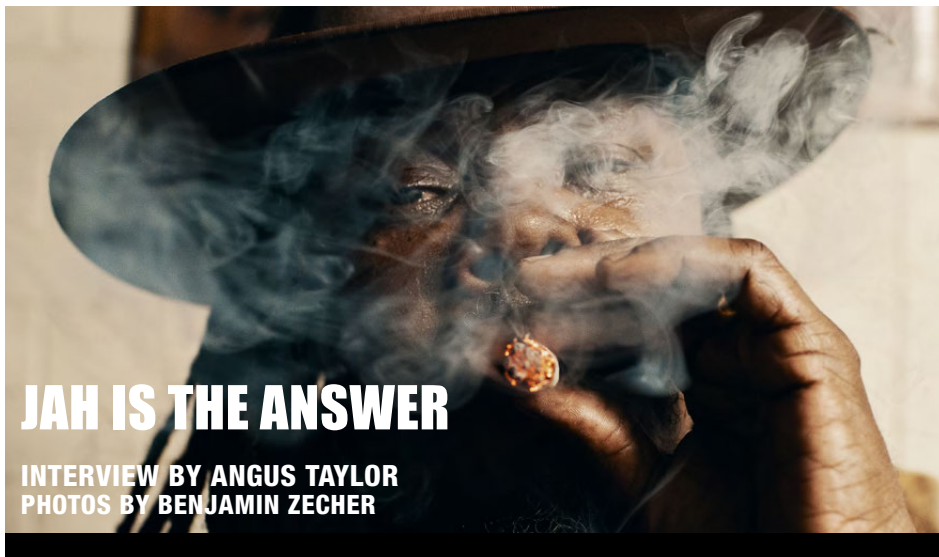


INTERVIEW



LUCIANO

THE OLD SCHOOL RULES



We are living in serious times. The world is locked down in fear of a global pandemic. Trust in governments is at its lowest ebb. Racism and police brutality are being protested worldwide.

Yet despite all this turmoil and frustration, **Jepther McClymont**, better known as **Luciano**, remains positive. He is sitting in a beautiful garden in Jamaica, ready to release his album **The Answer**, out July 24th, produced by Germany's **Oneness Records**. He believes that if we have faith, these issues will pass. Throughout our interview, he does not ignore the pain the world is facing today. He just feels sure Jah is the Answer.

The album contains the key ingredients **Luciano** fans love. His deep baritone voice rests on **Oneness'** organic modern one drop rhythms, singing messages of warning against mankind's transgressions and faith in Rastafari livity and Zion's glory. But the track list also features a young guard of cultural roots artists who have followed in **Luciano's** wake. From Jamaica, **Iba Mahr**, **Runkus** and **Jesse Royal**; from Germany, **Jahcoustix**.

Luciano and **Oneness** go back over ten years. The Rasta messenger and the label were introduced by the late **Grizzly** from **Caveman Sound**. One of their first recordings, **Use Jah Words** on the **Oneness** rhythm, has been remixed for the new record as a tribute to their shared history. **Ben** from **Oneness** is with **Luciano** in the garden for the interview, filming the discussion.

As ever, **Luciano** gives a lot of himself in this interview. Much of what he says chimes with his image as a deeply devout and serious advocate for conscious reggae music. He's open about his expulsion from the 7th Day Adventist Church for his interest in Rastafari, his disappointment in **Peter Tosh** for singing the song **Oh Bumbo Klaat**, and his yearning to perform live again for his followers.

Yet, with his throaty chuckle, he shows another, lighter side. He is honest about leaving **Oneness** to the creative decisions when formulating **The Answer**, his love of Kung Fu movies, and not wanting to be seen as a po-faced reggae prophet. He also shares his memories of **Bob Andy**, who passed away in March of this year.



How are you finding the whole quarantine, curfew situation?

I'm feeling great you know, sir. In very high spirits. I realise there's a lot going on out there, a lot that they're not telling the people and a lot of mixed messages. And if you're not careful you'll get carried away and disillusioned and in confusion. So you just have to be strong, hold your reins and just go on and do your thing.

Where are the mixed messages coming from? From the government, from the media?

From everywhere. From the media: people sending messages, new findings, a lot of speculation. They are saying they have found a cure which is aspirin. And they say that the virus is actually a bacteria and not a virus. But whatever it is, whether virus or bacteria, it is dangerous in any which way. So we still have to be careful because there is something out there. You cannot deny the reality of this pandemic, you know? You just have to be careful and tread safely. I have my mask. I don't love to put it on because sometimes it's a little stifling. But I still have my mask in my pocket and I make sure I wash my hands and wash my face. I don't know why they don't tell the people to wash their face too?

Would you say that for you it is a period to reflect and for spiritual growth?

Definitely, and it also gives me time to re-cogitate, put together my perspectives and come forward. We have this album, *The Answer* and we believe this is the answer to what is happening today.

How do you feel about there being no touring and no festivals right now?

Well I know that it's just another time where all this will pass away. All this global pandemic will pass away and we can only be optimistic about the future. Because we believe and we know that Jah is the Answer so we know Jah is going to work it out. There is a saying, "*If God is in the vessel then you can smile at the storm*". So we hold firm and we are optimistic about the future.

And this is why we are preparing ourselves to put out this album and make sure we get the message out there to the people. Because they're going to need it. They need this. They need inspiration, they need encouragement with all that's happening. A lot of people are disillusioned, many are bewildered, a lot of them out there just don't know what to do. They have lost their loved ones. A lot of people are giving up. So we want to at least remind them that Jah is the answer, you know?

A lot of the messages in this album seem particularly relevant right now. Not just with people being unable to physically come together but also because of what we are seeing in America right now, the injustice and the turmoil that's going on...

Definitely. It's everywhere, man. Well, these messages have been coming because of an ongoing process with me and **Mr Benji** from **Oneness Records**. He is the one who approached me with this idea and I liked it. So we started doing some work in the studio.

How did you first link with Oneness Records? I know they have a link to AlTaFaAn Records who produced your 2013 album *The Quabalah Man*.

I think it was from a **Caveman** connection, you know? The first link was **Doctor Caveman** that introduced us. And that was like 10 years ago. I think the first song that came out was **Use Jah Words**. That was the first rhythm that he gave me and I really liked the rhythm, the energy and the message, very strong. And now it's remixed also featuring **Runkus** on this track. And ever since we have that flow, honestly. I feel that connection with **Mr Benji**. Any time he was in Jamaica he would call me up and say "**Luci**, I have some new rhythms and I'd like you to check out some vibes".

You mentioned Runkus being on the new mix of *Use Jah Words*, but all the artists on the album are younger artists who share a similar vision. Was that your idea or Oneness'?



Well, most of the ideas I have to give it to **King Benji** from **Oneness Records**. Honestly, he came up with most of these ideas. He kind of anchored who wants to work on the album. Like **Jahcoustix**, you have **Runkus**, you have **Jesse Royal** who calls himself Small Axe and you have **Iba Mahr**. This community of cultural people who have the same intention, a good heart, good views and are optimistic about the music, keeping it clean, sending the message. So I think we are on the same page. And it's good to have the younger generation joining. **Runkus** is the son of **Determine**. So he is already in the family. I think one of the tracks, *The Music* featuring **Jesse Royal**, we had other intentions and **Benji** made other suggestions. But it didn't work out how we planned it so it wound up that we got **Jesse Royal** aka the Small Axe to feature on that track. And I really like the way he expresses himself. It turned out great.

The Music is something you have campaigned for, in terms of its betterment through the years. And in this time with no touring, listening to music and its strengthening powers is needed more than ever.

Yes, sir. Definitely. A lot of people are saying this. Because you can't keep a dance, there are no festivals, nothing at all. So the best you can do is tune into some nice music. A lot of them go online. They go to their computers and just listen back some songs. They have more time on their hands that they can really listen to some nice music. So it's really great. I think singers and players of instruments, this is our time to really administer to these people because they are quicker to listen to us now than when everyone is busy going about his own thing.

On the song *Take Me To The Place* you give a speech to the government using a particular type of preaching delivery. What was the inspiration? Was it your Adventist church background?

It could have a little bearing of **Marcus Garvey** too. That's one of my greatest inspirations right now. Sometimes I try to emulate his spirit and his vibes when I try to express. Sometimes you sing certain things and the people love it and say "*That sounds good.*" But sometimes when you speak it, it really arrests the mind of the people on a more serious level.

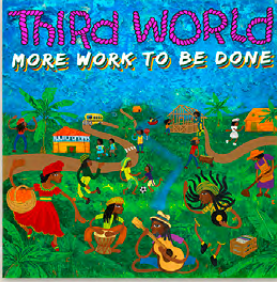


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Do you often listen to the speeches of Marcus Garvey?

Yes man! And I sometimes feel his energy when he literally gets up sometimes. Because sometimes I feel he gets a little frustrated! (laughs)

Well, he was under considerable pressure...

(laughs) Yes! Serious! Oh my God. But the thing about me, even though we're singing all these nice messages and these are serious messages, I don't want the people to go into themselves saying "*Bwoy, this man gwaan like him a reggae Jesus*". I don't want them to feel like that. So I still keep a little joyfulness, a little youthfulness to my music. Where people can smile and listen and say "*Bwoy, Qabalah nuh easy. You can tell he watch a lot of movies too.*" I love old-school kung fu, so sometimes I will talk like the masters, you know! (laughs)

Give me an example of an inspiring old-school movie that you love?

The Three Evil Masters - have you ever watched that? That's a real Kung Fu movie. I find a lot of these old-school movies have a lot of morals behind them and a true-life story. It's not like these modern movies where as soon as the show starts man bust gun and cuss words. What I also love about old time movies is there's not much swearing, so you can sit with your family and enjoy the movie. This is what I love about the old-school. The old-school to me is the best of all schools.

Tell me a bit about the track The Victory with Iba Mahr. How did you link with him?

Iba Mahr, he and I have already been featured on rhythms by **Oneness** like *Nuh Play Ting* - he is also on that rhythm. So he and I have this kind of spiritual connection. From ever since we did the [**Nice & Easy Riddim**] Medley video, we always have a link up. And

THE WAILERS

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I knew that brother **Benji** also saw the connection and saw that he and I had a natural chemistry. So to have been featured on this song *The Victory* is really a blessing also.

One of my favourite tunes is I Wonder, where you think about what has gone wrong with humanity. What do you think has gone wrong?

When we talk about mankind has been living: I mean everything has been created for us and even after God created everything and saw that it was good, man in his own creativity started inventing a lot of stuff to make his life happier, bringing more luxury into the life. But instead they bring more misery. That's one of my favourites too, you know? I think it's the melodies that really touched me deeply. And I must say I have to commend the bassline. **Morry** [Da Baron] is a great musician. Most of these rhythms have been very inspiring. The way the rhythm plays and the way I flow with the melodies, it's really touching.

We've already mentioned Use Jah Words with Runkus. The importance of using the right words, Word Sound Power, is also something you've campaigned for in the music...

Definitely. I believe words can build you and can kill you. You say the wrong word at the wrong time to the wrong person, it can kill you. I believe as the Bible says "A soft answer turneth away wrath but grievous words stir up anger". So we look into these things. When we see fighting all over the world, it could have been avoided if people just used the right words. And from the words and meditation in your heart you'll be accepted in Jah sight. To me, if you grow up and become accustomed to listening to and meditate on good words then automatically you turn out to be a good person.

Because in James [chapter] 3, the Bible, it tells you that. How do you know a perfect man? You check him by his conversation. Because when a man can really control his



tongue and use words properly, he's able to control other members of his body. Because the tongue is a little member of the body but it boasteth much. And it causes the fire that is like a furnace with fury. So you should control the tongue. A man controls beasts and all other animals but they can't control their own tongue. When I read that it puzzled me and I said "*Bwoy, it's important*".

And when I listen to the works of the honourable **Bob Marley**, I say "*But this King is hailed as the king of reggae and I never hear him sing any bad words or sing any garbage*". And this is what I feel the new generation should continue. I think it's only **Peter Tosh** that really surprised me out of **The**

Wailers. **Peter Tosh** surprised me, I won't lie. Because after he did that song named **Creation** I listened to his words and realised the levels that he had reached. But I believe he had fallen from his grace at one time when he sang another song which is almost to the extreme opposite of **Creation**.

Which song was that?

It's a song using a curse word.

I thought that was the song you meant!

(laughs)

Is it right that when you first learned to play the guitar as a youth, you sang a lot of Bob Marley and Dennis Brown?



ALBUM RELEASES

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AND SLIGHTLY
STOOPID.**



ARISE ROOTS

PATHWAYS - JUNE 19



Yes sir, yes sir. I started out singing **Bob Marley**. Because I grew up in the church, really. And I think this is why I have this kind of spirituality in my music. But my brother wasn't happy when I was singing **Dennis Brown** and **Bob Marley** on the guitar. Because my father who was an evangelist made that guitar, and he claimed that my father never made the guitar to play that. Because in the church they used to see reggae as devil music. So it was not easy getting out of that kind of barrier. Because they made you feel like if you sing about Babylon going down, you're being rebellious and they didn't want to associate with that kind of rebelliousness. But to me it was reggae music that brought forward the truth to the people and brought about the liberation of the nation.

And later when you were an internationally famous artist did you see any of those church people again? Were they more happy with what you were doing?

Yes, at one time. Because my brother was instrumental in them having us leave out of the church. So I was run out of the church but that didn't really run God out of me. But after I started singing songs like **Lord Give Me Strength** and **Sweep Over My Soul** the pastor for the church sent back for me. They wanted me to come back to the church. But I said "*Bwoy, I didn't feel like I was dealt with properly*" because there was no substance or reason why they ran me out of the church. So I just decided, I told them "*Thanks for the invitation but I didn't feel welcome in that church*".

So from time to time I would see my brother. And I see a lot of my church brothers and sisters. And they realised that I still hold my integrity and keep my music clean, you know? So they have respect. Great respect. And from time to time we did have concerts, like gospel concerts. They would call on me and I would go and sing for them. Because I don't believe there is any barrier between music. Once the messages are clean and lyrics are spiritually clean and you don't sing any derogatory words. To me the music is innocent.

On a similar topic about the importance of the right words, the song Nuh Play With talks about gun lyrics in music. You have lost friends and family members to violence. What was the incident that inspired the song?

Oh, there was a situation where a little kid died. This is a true story. They were playing with a gun they found in a backyard. This old gun that went through the passage of time and they found it with a lot of dust. One of them had their finger on the trigger and they were playing, holding it, pointing at the next one and squeezed the trigger and shot went "Bo"! Shoot out the next little youth and he died on the spot. That's where it came out of, the reality.

So we tried to extrapolate a little and bring it into the music to appeal to all the singers and players of instruments. Because a lot of them sing a lot of gun lyrics out there. Man will sing some things you never dreamed of. Some man singing them "Murder the ting deh" and a "No body to fling weh" and all those things. So it goes to show how people respect life. Because if they really respected life they wouldn't be singing this kind of stuff. And it hurts me deeply, honestly. If I could do more, like get the government to pass a law or legislation on some of this music, I would really join and lobby for that. We need a law to govern the music.

I remember a few years ago you telling me that you wanted to sit on a panel to discuss and decide on the appropriateness of music.

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Yes, yes. They used to have this in Jamaica. There was a committee, you know? They need to bring it back. You see, we as the younger generation need to go back to the tradition and the ways of how people of yesteryear would do things. Because we could learn a lot from them.

The final song with Jahcoustix, Stronger is a very different kind of song because it's about inner reflection rather than what is happening in the world outside.

Yes, that song was written by **Jahcoustix** and he asked me to be a part of it. And when we realised how nice the song is, brother **Benji** and me decided to add it to the album. Because it was a single with **Jahcoustix**, differently. But the song is so good and I really admire his writing skill. He is a very good writer and it's a song that I can relate to. We have to be stronger. We have to learn to become stronger family. No matter what the temptation out there, we have to be stronger than that. Because in the times when you get weaker, that's when they overcome you brother.

I want to ask you about a couple of things that happened in Jamaica recently. Did you watch the Beenie Man vs Bounty Killer clash that was streamed on the internet?

I never got to watch it yet. But I am seeing bits and pieces of it. I need to sit down and really watch it. I've been a little busy myself. But honestly, I believe this love and unity that I see amongst **Beenie** and **Bounty**, this is a good look. This is how it is supposed to be with the music. We're not supposed to be fighting each other. And we are finding out that the younger generation are sending and dropping words over one another "*This man bad-minded*" and "*That man that*", you know?

The Jamaican music community was very sad at the loss of producer Bobby Digital who you worked with in the past.

You know what? I don't know if it's the coronavirus causing this but just before **Bobby Digital** we lost **Mr Bob Andy** too.

So it's two great icons we have lost in the same time span. And we have managed to do some works. **Alpha And Omega** that's on the **Serious Times** album was produced by **Bobby Digital**. Big song. He's well-hailed and world-renowned as one of the greatest producers of all time and it's a great loss. And it's a pity that we lost them at a time when you can't have a multitude of people coming to show their respects. Because they say that the most you can have is 10 people at a funeral right now. So honestly my brother, it's really a rough time. This Covid-19 time it's not an easy time. It's rough for everyone.

Did you have a chance to reason with Bob Andy very much over the years?

Yes sir. He and I used to have some nice conversations. Especially when we had shows together. We'd be in the back, in the tent, the dressing room, we'd laugh and talk. I remember once I went to him and I had a little problem with a personal assistant. I was saying what this personal assistant was saying. It was like the person wasn't satisfied with his position as a personal assistant, so I was saying to him "*How do you deal with this? What am I going to do?*" I asked him to give me advice. So he said to me "*Well, if he doesn't want to be the personal assistant just make him the ex-personal assistant!*" In other words, he said "*Just fire the man!*" So he had some very simple ways of dealing with matters. He was a practical and down-to-earth man. You'd see him in his short pants going through easily. He wasn't about boasting or hype. He was a legend but he was just living as an ordinary man. And I really admired that about him.

When the world and the island is set free from this lockdown what's the first thing you want to go and do?

I just want to go and perform for the people, man. I'm telling you. It's the first thing I want to go and do. The first stage show I want to be on it! Because right now I have my album to push. Because Jah is the Answer you know?



LUCIANO - THE ANSWER

Oneness Records - July 24, 2020

Luciano's place in reggae's roll of honour is long assured. Though he may not have secured a much-coveted **Grammy** award just yet, much more importantly, his product and his principles reflect well on the man. With over 20 (high quality) albums to his name and a string of prestigious collaborations, **Luciano** can take much satisfaction from passing the test of time in the swirling seas of music.



He opens his new 11 track album - 4 of which have already been released as singles - in characteristically formidable style, with the aid of **Jesse Royal** on **The Music**, as they rightly proclaim that there's *'nothing they can do to stop Jah music'*. This righteous and upful tone persists in **Build a Better Land** and is followed by **Take Me To The Place** (i.e. Mount Zion), a track that serves to confirm the artist's strong spiritual association with Rastafarianism. This spiritual theme continues to flow on **Victory**, as **Iba Mahr** joins in for a delightful duet, as the pair set out to overcome all their adversaries.

Next up comes **I Wonder**, one of the sweetest sounds on the album, with the artist reflecting on how all that should be right can go so wrong. With a pandemic sweeping the globe, this is a timely contribution, enabling the album's (strong) title track **The Answer** to follow up, underlining the role of Jah as *'the answer'* and love as *'the way'* to sort out the many failings of the human race. As ever, **Luciano** heads for the high moral ground here, a ground that many mere mortals can only aspire to.

Further reflecting **Luciano's** religious (safe to say) addiction, **Jah Army** then arrives, in a man-

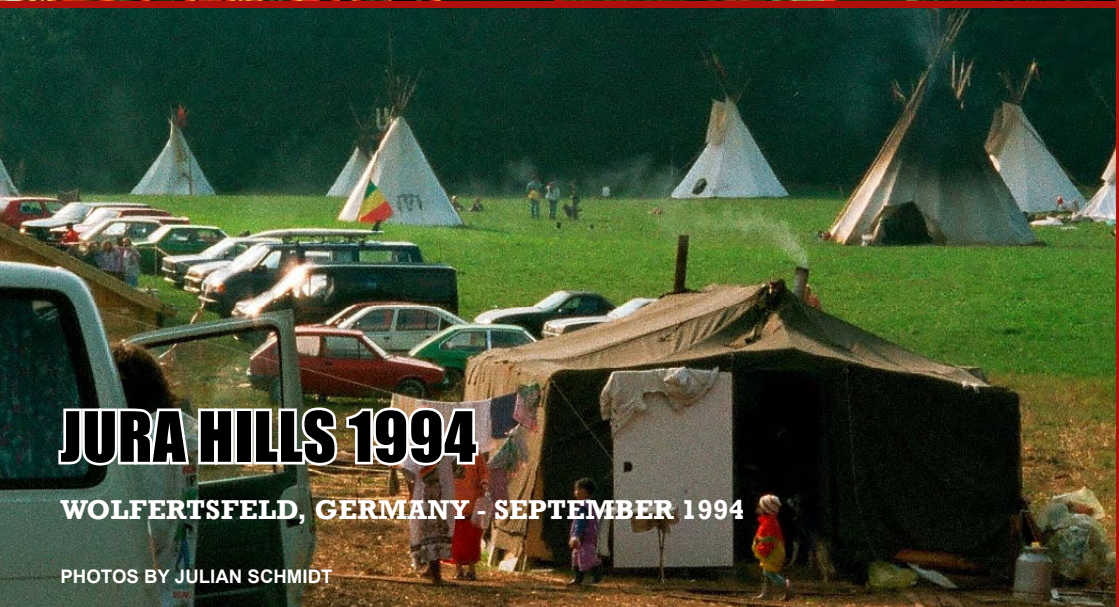
ner that is sure to set the masses swaying, in support of the music and much of the message. Thereafter the exciting Rastafarian **Runkus** joins up on **Use Jah Words**, where the brass - like **Runkus** - makes all too rare inputs on a jaunty track with a powerful message that's delivered with force. **Nuh Play Ting** then slows the pace somewhat, but the message is as intense as

ever, laced with real life anecdotes and warnings about the dangers of using guns as playthings.

The album's penultimate piece **Ah We Dis** sees the artist wearing his heart on his sleeve, with a strong pacey pulse (and a catchy chorus-cum-rhythm), that extols the virtues of *'positive vibes'* as *'negativity'* is shown the door. It's not uncommon to save the 'best wine 'til last', and whilst **Jahcoustix's** assistance on **Stronger** is a welcome addition, the message and the music here are merely an extension of much of what has gone before - that is, good quality message music.

Much as we have come to expect from this considered musical maestro, **Luciano's** latest release is a genuine 'tour de force'. With his strong vocals, an accomplished horn section, live instrumentation and select melodica inputs, it makes for a lively listening experience. Indeed, **The Answer** - fully produced by **Oneness Records** - is sure to set the artist off on one of his characteristic cartwheels, as it vaults its way up **Billboard's** reggae listings. So, if roots reggae is your thing and you can cope with the religious righteousness that seeps right through the product, you're in for some tasty tunes.

by Gerry McMahon



JURA HILLS 1994

WOLFERTSFELD, GERMANY - SEPTEMBER 1994

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ARISE ROOTS

UNITY ACROSS PATHWAYS

LEAPS OF FAITH

INTERVIEW BY STEVE TOPPLE
PHOTOS BY ALEX ROTH



If ever an album represented a decade of growth and artistic synergy from a band, it's **Arise Roots'** possibly seminal work, **Pathways**. The inventive, genre-smashing record also marks a rebirth for the group, now under a record label's wing. But how did the album come to be such a Smorgasbord in the first place? And what else happened to create such a powerful release? **Reggaeville** chatted with three of **Arise Roots'** members, **Robert Sotelo** (lead guitars), **Todd Johnson** (keys/backing vocals) and **Karim Israel** (vocals and frontman) to find out.

How long has **Pathways** been in the making?

Todd: We've been working on this one for a long time. I can remember *One Life To Live* was an idea that came out of a soundcheck in 2016. So, these songs have been in the making for a long-time, pulled out of the archives too. But the album has been done for about a year or so, so we're ready to get this thing out!

You're now part of **Ineffable Records**, which is a first for you. Why was now the time to make that move?

Robert: To be honest, we've never been on a label. Everything we've done has been independent, through hard work, gigging, saving our money and not paying each other out for nine of the ten years! [laughter]. But we've always done it for the love and passion. We finally felt that with the opportunity with **Ineffable**, the timing was just right for us to



finally allow somebody to help us go further, to reach the world and to be interviewed by someone of your stature!

You're making a vast assumption about me there, but thank you Robert – you're too kind...!

Arise Roots [laughing]

Did it take a lot of trust to make the move from being an independent band to working under a label?

Karim: It was definitely a big leap of faith; it took us out of our comfort zone. It took a lot of conversations between the bandmates, some compromise, a lot of talk and dialogue to see where we're trying to go. It basically boiled down to the exposure. We felt we brought a lot to the table when we went to **Ineffable**. So, we felt like that, even being able to have a conversation with them, we had some leverage to say, well "*We built all this up completely independently, without management, promotions - we've been a lone wolf*". So, we decided to give it a try. If it doesn't work, we could go back to what we were doing it before. But we've been completely happy with **Ineffable**. Those guys are amazing, we really love how smart and connected they are and how much time and effort they put into what they do. That gave them the stamp of approval: we really feel like part of a team.

Todd: The trustworthy factor is a big factor.

Robert: I'll be honest, I was just like "*Every label is the devil! We're fine on our own!*" But like **Karim** said, we were all in agreement.

Todd: We're never all in agreement!

Robert: [Laughs] We're never all in agreement, but we all agreed on this. It didn't feel like reality until this album was finally released.

Pathways is musically intricate, yet really accessible. Is that important to you?

Todd: That's important to us in all our music. We've always aimed to make our music accessible to everybody.

Karim: To me, from my own perspective, is two things. One: the album is a representation of us as a whole, and where we are and the music we like. And I feel it's a balance between who we are, our own musical tastes with a little bit of musical experimentation. Because we did push the limits a little bit for us, and so with that being the case I felt that even with pushing those limits – we didn't go super-far reaching, but they were pushed kind of far for us. So, with that I think we were able to find a balance between pushing the envelope a little bit and staying in the pocket a little bit. And I feel like that balance was reached with **Pathways**. But two, our sound: I feel like that is ever-evolving. How we sound now is different to when we first started. So, it's a natural evolution of a band.

The album is very much focused on the rhythm section: bass, drums, guitars. Was that intentional?

Robert: Definitely. We're totally rhythm-section driven. I've all about the Rub-a-Dub, the Dub sound, the **Studio One** Sound – the bands behind the lead singers. Myself, I'm a very big fan of classic guitar players like **Ernest Ranglin** and **Hux Brown** – so I definitely feel like we're heavily driven by our rhythm section. And the combination of that with **Karim's** voice and the back-up vocals – that's the chemicals to our formula.

Pathways is a really diverse and ambiguous album in terms of genres. The track Nice And Slow is a perfect example, as it has heavy nods to Soca. Was this eclecticism a conscious choice, or did it just happen?

Todd: Yeah, we've got to shout out our boys in the band, especially **Jamey "Zebbie" Dekofsky** on drums.

Robert: On *Nice And Slow*, he was the one who was the creative force behind that whole drum-beat breakdown on there. He has a lot



of influences, which he brought. We didn't think of it as a Soca rhythm – but I can hear that now you've mentioned it! I think it just happened naturally – and that's how we develop songs; we just build off a rhythm and it blends together.

Todd: Yeah, that's our writing process: we start off with one idea and it just gets bigger and bigger until it takes form.

The album is recorded 'as live', so did the tracks evolve from what you'd originally written?

Karim: Yeah, there are little differences. I feel like by the time we get to record, we've done so much of the experimentation, trying different things – so once we're actually at the studio and spending money to record, we stick to the script. But we do still get to have some experimentation, like **Robert** on the guitar. It's a living organism even when we're in the studio. Like with my vocals, I tend to go in with 99.9% of it written – but I like to leave the door open for a little bit of experimentation. But what we don't do, is we're not the type of band where we go into the studio and completely just jam and wing it at that

moment. If we had the money and availability to be able to record sessions like that, then we'd have a lot more of them!

Pathways feels like the band is as one, all working in unison. There's a great energy and synergy throughout it.

Karim: One thing in the recording process, I do like that we're all able to play at the same time. It feels like you're on stage doing it. As a vocalist, having that versus just having a track to sing to, when I can see the guys playing at the same time, and I can know that this synergy is happening – it creates a vibe. And it might seem to some people that this vibe doesn't make a huge difference. But it does, it's unmistakable.

Robert: You mentioned we sound like we're in unison and it all just sticks together. This group has nothing to do with Reggae at all, actually. You know **Robert Smith, The Cure** – his way of creating the music that he creates with them – it's like everything is fused and it becomes one, gigantic chord, and it's just... the melodic, the feel, you get immersed in it. That's how I feel our music comes together. It becomes a unison.

Clay G



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Correct me if I'm wrong, but there's a Prog Rock, Peter Gabriel-type vibe running across Pathways, not least in the use of synths. Am I right?

Robert: I think that **Peter Gabriel**, they're just massive, amazing records he recorded, they were big sounds. And the synths sounds were heavily used back then. So, when **Todd** picked up the synthesiser, we were just like "*What is that thing?*". But it just worked for us. Yes, it does sound like Prog Rock, but it's a modern instrument used around the world by bands. So, it's that sound mixed with me, using vintage guitars along with still trying to incorporate a classic Roots Reggae sound: our interpretation, our attempt of a Nyabinghi Rastafari sound; one of our good friends came on board to do all the binghi drums. We didn't intend to do a Prog sound! I don't think any of us ever mentioned that to each other. But I can see how that would come across.

Todd: [laughing] These guys have been pushing me to try some new sounds for a while. I come from a horns background, so I had a built-in resistance to the synthesiser! But this is the first album we played with new sounds; it created a new layer in the band – we called it "sonic exploration". It's definitely something that hasn't been incorporated into our sound prior to this album.

Robert: And it's rarely used in Reggae, modern Reggae – unless it's an experimental band.

Karim: For me, those different sounds together, and the way we used them – I feel like it creates something that's a sound overall, not individually – something that's unique to us. The way we used some of the old techniques with the new, that's our MO as a band, as a whole – being able to mesh old and new. I feel like we don't really sound like anybody

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else out there. And I'm glad that we don't, and that we could create a new branch in this Roots tree. Sonic exploration is something we've been trying to have with **Pathways** – it was the goal, but also to make it come together so it still sounds good. I wanted it to be easy enough and good enough so any average person, whether they're a Reggae fan or not, would hear it - and sonically it sounds good enough and appealing enough so they'd like it, no matter what kind of fan they are. So, if it's got a little bit of Prog in there – I'll take it!

Robert: [laughing] Put us on the Prog Fest! But at the same time, I feel like we're trying to keep the integrity of **Arise Roots**, of Reggae music and not to over-infuse this Reggae that we play. I do feel over the past ten-years we've developed the **Arise Roots** sound. It's our sound, but all influenced by the Jamaican hit makers, from Europe and Jamaica – from the **Trojan** sound, to **Studio One**, to artists like **Chronixx** and **Protoje**. I feel like we could still fit in there, but we don't have their

sound. I'm pleased we can stay separated but still be as influential, I hope, to the Reggae music world. I want people eventually to be able to pick up another band's album and say "*That sounds like **Arise Roots!***". That's complimentary to me.

Moving away from the album, the current pandemic has caused a lot of artists to switch heavily over to social media with live gigs, interactive events and so on. Do you think this is a good move?

Robert: I feel like with a lot of these Q&A's, these acoustic performances in their garages, bathrooms, their cars, whatever – I appreciate them, I get them – but at the same time I feel like I'm getting to know them too much. There's no mystery behind them anymore. Like with artists like **Elvis** – you didn't know anything about him, you saw him in his outfits, on the stage. I just feel like we're losing that with this 'in home' stuff. I get it, but personally I'm not one to post myself up on Instagram Live. I feel like once we're able



to get out again, and hit the stage, that's the real element. We want people to be able to hear the full-on **Arise Roots** sound, on stage, we want them to see our energy, our vibe, us running around the stage and putting on a show for them.

Todd: I kind of agree, this live thing comes off almost desperate right now. If you have a quality product, and it sounds good, that's cool – I love it when I see that. But sometimes it's just too much winging it, it doesn't sound good... I'm tired!

Are you pleased with the current resurgence in vinyl as a medium?

Todd: Absolutely – vinyl's coming back! It's got this natural saturation that the MP3 doesn't have. And the whole process of putting vinyl on the record, putting the needle on – it's all thought out. You intended to hear that song; you listen more intently because of it. We're working on printing up some vinyl of **Pathways**, it was going to be out with the album but should be coming soon!

You work with the incredible Nattali Rize on Lions In The Jungle. She's part of a growing community of women coming out of the Roots movement, as almost a movement in themselves. Why do you think it's taken so long for this surge in females working at the same level as their male counterparts?

Karim: Yeah, y'know – that's the way it's always been. So of course, there's always going to be remnants of that old guard – the 'boy's club'. And that's going to be tough to break through. But it's amazing to see what's happening with the ladies right now. This boom that's happening with all of the artists, the stuff they're putting out is pure gold. It should never take any type of backseat or side action to what the guys are doing. Saying 'on par' makes it sound like it's a surprise that they sound as good as they guys – and that shouldn't be the case. They sound every bit as good, and sometimes better. So, like the talent is there. Given the opportunity, and in some cases, them taking the opportunity, which I'm sure has been the case, I'm happy it's happening. I liken it to water: as soon as you fill up a certain space with water, as

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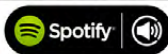


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soon as you let even pin drop of an opening, then the water is going to fill that space. The quality of the water hasn't changed. Water's always going to be water. The same thing with the quality of these ladies, the talent has always been there. But it's awesome now that there's so many ways to get their music out there, you don't have to go through as much of an 'old guard' as you had to in years past, you can get your music out there on streaming sites as easy as anyone else can. Once those tunes get to the streets, there's a phrase: 'The streets don't lie'. The proof is in the pudding. As soon as I heard **Koffee** for the first time, when I heard **Toast**, I was like "*Oh my gosh. This is freaking amazing*". It's unmistakable how good it is. So, when given those opportunities, given the exposure, you can't stop it. You can't hide the sunshine. It's too bright.

Robert: I feel like a lot of these ladies are taking the risk, and hitting the road too, putting themselves out there on the road, too; putting in the work and making the effort around the

world. Like **Jah9**, **Nattali Rize**. Not only are they recording the album and letting it go out there, they're hitting the road right behind it. They're putting the work in equally, if not more than the men.

Does this also reflect in ethnicity?

Robert: Yeah, like **Arise Roots**. We're a multinational race band. We're all from different parts of the world, different origins. Like myself, 20 years ago when I was playing Reggae here in LA, it was kind of hard for me to be looked at as a legitimate Reggae guitar player – because I'm a Latino. And being Latino in Reggae 20 year's ago, was pretty much a rarity. Now, especially here in LA, there's a huge community of Latino Reggae, then we've got the white Reggae. And then with us, I feel like we're a mash-up of all those nationalities. We're trying to show the world that Reggae is international. This is what Jamaica wanted. Jamaica wanted Reggae to go international and be played by the world. And we're proof of all the hard work Jamaica put out there for us.



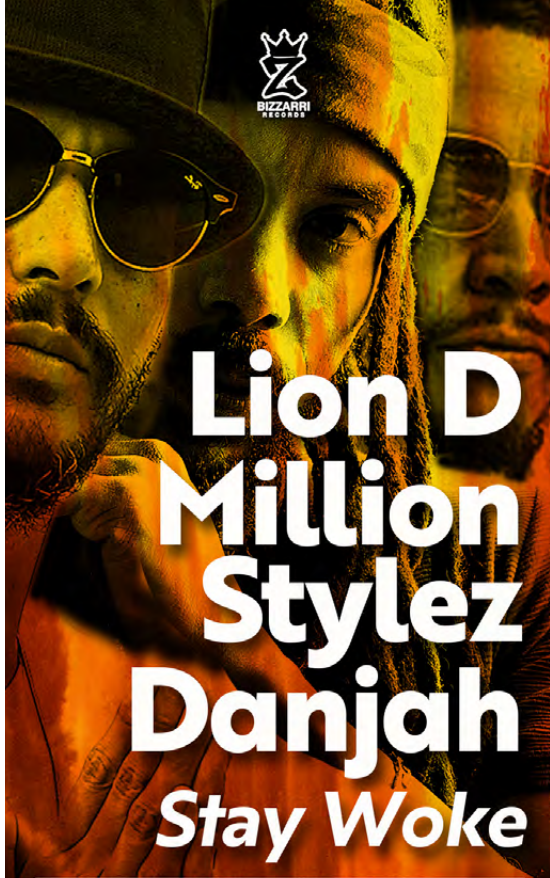
Is there a central message you'd like the audience to take away from Pathways?

Todd: It's a collection of songs, and it's about all the different paths. So, I don't know if there's a central theme to all the songs.

Robert: The personal meaning of **Pathways** to me, is the roads that we've taken while on tour, while travelling, the road leading up to us signing to the label. All those paths that we took, all the decisions we had to make, all the arguing, all the happy times. It's the pathways leading to the point we're at today. As for the meaning to the world – it's the pathways you choose, whether they're good or bad. But I feel our music will help you choose a good path. That's my take on it.

Karim has a very good one, I bet...

Karim: [laughing] Two things come to mind. First, the pathways that allowed us to come together to create this album. We all had our own individual pathways that we took to get here. From even once the band



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was formed, to the evolving of our sound, and just all of that together and how we got to the album, is definitely a key point. Another is, I feel like when it comes to **Pathways** – the different styles, the different sub-genres you hear, the different sounds – they could appeal to different people, and how these different pathways could get to the main goal: to lead people back to Reggae music. And with that, with those different pathways, one of the themes of the album is knowing that there's going to be these differences throughout our lives and throughout people: differences of religion, faith, skin colour, preferences. Those differences are there and we can acknowledge and be respectful of these differences, with these different pathways people are on in life – and still be able to come together to lead to this one thing that we can all enjoy at the same time. Which is this album, and Reggae music as a whole. And that's what **Pathways** means to me.

For me, Pathways is simply a message of unity across humanity.

Karim: I'm actually really glad you used that word 'unity', because from the begin-

ning that was a word that kept coming up in my heart. The album took so long to come together and now, hearing you say 'unity' is definitely satisfying.

What's in store for Arise Roots for the rest of 2020? If Coronavirus allows, will you be touring?

Robert: Definitely, I feel we want to get out there and start pushing the album, and chat to our friends and fans around the US, and hopefully the world. Hopefully we can travel and really spread the message in person. That way, they can feel our energy playing the music they've been listening to. So once the pandemic is over, we're ready to go out there and hit the road. But in the meantime, I think that some venues are going to start allowing bands to set up in them and do live performances, like a concert, and stream it live. I feel that's going to be the initial way to do this. So, hopefully during the fall we'll be able to do this, and then eventually get on the road. But definitely, we're anxious, ready and willing to hit the road.



ARISE ROOTS - PATHWAYS

Ineffable Records - June 19, 2020

It's been a decade since **Arise Roots** first formed. Since then, they've worked independently of any record label. But now with their new album they've taken the plunge and teamed with one of the industry's well-known players. But has this leap of faith paid off?

Pathways, released via **Ineffable Records**, is a classy, cleverly orchestrated, expertly produced (mostly by the band) and ultimately powerful project. With Roots at its heart, it branches out into delicately scored intricacies which elevate it to higher plains. Engineering from **Lewis Richards** is top-class. But three standout features of **Pathways** serve to define **Arise Roots'** approach to their craft.

The first is musical elegance, in terms of the expansion on traditional Roots. **Colors** is the opening track and serves as an amalgamation of some of the genres touched on across the album: Roots, Ambient, Dub, Soul and Rock.

Many tracks highlight this progressive approach: **Come and Get It** featuring **Kyle McDonald (Slightly Stoopid)** and **Eric Rachmany (Rebellion)** and produced by **Gary Larason** and **Rick Haze**, where the words "let us play it in a Rub-a-Dub style" are over an actual, stripped-back Rub-a-Dub bridge; the Dub-heavy **Selecta** with its imposing, rounded bass dropping the second and fourth beats; **If You Let Me** sees **Arise Roots** move into 21st century Lover's Rock territory as the heavily layered, Soul harmonised backing vocals intertwine with a whining electric guitar, and syncopated Rocksteady-esque bass.

Lions in the Jungle features the always-superb **Lutan Fyah** and **Nattali Rize & Turbulence**. It's



a brooding, hybrid Roots track, designed specifically for the guest artists. **Fyah's** segment is stripped Roots through and through. **Rize's** plays to her ambiguous musical nature: heavily Ambient with Dub elements thrown in. Pitch perfect and ultimately extremely clever song writing. **Nice and Slow** takes **Pathways** into another different area: from frantic, opening EDM-like synths to

the Soca-esque percussive arrangement. But what also drives **Pathways** is the group's focus on the rhythm section.

This is apparent across numerous cuts. Guitars feature prominently on **Here I Am**. The bass leads on the haunting **Follow the Leader**. And percussion is dominantly syncopated on the Ambient-led Dub cut **One Life to Live**. But it's combined rhythm section sound which gives **Pathways** its overall vibe; moreover, it's the sign of a quality band, too. But the third factor which makes the album stand out is **Arise Roots** themselves.

The chemistry between the members is undeniable, leaping out from your speakers. While bands generally record albums 'as live', **Pathways** is far above the normal standard. It feels magical; sounds like a recording of a live performance; is utterly accessible and engaging. It's clear that **Arise Roots** have huge synergy across both the music and the mission. And it shines through on the album.

Pathways is a stellar effort from this skilled, innovative and compelling group. Chic, smart and expertly crafted, **Arise Roots** have created a musical and lyrical masterpiece, worthy of their new record label. **Ineffable** should be over the moon. And the Grammy committee should be listening.

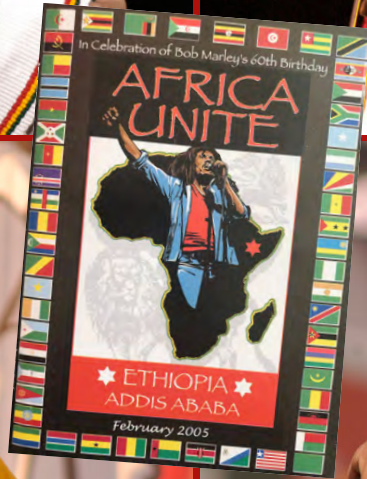
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INTERVIEW



ETANA

GEMINI

SHARE A SMILE

INTERVIEW BY GARDY STEIN

Adaptable, outgoing, intelligent, adventurous, communicative, creative - the air sign Gemini is said to show many traits a good entertainer requires. This predisposition of birth paired with incredible talent in the person of **Shauna McKenzie**, yielding the artist we know as **Etana**. Having created albums such as **The Strong One** (2008), **Free Expressions** (2011), **Better Tomorrow** (2013) and **I Rise** (2014), she rightfully earned a Grammy nomination for **Reggae Forever** in 2018 - the first female nomination in 20 years!

With **Gemini**, she now continues the journey and once more the album is an outpouring of **Etana's** phenomenal self. **Reggaeville** linked up with **The Strong One** to learn more about the singer's unique outfits, her opinion about the obvious presence of female Reggae artists and, of course, the creation process of **Gemini**.

Greetings! Are you in Jamaica at the moment?

No, I am in Florida until they open up again... they have this application system now and you have to go in quarantine when you reach Jamaica, I don't want to do that. My mother lives here, in Florida, so I am fine.

Good to hear. Before we talk about your upcoming album, let's take a look back. Last year around this time, you had a performance in Kenya. How was that?

Oh yeah, that was amazing! When I arrived in Kenya I was told that the show was sold out. By the next day, I was told that the show was oversold. They were expecting like 5,000 people and they had already 6,000 tickets sold.

That show... the people were singing every single song, especially love songs, all the songs! It was amazing, it was loud, at some points I couldn't even hear myself, I just let them sing. I couldn't hear the stage, nothing, they were louder than the band!

Judging from that and the comments on your Instagram, it seems like you have a strong fanbase over there.

Very strong! And I appreciate and love them so much, it's crazy over there. But that's why I love it, the love that they give and the passion that they have for Reggae music is just unbelievable.

True. Have you been to other countries in Africa?

I've been to the Gambia, to Ghana, to South Africa... beautiful places!

Did you have the chance to look around a bit, apart from the shows you had?

In South Africa, I was there for a week and a half, so I was able to walk down to the port where they have the fish, and I went to buy fresh fish there, also we walked down to the beach and we went to Capetown... we did a lot of things!

Something I realised from the pictures that are out there of you is that a lot of your dresses are inspired by African materials and fabrics. Who do you work with to get these unique outfits?

Most of the times when I see a print, I only buy the prints that I'm really drawn to, the prints I really like. And then either I come up with an idea of how I want the clothes or they send me a drawing and I either approve or I tweak it and send it back, and then I get it made that way.

Do you have designers you work with all the time?

Yes, I like to stick to the people that I have known over the years. I have worked with a lot, she made most of my clothes for **Sting**, back in the days, all the way up to now. We

never broke connection. She left Jamaica and moved to Florida, so I would just drive up to her or I can just call her because she has my measurements, and then she mails it to wherever I am, whether I am in England or Jamaica or Florida.

Did she make the dress that you wore at the Grammy celebration last year?

She sure did! (laughs)

I saw that mentioned a lot. Speaking of... you were nominated as the first female Reggae artist in more than 20 years for your album Reggae Forever, Koffee won the Grammy this year. It seems like, at the moment, female Reggae artists really are in focus, artists like you or Jah9, but also many talented young singers like Lila Iké, Sevana, Kelissa, Jaz Elise, Naomi Cowan... why do you think this is happening right now?

I don't really know what it is, I just think that those before us did what they did, and then in my period I think that I didn't drop the button neither, I continued the run, as strong as I could possible. That left the door open for other females to come up, so... for that, I would credit it to the women who came before me!

Being a woman myself, I'm really happy to see that development and hope it continues! And now, talking about your album Gemini, the title struck me because I am a Gemini myself, so I have to ask first, why did you pick that title?

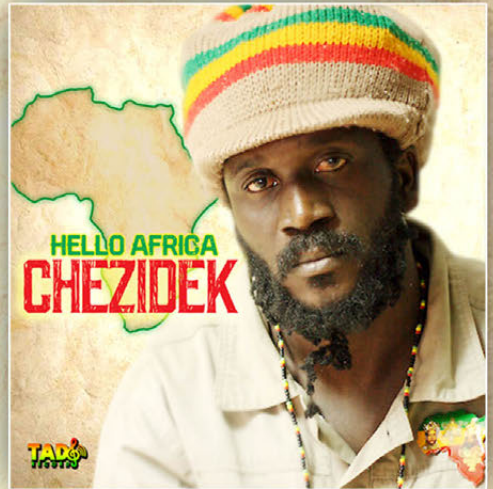
Well, my birthday is May 22nd, so I'm a Gemini. Also, there is so much about Gemini, being spontaneous, being creative, being able to adapt and adjust easily and get along with everybody... And music, music is like that as well, it gets into the heart of people in many different countries, with many different languages, it brings joy, it brings happiness and it's not the same while being the same at the same time. Music brings different moods but it's still music, you understand, so... it's a lot that has to do with music and life and people.



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When did the creation process for Gemini begin?

I started like last year October and I finished the project in February.

Wow, that was quick then! Were all songs created from scratch or did you have some ready?

No, they are all brand new! There is nothing that I have picked up that I had before, it was all created in that period.

Which producers did you work with?

TJ Productions, Barbwiya Productions, Freemind Music... my own label, Cashflow Records and Young Veteran's Music.

Which song was the first one to be ready?

The first song I did was *100 On The Highway*, and it ended up being the first song on the album!

The message of the song, does it mean to leave your troubles behind, to look ahead?

That's exactly what it means. It means that no matter what negative energy comes along, either through people or situations, I'm just leaving it all behind and I'm moving forward, moving forward speedily.

Before speaking about some other songs in more detail, it struck me that you work with a lot of different styles, a lot of different moods. Was that a natural process?

Yes, because that's how my spirit is. I don't just think in one way, and I don't think that my music should sound just one way. I think I'm very creative and there is no limit to my creativity, and I tried my best to display that on my album. There is no limit to music and no limit to creativity, and especially in incorporating that into a Gemini who is very spontaneous as well, so it is all mixed together.

Tell us something about the features that are on there, how did you choose the people who



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can be heard on tracks like Jamaica, Secret Lovers or Tight Space?

I am familiar with the sound of **Wiya**. I know that he can sing, he used to be a singer with **C-Sharp Band**, and so I used his sound for the background vocals on **100 On A Highway**, and also for **Secret Lovers**, which I did in collaboration with him. You know, the whole Covid-period, a lot of things that I wanted to do, I wasn't able to do it. I know that the people I work with are very talented, like the background vocalist is also a writer and a singer, the one called **Klyve**. So I worked with people who are just talented enough to get the work done. Even like the young artists, like **Yahsha**, very talented as well, so we kind of just grouped together all the talented people who are also in majority gemini, same way (laughs), and we completed the project!

Can you introduce Yahsha? That's a name I'm not familiar with as yet.

Yahsha is an artist from Jamaica. We partnered together on a few tracks on this album, and he is also a part of **Freemind Music** which is the management company for him as

well, so it's like a collaboration of family! You can look forward to some releases from him.

And what made you pick Bugle and the No Maddz for the track Jamaica?

Bugle, I love the spirit of **Bugle**. He is humble but talented, he is serious about music and serious about life, and again, I only work with people who are not just talented but spiritually connected as well, and he is one of them, so I had to call him. He did wicked! And I also enjoyed working with the **The No-Maddz**. They are so cool, they can be seen as funny, but then the lyrics they put out sometimes, and the words they spit out, it's serious stuff! So I thought that they would be a good fit for this one as well.

What was your motivation to write Jamaica? It's one of the more serious songs, I mean, of course the love songs are serious in their own way, but this one is very...

Very serious, right! (laughs) Well, it's been a long time since I touched on any topic like that, and I seriously saw many things happen between last year and this year. What struck me most about the sensationalism around was just how so many things happen in and around Jamaica and we talk about it all the time, but nothing ever comes off the top and it just continues. When you do talk, there are just so many different opinions that come up, and so I figured it's best to put it in a song. That way, people can agree or disagree, and I just sing and there is no fight and no argument, but the truth is still out there and it's out there in a way where it doesn't cause war amongst people, you know.

True. Also, the next song, Party & Smoke, it sounds like a criticism of party culture...

Well, there is nothing wrong with partying and smoking, but some people make it a life... a career, a thing that they go through every single day. And I say (sings) "*Nuff a dem wanna party and smoke, a jacket and tie see them as joke as the cups go up dem a tear dem down*" like, for example in America or any other country, when they want to find

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someone who is illegal or on their criminal list, right, the first thing they do is they go to a club or party because they know that's where most of them will go to show off or spill champagne or do things that make them obvious because they want to be seen. But at the end of the day, when life changes and becomes more difficult, the thing is not to blame everybody else but to look at the decisions that the individual made and to see how much they could have made their life better by making better decisions. I wrote that song to spark some thought in people's minds to how society views especially people with black and brown skin and what they expect of them, and to me it's time for us to change the narrative with our actions as a people and it's so much deeper than what you hear... It sounds like being about party and smoke, it sounds funny, but when you really listen good, you'll hear... *"and the time will come when things won't be the same, everything will change, swinging your gold chain."* You know, and even in the

part when I stated... *"A serious time, it's sour than lime, black on black, why the numbers so high, gold still shine in a free food line ahah"* so it's like you have a little, you have a small amount, but instead of investing it to make your life better, you invest it in... a grill or the next bad shoes or... you know, and those are the things that I'm talking about because at the end of the day as a people, a lot of the population is still in the free food line, you know. So, it's a lot to look at.

I think the time right now is a special chance, because there is no party, no distraction, so you are kind of forced to stay at home and work with what you have. So for some people this might be a chance to... read a book or concentrate on things that bring them further in their lives.

Exactly! But, you know, in doing this song, Covid was never a thought, so it's funny how things come into realisation after putting them on paper, it's just weird (laughs).

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A lot of the other songs talk about love in different shades, so maybe you could introduce one or two which are especially dear to you?

The song *Love*, because I feel like social media has made a lot of people forget what it means to have compassion or have a relationship with someone and truly be in love. I think the time has come now where a lot of people have forgotten how to love. And so... swiping left and swiping right and forgetting about the love and true connection, that's something that I don't ever want to slip away from me, so I try to hold on to what I know love to be like.

In the song, do you talk to a lover or love itself?

It's a letter, writing a letter to love. Like saying "*Love, don't make me forget.*" I'm talking to love itself. Also, *Anything For You...* that's something completely different. It's fun and I think that people will find a lot of joy in that one, it will make them dance and move around, it will take them to a happy place.

The track Tight Space also has a playful, speedy vibe. Why did you choose Kabaka to feature on that one?

I thought that he was fitting, and we talked a couple of times about working together or even just hanging out or whatever, but we weren't able to do that yet. I figured with his tone and the direction of the song, he would be just perfect. So I sent him the song and he did it within a day.

My favourites are Bubble and Truly. The video for the latter was shot in a maze, where was that?

In Jamaica! It was shot in Hope Gardens. You need to go there one day. That was in the Chinese Garden and they have a maze. It's a part of the park. It was... at first when I saw the pictures and they were talking about doing the video, I asked the guy "*Can you find a tree with these yellow flowers?*" because that's my favourite colour. And when I got there, sure enough, the tree was there with the yellow flowers on the ground, it was beautiful! And it rained all day, so I think the rain set the tone, the vibe for the video, so that was really nice.

Later in the video you see a live band, who are they?

They are called the **Tower Band** and they also have a video productions crew which is made up by themselves and one or two other people, and they are the ones who shot the video.

Last question, what does Talk About It talk about?

Talk About It is for those who may go through depression for whatever reason, or those who feel like cutting themselves to kind of numb the pain they feel or hide the pain they really feel inside. It's basically saying to talk about it and express yourself instead of holding it in or putting another mark on your wrist. Because most of the things that we go through in life, and some of them may be so difficult to the point where you feel like "*You know what, I'm just gonna take my life it's just not worth it to live it through.*" But everything is a test, and each test and each hurdle that you jump over brings you that much closer to becoming a stronger and better person, and even if the world brings you to your knees, life is still for living. We always just have to either cry it out, fight it out, sleep it out, whatever we do, but we still have to get up and keep going because what's worth it in the end is look back and say "*I've been there but look where I am now*". So that's what it is about.

Thanks for the insight, that's very deep. I'm sure you are looking forward to the release!

I'm excited! I can't wait. As an artist, every project makes you feel that way, once you put it out there, you automatically want to know what everybody else's favourite track is.

What is your focus during the next few weeks?

Just promoting the music, enjoying my birthday, and continuing to write and record just the same. I want to release another album after this one - the work continues.

Hopefully we see you on tour soon after all this is over.



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Yes! I was supposed to be in Germany, in France, in Switzerland, all over there right now... it's alright though. I don't know how we are going to start again, maybe we have to start in smaller locations or whatever. I hope there will be a cure soon.

Any closing words you want to share?

I just want to say to everybody across the world, it's a hard time for all of us but wherever you find peace and whatever you can do to find peace within yourself and strength when you need it... this is the time to do just that. Share a smile when you can, be more compassionate and share love. Take care of each

other as much as you can and, even if you don't think that it's real or even if you don't think that there is an actual virus, whatever you think of it, the best thing to do is just to be as safe as possible, because we really don't know what it is, not even the professionals know everything about it, so the best thing is to be as safe as possible and share and care as much as possible. And love yourself.

And be a little Gemini!

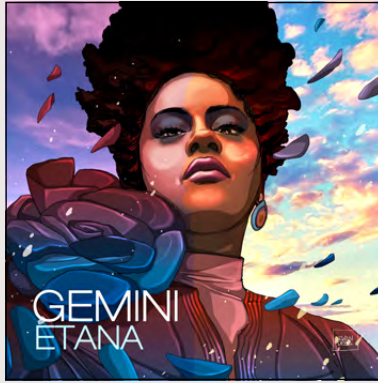
Yes, be spontaneous, be happy! (laughs)



ETANA - GEMINI

Freemind Music - June 19, 2020

Being a Gemini myself, it feels like destiny writing the review for an album called **Gemini** - in the middle of the Gemini season at that! The reason why **Shauna McKenzie** aka **Etana** aka **The Strong One** has given her new release this title is, of course, that she is a Gemini as well, but also because she values the characteristics attributed to that air sign: creativity, spontaneity, adaptability and sociability.



Her album sure is a representation of these, the 12 tracks included covering such a wide range of topics and styles that they conjure up the image of a glittering, iridescent butterfly. In part, this impression is evoked by the different producers responsible for the music. **Young Veterans** (*Party N Smoke*), **Cashflow Records** (*Talk About It*) and **TJ Records** (*Bubble*) contribute one track each, **Barbwiya Music** has three (*Truly*, *Secret Lovers* and *Love*), while the lion's share of six tracks was shouldered by **Etana's** own label, **Freemind Music**.

They are the ones who composed the pacy **100 On The Highway** kicking off the release, an affirmation of the determination **Etana** displays when it comes to her music. Straight ahead! More laid-back, the subsequent *Truly* is a rootsy love ballad with beautiful bass and brass lines, provided and mixed by **Dwain "Wiya" Campbell-Fletcher**. If you are in the mood, check out the atmospheric video that shows Kingston's **Tower Band** in full effect.

Bubble, now, is another love song as well as an irresistible invitation to dance. **Etana's** voice is at its best here, shining in the versatility of both powerful belting and tender harmonising that is her speciality. More of these abilities can be heard in *Deception*, which is one of the more up-tempo

pieces, and *Easy To Let Go*, a track that will automatically make your head bounce and your fingers snap.

While *Anything For You* and *Love* are a matter of personal taste, the features add exciting highlights. **Wiya** joins **Etana** in a yearning, almost desperate description of how it feels to be *Secret Lovers*, and **Kabaka Pyramid** flows

with her on the reggaeton-ish riddim of *Tight Space*. By far the most interesting combination is heard on *Jamaica. Bugle, The No-Maddz* and newcomer **Yahsha** share lines with **Etana**, who doesn't mince matters in a criticism of Jamaica selling out land and resources to foreign states and companies.

In fact, it is this seriousness that is the greatest strength of the album **Gemini** - love and relationships are important and sweet to sing about, yes, but the world right now has issues that are of crucial relevance and should be brought to the listener's attention to spark meditation. Thus, *Party & Smoke* intends to shake up those who invest time, money and energy in the fleeting pleasures of a grand night out instead of focusing on building a stable future, and *Talk About It* is a plea to all those struggling with a tough situation, a plea to talk about what's hurting you instead of harming yourself.

Together with her partner-in-crime **Andre Morris** and everyone else involved, **Etana** has created yet another powerful testimony of her artistry. Well presented by the stunning cover-artwork of **Ivan Debs**, **Gemini** is a treat for all the signs of the zodiac (although it would be interesting to know if **Gemini's** purchase it more often than others).

by **Gardy Stein**



CHIEMSEE REGGAE SUMMER 1995

ÜBERSEE, GERMANY - JULY 7, 1995

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DOUR FESTIVAL 2004

DOUR, BELGIUM - JULY 2004

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ROOTZ UNDERGROUND

RED, GOLD & GREEN

LABYRINTHS OF MEANING

INTERVIEW BY GARDY STEIN - PHOTOS BY LEE ABEL



Three years ago, when travelling wasn't a problem and festivals still took place, I met **Stephen Newland** aka "**Lightning the Magnetic**" at the **Ostrodá Reggae Festival**, Poland, to talk about his upcoming solo projects. A lot has happened since then in the artist's life: he has performed with the **Inna De Yard** crew in France, has released his second solo album **Thunderground** and rocked the stage as **Bob Marley** in Oslo's musical **56 Hope Road Revisited**.

Reunited with his band **Rootz Underground** in Jamaica, they set to work immediately to produce a remarkable oeuvre that is about to be released: **Red, Gold & Green**, a triple album, harbours an enormous amount of music, music which is best ingested with a little background knowledge.

In order to learn as much as possible about the trinity album, **Reggaeville** has zoomed in with **Stephen Newland** on a windy Sunday afternoon:

How does the lockdown treat you?

Good actually... I'm enjoying the time I get to spend with my children, with the home-schooling and home office and all. Of course, the reason for this is not enjoyable at all, there are many cases over here and a lot of people are losing their jobs.

How is the situation in Jamaica?

Poor people suffer for food, so in that way it's bad, but the whole thing... it's Jah Jah control. There is heavy curfew and quarantine going on for the past months. The curfew is from 6 o'clock, nobody is on the road, which means

that businesses will close at 3pm, supermarkets, gas stations and so on, so employees can be at home in time. For me, let me tell you, me de pon lockdown all the while anyway (laughs), so it's no difference for me. All I do is recording, writing, I run a school project around... I just have more time with my garden, my plants are looking great, I grow some monster marijuana (laughs), right here, I'm cooking a lot, doing exercise... So in that way, as I was saying before, for me it's a minor adjustment, sistren, so I'm just chilling and using the time constructively, focusing strictly on the album release.



Which brings us to the new Rootz Underground album coming up, the triple album Red, Gold & Green. Can you explain the concept behind it? And why do you release it at once and not one after the other?

For several reasons. Number one, originally the formation of the band **Rootz Underground** was in the year 2000, so we wanted to put out a 20th anniversary classics, a best of **Rootz Underground**. But then, you know, that's such a played-out thing unless you give it fresh material, because especially nowadays the fans want food, musical food. People are starving for food, because the musical format of Reggae now is getting so pimped out that all type of Reggae beats with no message, no spiritual nutrition is reaching the people. I mean, look, I don't say anybody is doing wrong but... you listen to the content of a lot of the mainstream Reggae music, it's very light. It's not **Twinkle Brothers**, it's not **Israel Vibration**, it's not **Midnite**, it's light. It's like dem not using the inspiration of the here and now, and the inspiration of yesteryear and combining them to come wid a stronger ting. It's more like dem a rob yesterday and just a basically regurgitate the styles of **Studio One** and the styles of **Lord Creator**, **King Jammy's**, **Bobby Digital**. That take away from the musical creation because somebody nah really sitting with a guitar again and meditate up a tune, or going to da realmz, as we like to say in Rasta culture, and make a tune fine with guitar. People just kind a study an algorithm of rhythm and mek it like a chemistry lab, so dem just know se, yeah the beat fi be one drop, bopbopbopbop, then the ting lose feelings! It nah go have no impact on your soul that way, you know... that's where di whole ting come in now, cause I have these tunes, and what's the point of me having them alone? No matter how much albums I make, as long as Jah give me breath and life, there is more albums to come, so why hold them back? I put out what I want, I don't put out what I want, see, cause I am the lion and Jah give me the power fi do it.

The release date has a significance also, right?

Of course! July 23rd, greatest day of the year when **His Imperial Majesty** was born and earth reveal Jah Rastafari to everyone in the world, modern and ancient, so that's the day we a go do it, and it's three albums representing the triple crown, representing the Red, Gold and Green!

And what do the three colours symbolize?

The **Red** represents the grittiness and the rebel determination, **Gold** is actually a collaboration with the empresses, and the **Green** album is classic **Rootz Underground** from different albums over time, remixed and re-mastered, and we also have some new releases on that as well. It has part A and part B, but we will go into that later.

Ok, so let's start with Red. There are a lot of names mentioned in the credits...

The **Red** album is all brand-new tracks, previously unreleased. Some of them, I recorded them before, like **Strength Of Days**, it was recorded for the **Return Of The Righteous** album and we never included it, but the time is now. **Reggae Soul**, this one was co-produced by myself and recorded by our long-time engineer **Neil Ferguson**. The idea was that **Fergie** wanted more to capture the live feeling of **Rootz Underground**, because a lot of times we were in studio before and we have a different approach to music in the studio than we have had live traditionally. So this is an effort to kind of bridge the gap between these two elements. It have a rawness to it, but at the same time we produce it at **Tuff Gong Studio**, and this is the opening track on the **Red** album.

Are all the instrumentals done by Rootz Underground?

Except for track number 8, it's all **Rootz Underground**, yes. Oh, and number 6, **Double 07** that was actually very interesting, because it is a re-cut by one of my original bandmates, my long-time bredren **Derrick Scott**, he was the bass player of the band. We recently linked up and were working on what we call



The Bridge To Ethiopia, the Black Sounds of Freedom Festival, we did it already last July for His Majesty birthday, we trod Shashamane land, we played a solo concert in Addis Ababa with **Rootz Underground** and some other Ethiopian acts. We plan to make it a yearly festival after Corona, which mash up this July, but we just use this time to build. Within all of that, we are also producing an album and on that album is a tune like **Walk The Lion** and also this **Double 07**, which was originally intended for that, but now we put it on **Red**, for two reasons. One was because that the new **James Bond** film was coming out, so it's just like a kind of Roots man message, like we bun **James Bond** basically (laughs). We are Rastas, we want to be proud to live that life, we don't want a licence fi kill, we want a licence fi thrill!

Judgement Day is speaking to that again, recorded back in 2016. The righteous shall stand, sing with joy and praises, read it in Revelation. It's not to say like everyone a go dead, but... **Judgement Day** say yes,

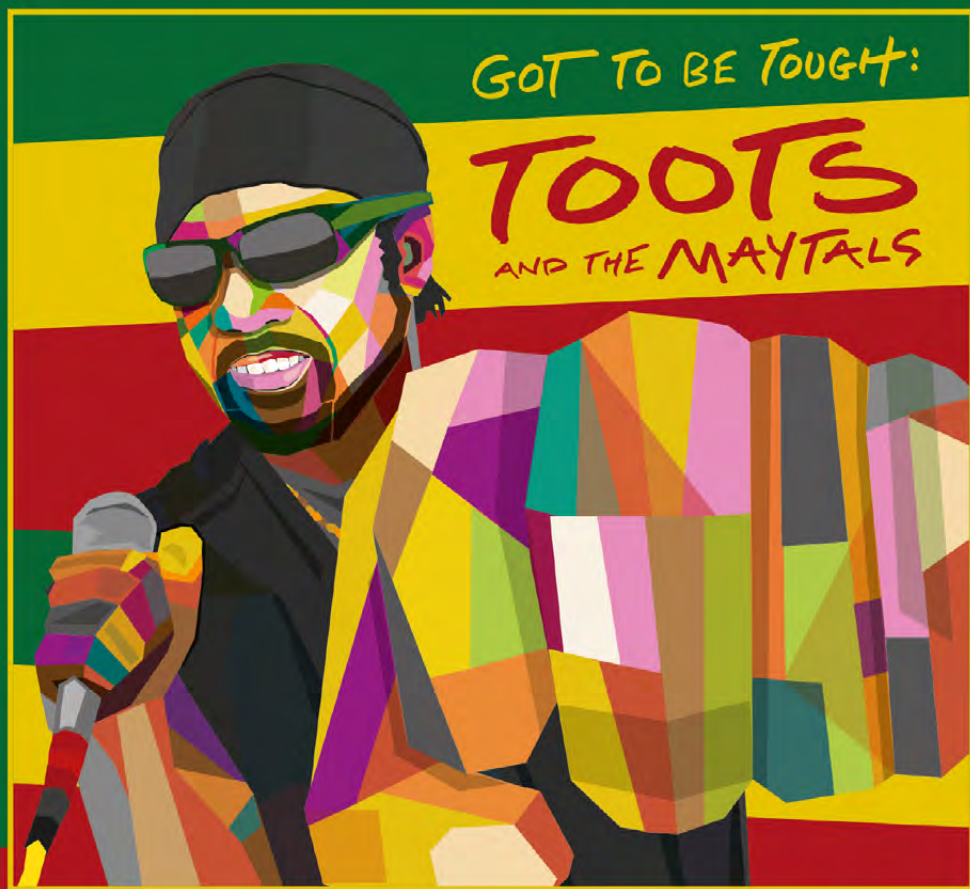
nuff man a go dead but the righteous shall stand, as we say in the song, more justice, more balance, more balance for the poor, more overstanding, more love and kindness, that's what that whole vibration is about as well.

Herb Green now, it speaks for itself, it's a herbs tune, but it's also a combination of several of my mentors in the Ganja hustling ting, it's really a story of many people and experiences, a message fi chant and plant, don't forget the farming!

We And Dem, big soldier tune again, produced by **Paul "Scubi" Smith**, who is the keyboardist of the band **Rootz Underground**, retired. **Scubi** and I did this song together, I did the lyrics and he did the music. I can't really describe, you haffi listen to it... it's a reasoning, and also a tribute to **Robert Nesta Marley**, the song **We And Dem** from the **Uprising** album. (sings) So, music just brings forth lyrics and lyrics bring forth music, it works two ways.

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Across The Binghiverse now... this one is a **Beatles** tune done in Nyabinghi style. I am a big **Beatles** fan from long time, when mee drive out with me parents we put in a **Beatles** cassette and the whole family sing along, me know every song by heart! **A Hard Day's Night** album. And as me grow big, I get to be a musical lover as well as musician. I love the **Beatles**, they were 100 years ahead of their time! In the next ten years, people will emulate much more that heartical style of creation they did... "Hey, swap instruments, give me the bass, take my guitar, let's write a song." That's how dem do it. And dem come with songs that were recorded in 1960, which is now 60 years old, and even now they are still fresher, more meaningful and soulful and better recorded than many of the contemporary, you see me? Anyway, the point is not a **Beatles** praise, it's just a tribute, and of course, as a Rastaman, we do it in a Binghi style, we did a slight variation of it.

And then the final one on the **Red** album is *Rise Up*, that was produced by **Ansel Collins**, legendary guitarist and producer. I did the vocals and the lyrical creation, but it is actually from a book known as **The Wise Mind Of Emperor Haile Selassie**. The whole tune is basically written out of quotations from the **King of Kings**. It says, "Rise up, take a look inside yourself. Freedom cannot be bought with material wealth..." so that is the hook of the song right there. **His Majesty** say again, "Africa shall rise up as a free continent and all Africans were born as free men as a new race" seen, all Africans, dat means all the I too, if you identify, seen. I say, **Marcus Garvey** gives me the rebel determination and **His Imperial Majesty** gives me the spiritual revelation and vibration.

Turning to the Gold album now... There are a lot of covers on there and, to be honest, usually I am a bit wary of Reggae covers, but all these are really beautiful pieces!

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I wouldn't do it and call it **Gold** if it wasn't gold, right! (laughs) It's **Gold** all the way!

Ok, so let's start with the Intro, Where Do I Begin?. I know the melody, but I don't know from where...

It's an ancient... well, not ancient, I think it was composed in the 60s by **Francis Lai** for a famous film called **Love Story**. He was the original composer and then a vocalist called **Andy Williams** paired with him and sang (sings "Where do I begin"), but you'll never believe where I got it from. I listen to Drum'n'Bass a lot, and when me trod in a England, London, I was going to **HMV** that time, a CD and record store, me and guitarist **Jeffrey Moss-Solomon** and **Charles Lazarus**. I bought this CD, Drum'n'Bass Anthems, mostly because it had camouflage on the front cover, and the third or fourth track on it had like a Garage version of this tune as an intro. And I just fell in love with it, I liked that style in that Drum'n'Bass ting, I still play it! So I had it for a long while and when the tune **No**

Fairytales was written, I played it and moved it into **No Fairytales**, and it was just perfect! Keyboarder **Vern Hill** was playing this piece, perfectly, and that is the intro.

Then, **No Fairytales** is a great story again. We were in New York with the band and we met up with a man who had all these **Bob Marley** and **Lord Creator** tapes on real tapes, right, and we found a **Wailers** tune which... it didn't have no lyrics, it was just **The Wailers** jamming. We started creating a song around that, but then the producer lost the studio, different things happened. I re-wrote the song just from zero on my guitar, and of course it's a love song, but it's not a love song. It says love is real, real out in the field (laughs).

How did Nattali Rize come in?

Well, me love **Nattali** from long time and as I say, I was seeking to make this whole **Gold** album be a tribute to the lionesses. I first met **Nattali** in Australia, in Melbourne at a music



conference in 2010, and then we met again in **Sierra Nevada World Music Festival**, she played a couple of acts before us. We were there backstage and were able to go on stage and see her and she was wicked, tough! Subsequently she moved from the band and went solo and moved to Jamaica, and one day me say *"We need to do a tune!"*. And then we brought her to the studio and we had the basic of the tune done already for her to come do a verse, and her thing is the highlight of the tune. I love everything about how she say, *"Me a no damsel in distress, me a no Cinderella!"*, cause that is exactly what we talk about. And it's a message to the youths, because this modern-day synthetic world make people no really get to the roots of things. We try show dem se... love is real and although sometimes it's ups and downs, the real love is real and it's not a fairytale!

One Common Need now...

My bredren **Gabre Selassie**, cyaan lef him out. He is a DJ here in Jamaica, **Dub Club**,

and from long time me and the man trod the earth, for decades! The first business venture we did together was when I was a young teenager just leaving high school, and we put on a party here in Jamaica called Jukes together. And **Gabre** at the time had a Sound System and me and my four friends joined forces with him and his partner, and the six of us put on the best party, even still legendary from the time! This tune is one of **Gabre's** archive tunes, he plays it often, but not many Sounds play it. It's a classic tune by **Lincoln Thompson** aka **Prince Lincoln and The Royal Rasses**, they have a few albums, very excellent music. This tune now, no matter what or when, is fire bun because it is original meaning, this is what Reggae is all about. *"No man can be happy until everybody is happy. Food, clothing and shelter is what people need, don't make we mouth water fi just a likkle food."* So, it shouldn't be fair to think that some man waste and live lavish and some other children are literally dying of starvation.

Who is singing along with you on that song?

This one now is **Brina X**, from Kingston, but now residing in Dublin, Ireland.

I never heard of her...

That's why we named **Underground**, you know! (laughs) Don't think we go bury you! It's a heights, sometimes in these desolate places you find these musicians where you would be amazed why dem not de pon di Grammy list. She tours all over Africa, Europe, she may not be famous but check out her vibes.

The next track, ***Dream Is Over***, is a famous song from the 80s by **Crowded House**. I didn't want to sing on this at all, because it was sung with **Desiree Dawson** and she did it so perfectly, but because of the duet idea I did a couple of lines. I love how it came out. **Desiree** is from Canada, she won a national competition of singers there, one of the best voices in contemporary music. The first time I heard her was on a jam session in Kings-

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ton, she sang a song called ***Without Your Love*** and I got goosebumps! So immediately when she came off stage, I said “*Yo, I love your voice, I have a song I have written and I'd love for you to sing on it.*” So she came to check me at my office, I wrote the lyrics to her on WhatsApp, she scrolled on her phone and I strummed the guitar, and she sang it and I said “*OK let's go the studio tomorrow!*” (laughs)

Which song was that?

This is ***Lonely Stars***.

Oh I love that song! It's my favourite, it's so beautiful.

This one I'm very proud of, because I think it's one of the best songs... one of the most meaningful songs I have ever composed. I wrote it three or four years before I met **Desiree**, and I sung it also, but once she sang it, I never played it on my own again. The way she delivered it, it's unbelievable.

Also, we have to talk about ***Young Gifted & Black*** which is a famous **Nina Simone** Song.

We recently lost **Bob Andy** who made this song famous in Reggae and Ska. So fi groove it, in a more modern stylee, obviously we slowed down the tempo. The inspiration of this song was a documentary seen on Netflix about **Nina Simone's** life and it caused me to look on YouTube for a video when she performed at Morehouse University, a historical Black College. It was originally recorded in 1969, and it's almost prophetic... as you can see up to last week, or last month, or yesterday or tomorrow, dem will shoot down a next black man again, for racism, seen, so me feel proud fi put it out.

Valerie of course, **Amy Winehouse**, powerhouse in music, I love a lot of her music. The tune that she did, the **Valerie** version shot live at BBC radio, I heard it one day years ago and I thought ‘*Wow, I love that song.*’ So when I met **Desiree**, it came back to me and I thought this would be great to do in Reggae. As you can hear I only did one verse on this one, because, same reason, **Desiree** was awesome. I just love how that came out, too, **Natural High** did a great job.

What was their part on the production?

They really had a big collaborative input in terms of arrangement, so I have to give thanks. Myself and **Blaze Davis** and **Jordan Armond**, we did all the work, recording, production, arrangement, and then they did the mastering. I led the arrangement, but they come up with some independent things which were brilliant, which uplift every tune! I love working together, we are a good team. They made **Desiree's** smoothness and my roughness merge perfectly! I hope that when the time comes we get to tour together for this album, **Desiree** and I, that would be sweeeeet! When the world see us live doing that? Poof!

You hear **Desiree** on *Far Away* again, it was written about a love but with a distance to it. We first did *Lonely Stars* and then I flew her back to Jamaica to do the rest of the songs. It was nice! We went to Portland and got some earth time, on the beach and the river, me and the whole **Natural High** family, so all this music have this earthiness in a it same way, from the riddim to the beat to the melody.

Which brings us to Green now...

As I mentioned earlier, the original idea was to do a greatest hits kind of thing... or let's say the tunes that I think are the most meaningful at the time. Primary reason is to re-introduce our music to a younger generation. We are not famous enough in that way that you may google us and dem a go see we jump up. What people of a younger generation might see as Reggae is not what I'n'l represent as Reggae or what many other artists may represent as Reggae, all about girls and some likkle tour-bus ting, seen, that is not really Reggae. Right now it's only fame, a wave dem ride upon, the content isn't there. At age thirteen, when myself I got turned into **Bob Marley** and **Burning Spear** and these artists, mi start grow consciousness and learn about Rastafari - this is why we are here! We nah deya fi mek no million, we can mek a million nuff different ways! So if it's just come to pimp out the music, we nah ina dat, Iya. So

this album is also a reminder to dis generation fi say, look, here is an alternative, you nah have to be in a boogooyagga ting (laughs), you understand.

You said before the Green album has two parts...

You listen and you will hear the reason. We start the album with a tune called *Time Is An Illusion*, because, as we were saying back in 2005, what is killing the most people now in all of Europe and all of America, more than Corona, it's gun! Next tune is *20 Centuries*. Back in 1998, I saw the vision, listen to what I say in the song... new world order! KKK at the time, this was a big shock, but guess what, KKK me could not care. Me 'kould knot kare', seen, that's what happen right now, why you think Black Americans dead more than Corona, because they are the frontline workers, they are the ones exposed, they are the paramedics, the ambulances... listen again, keenly!

Fret Not Thyself, a beautiful tune, this one was one of my favourites to play live. Even when people never heard it before, we can see and feel the reaction of the goodness it brings, so it's a tune we love and we could neva lef it off in a classics collection.

Hammer is another cover too, right?

You could say so, but it's not really a cover in the traditional sense. The inspiration comes from that old folk tune, yes. The root of that tune now is that... me a sit down ina mi vehicle smoking a spliff, I was listening to the radio in Jamaica, and an ad came on (laughs) and this was the music of it, some ad for hardware (laughs). Anyway, at the time my bredren **Doczman**, he was a big producer, we linked up and did a rude riddim on the **Striker Lee** original *Money Money Riddim*... (sings), so we did first record this lyrical idea on it, but we sing about Rasta thing. And we did a re-cut of it for the **Gravity** album, the whole band playing it instead of using the riddim. Two awesome cuts of this tune!



Then again now we have *New Tam*, it's just one of dem tunes which was a heavy hit on the *Gravity* album but we never really promote it. The harpsichord playing, you can hear the viola, you can hear the strength of the musicians, the soulfulness of the music, **Dean Fraser** playing on saxophone... the vibes was high. And this song was from a true story in California, a sistren had come and she made me a tam and came and give it to me and just say how I impact her life so much that she made this so she coulda give me something. And me se wait, me haffi gi you something too. So I wrote this song.

Likewise *Kingston Town*, Jah know, it was more like a tribute for the Trenchtown residents in Kingston. We invited **Toots** and the **Maytals** to be a part of it, one of our teachers and elders, and he agreed and it was beautiful, so I wrote this song, it came from **The Animals' House Of The Rising Sun** obviously.

Frontline now, of course.... that's a whole interview in itself.

Yes, you told us about this special song in our last interview. How did the passing of Vaughn Benjamin make you feel?

Bwooyy... there would be no **Rootz Underground** without **Midnite! Vaughn Benjamin** is a bredren, a Rastaman we met **Vaughn** in a Nyabinghi house in Washington DC. All of us were young Rasses, just a ras up, and **Vaughn** music was just on a heights, moving higher and higher. We watch every show back then, every week! **Midnite**, it's like the soundtrack of my life, until now! Now I'm learning more of his music that I didn't even know bout when he passed on, and I'm a big fan. And I have so much of his music, I just never got the time...

Let me tell you this as a Rasta, he was one of the prophets who stand forth in truth and rights. I work with him, I spent time with him,

we talked many times, I shared stage with him many time, 20 years! He is like the **Bob Marley** of our time. So the world feel it in a Reggae, everybody cry, I cry too. When I get the news in the morning me couldn't believe me ears, me was hoping it was a lie. But this is how everyone feel when the prophet moves. When Moses passed on, the whole world was in mourning, because you know the power wha leave the earth! The beauty of it now is that the word and the sound and the recording is there, that even now he is teaching me still! The mount of work him do, it's like... he is so far ahead a we, you know. So yeah, it's a powerful thing, so of course no doubt bringing this on as a classic, as a tribute to **Vaughn** and to make the goodness of the music reach the people.

The final tune on the **Green** album part A is **Psalm 131**, it starts and ends with a door from the studio closing, so it also represents a chapter in the life of I'n'I and the band and everything. Ironically, it is the only tune on this whole thing other than **Frontline** which **Rootz Underground** never play, but **Inna De Yard** play it live on many occasions, it's unusual in that way. And I love it because it's Nyabinghi, to me it's all about what I feel about my connection to the earth. To hear the birds and the trees and the wind, that's the beauty of that.

That leaves us with part B...

Right. **Always** is a tune that was recorded 3 or 4 years ago, when we were doing our last two albums, it was ready but we never released it. When you listen to it, hopefully it will not give you the same feeling as a pop Reggae tune. Hopefully you can overstand the message and overstand Nyabinghi and as connect with the musicality of what we a say and do. And even the vocals, it was a collaborative effort, and **Dean Fraser** produced the tune, people don't even know he is a well-known producer too, he's more known as a horns player.

Marching On, this tune was recorded by a producer named **Gorilla Blacks** which



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originally was released on the **Lost Tracks** album and we brought it back because it is just so powerful and again, the lyrical message has meaning to Rasta and to all people: “*Strip all vanity away, now Rasta music flow through me.*” And whether you say Rasta, whatever is your spirituality, you could be a Zen or Buddhist, your simpler self is your higher self.

We are going into **Potholes** now. You know **Jubba** of course, **Dubtonic Kru**. This tune is written by **Rootz Underground** combined with **Dubtonic Kru**, known as **Rootzonic Production** and in this one we talk about the here and now. It’s really from an environmental thing, so you can start see the socio-economical kind of thing. There is potholes in the road, that’s the physical, but there is potholes in the ozone, that’s environmental, and then there is potholes in religion, so these are psychological and philosophical potholes. On this you have **Stone** on bass, **Jubba** on drums, and you supposed to can feel the difference in the music. And **Jubba** is licking the potholes on the drums, the snare, pishhh, seen.

Alright, **Circus Music**, **Sign Of The Times** and **One Thing**, you already interviewed me on that, these tracks are from the **Thunderground** album as well. So you see them come again. (sighs) In every song there is like a labyrinth of meaning.

True. Now there are only four songs left to talk about... **Dubline, Slow Motion, Still Raining and Corners 2020.**

Dubline, it’s just a musical Dub to give a break, a breathing room, and it’s a love song, listening music when you wash your dishes or work in the garden to feel nice. **Slow Motion** again, it’s funny it’s just the story of one of my girlfriend fans like “*I will do anything for you*” she said she will stop the earth for this moment because she is backstage with me and all these things and I just used the idea of this as a present, not just for her but for everybody who says “*I love him so much*”, so that’s just a kind of light tune on it. **Still Raining** likewise, it’s a love part of the whole thing.

Corners Of My Mind now is called **Corners 2020** because we actually did some work on the tune itself, did some parts, slowed the riddim down like 8 beats per minute from the original recording, so it’s way more heavy hitting and grooving. But of course the message lyrically we didn’t change, it stays the same always.

So yes, I feel proud of myself, to follow the inspiration of the Most High to write these truths cause I never feel shame a none a dem yet. And then as a late comer to this project, **Longtime**, it was inspired by Corona, an acoustic cut from the **Thunderground** album, because it’s what everybody is living right now.

The last question I have concerns the cover art – who did that and what do the Amharic letters mean?

That was all done by **Barefoot Browning**, they do most of our album art from when I can remember. It was an original illustration of the **King of Kings**, her interpretation of **His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie**. Of course, we didn’t use any... usually we don’t use a band image on most covers, but an art picture, this is no difference. And the Amharic script you see it’s just the Amharic words for red, gold and green. And yes, it is African colours, yes it is Rasta colours, but what do they mean in terms of Chakras? Check it. Green represents the heart, growth, seen, Jah create the earth, in majority green and blue. Red represents passion, the root chakra, the grittiness, the rebel spirit determination, the warrior, the impulsive leader, that’s red. Gold represents the stomach, the bread-basket, the intuition, the wombman. So everything has a meaning, nothing is by accident.

That’s a package!

This is like a movie trailer me a gi you now. (laughs) Let’s take it to the next level! It’s a holistic thing.

Thank you! It’s so important to understand the concept behind an artwork.



ROOTZ UNDERGROUND - RED GOLD GREEN

Thunderground Music - JULY 23, 2020

Red, gold and green - three colours, three energies, three... albums? Indeed, with **Red - Gold - Green**, **Rootz Underground** release a triple album on July 23rd, a significant date chosen because it is the 128th birthday of **HIM Emperor Haile Selassie**. Just to make the numerical considerations complete, this year also marks the 20th anniversary of the band **Rootz Underground**, who formed in 2000.

Consisting of **Charles Lazarus**, **Omar Francis**, **Salim Browne**, **Kristoff Morris**, **Aldaine Goodall** and the charismatic singer **Stephen Newland**, the band has a long history, a strong fanbase and a rich catalogue of songs.

The album **Red** adds to this catalogue, as it contains eight previously unreleased songs. **Red** represents the Ites, the fire, the rebel spirit, male energy and fierceness cast in songs like **Judgement Day**, **No 007** or **Rise Up**, a collaboration with **Ansel Collins** spiked with quotes of Ras Tafari. With **Herb Green**, the obligatory Ganja tune finds its place as well as the **Bob Marley** tribute **We And Dem**, more relevant than ever with the international protests going on against racism and police brutality.

Outstanding tracks on **Red** are the opener **Reggae Soul**, incredibly performed by the intense, raspy vocals of singer **Stephen Newland** and energising guitar solos, and the beautiful **Across The Binghamiverse**. The latter is a slowed-down Nyabinghi-adaptation of the **Beatles'** original **Across The Universe**.

Gold now stands for bloom, beauty, the breadbasket of nature and womanhood. According to the press release, it is "a tribute to the *Sisters, Mothers and Daughters, celebrating the feminine balance which is needed in modernity*". To accomplish this balance, **Rootz Underground** has invited three powerful singers that join **Stephen Newland** on a choice of exquisite covers.

Brina X, a rather unknown but talented singer from Kingston, sings the Roots-Reggae hymn **One Common Need**, originally created by "Prince Lincoln" **Thompson**. A song written by **Stephen**, **Now Fairytales** has found a perfect match in **Nattali Rize**, who brings the message across that real love is not what the likes of Disney put on the screen. A tribute to the wonderful **Nina**



Simone, Young, Gifted & Black in Reggae is a real treat. With **Desiree Dawson**, a Canadian singer who holds the lioness share of voicings on **Gold**, we are led into an irresistible realm of vocal beauty, continued with the **Crowded House** cover **Don't Dream It's Over** and **Amy Winehouse's Valerie**. Co-producers **Natural High**

Music did a great job mixing her velvety timbre and **Stephen's** roughness.

The golden peak of this combination is reached on **Lonely Stars**. Another original creation by **Stephen**, it is a goosebumps-affair from beginning to end, one of those rare tracks that combine melody and lyrics in a divine, unforgettable way.

Finally, **Green** can be seen as a **Rootz Underground** anniversary compilation. Representing growth, the grounded self and the fruit of one's labour, it assembles the best of the band's twenty years of history in two chapters. **Centuries**, **Hammer**, **Still Raining** and **Corners 2020** were first released on **Movement** in 2008, followed by **Gravity** in 2010 (**Time Is An Illusion**). 2015's album **Return Of The Righteous** harbours **Fret Not Thyself**, **New Tam** and **Kingston Town** (a collaboration with **Toots**).

From his solo albums, **Stephen** included **Psalms 131** and **Marching On (The Lost Tracks)**, 2012) as well as the **Akai Beka** feature **Frontline**, **Circus Music**, **Sign Of The Times**, **Long Time** and **One Thing** with **JR Reid** from **Thunderground**. Previously unreleased tunes are the **Jubba White** collaboration **Potholes**, **Dub Line**, **Slo Motion** and the touching **Always**, again in a meditative Nyabinghi style.

What remains to be said is that the triple album **Red - Gold - Green** is an enormous feat reflecting both the creative potential of the band **Rootz Underground** and the encompassing vision of singer, songwriter and executive producer **Stephen Newland**. Teaming up with **Natural High Music**, **Rory Gilligan**, **David Pransky**, **Paul Smith**, **Derrick Scott**, **Neil Ferguson** and **Dean Fraser** for the re-recording, re-arrangement and re-mastering of this immense number of tracks, the outcome guarantees a quality in conscious lyrics, replete sound and music that is rare to find today.

by **Gardy Stein**



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INTERVIEW



THE WAILERS TRIO

50 YEARS OF SOUL REBELS

BRIDGING THE GAP

INTERVIEW BY GARDY STEIN
PHOTOS BY JEANA LINDO



History time! With **Soul Rebels 50**, a tribute to the legendary group **The Wailers** sees the light of day exactly fifty years after the original release of the **Perry**-produced album **Soul Rebels** in 1970. It's not a remix or jubilee edition, it's a completely new production, presented by the freshly founded **The Wailers Trio**. Made up of the voices of **Hervin Bailey Jr.** aka **Blvk H3ro**, **Jason Wright** aka **J Written** and **Abijah "Asadenaki Wailer" Livingston** (son of the living legend **Bunny Wailer**), **The Wailers Trio** is on a mission to preserve and transmit the beauty and message of the original **Wailers'** songs to a younger generation.

In a memorable Zoom-meeting, Reggaeville reached out to the three young artists, backed by the expertise and deep knowledge of **Maxine Stowe**, to talk about their motivation, interpretation of, and hopes for the upcoming release of **Soul Rebel 50**. As joyful as this occasion is, it is however overshadowed not only by the global Corona pandemic and the violent death of **George Floyd**, which prove the lyrics of songs like **Soul Rebels** or **400 Years** more topical than ever, but also by the very personal tragedy of the disappearance of "**Sis Jean**" **Watt**, partner of **Bunny Wailer** and step-mother to **Asadenaki**, who has been missing since May 23rd. Let us hope she returns to her family in good health soon. Meanwhile, read on to brush up on your knowledge of Reggae's foundations in this interview charged with meaning:

First of all, congratulations to the amazing work you did on the Soul Rebel 50 album. Before we start talking about it, maybe you can introduce the individual artists who make up The Wailers Trio.

Abijah: Asadenaki Wailer here, representing. This is a family honour, a historical moment for all of us really. This is a new task for I and I because my style is more deejay and singjay, and this is more singing and harmonising, so it connects me back to that musical roots of especially how the Wailers started. That's me!

Blvk H3ro: Bless up, I'm **Blvk H3ro**, a Jamaican singer and producer. I am just happy to be a part of this project at this moment in time.

J Written: I and I is **Written**, and I am honoured to be a part of this project. I work with dem bredren and dem no know how good dem be, trust me. Dem really allow me

to step up my game cause being amongst dem two ya now... me nah go lie, being like the unknown factor amongst dem, me really haffi step up in order fi be at their levels, so it's really a honour to be a part. The whole team and the whole work, it's a joy.

The three of you have released solo projects, singles or even EPs as individual artists. What made you join forces to become The Wailers Trio, what was the kick-off for that?

Abijah: Really and truly, what made it happen is the **Wailers Statue** project in 2018. There was a sculptor who did the mock-up for the **Wailers Statue**, what was his name again, **Maxine**?

Maxine Stowe: Paul Napier. We met him when he did the **Wailer** bust at the **Irie FM Lifetime Achievement Award Show**, but he has done other public projects in Jamaica as well.





Do you kind of impersonate the original Wailers, then? You just said you needed to find a Bob Marley, which is Written, so... are you the Wailer and H3ro is Peter Tosh?

Abijah: Well, naturally! (laughs)

Blvk H3ro: That's just a natural thing because **Abijah** is **Asadenaki Wailer**, his father's spitting image, with the same manners and characteristics. Then, **Written** now, he is basically **Bob** in his second form with the Afro and ting (laughs), you see me, and then **Peter Tosh**... I'm smoking right now, so it's just obvious, you see me? So it just worked out itself, the energies are there, so it's almost like a reincarnation!

Did this project make you dive more into the history of these three individuals? Did you for example read more about these artists, did you prepare for the part that you take on in the Trio?

J Written: Most definitely! It's not just history, to be honest, singing over these songs show you that dem people really did face certain

hardships that we as youths have the luxury of really breathing past. The truth is, dem face the challenges and now we as youths can reap the benefits of it. So, singing over these songs, we get to feel a bit how dem a... we nah go experience it fully, but we get fi dive in ina di history a it fi grasp the concepts and ting. And certain tings me never really learn until whole **The Wailers Trio** movement, so yeah, we haffi go back ina di history and recite and read over everything, you understand?

Maxine Stowe: You spoke about three individuals in your question, and the idea is that there were never three individuals. They became three individuals, but they started as the group! And part of the problem that they are trying to get back to is to differentiate their solo careers from the group, and that the group is the foundation for all of them being individual artists! So the tendency in the market is to look at them only as individuals, because they were the group until 1973, but after that, particularly because **Bob Marley** took the group name as **Bob Marley**



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and the Wailers, his success has eclipsed the fundamental work that they creatively and collectively created. Like, when you are doing a session together, everyone has input! It's not like he wrote songs and brought it back to the group, everything was always done collectively! So that's kind of been lost in the huge international success of **Bob Marley**, to the detriment of the contribution of this collective experience. For me, with the group as it is now, as they said it's magical.

From creating the Wailers Trio, what led to the next step of creating Soul Rebel 50? What was the process?

Abijah: Really and truly, the first thing we did was we launched the group at **Rootsman Skanking**, which is **Bunny Wailer's** live show that brings the stage for younger artists and veteran artists, so we launched there and got the feel from our Jamaican peers who said "Yow, this is bad!" Then we went to New York

to do a performance at the **CPR**, the Coalition to Preserve Reggae Music Awards in honour of **Bunny Wailer**. It was during that performance, it was an overwhelming reception, that we linked up with **VP Records**. Everybody wants to see something happen for us, everybody was asking "What's next?" So we automatically know we have to go in the studio now, so we say "Well, let's introduce the **Wailers Trio** with an EP!" **Maxine Stowe**, **Jay Edge** and **Blvk H3ro** played a very integral role in the further development. We had a meeting and we decided to re-make some of the **Wailers'** songs. And now, with the project **Soul Rebel**, this is where **Maxine** was very specific, because this year, 2020, is the 50th anniversary of the **Soul Rebels** and **Soul Revolution** LPs so we wanted to pretty much commemorate that with our EP.

How did you pick the songs on the EP? Did everybody just name his favourite?



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Abijah: You know, there is a whole bunch of **Wailers** songs, their catalogue is huge. When we sing on stage, we perform different songs, we sing the major hits, but this was specific to **Soul Rebels** and **Soul Revolution**, so we picked six tracks from those LPs and that's how this was done.

Blvk H3ro: Some songs were universal, like everybody know some songs, and then **Maxine** executively decided on some other tracks, for example **Soul Rebel** and I think **Dreamland** too, as we were going for the more up-tempo tracks.

Maxine Stowe: I think it was important to show that the **Wailers** was not just **Bob Marley** leading, that each artist contributed and led various songs in the **Wailers'** catalogue. **400 Years** is from **Peter Tosh**, **Dreamland** is **Bunny Wailer**, **Sun Is Shining** is **Bob Marley**, but we also wanted to emphasise that the individuals led within the career of the **Wailers**. So that was definitely one of

the reasons for the song collection. The other was that the individual **Wailers** have in their solo career covered these same songs as solo recordings, so once you listen to the early **Wailers**, you'll see that the harmonies led the song. It wasn't harmony singers in the background, it was definitely the group led the song and the solo person coloured the group's sound. So that was very important for us to achieve. It's just a whole different oral experience in the songs and it gives back the credibility, the credential of what the group was, not one man and two background singers, but three purposeful and collective individuals.

Could you introduce the songs that you sing on the release? Like, which song was your main focus and why?

Written: My two tracks were **Kaya** and **Cornerstone**. I was blessed to do **Cornerstone** because it is one of my favourites actually, from way back when. As ghetto youth, that song really resonate with me.

Abijah: My two songs, I was blessed to sing *400 Years*. It has always been one of the first **Wailers** song I learned to play, and it's a powerful message, the whole message of what we've been through as a people. And it's not really a mentality song because it's really about us fighting each other, it's not about us being oppressed, it's about us oppressing each other and how the mentality and philosophy has to change. So, it's a very deep message and I added a verse based on my interpretation of that same message, telling people to be self-sufficient and whatever. And then *Dreamland*, of course, my father's song that I grew up on... I didn't know the **Wailers** song *Dreamland*, I only knew the **Bunny Wailer** version, so through this project, listening back to that version where they all sing together, it sounds sweet, it sounds different. We did it more mixed, like, we harmonised it in the same old-fashioned way, but we did it on the **Bunny Wailer** version instrumental, so that was a cool vibe.

Blvk H3ro: My two tracks are *Sun Is Shining* and *Soul Rebels*, and... I never said this to the rest of the team, but those two songs are the hardest songs! (laughter) Serious! I was very scared, I mean, I'm not scared when it comes to music, ever, like I just always approach it with confidence, but I was at home for a couple of days to study these songs, to really feel what they were feeling, especially *Soul Rebels*, it's just a different message. It's just crazy that you can write music and then 50 years later it's still relevant!

In preparing the songs for recording, was Mr. Bunny Wailer part of the process? Did he advise you how to sing which part and so on?

Abijah: Yeah, **Bunny Wailer**, from day one of the rehearsals...

Blvk H3ro: He sat in the sessions!

Abijah: Even at Trenchtown, from the first sessions, I remember he sat in rehearsals and gave us the nod of approval, or him give we the "that-not-sound-right-face".

Written: Everybody know what the nod mean, because even before the group we used to grow under his impact, and I remember, as soon as somebody play the wrong note, he would be like "*No, that's wrong!*"

Abijah: (laughs) So him stay! And he was in the studio, I think by that time he had already trusted us, seen us rehearse, seen us take it serious. And you asked a question earlier about the research, and really and truly, each member, as **Written** and **H3ro** can attest, because we had to learn twelve songs before we had to learn these six songs. Learning those first twelve, we had to literally sit down and listen, especially the harmonies, break it down at the rehearsals. We had to listen at home but also together, we play the track and "*No, no, no, you no hear that part de!*" so it was a lot of research, a lot of rehearsals, and by the time we hit the studio, we had already gotten that synergy, it was more like a mission, it was smooth. **Bunny Wailer** just sat there and basically he didn't have to do much. He just sat there, but he was very much an inspiration to even **Jay Edge**. Because **Jay Edge** would have the great **Bunny Wailer** sit in studio with him while him build the tracks and gets musicians to come in and **Bunny** was there, so it was a very real moment.

That would be my next question, about the production side. What made you choose Jay Edge to re-arrange the tracks?

Blvk H3ro: To be honest, I referred him to the team because I was working with him on my personal stuff. Just knowing how he levelled up my sound and everything, I actually recommend him to everyone. So I said "*Yo Max, yo Abijah, give him a chance!*" And because **Max** had a time frame on it too, it wasn't like we had months to do this, she was like "*A week and a half, two weeks!*" and I'm like "*Who do I know whose skill level but also speed so you getting that quality and the time frame?*" I said "*Yo, I think Jay Edge is the one!*" and he really delivered. Like, first week he had all the tracks recorded, the beats were



done, so it was... it was ridiculous, that whole body of work that you hear now, **Gardy**, it's been done in two weeks! So he is really a genius, he is like the embodiment of **Lee Scratch Perry** doing some different things, some sampling, calling instrumentalists, he's just an overall good mastermind. I'm just glad it turned out so well.

Abjah: (laughs) I'm glad!

Who did the Dubs for the project?

Blvk H3ro: **Jay Edge** as well!

Abjah: Not in the same two weeks though! (laughs) When me and **H3ro** and **Written** stepped in the studio, we were focused on completing the songs and vocally we had to get together to do the harmonies, and **Jay Edge** had a very unique recording style for the harmonies where we all sang at the same time on the same mic, so you get that...

Blvk H3ro: Body...

Abjah: ... that body, exactly, so even with the Dub mixes, I would say it's because of **Maxine Stowe's** history in the Reggae music, she was the one telling me about the dubs. I didn't even know that was going on the project! So, now we have 12 tracks on it, so it's almost like an album!

Blvk H3ro: The dubs sound like tracks! You hear the **Kaya Dub**? It's sick... ridiculous!

Abjah: It's loud, no true?

Maxine Stowe: Coming from the showcase style in the early music, but also **Bunny Wailer**, his **Dub'sco** albums were very... the same thing that you're experiencing now. Listening to **Jay Edge** and the music, before they even sang on the songs, the musical tracks were already transporting you, so it called for that!

What about the release date? It has a history to tell as well, right?



Maxine Stowe: We're looking forward to releasing the album on July 23rd, significantly because it's the birthday of **His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie** and it brings the character of the group across, of being the most known missionaries of the Rastafari faith that spread the cause globally, so we wanted to also acknowledge our responsibility and role in spreading the doctrine of Rastafari because that's an important outcome for the **Trio**.

Speaking about responsibility, I wanted to ask you about the relationship between the young, current artists and the elders... I know that, in Reggae generally, there is a big respect, the young artists say 'We respect the elders and reason with them,' and so on, but there are rarely any collaborations out. Rare are the artists who really sit down and work with the elders, who feature someone like Dandy Livingstone or Prince Alla or whoever is still around on their releases. I really miss this kind of co-production which would put the elders in the current. Why do you think it's

like that, why are there such few collaborations between young artists and the elders, the foundation?

Maxine Stowe: I think it is interesting, just to start it off... number one, there is an energy that the children of the elders are the ones that... like **Bob Marley's** kids or **Peter Tosh's** kids that really put the culture out, it just seems to be a big trend in the Reggae music that the children must or should continue the legacy of their parents or whatever, but other than that there is a lack of exposure of the younger artists in Jamaica, I think, to the music, there is much more exposure internationally to the audiences. It is a fact that it is happening culturally, I see where there is this expectation that the elder... certainly the ones who have passed, but I think your question was about the ones who are still alive?

Exactly. I had an interview with Errol Dunkley and Dennis Walks last year, and I asked them the same thing, and they said "Look, we cannot go to the young artists and ask them for collaborations, they should come to ask us!"

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Blvk H3ro: Can I say something? I'm in the middle of this scene right now, actively, and I've been there, I reason with everybody. I think, and nobody wants to say it, before we came, there was a generation before us, and they didn't bridge the gap either, and that makes it now ten times harder. Like, for example, **Mavado** and **Bobby Digital** needed fi link up, that never happen, and now it never will. And truly, we never even get to bridge that gap deh. So it's literally impossible, and then the older artists feel like we should come to them, which they don't even know that we want to, but we don't know where you guys are! We don't have your numbers and you don't answer the Instagram, so it's many different things why it's just not happening now.

Abijah: Wait, wait, wait, let me talk now. It is happening, it is happening right now, so we are the first, **Wailers Trio** is setting the trend because we are bridging the gap, we are being produced by patriarchs and matriarchs of the scene. For example, I hear a lot of big artists telling me about **Maxine Stowe** giving

them their first hit and I grow up hearing artists saying **Bunny Wailer** build the stage fi dem go pon, like **Sizzla**, **Capleton** and nuff a dem, **Luciano**, dem buss off a **Bunny Wailer** building the stage by **Caveman Studio** and having a platform, you know, so... basically it is happening, you just don't see a collab necessarily. However, **H3ro** is here, **Written** is here, **Maxine** is here, you get what I say? **Bunny Wailer** is here, we just have to continue working.

Maxine Stowe: It's also the industry, meaning to say that the industry must also see it as important, not just the artists. Industry determines a lot what the artists do. The artist wants to be relevant to that industry. So I would put a lot of the fault on the limitations of the Jamaican music industry, which is why I said the international knows more about the music, the young people, you find a lot more international groups covering the songs of the older artists, incorporating them in their modality. The other thing too is that the elders were hardly ever paid, and their

contribution is... a very tough thing to see the younger artists commanding hundreds and thousands of dollars for music that they are still not getting paid for, you understand, the riddims and stuff like that, so I know for a lot of elders, their attitude of not responding, because they are under a lot of pressure, emotionally.

J Written: You already said all in a way. Well, as a younger artist I see a lot of talent, they give me a lot of strength. I appreciate the help and everything.

What you do is so important, as you say, you bridge the gap and bring a 50 year old album back, hopefully to a young audience. Looking ahead, what do you wish to happen after the release day?

Abijah: I mean, if you're talking wish? I want to thank you for the **Grammy**, I want to thank everybody involved in this project, I want to thank **Reggaeville** for the promotion...

Blvk H3ro: The **Grammy** speech!

Abijah: I am already practising. (laughs) I always preach growth. We continue to grow, even after this interview we are growing, because we are hearing a different perspective, you bring up some things that maybe we do not talk about all of the time, so I can see that, I can see a lot of growth after this project. Even how people view us, me and **Written** and **H3ro**, they might assume a lot of things, so when we pay homage now to the **Wailers** and we do it in an energetic, youthful way and also still doing our solo career same way, I think it will bring it to the youths, because it's not like we did audition fi do this. **H3ro** and **Written** and I are putting out music and we put out **The Wailers Trio** which is really **Wailers** music, so at the end of the day it's going to be growth for everyone's catalogue. Just growth.

Blvk H3ro: The vision that I have is like... I think this is a good time, it seems weird



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to say this, but I think this time of staying in and isolating yourself, it's a good time to learn so I just want the education of the **Bunny Wailer** thing to spread. I didn't know a lot of things, so, just feel like it's a good moment for everybody to know that "*Yo, there is a tree called Reggae, but we are reminding them about the seed, who started the roots of it all.*" So it's like it doesn't matter what year, I just want the sound to be fresh enough for younger ears to listen and more mature ears that know the music even better than we do to can just be like "*Yo, this is it!*" That's what we really have in mind. A love thing.



And you mentioned that we can look forward to a next project?

Maxine Stowe: Yes. We are aimed at the 50th anniversary of the **Catch A Fire** album which is going to come up in 2023, so that's going to be a major platform because I think at that point, the **Universal Music Group** and the **Grammys, Hall of Fame**, all of those inputs are going to be there because of what **Catch A Fire** has been promoted as. But in a sense, we know that they promoted it as **Bob Marley's** first solo album, so it's very important in what our work is, to have people know that "*No, it wasn't Bob Marley's first solo album, that was Natty Dread!*" **Catch A Fire** was **The Wailers**, and **The Wailers Trio**, and it's important for us to have people understand that because it was given a lot of accolades, but it wasn't attributed to the vocal group, just to Bob.

Blvk H3ro: You'll hear it! It will be awesome. It's just that the Covid slows us down a bit...

Abijah: But it also makes us reflect on the work we did already!

Maxine Stowe: Actually, we are looking at **Harry J Studio** for that. I met with his daughter **Tara**, because she is doing some phenomenal work there, so... I say that because **Harry J's Studio** is where the **Catch A Fire** album was recorded, so we are definitely looking to go there to do catch some of that original vibe, and the young vibration from **Tara** as the new **Harry J.** (laughs)

Thank you for these interesting insights. It was a pleasure talking to you all.

Abijah: Thank you! Respect to **Reggaeville**, thank you for the works, for the support, because there is nothing we have done individually or as a group or as **Bunny Wailer** that **Reggaeville** hasn't helped us doing some promotion, so we are really grateful for that.



THE WAILERS TRIO – SOUL REBEL 50

Wail Entertainment Group - Summer 2020

“Run for cover, rebels taking over!” With its unmistakable five ascending notes, the first and title track *Soul Rebel* takes up where its “father”, the original **Soul Rebels** album, started half a century ago. Living legend **Neville O’Riley Livingston** aka **Bunny Wailer**, OD, has teamed up with **Maxine Stowe** to create a different kind of anniversary release for their **Wail Entertainment Group**. 50 years of

the seminal album by **The Wailers** are definitely a reason to celebrate – and to transport the messages so vividly captivated on tape and vinyl back then to a young generation who might not even know that **The Wailers** were a successful vocal trio of equals back then, not a mere embellishment of **Bob Marley**.

A total of six tracks has thus been re-recorded for the project, both instrumentally and vocally. In the astonishingly short period of only two weeks, producer **Jermaine “Jay Edge” Williams** has managed to create a sound that is at once authentic and modern, transporting these classics into modernity. The musicians who are responsible for bringing his vision to reality are **Janoy Ellis** (guitar), **Sherwayne Thompson** (bass), **Ricardo Peter-John Adams** (percussion) and **Jay Edge** himself on drums and synthesisers, all of them led by **Dave “Prime Time” Green**.

The Wailers themselves are impersonated by three talented youngsters who know exactly how to talk the talk and walk the walk: **Abijah “Asadenaki Wailer” Livingston**, son of **Bunny Wailer**, **Hervin Bailey Jr.** aka **Blvk H3ro** as **Peter Tosh** and Trenchtown resident **Jason Wright** aka **Written** as **Bob Marley**. Voilà, the **Wailers Trio**! And although their voices are not the same, their spirit sure is!



Blvk H3ro rocks the intro song *Soul Rebel*, slowed down a bit in comparison to its original, and **Sun Is Shining**, in which he applies his voice extremely creatively. *Kaya* and *Cornerstone* are interpreted by **J Written**, both tracks reflecting his ability to effortlessly shift between gentle and vigorous passages, while his vibrato is commemorative of **Marley’s** at times. Finally, **Asadenaki**

sings the beautiful *Dreamland*, based on the instrumental of a version his father delivered after **The Wailers** first released the track in 1971. Both the melodic mood of the track (oh, the harmonies!) and the singer’s voice make it an instant favourite. *400 Years*, a more serious affair altogether, is brushed up with a touch of trappy hi-hats, teeth-kissing and an extra verse empowering the youths.

All three singers can be heard on all songs, providing the harmonies whenever they don’t sing lead. The cherry on this musical cake are the Dubs: aforementioned **Jay Edge** has created six fine versions of the songs that are quite focused on drums, but also bring other instrumental passages to the fore and play with the vocals.

Soul Rebel 50 is an effort to bring back the vibes of the first internationally released **Wailers’** album, aiming to make this fine music accessible to a whole new generation of listeners. As for the cover, the current version, designed by **Craig Small** and **WeeDesign**, is far more artistic and conscious than the original one, which was published without the consent of **Bob**, **Bunny** and **Peter**. **Hail today’s rebels taking over!**

by **Gardy Stein**



REGGAE SUNDANCE 2007

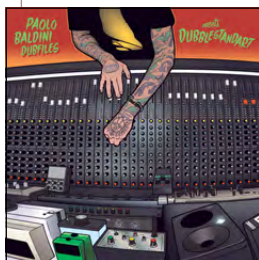
EINDHOVEN, THE NETHERLANDS - AUGUST 2007

PHOTOS BY JULIAN SCHMIDT



PAOLO BALDINI DUBFILES meets DUBBLESTANDART

Echo Beach - June 26, 2020



With Covid-19 putting a clamp on the music scene, addicts are currently confined to visiting the vaults of stored sounds. However, for those who have exhausted their trip down memory lane and are in search of some new and exciting sounds, **Paolo Baldini** is the man.

Dub Me Crazy! In this 12-track album, Italy's **Baldini** links with near neighbour's Austria's **Dubblestandart**, providing a quality fusion of dub reggae that's heavy on techno-soaked echo effects.

Baldini's latest produce is but another storey on the reggae building, as it takes on contributions from artists that first emerged during the genre's 'golden era', like **Lee Perry**, **Marcia Griffiths**, **Steel Pulse** and **Burning Spear**. But it is nevertheless novel, as **Dubblestandart's Paul Zawilensky** pens – with the aid of his crew – the majority of the set's tracks, whilst **Baldini** characteristically excels on the production and re-mixing duties.

Though all tracks have their merit, the contributions of **Perry** and the late **Ari Up** to the closing track **Island Girls**, may well be the standout, as it merges sweet sounds from the past with more modern influences. Though not a patch on the original, **Fly Me To The Moon** (as covered by **Spear**, **Sinatra** etc.) will also evoke positive reviews. But the millennials may well disagree and opt for **Anthony B's** embellished input to the extended **Dem Can 't Stop From Talk** or **Up's** crystal-clear vocals on the assorted sounds of **Soulmate**.

Baldini's DubFiles Meets Dubblestandart is a must for dub aficionados. So, if you want to banish the Coronavirus blues and go **Dub Crazy**, then this is the job for you.

by Gerry McMahon

GROUNDATION - THE NEXT GENERATION LIVE

Baco Records - June 5, 2020



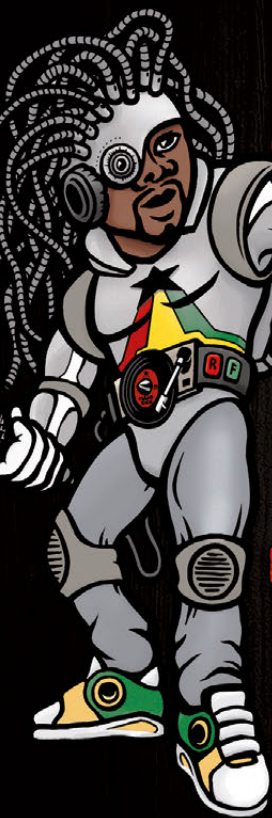
Groundation's first live album **The Next Generation Live** is a welcome addition to the band's inventory and a testament to their Californian leader's powerful persistence. The leader - **Prof. Harrison**

Stafford - recently declared that *'For the first time in my life I am not inspired to play music'*. And so, this 'live' substitute will have to suffice until such time as his mood changes and the live music scene returns. But the good news is that for now, this album suffices as a worthy substitute.

The 10 tracks were recorded in 2019 in Italy, drawing on the band's back catalogue: **Each One Teach One**, **Hebron Gate**, **A Miracle** and 4 tracks from the group's latest (award winning) **The Next Generation** release. The instrumental and vocal fusion across all tracks serves to confirm the quality and commitment that's long been the hallmark of the **Groundation** stable.

An atmospheric opening on **One But Ten** – with the late great **Peter Tosh** getting a look in – sets the tone for much of what's to follow. This fast-paced track, with an organ solo thrown in for good measure, is a powerful testament to Mr. Groundation himself. That is, to **Stafford's** ability to effect an almost orchestral communion with his new band. The female vocal inputs on **Undivided** make for a wonderful track, that's considered and contrasts well with Harrison's delivery, whilst the brass inputs on **One More Day (Live It Up)** put it on a different plane. So, if you can live with **Stafford's** vocal pitch, the burst-fire deliveries, the solo instrumental interludes that fall in between some mesmerising mixes, alongside decent dollops of jazz – courtesy of the breezy and brilliant brass – this album is sure to set you swinging. It stretches the boundaries of roots reggae, ensuring that the music will live, develop and entertain the masses in a spirit of consciousness long after the confounded virus that's crippling **Stafford** (and many more) has eased up.

by Gerry McMahon



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CHEZIDEK - HELLO AFRICA

Tad's Record - July 23, 2020

Chezidek appears non-stop in 2020. Because hot off the heels of his stunning collab **Timeless** with **The Ligerians**, he's back with a full solo album. And it is solo in every sense of the word.

Hello Africa, released via **Tad's Record**, sees **Chezidek** take on the whole project himself: composing, arranging and producing every track. No mean feat for an artist. But then this is no normal artist we're dealing with. And **Chezidek** has, by only his own hands, produced a thing of beauty.

The album is ostensibly Roots. From the brooding **March** with its defiant horn section, to **Ungrateful People** with its melodica, via **My Life** with its Dub reverb, the genre is the driving force. There are two exceptions to this: the RnB-driven **Freedom** and the Neo Soul-esque **Standstill**.

But **Chezidek** has also cleverly made a nod to Africa across all the tracks; not least in the inclusion of different instrumentation on certain cuts. **Jah Protect I Life** has djembe; **Hello Africa** features a balafon; **No Guns** a wooden flute; **Standstill** a kora; **Try Again Mix** the vibraslap and **Inna Dem Eye** a hang drum. This intelligent use of continuity and cultural representation is one of **Hello Africa's** strongpoints. As is **Chezidek's** voice.

He is infinitely impressive. **Chezidek's** high tenor is opulent and crystal clear, bringing both delicacy and urgency to his performances when needed. He has a haunting falsetto, also used to excellent effect. And he possesses an intuitive use of dynamics, which serve to stir and move you in equal measure. An equally strong singjay, he demonstrates neat and fluent use of complex rhythmic patterns.



But it's perhaps **Hello Africa's** narrative which is most impressive.

Chezidek has created individual messages within each song: from the criticism of corporate colonialism and corruption on **Freedom** to the Rasta history lesson contained within **Inna Dem Eye. No Guns'** call to peaceful, love-filled arms and a renegeing of violence is blunt yet dignified, and follows on from **March's** protest cry.

His genius is perhaps summed up best in **Because I'm Black**, as **Chezidek** creates a devastatingly searing paradox: the cheerful major key and funky horns of the Roots-led track juxtaposed with the brutal lyrics about historical and systemic racism.

But there's also an overall picture of the challenges facing the continent, woven together as a sum of the tracks' parts. Throughout **Hello Africa**, **Chezidek** is driven by a clear love for the Motherland. This is summed up best in the title track. And his ultimate message is that if its people put their differences to one side, cast off the system's shackles then true emancipation would follow. A lesson for the whole world, perhaps.

Chezidek is a thoroughly engaging artist, and **Hello Africa** showcases him at his very best: emotive, compelling, musically deft and lyrically profound. But it also serves as a masterclass in how one artist can create an album by himself. A truly awe-inspiring feat, and one that **Chezidek** has triumphantly achieved. Glorious.

by Steve Toppie

REBELUTION - DUB COLLECTION

Easy Star Records - July 17, 2020



After the success of their 2018 project **Free Rein, Rebelution** are back. This time they've taken a deep dive into Dub territory – but it's not uncharted waters.

Dub Collection,

released via **87 Music** and **Easy Star Records**, sees the band revisit and Dub 15 of their previous tracks. It's delivered by the band's lead touring guitarist **Kyle Ahern**. No mean feat, but he's pulled it off with aplomb.

Much of the focus is on the engineering. For example, on **Inhale, Exhale Dub** featuring **Protoje**, the keys are heavily reverbed, rhythmically on triplet quavers (versus straight quavers on the original). The bass has been high-passed and engineered, a wah-wah pedal is on, giving a raspy tone. Then elongated reverb creates almost an additional bass line: tinny, with decay flowing in and out and the sound traversing left and right inputs.

He's also rearranged the compositions. On **City Life Dub**, **Ahern** has at times stripped away the original, complex instrumentation and created breaks; leaving the bass and drums as the focus, with occasional, heavily reverbed keys, some bending guitar and an additional organ. These breaks and pared-back arrangement are central to many of **Dub Collection's** tracks.

But **Ahern** has also done something quite magical: taking the original tracks and often enhancing them. **Mirage** is the perfect example. The original, Alt Rock-Roots track was quite ambient. But **Ahern's** Dub, with its heavy reverb, decay and sparse arrangement, has paradoxically taken the track closer to its meaning – in a deft piece of musical anthropomorphism. **Dub Collection** is a cleverly positioned project from **Ahern** and **Rebelution**. Not only does it serve to showcase the versatility of the band's tracks, but also **Ahern's** considerable production skills. And moreover, it demonstrates the power of Dub.

by **Steve Topple**

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JAHMIEL - REVAMP EP

Patriotz Muzik / Quantum Records - June 12, 2020

Jahmiel was one of the highlights of 2019. His album **Great Man** was an awe-inspiring mix of genres with overly conscious themes. Now, he's back for 2020 with a taster of more things to come.

Revamp, released via **Patriotz Muzik** and **Quantum Records**, is small but perfectly formed. With production from both outfits, and compositions by **Jahmiel** and **Akiem "Bing" Bingham** (who also mixed the EP), a real sense of continuity exists. Attentive mastering from **Germaine "Big Beast" Ranglin** is the finishing touch. But what also stands out is a sea change from the 'great man'. As **Revamp** is wholly R&B-led.

Preserve My Life sees **Jahmiel** and **Bingham** work with **Elton "EllyB" Brown** on the composition. Completely sparse, it sees just guitars: working around slow arpeggio chords at the start, then slowly building. The track is delicate, purposeful and moving; perfect for **Jahmiel's** beautiful melody and the heavily harmonised backing vocal line. His performance is stunning: expressive, building in pitch up to a high tenor and full of excellently timed dynamics. A gorgeous praising of Jah.

I See An Angel takes **Revamp** towards Afrobeats R&B, with its on/offbeat kick/snare combo running at half the time you'd expect of the genre. Electric keys, running on chords, lilt in the background; the bass is unfussy yet gives depth, and a shimmering tambourine provides anthropomorphism for the title. **Jahmiel** is strong again, with a clever call and response going on with his secondary vocal line; more forthright than the main one. A well-constructed love song.

Then, **Life Lessons** builds on the R&B theme, with a more complex arrangement and less focus on



Afrobeats-inspired percussion. The inclusion of a balafon, mimicking the nicely arranged piano line, hints at Africa; an additional xylophone enhances both. The bass is further stripped back again, working mainly on whole bar breves. And **Jahmiel's** humble and reflective vocal, on how Jah has a plan for all of us even when the road is rough, is haunting.

The hit **Lights Off** is a sensuous piece of Ambient (almost **Toronto**) R&B coupled with an 'Afroballad' vibe. The kick/snare rolls are back, but nearer a standard Afrobeats tempo. The lack of hi-hats slows the cut down, as does the elongated bass, EQ'd to give that pulsing and somewhat grimy **Toronto** feel. This, plus the use of reverb, a haunting electric piano line and the layered vocals turn **Lights Off** into a **Toronto**-African hybrid. Smoothly done.

The EP concludes with **Shining**, the most musically detailed track of the EP. Heavily low-passed horns and strings glide around; a piano line runs a counterpoint to the melody; drums perform stretched out Afrobeats duties and a rasping electric guitar does a hauntingly simple riff. But **Jahmiel** juxtaposes the musical bustling with a highly controlled and measured performance, full of emotive light and shade.

Revamp is a musically deft and very well-crafted EP. The attention to detail in the compositions and arrangements shines. But what really stands out is **Jahmiel**. Because, given his performance across the record, he could stop producing Afrobeats/Dancehall cuts tomorrow and have a hugely successful career as a straight Soul/R&B vocalist. Revelatory.

by Steve Toppie

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REBEL SALUTE 2007

ST ELIZABETH, JAMAICA - JANUARY 2007

PHOTOS BY JULIAN SCHMIDT





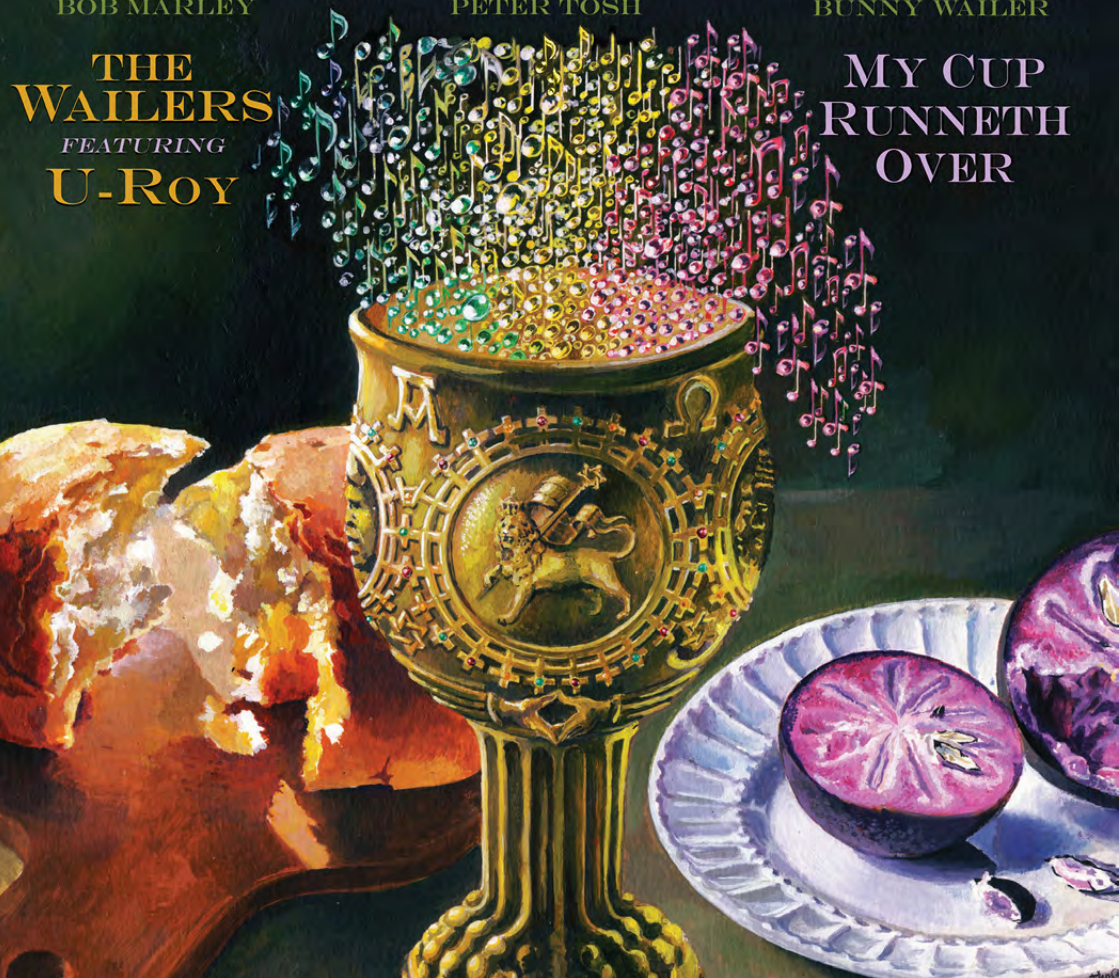
BOB MARLEY

PETER TOSH

BUNNY WAILER

**THE
WAILERS**
FEATURING
U-ROY

**MY CUP
RUNNETH
OVER**



MY CUP RUNNETH OVER

PRODUCED BY DOCTOR DREAD

ORIGINAL RECORDINGS

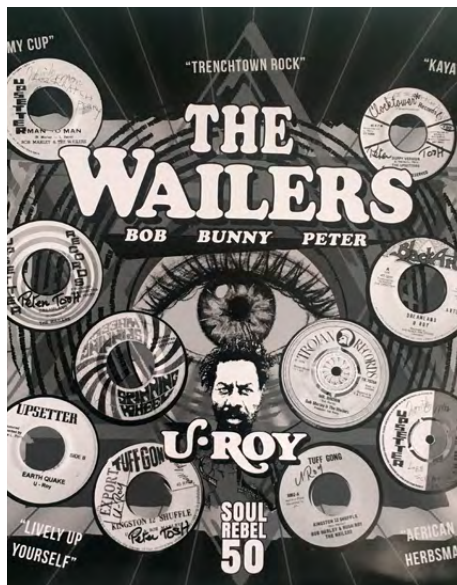
PRODUCED BY LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY

PAINTINGS BY ELEN G

LINER NOTES BY ROGER STEFFENS

50 years ago the album *Soul Rebels* (1970), produced by **Lee Scratch Perry**, was re-released. *My Cup Runneth Over* celebrates this anniversary with new versions of these revolutionary sides, with the foundation father of all DJs, **U Roy**, adding his distinctive vocals. Produced by **Ras Records'** founder **Doctor Dread**.

TAFARI RECORDS - JUNE 19, 2020



ALBUM LINER NOTES

Quite often, when reality and fantasy are juxtaposed and merge in and out of each other, it can be difficult to ascertain which is real and which is make believe. Sometimes it is more entertaining to entertain the fantasy aspect of a story and believe what you know is probably not true. And then the scientific part of the brain might want to know the truth and just believe that. So with all of this in mind it is left to you, the reader/listener, to decide for yourself which you choose. Either way it's all about the music anyway, so we encourage that to speak for itself. Listen up.

Reality or Fantasy?

In the mid-1990s **Sanctuary Music** in England bought **Trojan Records**. Part of this catalog included the seminal recordings from producer **Lee "Scratch" Perry** that had what many consider to be the best productions ever created by the original **Wailers**, **Bob Marley**, **Peter Tosh** and **Bunny Wailer**. The Power of the Trinity. Hard core tuff reggae at its very best. So when in the late 1990s **Sanctuary** purchased the **RAS Records**

label, founded by **Doctor Dread** to bring hard core Jamaican reggae to the world, an idea occurred to him which he had contemplated for quite some time. He seriously loved these **Lee Perry** recordings of the **Wailers** and he also loved the rap style from the rap originator the great **U Roy**. He was aware that when the **Wailers** were releasing some of these tracks on **Tuff Gong** in Jamaica many years ago that they had made a version of "**Trench Town Rock**" with **U Roy** toasting over **The Wailers'** vocals. He was determined to make a complete LP of all these tunes with **U Roy** adding his rap component. After getting permission from **Sanctuary** to go into the studio and make these recordings he approached **U Roy**. By this time **U Roy** was much older but he still was very capable and very interested in the project. **Doctor Dread** called **U Roy** to his hotel in Kingston and presented him with the idea. **U Roy** wanted double the amount of what **Doctor Dread** was offering and wanted to be paid on the spot. He also said he could only voice five songs a day and it would take a subsequent visit to Jamaica for **Doctor Dread** to complete the project.



U Roy voicing in studio. Bunny Wailer in foreground in control room.



PHOTOS BY AYOOOLA DARAMOLA

Doctor Dread was in Jamaica with his brethren **Ayoola Daramola** from Nigeria who had loaded all the vocal and dub versions of these tracks onto his computer. **Doc** booked **Gussie Clarke's Music Works Studio** in Kingston for later that day and arranged for **U Roy** to meet him there. Original member **Bunny Wailer** also showed up to witness this session. Once the tape began to roll **U Roy** was right on it. It was like everyone had gone back forty years in time to when these tracks were first recorded, a truly goose-bumps moment. **Bunny** was so excited he exclaimed "Yo Doc, this should have been done long time. This is the real vibe." They had jelly coconuts in the studio, **Doc** recalled, "and we wanted **U Roy** to be comfortable voicing these tracks. After voicing the first track we requested he come into the control room to hear what we had recorded and maybe sip on a jelly. Instead he said 'Doc, run the next track.' He murdered that and the one after that and so on, and without taking a break **U Roy** ripped through 14 tracks in only 4 hours time. Everyone was

so excited about what had been recorded that day." The original vision of making these tracks had now come to fruition. After mixing the tracks and adding some effects at **Lion and Fox Studio** with **Mike Caplan** in Washington DC the LP was now complete. Afterwards **Doctor Dread** would play these songs for many reggae luminaries and tell them that they had been recorded forty years ago but had somehow never seen the light of day. The amazing thing is that they believed this because the songs really did sound that authentic. Ah yes, that **Real Authentic Sound** of Jamaica had again come into being. Says **Doc**, "It is so exciting to hear **U Roy** voicing these tracks with the Wailers, and we are now overjoyed to share them with you. Another dimension and a new way for new and old fans alike to discover and rediscover the Wailers. Keep on Skankin'."

Roger Steffens, author of „So Much Things to Say: The Oral History of Bob Marley“



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MONTEGO BAY, JAMAICA - JULY 2005

PHOTOS BY JULIAN SCHMIDT



INTERVIEW



RAS MUHAMMAD

A KNIGHT, REBORN

A CINEMATIC VOYAGE

INTERVIEW BY STEVE TOPPLE
PHOTOS BY MOHAMAD RAJHAB
& BENJAMIN ZECHER

Back with perhaps his seminal work, the album **Satryo** (Indonesian for “knight”), and **Ras Muhamad** is in the midst of a rebirth. But he has been for some time, as this latest project to be released on August 7, marks a departure from his previous album, **Salam**. So, where has this reinvention and recalibration of his life and who he is as a person come from? What influenced the radical, eclectic sound contained within **Satryo**? And is this new, redefined **Ras Muhamad** the true one? **Reggaeville** chatted with the groundbreaking Indonesian artist to find out all this and more.



You new album, *Satryo*, is staggering, not least musically and lyrically, but also in the way it's constructed. Has it been a long time in the making?

This whole album, this whole project, the **Satryo** experience – it took us about three and a half years to finish. Usually with my albums it's six to eight months. Even the **Salam** album was less than a year. I go into the studio, become almost like in a cave, come out and it's finished, the album's done. But this one was a different approach to producing and recording an album.

You're back working with Oneness Records, again. How did that come about?

This would be my second effort with **Oneness**. And thankfully, from the success of **Salam**, they approached me again and offered me another project. Of course, I said I'd love to! It's still on the same team – **Moritz (v.Korff)** and **Benjamin Zecher** did a lot of the production, and **Umberto Echo**. That's

pretty much the trinity of **Oneness Records**. And they were with me all along, and were quite challenged with my idea of taking a different direction and approach to the album.

Where did the eclecticism of *Satryo* come from?

I think there was a natural process, and also it came to fruition organically. I'm not just a singer and lyricist but I'm also a songwriter. So, when **Oneness** told me about the second project, I said I wanted to have more input about the music. It just became organic and I'm very grateful that I have a very eclectic and wide musical background, and we wanted to express that through the music of this project.

Was it a conscious decision to construct *Satryo* in three acts?

It came about piece by piece. For example, with **Madda Like**, I was in Bali, sitting by the beach, sipping coconuts, playing acoustic gui-



tar and then suddenly I came up with [sings] “*Your mother she like me...*” Or I’d be riding a bike, swaying to whatever music was going on in my head. And then I’d finish the whole tune in Jamaica the next time I was there. So, everything came together piece by piece. For a song like *Madda Like*, I wanted to make a Dancehall tune but acoustic style. I don’t want to disrespect any Dancehall artists, but a lot of the lyrics are very misogynistic. I wanted to show me as personally being the shy guy the mother would approve of. I thought it would be a cute way to put it on another angle.

Tell us about your relationship with Tóke, who is also featured on two songs.

Well, another supporting role in the *Satryo* album is this new artist called Tóke, a singer/songwriter. We’ve been working together for the past five years; we linked up in Jamaica. He has Indonesian heritage but grew up in Germany. He has a lot of creative and spiritual authority, and that worked vice versa. So, if I came up with any line, or notes I’d talk to him and say “*What do you think of this idea?*”. We mutually inspire each other.

You said Madda Like was acoustic Dancehall that went against the grain of slackness. Do you think we’ll start seeing more conscious work in the genre?

I hope so. Because I think that in hindsight, maybe 20-25 years ago, people like **Bounty Killer** they were Dancehall artists, their lyrics were very tough, street lyrics but they were also very conscious. Y’know [sings] “*Roots, reality and culture*”. And maybe that’s what were missing these days is Dancehall artists picking up consciousness. But I think it’s going to come in – the way Roots is taking over, like **Chronixx**, **Protoje**.

For me, the songs on Satryo roll on from each other as parts of a story, but then form a bigger story in each act, and then when you put the entire album together that’s one, whole story too. Is that an accurate description?

That’s very accurate, because I wanted to release an album (like *Satryo*) where a lot of the music can be left to interpretation, it can’t just be black and white. So, I wanted to really make the music speak to people – just like a big illustration, or big painting of it. And it’s

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pretty much my self-portrait! So, there's no accurate interpretation, everyone's interpretations are accurate.

Was it a hard balance to strike between something accessible and something musically creative and experimental? Or did it just happen?

It was very organic, there was no pressure at all. I never had the idea of a concept album. But almost to the end of finalising **Satryo**, I was like *"Oh! This is actually a journey where I can piece it all together"*. Like **Kick A Lil Prelude**, the intro, is actually an echo to **Meta Matter Eye Allah** [the album's closing track]. It starts with like a man broken, vulnerable, and he tries to seek something, he is hopeful. So, he goes to an inward journey and he finds himself in this conscious awakening and also the **Ascension** part of the album. And it's like *"OK, I'm here now"* and it ends with the power being in his and our hands

and it's like *"OK, so what are you going to do with it?"*. It just came naturally, I'm not a genius, it just came together piece by piece and that's how the album came about.

You've gone from being very Roots-driven to being very experimental. Has this always been in you, or was now just the right time to explore it?

I think it was always within me, and I took that momentum. I see so many peers in this Reggae Revival movement, what I call the Reggae Renaissance, in which they experiment with a lot of things. On my first trip to Jamaica I was very impressed, and admired very much, **Runkus**. Because he made RnB songs when he was 16 years old, but he still has that Reggae breath in it. And in meeting **Tóke** - he's also a very personal type of songwriter. We both have such rich backgrounds, I can speak from my personal being also. Whereas the majority of my career I spoke on



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educational things, social things and political things – but I felt I suppressed that personal part. And it took me a while to really express it. I needed to dig deep within myself, personally and also musically and thematically.

Was that a conscious decision to suppress the personal side of you from your music?

It was a very conscious decision. Because I felt like this pressure, being the Reggae Ambassador of Indonesia, I really wanted to connect Kingston, Jamaica to my Indonesian people and audience; educate them and also tell them where this music is coming from, that this music is still alive and well. That was my priority. I think the words of **John Lennon** really spoke to me. He said *“I like to write about me, because I know me”*. I think that’s correct. And for me, I have so many things inside my heart I really want to speak about. About myself, being the Reggae Ambassador, travelling, having this rebirth and evolution as a person and an artist. And really put that out in and through my craft.

Once you finally moved away from what you had to be doing and did what you wanted to do – was there a sense of relief?

I felt very relieved, like I was born again very much. For the past few years, it’s been like a rebirth. I have actually something. I feel like everyone is carrying their own universe, and their limitless explosions of creativity once we’ve tapped into that channel; being connected to our true self.

So, with this rebirth – do you now let the universe guide you?

Yes, I do now. But I didn’t operate like that before. I was very ambitious, driven and when things didn’t go my way I became very angry, always blaming myself – and I think that accumulates to why the album, this rebirth came about. Some things you can’t strain, somethings just flow. When I was living in Jakarta, I swam counter-stream pretty much; everything has to go my way, my way. It’s different now, being born again – this rebirth of a person. I do have some visions, for me,



I would love to go to west Africa to see what inspirations it can give me. So that's probably how I see myself in the future: going to west Africa, taking some time off – six months, maybe one year. That's my plan. And it feels good now; good with the album. I feel I'm not being dishonest with myself any more.

Was there one moment where your rebirth began? One moment when you thought 'enough is enough'?

Yes, there were a few moments in being so driven I think I exhausted myself. There were moments on stage, where I felt like I was on autopilot. Being an artist, you shouldn't be on autopilot. You should give your full passion

to it. And I thought *"What am I doing?"*. I was dealing with those personal issues, and my partner was like *"Where would you like to go?"* and I said Kingston. So, I stayed in Kingston for about six months. Another moment was I was on a beach in Bali, writing some social songs. And they came out great; I knew they sounded great. But my heart wasn't connected to them. I thought *"I really need to let this out, whatever personal feelings are going on"*. And the universe heard me, and I had to experience what I had to experience for that album: all the lines, all the bars, all the lyrics. I had to experience that the past couple of years. So, it's pretty much first person. No more third person, or hearing it from the news. It's from my heart and mind.

So, how did it feel once Satryo was completed?

Besides feeling relief, I feel younger. It's felt like I've taken 10-20 years out of my life, but then gained 50-60 years of wisdom. I'm a different person a few years ago, to now. I tried to be, and make an effort to be, smart with my being, instead of just the brain – because the brain has its limits. One of the purposes

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of **Satryo** is to give people a lot of emotional content. People tend to have this image of burning fire, hyper-masculinity, or like very happy. You can't make Reggae music one-dimensional like that, it's very superficial. It's music made by humans, and humans have emotions. And our emotions aren't just happy. We should be grateful we can feel anger; grateful we can feel sorrow. Because we can learn from that.

What do you hope the audience will take away from the album?

I want them to feel like it's a movie. And also, pretty much that they can be triggered to reflect on themselves. Hopefully people will see that. And also, that I'm an artist who can be the nice guy, or good guy, but he does have this shadowy behaviour, and sometimes can be confused or uncertain about things. So, that's the emotion I want to give to an audience through **Satryo**.

Was making **Satryo** emotional for you, then?

A lot of the songs were very overwhelming, especially to record. There were moments where I'd cry, be in tears. I was in Berlin recording and I'd have to say "*I just have to step out and do something!*" It's quite challenging, but quite refreshing also that we can do that within this medium, and within Reggae culture. Yet still keep within it.

What's in store for you, for the rest of 2020?

Well, hopefully if things are OK, we can do some live work online. This year my plan was actually to go on tour across Europe in the summer, but that will have to be postponed now.

Ras, thank you so much. The album is phenomenal and you should be extremely proud of what you've achieved.

Thank you for the opportunity – and thank you that you've enjoyed the album!



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RAS MUHAMAD - SATRYO

Oneness Records - August 7, 2020

If there was ever an album that represented an artistic and spiritual rebirth, it's **Ras Muhamad's** latest release. But not only has the Indonesian sensation been reborn, but he's given us his most stunning work to date.

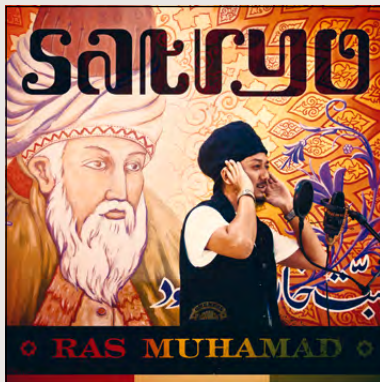
Satryo, released via **Oneness Records**, is a stroke of genius. A complete musical departure from his previous Roots-heavy (yet still glorious) **Salam, Muhamad** invites us on a voyage of self-discovery for both him and us. The result is an exceptionally well-constructed and executed project.

He's split **Satryo** into three "acts". While these are thematic dividing lines, they also break the music down into its constituent parts.

Act 1 - Awakening is dominated by hybrid Roots: from the acoustic-led opener **Kick a Lil Prelude**, to Afropop on **Give Praises** via Funk on **Worldwide Love** (with **Million Stylez**), Rock on **Flight of Ananta** and brooding 80s-style Synthwave on **Jamaica**, featuring **Cali P**, **Promoe** and co-collaborator on much of the album, Berlin-based singer/songwriter **Tóke**.

Act 2 - Alignment vs Disharmony is the most eclectic and compositionally impressive; musically reflecting the juxtapositions of the title. **Muhamad** travels back to Afropop on **Madda Like**, before stopping at orchestral R&B with **Kelissa** on **Satu Dunia**. He gives us acoustic Rock via **King and Goddess (Madda Like Reprise)** before closing with some straight-up Soul on **Pretty Girl Issues**.

Act 3 - Ascension returns to Roots, and showcases the genre in its more authentic form; not least **Step It** featuring **Tippa Irie** and **Noizekill** of **Kunokini**. **Bambu Keras** is on-point Dub, while



Al-Wadud has some Soul tendencies mixed in and **Thin Red Line** with **Jahcoustix** and **Tóke** goes back to a Roots/Dub vibe. But the album's conclusion, **Meta Master Eye Allah**, discards all that came before it - employing cinematic orchestration worthy of a film score.

Overall, these three acts showcase the genius of **Muhamad's** musical skills. The tracks are filled

with intricate detail; expertly crafted to sound complex yet accessible and the production from **Oneness's Moritz 'DaBaron' v. Korff & Benjamin Zecher** is top-class. But **Satryo** is also a lyrical and thematic powerhouse.

Muhamad's construction is epic; an effective piece of musical literature with each track's story leading into the next. For example, in **Act 2** he muses on the quest to find spiritual and physical love. **Madda Like** is the potential of this love; **Satu Dunia** the challenges of it blossoming under the system; **King and Goddess** what that love, and a man's part in it, should look like, and **Pretty Girl Issues** how the system's entrenched patriarchy and misogyny affects women.

But listen closely, and **Satryo** also charts **Muhamad's** whole journey: from the personally chaotic yet acutely conscious **Kick a Lil Prelude** to the resolute **Meta Master Eye Allah** and its message of hope that once you've found yourself the power is in your hands, not the system's.

Satryo is a triumph on every level. Musically perhaps one of the most accomplished works of 2020, **Muhamad** has created a truly breath-taking and colossal project, worthy of his re-birth. It will stand as his seminal piece, holding a place in Roots' history.

by Steve Toppie



ROOTS ROCK REGGAE FESTIVAL 2004

PORTSMOUTH, VIRGINIA/USA - AUGUST 7, 2004

PHOTOS BY JULIAN SCHMIDT



INTERVIEW



RICHIE SPICE

STANDING TOGETHER



MOTHER NATURE'S SON

INTERVIEW BY ANGUS TAYLOR
PHOTOS BY NICKII KANE

Emotive-toned singer **Richie Spice** releases new album **Together We Stand** on June 12th. His first long-player in eight years, once again via **VP Records**, **Together We Stand** reminds us that **Richie** is one of the 21st century's more consistent reggae artists.

The lion's share of productions come from two studio recording legends, veteran polymath arranger **Clive Hunt** and master engineer **Steven Stanley**. The album boasts a blistering, respectful cover of **Max Romeo's Valley Of Jehoshaphat**. The title track is an American soul inspired anthem - whose words relate to the isolated world of Covid-19 quarantine. Combinations include **Beautiful Life**, a **Stanley**-produced duet with Canadian songwriter **Kathryn Aria**; **Unity We Need**, a deep roots mediation with **Chronixx**; and **Murderer** featuring **Dre Island**, bearing the portentous line, "Let us get together in ah this ya last days..."

Angus Taylor spoke to **Richie Spice** at his home in Jamaica, as the island was locked down to avoid Covid-19 infection. **Richie** had been spending the time productively, tending to his garden. He had recently ventured out to perform a rooftop concert at **Clive Hunt's** studio for Mother's Day which was streamed live on Facebook.

For such an expressive singer, **Richie Spice** is not the most talkative of interviewees. The topic of herbs seemed to excite him more than the minutiae of his already-recorded music. But at all times, he was warm and in no way hostile. He's just more of a doer than a talker. And, based on another album of simple, catchy songs to swell his live repertoire once touring returns, doing his thing is working out for him.

*(This interview was conducted before the sad loss of **Bobby Digital**, who produced **Richie's** 2008 album **Gideon Boot** - hence no questions were asked about their time together)*

How are you finding quarantine? How are your brothers - Pliers, Spanner Banner and Snatcher Lion?

I'm giving thanks for life. It is the greatest of all things. Well, you know it is not anything we are used to. Apparently, we just have to obey the rules and do what we have to do until it passes. Everyone is doing good. The brothers are doing great, you know? **Pliers** is here. **Spanner** is in Miami. I think **Snatcher** is here. And everyone is doing well so far.

I read in the Star that you've been doing a lot of gardening... Some of my friends in Jamaica have been trading fruits and vegetables with each other to make sure everybody has a full plate of food.

Yes, I've been planting. You know, you plant your pepper and your seasoning. Because Jamaica is a tropical climate and we have good seasons which mean you can grow. Throughout every season we can always grow whatever we want and whatever we love. There is a lot of trading. All these things so that you can choose whatever you want. I don't plant a lot, not a massive amount but we do give away when we have an amount and share it.

Congratulations on your new album. It's been 8 years since your last album, what have you been doing in that time? Touring?

Thank you. Yes, I've been here and there doing a couple of small dates and some small tours. And I've been working on the album until it was finalised. I think it's [taken] about 5 years, you know? I mean we change and then we record and we pick and choose and then go back and remix until we get it right. You know, I keep working.

How do you feel now that there's no touring?

Well, it's kind of sad knowing you can't go out there and meet and greet your fans, brothers and sisters. Go out there and play the music for the people. But I mean it's no fault of anyone where we could point a finger at anyone. So we just have to stay still until this flu passes.

One of the main producers is Clive Hunt. Can you tell me a bit about your history with Clive? He worked on Groovin' My Girl which was your first big hit back in the 90s...

Clive played a significant part in my career. I did *Groovin' My Girl* with **Clive** and there's another song that I've done with **Clive Hunt** called [*Living Ain't*] *Easy* which was a combination with my other brother [**Snatcher Lion**]. I have been working with **Clive Hunt** for numerous years, coming up in this business, and he taught me a lot. Because he plays every instrument. He knows keys. He can tell you and guide you through whatever you might fall short in. **Clive** is a good person to work amongst. We love working with **Clive Hunt** because **Clive** understands the music and has good vibes. We have tracks on this album like *Red Hot* [*Valley Of Jehoshaphat*], he produced *Together We Stand*, he produced quite a few tracks.

The other main producer on the album is Steven Stanley, who worked for Gussie Clark and Island Records as an engineer. Did you have any history with Steven before this project?

No, I didn't do anything with **Steve** before this project that I remember. But **Steve** is a genius and working with **Steve** is pure vibes. He is a happy person. Just like **Clive Hunt**, you know? You get to overstand the fullness. A great man with great vibes.

The title track has Rasta drums but a soul or gospel feel. Do American soul singers inspire you?

Yeah, definitely. I wouldn't say specific but I'm always listening to their music. They play good music. They put their stuff together that is unique. So I always listen to them. I love this artist called **Mary J Blige**. She's a very soulful person. I always admire her voice. And the way she projects her music.

The song has a line "spreading germs like Pharisees" but according to Jamaicans.com





it was written long before this virus situation... Obviously right now people can't stand together physically but how can they stand together spiritually?

Well, the whole inspiration for this song is the way we see people living out there in the world. We know that people can be more united and make life a little bit easier. Care for Mother Nature more than how they're treating it right now. Spiritually, people have to know that they have to care and share with each other. Love their neighbours and share with one another. Everyone has to know that right now they have to keep their environment and their surroundings so that nature can treat us kinder.

You sing about this in your song Mother Nature on the album. Some people are saying that with everyone staying indoors nature is having more of a chance to grow and flourish - do you see that?

Oh yes, because there is less littering and there are less people going out there to cut down the trees and all these things. So nature is having its time now to flourish. Because we know that Mother Nature is very important to us. I mean she treats us so well. She gives us food, our atmosphere, our heat, our air, our water. So I think that people should pay attention to and try to treat her as kind as possible just like how she treats us.

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SAVE THE CULTURE!



Clive is a horn player and an arranger and there are a lot of nice horns on the album. Songs like Di Dub Dance, Red Hot, and also Steven's productions like Eyes To See The World...

It's a good vibe you know? It's a good vibe, a good feeling, all the people that play on the album. We appreciate them and love them. We appreciate the whole vibration. People coming together and making the music as it is supposed to be. The music is something that guides people in their lives going out and coming in. It's just happy, you know?

When you were building the album with Clive and Steve, were the rhythms already recorded or did the songs and rhythms get built together?

I would say some. Some of the rhythms, we played them inside the studio, creating the songs and the words. Then we would

go in and play the rhythm around the song. Songs like *Together We Stand*, that was one of the songs we built in the studio. Some of my musicians, my bass player plays on that song [Element Band bassist **Dale Haslam - Aeion Hoillett** according to the credits]. *Dub Dance* was another song which **Clive** presented to me and we played it in the studio. I think *Red Hot* also. Then some of the songs, the rhythm was there before and we'd just sing on it.

How did you link with Kathryn Aria from Toronto to work on Beautiful Life, produced by Steven Stanley?

I linked with her through my management team which is **Element Music Group**. We listened to her vibration and she is a cool daughter like that, you know? She has a unique voice, so we worked with her from there.

VARIOUS ARTISTS FT. GREGORY ISAACS

NIGHT NURSE

TO #COVID19 WORKERS

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ROCKY DAWUNI | DARRIO
DOTTA COPPA | KENNY SMYTH
MEGUMI MESAKU | ADONAI
PAPA MICHIGAN | WYRE
GLENNY | AFRIKAN SIMBA
IZA | KAYAFYAHOUSE**





One of my favourite songs is Eyes To See The World which has a message of uplifting the youths and the poor, a message you really believe in.

Well it's an inborn thing, you know? It's been in I and I to always have this thing to help people in many different ways. Through the music helping the people spiritually and physically likewise. It's just a thing that's inside.

How did you link with Chronixx for the song Unity We Need? It's produced by Bulpus who is a friend of Clive...

Bulpus presented the rhythm to me and said he would like to be a part of it. The rhythm was a nice track. So I started to work on it and it happened. Well, **Chronixx** now is a youth who grew up with us here in Jamaica. The whole link came from the same team, from my management team **Element Music Group**. And the whole link up with **Chronixx** right now... because you know he is a very busy person out there musically...

Did you interact with him at all during the song? Or was it just sending files, you did your parts, he did his parts?

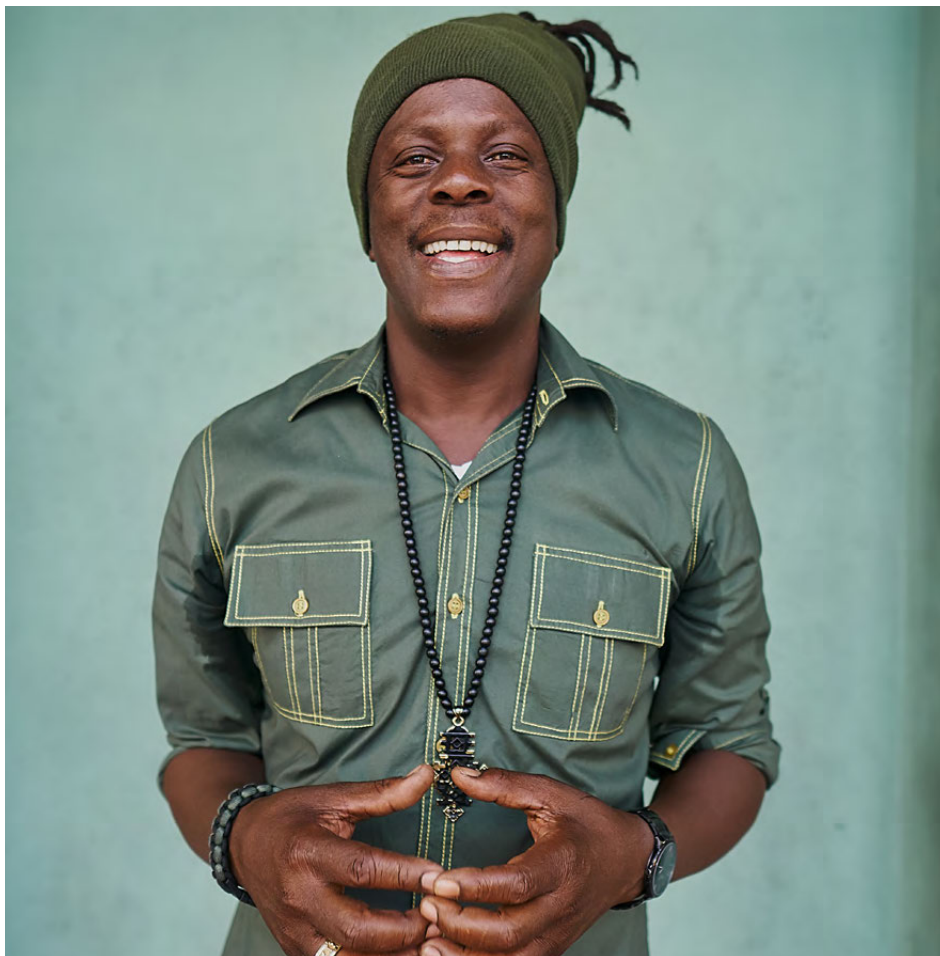
Well it was something like that. But I had met him before and when I sent it to him, he said *"Yes, good vibes"*. He liked it. He liked the whole idea and he was so excited to be a part of it.

It's a more unity vibration. We stress the unity because the world needs that. To come together, unite together. I mean every nation living on Earth as people should live.

I saw him afterwards and he was telling me how nice it was so I said *"Yes man, thanks and thing"*. Cool vibes, good youth.

Let's talk about this cover version of Max Romeo's Red Hot [Valley Of Jehoshaphat]. Max lives in Linstead where Clive is from. Do you know Max at all? I guess Clive suggested the song?

I don't know **Max** that well, you know? He is a big man! I met him before but I live in



a different section of Jamaica from **Max**. But yes, the song itself was introduced to me by **Clive Hunt** and he said he was the person who created the song from that time. So he sent the song and I said “*Yes, good vibes, good feeling, **Max Romeo** - elder in the business*”. I listened to it and added a couple of lines to it and refreshed it you know?

It's quite rare for you to do a famous cover version. You have written songs on famous rhythms like Youths So Cold on Truths And Rights. Did you and Clive write songs together? How does writing work for you?

Well it's vice versa you know? Sometimes you sit by yourself and you listen to a rhythm and you get that inspiration. Come through and do it. Lyrics just flow. Sometimes I might write songs with my brothers also. Or anyone who is around. Because at times somebody might say “*Change this line here and say that instead*”. It's kind of vice versa.

You have three songs about herbs in a row on the album. Let's talk about the song California. Was that inspired by a specific California trip?



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Yes man, that was a specific trip man! I went there and I went on this farm. And it was so inspiring to see how the people really grow the herbs. And how the herbs come out looking. Fluffy and the texture was great. So yeah inspiration came from that meditation.

And then on I Use The Herbs you talk a lot about the medical benefits of the herbs?

Oh yeah, because as you say the herbs are the healing of the nations. Which means it has a lot of use or influence. There are a lot of products you can get from the herbs. A lot of healing products, you know? It's just the healing of the nations man. It's a marvellous plant, you know?

On your song Dabbing you talk about a specific way of using the herbs. Can you tell people who don't know, what "dabbing" is?

Well you know dabbing is not that popular in Jamaica but back in California and certain places you find people dab a lot. Dabbing is

the extraction from the herb itself so that instead of smoking it they put it on a little thing and you vape instead. And you get a cleaner texture from the herbs itself. Because the people in Jamaica smoke herbs a lot. So if you find a new way to use the herbs it's good, you know?

And before the quarantine, what was the situation like in Jamaica for local people being able to make money from the herbs?

Well, the situation in Jamaica is now a little different from before, you know? Because once upon a time a couple of years back it was illegal. So [since 2015] it's kind of more decriminalised right now. Which means a person couldn't lock you up for a spliff as before. The government gives you an opportunity where you can plant five trees in your household, five plants. The normal person who used to plant the herbs in the forest and deal with it, they have more opportunities now.



THE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED *Triple Album* FROM
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Tell me about your song Murderer with Dre Island produced by Jon FX and Chevy... Like the Chronixx tune, it's about people not fighting. Would you say crime and violence has gone down since people had to stay indoors?

Well **Dre Island** was a part of **Element Music Group** so he was like a brother there. That's how we linked up and did this track and the producers were **Dre's** producers. Well yes, because crime has shut down a bit, you know? Because people don't have that opportunity to move back and forth as they would like to. So it has kind of taken a little dive.

During that song Dre Island says "Let us get together in ah this ya last days" Do you think this is a time of judgment right now? Is what's happening right now part of that?

Well, I would say these are the days of the trod through Babylon you know? The Bible tells you about Revelations where they say that in certain times you shall see certain things happen. You know - children having children, mother against daughter, daughter against father, son against father and all these things. So these are just the times now where we see some signs and wonders, you know?

In the song *There's A Way*, you talk a lot about critics. You told me in a previous interview that when you first started it was hard to get people to record you. I guess if you'd listened to critics we wouldn't be here doing this now.

Oh surely not. Surely not. People always have things to say, you know? But you have to be a person who is strong within yourself, strong-headed and know that you cannot listen to what people have to say. Because not everybody means you good at all times. So you have to just keep your focus and be steadfast once you know you're doing something that is productive.

The song *Destress* is very relevant right now. People are finding ways to stream concerts, for example, finding ways for people to interact so they can dance and have fun in their home. I know you did a concert with Clive for Mother's Day that was live-streamed a couple of weeks back with Patrice...

Yes, we did. The concert was me, **Patrice** and **Jesse Royal**. It was a good vibes. At **Clive's** studio in Linstead, we were on the roof and we had a good time for Mother's Day. It was a gift for the mothers, and it was so nice. And I think that yeah, to get the opportunity to go out there and sing for the people, should surely interest them. Because the people wanted to see us and they don't have that opportunity to see us. So getting the opportunity now is like a breath of fresh air to them.

You end the album with the song *Put This In The Schools* produced by Steven Stanley. It returns to the Rasta drums of the title track. You quote a 1946 speech by Haile Selassie asking that his teachings be put into the curriculum for the youths to learn...

Yes it's a very important song with very important messages. We need to get these messages out there for us to have a better world, to have a better tomorrow. We really have to put these types of messages in the schools, in the curriculum for the youths,

because they are our tomorrow. So getting a message out there for us to have a better world, we always have to teach the youths the right thing. Tell the youth the truth so they can understand, so they know right from wrong and good from bad.

I read on LoopJamaica.com that it was the 20th anniversary of Fifth Element Records...

Yes, it is. This will mark the 20 years since **Fifth Element** came together as a music company. And it's a good vibration that **Fifth Element** came out and came into this music world here and created a great vibe for the reggae music. Strengthening back the reggae music and putting a lot of work out there.

It's been over 25 years since you started recording. When I last saw you at Reggae Geel 2019 it struck me how big a crowd you had but also how many memorable songs you have in your set. You've been going since the 1990s but there are artists from the 1970s and 1980s who don't have so many hits...

(laughs) It's a good vibe man and it's a good feeling. We just keep playing the music on a level where it's nonstop. And whenever we plan to put the music and videos out, we try to put it together with our whole heart. Whatever we put into it, we get out and we try to do it in a form which means people will accept it. And also in a form which means it always has a message saying something positive. And we keep it that way. When they set the world free again, I'll be out there promoting this new album **Together We Stand**. And I'll be there meeting my fans and my people all over the world playing music for them and it's such a delight. Thank you for everything. Thank you for the supportive vibes over the years. Keep on doing what you're doing bro, enough love, enough respect.



RICHIE SPICE - TOGETHER WE STAND

VP Records - June 12, 2020

Richie Spice is back. The legendary artist returns with a new album. And it sees him sweep across genres, styles and themes.

Together We Stand, released via **VP Records**, is **Spice** at the peak of his powers across 15 tracks, having co-written the majority of them. Composition and production credits include **Clive Hunt**, **Steven Stanley**, **Giovanni "Ras Vanni"**

Powell and **Rickman Warren**. There's impressive live instrumentation from a host of musicians. And together, they've made the album a melting pot of Roots-led flavours.

The genre appears straight-up on the powerful **Valley of Jehoshaphat (Red Hot)** and the more Pop-feeling **De Stress**, with a beautiful flute line from **Richard "Isax" Howse**. **Di Dub Dance** does what it says on the tin, although leaning more to Roots than Dub.

Soul is heavily into the mix; often in the intricately harmonised, call and response or vowel-led backing vocals. **Mother Nature**, for example, heads direct into Doo-Wop territory while the title track takes **Richie Spice** almost into Gospel realms – but with nods to Africa in the drum arrangement. The Motherland's influence is also clear on the album's finale, **Put This In The Schools**: a stark and compelling traditional African affair, almost sermonic in nature.

But **Spice** is at his best when he pushes musical boundaries. With the incomparable **Chronixx** featuring on **Unity We Need**, Revival-esque genre smashing dominates as the track veers between Funky Soul, Roots and Dub. The clever arranging, engineering and **Ernie Wilks'** performing of the guitars on **California** smashes Roots together with Surf Rock; geographically apt.



Afropop-meets-Roots and Afrobeats feature on **Dabbin'** and **There's A Way (Remix)** respectively. And **Dre Island**, fresh from his debut album **Now I Rise**, goes with **Spice** on a Hip Hop-Roots journey via **Murderer. I Use The Herbs** is perhaps the most eclectic of all – in essence, Neo Soul. **Richie Spice** and **Elvis Grant** and **Roger King** take a Dancehall

clave, mix it with some Ambient, **Toronto**-like R&B vibes and a dose of Soul via a sax. Divine.

Vocally, **Spice** has lost none of his power. That rich yet raw sound remains, and is showcased well on the Soul-heavy Roots track **Beautiful Life** with the sublime **Kathryn Aria**. But **Eyes To See The World** is him at his best. His impressive range and breath control, use of intonation and intuitive skill with dynamics are all on show across this moving cut. **Spice's** interplay with **Howse's** sax is divine, and the track is perhaps one of the album's strongest.

It's a powerful thematic album as well. **Spice** tackles various issues, from the legalisation of cannabis to love and some lighter moments. But unity and emancipation are key; not least on **Unity We Need**, **Eyes To See The World**, **Mother Nature** and the biblically-apt **Valley Of Jehoshaphat**. **Spice** delivers a powerful protest cry for humanity throughout the project and succeeds in delivering this message.

Together We Stand is an expansive album from **Richie Spice**. Him and his team musically deliver in droves, with enough variation to hold your ear for many listens. But it's the message which also shines through. And **Spice** has crafted a moving and searing narrative, wholly relevant today. Stirring work.

by Steve Topple



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INTERVIEW



DRE ISLAND

MANIFESTATION OF SPIRITUAL FREQUENCIES

THE RIGHT TIME

INTERVIEW BY MUNCHY
PHOTOS BY WILLIAM RICHARDS

For years **Dre Island** has been announcing a compilation of his songs, now he finally dropped his debut album **Now I Rise** on May 29. 13 tracks, 4 featured guest artists, a bunch of Jamaica's finest contemporary producers – and no Reggae song. Really? Ahead of the release Reggaeville connected with **Dre Island** in Kingston through Skype and caught the musician right on spot on his piano to find out all about the project, its makers, and of course its genre.



On May 29 you will finally drop your debut album *Now I Rise*. How do you feel about this release?

It is a great feeling because it has been years that the people have been anticipating this project. And it has been years now that I been wanting to put out this project, but I forwarded to the realisation that it is not what I want but what Jah wants. Now is the time for **Now I Rise**, on May 29 to the world!

You been speaking of this project since about five years now. In the meantime, you also spoke of releasing it as a playlist instead of an album. How did you finally come to the decision that it's going to be an album to be put out this year?

Originally **Now I Rise** started out from a song which I gave to the people in 2012. That was the whole creation of **Now I Rise**. Along the way I never wanted to put out an EP because after the success of songs like *We Pray, Reggae Love, Rastafari Way* I felt like so much people love **Dre Island**

and these fans never wanted just five or four songs from me. From the beginning though I spoke of “project **Now I Rise**”, so I didn’t go with the name “EP” nor “album”. Project **Now I Rise** for me is not just an album, **Now I Rise** that is coming out on the 29th of May is the musical part of a greater project that is coming to life.

You said the fans wanted more songs than just four or five, and that how it went was Jah will, but would you also say that maybe you are a perfectionist or did something tell you that 2012, 2013, 2014 etc was not the right time yet?

I have been hesitant as willing flesh mainly because of seeing the situation around and knowing that nothing can run without proper management, structure, and organisation. **Dre Island** loves music. But we all know that music is also something that to get the best result, you have to treat it in a particular way. If you love it so much, you want to put in the best. Then you should make music want to appreciate you before the fans

get it because for me music is a conversation between me and the tracks, the record, the riddim, the instrument. And it was also Jah will because I wanted it to come out many times. I would say “*Put out the album*” and somebody would say “*No*”. I was getting my team and my business together, making sure that everything was structured right, so that whenever I drop a song **Munchy** wouldn’t be wondering how she never got to know that song, and so wouldn’t the rest of fans that you need to reach to. For me now is the right time and also Jah said now, even though it is a challenging time.

The cover shows you in sort of a cartoon or animated version. Why did you choose this artwork for Now I Rise?

Cartoon or animation can only be words for people to understand what we are talking about, but for me it was more of a vision. The whole album is about where I am coming from to where I am going, and it is also the vision of the person who did the art, too. I left it for Jah to inspire him. And I never troubled him too much on what he was doing or which direction to go. All I did was send him a picture and let him listen the project. The picture I sent to him was a picture of my youngest son. While everybody thinks it’s me, it’s actually my youngest son. Everything just came to life and that’s how I wanted to see it. Because life is not an easy road sometimes.

You didn’t just write the lyrics for your songs, some tracks like Now I Rise and Calling are entirely produced by you, and with other tracks you were also involved in the composition. How do you approach these productions that are mainly done by you alone? Do you have an entire song in mind, do you create the beat first? How do things fall in place?

Naturally I love music, I love producing, I love creating. This project was created over a period of time. I wrote all of my parts of the songs of my album. Maybe about three songs from 2012, 2013 were co-written by

one of my good friends, who is a doctor, a general practitioner Dr. Fisher. As for the features **Chronixx**, **Popcaan**, **Jesse Royal**, and **Alandon** wrote their parts. I wanted everybody to express their point of view, that is why I did those features. For me building the riddim was sitting on the piano (*actually plays some chords on the piano*), vibing something and Jah just gave me a melody. Sometimes I sit on the piano and literally just drop my hand and the first sound I hear, that’s what I groove with. And sometimes if it’s not the vibes, you have a next time when you feel a particular way, maybe on the road, maybe in the studio. But it all comes from a natural vibration, a natural energy. The material for some of my songs and the way I write come from my inspiration as an artist, from piano lessons in the past, from growing up through church. Every part of making **Dre Island** who he is today, that soul, that spirit is put in the project **Now I Rise**.

You mentioned the several collaborations on Now I Rise. Popcaan, Jesse Royal, Chronixx, and Alandon are featured. Those are people I would also see you par with you outside the studio and music business. Is it important for you to work with fellow artists you also have a good personal relationship with?

It is very important because we oversee each other and we are on the same frequency spiritually. That must be the reason why we par together because they say “*Show me your company and I’ll tell you who you are*”. So, in some way we are connected, we are family, as you said we par outside of music. I don’t even see any of them as an artist, I more see them as souls that Jah sent. That is how I view my brothers. All of them are my brothers, I see them as the household I grew up with. They just never came out of my mom, I never came out of their mom, but their mom is my mom and my mom is their mom. Their grandparents are my grandparents. I know them, they know my life. We all grow together. I am glad that I had the opportunity and experience to have my brothers on my project, my album. The name and the story of **Now I Rise** is real.



These are people that can share stories, these are people that can really tell the rise. These are people that can really tell where you're coming from, where you reach, and can see where you are going naturally because they know you. We also have features with other artists that we might not par necessarily everyday with because we are in different places or different times zones but most people that **Dre Island** does songs with are like this.

How did your friendship with Popcaan evolve and what do you appreciate about him as a person, rather than as an artist?

Me and **Popcaan** started out long time. He was always a brother who showed me love from the get-go. I remember the first time acknowledging his immediate presence. I was voicing for **Jam2** at **King Jammy's** studio. Me and **Jam2** alone were there, and he walked in while I was in the recording booth. It has no glass, so you can't see outside. You can only hear whosoever is in the engineering room. I heard his voice and from [when] I heard the voice I knew that there is only one person that sounds like that and that's the boss. I continued voicing and working. **Jam2** ended up playing back the song when I finished, while **Popcaan** was sitting outside in the lounge area holding a vibe with his family and when I went outside to leave he said "Yo, you that?". I said "Yeah" and he replied "Yo, you bad you know, youth! Youth, you ah go big!" At that point **Popcaan** was already a superstar and he told me that at a time when I didn't even know I was going to be an artist. The next time I was on the road and **Jam2** called me. He said he was at auntie **Sharon Burke's** of **Solid Agency**, who is my manager now, for a photo shoot with **Scorpio21** and he was going to link with **Popcaan** and I should also link them. So, I decided to hold a vibes and go there. As I stepped out of the vehicle I heard his voice saying "Yo, **Jam2**, ah di artist this? Rasta, you clean!" and I was just in my natural way, wearing cut-off jeans. That showed me again that this youth is

pure, when he just talks to you, natural, into your face. From there on it just evolved into us doing a song. He came to me and said that he rates me, he as the mega superstar, not just the superstar, comes to me and says we should have a song together. "You are my bredda! You bad! Me rate you!" For a good three months period of time he asked and we ended up giving the world **We Pray**. Jah gave us **We Pray** and we gave it to the world.

Alandon is a young rising star from Waterhouse, Kingston, who some people might not know yet. What can you tell us about him and why did you invite him on the project for the somewhat hypnotic love song?

Remember what I said about **Alandon**? He is my family, I know him personally. The people I collaborate with are my brothers and I don't look at if they are on the road a lot or any of these things. I know them, where their heart is, what they really love, and how passionate they would be about this. That is how I approach all my family that is featured on tracks. I just give them tracks that Jah inspired me to do and here I knew, that was for him. Not just as an artist but it also fits him personally, and he didn't even think twice when he heard it. He has a lot to say, that is what we always talk about, because all my four brothers on the project we speak different things. So I know what track to give **Alandon**. I wouldn't give you something you have to come too much out of your zone for. That's what I did when I gave him that type of song. **Alandon** is a good youth. I know him from long before I became an artist, as a producer. A family friend who grew up in the house that my grandmother took care of, he introduced me to **Alandon** when he was in Connecticut. I became an artist, met him in flesh, and realised that he is like me, we are similar, he is my bredda for real. We grew up over a ten year period, pared, and then there was the album **Now I Rise**. People will say, how I put him on the track even though he is not famous – yet, or not popular, but that's yet. Just like with the album it's all about timing.



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As producers Anju Blaxx, Winta James, Teetimus, and King Jammy's son Jam2 are also on board of the project. The latter has been working with you from the very beginning, he produced some of your first hits.

Yeah, long time, Waterhouse days 2012.

Exactly! Was it important to work with him also for this album? Tell me a bit about the relationship you have!

Jam2 was the first one to say **Dre Island**. He told me to stop deejaying and start singing. I thought I couldn't sing and told him he should talk to people like **Chronixx**, **Romain Virgo**, or **Christopher Martin** to sing and I would deejay my part. Look at me now singing. Memories don't live like people do, so you always have to do what you know is right and pleasing in Jah sight. So, I couldn't leave out **Jam2** when he is the man who told me to sing. I gave him a song on which I sing and deejay on the album. Also

with **Winta James**. We did *Uptown Downtown*, a very successful song. I could also not leave him off. He is one of the producers I worked with from the beginning. Likewise **Anju Blaxx** with *Way Up*. I also had to put him back on the album. The song with me and **Alandon** is produced by a family friend who lives in New York. We grew up in Primary and High School together. He also has a label. So, you see we all connect back. Everything is a journey. **Teetimus**, we know each other from Waterhouse days and ended up in a house with studio together in Miami and built music together. Everything is natural, everything is real from the project.

Wonderful! When I listened the project I was a bit surprised because it's not the typical Dancehall material, there is not really any Reggae. Over all there are Hip Hop influences on quite some tracks, even a little funk on Four Seasons, many industrial or even



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PROMOTION



futuristic elements, and a pretty dark sound for the most parts. How would you describe the sound of this record?

I'm glad you said it's not Reggae, but it is Reggae because of the message. Reggae for me is not the beat. Reggae as we know it in Jamaica is the message of Rasta youths. It is about delivering His Majesty's message. For that reason alone everything on it is Reggae. What the beat is concerned now... I bun race, I bun religion, also language and all the things that separate people from being together. I bun Corona because of that people have to keep social distance and that's not being together. Anything that causes separation, I am not for it. Just like genre. I don't live one genre, I never grew up hearing Reggae alone in Jamaica, I grew up hearing everything. I also didn't grow up hearing Dancehall in Jamaica, because I couldn't play Dancehall in my house. That was considered boogoyaga music by my grandmother when I was a little child growing up. I gave everybody on the project

what I know from a little child growing up, the sounds that I hear, everything that I feel. **Bob** said "*Play I on the R and B*". Reggae for **Bob** is not typical what people know it as right now. **Damian Marley** also does Reggae and that's not the typical Reggae, it doesn't include the stre-ggae, stre-ggae guitar sound. That's on none of his albums. For him, also for people like **Stephen Marley, Popcaan** it is about people, culture, humanity, one race, one love, one blood. We shouldn't go back way, we have to look forward and remember how **Bob** said "*Play I on the R and B*". He also never started out with the stre-ggae, stre-ggae guitar sound, he started with Ska and it evolved from that. But you get the message. He gave you roots, he always gave you his heart and soul and him. So, I give you me. The same with **Four Seasons**. It is something like **Bob** singing a Reggae party song or **Chronixx** making a joyful noise, it is also something I consider a joyful noise for the females. Right now in these quarantine times nobody can see the

sun, the moon, the beach or go the river. Nobody can walk up and down as they would like to. So, the person I am sharing my personal space with, the partner I am at home with, that has to be my sunshine, my river, my beach. I want to look at her and feel like I am at the beach. She is the rose in my garden. I just want to give the people **Dre Island** and what I am about.

So, is there any style you want Dre Island to be associated with or described as?

I want to be associated with music and that's any style that I can be associated with. Other than that, nobody can categorise me or class me or put me in a box or a corner, spot, or position. It's only music. I play the piano, I produce, I mix, I love movies, I love acting, I love the arts. So, if you want to put me in a category put me in the arts. (laughs)

The track *My City* is dedicated to your hometown Kingston, especially to shaken communities like the ones you grew up in or near: Common, 100 Lane, Park Lane, Whitehall, Cassava Piece. Tell me how life is still like there now and why you felt the urge to address this song to the people of Kingston?

The situation in some of these areas is not as bad as the place that I am from but the place where I am from still has its struggles. But it is not as bad as I saw it 10, 15, 20 years ago. It is getting more civilised, in a more family fashioned, in a more lovely way. The people have more love, and control their anger and their frustration. That's also because it is not as much poverty as back in the days. It's not gone but people are more managing the situation now, which causes people not to want to do things that are not of love. I dropped this song because by the end of the day I do timeless music and I speak what I know. The way I see it, I say it. "*I'm from a place which part dem buss rifle with the scope a top*" these are facts and nothing can change that. Even if it's not like that now, that's where I'm from, that's the true story. And at the end of the song I tell you how it goes. I have been around the

world, I've been to Munich and the **Wha' Gwaan Munchy!?!?** show, and I got nuff love for who I am. It's a journey same way and we stay on the rise. It's from that place to the light.

Speaking of the light, because as I mentioned earlier the album to me sounds somewhat "dark", yet songs like *My City*, *More Love*, or *We Pray* spark hope and positivity through the lyrics. Would you describe yourself an optimist?

You know what I always say? I am a Rastaman that Jah loves dearest to His heart. I am just being used to do the works. Even with a song like *Be Okay* where **Jesse** says "*stock market crash, recession kick in*", people will say how we knew that before. However Jah leads me, I shall go.

Your grandmother brought you to church, encouraged you to sing in the choir. Did faith and spirituality also foster this approach on life?

It came from all walks of life. Because my grandmother never really brought me to church still. Mommy and daddy lived on the churchyard but I grew up with my grandmother from when I was two months. Along the way in life my grandmother became a Christian. It was the best of both worlds that brought me to this because all my uncles that I grew up with in my grandma's house were Rastas. They went away to England when I was young, so I ended up being in the house with my grandmother and an auntie. They went to church, yes, but more importantly my grandmother taught us real life. Her and the ancestors' teachings, also the Rasta elders in the community and where I grew up in Kingston, in Jamaica, all that knowledge played a part in how I approached writing the album and making the beats, the soul, the spirit of the album. It all comes from that.

Did the Rasta elders in your community you just mentioned also influence you to turn to Rastafari?



POSITIVE VIBRATION

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It influenced me like how a Christian would tell you to give your life the Lord. They just told me stories about how His Majesty used to live. I remember how an uncle came back from England. That time I was still a baldhead, that mentality. In the streets my uncle hailed up a mad man. I said nothing. He said "*Rastafari, one love! You good?*" and the man answered him like he was never mad. I saw him doing it again the same time, just a bit up the road, he hailed a next mad man and he and the man started a conversation. I never asked any questions about that. But up until today these things played on me. I learned from them. Naturally you would have told such a man to move, but the response I saw was shocking. That taught me how to be humble, it taught me how to appreciate life for what it is. It taught me that you are here, but you can achieve way beyond any marker that they set for you. Just being with the ones that sing Reggae music,

spreading the message through music, that pierced my soul from when I was a little child. It's about love, roots, love.

Coming back to Now I Rise, your new project that normally people would keep an album release party for when they drop it, play concerts or tour. Due to Corona you will not be able to do any of that. How does that make you feel?

Every day I see performances going on on my computer same way. When **Popcaan** performed at the Wembley Arena a year ago, I wasn't there but I watched the performance on my phone like I was there. We give thanks to modern technology. We just have to find creative ways to get the message out. One thing I know about our existence is that we always evolve. We will always find a way, we will learn to adapt. I will give you the performance, **Munchy**. Right there where you are sitting you are going to get **Dre**

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Mad, so we still have something to look forward to. How do you manage the situation due to Corona in general? How do you spend your time these days? What have been the most significant changes since the start of the pandemic?

For me as a Rasta, my circle is small in a way. I always go to the same places and these places didn't close off. It's from the studio to my yard. Other than that, it's just when we tour or have other engagements we have to leave for but due to Corona that can't happen. I know that there is a time and

place for everything under the sun, so I'm fine knowing that for now we have to stand still. I look forward, and I use this time for the project, for the album **Now I Rise**. That's all I been focusing on. I have my piano right here (plays a chord) in the house, so I can still rehearse, do interviews like we are doing this one right here. So, I just keep going. I am here to do what I came here to do. Just like the doctors are fighting the fight against Covid-19, love and condolences to anybody who lost anybody from this madness, I keep the motion going. The sun is always out, so, give thanks.

Certainly! You also contributed an amazing production for the Tan A Yuh Yard campaign by Pepsi, in which you created a song from the natural sounds of different private phone videos people made at their yard. How did this project come about?

Pepsi linked auntie **Sharon Burke** and told her they wanted me to produce this for them. They gave her the guidelines and



rules, and sent me the videos of like **Creep Chromatic** spraying his tyre and various influential people doing things at home in this Covid quarantine. I just created the beat with all these natural sounds from somebody jumping and exercising, spraying the tyre, washing the dishes... Sound is vibration, that is what we hear and feel, and everything is a vibe! I just did what I know to do, I played the piano and added musical sounds to complement it.

And now we have Now I Rise to look forward to...

Yes! On the 22nd of May it will be on an app that Digicel created for the Caribbean in particular. Because we don't have iTunes in this region. I hear that it is now coming but we don't have it yet and more times the people drop songs, the Caribbean can't get to download. That's been going on for years now. So, now the Caribbean and of course the

people worldwide can get it. It will be out on D'Music from the 22nd, on the other platforms it will be out the 29th of May. And I also have a collaboration with **Wyclef Jean** coming up for **Ahmaud Arbery**, the young man that got shot in Georgia the other day while he was jogging. **Sharon Burke** organised that as well. We also shot a video for it, that is coming up. So, that is also something the people can look out for. Other than that it's all about project **Now I Rise**, the album. All the information will be on the social media and my website even for people that don't know how to use certain apps and download, everything will be right there for them to find.

Great! All the very best for the release! It was a pleasure speaking to you! Thank you!

Give thanks for all the love **Reggaeville** showed me over the years. I see the love. Thank you very much **Munchy!**



DRE ISLAND - NOW I RISE

Dre Island Music / Kingston Hills Entertainment / DubShot Records - May 29, 2020

"This album speaks of arising, growth, new beginnings and emerging from the ashes and at this time these are all the things we need based on what is happening right now... I am inspired by life and everything I do is inspired by the Father and so I am moved to drop this album at this time because I am divinely inspired to do so." (**Dre Island**)

Five years in the making, the time is now for **Dre Island**

to release his debut-album **Now I Rise**. The Kingston-born-and-raised youth has come a long way from his first single **Reggae Love** in 2013, followed by charismatic stage shows triggering international attention, to the full-fledged artist he is today. As such, he and his label **Dre Island Music** are responsible for the executive production of the present album, although he teamed up with **Kingston Hills Entertainment** and NYC's **DubShot Records** for good measure.

It's with an eerie feeling the lyrics of the opening track **Kingdom** fall on our ears, knowing that the album went through the final mastering well before the vile homicide of **George Floyd** provoked an international outcry. Almost literally, **Dre Island** predicts what's happening in the big American cities today: "*Watching we shake up every city and break up dem bones when rasta youths come fi claim dem own...*" Co-produced by **Anju Blaxx**, the track has a gripping marching riddim to which both the staccato delivery of the verses and the hypnotic melody of the chorus make a perfect match.

Other producers lending their skills to the project are **Jam2** (*My City*), **Teetimus** (*Four Seasons*) and **Winta James** (*Never Run Dry*), thus expanding the scope of the musical experience by R&B, Disco and HipHop flavours, respectively. **Barkley Productions** add the pensive *Be Okay*, which



brings us into the realm of features. The unmistakable voice of **Jesse Royal** teams up with **Dre Island** to confront us with the way we treat our environment: "*She give you all this food to eat, all this air to breathe, all these memories, and this is how you repay her?*"

Further features include newcomer **Alandon** on **Run To Me** as well as genre-celebrities **Chronixx**

(*Days of Stone*) and **Popcaan** on *We Pray*. About the latter, **Dre Island** says: "*I can take no credit for a song like that. Yes I wrote the lyrics and built the rhythm and I voice the track, but it's a prayer, not just a song so how a man fi tek credit for something that come from above.*"

Turning to the title track **Now I Rise**, it rather sums up the mood of the release. Musically, what we hear is not a Roots Reggae album, but it incorporates much of the confident, rebellious Rasta mindset with which **Dre Island** has grown to identify.

Closing the album, **Still Remain** is one of the most powerful tracks. Produced by **Dretegs Music**, it creates a dense, almost ominous atmosphere in which **Dre Island's** vocals unfold their full potential. Harboring an insistent roughness, they still bring across the emotion necessitated by the lyrics, so vividly depicted by the accompanying visuals.

A special treat for fans and important contribution to these times, **Now I Rise** will be released as deluxe edition on June 26th, including three additional tracks plus the stirring **Justice**, a feature with **Wyclef Jean** talking about racial divide and the continuous, unjustifiable murder of black people.

by **Gardy Stein**



REGGAE JAM 2009

BERSENBRÜCK, GERMANY - AUGUST 2009

PHOTOS BY JULIAN SCHMIDT





INTERVIEW

BUJU BANTON

REUNION WITH THE GARGAMEL

FEEL THE ENERGY!

INTERVIEW BY MUNCHY
PHOTOS BY SHAWN THEODORE

His return to the stage inside Kingston's National Stadium in March 2019 was one of the largest Reggae events in recent years. Now finally all fans around the globe, even those who missed out on his stunning live appearances of last year, can get new music from **Buju Banton**. The legendary Jamaican singer and deejay is about to drop his 13th studio album this summer, a record that raises high expectations not just because of its artist but also the features revealed thus far, such **John Legend**; the producers on board including **Donovan Germain**, **Dave Kelly**, and the late great **Bobby Digital**; and of course, the protagonist's seven year absence from the music scene. For the first time since his



release and return to Jamaica, **Buju Banton** took the time to speak to **Munchy** from Reggaeville on the phone, to discuss his sound and lyrics, the current situation in the world due to Corona, his love for Jamaica, and certainly not the formula for his abundant hits.

Ten years after the release of your last album Before The Dawn you are about to drop your new album Upside Down 2020 in June. How do you feel about this next milestone in your career coming up?

First and foremost I want to say give thanks to all the good people who helped me and worked with me over the years to accomplish all that I have accomplished musically. And first I want to thank the Most High God who has been on the forefront of all my journeys. This journey is not different from all the other journeys. The only major difference is, you have been missing my voice so much. But you know the truth shall not cease and as a bearer of the truth I shall always bring it whether I'm coming from the dungeon, whether I was buried alive or not. Did I say how I feel about this project? It's the truth serum!

Why did you name this album Upside Down?

Why wouldn't I name it **Upside Down**? That should be the question. In a world where good is called bad and lies are accepted as truth and the guilty can be made innocent and the innocent can be made guilty, why wouldn't I call the album **Upside Down**? (laughs)

The album starts with Lamb Of God, the same divine hymn you also started your first Long Walk To Freedom concert with in March 2019. Why did you choose this song, and these words in particular, to open both the show and the album?

We are in a very awakening dispensation. It is not one of stature, nor one of social prestige. It is more one of spiritual awakening in this age. Mercy and comfort and truth are pillars

of a foundation that are everlasting principles that cannot be removed. I don't care if you are rich, poor, black, or white. These are fundamental principles to stand by. Given to us by the True and Almighty God. Therefore, to call upon mercy and have mercy upon I and I as the children of men. Maybe some of us are so arrogant they refuse to do it for themselves. Well, I am not. Let me do it for me and let me do it for you. Because Our Father is merciful and there is an abundance of mercy. The world needs to know this. Which man lights a candle and puts it under his bed? Is he trying to burn down his own house? So, what if he puts this candle on a window? Wouldn't the world see that this house is lit? Then someone can light their candle from this candle. Have mercy on us, oh Jah, oh Lamb Of God. The world right now needs healing, even in our part. That's all we doing!

How do you recall the first time you performed Lamb Of God in the National Stadium in Kingston on March 16, 2019? Was the concert and the return to the stage how you expected it to be? Are you a person who puts a lot of pressure on himself or did it feel like effortlessly coming home?

First, I don't believe in putting pressure on myself, none at all. I don't believe in fighting music, neither the production nor the creation because music is supposed to flow. If all frequencies are in synchronicity the music flows. Such was the same principle as it concerns the concert **Long Walk To Freedom**. It must flow. The right people must fall in place. Everything must be seamless to give a flawless presentation. That was a long-anticipated time. I can't speak of this in terms the English language would allow. It is something you have to feel. You have to be present in the moment. You understand, sister?

Yes, totally! So, it was more like coming home?

I have always been home. It was more like seeing friends and seeing ones who I haven't seen in a long time, and having a re-unification and a re-dedication of ourselves unto

the true purpose why we are here which is to continue learn and continue to find out about the mysteries of who we are as a people. It was a brief pause in transmission for ten years and then we reconnect again. So that to me is greater than anything that one might perceive in their own perception but everyone is entitled to that. But I see it as a re-connection and a re-establishment of a spiritual groundation.

Was that similar to the feeling you had when you reached the Norman Manley International Airport in Kingston and returned to Jamaica in 2018?

When I set in the jet plane entering the island I was overwhelmed with a feeling of nostalgia because long time I didn't see my home town, long time I haven't seen my people. But all of that is just a moment in space, a moment in time. A man did have to return, a man did have to enter through the court of entry. So, I don't place too much thought and emphasis on my return because in reality I should have never left. You sight?

Yes, sir. The opening track Lamb Of God is followed by another piece your fans are already familiar with: Yes Mi Friend, the cover of Duppy Conqueror that you already performed on the Welcome To Jamrock Reggae Cruise with Stephen Marley. He is also featured on the album track. How did the idea of re-creating and performing this song with Stephen come about?

Stephen is a good brother of mine and we go forward in time, and forward in time and time. So therefore this was inevitable, the perfect song for the perfect moment. With the musical spirit that we both have and possess through the gift of God we were able to come together musically and set everything in order and present it to the world. Now the amazing thing with that song was no one has ever seen or heard me perform that song before but the reaction from the cruise was an eye-opener that the spirit of God still lives through man. We don't have to pre-program them through radio or any other



BUJU BANTON & STEPHEN MARLEY IN KINGSTON, JAMAICA - DECEMBER 1998

PHOTO BY JAN SALZMAN

broadcasting situation. You have them learn a song before you actually give them a song. Because from the beginning of time this was the way it worked. So, I'm saying all this to say that this song was a perfect introduction for the album to the people on the **Jamrock Cruise**. Everything was just magical. Jah live, spiritual Iyah!

You have worked with Stephen on several collaborations in the past. The two of you are good friends. How long have you known each other? Tell me a bit about this friendship.

You are asking me to measure time which I cannot. You're asking me how long have I known him. You want me to say ten years? What is ten years? I have known him for ages. Our spirit just reconnects in this dispensation which is unfamiliar to the eyes of men but our souls know who we are. How is that? (laughs) You overstood?

I think I overstood. Stephen mentioned in an interview that you were always very keen to hear about the WTJR Cruise. How did you enjoy your first time on board and especially this performance with Stephen Marley?

The cruise was spectacular. I have never been on such a huge ship in my entire existence. It was my first time and it was amazing to see how these things really operate and all that kind of stuff. But more than anything, that I got to perform for the people while we were separated from the land and separated from air. The gates were upheld by the gravity of the sea, and that showed how majestic and powerful the true and living God is. And He is great!

Indeed! Stephen is not the only featured guest artist on the album though. John Legend, Pharrell Williams and Stefflon Don are also onboard Upside Down. Why did you invite them on this project?

Me and **John Legend** did a song back in the years called *Can't Be My Lover*. So, the act of reciprocity dictates that he is supposed to do a song for me. So that is how that one came into place, musically, you understand? Now what **Pharrell Williams** is concerned, he heard our works and had a desire to partner with us, so we said "*Let's go!*". Anything to spread the culture of Reggae music in a positive way, to shed light on it on a positive note. We are all for that. Likewise, **Stefflon Don** contributed to Reggae music from Britain. And it's only good and righteous that we reach out and bring her in, musically. It's all about music for me, nothing else. Let that be known!

Yes, sir, I will. Apart from the guest artists also the list of featured musicians is very impressive. The Shiloh band contributed its talent, but there are more big names to be found. Can you tell us which musicians and producers are onboard this project or played a major role?

The names are already listed, but the thing is, it's not about their names, it's what they bring: their talent, their musical offering. When I make a record, I don't try to make a record all by myself. I use great minds that I know musically, so therefore the presentation will be accomplished.

How are the vibes when you're in the studio with Donovan Germain and Dave Kelly, producers you have been working with from way back in the day, more than 25 years ago?

The vibe is exceptionally great because we make music from our heart and our soul. We make music that can resonate with the masses, and deal with social and political issues, geopolitical issues as well, that people can resonate with no matter where in the world they live. Because that was the founding purpose of the music: to teach, uplift, educate, and eradicate negativity from the minds of the people globally. Jah live!

In what period of time were the songs for Upside Down created? Do we hear all new material?

Since I came home. Since I came from work-house, I started working on this record.

This album sounds like a real Buju Banton classic. It is very diverse...

We want to have something on it for everyone. You know, I love music and if you love music like I and I you wouldn't be satisfied with anything else. I want something else.

I appreciate especially the variety of different genres you always put on your records...

Thank you very much.

This one goes from hardcore Dancehall to Gospel, Pop and Afrobeat...

I don't say Gospel, I say Negro Spiritual. I remove myself from the Gospel aspect and all them situation there because that has been leading my people down the wrong avenue for a long time. So, hear what we do now? We deal with a thing named Negro Spiritual. That's the way we work. We need to communicate with God directly, we don't need to have no middle-man, sight?

Does this variety of music also reflect your own personal taste in music or what inspires your music?

Absolutely, absolutely! I am a man who doesn't see himself locked into one genre or listening to what's being praised. So around my music and if you want to grow musically you have to dive into other genres. It will have influence on you and it will help you. It works! Each one, teach one to do well.

How do you go about especially creating songs like Unity with its Latin/Afrobeat, or the...

Are you asking me my formula? My method of creating a song like that?

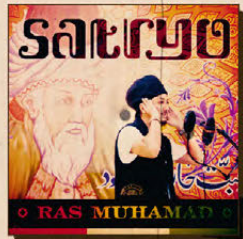
Do you have a secret recipe?

The day when Kentucky Fried Chicken announces what is the secret recipe, I'll tell you, man! How about that?! When these drug companies are telling people how they make the poison, then I will make the cure. (laughs)

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Would you approach a producer directly with a specific idea in mind or would such a song evolve naturally?

Music is something that flows. From a pure heart, pure music flows. Just keep it like that, keep it simple.

On April 20 you released the single *Ganja Man*, which is not on the album though. The same instrumental including the theme from *Wailing Soul's Waterhouse Rock* is still used on *Upside Down* for a track named *Appreciated*...

Yes, I did two songs on the same track but the first song was *Ganja Man*. Then when I did *Appreciated* I pulled *Ganja Man* from the album and put *Appreciated*, but 4/20 is still relevant and we can't hold back the works. We can't hide the word from the people, the words must go out. There is always a need for the message.

Are you a particular fan of this classic horn theme from *Waterhouse Rock* or is there a reason you used it twice?

Let me tell you something. I am a fan, I am an avid lover of everything Jamaican and what concerns our musical culture which is so rich, vast, and diverse. The world has not even begun to hear the tip of the iceberg of what Jamaica has to offer in terms of musical composition and musical rendition. Being a fan of my culture, it's the greatest thing. I can say "You large!" Studio 1, studio 2, studio 3, you name it... I am not even a fan, I am an air condition!

On full power! *Upside Down* is very diverse, not just musically but also lyrically. It starts spiritually, but also includes love songs, tracks about friendship like *Helping Hand*, others that boost confidence, while *400 Years* covers history, and social commentary is found for example on *The World Is Changing*.

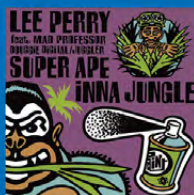
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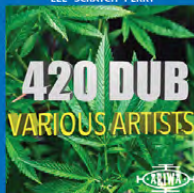
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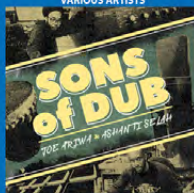


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How personal are your lyrics, and what do you consider the most personal song on *Upside Down*?

I see you are desperately trying to tap into my mindset. My music is indeed personal, because I see myself as a social mirror, dealing with different realities than the mainstream media and the newspaper. The world is changing. Things that are highlighted out there don't coincide with the global issues that are being reflected on the ground. News only say these things to the masses. It must be all about "*I love you, baby, I love you and I want to do this and I want to bring you the moon and the stars...*" and I am not into that Bomboclaat, you know, mother?! I want to speak the truth to the masses. You sight?

Yes sir, I am hearing you.

You understand me? Really? We have to speak about those things. I don't come to be packaged. You dig? You can't turn a rebel into a pussycat. That will never work. The truth must be heard!

You also recently made the link with Roc Nation. The album will be released through them. How much influence did they have on the record?

People don't really have influence on my music. I control that. I don't play with my artistic creativity. No guy can't tell me about that. You can have your opinion but it's people who choose to buy or not to buy it. I don't take that away from no-one but the final say will always rest with me. Because we know what we do.

As far as I am concerned you graduated and received a Master's Degree in Music Business Management four years ago. Is the knowledge you gained through your study helping you now, especially in terms of being independent and the release *Upside Down*?

Let me tell you something. They have been spouting that ever since I was in workhouse. I never admitted to it and I never denied it because I wanted to know where the source of this came from. Because these are the same people who kick I out and said I wasn't

eligible for the Pell Grant. So therefore... what the fuck is this now? No one shall know what I studied and no one shall know what I received because no one deserves to know what I studied and no one deserves to know what I received. But I can tell you one thing, I did not receive the packaged education that everyone else did. How is that? (laughs)

So, in June the fans will finally be able to hear the works we spoke about so much now...

Listen to me! The world is changing and unfortunately things are not going to be the same. And we do not want it to be the same! Because it was not right the way it was. The suffering of people every day, living from hand to mouth, from paycheck to raaaaas-tafari paycheck, while a certain set of people alone masters all this wealth. That has to

change! Right now we need a global reset. Just chill, chill, and find your centre. Let Jah do His thing. It is mysterious, you know? He uses all kind of people to do His works, and He knows the warriors and watches the traitors.

Do you think that the current situation people are in right now, being home, knowing that they will not have any live music events any time soon, do you think the fans will appreciate receiving a new record and new music from you even more?

People are going to get something more, they are going to get more. But I am offering just a tip of the iceberg. What is coming, is more. So much more not only for you and me, but for everyone. Not only for the people of America but for the people of the world, the people of Africa, the people of the Caribbean. It is called a new shift in consciousness. And if the people at home wish to tap into their higher self, they will feel it. But because they are so caught up in the mundane world and the things and lasciviousness that they were accustomed to and the chasing of the dollar bills they are unable to feel the seismic shift that's going on. That is more important than selling records because I don't want to sell my records to a bunch of dumb people. We want them to understand where we are coming from, when we are coming forward. That is important not only for you and me but for the entire community of global citizens. When you ask me this question, I can't answer from an individual perspective. I have to give you the global answer, that resonates universally. That is the time, we are in now, sister. It's not the norm. It is not going to go back to the way it used to be. You are going to see a higher level of consciousness. Higher level, believe me, and eyes are going to be opened. This time at home people should just relax. It is discomfoting to a lot of people because they have never sat still. They never went inside themselves to find that quiet place and now they are forced to. But settle yourself! Relax! It's going to be ok. No situation is ever permanent.





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Do you find it frustrating in general that people are as you said “chasing the dollar bill” and focusing on financial wealth?

I don't let their frustration project on me. I cannot find it frustrating. I find it to be a challenge where we have to reach out to the masses and tell them “*My people..!*”. People that reach a higher level of consciousness will survive this. It is those who are still stuck, they will not. It is simple as that. I hear of things going on. A whole bunch of things going on. Some of it you know about, some of it you are not aware of. Everyone just needs to relax. I know everyone is hurting, entertainment is hurting, factories are hurting... a reset is coming, man! For everything must be reset. Do you know how many families get together during this lockdown and thrash out these little issues they were fighting over? Do you know how much things get right during this period? From the negativity we must always try to seek the positive.

So, you see this situation that we are in right now as a positive chance for people to re-focus on what's really important?

Yes, I absolutely do. Take your time and relax. Everyone will feel the energy, everyone will know. It's okay, it's okay.

That is a great approach to the situation. How do you personally manage the Corona crisis these days? Are you still in the studio working as usual?

For me it's all mental. I am just coming from prison, I was locked down for ten years. You guys have always been in a bigger prison, they just decided to tighten your cuffs. Do you see what's happening in certain states? Where draconian measures have been imposed on the people that go way too far. People are scared and frightened. Now you shouldn't be frightened, that's what you voted for. That's what you asked for because you have been sleeping. Now your being caught off guard. Those of us who trust in the true and living Almighty God have always warned you guys. Always tried to warn you. But “*They smoke too much weed, they're*

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“That until the color of a man's skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes.... the dream of lasting peace and world citizenship and the rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting illusion, to be pursued but never attained.”

- HIM Haile Selassie 1

#BLACKLIVESMATTER

WAILER LIVE

Jamaicans, they're this, they're that..." What can we say now? You cannot say that you have not been told. None of you people can ever say a warning never came on to you. I told you a higher consciousness can survive this. Those who are trapped in the mundane world, those are the people you see agitated and losing their mind. It's only for a short matter of time, no situation is permanent. God lives! If it was so dramatic would you be on the phone with me now? All is good sister, have faith!

Would you say you have a special appreciation for freedom?



I don't even like that word because I see you guys are free but you are all dumb. Most of them, not you particularly. I don't like that word. I prefer the word liberty. It is more enduring to man. Man was not meant to live in a cage but circumstances sometimes like this particular one we are going through with the Covid virus... Can you imagine if all the people were on the road? The chaos that would have caused in every major city. I am not saying that there is no virus. There is something out there but I can tell you it's not the common flu.

Would you say this liberty is a state of mind rather than something physical?

I said there is a virus out there. Actually, there is a biological warfare. But the good thing is, the guys in America were smart enough to catch up on it early and that saved a lot of tragedy from happening. But there are other things going on that we don't know but I don't think that all of this is attributed to just Corona virus because up to now the numbers and the statistics are proven to be fudged. I am not trying to lead the people astray. That's not my thing. I want the people to know the truth. Because the truth shall set you free and more importantly it shall make you free!

So, your record is coming at a good time for people to hear a good and righteous message.

You cannot measure space and time. We just know that the universe agrees.

Would you want to add anything to the news of the album coming, something you really want to share with the fans?

I want to share with the massive my love for you. The love I have for the masses is not just for one demographic, it's global, it's universal. My love I want to share with you. I am not a wealthy man to share every dollar with each and every individual that's on planet earth, but with music I want to make it wholesome from a place of peace, from a quiet place of love, from a quiet place of unity, from a quiet place of togetherness. This is my global offering to the world.



BUJU BANTON - UPSIDE DOWN 2020

Gargamel Music Co. / Roc Nation - June 26, 2020

"It's all about music for me. Nothing else." (Buju Banton - April 2020)

How can you exceed expectations that are already soaring sky-high? If you are an artist with the relevance of **Buju Banton**, you damn well can. No stage show, no album has been as eagerly anticipated by the international Reggae community as the **Gargamel's** return to the mic - and here it is! With **Upside Down 2020**, he presents a fascinating array of songs that speak of passion, love, hope and, above all, of the long road **Mark Anthony Myrie** has trodden to reach the peak he resides on today.

20 tracks for this tumultuous year 2020, produced by winning formula **Gargamel Music** (aka **Buju** himself), **Donovan Germain** and **Steven "Lenky" Marsden** as well as long-running engineer **Jermain Reid** and the **Shiloh Band**: the result is a stirring display of talent and diversity that has favourites in store for everyone.

You like the "classic" **Buju Banton**? From the intense opening chant **Lamb Of God** (also sung as opener for the legendary **Long Walk To Freedom Concert** in Kingston last year) via the already released **Steppa** to the **Dave Kelly** production **Blessed**, the artist you know and love since three decades is here again. Every note, every vocal timbre and every intake of breath testifies **Buju's** return!

You like **Bob Marley**? No way you can resist the **Duppy Conqueror** cover **Yes Mi Friend**, produced and vocally enhanced by the legend's son **Stephen**, especially touching with the mental picture of how liberty must feel after such a long time behind bars. This energy of trust, gratitude and optimism is continued in the subsequent **Buried Alive**, a track that will make your eyes water if you have a soul that feels.

You like the modern stuff? Then, of course, the celebrated **Trust**, the slightly confusing **Beat Them Bad**, the multi-layered **Cheated** and the Afrobeat-



Jazz-Fusion **Unity** are for you. You like collaborations? **John Legend** is the singer that flows with **MC Banton** on **Memories**, while **The Neptunes** created the **Cherry Pie** that **Buju** and **Pharrell "Happy" Williams** offer for consumption. And with **Stefflon Don**, a powerful female voice outta London claws herself tightly into the sexy **Call Me**.

You like Lovers Rock? Let songs like **Appreciated** (on a re-lick of the Firehouse Rock Riddim) and **Lovely State Of Mind** speak directly to your heart, feeling the excitement again that tracks like **Love Sponge** or **One To One** made it flutter back then. A surprising, light-hearted swing is added by **Good Time Girl** and **Moonlight Love** - sweetness musified!

You like consciousness? **The World Is Changing** (produced by **King Jammy's**) carries forward a section talking about more serious issues opened by the anti-weapon plea **Steppa**. **400 Years** and **Rising Up** add a Nyabinghi and Modern Roots vibe, respectively, the latter sounding eerily prophetic of the worldwide demonstrations sparked by the BLM movement. *"Revolution is everywhere! They're rising up, everywhere around the world."* And oh what a tragedy that producer **Bobby Digital** didn't live to see the release of his **Helping Hand**, an emotional hymn of empowerment and support!

With all this said, it is important to point out that these songs, this whole album, was not created to be liked or not liked by individuals or to feed any conceptions about common threads or playing lengths (these being criticised as flaws by other reviewers). On a much higher level, **Upside Down 2020** is talking about global truths and the realisation of what it really means to live in a time like this. There is a change in the air, a shift rippling through our global consciousness, and it is artists like **Buju** who acknowledge that.

by **Gardy Stein**



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