Rub a Dub Style
The Roots of Modern Dancehall
by Beth Lesser
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If you are interesting in supporting vintage artists, here are ways you can help

The Jamaica Association Of Vintage Artistes & Affiliates
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JAVAA is always fund raising to support its social welfare and business education programs for members. JAVAA promotes the history of about Jamaica’s popular music in schools.

To support the artists, I recommend that fans buy re-released vinyl from reputable dealers or download songs from websites that who pay royalties to the artists.

Fans could also help arrange a booking for a vintage artist in a local club- it just takes speakers, an amp and someone to play music.

If there is a vintage artist who you would like to directly support, request that he or she voice a dubplate/special for you. Contact artists, studios and producers through the internet- through Myspace and Facebook etc. Certain artists, like Prince Jazzbo, can arrange ‘special’ recording with a wide variety of artists. Ask around. Jamaica is a small island and everyone knows everyone, or at least they know someone who knows someone who knows that person you are looking for. If you are visiting Jamaica, bring along a gift of anything that can help in the production of music- even if it’s just batteries or blank CDs.

Special thanks to
Dave Kingston for his work on this project- his time spent and his knowledgeable assistance - and for his continuing moral support, Guillarme Morel for creating and maintaining my website, Al Fingers for providing music, Michael Tutton for organization and planning.

Support Vintage Artists
This book is being offered as a gift of gratitude to the people who have created this magical and inspiring thing called reggae music. I hope that this book will provide a greater understanding of what went into making and sustaining this music, and a greater appreciation of the music itself. As this book is available to everyone free of charge, it would be wonderful if those who are willing and able could find a way to get some monetary returns to those artists who have dedicated their lives to making this music and have precious little to show for it today (like many of the artists mentioned in this book). Some have moved abroad and are working in different fields. But others are living very close to poverty despite having made hits and toured abroad. I am suggesting that fans investigate the living conditions of their favorite artists and do whatever is possible to help out.
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The Early Days

In the early 1980s, when Dancehall hit the record markets abroad, many long time reggae enthusiasts were disheartened. Fans had been comfortable with roots music – Burning Spear, Bob Marley, Yabby You, Augustus Pablo, Culture. They felt they knew what reggae was. As they most people understood it, reggae was music that carried a message. Reggae advocated change, overthrowing the colonialist system and lifting the suffering masses out of poverty. Reggae was the music that gave a voice to those who would speak out against a status quo that had traditionally silenced the voices of the poor. Young people around the world felt a firm affinity with this message. It resonated with their ideal of creating a world without war, oppression and commercialism.

But, the mood in Jamaica had changed. The new decade saw a move away from reggae as reggae fans had known it for almost a decade. Many roots artists seemed to fade into the background as young unknowns arose to take their place. When Bob Marley, the undisputed king of reggae, died in 1981, many people felt that reggae had ceased to exist- that without Bob, there could be no reggae. In an attempt to keep his legacy, and the music, alive, efforts were made to name various bands and individual artists as his heirs to the throne. But, the attempts were fruitless, because by 1981, the music had changed.

The music that replaced roots reggae seemed, to the many disillusioned fans, to be trivial and devoid of deep meaning, lacking the potential to right the wrongs and injustices of society. All the brimstone and fire where gone. The new music of the ‘80s appeared materialistic. It was often sexually suggestive, sensationalist, focused on the excitement of the moment. A large group of former reggae supporters felt abandoned and moved away from the music. But many more new fans flocked to this exhilarating, provocative, bracing new form of entertainment. Jamaica was reclaiming its music and bringing back home. After years of artists vying for foreign exposure, reggae was becoming more purely ‘Jamaican’ than it had even been in its short history. Dancehall had arrived and was bringing big changes to the musical landscape.

The power of the Sound System
Jamaicans loved their music, and they liked to adapt anything new that came along as a way of accessing music - like radio, TV, personal record players and tape recorders. Jamaicans, at least in the ghetto areas, lived every day surrounded by music in a way that people in colder climates have never experienced. Music was there because people wanted it, and sought it out. In
earlier days, before radio and personal stereos, people would stand outside record shops just to hear the new jazz tunes from the U.S.. Self-taught dancer Pluggy Satchmo remembers his youth, just after World War II, “We go out to the record store, Hedley Jones [Bop City], evening time and listen him play jazz and we used to practice dance. People coming from work used to see me, Pam Pam, Fish and the rest of little youth them that deh bout there a dance in the evening.”

Pluggy and his friends would wander day and night in search of music. Even the Pocomania meetings provided some relief in the quest for melody and beat. “If you want fun, you have to go out there and listen the street meeting- people playing drum and singing revival songs. They have three drum and they preach and they tie they hair and they sing. And if there is no [other music], we go and listen them.”

Two other options were the ‘Garvey meetings’ and the massive funerals the UNIA (United Negro Improvement Association) held on Sundays in downtown Kingston. At the meetings, the representatives of the UNIA would dress in white with red, green and gold braids and military style decorations. A speaker would address the crowd, a military drum band played and the chorus sang songs of repatriation, of returning to Africa. On occasional Sundays, the UNIA held massive funeral processions that would wind their way through the downtown area. Those who agreed to give over their property or savings to the organization were guaranteed to be taken care of on passing away. They got a funeral worthy of a head of state, and the city dwellers would watch the grand parade, often the most exciting entertainment a Sunday had to offer.

While downtown ghetto-ites didn’t go into the more upscale clubs, they had access to live bands through the Coney Islands that would crop up on the weekends. Inside a designated area (like a “lawn”, as they were known), people would set up tables for gambling with dice. A band would play and people could come in for free and dance. At the time, the bands were playing American music of the swing era. That’s what Jamaicans wanted to hear. “Most of our habits come from the American music,” Pluggy remembers. “It make me a dancer - Ella Fitzgerald, Glen Miller, Mister Jordon, Louis Prima, Thelonious Monk, Gene Krupa.”

Before the Second World War, big bands flourished in Kingston. According to Bunny Lee, “They used to play over some American tune like Sentimental Reasons. You used to have the bandstand in the nighttime - you used to go up there and hear them playing. [Jamaican] bands like Sonny Bradshaw and Eric Dean used to play at Beaumont and all them place.”

But the war proved to be a fatal blow to the big band scene. The orchestras, which contained as many as ten people, were decimated by the call to arms. Nightclubs shut down. As former Bop City owner, Hedley Jones explained, “Live music had all but disappeared in the city, most musicians having been absorbed in farm or munitions work, aiding the war effort in the USA, or
engaged in the then growing North Coast Tourist Industry.”

What were denizens of the nation’s capital to do for entertainment when the bands started dwindling? Two men in Kingston who owned PA systems, Count Nick and Count Goody kept the music flowing, albeit on record rather than live. These public address systems were designed to amplify the spoken word, not to handle the subtleties of music. But they made some kind of “musical noise”. So, people began using them to amplify records and inviting crowds to come and listen and dance.

Back home from the war, Hedley Jones Sr. took a government offer of a loan of 50 pounds and invested in a repair shop that also sold imported records, Bop City, that soon began to attract dancers and music fans from all over the city. In 1947, “With my record sales department in place, I designed and built a high fidelity audio amplifier using my newly acquired electronic technology. Equipped with what I presumed to be the best recorded sound reproducer anywhere, I set out on a Saturday night near mid 1947 to demonstrate my thunder. I started to play some Perez Prado recordings. A crowd gathered and from the crowd emerged two street-side dancers. They called themselves Pam-Pam and Chicken. Little did I realize that Tom Wong’s sound was contracted to perform at the Jubilee Tile Gardens, almost opposite my business place. Tom’s puny sound with his re-entrant steel horns was no competition for my bass reflex baffles, mid-range speakers and high-range tweeters. His dance, in Jamaican parlance, flopped.”

Tom Wong, a table tennis player from Jones Town who operated a hardware store, took in the whole scene and, according to Mr. Jones, “The following Monday morning, I was in for a surprise, as Tom paid me a visit, complete with cash down for one of my amplifiers. Within two weeks his system was transformed with a Jones amplifier and two bass reflex speaker baffles loaded with twelve-inch heavy-duty Celestion speakers. The true Jamaican Sound system was born and scratchy recorded noises receded into oblivion forever.”

With his new-found powerful and clean sound, Mr. Wong started calling himself Tom the Great Sebastian, and his ‘set’, now more than just a P.A. system, he began to call a “sound system”.

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* Hedley Jones, The arrival of LP Hi-Fi records in Jamaica, personal communication

** According to Hedley Jones Sr.

*** Hedley Jones, The Jones High Fidelity Audio Power Amplifier of 1947, personal communication

**** Hedley Jones, The Jones High Fidelity Audio Power Amplifier of 1947, personal communication

Mr. Jones continues, in an essay named “THE JAMAICAN SOUND SYSTEM Pt.one, Its purpose, origin and growth”, that “the power output end was designed with 807 power pentode tubes, then used as modulator input drivers in radio transmission systems, and capable of delivering 120 watts RMS (Root mean square) or true value of raw audio power. To effectively handle that--- at the time--- enormous power, two English Celestian 18 inch diameter100 watt peak, heavy-duty woofers, (speakers) two twelve inch heavy duty mid-range and two 6inch high end tweeters, mounted in bass-reflex speaker baffles (boxes) were employed.”
Sound Systems Rule

From that day on, ‘sound systems’ ruled Jamaica. Carlton Hines named his vocal trio after Tetrack, a sound system that used to play in his childhood neighborhood of Franklyn Town, Kingston. The three members of the group Tetrack grew up with the sweet rock steady melodies constantly in the background, day and night, during lunch, after school, when eating dinner and even while doing homework. As the children fell asleep each night, the music continued to drift in through the windows and into their dreams.

Children grew up wanting to be close to where music was happening. The challenge for the young ones was how to sneak into the dancehalls at night. Jah Wise remembers, “In those days, little boy don’t go to dance. They wouldn’t allow that. You could go in the dance early, but when the dance start, you have fe come out. The promoter [tell you to leave]. You could go in there early, but when the liquor start sell, the teenagers have fe come out. When I was little, nine, ten, if you do something on the street there, they would tell your mother. So, you would behave.” To begin the session, the selector would play the ‘sign – on’ tune, “and the small kids step out now.” But you didn’t really need to go inside the ‘lawn’ to hear the music; the power of the equipment pushed the sound waves for miles through the moist Jamaican air.

“Those times, you could listen to sound anywhere. Could be one mile, five mile, you could listen to the sound,” Jah Wise recalls. The memory of music floating by from a close, but uncertain, location is still palpable for many Jamaicans. Deejay Dillinger recalls, “They used to climb the ackee tree and put the steel horns – so you could hear the sound from all three miles [away]. The steel horns carry the sound from afar. You could be miles away and hear the music playing. Sometimes I would be in my bed and I hear a steel horn clapping on my window pane and I would have to get up and follow that sound. It’s like I’m in a trance. So I would just have to walk until I find that sound. Like it hypnotize you.” Zaggaloo, selector for Arrows in the ‘80s, remembers the first dance he went to, drawn by the sound of Cornell Campbell singing ‘Stars’ carried on the night breeze. A youthful Flabba Holt would follow the melody in hopes of finding a session where he could show off his dancing skills as a “legs man”. “When I was small, I usually go up and down the place to hear sound. I walk from Trench Town go to Jones Town, listening the steel horn in the tree tops. And sometimes when the wind blow, you can hardly hear the sound so you have to keep on listen, listen, listen…”

Sound system sessions were more than mere entertainment. They became the life sustaining cultural and economic centre of a community. Some sets where small affairs, mainly used for weddings and private parties. Some were massive and played to large crowds in established venues. Some played funk and others, rockers. But even the tiniest community had someone playing music for public consumption.

The underground economy they created allowed ordinary people who had a small amount of money to invest and experience a modest return on capital.
However risky it might be, with the police breaking up sessions and the ever present possibility of violence, it was one of the few opportunities available. Furthermore, employment with the sound provided an alternative to crime for the unemployed. Each dance session offered the whole community an opportunity to make a few dollars on the side. As evening fell, the street leading to the “lawn”, the venue for the dance, would be lined with food vendors selling complete meals of curry goat or jerk chicken with rice and peas, while the peanut sellers would walk along the side. The ‘cane man’ would be chopping the sugar cane into individual pieces. Inside, the promoter would be sure to sell off a quantity of Heineken, Red Stripe and Guinness. “At the time, there was nothing else [to do for a living] but music,” Recalls Prince Jazzbo, one of the deejay originals. It wasn’t much. Music was not a money making career choice. Salaries were low. The sound was being paid maybe $300 by the promoter, and ‘playing out’ involved purchasing records and ‘dubplates’, maintaining the equipment and hiring a crew of anywhere from five to 15 people.

Despite the low pay and the tough conditions, it was a way of surviving with the added bonus that the men who worked with the sounds were big men in the community. Kids used to dream of growing up to be deejays or selectors. “When I was a kid, I used to put up empty box and run telephone wire and pretend I am playing a sound,” Ranking Trevor recalls. Parents didn’t take to the idea very well. “[My mother] thought it was just for rejects, like music is nothing. Not important. Music is joke,” recalls singer Anthony Malvo. “That is when you want to [be] idle. That is not a profession.”

Working with a sound involved following a clearly defined career path. The aspirant generally entered at the bottom, as a ‘box man’, carrying the boxes from the truck to the venue and back again. “That was the start of it, until I start to work with Gold Soul [Sound System],” Trevor continues. “[I had to] lift up the box and go around with the sound until I start holding the mic. [The deejays] start out as box men. You work with the sound first.”

The day of the dance, the crew would load all the boxes onto the truck. Then, each man hopped into the back, and found a seat on top of the equipment for the long and bumpy ride. People often died falling off the back, as the truck careened around sharp curves on the twisting mountain roads. At the other end, the sound was unpacked and the wires connected. “Your face was so black from the exhaust,” singer Anthony Malvo explains. “[But] you didn’t care. You just get a little [water] pipe and wash off and you start to sing from [when] the sound turn on. You go all night until the dance done… By the time you pop back the sound on the truck, you have a little time to sleep, but you have no bed. So, you sit on a chair, or find a corner where you can get a little nap. Then you are back on the truck again.”

The main jobs in the crew were the performers – deejays, singers, and even instrumentalists, the selector - the man who picked out and played the records, the operator who adjusted the sound, the technical crew who wired the sound on location, the box men who lifted the heavy equipment and loaded it
on and off the truck and the driver. The only requirement for these jobs was an
ability to forgo immediate comforts and to dedicate oneself heart and soul to
music, where ever it lead. The reward was the love and admiration of the com-
community, the ability to bring a little money home to the family, the excitement
of going around the island with the crew and being greeted by enthusiastic
fans in every town.

COUNT MACHUKI
The sound system culture grew as records became more available. Early own-
ers created a grand pageantry around sound engagements, like Duke Reid
who would arrive a in truck back wearing a crown. The rivalry between own-
ers lead to ‘sound clashes’ which pitted one sound against another in a live
competition, with fans lining up on either side, proclaiming their loyalties
with shouts and cheers. The winner was the man who had the most exciting,
the most rocking, the hardest to find records.

In the beginning, the music was foremost and all – important. The early
sound system was functioning as a kind of ‘live and direct’ radio program
with the ‘selector’ in the role of the disc jockey. In front of a live audience,
the selector would spin the top songs of the day. The format was modeled on
the radio stations in New Orleans that played the R&B Jamaicans loved. To
imitate the radio jocks, the selector would introduce the records with a little
jive talk. He might follow that with hoots and hollers, rhythmic interjections-
Hep! Hep! Hep! or Yupyup Yupyup. Eventually the job of vocalizing became
a separate function assigned to the deejay. But at the start, the selector did
everything – rotate the discs, call out the song titles and artists, and ‘lively up’
the place with his words and interjections.

As sound system functions became specialized, a deejay began to handle
all the vocal elements of the performance. The deejay style, at first, was simple
and unrefined, consisting mainly of stock phrases and rhythmic vocalization.
The deejay sought only to emphasize the beat of the music, not distract from
it with too much talking. Like the jazz ‘scat’ singers, they used nonsense syl-
lables - ‘ska ba do, ska ba dooba day...’ The deejay wanted people up on the
floor and dancing themselves into a great thirst so they would ‘buy out the
bar’, making the whole undertaking a financial success. This practice was
referred to as “toasting”, as in public speaking or the act of offering up a few
words on behalf of someone before sharing a drink. The great “toasters” of the
early years included men like Sir Lord Comic, who used to work for King Ed-
ward the Giant, Lizzie from Prince Jammy’s, Prince Pompidou on Kentone,
the sound from Kencott, King Stitt with Sir Coxsone and Dennis Alcapone
on his own sound, El Paso.

At this point, toasting was still considered a live performance art, not
something that translated well onto record, although several early examples
of recorded deejays exist. Foundation Deejay Dennis Alcapone remembers,
“Once in a while you would hear a deejay record but it wasn’t much [talking].
It was mostly introduction with the instrumental [following] – like [for] Baba Brooks, Skatalites and those instrumental groups. King Stitt did come and do a few tunes for [producer] Clancy Eccles – ‘Fire Corner’, ‘Vigerton Two’, ‘I’m the Ugly One’ – that was before U Roy. They were hit songs.”

But, more commonly, in the ska days, the idea of a deejay making a full record seemed absurd to most people. According to Dennis Alcapone, “The bigger heads were not used to us making records, so when I did a record, they would laugh and say, ‘But Dennis, you don’t sing, a talk you talk. How you mek record?’”

Many people consider the first toaster to really ‘deejay’ on a sound to have been Count Machuki. Count Matchuki, like many other reggae legends, started his public life as a dancer but, by 1950, he was working as a selector for Tom the Great Sebastian and later moved on to work with Clement Dodd’s Downbeat sound.

“He had that little flavour in him, and he brought it on with a lot of style,” explains Clive Chin who used to see Machuki in the dance. In those early days, Machuki was officially employed as a selector. “Selectors, at the time, all they could know to do was pick up the record, put it on, pick it up, put it on, and they had nothing in between because, you must remember, it was just one turn table they using at the time. So, they had that break. And in that break now, Machuki would do his toasting. He brought in that whole style of saying something before he put the needle onto the vinyl. He was the first- before Lord Comic, King Stitt.”

Legendary toaster U Roy used to listen to Count Machuki. “I used to love to hear that man talk because when him talk it’s like you wan’ hear him say something again. So, I always try to be in time, the way he was in time with the rhythm. Cause there’s a little art to it. You have to listen and be in time with the rhythm. Them things me learn from dem man there.”

Machuki, though, had a secret source of inspiration. Producer Clive Chin remembers him carrying around a particular book. “There was one he said he bought out of Beverly’s [record shop] back in the ‘60s. The book was called Jives and it had sort of slangs, slurs in it and he was reading it, looking it over, and he found that it would be something that he could explore and study, so he took that book and it helped him.”

Yet, even with so many deejays performing regularly in the dance, Jamaicans didn’t take deejays very seriously as artists. “People didn’t really recognize the deejay stuff until U Roy took over,” explained Dennis Alcapone to writer Carl Gayle. “King Stitt did a good thing with things like [hit 45] Fire Corner, but it didn’t really get off until U Roy came along. I came on the scene

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* Jamaican Sunday Gleaner July five,1998, Dennis Alcapone, Godfather of reggae
** Clive can’t recall the exact name of the book Machuki was reading at the time. One possibility would be The Jives of Dr. Hepcat, written by Austin disc-jockey, Albert Lavada Durst (Dr. Hepcat), 1953. Dr Hepcat worked in Austin, Texas on KVET
about three months after U Roy. Then Lizzie came - he used to play Jammy’s Hi-Fi. And then you had Scotty…[but] I rate U Roy, up to now, as the greatest, Yeah! I used to go and listen to him and I admired the sounds he put out. He used to play King Tubby’s sound system. That was, and is, the best. It had everything a system should have. When you sat down and listened to that man [U Roy] playing that sound system, it really blew your mind.”

**U Roy**

“King Stitt made it interesting. We hear King Stitt and we were like, ‘WOW! This guy’s talking!’ And then we hear about U Roy and [his 45], ‘Wear You To the Ball’. U Roy came and mashed the place up!” - Singer Madoo

During the ’60s, a small but increasing selection of deejay records was released. “You had deejays that actually recorded in the Ska era, you know. Lord Comic, ‘Ska-ing West’ – ‘Adam and Eve went up my sleeve…’ And then Machuki,” Producer Bunny Lee explains. “But those deejay didn’t follow it up. Machuki do a nice tune for Clive [Chin]. But when U-Roy come on the Duke Reid rhythms and say, ‘Wake the Town’, it take off everything else.”

U Roy, teamed up with producer Duke Reid, shot off like a rocket. U Roy, himself, was stunned by the songs’ success. “Not long after the two tune recorded in the studio, me hear them a play pon the radio station. When I hear the two tunes playing pon the radio, I just tell myself, seh, ‘Oooooo, a just two little stupid tunes whe’ them a play pon the radio, just like how so much tunes just a play pon the radio and don’t get nowhere. That is the first thing I tell myself.” But, the tunes didn’t disappear. They just got bigger. “I hear them everyday! Them things was a big surprise and that was the starting of something good for me”

‘Wake the Town’ went straight to number one on both radio stations. And so did U Roy’s next two 45s, ‘Rule the Nation’ and ‘Wear You to the Ball’. “To my surprise, those two songs become number one and number two,” U Roy recalls. “It was like a blessing to me. A deejay never do that. And a couple of weeks after, I had the one, two, three on the radio station. ‘Wear You to the Ball’ stay pon the chart for 12 weeks in the number one position.”

The fact that U Roy was talking over the versions of the most popular records of the day made all the difference. It was the U Roy/John Holt combination that made the records work so well. As Singer Madoo explained, “The reason that U Roy got so popular is because John Holt” was already an international star. If U Roy didn’t join with somebody who was already mak-

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* From the vaults of Black Music (1974), Dennis Alcapone and the Rise and Fall of the DJ Cult, by Carl Gayle

** John Holt was the lead singer of the Paragons, a hugely popular rock steady group who often had several songs on the charts. Holt. So, there was an element of nostalgia in play. In 1970, the reggae beat ruled the day. The Duke Reid tunes were rock steady, and people loved to hear them again, but now with a modern twist- a toaster on top. So there was an element of familiarity coupled with something current and modern.
ing hits, it would never have happened.”

The U Roy releases with Treasure Isle were revolutionary. Each 45 featured something old and something new. The John Holt songs were already well known throughout the island. But the toasting was new. The combination of something familiar and something different caught fire, paving the way for the deejay revolution. Dennis Alcapone remembers, “It took the place of the vocals that was going on at the time, because U Roy actually took over the charts. He had one, two, three \[songs on the top ten\]. Deejay records took center stage at the time.” After U Roy’s success, everyone wanted to be a deejay. And every producer thought he could get a hit by putting a deejay over his old vocal tracks. And a whole generation of young men had a new hero to emulate.

U Roy also deserves credit for his style of deejaying, which was very different from was going on earlier in the dance. Deejay Dennis Alcapone recalls, “U Roy actually did change the whole thing. Because U Roy made up his thing like it was a complete song, like a singer. Lyrics were going straight through the rhythm and he actually made up a song that people could sing along to. [Before that, the deejay was] in and out, in and out. No one wasn’t filling out the whole rhythm with lyrics. It was regular dancehall jive, in those days. Then U Roy came and filled the rhythm out with lyrics, and that was something new.”

The deejays who were toasting over instrumentals left a lot of space for the music to flow in between the words. U Roy recalls, “That’s how it used to be when you at a dance and talk on a sound. You generally never used to crowd the music. Just say a couple of words and the people long fe hear you again. \[When\] you say a couple of words, it reach the people outside deh a street and, yea, your dance get cork up with people of all descriptions.”

That was the way it always had been. But when U Roy began making hits, he set a new standard. Earlier deejays used to start with a spoken introduction and then add a few carefully placed interjections to accentuate the beat. King Stitt’s song, “Van Cliff”, consists of Stitt intoning, after the introduction: “Die! Meet me at the big gun down. I am Van Cliff, Die, Die Die! I am Van Cliff. Die!” That’s it. And it was great for instrumentals, especially in the upbeat Ska age.

But when Rock Steady took over, it was a different story. While mixing, the engineer left strands of the vocal in the version. This gave the deejays a jumping off point, something on which to base his lyrics. For example, in the song ‘Merry Go Round’, the engineer leaves the opening where John Holt sings, “Where must I go, if there is nowhere that I know.” As the vocal drops out, U Roy comes in with, “That is a musical question and it needs a musical answer. Where do I go from here? Got no place to go. Got to stay right here and work my musical show.”

Ironically, at the time, U Roy didn’t fully believe that deejays could make legitimate recordings. When he was working with King Tubby’s set in the late
'60s, U Roy wasn’t thinking of recording retail selling 45s. He was making dubplates for King Tubby’s exclusive use on the sound. “When I used to play with Tubby’s sound, Tubby used to have a dubbing [dub cutting] machine. So, if he want a special tune to make for his sounds, he could just make it. So, that was the only thing that ever got me to record at that time, doing certain tune for the sound.”

Tubby’s recorded some exclusive discs for his sound system with U Roy toasting over some of the rhythm tracks Tubby had mixed in his studio. Rock Steady producer, Duke Reid, heard them playing and was fascinated. “Duke Reid … heard the music and he said, ‘I would love to see this man’. So, I went to the studio with him and made some arrangements. So, I start recording for him and the first tunes I do was Wake the Town and Tell the People and This Station Rule the Nation.”

Duke Reid knew exactly what he was doing. He had a sixth sense for knowing which songs would go straight to the top. According to U Roy, “Duke is a man whe’, when him hear a hit, him know it- that it’s a hit. At first, him know it. The man used to have a gun and when him have a hit, whenever it’s a hit, the man bust up pure shot in the room.” The U Roy recordings were never meant to remain dubplates for a sound. When he made those first recordings with U Roy, he was aiming for the commercial market. U Roy recalled, “This is a record fe go out there for sales, and it’s a different thing from when you deh a dance. He [Duke Reid] definitely do them for sale purpose. No question about that. This go there to the public for sales, it haf fe more professional.”

Once U Roy hit the charts, deejays were freed from their live status and joined singers as regularly recording artists. A deejay on vinyl was no longer just a dubplate thing. Not only did U Roy’s popularity launch a continuing barrage of deejay recordings, it struck the first rock from the wall diving uptown and downtown Jamaica. People from all over the island bought the new releases, not just the folks in the ghetto who went to dancehall sessions. “There is a lot of people from up Beverly Hills, Red Hills, (from) all about, that buy a lot of my tune”, U Roy commented. The popularity of the songs bridged a great social divide and also created a market for downtown music uptown and all over. It also made U Roy the musical granddaddy to generations of youth that followed.

U Roy was, and is still, well loved by Jamaicans. Former pupil, deejay Josie Wales used to look up to him, “U Roy used to be a pace setter like that and we used to admire him, as youth, and want to be like him.” With his gentle manner and warm humor, he inspired confidence in people. U Brown, the heir to U Roy’s vocal styling, followed the teacher closely in those early days. “On any given day, I wake up and I’m walking around Towerhill, when I see U Roy ride past on his motor cycle or on his brother-in-law peddle bike, It was like a joy to see him. It was like my musical god [is] there. I speak honestly. And I never get a chance to express these things to U Roy. He don’t have to put out a lot, like some people have to come and do a lot of physical things to
make themselves recognized. U Roy just a humble person. But once you and him click, from there, the rest is just joy. I respect him a lot to be honest. I adore U Roy so much because the inspiration I get from U Roy, it makes me be who I am today, music-wise. Even clothes, I used to love how he dressed.”

Wearing his tall beaver hat with his red, gold and green robes, U Roy always looked the part of the star deejay. To U Roy, looking ‘trash’ was a professional requirement. “We learn to buy good things - it’s nothing about no show off thing, but you ina the music, music is a ting whe, is different from when you come out of a yam field. You cyaan go up on stage and look like you a come out of your yam field. If me sit down pon me corner then, those are the clothes me sit down pon the corner in, not the clothes me come pon the stage, you know?”

Spending over 40 years in music, U Roy saw the whole scene take shape, climbing the ladder from selector to deejay to sound owner. “If me didn’t enjoy it me woulda never, never do it. Until this day it’s my trade.” He influenced so many people and set the stage for what was to follow musically, a 50 year reign of dancehall music from Jamaica spreading throughout the world.

**DENNIS ALCAPONE**

Although U Roy was the main star of the day with his Treasure Isle hits, one of the most important but overlooked toasting masters was Dennis Alcapone whose Studio One LP, *Forever Version*, remains a true classic of early deejay recording.

Dennis’s influence was just as pervasive as U Roy’s, especially inside the dancehall. A lot of young deejays were coming into the session inspired by Alcapone’s style. “All of those guys used to listen to me. Big Youth used to come to my dance and listen to me. Jah Stitch used to follow me all around the country when I was playing. Trinity used to live close by me, where I used to play. I remember him as a little boy. I used to call him Glen. Dillinger was my apprentice.” In fact, Dillinger originally called himself Young Alcapone. Deejay Jah Stitch recalls, “I used to go around [to see] Dennis Alcapone, El Paso [sound]. I really get my deejaying skill from Alcapone.” Stitch claimed, further, that when Alcapone heard him deejay, he would tell Stitch that he still heard a big piece of himself in the younger man.

Dennis started with El Paso sound in 1969. Although he was a follower of U Roy, his style was completely his own. Where U Roy had more melody in his voice, Alcapone’s words were more spoken, or chanted. Where U Roy slurred common words into entirely new permutations, Dennis spoke clearly, his lines punctuated by his piercing, “YEH YEH YAAAAA!”

His sound, El Paso, became an institution in Jamaica. In fact, El Paso became so identified with Dennis that people started calling him ‘El Paso’. “It was just me. I was the whole thing. I used to deejay, I used to select, I used to

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* Well dressed
take the sound to the dance, string it up, put the steel horn in the tree, I used to do everything. So, they couldn’t match that! I went and get the dubplates, myself. I bought all the records for the sound. I take the dates [bookings] as well. I did everything. The guys nowadays think they can just drive up when the dance is going on, take up the mic. They don’t know lucky they are.”

Making records with deejays had caught on by this time and Dennis took full advantage, cutting many timeless sides including the heavy ‘Spanish Omega’ (over Ken Booth’s ‘Old Fashion Way’ for Keith Hudson), ‘Mosquito One’ (over Nora Dean’s ‘Barbwire’, Duke Reid), and ‘Guns Don’t Bark’ (Bunny Lee). These lyrics were so popular and so well known that they entered the vocabulary of every deejay in Jamaica.

By 1974, after several prolonged stays in the UK, Dennis got married and settled there permanently. He resides there today, still working in the business. When Alcapone left Jamaica, that was the end of El Paso. “It was going on after I left, because you had quite a few people [deejays] that went on El Paso since I left. It wasn’t about the equipment; it wasn’t a big sound. But El Paso was me. There was no El Paso without Dennis Alcapone. Dennis Alcapone was El Paso.”

By the mid ‘70s, a new type of toaster was taking over, a group of men who had learned from U Roy and Dennis- deejays like Big Youth, Jah Stitch, Dillinger, Big Joe, Jah Woosh, Prince Jazzbo, Shorty the President, Jah Lloyd, Dr Alimantado, Jah Lion and assorted others. Many of the fresh crop were toasting in a new way, with a new range of subject matter – roots and Rastafari.

SECOND GENERATION OF DEEJAYS

By the early ‘70s, Jamaicans were clearly in love with toasting. Deejays had broken through the invisible barrier between the dancehall and commercial worlds. Even so, there remained certain islands of hostility towards the mic chanter both in and out of the music business. Competition lead to a certain resentment between the singers and the talkers. As U Brown recalls, “Back in those days, a lot of singers never liked when deejays would deejay on their rhythm tracks. Singers were the ones that always made the original rhythm. They are the ones that always go with the musicians and make the tracks. And then the producers might call the deejay to say something on the track. So, when the deejays start to become popular, a lot of singers never liked it.” But producers couldn’t ignore sales, and deejay records were hits.

People still loved U Roy as the originator, the ‘godfather’, but the style was changing and now people were looking for more content in the ‘lyrics basket’. The new deejays complied. By the mid ‘70s, deejays were not only talking in complete sentences, they were delivering a message. The roots era had begun and music was increasingly being used to impart a social, political and spiritual agenda.

The biggest changes to in the art of toasting in the ‘70s, came from the large man with the imposing appearance, Big Youth. Flashing his red, green
and gold be-jeweled teeth and smiling his broad grin, Big Youth made a big impression wherever he traveled. With his head full of thick dreadlocks, at a time when performers were almost universally ‘baldheaded’, Big Youth launched a Rasta revolution in the dancehall.

Bunny Lee remembers, “Big Youth come in the midst of I Roy and U Roy and turn the whole thing upside down. *Dreadlocks Dread*, man, that album was a phenomenon! Change the whole deejay concept and everything. Cause Big Youth come in a different style - with dreadlocks. He had an LP come out same time in England, and it sell like a 45. Bob [Marley] was just starting with Chris Blackwell. Bob, them, did trim off them hair. When Big Youth [became a] dread now, Chris Blackwell see the potential of it and make Bob them dread back.”

As a new beat came in, with a different pace and a different atmosphere, the newer deejays developed a fresh approach that complimented the current sound. “Big Youth came in a different era really”, Dennis Alcapone remembers. “People like me and U Roy, we were working on the Rock Steady rhythms that was laid down from in the ’60s. Big Youth started working on the new drum and bass [style]. That’s when the music was changing. The rhythm change. The style change in Jamaica. And the rhythm keep changing. You have so much different deejays that come along and take over from another deejay cause the rhythm the deejay is working on change on him, and he cannot handle the other one as a new deejay [could] that come when that style change. There’s always changes.”

**Big Youth**

At first, Big Youth sounded a lot like both Dennis Alcapone and U Roy. He yelled, he shrieked, he hollered. Like Alcapone, he incorporated nursery rhymes into his lyrics. But, as Big Youth matured, the influences he drew on broadened. For example, Big Youth began to borrow bits and pieces from American rap, even extending to rap’s predecessors, the Harlem masters - *The Last Poets* **

Big Youth was working as a mechanic by day and toasting with Tipper tone sound system by night. His first record, the 1972 ‘Movie Man’, was not recorded for any of the top producers of the day, but as a joint effort between him and his good friend, signer Gregory Isaacs. As a first effort, it got a positive reception, but didn’t go far enough. The record that really made him a household name was Keith Hudson’s production, ‘S 90 Skank’, a lyric about

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* 1975, Klik records, produced by Tony Robinson. The album contains all Rastafarian inspired lyrics like House Of Dread Locks, Natty Dread She Want, Some Like It Dread and Marcus Garvey Dread

** This group of literary rebels, formed in 1968, predated and influenced the rappers and dub poets who followed. Their records included titles like Niggers are Scared of Revolution, This is Madness, and When the Revolution Comes. Referred to, in hindsight, as the Godfathers of Hip-Hop, the Last Poets worked to define and articulate a black identity within the North American environment, and to communicate these ideas to urban African Americans.
the current motorcycle craze. A year later, Youth worked with Gussie Clarke who produced his second big hit, the innovative 'Screaming Target', followed by an LP of the same name.

Gussie recalls, "It was even unique how we put it all together. It's kinda like Screaming Target just flow into the box. Overnight we just recorded the whole album. Cause interacting with so many producers, I could get all the rhythm tracks I needed. So, we just recorded the whole thing in one night in Dynamics [studio], edited up everything and an album was done overnight. It was well received. It was phenomenal."

With the impetus of the two hits propelling him forwards, by 1973, Big Youth was able to set out independently with his own label, Negusa Negast, and begin producing himself while he continued to have hit after hit with other producers.

The concepts of black consciousness and African unity were just starting to appear in reggae, reflecting the rise of the Black Power movement in North America and elsewhere. Big Youth began to use his performances and his records to talk about the social and economic conditions for black people in Jamaica and around the world. Because of his borrowing from such diverse sources, Big Youth developed a loyal following among American intellectuals who considered him to be the “thinking man’s deejay”. In the music press, articles appeared analyzing his lyrics in an often heavy-handed, academic manner (that, up to that point, had not been experienced within Jamaican music).

But, while others were picking his lyrics apart, he was throwing them together, with enviable joy and enthusiasm. An incredibly versatile deejay, Big Youth broke all the unwritten musical rules. Because he had so many lyrics, he frequently recorded several songs over one rhythm, each new recording taking a different theme and a different style. He would double track his own voice. He would even sing. With absolutely no modesty or reserve, Big Youth would belt out soul and reggae songs using current rhythms as backing tracks.

Because his lyrics were complex and often beautiful, and his messages powerful and universal, Big Youth was one of the first deejays to appeal to a worldwide audience. His records were far more than some scat singing and some jive catchphrases (although he could settle into a rhythm with the best). Each 45 was as complete as any song written and recorded by a singer. Big Youth attacked issues in his words, like the poverty of shantytown Riverton City, or Kingston’s political violence. Youth was truly a masterful song writer. In writing such complete lyrics over the versions, he raised the standard for deejaying and created a role for deejays as reformers, in delivering their messages of social injustice. After Big Yououth exploded on the scene, DJs could no longer be classified as the “second-class musical citizens” of Jamaican en-

* The backing tracks came from all over. “Some were mine and some were tracks from other producers I was able to get them because it was just a business. We wanted to do the project, we offered them a price. In those days it was called, ‘I bought a cut off the rhythm’.”
entertainment. They were making the hits and defining the trends. The studio bosses began to take notice.

**DILLINGER**

In the mid ‘70s, Channel One Studio did very well with a young and upcom- ing deejay with a piercing wit and an original style. When Dillinger came along, U Roy and I Roy were already well established and at the top of their field. But Dillinger didn’t pick either one as his teacher. Instead, he studied under Dennis Alcapone and came to sound a lot like him–at least in the beginning.

Born in 1953, Lester Bullocks began hanging around the dancehall until, as a teenager, he got a break and started performing with El Brasso sound from McKoy Lane. From there, he joined Prince Jackie Hifi from Hagley Park Road* in 1971 and also deejayed with Smith the Weapon, all before joining Dennis Alcapone on his El Paso hifi.

The youth hung around El Paso sound doing anything that needed to be done. “At times I had to lift the box because the boxman is not there and I just want to hear the sound play. It was the love of the music and [we wanted] the music start play. So, we do anything to let the sound play quick as possible.”

Alcapone took the young deejay under his wing and began giving Dillinger a chance to be heard. “I used to follow that sound. So, any time he take a break, went to smoke or get a drink, I would take the mic.” Alcapone didn’t offer direct instruction, and Dillinger, a natural at the microphone, didn’t seem to need any. “But he was the first guy who put a mic in my hand. He gave me the opportunity to build up my own craft, to expose myself.”

On some of his early recordings, Dillinger sounds uncannily like his el der. But the young deejay didn’t waste time in finding his own unique style. “When I come in the business, they [deejays] were talking like ‘Yea!’ ‘Wow!’ ‘Do it to me’, ‘hic, hic’, ‘Tchka, tchka’, ‘Good gosh!’ Cause it was ‘toasting’ when I come in the business. Man like U Roy, Dennis Alcapone, they used to toast. I come with like a sing-jay. The first number one, ‘Woman then a locks and the man them a plat…rest a lickle while and make me show you me style… Woman them a locks and he man them a plat. Cha man! Cha man! - you better than that.’”

While the toasters had thrown a lot of words and syllables together to compliment the rhythm, Dillinger added narrative potential to his lyrics. Little vignettes found within his songs offered a subtle but humorous slant on the society of the day. While most of the deejays in the ‘70s took Rastafarianism very seriously, and expressed these sentiments in their songs, Dillinger took a humorous, although always sympathetic, perspective. In ‘Plantation Heights’

* In ‘Plat Skank’ (Phil Pratt, 197? LABEL), he refers to the sound, “Right now, I belong to Prince Jackie Hifi, so you got to take care of I, and you can make it if you try.”

** also refers to Platt Skank
(1976 Channel One), for example, he pokes fun at the Rasta’s ban on adding salt to their cooking.

Natty swim ina the ital bath,
Him don’t go a sea cause the sea so salt,
Natty dread find fault,
say the sea too salt

In ‘The General’ (1976 Channel One) Dillinger draws a lyrical picture of the Rastaman who doesn’t eat meat or believe in death.

Natty Dread a the general
That’s what him don’t go a funeral
Natty dally out a mineral – fe wha’?
Fe go swim ina the river
But Natty Dread don’t shiver
Cause him don’t eat liver,
Him a go swim ina the river,
Simply because him live ya, you know…

Dillinger was a keen observer of life. One of his biggest hits, ‘CB 200’ (Well Charged 7 inch, 1978), looked at the motorcycle craze that had taken over Kingston. “It was a fashion in those times. In Jamaica, if you are going in the dance, you had a lot of bikes. Sometimes you hardly have space to stand up because of the bikes; sometimes you lean on a bike muffler and it burn you because it’s hot. They would ride their bike to the dance, the girls in their shorts was on the back of the bike.

“They start with Honda 50, then they come with the S 90, the 790, the 175 and they come down to the CB200. There was a lot of dread in the ‘70s-you used to see riding. That’s where the inspiration come. Cause you would see one dread, two dread – cause you had the ‘pilon’, the one dread is the rider and the second dread is the pilon’ rider.”

Although he would shout and wail like the best, Dillinger’s tone was often much calmer than his predecessors, at time, almost conversational. In ‘Eastman Skank’ (1976 Channel One), when faced with a tense situation, he remains unruffled.

Traveling from the west to the east,
To go check Harry Geese
To have a musical feast
with my brand new release…

* The ‘pilon’ rider sits behind the driver
Here come a beast*
fe go disturb the peace,
so, me leave with me niece.

Yet, for all his restraint, Dillinger recorded some of the most intense dee-
jay records of all time. Behind his calm reserve, he held a laser-like-ability to
focus pure energy in single word or phrase. In ‘Braces a Boy’, over an earth-
shakingly heavy King Tubby mix, he slowly intones:

Braces a bwoy
I tell ya!
and a that you fe know
Look at that!

With the quiver in his voice, Dillinger’s chant, “Ethi-Ethi-opia, Addids-
Addis-Ababa,” brings the righteous wrath of Jah down on all evil doers.

THE CHANTING STYLE
Deejay Trinity recalls, “I was inspired by Big Youth. Cause in those days, Big
Youth usually chant, and I love chanting, cause chanting have a message. U
Roy only have a sweet tone, and him have some nursery rhymes, some nice
likkle [little] lyrics, but Big Youth usually have the revolution kind of style.”
That was the style people wanted in the ‘70s as political changes moved the
country closer to discord and disorder.

The chanting style became the mark of the ‘70s deejay. Jah Stitch, another
popular deejay from Big Youth’s area, would use a similar technique. Stitch’s
hallmark was the quivering voice, the bible verses, the rhythmic monotone
delivery.

The effect of the slow, droning vocals over the dense, thickly layered
rhythm tracks, was hypnotizing. Selector Jah Wise suggests, “The chanting
really start in Nhyabingi, Rastafarian movement. Big Youth [used it] before
U Roy. U Roy used to record for Treasure Isle. Nobody couldn’t do no Rasta
tune there. Treasure Isle [Duke Reid] was a police. So, nobody could do no
‘Jah’ tune there. When U Roy left Treasure Isle, he start to do Rasta chant
now. That’s why Coxsone get out Duke Reid”, cause everybody could smoke
weed at Coxsone. Everybody smoke weed down there. Reggae music really
come with weed.”

Weed smoking and the Rastafarian consciousness were penetrating deep
into the music. The romantic rock steady period was over. Artists were taking
up questions of black identity and looking toward Africa for solutions. The
music reflected the new, post independence, reality. Jamaica in the ‘70s hit a

* refers to the police
** i.e.got ahead of him, got more popular
serious time, a time of struggle. People had seen their dreams evaporate and they were angry, frustrated and searching for solutions. All of which lead reggae to undergo seismic changes which affected the very core of the dancehall. The roots era had dawned and music was increasingly being used to impart a social, political or spiritual agenda. In Jamaica, times were getting dread.
The seventies brought a whole new atmosphere to the dancehall. “In the ‘60s, when we celebrated our independence, when we came out of the colonial era, it was really nice,” explains producer Clive Chin. “It’s just that, after that 10 year stretch that just went past unnoticed, like the turn of a page - everything just started changing. People became more self conscious of who they are, what they were defending. The music started to change as well. Then, you had certain Jamaican artists picking up the team of the socialist system, where they would sing about Joshua, ‘Better Must Come’*, and things like that. There was a big change. The rock steady, which had that sweet melody, went by and the more political and social material came into effect.”

In the ‘70s, life proved so difficult that many Jamaicans, including Clive and his family, moved to the U.S.. Politics began to creep into every aspect of life in Jamaica, including music. Deejay Dennis Alcapone was one of the many who, like the Chins, abandoned the country. “At the time, Jamaica was just turning violent [due to] the political situation. Guns were firing in the dance, and I heard from a lot of people that I died several times [he laughs]**, and I didn’t want it to become a reality. You can be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Better to be safe than sorry. So, when I came to England and see the situation here, and go to the dances and see that there was no shot firing and people would stay in the dance until six, seven in the morning. It was a completely different situation, you know.”

In 1972, Manley had been elected with 56% of the vote. Appealing to the downtrodden and disenfranchised, Manley had sought out the help of musicians in his campaign. Singer/producer Clancy Eccles, who recorded several songs in support of Manley including the crucial ‘Rod of Correction’, was called in to organize the traveling ‘Bandwagon’ shows that took Manley’s message to every parish. Inner Circle, Jacob Miller’s band, supplied the music. Singers included Bob and Rita Marley, Junior Byles, Dennis Brown, Judy Mowatt, Scotty, Marcia Griffiths, Tinga Stewart, Brent Dowe, Max Romeo, Derrick Harriet and Ken Boothe. The charismatic Manley toured the countryside, and ventured deep into the inner city ghettos to spread the message of his party. Although true Rastafarians eschewed political involvement, the People’s National Party began a campaign to co-opt the movement by incor-

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* Both songs, ‘Better Must Come’ by Delroy Wilson and ‘No Joshua No’ by Max Romeo were written referring to Michael Manley, leader of the PNP party

** The violence often lead to rumors that certain entertainers had been killed
porated Rasta symbols, ideas and music into their campaign. Manley portrayed himself as the Biblical Joshua and carried a stick he referred to as the ‘rod of correction’. Claiming the rod has been given to him by the Emperor Haile Selassie, Manley courted the Rastafarian vote with considerable success.

But the euphoria of the election victory quickly dampened as Jamaica began to confront some of its greatest challenges. Manley was a strong supporter of Third World solidarity and aligned himself with Cuba and other revolutionary governments, something that set off alarms in Washington, still shaking from the Cuban Missile crisis. Jamaica’s close proximity to Cuba was a concern, and the U.S. did want to see communism, or socialism, spread. As Mark Wignall expressed it in The Jamaican Observer, “In the mid to late 19’70s, at a time when Cold War tensions were being played out right across the globe between the U.S. and its NATO allies and the Soviet Bloc and its satellites, Michael Manley’s political direction placed Jamaica, a small island in America’s backyard pond (the Caribbean Sea), in the cross-hairs of hostile U.S. policy action.” The CIA, according to ex-CIA agent, Phillip Agee, began processes of destabilization in Jamaica. Guns began coming into the country. “In the period leading up to the 1976 general elections, violence took off in earnest. It was then no secret that new guns had come upon the Jamaican landscape, and it was argued that the firepower of the JCF [Jamaica Defense Force] was inferior to those of the gunmen aligned to the political parties.” The inevitable result was an escalating arms race between the two opposing political factions in which many innocent lives were lost.

GARRISONS COMMUNITIES AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

During the ‘70s, life in Jamaica was exactly the way it was described in so many songs from the period. People were suffering. Jobs were scarce, wages were low and essential goods were in short supply. In 1980, inflation was running at 28.6%, with unemployment at 27% with an estimated 50% for young people***. The economy was unstable and factories were closing because the lack of foreign exchange made it impossible to buy parts and raw materials from abroad. The middle class was leaving as quickly as they could find a way around the restrictions on taking money put of the country. Because of the import controls, the shelves of stores lay bare and something as simple as an (imported) can opener could run you $25 Jamaican in the supermarket.****

Violence and poverty weren’t anything new to the streets of Kingston. For

* Who First Gave Tivoli its Guns, Mark Wignall, Jamaican Observer, June 27, 2010
** Who First Gave Tivoli its Guns, Mark Wignall, Jamaican Observer, June 27, 2010
*** September two, 1986, The U.S. Message to Jamaica’s Seaga: It’s Time to Keep Your Promise, by Ashby, Timothy The Heritage Foundation http://www.heritage.org/research/latinamerica/bg531.cfm
**** The music industry suffered also under import controls. Coxsone Dodd had to stop repressing his material in Jamaica and Jojo Hookim of Channel One had his import license reduced making it hard to get parts for his jukeboxes and gaming machines
decades, people had been fleeing the hard life in the country for the hope of better employment opportunities in the city. But when they arrived, they soon discovered that the infrastructure wasn’t there. The farmers arriving daily in Kingston found that there was neither affordable housing nor land on which to build for themselves. So, many made their homes squatting on what came to be known as ‘capture lands’, or in ‘shantytowns’ where the dwellings were mere shacks, constructed with cardboard and zinc.

These lawless lands appealed to the politicians who would go in with favors and easily buy control of the area. Or they could take down the whole thing and build up their own community to replace it. “Between 1962 and 1972, (Edward) Seaga built Kingston West into a fortress, with a centerpiece in Tivoli Gardens, Jamaica’s first government housing scheme, which he built on the bulldozed site of the then Kingston dumps and a dreadful area named Back o’ Wall”. Tivoli Gardens came compete with schools and health care centers. The project supplied first jobs and then dwellings for supporters of JLP leader, Edward Seaga, who was running against Michael Manley in the 1976 elections. Public housing schemes became a powerful tool to manipulate the people. Once built and filled with party supporters, that area could be counted on as a loyal constituency.

These neighborhoods, once connected to politicians or a particular party, became known as Garrison Communities. In the Corporate Area, they cropped up all over - Rema, Arnett Gardens, Olympic Gardens, Wareika Hills in East Kingston, Tel Aviv, Payne Land and Southside… All to insure a good turnout for the party at the ballot box. As singer Wayne Smith put it, “In Jamaica, in those times, you know seh, if this side is PNP and this side is Laborite, most of the politicians would pay some guys over there right now to intimidate those people to vote for us. Kill them! Do anything! But make them vote for us.” It was in these overcrowded ghettos that the trouble started. Often communities were only a few blocks wide making it hard for opponents to avoid each other. **

Where the ‘50s and ‘60s had been an era of excitement and optimism, the ‘70s where anything but. Fear and hopelessness began to seep into the national psyche turning what was once a dream into a nightmare. In the early ‘70s, many people had climbed aboard the Manley bandwagon, believing that change was possible. But, when faced with continual interference by the U.S. and its allies, the only change that came was that the rich got richer and the sufferers suffered more. Jamaica was indeed, as Prince Far I put it, “under

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* Philip Mascoll, Jamaica: The Guns Of Kingston, Toronto Star, Tue, 24 Jul 2001

** For example, “The three blocks west of Gold Street in Central Kingston support Manley’s party but the three blocks east of Gold Street, known as Southside back the Jamaican Labor Party (J.L.P.) Of The Current Prime Minister, Edward P.G. Seaga.” - Showdown In Jamaica, By Mark Kurlansky; Mark Kurlansky Has Reported On The Caribbean For The Chicago Tribune, Maclean’s And Other Publications. Published: November 27, 1988
heavy manners”.

“In ’75, ’76 the politics down there was getting a little bit out of hand. And that is one of the reasons we decided to set up a branch in New York in ’77.” Clive Chin explains. The Chin family, owners of Randy’s Records and Randy’s Studio 17 on North Parade, moved the main operation to Queens, New York and set up VP records (VP for ‘Vincent and Pat’ Chin) where the record store grew into what is today, the largest reggae distributor in the world.

“It was very tense. When you come down to Randy’s, North Parade, before you actually enter into the store, itself, from the sidewalk, you would see a long pole in the middle of the walkway. That pole never used to be there back in the ’60s and early ’70s. That pole was to guide the shutters. There were two shutters that came down in the evening to lock up the store. But the reason why we had to leave that pole in the middle was that, sporadically, there would be gunfire firing out from Hayward Street, Orange Street area, coming into Parade and in order for us to secure ourselves, we had to draw the shutters down quick. In order to make sure that the shutters come down in time, we had to leave that pole in, to guide the shutters down. We saved a lot of lives inside that record store.”

The reach of politics extended even into the daily lives of even those who never gave political parties a second thought. “They used to label you in them time there,” recalls deejay Ranking Trevor. “Cause the second owner [of the sound] was a politician from Jungle, one of the top guy, Tony Welch. But because I was sparring with them, they start label the sound and label me, say me is a PNP. You have to be careful, cause in those days, those guys want to kill anybody.”

“In that time it doesn’t matter what,” Selector and producer Jah Screw agreed. “If they think that you are ‘leaning’. Because it takes nothing to think you are leaning to the next side. You have be careful if you’re wearing green [the JLP color]. You have fe be careful if you wearing orange [the PNP color]. It was easy to get branded.” And, of course, “If you were branded PNP”, Welton Irie remembers, “you couldn’t go into JLP areas and vice versa.”

Clive Chin remembers a close call he had. “I believe it was in ’76, before Joel [Clive’s son] was born, I took his mother up to Half Way Tree to the Kentucky Fried chicken Place. I walk up to the [counter] to take my order, two guy back me up. I don’t know if they have guns or knife on them or whatever but I could see that they were politicians [people involved in politics]. So, them say ‘Mr. Chin, what party the I defend?’ So I say, ‘What?’ [They replied,] ‘Tch, you hear what I say, what party the I defend?’ Me say, ‘Party? Me nah defend no party. Me defend music. I am a producer. I am a musician. I produce music.’ So, him look pon me good to rahtid and he hear how me talk to him and him say to me, ‘What happen? Me a beg you a money, ya know’. So me say, ‘Whatever money done left after I buy the chicken, you are welcome to it’. But this is how tense Kingston became. It became so tense that, bwoy, you just haf fe know where and where you walk”.
Sometimes, choosing a side was the only way to stay safe. Sleng Teng vocalist, Wayne Smith, a resident of the Waterhouse district, known at the time as Firehouse on account of the rampant violence, recalls, “When I was growing up, my grandfather was JLP and my grandmother was PNP. So, you have the PNP people in the area used to drive round in the cars with the [megaphone] and say ‘Wayne, Junior – Leave out of Waterhouse!’ And then the JLP would come and say we must leave too – [that] me and my brother Junior and my brother Christoph fe leave. The PNP want us to leave and the JLP want us to leave. So, one of my brothers have to come out and turn a bad man for PNP.”

**Political Lyrics and Pressure on Sounds**

The vast majority of sounds were apolitical and carried entertainers of every social, political and religious group on the island, all together, united under music. However, no matter what an individual deejay’s personal opinions may have been, sometimes circumstance called for him to bring the thorny topic of politics into his lyrics. Like when the sound was performing in an area with a distinct affiliation with one of the two major parties.

“How it would work”, Jah Screw explains, “when you was in an area, sometimes you have to take the chance and ‘big up’ somebody in that area, because you have to do it. For the time that you are there, you have to do something. You have to send out requests to everybody. You have to send out to Jim Brown. You have to say, ‘Big up father Jim Brown’, Claudie Massop. If you’re in his area you have to say something. When you reach up a Jungle, you have to say, ‘Yes, Mr. Welch’*. You have to.”

It was expected and it worked. Political lyrics were well received because they were so specifically local and aimed at the particular community. Zaggalo recalls, “We keep a couple of dance out in Ashanti Junction and it was like that – political. I was even talking to Sluggy Ranks and I tell him, ‘When you singing, try sing anything that’s talking about what’s going on in the community and you will see how your song really reach out to more people than anything else’. More people would more listen to songs like that, in those days. I don’t know about now, because now is a different trend. But, in those days, it was more like, what is going on in your area you would deejay about. They get a better response more that anything else.”

Whatever the sentiments of the sound owners or personnel, they had to go with the leanings of the particular area they were playing in, and that meant coming up with some pretty incendiary lyrics which could be seen as provocative. Ranking Trevor recalls, “I don’t know how I do it all those years, cause so much guys did wan’ kill me. We had so much politician song, like you say, ‘Two sheet of Gleaner fe go bu’n down Rema. Cup a cup fe go clap Up Massop’. That way the other side wan’ kill you! That’s what we used to deejay. You have certain rhythms that you put lyrics on. Father Jungle Rock [became]

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* Jim Brown, Claudie Massop and Tony Welch were politically involved community leaders
Concrete Jungle Rock*. But the guys them used to stay down a Rema love it. They used to say, ‘Uuuuhhhhh! If I get a hold of Ranking Trevor, gonna blow off him head! But he’s one of the greatest deejay. Him bad.’"

Political lyrics were actually very common in the dance, despite the apparent dangers. Peter Metro, for example, appeared at a PNP Rally held in Skateland. He explained, “You know, at the time, I was living in a PNP area, a PNP constituency, whatever time the PNP rally would be keeping, PNP meeting, they would call upon me, because I live in the community, to come and entertain the crowd that was there - either before or after the Minister make him speech. So, I would go there and sing. I guess a lot of guys do this in their communities.”

Peter’s brother, Squiddley Ranks could be quite outspoken with lyrics like, “Wan’ Michael Manley pon the fifty dollar bill….Put the boy Seaga on the one cent….” He readily admitted that if you talked like that, “You get branded as a PNP deejay” with possible severe consequences. “Cause it’s a life and death thing when you sing like that. But, in those days I never really stray. Just stick to the area I come from. In those days, I don’t go in a laborite area go deejay. Gemini don’t play in laborite area them times.”

Sound systems came under tremendous pressure to play out in support of one side or the other. “Guys used to come to us and put gun to our head to go and play,” Arrows owner, Sonny, remembers. “That was before the peace treaty. Guys would come and demand us to play- showing up brandishing guns and all like that. We just say, ‘OK no problem, you name the dance and we’ll be there.’”

Jah Screw remembers having to cancel a pre-booked date in order to take the sound down into Tivoli Gardens when one of the community leaders insisted. “We supposed to play by Macarthur Avenue and we couldn’t play because they demanded the sound play down there [Tivoli]. We have to play because, I mean, we wasn’t really into politics, but the whole of Jamaica use any little thing you say to brand you. Ray Symbolic [the sound owner] come by my house and say, ‘Bwoy, Screw, you have a career. You either have to think about your career or you going to finish with the whole businesses’. So, the following day I decided to play [in Tivoli]. And we went down there and it was a roadblock, down there in the Center. And at that time I play about fifteen piece of ‘Death in the Arena’! They have like Massive Dread, Gully Rat, General Echo. Everybody come along and I play for them. I have fe do what I have fe do, you know what I mean.”

The pressure was on the individual deejays, too. Deejay Crutches, who had carried Arrows through the ‘70s with his talent and dedication, was forced to leave in 1980, “due to political friction”. Zaggaloo, the selector for Arrows, explains, “Crutches couldn’t play the set no more. Because the area where the sound come from, they said it was a PNP area. They accused Crutches of

* Arnett Gardens, a PNP stronghold, was referred to as Concrete Jungle
putting up JLP posters and it caused a conflict where they had beat him up and they threaten his life. They say he’s not to come around no more and all of that. Sonny and Bill [Arrow’s owners] wasn’t really [happy] with that, and after while he just pull away from the set.”

Still, singers and musicians were largely considered exempt. “Most of my little friends them get dead”, Wayne Smith recalls. “You have Tower Hill man a come over to Waterhouse, pure shot a fire that night there. While the shot them a fire, me come out and me say, ‘Me live around here so me have to defend around here too’. So, my brother look pon me and say, “No, man. You are a singer. Go on in back!’ So them time there, me did a try. But me breddah say, ‘You a singer, you cool’”

Singer Sammy Dread was once the victim of a notorious kidnapping. “Those times, I used to sing but I never really used to go and hang out because of how the politics was going on. Early one Sunday morning, three gunmen juke me down and take me to Rema and was going to kill me.” Luckily, someone who recognized him as a singer arrived in time and they let him go. In the 30 years since, he has never set foot in Jamaica.

Singer Anthony Redrose moved from Spanishtown to Waterhouse and found that, despite the bad reputation of both areas, as an artist, he was safe. “In those days nobody na kill no singer. And nobody na shoot no singer. Them love you. From them find out a you can sing and a you sing that song there, them honor you. From you sing songs, you can go anywhere. Safe passage. And you no need nobody to walk with you. Them nowadays people are different. Them no care. Them man a go rob you. Them want your things that you sing and work for.” But back in the ‘70s and ‘80s, music was the one thing that could cross borders and unite fellow Jamaicans. People loved their music, and the artists and the sound system personnel received the best celebrity treatment a ghetto could offer.

Some artists, however were openly politically active, and many died for their allegiance. “Mickey…Simpson was stabbed to death after getting involved in a ‘neighborhood dispute’. Dirtsman, a dancehall star, who lived in a PNP stronghold, was shot after refusing to publicly endorse the party. Pan Head, another dancehall star, was killed in an incident disguised as robbery. Nothing was taken from him… Massive Dread was shot for publicly speaking out against the political authorities. All these performers lived in so-called ‘garrison communities’. These are ghettos controlled by political gunmen who are loosely linked to Jamaica’s two main political parties, the JLP and the PNP. None of these murders have been solved.”

**Peace Treaties**
Throughout the ‘70s, politically inspired violence affected everyone. “You get

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up this morning and you wonder who you know was killed”, recalls Producer Dudley Swaby, aka Manzie. “Every day, I know somebody who was killed. Or if I didn’t know them, I know of them or know about them. Even Michael [Manley] couldn’t wait until the day of the [1980] election for him to lose and give it up. He had given up a long time. A lot of my friends too, close friends, they were all in that situation. Together, we all had to leave [Jamaica] immediately. You didn’t have to belong to no political party [to be threatened]. You didn’t have to be no activist or nothing. It’s just where you was living, you’re branded and you can’t say or do nothing different, or you lose your life right there. Have to just go with the flow.”

By the 1976 election, Jamaica was on the brink of an outright civil war. The contest between Manley and Eddie Seaga pitted two determined men, and battles were being fought on the street of downtown Kingston. Travel around the city became a perilous endeavor. Sound systems had to stay within their own neighborhoods. Jazzbo recalls, “Before that we used to play seven nights a week. But, there was a time in the middle ‘70s, when the sound couldn’t play at all. Because it was political administration and violence against leaders and opposition. No sound. 1975, 1976. No sound couldn’t play.”

On May 19, 1976, a tenement building on Orange Lane, where PNP supporters were meeting, was set on fire. The gunmen blocked the exits and prevented firemen or police aid from reaching the conflagration. Rumors blamed both sides for the tragedy. No one trusted anyone anymore, and no place was completely safe. Manley declared a state of emergency and 500 people were detained.

In 1976, despite the worsening economy, Manley was returned to office with a substantial majority. But the violence didn’t stop. Wayne Smith, who lived in the politically sensitive area of Waterhouse, recalls, “That time there, it wicked, wicked. Worst, worst, worst! Nuff of my little friend that me grow with dead. Even one time, when me come out of Tubbys and me run, me a see some people come down a fire gun, a fire gun and a come ina our turf. One of the persons was a pregnant girl. She was firing a gun. And some of the man them from over our side now, shoot, shoot, shoot. And then she get a shot ina fe her chest. All them a do is take her up and throw her in the truck. And keep on coming. And me say ‘Wha! Them people deh no human beings. How them no ‘fraid of nothing?’ And then me have fe hide, hide, hide. One of my friend, he was about 21. He went up to the daycare center to pick up his son and he was coming out of the daycare center with his son and they just shoot him. And him just drop and him son just drop on the road. Dangerous them time there!”

People were growing weary of living in fear and the public pressure for peace was growing stronger daily. Even as early as 1975, peace movements began to surface but none was able to withstand the external pressures to keep the war going. Jah Wise, Tippertone selector, commented, “They had a lot of peace time before the big one, you know. Everybody used to have their little
peace for all one week, two weeks.” Then violence would spill forth again.

To support a moratorium on violence in a particular area, sound systems began crossing the borders to play in territories previously verboten. For a brief period the treaty would hold and people could walk freely between two warring communities. Then suddenly, the months of planning would be shattered with one gunshot.

One of the best known downtown Kingston peace efforts was between the neighboring districts of Jungle and Rema. Leroy Smart’s song, ‘Jungle and Rema’ (Well Charge, 1977), made the two little neighbors famous all over the world. Jungle and Rema were both parts of Trenchtown. Concrete Jungle (Arnett Gardens), was on top, and Rema (Wilton Gardens), below. Both were hard core garrison communities. When the leaders of the two neighborhoods proclaimed a cease fire, the whole area celebrated at a peace dance where Papa Roots played. Ranking Trevor recalls, “Claudie Massop, the famous Claudie Massop, and the famous Tony Welch, they were on the front line and some guys must have fire some shot in the crowd. One gunshot fire and, for the whole week, its pure gunshot. The peace break up for a couple of months until you reach the real peace.”

The real peace movement also began at the grassroots level. People in the affected communities were desperate for a respite. They began pressuring the top guys on either side to do something to stop the violence. Popular support for the peace movement reached the community leaders. The two opposing sides held an all night meeting and at daybreak called for a cease fire. A truce had been reached.

Jah Wise watched the peace process begin right by his home. “When peace start, it start right on my corner. Peace just start one night. My corner, Beeston Street, me just stand up. Everybody come across and people say, ‘Peace’. The west – Beeston Street, Regents Street, Oxford Street. Everybody say ‘peace’. And I wasn’t sure. And I looked. And I take time, look, and I take time, and take time…People was coming over this side and people going over to that side. It was on my border*. I take a little walk and I can’t believe it. I walk right over to Duke Reid’s studio and see if everything is alright. Peace was there. Then dance start keep.”

A decision was reached to hold a concert to officially proclaim the peace. The One Love Peace Concert was held on April 22, 1978 at the National Stadium with Bob Marley headlining. Jacob Miller sang his Peace Treaty Special. Dillinger deejayed ‘The War is Over’. Trinity appeared along with Peter

* For people living in downtown Kingston, ‘tribal’ war was never far from their doorsteps. Because the politically affiliated territopres were so small, there were many ‘borders’ one had to avoid crossing in the city. Many songs have dealt with the reality of having to live inside a war zone. Sugar Minott used the metaphor of crossing the border to talk about his spirituality in “Can’t Cross the Border”, produced by George Phang. Thriller used the same basic lyrics and melody in his dubplate of the same name. Barrington Levy’s ‘Be Like a Soldier’ talks about defending your area. The theme often present in lyrics from these times.
Tosh, Big Youth, Dennis Brown, Ras Michael and others. The high point of the evening was when Bob Marley was joined on stage by the two leaders of the rival political parties and, in a dramatic moment, Bob joined their hands together in a forced display of unity.

But the dances had come first. Even before the big concert, sound systems had been holding peace dances all around Kingston as part of the burgeoning movement to end the bloodshed. Jah Wise began to travel with Tippertone into areas he had never been before. The community leaders had sat down together and decided to try and live in harmony. “I think it was [in] jail or gun court, but a man reason and reason and it just happen. Claudie Massop said, ‘peace dance’, and we came to Tivoli – the first peace dance. The second peace dance [was] in Rema. That was before the concert. The concert come long after. The dance them keep before.”

The peace dances became a big trend. Dexter Campbell, owner of Echo Vibration, remembers, “You have this place in front of Duke Reid’s Studio. Used to have a bar there. We play a peace dance there. And I play at Lizard Town, a part of Tivoli Gardens. They used to call Lizard Town the ‘social’ part, the PNP part. They used to have Tivoli Garden at the top and, at the bottom, you have a little areas where you have the high rise houses and things, and we played there. Everybody come together, PNP and Laborite. That was one of the first peace dances I play. At that time Gemini also play in Tivoli Gardens- a peace dance.”

It was a very exciting time for dancehall. While the truce was in place, it allowed people to cross borders for the first time and learn about new deejays with lyrics and patterns that still hadn’t reached very far ‘out a road’. Ranking Trevor, then a deejay with Socialist Roots recalls, “The way how it get so united, we have some politicians from the other side following the sound now! Them time there, we just learned about General Echo. That’s the first time I hear Tappa Zuckie and General Echo.”

The peace idea struck a chord all over Jamaica. For the week ending week ending April 11, 1978, The Daily Gleaner’s top ten hit parade included three songs about peace, two of which were specifically about the peace treaty. At number four, ‘Peace Treaty Special’, by Jacob Miller, on Top Ranking. At number five, ‘Tribal War’ by George Nooks on Crazy Joe. And, just entering the chart at number 10, ‘War is Over’, by Dillinger, on Joe Gibbs.

Deejay Trinity, who recorded the song ‘Western Kingston Peace Conference’, remembers peace time mainly for its brevity. “It help things. But only for a time. It never last. You know, politics come. The whole thing just stir up back. It was just for a time. It was a nice little time, but it just come and just gwaaaann, and you have [community leaders] Claudie Massop dead and then Bucky Marshal go ‘way a foreign. Because they was the instrument of peace. Yea, instruments of peace. Cause most of the big politicians dem didn’t like peace cause them know that when peace [come] and people come together, then people get smarter. They use it to divide the people. It never last, as I say,
because corruption, violence, cause they [the politicians] prefer that. Because once you live [in] violence, them get stronger than before. So, it didn't last long. But it was a good thing.”
Sounds of the late ‘70s

“Emperor Faith did have a heavier bass line still, but Papa Roots was a more mellow sound, like it have a more mellow tops. It was really mellow.”

- JAH MIKEY

PAPA ROOTS

After King Tubby shut down in 1975, the big dubplate sounds playing in the ghetto counted, among the most popular, King Attorney (later Papa Roots), Ray Symbolic, Stur-Gav, Emperor Faith, and Arrows. From these sessions emerged the most celebrated of the time including Trevor Ranking and U Brown, two direct deejaying descendants of U Roy.

By the time of the name change, Papa Roots was a ‘Rockers’ sound and played heavy rub-a-dub from 45s and dubplates. But there had been a time when the sound did play soul – a lot of soul. “The first owner for the sound system was a guy called Rupert Brown, from Olympic Gardens,” U Brown explains, “and the first name for that sound was Soul Attorney. Then, U Roy [who was working with King Tubby’s sound] had an accident and fractured his leg. When U Roy came out of hospital, he started playing Soul Attorney sound. U Roy was the top deejay at the time. Anywhere that U Roy go, the crowd follow.”

“We start become one of the top sound,” According to Ranking Trevor. “Them time King Tubby’s did break up cause the police them did mash up the sound. So, when I take [Attorney] to Waterhouse and the people discover this new sound - that’s where it get its break as Soul Attorney. When U Roy came across, U Roy decided to change the name to King Attorney.”

King Attorney, manned by selector Danny Dread along with deejays Trevor Ranking and U Roy, was a heavy sound with some serious dubplates. “That’s what used to make King Attorney outstanding,” Trevor continues. “We used to play seven version of one song. Like when we play ‘Death in the Arena’, we play all six ‘Death in the Arena’. When we play ‘Ali Baba’, we play ‘Shot the Barber’, ‘Assassinate the Barber’, ‘Kill the Barber’.”

* originally John Holt for Treasure Isle but made famous, in a deejay style, by Dr Alimomtado’s ‘I Shot the Barber’, also Jah Stitch ‘Barber Feel It’ and ‘Bury the Barber’, I Roy’s ‘I Shot the Barber’, U Roy’s ‘Bury the Razor’ etc.- all pleas by the Rastamen to allow him to grow his dreadlocks in peace.
But the owner ran into some problems. Mr. Brown owned a tow truck and ended up with a government contract after a new law was put in place that cars parked in no-parking zone would be towed. In the over-heated atmosphere of the mid '70s, even that was enough to arouse suspicions that the sound was affiliated with one of the two political parties.

“We had a nice era playing all over the place,” Trevor recalls. “But them start class it as politics sound and they say we play for one party and we don’t play for the other.” Although they attempted to play “neutral boarders”, the incidence of violence increased. The owner wasn’t involved in politics, but the area they were in was getting hotter as the ‘76 election drew near. “They used to shoot up King Attorney so much,” Trevor continues. “When them shoot up the dance, they took all the records, all the dubplates. They did it in Greenwich Farm, and they come back and do it in Barbicon. The politicians on the other side. This set of guys decide that we are not playing for them, so they want to kill the sound. And that’s the time my brother-in-law [Mr Brown] sell the sound”.

Mr. Brown decided to give up the sound and retire from entertainment. “After Rupert, this political activist from Trenchtown, the top part of Trenchtown, they call it Concrete Jungle, by the name of Tony Welch, he bought the sound,” U Brown explains. “And when he bought the sound, he played the sound for the first two or three years under the name of King Attorney, same way. And then after that, the People’s National Party wins the election [in 1976], they changed the name to Socialist Roots because Tony Welch, he was a member of the People’s National Party which is a socialist party”

Once the sound was sold and officially re-christened Socialist Roots, the violence stopped. “When those guys get to own the sound nobody didn’t bother it,” Adds Trevor. “Cause they know those type of guy. It’s only when it was King Attorney, it used to get problems.”

With the change, Danny Dread and Trevor remained and were joined by Nicodemus* and Jah Mikey. Even singers came, as Jah Mikey recalls. “Barry Brown used to sing on Papa Roots all the while. Linval Thompson and dem man deh have fe pass through and sing out, [even] Little Roy.” U Roy had gone off to start his own Stur-Gav sound and was replaced by U Brown who was a carryover from the U Roy School of deejaying.

**U Brown**

During his increasingly frequent flights overseas for concerts and record promotion, U Roy needed an understudy to fill in for him on King Tubby’s sound. U Brown just happened to live in the neighborhood and could sound identical to the teacher himself.

“In the ‘60s, U Roy was living in Kingston 11, which he still does, but he was living a little further up from where his house is now. I wasn’t living far

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* Even the legendary Nicodemus had to start out on the sound as a box man
away from U Roy. King Tubby’s sound system wasn’t far away, and I just take something onto U Roy, identify something within myself.” The young deejay began to hang around doing odd jobs, lifting the sound boxes and traveling with the crew to dances to set up, until he got comfortable and began to feel like “one of the family”. Until, one night he got his chance at the microphone.

“I start to smoke weed from I was young and I can remember distinctly, I was in a dance in St Mary, and the place is called Zion Hill in a little district of Richmond where they manufacture Cadbury chocolate. The dancehall is called Zion Lawn. U Roy was playing a record and we were smoking the chalice, which they call the Chillum pipe, and U Roy need to get a puff from it but the never want to do it around the sound system, so while he move away from the sound system into a dark corner where I was, the record almost finished and he asked me to go back and start the song from the top - and that’s the first time I ever touched anything on King Tubby’s sounds system. That’s the first time I get closer to U Roy.” Once they heard how close U Brown was to the ‘originator’, they invited him to fill in when U Roy was absent with a broken foot in the mid ’70s. “Dillinger style more fit sound like Emperor Faith an’ Black Harmony, Kentone, an’ all those sounds. So, I was called on, as a young deejay who had a sound like U-Roy, to do the duty on Tubby’s.”

At the time, U Brown was working with a sound called Silver Bullet. “That’s the first sound system that I get the chance to try my skills. [It was located at] Phillip Avenue, off Tower Avenue, in Towerhill. Jack, the owner was a cyclist as well. Another guy was there playing the sound. We call him Duppy.”

From there, U Brown moved up to Sounds of Music which was owned by a man by the name of Phillip Monroe*, the father of female deejay Macka Diamond (formerly Lady Mackerel). There, he was filling in for deejay Winston Scotland.

The sound system scene was slow in the early ‘70s. “There wasn’t a lot of sets around then, just some small hifi. It was mostly Tubby’s, because Coxsone and Sir George [the Atomic] and sets like those fade out. So, it was sounds like Tubby’s and Kelly’s – Lord Kelly the Maestro, [and] a sound called Earl Discotheque that Dillinger usually follow,” U brown recalls. When the violence in Kingston got bad, around 1974, U Brown moved out to Ocho Rios to play Jack Ruby’s sound. He stayed on board until 1976, traveling with the sound to New York, until, on a visit home to his mother in Kingston, he found a letter from the employment office offering him a job. Solid employment was not to be scoffed at, especially in a time when deejays still had no aspirations to making a living from music. So, he stayed in Kingston and began working with the post office by day and King Attorney by night.

The first producer to record U Brown was Winston Edwards. U Brown

* Phillip, as well as being in the liquor delivery business, also owned the label, Sounds of Music, and had released a song with Winston Scotland called Swing and Sway.
did two sides for Edwards, ‘Jamaican Tobacco’ and ‘Wet Your Pants Foot’. Following Edwards, U Brown did a bit with Yabby You before moving on to producer Bunny Lee, in 1977, with a string of very successful 45s and albums that penetrated the UK Market. But the biggest hit for U Brown was one that he produced for himself, ‘Weather Balloon’. Inspired by the success of the tune overseas, U Brown delved further into producing, all the while continuing with his recording for Bunny Lee.

TREVOR RANKING
The man most frequently cited by deejays in the ’80s as their inspiration and teacher was Ranking Trevor. Learning the trade directly from U Roy, Trevor provided the crucial link in the deejay line going from the start straight through until the modern era, directly influencing deejays like Supercat who, in turn, inspired the hip hop and rap crossovers.

Ranking Trevor grew up in Waterhouse, Kingston 11, Binns Road, not far from King Tubby and Prince Jammy. Around 1973, he started deejaying with Gold Soul, a local “party sound” that played all types of music. When Gold Soul started clashing with the bigger guys, like Killertone and Earl Disco, Trevor began to be recognized. Fortunately his ‘brother in law’, or at least the man who was dating his sister, owned a sound named Soul Attorney that used to play out at three mile, and Trevor was invited to join the crew.

King Tubby’s was the ruling sound in the area at the time, with U Roy at the helm. But then came the infamous night in St. Thomas when the police mashed up the sound and destroyed Tubby’s equipment. Out of frustration, this time Tubby never bothered re-building the sound. So, with Tubby’s, out of commission, U Roy moved over to Attorney. And that’s when Trevor got the best learning opportunity that a deejay could ask for. Trevor recalls, “When U Roy come amongst King Attorney, that’s where I learned more timing and how to sit on the beat. That’s why they say Ranking Trevor is one of the greatest rhythm ‘rider’ of all time. If you listen way back, I was just talking. Now, when U Roy come, I am more riding the rhythm. U Roy is my teacher. I am one of his ‘baddest’ students. He bring a lot of deejays, but is only Ranking Trevor could carry his melody. Ranking Joe tried. Brigadier Jerry tried, but Ranking Trevor is the only one who carry the real U Roy melody.”

The new generation of deejays coming of age in the latter ‘70s sounded like the originators, but the style, like the rhythms, was a bit different. “U Roy, them, used to talk and break and give the rhythm spaces. But we talk more on the rhythm. We full it up with sensible thing,” Trevor explains. The intonation was different, too. “When we say, ‘After you make war go and you let love stay’- U Roy would say, ‘Make war go!…and…you let love stay’. We ride it more pon the rhythm, so it gives the rhythm a groove”.

Ranking Trevor did his first recordings at Channel One where Attorney used to get dubplates cut for the sound. The Hookims gave him a try in 1977 with the 45, ‘Cave Man Skank’, followed by the even more successful, ‘An-
swer Mi Question’. But the songs that made Trevor the legend he is today were ‘Queen Majesty’, over a remake of the rock steady classic by the Techniques from Treasure Isle, and ‘Truly’, over a Jay’s update of Marcia Griffith’s Studio One hit. The recordings came out as two of the first 12 inch disco mixes and created a sensation. It was the closest thing on vinyl to being in the dance and hearing the deejay come in with his rap right after the vocal. Disco 45s brought the dancehall experience directly into people’s living rooms. Still they remained mainly a foreign commodity, not a big seller in Jamaica.

In 1977, Trevor and five others were traveling out to Sav-La-Mar for a session when they collided with an old bus at Old Harbour. “It’s a lucky thing we crash there! Cause the way that guy was driving, I knew something was wrong. He’s not used to the road- those highway. He’s just used to the in-and-around roads.” Fortunately there were no fatalities, but Trevor broke a foot and wrote a song about it, ‘Sav la Mar Rock’, which appeared on the Train to Zion LP, and it became a bit hit for him.

Trevor was truly a prolific hit maker. He recorded popular favorites like ‘Three Piece Chicken and Chips’, ‘Rub A Dub Style’, ‘Ital Stew’, ‘Masculine Gender’, ‘War’, ‘Auntie Lulu’. ‘Three Piece Chicken and Chips’ was a take-off on the popular Althea and Donna, ‘Three Piece Suit and Thing’. “It made from when we leave the dance a nighttime, we end up a Kentucky, ca’ that was the only restaurant open at night”. But there was only one Kentucky those days, at Cross Roads. That’s how that song come ‘bout - me and my little Indian girl from Cockburn Penn, I meet her up there [he chuckles and deejays]: ‘Long time I call you and you just feel fe come, through you see me with the chicken and chips...’”

Trevor went back to deejaying Attorney (by then, Papa Roots) after his foot mended, but times were changing. New sounds had taken over the spotlight. Trevor began to want more than just a permanent spot on one sound. He wanted the freedom to work wherever the pay was the highest, where he could reach the most people. “The independent sounds will pay you more cause if you no come a them dance, them nah gonna get that crowd. They put you pon the posters, the people them come out, so it’s a better pay from them than from the sound whe’ you work for permanent. The sound that you work with, you hardly get paid from them. Sometimes, they have so much excuse. But when you deejay for all Gemini, Scorpio or Virgo, they pay you different.” So, Trevor broke off with Papa Roots and started making some welcomed guest appearances on the top sounds in Kingston, ending up on Kilimanjaro before Super Cat and Early B joined the set.

* Originally by Curtis Mayfield & the Impressions

** ‘Kentucky’, from the proper name Kentucky Fried Chicken, is used as a generic name for any fried chicken place in Jamaica
**Emperor Faith**

Although these early sounds had a lot in common, each had its individual pattern, its signature style, something that made it stand out. “In those days, if three sound system is playing in your community,” U Brown explained, “and you can hear like each sound system with a couple of seconds [delay] in between, then you can know which sound is in the east and which sound is in the west because you could hear that particular deejay’s voice, and you hear a certain type of song playing. Emperor Faith would play mostly Studio One - because in those days, that was the secret weapon. Tubby’s, now, would come with more Bunny Lee stuff.” King Attorney was known for its connection to Channel One.

Emperor Faith was one of the most highly rated sounds ever in Jamaica. “He had a big sound,” Recalls producer Bunny Lee. “His sound used to play Red Hills Road”, all over Jamaica. He used to rule the roost one time. Through he had such a large following, when he played the dubs [dubplates], people would go out and buy [the records], ask for them in the record shop… Emperor Faith was one of the champion sounds in Jamaica.”

Owner Mikey Faith was a man with an impeccable selecting sense, someone who truly lived for music. “He got good ears!” U Brown explains enthusiastically. “He always choose some particular songs that other sounds is not playing, and he just go for two, three different cuts of it. For example, [he was ] the first sound system I hear play more than one [particular] version of ‘Death in the Arena’ – Studio One cuts – and that song was played against me in the National Arena, playing against King Tubby. It was a clash – King Tubby’s versus Emperor Faith in the National Arena.”

Mikey started Emperor Faith in 1970, but he didn’t have it road-ready until 1971. A friend of his out in Rockfort had been running a small set named Sir Faith, but not really doing much with it. “I started to get interested in the music, so one day I said to him. ‘Juba, why you don’t bring the sound?’ So, he brought the sound, but he didn’t have much music.” Mikey was already thinking of taking over the sound and building it up. “I started to cut some dubplates with Bob Marley, cause I was around them from about 1967. They were doing some music with Scratch [Lee Perry].” Mikey began playing Bob Marley on dubplate in the dance long before people caught on to the changes reggae was undergoing as it moved away from Rock Steady at the end of the decade. “I remember when he came with tune like ‘Thank You Lord’ and I

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 Evidence of this is U-Roy’s CD release, Right Time Rockers, which finds U-Roy toasting “specials” for Attorney over the popular Channel Ones ridims of the day (Sound System 1998)

 The material was reported to have appeared on an LP but resurfaced when Papa Tom Ray collected it and released the CD. On the recording, U Roy mentions King Tubby’s name as if he were live in the dance, identifying the sound as he would normally in the course of toasting. I this case, the songs were meant to sound as if U Roy were toasting live on the sound.

 The headquarters was 123 Red Hills Road until the 1980 election when the area changed and Mikey moved the sound out to Portmore where he lived.
was trying to sell it for him. I remember him saying, ‘I have a nice tune, a church tune business, ‘Thank You Lord’.” But, people weren’t interested. “At the time, it was like the Techniques, ‘You don’t care for me at all…’ – all those pretty tune was popular. The people never ready for him [Bob] yet. After a while, they got ready for him, and I see about four months after that the same people that was trying [to keep him] down, start to flock him.”

According to Bunny Lee, Mikey used to be Bob’s accountant. “He used to do accounts, check up on Lee Perry and all that for Bob Marley. Check on his royalty and how much records sell and all that. They were very close. He had the whole of the Wailer’s things [Music].” Mikey adds, “Bob used to just give me the 16 track tapes and say, ‘Boy, go and cut dub”. Sometimes when it was on an eight track, Family Man would come and mix it, mix a dub cut off of it for us.”

“Faith had a lot of Bob’s music on dubplate,” Producer Clive Chin remembers. “‘Kingston 11’, ‘Trench Town Rock’, ‘Earth’s Rightful Ruler’ with Peter Tosh and U Roy. They would come to Randy’s [Studio] and cut dubplates. This was early ’70s. At that time, Bob had a little tiny store up by King Street and Charles Street and he had the Tuff Gong label going. Peter and Bunny had their own solo labels. They were in it as well. They all had dub cuts of their tunes being done.” “I used to have every Wailers when it just come out,” Mikey Faith explains. “There was one that has been released for a couple of years now, ‘Rainbow Country’ – I had that plate for years. Nobody else had it, until I got another cut and I gave my other [first] cut to Jack Ruby.”

Mikey also tried to help promote Bob’s music. It was Mikey’s money that paid for the tune Trenchtown Rock to be recorded. He even turned down an offer from Bob to be his manager, something he never stopped regretting.

With the fresh dubplates he cut ready to be played, Mikey had little trouble convincing Juba to relinquish ownership of the set. The only condition was that Mikey keep the name, which he did with one change, substituting ‘Emperor’ in the title. “It was a more African connection more than the ‘Sir’ thing which was English.” With that, Mikey stopped playing soul and, by 1971, was fully into the rub-a-dub. “When I came in, I used to play soul music, but I never played soul [after that]. It was a more hard core thing. They used to call me the dub master. Believe me, I had a lot of dub[plates]. I hardly play 45s. Most of my music was on dubs”.

His big break came as an opening act. “There was some guys now used to [come up] from Greenwich Farm to come up to Redhills Road and they used to talk about El Paso sound a lot, say they are going to keep a dance one night with El Paso. I was a young sound, so they were saying, ‘Come on, open for the sound.’ So, I went there and I opened the act. I played there until Dennis Alcapone came and they [El Paso] took over.”

From there, Mikey began to build a loyal following. Then the clashes began. “In the early days, I was young [but] I wasn’t afraid to play against anybody, cause I didn’t have anything to lose. I wasn’t afraid to play against the
established sounds, cause I know I have the ammunition, cause I used to buy the records and just keep on buying records. I was buying records from everybody. It’s an expensive thing running a sound system. So, eventually we started having some clashes with me and with Big Youth on Tippertone’.”

When Mikey headed for a clash, he was thinking about the music, not the deejays. “I started out with [deejay] Jah Mike and then after a while I used to change my deejays regularly. As a matter of fact, sometimes, I don’t have any deejays. When I’m going to play out, I have to pick up two deejays. I didn’t have a resident deejay. There was a guy named Trevor, we used to call him Higher [?]. He used to be with Coxsone number two sound - cause King Stitt was on number one them time - and he came over to me for a while. I think he was the first one.”

By the mid ‘70s, many of the older sets had shut down. But, Mr. Dodd was still producing records and needed to get them played on sound systems for exposure. Sugar Minott, who was recording for Mr. Dodd, recalled, “Emperor Faith was the only sound that Coxsone used to give all the unreleased tracks.” Mikey’s intense search for good music led him to a productive, cooperative arrangement with Coxsone Dodd’s studio where Faith had access to all the newly recorded material before it was released. “I used to go down to Coxsone, at the Downbeat studio. We had Miss Enid” and Larry Marshall – those were the two people that were in the studio. And then you had Sylvan Morris [The engineer]. And eventually, between Larry Marshall and Enid and Sylvan Morris, they used to just tell me, ‘Take this tune’. Some of them, they didn’t even know the name if it, so I used to go up there and give it my own name. I used to kick up a storm out there with those tune! We push off a lot of Downbeat [Coxsone Dodd] tunes. When we go up to the studio and select the tunes and start to play it on the sound system, he could release those tunes, cause he know we sort of hot it up for him.”

Although the sound had many selectors over the years, Mikey remained the main man at the helm. “I used to just seek out the music. I wanted to have every tune. I used to seek out the one-away tunes there, and after a while, I get to know the tunes that the people want and the tune that would make a hit. Selection is the whole thing to this music thing. You could have 10,000 records in front of you and a man come with a handful of musics and him just play nicer than you. Cause it’s just the selection, the way you play the music – what music you play now and what music going to follow it. When you put on this tune, the next one must be just as nice, or nicer, and the next one nicer and nicer, and on like that. You build up a crescendo. You have to play in a sequence. You can’t just hopscotch - you play this tune and then you play the next tune, you play a rubbish tune and then you play a nice tune. It’s the

* Big Youth eventually started his own sound, Negusa Negast and in the early ‘80s.

** Enid Cumberland was a gospel singer who recorded for Dodd and was working in the studio and record shop
people mind you working on. And if you keep them rocking, you can control them. You are actually controlling them at the time, forcing them to listen, and liking what you are playing. You have to be there for the people. You can’t be just playing for yourself.”

When Mikey first bought the set, former owner Juba was using “some old time tube amps called 807. Now, Tubby was a technician and he build his own sound and I used to like how his sound look, so I started to go around Tubby, and Tubby built the amplifier for me. He built me a number of amplifiers over the years, like when I change over from the 807 to the KT. The sound systems go through phases. When I first started with the sound, we used to use steel horns and put them in the trees and after that, the thing change over and we start using tweeter boxes. So we change our equipment over the years.”

Mikey also remained close to his sound system peer, King Tubby, for many years. “Tubby was my technician, so I was in Tubby camp. So, at first, I used to get everything [on dubplate]. I used to spend a lot of money at Tubby’s! Tubby had one tune that he had gotten from Coxsone there, ‘Choice of Colors’ [Originally by Heptones], and he mix it up with ‘Everybody Talking’—some people call it ‘Midnight Cowboy’. Tubby join the two tune together. You would be hearing the first one and it would just slip into ‘Everybody Talking’ [Leroy Sibbles, Produced by Coxsone Dodd].”

When U Roy and Tubby separated, and U Roy offered to work with Mikey on the sound, Mikey turned him down, not wanting to risk a rupture with his good friend and music supplier.

However, “After a while the relation with Tubby kinda got a little sour. Up to his death, which was very sad, we were not on speaking terms. Because of the relationship with Tubby, we never used to play against one another, but there was a breakdown… and because of that, we had a clash.”

It happened around 1975. “That clash came about almost by accident because it was supposed to be Tubby and Coxsone. Coxsone had stopped playing for a couple of years so he didn’t have any good amp. So he gave out his amp to Stero in Spanishtown to have it fixed.” But the repair wasn’t going smoothly, so when Mikey stopped by Studio One, the two promoters asked him if he would be willing to fill for Mr. Dodd in the clash. “Normally I

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* Tube Amps: “Those time Tubby’s sound was tube amps,” explains area deejay Pompidou. “The sound have to go from early morning and string up for the amps can get hot! Cause the hotter them get, the more the sound play better. Gussie Clarke adds, “They were the drawing card to the sounds then. The sound was 90% more important than the deejays then. Because the importance of (the) sound was power- the type of amplifier, the power the amplifier have, the size of the boxes, the amount of bass you’re going to hear. In those days they were primarily tube amplifiers, and there was a specific tube that was used. It was called a KT, so the boost- the important catching card - was how many KTs does this amplifier, this sound have. Whatever the number was in terms of volume, you know that sound was a lot more powerful than the other sound. So, it was much more the power of the sound that was the drawing card.”
would have said no, cause Tubby and I not supposed to have a sound clash. But because we were at odds at the time, I said, ‘OK I’ll play’.”

On the Sunday of the clash, Mikey stopped in to Studio One to pick up some dubplates. “[Mr. Dodd] put on a 16 track tape and started to play running it down, and when he came to this tune, it was an old tune that they did long ago, it was about Prince Buster, killing the prince or something like that, and Alton [Ellis] did it*. I said, hold on a second, I want this rhythm – this is the rhythm I’m going to use tonight. I got three pieces of it and I said, ‘Mr. Dodd, I’m going to name this tune ‘Death in the Arena’, cause we were playing in National arena. So, I got three cuts off of it – I got the straight cut, a dubplate cut and another rub-a-dub.”

U Brown was fronting Tubby and Jah Mikes was with Emperor Faith. Tubby started playing first, but then complained his amps weren’t running well and there was something wrong with the transformer. He asked Mikey if he could play. “It was just a ruse, still. What he wanted me to do is play out my records and then he would come, but it backfired. It backfired!” Mikey started playing his pieces of ‘Death in the Arena’ and Tubby had no answer. “This is what catapulted me to fame, that same clash with King Tubby. After that, the dates started to come in’.

It also gave Mr. Dodd a big boost. Sugar Minott, who was in the studio at the time Mikey found the rhythm, recalls, “Afterwards, Emperor Faith used to get all them dubplate [from Studio One]. That’s how people started to get some, cause [Mr. Dodd] realized he could name money from this. So instead of being so tight, he loosen up a bit.”

The effect was a sudden recrudescence of interest in Studio One. Sounds came to reply on the versions. Studio One rhythms became a central feature of the dance. And once the ‘versioning’ took off (the updating of the older standards), these foundation riddims, so familiar and so well loved, formed the basis for the emerging style that came to be called ‘Dancehall’.

* The song is Whipping the Prince by Alton Ellis and The Soul Vendors
During the ‘70s, Studio One, previously a giant of rock steady, lost its prime vocalists to the more happening studios like Channel One, Joe Gibbs and Randy’s. Coxsone Dodd tried to rebuild the studio’s rub-a-dub credibility with a series of Dub Specialist LPs*, but without much success. The slightly muffled, underwater Studio One sound didn’t interest fans who preferred their dub sharp, crisp and edgy.

For a time, in the early ‘70s, Studio One was on the way down. The singers had moved on and the rhythms had fallen out of favour. But the story wasn’t over yet. “Interestingly enough, Channel One actually started the Studio One revival in some ways,” comments David Kingston, selector and former radio host in Canada. At least, they took the first step.

Channel One began working with The Mighty Diamonds and gave them a couple of rhythm tracks to sing over. Both were updates of Studio One classics. When Coxsone found out, he got really angry. Sugar Minott recalled, “The first one that cause a big war between Coxsone and Channel One was the [Mighty] Diamond’s ‘I Need a Roof’. Because they used the Larry Marshall rhythm, ‘Mean Girl’. They change the horn section and they say Spa da da dap Daaah. That was the first time somebody did that and Coxsone himself, he didn’t know it was his rhythm cause he [Channel One] disguise it, right? But I’m the man who was listening to sound since I was eight years of age, six or whatever, so I’m knowing every rhythm- you can’t fool me. So, when I heard it, I went to Coxsone and I said, ‘Look Mr. D, they’re making your rhythms over, don’t you hear that Mean Girl, man?’ So, he got time to listen it good now. He said, ‘Ahhhhh. It’s True! Raharaharahah….’(like he’s mad). So, what I did, I said, ‘Don’t worry, we’re going to answer them. Then I went for Larry Marshal’s rhythm and I [recorded the song], ‘I Need a Roof Over My Head’. That’s why you have a Studio One version of ‘I Need a Roof’. That was answering back to Channel One, like a war.”

So, when Channel One followed up with another Diamond’s hit, Have ‘Mercy’, using Coxsone’s ‘Baby Why’ (originally by The Cables), Coxsone, according to David Kingston, “responded by releasing ‘Rearrange’ by The Gladiators, which mocks [Channel One] for basically ‘rearranging’ The Ca-

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* According to David Kingston: “The first set of dubs (Zodiac, Hi Fashion etc) were all mid-‘70s, and were mixed by Selwyn Morris. The latter dubs, like Juks Parts one and two, with the overdubbed effects and additional instrumentation, were mixed primarily by Coxsone himself. The appearance of these LPs in the late 1970s, together with a new stable of artists (Johnny Osbourne, Freddie MacGregor etc), reminded reggae fans of Studio One’s relevance during those transitional times.”
bles tune. It was probably at that point where Mr. Dodd felt that it was fair game to ‘version himself, so to speak, and realized the value of his riddims’.

The fierce competition between studios and producers lead to even more versions of old classics surfacing in new styles. And the versions were being played on the many sound systems throughout the island. At the time, Sugar Minott was selecting and singing on a sound system in Maxfield Park called Sound of Silence. “I used to play Studio One dubs [dubplate versions of the rhythms] on my sound and I used to make up songs to them.” So, when Sugar went to Studio One to audition for Mr. Dodd, he explained that he wouldn’t need Mr. Dodd to make any new rhythm tracks for his music. He could sing on what Coxsone already had in the vaults.

Coxsone Dodd was interested in the idea and cut some dubplates for Sugar to take home and practice with. Sugar returned with ‘Wrong Doers’, sung over the version of Leroy Sibbles’ ‘Love Me Girl’. Mr. Dodd was impressed and ran off eight more rhythms for Sugar to play with. Sugar took the rhythms and composed songs with his characteristic lyrics of suffering and struggle. Mr. Dodd selected 10 of the songs that Sugar brought to him and released them on the album *Live Loving* in 1977, songs like ‘Hang On Natty’, ‘Live Loving’ and ‘Jah Jah Lead Us’. The lyrics were true roots and culture, but Sugar sang them in his romantic, melancholy style giving the songs the feel of a ballads rather than protests.

The reaction to the first album was so favorable that Mr. Dodd followed it up with a showcase LP that contained some of Sugar’s strongest and best loved work, including the classics ‘Vanity’, ‘Mr. DC’ and the afore-mentioned “I Need A Roof”.

The release of the two albums gave Studio One a new lease on life. “Everybody start to find out that Sugar Minott has Coxsone rhythms that nobody could ever get,” Sugar recalled. “So, all the sound people start coming to me for dubplates, so I was like the king, man! Jack Ruby come in, Scorpio, Arrows. So that’s how the whole revolution start, of singing on rhythms. And at that time, I was like a savior to Studio One, cause, remember, there was no more Ken Boothe, there was no more nobody. It was different. Freddy McGregor was there, Silvertones and some people like that. it’s like a new studio one started cause Everybody started singing on the rhythms. I did a song called ‘Come Now Natty Dread’ and that’s how Freddy McGregor got his first hit song – by making an answer to that, like ‘Come Now, Sister, Come

* “What was temporarily ‘out of date’ in the mid-‘70s saw a re-assessment in the late ’70s. He real-ized the value of the bedtracks, and had musicians like Pablove Black ‘update them’ with over-dubs to give them a bouncier, heavier sound.”- David Kingston

** The most common method for recording a vocalist was to have the band create a backing track around the singer’s vocals. Sugar was, instead, building his vocals over already recorded backing tracks
right now.’”

Freddy was a lot like Sugar, a rootsman with a ballad style who could sing cultural material convincingly handle the love songs as well. His follow up was another song on timeless Coxsone rhythm, ‘Bobbly Bobylon’, sung over Coxsone’s ‘Hi Fashion Dub’”, which became the title track of his well known LP.

Freddy McGregor had recently become a Rastafarian and joined the twelve Tribes of Israel. The 1979 album contained, like Sugar’s recordings, mainly roots lyrics sung effortlessly over Studio One’s rock steady standards. It was a good example of Coxsone willingness to experiment with more ‘cultural’ material. The Freddy McGregor album featured strong, though understated, roots ballads like ‘Bandulo’, ‘We Need More Love (In the Ghetto)’, ‘Bobby Bobylon’, ‘Wine of Violence’, ‘Rastaman Camp’, and ‘I Am a Revolutionist’. Freddy, like Sugar, had a way of singing about the painful truths of ghetto life in a soothing, open, melodic style that flowed along with the Studio One Rock Steady backing tracks. The formula not only saved all kinds of money in studio expenses by eliminating the need for a band to play on every song, but it was wildly popular with record buyers and sound system operators. These releases were, again, that tantalizing mix of something old and something new.

**Johnny Osbourne**

Johnny Osbourne was also a good fit for the format. His come-back LP in 1979, *Truths and Rights*, mixed rock steady rhythms with social commentary in songs like ‘Truth and Rights’, ‘The Children are Crying’, ‘Jah Promise’, ‘We Need Love’ and ‘Love Jah So’. The new activity over the old rhythms was creating a stir. “When I start singing pon them rhythm there, everybody who start hearing them tune pon them rhythm ya, want fe sing pon them rhythm,” Johnny recalls. “It’s like it was a revival period fe them rhythm there.”

In the ’60s, Johnny had been singing with a group called The Wildcats and afterwards, with a band he created from among his friends, called The Diamonds. His parents still opposed his career in music and kept encouraging him to practice a trade. “I study book keeping and accounts. And I learn welding and all that. After a time, I realize that them things there is not me. So, me just ha’ fe get them out of my mind and just go ina the music.”

To keep him off the streets and out of trouble, Johnny’s parents decided to send him to the Alpha Boy’s School, but this only encouraged his interest in music. Aside from his academic work, he helped out as an office boy and studied the trumpet under teachers Lenny Hibbert, David Madden and Nathan and Arnold Brackenridge. But, instead of sticking with the trumpet, Johnny

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* The original of the rhythm was The Heptones’ ‘In the Groove’.

** The original rhythm was a Jackie Mittoo organ instrumental, ‘One Step Beyond’. even though the riddim is commonly called “Hi Fashion” because of the fact it appears on the dub LP of the same name.
found that by listening to horns, he could learn a lot about singing, and about music in general.

When his group The Diamonds folded, Johnny managed to stir the interest of producer Winston Riley. Riley, a member of the vocal trio, The Techniques, was just starting out as a producer and he knew Johnny well from the neighborhood. The first song Riley recorded with Johnny was ‘Come Back Darling’, followed by an LP of the same name released in 1970 on Trojan. The songs, in which Johnny is backed by ‘The Sensations’, had a post rock steady, pre-reggae feel.

Then, just as he had recorded his first album, Johnny’s mother, who had migrated to Canada, sent for him. “The political scene was very violent. We get used to that already and deal with that. But in 1968, ‘69, it just come up wicked. Jamaica was getting very violent politically.” Johnny’s mother got worried and went down to Jamaica to fetch her errant son and bring him north to safety. He went reluctantly, but stayed for ten years. Despite his active musical career as both a solo artist and founding member of the group Ishen People (who enjoyed a modicum of success in Canada), Jamaica was always calling him home.

One of the things pulling Johnny back was the music, specifically Studio One. “Them rhythms there is some standard rhythm whe’ I used to listen to, even when I did deh a Canada-listen them and think about when I would get a chance to go to Jamaica. And I thought, I have to sing pon them rhythm there.”

So, after ten years abroad, Johnny returned in 1979 and sought out Mr. Dodd. Under Mr. Dodd’s supervision, he selected his favorite rhythms and voiced the songs that became the LP Truths and Rights, 1979. “That’s one of my best albums to date and it’s like a collector’s item. That one deh a I love more than most albums.” Johnny proved so adept at singing over studio rhythms, he went on to become one of Dancehall’s greatest dubplate and special singers in the 1980s, as well as a huge hit maker for the top producers of the decade.

SMILEY AND MICHIGAN

The deejay duo, General Smiley and Papa Michigan, proved to be dancehall’s first media darlings. The Jamaican newspapers loved the pair and wrote about them glowingly as their songs ascended the charts. On their way up, the duo even picked up an official manager, Janet Enwright, something quite new for dancehall deejays.

The pair had been working with Third World Disco when a man named

* Johnny Osbourne recalls, “The Techniques and The Sensations was two friend groups and at night time we’d sit down and sing. I used to go round by them, walk from my area. They have a music corner. Them sit down and sing, sing a lot of harmony, which I used to love. I leave from my corner and go to their corner and listen to them.”
Ragamuffin heard them deejaying in a combination style and was struck by the novelty of the act. He not only brought them across the railroad tracks from Union Gardens to work on the Greenwich Farm based roots sound Black Harmony, he also took them to Mr. Dodd to audition. The two had been practicing together on the sound for so long, they were well prepared for an audition. When Dodd told them to hit it, Michigan recalls, “We went in the studio and said, ‘Go ina it – Outasight! Dynamite! Music make you feel alright! Is alright, is alright, watcha man!’ Wop!” They did the recording seamlessly in one take. Coxsone, impressed with both their style and professionalism, released the recording. ‘Rub-a-dub Style’, over the same rhythm Sugar Minott used for ‘Vanity’. Sugar recalls, “I just did my thing, ‘Mary Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?’ and they came with, ‘Mary Mary quite contrary, how does your rub-a-dub flow’. That started a whole new revolution right there.”

‘Rub-a-dub style’, and the equally successful follow up, ‘Nice Up the Dance’, were pivotal records in the transition from roots to dancehall. Both songs acknowledged, and paid tribute to, being in a dancehall session. As Michigan explains, the current music “wasn’t rub-a-dub ‘style’- it was rub-a-dub.” He was referring to the practice of playing the version after the vocal-the straight rhythm track for the deejay to talk over. Smiley and Michigan didn’t invent the term. It came from the way couples danced, pressed tight together, ‘rubbing up’ against each other. The follow up 45, ‘Nice Up the Dance’, over an updated version of Coxsone’s thumping ‘Real Rock’ rhythm, was also a song about being in the dance.

People outside can’t get into the dance,
them really have fe dance on the street tonight

The sound system was the focus of the lyrics, which glorified and celebrated the live session. Both songs reached number one at home and penetrated the markets abroad where this new style of reggae was attracting a fresh, younger generation of fans.

‘Nice Up the Dance’ was named song of the year and so was their follow up, ‘One Love Jam Down’, written and produced by their manager Janet Enwright. The theme of the new song dealt with the opening up of Jamaica’s entrenched class system.

No more uptown- downtown, we all rock together on a one ground.
Social barriers bruk down, together ina One Love Jam Down.
The ‘Risto and the dreadlocks, come together ina I-tal wedlock

“That song - that’s [about] when Bob Marley married Cindy Breakespeare,” Smiley explains. “Bob Marley, from out of Trench Town, Cindy Breakespeare was Miss World, Miss Jamaica World. So, Bob Marley is a dreadlocks
Rasta man. That just move the clouds from over the sun a little bit. All of a sudden you look up on the hill, you start to see some little youth - drive, go uptown, go home.”

Kingston still had territorial markers, but by the ’80s, the barriers were beginning to weaken. As the land begins to slope upwards, the houses take up more space, sitting farther apart from each other, with gardens and well tended lawns in between. You didn’t see often dreadlocks above Half Way Tree. That is, until Bob Marley moved his motley crew of dreads and ragamuffins up to Old Hope Road, into a mansion they turned into a crash pad and studio.

“We never [used to] go above Half Way Tree, [to] Constant Spring, Cherry Garden. As you come out of the bus, Police come pick you up – ‘A whe’ you a do here? Whe’ you a come to? A whe’ you going?’ That’s how it was at one time,” Smiley explains. That was about to change, at least for the two deejays.

With the success of that song, along with their two previous hits, the two deejays were being invited into uptown locations to perform their downtown, rub-a-dub style material. “We were performing in the high schools uptown, up at Merle Grove, at Queens High school, all these nice places,” Smiley still marvels at the idea. “And we from downtown, ghetto! Bob Marley – Cindy Breakspeare, come on man! ‘No more uptown downtown.’”

The biggest hit for Smiley and Michigan came when they met up with Junjo Lawes and recorded ‘Diseases’, a song that predicts calamities for those who don’t uphold the teachings in the Bible.

Jah Jah lick you with diseases, the most dangerous diseases, like the elephantitis (sic) and poliomyelitis, and the one diabetes.

Smiley and Michigan recorded the song for Junjo over one of his most popular rhythms, his remake of Alton Ellis’s Studio One recording, Mad, Mad, Mad, little knowing the effect it would have. “I wasn’t trying to bring down disease on anybody,” Michigan apologizes for what happened next. Right afterwards, Jamaica suffered an outbreak of polio. Some people actually accused the duo of causing the problem. If the record hadn’t been such a big hit, it wouldn’t have mattered. But, by the time the disease struck, the lyrics were known by every Jamaican, so the question was actually taken seriously enough to be debated in local newspaper columns.

By the late ‘70s, Studio One had come full circle. No sound could play without a full complement of Studio One originals. Mikey Faith recalls, “Coxsone rub-a-dub sweeter than anybody else’s own and I don’t know why. Coming like rubber, like a bouncing ball. I find out that if you are in a competition, if you just kick into the Studio One rhythms, they can’t get you out you know. Cause when it’s time for your music to come on, your music have them rocking! Studio One music have them rocking. There is no comparison.”

In the late ‘70s, after the dance was in full swing, the selector would start
playing the ‘Midnight Attraction’- an hour or so of pure Studio One versions. As Selector Danny Dread recalls, “It was like one or two A.M. – Break out the Studio Ones. All the sounds did that, all the roots sounds – Jah Love, even Stur-Gav.”

With all this new momentum swinging in his favor, Mr. Dodd packed it up and left the island for New York in 1979 leaving the store open but in the hands of Miss Enid. In New York, Mr. Dodd started back into producing from his new location in Brooklyn where he began rereleasing a lot of titles that were out-of-print for years. Although he continued to record new artists over old rhythms, like Lone Rangers’ *Badda Than Them* and Earl Sixteen’s *Showcase*, he never quite matched his former level of quality and originality.

Nevertheless, through updating his work, Mr. Dodd had ensured that Studio One riddims would never die. Channel One spent the ‘70s and ‘80s versioning the old rhythms, as did every future producer, Junjo through Jammy. Mr. Dodd passed away in 2004, leaving an abundant legacy of innovative and inspired music for future generations to enjoy, a catalogue of classics that formed the foundation of the developing dancehall style that came to rule Jamaican music in the ‘80s and beyond.
As the 1980s opened, a new sense of calm was settling on the war weary city of Kingston. City life returned to its slow but regular pace. Although the legendary Studio 17 was now closed and the equipment covered in plastic, artists continued their regular vigil around the corner, along Chancery Lane. The weekend was all about packing up the sound and setting up somewhere for a late night party. But, then the week would begin again, with its own familiar pattern. “Monday morning we end up out a Randy’s up a North Parade where all of the artists them used to be, on Chancery Lane corner,” Recalls deejay Crutches, “me, Gregory Isaacs, Horace Andy, Leroy Smart, there was a musician we call Dirty Harry - the whole of we used to out there. Frankie Paul just a come from outa the Salvation Army, a come pon the corner and deh amongst we. We was a unit.”

Leroy Smart and Trinity were the stars of Chancery Lane. Once they hit the corner, everybody ate food. “Cause those where the popular guys who used to make money from the music. Trintiy would buy lunch for you and when you leave, put a money in your pocket. Leroy smart is like that too,” Jah Thomas recall, “If him buy a shirt, him buy shirt for everybody, if him buy Clarks, him buy Clarks for everybody. They were popular. They were the guys making money”

The high point of the week was Wednesday. “There used to be a thing up at the Carib [theater] on Wednesday, the ‘martinee’ [movie matinee],” Crutches continues. “Every man just ride out – 12, 14 bike just ride out. Horace Andy did love riding with a bike more time. Gregory Isaacs had a 50. Me had a 90. Big Youth have a 90. We just ride and go up - ride and take taxi - all of we, pure artists, just gone a Carib and we enjoy we self. Everyman come down and see a who get a girl.”

When they weren’t hanging out on Chancery Lane or taking in a cowboy show, entertainers would congregate at Channel One Studio on Maxfield Avenue. Business was still thriving and a steady stream of artists and session men were coming and going all day. Sly and Robbie still dominated the scene, but the newest band, the Channel One Allstars (later The Roots Radics) was picking up more sessions.

Since the mid ‘70s, Channel One was the studio of choice for the downtown crowd. It was the one full service studio that had its roots in the sound system business and maintained a close association with the dancehall. The location of the studio near an election time ‘no-go’ zone had created problems for visiting artists in the late ‘70s. But, as the 1980s opened, with the elec-
tion over and the verdict in, the struggle seemed to stop, at least temporarily. Owner Jojo Hookim had recently bumped the studio’s capacity up to 16 tracks to attract new business and hired several young engineers with new ideas. Among them, straight from King Tubby’s studio, was the soon to be legendary, Scientist.

Channel One represented the collaboration of the four Hookim Brothers, Joseph (Jojo), Ernest, Paulie and Kenneth. Descended from a Chinese immigrant father and a mixed Chinese-Jewish mother, the brothers grew up as part of the middle class ‘Hakka’ community, as the Chinese Jamaicans were referred to. This community included luminaries of the music industry, like band leader Byron Lee, producer Leslie Kong, sound owner Tom Wong – better known as Tom the Great Sebastian, and the Chins of Randy’s/VP.

The Hookim family started out with an ice cream parlor and a collection of slot machines. But in 1970, the government made gambling machines illegal, so the brothers switched over to the similarly structured business of juke box ownership. That was their first step into music. Their second was the sound system.

**The Channel One Sound System**

Each of the four Hookim brothers had a distinct role in the development of Channel One. Jojo ran the studio. Ernest engineered. Kenneth served as a talent scout and Paulie’s passion was the sound system. The Channel One sound system was the champion for the mid to late ’70s. U Brown recalls, “Channel One had all of the fresh songs. Plus, all of the producers who wanted to get their songs popular usually give Channel One cuts of the songs to play on the sound’.”

Growing up in downtown Kingston, where music is a part of daily life, all four boys were heavily exposed to sound systems and grew up going to dances, especially the three younger ones. Jojo was more interested in business.

Although the sound was mainly played in the evenings, the Channel One sound system was never very far away from the brothers’ day to day affairs. Music from the studio went straight to the sound as dubplates before going to press for general release, and the deejays went straight from the recording studio to perform live at the sessions. The sound and the studio were so closely connected, they were like one complete unit.

In 1979, the sound was going strong with foundation deejays U Brown, Nicodemus, and Raking Trevor. Then, in a moment, it was all turned upside down. The sound was playing at the beach and brother Paulie was gambling with some pals, as he usually did, when an argument broke out and quickly escalated to violence. Paulie was shot and killed.

“Paulie was a really nice person. A very strict man also. But he was cool,” says Barnabas who was deejaying Channel One sound the night Paulie was

* Sound being short for sound system, also called a ‘set’
killed. Paulie had been the heart and soul of the sound, and his death put an end to its activity. “A little after he died, Channel One didn’t play again,” Barnabas continues, “They didn’t book any new dates. They just finish out the dates that was booked.”

Jojo had always lived with the disturbing presentment that harm would befall one of the brothers. Brother Ernest and a friend were attending a dance once when shots started to fire. “The two of them were running. His best friend got shot and died. Sometimes I wonder to myself, if that shot was meant for Earnest.” Now that his premonition had been fulfilled, he no longer felt comfortable living in Jamaica. “I knew one of us was going to lose our life. The sort of environment that [we] were into, the sort of people we deal with, where we live, where we do business. Every now and then you have somebody in an argument. So, you know something going to happen one day. Cause I say to Earnest and Paul, ‘One of us got to go, you know. I don’t know which of us got to go, but one of us going to go’. ” After Paulie died, Jojo was happy to let the sound go and concentrate on the studio. But, he took the added precaution of moving to New York to set up his business abroad, both as a safeguard and an addition to his continued work in Jamaica. That left the day to day running of the various business components to the two remaining brothers, Kenneth and Ernest.

The brothers had been planning to make the studio 16 track and went ahead despite Paulie’s death and Jojo’s move. The new mixing board’s expanded capacity attracted new interest in the studio. The relative calm allowed artist and producers to venture back into the area. By 1982 The Roots Radics band was booked solid, and there was a constant flow of artists and producers, musicians and engineers, all accompanied by an entourage of assistants, body guards, fans and ‘loafers’*. Producers came flocking to the studio just to have the Radics play on their sessions, and to have the new boy wonder, Scientist, engineering their rhythms.

**ENGINEERS**

Jojo had opened the studio on Maxfield Avenue in 1972 with an offer of free studio time to try out the new facilities. Yet, despite the Hookim’s best marketing efforts, the studio seemed to stagnate.

The problem turned out to be the current engineer, Syd Buckner. “The first set of tunes we bring out, when they were mastering it, [they sounded] too flat. You didn’t get no boosting. There were certain things on the board that [Sid] didn’t know about”, Kenneth commented. “Jojo show him, but he didn’t use it same way”. So, Ernest Hookim took over the crucial engineering position and things started to look up. Engineering was everything. Without a skillful man at the helm, the number of tracks, the brand name of the equip-

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*Loafters – in Jamaica, the term refers to freeloaders, people who hang around and contribute nothing. The verbal equivalent is loafting, as in the Jah Thomas song, Stop You Loafting
ment – nothing mattered. Channel One’s success as a recording studio was due to a succession of capable and creative engineers.

The mixing board at Channel One studio was manned by some of the best – Peter Chemist, Scientist, Bunny Tom Tom who later left to work with Music Mountain, Lancelot “Maxie” McKenzie, Soljie Hamilton originally from Studio One and who worked mainly with Sly and Robbie on their Taxi material, Barnabas and Ernest Hookim. These engineers provided the basis for the emerging dancehall style.

**BARNABAS**

“Back in Channel One days, Ernest deal with poker machine and the race horse machine. So he used to leave the studio to me, cause he knew I could do the work good,” Barnabas remembers. “He would recommend me, cause he was so much more into his machine work.”

Barnabas had the good fortune to live right across the street from the studio, so he was available anytime. As a boy, he would hang around the studio trying to make himself useful, going to the shop to buy drinks for the musicians, just to have an excuse to hang around and watch what was going on. He began playing drums and worked with various bands including The Gladitors and Gifted Roots, the band that toured Japan with Sugar Minott in 1984. As deejay Ranking Barnabas he recorded a few tunes, like the deejay part of Gregory Isaacs’ ‘Tumbling Tears’ on a GG 12 inch in 1977, and deejayed with the Channel One sound. He also contributed drums on Sugar Minott’s debut LP, *Ghetto-ology*

While Junjo used Scientist a lot, he also liked the way Barnabas worked. Barnabas engineered several of Junjo’s top hits, like Eekamouse’s ‘Wa Do Dem’. “I did all the engineering. I recorded it [the instruments]. I recorded his voice the same day. I mixed it the same night. It was released the next day and it was a hit song the day after.”

Peter Chemist, a neighbor and fellow engineer, commented, “He was good and he was fast. He was very fast. He could mix an album in a few hours. [The sound he achieved] was pretty much the Channel One sound – stuff that I believe Barnabas picked up from Ernest.”

Barnabas admits getting his inspiration from the Hookim brother. “Ernest Hookim – I always watching him. The first song that I did a little engineering on was ‘Blood Sweat and Tears’ – Earth and Stone. I went around the board. I did the mixing of the version. But Earnest was the one who balance everything as the chief engineer. That’s my teacher. I learn a lot from him.”

Just next door to Barnabas, lived a little youth named Donovan whose mother used to work cleaning the Channel One studio. In the very early mornings, she would take the boy with her to the studio where there was often a late night session going on, and he would help her clean while he watched the musicians and engineers. Soon, he began asking questions. Scientist took him seriously and spent time showing the boy how things worked.
Peter Chemist, as the youth came to be known, became a leading engineer, working often with Sugar Minott on his Black Roots and Youth Promotion productions. Although he never worked on a sound system directly, he spent a lot of time making specials and dubplates, sitting down with the artist and helping him work out the presentation, as he did with Trevor Junior’s classic ‘Hip Hip Hurray’.

The rest of the engineers all had a direct relationship with the dancehall, and it showed in their production techniques. Like King Tubby, they were looking for a sound that would carry outside in the open air, that had crisp separation and outlandishly heavy bass. Out of this group of engineers, Anthony ‘Soljie’ Hamilton had been the selector for top ‘80s sound, Echo Vibration and, like Bunny Tom Tom, selected for the Channel One sound as well. Drummer and engineer Barnabas deejayed as ‘Ranking Barnabas’ with the set. Maxie’ had put together some of the electronic components of the sound. Bunny Tom Tom, aka Crucial Bunny (Anthony Graham), started out working for the Hookims in their shop around the corner as a motorcycle mechanic. Then, according to Peter Chemist, “He found out he could make more money working on the sound system.” So, he began working as the main selector and, from there, as an engineer in the studio.

This combined experience added up to a lot of dancehall exposure for a core group of engineers. In the early ‘80s rhythms, the instrumentation was minimal – predominantly drum and bass, and the mix dripping with echo, giving a feeling of vast empty space. The effect was powerfully bleak and almost intimidating. The beat was slower than the ‘70s, much slower than Rock Steady or Ska, and many of the songs were in a minor key.” It wasn’t until 1982-’83 that the more upbeat rhythms began to dominate.

Jojo Hookim had high standards for the engineers he allowed at the ‘controls’. Engineering was supposed to be a physically demanding job, at least the way it needed to be done for dancehall. “Earnest started it [engineering] first,” Jojo recalls. “But I tell him, if him going to do it, he has to be all over the control, like he’s running a keyboard. He can’t be there just pushing a little slide up and ease back. He has to be constantly moving something, throughout the whole complete rhythm. I usually say if they are mixing a dancehall rhythm and they can’t look like they are playing a keyboard, it doesn’t make sense.”

One of the reasons was the massive use of echo. Jojo continues, “The high hats delayed, the snare delayed, the rhythm section delayed, the voice delayed – so you have to be click-click-clicking – that was for four track! It was worse when it come 16 track.”

Dwight Pinkney, who worked with each of the engineers while he was with the Roots Radics, was aware of the importance of this link between the studio

* Lancelot Mackenzie. He later left for the U.S. to attend electrician school

** Some examples would be the Michael Palmer songs ‘One Away Soldier’, ‘Ghetto Dance’ and ‘Long Run Short Ketch’
and the dance. “People like Soljie, Bunny Tom Tom, Earnest from Channel One,” Dwight commented, “these engineers are active in the dancehall. They don’t just study the book. They had experience in the field, in the street. They go around the sound… and capture the whole vibe of what people reacting to. So, they brought it into the studio and enhanced the production with those vibes - all those delays, the delayed timing, the EQ. It affects the dynamic, you know. That’s what the engineers were able to bring out.”

KENNETH AND THE SHOWDOWN LPS
On any given day, Channel One was full of people coming in and going out, or just standing around watching. Chuku was the studio manager. If you wanted the book time at the studio, you had to go through Chuku who would take the payment, mark down your time and give you a receipt. When you came to work, the gateman Zebbe would let you in. All day long, Zebbe, the studio’s front line defense against chaos, sat by the inside wire mesh gate, keeping out the loafters and allowing in authorized personnel.

Channel One was a high traffic area. When not in use, and even frequently during sessions, Channel One was often overrun with ‘loafters’. Some of the idlers just wanted to beg money or a spliff. Some desperately wanted a turn at the mic and a chance to record. Some just wanted to hang out with the artists. Sometimes it was hard to work under these conditions. Sly and Robbie didn’t allow it. They kept their sessions under strict control.

The uniquely Jamaica ‘loafter’ constituted a certain percentage of the personnel in any ghetto area. Made up of unemployed men, these aimless individuals milled around any place where something was happening on the off chance there may emerge an opportunity to obtain some money, however small, however acquired – earned, borrowed, found. If no money came out of it, at least they had been entertained by the events.

These loiterers, old and young, were an important part of the economy of the ghetto. Always available to do odd jobs, they sometimes ended up with full time employment or found their way into a de facto apprenticeship. But, for the most part, loafters were considered to be lazy procrastinators who never quite got around to finding gainful employment, and thus, tried to live by sponging off others.

For Jojo, who admits that his main interest in reggae was always to make a living, loafters got in the way and harassed the artist, created an obstacle to business. “The problem we had down at Maxfield [Avenue] was the constant begging. And when the musicians come there to do their work, it’s like they couldn’t leave in peace with whatever money.” However, for Kenneth Hookim, the presence of throngs of idlers in the studio area created a vibe, encouraging the singers and deejays, producing a more live, dancehall like atmosphere during recording.

With Jojo in New York, and Ernest busy with running things day to day, Kenneth had taken over the job of auditioning the new artists. Kenneth had a
good ear and an intuition about newcomers. It was a thankless task that Jojo loathed, but Kenneth had a knack for it. “Kenneth had a little more rapport with the singers, probably more than I do”, Jojo admitted.

The artists who came were young and fresh and generally inexperienced, so Kenneth’s job was to work them into shape to record and then get them exposure. Kenneth collected a group of young male singers who he spent 1984 producing. The list included Patrick Andy, Frankie Jones, Paddy Anthony, Michael Palmer, Trevor Junior, Steve Knight, George Wright and Wayne Smith. Kenneth managed to create a few hits, but most of the artists went on to record their best work elsewhere. Although some of Michael Palmer’s early works for Kenneth, like ‘Fancy Girl’ and ‘Lean Boot’, can still stand up quite well, Michael didn’t hit his peak until later, when he recorded ‘Lickshot’ for George Phang, ‘Long Run Short Ketch’ for Tonos, and ‘Ghetto Dance’ for Jah Thomas. Patrick Andy did a few with Kenneth Hookim, like ‘Pretty Me’ and ‘Life in a Jailhouse No Nice’. But it was his work with Jammy, including ‘Sting Me a Sting’ and ‘Speak Your Mind’, that stood out. (Patrick, later, recorded a neat little cut, Cowhorn Chalice, for Prince Jazzbo). Frankie Jones was already an established recording artist, having made the LP Satta and Praise Jah for Bunny Lee in 1977. He recorded a few 45s for Kenneth that appeared on a clash LP with Michael Palmer, but he was more successful with ‘Run Come for Witty’, ‘Them Nice’ for Harry J and ‘Nice Like She’ for Myrie and Marshall. Wayne Smith had the popular ‘Karma Chameleon’ for Kenneth, but hit big with ‘Sleng Teng’ for Jammy a year later. Frankie Paul’s ‘Slavedriver’, over the ‘Darker Shade of Black’ rhythm, is dynamic, but he went on to much bigger hits with George Phang and Junjo, and became one of dancehall reggae’s superstar sensations.

To introduce the newcomers, the Hookims devised an innovative system, taking inspiration from the dub clash format - pair the newcomer up with a more established artist on a ‘showdown’ LP. Thus, a series of clash albums was launched in 1984. Largely a personal project of Kenneth’s, this format allowed Channel One to put new artists in an album format without much risk.

One of the first LPs featured Frankie Paul v. Sugar Minott. It paired the young Kenneth Hookim protégé with the well loved hit maker and proved that Kenneth’s new singer was on a par with the best. Kenneth continued the product line with The “Frankies” (Frankie Paul and Frankie Jones), the “Andy’s”, (Horace Andy and Patrick Andy) and the “Palmer”s (Michael Palmer and Wayne Palmer). The series of pairings continued throughout '84 with a Wayne Smith and Patrick Andy Showdown, the clash of Frankie Jones v. Michael Palmer, Barry Brown V. Little John, and Frankie Paul v. Little John.

Soon, other studios had caught on and were making their own clash style albums. Jammy came out with Double Trouble, with Frankie Paul and Michael Palmer. Errol Lewis & John Marshall put out Two New Superstars, featuring Patrick Andy & Frankie Jones. Sir Tommy had Roland Burrell v. Admiral Tibet. Fantastique let Tristan Palma meet Early B, The Doctor and Black
Solidarity presented *The Big Showdown* of Phillip Frazer and Tristan Palma.

At the time, sales of vinyl recording was facing the challenge of pirated cassette copies being sold illegally and interchanged between friends. Jah Thomas tried the clash format on an LP called *Wicked*, with Johnny Osbourne against Michael Palmer, as he explained, “Because the business getting slow a bit, you know. Like the cassette business was taking over [from] the records. So, I had to do something to attract people to spend their money.”

Eventually, the fad lost momentum and faded away, but not before introducing the public to the next generation of singers who came to dominate the decade.

**The Decline of Channel One**

However, despite the number of popular artist recording at Channel One, and the hits they were making, the studio just couldn’t seem to maintain the momentum. “Jojo migrated and went away for a long time and everything just went down,” Singer Pad Anthony reflects. “Everything just winded down. That was the end of it.”

Jojo tried to keep the studio afloat from afar with his frequent trips back and forth. But it grew more difficult. Jojo’s heart was in the new pressing plant in New York, and Channel One was heading into a decline.

Beginning back in 1983, business at the Hitbound record plant across the road, had started to slow due to a recent rise in the price of records. Albums were selling for $24 (Jamaican) and 45s for $5.50 each. So a lot of the staff were laid off and spent their days loafing at the studio. The new government had decreased Jojo’s import/export license so he could no longer import the parts he needed to run a studio and a pressing plant in Jamaica. The jukebox business was losing ground.

Jojo’s long stays abroad left a vacuum at Channel One. The loafers seems to take over like weeds growing on an old, abandoned castle. The Hookims began talking of building a new 24 track studio out in the suburbs, but year after year passed. Jojo concentrated on the plant in Queens, pressing records for other producers, and moved farther and farther away from Channel One.

Goldielocks, Hitbound record presser, always held that Channel One began having problems when Kenneth left. Kenneth and Jojo weren’t on good terms. As Barnabas expresses it, “Kenneth is like the black sheep of that family.” So, the separation was inevitable. His replacement, Chucu, just wasn’t the same. Channel One had definitely been the place to be in 1976. But somehow, although it underwent a revival in the early ’80s, it never really reached the same peak of creativity that it achieved in the ’70s, and its popularity soon began to decline.

Then, in 1985, the digital revolution hit like a tornado, sweeping all the musical activity up to Waterhouse, and Channel One seemed unprepared to respond. Jojo was in New York, Kenneth had left, Ernest was busy with the machines and no one was there to keep the music current.
When Channel One closed, it ended an important chapter in reggae history. Like Randy’s before it, Channel One encapsulated a unique time in the development of reggae. Its closing signified the end of an era. Reggae was already rushing headlong in another direction, into the world of drum machines, synthesizers and digital production.

1. “Channel One at that time didn’t have any outboard stuff,” Peter Chemist explains. “They only had what was on the board and they used to run a tape delay.” The tape delay was a crucial piece of engineering in the ’70s and early ’80s. The technique took advantage of the time delay between the tape passing the record and play head on the tape deck. “It wasn’t like those more modern equipment. Those music are history music. They were created from scratch,” Barnabas explains. “Back in those days, the echo was coming from a two track tape, four track tape. We would run a four track tape. We’d use that also for the vocal, the echo on the voice when you’re voicing a singer. Nowadays most engineers are just recording the singers voice flat. They do all that [add echo] when they’re mixing. But we never used to do it like that in Channel One. We used to put that [the echo] on the voice while the voice was recording. So, whosoever mix it, it would already have that kind of sound, the way you wanted the echo to be on the voice.”
In 1979, Jamaican-born but American-based sound owner and producer Jah Life left his home in Brooklyn, New York, and headed for Kingston, Jamaica. He was looking for popular singer Linval Thompson to voice over some rhythm tracks he had created. Once in Jamaica, Jah Life didn’t really know where to begin his search. As a youth, he had left Jamaica and moved to New York with his family, which left him without the contacts he would need in Jamaica to launch himself in the music producing business. But he was determined to make them.

“A friend of mine named Banny Dread live around the area. I tell him I’m looking for Linval, and he say, alright he’s going to take me on the corner. So, he take me around by Oakland [Avenue]. Linval wasn’t there. But Junjo was. So Banny say [to me], ‘See this man here, this is Linval sparring partner. You can deal with him.’” It was there, on what would later become known as ‘Volcano Corner’, that Jah Life first met future sound system owner and mega hit producer Henry ‘Junjo’ Lawes.

At the time, Junjo was still just another youth who hung around popular artists, trying to find a way into the music business. Linval Thompson was one of the biggest singers in Jamaica and Junjo used to follow him to the studio, carrying his boxes of recording tapes.

Jah Life introduced himself to Junjo. “Junjo say to me, ‘Whe’ the I want? The I want voice some rhythms and things?’ I say, ‘Not really rhythm. Is just Linval me want fe voice a track weh we bring down and thing.’” Instead of offering to find Linval, Junjo offered to sell Jah Life ten rhythm tracks, six of which he had acquired from producer Leon Symoie, of the Thrill Seekers label. Junjo even had vocal artists lined up - deejay Jah Thomas, and singer Barrington Levy. Jah Life agreed, so that same day, they all drove up to King Tubby’s studio in Waterhouse and started work, first with young hopeful, Barrington.

Just as soon as the first batch of rhythms had been voiced by Barrington and mixed by a studio apprentice named Scientist, Junjo took pre-release “dubplates” around to the various sounds to get the songs some promotion. Selector Jah Screw remembers when Junjo approached him, “He come to me one night when I was playing [King Stur-Gav] sound, and he says to me, ‘Jah Screw, a bad tune here, yu know!’” Screw reminded Junjo of protocol. “I said to him, ‘You know, Junjo, you should have come earlier on, make me hear the singer.’ But I hear him [Junjo] say, ‘Jah Screw! Jah Screw! You got to believe me on this one! I know the policy. I should have check you earlier on. But
there was no time. We just mix the record off.”

Screw relented and put the dubplate on the turntable. “And I tell you something, that singer mash up the night! I said to myself, all of my people who coming to hear the sound must hear this singer! By midnight, one o’clock, the dance was in full swing. I fling him back in there and it mash up the dance! Again!”

The rhythms were crisp and Barrington’s performance was magical. There was something engaging about Barrington’s plaintive but full bodied vocals. Jah Life later would refer to this as Barrington’s “canary style” voice, his vocals were so sweet and melodic. Barrington’s ethereal voice floated over the heavy dancehall rhythms. It was a perfect match.

When Junjo and Jah Life ran out of rhythms, they went to the Channel One studio and built more using pick up musicians who were referred to on LP credits as the Channel One All Stars. This group of musicians was soon to become much better known as the Roots Radics.

After enough rhythm tracks had been built, and voiced by Barrington and Jah Thomas, Junjo and Jah Life went their separate ways to do business. They divided the territory – Jah Life was to handle the U.S. and Junjo could deal with Jamaica and the UK. Each man had his own set of tapes and Jah Life headed for his home in New York and Junjo flew over to England.

But, over the next several months, Jah Life was surprised to see releases from those early sessions turn up in New York shops. ‘Looking My Love’ appeared in Keith’s Record Shop along with ‘Sweet Reggae Music’ (Junjo’s name for the song ‘Natty Dread You No Fe Fuss Nah Fight’), both as 7 inch 45s. VP was selling ‘Hunting Man’ (Junjo’s name for ‘Bounty Hunter’) and ‘It’s Not Easy’ (Juno’s name for ‘Looking My Love’). An irate and confused Jah Life tried to stop production on the records which bore only Junjo’s name on the production credits.

So, when Jah Life went ahead and released the Bounty Hunter LP, to even things out, he put only his own name on the sleeve as producer. But Jah Life and his partner Percy forgot that reggae distributors in New York would export it. Percy recalls, “People was buying 500, one,000 and they send it to England. It broke in England and then Junjo was like, ‘What happen man? How come you all put out the album?’”

Unfortunately, this created problems when Junjo took the album to England and offered it to up-and-coming UK reggae record company, Greensleeves. Jah Life explains, “They wanted the LP, but Junjo’s name wasn’t on it.” With the ownership of the tracks in question, Greensleeves sent Junjo back to the studio to record tracks that he could put his name to. Luckily he had Barrington and Jah Thomas with him in the UK, and they went to a studio in Tottenham and voiced what became the Englishman LP.

In 1979 alone, four separate albums appeared with overlapping tracks, often with different titles, and inconsistent production credits – Shaolin Temple,

From the start, Junjo and Jah Life had very different visions of the future. After dealing with the sales in England, Junjo would fly back to Jamaica via New York, and Life would drive out to the airport to meet him and tally up the totals. The first time they met to work out the finances, Junjo arrived with his windfall from Greensleeves and asked Jah Life how he wanted to split the cash. Jah Life was taken aback. He intended to plow all the profits back into production. “I say, ‘Split? We not doing any split thing. We are building a catalogue!’ And Junjo say, well, he’s going to buy a car. And me say, ‘Car? Wha’ you need car for? You need money fe go make tune!’ And him say, ‘Alright, when you come a Jamaica you can walk’”**

“At the time, people was kinda thirsty. Music wasn’t selling,” Jah Life recalls. “[The Barrington releases] was a different style of music. It changed the trend.” The songs were easy to listen to, very musical and very compelling. Barrington had a raw talent that was mesmerizing. Drummer Santa Davis, who worked with Barrington, recalls, “The first time I see that bredren, he was a little youth come in the studio. I couldn’t believe that a little kid like that could - I mean this guy could sing, man! He just had this natural thing about him. Very young and vibrant and energetic. When you see somebody like that come to the studio, it’s like you turn on a bright spotlight. That was what it was. He come in and immediately you have to adapt to that energy. He had the energy.”

Greensleeves’ Chris Sedgwick was equally captivated by the youth. “The music was very exciting. In fact, it was fabulous. He’s got this astonishing voice. He was young. I think he was 14, 15, or 16. He didn’t say very much until he got up on stage when he took fire completely, took control. He was astonishing on stage.”

Like a changing of the guards, new players were starting to emerge on the reggae scene, bringing a new sound and a new sensibility to the new decade. The changes were being carried along atop wave the cresting waves of Barrington’s soaring voice. “That’s what made all of us”, Jah Life reflected years later. “Tubby’s studio burst out, Channel One, Roots Radics, Scientist, Me, Barrington Levy, Jah Thomas.” And Junjo, of course, and even the UK label, Greensleeves. The principal actors were newcomers.”*** Even the atmosphere in

* Bounty Hunter, on Live and Learn, credited Jah Life as producer, whereas Englishman, on Jah Life records, lists both. Shaolin Temple, on Jah Guidance, and Shine Eye Gal, Burning Sounds, credit Junjo. Robin Hood appeared on Greensleeves and Volcano, crediting Junjo.

** Jah Life adds, “So what happen is, [female deejay] Shelly Thunder have a jeep so I ask her to take us to Manhattan to buy a BMW and that’s how the BMW come about.” That was the famous BMW that Junjo later gave Yellowman after he recorded five top selling LPs for him.

*** The exceptions being the well known King Tubby’s and Channel One, a studio which had been making hits during the ’70s.
Jamaica was new. And, there was a generation of young people who wanted their own music. The early Barrington releases spoke to them. The music was roots, but without the militancy, lovers-rock without the usual sentimentality. And powerful enough to rock any dancehall session. The Junjo – Jah Life releases provided a clear musical statement that a new era was dawning.
“It’s hard to pin a musical change down to any one component,” mused drummer Santa Davis who played on the first Jah Life/Junjo sessions. Yet, one of those possible components is the influence of the singer. “The singer would come into the studio and it depends on the kind of song he’s singing,” Santa continues. “Once the singer start singing now, he has a certain attitude and you [as a musician] kinda adapt to that – that style, that vibe – cause it’s a vibration.”

Barrington Levy had a new vibration. The interaction between the adolescent vocalist and the young but experienced session men, created an electrifying musical mix that reflected a change in the course of reggae.

In 1979, when Junjo and Jah Life began working with him, Barrington was still a ragamuffin youth. According to Jah Life, “Barrington, now, him used to just wild, do all kinda wild stuff, just run up and down, run down [chase] girls and all them thing there like a little kid – cause he really was a little kid still.” But he was already blessed with a rich voice and the ability to make up lyrics on the spot. Wherever he went, whatever he was doing, he accompanied himself with song. Always performing or joking around, he would entertain friends with his imitations of well known people in the business, from Gregory Isaacs on stage, to the Hookims at Channel One.

Barrington’s mother and father strongly objected to his entering the music business. They wanted him to be an “auto mechanical engineer”. But Barrington couldn’t stay away, “He [my father] beat me because if he send me to the shop to pick something up for him and then I go out and I start to hear certain songs, I get carried away, forget all about what my father send me out for.” So, to pursue his career, he had to leave home. His family had recently moved from Kingston to the country where Barrington felt he had no hope of connecting with music industry. “So, I have to run away and go back to Kingston.”

Back in Kingston, Barrington joined a group called The Mighty Multitude, and passed the time hanging out in Backto and in Payneland where he often performed with Burning Spear Sound and Tapetone. The group cut a record in 1975, a 45 called ‘Black Girl’. It never came out in Jamaica but sold a few copies in the U.S. and England, enough to earn them a contract with Dynamic Records in Kingston. The group stayed together just long enough to record one more 45, ‘Been a Long Long Time’, before disbanding. That left
Barrington on his own. He recorded a few sides for singer Dobbie Dobson, but without much success. His career seemed stalled - until Junjo saw him singing in a dance one night. Junjo sent a friend to go find the youth and invite him to come and get acquainted. Now, Junjo had a singer to go with the rhythm tracks he had obtained from Leon Symoie. He was just waiting for the financing when Jah Life arrived.

The initial flurry of albums in 1979 and 1980 established Barrington as Jamaica’s top newcomer. Tupps, King Jammy’s selector, commented, “At that time, the artist that was kicking up Jamaica was Barrington Levy, Shaolin Temple album, and we used to have them pon dub [dubplate]. That’s how come Jammys [sound] used to conqueror the place.” Barrington was making records at such a pace, it was hard to keep up with everything he put out. By 1982, he had at least six LPs and a number of hit 45s. But Barrington didn’t stop there. He was enjoying success and loved to sing. Thus, he continued to record with a whole string of producers in Jamaica and abroad until he began to wear himself thin. He was getting “overexposed”, the term reserved for artists with too many releases out at one time. Beyond the Junjo and Jah Life material, he had the 45s, ‘The Winner’ for Channel One, his own production ‘Deep In the Dark’, ‘Min’ Your Mouth’ for Joe Gibbs, ‘Poor Man Style’ produced by Linval Thompson (Clocktower/Trojan), ‘Doh Ray Me’ on JB Music and an LP in Canada called Run Come Ya.

Being considred ‘over-exposed’ can put a damper on a young artist’s career. But, because Barrington was an ambitious singer with vast reserves of raw talent, he was able to bounce right back. In 1982, the hit ‘Twenty One Girl Salute’, again for Junjo with Scientist and The Radics, put him back on the map and launched Barrington on another hit- making spree.

After another round of releases, the market, once again, reached the saturation point. “I did have too much song on the road,” He now admits. “So, I decide fe just cool off for a while. But, you find say some new artists get bad pon the scene! So, I have fe take up back my whip again and start ride, say ‘Gwan Jockey!’” Again, Barrington bounced back, this time in 1984 with ‘Prison Oval Rock’ (again for Junjo with The Roots Radics), a huge hit both inside and outside the dancehall.

Soon he was back at the top of the charts with, according to his estimate, with “around five number one”. And he was still just gathering steam - his biggest releases were still to come. Along the way, Barrington’s hit making streak continued with ‘Money Move’ for George Phang and ‘Murderer’ for Jah Life. But it was his two releases with former Stur-Gav selector Jah Screw- ‘Here I Come’ and ‘Under Mi Sensi’– that really demonstrated his talent as a mature and capable vocalist. Both were huge hits, topping charts in Britain for months in 1985. From that point on, Barrington was no longer seen as a site specific dancehall singer from Jamaica. With Jah Screw as his guide, he became an international name, attracting broad audiences wherever in the world he performed.
Jah Thomas

When Jah Life and Junjo first recorded the new songs with Barrington, they included a deejay cut of most of the tracks. Jah Life’s business partner Percy Chin recalls, “Junjo didn’t really know the business. He wanted to put out 12 inches.” The original format of the songs were as “disco” 45s with Barrington’s vocals and either a Jah Thomas rap or a dub following. So, when Junjo was in England, he was originally looking for a deal for the 45s. In the meantime, Jah Life and Percy released the material as the Bounty Hunter album in New York. The Jah Thomas deejay tracks from the discos ended up on a separate LP called Dance Pon the Corner*. The vocals where on one side and the dubs on the other. Percy recalls, “We did not have enough songs from Jah Thomas to make a full two sides.”

As a youth, Jah Thomas was working in a garage as a bodyman but seeking a start in music. Growing up in Rosetown, where he moved at the age of eight, Thomas would hang out in a small ghetto called Backto, at Three Mile.” Each day, he and his friend Guy Beckford would ride their bicycles after work down into Backto to listen to music on the juke boxes in the little bars that lined the streets. “It was a lively place with all these juke boxes. It’s a ghetto place and I used to like [the] ghetto.”

After moving to Payneland, Thomas began following local sound Burning Spear, selected by Stanley Braveman, with deejays Dillinger, Clint Eastwood and Lee Van Cliff. “The owner was named Bones. He used to sell ganja, used to smoke chalice, drink him Dragon Stout. A lot of deejays used to come, like U Brown. But Clint Eastwood was my mentor there, cause he was the guy who take up the needle off of the record and say [to me], ‘This is how you approach a rhythm’, and from there I catch on.”

Thomas’s big break came with the hit ‘Midnight Rock’ in 1976 for Alvin Ranglin’s GG label. Ironically, it was E.T. at Joe Gibbs studio who told the youth that GG was holding an audition. Thomas recalled, “GG hear me tonight, record me tomorrow, next week, the song is on the radio. He didn’t hold back. It was an instant hit, eight weeks on the chart.” It was his first recording, the first time he had ever been inside a studio. “I’ll never forget that morning when Sly said, ‘Rolling’, and I started to do my song. It was Maxie, the engineer. When I go in the studio to voice my first song, the mic was on the mic stand, and when the music hit me, I tried to hold the mic, through I used to be in the dance and hold the mic. [Maxie said], ‘This is a studio! You can’t hold the mic. Step back and talk into the mic’. Then I come from top again, ‘This one call the Midnight Rock, so Rock on! Yea!’”

* Not to be confused with Dance On the Corner which Jah Thomas released on his Midnight Rock label in 1979

** Backto was another name for Majestic Gardens, an economically challenged area of St Andrew near Three Mile
Thomas had been waiting for the chance to show his talents. “One night I was in Backto, VJ the Dubmaster was playing the original song - ‘Back out with it, your days are numbered’, Wailing Souls*. So, VJ the Dubmaster, when he play ‘Back Out With It’, he play ‘Things and Time Will Tell’. After he played them, he played the version and this guy named Stickman was deejaying. So, when I asked him to play the rhythm for me to get a chance to talk, Stickman was avoiding me. I could feel it – I know I have a hit song. Cause when the rhythm hot me and I know what I had in me, I bus’ a flight with him to get a chance to express myself at the mic.”

As soon as ‘Midnight Rock’ came out on 45, the song was being played everywhere. “I’d be going through Backto and eight different shop with eight different jukeboxes playing my song at the same time, all the corners, all the shops, playing the song at the same time. It was such a big hit. That’s why I call my label Midnight Rock.”

A tall, self-confident, thoroughly extroverted man, Jah Thomas lived every moment of his life as if he were inside a dancehall. His deep voice carried well and commanded attention. He would break into a rhyme or throw out some impromptu lyrics. To greet a person, he was always, “glad to see your face ina the place”. When he had to leave, he announced, “Got to move – a so me improve!” Rather than relying solely on established producers for his income, Thomas started his own label, Midnight Rock, and began producing himself and other artists in 1979, starting with his first self produced release, ‘Cricket Lovely Cricket’. The rhythm he used was the same ‘Conversation’ version that Leon Symoie had sold to Junjo, the magic rhythm that supported so many hits**.

Jah Thomas continued to record sporadically, but his greatest success came from working with young artists. If all he had ever done in his life was release Tristan Palma’s ‘Entertainment’, it would have been enough to inscribe Jah Thomas in the annals of dancehall history (and it was such a big hit that was later referred to as the ‘Dancehall Anthem’*). But he did much more, releasing Michael Palmer’s ‘Ghetto Dance’, Little John’s ‘Gambling’, various 7 inch and 12 inch 45s with Sugar Minott, Al Campbell, Earl Cunningham and albums Junior Keating with Barry Brown (Showcase, 1979), among others. Although

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* The Wailings Souls recorded two classic songs on the same basic rhythm, ‘Back Out with It’ and ‘Things and Time’, both done originally for Studio One and, later, for Channel One

** Of those very first ten rhythm tracks that Jah Life bought from Junjo, at least six originally belonged to a man named Leon Symoie, whose brother, Chester, worked with Lone Ranger. Leon had already used the rhythms to produce people like Tony Tuff and Dean Stone. He was then working with Tony Murray, Barry Brown, Carlton Livingston and, of course, Chester’s good friend, Lone Ranger. The backing track for Barrington’s Collie Dread, an update of Slim Smith’s ‘Conversation’, had been voiced by Lone Ranger for one of his biggest hits, Barnabas Collins, released on Alvin Ranglin’s GG Records. As Jah Thomas expressed it, “I give [Leon] a money, but the money that I give him- the rhythm is bigger than the money I give him. ‘On my way up to Maverly’- ‘Collie Weed’, Barrington Levy’s first set. That was the first song that people start recognize him. Cause it mash up the place”
his biggest hit was with a singer, Jah Thomas' years of dancehall exposure gave him a special knack for working with deejays. Thomas had the ear to pick a solid old standard to refurbish, and a feel for what the fans would react to. This first-hand experience helped him produce hits like Peter Metro’s ‘Seven Heroes’ and ‘Calypso Calypso’ (with Zuzu), Buro Banton’s ‘MC Peggy’ and some of Early B’s strongest material including ‘Sunday Dish’, ‘Wheely Wheely’, ‘Ghost Busters’, ‘Call the Doctor for Me’, ‘History of Jamaica’ and ‘Learn fe Drive’.

But it was his work with Tristan Palma that has had the most lasting response. Thomas released a total of four LPs with Tristan in the early eighties, each one containing major hits. *Entertainment* and *Joker Smoker*, LP title tracks, were huge successes, and the LP, *Showcase*, contained two more sound system favorites, ‘Miserable Woman’ and ‘Runaround Woman’. The forth LP, *Touch Me, Take Me*, had ‘Reggae Music Taking Over’.

Currently, his son Orville Thomas is carrying on the tradition as Da’Ville, a multi award winning reggae entertainer, but as a singer, not a deejay.

* ‘Runaround Woman’ was voiced over still another version of the ‘Shank I Shek’ rhythm, the same rhythm that formed the base for ‘Entertainment’. Thomas later admitted it was his favorite rhythm.
The Roots Radics

“They used to be the hottest session musicians during the ‘80s. You know, they had a real nice groove together and everybody was just loving it.”

DRUMMER AND DEEJAY BARNABAS

“After I get those rhythm from Junjo now, him say me and him can do some business together. That’s when the Roots Radics come in,” Jah Life remembers. Once they had finished working with the rhythms Junjo already had, the partners had to start building some new backing tracks at Channel One Studio.

Throughout the later ‘70s, drummer Sly Dunbar and bass player Robbie Shakespeare had held court as the studio’s house band, The Revolutionaries. But Sly and Robbie weren’t available to do session work anymore. The two had long held the dream of starting their own production company. So, they embarked on a heroic schedule of touring, first with Peter Tosh, a tour that covered Europe, North America and the Caribbean, and later with Jimmy Cliff, The Mighty Diamonds and Black Uhuru. In addition, by 1980, they were under contract to Chris Blackwell to work at Compass Point Studios in the Bahamas to lay down tracks for various Island Records artists. Blackwell envisioned creating for reggae, with his own label, the same type of “session factory” as STAX and Motown had done earlier. Sly & Robbie would be the foundation. The hard work paid off and they were able to start their very successful Taxi label. As part of the arrangement, Blackwell agreed to handle Sly and Robbie’s Taxi productions abroad. Island’s Mango subsidiary began handling the overseas pressing and distribution of Taxi, helping making an international star out of Ini Kamouze and furthering the already established career of Black Uhuru.

As the duo was still working for the studio while producing material for themselves, their relationship with Jojo Hookim began to become strained. Although Sly and Robbie were often working with leftover session tracks and using whatever free studio time they could earn through session work, Jojo worried that they would be holding back their best material for themselves. So, he was happy to welcome in a new group of session men. Credited on record labels at the time as The Channel One All Stars, they included, at various times, Flabba Holt on bass, Santa on drums, Bingi Bunny or Bo Peep on rhythm guitar, Chinna Smith or Noel ‘Sowell’ Bailey on lead guitar, Gladdy
Anderson or Ansell Collins on keyboards. They were joined by horn players Headley Bennett on Sax, Val Bennett on sax and Bobby Ellis on Trumpet. Percussion was by Bongo Herman, Sky Juice and Skully Zenda. Sky Juice was fresh from the dancehall having been a selector on the Channel One sound. Having three people available for percussion added a variety and depth to their early sound that wasn’t always sustained during the years to follow.

Jah Life and Junjo brought Barrington Levy to Channel One and began recording rhythms tracks. At some point, Jah Life sent someone to go and buy some old Studio One and Treasure Isle albums so that the band could work out new arrangements of the Rock Steady classics. After the tracks were laid, Junjo and Jah Life took Barrington to King Tubby’s to do the voicing.

When the Barrington songs began to penetrate the music markets, this group of loosely affiliated musicians became the most active session men in Jamaica. The eclectic influences provided by the various musicians that made up The Roots Radics, as they came to be called, gelled into a sound that was fresh and different, something a little lighter, more buoyant than the heavy rockers of the ’70s. However, what really distinguished the Radics sound from the music of the ‘70s was the beat. The Radics had gone back to pure one-drop style in which one beat is left out of each bar creating that swooping feel, a sensation of falling and rising in quick succession, that ‘dip’. The new sound was a throwback to the days of Rock Steady with the rhythm guitar line, once again, duplicating the bass line.

Yet, it wasn’t exactly rock steady all over again. The style that the Channel One All Stars session band came up with for the Barrington tracks still had links to the old ‘70s sound – like the reverb and the deep layers of percussion. But the mix and the tempo were heading in a new direction leading, eventually, to a sound which was far sparser, more stripped down, with less percussion.

Harmonica player Jimmy Becker, who played on many of the Radics sessions in the ‘80s, called it the ‘minimalist’ sound, as the horns section was dropped in favor of keyboards. “A lot of the Junjo [Lawes] stuff didn’t even have horns on it. And horns in reggae is a trademark sound. I think a lot of it was possibly finances. If you hear a lot of that stuff, if they are playing a Studio One rhythm, and say the Studio One rhythm had horns on it, you would hear the guitar player or the keyboard player playing the horn line.”

A quick thinking Junjo once claimed that he was making “economy” rhythms for the people by not adding all the expensive extras but, in reality, that was just the style. The Radics created slower rhythms with far more empty space – lots of room for the bass and drums to spring forth with maximum impact.

The Radics rhythms, like many new trends, started with a little borrowing from the past. Sly and Robbie can be heard moving in a new direction in some of their work from around this time. “If you listen to a song like Baltimore,” Jimmy Becker explains, “that’s in that slower groove.” Sly was experimenting with different beats, changing the pace on certain tracks, many of which were
Gregory Isaacs was among that early group of artists who bucked the system by starting their own labels. Way back in 1973, working with Singer Errol Dunkley, Gregory opened African Museum, a record store, in downtown Kingston and began producing himself and others. He continued to record for other producers while putting the revenue back into his own work. Unlike many others who have tried the same thing, Gregory succeeded. He was signed to the UK company Virgin’s Frontline label who released albums for him containing the 45s he had put out independently on his African Museum label. He became one of best known reggae singers abroad and he was in demand for shows all around the world.

The original lineup of the Radics was formed to support the hugely successful Gregory Isaacs on tour when Sly and Robbie got too busy. The Riddim Twins were booked up in the Nassau Compass Point Studio where they were working for Island records backing such rock luminaries as Grace Jones and Joe Cocker. When the Radics began backing him, Gregory was about to tour with a lineup of songs he had developed with Sly and Robbie, who had played on his most recent albums, Cool Ruler and Soon Forward. A quick listen to both LPs reveals that the music was already changing. Songs like ‘Our Relationship’, ‘Jah Music’ and ‘Mr. Brown’ have an entirely different feel to them. These songs feature rolling bass lines with a dip and a gentle sway. The Radics brought this sensibility into Channel One Studio and began working with Junjo Lawes to make some of the biggest this of the decade.

**THE BASS: FLABBA HOLT**

“The bass that I got is an old time Fender Jazz bass, and it’s one of the wick- edest sound in the world. Bass guitar is the thing whe’ carry off music. Drum sound is a very important thing, but the bass line, trust me, if you listen to a sound and if you don’t hear the bass, that heaviness in the sound, it’s like it ain’t got no taste. The bass line is the leader for everything. If you listen all them Studio One, it’s the bass that carry off the song.”

Errol ‘Flabba’ Holt started out in music as a dancer. “I was one of the best dancers, me and Johnny Osbourne. I used to go on Vere John Opportunity Hour and I came first. I was one of Jamaica best ‘legs man’. Nobody coulda dance like me.”

Flabba had begun experimenting when a friend of his handed him a bass guitar one day and suggested he try it. He was surprised by the feel of it and said to himself, “It’s coming like singing. It look easy but it hard.” (Flabba was also singing at the time, as he continued to do, however infrequently, throughout his career.) The bass appealed to him and Errol left the dancing and the singing for a time, and dedicated himself to learning to play.

Hanging out at Chancery Lane, a.k.a. ‘Idlers Rest’, Flabba met Eric ‘Bingi Bunny’ Lamont who became the rhythm guitar player for the Radics. At the time Bingi Bunny was working with Blacka Morwell. The Morwells, the
group founded by Maurice “Blacka” Wellington in 1973, released a series of 45s and a handful of albums in the ‘70s with Bingi Bunny on guitar and singing lead. Songs like ‘Crab Race’ and ‘Kingston 12 Toughie’ were deservedly popular. But Bingi Bunny felt the group was Blacka’s thing and wanted more artistic control, so he started doing his own productions, releasing, first, an album featuring singer Peter Broggs, aka Progressive Youth in 1979, followed by one of his own, Me and Jane (Cha Cha 1982). Through his friendship with Bingi Bunny, Flabba became a sort of ‘associate member’ of The Morwells, sometimes playing with them or singing harmony.

During this time, Flabba also worked with producer Alvin Ranglin, of GG’s Records, singing harmony and managing production in the studio. That’s how he began a long association with Gregory Isaacs, singing back up on songs like ‘Number One’, ‘Front Door’, and ‘What a Feeling’. The association continued with Flabba working with Gregory on the production of the Night Nurse LP in 1982.

From his success with Night Nurse, Flabba continued producing, along with his friend Leggo Beast (Trevor Douglas) who opened a studio in the ‘90s on Orange St, former home of Cash & Carry Records. Together they released albums with Dennis Brown and Israel Vibration. He also worked with a little-known deejay named Chuckleberry, an album for RAS Records called Cost of Living, and went on to work closely with the professional and popular Beres Hammond. Sadly, Bingi Bunny passed away in 1993, from prostate cancer.

**Drums: Style Scott and Santa**

Santa Davis, who played on the early Barrington Levy releases and stayed with the band until 1981, hadn’t planned on a career in music. “At first, I wanted to be in the police force. Then one night I saw two cops got shot. That was the end of that. That was at a young age. I was hanging out with little kids, like myself, who wasn’t really doing right. So, I said to myself. I need to make a difference [meaning “to change”]. And, at 11 years old, I went and joined the drum corp. And that’s where I actually started.”

After learning strict discipline with the Catholic Church affiliated drum corps, for which he is still grateful, Santa decided to dedicate himself full time to music. So, he joined a band called The Graduates. The leader of the band, an alto sax player, had been living in the U.S.. “He kind of put me in mind of a kind of [John] Coltrane type because he used to like a lot of jazzy kind of stuff. He had a record shop and he used to play a lot of jazz and I used to hear that. So, I kind of came into business at a time when you used to hear a lot of foreign music, a lot of jazz, a lot of blues. The whole works.”

The complexity of the music he was hearing appealed to Santa. The second band he joined was also run by a jazz fan. “He kinda got me more into it, cause he said, ‘Look you got to listen to these kinda songs’. Then he got me listening to time signature. We play four/four, but then you have jazz which has different time signatures seven/four, five/eight. So, I started to listen to
these kinds of polyrhythms - mainly a lot of African music. Even today, I play a lot of those kinds of styles. I listened to Middle Eastern music, classical music – no holds barred – I listen to every genre of music that I can lay my hands on. So, I think I was influenced by listening to all those different types of music. And I say, ‘OK. I can fuse that into reggae, make my style in reggae be different’.”

Santa, with his endless sources of inspiration, was so creative that he never played the same pattern twice. He was always looking for a way to improvise. “While I’m playing, even in the act of playing, I’m thinking about something, trying to re-invent. Like – God bless his soul – Joe Higgs, he looked at me one day - he looked at me real serious - and said, ‘You see, you nah have no discipline, you know’, and I was like ‘Woa!’ I thought I was doing something bad. And he looked at me and said, ‘You don’t have any discipline.’ And I said, ‘A how you mean me nah have no discipline?’ He said ‘You nah have no discipline. But that’s what makes you so good!’”

In 1981, Santa become Peter Tosh’s touring drummer and Lincoln Valentine ‘Style’ Scott stepped in. Style, who had also been in the military drum corps, was fresh off a tour with Prince Far I around England. Overseas, he ended up playing with a little group called Creation Rebel. He never actually lived there, but commuted to his gigs abroad. Scott recalls, “Eventually Prince Far said, ‘Bwoy, you got to stop that and cool out and stay in Jamaica and build that name’. And then I find, really, it was a good idea”. So Style joined the Radics and remained in Jamaica.

Style was also influenced by a little known Jamaican drummer, Wayne Anton, aka Money Man, who “specialized in funky. I used to listen to him and watch him from the time I was small.”

Style Scott didn’t have any of Santa’s little flourishes. He was pretty straight ahead, maintaining a regular, metronomic beat right through. “Style just played slower,” recalls Jimmy Becker, who played with the Radics on several sessions. “He didn’t throw in any of the little nuances that Sly would throw in. And at times, I think it [Style’s way of playing] was a little harder. The Radics slowed the groove down.”

**GUITAR: DWIGHT PINKNEY**

Guitar player, Dwight Pinkney joined following Style Scott and replaced current lead guitar Sowell who had gone to England, fallen in love with the place, and stayed. Starting out in the ’60s, with the group, The Sharks who were recording for Coxson Dodd, Dwight wrote a “little song” named ‘How Can I Live’, which the group recorded in 1967 featuring Dwight strumming a flamenco style on his guitar. The song was such a massive hit that it continued to be done over many times by singers through the years, including Dennis Brown who made a hit out of it for Joe Gibbs in 1978 as ‘How Can I Leave’. The Sharks also worked as a session band at Studio One.

Dwight’s next move was to join the band, Zap Pow. Zap Pow, formed in
1970, was a very experimental jazz-reggae band that started out with David Madden on trumpet, Mike Williams on bass, and Dwight Pinkney on guitar. Many of Jamaica’s top musicians passed through Zap Pow over the next couple of decades. The unit played stage shows and did session work but never scored well in popular recordings. Known for their professionalism and originality, the individual musicians were in demand for studio work. There is a collection of their early work available on Rhino records.

Coming from his days as a student of The Jamaica School of Music, Dwight Pinkney saw the Radics style as being ‘rough and ready’, but with the sharp edges smoothed down. “The people who were producing at that time were simple people. Like Junjo. What I brought to the Radics was a little formalization of the basic, ‘people’ sound. In other words, instead of playing just a one chord or a two chord behind a creation of work, I was able to contribute in terms of getting some expansion to the arrangement.”

Dwight felt that, with his musical education and formal training, he could lift that music up a little higher by seeing that it was properly arranged and properly recorded. He still wanted the music to remain simple enough to be accessible, “so that [the music] always was roots, [and] still have that integrity” and still reach a larger, more sophisticated audience abroad.

“Instead of playing a progression with 12 chords in a song, we simplified it. What we tried to do is to make music as simple as possible but a driving force, [so] that the people in the dancehall could relate to it easily, people who are not musically trained could also relate to it easily. That’s what really create the popularity of it, that it was easy going down. You could hear a song one time and sing along the bass line. And the drums – the drum was basic, you know. Sometimes less is more - and that was one of our formula. The Roots Radics was five musicians, apart from adding horns (for those sessions that required them). There was not a lot of instrumentation coming in. What we did was maximizing - from the recording stage - maximizing the few instruments that we used. We got the most out of it.”

Santa still laments the loss of percussion in so much modern music, something the Radics had in the beginning, but began to fade as the ‘80s progressed. “A lot of people don’t realize how important it is to have these things in the music. [But], it’s like when you’re cooking, you use some black pepper and you use some red pepper and you might use some garlic powder. We call it seasoning. Percussion was the seasoning. It was important because, when I used to work with percussion players back in the days, with Skully, Sticky, Sky Juice - that used to influence [me].

“We used to play off each other. So, a lot of the beat and the stickiness that you hear, and the vibe, was coming because the percussion player plays something and you answer him or you play something and the percussion player answer you. Everything was bouncing off of each other. The bass player play a certain thing or the singer sing something and you interact with what him say.”
Finally, with the addition of keyboard player Steely Johnson from the group Generation Gap and the Black Roots players, the official Roots Radics line up was complete. The Radics were bubbling. As Dwight Pinckney said at the time, “Whatever we play on record, it makes the record a seller you know. That’s why we get so many sessions. Because the artists know... they have a big advantage using The Radics.” Bingi Bunny agreed, “Right now, every producer saves his session money until we come back [from touring] and can play for him. There are other musicians, but producers need the Radics sound for a hit record.”

The pull of the new band was so great that it managed to capture dedicated rootsman Bunny Wailer, perhaps the last person one would have expected to see hopping on the dancehall bandwagon.

Quite apart from being a devout Rasta, Bunny Wailer was a canny businessman and he immediately saw that the rules of the game had changed. In 1981, Bunny Wailer crossed the line into dancehall territory with his breakthrough LP, *Rock and Groove*. Instead of “Can’t kill the Rastaman”, he was now watching the “rootsman skanking all night long” to the “top ranking” sound with his new album, backed by the Roots Radics

Rope in ... cause this ya session is vital  
Cause it's a cool runnings, and now dancehall a go nice  
Cool runnings, this ya rhythm a go drip like sugar and spice  
Cool runnings, rock with your deejay all night long  
Cool runnings, while the disc jockey plays your favorite song  
- Cool Runnings, Rock and Groove LP, Solomonic ‘81

“Getting current- that was his idea,” Guitarist Dwight Pinkney commented. “At that time, recording with the Radics, he would have a 99% chance of having a hit song. We just work in collaboration. Not that he came into the studio and said, ‘Alright, Radics, give me a dancehall tune’. He had his own ideas how he wanted things to sound, but he knew that, through us, he would get exactly what he wanted – contemporary, at that time, with the dancehall. That is how it work. He gave us his ideas and we just converted it [into a dancehall format].” The album, although quite a departure for the former ‘Blackheart Man’, was a huge success, and hearing an established artist like Wailer anointing the Radics riddims was another significant milestone towards the acceptance of the burgeoning dancehall sound.
Due to the fact that King Tubby had all but given up engineering music, Scientist, his young apprentice, was conscripted for the job of mixing Junjo and Jah Life’s early material. It was the very beginning of his illustrious career in dub as a mixing engineer. When Junjo and Life came along, Scientist had been just a local kid interested in how electronics worked, Tubby’s helper and student who was learning to take things apart and rearrange them to make them function again.

Like his mentor, Scientist used to tinker with electronics. Even before he met the King, Scientist was experimenting with sound amplification. “Before I was an electronic engineer, as a kid I was learning to build amplifiers. When I built my amplifier, as soon as I play reggae music – like a King Tubby mix – my perfectly working amplifier would stop working. All other music would come through. I thought something was strange, so I wanted to meet Tubbys. A friend that I have made the grill that you see outside Tubby’s house. So he said, ‘Hey, let me take you around there’. It was the happiest day of my life.”

For Scientist, a kid, with an obsessive interest in producing sound, meeting the King was a huge honor. “Me and Tubby became kinda like buddies.” Tubby began allowing him to come around and repair TVs and other electronic equipment. But Scientist had his eyes on the board. He kept begging Tubby to let him into the mixing room. “And Tubbys would say, ‘Nah, you can’t mix. It took Jammys years to learn that. It’s too hard’.” But Scientist never stopped asking.

Then, one day in 1979, Junjo came to King Tubby’s studio in Waterhouse with Barrington Levy and Jah Life. Junjo had the rhythms he got from producer Leon Symoie, including a recent re-cut of The Unique’s ‘My Conversation’. Scientist was in the studio.

“At that time, [producer Prince] Jammy was the primary engineer. Tubby never usually wanted to work and I wondered why he don’t want to mix. He only want to repair the equipment. And he would always send the producer to get Jammys. At that time Jammys was trying to build his studio. So, trying to get him to come up to Tubbys, it was very hard a lot of times.

‘Junjo was there to record Barrington Levy. So, he try to get Jammy, but Jammy say he don’t want to do it. So, Junjo, he say, ‘Overton’, and Tubby say, ‘No, he’s just a kid’. And like it’s Junjo’s only opportunity to get this rhythm from Leon, the one that Barrington Levy did, ‘On my way to Marveley…’

Scientist & the Greensleeves Dub Albums

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So, he had no choice but to let me do it. So Tubby, very reluctantly, let me do it. Damn record went to number one!"

“That really put Scientist on top,” Percy Chin, Jah Life’s business partner, reminisces. “He had his own style. Because, usually people mix from top to bottom [i.e. high-end first, bottom-end second], he mix like bottom to top. They say that’s not the way to do it. People might mix the bass first and then the drum, He would mix, like, the percussion first – from the top and go down to the bass, the last thing he mix in. He had a kind of different technique that we like.” Mixing from the top down, and focusing on the highs, Scientist brought the percussion to the front, giving it a bright, clear sound that added a fine layer of texture to the mix.

The ‘unique’ alternative mixing technique caused friction with his boss. “Tubby used to come out and argue with Scientist”, Jah Life remembers, “saying he’s playing the board back ways – something like that. That’s why I always tell people Scientist was one of the greatest engineer. His mixes come out and kick up a storm. It changed everything. Even the instrumentals sound like somebody singing. And it complements the artist too. That’s what help make Barrington.”

After the singing and the deejay versions of the rhythms hit the street, Greensleeves, in charge of Junjo and Jah Life’s products overseas, wanted an album of the dub versions. Taking advantage of the interest in the new Roots Radics ‘versions’, and the innovative mixes Scientist was providing, Greensleeves released *The Big Showdown* which pitted long time heavyweight engineer Prince Jammy, against newcomer Scientist in a mixing contest. The whole idea was basically a gimmick aimed at the foreign market. Dub albums weren’t a big seller in Jamaica. It was more of a foreign taste. “Our idea was to try and make it a bit of fun,” Greensleeves founder Chris Sedgwick recalls.

Tony McDermott, Greensleeves graphic artist, remembers, “The notion of clashes had been around forever- sound clashes, deejay clashes… So, Greensleeves got presented with an album jammy v. Scientist. And if something is a clash, how can you present it, in what context can they clash? Somebody said, ‘Boxing match – heavyweight showdown. Let’s make it a boxing theme’. So, I came back with a drawing, they said, ‘That really works. We like that’.” The album cover featured a sketch of a boxing ring with each engineer in his corner, the referee in a red, green and gold tam and a girl holding up a sign reading ‘round one’.

For this new dub ‘showdown’, the MC was Jah Thomas. Greensleeves overdubbed his vocals announcing each round as the rhythm tracks played, allowing each ‘contestant’ to show his special talents at the controls. Guess what? The follow up LP conveniently, proclaimed Scientist to be the winner, the new

*The idea of a mixing showdown was a natural extension of the sound system clash, another example of the dancehall entering into the studio recording process

**Scientist v Prince Jammy, Big Showdown, Jah Guidance/ Greensleeves, 1980
‘Heavyweight Champion’. Now Junjo and Greensleeves had the services of a ‘heavyweight champion’, not just an apprentice from Tubby’s. It was a brilliant marketing move. Now, every album of Junjo’s material that Greensleeves released could be presented as another chapter in the saga of Scientist against various forces of evil. Greensleeves opened the floodgates and out came an avalanche of theme dub releases, all mixed by Scientist, including *Scientist Meets the Space Invaders* (1981), *Scientist Rids the World of the Curse of the Evil Vampires* (1981), *Scientist Wins the World Cup* (1982) and so on, ad infinitum.

“We would sit in the office and say, ‘What’s happening in the world, what are the latest crazes?’ The Space Invaders’ - I don’t think Jamaicans had seen a Space Invaders machine when we came out with that album. They had just arrived in the UK and that’s just how things worked. The World Football Cup was coming around - let’s make it a world cup theme. Sometimes messages would go back to Jamaica [to Scientist], ‘It would suit the theme if you put these sound effects in it’. Some of the space effects, the boxing effects were added over here in the UK anyway.”

The cover art succeeded in altering the context of the music so successfully that dub (as it was made in the ‘70s and early ‘80s) eventually faded away from the Jamaican scene and morphed abroad into several new European/North American forms like ‘drum and bass’ and ‘dubstep’. The comic book images of Scientist as a muscle bound superhero battling strictly non – Jamaican villains such as Frankenstein and Dracula, helped ease the music into the hands of a fresh, open minded generation of record buyers who were experimenting with new sounds.

The early Scientist dub releases proved so popular abroad that the name Scientist came to be a guarantee of sales. The Greensleeves label had become an instantly recognizable stamp of approval for new Jamaican music coming into the market overseas and Scientist had the requisite ‘battle scars’ to now be crowned as the top engineer working in King Tubby’s studio.

**GREENSLEEVESS**

Greensleeves was fast taking over the market as a new generation of reggae fans abroad began purchasing records. Having linked up first with Junjo, and later with the top producers of the decade including George Phang, Jammy and Gussie Clarke, Greensleeves enjoyed the position of ‘label of choice’ for discriminating dancehall fans in the UK and North America throughout the 1980s, and, as such, had a big part in defining what comprised the growing genre.

Previously, fans aboard had relied mainly on Trojan, Virgin and Island. But Greensleeves was different. “In the sense that Island was trying to reach into the bigger rock market, adding guitars and stuff to Bob Marley albums, we were just putting out the raw music, at street level, not trying to doctor it

* Space Invaders was a new electronic arcade game
in anyway,” Explains Chris Sedgwick, one of the founders.

The first album that Greensleeves released was the classic 1978 deejay LP, Dr Alimontado’s *Best Dressed Chicken in Town*, featuring a cover shot of ‘Tado’, in his ragged cut offs, on a Kingston street, passing what appears to be a soul boy in his ‘bell foot’ pants, and carrying a chicken wrapped in newspaper. The vinyl inside was pure hardcore reggae, a collection of Dr. Alimontado’s self produced 45s spanning the decade.

The music was good, solid roots reggae, but the cover was truly inspired. The record sold successfully to a new crowd, a young, under-twenty-five group of record buyers who were mainly purchasing punk records. For many future dancehall fans, Greensleeves was their first introduction to real yard style reggae.

The older, long time reggae fans already got their music on ‘pre-release’, imported from Jamaica. But a new generation of teenagers, both black and white, was growing up in England, looking for something new and rebellious to make their own. Dancehall was a good fit. “It was music their parents wouldn’t like, it was anti establishment, it was anti police, it was pro ganja. It had all the right ingredients,” recalls Tony McDermott. For all the people who weren’t buying the 45s straight of the boat, Greensleeves came to represent the true sound of Jamaica, albeit packaged in a format that anyone abroad would be comfortable with.

With interesting, professionally designed covers, combined with authentic music, Greensleeves quickly gained the trust of record purchasers. The Barrington material just blew it wide open. Because, along with Barrington came the whole package, Scientist, Junjo, Channel One, and the Roots Radics. And Greensleeves practically had a monopoly on them at first. Knowing they had struck gold, Greensleeves stuck closely to Junjo and Jah Life, continuing to release their material as fast as they could produce it. Over the next couple of years, Greensleeves put out the Toyan LP, *How the West Was Won*, The Wailing Souls’, *Firehouse Rock*, along with work from Michael Prophet, Wayne Jarrett, Eakamouse, Johnny Osbourne, Yellowman and many more, building up a catalogue that tracked the developments in reggae over the next three decades.
Slackness

The media, along with those within “proper society” who felt they had the right to dictate what were acceptable social standards, didn’t take long to start attacking the new ‘dancehall’ style music. In a barrage of invective that lasted the entire decade, the press, the police, the government and all the upper echelons of society proclaimed that the music and lyrics were pandering to the lowest common denominator and compromising Jamaica’s image abroad. The venues were patronized by gangsters, they complained, and that the lyrics encouraged public lewdness, drug consumption, violence and crime.

It is interesting to note that not a single one of these complaints was new to reggae music or exclusive to dancehall. Rastafarians had been totally open about promoting ganja use for years (as had Bob Marley) through their music. Mento music was rife with sexual references and innuendo. Rock Steady and Reggae often celebrated Rude Boys and their lifestyle.

Just as ‘the establishment’, from the press to the police, had fought Rastafarianism, it now honed its sites on dancehall. And as with these earlier instances, the typical response was to resist change and blame music for society’s shortcomings. And dancehall, with its strong ties to ghetto culture, seemed every bit as threatening to middle-class morals as Rastafarianism had a generation ago.

By the ‘80s, Bob Marley had done much to promote the image of Rastafarians in both Jamaica and abroad. Having been cleansed of his revolutionary image, Bob was elevated to the level of Jamaican National Hero, and wearing dreadlocks had become more a fashion statement than a political, social or religious statement. Now that Rastas were no longer seen as crazed murderers or members of a revolutionary army, the government and media began to view them as something benign enough to start including their images in tourist campaigns. Whereas, in the ‘70s, grandmothers used to tell their grandchildren to stay away from the ‘Blackheart man’, she was now more likely to threaten kids with a good hiding for repeating slack lyrics.

When Bob Marley passed away, people in society even grew nostalgic for the dreadlocks era, and were ready to forgive Rastamen all the sins previously imputed to them. Anything to keep the new threat of dancehall at bay. Articles in the Jamaican Gleaner warned of the calamity to befall Jamaica because of this new form of music anarchism:

“Dancehall as a way of life emphasizes the unproductive elements in society. It does not contribute to the development of human capital and, like the posses, is a challenge to our social order since it threatens to grow beyond the
narrow confines of entertainment and become an alternative to what we know as our criteria for progress. If not channeled, dancehall will create a class of people which is incapable of doing anything productive."

Mutabaruka, Rastafarian dub poet, ranted, “Don’t you know that in America is mostly white people buy reggae music? Yes, and whenever white people hear about ‘punani’ business them get turn off …”" Ironically, it turned out not to be the cultural music, but the ‘gansta’ identification and lewd rapping that eventually brought Jamaican music to the North American pop market in the ‘90s.

Now that Bob Marley had made reggae music a major tourist draw, people feared that dancehall would spoil Jamaica’s newly acquired status as a ‘cool’ country to visit. And the aspect of dancehall that worried them the most was ‘slackness’, the new vogue of using bawdy lyrics and sexually explicit themes.

What the critics failed to understand was that the changeover to slackness was a move away from revolution and represented a new-found feeling of comfort and luxury. At last people were able to let their guard down and go to parties, drink and dance and relax. As Floyd George points out, “Two or three years ago we were dealing with such moral issues as the imprisonment of masses of people under the rules of a questionable State of Emergency. The newspapers and the electronic media, the bar-room gossip and verandah talk were about the slimy sequences of the ‘Spy’ Robinson story; the great Gunpowder Plot that never was; the clandestine importation of ‘boolets’; the Gold Street Massacre; The Green Bay Slaughter, The Orange Street and Eventide Fires; the Migration of ex-Ministers; the confusion of the Church and so on and so forth. Those were the days and the issues that seem so easily forgotten now.”" The fact that those issues were forgotten meant that people wanted to forget them and move on with their lives. And that included going to dances, finding a partner, having a warm Guinness and maybe looking for a little romance.

An album, released in 1984 on Arrival, summed up the division in Jamaican popular music at the time. Slackness V. Culture featured Yellowman, on the ‘slackness’ side, clashing with Charlie Chaplin, standing strong for ‘culture’. The dancehall audience was similarly divided – some people frequented the sounds that carried the slack deejays while others went to the few roots and culture sounds. In the early ‘80s, slackness was clearly in the lead.

Despite the perceptions of those warning about this ‘new’ form of music, the practice of singing lewd songs didn’t start with dancehall. According to Frankie Campbell, leader of the Fab Five, “Slackness as a style was nothing new to Jamaica. There is no music slacker than Mento which was already, at the time, over 100 years old as a music form.” Popular songs containing sug-* Is dancehall a creative force? The Daily Gleaner, Tuesday, November 29, 1988
** Punani- Female genitalia, quote from Sports ‘N’ Arts, September 11-25, 1987 p.16
*** August 12, 1982, Songs of the Times, Jamaica Gleaner
gestive lyrics were nothing new in Jamaica, or in the folk music of most countries. Calypso, Mento and other earlier forms of West Indian music contained steady diet of innuendo. So did Ska and Rock Steady - songs like Jackie Opal’s ‘Push Wood’, The Starlight’s ‘Soldering’, Lord Creator’s ‘Big Bamboo’, Phyllis Dillon’s ‘Don’t Touch Me Tomato’, Prince Buster’s ‘Wreck a Pum Pum’ (and the answer, The Soul Sister’s ‘Wreck a Buddy’), or Dawn Love’s ‘Watering’.

By the 1980s, Mento and its cousin calypso were seen as innocuous and archaic folk musics, something harmless to play for tourists. But in 1956 there was a Parliamentary inquiry looking into banning ‘calypsos’ with offensive lyrics, songs like ‘Rough Rider’, ‘Big Boy And Teacher’, ‘Red Tomato’, and the infamous ‘Night Food’.

The term ‘sexually explicit’, of course, is relative. “[Slackness] was always around but people used to use it like more poetic, more suggestive,” Observes deejay Lord Sassafrass. “Like [calypsonian] Sparrow for instance. He would be singing about ‘Salt fish, nothing no nice like salt fish’. So, more or less, everybody presume what he is talking about. So, it was always around, but it was never so explicit. Now, it became explicit. People actually saying out the words. Instead of making suggestions about the thing, they actually call the name.”

With more churches per capita than any other country in the world, Jamaica remained a very conservative, Christian society. It didn’t take much to get a song banned for lewdness. Deejay Dennis Alcapone comments, “I remember one of the songs banned on the radio station was a Heptones song called ‘Fat-tie Fattie’. All they was singing was, ‘I need a fat girl tonight,’ and that was taboo, that was outlawed. Compared to what these [modern] guys was doing!”

Critics in the ‘80s failed to recognize that slackness actually represented a return to a more politically and socially conservative set of values. Slackness was not about changing government structures or advancing human rights. Slackness, as enunciated in the dancehalls, adhered to a very traditional interpretation of sexuality. Sex was something that happened between men and women in very standardized ways. The purpose, and outcome, of sex was still seen as procreation, and the lyrics reflected that.

Put it n dry, the gal start cry
Take it out wet the gal start fret
Next thing she know, a pickney she a get

-Ringo

Rice and peas and Ackee
Papa Echo skin him cockie

And he push in a young gal gravy
And out come a bal’head baby
- General Echo

Overall, slackness actually supported the main values of the society and really did not offer any concrete challenges. Despite the inherent conservatism of the trend, those in positions of influence in society continued not only to condemn the practice but to go about doing so in an often arrogant and condescending manner. Andre Fanon, writing in The Gleaner, articulated the popular view that, “[W]hen one attends a session…products of uninhibited imaginations, are poured through the speaker boxes. Of course, ‘slackness’ appeals to our baser instincts which are aroused by our consumption of Red Stripe beer, Stout, and Heineken.”*

Part of the rawness of many professional and middle class Jamaicans’ revulsion to slackness, and dancehall in general, was because, deep inside, Jamaica remained a society with a strong undercurrent of both racism and classism. To those in the middle, with their gaze pointed upwards, slackness was embarrassing and threatened, somehow, to make their goal of ascension harder to achieve. The coarse lyrics and loose behavior reminded them that not everyone shared their values. Slackness exposed an underbelly of society that many preferred to deny. That these people in the sessions were expressing their needs in such a frank and direct way, made social and class aspirants very uncomfortable. (And, although slackness didn’t have an overt political agenda, this result wasn’t really that far from the aims of the Rastafarians). As David Kingston explains, “Good social commentary should make certain segments of society squirm.” But nobody in the dancehall really cared. The party was just getting underway.

After bubbling underground in the dancehall for years, slackness suddenly leapt forward in the late ’70s to become the most popular drawing card in the session, the required style for a rising deejay who wanted to attract attention. While the peace treaty had been in effect, deejays had begun to hear slackness in session in other neighborhoods and began to bring it back to their individual communities. By 1980, deejays who couldn’t contribute their own little slack talk got left behind.

The king for slackness at the time was the legendary General Echo, aka Ranking Slackness. A humble man with a wicked sense of humor, General Echo (Earl Robinson) was born in 1955 and grew up on Maiden Lane, Kingston, Jamaica. An only child, he was doted on by his mother after his father died leaving the two of them alone. Although she was a devout Christian, (”a real church going woman”, according to Sister Nancy), who toiled long and hard to support her son, Echo’s mother never interfered with his musical career. And, he in turn, always lived with her and supported her with his earnings. Echo’s mother also wisely stayed out of the way when Echo was practicing on his little component set around the back of the house. Out of deference, Echo used to keep the sound turned low while he rehearsed.

In 1975, Echo was just starting out. He ran a little sound system of his own, Echotone Hifi, playing mainly soul records. But when he heard Ranking Joe deejaying his slackness, Echo was moved to take up talking.

The various peace treaties freed the people in Kingston to travel out of their own districts to dances and allowed the slackness style to spread. Deejay Sassafrass recalls, “That was when things really open up. Because, previous to that, you couldn’t move around, leave from one area to another to another. So, that really opened it up and that’s when Echo really get to shine now. Cause he could go places, both in Laborite area and Socialist area. So, he was really in demand – on both sides.”

Deejay Welton Irie agreed, “In 1978, when all the warring political gangs made peace, that’s when dancehall exploded, ’cause everybody could go anywhere. People, who normally couldn’t go somewhere, could go. So, the crowd was big, thick! Echotone now was a very small sound and the dances would be so packed you could hardly hear the sound – they would be blocking it.”

Because of his wide appeal, Echo began to come under pressure from local bosses. Typically, political meetings were wrapped up with a dance running
late into the night. If your sound was invited to play, you could hardly refuse, and Echo was frequently expected to perform at party functions in his neighborhood.

“Echo had no political aspirations, one way or another,” Echo’s producer, Manzie, recalled. “He never cared whether it was PNP or JLP. But he lived in a JLP area so he was branded. So, that’s what caused that ‘tug-and-war’ now. It was all good during peace time. But the peace thing start breaking down now.”

To avoid pressure to go along with either side, in 1978 Echo gave up self employment and left Echotone to work, for a short time, on Ray Symbolic with Ranking Joe. It was easier to let someone else navigate the minefield of booking and managing the sound, allowing Echo to focus on what he did best, which was performing. From there, he joined the sound he is most famous for, Stereophonic.

When Echo came on board, Stereophonic was already a popular, competitive sound with deejay Welton Irie, singer Maddo and selector Fluxy. Stereophonic was, “A much bigger sound than his own. But they never really have a ‘star,’” Manzie remembers. “So, when he jump to that now, it was like, OK – the best deejay in the dancehall on a big sound now. Stereophonic just take off!”

In the beginning, Stereophonic sound was called Sir John’s, after the owner Leon John, aka Big John, and it’s headquarters was at 30 Windward Road, Kingston two, referred to as the Bionic Lawn. Welton Irie had been working the sound along with Colonel Fluxy as the selector, and Denie and Donovan as the box men. When Echo joined, he brought along his old friend, Oh Lord.*

Echo, with his unabashed lyrical content, made an indelible impression on dancehall. Not only did he raise the stakes by deejaying bolder lyrics than ever, Echo consolidated “slackness” into a complete package, a kind of burlesque that included sound effects, jokes, stories, impersonations, singing and deejaying. At times, he was more like a rapping standup comic. Echo would go through a succession of bawdy tales, from ‘Bathroom Sex’ in which, as a child, he would “peep pon” his mother and father in the bathroom, to ‘Hotel Fee’, where he saves his money for a hotel quickie. A virtual one man show, Echo had an astounding capacity to invent lyrics.

This new slackness style that Echo built with his personal dynamism and inventiveness, proved so compelling that deejays were under great pressure to conform. Welton recalls, “The first time I went into Echo’s area, to Stereophonic, chatting my culture, everybody stood outside the gate and nobody would come in. A man come to me and say, ‘Boss, you no chat slackness -

* According to Welton, “This song that he made, ‘People Are You Ready’, Tappazuckie recorded it [Oh Lord, Stars 1978], but that was his [Echo’s] signature song, ‘People are you ready? Bo! Oh Lord’. When he said Oh Lord, he was actually referring to his sidekick, Oh Lord. If you listen a lot of them old tapes [dances on cassette], he always be referring to Oh Lord.”
Chat one! ’The first slackness me chat, gate tear down! Bouncer, the gateman, pops down the gate - the dance ram! I was in the west now, which was Echo’s area, so in order to come in his place and be accepted, I started writing and building the slack lyrics.”

Ranking Joe (then known as Little Joe) was one of the top ranking deejays and the one who introduced many people to slackness. Welton Irie remembers first hearing rude lyrics in the dance with Ranking Joe deejaying on Ray Symbolic. “That was very mild compared to what is going on now. That was [considered] slackness because everybody else was culture. You had Big Youth, U Roy, U Brown - all culture. [Ranking Joe was saying] the tamest things, but at that time but he was the only one saying those things, so it was a big deal. Echo took it from him and took it to a slacker level.”

Whereas Ranking Joe was talking some rude lyrics here and there, he never devoted himself to it the way Echo did. Welton Irie, also a deejay known for slackness, gives Echo full credit for promoting the style. “Echo really exploded and bust slackness big time! He was the best at it, regardless of who else was saying it. Cause he actually made up lyrics about those things and other guys copy cat. He was the best at it and his following kinda proved that. Cause all the little girls – teenagers and in their twenties – couldn’t get enough!”

The unquestionable appeal of slackness to women was puzzling and disturbing to many on the outside. “Much to the chagrin of many middle class feminists and religious leaders,” commented bandleader, Frankie Campbell, “it was the women who screamed loudest and danced longest to the slackest artistes.” According to Welton Irie, “[Echo] had this big girl following. In the west, there were much more girls than men because a lot of the guys either died in political war or they were in prison. So, there were women, an excess amount. So, the funniest thing, the women usually love to hear the slackness, the most outrageous things. They’re the one making noise and, them time there, they used to wear some shorts – long before we hear about ‘batty rider’.* In 1978, girls had some shorts exposing them butt cheeks and they used have the shoes named ‘ballerina’, the Chinese ‘ballet’ shoes, the kung fu shoes that the Chinese wear. That was the order of the day. And all the girls in the Echotone dance would be dressed like that.”

Yet, far from coming across as boorish and uncouth, Echo was able to pull it all off because he executed his lyrics with a certain good humor, self effacement and charm. Even his non X-rated lyrics contained his particular brand of comedy**. In the Big Youth tradition, Echo sang more than most other deejays at the time. He combined the skills of comic, impersonator and raconteur, and came up with a very different style of toasting. Maddo comments,

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* Shorts that ride high up on the posterior, exposing several extra inches of skin

** In fact, the LP containing that song, Echo’s Rocking and Swing, produced by Manzie (Dudley Swaby) and released in 1980, contained no slackness at all, but is still marked with his particular brand of humour.
“Echo is a comedian. If you did one of Echo lyrics – and then Echo did it- you would sound like an idiot.” He cites the song Arlene where Echo sings about his girlfriend who loves to eat beans: “One little bean, two little bean, three little bean and a more bean please, Arlene a must be dream you de dream”. Only Echo could make a simple line like that sound hilarious.

Echo could deftly handle tales involving several characters, giving each individual a separate and distinct manner of speaking. In his ‘Drunken Master’ lyrics (a spoof on the 1978 Jackie Chan movie that was inspiring deejay lyrics at the time), he uses the gruff, slurry voice of the drunk husband along with the high pitched whine of his long suffering wife, as he come home from the bar in the evening, drunk once again. In his popular lyric about ‘Jean and Miss Follow-Fashion’, Echo does the voices of both women as he encounters them in various locations and offers them a drink or something to eat. The running gag is that Miss Follow-fashion is “hard of hearing” so she mishears what Jean orders:

Jean, what you drinking?
(girl's voice) Oh Echo, I’ll have a Ting
Miss Follow Fashion, what you having?
(Different girl’s voice) Echo, gimme some of the same bird wing…

The misunderstandings get progressively more ‘slack’ with each verse. Imitations were Echo’s specialty and he would work them into the lyrics, usually embedding them in one of his stories like “Who was Adam and Eve” (over the Mighty Diamond’s ‘Love Me Girl’, a.k.a ‘The.General’).

When we go a bed she just a act funny
Me say, the gal no wan’ take off her panty
Me have fe fuck it, make the pussy sing like Harry Belafonte:
How it sing?
‘Day-O! Day-O! Day a light and me wan’ go home!……’

Round the back, Ram the cho cho,
Make the pussy sing like Louis Satchmo,
A how the pussy sing, Echo?
‘Hello Dolly, Oh! Hello Dolly, It’s so nice to see you back where you belong.….’

But the verse that would bring down the house was his finale:
This little girl love to fuss and fight
Me have fe juk the little pussy ‘til it sing like Barry White:
‘Don’t go changing, trying to please me. You know I’d never let you
All this from a man with a Christian upbringing who neither smoked nor drank. “Him was so nice,” remarks Sassafrass- a commonly expressed opinion. But once Echo got a hold of the microphone, he was transformed. He was confident, boastful and full of mischief- a persona Yellowman would adapt with even greater success a few short years later.

**SISTER NANCY AND LADY ANNE**

Stereophonic Sound was also unusual for hosting a female deejay, and sometimes more than one. At the time, women were supposed to be singers who primarily sang lovers-rock and soul covers. A few were roots and culture, like Marcia Griffiths and Judy Mowatt. But the majority, like June Lodge and Carlene Davis, stuck largely to foreign love songs and ballads.

Sister Nancy and Lady Anne challenged that mold. The two worked Stereophonic as regular crew members, opening up a field that had previously been all but closed to women. Gaining that acceptance wasn’t easy. But, Sister Nancy was a tough lady and a good deejay. She walked with her own posse, and she was completely devoted to the dance.

“When Sister Nancy came in,” Maddo recalls, “and then they found out she was Brigadier’s sister**, we were like, ‘Nancy, you can deejay?’ and she was like, ‘yea’. But, when we gave her the mic, the first time, we couldn’t stand her. Her voice was so high pitched. It was unbelievable.”

People weren’t used to hearing a female voice. “They would tease me… they would boo me too and tell me I don’t sound good,” Nancy recalls. “A lot of them tell me, ‘Your voice sound so fine [thin], you sound like a rat baby’. They say, ‘Your voice is so squeaky’. They tell me all kind of thing, and I say, ‘Yea. I ain’t going nowhere’”.

In the hopes of integrating herself, Nancy took up the itinerant life of the crew. On dance nights, “The truck came – that time we used to go on the truck back. Nobody come pick you up in no limousine. No car. Nothing like that. You go on the truck back with the sound system, with the boxes and everything, just sit on the box, that’s how I used to travel. You sleep same place. They don’t get no hotel for you or nothing like that. You may get something to eat and a bottle of beer to drink. That’s what they used to pay me. I never used to get money”.

As the second youngest of 15, in a household dominated by older brothers, Nancy grew up impervious to teasing and with a powerful will of her own. Accustomed from childhood to persist against all odds, Nancy knew what she wanted to do and refused to take no for an answer. “You know, I was dedicated! Anywhere the sound play, anywhere they go, I was always there. I was willing to work with the guys and everything. It doesn’t matter what they

* The song is actually by Billy Joel, Just the Way You Are, albeit delivered in a Barry White style

** Deejay Brigadier Jerry
say to me or reject me. They took me serious after a while. Cause I keep going there. Everywhere they play, I’d be on the truck back with them. Them say, ‘We cyaan get rid of this gal! We cyaan get rid of this gal! Everywhere we go she follow we’.

Finally, they gave in. After months of hanging around, Stereophonic gave her a break. Big John made her one of the crew. “They say, ‘OK, you know what, you’re on the payroll.’ So, each dance, they would give me $50. By the time I get $50 – man, I was rich! I was rich! I could buy anything, and everything. More than three days, I have that $50 spending. Stereophonic [owner Big John] was the first person who pay me $50.”

Echo really supported his female artists, and they were considered part of the crew. “Echo was the teacher then,” Lady Anne recalled. “Echo did just love us. He just love us, me and Nancy. So, I would say Echo is a great inspiration for both me and Nancy. He took us everywhere he was going and he would show us how to grab the mic. He was the real big man behind us then.”

While Echo was being chastised for “degrading women” on the microphone, he was the first one to open up opportunities for them in what was, up to that point, a totally male dominated field.

At the time, Anne was only working part time, but Nancy never left. “Nancy used to go every night,” Anne explains. “I never used to go every night. I had to go to school. So you find I go three or four nights out of the week, but Nancy go seven days.”

It was her older brother Brigadier that really inspired Nancy. “I used to listen to him so much. Usually when he used to take a shower, that’s when you would hear him deejay. For real! Some nights we can’t find him and we’ll be in the back of the yard and we hear his voice coming from up in the hills and he is over in the hills on Emperor Marcus [sound]. He’s doing what he does. And I tell myself, ‘I can do that! I know I can do that’. I start follow him without his knowledge and I would go to dance. Once in a while, when I know he’s not there, I may try talk on the mic, and when he comes and he hear, he is mad! I couldn’t go where my brother was ‘cause he didn’t want me there. He don’t want me in the dance. When I come, he would tell me, ‘Go home! Go home!”’

At the time that Echo was killed in 1980, Nancy was pregnant. “I waited until I had my baby. Then I started with Studio 54 and Aces with Yellowman.” In 1980 she recorded her first LP with Winston Riley, One Two, with her Transport Connection lyrics on it. She followed it up in 1982 with The Yellow, The Purple & The Nancy, featuring Yellowman & Fathead along with Waterhouse deejay Purpleman. Riley also made her the first women to record over his ‘Stalag 17’ rhythm resulting in the hit, ‘Bam Bam’, a massive hit. A remix of the song by Krinjah in 2001 created a sensation, and a big revival for Nancy who went on to voice a fresh version of it for RCola in 2006, leading to its being sampled and mixed into several hip hop hits.
Nancy never released slack recordings. Women just didn’t do that back then. But General Echo did. Releasing an X rated disc was always problematic. On the one hand, the lyrics and style had enormous appeal. But on the other, the song would get no radio play or media exposure in Jamaica (except some hearty criticism).

Echo’s first LP, released in 1979 by Manzie, *Rocking and Swing*, had no outright slackness on it. But the album he recorded for Winston Riley the same year did. *Slackest* LP (credited to ‘Ranking Slackness’ rather than General Echo) contained all of his best loved lyrics as he performed them on the sound, including ‘Lift Up Your Dress Fat Gal’, ‘Cockie No Beg No Friend’, ‘Adam and Eve’ and ‘Bathroom Sex’. The LP was the closest thing to catching a live Stereophonic session, a high quality, well produced album of pure X-rated lyrics. Riley was willing to take an educated gamble that, despite the risqué content not being OK for radio play, the album would sell. And he was right. Slackness began to appear more regularly (although never very frequently) on record, and took off like a meteor in the dancehall.

Producer Junjo Lawes, now having a pipeline to the UK based reggae company Greensleeves, sent over his own General Echo album, *12 inch of Pleasure* in 1980. Unfortunately, the rhythms he gave Echo were draggy and slow and did not provide a good framework for Echo’s easy rocking vocals.

Deejay Ringo released an LP, *Two Coxman* (Ariola, 1981), with a photo on the cover of him standing in his underwear with his slacks dropped around his knees. The songs included ‘Untidy Pum’, ‘Fuck Shop Is Not For The Handicapped’ and ‘Pum Pum Ugly’. Welton Irie also recorded an ‘X rated’ LP, *It Feels So Good* (Joe Gibbs 1980) with ‘Fishie Anniversary’ and ‘Toilet Sex’. But neither one had the impact of the Echo release. Clint Eastwood followed the trend and managed to get a release on Greensleeves for his LP, *Sex Education*, which really had just the one title song in a slack style.

However, by 1982, some top slack entertainers were abandoning the style altogether in search of airplay. Lone Ranger, who appeared on both Virgo and Soul to Soul as “number one slackness deejay”, suddenly underwent a change of heart and cleared out of the slackness field, at least on records. His decision paid off and he maintained a very profitable recording career.

Ranking Joe had a similar epiphany. Joe commented, “I start to sight certain Rastafari thing. What you say on the mic and what you say in the dance can control people.” No longer as young and impulsive as before, he began to realize the permanence that putting something on vinyl implies. “It nice to listen to in the dance, but when you record, it’s on the record and it’s going to stay for life.” Then one day, a station in Texas said they couldn’t play his songs because of the slack content. “I would go on certain radio station and find out they wouldn’t play any slackness songs. That really move me and from that

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* The track Bathroom Sex was produced by Winston Riley
I say, ‘I’m going to try to keep away [from slackness]’. You have to do more things that can really get airplay. So that really changed.” It would take the arrival of Yellowman to make recording slackness cool again.

**Echo’s Killing**

Stereophonic was going strong and Echo was the most popular deejay on the island. But, it all came to an abrupt end at noon on Saturday November 22, 1980. Big John, Echo and Flux were driving along Constant Spring Road near Half Way Tree Road, on their way from the equipment technician to a dance in the country, when two policemen in a squad car stopped them for a search. No one will ever know exactly what happened next. The police allege that there was an illegal gun in the car and that a shootout followed. No police were injured. However, all three men inside the car were killed. The officers did eventually come to trial but were completely exonerated of all charges. “As Mrs. Robinson [Echo’s mother] said, her own lawyer was ‘deaf and dumb’ regarding the case, and the gun the trio was supposed to have had was never produced in court as evidence.” Maddo recorded a song about the Half Way Tree killing, Bite Di Dust. Then he stopped recording and eventually left the country.

Manzie offers his explanation, “Big John wasn’t a man who went around making trouble or problems or whatsoever. John was no political activist. John was just a businessman that had a bar, with a little club to it and he distribute liquor and stuff like that. What I really think happened was surrounding around that gun that was in the car. Big John had a legal firearm. And I think that Police pull down on the car. Maybe they spot the gun. Maybe he tried to explain about the gun but the police don’t want to hear nothing. Cause, when you see three man in a car like that- and, you know, in Jamaica, its politics time ca’ that election was maybe a month away, and there was this whole tension in the air. By that time, the peace treaty had fallen apart long time. So, I think that is what cause them to lose their lives- that gun, and the police with their mentality to shoot first and ask questions after.”

Echo was an unlikely a candidate for assassination. As deejay Lord Sassafrass remembers him, Echo was “very, very humble. You know, a lot of time, when all that bad political stuff going on, that time, him come to me and say, ‘I have to try diffuse things’. There wasn’t an inch of violence in him. He was just a humble person.”

For the next few years, Big John’s son Rocky took over the sound officially. In 1983, Maddo left for the United States, first to Connecticut, then Maine. With all the main talent gone, the sound had no choice but to fold, leaving the field clear for Gemini Disco to claim the territory, and deejays like Welton Irie, Ringo and Lone Ranger, all from eastern Kingston, to carry the standard.

* Jamaican Gleaner, 1980, exact date unknown
** Maddo- Bite Di Dust/ Maddo & Jango- Half Way Tree Killing (Bionic)
until slackness found its second champion in the form of a little known albino toaster named Yellowman.
Despite condemnation in the media, and the cultural deejays’ admonitions that slackness would “bite the dust”, slackness refused to die. In the years after the demise of General Echo and the closing of Stereophonic, slackness found a new home, Gemini Disco. With the relative peace that arrived in 1980 at the end of the violent election campaign, all sounds had the potential to attract bigger crowds and Gemini was at the right place at the right time. With a roster including the top slack deejays and two selectors- one for reggae and one for soul, and a club all its own to play home sessions, Gemini was the perfect sound to open the new dancehall decade.

In 1980, the big music in Jamaica was soul, not reggae. American soul, and its cousins, disco, funk and R&B, were played in stores, homes and on the radio. As Singer Anthony Malvo recalls, “We grow up on soul music, R&B. I love soul music.” So did the majority of Jamaicans. Soul was the most popular music on the island. So, most sound systems played it.

In Jamaica, there were two kinds of sounds. According to Producer Gussie Clarke, “the ones that were playing Jamaican music and there’s the ones playing foreign songs – the soul sounds. It was pretty hard to get the soul records, [so] I used to import records and sell to the sound systems.”

“Back in those days, most of the sound were called ‘-tone’, like Echotone, Soultone,” Welton Irie explains. “And those were the sound that normally play mixed music- a little soul, a little reggae, a little disco. And the sounds that were called Hifi, play pure rub-a-dub. King Tubby’s Hifi, Arrows Hifi, Tippertone Hifi, Black Harmony Hifi. All the hifis were rub-a-dub sounds. That’s how we distinguish. Gemini Disco, Channel One Disco – from they say ‘Disco’, you hear mixed music. When it is a hifi, you’re gonna hear rub-a-dub all the time.”

Well, almost all the time. Even roots-man selector Jah Wise played soul on Tippertone, Big Youth’s home sound. He explains, “Jack Ruby’s sound was a soul sound. Most of the sounds, everybody used to play soul, real soul, The Impressions, Drifters. That’s where they [producers and artists] get the cover versions.”

Ranking Trevor recalls, “Most of the sets still played their 30 or 40 min-
utes of soul, disco and funky in between rockers sets because it attracted a 'better' class of people. Rough guys used to hang out at sounds like Tubby's - rude boys. That's why those sounds got mashed up so many times.”

Most of the soul sounds would still play a portion of reggae. “They start [the session by] playing reggae,” according to Anthony Malvo. “Then, after that, they start to play disco music. After that, soul music play for an hour. When it reach down to like one o'clock, two o'clock, then they play reggae. It depends on the type of party. Some parties you play everything and it's just cool. Some parties it's just soul and reggae.”

The mixed sounds like Gemini were more commercial than the roots sounds of the '70s. It was a question of survival. The soul sounds attracted a wider audience including a more uptown crowd, while the more specialized, 'dubplate' sounds like Papa Roots and Emperor Faith maintained a smaller, more hardcore following. Squiddley Ranking explains, “Gemini is mostly like an uptown sound. They used to play in Gemini Club, Skateland, and that club in New Kingston, Tropics. Gemini was the sound that carry the most spenders, the most respectable men who have money. Everybody wan' follow Gemini sound and when you keep a dance with Gemini, in those days, your liquor must sell off, because Gemini carry a spending crowd.” But, Gemini could also shock out in the ghetto. Gemini was at home anywhere. Uptown or down, Ocho Rios or Portland, it always drew a crowd. In the country, “it would be chaos,” says selector Deejay Funky. A crowd of one thousand people would be blocking the road.

**Gemini**

Gemini first appeared on the scene in 1967 with the owner, Papa Gemini, doing all the selecting. Papa Gemini (Gerwin Dinal), started out as a record collector and his love for the music led him into the sound system business. In the early days, he worked as a machinist in a work shop near Cross Roads and it was in that little shop that he started playing records for the public. From there, he and his partner started to put together the sound. They started with three tube amps and a turntable. In 1974, they had well known technician Denton make them a new amplifier. The sound was expanding.

* There were a special group of sounds that played mainly dubplates of locally made reggae music. Like Emperor Faith, as Mikey explains, “I was the dubplate sound. I had the most plates, I used to play pure dubplate right through, a rhythm sound. Sometimes you had the singing, but I had the rub-a-dub rhythm [without the vocal] and I used to play them one after the other and the deejays love that. It had to be a special music. I hardly play music they play on the radio. Our music was different. If you wanted regular music you had to go somewhere else. We were the innovators. Some sounds could get away with it, but I couldn't get away with it cause when the crowd come to listen to me, if I woulda start play radio music, they would leave very disappointed.”

** The reason people don't realize the amount of foreign music that was played is because the fans would wait until the reggae part came on to start taping the sessions. Anthony Malvo explains, “When the reggae start now and the deejays take the mic- then everybody turn on their tape recorders.”
It wasn’t long before Papa Gemi was deep into the sound scene, clashing with the top sounds of the day. His first major clash was against Stan the Soul Merchant on Musgrave Avenue in the ‘70s. Soul Merchant was the number one sound at the time but Gemini won and became the Champion Sound. By that time, Mr. Dinal wasn’t selecting anymore. Archie had arrived. Back then, Ranking Trevor was the main deejay, but all kinds of artists would drop by including General Echo who Archie (in 1983) ranked as “the best one so far”. In 1975, Gemini added a second selector to control the soul music, DJ Funky. “I was more on the funky side of things. Archie was the main guy for the dubplates. We complement each other.”

Gemini’s first home base was Love Shack, on Retreat Avenue, a little dead end street off Brentford Road, in the Crossroads area of Kingston. The club belonged to sound owner Gerwin Dinal. Around 1978, they moved to the Gemini Club, a restaurant they bought at Half Way Tree.

Gemini was officially a ‘disco’ and played a bit of everything – funk, soul, disco, reggae. The soul and funk was an important part of Gemini’s repertoire. “Gemini was popular because of its versatility,” DJ Funky recalls. “Woman used to dress up and they were drinking like they were men. A lot of them was not there because of the dubplates, but because of the soul music. They love their soul music.” To determine the right mix, Funky explains, “We base it on crowd reaction. We play like four, five, or six funk and then we play a few soul music. Those days you could get away with a lot of soul music compared to now. You could play eight, nine, ten soul music and everybody’s bawling for more. Then we would go back into the reggae and play that for an hour or more.”

In 1976 downtown Kingston, the cool guys were the ‘soul boys’ and Archie, despite his role as the rub-a-dub selector, was the quintessential soul man. “All of us used to dress,” DJ Funky explains, “but Archie was the guy to watch. Whenever he stepped into the dancehall, he would have on a white shoes, white bell foot pants – he loved white. And he was ever slick! And he always wear a beaver hat and gold chain. I would pick up Archie and we would show up as aristocrats. And when we finish playing, Charles and his crew would pack up back the sound and I would drive the truck.” As the technical person, Charles, nicknamed Apache, was responsible for stringing up the set and running the wires to connect to the light pole for the power supply. In the mid ’80s, with Archie traveling frequently, Charles got bumped up to part time selector, even appearing at the big venues such as Skateland.

**Welton Irie**

Although he had been around longer than most of the Gemini crew, Welton never really got the boost he deserved as a foundation deejay. Welton didn’t hang out with the crowds on the corner. He never smoked weed and wasn’t, in his own words, a ‘modeler’. For a deejay who could come up with such outrageous lyrics, Welton was remarkably reserved and very serious
about his music.

In the beginning, he did more selecting than deejaying. He and record collector Tony Walcott used to work freelance. Sometimes they would select a dance together. Sometimes they were working separately.

Welton found his niche in the ‘70s acting as a lyrical liaison between the east and the west sides of Kingston. “The deejays were in the west. So, all the styles, all the lyrics were in the west. We [in the east] were secluded. We just had two top deejays at the time, Puddy Roots and Crutches [on Arrows]. Those were the big deejays in the east- for the entire east.”

So Welton rode his bicycle to the various dances in the west and brought the new styles back to the east to perform. “When I started out, I sounded exactly like [Ranking] Trevor. I used to go over to Channel One Sound and all those [sounds]... Ranking Trevor was the deejay in the late ‘70s – songs like ‘Truly’, ‘Queen Majesty’, ‘Answer Me Question’. So, sounding like him was a plus for me, especially in the east. People, who would normally have to leave and go all the way in the west to hear to hear Ranking Trevor on King Attorney, had me in the east now sounding like him.”

Welton started out on Sir John the President, the sound that would soon become Stereophonic. “I built that before Echo came on, from about ’75. I was just 14 plus going on 15. I started doing a little bit [of slackness], but in the east here, there wasn’t anybody really doing it, so I started building more and more slack lyrics. But I always tempered it with some culture lyrics and some reality lyrics. There would be a little period in the dance where I would say, ‘Bwoy, the dance is too tight, I going to slack it up now’, and I would give a few [lyrics] and then get back to some culture. And my slack lyrics, me and Ringo were usually humorous, telling a story. Not just raw slackness. You found yourself laughing”.

Welton didn’t record much. He was first and foremost a live performer. But, he managed to do several 45s and a handful of albums. His first recording was a duet with Lone Ranger, with Ranger doing the singing. Welton remembers, “I was nervous man! Tony [Walcott] took me to Studio One and my first recording was ‘Chase Them Crazy’, the ‘Mr. Basie’ rhythm*. And Lone Ranger was singing the part of Horace Andy, cause Long Ranger used to sing like Horace Andy. So he was singing, ‘Hey Mr. Bassie’ then I would come in and deejay. And I would say that was the first duet style. Before Michigan and Smiley, me and Ranger been doing combination.” The two good friends recorded another combination, ‘The Big Fight’ (Chord, 1978) on the Joe Frazer rhythm.

Welton’s biggest hit, ‘Army Life’, created contention between him and deejay Peter Metro. Metro was the first to come up with the song. “After hearing it, I came up with some other ideas that could fit it. Sometimes you hear a deejay and say, ‘I would say this here’ or ‘I would add this to it’- you are always

* Original song by Horace Andy, Mr. Bassie, Studio One; Chase them Crazy, Studio One, 1977
thinking.” So, Welton began deejaying his own version of the lyrics.

“Johnny Dollar’ was the rhythm it fit and that’s the rhythm Peter Metro used to deejay it on [live].” The ‘Johnny Dollar’ rhythm easily accommodated an army theme with its solid ‘one two, three four’ marching beat and regular slams. “Left right, left right, government boots is not your own. They say that in the army the shoes are very fine. I ask for number seven, they give me number nine.” The blaring horns added to the military feel. ‘Johnny Dollar’ was Sly and Robbie’s take on the ‘Mad, Mad, Mad’ rhythm (Alton Ellis, Studio One). Voiced by Roland Burrell, on the Taxi label, the ‘Johnny Dollar’ rhythm was one of the hottest of the 1980s pre-digital period. “Johnny Dollar was mashing up the place. [But] there was no deejay [voiced] on the rhythm yet,” Welton recalls. So, he offered to get the rhythm for Peter Metro to voice but Peter ended up voicing it over a slower rhythm produced by Clive Jarrett. “After his own [was] released, I say, ‘Alright I’m going to do it on the ‘Johnny Dollar’ rhythm.’ And from it came out – right up the charts! No more Peter Metro.” Understandably, there were some words, but the two made it up in the end. Still on the army theme, Welton voiced a song called ‘Soldier Take Over’, on the Admiral label, in 1981, only to see Yellowman voice a song by the same title, again, on Sly and Robbie’s ‘Johnny Dollar’ rhythm, a year later. (*Yellowman, Soldier Take Over*, Taxi 1982)

Welton had another record, but this one Jamaicans knew nothing about. “I did an album for a guy named Glen Brown called *Ghettoman Corner*. That’s my biggest songs in Europe. In all of Europe, that’s what I’m known for. Nobody know ‘Army Life’ in Europe. All the tracks are original...’cause he wanted a roots album. That’s what Europeans love – they love roots. It was surprising for me ‘cause when I was doing that album for him, there was nothing I was doing on the album that I was pleased with. But that’s what he wanted. The ‘Dirty Harry’ rhythm, I did that twice for him, but *The Lamb’s Bread* – I had a hard time with that, it was just weird! All those lyrics were made in the studio. And I’ve never done any of those lyrics on the road.” And sure enough, that’s what they want in Europe.”

**Ringo**

Every night was a new party on Gemini with Ringo and Welton Irie out-doing each other with silliness and rudeness. “Seckle [settle] crowd of people, you fe seckle. Me and Welton coming like Heckle and Jeckle”, Ringo used to chant. Like the two mischievous magpies, Ringo and Welton liked to provoke the crowd with their libidinous and licentious lyrics.

Without Welton Irie, there would have been no Johnny Ringo. Ringo came into the business inspired by the older deejay and the two became a

* Pantomime Records 1977. Later released as Syford Walker & Welton Irie - Lamb’s Bread International- combination of the two albums

** ie. He never performed them at dances, they were made up for the LP
team, the main attraction of the sound. Both men could be either topical or raunchy. Ringo was a careful lyrics writer who could always be found with his notebook and pen, carefully working out a song the way a singer might. Everyone who knew him in the business at the time commented that he was ‘the most intelligent deejay’ in terms of writing well thought out lyrics. Ringo set the standard, at least until deejays like Early B and Peter Metro (and Lt. Stitchie) came along.

Ringo started out in music selling records in Randy’s Record shop on North Parade. Then, one night, he went to a dance and heard Welton. From that time on, Ringo would follow Welton, learning his slack lyrics and coming up with his own styles.

“I heard Ranking Trevor and became a deejay,” Welton Irie remembers. “Ringo heard me and became a deejay. When he started, exactly like me he was sounding. He even tell me he used to come a dance and write up my lyrics I was doing. Jot it down. He tell me so himself. So, me and him start to spar together, cause I never have a problem with that.”

Ringo remembered being impressed by the more established deejays, Welton Irie and Lone Ranger. He said at the time, “I started off playing sounds, cause that’s what I really love, playing sound system. Welton and Lone Ranger used to come along and [Welton] used to influence me. When he was carrying a swing, he was really ‘carrying a swing’, and that inspired my style. And I sort of create, lyrics for my own self. Now, he knows my style and I know his style so we get along better than any other deejay.”

Like Welton, Ringo spent some time as a freelance selector working with Chester Symoie and Tony Walcott. He was selecting a small sound in the east, between Rollington Town and Franklin Town, named Ripatone, when the opportunity arose to work at Gemini. Welton left an opening there when he went to work for Virgo temporarily. Since Ringo sounded like Welton and knew all his lyrics, Papa Gemini offered him the spot.

Welton came back to the set soon after and Gemini was a slackness free-for-all. Ringo proved more than capable of carrying on, and even furthering, the slackness tradition. Welton recalls, “Ringo had it down to a ‘T’. Ringo wrote some of the toughest slack lyrics, like ‘Dry Head Hadassah’ and all those. Story telling. And they’re funny. People would die of laughter, man.” It had to be funny. Ringo commented at the time, “When you make it too serious or too real, it sound vulgar. You have to make it a spicy and nice.”

Typically, the dance would begin on neutral territory with cultural and reality lyrics. Welton Irie, explains, “We started the dance with culture, always, and riding the rhythm, you know - sometimes a little freestyle. Cause you want to hold back on the tough lyrics, especially when you got a new song. In the early part of the dance, all the new stuff was being played. Usually, the newest songs, the songs that just got released, was played early as an

* Meaning he was the most popular
introduction for the people, so you would be feeling it out and doing some freestyle things”.

But later on, when the crowds thickened, the real hard core music would come out. “You just went to Tubby’s and got some tune on dubplate and you would be featuring up a lot of those going up to midnight, now, when it started to get tough, when the dance is packed. Then you start to unleash the lyrics and the popular songs of the day would be played. And later we would start to touch slackness. Sometimes, we would go for a while, then we would change and back into some culture throughout the night, in and out, like that.”

When the rhythms got hot, Ringo would prepare for the slack part of the evening. Starting out mild (“Water Pumpee, Bubble pon me frontee, water coconut, bubble pon me tea pot”), he would continue through STDs and sexual acts (“Me go down on me knee, fi go ram the fisheeeeee”) and soon reach the scatological stuff, (“She work at Belleview and wipe mad-man batty when they done doo doo” or, as in Roach ina the Toilet, “Them nah pay me no mind, Them make a long line, A very long line and start tickle me behind”). But mostly, Ringo sounded like a spirited, young man with one thing on his mind

Everyday the girls go a beaches
and them a model ina skin tight bikini
When them bend down, the fishy exposes
And when me see that, mi hood it increases


I was born ina the labor ward down in Jubilee
In the waiting room was my maaga daddy
Cost him a fee of two guinea
While me in the belly the doctor shout to mommy, say
Push Lady Push, Make the youthman born

The lyrics, already extremely popular in dance circles, just grabbed the nation’s attention. They were topical, they were appropriate, every mother readily identified with the theme, and Ringo pulled it all together with his usual confidence and humor. Kids were singing the song on street corners, hands on their bellies, laughing. The phrase quickly entered the national vocabulary and every pregnant woman was seen as an opportunity to sing a few lines.
Squiddley

The story of slackness wouldn’t be complete without Squiddley Ranking, Peter Metro’s little brother and ‘Jamaica’s skinniest deejay’. Squiddley could hold his own with the big boys and he was completely dedicated to slackness. “When I was a little boy, me and Peter Metro, we used to go to dances and listen to Johnny Ringo, Welton Irie and General Echo – they were the slack deejays – slack, real slack – and we would say, we want to be like them.”

Squiddley chose to follow the slackness path while brother Peter stayed largely with culture and reality. Perhaps that explains why Squiddley was noticed first. By 1982 he was a well known, up and coming deejay on Gemini, while his brother didn’t make his name on Metromedia until ‘83/’84.

Squiddley and Peter grew up with in Arnett Gardens, a.k.a. Concrete Jungle. At first, their parents were not too happy about their choosing musical careers. “When I just started they never like it too much. [They thought] Peter and me never going to make it in the music. We make too much noise, and we have to deejay slackness and it don’t sound right and reh reh reh… until about five years after that when I went to England in 1983 on Gemini sound on tour with Welton Irie and Johnny Ringo. I went to England for eight months on tour. When I came back, my family them say, ‘Whaaa?! Money a mek!’ and that’s the time now them start say, ‘Well, stick to it’.”

As a youth, Squiddley used to deejay smaller local sounds like King Phillip, Stax Disco and Hot Sizzler. His lucky break came when Ringo and Welton left Gemini temporarily. At the time, he was deejaying a small sound named Black Hawk who used to play in his home area. “Johnny Ringo and Welton leave the sound and go to Virgo, so Gemini was searching for some younger artists and I was the one who was available at the time. I was a little bit maaga*, good looking, and bad.”

Right off the top, Squiddley was into the slackness. “The reason why I deejay slackness, I think you get more attention. People love hear about sex. And when you sing about a girl and you ‘turn her this way’ – or about how your Johnny is big – people wan’ hear that something there. That is the reason Lady Saw and Tanya Stevens bus’ out so quick. When you deejay slackness, you quicker fe bus’ than even a man who sing culture. I think people love hear sex argument**.” The other reason for the popularity of the genre for budding deejays, according to Squiddley, “When you deejay slackness, you get more girls.” As evidence, Squiddley, points out his numerous progeny. At last count, he had 13 children, between two weeks and 23 years old.

The downfall of Gemini

Everything was going smoothly with Gemini on top and its deejays rack-
ing up the number one hits, until the sound left Jamaica for an extended tour. Squiddley recalls, “Gemini went on tour to America in 1983 - carry all them sound box with them too. And after that, Gemini went to stay a England too long and all the sounds [in Jamaica] just screechy back and take Gemini space. When Gemini come back, Gemini was slow. Metromedia [had] screechy through. Metromedia a bus’ out while Gemini deh a England. Metromedia, deh a Jamaica, a gwan bad.”

The absence of Gemini had left a hole in the sound scene that every little set was rushing in to fill. Metromedia was smart. They began playing regular Wednesday night sessions at their home base in Allman Town to replace the regular Wednesday spots Gemini used to play. Gemini never recovered the territory. New sounds like Kilimanjaro were emerging that were flashier and more up to date.

Around 1984, Ringo and Welton left Gemini with a great flourish and began playing a new set named Lees Unlimited. Lees was a huge sound from St.Thomas that began making inroads into Kingston when it acquired Gemini’s star deejays. The owner, a wealthy businessman, had the funds to build a powerful sound. But it only lasted a few years. Mr. Lee just wasn’t a music person and he couldn’t sustain the effort, and the deejay pair found themselves back on Gemini.

Ringo’s personal decline started when he left the country and settled in New York. Following the move, people heard little from him. His health had been declining for several years due to his substance abuse. DJ Funky recalls, “Ringo was really down and out but he got sober and he got cleaned up and he started putting his life back”. But it was too late. Ringo passed away on July two, 2005 at the age of 47 of complication due to pneumonia.

Although he never became as big a star as Lone Ranger, Welton hung in there. He stayed with his first love, selecting music, and now plays an oldies disco. On Saturdays and Sundays, he also plays music on Jamaican radio station, Mega Jams. Meanwhile, Squiddley is still in the business, living in Jamaica and deejaying specials for dances. Selectors Archie and Funky now live in Toronto, Canada.
The social environment in Kingston, played out like a tale of two cities. Kingston contained sharp divisions, not only between the upper (newer) areas and the lower (original city) area but also between the east and the west. The division that has received the most attention is the one marked by the Torrington Bridge, between uptown and downtown. Above the bridge rest the more well off neighborhoods like Barbican, Lingueanea and Jamaica’s own Beverly Hills. Below the bridge sit the ghettos and the garrison communities.

The division between the east and the west was more subtle. Although there were no checkpoints, and no one was preventing easterners from setting foot in the west, there were unwritten rules that people respected.

“It was just a big divide,” Carlton Livingston explains. “I have a friend that always say to me that the thought process in the west is different than in the east. There were more sound systems in the west, more deejays definitely in the west. A lot of the eastern Kingston guys couldn’t get along with the western Kingston guys. They were always in war. They were saying the same thing politically*, but for some reason, they couldn’t get along. Rockfort man don’t deal with the west man, Dunkirk man don’t deal with the west.”

The east and the west were worlds apart, even when it came to style and fashion. “The western guys back in those days, we call ‘modelers’”, Carlton remembers. “And the eastern guys were more laid back, very old school. The first time I saw a dreadlocks wearing a ‘bell foot’** jeans was in the west – bad boys in the west. In those days, bad man was dreadlocks, to be feared. It wasn’t about Rasta in the ‘70s. Bad man and them all wore dreadlocks and riding these big bikes. But the eastern guys were more laid back – Clarks

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* They supported the same parties. Both the east and the west had both PNP and JLP garrison communities. “In the west you’d have Mathews Lane, you had Payneland, you had Concrete Jungle all PNP areas. In the east you have Dunkirk, Rockfort - all PNP,” Reports Zaggaloo, Arrows’ selector. “But for some reason, apart from politics, badman has a mentality - so they supported the same political party but at the same time, they want to come out on top, who is the baddest of the baddest. So, based on that, they were always proving on each other.”

** Bell Bottom
shoes, ‘terleen’ and wool pants and them Arrows shirt”. No bell foot pants and all of that.”

According to Sonny, Arrows sound owner, the west had the reputation as the birthplace of reggae. “Most of the artists, if they come from county, when they come up they live in the west. Bob Marley started from Trenchtown, Peter Tosh, Bunny Livingston, Leroy Sibbles, Alton Ellis, Delroy Wilson - all of them were in west Kingston. They [the popular artists] were from Greenwich Town, Trench Town, Denham Town, Allman Town, Jones Town they all come from the west. The west was known for artists.”

“The west was where what’s happening was happening. [When] you were there, you saw the new fashions, the new outfits, the new styles,” Carlton Livingston remembers. “All of the studios were in the west. There was not one studio in the east until Arrows came on in the ‘90s. There wasn’t a record shop in the east. You go by Randy’s [Record store in the east], you see all the artists- Leroy Smart, Trinity, all of them. The west was more flashy. I would be standing in Randy’s, [as] a little unknown, watching Leroy Smart, Trinity, Dillinger – like them just come from England, have on the latest Clarks boots, knits ganzie***, gold chain, and modeling, at the top of them voice: [says it in a low Leroy Smart imitation], ‘Ooo. We mash up England’. U Brown, all of them, Ranking Trevor would ride up and I was just standing there, all amazed and just looking at them, star struck.”

This division had a considerable affect on the music. As all the studios and record stores were in the west, the western artists jealously protected their territory from the eastern outsiders. “It’s just a psychological thing,” Eastman Carlton recalls, “We found it pretty hard to get things done in the west because west people would try to keep us out. I can remember an incident that happen with Blacka Morwell. I went to Channel One and he basically ran me out the studio and he was like, ‘You can’t sing’, and I was like ‘OK, no problem’. But after a while, he accepted me coming around to Channel One.”

Yet, despite the challenges, the east produced several of the most influential artists of the decade. Ringo, Welton Irie, Lone Ranger and Carlton Livingston all hailed from the East. As it was harder for them to gain acceptance on the music scene at first, the four stuck together, forming close bonds that have lasted their lifetimes. “Even to this day we are still very good friends,” Carlton Livingston says of his close relationship with Lone Ranger. “It’s just that we went to our different parts. But we always stuck together - always.”

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* Terylene, a synthetic fabric

** To Arrows’ selector Zaggaloo, as an eastman, an Arrow shirts was the height of fashion, “I was surprised when you look on the back of the label and it says ‘Arrows’. There were some with short sleeves, but it was mostly long sleeves [they wore] and you had to have cufflinks.”

*** ganzie- refers to any t shirt, golf shirt, or any top of ‘knit’ fabric (meaning a loose weave as opposed to a tight weave cotton suit shirt). Possibly derived from the Irish Gaelic word for sweater, geansai
In the late ‘70s and early ‘80s, the eastmen finally had their day, albeit on western sounds. Ringo, Welton, and Lone Ranger carried the slackness style from the west into their home turf and back again to the west. The three dominated the dancehall scene, carrying sounds like Gemini and Virgo to the top. Carlton Livingston, and later Lee Van Cliff, added to the list of eastmen who made it on the western sound system circuit. The end of the ‘70s and the early ‘80s saw the advance of the western sounds manned by eastman deejays and their slackness, as they took over considerable chunks of the audience from the western cultural sounds.

**Lone Ranger**

Lone Ranger always stood out among the throngs of would-be toasters in Kingston in the ‘70s. His voice was clear and strong, and he had a way of enunciating words that other deejays just strung together in long, indiscernible lines of patois. Ranger was different, perhaps as a result of his years abroad as a child. As one of the top ten deejays of the decade, Ranger left his mark on the dancehall scene.

In the ‘60s, Ranger and his mother spent seven years living in the UK. They left Jamaica when Ranger was five. While abroad, Ranger’s mother enrolled him and his brother in after-school lessons in dance and theater. He also studied trumpet and violin. Ranger’s still young mother used to go to parties where sound systems would be set up. She would often bring along her boys and Ranger would listen to the English deejays. His mother also kept small parties in the house. Besides ska and rock steady, his mother and her friends would play the new British and American pop artists like Beatles, Simon and Garfunkle, and Cilla Black. Ranger and his brother would lie in their room listening late into the night.

But, London didn’t turn out to be the haven his family expected and, in 1971, they moved back. At first, both Ranger and his mother found the transition very difficult. “When we came back to Jamaica in the ‘70s, Jamaica was kinda slow. You know, you’re coming from London. It’s like you’re coming back in the past. Everything is slow, there are no jobs. So my mother didn’t want to stay.” And she didn’t. She went straight to the U.S. “She left me here with a big house and every month she would send my big fat check come.”

**Tony Walcott and the Eastern Dancehall Scene**

Left alone, Ranger found a new ‘family’ through Chester Symoie, his next door neighbor where he was living in Bowerbanks. Chester used to move with Tony Walcott, the eminence grise behind several Eastern entertainers. All the eastern sound aficionados would hang out together in a loose circle that centered on Tony.

Although Tony had a regular nine to five job, his real passion was records. Tony was an avid record collector. With his huge collection of Studio Ones, Tony would hire himself out to sounds as a freelance selector. He was joined,
at various times, by Welton Irie, Ringo, Lone Ranger and Chester Symoie. Tony had all the music and all the contacts, so it wasn’t long before he had Ranger singing on the local Merry Soul Disco.

Tony also hosted a weekly practice session at his home where all the eastern entertainers underwent their training. “Sunday mornings we usually end up going out there and rehearse with Lone Ranger, Puddy Roots, Welton Irie and a guy who lives in New York now named Dexter Macintyre,” Carlton explains. “Tony was our mentor. I mean for me, Ranger, Puddy, Welton, Dexter – even Ringo was there with us too. Anywhere we are as musicians now, the credit goes to him. After God, it’s him.”

Tony gave the artists a thorough work out. He challenged them. “I remem-ber when we started going out there first, there was one rhythm he would play nearly every morning – Alton Ellis, ‘Pearl’,” Carton continues. “It’s a very dif-ficult song. The changes are so sharp and unique. And Tony always say, ‘If you can sing to ‘Pearl’, you can sing to anything’. Even Ranger and Welton deejay to ‘Pearl’. Because ‘Pearl’ had changes. Not just a bridge- there were like three changes in that song.”

It was also Tony who first took Welton and Ranger to audition at Studio One and Channel One. When the two deejays were up and running, Tony took Carlton to do the rounds. Eventually, Tony got married and became a Christian, so the weekend practices ended and the eastern friends had to string up the sound during the day to rehearse on their own.

**Soul Express**

Carlton Livingston was originally a country boy, born in St, Mary’s, but he came to Kingston with his family when he was 11, in 1970. “My big sister lived in Kingston for a long time, and my mother was raising my sister’s kids [in St Mary] and then she decided it was more economical if we move to Kingston and live with her”. The family settled in Franklyntown, in the east.

As a youth, Carlton would follow his sister to the dancehall. “My sister used to sing. She was my greatest influence, apart from my mother. And she was the one who usually go to dance – I mean a lot! And my mother usually get on her case. So, my big sister, when she sneak out, I usually wait till she goes out, then I go sneak out and go watch her dance.”

The challenge for the young Carlton was to find a way of getting to the dance without walking on any main street where he could be spotted by nosey neighbors. “Way back, there was a sound named King Edward that played ska and R&B. I was young at that time. I couldn’t take any chances going on the street. I had to go through the bushes. So, I just jump people’s fence and go and listen to the sound. The dancehall was pretty close to where I live. You have to pass a lot of graves. And my mother would say, ‘You’re not afraid?’ I would walk through the graveyard to go to dances!”

Carlton first attempt to sing professionally was in a duo with future Knowledge member, Anthony Doyley, a friend from Trenchtown Primary
school. They went to Beverly’s Records on Orange Street to audition, but, “Leslie Kong turned us down. I just really got up and chill and learn a trade and stuff.”

Discouraged, at least for the moment, Carlton apprenticed himself as an electrician to a man who worked as the chief transmitter engineer for RJR. “I started out by getting transistor radios and me and my friends build amplifiers. The guy that worked at RJR, he would teach us how to build the stuff.” Starting out building transistor radios, he and his friends from work soon progressed to making amplifiers and other sound equipment. With the new skills, the apprentice electricians decided to build themselves a starter sound, originally called The Fabulous Three. Then one of the partners sold out his share. No longer ‘three’, they changed the name to Soul Express and began to play more reggae and “hardcore dub”.

Tony Walcott often brought his records to play on Soul Express. From the start, Tony had been helping the young men develop their skills as sound operators. “He would show us pointers, like how to play in sequence when we were selecting,” Carlton recalls. The set had two selectors, Carlton would play the R&B that he loved, and his friend would play the Jamaican material. That’s when Lone Ranger came around and started working on the set singing, while Carlton was still deejaying, beginning a friendship that has lasted decades.

**Soul to Soul**

Ranger was still spending most of his evenings on Soul Express when a new sound came to town, Soul to Soul, in 1980.

“One night I was going to a Gemini session uptown - Ringo, and probably Welton, was working. And everybody was talking about this new sound from Montego Bay coming to Kingston to gets roots and to build up his sound”, Ranger explained. “So, I said, I’m gonna pass through and listen to that sound. So, when I pass, there was a lot of people from Montego Bay and police officers – cause it’s an uptown people’s sound. Someone must have told them that Lone Ranger is in there, cause they asked me if I could deejay one or two tunes. And I say, OK no problem.”

Ranger gave them some lyrics and the place went wild. So, the next day, “I was at my house, and some policeman came to my house and told me that the ‘soop’ down the central police station wanted to talk to me. So I said, ‘But what did I do?’ And he said, ‘Don’t worry. It’s OK. He just wants to talk to you’.

The ‘soop’ turned out to be the “top cop in Jamaica at that time,” Superintendent Oliver Grandison from Montego Bay, owner of Soul to Soul. “When I went down there to the station, I went in his office, he said, ‘Welcome Lone

* “Soop”- here he is referring to the Police Superintendent, but the term became stylish in the ‘80s and was used to ‘big up’ people, meaning something more like ‘Super-dooper’
Ranger. I hear about what you did the other night with my sound system, and I would like you to work for me. I told him I couldn’t cause I was working with a sound called Soul Express. He said, ‘No you are not. You are gonna work for me. I’ll pay you double. Whatever it is, I’ll pay you’. So I said OK. I’d be more facing the uptown crowd now.”

The ‘uptown crowd’ included a lot of police officers and their girlfriends. Soul to Soul was playing to the comfortable, well- heeled crowd at the time, but once Ranger came with this rub-a-dub groove and his slackness, the sound took a turn and began to build up a roots following, “It was doing good,” Chester explains. “It was the strongest sound in Montego Bay but it didn’t have nothing great ina Kingston – until Ranger take it up. Kingston and Mo-bay – him have the date them book. I think only pon Monday them no play. But them play every other night.”

Soul to Soul was started by Tony Green, aka Rosa, and three friends in Montego Bay. Rosa explains, “I used to have a sound before called Supertone and it was three of us that owned that sound. One of the guys went away to Bermuda. And then after that, a couple of the guys on the set get together and ask me if I want to set up a thing. We had a meeting and we decided to start the sound and I gave it the name Soul to Soul. One of the owners was Oliver Grandison, just a sergeant at the time. We specialized in a lot of soul music in the beginning.”

Soul to Soul had a peaceful start in Montego Bay. “In those days it was different,” Rosa comments. “There wasn’t that much violence in the dances because of the police presence that we had. A lot of people came out to dances because they feel secure and safe. We catered for a more peaceful crowd. You know, you come to the dance and you see a lot of soldiers and police, you find that a lot of bank clerks follow the sound, nurses and doctors, everybody on that upscale fraternity used to follow the sound because they used to feel so safe and secure. We used to play like an hour of reggae music, half an hour of soul, another 15 minutes of calypso. We were playing reggae, calypso, rock and roll, everything—everybody was being entertained.” There was no need to have a deejay, at least in the beginning.

But times where changing. Soul and funk sets in the city were playing more reggae and starting to feature a live deejay for the reggae segments. In 1978, Soul to Soul started using deejays. At first, Rosa explains, not everyone appreciated the change. “It wasn’t everybody who liked the deejays. So, we didn’t make the deejays be too monotonous [i.e. by performing all the time]. We did it in different segments. Like in one part of the reggae we used to play singing songs and then in the other part we used to play singing songs for about a minute then we would turn over the record – the version is on the

* The name comes from Soul to Soul, the 1971 documentary film of a concert in Ghana that featured artists like Tina Turner, Wilson Pickett, Santana and the Staple Singers
other side - and the deejays would deejay it. A lot of deejays and signers started following our sound. All the top deejays used to come around. They loved to deejay in the set because the environment was so different.”

Before Lone Ranger joined, it was Rosa alone and selector Captain Ritchie on the sound each night. “After Ranger started that first night there, the following week he was permanently on the set as the deejay. It was him [alone] until Ringo came, Welton Irie came, Mikey Dread – we had too many deejays. But, apart from Ranger and maybe Ringo, and Welton, the other deejays weren’t on the staff. They would get something when they work, at the end of the night. But Ranger and Welton and Ringo, they used to get regular payment.”

The slackness part would be saved for after midnight. As Rosa explains, “Those days in dance, you’d be playing in a lawn there would be 100 people inside, and outside there would be like thousands of people. So, the people would not be coming in the lawn until they hear the deejays. And after the deejays start deejaying, there is a rush at the door – everybody is coming in until it is fully packed. Once they were inside, that’s the time the deejaying slackness really started.”

Ranger remembers the huge response slackness got, “The Soul to Soul crowd love that kind of songs. People would follow me [to] 14 parishes just to hear me deejay my slackness round. What I did sometimes, I have a special hour that I say, ‘I’m going to do strictly slackness for this hour’. So you have people come from far just for that hour. Sometimes I don’t deejay it until one or two o clock when they are crying for it. When I give it to them, the place is up and down!”

By this time, Ranger was headlining dances all across Jamaica, as well as performing at Sunsplash and touring abroad and, at home. “Right in that time, ‘Barnabas Collins’ went to number one. I got deejay of the year, and Soul to Soul got number one sound of the year in 1979 at the El Suzie award. It was through Rosa that I made my first appearance on Reggae Sunsplash in 1979 and 1980, with Bob Marley, and Burning Spear, Toots and the Maytals, Joe Higgs and Jacob Miller.”

**Virgo**

Carlton and Ranger had been separated when Ranger was with Soul to Soul, but they were to meet again on Virgo Hi Fi the following year. Ranger had gotten too big for a sound that played so much soul and ‘funky’ [funk]. So, he took his talents to Virgo. “Soul to Soul used to play rub-a-dub, soul and disco music. Virgo, now, was a rub-a-dub sound. Virgo don’t play soul music. Virgo don’t play disco music. They used to. But when I come, and rub-a-dub era start, it was strictly rub-a-dub,” Ranger recalls.

Lone Ranger was the first of the pair to join the crew of Virgo. But eventually, Ranger managed to coax Carlton into joining him. Very few sounds had resident singers back in the ’70s. “Virgo was one of the sounds that was
a leader in that,” Carlton remembered. “Ronnie Virgo [the owner] had a vision. Sammy Dread was with the sound about two years before I came. He would come around to certain big dances but there was another sound from down around where he comes from and he was singing on it. I think that Ronnie loved singers. Of all the sound systems, Ronnie treated his singers pretty good.”

Owner Ronnie Virgo was a businessman who had a little trucking operation and took on construction and demolition jobs around the island. Even before he started Virgo, he used to play a little component set for parties. And he used to play pure soul. But everyone was playing soul back then – Gemini, Kilimanjaro and the special soul sets like Afrique and Mellow Canary. Virgo’s future Selector Tony Virgo admits, “I never stop play soul, but I never play as much like before when Ronnie used to play him office party. Cause he used to be living in Havendale. He grow in the ghetto, but he was a Havendale guy. He was wealthy and he love to have his nice parties with the soul.”

When Ronnie started the sound around 1977, Virgo had deejay Ray I. “Used to start like 100 people, 200 people”, Tony Virgo recalls, “Two night a week, three night a week. There was some big clash come up now between [Virgo and] Ray Symbolic with Ranking Joe, then [with] Arrows, Emperor Faith – so we start to get tough now. We would play every sound you can think of in Jamaica. Some we lick down, some lick we down.”

It was at a Virgo dance that producer Derrick Harriott spotted Ray I and started recording him. In fact, Ray I’s 1977 LP, Rasta Revival, on Move and Groove Records (produced by Derrick Harriott) featured a shot of Virgo sound in action on the front cover. Tony used to go to Derrick’s record shop a lot, as he puts it, to “hunt records”, so when Ronnie decided to try his hand at producing with his own Virgonian label in 1977, he gave the 45s to Derrick to distribute. The label had a handful of releases, produced and arranged between Ronnie Virgo and I Roy, including Brent Dowe’s ‘Come On Pretty Girl’ and ‘Things You Say You Love’, a couple from Cornell Campbell, ‘Confusion and Heartache’, and Tinga Stewart’s cover of soul singer Timmi Thomas’ ‘Why We Can’t Live Together’. The Brent Dowe LP was popular and brought a new crowd out to see the sound.

After he had a falling out with Papa Gemini, Welton Irie joined Virgo for a short time, but he soon returned to share the spotlight with Ringo. “Ringo was there first [on Gemini],” Welton recalls. “I leave Virgo and left Ranger alone there, and I went to the country for some time, on Echo Vibration in St Marys. Then, when I came back in town now, 1982 – on Gemini, again.” And so began the famous combination of Ringo and Welton that kept Gemini on top. Ranger remained on Virgo where he was joined by lifelong pal, Carlton Livingston and later, U Brown and Nicodemus.

Ronnie had to travel for his work, so Tony Virgo was the one keeping the

* He came from Greenwich Farm and sang on Echo Vibration
set going. Traveling frequently gave Ronnie the opportunity to pick up anything the sound might need, all those things that were ‘expensive and dear’ at home, like boxes of dubplates, and phonograph needles. Officially, Tony was the selector. He would normally arrive at the dance at 10 pm and play until three or four in the morning. In the early evening, the warm up crew would be in place. Tony still played his 20 minutes of soul, but focused on the rub-a-dub, constantly updating his dubplate collection at Channel One, Gussie’s and King Tubby. Virgo was getting so popular, they started getting calls from abroad begging them to tour.

So, two weeks into October, 1982, the sound packed up and flew to New York. When they showed up in Queens, to play their first dance, they were greeted like celebrities. Radio jock Gil Bailey* came out to interview Tony and the crew for his program. For a while, Virgo ruled. But things started going bad. Nicodemus was shot at a dance that Tony was selecting with Emperor sound in Washington, DC. “Then, I went to Chicago and that same problem occurred and I say, ‘It’s coming like this thing getting out of hand’. Then I play in Connecticut one night and one my way there some police stop me and ask me if I am Tony Virgo.”

Things were getting too hot for the selector. “Shortly after, I play in Queens one night and leave the sound in Queens, and they burn off the lock that night and thief the amplifiers them and some of the speaker, and mash up some of the dubplates.” Tony had to borrow equipment and cut some new plates, but he was starting to long for the tour to wrap up and see the sound safe at home. Life in the U.S. wasn’t turning out to be as easy as it looked from afar.

At that point, Tony suggested to Ronnie, “‘Let’s not live in America. Let’s take the sound and go to England and move on, and go back to Jamaica. Make we just play four more dance here and move again’. But Ronnie got caught up in a lot of woman stuff and stuff like that.” The sound was going down, so, eventually Tony left and started to select the champion New York set, Papa Moke.

Tony ended up staying in New York as a coveted selector for many years. He finally gave up the sound business and got more involved with his church. But for a long time, he continued to keep busy producing a few artists like Cocoa Tea and his good friend, Carlton Livingston.

Meanwhile, Soul to Soul hadn’t weathered the change to rub-a-dub well. In 1982, Rosa sold the equipment to Studio 54 and moved to Canada, went back into the sound business, where he became a leader and a role model for local sounds in the burgeoning Toronto dancehall scene.

**THE LONE RANGER STYLE**

In 1980, Lone Ranger was sizzling hot. Every sound he touched reached

* Gil Bailey is now into his fifth decade on the air and has an upscale fashion shoe named after him, The Bailey, by Clae.
number one. “Being with Coxsone, with my first song for Coxsone, which was ‘Answer me Question’, and during that time, me and Welton Irie, we did a combination, ‘Chase Them Crazy’, on the ‘Mr. Bassey’ rhythm. And then I did the ‘Love Bump’ and it shot straight to number one. I got deejay of the year. Virgo got champion sound for the year. Virgo won champion sound again, for 1981 and I recorded a thing for Winston Riley, ‘Rosemarie’ that went to number one again! Virgo got number one sound again. We had a sound clash with Jammys, Jack Ruby and Scorpio in Skateland. We threw them down. We beat every sound.”

Ranger stood out from the pack. Because of the time he lived abroad as a child, Ranger developed a different style of toasting that greatly influenced the way deejays approached their material in the ‘80s. Despite being new in town, Ranger was quickly getting recognized on the circuit. With his typically disciplined approach, he would begin by studying the styles of the most popular toaster of the day. He would write down all the lyrics from the A side of a 45 and then practice them over the B side version, with special attention to the work of U Roy and Big Youth.

Thus, Ranger’s style certainly had its roots in the founding fathers, but his having attended school so long in London gave him a unique delivery. English music had made a big impression on him, as had his time in an English school. He had a way of enunciating each word so that his delivery, although in patios, was clear and his words distinguishable. “I was going to Tottenham County Grammar school, so you know, you have to speak proper grammar, English, yes, and I was doing drama in school at the time.”

Whereas U Roy had the swing and tended to slur his words for effect, Ranger had clear diction and kept to a straighter, almost metronomic timing. The major difference, however, was the way Ranger filled the spaces with words. He didn’t wait out the bars for the right spot to jump in. He just talked right through, telling fabulous stories, using his imagination and sense of humor to spin a tall tale, just like General Echo used to do.

Recording

Chester Symoie believed in Ranger from the start. Early on, he had booked time at the Treasure Isle studio and recorded two songs with Ranger deejaying backed by a group called I-Fenders. Like many other deejays, Ranger started out singing, but the deejaying experiment sounded so professional that Chester decided to stick with it. “When we see that he was doing so good with the deejay, we park the singing and follow the deejay career.”

In fact, Chester was so impressed with Ranger, he rounded up Tony Walcott and they both took Ranger to Studio One, to be presented to Mr. Dodd. There, Ranger deejayed a version of the ‘Answer’ rhythm and Coxsone immediately gave him the key to the vault and let him pick out some rhythms he wanted to voice for an LP.

In 1977, two years after having released deejay Dillinger’s LP, Ready Natty
Dready, Studio One owner Coxsone Dodd recorded an album called *On the Other Side of Dub* with newcomer Lone Ranger. Instead of presenting the LP as a ‘showcase’, i.e. the vocal followed by the version, Coxsone put all the vocals on one side, and all the versions on the other*.

At that time, Chester’s brother Leon Symoie was producing for his own label, Thrill Seekers, but without much happening for his records. So, he and Chester borrowed some cash from an older brother and invested in building five new rhythm tracks at Channel One**.

The rhythms turned out to be the perfect vehicle for Ranger’s broad talents. Leon recorded a full LP, and they decided to release ‘Barnabas in Collins Woods’ as a seven inch on the Thrill Seekers label. Afterwards, they approached various distributors and producers with the tapes for the LP.

First they gave the two-track tape to Miss Pat at Randy’s. After a year, Randy’s still hadn’t done anything with it, so the next stop was GG, Alvin Ranglin’s label.

Mr. Ranglin took the 45 to distribute and gladly released the LP on his own label. Chester recalls, “When he press the first set of the record, he put we name on it— that we produce it. But when the tune take off, him don’t put our name with it. Him behave like him is the producer of the song. We never get we fair share, but during those time, it was like a learning process.”

The LP showcased Ranger’s excellent song writing capacities as well as his top notch deejaying. In the song ‘Annie Palmer’, Ranger manages to toast a lyric telling the old legend that every child learns in school, the story of Annie Palmer, the White Witch of Rose Hall, the powerful and cruel plantation owner who allegedly kept her slaves under her control by using ‘obeah’ (witchcraft or sorcery).

The title song, ‘Barnabas in Collins Wood’, was influenced by ABC’s soap opera serial, Dark Shadows, which appeared in the U.S. from 1966 to 1971. In the lyrics, Ranger gives a hilarious account of Barney’s night out on the town.

Me seh, twelve o’clock Barney come out of him box
Him eye get red and him ears start dread
Him teeth get long, man, him start feel strong
When him forward pon the scene, you hear a gal start scream…
Gal, me seh, out the candle, take off your bangle,
Turn you neck pon the right angle…

**L**ove **B**ump

Despite its evident quality and appeal, the album ran into problems when GG licensed it to Island records without Chester or Ranger’s knowledge, leav-

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* The idea was used again in 1980, by Jah Life and Junjo on Jah Thomas’s LP *Dance Pon the Corner*.

** Included was the Conversation rhythm that eventually made its way to Junjo and Jah Life.
ing Ranger to have his greatest success with his next release in 1981 (back again with Studio One), the rollicking 45, ‘Love Bump’.

The lyrics were inspired by a recent news story about some canned fish that had gone bad. Ranger explains the story behind ‘Love Bump’, “Bob Marley was around in those times – well, you know Bob Marley and the dreadlocks– he was going to foreign countries and the white people were starting to locks.” Hippies all turn on to Bob Marley music. They were coming to Jamaica a lot.

“During that period of time, we had some problems in Jamaica with the tin mackerel. Mackerel used to come in tin and some bad batch would come to Jamaica and you would eat it and get ptomaine poisoning and bumps.” All that was going on in Jamaica.”

Somehow, people got it mixed up and thought that the ‘hippies’ (or white rastas) were bringing the ‘bumps’ in. So, it turned into a big controversy – some people said it was the food, some blamed the hippies. So, Ranger tied it all to another ‘bump’, the ‘love bumps’ as Jamaicans would call a teen’s first pimples. “You know when you’re young and you fall in love, you start to get pimples on your face, they say, ‘Oh, that’s a love bump. You’re in love. You have a girl,” Ranger explains.

Like Echo, Ranger presented the story with humor, imitations, and interjections – more like a routine than just a song. Done over the Studio One version of Slim Smith’s rock steady classic ‘Rougher Yet’, ‘Love Bump’ was upbeat, cheerful, and the lyrics were catchy. Ranger animated the songs by emphasizing certain words and varying his vocal range. Love Bump became one of the most well known and well loved songs of the entire decade and Ranger one of the biggest stars.

“I was so hot on sound system at that time. I was deejaying seven nights a week all over Jamaica, and tapes*** were going all over the world,” Ranger recalled. Cassettes of dance with Ranger at the mic where being passed around at home and abroad like hot potatos. The mark of a good deejays was always the value placed on cassette recordings of his performances on a sound. Ranger tapes were in high demand. His friend in New York, deejay Mikey Jarrett**** got a hold of one and took it to Jojo Hookim at Channel One and told him, “Listen to this deejay!” It was brilliant marketing. Mikey played Jojo the part of the dance cassette where Ranger was toasting live over rhythms that had been made in the Channel One studio, and told Jojo, “You get him to voice them on an album, that would be a seller!” Ranger continues, “When Jojo heard it, I got a phone call in Jamaica, ‘I want you to go round by Channel

* Grow dreadlocks

** The song said, “How you get the hippy bump? Through me nyam tin mackerel and feel ill”. “Nyam” means ‘to eat’.

*** Cassette recordings of the dances

**** Mikey Jarrett was a polular deejay who had emigrated early on to NY. Had an ex-pat hit with Sadat for Jah Life in 1981 and in 1983, started his own label, What’s Up Doc.
One Studio and wait on [Jojo’s] call’. So I went to Channel One studio and Jojo called and asked me, ‘How long will it take you to do this album?’ I said, ‘It will probably take me 20 minutes, half an hour’. He said, ‘Ok, do this’. I went in there and in half an hour, the album was done.”

The album was *M 16*, perhaps Ranger’s strongest work to date. The only two tracks to be released on 45 in Jamaica were ‘Fist to Fist Days Done’ and the title track. But ‘M 16’ was so popular that the original rhythm, recorded Lloyd “Matador” Daley and voiced by U Roy in 1969, was never called ‘Scan-dal’ again. Its new name was ‘M 16’.

The powerful backing tracks for the LP were laid down by Sly and Robbie and mixed by Soljie – in fact, ‘M 16’ was the first tune he mixed as an engineer. “It’s bright and it’s mixed properly”, Ranger asserts. “And the words are clean. And the ‘slurs’, and the ‘Bims!’ and the ‘Rights!’ Everything is so clean.” ‘M 16’ was another one of the biggest songs for the decade, inspiring a tidal wave of gun lyrics that lasted the entire ten years and still continues in the dancehall today.

Not long after *M 16* came out, Ranger began working with producer Winston Riley. This time with the rhythms laid down by the Roots Radics band, Ranger voiced a new LP, *Rosemarie*. For the title song, an update of Ray Charles’ 1955 massive hit, ‘Hallelujah I Love Her So’.

Ranger and the band developed an original backing track to which Ranger added his percussive “slurs”- “I’m always full of ‘Bim’, ‘right’, ‘ribbit’”. The final song opened with a loping beat and Ranger chanting, “Widly bong–slong. Let me tell ya bout a girl I know. Wuddlyey bong – slong.” It was another chart buster for the deejay.

**Freestyle to Composition**

Although his career had been short, General Echo was an innovator and a pivotal deejay in the development of modern toasting techniques. The mic chanters of the ’60s and ’70s, like U Roy, Dennis Alcapone, or Jah Woosh, tended to be ‘freestyle’. They allowed the strands of vocal left in the rhythm by the engineer to dictate the theme, or at least suggest the starting point for what they would say. What followed was up to the mood of the deejay and the atmosphere of the dance. The deejay could go into folk songs, children’s nursery rhymes, pop hits or scat singing. The deejay’s lyrics didn’t have to make logical, sequential sense. They didn’t have to function as a whole, as a singer’s would. They could start anywhere and end up somewhere unrelated with no apparent link in between. The beauty of this style was that it allowed for maximum freedom and complete spontaneity.

As ’70s deejay Crutches explains it, “Those things was ‘style’. When you go a dance, it’s not like you make the lyrics from two, three days before. In the dance those things come to you. One night, me and Ivan [the owner] playing

* meaning clear and crisp sounding
the sound in Kencott. I was [selecting] the sound and we want Bill...and I was like, ‘Bill, you’re wanted at the control’. And something just come to me and I say, ‘Bill Bo Bill Bo, in and out the window, Bill Bo Bill Bo, tell me what you really know’. It’s just like something come to you. It’s not a thing like you plan.”

The deejays of yore rode the melody and the rhythmic waves with all the dips and peaks. They went with the music’s swing. As they said, they would ‘lay down pon the rhythm like a lizard pon limb’, relaxing into it and taking its shape. They let their words mark a pace within the time structure of the song. So, rather than going with a narrative, they tended to go with loose phrases, words, syllables and cries. Trinity recalled that, back in the early days, deejays didn’t even plan for recording sessions. “We just go in and listen to the rhythm and freestyle it out of we head. Cause sometime, when it come out of your head, you get more vibes. When you a look pon the paper, and stand ‘round the mic, it’s like you a recite. People can listen and say, ‘a read, him a read’. Them hear you like you a count lyrics. But when it build ina your head, it flow more.”

But, newer deejays were becoming more apt at filling up every beat with words. No syncopation, no swing. One of the popular shared lyrics in those times, was a round of adding sums that went, “two and two - that a four. Four plus four - that a eight...” and so on, ad infinitum. It became a popular way to fill in the gaps - gaps which were increasingly viewed as empty space rather than rhythm enhancing pauses.

“Style” had ruled the ‘70s. “Those deejay were free - right off the top of your head,” Welton Irie explains. What was most important was the deejay’s tone of voice and his timing. “There was a lot of repetition. There wasn’t a lot of lyrics. Maybe only one thing – but it sounded nice,”

Popular hit making deejay Dillinger began to change that style. “Dillinger took it a step with the lyrics and then Ranking Joe took it another level,” Welton continues. But even though Dillinger’s lyrics contained a more complex narrative, he never wrote them down. “I just do them in my mind anytime I get an inspiration. I just practice, practice on the sound system,” Dillinger explained. “Then guys like me and Ringo came on,” Welton adds, “Especially me and Ringo – we started writing.”

They had to. Slack lyrics required forethought. “You have to sit down and really put the slackness together, cause it’s actually like a story you are telling. Some times when we just wrote a lyrics we would take the book with us and read from it until we got it down. Me and Ringo had our book there, open it, and we had our ear phone on. And we be reading it. Sometimes we make a little mistake. Eventually, we would memorize it fully; we wouldn’t need the book anymore.”

The slack style relied on a story line to support (however loosely) the bawdy sections, like Ringo’s ballad about romping in the White House (to the tune of ‘Ali Baba’):
I dreamed last night I was in the White House,  
Ronald Reagan say him catch crab louse,  
His wife, Nancy, she wan’ sex me,  
She just a stare pon me long cockie,  
(chorus) I slept with the president’s daughter and his wife,  
When I done fire off, I have to run for me life.

Lone Ranger, in his later sanitized incarnation, carried the same writing style into his culture and reality lyrics. Choosing each word carefully, but spicing it with some scat, like the popular ‘right’ and ‘ribbit’, he created a new hybrid style that came to dominate the dancehall world.

Ranger’s lyrics were no longer spontaneous outpourings, driven by the beat. They were written for presentation, as carefully as any song. When he left the slackness field, Ranger took his composing style with him and began writing deejay lyrics for the dance that fit the format of a song. They were two-three minutes in length, had a chorus, a bridge and a few verses.

The lyrics to Ranger’s hit ‘Love Bump’ were originally Ringo’s. But Ranger took the idea and polished it, using all of General Echo’s best loved devises – impersonation, exaggeration, humor – and carefully constructed a funny story that was safe for the whole family.

The gal say she wan’ go show!  
Take her to the show that she wanted to go  
Nuff entertainment, Nuff excitement  
Little after that she say, she want refreshment!  
(croons) A whe’ you give your daughter, Lone Ranger, a whe’ you give the daughter?  
(deejays) Ice mint and ice water (Rasta me did bruk!)  
Ice mint (unlike Scat) and ice water - kiss me neck!  
When me reach home, she back her cutlass  
(Angry girl voice) Me gwan have fe kill you cause you nearly mek me dead with gas!!

Ranger recalls, “It was comedy. In those days, when we were writing our lyrics, we put a little humor in it too.” In the ‘80s, people began to demand humor from their deejays, and to comply, deejays began to take more care in writing complete, coherent lyrics. Deejays like Josie Wales, Charlie Chaplin, General Trees, Early B, Lt. Stitchie, Peter Metro and Yellowman came up with fairly complex stories, full of fantasy, imaginative scenarios, jokes and punch lines. Even later, came men like Tiger and Professor Nuts who staked their careers on being funny. Deejays were coming to the dance prepared with prewritten scripts and not much freelancing was heard anymore.
PRODUCING

At this point, with so much going for him, Ranger, like so many other deejays and singers, began to feel the need to control his own product. So, he got together with Clive Jarrett and formed the Dynamite label with the support of Sly and Robbie who played on the tracks. The first release was Ranger’s ‘Johnny Make You Bad So’ 45, followed by the album, *Hi Yo Silver Away* which was released by Greensleeves in 1981. The producing team followed up with several releases with Carlton Livingston including the classics, ‘Marie, Confusion’ and ‘Rumors’. Dynamite also released Welton Irie’s LP, *Army Life*. Meanwhile, Ranger developed his own label called Silver Bullet.

Around this time, Ranger left Jamaica, like so many other artists, and took up residence in New York. Chester explains the move, “His mother and brothers had gone. He was the only one here [in Jamaica] after his old man died. So him do some show and him start tour with a bredda name Sam [Selkridge] and then, one of the times, him never bother come back. Get himself straight, and get him green card and stay up there.” When he abandoned his homeland, Ranger left the job of maintaining slackness in the dancehall to his east side buddies, Welton Irie and Ringo, who carried it on with conviction.

Once in New York, Ranger did the rounds of appearances on stage shows and sound systems. Then came the missing years during which nobody heard very much from him. As happened to so many other artists who left promising careers in Jamaica, New York seemed to swallow him whole. There were some Silver Bullet releases out of New York, like the disco 45 of ‘Four Season Lover’ with Ranger back into singing mode, proving himself a competent balladeer, as well as some combo tunes with Carlton Livingston and Sammy Dread. In 1984, Ranger recorded the LP, *D.J. Daddy* for Winston Riley, and 1985 also saw the release of ‘Learn fe Drive’, for Clive Jarrett. Then, nothing much until the 1994 LP *Collections* was released. Still, *Collections* was basically a sampler containing work from his previous releases, not new material.

Coming to New York proved the downfall of many Jamaican artists. Lone Ranger was one of the fortunate ones who went through the worst and had the strength and courage to come out of it alive. “In 1984-85, when the cocaine was the ‘in’ thing in New York, if you didn’t have a dollar bill filled with cocaine, you weren’t partying. Remember those days? That was the ‘in’ thing. You go to Reggae Lounge, you go to Manhattan, you go to Brooklyn, you go to Bronx session – everywhere. Some of them get in the game and can’t come out. Some of them get dead in the game. Some of us go through the struggle and manage to get out of it.”

The result was almost a decade of silence. Apart from a handful of 45s, Ranger recorded nothing until 2002 when his loyal friend of so many years, Coxsone Dodd, released the LP *Top of the Class*. That gave him the boost he needed to jump back in and start working again in earnest.

Like many of the founding dancehallers, Ranger found his niche as a producer and began working once again, choosing artists he really respected,
artists from the past like The Silvertones and Raking Trevor, trying to raise awareness that ‘real’ dancehall music was still around.
Where there was slackness, there was also “culture”, the opposing force in
dancehall, championed by those who felt music ought to be a force for change in society and a tool for teaching the youth. “Slackness in the Garden hiding, hiding from Jah Jah…”* cultural deejay Brigadier Jerry used to chant on the microphone, as if taunting the slack sounds and challenging them to try and beat ‘culture’.

Arrow’s deejay, Crutches, a purely roots and cultural toaster explains, “At the time, it was two different set of deejay. It wasn’t a physical segregation. It was just a different type of man. Cause them [slack deejays] drink. We [culture deejays] don’t drink. We don’t eat meat. At that time, you had two different set of food sell in dancehall. You have a thing named I-tal food – I-tal stew. And you have the curry goat section, different. That time, [Rasta] man don’t drink beer. It was them kinda thing.”

It was a battle for the heart and minds of the dancehall fans, as sounds of both types tried to appeal to a larger segment of the population. In the early ‘80s, slackness was in the lead. As more deejays picked up on the slackness style, the soul crowd began to pay attention to reggae. While the thunder rolling and lightening flashing of the ‘70s roots music had kept the soul crowd at a relative distance, slackness meshed better with the themes of foreign songs, disco and funk. The more commercial (i.e. soul) sounds were gradually adding more reggae and getting the majority of the bookings in the big venues. It looked like the days of roots and culture were fading away. So, who could have predicted that one of the most highly rated and well respected sound systems of the ‘80s would be the small, non-commercial, ‘orthodox’ set, Jah Love Music, the official sound of the 12 Tribes of Israel organization, with toaster Brigadier Jerry.

THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

The 12 Tribes of Israel, founded by Vernon Carrington, alias the Prophet Gad (or Gadman), grew out of The Ethiopian World Federation, Charter 15. The EWF, incorporated in 1937 had, as its original aim, the support of Ethiopia against the invasion by Italy. In the early ‘70s, EWF member Gadman turned that Charter 15 into an organization he called The 12 Tribes of Israel

* Taken from the West Indian folk song, Adam in the Garden Hiding.
and he began to operate the new group independent of the parent body.

The Twelve Tribes, named after the sons of Jacob in the Old Testament, reflected a mixed Rastafarian/Christian system of beliefs. While they considered Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia to be God’s kingly manifestation on earth, they found room for the divinity of Christ. Unlike their Rastafarian brethren, there was no requirement to grow dreadlocks and they were permitted to eat meat. According to Gad, the way to salvation was to read a chapter of the Bible a day, a concept that enters regularly into Brigadier Jerry’s lyrics on the sound. Oddly, for an organization devoted to returning to Africa, the native land, the membership varied widely in ethnic origin. Like Rastafarians, the 12 Tribes did not believe in death. As the late Gadman put it, “For us, we don’t die. We only sleep, waiting for the resurrection.”

The 12 Tribes was not a rambling, ragamuffin venture. It was a highly structured, international organization. As the members tended to be more ‘uptown’, and therefore had better access to education, the organization, in some ways, suffered from a perception that it was a middle class operation, as did the sound. At home, it included many reggae entertainers like Pavlov Black, Dennis Brown, Judy Mowatt, Bagga Walker, Freddy McGregor and Fredlocks.

**Jah Love Stands Alone**

In the ’70s, when it became the Twelve Tribes, the organization had a sound system based in Papine, a residential area along the far eastern side of Kingston past Mona Heights and close the mountains, where Brigadier and future selector Ilawe grew up. Papine was had several cultural sounds going at the time.

“You used to have a sound named Sounds of Love [owned by Earl Belcher] and you have a sound named JahMik Music,” deejay Brigadier Jerry explains. “So, the two sounds combined by taking the Love out of Sounds of Love and taking the Jah Music and putting the ‘Love’ in the middle. So, they turn it into one sound and that is how we get Jah Love Music. I went there I think it was about ’73. Cause, I’ve been there since I was about 13.”

Before coming to Jah Love, Brigadier made his debut on another local sound. Emperor Marcus, the grand foundation cultural sound, deejayed by Augusts Pablo’s recording artist Jah Bull, was the first sound system that Brigadier worked professionally. Owner Marcus’s home was next door to Brigi’s. “How that sound started, he just had his little component set on his veranda playing some real good music,” Brigi explains. But Marcus was a fiercely territorial sound owner. “You cyaan go a that yard deh ya. The man whe’ own the yard deh [was] like a lion and you cyaan go ina him yard. Whe’ you haf fe do is stand up on the sidewalk and listen. He was my next door neighbor. The

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* Interview with Dr. Vernon Carrington: The Beloved Prophet Gad, July 13th, 1997 on Jamaican radio station IRIE FM’s Running African, Interview by Ms. Andrea Williams
steel horns coming like them setting right in my yard.”

The sound often played sessions up in the hills. Brigadier’s sister and fellow deejay, Sister Nancy, used to hear Brigi’s voice from afar while she was working around the house. Brigi was out there deejaying for Emperor Marcus. Brigadier recalls, “I couldn’t wait for school to over, man! School over, I went to my home, changed my clothes. The sound was over in the hills. So, I cross the river, I go up there and string it up. String up the steel horns and the one little box. And they couldn’t get rid of me.”

After a stay with Marcus, Brigadier was invited to hold the mic at a Jah-Mick Music dance at Mona Heights. At the time, Brigadier was known as Ranking Dickie. “I went to the celebration they were keeping for a Bredren. I think he was going to Ethiopia. Through a couple of people in my community know that I am a deejay, [they said], ‘Brigi, come hold the mic and chat two thing now.’ And from that day, I never put it [the mic] down back.”

Even before becoming a professional, career deejay, Brigadier used to perform what he refers to as ‘stand-up comedy’. He would tell the audience children’s stories and fables, often about animals, like the Guinea pig named Sammy*, Bumbo the elephant, or Aesop’s Androcles and the Lion. The tales had a twist at the end and he would narrative them in a patterned vocal style that made use of pauses and rhythmic changes to emphasize events along the way. He later developed a deejay style that made good use of his ability to pace his words and measure his phrases.

When Brigi began to take the sound system business seriously, he changed his name. “Ina them time there most of the deejay were Ranking – Ranking Joe, Trevor Ranking, Peter Ranking, and through I say Brigadier run all the ranks, so I just go one step ahead of the ranks. Jerry was my original name ‘cause my father was Mr. Jerry. And whenever time anybody see us they say, ‘Boy, from me see you, me can tell you a Jerry pickney [child].’ So, me just use his name ca’ he was a big man in the community.”

Just as described in Brigadier’s popular lyrics, Mr. Jerry farmed ** and did, indeed, leave every morning to tend to his land in St Andrews. As did his grandfather on his mother’s side. So the Jerry clan never lacked for food.

Both Brigadier and neighborhood musician Albert Malawi, later to become legendary Jah Love selector Ilawe, joined the Twelve Tribes the same year. Gadman’s teachings were sweeping the community in the early ’70s. “Me go to the 12 Tribes in 1972 at the age of 13 - same time Ilawe joined. Me big sister whe’ me follow went to one of the meetings and then she come back and tell us about it. So, we go now and check it out and, boy, the vibe was

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* For example, this story began, “There was brown and white Guinea pig called Sammy who lived quite a happy life in his hutch looking after wise young master. One night he escape and, how pleased he was to be free!”

** lyrics: “My father is a farmer, everyday him gone plow. Him plant I-laloo and him plant Bok Chow” (Calaloo and Bok Choy)
there so we just hang on.” The ‘Jerry’ family ended up with five of the siblings as members, three of Brigi’s sisters and his older brother Jeremiah.

**Jah Love Crew**

Ilawe, Jah Love’s selector, began his musical career as a drummer under the name Albert Malawe. The young Malawe learned his craft as a pupil attending the Alpha Boy’s school, the home of so many of reggae’s musical legends. There he gained experience - not just drumming, but selecting. Ilawe recalls, “The school ran a little disco and Sister Ignatius Davies would play the sound every weekend”. Some days, she did the selecting. Sometimes, she called for Ilawe to fill in. Ilawe originally joined the Twelve Tribes in 1972, in response to their request for a drummer, but stayed on as the selector for Jah Love.

For a long time, Brigadier was the only deejay on Jah Love, until he was joined by Mr. Peng. The other mainstay, apart from his brother Jeremiah, was Rueben. Each Jah Love dance had a certain point at which things got serious. Regular patrons knew when it was coming and hit the record buttons on their tape decks. The signal would be Rueben the Chanter starting his chant. “That’s all him do”, Brigi recalls, “When certain music play – like, ‘Sattamasagana’, ‘Drum Song’, he always chant him two, three tune”.

**Revival Style**

A Jah Love dance, with Brigadier at the ‘microphone center’, was considered by many aficionados at the time, to be the pinnacle of dancehall excellence. Multi-talented Brigadier could deejay, chant, and sing. He was famous worldwide for his ‘revival style’ - the way he sang hymns and gospel songs over the rub-a-dub rhythms with the words changed to reflect his Twelve Tribes beliefs.

Brigadier brought the pulpit into the dancehall. “I was the first person who really do that – put [gospel] on reggae. Calypso, Country & Western – all those things [have gospel in them]. I was the first one who put it in reggae.”

Such a merging was inevitable as Brigi had grown up surrounded by church music. The local church was six houses away, although it felt like it was right on top when it was full of people singing. His father, Mr. Jerry, had been a preacher before he lost his voice following a throat operation. He was known all through the community for singing in church. However, Brigadier has no memory of hearing his father sing. He was too young at the time. His father was an older man, coming from a first marriage that produced several children, before marrying his mother and producing seven more. But, when local people used to hear Brigi singing, they would often comment that he sounded like his father.

Although he loved music, as a child Jerry still resisted going to church. “I didn’t like the choir, but they push me up there anyhow. I go because my

* According to Brigadier, Rueben now lives in Canada
parents said to go but – serious thing – I didn’t like it.” Despite his resistance, Brigi borrowed widely and successfully from both the church and local folk religious practices to enrich his lyrics and his performing style.

The ‘Shank I Shek’ rhythm seemed to be suited to gospel. With a repetitive phrase and no bridge, the rhythm charges forward with the energy and zeal of a revival meeting. The original is reported to have been a Baba Brooks instrumental cut as a special for King Edwards the Giant’s sound system. (The title is a corruption of the name Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese military leader who sought to unify China and suppress the communist movement). It was released in 1966 as a King Edwards 45. Bobby Ellis brought it back in 1979 with his version on High Note which became one of the more frequently played rhythms of the early ’80s. While on sets like Gemini, ‘Shank I Shek’ usually served as a base for singing Mento songs, on Jah Love, it was pure ‘revival’. Brigadier reports that he once filed a 90 minute cassette tape with his gospel based, ‘revival styles’ over the rhythm.*

Once Ilawe put the ‘Shank I Shek’ on the turntable, Brigi would go from his ‘Flat Foot Hustling’ lyrics straight into revival. “Oh, this is showers of blessing that come from the heaven above…”, followed with “Oh Lord, remember me when I go down on my knees to pray. Give me protection from all the wicked in this world….” Then, “Jah sent Jonah to Nineveh land…Jah move and the wind blow, Jah move and the wind blow and it trouble everybody mind…” And, “If anyone asks you, what’s the matter with you, Brigadier, tell them you’ve been baptized in Jah Jah blood and sanctified…” The grand finale would be, what came to be called, “The Twelve Tribes Shake” in which Brigadier would sing “This a the Twelve Tribe shake. Jah Love make the whole place quake. Jah Love coming like a damn earthquake…”, still over ‘Shank I Shek’.

**Nine Nights**

After his extensive Shank I Shek showcase, Brigadier would transition into the Burial versions, toasted over the version of Peter Tosh’s 1975 Intel Diplo release†. Usually Ilawe started the set with Prince Allah’s song, ‘Funeral’, and Brigi would deejay his reluctance (as a Twelve Tribes member) to attend funerals. In his lyrics, he refers to the Nine Night celebration‡. Like most Jamaicans, Brigi attended many Nine Nights, the gathering held following the death of a relative or friend.

“More times, [when] you go to a Nine Night, some people sing some dangerous [powerful] songs, man. Because the whole of them grew up [together], if somebody in the community died, everybody would have to stay the night and them and sing and sing until daylight, from night ‘til morning. And them

* Two popular vocal version were the 7th Extension’s Hard Times, aka Hey Youthman (Zodiac 7 inch), written and sung by veteran singer Derrick Lara. The other piece on the rhythm was Ranking Devon’s All Nation Have to Bow, also a Zodiac 7 inch, 1981
drink their coffee and eat then fish and [drink] them white rum and the singing didn’t stop. Me deh de as a youth and me observe.”

For nine whole nights, people gathered at the home of the deceased and kept watch over the corpse. To pass the time, people would play dominoes, talk about the deceased, tell stories about his life, pray and sing songs from ‘The Sankey’, as it is referred to in Jamaica, a book of hymns written by American, Ira Sankey, at the turn of the century. At the ‘Set-Up’ or the singing night, people ate food and drank their 100 proof rum until the early hours of the morning, taking existing songs and changing the lyrics to recount passages from the deceased’s life. On the ninth night, the deceased’s soul was thought to drop by on its way to the great beyond.

Brigadier borrowed heavily from Nine Nights traditions in his toasting, lifting popular and folk songs and adapting them for the dance. “‘Pope Paul dead and gone. Him never write no will’ – all them things, they come from Nine Night. Those are the songs they sing – like, who dies, they use his name. Like ‘Johnny dead and gone. He didn’t write no will’, and I just turn it around to [say] Pope Paul”

Charlie was an Israel Man
He used to walk with a Bible in his hand
Orthodox religion he always had.
One day Charlie pick up a stray corn [bullet] fe true…
He was lying on his dying bed,
He said to Piri with his Bible in his hand
Tell Gadman, I’m depending on him now
It left for the 12 Tribes of Israel to do the rest…

When Brigadier sang these lyrics, he was borrowing from the tradition of making up verses to describe the deceased’s life and/or manner of death- but he changed the lyrics to refer to the Twelve Tribes of Israel, rather than the church.

He would continue in the Nine Nights format to announce the demise of Pope Paul (who was considered by Rastafarians and Twelve Tribes to be the leader of Babylon, a minion of evil) with Ilawe juggling the heavy, dubplate versions of Peter Tosh’s song, ‘Burial’.

VINYL

With not a single (accessible) record release to his name, Brigadier became the most revered and imitated deejay in Jamaica, and impatient fans all over the world were waiting, restlessly, for something on vinyl to arrive.

All kinds of rumors arose to fill the void. One story that was circulating in

* By the 1990s, however, the Nine Night tradition had begun to die out. The remaining part, the ‘set up’ night, with the singing and storytelling, continues to this day.
1982 held that Brigadier had actually recorded an album with Channel One but the Twelve Tribes authorities opposed the release. Others spoke of an LP produced under Twelve Tribes auspices that the organization was keeping under wraps.

Meanwhile, Brigadier had been hoping to have some tunes on the market, but was waiting for the Twelve Tribes authorization. “You see, I was in an organization that wanted to do everything for themself. They wanted to produce, [do] everything. I was there sitting down like a sitting duck waiting on them. And it never happen. So, I have to just jump the ship.”

Brigadier did jump ship and made a couple of early releases, but neither one was commonly available or well known. ‘Wild Goose Chase’ was his first and he followed it with the toasting half of a record with singer Fredlocks, another Twelve Tribes member, titled ‘Love and Harmony’.

Brigadier was happy to have put something on vinyl at last, but the organization wasn’t too pleased. “Them say me sell out the organization. I was there waiting and waiting and if I was there waiting up until today, I wouldn’t get no music on the street. So, I have to jump the ship and go do certain things. My first kid just born and you can’t just sit there. You haf’ fe go look food.”

‘Wild Goose Chase’ was produced by Dudley Swaby who recalled that working with Brigadier, in those early days, wasn’t easy. “It was hard. Brigadier never wanted to record more than one or two songs at a time. He wasn’t comfortable in the studio. Ca’ Brigi could talk on the mic, but when he go into the studio, he was difficult to record.” Brigadier was a shy, guarded person in public, outside his circle. In those days, he didn’t like to have his picture taken or give interviews. As he became more and more in demand abroad and toured more frequently, both with the sound and on stage shows, he gradually began to loosen up. But early on, he retained an uneasy reserve both with strangers and in the studio.

Thus, none of the early 45s showcased the classic Brigadier everyone was waiting for. And, without adequate publicity or distribution, they went largely unnoticed until years later, after Brigadier had jumped ship a second time. In 1982, Brigadier recorded the 45 ‘Pain’ for the Jywanza label, this time to a much better reception. It went to number one in two weeks. Brigi’s fans loved the tune, a lyric he popularized in the dance, and voiced over the ever-popular ‘Answer’ rhythm. This time, his fans were satisfied. It was the same Brigadier they were hearing on record as they heard in the dance.

Brigadier went on to record ‘Gwan a School’ on Jywanza, ‘Every Man Me

* The rumors of the Twelve Tribes album remained a mystery until 1995 when VP released Freedom Street, an album of material recorded under Twelve Tribes supervision in the late ’70s. At the time, the production was kept under lock and key by the organization for fear of having the lyrics ‘borrowed’ and used first. Brigadier gave the Twelve Tribes another LP, recorded around ’79, called The Twelve Lights. “All now, not even one tune release. I don’t even know if they can find the tape. I wish they coulda find it and give it to me. A wicked tune deh de pon the album. Spiritual tune.”

** The 12 inch featured Brigi singing Guiding Star for the part one and toasting for the part two.
Bredren’ and ‘Dance in Montreal’ on Studio One, and his 1984 hit, ‘Jamaica, Jamaica’, which was included on an album released by U.S. based RAS Records. The album was produced by Jah Live music with Ilawe playing drums on all the tracks. The LP used originally recorded rhythms (although they were for the most part versions of old standards).

**The Decline of Jah Love**

In its heyday, everything about Jah Love just clicked. “It’s just spiritualness and the love of God keep that sound together,” Brigi reminisces, “Everybody was like a family, you know. There was about nine, ten of us. Never have a fight, never have a fuss. We know what we have to do and we just go and do what we have to do.”

Jah Love kept the culture standard flying though a time of almost omnipresent slackness. Even the slackest of deejays pay tribute to Brigadier as a teacher and a role model for everyone in dancehall. He was the originator of so many lyrics that were recorded first by others.*

Brigadier, live on Jah Love, was responsible for some of dancehall’s finest moments. But, it didn’t last. A sad Ilawe commented recently, “One of the manager for Jah Love [Earl Belcher] dead just like how Gadman dead, so those ideas that we talked about dead. The sound dead too, cause I’m not around it and Brigadier not around it.” While it reigned, Jah Love with Brigadier exerted a profound influence on dancehall, an influence that is still felt and respected today.

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* Brigadier’s lyrics spread quickly through the dancehalls via cassettes and were often recorded by other deejays who had were currently recording. “All the deejays in the world take something from me. Every single one,” Brigi commented. As he complains in his song Lyrics of Mine, “‘See the Bobo Dread’ – me build that, ‘dance cork’- me build that, ‘me say me hot’- me build that, ‘pass the chalice’, a me build that, the whole of them sit down pon Brigi almanac….I’ve got lyrics, yes lyrics, whole different type of culture lyrics, of yes, the whole of them are mine…” (Released as ‘Lyrics of Mine’, 1990, produced by Brigadier Jerry and Dr. Dread, RAS Records). Still, Brigadier didn’t bear anyone ill will. As he said in ‘Everyman a Me Bredren’: “Everyman him a me bredren still….every deejay a me bredren set speed…”
1. The original is The Wailers’ 1968 ‘Funeral (Burial)’ on their Wail ‘N Soul ‘M label. Arrows Intl. owner, Sonny, recalls the story behind one of Jamaica’s most popular dubplates ever, Peter Tosh’s ‘Burial’. “The ‘Burial’ came from a dance with Arrows and Emperor Faith (Easter Sunday, 1974). We played Emperor Faith that night. Faith came with Bob Marley, Skill Cole and all the 12 Tribes of Israel leaders and 12 Tribes men (I don’t want to call them followers). Over by Emperor Faith sound – there was more red green and gold than Ethiopia, I’m telling you. The dance [was] at the Students Union. That night, was packed to capacity, overflowing. Everybody come to see Emperor Faith come to dethrone the king, Arrows.

“The day in question, before the dance, I had a good friend, a school mate of mine who used to play drums for the Wailers, Carlton Barrett. I had been looking for him for oh so long, just to get some Wailers songs because I knew I would be up against Emperor Faith. The day of the dance, cause it was a Sunday night the dance kept, Carton drove to my home and said, ‘Ivan I hear you have been looking for me but I just came out of the studio with Peter Tosh and he gave me these songs to give you’. I said, ‘What the heck are you talking, Carlton?’ And He gave me the ‘Burial’ and I went and cut it. As a matter of fact, there were two songs - the ‘Funeral’ and the ‘Burial’. The difference between them is the ‘Burial says’, ‘Them want I, them want I, to come a them funeral. Them claim seh, them claim seh, them a the general’. And the ‘Funeral’ goes like this, “You must fe want me fe come a, come a funeral’. The ‘Funeral’ is sung by The Wailers. The ‘Burial’ is sung by Peter Tosh. That is when we got all those songs together and played that night at Student’s Union and what stuck in the minds of everybody was the ‘Burial’. We are the first sound to play it cause Peter Tosh just record it and Carlton Barrett came and gave it to me. I ran over to King Tubby’s, cut it and went to the dance and play it.”

2. Brigadier used to deejay:

Me nah go a no funeral, Nah go a them burial
If me go a Nine Night, me and my wife ago fight
If me go a Set Up – my family life a go mash up
Me nah go a no funeral, Nah go a them burial
Them a come with fried fish ina the dish
Them a come with hot coffee ina the cup
And if me go there, Jah Jah know, me mash it up
Every successful deejay around today, enjoying hits and touring the world, has Yellowman to thank. The young Winston Foster spread dancehall across Jamaica, across the ocean, reaching all around the world. “Yellowman open the way fi every deejay”, commented peer and avid admirer, deejay Josie Wales. “A the first deejay a ram it.”

The presence of the bold, aspiring, young deejay created such an excitement, such commotion, that he would not easily be ignored by the media. And once he was signed to a major label, and raking in the foreign dollars, no longer could his dancehall style music be pushed aside and marginalized as ‘ghetto music’. Yellowman, more than any other person, legitimized dancehall as a viable, commercial entity.

Yellowman was the biggest surprise that ever hit Jamaican music. His rise to fame was such an unlikely event. No one could have predicted that an albino orphan would be making hit records, let alone become the new ambassador of reggae around the world. But Yellowman was the perfect person to fill the spot left by the passing of Bob Marley. He gave reggae new life, a new direction, a new identity for a new era.

When the thin, pale youth first appeared on the stage at The Tastee Talent contest, the audience reacted with derision. However, Yellowman was used to rejection and wasn’t put off by it. With his now well known swagger, he took centre stage and launched into a clever response to the Lone Ranger hit, ‘Barnabas in Collins Wood’. By the end, the crowd was cheering. Some say the crowd made the most noise for him because of his color. However, in the long run, it really didn’t matter why they applauded, because he managed to parlay that one small win into a lifelong career in entertainment.

Like Lone Ranger, Yellowman was a marketing genius. He was able to take what deejays around him were doing and re-packaged it – just as he re-packaged himself. He molded an alternate image, a personality that was very far from the person he really was underneath. His public persona was brash, cocky, arrogant, and egotistical. The real Yellowman was calm and reserved and very serious about making it in the field of music.

Yellow’s strong point was his versatility. He could be just as slack as Ringo or Welton, but he could also be cultural, topical, or funny. He had no fear when it came to performing. He boasted, in song, wildly of his ‘attractiveness’ to the opposite sex, which always set off the audience. He made outrageous claims - all in good humor. His physical appearance was one of his running jokes. Albino people, referred to as ‘Dundus’, were outcasts in the society of
the time, which made his claims appear even more outrageous.

In doing all this, Yellowman broke down barriers not only for albino people, but also for dancehall music. Yellowman was the elephant in the room - the Jamaican press couldn’t afford to ignore him. They didn’t have to like him (and many didn’t), but they did have to acknowledge him and write about him. His songs were on the top of the charts. Producers were vying for his time, and Yellowman was working hard, turning out hit after hit. He was in high demand to perform for concerts and even headlined Reggae Sunsplash’s first Dancehall night. It was enough for CBS records to take notice. They signed him and released King Yellowman in 1984, the first dancehall album to come out on a major label.

This unlikely hero had unimaginably humble beginnings. Winston Foster was abandoned at birth and found in a shopping bag on the side of the road by garbage collectors out on duty. All his childhood and teenage years were spent in a succession of charitable homes where the young Yellowman felt friendless and alone.

“Childhood, growing up for me, it was very hard. Even now it is still hard. When growing up I used to get a lot of discrimination and prejudice. And I used to [be] call a lot of bad names. Children used to make fun of me. When I was in class, I was like, ‘I’m alone’. Even when I’m in the children home, I was alone cause none of the other children would play with me. I remember when a lot of adopted parents [parents looking to adopt] come and they adopt my friends, but they did not adopt me.”

Yellow’s first home was the Maxfield Park Home but as he grew older, he moved to the famous Alpha Boy’s School. Yet, even amongst the kids at Alpha, Yellow was teased mercilessly. The boys used to taunt him and call him “white man”. When he acted up, the nuns would give him a flogging. “I used to get punishment, but the doctor used to tell them they are not supposed to beat me over my skin because my skin used to be sensitive [due to his medical condition]. So, the doctor used to say I must get flogging on my feet, on my foot bottom.”

From Alpha, he went to the Eventide Home, on Slipe Penn Road, where he survived the fire that killed 153 people on May 20, 1980**.

Although Yellowman had been taught the trade of shoe making in Alpha, he never considered doing anything but music. For a time, he sang in the streets for spare change, while he did the rounds, knocking on the doors of all the major studios in Kingston. But, the prejudice against albinos was deep rooted. “They didn’t bother to listen. They turn me away… They never see a person, like me – albino- because in Jamaica, we used to be hiding in the

* The school ran a special music program but Yellow was never accepted into it.

** In the brutal months leading up to the election, the home had been entered several times by armed gangs threatening the residents. Even after the election, the home continued to be a target of political sabotage.
woodwork.” In the ‘70s, it was still rare to see an albino on the streets. Those were still dark days when people who had children with disabilities either left them in institutions or kept them at home.

Desperate for a chance to be heard, Yellowman turned to the Tastee Amateur Talent contest. In 1979 he entered and performed “I Killed Barney”, which proved to be his breakthrough. Yet, even after he began to record and perform with the top sounds, the prejudices remained. Sister Nancy recalls, “When Yellowman finish deejay on the mic, a lot of deejays, they used to put a piece of kerchief over the mic or a piece of sponge or something - for real! I used to see that. They used to scorn him.”

When Yellowman finally got the opportunity, he set to working with a fierce determination to succeed. Within the first three years, he recorded eleven albums and countless 45s. When he first toured, in 1982, there were riots in Toronto and New York, with people trying to squeeze into packed, oversold concert halls to see him. Yellowman was the biggest star ever to come out of the dancehall. As he began touring Europe and Japan, people began to call him the new reggae ambassador, in Bob Marley’s place.

While it was true that Yellowman was headlining big concerts in Jamaica and abroad, Yellowman was an entirely different phenomenon from Bob Marley. Yellowman showed the world another face of Jamaican music. For, despite all his recordings and stage shows, Yellowman was essentially a dancehall artist. While Bob Marley had belonged to the ‘70s, with his quiet poetry and open rebellion, Yellow embodied the boldness and materialism of ‘80s. He was a chameleon, a master at taking advantage of whatever was at hand. He borrowed styles and freely adapted lyrics.

Like most deejays, his lyrics covered everything topical, from the dance itself, as in ‘How You Keep a Dance’, to social problems as in ‘Don’t Call me Daddy’ and ‘Baby Father’. When singer Gregory Isaacs was released from jail, in 1982, after his arrest on drug charges, Yellow recorded a jubilant, ‘Gregory Free’. Like General Echo, he was a good story teller. And like Ringo and Welton, he could be quite vulgar in his slackness. Yellow wrote about what he knew, what was going on around him, and he wasn’t afraid to include some controversial material.

‘Mr. Chin’, one of Yellowman’s most memorable songs, deals with the tensions that existed between the black Jamaicans and the Chinese Jamaicans during the food shortages of the ‘70s. The Chinese Jamaicans tended to comprise a merchant class. As owners of local businesses, like the small corner shops, liquor stores, and bars, they were visible in the community. While the truly upper-class and wealthy Jamaican lived miles away, up in the hills, completely out of sight, the Chinese lived and worked among poorer Jamaicans who were dependent on them for goods and services. As men in the middle, they were vulnerable and often the targets of pent up resentment and frustration. During the food shortages of the Manley years, the Chinese shopkeepers were accused of hording supplies and of “marrying” foods, that is, you could
only buy the sought after, scarce food only if you made a purchase of some common, easily available commodity. As radio Jock Barry G explains, “Business people were doing it, whatever class. [But] he was targeting the Chinese community.” Because that’s who the average Jamaican living in downtown Kingston came in contact with, not the politicians or the presidents of the corporations.

In another massive hit, ‘Operation Eradication’, Yellowman boldly took on the government police squad whose mandate it was to search relentlessly among the poor for illegal weapons. Lead by Joe Williams, the squad had license to burst into homes and search the premises at will.

People living in Kingston at the time, genuinely, and with good reason feared this group. Officially named the Operations Squad, this police unit was granted extremely wide powers that were inevitably misused. Many considered the squad to be another excuse to curtail the power of the political opposition and intimidate critics. One story that made the rounds was that the squad had burst into the offices of CUSO, a small Canadian Government agency concerned with community development projects, and accused them of having too many “white and rasta” visitors.

People in the ghetto had no way of protecting themselves from rumors or false accusations. So, they lived in fear. Yellowman took what was a popular lyric on the dance circuit and made it into an effective protest song that expressed the insecurity of people living in the ghetto, and their vulnerability to the misuse of power.

On the lighter side, like Big Youth before him, Yellowman wasn’t afraid to burst into song. By summoning up all his powers, Yellowman, unabashedly, sang the Dixie Cups’ ‘Chapel of Love’, Frankie Ford’s ‘Sea Cruise’, Sammy Davis Junior’s ‘Candy Man’ and, of course, Fats Domino’s ‘Blueberry Hill’. But he didn’t stop there. He soared to new heights with ‘Another Saturday Night’, ‘Take Me Home Country Roads’, ‘Summer Holiday’, and ‘If You Should Loose Me’, to name just a few. “Old songs are the best songs,” He claimed, “especially when you bring it back in your style. You bring back a lot of memory.” Like a Karaoke singer, Yellowman in full song, mesmerized an audience with his willingness to go all out, to be outrageous, to be ridiculous. People loved him for it.

On July seven, 1985, at the height of his career, Yellowman traveled to New York to undergo an operation that removed a good part of his jaw bone.

* Yellowman not only expressed the resentment of the lower classes but, interestingly, in a live version of the song, also expressed the complex relations between classes, in this highly stratified society.

(live dancehall verse)

Him sell the chicken-back, him no sell the chicken
He sell the soft drink, him no sell Heineken
But through a Chiney man, I nah feel like lick him
But if a black man I would a lick him - kill him
George Phang recalled that Yellowman had been sitting next to him in his car the day before, complaining of jaw pain, but everyone assumed that it was due to his recent dental extraction. It wasn’t. The cancer in his jaw had spread and he needed further surgery.

It was to be his fifth operation and his most extensive, involving 24 hours on the table. Each time they had operated previously, the cancer returned, landing him back under the knife yet again. Each time the doctors gave him a short time to live. But each time he proved them wrong. In the months leading up to this, his 5th major surgery, Yellowman had completed an entire tour while in great pain, without letting even his wife know that he was suffering. “Nobody know until after I finish the tour. [Then] I tell my manager that I need to go to the doctor and him say, why? I say, ‘Because I’m feeling pain.’”

When Yellowman came back, his face looked sunken and twisted, but he didn’t let it slow him down. He continued touring, even without reconstructive surgery, as part of the Sly and Robbie Taxi tour that included Half Pint and Ini Kamouze, putting all his energy into each performance.

Things were going better after the operation until he ran into financial problems – the result of bad dealings of some associates. He lost two properties, a two.five million dollar house in Cherry Gardens and his first property in Meadowbrook Estates. Calling it a ‘setback’, Yellow went straight back to work touring and quickly built up enough reserves to buy his current two story house in rural St Andrew.

Despite everything, Yellowman is content with his life. Because he learned early in life how to live without money, he never felt dependent on his earnings for his happiness. “To me, it’s the same, because, [I’m] not used to money and when it comes your way, you don’t look at it, you don’t think about it. You just spend it. It’s not a big deal. If I did grow with money, it would be a big deal. But, money is nothing to me. Money is just a system that mankind build. Once you know you can have happiness without money, you know it’s real worth – just something you use to get things. To get food, you have to have money, to get a house, you have to have money. But, to live! – you don’t have to have money to live.”

In the early ’80s, while still residing at the Eventide home, he met his future wife, Rosie, at a dance, and they have stayed together ever since- over thirty years. They have six children - four boys and two girls, and a handful of dogs. Because of his background, having a family is the most important thing in his life, “after God”. But, what carried him through it all was his devotion to music. “My secret is, I just love music. I don’t matter if it’s reggae, rhythm and blues, or rap, disco or rock and roll. I just love music!”
The Dancehall Explosion

“There was no stopping dancehall because it was a new form and a new kind of music. It was crazy! The youth them a do some new things, and everything was new. The original artists them, they were kinda baffled.”

- OSSIE THOMAS

Yellowman was leading the new wave of deejay popularity. Yet, although deejays had made huge headway, certain segments of society still wrote them off as second class entertainment. Singers where the real thing. The singers themselves also harbored resentment towards the intruders who were poaching their musical territory. As U Brown recalls, “A lot of singers never liked when deejays would deejay on their rhythm tracks. Singers were the ones that always made the original rhythm. They are the ones that always go with the musicians and make the tracks [in the studios]. And then the producers might call the deejay to say something on the track. So, when the deejays start to become popular, a lot of singers never liked it.” But producers couldn’t ignore sales, and deejay records were hits. Especially after Yellowman showed Jamaica just how big a local dancehall deejay could get.

With heroes like Yellowman, more and more kids began looking towards a career in toasting. Sound systems began to fill their rosters with upcom - ing artists. Gone were the days of the one man sound, where an artist like General Echo might own the set, select the records and deejay the whole night. Now, the sounds were manned by a whole crew consisting of operator, selector, owner, deejays, apprentices, singers and the usual technical staff and equipment handlers. Everyone wanted to break into a business where even a ‘dundus’ from the ghetto could tour the world and record with a major la - bel. Sessions were becoming magnets for every little youth who felt he could throw down two lyrics.

With everybody and his neighbor wanting to get into the entertainment business, it became common for sounds to fill the invitation cards with names. A Gemini session might feature Ringo, Squiddley, Sister Nancy, Welton Irie plus special guests and apprentices. There were even more guests for clashes and certain large venues. Lees Hi Power, for example, in ’84, held a dance with Frankie Paul, Michael Palmer, Kelly Ranks, Papa San, Screecha Nice,

* Dundus was a pejorative term for Albinos in Jamaica
General Brain, Echo Minott, Rappa Robert, Welton Irie, Jim Brown, Danny Dread, Matta Pang and Toyan. Noel Harper, owner of Kilimanjaro, complained, “We would have problems because sometimes there were so many guest deejays that we hardly had space for our regulars.” Along with each regular deejay, came his crew of apprentices. “Gemini always look out for the apprentice, them,” Archie, the selector, boasted at the time. “Most sound, them nah use the apprentices. Gemini use them because, after a time, they become good. So, it’s more livelier on Gemini. You can feel the vibes.”

The apprentices did make the dance lively but they also contributed to the overall crowding. “You have guys back of you and grab the mic out of your hand and things”, Ringo grumbled. Early B, commenting about Lee Unlimited, said, “Sometimes they carry 10 or 12 deejays a night. It gets confused and the deejay doesn’t have a chance to settle down. They just pass around the mic.” There wasn’t time for the toaster to settle into the rhythm like “a lizard pon limb”. He had someone breathing down his neck the whole time.

Not only was the deejay competition fierce, now singers were appearing on sounds as regularly as deejays. “Sound system is originally a deejay thing,” U Brown explains. “But, after a while, young singers like Thriller, Little John and all those guys start to come to the dances and put in their little part.” The addition of singers greatly increased the population directly around the control tower (as well as giving the dance a more ‘above ground’, official feel).

Some deejays were more patient than others. “They would all line up, singers, deejays, all about,” Welton Irie recounts. “Like them do a little one lyrics ina their area. And they make their name ina them area and they would come out on the bigger scene now, and they wanted a bus’. And we gave them it. It wasn’t anything. Cause that’s how we were – laid back and easy.”

Ringo however, found it annoying that the amateurs were taking the spotlight away from the deejays who had come up the hard way. He complained at the time, “Too much competition in Jamaica. Small kids a deejay and, and them don’t deserve that boost because it’s so easy now, like saying A…B…C… And to me, that’s not deejaying. I usually sit down and put something constructive together, the most intelligent words, so people say, ‘Bwoy, listen to that!’ It even puzzle some people because they have to look it up in a dictionary. This little sing-song business is a little baby [thing]. We have too much competition. But I know where I’m coming from and I know what I’ve been through to get the name Johnny Ringo!”

**Haul and Pull**

The crowding situation at the microphone created another vexing problem - the ‘haul and pull up’ business. Each time a new man took over the microphone, he wanted the version started again. “Wheel!” he would shout.

* Haul and pull was a request by the deejay for the selector to lift up the needle and start the record over again
“Rewind!” And the version would play again for the 7th or 8th time in a row. Starting the record over was an established dancehall tradition. Dancehall crowds were notoriously expressive. The opening bar of a new record was sufficient to send the people into a frenzy. Men would shout and fire guns in the air. Women would turn and pound their fists hard into the closest piece of zinc fencing. At that point, it was incumbent upon the selector to lift up the needle and begin the rhythm again from the start. That moment of silence that followed could be the most intense moment of the whole evening – a whole yard full of people waiting breathlessly for the rhythm to come pounding back.

But too much of a good thing can turn bad. “Jack it up!” “Come again!” Now, it was the performers around the mic yelling, “Lif’ it up again!” instead of the audience. Each new ‘prento’ (apprentice) that came for his five minutes of glory demanded, “Haul and pull”. Originally, the cry of “Forward!” from the crowd was a sure indication that the rhythm had hit the target, that it got a big reaction from the paying customers. They might demand the record be started over once or twice, but not usually for thirty minutes or more. But now, rhythms like ‘Boxing’ (Cornell Campbell, Joe Gibbs, 1982) and ‘Pass the Kouchie’ (Might Diamonds, Music Works, 1982) would be repeated endlessly at the request of a series of artists who each wanted a turn to show off his particular turn of phrase on the version. “Forward”, instead of being a spontaneous response to the music, became an obligatory one. The constant interruption created a choppy feel to the dance. It was stimulating and exciting for some people, but for older dance fans, it was irritating.

Foundation sound system owner and producer Jack Ruby loathed the practice. “Most people in Jamaica go to ‘old hits party’ and disco party for the reasons [that, in the dancehall] you have 20 little deejay, or who call themselves ‘deejay’, stand up around the sound, and from the tune put on, ‘Wheel!’ ‘Take it!’, ‘Cease Fire!’, ‘Come Again!’ So, the tune don’t play. And their attitude - every deejay want the same rhythm to prove how much a star him is… So, it a go ‘haul and drag up’ until the people who come to spend a money, leave the dance… The people who come to dance don’t come to hear ‘wheel, haul’ and ‘drag up’ and all them things. We want more music to play [so] the deejay can work efficiently with the rhythm.”

With the increasing crowds at the microphone stand, the apprentice deejays didn’t get the chance to build up endurance. Each man got a little one or two lyrics before the next man came barging in. Newer deejays were learning to come to the dance equipped with a couple of attention catching lyrics. Once there, they would wait in the wings until their particular rhythm came up so they could do their act. As deejay Sassafrass describes it, “Those deejays can’t chat for the whole night. Them wait pon ‘Answer’ and them a wait pon ‘Shank I Shek.” When one of those popular rhythms finally got played, it would have to be ‘haul and pulled’ for an eternity.
When not playing the regular weekly session at the Gemini Club, Gemini sound had a second home in the most popular dance venue for the ’80s, Skateland. Skateland was for the really big dances. Only the sounds that could pull in a good crowd where invited to perform. When a sound was on top, it could fill Skateland. Situated in the bustling intersection where Molynes Road, Hagley Park Road, Hope Road, Half Way Tree Roads and Constant Spring Road meet in central Kingston, Skateland was actually an open air roller skating rink that could also be rented for dances and stage shows. The location was ideal. It had easy access to all the downtown core’s poorest areas, from Trench Town to Waterhouse, but was also close to the hotels and office buildings of New Kingston, and the shopping centers Tropical Plaza and Twin Gates Plaza. Half Way Tree, with its central square surrounded by bus stops, was a busy commercial area. With high walls, a guarded entrance, and full security, Skateland was among the safer places to take in a session, an open place, both commercial and cool, where uptown and downtown could all rock together.

To Papa Jaro, owner of Kilimanjaro sound, Skateland always felt secure. “In those days people hardly felt any kind of threat or worry about danger. The fact that skating was going on there and people really enjoyed skating- it was really fun. You had some people who were just there to watch people skating. And of course, you had refreshment there and food- so people would go there to enjoy themselves.”

Back in the 1980s, business was booming. The Roller Rink/concert venue was owned by legendary character Clinton Davy, popularly known as ‘Jingles’ because of the sound his jewelry made. A gardener at age nine, Jingles quit school and at 14 to become a handyman. According to Papa Jaro, Jingles used to work for Skateland’s previous owner. When the owner left the business, Jingles stepped in, leased the property and began fixing it up, until it became the venue for some of the biggest dances in Kingston and the place several live dancehall LPs were recorded.

Roller skating was a popular urban sport in Kingston. It was not unusual to see a bus or truck barreling down a crowded city road with several young men on roller skates hitched on behind, enjoying the free ride. In fact, Jingles told the Jamaican Gleaner, “My whole idea behind skating is that it keeps a lot of kids off the streets. It’s a healthy sport. It’s good for young and old and we get a mixed crowd and all of them mix together in a friendly atmosphere.”

A large, gregarious man, Jingles kept occupied with political activity and horse racing. Hanging out in Skateland by day, Jingles entertained political associates and friends at the bar inside, sipping his Johnny Walker Black, or in his office, adorned with a photograph of Michael Manley looking pensively.*

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* For this reason, the rink offered beginner lessons on Saturday mornings and had a deejay playing music for the skaters night and day. The Sunday Gleaner, June 17, 1979.
down at the gathering. A staunch PNP supporter, Jingles eventually ran for elected office in the 1989 General Election – against former Prime Minister Edward Seaga in his own riding. It was a bold gamble, and he lost, but he didn’t allow himself to feel defeated. Instead, he moved to a new riding, Central St. Catherine, where he lost yet again, in 1993. But he never gave up his political interests or his work to support the community. Over the years, Jingles set up charitable events and donated money to provide scholarships for inner city kids to attend YMCA camps. As a race fan, he owned a number of horses that ran at Caymanas Park. He also belonged to the management of the Arnett Gardens National Premier League football team.

In the end, his political work proved his undoing. In 1997, Jingles was shot and killed in broad daylight while standing near the Cooreville Gardens Housing Scheme where he was reported to have been supervising a cleanup project in a gully nearby.*

After that, Skateland wasn’t the same. Deejay Pompidou reports that Skateland was turned over to Jingles’ second- in- command, Pepsi, “a calmer person”. According to Papa Jaro, “Bunny Wailer leased the place and he tried to refurbish it, but they didn’t know anything about skating so the skating side of it wasn’t doing well. They still rent the place every now and then to put on shows. But it’s not doing all that well.” When Skateland faded out, it was the end of an era. As Dexter Campbell lamented, “The dance thing change” and nobody needed Skateland anymore.

* The Jamaica Gleaner, February 28, 1997
Junjo Lawes & Volcano

While the great popularity of Gemini broadened the appeal of dancehall in Jamaica, in 1982, it was Volcano’s turn to erupt. There was nothing uptown about Volcano. It was a true ghetto sound, manned by residents of some of Kingston’s toughest neighborhoods, and owned by the wiry, intense Henry “Junjo” Lawes, a man who radiated excess energy. As a producer, Junjo was responsible for the majority of the current hits. So he was able to attract just about any artist he wanted to the sound – Yellowman, Eekamouse, Josie Wales, Tony Tuff, Little John, Toyan, which allowed the sound, despite its ragamuffin heart, to slip into uptown venues to perform.

In 1982, Junjo was on another mission to England to deliver tapes of his newest productions to Greensleeves. While abroad, he purchased all new, top of the line sound equipment and had it shipped to Jamaica where he put it together to make Volcano sound. “Junjo bring this big sound to Jamaica,” Burro recalls, “and need deejays to deejay on the sound. Junjo was the number one producer in Jamaica. He had a lot of artists around him. But, he was looking for somebody to deejay the sound because deejay and recording is two different things. Recording, you could do just one recording and be big. But a deejay would have to deejay the sound for the whole night.” That’s where Burro came in. Often teased by his peers and called “two lyrics Burro” or worse, Burro was actually a solid, steady, trustworthy, workhorse of a performer, just what Junjo needed for the new sound.

Starting out on a “little, area, sound” named Black Hoover, Burro’s first official set was Hot Sizzler. With its home base in Liganae, Sizzler was a ‘party sound’ and played a bit of everything. Burro deejayed during each reggae hour in between the soul sets. On Volcano, he proved to be a good backbone to support the youngsters who were to follow, including Little John, Toyan, Billy Boyo, Little Harry and Shadowman. The music was to be handled by the highly experienced master selector, Danny Dread, from Socialist Roots.

Junjo

Junjo was still a relative newcomer when Volcano erupted on the scene. He had only begun producing music in 1979. But, by 1983, he was in full control of the dancehall scene. His hits, in the first half of the ‘80s, included Frankie Paul’s ‘Pass the Tu-Shung Peng’, Johnny Osbourne’s ‘Water Pumpee’, Michael Prophet’s ‘Gunman’, Smiley and Michigan’s ‘Diseases’, Eekamouse’s ‘Wadodem’ and Yellowman’s ‘I’m Getting Married’. In the process of putting out hit after hit, Junjo broke many of the artists who were to become the
leading lights of reggae for the following decade and beyond, like Barrington Levy and Cocoa Tea.

“Junjo was very well organized, full of energy, always doing things, finding new artists,” Recalls Greensleeves’ Chris Sedgwick. “He had an energy and an organizing ability that is essential in a producer in the sort of market that reggae was – everything sort of revolved around producers.”

Junjo also had a special genius for resurrecting the careers of older singers who had not survived the musical changes. He turned a middle aged John Holt, formerly regarded as a balladeer, into one of the hottest dancehall singers around flashing his newly sprouted dreadlocks, with songs like ‘Police in Helicopters’, ‘Ghetto Queen’, ‘Sweetie Come Brush Me’, ‘Fat She Fat’ (which Junjo wrote), ‘Private Doctor’, and a Roots Radicalized update of his Studio One hit, ‘Love I Can Feel’.

Using the same tactics with Alton Ellis, Junjo recorded ‘Skateland Girl’ and ‘Winsome (Hurting Me)’. He gave Ken Boothe another lease on life with ‘Thinking’, ‘If I Had Known’ and ‘Welfare People’. Even Junior Murvin was transported into the new decade with ‘Poison Dart’ and the LP, Muggers in the Street.

With his radical make-over talents, Junjo also eased the transition for roots artists like Michael Prophet, from his Rasta themed tunes (when he worked with producer Yabby You), to a popular dancehall act with up tempo tunes as ‘Boom Him Up’ (Boom meaning ‘to bomb’ and the “him” refers to Pope Paul), ‘Gunman’ and ‘Here Comes the Bride’. The Meditations got an updated sound with ‘Ease Up Fatty’ and ‘Shadowman’. Junjo even gave Cultural Roots a dancehall hit, ‘Hell a Pop’. But, Junjo’s most successful transition of a roots group into a dancehall act was Wailing Souls. The vocal quartet, up until then firmly associated with the Channel One militant sound of Sly and Robbie, scored with the hit ‘Water Pumpee’, which Junjo followed with a grand comeback LP for the group, Firehouse Rock."

With his hit making radar, Junjo also took popular ‘70s singers like Tony Tuff and Johnny Osborne and transformed them into dancehall sensations, Tony Tuff with ‘Water Pumpee’** and ‘Come Fe Mash It’, and Johnny Osborne with ‘Ice Cream Love’. Although Jonnie Osbourne had dabbled in the dancehall style on his LP Truth and Rights, Tony Tuff’s career was stalled due to overexposure and Junjo brought him back as a competitive hit maker with ‘Come Fi Mash It’ (Volcano 1982) in which he declares, appropriately, “Long time them no hear me in the dance, I was giving other singers a chance…” (one of the few reggae songs to contain yodeling).

Johnny Osborne remembers Junjo as a real ragamuffin soldier. “Junjo was a dancehall person. Him know what him want, so him can direct it like how

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* When he tried to reanimate the career of Barry Brown, the effort failed. While he did record a few successful songs, Barry wasn’t stable enough to sustain the effort.

** a different song about the same popular dance
him want it. Cause, you know, Junjo is not one of them producers who just sit down and tell a guy to make some music. Him ina the nucleus of the thing, because Junjo is a dance man. Junjo go to dance, him love dancehall. You notice most of Junjo’s tunes is dancehall. He might not write all the words, but him give a lot of the artists them the idea. Tell them whe’ him want, [give them] some lyrical idea.”

Like many of the young artists he produced, Junjo started out as a ghetto youth who chose the musical path, in part, to avoid the snares of politics and violence. His home area was a PNP zone in the Spanishtown Road area, where the choice for young men was to work for the politicians, the gunmen, the drug trade or remain unemployed. Music was the only way out. Veteran deejay Dennis Alcapone remembers Junjo from the early days. “Junjo Lawes used to be one of my dancehall fans. He used to be in the dance all the time. Junjo used to be a rude boy that follow badman. Junjo dem come from McCoy Lane, off Spanishtown Road. The whole of the area, it was a musical corner.” Later, it became Volcano Corner, headquarters for the sound and the crew, the place you could always find Junjo’s artists hanging out, waiting for something to happen.

Luckily, the young Junjo met up with Linval Thompson, who was returning to Jamaica after having lived in New York with his family and was interested in going into the record business for himself. Linval, already one of the most popular singers for the dancehall crowd in the late ‘70s, was an experienced man in the business. He had worked with all the musicians in Kingston and had contacts abroad. Junjo had a little saved from the money that he earned singing and diving to entertain the tourists at Victoria Pier, operating a crown and anchor stand, and various other small jobs. Junjo was just waiting for the opportunity. “Then my good bredren Linval Thompson come on and I get down to some business,” he explained a few years later.

The first record the two made together was Linval’s ‘Jah Jah Guiding Star’ which went nowhere. Then they tried a thing with singer Al Campbell and deejay Jah Thomas. Junjo even did one himself called ‘79 Rain’. But Junjo found his talents lay more in writing material than singing. In fact, Juno’s influence can be heard in many of his productions. Little John, who knew Junjo from the start, remembers, “All those Barrington songs, like ‘Looking my Love’ and ‘Shine Eye Girl’, Junjo hum them to Barrington.”

“He gave a lot of ideas, trust me,” remarks Lady Ann. “I go to studio with him a lot of times when I was much younger, and he have ideas to kill! And his ideas always end up a hit.” Junjo remained very proud of writing Johnny Osborne’s hit ‘Ice Cream Love’. Flabba Holt remembers that even if he didn’t write the whole song, Junjo always had “a little line, and a little line, and a little line” to feed the performer.

Roots Radics guitarist, Dwight Pinkney remembers Junjo largely for his absence from the studio during recording sessions, “When Junjo was running a session, Junjo books the studio time and tells the Radics to be at Channel
One, 10 o’clock Monday, and Junjo arrange with the artists to be at the studio at 10 o’clock on Monday, and he just throws the artists into the studio with the Roots Radics, and Junjo is gone about his business. So, the production was really done by Roots Radics band. But, Junjo used to find the artist. He used to scout the artists.

“But, as far as being a producer of music, I would credit Junjo as the ‘executive’ producer and the Roots Radics as the producer. It was the Radics who stayed by the console when the engineer was setting up and miking the instruments. It was the Radics who worked with the artist to decide what to play and helped him to find the right key, the right tempo. And it was the Radics who hung around for the final mix.” Gladdy Anderson, the keyboard player, was mainly responsible for taking the singer’s guide vocal and coming up with the chords to support it, thus doing the arranging.

“[Junjo] usually have other guys that works with him that take care of the studio works”, Burro recalls, “Mellon, Belo and Steve. Those guys do a lot of the music works. Junjo was the one, now, sometimes he flies and gets the visa. He was the boss.”

Yet, Junjo didn’t have to be there the whole time to exert his influence. As Barnabas, one of Junjo’s preferred engineers describes it, “Junjo was the kind of person who leave it up to the musicians a lot. But, every now and then, he would come with a little idea that he had. He’s got a lot of vibes. He was really a vibes person. He would just appear, and he didn’t have to say much. The musicians, just by seeing him, would get a vibe, by seeing him just being there.” Roots Radics bass player, Flabba Holt recalls, “Junjo, him have good ideas. Him fun! Is a fun guy, man! Nice bredren to work with.”

Junjo understood how to make music. Lady Anne recalls him advising her, “Anyway you record a song, that is the way the song is gonna come out – if you move, that’s how it gonna come out. If you stiff, that’s how it sound.” But he also understood marketing. “I remember [Junjo] used to tell me this when I was young, very young, in the music,” Lady Ann adds. “‘If you force it upon them, they will accept it.’”

As Junjo wasn’t a studio owner, he had to hustle to put together the money to rent the location and pay musicians and engineers. That’s where the sound came in handy. Dances were an important tool both for raising funds and for promoting new releases. As long as Junjo was making the hits, the sound would keep attracting crowds and the money would keep coming in to put out more releases.

Junjo had everything going for him. He could work with just about any artist he wished as he had a reputation for dealing with people fairly. Errol Scorcher commented back in ’82, “It’s like Junjo – why him have so many artists, him deal people fair. If Junjo want to do a record now, him give me two weeks in advance. Pay me two weeks! Him say, ‘Set yourself up and come check me in two weeks’ and him just gone.”

Junjo didn’t pay royalties directly. He told the artist that he could col-
lect them himself from the distributor. He always gave a generous advance, enough that the artist could make a major purchase. Little John says he never got a ‘royalty’ directly from Junjo. “Junjo would give you money, sometimes more than even the record would sell. You get an upfront money, like so you could buy a car or something. And, you could go down to Sonic Sound or Dynamic to collect royalties. He give us that option. Him nah ha’ fe deh de for you to get royalties. I used to collect my royalties from Sonic and Dynamic.”

**Little John**

Junjo and his crowd hung out by day at Volcano’s headquarters in downtown Kingston. The posse included Lee Van Cliff, Louie Lepke, Shadowman, Burro, selector Danny Dread, assorted loafers, all manner of little youth like Billy Boyo, Beenie Man and Little Harry, the inseparable friends, Little John and Toyan and an, as yet unknown, singer named Cocoa Tea. Little John and Toyan were just starting to enjoy recording success, but everyone already knew them from the sound. The girls went wild for Little John. He was young and petite with a baby face and an aura of good natured self confidence.

Little John was a natural entertainer. No one could hold a crowd like Little John. He would throw himself into every performance and the audience would soak up his energy and enthusiasm. Girls were especially drawn to him, and he loved that. “Me is a girl singer. Me sing for the girls. From the girls react to it, any man can react to it.”

Little John was a member of a group of early dancehall singers who got their start with Sugar Minott. Like several other singers of his generation, his first instinct was to deejay.

“As a matter of fact, I go check Sugar Minott as a deejay, not a singer. And when I go, my voice sound like a real baby. That was like eight years of age. And him say to me, ‘You don’t have the voice of a deejay. You supposed to be singing.’”

Sugar could tell that John had talent but needed to strengthen his voice. “His voice so fine, you couldn’t even hear what he’s saying, man!” So, Sugar gave him a small part deejaying in the song with Captain Sinbad named ‘51 Storm’, after which, John went on his own to work with Errol ‘Don’ Mais on his Roots Tradition label. With Mais, John recorded his first singing song, ‘(Wait ‘til I put on my) Robe’, followed by ‘What is Catty’, an update of the old Mento tune.

But Sugar’s advice lingered in his mind. So, he left town to develop his vocal strength. “I run away to country. I have to go in the hills. I can go in the mountain and shout out to get my voice big.”

* As always, the inevitable misunderstandings came up between artists and producer. Eekamouse got his back up once over what he perceived as missing royalties and smashed Junjo’s car during the taping the live Heartbeat LP, Various Artists, *Dee-Jay Explosion in a Dancehall Style* (1982). Gemini Selector Archie recalls, “In fact, them come arrest him just as him take the mic...The police come and take him away. It’s on the tape. They have to record his part a week later.”
Back in town, with a stronger, though still nasal, voice, Little John recorded an LP for Jah Thomas. *Reggae Dance* came out in the UK in 1982, followed by Junjo’s *Give the Youth a Try*. But it was the recording with Channel One’s Kenneth Hookim that broke him big. *Look How Them Work Us So Hard*, made the sound circuit on dubplate for a long time before being released to the public. By the time it was released as a 45, Little John was one of the biggest stars of dancehall.

Then George Phang came along. With ‘Roots Girl’ and ‘True Confessions’, on Phang’s Powerhouse label, John’s success on record began to reflect the true extent of his popularity in the dance. ‘True Confessions’ was an instant hit. It was built off a popular old time Silvertones recording called ‘Dear Mr. Editor’. Little John was just 18.

**TOYAN**

Toyman was small in stature, like Little John, but rougher around the edges, with a gruff voice, forceful delivery and a habit of giving a little gasp for air between lines. “Me, as a youth, used to thief,” Toyman recalled of his childhood. “You know, sell herb and things, just for a living. More times I embarrass financially. And, bwoy, Jamaica rough! You have no choice. You have to look food. You see, no one give me bread. My mother, father poor. So I have to look [after] myself, every time.”

When Toyman decided to devote himself to a career of music, he hooked up with Don Mais of Roots Tradition, the man who had worked with Greenwich Farm artists like Sammy Dread, Phillip Frazer and Peter Ranking. Don released his first 45 in 1975. But, it wasn’t until he started working with Junjo that he was recognized internationally. When the LP, *How the West Was Won*, was released by Greensleeves in 1981, the UK went mad for Toyman. In fact, it shocked Toyman to see the different response he got in England. He had hits in Jamaica, but he was never considered to be in the top ranks. In England, they were mad over him.

Toyman seemed to thrive on the freedom and spontaneity offered by a life in show biz. Like a grown man with a child trapped inside, Toyman was always up to something. He would climb trees, balance on fences and spontaneously dance and deejay anywhere at all. In Kingston, he used to roar through the ghettos on his motorcycle with a nattily dressed Little John perched on the back. From Volcano Corner to Channel One, Toyman and Little John would zoom around the city, joking and laughing. But Toyman had a wild streak that proved fatal.

Little John has a note of sadness, in his voice when he talks about his long time sparring partner Toyman. “Toyman is a good friend. Me and him grow. Toyman was like my father, in a sense, because he was a little bit older than I am. Him used to guide me in the fraternity. Him see, seh, me have potential and he have me behind him, everywhere that I go in the world, it’s me and Toyman.”

But Toyman couldn’t leave guns alone. “I talk to him before he died, you
know, and I tell him, ‘Listen Toyan, you have to put away those things. You go a foreign and all you bring back is two gun’. And the same gun, them [use it to] kill him.”

Toyan had just lent his gun to some men he knew. He was starting to walk away from them, down the lane, when they called him back. “I said to him, ‘Toyan, don’t go around there to those guys. Make them come to you’. Him never hear me. He go to them. And there was one shot, out of him owna gun. Them just kill him just so they don’t have to give him back the gun.”

Life in Jamaica could be short. For many dancehall artists, it ended when they were young and just reaching their potential. Little John lamented, “I remember I was watching a video from the “80s and I see most people that on it died. The only people on it whe’ no die is like me and Josie Wales and couple more.” The Volcano crew, especially, seems to have suffered the early demise of its key entertainers.

**Cocoa Tea**

One of Junjo’s greatest success stories, Cocoa Tea, also turned out to be Junjo’s swan song, his last important contribution to the music.

Born in rural Clarendon, Cocoa Tea was a country boy. Growing up in the tiny fishing village of Rocky Point, but with big ambitions to record, the youth found himself far away from the entertainment industry in Kingston. Doing what he could, Mr. Tea and his friend Shorty had put out two tunes, ‘Summer Time’ on the Vibration label, and ‘Big Iron’ on Fisherman’s. It was a great start, until it came to handling the business side, like getting good distribution and air play for the records, which proved impossible from the remote location.

Cocoa Tea did eventually manage to relocate in Kingston. Because of his small stature, he found work as a horse jockey for a while. But Cocoa Tea didn’t want to ride. He wanted to record. When things got hard, he and his friend returned to the country where Cocoa Tea went back to fishing along with doing some masonry work, all the while singing around the local sound systems and waiting for the right moment to come.

He might have been missed entirely, hidden away in the country. But, by chance one evening he came by a Volcano dance held in his hometown and got a turn on the mic. He sang his lyrics, ‘Sonia’, over the ever-popular ‘Johnny Dollar’ rhythm. The crowd went wild. Volcano deejay Louie Lepke was impressed.

Junjo wasn’t at the session that night, but the next day the crew – Junjo’s partners Steve and Bello and deejay Louie Lepke told Junjo about the youth they heard mashing up the place the night before. So, Junjo called him in for an audition. Mr. Tea recalls, “He did make me sing, and I just sing Be-doooo, Be-doooo, Be-doooo, Be-dooooo-ooo-oo, Lada lada la Da Da, ummmmm, Hear me now…” [From ‘Sonia’]

As soon as he heard Cocoa Tea, Junjo knew he had his next big thing.
Even back then, Junjo was introducing people to Cocoa tea as “the singer I’m predicting”, the man who was “gonna make all the singer out a street a fret.” Still, Junjo didn’t rush with Cocoa Tea.

Shy at first in the big city crowd, Cocoa Tea waited in the background, never pushing himself upfront. At first, Cocoa Tea was still living in Rocky Point and commuting the 40 or 50 miles into Kingston for sessions. A quiet and polite young man, he seemed a bit out of place surrounded by the rough-necks and hooligans who hung out at Volcano HQ.

By this time, Junjo’s first star, Barrington Levy, was well established and independent. Junjo needed a new weapon. In the first session they did, Cocoa Tea recorded ‘Champion’, ‘Jah Make Them That Way’, ‘Chalice No Fe Romp With’ and ‘I Have Lost My Sonia’. Out of the four tracks, ‘I Have Lost My Sonia’ was the hit. The song showcased the unique crooning style that made him so popular. Although Tea, with his smooth voice, could have handled lover’s rock or ballads easily, he stuck closer to reality and dancehall material throughout the ‘80s, recording many hits as well as dubplates and specials for sound clashes.

Junjo was convinced that he had found his new Barrington. Just to make sure everyone else knew it too, he recorded Cocoa Tea on the ‘Real Rock’ rhythm, with ‘Rockin’ Dolly’, a song about a new style of dance inspired by a kind of motorcycle riding that didn’t sound very safe. The song was an instant hit - just like Barrington’s ‘Looking My Love’ on the Radics’ ‘Real Rock’ rhythm years before. Cocoa Tea’s song also borrowed from Barrington’s melody making the link between the two even stronger. Junjo knew the psychology of selling records, and once again his gamble paid off, making Cocoa Tea one of the most popular singers on the island. ‘Rocking Dolly’ was a huge success. The song was written between Cocoa Tea and Junjo. Junjo had the idea to write a song about the new dance style. Cocoa Tea, fresh from the country, wasn’t up on these things, so Junjo had to tell him all about it. Soon, Junjo had enough dancehall killers to fill Cocoa Tea’s first album, *Whe Them A Go Do*, released in 1984.

Cocoa Tea was Junjo’s last big success. After Junjo packed up Volcano and left for New York, Cocoa Tea, still in Jamaica, worked with several other producers including Jammys – singing over the new computerized rhythms, Cornerstone, Witty and Blue Mountain. But he always remembered Junjo. “There’s no producer I love like Junjo. He give me the best vibes.”

Whereas in the ‘70s, many artists migrated to the UK, in the ‘80s they went to Brooklyn, settling around the aptly named Jamaica Ave. area. In

* He commented at the time, “It’s coming like Barrington a sing. I hear him [Cocoa Tea] ina the studio and my mind just flash pon Barrington and me say, blood cleet!”
1985, a newly Jheri Curled Junjo started spending more time in New York. Newly installed in a Queens apartment not far from V.P. records with his baby mother and kids, Junjo continued releasing music with his regular artists and promoting his new star Cocoa Tea. But it wasn’t the same as when he had been in Jamaica. Then, one night Volcano played a big dance in New Jersey. The venue was sold out and the streets were blocked – a huge success. Except that the very same night, after the dance was over and the crew had gone home, the whole place burned to the ground. Volcano was safe, but the sound never played again. The fire was like an omen that Volcano’s luck was running out. Then, Junjo was arrested and went to jail on a drug possession charge, leaving the musical territory wide open for new producers to move in. The dancehall empire Junjo had created evaporated overnight, and new powers moved in to fill the vacuum.

Junjo kept intending to make a comeback. He managed to work in music again but he never reached the same level of success. One morning in 1999, Junjo was found dead on the side of a street in London. He had been shot. Since Junjo never kept written records or made legal agreements, the estate he left, of music and publishing rights, was open to exploitation. It wasn’t long before disputes erupted between baby-mothers, distributors, collaborators and artists, none of which can ever really be resolved satisfactorily.

Volcano had been the sound of the ghetto boys seeing real money being made in music for the first time. Unfortunately, not many of the originals lived to tell about it. Louie Lepke, Lee Van Cliff, Toyan and Junjo, himself, all fell victim to life in the fast lane. But Volcano, with all the star performers and hype, brought the image of the roughneck sound system into the open, giving dancehall a little more legitimacy without sacrificing the bad boy appeal. Volcano glamorized sound system business both at home and abroad, giving audiences a little taste of the wild ride dancehall in the ‘80s would prove to be.

*The American influence was increasingly apparent in Jamaican fashions, as the men’s ‘84 craze for shearing off the locks and getting a Jheri Curl, a response to the trend set by Michael Jackson. The result was a soft, wavy East Indian look. Instead of Rastas in wooly tams, men could be seen on every corner from Kingston to Brooklyn with their shower caps on over their treated hair while the chemicals set. Junjo was one of the first. Even Ranking Joe and Tony Tuff went with the trend. Earl 16 write a song about it, Jerry Curls, a 7 inch on Hitbound.
New York City in the ‘80s

By the ’80s, New York was starting to feel a lot like yard, as if a little piece of Jamaica had come loose and drifted north. Artists came and went daily. Record stores were busy and producers were making quality music locally. The base for a northern scene had already been established in the ’70s by the pioneers like Lloyd Bullwackie with his Wackie’s studio and label, Brad Osbourne with his Clocktower Records and store on White Plains Road in the Bronx, and Everton Da Silva with his Hungry Town label and his store in Corona, Queens.*

In the early ‘80s, Brooklyn’s Utica Avenue, home of Jah Life and Percy Chin’s record shop, was becoming one of the focal points of reggae in New York. Out in quite another part of Brooklyn, Coxsone Dodd had carried his operation from Brentford Road to Fulton Street. After the crime in Jamaica drove him out of downtown Kingston in 1979, he moved both his studio and record shop north to open Coxsone’s Music City. Not that Fulton Street was much better. At least in the ’80s, it was a serious no-go zone for most New Yorkers. Once established in the “Big Apple”, Mr. Dodd continued producing his favorite artists, and pressing releases, both new as well as popular items from his back catalogue.

On the other side of town, in Queens, V.P. Records ruled. Miss Pat (Chin) and Chris Chin, formerly of Randy’s Records in Kingston, ran a tight ship. There were no ‘loafers’ drifting in and out of V.P.. Miss Pat and Chris were too busy working to socialize. The diminutive Miss Pat could be seen walking along the rows of shelves in the back room, carrying stacks of 45s, while Chris sat at his desk filling out the receipts and shipping invoices. Artists and producers, like Junjo who was watching his Cocoa Tea album sell off, would stop by for royalty payments. Junjo had moved to an apartment just off Jamaica Avenue to be close at hand. Although V.P. started as a small family run business, it quickly grew into the major reggae importer and exporter in the world. Neville Lee, of Sonic Sounds, gives V.P. the credit for promoting reggae in the U.S.. “V.P. is a great asset to where the industry reach. [Miss Pat], actually, single handed broke open the whole United States. Her sons really took that business and worked it. No one should begrudge were V.P. is today- it was hard work.”

While waiting for Chris Chin to make out a royalty check, producers

* Da Silva co-produced the legendary LP In the Light with Horace Andy in 1977. He also worked with Augustus Pablo and his Rocker’s International artists. He was shot and killed in 1979.
would stop a few doors down at JC Kitchen, the restaurant owned by gourmet chef and producer Clive Chin. There, people would relax and take their time, chatting and reminiscing with Clive about his productions at Studio 17 and the days when Kingston was an easier town to live in.

A major figure of the New York scene, deejay Mikey Jarrett was omnipresent. The godfather of dancehall artists in NY, he was one of the very first to arrive, back in 1970. His 45 for Jah Life, ‘Sadat’, was a big hit. Going on to work as a producer, with his What’s Up Doc label, Mikey worked with Horace Andy, Patrick Andy, Carlton Livingston, Lone Ranger, Dillinger, George Nooks, Sammy Dread and many others, both residents and visitors to New York.

Most reggae producers in New York came to rely on former Channel One owner, Jojo Hookim, who had opened a pressing plant in Queens. Situated in an industrial area just over the bridge from Manhattan, it was quite a distance from the heart of the reggae scene, but worth the trek because Jojo understood the particulars of pressing reggae on vinyl like no one else in New York. Jojo had many reasons for moving part of his operation north, but one reason was that having an outlet abroad gave him a way to get his money out of Jamaica where the currency was undergoing devaluations throughout the ’80s and beyond.

**CHANNEL ONE AND THE TWELVE INCH “DISCO” 45**

The very first 12 inch 45 that Clive Chin ever encountered in Randy’s Record store was a Lloyd Charmer single called ‘Rhythm in Rhapsody’ released by Federal in the summer of ’76 on a Wildflower label. “It only had one tune on it, one side, and the other side was blank. I can remember clearly when Miss Pat was selling that record in Randy’s in Jamaica. A customer bought the record and brought it back and was cursing like hell! He said ‘Miss Pat! The record needle just run offa the record! And no music play. Me wan’ me money back!’ And Miss Pat had to explain to him that it was only one song. But him say, ‘But, a two tune me buy and only one tune me get!’ But, what happened, Federal was feeling out the market to see how it would be. In other words, they took on a commodity but they had no tactics to sell the product.”

Which left the territory clear for the Hookims. Channel One jumped in the same year with a 12 inch pressing of ‘Truly’ by The Jays and deejay Ranking Trevor, the big first hit on the larger format. The success of the song put the new extended play single out there and soon, every producer was leaping on the bandwagon.

The 12 inch single, although directly influenced by the manufacture of the extended mix disco 12 inches in the U.S., appeared with a uniquely Jamaican twist. Drawing on the format of the dance, where the recorded singer was followed by a live deejay performing over the instrumental version of the song, the 12 inch would feature the vocal followed by the deejay chatting over a continuation of the rhythm. This way, the b side could contain a very long
dub version of the song with superior sound quality than that of a 7 inch 45, great for home-based hi-fi’s that couldn’t afford dubplates (They later began to put a different vocal and deejay combination on the B side). Yet, the format was not really designed for the local market, where 7 inch 45s reigned and not even albums sold well. These “disco” (12 inch) 45s were made for export and, during the ‘80s, supplanted 7 inch 45s for pressing abroad. As more and more record shop opened in major cities around the world, they sold 12 inch 45s pressed in New York or the UK, and 7 inch 45s that they imported. The 12 inch, costing the consumer quite a bit more than a 7 inch, had a better mark up for the manufacturer and retail outlet.

In the U.S., extended disco mixes were becoming mainstream and Jojo was the main force behind the change. For Jojo, it was an idea born of economic necessity. “To be honest, this is how it work out. The sales of 45s were coming down. If you talk to Prince Buster, in his time, he usually sell 80,000. When I come on the scene, 50,000. But, gradually, going along in the business, 50,000 wasn’t the mark anymore. You’re talking about 25,000. Then it go to 15,000. So, you begin to sell 15,000 for a hit record. And financially, we said, if we sell 4,000 of a ‘disco’ [12 inch 45], we would probably make the same money as when we sell probably 20,000 [of a 7 inch 45].”

The 12 inch was designed for the foreign market and that’s where it sold. The foreign currency shortage during the ‘70s left businessmen hurting. Needing the foreign exchange, producers often released records aboard first to make an immediate return on the investment. Only afterwards were they released in Jamaica. Jojo felt the pinch. “You couldn’t get nothing at all since Michael [Manley] come. That was the most frustrating part in Jamaican history. After Michael lost, everything come back. What was happening during Michael time, you couldn’t get the [U.S.] dollars.”

Even in the early ‘80s, the official exchange rate for the U.S. dollar was pegged far lower than its real value, so a black market thrived. During the later 1970s, people couldn’t take local currency out of the country, so many businessmen tried to earn foreign currency and keep it in bank accounts abroad so that they could maintain as much of their money as possible intact. The situation led to creative financing arrangements. Percy Chin describes how he and Jah Life worked with Jo Jo Hookim around the financing of the early Barrington material. “Jojo, who owned Channel One, he was living in the states that time. I would pay him the money for the studio [to use Channel One] here, in America [in U.S. currency] and Jah Life just go down and he use the time [in the studio].”

“All you were interested in, to be honest, was the dollars”, According to Jojo. “The Jamaican money didn’t mean anything. You just interested to get dollars. Because anything you are going to do, like you want anything to buy, you couldn’t get the dollars locally. And furthermore, you couldn’t carry [Jamaican currency] out [of the country]. I think [the maximum] was more $150 [thousand]. And if you are taking out any money, the people stop you
and search you. So, you rather send the record to Randy’s [in NY] and, when you come over, you collect a few thousand dollars [U.S.] and you do what you want, buy what you want. And that was the main thing really.”

The desperation for foreign funds ensured the longevity of the 12 inch 45 and led to further packaging experiments including the short lived attempt by Channel One to put four songs, a ‘Mini LP’, on a 7 inch.

Jojo Hookim, once again, was thinking of how to get attract attention to his product. “As I tell you, you try everything. You try everything in music! To get something a little different.”

More successful than the Mini LP but not as big a hit as the 12 inch, was the 10 inch extended mix 45. Jojo recalls the move as another cost saving devise. “It cost you less money to produce a 10 inch than a 12 inch record. It doesn’t involve a jacket.” Channel One released a series of very popular songs in the 10 inch format using the Hitbound label, like Sugar Minott’s ‘Lover’s Race’ and Barry Brown’s ‘Serious Man’. But the fad was short lived. “You got a lot of problems,” Jojo recalls. “Like people didn’t like to sell it, especially VP. They were more into the ‘disco’ [12 inch 45]. I don’t know the reason why they wouldn’t go for it, because at least it didn’t use any jacket.”

**NEW FACES**

In the mid ‘80s, new faces were showing up in New York. Blue Mountain, which had released Tenorsaw’s 1985 classic LP, *Fever*, was moving out of the reggae ghetto in the boroughs and into offices in downtown Manhattan with the new moniker, Track Records, and the new Don in town was owner Lloyd Evans. An imposing man with a full beard and shaded glasses, Evans was a serious business man who didn’t take lightly the customarily casual practices of the reggae scene. He used to grumble, “I pay my bills on time so I don’t see why other people can’t.”

As the decade wore on, the sleepy, yard-like feeling was beginning to fade as the big reggae guys began wearing beepers and locking their office doors. Small cameras were continually trained on the entrances. Some store owners were in the herb business, where the new locally grown hydroponic pot was making a big dent in the traditional import/export market. Others had moved on to bigger things.

The Utica Avenue area was getting crowded as more and more record dealers took up residence in Brooklyn. Count Shelly had long maintained a retail shop on Church Street, a few blocks away from Jah Life, but now he was adding a wholesale outlet across the street. Witty (Whitfield Henry) had a shop and was also working on releasing a new *Boops* LP and a 12 inch 45 with Tenorsaw on his Music Master and Witty labels. His releases included Shelly Thunder’s *Small Horsewoman* and *Kuff*, the Nicodemus LP *Mr. Fabulous* and *Ninety Five Percent Black* by Sluggy which “became an anthem for all who got
incarcerated at that time”

**Carlton Livingston**

“Basically we all came to the states around ’82”, Carlton recalls. “Me, Ranger, Sammy Dread, Lui Lepke. They came before me. With me it was totally different. I just came to work with Sam [Selkeridge, his manager].” Sam was taking Carlton, Ranger and Tristan on a tour around the U.S. and Canada. But in the end, Carlton stayed just like the others and began to find a place in the burgeoning New York scene. That’s where he met Jah Life and recorded his classic 45, ‘One Hundred Weight of Collie Weed’.

Carlton first came to the attention of dancehall fans while still in Jamaica with ‘Trodding Through the Jungle’. The original version of ‘Trodding’ came out as a 45 in 1977. Carlton used to sing the lyrics at dances, which is where Flabba Holt heard the song and suggested he record it for GG’s, for whom Flabba was working at the time. “So, I end up doing about four songs for GG, [one of] which was ‘Trodding’. But it was a little bit slow because in those time, most of the tracks were slow.”

This original version didn’t go very far due to the lack of energy in the backing track. “After that I was in the studio with Robbie [Shakespeare, for his Taxi label] putting down some tracks – just some overdub vocals – and [engineer] Soljie came and said, ‘Why don’t you do this song over for Taxi, a little bit faster?’ and I was like, ‘I did it already’. And he was like, ‘Come on’. So we end up doing it for Taxi.” The faster pace gave it the lift it needed, and the second version took off, but as a dubplate before the official release.

“I remember, when I left Jamaica, they had just released ‘Trodding Through the Jungle’. When that song came out – the reaction of the people! Cause it started to creep up on sound systems. I remember that one of the first sound that play that song was Socialist Roots. The next day somebody came to me and said they heard that song playing over in Jungle by the water tank, and they had to play that about three or four times! Then other sounds start to play it and so after a while it start to get real popular so it was quite a while after that Robbie decided to release it [as a 45 to the public].”

As one of the sizable group of Jamaican artists who settled in Brooklyn, New York, in the early ’80s, Carlton soon gravitated to fellow ex-patriot Jah Life’s house where all the recently re-located entertainers gathered. Soon, Jah Life was carrying Carlton along with the rest of the crew to Phillip Smart’s HCF studio on Long Island where he recorded, among many songs, ‘One Hundred Weight of Collie Weed’ which proved to be his most popular and a much sampled and imitated dancehall classic.

“That song just came, cause I knew some guys who were doing some ‘stuff’ and I end up at their house one night and I went to the basement and I saw all that stuff inside there and then when I went back, and Jah Life was [in the

* [http://home0.castekeystems.com/HCF/test.html](http://home0.castekeystems.com/HCF/test.html)
Two versions of the song were recorded, a version for Jamaican release, which said “100 weight of collie weed coming from St Anne,” and the New York version which said “coming from down south.” The St Anne version was the one Jah Life gave Junjo to play as a dubplate on Volcano. Once it hit the dancehall, it became a staple. The rhythm was crisp and clean, the singing was Carleton at his best. And the subject - smuggling Ganja- was topical and compelling. As the government was clamping down on ganja production, an important source of income, the music reflected people’s concerns – like John Holt’s ‘Police in Helicopters’ and Eek-a-Mouse’s ‘Ganja Smuggling’ and, now, Carlton’s contribution. Jah Life laughs and refers to it as one of the all-time, top ten ‘weed’ songs.

Its popularity reached far enough beyond the Jamaican dancehall community that parts of the song keep cropping up in rap and hip hop music. “KRS one did ‘100 shots, 100 clips, coming to New York, New York’,” Jah Life recalls. “That was in the ’90s. Jah Rule did it in 2000. Now JZ did it – some of Carlton’s lyrics is in the title track for his album Kingdom Come. Like he’s talking, “Kingdom Come” and all of that, and then him say, “New York, New York.” So I get my publishing [royalties] for that.”

In New York, Carlton continued recording successfully with Jah Life, releasing songs like ‘Let the Music Play’, ‘Never See Come See’, ‘Second that Emotion’ and ‘Sound Man Clash’. However, after living in New York for several years, Carlton began to see things happening in the reggae scene he wasn’t comfortable with. So, he moved out to Maryland, staying in touch with music through his touring and recording.

**Scion Success**

On any given afternoon, visitors to Jah Life’s record shop would walk in and see singer Scion Sashay Success’s thoughtful face buried deep in the latest racing forms, his small frame perched on a stool behind the cash register, as he studied the day’s races with attention to every detail. By 1986, when Jah Life released his first LP, Scion was already a big name in dancehall because of the popularity of his dubplates, which were mashing up both New York and Jamaica. But he almost didn’t get the credit for singing them. Someone’s name was on the label, and deejays were calling out, “another scorcher from the man Sammy Levy.”

Everyone involved has a slightly different version of how the mix up occurred. But it all started back in 1983, when Jah Life, now an established producer in New York, cut a deal with Greensleeves for the British company to release some of his original productions, apart from his partnership productions with Junjo.

So, when Junjo was heading off to England to deliver their co-productions, Life gave him an extra cargo, a case of tapes to deliver of his own material. The tapes from Jah Life included tracks for Greensleeves of a Carlton Livingston studio, it just came to me.”
LP and tracks for Junjo to cut dubplates to play on Volcano. Of the tracks intended for Junjo to cut dubplates, several were from Carlton and the others were new songs from Jah Life’s secret weapon, a brand new singer he had discovered in New York.

When the Jah Life’s dubplates with the new singer began playing on Volcano, they created a sensation. ‘Pain a Back’, ‘Roots Girl’ and ‘It a Go Done’ were mashing up sessions all over the island. Meanwhile, Jah Life was sitting in Brooklyn, happy that his new dubplates were getting a good reception when, “What happen now, I hear my song is number one in England. How my song is on the chart and it not released?” Jah Life was confused.

To add to the mystery, the released songs were listed as being sung by a ‘Sammy Levy’ and none of the production credits were correct. According to the labels, the rhythms were laid down by The Radics in Channel One. In fact, they were recorded in Freeport, Long Island, at HC&F Studio, and were mixed by studio owner Phillip Smart. The production was by Jah Life and Percy Chin. And the real singer was a Jamaican born, Brooklyn dwelling youth calling himself Scion Sashay Success. He was indeed a huge success, but nobody knew who he was.

“We did some songs in America,” Percy Chin explains, “the Philip Smart studio – HC&F, and we send some of the tapes to Junjo and Junjo send some of the tapes to Greensleeves in England and they put out two Scion Success [12 inch 45s]. But they didn’t know the name of the artists so they called Junjo and Junjo say, ‘Just write Sammy Levy’ - I’m not sure’. He didn’t know the name of the artist ‘cause he [the artist] was local [in New York]. Junjo wasn’t really supposed to release those. We send those song down for his sound and apparently he send them to Greensleeves. But through we was close friends, we just spoke to Greensleeves and ask them to change the name.”

As a result, the songs were huge pre-release hits as dubplates on Volcano, but everyone continued to call the singer Sammy Levy for a long time. Meanwhile, the real singer, Scion Sashay Success (real name George Narcisse) continued recording with Jah Life and Percy Chin in Brooklyn NY. He even began working at Jah Life and Percy’s record store on Utica Avenue.

Unlike the publicity seeking posse that often hung around the store, Scion never gave interviews or allowed photos to be taken, not even for LP covers. His first LP release with Jah Life had a black cover with his name in large white and gold letters.

Born in Jamaica, Scion came to New York in 1977, after graduating college, having majored in history. “I used to go to dances a lot. I used to deejay, not sing. I used to love to deejay.” Still, he never did either one professionally until he moved abroad. His cousin, established singer Horace Martin, was the first one to encourage him to go into the music seriously. “Scion went away from Jamaica to live in New York for a period of time,” Horace Martin recalls,

* There was a lesser known singer named Sammy Levy at the time
“and he wrote a song for me, ‘Awake’ ‘Jah Jah Children’, and send it to me and tell me I can use it. He sent me a demo of his voice and then me write him back and tell him say, ‘Yo, Scion, you nah know say you wicked! You fe sing, you know.’ And him [start to] record for Jah Life. Jah life really bring him.”

The combination of Jah Life and the new singer worked perfectly. Scion humbly gives a lot of the credit to the producer. “Jah Life should be running New York,” Scion explains. “I saw that from the first time I met him. It wasn’t by accident that I ended up with Jah Life. I chose to voice songs for Jah Life. There were other producers around. He was young. He was Rasta like I was. He was the type of person I wanted to be amongst.”

It wasn’t easy being a reggae producer in New York at the time. “There is always this stigma in reggae that if you’re not doing it in Jamaica, it’s no good,” Scion mused. “Canada had suffered from it. New York has suffered from it. All the places reggae had tried to uplift itself. If Leroy Sibbles was in Jamaica doing all those things he was doing in Canada, he would have had a different career.” Scion’s success helped break that spell. “I wasn’t the first artist to come [to NY] but I was the first artist to catapult internationally on all three stages: New York, Jamaica, England. Of that bunch [of artists who immigrated to New York], I was the first to break out.”

However untried, Scion was a singer with a professional attitude. Although his compositions often pack a lot of emotion, he claims that they aren’t representative of his own experiences. “When I’m writing songs, it’s not necessarily about my personal feelings at the time. I think about melody before I think about lyrics. The words just come to me when I sing the melody. Most of my songs are initiated by melody. When we actually go to the studio with the musicians now, I would start singing the song, they would pick up the key and they would they to build a rhythm around it. If I didn’t like that, I would day, ‘Change that’. That’s how we made ‘Juggling Spot’ and ‘90 Minute Tape and Cassette’.” Both songs feature original rhythms made for those releases.

Soon after his first LP release, however, Scion left Jah Life and worked briefly with engineer and studio owner Phillip Smart on a second LP – still without a photo. “I didn’t want to put a picture out because I thought as I develop as an artist I wanted to keep something in reserve. I didn’t want to give Jah Life everything. I thought would be wise to hold something.”

The first photo of the reticent singer appeared on his self production Decisions, released in 2001. Scion remains an intensely private person. “I don’t do interviews either. I’m trying to preserve my career. I don’t want to be burned out doing a lot of interview. There are so many disgruntled artists – they think they have done all of that and they’re not getting what they deserve. I don’t want to be disgruntled.”

Scion lives far away from the mainstream reggae scene in Georgia, working on his career quietly.
**JAH LIFE AND PERCY CHIN**

Jah Life can’t remember a time he wasn’t involved with music. Before he became a producer, he ran a small sound system. “I used to have a little thing in my yard [in Jamaica]. I wouldn’t call it a ‘sound’, but it was a start.” Musical talent ran in the family. Both grandfathers were musicians and his uncle, Lloyd Mason, used to teach music in Jamaica. His father was also a record producer. Back in 1968, Jah Life’s father, Mr. Wright, and Stanger Cole were producing together and eventually, Mr. Wright set up a record shop for Stranger and Delroy Wilson on North and Law Streets, right across from Denham Town. The record shop was called ‘W and C’, Wright and Cole. They produced two songs, ‘Once Upon a Time’ and ‘I Wanna Love You’, with Delroy Wilson and took them to Tubby to mix. The 45s came out years later, released by Bunny Lee, who got the tapes from Delroy and released them on Roydale Anderson’s Andy’s label out of the Bronx.*

When Jah Life (Hyman Wright) first came to New York with his family, in 1970, his father opened a jewelry store and Junior, as Jah Life is called, learned the trade alongside his dad, eventually working in a watch case company. But Jah Life continued this connection with music by putting together a sound in New York called Sir Junior. He set up himself with some records, two Jenson speakers and a solid state amp and began playing out, doing all the selecting, operating, singing and deejaying himself. It was while he was buying records for the sound, in Chin Randy’s store at Schenectady Avenue and St. John street, that he met Percy Chin, the only Chin in Randy’s who wasn’t a descendant of the Vincent Chin line.

Percy had been building up the wholesale business in the Chin’s record store. “I started working in Chin Randy’s records in ’69, and working in the retail store,” Percy recalls. “I saw the need for a reggae music that is based in America. They said it couldn’t happen but I said, I’m going to do it.”

Percy had a vision. He believed that real, authentic-sounding reggae music could be recorded off the island and produced so skillfully that no one in Jamaica would know the difference. Luckily, he found someone who shared his vision.

“He [Jah Life] came to the record store to buy records, and he had a sound and I had a sound, so we put them together to have one sound and we called the sound Kayasonic. And then we decide that he should go to Jamaica and do some rhythms and he would bring back the rhythms and we would voice some of the local artists.

“So, when he went to Jamaica, he met up with Junjo and he called me and he said he and Junjo was doing some business because they put together their finance and they found this artist Barrington Levy and between him and Junjo they did about 12 songs.

* for more on the New York scene in the early days, see Roydale Anderson’s excellent book, My Reggae Journey.
“At that time they call them [12 inch 45s] ‘discos’ – like the singing and the
dub or the singing and the rapping. So, when he came back to America and he
came to me and we went in the studio to play it, I said, ‘No, this don’t make
no sense. To promote a song, you have to put out one each time’. So, instead
of putting out the ‘discos’, we just put out an album.”

At the time, reggae was very much a single release format. Albums sold
a portion overseas, but in Jamaica, people bought 45s and in the U.S. they
bought the 12 inch singles. Their decision to put the songs together and mar-
ket **Bounty Hunter** as an LP was counterintuitive but provident because the
material, in the LP format, appealed to a new sub-cultural cross-over market
and helped the new style of reggae reach a broader audience. Non-Jamaican
reggae fans abroad, especially in the U.S. and Canada, still weren’t comfort-
able buying 45s in Jamaican shops. But, the alternative/import record stores
that carried punk and new wave releases from the UK also stocked reggae.
And that is where North American kids first became aware of the new sounds
coming from Jamaica, records by artists like Gregory Issaccs, Augustus Pablo,
and now Barrington Levy and Jah Thomas.

**HC&F**

Building on the success of the first Barrington/ Jah Thomas/ Scientist re-
leases, Percy and Jah Life began seriously working to create new rhythms
in New York, in Phillip Smart’s HC&F studio on Long Island. One of the
frequent criticisms of “foreign” produced reggae music was that non-Jamaican
engineers couldn’t get the “yard” sound. Having Smart, with his “Tubby’s
pedigree”, as part of the team, overcame this obstacle. As artists began to
migrate north, Jah Life and Percy put them down on vinyl with the help of
engineer Phillip Smart at his HC&F studio in Long Island. Phillip mixed
rhythms that passed the test. No one in Jamaica suspected that they were any-
thing but the genuine article, and the songs became competitive hits, like the
Go Done’, Sister Carol’s ‘Black Cinderella’, Carlton Livingston’s ‘100 Weight
of Collie Weed’, not to mention the Barrington Levy tracks ‘Murderer’ and
‘Black Rose’. Phillip also had the hippest New York City radio show going, in
which he played oldies he couldn’t even name because the labels were blank.
But he knew the songs because he had mixed them himself in Tubby’s studio
in Waterhouse and could provide anecdotes that connected his listeners with
the music in a way that other radio DJs could not.

“I was the first actual assistant Tubby had. How I actually got to Tubbs
was, I used to be a partner with Augustus Pablo. We used to do productions
together, from when we were in high school. We used to record the tracks at
Randy’s Studio 17 and we would take the tape and go round to Tubbs and
make the dub to play on the sound. (We had our own sound systems, too.) I
started going there more and more, and when I left high school, that’s where
I went.”
At first, after moving north, Phillip survived doing freelance studio work for Brad’s, Glen Adams, Jah Life and various other New York based reggae producers. The result was, he got so much work, he decided to set up his own studio. In 1982, he opened H, C & F on Long Island where he still works with reggae, hip hop and R&B producers.
A deep, commanding voice greets the caller, “Hello. This is Octopus Prime”, and then directs you to leave your name and a message at the sound of the tone. It’s one of Frankie Paul’s little tricks. “When people hear this voice mail I have they start calling me Octopus Prime,” he recounts with childlike pride and excitement. Despite being an adult now, and an acclaimed vocalist with some 40 to 50 albums to his name and a string of top hits, the veteran reggae singer, Jamaica’s Stevie Wonder, still can’t resist the passing opportunity to stir things up a bit.

Paul Blake was born October 19, 1965, and spent his childhood in “Dehnamtown, the Tivoli Gardens area, near Oxford Street”, one the poorest areas of Kingston. Born completely blind, Frankie was sent by his parents to the Salvation Army School for the Blind on Slape Penn Road (it later relocated to Manning’s Hill Road), in Kingston. When he was about eight, he had the good fortune to obtain a special operation performed on a hospital ship. Life aboard the itinerant vessel made a big impression on the youth. “I went on the Hope Ship for about five years. The hospital Hope. It went from Jamaica and went to America and to more places. Five years I spent on that ship. I became friends with every doctor on board and the captain, and the patients. I sang almost everyday. I was like the top star.”

The complex operation succeeded in partially restoring his sight in one eye. When the bandages finally came off, it was very disorienting for the youth. “I was like, ‘What’s going on. This looks different!’ I didn’t even remember I was on the ship. When they took the bandages off, I got myself lost in the ship. I was riding this, you know, kid’s vehicle – and there were four of us driving around. [My friend] went the other way and I took the other corridor. And he said, ‘Let’s meet up back right here’. I couldn’t even find that part where we were supposed to meet. Everything got so strange. I didn’t remember where places were.” With his sight partially restored, he eventually learned to get around on his own but he could never see well enough to master reading and writing. When he began his singing career, he had to keep all his lyrics in his head.

Back at The Salvation Army school following the operation, Frankie devoted himself to music and, once again, to making mischief. The school had moved to Mannings Hill Road, St Andrew, where it was bigger and the students had more space. “I had the music room all to myself. Whenever they had lunch and supper, I would hurry up to eat mine. I don’t even wait on the dessert. I hurry up and eat mine and get up and run to the music room and
I’m playing the piano and singing loud cause no one is there but me,” Frankie reports.

Things were going smoothly until one day, the irrepressible Frankie got the other kids to help him make little contraptions called ‘flappers’ out of braille magazine paper. When the things were flicked, they made a sound like a gunshot. The kids all took them round by the manager’s office and started firing away. “Bo! Bo! Everybody ran! Just me standing there. And the principal came out, ‘[strict voice] What was that a while ago? You know, you guys disturbed me. Who and you was here?’ – ‘It was just me alone.’ And he said I’m lying, cause it sounded like twenty of them firing one time. I got myself in trouble - I couldn’t sing for a year.”

Banned from the music room, Frankie found other outlets. During holiday time, he was introduced to singer Jacob Miller who brought him to the soldier camp to meet a band he knew called the Mighty Tides, and asked if he would like to do some gigs with them. “I used to sneak out of the school Tuesdays and Thursdays for rehearsals.”

The Mighty Tides consisted of all police officers, soldiers, security officers and inspectors. The leader was the saxophone player, Mr. Manhurst. “I was the only school boy in the band. I was young, fourteen years of age, doing Cabaret. I stayed with that band for a while. I went all around Jamaica, Ocho Rios, Portland, Negril, Montego Bay, performing Cabaret, performing songs like, [sings] ‘I only know when she, began to dance with me, I could have danced, danced, danced, all night.’*

Frankie started worked with a band called Fabulous Five back in 1976. Long time band leader, Frankie Campbell, had positive memories of the youth, “Frankie Paul went to the Salvation Army School for The Blind with members of the ‘Fab five’ band and our brother group, (the mainly visually impaired) Unique Vision. He performed with us on many occasions while his career was still growing. His success as singer in the visually dominated dancehall market owed much to the uniqueness of his voice and vocal interpretations.”

His next step took him a little closer to his success in popular music. One day High Times** was holding auditions. “I was passing along and I touched a little note there and Chinna said, ‘Wha? Bring the youth there come, bring him come, man!’ There, he recorded ‘African Princess’. ‘Tell Me Why’, ‘I Need Your Loving’, and ‘Gunman Around Town’. “I recorded an album, actually and they sent it to Japan. The first time I am hearing about this country. I heard about it in school, but the first time I’m hearing people talking about it out on the streets. They sold it to Overheat Records in Japan.”

Frankie Jones, who was working with Kenneth Hookim at the time, in-

* From My Fair Lady but interpreted by Frankie with a soulful inflection

** The High Times label was owned by veteran guitarist Earl ‘Chinna’ Smith and named after the High Times band he used to lead.
introduced Frankie Paul. “Frankie Jones told Kenneth that I am a good singer so he [Kenneth] asked me to do one music.” Kenneth liked him and took the young singer under his wing. Frankie lived in Kenneth’s house in Portmore and went to school from there. Over the next few months, Frankie spent the majority of his time in the studio. “I recorded 42 songs for Kenneth, bleached’ in the studio, eating bun and cheese and soft drink.” Out of those sessions came the clash LP with Sugar Minott featuring the songs ‘Worries in the Dance’ and ‘Lazy Love’. The success of the LP, created a lot of interest among producers. They began coming down to Channel One to seek out the new singer-producers like Winston Riley, for whom Frankie recorded his first full LP Strange Feeling (Techniques), one of Frankie best, which includes the two crucial cuts, ‘Strange Feeling’ and ‘I Wish You Good Luck’.

Frankie’s music got an instant response. He had a strong, clear voice and could have handled any style of music well - soul, blues, jazz. Frankie’s favorite singer was Dennis Brown and, although you could hear the influence, Frankie Paul already had his own distinct style. He was only eighteen years old, and, although he was attracting a lot of attention, he still hadn’t seen a real breakthrough.

That came in 1983 with a tune he made for Junjo. “I was scared to meet Junjo, because I heard he was a bad man.” Frankie told C. Danielle McNish in an interview. “I was in the studio one day and I was saying, ‘I don’t think I want to meet Mr. Junjo Lawes, I hear he’s a bad guy’. But when I met him, he was one of the coolest persons I ever saw.” Junjo had Frankie rework his Tasha recording, ‘Pass the Kushunpeng’, over a new up-tempo rhythm which gave the song an entirely different feel. The new ‘Pass the Kushunpeng’ was bold, catchy, full of horns, and irresistibly danceable and remains a dancehall anthem. At the same time, Junjo recorded a new version of the song ‘Worries in the Dance’ (released as ‘War is in the Dance’). The renovation gave the song new life. Whereas the Channel One version had been riveting and intense, the new version was uptempo, pure fun.

The following year, Frankie scored another massive hit with ‘Tidal Wave’ (Powerhouse) for George Phang, inspired by an event in his life. “I called Jamaica from London and they told me I shouldn’t come to Jamaica the next day because there is a tidal wave coming. I said ‘Eh? [dismissively] I’m not afraid. I’m coming still’. And I jumped on the plane and when we got close to Jamaica, the sky was different. There was rrrrrrrrrrr, thunder rolling. I thought about what they say, but me still nah ‘fraid. The plane landed, we went to Payne Avenue and we sat there. And I said to [my friends], ‘Listen nuh. Me go write a tune bout this thing ya, ca’ unu a tell me ‘bout it [the tidal wave] a reach six o’clock tomorrow morning’. But there was no tidal wave at all that

* “Bleach” meaning to stay awake all night doing something
** Current dancehall culture is very different and derogatory, Jamaican Observer, by C Danielle McNish Sunday, May 23, 2004
next day. So, I wrote the song.”

By 1984, the albums were coming out fast and furious. *Bye My Lady*, for Joe Gibbs, *Strictly Reggae Music*, for E.J. Robinson, and two ‘clash’ albums, a Channel One clash with Little John, featuring the forceful cut, ‘Slave Driver’, and a clash LP with Barrington Levy for Junjo, which featured ‘Pass The Kushunpeng’ and ‘Them a Talk ‘Bout’. In 1985, Frankie also came out with the album *Over the Wall*, on Blue Mountain Music, which featured ‘Inferiority Complex’. He followed that with yet another clash LP, this time against Michael Palmer, for King Jammy.

Frankie’s career was set and he continued to rack up chart toppers. But apart from his chart success, Frankie recorded several underrated gems along the way, like the two High Times releases ‘Old Nigger’, produced by King Culture and ‘I Need Your Lovin’ which appeared on the Aligator LP *High Times All Star Explosion* (1985), Top Rank’s ‘Pass Me the Scale’, and the cheerful, uplifting, ‘Zion Train’ which he did for Clive Anderson’s Leo Productions.

Frankie wrote most of his own material. Even as a youth in school, he had always written songs, poems, stories. Frankie Paul was a multi-talented man. He played several instruments and actually began his musical career as a drummer. As a result of the popularity of his recordings, Frankie began touring all over the world. From the beginning, Frankie Paul was a professional. Even in his first stage shows abroad, Frankie commanded the band like a drill sergeant, instructing the drummer which drum to hit and when. He was in full control and knew precisely what he wanted.

Yet, for all his musical sophistication, off stage Frankie could act like the child he still really was, always joking around, playing tricks. Although his contract for performing abroad often contained a clause that as a legally blind person he had to be accompanied at all times, Frankie liked to try to escape from his ‘baby sitters’. The promoters, in order to get clearance from immigration, had to sign special papers promising to be responsible for him and to keep his passport secure. Being tied to the promoters seemed to rankle, and it aggravated Frankie’s naturally rebellious nature. So, he would hatch plots with local accomplices to get away. Once out with friends, he might start a conversation with a gold fish, or walk up to a manikin in store, shaking her hand and declaring in a low, formal tone, “Hello, I’m James Bond 007.”

All day long he would sing. He would sing songs, snippets of commercials - he said he especially loved the American Airlines song. He respected all forms of music, ads as much as operas. Let loose abroad, he could spend all his time buried in record stores, searching for any soul releases he might not have in his collection.

Speaking in a mid range, sing-song voice while at ease, he was careful to alter his vocal patterns according to the situation. When being interviewed

* written by percussionist Sky Juice
on the radio, for example, he spoke in a deep, resonant voice and enunciated carefully so that his accent sounded almost British – not a trace of yard left in it. His ability to do imitations was uncanny. He loved to do announcers from the JBC, specializing in Barry G with his distinctive “ouwwww!” Dogs were his other favorite category. From a Doberman to a mutt, Frankie knew each dog’s distinctive call. He always found an excuse to let out a few barks.

People were often frustrated with him, but never could hold a grudge. His impressive talent and personal openness and his natural charisma made it all forgivable. People liked to take care of him. He seemed so childlike and helpless while, at the same time, being so immensely talented.

After more than twenty years in the business, he finally achieved his dream of moving to Gambia, West Africa. He is reported to speak several languages including Wolof, the main language used in Gambia. In Africa, Frankie looks forward to leading a peaceful, polygamous life in a country that, according to him, looks a lot like Jamaica. He claims 14 children in his new homeland, several more in Jamaica and an assortment of adopted youngsters, so Frankie has lots of company. “Now I live in Gambia. I live like a president, like a king, like the owner of the country,” he explains with his natural exuberance. Especially to his liking, he can carry his herb and smoke openly, a happy life for the resilient and talented singer.
How Cassettes Spread Dancehall

Technology has always been the invisible hand shaping the development of Jamaican popular music. When Jamaicans see something new, they take it and find a use for it that involves music. One of the first uses made of the individual boom boxes with recording capability, was to carry them inside the dancehall and tape the session. A cassette, although not cheap in Jamaica, still beat buying 90 minutes worth of 45s. But, more importantly, one could record the kind of music one wanted, the kind of music that never made it to the airwaves - the live deejays chanting over the raw rub-a-dub rhythms.

The practice of recording live sessions started in the ‘70s but took off and spread rapidly in the ‘80s. With easier travel and more goods coming into the country, people were able to acquire different types of recording decks – boom box to Walkman – and soon dance cassettes were competing with records for the attention of hard-core reggae music fans.

The earliest cassettes, from the ‘70s, were largely recorded ‘open air’, recorded from the spot the tape recorder was placed, through either the internal microphone or an auxiliary microphone that plugged into the deck. The giant boom boxes, or ‘ghetto blasters’, were carried into the dance and left resting by the owner’s feet as he took in the proceedings. Tapers would move around the dance to find the sound “sweet spot” and when the vibes were right, the owner popped in a cassette and 90 minutes later he had his ‘field recording’ of the dance. These recordings were usually such bad quality as to be almost inaudible. Nothing can be distinguished apart from the prominent, pounding bass. The deejay sounded like he was down a deep well. But you could still feel the rhythm of his vocals. And the vibes came through clean and clear.

For this reason, Brigadier Jerry was a great exponent of internal mic taping (as opposed to taping from a direct feed), feeling it rendered a more authentic experience of the session. “When you listen them tape now, you can hear some weird noise ina them. Cause in those tapes, you get the real thing. You can hear the peanut man. You can hear, ‘Peanuts!’ You hear some man a bawl out, ‘Bwoy them deejay a wicked, huh…blah blah blah…’ It give you the real vibes of the dance.” Usually, only the owner and the top sound personnel could patch their decks directly into the amp to get a clean recording. On Jah Love, for example, according to Brigi, “Nobody never plug [their deck] into the amp those days. Only the sound man could do that because them no allow nobody to run nothing through the amp. Just like Belcher and Mickey and
them man. Them have the real thing live and direct through the amps. So, if all I want a copy now, or Ilawe want a copy now, them man there have fe run it [off] and give we.” Everyone else had to tape the music as it traveled through the air to where they were standing.

The master cassette was used to make individual copies with a dubbing deck. From there, these second generation copies were further copied. With each generation, the quality would erode significantly to the point of being inaudible. Having a clean copy, as close to the original as possible, was a powerful status symbol. And having one from the ‘board’ meant you were in with the ‘in’ crowd.

This practice of taping sessions gave the owner of the desk complete editorial control, meaning he could pause the tape when he didn’t like the selection, or cut a particular artist out of the dance entirely. So, you might end up with, say, a whole Stereophonic dance with all the Maddo parts omitted if the tape owner didn’t like singers. Because cassettes were still relatively expensive, one single tape would be recorded over week after week resulting in further loss of quality and gaps where an older recorded dance would often push through.

Because many of the sounds played soul and funky, people would wait until the part of the dance when the deejays would come on, and then start the tapes rolling. For example, in a Jah Love dance, “Them [the audience] know the runnings, cause we have the orthodox selection and then the ‘morning ride’ – and the people come for the ‘morning ride’ from three o’clock onward. They would start the orthodox selection from one to three, so at three o’clock you don’t know seh, a ragamuffin dancehall time now.” That’s when Ilawe would pull out the Burials and Shank I Shek, and all those selections people have come (through listening to cassettes) to associate with Jah Love.

Dance cassettes were highly prized and sought with such intensity in the ‘80s that people went to great lengths to get a live recording. As Sonny Linton, Arrows owner, puts it, “That became an epidemic - everybody start carrying cassette to dance.” Problems would start when people brought their huge ghetto blasters and tried to tap into the power line, the same power line that was supplying the sound. The sound would connect the amps to the outdoor electricity (light) poles and take what they needed to support the sound from the 110 volt power lines. Since batteries were quite expensive and the electricity was ‘free’, people would come into the dance without batteries and, one by one, add their decks to the power lines until, with piles of decks sucking up the current, a faulty deck would catch fire and everyone would run to plug out. Sometimes the sound would get shorted and the equipment damaged. Brigadier recalls, “We did have [a session] called, ‘Too much tape pon the line’. Man plug it in until all the wires burn up, man. All a hundred odd people on that one line, so it must burn up – the line catch a fire.”

* Some sound owners, as well as collectors, gave each session cassette a name like “Slackness Bites the Dust” or “Papa Faith ina Pretty Good Shape”
In Jamaica, the cassettes were either given away by the sound for promotion, or sold for immediate gain. But abroad, a whole culture arose around the rare and revered item. Hard to come by outside of Jamaica, dance cassettes became a highly valued commodity and a trading system developed.

Jamaicans living in other countries regarded the cassettes as the only truly authentic way to know what was going on ‘a yard’. For one thing, they were immediate. Tapes could potentially reach a foreign country the next day, or at least, within weeks, much faster than a record. With this immediacy, you always knew which sounds and which deejays were on top – the top sound usually had the most cassettes circulating.

“People [would] wait to get this cassette from Jamaica,” Producer and selector Jah Screw recalls. “Anybody who was leaving Jamaica and going to England, they have to bring some Ray Symbolic Hifi or some Stur-Gav tapes, you know. So, those cassettes was actually our promotion.” So, when Ray Symbolic Sound went to tour England in 1980, their reception was secure. Jah Screw remembers, “It was a huge reaction because people in England and America, and all over the world, listen to the cassettes. Up to today, people selling those cassettes.”

Cassettes influenced a whole generation of youths who grew up collecting tapes of dances rather than saving lunch money to buy 45s. “I used to live on Harbor Road in Rockfort and attended Camperdown High School, which is located near Dunkirk, the home of the king, Arrows Int’l Hifi,” writes dance fan Granty*. “I remembered when Danny Fish used to bring Arrows cassettes to school in the early ’70s and we used to form a big crowd around him during lunch time to hear the great [deejay] Crutches on the Mike… I think Danny Fish used to charge to listen to his tapes. My older brother used to bring cassettes to our house also and we used to listen to the king, Arrows, all day and night.”

Dance cassettes became a part of everyday life in the ghetto. Instead of musicians gathering on street corners in the evening to jam together, people who carry out a boom box and play the latest cassettes.

Artists liked cassettes because they leveled the playing field. Now, every little man could have his 90 minutes of fame. He didn’t have to have a record out. Brigadier is a good example of the star making power cassettes had in the early ’80s. Without ever issuing a popular recording until 1982, Brigadier was the most respected sound system deejay in Jamaica. “That is what give me the break internationally. All I can tell you, cassettes control the world,” Brigi reflects. “I nah have no record out there and [through] cassettes, I bigger than people with records out there.” His lyrics were often imitated by the recoding deejays and put on record first, as when Lone Ranger borrowed heavily from Brigadier for his M 16 album. When Brigadier did finally record, he was already so well known his song went right to number one.

* Arrows Hifi MySpace blog
Cassettes gave everyone a chance. “Back in Those days, we wasn’t thinking about [recording in the] studio,” recalls veteran deejay Welton Irie. “Actually we didn’t have access to studios. Back in those days, it was more like George Nooks, Trinity, Dillinger. Those were the guys who were seen as recording artists. But eventually now, the studio guys [producers and engineers] started hearing about us, hearing the cassettes and stuff, and they would send somebody to go out, say ‘Welton come do a tune’.”

Engineer Errol Thompson from Joe Gibbs studio actually sent for Welton to record based on hearing him on a cassette. In the same way, Jojo, in Channel One, heard a cassette with Long Ranger doing his M16 lyrics and decided to record him resulting in the classic LP by the same name.

Sammy Dread commented in 1982, “It’s the cassette that make me. I don’t really have a personal record [hit] that did it…It’s what me do when me go a Jamaica – [go to] dances and sound systems and sing pon that. So you see, a cassette come up from yard, and everyone hear [the crowd cheering], ‘Sammy Dread, Sammy Dread!’” Carleton Livingston had the same experience. “In America, like when I first come here, people were like, ‘I hear you on a dance cassette’. It help my career a lot.”

**Live Session LPs**

It was inevitable that something so popular underground would surface commercially. On Jan 20, 1982, Heartbeat Records, a division of the U.S. folk company Rounder Records, recorded a Gemini dance live at Skateland, with Archie at the Controls and a whole heap of well known entertainers. Released as *A Deejay Explosion ina Dancehall Style*, it was the first LP to capitalize on the dance cassette trend and it brought to the forefront new legal issues in dancehall that had not been addressed, like the payment for performance rights to the owner s of the rhythms that were played for the artists to deejay and sing over. Right from the start, producer Sonia Pottinger put an injunction on Heartbeat claiming they had used her label’s recording of Bobby Ellis’s Shank I Shek without permission. Despite the potential for legal complications, many similar albums were released. It was a relatively inexpensive way to put something on vinyl and quality often suffered. Many of the live LP releases that followed were nothing more than cassettes, pressed and packaged in the form of an LP. A promoter kept a dance, felt it belonged to him, and took the tape to a studio to master.

Most, however, fell into a grey area. Maybe the artists were properly paid, but no one had sought copyright permission to use the recordings that were played in the dance. Nobody took much notice and few, if any, lawsuits were ever filed. Some of the more prominent LPs of the genre included *Junjo Presents a Live session/Aces International*, (1982), *George Phang and friends Live at Skateland Live* (1984), *Live and Learn Records presents a live session with King Stur-Gaw Hifi & Lees Unltd* (1983), *A Live Session with Kilimanjaro* (Live and Learn 1983), and *Powerhouse Presents Strictly Live Stock* (1985). Gussie Clarke
released *Live at Kilimanjaro* (Music Works 1983).

Dancehall had come full cycle. Even Coxsone Dodd, who started producing records originally to feed his hungry sound system crowd, allowed RAS Records to put out an LP of *Dancehall Style* Studio One releases, featuring cuts with Little John, Carlton Livingston, Earl Sixteen and others. While not exactly a live session, the LP was still in the dancehall spirit and showed that dancehall was now the new norm, the new standard for recording.
The Sing-jay Style

Talent Shows

In the ’50s and ’60s, when sounds were operated, played and deejayed by a lone selector, singers were rarely heard in the dance. Who needed a singer live in the dance when vocals were freely available on records and dubplates? Back in the ’60s, while deejays could get all the training they needed in the dance, singers typically had to go through the talent show circuit.

Amateur talent competitions were a mainstay of Jamaican entertainment. That’s where singers like John Holt started out. Performing in these shows wasn’t easy. According to producer and singer Winston Riley, if the audience didn’t think you were up to par, they would “stone yuh down”.

In the “50s and ’60s, the Vere John’s Opportunity Hour provided an opening for new artists to get exposure in front of an audience. That’s where Derrick Morgan got his first exposure, doing his Little Richard imitations. On any given show, he might be competing against Jackie Edwards, Hortense Ellis, Eric Monty Morris, or Owen Gray.

“All Tuesday night,” Pluggy Satchmo explains, “[Vere John] put four singer, four dancer together and you get first and second [prize]. Two pounds for first prize and one pound for second prize – but it run to 15 weeks. So, when you win this week, the first and the second go aside, till he get first and second now, ten of we again. Then he put all the first together and then pick again for ten weeks and then [at] the ending of the 10 weeks, we have about six artists – three dancer and three singer and then we have a big show now. That is the final. He might give you say five pound for first and three for the second prize.” The rule was that after you won, you couldn’t enter again. But you could appear as a guest artist. Many performers regularly did the rounds, appearing on different stages, keeping it up for years. If they had talent, they might be picked up by a producer. If not, they often just kept on trying, gaining invaluable experience and training along the way. Even into the ’70s, performers like Fredlocks, Gregory Isaacs and Earl 16 used talent shows to get their start performing.

Youth Clubs also provided another outlet for young musicians. The Victors Youth Club, at Chocomo Lawn, was one example. Run by future Prime Minister Edward Seaga, the club gave a start to artists like Ken Boothe, Marcia Griffiths, Jimmy Cliff, Delroy Wilson and Stranger Cole. “The Victors train guys to play instruments and sing,” Winston Riley explains. “Anything you

* Winston Riley perfects musical ‘Techniques’, Krista Henry, Jamaican Gleaner, May 18, 2008,
want to do, you come inside and learn to do it.”

In the ’70s, singers were starting to show up live on sounds here and there, but not as a regular feature. Johnny Clarke, who grew up in the musical territory of Greenwich Farm, remembers singing at local dances in the ’70s, but never at official sound bookings. “If we [as singers] gonna sing on a sound, we do it in our community. It’s nothing for me to just take the mic and sing some song on some rhythms, but it’s not for the public. It’s just for our bredrens on the corner, for them to feel nice when them licking their chalice, drinking up their juice.”

As dancehalls became more popular, and more singers began to perform live on the sounds, talent shows and community clubs began to fade away. Frankie Campbell, of the Fab five, lamented the loss of the talent show in the 1980s. “The age of the talent show, which had been an integral part of Jamaican music in the ’60s and ’70s, was over and the power of those shows to influence stagecraft also died. Replacing it was raw energy from the ghetto streets, unrefined, crude, but powerful.”

Dancehall took over from talent shows by fulfilling the same functions of training and exposure. Beginners could learn as they worked, as an apprentice to an established artist, right inside the session. Now, producers scouted the dancehalls, looking for new artists to record and often brought their new discoveries to sessions for initial exposure.

MADOO - GODFATHER OF DANCEHALL SINGERS

One of the first popular sounds to carry a resident singer was Stereophonic, where singer Madoo was just as important a part of the lineup as the deejays and selector. In the late ’70s, one of Jamaica’s best loved singers had to be Horace Andy. His intense falsetto was well suited to the dramatic, echoing rhythms of the time. Horace had innumerable hits, and his distinctive voice had such power over people that he may have attracted more imitators than any other singer in reggae history. The list of Horace Andy disciples included Madoo, his brother UU Madoo, Puddy Roots, Patrick Andy, Icho Candy, Horace Ferguson and Wayne Jarrett, to name a few. But Madoo was the first to bring the Horace Andy style live into the dancehall.

When Madoo began singing, “The first thing people heard was the similarity between me and Horace Andy.” So people assumed that Madoo was imitating him. “The thing that a lot of them don’t know about my voice – I was singing more like Little Anthony and the Imperials. But them type-set me.” To make sure fans could hear the difference, Maddo says he cut out most of his “tremolo”. “If I want to imitate Horace Andy, I can imitate him perfectly, but when I start recording, I’m singing in my own voice.”

Madoo wasn’t a sing-jay, per se. He didn’t use deejay patterns in his vocals. But the lyrics he was singing were essentially deejays lyrics, usually General Echo’s, like How You Jammin’ So, Joe Grind, ‘Can’t Spend Me Hotel Fee’. All were lyrics that Echo would use in the dance. Madoo used to wait until right
after Echo had deejayed and come in on the mic and sing – like a disco 45 in reverse, with the deejay coming before the singer.”

This new approach made for sublime dancehall. Fans savored those moments when Maddo’s silky vocals would glide in over Echo’s assured and audacious toasting. By providing a melodic echo to the deejay’s talk, Maddo opened the way for singers to be featured performers on sounds. He demonstrated that singers had something to contribute to the immediacy of dances that wasn’t already available on a 45.

**SINGING DEEJAYS**

As singers began moving into deejay territory, the lines of distinction began to blur. The increasingly hazy division between deejay and singer had been crossed before - in the other direction. The best deejays had always been recognized by their ability to add song to their chanting, like Big Youth belting out ‘Hit the Road Jack’. Brigadier sang gospel, Yellowman sang ‘Blueberry Hill’, ‘Sea Cruise’ and “Mamacita, where is Santa Claus”, and even Josie Wales had his ‘cowboy style’, singing ‘Big Iron’, ‘Wolverton Mountain’ and other Marty Robbins classics. Deejays still bore a stigma in Jamaica where only singers were deemed to be ‘real’ artists and deejays were still musical second class citizens. Most deejays did not have much vocal range and some lacked even the ability to stay in key. But, what the toasters lacked in professionalism, they made up for in confidence and enthusiasm.

As the deejays encroached further into singing territory, the singers started throwing a little toasting into their vocals. Gradually the lines between the styles began to cloud – which lead to the birth of that uniquely ’80s creation, the “sing-jay” style. In sing-jay, the vocals hover between rhythmic chanting and melody. To accommodate the style, singers began to write songs closer to deejay lyrics and shape their presentations to more of a deejay pattern.

**NEW TERRITORY FOR SINGERS**

In the beginning, it was still hard. Singers who wanted to join a live session, even in the late ‘70s, were often misunderstood. “That time, singers not doing nothing like that,” Little John recalls. “Cause I used to have singers saying to me, ‘Why you singing on sound? That’s not a singer thing. That’s for deejays’. I say ‘No. That’s the only way I can get myself across to the people, so, that’s what I’m gonna do’.”

Little John had a very different style of singing from Madoo. He actually started out as a deejay, so using a rhythmic vocal patterning came naturally

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* Deejays sang with such determination and conviction that they could even be forgiven such musical improbability as Ringo singing Hard Day's Night over the Heavenless rhythm.

** As a harbinger of what was around the corner, Johnny Osbourne recorded a song on his Studio One LP, Truth and Rights called Sing-jay Style in which he hovers between a nasal chant and his usual singing style.
to him. The way Little John sang, his lyrics could easily have been performed, without alteration by a deejay. In fact, many were. “Most of the Toyan lyrics, them, I really put together and sing-jay it. ’Ca even the song, All Over Me, [that] was Toyan lyrics, really. Him say, ‘John, take them lyrics and use them.’”

Little John wasn’t the only sing-jay in the early ’80s, but he was certainly one of the very first and, perhaps, the most proficient. In one of his first records, for Roots Tradition, ‘What is Catty’ in 1979, John had already perfected the technique. The song, originally a mento, was recorded first as a deejay record by U Roy, and turned into a sing-jay by Little John. In the verses, he uses more melody, but breaks out into a chant half way through. Perfect examples of the style include John’s ‘Bubbling Style’, ‘Form a Line’ and ‘Clarks Booties’.

Veteran singer Tony Tuff, who deejayed on a few discos under a different name, claims he found singing to be a lot harder than deejaying. In 1979, he was already combining deejaying and signing with his release ‘Flat Foot Hustling’, produced by deejay Errol Scorcher, on a ‘Shank I Shek’-derived rhythm. Like Stereophonic singer Madoo, Tony Tuff took a popular deejay lyric and set it to a melody.

(Sung) I say, we’re going on the hustling
This ya flat foot hustling
From morning till evening
Just a flat foot hustling
(Chanted chorus) Nah get no job no bother rob
Can’t get no work no bother chuck
(Sung line) Can’t get no work, no bother go berserk
(Chanted) Can’t get no work no bother lurk

Top dancehall singer Johnny Osbourne called sing-jay, “The style of the ’80s”, and added, “It’s easier to sing-jay than to do some real singing because real singing needs more attention to the melody and different breath techniques. But sing-jay is like you’re talking, but with melody – a melodious way of talking. It’s just like their deejaying, but with more melody.” Some of Johnny’s most successful songs were sing-jay classics, like his Jammy’s hit Buddy Bye.

Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Number One
Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Number two
Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Number Three
Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Buddy Bye Number Four
Hold up your hand like a Speshie* if you love a dem ya stylie

* Speshie refers to a gun. Johnny means to hold your arm in the air with your hand in a gun shape.
There is a posse in the corner, all of them just a ball out fi ‘murdeeee’e’
But let me hear you say Woaaaa (chorus: Yeaaaaa), Woaaaaaa (chorus: Yeaaaaaa)
Woa, Yea, Woa, Yea…….
Put it pon the table, Put it pon the table, It’s a number one”

Johnny Osbourne, a singer with phenomenal output throughout the ‘80s, took the sing-jay style even farther, by ‘speed sing-jaying’ in his mega hit, ‘Rewind’.

As the ‘80s progressed, it became expected that even recording singers would be popular in the dance and know how to come up with lyrics on the spot, just like a free-styling deejay. For the new generation, who were growing up in a musical culture dominated by dancehall, it was already second nature.

“All those songs was written in the dance,” Echo Minott says of his large output of lyrics. “I was in the dance before I started [to] record. So, when I start to record [on] those rhythms, it’s no problem to me, cause I know how to ride them. Those was my pet rhythms. I sing on them every night on sound system. So, it’s no problem when I am in the studio. I already have it.”

Pad Anthony recalls going into the studio to record in 1986 and being presented with a variety of rhythms selected for an album, and being expected to write the songs and record them right away – all in the same session. “They also had a lot of rhythms that we would just go in and listen to a beat and start writing and recording. Those times my brain was so quick. I could just hear the beat, find a punch [line] and start recording. I did an album, Pad Anthony meets Frankie Jones’’* and all those songs was just straight from my head. I never wrote nothing on paper in those days. Had to be sharp.”

“Actually, back down in those days, we never use pen and paper to put things down,” recalls Barrington Levy. “It just make the vibes, and you catch the melody and you just work it from there.”

Johnny Osbourne came up with his huge hit, Yo Yo, on the spur of the moment at a dance. “Them thing deh ya just come spontaneous. Sometimes I’m at a dance and my bredren keep bothering me to sing a song, for hours and hours. I say ‘alright’ just to stop them from bothering me. [I] just go there and hear a rhythm and make up something without any meaning and, after everybody start liking it, I have to record it or somebody else will do it for me.”

Even in dancehall songs that contained traditional style vocals, the singing style came off a little different, often less melodic and more rhythm driven. In the song ‘Yu Woulda Wrong’ (Super Supreme), Tristan Palma uses the bass line to guide his vocals (just as Little John recalls doing in ‘Work Us So Hard’), resulting in a choppy, vocal that follows the shape of the backing track

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* Murdee means Murder – a popular exclamation meaning great, excellent.

** Buddy Bye, Johnny Osbourne, Jammys, 1985

*** Hell in the Dance, Pad Anthony and Frankie Jones produced by Delroy Wright for Live and Learn, 1986.
You’d a wrong (pause)
To walk through my door
With another man (pause)

In this sense, Tristan Palma, although not strictly a sing-jay, was a dance-
hall stylist. The vocals are subordinate to the rhythm. In rock steady, vocals
stood out as melodically and rhythmically distinct from the rhythm track.
Compare Alton Ellis’ vocals on the song Mad Mad Mad to later vocals over
the same (updated) rhythm such as Roland Burrell’s Johnny Dollar in which
Roland sings a much more restricted vocal range that keep much closer time
with the bass and drums.

Jah Thomas claimed that the style appealed especially to the UK market.
“Chris Cracknel at Greensleeves love that style.” It was becoming impossible
to make a name in recording without your dancehall credentials. “At that
time you had singers like Tristan Palmer, Barrington Levy, Sugar Minott…”
Robert Ffrench told the Gleaner. “So for me to fit in, I had to come good and
be in that league. I had to be going from dancehall to dancehall to listen what
people love. I traveled with several sound systems at the time, like Metro Me-
dia, Killamanjaro, Gemini and some others.” The pressure was on and singers
were changing their styles to adapt to the new demands.

**Barrington Levy**

Levy was typical of the younger generation that was growing up with its
principle performing experience coming from the sound system. Thus, a lot
of Barrington’s material started out as deejay or sing-jay lyrics and only later,
became a song. The lyrics to ‘Robberman’, (from the 1984 Junjo Lawes’ pro-
duced LP, *Prison Oval Rock*) for example, came directly from a Reverend Ba-
doo lyric. Much of Barrington’s original material was collaboration between
himself and whoever was there with him, and a lot of the time, that was a
sound system person like Jah Life, Junjo or Jah Screw.

Singers who came to a dance to sing had to ‘wing it’ just the deejays did.
Rarely where they handed the rhythm that matched one of their recorded
songs. So, they had to improvise, singing bits and pieces of foreign or reggae
songs, whatever they could come up with that would match a part of the ver-
sion being played. Freestyle singing, like deejaying, took snatches of one song
and lines from another and put them all together over a rhythm, according to
the skill of the singer.

They brought the same approach into the studio to record. Barrington was
a master of the style. For songs like ‘21 Girl Salute’, for example, Barrington
borrows from the The Cables song, ‘What Kind of World’. Junjo just handed
him the ‘punch line’, “21 girls to one slim bredren”. Likewise, ‘Looking My
“Love’ contains lyrics from ‘Love on a Two-way Street’ by The Moments, “I found love on a two way street, and lost it on a lonely highway.” The style of combining elements of soul or pop songs with original lyrics was a dancehall practice where singers (and deejays) often started out singing something familiar and then launched into their own take on the theme.

‘Dances are Changing’, his hit from 1983, was pure ‘dancehall’. Both in his style of singing (he deejays the chorus) and the way the rhythm was mixed. The lyrics are about various new dance styles and how quickly they come and go. He asks the audience to perform certain moves and he addresses certain girls as if they were right there beside him in a session. The rhythm was one of the first to be engineered with a ‘mixing’ pattern.

One of the biggest trends to emerge in the ‘80s dancehall was ‘mixing’. While a record was playing on the sound, the operator would flip the dials on the board to drop out the music and bring it back in rhythmic patterns. It interrupted the flow of music but gave the deejays a strong rhythmic support. ‘Dances are Changing’ was one of the first records to have the ‘mixing’ done right on the tape by the engineer, which was both new and highly unorthodox for a singing record, as most of the mixing was performed on the sound for the deejays.

Barrington’s hits for Jah Screw, ‘Under Mi Sensi’ and ‘Here I Come’, proved to be pivotal, not only because of Barrington’s vocal style, but for the way in which the rhythms were constructed. For selector Jah Screw, producing records for general release was a natural outgrowth from his years making dubplates and specials for the sound. Naturally, his approach to producing for the public retained many of dancehalls signature tactics. For example, the rhythm for ‘Under Mi Sensi’ (an updated ‘African Beat’ rhythm) had been recorded originally in Channel One by the Roots Radics. Barrington Levy was living in England when he first heard it. “Barrington was so impressed that he went home and wrote lyrics for it,” Jah Screw remembers, “Him sing it to me in my house and we go to the studio to record it - that’s where the partnership started with me and him. Then about a month later, that song was a hit in England.”

Jah Screw was still thinking in dancehall mode when he went into the studio and put the mixing pattern in the rhythm – ‘Boof! Boof! (pause) Boof! Boof! Boof!’ The engineer just had to drop out all the sound and bring it back a few times, as they did in the dance. But dancehall crowds went wild for it. Barrington remembers the reaction when ‘Under Mi Sensi’ first came out. “They was really jammin’ to it. It was a big hit for me in England. It was something very new. It was a new style, a new sound.” ‘Here I Come’ took the idea one step further.

For the follow up, the mega hit ‘Here I Come’, Jah Screw actually had the

* Another example is Ghetto-ology where Sugar borrows from Sam Cooke’s What a Wonderful World.
Roots Radics play the mix right into the rhythm. “‘Under Mi Sensi’, we actually do [the mixing] in the studio, but ‘Here I Come’, is live and direct, the band was doing that style,” Jah Screw explains. “I learn it off the mixing from the sound – dup, dup, dupdupdup.”

“That was my idea. My bonafied idea,” Barrington recalls. “Cause, you see, I started coming in the music business singing on sound system. So, when I was singing on the sound system in the dancehall, that’s the mix that I have – the selector do it for me. So, I decide that when I go to England, I was gonna do this song. I was gonna – instead of having the sound system keys doing it, we could use the band to play it live.” ‘Here I Come’ made it into the UK National Charts in 1985.

The lyrics to ‘Here I Come’ originally came to life in The Howard Johnson Hotel on the East side of Toronto, Canada. The standardized low rise hotel just happened to have an intercom system to buzz up to the rooms and to speak to a person in another room. Barrington thought the phone connection was a great game and loved to call up Jah Life in the room next door. After seeing how Barrington mashed up the concert the previous night when he sang ‘On the Telephone’, Jah Life got the idea for a follow-up, ‘On the Intercom’ (aka ‘Here I Come’ – the song goes under both names).

Barrington readily described ‘Here I Come’ as “a dancehall song”. The lyrics start out telling a story about a relationship in which one partner wants more freedom. Then Barrington breaks into a sing-jay chant

I’m broad, I’m broad,
I’m broader than Broadway
When you go to Volcano,
It’s like a stage show
You have men who sing, deejay and blow
Pull it, Danny Dread-o! Swing!

A song within a song. The sudden topic shift creates the impression of spontaneity. The topic turns from the story to address the ‘runnings’ in the dance. “Pull it Danny Dread-io”. He tells the selector (Volcano’s Danny Dread) to lift up the rhythm and start it again. Rather than being a cohesive whole, the song becomes a mosaic of different parts. Like a performance live in a dance, the performer shifts attention back and forth from his romance with Rosie to the environment which he shares with his audience. Only now, the audience wasn’t in the dancehall. It was people listening to the radio in the UK.

The sing-jay styling had become the only style hard core enough to play in

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* As Jah Life describes the scene, “I start deejaying, like sing-jay, ‘On the intercom Rosie tell me to come…”’ Jah Life had a simplified melody, more rhythmic than the one Barrington used. From there, Barrington took it and made it his own, throwing in some “shudeley wadily woaaas”, a scat riff that was inspired by an in joke between him and Jah Life based on an old Spangler named Shuddely Blinds who used to sit in the local community center and boxing gym in Jamaica reading all day.
the dancehall. Even singers like Sugar Minott felt the pressure. “When I was singing like, ‘Hear me now supe, hear me now star, you come a this ya dance, you no make no war, you buy off the bar’ [Buy Off the Bar, Powerhouse, 1984], those thing come from deejaying. Cause, like deejay was so strong [popular], I had to come with something to mash up, to sell at that time, so my mind formulated singing like a deejay – ‘Give them in a dance hall style…’ That wasn’t really my [style of] singing. My singing was like, ‘Never gonna give Jah up’.”

Many straight singers were slipping sing-jay into their songs. In the early dancehall classic, Lean Boot, Michael Palmer sings the verses but deejays the chorus, a common sing-jay devise.

(Chorus) Ready me ready and a gone me gone
Ready me ready and a gone me gone
Who come fe stop me, don’t stand a chance
Hot like a pepper so me gone a dance

By the mid eighties, singers were an expected part of any session. In fact, it was hard to get a name for yourself outside the dancehall structure.

**The “Off Key” Style**

Freestyle dancehall singing was a new phenomenon. Thus, it had some brilliant bursts of creativity that shone through. But it also had its dreary side. One of the hallmarks of ‘80s dancehall singing was the often unfortunate combining of foreign cover songs with barely matched (or all-out inappropriate) rhythms. The singers must have picked it up from the singing deejays whose offenses included such musical crimes as Massive Dread singing ‘Maria’, from Leonard Bernstien’s West Side Story, over the ‘Love Me Forever’ rhythm.

The M16 rhythm, with its slower pace and wide open spaces, seemed to be magnet for this style. When it played on Gemini you could hear 10 different songs sung over it, including the pop standards like “Brandy”, “Endlessly” and “Sukiyaki”. Barrington Levy disapproved of singing a song over anything except the backing track the song was meant for and referred to the practice as “some off key singing”. He even held up a Metromedia dance once over being offered the wrong version to sing over. He told the selector to ‘pull up’ and began to sing acapella.”

* lyrics from Dancehall Stylee, Black Roots 1982; Never Gonna Give Jah Up, Ghetto-ology 1979

** Later, in an interview, he explained that the sounds encouraged this practice. “For instance, the sound system, they want to do dubplates for their sound and they would come with some beat that doesn’t go with what you are saying, and they are telling you ‘Yea. Yea, it will work!’ Well, some people just record it because they get paid. But, for me, although it’s just a dubplate, you still going to be listening to it so it have to be right.”
In the early ‘80s, the practice got a big boost from the popularity of Phillip Frazer’s covers of a variety of Manhattan’s songs, widely circulated on dubplates. Phillip remembers how he first came to sing ‘Shining Star’ in the dance. “We were in a dance and everybody were singing on ‘Hi Fashion’ rhythm, Barrington Levy, Sammy Dread, all of them. When it comes to my time, I am wondering what I am going to sing. Cause everybody is mashing up the dance. And, through I know a lot of foreign songs, I say I’m going to fit this song on this rhythm. I’m the first one in Jamaica to do that. Big Youth did ‘Hit the Road Jack’ on the ‘Love Me Forever’ riddim. Big Youth sing that song on a dancehall rhythm. I come offa that and I fit ‘Shining Star’ on ‘Hi Fashion’.”

It took particular skill to be able to sing a soul song seamlessly over a completely different reggae backing track. Phillip Frazer made it his specialty. Puddy Roots’ ‘Halfway Up’ over the ‘Never Let Go’ rhythm sounded credible. His version of Tom Jones’ ‘Delilah’, sung over the thick and heavy rhythm for Michael Palmer’s ‘Ghetto Dance’, was a bold a move. Puddy also contributed, with his typical cheer and confidence, ‘Don’t Sleep in the Subway’, over the same ‘Ghetto Dance’ rhythm, followed with Michael Jackson’s ‘Human Nature’, over ‘Full Up’.

As the style gained in popularity, singers merrily forged ahead with Thriller singing ‘Silvia’s Mother’ over the ‘Boxing’ rhythm, followed by Chris Wayne (on the same rhythm) singing ‘Rain Drops Keep Falling on My Head’. Yami Bolo often sang ‘Betya By Golly Wow’ over ‘African Beat’ and Hugh Griffith tried ‘Want to Wake Up To You’ over ‘Victory Dance’, and Barry Brown singing the bland ballad, ‘I Want to Make It with You’, over the storming, thundering, intense ‘Cuss Cuss’ rhythm.
**VIOLENCE IN THE DANCE**

Alongside the broad audience and the fans from all walks of life, the dancehall had always attracted a certain population that came for the excitement and stimulation. These young men came to model and show off, to pose as the 'tuffest', to tell the world they 'ruled' and would brook no challenges. “There was too much injustice,” Singer Percy Williams explains. “You have boys who start to make gangs and then you have the Spanglers and all these people start to make them own gun with bicycle bar. They call it the ‘Bucky’. Buck shot. It cannot hurt you at a distance. But close to you, at arms length, it could blow you away. That started in the late ‘60s – ‘67, ‘68.”

The ‘rude boys’ evolved into gangs based in small areas of the city. These men were often considered local heroes and were the envy of many a youth in the ghetto. Ranking Trevor remembers watching them filing into the sessions in Waterhouse in the ‘70s. “You had the Spanglers and the Skull. The Spanglers is like from Princess Street, downtown, and the Skull them is from Southside, Tel Aviv. Them and the Spanglers used to war. I remember when I was a kid, I’d watch them come a King Tubby’s dressed slick. Those guy know how to dress! White shirt and black pants with a little bowtie.”

The dancehall sessions attracted all kinds of youth, some well mannered, others bored, restless and ready for anything. When they all came together in a noisy, crowded space with the excitement of the dance, under the effects of liquor and ganja, the slightest provocation could spark an incident (for example, a stampede erupted at Cinema four during one of the huge four sound clashes when a rumor started that armed men were climbing over the wall).

When people got too out of control, the deejay had to cool things down. As Sonny, Arrow’s owner, explains, when the dance got hot, “They would just run up and down. They would be firing shots on the air – from the excitement, not violence against each other. Or, it’s a security guard firing shots.” That’s when the deejay had to step in. “Because he has the mic and everybody can hear him. So, he would say, ‘Just cool! Just cool, man. Everything nice’ and ‘More music’ and ‘Stop your run up and down’.”

Arrow’s selector, Zaggaloo remembers the very first time he took in the
sound. “I live in Franklyn Town and I had been hearing the name [of Arrows]. I ask my parents, cause much as I was working, in those days you have manners for your parents. That was my first trip to hear Arrows. They played at Bower Bank, in east Kingston. It was a Labor Day night. Crutches was deejaying. I remember that dance specifically because, what happened, police came into the dance. They were just patrolling, but the dance was so crowded that people get bummy and start run up and down. That was when they put on Burning Spear name ‘Run Up and Down’. Crutches start to deejay and the crowd got so settled, everybody [who had run outside] came back. On the mic, he was like, ‘It’s Ok officer, we are enjoying weself on Labor Day, and we are just playing some music’. It calmed them. He played it and they just calmed down. And the flow of the crowd – some people were moving towards the gate, and from he played it, they come right back into the dance and everything was OK. The officers never even come out [of their car]. They just look around and then drove out back. I always remember that. A lot of people don’t understand that. That’s why most of these artist nowadays, I don’t’ think they understand the magnitude of [the power] they have towards people. Just listening to lyrics, music, it makes a big difference to a lot of people.”

The opposite held true as well. The deejay had the power to disrupt the dance and provoke trouble. People came to the session ready to listen. Whatever the deejay talked, the audience did. If the deejays said ‘wine up on your toe’, that’s what they did. If the deejay said, ‘cock out yu foot and make me see your Clark bootie’, the well dressed would lift up a well-shod heel. If the deejay said, ‘Gun man move’, someone would take out a gun and fire shots in the air. And that is exactly what happened in 1982 when Ringo came to Canada for a few dances with Leroy Sibbles’ sound Papa Melody Hifi. Everyone told him, ‘Don’t deejay anything about guns’. Unfortunately, the M16 rhythm was popular at the time, and sure enough, as soon as Ringo started talking guns, shots rang out and a bystander was hit. The next day, the police came looking for him.

No matter how well planned, or how much security (if any) was around, something was bound to happen eventually. If not today, then tomorrow or the next day. Inspector Willie, from U Roy’s Stur-Gav sound, explained that steady exposure to the threat of violence was a hazard of the job. “I remember being at one dance. About seven people died. It was an awful experience. The police said someone fired a shot at them; they was patrolling and somebody fired a shot at them. They just radio up more police and start firing shots. I get low, went into a little room. It’s a good thing it was concrete. See, when I look, pure hole in the wall. And some of the equipment got shot up. But it didn’t really affect us. See, it’s like I get used to those things still. Not to say that when I am at a dance, I like it. But, I get used to it. Like if something should occur, I know what to do.”

Sometimes, it was the police who were to blame, not the rude boys, for mashing up a dance. U Roy recalls, “They didn’t love when a sound carry a
certain large amount of crowd. There would be some feelings – like maybe if you're not dealing with a certain set of police, they carry feelings and mash up your dance. They just come and see a big crowd and they fire shot and people run up and down.”

Stur-Gav had gained a reputation for such incidents. “You have all kinda rude boy,” Selector Jah Screw recounts about his time working with the sound, “That’s why Stur-Gav end up branded with the name ‘Stur-Grave’ - cause you would have shoot out.” Stur-Gav deejay Charlie Chaplin says, “Wherever we go them always say, a pure badman and gunman. Through the area where the sound come from, whe’ it represent, and the type of people who love the sound. People who were known as ‘hardcore’ or dangerous men follow the sound. But we a play the sound fe everybody. We cyaan tell who fe follow it. Through the police see that, they kinda target all of our dance, shoot it up and throw tear gas pon we. Nuff time them tear gas the dance, we have fe run out of it.”

It wasn’t all bad, however. Getting shut down was a status symbol. “The only sounds that don’t get shut down is the sounds that wasn’t popular,” Screw explained. “If you sound is a popular sound, or a number one sound as we put it, you will get shut down.” Stur-Gav, wasn’t a ‘badman’ sound. With veteran Daddy U Roy as the owner, it became of the 1980s most well known and most influential sounds though the introduction of deejays Josie Wales and Charlie Chaplin. But that hint of danger gave it an edge that other sounds lacked. Unlike the fun-loving and sometimes silly nights with Gemini, and the wild party that was Volcano, Stur-Gav was serious and down to earth.

Stur-Gav Hifi was all roots, but ‘royal’ roots, as the sound traced its lineage right back to King Tubby’s where U Roy held court in the late ’60s. In the ’80s, Daddy Roy didn’t spend much time around the Stur-Gav, although he did make an occasional, sensational, appearance on the mic. Mostly he left it to the crew to run and maintain. But his musical experience infused everything the sound did and played.

Around 1971, U Roy broke away from King Tubby and King Attorney and started his own set, King Stur-Gav*. The ‘originator’ found himself on his own now, backed only by all his professional experience in the dance world. “I tell meself, this is something whe’ me love, this is the only thing that me know. This is the only trade that the Father give me whe’ me master. So, I decide to start my own little sound. And believe you me, it was the best thing me ever do. And me no really regret nothing about sound work.”

For the first little while it was a one man show, with U Roy selecting, deejaying and operating. “It was a little sound at first, you know, but this little

* The name, which has been often written as Stereograph, really is the oddly spelled Stur-Gav. U Roy explains, “Stur-Gav is two piece of two of me sons names. Its three letters out of one and four letters out of the next one. It’s not a counterfeit name. This is a real name. This is not no joke name. The sound register like that.”
sound have the biggest crowd behind it. It just pure joy ina me heart!” At the very start, people weren’t impressed. “I used to gwan make two little talk ina the nighttime until some people start talk and talk and say, ‘Whe’ the dread a go with the little sound there?’ Them time Stur-Gav just young. Them time there me just have two little box and anytime rain fall, them two little box there just crumble.”

So, U Roy bought some fresh boxes, but the crowds still weren’t coming. “I hear some people say, ‘A whe’ the dread go with that foo foo sound? Him think the sound can reach all certain sound?’ And me a stand up and listen to them man good, and me a tell myself, seh, ‘Well all right, unu gwan see. Gwan make unu eat them word there!’” And he did.

For the first few years, U Roy kept the sound going all on his own, barely earning enough to survive. Then he found Little Joe, who grew up to be star deejay Ranking Joe, and the selector Jah Screw. Joe and Screw became one of the hottest combinations going. Joe was a seminal deejay who influenced a whole generation of younger men who rose to fame in the ‘80s. Charlie Chaplin, who came on board during this time, started out as Joe’s apprentice. Not only was Joe one of the first to promote the slackness style, but his “fast talking” was heard all the way to the UK where it was morphed into an English pattern and bounced back to Jamaica in the mid eighties. Throughout the decade, Jamaican deejays could be heard echoing his ‘bong didley, bong diddley’.

**Ranking Joe**

“The deejay that I used to like was Ranking Joe,” Emperor Faith Sound owner Mikey Faith reminisced. “Out of all of the deejay, when him come to work, him come to work. I used to pick him up and we would go. I used to operate the sound – I was the selector, so I would go to the dance early and I would pick up Joe and Joe would start to talk and wouldn’t put down the mic until dance done.”

As a youth starting out, Joe worked with El Paso sound as Little Joe, where he was taught by a deejay named Waistline. Like the sound’s principal deejay, Dennis Alcapone, Joe’s style was upbeat and energetic. When he was 15, he went to Studio One to audition for Coxsone Dodd. Dodd was open to recording deejays and released Joe’s first song, ‘Gun Court’, which became a hit. Joe continued recording regularly, with a variety of producers, including Bunny Lee, and Sonia Pottinger, before he had his break-through hit with Tony Robinson, ‘A You Mr. Finnegan’, in 1977.

By this time, U Roy had left King Attorney and formed his own sound system, King Stur-Gav. Well established and respected in the music business, U Roy was the ideal person to run a sound system. He was soon joined by the then young and slim deejay, Little Joe and the selector Jah Screw. Together, on the sound, Joe and Screw were a powerful force. “Me and Jah Screw have a combination and a chemistry,” Joe reminisced. “He was very special. He
would know my voice, my tempo, and I wouldn’t have to look at him to know the song playing, just know. We have that down pat, you know.”

U Roy was in demand for overseas tours, and in his absence, Jah Screw would take care of the music. Jah Screw recalls, “U Roy’s girlfriend, Vivian, she was the manager who runs the sound. U Roy often have to go and tour. And between me and she, at that time, I would take care of all the dubs and all the specials, all she would have to do is just give me the money. So, often, at the time, he wasn’t the one who was paying us. She was the one. When we mash up the place, she was there, taking care of all the business. When U Roy gone about him thing, I said to her, ‘Vivian, you got to change those boxes, we need bigger boxes’, she would work along with me cause I was there. I spend most of my youth days, giving all of my time to King Stur-Gav.”

Despite Vivian being an easy person to get along with, it was hard to work for a sound with an absentee owner, so Joe and Screw took their act to Ray Symbolic around 1975. Joe describes Ray Symbolic as “a discotheque sound – they used to play a lot of soul records, R&B, and they was doing their thing before I come along. [In those days,] they have sounds like Stan the Soul Merchant, Gemini, and a lot of sounds that were playing R&B stuff, like a mixture. Ray Symbolic used to play that way. But, when I come along [to] deejay, they turnover to the reggae part now. I start to deejay and then they go back to the soul. But after playing more and more, a lot of promoter wouldn’t want us to play the soul. We become hard core.”

For the following years, Joe and Screw switched between the two sounds, Ray Symbolic and Stur-Gav, easily and often. Joe was becoming more popular every day. Now working with Errol Thompson at Joe Gibbs Records, he scored big with ‘Leave fe me Girl Arlene’ and ‘Drunken Master’. At the time, Joe was talking slackness on the sound. “[Joe] did slack when him just come a Stur-Gav. He was one of the slackest, most dirty mouth deejay you ever hear,” U Roy ruefully recalls. “Same thing with Charlie [Chaplin] when Charlie just come.” U Roy had to tell them to cool it.

But the style that Joe will always be remembered for is the fast talking style. Joe would punctuate his phrases with a quick ‘Bong diddley’, or suddenly launch into a lengthy, “bong diddley bong diddley bong woodely woodely …” It was Joe’s signature scat singing style, different from U Roy’s distinctive, ‘yea, yea, YEA’, and ‘Waaaaaaah!’ Joe’s style was a little more modern - something new that spread among the deejays until it became part of every toaster’s repertoire. Hardly a song went by in the dance with at least one ‘diddley’ or ‘woodily’. Soon deejays were coming up with their own improvised riffs, like ‘cree cree cree cracka’ and adding ‘bim’, ‘right!’ and ‘ribbit!’

**Stur-Gav in the ‘80s**

Stur-Gav suffered a significant setback in 1980 when it was shot up during a session in Jungle. U Roy remained quiet for a year or two and then brought the set back with a new configuration including deejay Josie Wales as “The
Colonel”, Joe’s previous apprentice, Charlie Chaplin, as “The Principal”, and a new selector, Inspector Willie.

It was an uphill battle, working in the early ‘80s. “We get a lot of fight from the police. Like certain area they don’t want us to play, certain area we go, they say we have to lock off certain hours, especially uptown, like Barbican and those places,” U Roy recalls. “Cause they would say, its first class citizens living there. They don’t want them to be disturbed.”

Josie and Charlie had a natural chemistry rarely found between two performers in a dance. “Jah works”, comments Charlie with a tone of puzzlement and resignation. “Me and Josie never sit down, not even one minute and say, ‘mek we plan it this way’. We come to the dance, and him lick a lyrics and me listen it and me counteract it, or me do a lyrics and him listen it and counteract it. A so we deal with it. We haf fe make everybody happy.”

A 1982 live Stur-Gav session was a brisk and rousing experience. Josie and Charlie could be light hearted or deadly serious, but their words were never frivolous or petty. Their dedication to entertaining and maintaining a responsible, educational vibe, separated the sound from the slackness sounds where some deejays seemed to parade their immaturity. The rough edges just gave Stur-Gav that 100% ghetto authenticity. But, behind the ragamuffin exterior, Stur-Gav was about quality and hard work.

Even during the overpopulated dancehall explosion of the early ‘80s, U Roy ran Stur-Gav like an older sound from the ‘70s - no little youth grabbing the mic, no line ups of beginners waiting for their turn to say two little lyrics and ‘gone’. Each man had his apprentice. Desi was attached to Josie and Buzzy to Charlie. Special guests made appearances. But the atmosphere was always work, not play.

**Josie Wales**

Josie was always seen as the roughneck of the duo. He was shorter, with a solid, stocky build and a deep, gravely voice. He kept his gaze to himself, rarely looking directly into anyone’s eyes. Charlie, on the other hand, was social. He was relaxed and gentlemanly, at ease in any group of people. Tall and slim, bubbling with energy, Charlie never stopped moving. “Anytime I hear music, even if I sick, I have to wiggle up like a worm.” Charlie came across as educated and sophisticated, a huge contrast to Josie’s deep, ghetto vibes.

The name Josie Wales came from his reputation of being like a cowboy, always roaming the land. “Them time, I never really have no resting place,” Josie recalls. On his own from the age of ten, Josie had to look out for himself. He spent most of his youth on street corners, “running jokes” and talking. He wasn’t holding down any job, just drifting. “I never really go to high school, you know. Just leave at primary age. I get most of my knowledge off the sidewalk, off of the street. I don’t really grow up with no family. I grow up on my own.”

Having virtually raised himself, Josie developed a cowboy outlook on life.
He saw himself as a Wild West drifter, traveling with his horse and his “one frying pan”, sleeping under the stars, fending for himself. Life in the ghetto was kind of like that. “It was just reality,” he sighs. “Funny enough how it becomes music.” Like the best deejays of old, Josie also liked to sing, and made a specialty of doing cowboy tunes, like ‘El Paso’ and ‘Wolverton Mountain’. He got them from an old Marty Robbins LP his grandmother used to have.

During the early years, Josie wasn’t serious about music. He used to go to dances and deejay - mainly small sounds like Roots Unlimited, Black Harmony, and Rebeltone. He admits freely that he was doing the wrong things back then, that he was into ‘badness’. But Josie found his dedication to music grew as he got more involved. “It’s like an inborn thing”, he commented remembering how easily it all came to him in his youth. Music reached him, deep inside his soul.

**REality LyRics**

In the early ‘80s, most deejays were moving away from the slackness. However, the slack lyrics weren’t being replaced by the cultural sounds of the ’70s, but by a new style that spoke of current events, from local runnings to national social and economic conditions. Reality lyrics began where culture left off, dealing with whatever was happening in the community - ganja smoking, going to sessions, dancing, being harassed by gate men, being harassed by the law, unemployment - all the little stumbling blocks of life ‘a yard’.

No one represented the style better than Josie Wales. He was a keen observer of life and he described what was going on around him with humor and compassion. Like Kingston Hot, which provides a compact but vivid picture of what the Jamaican capital was like in those days.

The youth dem make a hustling by selling Kisko Pop
Dreadlocks just a jog ina dem sweatsuit top
Bad boy and police just a fire pure shot
Kingston hot! Lawdagod me say, Kingston Hot!

One of Josie’s signature reality lyrics, “It haf’ fe Burn”, looked at the relationship between police and ganja smokers (and the very strict laws against it). Josie came up with the words on the spot during a dance that took place across the street from the station.

“It was a dance with Stur-Gav one night and [the sound] was playing exactly in front of a station, a police station, and them dare me- them dare me! They was daring me to see if we a go burn the chalice tonight. Cause we carry the chalice go a every dance. Cause it was a part of the dance to have the chalice there. [So, they] dare I fe go burn it that night.”

Josie took up the challenge. There was a notorious bad boy police in the crowd. “But I was a daring youth and a brave youth.” At 20 years old, Josie feared no one. He took out the chalice and lit it up with a piece of paper. In-
spector Willie dropped the needle down on the Mighty Diamonds, Pass the Kutchie and the crowd sent mad. And Josie began to chant,

Ina the dance early one Friday night  
Me and my bredren just a burn ganja pipe  
Rip out a road and then we sight a bright light  
Babylon a come in him red, black and white  
Coming in the dance wan’ give I a fight  
It have fi done, Jah know, it haf’ fi’ done

From Inspector, Corporal to Sergeant  
Whole of them have a gun ina them hand  
Push down the damn gate man  
Say move your hand when you sight Babylon  
Then him lean up him M16 in a corner  
And jack up himself on a stone  
Say, ‘dreadlocks you take me for fool?  
Ganja pipe is my favorite tool-  
I man burn this from I go a training school’  
It haf’ fi’ burn, Lord it haf’ fi’ burn!

Perhaps because of his checkered past and bad-boy reputation, Josie was careful to stay away from anything that sounded like he was advocating or supporting violence. He had already come into the business with a reputation. A lot of promoters and producers were afraid to work with him. Still, a certain amount of violence went with living in the ghetto and Josie found himself in trouble over the words to his hit, “Leggo Mi Hand”. The media objected to, what they perceived to be, gratuitous violence.

Based on an event in Josie’s own life, the song told the story of an experience familiar to everyone who has gone to many dances. In the story, the protagonist encounters a gateman who doesn’t recognize him, says he looked “too simple” to be the real Josie Wales, and won’t let him into the session. The ‘violence’ that ensues in the song is more verbal slapstick than a promotion of badmanship. Josie intended it as humor. To Josie, these things were part of everyday life in the ghetto. “That’s where you were born, where you are com-

*.Went to a dance down a Clarendon  
Me and a big fat thing name Pam  
When we reach at the dance gate  
The gateman just a hold on pon me woman hand  
One box me gi’ him in his blasted face  
Money scatter out all over the place  
Babylon come butt me with a big 38  
Hear me now dread  
Leggo mi hand, gateman make me come in
ing from. So, it make no sense you hide from reality. Someone like me, I’m a street guy. I know the runnings. I lived there. I walked there. I know it!”

Yet, Stur-Gav seemed to carry a stigma that gave everything the two star deejays did a patina of suspicious intent. Although Josie and Charlie were making hits on the radio, and selling out concerts all over the island and abroad, the media didn’t really like them or trust them completely. There was always a tension in the relationship. Stur-Gav just wasn’t like Gemini, with two soul boy selectors who were eager to please. The fact that no slackness was allowed gave the set a gravity that alienated a certain audience that night have legitimatized the sound for the upper echelons.

**Charlie Chaplin**

It was Chaplin who gave each man his official nickname, Josie Wales as The Colonel, Charlie Chaplin as The Principal and Willie as The Inspector. Charlie Chaplin was a nickname he had already earned for being such a comedian. With his artless charm and understated humor, he was able to bring out the clown in the often reserved Josie Wales as well. Both Josie and Charlie liked to act the funny man, and both injected a lot of humor into their lyrics.

Although he appeared stiffer and more distant at first, Josie also loved to be drawn into a joke. Being around Chaplin encouraged Josie’s lighter side. One of their classic joint lyrics was their ‘musical diseases’ which includes “donkey-myilitis and the cow-arthritis”. Josie had a few droll lines of his own in his story of trying to import a car, “Them get me rude, them get me rude, in a the Honda Prelude”

The way they worked, Josie would start off with some serious subject and Charlie would come in with something absurd. When Josie would deejay Kingston Hot, Chaplin would follow with “England flat…”

Chaplin grew up in Spanish Town. As a child, he didn’t really have it in his mind to deejay, but he never strayed far from the music. “I used to look up to Bob Marley because Bob Marley used to send me go buy him cigarette and him spliff them thing there, when him a play [foot] ball. So, me used to kinda involve ina the music them way deh. But me never know me woulda be an artist ‘till me start listen Stur-Gav. Ranking Joe used to deejay that time. When him deejay and dance done, like five o’clock ina morning, him always call me and give me the mic. The dance empty but me still talk pon the rhythms dem. So, people start hear the tape and start talk to U Roy and them take me on officially.”

At first, Chaplin wasn’t ambitious. He wasn’t even looking for a recording career. Luckily, it came and found him. Producer and lead singer with The Royals, Roy Cousins, approached him and offered to take him to the studio. “Me just a do it for ‘do’ sake, cause me never make no money. Me never money motivated. Me just fascinate fe go ina the studio, do a couple of songs,

* An answer to the Smiley and Michigan, Diseases
and him release them, put them out.”

Roy Cousins released two LPs, *Presenting Charlie Chaplin* and *One of a Kind*. But, people in Jamaica still didn’t know Chaplin as a recording deejay. The Cousins material was released in the UK and only available as an import. The real recognition started when he voiced ‘Que Dem’ for George Phang.

The oddly titled ‘Que Dem’ was Chaplin’s first Jamaican release and his big break at home. The song, originally named ‘Credel’, criticized deejays for using pejorative names to refer to women*, but the label on the 45 was printed incorrectly. When the song became a hit, there was no reason to change it.** Since people knew the song by the strange name, Phang allowed the LP to retain it. Phang released another 45 from the LP, *Diet Rock*, which also became popular. He then followed it up with another LP named *Fire Down Below*, which contained ‘Dance in the Atlantic Ocean’.

Naturally, George Phang was interested in recording the other half of the duo. Seeing the success of the work Phang was doing with Charlie, Josie agreed give Phang a try. His gamble paid off immediately. The LP *Undercover Lover* came out in 1985 and contained some of his most beloved dance lyrics, like ‘Throw Me Corn’, ‘Hoola Hoop’, ‘Ganja Pipe’, as well as new material like the title song which came with a video, one of the first in the emerging medium of Jamaican music videos.

Although they recorded separately and maintained independent careers, Josie and Charlie continued to perform live, on the sound or in concert. They had developed such a close working partnership, their lyrics could flow into each other’s. Chaplin saw his relationship with Josie as something organic, something so natural that it almost had a life of its own, “If I have a shilling, is not only one side. Its two sides. So, it’s two sides to everything.” He once described the power of Stur-Gav, “We try to spread something around so that the people, so that their eye can be more wider. And Inspector Willie, him is a man now, him always know the right stuff at the right time. I and Josie like a spiritual business a gwan. Sometimes, we listen back the cassette and we shake we head.”

Today, Chaplin is involved in a variety of business ventures, including a security company, a rent-a-car company, a construction company and his own music company, Government Yard Production. As if that weren’t enough, he’s taken over George Phang’s old post as the manager of the Arnett Gardens football team. To Chaplin, music and sport, in Jamaica, go hand in hand. “Bob Marley always have a football on him guitar when him a go pon tour. Them two things go along.”

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* There was a trend of deejays referring to women in their songs with names like credel, tegereg, pancoot, Jezebel, kinarky, etc

** That sort of thing happened all the time in Jamaica. For example, Frankie Paul’s version of Worries in the Dance for Junjo came out, on the 45 and LP, as “War is in the Dance”. Anthony Redrose’s Temper came out as Tempo.
**Inspector Willie**

“Selecting a sound is not so easy. You don’t just play the tune. You have to listen and follow up the deejay all the time. It take a lot of concentration,” Willie explained in 1985. “You have to study the crowd. Cause, you see, I am studying the crowd. Like, if I should play a tune and I hear them, like, ‘Farward!’ and make enough noise, well, I know instantly what type of tune they like. I just keep on the same line.”

The selector was the glue that held the whole sound together. Without a solid selector to maintain the pace, nothing else would function properly. “It’s no use having a big sound and no selection of music or a selector [who knows] when to fit in a tune,” U Roy recalls. “Because you have certain dance time when a lot of people out on the street. If they are not hearing the type of tunes for them to come in, they just not go to come in. Willie is good at that.”

Inspector Willie came from musical roots. His father was Count Lasher, a well known old time calypsonian. Willie got his start selecting with the Stur-Gav back when Ranking Joe was deejaying. But his first night proved to be his last – at least, for a couple of years. That same night he played out, was the night the sound got mashed up and closed down.

To his credit, Inspector Willie never ‘mixed’ on Stur-Gav. The current trend, heavily used by Gemini and almost as much by Volcano, involved dropping out the music for a beat and bring it back with a slam. Willie let the music play as it was mixed by the engineer. Unlike other selectors, Willie varied his selection greatly instead of sticking with the hits. He wasn’t afraid to play artists who weren’t considered cool at the time, like Beres Hammond, who, at the time, was dismissed as middle of the road, not roots enough for a dance. Or he might throw in very un-dancehall styles of music, like festival songs. He would play Tinga Stewart’s ‘Float a Come’ or even a deejay 45 like Smiley and Michigan’s ‘One Love Jam Down’. He could pull out oldies like The Eternal’s ‘Stars’ or The Mad Lad’s ‘Ten to One’, or more current but less common selections like Hugh Griffith’s ‘Cool Operator’ or ‘I’m Coming Home’, The Wailing Souls ‘Ishen Tree’ or the wicked Freddie McGregor tune, ‘Roman Soldiers’ (produced by Niney the Observer). One of his favorite pieces was the smooth and uplifting ‘Skin Up’ by Ernest Wilson. Another was the Meditations’ ‘Turn Me Loose’. Willie liked to vary it up so that no two nights were the same.

Stur-Gav could hold its ground in U Roy’s home turf. But when it first came back on the road, I Roy started trying to muscle in with his Turbotronic sound. “U Roy is more strict with his sound and wouldn’t, say, give you a date unless you pay down some money,” Willie explained. “Well, after a time now, is like the people couldn’t keep up to it, so I Roy come around and start giving people date for no money. So, him start saying him control the area. The people he was giving free dates say him sound was better than U Roy’s sound. They was just, like, boosting him up. So they say, alright, since its bet-
ter, we gonna have a competition. So we had a competition one night at five Southgate Plaza. It was the new Stur-Gav’s first competitive outing.” When the dance got hot, Willie pulled out his unlikely secret weapon, a dubplate of the Mediation’s song ‘Enemy’, (a song he claimed, at the time “no one wanted to hear”) and, “from I put it on, pure noise! Boy, I Roy cried that night!”

**Phillip Fraser**

Willie stood out as a selector because he didn’t follow trends. As Josie states in his lyrics, “Stur-Gav don’t rewind”. You didn’t hear a lot of ‘haul and pull up’ on the sound. Just music, cool and steady. The continuity created a smooth, flowing vibe that could be very intense but never out of control. Willie played according to his own tastes, which ranged from the hottest dubplates to oldies like ‘Evening News’ and ‘Clarendon Rock’. Phillip Fraser was one of his favorite artists and Willie gave his material a lot of play, songs like ‘Blood of the Saints’ and ‘When I Run Out’. Phillip later credited his exposure on Stur-Gav as giving him the boost he needed in the early ‘80s, when he was trying to get his career back on track. Willie would play ‘Please Stay’, on the ‘Johnny Dollar Rhythm’, to which Josie would chant, “Everything gone electric”. From there, Willie would go into his special dubplate of ‘Goodbye My Love’, on the ‘Live and Love’ rhythm, and then into Phillip’s dancehall classic, his rendition of the Manhattan’s ‘Shining Star’. Willie made Phillip one of the biggest dancehall singers of the early ‘80s.

Phillip’s style, with the vibrato at the end of each phrase, seemed to inspire the deejays duo. Many of the Josie’s greatest hits arose in response to Phillip Fraser selections. Josie commented, “Phillip was my artist, and a friend, and then the songs that he sing really touched me. Like one called ‘Special Request’ to the Manhattans, ‘Come on baby, let me dance, we never danced to a love song. Come on Baby’ – on the ‘Hi Fashion’ rhythm. Those songs – it was the joy of my life. I live to go to the dance, just to be on those versions. It gave me a high there, a high like where you feel extra fit, to the utmost. Words cannot express that feeling. And you lost yourself in the music and you skank your life away.”

Phillip can remember the way he and Josie interacted musically like when Josie came up with his lyrics, ‘Leggo Mi Hand’. “It was over one of my songs,” Phillip commented. “Girl I love you and I don’t want you to leave me please stay…” Willie was selecting and, as usual, playing the Phillip Fraser, ‘Please Stay’. “Josie is at the mic and he haf’ fe find something to say,” Phillip continues. “That’s when he came up with, ‘Leggo mi hand gateman, make me come in…’ Also, every time I sing ‘Never Let Go’, Josie would do [his lyrics] ‘Kingston Hot’.” Phillip was so well loved by Stur-Gav that he was often invited to sing live, although he was much more a recording singer than a dancehall artist.

In the ‘70s, Greenwich Farm had been one of the most active music neighborhoods. After all, reggae don Bunny Lee lived “up at the top” on West
Avenue. So, all the singers would pass through to check him - John Holt, Ken Both, Delroy Wilson. Situated right next to Trenchtown, the other great birthplace of musicians in Kingston, Greenwich Farm was a little pocket of intense creativity. “Greenwich Farm was one of the nicest area as a ghetto community. It was a residential area. We have seaside, we have the best herb, All the singers used to go there,” Phillip reminisced.* In addition, they had Earl Chinna Smith’s Soul Syndicate Band, who provided the backing for many of the roots classics that were recorded by local artists.

Phillip Grew up in Greenwich Farm as one of the last generation of singers in Jamaica to learn their trade accompanied by live musicians rather than recorded tracks. Phillip’s generation included singers like Sammy Dread, Earl Zero, Michael Prophet, and Rod Taylor, singers who later became popular in the dance but who started out accompanied by acoustic instruments.

“We were practicing with Earl Chinna Smith and Earl Zero – fishing line and sardine pan to make guitar – that how they made the guitar – and we would sit down and play. And then we took it from there and the Soul Syndicate band was formed in the same place, Greenwich Town. Then we started recording with Soul Syndicate. We would go to rehearsal at 9th street and then we would go into the studio.”

Desperate for the opportunity to practice, even when there wasn’t anyone around with an instrument, the youngsters would go to the closest bar and sing along to the music on the jukebox. Phillip recalls how they would, “Punch in the version and sing. That was before I was singing on sounds. Punch the version in on the jukebox and sing on it.”

Sammy Dread was always there with them, “It’s like Phillip Fraser is one of my best friends. Me and him grow up together, spar together. We used to go to the juke box because you used to have the vocal and the version. A lot of us used to go to the bar. We used to compete - me, Phillip Fraser, Michael Prophet, Peter Ranking, General Lucky. And you know [in] Jamaica, people used to be drinking the white rum, Heineken. They would be drinking and then somebody would come in and punch the jukebox and punch the version of the music and everybody used to take it up. Whoever sound good, get that praise for that day. That’s how we used to do it.”

Neighborhood producer Bertram Brown released Phillip Frazer’s first LP, Come Ethiopians Come, backed by the Soul Syndicate on his Freedom Sounds label in 1978. The Freedom Sounds style was strictly roots. The Soul

* Phillip also had an illustrious father, the dancer Sparky of the duo Sparky and Pluggy who performed at various venues around Jamaica and on the Vere John’s Opportunity Hour stage show. Close as brothers from childhood, Sparky and Pluggy grew together in Greenwich Town. Sparky started out dancing with a man name Gandi, Gandi being the other half of the duo named Sparky and Pluggy. When Gandi left to go to a trade school, John Peck (Pluggy Satchmo) filled in and the duo returned to the stage. Eventually, Sparky relocated in the UK and Pluggy teamed up with female dancer Beryl McGar and continued performing their “swing tempo” routine until the two immigrated to Canada in the late ‘60s.
Syndicate provided deep, complex, moving rhythms to back singers like Phillip, Earl Zero and Prince Allah. The tone was serious culture but the music was fluid and melodic.

When Freedom Sounds folded, after trouble with a bogus label with the same name in the UK that was pirating their records, the territory was taken over by Don Mais, also a native of the area, and his Roots Tradition label. The Soul Syndicate band had morphed into High Times, but Chinna Smith was still at the helm. With Don Mais, Phillip recorded ‘Never Let Go’, the beginning of his passion for doing over the songs of his long time hero, rock steady singer, Greenwich Farm’s own local star, Slim Smith.

“Slim Smith never really teach me,” Phillip recalls, “He was an elder in Greenwich farm. His baby mother was a friend of mine and her brother used to stay in the same yard. I used to love him. I used to admire him for his voice. If you notice, his songs were my biggest songs – “I will never let go” - cause people didn’t know that song until I did it on 45. I record it over and then people realize it’s a Studio One. Also ‘Watch This Sound’. He was my idol.”

While Phillip loved Slim Smith’s smooth, malleable, soulful vocals, he also felt for his pain. Slim Smith was one of the long list of great Jamaican artists who succumbed to mental illness. “This business now, it’s not an easy thing,” Phillip lamented in 1986. “It’s a very bad thing. You have to have your head pon your body. You can’t let them rob you and you just go mad and stop sing. You have to just gwan and take the robbery and gwan sing the same way.”

Phillip claimed his independence around 1992 and began producing for his own Razor Sound label. “The music business has always been hard because it’s like a mafia thing. People don’t want no one to reach to the top. That’s why right now I have my own thing going. I have my own label my own distribution, everything.” He works with a “whole heap of artists- Al Campbell, myself, Candy Man, Tristan Palma. I recorded Michael Palmer, Wayne Smith, Tony Tuff, Sugar Minott, The Meditations. Also my son, Ras Frazor Jr.. I put out an album with him – Philip Fraser and Son, Roots Man Time.”

THE DECLINE AND RE-BIRTH OF STUR-GAV

By the time Stur-Gav left for its New York tour in 1984, both Josie and Charlie were showing signs of being too big to be contained in one local sound. They were performing on major Jamaican stage shows, along with superstar Yellowman, as the three top deejays (often joined by the forth, Brigadier Jerry). Both were beginning to kick up and assert their freedom, often appearing on other sounds. In 1984, Stur-Gav peaked. The tour abroad was the culmination of Josie and Charlie’s organic development as a team and the beginning of each one’s independent star status. When Stur-Gav returned home in 1985, Josie and Charlie were gone and the main deejay was Principal Grundy, formerly Jah Grundy. The audiences started fading away and other sounds, like Kilimanjaro and Stur-Mars took over.

During its short reign, Stur-Gav had been unique in maintaining a vi-
tal balance between professionalism and street credibility. Despite the rough
necks, the gun salutes, the posses, Stur-Gav maintained a quiet dignity, an air
of pure professionalism. As Chaplin explained at the time, “Stur-Gav, it no
‘just come up’ - like most of these sound. U Roy have a following from him
deejay King Tubby’s and he go through the struggle.”

Eventually Josie and Charlie did come back to the set. But, by that time,
both men had outgrown the sound system. They were touring internationally
and doing stage shows. After that, the sound would disappear and re-emerge
periodically. U Roy never gave up as he loved being in the business and saw it
as his true profession.

Today, Stur-Gav sound is still up and running. Although the sound still
plays in Jamaica, most of the demand is abroad, and U Roy spends a substan-
tial portion of his year touring. “We only play one type of music,” He asserts.
“We strictly play rub-a-dub. We don’t come out of that range. We no cross
over no bridge, no boarder, no nothing. Strictly rub-a-dub music. Whoever
hear my sound, and expect to hear a soft music or a calypso – don’t expect to
hear that. Those thing will stay at my house (because I listen to every different
type of singer). But when it comes to my sound, my sound play just one type
of music- rub-a-dub. You hear the vocals, you play the version – this is how we
deal with it. I don’t plan to change that style. Whenever people refuse to hear
that style, I know exactly what to do, put my sound down. Yea. When people
stop wan’ hear that style whe’ my sound play, my sound put down.”
For a while, it looked like Junjo would reign forever. But that never happens in the easy-come easy-go world of reggae music. Around late 1982, after a very prolific period of producing music, Junjo was slowing down, creating a void that came to be filled by newcomer George Phang.

Backed by pal Robbie Shakespeare, Phang had no trouble making his mark. After a few releases to test the waters, George made his presence known by scoring hits with Junjo’s biggest artists, including Barrington Levy (‘Money Move’), Frankie Paul (‘Tidal Wave’), Yellowman (‘Walking Jewelry Store’) and Little John (‘True Confessions’). Michael Palmer had his biggest hit to date with Phang, ‘Lickshot’, and Half Pint’s ‘Greetings’, one of the most celebrated songs of the decade, has become emblematic of the era, the songs that best embodies the spirit of the time, the day when ‘ragamuffins’ ruled the dancehall scene.

George grew up in Arnett Gardens, commonly known as Concrete Jungle, among the emerging musical super-stars of the era. “Bob [Marley] was one of the influential people amongst me. Bob was my good friend. Rita, my good friend. We are like family cause all of us is from the same Trench Town. The name ‘Pepper’, Bob Marley give me that name, you know. Me always around him, cause when him singing is like, I don’t care how you feel bad or sad, when Bob Marley take him guitar and sing, and it’s like a different felling.”

George clearly had an affinity for music. But his career diverged and he got involved in local affairs as a community leader. Phang had been nurtured in politics by Anthony Spaulding, parliamentary representative for the area who became Housing Minister in 1972. With the PNP in power, Spaulding took on the task of doing Tivoli Gardens one better, and built Arnett Gardens into a full service garrison community with housing, a school, a sports centre and more.

Even when he became involved in the record business, Phang never hid his political connections. The walls of his home were lined with press clippings documenting his travels and appearances with Michael Manley. Phang proudly told the story of how he accompanied the then Prime Minister to Washington, D.C. in 1978 and his amazement, as a youth from the ghetto, upon seeing the scale and grandeur of the White House. “They had a table as long as all these rooms”, he would explain sweeping his hand to indicate the length of his house.

It was his good friend Robbie Shakespeare who first encouraged Phang to leave politics and pursue his passion for music instead. “Him really push me,
“push me a lot”, George recalls. Sly and Robbie needed someone to remain in Jamaica and look after their interests when they were touring abroad. So, the next time they had to go, they left George in charge of running their label, Taxi Records, in their absence. George was expected to take care of voicing artists and getting the songs mixed and released. “Robbie woulda call me now and say, ‘George, get that Tinga Stewart [song] mixed and thing.” The songs Phang handled during this first trail did well and George became part of the Taxi family.

Once in the business, George found many people willing to help him learn. “Soljie was the number one man down by Channel One. He taught me a lot about engineering. I can almost sit down and mix a tune and voice a tune around the machine. And the late Ruddy Thomas show me a lot too.”

After serving his apprenticeship and learning the ropes, George began to produce material for himself. He used the aptly named Powerhouse label that had once belonged to his friend, producer Clive Jarrett. The first session, with his childhood school mate, Eek-a-Mouse, resulted in the song ‘Tribulation’. This was followed by work with Thriller, Little John, Toyan, Winston Hussey and Echo Minott. Phang’s first contact abroad was Rap Rose, Black Uhuru member Michael Rose’s brother. Rap ran Joe Gibbs Records, a shop in Toronto, Canada. Through the connection with Rap, George began working with Darcell Grant from Jam-Can records run out of Pete Weston’s record shop. Jam Can released the disco 45s ‘Twinkle, Twinkle’ by Thriller, ‘Thanks and Praise’ by Little John, ‘Praise His Name’ by Barrington Levy, ‘Long, Long Time’ by Tristan Palma and a showcase album with Echo Minott.

George thrived in the producing life. But, in the beginning, he hadn’t been really committed. “Like, me having one foot in and one foot out,” he recalled. It wasn’t until he actually scored a huge hit with the runaway success of Little John’s ‘True Confessions’, that George realized the power of what he was doing. George and John had been working in the studio on Sunday, with Gemini selector Archie sitting in, when both men heard Little John singing a line or two of Dear Mr. Editor.** Sensing something big, the three men added some “dancehall slur” to it and recorded the update. The song was just not only just right for the dance, it was such a big hit that even Little John claims he was shocked by its impact. Now things were really happening for both Little John and George.

Next came Sugar Minott’s LP, *Buy off the Bar*, featuring the roots and ballad singer moving farther away from lovers rock and into dancehall territory. The title song talks about selling off all the beer in the dance. How could a song encouraging people to buy alcohol possibly loose? Every respectable bar contained an up-to-date juke box and every bar owner wanted a song telling

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* Former Micron Record owner, Pete Weston moved to Canada and worked managing Leroy Sibbles and distributing records from his store on St Clair Avenue West

** Dear Mr. Editor by The Silvertones, Treasure Isle, 1966
clients to buy more liquor. George still has a ring of triumph in his voice as he
recalls the impact the song had, “Every Juke box you go ina yard, it de deh.
And before a man even start drinking, he say, ‘buy off the bar’.”

Because George came from a background of community work, not music,
some music fans were skeptical of George’s success, claiming that Robbie did
the work and just handed George the finished product. In fact, George spent
a lot of time inside the studio working with the musicians and the engineer,
unlike many other producers who left everything up to their arranger. George
would often request a remake of one of his old time favorites. “The Studio
One rhythm them is some rhythm that really, really bore a hole in me. So,
we would make some Studio One rhythm, but we would make some little
changes.” In one very successful move, he took Michael Palmer’s previous
recording of the song ‘Lickshot’, and suggested that they do it over on ‘Mad
Mad Mad’ (Alton Ellis) rhythm.

A lot of the inspiration came from the dance. George was a big dancehall
fan and a patron of local sound systems and artists. “Sometimes when I go to
a dance, I hear a singer singing a tune and [see] how the people react to that
tune, I just say well, we could record that tune and that could be a good tune.”

It was in a dance that George first became aware of the potential of deejay
Josie Wales. “I met Josie in a dance. He was deejaying, and when I actually
see the crowd reacting, me call him and say, ‘Josie, make we put that on wax.’
The following morning, him come look for me and we go a the studio, call
Sly and Robbie and we make that rhythm and put him on it and that song
go to number one for a very long time – ‘Undercover Lover’. And we put Al
Campbell also on that rhythm, ‘Talk about Love’. Those tune really, really
do good for them.” The rhythm had a magnetic appeal, with its bouncy up-
tempo and strong, thumping bass line. Josie’s confident vocals just sit in the
groove and Al Campbell’s voice soars. Phang’s rhythms tended to have a faster
pace than Junjo’s had, and this appealed to dancers who had new, quicker
steps to show off.

With the mounting hits on George’s side, a slow migration began. Junjo’s
most reliable hit makers were crossing over. Phang worked with Burro, Toyan,
Little John and Billy Boyo. But the biggest coup for Phang was the acquisition
of Barrington Levy. It was a high point for both singer and producer. Barrin-
ton was emerging from a period of overexposure. The 45 ‘Money Move’,
for George, and the follow up LP, put Barrington right back on top.

“Then Half Pint come and we make a tune ‘Greetings’,,” George recounts
with pride. “That tune is the biggest tune because that tune go into the na-
tional chart in England. I think it go a number two on the British chart. And
the tune Greetings was like the anthem in dancehall.”

If 1985 was dominated by ‘Sleng Teng’, 1986 was the year of Greetings.
More than any other song at the time, it was perceived by Jamaicans as a sin-
cere effort to unite people. “Greetings I bring, from Jah, to all ragamuffins” –
with the lyrics, the young singer reached out to people all over the world who
were struggling to make ends meet.

Ghetto dwellers adopted the label and wore it with pride. Junior Delgado followed up with the accurately titled song, Ragamuffin Year. Junior defined ‘ragamuffin’ as “the poorer class of people”, the oppressed, and his song had a subversive edge that the Half Pint didn’t. People were immediately identifying with the term and it came to represent the dancehall life and the musical style that supported it.

One of the keys to the popularity of Phang’s work was that all his music was beyond reproach lyrically. Not one of his productions ever advocated violence or denigrated women. His music either provided a positive message (like ‘Greetings’, or Barrington’s ‘Praise His Name’), supplied a little comic relief (like Chaplin’s Dance in the ‘Atlantic Ocean’) or celebrate the dance (like Frankie Paul’s ‘String up a Sound’). George intended it this way, deliberately producing music that the whole family could enjoy.

By this time, Phang had a nice house, in a quiet neighborhood with green lawns and well kept bungalows. He lived there with his wife, Elaine, and a pack of kids who would all come parading home each afternoon in their crisp school uniforms, making George very proud.

But despite his success, Phang eventually left the music business for his second love, sports, and set out to rescue the Arnett Gardens Football team which had been going downhill. But the music he created was never forgotten. VP records released the definitive George Phang collection in 2008, George Phang: Power House Selector’s Choice Vol.1-4, with each CD featuring 20 of his top productions, demonstrating the wide range his work, songs that continue to influence the dancehall.
A sound system had three things it could use to attract an audience – the quality of the sound the equipment could produce, the entertainers, and the music itself. As far as sound quality is concerned, people wanted to hear a set that had a ‘crisp’, clear top end, and a heavy bottom with the kind of boost that could push air. Jamaicans generally liked their treble to be sharp and clearly defined, and the bass to be thick and solid. As for entertainers, the top sounds vied for the deejays and singers who had hits on the charts. But, the surest way for a sound to attract a loyal following was to have music that nobody else could play – music that couldn’t be heard on the radio or bought in a store. These recordings were one of a kind and could only be played by one man, the selector for the sound that owned the vinyl.

Dubplates

In the very early days, sound system owners used mail-order services, had friends or relatives ship records back home, and even took trips abroad to search U.S. cities to find unique R&B records that no one else had. Those were ‘exclusive’ records – but only until the next sound owner managed to discover the title and obtain a copy.

However, once an indigenous recording industry sprung up in Jamaica, sound men found another way of getting ahead of the competition, a way to have something no one else could ever get – a one of a kind record that could not be reproduced, a unique disc, individually tailored to the sound man’s specifications. This was the dubplate.

For a record that was going to be reproduced many times over, a mold was made. But, for a dubplate, the music was cut directly from the master tape into a thick, ten inch platter of acetate, usually two songs per side. As the tape was running, and the needle was etching the grooves into the pliable surface, the engineer would be calibrating the sound, bring in more treble or dropping out the bass and drums. Once the grooves were in place, nothing could be changed. But neither could the process be faithfully reproduced. Although a new dubplate could be cut from the same master tape many times over, each mix would be different because it mixed done live, as the plate was being cut.

Rosa, the owner for the sound, Soul to Soul, remembers, “Studio One had a four track machine. So, the mixes weren’t that different, like [they were] from Channel One where they had a 16 track… Sometimes, what they would do with the mix, they would take out the rhythm and you would just hear the vocal, then they bring in back the rhythm – [sings acapela:] “When the sun
comes out and the moon goes in…’ Then the rhythm comes in.” (From the
dub of the Burning Spear song, ‘Are You Ready’).

“When you go to the studio, you get your special mix,” Dexter Campbell,
the owner of Echo Vibration, explains. “You can always tell the engineer
what you want – when to put in the reverb, the echo – in certain part of the
dubplate.” That way, every sound man was assured a totally unique, custom-
ized version of the rhythm that only he could play. Some top sound men had
several different versions of a rhythm track that they could play in sequence.

Secrecy was still important to cover their tracks, sound owners would give
the rhythm a new name to obscure its origin. Like the rhythm commonly
known as ‘Where Eagles Dare’. Mikey Faith explains, “Arrows that was one
of my competitors. I was playing at the student Union and I have this tune, it
was called ‘Why oh Why’, Earnest Wilson (Studio One, 1979), I had it with-
out the singing cause that was the style – rub-a-dub *. I name it ‘Where Eagles
Dare’, so everybody was in Downbeat Studio asking for ‘Where Eagles Dare’
and he [Mr. Dodd] didn’t know what they were talking about.” Arrow’s selec-
tor, Zaggaloo recalls naming another popular Ernest Wilson rhythm, from
Studio One, ‘Story Book Children’. “We took the instrumental and called it
‘Dunkirk Rock’.

“If you get a dubplate, you give it a different name,” Selector Jah Wise
explains. “That means when [someone] go ina the studio and ask for that,
[he] don’t get it. For example, Tippertone called ‘Please Be True’**, ‘West Gone
Black’. So, anytime you go to Coxsone and ask for ‘West Gone Black’, him
don’t know.”

Winning sound clashes had a lot to do with finding, and naming, that key
rhythm. “Normally when you got to clashes”, according to Arrow’s owner,
Sonny, “you would have to come up with a song that will just stay in the
minds of the people for the next couple of days or weeks – that they can talk
about the name of the song that killed the other sound. You have to come up
with a name that sticks.”

“Scalahwah – it was a real popular dub in Eastern Kingston,” recalls Ar-
row’s deejay, Crutches. “That was the one that got Arrows real famous. When
we went to the studio, there was a vocal, Sonny didn’t take the vocal. He take
the dub. He came back, string up the set and he asked us. It was all the youths
them that live in the area – he said, ‘You all come to dance every night. I think
you should name this one’. So, we started to think. During the week, we went
to the movies, and there was this show named Scalawag (1973) we had seen.
It was a pirate movie. One of my friends name was Black. He was the first one
to jump out and say we should name it Skalawag. Somebody say, ‘Wag?’ - like

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* Many selectors would get dubplates made of only the version part of the song, the part with no
vocals.

** Alexander Henry, Studio One, 1969 – a dancehall classic played by ever y sound but the special
favorite of King Stur-Gav in the ’80s
they were trying to pronounce it and somebody say Scalawah.” And that’s the version that stuck.”

A clash between Tippertone and Arrows the Ambassador provided the opportunity to showcase the newest rhythm from Channel One, a do-over of a Studio One Slim Smith song ‘Never Let Go’. “Tippertone had a Studio One rhythm he called ‘Question’,” Sonny explains. “I tried to find that song. I could not find the song. I was in the studio Saturday about ten o’clock in the morning when the studio opened. I left four o’clock in the evening - searching the tapes, trying to find the Question rhythm. I couldn’t find it.” But, he found something very much like it. And he called it ‘The Answer’.

The clash with Tippertone took place the east, in the Hermitage Club, is at the foot of August Town, in Mona heights. When the dance got hot, Tippertone threw in their ‘Question’. But this time, Arrows had the ‘Answer’. “When I play that song and call it ‘Answer’, It stuck in the minds of everybody for the rest of their lives, till even Coxsone started calling the song ‘Answer’. The original name of the song – Slim Smith did it – ‘I will never let go’. Nobody calls it ‘I Will Never Let Go’. Everybody calls it ‘Answer’.”

**Sound Clash**

In the pre-version days, sounds like Sir Coxsone and Duke Reid used to have fierce competitions that drew enormous crowds. According to Arrow’s owner, Sonny, “That time they would play songs. They were clashing with vocals. They weren’t clashing with the instrumentals. Dodd would come with a Slim Smith that he had just pressed… and Duke would come with a song by the Paragons, like ‘On the Beach’.”

In the ’70s, when dub became popular, dubplates were judged on the originality and creativity of the mix. The vocals weren’t as important. “Most of the time we ask for a ‘special cut’ [of the rhythm], a ‘rub-a-dub’ cut, or they had a special bass line,” Echo Vibration’s Dexter Campbell explained. “I get a dubplate from Sir Coxsone by the name of ‘Rougher Yet’, that Slim Smith tune. But I get the raw dub [without vocals]. That was one of the best rhythm I really know today. And I had the ‘Cuss Cuss’ rhythm also. Even ‘Cherry Oh Baby’, we have a rub-a-dub cut”

The master tapes of songs were often stored in the studio where they were mixed. That meant a clash against Tubby’s Hometown Hifi was a real challenge, as Tubby had access to so many hits (as well as having hit maker, U Roy, the top deejay). With so many master tapes in his home studio, he could cut himself a fresh dubplate whenever he wanted and even string up the sound in his yard to try it out.

According to Dexter Campbell, of Echo Vibration, a clash was different from a regular dance in that the object was to play only dubplates. “We used

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* Rub-a-dub meant the cut was a special mix of only the instrumental of the song and did not include the vocals.
to clash two or three times for the year. I would take my deejays and dubplates. No discomix or 45. Strictly dubwise! If you play a 45, then you loose the clash. Some really hard core music. In those days, it was really hard core dubplate. For the whole night, dubplate. So much sound play 45 still because they don't have enough dubplate. We start play at eight o'clock. When [the other] sound finish play, at twelve o'clock, we come on now and we draw the Burial* and the crowd go wild. You have to draw the Burial to bury the sound!”

One of the most well known songs in reggae started life as a dubplate, Burning Spear’s ‘Marcus Garvey’, produced by Jack Ruby, and played on his Ocho Rios based sound system, Jack Ruby Hi-Power.” Singer Winston Rodney had been working with Coxsone Dodd and released two classic albums. Then Jack Ruby found him and decided his rootsy vocal style was exactly the sound people needed to hear. ‘Marcus Garvey’ was one of the hardest roots tunes ever to come out of Jamaica. The crowds started coming and Jack Ruby found himself owner of the most competitive set outside of Kingston. The song broke both Spear and Ruby and created reggae history.

**PRE-RELEASE**

In the early days, before ‘version’ became the foundation of the dancehall session, sounds competed for recordings of songs before they went into the stores. Prince Jazzbo remembers his days with Killerwhip Sound in the ‘60s, “In those days it was just pre-release songs. Nobody else got those songs. All these brand new Alton Ellis, Heptones, all these great songs, we used to play them before they released on the street because Coxsone [Dodd] used to come to our dances and he always bring dubplates to give us to play.”

Producer and former Techniques member, Winston Riley remembers recording for Duke Reid’s Treasure Isle studio and his music being used in clashes, “There was a big competition, you know, between Duke Reid and Coxsone. Anything we sing, he use it against Coxsone. He would play them brand new. That is where we get the promotion from, all those dance songs.”

This test pressing served both the sound system and the producer. Playing an exclusive recording both enhanced the sound’s reputation and was good advance promotion for the record. Producers could try out new ideas and new artists. A producer would give his neighborhood sounds a test pressing and then hang around the dance to witness the crowd reaction. If he didn’t hear his song, he would complain to the crew, “Bwoy, you nah play me tune, Rasta. Two weeks and you nah play me tune…”*** Depending on the response

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* Dubplate of the Peter Tosh song, Burial

** Jack Ruby also held jazz sessions every Sunday afternoon in his yard playing pure jazz as a means of exposing the youth to different sounds, showing that the sound system could also be used as an educational tool. It would have been interesting to see what else could have been done to reach young people through this medium if any institution had been willing to experiment (author’s note).

*** According to Brigadier Jerry
in the dance, the record would go to press or the song erased so the tape could be reused.

“Mr. Dodd have some sound man that him really like and him just give them dubplate – like it being a test recording,” Singer Johnny Osbourne observed. “He’s testing it to see how the people react to it before he puts it out.” Like Killerwhip, Jah Love was one of the fortunate sounds. “When [Mr Dodd] have some new tune whe’ no release yet, him come give Jah Love,” recalls Brigadier Jerry. “So Jah Love make the people know about it before it come out. He would make all like 25 dub and he just bring it come give Jah Love – no money, [just] the promotion fe him music. He would just bring a box of dubplates and come give Belcher [owner of Jah Love] and say, ‘Some rahtid tune, me a tell you, man’, and I would sit down pon them from eight o’clock until all eight o’clock the next morning. Stand up there and deejay right back.”

Singer Johnny Clarke, who was recording with Bunny Lee in the ’70s, recalls. “In those days, radio song was different from dancehall song. Certain song you wan’ hear, you just have to go to the dance. So, those songs would be played, like, months before it released. When it’s released now, a lot of people would grab onto it because they would be waiting to get it personally – cause the dubplate is just for the sound. After Tubbys play it for a period of time, and we think the time is right, we just release it now, and it take off – because people is aware of it and its not strange to them anymore. That’s a part of the promotion.”

The sound system and the studio had always functioned in a symbiotic relationship in reggae. Not every studio had a dub cutting space, but many did, including Treasure Isle, Studio One, Channel One, Randy’s, Tubsy’s, Jammy’s and Gussie Clark’s Music Works. Producer Gussie Clarke started off with his own little sound system and then acquired a dub cutting machine second hand from the Treasure Isle studio. “We were doing so well after we got the dub machine. Producers used to come to us, give us a two track stereo mix of the tape of songs that are going to come out. Everybody was coming to me to cut dubs – producers like Channel One [before they built their own space] and a couple of the independent producers gave me their tapes. I could sell as much dub as I want, because it would [make the record] popular and, ultimately, it’s gonna make money. They gave me the tapes to cut on dub and they would say, ‘do whatever you want’, meaning cut as much dub as you want, sell them to anybody who has a sound system. So, [the song is] gonna get popular. By the time it gets popular underground, in the dance, when the record is ready to be released, people will buy it. So it was a win-win for

* Many of the artists and musicians Mr. Dodd worked with belonged to the 12 Tribes of Israel such as Pavlov Black, Freddie McGregor, Dennis Brown and Judy Mowatt.
Channel One studio finally built its own dubplate cutting facility, a small cubby hole in the building, with a separate entrance from the studio. Jojo Hookim saw the dubplate business as a means to get exposure for his music. “To be honest with you, I never make money off dubplates, you know. I just leave it to the workers them. Dubplate to me, was a promotion because once it drop in the dance, you know you have something good. And I usually take that as a feedback. The soundmen them coming and asking for special rhythms, we know we have something.”

Sending out fresh dubplates of a new artist could build up demand for his records before their actual release. A good example was, Don Carlos and Gold, whose songs ‘Natty Dread Have Him Credential’, ‘Hog and Goat’, and ‘Dice Cup’ all broke big on dubplate before they hit the market. Deejay and engineer Barnabas, who was working at Channel One, recalls The Meditation’s 1978 hit, ‘Woman is Like a Shadow’. “That song was on dubplate for about 10 years before it finally released as a 45. And another one, ‘Girl I Love You’ by Horace Andy. Those songs used to play on dubplate for years before it was finally released on 45.” Another example was Barry Brown’s ‘Far East’ (Hitbound, 1978). Carleton Livingston recalls, “That was one of the biggest selling dubplate songs out of Channel One and it wasn’t released until years after that”. The interval between the dubplate stage and the actual commercial release date, gave the sound system time to enjoy the benefits of exclusive ownership, while the building up anticipatory excitement and familiarity with the tune.

Dubplates proved to be the kick start each of Carlton Livingston’s songs needed to climb the charts. Carlton recalls, “Dubplates really start my career on a high level. Like ‘Rumors’. Daddy Roy, Stur-Gav, was the first to cut it on dubplate. After that, people come for it in droves. We had ‘Rumors’ on tape for years and then Stur-Gav put it on dubplate and that was it. The song just run away! And when it run away, they decide to release it. Because that’s what dubplates were in Jamaica at that time. People play them, and they get popular, and you release it. A next one was ‘Please Mr. Deejay’. U Brown [produced it]. It went through the same cycle.”

Keeping the sound’s music library current was the duty of the selector. Archie, Gemini’s selector reckoned he went to get dub cut three or four times a week. The vinyl at Gemini filled an entire room. Many of the recordings were only played once, but they were never thrown out because the rhythm might be revived and that outdated special may suddenly become a classic.

* In the early ’80s, a blank plate might run around $20. Most dub cutting operations would only burn the plates that they, themselves sold, as a precaution. For about $100, a sound man could get a few songs from a producer but, as Soul to Soul’s Rosa explains, “You pay them for the song and then you have to pay them to cut it pon dubplate.”
THE HISTORY OF SPECIALS

“[Specials were] from a long time, but never so popular [as now],” Jah Wise explains. “Sir Coxsone had them, like, ‘Dancing to the music of Sir Coxsone Downbeat on the beach.’” Or sometimes what people called ‘specials’ in the early days where exclusive instrumental dubplates, like the ‘Val Bennett Super Special’ that Bunny Lee recalls being played the Spanishtown sound Stero played against Ruddy’s in a sound clash taking place in the Yorker club. Clive Chin explains, “We didn’t really call it ‘specials’ at that time. Technically speaking, it was similar to what is happening now but it wasn’t that high cost venture where a man woulda charge you hundreds of dollars just to do a ‘special’.”

For a long time, the line between specials and dubplates was blurred, and the terms were used loosely, almost interchangeably. But, in the ‘80s, the idea of the ‘Special’ took on a very specific meaning. While dubplates were played to test out the potential of new material, specials were often straight copies of existing songs with a slight twist in the lyrics intended either to challenge another other sound in a clash or just boost the name of the sound playing the song. Like Johnny Osbourne singing, “Papa Jaro on the dubline…” over the ‘Hi Fashion’ rhythm, using the melody of the Eddie Rabbitt pop hit, ‘Loveline’.

Bunny Lee remembered sounds making specials in the ‘70s at King Tubby’s studio, “I na the night they carried Johnny Clarke and Cornell Campbell and they do specials with the sound name in it. ‘Went to a dance in Greenwich Farm, King Tubby and the dreads was there.’” That was a special. The people get mad [ie. They love it], like it was the only tune in the dancehall.”

Dextor Campbell of Echo Vibration explains, “In the earlier days, the thing what you call a ‘special’, we really only made one and two. We [mainly] used ‘pre-release’ – with the raw dub – and then the singers and the deejay go on [the version, live]. Only in the ‘80s now, young sounds come, like Stone Love, start to call out their name in the song. That’s a ‘special’. That come now in the ‘80s.”

Although the ‘80s saw special making become institutionalized in the Dancehall, it was going on before. Even Bob Marley left a legacy of specials. He is reported to have recorded several for Tippertone and had at least one for producer/sound owner Jack Ruby. To the melody of ‘Rainbow Country’ (Bob Marley and The Wailers, produced by Lee Perry, 1975), which begins, “Hey Mr. Music, you sure sound good to me…”, Bob sings, “Hey Jack Ruby, you sure sound good to me…”

* Released later as Dance in Greenwich Farm, Cornel Campbell, Clocktower, 1975. Almost every sound had a version of this hit with its own name in it. For example Arrows had a version that went, “Well, I Went to a dance in the East Coast, Arrow Hifi and the crew was there…”
**Deejay Specials**

In the very beginning, the deejays, rather than singers, were often the ones making the specials, a practice that all but disappeared in the ‘80s, at least on the rub-a-dub sounds. But the soul sounds in the ‘70s often didn’t have live deejays at their disposal and they could get caught short in a clash against an all reggae set.

“What these guys are calling specials now, and acting as if it’s new, it come from ina the ‘70s,” Deejay Welton Irie explains. “Gemini was a soul sound and we used to play a lot against King Attorney which was a sound that had deejays. So, [Papa] Gemini got it in his head to make Ranking Trevor deejay some stuff about his sound. When King Attorney stop playing and Gemini came on, just the music playing would be a drop from actually hearing a deejay. So, Gemini had one or two dubplates with Ranking Trevor deejaying, ‘Gemini gonna kick you around’, calling out the name of Archie, the selector and ‘great sounds called Gemini’ and all of that.”

Papa Jaro, from Kilimanjaro sound, had the same idea at the time. “Ranking Trevor and U Brown used to work with Papa Roots sound on a full time basis and they used to work with mine on a part-time basis. When I want them to be at a dance and they couldn’t come, I would actually take them in my house and voice them and make a dubplate deejaying about the sound system. So, when we took those dubplate into the dancehall and started playing them, at first people were very excited. This was something new in the dancehall. And then, little by little, they began to realize that Ranking Trevor and U Brown was not really in the dance. It’s a dub plate them playing with those guys.”

General Echo had a unique method of getting specials for his Stereophonic sound system back in the late ‘70s. “Stereophonic – that was my favorite sound because I think that sound that really push up my music in the dance”, singer Sammy Dread explains, “They used to play a lot of my dubplates. They used to play, like, ‘In This Time’, ‘African Girl’. General Echo used to deejay, ‘African Girl a carry the swing’. I used to sing on Stereophonic… I used to go to the dance and they used to play Studio One music – ca’ I up-rise off off Studio One sound – that sound is really my type of sound. So, [when] I go in the dance and sing on the rhythm, General Echo now, he tapes it. Then when he go back, and listen it and hear me singing about the sound, he just take it to the studio, to Channel One, and put it on dubplate and then he have that to play.”

The problem is he forgot to tell Sammy what he was doing. “I used to hear a lot of guys go to the dance and say, ‘I hear Stereophonic play a lot of tunes with you’. I say ‘Tune with me?’ Them tell me, and I say ‘No’. And when I go

* Some recorded examples remain, such as Tapazukie’s ‘Viego’ on the LP *Man a Warrner* (MER 1973), Dennis Alcapone’s ‘El Paso’, Big Youth’s ‘Tippertone Rocking’ and Clint Eastwood’s ‘T Tone Hifi’ (*T Tone* was Tippertone)
to the dance, I hear them playing the tune, I say, ‘Oh shit’. I was singing on the sound and they just cut it from the cassette.”

But it didn’t bother Sammy. “It didn’t make me angry. That give me lime-light in the dance, cause a lot of people want to have my music now, so they got to find me. So, that was a good thing for me.”

The formula for making a special was simple – take an existing, popular song and change a few of the words. Jammy’s, with such easy studio access, began making a practice of turning all his (and other producer’s) current hits into specials. Tenorsaw adapted ‘Ring the Alarm’ as, “I love how King Jammy’s sound is playing, I love how Tupps selecting.” Wayne Smith’s ‘Ain’t No Meaning’ (of saying goodbye) now began, “Dedicated to the sound I love…” Johnny Osbourne had so many hits with Jammy that he was like an ever flowing fountain of specials for the sound. He recorded customized versions of ‘In the Area’, ‘Rub-a-duba’, ‘Road Block’, ‘Rock It Tonight’ and ‘Hill and Gully Rider’, to name a few.

Yet, even in the mid eighties when they began to flourish, specials were still considered second class music. Dubplates carried the swing. Specials were thought of as something forced – a copy of something that already existed, not an original song. “Nobody no waan do special. It was almost like a crime commit,” Stone Love owner, Wee Pow, told the Jamaican Star. “Only people like Johnny Osbourne. Him was the master at that. That him a live pon. But de top man dem no waan do no special. It was like the worst thing coulda do, musically.”*

Whereas a dubplate was something no other sound could have, a special could be repeated endlessly for anyone, just by inserting a few different names. With the advent of electronic file (and money) transfers, specials could be ordered from overseas and supplied from Jamaica in a matter of hours. By the mid ‘90s, artists were lining up at the studio’s door for their turn to voice a few, often identical, specials and walk away with a pocket full of cash. Once specials became mass produced, they lost their association with any particular sound or producer and became generic. The artist didn’t even have to know the sound (which could be located in Japan or Italy).

The producer didn’t matter, as it could all be put together easily in a home studio with a computer and a music editing program.

As specials became more important in the dance, around ’87 and ’88, it became possible for a singer to ‘bust out’ based on his ‘specials’ alone. Arrows the Ambassador introduced a new signer with the special, ‘What’s the Name of the Sound’, sung to the melody of the Sam Cooke hit, ‘Chain Gang’. The singer was Leroy Gibbons who had spent years in Canada struggling for recognition. The special highlighted his mastery of the dancehall technique of transposing R&B material to a computer beat. Within no time, he was a star, making hits with King Jammy.

* Stone Love tapes ‘sell, Mel Cooke, Star Writer December 16, 2008
Whereas during the ‘70s, specials had often been recorded by deejays, throughout the ‘80s, it came to be the function of the singers. The rub-a-dub sounds never used deejays on dubplate because they had them live in the dance. But that too began to change. Papa Jaro watched as the idea of making specials with deejays got a boost overseas, “We were in England and, at first, those sound system in England, when they have a special dance they would hire some of these local disc jockey from Jamaica to come and work on the sound system as a guest for those sessions. But later on it started to get expensive for them and they couldn’t afford to transport the guys physically and they started to come down here and take those guys in the studio and ask them to make the specials.”

Late ‘80s dances were characterized by the abundant use of specials. Producer Gussie Clarke explains, “What made it so lucrative – if two sounds were having a clash, it was like – this is what is going to decide tonight what sound is going to win the clash – how many specials a specific artist who is on top could do against the other artists. Those where the real drawing cards. And that, in itself, became a business. ’One sound killed another sound last night because they had a John Holt special’. Then the next sound say, ‘The next time I play, I have to get one too’. And there’s all these demands coming down on the artists and they say, ‘OK, We need to be paid more and more’, until it just evolved.”

The computer revolution, and the ensuing ease with which producers could build new rhythms, facilitated the increasingly universal use of specials. King Jammy began renting out his studio to other producers eager to come away with master tapes full of specials voiced on the easily made computer keyboard backing tracks. Anthony Redrose witnessed the quick jump in special making. “Around ‘87, the specials thing really started. You know why? It get commercialized. So everybody want to do it. Cause they come to dance and see King Jammy alone can play a certain amount of tunes, everybody start to come to King Jammy place now to book artist and cut dub. So, it become commercialized where King Jammy start to make money off of it. Cause people pay for the time to do dubs and the artist make a money now. And you can do back the same dub now for ten diffident sounds. Anything they hear King Jammy play, they want the same thing. We [artists] start to make money off of it. I even build a property off singing dub [plate specials]. I build a place.”

Gradually, the specials business evolved into a high paying, highly competitive pursuit in which the bigger artists could command any price they wanted to voice a special. Once specials became the norm, no sound could play without them. So, rather than hiring deejays for the night the sounds began to invest their money in recording specials and the practice of deejaying live began to die out.
Jamaican Radio in the ‘80s

In 1980, there were still only two radio stations serving all of Jamaica: RJR (Radio Jamaica Rediffusion), and JBC (Jamaican Broadcasting Corp). Despite the international success of Bob Marley and other reggae artists, radio in Jamaica was dominated by ‘foreign’ music and was controlled by an elite class whose gaze was affixed towards foreign shores. But, starting in the very late ‘70s, certain select radio hosts began to look closer to home. Reggae began to be featured as primary content, not as an afterthought fit in between the calypso, Country and Western, and pop. Two men were responsible for this transition. The first was Mikey Dread who brought some heavy vibes to the late night shift. But by 1980, Mikey was already living in the UK. The man who brought radio to the next level in the 1980s was Barry Gordon, better known as Barry G.

Before radio came to Jamaica, people would gather on the street in the evening to listen as one of the more educated members of the community read aloud from the daily newspaper. The reader would lay the paper out on the ground and maybe twenty locals would stand around to hear about political events or the latest boxing match.

Then one day someone went to America and came back with a handheld transistor radio causing a great sensation. As Pluggy Satchmo describes the scene he witnessed, “Big excitement! Crowd folla him, ‘ca them wan’ know how him have a radio and him nah have no wire pon him. Yes, serious thing. He come a wharf and him carry it out one evening and everyman hear him a play – is not the sound a play, is a man with a radio. After a while they know it’s a radio and they bring [them] down. After a while, radio start come.”

One of the ways people heard music was through the gramophone which contained a radio inside the body that received a signal from Cuba. Locals who had short wave sets could pick up signals like Voice of America and the armed forces radio. These stations primarily played the big band and Top 40 pop music of the day. Jamaica, set in the middle of the water and so close to so many shores, received radio signals from two continents and several islands. Percy Williams recalls, “We get stations from Ecuador, Cuba and other Latin American countries.”

Although ham operators were broadcasting since 1939, the first official radio station in Jamaica was ZQI, which RJR (Radio Jamaica and Rediffusion) bought out. The Jamaica Broadcasting Company (JBC) started out as a subsidiary of the English Rediffusion Group and got a license in 1949. They took over ZQI in 1950 and turned it into Radio Jamaica and the Re-diffusion
Network, or RJR. In 1951, the rediffusion service began.

Producer Bunny Lee recalls, “Jamaica RJR did bring in some little thing from England called Rediffusion so poor people like all our parents who couldn’t buy a radio could rent rediffusion - eight shilling a month. Some little box with some speaker. And you used to have radio shows on it like Second Spring and those radio talk show and radio serials.”

For those eight shillings a month, the household got its own rediffusion box that received radio signals from RJR only. You could turn down the sound but you couldn’t turn it off. It kept streaming the signal into your living room. Throughout the ‘50s, Rediffusion grew in popularity rapidly because it played more of what people wanted to hear - jazz, American music and the soap operas and dramas that became part of the national culture.

“They played Mento, calypso and all these Latin music,” continues Percy Williams. “You have Meringue those days. We had a deejay between 1964 and ‘67, a well known Canadian that work with Radio Jamaica, and his name was Charlie Babcock. So, we would have Country and Western Jamboree at five:30 - six in the morning. It was his show.”

Country and Western, Jazz, some R&B, soul, easy listening, pop - everything but Jamaica music was being heard on the radio. Apart from the segments purchased by the various producers there was a marked reluctance to play local fare. It was considered to be rustic, simple – as Barry G explains, it was “Booguyaagga” music.

“The radio stations were owned by money people and they influenced the format on the radio stations,” Barry G explains. “So in their living rooms they were playing Charlie Pride and Jimmy Reeves and later, Dolly Parton. So, setting up the radio station, as station managers, their philosophy was to base the programming on what they liked - not necessarily what the society was about.

“The singers, the singing groups, they were not children of the rich and famous in Jamaica. All of the musicians, at the time, were from poor families. So they couldn’t connect. The people who had the money, who had the influence in society, who had the radio stations, who and the recording studios, it was not their children who were going into music. So it was not in their interest to propel the music.”

**Dread at the Controls**

The man who single handedly took on the entrenched elite of Jamaican radio in the ‘70s was Mikey Campbell, a.k.a. Mikey Dread. Sound system and recording deejay Mikey Dread dared use the air waves to take the dancehall

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*The music snobbery was so ingrained that Jamaicans suspected everything and everyone from ‘yard’. Robert Witmer, writing in The Jamaica Journal, quotes a report in The Star, “(W)ith the Trott’s Band (Montego Bay), the bassman (Lloyd Brevitt) thrilled tourists and North Coasters who were always inquiring if Brevitt was a foreigner” - Kingston’s Swinging Bassman Lloyd ‘Wowed’ ‘Em in Nassau, The Star October 19, 1963 from: A History of Kingston’s Popular Music Culture – Neo-Colonialism to Nationalism Robert Witmer, Jamaica Journal, two:three 11-18, 1989*
into the living rooms of the nation. On his late night radio show, Mikey was playing hard core roots music and talking his jive talk the way he would live on a sound.

He only got the chance because JBC, which used to sign off the air at midnight, was toying with the idea of going 24 hour (on the weekends) in 1977, so they were looking for announcers to do the two graveyard shifts. Mikey got Saturday night.

The effect of Mikey’s show was seismic. It was the first big blow to the powers that had long dictated what music Jamaicans could listen to. Mikey crafted a unique broadcasting style that has influenced every reggae radio jock that has followed. Unlike the daytime announcers, Mikey spoke in patois – a carefully enunciated, broadcast style of patois, but none the less, he was speaking directly to the ordinary Jamaican. Mikey utilized pre-recorded ‘jingles’ and sound effects and played dubplates cut at his good friend King Tubby’s studio, making the show the very essence of cool. Mikey, who was also a recording deejay, captured the dancehall vibe perfectly.

Still, the powers in control were not giving up so easily. “At the time, the radio station managers would not have allowed us to play all Jamaican music on daytime radio,” recalls ‘80s radio host Barry G. “But, they accepted it in late night. Mikey Dread’s show came on after midnight. They would not have given him two o’clock in the afternoon. So, everything took time. It was a transformation.”

The next radio star was Errol Thompson – ‘ET’ – who had a slot on JBC Saturday mornings. Errol took it a step farther than Mikey Dread by introducing daytime audiences to heavy rhythms. Returning to Jamaica after studying abroad, Errol played Bob Marley, Bunny Wailer and Burning Spear but, as Barry G explains, “He was also heavy into the Spinners, Marvin Gaye, Al Green, and no matter how much he wanted to be all roots, he couldn’t go fully – they would have clipped his wings.”

When Barry G entered the picture, radio jocks were still firmly under the thumb of management. The format was set at 60% foreign, 40 % Jamaican and the records that the jocks had to use were stored in the library. All the shows were pre-programmed. Jocks were not allowed to bring in their own records from home.

“When I first came in, I had to follow the rules,” Barry G explains. “It is very important that people remember that point. You walk into a radio station in those days… the music was picked for you. You had nothing to do with it. If you took on the authority, they would have taken you off the radio.”

But Barry G beat them at their game. He became so popular, that JBC didn’t want to risk losing him. Thus, Barry G was gradually allowed freedoms no other jockey enjoyed. “So, they allowed me to pick my own music and that

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* Errol Thompson the radio announcer, not to be confused with the engineer by the same name, was killed in Kingston in 1983
changed the energy.”

Barry G was successful because he able to span two distinct worlds. He had his own company, Gold Rush Ltd, and an office uptown. He wore a pressed shirt and business slacks and spoke the Queen’s English. After all, technically, he was a government employee.

But he also owned his own sound system, and come Saturday night, he could boogie ’till dawn with the hottest deejays and singers, flinging down dubplates and pulling up specials. No radio personality (except Mikey Dread, who went into producing) had ever ventured so far into the music on a personal level. For Barry G, it became his life.

After he finished his shift, Barry G would head up to a local venue where the sound would be set up and crowds of fans waiting for his arrival for the session to begin. “I became the first jock in radio history to go to the people after the radio. I decided that since I couldn’t be all Jamaican on the radio, I would have my sound system. I would choose particular nights and then I would tell the listeners on the radio when signing off – I’m going to be at this and this lawn, I’m gonna be in Skateland, I’m gonna be in Montego Bay, I’m going to be in Mandeville. I then used my sound system to play a lot of the music I couldn’t play on the radio.”

Waddat* became a credible, competitive sound on the circuit. The top deejays like Josie Wales and Yellowman would show up because it was excellent promotion. Toyan even did a dubplate (which was released and became a hit) for Barry G, ‘Spar with Me’ (and I’ll show you Barry G). Barry G would test out songs on the sound, and according to the reaction, bring them to the radio for a spin.

**DANCEHALL AND RADIO MERGE**

U Roy used to say, “The type of music that the dancehall [play] was the kind of music that the radio stations never get to play”. Bunny Lee adds, “The sound was like our radio station. When the people hear dubs on these different sounds, they go to record shops and start asking for the record.” U Brown agreed, “King Tubbys was the ghetto radio station, because when RJR and JBC didn’t want to play certain songs.” Previously, radio and the sound system had occupied completely separate spheres. They still did, but they were getting closer. “I had one set of music for radio and another set of music for the dancehall,” Barry G recalls. Now Barry G was about to bring the two worlds together.

In 1985, Barry G did the unthinkable and brought dancehall music onto the air in prime time, and he did it in a very big way. He and top UK reggae

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* Waddat: “In English, that means ‘what is that?’ The first time I did it, I didn’t have all the money to create a top sound – the best speakers and the best boxes. It was a group of investors in Mandeville who started the sound. And because I worked in the radio, I connected with them. But when it first came out, people were like “a wha’ dat?” meaning ‘what kind of sound?’”
jock David Rodigan agreed to a series of annual matches that would be broadcast on the air in both countries. “The idea was: Barry G was number one in Jamaica. In Britain, Rodigan’s shows were popular. So, the deal I had with Rodigan was, every year I would fly to London, clash with him. I would play the hottest things from Jamaica. He would collect the hottest things as well and we would challenge each other – in a gentlemanly way.” Each broadcast was then aired on the radio during show time.

The tension had been building for weeks before the first meeting. In such a small country as Jamaica, news traveled fast. Both men were spotted at various studios getting dubplates voiced and cut, just as sound men would for any clash. The result was an eclectic mix of theater, showmanship, prime time radio and dancehall. Glued to their radios as they had never been since the world cup, Jamaicans felt involved on a very personal level. They followed each selection as it was played, judging the competitors, and predicting a winner. “When I brought him to Jamaica and I was doing my radio show with him, the population at the time was two.three million people”, Barry G recalls. “The radio survey said I had more than two million listeners. Everything locked down. I had more than two million listeners. It was more powerful than the political parties. Because the music has no boundaries. It was powerful.” The real winner was local music. “It elevated the music. Those clashes advanced dancehall,” Barry G correctly asserts.

These elevated rating, ultimately, meant an increase in revenue for the JBC, as radio station based their advertising sales prices on listenership. Once the option of playing reggae was seen as commercially viable, the tide began to turn and station executives where more willing to allow the announcers to play a broader range of music including local productions.

Still, the airtime hadn’t been liberated completely. Before Barry G could allow Rodigan to play a dubplate on the air, he had to check for content. Anything that could be labeled “not fit for airplay” was anathema. Very simply, “I would be fired,” Barry G contends. “Because culturally, some of the things that are allowed in London radio, are not allowed on Jamaican radio.” Jamaica remained, throughout the ‘80s, a bastion of conservative, if not Victorian values.

Ironically, Barry G had only been able to sell the idea to the studio bosses based on the foreign angle - that Rodigan was an Englishman and very well respected abroad. “What was interesting - and this is very important – Rodigan is a white man. The credibility of a foreigner adds importance in eyes of Jamaica’s elite.” Rather than supporting the elite, however, this foreigner’s presence, helped Jamaican radio to transcend it. Jamaicans saw a proper British gentleman taking dancehall music seriously.

Long before the ‘80s, records were being declared NFAP (“not fit for airplay”), but the ‘80s had its fair share as the dancehall culture encouraged producers to put out music that pushed the boundaries in every direction. “[The producer] would want to produce it as raw and as people-oriented as possible,
like what you hear in the dancehall, and think it’s no big thing. But I couldn’t play that on the radio. A perfect example of that is Yellowman. Yellowman did hundred’s of songs for the dancehall that I could never play on the radio.”

Like Yellowman’s ‘Operation Eradication’. “The government would hear certain songs and demand that the radio station pull the songs. Crime was getting out of hand and the government didn’t have a clue how to curb it. They were creating different firing squads and the deejays had a field day writing songs about how they were behaving! And when they recorded them, it embarrassed the government.”

Former rock steady balladeer, John Holt ran afoul of management when he sang that he would burn down the cane fields in ‘Police in Helicopter’ (Jah Guidance 7 inch 1983), and the song was also banned. “I wanted to play it. The radio station said, ‘You could play it on Wadat’.”

In the latter half of the decade, a lot of songs were banned for lewdness, starting with Admiral Bailey’s number two chart topper, ‘Punanny’. Bailey had at least three records banned in of a couple of years.

Working as a jock was a constant pull between the radio station management, the individual deejays and the audience who wanted to hear these banned songs - they were often the most popular ones. “The government would threaten to take away their license. Or say to you, ‘Take Barry G off the radio’. Picture Barry G arguing with management - ‘There is nothing wrong with the song. Tell me what’s wrong with the song?’ But, he [the manager] knows his hands are tried because the government is pressuring him.” Radio in Jamaica didn’t really start to change until the ‘90s when new stations began to open up competition by taking listeners away from the two who had monopolized the airwaves for decades.
Sonic Sound Records &
the Local Market

With people like Barry G supporting reggae on the radio, the ‘80s saw a wave of new producers getting into the business. Sonic Sounds was one of the main manufacturers and distributors of locally produced records. As well, they handled the local pressing and distributing of foreign records. The warehouse, inside the headquarters at 14 Retirement Road (they later moved to 25 Retirement Road), consisted of row upon row of shelves lined with small, cardboard boxes, often cut to shape from recycled album covers. Each box held 25 seven inch discs. The labels ranged from the well known, like Volcano, Taxi, Powerhouse, Redman International, Time 1, Penthouse, Waterhouse*, to the relatively obscure, like Star Trail, BCR International, Diamond Music and Rude Boy. Sonic also handled material by independent producers on their own house label, Sonic Sounds, like John Holt’s self production, ‘Can’t Get You Off My Mind’.

The ‘80s saw a blossoming of independent production, even before the introduction of digital equipment. With the backing of distributors like Sonic Sounds, new labels were appearing every day. “In the ‘60s, when you had 10 release in a week, that was plenty,” Sonic Sound’s Neville Lee recalls. “But in my time, 200 release a week was considered normal.” That meant a lot of independents.

Small labels were common in the local reggae market and, unlike in the more competitive markets abroad, they were accepted by the main distributors Sonic, Dynamic, Tuff Gong, Techniques and Aquarius. There were labels like Prince Huntley’s Modernize and Greedy Puppy, run from his Modernize Printing shop around the corner from Channel One. Prince Huntley produced a few hits in the early ‘80s – Horace Martin’s ‘Me Rule’ and ‘Na Fry No Fat’, Admiral Tibet’s ‘Too Quick’ and Hugh Griffith’s ‘Step it in Ballet’. Huntley also worked a lot with the under-recorded singer, Bobby Melody.

Horace Martin was getting hot at the time and he recorded a song on the All Sport label, ‘Ready Fe Dem’. So did Puddy Roots – ‘El Paso City’. All Sport was owned by Kenneth Teddy Hayles of the musical Hayles family. Dennis ‘Star’ Hayles ran the Dennis Star label and worked with Flourgon, Red Dragon and Charlie Chaplin, among many others. Brother Stephen Hayles ran the sound system Bass Odyssey.

* while Tuff Gong handled King Tubby’s other label, Firehouse.
Without sound owner Clifton Henry creating his own Stereo One label, we might never have heard Lt. Stitchie. The small label introduced him to the hit parade with ‘Nice Girl’, ‘Story Time’, ‘Labba Labba’ and the controversial ‘Natty Dread’ in 1987 (before he went to Jammy and recorded the hit, ‘Wear Yu Size’). Gemini sound owner, Gerwin Dinall, ran a Gemini label for a short time featuring songs like Tristan Palma’s ‘This Little Girl’, Hugh Griffiths’ ‘Chant Down Babylon’ and Ringo’s ‘Higgler Move’. Sound owner Hugh ‘Redman’ James added the notable contribution of Sanchez’s ‘Lady in Red’, Pincher’s ‘Sit Down Pon It’ and ‘Hackle Me Body’, and, Conroy Smith’s dancehall rocker, ‘Dangerous. Back’ in 1987 and 1988, Redman was also showcasing newcomers like Shabba Ranks, Tanto Metro, Ninja Man and Toby Rebel.

The ‘80s saw an explosion in the development of locally produced music. “By this time, the producers and the studios were changing,” says Barry G. “There were more local people who could get some money. It was not just the upper class who were producing [records]. It was a mix of people from poor situations who invested their money now in certain songs”. It worked because Jamaican music was comprised of individuals more than companies, like the man who had five rhythms, and could trade up for enough studio time to release a showcase LP, or the deejay who would swap his vocals for a little studio time to lay rhythms for himself that he could carry abroad with him when he toured.

Recordings from independent producers and small labels made up a sizable selection on the distributor’s shelves. Mr. Tipsy, producer Blackbeard’s label, was carried by Sonic. Rodguel “Blackbeard” Sinclair, brother of deejay Tappazuckie, began producing in the ‘70s, working with Barry Brown, Johnny Clarke and the other popular artists of the day. His label appeared irregularly throughout the ‘80s with inconsistent quality but resulted in the gem ‘Watermelon Man’ by Horace Martin and another chapter in the ‘What One Dance Can Do’ musical soap opera, ‘Step Aside’ by Beres Hammond on a re-cut of Dennis Brown’s ‘Should I’ rhythm. Blackbeard also assisted on the self produced Kotch hit, ‘Head Over Heels’, on the Macca Label, distributed by Sonic in 1986. Likewise Jah Thomas’s Midnight Rock label. “Neville Lee do a lot for the business, for the small producer”, Thomas recalls.

Sonic also handled independents like Junior Delgado’s Incredible Music (which had popular hits like White Mice’s ‘True Love’ and one off productions like Mr. Prince’s ‘Operator’) and the Penthouse label early on, before it grew in the ‘90s. They had Time 1, Jah Screw’s label (on which he released the Barrington Levy classics ‘Under Mi Sensi’ and ‘Here I Come’), and Busy records with the Carlton Livingston sound system hit, ‘Hot Hot Summer’. Dynamic handled the Photographer label, owned by photographer George Lemon, which gave Carl Meeks his start with tunes like ‘Haul and Pull Me’ and ‘Tuff Scout’.

“Let me take you to 1979, ’80 - just on the edge of where the local stuff
was getting [big],” Neville Lee comments. “Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff, Third World – those things were happening. Radio stations were now actually starting to play local stuff.” To Neville Lee, it seemed like a small opening was appearing for local music to be sold locally, and that’s just what he wanted to exploit.

Neville Lee had been working in the UK when his brother, popular band leader Byron Lee, formed his own distribution company, Dynamic Sounds in 1969. Byron had purchased the WIRL recording studio from future Prime Minister Edward Seaga after the pressing plant belonging to it burned down. Once he had possession, Byron set about constructing a new plant and then sent for Neville to come home and help him run it. But, after 12 years working for the family, Neville decided to go solo.

The late ‘70s exodus of people and businesses from Jamaica proved to be his break. Three record manufacturers were leaving – Record Specialist, Federal Records and Total Sounds. Neville bought out Total Sounds, and Sonic Sounds opened its doors in 1978, just in time to see the dancehall movement burst wide open.

Byron’s son, Eddie Lee, was now the front man at Dynamic, Sonic’s main competitor. Dynamic was busy licensing a lot of foreign music for local distribution – they had deals with Atlantic and Columbia - as well as manufacturing and distributing labels like Jammy, Black Scorpio, Youth Promotion, Top Rank and Arrival (Junjo’s second imprint). They also, released locally produced material on Dynamic’s own in-house labels Jaguar, Panther, Tiger, Weedbeat and Dragon. Dynamic was ahead of Sonic in having a state of the arts studio that attracted rock aristocracy like the Rolling Stones, Cat Stevens, Eric Clapton, Paul Simon, Joe Cocker and Eddie Kendricks.

Yet, despite the less prestigious quarters, Sonic was the distributor that reflected the real dancehall vibe in the early ‘80s. Dynamic was still associated with the many Festival* records they released, and with band leader Byron Lee who played the calypso-influenced Soca (he had hits like ‘Give Me Soca’ and ‘Miss Tiny Whiney’ and was seen as an uptown musician). As Dynamic was releasing the majority of the foreign material that came out locally, and sending local material for distribution abroad, Neville Lee saw a niche for himself in promoting local music locally.

“We were really on a roll, an exciting roll that even we couldn’t understand. We would work seven days a week, 12 hours a day. We only had four little pressers. My wife and I, she would be bagging records. We would be there doing a thing. So, that is how it came about that we got the good will of all the local artists and producers. They showed me how big it could be.”

* The annual national Festival Song Competition in Jamaica began in 1966. The first winner was Toot Hibbert, of Toots and the Maytals with Bam Bam. Much later songs tended to have a calypso edge to them and, come dancehall, were not considered pure reggae. They were viewed as commercial and, in other words, no longer ‘street’ and were never heard in a hard core session.
Building up material for the local market started with the sound system. “That is why Junjo was so strong,” Neville explains. “Volcano [Junjo’s label] was one of my strongest labels when Junjo was working with us. He would promote it in the dance and we would insure that the stuff [45s] was there [in the stores]. Junjo would cut dub [plates] and go to the dances and he would come back and say, ‘Here is the [two track] tape. Go and cut it and put it out’. My role was distribution.”

Once a record was being featured in the dance on dubplate, the next step was to have it playing in the shops where the clerks would spin 45s for the customer all day long. “People tend to overlook the record store. They were key because they were able to take a record and get people to hear it. And they would push it.”

In those days, anything between 10,000 and 16,000 was considered a good seller for a 45. And the distributors and manufactures were happy to take a chance on an unknown commodity, because whatever records remained unsold were melted and put back into the press. “We could press regardless, because we knew that what we couldn’t sell, we could always recycle. So, there was minimal cost. Every six months, we would go through the stock [and take out] the ‘deadstock’, as we would call it, and we ran it over back. That piece that you cut around the outside [of an LP] you could also mix it back into the 45s. The LPs that were manufactured, we call them ‘virgin’ vinyl. The LPs were too sensitive. Bad vinyl – you would hear it.”

Recycling made for some rough pressings but it allowed record manufacturers and distributors to broaden their catalogues and to take a chance on countless small, independent labels, resulting in the release of hundreds of lesser known classics like Clarence Parkes’ ‘Run up and Down in a the Dance’ on Clive Jarrett’s Roller Label, Tenor Saw’s ‘Golden Hen’ on Humming Bird, Pincher’s ‘Mass Out’ and ‘Grammy’ released on Vena, Brigadier Jerry’s ‘Pain’ on Jywanza, Admiral Tibet’s ‘Babylon’ on Kings Intl, or his ‘Too Quick’ on Modernize.

“I had a Fantastic run!” Neville Lee reminisces. “I look back and laugh. For about eight or nine years, we had 70% of the local artists. The first five – eight years of Sonic Sound, all the other years afterwards couldn’t compare. Everything we touched went into the chart. Not that we were making massive money – [but] the excitement! Having all those hits on all those labels.”

Ultimately, with the changeover to Digital reggae, the seat of power shifted to Dynamic who had both Jammys and Black Scorpio labels, as well as the Jammy offshoots like Digital B, controlled by Jammy’s former engineer Digital Bobby.

* This practice of recycling was common in Jamaican record manufacturing, especially in the ‘70s due to the skyrocketing cost of oil during the OPEC oil embargo. Coxsone was a big recycler as was Jojo Hookim. As Clive Chin explains, “The only one that you used to get clean records from was down a Dynamics and Federal – and Record Specialist up a Torrington Road. But, boy, Studio One! And Channel One! Pure noise, man! chshshshshshshshshhhhh.”
Kilimanjaro, also known as Killer-man-Jaro, was a high performance killing machine, a destroyer of sounds, a silencer, the most formidable foe to face in a sound clash in the mid ‘80s. Jaro had top deejays Supercat and Early B, three ranking singers, U U Madoo, Puddy Roots and Hopeton James, and a strong supporting cast that included Burro Banton, Dickie Ranking, Little Twitch, and Dirty Harry. The crew, teamed up with the fiercely competitive selector Ainsley Grey, brought the sound to the top of the dancehall scene, one clash at a time. People came ‘in their tens of thousands’ because Jaro was up to date, with hottest performers, the cleanest sounding equipment and the crispest dubplates. With confidence and a more than a little swagger, Jaro hit its peak in the mid eighties and brought a new edge into the dancehall scene.

The sound was started in 1969 by Noel Harper, ‘Papa Jaro’. His brother used to operate a sound called Count Harper. When the brother left for England, their father took over for a time. But seeing his other son take so much interest, he thought it best to get rid of the bad influence and sold the sound. But it was too late, Noel was already hooked. So, he bought his own equipment and started playing out.

At the time, Noel was living in Lawrence Tavern but the sound was playing mainly in Kingston, most often at Skateland, still not making much of an impact. Noel was playing the records himself. The trouble was that he was dividing his time between the sound and his regular work at the Bank of Nova Scotia, and the sound was taking second place.

The deejay at the time was Oh Lord, from the defunct Stereophonic sound. So, naturally there was a certain amount of slackness. Oh Lord introduced Mr. Harper to deejay Jim Kelly who became the main toaster in 1981. The sound was just starting to rise with the promising new deejay, when Jim was shot and killed while defending his brother in 1982.

There was a huge outpouring of grief. Jim Kelly’s little brother, ‘Junior’ Kelly, 13 years old at the time, witnessed the murder and pledged to continue in Jim’s footsteps, eventually becoming a well known and well recorded deejay in his own right.

It was right around the time of Jim Kelly’s death, that Mr. Harper decided that he couldn’t serve two masters. The sound would never reach its potential if he had to divide his time. His career at The Bank of Nova Scotia still had to come first. So, he decided to find someone who could take over the day
to day runnings. Not just anyone, but someone skilled in the art of musical warfare, who could lead Jaro into battle and emerge triumphant. With deejay Jim Kelly up front, the sound had been making a name, so the time was right to make the big push.

Whether he was aware of it at the time or not, Mr. Harper had come upon a true warrior in selector Ainsley Grey, a man able to focus on winning with his entire being. Ainsley’s arrival, in 1982, gave Jaro the force and the stamina needed to annihilate every sound it encountered on its way to the top. With Ainsley on board now, Jaro discontinued the soul music and became a pure rub-a-dub sound. “It was a perfect match,” recounts Ainsley. “What happened now, I turned Jaro into a killer sound, a killing machine.”

With Ainsley, the sound had a new, aggressive style that hadn’t been seen before on the ‘80s dancehall circuit. Competitions between sounds had always been serious business, but there was an element of driven pursuit that marked Jaro’s style as something new. “In this business, the way I select, I don’t take any prisoners,” Ainsley warns. “I just have one aim – to kill and destroy.”

AINSLEY

At the time, Ainsley Grey had been working in Herman Chin Loy’s Aquarius Recording studio as an apprentice engineer. But he wasn’t satisfied. “I’m a kinda rebel guy, so I always like the hard core stuff. So, I just spent a year there and someone introduced me to Skateland, to Jingles and we became very good friends, and I used to hang out there with Jingles, play music there for a time. There always be skating there, so you always have the in-house sound playing. So, I always there playing all the time – day and night.”

A mutual friend named Ted (who later became the sound’s van driver) told Mr. Harper about Ainsley and Mr. Harper had him come and play the sound for an office party around Christmas time. “I guess he liked me and liked how I play. He introduced me to his wife, Mrs. Pauline Harper, and he told his wife, he got the right man.”

He did have the right man, the man with the ambition to take Jaro all the way. “Jaro is a rub-a-dub sound and rub-a-dub is in my blood. I don’t like play nothing else but rub-a-dub. I’m capable of playing everything, but I’m an aggressive person and Jaro is a rub-a-dub sound. When I met [Papa] Jaro, he had everything. He got all those musics – that is one thing that kept me there. He got all these musics – these Studio Ones, hard core music. And that is what I wanted.”

Ainsley attributes this forceful approach to the alliance between himself and Papa Jaro. “It was a combination, cause Jaro, he’s the chief of staff of this rub-a-dub sound business and I was like the field commander. We moved this rub-a-dub thing to a different level. If I’m playing against another sound, my aim was to destroy that sound and never let it come back and play. I was like a destructive force.”
The Jaro crew was totally dedicated to music. “We were like a family. We were always together,” Ainsley recalls. “We always on time and we always leave late. We used to be very dedicated, work hard cause we weren’t in it for the money. We just love music. Jaro put a lot into this music. If we go to a dance and like say ten people is in the dance, and they pay their money, we would play back until five in the morning. People love Kilimanjaro for that. We don’t just pack up and go home twelve o’clock. We were dedicated like that. It wasn’t a ‘star’ thing. We just love music and a lot of people love Kilimanjaro for that.

Papa Jaro made it his job to research the sound producing equipment field extensively, even going into recording studios to experience how good equipment should sound under ideal conditions. As a result, Jaro didn’t have the biggest speakers or the flashiest equipment. Where all the other sound owners used trucks, Jaro’s equipment was small enough to fit into a VW van. Mr. Harper believed that he could get a purer sound with fewer components. He had observed that additional equipment often added distortion. So, he went for simple and got the clarity he aimed for.

After the death of Jim Kelly, the Kilimanjaro crew consisted of singer Puddy Roots, with his Maddo style vocals, Maddo’s brother, U U Maddo, and deejays Dirty Harry and Mellotuffy. They had the singers but were badly in need of more deejay power. Just in time, they found Early B and Supercat. The addition of the pair raised Jaro’s prestige so that it was competitive in the tough Kingston market again. The two worked the sound as a duo but, at least at the start, Early B was having greater success recording.

Supercat was the first of the pair to appear with Jaro. He was called in, originally, to replace Jim Kelly. Cat and B had been working King Majesty together, a popular St. Thomas sound. Early B had been the first to deejay with King Majesty and he brought along Cat. At the time, both lived in downtown Kingston and had to commute every weekend to Morant Bay. It wasn’t their first time together on a sound. Their partnership began long before.

In those early days, the two upcoming deejays spent most of their time together practicing lyrics at home, in the basement. The first place the two performed together was on Soul Imperial, a small sound, but one that has seen a lot of top entertainers pass through. Back then, Early B was the star and Supercat the apprentice. “That [is] the man who teach me,” Supercat said about Early B in 1986. “He’s been deejaying around 13 years.” People predicted a successful career for rising deejay Early B and a secondary role for his sidekick. Supercat remained a long time in Early B’s shadow.

**Early B**

When Early B was 17, he decided to quit school and start working. His mother was alone, struggling to support him and his two brothers. B began as a machine clerk but, within a year, was promoted to supervisor. Still, despite his hard work, it wasn’t enough. So, he kept deejaying to supplement his
“I started to deejay on a small set called Soul Imperial, and Jack Scorpio used to come into the area and hear me and started to take me to talk on Black Scorpio,” Early B explained. “Eventually, one night I ended up at Skateland – and it was like an earthquake. Daddy Jaro just say him have to find the ‘doctor’. It was like a right match, you know, a right meeting.”

Ossie Thomas, who went on to produce Early B, remembers, “Kilimanjaro was like a phenomenon. Kilimanjaro was a dancehall phenomenon. Early B have lyrics that come from every angle of him. Like come out of him ears and him nose and everywhere. There never was a deejay who had so much lyrics. What enough people don’t understand, to be a deejay ina them time there, you have to rock the whole crowd all night. It’s like a six [p.m.] to six [a.m.] business and it’s the deejays like Early B [that] had the lyrics, lyrics in a bundle.”

Early B did have lyrics. He took the story telling aspect of toasting to a whole new level with his hits like ‘Send in the Patient’, ‘Sunday Dish’, ‘Gateman Get ‘Fraid’ and ‘One Wheel Wheelie’, all of which were in the JBC top 100 songs for 1984. With so many lyrics, he made a perfect recording deejay.

One of Early B’s strengths was his talent for reporting local events. His song, ‘Gateman Get ‘Fraid’, for example, celebrated an incident in the life of legendary gateman, Gillipriest. Gillipriest worked as a gatemen for dances all over Kingston, from Gemini to Volcano. There was even a dance held on Chisolm Ave., September 28, 1983, called “The Crowning of Gillipriest”. The man was tough - and a little scary. You didn’t want to mess with Gillipriest. But one night, Gillipriest met his match, Ducky Wobbles. The man who produced ‘Gateman Get ‘Fraid’**, Ossie Thomas, explains, “Gillipriest love the badness, so Gillipriest bad up Ducky and Ducky go outdoor fe a stone a lick down Gillipriest. It was a Kilimanjaro dance. Early B see the whole incident. So, Early B just document everything. Early B come up with that song and we produce it.”

Seh gateman work is a serious trade
To be a gateman I say you better be brave
No follow Gillipriest and use me people like slave
Gillipriest barely escape him owna grave
and check with a doctor and say they want first aid
better Gillipriest gwan and go turn barmaid

I’ll tell you why the gateman them really get fraid
Gillipriest buy piece of cane and give dreadlock a slap
the dread touch him up with a half a block

* interview with Bev Binns on JBC radio June four, 1985
** The song was released by Ossie Thomas and with Tristan Palma on the Black Solidarity label.
then come a Papa Jaro with him left eye fat  
and tell Papa Ainsley fi haul and stop.

The song immediately hit the charts, a great boost to Early B and an even greater embarrassment to Gillipriest who stayed out of sight for some time.

Early B covered events like the visits of King Selassie (1966) and the Queen of England in (1983) like a reporter. He also took subjects he had learned in school and made them into songs, like geography, as in his songs about the provinces of Canada or the Parishes of Jamaica. He was the first to deejay in Spanish, a trend that became popular.

To his sometimes dry subject matter (like history and geography), Early B was threw in his own brand of humor. Playing on his doctor image, he wrote the hilarious ‘Ghost Buster’ lyric, based on the old Jamaican legend about the three wheel coffin driving around town with three vultures on top. Early B updated the lyrics and mixed in dancehall references. To get rid of the ghosts, he says he wants to call Lord Sassafrass, the deejay, for help because “Sassa him talk ‘bout him know ‘bout Obeah”, referring to Sassafrass’s 45, ‘Poco Jump’. ‘Ghost Busters’ was a creative and entertaining fantasy, something for the whole family.

“Early B was like a real African story teller,” Ossie loved to say. Referring to B’s record ‘Learn Fe Drive’, an eventful outing with an unreliable driver, Ossie says, “[When] Early B tell you fe ‘learn fe drive’ - you know, you learn fe drive proper. Every time me drive a car, me remember Early B. You know how some things stay ina your mind? When him make the lyrics, ‘You ha’ fe put on your indicator when you turn every time’ – up to this day, I don’t turn my car at all without put on my indicator!”

In 1994, Early B was yet another victim of random dancehall violence. He was shot while performing with Brigadier Jerry at the Windsor Cricket Club in Dorchester, Massachusetts. A patron of the club pulled out a gun and fired a salute into the air. But the dance was indoors and the shot ricocheted and killed Early B.

**SUPERCAT**

If Early B was like the teacher’s pet, Supercat was the rebel. “Both of these guys used to work as a team,” Papa Jaro explained. “But Early B was more the academic type. He was more with pen and paper and writing lyrics, while Supercat was more about making himself a star. Although Supercat was an exciting person, people would just relax and listen to Early B because he was saying the kinds of things a lot of these people enjoy listening to. He make up some little lyrics about history lessons and geography lesson and stuff like that. But, Supercat actually lived in a community where it was kinda rough

* “Early B started the Spanish [style],” Papa Jaro explains. “But he didn’t establish it like Peter Metro. He just did it one or two times and Peter Metro heard it.”
and he knew that to survive, you have to defend yourself, and he wasn’t afraid to deejay about badman lyrics and stuff like that.”

Back then, it seemed obvious to all that Early B was going to break out. But everyone underestimated Cat’s appeal. As producer Ossie Thomas explains, “Early B was the godfather of the deejay for Kilimanjaro. Early B had the most lyrics at that time, Early B a the star. But Early B always pass the mic to Supercat. What happen now, Mr. Cat have a style and a pattern of him own. Mr. Cat have a more rude boy style and pattern.”

The times were changing. By 1986, people wanted to hear less ‘fanciness’ and more tough talk. Supercat was the perfect street-wise guy. Born in 1966 in Seiveright Gardens, Kingston, an area where many Jamaicans of East Indian decent made their homes, his original name was Cat-a-Rock until he joined Jaro. The nickname, Wild Apache, came from his mixed ‘Indian’ heritage. Like Early B, Cat originally planned to become a singer but found that as a deejay, he had more freedom and mobility.

As a youth, Cat thought of himself as ’music craved’. “I remember when I was a little boy, around seven years [old] and I usually love to go to the dance-hall. More times, I used to get a beating from my mother. She don’t want me to go, but I love it very much. She always find me taking in a session and she always come for me 10, 11 o’clock. She didn’t like dance because she say a lot of bad things usually happen.”

Early B had been a pupil of the great Trevor Ranking. Supercat also came under Trevor’s tutelage for a time. “Trevor Ranking teach me entries - before you start talking,” Supercat recalled. “We used to work together and I used to watch him entertaining the crowd. And, sometimes he would show me a thing or two, like it’s best to entertain the crowd before you start talking, [say] ‘special request to you and you’ and those sorts of things.”

Deejay Trevor Ranking recalled Supercat as a little youth coming to watch him perform, “Supercat, now, we used to play at Cockburn Penn and him used to look through the fence at night time and say, ‘Boy, I woulda like to be like that brother.’ One night he was there – through I used to deejay an independent sound, Soul Imperial, in Cockburn Penn – and him come and him say, ‘Make I talk now’, and me give him the mic and he talk and me say, ‘Boy, you sound good’ and him say him practice for years. Cause him a listen me and a get him practice.”

Cat joined Soul Imperial where he came to work with Early B for the first time. Every Friday, Saturday and Sunday night, they played out together on the sound until they moved to King Majesty for a year. The crowds out in St Thomas were always good, but the weekly commute from Kingston to play the sound was difficult and Supercat was beginning to get frustrated. “The

* People confused his East Indian heritage with that of a North American native person. Wild generalizations were rampant when it came to ethnic status. In the same way, Jamaican often referred to anyone from the middle east as “Syrian”
manager that own that set that set, you find that it’s not the sound alone. He works a Sugar industry job, molasses, and sometimes, when the sugar is in, the work is so busy that he don’t have time fe play the sound.”

Cat’s break came when he was invited to join the big time sound, Kilimanjaro, in Kingston. “[Papa] Jaro, him come and check me because one of his deejays [Jim Kelly] was shot in Spanishtown.” So, Cat came on board first with B following soon after. As a team, they fit perfectly, despite the differences in their approach, experience and personalities. Cat said at the time, “Me and Early B have a vibes that match and we keep the crowd more rocking.” “Them flatten the whole 14 parishes of Jamaica,” recalls Ossie Thomas.

**Recordings**

At Kilimanjaro, Cat was still seen as Early B’s sidekick. But the release of his 45, ‘See Boops Deh’, changed everything. No longer seen as the pupil, Supercat’s, reputation soared internationally until it far exceeded that of his teacher. In fact, Cat became one of the most influential deejays in the transition from the ’80s style dancehall to the ’90s’ more international, cross over style. One of his greatest fans, Sean Paul, was known to say that he loved Supercat so much he ‘ate, slept, lived, breathed - did everything Supercat!”

Cat’s first recording, ‘Mr. Walker’, released in 1981, was a combination style with his apprentice, Bruk Back. Bruk Back was then dating Sister Nancy who was working with Winston Riley on her first LP, *One, Two*. Bruk Back brought Cat to producer Winston Riley and the two started working together. Although Cat recorded for several other producers in the next few years*, it would be his return engagement with Mr. Riley, ‘See Boops Deh’, in 1985, that would make his name.

“Boops was a gigantic hit, a massive hit,” recalls Winston Riley. “Boops cause death, death in this country.” Winston Riley, the producer, was in shock. “From I am in the record business, that is one of the biggest selling records I ever experience in my life. Within two weeks, I sell 10,000. Never see a record sell so. And, if I had the amount pressed, I could sell even more – cause it run out for days and days and people can’t get it. I had four press pressing it. The same thing in England, [Count] Shelly say him sell 10,000 in two weeks.”

The song became the 1986 anthem. Supercat’s tongue-in-cheek lyrics launched an interminable string of versions and responses from artists including Peter Metro, Horace Martin, Michael Prophet, Sugar Minott, Little John, Mikey Jarrett, and scores of others. On the Daddy Kool reggae chart for April 1986, the top seven songs were all Boops related. :  

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* He also recorded for Jah Thomas, Walk-A-Thon. Early B himself produced Cat’s Ride and Shut Off (84). Trash and Ready saw Cat riding the Sleng Teng rhythm for Jammy. Learn fe Ride was an answer to B’s Learn fe Drive (only a scaled down version that dealt with bicycles rather than cars), and he also recorded Under Pressure for George Phang (Powerhouse ’84).
1. King Kong - Don’t Touch My Boops - Jammys
2. Anthony Red Rose - Me No Want No Boops - Firehouse
3. Michael Prophet - Nah Call Me John Boops - Techniques
4. Sugar Minott - John Boops - Cornerstone
5. Lyrical - No Try No Boops - 10 Roosevelt Avenue
6. Pompidou - I Love My Boops - Striker Lee
7. Super Dad - See Boops Ya - Blue Mountain

Radio jock Winston Williams, “The Conscious One”, even recorded a 45, accompanied by a video, featuring the man himself in his black suit and red bow tie, in which he claimed to be the “Conscious Boops”.

The original version came out on the Techniques label before being redone for Skengdon. The rhythm was based on Marcia Griffith’s ‘Feel like Jumping’ and Toots & The Maytals ’54-56’. The lyrics deal with girls who look for relationships with men just for the monetary gain. Supercat was just picking up on a current street slang. “Me didn’t start the ’boops’, but me write the original ’Boops’. Nicodemus, the entertainer, the short man – well, Nicodemus deh a Jamaica and a girl come look fe him from America and she say, ‘Wha’, she can’t see her Boops and she wan’ see her Boops’, and the short man get vex and start wrinkle him face and say, ‘You can’t call I Boops.”

So, Cat took the lyrics to Mr. Riley and they went to Channel One to lay down some fresh rhythms and the song took off. It puzzled Supercat at the time, that ‘Boops’ should be such a hit. He preferred the songs ‘Cry fe de Youth’ and ‘Teach them Something’, in which he tried to reach out to the youths in the ghetto and “influence [them] towards the right path.”

At the time, ‘Boops’ was both popular and controversial. The lyrics elicited strong emotional reactions. Some girls hated it and felt it was a slur on all women. Some identified with it. Some men got teased and began to feel self-conscious about letting off money or giving gifts to their sweeties. Nobody wanted to look like a 'Boops!' Admiral Bailey (who deejayed, “No call me no Boops, nah wan’ no girl fe come call me no Boops’), commented at the time, “Me no support the ‘Boops’ thing, you know. It kinda make ‘nuff girl hungry everyday. Ca’, all a man who used to let off him little $5, [now] him done with it, ca’ him no wan’ no woman call him boops and all them thing.”

But the final word on the Boops controversy came from Lovindeer, the Jamaican Weird Al Yankovic, known for both his slack and satirical songs. He told Jamaican they were all ‘Boops’ for the government.

Whether you ragamuffin or you decent
All of we are Boops fe government
Easy Papa Tax, easy nah man
The girl vex with you all over the land
Cause government tax Boops till him can’t function
See Boops deh, taxes nyam him now
See Boops deh, government a eat him out
See Boops deh, light bill a burn him out
See Boops deh, water rate a wash him out

Things and time getting hard
Everybody a try fi go live abroad
One time Boops used to carry the swing
Now poor Boops can’t let off nothing

**Puddy Roots**

Not many sounds had singers in the crew, but Jaro hosted three top dancehall stylists. Papa Jaro never planned to have a coterie of singers. They just showed up. “Puddy Roots, when he came on the sound system, it was because of Lone Ranger. Lone Ranger used to work on a sound system by the name of Virgo. And the owner for Virgo actually migrated to New York at one stage and Lone Ranger started working with my sound. Puddy Roots used to work on Arrows. So, when that sound came off the road, Puddy Roots wasn’t doing nothing. And then, because he was such a good friend of Lone Ranger, he would follow Lone Ranger to work when ever Lone Ranger would come [to Jaro].”

Puddy came from Eastern Kingston where he started his career as a deejay on Arrows the Ambassador. In the early days, he used to hang out and rehearse with his eastside peers, Lone Ranger, Carlton Livingston, Welton Irie and Ringo. Puddy had left Arrows and gone to a sound named Soul Express to deejay alongside Ranger. He and Lone Ranger even recorded a tune together for Techniques, ‘Evening Girl’ on the ‘Evening News’ rhythm. It was Ranger who took him to Jaro to try out as a deejay. He had recorded a couple of sides for Errol Thompson at Joe Gibbs, ‘Jah Jah a the Magic Man’ and ‘Chalice It Good to be There’. The latter was a minor hit, but it was released as ‘Be There’ by Joe Gibbs and the Professionals, without his name anywhere on it. His deejay career seemed stalled.

“I actually gave him the opportunity,” Noel Harper recalls. “I gave him the microphone, but I wasn’t really impressed with his type of deejaying. So, one night, he decided that he would try some singing. It was early in the morning when the dance was almost over. He grabbed the microphone and started singing. And he actually sound pretty good. So, I said to him, ‘Maybe you should try singing because if you are singing, perhaps we would have some space on the sound for you. But we don’t really have any space for you as a deejay’. And this is how he started to sing.”

At first, his voice was so weak and thin, Puddy recalls, “They say, ‘What kinda little mice deejaying?’ The sound owner’s mother say, ‘This is a little mice deejaying’. But from that, me start getting better and better.”

Puddy proved to be a consummate dancehall stylist He had a Horace Andy
falsetto but with much more lung power. His special talent lay in taking foreign songs and mixing in dancehall elements in odd juxtapositions as he did with into the Sue Thompson song ‘Sad Movies Always Make Me Cry’. Steely and Clevie actually recorded his version of the song but have never released it, leaving Puddy one of the most under recorded masters of the dancehall style vocals. His best known dancehall lyric, ‘Went Downtown’, was never released (until it surfaced on Roots Music – A Kingston Sounds Sampler in 2005) although it was available as a killer dubplate. His boost came from ‘King Discohèque’, which Jammy sent to England where it came out as a Greensleeves 12 inch. But, Puddy remained first and foremost a dancehall singer, a live performer. His few hits include his ‘Cowboy Style’ with Ninja Man on Kangol, and ‘Life in the Ghetto’ for Youth Promotion.

As for the other two, UU Madoo was the smaller brother of the legendary singer Madoo who started it all, back on Stereophonic. After his bigger brother left the island following the deaths of Echo, Flux and Big John, UU entered the dancehall scene to fill in the gap. Their actual surname was Madoo, and Hugh came to be called ‘UU’. He had a very similar voice to his brother, but a style more suited to the new computer rhythms. Like Puddy, UU also took pop and soul songs and gave them a dancehall interpretation, fitting them over various popular rhythms of the day. ‘Boardwalk’, the Drifters soul classic, was his signature piece. He sang it in every dance and eventually recorded it for King Jammy. Like Puddy, he didn’t have a lot of recordings. ‘Teenager in Love’ (Stereo One Records) was perhaps his best known, a cover of the 1960 Dion and the Belmont’s hit.

Hopeton James was another sweet voiced singer but not in the same dancehall mode. He came from a 1970s stint with the old rock steady group, The Techniques, and carried on as a more ballad oriented performer. During the ‘70s, Hopeton released a few roots songs. He also had three with Winston Riley on Techniques, ‘Ain’t too Proud to Beg’, ‘I’m Lonely’, ‘In the Mood’, and a handful for other producers like ‘Brand New Woman’ for Black Scorpio and ‘Sure Shot Medley’ for Jammy.

**Joe Lickshot**

Rounding out the Jaro killer team was a secret weapon they could unleash in a clash or anytime they wanted to ‘lively’ things up, Joe Lickshot, the human firearm. Lickshot had a unique talent, honed over the years of living in a dicey environment where the crack of a gunshot was an everyday non-event. Joe Lickshot could imitate guns – not just guns in general, but specific makes. His sensitive hearing could discern the subtleties in the echo of AK 47 or the blast of an M 16.

“When I was a youth, I usually deal with the political affair and the politics, so I usually run up and down and hear all of these gun firing. So, I just take it as a style and take it in the dancehall and use it.”

Starting on Gemini sound, Lickshot hit the big time when he was be-
friended by Early B who brought him around to sounds like Kilimanjaro. “Early B was my teacher. He get me international. He start to make me travel all about with himself... Early come to be a brother of mine. He start to take me more serious in the dancehall, tell me I must take the dancehall business more seriously. It will put me somewhere. It kinda draw me out of the politics a little bit too, you know. I take the music so serious that, if I [want to] go anywhere, I have to cut down with the politics.”

His first step towards moving more seriously in music was to change his name, Junglist, for a more adaptable stage name, one that wouldn’t create serious misunderstandings. “At one time, I remember when Jaro a play a Back-bush, them time there them call me Junglist [meaning a man from PNP area, Concrete Jungle] pon the sound. Little Twitch call me round [to the mic] and say, ‘Come in Junglist! Come lick two shot’. And a juke, the man them juke down the dance say, ‘Whe’ the Junglist wha’ carry the Bushy [Bushmaster gun] with him’. Twitch have fe tell them, seh, ‘No, a so we call him pon the sound.’ And the man them said to Twitch, ‘Unu fe change him name, you know’. And Twitch gave a name ‘Don Lickshot’ and one night me deh a Skateland, and Jaro and Scorpio [clash] and Early B call me, and Twitch take the mic from him and say “Come in, Don Lickshot” and Early B said to him, “No, that name deh no fit him, a Joe Lickshot him a go name’, and that’s how Joe Lickshot a stick pon me from 1985.”

Soon, Lickshot was getting recording offers. His first came from his sparring partner, Jah Thomas, for whom he contributed effects on songs like Early B’s ‘Cane Man a Fe Bathe’ and ‘New York Party’. He also appeared on ‘Lean Boot’, sung by Michael Palmer, Early B’s ‘Rambo Mi Rambo’ and Little Twitch’s ‘All Rounder’.

**Kilimanjaro After the Arrival of Stur-Mars International**

Sometime after the sound hit its peak in ’85, Jaro began losing ground. The problem was the new super-sound from Mandeville run by Skeng Man. Skeng had Tenorsaw and Cocoa Tea on the sound, singing. He had Nicodemus toasting, and Nicodemus was a great pal of Supercat. So Cat jumped ship and went to Stur-Mars where he was joined by Burro Banton and, eventually, selector Ainsley Grey. The last straw for Noel Harper was when singer Puddy Roots left Jaro to tour Canada with Metromedia.

Noel Harper recalls, “Things actually changed quite a bit when Stur-Mars came. At that time, Kilimanjaro sound was considered the leading sound. We had the leading deejays as well. When Stur-Mars came on the scene and Supercat, Buro Banton and Ainsley went over there, we actually slowed down a bit. The only good thing is that we had a lot of reservations. In those days, people usually book dance in advance. So, it’s not like anybody came up and canceled because they heard these guys were no longer there.”

Things were looking grim, but Jaro wasn’t finished yet. Although the sound stopped playing for a while, Mr. Harper eventually got a new selector,
Patcheye, from Studio Mix, after defeating the sound in a clash, and Patcheye invited most of the Studio Mix crew over with him – Tullo T, Pompidou, and John Wayne. In addition Mr. Harper got a new deejay, Major Manzie. Not long after, Jaro made a triumphant come back lead by Ninja Man. In the early ‘90s, Ricky Trooper, former deejay turned selector, led the sound aggressively through clash upon clash and back to the top.

But, the big winner was Cat. Ultimately, Supercat decided to move to New York City where he became an icon of the emerging cross-over scene. Once he was ‘in’ with the hip hop superstars, like Puff Daddy, Heavy D, Mary J. Blige, Wu-Tang Clan’s Method Man, Kris Kross and DJ Muggs, he rose to an entirely new international level bringing Jamaican ragamuffin reggae along with him.
Winston Riley & the Techniques Label

Winston Riley, legendary rock steady vocalist turned producer, was one of the few who not only survived the transition to the modern dancehall era but flourished. He gave several top artist's their breakthrough hits, including Supercat with ‘See Boops Deh’, Tenorsaw with ‘Ring the Alarm’, and Red Dragon with ‘Hold a Fresh’. And he made celebrities of Admiral Tibet, Sanchez, Lady G and Papa San.

Winston Riley grew up in Denhamtown, Western Kingston, among the early musicians and singers who were emerging from this urban ghetto. Like most singers in Jamaica, he began singing at school concerts and local competitions. It was while attending an inter-school competition that he met a bunch of like-minded youths from various neighborhoods close by and formed a group called The Techniques. The band began rehearsing at The Victor’s Club, Winston playing bass with Franklin White on guitar, and the inimitable Slim Smith performing lead vocals.

The Techniques got their first opportunity to record when (future Prime Minister) Mr. Edward Seaga brought American R&B singer Major Lance to the island and asked the group to do a tune for him. “We did a tune named ‘No One’, and that was our first tune, the first money we received for recording. Then Major Lance said to us, boy, we sound so good, sound like some girls who do the backing vocals, we sound so sweet and so pretty.” In 1963, the 45 was released by Colombia records in the UK.

Ken Booth and Strange Cole, both popular recording artists at the time, then took the group to audition for top producer Duke Reid in 1965. “They tell Duke, ‘We have a group of singers – very good’, and Duke Reid listen to us. And then we did the first tune we ever do for Duke Reid, ‘Little Did You Know’, and that was massive hit.” Slim Smith’s falsetto vocals, although sweet, were emotionally charged and powerful.

Despite the tremendous success, the group was showing signs of strain. Winston wanted to move into producing. “Through I used to help Duke [Reid], and most of the time, I sit at my home, writing, singing, arranging – and those things, I [say, I] gwan try fe do it for myself.” So, he asked the other members to help out by putting up some of the money to start. “All the

* A seemingly depressed and moody individual, Slim sang out his suffering until he allegedly, took his own life in 1973.
guys them refused.” In the end, it was his mother who gave him the capital required capital to get started.

That’s when things got difficult in the group. “Every guy start get jealous and want more than what him pay, although I give them enough – more than anybody what anybody else would give them.” The personnel was changing frequently, which was especially tricky for a tight harmony group. “Slim Smith [left], then you have Fredrick Waite. You have a lot of changes in group. We have Junior Menz, then we have Pat Kelly, then you have Winston Francis (who do ‘Go Find Yourself a Fool’). When one guy gone, we put in a next guy. And I have to find a guy what match my sound.”

Despite the constant rotation (the group, at various times, also included Dave Barker, Lloyd Parkes, and Bruce Ruffin), The Techniques kept putting out hits. The group had some of the most successful and memorable songs ever in Jamaican music, songs like ‘You Don’t Care’, ‘Play Girl’, ‘Love is Not a Gamble’, ‘My Girl’, ‘Queen Majesty’, ‘I Wish it Would Rain’, and ‘Traveling Man,’ all for Riley’s newly formed Techniques label.

Many singers and deejays came out with a label and jumped into producing, but most had a couple of records and were never heard from again. Riley, however, hit it big right off the top. In 1971, Riley had the rare privilege of scoring a number one on the UK charts. ‘Double Barrel’, by Dave and Ancell Collins, features Dave Barker’s toasting, with interjections of ‘work!’ and the repeated phrase, “I am the magnificent, double 0,0,0”, over a funky, upbeat instrumental. The follow up, Monkey Spanner, went all the way to a respectable number six.

“How that song [‘Double Barrel’] come about, I said to myself, let me make something different, like a ‘rapping’. Then the tune hit. It never hit in Jamaica, but it keep on playing. Then we sell it to England, to Trojan. Then Trojan put it out and it hit the British charts. Some people hear it and start to play it and it reach number one and I went on a tour.”

In the late ’70s, Riley opened his Record Shack, a tiny, closet sized hut on Chancery Lane, just up a little ways from where Gregory Isaacs was to open his headquarters, the record shop, African Museum. “That Record Shack on Chancerly Lane was one of the biggest record establishment, although it is a very small place,” Riley recalls. From the one room, Riley sold records and distributed his productions. And that’s where artists came who were new and looking to break into the business.

One of those artists was General Echo. Riley knew of Echo’s formidable reputation in the dancehall as the king of slackness but decided to record him ‘clean’, at least at first, and released the now classic, ‘Arlene’ (1979), over Riley’s most frequently versioned rhythm ever, ‘Stalag 17’. The original version of the rhythm was an instrumental by Ancel Collins in 1974. “I have one of the biggest tune in the entire world,” Riley explains confidently, “the ‘Stalag’ sell millions. King Tubbys is the one who launch it out. He was young and him have him sound, so he was the one who really get it out to the people.”
Tubby was famous for playing a series of versions of the versatile rhythm on dubplate at his dances, each mixed a little differently.

Stalag made another comeback in the ‘80s with hits like Admiral Tibet’s ‘Woman is a Trouble’ to her Man, Colourman’s ‘Preach the Gospel’, Junie Ranks’ ‘Counteraction’, Little Kirk’s ‘What’s Love Got to Do’, Yami Bolo’s first, ‘When a Man’s in Love’, and Tenorsaw’s ‘Ring the Alarm’. In 1984, Riley released *Original Stalag 17-18-19*, an entire album devoted to the rhythm. A second LP, *Original Stalag 20*, followed in the late ‘80s. The selections went back into Stalag’s past and spanned the transition from rockers to dancehall including versions ranging from Big Youth’s ‘All Nations Have to Bow’ to Spanner Banner’s ‘Extra Man’, proving just how versatile and timeless a solid rhythm like ‘Stalag’ could be.

At age 65, after 50 years in music, Winston Riley passed away on January 19, 2012. He had been in a coma since being shot in the back of the head last November at his home in a comfortable area of Kingston. His son, Kurt Riley, is a disc Jockey on Fame FM.
Sugar Minott’s Youth Promotion Sound

“Our company is designed just for newcomers,” Sugar explained in 1984, speaking of his Youth Promotion operation. “I’m trying to give the youths an opportunity I never had… You can come here and build up your talent and get your songs released through the organization.”

Youth Promotion was designed as an artist run co-op. Sugar never intended to be the leader. Funds were raised through holding dances at Sugar’s home base, at 1 Robert Crescent, where he lived surrounded by children, relatives and supporters.

When Sugar got the Youth Promotion sound running, budding local artists began coming to check it out. Those with the interest and the talent were given the opportunity to practice and get exposure through the set. When they were ready, Sugar moved them into the studio to record. Thus, many artists got their early training with Sugar, artists like Tenorsaw, Yami Bolo, Tony Rebel, Junior Reid, Little Kirk, Daddy Freddy and so many more. Youth Promotion was designed to be a music university, modeled after Studio One where Sugar had learned the trade.

African Brothers

Sugar Minott’s musical story began in Maxfield Park, a small area of downtown Kingston that was home to a vast array of reggae artists. Lincoln Barrington Minott was born May 25, 1956 and grew up on Delacree Road, with his mother Lucille and seven siblings. As a youth, Sugar’s dream was to play football, but he also liked to sneak out at night and take in local dance-hall sessions.

A popular place to hear music was the bar on Tunny Martin’s corner where Delamere Ave. met Delacree road. Locals would sit outside the bar in the evening and strum a guitar and harmonize. That’s where Derrick Howard, aka Eric Bubbles, Tony Tuff (Tony Morris) and Sugar Minott would regularly convene, as the love of music was common amongst them. Tony was the most experienced of the three. He had already done the rounds of studio auditions and worked with producers like Yabby You and King Tubby. Derrick had been a member of the group Charles Hanna and the Graduates. All three wanted to make a record, so, in 1969, they formed a vocal trio, The African Brothers.

Over the following years, they recorded for several notable producers in-
cluding Micron Music, Rupie Edwards, Winston “Merritone” Blake, Clive Chin at Randy’s, Jimmy Radway, Coxsone Dodd of Studio One, and eventually for themselves.

With Mr. Dodd, the group managed to record only one song ‘No Cup Na Broke’, in 1974, before dissolving. But Sugar stayed and began to work as an all around studio assistant, singing backing vocals and providing some instrumental backups on percussion and guitar.

During the five years he spent with Mr. Dodd, Sugar took some of Dodd’s most memorable Studio One rhythms and made them into popular classics that still stand up despite the years, songs like ‘Mr. DC’ on the ‘Pressure and Slide’ rhythm (Tenors), ‘Vanity’ over ‘I’m Just a Guy’ (Alton Ellis) and ‘Give Me Jah Jah’ over ‘Breaking Up is Hard to Do’ (Alton Ellis).

But in 1979, Sugar felt it was time to move on. Mr. Dodd wanted to sign Sugar to his label but Sugar didn’t feel satisfied financially. “I was going to stay, but I had two children at the time. I was struggling. I didn’t know what studio to go to.”

Sugar felt it was time to go it alone, to try to work independent of the big producers. To raise funds, Sugar began voicing 45s for the Hookim Brothers at Channel One, songs like ‘Show Me That You Love Me’. The Hookims, were happy to trade studio time for voicing, so Sugar was able to book time in Channel One to record his own productions in the late night, off-hours.

After he wrote some songs, Sugar looked to his own community for support. “I went to Earl China Smith, Soul Syndicate Band. The band that used to practice on our corner [Delamere Ave], and I told them I had some studio time at Channel One. I bought a tape, and they came and they play a whole album for me for nothing, man – no money!” As well, many artists from the community contributed: Tony Tuff, Tristan Palma, Ashanti Waugh and Little Roy all did backing vocals. Freddy McGregor, Ilawe (Albert Malawe), and Barnabas helped out on drums.

It was like the whole of Maxfield Park coming together to try and make something of value. The resulting album was named Ghetto-ology, and the lyrics reflected Sugar’s experiences growing up in the inner city. Trojan Records took the LP and released it in the UK, giving Sugar the much needed cash to start his own, ghetto based operation, Black Roots.

Out of that true community effort that had created Ghetto-ology, the Black Roots/Youth Promotion organization was born. The reaction was tremendous. “The youth heard that Sugar Minott have a thing over so, you know, on Maxfield Park,” Sugar recalls. “Then Tristan Palma start come, then Barry Brown, Rod Taylor. Every youth start come in.”

The first releases for Black Roots were ‘Fifty One Storm’, with Little John and Captain Sinbad, Barry Brown’s classic LP, I’m Not So Lucky, and Tristan Palma’s LP, Presenting. Sugar also released some of his best material around this time including the LPs Black Roots and Roots Lovers (with tracks recorded in Jamaica, America, and England).
However, when problems arose in the Black Roots organization, Sugar decided to take a break and travel to England where his music was already popular. There he felt free to leave the roots material and investigate his other musical interest, ballads and romantic songs, which lead to his biggest hit, ‘Lover’s Rock’, which, he reported, sold 20,000 copies. While he was abroad, his LP containing a cover of the Michael Jackson b side, ‘Good Thing Going’ was picked up by RCA.

**Youth Promotion**

After a time spent overseas, Sugar was home again in 1982 with a a bit of extra cash to get the sound running. The Black Roots co-operative had folded although Sugar kept the label, so the next project was to get Youth Promotion running. The funding for the operation was to come from the proceeds of dances, so Sugar gathered his supporters together and built a sound. Jah Wise [the artist seen in the movie Rockers] was selecting, Major Stitch operating, and a host of newcomers were manning the microphone.

The official launch for the sound under the name Youth Promotion was held on March 25, 1984, Sugar’s birthday. Home base for the operation was one Robert Crescent, off Rousseau Road. The sound thrived under Sugar’s care and even won a trophy in the 1986 four sound clash, after which, the jubilant crew left for a tour of the UK.

Ultimately, Youth Promotion’s contribution to dancehall music lay not so much in what his sound was doing and playing, as in the artists who came through it - the entertainers who cut their teeth on Youth Promotion, under Sugar’s guidance and direction. Sugar was brilliant at coaching young vocalists. The list of singers who have passed through his organization is impressive: Tristan Palma, Little John, Junior Reid, Tenorsaw, Yami Bolo, Nitty Gritty, Don Angelo, Garnet Silk. Although his deejays were excellent, they didn’t have the star drawing power of a Josie, Brigadier, or Early B. The other problem was financial. Sugar didn’t have the ability to hand out star level salaries. The money earned went back into the co-operative to buy studio time and materials. So, many artists would score a hit with him and then move on, aspiring to greater financial returns.

Two of his top singers in the ‘80s were Yami Bolo, then still almost a child, and his sparring partner, Tenorsaw. Sugar took both in as youths and coached and cared for them. In return, the two carried the sound through many clashes to victories, but eventually left Youth Promotion and went on to become celebrated and influential singers with other sounds and other labels.

**Yami Bolo**

Sugar’s yard was one of the few music locations where you could always find children – kids of all ages from newborn to high school. There were Sugar’s children and Sugar’s sister Patsy’s little girl. There were small fry entertainers, like Little Kirkie, Rohan, and, of course, there was the impish Yami Bolo.
Yami Bolo was as wild as a leggo beast when he first began to hang around Youth Promotion. At age 14, Bolo was already joining the crew at the morning chalice smoke. He even landed in jail for a week for holding a couple of spliffs.

Born in the Kid Lane area along Spanish Town Road, Bolo was a dedicated music fan and he wanted to get into the business badly, so he started off imitating his idol Junior Reid.

According to Jackie Knockshot, “Him start to use Junior Reid slur in his voice like, ‘tanya tanya ta nini mo’. I can remember one time when Junior came to Sugar home asking Yami Bolo not to use up him ‘lingwah’, that is, not on record yet. All those slurs and lyrics were Junior Reid’s favorites. But because Bolo was a young boy, and love Junior Reid, everyone tell Junior Reid, ‘Yami won’t stop singing like you.’” It escalated until Nicodemus and Supercat had to intervene on Yami’s behalf and tell Junior Reid to keep cool. In the end, the two became friends and Yami even recorded three songs for him.

Yami at 14 was a rascal, mischievous and given to provoking people. But he was also intelligent and eager to learn. Bright, inquisitive and a good reader, he wanted to know everything about music. He would follow people around the studio, asking about everything they touched. But he also liked to horse around and fight. He would bounce through Sugar’s yard, executing his karate moves, then climb up on the roof of the shed and throw rocks down at the other children. Or hang from the trees and insist, to everyone listening, that he would grow up and marry Sugar’s daughter. Other times, Yami would roam around Kingston in cut off pants with no shirt or shoes, ready to take on anyone or anything. Luckily, he was also tremendously talented. Under Sugar’s coaching, Yami was becoming a top notch singer and songwriter.

Originally, Nobby, who worked with Sugar, had found a pint sized Yami playing in the streets and brought him around to Robert Crescent. Sugar let him hang around the yard but, at least at first, he used to tell Yami he had to go to school in the days and come back to the yard in the evening. Then Yami’s grandmother took sick and died and Yami had nowhere else to go. It was then that he became a more or less permanent fixture at Youth Promotion, fully integrated into the community.

Yami remembers his first recordings for Sugar. “The first thing he taught me was to sing a dubplate. And when I sing the dubplate, he was saying, ‘Boom! It’s good!’ We used to practice singing the American songs. But to sing in a reggae rhythm, there was a different formula that had to be learned. Then, we went to the studio, ‘84, ‘85, and I did three songs for Sugar, ‘Jah Jah Give Me True Love’ – which [singer] White Mice sang over, ‘Because I’m Hurting’ and ‘Roots pon the Corner’.”

Yami’s first truly successful recording was the 45 ‘When a Man’s in Love’ (Techniques, 1985), followed by ‘Jah Made Them All’ (Techniques, 1985) on a re-cut version of The Wailing Souls’ “Things And Time” rhythm. Although
he wasn’t recording heavily, at least not yet, Yami was everywhere – at stage shows, live sessions, sound clashes. As Jackie Knockshot said at the time, “Although Sugar tell him not to go so fast, he doesn’t care. He’s living the life of a young scout.”

What that meant for Yami was bleaching all night and sleeping in the open air when the sound stayed out overnight. Yami still didn’t have a permanent home other than Sugar’s yard. “Sometimes I was staying in the yard, sometimes sleeping on the sound box in the shed. Hard bed, but when morning come, you just fresh up and clean up like any soldier in the army. I had been a cub scout and that was like a little army training for me.”

One day, Tenorsaw came and told him, “Oh, Yami, the Don have a new sound and him need some new artists.” The Don was Skeng Man with his Stur-Mars sound and new label. Yami joined the sound and was promptly flown from Jamaica to Miami to perform and record. Skeng released Yami’s ‘Free Mandela’ and ‘Loving You My Dear’. “It was a new venture, and we did a few songs and then a friend came one day and told me that I should go back to Jamaica and do the work.”

Back in Jamaica, Yami was prepared to resume his former ragamuffin existence when he got word that singer Junior Delgado was looking for him. So, Yami went to live with Junior in his hotel room. It was his first time away from the ghetto and it opened his eyes to the real possibilities in life. It also introduced him to a whole group of Rastafarian artists and friends.

“Junior start to teach me guitar and he introduced me to Augustus Pablo who taught me the piano, the organ and the arrangements. They brought me to a new level. And then he took me to Europe, Germany, those places, with Pablo and we started to tour with the Rockers band – Junior Delgado, Augustus Pablo, White Mice and Yami Bolo.”

In between tours, Yami was now living with Delgado and his crew up in the hills. When they came down, Junior recorded Yami’s first LP, Ransom of a Man’s Life, followed by Tell Me Why Is This Fussing & Fighting (1988) and Love Me With Feeling (1989).

In 1987, Yami met his mother for the first time. She had left little Yami with his grandmother and gone to America to get work. “She had gotten out [of Jamaica] to get us whatever she could in terms of survival.” While touring, Yami stopped in to see her in New York. “When she came up here, it was rough for her but, at the end of the day, she had gotten a green card.” With that, she sent for Yami, and eventually, he “humbled himself” and took the green card she offered and moved. Now he is content living abroad with his wife and growing family.

**Tenorsaw**

Tenor Saw was a very talented youth who could have gone farther if he had been easier to get along with. Record Distributor Sonic Sound’s owner Neville Lee reported having run Saw out of Sonic Sounds for threatening him over
what he claimed were unpaid royalties. Eventually, Mr. Lee got so tired of Saw coming in and making trouble that he decided to stop pressing ‘Pumpkin Belly’ altogether. Tenorsaw often got a bad rap from the producers he worked with. Winston Riley, who produced Saw’s massive hit ‘Ring the Alarm’, said, “I get through with him and I never make a next tune with him after that, through him behavior.”

But Yami Bolo remembered a different side of the youthful singer. “Tenorsaw was like a brother to me. Because I came from Kingston 13 and he came from Payne Avenue which was in the same Kingston 13. So when we met at Youth Promotion, Tenorsaw discovered that I had a Michael Jackson voice and a range that a lot of the artists couldn’t sing. I was younger, so he became like a big brother to me. When we came together, I taught him to ride the bike, even though I was like a little son, to teach a big man to ride a bike! So, we became more bothers now. Whenever he went shopping, he would shop for me and get me stuff – get me my pants, shoes, whatever – cause I wasn’t making money at that time. Whenever he was shopping, he shop for me – underpants, shirt, whatever.”

In fact it was Tenorsaw that gave Yami his first stage show appearance. Tenorsaw had a slot in Dancehall Night in Harbourview Drive-In following the release of his mega hit, ‘Pumpkin Belly’. It was to be Tenorsaw’s first big show. When his act was finishing up, he called Yami on stage to sing a song. The people loved it and the crowd appreciation gave Yami new confidence.

It was also Tenorsaw who introduced Yami to Winston Riley. Riley recorded three songs with Yami and gave him $1,000 and a bank book. Tenorsaw showed Yami how to budget. He told him, “Yami, you have to save money but you have to spend too.” So, straight away, $700 went into the bank and the rest into his pocket.

It is said that Sugar Minott found Tenorsaw on his doorstep one morning like an abandoned kitten. The troubled youth from the desolate Payne Ave. neighborhood was trying desperately to get a break. “I see a youth outside a lick the stone, outside of the studio at mi house. So I check him and him seh, ‘Bwoy Fadda, a long time mi a try yuh, nuh, and mi caan get nobody fi listen mi’, Minott recalled.” Sugar listened and was impressed by his vocal style. Tenorsaw had the unique vocal ability to be both expressive and detached at the same time. Sometimes a bit off key, his voice had with a wailing cry to it that could be both heart rending in its intensity and chilling in its flatness. It was a vocal style that influenced many of the top singers of the era like Nitty Gritty, King Kong and Anthony Redrose.

Tenorsaw got his break as a Sugar protégé around the Youth Promotion sound. But, after being groomed and supported by Sugar, Saw left Youth Promotion around 1985 and went up to Jammy where he enjoyed his famous string of computer hits.

* Tenor Saw still on dancehall’s roll call, Gleaner, Sunday, August 31, 2008
Saw’s first big hit was ‘Pumpkin Belly’, originally a dubplate for Jammy on the ‘Sleng Teng’ rhythm, one of the first batch of computerized tracks to come out of Jammy’s studio in 1985. Writing from life, observing the things going on around him, Saw took the lyrics for Pumpkin Belly from his own childhood. “When I was small and at home, my mother used to stay, ‘Stay inside! Don’t leave the yard’. And when she turn her back, [I] leave and gone with some friends. Run around and play some games. When I get back, probably, my mother isn’t home so Granny would say, whenever I do something wrong, “If I hold you, you [will] know how water walk go a pumpkin belly! Hear Bwoy?’ She was always saying that when I do something wrong. And not her alone. I hear other people in her age bracket say the same thing. After a long while, I didn’t hear it anymore. So I say, ‘Alright, I’m going to sing it and bring it back.’”

Surreal images from the folklore and superstitions of rural Jamaica persist in Tenorsaw’s lyrics. In ‘Golden Hen’, inspired by a children’s story (“Ticka Ticka Tick my golden hen, laying eggs for the gentlemen…”), he suddenly shifts and addresses a girl, “Don’t be like a rolling Calf.” Tenorsaw’s delivery adds to the dreamlike feeling of the song. Singing nursery rhymes in a minor key always sounds ominous, but Saw adds his intense wail - the sound of the golden hen crying “Cah Cah Cah Cahcahleho - Oooooh”. His next release, ‘Ring the Alarm’, recorded for Winton Riley, was one of the biggest dancehall killers of the decade, a sound clash anthem that warned, “Ring the alarm! Another sound is dying, Woooooa.”

Raised in church traditions by a god fearing family, Saw spent Sundays singing in the church choir. So, Saw could mix dancehall with pure revival style on songs naturally, like ‘Roll Call’ which he recorded for producer George Phang: “When the roll is called up yonder, Tenorsaw got to be there…” The style suited his voice and delivery. His follow up hit, ‘Lots of Sign’, had an equally portentous quality. The brooding vocals over the minor key, robotic, ‘computerized’ rhythm create an atmosphere of foreboding. His deadpan vocal intonation adds to that feeling that his meaning goes far deeper than his simple, folksy words. After recording his computer classics, he went back to the gospel style with the driving, ‘Victory Train’ disco 45.”

Never one to sit back and accept what life brought him, the intense singer began to get ever more agitated by what he perceived to be deliberate evasions and stalling on the part of his producers. According to Yami Bolo, “It was a great conspiracy when the guys [producers etc.] was saying, ‘Oh, check Sugar’ and the next man is saying, ‘check Jammy’s’, and he get crazy cause they are putting him in a run around. After him work, and he wasn’t making any money and people were making money, so he had to get real serious, you

* The ‘rolling calf’ is the name of a shape shifting “duppy” with red, blazing eyes, that could be found by streams and rivers, in the shape of a dog or cat, blocking the path.
** Black Victory, 1985 produced by Ibo Millington & Bunny Tom Tom
No one will ever know the exact cause of his death. His body was found by the side of a Texas road one morning in 1988. Some people say he was struck accidentally. Others call it foul play. He was 22 years old.

**SUGAR’S LAST YEARS**

Despite the changes to the dancehall scene, Youth Promotion kept soldiering on through the decades. Sugar had becomes such an established artist that reggae labels were compiling his vast archives of material into anthologies and ‘Best of’ compilations.

His next focus became the studio at his home base at 1 Robert Crescent, Kingston 5. Returning from a trip abroad in 1991, Sugar decided the time was right and he built the foundation of what was to become the Youth Promotion recording studio. When the construction was done, long time friend and studio owner Lloyd Barnes, a.k.a. Bullwackie, came to Jamaica from his current home in New York and helped put in the electronics. The new facilities could handle eight-24 tracks.

Sugar’s very last album, *Raw Sugar*, was slated for release in July, 2010. His son, Danny ‘Blae’ Minott, now an engineer in the studio, was helping with the project which Sugar envisioned as a return to his roots in the original dancehall of the 1980s. But Sugar didn’t make it through. His health had been failing and he suffered from chest pains. But no one really knew how serious his condition was. On July 10th 2010, Sugar was rushed to University Hospital of the West Indies, Mona where he passed away at age 54.

The whole community of family, friends and fans went into mourning. So many youth owed so much to the humble man who eschewed following the path to personal riches in order to work with those who needed an opportunity to display their talents, as well as basic support in their day-to-day existence. In his professional life, Sugar was a master of all musical styles. His influence on the music is still heard in singers from roots to dancehall to lover’s rock. The studio and the sound continue to be active and to keep his spirit alive both in the ghettos of Kingston, and internationally.
The Business Side of Dancehall

“Funny enough, contracts were never signed in my heyday. It was a hand shake. No contract to say, I have given you this work for distribution.”

- SONIC SOUNDS OWNER, NEVILLE LEE

Reggae had a casual side when it came to commercial affairs. Business arrangements were often interpreted to mean what one chose them to mean, and therefore the rules were always flexible. Recording, as well as record keeping, was a haphazard affair subject to the impulse and mood of the participants. And while this informal approach gave the music space to breathe and grow, it also left a legal muddle that lawyers around the world are still trying to sort out.

“You didn’t have it like now,” explains Deejay Trinity looking back on his early days in the ‘70s. “We didn’t have books you could look in [for legal information]. Those days – you call it ‘dark days’. The music was good, but the business part of it was dark.”

Trinity should know. He lost out on a great financial opportunity early in his career. Back in 1976, Trinity had a big hit with his Joe Gibbs 45, ‘Three Piece Suit and Thing’. Next thing he knew, Althea and Donna had done a female version of the song. That, in itself was nothing unusual. Reggae music was full of versions. But this time, the female response made it to number one on the singles charts in England and generated a lot of money, some of which would have gone to Trinity if he had known about copyrights and publishing.

“I didn’t understand. All I understand is just I go to the studio, I do the music, and then they put it out. I didn’t know about royalties, I didn’t know about publishing, PR and all that. They [the producers] didn’t let us know about those things.”

Jah Thomas, who frequently traveled back and forth from Jamaica to England to license his productions, remembers the day he noticed that, on foreign records, the writer of the songs had his name in brackets on the label. “I used to just write songs for the singers and just give them.” But when he went back to the UK with his next stack of tapes, he began putting his name on the label as author.

Concepts like copyright and contracts were not common knowledge in the ghettos. All control was in the hands of the man who could afford to put...
up the initial investment, the producer, who called all the shots. On other hand, the artist could go and record anything for anyone - new material or the same material he had recorded previously. The producer had no power to stop him. As a result, and artist who felt cheated by a producer would very often re-record the same track for a different producer with hopes of receiving fairer compensation.

Recording in Jamaica, at least for the artist, was never a truly money making venture. Mostly, it involved a little money after the session, a little less later on, and – if the need arose – perhaps an even smaller amount at some point down the road. If the recording was licensed abroad, that wasn’t the artists’ business. The artists who co-operated with the system kept recording. And recording – often to the point of gross overexposure. Those who didn’t like the treatment earned the reputation of being ‘difficult’ and, consequently, recorded less often. This resulted in many talented artists being shunned by producers in favour of younger, and more inexperienced talent. For every artist who demanded fair compensation, there were three or four waiting in the wings for an opportunity to record, and producers took full advantage of this situation.

In the frontier style business structure, the producer was more of a paternal figure than an employer. While the the pop music stars of America and Europe could demand high salaries and exotic foods in backstage rooms, reggae artists were kept in the position of children, dependent on the producer and very much in the producer’s power. The producer was often better educated, more sophisticated and may have traveled abroad. The artist had no access to the business side of music except through him.

Techniques vocalist, and later a producer himself, Winston Riley, remembers recording at Treasure Isle, “Duke Reid come [to the studio] after you done sing a couple of songs and you get paid. You never really get a royalty statement like what we did now. But you were taken care of.”

“When I make my first two song with him and I go to him and I said, ‘Duke Reid, I want a little house with my royalty’ and we agree at that,” U Roy recalls. From the time the artist recorded for the producer, especially if he recorded regularly, it was the producer’s job to take care of him. U Roy would run to Duke Reid on weekends for money for maintaining the house. “When I work with Duke Reid, I could go to Duke Reid each and every week or month. And any time in the week I wanted some money, I could always check him and get some money. And I know the reason why he was so free with me is because my tune was selling. Cause I only did have a verbal agreement.”

Producers would frequently take a promising youth into their home and raise him, sending him to school each morning and recording him in the evenings and weekends. A young Leroy Sibbles boarded with Mr. Dodd who bought him guitar lessons from Ernest Ranglin. So did the Wailers. In fact, Bunny Wailer launched a suit against Mr. Dodd claiming that the group was never paid royalties, only to have Mr. Dodd counter with the claim that he
had all but maintained them for those years. The Jamaican Gleaner reported, “According to Coxsone, ‘It’s been kicked out of the court…The court people inspected my agreement and saw that I have the right to lease the music to whomever I choose. The Wailers operated as work-for-hire. They got paid every week and I provided them with boarding for over four years. Things were so bad that every minute they got a money out of my hand. When we got a little bit from Island, I made sure they got a little something from it. I found a nice place for them and provided them with guitar and piano so they could practice in the evenings,’ said Coxsone.” The practice continued well into the ’80s with producers like Kenneth Hookim who took in Frankie Paul and gave him room and board while he voiced him at Channel One.

**Executive Producer**

The producer was the big boss, the man who made the recording happen, but not necessarily the source of creative input. The producer had the money. He could rent the studio and book the band, but after that, he often left the musicians and the engineers together with the artist and returned after a time to see what they had come up with.

“The majority of those producers in the ’80s, they wasn’t the real producers,” Explains session drummer and engineer Barnabas. “They was just executive producers. Cause it was the musicians that was putting the arrangement together, and musicians would decide the song structure and everything. If it’s an original song, they would just let the singer go in the studio, sing the song and then the musicians would do all the rest. These producers didn’t tell us what to play. They didn’t give us any kind of direction.”

Cleveland “Clevie” Brownie describes the real role of the producer in reggae, “They went to the studio with the tapes and [said], ‘Put this on eight tracks for me and voice such and such an artist’. And in fact, it was the musicians and the engineers who actually produced the songs, with the producer just being ‘executive’ and credited as producer, and the performing producers were not credited at all.”

Sometimes the system backfired. “Some Jamaican producers thought they knew how to produce, until some of them started getting production work from the majors [record labels] and found that it wasn’t the same thing when they worked with any musician outside of Jamaica,” Clevie recalled. “Those musicians would sit and say, ‘What do you want me to play?’ A producer told me that he went to California to overdub a guitar track, and the guitarist sat there and said, ‘What do you want me to play?’ And he couldn’t tell him, ‘cause he was just an executive producer. So, the guy said, ‘If I play anything out of this, it is my intellectual property. I want my publishing’. That producer came back to Jamaica a changed man.”

* Wailer files writ against Dodd, Andrew Clunis, The Jamaican Gleaner, May 15, 2001
SESSIONS

Any artist embarking on a new career was expected to do a certain amount of work for free, or next to nothing, to get his foot in the door. As a fellow artist explained to Wayne Smith, then just starting out in the business and afraid of getting ripped off, “Wayne, even if you get no money, at least you will make your name. And by making your name you can make some money.”

So, most artists were more than willing to record anytime the opportunity arose. But, it didn’t always have such a happy ending. Artists routinely suffered from “over-exposure”, when they had put out too many 45s at once and the public was getting tired of them. “I’m afraid of that happening,” Ringo said in 1982. “One tune can destroy the other. People don’t know which one to choose. That way you can get robbed too, because you don’t have time to keep in touch with all those guys [producers] and check what them selling. [Royalties are] one of the biggest problems when you have too many tunes out. It’s a problem collecting for one, much less ten at one time.”

On the other hand, Echo Minott’s strategy was to cover all the bases. “I didn’t stick to Jammys and lay all my songs in Jammy’s camp. If I do that, I don’t know where I would be now. But I distributed my thing to different producers, like Joe Gibbs and all of them guys. So, any way the boat rocks, that’s where I am.”

The artist had conflicting interests every time he entered the studio. He needed money immediately, but he also had to think about his reputation and his future. Sometimes the best strategy in the moment seemed to be recording for several different producers. Barrington Levy worked well with Junjo at the time, but remembers that it just wasn’t enough. “Junjo is the one who let me get there. [But] if Junjo was giving me what I supposed to get, maybe I would have stayed and mash up [the place with Junjo alone]. But I got into a financial situation, you know. Then my first son was born, and you go to Junjo, and Junjo making money but he’s not giving me no money and I have responsibilities now, I have to move.” So, Barrington kept on recording wherever he had the opportunity and, at least twice in his career, ran into serious overexposure problems. Barrington took further steps to control his career in the early ’90s, and it resulted in him achieving international stardom.

Artists who were just coming up where so eager to work, they would give the producer everything they had and allow him to squeeze out more. “In those times I do all three, four albums in one day,” Little John recalls. “Sometimes, you deh ina the studio for weeks and you don’t see out a road.”

After sessions like that, the producers were armed with enough material to take advantage of any spike in an artist’s popularity. Someone like Junjo, for example, could record several albums worth of material with Little John and then wait until Little John had a song in the top ten (perhaps with another producer). Then he could flood the market with Little John 45s while he was still a hot commodity.

Musicians, too, were worked to the maximum. They were expected to con-
tribute creatively to each new rhythm, on the spot without any advance preparation. The singer came in with a song and everyone worked to build a rhythm around him. Often they were expected to keep this level of productivity for an entire day straight through, or more. “Big producers, like GG, Junjo, Channel One, we could do two days on a stretch,” Recalls Dwight Pinkney. “I can remember one time I did a session - I think this is the record – We did like 35 tracks. We started like a Monday morning about 10 o’clock and Tuesday afternoon, we come out of the studio.”

Session musician Jimmy Becker remembers one of his sessions with The Root Radics for Junjo. “I went down to Channel and it was a mammoth session. I played on like 14 track in one afternoon- and the Radics played on between 20 and 30. It was an all day session. What is interesting is that I have only heard one or two of the tracks that I played on that were actually released. Everything else went onto dubplate.”

**COPYRIGHTS AND PUBLISHING**

Artists had to struggle hard to get their publishing rights. “[Producers] confuse ownership of the master [tape] to ownership of the copyright, which they have no right to,” Producer Gussie Clarke explains. “And a lot of producers, much more in the past, is stealing creators copyright on the premise that, ’a me pay fe the tune. A my money, so me own everything’. And they have no right to anyone’s copyright in law.”

The tricks could be subtle. The producer would put the artist’s name of the 45. But as General Smiley, of Smiley and Michigan explains, “Them times, you record and your song release and you see your name on the record, ‘General Smiley’, but you don’t see your real name on the record. You see the name of the producer.” The name ‘General Smiley’ had no legal standing, but the producer’s proper name did.

Making sales tracking even more difficult, the producer would travel abroad with the finished product, perhaps to the UK, America and Canada and sell the songs to a different company in each country, often unknown to the artist.

According to Jah Screw, the problem was, “Enough record shop owners, like Coxson, and GG and Channel One, they would have a record store in London. Or they hook up with some form of different people, as the main people who release their stuff in England. And you wouldn’t know about the releases in England.”

“When Junjo come down to Jamaica, [he] tell me it didn’t make nothing, he didn’t get nothing”, recalls Barrington Levy, speaking about the sales of his early material to Greensleeves in 1980. “[When I went to England], I get to meet the people who take the records and give him the advance, show me contracts that Junjo signed.”

It was easy for distributors to hide sales figures from the artists. Burro Banton explained, “Even if you deal with one of these companies like Sonic
Sound or Tuff Gong, they put out the music and... they will show you the sales for Jamaica and you have to believe that. You never get a foreign statement. That’s how they do it. They show you a statement from Jamaica and say, ‘Yea, you sell 4,000 copies’, but when you travel you get to find out.”

To make matters worse, reports Fab Five’s Frankie Campbell, “Producers were also rumored to be in the business of pirating themselves. They would make a second, third or more stampers of a popular recording and press record copies from the Stamper. The advantage is that these copies were not legal and did not appear on any statements. These could then be sold at home or abroad with all the profit retained by the producer. Often an artist would hear his song everywhere and when he eventually got a statement it said 50 copies were sold or some other such nonsense.”

Payment for recording was usually a one shot deal. According to Burro, “Some people gave you like $10,000 [Jamaican] as an advance, cause you never see no royalty.” Wayne Smith recalled, [The producers] said, ‘Wayne, I want you to do a tune for me and I’m gonna give you 500 pound’ – 500 pound, that was the standard for the bigger artists. They give you 500 pounds and you put it in your pocket, they take the tune. If they put on the record that you are the writer, you get publishing. But you don’t get anything else.”

In an example of a common occurrence, Yami Bolo unknowingly signed his rights to producer Augustus Pablo. Pablo recorded a showcase LP that he took to England and which was released by Greensleeves. When Yami got to London on a tour, he stopped in the office to ask for his royalties. “The guy said, ‘OK you want your publishing. Well, you signed your publishing to Pablo. The money have to go to Pablo and then it come to you’. I said, ‘Why?’ And the man said, ‘When you sign your publishing, that’s what happens.’ So, right there I learned the great [lesson] of the business. My eyes open up to the publishing and I said, ‘OK there are aspects to the business that I have to learn’.”

PRODUCERS ACCUSED

Throughout the history of reggae, accusations have been leveled against almost every producer by disaffected artists convinced they got a raw deal. Everyone who ever produced a record in Jamaica has been called a ‘crook’ by somebody. Sometimes the accusations were justified, but not always.

Sometimes the problem was the over-inflated expectation of the artist. The artist hears his song is number one and thinks that it must have sold a certain number of copies. Producer Gussie Clarke explains, “In their minds – ‘OK, I think I’m going to get a million dollars’, and they only got $500,000 – something is wrong, and their perception is, ‘somebody t’ief me somewhere’.”

Winston Riley speaks from his experience both as a producer and a singer. “Everybody still call you a thief, you know. There’s no producer that don’t got nobody a call him a thief. I myself called Duke Reid a thief once too. That’s the way it goes. You have to accept it until you go through this learning period
and know what is what. Then you sing a different tune.”

What Riley came to realize was the amount of work a producer might put into an individual singer. “When a person take you up as a singer, put his money out and try you, if you flop, is his problem.” The producer took all the risk. He invested his time and money over and over again with untried products - new singers and deejays who came in to the studio rough around the edges, needing a lot of training and support. The producer was the one who prepared him for studio work. The artists and musicians, for the most part, had no formal training – just inborn talent that needed refining. Sometimes, the artists came expecting to have it all from the first session, not realizing the long path it took to build up your value. “You take him up and you give him ten dollars. That is what he valued at that time,” Riley explains. “Then he get big and established. A guy who sell drugs come and give him a ton load of money. Then him call you a thief, say you never give him nothing. And that’s the way they call the producer thief.”

So far, none of Jojo Hookim’s children have expressed any interest in following in their father’s footsteps. Jojo understands. “I don’t blame them to be not interested because it’s a tough business! It’s a nice business, but people make it tough. A man comes here [to the Channel One pressing plant] and he said, when him come into the business, he didn’t know that when you deal with an artist, it’s like you’re dealing with your son! Because every time something happens, they take up the phone and call you – they need this, they need that. It’s like you take up a son! Some [artists ask] if I want to be their manager. I have enough problems of my own and I’m going to take up your problems! I’m your manager – when your baby drop offa the bed, you’re going to call and say, ‘The baby drop offa the bed’. And them ‘don’t eat for two days’ … I know you supposed to manage them and make money and so forth, but the amount of problems. It’s too hard.”

Often, one producer would groom an artist, putting in time and money, only to see the artist go on to another producer and score a big hit. Kenneth Hookim tells the story of how he tried, back in his days as ‘talent scout’ for Channel One, to develop Frankie Paul, a youth whose talent was so strong, it was worth the risk.

Back in the early ‘80s, Kenneth took a talented but untried youth with a magical voice into his home. He, and his wife, fed and clothed him while he worked with Kenneth in Channel One. “He’s a blind fellow,” Kenneth recalled a couple of years later, “If he eats out of a plate, he can’t wash it. If he takes off his clothes, somebody have to wash it for him and that is what I do for him.” Kenneth produced some of Frankie Paul’s greatest early material - strong, solid work like ‘Worries in the Dance’, ‘Happy Birthday’ and ‘Lazy Love’, songs that showcased Frankie’s striking voice and vocal abilities. But Frankie Paul got popular fast and began recording for every other producer who came along. Kenneth stills feels hurt but doesn’t bother holding a grudge. At the time, he felt had no other choice than to let him go. In 1984 he said, “I
still say that Frankie Paul is one of the best singers in the whole of Jamaica. I can’t fight him for that. I really love how he sing, even now.”

At first, Junjo worked mainly with brand new, fresh artists and developed them through his sound. But after artists Don Carlos and Gold went and re-recorded the material they had done with Junjo, for Channel One – ‘Dice Cup’ and ‘Day to Day Living’, ‘Hog and Goat’, Junjo took a different approach. “I used to penetrate new artists. I used to bust new artist. But as soon as I bust Harry and Jack and Tom and William, fifteen people come up from foreign ready for some stage show. So, where these people was all the time? So, I just do like the previous promoter weh’ ride off a next man back. When a next man bust a artist, I just work it up. Ca’ that’s what a man do me, for the last few years. Every time I bust an artist, a next man form some angle weh’ say ‘ him ready now’, and by the time him come back from foreign, him have all ten, fifteen tunes…I tell you, it’s the fittest of the fittest shall survive and the meek shall inherit the earth. Seen? Alright.”

So Junjo took Frankie Paul, who had been groomed in Channel One, and re-recorded his Channel One release ‘Worries in the Dance’ and his Tasha label 45, ‘Pass the Kushungpeng’, making the popular dancehall singer into a dancehall sensation. Junjo did the same for Eak-a-Mouse when he re-recorded his ‘Virgin Girl’, originally done for Joe Gibbs, as ‘Wha Do Dem’. That Junjo-produced version has been reported to have sold over 40,000 copies on 45 in Jamaica alone.

U Brown, having also spent time on both sides of the fence, could feel for both parties. “Sometimes the producers don’t even understand the rights of the business. They was just looking out for their interests. Because they invest some money and they come to make some money. And they go back home and, yea, if they feel to give you something, they give you something, but, God bless what you get.”

But, Deejay Trinity isn’t ready to let producers off the hook so easily. “Joe Gibbs did understand. Coxsone, Duke Reid, the whole of them did understand. But most of the artists didn’t understand because we was blindfolded. We didn’t understand publishing. It’s just recently we know that, most of us. Right now, we’re suffering through that. Because we didn’t get what we supposed to get to invest so we could live offa it today.”

The result of learning too late has been a generation of artists growing older with nothing to show for the years they put into making music for others-singers and deejays who have managed to avoid immediate poverty, but not seen enough financial gain to build any reasonable level of long-term security. Now, in their declining years, they are trying desperately to sort out legal tangles that cannot be unraveled because there is no written record anywhere apart from the faded printing on the labels of 45s and LPs.
Lick-over Rhythms

Already an established practice by the 1980s, making over updates of already recorded rhythm tracks became the norm. In the beginning, many rhythm tracks were first released with vocals and later used as the backing for an instrumental featuring one of Jamaica’s many highly talented musicians. When deejays began to be recorded more frequently, producers would release another version of the rhythm track with toasting. When dub got popular, a dub version would be made.

This fast track mode of making music flourished in the highly charged, quick paced, atmosphere of dancehall. Once a producer had taken the time to book a studio and hire musicians to record a rhythm track, he then used the same backing track to voice as many artists as possible, to make dubplates, specials and general release 45s, to sell both in Jamaica and abroad.

In the ’60s and early ’70s, producers commonly used their own rhythms to voice several different artists or create instrumental versions - that was standard practice. But they were using their own original rhythms that they had personally produced in the studio. But when Bunny Lee and Channel One jumped in, the practice changed. In the ’70s, they began making copies of rhythms that had already been produced by someone else.

Call it ‘recycling’, Jamaican style. Bunny Lee picked up the rhythms from many of the old Studio One and Treasure Isle classics, a lot of John Holt and Slim Smith originals, and gave them a ’70s re-working, rockers style, with Santa Davis’s flying cymbals. Channel One did likewise, re-conditioning old Heptones and Alton Ellis backing tracks using Sly and Robbie’s ‘militant’ beat. Sound systems encouraged the practice by playing version after version of the same rhythm – ‘Stalag’, ‘Real Rock’, ‘Ali Baba’, ‘Answer’, ‘Shank I Shek’, ‘Death in the Arena’.

Bunny Lee

Well known and respected, the producer Bunny Lee could walk safely anywhere in Kingston. He was a hero to the kids in the ghetto and an envied business man to others in the record business. Unlike some of the older producers who remained aloof, Bunny Lee was right there in the community, in the middle of the action, involved in the daily lives of all his artists.

“Bunny Lee was a more people person. Bunny Lee was one of us, one of the guys,” Recalls deejay Dennis Alcapone. “When Duke Reid and Coxsone were strictly business, like spend their time minding their business, Bunny would be with all of us, you know. Bunny would be the guy who is running
around with us, trying to book studio time, would be going to the Kentucky [Fried Chicken], buy a couple of bucket of chicken and we all sit down and eat, sit down and chat all the time. Bunny was one of us, one of the guys. Still is. We still hang out.”

“We, as the youth now, we used to admire Bunny Lee,” remembers producer Ossie Thomas, one of Lee’s biggest fans. “Bunny Lee was really a hero. Cause Bunny Lee used to have a big Buick and he used to come pick up the prettiest girl on the corner. Duke Reid and Coxsone was like the godfathers. Bunny Lee become, now, a man whe’ upset the whole apple cart, blow the whole thing apart. Cause Bunny Lee make the production thing look simple, like it accessible to everybody now. All of the ghetto youth start aspire- realize, well, we can do our own production, that we can set our own thing. You see, everybody need heroes. Bunny Lee was a hero.”

What Bunny Lee did with music was revolutionary. He showed the youth in the ghetto that it only took one rhythm track to go into business. From there, you could create a vocal, a deejay track, a dub and then another vocal. The possibilities were endless.

Bunny Lee wasn’t the first man to do-over older songs, but he was the most prolific. He was attuned to the fact that you could take a popular rhythm, and change the style to whatever was current- take a popular Rock Steady song and give it the rockers treatment with Santa’s ‘flying symbol’ drum style, just as many Mento songs had been successfully reworked as Ska numbers during the ’60s.

However, previously most producers would release only one vocal and one deejay version of a rhythm. Bunny Lee took the next step of recording multiple artists over each rhythm, vastly increasing the pace and quantity of his output. In his aggressive pursuit of both songs to cover and rhythm tracks to re-do, he institutionalized a new model for reggae production. Bunny Lee’s way became the standard and the practice continued into the ‘80s where it intensified with the demands of the dancehall for ever more variations of old favorites.

Jamaica was a frugal society. In the ghetto, nothing went to waste. Old crates were made into amplifiers and fishing line into guitar strings. So, the idea of using a backing rhythm more than once made a world of sense. As producer George Phang expressed it, “We can’t afford to make a rhythm [track] and use it one time. If every time we go to the studio we have to make a new rhythm, we would not be able to afford to make records. But we make some changes every time we use the rhythm, like putting in a [synthesizer] or some rhythm guitar.”

“We couldn’t afford to record, to pay so much musician every time,” Bunny Lee agrees. “So, if we have one rhythm, we use it 10 or 20 times with a different thing on it. What we used to do first time, when we gonna do a deejay album, we used to do four deejay album in one night, you know, in about four hours, cause as one deejay miss, you have another deejay to take his place.
We used to mix the rhythm first with the voice [singer] and then call in the deejays. So, sometimes you find four deejays on the same rhythm, each deejay doing a different thing. After that you take off the deejay voice and put the rhythms together and you have a full dub LP.” The idea came from cricket, Bunny Lee explained further. “If you find the spot on the wicket, if the horse wan’ run, don’t hold it. Make the horse gwan!”

**Jojo Hookim**

Running neck and neck with Bunny Lee in the do-over business came Channel One. Jojo Hookim never hid the fact that he was in it for the money. So, when he found a profitable formula, he ran with it. During the ‘70s and ‘80s at Channel One, Jojo oversaw the recording of hundreds of ‘lick-over’ versions of popular rock steady rhythms. ‘Why Baby Why’, by the Cables became ‘Have Mercy’ by The Mighty Diamonds, ‘Jah Shaky’ by Roland Alphonso was done over as ‘Far East’ by Barry Brown, which are just a few of many examples.

As a result, people have often held Channel One responsible for the do-over boondoggle. “I do it on probably a wider scale than anybody else,” Jojo admits. “But I didn’t start it. So don’t blame me!”

Barnabas, who was working as an engineer in Channel One watched as Jojo Hookim revamped old favorites. “What we started at Channel One, everybody’s been doing for years now. We would play over a studio one rhythm and then we would have the artist come and write an original melody and original words for that do – over rhythm. While the rhythm tracks was there playing, no artists wasn’t there singing.” It was up to the musicians to be able to replicate the rhythm, but give it a modern beat. “Jojo would bring an original copy of songs he liked [on 45] and they would play it, and the musicians would all listen to it and they would replay the rhythms. They listen to the Studio One tracks and then play it back.”

The do over formula proved wildly successful. People complained, but they still bought records. The records with the do-over rhythms got an instant response, both in the shop and on the sound. Some of the most popular, and frequently licked-over rhythms of the early “80s were Coxsone Dodd’s instrumentals ‘Peanut Vendor’, ‘Full up’, ‘Heavenless’, ‘Hot Milk’ and the king of rhythms, ‘Real Rock’, and the versions of the songs ‘Mad Mad’ (Alton Ellis), ‘Never Let Go’ (Slim Smith), ‘Love Me Forever’ (Cables), ‘Won’t You Come Home Now’ (Delroy Wilson and Ken Boothe). The most popular contributions from Treasure Isle included ‘Ali Baba’, original sung by John Holt, ‘It’s

*Deejay U Brown names Real Rock by the Sound Dimension, as the all time dancehall ruler, one of the most versatile rhythms ever. “The Real Rock pull hip hop artists into the Jamaican deejay stuff, cause it’s one of the rhythms you can sample and change the beats, cause the beat is only one chord.” Some of the most instantly recognizable songs in reggae are on Real Rock: Barrington Levy’s Looking My Love and Money makes Friends, Cocoa Tea’s Rocking Dolly, Errol Scorcher’s Roach in the Corner, Michigan’s Nice Up the Dance, Willie William’s Armagideon Time.*
As Jojo was a businessman first (or as he prefers to be known, a ‘hustler’), and a music lover second, he admitted, “The problem is really that, we just have to follow the trend to make money. If someone is doing a thing and it doing good, everybody seems to jump on that bandwagon. If everybody could do them own thing, the music would be really better.”

Dwight Pinkney, who as a member of Roots Radics was busy recording lick-over rhythms in the ‘80s, felt it was unfair to always blame the producers for using the same rhythms over and over. The artist’s had an equal share in creating the problem by demanding the same overworked rhythms to sing or deejay on when they came to the studio to record. The artists would come up with new lyrics in the dance, performing over the versions of popular records. Once, in the studio, the artist would request that same rhythm because it matched his lyrics and he had been rehearsing the song over that track.

Jah life recalled that Junjo, at the height of his success and popularity as a producer, still had many unreleased rhythms that were “wicked”. But Junjo was afraid to release fresh rhythms that people weren’t familiar with. The tried and true were sure to sell a certain portion. So, Junjo kept reworking the big sellers. For example, Junjo found gold with his ‘Mad, Mad’ rhythm and used it over and over, creating hits like Smiley and Michigan’s ‘Diseases’, Josie Wales ‘Leggo Mi Hand’, Yellowman’s ‘Zuggazuggazuggazengzengzeng’ and Cocoa Tea’s ‘I Have Lost My Sonia’.

“When you are in the studio, really, and you have a good rhythm”, Jojo Hookim explained, “everybody want to go on it. And what usually happen. If you come out with it on a disco or on a 45, as a good rhythm, you find that 10 producer or 20 producer make over the rhythms. So we usually say, better we kill the rhythm, and done! So, if somebody version it again, it probably don’t make sense.”

One of the ways Jojo came up with for maxing out a popular rhythm was to voice an entire album over the one backing track. As before, Jojo didn’t invent the idea, but he exploited it, and it soon became a competitive album format. The first LP of the type had been the Rupee Edwards’ Conversation Stylee, a compilation of versions of the popular Slim Smith song, ‘My Conversation’. The LP featured the same backing track played over by Joe White or voiced by The Heptones and Shorty the President (including his tracks, ‘Yamaha Skank’ and ‘President Mash Up the Resident’).

As it became more acceptable, and even expected, to see multiple vocal and instrumental versions of the same rhythm track, the one-rhythm LP became the obvious solution to the problem of what to with all the 45s by a artists with whom the producer didn’t have enough tracks to fill a solo LP.

* The musicians, who were relying so heavily on the older rhythms, were not the classically trained Alpha School Boys who created Ska. Most of the new generation where self taught and lacked the sophisticated musical knowledge possessed by the previous generation of musicians.
The first rhythm Channel One selected for a workout was General, which was originally recorded as the backing track for The Mighty Diamond’s cover version of The Heptone’s ‘Love Me Girl’. The LP, General for all Generals, came in 1983 on Hitbound, in a plain white cardboard sleeve with the center cut out so that the label could be read. ‘General’ was a hot dancehall rhythm. But, what made the LP unique was that the version of General that Channel One recorded and used on the LP, lacked the bridge it had in the version of The Heptone’s song it was based on. The rhythm went straight through without a change, a harbinger of things to come in the digital era. The LP contained the dancehall classics, Little John’s ‘All Over Me’ and Barrington Levy’s ‘Dances Are Changing’.

The next year, Channel One followed up with an LP, Hypocrite Inna Dancehall Style (based on The Wailer’s song, ‘Hypocrites’), that featured the nicely done Michael Palmer cut, ‘No More Lean Boot’, featuring Joe Lickshot’s debut licking his vocal ‘shots’ on vinyl.

The same year, 1984, Channel One released Sly & Robbie Presents The Unmetered Taxi, based on the ‘Riddim Twins’ popular interpretation of the old ‘Victory Dance/Prophecy’ rhythm. After that, it was a free for all with every producer stepping in to voice his own collection of songs on one base rhythm. The new contributions were uneven. Kenneth Hookim did his own LP based on his Frankie Paul, ‘Worries in the Dance’ rhythm. Top Rank came out with an ‘Answer’ compilation. Channel One had an LP based on ‘Adam and Eve’. Even Jammys had time to squeeze out a ‘Stalag’ based LP before he went ‘digital’ and came out with his ‘Sleng Teng’ versions.

The newspaper columnists complained bitterly. In an article entitled, Is Dancehall a Creative Force? Andre Fanon answered his own question. “A musician may discover a rhythm and develop it. It is then ‘ridden’ mercilessly like an ill-fated donkey which falls among idle schoolboys… It becomes a nauseating thing to hear that there are several ‘pieces’ of a particular rhythm. And I must confess my own embarrassment when my cousin (who lives in the Eastern Caribbean and does not readily comprehend Jamaican patois) told me that the tape I sent him had the same song about six times.”

Older producers, likewise, complained, but the trend only became more entrenched. Producer Harry J grumbled, “Reggae has been stagnant from about 1976. All they are doing is taking like my old productions, Coxsone’s old productions and do it over again and is a lot of version you have going.” Sound system owner and producer of Burning Spear, Jack Ruby, felt just as strongly. “Since Bob Marley, as far as Jack Ruby care, reggae is on the reverse. Nobody is creating no rhythm. Them little rhythm, which Downbeat [Coxsone] made when him a wear short pants, them the producer keep playing over. Hear what them start do now, them start do it now computer style! Stalag and some rhythms me used to play [on the sound]. If them people who

* Is dancehall a creative force? Andre Fanon, The Daily Gleaner, Tuesday, November 29, 1988
have sound keep playing these things, and follow those idiots, reggae gwan stop right there.” But reggae didn’t stop. It continued along, using the same rhythm tracks as bases for almost all the new productions coming out in the ‘80s and beyond.

* Interview with Dave Kingston on CKLN Reggae Showcase, 1986
Metromedia Sound with Peter Metro

“Metromedia a gwan rule, you know. We rule yard right now as the smallest upfront sound. We no stop shock out. Ca’ you find the most girls follow our sound still and anywhere the girls deh de, the man must ha’ fe deh de. So we have the vibes. We have the kick for ’86.”

–PETER METRO IN 1986

In 1971, Lou Godden, had taken over the sound system owned previously by Tom the Great Sebastian following Tom’s suicide. After renaming the set Metromedia, Lou began playing at a club called Baby Grand in the Cross Roads area where his good friend Jimmy Haldaine used to come regularly and listen to the music. But, in 1974 Lou migrated to the United States, closing down the club that Mr. Haldaine used to frequent.

Mr. Haldaine, then working at Dynamic Sounds, continued to go to sessions but began to think about opening his own sound. So, he began picking up pieces of equipment until, in 1976, he opened his own Metromedia Sound, borrowing the name from Lou Godden’s old set.

“I started out with an amplifier, two Goodman speakers and a long time Gerard turntable,” Mr. Haldane recalled. “We used to play at little parties, at bars, every Friday night at Bonaire Lane for a man called Johnny, and get 75 cents a night. We had a good following and, considering that I was working for Dynamic Sounds, I got the new records pretty fast, so I always got requests from the patrons”.

Metromedia started out as a “party sound”. It had one selector, Snack Jack, but no deejays - until Jimmy ‘Metro’ Haldaine was introduced to Peter Ranking, who had just returned from abroad. “Coming back from Cuba,” Peter recalls, “a friend of mine who worked with Stax [Disco], take me to Metromedia. It was down Orange Street at a place named the Spanish Jar Club. I started to deejay on Metromedia for the first night. Jimmy Metro, which is the boss, heard me and gave me his number and say I must come and see him. I never go back and until around, maybe three months. When I go and see him, he don’t remember who I was. So I said, ‘Do you remember me, Peter

* From official biography of Metromedia, courtesy of Lou Godden
Ranking?’ And him say, ‘Oh yea yea yea yea yea yea!’ Somebody was on
the mic, but [Jimmy] said, ‘Give Peter Ranking the mic.’ And then I started
to deejay and it’s like the whole place start to catch a fire! Because I have some
new lyrics, some different lyrics – just coming from Cuba with the Spanish
style. So everybody start say, ‘Who is this guy?! Who is this guy?!’ From there,
I never look back. Until today, I work with Metromedia – until today.”

Jimmy Metro recalls, “He was fantastic man. He used to do a little Spanish
and things. At that time that he come, he actually brought something differ-
ent. In a quick, quick time, he had a large following. If something happen
down the road, he make a story off it. He was really something refreshing.”

There already was a deejay named Peter Ranking, so Peter Clarke was
given the last name “Metro” by Jimmy Haldaine when he joined the crew.
Back then, Metromedia used to hold regular sessions on Wednesday nights in
Allman Town, with their crew of Crackie, Sprouty, Zuzu, Dickie Ranking,
Tanto Metro, Ashman, and singer Errol Turner. The original selector Snack
Jack was still with the set.

THE RISE OF METROMEDIA

When Gemini Sound went on tour in 1983, Metromedia took over its reg-
ular Wednesday night gig at the Gemini Club, boosting Metromedia’s profile
considerably. Soon, Jingles was booking Metromedia into Skateland regularly.
“Skateland is more uptown, so we ended up playing more uptownish than
downtown,” Jimmy recalls. Metromedia, while it gained a reputation as a
popular commercial sound, still kept to its roots, playing dances in the ghetto.

Peter Metro was one of the growing number of deejays who wrote well
thought out lyrics that told a story or gave information. He often used el-
ementary Spanish lyrics in conjunction with his calypso style when toasting
over the up-tempo Studio One version of Slim Smith’s ‘Never Let Go’. In
Jamaica, a former Spanish colony, the language is taught in school, so most Ja-
micans have at least some exposure to it. But Peter, like Early B, took it more
seriously, “If I hear a soul song, I go home and write it out in Spanish and sing
it in Spanish in the dancehall and people say, ‘Metro, it bad!’ So, I just go in a
the studio and do it. Cause, I just want to show the people how versatile I am.”

Following in the footsteps of deejay Johnny Ringo, Peter Metro wrote out
his lyrics as a composition. Unlike the free-styling originators, the modern
deejays were coming to the dance with carefully written lyrics and delivered
them ‘straight’ – a rhythmic pattern with little variation in pace or melody.

The deejays from this school were also very careful about structuring sen-
sible lyrics that worked together as a whole. Like Ringo, Metro wanted his
words to count. “When I talk, I just like to educate the people.” With that
in mind, he recorded songs like ‘Seven Heroes of Jamaica’ (Midnight Rock)
which names all the great men in the history of the island, and ‘Metric Sys-
tem’ (Volcano), which teaches the European system of measurement. He even
had one about family planning in which he discourages Jamaican parents
from having more mouths than they could feed. Lists were also big. Metro could list everything from capitol cities of the world to race horses whose names end with ‘o’.

In fact, Metro’s long, brain-busting stories became his trademark. Papa San, a popular deejay who became a successful humorist and top lyrics writer, heard Metro and took it as a challenge. He went home and wrote the longest song he could. “That’s the first time I met Papa San, Metro recalls. “He made a loooong lyrics - longer than mine at the time! I said to myself, ‘No, man, this guy is really bad!’ Because I’ve never seen anybody go around my lyrics in terms of the length. We started to spar together because he loves my style and I love his style as well.”

Peter shone brightest when spinning a humorous or moral tale. In his 1986 ‘Obeah in America’ (Jah Life), Metro expresses his surprise at finding common Jamaican country superstitions alive and well in New York City. The story was inspired by a girlfriend whose father, a Pastor in a Revival Church, used to deal with such things as curative oils and special sprays which claim to attract money or scare away the evil eye. “A lot of people would come at her house and say ghosts is following them, and ghosts is in their home and they buy a lot of stuff, burn a lot of candle. And I said, ‘I never know that was in America. I thought that was in Jamaica alone’. That is how I come with that song. That is real. And that girl became a baby mother of mine today.”

Peter proved to be a brave writer who was willing to tackle controversial subjects live in the dance. No other deejay could, or perhaps had the fortitude to talk about life in the ghetto the way Metro did. He didn’t record these lyrics, but flashed them in a dance where the people who needed to hear the messages, could hear them.¹

**Massive Dread**

Various guest singers and deejays would drop in, like deejay Massive Dread (Dennis James), from Rema. Massive’s presence, however sporadic, gave the sound another unique touch. Massive had his own style and was on the charts for a couple of years with the biggest calypso derived hits of the early ‘80s, including the classics ‘Melda’ and ‘This Is Massive’. ‘Melda’ was a version of the classic Sparrow calypso ‘Obeah Wedding’, and ‘This is Massive’ featured the chorus, ‘Soca rumba, Aruba the Bubbler’. Formerly, Massive Dread had been known as a heavy roots deejay. He recorded for Tappazuckie’s Stars label in the later ‘70s, and an LP, shared with Ranking Dread, came out on Silver Camel. The only other LP featuring his early work was recorded with Militant Barry on vocals, in 1979, and released on Gorgon Sounds.

The match up seems unlikely. Massive had been touring with Byron Lee and the Dragonaires whose specialty was calypso, not reggae. Yet, something

¹ The 1982 LP, *Strictly Bubbling* was produced by Valerie Chang-Cowan for the Wailing Soul’s UFO label and the 1983 *It’s Massive* was produced by the Wailing Souls on Upfront
of the Soca styles Byron Lee was playing must have rubbed off on the deejay, for he came back to the dancehall with his new way of toasting he called “Bubbling.”

Peter Metro remembers, “His style was a little bit strange, you know? He came and go on Metromedia. Whenever Metromedia plays Denham Town area, Tivoli Gardens area,” he would come and deejay beside me and Sky Juice.” Massive stayed pretty close to home as he wasn’t just an entertainer, but a community leader as well.

In 1993, Massive began working on a project called The Trench Town Reading Centre with the aim of bringing literacy to children in the inner city. The centre finally opened in December with a ribbon cutting ceremony and “five banana boxes of new books.” Massive provided the entertainment at the party that evening. Then, “Something happened,” Peter Metro reports sadly. “Unfortunately he got killed because of some mix up down in his community. Something went wrong with the guys them down there. He was shot and killed by one of those same guys in the community.”

“CalypSo, CalypSo” – Soca In The Dancehall

In Trinidad during the 1980s, the calypso scene was giving way to the new, disco influenced style called Soca. It was Arrow’s 1983 mega hit ‘Hot! Hot! Hot!’ that helped popularize this new musical synthesis. It is reported that four million copies of the song sold and that it appeared in twelve different languages. The name Soca came from the combination of Soul and Calypso. Whereas Calypso could be a little stiff, Soca was loose and rhythmic, infectious and danceable, the ultimate party music. It successfully incorporated influences from all over the globe, from the U.S. to India. Arrow became the Soca ambassador and the only Soca artist to perform at Reggae Sunsplash in both London and Jamaica.

Soca was so hot, at the time, that the influence began pouring into the dancehall with hits like Johnny Osbourne’s ‘Calypso’, Echo Minott’s ‘Rock and Calypso’, and Toyan’s ‘Calypso’. In his 45 ‘Reggae Calypso’, Sassafrass successfully gave a classic rock steady rhythm, ‘Love I Can Feel’, a modified Soca beat. Josie Wales borrowed a lot from foundation Calypsonian, The Mighty Sparrow. “Do the Stur-Gav dance,” a Josie trademark lyric, came directly from Sparrow’s, “Do the Dragon Dance” and Josie’s “Salt Fish” came from one of Sparrow’s Road March songs by the same name.

In 1985, in recognition of the growing popularity of the new Soca beat, Jamaican promoters held an event touted to be the clash of Dancehall music v.
Soca. Heat in de Place featured Arrow and the Mighty Duke on the Soca side and Sugar Minott, General Trees and Wayne Smith, representing dancehall. Today, Jamaica has its own Carnival, the inspiration of Byron Lee, who continued to promote Soca music up until his death in 2008. Started in 1990, the annual event has proven to be a very successful tourist draw. The promoters have been able to enlist the support of many of Jamaican’s top businesses and the event has given Jamaica a new group of soca and calypso stars.

**DOMINIC**

Another frequent guest on the sound, in the later ‘80s, was white deejay Dominic, from England. Dominic used to love to chat, “Who say Dominic favor Boy George…”, sparking a recrudescence of the homophobic lyrics that had been largely in the background since slackness days. Dominic hung around until he proved that he could hold his own in a dance. A tough little roughneck, Dominic recorded a duet with a Peter Metro contrasting the two cultures, ‘Yardie and Cockney’ (Germaine)**.

At the time of the release of ‘Yardie and Cockney’, deejay duets were becoming an integral part of the late ‘80s dancehall style. Artists like Admiral Bailey and Josie Wales, or Chaka Demus and Bailey were teaming up in the studio. But Metro got a head start. With little brother Squiddley Ranking he had recorded ‘Bad Boy Posse’. With Sister Charmain, he did ‘Dibbi Dibbi’. With Yellowman, he recorded ‘The Girl is Mine’. With Lady Anne he had ‘Bosa Nova’. With Zuzu, he had ‘Calypso, Calypso’. And he had still another with Dominic, ‘Old Lady’.

**THE TOUR BEFORE THE FALL**

In 1983, Metromedia did the same thing Gemini had done before – they

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* Jamaica, being so close to Trinidad and Tobago, really felt the heat. The advent of this highly contagious music looked like a fresh opportunity to divert people from their dancehall ways. As Frankie Campbell puts it, “The gap between ‘uptown’ and ‘downtown’ was at its greatest as dancehall music slowly began to replace reggae as Jamaica’s music of choice. The backlash led to the creation of the Jamaican Soca industry (in which Fab five had a great part) and Jamaican Carnival.” An entire Jamaican Soca movement arose to accommodate the popularity of the new genre. The Fabulous Five, along with band leader, Byron Lee, were instrumental in developing an indigenous Soca industry. On one extraordinary occasion, Prince Jazzbo agreed to deejay over some Trinidadian style rhythms for the LP Soca Rockers (Dynamic, 1981), an act he later came to profoundly regret, claiming that the intent of the LP was to “soak the rockers”, or to take the power out of reggae music.

“When I do those songs, I was illiterate to those kind of things. I wasn’t educated as much as now. If it was now, I would never, never do stuff like that. For me, it’s not about sounding good. It’s about the music. It’s about the lyrics. How can I want to soak reggae? I need to uplift reggae. That man who write the lyrics is a ‘diplomat’ who is working for Babylon, who wants to keep the music down. So, he sees me is a soldier who is keeping up the music, who is illiterate towards what is going on, and he use me. There should be a court to send him to prison for that. He should be helping me uplift the music instead of wanting me to keep the music down. But that only makes me work harder once I understand what it’s all about, work harder towards uplifting the music”.

** Later recorded for King Jammy
went on a tour. Jimmy Haldaine recalled, “We went to England with Peter Metro and Josie Wales. We actually spend more time than we supposed to spend too. We went there in November and we didn’t come back until the following year. While we were there, the sound was definitely off the road [in Jamaica].” When they came back, they optimistically resumed Wednesday night session in their Woodford Park home base. But Selector Snack Jack remained abroad having fallen in love. He was replaced by Metro’s friend Sky Juice, formerly a dancer and a selector for Black Zodiac and a sound named Soul Town. At the dance called ‘The Return of Metro Media’, held at Standpipe, Sky Juice debuted as the new selector, a position he still holds today.

Sadly, some of Peter Metro’s dreams died when, “in the prime of my career, I lost my Visa to go to the U.S.” He wanted badly to make the money to build a little basic school for the youth in his community. He could still go to Europe, and when he went to England he came back with soccer balls and boots for the Arnett Gardens Football league.

Metromedia never recovered the top spot. As usual, other sounds had moved into the territory and the crown was passed on yet again. But they never gave up. Today, Metromedia, after over 30 years going strong, still travels widely overseas with Sky Juice and owner Jimmy Haldaine who is still content to be leading the sound. “We’ve been playing for a while, but we’re still around. We are not going anywhere.” **

* one Moore Street in Woodford Park, Allman Town

** Jamaican Gleaner, ‘Metro’ plays year to year, Sunday, November 11, 2007
1. For example, his instructional real life tale about a youth mixed up in politics:

(spoken intro) This one dedicated to all the youth them who end up ina politics business.

I come fe teach the youth them:

Due to political folly,

Certain youth can’t go in a certain territory
Some can’t go a Dunkirk, some can’t go Tel Aviv
Some can’t go a Jungle or TG
You have some politicians from some different party
Some from PNP and some from JLP
And them go in certain area with them bag of money
Encouraging youth to commit fuckery
Which might cause a youth to reach a GP
From the Kingston Morgue to the cemetery
Dovecot, Maypen or Calvary
Me know this youth a name Petrol Jelly
Him always tell me how him fulla stylee
It was about in the month of March 1983
When he saw this youth man walking very gently
Accused the youth of voting for a certain party
He give the youth three shot out of a 44 Maggee
Which cause the fellow, lord, to die instantly
Petro Jelly went to Carib to watch a movie
Was cornered by some police from CIB
Them shoot out him heart and fi him kidney
When Petrol Jelly die he was just twenty
He left him baby mother with “bout three pickney
So, due to political folly
Certain youth can’t go in a certain territory…..”

(note: Dunkirk, Tel Aviv etc are names of political garrison communities in Kingston.
GP refers to General Penitentiary. Forty four maggee refers to a Magnum semi
automatic rifle. Dovecot, Maypen and Calvary are cemeteries)

Despite coming from a solidly socialist neighborhood, he remained flexible and bold enough to entertain the crowds from nearby JLP turf with rousing rounds of militant laborite lyrics

This a the Laborite connection:

nine mile man connected to eight mile man
eight mile man hen connected to seven mile man
seven mile man connected to Shooterville, man
Shooterville man connected to back bush man
Backbush man connected to Southee
Southee connected to Lan(?) Man
Lan (?) man connected to Amharic man
Amharic man connected to Garden man
What about TG man?

I’m gonna tell you how the youth at Garden stay….
The youth down a TG have a new kinds ways
The way how them bad, them chuck them hat pon them ears.
Before a youth stand up make a boy take him life,
Him get an old car and then block the road
And lay down pon him belly like a damn poll cat
A little after that the youth a fire pure shot
Boom whadat! Boom whadat!
A so him lick two shot
(a great swell of cries of Forward! From the crowd)

Guess who bury me say down a TG
Now, the general they call Claudie….
The girls nowadays, them a real sassyso
If you love Jim Brown say YO! YO! YO! YO!
In 1985, when Kilimanjaro withdrew from Shock of the Century, the four sound clash, the promoter, police officer Isaiah Laing had to hustle to find a forth sound to compete against Jammys, Youth Promotion and Black Scorpio. The sound had to be solid, well known and be performing on an international level. Arrows the Ambassador fit the bill. The only sound from the east to appear that night, Arrows had been around for two decades and had a reputation for good sound quality, good selection and hardworking deejays.

In the early days of reggae, western Kingston was overflowing with music. The eastern side had a hard time keeping up. Everything was happening in the west. But, the east still had one musical endeavor to boast of – Arrows International.

Arrows International Hi Fi was formed in 1965, as owner Sonny writes, “by three adventurous and talented brothers born and raised at 19 West Avenue, Newton Square, Kingston 16 Jamaica. The three kids were Ivan (Sonny) Linton, Phillip (Bilbo) Linton and Robert (RO) Johnson.”

Starting out with a homemade ensemble consisting of sardine box cases with eight inch speakers, an amplifier built by Robert from a Grundig radio and a Gerard turntable, the Linton brothers soon upgraded to a tube amp and plywood boxes. The sound was named after Robert, the original builder, who was commonly called by his first two initials, R.O. which sometimes came out as ‘arrow’. Their first records were obtained by the Linton’s older sister. Sonny recalls, “She was working with the family’s business- that’s Linton’s Hardware at 48 Luke Lane, downtown Kingston. So, she had an income. Margery had connections with this friend of hers named Winston Sterling from Joe Gibbs records. He was the sales guy. So, all of the new songs, he would put them aside and save it for her and she would pay him every Friday that she gets paid. So that’s the way we start to make our collection.”

Prince Patrick

In the ’60s, Arrows was playing reggae as well as soul at parties and weddings as a small ‘disco for hire’ operation. Then, in 1972, they struck gold. Jackie Birch, aka Prince Patrick, decided to move to Canada and he passed on his entire collection of dubplates to the sound.

“At that time, you didn’t have specials with the name of the sound. It was just the rhythm of the different songs,” Sonny explains. “Prince Patrick had the dubs for most of Coxsone’s hits, like the Heptones, Horace Andy, Delroy Wilson. All the hits that came out of Studio One, he had the raw rub-a-dub
for them. And those were expensive at the time. It was a bargain to get all those dubs. We get something like about 30 or 40 dubs from Prince Patrick and that was something that we did not have initially cause in the ’60s, we were just collecting 45s, vinyl records. And we used to play soul, which is R&B. Cause, at the time, in the ‘60s, we came from ‘Arrows Disco’ - that’s our first name. In the discotheque era, sounds play soul and funk. Back then, we were playing songs like Junior Walker and the All Stars, Impressions- ‘Around the campfire light’.

Getting hold of Patrick’s dubplate collection changed everything. “We started catering to the dancehall crowd. We changed the name from Arrows Disco to Arrows Hi Fi. I took it from there and started going to Studio One myself and cutting some more dub. I went to Tubby’s, started cutting dub and a lot of producers started giving me their songs to play on dubplate. So that is how we came to dominate the music industry by the type of songs that we were playing. Come to think of it, we were the only sound out of eastern Kingston to be catering to dancehall.”

The first dance they played as a ‘Hi Fi’ was promoted by Bobby “El Bebo” Phillips at a lawn on Milk Avenue in Rollington Town. “One of the biggest songs that we got from [Patrick] was done by the Heptones – ‘The Best Things in Life’.” Whenever we played that song, you would have to play it three or four times because it was so loved by the people. You couldn’t play it one time and they are satisfied. When I got that song, that springboard me to the next level. Whenever I play, I got Patrick’s crowd following our sound. Whenever they come, they want to hear ‘The Best Things in Life’. Some people where even saying that our sound was Patrick’s sound. So, you see the Patrick to Arrows era transition.”

**CRUTCHES**

Arrows also got something from Patrick beside dubplates. Arrows inherited his deejay Crutches (Delroy Jones). Crutches was a true Eastman, born and raised in the Mountainview area. “Between Derrick Lane and Sanders Lane, I lived there for most of my life. I started moving around some artists. Some singers, like the Melodians was living a couple of blocks from my house, and the Gaylads used to come around. Ken Boothe and we used to sit and smoke together and things.”

When a young Crutches joined the original Prince Patrick sound, it was still called Raggatone, but earned the new title after winning a clash. “Patrick is a master,” Crutches recalls, “Trust me, Patrick is a master. A lot of songs that hit the chart was not known until that sound Prince Patrick started to play it. There was a tune by the Wailing Soul named ‘Back Out’. I can give Patrick credit for that song. And there’s a lot of other songs like Aquarius that

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* Gypsy Woman by The Impressions, 1961, ABC- Paramount label
** On the Studio One LP Fattie Fattie
Leroy Heptone had done – enough people don’t even know of that song. Ina him time, Patrick run the whole of east Kingston. Him is more a technically person. Him might not have the weight of a big sound, but him have quality. And in those years, there were very few persons who do have it.”

Football and music were common hobbies in Jamaica. When young men, like Crutches, weren’t involved in one, they were busy doing the other. “I used to play major league same time I’m playing sound. I used to go by Bob Marley every Sunday, up by Hope Road. I had a bike. And I would play sound Saturday night. And no matter where we play, me ride just cause me want to go up a Bob Marley, play ball a morning time. After I been playing sound all night, till four or five o’clock, Sunday you go there, food just cook, man play ball. Man would play for a half pound of herb. The looser smokes still, but we just play for a half pound of herb. And we just have a nice day. It was just fun time.”

All this time, Crutches was going to high school. He had two more years to go when he dropped out to go full time into the music. “I did my first tune just after I left senior school and went to high school. I stayed in high school two years still playing sound, stop going to school.” ‘Bum Ball Chapter II’ [Smash], ‘Donkey Skank’ [Puzzle], ‘Double Attack’ [Puzzle], were a few of his other popular records. On many records, he is listed as Delroy Jones, rather than Crutches. His ‘Harbourview Rock’ (Studio Shack, 1974) went to number 13 on the charts. He also appears on Clive Chin’s LP with Augustus Pablo, and he introduced the 45 ‘Musical Hop’ (Errol T) with the famous line, “Moses struck musical rod and bring water, I stuck the musical amp and bring forth scorcher”. He is most well known for his deejay version of Errol Dunkley’s ‘OK Fred’.

**PUDDY ROOTS**

Soon after Delroy, Arrows was joined by Puddy Roots who became the second deejay. Puddy lived in the east, and had grown up hearing Arrows play. “Arrows Hifi [headquarters was] alongside the wall where we go to school. So, every time them playing them music, I always go up to the school playing field and listening. And I ask myself, could I get a chance to go and deejay- cause I was a deejay before I start to sing. I would climb up on the wall and look over the sound yard. One day they say, ‘Come around West Avenue’ - that is 19 West Avenue. So, I went there and they play some rhythm and I start to

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* Contrary to his name, Crutches (in Jamaican slang Crutches refers to the crotch) was never a slack deejay. He came by the moniker playing soccer as a youth. “At one point, I was playing football - cause I used to play for Vauxhall - and there was no pants or no shorts that the crutches -I had to sew mine, almost every day. It was just a habit - my pants crutches always burst. I was playing against a side named Holy Trinity and a boy kick a ball and I making a slide tackle and the whole of we crutches burst and the whole of the school----- you understand? I get the name from that, but it was one of my favorite games. *
Puddy began by following Crutches’ model. “Crutches come from Brace Street, from Paradise Street down Windward Road. He’s a good deejay. I used to idolize him work, and it’s through him why I was taking set in the deejay world. Coming like he’s the manager for me, like showing me how to ride certain rhythms.”

The Linton brothers and the two deejays took turns in a selector and deejay tag team fashion. “So, it’s like, Crutches and Phillip usually team up, and the one who wear the glasses, Sonny, it was me and him team up. So it’s like a segment. Me and Sonny play a segment, and Bill [Phillip] and Crutches play [the next] segment. They select the music and we do the talking. So we [each] have a partner working together.”

**Arrows 1980**

After seeing the sound through its development in the ’70s, Sonny took himself out of the picture temporarily. In 1980, Sonny left for Miami to continue his studies and Phillip (Bill) remained in Jamaica in charge of the sound. Philip decided to bring in someone new to handle the selecting. His choice was a youth named Zaggaloo who had been stringing up the set and playing the music in the early part of the dance.

Zaggaloo remembers how he first came to fall under the spell of Arrows Hifi. “I [was] with a few friends out by Newton Square. We used to play soccer – football we call it – on the road, and we got to know everybody, cause they would pick up sides, or this road played that road, and we all become one big friend. One day we were there playing and we heard some music and I said, ‘What’s that?’ And they said, its Arrows [Hifi] playing a ‘serenade’. And I said, ‘Arrows? I didn’t know they lived in the area’. So, I stopped playing soccer right away and I asked if I could go I there where they were playing. The Serenade was an impromptu session played in the home base to test out equipment or the listen to new dubplates. “They do it just to make sure, like if they have a dance in a week, or within a couple of days, they would just take out the boxes, clean up the amps. They get the tunes organized. They don’t have a specific time when they do it. They [the Linton brothers] would come home [from school] and they would say, ‘Arrows serenade is this evening.’”

From that day on, Zaggaloo never missed a Serenade. “Until eventually, one day, we were playing and I was there in the music room, just looking around – I started to know the songs cause I started to go to one and two dance – and he [Bill] ask me if I wanted to play while he go in the house and do something. That’s how I started to get involved with Arrows. I started at serenade, playing a couple of musics there.”

Selecting was clearly in his blood. “My father was a big music fan, mostly of jazz and ska music and he used to play every Sunday – a home component set – just in the home and sometimes he had a few friends come over. As a small kid I grew up at 13 North Street, that’s where they call it Progressive
Hall. They used to keep big dance around the back every Friday and Saturday in the ‘50s, early ‘60s. So, I grow up there hearing music almost every weekend. They used big boxes—they were very tall, some of them maybe about 14’. Those boxes were 14’ tall and very wide. My father had some speakers they were going to throw away. And a friend of his had an old changer. It didn’t play so good but I did what I could. I got it going and I just set up a little thing on the veranda and start playing music. That’s part of where my love for music came.”

Around 1980, the sound personnel began to change. Zaggaloo recalls, “Puddy was playing the set and we had a couple of dances in Yallas. Crutches didn’t show up and there was this little friend of ours in the area that we grew up with – Boney we used to call him. His real name was Michael Bowen. But we call him Boney, Jah Bones. He was flowing with lyrics. There was a couple of dance we keep in Yallas and Seaforth where it was him, Puddy and they brought in Captain Sinbad. That’s when Captain Sinbad come in and started to play the sound. He stayed for around three years. That’s how we got to know Little John. We brought in Little John a couple of nights to come play the sound. Also, this kid named Phantom. There was a couple more come from round a Waltham Park area.”

The two main deejays, Liberty and Shamba, didn’t emerge for a couple more years. “When I started playing the sound more full time, about ‘82, they brought in Liberty to start play the sound. Capt. Sinbad, he was doing more production. That was the time he went to England and he was back and forth. He started doing record producing so he wasn’t available most of the time. We had a meeting…a friend who had heard Gemini knew about Liberty and Buru Banton. So we drove to Barbican and talk to [Liberty] and see if he would like to come and play the sound.

“The first time he played the sound it was somewhere in Franklyn Town. He came and worked the sound about two nights of the following week, we played out ina Yallas. That’s how we got to know Shacka Shamba. We went out to the dance the night. Liberty didn’t come with the set the same time. He was a bit late. Shacka Shamba and a few more deejays were there. When I string up and started playing, those fellows started holding the mic and Shamba came in and started talking early. Most of us got so intrigued with the style of how he talked. He was more of a patois, we call it country style. He had a deep patois.

“The night he deejayed with Liberty and we thought they sounded really good. After the dance, Bill spoke to him and asked if he would like to come on the sound. He was really excited and he said ‘Yes’ and they told him when was the next dance – at Prison Oval.”

By this time, Crutches had left the sound and new deejays were coming on board. Hugo Brown, Zu Zu, Nigger Charlie, Joe Mannix, Mello Ranks, Chicken Chest, Bennie Man, Cutty Ranks and Professor Nuts all became regulars. But the stars were Shamba and Liberty. They made a good combina-
tion, like Cat and B. Shamba had a tone of voice a bit like Early B, and he could fling revival styles over Shank I Shek. Together, Shamba and Liberty fronted the sound throughout the ’80s.

In 1990, Phillip opened a 24 track digital recording studio on Windward Road, Kingston, the east’s first recording facility. The Arrows label featured songs like ‘Move Off’ by Cutty Ranks, ‘Bigger Boss’ by Chicken Chest, Michael Buckley’s ‘New World’ and Leroy Gibbon’s breakthrough hit, ‘What’s the Name of the Sound’. The east was finally holding its own.

Then, on the morning of March 4th, 2004, just as he was opening the gate to go into his business, Phillip Linton was shot and killed. A report in the Jamaica Observer discloses, “[The killer] waited patiently inside a guard house at Arrows Recording Studio on Windward Road. Several residents of McKintyre Villa in East Kingston recalled seeing him ‘lurking’, there yesterday morning. They distinctly remembered that he wore a blue shirt and black pants, perhaps the kind worn by security guards. But he was no security guard. As the hands of the clock scraped past 9:15 am, he apparently caught sight of his intended victim, 51 year-old Phillip “Bill” Linton, the owner of the recording studio.” *

Shorty after, Phillip’s his wife, Rose took over the business. The studio is still active and has released hits like Morgan Heritage’s ‘She’s Still Loving Me’ and the popular ‘Under Attack’ rhythm. Brother Sonny took the sound up to Miami and where he still plays out for special occasions. Zaggaloo now moves between Jamaica and Manhattan where he works for an insurance company. But, when he has time, he still listens to the old music he loves.

* Record studio operator shot dead, KARYL WALKER, Jamaican Observer, Friday, March 05, 2004
The Ladies

“People no like women deejays then. You have fe work hard to be a woman deejay.”

(MALE) DEEJAY LORD SASSAFRASS

The numbers tell a dramatic story about gender relations in Jamaica. A UN study, in 2000, stated that, “Eighty percent of adult Jamaicans have never been married, 87% of the children are born to single mothers, and 38% of the households are female-headed.”

Amnesty International published a report on sexual violence against women and girls in Jamaica in which they examine the roots, and the results, of gender discrimination, observing, “Discrimination starts early in a girl’s life. Girls in poor families are often expected to eat less in comparison to their male siblings, and to give up school – or to find the money for their own fees if families are unable to provide for them.” They further lament that, “Women’s voices are silenced – not only by the discrimination and violence they face, but also by the failure of the state to protect them, investigate abuses and punish perpetrators.”

The way Jamaican society was structured, women were under attack in pervasive, and largely accepted, ways. This came out clearly in the deejay lyrics of the ’80s in which women were often called pejorative names like tegereg, pancoot, or credel. Yet, despite the derision, women were expected to hold the community together. Society was built around a women’s role as both the home maker and principle support. It was a woman’s job to maintain the family unit, financially and emotionally. Men often didn’t live permanently with the children’s mother and were free to roam.

In fact, men were taught that they must stay clear of domestic entanglement for fear of losing their liberty. In Admiral Tibet’s ‘Woman is a Trouble to her Man’, the man complains “Woman is a trouble to her man when Friday evening come. All weh de pon dem she mind is a bag of lump sum.” In other words, if a man were to return to his family after the work week, the woman would just be pressuring him to give her his ‘hard earned money’.


** Sexual violence against women and girls in Jamaica: “Just a Little Sex”, amnestyusa.org
Despite female deejays finally beginning to express their anger in the ‘80s, men didn’t seem to understand why women were complaining. Shabba Ranks genuinely felt that he was defending women with the lyrics in his song, Pay Down Pon It, released in 1990, in which he advocates making regular gifts of cash to your partner the same way you would ‘pay down’ a sum of money towards a refrigerator or an air conditioner. “Well, the girls are crying you know,” he explained at the time. “A girl would be living in a house with a man and she would wash the clothes and she would do all the things that was necessary to let him look cris’ and sharp and he wouldn’t give her the dollars. He would just destroy or take from her instead of giving to her. Well, I do not respect nor support it if a man doesn’t give his girl something.

“It’s generally said that you are ‘paying down’ on a house or a car. But whenever you give money to your special [girl], and she get herself up to date, that’s simply paying down.” In other words, keeping cash flowing to your girl was an investment with a tangible return. The girl, according to his theory, would go out and buy nice clothes to get herself ‘up to date’ and the man insured his continued comfort with no service disruptions. Despite the fact that he reduced the interaction to a commercial transaction, Shabba was at least advocating that men recognize their financial responsibility in a relationship.

Lazy Body

In 1985, Echo Minott created a controversy when Black Scorpio released his 45, ‘Lazy Body’.

Lazy body, me no want no lazy body
Any girl me love have fe physically**
Wake up in the morning, very early
Round the table prepare breakfast for me
Twelve o clock, lunch on the spot
Three o clock, that a dinner
Seven o’clock, that a supper
Me say, Lazy Body, me no wan’ no lazy body
Can’t take the girl weh a sleep pon me
Can’t take the girl weh have dropsy

Barry G called Echo down to his radio program to give him a chance to explain himself amid the charges of misogyny from listeners. But the ensuing conversation made it clear that Echo really meant what he said.

“Well, take for instance, you have some girls like to sleep in bed and love man to do everything. They don’t love to wake up before twelve o’clock and make the sun ketch them. You know, from a woman love a man, supposed to

* Interview with Dave Kingston on CKLN Radio, 1990
** She has to be physically active
do everything to comfort him. That’s why my girl is very physically – cooking breakfast for me.”

Barry G asked, “That’s not implying that you won’t get up one morning and just allow her to stay there and you do the turns?” Echo didn’t like that idea. He responded, “No, not directly, you know. But, most girls don’t do nothing at all.”

In 1986, Echo Minott was back at it again, with yet another hit song, ‘What the Hell the Police Can Do,’ with which he, unintentionally, ignited another controversy. In an introduction, spoken in a slightly twangy Trinidadian accent, he recounts:

Me and my girl was fighting,
and I accidentally tump her in her face
and her face black and blue
and she run go to the police station
fe go tell the police fe true…
But, what the hell the police can do?

It was an entirely legitimate question. What could the police do in an all too familiar case of domestic violence in Jamaica? Sung in a lilting calypso style, the song first readily engaged a community accustomed to fearing authority. “I do that song in 1986 for King Jammys. The fastest song to go to number one in 1986,” Echo Minott remembers. “It enter the top 30 chart at number nine and go straight to one the next week. Then the whole Jamaica, it was like everybody was singing ‘what police can do?’ Then Echo’s song got knocked off the air. The ban was placed because of the domestic violence theme. But Echo still didn’t see the problem and defends his actions, claiming he never intended to hit his girl. “It was like that but I say ‘I accidentally’- I didn’t mean it. They change it around and make it look like – you know…”

As late as 1987, Gem Meyers had a huge hit with her song, ‘One Man Woman’. The chorus asks:

Hold up your hand is you a one- man woman
Wave your hand if you love one man
Hold up your hand if he treats you right
Hold up your hand if he comes home at night

A man who would “come home at night” was still a rare and coveted item. Having a male around the house was something for a woman to boast about. The ideal, for women, was to stick to your man no matter how badly he behaved and maybe, by being so self sacrificing, you could get him to take some responsibility.

In such an atmosphere, it was naturally hard for women to be taken seriously as sound system personnel. Females were kept firmly on the outskirts
of the dancehall scene. But that didn’t mean they weren’t trying to break in.

One of the welcome changes in dancehall in the ‘80s was the gradual appearance of more women at the microphone. Formerly, women hadn’t received much respect in the dancehall world. This unwritten prohibition began to loosen significantly around the mid ‘80s when a handful of sounds started to carry female deejays. Black Scorpio had Shelly Thunder first, and then Lady G who, although never appearing with the same frequency as General Trees, was present for big clashes and often traveled with the sound. Sister Maureen sometimes appeared with Jammy’s in 1986 and ‘87, and she managed to cut a few good tunes motivated by her outrage at the way women were represented in the dancehall. Sister Carol, in New York, appeared with Jah Life’s HiFi, and was making major inroads with her records as the solitary roots deejay among the women. But the numbers were small and scattered throughout the decade. The process of integrating females into dancehall was lagging way behind other changes in the music.

**FIRST WAVE: THE PIONEER, LADY ANNE**

Like Sister Nancy, Lady Ann started hanging around the dancehall in the ‘70s. She didn’t set out to be a trailblazer. She was just doing what came naturally, growing up in Kingston 13 where it seemed like every other person was in the music business.

A dedicated tom-boy, Ann would sneak out of her house to see VJ the Dubmaster and Papa Roots with her pal, future deejay Clint Eastwood. Later, she would do the circuit with her best friends Toyan and Little John, going to sounds like King Pruff (which was renamed Ribbit after the popular dancehall vocalization) and Romantic. By the time she was 16, she was performing occasionally on sounds like Roots Unlimited with Josie Wales and Stereophonic with General Echo.

“When I start, to be honest, they didn’t really have no woman deejay then. Further on then I start to hear Kojak and Liza, Althea and Dona. There wasn’t no other females when I started.” Althea and Dona had a huge hit, ‘Uptown Top Ranking’ (Joe Gibbs 1978), which rose to number four on the UK Singles Chart. But Althea and Dona were not dancehall deejays. Only Liza was on the scene at sessions occasionally, along with her male recording partner, Kojak. There was another woman named Sister Charm who kept to the Waltham Park area, but no strong role models for Ann to follow.

Lady Anne’s problems started when she began recording. ‘Shine Eye Boy’ (Roots Tradition, 1980), a response to Barrington Levy’s hit for Junjo and Jah Life, ‘Shine Eye Girl’, landed her in trouble with Junjo. “The song was getting a lot of attention, a lot of airplay. It was really doing good in England. Junjo was in England with Barrington and heard the song playing and was upset, so he wanted to hurt me. At the time ‘Shine Eye Girl’ did release and him never really want nothing to take away the attention from his artist. He was mad! He buy a cow foot and say he was going to lick out all my teeth. So, I
couldn't go back in the dancehall 'ca I had to be hiding – running and hiding from Junjo. I couldn't let him ketch me and lick out all my teeth. Me and John and Toyan in the dance and they always watching the gate for me to tell me if Junjo coming.”

In the time she remained at home and away from the dance, she had her first baby. But, after hiding and allowing her career to slip for too long, Ann got frustrated. “After Junjo start to hunt me, that make me stop working. If he had just allow me, make me continue, I probably wouldn't have even got pregnant, because I would have focus more on the music. But after he start to hunt me, that's when I start to hide away and that's how I end up get pregnant. I turned 20 then.”

Producer Leon Symoie began to encourage Anne to go back into music and she went with Leon to the studio where they recorded “about 30-odd songs.” One of the tunes, ‘Satta’, enjoyed some success. Her neighbors, The Mighty Diamonds, heard it and carried her to Joe Gibbs Studio to meet Rocky, Joe’s son, who took her on and recorded the ‘Informer’ 45 and album, her greatest success of the period.

Ann began going to dances and performing again, but she always traveled with company. Even after Junjo had cooled off, it still wasn't safe for women to be out at dances late into the night. She started to walk with the Ringcraft Posse consisting of deejay Trinity, engineer Blackbeard, and singer Al Campbell.

“Trust me, not many women wanted to go in the dance and deejay. If you live in certain neighborhood and you go to the dance, when you are coming back you might get rape. The only time I go to the dance is when Trinity, Al Campbell and Blackbeard come get me and me know them a go drop me right back a me gate and me can run go inside of me house. So, many times I had to run to prevent get rape, or beat up, when some guys want to beat you up to take you away.”

The tomboys, and the women with strong male backing, had the best luck negotiating time in the dance. Lady Ann used to be called “half a man” by her male friends and was accepted into many all male groupings. “Me and Tristan were close friends. Me and Little John and Toyan was good friends. Every time you see John and Toyan, you see me. And if you don’t see me with John and Toyan, you would see me with Peter Ranking and General Lucky. Michigan and Smiley – all of them. They used to boost me a lot.”

To her credit, Ann was the first female to win Best Deejay of the Year from Rockers International, and she was the only female deejay to record for Coxson Dodd.*

In 1983, Ann traveled to New York. Like many others, she never intended

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* The material was never completed or released because of a person problem that arose when Mr. Dodd allowed himself to be swayed by jealous performers who set it up to look as though she had stolen something from the studio.
to stay but she got pregnant with a second baby and ended up remaining for the sake of the kids. Although she wanted badly to go back home, she knew the kids would have a better, safer future abroad, so she stayed and eventually returned to recording. Now, with five children ranging in age from nine to 28, she has a new album, *Bad Girl ina Dance* and a single out with Teddy Brown.

**SECOND WAVE: JUNIE RANKS & THE COUNTERACTION STYLE**

Firmly in the background for most of the early dancehall years, women only began to make noticeable headway in 1987. This easing up began with a trio of ladies who proved that women could record deejay hits, Lady Junie, Junie Ranks and Sister Charmaine. With few role models to learn from, women were pretty much on their own in the dancehall field. They remained loosely connected to certain sound systems as performers, but were never the selector, operator, or owner.

One of the ways female deejays increased their credibility was through recording. Once they had a hit record, people were more accepting of them in a dance. And 1987 brought a wave of female deejay releases in which women took the opportunity to respond to the men, using the ‘counteraction’ format in which they would take a popular song by a male deejay and answer it over the same rhythm but from a female perspective.*

“That’s what really put [female deejays] out there right now. As soon as you come with a song that somebody has done already, and you say, ‘NO’, it will go out there,” Explained Junie Ranks. Like when Echo Minott did ‘What the Hell the Police Can Do’ and Lady Junie come back with ‘Tell You What Police Can Do’. When Admiral Bailey came up with ‘Gi’ Me Punany’, Junie Ranks just replied, ‘Gimme the Buddy’ while Lady Junie challenged him with ‘Nah Get Punany’. Whatever the men said, in the late ‘80s, the women had a response, and dance fans loved the action.

When Junie Evans was still a school girl of 14 or 15, she used to wait until her mother was sleeping and then sneak out of the house and head for the local community centre where they often held stage shows and sound system dances.

“They might be having a concert at the community centre and they would come and ask my mom, ‘Can Junie come, because we want her to perform,’ and stuff, and my mom would say, ‘No, she’s not a boy’. In those days, not a lot of women [were] in the business like now. But, even though she told them that I couldn’t go, before everybody go to bed, I would take my clothes and put it outside on the line and as soon as everybody fall asleep, I would take my own little time and open that back door, put on my clothes outside and run away to the concert.”

* As the Soul Sisters (with Nora Dean) had answered Prince Buster’s Wreck a Pum Pum with Wreck a Buddy in 1969, one of several examples of female artists talking back to the men.
The center was only a couple of blocks from the house. One night Junie was over there performing and the wind must have been traveling in the direction of her house. Her mother heard her and came tearing over to the center. "I was there performing at the time. I used to have a whole bunch of little friends that used to hang out with me at that time, and I heard some of my friends say, 'Junie, your mom is here!' When I heard them, I dropped the microphone and I started to run, but my mom run and she catch me. It was like a drama. My mom take her shoes and believe me, she give it to me right in that crowd. I get up and I run home and, let me tell you, not even that could stop me. I would still sneak out and do music."

But finding a place that would allow her to deejay wasn’t as easy. "Really and truly, it’s a male dominated field and it’s very hard", Junie reflects. When a woman went out to a dance and tried to get a talk on the mic, she was ignored. "You would go to a dance and probably you would want to take the mic, you would have to stand up till you would be forced to say, 'Give me the mic'. Cause all the men would be just like you’re not there. Like you’re invisible. Cause it’s not a woman thing." It took all a woman’s courage to go right up to the men and say, "I need a talk off of the mic."

Once a woman got a turn at the microphone centre, the best strategy was to try, like Lady Ann, to be “half a man”. It helped to have a more masculine voice. "If you listen to how I deejay, my voice is not like a light voice. And when I come into it first, I try to sound like a man, cause I tell myself, this is a man’s field. So, if I want to deejay, I have to deejay like a man. I always try to have that hoarseness in my voice like a man. If you deejay like a woman, it’s not gonna last."

When Junie was 15, her mother ran away and Junie was left with brothers and sisters to support. Still living in Old Harbour, she earned money performing on local sounds ET and Techniques (not related to the label of the same name) in the evenings, often staying out until daybreak and falling asleep in school the next day.

But Junie wanted to record. So, she took a bus from Old Harbour bound for Kingston and went straight to Chancerly Lane to look for Mr. Riley in his Techniques Record Shack. She had seen the address on her mother’s copy of Sister Nancy’s 45, ‘One Two’, a song that she practiced everyday and used when she performed in concerts. When she arrived, ‘Snake’ (Riley’s nephew Tony) and a female employee were there. "I went up to them and I said, ‘I’m looking for Mr. Riley. I’m a deejay and I want to make music.’ And they sort of laughed, because them time, they didn’t have no female deejay away from Nancy. Mr. Riley wasn’t there, so they try to make fun of me.”

But Mr. Riley, who was doing well with Sister Nancy, was happy to take on a second female. So he offered to take her to the studio that night when Nancy recorded the rest of the songs on her One Two LP. He told her to go home and come back that evening. But as she couldn’t take a bus all the way back to Old Harbour that day, she sat on a box in the corner until night fell.
When the shop closed, Junie saw Nancy come. “That’s the first time I met Nancy. And when she came, Mr. Riley said to her, this is Junie Ranks. She’s from Old Harbour and we gonna take her to the studio and record her tonight’. Nancy was like, ‘Oh please!’ She never say that in words to me but, you know, you see somebody come and feel like that’s a threat to you now. If you talk to Nancy, she will tell you all of that. We just laugh.”

They all went to Channel One and Junie was placed in the big voicing room with the earphones on and the air conditioner blasting, getting progressively more nervous by the minute. The first take was a disaster. “I was all over the rhythm”. Nancy was in the control room with the engineer, trying to tell her, through the glass, to get back on key. Finally, with enough coaching, she recorded the final take of her first 45.

But when it came time to go home, Mr. Riley had to explain that there weren’t any buses going back to Old Harbour that time of night. Junie had nowhere to go, until Nancy offered to let her sleep at her house. Nancy was living with deejay Bruk Back at the time, and the two were sharing the one bed in the house. “So, she told me I could sleep at the end of the bed. But the mattress, it was like go down in a hole. So I lay down and I hold on to the bed. The whole time I hold onto the bed, cause if I let it go, I might just roll down on both of them.”

Junie’s first recording was ‘Counteraction’, followed by a series of 45s including ‘Gimme Di Buddy’, ‘Cry Fe Me Boops’, ‘Big and Ready’, ‘Bruk Pocket Man’, ‘Tell Them’, and ‘Shirley Duppy’. Now that Junie had become part of the Techniques crew, alongside artists like Nancy, Supercat, Johnny P, Admiral Tibet and Red Dragon, she was taken care of. “I was just fortunate to be on Techniques label so that anything I did at that time, I never go wrong, cause I was on a big label.” Mr. Riley actively promoted his artists and Junie eventually was able to branch out and work with other labels including Kangol, Penthouse and King Tubby’s labels, Taurus and Firehouse.

**THIRD WAVE: WOMEN IN THEIR OWN WRITE – LADY G**

Although female deejays’ big breakthrough came in the mid eighties, the dancehall life still wasn’t as easy for a woman. Women artists struggled on many fronts. Pregnancy and child bearing, for example, put many a career on hold. Sexual harassment appeared in the Jamaican recording industry much as it did in other parts of Jamaica, in a society that gave men power over reproductive choices but with little of the responsibility.

Janice Fyffe (Lady G) had a few things to say to the men, and she said them in many popular recordings. To the Casanovas looking to use women, Lady G said, ‘Breeze Off!’ “It’s just a little female harassment thing,” She explained. “Me just tell the man them fe ease off.”

No bother come ya with you gally-gally trend
Just ease off, breeze off
Through you no get me, you wan’ look me friend,
Just ease off, breeze off
Every night you gone a show and watch Go-Go
Lick your lip and a lust off a cho cho*
In case you never know, me a no yo-yo
You mustn’t think you can come touch and let go, so

With one foot in each decade, Lady G bridged the transition from the pioneers to the fiercely independent female deejays of the ‘90s who spoke their minds without hesitation.

As a teenager, Lady G used to watch her active mother go to dances, and then sneak out after she left. Her big break came at an Independence Day street dance that the government used to put on every year in Spanish Town where she grew up. The promoters, “two guys they call Daddy Meeky - Big Meeky and Little Meeky,” actually wanted a female deejay to balance the overabundance of men in the lineup. Lady G was hired for the show and deejayed about the current polka dot fashion trend. The crowd responded well, and the Meekys liked her performance, so they took her to Black Scorpio in Drewsland and introduced her to Jack who invited her to join their Thursday night sessions at the headquarters.

There, she began working beside masters like Sassafrass and General Trees. But, the ladies on staff weren’t invited to the big events yet. “The real heartbroken part for me, the first time the sound system was going away [out of town] to perform and they didn’t bring me. I guess they probably felt not to take me, I don’t know. I didn’t ask the reason why, I just push on through.”

Eventually they did invite her, but Jack had to come to her house and ask her mother’s permission to take Lady G with them. “Going to the area dance, I always reach inside the house before my mother come home. But now, if I left and go to this dance, my mother is gonna really miss me and I’m gonna be absent from home and I couldn’t really afford that. So, I ask [Jack] Scorpio to come and ask my mother, ‘Don’t worry, we a go take care of your daughter’, and stuff like that. So, that’s how I started going to the real big dances. After that I became a household deejay on Black Scorpio sound.”

Jack and Trees really looked out for Lady G and she was happy in the Scorpio family. Jack recorded her first two 45s, ‘Ghetto Rock’ followed by ‘No Bad Mind’, both of which did well although neither was a top seller. Then came the release of “Nuff Respect” for Gussie Clark (1988) on the ‘Rumours’ rhythm.

“Nuff Respect came about in the time when there were a lot of lyrics degrading females. It became an issue and everybody was talking about it on

* Cho cho is slang for female genitals. The word is the Jamaican name for the vegetable, Jerusalem artichoke
the radio saying, ‘What kinda lyrics them, and the females them a jump to it, making noise for it and them don’t realize the males are disrespecting them.’ So, that’s how I come about writing [the song].” With its release, Lady G gained a reputation as an outspoken champion for women.

No carry me name, no spread no rumors, show me nuff respect
Through me live in a the ghetto, show ne nuff respect
I want all of the women, you fe penetrate*
If your man a do wrong, that a you no fe tolerate
Just live independent, get yourself up to date
Change your life style, make your future so bright

Lady G was doing well as a deejay with a few hits and a growing reputation. Then she teamed up with long time buddy and co-worker, top ranking deejay Papa San. After working with Scorpio, she had moved on to Creation Sound in Spanish Town, where Papa San was the principle deejay. In 1988, the two joined forces and recorded two songs that broke the mold. ‘Legal Rights’ (Techniques) and ‘Round Table Talk’ (Music Works) are almost like skits, a little play within a song looking at male-female relationships. ‘Legal Rights’ takes a tongue-in-cheek approach to the “rights” of each person in a couple, as Lady G and Papa San declare love and then proceed to trade threats of exaggerated violence should the other prove false. (The story ends happily when Lady G, after boasting about her man in New York, admits it’s all a joke.)

‘Round Table Talk’ lampoons marital strife. The story was inspired by real life experiences growing up. “Me and San, we grow up in the ghetto and I mean around the whole family life and everything. I think it was really San’s idea, and both us sit down, and we was like having fun, just joking right in the song. He says something and I just find something to match up. It just comes natural. We had people sitting around us and they were just laughing while we was writing it.”

Papa San was already a master at the comic song and Lady G learned from him that, as she explains, “People want to laugh, people want to be entertained.” Like fellow comic deejay, Professor Nuts, San played it for laughs starting with his hit ‘Animal Party’ (1986 Balck Solidarity). But, eventually, he become a born again Christian and began recording Gospel. In his prime, he was a favorite for his duets with the ladies.

Lady G had to take a break in 1990 after her daughter was born. Despite the inconvenience and temporary setbacks, she never regretted taking the time out as each child came along. Her three children have given her life a new significance and meaning. Working for herself now, with her own G String Productions, Lady G is producing powerful female entertainers such

* understand
as Ce'Cile, Macka Diamond, Lady Saw and Queen Ifrica (as well as some of the top male performers).
Sitting right where Kingston meets the mountains, Papine grew into an area rich in talent, the home of performers like Horace Andy, Major Mackerel, Assassin, Brigadier Jerry, Sister Nancy, singer Anthony Malvo and deejay Tiger, as well as sounds like Emperor Marcus and Black Star.

Tiger, Malvo, Brigadier and Nancy all attended the same school. Malvo and Nancy were in class together. And they went to the same church. Singer Anthony Malvo’s mother was a preacher in that church, just as Brigadier’s father had been before his operation. The church, with its singing and music, was a popular place in the community, especially for budding entertainers. Malvo remembers how packed it would be Sunday morning, “The church was so small, they couldn’t fit inside. They would be standing outside, looking through the window. And through it was a musical thing, everybody was there, testing out their voice, singing and having fun.” There would be a lot of “clapping, stamping feet, getting the spirit – a lot of niceness.”

As the boys got older, they began to transfer this energy and enthusiasm to the dancehall. But, to do that, they had to sneak away from home at night. Malvo, because he had known Brigadier from childhood, used to slip away on Sundays to take in Jah Love.

It wasn’t long before Malvo was performing as a deejay on a small sound on his street in Kentyre, called Music City. But he soon went back to singing because the deejaying hurt his throat. His friends in the area started encouraging him to take the next step up and go for a job with the bigger local sound, Black Star.

Black Star sound was one of the premiere sounds in Kingston from the late ‘70s and throughout much of the ‘80s. Although never the very top sound at any one time, Black Star maintained its solid reputation with tight selection and a host of front line entertainers like Brigadier Jerry, Tiger, Tanto Irie, Earl Cunningham, Bruk Back and Malvo.

The sound was created in the ‘70s by Danny Darlin, aka Smokey Dan, and his brother Yami. Yami built the amplifiers and Danny built the boxes. “Their

* Papine, just to the north of the University of the West Indies, is, what Mel Cooke, of the Jamaican Gleaner, calls “the gateway between the two St Andrews, below Papine is distinctly urban, Hope Road leading to Liguanea, while above the heavily commercialized community it takes on a rural appearance, the greenery quickly becoming more dominant than built-up areas.” Jamaican Gleaner, Sunday, December 12, 2010
sound was a small sound but everything was so clean,” Malvo recalls. “You could hear everything separate.” They played out at a community centre in Elliston Flats where they used to “keep some wild parties.”

“It was Black Star Disco [originally],” recalls Brigadier. “It was a disco sound, cause them people coming like them high society you know. So, you get funky, disco, all type of things.” But times were changing. “The dancehall thing come bruk out now!” Brigadier continues. “So, they say, through the disco thing [fading], why not just go ina the rub-a-dub thing 100%. Cause we have a deejay now, so we have to have more time to play more reggae so other deejay them can emphasize themselves. One of the wickedest sound, me a tell you.”

Malvo joined the sound in 1980. In those days, the sound carried, Bruk Back, Toto Ranking and Danny Dread with Smokey Dan selecting. Brigadier continued to deejay with Jah Love. But, as Black Star was in his area, and run by lifelong friends, he kept up an active association with the sound.

**Tiger**

Tiger came to Black Star in 1985 and completely shook things up. While people in the Papine area were used to the quirky, eccentric little man with the rocket fuel energy, when the sound went out into the country, people were completely confounded by this performance.

“Nobody never see him more than the people who live in our area,” Malvo recalls. “So when we leave go out to different parishes and thing, it was a different thing – people had never seen that type of energy and the type of comedy, so it was fascinating.”

Tiger was different from any entertainer who had ever appeared in Jamaica. To the audience, he looked like he might have walked right off the pages of some children’s comic book. Whether dressed in his Tiger suit, or in a sequined, padded-shoulder gangster ensemble, Tiger, would tear any dancehall down with his spirited deejaying and clowning. Malvo claims, “The deejay style that Tiger take was more humorous. He was a comedian, so he put it into the music.”

Tiger (b. Norman Washington Jackson) started his career working as general help with a band in nearby Mona Heights, hooking up the instruments, going out to pick things up, gradually moving into a singing position. He got the name, Tiger, from his father who was a fast runner and was called Man Tiger in the area. His little son became Boy Tiger, and when he started to perform, Ranking Tiger. When he was young, his parents insisted he learn a trade, “but the music got a hold of me so much, I left the job.”

As a singer, he recorded a handful of early releases including ‘Why Can’t You Leave Dreadlocks Alone’ (Phillip Grant 1977), ‘Knock Three Times’ and ‘Love Line’ (Lloyd Campbell, 1981). But his career was stalled until he joined Black Star Sound in 1984.

Tiger was living in Standpipe where Black Star used to play. Now, more a
deejay than a singer, he had been working local sounds like Inner City Vibes. Malvo recalls. “Tiger was a little comedian in Standpipe. So, when Black Star played in standpipe, Tiger would come and ask for the mic and he sound good, everybody make a lot of noise, so [Black Star] say, ‘OK, come’ – cause him talented – and that’s when him join. Full of fun, and he was just crazy, he do some crazy things.”

While he was corking sessions in the evenings, by day, he retained regular employment, selling records at Aquarius Studio, bagging groceries at the Welcome Supermarket and “holding the gate” at the Kentucky Fried Chicken boardroom on Old Hope Road. “When I was at the gate, I got this call. Black Star sent for me to do a dance in America. And I told Mr. Myers [Mark Myers, his boss] that people wanted for to do some shows and he said, ‘Tiger, it’s alright. you can go. I won’t fire you if you go’. When I came back, I still had the job, but I was into music so much, I even did a concert for Kentucky. It was beautiful.”

Black Star went on an extended tour taking Tiger and the crew. In Washington D.C., he bought a Roland 505 drum machine. Back in Jamaica, he added a Casio keyboard. Like a kid, Tiger, “loved his toy cars and gadgets,” according to Malvo. Also, he loved electronic devices, musical and visual. He walked with his camcorder and had a library of videos, mainly comedy. At home, he would make his front porch into a studio anytime a musician dropped by. First he would bring out the Casio Keyboard, then, a Tascam four track mixing board. And finally, the drum machine. After quite a bit of patching, he was ready to rock. On a lazy day, Wire Lindo* might drop by to jam while a crowd of youths watched, mesmerized, with their faces pressed up against the iron grill. “I do something that a deejay never do yet – build them own rhythm,” he boasted in 1987. What Tiger was doing, back in 1985, was revolutionary – he was building his own rhythm tracks in his own home. His first LP, *Me Name Tiger*, was entirely self-produced. Self taught in music and electronics, Tiger made all the rhythms for the album, and the next several albums to follow.

A dazzled press began to take notice and Tiger started to receive awards from the music industry, the same industry that was often very anti-dancehall. In 1986, he performed at the Annual Rockers Awards with major press coverage, and scored a starring role in Sunsplash. But his best was yet to come. In 1989 he teamed up with Steelie and Clevie for the LP *Ram Dancehall*. The partnership worked well and in 1991, Tiger hit the charts again with ‘Cool Me Down’ (which was featured in the movie Cool Runnings) and ‘When’ which became his biggest hit yet, attracting the major label Columbia who released his *Claws of the Cat* LP in 1993.

Through the later ‘80s and early ‘90s, he served as a compelling role model for deejays in the field, many of whom picked up his high octane style. Tiger

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* Keyboard player with the Wailers
was on top of the world. As reported in The Jamaican Observer, “He went on to record with the American rap group, the Fat Boys and ink a deal with Columbia Records, and was then at the height of his career. Back in 1994, Tiger was not only a superstar dancehall deejay, but quite a rich one too. He boasted a Mercedes S190 Benz and an Astra Chevy, in addition to his Ducati and Honda 50 motorcycles. He was riding the Ducati 1100 superbike along Hope Road on the fateful day when suddenly, crash, and then everything went silent.”

Tiger crashed his bike and suffered serious head injuries that kept him in the hospital for an extended period and almost cost him his life. Tiger recovered, but was left with a limp and a slurring of his speech that made going back to his old profession problematic. Always a strong spirit, Tiger decided to meet the challenge and began taking part in stage shows now and then, as well as recording. To a certain extent, he succeeded. Malvo explains that “He still can say the songs and him still funny. He can perform, but you not going to see the same Tiger with the jumping. But he have this comedy thing in him still.”

Tiger’s influence on the scene lived on. Other artists were picking up his positively frantic performing pace. His style was energetic, bold and assertive. And he wrote his fast paced lyrics to match the new minimalist computerized rhythms. The use of preprogrammed keyboards, with their faster beat settings, was contributing to the acceleration of reggae, and the madcap performances of deejays like Tiger pushed the pace ahead into a full gallop.

**Fall of Black Star**

In 1986 and 1987, Black Star was going strong, competing with the top sound in the big clashes, until it met the same fate that befell Volcano and so many other sounds.

“Black Star went to the United States for a one month tour [playing against] Downbeat and all the [other New York] sounds,” Malvo recalls. “After the tour, when we ready to come back, most of the guys say them not going to come back. You know, in those times, when people get a chance to go to America, nobody want to come back home. The only person who came back with us was Tiger. We got on the plane, I was looking around and I didn’t see nobody. Danny Black Star [the owner], his brother, Earl Cunningham, Tanto Irie, Danny Dread [the deejay] stayed.”

Artists easily disappeared into New York’s cavernous dancehall scene and were never heard from in Jamaica again. “They see this type of life - those times, when you go [to America], you find guys who want to give you everything. They give you a lot of gifts. This thing is like, you say, ‘This is the real deal, land of opportunity’, cause they say, ‘Yo, whe’ you a go back for?’” Malvo explains. “Mostly in the ‘80s, a lot of guy who came to America didn’t go

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home and their career died. It never work out cause, after a time, everything changed.”

The computer thing came in, the beat sped up and the artists living abroad fell out of the loop. “They start to take cocaine, get messed up, and lose them life, and some of them go to jail. A couple of them in the U.S. right now, they can’t go back home. They’re stuck and their career just die out.”

Like the other sounds that got swallowed up abroad, Black Star went right off the map, and the crew members that eventually returned to Jamaica had to look for other outlets. Black Star continued to play for a time without the owner/selector and most of the crew. They recruited Tony Roots, who used to play a smaller sound in the area, to do the selecting. In that way, with Malvo and Brigi, they were able to fulfill the dates that had been pre-booked before the tour. After two months, they packed it in. That left Malvo to go on his own and he began to hang around King Jammy’s sound, the top rub-a-dub sound running in Jamaica.
When Wayne’s Smith’s hit 45, ‘Sleng Teng’ made its debut in early 1985, reggae music was transformed. Jamaicans were instantly captivated by the quirky rhythm track built using a simple electronic keyboard. ‘Sleng Teng’ was the first fully ‘computerized’ rhythm to have such a big impact. That one hit rendered obsolete everything that had come before and set reggae on a course that it is still following today, utilizing almost exclusively computerized, programmable instruments.

**Sleng Teng**

The story of ‘Sleng Teng’ began in Waterhouse, Kingston 11, with a Casio keyboard and two young men with time on their hands, Wayne Smith and his friend Noel Dailey*. Wayne and Noel found something they liked among the pre-set programs and made up a little ditty to sing over it. The rhythm was a rock setting on the Casio designed to emulate Eddie Cochran’s ‘Come On Everybody’. But, just when they had the little machine rocking, the battery went dead and Noel took his Casio home to check it out. Wayne was at home waiting, when his friends came by and told him that Noel was on the corner playing the new rhythm they had created.

Fearing that someone might steal the idea, Wayne rushed to the corner where Noel was serenading his friends, and insisted that the two of them take their find directly to the studio of the legendary Waterhouse producer and engineer, King Jammy.

“When we go up to Jammys, Noel put on the thing. We put on the speed to my speed and my key that I sing in. And then when he [Jammy] hear it he says, ‘Wha’? Alright!’”

“Jammys was like a kid,” remembers singer Anthony Redrose. “Anything that you tell Jammys to do, like if you come to him and say, ‘King, if you play this, or you play that, it’s gonnaa be good’, [he would say], ‘Ok, let’s go in the

* Wayne mistakenly referred to him, previously, as ‘Noel Davy’, as quoted in Reggae Quarterly and King Jammys
studio right now’. That’s why ‘Sleng Teng’ come. Cause when them [Wayne and Noel] come with the little thing on the machine and say, ‘King, listen to this - ding diga ding...’, he say, ‘OK, record it!’ Him say, ‘Let’s try it’. He always want to do something. He never turn you away. If you give him an idea, him jump to it.”

So, Jammy eagerly recorded the Casio rhythm on a tape and Wayne voiced it right then and there. But then, Wayne remembers, Jammy asked the other artists hanging around the studio what they thought. One singer responded, “Tcho. It nah sound like it a gwan nothing. It too straight.” Perhaps it was merely professional jealousy that motivated the comment, but that statement alone was enough to dampen Jammy’s enthusiasm and cause him to hesitate. Wayne was devastated and broke into tears and fled the studio. He felt this was his one chance the make it big, and his friends were spoiling it.

When he was able to get a hold of himself again, he went back into the studio and reasoned with Jammy. He explained that Jammy would be taking no risk in putting it out. Jammy hadn’t paid anyone yet, and there was no expenditure for studio time. He had nothing to lose. Jammy decided to try it out in the dance on dubplate and see how people reacted.

Jammy needn’t have worried about the new computer tune. Once the song was played on the sound, the response was overwhelming. As soon as they heard the walloping, relentless bass line, dance patrons would beat down the fence and bawl, ‘Murder!’ With easy lyrics and a simple structure, the song was an instant hit and propelled reggae music towards its biggest structural change since dub was invented – the move to music made with instruments programmed by musician/programmers and engineered through a computer program.

**King Jammy at the Control**

As a youth, Lloyd James, aka Prince Jammy, enjoyed repairing electronic equipment. A good electrician was invaluable in the Jamaica of the ’60s and ’70s when imports were expensive and most musical components were improvised by skilled technicians. Jammy began to experiment with building sound equipment. During this time, Jammy began to play a small neighborhood sound at private parties and weddings. The sound was just developing a reputation at home when Jammy and his future wife, Mama Iris, left for Toronto, Canada, where Jammy began playing the set, Jamaican style, on the local circuit.

While abroad, Jammy was invited to work at Jerry Brown’s Summer Sounds studio in Malton. Jerry, formerly a member of the vocal group, the Jamaicans, migrated to Canada, as did a large number of Jamaicans, in the ’60s when immigration was easy. “You could just go to the post office and pick up the social [insurance] number, get landed [immigrant status] easy. Just like that. You could bring your whole family over,” Jerry observed. Once in Toronto, Jerry, aside from his auto body work, found odd jobs operating the
sound for stage shows. Eventually, he acquired the equipment from a friend, bought a house in the suburb of Malton and set up the basement as a studio where he started recording both local and expatriate artists like Johnny Osbourne, Jackie Mittoo, Stranger Cole and the Canadian band, Earth Roots and Water. And that’s where Jammy did an engineering apprenticeship.

“King Jammys used to have the number one sound system in Canada,” Jerry recalls. “But what happened, people didn’t like the noise. People wonder, ‘What the hell is this?’ and it’s new to them. Cause when them playing, it’s inside door, and you got this thing blasting out of Masonic Temple* and police come and tell them ‘turn it down’ and as soon as the police left, it’s up again, and [the police] come and throw the baton in it and mash up the amp and everything. So, Jammys was there and I go for him one day and say, ‘Jammys, come run the studio for me.’ So, that’s where we started.”**

Once he returned to Jamaica, Jammy, with his electrical skills, began working alongside King Tubby who was often busy fixing broken TVs and radios. Back in those days, they used to call him ‘Little Tubby’. But Jammy now had experience with sound engineering. So, when Tubby’s current engineer, Phillip Smart, left for New York, Jammy got a chance to apprentice on the board, mixing songs for producer Bunny Lee.

Not long afterwards, Jammy moved into his girlfriend Iris’s house nearby and he was able to set up a small, one room studio and begin working on his own productions. The tiny studio, in what was once a bedroom, could not fit an entire band playing instruments. So, Jammy, like all the other small independent producers, had to rent studio time elsewhere and hire a full complement of musicians and engineers in order to lay rhythm tracks.

That’s why, when he was presented with a great backing track created entirely in one small electronic keyboard, the idea so captivated him. Being able to complete a rhythm at home, with two musicians and a mixer, was the opportunity of a lifetime. It allowed the producer maximum freedom to experiment and far more independence in creating new works.

In a burst of enthusiasm, Jammy began recording new rhythms and voicing artists on them as fast as he could churn them out. He hired veteran keyboard player Tony Asher to help. Tony had started out as a drummer before becoming a keyboard wiz. Tony’s keyboards can be heard on Johnny Osbourne’s ‘Water Pumping’ (the string synthesizer) and on Horace Ferguson’s Sensi Addict album, produced by Prince Jazzbo. Jammy asked Tony to do-over the original ‘Sleng Teng’ rhythm as an instrumental, which Jammy then used to voice cuts like Pinchers’ ‘Agony’.

The effect of these new digital rhythms was so powerful that, almost overnight, studios dropped their session bands and began looking for men with machines – drum machines and electronic keyboards – leaving top musicians

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* Toronto concert venue
Wayne Smith grew up right next door to Jammy. The two houses shared a fence. That was Jammy’s original home, his father’s house, where he grew and lived until he moved to girlfriend Iris’s house on St Lucia Road. Jammy and his brother, Trevor, had gone to school with Wayne’s mother.

Local singer Eccleston Jarrett was a friend of Wayne’s brother and, when he heard of Wayne’s ambitions, he brought him to a little bar that had a juke box and told him to sing over the rhythm tracks. After a few false starts, Wayne got such a good response from the patrons that Eccleston disappeared before it was his turn on the mic.

Strengthened in his resolve to sing, Wayne began hanging around producer King Tubby’s yard, trying to break into the inner circle. But first he had to pay his dues, which, for budding artists meant carrying tapes for producers and acting as a studio go-fer. It also involved getting run off the property regularly. Until one day, someone let him into the studio and was about to give him a try when he noticed the two track tape was already full. But Wayne had a supporter in the studio.

“There was guy in the studio named Pug. Pug used to love him badness. So, Pug come and back out him gun and say, ‘No, you have fe give him a chance man!’ And Pug pick up a tape. So, [Tubby’s engineer] Scientist say, ‘A Bunny Lee tape that! You can’t trouble it!’ And Pug say, ‘Shut your mouth. If you no shut your mouth, I gwan shoot you!’ And he say, ‘Go ina it youth! Go, let me hear you!’ And I start sing now. And Linval Thompson come push the door now, and say, ‘Oouuu, you sound good man. A you in there sing?’ And then people stop [saying], ‘You can’t go ina the studio’. And then no one nah run me out again. And me start [voicing] nuff, nuff, nuff, dubplate.”

Wayne’s first opportunity to record a 45 for general release came in 1979 when he recorded ‘I Want You Tonight Girl’ for Allen Buckers. The ‘Buckers’, of which Allen was a member, was a posse that hailed from the Balcombe Drive area, close to Jammy and Tubby, the area where Myrie and Marshal, Half Pint’s first producers lived. Allen only pressed 500 copies or so and then he went around the city selling them.

Wayne’s next stop was Channel One where Kenneth and Ernest Hookim were auditioning young singers. Ernest agreed to give Wayne a try. Still, despite their early interest, the folks at Channel One didn’t do much with their new singer. Kenneth Hookim released a showdown LP* pitting Wayne against the sweet-voiced Patrick Andy, but not until 1984. At this point, Wayne was best known for his dubplates which were on heavy rotation on sounds in the Waterhouse area.

King Jammy had been spending a lot of time traveling to England to mar-

* Show-Down vol. seven, Empire, 1984
ket his productions so he wasn’t aware that his next door neighbor was getting popular. He wasn’t even aware that Wayne was a singer.

“When Jammys came from England, he told someone, ‘There was a little youth a gwan good a England. I hear some dub with him.’ And him tell the people them me name, and them say, ‘You no know, a Mr. McKnight grand-son’.”

Jammy contacted Wayne immediately. But, Jammy wasn’t satisfied with Wayne’s current style. “Those days I was singing more cooler. Then Jammys come to me and him say, ‘People love you in Europe. I would like you to step it up a little bit’. So, I go a little harder then, and then I start sing like ‘Ism Scism’, ‘Come on, Come on, I-Man can’t take the ism scism…’ ‘Then I come up with ‘Come along, come along, make we have some nice time tonight’. Me start go harder now.”

Wayne was now officially in Jammy’s stable. Jammy released several disco 45s and an album, Youthman Skanking*, which he gave to Black Joy in the UK. Thus, Wayne became far better known abroad than at home, where he was still mainly known for dubplates and live performances with sounds.

Although Wayne will always be remembered for ‘Sleng Teng’, his earlier work with Jammy was popular on sound systems, especially ‘Life is a Moment in Space’, a Barbra Streisand hit from 1980 written by the Gibb brothers, and the romantic, ‘Ain’t No Me Without You’, which was written entirely by Wayne. Also successful were the pre-’Sleng Teng’, ‘Rapid Dem Love’ (Youth Promotion), ‘Smoker Super’ (Jammy), and the afore-mentioned ‘Come Along’ (Jammy).

**After Sleng Teng**

After Sleng Teng came out, there was no turning back to the older ana-logue style. Wayne had recorded a whole album in 1983 produced by Pug who was ready to release it in 1985. It contained the songs ‘Bossman’ and ‘Jumping On My Bed’, which had been playing as dubplates on Stur-Gav. But when Wayne tried to market it to distributors, he was met with the response, “A how you fe come with digital style and you then you wan’ come give we that?”


Sleng Teng effectively killed off all the music that had been recorded with a full live band. This computer revolution became the new gold rush. Everybody was looking to stake out a claim. The apparent ease of creating a back-

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* Youthman Skanking, Black Joy, 1982
** Computer Seh So, LP - Various Artists, Waterhouse, 1987
ing track on a Casio keyboard fired up the ambitions of the most complacent artists and producers. There was no longer any excuse not to get into the music business. You didn’t need to put out cash upfront for studio rentals, live musicians, and instruments. All you needed was a little keyboard player and a portable, electronic keyboard with pre-programmed drum patterns built in.

Without hesitation, other producers began releasing their own Sleng Teng versions. Selectors in the dancehalls could play ‘Sleng Teng’ versions for hours straight. Jammy released the one rhythm LP, *Sleng Teng Extravaganza*, which consisted of different singers and deejays all voiced over the same Sleng Teng backing track. Soon, many of the top producers followed indiscriminately with their own ‘Sleng Teng’ versions. Artists, producers, distributors, all allowed themselves to be carried away by the ‘Sleng Teng’ tsunami. Even Neville Lee, owner of record manufacturer Sonic Sounds, released an odd record that he referred to as a “collector’s item”, his own ‘Sleng Teng’ style LP, curiously named *Antheng*, featuring Dennis Brown, Gregory Isaacs, and Delroy Wilson over a slightly twisted Sleng Teng knock off.*

*Produced, officially, by Pablo Stewart, Stephen Lee and Trevor Baillie. It featured tracks like Ibo Cooper’s ‘Space Scientist’, Sugar Minott’s ‘Dancehall Theng’ and Dennis Brown’s ‘I’ll Get Along With You’.*
Drum Machines & Preprogrammed Instruments

The most interesting thing about the so called digital revolution in Jamaica is that the music was neither created or edited digitally and there were no computers in sight. The breakthrough song, ‘Sleng Teng’, was not created with a computer or edited with digital software. It was recorded and mixed the same way Jammy did all his other productions, through the amp and onto a four track master tape that was used, in the plant, to make the ‘stamper’ for pressing the 45. Thus far, there was nothing ‘digital’ or ‘computerized’ about the music.

Even the use of electronic keyboards, like the Casio used to make ‘Sleng Teng’, was nothing new. The only real difference with ‘Sleng Teng’ was that the rhythm – the drum and the bass-like sound – was supplied by a keyboard that had pre-programmed patterns and that it was left raw without over dubbing ‘real’ drums and bass. On the basic Casio, a drum pattern could be selected from several and the pace picked up or slowed down. The bass-like phrase, played on the keyboard, could be looped in sync with the beat to play over and over. Because of the raw state of the mix, the rhythm sounded like a computer might have made it. This driving, robotic drone of ‘Sleng Teng’ captured the public’s imagination – it sounded like what people imagined ‘computer music’ would sound like – and a legend was born.

‘Sleng Teng’, for all its power to startle people into an awareness of alternative music making processes, was not the first example of “computerized” (mechanically programmed, electronic) instrumentation used in reggae. Just as the U Roy ‘Wake the Town’ series of 45s for Duke Reid was not the first time a deejay had toasted on vinyl. U Roy tends to get the credit because his records made the biggest splash. Likewise, ‘Sleng Teng’ created a sensation because it was a bold, new approach to the practice of using these instruments. Left in its rough unadorned state, the rhythm proudly proclaimed its simple roots, rather than masquerading as a traditional bass and drum rhythm. In this way, the austere, relentless keyboard riff challenged previous notions of what was and was not ‘musical’, and went on to be one of the biggest reggae hits of all time.
**Chim Cherie**

The startlingly new sound, along with Jammy’s solid connections in the business at home and abroad, ensured that ‘Sleng Teng’ would rapidly circle the globe, moving much farther and faster than previous musical pieces that may have used pre-programmed instruments. But, the idea of the pre-programmed instrument had already reached Jamaica and taken root firmly.

The original link to the early activity was Bob Marley’s bass player, Aston ‘Family Man’ Barrett. “It was in the ‘70s when I and Bob was coming through California. We were in a music store and we run into this Latin American machine drum called Rhythm King. So, we listen to it and we like it and so I say, ‘Yes, that’s nice to accompany [me] when the drummer not around’ - [to] get a vibes, cause you can speed it up and down and thing. And we bought it and bring it to Jamaica and put it in our music room. It wasn’t so modern, like the modern ones, but it was the first.”

With the steady beat provided by the little box, Family Man could sketch out instrumental backing tracks that might be fleshed out and voiced over at a later date. “I use it to set the tempo for ‘No Woman No Cry’. Also ‘Revelation’, also ‘So Jah Say’. I make some machine drum rhythm, but I was only playing it in 56 Hope Road, in our music room.”

‘Rainbow Country’ was created in the same legendary ‘music room’ at Tuff Gong, where Bob was living. “We did a lot of demo. I set up the music room like a demo studio from 1974, two reel to reel machines – one spinning at 7½, which is slower than studio speed, and the next one was slower. It was 33¾, a cassette machine. Those days, we didn’t have any Radio Shack around where we could buy adapters and thing like that. I was buying wire, cutting it, putting them together, soldering them, painting it. I was building my own studio. I would wire the whole thing up so the two tapes can play back, and also the cassette. Put the rhythm, the drum on one track, leave the other track. Then put in the piano on the track, other instruments. I would mix it down to one track, now, and voice it.” Peter Tosh’s 1970 recording, ‘Field Marshal’* and its version, ‘No Partial’, was also built around the same the Rhythm King drum machine.

Bunny Wailer was also attracted by the new sound. “I also did a rhythm which Bunny Wailer loved,” Family Man recalls, “and he say he want to write some lyrics for it. It was called ‘Armegedeon’.” What I do, I vary the speed, I get it to the tempo which I like and put the percussion on it. There is a button, when you touch it, it roll like a snare, it you don’t ease your finger off it, it keep rolling. I just touch it – Tap, rrrrap, rrrrrrap tap, then let it go, let the rhythm play.”

Apart from his work with The Wailers, Family Man continued experimenting on his own, but found that, at the time, record distributors in Jamai-

* While it had been recorded in 1970, it wasn’t released until five years later

** Appears on the LP Blackheart Man 1976, Solomonic/ Island
ca weren't ready for the sound he was creating. “I made two masters and carry one to England for them to release it and they say they don't know how to deal with it because it's like 10 years too advanced. The guy at Starlight Records say it was 10 years too advanced. So, I put it out one at Randy's North Parade, in Jamaica which is now VP. They also said it was advanced, but a friend of mine, who is the son of the Chins, decide to put it out as a single. It was called Jack Spratt, with a guy who called himself Black Skin the Prophet.”

Another product of this experimentation became one of the most sought after dubplates of the late '70s – early '80s, the instrumental that came to be known as ‘Chim Cherie’. “I did it in my music room first and I cut dubs and used to have it playing on the sound system Jah Love. I always cut dub and send them to the sound system, Soul to Soul. Jack Ruby sound from Ocho Rios and I take some to England too, Lloydie Coxsone up that side, Sufferer's Hi-fi.”

On its own, ‘Chim Cherie’ was a compelling, if slightly off kilter, rhythm featuring the drum machine along with wobbly electric piano chords and exploding percussive snaps. Jah Love sound brought it to prominence with Brigadier chanting, ‘Up Chim Cherie, Down Chim Cherie” The rhythm was originally recorded for Bob Marley to sing over but he was never interested in it, so it remained a dancehall instrumental favorite until Shinehead made it a song by voicing his cover version of Michael Jackson’s ‘Billie Jean’ over it.

Family Man had left the tape in Lee Perry’s Black Ark studio for safe keeping. “It was my rhythm but I leave it on tape and then I went off... And that was the time when I returned to Jamaica and heard that his studio had burned down.” Assuming the rhythm was destroyed in the fire, he forgot about it. But then he started hearing a vocal version of it playing at dances. New York based singer Shinehead had voiced the rhythm three times, the most popular version being his cover of Michael Jackson’s hit, ‘Billie Jean’. Shinehead was a popular entertainer with the local Downbeat sound. But it was the owner of another sound, African Love, that took Shinhoed to the studio to voice.

* ‘Jack Spratt’ by Black Skin The Prophet, One Way Sounds, 1972

** Although Family Man had created it as an original, the rhythm has been linked to a Hippy Boys instrumental, ‘Safari’ which Family Man played on.

*** 56 Hope Road had its own little sound run by Family Man, “I usually have a sound system myself called Dread Lion which I play- not so much- mostly at the back when they are having a function in there. All of the bredren come there and they say, ‘Man, is only up here you can come and hear these kind of musics’.”

**** The lyrics are attributed originally to Jah Bull on Emperor Marcus, but no one knows exactly what the title referred to. Jah Wise averred that it was about a hill since the deejays who ride it uniformly say “Up Chim cherie, down Chim cherie”, but admits it could just have easily been from the Disney movie Mary Poppins, from the song Chim Chim Cher-ee. Other lyrics from the movie entered the dancehall lexicon including Madoo singing Supercalafragilisticexpialadocious in his “How You Jam-min” So lyrics. Brigadier Jerry, who popularized the rhythm and the lyrics, claimed to have heard the phrase in nursery rhymes.
‘Billie Jean’ was released on an African Loves 12 inch in 1984, with the B side ‘Mama Used to Say’, a cover version of a Junior Giscombe song. The third version he voiced was ‘The Lady in My Life’, another Michael Jackson cover.

It took Family Man a while to figure out how his original rhythm that he thought had been lost in the Black Ark fire had made its way onto the reggae charts. But, it turned out selector Jah Wise had taken the rhythm from Lee Perry and brought it to New York to help with the Shinehead production. Family Man recalls, “Years later, I run into Shinehead’s manager and I said to him, ‘Who do you pay royalties to this rhythm here?’ And he told me, ‘Lee Scratch Perry.’ And I just smile.”

**Jazzbo’s ‘Home’ Studio**

Prince Jazzbo makes the quite plausible case that the very first all-computerized song in reggae was his production of Horace Ferguson’s ‘Sensi Addict’, released in 1984. Jazzbo admits that the drum machine appeared in many earlier Lee Perry releases, but claims that he was the first producer to combine it with keyboard generated bass.

After he returned from his three year stay in England, Prince Jazzbo began working as a resident producer in Channel One. In exchange for the work he did, Jazzbo got free studio time to work on his own productions. While working there in the early ‘80s, he got friendly with many of the Channel One roster of upcoming singers including Michael Palmer, Frankie Paul and Horace Ferguson. Horace, with his sweet, Horace Andy style falsetto, started working with Jazzbo right away. The original (non-“computerized”) version of the song Sensi Addict was recorded at Channel One in 1981. Jazzbo offered it to the Hookims, but they weren’t interested in releasing it. So, Jazzbo left Channel One, taking the tapes of his own material to try and re-record it in his own way, on his own limited budget. Ever resourceful and determined, Jazzbo began experimenting with using pre-programmable instruments in his ‘home’ studio in an abandoned building at 8 Olympic Way, Kingston, a “capture land” in the heart of a no-go zone. There, Jazzbo set himself up with a studio and a record shop and began working on his digital rhythms with electricity conveniently borrowed from city wires. (“We ran the electricity underground,” Jazzbo commented. “There’s many ways to get electricity without paying for it.”) To do the actual voicing and mixing, he still had to rent time in the big studios, but he didn’t have to pay for a band and most of the preliminary work could be done at home.

As early as 1983, Jazzbo was making music that was fully programmed on the drum machine and keyboard, like the *Sensi Addict* album he did with Horace Ferguson. “When I started working at Channel One, Channel One
was a different era,” Jazzbo explains. “We never used to use ‘computer’ at Channel One. That time I had to hide to make ‘computer’ music. I couldn’t do that in Channel One. I had to hide and go somewhere where nobody would see me. People would say I am doing foolishness.” At first he used Wailer’s keyboard player Tyrone Downey to build the official rhythms in a little studio up by Mountainview Avenue called Creative Sound, but later began to rely on Tony Asher. By 1987, he had moved to Tuff Gong and was making rhythms like Horace Ferguson’s ‘The General’ with veteran keyboard player Winston Wright.

**Sly and Robbie**

In the ‘80s, technology began taking up more space in reggae. Sly Dunbar, of the original ‘Riddim Twins’, had been purchasing new electronic devises abroad and bringing them into the studios in Jamaica. First he brought in the Syn-drum, which became part of the signature sound of Sly and Robbie’s Taxi label in the early ‘80s. Next, he showed up with the Simmons drum kit which he proudly displayed in Channel One. Sly had been using the Simmons in the Compass Point studios in Nassau while working on the Black Uhuru LP, *Anthem*, for Island Records. “According to Dunbar, the plans were to make the new [Black Uhuru] album more acceptable to a rock crowd in the United States so the sound, and in some instances the songs, would be different from the group’s previous records. ‘We decided to step up the production and we bought the Simmons drum,’ Dunbar remembered. ‘It had a different sound which was fresh…’”

The Simmons contained five drums - bass, snare and three tom-toms, and settings for 40 complete “drum kits” (20 factory and 20 programmable presets). It was designed to replicate both the sound and the feel of an acoustic drum in its sensitivity and response. At that point, musicians still wanted the electronic instruments to sound as acoustic as possible, as if using a programmable or preset instrument was ‘cheating’, as if it carried some moral stigma. In 1983, audiences still felt that musicians ought to be playing instruments, so the bands that used the new technology tended to disguise it under a heavy, otherwise manually generated, rhythm track.

Sly Dunbar happened to be in the studio experimenting with a new drum machine that included a programmable bass, when Sugar passed through and heard him playing. “Sly Dunbar was just licking things - weird rhythms, man. I heard Sly with this thing that was different from all kind of rhythm - you never heard a rhythm like that before. It was like chu chu chu chi chu-chuchuchu. It was just like another version of ‘Heavenless’, in a computerized...

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* By “computer”, Jazzbo, like other Jamaican artists and musicians at the time, meant pre-programmable instruments like drum machines and electronic keyboards that could be set – by a human- to play certain patterns.

** Jamaican Observer, Wednesday, February 27, 2002, Howard Campbell
form,” Sugar recalls. “I knew that ‘Herbman Hustling’ could work on this rhythm, man.”

The earlier version of the song ‘Herbman Hustling’ had already been released by Wackies in New York but not gotten much exposure. So, Sugar felt safe in re-recording the lyric over the new backing track. With lyrics inspired by watching friends trying to make a living in the ghetto, Sugar sang over Sly’s driving computer-style beat. The 1984 Taxi release was a bold move, yet, for some reason, it didn’t bring the spotlight to bear on the programmable instrument sound the way Sleng Teng did shortly after.

As the way music was made abroad was changing, Jamaican musicians were feeling the pressure to get with the times. Producer Ossie Thomas remembers one event that stirred up a lot of controversy in the music business. “What happened, they had like a reggae seminar and they had James Mtume, from Mtume of the hit song ‘Juicy Fruit’. They had this big reggae seminar and they bring him in as a special guest and he was telling the musicians they have to use more synthesizer to get the American ear keener to the sound*. So, weh you find seh is that, through people travel and things, more people start bring synthesizers [back to Jamaica]. Then you have Bloodfire Posse.” They made the song ‘[Every Posse] Get Flat’ and the whole thing just go digital. People was going digital before, like Lee Perry and Tyrone Downey. Then, [after the seminar] it go haywire. Everybody just go digital.”

The Bloodfire Posse hit spread the digital sound to a crowd that didn’t follow dancehall music. As Family Man explained, “That was the first time it catch on.” While ‘Sleng Teng’ brought pre-set rhythms to the sound system scene, The Bloodfire Posse took the sound uptown.

At the same time, the manufacturers of the new equipment were also pushing for the sound of pop to go digital. “Although I was a drummer, and I loved to play live drums,” recalls Cleveland “Clevie” Browne, “I saw where the technology was going to be the future. We also looked at it from a business aspect in the fact that these companies developing the technology would also push for the technology to be successful. They had links with record companies. [For example, if], Sony developed some new drum machine, Sony company

* In November of 1982, the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission, held the first Music and Entertainment Seminar aimed at helping Jamaican musicians improve musical standard to make their music more competitive abroad. According to then Prime Minister Edward Seaga, it would “enable artistes to benefit from the growing international demand for Jamaican music and performers, and to meet the need in the established resort market for entertainers of higher standards of performance in Jamaica.” (The Daily Gleaner, November nine, 1982). James Mtume was one of the international guests.

** Bloodfire Posse, a band with lead singer, Paul Blake, former hotel-circuit cabaret singer, took a popular dance trend and made it a hit song, ‘Every Posse Get Flat’ (Studio Works, 1985). It was one of the first songs that was made with a fully programmed rhythm section. But Paul Blake and Bloodfire where a stage show band, not a dancehall act, so the effect didn’t penetrate the sound system scene directly.
maybe make that be the sound of the day. We just looked at it that way.”

**King Tubby**

In 1985, with the release of ‘Sleng Teng’, the spotlight shone bright on Waterhouse. The overnight success of the simple, unpretentious Sleng Teng rhythm took the music world by surprise. While Jammy was the one who had the breakthrough, his teacher and neighbor, King Tubby, reacted swiftly releasing a pre-set drum and bass track of his own, Anthony Redrose’s ‘Under Mi Fat Thing’, signaling a big comeback for the engineering don, and making Kingston 11 the home of early so-called “digital” dancehall.

After remaining in the background since the end of the ‘70s, King Tubby had resurfaced dramatically in 1984, with four new labels: Waterhouse, Firehouse, Taurus and Kingston 11. For several years, Tubby had been in the process of building a new 32 track studio on his Drumalie Ave premises.*

By 1985, Tubby had released several 45s on the Waterhouse label, like Sugar Minott’s ‘Hard Time Rock’ and Michael Palmer’s ‘Them Nah Sting’. But he hadn’t come up with that key hit until Anthony Redrose came along. Redrose had a song he wanted the King to hear. It was a response to ‘Sleng Teng’ called ‘Under Mi Fat Thing’ and meant to be sung over the same rhythm.

Growing up in Spanishtown, Redrose served his apprenticeship on a sound called Sir Duncan where he sang, deejayed and selected. His first release was with Dennis Star, but it was ‘Under Mi Fat Thing’ that broke him big. The follow up, ‘Tempo’, was even bigger. Redrose had the vocal style that people wanted to hear on a computer-style rhythm, a sort of update of the older ‘Waterhouse sound’ with the minor key inflections. The new generation of top vocalists in Jamaica all had that sound – Tenorsaw, Nitty Gritty, King Kong, Redrose.

Redrose was hot, so Tubby, followed up by releasing a series of notable keyboard-and-drum-machine Redrose 45s, including ‘Worries Again’, ‘Bangarang’, ‘Gwan Talk’, ‘Can’t Knock Me’ and ‘No Touch the Nine’. Tubby also oversaw some solid work over computer-style rhythms with artists like Lloyd Hemmings, Patrick Andy, Lilli Melody, Phantom, Wayne Palmer, Little John and others.

The only thing was that Tubby wasn’t actually in the studio doing any of the work. He was only releasing the final product under his name, on his labels. Bunny Lee, Tubby’s close friend recalls, “Tubs reach a stage where he never even come to the studio. Him just come and look round and gone again.” Most of the actual studio work fell on the shoulders of his new singing sensation, now house producer, Anthony Redrose, who had quickly gained

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* The studio was intended to include a pressing plant but, although Tubby did complete the studio, he never lived to put it to use.

** The song Sleng Teng was often taken to be saying ‘under me slim thing’. In fact it referred to marijuana, not women.
Tubby’s confidence. “At the time, Tubbys wasn’t doing no work,” Redrose recalls. “Tubby was just making transformer and people book the studio and work there.” But, Tubby still had the last say. “He always come and give the songs the final listen,” Redrose affirms.

Tubby continued to oversee the release of records using rhythms created on programmable keyboards and drum machine though out the later ‘80s, including the first rate and entertaining tunes ‘Jumbo’ by Lily Melody, Wayne Palmer’s ‘Hell In A Town’, ‘Phantom’s Stylee’, King Everall’s ‘Automatic, Patrick’, Andy’s ‘Woman A Yard’, Lloyd Hemmings ‘Rude Boy’, Tinga Stewart’s ‘Dry Up Your Tears’, and Cornell Campbell’s ‘Hell In A De Yard’.

Tubby was holding his own in the new computer-style reggae competition, and releasing innovative music, right up until his tragic death. In 1989, the King was shot and killed outside his house in Duhaney Park. As Pad Anthony expressed, “Nothing in music hurt me like when we lost Tubby.” One of the most creative and influential men in reggae was gone.

Around the same time, Jammy was undergoing problems of his own. His most important partners began to jump ship. Steely and Clevie, Digital Bobby and arranger Mikey Bennett (originally from Home T four) all left to form their own labels. It took a while for Jammy to recover, but by 1994, he was back on his feet releasing hits with newcomer Bounty Killer.
The Digital Dynamic Duo
- Steely and Clevie

Up until the 1985 “digital revolution”, drum machines and other preset instruments had generally been incorporated into a band consisting of human musicians playing guitars, organ, horns etc. Now, after Sleng Teng, producers realized that they needed only the keyboard player. He could program all of the parts that required multiple musicians – drums, horns, percussion, guitar – all on the one instrument. Everyone else was redundant.

“In Jamaica, we Jamaicans kinda of have a thing whe’ anything we do we go to the extreme,” Explains Clevie (aka Cleveland Browne, the other half of ‘Steely and Clevie’). “We don’t just drink a whole heap of beer; we drinks cases of beer. A man don’t just smoke some weed, him smoke a whole heap of weed. Man don’t have a girl, him have a whole heap of girl. So it’s just an extreme thing where [computer rhythms] took over. It’s like the peer pressure thing. A lot of musicians bought drum machines and they start programming stuff.”

Many newly unemployed musicians remained adamantly opposed to computerized music making, both for economic and aesthetic reasons, and not without some justification. “Everything was cool until the mid eighties when the machines came in,” Drummer Santa Davis contends. “That is where things kinda of start going to hell in a hand bag. It used to be a thing where the singer and the musician have an interaction in the studio. Now there is no real interaction between musicians and singer. The music start to get sterile or mechanical because you don’t have real people playing the music.”

Despite his renown for, and expertise in, digital music, Clevie understood this more than anyone. “If you write out a bass line and give it to two different bass players to play live, it might come out with two different feel, because if you zoom in to the actual, the exact beat on which the player plays, some players play a little ahead. Some play a little behind, some laid back, some are directly on the beat. Some notes you might be on the beat, and some off. That’s what creates the difference, and the velocity, how loud you pluck, which finger you play the bass with, your thumb or your forefinger. All of that adds to the creation of feel. I believe that we loose that when we get too much into quantized programming.”

**Steely and Clevie**

Although, at first, as many people abhorred the new trend as loved it, the computer revolution did have one immediate benefit - the increasing incidence
of fresh rhythms. Rather than continue to rely on the old classics, musicians found it easy, with the new technology, to come up with fresh material. Sleng Teng was an original rhythm. The new approach to creating sound inspired musicians to experiment. This attitude extended even to the few studios still making analog rhythms. Track Records put out a John Holt LP and a Jimmy Riley LP with rhythm tracks that were either original or ‘derived’ (rather than copied straight out).

Wycliff ‘Steely’ Johnson and Cleveland ‘Clevie’ Browne, the new digital dynamic duo, carried the weight of the digital metamorphosis, and contributed quite a few original rhythm tracks to the dancehall lexicon, including ‘Street Sweeper’, ‘Bitterblood’, ‘Nine Night’ and ‘Sleepy Dog’. “The music industry in Jamaica has always been on the cutting edge of technology,” asserts Cleveland Brownie, the percussion half of Jammy’s new digital rhythm section, adding, “We love technology!”

While other musicians had been laying down rhythms as usual, with their guitars, bass and drums, Steely and Clevie were one step ahead, already experimenting with new ways of making music. Together the two transformed the musical landscape of Jamaica with their creative computer based rhythm tracks. Starting with a tour of duty as Jammy’s resident rhythm builders in 1985, the duo recorded for most of the major Jamaican labels including Techniques, Redman International, Music Works, and Penthouse. Along the way, they worked with just about every top artist in reggae as well as some pop stars like Sting, Annie Lennox, Billy Ocean, Heavy D and The Back Street Boys.

Wycliffe “Steely’ Johnson came to Jammy fresh from his informal experiments making Black Star specials. As a sound system owner as well as a musician, Steely carried the dancehall consciousness into his studio work*. As a bass player, he appeared on records from Sugar Minott’s community effort LP Ghetto-ology to Junjo’s Volcano hits of the 1980s, as a member of the Roots Radics band. Cleveland Browne, aka Clevie, had been the drummer for In Crowd and had worked as part of the session band at Studio One. Both were highly acclaimed professional career musicians.

Clevie’s roots go back to his childhood in a family of musicians. “Music was always in the household, like any basic necessity, like the food, like anything else you couldn’t do without. Our home was a music home.” As far back as he can recall his relatives were musicians. His father, who worked as a builder, collected records and still had his 78’s “from gramophone days.” “My home, being one of the few homes around where you could find the parents allowing the music – ca’ everybody thought, ‘Oh musician thing – you’re going to turn Rasta, smoking weed and all’. But my home allowed for us to learn music. We were considered the music house.”

In the early 1960s, Clevie’s brother Glen** was operating his own sound

* Steely owned the Silverhawk sound system
** Glen later went on to play for Ziggy Marley. He’s now playing for Tarrus Riley.
system and their father had built an extra room in the house specifically for music. Once the room was set up, artists would use it to rehearse, which meant Clevie got to watch artists like Bob Andy, Keith and Tex, Now Generation with Geoffrey Chung, Mikey Chung, [Earl] Wire Lindo, Robbie Lynn, Mikey Boo, even Derrick Harriot. They all used to practice in that room, leaving behind a house full of instruments at the end of the day. The young Clevie would wander around the room, trying out each one.

Clevie had begun playing drums professionally while still just a child. He also played tuba and learned to sight read music, both of which he felt helped him in his later music programming. Throughout the ‘70s, Clevie went to school and played with the family band, The Browne Bunch. The brothers started working together as a group and in 1972 and did their first recording for Geoffrey Chung, ‘We’ve Got a Good Thing Going’. Upon leaving school, each of the brothers was invited to join a different band. Clevie ended up being absorbed into In Crowd at age 18. A year later the band were signed to Island Records and set off to the UK on tour.

“I did a few sessions with Lee Scratch Perry,” Clevie recalls. “The first session, as a drummer, was actually the same session as Steely.” The two met in 1974, Black Ark studio, when Clevie was just 14 and Steely 11. Although they didn’t start working together regularly until the early ‘80s, they noticed a musical compatibility. At Lee Perry’s Black Ark studio, Clevie also came in contact with the drum machines that Perry and the Wailers were experimenting with and even went out and bought a Rhythm Box at the Music Mart.

Wycliffe “Steely” Johnson came from August Town, next to the community of Elletson Flats where Black Star sound was headquartered, and he was a frequent visitor. The two brothers, Danny and Yami Darlin, who owned the sound, used to have a little studio in the back of their house, and when Steely would drop by, he would make backing tracks to use in voicing specials for the sound. After they had recorded the keyboard and electronic drum rhythm onto a cassette tape, they would take the tape to Jammy or Tubby to have it mixed.

With his own equipment, Clevie joined Steeley in Papine, in the Black Star in-house studio. The pair began working with deejay Tiger to make specials for the Black Star sound system. “[Sound systems] wanted to make the specials economically enough where they wouldn’t have to be spending too much money in the studio. Unlike the early sound systems, where Coxsone and Duke Reid had their own recording facility and could make specials when they wanted to, most of these sound systems, you have to spend an arm and a leg.”

Steely and Clevie were able to record the rhythms directly from the keyboard onto cassette tapes. “The sound was so good, [even] on cassette, that we say, ‘Boy, which producer we could go to with this?’” Clevie recalls. “Then, when we heard ‘Sleng Teng’, we say that Jammys is the man who is willing to accept this sort of technology.” So, they took a tape of their productions over
to Waterhouse. “When we went to Jammys now, with a cassette of some of the rhythms that were made during some of those sessions for sound systems, he said, ‘It alright, you know.’” Jammy was intrigued by the new sound and willing to explore what it could do.

“Danny [Darlin] didn’t use [the rhythms] for no recordings. We just use it for dubs alone,” Malvo explained. “But King Jammys is more a recording thing. So [Steely] play back all those beats for King Jammys - that’s when the big thing start. When he went to King Jammys, he made over all those rhythm that we had [done] before.” As the rhythms he developed for Black Star had only appeared as dubplates, Steely felt free to reuse the ideas. For example, Black Star used to play a rough, computerized do-over of Slim Smith’s ‘Happy Times’, that Tiger used to deejay his lyrics ‘Dus’ Out a Sound’, “ Dus’ out a sound, we a go dus’ out a sound. Black Star a go dus’ out a sound.” Steely did it over for Jammy, and the song entered the British charts. Nitty Gritty’s ‘Sweet Reggae Music’ was a big hit for the young singer.

As they worked together in the ’80s and early ’90s, The Digital Dynamic Duo, developed their own style that involved both digital and analogue elements. “We didn’t use sequencers at that time,” Clevie recalled. “We did the drum and bass first. We did live bass, not sequencer. We played the synthesizer bass without midi. No technology to it. Just the sound. The drum and bass went down first. Then we put on the other keyboards. Occasionally, I would do some backing vocals.” As they developed a rhythm, they would play off one another, always trying to work in human variation. “If you are able to determine what makes live music sound the way it does, you can program the music to sound that way. Cause I do programs sometimes to create a live feel,” Clevie explains. “For example, there’s a recording we did on the Steely and Clevie Studio One Vintage album, ‘No, No, No’ – Dawn Penn. We actually played the drum machine with the tempo drifting, and manually moved the tempo around a bit, to make it sway a little, to have a little humanness to it. I mixed the program with live playing. I went around and played it on the drum, the live drum set, and mixed it down in the studio, and combined it, and that created an overall feel to it. The drum rolls are all live, not sampled from any recording. ‘I’m Still in Love with You’ – Sean Paul and Sasha – it was similar to that as well, where we messed around a bit with the tempo to create imperfections. Because, we are human and there are imperfections in humanness.”

Never satisfied with what was going on at home, the Jamaican press pounded the new computer music the way they had pounded the Roots Radics’ “one and two chords rhythms” five years earlier. “There were criticisms after criticisms. Write ups in the newspaper to say that, boy, the crap that we are doing. Little did they know that we were trained musicians and we knew what we were doing,” Clevie explains. “But we also understood the society we were living in and the level at which the artists were at. Sometimes you have to be minimalistic and groove the music. It was more about groove in those days.
The music was really grooving.”

As Clevie’s career grew, so did his knowledge of the business side of music. “When we started out, it was more about being famous. You hear your song on the radio. You’re not even thinking about the money, the business aspect of it. But, I recall hearing conversations out in the hallway and into the waiting room. Sometimes you would hear them talking about publishing, copyright – all those things were new to me.”

After he left high school, Clevie had been invited to tour England as part of the In Crowd band. While on the tour, an odd thing happened. “I had a visitor – I don’t recall the name. But this person I had never known before came to visit me one day at the hotel and handed me two books - one on the business of music in the USA and one on the UK. To this day, I often wonder, sometimes, if it was an angel. Because this person handed me the books, he said he was following my career (which wasn’t much of a career at that time). And said, ‘One day you will be an industry leader’. And then he left.”

One thing he learned was that although the producers in that period operated under a work-for-hire system in which the ‘apprentice’ is paid a salary and the producer who hired him retains the rights to his creative output, this wasn’t legal in Jamaica. As Clevie contends, “The Jamaican copyright law does not have ‘works for hire’. All intellectual property coming from the musicians belongs to them.” This realization led Clevie and Steely to dig a little deeper into the laws regarding the remuneration of their creative endeavors.

Once they realized that they were not being granted what they were entitled to, Steely and Clevie started demanding their publishing rights. “We were blacklisted by some producers. Some producers say they would not work with us because we want more than what we should be getting.” To finally get what they knew was theirs, Clevie and Steely started their own company. The pair created their own Steely and Clevie label and quickly earned a spot on the Billboard Top 100 Black Singles with their do-over of the Tracy Chapman hit, ‘Sorry (Baby, Can I Hold You)’, with Foxy Brown. They also scored big with Tiger, Dillinger and Johnny P and went on to issue a series of one rhythm LPs. Their production facility in New Kingston was voted ‘Studio of the Year’ twice. Then EMI called. “EMI called us and said that they actually did some research and found that our name kept coming up. And they asked us to sign a publishing deal in 1990.”

The two were still signed to EMI when Steely passed away suddenly on September 1, 2009, after a long series of medical problems. He was undergoing treatment for kidney failure when the doctors found a benign brain tumor. Following the removal of the tumor in New York, he caught pneumonia and, ultimately, died from heart failure.

In an impassioned letter to the Jamaican Observer, a dedicated music fan addressed Steely’s legacy: “Dancehall used to be a place where we went and danced, listened to sound systems and popular DJs. Steely, when all is said and done you made the biggest paradigm shift in reggae music history, period.
Along with Clevie and King Jammy, you totally computerized and changed the sound, set the standards in the mid eighties and the music has never been the same again. You, Clevie and Jammy made Dancehall a genre, and since its inception it has evolved as Jamaica’s premier music, yet to be replaced. Your memory forever lives on in your creative mastery.”

Meanwhile, Clevie did become an industry leader. He is the immediate past chairman of the Recording Industry Association of Jamaica where he now sits on the board. He also serves on the boards of Jamaica Music Society, Jamaica Signature Beats and serves on the Reggae Academy steering committee, still fighting for artists to see their rights upheld in the business.

* Blemo, Response to an editorial: ‘Steely’ Will be Missed, Jamaican Observer, September 02, 2009
Throughout the ‘80s, Jamaican music was being pulled strongly in two directions. Reggae musicians had never abandoned their longing to appeal to the audience outside Jamaica and for Jamaican music to be received with the same respect as are other popular musics around the world. On the other side was the neighborhood, the community, the real audience the entertainer faced every day, the fans who hailed him as he walked down the street and called out his name when he was performing.

Luckily, the establishment, when not criticizing dancehall, left it largely alone. And the medium flourished unfettered. Not yet considered viable by the ‘major’ record companies, dancehall was under no pressure to conform to industry standards. On its own, without the corrupting influences of radio advertising sales quotas or big multinational record divisions, reggae followed its own natural course, shaped by experimentation and audience response. The ‘80s was the last decade it would have the complete freedom to maintain an inward looking aspect that kept it very local, very authentically Jamaican.

One of dancehall music’s great draws at home was its unabashed appeal to national pride. Instead of issues of redemption and black liberation, the longing to return to Africa as the homeland, dancehall artists spoke of their birthplace and their traditions.

The euphoria and hope generated by the 1962 independence from Great Britain had been all but shattered by the violence and territorialism of the ‘70s. Having come out of a brutally divisive and painful decade – economically, socially and politically, Jamaicans were trying to come back together as a nation with a shared purpose and vision – something that the current leaders weren’t providing. With the relative peace of the ‘80s, Jamaicans had the opportunity they so badly needed, to explore the national soul and build a new identity. But, before they could musically meet the outside world head on, Jamaicans first had to know what it meant to be Jamaican. Dancehall artists began doing this work with gusto. Through deejay lyrics, Jamaicans opened a dialogue about what being a Jamaican meant, a dialogue that could define a national culture. What did Jamaicans love to eat? Who were their heroes? What sports did they follow? What sayings did they hand down through the generations? What values did they hold?

Deejay lyrics in the ‘80s covered all these topics and more, from national radio and TV shows and personalities, popular ad jingles for Jamaican products, football and horse racing, local business, and neighborhood characters, to current fashions and social trends and politics.
Many deejays and singers took up the theme of national pride. Despite a decade lost to war and tribalism, Jamaicans were hoping for a renaissance of patriotism. The song that, perhaps, best summed up the new public spirit was ‘Product of Jamaica’, by the late Major Worries. In it, the gravel voiced Deejay identifies himself, like local merchandise, as being ‘made in Jamaica’

Me a product of Jamaica, entertainers, me love sweet Jamaica
Entertainers, say me proud of Jamaica
Just through me a product of Jamaica
Hear me now star
Just like a product of Salada
Me get me biscuit from Excelsior
Me get me little paint from down a Berger…
Grace make me ketchup and the pickle pepper
Down a D&G a weh me buy me liquor
and you know seh, man, me get me oats from over Foska
Me a product of Jamaica

Chicken Chest, in ‘Jamaica Nice’, lists all the achievements of Jamaican nationals – athletes, radio jocks and pretty women, Josie Wales was truly loved for his heartfelt, patriotic song, “Nah Lef’ Yah”.

(spooken) Eternal father bless our land
Guide and protect I and I with thy mighty hand
From all these troubles and frustrations
Cause out of many, we are one
Proud of mi island, seen?
(deejayed) Sweet, sweet Jamaica chorus: (Nah lef’ yah)
Ackee and me salt fish (Nah lef’ yah)
Soft yam and banana (Nah lef’ yah)
Big flour dumpling (Nah lef’ yah)
Love me Ocho Rios (Nah lef’ yah) …
No lef’ a Yah (Nah lef’ yah)
Love off Jamaica (Nah lef’ yah)
Navel string cut yah (Nah lef’ yah)
Born and grow yah (Nah lef’ yah)
Come on! !…………
Don’t wan’ no Visa (Nah lef’ yah)
fe go ina no freezer (Nah lef’ yah)

Food items were easily identified as uniquely Jamaica and always got a good response in the dance. Tiger’s similarly themed lyric, ‘Na Lef’ Ya So’, mentions the national dish as a good reason to stay at home – “Ackie and Salt Fish - nah lef’ ya so”. Deejay Sassafras also threw a few food items into his
‘Jamaica Way’ (Skengdon), while he boasted about adhering to the ‘Jamaican’ methods of doing things:

Everything we do – Jamaica way  
Rock we a go rock in the Jamaica way  
Dance we ago dance in the Jamaica way,  
Cook we a go cook in Jamaica way  
Wash we a go wash ina the Jamaica way’…..  
We no want no Big Mac, we nah want Cracker Jack….  
Ackee and me salt fish ina me pot…

Likewise, Early B’s, ‘Sunday Dish’, recorded for Jah Thomas (Sunset 85), was all about Jamaican food. It was also one of his biggest hits.

Help me cook me Sunday dish  
Me call it rice and peas, Escovitch fish  
To eat it every Sunday is my favorite wish  
See me Sunday morning when me go a market  
Me buy two pound of the red snapper fish,  
One pint of peas, scellion [scallion] and garlic  
Three pound of rice ca me a real craven [word missing]  
One ripe coconut with water ina it…..

Early B’s recipe lyrics inspired Lieutenant Stitchie’s ‘Wedding of Sister Ackee and Bredda Saltfish’. The idea of Stitchie’s song goes way beyond the everyday cooking theme, but none the less draws on people’s familiarity, and love, of Jamaica’s native cuisine.

Deejay Sassafrass had more to say about the local cuisine with his ‘Love You Jamaica’, on the Poco Jump Album.

Ackee salt fish, jerk pork, jerk chicken and rum  
We have the music with the bass and drum  
God bless Jamaica…

Always the super-patriot, Sassafras also went on to celebrate Jamaica’s 25th anniversary, in 1987, with Harry J release, “Jamaica me born and Jamaica me grow”. Charlie Chaplin managed to slip Jamaican brand names into his song, ‘Everything Gone Electric’, and he stuck an advertising Jingle in the middle of his peon to the Jamaican powered fruit beverage, Quench Aid.

Yellowman offered his interpretation of the Grace Tomato Ketchup ad, to which Deejay Sassafrass responded by turning the jingle it into “Great Jamaican Jockeys”.

* i.e. with a basin and bar of soap
Place names were also a way to involve Jamaicans more intimately in the lyrics. Tress deejayed about ‘Negril’ while Josie Wales had ‘Kingston Hot’, his ode to the nation’s capitol. Pincher’s declared that he “rule the 13”, in the song, ‘Kingston 13’. Brigadier Jerry endeared himself to patriotic islanders with ‘Jamaica Jamaica’, one of his biggest hits, in which he names parishes and locals crops.

Down in Jamaica Brigi born and grow
the Ocho Rios fall, I-man love it so
I used to go to school and play ti-ta-toe
and down in Jamaica they play domino
I tell you St. Catherine down to Hanover
Trelawney down to Westmoreland
I tell you St. James right round to Clarendon, lord,
St. Mary right round to Portland…
Give me 17 bunch of the green, green banana
34 pound of the Irish potato
55 pound of the sweet cassava
Lord, them never have no tomato

Like General Trees, Brigadier named local characters, as in “Bumpy a the post man fe Old Harbour”. Other deejays and singers dove into history for points of unification. Tiger sound-alike, Super Lion, came out with ‘Nanny and Cujoe’ (Humble Lion), not to mention Early B’s history lessons.

Ringo expressed the new mood of the ‘80s brilliantly when he took the ‘move’ craze (where everyone had some kind of new dance move to sing about) and used the format to describe a uniquely Jamaican phenomenon, the Higgler. Higglers were government approved small time business people – usually women – referred to officially as “informal commercial importers”. They took shuttle flights regularly to Miami, or to various Caribbean Islands, and brought back sacks filled with consumer goods, as much as they could carry. Each person was allowed a permit to bring in limited amounts of materials which they would take and sell on the street of downtown Kingston, mostly around Parade and Halfway Tree. This system allowed many people to go out and earn a living independently while providing Jamaicans with affordable goods.

Me have the latest Clarks [shoes] and gentleman boots
Expensive Beavers and Lee Jumpsuit
Me sell bikini and granny panty
The latest model boot, it come from Italy
Me have things for the young, middle age and elderly
That is to show you, I-man no choosey
White collar shirt and all wool skirt
Fancy track suit and fancy track shoe
Samacan and Rano, Even things to help you screw
Like Spanish Fly, Chiney Brush, Stud 100
Me Christian customer see it and then them drop dead
I’m going to take Jamaican dollars buy some U.S.
Go to foreign buy nothing but the best
Ina business, fe me money invest
Me walk all the time, Selassie know, me nah go rest
I’m going to go to Panama, Cuirasau and Cayman
New York City, Canada and England
When me come back, a pure worries pon the land
A cool runnings, me know all the immigration

But the most prophetic song, in hindsight, was Junior Reid’s ode to Jamaica, ‘The Original Foreign Mind’, in which he defined a trap that many Jamaican artists were about to fall victim to, the lure of living abroad. Junior had been on tour and understood the allure of the unfamiliar, the attraction of the exotic. He came back to Jamaica aware that he had been exposed to a snare, but appreciating Jamaica all the more for it.

Worry them a worry them a worry them a worry them foreign mind
deaf, you must be blind
Worry them a worry them a worry them a worry them foreign mind

Foreign is a place where people come and go
when some people go a foreign, they see they never see before
and forget all about their bredren a yard, how we living so poor
right now he’s down there sleeping on the floor

Worry them a worry them a worry them a worry them foreign mind
-deaf, you must be blind-
Worry them a worry them a worry them a worry them foreign mind

Me go a England, they treat me fine
take me to the club, me drink expensive wine
Me come back a yard, `ca me no foreign mind
Me come back a yard, me love me sunshine

New York nice but in the summertime,
Canada nice but in the summertime
London nice but in the summer time
Jamaica nice all the time

Living in Jamaica, that a paradise
Cook me food, Jah Jah know it nice
Carry banana fe me lunch, me eat it by the bunch…

More and more artist would be exposed to the same temptations as reggae genuinely began to cross over in the ‘90s. Suddenly, the music that had been kept down for so long as home, jumped the hurdle and broke out, crossing over to the major markets in the U.S.. This generated big changes, as reggae turned itself into what it needed to be to fit the new global standards. What the changes meant, however, was that while reggae was becoming more accessible to foreigners - the outcome musicians had fought for, the music was losing much of its uniquely ‘yard’ character.
Black Scorpio Sound with General Trees

The new focus on Kings Jammy and Tubby’s ‘digital’ productions raised the profile of the whole Waterhouse area, benefitting local sound Black Scorpio from the nearby neighborhood of Drewsland. Although Jammy was on top, with his years of engineering experience and contacts abroad, Scorpio had built up an impressive roster of artistic talent. By 1985, Black Scorpio owner Maurice Johnson (aka Jack) had a top caliber sound, star entertainers and a well respected record label, all running out of his Hedley Ave headquarters.

Jack didn’t always have such a nice set up. “Jack is a hustler, you know. He work hard,” says deejay Sassafrass. Jack began working alongside his father, selling yams from his father’s cart as they walked from Windward Road, along Mountainview, and past Warika Hills. On his days off school, Jack would join his father, traveling from their house on Hedley Avenue all the way downtown to Coronation Market to buy the food which they would wheel along in the cart, selling it house to house.

Jack’s initial taste of the entrepreneurial life came when he was 12 and his father gave him a bunch of sugar cane to sell on his own. “It cost 12 shillings. And I sold it. I make back 15 shillings and [my father] take 10 of them and he buy one more. That’s where I actually start my work. From I was 12 years old. I start to buy clothes for myself. My parents never have to buy nothing for me like shoes, clothes. I start from that until I start sell stamp and seal and starlight and all like that, down King Street ina the Christmas time.”

As one of eight kids in a poor household, Jack left school and begun working in construction by age 15. With the money earned from his first job, he bought a little component set, really not much more than a portable record player with speakers, the kind that folded up into a small carrying case.

That was all Jack needed to play music. With this new set up, he began playing his three favorite albums while his friends sat around the yard playing dominoes or having a beer. Over and over, all night long, Jack played the same three albums – Delroy Wilson’s Feel Good All Over, The Heptones On Top and Dennis Brown’s No Man is an Island. Still, the people in his neighborhood seemed to like it, and as the crowd got bigger. Jack decided it was time to expand.

Next, he built a tiny shop. It was situated in the front of the property on
Hedley Avenue that was to later serve as Scorpio HQ. Jack’s next step was to buy an amplifier. In those days, people only used tube amps (often built by either King Tubby or Denton, a popular sound technician) instead of the transistor amps. The tube amps took a long time to warm up, but when they did, they would emit an eerie glow of electric blue and the bass sound would come out warm and full. “We used to put the steel horn in the tree tops. Or, maybe on the housetops. When one of those steel horns play – and your bass! Oh Man! It was like the real sound, you know! Acoustic sound.”

About 1971, Jack started the sound that is now called Black Scorpio. The original name was Special I but he changed it before the election, when the JLP began using the slogan, “I Up” (High Up) so as to avoid any association of the set with a political party.

With the sound going well, Jack, largely influenced by his ambitious deejays, turned his attentions to a new venture - record producing. At the time, Sassafras was actively looking for a producer to help him put out some records, so he decided to introduce Jack to studio recording. Their first song was Sassa’s ‘Pink Eye’ about a current epidemic of the highly contagious condition. After that, Jack continued to record, releasing some memorable material with not only his own artists, but singers and deejays like Half Pint, Michael Palmer, Leroy Smart, Sugar Minott, and Yellowman. The first number one for the Scorpio label was the spirited ‘Poco Jump’, from his original deejay, ‘horseman’ Lord Sassafrass.

**Lord Sassafrass**

From childhood, hanging around the track where his dad worked training horses, Sassafrass longed to be a jockey, as did many Jamaican boys. Everything was set for Sassafrass to live a horseman’s life. But, there was one problem. “I wanted to be a jockey but me couldn’t be a jockey. Me too big.”

Sassafrass did manage to work at the Caymans Park starting gate for a while. But it wasn’t satisfying. Instead, he went into performing. In the early days, before he began deejaying, Sassafrass used to perform at local theaters reciting poetry, like the dialect verses of Miss Lou. After that, he tried art school unsuccessfully, and eventually ended up joining the Underworld Dance Group. One night, the sound King Attorney with Ranking Trevor was playing at Little Copa Beach in St. Thomas. The owner invited the dance troop to perform with the sound. It was there, that Sassafrass heard Ranking Trevor deejay. ”I see this little Indian guy deejaying so good. I say, I have to be a deejay. Him inspire me.”

Sassafrass surveyed the scene and saw that Brigadier Jerry was drawing

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*Jah Mikey remembers Jack’s shop. “Nineteen seventy six was a trying time. It was election time and there were a lot of shortages. Scorpio had a little shop and he just sort of getting started in the music and he was coming around Tubby’s. I was always there all the while and he used to bring rice and things, and we used to give him a little shopping list of the things we were short and he would bring it for us.”*
the most crowds. Sassa figured that was because he had the whole Twelve Tribes behind him. Sassa decided to make a gimmick for himself, so he started deejaying about horses. He even borrowed his name from an American race horse. The gimmick worked. “I become the ‘horseman’. So, I have all the racehorse people in Jamaica following me”.

In fact, the theme fit the whole Scorpio operation perfectly. Jack Scorpio was another horseman at heart who ended up owning race horses, and the sound often played out at the race track. Sassafras would entertain the jockeys with his Horseman Connection lyrics, over the ‘Diseases’ rhythm, listing all the great champions

Sinbad connected to Nobad  
Nobad connected to Royal Dad  
Royal Dad connected to Bagdad  
Bagdad connected to Superstar  
Superstar connected to My Lad  
What a whole heap of Dad and Lad  
Ina the horseman connection……

When Sassafrass eventually moved to Canada in the ‘80s, he left his protégé, General Trees, to carry the show, pretty much on his own, for years as the ‘younger horseman’.

**GENERAL TREES**

Jack had always seen something special in his second star performer. “Seeing Trees work on a stage, he’s different from the rest of the artists. [Even if] he don’t have to have a [hit] song to really perform to an audience, he will make you happy and laugh. He’s wonderful.”

General Trees was no ‘loafter’. While his records were climbing the charts in the ‘80s, he continued to practice his trade of shoemaking. In a little wooden shack close to his home, he and his fellow tradesmen created women’s sandals and men’s slippers out of dyed leather. His father had been a cobbler and taught him the trade. In the beginning, Trees had never had any interest in music and no dreams of performing.

“The first thing I tried to do, I was trying to turn a Jockey. I run away from home. I go to Caymanas Park. But the life was too rough. I couldn’t manage it. The mosquitoes would kill me, man!”

So, he followed his father into shoemaking. But, music was never far away in the ghetto. Right by the shop, a sound used to play – just a small local hifi – and Trees would listen as he worked. “Whenever time I’m working, and he come and sting up the sound, I don’t do anymore work, I just want to go over on the sound.”

Still, it had never occurred to him to try to get a turn at the mic. Until, one day, deejay Lord Sassafrass came to get his shoes repaired and he heard Trees
‘flinging some lyrics’ and invited him to come to Scorpio’s regular Thursday night session. The next week, Trees stopped by. Just that short, initial visit was enough - Trees became fascinated with deejaying. “After a time, it’s like there’s nothing else to me but music. Up to today, there is nothing else for me but music.”

Trees proved to be a natural performer. His high energy and stylishly gruff voice made an immediate impression. Small in stature, Trees looked convincing in his Jockey outfit, as seen on his debut LP cover, *Younger Horseman*, released in 1984 by Half Pint’s original producers, Myrie and Marshall.

In the first 45 he did for Jack Scorpio, ‘Heart Mind and Soul’, Trees decries the violence in Jamaica. The record was sensitively written and well produced - the first installment in a run of successful recordings the two had together that included ‘Mini Bus’, ‘Ghost Rider’, ‘$50 Bill’, ‘Negril’, ‘Peanut Man’, and ‘Everything So So So So’.

Whereas Josie Wales’ reality or “Street” lyrics talked about rough ghetto runnings, Trees talked about the local scene, often very specifically. He deejayed lyrics about his neighborhood, the characters who frequented it, local current events and topical news items.

The song ‘Everything So So So So’ was a humorous look at the recent shortage of salt fish and meat. “Every meat kind was scarce,” Trees recalls. The shortage forced people to eat their foods unaccompanied (or, as Jamaicans say, “so-so”). Trees added to the song the local characters Jambo, with the “caste eye” (crossed eyes), and Ocopoco, and a few vegetables.

Not to mention fe me bredren called Ocopoco who used be a baker, used to bake Toto but now he have a big farm down at Moco. Miss dasheen, Miss Irish and Miss cho cho. Can’t get no salt fish to eat the choc cho, Everything So So So So.” *

People in the community were a constant source of inspiration, as in the song ‘Peanut Man’ written about a well known vendor who used to live at Cross Roads. “Whenever time the bus comes, he run out and say, ‘Peanut - I-tal and salt’.” The song ‘Ghost Rider’ was written about a local celebrity commonly known as Elvis who used to ferry entertainers around Waterhouse and Drewsland on his motorcycle.** He got his name from his habit of riding at night without lights. He has since passed away, the result of a motorcycle accident.

One of the songs that generated a lot of attention in the press, and a lot of talk in the dancehall, was ‘$50 Bill’. The lyrics refer to a practical problem fac-

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* Toto is a Jamaican cake. Dasheen, Irish (potato) and cho cho are all locally eaten vegetables.

** He was also immortalized in Screecha Nice’s track, Ghostrider (Greensleeves 12 inch, on the flip of Frankie Jones’ ‘Get Out Of My Life’)
ing Jamaican’s in their day to day life. “In Jamaica, we had the $100 and the $20 bill and people bawling for change,” Trees explained. “Everywhere you go, a man say, ‘Me nah no change fe dat, you know’. So, I just come with the idea and say, ‘Bwoy, I want $50 bill.”

Jack adds, “We was trying to ask them, when them make the $100 bill, what happened to the ‘half of it’? It was like, something that was make off of what was really happening.” It must have worked. As Trees says, “Jamaica got $50 bill now. They say I should be on it!”

Mini Bus (aka Mini Van) was perhaps his most popular tune. It remained on the charts for 35 weeks. Again, it addressed, a problem people could relate to – this time, the transportation fiasco.

The song was a humorous tour through the new transportation system that had replaced the original Jolly Joseph buses. Under Prime Minister Edward Seaga, the bus system was deregulated and private individuals could ply the routes of Kingston with their vans which were in varying states of cleanliness and repair. The complete confusion that resulted made traveling around the city not only complicated and uncomfortable, but dangerous. Questionably trained drivers raced each other to each bus stop in order to arrive first and claim the passengers. People were crammed in so that heads and limbs hung outside and an extra person might be riding the bumper. Dance cassettes blasted as the vans wove through traffic at breathtaking speeds, horns honking and drivers cursing the entire way.

What Trees focused on in the song was the competition between drivers for passengers. “Mini Van, him a hold on pon me shirt. Him a hold on pon me hand’ – cause that is the way they is down there, you know. Just like, you try going to Portland and a man is pulling you into a bus going to St Thomas or Manchester. So you just have to understand what you are doing.”

Jack, with help from deejay Sassafrass, who was frequently in Jamaica working with the sound, managed to tease some very fresh, dynamic rhythms from The Rhythm Kings Band and Gifted Roots. In fact, the rhythm tracks for both hits, ‘Mini Bus’ and ‘Negril’, were made in the studio especially for the lyrics Trees had written. It was unusual for a deejay to record over an original rhythm. Usually, the band built the rhythm track around a singer’s guide vocal and the deejays got the leftovers. Drummer Barnabas, who played with the Gifted Roots Band on ‘Mini Bus’, comments, “Most deejays come when the rhythm already made. That was one of the first deejay songs that he came to the studio, deejay the song and we played the rhythm for his song. That’s another history.”

The difference can be heard in the unique arrangements. Similar to what Jah Screw and Barrington Levy had done in ‘Here I Come’, Jack had the Rhythm Kings band build the percussive breaks right into the rhythm in an effort to imitate the “mixing” that would be done live on the sound system.

“The greatest thing with the song is the whole arrangement,” Jack contends. “So, you want to go to ‘Negril’ – Bamp Bamp Bamp’. Trees is one of the first deejay who go to the studio with live musicians and make his own key, chords with lyrics and rhythms. Most of the other deejay who do that, they come off a version – like U Roy did a come with ‘Wear You to the Ball’, off of the John Holt version. Them always come offa the singer.” The resulting rhythms were faster with more emphasis on the beat, a perfect fit for Trees’ vast stores of energy.

The pace of the music was speeding up and the kind of high energy style that Trees manifested was becoming not only more common, but necessary to keep up with the accelerating beat. Trees, with his vigorous delivery, became the model that influenced the newer entertainers, including men like Tiger and Lt. Stitchie, both of whom used both humor and energy to move a crowd.

In 1990, there was a breach between Trees and Jack and they went their separate ways. Trees went off to record with other producers and Jack carried the Scorpio HQ to a new and safer location not far away, along Molynes Road. “The guys started getting a little rude there,” Jack admits when commenting on the move from his long time HQ. Recently Jack recorded himself, a song called ‘Black and White ina The Dance’ on the ‘Duck’ rhythm. He currently tours the world with the sound and his specials, often clashing with his old friend and rival, King Jammy.
During the second half of the 19’80s, the influence of dancehall was spreading farther abroad. At home, even the media didn’t bother to protest much anymore. Like roots music in the ‘70s, it was shunned by “proper society” until it was proven to be commercially viable, and then everyone was trying to jump on the bandwagon.

Deep Voiced Deejays

Admiral Bailey, who joined Jammy’s crew around 1986, proved to be the producer’s biggest (literally) hit maker. A tall man with sturdy bones and a thick waist, Bailey was a steady talker whose booming voice and confident delivery made him a session favorite. No longer did deejays lay down on the rhythm “like a lizard pon limb”. Like Bailey, they charged forward, taking the simple one or two chord ‘computerized’ rhythms along for the ride.

As a youth, growing up in Cockburn Penn, Bailey used to take in deejay Ranking Joe on Stur-Gav. After the dance, he and his friends used to gather on the corner and try to perform Joe’s lyrics. It was Jammy’s engineer, Digital Bobby, who discovered Bailey deejaying on a sound called Roots Melody and brought him to Jammy’s attention.

Displaying his characteristic joviality, Bailey recorded the song ‘Big Belly Man’ in which he defended paunchy men with the convincing argument that many of the island’s most important and wealthy men had Santa Claus stomachs like his own, listing King Jammy, George Phang, Jack Scorpio, Count Shelly, Steely, Josie Wales and Bobby Digital. He exhorts his listeners to, “Get some belly! Get some belly, like Jammy.”

Bailey’s songs were popular and often controversial. His biggest hit, ‘Punany’, which launched hundreds of responses and imitations, was considered too explicit for radio play, so he recorded the cleaner version, ‘Healthy Body’, in which he encouraged the listeners to eat well and take care of their ‘structure’. The new versions passed the censors, and became a hit on its own.

But ‘Punany’ couldn’t be erased just by banning it from airplay or replacing it with a sanitized version. The success of the lyrics had gone deep into the Jamaican psyche. Despite the radio ban, and the outraged letters to the local papers, everyone on the street knew the words and the tune. Now, the subject of sex was once again fair game in the dancehall. ‘Punany’ was the opening salvo in the grand return of slackness.

In the early ‘80s, after Gemini’s popularity waned, and deejays like Lone Ranger and Ranking Joe were no longer talking dirty, slackness hit a slow
period with fans preferring the reality lyrics of Josie and Charlie or the comic stories of Early B. When ‘Punany’ appeared, it brought slack deejaying to a new generation. But, slackness didn’t take over right away. Bailey remained a pretty straight deejay for the rest of his career. It was left for the next wave of deejays, including the outspoken Shabba Ranks, to pick up the theme and take it to the limit.

Despite not being a slack deejay, Bailey seemed to court controversy. His hit ‘Two Year Old’ caused another scandal. The press accused him of being a pedophile, when in fact he was talking about two year old horses.

Another time, rumors were circulating that during the previous election, he and Jose Wales had been swiping opposition party ballot boxes. In their defense, the two deejays got together and recorded ‘Ballet Box’, “Who say the Colonel, who say the Admiral steal the ballot box… Look how we big, look how we fat, how we fe jump fence with ballot box?”

Bailey continued to have a good stretch of hits, including ‘No Stop Say So’, ‘News Flash Time’, ‘Kill Them With It’, ‘No Way No Better than Yard’, and ‘Horse Tonic’. After a gap in recording left him open to speculation that his career was finished, he came back strong with “Think Me Did Done” (“Think me did done, me just a come”). Eventually, Bailey did stray from the music field for the soccer field and began a new career teaching the game at a youth club. He did, however, return to his musical roots in a new persona, as kaiso king, fronting Byron Lee’s Dragonaire’s band as they toured, and recording a series of calypso style singles with the band for Dynamic Sounds, including ‘Dancehall Soca’, ‘Soca Tatie’ and ‘Soca Butterfly’.

Back in ’87, Josie Wales had extended his post-Stur-Gav career by teaming up with Jammy and recording some classic works like his ‘Nah Lef’ Ya’ and ‘Whole Heap a Corn’, making him one of the most popular deejays, alongside Bailey and Chaka Demus – and Jammy had them all in his stable. The only real competition came from newcomer Lt. Stitchie who was working on Stereo One sound and recording for owner Clifton Henry’s Stereo One label. Stitchie was an intelligent, educated young man who had his diploma from Foster College and was teaching high school phys-ed and biology, at least until he got too well known and the children began to respond in class, ‘Yes, Stitchie’ instead of ‘Yes, Mr. Laing’.

He was doing well with his songs ‘Labba Labba’ and ‘Story Time’ when Jammy claimed him and released his massive hit, ‘Wear Your Size’, a song about women who try to squeeze into an inappropriately small shoe. The song was funny, and the style was high powered, kinetic, and punctuated by Stitchie’s own brand of ‘fast talking’. This was followed by the super charged, ‘Natty Dread’ (Stereo One, 1988). Both were accompanied by equally humorous videos that showcased Stitchie’s abundant energy. Stitchie had a sharp, penetrating sense of humor and his lyrics satirized Jamaican society. Like Peter Metro, he could say a lot in a short time, and, like General Echo, he could tell a complicated story with impersonations and character changes. The me-
dia loved him. ‘Wear Your Size’ became such a big hit that it was number one on both radio stations and on the Gleaner weekly chart.

**PINCHERS**

Singers, at least in the very beginning of the ‘computer’ revolution, were fighting the competition from the deejays by adding more of the sing-jay style to their repertoire. Anthony Redrose, Nitty Gritty, King Kong, and Tenorsaw all worked first generation computer-style rhythms with a flat, deadpan styling that featured less melody and more beat.

Still in the sing-jay camp, but with a different approach, Pinchers made quite an impression on the reggae scene when he appeared with ‘Agony’ in 1986 (Jammy). The lyrics were provocative, and he sang them with a compelling mix of wantonness and choir boy innocence and that captivated the public, especially the ladies. Although the sensual, ‘computerized’ ‘Agony’ was the breakthrough, it wasn’t his first recording. He had done one solo and one combination tune for an “all-star” LP, *Jamaica Affair*, with John Dread in England. At the time, he hadn’t yet found his distinctive style, the Waterhouse style slur accompanied by the ambiguous lyrics.

Ironically, the dancehall ladies’ man had, in fact, been an active choir boy who attended in church seven days a week. His father was a Deacon and the only singing Pinchers did was in church and at his school, which was part of the Christian Institute. Coming into the dancehall as a youth, he managed to retain some of that purity as he skimmed the edge of slackness with his hits, ‘Hackle Me Body’, ‘Gummy’, and ‘Sit Down Pon It’. With such a role model before them, more and more young men began choosing to become singers. And when they did, they wanted to sing for the girls. The new group of emerging vocalists proved so popular, it brought on a new wave of lovers rock that began to soften the edges of the chiseled digital sound. And it threatened to sweep away the deejays as it (temporarily) placed singers back on top. For a while, singers were singing again, and the deejays were left to take over the sing-jay territory.

**GREETINGS**

The most important song of 1986, on the dancehall scene, was Half Pint’s ‘Greetings’ (Powerhouse), “Greetings I bring, from Jah, to all ragamuffins”. More than any other song, it was genuinely felt by Jamaicans as a sincere effort to unite people. “It was in London I record it, you know,” Half Pint remembers. “When I went to England, I saw the living conditions [were] similar to Jamaica, so I know that poor people is poor all over the world. [The Bible says] ‘Blessed is the poor’. So, I still had that sense of what I was learning attending Sunday school at church. A song like Greetings just come out naturally. It just comes out of my mind and my heart directly.”

The song made such an impression, it stamped the term Ragamuffin indelibly into the Jamaican vocabulary. Not that it was new. Jah Stitch had his own
Ragamuffin style back in the ‘70s. For a short time, the media tried to portray the song as advocating gangsterism, or rude boys. “But I know what I had meant, what it was referring to. Because, we grew up poor and humble but we were still rich in morals and values,” Pint replied to his critics.

Half Pint grew up poor and clean, his childhood spent between central Kingston, where his parents lived, and Kingston 11, where his grandparents had a house. “My grandmother and my grandfather were originally from Kingston, the city itself … But after 1951, a storm that was in Jamaica, most people in the city was devastated. The then government at the time established some land up in St. Andrew, Kingston 11. So most people from the city that was without a house, they got land and houses up in Kingston 11, Olympic Gardens, average people just call it Waterhouse. A lot of rain would fall up in that area.

“At the time, really and truly, Waterhouse was like a residential area. The place was more like really secluded, a lot of trees, fruits. People were really gentle and kind. Because, in the ‘50s and ‘60s, Jamaica was more really together. Coming like about the ‘70s Jamaica begins to take a turn, while I was still living in central Kingston, attending All Saints All Age School. Politics begin in the ‘70s there - rivalry, clashes, fighting. Central Kingston – that is where the whole political rivalry begins and spread throughout the entire island.”

Things were different once the political violence flared. For the young Pint, it was an education, and it made him aware of the complex forces at work keeping poor people in Jamaica down. “In Kingston, back in the early ‘70s, it was a developing stage of gang rivalry but they did not start killing themselves as yet. When the political arena steps in, they were given guns and start killing each other. So, come 1978, they tried the One Love Concert to stop the killing. It didn’t really last [because] it was international…people [were] supporting for us to be divided. So, they escalate it, burned a lot of shop, close down factories, burn out buses. It seemed like an internal political affair, but it was orchestrated from international people outside. So, I grew up learning that, and realizing that it wasn’t altogether our fault, we more like a victim of circumstances. From then, I sing songs trying to elevate us out of that situation.” Pint used his understanding to write his hit, ‘Political Friction’ (Feel the Beat, 1984, produced by Myrie and Marshall), and to continue to champion the poor in songs he made for King Jammy, like ‘Mr. Landlord’, ‘Money Man Skank’, ‘One Big Ghetto’ and ‘Cost of Living’.

Although, as a youth, he did work at regular jobs, he knew his talent lay in singing. “People in that neighborhood knew that I could sing, cause my grandmother used to have us going to Sunday school and they use to have me singing. I would sing the church songs or hymns and sometimes some of the people would throw up a next penny or two pence to get me back to do an encore.”

Not wanting to contravene the rules of the house, Pint waited until he
had left school and was a full adult before he started traversing the island, performing live on sounds. Local producers Myrie and Marshal, from the same Balcombe Drive area, sometimes known as Buckors’, first heard him on the dancehall circuit. In 1982, they released his first 45, ‘Sally’. From there, he went on to work mainly with Jammy, Phang and the Taxi gang.

In 1986, after becoming the ragamuffin’s mascot, Half Pint was on the verge of leaving the ghetto behind. He had just received a call from The Rolling Stones’ lawyer informing him that the band wanted to record his hit ‘Winsome’. They had picked up a copy of the LP while touring around Europe. Apparently, the Rolling Stones were into dancehall now, and the lawyers assured Half Pint that they were playing several reggae covers on tour.

Pint had written Winsome to reach the young girls in his neighborhood he saw moving too fast. “These girls, I used to see them in Kingston. And they were really some, real [Pint makes a series of noises indicating something eyebrow-raising]! Like if any guys would be down the lane, if a next tough guy come on the street, they would drop the one that they had before and pick up the next one.”

Once the song was released, Pint worried. “I was thinking that [those girls] would be mad. But some of them, when they saw me, they were just, ‘Oh, I love that song’. And even when I see one of them, she say, ‘Devon, is it you write that song?’ and I say, ‘yea’. And she say, ‘Oh I love it’! And she was one of those girls!”

The Rolling Stones covered the song as ‘Too Rude’ on their 1986 LP, Dirty Work. That was only the beginning. “I think the second time, I get a bigger money… it was a group called Sublime from Long beach California. They had re-recorded a track also of mine from the Greetings album titled ‘Loving’.” That song sold over three million copies. I got some compensation. Lawyers work it out and I also got a major publishing deal with EMG Music Group.”

Half Pint was fortunate. He eventually left the ghetto and moved up near Constant Springs Road. He is frequently touring with big names and winning international awards. Despite a gap in his recording career, he is back in the studio and working on new material.

**SINGERS BACK IN FASHION**

At first, the ‘digital revolution’ looked like it was going to be a bonanza for deejays. But the opposite happened. In the beginning, it all but killed them off. The one and two chord machine made rhythms became the favored backing tracks for a new breed of lover’s rock singers and ‘do-over’ masters.

What had been a long established practice in the dance, for a singer to spontaneously break into a few bars of a pop song over any old rhythm that was playing, was becoming institutionalized in recording. Computer-style

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* Buckors was also the name of a gang and a popular English wool cap wool a peak in the front

** What I Got, Sublime, 1997, was a mainstream top 40 hit, Cocaine
rhythms, beat oriented and often devoid of much leading melody, seemed
to invite this approach. Top producers began recording well known covers
over the repetitive, bridgeless ‘computer’ backing tracks. Jammy released these
cover songs alongside his regular hard core dancehall cuts, and they were of-
ten the bigger hits, sometimes the individual artist’s top seller. Like Frankie
Paul’s ‘Sarah’ in ’87, a cover from Starship (formerly Jefferson Airplane). New
vocalist Leroy Gibbons found his niche in the ‘computerized’ cover version
market and recorded re-do’s like ‘Magic Moment’ (originally by The Drifters),
Cupid, (Sam Cooke), ‘Lover’s Question’ (Clyde McPhatter) and the old clas-
sic, ‘I’m in the Mood’ For Love, all for King Jammy. Jammy knew he was on
a run, and he continued in the same vein releasing Yu Yu Madoo singing The
Drifter’s ‘Under the Boardwalk’, Chuck Turner’s ‘I Need You’, Robert Lee
with Atlantic Star’s, ‘Tears’, Pinchers with ‘Genie’, and Sanchez with ‘Here I
Am’ and ‘End of the World’ (Skeeter Davis).

But, the song that really gave the new trend its force was produced by
newcomer Hugh Redman. Sanchez’s ‘Lady in Red’ came out in 1987 with
the young singer covering the Chris De Burgh pop song over a standard two
chord computer-style rhythm. It was his first release and it made him a house-
hold name in Jamaica.

His follow up, ‘Loneliness’ (Techniques), was an even bigger hit. That same
year, 1988, Sanchez was voted Singer of the Year, Best Up and Coming Artist
and Best New Artist, and ‘Loneliness’ was voted song of the year. Sanchez
came to be labeled a do-over singer – but that was only until everyone else
catched up with him. ‘Lady in Red’ was an unforeseen massive underground
hit. So huge that everyone wanted a piece of the action and a new race was
on to put cover songs over computer-style beats. Producers were happy to go
along on the cover version style. It was less risky to record a song that was
already popular (albeit in a different version), and if the soul or R&B original
was still being played on the radio, the producer could piggy back off the
airplay the original received.

All the young signers began working towards a blander, soul ballad sound.
Fast on the heels of ‘Lady in Red’ came a flurry of pop do-overs and lover’s
rock originals from a surging wave of newcomers. There was Conrad Crys-
tal (‘Indian Lady’), then Conroy Smith (‘True Love’), then Chuck Turner
(‘I Need You’). Pliers had a hit with the cover, ‘Didn’t We Almost Have It
All’. And both Sanchez and Foxy Brown both racked up hits hit with Tracey
Chapman’s, ‘Baby Can I Hold You Tonight’.

The new ‘order of the day’ seemed to be ‘imitate, don’t originate’. Gone
were all traces of the minor key, ominous, Waterhouse stylings of Redrose,
Nitty Gritty, King Kong and Tenorsaw. The cover versions weren’t always
covers of soul and funk, but often of ordinary pop material, like the Sanchez
follow up, ‘One in a Million’, sung over ‘College Rock’. Little Kirk had a hit
with an original song that was one hundred percent soul, not reggae, ‘Can It
Be Me’. He then hit with the reggae cover of ‘I Don’t Want to Lose Your Love’.
This was after having made his name covering Michael Jackson hits. It was as if reggae artists had stopped trying to cross over to the world outside Jamaica, and decided to create a copy of that world inside Jamaica. It was like the early days of Ska and Rock Steady when a large number of locally produced songs were imitation U.S. R&B tunes. But, it was a also sign that Jamaican music had temporarily lost its way and was feeling around in the dark for a new direction.

**What One Dance Can Do**

Into the general musical confusion walked popular soul man Beres Hammond. Beres had never been considered a dancehall artist, at least until 1985 when he had a massive hit that brought lovers rock and dancehall into a successful interface. ‘What One Dance Can Do’ gave Beres some much needed street cred, and defined a new style that would seek to balance the softer and harder sides of digital reggae. Beres Hammond had been recording for years, gaining a respectable but middle class audience. But his records were rarely played in the hard core sessions. He was considered an uptown singer. The song that changed all that was ‘What One Dance Can Do’ (Germain 1985), coming just at the inauguration of the ‘computer’ era. Germain put Beres over a tight, digital version of the classic Studio One rhythm, ‘Pressure and Slide’, aka ‘Mr. DC”, and let Willie Lindo do the arranging. The result was something similar to the later Gussie productions, the merging of a dancehall rhythm with a polished vocalist to create a hybrid sound that appealed across the board. Dancehall fans liked the up-tempo rhythm – ‘Mr. DC’ had always been a favorite. And the soul crowd responded to Beres’ refined vocals.

“Before that, Beres Hammond did work for Joe Gibbs – [the album] *One Step Ahead* – it’s like soul versions,” U Brown comments. “But the track that really opened the eyes to Beres Hammond in the real roots dancehall was that song.” The popularity of ‘What One Dance Can Do’ was taken as an open invitation for all middle of the road vocalists to have a crack at dancehall. ‘What One Dance Can Do’ was the story of romantic triangle – some electricity passing between the singer and an unknown female on the dance floor accompanied by her boyfriend. The singer wants to approach, but the stubborn partner is “standing in my way”. Audrey Hall (Pam Hall’s sister) was the first to record an answer, ‘One Dance Won’t Do’, which followed the same plot line, but this time from the perspective of the woman: “You think one dance will do and I’ll go home with you - you’re crazy!” That was followed by ‘Standing in His Way’, from the old time balladeer, Owen Gray. Gray took the side of the woman’s date who was watching the flirtation from their table.

The rhythm was dancehall worthy, so next the deejays took up the narrative and created their own humorous versions – Brigadier Jerry with ‘One Dance Story’ (Super Supreme) and Charlie Chaplin with ‘Come Out Of the

* Pressure and Slide by the Tenors, Mr. DC by Sugar Minott, both over the same Studio One rhythm
Way’ (Striker Lee). Beres had the last word with ‘She Loves Me Now’, which settled the relationship question for once and for all.

After that, it was clear sailing for Beres. He had acquired sufficient downtown authenticity to appear on various artists compilations alongside Bounty Killer and Beenie Man. His follow up for Germaine, ‘Tempted to Touch’ (1990) – a hit in the U.S. and UK – used the same idea of mixing a smooth, ballad style over a dancehall rhythm, cementing Beres’ image as the new Gregory Isaacs, and Germaine’s Penthouse label as the new trendsetter. Penthouse led the way into new decade handling not only the cutting edge dancehall acts like Buju Banton, Wayne Wonder and Tony Rebel, but also the timeless performers like Marcia Griffiths.

For a while, it looked like hardcore reggae was down for the count and lovers rock was taking over. Then the deejays jumped back in. Not that they had ever left completely. But, now producers found a way to put them back into the picture without sacrificing the official status the new, smoother content had earned for the music - they paired off the rough and rugged toaster with a sweet or soulful sounding singer. This contrast became the trademark of the late ‘80s and carried reggae over into the new decade with some big names and big success stories.

**Dynamic Duos**

In the late ‘80s, deejays made a huge comeback with Shabba Ranks leading the pack. The public seemed to respond best to the deep voiced, croaking deejays who could sling their lyrics at accelerated speeds. High energy, low voice - that was the winning formula. In contrast, singers were sounding more sophisticated, more urbane. Nothing created a better frame for the hard edged, tough talking deejays than the fluid tones of the young singers.

Twosomes had a long history in Jamaican music. Going back to the days of R&B, even before ska, Jamaicans liked their duets. As the music changed, Shirley and Lee gave way to Derrick and Patsy and then to Alton and Eddie, Bob and Marcia, Larry and Alvin.

In the ‘70s, the engineer would allow a few strands of the vocal to remain in the mix as a framing device and the deejay would weave his toasting in between, often responding to the words of the singer. In the ‘80s, however, the mixing style changed and deejays would be talking over clean versions with all traces of the singing erased. They were expected to create their own lyrics, on a subject that had nothing to do with the original vocal. So, during the ‘80s, the tradition of singers and deejays interacting on record was all but lost, only to come back with a vengeance once the digital age struck.

In the beginning, it was pairs of deejays interacting musically – Peter Metro and Dominic doing ‘Cockney and Yardie’, Josie Wales and Admiral Bailey with ‘Ballot Box’ for King Jammy in 1987. Admiral Bailey teamed up with

* Produced by Willie Lindo, Greensleeves
Chaka Demus on ‘One Scotch, One Bourbon’, also for Jammy. But the singer–deejay combo soon conquered the territory.

**THE RISE OF GUSsie CLARKE**

Slowly, in small steps, the music began to become more commercial, more North American. It began to acquire that sophisticated, urban feel of post-disco pop and soul. The man who helped guide music in this international direction was producer Augustus ‘Gussie’ Clarke.

“Gussie had a superb team of song writers and musicians around him for a few years at the end of the ‘80s – Hopeton Lindo, Mikey Bennet – really good people, and he produced some really classic work then,” Tony McDemott of Greensleeves Records explains. “He took the whole digital thing to a diffident level. The digital thing had started a year or two earlier but he brought it to a much more professional level.”

From 1988 until 1990, Gussie ruled. The veteran producer now manned a slick operation matching singers to songs and songs to rhythms. Deejay Shabba Ranks, with his deep, resonant bass vocals, was his star performer, and Gussie cleverly exploited his strong, rumbling voice by recording him in a series of duets with various softer, gentler sounding female vocalists. With Krystal, he had ‘Steady Man’ and ‘Don’t Test Me’. With Deborah Glasgow, he had ‘Mr. Lover Man’. And with J.C. Lodge, he had ‘Hard Core Living’ and the mega hit, ‘Deh Pon Me Mind / Telephone Love’ which gave Shabba his first big overseas success. Gussie had found a way to appeal both to the uptown crowd and the ragamuffins by mixing two genres onto one new one 12 inch 45, the best of both lover’s rock and dancehall combined in a savory new mix. The format worked well because each member of the pair accentuated the sensuality of the other. Shabba’s sandpaper vocals made J.C. Lodge, or Krystal, sound even more tender and vulnerable. And the singer’s soothing tones highlighted the strength of the hard edged talkers.

“Some of [Gussie’s] biggest hits were combination tunes and that became another kind of phase [in reggae]… putting deejays and singers on the same tunes,” Greensleeves’ Chris Sedgwick recalls. “That certainly did carry the swing for quite a while and obviously lead to Chaka Demus and Pliers huge international success. Even Shaggy would often have singers on the massive hits he had. The international market liked that. They can’t take a deejay through an entire tune. With a singer in between, they seem to like it. The deejay then comes through to punctuate it.”

Gussie had been producing reggae music since the ‘70s. He started out in the business by acquiring a dub cutting machine second hand and having Tubby fix it up for him. He used to keep it at his home on Church Street and cut dubplates for sound systems like Emperor Faith and Arrows.

His first big producing success was the influential and celebrated 45,

* Original by Amos Milburn
“Screaming Target” by Big Youth. Gussie set up shop in Music Works, his small studio on the second level of the store fronts at 56 Slipe Road, near Cross Roads, where he worked until 1988 when he moved into the Anchor Complex. Every so often, he had a major hit, like Dennis Brown’s ‘To the Foundation’ and ‘Pass the Kouchie’ by the Mighty Diamonds. Even back then, although he used dancehall deejays like I Roy and U Brown, Gussie tended to work towards a slightly more refined sound. Thus, he gravitated towards vocalists like Gregory Isaacs, Hopeton Lindo, the group Tetrack, Delroy Wilson and Pam Hall, and his records were not usually big dancehall hits.

“We worked in that little place. We turned a toilet into a vocal room. The front of the office, we turned it into the control room. We usually distribute our own records. We actually sat outside on the steps of Music Works and transacted business as people come to buy records. And as the lady downstairs—a hairdresser—moved, we got her place and the whole thing just evolved.”

In 1988, Gussie opened a full recording set up, Anchor Studios, and began to produce the kinds of music he had always dreamed of. As it happened, the time was right. That was exactly the music that people wanted to hear. Now, with MTV images pouring in, people wanted something a little more sophisticated than the raw cuts that Dancehall music had been associated with.

Greensleeves picked up on Gussie early on and established a good working relationship.

“It was very polished dancehall,” Chris Sedgwick explains. “It was completely at odds with Jammys. He really had in his own head that he wanted to produce very highly polished music with a dancehall vibe, but with a much more up-market and international outlook.”

Gussie wasn’t afraid of making openly commercial music, and he easily adapted a very North American approach. “He was hoping to build a kind of Motown factory with in-house writers, in-house musicians, everybody working around the clock, with the best equipment, the best song writers,” Chris Sedgwick explains. Gussie hired writers to write songs, musicians to create “beats” (backing tracks – formerly called “rhythms”), and then matched the artist to the music. Gussie’s all star writing team consisted of Home T four member, Mikey Bennett, formerly with King Jammy, singer Hopeton Lindo, and Carlton Hines, an experienced song writer and singer, formerly with the group Tetrack. “Together, they were responsible for ‘Champion Lover’, ‘Mr. Loverman’,” Gussie explains. “My god, it is so much songs! Seventy percent of all the songs from the [late] ’80s era were written by them.”

That’s how one of Gussie’s hugest hits, ‘Telephone Love’ happened. Gussie’s team had been working on a song for the Mighty Diamonds called ‘Rumors’, but Gussie didn’t feel it was right for the group. So, he decided to give it to Gregory Isaacs instead. The result was a hit so massive that Gussie knew he could get a lot of mileage out the rhythm. So, he had his writers start looking for something else to put over it.

“Mikey Bennett and Hopeton Lindo started to jam and came up with this
song about talking to women on the phone and phone sex. Mikey Bennett is always onto some kinky thing like that. He and Hopeton Lindo are two great writers. And then we started to say, ‘This sound like J. C. Lodge’. J.C. was there doing background vocals too. And we started to jam the song. J.C. Lodge didn’t like the song. She was totally against it. She went home, played the demo of it for her manager, now husband. He loved the song! It was very strange, cause it’s usually the other way around. And she came back the next day and sung the song, and the rest was history.”

‘Telephone Love’ became one of the biggest songs ever to come out of Jamaica. According to J.C. Lodge’s website, “‘Telephone Love’, recorded for Clarke in 1988, was the first dancehall reggae track to cross over in the R&B and hip-hop markets in the United States, topping the urban charts in New York and other cities.”* J.C. even landed a deal with hip hop label, Tommy Boy Records.

**SHABBA RANKS**

One of the versions of ‘Telephone Love’ that followed was a new mix with J.C. Lodge singing her breathy vocal followed by Shabba Ranks threatening that he was “done with the phone talk” and that he would “come over there, NOW.” Shabba Ranks sounded so good when set against a female vocalist, that Gussie made a whole LP of duets, *Rappin’ with the Ladies* (VP).

The rise of Shabba Ranks** was the start of something new. A pupil of Josie Wales, the man who first brought him to King Jammy’s sound, Shabba had also worked with Admiral Bailey on Roots Melody. When he started out, in the ‘70s, he was doing strictly cultural lyrics.

By 1988, he had abandoned the culture field and gone straight into what he called “X-rated” material with ‘Love Punany Bad’ (Jammy 1987), ‘Needle Eye Punany’ (Witty, 1988) and ‘Wicked in Bed’ (Digital B 1990), which he claimed, with his customary flourish, “proved to me that humor towards deejay business, and life of living, has a great tendency towards the career of mine,”*** meaning he saw how sex and humor could be mixed into a hit making combination.

One of his biggest hits was ‘Twice My Age’, recorded for Gussie and released on a 12 inch 45 in 1989. As with ‘Telephone Love’ and Gregory Isaacs’s ‘Rumors’, Gussie was seeking to achieve an “international standard,” not just make another ‘killer dubplate’ for the next clash. Singer Krystal came to him one day and said she had a song she wanted to record. “She was a young girl, and she was in a relationship with a man who was twice her age. So, she came to me with the song [‘Twice My Age’]. I liked it, so we recorded the song. We were working with Shabba [Ranks] around those time. I am always into

* www.jclodge.com

** Shabba kept his real name, Rexton Gordon, top secret information for quite a while.

*** In an appearance on Dave Kingston’s Reggae Showcase, CKLN radio, January 1990
collaborations and trying to create a unique thing, so I said, ‘I would be a
great thing for you and Shabba’, cause its Shabba’s line of lyrics, reasoning
and thought.”

As the original 45 by Krystal was already a big hit, Shabba had developed
lyrics for it. But, Shabba had a slightly different take on the age difference.
“What this girl thinking, she want an elderly man. She’s thinking about the
dollar bill.” Krystal sings, “I’m in love with a man nearly twice my age, I don’t
know what it is, but it’s a thing from youthful days,” and Shabba replies, “She
wan’ no idle juby, She nah wan’ no lovers honey – she wan’ the money.”

Gussie didn’t stop there. Knowing that once a rhythm is popular, other
producers will jump on the bandwagon, Gussie decided to run the rhythm
into the ground himself, coming up with Cocoa Tea’s ‘Half My Age’ and
several other versions.

PROBLEM WITH DIGITAL

By the end of the ‘90s, reggae was almost unrecognizable from what it
had been in 1980. The advent of digital music couldn’t help but change the
way reggae was produced and consumed. It brought reggae more in line with
what was being made in commercial studios all over the world. The digital
programming was what allowed reggae to break out of its ethnic confinement
and become a world class pop genre. But here was also a downside.

With the universal use of the same computer programs, the music had lost
much of what made it unique. Bass player Flabba Holt complained, “Once,
when you play music, you coulda know seh that song come from Channel One
Studio, that one come from Joe Gibbs [studio], that one come from Treasure
Isle, the other one come from Studio One. Nowadays, you don’t know where
the song record. Everything sound the same way. It’s the same Pro Tools”.

Gussie agrees, adding that the new digital rhythms could be created by
anyone regardless of training or talent. “These people who are making records
now, they are not even musicians. When the people playing were actual musi-
cians, there was natural quality control in the original music.” Once hobby
producers were able to enter the market professionally, the sudden onslaught
of new rhythms and releases overwhelmed an already strained market and
watered down the music.

By the late 1990s, getting into the business required no special skills or
knowledge. “[Now], if he has enough resources,” Gussie continues, “[the art-
ist] can build a home studio, hire musicians, and voice his song himself. That’s
what [is] kind of messing up the thing. Let’s say the artist wants to say, ‘It’s
my studio it’s recorded in. Me write it, me mix it, me produce it, and, don’t be
surprised, me gwan publish it meself’. That is the ‘me’ factor. What it is doing
is letting us lose our uniqueness, a quality and standard for which we have

* CKLN appearance

** Pro Tools is a program for creating and mixing music digitally
been known worldwide.” Yet, despite the naysayers, digital production was now ubiquitous and the music was reaching abroad into sectors it had never penetrated before, undergoing big changes in the process.
Starting out the night with some heavy oldies, like Johnny Clarke’s ‘A Man Like Me’ (over the rhythm that Jah Stitch made famous as ‘Greedy Girl’) and Errol Dunkley’s ‘A Little Way Different’, selector Danny Dread watched as people drifted into the yard lead by a group of young men dressed with red and black tams and headbands. The security was serious, large men with large guns positioned at strategic locations about the place. Jah Mikey was warming up the crowd as Nicodemus, U Brown and Burro stood around the control tower, sipping their Heineken and waiting for the dance to heat up. Ricky Tuffy and Cutty Ranks, still considered apprentices, were also around the back, preparing to take a turn. Live singer for the night was Clarence Parks. On June 9, 1985, Stur-Mars was officially launched at 56 ½ Old Hope Road and the place was rammed.

The newest addition to the dancehall scene, Stur-Mars, appeared like a reincarnation of ‘70s rub-a-dub set Papa Roots. The sound was the brain child of long time Papa Roots fan, Kenneth ‘Skengman’ Black, a wealthy entrepreneur and PNP supporter who had made a promise many years before to build a sound for Danny Dread and Nicodemus. Nicodemus recalled, “My friend, Skengman, he keep a dance with Socialist Roots and he like what I did. From that time, he keep a lot of dance with me. He go to foreign [Miami] and I meet him and he say, ‘Nicodemus, we check for you. Gonna buy you a sound and you can go and come any time you want’. And he buy Stur-Mars.”

Stur-Mars was an odd mixture of the old and the new. The set carried the foundation deejays from the Papa Roots days, Nicodemus, U Brown and Jah Mikey as well as former Papa Roots selector, Danny Dread, who had been working with Studio 54 after the demise of Volcano. Early B, Supercat and selector Ainsley joined the crew later, fresh from Jaro. In addition, another former Volcano man, Burro came along with his apprentice, Cutty Ranks, a young deejay who sounded just like his teacher. Ainsley was needed because Skeng always kept two selectors. That left Danny Dread free to travel to Miami to work with the record label. Skengman had businesses going on all over. The new record label prompted him to open record outlets in several North American cities.

To start up the sound, Skeng first had to fly Nicodemus back home. The deejay had been living between New York and Canada on and off since 1980. So Nicodemus was sent a ticket and he arrived in Jamaica fresh from foreign. To make sure everyone knew he really was in town, his first stop was St. Anne’s where he appeared, like the prodigal son, in the middle of a Youth
Promotion dance, and laid to rest any suspicions that he might have lost the
vibes by staying so long abroad.

In 1972, Nicodemus, brother of Blacka Morwell, was just getting his feet
wet on a small sound from Independence City called Emperor Slave where
he worked under top deejay Trevor Ranking. Although he deejayed many
sounds, such as Channel One, Taurus and King Jammy when Liza and Kojak
were around, he is best remembered and for his work with selector Danny
Dread on Socialist Roots. Mikey Faith, owner of Emperor Faith, was a big
fan of Nicodemus. “They used to say Nicodemus lie down on the rhythm like
a lizard pon a limb. He carried a lot of vibes.”

Nicodemus was working at the Caymanas Park Race Track as a groom in
the early ‘70s. “He was trying to get to be a jockey,” Ranking Trevor recalls.
“But he was so short and thick and heavy, he would never reach that stage.
But he work with them, groom the horses and thing. One night I perform
over Independence City and him hear me and from that night, Nicodemus
decide him nah leave me. So, he come a my house come live. So, that’s where
Nicodemus career start – right in my yard.”

Nicodemus eventually followed Trevor to Papa Roots where Trevor was
the main deejay. Then Trevor crashed on his motorcycle and had to stay in the
hospital for a time and Nicodemus had to handle the sessions alone. It was
a big responsibility as Trevor was the top deejay with the most hits at the time.

Nicodemus handled it well and began earning a name for himself. He
and selector Danny Dread became inseparable and even left to work Jammy’s
together for a short time in the ‘70s. Although he was rated more as a live deejay
than for his recordings, Nicodemus cut some popular records, like ‘Susie
Wong’ (Skeng Don) and ‘Bone Man Connection’ (Volcano).*

A versatile and experienced selector, Danny got his start with a small set in
Greenwich Farm called Ioses where he was able to aid in the development of
such crucial singers as Sammy Dread and Michael Prophet. He came to work
with Papa Roots while it was still King Attorney. When Nicodemus joined
Papa Roots, the deejay and selector became a team and stuck together, even
long after the sound folded. When Papa Roots was abandoned in 1980 due
to internal disputes, Danny Dread and Nicodemus remained together, mov-
ing temporarily to Jammy’s’” where they helped the sound win three cups in
competitions held at Skateland.

But, soon after, Nicodemus went abroad and Danny, on his own again,
joined hit maker Junjo Lawes’ Volcano Hi Power, as it’s primary selector, until

* A one-off album named *Tidal Wave*, which featured Nicodemus along with Bobby Culture, Louie
Rankin, Brimstone & Fire, all part of Jack Ruby’s Hi-Power’s core crew, was recorded in New York, in
Phillip Smart’s HFC studios. (Unicorn, ‘83). Channel One also released ‘She Love it in the Morning’ in
1982 at the height of their interest in recording popular dancehall deejays. In the same year they also
put out Ringo’s *Riding West*, Lone Ranger’s *M 16*, Yellowman’s *One Yellowman* and Toyan’s *Tovan.*

** In those days, Jammys sound was still being played using the equipment that had belonged to the
Payneland sound, Tapetone, with all tube amps.
1984 when the whole sound traveled to New York. Danny Dread went along and played the sound for a while, but never felt comfortable abroad. So, he returned to Jamaica.

Back home, Danny Dread joined Montego Bay sound Studio 54, selecting off and on for deejay Papa Desi, and sometimes, Burro. But Danny was happiest when Stur-Mars sound invited him on board and he started working, once again, with his old sparring partner, Nicodemus.

Skeng, a.k.a. Kenneth Black, seemed to appear suddenly on the scene in late 1985 with his new sound system and his bright, shiny label with distributors situated in key cities. But Skeng had been involved with the dancehall scene for a long time. “Skeng is not just a guy who just come around recently,” Ainsley explains. “Skeng is not just a guy who make some money and buy a sound like ‘nuff guys do. Skeng is a man who used to keep dance from back in the days with King Attorney, Socialist Roots with Tony Welch and those guys. That is how he know Nicodemus, Trevor Ranking and U Brown. Down in Yorktown, Clarenden, in his area, way back in the ‘70s, he used to bring in King Attorney, Socialist Roots come and play for him with Trevor Ranking and those guys.”

Skeng was originally in the construction business. According to entertainer Joe Lickshot, when he was just a young worker, Skeng’s boss had left the business to him in his will. With the windfall, Kenneth invested in a string of gas stations and a trucking business in Miami, the profits from which he parlayed into the Black Brothers construction company in Jamaica.

Mr. Black became a wealthy man. He used his money to hold dances all through the ‘70s and, by the mid eighties, he took it a step further, building the sound and setting up his own label and studio in Miami. Thus, the well known Skengman was soon promoted to Skeng ‘Don’, the new ‘don’ of dancehall.

“WHO a THE DON?”

From Leroy Smart’s ‘I am the Don’ to Shabba Rank’s ‘Article Don’, the age of the “Don” was being proclaimed in music. These larger than life characters captured the imagination of Jamaicans. Wherever a Don went, things happened. Imported cars breezed through customs, new shoes were modeled, and everybody ate lunch.

Dons were supposed to take care of people, which they did even more effectively than elected officials. They assisted the social and financial needs of their community’s constituency. In return, they received undying loyalty and devotion of the local people. Dons had always been there in the background of society in Jamaica, making the wheels run smoothly. But, in the ‘80s, dons were coming forward, celebrated in song, like deejay Lord Sassafrass’s 45 release, ‘Don of all Dons’, produced by the Don, Altiman.

Have fe know where the Don come from
All over the island, a Don
(Chorus) Who a the Don
Sassa a tell them where the Don come from:
Down a Yorktown whe’ me find Skeng man
Who rule Drewsland, a the one Altiman*
Out a Southside a whe’ me find Redman
Pon the race track that a Boogie Wonderland”

The whole world haf” fe bow to the Don
Respect is due to the Don
Easy now Don, you come to Jamaica to please everyone
One time, me used to fan with me hand
Since me meet up the Don, him give me air condition

With the endemic poverty, and the failure of the existing power structures, the Don was the man who dealt directly with the people, helping them with any problem that arose. Joe Lickshot, who was given a bike by Skeng, remembers, “He always take care of the youths in Jamaica. He give them work, give them business to do, find things to give them to work. He comes from the poorer class. [So, he] come to help the poor people, for he’s a poor people government.”

“Skengdon, that is a guy who really love youth,” Danny Dread commented at the time. Skeng had no trouble moving into recording. The way he treated his people, he had access to the biggest and brightest at his fingertips. He bought everyone on the sound matching crisp white suits. He imported cars for people, bikes, everything. He treated his artists like stars and paid them much better than most downtown producers and sound owners. Burro recalls, “Ina them days, you [as a deejay] never really make money. [Skeng] was the first guy who come and offer me money. The same work I was doing on Volcano and Kilimanjaro, this guy is asking you to come and do it for real money… Cause Skeng is a business man like that. He paid people what they wanted. He set up a lot of people in Jamaica. He set up a lot of musicians. When I was around Skeng, everything going right.”

The other side of Skeng’s new empire was record production. Skeng had

* Altiman owned GT Hi Power. The sound was originally from Harlem but Altiman built a Jamaican version and was playing out in the Waterhouse area. Some of the Dons who entered into producing had big hits and came up with a credible body of work. Hugh Redman, for example, often cited as the Don exemplar, scored the classic Lady in Red by Sanchez and We Run Things by Flourgon among others. “Hugh ‘Redman’ James epitomized the outrageous dancehall movement of the 1980s with his flashy cars, multi-layered jewelry and natty threads,” reports Howard Campbell in Return of the Redman Where Are They Now, Jamaican Observer, February 02, 2002.

** “Boogie Wonder Land,” Sassfrass, explains. “Him did have him own a thing go on a country Wednesday night or Thursday night. Big man. Him was a monster ina the racing business. Boogie Wonder Land come from Harlem too. Him buy a lot of horse. Them kill him when he go back.”
some of the hottest Jamaican entertainers at his disposal. He began working with the most popular artists of the day, including Supercat, Cocoa Tea, Johnny Osbourne, Gregory Isaacs, Leroy Smart, Horace Martin and Earl 16 among many others. During his short burst of activity, Skengdon released hits like Supercat’s ‘Vineyard Party’, a response to Papa San’s ‘Animal Party’, Sassafrass’s ‘Jamaica Way’, and Junior Delgado’s nicely executed, ‘Fine Fence’. Nicodemus had a hit with ‘Suzie Wong’, lyrics that harkened back to an earlier era.

The songs were being voiced and mixed at Skeng’s new studio in Miami, run by the Inner Circle’s Louis brothers, Roger and Ian. The Skengdon label had a lucky horse shoe as its symbol, reflecting his business interests in race horses at home.

Skengman also had a special affection for Sugar Minott and Sugar’s mission to promote the local youth. The two men had come together after two fierce clashes – Youth Promotion v. Stur-Mars sound. In the end, Skeng invited Sugar to work with him, as Sugar says, “like two boxer done fight, them say, ‘Bwoy, you too rough for me. Bwoy, come work for me’.” And he did.

Sugar moved his recording operations from his home to a rented building on Waltham Park Road that became a combination record shop/studio for voicing and mixing. L & M Recording Studio was a joint venture of Sugar and his new business partner, Skeng. The front window of the record shop bore both logos. Sugar was now “running the Skeng Don label in Jamaica” and, as Knockshot remembered, “Every one living like kings”

In 1986, Sugar took Chris Wayne and Yami Bolo with him to Miami to do a show up there for Skengman. Skeng, as usual, was ever bountiful. Sugar returned alone from the trip and he brought with him suitcases full of things for the crew. Sugar let everyone in the crew choose a fresh pair of shoes.

Because he could afford it, Skeng planned spectacular, all-star stage shows and events like the one he held in Miami for Jamaican Independence day in 1986 with 44 top entertainers and special guests in a full day affair at the Miami baseball stadium. He kept the ticket prices at an affordable $7 out of respect for the fans. Naturally, the place was ‘corked’.

Then, around ’87, Supercat, Burro and Nicodemus left the island to tour England. They were gone over six months and never came back to the sound. Then, Ainsley then left for the U.S.. The last straw was when Danny Dread’s house burned down with his entire library of Stur-Mars dubplates and specials. “I feel Stur-Mars would still be playing if that didn’t happen,” He reflects sadly.

When Skeng went back to Mandeville, he left behind a different scene than the one he came into. It was the first time real money was floating around, the first time many of the entertainers involved had been offered such high sums. Skeng was the first to raise salaries and the other sounds and producers had to follow suit. It was now becoming possible, for the first time, to make a good living as a dancehall entertainer.
But, for the foundation generation it was too late. They had to watch as their apprentices and students got the recognition and recompense they had only dreamed of. The dancehall scene was undergoing a cycle of rapid changes in the later ’80s. Burro explains, “Money start come in the thing and it change things. And it change things until this era. Cause the youth growing up now, in the music, they making money now, they making real money now like Sean Paul and Beenie Man and these guys. They’re making good money. Different from us. We used to put in a lot of work for this thing to reach where it is now, and we never really get paid for that. That was the planting. Then come the growing process and now is the reaping time. The reaping now is for the kids. Everything sow. It reach up now and it start to blossom and the youth get the fruits now and we were the ones that plant those trees.”
Foreign Mind

“The ’80s is the drug decade when the whole cocaine thing started to filter into Jamaica and all kinda shit started happening”

DENNIS ALCAPONE

Cocaine had been around Jamaica before. People were using it in the ‘70s, but it was too expensive for the average entertainer, let alone for the kids living in the ghetto. In the ‘80s, that changed. “When crack cocaine made its way across the island of Jamaica in the 1980s, it made our experience with Hurricane Gilbert on September 12, 1988 seem like child’s play,”* wrote Philip Mascoll in an article in the Toronto Star. The already well established drug cartels in South America saw Jamaica as a new frontier. There was already a system of ganja smuggling in place and a base of well organized criminal gangs. The leaders were happy to be paid with a portion of the drug to sell locally which increased use throughout the island.

Ganja was a native and abundant herb growing wild all over Jamaica. Arriving in the island from India, Marijuana quickly became so commonly used by such a large percentage of the population (either smoked or as tea) that in the 1970s a team of American researchers traveled to the island to study the effects of long term ganja use.”**

Ganja cultivation was widespread and thought of as a way a farmer could make a little extra cash on the side. But in the ‘70s, ganja became big business with the target market the United States. Light aircraft flew regular missions from the ganja field of Jamaica to landing strips up north. The reaction by the U.S. government was to proclaim a “War on Drugs” which cut deeply into ganja exporting. The Jamaican government was asked to cooperate, which it did wholeheartedly.

When Edward Seaga came into office, he arrived with the backing of then president Ronald Reagan who had every reason to expect that Seaga would give the U.S. free reign in its proposed campaign to eradicate the ganja production on the island. Seaga didn’t let them down. He allowed the U.S. to fly into the country and to cut and burn the ganja fields. When John Holt sang

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* Media Awareness Project, Jamaica: The Guns Of Kingston, Philip Mascoll, Tue, 24 Jul 2001, Toronto Star |CN ON

about “police in helicopter searching for marijuana,” he was talking about the U.S. DEA that eliminated up to ⅓ of the ganja grown in Jamaica.

The only problem is that this left the way clear for the cocaine dealers to move in. “This side-effect of the ‘War on Drugs’ did not only mean that at the beginning of the ‘80s it was sometimes easier to get crack than marijuana in, for example, New York but it also led to the sudden availability of lots of cocaine (in the form of crack) in Kingston’s ghettos”.*

If ganja business earned hundreds of thousands, cocaine made millions for its entrepreneurs. “The drug gang leaders, or Dons as they are called in Jamaica, have so much disposable income that they have become the new leaders of the impoverished and disenfranchised of the ghettos.”**

The new drug entrepreneurs moved quickly up the ladder, making previously unheard of amounts of money. So much so, that they no longer needed the support of the politicians to sustain their community base. The drug men were now able to dictate to the politicians.

Big money was thrown around with an abandon never seen before in Jamaica. The natural order of dancehall was turned upside down. Earlier, you had to build a sound in order to make money. Now, money came first, and then you built the sound. That gave the dance a very different feel. “My honest opinion, half of the people that was pouring in the money, they weren’t interested into the music,” U Brown explains. “They interested into the surroundings, like the attention, and your name being all over the papers, like you’re the ‘Don’***. Some of them come with this big sound system, 12 piece of amplifier and this and that, and, after a while, they don’t last for long. It’s not like Stur-Gav, U Roy’s sound, who comes from genuine thing. And it’s not money U Roy did have [that] make him make his sound. It’s not money Gemini did have [that] make him make him sound.”

Newcomers were entering the sound system business with other motives than pure love of music. “What happen in the late ‘80s, all of the drugs culture had taken over,” Half Pint remembers. “There was a lot of guys who wanted to launder their money and they used the music as a means.” Rather than trying to make money through the music, people who already had money were using music to move their money from one country to another.

Besides being rich, the new entrepreneurs wanted to be famous, especially in their former neighborhoods. They wanted their names to be called in the

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* Jamaica, A Visitor’s Guide, Harry Pariser, Published by Harry S. Pariser, 1995
*** Media Awareness Project, Jamaica: The Guns Of Kingston, Philip Mascoll , Tue, 24 Jul 2001, Toronto Star (ON ON)
**** Originally an Italian form of polite address, Don came to referred to anyone respected as an authority figure. Used as underworld slang, in the ‘80s it was applied more loosely. A Don could be a drug lord, a respected record producer, a politician or a popular entertainer.
dance, to hear the accolades of the crew over the big speakers. Normally, a person would have to go up to the selector and tell him to “Big up John Tom from New York and the crew.” So, according to Welton Irie, “Some of them got the idea to build them own sound so that their name can call the whole night. And then, them got the artist doing specials with them name in it, to look big.”

As Dennis Alcapone explains, “These people was making ‘monopoly’ money, crazy money, through the drugs trade. They would call a deejay or a singer and give him so much thousands just to make something [a special] that call their name on it. Just something for their pleasure. They allow everything [as lyrical content] because they are like that; they are people that don’t care. They don’t care what the deejay or the singer is singing about. They have their money and that’s all they care about. They were the people that hijack the music industry. It becomes a really messed up thing in the ’80s. The whole music thing changed.”

Soon, men with big money started buying expensive sound systems and arranging extravagant affairs, even flying entire posses from New York into Jamaica to attend a session. “More boxes, more equipment, more everything - cars going to dance, buses carrying people,” Welton explains. “And then, each year it got harder for those guys. When the speakers started getting damaged and need repair, they couldn’t really bother do that. Them wonder why them have to keep spending money on this sound. And the sound deteriorate and it park and then the selectors gone elsewhere.”

Big money was pouring into the dancehall business and money has a way of warping things. Denis Alcapone continues, “It’s all when the drugs people get involve and [people] start to say they are producers because they was looking something to do [that was] legitimate. They came in and they mess up the whole thing and it take away the control from the normal man because the normal man wasn’t making a lot of money.” The more money the artists made, the more they came to see themselves as celebrities because they had fancy cars and gold chains. The artists thought it was great, but long time, local producers found it hard to compete with the power of this easy money.

“Who do you think is the problem?” An angry Winston Riley complained. “Is the guys who come up on the scene with a whole heap of money. Cause them take the artists and give them a ton load of money whe’ you can’t afford to give them.” The new producers had a habit of handing out large sums with ease, creating a difficult situation for the working producers who had been toiling away in the studios of downtown Kingston and could never match such high levels of remuneration.

**New York Calling**

Drugs and music mixed easily, especially in the reggae hot spots of New York and Miami.

“If you’re in a club in New York,” Dillinger explained, “like you go in a
club and a guy ask you what you drinking – a Babycham, a pop or whatever you like to drink, and there would be a saucer, or maybe a $100 bill with some blow for you to nice up your nose.” Burro witnessed the same scene developing in the ‘80s. “You see, when you really go to New York now and see the settings, the music surround a lot of drugs people. A man put on a party, a lot of drugs man comes, and you get sucked into the thing. And if you don’t really make a good step, the drugs thing gonna take away you career. Cause money you looking, and bad things carry money. Some people gone a prison, some poor, some coked out. It just kill your career.”

New York and Miami were the dual epicenters of the fast money phenomenon, and too many of the early ‘80s dancehall artists ended up in either city, drawn in to the glamorous high life. Deejay Burro Banton, who made it through successfully, spent several years in the big apple observing the scene. He speaks of the fascination living abroad held for so many. “When you come to New York and you don’t know about it, it coming so lovely that you’re not even checking that no Jamaican artist nah really bust a New York. After, you start to think these things. But you get so caught up, it seems like you can’t go back. People grabbing after the money, they get caught in a corruption thing. You push [open] doors whe’ you never supposed to push.”

New York was like a black hole in the ‘80s. Artists could easily be sucked in and swallowed up. Sound after sound left Jamaica and never returned. And those left at home longed to go abroad where they imagined streets paved with miles of gold rope chains. Little John had a song, “Foreign Mind and local body,” warning artists that foreign was for foreigners, not Jamaicans. But as Burro says, “The musicians ina my time was searching to eat some food.”

Black Star was one of those sounds that languished after touring New York and getting stuck abroad. Only Malvo made it back to Jamaica to launch a fruitful career in the new digital world. “Mostly in the ‘80s, a lot of guy who came to America didn’t go home and their career died. It never work out cause, after a time, everything changed,” Malvo explains. “The ‘party’ man pay you more than whe’ the [ordinary] promoter pay you. So, when you come, if you’re not strong, you would stay – because they are buying you gifts. I remember, one day I went to the store, and the man say, ‘A whe’ you name – Malvo? You are my singer. Pick up anything you want!’ And I pick up two shirt and two pants and the man say, ‘A whe’ you doing, you embarrassing me? I said, pick up anything.’ So, I pick up eight pair of shoes, eight pants, eight shirts. It was Bally. Bally is an expensive shoes. So, if you weren’t strong, you would never leave, you would never go back to Jamaica. They start to take cocaine, get messed up and loose them life and some of them go to jail. A couple of them in the U.S. right now, they can’t go back home. They’re stuck and their career just die out.”

Throughout the ‘80s, as Jamaicans continued to migrate northwards, they carried their music with them. The sound system scene was booming. The top venue, the Galaxy Ballroom, featured local sounds like Papa Moke with
Mikey Jarrett, Downbeat the Ruler with selector Tony Screw and artists like Louie Ranking, Reverend Badoo, Neville Valentine, and Brimstone, African Love with Shinehead. Jamaican artists came and went easily, as the sound system scene was ready to receive them. There was always a good paying job waiting for them at the end of a three-hour flight.

Sharing the sidewalks with the new Jamaicans, young Americans began to hear their music and pick up on the scene with the unintended result that these youths from the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens, began to incorporate dancehall into their emerging forms like Rap and Hip Hop - and vice versa, an interchange that defined a new path for both forms of musical expression.

**Digital Reggae and Hip Hop**

From the digital revolution, and even before, foreign influences were working their way into the dancehall. But the changes in African-American music that were taking place in the ‘80s created the perfect climate for, not exactly a merging, but a close connection between the growth and development of Jamaican and American music. As the two genres began to talk, digital programming became the common language.

Because both reggae and hip hop recordings were now being created using the same computer programs and technology, they shared certain characteristics that allowed them to be played together seamlessly. A reggae record, built on a certain preprogrammed drum pattern, for example, could now be mixed into a similar hip hop record without a break. Kids in the Bronx were already mixing the two genres in parties and on the mix cassettes they played in their jeeps as they cruised the avenues with their windows down and the bass cranked way up. For dance DJs, the steady drum machine beats allowed for seamless beat-mixing between genres, which helped blur the differences to their listening audience. The cool kids in New York began to hear reggae played alongside their favorite American Rap and Hip Hop with no special fanfare or hype. A major factor in breaking down the divide between the two musical forms occurred when popular New York radio DJ Red Alert began mixing dancehall with hip-hop tracks on his afternoon radio show. His acceptance of dancehall created instant converts within the hardcore rap community, which later spread to suburban rap converts.

Hip Hop artists began to see reggae, not as a country cousin, but as a source of inspiration and creative ideas. Many began incorporating samples from reggae in their music. Yami Bolo’s ‘When A Man’s in Love’ found its way into the KRS-one hit ‘Take It Easy’. KRS-1, a big borrower from dancehall, also used the melody of Yellowman’s ‘Zuguzuguzuguzengzengzeng’ in the song Remix for ‘P is Free’.

Afraid to be left behind in the next big trend, the major labels acted quickly. Columbia Records snatched up Super Cat in 1992 and released one of the first true dancehall albums to appear on a major U.S. label, the classic *Don Dada*. The album was authentic, rough-and-ready dancehall. The big hit from
the LP, *Ghetto Red Hot*, became a cross-over anthem, introducing true JA style
dancehall deejaying to a whole new audience.

In the UK, former Youth Promotion deejay Daddy Freddie was leading
the movement to merge reggae and rap with his speed rapping style. His col-
laborations with Asher D, ‘Ragamuffin Hip Hop’ and ‘We are the Champion’,
helped launch the “ragga/hiphop craze” that swept England at the start of the
‘90s. The album that followed, *Ragamuffin Soldier*, was licensed to Chrysalis
USA.

The hungry U.S. labels were greedily gobbling up dancehall acts. “Epic
signed Shabba Ranks. Polygram snagged Buju Banton and CBS got Super
Cat. Everyone from Elektra to Profile, East West, Def Jam, and Delicious
Vinyl scooped up veteran acts like Ini Kamoze, Cutty Ranks, Tiger, Shyne-
head, Capleton, and Tony Rebel, alongside newcomers like Shaggy, Red Fox,
Jamal-ski, Terror Fabulous, Patra, and Born Jamericans,” Wrote Mark Harris
in a review of the CD, *Dancehall Dub*.

But not all the stories had a happy ending. The biggest problem for reggae
crossing over has always been the major companies’ inability to keep their
hands off the product. Many deals eventually failed because the labels wanted
the artist, whom they originally liked for his independent work, to conform
to an industry standard that bled all the life out of the music.

The fact that rappers, who were so influenced by the artistry of Jamaican
deejays, were now starting to use patois lyrics and dancehall beats, meant
that things had truly come full circle. For a few years major labels tripped
over themselves to sign just about every dancehall artist available. But success
comes at a cost, and in this case the price paid in appealing to an international
audience meant severing the arteries that served dancehall’s life-blood – refer-
ences to Jamaican culture, and day-to-day living.

“The problem was… the record company would try to put you to the world
standard,” Deejay Chaka Demus complained. “But they would remove all
the elements that made you what you are. The majors didn’t understand that,
look, it is music, but its Jamaican music. It is unique. So we need to maintain
the uniqueness of it. It’s not just an issue of – let’s get the best producer, let’s
get the best studio, let’s get the best musicians. They need to have understood
it better. That’s why a lot of people who got signed easily, got dropped like
bombshells after, because the end product wasn’t selling as they had expected
– because they had removed the uniqueness from it unknowingly.”

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*Crazy Caribs*, http://www.popmatters.com/music/reviews/c/crazycaribs-dancehall.shtml, 15 April
2005
By the new millennium, Dancehall had achieved a level of acceptance in Jamaican society never before imagined. Admiral Bailey starred in television commercials for banks. Western Union continued to run its ads featuring Wayne Marshall despite his arrest in charges of procession of Marijuana.* Kiprich was making commercials for Mother’s Chicken. Singer I-Octane is Digicel’s ‘brand ambassador’. The Jamaican government finally established “a new sub-committee on music, somehow only recently realizing that the country’s music is among its most successful exports.”**

Burro Banton, reflecting on the upwardly mobile course of dancehall, told Gaia Branca in an interview in 2006, “When I started it was 1974, only the people from the ghetto loved reggae. It was in quarters like Trench Town that everything started. When you started to play, people from the upper classes called the police to make you stop, they didn’t want that type of music to spread. But that was impossible, the kids started to love reggae and the music invaded Up Town.”***

Throughout the ‘80s, dancehall kept its flight path still a little below the radar. The upper classes still listened to ‘funky’ and soul in parties while the sound systems held their corners in the many ghetto neighborhoods of Kingston. But that was about to change completely, in large part, due to the emergence of a sound system that brought the two worlds together.

“Everything changed when Stone Love came along,” Sugar Minott lamented in the late ‘80s, as he watched the new sound system on the block came in and rewrite all the rules. But Stone Love wasn’t really new. It was just new to downtowners who still thought of it as something alien – an uptown, ‘party’ set.

Stone Love started out as a disco set, playing mainly soul and very little hard-core rub-a-dub. They did mix in a bit of reggae, just to keep the uptowners on their toes, but the set was clearly aiming for a well heeled crowd. Which was all well and good as long as Stone Love stayed in its own territory. But

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* The Jamaican Gleaner Friday, September 15, 2000

** Resistance and Complicity: Dancehall, Rap and the Market. Ed. note: The text says that the article is from the Glendora Review, African Quarterly on the Arts, vol. three nos. three & four, 2004, but I am unable to confirm the source.

*** www.rototosunsplash.com
in the later ‘80s, Stone Love began to penetrate the ghetto, bringing with it a very different approach to entertaining.

Stone Love was a slick operation, heir to the former uptown champion, Klassique. They had been playing happily in the rural parishes and uptown because, as creator and owner Winston ‘Wee Pow” Powell admits, “During that time we were afraid to venture into the ghetto area and that was why we only used to play uptown and in the country.” Then, deejay Sassafrass took the sound into Jonestown to play and the crew found that it wasn’t half as scary as they thought and, on top of that, the downtown crowds loved them.

Once they had a foothold downtown, they started playing for free, which the struggling ghetto sets saw as the new guy being a spoiler. “Before Stone Love, you pay to go to dance. You have a gate man,” Sugar continues. “And now, Stone Love came with a dance in the street. So, while we [in Youth Promotion] had Thursday night at Robert Crescent, they came with a free Thursday night at Cross Roads. So, all the people that used to pay a $50 [Jamaican] to come here, go to Cross Roads for a free dance. So, that changes it.”

Since they had never had a live deejay with the crew, Stone Love compensated by playing deejay records and specials. They called the style ‘Juggling’. Welton Irie explains, “[Rory, the selector] didn’t talk much, just play music and when him did play reggae now, him had the Admiral Bailey dubplates, the Shabbas [Ranks] and all of those. Him would play the vocal, like he would be doing a Frankie Paul vocal, and he would mix in a special with Admiral Bailey pon it and that would get the crowd going wild. The soul sounds now would play a little disco, a little soul, two Admiral Bailey [records], two Shabba on dubplate – juggling, that’s what they call it. Stone Love became the master for that, with Rory [the selector]. He eventually change everything. Everybody wanted now to play like Stone Love.”

Stone Love also came with two turntables and could beat-mix. So, there were no awkward silences to fill between records, and no need for a deejay to talk. People didn’t seem to care much. They didn’t especially miss the live deejays in the dance. They were just as happy to hear them on vinyl. To keep current, Stone Love began making specials like never before. They had hours of Admiral Bailey and Tiger, two of the most popular deejays of the late ‘80s. Then they started working with Shabba Ranks as his popularity rose.

Employment for deejays tumbled and they had to resort to recording specials to keep in the game. Soon, making specials became a big, very competitive industry with the top artists charging anything the market could bear. Except that, now, there was nowhere to practice live, nowhere to be spontaneous, and the deejay recordings began to resemble more and more the pre-written, rehearsed, standard song.

The deejays were spending their time hanging out at the studios waiting to be called in to voice a dubplate. While the presence of deejays on specials

* Stone Love – After 25 Years, Still the Leading Sound, Stone Love Company Profile
meant that, at last, after a decade’s long fight for equal recognition, deejays were considered on par with singers, it spelled the demise of their unique role of active, live performers in the dance. “The deejays are doing a lot of dubplate for the sound,” Welton Irie observed. “So them actually killing themselves. If they decided that they wasn’t going to do any dubplate – ‘if you want to hear me, hear me in the dance’. But they didn’t do that. Everybody jump on the bandwagon and want to do dubplates. So, they have killed themselves.”

**Stage Shows**

No longer needed in the dancehall, deejays were looking for work on stage shows, a format that was always problematic for an art form that exists only, in its true sense, in its original context - the dancehall. Whereas, placing deejays in stage shows like Reggae Sunsplash went a long way in spreading the popularity of dancehall music, it also effected subtle changes in the way deejaying was practiced and perceived.

In the original dancehall session, the deejay would stand at the ‘control tower’ with a microphone in his hand. Next to him, the selector would sift through multiple stacks of 45s and dubplates as he chose the next song to place on the turntable. With often a single light focused on the records so the selector could read the titles, the dance proceeded in relative darkness, lit only by the stars and the moon. There was nothing to see. Nobody was watching the deejay. They were listening. And dancing, of course. But their attention was absorbed by the sound.

The deejay would often stand with his eyes shut, or his gaze directed downward as he let the beat wash over him. At times, he would disappear deep inside himself, allowing the words to come flowing to the surface. The microphone in one hand, he swayed to the beat, allowing himself to relax into a groove. Couples would dance close together in the shadows, lost in the moment. Around the edges, solo dancers moved languidly, bodies undulating gently, each person inside his own private experience of the music.

The aloofness of the deejay to the audience was hard for North Americans to get used to. Abroad, people were accustomed to seeing the performer direct his attention to the audience, working hard to get a reaction. Most performers would move around the stage, ask people to clap, to sing. Yet the deejay and the selector, although not focusing on the audience, were paying attention to the crowd, monitoring the mood of the dance. The deejay often used what he was seeing to create lyrics on the spot. What posses where there? What were people wearing? What dances were they doing? Then he would create his lyrics - Shoulder Move, Clark’s Booties, Geri Curl …

Thus, dancehall music was never meant to be performed on stage. But it was adapted, out of necessity, for touring and for official venues such as Sunsplash. At first, the dancehall artist would just deejay his hits while a live band
played’. This modification forced the deejay to perform lyrics that were written as a completed song, not to freestyle it, as in the dance. Deejays that were touring had to have a repertoire of finished lyrics that matched the standard song pattern: two-three minutes long, with verses, a chorus, and a bridge.

The new stage show practice also changed the role of the deejay from crew member to front man. But with the popularity of the stage show format, the deejay began to emerge as the ‘leader’. Deejays were big stars now, and the balance of the sound system, essentially a team effort, was thrown off.

**THE 1997 NOISE ACT**

In an earlier, less bureaucratic age, music was always in the air, floating in windows and open doors in the heat of the tropical nights. Young people would hear the faint trails of a song and follow it along the streets until they arrived at the source, a sound system set up somewhere in the ghetto.

In an interview for the Red Bull Academy, Clevie reminisced, “Back in the days you could hear them for miles around, they used to put steel horns up in trees to pull crowds from miles around.” Steely added, “You’d be 20 miles away and hear a song in the air but don’t know where it’s coming from, you could just follow that sound. You can’t do that anymore.”**

With the increasing number of sounds, late night sessions began to interfere with people’s daily lives, with the noise lasting into the early morning hours. People complained that they couldn’t sleep. Thus, the infamous Noise Abatement Act came into law in 1997, effectively shutting off sessions at 12 am on weekdays and at two am on Saturdays. In addition, the Kingston/St Andrews Corporation (KSAC) began charging a minimum fee of $3,500, leading to a marked decline in “roadside dancehall session.”***

As if that weren’t enough, the Jamaica Association of Composers Authors and Publishers (JACAP), began asking that a portion of the entrance fees be given to them to cover performance rights royalty payments for playing the records.

Venue owners sold their properties as their costs mounted, and promoters had to find alternatives. With dancehall venues disappearing, promoters turned to hotels and clubs only to find they were charging $80,000 per event. ****

The Jamaican Gleaner lamented, “The days of arbitrarily stringing up a

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* A later style adapted for the stage, was to bring the whole crew on stage and have the deejays out front, facing the audience, performing his lyrics backed by the sound system.

** Session Transcript, Steely & Clevie, Red Bull Music Academy, Seattle 2005

*** Dancehall has lost its sting Friday | September 15, 2000, Jamaican Gleaner

**** “The number of dancehalls around Kingston is small right now and the prices do not encourage promoters. For example, the Countryside Club rents for $65,000 if you allow them to sell the food and drinks, or $130,000 if you keep the bar and kitchen. In Portmore, La Roose rents for $60,000.” Friday, November 10, 1995 Jamaican Gleaner
sound system on the corner to stage a session are over. Nowadays, any person with the intention of holding a street dance has to apply to the Superintendent of Police in charge of that area for permission. After investigations of the promoter’s character, his ability to control the expected crowd, inspection of the premises and social consequences, the Superintendent makes a ruling, whether the dance can be held. If the promoter is favoured, then a fee has to be paid to the KSAC and a receipt received. This receipt must be presented to the police if requested at any time during the session. Failure to produce a receipt gives the police the right to turn off equipment at the session. If the promoter is unsuccessful in his bid, then there is a seven-day period during which he may file an appeal. Inspector Hopeton Baines of the Kingston Central Police says, the system has been successful thus far and the Night Noise Abatement Act has been working wonders in ensuring a quieter nocturnal city.”

The Noise Abatement Act produced fundamental changes in the structure of the dancehall session. “In order to keep these dances, people had to get permits,” Noel Harper, owner of Killamanjaro sound, complained. “Jamaican people are basically very laid back, relaxed and can’t be bothered, and some of these promoters felt that they wasn’t going to seek any permit… So, some barkeepers started to keep something they call a ‘Round Robin’. They would have a free weekly dance at these venues. So people could go to these dances and hear music for free and could get liquor at a reduced price. So, when there was a Round Robin going on, a regular promoter wouldn’t want to promote a dance if something free was going on down the road, cause his support would be divided. So, after that you find some promoters started to keep, not really a Round Robin but a kind of free dance where they would be able to attract more people and sell the liquor a little bit more expensive and see if they could attract more people. See if they could make some profit. This started to get more and more popular and the real promoters realized this is what they are up against. That created a further decline.”

Soon, many of the major venues, like the House of Leo, disappeared altogether. Sounds began to play in clubs. Promoter Sassafras told the Gleaner, “Promoters are being turned off and the economy is being hurt. In the House of Leo days, for example, there would be no less than 20 vendors at a Stone Love or Gemini dance. People depended on that to send their children to school. The cane man, the peanut vendor, the orange man who sells oranges - this was their livelihood. It’s all gone now.”

The last straw has been the recent arrival of the corporate sponsored Karaoke party. Wray and Nephew saw an opportunity to increase brand recognition for their famous rum products with the bar hopping crowd, so they linked up with Starz Entertainment to offer Karaoke nights at several loca-

* Dancehall has lost its sting Friday | September 15, 2000, Jamaican Gleaner http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20000915/ent/ent1.html

** Dancehall has lost its sting Friday, September 15, 2000, Jamaican Gleaner
tions in St. Catherines and Clarendon offering rum at a reduced rate to the establishment’s owner. Starz Entertainment was happy to have someone renting their equipment once again. The owner, Donovan Cunningham, was quoted in the Observer, “The big sound system dance was not happening and so there was a slowdown in demand for that service and so we made the switch to the smaller boxes, which are not so deafening.”

Despite all the bad news, there is still a little life in the street dance. Passa Passa, the Wednesday night outdoor party that takes place each week in Tivoli, has become an international tourist attraction. The festivities start at 10 pm and go on until eight am the next morning with the roads jammed in all directions. Despite it’s ghetto locale, the dance is considered to be very safe and welcoming to all.

* Karaoke business upstaging dancehall, Jamaica Observer, Sunday, February 13, 2011
Old Time Something
Come Back Again

Now, after breaking down the barriers in North America and overseas, dancehall has finally begun to break down barriers at home, but it didn’t come easily. Frankie Campbell commented that in the ‘80s, “There were hits, like Fab 5’s ‘Jamaican Woman’ or Lovindeer’s ‘Wild Gilbert’ which scored across the boards, but it took until the mid ‘90s, with the new young generation of uptown youth, before dancehall became socially acceptable, to an extent, throughout Jamaican society.”

Now, in the new millennium, ‘dancehall’ is what Jamaican popular music is called. The original dancehall from the ‘80s has moved into the category of oldies and no one is attacking it anymore. In fact, Jamaicans love their ‘oldies’ just as much as anyone, and now look back with nostalgia on those minimalistic ‘computer’ rhythms they once scorned. The ‘80s are seen, in some quarters, as the last years of real reggae music before the foreign influences moved in, the last time reggae was about working together, about building a community that was truly Jamaican.

Vintage Dances

That nostalgia has been forceful enough to keep the ‘80s alive in the world of Jamaican entertainment. U Roy has been especially active in preserving the ‘80s rub-a-dub style through his sound system, King Stur-Gav. Puddy Roots, currently working with the sound, reminisces about the ‘80s, “That time, it was the nicest time for me in the music. That was the time when the love spreading and everyone trying to unite, and man dancing with him queen, hold her and dance with her and rub her, you know. That was rub-a-dub time. But, that’s not so it going now. That’s why I do dance with Stur-Gav. Stur-Gav showing you the same way Daddy Roy have in the original system. Daddy Roy don’t change. Pure rub-a-dub.”

Enough people agreed. In March, 1998, a continuing concert series was presented at De Buss in Negril. The event would feature classic performers like Brigadier, Yellowman, Josie and Charlie – all backed by the Jahlovemuzik sound. The stated purpose of the session was “to bring back the original dance vibes, the way these deejays knew them in the 19’70s and 19’80s”.

After that came traveling shows like the Ten Giants of the ‘80s, where both Black Scorpio and Stur-Gav sounds played to sold out crowds all over the island. “Ironically, ‘80s dancehall is now among the most popular vintage
musics played in Jamaica,” Frankie Campbell explains. “Uptown, the crowds are grooving to the dancehall beat, to all the songs – the deejays and sing-jays – all those songs people dismissed twenty five years ago as ‘foolishness’.

Meanwhile, the hardcore, downtown crowd is still into their own thing. But the older dancehall artists have carved out a niche, performing in successful tours though America, Europe and parts of Asia – tours with names like Legends of Dancehall.

**BOOYAKA**

In 2007, Mas Camp, New Kingston, was the site of the first Booyaka. “Booyaka rings out tonight at the Mas Camp,” reads the headline in the Jamaican Observer. “Tonight, a musical alarm will ring out at the Mas Camp as the first staging of a dance symbolizing a yearly requiem for artistes who have died dubbed Booyaka.”* Jamaicans suddenly seemed to have become aware of what they had lost, musically, throughout the years.

Another article elaborates, “In other words, Booyaka is a night of memorial for all the singers and players of instruments whom we revered because of their musical works. But Booyaka is more than a dance, in its broader concept; it’s about the preservation of Jamaican music. The purpose of Booyaka is to help to document reggae history in Jamaica.”**

The music was provided by vintage sounds Black Scorpio, Merritone, and Kilimanjaro. According to the report in The Jamaican Gleaner, “The persons singing on the records were dead, but the music was, in the main, lively.”*** The venue contained a special booth with pictures and write ups on the featured artists who had passed away, like Dennis Brown, Tenorsaw, General Echo, Hugh Mundell, Garnett Silk, Junjo Laws, King Tubby, Culture, Coxone Dodd, Don Drummond, Barry Brown, Puma Jones, Nicodemus, Louie Lepki, Delroy Wilson, Hortense Ellis, Keith Hudson, Jr. Delgado, Scottie, Nitty Gritty, Slim Smith, Panhead, Jack Ruby, Ranking Toyan, Early B and so many more.

It’s all part of a move by older artists to teach the younger generation about the roots of the music they are enjoying right now. Among other things, the younger fans don’t always realize that dancehall reggae isn’t just something that started around the time of hip hop. People are beginning to fear that the music’s real roots are in danger of being lost in the media deluge that accompanies the more commercialized music of today. Before his recent demise, Winston Riley was setting up a museum of reggae’s past. He said, at the time, “I’m on Orange Street and we are now making up a state of the art studio. I’m making a museum in the same place [with] a whole heap of things inside. A description of the musicians who make us, today, enjoy the business, because,

* Jamaican Observer, Saturday, December 1, 2007

** Jamaican Observer, Saturday, Nov. 16, 2007

*** Jamaican Gleaner, December 4, 2007
without them, we wouldn’t be here. Nobody recognize them, but I am setting up something for them here. We are gonna have a room with a whole heap of photographs of all the past musicians, the foundation members.”

Despite his fame in the current scene, deejay Chaka Demus remains nostalgic for the days when dancehall was a live, interactive medium. “Those days was the real, real dancehall days. Today it’s not really nice like those days when people come to dance to enjoy themself.” Chaka Demus and Pliers even wrote a song about it, ‘When King Tubby Used to Play’. “What we’re trying to say in that song, we try fe make them know seh a right now we wan’ the vibes of the old days fe come back, like when King Tubbys used to play. Wan’ the youth them fe know seh, ina them times we work with each other. We nah fight like weh them a do right now. You know, you hear little youth a fight ‘gainst each other, a preach pure violence. We try fe show them, say, bwoy, nuthin so nice like yesterday. King Tubbys and King Jammys used to play, when everybody just nice and love fe see each other. Everybody happy, you know. It’s real, real nice. Believe me. I think it’s a beautiful song.”

Pliers:
Yesterday, where is the fun the joy of yesterday
The joy we share like when King Tubby’s used to play
Yesterday, where is the fun the joy of yesterday
The fun we share with people all the way

Chaka Demus:
Remember the time we used to stand up round the mic
Me used to ram dancehall and party
Stur-Gav, Volcano, Black Scorpio,
not to mention the great King Jammy
Chaka Demus, Admiral Bailey, General Trees, Nicodemus
And the one named Nitty Gritty,
Brigadier, Super Cat, Early B the doctor
King Yellow and Mumma Nancy
Hear me sing

Pliers:
Whe the love gone for the youths of tomorrow
Whe the love gone me no want no more sorrow
Yesterday where is the fun the joy of yesterday
The joy we share like when King Tubby’s used to play
Yesterday where is the fun the joy of yesterday
The fun we share with people all the way

* released in England, Pull Up Me Selector label
All the nostalgia for the ‘good old days’ is understandable, but exactly who is benefitting from it? Right now, the retro trend is becoming a big business for collectors with the advent of eBay and other auction websites. Deejay turned selector Welton Irie complains that he is no longer able to play only vinyl in his retro sessions. The original records, now considered ‘oldies’, are highly desirable, highly priced commodities. The 45s go for $40 or $50, and the original artists, many of whom are still living in poverty, don’t see a cent.

The advent of CDs presented its own set of problems. U Brown has noticed that the older companies he licensed his music to back in the ‘70s and ‘80s have turned around now and re-issued the material in CD form, all without any acknowledgement of royalties owing. “I produce my album and I license it to them. They didn’t give me some money and say, ‘Sign this agreement and I’ll give you 2,000 pounds and you go down and make us an album’.”

Raking Trevor noticed the same thing, “If you check the internet, they have the songs still selling. They don’t even tell me seh they are going to get reissued. They supposed to tell me. They supposed to give me an advance and I don’t get all those things.”

Likewise, the lack of written contracts still haunts many of the foundation artists. Welton Irie reports, “I just come back [from a tour] and learn that Joe Gibbs is dead and buried. I did some songs and an album for him back in the early ‘80s, It Feels so Good. Then I hear that Clive Jarrett has now died, that’s the Dynamite label. Cause he was releasing some songs for me and I was getting some royalties.” The death of the studio boss means the end of the line for an agreement that was made on a word and a handshake.

“It’s not so easy to fix the mistakes of the past,” Veteran musician Clevie muses. “I worked with one of the artists who worked at Studio One in the ‘70s. I remade one of his songs, and he told me, then, that he had his own publishing house and was credited accordingly, and so on. I decided to call Coxson himself at that time, When I called him, he said, he had a contract where that artist had signed his publishing to him and he faxed me a copy of it. And when I showed it to the artists, he said, ‘Ohhhhh. I forgot’.”

Jamaicans are now trying to learn from the past to build a better future for the artists of today. Still the mistakes of the past can’t be erased so easily. Vintage artists are still struggling to live in Jamaica today. As they age, with no savings and no insurance, they are often finding that the health care they need way beyond their means.

Foundation artists are still, in this day and age, being denied royalties and performance rights payments because of age old copyright issues. The problem is that nobody back then ever dreamed their music would amount to anything outside of Jamaica. They made music for the sake of making music and hoped for the best.

“Nobody used to get paid then,” Lady Ann recalls. “Nobody used to pay you. Music then for me was just fun and love. It wasn’t a money thing. We didn’t know seh people coulda get rich outa music. We just do it cause we love...
it”. Deejay Crutches comments philosophically, “And that was it. No controversial thing. Reggae music was a thing whe’, you could just enjoy yourself. And the funny thing about it is, we achieve nothing out of it.”

When Prince Jazzbo reflects on the early days of dancehall, when everybody was coming together and creating this new musical expression, he emphasizes that the artists weren’t motivated by material gains. Like most other deejays, he recalls that in his earliest days on the sound, “I never even thinking of making records. I just love music. I never know I could make records much less know about traveling and all like that. It wasn’t about that! It was about loving the music. We play all night and never get money. But we get food and we get drink and we get herb and people respect us. Everywhere you go, people say, ‘Jazzbo! Where you a play tonight?’ And that was nice. You could go anywhere. Everybody know you. You are not a ‘wrong do-er’. Bad man like you. Police like you. Thief like you - everybody like you. You live happy. It wasn’t about money. It wasn’t about going to foreign. It wasn’t about making records. It was about loving the music. It was nice.”

To deejay Trinity, the old days were the time when people cared more about their music than material processions, “We didn’t get no money up front. We just love the music. That’s why the music turn out to be what it is, in those days, that you can play it today. Cause we do the music out of we self, like spiritually. You find, seh, the music live on”

Jack Scorpio sums it up, “The song what them never used to like in those times, is the song what people, especially in my age group, want to hear. Because what [music] is doing now – the younger generation is taking on to it. The song what you used to hear in the eighties, [are the songs] what our parents never used to want to hear. They wouldn’t want to hear Josie Wales. They woulda rather hear Alton Ellis. Today, my age group people would want to go and listen to Josie Wales or go to Josie Wales show. We have to just do what we know is good, the good way.”

Clearly, despite Raetown and all the Booyakas and Oldies Nights, reggae, and dancehall, is onto something new, charging ahead in a new direction. Which is as it should be. U Roy, a veteran in the business, looks back on his career with a hint of bewilderment, and a respect for the inevitability of change. “I never did expect that, from the time that I was number one deejay, that after 40 years, I would still be number one. You have to have youth come fe replace me. More modern kind of style. The youth them have them style. Them versatile and, yea, them creative. I respect the youth them to the max whatever them come fe do. Them haf fe look them own thing. I see them and me just tell myself, seh, I can’t envy them what them have, cause me have my fair share of fame. Some [new] youth haf’ fe come, come get them fame too.”

Still, many who lived through the decade still feel that something very special was left behind as music forged ahead into the new millennium. Deejay Dennis Alcapone is saddened by the current state of dancehall. “The musicians, now, they lost the respect of the public. In my days, nobody would
think to hurt a deejay or a singer. People just love you. People will take off their clothes and put it in a pool of mud and then you walk on it, like Sir Walter Raleigh. You could never hurt a musician.”

Little John still sees the 19’80s as a special era for all kinds of music, soul to soca, a period that stands out as a time when people came together and creativity flowed.

“So, at the end of the day, you can say it was a good vibe. And you can see, seh, those days was real entertainment. And the love was there. A lot of love for entertainers.”